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UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Independence NATIONAL PARK

*1 of 6*  
*Chas. Dale*  
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STORAGE

FILE NO. H2615

DOCK CREEK ARCHEOLOGY  
ARCHEOLOGICAL PROJECT 13  
RECOMMENDATIONS

1958

B. B. Powell  
Archeologist  
March 18, 1958

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*Chas. Dale*  
*10-23-58*  
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The Independence National Historical Park Archeological Research Program includes, as Project No. 13, the "complete excavation of the Dock Creek area"<sup>1</sup> within the Park boundaries.

Mr. Schumacher felt that such an excavation "is advisable and would be highly justified," basing this assumption on the work done in conjunction with the steam line trenching in 1954.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Schumacher states the preliminary investigation "showed there is a great depth of historical material---possibly 30 or 40 feet. It is possible to locate many of the areas [sic] old buildings, wharves, docks, bridges and other structures."<sup>3</sup>

I have given some thought to this project and have reviewed the historic situation of Dock Creek within the Park, with the result that I feel obliged to recommend that no archeology be undertaken along the course of the creek and that Project No. 13 be dropped from the Archeological Research Program.

Briefly, the historical situation is this (see Appendix I): by at least 1762, Dock Creek was either diked or filled in west of Third Street.<sup>4</sup> The portion of the creek from Walnut Street to Third Street, now Dock Street, was arched over with masonry and filled in with earth in 1767<sup>5</sup> (see Illustration I).

Thus, Dock Creek no longer existed within what is now the Park boundary by 1767. I may note here that the Benjamin Easburn map of 1776 does show the creek in existence between Walnut and Third Streets. There is evidence, however, to indicate that this map was actually made before 1776.<sup>6</sup> In view of the foregoing, it seems to me

that an excavation of Dock Creek would have no real validity in relation to interpretive planning or to the Master Plan.

As noted above, the creek bed lies at a 30 to 40 foot depth in some places, and it is probably nowhere shallower than 20 feet. Excavation at such depths is a monumental task which would require an extremely large labor force as well as earth-moving machinery. Mr. Schumacher's estimate of labor costs (\$10,800)<sup>7</sup> seems to me to be very low for such an excavation---I would make a rough estimate of ten times that amount. Needless to say, the work would require considerable interruption to traffic and to utility lines along Dock, Third, and Fourth Streets. I seriously doubt the wisdom of attempting an excavation of such size merely to collect artifacts or to locate features of no great historical importance.

Illustration I represents the course of Dock Creek through Area A, Independence National Historical Park. This drawing is based on considerable documentary research, and I believe it is a reasonably accurate representation of the actual creek bed. It is, in my opinion, adequate for a marker program if such is undertaken. If some more ambitious program of recognition or representation of Dock Creek is contemplated, it would be possible to check the accuracy of the drawing with spot excavations located at several selected points.

In my opinion, the extreme expenses which would be incurred in an excavation of the course of Dock Creek is far out of proportion to the possible historical or archeological information to be gained. Furthermore, Dock Creek did not exist as such in the period commemorated by this Park. I, therefore, strongly urge the Project be removed from the Park's Research Program.

## APPENDIX ONE

### Dock Creek Chronology

- 1699-ca. 1750 - Brick bridge over Dock Creek at Chestnut Street.<sup>8</sup>
- 1762 - Bank holders instructed to erect stone walls for confinement of channel.<sup>9</sup>
- " - Clarkson-Biddle map shows creek terminating at Third Street.
- 1765 - The creek between Walnut and Third Streets ordered into an arch, to be covered with earth and used as a street.<sup>10</sup>
- 1767 - Walnut to Third Street portion of the creek arched over with masonry and filled in with earth.<sup>11</sup>
- 1784 - Lower part of the creek, from Walnut Street to the River, arched over and filled in.<sup>12</sup>
- 1823 - Remains of wooden<sup>1</sup> Chestnut Street Bridge (ante-1699) exca. when laying iron water pipes.<sup>13</sup>

#### REFERENCES

1. Research Program, Project 13, Basic or Description Sheet.
2. Research Program, Project 6, Basic or Description Sheet.
3. Research Program, Project 13, Basic or Description Sheet.
4. Clarkson-Biddle Map, 1762.
5. Jackson, Joseph, Encyclopedia of Philadelphia, 1931, Vol. II, p. 591.
6. Riley, Edward M., Preliminary Historical Report, Franklin Court, 1950, p. 16.
7. Research Program, Project 13, Basic or Description Sheet.
8. Watson, John F., Annals of Philadelphia..., 1909, Vol. I, p. 372.
9. Oberholtzer, Ellis Paxson, Philadelphia; a History of the City..., 1912, Vol. 1, p. 208
10. Ibid., p. 208.
11. Jackson, Op. cit., p. 591.
12. Oberholtzer, Op. cit., p. 208; Jackson, Op. cit., p. 591.
13. Watson, Op. cit., pp. 372-373.



## DOCK CREEK

Located within the Park are parts of old Dock Creek, a water course now only a part of the Philadelphia storm sewer system which once played a historic and colorful role in the history of the City of Philadelphia.

Dock Creek's natural facilities as a harbor and inland waterway were important elements in the early development of the city. Before the arrival of William Penn, the Indians of the area had used the Creek as a protective cove for their canoes, and they gave the Creek the name "Cooconocon".

Sailing up river from Chester, Pennsylvania in 1682, William Penn landed on the low sandy shore of, a site so pleasing to him, it is said, that he decreed its perpetual use as a public landing place. Penn used the Creek as a winter haven for his supply ships, as the tiny stream offered an inviting harbor for the shallow draft sloops of the day. From this use came the name, "Dock Creek". In William Penn's charter of 1701, the role of Dock Creek as a public landing and harbor was officially recognized.

The Front Street and Walnut Street area saw the beginning of Philadelphia as a city. The area around Dock Creek witnessed much of the birth of the city's commerce. Shops, tanneries, stables, taverns, and inns were built on the creek banks. The respectable and the not so respectable rubbed elbows in the grog shops. Among the more infamous reputed to frequent the liquor dives of the Dock Creek area were Captain William Kidd and Captain Edward (Blackbeard) Teach accompanied by their roudy band of swash-bucklers.

Most of the houses in the early eighteenth century were built north of Dock Creek. There were a number of interesting ones near the Creek, notably on Society Hill, where the Society of Traders had their offices. Guests Blue Anchor Inn on Front Street stood near the creek. To reach the front of the home of David Breintnall you had to approach by way of Dock Creek. At the home of Edward Shuppen the lawn sloped to the creek bank. The area was more devoted to businesses than residences.

There were numerous crossings of Dock Creek in the eighteenth century. A variety of bridges existed and there was even a ferry service. About 1691 there was a drawbridge on Front



Street, and other bridges during the eighteenth century on 2nd Street south of Walnut, Walnut west of 2nd, 3rd north of Walnut, and Chestnut east of 4th.

In the early eighteenth century the Creek north of Third Street was filled and in 1741 its banks between Second and Third Streets were made into streets. By 1750 the Spruce Street branch had become so swampy that it too was filled.

Benjamin Franklin played a part in the story of Dock Creek; In 1747 Franklin was appointed to a committee, along with five other Philadelphians, to review the filthy condition of the Creek area and make recommendations to alleviate the problem. This committee recommended that "The Dock" be dug out, cleansed, and walled up as far as Third Street. As a result, some provisions and agreements of landowners along the Dock were made for cleansing portions of the Dock. No lasting improvements were made, for, in 1760 the Creek was described as being a filthy uncovered sewer, bordered on either side by shabby stables and tanyards.

Dock Creek was so polluted by 1767 that it was declared a health menace and ordered arched and covered with fill from Third to Walnut Streets. The Provincial Assembly of 1784, impelled by the same reasoning, ordered the remainder of the Creek covered in the same manner.

In 1793 when the yellow fever epidemic infected Philadelphia, Dr. Rush found it worse in the neighborhood of Dock Creek. He complained to the City Council about the condition of the Creek and shortly afterwards they ordered that parts of it be arched.

Dock Street was constructed over the covered bed of Dock Creek. In 1811 Dock Street had the distinction of being the only street in the city not intersected at right angles by another street.

Because it followed old Dock Creek, it was unusually wide for a Philadelphia street. This width encouraged merchants to use it as an exchange. Thus, the Dock Street market was born. By 1884, 100 years after the street was completely covered, the market was firmly established as one of the principle produce centers on the East Coast. The Dock Street Market remained an active market place until the early 1950's when the last of the market stalls were demolished.

In 1832 Dock Street was the site of a modest bi-centennial celebration for the City of Philadelphia.

Buildings of major importance located on or near the course of Old Dock Creek are Carpenters' Hall, Pemberton House, The Philadelphia Merchants' Exchange, the site of Benjamin Franklin's House, and the First Bank of the United States.

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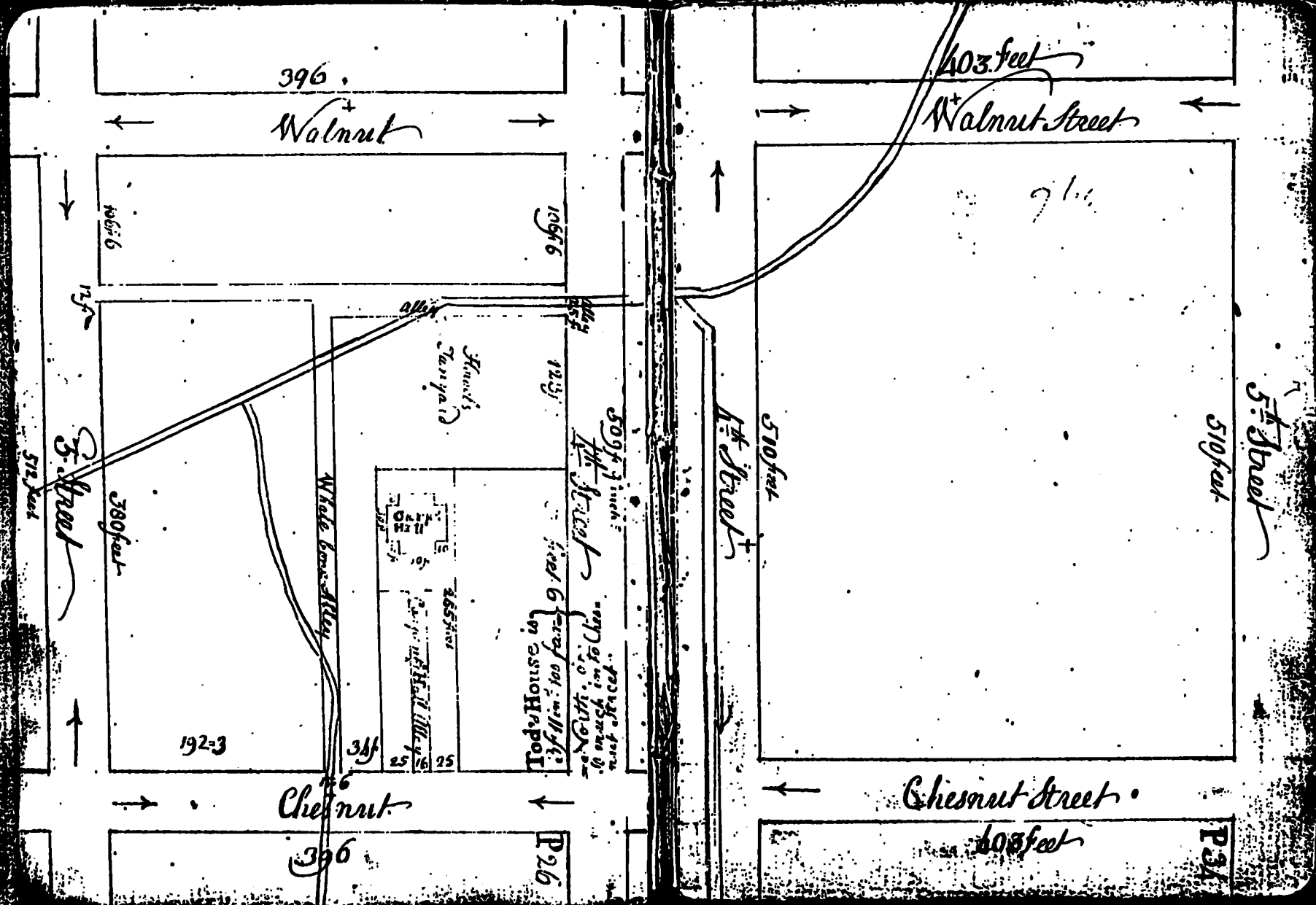
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SEWER LINES? Follows path of Dock Creek + Becker's Hollow!



STREETS; EAST TO WEST-CHESNUT TO WALNUT,  
THIRD TO FIFTH.  
LUKENS MANUSCRIPT PLAT, 1785. From Map