

Fort Mifflin
Guard House (Arsenal)
Mud Island
Marine and Penrose Ferry Road
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1225-A

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. PA-1225 A

FORT MIFFLIN GUARD HOUSE (Arsenal)

Location: Near northeast demibastion of southeast scarp of Fort Mifflin, Mud Island, Marine and Penrose Ferry Roads, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: City of Philadelphia.

Present Use: Historic site museum.

Significance: Built in 1815-16, the guard house displays unusual fenestration and sophisticated detailing. By 1839 it was designated as an arsenal.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Babcock proposed the erection of this structure December 4, 1815:

The one I have projected is intended to serve as a Guard house and Prison; to be situated parallel to the revetement, one side facing the parade the other joining the rampart the arch to be covered with Earth--with small circular apertures grated, instead of windows which will furnish a supply of light and fresh air to make it dry and healthy. (Babcock to Swift, Buell Collection, M417, 2/563, RG 77, NAB).

In 1820 he reported that "a permanent brick Guard house including a place of confinement 44 x 22 feet" was erected in 1816 (Babcock to Armistead, October 31, 1820, #475, RG 77, NAB). This building was also indicated on a plan that Babcock drew in December, 1815 (CGM #64). On Henry Belin's 1839 plan, the structure was first labelled an arsenal (CGM #71). On J. A. Miller's 1861 plan, it is designated "Labratory" (CGM #56). For additional information see Fort Mifflin History (PA-1225).

Prepared by Alison K. Hoagland
Historian
Historic American Buildings
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Fall, 1979

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Its massive wall thickness not apparent from the exterior, this brick building has unusual fenestration.
2. Condition of fabric: generally good, but the roof and sections of the cornice are deteriorated.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This one-story structure is one bay wide, 24'-2", by three bays long, 44'-2".
2. Foundations: Probably brick.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The walls, which are approximately 4' thick at the long elevations and over 3' thick at end elevations, are red brick laid in Flemish bond with traces of whitewash over yellow paint.
4. Structural system: Load-bearing walls support simple roof trusses consisting of collar beams tied onto rafters.
5. Porches: A 4'-3" wide section of brick paving laid in a herringbone pattern extends the width of the structure at the northwest elevation and is edged with a 5" wide gneiss curb.
6. Chimneys: Two interior brick chimneys with two-course corbeled caps extend above the roof. One is located at the center of the southeast facade, and the other is in the southwest wall near the west corner.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: An 8'-7" high, semicircular arched doorway is centered on the northwest elevation.

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- b. Windows and shutters: The northeast and southeast elevations have three bays of circular window openings, 2' in diameter, which are located approximately 4' above grade. Each roundel has a brick rowlock surround, penetrates the walling with a semicircular vault, and is set with square section, diagonally turned iron bars. At the interior of each opening a single sash, originally having six lights, is hung in a frame which extends above the head of the opening to allow the complete raising of the sash. Above the window openings of the northeast elevation are square, recessed panels in the brickwork. There are no shutters.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape and covering: The low gabled roof is covered with slate shingles, which at the eaves are laid over wood shingles to relieve the weight bearing on the cornice.
- b. Cornice and eaves: A boxed cornice, which returns on itself at the corners, extends beneath the shingling. The cornice consists of a small cyma recta crown molding, a fascia and soffit above an ovolo molding, and a fascia and a soffit above a small cavetto bed molding.
- c. Parapets: The gables of the end elevations extend above the roof line to form short parapets which pitch out near the eaves and are sheathed with seamed sheet metal.

C. Description of Interior:

- i. Floor plan: The interior space is divided into two rooms, the southeast one of which is smaller.

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2. Flooring: Concrete.
 3. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are furred out from the brick masonry and are plastered over lath. The ceilings, which extend into the roof structure to the collar beams, are coved and lathed plaster over hand-cut, arched bracing above the northeast and southwest walls.
 4. Doorways and doors: At the main entrance doorway, which is trimmed with plain boarding having a beaded inner edge, were a pair of doors cut to fit the arch. The surviving leaf was originally muntinned and glazed above a single, flush panel. In the partition between the rooms an off-center doorway is trimmed with similar beaded boarding which has an applied cavetto molding at the head. No door survives.
 5. Trim: The window openings, trimmed with plain boarding set with sash beads, have beaded sills. Beaded baseboarding extends around the rooms.
 6. Hardware: The exterior entrance doors are hung with pairs of wrought iron strap hinges from pintles driven into the brick jambs. An exterior iron bar, which pivots from the north jamb, locks into a west jamb hasp and secures the doors. The interior entrance doors were hung with surface mounted butt hinges.
 7. Heating and lighting: No heating or lighting exists; however, stoves probably heated the rooms.
- D. Site and surroundings: The axis of the Arsenal extends from the northwest to the southeast and is perpendicular to the southeast Sally Port.

Prepared by Rodd L. Wheaton
Architect
Historic American Buildings
Survey
Spring, 1974.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Fort Mifflin projects of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) were carried out during the summers of 1969 and 1970 with grants from the Haas Community Funds in cooperation with the Philadelphia Historical Commission, the Independence National Historical Park, and the Shackamaxon Society, Inc. The projects were under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief, HABS. The 1969 survey team was supervised by R. Michael Schneider (Texas A & M University) with student assistant architects Allan H. Steenhusen (Iowa State University), Bruce V.A. Bonacher (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute), and Malcolm Heard, Jr. (Tulane University). The 1970 survey team was supervised by Allan H. Steenhusen (Iowa State University) with architect Ronald B. Tjerandsen (University of Washington) and student assistant architect John T. Shumate (Carnegie-Mellon University). The drawings were completed in 1971 by HABS architect Allan H. Steenhusen and student assistant architect Tim Wolosz (University of Cincinnati). The drawings were edited in 1972-73 under the direction of John C. Poppeliers, Chief, HABS, by HABS architects Rodd L. Wheaton and John A. Burns with student assistant architect K. Barry Peckham (University of Cincinnati). Historian for the project was A.C. (Gus) Hamblett until 1972. The data was then edited by several members of the HABS staff, including Rodd L. Wheaton, John A. Burns, and Philip Hamp, and completed by Alison K. Hoagland in 1979.