

**Supplement I to
Historic Grounds Report, Part I
on
State House Yard**

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PHYSICAL HISTORY

This supplement groups together data relating to physical features in front of Independence Hall during the historic period. Much which follows has already been reported in the Part I grounds report, considered as part of one phase or another of landscaping around the building. Some results from research done since that report was written in 1959.

Evidence about the appearance of these grounds is sparse. A few scattered and specific references in Pennsylvania's legislative records and vouchers issued for work done during Samuel Vaughan's landscaping of Independence Square are the sum of documentary evidence. The William Birch engravings "State-House With a View of Chesnut Street Philadelphia" and "Congress Hall and New Theatre, in Chesnut Street Philadelphia," ground plan of the State House drawn in 1783, and John Lewis Krimmel's "Election Day at the State House" also identify features in place before 1800. However, these sources are to the point and valuable in making determinations about the grounds on the Chestnut Street front of the Square. The views show a very plain treatment of the front lot, devoid of trees and shrubbery and dominated by the mass of the State House and its range of associated structures. The few ground features apart from the grassy plot are utilitarian and not calculated to add to the impressiveness of the buildings they served (Illustrations 1 and 2).

Brick Walks, Skirting, and Grass Plot

On September 22, 1784, the legislature's committee to examine the condition of the State House and "report such repairs as may be necessary for the preservation of the building" listed among the measures to be taken touching up the "mason work of the base of the building" and installation of

...a brick pavement of nine feet broad on the east and west sides of the steps, to meet that of the wings, [and] taking up the present pebblestone pavement,...¹

Early in November of the same year James Pearson, who had been assisting Vaughan and making repairs to the State House, secured 4500 paving bricks from one George Krebs "for the use of Paving Before the State House."² To this number Pearson added 22,500 paving bricks more before December 16 "for the use of the Staithouse."³ While this was going on, a Michael Wartman between October 12 and December 29 delivered 301 loads of earth, sand, and gravel "to the State House."⁴ Pearson in summing up his services and soliciting payment for "...expences incur'd by paving and Graveling at the front of the State House," makes it clear that these materials went into the walk system shown in the engravings.⁵

*Calculate
extent paved?*

Judging from the Birch prints and a study of the ground plan drawn in 1783, Pearson filled in the gaps in walks extending not only along the front of the Independence Hall, but also along Chestnut Street, setting off a plot the full 260 foot breadth of the main building,

piazas, and wings. Paving a walk twelve feet wide on the Walnut Street side of the square in 1791 required 21,750 bricks.⁶

The Birch prints show a walk along the street half again a man's height in width, (the nine feet specified by the House's report) and one of corresponding width in front of Independence Hall. The two prints are not in complete agreement, but are readily reconcilable. They were drawn in 1798 and 1799, by which time Congress Hall and Old City Hall had been built and the brick pavement extended, as they show, to cover the entire space between these buildings and the curb line. An examination of the Thomas Birch colored engraving "Congress-Hall and New Theatre" at the Philadelphia Free Library shows more clearly than Illustration No. 2 the ending of the plot in front of the West Wing building, with indications that much of its area was in grass though some apparently was bare earth. Both views suggest an extent of ground between the street and Independence Hall narrower than the present. Chestnut Street is scaled in the 1783 ground plan at fifty feet, where for a number of years now it has been forty feet. The 1783 ground plan shows the front of the State House to have been approximately 58 feet from the curb as against 53 feet today. Sometime after 1799 the street was reduced ten feet in width and the curb moved five feet.

Further on the composition of the plot, Pearson's solicitations recited that he had done "Gravelling at the front" of the

buildings.⁷ Wartman had delivered 108 loads of gravel.⁸ These may have been used in walks connecting various of the features shown in the Birch views, or in the plots. On this score, it is relevant that 69 loads of sand sufficed for a bed to the extensive brick walks.

Curbs and Posts

In 1763 Philadelphia ordinances required that house owners on streets having paved cartways, provide stone or brick footways and gutters. In conjunction with these features they were to erect a cedar post of six or more inches thickness for every ten or twelve feet of frontage.⁹ The gutters were to be 22 inches in width. Gutters and posts answering to these prescriptions are discernible in the 1798 Birch print "State-House With a View of Chesnut Street," although the 1763 ordinance had by then been superseded by one requiring curbstones. This latter method of edging was employed while paving the walks on the other three sides of Independence Square and by the time of the 1815 Krimmel engraving had been used in front of Independence Hall as well (Illustration No. 3).

Lamps

The Birch print "Congress Hall and New Theatre" shows two lamps in front of Congress Hall. The Krimmel shows one in front of the West Wing Building (Illustration No. 3). All three are judged to have been on the curb line. Lamps on the Independence Hall facade may have precluded others along Chestnut Street before 1800.

Watchboxes

In May 1789 carpenter Christian Schaffer made three watchboxes for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.¹⁰ State authorities placed one or both of them on the plot in front of Independence Hall, where William Birch shows them in his "State-House with a View of Chesnut Street." (The Pennsylvania financial records show construction of three only, though the 1798 Birch print shows two in front of the building and the 1799 print two in back.) Perhaps during the one year interval between prints, one was moved from the front to the back. The 1804 view of the front shows only one watchbox and thus tends to support this interpretation of the views.

Pumps

In 1773 the provincial assembly paid a total of £35..19..2 to Christopher Cave, Elmsley and Morris, Thomas Morris, and Thomas Hallowell for two pumps, associated ironwork, well curbs, painting of pumps, digging of wells and laying the wells' brickwork.¹¹ These pumps are conspicuous if graceless features of the two Birch prints (Illustrations No. 1 and 2). They were located, one in front of each wing building, near the ends of the plots (see enclosed diagram NHP-IND 2652). They also appear in the 1804 Birch print "Independence Hall" and the 1790 Columbian Magazine print "A N. W. View of the State House in Philadelphia, Taken 1778."

Archeological Features

Although Archeologists Schumacher, Powell, and Moore investigated seventeen grass plots and sites in Independence Square between 1953 and 1959, none touched the area in front of Independence Hall. As there are indications that the present grade is higher than that of the pre-1800 period, evidences of the features above and of certain other long-vanished structures may yet remain beneath today's pavement.

Among the features still believed to be in place there are the foundations of the interior corners of the original East and West Wings of Independence Hall; foundations of the Peglar House (demolished in 1735 when the Assembly moved from it into Independence Hall); portions of the beds of the brick walkways, such as were found in Independence Square (and perhaps of the surfacing itself), enough to establish configuration, composition, and others of their characteristics; and well-shafts and artifacts relating to the pumps. Extensive archeological work would bring these to light and could be expected also to recover artifacts relating to various of the above-ground features of the historic period. The grounds have been disrupted repeatedly in the past for landscape alterations, installation of utility lines, and the like. It is to be hoped that further development will be planned in such a way as to prevent adding to the toll.

NOTES

1. _____, Minutes of the Third Session of the Eighth General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, John Dunlap, 1784), 346.
2. Item No. 13, George Krebs Account, Nov. 10, 1784, Folder "G", Independence Square, State House, Maintenance Vouchers and List, 1784, Oct. 10-Dec. 21, Nos. 1-25, Public Improvement File, Public Records Office, Harrisburg, Pa.
3. Item No. 18, Christian Lybrandt Account, Dec. 16, 1784, Folder "G", Independence Square, State House, Maintenance Vouchers and List, 1784, Oct. 10-Dec. 21, Nos. 1-25, Public Improvements File, Public Records Office, Harrisburg, Pa.
4. Item No. 22, James Pearson Account, Dec. 29, 1784, Folder "G", Independence Square, State House, Maintenance Vouchers and List, 1784, Oct. 10-Dec. 21, Nos. 1-25, Public Improvement File, Public Records Office, Harrisburg, Pa.
5. Pennsylvania Archives (First Series), Volume X, 426-427.
6. Quinn, Miriam, "Paving of the Footways Around the State House Yard," Independence National Historical Park Report, June 1961, p. 3.
7. See footnote No. 5 above.
8. See footnote No. 4 above.
9. Quinn, Miriam, "Paving of the Footways Around the State House Yard," Independence National Historical Park Report, June 1961, p. 1.
10. Colborn, Robert J., "A Study of Philadelphia Watchboxes," Independence National Historical Park Report, May 1961 (revised July 1964), pp. 8-9.
11. Pennsylvania Archives (Eighth Series), Volume VIII, 7007.

ILLUSTRATIONS



STATE-HOUSE.

With a View of Chestnut Street PHILADELPHIA.

All-inclusive view of ground features before Independence Hall is furnished by this 1798 Birch print. Grass plot is indicated dark, bordered by brick walks. Brick gutter and row of posts are to be seen left of strollers. Pumps are in foreground and at far end of plot. Watchboxes show clearly in grass plot. The near one fails to show in 1804 Birch print.

Chapter II
Illustration No. 2



Drawn & Engraved by W. Birch & Son. *Published by R. Campbell & Co. No. 30 Chesnut Street Philad^a 1799.*
CONGRESS HALL and NEW THEATRE, in Chesnut Street PHILADELPHIA.

"Congress Hall and New Theatre, in Chesnut Street Philadelphia." This 1799 Birch print presents the location of two lamps, and one pump near Congress Hall.



Little of the ground before Independence Hall can be seen through Krimmel's election-day mob in 1815 view. Changes in gutter and adding of curbstone is visible at lower right. Lamp to left of boat-on-wheels is believed to be the same one shown in Illustration No. 2.

