

John Brown's Fort (Fire Engine House)
Harpers Ferry, West Virginia
JEFFERSON Co.

HABS No. WVa. 21-5

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W.VA.
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**ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...**

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of West Virginia

Historic American Buildings Survey
Herbert S. Kyle, District Officer
1107 Union Bldg., Charleston, W.Va.

JOHN BROWN'S FORT (Fire Engine House)
Harpers Ferry, Jefferson County, West Virginia.

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Owner Storer College, a State institution. 2-
Date of Erection About the time of the Revolution.
Builder United States Government.
Present Condition Good. Rebuilt. Removed from original site.
Number of Stories One.

Materials of Construction Brick walls. Wood floors. Wood trusses and wood construction under roof. Window frames are wood casement. In south end of building, wide arched openings are wood fixed sash, glazed. 8' stone foundation around entire building. Under this is a foundation of shale, but as far as can be learned, under the original building there was no basement. Roof trusses appear to be the original timbers. Rest of material is probably not original. Wood show cases with glass doors and wood mezzanine floor with stair, as well as dividing wall from front to back of main room, are additions by Storer College for museum purposes.

Other Existing Records Newsprints from old newspapers.

Additional Data John Brown's Fort at Harpers Ferry was originally the Fire Engine House, which stood in the United States Armory enclosure. This small building was the scene of John Brown's raid on October 17, 1859, a prelude to the Civil War. It was considered of so great historic value that it was removed to Chicago in 1892 and exhibited at the World's Columbian Exposition. It was purchased from its owners in 1895 and moved back to Jefferson County, where it was re-erected about two miles from Harpers Ferry on the Shenandoah River. This site was somewhat inaccessible and in 1910 the building was removed to the campus of Storer College in Harpers Ferry, where it houses a library and small museum collection. A monument has been erected at Harpers Ferry to mark the original site of the fort.

History of Jefferson County - Hardesty.
"Captain John Brown and Harpers Ferry" -
Boyd B. Stutler.
"When Tidewater Invaded the Valley" -
Lucy Johnston Ambler.

Theresa M. Mathes
Robert J. Mathes

Approved

Rev. July 31, 36 MW

June 25, 1936.

Addendum to:
John Brown's Fort
(Armory Fire Engine House)
(Harpers Ferry National Historical Park)
Shenandoah Street
Harpers Ferry
Jefferson County
West Virginia

HABS No. WV-21-5

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PHOTOGRAPHS
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS
WRITTEN DESCRIPTIVE AND HISTORICAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
BROWN'S FORT (The Armory Fire Engine House)

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Location Storer College Campus, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia.*

Present Owner Storer College, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia.

Present Occupant Storer College, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia.

Present Use Museum for relics collected by the College.

Brief Statement of Significance

This structure was built in 1848 by the government to house the fire engines and watchman's house for the U. S. Armory. In 1859, Abolitionist John Brown and his followers, having sought refuge in this building, surrendered to Robert E. Lee and a company of U. S. Marines after Brown's unsuccessful attempt to capture the Arsenal. The building was subsequently moved to the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893) and then to the Murphy Farm in the Shenandoah Valley above Harpers Ferry. In 1909, the building was acquired by Storer College and relocated on that campus. The age of the various parts of the building cannot be authenticated.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

This structure was built in 1848 by the Federal Government and served as a fire engine house for the U. S. Armory as well as watchman's house. Although it is not definitely known, the building may have been designed by Major Symington, Superintendent of the Armory. No original plans have been discovered, but the specifications and estimates are to be found in Harpers Ferry National Monument microfilm files, Reel 23, Vol. 3, page 241. Because the Armory was destroyed

*See note at end of data pages.

during the Civil War and not reactivated following that war, the building was subsequently acquired by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. It was then purchased and displayed at the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893. In 1895 it was purchased by Kate Fields and rebuilt and displayed at the Murphy Farm near Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. In 1909 the building was acquired by Storer College and relocated on the campus where it stands today.

The most significant historical event associated with this building is the raid from which it got its name. The entire engagement was centered around and in this building and Brown was captured here.

Because it has been moved so many times the parts of the building cannot be authenticated. There is some indication that the cupola was halved, moved, and reassembled at least once. The present stairs and messanine are obviously later alterations and with cabinet work are part of the system for the display of artifacts now housed in the building.

There are numerous old photographs of the structure as it stood in the Armory yard, but those of most value can be located in photograph files at the Harpers Ferry National Monument and indexed as HF-27, HF-55, HF-58, HF-113, HF-223, and HF-349.

Prepared by Herbert H. Kissling
Historian, HFNMM
August 28, 1958

The above compilation taken from National Archives, Washington, D.C., Historian's Files, Harpers Ferry National Monument, Harpers Ferry, W. Va.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The "Brown's Fort" - The Armory Engine House is a wall-bearing brick masonry building of one story occupying 748 square feet of ground area. Alterations include foundation walls, apparent reversal of interior spaces and entrance, and the additions of cabinets, stairs and messanine. The poor condition of the fabric is probably due to the many times that the building has been moved and due to the unskilled labor utilised at the time of the last reconstruction. The masonry is traversed with many cracks and window frames are loose in their openings. During the last erection cement mortar was used instead of the original lime mortar.

The foundation walls are recent and are of stone masonry and concrete block piers. Exterior wall construction is of brick and laid in common bond in general at a thickness of 1' 1 3/8" at piers and 9 1/2" at brick non-bearing panels. The building is characterised by round brick arches defining panels composed of a half-circle of operating wood sash, pairs of metal or metal covered doors and one wooden door. The present construction of the brick arches of one soldier course does not agree with those in old photographs which indicate two soldier courses.

The roof of the building is gabled, covered with slate shingles and supported by four wood king-post trusses and purlins. The wood cupola has a flat roof covered with building paper. The brick cornice consists of three corbelled courses on the long elevations and is

continued on the face of the end walls which terminate in a crenelated parapet topped with stone coping and brick finials.

The building is rectangular in plan and divided into two spaces separated by a 10" brick partition. One space of one bay is currently used as the reception area for the museum housed in the other space of two bays. The museum space has a stair leading to an unused mesanine. These spaces were formerly used as the quarters for a watchman and for engine storage. As previously mentioned and according to old photographs the original functions were apparently in reversed ends of the building.

The flooring is new 2 1/2" T & G while the walls are obscured for the most part by exhibition cases. The ceiling is the exposed trusses and underside of the roof. The interior door is new and of no consequence. The entry door and doorway, while new, resembles the original as indicated by photographs of that era. The door is of wood and of five panels while the wood sidelights are vertical wood siding.

There is no evidence of any present heating system or of the original. The building presently is lighted with a crude electrical system with no evidence of the original system.

The "Brown Fort" - The Armory Fire Engine House is located on the Storer College Campus on a bluff overlooking the Shenandoah River. Its present entrance faces to the East with the long dimension of the building at North 10 degrees East.

Note: In 1967, "Brown's Fort" was moved once again, to the SE side of Shenandoah St., opposite the intersection with Potomac St. At this site some 150' from its original location, the building currently (1976) serves as a museum at The Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. The building is now under Federal ownership.

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