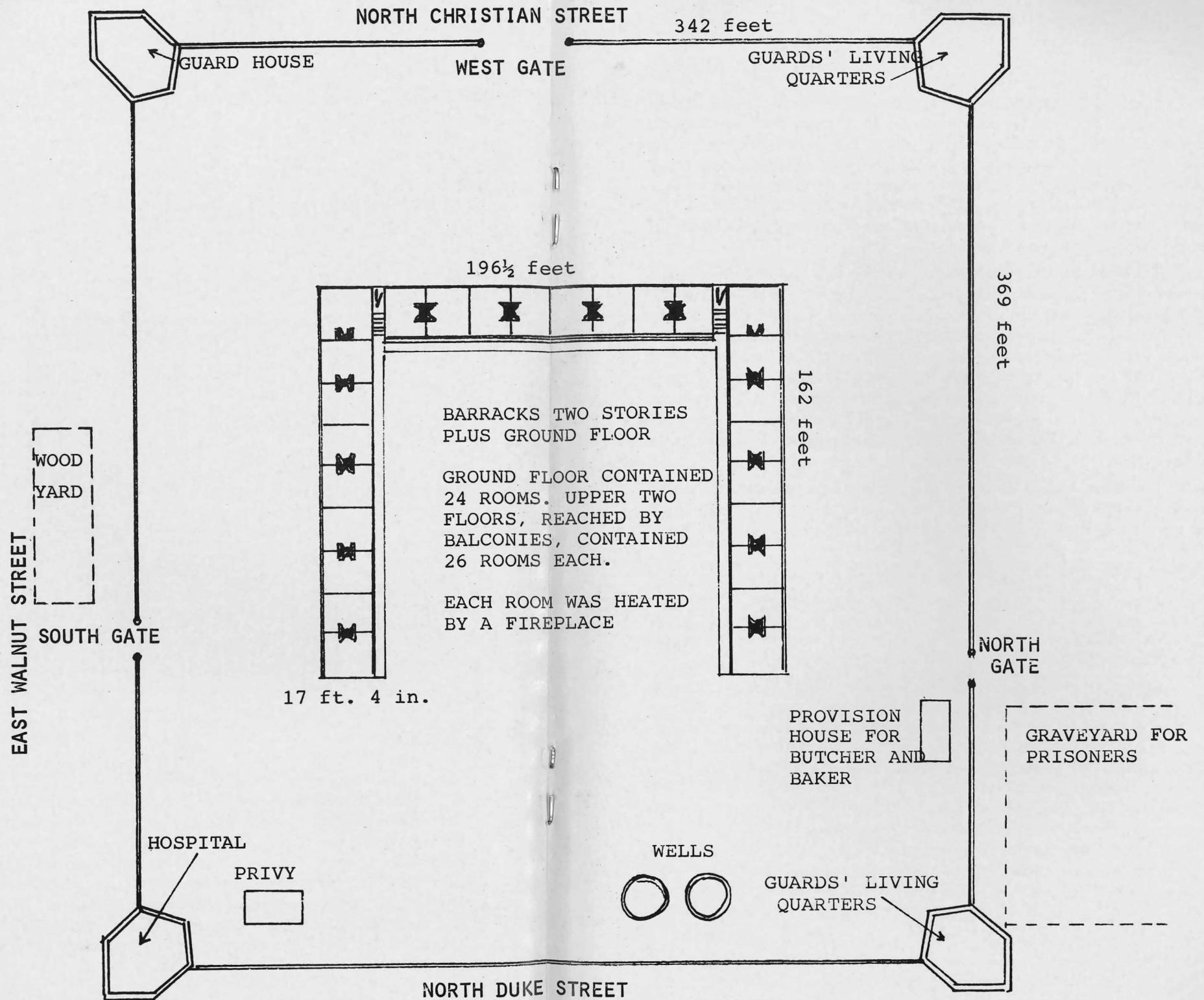


An Unusual Discovery

Prisoner-of-War Barracks in Lancaster Used During the Revolutionary War

By Albert G. Overton and J. W. W. Loose

Although historians have known for a long time barracks to house British and Hessian prisoners-of-war during the American Revolution were located at the northwest corner of what is now North Duke and East Walnut streets, Lancaster, now the site of First United Methodist Church, no detailed description of the facility has been available until recently. Mr. Albert G. Overton, Florissant, Missouri, discovered a scaled plan of the barracks drawn in 1777 by Judge William Augustus Atlee, while doing some research among Revolutionary War documents. Mr. Overton kindly sent us a photostatic copy of the plan which has been retraced to make reproduction possible.



GROUND PLAN OF PRISONER-OF-WAR BARRACKS USED DURING REVOLUTIONARY WAR

We know the barracks were constructed hastily, were crowded, and apparently were not built for permanence. On 16 August 1784, a year after the end of the Revolution, the last barracks master, John Schreiber, wrote to President John Dickinson, reporting one of the gable ends collapsed during the fall of a chimney, and that if a new roof is not put on the entire structure will be ruined. A month later Schreiber informed Pennsylvania Adjutant General Armstrong that more chimneys had fallen, and that Frederick Kuhn was salvaging the bricks from the chimneys and gable ends.

The sketch by Atlee is reproduced here with new lines replacing the faint original draft. A stockade fence surrounded the barracks. A blockhouse, hexahedron in shape, was erected at the four corners of the rectangular stockade. The blockhouse at the corner of what later was to become Duke and Walnut streets was designated the hospital for the barracks. The blockhouse at the corner of Walnut and Christian streets was the guard house office, and the remaining blockhouses were used for guards' living quarters. A graveyard for prisoners was situated outside the north gate of the stockade at the approximate present site of 332 North Duke Street. A large privy was located under the present chancel of First United Methodist Church.

The barracks themselves were three stories high including the ground floor. The upper floors were reached by stairs and balconies. Three wings formed in the shape of a "U" comprised the barracks. The open portion faced present Duke Street.

Twenty-four rooms were on the ground floor. The second and third floors had 26 rooms each. Every room was heated by a woodburning fireplace, supplied from a wood yard outside the stockade's south gate along Walnut Street. Two dug wells provided water. Supplies for the baker and butcher were kept in a structure near the north gate.

Reports during the Revolution suggested the barracks housed as many as 2,000 prisoners at one time. It is difficult to believe more than 25 prisoners were crowded into each room! There were other buildings in Lancaster used for housing prisoners, but the Duke Street barracks were the main facility. General Moses Hazen commanded the troops guarding the prisoners in the latter days of the Revolution. □