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HISTORIC BUILDING REPORT - PART I

22

HARPERS FERRY NATIONAL MONUMENT

Richards Building (No. ⁴⁰44)

APPROVAL SHEET

Recommended: _____
Director

Recommended: _____
Regional Director

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

Approved: _____
Superintendent

PART I
HISTORIC BUILDING REPORT

The Richards Building

(Building No. ⁴⁰~~44~~)

Harpers Ferry National Monument

Distributed for Review by Region Five

HF-9

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SECTION III: ARCHITECTURAL DATA (To Be Prepared)

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

The Richards Building

(Building No. ⁴⁰~~40~~)

Harpers Ferry National Monument

Prepared by
Acting Superintendent Raymond L. Ives
October 14, 1957

SECTION I: ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

A. Name and Number of Building:

Building No. 44, "The Richards Building".

B. Proposed Use of Structure:

The exterior of Building No. 44 is to be restored to its 1859-1865 appearance. Window exhibits are to be installed in the first floor windows as a store of the historic period. The second floor could be used as quarters for seasonal personnel. The third floor could be restored as a Masonic lodge room of the 1859-65 period.

C. Provisions for Operating the House:

No funds have yet been programed for refurnishing the house. Money will be required to establish the small period store museum exhibit on the first floor of the structure.

No cooperative agreements have been executed for furnishing or operating the house. It may be possible, however, to interest the Harpers Ferry Masonic Lodge in refurnishing the third floor of this building as a period meeting room by means of an cooperative agreement.

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

It is estimated that the total cost of restoring the exterior and rehabilitating the interior of Building No. 44 will amount to \$45,000.

HISTORICAL DATA

The Richards Building

(Building No. 44)

Harpers Ferry National Monument

**Prepared by
Supervising Park Historian Charles W. Snell
October 14, 1957
(Rev. Feb. 4, 1958)**

SECTION II: HISTORICAL DATA

INTRODUCTION: Part I of the Historic Building Report for Building No. 44 has been prepared in accordance with Acting Regional Director Gibson's memorandum of September 17, 1957. This section is based on all presently available documentary data.

1. Ownership of the Land, 1835 to 1872.

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, deceased."¹ The property thus being divided at Harpers Ferry was commonly known as the "Wager Six Acre Reservation," 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 appointed a

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

2. 1835 Plat, "The Wager Six Acre Reservation, drawn by James M. Brown, S.G.C.," in Deed Book 29, 1847-48, p. 140. See Appendix I.

special receiver for 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 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 on June 18, 1836, sold Wager Lot No. 46 to James Duncanson and Philip Coons, both of Harpers Ferry, for the sum of \$600.⁴ Building No. 44, today, stands on the site of Wager Lot No. 46 (See Appendix I).

On January 10, 1840 James Duncanson put into trust the following property: "two houses and lots...which two lots are marked and numbers 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 15 - subdivision 4, the present site of Building No. 15) - The other (Wager Lot No. 46) on Potowmac (sic-Shenandoah) Street adjoining the U. States line on the south, near the house now occupied by Henry Ward."⁵

On November 12, 1842 the Trustee sold at public auction, on Duncanson's behalf, his portion of Lot No. 46 to Philip Coons for \$100. The Deed reads in part:

3: Deed Book 29, pp. 140-41.

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

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

"...one undivided half of the Lot 46...situated on Potomac Street, Adjoining the U. States Line on the south, near the house now occupied by Henry Ward, and immediately below the Roman Catholic Church... To have and to hold the said one half of said house and lot..." 6

Thus in 1842 Philip Coons acquired the complete ownership of the house on Wager Lot No. 46.

This property remained in the possession of Philip Coons until July 17, 1855, at which time, for the sum of \$1,830.00, Coons sold to William Richards, of Harpers Ferry, the following property:

"a certain Lot or parcel of land with a Stone House thereon, situated on the West side of Shenandoah Street..., and described as Lot 46... But there is excepted from this sale and conveyance, so much of the third story of the building erected on said lot, as is now owned, used and occupied by the order of Free and accepted masons, to whom the Same belongs by virtue of an agreement made heretofore by the said masons and the said Coons, therefor as well as for a pass way to and from the Said third Story on the South Side of Said lot..." 7

William Richards remained the owner of Wager Lot No. 46 and Building No. 44 from 1855 to 1872, at which date he sold this property. As Richards was the owner of this property in the 1859-1865 period, it is therefore suggested that Building No. 44 be called the "Richards Building."

2. Erection of Building No. 44, 1836-1840, 1845-46.

A 1836 newspaper advertisement for the sale of James B. Wager's real estate in Harpers Ferry describes Wager Lot No. 46 as a vacant lot, 38 $\frac{1}{2}$ feet by 70 feet, located on Shenandoah Street. That this property was then a vacant lot

6. November 12, 1846, Deed of B. & S., Deed Book 27, pp. 61-62.
7. July 17, 1855, Deed of B. & S., Deed Book 35, pp. 9-10.
8. April 27, 1872, Deed of B. & S., Deed Book 7, pp. 198-99.
9. Virginia Free Press, April 7, 1836, p. 4, Col. 1.

is also confirmed by the 1835 map, "Harpers Ferry Shewing the Location of the Winchester and Potomac Railroad, Drawn by Lieut White, Allen, and R S Smith, U.S. Army under the direction of James Kearney, Lt. Col. and T.E., 1835, Map 2/"
10
(See Appendix II)

Duncanson's trust, of 1840, (see page 2 of this report) indicates that there was a house standing on Wager Lot No. 46 at that date. This building must therefore have been erected between June 1836 and January 10, 1840.

On September 8, 1852 the following trust was executed, which reads in part:

"...Whereas the Grand Lodge of Virginia of ancient Free and accepted Masons, have loaned and advanced to Charity Lodge, No. 111 at Harper's Ferry, the sum of Four Hundred Dollars, now this Deed witnesses, that the Parties of the first part, Trustees of the said Charity Lodge, No. 111, pursuant to the order and resolution of said Lodge, do grant, sell and convey unto the party of the second part the Hall now occupied by said Lodge, being the third story of the building on Lot No. 46 situated on Shenandoah Street, in Harper's Ferry together with the right of way to the same and all appurtenances belonging to the said premises, and subject to all the conditions annexed to their title to the same, but on the following Trusts and conditions, viz: to permit the said Charity Lodge No. 111 to occupy and enjoy the same, unless default shall happen in the following Trust, and on the further Trust that if the said Charity Lodge shall repay the said sum of Four Hundred Dollars to the said Grand Lodge of Virginia...." 11

The above indicates that Building No. 44 had a third floor that was being used by the Masons in 1852.

On November 11, 1852, Philip Coons and his wife Annie C. Coons signed the following deed with the Trustees of Charity Lodge No. 111:

10. National Archives R.G. 77-Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers. Fortification Map File, Part of Map Dr. 150-Sheet 82-2. Map also reproduced as part of Harpers Ferry Master Plan, Drawing No. NM-HF 3002, sheet two of three.

11. September 8, 1852, Deed of Trust, Deed Book 32, p. 373.

Coons granted:

"...the privilege and right to build as a meeting place or lodge of the said Fraternity an addition or third story upon the stone house built by the said Coons on the West side of Shenandoah Street in said town on Lot No. 46 on the plat of the division of lands of John Wager deceased... free from rent or imposition... but it is expressly stipulated herein... that the said parties of the second part (the Lodge) & their successors shall at all times hereafter keep in good repair the roof & spouting of the said building at their own proper costs and charges. And further that there shall be no limitation as to time in this grant except in the event of the destruction of the building by fire when this privilege shall cease & be forever void without the assent in writing of the said parties of the first part (Coons)...; it is also further stipulated for & provided that the alley on the south side of said house now occupied by a flight of steps shall be at all times hereafter used & occupied in common by the said parties of the second part & their successors & the said P. Coons & his assigns tenants & others claiming by his authority..." 11

The discrepancies in the two above-quoted documents are apparently resolved by Mr. ^{HARRIS} Chambers, of Harpers Ferry, search of the records of the Harpers Ferry Masonic Lodge. Mr. Chambers reported that the Masonic Lodge was established in Harpers Ferry in 1818 and until 1845 the meetings were held on the second floor of the Episcopal Church. In 1845 a fire destroyed the church, the lodge meeting-place and records of the lodge. Arrangements were made in 1845 with Philip Coons, the owner of Building No. 44, to add a third floor to his two-story structure. The third floor was dedicated on June 24, 1846, but was not deeded to the lodge until November 11, 1852.

Summary of Construction of Building No. 44:

Building No. 44 was designed and erected by Philip Coons of Harpers Ferry sometime between 1836 and 1839. The original 11. November 11, 1852, Deed of B.&S. (Grant), Deed Book 33, pp. 43-44.

structure was a two-story stone building. In 1845 a third story was added to the building by the Masonic Order, this construction being completed in 1846.

3. Historical Uses of Building No. 44:

The uses of the first and second floors of Building No. 44 in the 1859 to 1865 period awaits the results of further research in the newspapers of that period.

The third floor of the building, from 1846 through at least 1872¹², was used as a meeting place by the Harpers Ferry Masonic Lodge.

4. Measured Drawings of Building No. 44:

No historical or modern measured drawings of Building No. 44 are presently available

12. Rights of the Lodge are mentioned in the deeds for both 1855 and 1872.

Report written by:

Charles W. Snell,
Historian (Park Supervisory)

from primary data
collected by:

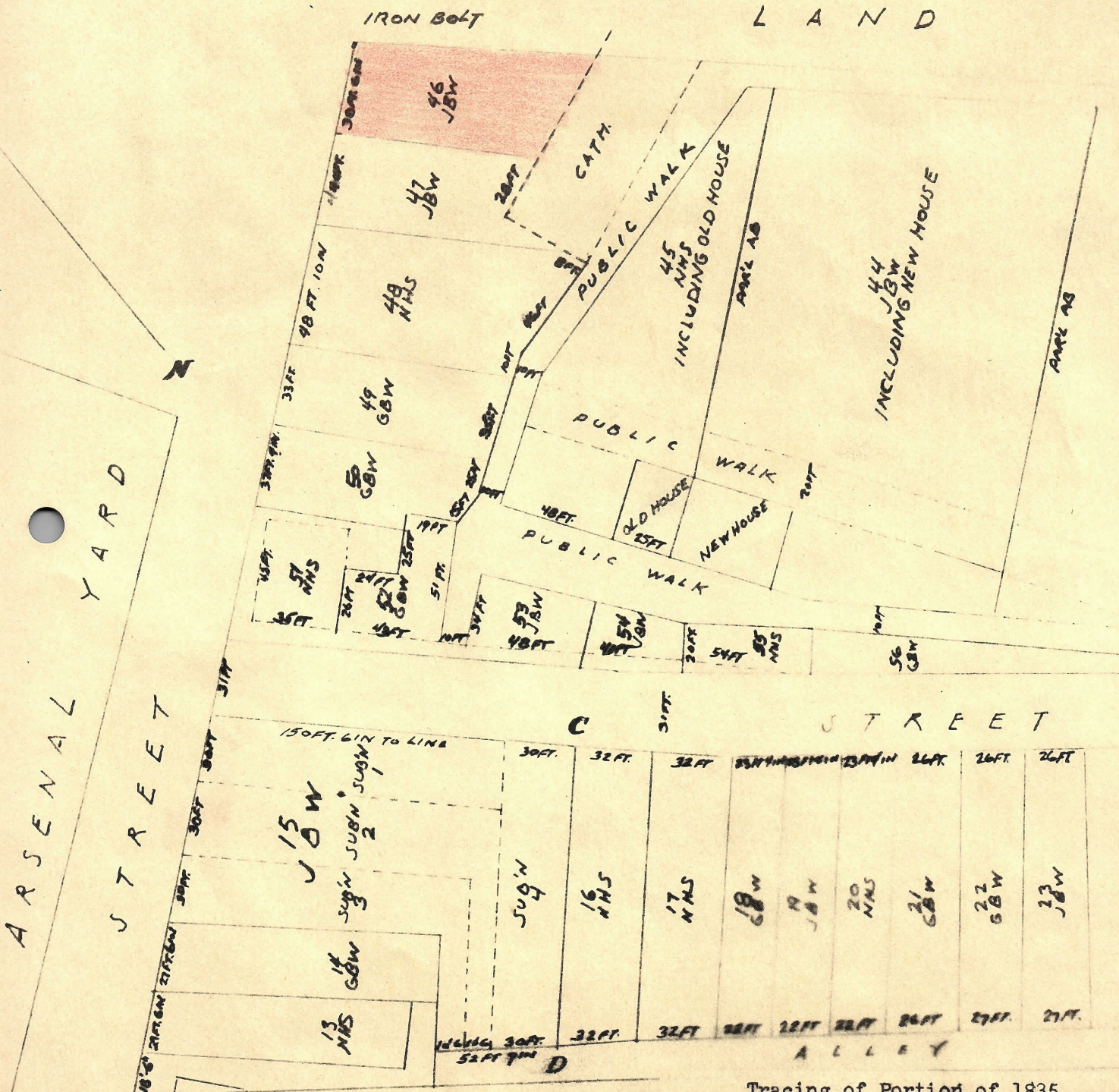
Herbert H. Kissling,
Park Historian

Dated: October 14, 1957

APPENDIX I

TRACING OF A PORTION OF THE 1835 WAGER PLAT

PUBLIC LAND



SCALE 1" = 60 FT.

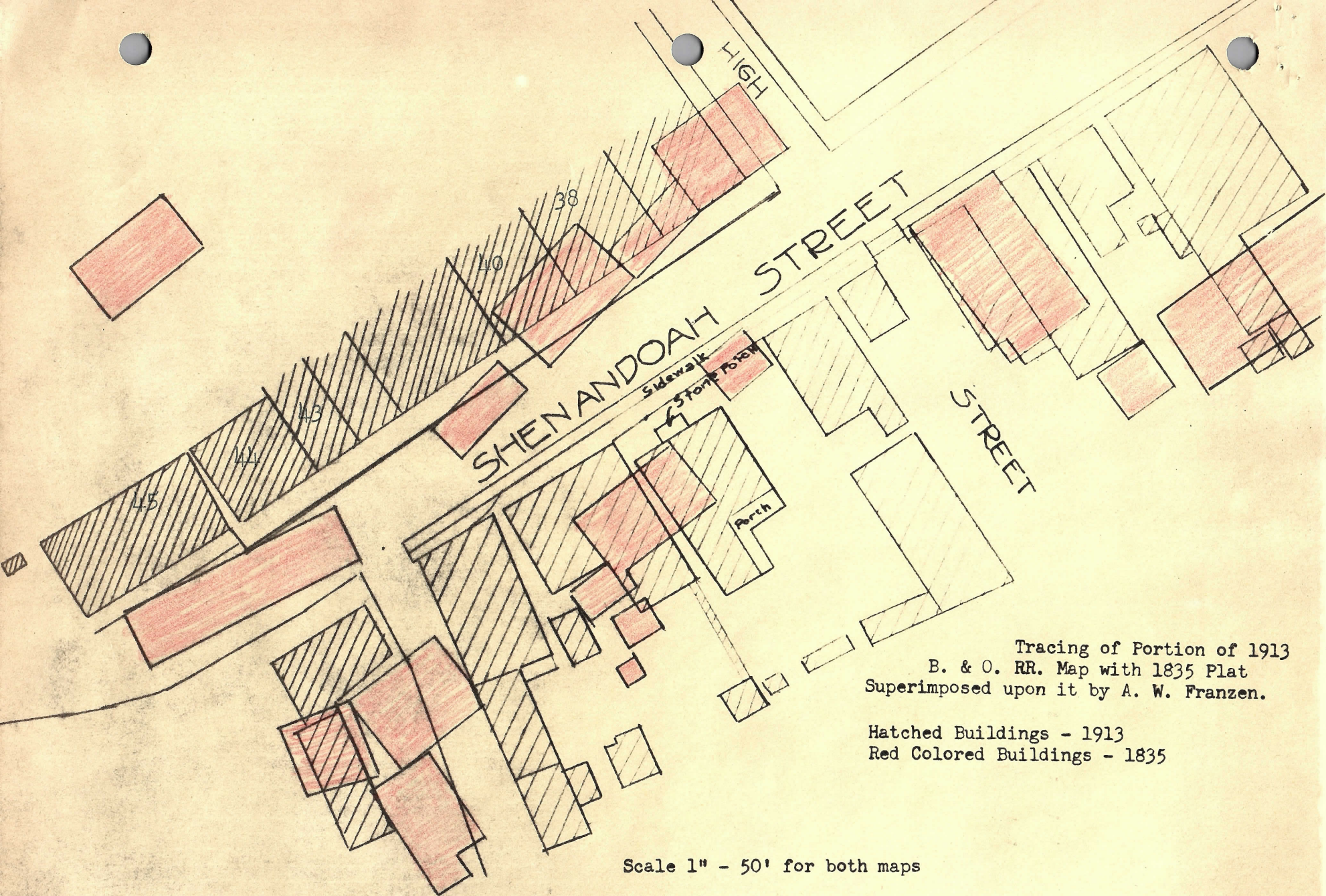
Tracing of Portion of 1835 Plat of Wager Lots. Traced from the Original in the Jefferson County Court House, Deed Book 29, by A. W. Franzen.

APPENDIX II

TRACING OF A PORTION OF THE 1913 B. & O. R.R.

MAP WITH THE 1835 WINCHESTER & POTOMAC R.R.

MAP PROJECTED ON IT



Tracing of Portion of 1913
B. & O. RR. Map with 1835 Plat
Superimposed upon it by A. W. Franzen.

Hatched Buildings - 1913
Red Colored Buildings - 1835

Scale 1" - 50' for both maps

APPENDIX III

PHOTOGRAPHS

HARPERS FERRY FROM LOUDON HEIGHTS. After 1870 and prior to 1896.

(Probably taken between 1893 and before 1896 - Catholic Church not yet remodeled, but B. & O. Tracks in present location along Potomac)

Church in the center with the steeple is the Catholic Church; Building No. 44 is the white stone three-story building located directly below the church on Shenandoah Street, flanked on the right by Building No. 43 and on the left by Building No. 45 (large building with porches on the front).

Harpers Ferry N. M. Negative No. HF-99
National Geographic Negative No. 140321-A



5. Conclusions and Recommendations:

Building No. 44 was designed and erected between 1836 and 1839 by the merchant-architect Philip Coons as a two-story stone house. The third floor was added in 1845 by the Masonic Lodge as a meeting place and used for this purpose until after the Civil War. In 1855 Coons sold the building to William Richards, who remained the owner until 1872.

Further Research Required:

A careful and complete search of the newspapers from 1836 to 1861 will give us a complete chain of the uses of Building No. 44. The same sources will also yield data on the construction of the house. The U. S. Census Records for 1840, 1850, and 1860 will produce background material on both the owners and occupants of this structure. Correspondence of the U. S. Army contains information on the early career of Philip Coons; this data is now on order from the National Archives.

Historical Significance and Restoration:

Building No. 44 was definitely a part of the 1859-1865 historic scene. As far as is now known, however, the building was not closely associated with the John Brown ^Raid or the events of the Civil War, other than by being a part of the scene in which those historic actions took place. It is therefore recommended that the exterior of Building No. 44 be restored to its 1859 appearance. It is also believe that the exterior of this structure, in the main and from an architectural point of view, is substantially as it was in 1859. Therefore, only restoration, and not reconstruction, will be required on the exterior of this building.

Monument Use of the Building:

It is recommended that the first floor of Building No. 44 be fitted out as a shop of the 1859 period. These exhibits to be viewed by visitors through the windows from the street. In other words, visitors will not actually enter the house, thus reducing the problems of protection. The second floor should be saved for the storage of the exhibits in the event of floods. Now that Storer College may become a part of the Monument, with ample buildings for housing seasonal personnel on Camp Hill, I do not recommend that the second floor of Building No. 44 be any longer considered as quarters for seasonal personnel. If the third floor is used as a museum, visitor traffic up and down the steps, just outside the second floor, to get to the third floor, will make it most unpleasant for people living on the second floor.

The third floor could be restored as a Masonic Lodge of the 1859-65 period. I suggest, however, that this be done only if the local Lodge is interested in carrying out this project through the means of an cooperative agreement. It should be specified in this agreement that visitors will only be able to view the Lodge Room from the outside third floor steps unless there is some attendant of the Lodge on duty in the room to protect the exhibit. With the limited Monument staff, it is my opinion, that this proposed exhibit would not be important enough for the National Park Service to guarantee it any more protection than that given to the many other exhibits located in the Lower Town section.

If the Masonic Lodge is not interested in developing this exhibit, then I suggested that the third floor of Building No. 44 be reduced to a shell on the interior. Under either plan, therefore, restoration work on the interior of the building, by the National Park Service, would be limited strictly to the first floor of Building No. 44.

Charles W. Snell

Charles W. Snell,
Historian, (Park Supervisory)

February 4, 1958