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REPORT ON TEST EXCAVATIONS AT THE QUAKER MEETING HOUSE, FLUSHING, QUEENS COUNTY, NEW YORK

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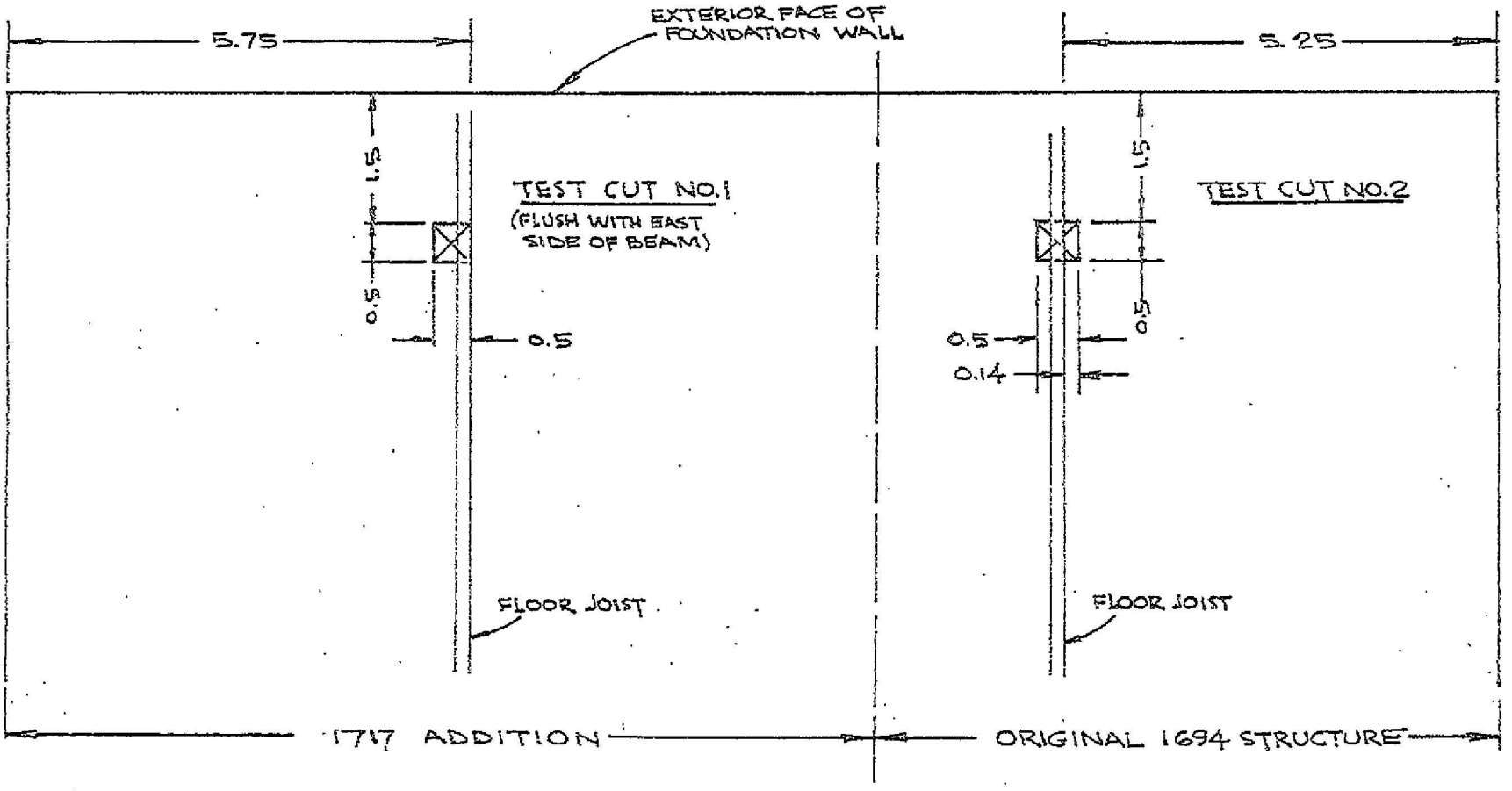
Report on Test Excavations at the Quaker Meeting House, Flushing, Queens County, New York

The Quaker Meeting House, located on the south side of Northern Boulevard in Flushing, is a National Historic Landmark (National Register 1976:5991). It is thought to be the oldest church on Long Island and may be the oldest church in New York (Prudon 1976:2).

The Meeting House was built as a place of worship in 1694 by the Religious Society of Friends. With the exception of a short period of time during the Revolutionary War, it has functioned as a place of worship to the present time. During the Revolution, the British occupied the Meeting House and used it as a hospital, barracks and storage area for hay (Prudon 1976:4).

On September 30, 1976, a short archaeological reconnaisance was made in connection with proposed stabilization work, funded by the Society of Friends and by a matching grant - in - aid from the National Park Service. This work was done at the request of the New York State Division for Historic Preservation which administers the National Park Service grant - in - aid program in New York. The volunteer archaeological crew from New York University and the New York State Division for Historic Preservation was headed by Professor Bert Salwen of N.Y.U. and Sarah Bridges of D.H.P. The crew members were Kathy Ataman, Wendy Harris, Susan Mayer, Philip Perazio, Diana Rockman and Karen Zukerman.



LOCATIONS OF TEST EXCAVATIONS
QUAKER MEETING HOUSE, FLUSHING, QUEENS

FIGURE 1.

The archaeological tests were designed to determine the nature of the surface below the Meeting House floor, and, if necessary, to provide data on which to base plans for additional salvage excavation, at locations which were to be disturbed by shallow excavations for the installation of a series of concrete pads. These pads were to be footings for support posts to brace the floor joists. The planned repair work called for two-foot-square and eight-inch-deep excavations for the concrete pads. These excavations were to be centered under the joists and located two feet south of the inside of the north wall of the structure (Tony Vermey, personal communication).

Two test cuts were opened during this one day field session. In order to minimize subsurface disturbance to this National Historic Landmark property, it was decided to place the test cuts only at places where the excavations for the concrete pads were to be made. Because the present structure was constructed in two phases, one cut was placed under the original, eastern, portion of the building, built in 1694, and the other under the 1717 extension (Prudon 1976:5,6).

The test cuts were half-meter-square units. All of the material was excavated with trowel and dustpan, and screened through 1/4" mesh. The tests were located 1 1/2 meters south of the outside of the north wall of the building. These excavations in the crawl space are described below and their locations are shown in Figure 1. The specimens are listed by provenience and briefly described in Appendix A.

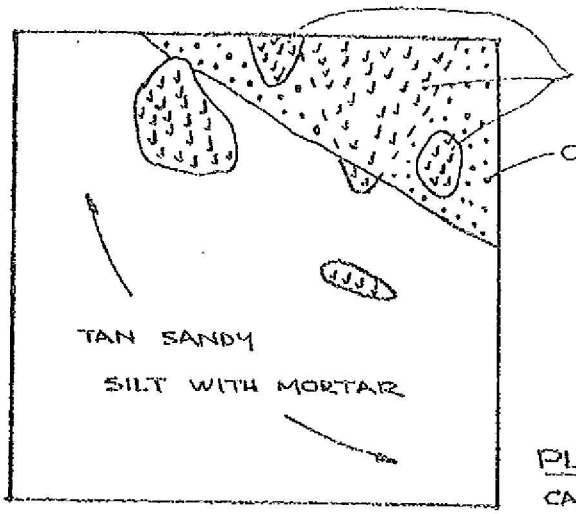
Test Excavation No. 1

The first test cut was located under one of the joists of the 1717 extension of the building. It was centered approximately 5.5 meters east of the northwest corner of the Meeting House, with its north side 1.5 meters south of the exterior face of the north wall (see Fig. 1). At this point, the vertical distance from the bottom of the Meeting House floor to the present ground surface was 0.78 meters.

The surface of the crawl space in this area was covered with light tan sandy silt mixed with mortar and pebbles. This light tan sandy silt extended down about 4 cm. The northwest corner of the cut contained a lens of coarse orange sandy silt about 4 cm. thick. Below this was a 3-cm.-thick tan sandy silt layer with heavy mortar mottling. This was underlain by a 7-cm.-thick layer of brown sandy silt. Below this was a 7-to-10-cm.-thick stratum composed of fine orange-brown sand with yellow and black mottling, and this overlay a 5-to-7-cm.-thick brown silty stratum. Below the brown silt, sterile tan sandy silt was encountered (see Fig. 2).

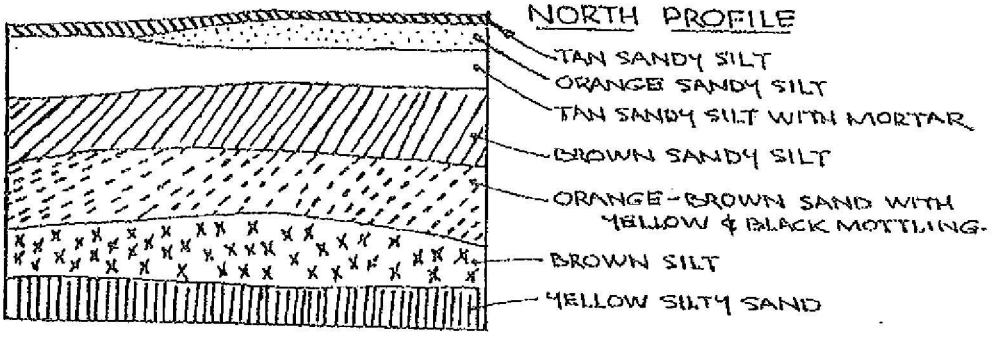
As shown in Appendix A, the cultural material from this cut consisted primarily of building material, including plaster, mortar, nails, brick fragments and window glass. The series of layers probably represents fill deposited at the time of building construction or during subsequent repair or remodling episodes.

The few datable specimens encountered include a piece of creamware recovered from the surface. It was probably manufactured during the period from 1750-1820 (South 1971:opposite p. 85).



PLAN VIEW
CA. 5CM. BELOW SURFACE

TEST CUT NO. 1



TEST CUT NO. 2

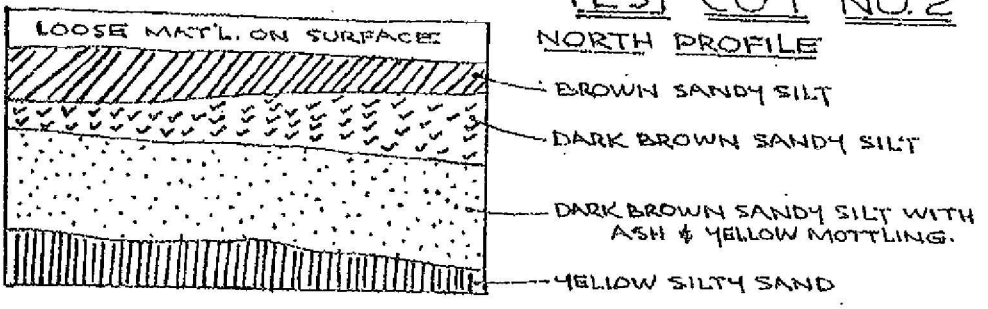


FIGURE 2.

A pewter button found in the tan sandy silt was cast in a mold before 1790 and is the type usually found in Revolutionary War contexts. It is a plain Quaker style button (Paul Huey, personal communication). It was found close to the present surface of the crawl space and could easily have been lost through the floor boards of the Meeting House.

A brass(?) cufflink with an engraved thistle decoration, which probably dates from pre-Revolutionary times (Paul Huey, personal communication), was found in the tan sandy silt with mortar stratum. A yellowware sherd from the same stratum was probably manufactured in the period between 1670 and 1750 (Salwen, Bridges and Klein 1974:36). The stratum in which these artifacts were deposited may have been associated with the building of the 1717 addition to the Meeting House. These artifacts may have been left behind by workmen, although the cufflink may have slipped through a crack in the Meeting House floor after the building was completed. This stratum overlay a stratum of brown sandy silt which appeared in both cuts and which seems to have been associated with the construction of the 1694 portion of the Meeting House. It contained most of the mortar and plaster found in Test Excavation No. 1. Except for these mortar and plaster fragments this layer and those below it yielded little cultural material (see Appendix A). A single piece of delft, manufactured in the seventeenth or eighteenth century (South 1971: opposite p. 85), was recovered from the brown silty earth. It may have been deposited prior to building construction, or

at the time of, the construction of the original 1694 structure. The scarcity of material in these lower strata implies that there was little activity in this area prior to the construction of the Meeting House.

Test Excavation No. 2

The second half-meter-square test cut was located under the 1694 portion of the Quaker Meeting House. It was centered about 5.3 meters west of the northeast corner of the building and its north side was 1.5 meters south of the exterior face of the north wall (see Fig. 1). The vertical distance from the bottom of the Meeting House floor to the ground surface at this point was 1.07 meters.

The ground surface in this part of the crawl space was very loose and dry, and contained almost all of the mortar and plaster found in this cut (see Appendix A). The uppermost stratum consisted of brown sandy silt which resembled the third stratum encountered in Test Excavation No. 1 (see Fig. 2) and was approximately 9 cm. thick. This was underlain by a 3 cm.-thick stratum of dark brown sandy silt. he stratum below consisted of dark brown sandy silt with yellow mottling, wood ash and wood charcoal, and was 8 cm. thick. Under this the same sterile tan silty earth uncovered in Test Cut No. 1 was encountered. For details on the stratigraphy see Figure 2.

As shown in Appendix A, very little cultural material

was found in this cut and none of it was datable. Most of the specimens consisted of construction debris, including nails, mortar, plaster and window glass. Almost all of the mortar and plaster (325.1 of the total 325.8 grams) was recovered from the loose surface material. The brown sandy silt stratum and the underlying strata were probably associated with the building of the original Meeting House structure. In any case the paucity of material from these strata indicates that this area was not intensively used prior to the construction of the Meeting House.

It should be noted that the brown sandy silt stratum in Test Cut No. 1 was the third stratum below the surface, while it was the first stratum encountered in Test Cut No. 2. Test Cut No. 1 contained 855.4 grams of mortar and plaster while Test Cut No. 2 contained only 325.8 grams of mortar and plaster, most of which came from the loose surface material. The total number of specimens recovered from Test Cut No. 1, 156, is much greater than the 32 specimens uncovered in Test Cut No. 2 (see Appendix A).

Surface Material

Also listed in Appendix A are materials found on the surface of the crawl space, as well as one piece of pearlware found on the surface outside of the Meeting House. The datable items all post date the construction of both portions of the Meeting House (see Appendix A) and may have been left there

any time after the Meeting House was built. This deposit probably accumulated during the normal course of use of the Meeting House. Small items may have been lost through the floor boards and larger ones discarded underneath the structure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The major part of the thin cultural deposit encountered in the archaeological test of the crawl space of the Quaker Meeting House seems to date from the two episodes of construction of the building. There is little evidence for use of the area prior to that construction and some evidence of debris which accumulated after construction was completed. Because of the sparse amount of material recovered, it is believed that no further archaeological testing of the area is needed. Excavation for the remaining concrete footing pads should not damage cultural resources protected by the National Historic Landmark designation.

APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SPECIMENS

Stratum	Cat.No.	Specimens	Prob. Date	Quantity	
		TEST EXCAVATION NO.1			
Surface	3	Metal:			
		Iron nail		1	
		Iron fragment		1	
		Ceramics:			
		Creamware sherd (more of vessel-Cat.No. 1)	1790-1820	1	
		Red brick fragments		27	
		Glass:			
		Bottle fragments- Dark green		4	
		Window glass fragments- Patinated		10	
		Clear glass fragment		1	
		Miscellaneous:			
		Leather strap with buckle holes		1	
		Coal fragment		1	4.7 gm.
		Mortar and plaster			220.6 gm.
		Food remains:			
		Peach pit		1	
		Oyster shell (weighed & discarded)		3	6.4 gm.
		Hard shell clam shell (weighed & discarded)		2	25.1 gm.
				53	
Tan sandy silt	5	Metal:			
		Iron fragments		3	
		Pewter button- plain with beaded edge	pre-1790	1	
		Ceramics:			
		Red brick fragments		10	
		Glass:			
		Bottle fragment- Dark green		1	
		Window glass- Patinated		12	
		Window glass- Pale green		2	
		Miscellaneous:			
		Coal fragments		4	1122 gm.
		Mortar and plaster			313.0 gm.
		Food remains:			
		Oyster shell (weighed & discarded)		5	0.9 gm.
		Hard shell clam shell (weighed & discarded)		1	13.7 gm.
				39	

Stratum	Cat.No.	Specimens	Prob. Date	Quantity	
		TEST EXCAVATION NO.1 (continued)			
Orange sandy silt	7	Metal:			
		Iron nail- wrought		1	
		Ceramics:			
		Red brick fragments		2	
		Miscellaneous:			
		Coal fragments		4	4.0 gm.
		Mortar and plaster			3.3 gm.
		Food remains:			
		Oyster shell (weighed & discarded)		2	4.3 gm.
				9	
Tan sandy silt with mortar	8	Metal:			
		Iron spike fragments		2	
		Iron fragments- rusted		2	
		Brass(?) cufflink- engraved thistle	pre.-Rev.	1	
		Ceramics:			
		Yellowware sherd- pie crust edge	1670-1750	1	
		Red brick fragment		1	
		Glass:			
		Bottle(?) fragments- Green		2	
		Window glass fragments- Patinated		23	
		Container fragment- thin, clear		1	
		Miscellaneous:			
		Coal fragments		10	22.8 gm.
		Fragments unknown burned material		3	
		Mortar and plaster			301.7 gm.
		Food remains:			
		Mammal bone fragment		1	
		Peach pit fragment		1	
				48	
Brown sandy silt	10	Metal:			
		Iron nail fragment		1	
		Ceramics:			
		Red brick fragment		1	
		Glass:			
		Window glass fragment- Patinated		1	
		Miscellaneous:			
		Coal fragment		1	0.7 gm.
		Mortar and plaster			16.3 gm.
				4	

Stratum	Cat.No.	Specimens	Prob. Date	Quantity
		TEST EXCAVATION NO.1 (continued)		
Orange brown sand with yellow & black mottling	12	Glass:		
		Window glass fragment- Patinated		1
		Window glass fragment- Green		1
		Mortar and plaster		0.5
				2
Brown silt	13	Ceramics:		
		Delft sherd	1600-1802	1
				1
Yellow silty sand	15	No specimens		0
				0
		TOTAL-TEST EXCAVATION NO.1 -156		
		TEST EXCAVATION NO.2		
Surface	4	Metal:		
		Iron nail fragment		1
		Ceramics:		
		Red brick fragments		2
		Glass:		
		Bottle fragment- Light olive		1
		Miscellaneous:		
		Shoe sole fragment		1
		Wood fragments		2
		Mortar and plaster		325.1 gm.
		Food remains:		
		Large mammal bone fragment		1
				8
Brown	6	Metal:		
		Iron nail(?)		1
		Iron sheet fragment		1
		Ceramics:		
		Red brick fragments		3
		Glass:		
		Bottle neck- green, molded		1
		Miscellaneous:		
		Wood charcoal		1 0.03 gm.

Stratum	Cat.No.	Specimens	Prob. Date	Quantity	
		TEST EXCAVATION NO.2 (continued)			
Surface (cont'd)	6	Mortar and plaster			8.7 gm.
		Food remains:			
		Oyster shell (weighed & discarded)		1/8	1.1 gm.
Dark brown sandy silt	9	Metal:			
		Iron nail fragments		5	
		Ceramics:			
		Red brick fragment		1	
		Glass:			
		Wine bottle fragment-Green, patinated		1	
		Window glass fragment-Green		1	
		Food remains:			
		Oyster shell (weighed & discarded)		2/10	2.5 gm.
Dark brown sandy silt with ash	11	Metal:			
		Iron nail fragments		2	
		Miscellaneous:			
		Wood charcoal		1	1.8 gm.
		Food remains:			
		Oyster shell (weighed & discarded)		2/5	1.0 gm.
Yellow silty sand	14	Miscellaneous:			
		Wood charcoal		1/1	0.5 gm.
		TOTAL-TEST EXCAVATION NO.2 -32			
		CRAWL SPACE SURFACE			
	1	Metal:			
		Iron sickle blade	19th. c.	1	
		Iron spike- 17cm. long, spoon tip		1	
		Iron nails- wrought		2	
		Iron nail- machine cut	1870-present	1	
		Iron nail fragment		1	
		Iron screw		1	

Stratum	Cat.No.	Specimens	Prob. Date	Quantity	
		CRAWL SPACE SURFACE (continued)			
	1	Ceramics:			
		Earthenware sherd- red, lead glaze, slip decoration	18th c.	1	
		Creamware sherd- bowl base, knurled decoration around foot	1750-1820	1	
		Pearlware sherds- faether edge, green	1790-1810	2	
		Pearlware sherd- hand painted, under glaze blue, imitation Chinese porcelain	1780's	1	
		Red brick fragments		3	
		Glass:			
		Wine bottle fragments- thick, dark green		5	
		Wine bottle neck and lip- dark green, lip tooled over string	1780-1790's	1	
		Window glass- pale green		3	
		Container fragment- thin, clear		1	
		Miscellaneous:			
		Shoe bottom- straight last, laces, iron nails, wooden pegs	1812-1860*	1	
		Shoe fragment- same shoe as above	1812-1860	1	
		Leather strap		1	
		Mortar and plaster			8.8 gm.
		Food Remains:			
		Pelvic fragment- large mammal		1	
		Tooth fragment- mammal		1	
		Vertebra- bird		1	
		Oyster shell (weighed & discarded)		3	20.0 gm.
		TOTAL-SURFACE OF CRAWL SPACE-34			
		SURFACE OUTSIDE OF STRUCTURE			
	2	Ceramics:			
		Pearlware- transfer print	1795-1840	1	
		TOTAL-SURFACE OUTSIDE OF STRUCTURE -1			
		TOTAL-ALL SPECIMENS -223			

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