

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received **SEP 1 1983**  
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Fortín de San Gerónimo de Boquerón

and/or common Museo de Historia Militar de Puerto Rico

**2. Location**

street & number Puerta de Tierra

not for publication

city, town San Juan

vicinity of

state Puerto Rico

code 72

county San Juan

code 0930

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<u>N/A</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Government of Puerto Rico, entrusted to the Municipality of San Juan

street & number Alcaldía de San Juan, Plaza de Armas

city, town San Juan

vicinity of

state Puerto Rico

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. P.R. Registry of Deeds, San Juan, Section 1

street & number San Juan Judicial Center, Second floor

city, town Hato Rey

state Puerto Rico

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Preliminary Puerto Rico Survey

has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

HABS (P.R.-49)

date Puerto Rico-1974; HABS-1952-53

federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Institute of Puerto Rican Culture

city, town San Juan

state Puerto Rico

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved    date
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The building is a small rectangular fortress with rounded corners, approximately 31 meters wide by 53 meters in length. It rises above sea-level to a maximum of nine meters. Its principal axis runs east-west. The structure is built of local stone masonry, and plastered.

It sits on a flat coastal reef which lies scarcely under the mean low water level, forming a small island. It connects with land by means of an arched bridge. As one enters, there is a forecourt that precedes a structure built to accommodate ammunition and a small garrison. This small pavillion is rectangular in plan and has three arches in its facade. To the right there is a small guard house that was built early this century. On each side of the main building there are ramps that lead to the gun deck, which faces north, east and west; and it sits on unexcavated fill.

The original site was built in 1591 and consisted of a very small defense line provided with four cannons. In 1595 the British attempted to disembark at this point, led by Sir Francis Drake; their attack was frustrated. During the next three centuries the fort was the object of several attacks, and as a result was considerably built-up.

The building as we see it now, has been restored to its period of maximum development, which was the 1791 reconstruction (see item 8). Nevertheless, repairs by the Spaniards were continuous, with the last occurring in the 1880's.

After the Spanish-American war, the American Armed Forces took San Gerónimo over and added a superstructure of wood atop the main building. The fort continued to be used as a military post until 1921, when the United States Congress passed a law leasing the property for 999 years to a colonel Baker, for use as his private residence.

In 1942 the Government of Puerto Rico acquired the property and put it under the tutelage of the Municipality of San Juan. In 1957 the "Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña" undertook the historic restoration of San Gerónimo to its 1791 state, and installed there a small and discreet military museum.

Because of the ravages of the sea and the wind, this last restoration acquired a deep patina. There was evidence of deeply disaggregated plaster exposing dissolving masonry with obvious problems of water penetration into the walls. The roots of at least six trees planted in the fifties, caused a heavy toll penetrating into the walls of the fort and the roof of the pavillion causing enormous cracks and with the obvious problems of water seepage. In 1978 the small military museum was closed down because of the advanced state of deterioration of the fort, mainly due to the weather conditions existing in Puerto Rico (high temperatures, high humidity conditions, salty air), ravages of the sea and wind, poor maintenance work and acts of vandalism.

In late 1982 the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture undertook again the restoration of San Gerónimo. All the trees were taken down, the roots drawn out, and the cracks and water seepage fixed. Most of the walls, including those of the bridge, were carefully replastered. The cannons in the gun deck that were lying on the floor, were restored and placed into position. An iron gate was installed in front of the bridge for security reasons. A small reinforced concrete pier to the south added in the late forties was demolished to bring San Gerónimo to its 1791 state. The small military museum will be opened in late 1983.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1791, 1795      **Builder/Architect** Juan Francisco Mestre

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Early in the colonization period, the Spanish coastal settlements in the Caribbean began to feel the very serious threat of naval attacks from pirates and the warships of the Crown's enemy nations. In order to protect them, Juan Bautista Antonelli and Juan de Tejada were sent to America to devise a comprehensive plan for the defense of important seaports, among which San Juan was included. They arrived in San Juan in 1587 and acknowledged the military importance of the shallow bay of Boquerón and recommended to close it by sinking an old vessel in it. The process of fortification was a sustained one, and reached its peak at the end of the XVIIIth century.

San Juan, located in an island separated from the mainland only slightly, presented peculiar problems. This geographic condition made the city very vulnerable along its entire periphery, thereby requiring a full enclosing wall of protection. The position of the Island is parallel to the coast of Puerto Rico, presenting a lagoon or bay where the port was located and to which access had to be prevented. Of the two maritime entrances, the western one, nearer the city was ample and fully navigable, and so, was fortified by the impregnable Morro Castle. The urban coastline on the ocean side was protected by San Cristóbal Castle, and the lagoon side, later on by la Princesa. But in order to make the bay inaccessible to undesirable vessels, a defense line had to be created at the eastern, shallower entrance. For this purpose, the Spanish erected in 1591 a small battery with four cannons, guarded by 13 soldiers, at a point on the beach known as the Boquerón.

In 1595 the British, led by Sir Francis Drake and John Hawkins, attempted to disembark at this point, but were frustrated. Three years later, led this time by the Count of Cumberland, they attempted to approach the City once more through Boquerón and were unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the troops were able to siege San Juan further to the northwest and did occupy the City for 155 days. These attacks proved the importance of the Boquerón site and, in 1609, Governor Don Gabriel de Rojas rebuilt the fort to cover approximately its present size and placed it under the guidance of San Gerónimo. Since that time the fort is known as "San Gerónimo de Boquerón". By 1609, as described by Governor Rojas, the fort had the presently square shape. San Gerónimo was refurbished again in 1646 by Governor Don Fernando de la Riva Agüero. During those years, and later into the century, it was used as a prison, and again, in 1664 was repaired extensively by Don Pedro Paradas.

At the end of the XVIIIth century, the Spanish Crown gave special attention to San Gerónimo, ordering better reconstruction work to be carried out. In 1791, Juan Francisco Mestre, a military engineer, submitted plans to Madrid, for the total reconstruction of San Gerónimo. The new work included the raising of the gun deck, a more substantial lodging for troops and ammunition and a higher bridge that could be usable during abnormally high tides. In addition to that, access to the bay was closed by means of piles and walls that rose visible above the water level. These plans were approved by King Charles IV, and the reconstruction completed five years later.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

La Gran Enciclopedia de Puerto Rico-Vol. 9: Arquitectura y Leyes. Ediciones Madrid, 1976.  
Alegria, Ricardo, El Fuerte de San Gerónimo de Boquerón, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1969.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property .41 acres

Quadrangle name San Juan

Quadrangle scale 1-20,000

UTM Refererences 18°- 27' - 57" Lat. North, 66°- 05' - 06" Long. West

A 

Zone	Easting								

B 

Zone	Easting								

C 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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**Verbal boundary description and justification** A small man-built island, approximately 1,645 square mts in area, off the tip of the island of San Juan, to the east, and connected to it by a bridge 32 mts in length and 8 mts wide. The island is approximately rectangular in shape.

**List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries**

state N/A code county code

state code county code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Armando Moraled Parés- architect

organization State Historic Preservation Office

date June 9, 1983.

street & number La Fortaleza

telephone (809)721-7000, ext.2232, 2241

city or town San Juan

state Puerto Rico

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*Alfonso Fabín de Rosas*

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date

8/22/83 (see letter)

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

*Patrick Andrus*  
Keeper of the National Register

date

10/11/83

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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Continuation sheet

Item number 8

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In 1797, Fort San Gerónimo, along with the adjacent battery of San Antonio, had an outstanding participation in the defense of San Juan against the British. An enemy squadron of sixty ships reached Puerto Rico and disembarked 3,000 men east of San Juan, proceeding to siege San Gerónimo de Boquerón and San Antonio. The British, under Sir Ralph Abercrombie, sustained their attack for thirteen days, but San Gerónimo under the command of Col. Don Teodomiro del Toro, and San Antonio under Captain Don Ignacio Mascaró, resisted victoriously and the British retreated in defeat. San Gerónimo, however, was in ruins. Its reconstruction, which followed the 1791 remodeling, was immediately undertaken, and by 1799 it was completed without alterations to its previous plans.

During the XIXth and part of the XXth century, San Gerónimo continued to be used as a military post. In the middle of the XIXth century a moorish wood house was built over the roof of the garrison as the residence of the fort's Commander. Said house was destroyed by a hurricane in 1897 and was rebuilt by the United States when Puerto Rico was ceded by Spain in 1898.

The fort is an integral part of the lagoonscape at the transition of the traditional town and the suburbs of El Condado and Santurce. As a small fort, San Gerónimo gives of itself a full and rapid documentation of Spanish military architecture. As part of the San Juan defense system, it forms part of one of the greatest monumental military compounds in America.