NPS Form 10-900
(3-82)

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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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 La Fortaleza

and/or common

2. Location

street & number Calle Fortaleza, San Juan Island between San Juan Bay and Calle Recinto Oeste ___ not for publication

city, town San Juan ___ vicinity of

state Puerto Rico code 93 county code

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
___ district	X public	X occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
X building(s)	___ private	___ unoccupied	___ commercial	___ park
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	___ educational	___ private residence
___ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	___ religious
___ object	N/A in process	X yes: restricted	X government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	___ yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
		___ no	___ military	___ other:

4. Owner of Property

name Commonwealth of Puerto Rico

street & number Apartado 7428 Barrio Obrero Station

city, town Santurce ___ vicinity of Puerto Rico state 00916

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Institute of Puerto Rican Culture

street & number Apartado 4184

city, town San Juan state Puerto Rico

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes X no

date ___ federal ___ state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
___ excellent	___ deteriorated	___ unaltered	_X_ original site
_X_ good	___ ruins	_X_ altered	___ moved date _____
___ fair	___ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

La Fortaleza (The Fortress) was San Juan's first true fortification. Repeated raids by French and English free-booters and Carib Indians led to its construction between 1533 and 1540. Within 15 years of its construction, a new fort named El Morro was built on the more strategic headland guarding the entrance to the bay, and La Fortaleza was relegated to a position of secondary importance in the defenses of San Juan. It then was used as the residence of the military commandant and other military officers and later became the home of the governors of Puerto Rico, a use that continues today.

When the Earl of Cumberland led the successful English attack on the city in 1598, he described La Fortaleza as "a strong castle, built of stone, square and commonly called the King's Palace...." La Fortaleza remained an integral, though secondary, part of San Juan's defensive system. It is a good example of the Spanish style, which is characterized by heavy-tiled flat roofs, sunlit patios, galleries, casements, graceful arches, grilled doorways, and wrought iron, tile, and mahogany staircases. Many of its existing features date from the major restoration of 1846, when the building was converted to full-time use as the governor's house.

Specific Elements

FACADE - The present facade dates from 1846 when the most important remodeling of the building took place. A marble slab at its top states that in 1846, during the reign of Isabella II while the Count de Mirasol was Governor, La Fortaleza was reconstructed by don Santiago Cortijo, Lieutenant Colonel of Engineers.

This facade replaced an austere wall of military architecture built in 1640. Its architecture is neo-classical with decorative motifs of the Isabelline era. The first floor has a massive pine door leading to the main staircase and the interior patio. The floor of the vestibule is paved with old stones called Canarias stones.

MAIN STAIRCASE - The staircase dates from the 1846 remodeling done during the Count de Mirasol's governorship, and its decoration is an example of 19th century Spanish style. In its profuse ornamentations there are characteristics of the baroque, gothic, neo-classical and Arabian styles. There are 3 decorative stucco plaques on which appear, under crowns, the emblems of Puerto Rico, Castilla and Leon. Further up there are four windows in the Arabian style. The dome is decorated with military standards and flags which at one time displayed the colors and insignia of the military units stationed in the country.

The staircase is tiled with Genoese marble and the steps are of Puerto Rican ausubo wood. The banisters are in the tuscan style and the risers are embellished with 19th-century Catalonian glazed tiles.

SALA DE RECIBO - This room dates from the reconstruction in the middle of the last century during the Count de Mirasol's governorship and is tiled with Genoese marble. Four paintings hang on the walls, two representing Luis Munoz Rivera and Eugenio Maria de Hostos, 19th century Puerto Rican patriots and two others illustrating George Washington and Simon Bolivar. The wicker furniture was probably made in Puerto Rico. The beautiful gilt-framed mirrors are from the 19th century.

STATE DINING ROOM - On the dining room entrance there is a Spanish rococo coat of arms dating from the 18th century. It is painted in oils and surrounded by the chain of the Order of the Golden Fleece whose Grand Master was the King of Spain. The coat of arms shows the Bourbonic fleur-de-lis, and the emblems of Castilla, Leon and other Spanish provinces.

The 18th-century type ceiling of the dining room has old Puerto Rican ausubo wood beams. The floor is tiled with Genoese marble, and the rug bears the seal of the Commonwealth and the coat of arms of Juan Ponce de Leon. A beautiful set of crystal fruit bowls is standing on the table. They bear the seal of Spain, and tradition has it that they were sent to La Fortaleza by Queen Isabella II.

STANDING CLOCK - In the interior corridor near the Sala de Recibo, there is an old clock made of mahogany. The last Spanish governor, upon leaving La Fortaleza, stopped in front of it and with his sword broke the face of the clock so as to mark the last minute of Spanish rule in the New World.

OLD KITCHEN - The old kitchen is found in the upper room of the South Tower and dates from the 16th century; it may be the oldest extant kitchen in Puerto Rico. In early colonial times, it was possibly also used to melt metals and make ammunition.

The circular construction of this room is very interesting. It has massive 6-feet-wide walls and a skylight at the top of its semi-spheric vault. The steps of the stairway are of ausubo wood and the lintel of the window bears, as was the custom of those days, a picturesque row of glazed tiles. The thick bricks on the floor were made in the old San Patricio factory in Puerto Rico and arranged in the traditional palm-leaf pattern.

It was not until the summer of 1956 that this room was discovered to be part of the original kitchen of the old fortress. It was found when some old wooden boards that covered the cooking stove and chimney were removed. It has since been restored and furnished with the kind of old utensils that were in use at that time. There is in the kitchen an old Puerto Rican water pitcher made of ausubo wood with a porous stone that filters the water falling into a native clay receptacle. There is also an old coffee mortar, a corn grinder and rustic chairs made of tabonuco wood with woven rush seats. The old cooking stove holds such old utensils as clay pots and kettle, "jatacas," pans, a tub, an annatto seed container and a tray.

SUN DIAL - In mid 17th century, most likely during the reconstruction of La Fortaleza after its burning by the Dutch, a sun dial was built on the flat roof of the South Tower over the old kitchen. It is mounted on a quadrangular stone prism and carries on each of its four faces the design of a quadrant.

SALON DE LOS ESPEJOS or Hall of Mirrors - The reconstruction of this spacious rectangular room, second largest in the building, dates back to the 19th century, the period during which the Count de Mirasol remodeled La Fortaleza.

The principal ornamentation of the well-disciplined decor of this room consists of ten beautiful mirrors whose gilt frames are topped by beribboned flower garlands. Twelve classic pilasters with Corinthian capitals run from socle to frieze and give the room an air of formality. The doors are of native wood, all with joined panels which fold in the middle and back to the sides. The floor is tiled with white and grey Genoese marble.

A stucco rosette in high relief stands out from the center of the ceiling, bearing six coats of arms containing, by order of surname, the heraldic emblems of General Prim and Count de Reus, who commissioned this work during his governorship (1847-48).

SALON DE MUSICA or Music Room - This room also dates back to the mid 19th century reconstruction and has a pretty, gilded stucco border along the top of the walls.

The oil painting of the Immaculate Conception was probably done in 18th century Puerto Rico and has been attributed to the studio of the Campeche family. The furnishings are traditional 19th century Puerto Rican.

Adjacent to the Music Room, facing the sunken garden, there is a covered gallery whose main adornment is eight classic columns. It contains an 18th century tapestry and a bust of the Puerto Rican patriot, Luis Munoz Rivera, by the sculptor Francisco Vizquez Compostela. There is also a handsome 19th century Spanish chest with a plaque indicating that it had been used in the Puerto Rican lottery.

SALON DE TE or Tea Chamber - The ceiling of this room is paneled with Puerto Rican ausubo wood, the floor tiled with Genoese marble. The doors, of a native wood called capa prieto, fold in the middle and back to the sides. The chandelier is of the Isabelline period and the furniture of a native mahogany.

THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - This large room running along the east front, which at present serves as the Governor's office, used to be called The Throne or Court Room, dating back to the Count de Mirasol's reconstruction. Inaugurated on November 19, 1848, with a sumptuous ball given at La Fortaleza by the Count de Cheste, who was governing at that time, it was used for official functions.

The Isabelline decoration of this spacious room is most attractive. It is made of 12 Ionic pilasters rising from the ground to join countless putti in high relief and linked by flower garlands. At the center and ends of the ceiling there are three neo-Renaissance rosettes with three elaborate crystal chandeliers hanging from their centers. There are 12 wooden doors, three of them with delicate latticework, the others with joined panels folding in the middle and back to the sides. Over the doors there are 12 stucco shells containing the coats of arms of Puerto Rico, Spain, Castille, Minerva Protectrice of the Arts, Peace, Justice, Perseverance, Fidelity, Strength, Charity, Vigilance, and Mars. The floor is tiled with white and grey Genoese marble and contains three marble ornaments corresponding to the ceiling rosettes.

At the Throne Room's south end there used to be an elaborate canopied throne whose steps were lined with crimson damask. This throne set off a magnificent full-length portrait of Isabella II, the work of the noted Spanish portrait painter, Francisco Madrazo Y. Kuntz, First Painter of the Queen's Household.

CHAPEL - In the upper room of the circular North Tower, or Tower of Homage dating back to the 16th century, there is the Fortaleza Chapel, measuring 20 ft. in diameter and topped by a semicircular vault. It contains a "chapel gallery," or window where the Governor could hear Mass privately without being seen by other worshippers. In 1951, the ancient chapel was redecorated by the Dutch artist, Marcolino Maas. It was dedicated to the Holy Trinity.

On the altarpiece there rests a mosaic of opaque tiles representing Christ on the Cross. Prostrated at its foot there is Magdalene; the Virgin and the pious women on the left; and on the right, Saint John and Longinus, the centurion who pierced Jesus' side with a lance.

There is a stained glass window facing the bay. On the left you see Catherine of Alexandria, La Fortaleza's patron saint, who defended the Catholic faith in her writings. On the right is John the Baptist, patron saint of Puerto Rico's capital. Below these is the seal of Puerto Rico and the coat of arms of Ponce de Leon, the first governor.

GARDENS - In the course of time the gardens have undergone countless changes. The sunken garden is known to have existed as early as 1845; for it was in that year that Pedro Tomas de Cordoba described it as "a large, amphitheatrical piece of land for gardens and orchard."

On the wall, next to the Bastion of Santa Catalina, there is a two-ton cannon brought over from Vieques Island in 1954. The crown in relief is that of the British monarchs. The traditional monogram contains the initials G. R., Georgius Rex, with three linked symbols meaning that it was one of the cannons of George III (1738-1820), under whose reign the Independence War of the United States was lost.

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
X 1500–1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture
X 1600–1699	___ architecture	___ education	X military	___ social/ humanitarian
X 1700–1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ theater
X 1800–1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ transportation
___ 1900–	___ communications	___ industry	X politics/government	___ other (specify)
		___ invention		

Specific dates 1533, c.1649, 1846 **Builder/Architect** N/A

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

La Fortaleza, or Santa Catalina Palace, is the oldest Executive Mansion that is used as such in the Hemisphere. It was the first fort built in San Juan Harbor, and it was the first of a series of military constructions which, in the course of time, made San Juan de Puerto Rico and Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, the two strongest defense bastions of the Spanish Empire in America.

Its construction was started in 1533, and finished in 1540. At first it consisted of a circular tower and four walls enclosing a patio. This Tower, still in existence, has thick stone walls and two vaulted rooms, one of them the chapel. Its name--Torre del Homenaje or Tower of Homage--arose from the custom of the governor of the Castle to make a solemn oath of loyalty and courage at the top of the tower in times of danger.

Years later, a second circular tower, called Torre Austral, was constructed. The architecture of these towers is of the medieval military type, and their great interest stems from the fact that they are among the new structures in the Hemisphere that have the architectural style popular in Spain during the early days of America's history. Their tops served as watchposts of the arrival of threatening Caribe Indians and the departure of colonizing expeditions on their way to discover and conquer new regions in the Hemisphere. They have been mute witnesses to the flow of the treasures from the Indies and to the maritime traffic of Spain with its empire in America.

Only twice was this fortress taken by invaders. The first time--in 1598--occurred when the Earl of Cumberland took San Juan; the second when, in 1625, the Dutch Commander Boudewyn Hendrick took control of the community and installed himself in La Fortaleza.

A raging fire which marked the withdrawal of the Dutch caused great harm to the building. Its reconstruction was begun in 1640. By that time it had become the custom of the Governors to reside at La Fortaleza; the reconstruction of the fortress was adapted to the use it would continue to be given. The Santa Catalina hermitage existing outside of the walls was destroyed during this reconstruction. It was later integrated into the walls, thus giving rise to the name of Royal Fortress or Palace of Santa Catalina.

The fortress underwent many additions and alterations during the following years. In 1800, a wing was built on the southeastern part, which today houses the Governor's offices. The Artillery Arsenal and the Governor's honor guard occupied the first floor. Part of this building, used for government offices, was enlarged and remodeled in 1827.

On November 27, 1822, it was officially decreed that La Fortaleza would be the residence of the Governors of Puerto Rico, thus making official a custom observed since the 17th century.

In 1846, the Count de Mirasol, who was governor at the time, started an enlargement of La Fortaleza, reconstructing the building almost completely, except for the west side. The austere facade was altered and adorned with neo-classical motifs, the main entrance was enlarged, the chapel was redecorated, the halls were embellished with applications of stucco, marble Genoese tiles were used on the floors, and the galleries were adorned with stained glass. This reconstruction gave the historic building the palatial appearance that it has today.

9. Major Bibliographical References

E. A. Hoyt, A History of the Harbor Defenses of San Juan (San Juan, 1944).
A. P. Newton, The European Nations in the West Indies, 1493-1688 (London, 1943).
Ricardo T. Reyes, The Harbor Defenses of San Juan in the 16th Century (Ms. Report, National Park Service, Aug. 22, 1955).

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1.6

Quadrangle name San Juan Quadrangle

Quadrangle scale

UTM References

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
A	19	804	2510	B			
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

La Fortaleza is located in the center of four walls that surround a large patio. It is bounded on the north by the San Juan Gate, on the south by the hospital, on the east by the west curb of Calle Recinto Oeste and on the west by San Juan Bay. (See Continuation Sheet 10-1 for more precise description.)

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

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cecil N. McKithan

organization NPS-SERO date August 1981

street & number 75 Spring Street telephone (404)221-2651

city or town Atlanta state Georgia

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

title date

For NPS use only

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

date 8/26/85

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: date

Chief of Registration

GPO 911-399

La Fortaleza or Santa Catalina Palace is located in the Southwest Litoral of the San Juan Isle.
Its boundaries are: To the Northeast Recinto Oeste Street and Fortaleza Street; To the Southeast the Siervas de Maria Asylum to the Southernmost corner of the wall; Northwest along the wall to the Marine's Walk, and Northeasterly along the Marine's Walk that leads to the San Juan Gate on the North.