

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

SKYTSBORG

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: SKYTSBORG (BLACKBEARD'S CASTLE)

Other Name/Site Number: Fogarthy's Castle, Kjaer's Castle

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: No. 38 Dronningens Gade, King's Quarter Not for publication: N/A

City/Town: Charlotte Amalie Vicinity: X

State: U.S. Virgin Islands County: St. Thomas Code: 030 Zip Code: 00801

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X
Public-Local:
Public-State:
Public-Federal:

Category of Property

Building(s):
District:
Site:
Structure: X
Object:

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1

Noncontributing

0 buildings
0 sites
0 structures
0 objects
0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: Charlotte Amalie Historic District

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic:	Defense	Sub:	Fortification
Current:	Vacant/Not in Use	Sub:	N/A

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Colonial - Danish colonial

Materials:

Foundation:	Limestone, Augite Andesite or "Blue Beach," Coral and Brick
Walls:	Limestone, Augite Andesite or "Blue Beach," Coral and Brick
Roof:	Concrete
Other:	N/A

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Description: Skytsborg, commonly referred to as Blackbeard's Castle, is situated on Government Hill (formerly called Baggaertsbjerg in the seventeenth century) overlooking Charlotte Amalie and the St. Thomas Harbor. This fortified stone tower, constructed in 1679, is slightly ovoid in ground plan, 20 feet in diameter at the base and tapering to 17 feet 8 inches at the top of the parapet. The total height of the tower is 31 feet 6 inches (photos 1 and 2).

The interior of the tower was originally divided into four levels by three wooden floors, with the first floor being stone. The original levels are clearly identified by projecting stone ledges on the interior side of the tapered stone walls. The walls of the tower are constructed of masonry rubble, 53 inches thick at the base and tapering to 40 inches at the edge of the parapet. The exterior and interior surfaces of the walls were originally covered with a thin coat of lime plaster and whitewashed. Traces of this plaster exist on the interior surfaces of the tower, although this covering does not exist on the exterior surface.

The tower is entered from the north, through a four foot wide, seven foot high elliptical arched entrance. The entrance has three stone steps leading into the tower, and the entrance opening is faced with brick. The floor is stone. The wooden entrance door and metal fittings are modern, but are in character with the tower (photo 2).

The first floor room is 9 feet high. Nine brick lined, gun ports (6 inches x 9 inches) are arranged in a radial pattern throughout the first floor room, seven feet above the present floor level (photos 1 and 2). This would indicate that there once existed a wooden platform along the inner wall to serve as a firing platform for the gun ports. The floor of the first floor room is made of stone.

The second floor room is 7 feet 2 inches high. Thirteen brick lined gun ports, similar in size to those in the first floor room are arranged in a radial pattern (photos 1 and 2). They are 6 feet above the present floor level. There is also a larger gun port or embrasure, measuring 14 inches x 26 inches, set 45 inches above the floor level in the south face of the tower (photo 1). This is probably one of two embrasures cut into the existing tower in 1688, for cannons to command Charlotte Amalie Harbor and protect the north approaches to Christiansfort. The floor of the second floor room is made of reinforced concrete.

The third floor room is 7 feet high. Thirteen brick lined gun ports repeat the radial pattern found on the second floor room (photos 1 and 2). The floor of the third floor room is made of reinforced concrete.

The fourth floor room is 7 feet high. The tower walls are pierced by 8 gun ports (photos 1 and 2). Seven gun ports measure 12 inches x 16 inches, while the eighth one is 12 inches x 30 inches. This latter gun port (photo 2) is on the north face of the tower and probably served a small cannon to protect the tower from the hills above.

Originally above the fourth floor room was an open observation and gun platform on top of the tower. It was covered with a small wooden structure with windows in the nineteenth century when the tower served as a private astronomical observatory (figure 7). This structure was removed in the mid-twentieth century and replaced with a wooden floor below the parapet wall to simulate the original historic appearance of the open gun platform. The floor of the observation level is made of reinforced concrete covered with wood on top. A circular metal stair permits access to all floors.

The original stone masonry construction of the tower and brick facing for the entrance and gun ports of the tower are in excellent shape. None of the original wooden interior floors are extant, although stone projections on the interior walls of the tower indicate the original locations of the

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floor levels.

All wooden floors and stairs were replaced with reinforced concrete and a circular metal staircase in the late nineteenth century. In the mid-twentieth century a wooden floor was placed on top of the concrete floor of the observation level.

Integrity: With the exceptions noted above of having the wooden floors replaced by concrete floors in the late nineteenth century and a wooden floor installed in the mid-twentieth century on the observation level, Skytsborg is substantially unaltered from its original construction in 1679.

Skytsborg served as an outer defensive work in conjunction with Schmidtsbjerg tower and Fort Christian, which also contained a tower called Trygborg, situated within the fort. Trygborg was torn down in the 1870s during a renovation of Fort Christian. In the 1930s, Schmidtsbjerg was substantially modified. Large windows were cut through the rubble masonry tower walls of Schmidtsbjerg and the building was physically attached to a tourist hotel. It has guest rooms on its upper floors and a gift shop on the ground floor. Only Skytsborg still retains its original shape. Skytsborg is situated within a modern hotel complex, but the buildings and structures associated with the hotel are not physically attached to the tower.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: X Statewide: __ Locally: __

Applicable National Register Criteria: A X B __ C __ D __

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A __ B __ C __ D __ E __ F __ G __

NHL Criteria: **Criterion 1**

NHL Theme(s):
1 Peopling Places
6. encounters, conflicts, and colonization

Areas of Significance: **Exploration and Settlement**

Period(s) of Significance: **1679 - mid-nineteenth century**

Significant Dates: **1679**

Significant Person(s): **N/A**

Cultural Affiliation: **Danish Colonial**

Architect/Builder: **Governor Jørgen Iversen**

Historic Contexts: **II. EUROPEAN COLONIAL EXPLORATION AND SETTLEMENT
D. Other European Exploration and Settlement
1. Scandinavian (Danish)**

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Summary Statement of Significance: Skytsborg, or Blackbeard's Castle, is a rubble masonry tower constructed in 1679 by the Danish colonial government as part of a network of defensive fortifications to protect St. Thomas. It is the best remaining example of seventeenth-century Danish colonial military architecture in the United States, and is the only unmodified seventeenth-century fortified tower in the Caribbean.

Historical Background to Tower Fortifications

Throughout Europe in the fifteenth century tower fortifications underwent a major modification in both intent and design as a result of the new technology of artillery. Prior to this time tall stone towers, or keeps, often served as isolated defensive structures or observation towers able to fend off Medieval attackers armed only with bows and arrows and rudimentary siege machines. As the power of artillery grew, allowing attackers to stand off and breach the high stone walls of such towers, military engineers began to reconfigure the shape of the tower to confront this threat and incorporate the tower into larger more complex defensive designs (Duffy 1979:2).

Instead of tall isolated stone towers, the towers became shorter, usually not more than 40 feet tall, with walls up to 20 feet thick to counter the effects of battering by artillery. These massively designed towers, often incorporated into town walls as roundels, became gun-towers, or platforms for artillery. The first appearance of these gun-towers occurred in Renaissance Italy during the latter part of the fifteenth and first half of the sixteenth century when control of the Italian states was contested between the French and Spanish crowns (Duffy 1979).

However, in the instance of coastal fortifications isolated gun-towers still had an important defensive role. As Christopher Duffy in *Fire and Stone, The Science of Fortress Warfare*, notes, "Given the peculiar circumstances of coastal fortification, there was still a place for isolated and tall towers of a kind that would have been considered decidedly old-fashioned in inland warfare" (1975:155). The offensive function of these towers dictated their form.

The designer of coastal fortification had to bear in mind that these works were intended to deliver a heavy weight of fire rather than to offer resistance against prolonged siege. These considerations, taken together with the usual lack of space and earth in coastal sites, made for a characteristic architecture of simple traces, and high exposed walls executed in full revetment. The parapets and embrasures were nearly always of masonry, even though "it had been found by experience, that nothing disheartens troops placed behind a wall so much, as pieces of stone flying about their ears" [Duffy 1975:154-155].

During the first half of the sixteenth century isolated masonry gun-towers made their appearance as coastal fortifications throughout the islands of the western Mediterranean, as defense against Moorish pirates and well as European raiders (Fornals 1992:31-32). At the same time, such isolated masonry structures also solved for the Spanish problems of harbor defense in the New World at Havana, Cuba; Santo Domingo; on Hispaniola, and San Juan, Puerto Rico (Anonymous 1985:149-150, 341, 377; Torres-Reyes 1955:60-62).

These New World towers erected by the Spanish in the sixteenth century were pulled down, with the exception of those built into the walls of La Fortaleza (designated a National Historic Landmark in 1960), in favor of more

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extensive harbor fortifications in later years (Hoyt 1943:27-36). However, a sixteenth-century Genoese fortified tower on Mortella Point on the island of Corsica so ably defended itself, in 1794, against two British warships that the design was copied and numerous "Martello Towers" were constructed in England, Ireland, and the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century (Duffy 1975:155; Floyd 1991:47-56).

Due to their adaptability to coastal areas, tower fortifications also continued to play an important role in military engineering in the Baltic Sea region, where during the seventeenth century the kingdoms of Denmark and Sweden fought over control of the sea lanes leading into the Baltic. The two preeminent military engineers during this conflict were Gottfried Hoffmann, of Denmark, and Erik Dahlberg, of Sweden. Both of these individuals utilized low thick fortifications to protect towns in combination with outlying fortified towers to protect key defensive points (Dahl 1992:6; Duffy 1985:191).

As noted by Christopher Duffy,

The surest signs of Dahlberg's presence were, however, his idiosyncratic multi-storeyed casemated towers, which he employed variously as island batteries, hilltop forts and inner keeps [1985:195-196].

Gottfried Hoffman, during the mid-seventeenth century, also constructed fortresses with outlying tower works at Fredericia and Helsingborg, Denmark (Dahl 1992:6).

Throughout the troubled seventeenth century, both contenders for control of the Baltic - Denmark and Sweden - also undertook efforts to establish colonies in the New World. Sweden established a military outpost called Fort Christina (designated a National Historic Landmark in 1977) in the vicinity of present day Wilmington, Delaware, where they traded for furs until the colony was captured by the English in 1664. The Danes were more successful in establishing and holding a colony in the Caribbean.

In early 1671, the rechartered Westindia Company was created to establish a Danish colony on the island of St. Thomas. The Company selected as the Governor of the colony Jørgen Iversen. Iversen had gone to the British Caribbean Island of St. Kitts at the age of 13 as an indentured servant in 1651. In the next fifteen years he rose to become a full partner in a Dutch trading concern in the Caribbean, from which he learned the necessary lessons for a successful colony (Gjessing 1982:2-3).

Between 1672 until 1680, when he was relieved, Iversen succeeded

... in creating a community out of the multinational and racial components of the colony and steer it towards a promise of prosperity while building Christians Fort, carrying out an interisland trade for the company and establishing plantations on St. Thomas [Gjessing 1982:3].

It was during Governor Iversen's tenure that he had constructed Fort Christian and its outlying hilltop gun and watch tower of Skytsborg (Gjessing 1982:12). According to Frederik Gjessing

An Army Lieutenant had been included amongst the Company's functionaries of the proposed colony. He was to advise Governor Iversen in all military matters and provide the technical knowledge needed for the design and construction of a fort. To insure that this was done according to the standards of the times, a copy of Admiral Freitag's treatise on the construction of forts was included among the books that Jørgen Iversen brought out to guide him in his duties as the governor. This 17th century work provides layout of fortifications, explanations of the military functions of their different parts and served as a design handbook for military engineers [1982:17].

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Unfortunately, the Lieutenant died on the voyage from Denmark to the Virgin Islands, so “Iversen was left to make his own decision regarding the fortification” (Gjessing 1982:18) of Fort Christian and Skytsborg using Admiral Freitag's work which provided information on the fortification of coasts utilizing gun towers on hilltops to support major coastal forts, as pioneered by Hoffmann and Dahlberg.

II. EUROPEAN COLONIAL EXPLORATION AND SETTLEMENT

D. Other European Exploration and Settlement

1. Scandinavian (Danish)

Skytsborg has its roots in the earliest history of the Danish Virgin Islands. In 1678, war having broken out between France and Denmark, the French settlers of neighboring St. Croix launched an attempt to seize St. Thomas Island. Fortunately, Governor Jørgen Iversen, since arrival in 1672, undertook to construct a large four-sided fort at the harbors edge of Charlotte Amalie the capital of St. Thomas, called Christiansfort, or Fort Christian. As the attackers did not have any siege cannon this structure was easily able to withstand the brief siege imposed by the French from St. Croix, who were forced to retreat.

One of the main features of Christiansfort was a squat three-story high tower, called Trygborg, on the north side of the fort. Twenty-six and one half feet high and 90 feet in circumference the tower was intended as a self-contained last ditch defensive position if an enemy carried the outer walls of Christiansfort.

The first floor was a large storeroom for ammunition and provisions. The walls of the upper two floors were studded with embrasures for both small arms and light cannon. This was the first military tower that can be documented on St. Thomas. Trygborg and the north side of Christiansfort were torn down in the nineteenth century during renovation.

Christiansfort provided a strong defense for St. Thomas against an attacking force from the sea. However, Governor Iversen realized that an attacking force could have pounded Christiansfort into submission by erecting an artillery battery on the high ground behind and north of the fort. For this reason, Iversen ordered a tower fortification erected on Baggaertsbjerg, a hill top north of Christiansfort in 1679, similar to Trygborg. Such a tower, would serve not only to deny the high ground to an attacking force, but could also serve as a watchtower providing a vantage point high enough to peer over Hassel Island to scan the open ocean; thereby providing early warning of an approaching enemy.

The success of the 1678 defense of St. Thomas convinced Iversen of the usefulness of stone towers for defense. Iversen's letter of February 2, 1680 to the directors of the Danish West India Company indicated that Skytsborg had been erected at Baggaertsbjerg by that date. In it he wrote “Since I had the Watchtower erected at Baggaertsbjerg I did not fear a hasty attack so much.” A 1687 English map of St. Thomas harbor depicts and describes a “small white tower” on Baggaertsbjerg Hill to the north of Christiansfort. The relationship between the tower on Baggaertsbjerg Hill and Christiansfort is also shown on an undated late seventeenth century map (figures 1 and 2).

It is possible that Iversen used the Company stone mason Simon Lamare who had worked on Fort Christian and Trygborg tower to construct Skytsborg in 1679. According to Frederik Gjessing

In August, 1674, Jørgen Iversen acquired for the Company a mulatto slave by the name of Simon Lamare. He was a mason and was to serve as the clerk of the works, for the construction of the fort [Fort Christian]. The phrasing in the account book of this transaction is of interest. It states “brought Simon

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Lamare to serve the Company for seven years" [1674-1681], implying some sort of contractual agreement with Simon Lamare for his manumission after an agreed upon period of service [1982:20].

In 1688 another crisis occurred when in response to dynastic wars in Europe, the Spanish from Puerto Rico occupied Crab Island (Vieques) and Anguilla, thereby surrounding St. Thomas. This made the Danes in St. Thomas concerned as the Spanish had never abandoned their claim, by right of discovery, to the Virgin Islands. Governor Christopher Heins, who had replaced Iversen, undertook a program of upgrading the fortifications of Christiansfort and Skytsborg. He had embrasures cut in the walls of Skytsborg for two large cannon capable of covering the harbor. In addition, he erected a third tower to the east on Schmidtsbjerg. The erection of this last tower in 1689 completed the seventeenth-century defenses of St. Thomas (Gjessing and Gardner 1958:1-3).

In peacetime no soldiers were stationed at Skytsborg or Schmidtsbjerg, while a skeleton force was maintained at Christiansfort. If an attack by other colonial forces or slave rebellion was anticipated an alarm was sounded by firing a predetermined number of cannon at Christiansfort. This signal would call out all able bodied whites and free blacks to take up arms and report to one of the three fortifications. A militia sergeant and eight men were posted in Skytsborg in emergencies. Such an alarm occurred in May of 1694 when a slave insurrection was anticipated from the newly established plantations in New Quarter, present day Tutu (a suburb of Charlotte Amalie).

Throughout the eighteenth century Denmark maintained a policy of strict neutrality in all European wars. This policy proved more of an economic boon to the Danish West Indies than the planting of sugar cane because of the commerce it attracted to the island to transact business. As a neutral Caribbean port of trade, all European traders respected the neutrality of St. Thomas, and to a certain extent encouraged its prosperity, as it provided a means of trade between otherwise belligerent European powers. As the warehouses and trading houses of Charlotte Amalie expanded to meet this trade the need for fortifications languished.

During the eighteenth century numerous European traders noted on maps the fortifications of St. Thomas. Van Keulen's 1719 map of St. Thomas, drafted for Governor Erik Bredal, in reference to Skytsborg noted, "De klyne Tooren es omgevallen" (the small tower is deteriorated) (figure 3). Similarly, a 1730 map of St. Thomas noted Skytsborg as a "gammellt fefalden Taarn" (an old collapsing tower) (figure 4). Oxholm's map of 1779 labelled Skytsborg as "et gammellt taarn" (an old tower).

During the early eighteenth century Skytsborg passed out of government ownership to a planter named Johannes Jahnsen de Windt. De Windt's plantation lands, called Catarinabjerg after his wife Catherine were willed to the Dutch Reform Church in 1759. The pastor, Reverend Francis Verboom, purchased the plantation and Skytsborg for 38,000 rigsdollars, subdivided the land and sold off individual building lots.

By 1800, Irish immigrant Thim Fogarthy, acquired Skytsborg from Verboom. Fogarthy used the tower as his private residence. The first floor was used for storage, the second as a parlor and dining room, and the third floor as a bedroom. During the first three decades of the nineteenth century, Skytsborg was commonly known as Fogarthy's Castle and it was noted on a map drawn by A. von Meley in 1807 (figure 5).

For most of the nineteenth century Skytsborg was called Kjaer's Castle, after Thomas A. Kjaer, who acquired the tower in 1826, and whose family owned the property until 1886. Kjaer's interest in astronomy saw him convert the tower into an astronomical observatory by placing a telescope on the roof, and putting a wooden structure on the top of the tower (figure 7). A view of St. Thomas harbor in ca. 1860 shows Skytsborg during the period of Kjaer's ownership (figure 6). When Kjaer's heirs sold Skytsborg in 1886 the stone walls were solid but the wooden interior floors had to be replaced by the new owner A. R. Raven in the late nineteenth

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century with concrete floors and a circular metal staircase.

In the mid-twentieth century the area was acquired and converted into a hotel complex. At this time point, the wooden observatory was removed and a wooden floor placed on observation level of the tower. One story hotel structures were constructed to the east and west of the tower, and a swimming pool was added to cliff face south of, and just below, the tower. None of these modern structures touch the tower or are part of the landmark boundary.

During the nineteenth century, Skytsborg became associated with three distinct but erroneous legends. The first was that the tower was built by seventeenth-century buccaneers, and later used by Captain Edward Teach, also known as Blackbeard the Pirate. Blackbeard was never known to have visited St. Thomas. The second legend was that the tower was built by the first Danish colonization attempt (1665-1666). However, there is ample historical evidence that it was constructed in the second Danish colonization effort when Governor Jorgen Iversen arrived in 1672. The last legend had a Dutch settler, Carl Baggaert building the tower in the 1670s on the high ground north of Christiansfort, then known as Baggaertsbjerg, as part of a dispute with Governor Iversen. However, there is no evidence Baggaert erected this tower.

Skytsborg may be considered the oldest unaltered structure on St. Thomas. Although Christiansfort predates Skytsborg, extensive alterations of the former in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries modified its seventeenth century appearance. Schmidtsbjerg tower has also been extensively renovated in the 1930s obscuring its earlier appearance. No other seventeenth-century structures survive in the Virgin Islands.

The three tower defensive network of Skytsborg, Schmidtsbjerg, and Trygborg (part of Christiansfort), although Medieval in appearance, admirably suited the defensive needs of St. Thomas in the seventeenth century. The principle danger, at that time, were not well equipped professional armies, but rather plundering raids, such as the French attack on St. Thomas in 1678, or slave rebellions. A small Danish force, supplemented with militia, could easily defend itself against such attacking forces. Nowhere else in the Caribbean were fortified towers constructed in the seventeenth century.

By the early eighteenth century the development of accurate large calibre cannon necessitated a shift from outmoded and exposed medieval fortified towers to the lower profile Vauban-style of rectangular forts with protruding bastions at the corners.

The eighteenth century also brought large, well equipped professional armies and navies from Europe to the Caribbean. The concentration of the Danish on St. Thomas on trade precluded the construction of new defensive works. The inadequacy of the tower network to defend the island was demonstrated in 1801 when the British forced a bloodless surrender of the island to keep it from being used by French naval forces during the Napoleonic Wars.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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Gjessing, Frederik C. and Philip E. Gardner

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Hoyt, Edward A.

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Torres-Reyes, Ricardo

1955 The Harbor Defenses of San Juan in the Sixteenth Century. Manuscript on file National Park Service, Southeast Regional Office, Atlanta.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register.
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark. **October 12, 1994**
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office **U.S. Virgin Islands**
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other (Specify Repository): **Blackbeard's Castle, Post Office Box 6041, St. Thomas, USVI 00801**

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

0.01 acre

UTM References: Zone Northing Easting

A 20 296050 2029400

Verbal Boundary Description:

The nominated property is the stone tower located at the peak of Government Hill, No. 39 Dronningens Gade, Kings Quarter, in Charlotte Amalie. The boundary is a circle 25 feet in diameter centered upon the axis of the tower located at the UTM reference point of 20 296050 2029400.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary for Skytsborg is intended to include just the tower area. It does not include any modern structures located next to the tower at No. 39 Dronningens Gade.

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National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

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**DESIGNATED A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK ON
October 12, 1994**



SKYTSBORG (Blackbeard's Castle)
Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas,
U.S. Virgin Islands
Northern face of tower
Photo: Mark Barnes, January 1992



SKYTSBORG (Blackbeard's Castle)
Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas,
U.S. Virgin Islands
Southern face of tower
Photo: Mark Barnes, January 1992