NPS Form 10-900
(3-82)

OMB No. 1024-0018
Exp. 10-31-84

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

received SEP 1 1983

date entered

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

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street & number Puerta de Tierra ___ not for publication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	
___ district	X public	X occupied	___ agriculture	X museum
X building(s)	___ private	___ unoccupied	___ commercial	___ park
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	___ educational	___ private residence
___ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	___ religious
___ object	___ in process	___ yes: restricted	___ government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	X yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
	N/A	___ no	___ military	___ 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 HABS (P.R.-49) has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes X no

date Puerto Rico-1974; HABS-1952-53 X federal X state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records Institute of Puerto Rican Culture

city, town San Juan state Puerto Rico

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
___ excellent	___ deteriorated	X unaltered	X original site
X good	___ ruins	___ altered	___ moved date
___ fair	___ 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 continous, 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			
prehistoric	archeology-prehistoric	community planning	landscape architecture	religion
1400–1499	archeology-historic	conservation	law	science
1500–1599	agriculture	economics	literature	sculpture
1600–1699	architecture	education	X military	social/ humanitarian
X 1700–1799	art	engineering	music	
1800–1899	commerce	X exploration/settlement	philosophy	theater
1900–	communications	industry	politics/government	transportation
		invention		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 inaccesible 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 cannnos, 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 Aguero. 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.
Alegría, Ricardo, El Fuerte de San Gerónimo de Boquerón, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1969.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property .41 acres

Quadrangle name San Juan — Quadrangle scale 1-20,000

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
A				B			
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

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:

x 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 [signature]

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 8/22/83 (See letter)

For NPS use only

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

Patrick Andrus date 10/11/83

for Keeper of the National Register

Attest: date

Chief of Registration

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.