

# PHOTO ALBUM

FORT BORST BLOCKHOUSE  
CITY OF CENTRALIA

# FORT BORST

## A BRIEF HISTORY:

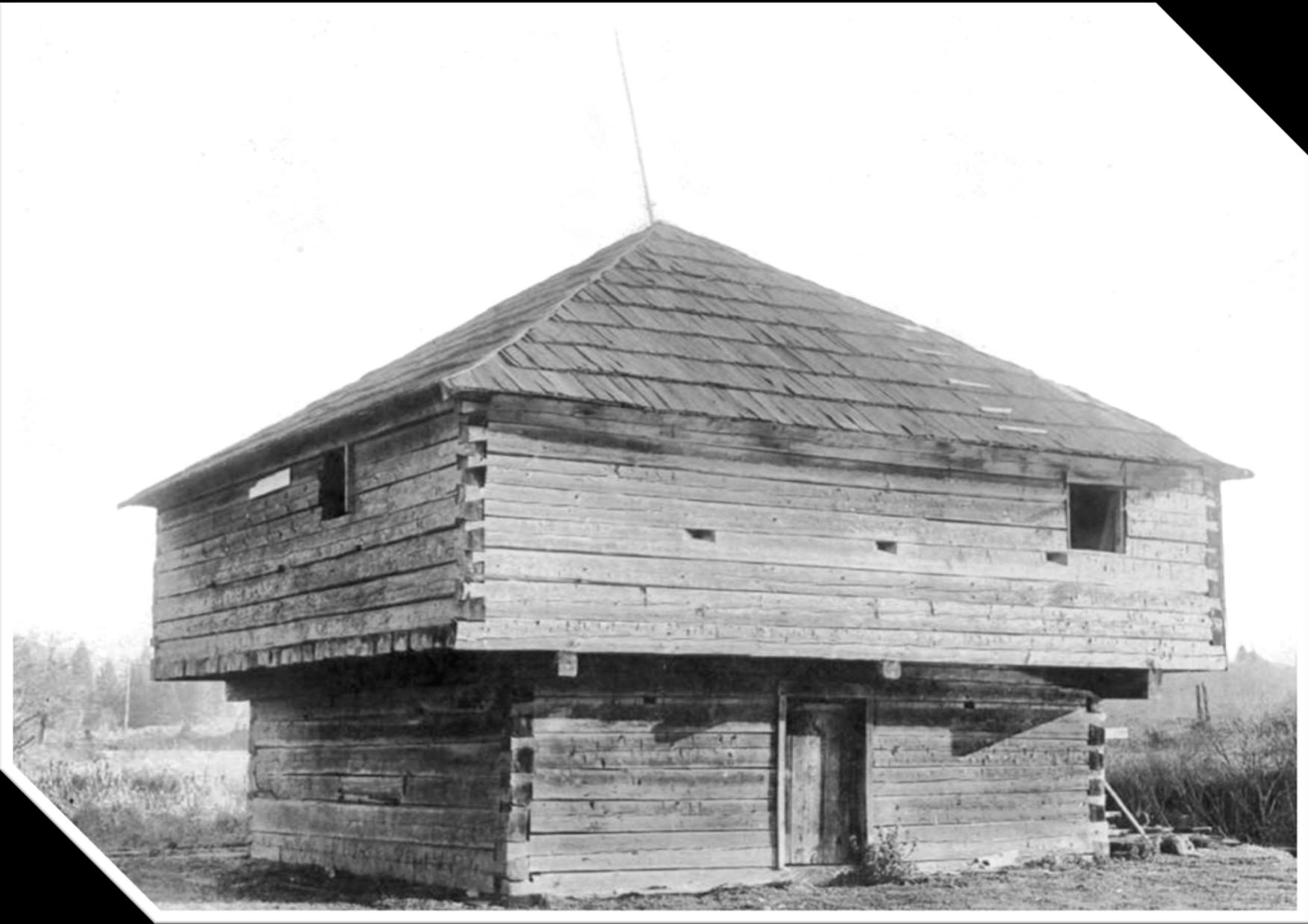
- The Historic Fort Borst Blockhouse was constructed by the Oregon Volunteers for the protection of the Chehalis river crossing and for storage of supplies needed by troops engaged in the Washington Indian Wars in 1856.
- The logs for its construction were cut on the opposite side of the river, hauled to the stream by Joseph Borst with oxen, floated across, then peeled, scored, and hewed. The structure is an excellent example of the pioneer axe man's skill.
- Joseph Borst bought the blockhouse from the government for \$500 and used it as a granary. Twice the Borst family used it as a residence. Ada Borst (Blackwell) claimed to have been born in the fort in 1857 when her family lived there. It was at this time that windows and the door on the upper floor were placed in the building.

## History cont.:

- In the early 1860's the Borsts again moved into it while their new home was being built.
- The blockhouse continued to be used for storing grain by the farmers of the upper stretches of the Chehalis River who brought it by canoe from as far as Curtis.
- John L Morris recalled that *"The remains of one of those old canoes was on the Borst place when I worked there in the 1880's. It was a dugout made of a cedar log five feet in diameter and was 30 to 40 feet long. Iron bands had been put around the outside to keep it from splitting. It could carry four or five tons of grain. Four farmers would man one of the dugouts and float their grain down the river to the blockhouse, store it there, and later freight it by team on to Tumwater."*

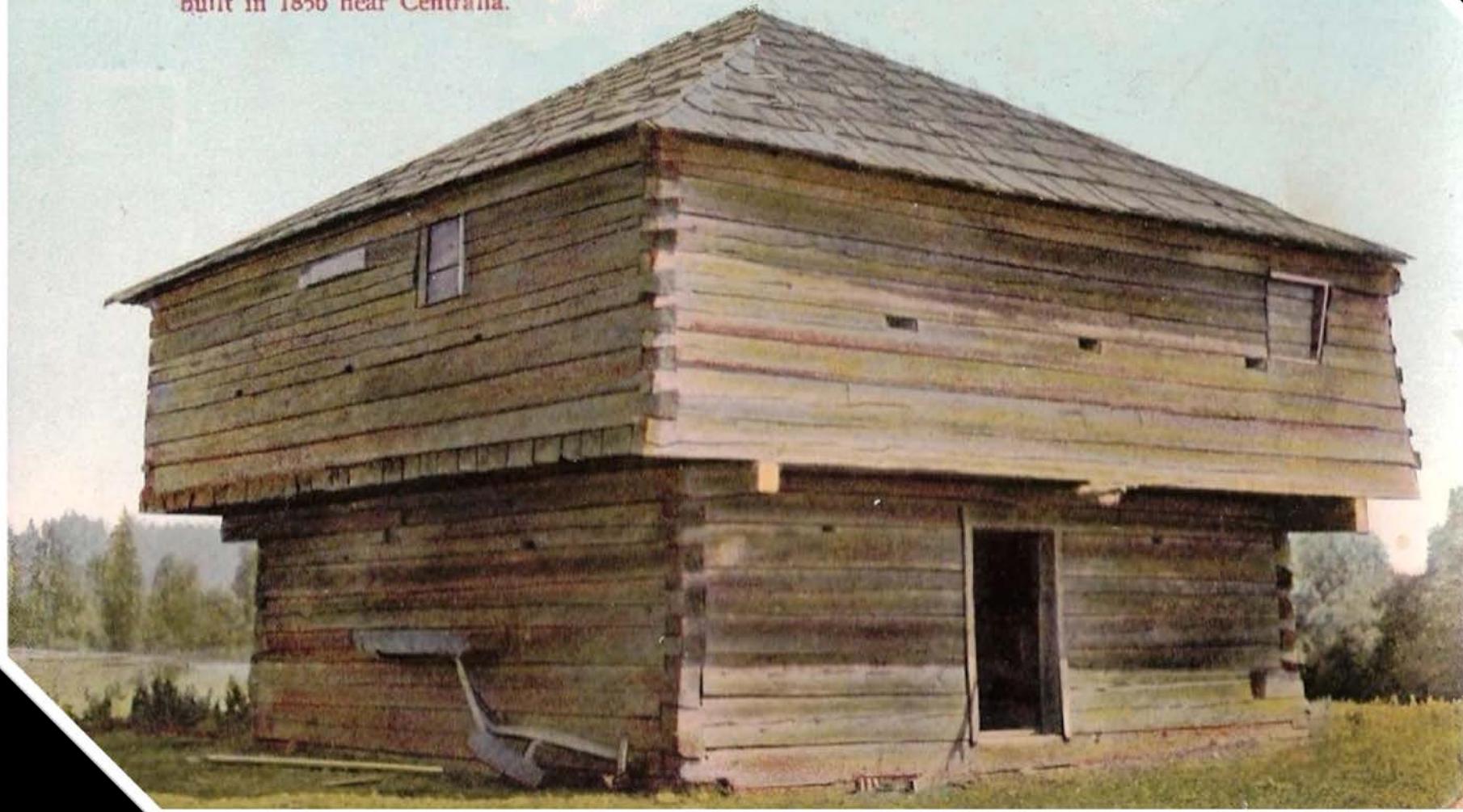
## History cont.:

- In 1915, the Chehalis River had changed its course and it was feared it would undermine the structure. In 1919, the old fort was jacked up on skids and rollers and taken to the Riverside Park. In 1922, it was moved again to its present location in Borst Park. In 1923 Allen Borst, youngest son of Joseph Borst, presented the blockhouse to the city of Centralia as a memorial to the early settlers of the community.
- Although the Joseph Borst Home is listed on the National Historic Register, the blockhouse is not. It is, however, listed in the State of Washington Inventory of Historic Places.
- Today the old Fort Borst stands as a monument to the successful culmination of the Indian Wars. The land where the friendly Chehalis Indians had roamed – hunting, fishing and digging the roots of the blue camas flower, could now be deeded, sold or bestowed on the white settlers.



Early photo of the blockhouse – very little deterioration, although windows and door have been added. (*Notice the beveled 'loop holes' designed to increase the range of marksmen should the structure be attacked.*)

A Relic of Pioneer Days. Fort Borst Block House  
The first Block House in Washington  
built in 1856 near Centralia.



Early postcard likely created from preceding photograph.

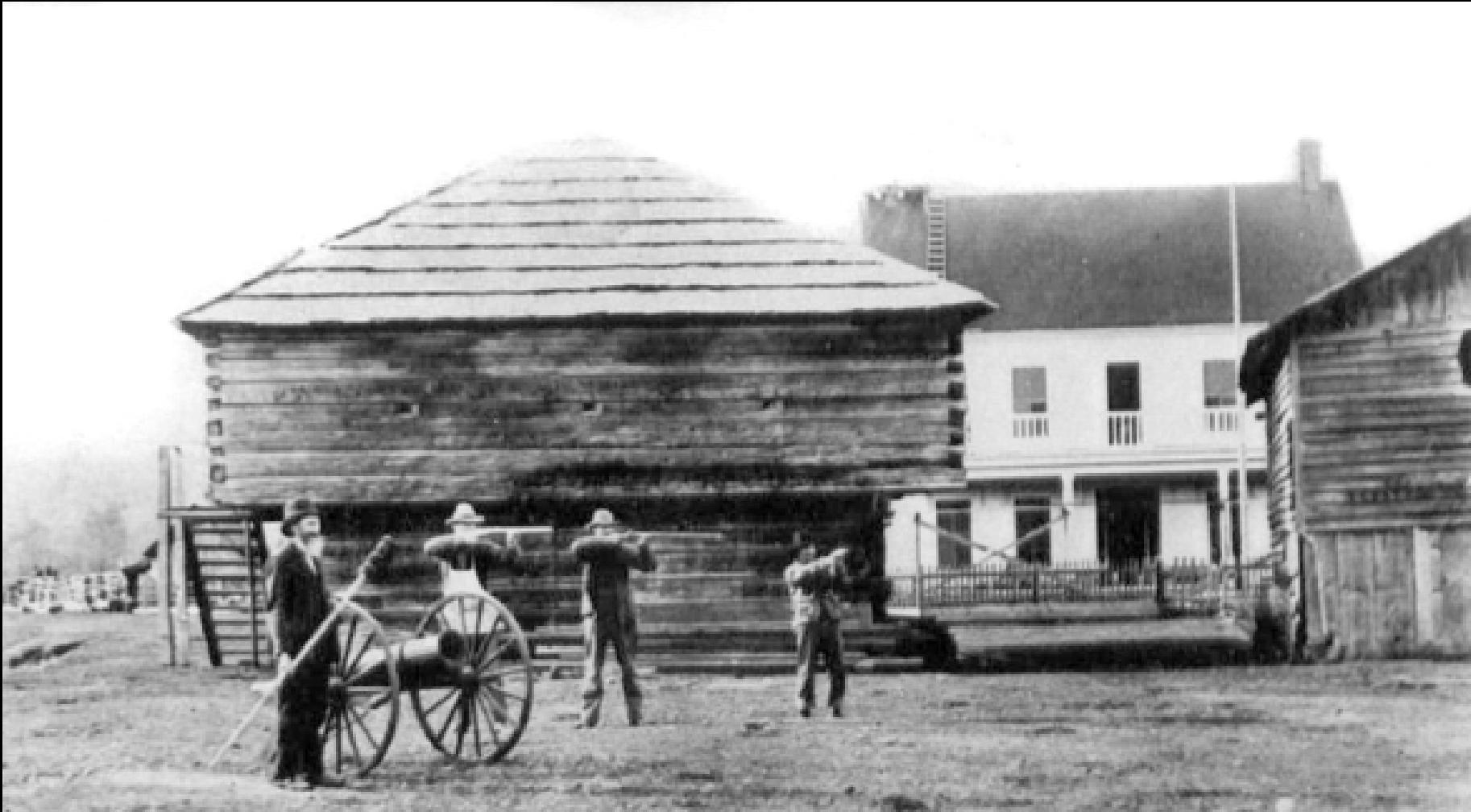


Photo taken while the home was being constructed in the early 1860's.

Joseph Borst added the stairs ~ family lived in the blockhouse while the home was being constructed.



This photo shows the blockhouse, home and the ferry (cable visible). The ferry could carry a four-horse team and wagon, or two two-horse teams and wagons. Mary Borst would watch from the upper balcony as everyone passed her home on the Military Road.



This postcard was likely created from the preceding photograph – artistic illustration of the ferry at work.



Photo shows the erosion of the Skookumchuck river bank that prompted the eventual removal of the blockhouse to Riverside Park. Photo shows the home in the background, as well as the barn.













Apparatus in the foreground was used to secure the cable for the ferry that crossed the river. In 1880 a flood destroyed the cable assembly and the ferry was beached on the bank. It was never used again. Note that the stairs have been removed.



Photos show the continued erosion that eventually led to the removal of the blockhouse from the Borst Home Site to Riverside Park in 1919. New stairs have been added.





Home and blockhouse early 1900's ~ note deterioration in both structures. Ferry landing still visible.



Although the river is low, erosion of riverbank is clearly visible ~ structure looks a bit 'twisted'



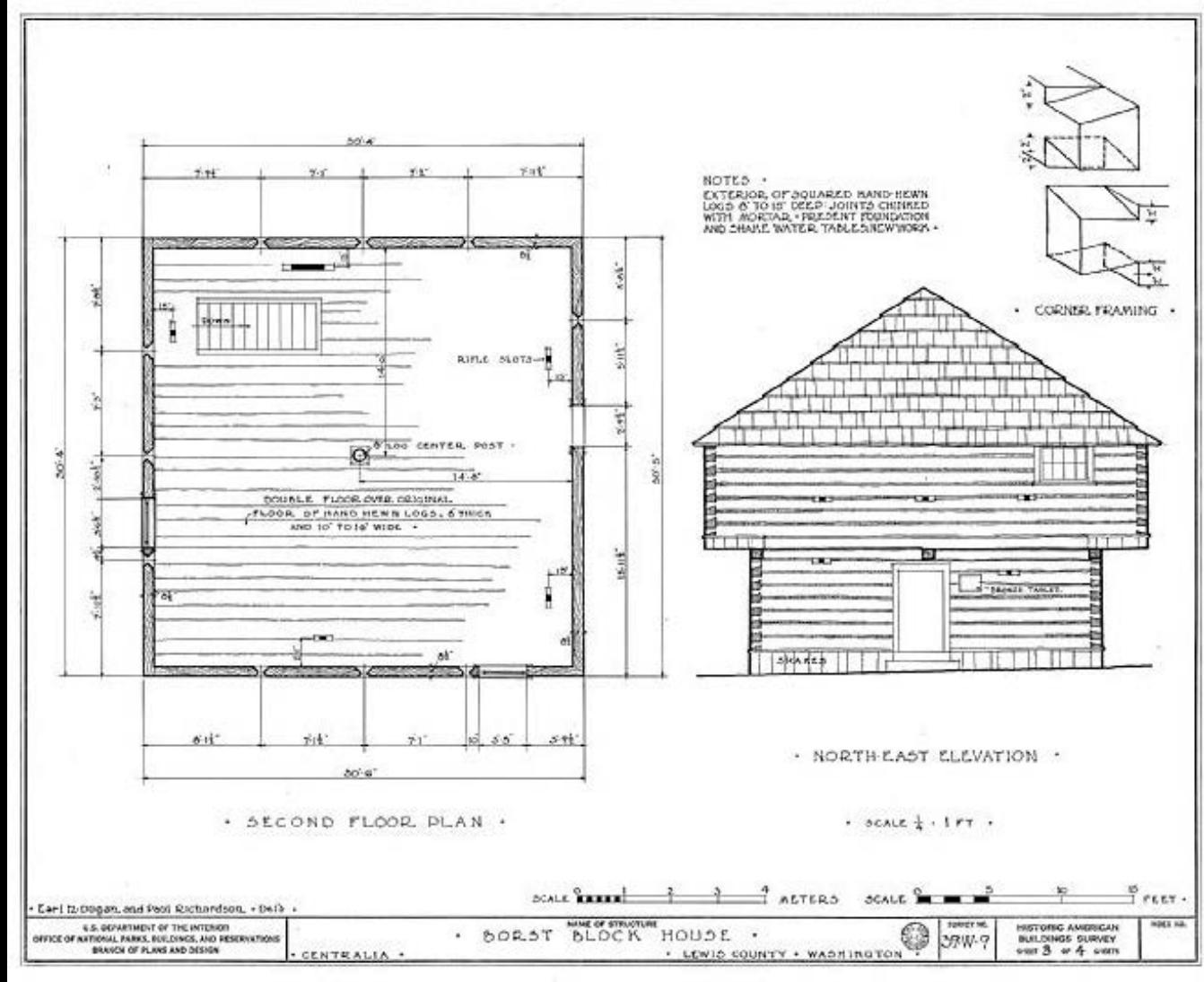


Blockhouse moved to its current location in Fort Borst Park in 1922.



BORST PARK - CENTRALIA

The blockhouse in its new and present location ~ note the name of the park does not reflect the change to "Fort Borst Park"



Detailed plans drawn by National Park Service in 1934 ~ Some repairs done in 1963

*"In 1934, three detailed plans of the building were drawn by the National Park Service's Historic American Buildings Survey. Efforts to rehabilitate the decaying structure began in approximately 1963 when a committee of the Centralia Chamber of Commerce along with other community groups raised funds for the project. The preservation efforts included building a foundation for the blockhouse and adding new timbers to replace rotting or diseased ones. Some renovations to the interior were also made at that time." (E. Heideman, 2009)*

OCTOBER 29, 1950

[Copyright, 1950, by Seattle Times Co.]



Picture and story from the Seattle Times, October 29, 1950.

CENTRALIA calls itself the Hub City because of highways passing through and railroads, which make it a junction point. It is the only city in the West which can claim to have been founded by George Washington, although the Washington in this instance was the son of a slave. He settled on Skookumchuck River in 1852, his nearest neighbor being Joseph Borst, a pioneer of '45 who owned the land on which Fort Borst formerly stood. The blockhouse, donated to the city by the Borst family, is one of the state's best preserved Indian War relics and is a major tourist attraction. After housing troops it served as a granary. John Stephens, city superintendent of parks (in picture) now has it under his care in 53-acre Borst Park.



Fort Borst Blockhouse as it appears today