

APPROVAL SHEET

Recommended:

Director

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Regional Director

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Chief, E.O.D.C.

Approved:

Superintendent

Harpers Ferry National Monument

HISTORIC BUILDING SURVEY

REPORT

for

WAGER LOT NO. 55, -- HIGH STREET.

"The Hillary Allison and John Gibson Lots."

Harpers Ferry National Monument

Prepared by:

Charles W. Snell,
Historian (Park Supervisory)
Dated: July 31, 1958,
14 pages.

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SECTION I - ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

A. Name and Number of Lots:

Wager Lot No. 55 - "The Hillary Allison and John Gibson Lots", High Street.

B. Proposed Use of Lots:

It is recommended that the boundary lines of these lots be marked on the ground and that the High Street area (Wager Lots 53, 54, 55, and 56) be interpreted by means of several trailside exhibits, utilizing some of the old photographs of houses which once occupied this lot.

It is suggested that Part B of Lot No. 55 be called the "Hillary Allison Lot" and Part A, the "John Gibson Lot" after the estates of the two leaseholders of this property in the 1859-60 period.

C. Provisions for Operating the Lots:

No formal operation required.

D. Cost of Rehabilitating the Grounds:

The \$500.00 estimated cost mentioned in report for Wager Lot No. 54 should suffice for the three lots 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 ¹ [J], 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 ² by the United States Government.

On October 10, 1835, the three Commissioners reported to the Court: "To Sally Ann Swayne, the wife of Noah H. Swayne, we allot and assign the lots as numbered in the annexed plat and marked N.H.S; to wit: Lots No. 5-8-10-11-13-16-17-20-24-26-28-31-33-35-40-42-45....,48-51 and 55," ³

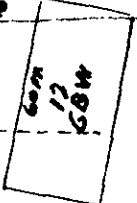
Thus in 1835, Noah H. Swayne and wife became the owners of Lot No. 55 (see orange and blue area on plat, next page) which is the

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. G. C., in Deed Book 29 (1847-48), p.140. See next page.

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

LAND



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property now under consideration. The Swaynes remained the owners of this lot until after the Civil War.

In 1839 and 1840, however, the Swaynes leased out Lot No. 55 in two parcels. For the purpose of this report the Southeast portion of Lot No. 55 will be called Part A and the Northwest portion of Lot No. 55 will be called Part B.

A. PART B of Lot 55, under lease 1839-1861.

On February 1, 1839, for a rent of \$35.00 a year, Noah H. Swayne granted a ten year lease to Hillary Allison, the lease taking effect April 1, 1840. Mr. Allison received "...thirty two (32) feet to be taken of the north west end of Lot number fifty^{FIVE}...said premises being now in possession of said Allison..."⁴ Allison renewed his lease in 1850 and apparently held this property until his death in 1857, his estate probably held the leasehold until at least 1860.⁵

B. PART A of Lot No. 55, under lease 1840-1861.

On May 18, 1840, Noah H. Swayne granted George W. Cutshaw a ten year lease, the lease to take effect July 1, 1840, at a yearly rental of \$20.00 per year. Mr. Cutshaw was given: "...lot fifty five (55)...excepting so much of said lot has been heretofore leased to Hillary Allison, being thirty two feet off the north west end

4. Lease, February 1, 1839, Deed Book 24, pp.26-27.

5. Deed Book 34, pp.112-113; Virginia Free Press, May 7, 1857, p.3, c.1. Deed Book 38, pp.87-88, all indicate that Allison held this lot.

thereof, the part of said lot intended to be leased hereby, to said party of the second part being the residue thereof."6 As Lot No. 55 fronted originally 54 feet on High Street, Part A therefore must have fronted 22 feet on the street.

On July 1, 1845, Mr. Cutshaw assigned his leasehold to William C Kirhart. On July 1, 1847, Mr. Kirhart, for \$35.00, in turn, assigned to John Gibson:

"all that the said tenement & premises above mentioned, to be demised & leased to the said George W. Cutshaw & by him subsequently assigned & transferred to the said William C. Kirhart in & by the said in part recited indenture of lease and deed of assignment aforesaid and every part and parcel..." 7

Mr. Gibson apparently renewed his lease in 1850 for another ten years. He died in 1853, but his estate probably held the leasehold until 1860.⁸

2. CONSTRUCTION OF HOUSES ON LOT NO. 55:

A. House on Part B (Northwest Portion)

There was a house apparently standing on the lot in 1839 when Hillary Allison leased the property. It is also probable that this building had been erected by the Wager family at some date prior to 1835.

A deed of trust made by Abraham Fleming in 1854 for his property,

6. Lease, May 18, 1840, Deed Book 24, pp. 88-89.

7. Assignment of Lease, July 1, 1847, Deed Book 29, pp.114-115.

8. Deed Book 35 (1855), p.184 and Virginia Free Press, January 24, 1856, p.3, c.1. indicate that Gibson's estate still held the lease to the lot. His death, see Virginia Free Press, August 11, 1853, p.2, c.7.

Lot 56-Part A, which adjoined the Allison lot, states that Fleming's house is "bounded,...in the other end by the two story stone building of Hillary Allison..."⁹

The ruins of this building were apparently standing ^{11/11} some date after 1933 (See Photograph NHP-670 and Drawing No. NM-HF 2004, Sheet 1 of 1, 1933 Survey of Harper's Ferry-Old Section). Judging by the 1933 Survey, the structure fronted approximately 22 feet on High Street and was about 22 feet deep.

B. House on Part A (Southeast Portion)

This portion of Lot No. 55 was apparently vacant or occupied only by minor structures, such as sheds, from 1839 until 1847. The assignment of the lease to John Gibson in 1847 for only \$35 would tend to substantiate this theory.

On November 23, 1848, John A. Gibson announced:

"THE GREEN HOUSE"

The undersigned looking to the comfort of the citizens of Harpers-Ferry, and those visiting the place, has fitted up an EATING HOUSE in the most comfortable and genteel style, on High Street, next door to Mr. G. W. Cutshaw's (who was located on Wager Lot 54, Part B), where he will serve to order,

OYSTERS IN EVERY VARIETY,

Either fried, roasted, or stewed-together with every other article in season. His bar is supplied with the choicest kinds of LIQUORS. Those wishing to enjoy themselves in his line, can do so in great comfort, as every effort will be used to make the "GREEN HOUSE" an agreeable resort." 10

9. Deed of Trust, February 11, 1854, Deed Book 34, pp.112-113. Some statement also made in his Deed of Trust, June 12, 1858, Deed Book 38, pp.87-88.

10. Virginia Free Press, November 23, 1848, p.3,c.3.

It thus appears that Gibson erected a house on PART A of Wager Lot No. 55. A deed of trust made by George W. Cutshaw for his property on Wager Lot B of Lot No. 54, in locating his house, states it is bounded by the "House and Lot of John Gibson, decd., on the West,¹¹ known formerly as the Green House."

The appraisal made of Gibson's estate states "Green House-¹² Property - one three story brick building." Photograph HF-99 also indicates that it had a gable roof. This house thus fronted about 22 feet on High Street and probably was about 20 feet deep.

In 1856, the Executor of the Gibson Estate advertised:

"...The undersigned has for rent or sale a House and Lot in the Town of Harpers Ferry, belonging to the estate of his testator (John A. Gibson, dec'd) known as the "Green House." It is suitable for a dwelling or hotel." ¹³

3. USES OF HOUSES ON WAGER LOT NO. 55:

A. House on Part B (Northwest Portion):

Hillery Allison was a tailor and in 1850 had apparently leased out the House on Part B of Lot No. 55 as a dwelling house. Allison died in 1857 and the building may have been vacant in 1860.

B. House on Part A (Southeast Portion)

This house was apparently occupied in 1850 by:

"Joseph Brittain, 44, male. Tavern Keeper. Born in England.
Joseph Brittain, 21, male, Bar Keeper, born in England.
May Brittain, 44, female, born in England.

11. Deed of Trust, December 1, 1855, Deed Book 35, p.184.

12. Will Book No. 14, p.77.

13. Virginia Free Press, January 24, 1856, p.3,c.1.

Elizabeth Brittain, 13, female, born in Virginia.
Sarah Brittain, 11, female, born in Virginia.
Alice Brittain, 6, female, born in Virginia.
Catherine Montalge, 15, female, born in Virginia." 14

The census also provides the following data on the owner of the "Green House":

"John Gibson, 35, male, boatman, born in Delaware.
Ann Gibson, 17, female, born in Virginia." 15

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Gibson died on August 3, 1853. In 1860, his building appears to have been rented by the two following families:

"William Small, 46, male, Carpenter, Value of Personal Estate: \$100,
Born in Virginia.

Margaret Small, 40, female, born in Virginia.
Sarah Small, 14, female, born in Virginia.
Newton E. Small, 12, male, born in Virginia.
Anna Small, 9, female, born in Virginia.
Mary Small, 7, female, born in Virginia.
William Small, 5, male, born in Virginia.
Amelia Small, 1, female, born in Virginia.

"James Wigginton, 34, male, Laborer. Value of Personal Estate: \$25.
Born in Virginia.

Martha R. Wigginton, 34, female, born in Virginia.
Sarah E. Wigginton, 9, female, born in Virginia.
James W. Wigginton, 2, male, born in Virginia.
Mary E. McCoy, 2, female, born in Virginia." 17

14. National Archives R. G. 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States 1850, Volume 12, Virginia, p.145.

15. Ibid., p.422.

16. Virginia Free Press, August 11, 1853, p.2, c.7. In 1848, Gibson operated a fish market in the basement of the house on Wage Lot 51. By 1852, Isreal Russell was acting as Gibson's retail agent, being located in Store No. 2 of Bldg. No. 43 on Wager Lot 43. In 1853, Russell purchased two canal boats from Gibson's estate.

17. 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, p.196.

4. HISTORICAL PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS:

Two historical photographs will be found in Appendix I of this report.

5. HISTORICAL PLANS OF THE BLDGS:

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

6. SUMMARY OF HISTORICAL DATA:

A. Ownership of the Land, 1835 to 1866:

1. October, 1782, to October 9, 1835, owned by the Wager family.
2. October 10, 1835, until after Civil War, owned by Noah H. Swayne.
3. February 1, 1839, to 1860, Part B (Northwest end) of Lot 55 leased by Swayne to Hillary Allison, Tailor.
4. May 16, 1840, to 1861, Part A (Southwest end) of Lot No. 55 leased by Swayne to John A. Gibson, Boatman.

B. Construction of Houses on Lot No. 55:

1. This house was apparently standing in 1839 and was probably constructed by the Wager family prior to 1835. The building was constructed of stone. It was two stories in height and had a gable roof. The structure fronted approximately 22 feet on High Street and was about 22 feet in depth.

2. House on Part A (Southeast end):

In 1848, John Gibson apparently erected a three story brick house with a gable roof on this portion of the lot. The house fronted about 22 feet on High Street and was about 20 feet deep. It was designed for use as an eating house and tavern.

C. Uses of the Houses on Lot No. 55:

1. House on Part B:

This was apparently the residence of Hillary Allison, a tailor, for many years and may have been vacant in 1859-60.

2. House on Part A:

Used from 1848 until 1856 as an Oyster House and Tavern, known as the "Green House." After Gibson's death, it was then apparently rented as a dwelling house and was probably occupied in 1860 by the families of William Small, a carpenter, and James Wigginton, a laborer.

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 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 also suggested that Part B of Lot No. 55 be called the "Hillary Allison Lot" and Part A, the "John Gibson Lot", after the estates of the two leaseholders of this property in the 1859-60 period.

Charles W. Snell

Charles W. Snell,
Historian (Park Supervisory)
July 31, 1958.

APPENDIX I

HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS

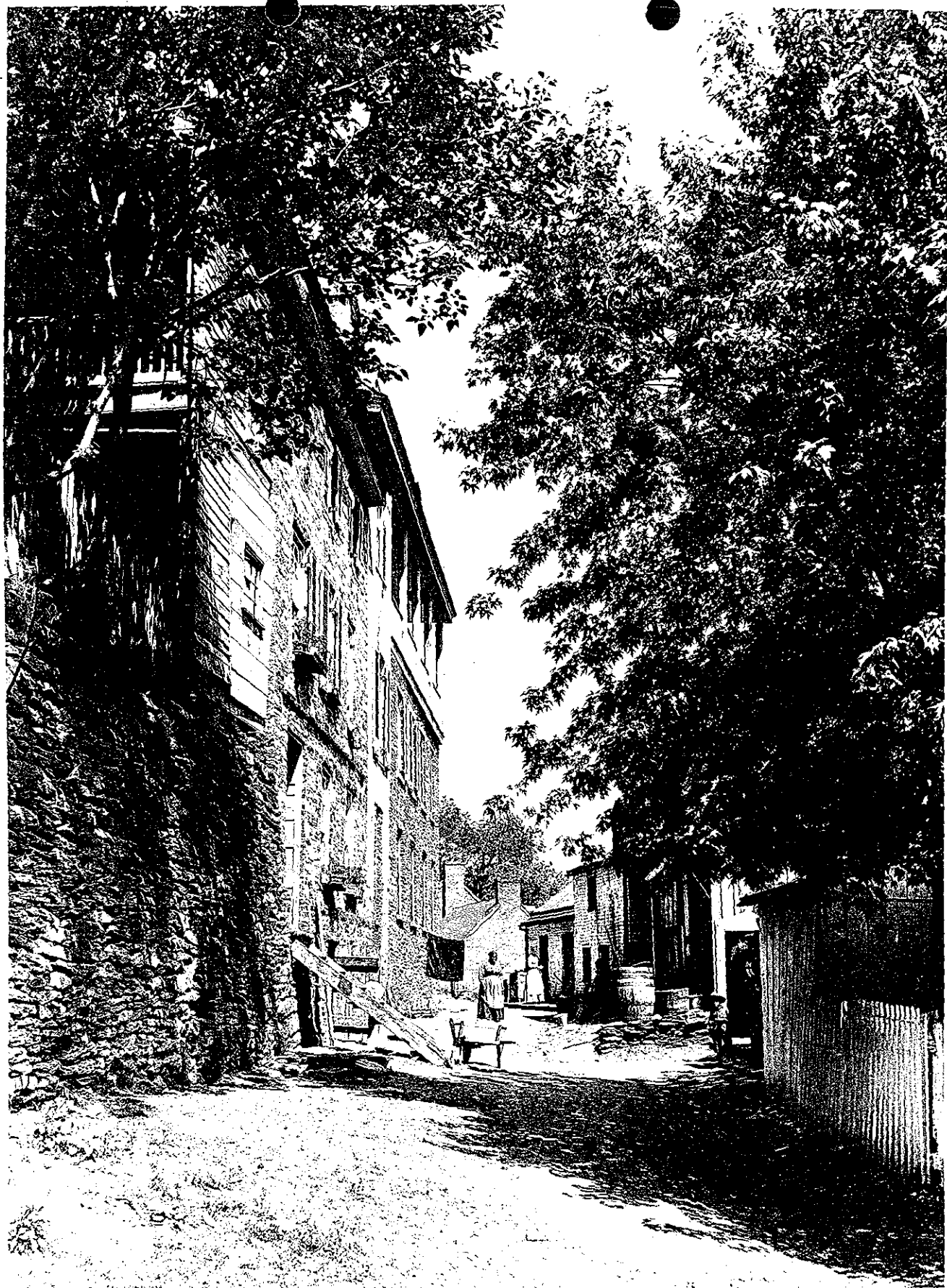
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THE PUBLIC WALK IN FRONT OF MARMION ROW
ABOUT 1880

National Geographic File No. 140317-A
Harpers Ferry Negative No. HF-79

Buildings to left, 1-A, The Harper House and
1-B, Marmion Hall. Buildings to the right:
Wooden shack foreground probably back out-building
of House on Wager Lot 52-A; then back of House^C on
Lot No. 54-B; three story Brick House, rear of,
on Lot No. 54-A; rear of three story brick house
on Lot 55-A; roof of two story house on Lot 55-B,
rear of brick three story house on Lot No. 56-A,
and rear corner of brick three story house on Lot
No. 56-C.

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



HIGH STREET ABOUT 1920

Harper Perry Negative No. NHP-670.

Bldgs. on left side of High Street: Lower left, ruins of the two story stone structure that stood on Wager Lot No. 55-Part B; next two wooden buildings erected after the Civil War and located on Wager Lot No. 56-Part A. Then ruins of the 2½ story brick house on Wager Lot No. 56-Part B, and finally the ruins of the three story house located on Wager Lot No. 56-C.

First and Second Marmion Tenant Houses visible over roofs of High Street House, to the left.

See also Historic Building Survey Report for Wager Lot 56-High Street, Appendix I, for other views of the street.

