

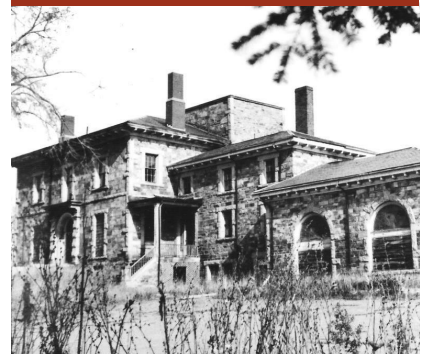
# GODDARD MANSION

c. 1853-1859 | Cape Elizabeth



Between 1853 and 1859, the Scottish-born architect Charles A. Alexander was contracted to build a stone mansion for local businessman and Civil War Union Army Officer, John Goddard. Constructed of local Maine stone in the Italianate style, the stately home remains in the town of Cape Elizabeth on the grounds of Fort Williams Park, overlooking Casco Bay. Alexander designed other notable buildings in the Portland area, including the Stephen D. Hall House at 85 Park Street, the John B. Brown “Bramhall” House, the Falmouth Hotel, and Alexander’s home residence at 393-395 Danforth Street.

Before The Civil War, John Goddard made a considerable fortune, primarily in the lumber business, but enjoyed success in other ventures such as the purchase of the Cape Cottage Hotel. During the war, Goddard volunteered as a member of the First Marine Cavalry, serving as Colonel until his resignation in February of 1862. The Goddard family continued to own the mansion until 1898 when the property was purchased by Judge Joseph W. Symonds. The property changed hands once more in 1900 with the expansion of Fort Williams Park. During the park’s expansion, the mansion became the property of the United States government. Subsequently, the building was converted into Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) living quarters, with an NCO clubhouse in the basement of the property. The mansion continued to operate as military housing through the 1920s, but was gradually abandoned. The mansion was seriously deteriorated upon the town’s acquisition of the property in 1962.



Postcard image above c. 1900.

Photo above right: Goddard Mansion c. 1900. Courtesy Maine Maritime Museum.

Photo below right: undated, courtesy Friends of Fort Williams Park.



The Goddard Mansion has been under threat of demolition since the early 1960s. In 1981, the interior of the building was burned in a controlled fire and removed. Since 2009, the mansion has been surrounded with temporary fencing for public safety reasons. A recommendation for demolition, with a remaining commemorative plaque, has been favored by public boards, such as the Fort Williams Advisory Council. Opposition to demolition came from neighbors and property owners on Surf Road and by Greater Portland Landmarks.

In response to a 2015 town-wide survey in which more than 50% of residents stated they want the mansion stabilized, the Cape Elizabeth Town Council adopted a policy ensuring that the remaining structure of Goddard Mansion would be maintained at Fort Williams Park. However, the 2021 draft park master plan proposes removing the side and rear wall, stabilizing just the front façade. While there is still support for saving the remaining mansion, funding needs to properly stabilize and maintain the structure have not been determined.

Ruined walls without the protection of a roof or wall protection caps are subject to the full effects of weathering from all sides. The agents of decay include wind, rain and frost, which can wash out mortar and erode structural masonry, leading to progressive collapse; birds and animals can burrow into and undermine ruined walls, and woody vegetation will lever walls apart. Vegetation within the fenced area at Goddard needs to be routinely removed before it is allowed to take hold. An unmaintained ruin will eventually be lost to all but archaeologists.

The best way to ensure that a ruin is properly maintained is to make productive, and perhaps revenue-generating, use of it. Examples of successfully maintained ruins exist that have been reroofed and given new uses, and many more remain simply as fascinating monuments of history. These are often attractions of interest to historians, tourists, photographers, and the general community. The Goddard Mansion could provide a remarkable setting for events, a backdrop for summer theatre performances or musical concerts, or be completely re-imagined into a restaurant, cafe or overnight accommodations. This will require a financial commitment to maintain and interpret the site to ensure this significant piece of our community history remains. We look forward to the opportunity to work with the Cape Elizabeth community to develop an innovative and creative reuse plan, beginning with addressing critical stabilization needs.

