

SENTRY BOX  
Fairmount Park  
West Valley Green Road  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia County  
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-6781  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS  
FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### SENTRY BOX

HABS No. PA-6781

Location: West Valley Green Road, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.

Significance: Built between 1890 and 1910, the Sentry Box served as a satellite station house for the elite guards of Fairmount Park. The guards patrolled on foot, bicycle, and commonly on horseback through the park's pathways. The sentry box was linked to district headquarters through a call-box system. Originally more than thirty-five sentry boxes were situated throughout Fairmount Park and the parks of center city Philadelphia. Today, less than a dozen remain serving as park storage, and as reminders of the important role the guards played in the Park's history.

Description: The Sentry Box is a one-room, single story oak frame structure, with glazed French doors and three single hung windows. Constructed on a concrete slab, it measures 7'-0 1/4" by 7'-0 1/4" with the roof peak height of 10'-3 5/8". The basic construction of the Sentry Box appears to be made of 4 1/2" square and 2 3/4" x 4 1/2" milled timbers, with a 1" chamfered edge 3" in from all joinery. Recessed panels of bead board set at a 45 degree angle between the milled timbers sheath the exterior, while the interior is finished with the same bead board, oriented vertically. A 6 3/4" baseboard with 5/8" bead wraps around the interior. Floor boards, 2" in width, run east-west. A 12" deep shelf runs along the south interior wall, above the window. The interior front edge of the shelf has two grooves cut into it, creating three 3/8" beads. The shelf appears to sit on two smaller shelves angled in either corner. The entire interior and exterior of the Sentry Box is painted white with dark green trim, although it is not known if these were the original colors.

The three windows are 4'-2 5/8" high by 2'-5" wide with nine over nine divided lite, and 5 3/4" x 7" visible glass. The lower sash of the northern window has only four divided lites. Each door has three larger lites, measuring 11 1/2" x 15 1/2" with 5/8" muntin, in addition to a single, lower recessed bead board panel. The hardware on the northern door remains incomplete, with no door knob, although the base of the door knob is still in place with a key hole below. The northern door also has a small uneven 5/8" hole going through to the interior. Above the doors is a 12" diameter circular cut-out, that does not penetrate through to the interior. This is a fairly unique feature to the Valley Green Sentry Box, and is supposed, but not verified that this was originally intended for a clock. The Sentry Box has a standing seam metal roof. Two purely decorative trim details, four of each type, are added beneath the roof eaves, lending the Sentry box its recognizable character. The Valley Green location has always been a highly traveled path with the picturesque location along Wissahickon Creek and within sight of the very popular Valley Green Inn restaurant.

History: Built between 1890 and 1910, the Sentry Box served as a satellite station house for the elite guards of Fairmount Park. The guards patrolled on foot, bicycle, and commonly on horseback through the park's pathways. The sentry box was

linked to district headquarters through a call-box system. The exact construction date and architect for the Valley Green Sentry Box is unknown.

The sentry boxes were still occupied and used throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In a 1947 inventory of Fairmount Park, thirty-four Sentry Boxes remained in service in city parks, fifteen of those located within Fairmount Park. According to an interview published in the Philadelphia's *Daily News* with Robert Armstrong, first deputy police commissioner, he recalled "The guard on the Sunday day shift had to clean the sentry house... I swept the floor, washed the windows, trimmed the kerosene lamp wick, and applied stove black to the coal burner."<sup>1</sup> However, by the early 1960's several empty houses were offered for sale, as many were left unattended. Today, less than a dozen remain serving as park storage, and as reminders of the important role the guards played in the Park's history.

Sources:

Dougherty, Frank, "Gone are Guards' Old Parking Spots Fairmount Sentry Boxes Dwindle," *Daily News Philadelphia*, August 16, 1988.

Historian: Greta E. Stoyko, 2011.

Project

Information: Measured drawings and historical report prepared by Greta E. Stoyko for the 2011 Holland Prize competition. Valley Green Sentry Box surveyed by Greta E. Stoyko and Andrew Fearon.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Armstrong began his career as a Fairmount Park guard in 1955, when he was stationed to a sentry box.