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ARCHEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

of

CARPENTERS' COURT
INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

by

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IMPORTANT

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I. INTRODUCTION

The 1958 archeological program in Carpenters' Court was undertaken as an emergency measure to salvage all information possible when it became apparent that landscaping operations in the area might seriously damage or destroy structures and data pertaining to the history of Carpenters' Hall and its surroundings.

Funds from the landscaping project were appropriated for archeological labor and materials, and six laborers were employed for the program.

Work was concentrated in two different parts of Carpenters' Court. The area immediately to the south of New Hall was explored: it contains a circular brick-lined pit (designated "Pit B" by Archeologist Schumacher;¹ "Feature 1" in this report) and a nearby complete brick cistern (Feature 13). Secondly, three test trenches were excavated in the courtway between Chestnut Street and Carpenters' Hall.

Features 1 and 13 were studied to determine their use, age, structure, and possible association with the Carpenters' Company. The test trenches in the alleyway were excavated in an attempt to find evidence of the nature and extent of historic paving features and with the hope of finding remains of a well and pump used from 1770 to 1810.

Results in each of the areas will be discussed separately below.

II. THE BRICK-LINED PIT

The results of documentary research² had led me to the conclusion that Feature 1, the large brick-lined pit some ten feet south of New Hall (Fig. 10), represented the remains of a necessary constructed in 1770-71 by the Carpenters' Company,³ and described as being 15 feet deep and 9 feet 2 inches wide.⁴ A necessary, probably this one, was cleaned in 1794⁵ and again in 1840 when, in addition, it was deepened.⁶

Local tradition held that the brick structure represented a well used by the Carpenters' Company during the nineteenth century, and some persons suggested it might be the remains of a cistern built in 1811 when Schuylkill water was introduced into Carpenters' Court.⁷

The approximate dimensions and location of the feature had been determined by minor testing some months earlier. The pit, before excavation, was covered with arched brick roofing (Fig. 1) which, in my opinion, was of nineteenth-century date and of minor importance. Removal of this roof and clearing of the area immediately surrounding the pit enabled us to go ahead with the excavation of the interior.

The fill of the upper 15 feet of the pit was composed of clay and heavy rubble, consisting of brick and brick fragments, mortar, plaster, and wood. It held few artifacts, all of late nineteenth-century date. This fill was obviously dumped into the pit at one time when the pit was finally abandoned as a functional structure. There was no evidence of stratification.

Below the 15 foot level (3.3 feet City Mean Datum), however, the nature of the fill changed abruptly. From this level to the bottom of Feature 1 at 16.5 feet (1.8 feet C.M.D.) and on down to the bottom of Feature 2 (see below) at 22.2 feet (- 3.9 feet C.M.D.) the contents of the structure consisted of a blackish-green, tightly compacted, feculent soil literally filled with artifacts ranging in date from the mid-eighteenth to late nineteenth-century. The nature of this soil left little doubt as to the use of the structure.

As the floor of Feature 1 was cleaned, we discovered another, smaller, brick-lined pit extending downward some 5.7 feet. The second pit was designated Feature 2. It is situated a little southwest of the center of Feature 1 (Figs. 2 and 10).

Feature 1 is a nearly circular structure which averages 9.5 feet in diameter, although it is a little smaller than this at the bottom and a little larger at the top. It is well constructed of dry laid brick (stretchers). The lowest course is composed of headers set directly on hard sand and projecting approximately 0.35 foot inward from the inner face of the wall (Fig. 3). At the top of the west side, nine courses of a corbeled roof remained (Fig. 4), and I consider this portion the only remnant of the original roof. From the lower edge of this roof to the floor of Feature 1 measures 15 feet, the depth described for the privy constructed in 1770-71. The width is close, but not exactly the 9 feet 2 inch diameter described in the Carpenters' Company Account Book.

In direct contrast to the construction of Feature 1, Feature 2 is so poorly laid up as to make one assume it was either built for temporary purposes or built under difficult conditions. It, too, is of dry laid stretchers, but with many gaps and uneven courses. The lowest course, stretchers in this case, was laid on boards which are now rotted to a pasty consistency. Three feet above the bottom, in an attempt to true up the courses, another board had been laid and subsequent courses rested upon this. Feature 2 is approximately 3 feet in diameter and extends 5.7 feet below the bottom of Feature 1 (Fig. 5).

I believe that Feature 2 is the "well" sunk in the Carpenters' Company privy in 1840 "to correct the foul smell arising from the same."⁸

In my opinion, archeological examination of Features 1 and 2 has proved without doubt that they represent the 1770-71 necessary pit.

Feature 1 is too large to have been a well. No structure known to be a water well in this area even approaches Feature 1 in size. The diameter and depth of Feature 1 are in close agreement with documented dimensions of the 1770-71 privy. The structure is not a cistern, since dry laid brick does not form a waterproof container. As we shall see below, the 1811 cistern actually lies a few feet to the northeast. The age of the artifacts recovered from the organic layer at the bottom of Feature 1 coincides with a history which includes cleaning in 1794 and again in 1840. Thus, there are

a few eighteenth-century articles, more from the early nineteenth century, and a great many of middle and later nineteenth-century date. As noted above, the "well" in the bottom of Feature 1 is in accordance with documented work done in 1840.

The most surprising thing about Feature 1 is the late date to which it continued in use. A majority of the artifacts from the layer of organic soil in the bottom of the privy must be dated in the last half of the nineteenth century. While the entire collection from the pit has not yet been analyzed, some of the more obvious and easily datable objects from the organic layer are:

1. An earthenware shaving soap container inscribed with the name of X. Bazin, a perfumer who occupied a store at 114 Chestnut Street (one door east of the Pemberton House site) from 1850 to 1855.⁹ The container carries the advertisement that Bazin had been awarded a prize medal at the London Worlds Fair in 1851, so presumably this piece dates from the latter part of Mr. Bazin's tenancy at 114 Chestnut Street.
2. A U.S. Nickel five-cent piece which, although its date is illegible, is of a type minted only between 1867 and 1883.¹⁰
3. A molded glass bottle made for "E. Roussel's Superior Mineral Waters" by the Dyottville Glass Works of Philadelphia. Roussel manufactured mineral waters in Philadelphia, under his own name, between the early 1840's and 1854 and again from 1862 to 1867.¹¹ The bottle is of a type common after 1855, so it is most probably from the last five years of his manufactory.

From the artifact content, then, it is apparent that the privy was used until well into the last half of the nineteenth century. Examination of the insurance surveys of New Hall indicates that in 1861 the three-story privy addition over Feature 1 contained water-closets with walnut seat risers and lids and a china urinal. These facilities apparently still dumped directly into the privy pit. A resurvey of 1899 states that there is "a flush water-closet in place of the former 'privy'-Urinal removed--." ¹³ This, I believe, indicates plumbing had been installed by this date and the privy pit was no longer in use. The fill material in Feature 1 contained no close dating evidence, but portions of an embossed china urinal were recovered, and it is possible these are the remains of the urinal referred to above.

Features 1 and 2 were refilled with earth as a preservation measure.

III. THE CISTERN

On November 13, 1958, I was informed by Landscape Architect Warren Lewis, EODC, that telephone workmen had run into a brick structure while excavating a telephone line trench between New Hall and Carpenters' Hall, just a few feet northeast of Feature 1. Examination proved the structure (noted Feature 13) to be a large cement-lined brick cistern, still containing water. Here, obviously, was the Carpenters' Company's 1811 cistern, built to receive Schuylkill water.¹⁴

With laborers from the Maintenance Division, I uncovered the top of the cistern, measured, and photographed it (Figs. 6 and 10).

The cistern is a large one: 10.3 feet in outside diameter and 12.8 feet deep. It contained approximately 2 feet of mud in 8.5 feet of water. The arched roof, of headers, is complete except for the 2 feet wide pump pipe hole in its top and a narrow section broken out to allow the passage of modern pipes serving Carpenters' Hall. The damaged portion had been patched with a concrete cap. The cement lining of the cistern is $3/4$ to 1 inch thick on the side walls, but does not extend up onto the roof. There is no indication of an entry pipe. The top of the cistern is some 1.5 feet below present surface (17.0 feet C.M.D.). Since the structure will not interfere with proposed landscaping, it was filled with earth and will be left intact.

IV. THE COURT

The first test trench in Carpenters' Court proper was excavated along the west side of the pavement 34.4 feet to 46.4 feet south of the Chestnut Street curb. This is in the general area where we hoped to find remnants of the earliest known well on the property---a well already referred to as "old" in 1770.¹⁵ The second test trench ran from the east side of Test Trench 1 to the east edge of the Court. Its north face was 38.4 feet south of the Chestnut Street curb. Test Trench 3 was excavated east-west across the Court 48 feet north of Carpenters' Hall itself. (Fig. 10).

No indications of a well were found in Test Trench 1, nor was any definitive evidence recovered as to the dimensions of Carpenters' Court in any previous period. Immediately under the modern concrete walk was a layer of large fragments of dressed stone which were striking in their size. Some of the fragments were a half a foot or more in thickness. One of the fragments had been carved as if to receive a pipe or post (Fig. 7). It is doubtful that these stones are from a previous paving of the Court. We have no documentary evidence of such stone paving, and the stones appear too thick to have been used as flagstones. Perhaps they are rubble from some nearby building.

All further archeological evidence in Test Trench 1 to a depth of approximately 4.5 feet had been destroyed by intrusive utility lines.

At a depth of 6 feet below grade (10 feet C.M.D.), we did, however, uncover a bed of hard sand (mixed with mortar?) in which there were set some brick (Fig. 8). This is definitely an early paving level, but not much more can be said about it. No artifacts were associated with the paving, but it probably dates from before 1796, when Carpenters' Court was raised to meet the new grade of Chestnut Street.¹⁶ It is interesting to note that when the new paving was accomplished in the Court, the previous paving was taken up. This may account for the scarcity of evidence remaining in the ground.¹⁷

Extension of Test Trench 2 from Test Trench 1 to the east side of Carpenters' Court revealed no new evidence of note. The trench was terminated when it met the foundation wall of the ca. 1847 building on the Pemberton House site (Fig. 9). Further up the Court the original ground level was higher than toward Chestnut Street. The old ground surface was found in Test Trench 3 to be only 1.6 to 2 feet below present surface (16.5 to 16.1 feet C.M.D.). Two bricks and a cobblestone which may have been part of an historic paving were found at the level of the old soil line, but there was no absolute evidence that they were so used.

No other important archeological evidence was recovered, and once again nineteenth century walls were found on the east side of the Court.

By a projection of the original ground levels as found

in the test trenches and a comparison with existing grades, we can see that whereas the ground level now slopes only about 2.2 feet in the 200 feet from Carpenters' Hall to Chestnut Street, it originally sloped about 9.2 feet over the same distance. There was also more slope from west to east in the early level than in the present paving.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The archeological investigation in Carpenters' Court proved the existence, location, and nature of the Carpenters' Company's 1770-71 privy and their 1811 cistern; provided information on eighteenth-century ground levels in Carpenters' Court; and indicated that early paving in the Court was brick or brick and cobblestone. Unfortunately, the location of the early wall was not determined, nor were we successful in delimiting the exact size and nature of early paving in the Court.

A collection of artifacts was recovered, mostly from the privy. The complete study, analysis, and cataloging of this collection must be postponed, but cursory examination has shown it rich in complete or nearly complete ceramic vessels, glassware, and bone and ivory articles of an amazing variety. It represents a sort of cross section, in miniature, of the articles used by tenants of Carpenters' Court for some 100 years. As such it is a valuable addition to the Independence National Historical Park archeological collection.

VI. NOTES

1. Schumacher, Paul J. F. "Archeological Data," Chapter IV, Section 4, Page 1, A Survey Report on New Hall in Carpenters' Court, November, 1956.
2. "Historic Grounds Report for Carpenters' Hall and Carpenters' Court in Independence National Historical Park," August, 1958, Chapter II, Section 3, Page 12, and Chapter IV, Section 1, Page 3.
3. Benjamin Loxley's Memorandum Book, John H. Dilks, Jr., Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
4. Account Book, January 18, 1771, Carpenters' Company Library.
5. Minutes of the Committee, 1792-1795, MSS, Carpenters' Company.
6. Managing Committee Rough Minutes, 1836-1857, MSS, Carpenters' Company. The privy in this instance was noted as being "in the rear of the Hall" which, I believe, refers to New Hall, that structure being occupied by the Carpenters' Company during the period in question.
7. Minutes of the Managing Committee, May 1, 1811, Carpenters' Company.
8. Managing Committee Rough Minutes, 1836-1857, MSS, Carpenters' Company. "[1/18/1840]... resolves that the Superintendent be authorized to have the Privy in the rear of the Hall cleaned and deepened in such a manner as to correct the foul smell arising from the same ...
"[2/26/1840] No. 8 in favor of Wm. Conatt for cash paid by him for cleanseing Privy & Sinking Well \$35.56."
9. Philadelphia City Directories, 1850-1855.
10. Yecman, R. S. A Guide Book of United States Coins, 9th edition, Racine, Wisconsin: Whitman Publishing Company, 1955, p. 86.
11. Philadelphia City Directories, 1846-1867. A contemporary print showing Roussel's establishment at 114 Chestnut Street appears on page 128 of Philadelphia in the Romantic Age of Lithography by Nicholas B. Wainwright (The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1958).
12. Philadelphia City Directories, 1850-1861.

13. Contributionship Resurvey of No. 10,457, November 12, 1861,
and April 13, 1899.
14. See Note 7, above.
15. Wardens Book, Carpenters' Company.
16. "Historic Grounds Report for Carpenters' Hall and Carpenters'
Court in Independence National Historical Park, "August,
1958, Chapter II, Section 3, Pages 2-3.
17. Carpenters' Company's Account with Benjamin Taylor, 7/12/1796,
in box of miscellaneous manuscripts, Carpenters' Company
Library. Quoted in report noted in No. 14, above.

VII. ILLUSTRATIONS

Note: The arrow seen in the photographs points north and is marked in one inch divisions.

Figure 1.

Vaulted roof of Feature 1 before removal.

The straight walls on the left and in the right middleground are remains of the 1833 privy and stairwell addition to New Hall. Looking northeast.

Figure 2.

Interior of Features 1 and 2 after excavation.

The large stone in the south wall of Feature 1 protruded through the brickwork. The masons apparently ~~worked~~ worked around it rather than try and remove it.

Figure 3.

Lowest courses of Feature 1 showing
header course set directly on hard
sand.

Figure 4.

Top of west wall seen from bottom of Feature 1. The remnant of corbeled roofing is believed to be a part of the original construction.

Figure 5.

Looking down into Feature 2 from
floor of Feature 1.

Figure 6.

Top of cistern, Feature 13, after cleaning. The arrow lies on top of concrete patch over a section removed to allow passage of modern utility lines. Water level can be seen in interior.

Figure 7.

Pieces of dressed stone beneath sidewalk in Test Trench 1. Rule lies behind a piece cut to receive pipe or post.

Figure 8

Arrow lies on top of old paving level
at a depth of 6 feet in Test Trench 1.

Figure 9.

**Nineteenth-century building remains
in east end of Test Trench 1.**

Figure 10.

Drawing. Plan of archeological excavations, Carpenters' Court area; and sections through Feature 1 and 2, east wall of Test Trench 1, and north walls of Test Trenches 2 and 3.