

New Bedford Armory History – Part II

By Arthur Motta



If you read my essay titled *A Castle for New Bedford: The Building of the New Bedford Armory, 1898-1904*, you may be interested to know of recent developments regarding this important city landmark. Once again the fate of the Armory is receiving renewed public attention, thanks to a Standard-Times article by Steve Urbon titled [*Possible sale of armory sounds alarm bells in New Bedford*](#) regarding the Commonwealth of Massachusetts's renewed effort to sell the Armory as a surplus state building under the management of the [*Division of Capital Asset Management & Maintenance \(DCAMM\)*](#). Urbon then did a follow-up article on the Armory's current condition titled [*Tour reveals slow destruction of New Bedford Armory*](#). The news was not good.

In 2003, nearly 100 years after its dedication, the Massachusetts National Guard announced to the City of New Bedford that it would be vacating the Armory. At that time, I had the opportunity to tour the Armory with city officials. I took several photos of the interior, in part, to document historic artifacts related to New Bedford's military history. Posted below, they are in startling contrast to the 2017 photos published with Steve Urbon's article (above), which documents the current state of deterioration from fire, vandalism and the elements.

In 2014, [*Jonathan Carvalho's article*](#) highlighted the challenge of restoration and reuse of great old city buildings, including the Armory. The good news is that the Armory can be refurbished if not completely restored to its 1904 grandeur. The bad news: due mostly to human-inflicted damage (vandalism and arson), it will cost exponentially more to do so than it would have when I took these pictures in 2003. Regardless of the cost, the public, any/all interested parties, and especially the Armory neighborhood should make their voices heard on what will be the next chapter in the Armory's history.





The Armory marble gilded Dedication Tablet was in the foyer in 2003. Its current whereabouts is not known by the author.
(photo: Arthur Motta, 2003)





A canvas painted map of the Regiment's actions in World War II is now in the collection of the New Bedford Military Museum, operated by the Fort Rodman/Fort Taber Historical Association. (photo: Arthur Motta, 2003)



Detail of World War II Map (photo: Arthur Motta, 2003)



Plaque of Battery E; current whereabouts of this object unknown to the author. (photo: Arthur Motta, 2003)



Captains of Battery E; current whereabouts of this object unknown to the author. (photo: Arthur Motta, 2003)



Captains of Battery E; current whereabouts of this object unknown to the author. (photo: Arthur Motta, 2003)



1801 Rousseau bell & dedication plaque; current whereabouts of this object unknown to the author. (Arthur Motta, 2003)



Detail of 1801 Rousseau Bell dedication plaque. (Arthur Motta, 2003)



Display case of marksmanship trophies in the 2nd floor officers' lounge. Current whereabouts of these objects unknown to the author. (photo: Arthur Motta, 2003)



Jail cells in the basement of the Armory. (photo: Arthur Motta, 2003)



Rifle range in the basement of the Armory. (photo: Arthur Motta, 2003)



The Boiler Room in the basement of the Armory. A massive gas-fired Smith Boiler drove the steam heating system for the Armory plant. (photo: Arthur Motta, 2003)



The Kitchen/Mess in the Armory Basement. (photo: Arthur Motta, 2003)



In 2003, the men's and women's restrooms had been fully renovated by the Guard. Unfortunately, vandals destroyed the fixtures before the building was secured after the 2009 arson. (photo: Arthur Motta, 2003)



The Drill Hall in 2003. The good news is that it remains intact. It also continues to be the City's single largest uninterrupted floor space at nearly 14,000 sq. ft. (photo: Arthur Motta, 2003)