

Fort Sam Houston National Historic Landmark
Military Post of San Antonio Commanding Officers'
Quarters
(Stilwell House, Building #626, Infantry Post)
San Antonio
Bexar County
Texas

HABS No. TX-3303-9

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Architectural and Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
FORT SAM HOUSTON NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

MILITARY POST OF SAN ANTONIO, COMMANDING OFFICER'S QUARTERS
(Stilwell House, Building #626, Infantry Post)

HABS No. TX-3303-9

Location: 626 Infantry Post Road, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

Present Owner
and Occupant: United States Army

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: This large two-story brick residence was built for the Commanding Officer of the Military Post of San Antonio and his family. When completed in 1888, the structure was the most notable residence on what is now known as Infantry Post, due to its use, size, and architectural detailing.

The quarters most illustrious occupant, General Joseph Warren Stilwell, resided here in 1939-40, between his assignments as Military Attache in China from 1935 to 1939, and his command of all U.S. Forces in the China-Burma-India Theater of World War II. The residence has been named Stilwell House in his honor. The quarters, now vacant, was most recently used for the Fort Sam Houston Military Museum.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: 1888
2. Architect: Office of the Chief Quartermaster, Headquarters Department of Texas, San Antonio, Texas; prepared under the direction of Major A. J. McGonnigle, U.S. Army, Chief Quartermaster, T. H. Millington, Civil Engineer.
3. Original and Subsequent Owners: U.S. Army from date of construction until the present.
4. Building/Contractor: Not known; both P. F. Shields and J. G. Marshall are recorded as contractors on Infantry Post of the construction of 14 buildings in 1888.
5. Original Plan and Construction: This two-story red brick, symmetrical center-hall plan includes a two-story, kitchen-pantry wing. A two-tier porch (with decorative balustrades and brackets now removed) surrounds the residence on three sides with a one-story porch on the rear north side.

One-story bay windows flank the front entrance. A shallow hipped roof, with center venting cupola and two exterior chimneys on both the east and west walls, adds to the structure's symmetrical appearance. The residence was constructed at a cost of \$11,476.98.

6. Alterations and Additions: The exterior appearance of this residence has been significantly altered with the painting of the red brick walls and modification of the original bracket and balustrade detailing on the two-tier porch. The roof, originally standing-seam metal, is now green composition shingles. The interior, while retaining its original floor plan, has had ceilings dropped and significant details such as the fireplaces altered to accommodate the structure's use as a museum.

B. Historical Context:

General Joseph Warren Stilwell, known as 'Vinegar Joe' because of his forthright manner, occupied the Commanding Officer's Quarters at Infantry Post from 1939 through 1940. Prior to his assignment at Fort Sam Houston, he had served for four years as Military Attache in China. In 1941, in the midst of World War II, he was sent to Burma to assist the Chinese and British troops defending Burma against the Japanese infiltration. When the Allies were defeated, he and his troops retreated to India where he trained several Chinese divisions to recapture Burma and open a line of communication to China. He accomplished this in 1944.

Stilwell returned to the United States a distinguished commander and died soon thereafter in 1946.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: While such details as the red brick exterior walls and decorative porch brackets and balustrade have been modified over the years, this two-story symmetrical residence, virtually unaltered in plan, retains a distinctive elegance in its massing and site. The wide center-hall, symmetrical plan, full length windows and encompassing two-tier porch are suggestive of the Greek Revival Style; more typical of the ante-bellum period rather than the late 19th-century.

2. Condition of Fabric: The condition of the fabric is fair to good; the building was considerably altered on the interior in 1968 to accommodate the Post Museum. It is now vacant.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: This structure has two stories and measures three-bay by four-bay with a three-bay by two-bay rear ell. The structure has a double-pile, center-hall plan with a rear kitchen wing on the northeast side. An approximately 10' wide porch skirts the entire building on the first floor, and surrounds the front and sides on the second floor.
2. Foundations: The foundations are made of limestone ashlar with limestone piers supporting the surrounding porch.
3. Wall Construction, Finish and Color: The walls originally red brick are now covered with light cement wash and painted white.
4. Structural System, Framing: The brick load-bearing wall construction is layed in common bond, 5-1-5 pattern, resting on a limestone block foundation.
5. Porches: An attached, two-tier wood-frame porch surrounds the structure on three sides, with the first story continuing on the north (rear) side. The porch rests on limestone piers-four steps above grade. Simple chamfered boxed posts support porch at the first and second level. A solid frame vertical board enclosure, originally an open work balustrade, runs around the full second floor level, and is also found on the northwest portion of the first floor rear wing. A frame open string staircase (west of the kitchen ell) runs north-south along the west side porch to the second floor. A rear poured concrete stair runs east-west along the rear north wall from the rear porch level to the rear basement door. A brick flight of stairs running north-south from the ground level to the basement meets the concrete stair at the basement door landing.
6. Chimneys: The two exterior red brick chimneys with corbelled caps are symmetrically set on both the east and west side walls, projecting through the wide roof overhang. Each has arched metal flashing over flues. A simpler north rear wall wall brick chimney services the kitchen. One square-stack interior chimney with a corbelled cap and an arched metal flashing rises on the left side of the center frame cupola.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and Doors: The front entrance has double doors; a two-pane transom above has curved upper corners. The doors have center rectangular panes with clipped corners and molded square panels above and below.

Numerous doors open onto the porch, primarily located in the rear of the building at both the first and second floors. Each door is slightly inset in the doorway, with two-pane transoms and heavy, hammer-dressed lintels above.

French double doors with five panes, vertically set, are located off the dining room and library on the first floor and the northeast bedroom of the central block on the second floor.

- b. Windows: All windows on the first and second floors in the central block are floor length, (3'-2" x 8'-2") slightly inset, varying from two-over-two sash in front to four-over-four sash on the east and west side. These windows have hammer dressed lintels. All rear wing windows are standard length (3' x 7'-4"- and all have six-over-six sash with hammer dressed lintels and sills. Prominent polygonal window bays flank front entry on the first floor. Bays are encased in wood framing with molded wood, lintel-like panels above each window. The front windows on the second floor above the polygonal bays are coupled two-over-two windows (one front window in the southwest bedroom has been converted to five-pane French double doors); original center front doors above the main entrance have been removed and the opening unsensitively boxed in when the room was converted to a bath.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, Covering: The roof is a shallow hipped roof with slightly flare ends. An attached 1/2 hip roof shelters the rear ell. Originally covered with standing seam metal, the roof is now covered with green composition shingles.

- b. Cornice, Eaves: The roof has a simple boxed cornice with light molding along the edges. The cornice is obscured by a dominating two-tier porch.
- c. Cupola: The hipped roof is crowned with a small, wood frame square cupola. The cupola has three arched vents on each side and a composition shingle hipped roof with solid curved brackets supporting the cornice.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor Plan: The main, central block of this residence is a standard double-pile, center-hall plan. The first floor consists of two front parlors with a dining area (east) and a library (west) set behind. Four bedrooms occupy the second floor in similar placement. What was originally a dressing area at the end of the front center hall is now a bathroom.

The attached rear ell to the east consists of a small lavatory, pantry areas, and a kitchen on the first floor level. The second floor houses separate servants' quarters with bath storage space and a full bath serving the northeast bedroom of the center block. A rear frame bath is a later addition off the northwest bedroom.

With no interior secondary staircase, the servants' quarters are only accessible from the rear outside stairs running from the first to the second floor.

The small basement area, accessible only from a rear north exterior entrance, is of rubble stone and concrete walls located under the rear ell of the structure. The south basement foundation wall is of brick, however, with a small frame entry door to the unexcavated crawl space under the central block. The basement has poured concrete floors and houses the water heater and individual heating system.

- 2. Stairways: The main staircase is set to the rear of the center hall in an open well, running east five steps and then curving south up to the second floor.

The staircase is similar to those in Staff Post residences with stairs fanning slightly at the base and a curved bottom step anchored with an octagonal wood block newel post. The post has inlaid panels with surrounding molding. Ornamental brackets are at the base of each step.

3. Flooring: The flooring consists of 3" wide hardwood throughout which is in good condition; the rear kitchen wing floor is linoleum, and the bathroom floors are tiled. The small basement has a concrete floor.
4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: All walls are plaster and are in fair condition. Many ceilings have been dropped, and now show large battened square plywood panels; the hall, dining room, library and southeast second floor bedroom still retain plaster ceilings. The rear second floor servants' quarters has a beaded tongue-and-groove ceiling.
5. Openings: Most interior doors still retain the solid, standard, four-panel, raised-panel doors with heavy surrounding moldings.

Paneled pocket doors divide west front parlor from the library (now nailed open) and east front parlor from the dining room (in poor condition).

On the second floor, four-panel double doors separate the front and the rear rooms on both the east and west sides of the main block.

6. Special Decorative Features, Trim, Cabinetwork: The long first floor center hallway is divided by a central plaster archway with 5' high turned wood corner guards on all four corners. Identical corner guards are found at the interior corners of the front bay windows in the west front parlor, and also on the chimney breast projections on the second floor in the front east side rooms.

Fireplaces are located in every room of the first-floor central block--all with wooden mantels painted pale orange. The mantels in the rear two rooms are extremely simple with curved wood brackets supporting the mantel shelf. The front two rooms have more elaborate paneling and carving detail.

All fireplaces have been significantly altered; hearth tiles and glazed tile surrounds of rectangular openings have all been painted with a flat black paint.

The kitchen still retains earlier (not necessarily original) built-in cabinetwork in all pantry areas. The wood frame pass-through from the kitchen to the center pantry still exists.

Simple molded door and window trim are found in all rooms. The first floor stairway and the entire second floor hall have beaded board wainscoting with heavy molding trim. Picture railing is found in all the main rooms of the main block.

Both tubs in the servants' quarters are raised, and have claw and ball feet.

7. Hardware: Many heavy original embossed metal (brass) hinge plates with finial-like pins and oval doorknob plates remain throughout.
8. Mechanical Equipment:
 - a. Heating: The heating consists of gas-fired, hot-water steam heat with standing radiators in each room. (An American Radiator Co. heating unit is in the basement.)
 - b. Lighting: Suspended florescent lighting is found in most rooms and was most likely installed when building was converted for museum use.

D. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation: The residence faces south-southeast on the northwest corner lot of Infantry Post onto what was originally the Post parade grounds. This area was developed with additional garden apartment housing units c. 1950. The house has been landscaped with a hedge surrounding the porch.

Two flag poles flank the main entry walk, and a chain link fence surrounds the yard.

2. Outbuildings: A small one-story frame quarters, c. 1910-1915, stands to the rear of the residence.

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 Service, Washington, D.C.

Copies of three sheets of original drawings held in the Office of the Facilities Engineers and the Post Library, Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas.

B. Old Views:

Views of Fort Sam Houston, Record Group 92F-56-5, Audio-Visual Archives, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C.

Fort Sam Houston Historical Museum, Building #123, Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and Unpublished Sources:

Buerkle, Ruth. Infantry Post at Fort Sam Houston, Texas: Location, Description, History of Buildings Recommended for Inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, July, 1974. Unpublished report.

Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, Consolidated Correspondence File 1794-1915, micro film reel from the National Archives, Washington, D.C., held at the Fort Sam Houston Post Library, San Antonio, Texas.

Real Property Records, Directorate of Facilities Engineering, Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas.

2. Secondary and Published Sources:

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

"Joseph W. Stilwell, The World Book Encyclopedia. 1979 Edition. (See Pershing House reference.)

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Correspondence and other miscellaneous files 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.

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**ADDENDUM TO
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MILITARY POST OF SAN ANTONIO,
COMMANDING OFFICER'S QUARTERS**
(Stilwell House, Building No. 626, Infantry Post)
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National Park Service
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