

U.S. Coast Guard Base San Juan, Store House  
(Building 101)  
La Puntilla Finalle  
San Juan  
San Juan County  
Puerto Rico

HABS  
PR  
7-SAJU,  
63C-

**PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA**

**Historic American Building Survey  
National Park Service  
Southeast Region  
Department of the Interior  
Atlanta, Georgia**

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**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY**

**U.S. Coast Guard Base San Juan, Store House (Building 101)**

**HABS No. PR-133-C**

**Location:** U.S. Coast Guard Base San Juan  
La Puntilla Finalle, San Juan, Puerto Rico

**Significance:** The Store House (Building 101), was constructed in 1922 for the U.S. Lighthouse Service's San Juan Lighthouse Depot, which was located at the southern tip of La Puntilla, in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The building is a contributing resource in the Coast Guard Base San Juan Historic District, which is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The Base San Juan Historic District is significant for its role as the Coast Guard's Tenth District Headquarters during World War II. Along with the Port of Spain, Trinidad and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, Base San Juan served as one of the most important Caribbean harbors during the war. Together with smaller ports and harbors, the installation helped to create a ring of protection guarding the approaches to the Panama Canal. In addition to providing ongoing maintenance of aids to navigation and communication, Coast Guard personnel stationed at the base also performed mine sweeping in shipping lanes, beach patrol near coastal areas, and convoy escort to Trans-Atlantic vessels during the war. When first completed, the Store House served as a storage building for the Lighthouse Service station at La Puntilla, which was initially established in 1903. The building appears to have later functioned as the Coast Guard base's rescue communications center building. Currently the building houses the base armory, as well as the offices of the base supply officer and Sato Travel, a local travel agent.

**Description:** The Store House is a one-story rectangular building of approximately 1,740 square feet. It is located on the east side of the base immediately north of the Tank House (Building 102), which is a nearly identical building that was constructed the same year as the Store House. Both buildings were built with a 3" concrete floor and reinforced concrete walls that were covered with stucco to resemble adjacent buildings. Originally each building had a wooden hipped roof constructed of 8" x 8" joists, 2" x 6" truss members, and a 2" x 10" ridge. The tips of the 2" x 8" rafters were exposed and extended below the roof's 1' - 6" eave. According to a set of construction drawings for the building dated June 20, 1922, "slate-coated felt" was to cover the roof surface.

The construction drawings also indicate that the north and south façades of the Store House were to have five recessed bays, each bay measuring 11'-0" x 11'-0", while the east and west façades each had three recessed bays. Two of the three recesses measured 8'-0" x 11'-0" but the recess of the remaining bay, which is in the center of the north and south façades, was 8'-0" x 10'-0". Each of the recessed bays are accented with poured concrete pilasters, which measure 1'-6" wide, and poured concrete horizontal bands that measure 2'-0" in width and encircle the building at ground level and just below the roof eave. The latter band does not appear in the 1922 construction plans.

In terms of fenestration, the Store House had simple doors and windows. A pair of large wood doors was located on the south façade and a single wood door was placed on both the east and west façades. Each of the doors were built of sturdy wood frames and diagonally oriented wood boards, possibly to withstand hurricane-force winds, and were placed within wood frames in the center bay of each façade. Each of the remaining bays on the buildings north and south façades had a single six-pane hopper window, while neither the east nor west façades had any windows. Measuring four feet square, each window opening was placed approximately 1'-0" below the upper concrete band encircling the building and had a projecting concrete sill.

While the Store House retains its overall rectangular form, numerous additions and changes have greatly altered its original design. For example, small poured concrete additions have been placed on the building's north, south, and east façades. Sometime around 1970, a flat concrete roof replaced the original wood hipped roof. The replacement roof is supported by large concrete joists that project 2'-0" from the north and south façades in a manner similar to the wood roof's exposed rafter tips. None of the building's original wood doors or windows is extant and the locations for these openings appear to have been blocked up, shortened, or otherwise changed. Likewise, new openings have been created such as the one for Sato Travel, which is located in the westernmost bay of the south façade. Replacement doors including the one for the Supply Office and for Sato Travel are modern aluminum and glass type. The replacement windows are of various types including glass block fixed windows, one-over-one aluminum sliding sashes, and metal louver vents. Several windows are protected with roll-down metal shades, presumably for protection in hurricanes and other fierce storms. Situated outside the north façade of the Store House are some mechanical systems including a large air conditioning unit.

It is uncertain when all of the above changes took place but based on the materials used they appear to have been made during the last thirty years. Furthermore, a 1949 photograph shows that the exteriors of the Store House and of the adjacent Tank House had been largely unaltered at the time the photo was taken. About the only apparent change in this view is that the hipped roofs of both buildings have been sheathed with diamond-shaped shingles, possibly of asbestos or asphalt composition. A photograph taken the following year likewise shows few modifications to either building but does indicate that metal and glass doors and transoms had

been placed in their door openings, which continued to retain the original wood doors. The 1950 photo also indicates that a window opening had been created on the west façade of the Store House just to the right of the door.

Similar to the building's exterior, numerous changes have been made to the interior. Originally a single, undivided space, the interior has since been divided into several offices and work spaces. Some of these spaces may have been built according to a May 1968 floor plan of the building in order to convert the Store House to use as a rescue and communications center, but according to the base engineer, it is unclear if any of these changes were ever executed. The present arrangement of space includes the Sato Travel Office in the west end of the building, the base armory in its center, and the offices for the base Supply Officer in the east end of the building. No original finishes or fixtures were found inside the building and appear to have been replaced with gypsum board, acoustical ceiling tiles, and flush fluorescent lights.

#### Historic Context

Coast Guard Base San Juan is located on a peninsula known as La Puntilla, which extends into the Bahia De San Juan. Originally a mangrove swamp, La Puntilla was drained and filled beginning in the early 1800s because of growth pressures in the old walled city. However, because it was not a desirable area, La Puntilla would eventually be used for military and industrial purposes. During the nineteenth century, the Spanish government had built an arsenal on the north end of the peninsula and a naval shipyard on the southern end, which was known as Barrio de la Marina. Following the Spanish American War in 1898, the U.S. government assumed control of La Puntilla. Between the war's end and 1906, the Department of the Navy occupied much of the peninsula's southern half, demolishing and constructing buildings whenever necessary. Another caretaker of the property was the U.S. Lighthouse Service, which established a reservation on the tip of La Puntilla on February 19, 1903. The Lighthouse Service administered the facility until 1939 when it became the property of the U.S. Coast Guard. In September 1940, the U.S. Department of the Treasury transferred the adjacent Quarantine Station property to the Coast Guard when it needed to expand beyond the limits of the Lighthouse reservation.

This expansion is in part due to the increased responsibilities the Coast Guard would have beginning in the years just before World War II. As with other U.S. possessions in the Caribbean, Puerto Rico would play an important strategic role during the war. In February 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt directed the Secretary of the Navy to take all necessary steps to guard all U.S. waterfront facilities in the region against any acts of sabotage and subversion. To assist the Navy in protecting American possessions as well as the mainland, the government militarized the Coast Guard and placed a heavy responsibility upon the service. To oversee activities in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, Base San Juan became the District Headquarters of the Tenth Coast Guard District.

In its wartime role, the District Headquarters took on new responsibilities in addition to its usual duties of search and rescue, and installing and maintaining navigational and communication aids.

For example, the District was also responsible for mine sweeping, beach patrol, providing escort service to convoys, and patrolling for Axis submarines. Much of this action was in response to enemy naval activity in the Caribbean. Throughout 1942 and 1943, the German Navy sent its U-boats to the region to prey upon merchant ships transporting vital war materiel from North America to the European Theater. Due to its location in the Lesser Antilles, which include some of the easternmost islands in the Caribbean, Base San Juan was often the first to deploy its vessels during emergencies, and thus was an important arm of the American effort to counter Axis threats to Allied shipping.

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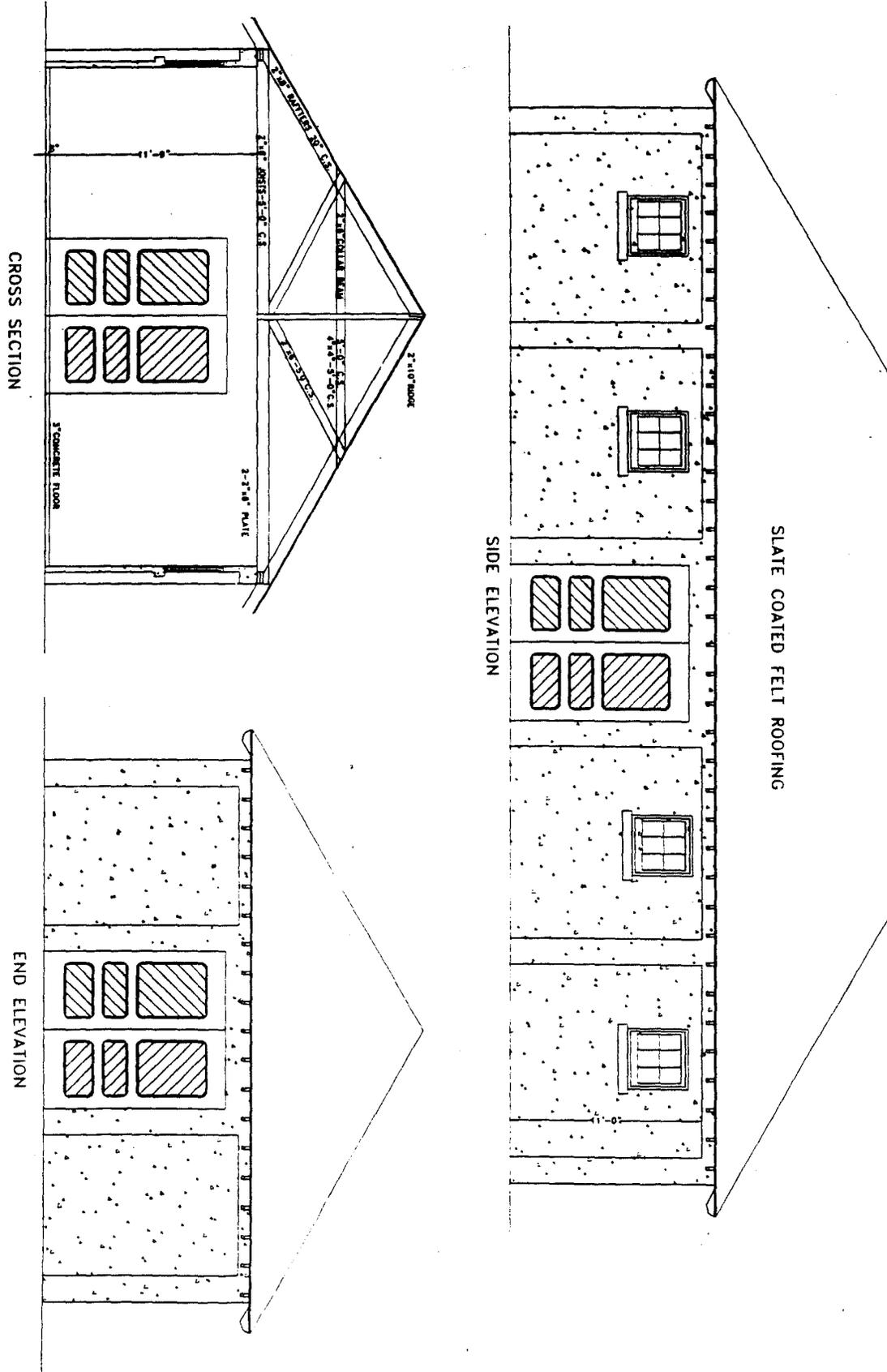
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Historian: Jeffrey L. Durbin, URS Corporation, Gaithersburg, Maryland, May  
2000

**Project Information**

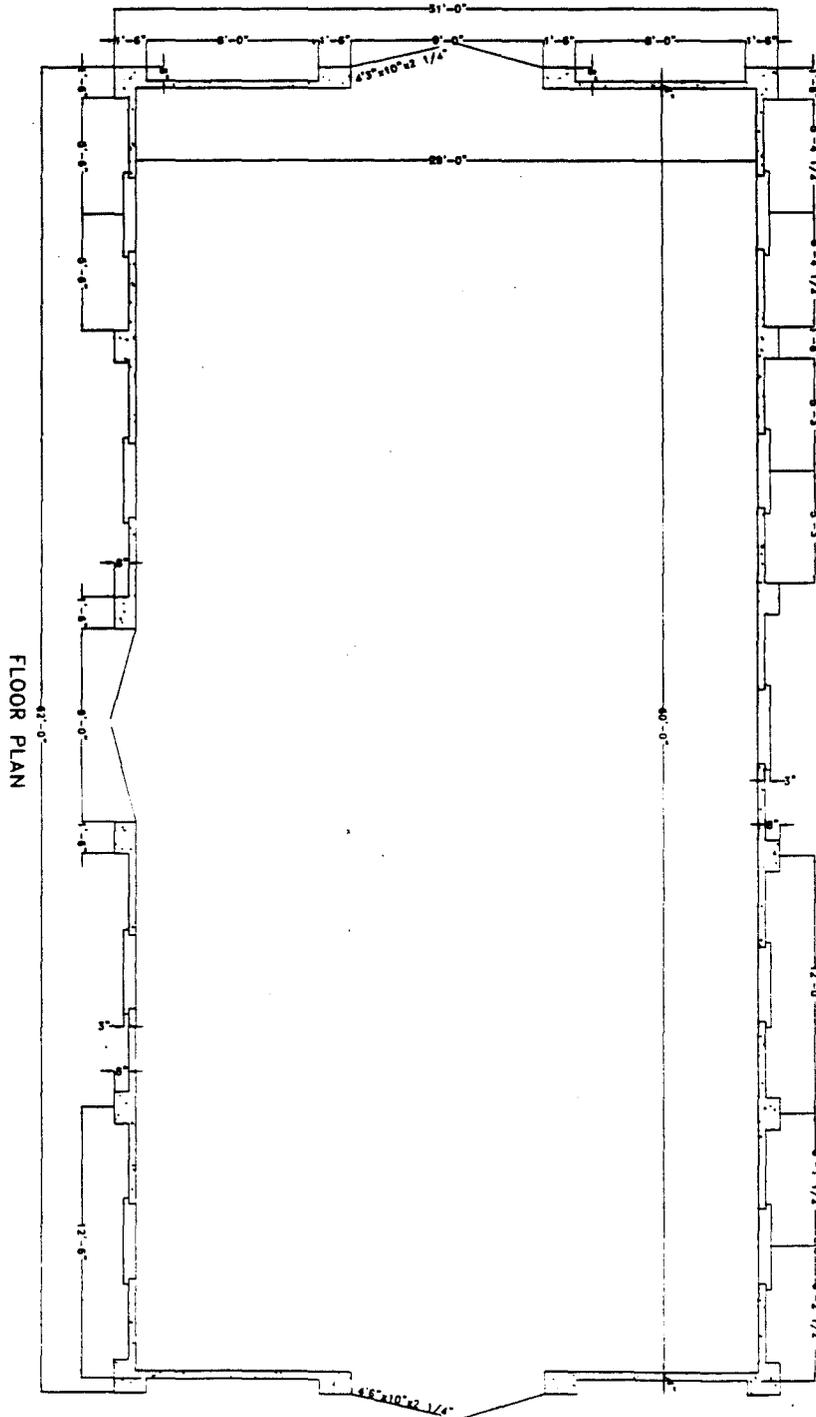
This documentation was required by a Programmatic Agreement executed by the U.S. Coast Guard, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office for the Implementation of the Coast Guard's Proposed Construction and Development Activities at Base San Juan. URS Corporation completed the fieldwork and research for this documentation during March 2000. Photographer Rob Tucher prepared the large-format photographs, Architectural Historians Jeffrey L. Durbin and Anne Brockett completed the written documentation, and Graphics Specialist John Berkey prepared the floor plan.

Original Elevations and Cross Section of Store House, San Juan Light House Depot, San Juan  
(Adapted from June 1922 Construction Drawing)



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Original Floor Plan of Store House, San Juan Light House Depot, San Juan  
(Adapted from June 1922 Construction Drawing)



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Current Floor Plan of Store House (Building 101)

