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Harpers Ferry National Monument

HISTORIC BUILDING SITE SURVEY

REPORT

for

WAGER LOT NO. 56 - HIGH STREET,

"The John Whip, John McCall and Thomas Boerly Lots."

Harpers Ferry National Monument

Prepared by:

Charles W. Snell,
Historian (Park Supervisory)
Dated: August 1, 1958,
16 pages.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page No.</u>
<u>SECTION I - ADMINISTRATIVE DATA</u>	1 page
<u>SECTION II - HISTORICAL DATA</u>	
1. <u>Ownership of the Land, 1835 to 1865</u>	1
2. <u>Construction of Buildings on Wager Lot No. 56</u>	4
3. <u>Uses of the Houses on Wager Lot No. 56, 1841-1861</u>	6
4. <u>Historical Prints and Photographs</u>	10
5. <u>Historical Plans of the Bldgs</u>	10
6. <u>Summary of Historical Data</u>	10
7. <u>Conclusions and Recommendations</u>	13
<u>APPENDIX I - Photographs (four)</u>	14

SECTION I - ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

A. Name and Number of Lot:

Wager Lot No. 56 - High Street - the John Whip, John McCall and Thomas Boerly Lots.

B. Proposed Use of the Lots:

It is recommended that the boundary lines of these lots be marked on the ground and that the High Street area (Wager Lots Nos. 53, 54, 55, and 56) be interpreted by means of several trail-side exhibits utilizing some of the old photographs of houses that once occupied this lot. It is further suggested that Part A of Lot No. 56 be called the "John Whip Lot"; Part B the "John McCall Lot", and Part C, the "Thomas Boerly Lot".

C. Provisions for Operating the Lots:

No formal operation contemplated.

D. Cost of Rehabilitating the Grounds:

The \$500.00 estimated cost mentioned in reports for Wager Lots Nos. 54 and 55 should cover the three lots Nos. 54, 55, and 56.

SECTION II - HISTORICAL DATA

1. OWNERSHIP OF THE LAND, 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. 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.

On October 10, 1835, the three Commissioners reported to the Court: "To Gerard B. Wager we allot and assign the following lots as designated G. B. W. and numbered in the annexed plat, to wit: Lots No. 2-3-4-6-12-14-18-21-22-29-30-32-34-36-38-43-49-50-52 & 56"

Thus in 1835, Wager Lot No. 56, the property now under consideration (See Blue, Red, and Green areas on Plat, page 2 of this report) became the property of Gerard B. Wager, who remained the

1. Gibson, etc., vs. Wager, etc. Decree, Deed Book 29, pp.140-141. Jefferson County Court House, Charles Town, West Va.

2. 1835 Plat, "The Wager Six Acre Reservation, Drawn by James M. Brown, S.C.C.," in Deed Book 29, (1847-48), p.140. See page 2.

3. Deed Book 29, pp.140-141.

PUBLIC LAND



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.

owner until his death in 1848. His estate retained possession of this lot from 1848 until after the Civil War.

For the purpose of this report, Wager Lot No. 56 will be subdivided into three lots, corresponding with each of the three houses that occupied it. The Southeast section will be known as PART A; the Center portion as PART B, and the Northwest part as PART C.

A. Ownership of PART A, 1842-1865.

On April 1, 1842, for annual rent of \$31.00 per year, Gerard B. Wager leased to Abraham Fleming for 99 years, with the option of renewing or buying, PART A of the Lot No. 56. The deed reads in part:

"...being the South East end or part of the lot designated as No. 54--sic) fifty four...(Said south east end of lot No. 54 [sic], fronting on the street known as High Street thirty one feet, is the same now occupied by Fleming and upon which he has lately built a house and extends back the depth of the said lot 54 (sic)..."⁴

On June 12, 1858, Fleming's leasehold for PART A of Lot No. 56 was sold to George Chambers and others for \$377.00. This deed reads in part:

"The three story brick building of the said Abraham Fleming... bounded on the one side by High Street, in the rear by a public walk, on one end by G. B. Wagers heirs two story brick building (Wager

4. Lease, April 1, 1842, Deed Book 26, p.79. Gerard B. Wager did not own Lot No. 54, hence it had to be Lot No. 56.

Lot No. 56-PART B) and on the other end by the two story stone building of Hillary Allison [on Wager Lot No. 55-PART B) and did also grant the indenture of lease from G. B. Wager, deceased, of the ground on which said building stands..." 5

On December 3, 1858, George Chambers sold this leasehold to John Sturdy for \$125.00. Mr. Sturdy remained the owner of this property until after the Civil War. 6

B. Ownership of PARTS B and C.

Gerard B. Wager and his heirs retained control of these sections from 1835 to 1865.

2. CONSTRUCTION OF BLDGS ON WAGER LOT NO. 56:

A. House on PART A.

The house on PART A of Wager No. 56 was constructed by Abraham Fleming, probably in 1841. A deed of trust, made by Fleming in 1843, describes his building as "a two story brick dwelling house, situated on High Street." 7 Another deed of trust made in 1842, 8 indicates that the building probably cost \$400 to erect. As the lot fronted 31 feet on High Street, the house could not have been wider than thirty--one feet. The depth of the house was probably about 20 feet.

In 1853, Fleming described his house as follows:

5. Deed of B. & S., June 12, 1853, Deed Book No. 38, pp. 87-88.
6. Deed of B. & S., Deed Book 38, p. 205.
7. Deed of Trust, July 18, 1843, Deed Book 26, pp. 396-397.
8. Deed of Trust, August 25, 1842, Deed Book 26, p. 80.

FOR SALE OR RENT

"My large three-story BRICK BUILDING at Harpers Ferry, lying on High Street...The property is in a good state of repair, consisting of a Dwelling House above, and two Store Rooms below..." 9

It thus appears that between 1843 and 1853, Mr. Fleming added another story to his house.

B. House on PART B.

The year in which this building was constructed is not known, but because it was constructed of brick, it appears likely that Gerard Wager erected this building himself after 1842 and before 1850.

In 1854, the lot was advertised for sale by N. S. White, Administrator of Gerard B. Wager's estate. This notice yields the following description of the house:

PUBLIC SALE

"Under the Will of the late G. B. Wager, will offer for sale on 4th March, before the U. S. Hotel, the following Harpers-Ferry property:

1st. Two story brick building, with lot belonging thereto, lying between Thomas Burley's brick house on one end [located on Wager Lot No. 56-PART C] and Abraham Fleming's on the other [on Wager Lot No. 56-PART A] - fronting on High Street and bounded in the rear by public walk--now in occupancy of Adam Whip..." 10

This house is to be seen in Photographs HF-83, HF-145, HF-280, HF-283, the rear in HF-79, and the ruins in NHF-670. The 1933 survey of Harper's Ferry, see Drawing No. NM-HF-2004, Sheet 1

9. Virginia Free Press, July 14, 1853, p.2, c.7; see also Deed of Trust, February 11, 1854, Deed Book 34, pp.112-113 for similar description of the building.

10. Virginia Free Press, February 16, 1854, p.3.

of 1, shows the ruins of this structure. The house is listed as being built of stone and as being 2½ stories in height (a gable roof). Photograph NHE-670, which shows the gable roof, also indicates that it was actually built of brick. By the 1933 plan, this house fronted approximately 33 feet on High Street and was about 19 feet deep.

C. House on PART C of Lot No. 56.

This house, like the house on PART B, was apparently erected by Gerard B. Wager after 1843 and before 1850. The 1854 advertisement quoted above describes this as "Thomas Burley's brick house." The house is to be seen in Photographs HF-33, HF-145, HF--280, HF-283, the rear in HF-79, and the ruins in NHE-670. These indicate that the house was probably built of a combination of brick and stone and was three stories in height. The ruins of the house are shown in the 1933 Survey, where the structure is listed as being built of stone and two stories in height. According to the 1933 map, the house fronted 30 feet on High Street, was 19 feet deep on the southeast end, 32 feet long in the rear on the Public Walk, and 13 feet deep on the northwest end.

3. USES OF THE HOUSES ON WAGER LOT NO. 56, 1841-1861.

A. House on PART A of Lot No. 56.

In 1853, Abraham Fleming advertised:

BUSINESS PLACE TO RENT

"His dwelling house and store situated on High Street, Harpers-

Ferry. The store rooms have been occupied by me as a General Flour and Feed Store for many years." 11

The census of 1850 yields the following data concerning Mr. Fleming, the builder and owner of this house:

"Abraham I. Fleming, 45, male, Flour Dealer, Value of Real Estate owned: \$1,700. Born in Virginia.
Susan Fleming, 45, female, born in Virginia.
John C. Fleming, 10, male, born in Virginia.
Jessie B. Fleming, 5, male, born in Virginia.
Harriett Fleming, 3, female, born in Virginia.
Sarah Bateman, 19, female, born in Virginia.
Robert H. Fleming, 17, Armorer, born in Virginia." 12

In 1858, the property was sold to John Sturdy and the house in 1860 was apparently occupied by:

"John Whip, 33, male, Saddle and Harness Maker, Value of Personal estate: \$400, born in Maryland.
Hannah A. Whip, 35, female, born in Delaware.
Francis (?) M. Angel, 18, male, Saddler's Apprentice, born in Missouri.
Oliver P. Angel, 11 male, born in Missouri." 13

The owner of the house was living elsewhere in 1860:

"John W. Sturdy, 21, male, Armorer, born in Virginia.
Margaret C. Sturdy, 16, female, born in Virginia." 13a

B. House on PART B of Lot No. 56.

In 1850 this building was apparently occupied by:

11. Virginia Free Press, July 14, 1853, p.2,c.7.

12. 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, p.415.

13. 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 12, p.196.

13a. Ibid., pp. 193-194.

"Soloman Fleming, 42, male, Armorer, born in Virginia.
 Sarah Fleming, 42, female, born in Virginia.
 Margaret Fleming, 14, female, born in Virginia.
 Francis Fleming, 11, female, born in Virginia.
 Jessie Fleming, 9, male, born in Virginia.
 Alice Fleming, 7, female, born in Virginia.
 Duscellia (?) Fleming, 5, female, born in Virginia.
 Catherine Fleming, 30, female, born in Virginia." 14

In 1853, Adam Whip announced:

SADDLE AND HARNESS MAKING

"Informs his old customers in Harpers Ferry that he is again in the above business on High Street, in the shop formerly occupied by Mr. Smith, and adjoining A. Fleming's Grocery Store..." 15

Mr. Whip occupied this house until his death in March of 1854. 16

By 1860, this house was apparently occupied by:

"John M'Call, 41, male, Shoemaker Value of Personal Estate: \$300, born in Scotland.
 Agnes M'Call, 20, female, born in Scotland.
 Margaret M'Call, 17, female, born in Scotland.
 John M'Call, 15, male, born in Scotland.
 Alexander M'Call, 13, twin, male, born in Scotland.
 Thomas M'Call, 13, twin, male, born in Scotland.
 James M'Call, 11, male, born in Scotland.
 Patrick M'Call, 8, male, born in Scotland." 17

C. Use of House on PART C of Lot No. 56.

The first reference to an occupant in this house appears in Administrator's notice in 1854, for the sale of PART B of Lot

14. National Archives R. G. 29, Census of 1850, Volume 13, p.415.

15. Virginia Free Press, April 7, 1853, p.3, c.1.

16. Virginia Free Press, March 16, 1854, p.2, c.7.

17. National Archives R. G. 29, Census of 1860, Volume 13, Virginia, p.195.

Not 56, In this advertisement "Thomas Burley's brick house" is
18
mentioned.

The census of 1850 yields the following data on Burley or
Boerly:

"Thomas Boerly, 32, male, Laborer, born in Ireland.
Bridget Boerly, 32, female, born in Ireland.
Mary Boerly, 6, female, born in Virginia.
Elizabeth Boerly, 2, female, born in Virginia.
Charles Boerly, 4, male, born in Virginia." 19

In a Deed of Trust made in 1854, Thomas Boerly put several
pieces of property in trust, including Wager Lots No. 29 and 36.
Bridget Boerly, his wife, he stated, had been keeping a "tavern
boarding house out of which from her excellent care and labor
considerable money was made." He also put into trust: "...and
all the household stuff and furniture and bar and bar fixtures
now in the dwelling house and tavern on High Street where said
20
Boerly lives..."

Thomas Boerly met his end in the John Brown Raid of 1859.
As Joseph Barry tells the story:

"A little before 7 o'clock, a.m. [on October 17, 1859], Mr.
Alexander Kelly approached the corner of High and Shenandoah
Streets (by Bldg. No. 12, on Wager Lot No. 15, subdivision T),
armed with a shotgun, for the purpose of discharging it at the
invaders. No sooner did he turn the corner than two shots were
fired at him and a bullet was sent through his hat. Immediately

18. Virginia Free Press, February 16, 1854, p.3.

19. National Archives R. G. Census of 1850, Virginia, Volume
12, p.415.

20. Deed of Trust, July 8, 1854, Deed Book 34, pp. 134-136.

afterwards, Mr. Thomas Boerly approached the same corner with the same purpose. He was a man of herculean strength and great personal courage. He discharged his gun at some of the enemy who were standing at the arsenal gate, when a shot was fired at him by one of the party who was crouching behind the arsenal fence. The bullet penetrated his groin, inflicting a ghastly wound, of which he died in a few hours." 21

His widow was apparently still residing in the house on PART C of lot 56 in 1860:

"Bridget Boerly, 43, female, Merchant, Value of Real Estate owned: \$1,500, Value of Personal Estate: \$800, born in Ireland.
Charles Boerly, 14 male, born in Virginia.
Elizabeth Boerly, 11, female, born in Virginia.
Thomas Boerly, 8, male, born in Virginia.
Mary Donaho, 9, female, born in Ohio." 22

4. HISTORICAL PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS.

Four historical prints and photographs will be found in Appendix I of this report.

5. HISTORICAL PLANS OF THE BLDGS.

No historical plans of these pre-Civil War buildings have been found and it is unlikely that any will ever be located. No measured drawings of these three buildings exist as the structures were demolished before 1955.

6. SUMMARY OF HISTORICAL DATA.

A. Ownership of the Land, 1835 to 1865.

1. October, 1782, to October 9, 1835, owned by Wager family.

21. Barry, Joseph, The Strange Story of Harper's Ferry, Martinsburg, W. Va., 1903, pp.59-60. See also p.93.

22. National Archives R. G. 29, Census of 1860, Volume 12, Virginia, p.195.

2. October 10, 1835, until after Civil War, owned by Gerard B. Wager, to 1848 and from 1848 to 1865 by his estate.

3. PART A (Southeast end) of Lot 56, leased for 99 years by Gerard B. Wager on April 1, 1842, for annual rent of \$31.00, to Abraham Fleming.

4. PART A leasehold sold to George Chambers and others on June 12, 1858, for \$377.00.

5. December 3, 1858, to after 1865, leasehold to PART A sold to John Sturdy for \$125.50.

B. Construction of Houses on Lot No. 56.

1. House on PART A.

This house was constructed in 1841 by Abraham Fleming as a two-story brick building. By 1853 he had added a third story to the house. The structure fronted about 31 feet on High Street and was about 20 feet deep. The house had a gable roof, two store rooms on the first floor and living quarters on the upper floors.

2. House on PART B.

This building was probably constructed by Gerard B. Wager between 1842 and 1848. The structure was built of brick, two stories high and had a gable roof. The house, designed for use as a residence, fronted approximately 39 feet on High Street and was about 19 feet deep.

3. House on PART C.

This house was probably also erected by Gerard B. Wager between 1843 and 1848. It was apparently built of both brick and stone. The structure was three stories high, fronted 30 feet on High Street, about 32 feet on the Public Walk in the rear, was 18 feet deep on the southeast end and about 15 feet wide on the northwest end.

C. Uses of Houses on Lot No. 56.

1. House on PART A.

This house was occupied by Abraham Fleming from 1841 to June 1858 as his residence and store. Mr. Fleming operated a General Flour (grocery) and Feed business. From 1859 to 1861 the house was apparently rented by John Whip, a saddle and harness maker, who undoubtedly had his shop located on the first floor.

2. House on PART B.

This building was used as a residence. In 1850 it was apparently occupied by the family of Solomon Fleming, an armorer. From 1853 to 1854 the house was the residence and shop of Adam Whip, a Saddle and Harness Maker. In 1860 the structure was apparently rented by John McCall, a shoemaker.

3. House on PART C.

From at least 1850 until 1861, this was the home and tavern boarding house of Thomas Boerly. Mr. Boerly was killed in

the John Brown Raid of October, 1859.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

It is recommended that the boundary lines of these lots be marked on the ground and that the High Street area (Wager Lots No. 53, 54, 55, and 56) be interpreted by means of two or three well placed trailside exhibits utilizing several of the old photographs of the houses that once occupied this lot.

It is suggested that PART A of Lot No. 56 be called the "John Whip Lot"; PART B, "the John McCall Lot", and PART C, "the Thomas Boerly Lot."

Charles W. Snell

Charles W. Snell,
Historian (Park Supervisory)
August 1, 1958

APPENDIX I

HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS

(Four)

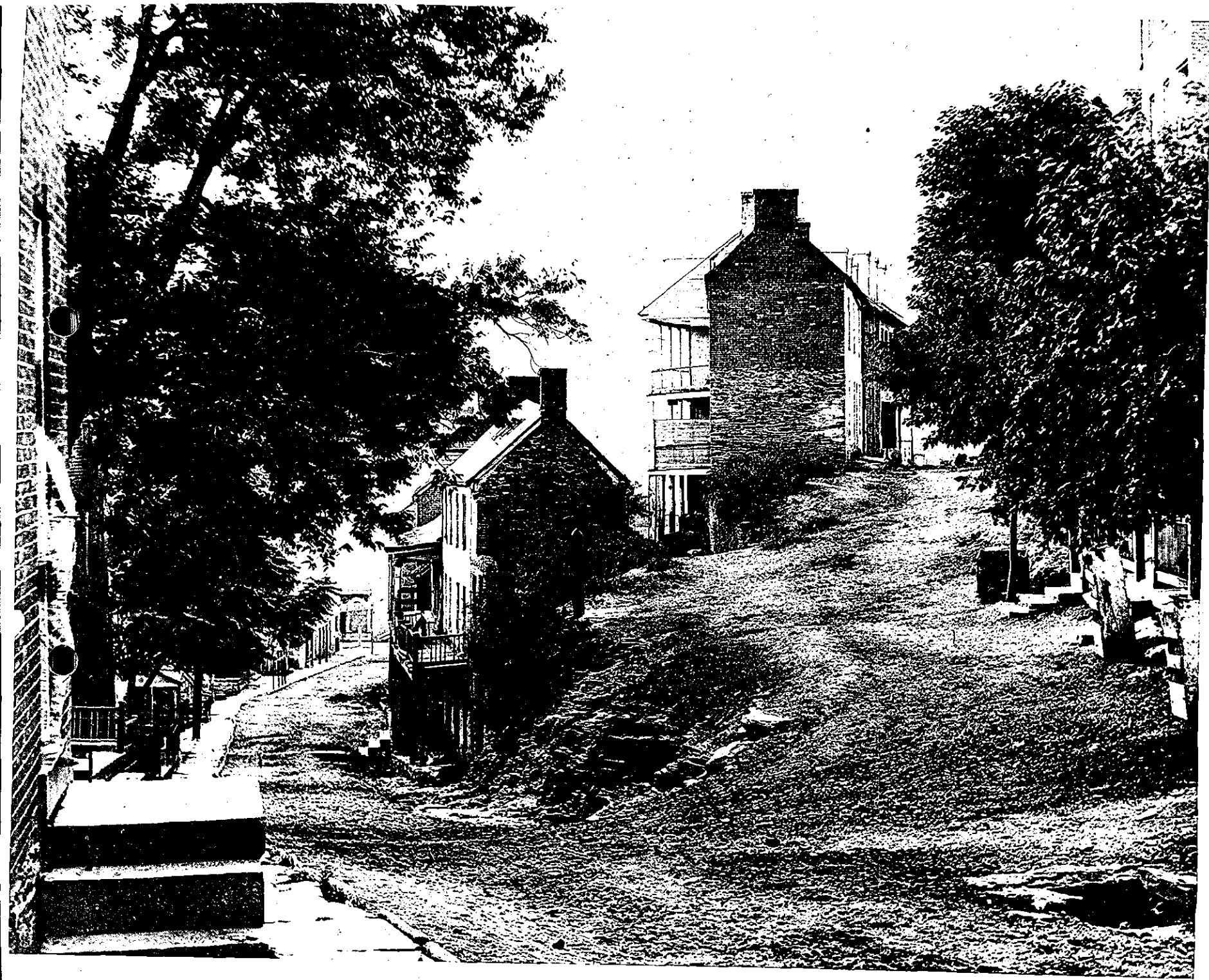
(765 Street Scene) View of High Street
Taken about 1870

Original Glass Negative at Gettysburg N.M.P.
Harpers Ferry Negative No. HF-33.

Note the unpaved road or street. Houses to right of High Street: Three story house on Wager Lot 56-Part C; then 2½ story house on Wager Lot No. 56-Part B; then corner of three story brick house on Wager Lot No. 56-Part A, visible. To rear of these houses is the Public Walk and then the Marmion Row Houses.

For a view of the roofs of these three houses, 1892-1896, see Photograph HF-99 in Appendix I, page 17 of "Historic Building Site Survey Report for Bldg. No. 3, Wager Lot No. 53-High Street," dated July 29, 1958.

For a view of the rear of the Houses on Wager Lot No. 56, Part A and Part C in 1880, see Photograph HF-79 in Appendix I, page 13 of "Historic Building Site Survey Report for Wager Lot No. 55-High Street," dated July 31, 1958.

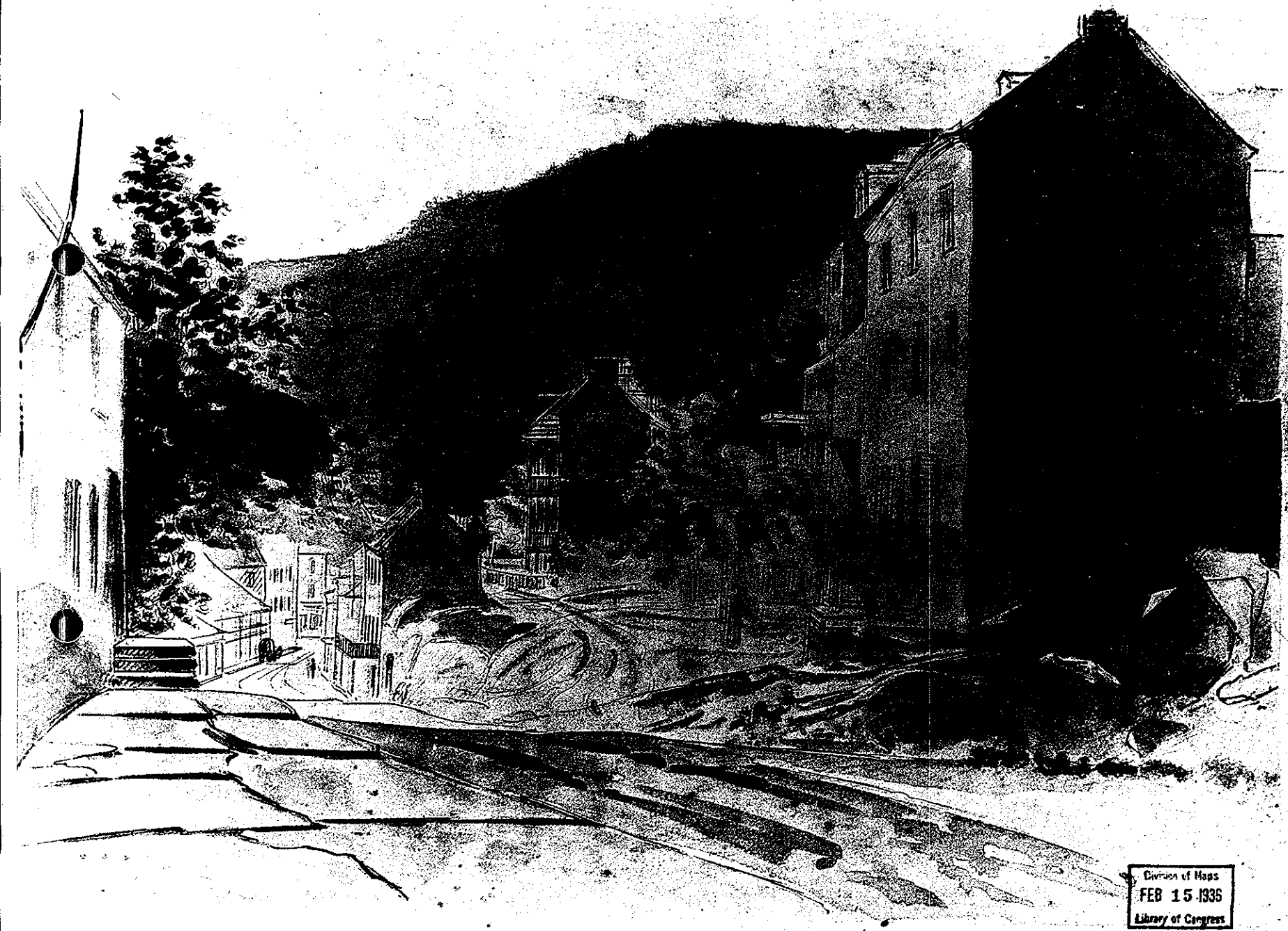


HIGH STREET, HARPERS FERRY, VA. - 1873

A watercolor painted by Alden in 1873. Map

Division, Library of Congress.

Harpers Ferry Negative No. HP-145.



Division of Maps
FEB 15 1936
Library of Congress

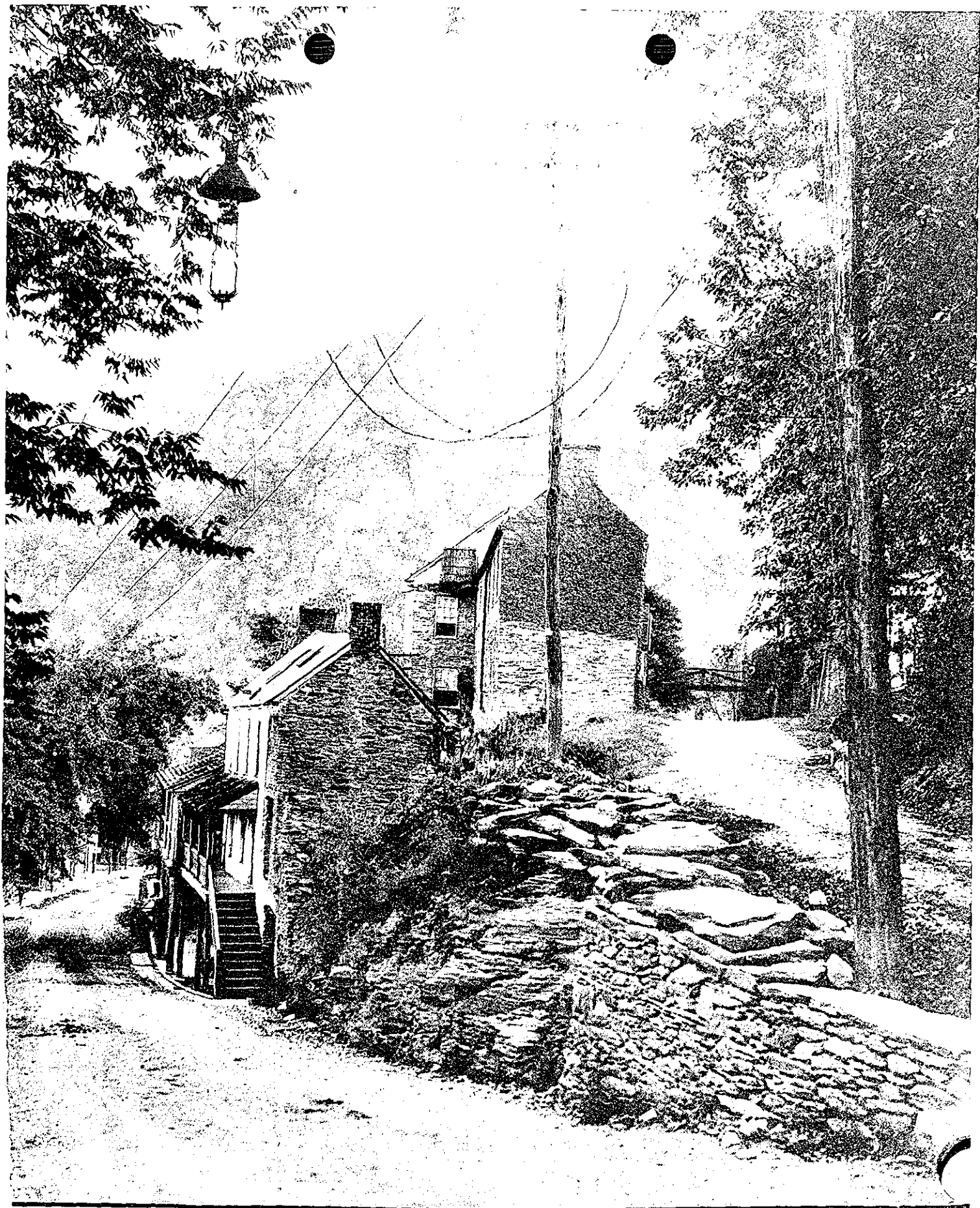
HIGH STREET ABOUT 1910

From a Post Card donated by Harold Peterson, Historian,
Washington Office, N.P.S., March, 1958.

Harpers Ferry Negative No. HP-293.

Center: Three story house on Wager Lot No. 56-Part
C, then roof of 2½ story house on Part B of Wager
Lot No. 56. The three story house on Wager Lot No.
56-Part A is missing and has apparently been demol-
ished.

Note the unpaved street. The houses to the right
of the High Street Houses are the Marmion Row
Buildings.



HIGH STREET, HARPERS FERRY
IN 1920's or early 1930.

From a snapshot donated by Harold Peterson, Historian,
Washington Office, N.P.S., March, 1958.
Harpers Ferry Negative No. HF-280.

Center; Ruins of three story house on Wager Lot No.

56-Part C, then ruins of 2½ story house on Part B of
Wager Lot No. 56. Buildings to rear of High Street
Houses are the Marmion Row Houses.

Note: the street is finally paved.

