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Bankoff

NCEGR

BROOKLYN COLLEGE
SUMMER ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SCHOOL

EXCAVATIONS AT THE
CHRISTIAN DURYEA HOUSE , Brooklyn, N. Y.
1986

562 Jerome St

[former LP - 1023] B 4077 L 31

Demolished (date heard
11-14-78)

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Frederick A. Winter
April 14, 1988

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Introduction

The following report presents the results of archaeological trial excavations conducted between June 19 and July 14, 1986 at the Christian Duryea House in the East New York section of Brooklyn. This field work formed one component in the Brooklyn College Summer Archaeological Field School directed by Profs. H. A. Bankoff of the college's Department of Anthropology and Archaeology and F. A. Winter of the Department of Classics¹. The project was proposed to Brooklyn College by the New York Landmarks Conservancy, as part of their efforts to maintain and restore the historic Christian Duryea House.²

The house is named after Christian Duryea (1751-1830), an early leader of the settlement of New Lots, and the descendent of seventeenth-century French Huguenot immigrants to New York (Tabachnick 1986:2, 7-11). Although tradition associates Duryea with the house, it is not known from the historical sources whether he actually built it, although he is listed in 1787 as one of the co-owners of the lot on which the house stands.

¹ Student participants in the field project were S. Adler, J. Campbell, D. Clifford, S. Goldberg, S. Goldsmith, S. Pruzhansky, E. Rundquist-Porter, E. Rosenberg, A. Smith, and M. Stanton.

²We acknowledge with thanks the early interest and continuing support of Dr. Sherene Baugher, Urban Archaeologist with the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. Our chief liaison for the project was Mr. Wesley Haynes, former Director of the Technical Services Section of the New York Landmarks Conservancy.

The Duryea House provides a rare example of a well-preserved later Colonial or early Federal farmhouse within New York City. Detailed examination of the architectural remains (Tabachnick 1986) had previously demonstrated that the house was built in three constructional phases. The original two-story house is preserved today as the eastern half of the main house structure. This was doubled in size, probably not long after its initial construction. A small single-story western wing was added to the building at a later date. Persistent neighborhood traditions have it that the house was moved to its present location at 562 Jerome Street some time after its construction (Tabachnick 1986:3).

Thus, one of the primary goals of the excavation was to determine the dates of construction of the various segments of the house and to investigate the possibility that the house had been moved. Secondary foci of the project included attempts to locate outbuildings that would have served the Duryea farm (Figs. 1 - 3) and to establish collections of artifactual materials that could be used for local exhibitions of historical and archaeological significance.

Field Methods

The excavation trenches were positioned in hopes of recovering data relating to the early history of the Duryea House with its surrounding landscape and outbuildings. To this end, the location of the trenches was determined by the available historical data and the concerns for recovering data relevant to the architectural history of the site, rather than by any probabilistic sampling strategy. A total of 22 trenches were excavated, all but three down to the natural subsoil level. Additionally, fifteen shovel tests were conducted along the northeastern and north-central borders of the property in an attempt to locate outbuildings and areas of significant archaeological deposits. These shovel tests were placed at two-meter intervals and were used as a guide to the location of some of the subsequent excavation trenches. Two additional shovel tests were excavated in the crawlspace under the central portion of the house. These indicated that further excavation in this area would not be profitable.

Excavations were conducted using hand picks, trowels, and digging spades. All soil was sifted through quarter-inch mesh screens and all cultural materials thus recovered were returned to the archaeology laboratory of the Brooklyn College Archaeological Research Center for cleaning and analysis.

Digging crews consisted of teams made up of four or five undergraduate students. Since this was a first excavation for all of the students, faculty supervisors maintained a constant presence on site.

Excavation Results

Trenches: Trenches were of varying size (see attached plan). With three exceptions (trenches 7, 21, and 22), all trenches were excavated to sterile soil, which at this site consisted of a reddish-brown sandy soil, often with pebble inclusions. This soil is characteristic of the glacial outwash soils underlying the southern tier of Brooklyn and Long Island.

Trenches around the house: Ten trenches were dug directly adjacent to the house, exploring details of the foundation (trenches 1, 2, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 20, 21, 22). Five of these were located on the easternmost section of the house along the deep foundations of the basement. Two were located along the central portion of the building, two more were positioned on the junction between the central and the westernmost segments of the house, and the final trench was located along the northern side of the westernmost house extension.

The trenches located around the eastern segment of the house (trenches 1, 2, 9, 10, 21) exposed the exterior of a substantial house basement foundation constructed of large river cobbles bonded with minimal quantities of mortar. At the southeast corner of the building, the excavation of Trench 1 revealed that the foundation wall was thickened to provide extra reinforcement

for the corner (Fig. 4). The foundation trench was dug to approximately 1.5 meters below the surface. It was filled with slightly softer soil that was otherwise (i.e. in color and earth type) indistinguishable from the surrounding sterile sub-soil, and extended irregularly out from the wall. Ceramics from this trench included eighteenth-century slipped wares and late eighteenth- to early nineteenth-century shell-edged white wares, as well as fragments of stoneware (Fig. 5). Bivalve shells were also recovered from the foundation trench. These were especially common in Trench 2 on the northern side of the building.

Trenches 1 and 9 exposed a former cellar entrance on the south side of the house, blocked and filled with stone walling (Fig. 6). This entrance was closed prior to the construction of the present front steps and the slate path that leads from Jerome Street to the house's current entrance. Only limited traces of the steps leading down to the basement were preserved. On the north side of the house, trenches 2 and 8 investigated the exposed (current) basement entrance. The brick-lined modern basement entrance was found to be backed by cobble flanking walls similar to those on the south (Fig. 7).

Slate flagstone pathways led from Jerome Street along the south and east sides of the house, while a path of irregular large cobbles led along the eastern portion of the north side (Fig. 8). This cobble pathway did not continue west of the house's current

basement steps. On the south side of the house the flagstones were underlain by a bedding of slate chips. These, in turn, overlay an earlier walkway of cinders and coal clinkers.

Trenches along the central and western portions of the house (trenches 6, 8, 12, 20, 22) revealed considerably shallower foundations (Fig. 9). In trench 12, later nineteenth- to early twentieth-century white wares were recovered wedged under the foundation stones of the westernmost extension of the house (Fig. 10). Trench 22 showed that the shed-like entrance that extends north of the building had shallower foundations than the central portion of the house, and was presumably a subsequent addition to the building. Trench 8, situated between the basement entrance and the shed-like extension on the house's north, exposed a brick- and cobble-lined access shaft to the house's main sewer drain (early twentieth century?) (Fig. 11). This access shaft was filled with modern glass, predominantly half-pint liquor bottles. The cinderblock steps leading into the house's north entrance overlay and thus post-date this feature.

Trenches in the lot area: Trench 3 investigated the rectangular brick feature in the northeastern corner of the lot, thought to be a well by Tabachnick (1986:27). This feature proved to be an access shaft to the house's main sewer line. Modern rubbish filled the shaft. Below the level of the sewer pipes and the

brick shaft, sterile sand was excavated to a depth of more than 3 meters below the modern ground surface.

Trenches 4, 5, 7, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 were dug to determine the possible location of outbuildings or refuse dumps. No traces of outbuildings were found. Refuse pits from the twentieth century were found in trenches 5, 11, and 13. Trench 17 and, to a lesser extent, 19 produced a scatter of early nineteenth-century materials, most in very fragmentary condition. Trenches 11, 16, and 18 revealed a layer of fill overlying an earlier-twentieth-century humus layer. This fill episode indicates a fairly recent (mid-twentieth-century) effort to level the southern part of the house lot. Trench 7 uncovered masses of contemporary building rubble dating from the demolition of the buildings that previously stood on the lots to the west of the house site. The depth of the rubble in this trench suggests that the area was cut down below ground levels when these buildings were constructed, thus removing traces of earlier features and outbuildings. Trench 4 exposed segments of a cobble paving. This paving was interrupted in the central part of the trench, where it had presumably been cut by the installation of water pipes and sewer drains in the early twentieth century. Such pipes were found in trench 12, where they entered under the foundation of the westernmost extension of the house.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are based on an analysis of the features and artifacts from the excavations. Most of the artifacts were relatively non-diagnostic small potsherds and pieces of glass, although an assemblage of nineteenth-century clay smoking pipe stems and bowls (Figs. 12, 13), dice, and marbles was entirely consonant with the domestic aspect of the site. The primary goal of archaeologically confirming the constructional phases of the house relies on the dates given by the artifactual assemblage associated with the foundation trenches.

The foundations of the easternmost segment of the house date ca. 1780-1800, as determined by ceramics from the foundation trenches. The foundations for the westernmost segment of the house were laid after ca. 1875.

Trench 2, located on the north side of the older, east wing of the house, produced pottery from the builders' trench adjacent to the deep Duryea House basement, indicating that this segment of the house was constructed sometime around or slightly before the year 1800 (Fig. 5). The gray stoneware sherds from the trench, although fragmentary, undecorated and therefore not precisely datable, would be compatible with a date in the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. The two English slipped ware sherds

are of types that were produced in the middle and third quarter of the eighteenth century; the broader stripes on the larger fragment suggest a date close to the time, ca. 1770, when this Staffordshire pottery stopped being imported to the American colonies (Hume 1982:134f and fig. 29). The small fragment of English blue decorated Shell-edged Pearlware is of a type that began to be produced in quantity during the 1780's (Hume 1982:128 and figs. 35 and 46). These pieces thus provide a terminus post quem for the filling of the building's foundation trench.

The basement foundations of the easternmost segment of the house are sufficiently substantial as to suggest that the house is in its original location. Persistent tradition of the house having been moved may refer to the western extension of the original structure, the south facade of which would be compatible with an independent structure. It is this segment which may have been moved and appended onto the already existing building. A detail of a ca. 1875 painting shows this southern extension to the western addition to have had steps leading to a separate entrance which no longer exists (Fig. 14).

The presence of twentieth-century dumps and the absence of refuse dumps from the earlier periods of the house's occupation indicate a change in the pattern of domestic refuse disposal over the years. It is likely that the refuse dumps of the earlier periods of occupation lay outside the boundaries of the present-day house

lot. All of the refuse dumps located in the immediate vicinity of the house date to after 1887, the time when the farm was broken up into smaller lots and sold piecemeal (Tabachnick 1986:54). Perhaps as the surrounding lots were developed and the free space around the house was reduced, dumping and disposal were conducted closer to the house itself.

Remains of the outbuildings shown in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century views of the site were not located in any of the trenches or the shovel tests. As the scale and perspective of these illustrations are suspect, it is quite likely that the barn and larger structures were destroyed by the construction of the row houses (now demolished) to the west of the present house lot in 1914, while the privy and shed(s) to the north were most probably destroyed in the construction of the adjacent apartment building. It is barely conceivable that the site of the privy might be preserved within the confines of the present lot, but currently covered by a surface dump of heavy sewer conduit, and therefore unexcavatable at this time.

The house has undergone extensive remodelling, including a relocation of the basement entrance from the south to the north. The north cellar entrance underwent at least one modification. Excavation (trench 10) did not reveal traces of the door that is shown on the east side of the house in nineteenth-century engravings of the building, nor of any outdoor cooking area.

Works cited

Hume, I. N.

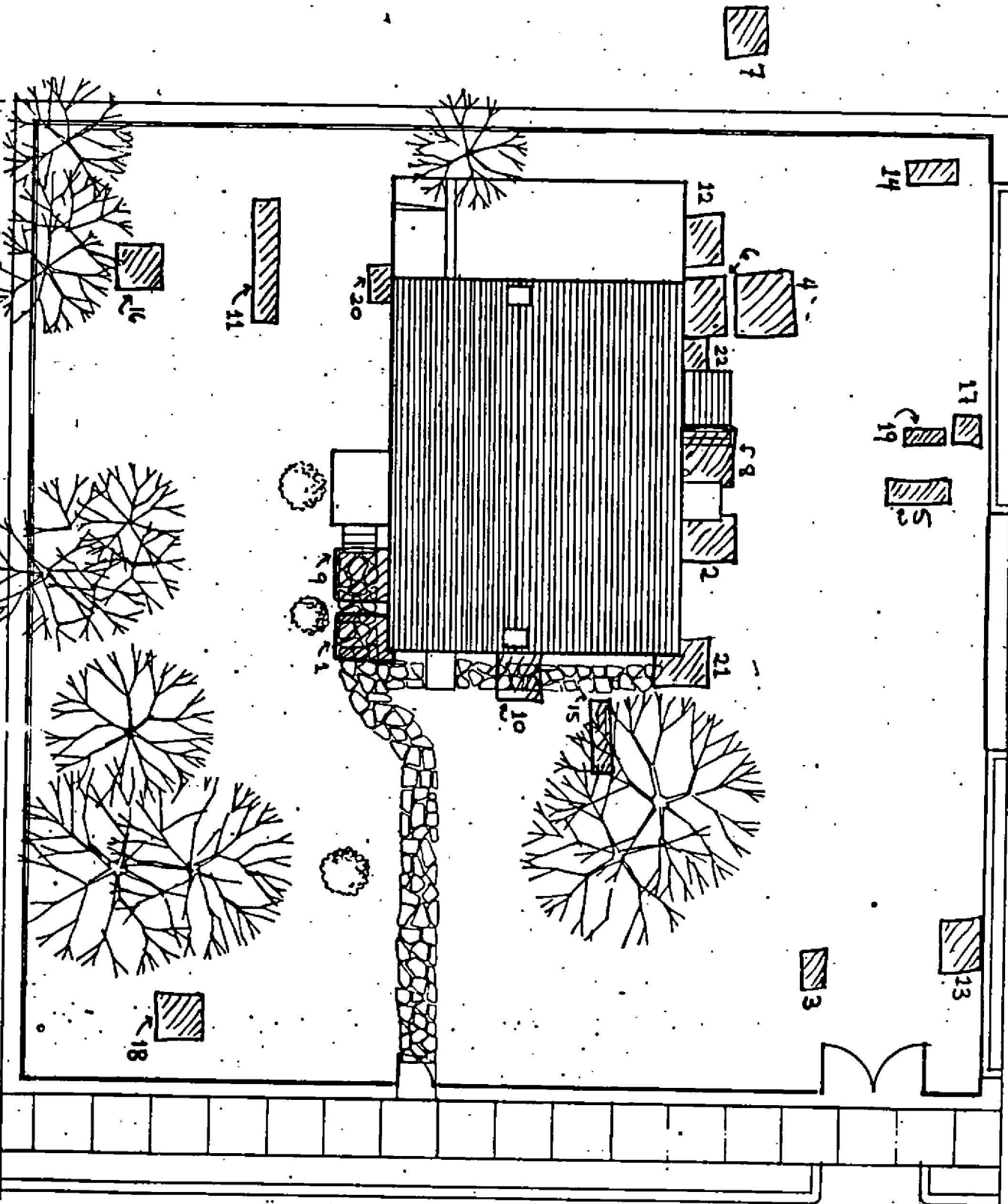
1982 A Guide to the Artifacts of Colonial America. New York:Knopf.

Tabachnick, A.

1986 The Christian Duryea House, Brooklyn, New York: A Historical and Archaeological Investigation. New York:New York Landmarks Conservancy, Technical Preservation Services Center.

SITE PLAN

Scale 1" = 10' - 0"



JEROME STREET

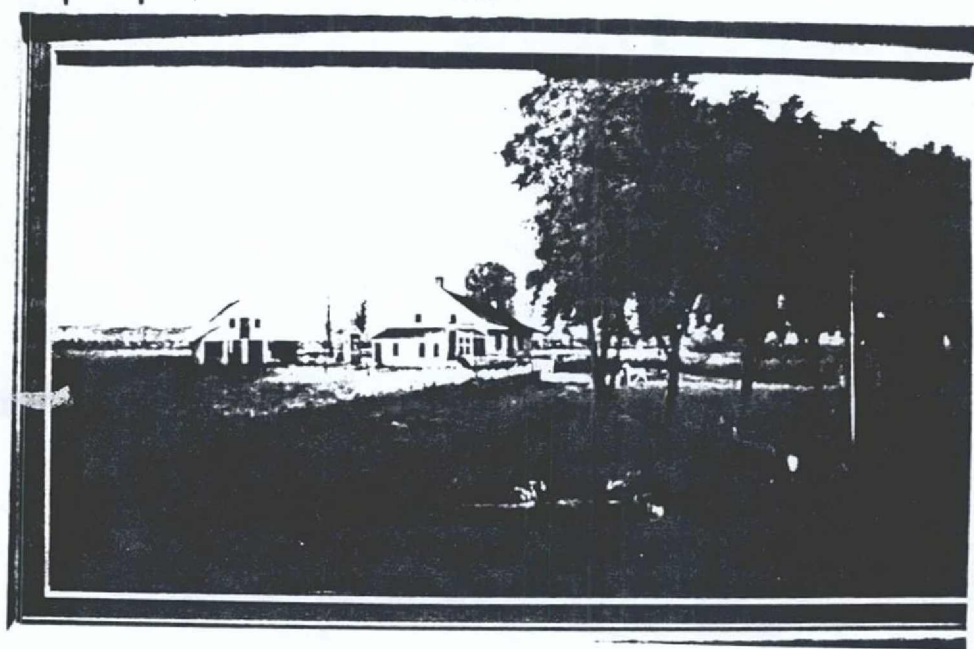


Fig. 1: Painting of Christian Duryea farm, ca. 1875. (owned by descendents of the family)



Fig. 2: Duryea house from the southeast (ca. 1915).

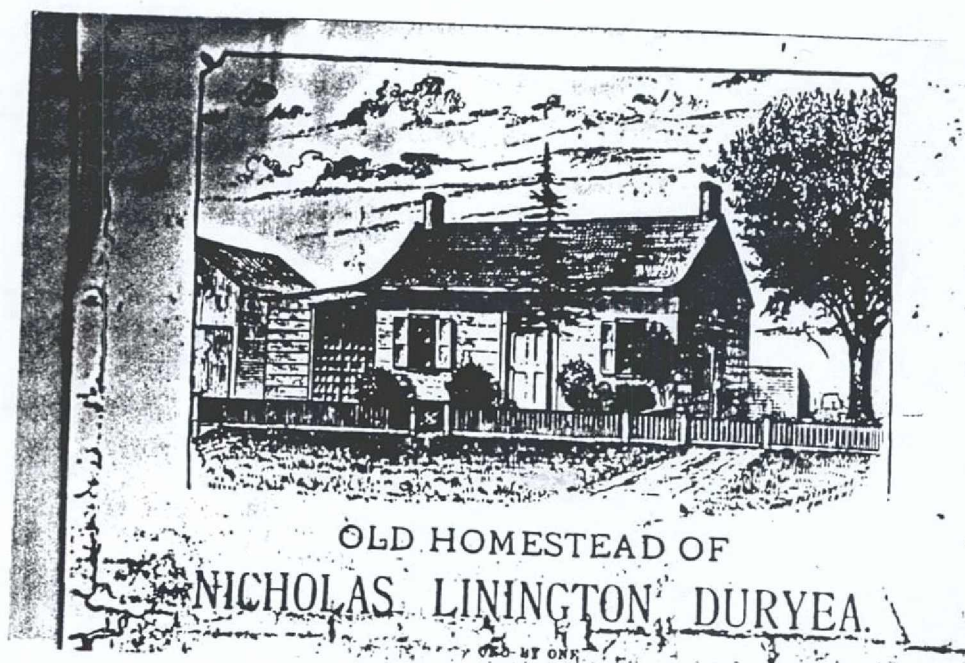


Fig. 3: From the handbill announcing the sale of the Duryea house and farm (1887).

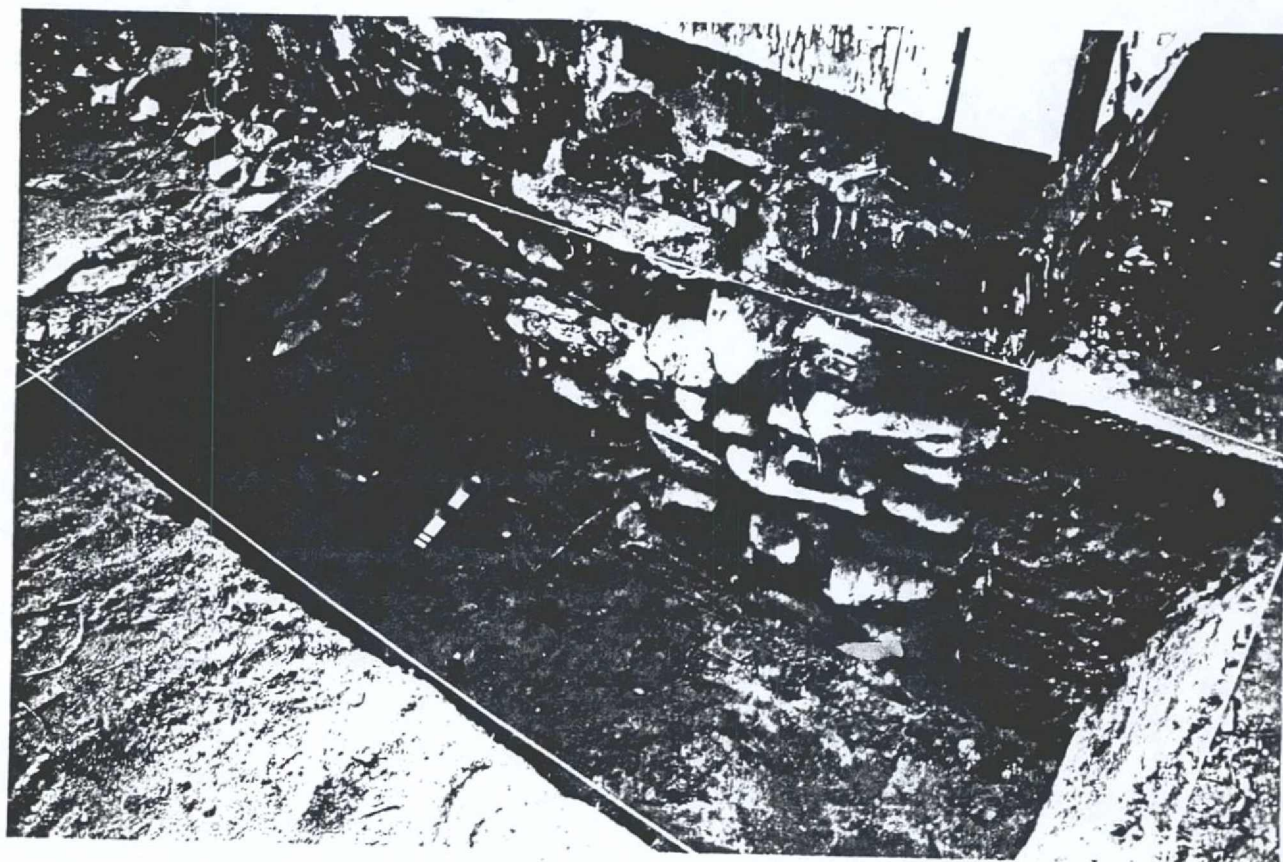


Fig. 4: Trench 1, showing thickened foundation at corner.



Fig. 5: Sherds from the foundation trench

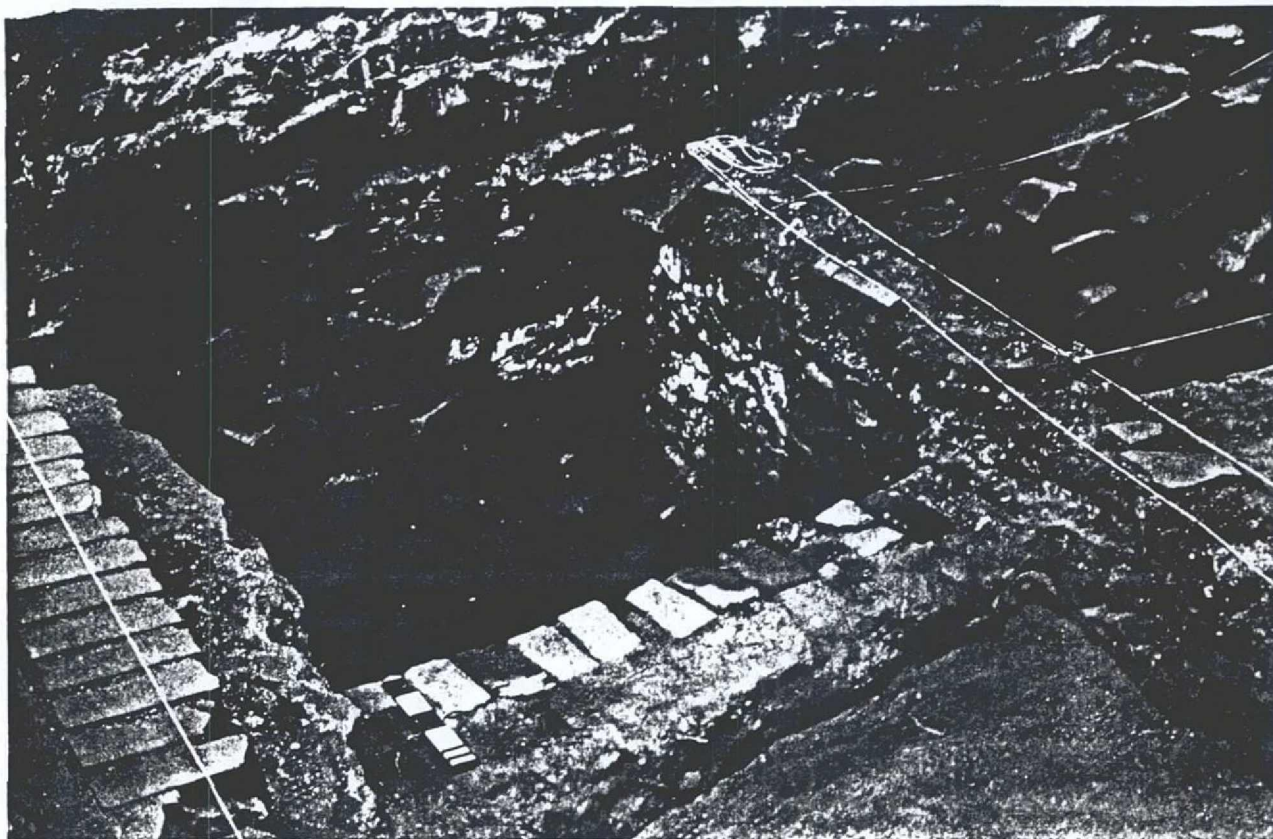


Fig. 6: Trenches 1 and 9 showing former basement entrance.

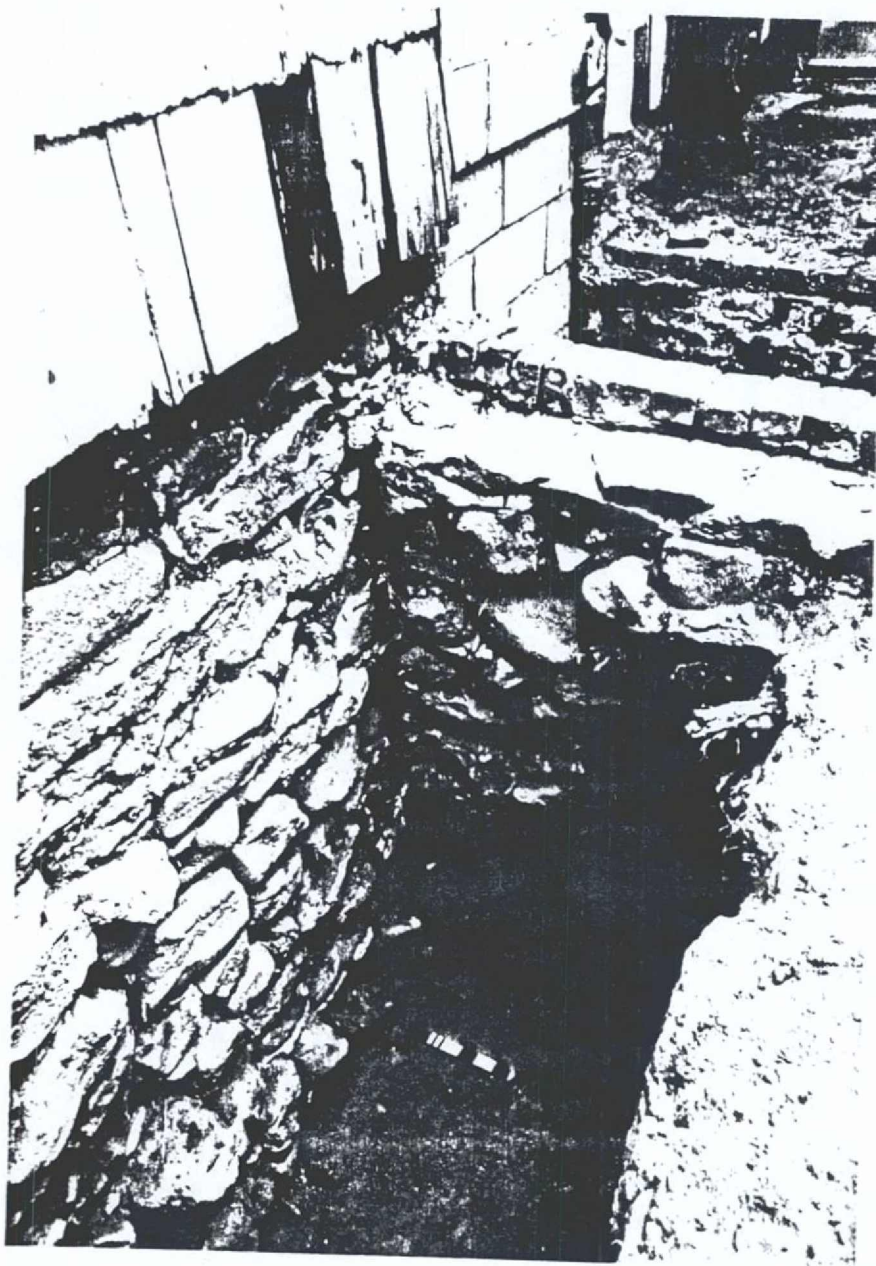


Fig. 7: Foundation and basement entrance on north (Trench 2).

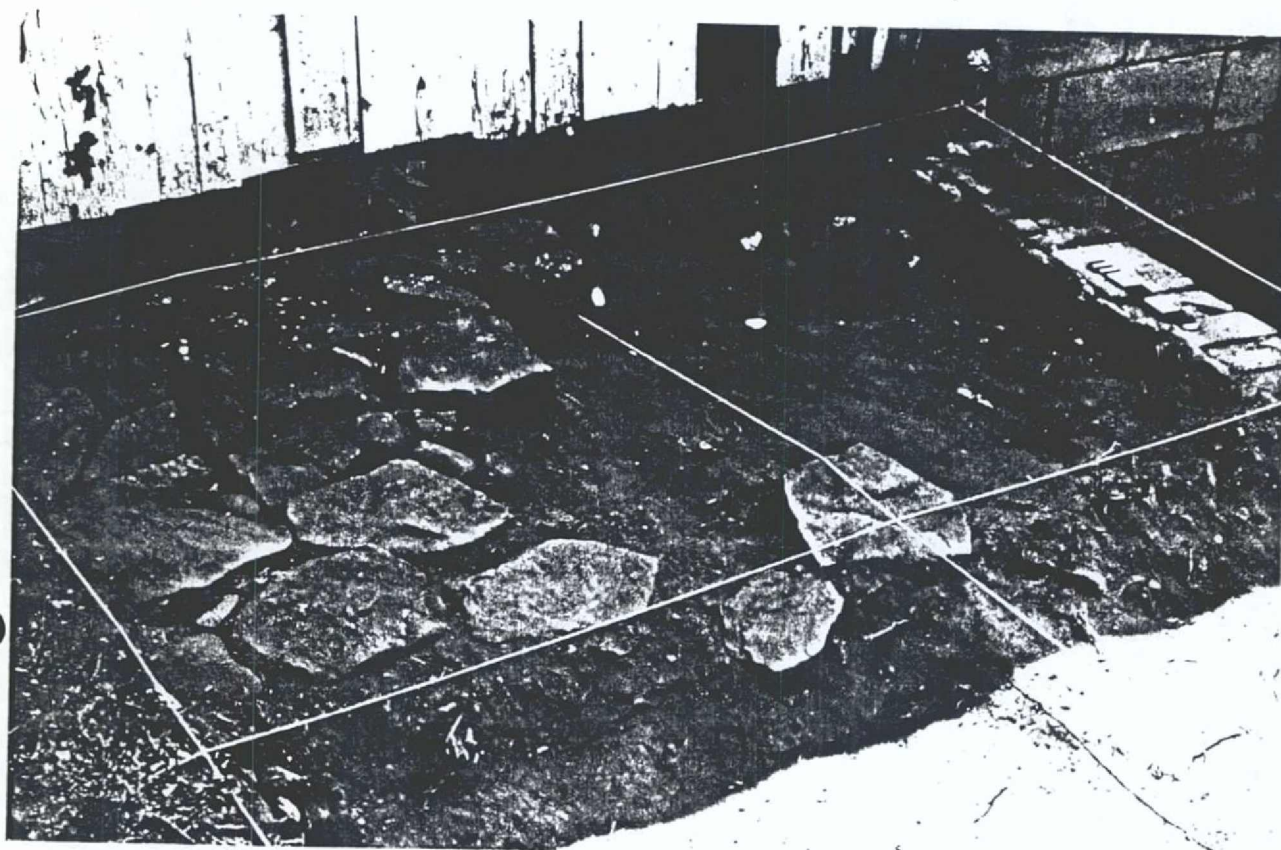


Fig. 8: Cobble paving on north side of house (Trench 2).



Fig. 9: Trench 6, showing shallower foundations of central portion of the house.

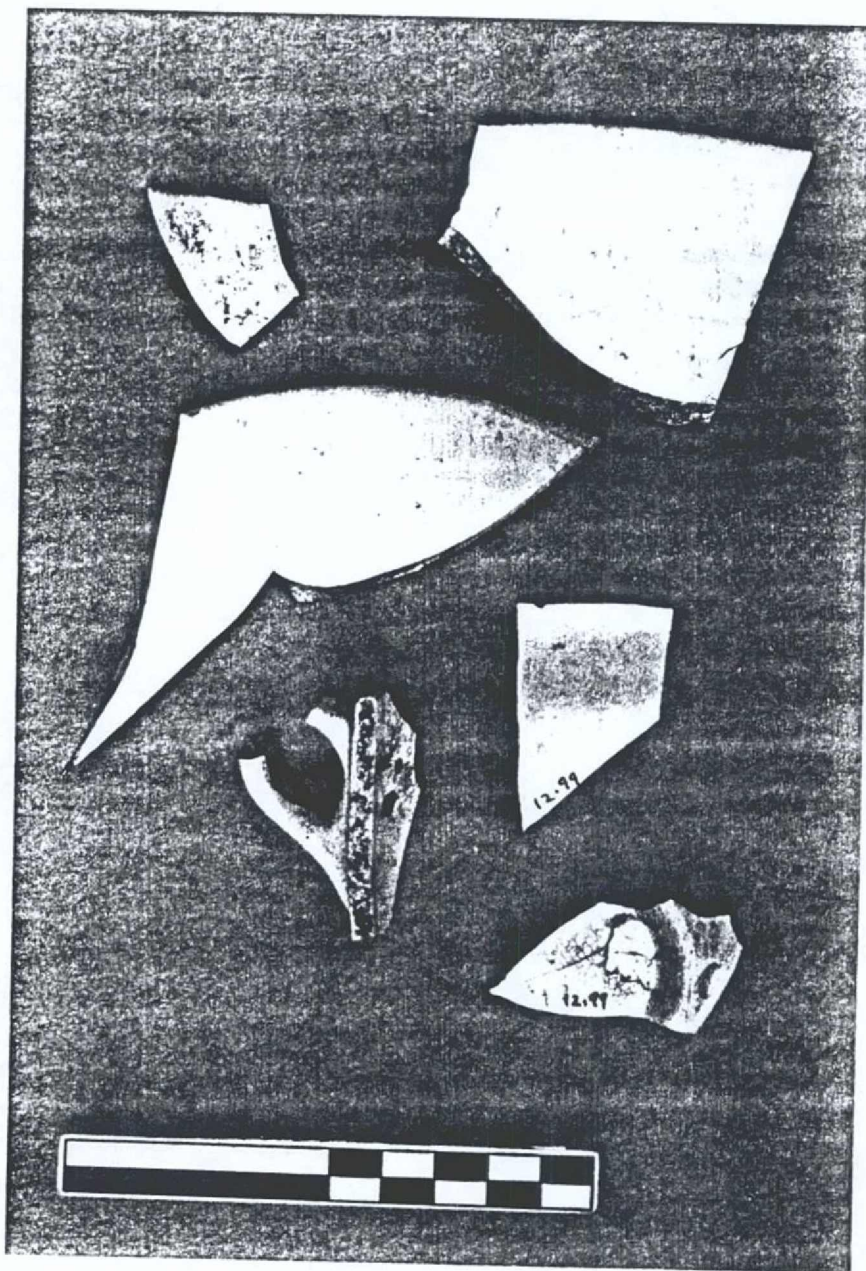


Fig. 10: Nineteenth-century white wares from Trench 12.

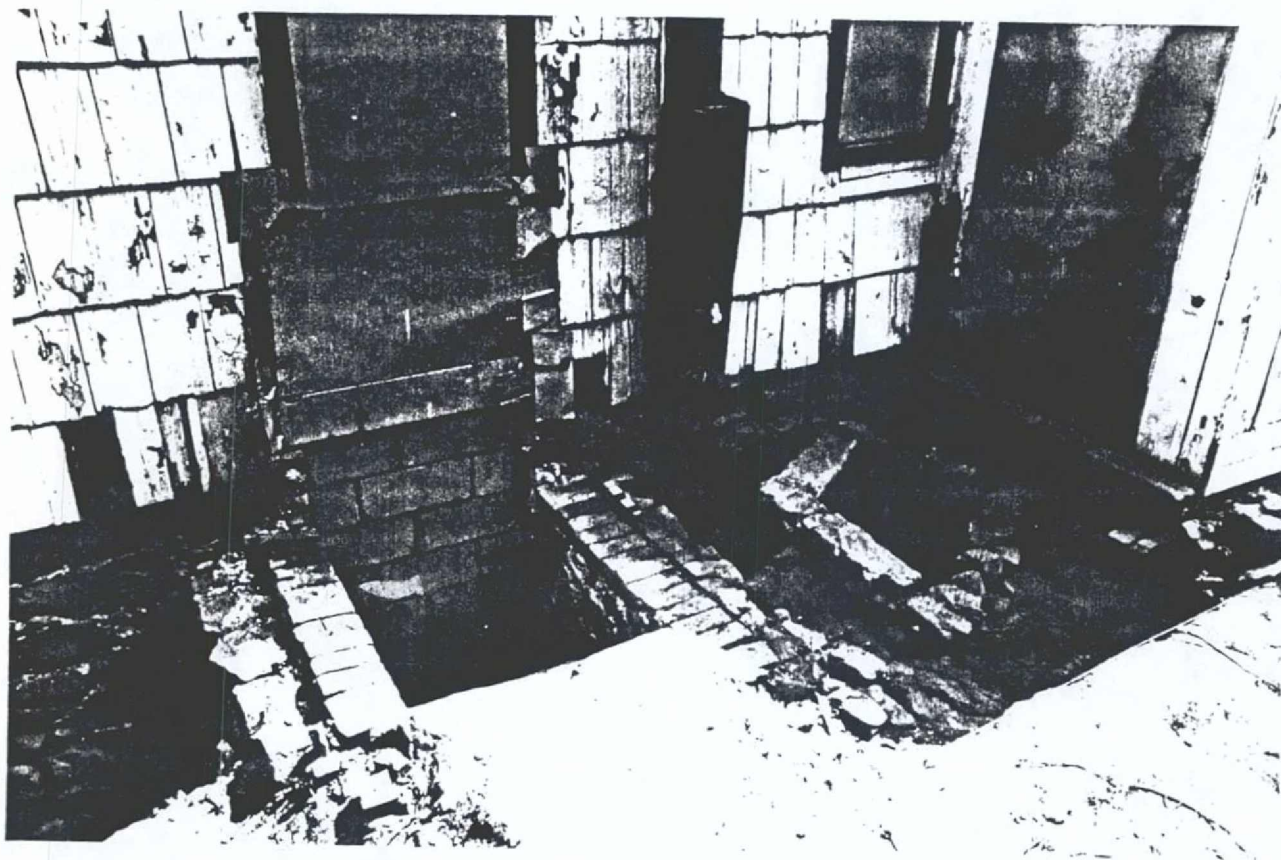


Fig. 11: North side of house, showing basement entrance and drain access shaft (right).

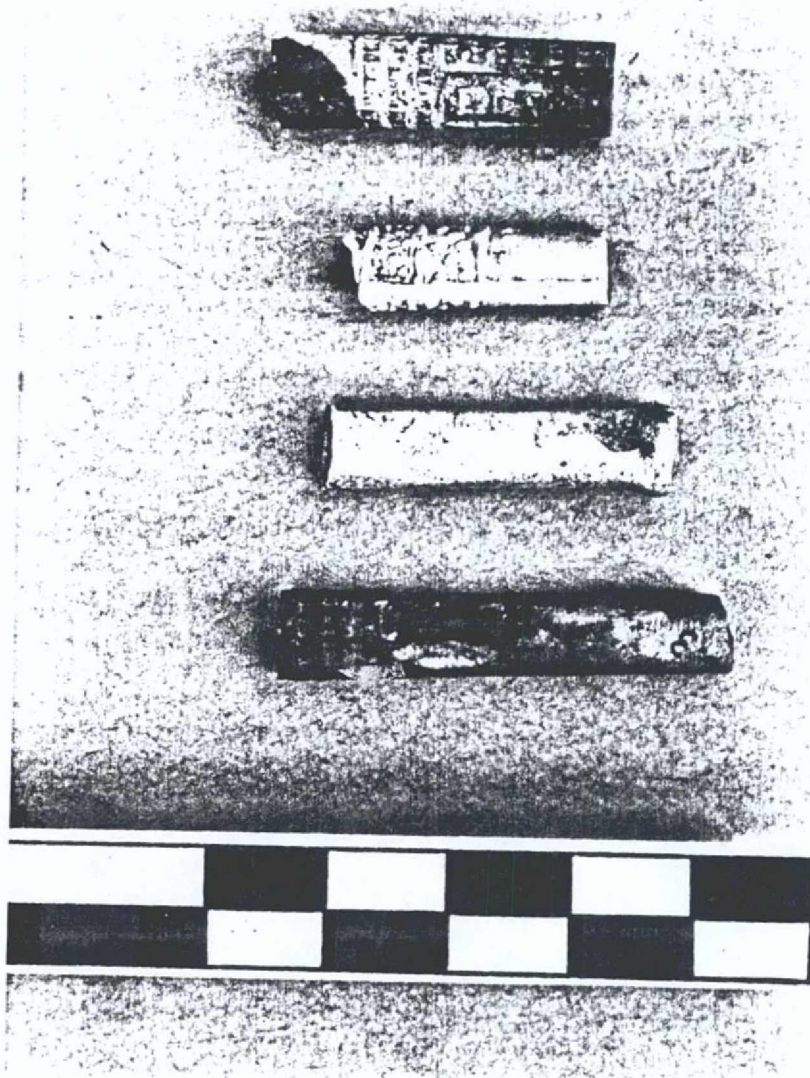


Fig. 12: Nineteenth-century decorated pipestems.

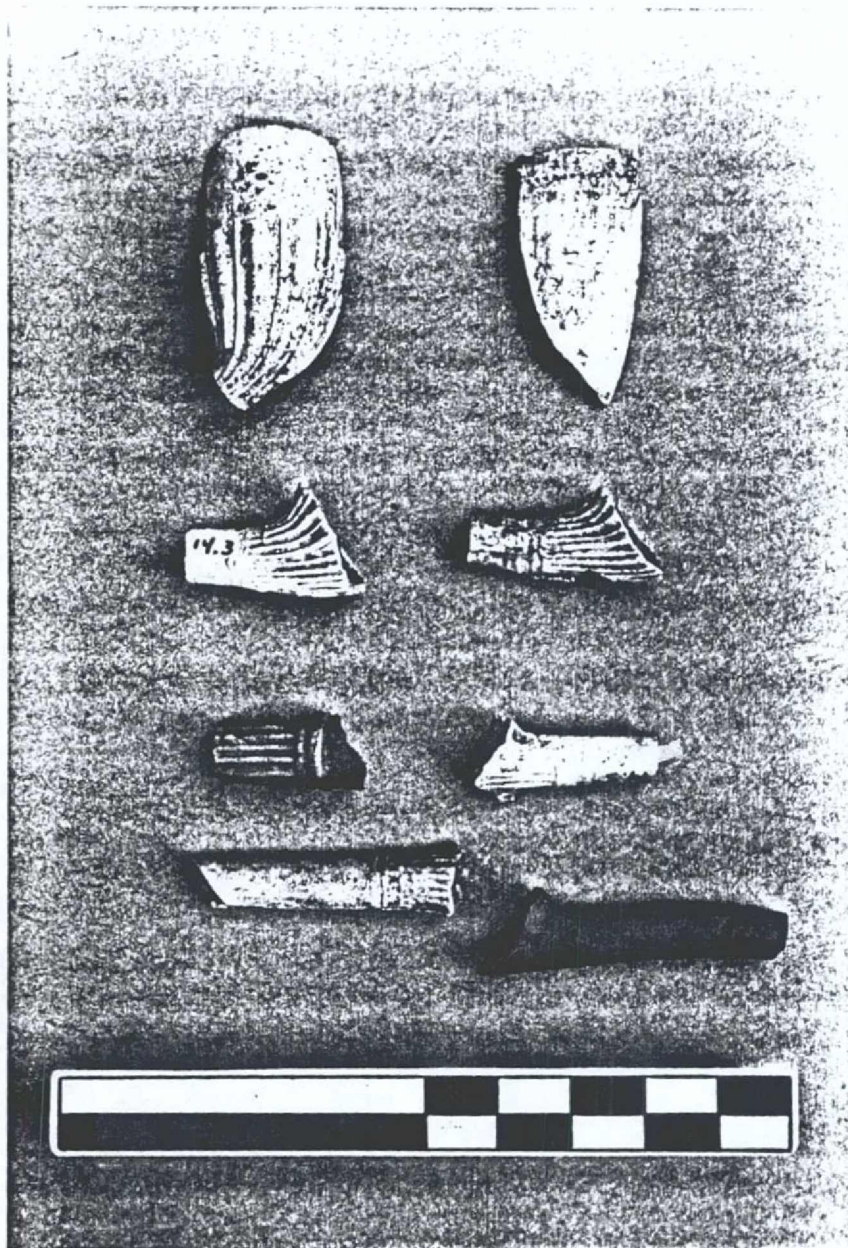


Fig. 13: Nineteenth-century decorated pipe bowls.

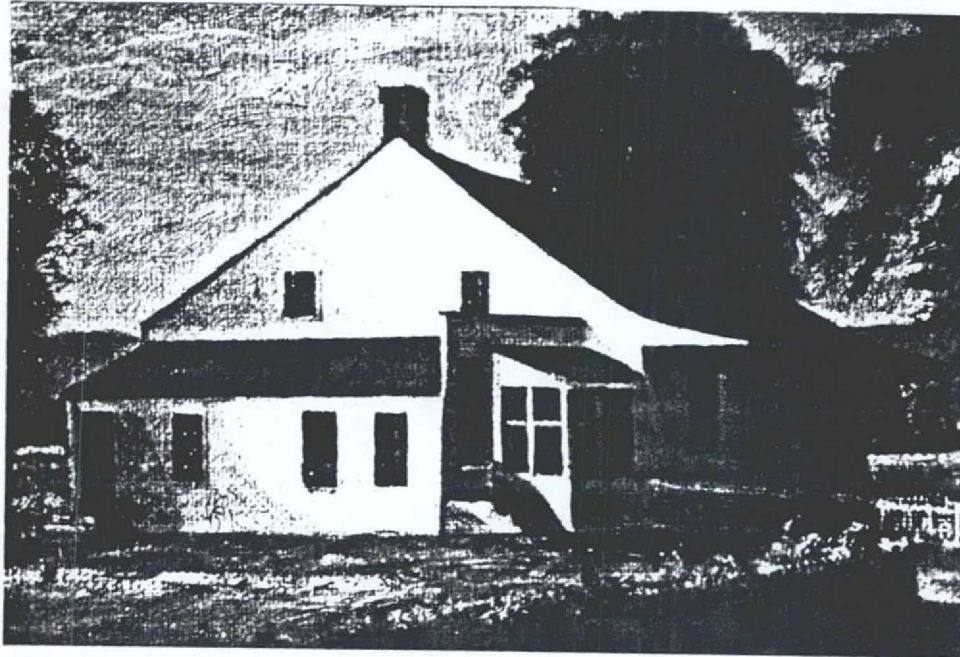
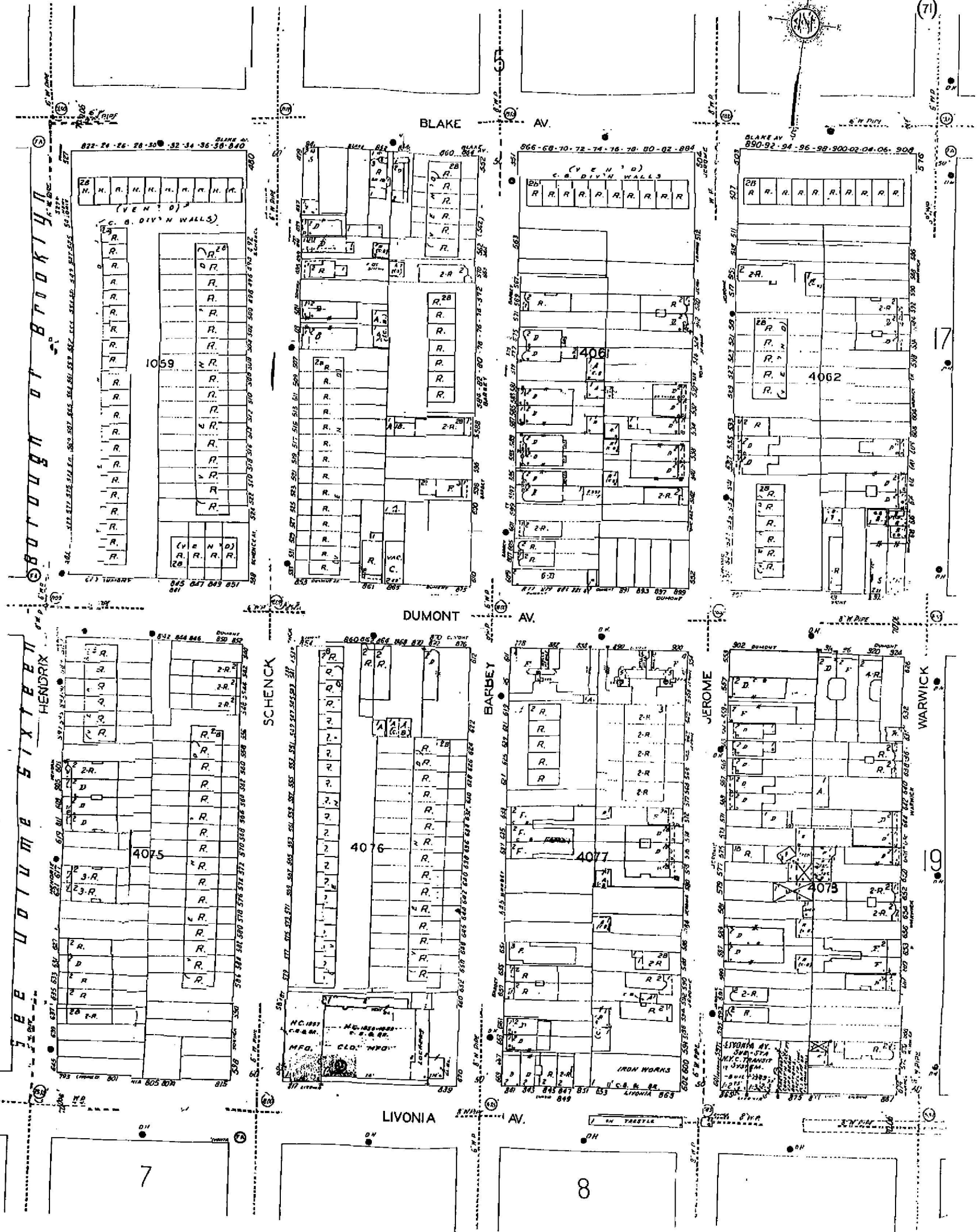


Fig. 14: Western addition to house, ca. 1875 (detail).



Scale 60 ft.

