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HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

PART I

ON

BUILDING NUMBER LEX-1

THE HENRIKER FINESS HOUSE

Massachusetts Avenue

Lexington 73, Massachusetts

Minute Man National Historical Park Project

Architectural Data Section

Prepared by

Russell V. Kenne

Architect

March, 1963

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

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

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BUILDING NUMBER LHM-1

THE BERNIERI FIRE HOUSE

Minute Man National Historical Park Project

APPROVAL SHEET

RECOMMENDED

Superintendent

Date _____

Robert G. Hall
Robert G. Hall
Chief, BODC

Date 3-4-62

Regional Director, Northeast Region

Date _____

APPROVED

Director

Date _____

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
I. FOREWORD.....	1
II. GENERAL.....	1
III. PRESENT STATE.....	3
IV. DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING CONDITIONS	
A. Site.....	4
B. Foundation.....	4
C. Architectural Material From Dismantled House.....	5
1. Stored in Park	
2. Owned by Mr. Bashian	
V. THE HOUSE OF 1775.....	8
VI. RECOMMENDATIONS.....	9
VII. ILLUSTRATIONS	
A. Photographs	
B. Location Plan	
C. Conjectural Floor Plans	

I. FOREWORD

The eighteenth century structure known as the Ebenezer Fiske House no longer stands. In a conversation with Mr. Martin Bashian of Lexington, Massachusetts, October 1962, Mr. Bashian informed us that he dismantled the house in 1955-56.

The National Park Service received title to this property on July 31, 1961. Preliminary site clearing was done during the summer of 1962 and some loose architectural artifacts found at the site were removed.

The park historian, Mr. Ronshelm gathered some material relating to this house while doing research on Building Number Lxx-3 The Jacob Whittaker House.

Documented architectural information referring to the Fiske House is not abundant.

Russell V. Eames
Architect
March 1963

II. GENERAL

The Fiske House was built prior to 1775; a positive date of construction has not been determined. In 1775, this house comprised a part of the farm of Ebenezer Fiske, located in the southwestern part of Lexington. It played a notable role in the events of April 19, 1775, when entered by British stragglers on their retreat towards Lexington and pillaged.²

The house also stood as a witness to the memorable encounter at the Fiske Well, between James Hayward of Acton and a British soldier in which the soldier was killed and Hayward mortally wounded.³ This incident is commemorated by a stone tablet on ground close to the house site which is owned and maintained by the Lexington Historical Society. The portion of the Fiske Farm that survives will be the most easterly property within Unit A of the projected park.

The only visible remains of the former farm are the stone foundations of the house and a barn together with remnants of stone walls. The land is now overgrown with trees and vegetation.

²Interim Report of the Boston National Historic Sites Commission Pertaining to the Lexington-Concord Battle Road, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1959, p. 52.

³Idid., p. 53.

¹Conversation with Mr. Martin Bashian, Lexington, Massachusetts, October, 1962.

Mr. Haskins is of the opinion that the front portion of the house was the original structure. Alterations to the house had been made, especially at the rear (see Illustration No. 1). He also recalled that there had been a fire in the house, but did not know the exact date. The fire did not gut the house, but damaged portions of it.⁴

⁴ Haskins, op. cit.

III. PRESENT STATE

The property is owned by the United States Department of the Interior and is situated within the boundaries of Minute Man National Historical Park.

IV. DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

A. Site

The house site is located near the eastern base of Fiske Hill and is just west of the point where Massachusetts Avenue passes over the circumferential highway, Route 128. Here Massachusetts Avenue is believed to coincide with what is also known historically as the "Battle Road," the road from Lexington to Concord used by the British on April 19, 1775 (see Illustration No. 4).

The existing ground cover has no known historical significance. From the remaining granite steps, walls and the cellar outline, it would appear that the front of the house faced the southeast.

B. Foundation

The house foundation walls are built of random stone ashlar, which was originally laid up dry and later pargecast. In plan, the rectangular front portion of the cellar measures approximately 18' x 36' with a rear ell measuring approximately 18' square which is centered on the front portion. The top of the foundation walls above grade have some sections of granite facing remaining in place; other sections have fallen into the cellar (see Illustration No. 2). The remains of early exterior stone cellar steps are visible in the southwest corner of the foundation; in

later years these were closed off by another wall added in the cellar. An extensive amount of rubble presently obscures the cellar floor; numerous broken brick remain serving to indicate the existence of fireplaces and chimneys.

To the rear of the foundations discussed above there is another foundation which appears to be a cellar, added perhaps to the front portion at a later date. These rubble stone walls are in a much poorer condition than those of the front and will require further investigation to determine their date of construction and purpose (see Illustration No. 3). The addition of these walls may have occurred during the period of Bulley's ownership when considerable alterations were made to the house.⁵

C. Architectural Material From Dismantled House

1. Stored in Park

Following the clearing of the cellar, loose architectural material remaining at the site was removed, tagged and stored in a park facility for future reference. This material consists of the following items: (1) decayed fragments of the mortise and tenon framing system, (2) assorted fragments of wood clapboards and shingles, (3) charred remnants

⁵ Norton, Edwin, Southwest Part of Lexington. (Typescript paper loaned by his son, Mr. Edwin S. Norton to Mr. R. Ronsheim, MCHPP).

of boards, and (4) fragments of window sash and jambs.

2. Owned by Mr. Bashian

This material was placed on an adjacent lot by the gentleman who dismantled the house in anticipation of erecting another house and incorporating some of this material into the new structure. Neither this material nor the land on which it is stored are yet the property of the National Park Service.

A visual survey of this remaining material revealed the following items of interest: A sizable quantity of whole and broken brick were found piled together, two types of which were discernible. One type is that commonly found in local chimney construction, and the other of a type used in nogging exterior walls of early houses. The first of these two types measures $1\frac{3}{4}" \times 3\frac{3}{4}" \times 7\frac{1}{2}"$, while the second type measures $2\frac{1}{4}" \times 4" \times 8"$ and is of a softer quality than the first. At the same site an assorted quantity of wood mortise and tenon framing members can be seen. Outside of a few relatively wide boards, the remainder of the material appears to date from later remodelings or additions to the house. Once this property is acquired by the park project, the material on it should be carefully screened for any additional material which may date from the eighteenth century house. During the process of dismantling the house, Mr.

Bashian retained portions of the fabric from the original house and also made sketches of certain details of the front portion of the house which he wished to incorporate in his new home. He still has these items in his possession together with an early 1890 photograph of the house.⁶ We regret that these items are not available for our use at this time.

⁶ Bashian, *op.cit.*

V. THE HOUSE OF 1775

The most valuable documentary evidence brought to light regarding the physical aspects of this house consists of five documents found by Mr. Henshoin. They are: (1) Will of Ebenezer Fiske, February 10, 1777,⁷ (2) Inventory, April 14, 1777,⁸ (3) Inventory, April 11, 1785,⁹ (4) Appraisal of Real Estate of the late Benjamin Fiske, March 27, 1786,¹⁰ and (5) Administratrix Account, November 11, 1794.¹¹ By piecing together the references to the physical aspects of the house contained in these documents and comparing them with standing examples of structures of similar size, one can begin to develop a semblance of the eighteenth century character of the Ebenezer Fiske House. From information available at this time, it would appear that the Fiske House of 1775 consisted of a two-story wood structure, with a mortise and tenon frame, cellar and garret. It was rectangular in plan with one room to either side of a central brick chimney and had a kitchen all to the rear. The conjectural floor plans were prepared by the author and in no way are intended to serve as a final scheme; they may be revised by information which may become available at a later date (see Illustration No. 5).

⁷ Middlesex County Probate Records, #7573, item #1, Bk. 57, p. 286

⁸ Ibid., #7573, item #3, Bk. 57, p. 352

⁹ Ibid., #7594, item #2

¹⁰ Ibid., #7594, items #4 & 5, Bk. 69, p. 52

¹¹ Ibid., #7594, item #9, Bk. 80, p. 7

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The house material which is currently owned by Mr. Bashian should be carefully screened and the land upon which it is stored is acquired by the park project. Every possible attempt should be made to review with Mr. Bashian the material he has in his possession and to record his recollections of the house prior to his dismantling it.

Following approval of both the Historical and Architectural Data Sections, Part I, it is recommended that an archeological survey be conducted to clear the cellar. The walls should be stabilized once this project is completed.

ILLUSTRATION NO. 1

View from east, taken about 1890

Note: Front portion of house reportedly original section. Alterations to rear. Noted on rear of photograph: "This is the Dudley (formerly Simpson) house on Mass. Ave. opp. Wood St. taken about 1890. In this yard is the 'Hayward' pump."

Photo: Original owned by Lexington Historical Society. Copies used through permission of the Society.

Copy Neg. No. E080 3903



ILLUSTRATION NO. 2

Front portion of house foundation remains.

Note: View from east, overgrown base, random stone
walls and remains of granite facing.

Photo: Jack Boucher, 1962
Copy Neg. No. BODC 3504



ILLUSTRATION NO. 3

Rear portion of house foundation remains.

Note: View from east, overgrown base, random stone
walls.

Photo: Jack Roucher, 1962
Copy Neg. No. SMC 3905



ILLUSTRATION NO. 4

Location Plans

Delinestor: Russell V. Keams, 1962

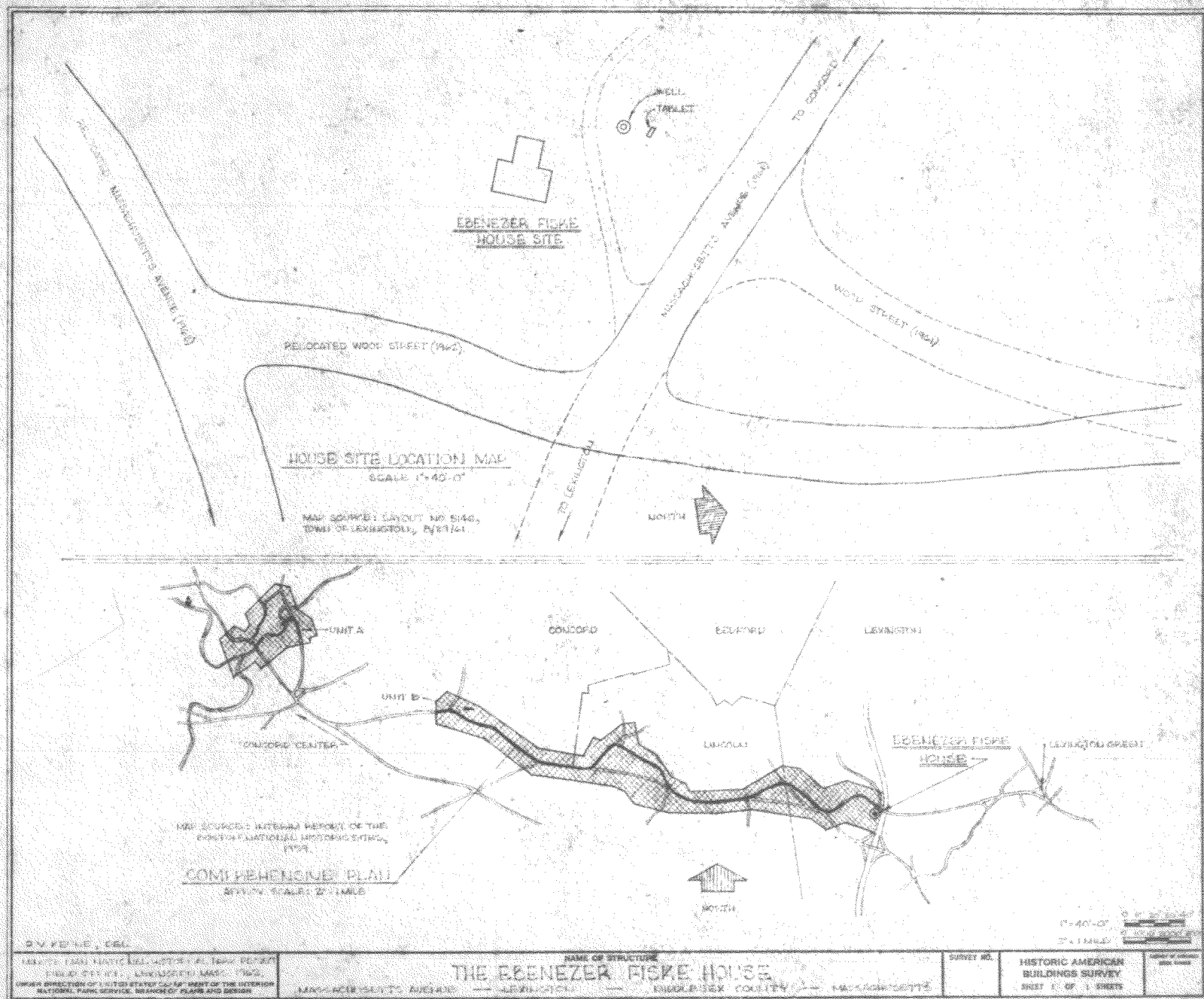
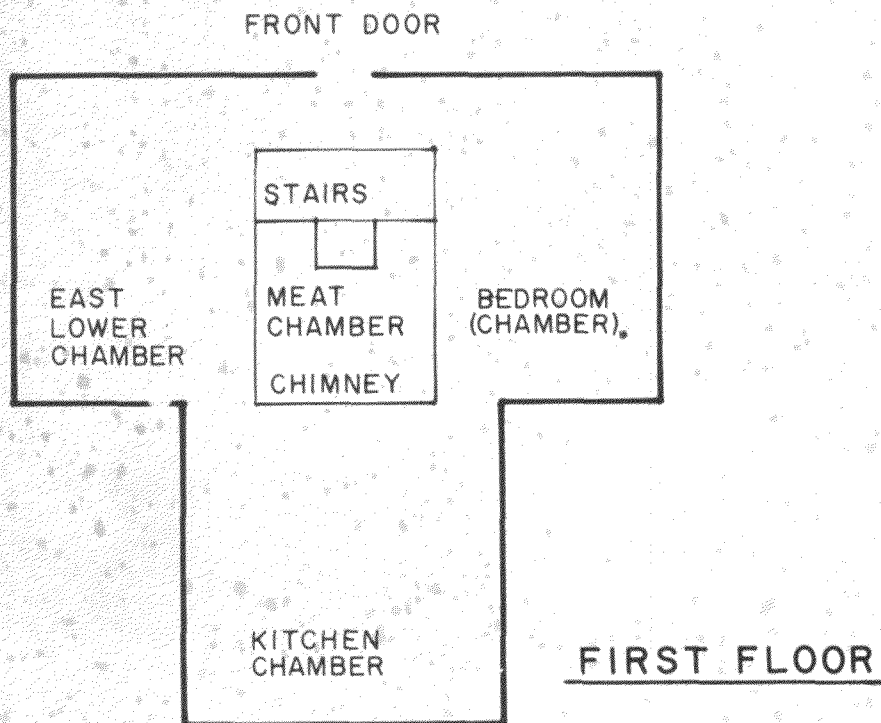
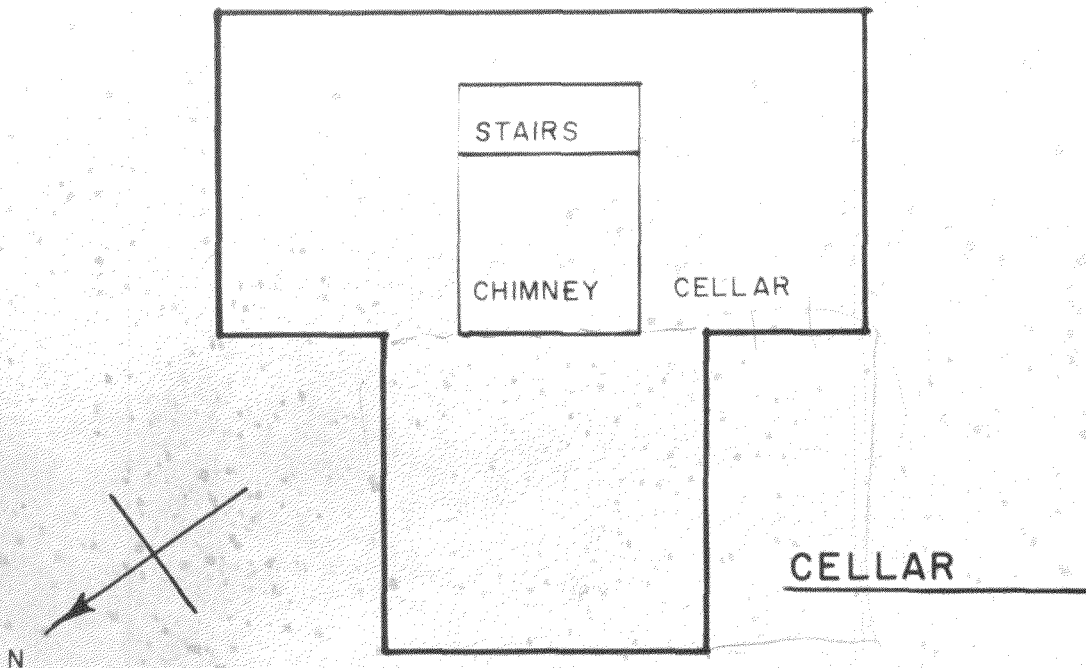


ILLUSTRATION NO. 5

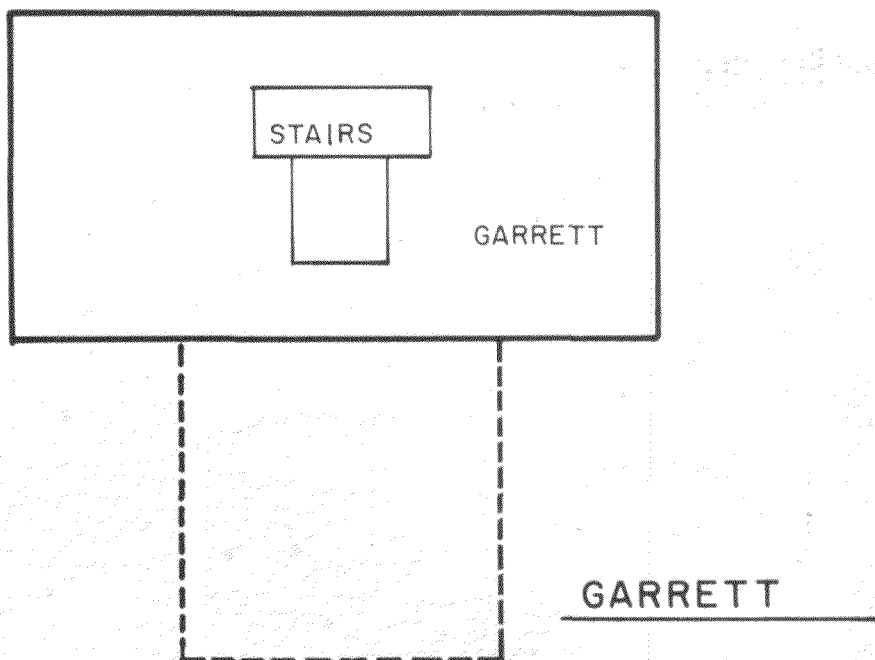
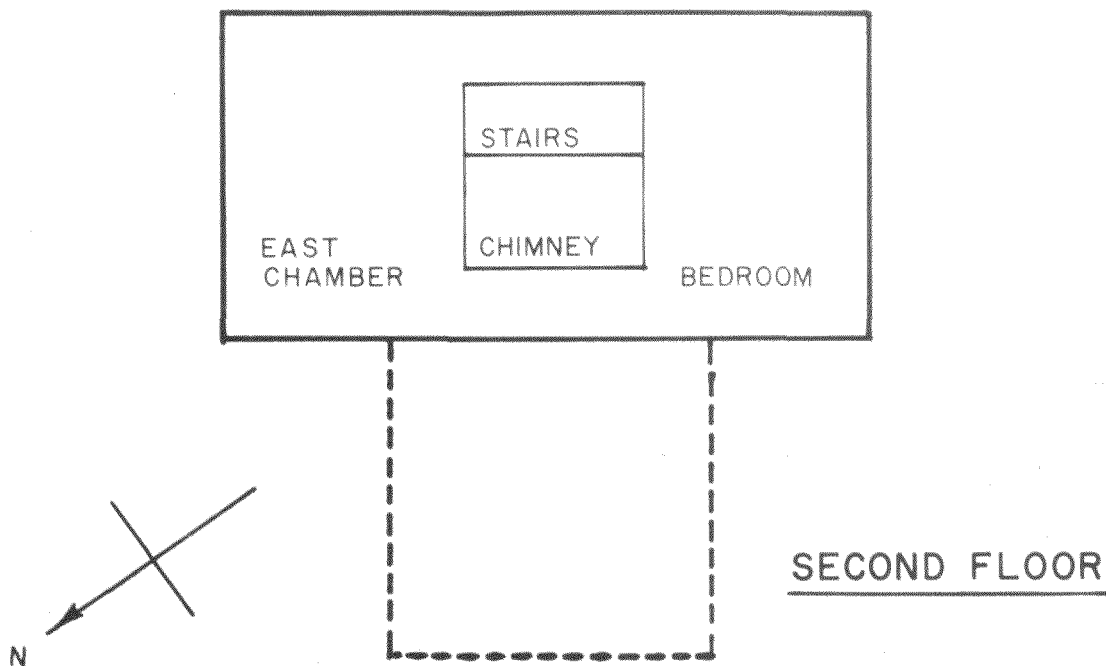
Conjectural Floor Plans

Delineator: Russell V. Keene, 1962



NO SCALE

ALL REFERENCES ON PLANS ARE THOSE
FOUND IN DOCUMENTS SIGHTED ON P. 8



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