
St. Paul's Chapel, West Portico

Archaeological Memo Report

NYCLPC Permit Docket No. 122601



1821

Prepared for Trinity Wall Street
Through Integrated Conservation Resources (ICR)
Prepared by Joan H. Geismar, Ph.D., LLC
May 2012

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DRAFT



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MEMO REPORT

To: Luke Johns, Construction Project Manager, Trinity Wall Street
From: Joan Geismar, Joan H. Geismar, Ph.D., LLC
Re: St. Paul's Chapel, West Portico: Archaeological Memo Report
Date: May 2012

As required by a New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission permit (Docket No. [122601](#), and following an approved scope of work,¹ two days of archaeological monitoring were carried out during initial excavation related to reconstruction of the west portico of St. Paul's Chapel. The chapel and churchyard, which occupy the entire Lower Manhattan block bounded by Broadway, Fulton, Vesey, and Church Streets (Block 87; Figure 1), are part of the Episcopal Parish of Trinity Church. As described on St. Paul's website, the chapel is "a center for worship and the arts." The chapel and its burial ground are among New York City's most revered historical features.

The monitoring, which occurred on March 16 and 19, 2012, entailed observing two trenches during hand excavation by ICC (Integrated Conservation Contracting), the sister company of ICR (Integrated Conservation Resources), the project's architectural conservators.² The portico's paving stones (Figure 2), which had been numbered and expertly removed by ICC (Photo 1), were stored on site within a sturdy and commodious protective structure erected by ICC to facilitate the proposed work (Photo 2).

In consultation with the writer, the two test trenches (TR A and TR B), each approximately 2 feet wide (Figure 3), were located to inform engineering issues related to the portico's reconstruction as well as to collect soil samples for archaeological purposes. While intact burials were not an anticipated issue, isolated—that is, disturbed—human bone was a consideration.

TR A, excavated on March 16, 2012, ran the entire interior length of the portico's west retaining wall. Like TR A, TR B ran north to south but only along the southern two-thirds of the portico's floor, adjacent to the chapel's exterior west wall (see Figure 3). Both trenches proved to be filled with broken stones and slabs, mainly brownstone but with some Manhattan Schist and relatively small marble fragments (unmarked) as well as fragmentary brick and mortar debris. In TR A, the stones were unmortared and appeared to serve solely as fill; in TR B, similar stones were haphazardly mortared in place.

The stones and soil were separated and stored in large Tyvek bags. Those containing the stones were removed from the work area while those with soil were kept on hand in anticipation of sampling and screening through ¼-inch wire mesh. In all, seven bags were filled with a basically clean, sandy soil mixed with mortar, four from TR A and three from TR B. The main aim of screening was to recover cultural material that might help date the portico's construction (at the time, thought to coincide with the 1794-1796 construction of the portico's steeple) or provide other historical or construction-related information. As noted, isolated human bone was also a possibility given the portico's construction in a churchyard, and, for the same reason, so was animal bone.

Less than a foot (.6 to .7 feet) into the stone-and-soil fill in TR A, excavation exposed the front of two large, arched, brick burial vaults (Photo 3). Purchased in 1814,³ the vaults are documented on a 1927 plan that shows their location under the portico (Figure 4).⁴ An approximately 1.2-foot gap separated the front edge of the vaults from the portico's west retaining wall. In TR B, the vaults abutted the rear chapel wall. These two family vaults belonged, on the north, to Joshua Waddington and, on the south, to Thomas Ludlow Ogden. "JOSHUA WADDINGTON/VAULT" was engraved on a stone marker exposed under the capstones of the portico's west wall, but only "THOMAS...VAULT" remained on the Ogden marker (Photos 4, 5, and 6).

About 1.4 feet below the top of the vaults in TR A, a line of mortared bricks spanned the space created by the arches (Photos 7 and 8).⁵ In TR B, the loosely mortared stones found above the vaults also filled the gap between them. In addition, three iron utility pipes were exposed in the southern part of TR B. All came through the back church wall, and installation of one—a large cast-iron sanitary drain that pitched down toward Fulton Street—had damaged but not breached the back of the Ogden vault (Photo 9).⁶ It should be noted that church records document a water closet in the now-demolished vestry building as early as 1864, but not in the chapel itself.⁷ They also make reference to unspecified repairs to the chapel's sanitary features in the 1920s.⁸

The excavation and monitoring of TR B and all soil screening occurred on Monday, March 19. The screened sample was intended to minimally comprise 25 per cent of the excavated soil (every fourth bucket of soil contained in each large Tyvek bag was to be screened). This was deemed an adequate sample to obtain the sought-after information since examination of the soil during excavation indicated it was homogeneous fill with little if any cultural material and no observable bone or bone fragments.

In a very smoothly coordinated effort carried out by ICC that involved an overhead track and pulleys (Photo 10), the bagged soil was made available for sampling. This was undertaken with the understanding that the proposed 25 percent sampling strategy would be revised if warranted, but this proved unnecessary as the soil was, indeed, virtually devoid of cultural material. Exceptions included a few food bones (identified by Matthew Brown, a faunal specialist who participated in the screening), one whole but small oyster shell, and several oyster shell fragments, a clam shell fragment, snippets of "modern" candy wrappers, a single glass bottle fragment, several badly corroded but possibly wrought nails, and a plastic-tipped bobbi pin. Most of this material came from a cache of debris located in the southeast corner of TR B (Photo 11), apparently associated with the introduction or repair of the aforementioned sanitary drain.

Ultimately, 125 of 226.5 gallons of soil were screened, a 33 percent sample. All in all, the soil proved to be as "clean" as suggested during monitoring, and no artifacts were collected.

While the archaeological component did not call for detailed historical documentation, information from the Trinity Wall Street Archives generously provided by Gwynedd Cannan, the church archivist, proved helpful. In addition, research at the New York Historical Society and in Surrogate's Court records helped define the issues and potential findings of field testing. This research also offered historical information about the Ogdens and Waddingtons that explained the proximity of the two vaults. For example, it established the close association between the two families when Waddington's will, written in 1840 and proved after his death at 89 in March 1844, indicated that Ogden was his brother-in-law.⁹ Further research by Gwynedd Cannan

revealed that Waddington had married Ogden's sister, Gertrude Gouveneur Ogden, in 1804.¹⁰ As mentioned, both Waddington, who was a well-off merchant and a Director of the Bank of New York, and the even wealthier Ogden, who was a lawyer, a banker, a one-time-law partner and friend of Alexander Hamilton, and a longtime trustee of Trinity Church, apparently built adjoining family vaults in 1814. They also were partners in large upstate land transactions.¹¹ Coincidentally, both Waddington and Ogden died in 1844, with the older Waddington predeceasing the just 71-year-old Ogden by nine months. Although built thirty years earlier, both men were the first interred in their respective vaults.¹²

That neither the steeple nor the portico was included in Thomas McBean's 1764 design of the chapel is evident from the original plan (Figure 5).¹³ As already mentioned, it had long been assumed the portico was added between 1794 and 1796 when the steeple, designed by James C. Lawrence, was erected on the west end of the chapel. However, Waddington and Ogden purchased the vaults that lie beneath the portico in October 1814,¹⁴ eighteen years after the steeple was erected. Since it is presumed the vaults were constructed soon after this purchase, it seems unlikely that the steeple and portico were contemporary additions. Moreover, there is no portico shown on an 1815 map of the "Trinity Farm" (Figure 6). However, it is shown in an 1821 rendering in the collection of the New York Historical Society (Figure 7), suggesting that the portico was constructed sometime between 1815 and 1821. To narrow it down further, church records indicate that a large sum of money was spent on unspecified repairs to the chapel sometime between March 1814 and March 1815.¹⁵ Although circumstantial, this tends to support the idea that the portico was added shortly after the vaults were constructed.

Archaeological monitoring and screening officially ended on March 19. However, the fully exposed top of both vaults was documented on a subsequent site visit (Photo 12). At that time, it was also confirmed the vaults filled the entire portico footprint, which would make them more than 8 feet wide. Excavation had also exposed the top of brick access "tunnels" (Photo 13) that enclose steps leading into the vaults. As described in an article about the 1942 interment of Fanny Ogden, Thomas Ogden's granddaughter, in 1942,¹⁶ access to these steps is buried just beyond the portico's west retaining wall:¹⁷

"To open the crypt to receive Miss Ogden's casket, workmen had to dig up three feet of earth just west of the porch of the church...[where] They reached two slate slabs which, when removed, gave access to the narrow stone steps leading down to the crypt under the porch."¹⁸

Both the placement and size of the vaults strongly suggest that construction of the existing portico occurred after they were introduced. While the depth of the vaults was not explored, based on a 1925 profile of vaults located under Trinity Church, the Ogden and Waddington vaults could be 6 feet high or more.¹⁹ Parenthetically, for the chapel wall's footing stones to be unaffected by the vaults' construction, they would have to be more than 6 feet deep (it should be noted the chapel only has a crawl space, not a basement, so this could not be verified).

To conclude, two days of archaeological monitoring combined with historical information indicate that construction of the chapel's west portico followed introduction of the large, arched brick, Ogden and Waddington family burial vaults that date from 1814. It also revealed these

vaults entirely fill the space beneath the portico floor, providing its support. The excavation also determined that the stone footings for the west retaining wall are relatively shallow. And, finally, it documented a clean, stone-laden fill above and around the top of the vaults—the exception being debris apparently associated with a sanitary drainpipe apparently related to the introduction of water closets and then toilets at the back of the chapel or from related repairs. Neither human remains of any kind nor artifacts to date the portico’s construction were recovered. However, both the placement of the vaults and documentary evidence strongly suggest the west portico was constructed between 1815 and 1821, with the most likely year being 1815.

No further archaeological monitoring is anticipated at this writing.

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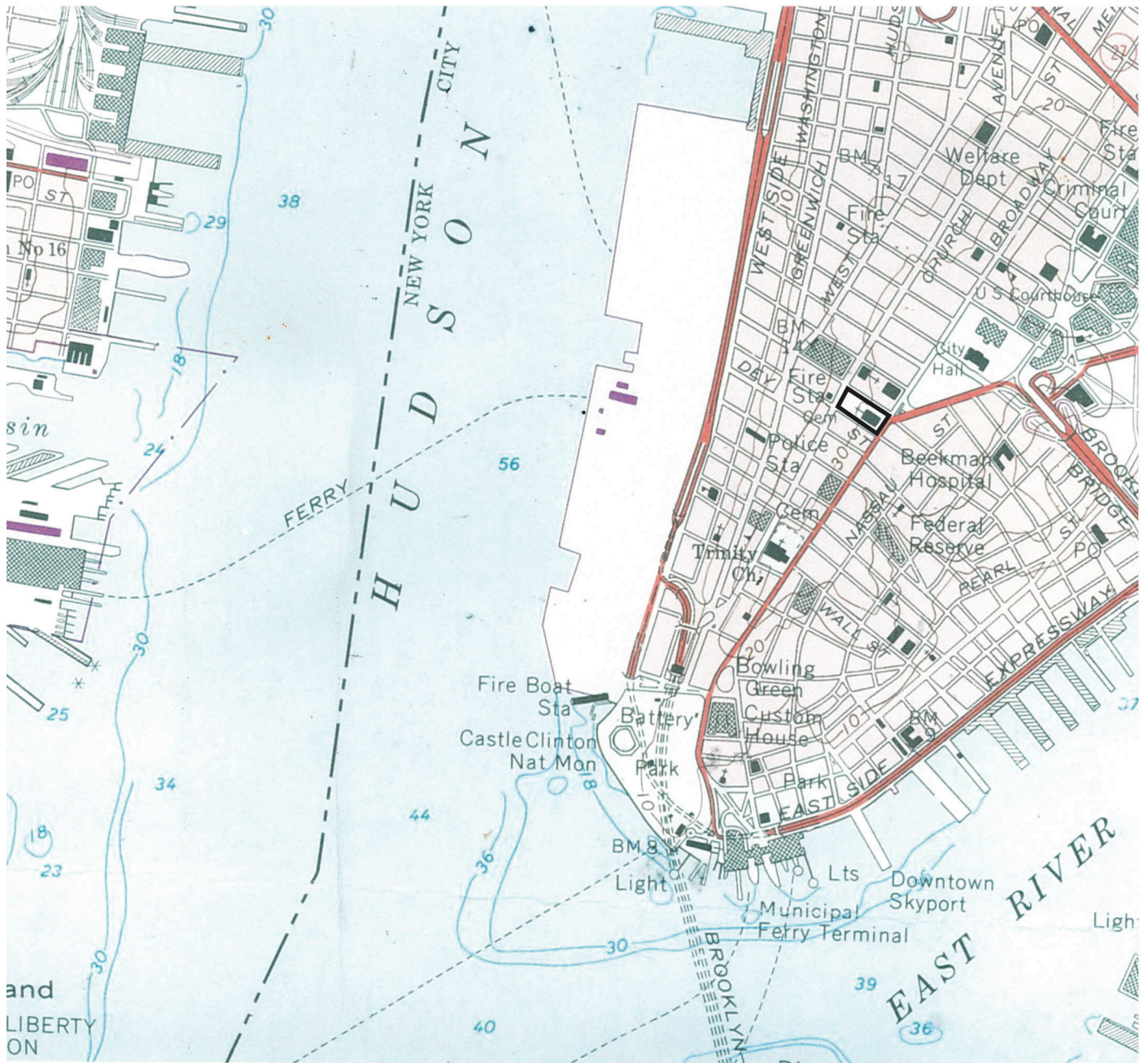
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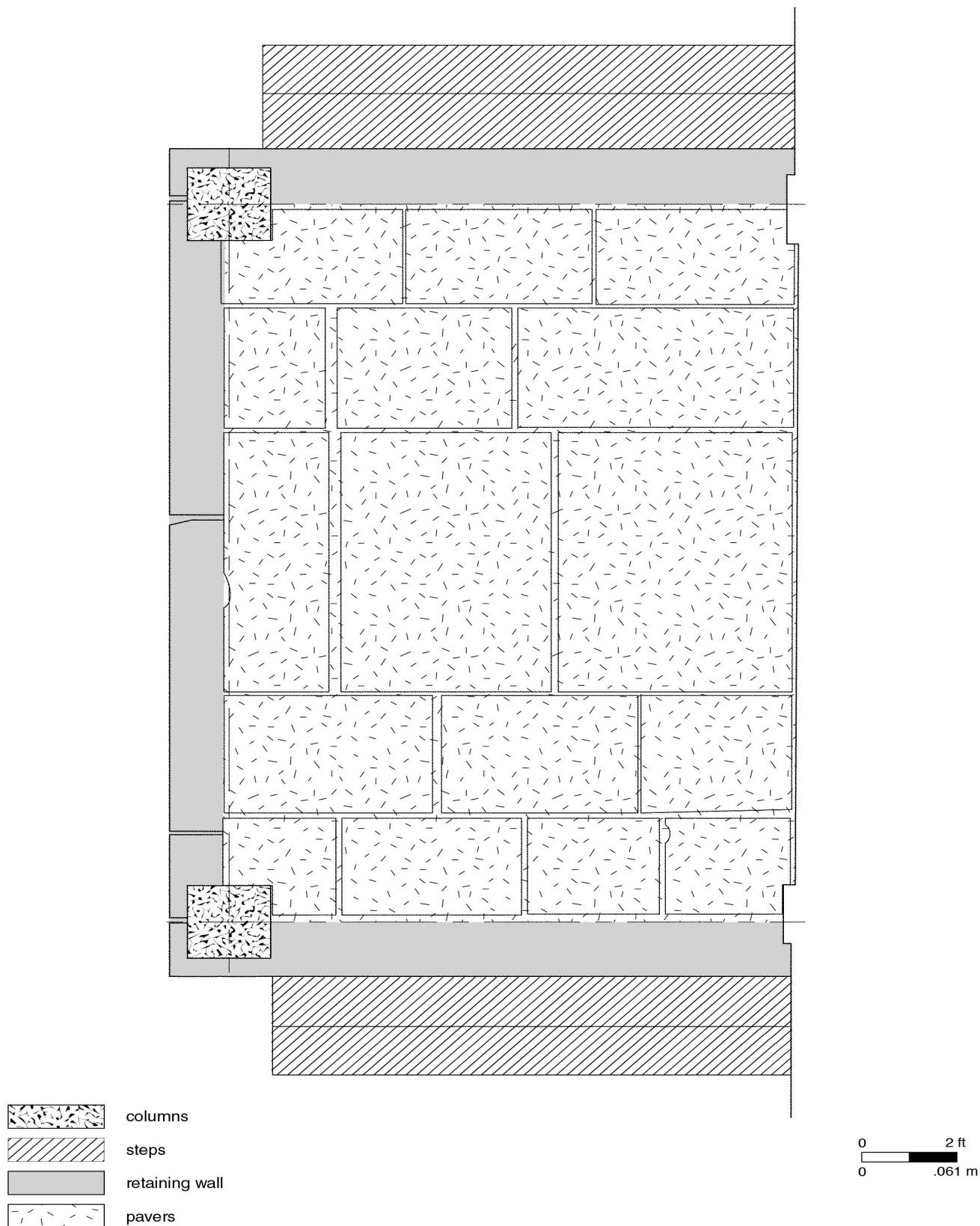
FIGURES

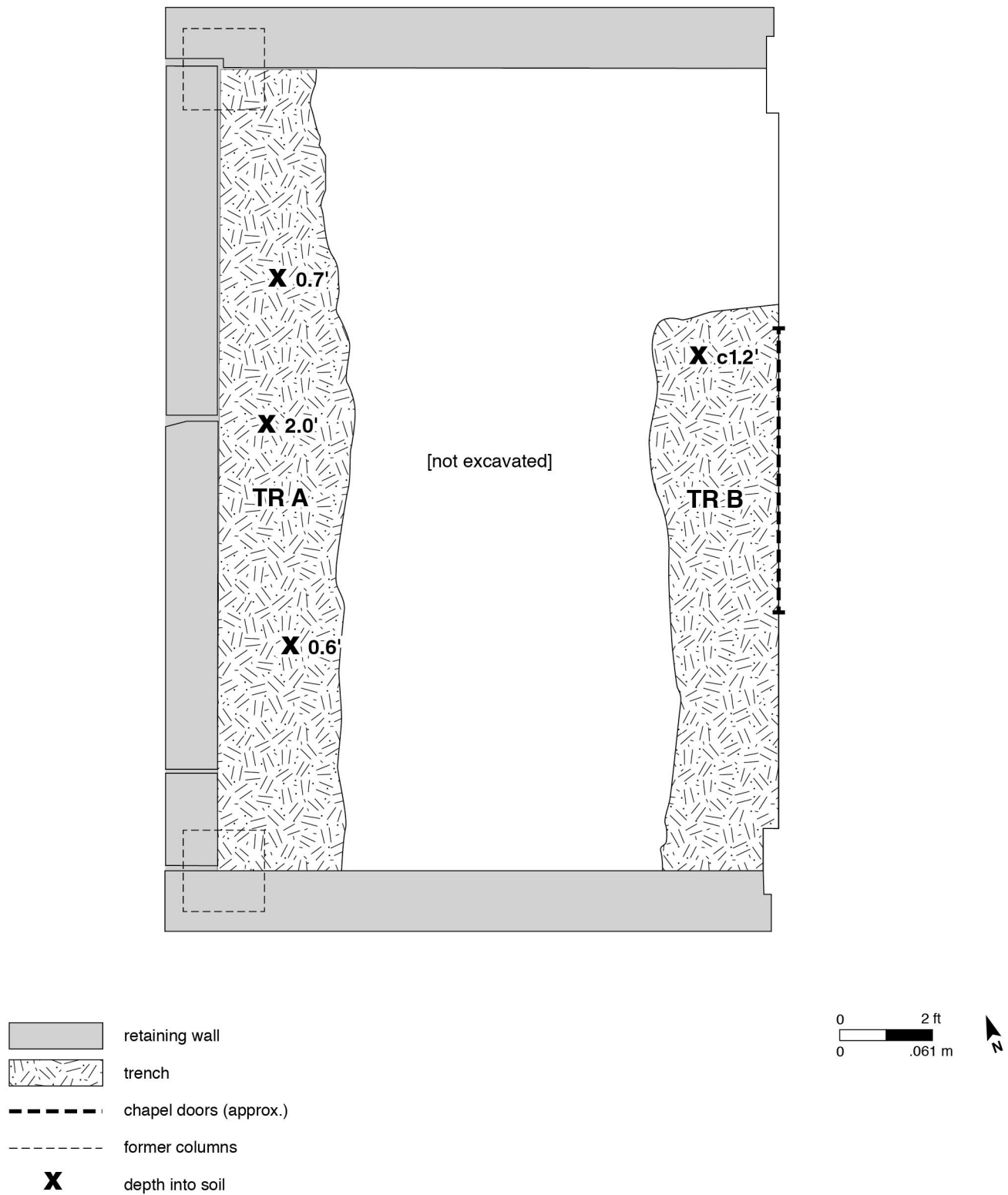
(Graphics: Amy Geller)

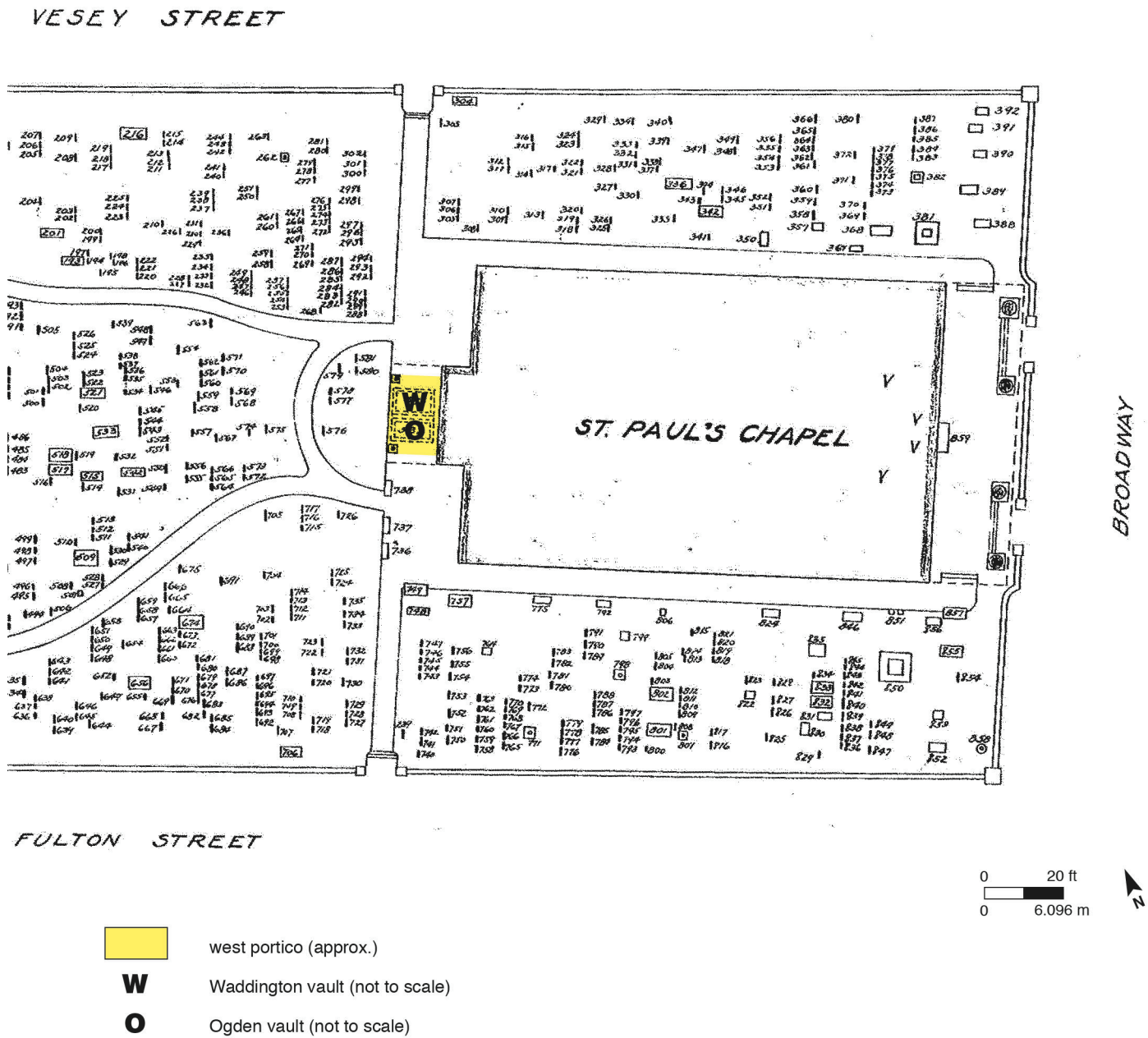


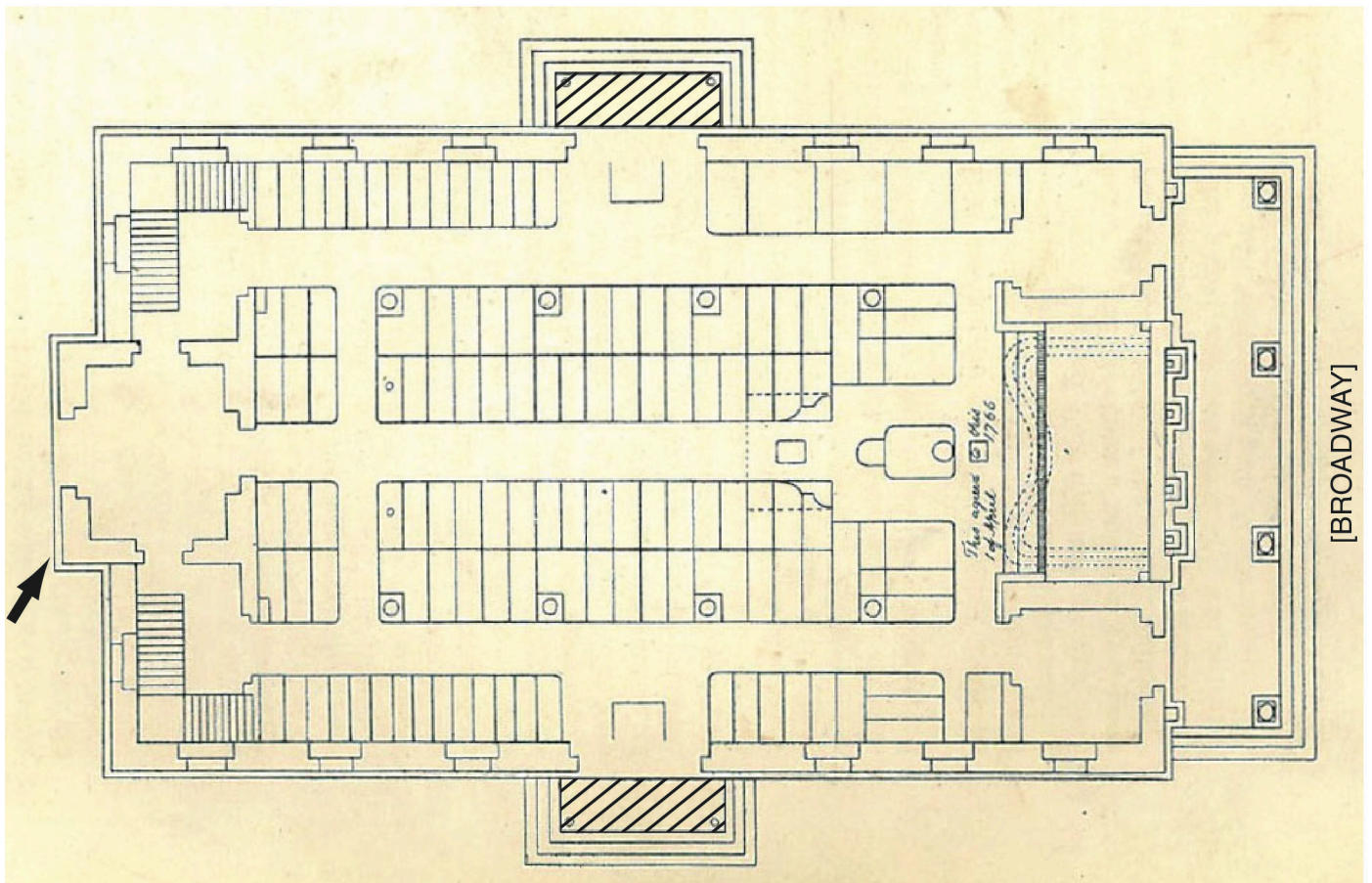
 project block









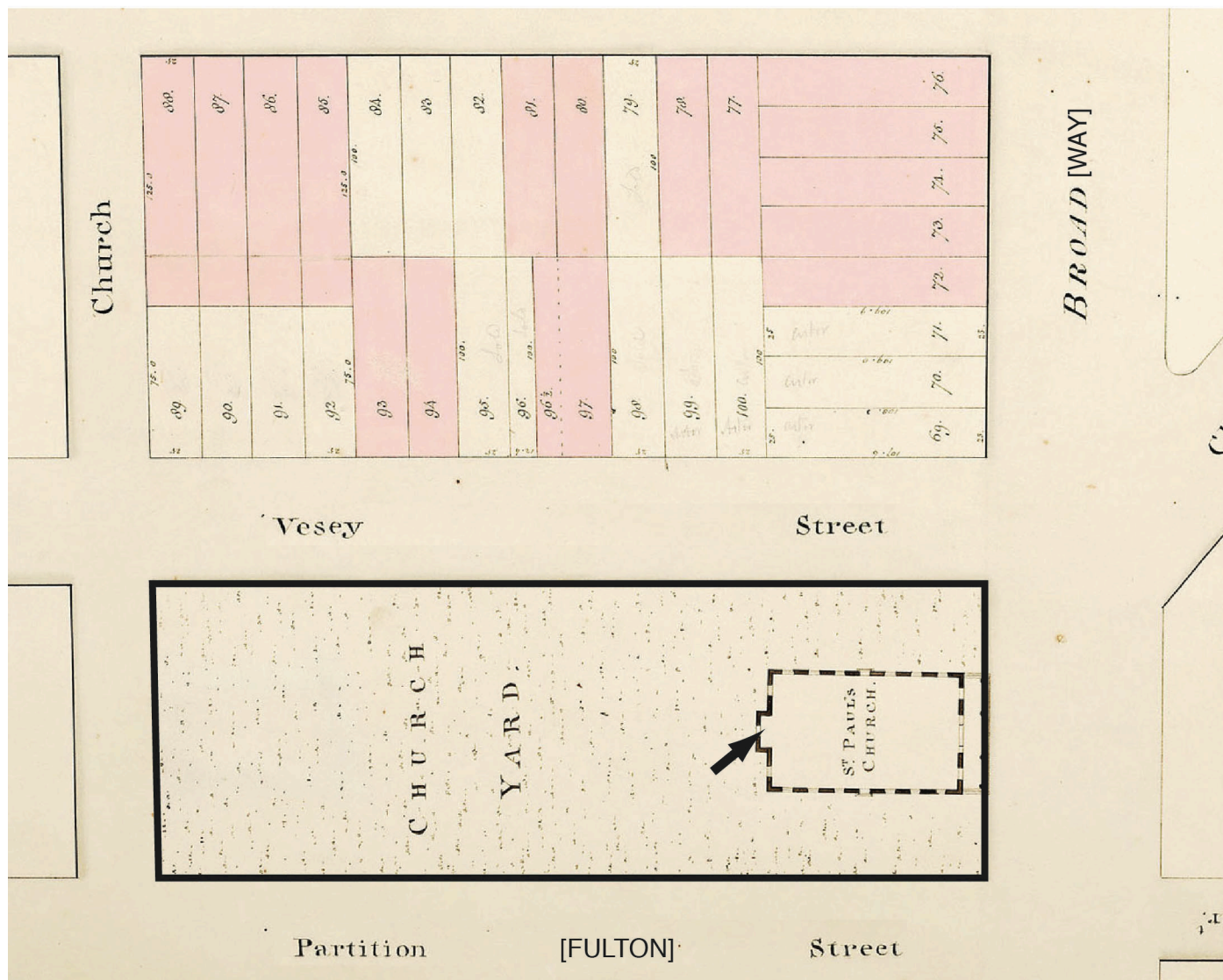




 west entrance (no portico)
 porches

no scale





- project block
- - - St. Paul's Chapel
- ➔ west entrance (no portico)

0 100 ft
0 304.8 m





→ west portico

PHOTOS

(Photos: Joan H. Geismar, Ph.D.)



Photo 1. An ICC crew person is lifting a paving stone in the northwest corner of the portico to expose the sand and stone beneath it. The west retaining wall and the construction shelter's flooring are in the foreground. (2/24/12)



Photo 2. View from the churchyard of the shelter (arrow) erected to facilitate the portico's reconstruction. (5/2/12)



Photo 3. Excavation in Trench A (TR A) quickly revealed the top of the Waddington (upper arrow) and Ogden (lower arrow) arched brick burial vaults. (3/16/12)



Photo 4. Joshua Waddington's stone vault marker under the capstone of the west retaining wall. (2/24/12)



Photo 5. "THOMAS" and "VAULT" remain under the west retaining wall's capstone to mark the Ogden vault. (2/24/12)



Photo 6. Joe Cordosa of ICC illuminating the Ogden vault marker. (2/24/12)



Photo 7. Waddington's vault (upper arrow) and part of Ogden's (lower arrow) in Trench A (TR A) at the end of the first day's excavation. The view is north. Excavated stones and soil, now separated, are stored in the large Tyvek bags to the right. (3/16/12)



Photo 8. South end of Trench A (TR A) with the upper front edge of the Ogden vault (right arrow) and the brick "floor" between the two vaults (left arrow) exposed. (3/16/12)



Photo 9. Excavation of Trench B (TR B) revealed that both vaults about the rear chapel wall. Waddington's vault (upper arrow) is intact but Ogden's has been compromised but not breached by a sanitary drain (white arrow) that runs along the back wall. (3/19/12)



Photo 10. ICC crew moving a soil-filled Tyvek bag to the screening area out of view to the right. (3/19/12)



Photo 11. Concentration of debris (arrow) in the southeast corner of Trench B (TR B). The “modern” material is probably associated with plumbing repairs. (3/19/12)



Photo 12. The top of the arched brick Waddington (upper arrow) and Ogden (lower arrow) vaults fully exposed. The view is north. (3/27/12)



Photo 13. Further excavation along the western edge of the vaults partially exposed the brick "tunnel" (arrow) enclosing underground steps to the Waddington vault. The west retaining wall (right) is to be replaced. (3/27/12)

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Geismar 2012; Sutphin 2012.
- ² I am extremely grateful to Glenn Boornazian, ICR President and Conservator, Christy Lombardy, ICR Senior Conservator, and Jose (Joe) Cardoso, ICC Vice President of Construction, and his crew for all their support during the archaeological monitoring.
- ³ e.g., Cannan 2012a.
- ⁴ Parsons 1927.
- ⁵ According to Joe Cardoso, this brick “floor” provided support to the arched structures.
- ⁶ An egg-shaped, Fulton Street sewer introduced in March 1851 (Croton Aqueduct 1857:120) was replaced in 1905 (Manhattan Sewer 2012). Church records document “substantial” payment for plumbing at St. Paul’s in 1864, possibly related to water closets; bathrooms were installed elsewhere in 1873, and similar work apparently was done at St. Paul’s in that year, and unspecified repairs are documented in the 1920s (Cannan 2012b).
- ⁷ The chapel’s vestry building, located on Church Street (Parsons 1927), was demolished in 1928 to make way for subway construction (Parsons 1927, 1932 addendum note).
- ⁸ Cannan 2012c.
- ⁹ Liber of Wills 89:561-566. Waddington’s will identifies Thomas Ogden as his brother-in-law.
- ¹⁰ Cannan 2012c. Gertrude Gouveneur Ogden was Waddington’s second wife (NYSL 1789-1792:261).
- ¹¹ For example, an 1860 gazetteer documents a large Ogden-Waddington upstate land deal in 1811 (French 1860:579 fn 9).
- ¹² For additional information, see the Trinity Church Blog by Leah Reddy, March 29, 2012.
- ¹³ Dix 1867:ff p. 46. This plan shows the chapel’s original north and south porticos (see Figure 5).
- ¹⁴ An accounting entry documents a purchase date of October 17, 1814, and a price of \$25 for each vault (Cannan 2012d:personal communication). It is assumed the vaults were constructed after this purchase.
- ¹⁵ Cannan 2012d.
- ¹⁶ Fanny Ogden, who died on June 9, 1942 (*New York Times* 1942), at the age of 93, was the last interment in the vault.
- ¹⁷ In 1943, Fanny Ogden’s nephew and niece requested permission to erect a “simple” engraved stone to mark this entrance “near the south end of the West porch...” (Harison 1943). To date, no such marker has been identified.
- ¹⁸ *New York Herald Tribune* 1942.
- ¹⁹ Parsons 1925 (not illustrated).