

Historic Building Site Survey

Report

for

Bldg. No. 3 -- Wager Lot No. 53 -- High Street,

"The Williams and Koonce Lots"

Harpers Ferry National Monument

[Note: Description of House on Wager Lot 53A
Rewritten on
Basis of Photos HF-648 and 787
on March 1973. CW Snell]

Prepared by

Charles Snell
Historian (Park Supervisor)
Dated July 29, 1958
19 pages. 1 map, 4 photos
HF-17

Table of Contents

SECTION I - ADMINISTRATIVE DATA.....	i
SECTION II - HISTORICAL DATA.....	1
1. OWNERSHIP OF THE PROPERTY, 1835 TO 1865	1
2. CONSTRUCTION OF THE HOUSES ON WAGER LOT NO. 53:	6
3. USES OF THE HOUSES ON LOT NO. 53:	7
4. HISTORICAL PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS:	9
5. HISTORICAL PLANS OF THE BLDG.	9
6. SUMMARY OF HISTORICAL DATA:	10
7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:	12
APPENDIX I - Photographs (four)	13

SECTION I - ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

A. Name and Number of Building:

Bldg. No. 3 (non-historic), Wager Lot No. 53 - the Samuel M. Williams and George Koonce's Lots.

B. Proposed Use of Structure and Grounds:

We recommend that Building No. 3 be demolished. Original pre-Civil War Wager Lots and sub-divisions on Wager Lot No. 53 could be marked on the ground. After the removal of Building No. 3 the entire High Street Row (Wager Lots No 53, 54, and 55 and 56) should be interpreted by two or three trail side exhibits which should be interpreted by two or three trail side exhibits which should include several of the old photographs that form a part of this report.

C. Provisions for Operating the House:

No operation planned.

D. Preliminary Estimate of Cost of Demolishing the Structure and of Rehabilitating the Grounds:

The preliminary estimate of the cost of this project is \$600.00.

SECTION II - HISTORICAL DATA

1. OWNERSHIP OF THE PROPERTY, 1835 TO 1865

On April 2, 1835, the Circuit Superior Court of Law and Chancery for Jefferson County, Virginia, appointed Commissioners "to lay off and divide into three equal lots and parcels the real estate at Harper's Ferry 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 (Jr.), deceased."¹ The property thus being divided at Harpers Ferry was commonly known as the "Wager Six Acre Reservation and Ferry Lot," an island of land in private ownership surrounded on all sides by land owned by the United States Government.²

On October 10, 1835, the three Commissioners reported to the Court: "To James B. Wager we allot & assign the following lots as designated J.B.W. & numbered in the annexed Plat, viz: Lots No. 1-7-9-15 being a part of the old tavern lot-19-23-25-27-37-39-41-44, including the new buildings recently attached to the mansion-46-47-53 & 54." The Court further directed that George W. Sappington be appointed a special receiver of the Court to take into possession the share assigned to James B. Wager for the purpose of collecting rents on this land to be paid into the Court, "from and after the time the said (James B.) Wager took benefit of the insolvent laws..."³

On January 14, 1836, the Court appointed two Commissioners and

¹ Gibson etc. vs. Wager, etc. Decree. Deed Book 29, pp. 140-41. Jefferson County Clerk's Office, Charles Town, West Virginia.

² 1835 Plat, "The Wager Six Acre Reservation, Drawn by James M. Brown, S.G.C.," in Deed Book No. 29, p.140.

³ Deed Book 29, pp. 140-141.

directed them to sell at public auction to the highest bidder the real estate of James B. Wager in Harpers Ferry. This the Commissioners did and sold Wager Lot 53 to James Duncanson and Philip Coons, both of Harpers Ferry, for the sum of \$1,010 on November 1, 1836.⁴ Building No. 3 now stands partly on the site of Wager Lot No. 53 and the remainder on Wager Lot No. 54.

On January 10, 1840, James Duncanson put into trust with George W. Sappington, for the purpose of securing a \$500 loan, the following property: "two houses and lots...which two lots are marked and numbered on the plat of said [Wager], Estate as Nos. 53 and 46, the one being situated on the south side of the street leading from Harpers Ferry to Charles Town [High Street], and opposite the lot owned by W. & S. B. Anderson [Wager Lot No. 15-subdivision 4, site of Building No. 15]-The other [Wager Lot No. 46] on Potomac [sic-Shenandoah] Street adjoining the U. States Line on the south..."⁵

On November 12, 1842, at public auction, Mr. Sappington sold, on Duncanson's behalf, his undivided portion of lot No. 53 to Edmund Chambers for \$350. This deed reads in part:

"the one undivided half of the lot designated in said trust as No. 53, situated on the South side of the street leading from Harper's Ferry to Charlestown, and opposite the lot owned by Wm. & S. B. Anderson...". "To have and to hold the half of said house and lot..."⁶

Thus Chambers and Coons now became the joint owners of Lot 53.

On April 29, 1844, Edward Chambers sold to Thomas Earnshaw and 15 other men a "certain house and lot called No. 53" for \$400.⁷ (sic). These men failed to meet their payments and according to the terms of

⁴ January 1, 1840, Deed of B. & S., Deed Book 24, pp. 214-15.

⁵ January 10, 1840, Trust, Deed Book 24, pp.94-95.

⁶ November 12, 1842, Deed of B. & S., Deed Book 27, p.61.

⁷ Deed of B. & S., April 29, 1844, Deed Book 27, p.126; also Deed of Trust, Deed Book 27, p.127.

the trust, the lot was offered at public auction. Chambers' half-lot was thus purchased on August 18, 1845, by William Moore for \$351.⁸

Coons's half of Lot No. 53 was also put on the market in 1844.

On May 2, 1844, for \$650, Philip Coons and his wife, Anne C. Coons, sold to Esau Woods and 25 other men, the following property:

"A certain piece or parcel of land lying and being in the town of Harper's Ferry..., the same being that portion of Lot No. 53, fifty-three,...which fell to him, the said Philip Coons, in the division of said Lot No. 53, and on which portion a large two story frome [sic] building stands,..."⁹

On May 1, 1845, Esau Wood and the 25 others, having failed to raise the money to complete payments on Lot 53, through their trustee Isaac Fouke, offered the property for sale. The half-lot and building were repurchased by Philip Coons for \$499.¹⁰

It is thus apparent that Lot No. 53 had been divided by the joint owners into two halves in 1844; no formal deed of partition, however, was issued until January 16, 1849. This deed reads in part:

"Whereas Philip Coons and William H. Moore are owners in common of Lot No. 53. And whereas a verbal agreement has been heretofore made by said Coons and the assigner of the said Moore, for the subdivision of Lot No. 53, whereby Coons was to have in fee simple that portion of the west end of said Lot No. 53, as would be laid off by a line of 28 feet 3½ inches from the northwest corner of Lot 53, laid off on the north or front of said lot-the said division line to run between the large two story frame building on the portion of the said lot, and the simple frame building on the other portion thereof, and to intersect in the rear on the south of the Public Walk, and to embrace all the residue of said lot lying west of said intersecting division line-and whereby also the said Moore was to have the whole of the residue of said Lot No. 53, not specially above allotted to the said Coons, including the brick chimney in the said line, which is declared to belong exclusively to said W. M. Moore, who hereby covenants with the said Coons to permit him, at all times hereafter to use the flues of the said chimney for his portion of the house, until the said Moore

⁸ Deed of B. & S., August 18, 1845, Deed Book 28, pp. 236-237.

⁹ May 2, 1844, Deed of B. & S., Deed Book 27, p.177.

¹⁰ May 1, 1845, Deed of B. & S., Deed Book 27, p.481.

L A N D

IRON BELT

Y A R D

STREET

ARSENAL

6

STREET

Scale 1: 20 ft

shall build or tear it down, the right to do which is acknowledged and yielded by the article..."¹¹

Between 1844 and 1849, Lot No. 53 was divided into two separate lots and for the purpose of this report the northwest portion will be called Lot No. 53-PART A and the southeast portion Lot No. 53-PART B.

A. Ownership of LOT NO. 53-PART A, 1845 to 1865 [North]:

This portion of the lot fronted 28 feet 3½ inches on High Street and 28 and 3 1/2 inches in the rear on the Public Walk. The lot was 28 feet deep on each end.¹² From May 1, 1845, until January 17, 1849, LOT NO. 53-PART A was the property of Philip Coons. On January 17, 1849, Mr. Coons sold this property to George Rothery for \$900.¹³ On August 17, 1849, Mr. Rothery, in turn, sold LOT NO. 53-PART A to Samuel M. Williams for \$893.¹⁴ Mr. Williams remained the owner of this portion of the lot until after the Civil War.

B. Ownership of LOT NO. 53-PART B, 1845 to 1865 [South]:

This portion of the lot fronted 19 feet 8 1/2 inches on High Street, was 34 feet deep on the line running up the Stone Steps, faced 19 feet 8 1/2 inches on the Public Walk in the rear, and was 28 feet deep along the division line with LOT NO. 53-PART A. This property was acquired by William H. Moore on August 18, 1845, for \$351. Mr. Moore, on February 21, 1850, sold this portion of the lot to Philip Coons for \$600.¹⁵ Mr. Coons, in turn, sold the lot to George Koonce on March 11,

¹¹ Deed of Partition, January 16, 1849, Deed Book 30, p.497.

¹² Virginia Free Press, August 9, 1849, p.3, c.1. gives the dimensions for this lot in full. Notice will be cited in full later in this report.

¹³ Deed of Trust, January 17, 1849, Deed Book 30, pp.356-357. Also Release of Trust, August 17, 1849, Deed Book 30, p.493.

¹⁴ Deed of B. & S., August 17, 1849, Deed Book 30, pp.494-495. Also Deed of Trust, August 17, 1849, Deed Book 30, p.496.

¹⁵ Deed of B. & S., February 21, 1850, Deed Book 31, pp.81-82.

1850, for \$600.¹⁶ Mr. Koonce remained the owner of LOT NO. 53-PART B until after the Civil War.

2. CONSTRUCTION OF THE HOUSES ON WAGER LOT NO. 53:

A. HOUSE ON LOT NO. 53-PART A [North]:

An 1836 newspaper advertisement for the sale of James B. Wager's real estate in Harpers Ferry described Lot No. 53 as "One lot 48 by 34 with one comfortable dwelling of frame."¹⁷ The May 2, 1844, trust for this lot also states that "a large two story frame building stands..." on the property.¹⁸ Further information on this house is to be found in George Rothery's notice announcing the coming sale of his property in 1849:

"...to sell at Public Auction on Aug. 11, the house and lot at present occupied by him situated on the south west side of High Street, between the stone steps leading to the Catholic Church, and the new brick house just built by R. D. Doran, Esq. (located on Wager Lot No. 54, PART B), and adjoining the latter. The lot fronts on High Street 28 feet 3 1/2 inches, and is bounded on the northwest by the new Brick House and lot belonging to R. D. Doran, and on the southeast side by a small frame house and lot belonging to William H. Moore (Wager Lot No. 53-Part B), and runs back to the public walk on the hill 28 feet, thence along said walk 28 feet and 3 1/2 inches, and then to High Street 28 feet...

"The Dwelling House is 28 feet 3 1/2 inches by 18 feet, and if a small sum in repairs and improvement was expended upon it, would readily rent for \$150 per annum, and there is room on the rear of the lot, facing the public walk, for another house of the same dimensions."¹⁹

To this can be added the data from the 1849 Deed of Partition, which states that the brick chimney standing on the division line between Wager Lots No. 53-Part A and B, was to go with Part B, but that the

¹⁶ Deed of B. & S., March 11, 1850, Deed Book 31 pp.82-83.

¹⁷ Virginia Free Press, April 7, 1836, p.4, c.1. See also September 22, 1836, p.3, c.5.

¹⁸ Deed of Trust, Deed Book 267-268. May 2, 1844.

¹⁹ Virginia Free Press, August 9, 1849, p.3, c.1.

owner of Part A was to be permitted "at all times hereafter to use the flues of the said chimney for his portion of the house, until the said Moore (owner of Part B) shall build or tear it down..."²⁰

It thus appears that the Wager family had constructed a two-story frame house on Lot N. 53-Part A at some date before 1836. [Williams tore the frame house down c. 1850 and erected a 3 1/2 story stone house.] The house fronted 28 feet 3 1/2 inches on High Street and was 18 feet deep, being set on the level with High Street. It was probably designed for use as living quarters and it is believed that this house was standing at the time of the John Brown Raid in 1859.

B. HOUSE ON LOT NO. 53-PART B. [South]:

This portion of the lot was apparently vacant in 1836 and remained so until after it was purchased by William H. Moore in 1845 for \$351. Between August 18, 1845, and January 16, 1849, Mr. Moore apparently constructed a small one-story frame house, the house being mentioned in the 1849 Deed of Partition for Lot No. 53. The sale of the lot by Moore to Coons in 1850 for \$600 probably indicate that the building was then worth about \$250. No further data on the nature of this building has been found, but its maximum dimensions, based on lot size and the ground, must have been a 19 foot frontage on High Street by about 18 feet in depth.

3. USES OF THE HOUSES ON LOT NO. 53:

A. Use of House on Wager Lot No. 53-Part A [North]:

This house was apparently used as a residence from 1836 to 1861; documentary evidence is therefore naturally limited. The census

²⁰ Deed Book 30, p.497.

of 1850 indicates that the building was occupied by the following people:

"Samuel M. Williams, 48 years old, male, Toll Gatherer.
Value of real (sic) estate owned: \$900. Born in Maryland.
Hecikiah Williams, 45 years old, male. Born in Maryland.
Joshua P. Williams, 29 years old, male, Carpenter. Born in
Maryland.
Robert Williams, 17 years old, male, Carpenter. Born in Maryland
Rachel A. Williams, 14 years old, female. Born in Maryland.
Prudence R. Williams, 11 years old, female. Born in Maryland.
Rachel R. Brown, 20 years old, female. Born in Maryland.
Mary Holland, 8 years old, female. Born in Virginia.
William Willis, 19 years old, male, Watchman. Born in
Virginia."²¹

In 1860 the house on LOT NO. 53-PART A was apparently rented and occupied by:

"William Wilson, 49 years old, male, Laborer. Value of
Personal Estate: \$25. Born in Virginia.
Mary J. Wilson, 38 years old, female. Born in Virginia.
Margaret Wilson, 15 years old, female. Born in
Virginia.
Maratha J. Wilson, 13 years old, female. Born in
Virginia.
Hamiah Wilson, 10 years old, female. Born in Virginia.
Rose E. Wilson, 1 year old, female, Born in
Virginia."²²

B. Use of House on Wager Lot No. 53-Part B:

This building was also apparently used as a residence.

In 1850 it was probably rented by:

"Caroline Docamp(?), 25 years old, female, Mulatto. Born in
Virginia.
Mary A. Docamp, 5 years old, female, Mulatto. Born in Virginia.
James F. Docamp, 2 years old, male, Mulatto. Born in
Virginia."²³

In 1860 it was rented by:

²¹ National Archives R. G. 29. Records of the Bureau of the Census. Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States 1850. Virginia, Volume 12, Jefferson County (part), p.411.

²² National Archives R.G. 29. Records of the Bureau of the Census. Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860. Virginia, Volume 13, Jefferson County (Part), p.196.

²³ National Archives R. G. 29, Seventh Census, 1850. Volume 12, p.411.

"Daniel Keaf, 30 years old, male, Laborer. Value of Personal Estate: \$25. Born in Ireland.
Mary H. Keaf, 30 years old, female. Born in Ireland.
Anna Keaf, 4 years old, female. Born in Maryland."²⁴

The census of 1860 also yields the following information on the owner of this lot:

"George W. Koonce, 43 years old, male, Town Constable. Value of Real Estate: \$5,400. Value of personal Estate: \$1,000. Born in Virginia.
Bettie E. Koonce, 23 years old, female. Born in Virginia.
George W. Koonce, 20 years old, male. Clerk. Born in Virginia.
Imogene F. Koonce, 18 years old, female. Born in Virginia.
Mary E. Koonce, 16 years old, female. Born in Virginia.
Alice R. Koonce, 9 years old, female. Born in Virginia."²⁵

4. HISTORICAL PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS:

All historical prints and photographs as well as all modern photographs of the High Street houses and Bldg. No. 3, four in number, will be found in Appendix I of this report.

See:

HF-49, 1861
HF-64, 1859
HF-43, 1870-75
HF-648 Ca 1882
HF-79, Ca 1886
HF-99, 1892-96
HF-96, 1896

5. HISTORICAL PLANS OF THE BLDG.

No historical plans of the pre-Civil War buildings that once stood on Wager Lot No. 53 have been found and it is unlikely that any will ever be located. No modern measured drawings of these structures exist as the buildings were torn down by 1900. No measured drawings have been prepared of Bldg. No. 3 which is a non-historic structure.

²⁴ National Archives R. G. 29, Seventh Census, 1860. Volume 13, p.196.

²⁵ Ibid., p.218.

6. SUMMARY OF HISTORICAL DATA:

A. Ownership of the Land, 1835 to 1865.

1. October, 1782, to October 9, 1835, owned by the Wager family.
2. October 10, 1835 to November 1, 1836, owned by John B. Wager.
3. November 1, 1836, to November 13, 1842, jointly owned by Philip Coons and James Durcanson; Purchase price: \$1,010.
4. November 12, 1842, to April and May, 1844, jointly owned by Philip Coons and Edward Chambers. Chambers' purchase price: \$350.
5. April 29, 1844, to August 18, 1845, Chamber's interest sold to Thomas Earnshaw and 15 other men for \$400.
6. May 2, 1844 to May 1, 1845, Coons' interest sold to Esau Wood and 25 other men for \$650.
7. August 18, 1845, to February 21, 1850, Part B of Lot No. 53, Chambers'-Earnshaw's interest acquired by William Moore for \$351.
8. May 1, 1845, to January 17, 1849: Part A of Lot No. 53, Wood's interest purchased by Philip Coons for \$499.
9. January 17, 1840, to August 17, 1849, Part A of Lot 53 owned by George Rothery. Purchased price: \$900.
10. February 21, 1850 to March 11, 1850, Part B of Lot 53 owned by Philip Coons, Purchase price: \$600.
11. March 11, 1850, until after Civil War, Part B of Lot 53 owned by George Koonce. Purchase price: \$600.
12. August 17, 1849, until after Civil War, Part A of Lot 53 owned by Samuel M. Williams. Purchase price: \$893.

B. Construction of Bldgs. On Wager Lot No. 53.

1. PART A of Wager Lot No. 53

~~This two story frame dwelling was erected before 1836 by the Wager family. The building fronted 28 feet 3 ½ inches on High Street and was 18 feet deep. The structure was used as a residence.—[3 ½~~
story stone House erected by Williams in period 1850-1858.]

2. PART B of Wager Lot No. 53

This one-story frame dwelling was erected by William Moore between 1846 and 1848. The maximum possible dimensions of this structure were approximately a 19 foot frontage on High Street and about 18 feet in depth. This building was also used as a residence.

C. Uses of Bldgs. On Wager Lot No. 53

1. PART A of Wager Lot No. 53 [North (Right)]:

In 1850, the house was apparently the home of the lot owner, Samuel M. Williams. In 1860, it was apparently rented as a home to the family of William Wilson.

2. PART B of Wager Lot No. 53 [South (Left)]:

In 1850, it was apparently rented to the Mulatto family of Caroline Decamp(?). In 1860, it was apparently rented by the family of Daniel Keaf.

D. Bldg. No. 3.

Bldg. No. 3 today, is a three-story brick structure fronting 41 feet on High Street by 33 in depth. The house is situated with approximately on half standing on Lot No. 53-Part A and the other portion standing on Wager Lot No. 54. The material used in the construction of Bldg. No. 3, together with the dimensions and its location astride two Wager Lots, clearly indicate that this structure was not standing before the Civil War. Further proof that Bldg. No. 3 was erected after 1893 will be found by a glance at Photograph HF-99. Photograph HF-142 also indicates that Bldg. No. 3 was constructed ~~before~~ [after] 1893 and before 1900 (see Appendix I).

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that Bldg. No. 3 be demolished as a non-historic structure. It is further recommended that original pre-Civil War Wager Lots and sub-divisions on Wager Lot No. 53 be marked on the ground, perhaps using stone to form these boundary lines. It is also suggested that, after the removal of Bldg. No. 3, it will be possible to interpret the entire High Street row (Wager Lots No. 53, 54, 55, and 56) by the means of two or three well placed trail side exhibits which should include several of the old photographs that form a part of this report. In conclusion that is recommended that Wager Lot No. 53-Part A be called the "Samuel M. Williams Lot" and Wager Lot No. 53-Part B be called the "George Koonce Lot", after the owners of this property in the 1859-65 period.

Charles W. Snell,
Historian (Park Supervisory)
July 29, 1958

APPENDIX I

HISTORICAL AND MODERN PHOTOGRAPHS

(Four)

[also See]

1. HF - 770 -1882 Photos - 787 showing a corner [?] & Lot 53B.
2. HF - 96, 1896 Photo made from Maryland Height clearly shows
one-story Frame structure on Lot 56B.
3. HF-79 1880-View of Rear of Lot 53 houses [?].

"Catholic Church as seen from Main Street (High
Street), Harpers Ferry, West Va."
1865-1866.

Photograph by Russell of Baltimore, believed to
have been taken in 1865 or 1866.
Donated by Mrs. Henry McDonald, Storer College,
May 18, 1958.
Harpers Ferry Negative No. HF-359.

On the left stands Bldg. No. 37. On the right,
on Part A of Lot 53 (but cut from this print by
the photographer) stands the end wall of the two-
story pre-Civil War building. Readers are asked
to look at the photograph (uncensored) on page 24
of Historic Building report, Part I, for Bldg.
No. 37, dated June 30, 1958, for the missing
bldg., HF H359



HARPERS FERRY FROM LOUDOUN HEIGHTS

National Geographic File No. 140321-A.

Harpers Ferry Negative No. HF-99.

Photograph made between 1892 and 1896.

High street runs down the hill at the right of the picture and joins Shenandoah Street.

Starting on the corner, left hand side of High Street, and moving up the hill: First, large brick house on Wager Lot No. 51; then gable roof of Bldg. No. 37 on Wager Lot No. 52; Part B of Wager Lot 53-vacant; Part A of Wager Lot No. 53 occupied by a two-story house with sloping roof, probably pre-Civil War and on site of Bldg. No. 3; three-story brick house-gable roof on Wager Lot 54-Part B; three-story brick house-gable roof on Wager Lot 54-Part A; Three-story brick house on Part A Lot No. 55; two-story stone house not visible on Part B of Lot No. 55; Three-story brick house (Turning) on Wager Lot No. 56; and 2 ½ story Brick house not visible (gap), ~~not visible-gap~~; and Three-story stone-brick house on Wager Lot 56-Part C at top of row. These houses were all standing during the 1859-65 period.



High Street, Harpers Ferry, W. Va.
About 1900.

Harpers Ferry Negative No. HF-142.

Bldgs. on left side of street; the house on corner located on Wager Lot No. 51; just above it, with only a portion showing is Bldg. No. 37. The large three-story brick building above Bldg. No. 37 is Bldg. No. 3.

On the right side of the street, at the corner of High and Shenandoah Streets, is Bldg. No. 12, then 12-A, Bldg. No. 13, Bldg. No. 14, Bldg. No. 15 and Bldg. No. 16.

This photograph, together with HF-99, indicates that Bldg. No. 3 was erected after ~~1902~~ 1901 and before ~~1906~~ 1907.



HIGH STREET, HARPER'S FERRY, W. VA.

HIGH STREET AND BLDG. NO. 2 AND 3.

JANUARY 1955

Harpers Ferry Negative No. NHF-674.

To the right, on the hill, are the Marmion Row Bldgs. 1-D, 1-C and 1-B. Below are the Sites of Wager Lots 56, 55, 54, and 53. The small wooden building on the right hand side of High Street is Bldg. No. 2 and the large three-story brick structure just beyond it is Bldg. No. 3. Both are non-historic structures.

