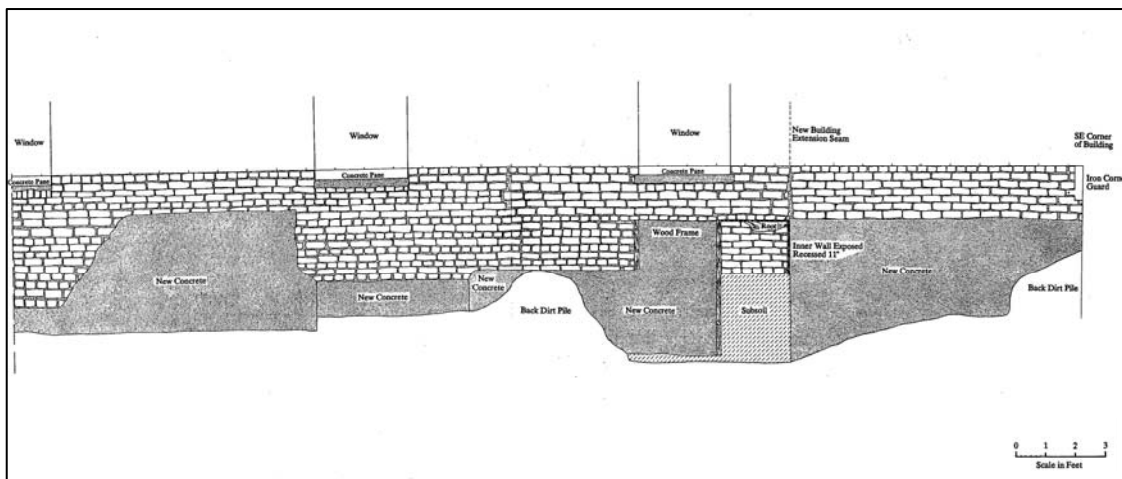


ALFRED STREET BAPTIST CHURCH (44AX161)



Profile, South Wall, Section 1 and 2 (Source: Engineering-Science)

INTRODUCTION

In 1991 and 1992, Engineering Science, Inc, on behalf of Robert J. Nash, F.A.I.A. & Associates conducted a Phase I archaeological identification survey and construction monitoring at the historic Alfred Street Baptist Church (44AX161) in Alexandria, Virginia. They coordinated the project with Alexandria Archaeology in accordance with the Archaeology Protection Code of the City of Alexandria and followed the Archaeology Preservation Guidelines for the City of Alexandria (Alexandria Archaeology 1990). This project consisted of archival research, subsurface archaeological testing (shovel test pits, test units and trenches), construction monitoring, and feature and artifact analyses.

The study area for the identification survey consisted of the original church lot, which first had been rented by the Colored Baptist Society in 1818, and the adjacent lot to the south which was acquired by the church in 1919.

Additional archaeological investigations were conducted in the yard area to the south and west of the historic church. Construction monitoring was conducted around the foundations of the historic church and in the area to the north of the historic church and to the east of the modern church.

HISTORY

The Baptist Movement in Northern Virginia. The Baptist movement in Northern Virginia has been traced to the evangelistic efforts of Edmund Hayes and Thomas Yates, who were members of Sater's Baptist Church of Maryland as early as 1743. The first Baptist Church in Virginia was established at Burleigh, Isle of Wight County, in 1714. By 1774, there were 54 Baptist churches in the colony.

One of the first persons associated with the Baptist movement in Northern Virginia was Jeremiah Moore of Fairfax County. In 1772, Moore professed the Baptist covenant and was baptized by

the Reverend David Thomas of the Broad Run Baptist Church at New Baltimore in Fauquier County, Virginia. Soon after, he began to preach and was successful in Fairfax County. Through Jeremiah Moore's efforts, Back Lick Baptist Church was established in upper Fairfax County and from this church came the charter members of the First Baptist Church of Alexandria.

The Growth of African-American Churches in the South. One result of the Great Awakening in the American colonies during the mid-18th century was the conversion of many African-Americans to Christianity. This religious revival stressed the importance of saving all men regardless of race and also emphasized the conversion experience in the heart rather than spiritual growth through study and discipline. The Baptists and Methodists were very successful in gaining converts for a number of reasons. First, at least during the late 18th-century, there was some anti-slavery sentiment among church members, particularly after the Revolutionary War. Second, the church organizational structure was flexible and particularly efficient in sparsely settled areas. Third, and perhaps most important, "both groups deemphasized an educated clergy, and therefore, many African-Americans were able to preach among them".

African-American preachers, Baptist and Methodist, were not uncommon in Virginia during the closing decades of the 18th-century. The African-American Baptist Church in Williamsburg prospered under the leadership of two African-American preachers named Gowan Pamphlet and Moses. The first African-American Methodist preacher

was Harry Hoosier whose first recorded sermon was preached at Fairfax Chapel in 1781.

By the early 19th-century, there were several independent African-American Baptist and Methodist churches in Georgetown, Washington and Alexandria. In 1816, the Mount Zion Methodist Church was organized from the Montgomery Street Church in Georgetown. The Israel Bethel Church was organized by African-American members who withdrew from the Ebenezer Methodist Church in 1820. This church was located near the foot of Capital Hill. The Nineteenth Street Baptist Church (known historically as the First Colored Baptist Church) was established by the congregation of the First Baptist Church of Washington in 1833. In Alexandria, the Alfred Street Baptist Church (known historically as the African Baptist or Colored Baptist Church) was established by African-American members of the First Baptist Church of Alexandria in 1803. In 1832, the African-American Methodists in Alexandria established Davis Chapel, the forerunner of the Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church. Even though there were African-American churches, some free African-Americans and slaves continued to worship with white congregations.

The African-American church was the first institution which African-Americans were able to control and this was a significant advancement in the African-American struggle for independence. The church encouraged the development of the community by being its social, educational and economic center.

The Establishment of the Alfred Street Baptist Church. When the First Baptist Church was established in Alexandria in 1803, both free African-Americans and slaves joined. While some were new converts, many had been members of other Baptist churches. The Colored Baptist Society was also established in 1803. Because African-American preachers were prevented from public speaking without permission from the church, and because the seating in the church was segregated, free African-American Baptists most likely held religious meetings in their homes.

When the trustees leased the lot on Alfred Street for the Colored Baptist Society in 1818, the council of the First Baptist Church established articles which "officially" granted the society the opportunity to meet and discuss on their own, though they were still considered as part of one church. The first article limited worship at the African-American meeting house to "the afternoon of every Lords day" and any other evening which would not interfere with the meetings held at the First Baptist Church. The second and third articles allowed the African-American congregation to relate religious experiences as well as evidence of improper behavior by African-American members among themselves. The final decision regarding any matter, however, ultimately rested with the white council.

On June 28, 1830, a committee was formed in order to organize a separate and independent "Colored Baptist" Church. One motion resolved that Brothers Cawood and Rogers together with the Pastor of the Church, be a Committee, with discretionary powers, fully to organize, the Coloured Members

of this Body into a Separate Church, in the Town of Alexandria. The Clerk was directed to grant, the Colored Members of this church, a letter of Dismission to Unite in a Separate Body in this Town, under the name of "The Colored Baptist Church of Alexandria."

By 1836, a meeting house had been constructed on the Alfred Street Baptist Church property. Little is known about the 1836 structure. By 1855, the earlier structure had been replaced by a new church building.

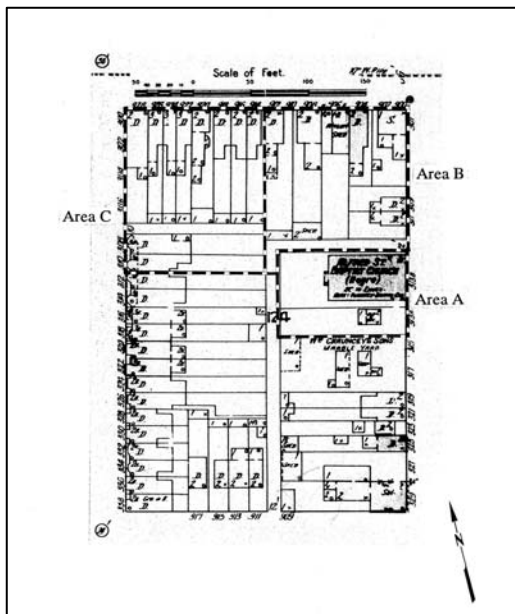
Although, the African-American Baptist congregation was subject to restrictions, they succeeded in establishing their own society, constructing their own meeting house and ultimately becoming the First Colored Baptist Church of Alexandria which was recognized as "an independent church with its own Constitution."

In addition to its spiritual function, the Alfred Street Baptist Church also assisted in the education of the African-American community in Alexandria by operating a Sunday school from as early as the 1820s. A more formal school was organized at the Church in 1833 by a teacher from Washington named Mr. Nuthall. This school lasted for only three years because of white fear and opposition following the Nat Turner Rebellion. Despite this setback, the Sunday school remained open even though legislation passed in Virginia in 1830 and 1839 prevented African-Americans from receiving any formal education. During the early 20th-century, the church's minister, Reverend Andrew Adkins founded the first African-American high school in Alexandria.

ARCHAEOLOGY

The Historic Church. Archaeological excavations and construction activities around the historic Alfred Street Baptist Church revealed interesting architectural traits and construction history. The work around the church foundation identified builder's trenches associated with the construction of the church and with subsequent alterations.

Architectural evidence clearly indicates that the historic church had additions to both the front and back. On the front, an extension was made toward Alfred Street extending 10 feet. On the rear, a smaller addition was made extending from the middle of the back (west) wall. Both of these changes appear to have occurred sometime between 1877 and 1891.

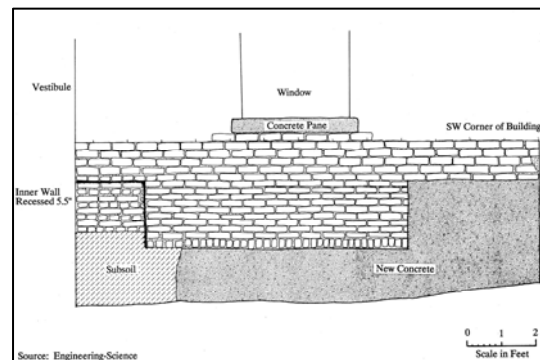


Project Area in 1891 (Source: Sanborn Map Co.)

A large organ was located snugly on a wooden platform in this rear addition when the renovation work began. Architectural evidence indicates that the rear addition was not originally built for

the organ. Windows in the addition have been bricked in and existing paint decoration on the interior of the chancel, including a medallion on the ceiling of the chamber and a stripe around all three walls (hidden from view after the organ was installed in 1926) indicate this space was originally naturally lighted and decorated. It most likely was built as a chancel especially for an altar, which no doubt was moved forward slightly after the organ was installed.

During the archaeological work, an outer wall and a deeper interior wall were identified. The inner wall was recessed 5.5 inches. It appears that the interior wall may have been installed when the basement was excavated in 1897. The exterior brick facing, only one course thick, is harder than the soft molded ("salmon") brick of the inner walls and foundation. This exterior brick matches the brick of the new facade. The Portland cement mortar attaching this exterior facing is much stronger than the interior mortar. It is likely that this exterior facing on the sides and back of the building was added during the major renovations which occurred during the period between 1877 and 1891 when modifications were made to the front and the rear of the structure. This brick facing gave the church a consistent exterior finish.



Profile, West Wall South of Vestibule
(Source: Engineering-Science)

The foundation varied in depth. The foundation undulates in a somewhat regular manner. Variation in the brickwork can be observed both on this south wall and elsewhere where the other walls were exposed. The reason for the undulation of the wall remains unclear. It has been postulated that this could have been done to save brick or possibly it was thought to be a method to stabilize the foundation.

Architectural evidence suggests a lower level was added. This evidence consists mainly of: seams in the exterior brick around the lower level window frames indicate that the lower level windows were not original but added (there are no structural seams around the upper level windows); and segmental arches over lower level windows are different than the flat arches on the top row of windows (generally, flat arches, common to Federal style buildings are of an earlier date than the segmental arches, which in the mid-19th-century began to be favored for several styles, including Romanesque Revival.) In addition, a few wood joist ends (most have been replaced by bricks) survive in the side walls at a level intersecting lower level windows, suggesting that at some point, most likely when the floor was raised to its present location, the original floor was taken out. The lower level was probably added between 1877 and 1891 when the front and back additions also were added.

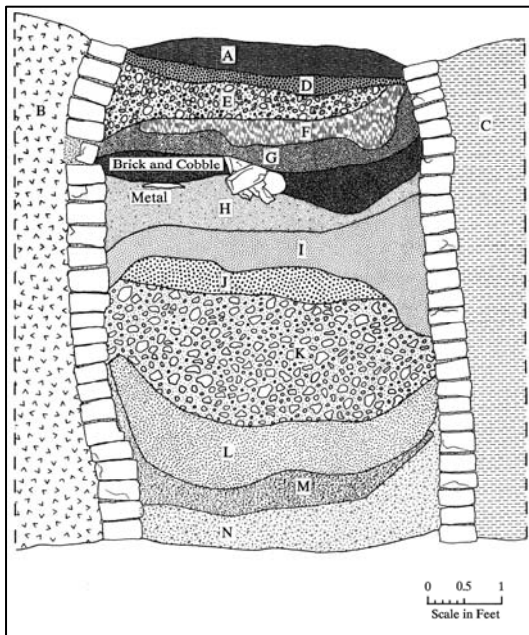
A basement was excavated beneath the standing structure and a concrete floor was poured around the turn of the century. No evidence is present in the basement which relates to the 1836 church.

The main portion of the existing brick structure most likely dates from 1855 with the front and rear additions constructed ca. 1871-1891. In 1896, the basement was lowered as indicated by the inner wall. The archaeological investigations also revealed differences in the construction of the church foundation from wall to wall. The foundation walls varied in depth, thickness, and style of brickwork. These variations may represent economic measures as well as the work of different bricklayers.

Buried 19th-century Layer. Testing in the yard areas revealed a buried cultural deposit datable to the early to mid-19th-century and consisting of domestic refuse and architectural debris. Its deposition appears to post-date that of the church as it overlay the builder's trench for the west wall of the church. The 19th-century deposit in the yard is significant for the information it may be able to provide on life in "The Bottoms" during the 19th-century. This deposit is probably associated with a family of free African-American tenants, the Beckleys, who occupied the lot next to the church throughout the 19th-century. The Beckley family occupied an economic position near the lowest rank of Alexandria society. Archaeological investigation has the potential to provide information on aspects such as diet, consumer behavior, and the economic and social strategies pursued by the Beckleys.

20th-century Features. Several other late 19th and early 20th century features were encountered during the archaeological investigations: a well, two brick-lined cellars and a brick wall

with builder's trench. The brick-lined well measured 4 feet in diameter; a total of 1320 artifacts were recovered from top portion of the well. The well was excavated to the depth of construction impact, approximately 6.5 feet; the lower deposits were left intact. Artifacts recovered from the top portion of the well represented secondary fill; no primary deposits were discovered. The date for the use of the well cannot be established based upon the excavations; however, a token dated 1934 was recovered from the well fill which would indicate that the final filling of the well occurred sometime after this date.



Profile, Feature 26, Well
(Source: Engineering-Science)

Two small brick piers and a brick filled cellar represented the remains of a 1877-1921 structure. Another cellar, this one brick-lined, was the remains of a 1912 structure. A brick wall, 24 courses high and three courses thick, with a builder's trench was encountered and appeared to be the southwest corner of a 1921 store at the corner of Duke and Alfred Streets.

CONCLUSION

Both the historic church and the subsurface deposits were considered to be significant for their information potential. In addition, the church is significant architecturally and for its association with one of the earliest African-American neighborhoods in Alexandria, known as the "The Bottoms". The church would have been a focal point for this community and an important representation of the community to the wider society. The archaeology revealed unusual architectural features that may shed light on the building techniques used in the construction of the church. This work could be incorporated with wider architectural and historical research into how the construction of the church was funded, who built it (e.g., building societies), as well as the specific building techniques used.