

Fort Sam Houston National Historic Landmark
Officer's Quarters (Building #15, Staff Post)
San Antonio
Bexar County
Texas

HABS No TX-3303-5

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Architectural and Engineering Record
National Parks Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
FORT SAM HOUSTON NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

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OFFICER'S QUARTERS
(Building #15, Staff Post)

HABS No. TX-3303-5

Location: 15 Staff Post Road, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Present Owner
and Occupant: United States Army

Present Use: Officer's Quarters

Significance: One of fifteen officer's quarters constructed of similar but varying design on post. Built in the early 1880s, it represents the post's earliest effort to provide housing for officers and their families. This limestone ashlar residence designed by local architect Alfred Giles possesses a more distinctive regional quality in comparison to the later quarters built from plans originating in the office of the Quartermaster General.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: c. 1881
2. Architect: Alfred Giles. Giles was born in 1853 in Middlesex, northwest of London. Upon graduation from public school in 1868, he apprenticed for two years with the London architectural firm of Giles and Bivens (no relationship) and attended classes on the art of construction at Kings College, University of London.

In 1873, Giles and a friend traveled to the United States to seek their fortunes. After only a short while they parted; Giles traveling to Texas and his friend returning to England. Giles arrived in San Antonio that same year was immediately employed by a successful local contractor, John H. Kampmann, who was a stonemason by profession. He worked with Mr. Kampmann for three years and in 1876 left to form his own firm, the Alfred Giles Company.

Giles experienced immediate success, and was reportedly one of San Antonio's leading architects by the end of the decade. This rise to prominence was due partly to the upsurge of development in San Antonio as a result of the coming of the railroad, and partly due to the professional contracts and support Giles received from some of the established families of San Antonio--among them the Maverick, Tross, Steves, Terrell and

Groos families. Giles designed many residences but also received public contracts as well, due to his influential contacts.

Mary Carolyn Jutson, Alfred Giles' biographer, describes his style as "simple and sober". "He exercised strong control over his work and preferred restraint. He had a reserved use of ornament and strong feeling for symmetry, even in asymmetrical composition". He employed native stone much more than other architects of the period. (Jutson p. 21-23) In his early years as an architect, Giles seemed to concentrate more on structure than on decoration. However, he did use elements popularized by the Italian Villa style -- segmental and round arch windows, bracketed cornices, corner quoinage and string courses highlighting each floor. The fifteen Staff Post residences, built early in Giles' career, constitute a summary of several basic plan types employed by him. The quarters at #6, 11, and 15 each represent a variation in plan found on Post, all sharing details that result in a unified appearance for the fifteen residences. These buildings are relatively modest, yet are definitely representative of Giles' style in his early period.

Giles' popularity slowed somewhat in the 1890s, and in 1900--seeing more opportunity to the South---he opened a second office in Monterrey, Mexico. His building in Mexico was primarily in the newly popular Beaux Arts mode. Some of his later designs reflect the innovative ideas of Frank Lloyd Wright but for the most part, Giles' success, as Ms. Jutson so aptly put it, "rested on his intelligent adaptation of traditional forms rather than an innovative departure from the norm" (Jutson p. 24).

3. Original and Subsequent Owners: U.S. Army from date of construction to the present.
4. Contractor: Thomas W. Carrico. Thomas W. Carrico was the contractor recorded in the Quartermaster General correspondence. However, both Mary Handy, author of A History of Ft. Sam Houston, and Mary Carolyn Jutson, author of Alfred Giles: An English Architect in Texas and Mexico, credit a "Mr. Coulter" as contractor.
5. Original Plans and Construction: #15 Staff Post is a two-story limestone ashlar structure with an irregular center hall plan. A projecting gabled bay set forward approximately 8'-8" results

in an L-shape front facade, originally with an inset one-story frame porch continuing across the front. This plan is identical to six other three-bedroom residences along Staff Post Road. Each was constructed for approximately \$7,625.

6. Alterations and Additions: The one-story front porch was replaced c. 1908 with a two-tier screened porch, significantly altering the exterior appearance. The roof, originally standing-seam metal, is now green composite shingles. The rear west porch off the library was enclosed prior to 1941, creating an office/day room. On the interior, a bath on the second floor and a lavatory on the first floor have been added. Natural gray slate fireplaces have now been painted off-white. The interior walls were sheetrocked c. 1965.
- B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure: None known.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: Staff Post #15 is one of six quarters on staff post originally built of limestone ashlar with a projecting front bay and first floor bay window. Designed by local Architect Alfred Giles, the house displays prominent segmental arched lintels, window proportions, and bracketed cornices reminiscent of the Italian Villa style. These features became typical of Giles' work and the work of many other architects and builders throughout the region during this period.
2. Condition of Fabric: The condition of the fabric is good with no apparent structural problems.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all Dimensions: Four bays x three bays (four bays on west facade), with partial basement and irregular plan.
2. Foundations: The foundations are made of limestone ashlar and rubble foundation. An unexcavated crawl space exists under the building.
3. Wall Construction, Finish and Color: The walls consist of random ashlar limestone in varying surface textures with dressed margins found at each corner.

4. Structural System, Framing: Masonry, load-bearing wall construction comprises the structural system.
5. Porches, Stoops, Balconies, and Bulkheads: A two-tier attached porch is on the east side of the south front facade with large screen panels between boxed, chamfered posts. The porch is raised five steps from grade. Lattice work is found between the pier supports. It has a simple squared baluster railing on the second floor — no balustrade on the first floor. The slight porch roof overhang has curved bracket supports.

Screen and lattice enclose the east rear porch.

The original porch on the west side of the north rear facade has now been enclosed with wide molded clapboard siding creating a small interior office space. A seven-step rear entry is located off the rear office.

A small vertical-board hinged storage shed opening is located beneath the later enclosed porch/office space.

The rear (north) coal shoot to the basement has been closed off (bulkhead still remains on #14 Staff Post with trap door entry).

6. Chimneys: The building has five chimneys, two-corbeled-cap brick interior chimneys with arched, green metal flashing covers project above the west wall. One chimney on the north side of the east gable end services the dining room. One chimney in the north rear gable end and a second more centrally located stack project from the roof in the rear wing, servicing the kitchen.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and Doors: The front doors are four-panel double doors with segmental arch transom light. The upper rectangular door panels are glass -- at one time both probably of etched glass, now one pane has been replaced with rough translucent glass. The door is highlighted by a segmental arch lintel of dressed limestone, with a keystone.

Rear side kitchen door originally with transom light has since been blocked off. The door has six horizontal panels, consisting of three upper glass lights and three inset horizontal panels below. There is a flat lintel above.

- b. Windows: All windows have 2/2 double-hung sash. Each has projecting stilted segmental arched lintels and lug sills of dressed limestone. The windows are squared off within segmental arched openings.

The front west one-story polygonal bay window is wood frame with three 2/2 windows. The bay has a denticulated cornice, and a modified keystone carved in wood above each window. Molded horizontal panels are found at the base of each window.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape and Covering: Irregular intersecting gable roof with green composite shingles. Two gables extend to the north with wide projecting eaves.
- b. Cornice, Eaves: Simple boxed cornice with air circulation vents along the soffit. The cornice is supported by carved coupled brackets; the fascia board on the front and sides has molded panels between coupled brackets. No bracket or paneling detail is found on the rear gable ends.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

- a. Basement: Small rear excavated portion below kitchen is finished with random ashlar stone walls. The gas furnace - American Standard Radiator Heating Unit - is set in a central shallow well. A small hinged wood door provides access to dirt crawl space under main block.
- b. First Floor: A central hallway with a staircase has a living room and a library to the west and a dining room to the east - each with a fireplace. The kitchen is located in the rear northeast corner. There is a lavatory and a pantry area separating the dining room and the kitchen along the east side of the building. Rear staircases to the basement and to the second floor are off the center hallway to the west of the kitchen. A small one-story frame office space, originally a porch, is in the northwest corner off the library. Porches are located on the front and off the kitchen along the rear east wall.

- c. Second Floor: An open central hall has three major bedrooms off it--above the first floor living, dining and library areas. Two baths, back to back, are on the east wall off the hallway, north of the front east bedroom. The northeast corner has a smaller storage hall (originally servants quarters) serviced by the rear staircase. A large walk-in closet is in the northeast corner of these quarters.
2. Stairways: A straight-run staircase ascends along the west wall of the center hallway with the closet space below the stair run. The stairs fan slightly at the base with a curved lower step anchored with a natural wood octagonal block newel post, 3"-8" high. The post is inlaid with contrasting wood panels highlighted with surrounding molding. Smooth turned balusters run the length of the staircase and continue around the open stairwell at the second floor. Single heavy bead runs along the string of stairs.

A simple enclosed 2 1/2' wide rear staircase runs up to the second floor and a shorter run goes to the basement off the rear hallway.

3. Flooring: Hardwood floors are located in all the major front rooms on the first and second floors; square 12" tiles are found in the rear kitchen, pantry/lavatory area and rear office on the first floor. Wall-to-wall carpeting is in the hallway. The baths on the second floor have square tiles also. Tongue-and-groove decking is on all porches.
4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: The walls and ceilings have been sheetrocked throughout, c. 1960s.
5. Doorways and Doors: The majority of the doors have heavily molded four panels, two doors on the second floor still retain porcelain knobs. The rest have modified hardware. The interior pantry and kitchen area doors are later five-paneled with plain undecorative trim.

Doors off the library leading to the rear office space (originally leading onto the rear porch) are French double doors with upper rectangular two-pane transoms (now painted). The doors are narrow with five-pane glass lights set vertically. Exit door off this office space is a later five-panel door with panels set horizontally.

The second floor center hall door onto the porch has a rectangular transom above. The door has a large glass upper pane with two horizontal panels below.

6. Special Decorative Features, Trim, Cabinet Work: Modified cyma recta architrave trim surrounds all doorways and windows. Molded picture rails are found in each room on the first and second floors. One foot baseboards throughout with an inverted, prominent scotia molding at the top and simple quarter round molding at the floor.

Three workable fireplaces are found on the first floor, in the living room, dining room and library. Originally gray slate, now each is painted cream color. The two fireplaces along the west wall have cast iron stove doors in segmented arched openings and a lightly etched diamond pattern as the sole decorative feature on the mantelpiece facing.

The fireplace in the dining room is more elaborate. A raised knob-like detail is flanked by raised spandrels on each side. Decorative knobs are also found just below the spandrels on either side of the opening. There are smaller molded rectangular panels below these side knobs.

A plaster medallion approximately 2 1/2 - 3 feet in diameter decorates the ceiling in the dining room.

All windows on the first and second floors are inset one foot. Painted plywood valaces are in the front three rooms and the rear office on the first floor.

7. Hardware: Some earlier embossed metal door hinges with finial end knobs remain. The lock at the top of the front entrance door is also of embossed metal.
8. Mechanical Equipment:
 - a. Heating: A gas-fired furnace is located in the basement which supplies hot water radiators throughout the structure with steam heat.
 - b. Lighting: Unobtrusive ceiling lights are in all rooms.
 - c. Miscellaneous: Smoke alarms are installed throughout.

D. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation: This structure is located on Staff Post Road directly west of the Quadrangle, facing the parade ground and tennis courts.
2. Outbuildings: A small frame outbuilding with wide molded siding (as found on frame porch enclosure) is behind the house. It is now vacant or used as a storage area. The building was originally used as "striker's quarters" - i.e., for the service men assigned to the staff post officers residing in the main residence. This building is a single living unit, in contrast to the two-unit structures behind the other staff post residences. Its small cottage form is reminiscent of the wood frame vernacular residences of this period found throughout the region.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings:

Miscellaneous Forts Files, Record Group 77, Center for Cartographic and Architectural Archives, National Archives and Records Services, Washington, D.C.

Five sheets of original drawing are held in the Office of the Facilities Engineer, Fort Sam Houston. Additional copies are at the Fort Sam Houston Library.

B. Old Views:

Views of Fort Sam Houston, Record Group 92F-56, Audio-Visual Archives, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C.

Miscellaneous photos at Fort Sam Houston, Fort Sam Houston Military Museum, Building #123, Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas.

C. Maps:

1905 map of Fort Sam Houston, Fort Sam Houston Military Museum, Building #123, Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and Unpublished Sources:

Real property records, compiled as a WPA Project in 1940-41, including measured drawings of 1940s floor plans and structural data, Office of the Facilities Engineer, Fort Sam Houston.

Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General consolidated correspondence, file 1794-1915, microfilm from the National Archives held at the Fort Sam Houston Post Library.

2. Secondary and Published Sources:

Jutson, Mary Carolyn Hollers, Alfred Giles: An English Architect in Texas and Mexico, San Antonio, Trinity University Press, 1972.

Handy, Mary Olivia, A History of Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Naylor Inc., 1951.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Correspondence and other miscellaneous file relating to Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The detailed survey of eighteen (18) architecturally representative structures, and a group of streetscapes, at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas, was undertaken in 1980 by the National Architectural and Engineering Record (NAER) after a comprehensive inventory of the Post was conducted. Funding for the project was made possible through the cooperative efforts of the Department of the Army, Fort Sam Houston, and the San Antonio Conservation Society.

This project was under the general supervision of Kenneth Anderson, Acting Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey of the National Architectural and Engineering Record. Sally Tompkins of the NAER staff was project supervisor. Project Historian was Kathryn A. Burns, San Antonio, Texas. Photographic records were provided by David Kaminsky, Roswell, New Mexico.