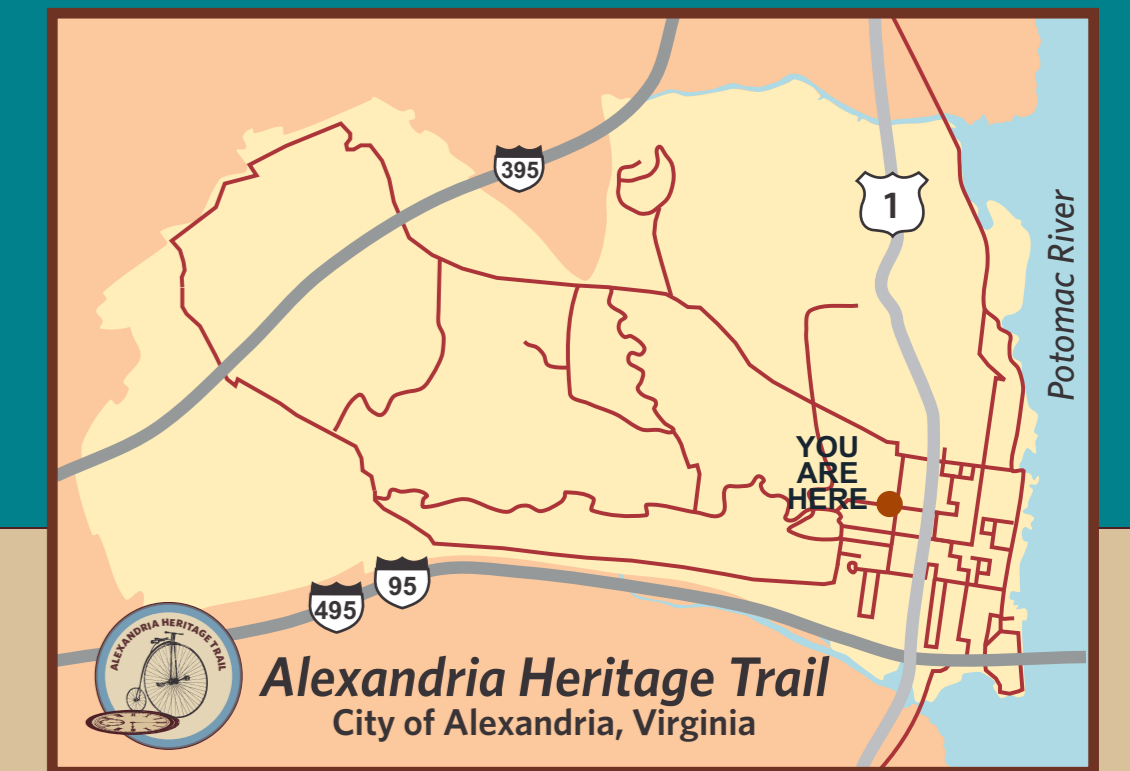


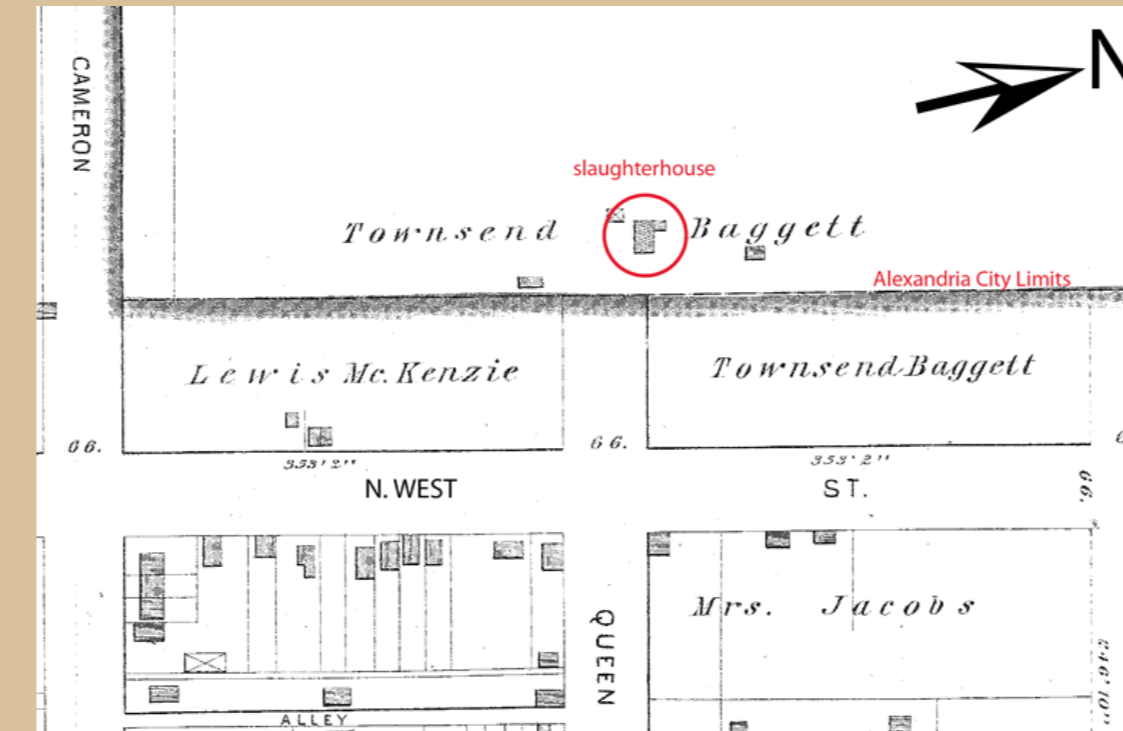
The Baggett and Hellmuth Slaughterhouse



A small slaughterhouse once stood on this spot in the 1870s and 1880s. Its discovery occurred when the City of Alexandria made plans to rebuilt Jefferson-Houston School. A City ordinance requires archaeological research to take place prior to development projects. Staff and volunteers at Alexandria Archaeology, in collaboration with URS Corporation archaeologists, conducted an archaeological excavation at this site in 2013 before construction began on the new school.

Why Was the Slaughterhouse Here?

In 1803 the Alexandria Common Council passed a law that forbade commercial slaughtering within the city limits. Throughout the nineteenth century these types of laws were not uncommon as city's tried to eliminate industries that produced unpleasant odors, noise, and offensive waste. As a result, in order to comply with the law, Benjamin Baggett very purposefully built his slaughterhouse set back from N. West street approximately 15 ft. outside the corporate limits of the City, technically part of Fairfax County, and therefore not subject to Alexandria's regulations.



An 1877 map depicts the Baggett slaughterhouse and two small outbuildings located immediately outside the city limits, *City Atlas of Alexandria, Virginia* (C.M. Hopkins 1877).

The Building

The archaeological remains of the slaughterhouse consisted of a 22.5 ft. by 20 ft. rectangular brick cellar filled with brick rubble to a depth of 7 to 8 ft. below grade. The cellar walls were 3 ft. wide at their thickest. Combined with the cooling effect of the underground environment, thick walls would have helped insulate the cellar, keeping the meat inside as fresh as possible. All four interior cellar walls had rows of regularly spaced iron fittings embedded in them, possibly to hold shelves or to mount hooks for hanging carcasses. The cellar had a wood floor and a brick-lined well tucked into the northwest corner. A slightly raised platform of packed clay was located next to the well, perhaps to support a scalding tank.



Two large iron brackets comprised of welded iron plates, possibly for holding a hoist in place.

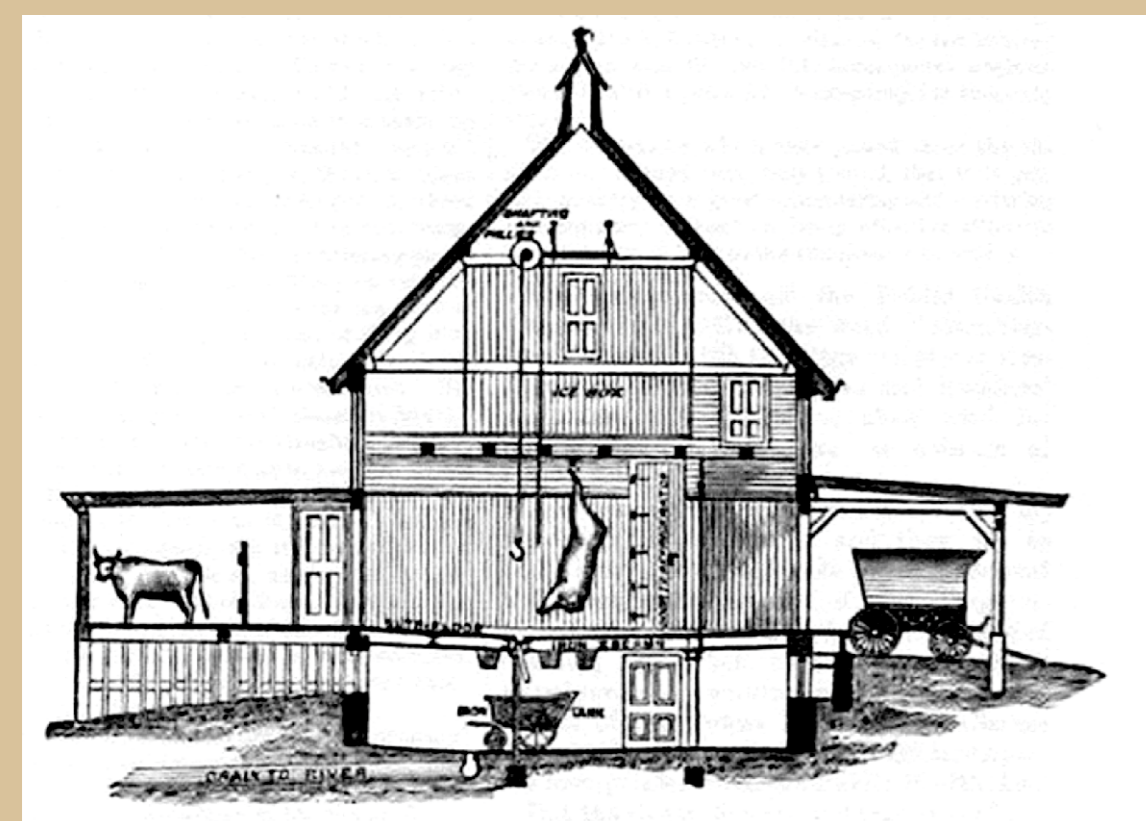
History

The story of the slaughterhouse began in 1871 when Townsend Baggett purchased 10 acres of pastureland near the northwest corner of Cameron Street and N. West Street on what is now the Jefferson-Houston School property. Townsend was a prominent local butcher at the time, and he taught three of his sons the butchery trade. Shortly after acquiring the land, Baggett's son Benjamin built a "slaughter house and other improvements" worth \$500 on it, and began operation by 1873.

"Mr. Benjamin Baggett slaughtered a hog yesterday, on one of the feet of which, there were six toes"
(*Alexandria Gazette* 4 December 1873).

The Slaughtering Process

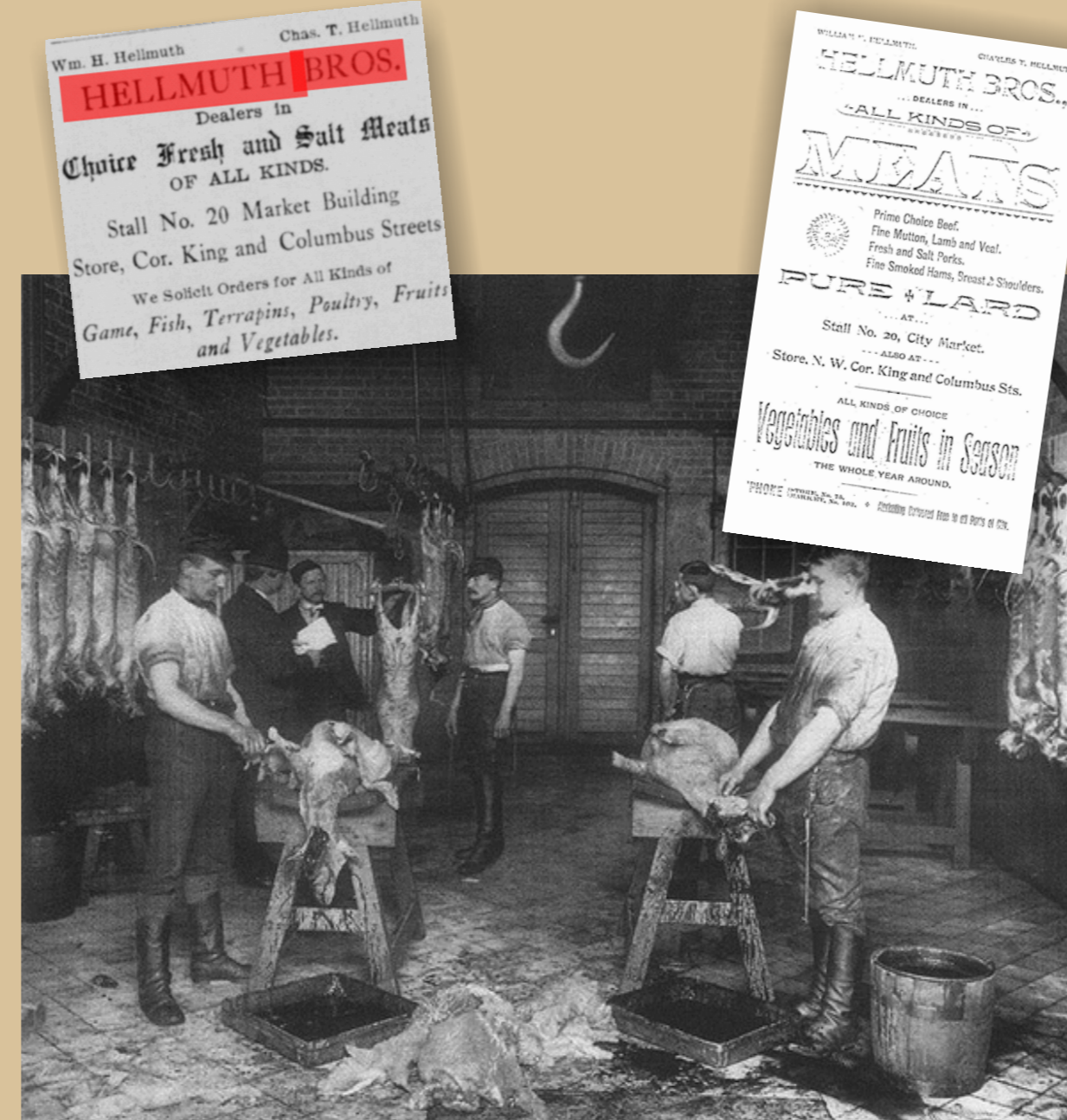
Throughout the ages most people raised and slaughtered their own animals for meat. By the nineteenth century in cities like Alexandria, professional butchers established commercial slaughterhouses (also known as abattoirs) to supply customers with prepared cuts of meat, thereby relieving people of this messy task. Unlike large assembly-line slaughterhouses in big cities, Benjamin Baggett's slaughterhouse was small in both size and scale. Nevertheless, some of the same principles and procedures were employed at both industrial slaughterhouses and private abattoirs.



Abattoir, ca. 1925, Brighton, Massachusetts.

For the next decade Benjamin Baggett operated his slaughterhouse and sold meat at the family's market stall in town. In 1884, Benjamin sold the slaughterhouse parcel to William and Charles Hellmuth for \$1,000. The Hellmuth Brothers also sold meat in one of the city market stalls. Evidence suggests that the slaughterhouse was no longer standing by 1891, possibly consumed by fire, although the Hellmuth Brothers maintained a butcher shop for many years thereafter.

A knocking pen used heavy retractable doors to confine the animals while they were dispatched.
(Swift & Co.'s Packing House, Chicago [1906]).



The slaughterhouse depicted here probably is the approximate size and scale of Benjamin Baggett's operation. (Municipal Slaughter House, Berlin, Germany, 1897 [Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum Collections])

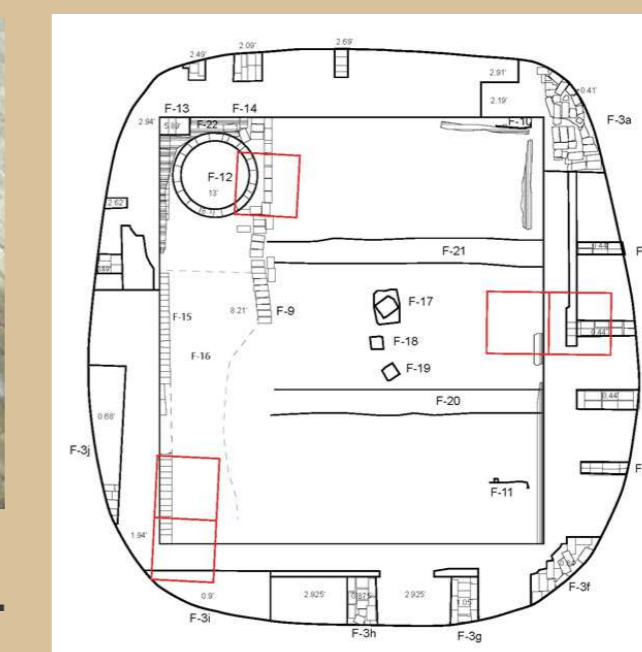
The typical components required for processing animals often included hold-ing pens, knocking and killing pens, dressing areas, and salting, smoking, and storage areas. Slaughterhouses often were equipped with scalding tubs to help with the removal of the hair from pigs, as well as meat hoists to suspend the carcasses for dressing. Hides and offal (internal organs and entrails) were carted away in wheelbarrows, and blood was drained into barrels for later transport and sale to secondary processing facilities.



Overview of the excavated slaughterhouse cellar.



The well in the corner of the cellar may have provided water for a scalding tank.



Plan map of the slaughterhouse. Note the location of a possible scalding tank and floor joists.



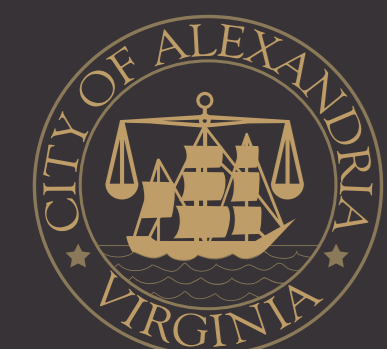
A pair of thick iron pieces connected with iron rods that may have formed the base for a trough or scalding tank.



A bent iron wagon wheel rim as well as other equipment recovered from the slaughterhouse cellar.



Pieces of iron strap or track, possibly part of a suspended track system for moving carcasses through the butchering process as well as a 7.5 ft. long iron pipe with a coil and gear on one end, perhaps for winding a chain or cable to lift carcasses.



CITY OF ALEXANDRIA EST. 1749

