Memorandum

To:    Director
From:  Regional Director

Subject: Historic Buildings Report, Part I
Building No. 1-A, The Harper House
Harpers Ferry National Monument

In accordance with PO 11-56, we are forwarding two complete copies of the above Historic Buildings Report for review. Comments should be made to the Superintendent by December 1.

(Sgd.) Daniel J. Tobin

Daniel J. Tobin
Regional Director

In duplicate

Attachments

Copy to:  Chief, EODC, w/copy Admin. & Hist. Data Sections
          Supt., Harpers Ferry, w/copy Architect. Data Section
APPROVAL SHEET

Recommended: Director

Recommended: Regional Director

Recommended: Chief, E.O.D.C.

Approved: Frank H. Anderson  
Superintendent

Harpers Ferry National Monument
HISTORIC BUILDING REPORT

PART I

for

BUILDING NO. 1-A,

THE HARPER HOUSE

Harpers Ferry National Monument

Prepared by:

Charles W. Snell,
Historian (Park Supervisory)
25 pages
Dated: May 12, 1958
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## SECTION III: ARCHITECTURAL DATA (UNDER PREPARATION)
SECTION I: ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

A. Name and Number of Building:

Building No. 1-A, The Harper House

B. Proposed Use of Structure:

Both the exterior and the interior of this building are to be restored to the 1850-1865 period. We believe that the furnishings, too, should be restored to the 1850-1865 period. While the best information available on furnishings for this structure is an inventory listing all of his household goods of John Nager Jr. of October 1, 1833 it is believed that this list can serve as a guide to restore the furnishings of the later period.

C. Provisions for Operating the House:

Altho no funds have been programed for re-furnishing the house, the Shenandoah-Potomac Council of Garden Clubs expect to cooperate in the project of furnishing the Harper House. In fact the proceeds from the recent "Historic House and Garden Tour" sponsored by this group, approximately one thousand dollars, has been reserved for this fund now totaling over two thousand dollars. The possibility should probably be explored of the ladies' group charging a nominal fee to visitors for admittance to the building. Such a fee would doubtless permit them to pay a guide on weekends and full time in the summer and thus eliminate the necessity for assigning a Park Service representative to this chore.

D. Preliminary Estimate of Cost for Rehabilitating the Structure:

It is estimated that the total cost of restoring the exterior and interior of Building No.1-A will amount to $60,000 of which $2,000 is currently programed.
SECTION II - HISTORICAL DATA

1. OWNERSHIP OF THE LAND, 1751 - 1924

The land on which Building No. 1-A now stands was acquired by Robert Harper, a mill builder, on April 25, 1751, in a deed for 125 acres, from Lord Thomas Fairfax. Harper died at Harpers Ferry in October 1782 and bequeathed this 125 acres to his niece, Sarah Harper, the daughter of his brother, Joseph Harper, and the wife of John Wager, Senior. Thus, in this manner, the property passed into the hands of the Wager family. On June 15, 1796, with the exception of six acres retained in the "Six Acre Reservation" and about three-quarters more of an acre located in the "Ferry Lot Reservation", John Wager, Sr., sold all of this 125 acres to the United States Government for $7,016.66 for the purpose of establishing an Armory at Harpers Ferry.

On John Wager, Sr.'s death on September 21, 1803, the Six Acre Reservation (which contained Building No. 1-A, the Harper House) and the Ferry Lot passed to his son, John Wager, Jr. John Wager, Jr. died on October 22, 1813 and the estate, in turn, was passed to his four children, still minors, James Bates Wager, John William Stein Wager (who died March 22, 1823), Gerard Bond Wager, and Sarah Ann Wager.

The Wager children held the estate in an undivided ownership until 1835.


2. Last Will of Robert Harper of Berkeley County, Va., dated 26 September 1782. Office of the Judge Advocate General, Military Reservation Division, Reservation File, West Virginia, Box 41, Harpers Ferry (ms). National Archives Record Group 153.

James Bates Wager

By the fall of 1834 was in extreme financial difficulty and indeed, soon took advantage of the bankruptcy laws to save himself from debtors' prison. In order to settle James' affairs and to protect the rights of Gerard B. Wager and Sarah Ann Wager, the Circuit Superior Court of Law and Chancery for Jefferson County appointed Commissioners, on April 2, 1835, "to lay off and divide into three equal lots and parcels, the real estate which descended to James B. Wager, Gerard B. Wager and Sally Ann Wager, now Sally Ann Swayne, the wife of Noah H. Swayne, from their father John Wager, deceased."

On October 10, 1835 the three commissioners reported to the Court: "To Sally Ann Swayne, the wife of Noah H. Swayne, we allot and assign the lots following as numbered in the annexed plat (See Appendix I) and marked N.H.S.: to wit: Lots No. 5, 8-10-11-13-16-17-20-24-26-28-31-33-35-40-42-45, including the old mansion (Eldg. No. 1-A), 48-51 & 55."

Thus in 1835 Wager Lot No. 45, containing Eldg. No. 1-A, the Harper House, became the exclusive property of Sarah Ann Wager, who had married Noah H. Swayne, then United States Attorney for the District of Ohio, on September 6, 1832. Under this same division, Wager Lot No. 44,


5. Gibson, etc., vs. Wager, etc., Decree, Deed Book 29, pp. 140-141, Jefferson Court House, Charles Town.

6. Ibid.

7. Virginia Free Press, September 13, 1832, p. 3.
containing Bldg. No. 1-B, Marmion Hall, passed into the exclusive
ownership of James B. Wager. The history of Wager Lot 44 and Bldg. 1-B
from 1835 to 1924 will be treated in a separate report.

Wager Lot No. 45 and Bldg No. 1-A, the Harper House, remained the
property of the Swayne family from October 10, 1835 until July 16, 1924.
On this latter date, Lot No. 45 and the Harper Houses were acquired by
the Marmion family, who then owned Lot No. 44 and Bldg. No. 1-B, and the
two pieces of property were again remitted under a common ownership.

During the historical period, 1859-1865, with which we are concerned,
however, Wager Lot No. 45 and Bldg. 1-A, the Harper House, were owned
by Noah M. Swayne of Ohio.

II. CONSTRUCTION OF THE HARPER HOUSE, 1775 - 1781.

No. documentary evidence has been uncovered to date that throws
any light on the construction of Bldg. No. 1-A. In the absence of such
evidence it is therefore necessary to fall back on the best accounts
embodying local tradition; in this case, Joseph Barry's The Strange Story
of Harper's Ferry, with Legends of the Surrounding County. Mr. Barry
states that Robert Harper lived for many years in a cabin reported to
have been situated approximately on the present site of Bldg. No. 9,
or Wager Lot No. 14 - "Until about the year 1775, when he built one
about half a mile farther up the Shenandoah, where he died in 1782".
This part of the tradition can be checked by means of two plats or
maps, and appears to be correct. The first of these plats, untitled,

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can be called for our purposes from its Legend, "Explanation of the Plat", appears to have been drawn either Leonard Harbaugh or N. King, who had prepared a 1803 survey for the construction of the Shenandoah Canal, in 1804 or 1805, following the completion of the canal. The plat delineates the islands in the Shenandoah River, later known as the Hall Rifle Factory islands, and in the legend states "T shews the Dwelling of Harper decd."

The second survey, "Harpers Ferry Armory, Jefferson County, Va., June 1843," drawn by James M. Brown, confirms the information given on the first plat and states "U is an old house in which Robert Harper lived and died". This house is shown on the 1843 survey as being located on the mainland, south and west of the Hall Rifle Work Islands, or south of Highway U.S. 340 in present day terms. This part of the tradition therefore seems to be correct.

But to continue, Barry states, "Shortly after building the house on Shenandoah Street he erected a large stone dwelling on what is now called High Street... He experienced great difficulty in finishing this building, owing to a scarcity of mechanics, nearly all the able-bodied men of the place and neighborhood having gone to join the army of Washington. It is recorded that an intimate friend of Mr. Harper, named Hamilton, lost his life in this house, by an accidental fall and this tradition, coupled with the age of the house, gives a sombre character to the building. At the time of Mr. Harper's death, therefore, there were but three houses at 'The Ferry'." All other accounts of 11, National Archives Record Group No. 77, DR.118-62.


are based on Barry's narrative; it would therefore appear that this house was constructed by Robert Harper sometime between 1775 and 1781.

III. USE OF THE HARPER HOUSE, 1782 - 1924.

While the house was probably constructed by Robert Harper in the period 1775 -1781, it is also apparent that he never lived in the building and probably never had an opportunity to use the structure. On his death the house passed to Sarah Harper, who "was married to a gentleman of Philadelphia, named Wager. He was the grandson of a German of the same name, who many years before, had emigrated from the city of Worms in Hesse Darmstadt." Neither John Wager, Senior, nor his wife, Sarah, Barry states, "ever saw their Harper's Ferry property, but many of their descendants were born there..."

The Harper House, from 1783 until 1803, and probably until at least September 30, 1807, was rented out under a lease by John Wagers, Senior and Junior, as a tavern. Thomas Jefferson, in letter to H. G. Spofford, dated May 14, 1809, mentioned what is undoubtedly the Harper House:

"That the scene described in the 'Notes' is not visible from any part of the road from Fredericksburg to Harper's ferry is most certain. That road passes along the valley, nor can it be seen from the tavern [Bldg. 1-A] after crossing the ferry; and we may fairly infer that Mr. Volney did not ascend the height back of the tavern from which alone it can be seen..."

"I told him I received a drawing of that from a French engineer sent there by the Marquis de Chastellux, and who has published that drawing in his travels."

"I visited the place myself in October, 1783, wrote the description some time after, and printed the work in Paris in 1784-5." 15


On August 6 to August 9, 1785, George Washington visited Harpers Ferry and probably stayed at the Harper House Tavern. Washington noted in his diary of this trip:

"Saturday, 6th. Breakfasted at Frederick Town (Hi), at Govr. Johnson's and dined at Harpers Ferry. (By Exps. at Dorris's Tavern-10s 6d (Cash Account))... Sent a Canoe in a Neggon from the Ferry to Keepies Furnance in ord.r. to descend the Falls therein tomorrow." 16

"Sunday, 7th. About Sunrising, the Directors (of the Potomac Company) and myself rid up to Keeprieste, where CAnoes were provided...

"At the foot of these Falls the Directors and myself (Gavr. Lee having joined us the Evening before) held a meeting.... Gavr. Lee on Acct. of the death of his Father in Law... left us at this place... The rest of us returned to the Tavern at Harpers Ferry." 17

"Monday, 8th. This being the day appointed for labourers to engage in the work we waited to see the issue until evening, when Mr. Johnson and his Brother Col. Johnson took leave of us."

"Many gentlemen of the Neighborhood visited us here today, among whom Mr. Wromeley, Senr. (Nalp Wormley), my Brother Charles, Colo. Morgan (Col. Daniel Morgan 7, who was then living at Winchester), Captn. Shepard, and Colo. Shepard his Brother of Wheeling on the Ohio, were of the number." 18

On August 9, 1785 Washington left Harpers Ferry to continue on his inspection trip.

A 1803 map, "Plan of the proposed junction of the CANAL, at the lower Falls of the Shenandoah, with the Public Canal at HAR PERS FERRY, and the necessary Locks for descending into the Potomack River, Surveyed & les'd by N. King & L. Harbaugh, Feb. 1803," (See Appendix II), not only labels the Harper House as a tavern, but gives us dimensions of the building at that date, with those of out-buildings, and the location of the "Harper Garden."


17. Ibid., pp.309, 401. 18. Ibid., pp. 401-402.

19. National Archives R.G. 79, Dr. 150-2, sheet 1 of 2; Map reproduced in Harpers Ferry Master Plan as Drawing No. NM HF-3004.
Use of the Harper House, following the death of John Wager, Sr. in September 1803 until October 1813 has not been established by documentary evidence, but the following uses seem highly probable:

1. October 1803 to September 30, 1807, the building was probably still used as a tavern, under lease from John Wager, Jr.

2. On June 25, 1807 Hannah Wager, a sister of John Wager, Jr., married Roger Humphreys, a merchant, and it seems probable that they may have leased the Harper House as their home as of October 1, 1807 (subsequent leases for the building all began on October 1). As collaborating evidence for this theory, a 1811 survey of the Arsenal tract labels a large building standing on the present sites of Bldgs. 20a No.11 and 12 as the tavern at that date, may be cited.

In any case, documentary evidence indicates that Roger Humphreys was occupying the Harper House as his residence, under a yearly lease, beginning at least on October 1, 1813. In describing that part of the Wager estate assigned to Catherine Wager, the widow of John Wager, Jr., in January 1814, we find the following information.

"We have further assigned to her the following part of the aforesaid six acres of land and the several houses and buildings on the said part to wit: Beginning on a line of said six acres lot at the west edge of the public road leading from Harpers Ferry up the Shenandoah at a point halfway between the House Robert Aeries lives in (probably on Wager Lot No.48- see Appendix 1), and the Wagers new stone stable (probably on Wager Lot No.50) thence up the Hill at right angles to said road 68 feet thence towards the Charles Town Road (High Street) 65 feet to the middle of the stone steps leading up to the old stone house (Bldg. No. 1-2) and at the edge of the wall in front of said old stone house, thence up the said wall between the same and the house occupied by Roger Humphreys (the public walk in front of the Harper House) 180 feet to near the southwest corner of the stable occupied by Roger

20a. 1811 Plat of arsenal tract, P-259 (Vol.5) enc. National Archives.

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"Humphreys thence (to exclude said stable) and at right angles to the last line down the hill 25 feet to the middle of the Charles Town Road (High Street) thence down said road 52 feet to a point opposite the centre between the two rows of grape vines in the garden called Mrs. Wagers thence down the middle of said two rows of grape vines (or probably at right angles to the last line, northeastly) across said garden 145 feet more or less to the line of the public property (probably) in back of the musket factory tract, thence up the line bounding on said property public property in lands the different courses round said six acre lot to the beginning." 20

The accounts of the guardians of the Wager children, Oct. 24, 1813 to February 24, 1823, indicate that Roger Humphreys rented a house at $40.00 per year during this entire period as well as a store at $300.00 a year from the Wager estate. It therefore appears that the Harper House was occupied by Humphreys as a residence until at least October 1823, when his yearly lease would have expired. In 1824 James B. Wager became of age, thus ending the guardianship of the Wager children.

Sometime between 1824 and 1831 the Wager children occupied the Harper House as their residence. The deed donating land for the erection of the Catholic Church, granted by the Wager children on May 10, 1831, establishes this latter date. The deed reads in part:

"The following land at or near Harper's Ferry: Beginning at a pile of stone on the side of the hill on which is situated the house wherein the said Wagers now reside..." 22


21. See Footnote No. 4, page 2 of this report for references in Will Books No. 2 and 3.

21a. The Grant of land to Catherine Wager is rather ambiguous, in 1814, as to which side of the Six Acre Reservation division she received. Either Roger Humphreys occupied the Harper House, 1813-1823, as suggested in the text. Or if the division wherein the other way, Catherine Wager and her children occupied the Harper House, while Humphreys was located on the children's portion. In either case she house was occupied by a branch of the Wager family.

22. Deed of B and S, May 10, 1831, Deed Book 17, pp. 6-7.
In December 1831, James B. Wager married Miss Mary Ann Wager, the daughter of Peter Wager, a Major in the United States Army and of Philadelphia, Pa. This event may account in part for the remodelling and additions that occurred to the Harper House in 1832.

Remodelling of the Harper Houses, 1832 - 1833.

On July 7, 1832 Gerard B. Wager and Sarah Ann Wager signed a lease with James B. Wager that is believed to cover both the construction of Building No. 1-B and the remodelling of the Harper House, Bldg. No. 1-A. Under this agreement they leased to James B. Wager:

"their respective shares of a certain tenament, lying and being at Harpers Ferry... now in the possession and occupancy of said James B. Wager, except that part heretofore occupied by Dr. Hoper (this was probably part of Bldg. No. 1-A) for an annual rent of $50 per year for eight years..."

Architectural evidence uncovered by Architect Archie W. Franzen in investigations of Buildings No. 1-A and 1-B suggests that James B. Wager, about 1832, constructed Bldg. No. 1-B as an extension of the Harper House. The older door and window casings and other trim of the Harper House were replaced at that time so as to harmonize with those installed in the new house, Bldg. No. 1-B. The two houses were also joined as a unit by means of two door openings located on the first floor level.


By July of 1834, James B. Wager, heavily in debt, was hard pressed by his creditors, and to meet these obligations, began liquidating some of his holdings in Harpers Ferry. Among the items offered for sale were:

"...all the interest of said James B. Wager in the House and Lot he now occupies, as derived from a lease executed to him by Gerard B. Wager and S. A. Wager..." 27

On 8 December 8, 1834, William Anderson, a merchant and builder, purchased for $2,330 certain personal property and the leasehold of James B. Wager to the "tenant & house in the occupancy of the said James B. Wager..." Thus William Anderson obtained full use of Bldg. No. 1-B, and probably a part of the Harper House, No.1-A, for the unexpired remaining six years of the eight year lease.

As all ready noted (see page 2 of this report), on April 2, 1835 the Circuit Superior Court of Law and Chancery for Jefferson County appointed commissioners to lay off and divide into three equal lots and parcels the real estate of the Wager family. The commissioners reported the division to the Court on October 10, 1835, Bldg. No. 1-A, the Harper House, becoming the property of Mrs. Noah H. Swayne, and Bldg. No. 1-B passing into the hands of James B. Wager. Thus sometime between December 8, 1834 and October 10, 1835, the two doorways located on the first floor levels, and connecting Bldgs. No. 1-A and 1-B, where probably blocked off. Thereafter the Harper House and Bldg. No.1-B became two separate structures, with individual histories, and they

26. Deed Book 20, p.11, July 7, 1834- James B. Wager was thrown into prison for his debts and sold all his rights, titles and interest to the High Sheriff of Jefferson County to take benefit of the insolvent debtors' laws.

27. Virginia Free Press, October 2, 1834, p.3.

were not to be reunited again under a common ownership until 1924.

Swayne Use of the Harper House, 1835 - 1865.

Documentary evidence on Swayne use of the Harper House is rather slight, but is of such a nature as to clearly indicate the general use of the building. In 1842 the following advertisement appeared in the newspaper:

"FANCY MILLINERY

"MISS E. A. WOOD Respectfully informs the public that she has just completed Fancy Millinery, under the instruction of Mrs. Joseph G. Johnson, and is prepared to execute all favors entrusted to her punctually, in the most neat and fashionable Style.

"Her residence is in the large STONE HOUSE on High Street, better known as WAGNER'S MANSION (The Harper House is built of stone, Bldg. No. 1-B is built of brick).......

"Harpers Ferry, May 5, 1842."

From 1835 to 1865 the Swanies therefore appear to have rented the Harper House out as a dwelling house.

In October 1850 the Harper House was apparently rented by either Isreal Russell or Fayette I. Conrad, both merchants, as a dwelling house.

In 1860, the house was rented by either Solomon Yantis, a tobacco merchant, or George W. Koonce, town constable and merchant.


30. Census of Harpers Ferry, 1850, p.410. National Archives R. G. 29. These two gentlemen were living in houses located on either side of Dr. Nicholas Marmion at that date.

31. Census of 1860 for Harpers Ferry, p.218. Again, two gentlemen living in houses located on either side of Dr. Marmion.
Use of the Harper House, 1866 - 1924.

Information collected by Architect Franzen from Mr. William Harnion and his sister, Mrs. Edythe M. Erosius, both of whom were raised in Bldg. No. 1-B, indicates that Noah H. Swayne used the Harper House after the Civil War as a home for elderly female relatives. Joseph Barry, writing in 1903 of the Harper House, also noted: "This house yet stands and occasionally it is occupied by some of his (Harper's) heirs". 32

IV. HISTORICAL PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE HARPER HOUSE.

In Appendix III will be found the following historical prints and photographs of the Harper House, Bldg. No. 1-A:

1. HF-21; Print of Harper House drawn prior to 1806 and probably between 1803 and 1806.

2. HF-23; Print of Harper House and Bldg. No. 1-E, drawn between 1835 and 1839. Probably done in 1835.

3. HF-43. Photograph made from the foot of Maryland Heights in the summer or fall of 1870-1880.

4. HF-236. Photograph made by Brady, taken after February 1862 and probably in the summer or fall of 1862.

5 and 6: HF-92 and 99; Two photographs made 1892-1895, showing Harper House porch, bridge and garden.


32. The Strange Story of Harper's Ferry, p.15.
V. PLANS OF THE HARPER HOUSE.

No original or historical plans of the Harper House have been found. For modern measured drawings of the building see: "Historic American Buildings Survey, Harper House, A Part of Marmion Row," Drawing No. NM HF-3051, seven sheets.

VI. SUMMARY OF HISTORICAL DATA.

The Harper House is a two and one-half story stone building, measuring 25 feet by 34 feet and 11 inches in size; the roof in 1956 was slate. The original or first roof was probably made of wooden shakes.

The house was traditionally built by Robert Harper between 1775 and 1781, but never used or lived in by Harper. From 1782 to 1803, and probably until about 1807, the structure was leased out by both John Wagers, Junior and Senior, as a tavern. From 1807 to 1823, the house was either rented as a residence by Roger Humphreys, a merchant and brother-in-law of John Wager, Jr., or occupied by John Wager, Jr. and his family as their home.

From about 1824 to 1832 the Harper House was definitely used as a residence by James B. Wager, Gerard B. Wager, and Sarah Ann Wager. Considerable remodelling of the building occurred in the period 1832-1834, when a part of the structure was occupied by James B. Wager as his residence under a lease from his brother and sister.

In 1835 the Harper House became the property of Sarah Ann Wager, the wife of Noah H. Swayne. The Swaynes apparently rented the building out as a residence or dwelling house from 1835 to 1865. From 1866 to 1924, the residence was occasionally occupied by the Swayne family and was also apparently used as a home for their elderly female relatives.
VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is believed that the historical prints and photographs presented in this report contain enough visual evidence to permit a generally accurate restoration of the exterior of the Harper House as of the 1859-1865 period. As is evident, however, the documentary evidence is insufficient to permit the interior restoration of Building No. 1-A. The question of whether or not accurate interior restoration is possible, must therefore rest on such architectural evidence as has been uncovered by Architect Franzen in his investigation of the physical characteristics of the structure.

Assuming that an fairly accurate interior restoration is possible, then several other pertinent questions arise: First, is the house of such historical significance as to merit interior restoration? And secondly, if so, of what period should it be restored? Interior restoration will not only involve considerable construction costs, but once completed, the house must also be furnished and protected if the public is to be admitted to the structure. These latter items require considerable additional and continuing outlays of money.

Robert Harper, the builder of the house, never used or lived in the building, and while Harper played an important role in the early history of the town, it can hardly be said that any national significance is to be attached to his name. During the period of national significance with which this park is concerned, 1859-1865, moreover, the structure was merely a residence of one of the many merchants of the town.

It is therefore suggested, that if the interior of the structure is to be restored at all, that it be restored to the period of 1824-1831, when it was occupied as a home by the Wager family, who played an important
role in the history of the town from 1782 to 1965. This involves an
certain degree of historical license, but seems to me to be the only
logical solution if the National Park Service is to gain any important
interpretive values from the interior restoration of the structure.

Information for developing a Furnishing Plan for the house under
this plan can be obtained from Will Book No. 2, pp. 95-117, which
contains a complete inventory and appraisal of the personal property
of John Wager, Jr., and from Deed Book 19, pp. 105-107, a Deed of
Trust made on October 1, 1833 by James B. Wager and which lists all
of his household goods. Both items are located in the Jefferson County
Court House at Charles Town, West Virginia.

The complete interior restoration and furnishing of the Harper House
would not, in my opinion, however, merit the amount of additional National
Park Service manpower that would be required to protect the house and
exhibits, as the same information could be presented in a visitor center.
It is therefore suggested that if the interior restoration and furnishing
of the house is carried out, that an cooperative group be permitted to
purchase the furniture for the building, as specified in the Furnishings
Plan, and that they be permitted to open the house on a seasonal basis,
provided that the cooperative group furnishes the necessary personnel
required to exhibit the house. To reimburse the group for the cost
of salaries, it is suggested that they be permitted to charge an
admittance fee to enter the Harper House. Under this plan, the National
Park Service would restore the interior of the structure, provide the
Furnishing Plan and necessary expert advice, and maintain the exterior
and interior of the building.

Charles W. Snell
Historian (Park Supervisory)

May 12, 1958

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APPENDIX I

TRACING OF A PORTION OF THE WAGER SIX ACRE RESERVATION PLAT

1835
Tracing of Portion of 1835 Plat of Wager Lots. Traced from the Original in the Jefferson County Court House, Deed Book 29, by A. W. Franzen.
APPENDIX II

TRACING OF A PORTION OF THE 1803 MAP
Tracing of a Portion of the 1803 Map of Harpers Ferry. Orig. scale 4 perches to an Inch. Scale reduced to 7
Junction of the Potomac and Shenandoah, Virginia.

Drawn by W. Roberts, draq.
Engraved by J. Jacques.
Library of Congress
Harpers Ferry Negative No. HF-21

This drawing was made prior to 1806, the year when the small arsenal, which is missing from this picture, was erected, probably between 1803 and 1805. Note Wager's Ferry crossing the Potomac just to the left of the large arsenal building. Coming down the Shenandoah River, to the right of arsenal building, is a river boat.

The Harper House is to be seen on the crest of the hill to the left of the arsenal. The building below and to the right of the Harper House may be the roof of Building No. 37.
This drawing was made between 1835 and 1839, probably in 1835. Clearly visible are the Harper House and the newly erected Building No. 1-E. The bridge across the Potomac is the old Wager bridge, which was replaced one of a different design by constructed by the B. & O. R.R. in 1836-37. Several three story buildings standing on the Ferry Lot, the point of land between the junction of the Potomac and Shenandoah River, however, were not constructed until 1838 and 1839.
HARPERS FERRY FROM THE MARYLAND SHORE

Photograph taken after 1870 and before 1880.
Original, Gettysburg N. W. F.
Harpers Ferry Negative No. HF-43

A fine view of the Harper House and Harmion Row.

Note the wooden porch on the left end of the Harper House.

Picture dated as follows: Building No. 23, which is known to have been erected in 1870 is visible. Second floor porch of Building No. 1-E, which was enclosed with stone in 1880, is still open.
HARPERS FERRY FROM THE B. & O. RR. ON THE MARYLAND SHORE

Photograph by Brady. Made summer or fall of 1862
Library of Congress
Harpers Ferry Negative No. HF-236

Note the porch on the end of the Harper House.

Photograph made after February 1862 as building s located on the Ferry lot where destroyed at that date and are missing from the photograph
HARPERS FERRY. LOWER TOWN FROM LOUDOUN HEIGHTS

National Geographic File No. 140316-A
Harpers Ferry Negative No. HF-92

Note the porch on the Harper House, also bridge to garden and the "Harper" gardens.

Photograph made (1892-1895). E. & O. R.R. track relocated to present position in 1892. Catholic church remodelled in 1896 and the church is still untouched in this photo (see HF-99, page 24—made the same day as this photograph).
HARPERS FERRY FROM LOUDOUN HEIGHTS

National Geographic File No. 140321-A
Harpers Ferry negative No. HP-99

Note the porch on the Harper House, also bridge to
garden and the "Harper" gardens.

Photograph made 1892-1895. B. & O. R.R. track relocated
to present position in 1892. Catholic church, unremodelled in this
picture, remodelled in 1896.
MARMION ROW STREET VIEW (Front, north and east sides)

National Geographic Negative No. 140117-A
Harpers Ferry National M. Negative No. HF-79

Photograph made between 1880 and 1898, as Building No. 1-B porch is enclosed up to third floor, which occurred in 1880's, and buildings on right side of the Public Walk were destroyed by fire in 1898.

Note wooden porch and Harper House on left, also Building No. 1-B. The buildings on the right were all standing at the period of historical significance, 1859-1865, and are the third floors and backs of houses fronting on High Street. This picture, although not taken until 1880-1898, represents accurately the "historic scene" as it must have appeared in front of Marmion Row before the Civil War.
HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

PART I

(ARCHITECTURAL DATA SECTION)

Prepared for the Restoration of

THE HARPER HOUSE
(Building 1-A)

HARPERS FERRY NATIONAL MONUMENT

November 15, 1958

by

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
RECOMMENDED

[Signature]
Supervising Architect, Historic Structures

Date
Dec. 19, 1958

Chief, EODC

Date

Regional Director

Date

Director

Date

APPROVED

Superintendent

Date
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a. Architectural and Structural Design

Robert Harper, a reputable millwright and house builder of Philadelphia, settled at the site of present day Harpers Ferry, established a successful ferry and built a home along the Shenandoah River. Late in the 18th century, not long after building his home, he started construction of the structure now known as the Harper House. Maps, a few years after his death, note it as a tavern. That it may have been planned as a tavern from the start is quite possible. Early Acts of the Commonwealth of Virginia exempted ferry-keepers, who ran an ordinary in connection with their ferry, from paying any fee for a license to operate an ordinary. This may have been an inducement for his starting such a venture. Conveniently sited close to the road to Winchester, oriented to command a view of the confluence of the rivers and easily picked out from the neighboring shores it would have attracted the attention of travelers.

The structure was constructed with a small cellar below a full basement, both carved out of the rock hillside and surmounted by two stories and a garret. The plan at the basement level was divided into two rooms by a stone masonry wall with a corner fireplace on each side of and at the end of the wall. There is evidence that this arrangement was continued on the floors above. While later renovations conceal likely evidence of the original location of the interior stairs, it is felt that the plan is similar to one in use in Philadelphia during that period and
which Harper would have been familiar with and being one of the earliest settlers, would have introduced it to the area for the first time.

There is a scarcity of original trim now remaining, namely the three window frames, casings and sash that face the rivers on the second floor level and a few interior door casings and the baseboard on the upper floor levels. This is attributed to the extensive remodelling that took place when "Marmion Hall" was added adjacent to the Harper House by James Bate Wager in the early 1830's. Marmion family tradition states that Wager needed the additional room for entertaining, which he did on such a lavish scale, that he went into debt. This in turn led to the partitioning of the Wager Six Acre Reservation in a bankruptcy action. That he wished to have the two houses match in interior appearance is demonstrated by the similarity of the trim. That they were used jointly is proven by the interconnecting doors between the two structures at the first and second floor levels that are now bricked up. When these openings were created it was necessary to remove the original fireplaces and chimneys before this could be done.

The closing of these openings occurred after James Bate Wager lost "Marmion Hall" after going bankrupt. They were probably closed mutually by Dr. Nicholas Marmion, or others, who purchased the property and the Swaynes who were allotted the Harper house by the Court.
D. Existing Conditions

At the present time the structure appears pretty much as it did during the Civil War Period with the following exceptions. The two story porch on the south elevation was badly damaged by hurricane and removed in 1954 by the National Park Service. It is related by the Germans that the present interior stairs and the eastern partition of the first floor hall were added by John L. Schilling, sometime after his marriage in 1867 to a daughter of Conrad Bond Wagner. Based on their statement the only means of access between floors from 1835 to 1867 would have been by an outside stairs known to have existed within the south porch. This should be checked by further research.

c. Description of Fabric

All the exterior walls are of rubble with the exception of the river facade which is faced with rough dressed stone, laid in courses but not patterned, starting twenty-one inches above the present grade. An early porch of two decks was attached to this side as is evident from existing or former door openings at the basement and first floor levels. A projecting stone ledge, three inches or so thick in the vicinity of the first floor line on this facade, further suggests a porch deck at this level. The 1803 King and Warbaugh map shows the faint outline of a porch running the full width of the building about five feet deep with steps at the south end. Whether this porch existed during the Civil War will have to be determined. This map also shows an entrance on the
north side of the building that is now closed with masonry and is found at the basement level.

Bricked up window openings existing below the present terrace grade on the south side of the building indicates that the original grade sloped from the first floor line at the back of the building to the cellar level at the front of the building. The present terrace appears to have existed during the Civil War period.

The cellar floor was apparently natural rock and the floor in one room of the basement above was flagstone laid over natural rock with a channel cut in the natural rock beneath the flagstone to drain water to the cellar level. The remaining area of the basement occurring over the cellar has a wood floor. The floor construction at the upper levels consists of a nine inch by six inch deep transverse wood girder at each floor located approximately at the center of the structure and mortised to receive the tenoned four and a half inch wide by six inch deep beams that support the floor and ceilings. The beams are spaced approximately twenty-four inches on centers. The flooring is relatively narrow random widths on all floors. It is tongued and grooved and surfaced nailed. Some new flooring has been laid not too many years ago.

The beams of the attic floor extend beyond the exterior walls to provide for a box cornice. Paired rafters, spaced irregularly to accommodate the corners, bear upon a wood ledger running across the top ends of the floor beams and are pinned at the roof
ridge. Collar beams occur at the garret ceiling line.

Some sheathing appears to be original due to its unusual width. The present roof is slate and judging from the rafter spacing it would appear that the original covering was wood shingles. This may be proven when the present damaged slate is removed to rehabilitate the roof.

The last known occupant of the Harper House, who rented from the Mannions, moved out in 1930. From that time until it was acquired for the Monument it was used for storage by the Mannions. During the last twenty-eight years it has not been heated and the effects of general dampness and the expansion and contraction of the plaster has caused it to fall or has seriously impaired its strength, particularly where it is affixed to ceiling lath. Damage by termites or powder post beetles and rodents is evident in some exposed parts of the structure.

Beam depths for the spans employed suggest a replacement with stronger materials engineered to sustain the greater loads that may be anticipated if the structure is subjected to heavy visitation.

c. Additional Architectural Research Required

It is felt by the author that this investigation should be directed toward an eventual restoration of the structure to the 1859-1865 period, both on the exterior and interior. As a local women's organization wishes to be identified with the furnishing
of the house the above stated period would allow them more latitude in acquiring pieces to display. The Harper House being a part of the most pretentious building complex in the Monument its furnishings should reflect this in their selection. An earlier period of restoration would require rarer and consequently more expensive pieces that might exhaust the groups fund raising capabilities short of a complete project. It would not be unusual to find some pieces of an earlier vintage than the Civil War period as carry over keep-sakes. This would permit the acceptance of some fortunate bequests of an earlier period.

To restore this structure to the period between 1830 and 1835 and maintain historical accuracy would require the combining of the Harper House and "Marion Hall" as one unit and thus increase the amount of furnishings required.

To restore to the period prior to 1830 would require the reconstruction of the window openings in the north side of the structure and the rebuilding of the corner fireplaces which could only be accomplished by the demolition of "Marion Hall". As these factors would affect a furnishings plan it appears desirable to hold to the restoration period adopted for the town scene.

To gain a thorough knowledge and understanding of the structure's features that existed during the restoration period it is proposed to remove the more recently applied plaster coats and remove the wood flooring to expose the structural system. This
should reveal factors affecting the series of alterations made through the years and also expose any hidden structural inadequacies. The roof system should be laid open for a critical examination of the roofing and flashing materials and methods employed. Partitions and ceiling lath employed should reasonably establish the sequence of changes in the various room subdivisions. Wallpaper samples will be sought behind junctions of partitions and outer walls and an analysis of paint samples made, layer by layer, to determine paint colors.

It is anticipated that a month's time on the part of the architect, his assistant and several workmen spread over a longer period to accommodate other phases of their duties will be required to complete the building investigation. Based on the above and including the taking of photographs and investigating the sources of the period materials used in the structure it is estimated that the cost of additional work needed to complete the architectural research will amount to fifteen hundred dollars.

A. E. Fransen
Resident Architect
EXTerior VIEW OF THE Harper house

View showing the south and west elevations of the Harper House. Pockets for girders that supported the south porch indicate where the first and second floor levels and ceiling soffit occurred. The roof of the porch was a continuation of the main roof. Small arrows point out stair run trace of porch stairs. First floor door appears to have been created by Charles L. Schilling sometime after 1867 when he added the present interior stairs. Chimney caps have been recently stabilized by the National Park Service. Note box cornice on west elevation.

Photo by
Harold Nelson
1958
RENOVATED WINDOW DETAIL

One of two windows found on first floor facing the river that were trimmed out to match the trim in "Marmion Hall" when the Harper House was renovated by James Bate Wager. Even the baseboard was replaced. Note wood paneling under the sash. Exterior window sills in general are in poor condition and will need replacement. Interior window trim appears to be in fair condition.

Photo by
Harold Nelson
1958
One of three original sash remaining in the Harper House. Sash are six over six lights with a plain meeting rail and do not have sash parting stops. Window frame jamb mortised to receive upper sash making it stationary. Original chair rail matched apron of window sill but was removed when room was re-plastered over original plaster. These windows being on the second floor and on the river side of the house were apparently not considered when the rest of the house was renovated by James Bate Wager.

Photo by
A. W. Franzen
1958
Former Opening to "Marmion Hall"

This view taken from the Harper House shows one of two bricked up openings that formerly connected the Harper House with "Marmion Hall" on the first floor. Another occurs at the second floor level. As can be seen it is made into a closet. The trace in the wall to the left of the door shows one of the original window openings of the Harper House that was closed when the adjacent building "Marmion Hall" was constructed by James Bate Wegner. These doors are large being three and a half feet wide.

Photo by
A. W. Fransen
1958
HARPER HOUSE
A PART OF
MARMION ROW
HARPERS FERRY NATIONAL MONUMENT
HARPERS FERRY, JEFFERSON COUNTY
WEST VIRGINIA

SKETCH PLAN SHOWING LOCATION

TRADITIONALLY ERECTED BY ROBERT HARPER
1771-1781