

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Dickson Tavern
other names/site number Perry Memorial House

2. Location

street & number 201 French Street
city, town Erie
state Pennsylvania code PA county Erie code 049 zip code 16507

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private, public-local (checked), public-State, public-Federal
Category of Property: building(s) (checked), district, site, structure, object
Number of Resources within Property: Contributing (1), Noncontributing (0), Total (1)

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of certifying official
Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official
Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
entered in the National Register.
determined eligible for the National Register.
determined not eligible for the National Register.
removed from the National Register.
other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCIAL/RestaurantDOMESTIC/Single Dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION & CULTURAL/Museum**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

EARLY REPUBLICAN/FederalMID-NINETEENTH CENTURY/Greek Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE/Limestonewalls WOOD/Weatherboardroof ASPHALT

other \_\_\_\_\_

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Dickson Tavern sits in isolation at the southeast corner of French and Second Streets. The property is bordered on the east and south by a municipal parking lot. Across the street to the north and west are the high-rise buildings of Hamot Medical Center. The building which may be described architecturally as transitional since it incorporates elements of both Federal and Greek Revival design, is of two parts: One (north section) constructed in 1815, the other (south section) erected in 1841. On sloping ground, the building is 2-3 stories in height, generally rectangular in shape, and has a stone foundation and painted clapboard framing. The integrity of the property has suffered not so much because of structural alterations, but as a result of the loss of its historic environment. Its boundaries are almost contiguous with the outline of the building. Only a small strip of lawn some 10 feet on the south and 20 feet on the east, enclosed by an iron rail fence, separate the building from asphalt pavement. From 1841 until 1924 the building was used as a residence or for rental housing. Threatened with destruction it was then acquired by the city and converted to a museum called Perry Memorial House.

The dual origins of the building are most apparent in its exterior. The original or north section exhibits the builder's appreciation of good architectural style, detail, symmetry, and proportion. In the later south section there is no longer the same concern with proper design. The simple yet unmistakable Federal influence in the original section is revealed in its orderly fenestration and window treatment, but most particularly in the gentle slope and pedimented ends of the roof where mutule blocks decorate the underside of the cornice. Lunette windows in the typanum of the east and west gables have been filled in, leaving only fragments of the exterior trim to indicate their former size and location.

Application of later Greek Revival elements are most evident in the principal doorways, namely that on Second Street which was squeezed in between the first and second bays of windows at a later date, and the main entrance on French Street. Both feature the shouldered architrave trim which was widely used for doors and windows at the time.

As opposed to the north section which has twelve windows ranked in four bays on the north facade and six windows arranged in three bays on the west facade; the south section has but eight windows - four on the west

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Dickson Tavern

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facade and four on the south facade - in neither case symmetrically disposed. Further the two lower windows on the west facade are not similar in size to any other in the entire building. But such differences in craftsmanship between the two sections are even more noticeable at the south roof line which is completely lacking in any gable details. An inspection of the original attic reveals just how much better the carpentry is there than the adjoining structure. More importantly, part of the original roof, complete with hand-rived shingles, is still intact but hidden by the roof line of the addition. Two chimneys remain, one at the center of the roof of the south section, and the other at the peak of the east gable in the north section. A third which would have been located at the peak of the west gable has been removed.

The north section has a full basement or ground floor, which would have been used as a kitchen and storage area for liquor, and possibly a ticket office. It contains a brick oven and hearth, and brick flooring (probably not original) and combination stone and wood walls which have been lathed or plastered over. Part of the space houses the building's heating equipment, while the balance has been converted to a period taproom.

The basic plan of the upper two floors is that of a wide central hallway extending the full depth of the building. The hallways are connected by a central stair, and provide access to two rooms on either side on each floor. With the exception of two rooms which were paneled at a later date, all walls are made of plaster. Flooring is random-width softwood throughout. The majority of space has been redecorated and refurbished to some extent for public viewing. The bulk of the furnishings are representative of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The discrepancies between the workmanship and design of the two sections is not so obvious in the interior since at the time of the addition, a conscious effort was made to create a uniformity of decor throughout. Thus Greek Revival elements predominate, not only in the newer doorways, fireplaces, windows, and splashboards, but also in the old where they were substituted for the original woodwork. However the delicate Federal staircase was left intact, and in certain areas of the upper floor simpler trim and molding can be found which are more in keeping with Federal taste.

In its present condition and configuration, it is quite difficult to visualize the appearance of Dickson's Tavern in the early 1820's. It would not have been painted and certainly its exterior louvered shutters would not have been anything like the metal, improper size ones that are there today. While the double hung windows with six panels per sash are correct, painting the muntins black has tended to conceal this delicate feature. Oddly the lower bank of windows on the north facade are 12 over 8 and hinged rather than double hung. There are no other examples of a casement-type window at this early a time, in the locality.

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Most of the alterations to the original tavern building would have been cosmetic. However, upon the conversion to a residence with the addition of the south section, its identity as a true Federal structure was pretty much lost. Of particular note was the failure to continue any semblance of orderly fenestration in the new section. Some of this was owed to the fact that by this time another building had been erected on the south property line eliminating the opportunity to have windows over a large part of the new south facade.

At some point during the nineteenth century, front and back porches as well as a wing at the southeast corner of the building were added. A regrading of French Street caused the removal of the first, while the back porch and wing were taken down when the city acquired the property in 1924. The opening for the doorway which led into that wing, is still visible in the east facade of the present building.

The majority of the interior changes have occurred during the period 1928 - 1963. This involved the partitioning of the ground floor for the creation of exhibit space, the installation of a fireplace and wainscoting in the northeast room of the second floor, the provision of restrooms in the southeast room of the same floor, and the erection of a wooden fire escape at the rear with exit doors from both floors. All this was done to accommodate the building's use as a museum and period house.

While the construction of the south section and the changes that were effected in order to integrate that addition with the original tavern did to some extent detract from the authenticity of the former, it did not submerge its identity. Subsequent alterations were essentially cosmetic and are reversible. The building still has the ability to reflect the operation of a landmark Erie tavern in the early 19th century.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)  
Commerce

Period of Significance  
1815-1841

Significant Dates  
N/A

Cultural Affiliation  
N/A

Significant Person  
N/A

Architect/Builder  
Himrod, William

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Dickson Tavern is significant for its association with the commercial growth during 1815-1841. It is the only tavern known to survive from these years when Erie became an important port. Founded in 1795 and serving Pennsylvania's only harbor on the Great Lakes, Erie early developed an important shipbuilding and trading capability. This was soon interrupted by war but with the return of peace in 1815 and the final settlement of many lingering land disputes, the community entered upon a period of considerable prosperity which was to last until the recession which the local economy experienced in the late 1830s. By 1826 three steamboats and ten schooners were clearing Erie harbor weekly. That same year, according to contemporary accounts, there were 27 arrivals of stagecoaches per week from Buffalo, Cleveland and Pittsburgh. In the decades between 1810 and 1840, the population of the county for which Erie was the hub, grew ten fold. There is little doubt that for traveller and resident alike, the services that a tavern would typically provide, would be in great demand.

A native of Baltimore, Dickson probably arrived in Erie as early as 1808 and for the next several years sailed the lakes. He was taken prisoner at the outset of the War of 1812 but was soon paroled and returned to Erie to open a hotel in a log house on the east side of French Street between Third and Fourth. Records indicate that Dickson acquired the lot at the corner of French and Second Streets on September 8, 1814 and that the tavern was erected there the following year by William Himrod. Its location at that site was critical since the principal wharf was then to be found at the foot of French Street.

Among the half-dozen or so taverns that existed in Erie at this time, Dickson's would have been favored by virtue of its size, design, and location. Many of the others were still operating in log structures. But the evidence suggests that Dickson was also a good advertiser and promoter of his business.

Drinking is the function most commonly associated today with tavern life, but food was important too since taverns served the role of restaurants.

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Dickson Tavern

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The earliest specific mention of tavern fare in Erie occurs in 1818 when Dickson advertised oyster suppers on short notice. He also provides the most complete list of what one could expect to be served at a tavern of the period. Among the foods available through his "victualizing business" were hot coffee, hot and cold meats, pickled oysters, tripe, tongue and pastry. Ice cream, wedding cake and punch could also be had on short notice.

Comradery was undoubtedly an important feature of what tended to be a male-dominated institution. Dickson advertised private rooms in which "genteel company" could enjoy refreshments until midnight, and apparently provided a billiard table for the use of his guests.

Erie's formidable winter climate made the outdoor banquet in the summer months a special event, and tavern owners frequently served as caterers for these affairs. The first of these recorded was that hosted by Dickson on the Second Street bridge just west of his property. It was staged on July 5, 1824 to celebrate the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, and according to a newspaper account the guests "sat down to an entertainment prepared by Mr. John Dickson, which was served in a style highly creditable to him." The festivities culminated with a "splendid ball" at the Exchange Coffee House, the name Dickson was using for his tavern at the time, and both citizens and the military attended.

But undoubtedly the highlight of Dickson's career as a tavern owner was the al fresco banquet for the Marquis de Lafayette upon his visit to Erie on June 9, 1825. The dinner which Dickson served was on a table almost as long as the Second Street bridge, and above which an awning of sails from the British vessels captured at the Battle of Lake Erie, had been placed to protect diners from the elements. This grand canopy was festooned by the ladies of Erie with garlands of flowers and evergreens. The dinner was a sumptuous one, suitable for the welcoming of one of America's greatest heroes.

There is evidence that class lines had formed in Erie by this time, and certain taverns sought to appeal for the patronage of a more well-to-do clientele. Dickson made an overt move in this direction when he named his tavern the Exchange Coffee House. Historically the coffee house was a specialized sort of tavern which drew its main customers from the merchant and business community. There is little doubt that the only real difference between the Exchange Coffee House and the other Erie taverns was that of name only. That was significant enough, however, for by using the term "coffee house" appended to the word "exchange" which had a commercial meaning, Dickson imbued his establishment with a cosmopolitan air with which the wealthier members of the community would want to be identified.

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Dickson's promotional ingenuity ran in other directions for he established a steamboat office in his tavern and provided a carriage to convey passengers to and from the landing, as well as a pleasure boat for their recreation. Dickson noted that he had a wharf and storehouse, and a large sailboat to ship or land any goods consigned to him.

Dickson's career as an Erie innkeeper lasted only sixteen or seventeen years. By 1829 his wanderlust had taken him to Meadville where he opened a "house of entertainment." But within a short time he had moved on to Pittsburgh and it was from there in 1831 that he sold the two lots with buildings on the southeast corner of French and Second streets to Daniel Gillespie for \$1,800. Gillespie was the younger brother of Mrs. Dickson. In the meantime the building continued to serve as a tavern under a succession of innkeepers. In 1834 the property was acquired by Josiah Kellogg, a merchant with substantial shipping interests and later a director of the local branch of the U.S. Bank of Pennsylvania. It is likely that the need to liquidate debts resulting from the closing of the bank, prompted Kellogg to sell the tavern to John Rogers in 1841. With that sale, the building became a home and was never again used as a tavern. The subsequent history of the building is immaterial to the purposes of this nomination, other than to account for the alterations or changes to the structure which have been previously described.

The elegant Federal style of Dickson's tavern and his obviously up-scale marketing suggests that the tavern's interior would have been appointed with equal taste. Whether or not this was actually so is difficult to determine since no known furniture has survived with a Dickson Tavern provenance. But inventory of another Erie tavern of somewhat comparable stature, suggests a rather spartan scene. If this is a reliable guide, then it is likely that few of the more luxurious appointments which graced big city taverns, such as silverware, draperies and fine furniture, would have been found locally.

Nevertheless if Erie's taverns were something less than elegant, they served the community well. For the first forty years of Erie's history the presence of taverns was an enriching element in the town's life. They were places where the community came for celebration, fellowship, business dealings, and occasionally for worship. By offering lodging for travelers, they facilitated settlement and materially were a part of Erie's transition from frontier outpost to commercial center. As this transition neared its end in the 1840's, Erie's taverns gradually gave way to the larger more luxurious hotels that increasingly were being built in eastern cities.

Thus the Dickson Tavern is significant in Erie history not only because it is the best remaining example of that early community institution, but as a vital link with its pre-urban, lakeport past.

**9. Major Bibliographic References**

Charles A. Watkins, "Oyster Suppers On Short Nocie: Erie's Taverns In The Early Republic," Journal of Erie Studies, XIV (Spring, 1985) 1-16.

Helen R. Andrews & Robert A. Krider, "Perry Memorial House: A Legend In Doubt," Journal of Erie Studies, IX (Spring, 1980) 41-50.

Library of Congress. The Historic American Buildings Survey. PA-52. Washington, D.C.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # PA 52
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Erie County Historical Society

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property 0.1 acres

UTM References

A 17 575392 4664900  
 Zone Easting Northing

C \_\_\_\_\_

B \_\_\_\_\_  
 Zone Easting Northing

D \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at the point of the intersection of the south line of Second Street and the east line of French Street, thence along the south line of Second Street north 64 degrees, 15 minutes-east, a distance of 56.82 feet; thence south 25 degrees, 45 minutes east, a distance of 58.53 feet

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

Boundary reflects the legally recorded boundary lines for the single lot upon which the resource sits. The boundary contains the nominated building and remaining historically associated land.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title John Claridge

organization \_\_\_\_\_

street & number 417 State Street

city or town Erie

date 7/10/89

telephone (814) 454-1813

state PA

zip code 16501



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National Park Service

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9. Major Biographic References (cont'd.)

Erie Gazette, June 9, 1825

Frank Severance, Editor, Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society (Buffalo, N.Y., 1905), Vol. VIII, 411-417.

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10. Geographic Data

Verbal Boundary Description (cont'd.)

to a point; thence south 64 degrees, 15 minutes east, a distance of 58.53 feet to a point; thence south 64 degrees, 15 minutes west, a distance of 56.82 feet to a point in the easterly side of French Street; thence along the east line of French Street north 25 degrees, 45 minutes west, a distance of 58.53 feet to the point of beginning.

GR

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**RECEIVED**  
FEB 1 1990

HISTORIC PRESEVATION

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

NRIS Reference Number: 89002256

Date Listed: 1/18/90

Dickson Tavern  
Property Name

Erie  
County

PA  
State

N/A  
Multiple Name

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This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Patrick Andrews  
Signature of the Keeper

1/18/90  
Date of Action

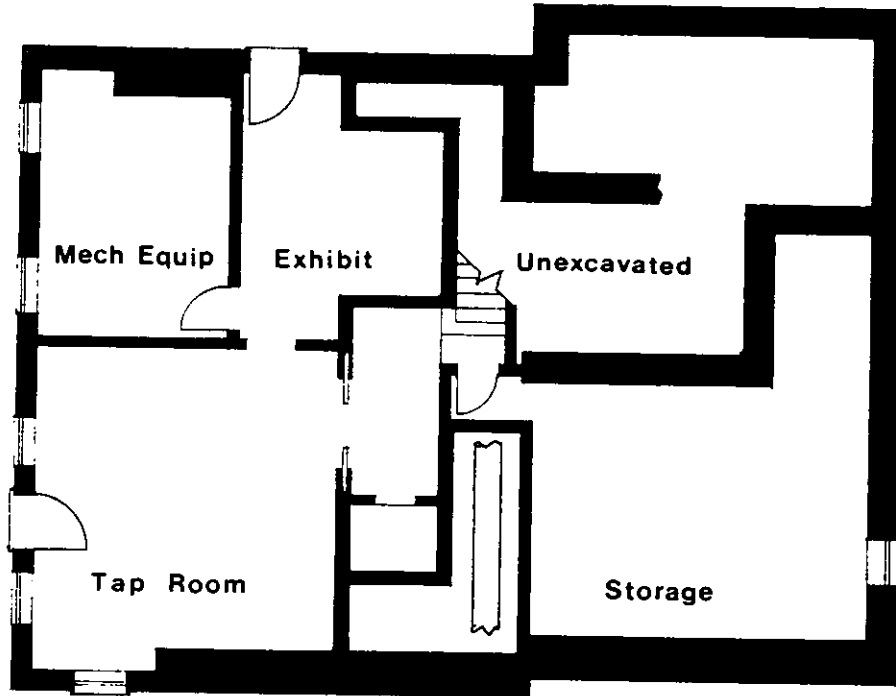
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**Amended Items in Nomination:**

The significance of this property was considered in relation to other properties locally. The nomination form is hereby officially amended to include this information.

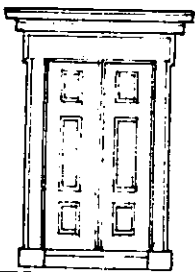
Verified by phone with Greg Ramsey of the Pennsylvania SHPO, 1/18/90.

**DISTRIBUTION:**

National Register property file  
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

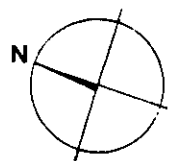


**Ground  
Floor  
Plan**



Existing

DICKSON TAVERN



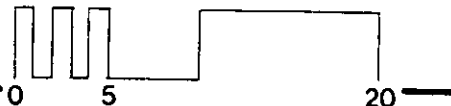
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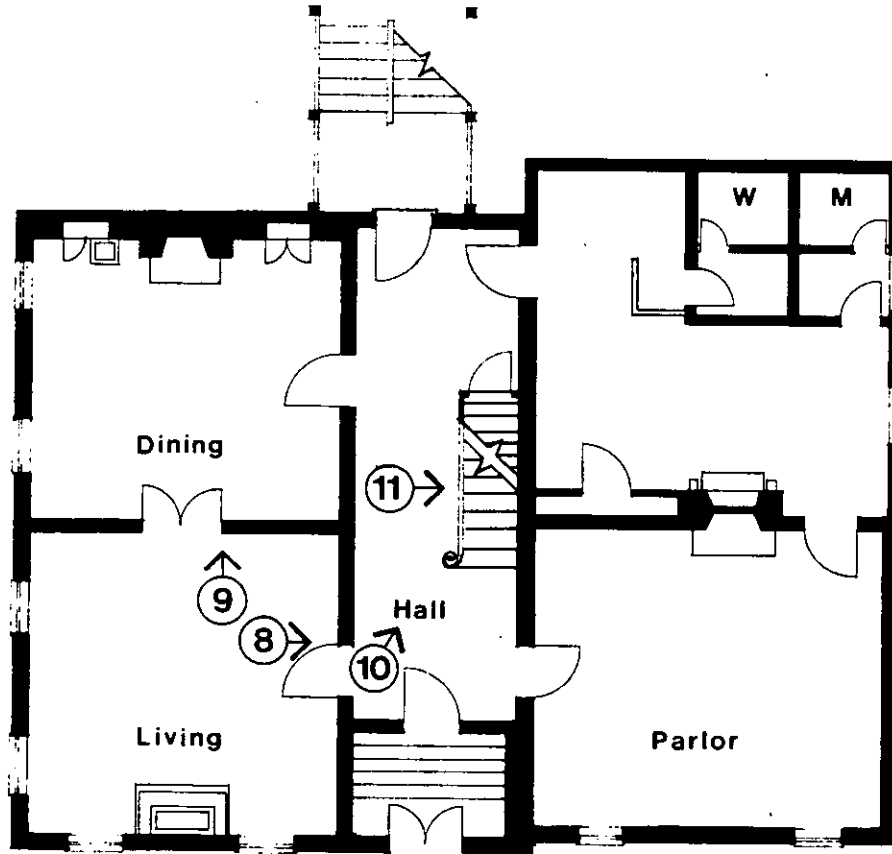
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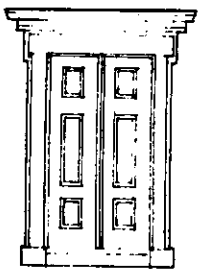
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E1

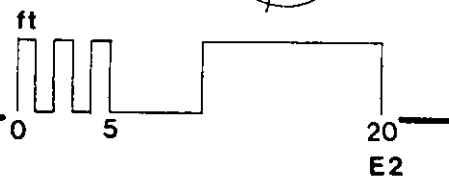
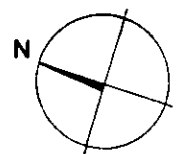


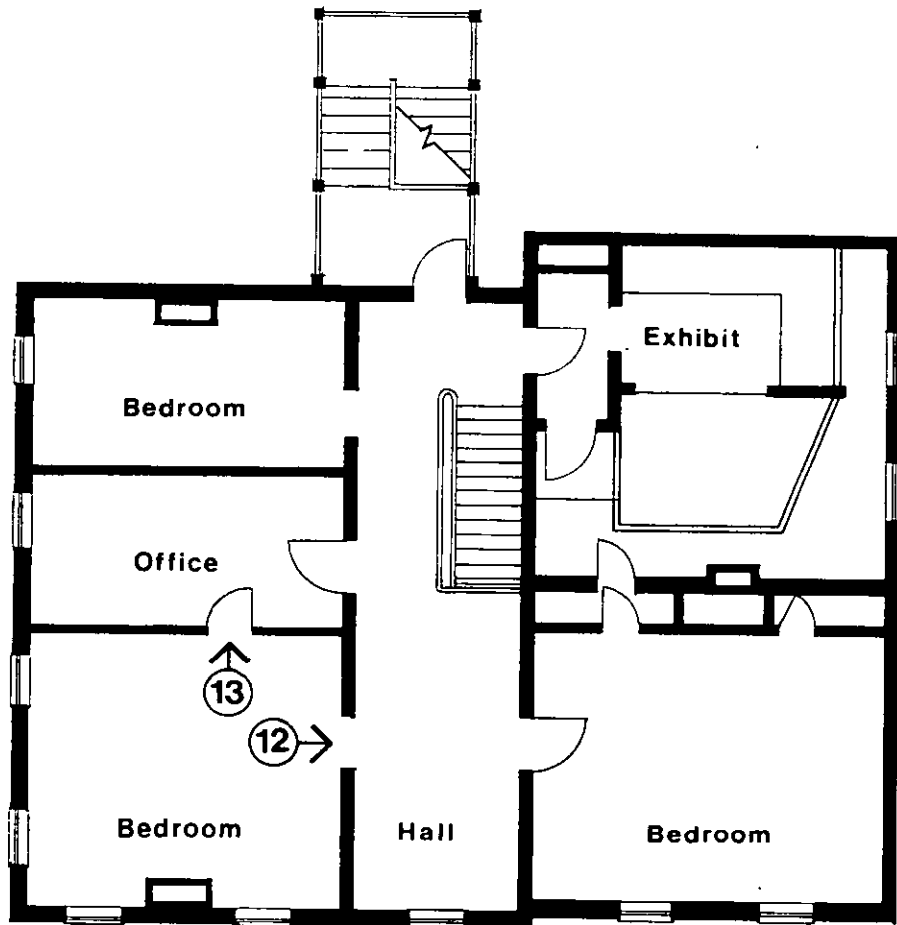


**Second  
Floor  
Plan**

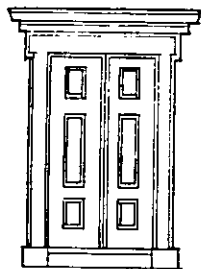


Existing  
**DICKSON TAVERN**



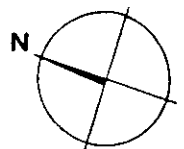


**Third  
Floor  
Plan**



Existing

DICKSON TAVERN



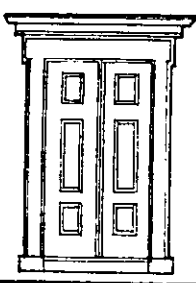
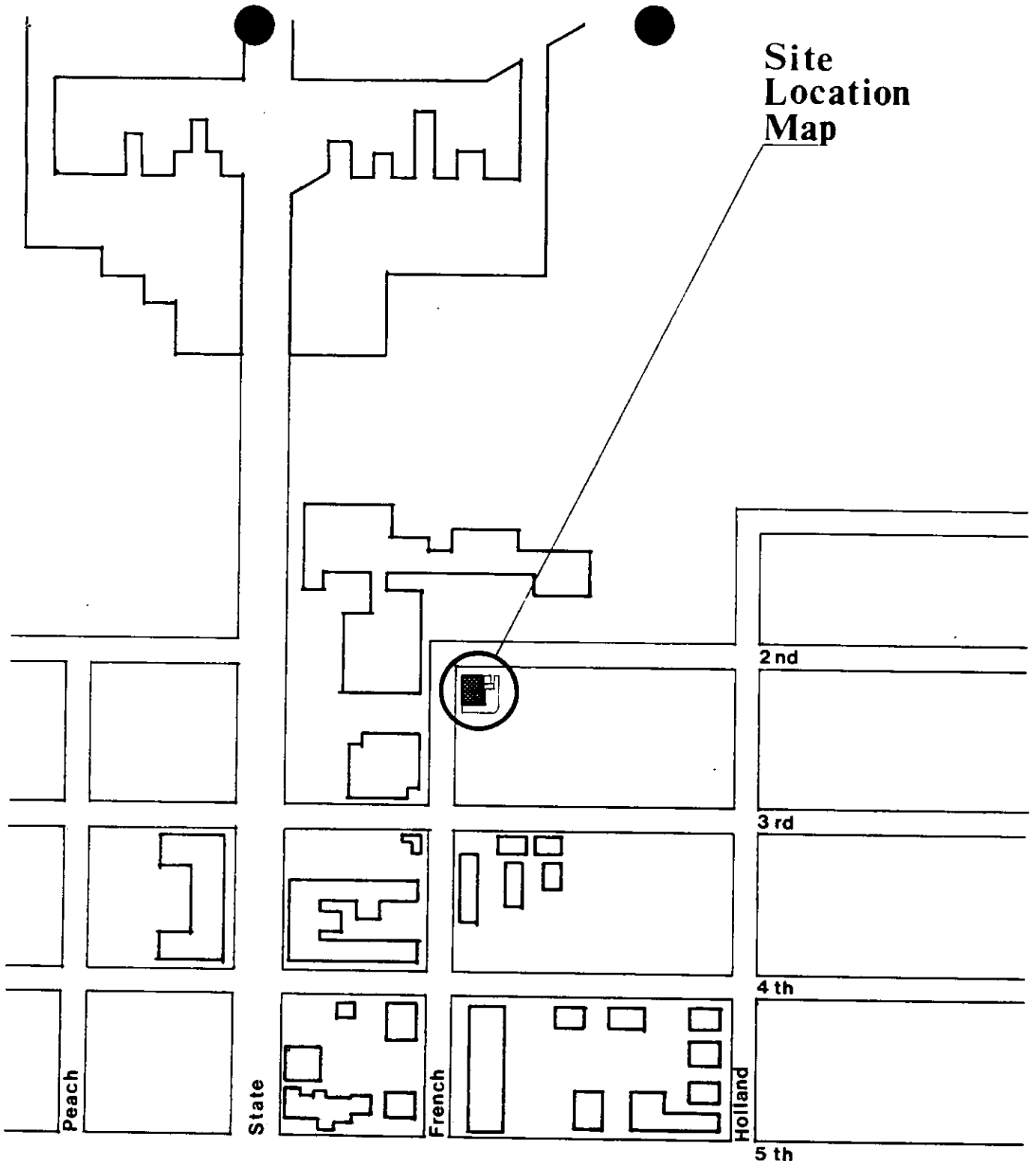
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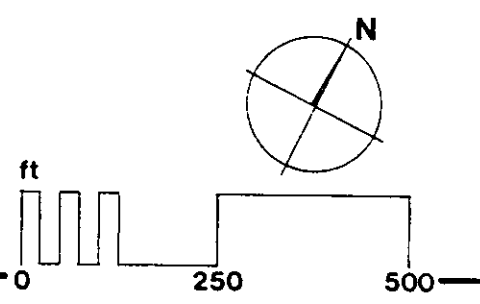
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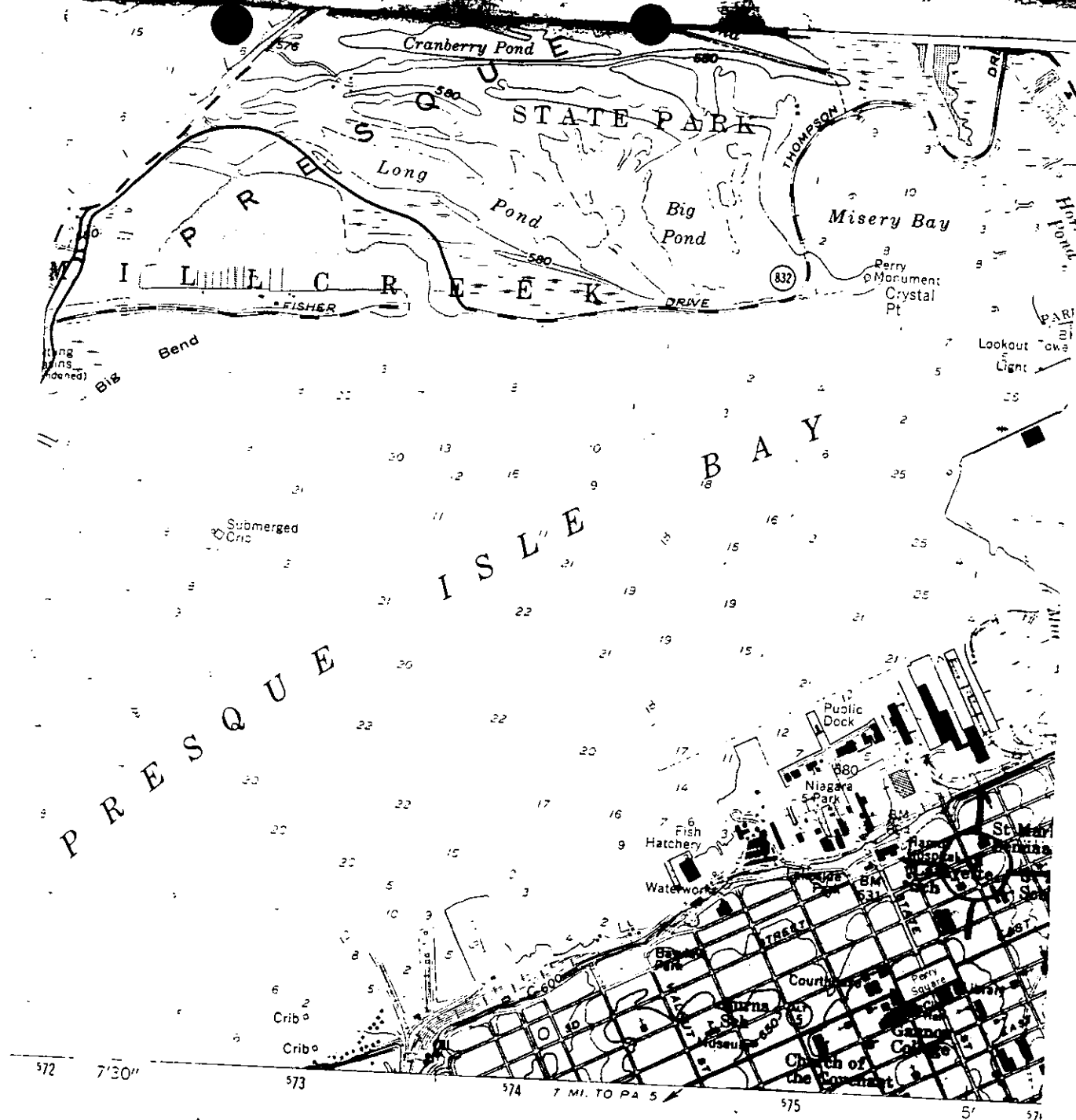
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E3



DICKSON TAVERN

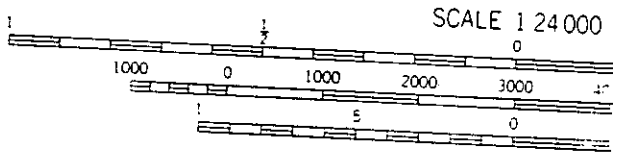




P R E S Q U E I S L E B A Y

MN  
GN  
7°  
124 MILS  
0°38'  
11 MILS

UTM GRID AND 1975 MAGNETIC NORTH-DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10  
 NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATA  
 DEPTH CURVES AND SOUNDINGS IN FEET—DAT.

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY. F A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYM

Map compiled from data with  
 1975  
 1975

*Duncan Tracey*  
*Eric County, 2000*  
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*5070392 1060700*