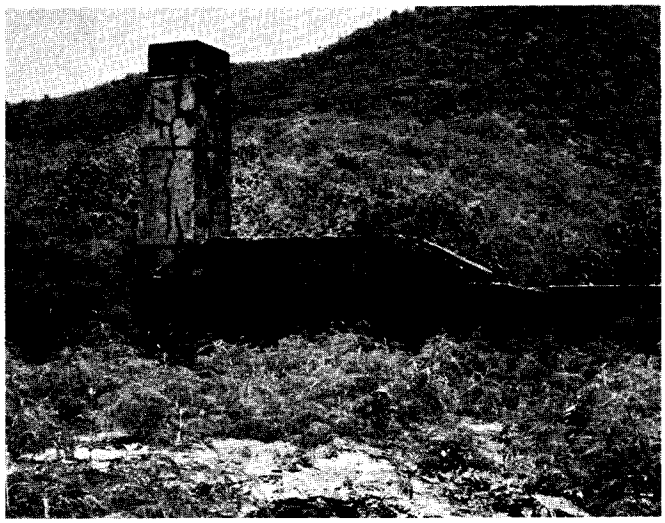
REEF BAY ("PAR FORCE") ESTATE HOUSE AND SUGAR FACTORY

VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT
HISTORY DATA

By

CHARLES E. HATCH, JR.



OFFICE OF HISTORY AND HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE

EASTERN SERVICE CENTER

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

(Part I)

History Data Section

"PAR FORCE" (REEF BAY)

ESTATE GREAT HOUSE AND REEF BAY SUGAR

FACTORY

in

Virgin Islands National Park

by

Charles E. Hatch, Jr.

June 1969

Office of History and Historic Architecture
Division of History

National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior

PREFACE

The content of this report deals with both the "Par Force" (Reef Bay) Estate Great House and the Reef Bay Sugar Factory since they are so closely related in story, in function, and in interpretive purpose and use. Together they illustrate the principal economic factor - sugar production - in two centuries of St. John Island history. Also, the nature of the records and material point to this joint treatment.

This study was prompted by Resources Study Proposal VI-H-1 and, taken together with the reports by Resident Architect Frederick C. Gjessing, is offered as a fulfillment of it. The report follows an on-site examination and inspection made during a study trip to the Virgin Islands on May 20-28, 1969, at which time there was every assistance from Mr. Gjessing, the Park staff, and officials of the Public Library of St. Thomas, where there is a very useful Virgin Islands collection.

Thanks go to Mrs. Francis R. McLawhorn of Colonial National Historical Park for converting the rough draft of this report into usable, typed draft and to Liliane M. Lykes for putting it into its final typed form.

Charles E. Hatch, Jr.
June 1969

CONTENTS

PREFACE i

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS iii

Administrative Data 1

Use, Plan, and Purpose 1

The Locality 1

The Present Situation 4

Additional Research 4

Historical Data 6

"Par Force" versus Reef Bay 8

Site Development 13

Architectural Evaluation 15

Structural Record 17

Illustrations 19

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Par Force (Reef Bay) Estate Great House. Cover

2. Reef Bay Valley: Section from U. S. Geological Survey: St. John, Western Quadrangle: 1958.

   A - Estate Great House Location
   B - Sugar Factory Location

3. Par Force (Reef Bay) Estate House - May 26, 1969.

   Stabilization of structure and presentation of area is an urgent matter.

4. Plot Plan of Great House Area in 1955.

   (from a National Park Service brochure "Proposed Virgin Islands National Park," printed July 1955)

5. General view of front elevation of Great House.

6. Reef Bay Sugar Factory - May 26, 1969.

   This is the present state.

7. Plot plan of Sugar Factory Area.

   (from Historic American Buildings Survey drawings, 1959-1960. Sheet 2 of 8.)

8. General view of the Sugar Factory Structure

   Note steam powered cane crusher equipment on extreme right.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

The "Par Force" (Reef Bay) Estate Great House is carried in the Historic Structures Inventory, as of April 1963, as historic structure Virgin Island NP No. 111 with a classification of BB. The "Reef Bay Mill" has the same classification of BB. It is unnumbered but indented under the Estate House in the Inventory.

Use, Plan and Purpose:

One of the present interpretive features in the Park is a tour (hike) normally conducted from the Center Line Road (along the backbone of the Island of St. John) down the "Reef Bay Valley" watershed from its very head to the top of the wide bay itself, some two miles away. The trail detours to the Estate House area and terminates at the sugar factory near the bay's edge, where hikers are picked up by boat for return to Cruz Bay. It is understood that this interpretive use will continue and expand. Certainly it is important to make greater and more effective use of the historical resources in the estate house and factory areas and to insure that the structures will be preserved and cared for in a manner that will make this use possible now and later.

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The Locality

Reef Bay[1] is a rather wide triangular body of water that cuts into the south side of St. John Island at about its mid point. Along each side of its apex there are rocky outcroppings, or reefs, which evidently gave the bay its name. To the right of the tip of the bay, topographically there is a rather wide valley that is flat at the bay and inland for about a mile. Then it narrows rather quickly and rises precipitately for its second mile up to the Center Line Road west of Mamey Peak. From the east side several short ridges project into the valley from the Bordeaux Mountain area. These became the locations for several estate houses with their associated tillable land below and around them. "Par Force" (Reef Bay) Estate Great House occupied the larger and more southernly of these projections having a commanding view up the Valley, a wide vista

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1. The prominence of Reef Bay and the valley above it, one of the larger drainage areas on the island, led to this name being applied to one of the five administrative districts introduced by the Danes and noted by Oxholm in 1800, one of the same five designations that continue until now. The name is "a translation of the Dutch equivalent, Rif, Danish, Rev.; with numerous variants: Refbay, Reffbay, Reffbayen, Revbay, Rifbay, Riffbay, and divided forms; Spanish, Bahia del arrecife, also called Kips Bay. From the bayhead along the northwest beach for 700 yards, it is called 'Genti'." See James William McGuire, Geographical Dictionary of the Virgin Islands of the United States (U. S. Department of Commerce, Coast and Geodetic Survey, Washington, D. C., 1925) p. 156.

to the Bay, and a good sweep across the valley toward "Living Gut" with its waterfalls, draining from east of the Camelberg Peak region.[2]

As reported in 1954, the estate buildings fall into three parts: (1) The Estate House, (2) the "New Factory" Group, and (3) the Village, on the floor of the Valley. At that time it was also noted that trails connected the group and led to Lameshur Bay on the east, the Main Line Road to the north, and Genti Bay on the south, and to the Indian Falls" across the valley to the west.[3]

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2. See the printed United States Geological Survey, "Western St. John Quadrangle: Virgin Island" (1958). It is on the rock at the foot of the lower falls of "Living Gut" that one can see carvings, "the so-called 'Carib inscriptions', which have excited the interest of archeologists and ethnologists." McGuire, Geographical Dictionary, p. 118. These have been noted by Frederick W. Sleight, Archaeological Reconnaissance of the Island of St. John United States Virgin Islands (The William L. Bryant Foundation American Studies: Report No. 3, December 1962), pp. 25-28.

3. /Frederick C. Gjessing,/ "Observations on the Architecture of Reef Bay Estate and Fortberg Hill, St. John, V. I.," a 16 page National Park Service Report with date and author not given in the report, p. 1. This report carries site plans for the estate house, new factory, and village groups as well for the fort on Fortberg Hill in the eastern part of St. John.

The Present Situation:

Currently the Reef Bay Estate House area is covered with brush. Though the main residence and larger structural remains are easily seen, there should be a search for the lesser remains. Rot and general deterioration are eating at the floors and interior woodwork of the estate house as well as the now leaking roof structure. The general impression is a sense of neglect and abandonment. While brush and vegetation currently are not engulfing the substantial sugar factory remains, they are not far away and there is some damaging growth even about, and in, the structure itself. Clearing and protective stabilization are essential at an early date, or much of the structure will be lost.

Fortunately, because of isolation and inaccessibility due to lack of roads and rugged terrain, vandalism does not seem to be a matter of any particular consequence. The area is owned by the Federal government and is a part of Virgin Island National Park. Once stabilization and development have taken place, no particular operational problems are anticipated beyond normal maintenance and surveillance by the regular staff. Regular staffing at the location is not comtemplated.

Additional Research:

Additional historical findings, as possible, should be incorporated into the Part II historic structures report as an aid to the work of stabilization and as a help in future inter-

pretive planning and presentation. The stabilization itself probably will not involve the use of archeological work though limited exploration may be needed in the development of interpretive site plans. Since there is substantial architectural data already on hand, future architectural research might be confined to that carried out during the stabilization work.

Historical Data

After a decade or two of trading and reconnaissance in the Caribbean area, Denmark, through an organized company set up for the purpose, staked out a "place in the sun" in the Lesser Antilles by the start of successful colonization on St. Thomas Island in 1671. The colony's objective was trade and agricultural exploitation, much after the manner of the already established Dutch, English, and French who were competitors. Nearby St. John Island, just to the east of St. Thomas, was brought into the Danish orbit by permanent colonization beginning in 1717 and at a time when the estate (plantation) fields of St. Thomas were wearing thin. This was at a time, too, when sugar had become king despite some success with cotton and tobacco.

It is said that all useful agricultural land on St. John was taken up and in production within a decade. In miniature (as the island is small and its resources limited) it became quickly typical of the "fabulous" sugar economy. Estate houses, sugar factories, and slave villages dominated the scene and the thinking. The plantation owners exulted in their life. Economically it succeeded for a century and a quarter on St. John and then hung on for another half century before it went into permanent eclipse.[4] "Par Force"

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4. This is largely a brief summary from a St. John Island Historic Base Sheet narrative and map now in preparation by the writer (RSP VI-H-2).

and Reef Bay are quite typical of the whole two-century cycle, and the existing structures are of sufficient substance, extent, and intricacy to tell the story well.

"Par Force" versus Reef Bay:

The earliest known detailed cartographic record of St. John was the work of P.L. Oxholm. He surveyed the area in 1780 and it published his map 20 years later. Before having it printed in 1800, however, he evidently updated his survey to show interim development, thus giving a good picture of the Island during, or close to, its time of most complete use. From 1780 to 1800 a good bit of additional land had been cleared, or reopened, including the Reef Bay Valley.[5]

In 1780 the "Par Force" estate house area was already in use with a factory and "village" below it in the flat of the valley. Also, but not related to it, another estate group lay close to the Bay. By Oxholm's notation the one was then owned by Anthony Zytzema and the other by C. Weyle. Twenty years later, on his printed map, Oxholm in most instances used estate names, rather than owner designations. Now the term "Par Force" was used to identify the holding of Zytzema. That of Weyle was left undesignated except by numbers "1" and "2," and another development just east-

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5. The "Map over the Danish Island St. John in America Made in the Year 1780 and Published in 1800" by P.L. Oxholm has been reproduced by Eastern National Park Monument Association and is available at its Virgin Islands Agency. A copy of the 1780 survey is in the Virgin Island National Park headquarters in St. Thomas.

ward of it on the close periphery of the Bay line was shown as "4."[6] Also in the twenty-year interval three other estates, numbers "5," "6," "7," had opened farther up the Valley above "Par Force;" two of them known as "Hope" ("6") and "Pasquerall" ("7"). Except for the two on the Bay's edge, each, including "Par Force," had its associated horse-mill sugar factory. Those on the bay did not have any mill symbol.

From this point on, for a century or more, the most consistent designation for the estate house was "Par Force" and that for this structure near the Bay, which in essence became its factory site, Reef Bay. This designation continued even after the two were joined as parts of a larger plantation holding. It is shown in this way on a map of 1907.[7] It is also described in this fashion by James William McGuire in 1925.[8]

> Parforce: Estate occupying plain at south end of 2-mile valley opening on the northeast shore of Reef Bay . . . Oxholm locates mill and buildings on west spur of 757-foot hill, at 100 yards northeast of Genti Bay. Identified with Reefbay Estate, q.v.

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6. Since both "Par Force" and the plantation directly at the mouth of the Valley were designated by the number "4," this may suggest association of the two even in, or before, 1800.

7. "Kort over Dansk Vestindien udgiret af Foreningen De danske Atlanterhavsøer," map in the Public Library of St. Thomas.

8. Geographical Dictionary of the Virgin Island, pp. 143, 156.

> Reefbay: Estate bordering on Reef Bay, southern shore of St. John; having a banana patch, coconut-grove, only sugar mill now on the Island, and cattle ranch . . . occupying plain from northeast beach to junction of Esperance and Reef Bay Roads, with latter-road continuing to landing /on bay/. Other authorities show Parforce occupying same location, hence identical.

The present hiking trail down the valley rather closely follows the Reef Bay Road, then described thusly: "Leaves Centerline Road at Old Works, runs south 1-3/4 miles down Parforce Valley, to Reefbay Mill on southern coast of St. John Trail, north of Parforce, overhung by trees, poorly maintained; south has easy grade and straight courses." No doubt the old stone walls, often marking estate boundaries, were as prominent then as now.

Likely the "Parforce" estate came into being in the first decade of St. John's development. It represented some of the flatter and better agricultural area. It was a going concern in 1780, then under the operation of Anthony Zytzema, who may not have been the first of that family to live here. No specific reference to the estate has been seen in connection with St. John's violent slave insurrection in 1733. There are references at the time, however, of word being spread along the south coast of the island and of white refugees being urged to assemble at Durloe's Plantation (Caneel Bay). In any event the insurrection, while greatly disruptive, did not long delay expansion and development on St. John.[9]

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9. Digest from Historic Base Sheet narrative draft, previously cited.

At "Par Force," Zytzema, as Oxholm clearly shows, had a home and a factory (with horsemill power) as well as other buildings necessary for the production of sugar. His neighbor down on the bay at Reef Bay Estate was C. Weyle, who raised cattle and cultivated cotton. In February 1792, after Zytzema's death, his executors sold his estate to one Jurco Vriehuis.

Records are meager and specific information thereafter of ownership is elusive and difficult to weave into a continuing narrative. It is clear, however, that some time prior to 1830 John Vetter came into possession of both "Par Force" and Reef Bay and combined them into a single unit devoted basically to the production of sugar. They would remain as one. In 1833 the holding passed from John to A.K. Vetter.[10]

In 1844 A.M. Porth acquired the estate, and he sold it in the same year to one L.D. Smith. Eleven years later O.J. Bergeest and Company acquired it. In 1864 this firm sold it at public auction to William H. Marsh, an Englishman from Tortola Island. He had been for a time the estate's manager for the Bergeest Company, and some time after 1861 had converted the cane-grinding operation from horse power to steam power.

Marsh continued the cane grinding operation here for another half century, despite a general economic decline on the island,

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10. Gjessing, "Observations on the Architecture of Reef Bay Estate," pp. 1-3. Gjessing further reports that "parforce" appears in local 18th century court records but he has not found the name of Reef Bay mentioned before 1833.

thus indicating, perhaps that he had notable ability and ingenuity. He also acquired considerable additional acreage in Reef Bay as well as the Lameshure, Carolina, and Maho Bay estates. According to Architect Gjessing, "He made his home in the Great House of Par Force estate, but as this plantation gradually expanded to include the entire valley, the name Par Force went out of use and was superseded by Reef Bay Estate."[11]

It is said that the sugar factory was abruptly stopped following a serious mill accident in 1908 that claimed the life of one of its workmen. Following this accident, intensive cultivation ceased in favor of cattle raising. Slowly the natural cover of woods and brush took over, in time yielding the present situation.[12]

At his death in 1909, Marsh left the estate to four daughters. Malvina, the oldest, died shortly after her father and was buried near him in the small cemetery southeast of the factory. The youngest, Idina, moved away, while Anna and Ella continued to live at the factory and in the Great House. In 1941 Anna was murdered in a small house next to the factory. Ella (now Ella Marsh Jensen) continued to live at the Great House until she sold it in 1951 to Frank Faulk.[13] Five years later Jackson Hole Preserve acquired it

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11. Frederick C. Gjessing, "Historic Structures Report: Part I: Architectural Data Section on Reef Bay Great House," National Park Service report, November 1968, p. 3.

12. Ibid., p. 1.

13. Ibid., P. 5; Gjessing, "Historic Structure Report: Part I: Architectural Data Section of Reef Bay Sugar Factory and Mill," NPS report, November 1968, p. 5.

for donation to the United States as a part of Virgin Islands National Park.

Site Development:

The Par Force estate house is generally considered to be of the 19th century. Regarding the construction of the house, Gjessing concluded: "The present buildings have the character and architectural details of early 19th century structures and the gate posts at the entrance bear the date of 1844. This most likely is the date of the completion of the standing structure. The cook house in front and west of the main building however predates the Great House and there are traces of an earlier structure within the main building."[14] Certainly such should be the case as the site was in use prior to 1780. The 1844 date may not necessarily date the Great House. Rather it may refer to its completion, or to some additional improvement of the establishment upon changes of ownership in that year.

It might well be that basically the house is earlier in the century and is in some way related to the shift of the sugar factory from the area of Par Force to that on the bay. Perhaps the Vetters, or even their predecessors, may have engineered this change, which seemingly came after 1800, the date of Oxholm's published chart. This chart shows no factory on the bay but clearly shows one at

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14. Gjessing, "Great House" (1968), p. 5.

Par Force. Joint ownership and operation such as came under the Vetters would make this a feasible assumption.

The design of the older section of the factory might also suggest this, since details of its design, as has been pointed out, are similar to architectural details in the design of the Great House. "The details of the factory correspond closely to the architectural treatment of Reef Bay Great House and are undoubtedly the work of the same designer and builder." The older section of the factory, as Gjessing has observed, was T-shaped and rather close to the design of the "ideal" sugar factory given by P.L. Oxholm in 1797.[15] As such it departs from the earlier 18th century rectangular design illustrated by Pierre Labat in 1723.[16] This again may suggest an early 19th century factory.

The enlargement of the factory under the Bergeest Company management to accommodate steam power was not done with the same regard for architectural detail. And this modernization is rather closely dated by the machinery, much of it still in place, which has the date 1861 cast in it.[17] When the "Sugar Estate Parforce" was sold at auction early in 1864 it included "its steam mill, stock, and cattle and all appurtenances."[18]

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15. Over De Vistincdiske Oens Tilstand (Copenhagen).
16. Gjessing, "Sugar Mill," (1968), pp. 4-6, 8-9.
17. The cast legend on the machinery reads: "Glasgow" and "W&A McOnie N-286 1861."
18. St. Croix Avis, January 1, 1864.

Architectural Evaluation

A considered evaluation of the physical remains of the Par Force and Reef Bay estate and factory remains has been given by Frederick C. Gjessing, who draws on wide experience and knowledge of the situation:[19]

> Reef Bay Great House is without any doubt whatsoever the most important architectural monument within the Virgin Island National Park and a significant example of Virgin Islands architecture. Considered in connection with the remains of Reef Bay Sugar Factory and the various ruins within the confines of Reef Bay Valley it ranks as the most complete exhibit of the plantation economy within the Virgin Islands.[20]

Of the sugar factory he states:

> It is also the only old sugar factory within the Virgin Islands, and therefore a rarity in the West Indies, that still exhibits the entire system of flues, vents and fire tunnels necessary for the boiling process. In addition,

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19. Gjessing, "Great House" (1968), p. 13. There is similar expression in Gjessing's "Sugar Factory" report: "Considered with the Reef Bay Great House, it is potentially the foremost exhibit of the sugar plantation within the Virgin Islands and an important testimonial of one aspect of the past economy and culture of the West Indies." "Sugar Mill" (1968), p. 11.

20. Gjessing observed further: "The Reef Bay Great House is considerably smaller than most houses of plantations of equal size and value. Architecturally, however, it is ambitious and the quality of its design and of its site planning is outstanding. Even in its present ruinous state its esthetic and architectural advantages are apparent." "Great House" (1968), p. 2. This was a re-statement of his observations in 1954: "The Main House is small but has a great deal of architectural quality. It is formal and symmetrical with classical revival details carefully balanced inside and out. Its plan takes full advantage of the site and its end galleries, an unusual feature in a West Indian house, are a concession to it." "Observations on the Architecture of Reef Bay Estate," p. 4.

it still clearly shows the traces of the many secondary elements, tool racks, crystallization platforms, wood separators between coppers, waste gutters, etc., that have been completely obliterated in other ruins. These elements alone should insure the factory's consideration as a prime site within Virgin Islands Park.[21]

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21. Gjessing, "Sugar Mill" (1968), p. 10.

Structural Record

The Great House and the structures in its group are built of local stone with bricks used in the cornering arches and trim. All buildings were stuccoed and painted. In like manner the factory is a masonry structure with stuccoed and plastered walls except that in the 1860s addition the rubble masonry was left exposed. Like the Great House, the older section of the factory had a flat brick roof. The later addition, however, had a low-pitched hipped roof. The floors were "paved in brick and earth concrete."[22]

Fortunately there are measured drawings of the Great House that treat the structure in detail as it was in 1958-59.[23] These were done by Architects Philip E. Gardner, J. Michael Everet, and Student Assistant Architect Frank Macioge, and delineated by Resident Architect Fred C. Gjessing. The 17 sheets, plus photographic record, are now a part of the Historic American Buildings Survey files in the Library of Congress and include floor plans, elevations, sections and details (masonry, door and window, and hardware). There is, too, a plot plan showing the location of structures and the relationship of the estate house to servant quarters, stable, cook house, bake oven, terraces, retaining walls, garden, and yards as well as some unidentified structural remains.

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22. Gjessing, "Observations on the Architecture of Reef Bay Estate," p. 4; "Sugar Factory" (1968), p. 5.
23. "Great House and Grounds, Estate Reef Bay," HABS.

Perhaps it is well to note, too, that there are front and end elevations as well as a floor plan of the Estate House that appeared in 1953.[24]

There is a set of measured drawings of the substantial Reef Bay Estate Sugar Factory remains that stand near the shore of Reef Bay. These include a factory floor plan with elevations and sections through the factory buildings. These are also a part of the Historic American Buildings Survey and include nine sheets plus photographic record.[25] Included in the plot plan is the factory with curing room, still, boiling house, and new steam mill as well as the foundations of the horse mill and grinding platform, bake oven, stone fences, and several unidentified structures. Nearby are shown the grave locations for William Marsh and his daughter Malvina.

Supplementing these factory drawings and also a part of the HABS record is the set of "Estate Reef Bay: Sugar Factory, St. John: Reconstruction Drawings." When done in June-July 1961 by Architect Neil Perry it was under the supervision of Resident Architect Gjessing. The plans are based in large measure on the earlier record drawings.[26]

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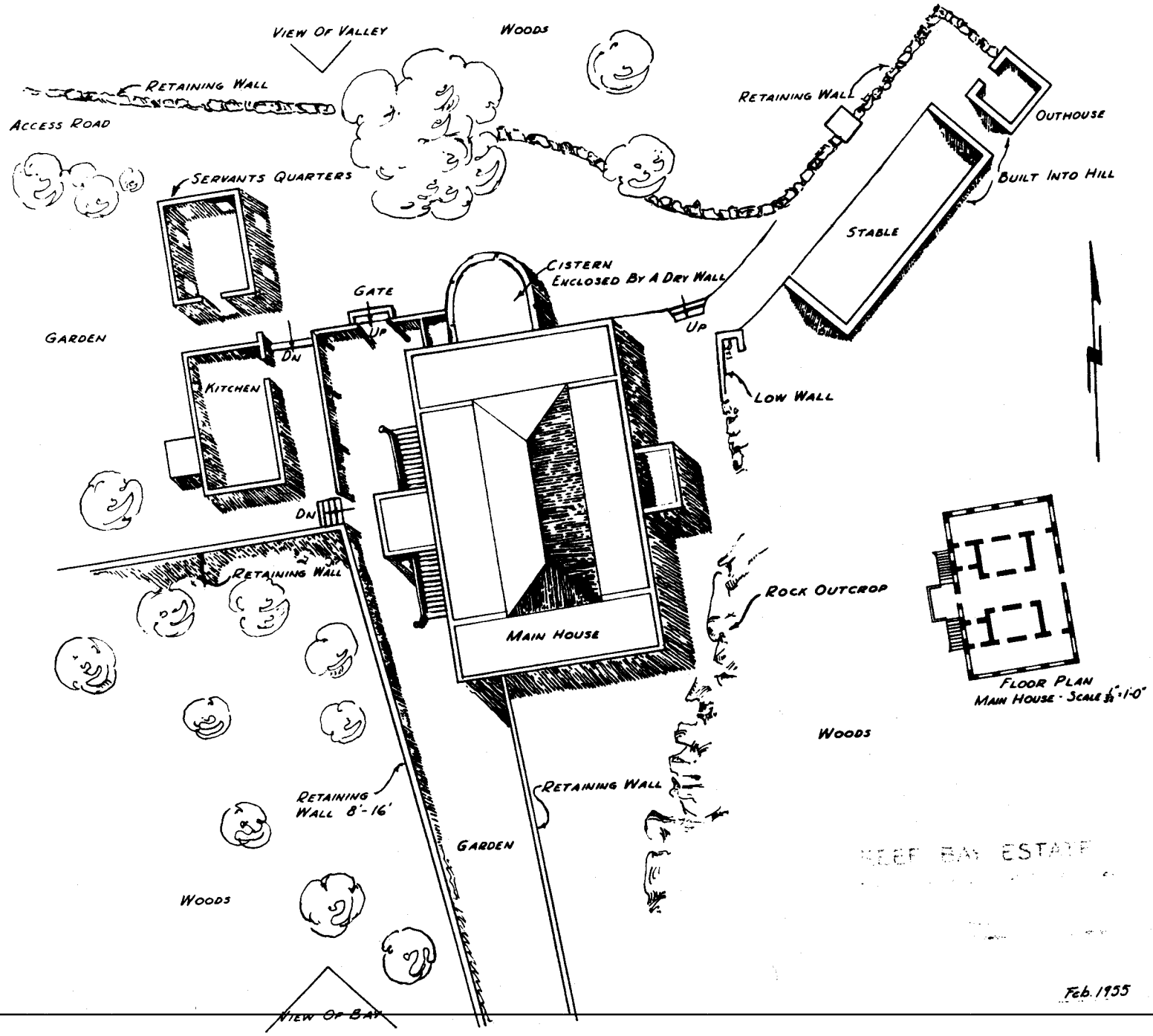
24. Johannes Brondsted, Vore Gamle Tropekolonier, II, Dansk Vestindien (Westerman, 1953), a double page fold between pages 346-47.

25. The ruins were measured and drawn in the period October 1959-February 1960 by Architect J. Michael Everett and delineated by Frederick C. Gjessing.

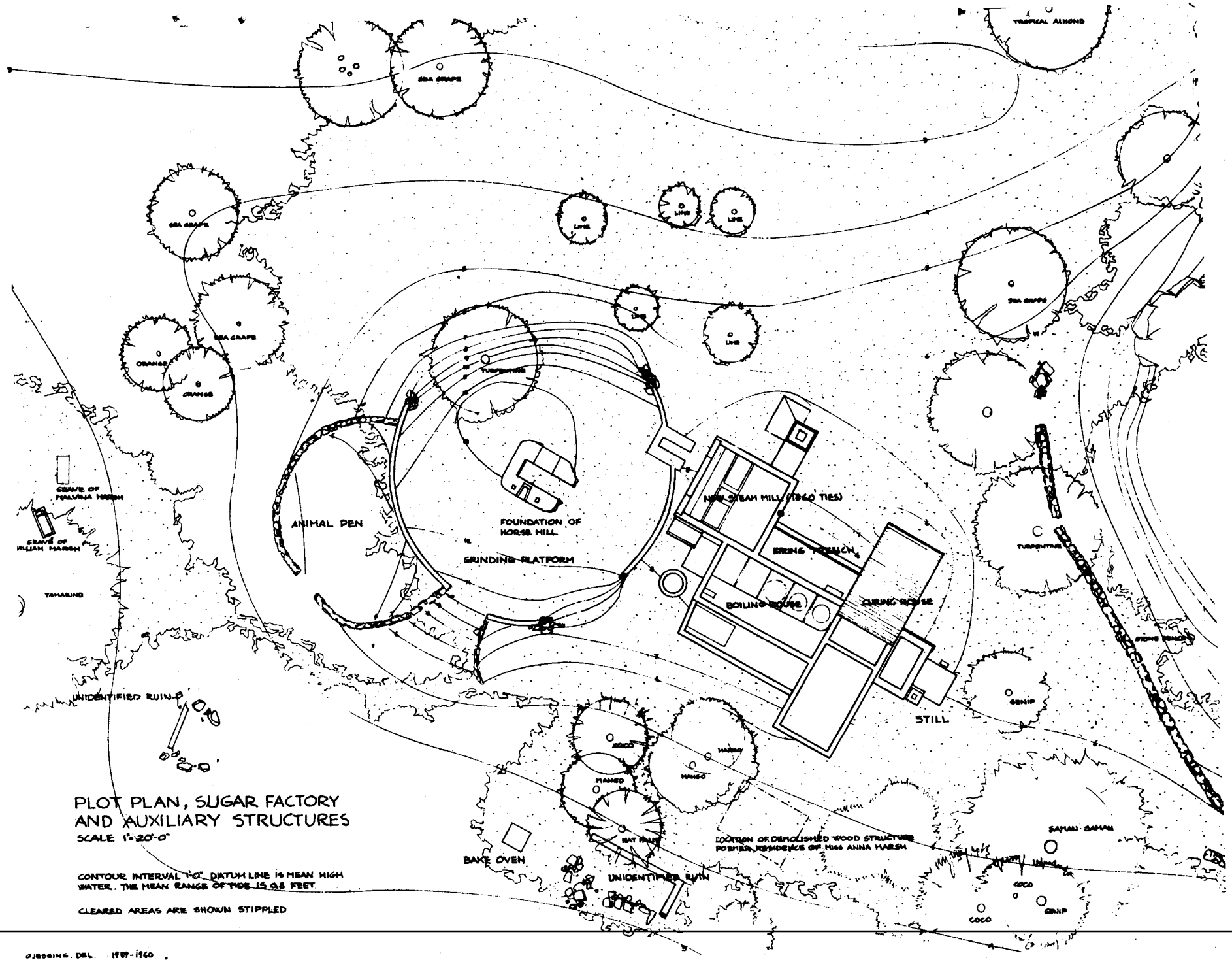
26. The plans include a set of six sheets with elevations and sections.

Illustrations

Mamey Peak
1147
1082
CENTER
600
Ruins
Ruins
1040
1065
800
1000
LANDS NATIONAL PARK
Ruins
800
Camelberg Peak
J O H N
Bordeaux Mtn
600
Ruins
TRAIL
Mollendal
Ruins 200
Reef Bay
R E E F B A Y
615
400
Ruins
Genti Bay
8
5
15
26
14
Reef Bay
30
28
Europa Bay


View Of Valley
Woods
Retaining Wall
Access Road
Retaining Wall
Outhouse
Built Into Hill
Servants Quarters
Stable
Cistern
Enclosed By A Dry Wall
Gate
Up
Up
Garden
Dn
Kitchen
Low Wall
Dn
Retaining Wall
Rock Outcrop
Main House
Floor Plan
Main House · Scale 1/8" = 1'-0"
Woods
Retaining Wall 8'-16'
Retaining Wall
Garden
Woods
View Of Bay

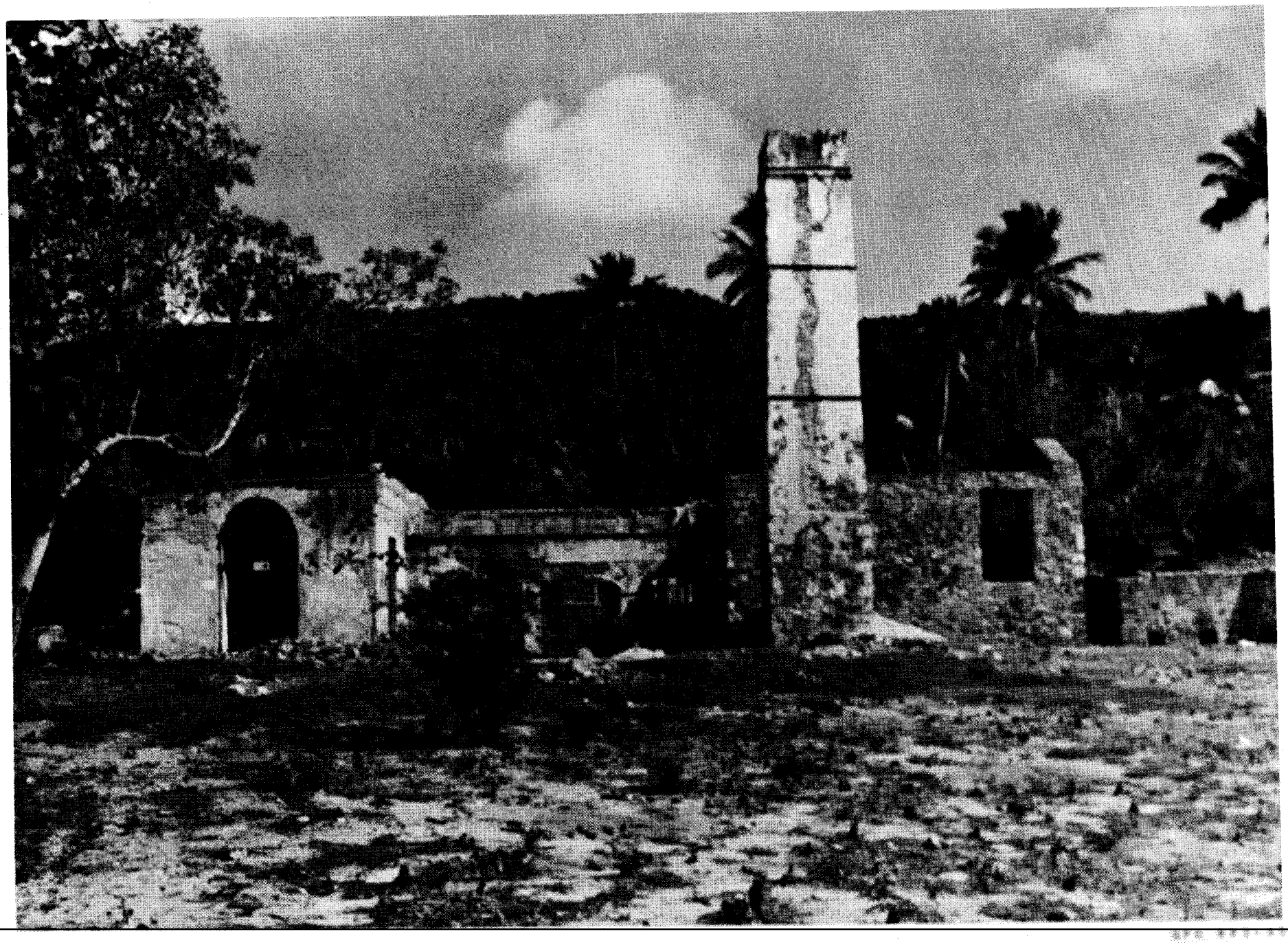
Feb. 1955



PLOT PLAN, SUGAR FACTORY AND AUXILIARY STRUCTURES

SCALE 1"=20'-0"

CONTOUR INTERVAL 1'-0" DATUM LINE IS MEAN HIGH WATER. THE MEAN RANGE OF TIDE IS 0.8 FEET.

CLEARED AREAS ARE SHOWN STIPPLED

GUGGING. DEL. 1959-1960