

Watervliet Arsenal
South Stone Quarters
(Quarters 1, Commandant's Quarters)
Mettler Road between Dalliba Avenue
and Bricker Lane
Watervliet
Albany County
New York

HABS No. NY-5521B

HABS
NY
1-WAVL
1/1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HABS
NY
1-WAVL
1/1-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WATERVLIET ARSENAL
SOUTH STONE QUARTERS
(Quarters 1, Commandant's Quarters)

HABS No. NY-5521B

Location: Mettler Road between Dalliba Avenue and Bricker Lane,
Watervliet Arsenal,
Watervliet,
Albany County, New York.

USGS Troy South Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18.606000.4730419

Present Owner: U.S. Army

Present Use: Col. and Mrs. Edward V. Karl

Significance: The building has served as the commandant's quarters since its construction in 1841. It is the earliest of five residences built at the north end of the arsenal during the nineteenth century to house the installation's highest ranking officers. Its residents include author Stephen Vincent Benet who wrote much of his first novel, The Beginning of Wisdom, while living in the house during his father's tenure as commandant of the arsenal.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: In May 1841, the arsenal's commander, Major Rufus L. Baker, submitted plans to the Ordnance Department for construction of the house. Shortly afterwards Baker was instructed to proceed with work on the building and procurement of stone began immediately (see Baker to Talcott, June 10, 1841). The building appears to have been nearly completed by the end of the year when Baker noted that stone was needed to complete the chimneys and portico (Baker to Shuler, November 5, 1841).
2. Architect: Judging from his correspondence with the Ordnance Department, Baker apparently designed the house (Kyle, pp. 98-100, 101-103). Baker arrived at Watervliet in 1838 and for the next 13 years pursued a vigorous expansion program that added storage, housing, and manufacturing facilities to the arsenal. He retired after leaving Watervliet in 1851.

WATERVLIET ARSENAL
SOUTH STONE QUARTERS
(Quarters 1, Commandant's Quarters)
HABS No. NY-5521B (Page 2)

3. Original and subsequent owners: U.S. Army
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Baker's correspondence indicates that stone was being purchased from John Stewart & Co. in Amsterdam, New York (see Baker to John Stewart & Co., July 23, August 12, August 20, and September 24, 1841). The company seems to have been constantly late in filling orders, so that stone may have been purchased from elsewhere as well.
5. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings were located. Baker's correspondence indicates that he planned the commandant's quarters to conform as nearly as possible to the general dimensions and style of the adjacent Arsenal building (Kyle, pp. 98-100). The Arsenal, built in 1826, was demolished in 1898. Baker departed from the design of the earlier building by using a hipped roof on the quarters since he felt that "the old-fashioned pitched roof...would not look well upon the quarters" (Kyle, p. 98). Baker also noted that the building was to have front and rear sections, each with its own stairway.

Two photographs taken in the 1870s and plans published in 1876 are the earliest records found which document the appearance of the house. The photographs (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-11 and HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-12) show a stone, two-story structure with classical detailing. A balustrade encircled the building's hipped roof. The interior plan of the main block consisted of a central hall with stairs flanked by two rooms. The ell contained the service stairs, kitchen, laundry, and closets on the first floor and bedrooms, closets, a bathroom, and service stairs on the second floor (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-15).

6. Alterations and additions: Prior to 1875, a balustrade encircled the roofline of both the main block and rear ell (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-11 and HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-12). At an undetermined date this balustrade was removed with the exception of the terminal blocks located at the corners of the structure. Two later but undated photographs (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-13 and HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-14) show the house following removal of the balustrade.

Several additions have been made to the exterior of the house. A balustraded deck and one-story sun porch were built onto the south and east sides in 1906 according to plans in the arsenal's Engineering Division. The one-story solarium on the north side of the main block was erected at an undetermined date. The wood-frame garage at the northwest corner of the ell was added in 1951 (Quarters One).

WATERVLIET ARSENAL
SOUTH STONE QUARTERS
(Quarters 1, Commandant's Quarters)
HABS No. NY-5521B (Page 3)

While the plan remains essentially the same, some changes have been made on the interior at undetermined dates. Doors were cut in the living room, parlor, and music rooms to provide access to the sun porch and solarium, and the door between the den and dining room was closed. The stairs leading from the first floor of the main block to the basement were removed and replaced with a closet. The closet in the southeast corner of the ell was converted to a dinette, and a door was cut between the dinette and dining room. A lavatory was added at the east end of the porch that extends along the north side of the ell.

On the second floor of the main block, a bathroom was added between the north bedrooms, and the closet at the east end of the hall was converted to a bathroom. Closets on the east and west ends of the ell were converted to bathrooms, and the bathroom on the north side was converted to a bedroom. The attic stairs were removed.

B. Historical Context:

Designed by Major Rufus L. Baker, this house was one of a number of structures erected at the arsenal in the 1840s during Baker's tenure as commandant. Baker resided in the house until his retirement in 1851. He was followed by a succession of arsenal commanders, including Major Alfred Mordecai (1857-1861) and his son Colonel Alfred Mordecai, Jr. (1881-1886, 1898-1899), Brigadier General Peter V. Hagner (1863-1880), Lt. Colonel Ira MacNutt (1905-1908), and Colonel J. Walker Benet (1919-1921). Benet was the father of authors Laura, William Rose, and Stephen Vincent Benet. The latter wrote much of his first novel, The Beginning of Wisdom, while living in the house.

When constructed, the quarters were separated from the arsenal's manufacturing and administrative areas to the south and west by the Erie Canal which was cut across the arsenal grounds in the early 1820s by the State of New York. Located adjacent to the Arsenal building, the house reflected the general dimensions and style of the earlier structure. Over the next five decades, four officers' quarters were erected nearby, and the arsenal building was demolished. As it developed, the housing area became one of spacious landscaped lawns, curving drives, and small scale residences which contrasted markedly with the more closely built manufacturing area. (For further documentation see HAER No. NY-1A.)

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The building is one of two similar and nearly intact, Greek revival officers' quarters built at the arsenal during the 1840s. Occupying a position adjacent to the Erie Canal site, it is surrounded by spacious landscaped lawns and curving drives.
2. Condition of fabric: The house is generally in good condition, but its stone walls are becoming increasingly pitted and discolored by industrial pollutants.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The main block of the L-shaped building is 56' (five bay front) x 44'. The ell on the west side is 29' x 58'. A garage is attached to the west end of the north elevation of the ell. Porches are located on the east, north, and south sides. The building is two-stories with an attic and full basement. The ell is lower than the main block.
2. Foundations: Coursed and random coursed ashlar limestone with a dressed limestone water table.
3. Walls: Walls on the east, north, and south sides of the main block and the south side of the ell are coursed ashlar limestone. Remaining walls are random coursed ashlar limestone. The belt course and the pilasters accenting the corners of the main block and ell are dressed limestone. The ell belt course, which runs at second story sill level, is cut away below each window. Solarium walls are beaded wood paneling, and sun porch walls are wood panels. Garage walls are wood panels with battens.
4. Structural system, framing: Walls are load bearing approximately 2' thick; roofs are supported by timber trusses.
5. Porches, stoops: A one-bay portico marks the main entrance at the center of the east elevation (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-6). Painted fluted Doric columns set on stone blocks and stone pilasters support a full wood entablature.

An open sun deck defined by a balustrade with turned wood balusters extends the width of the building south of the portico (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-1). The balustrade continues along the south wall of the enclosed sun porch. Three tapered Doric

WATERVLIET ARSENAL
SOUTH STONE QUARTERS
(Quarters 1, Commandant's Quarters)
HABS No. NY-5521B (Page 5)

columns supporting the shed roof of the porch are set on the paneled wood blocks of the balustrade. Entrances to the porch are on the east and west sides.

A one-story enclosed porch (solarium) extends the depth of the main block on the north side (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-4). Columns and foliated brackets support its decorated frieze and shed roof. Entrances to the porch are on the east and west sides.

A one-story porch with its shed roof supported by square paneled posts extends along the north side of the ell between the west wall of the main block and the east wall of the garage. The porch, which is screened, is entered on the north near its east end.

There is a stone stoop on the south side of the ell. Its balustrade is metal with thin balusters and rail.

6. Chimneys: Two massive stone end chimneys with corbelled caps rise from the roof on the north and south sides of the house. A similar chimney straddles the ridge slightly south of the center of the ell.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: At the main entrance, double-leaf screen doors are flanked by sidelights with pairs of attenuated fluted Doric pilasters (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-6). Above the doors is a transom with paneled ends containing short fluted Ionic pilasters supporting a molded cornice. The screen doors open to a set of dark-stained, double-leaf, paneled wood doors with single beveled lights. The doors are flanked by frosted, traceried sidelights. The doors and sidelights are surmounted by sets of operable and nonoperable, frosted, traceried transoms.

The entrance of the south side of the ell is a paneled wood door flanked by paneled pilasters and three-light sides. The transom above the door has four lights. Porch doors are glazed wood covered with storm doors.
 - b. Windows: Typical windows are one-over-one-light, double-hung wood sash with stone lug sills and flat stone lintels. A one-over-one-light, double-hung sash flanked by paneled pilasters and narrow one-over-one-light, double-hung sash is centered above the main entrance on the east elevation. Sun porch and solarium windows are multi-light wood sash.

WATERVLIET ARSENAL
SOUTH STONE QUARTERS
(Quarters 1, Commandant's Quarters)
HABS No. NY-5521B (Page 6)

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Both the main block and ell have shallow hip roofs clad with standing seam copper. Stone piers, originally part of the roof balustrade, remain at each corner of the main block and at the northwest and southwest corners of the ell. Skylights punctuate the roof on the east side of the main block and the west side of the ell.
- b. Cornice, eaves: A molded stone cornice encircles the main block and forms the capitals for the pilasters. The stone cornice on the ell is plain.
- c. Dormers: A dormerlike structure containing a ventilator sits west of the main block ridge.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: At the center of the main block, a small room precedes the central hall. Two rooms open off each side of the hall. The ell contains four rooms with the stairs to the first floor and a narrow hall set against the south wall. (See supplemental material, floor plans)
- b. First floor: The main entrance on the east opens onto a central hall containing the staircase. The living and dining rooms are on the south side of the hall, and the parlor and music room are on the north. An enclosed sun porch is entered from the south side of the living room, and French doors lead to the solarium off the parlor and music room. In the ell, the dinette opens off the dining room, and the den is entered from the central hall. The remainder of the ell contains the kitchen, the service stairs and hall along the south wall, a utility room on the right of the hall, a second hall leading to the garage, and three closets along the west wall. (See supplemental material, floor plans)
- c. Second floor: In the main block, the stairway from the first floor leads to the central hall with two bedrooms on each side. The stairs to the attic are also in the hall. There is a bathroom at the east end of the hall and one between the northeast and northwest bedrooms. The ell is entered by a short flight of stairs at the west end of the hall. A L-shaped hall to the left provides access to two bathrooms, the service stairs, and four bedrooms. (See supplemental material, floor plans)

WATERVLIET ARSENAL
SOUTH STONE QUARTERS
(Quarters 1, Commandant's Quarters)
HABS No. NY-5521B (Page 7)

- d. Attic: The attic consists of a single room with the stairway opening at the center.
2. Stairways: The main stairway rises in a graceful curve to the second floor (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-7). The round, tapering newel post and rail are stained. The thin turned balusters arranged two to a tread, the risers, treads, and stringers are painted. The stairs are partially carpeted. On the second floor, the stairwell is enclosed with the balustrade. The balustrade on the west side of the stairwell has a thinner tapering newel post (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-10). Near the east end of the hall, a second stairway similar to the main stairway curves upward to the attic (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-10).

A short narrow flight of stairs leads from the rear of the hall to the ell. The turned balusters, rail and round newel post are painted, and the stairs are carpeted.

The service stairs along the south wall of the ell are straight-run with turned newel post, thin tapering balusters, and plain rail. The risers are carpeted. The stairwell is enclosed by the balustrade on the second floor.

The stairs to the basement are wood, straight-run with a plain rail.

3. Flooring: Floors on the first and second floors of the main block and the solarium are varnished narrow-width boards. Floors in the stair hall and southwest and northwest bedrooms have a narrow border stained dark. The border on the living room floor alternates dark and light strips and has squares at each of the corners. In the southeast bedroom, the border is wide consisting of several thin strips outlined by perpendicular alternating light and dark strips and corner blocks with radiating light and dark strips. Bathroom floors are ceramic tile or linoleum. Flooring on the first floor of the ell is linoleum. Bedrooms in the ell have varnished narrow-width board floors with a dark border. Basement floors are concrete or brick. Attic floors are tongue and groove boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls in the major rooms throughout the first and second floors are papered. The dining room walls have a chair rail. There are wide molded baseboards in the major rooms; the bases in the ell are plainer than those in the main block. The utility room and bathrooms have ceramic tile wainscots. The sun porch and solarium walls are stone at the

WATERVLIET ARSENAL
SOUTH STONE QUARTERS
(Quarters 1, Commandant's Quarters)
HABS No. NY-5521B (Page 8)

side of the main block. Remaining walls in the sun porch are wood paneling and are beaded wood paneling in the solarium. Attic walls are beaded wood paneling. Exterior basement walls are stone, and walls along the sides of the hall are brick.

Ceilings in the main block are plaster with prominent molded plaster cornices. Bathroom ceilings and those in the northwest and southwest bedrooms have no cornices. In the ell, ceilings are plaster without molded cornices on the second floor and accoustical tile on the first floor. The sun porch ceiling is accoustical tile. Rafters are exposed below the wood deck of the solarium roof. Basement ceilings are plaster.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Typical doors are paneled and are framed by paneled pilasters supporting an architrave. The sliding doors have been removed from the large opening between the music room and parlor (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-8). On the second floor, the doorway at the east end of the hallway consists of a six-panel door framed by pilasters, sidelights now filled with wood panels, and a four-light transom decorated with a colored curvilinear design (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-10). Typical doors in the ell are paneled and have architrave trim.

b. Windows: In the main block, typical windows are set above panels and framed by paneled pilasters supporting an architrave. Each has bifold louvered shutters. Windows in the ell have architrave trim.

6. Decorative features and trim: The rectangular opening of the living room fireplace is framed by a glazed tile surround, pilasters, a plain frieze, and simple mantel shelf. The mantel is marble, and the hearth is glazed tile with a decorative border (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-8). The music room, parlor, and dining room fireplaces are similar.

Fireplaces in the main block bedrooms have glazed tile hearths and rectangular openings framed by light gray marble pilasters, a plain frieze, and simple mantel shelf.

A built-in china cabinet with segmental-arched glass doors above drawers and paneled wood doors is set in the west wall of the dining room (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-9). A second built-in cabinet is on the east wall of the dinette. It is simpler in design with plain rectangular glass doors.

WATERVLIET ARSENAL
SOUTH STONE QUARTERS
(Quarters 1, Commandant's Quarters)
HABS No. NY-5521B (Page 9)

7. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating, air conditioning: Heated air is pumped from the furnace in the basement through decorative metal grates on the walls at baseboard level (see HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-7). The house is cooled by central air conditioning.
- b. Lighting: The hallways are lighted by hanging metal and glass fixtures with candle-shaped electric lights (see HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-7 and HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-10). The dining room is lighted by a hanging multibranch brass chandelier with candle-shaped electric lights (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-9). Ceiling fixtures elsewhere are modern incandescent or fluorescent.
- c. Plumbing: Plumbing fixtures are modern.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Located north of Dalliba Avenue, the building faces east onto Mettler Road and the Erie Canal site. It is immediately surrounded by landscaped open space, curving drives, and additional officers' quarters on the north and west. Small fountains constructed of cannon and cannon balls are situated southeast and west of the house. The arsenal's industrial and maintenance areas lie to the southwest on the opposite side of Dalliba Avenue.
2. Outbuildings: A building constructed in 1903 as a greenhouse to protect plants that ornamented the arsenal's grounds (HABS No. NY-5521G, Building 12) is located directly north of the quarters. Now used as a horticultural facility by the arsenal's military personnel, it is one story high and has stone and glass walls and ornate cast-iron roof cresting.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

Basement, First, and Second Floor Plans. Published in Officers Quarters at the Arsenals and Armory. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1876. Copy available in the Watervliet Arsenal Museum. (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-15)

Porch for Quarters No. 1. April 16, 1906. Shows sun porch and deck on south and east sides. Watervliet Arsenal Engineering Division.

WATERVLIET ARSENAL
SOUTH STONE QUARTERS
(Quarters 1, Commandant's Quarters)
HABS No. NY-5521B (Page 10)

B. Early Views:

South and east elevations before removal of balustrade along roof and construction of porch on the south side. Dated May 31, 1875. Watervliet Arsenal Museum. (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-11)

East and north elevations shown prior to removal of balustrade along the roof and addition of porch on the north side. Taken possibly about 1875. Watervliet Arsenal Museum. (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-12)

South and east elevations following removal of balustrade along the roof and construction of porch on the south side. Undated. Watervliet Arsenal Museum. (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-13)

East and north elevations following removal of balustrade along roof and construction of porch on north side. Undated. Watervliet Arsenal Museum. (HABS Photo No. NY-5521B-14)

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Major Rufus L. Baker to George Talcott, June 10, 1841. Watervliet Arsenal, Letter Book G, pp. 162-163, Series 1416, Record Group 156, Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance. Navy and Old Army Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Notes Baker was given authorization to proceed with construction.

Major Rufus L. Baker to Colonel W. T. Shuler, November 5, 1841. Watervliet Arsenal, Letter Book G, p. 318, Series 1416, Record Group 156, Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance. Navy and Old Army Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Notes that stone was still needed for the chimneys and portico cornice.

Major Rufus L. Baker to John Stewart & Co., July 23, August 12, August 20, and September 24, 1841. Watervliet Arsenal, Letter Book G, pp. 205-206, 222, 228, 283, Series 1416, Record Group 156, Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance. Navy and Old Army Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Notes difficulty of getting stone from John Stewart & Co.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Building Technology, Inc. Historic Properties Report Watervliet Arsenal, Watervliet, New York and Rotterdam Family Housing Area, Rotterdam, New York. January 1985. The report and inventory cards for the arsenal are filed as field records in the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, HAER No. NY-1A.

Kyle, Francis K. A History of Watervliet Arsenal. Watervliet, New York: Watervliet Arsenal, 1920. Quotes contemporary correspondence relating to construction and repairs. Copy available in the Watervliet Arsenal Museum.

Quarters One, a Place in History. Watervliet, New York: Watervliet Arsenal, n.d. Includes historic and recent photographs of the house and its furnishings and a brief history and biographies of some of its residents. Copy available in the Watervliet Arsenal Engineering Division.

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance, Record Group 156, and Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers, Record Group 77, Navy and Old Army Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C. should be further investigated.

E. Supplemental Material:

Basement, First, and Second Floor Plans, Officers Quarters, Building No. 1. No date. Watervliet Arsenal Engineering Division. Current floor plans of the building.

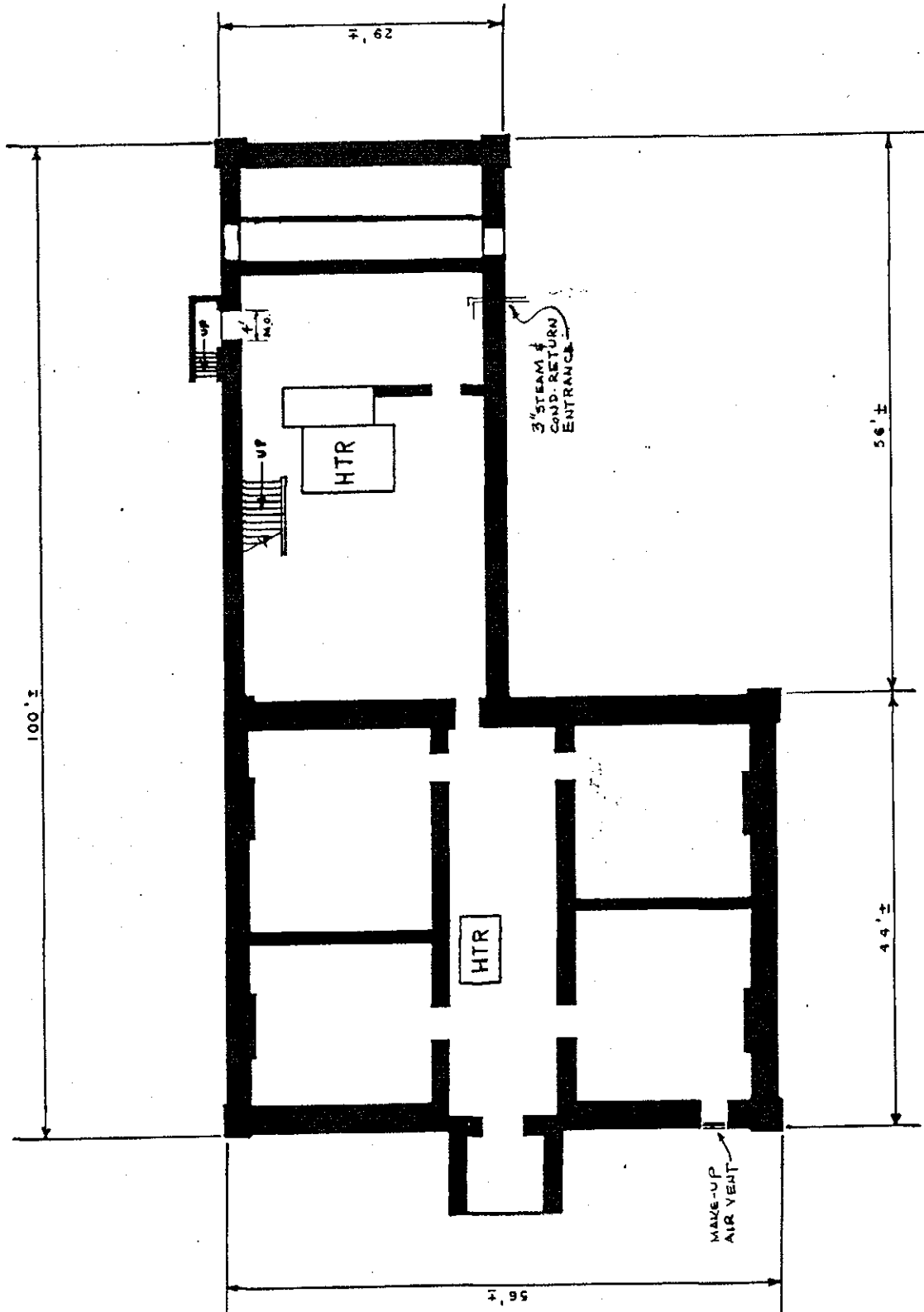
Prepared by: Barbara E. Hightower
Historian
MacDonald and Mack Partnership
February 1985

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was part of a program initiated through a memorandum of agreement between the National Park Service and the U.S. Department of the Army. Stanley H. Fried, Chief, Real Estate Branch of Headquarters DARCOM, and Dr. Robert J. Kapsch, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, were program directors. Sally Kress Tompkins of HABS/HAER was program manager, and Robie S. Lange of HABS/HAER was project manager. Under the direction of William A. Brenner, Building Technology Incorporated, Silver Spring, Maryland, acted as primary contractor, and MacDonald and Mack Partnership, Minneapolis, was a major subcontractor. The project included a survey of historic properties at Watervliet Arsenal, as well as preparation of an historic properties report and HABS/HAER documentation for 17 buildings. The survey, report, and documentation were completed by Barbara E. Hightower, historian, Minneapolis. The photographs were taken by Robert A. Ryan and J. Ceronie of Dennett, Muessig, Ryan, and Associates, Ltd., Iowa City, Iowa. Drawings were produced by Gary M. Louris, Minneapolis.

E. Supplemental Material
Floor Plan

WATERVLIET ARSENAL
SOUTH STONE QUARTERS
(Quarters 1, Commandant's Quarters)
HABS No. NY-5521B (Page 12)



C.O. QUARTERS

WATERVLIET ARSENAL WATERVLIET, N.Y.		REV.	DATE
		EL TR	4/78 6/78
DRAWN BY: E. LANSBURG			
BASEMENT PLAN OFFICERS QUARTERS BUILDING NO. 1			
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"		DATE: 3/78	

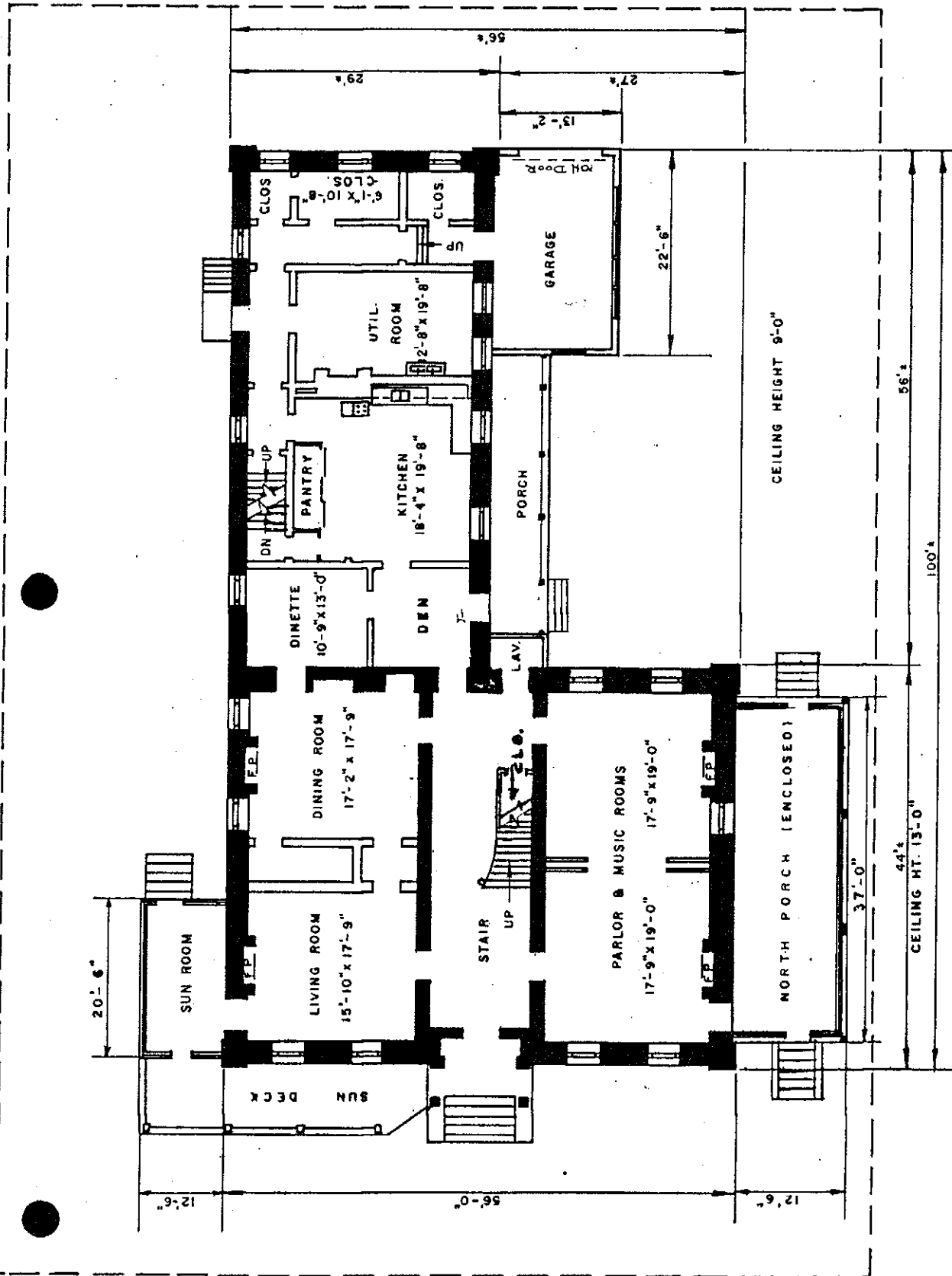
NET FLOOR AREA
3745 SQ. FT.



E. Supplemental Material
Floor Plan

WATERVLIEL ARSENAL
SOUTH STONE QUARTERS
(Quarters 1, Commandant's Quarters)
HABS No. NY-5521B (Page 13)

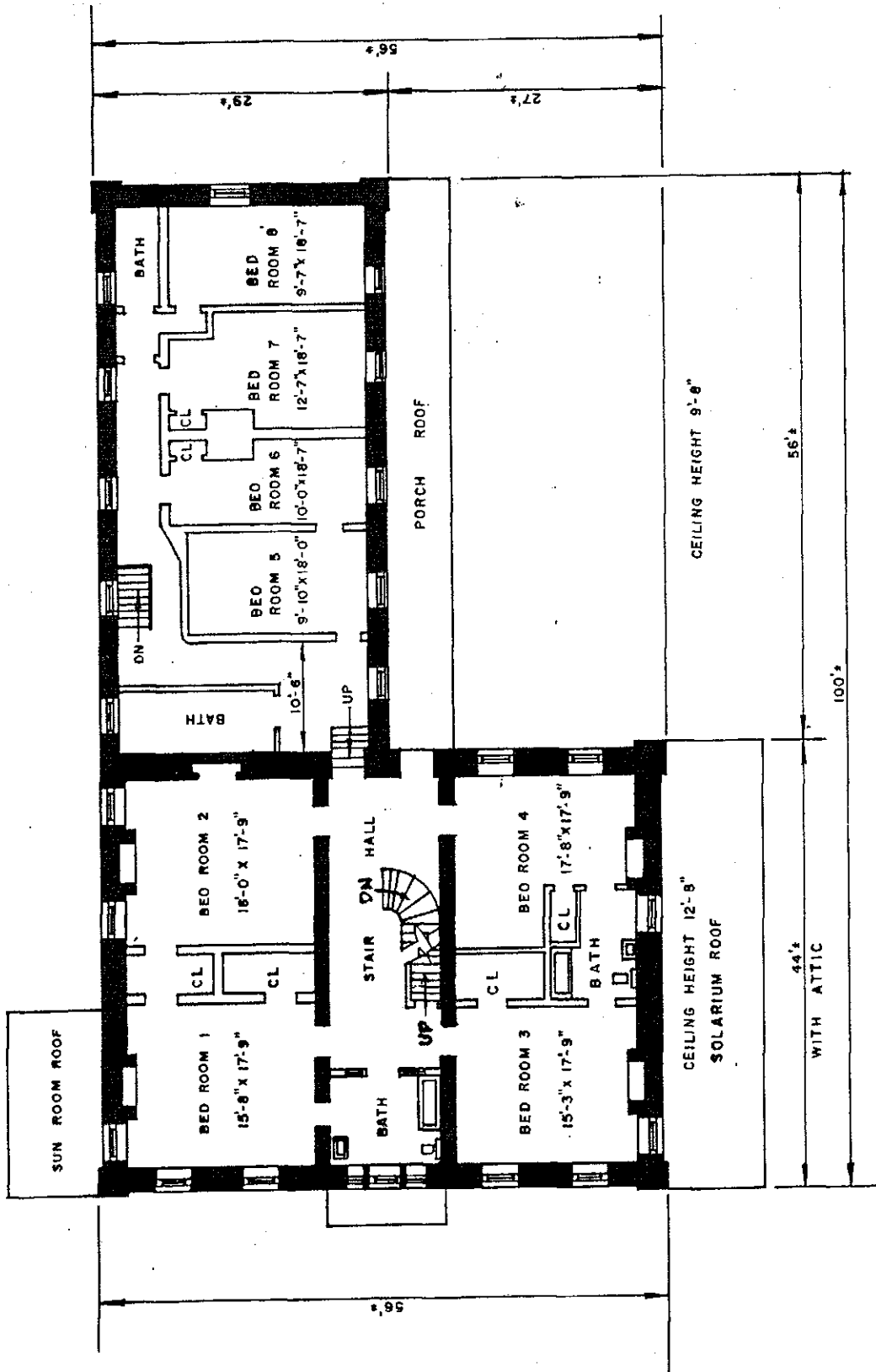
WATERVLIEL ARSENAL		WATERVLIEL, N.Y.
Drawn by: J.R. GANGEML, A.E. App'd by: <i>[Signature]</i>		Date: 3-75
FIRST FLOOR PLAN		Revisions: EL 4-78
OFFICERS QUARTERS		EL
BUILDING NO. 1.		EL
Scale: 1/16" = 1'-0" Date:		



NET FLOOR AREA	3450
Square feet	
FLOOR CAPACITY	40 LBS
Per square foot	

E. Supplemental Material
Floor Plan

WATERVLIET ARSENAL
SOUTH STONE QUARTERS
(Quarters 1, Commandant's Quarters)
HABS No. NY-5521 B (Page 14)



WATERVLIET ARSENAL	
WATERVLIET, N.Y.	
Drawn by: J.R.GANGEMI, A.E. Appd by: <i>J.R. Gangemi</i>	Date: 3/75
Revisions: E.L.	4/78
SECOND FLOOR PLAN OFFICERS QUARTERS BUILDING NO. 1	
Scale: 1/16" = 1'-0" Date:	

NET FLOOR AREA
3,205
Square feet

FLOOR CAPACITY
40LBS
Per square foot
12'-8" CL.G. HT.