

USE 4953K
23 F15

Brooklyn

N C EGR

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL
INVESTIGATION ON IDENTIFIED AREAS OF THE
PIETER CLAESEN WYCKOFF HOUSE PROPERTY PRIOR
TO DISTURBANCE BY ARCHITECTURAL RESTORATION
STAGES A&B

5900 Clarendon Rd

91 Ralph Ave

Prepared for The City of New York

Landmarks Preservation Commission

by

Susan Kardas, Ph.D.

and

Edward Larrabee, Ph.D.

Archaeological Consultants

September, 1977

B 7917 L9

246

Excavation under Contract #30050 at the Pieter Claesen Wyckoff House at the intersection of Ralph and Clarendon Aves., Brooklyn, was commenced on 4 August, 1977, the day after word was received that the contract had been filed and given an Encumbrance Number. Four full days of field work, one partial day of artifact cleaning and two days of report preparation were spent through 3 September, 1977.

The purpose of this archaeological research was to meet a requirement that "prior to any subsurface disturbance at the Wyckoff House during restoration or installation of underground utilities, an archaeological investigation" should be made, as agreed between the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the New York State Historic Preservation Office, and the City of New York, on 29 November, 1976.

Scope of Work

The scope of work authorized for this archaeological investigation and assessment was delimited by the architects at a job meeting held at the Wyckoff House on 28 April, 1977. It was decided at that time by the Landmarks Commission and an Architectural Representative of the New York State Historic Preservation office in Albany that the testing be limited specifically to three areas:

- 1) the area directly in front of the present south entrance to the house;
- 2) a line running from inside the north wall of Room 9, down the middle of that room, and continuing south across the yard to the present cyclone fence, and four test pits against the west wall of Room 9 where concrete pillars will be erected;
- 3) a diagonal line running from southwest to northeast across Room 1 where wiring and utility lines will be laid.

A fourth possible area was discussed in April for a test pit to be placed outside the East wall of existing bathroom near the cyclone fence. This was later deleted in agreement with Mrs. Tuft, as we found that the area in question consisted of 6-8 ft. of fill above any early ground surfaces, so cultural resources would not be disturbed by proposed utility lines.

Tests Made

A total of twenty one test pits or trenches were dug. Seven of these were outside the plywood wall which surrounds the house. Two of these were near the southwest corner (to test ground through which a sewer and water utility trench would run), and five were near the south door, cellar stairs, and southeast corner (to test the area where a proposed porch reconstruction would disturb the subsurface). Two of the remaining fourteen tests were made inside Room 1, on a diagonal line which would be disturbed by utilities running from the south end of Room 9 to the cellar under Room 2. In Room 9 itself a total of eight tests were dug, constituting a continuous trench north-south along the center of the dirt floor under this shed addition. Four additional tests were made immediately outside Room 9, between the existing wall line and the exterior wall of plywood. The tests in Room 9 and just south of it were placed where we were told at the 28 April job meeting that water and sewer lines would run, and the other tests outside it were in areas where the architects' plans for reconstruction showed cement supports which would disturb the earth.

Findings

A brief listing of features and conditions found follows:

a) Near the southwest corner of the grounds there is a thick layer of very hard road material, probably placed in this century. Total thickness of this and other recent fill material is at least 3 ft., and increases as one approaches the obviously elevated surface near the south fence line. Along the alignment we tested here, a utility trench about 30 inches deep (estimate made by Mr. Tim Tsang to us in phone conversation of 4 August) would not reach to buried historic surfaces. If the trench were to be 36 inches or more in depth, it probably would disturb the historic surface beneath the recent fill, and would require salvaging and recording.

b) Near the front door, the cellar stairs on each side of it, and the southeast corner, we found a curved stone foundation for a historic porch, stoop, or similar superstructure. Beyond (south of) this, there was a walk or pavement of bricks and brick-bats, edged with a wooden plank and Belgian-block paving stones. On the basis of brick style, this is tentatively dated to some time during or after the latter third of the 19th century. A wooden plank walk, at one time painted green, was found underlying a cut brown-stone which was part of the plank-edged brick walk. The plank deck or walk was thus earlier, perhaps of early 19th century date, and appears to be in excellent condition. Some artifacts of 19th and 18th century age were found in these tests.

c) Inside Room 1, we found the badly rotted remains of beams for a floor that preceded the wooden floor beams which are now partially exposed where recent concrete has been taken up. This earliest remaining floor evidence was at a lower elevation than the wooden floor still partly preserved. A number of probably 18th century artifacts were found in loose association with this earliest floor, but we are not able to ascribe even a tentative period to it until we have further analyzed the data.

d) Several features were uncovered in Room 9 (the shed addition at the west end of the house). There was a wooden floor of north-south running planks supported east-west beams or sleepers which rested on or in the ground. In the middle of the Room 9 space was a stone feature (foundation) which probably related to an outstructure. This irregular "foundation" of stones does not contact the west wall of Room 1 (at one time an exterior fireplace wall of the house), and extends beyond the west wall of Room 9. It also pre-dates Room 9. A deep cavity, possibly a well or cistern was found just outside the location where the south wall of Room 9 should have been. This cavity of unknown maximum depth was loosely filled with large stones and was capped or covered with cement which formed a 20th century garage entrance into Room 9.

Outside the northwest corner of Room 9 there was a large stone foundation, obviously for some earlier structure which extended west (rather than east and south, as does Room 9) from this point. Again, some apparently 18th and 19th century artifacts were found inside and outside Room 9.

So far, none of the artifacts found have been of obviously 17th century manufacture. Two ceramic sherds near the foundation wall at the corner of Room 9 may be of 17th century date. However, the sample is too small to be reliable. Until detailed examination has been made, all comments on dating, other than relative sequence, must be considered tentative. There are enough artifacts from all areas to provide some information useful for studying the structure, but probably not enough from any particular stratum to make a statistically significant sample for precisely dating that occupation level. This could be clarified by further excavation near important features. A preliminary inspection indicates that analysis of the artifacts can provide important cultural insights into life at the Wyckoff House, as well as provide detailed information regarding building patterns, relationships of walls, and construction techniques which would be invaluable to the architects' reconstruction.

Recommendations

On the basis of this preliminary study we make the following recommendations:

1) The proposed utility trench outside the house, if no deeper than about 30 inches, will not harm cultural resources. If it is to be dug deeper than 30" from the present surface it will cut into 13th and 17th century layers, and the material from this trench should be salvaged.

2) The same trench, as it enters Room 9 and runs toward the north end of it, will pass over a filled-in well or cistern, and will cut through the rotted remains of floor beams, and a stone feature which we assume is the foundation of an earlier outstructure. We suggest excavation of the cistern, and complete exposure and plotting of the floor beams and stone feature, before the utility trench is dug. Other than these features, all cultural material has been removed by us from the proposed trench location inside Room 9. Except for the stone feature noted above, excavation into the ground here will not disturb earlier cultural strata as it would outside the structure.

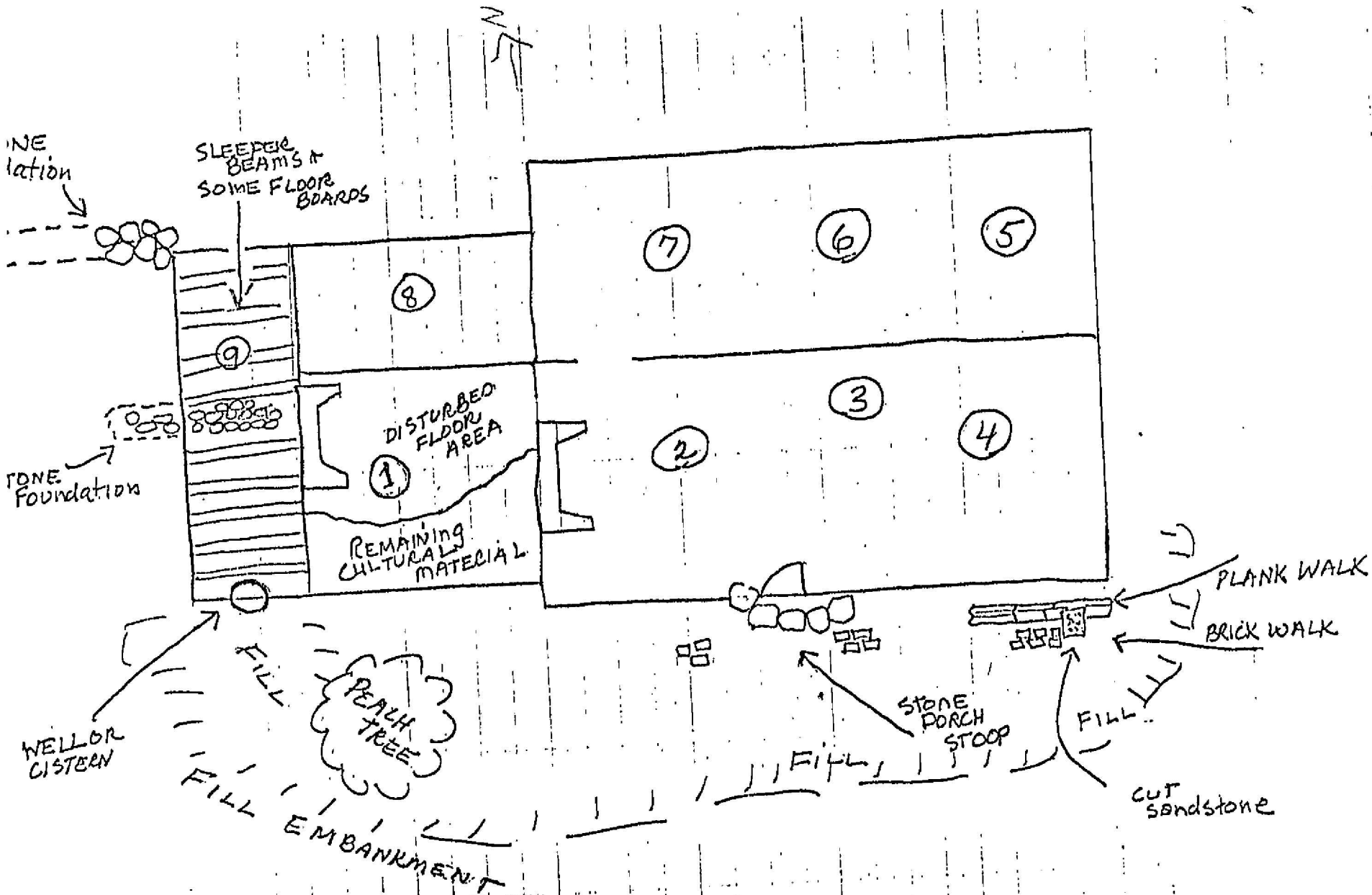
3) More complete study should be made of the unknown foundation found to extend west from under the northwest corner of Room 9, before concrete supports are placed to support reconstruction. Mr. Oppenheimer has also suggested that the location of this pillar can be relocated so as not to destroy this foundation.

4) There appears to be particularly valuable cultural and structural information buried under Room 1. The remaining significant deposit has been sealed under a cement floor, and is still protected where that recent floor exists. Most of the diagonal line which the utility line will pass through has already been disturbed by high school "digs" and probings to find foundation walls. We recommend that before reconstruction or during its very earliest stages, the remaining cement floor be removed under archaeological supervision, and that the earth beneath it (ca. 40% of the room) then be salvaged. Otherwise this uniquely preserved deposit will be destroyed. If utilities are to run diagonally across Room 1, this is an absolute necessity, because the cement prevented us from testing near the southwest corner of the room.

5) Reconstruction of the south porch should be held in abeyance until archaeological excavation can produce more information about early porch, stoop, or related structures, which these tests have shown are present. We suggest preservation of the brick walk and plank sidewalk which are intact. Additional archaeological work outside the house can reveal more data about the earlier plank walk, but some of the thick (up to 5 ft.) recent overburden must be removed first.

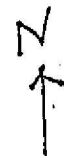
In summary, the exploratory excavations called for in the Memorandum of Agreement of 29 November 1976 have shown that significant information is preserved in some areas where utility lines or restoration may disturb the ground. Moreover, these excavations have revealed foundations for

previously unknown features at the house and of outstructures, none of which were taken into account in the restoration plans. More detailed archaeological research than was possible under the exploratory nature of this work will be needed to answer several important questions. These concern both construction details and sequence at the Wyckoff House and the way in which it was used for the three centuries of its occupation. Both kinds of information will be needed for proper restoration and interpretation of this very important residence.



SCHEMATIC DRAWING SHOWING
ARCHAEOLOGICAL FEATURES
DISCOVERED AT THE WYCK

HOUSE
APPROXIMATE SCALE



CONSULTING ARCHEOLOGISTS
E MCM LARRABEE PH.D.
SUSAN KARDAS PH.D.

86 Snowden Lane
Princeton, N.J. 08540

Oppenheimer, Brady & Vogelstein
55 West 42 Street
New York, N.Y. 10036

September 6, 1977

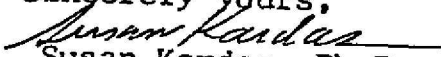
Dear Mr. Oppenheimer:

Thank you for supplying us with the three historic photographs of the Wyckoff House. They have been most useful to us in interpreting our preliminary test pits. Please find enclosed the two photos you asked to have returned.

We are currently writing our "Summary of Findings" (the preliminary report) for the Landmark Commission, a copy of which I will mail to you under separate cover. We have tried to incorporate some of the suggestions discussed at your visit to the house, which we hope will be incorporated in your construction scope of work. From our point of view, except for the obvious need to determine the type and approximate date of the several foundations located by these tests, the most critical salvage needed is of the material in Room 1 under the concrete slab. Proper excavation of this material would allow us to give you much more detailed information regarding the floor and wall construction in this room, as well as provide a sample of artifactual material which could be used to date it.

We were able to complete the field excavation at about \$1500 less than our anticipated costs for the initial survey; possibly this money could be utilized toward the expenses of this salvage (approximate total cost for salvage of Room 1 would be about \$3000). We will include a Phase II proposal with our copy of the report to you.

Sincerely yours,


Susan Kardas, Ph.D.

cc M. Tuft, NYCLC