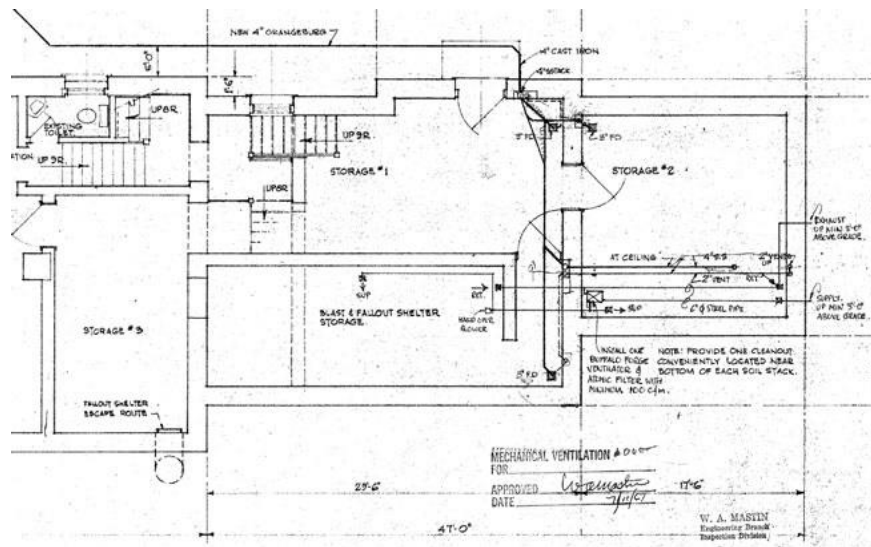


Cold War Reminder: The Tudor Place Bomb Shelter*

by Mark Hudson, Executive Director

Tudor Place is most often associated with events in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nestled beneath the Garage, however, is a reminder of the Cold War era of the 1960s. The Bomb Shelter, completed in 1969, offers insight into the nation's psyche at that time and the anxieties of Tudor Place's final private owner, Armistead Peter 3rd. Whether built primarily as a shelter from a nuclear blast and fallout, or as a safe retreat from civil unrest, Mr. Peter took great care to ensure that the space would protect the Tudor Place household.

Beginning in the 1950s, federal authorities promoted the creation of underground shelters to protect against missile strikes. These fears were heightened with the Soviet Union's detonation of a hydrogen bomb in 1955 and the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. To aid in the construction of residential



1967 Blueprints for Garage Addition

shelters, the Office of Civil Defense distributed publications that provided advice and specifications, some of which were used in the design of Tudor Place's Bomb Shelter.

Armistead Peter 3rd hired architect Dean Philpott in 1966 to design the Garage addition, including the Bomb Shelter. The Tudor Place Archive contains the extensive correspondence between them that reflects the extent to which Peter was involved in the design details. While working through these features and the amenities particular to this structure, Philpott did not lose sight of the primary

purpose, which he outlined in a letter to a vendor: “The shelter is to be designed not only from the aspect of fall-out protection but also bomb blast.” By July 1967, he was able to assure his client that the inner portion of the shelter would have high fallout protection and a blast protection factor of one hundred (with a government minimum factor of forty recommended).¹



Garage Basement Construction, 1967. A3.48

The core of the shelter was 5,400 square feet, expanding to over 8,500 feet when outer rooms were included. It could accommodate up to twelve people and included a ventilation system, water storage tanks, sanitary systems and a kitchenette. To ensure adequate fresh

air, Philpott’s design included an exterior air vent on the north side of the Garage addition that connected with interior ducts. In the event of a loss of power, the system’s circulating fan could be operated manually using a bicycle-powered drive belt. Three 420-gallon, glass-lined tanks stored water for the shelter, + including use in the bathroom. Noting that the chemical toilets initially specified for the shelter were “not luxurious,” architect Philpott instead devised a way to incorporate an existing bathroom into the shelter, with new fixtures that included an overhead water tank and a hand pump to fill the tank².



Armistead Peter 3rd, 1966.
A1.935

The final amenity was a kitchenette tucked beneath the stairs. This Crane Model 548 included a refrigerator, range/oven/broiler and sink. The Garage addition, with the Bomb Shelter in the basement, was completed in 1969. We can say with relief that Armistead Peter 3rd did not have to put the shelter to the test, either from a nuclear event or a

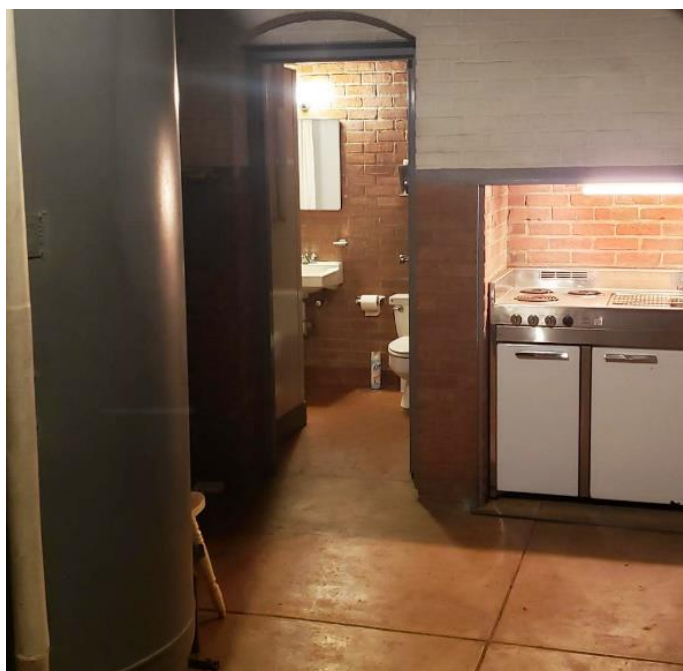
¹ Dean E. Philpott to T.J. Vanderoren, September 1, 1966. Papers of Armistead Peter 3rd, MS 21, Box 41, Folder 18.

² Dean E. Philpott to Armistead Peter 3rd, July 21, 1967. MS 21, Box 41, Folder 19

moment of civil unrest. Today, the inner rooms of the Bomb Shelter are used for the storage of museum collections. Many of the unique features remain intact in the shelter's outer room, including the water tanks, kitchenette and "escape route." With the upcoming renovation and expansion of the Garage, as part of the Tudor Place Master Preservation Plan, some collection items will be housed in a new purpose-built collections management center. This will allow for utility and living spaces of the shelter to be interpreted and presented as part of the visitor experience.

An unusual feature of the Tudor Place Bomb Shelter is a tunnel that extends from the east end of the shelter toward the Historic House. Identified on Philpott's drawings as the "fallout shelter escape route," the tunnel terminates well short of the house, with a hatch located adjacent to a storage building east of the Garage. How this tunnel was to be used during an emergency is unclear, but it has been useful as a utility tunnel that carries steam pipes and power conduits toward the house.

In addition to the interpretive use of the space, components of the Bomb Shelter will continue to serve operational purposes. The water tanks will supply the site's water mist fire suppressions system, the "escape route" will continue to carry utilities from the Garage to the Main House, and an inner room is being outfitted with compact shelving to maximize its utility for the storage of collections (see the related article in this newsletter). In these ways, this unusual space in the Basement of the Garage will continue to serve its original use as a Bomb Shelter, while also promoting the care of collections and the preservation of the architectural treasures of Tudor Place.



Bomb Shelter with kitchenette, bathroom and storage tank, 2022

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