



# POWDER HOUSE

THIS UNUSUAL CONICAL BRICK BUILDING was ordered built by the town selectmen in 1811 as a replacement for a powder house which had earlier stood in the North Cemetery near the North Mill Pond. Tradition has it that some of the old beams, trunnel pins (wooden pegs used to join framing members), and brick from the old powder house were incorporated into the new, which was constructed by Capt. Daniel Marden, a master mason. The Powder House was used for ammunition storage during the War of 1812 as well as during the Civil War. Thereafter, and up to 1904 when a new magazine was built on Jones Avenue, the city stored explosives in it. The structure stands on a stone foundation on a rocky ledge. Its walls are five bricks thick, with air vents interspersed. The small window over the massive front door allowed kegs of powder to be hoisted through for storage on the second floor.



## INTERIOR BEAMS

While this utilitarian structure is unprepossessing from the exterior, interior details reveal exacting craftsmanship. The great 12" x 12" wooden beams, which support the second floor are planed smooth, edge-beaded, and assembled with trunnels. All interior brickwork was originally covered with a smooth layer of concrete, a process called parging.

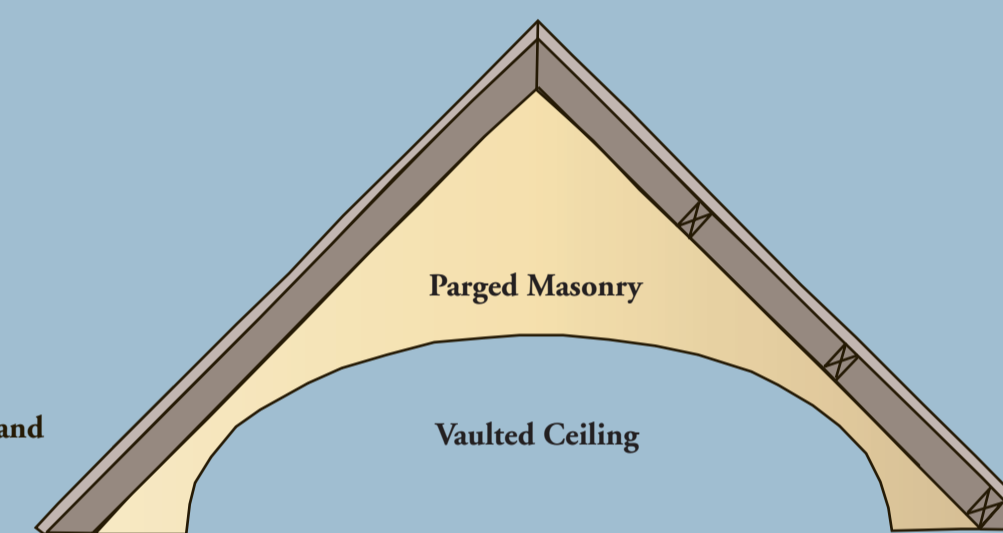
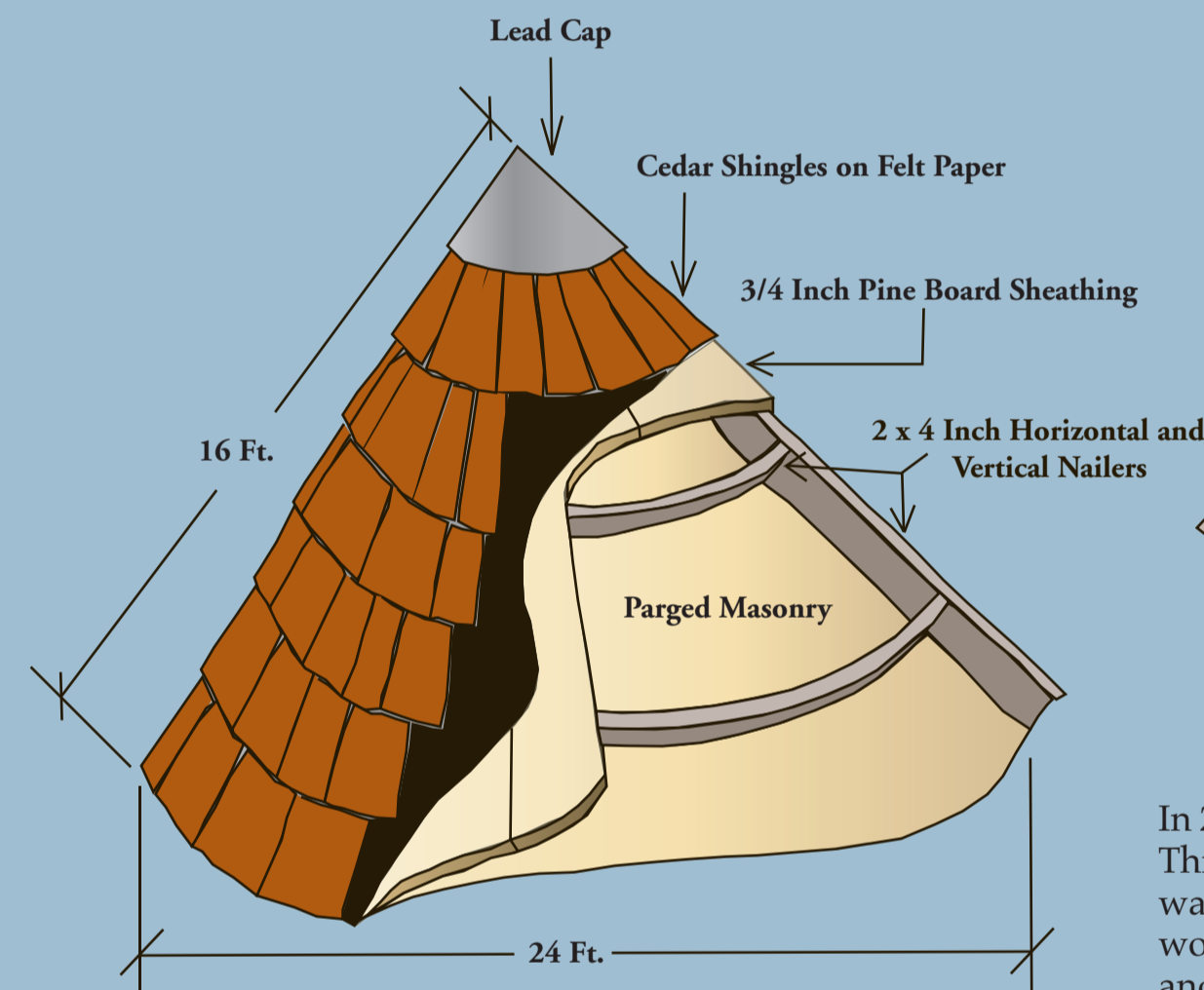
Photograph of wooden beams on ceiling. Courtesy of City of Portsmouth.



## BUTTRESS BEAMS

Eight feet above the second floor, and just below the point where the conical roof begins, are two interlocked beams which serve to buttress the vertical walls.

Photograph of interior cross beams. Courtesy of City of Portsmouth.



## A CONICAL ROOF'S RESTORATION

In 2007, the roof of the Powder House was stripped and reshingled. This image shows the sturdy framework to which the sheathing was nailed. Also visible (at right) are the initials of one of the 1811 workmen. The construction drawing (at left) shows the dimensions and components of the unusual roof structure.

Right: Photograph of exterior work on roof showing parged roof and nailers. Above and left: Sketch from construction drawing by Susan Kress Hamilton. Courtesy of City of Portsmouth.



## HISTORICAL PHOTO with WATER TOWER

Erected in 1892, a water tower stood in front of the powder house on Islington Street until it was taken down in 2006 at the expiration of its useful life.

Historical Photograph of Powder House, from *Lost Examples of Colonial Architecture* by John Mead Howells, Plate 240, 1931, W. Helburn, Inc. (New York). Courtesy of Portsmouth Athenæum.

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