

Docket Item # 5 & 6
BAR CASE # 2010-0006 & 2001-
0007

BAR Meeting
February 17, 2010

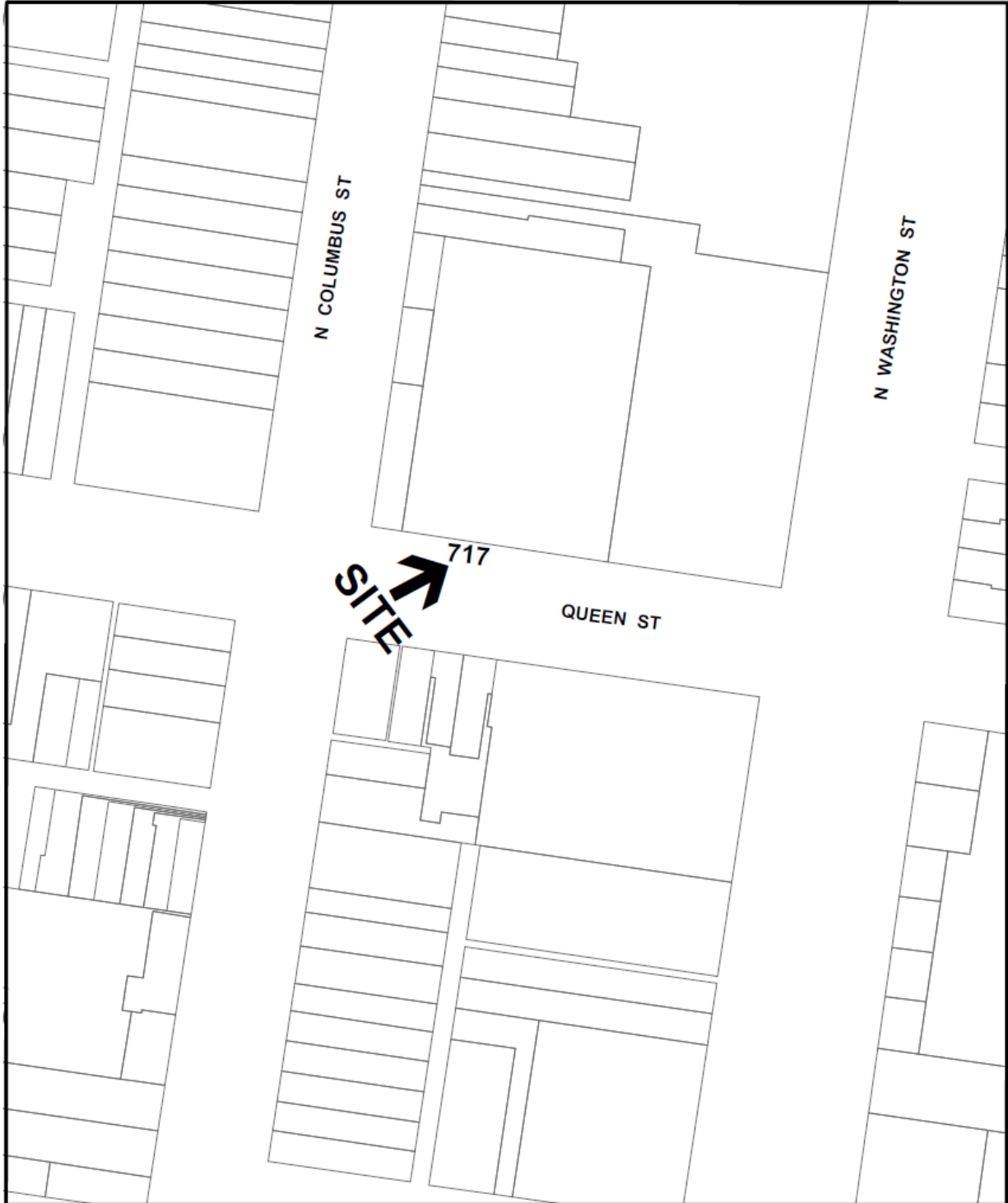
ISSUE: Demolition & Alterations to a brick fence
APPLICANT: City of Alexandria, Alexandria Library
LOCATION: 717 Queen Street, Kate Waller Barrett Library
ZONE: RC

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of a Permit to Demolish only the portion of the low brick wall where it abuts the adjacent mechanical screen wall and a Certificate of Appropriateness to vertically terminate the garden wall at the north and south ends of the adjacent screen wall with the following conditions:

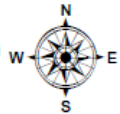
1. That the garden wall brick be carefully removed by hand down to one course above grade and that there be no ground disturbing activity; and
2. That the garden wall brick be salvaged for future repair of other portions of the garden wall on this site.

****EXPIRATION OF APPROVALS NOTE:** In accordance with Sections 10-106(B) and 10-206(B) of the Zoning Ordinance, any official Board of Architectural Review action will expire 12 months from the date of final approval if the work is not commenced and diligently and substantially pursued by the end of that 12-month period.

****BUILDING PERMIT NOTE:** Most projects approved by the Board of Architectural Review require the issuance of one or more construction permits by Building and Fire Code Administration (including signs). The applicant is responsible for obtaining all necessary construction permits after receiving Board of Architectural Review approval. Contact Code Administration, Room 4200, City Hall, 703-838-4360 for further information.



BAR CASE #2010-0006/0007 2/17/2010



I. ISSUE: The applicant, the City of Alexandria, is requesting a permit to demolish a portion of the low brick wall at the north end of the east side of the Kate Waller Barrett Library, located at 717 Queen Street.

II. HISTORY: The one story, red brick Colonial Revival style, Kate Waller Barrett Library was constructed in 1938 by the Barrett family and presented to the City. The library was constructed, with permission, on top of the Quaker Cemetery located on this site in the 19th century. Three City funded additions were made to the 1938 structure, one in 1954, one in 1964 and the most recent in 1994, also constructed above the historic cemetery. Portions of the garden wall may date from the period of the site's use as a cemetery.

III. ANALYSIS: An approximately 20' long portion of the 3'-6" high brick garden wall which extends along the north and east sides of the library site was in immediate danger of collapse, creating an unsafe condition for the public. The City's Code Administration staff cited the City on November 25, 2009 and required immediate removal of the failed portion of the wall to eliminate this unsafe condition. The City barricaded this section of the walkway, which is used to gain access to the rear of the property, to limit pedestrian access. However, while already gated, this area has limited visual surveillance and there was evidence that this narrow walk had been used as shelter by homeless persons who would be in extreme danger if the wall collapsed. BAR and Alexandria Archaeology staff, therefore, met with General Services staff on site to evaluate the immediate alternatives. Based on prior research performed by BAR staff prior to the 1994 library addition (attached), the portion of the wall in question is believed to date from the mid 20th century and did not have historic or architectural merit.

City staff, therefore, directed that the collapsing brick be carefully salvaged by hand and stacked on site for possible reuse, if directed by the Board. Upon further investigation, it appears that the approximately 8" wide space between the library's low brick wall and the brick wall enclosing the mechanical units of serving the adjacent office building had been filled with earth and plants as a garden design feature prior to construction of the most recent addition to the library. Hydrostatic pressure and subsequent freeze/thaw cycles created a horizontal load on the garden wall which caused its collapse.

Based on the brick color, texture and bonding and the color, texture and hardness of the mortar, Staff does not believe that this specific portion of the brick garden wall is related to the original cemetery or the initial library construction. Nor does the present wall serve any useful purpose where it parallels the adjacent mechanical screen. Finally, as reconstruction of the wall would require excavation a minimum of 24" deep to install a footing, there is a high potential for encountering human remains as part of this work. For all these reasons, staff recommends that the wall be carefully removed down to the first brick course above grade and that the garden wall ends be terminated vertically at each end of the adjacent mechanical screen wall. The salvaged brick will be saved for reuse patching other deteriorated portions of the library perimeter wall.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of a permit to demolish only the portion of the low brick wall where it abuts the adjacent mechanical screen wall and recommends approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness to vertically terminate the garden wall at the north and south ends of the adjacent screen wall with the following conditions:

1. That the garden wall brick be carefully removed by hand down to one course above grade and capped and that there be no ground disturbing activity; and
2. That the garden wall brick be salvaged for future repair of other portions of the garden wall on this site.

V. CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

Legend: C - code requirement R - recommendation S - suggestion F- finding

Code Administration: No comments received

Historic Alexandria: No comments received

Alexandria Archaeology: No comments received

Transportation and Environmental Services: No comments received

VI. IMAGES

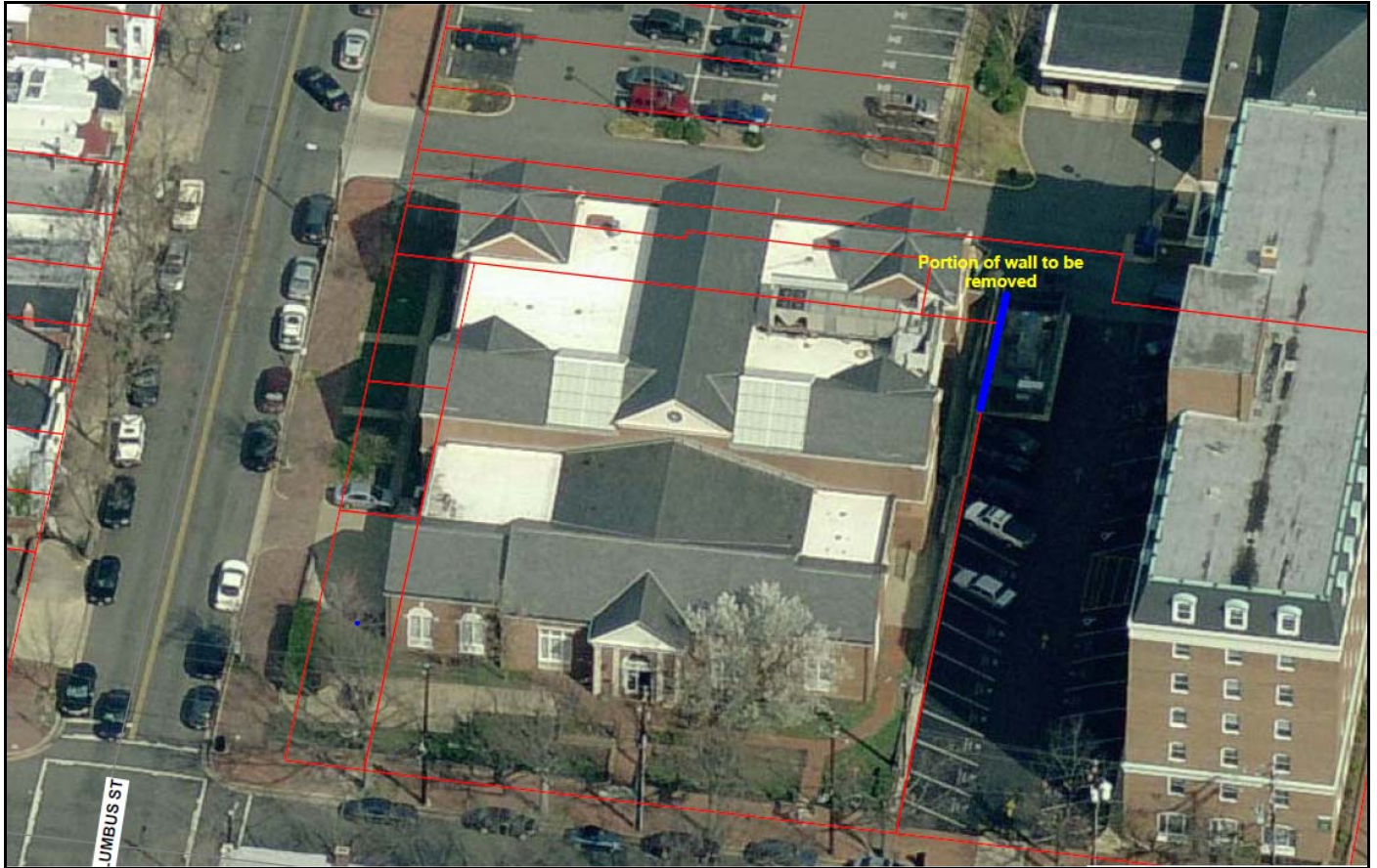


Figure 1: Corner of Queen Street and Columbus Street looking North

Condition of the wall prior to partial removal:



Removal of the wall in progress:



Remaining section of the wall to be removed subsequent to BAR approval:



Figure 2

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ALEX. ARCHAEOLOGY

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 4, 1993
TO: File
FROM: Peter H. Smith and Al Cox, Staff BAR
RE: Dating the Brick Wall at the Queen Street Library

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Traditionally it has been assumed that the brick wall around the Queen Street Library dated from the acquisition of the lot by the Society of Friends for use as a cemetery in the late 18th century. For example, Mary Powell in her The History of Old Alexandria (1928) states: "About 1820 a lot was purchased on the north side of Queen Street for a burying ground. It was enclosed by a high brick wall.....:(p.164).

However, based upon a number of factors we believe that this secondary source is unreliable, merely repeating oral history. It is our conclusion that the oldest portions of the brick wall dates from the middle of the 19th century and has been substantially altered on a number of occasions.

On July 23, 1860 the Alexandria Gazette reported that the old fence which enclosed the Quaker cemetery on Queen Street "will be replaced with a neat brick wall, with stone coping and stone pillars at the gate." It is likely that the fence to be replaced that is referred to was made of wood.

In 1884 the Gazette reported that the gate to the cemetery fell on a little girl crushing her to death (Gazette, 5/22/84). The Fireside Sentinel in a history of the cemetery reports that: "In 1918, the Society of Friends allowed the Audubon society to equip the old cemetery for a bird sanctuary. Later the ground was utilized as a children's play yard in the 1920's, and in 1937 the Alexandria library secured a 99-year lease on the property in order to construct a library." (Fireside Sentinel, October, 1987, v.1, no. 8, .p.63) In 1921 a 10' x 20' frame playground shelter with a brick foundation was erected on the grounds (Building Permit #616, 9/2/1921).

The new library was built on the site in 1938. In January 1937, the Gazette reported that the front brick wall (south wall) was razed (Gazette, 1/16/37 and 1/18/37). Oral tradition indicates that the bricks from this razed section of the wall were used in the construction of the front facade of the present library building. No documentary evidence has been found to date to

indicate when the stone pillars and iron gate for the cemetery were removed.

Additions were made to the library building in 1954 and 1964. The 1954 addition is the present rear portion of the structure. The 1964 additions are two flanking brick wings on either side of the original building.

In 1990, an application was filed with the Board of Architectural Review for extensive repairs to the north and east brick walls. Photographs supplied with the application clearly show the extensive amount of failure of the wall. The application was deferred indefinitely at the request of the library and no formal B.A.R. action was ever taken. The requested repairs, however, were undertaken.

PHYSICAL INVESTIGATION

On April 4, 1993, Peter Smith, Ralph Rosenbaum and Al Cox visited the Kate Waller Barrett Library, 717 Queen Street, as part of the investigation to determine the construction date(s) of the brick garden wall surrounding the perimeter of the site. The wall is built of red brick, generally matching the brick of the library and its additions, and has both slate and mortar coping in different sections. The fact that the brick of the front facade is similar to that found in the garden wall may or may not indicate that brick from the demolished south wall was used for construction of the front facade in 1938.

The north wall is constructed with light gray portland cement mortar. The west half of the wall has a slate coping and that section immediately adjacent to the asphalt parking area is of late 20th design and construction that does not match the other sections of the wall. The east half of the wall has a cement mortar coping. There are header courses at each 7c. The above grade portions of this wall were probably constructed in the mid-20th century. This is the section that received extensive repairs in 1990.

The oldest section of the visible wall appears to be the south portion of the central section of the east wall. This portion of the wall is 15c (42") above grade and 1 1/2c thick (12 1/2"). The brick here is 8 1/2" x 2 3/16", with a header course each 5 courses of running bond (the 1937 building and all other walls have headers at 7c). The mortar appears to be a light tan sand and lime mixture which is also used for the sloped coping. A sample of the mortar was obtained below grade. This portion of the wall appears - from the weathering of the brick, the lime mortar and the shouldered footing - to have been constructed in the 19th century.

A 12" x 12" x 22" deep test pit dug adjacent to this portion of the wall revealed a 2" wide shoulder 6c below grade (12 1/2"). The 2 1/4" x 3 7/8" wide header sat above at least three additional courses of stringers. The soil in the test pit was a uniform, friable, ochre colored sandy clay with uniform (up to 1"

diameter) washed river gravel approximately 22" below existing grade. Mixed throughout the soil were numerous fragments of pottery, glass and coal dating ca. 1880 to ca. 1920 indicating extensive disturbance. No evidence of oyster shells was found in the test pit. It appears that the site in this area was excavated during construction of the 1950s library addition, backfilled with gravel against the base of the wall and filled with clay loam to drain to the south.

The south and west walls appear to have been demolished down to grade and rebuilt with 16" wide x +-5' long x 3 1/2" thick gray slate coping. The brick and the coarse gray cement mortar visually match that used on the 1937 library. One exception is the area at the base of the wall to the west of the entry steps. There is a 2 3/16" x 3 3/8" rowlock course which does not course with the rest of the wall and which has a darker, more worn surface. This may be the remains of an older wall.

Figure 3