

Final Report
to The National Geographic Society

on:

ARCHAEOLOGY OF TOWN PLANNING IN ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND
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by
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Part I: The Research Problem

The purpose of the the research supported by this grant was to refine our understanding of the Baroque town plan of Annapolis, Maryland through archaeology. The plan of 1695, which was prepared under the supervision of Royal Governor Francis Nicholson, has long been considered one of the most sophisticated and best preserved town plans in Colonial North America (Figure 1). The town plan is well understood synchronically through the work of a number of scholars, but the plan was less well understood in terms of its gradual development and alteration over the almost three centuries since it was laid down. Therefore, a primary goal of our work was the initiation of a diachronic understanding of town planning in Annapolis. Further, while the joint Historic Annapolis/ University of Maryland, College Park program called "Archaeology in Annapolis" had established that a large part of the archaeological record of

Annapolis was intact, no one knew how much of the original and subsequent street patterns could be recovered archaeologically, nor exactly how one could go about that. Therefore, the second aspect of this project was to establish a set of methods to document street and lot borders. Such a project was urgent since the city of Annapolis plans to dig trenches throughout the core of the Nicholson Plan to bury utility wires. Among other things, these utility trenches provided an opportunity to understand how the third dimension of a Baroque town plan, depth, was handled. This work will allow us to see how the plan was used through time to structure activities and in turn how it was altered to better suit them.

Our specific goals included excavations at several locations around State Circle, one being the front yard of the State House Inn (marked A in Figure 2), the other two to be selected from a series of properties along the north side of the Circle. After the grant was awarded, we opted not to examine the north side of State Circle (marked B in Figure 2), shifting our attention to two areas, 1) the southwest side of State Circle, the point at which it is closest to, and connected by School Street with Church Circle, the other central focus of the Nicholson Plan, and 2) the Market Space/Pinkney Street area, adjacent to the City Dock (marked C in Figure 2).

The hope for discoveries at the State House Inn site included evidence for earlier perimeters of State Circle, marked

by curbs, fences, filling, and cutting into the natural grade of the hill on which the State House stands. Since all features could be expected to be datable through the ceramics and other material found in association with them, we presumed a chronology of alterations might help us understand the building episodes which could be associated with key political and economic events which would, in turn allow us to better understand such features recovered at other places within the city. Further, we hoped that eventually we could compare and contrast the timing, materials, and magnitude of alterations to the Plan throughout the city during the 18th and 19th centuries to gain a deeper understanding of the degree of local level political coordination within the city.

Part II: Previous Scholarship on the Nicholson Plan

Aside from remarks and observations on Nicholson's plan by historical writers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, few scholars took the town plan as an object of serious scholarship prior to the work of John Reps in the 1940s. While earlier historians knew that the plan was unique and probably the work of Nicholson, few moved beyond calling it an interesting, if inconvenient anachronism. It was Reps who first understood its Baroque qualities and began to amass data on the characteristics of the plan and its use of two circles, on two prominent hills,

to highlight the centers of power, Church and state. Reps properly characterized the radiating streets and established that Nicholson probably understood the political intentions of Baroque city planning because of his association with the workshop of Christopher Wren which produced Baroque designs for the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire of 1666.

While Reps's scholarship on Annapolis is somewhat impressionistic, the virtue of his extensive work on town planning in North America is the comparative base it provides for the characterization of any one city against others. In other words, Reps's status is derived from creating a sophisticated typology of urban settlement patterns. Even though the typology has never been reduced to a formula, Reps is able to celebrate the special quality of town planning in Annapolis and Williamsburg, by contrast to Puritan town planning in New England (Reps 1965: 124-5). As opposed to those for Annapolis and Williamsburg, New England town plans were intended to be two-dimensional, did not stress axial vistas, were planned to accommodate a limited population, included a central open space or common, maintained a sharp break between village and countryside, and exhibited little thought about the siting of buildings. Through this contrast, Reps establishes what we are to look for architecturally, historically, and archaeologically in a city like Annapolis. From Reps's characterization of the Baroque plan we understand that we should find features that

highlight vistas and which may even conflict with the commercial value of property, from the point of view of land speculation. Since we know, historically, that there was intensive use of property in Annapolis throughout the 18th century for speculative purposes, we would expect to find continual compromise between the need to make money on rationally designed pieces of property and the simultaneous use of the same pieces of property to contribute to vistas which direct the eye toward the sources of power in the city and the colony. While Reps's work has great value as a survey and a source of contrastive cases, it does not contain within it a method for understanding, diachronically, the compromises necessary in town planning between political power on the one hand and economic profit on the other. His view is essentially outside chronology; for Reps, towns were planned but did not develop.

In order to better understand town planning in Annapolis as a process, rather than the creation of a product or a finished work of art, Historic Annapolis Inc. sponsored research has focussed on the reconstruction of the 1683/4 survey of Annapolis made by Richard Beard. This work attempted to characterize the town plan as it existed before Nicholson redesigned it. This reconstruction based on the metes and bounds contained in Beard's 1683 certificate of survey, the survey occasioned by the town's becoming a legal port of entry. Its plan was most likely both

informal and primarily commercial. One of the conclusions is that Beard's survey was generally descriptive rather than prescriptive; it was for a town plan already in existence on the ground by 1683 (Ramirez 1975: 38-40).

The most important by-product of this work is that it establishes the relationships between the one or two antecedent street plans and Nicholson's plan. By comparing reconstruction of Beard's survey of 1683/4 with Nicholson's plan of 1695/6 (which was surveyed and platted by Beard for Nicholson), it demonstrates how Nicholson incorporated several pre-existing streets into his new Baroque plan. This research reversed Raps' characterization of Nicholson as an amateurish user of Baroque principles of design by showing that he was not drawing his plan on a blank slate, but rather had to effect compromises between 1) his Baroque vision, 2) the natural situation of the town, and 3) the plan of a town already established to serve certain commercial purposes.

The research outlined above points the way to understanding Annapolis in comparison to other colonial cities. However, to gain a full understanding of the implications of urban design, it is necessary to study the filling in of a town plan and that entails study of lot layout. Fortunately, extensive work has been done in Annapolis on the layout of lots, their uses, their subdivision, and changing titles to them. Two such studies, critical to the work of "Archaeology in Annapolis," are those by

McWilliams and Papenfuse (1971) and Baker (1983).

The immediate goal of McWilliams and Papenfuse was to create a picture of property-holding in Annapolis in 1783. Their starting point was a 1783 tax list which listed individuals, improvements on pieces of real estate, and the value of those improvements. The job of McWilliams and Papenfuse was to connect specific individuals to specific pieces of Annapolis real estate, the critical piece of information missing from the tax lists. In the process they carried out many title searches, moving both backward and forward in time from 1783, their period of concern. The value of their work is that it provides a considerable amount of information on the uses of specific lots in Annapolis. This information on the economic use of Annapolis property, and by extension the Annapolis town plan, serves as a critical contrast to the political and symbolic uses identified by Reys.

The study by Baker (1983) extends the work of McWilliams and Papenfuse in two significant ways. First, Baker works beyond individual lots and builds neighborhoods used by members of different occupations, such as tanners, gold and silver smiths, coopers, merchants, etc. Baker's second contribution is her identification of three distinct phases of land development in Annapolis. The first occurred during the period 1695-1705, when planter/merchants purchased most of the lots within the city but quickly sold them off. The second phase, from 1705 to 1720, saw

resident merchants, among them Charles Carroll the Settler, Amos Garrett, William Bladen, and Thomas Bordley, purchase large blocks of city property. By 1725 these four men owned more than half of the land in the city. The third phase, which began in the 1720s, was characterized by the development of commercial zones in the city, including West Street, upper Church Street (now Main Street) and upper Duke of Gloucester Street. Also during this time there was the establishment of an area known as New Town which was set up to house craftsmen, particularly those practicing crafts like tanning and brewing which were considered malodorous and unappealing to people in the social, political, and residential areas of the town. By the 1730s most of New Town had been sold off to several of the largest landowners in the city. Leasing became prevalent during this time and by the 1740s, sub-leasing was common as some merchants along West Street held the third or fourth sub-lease on the land where they lived and worked. Throughout the rest of the century land development followed this pattern and by 1770, many of the one acre lots in the city were being sub-divided to accommodate the needs of the less wealthy merchants and craftsmen.

The work of McWilliams and Papenfuse and that of Baker on the subdivision of the lots contained within the Nicholson Plan allow us to deduce specifically from plot to plot and from neighborhood to neighborhood the archaeological remains of the Plan, the features associated with it, and the explanations of

its changes. The work of these scholars identifies owners, tenants, uses, and duration of tenure/ownership for most of the properties in the 18th-century city. This provides a firm basis for placing 18th-century Annapolitans on 20th-century plots of ground, a significant goal of contemporary historical research in Annapolis. More importantly, this work provides a baseline for understanding the authorship of close to 300 years of alterations and adaptations of Nicholson's plan to the needs of successive generations of Annapolitans.

In addition to the strictly historical research which has preceded our archaeological investigation, there has been one previous archaeological finding of relevance to our study. In work at the Calvert House site on State Circle, Yentsch (1983: 8-9) found that "the original topography of State Circle at the point where it abuts the north section of the yard was 12 feet lower in the past." Yentsch's findings also include a scatter of architectural debris, associated with this filling, dating to the 1770s.

Part III: The Archaeological Findings

A: The State House Inn Site

According to McWilliams and Papenfuse (1971) the property on which the State House Inn is located is lot 73 of the 1718 Stoddert Survey of Annapolis. Its earliest ownership can be

traced back to Brooksby in the 1720s (Wright: personal communication). There is some evidence that there were structures on this lot as early as 1723. There is more solid evidence for buildings later in the century including a reference in the Maryland Gazette in 1783 describing on the property a "house ... occupied by William Whetcroft." It is not certain that these sources refer to the same building or that either refers to today's State House Inn. The earliest reference to the contemporary building is an 1811 comment linking Washington G. Tuck to it, as its owner. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries many modifications were performed on this structure and today it stands as a three story, mansard-roofed inn and restaurant.

The goal of excavation in the yard of the State House Inn was to detect any archaeological evidence such as curbs, fence lines, and postholes that would allow us to measure and date alterations to State Circle. We also wanted to construct a profile which would reveal the original topography of State House Hill and its subsequent stratigraphy. By dating any cutting and/or filling in of the natural terrain, we hoped to link activity at the site to specific social and political episodes in 18th and 19th century Annapolis. A five foot grid was laid over the entire site and the squares within it labelled 1 through 42. Excavation techniques included shovel skimming and troweling, following stratigraphic layers. Dirt was screened through a one quarter inch wire mesh. Six five by five foot

units and four two and one half by five foot units were excavated and every unit but one (unit number 17) was taken down to sterile subsoil. Each layer within a unit was assigned an upper case letter and at the end of excavations (Hopkins 1986), layers that extended into several units were linked and labelled with Roman numerals.

A principal find of excavations at the State House Inn was the steep slope in the natural topography of the site. In unit 39, adjacent to the present sidewalk, sterile soil was found at an average depth of one foot below the present ground surface. In unit 42, 15 feet further away from the circle, sterile soil was encountered at an average depth of four feet below the present ground surface (Figure 3). One of the west wall profiles for the State House Inn yard shows not only the natural slope of the topography, but also a distinct cut just outside a line of postholes marking an outer boundary of an earlier, wider circle (Feature 7 in Unit 39).

Even though the State Circle was in use by 1695, and a structure may have been on the State House Inn property by 1723, and was definitely by the late 18th century, analysis of the archaeological record indicates that there was little deposition of artifacts during the early 18th century.

The top layers on the site, I and II, were relatively disturbed by the recent renovations to the State House Inn.

This soil was a 10YR 4/6 dark yellowish brown silty loam (characterized according to the Munsell Soil Color Chart) containing modern gravel and construction debris. Beneath these mixed layers, layers III, IV, and V had mean ceramic dates of 1797 (n=16), 1792 (n=120), and 1794 (n=72) respectively, and each had a Terminus Post Quem (TPQ) of 1795. Most of these layers were composed of a 10YR 3/4 dark yellowish brown silty loam with some brick rubble mixed throughout. The two earliest layers, VI and VII, had mean ceramic dates of 1779 (n=186) and 1776 (n=85) with a TPQ for each of 1795. Most of the soil in these two layers was a 10YR 3/4 dark yellowish brown sandy loam with flecks of charcoal and some brick fragments (Figure 3). This suggests that there was a major deposition of rubble and soil in the yard of the State House Inn during and just after the American Revolution, presumably in order to level the steep natural slope of State House Hill. This filling seems to have taken place at about the same time as the filling Yentsch discovered across the circle at the Calvert House site.

Evidence for earlier boundary markers for State Circle takes the form of a line of seven features found toward the northern end of the site. Five of these were likely post holes and the other two features are as yet unidentified. These features were found in units 16, 33, and 39. The line they form runs about 12 feet south of and parallel to the present curb of State Circle and about three feet south of the edge of the present sidewalk

(Figure 4). All of the post holes appear to have originated in Layer IV.

Feature 7.3, which was probably a pit, had a ceramic date of 1733 (n=5) and a TPQ of 1715. Only one posthole, Feature 7, contained any datable material, two pieces of ceramic from the 1770s, a sample too small to be reliable. The remaining postholes appear to have been dug into layers VI and VII and may therefore be assumed to be more recent than those layers, intruding into them after their deposition.

Trenching

In addition to excavating at the State House Inn, we spent considerable time monitoring the excavation of trenches for various utilities at several points within the Historic District with the dual goals of perfecting techniques for monitoring the burial of electric wires throughout the Historic District and recovering information about alterations to the Nicholson Plan at points beyond the two circles. Our monitoring was concentrated in two locations, the Market Space/Pinkney Street area near the City Dock, and School Street, the thoroughfare that connects State Circle with Church Circle.

The profiles we made of sewer line trenching across the Market Space and up the length of Pinkney Street indicate that between two and four feet of filling has taken place in the dock

area and at the lower end of Pinkney Street. The same profiles suggest there was little or no filling at the upper end of Pinkney Street (Creveling 1986). While we were able to determine the magnitude of filling along the Market Space and Pinkney Street, the utility company's mode of excavation made it impossible for us to recover any data that would allow us to date the various episodes of filling and street resurfacing, beyond what little we have been able to learn from the historical and photographic records of major episodes of repaving in the late 19th century.

Utility trenches were also dug along School Street, the short roadway that connects State Circle and Church Circle. Profiles from this trenching indicate that the dip between the two hills was in the past at least five feet deeper in some places than it is today (Hopkins 1986). This leveling of the swale between the two highest points in the city seems to have occurred during the 18th and 19th centuries although, as is the case with the trenching in the dock area, we were unable to recover material allowing us to create a firm chronology.

Part IV: Conclusions

There are two different kinds of conclusions to be drawn from this project, one set primarily methodological, the other substantive and theoretical.

On method, our excavations at the State House Inn

demonstrate that at least in the case of the two Circles, which are the foci of the Nicholson plan, there is evidence that may be recovered concerning both Nicholson's original design, and the three centuries of alterations to it. Our identification of post holes, cutting, and filling demonstrate the kinds of evidence we need to search out at other points along the edges of both circles to understand the complex series of alterations that have cumulatively diminished each circle by a considerable number of feet. With regard to the trenching projects, we have learned both what the data look like, principally the kinds of surfaces used for streets in Annapolis over time, and also the real challenges we face in recording the data and in creating a chronological framework for those data.

More importantly, we have demonstrated the ability of sites like the State House Inn to comment on a tension that has existed within Annapolis ever since Nicholson laid out his Baroque plan. The tension is between the commercial needs of the city and the function of the town plan as an active guide to the sources of power within the city and colony. At the State House Inn we have the archaeological record of alterations to the property like filling and fencing, that made it more usable commercially, but which did not conflict with the symbolic function of the plan. The use of the State House Inn property is just one of many cases in Annapolis where land use decisions have served the interests

of commerce while preserving the Baroque character of the city. The archaeological version of accommodation is important because it characterizes not only Annapolis since Nicholson but also Nicholson's work itself. Nicholson accommodated his Baroque vision to the pre-existing town, platted by Richard Beard. The result of our work has added to the understanding of Nicholson's plan as dynamic and not simply as a static, aesthetic achievement, of value principally as a work of art.

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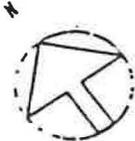
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The Nicholson Plan



PLAN
OF
ANNAPOLIS
20 JULY 1718

scale: 1" = 500'

*The original of this plan, with
and copies of same, deposited and then
destroyed by fire in 1796, and it is
therefore a reconstruction. The plan
is to the north of Queen Anne's Street
and is called in one of the original papers the
Nicholson Plan. It shows the
streets as they were laid out.*

Henry AN Gould
10 April 1878

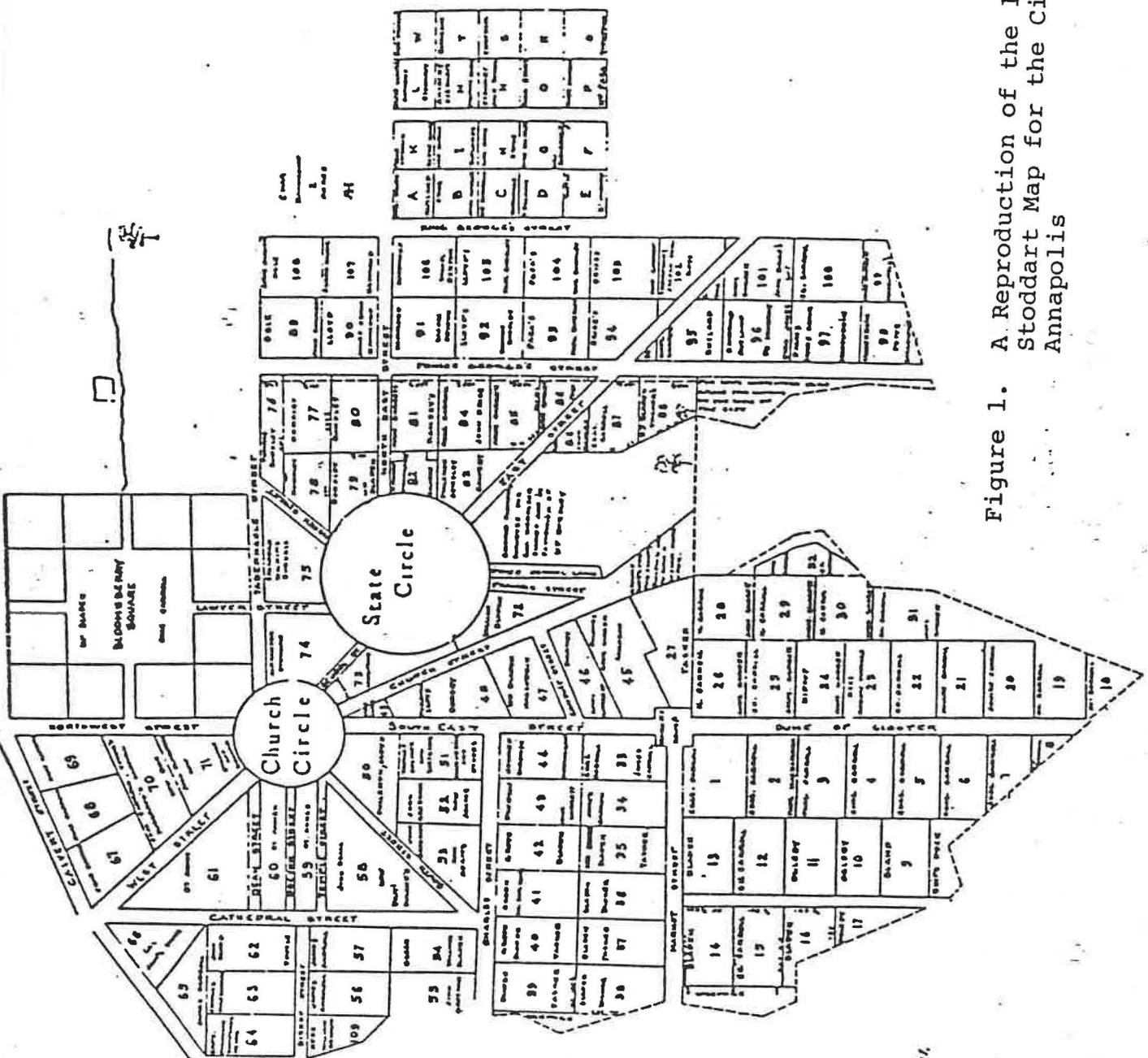


Figure 1. A. Reproduction of the 1718 Stoddart Map for the City of Annapolis

The Nicholson Plan



PLAN
OF
ANNAPOLIS
28 JULY 1710

scale: 1" = 500'

The original of this plot was made and certified by James Nicholson and has since been revised by John Callahan in 1791, George Shaffer in 1799, and W. V. Jones. Certain names have been omitted due to illegibility. The pocket line through the plot to the south of Prince George Street was added in one of the earlier copies to correct an error. All lines on this drawing are exactly copied.

Henry O. G. Gould
10 April 1956

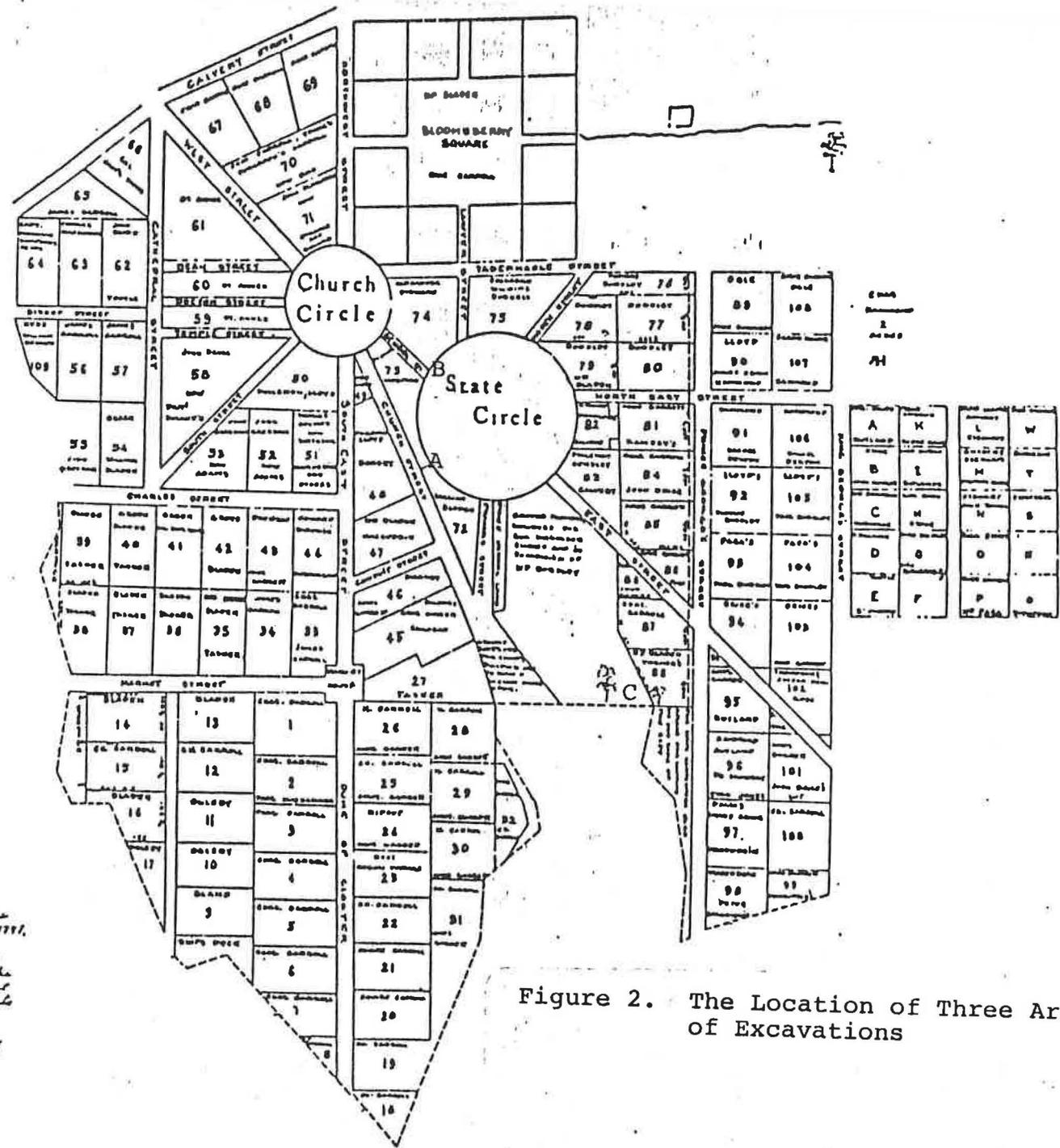


Figure 2. The Location of Three Areas of Excavations

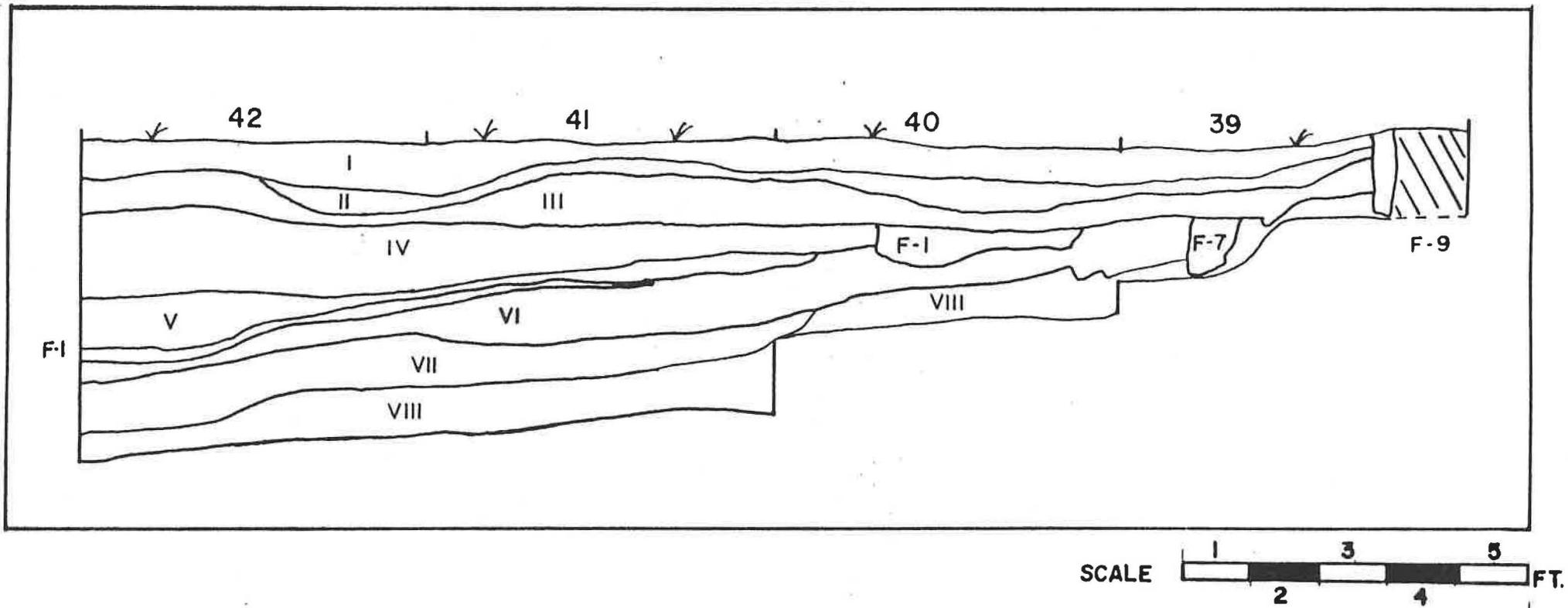
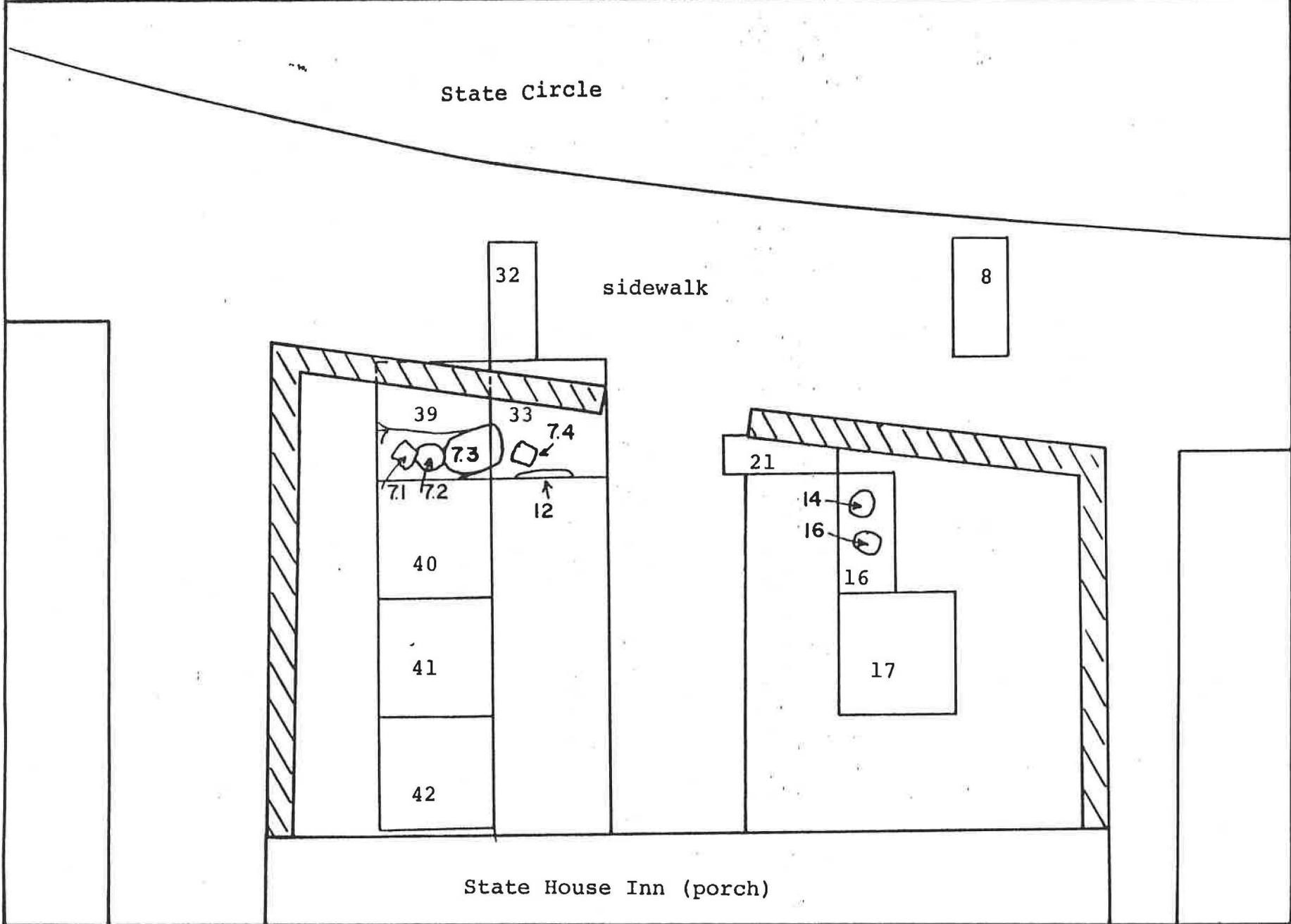


Figure 3. Stratigraphic Profile of the West Walls of Units 39, 40, 41, and 42



KEY:
 modern brick wall

SCALE
 0 5 10
 feet

↑
 GN

Figure 4. The Location of Features Marking A Previous Boundary of the State Circle.