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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTING OF THE
GEORGE STREET TUNNEL AND
INTERSECTION OF WILLIAM AND
CHARLES STREET,
CITY OF FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA**

VDOT Project No.: EN17-111-302, C501, P101

VDOT UPC No.: 111804

VDHR Project No.: 2018-0206

by

D. Brad Hatch, Kerri S. Barile, Danae Peckler, and Kerry S. González

Prepared for

Virginia Department of Transportation

Prepared by

**DOVETAIL
CULTURAL RESOURCE GROUP**

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January 23, 2019

Date

ABSTRACT

Dovetail Cultural Resource Group (Dovetail) conducted archaeological testing of the George Street tunnel and at the intersection of Charles and William Streets in the City of Fredericksburg, Virginia, during November 2018. The testing, undertaken at the request of the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), in partnership with the City of Fredericksburg, consisted of geophysical survey and the excavation of six test units at the George Street tunnel and the excavation of a single test unit adjacent to the auction block at the intersection of William and Charles Streets. The purpose of the work was to assess the integrity of any archaeological sites recorded in either area and to make National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) recommendations.

Work was conducted at both project areas in relation to proposed pedestrian improvements in downtown Fredericksburg. The intersection of Charles and Williams Streets, around the auction block, is the proposed site of traffic calming improvements, while the George Street tunnel is located within the public right-of-way, below the sidewalk, slated for pedestrian improvements. Prior to the archaeological testing, detailed archival and background research was conducted on both project areas to contextualize and help evaluate the archaeological findings. Fieldwork consisted of a visual inspection of both project areas, geophysical survey at the George Street tunnel project area, the excavation of test units, and selective testing of features.

Excavation at the George Street tunnel identified site 44SP0785, a sub-sidewalk vault constructed in the early-nineteenth century and used into the twentieth century as a storage area for the adjacent building at 826 Caroline Street. The archaeological deposits within the tunnel show evidence of disturbances and the artifact assemblage is small. **It is recommended that the Wellford House Storage and Tunnel Site (44SP0785) is not eligible for listing in the NHRP under Criterion D. However, the vault is a secondary architectural resource to the building at 826 Caroline Street and both should remain contributing elements to the Fredericksburg Historic District under Criterion C (111-0007/111-0132-0404).**

Archival research and archaeological study at the resource colloquially known as the “auction block” or “slave block” revealed that the stone was put in place during the 1830s or 1840s, likely concurrently with the construction of the nearby United States Hotel (later known as the Planter’s Hotel) in 1843. It may have been used as a sign post associated with the presentation of data on upcoming auctions and events but evidence suggests it was not used as a carriage block or built as a platform to showcase objects or enslaved individuals during an auction. Due to a lack of additional potential data from subsurface explorations, **it is recommended that the United States/Planter's Hotel Auction Block (site 44SP0786) is not eligible for the NRHP under Criterion D. However, the hotel and block should remain contributing elements to the Fredericksburg Historic District under Criterion A for their association with the public memory on the institution of slavery and Criterion C for their architectural merit (111-0050/111-0132-0236).**

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INTRODUCTION

Dovetail Cultural Resource Group (Dovetail) conducted archaeological testing of the George Street tunnel and at the intersection of Charles and William Streets in the City of Fredericksburg, Virginia, during November 2018 (Figure 1–Figure 2, pp. 2–3). The testing, undertaken at the request of the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) in partnership with the City of Fredericksburg, consisted of geophysical survey and the excavation of six test units at the George Street tunnel and the excavation of a single test unit adjacent to the auction block at the intersection of William and Charles Streets. The purpose of the work was to assess the integrity of any archaeological sites recorded in either area and to make National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) recommendations.

Work was conducted at both project areas in relation to proposed pedestrian improvements in downtown Fredericksburg. The intersection of Charles and Williams Streets, around the auction block, is the proposed site of traffic calming improvements, while the George Street tunnel is located within the public right-of-way, below the sidewalk, slated for pedestrian improvements. Prior to the archaeological testing, detailed archival and background research was conducted on both project areas to contextualize and help evaluate the archaeological findings. Fieldwork consisted of a visual inspection of both project areas, geophysical survey at the George Street tunnel project area, the excavation of test units, and selective testing of features.

Archaeological testing was conducted from November 5–13, 2018. Fieldwork was conducted by D. Brad Hatch, Kerri S. Barile, Jonas Schnur, Julie Chylsta, and Alison Cramer. Danae Peckler conducted the archival research. Dr. Hatch served as Principal Investigator. Drs. Hatch and Barile meet or exceed the standards established for archaeologists by the Secretary of the Interior (SOI). Drs. Hatch, Barile, and Ms. Peckler also meet or exceed the standards established for historians by the SOI.

RESULTS OF THE DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK AT THE INTERSECTION OF WILLIAM AND CHARLES STREET

Work at William and Charles streets focused on the northwestern corner of the intersection. In particular, studies were conducted in association with an object colloquially known as the “auction block” or “slave block.” This circular-shaped sandstone plinth is located near the curb at the apex of the street intersection and has been in this location for decades. Numerous oral and written traditions exist regarding the history of this object. Some state that it was a stepping block used to aid entry into a horse-drawn carriage while others believe it was used for the auction of chattel—including both materials and enslaved human beings. For this chapter, it will be referred to as the “block” to provide an inclusive moniker encompassing all potential previous uses. The block and surrounding soils have also been recorded as site 44SP0786 (see Figure 8, p. 22).

Prior to street improvements in this area, VDOT and the City elected to pursue limited archival research and archaeological studies. The goals were to ascertain the history of this object, understand the subsurface nature of this feature including size of the block and surrounding soils, and place the results within the context of area street development. Ensuing data allowed the team to create a preliminary chronology of the installation of the stone and street modifications in this area.

This chapter presents a summary of archival research completed on the block, including a synthesis of previous studies augmented by research completed as part of the current undertaking. This is followed by a description of the archaeological field results and an analysis of the history and physical parameters of the block in context.

Documentary Research

Currently located at the edge of the sidewalk inside the curb at the northwest corner of the intersection of William and Charles streets, the block site contains what is often said to have been “a common carriage step, intended to serve guests at the adjacent hotel” built by Joseph Sanford in 1843 on the eastern half of Lot 129 (Hennessy 2017). However, as aforementioned, many have also identified this stone as the “slave auction block,” for its historic associations with the sale of enslaved Americans at the various public auctions that occurred at the neighboring hotel. The actual date of the stone’s installation has not been previously identified.

A number of buildings existed on Lot 129 at one time or another prior to Sanford’s hotel. As early as 1809 a tavern was reported on the property in local tax records and between 1815 and 1839, the lot included two taverns, a lumber house, kitchen, stable, granary, and grocery store and dwelling—all of which are depicted in various MAS policies from previous lot owners, Edmund Penn and Thomas Proctor (Fredericksburg Land Tax Records n.d; MAS n.d.).

Joseph Sanford purchased the property currently addressed as 401–405 William Street in 1839 and erected the sizeable three-story, five-bay, brick building that remains at this location today

in 1843. Between 1843 and 1844, the property's taxable value increased by \$3,500 while Sanford's insurance policy assessed the buildings alone at \$13,850, suggesting that this new hotel was not modestly constructed (Fredericksburg Land Tax Records n.d; MAS n.d.). In fact, a few of the town's more notable citizens were counted as lodgers. The 1850 Federal Population Census identified 38 people residing in Sanford's hotel, including seven members of his own family, Fredericksburg Mayor R. B. Semple, lawyer William H. Fitzhugh, merchant William F. Cheek, and bar keeper William P. Ellis, along with several clerks, painters, and other tradespeople (United States Federal Population Census 1850). Sanford owned and operated what he named the United States Hotel at this location from 1843 until 1851, when he sold the property to James Charters, who renamed the business the Planter's Hotel (Hennessey 2017).

Taverns, inns, and hotels provided lodging for travelers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, but were also places for social gatherings, public auctions, and political events—thereby serving as communication hubs in towns of all sizes for people of various socioeconomic backgrounds. In the late 1840s, City Council attempted to impose a tax on auctioneers equivalent to a certain percentage of the proceeds made from auctions in town, but encountered a lawsuit that derailed the effort (FCCM 1847:325, 1848:343, 359). By 1857, the City had gained the right to tax auctioneers' sales; however, the tax was limited to personal property, requiring just “one half of one per cent on all sales at public auction; except sale of real estate and slaves” (FCCM 1857: 468). In 1858, an ordinance was passed requiring the licensure of auctioneers along with tavern and livery stable keepers with a 0.5 percent tax on the price of every slave sold or “fifty cents on every hundred dollars of the amount of such sale” to be paid within 10 days to the Chamberlain of the Corporation (FCCM 1858:250–251).

Situated along one of Fredericksburg's major thoroughfares, the United States Hotel/Planter's Hotel is known to have been the site of many public auctions throughout the mid-nineteenth century. At these auctions, enslaved people appear to have been regularly sold along with personal property and real estate of area residents:

The earliest ad appeared in the November 20, 1846 edition of the *Richmond Enquirer*—for the sale of 40 enslaved people “near the United States Hotel” in Fredericksburg. Over the next 16 years, sales or hiring of enslaved people took place regularly at the Planter's Hotel, usually around the first of the year. The biggest of all involved the sale 46 individuals on January 3, 1854 [Hennessey 2017:electronic document] (Figure 27, p. 55).

While it is probable that the stone was used during some of these auctions, “None of the advertisements for sale or hire reference the block specifically, but several place the sales ‘in front of the hotel’ while others (*Richmond Whig* December 24, 1847, *Fredericksburg News*, August 28, 1850 and December 21, 1851) place the sales specifically ‘before the front door’ of the hotel” (Hennessey 2017:electronic document).

PUBLIC SALE OF VALUABLE NEGROES.

On Tuesday the 3rd day of January 1854, the subscriber will sell at public auction, for cash in front of the United States Hotel in Fredericksburg 40 Negroes, most of them young, valuable and likely. Among them are two brick layers, a shoemaker, a boy now learning the cooper trade, and several good house servants.

**JOHN SEDDON.
Committee.**

Dec. 12, 1853.

(ts)

Figure 27: December 26, 1853 Advertisement in *Fredericksburg News* (Hennessey 2017:electronic document).

The practice of holding auctions at the hotel near the block continued into the early 1860s before the property was sold to retired grocers, Robert T. and James Knox (FDB 1868). The Knox family ran a grocery and warehouse out of the building while letting space to a variety of merchants during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (Fredericksburg City Directories n.d.; Sanborn Map Company 1886, 1896, 1902). Several early images of the property, believed to date from around the turn of the century, date from the Knox family's tenure and reveal the stone's location in relation to the building's original entrances (Figure 28, p. 56).

To date, the first mention of the site specifically as "a slave auction block" is by a Civil War veteran returning to Fredericksburg in 1893. An image of the stone in context during this period was taken by Albert Kern in 1898, showing the stone at the edge of the surrounding brick sidewalk and stone curbing (Figure 29, p. 57) (The Albert Kern Collection at Dayton History 1898). Kern labeled this object the "slave block." "By 1913, the stone had assumed significance enough that the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities sought to place a tablet at the site, recording the stone's historic use" (Hennessey 2017:electronic document).

In November 1913, the property was purchased by local builder, E.G. "Peck" Heflin who redesigned the façade, creating the corner entry visible in later images of the stone and its surroundings (FDB 1914). In the decade that followed, the "slave block" became a relic of historical interest to the general public with several African Americans recounting their experiences at the site. Photographs taken in the mid-1920s show that the curb and sidewalk had widened to encompass the block, and it was no longer at the interface of the sidewalk and the street (Figure 30, p. 58).

Throughout the twentieth century, the block remained a central object in downtown Fredericksburg, both physically and psychologically. Referred to as both a “slave block” and a “carriage step,” the block has been included in dozens of historical guides and narratives. Most notably, it has been the central cog of an ongoing dialogue regarding the place of slavery in the historical narrative of the community. Some residents and historians believe that the block, in its current location, provides an excellent in situ tool to discuss the horror of the practice of slavery and provides a harsh reminder of our past to future generations. Others believe that the block is a derisive and particularly cruel object that should not be left sitting, without interpretation and with little respect, at a busy city intersection and it should be removed. Some proponents of the latter have gone so far as to physically damage the stone to protest its presence, such as a hammer attack that occurred on the stone in 2007. It was repaired by a mason hired by the HFFI shortly after (Figure 31, p. 58). Most recently, the City of Fredericksburg hired the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience to conduct a study on public perception of the block and its place in Fredericksburg’s history. The study is ongoing.

The Free Lance-Star, Historical and Industrial Number, December, 1907.



**Office and Salesroom of Knox & Bro.
Showing old Slave-block. Here was formerly the Farmers' Hotel.**

Figure 28: Circa-1900 Photograph of 401–405 William Street Showing Stone Outside the Curb, Circled in Red (*The Free Lance-Star* 1907).

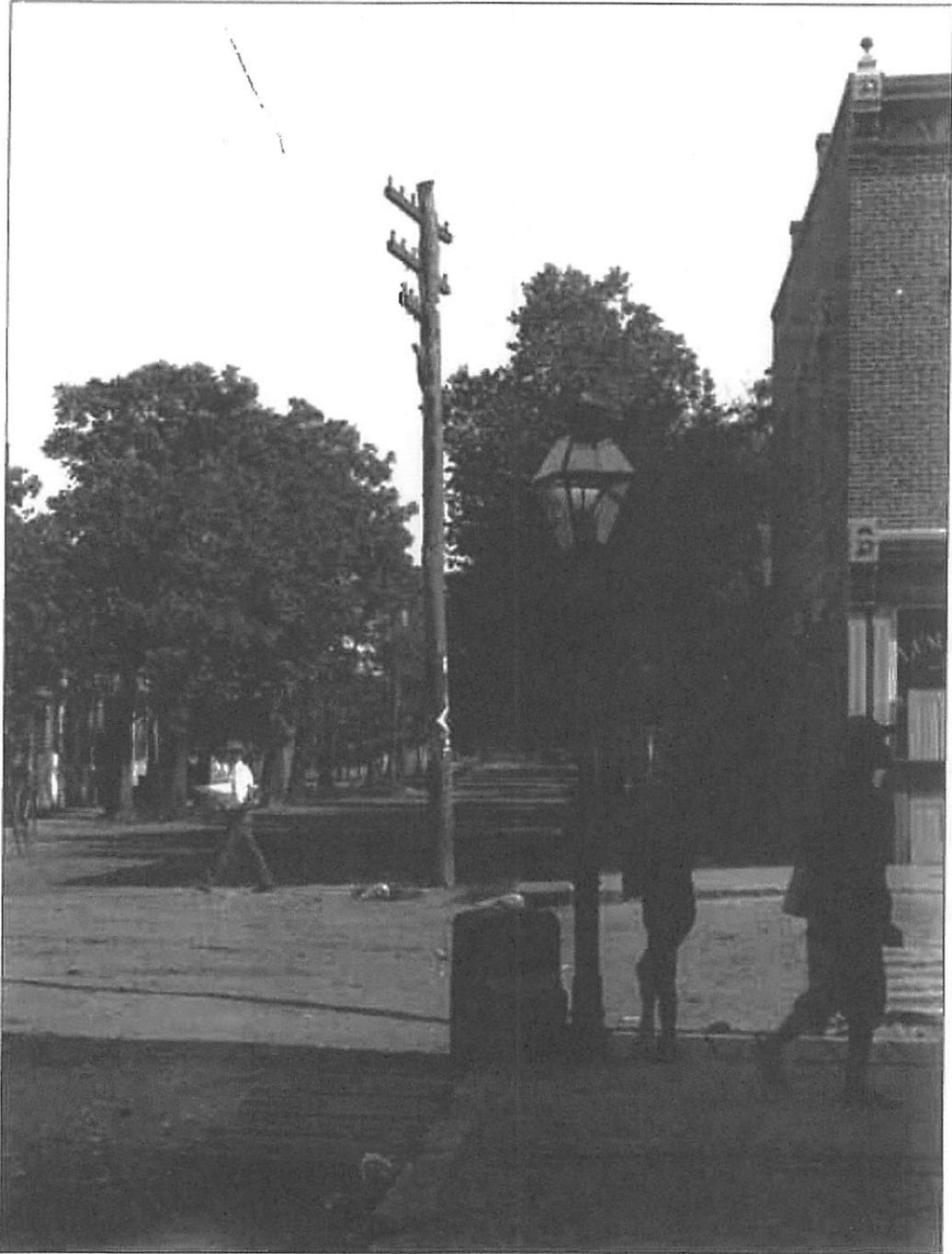


Figure 29: Detail of Historic Photograph of "Slave Block - Fredericksburg, VA, 1898"
Looking South from Charles Street Showing Sidewalk, Curb, Gas Lamppost, and
Surroundings (The Albert Kern Collection at Dayton History 1898).



Figure 30: Mid-1920s Image of “Slave Block” Showing Corner Entrance and Widening of the Sidewalk to Envelop the Block (Photo courtesy of HFFI).



Figure 31: Circa 2007 Damage to the Block Inflicted by a Hammer and Later Repaired (Photo courtesy of HFFI).

Archaeological Testing and Block Investigation

On-site studies at the corner of William and Charles street included archaeological excavations and an in-depth examination of the physical components of the block. Archaeological studies comprised the excavation of one 50- x 50-centimeter (1.6- x 1.6-ft) test unit (TU 1). The block is positioned very close to the intersection of William and Charles streets within a busy pedestrian thoroughfare, thus placement of the unit was restricted by extant development and sidewalk accessibility. Through consultation with the City, it was decided to place the unit immediately northeast of the block, between the block and an Americans with Disability Act (ADA) ramp to the north (Figure 32, p. 60).

Work commenced with the removal of modern brick and an unmortared greenish grey sand base (Gley 1, 5/10Y) directly under the brick that comprises the current sidewalk matrix. This task was completed by City of Fredericksburg Public Works. While not removed archaeologically, the sidewalk represented a culturally modified layer thus it was documented as Stratum I during the excavation (Photo 19, p. 61).

Upon removal of the sidewalk materials, the archaeological test unit was laid in adjacent to the block and excavation commenced. A total of three additional strata (labeled Stratum II–Stratum IV) were encountered in the unit below the brick and sand sidewalk. Stratum II comprised a brown (7.5Y 4/4) sandy loam with a light density of gravels and brick flecking. This layer, which ranged from 7–15 centimeters (0.2–0.5 ft), included fill brought in during the twentieth century to level and raise the sidewalk and street area. Only one artifact was found within the soil, a small fragment of undecorated creamware (1762–1820). At the base of Stratum II, archaeologists encountered several fragments of early-twentieth century, rough-tempered pavement near the eastern balk of the unit, near William Street (Photo 20, p. 61).

Below the pavement fragments, Stratum III covered the entire unit and comprised nineteenth-century fill. Measuring between 14 and 17 centimeters (0.5 and 0.6 ft), this layer included strong brown (7.5YR 4/6) sandy loam with 40 percent mottling of brown (10YR 4/3) silty loam and a light density of brick and charcoal inclusions. Numerous small- and medium-sized brick paver fragments were also noted throughout the matrix (Photo 21, p. 62). Eight artifacts, all very fragmented, were found in Stratum III—two undecorated creamware (1762–1820), two clear bottle glass, one green bottle glass, one slate, one aqua glass insulator fragment, and one oyster shell. In addition, one concrete fragment and two brick fragments were kept as samples to represent architectural debris noted in light density in the layer. The presence of the glass insulator gives the layer a terminus post quem of 1880.



Figure 32: Overview of the Block Location at the Intersection of William and Charles Streets Showing Site 44SP0786 (FredGIS 2018).



Photo 19: Overview of Block Excavation Area After City Public Works Removed Stratum I (Brick Pavers and Sand Base), Facing Southeast.

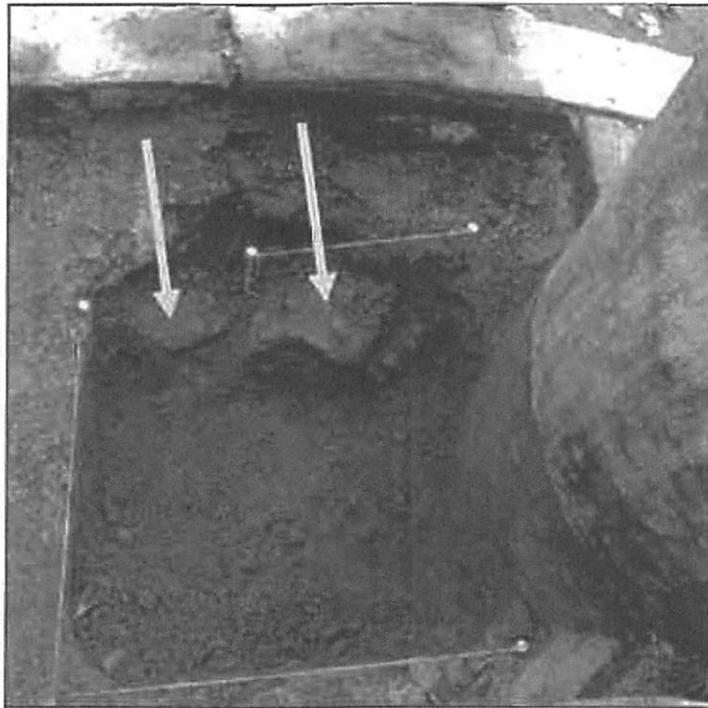


Photo 20: Early-Twentieth-Century Pavement Found at the Base of Stratum II Noted by Yellow Arrows, Facing Southeast.



Photo 21: Sample of Mid-Nineteenth-Century Brick Paver Fragments Found in Stratum III
Noted by Yellow Arrows, Facing North.

At the base of Stratum III, the team uncovered the bottom of the block. The block is sitting on a pad made of unmortared, pressed brick (Photo 22, p. 63; Figure 33, p. 63). The pad covered the entire southern balk of the unit adjacent to the stone and appears to be located under the entire object to create a level platform for stone installation. Soil surrounding the pad, labeled as Stratum IV, included dark yellowish brown (10YR 4/4) sandy silty loam with 25 percent mottling strong brown (7.5YR 4/6) sandy loam and a light density of brick flecking and brick fragments. This stratum was excavated to a depth of 7 to 11 centimeters (0.2 to 0.4 ft), at which point the team hit a sterile sandy clay loam below the brick pad and excavation of the unit ceased. Only one artifact was found in Stratum IV, a small fragment of green bottle glass. Based on the presence of the bottom of the stone and brick pad, as well as general paucity of artifacts, this strata was interpreted as the original nineteenth-century fill brought in to surround the block and its base.

Upon completion of the archaeology, the block itself was examined to understand its materials and size. The block is made of Aquia sandstone; however it is not formed of the pure, soft sandstone used in numerous eighteenth-century buildings around Fredericksburg but a more coarse variety that contains an abundance of large inclusions (Photo 23, p. 64). This coarse sandstone was used in the area after around 1820, once veins of the refined sandstone had been depleted. Evidence of this transition between varieties of sandstone has been found on archaeological sites throughout the city (i.e., Barile et al. 2008a; Barile et al. 2008b; Barile et al. 2014). The block was formed through rough cleaving using chisels and picks and later smoothed through fine chiseling and sanding. It is not circular, as usually depicted, but actually ovoid in shape, measuring 60 centimeters (2.0 ft) in diameter (Figure 34, p. 64). The total length is 110 centimeters (3.6 ft), with 70 centimeters (2.3 ft) currently visible above the brick sidewalk (Photo 24, p. 65).



Photo 22: Brick Pad Under Base of Block, Facing South.

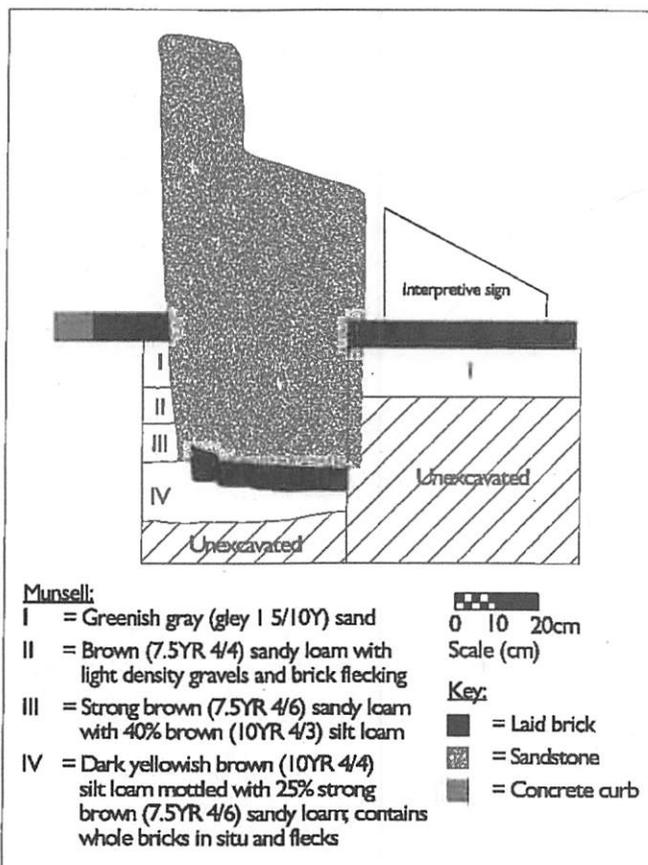


Figure 33: Block and TU 1, South Profile.



Photo 23: Close Up of Block Showing Inclusions and Impurities.

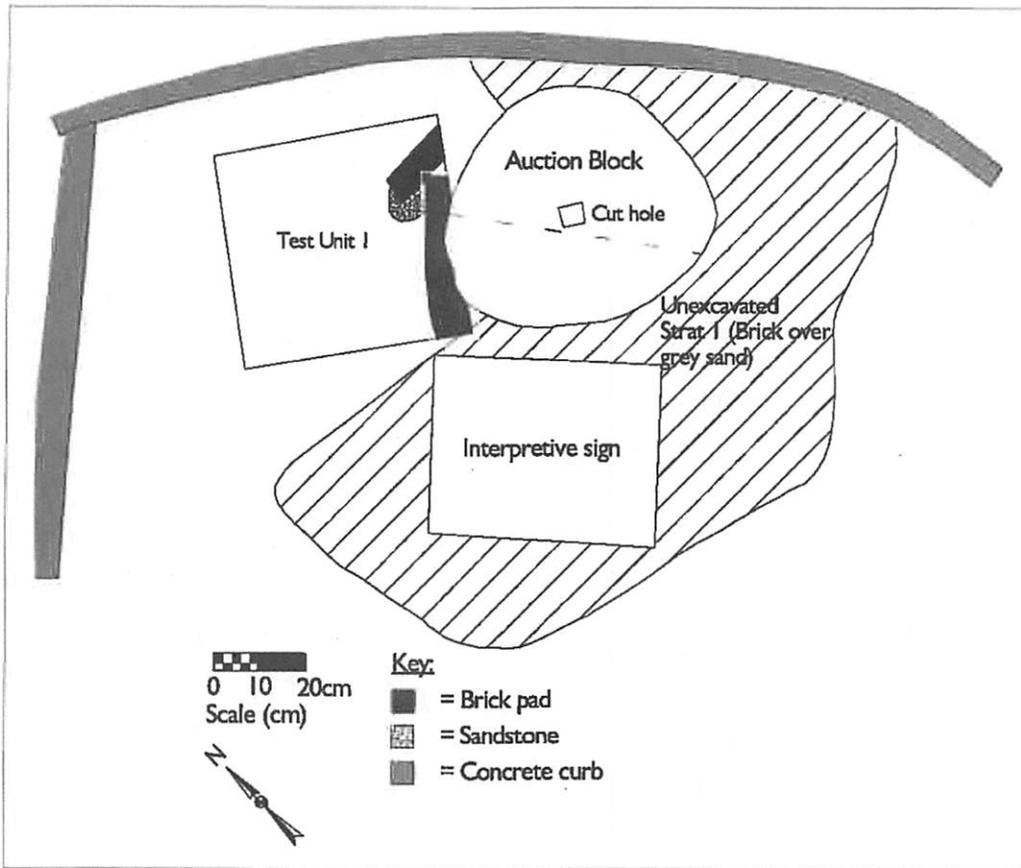


Figure 34: Plan of Block, Test Unit 1, and Surrounding Area.



Photo 24: Overview of Entire Block on Brick Pad, Looking South.

The upper northwestern one-third of the block is no longer present. Based on a close examination, it appears that this section broke off decades ago, likely in the mid-nineteenth century, due to an imperfection in the grains of the stone. The stone has roughly its current shape in the 1898 Kerns photograph, but the physical attributes of the cut are much sharper and cleaner at this time. Over time, the break has weathered smooth. Near the center of the exposed end of the block is a purposefully carved, square-shaped hole. This hole was cut through grinding and chisel (see Figure 34, p. 64).

Interpretation and Evaluation

The limited archival research and archaeological test unit revealed a great amount of information on the evolution of the street, erection of the block, and history of block use. It appears that the natural soils in the area comprised brown sandy clay loam. Around the time the neighboring hotel was built, circa 1843, the block was erected in the street at the edge of

the 3-meter (10-ft) wide sidewalk at the corner of William and Charles streets. The coarse sandstone block, ovoid in shape, was cut and refined elsewhere and brought to the area. The square-shaped hole in the top appears original to its cultural modification. A brick pad formed of mid-nineteenth-century pressed bricks with no mortar was created to level the land at the corner of the two streets—immediately adjacent to the interface of the sidewalk and the street itself—and the block was installed on its end lengthwise on top of the pad. Soil fill measuring 7 to 11 centimeters (0.2 to 0.4 ft) was brought in to cover the pad and the base of the block (Stratum IV). This would have resulted in 98 centimeters (3.2 ft) of the stone being visible above the ground surface (versus the current 70 centimeters [2.3 ft]). It appears that the brick pavers, likely manufactured locally in the 1840s, were then brought in to create a flat sidewalk around the south and west sides of the block and in front of the new hotel.

Sometime around 1904 when the street and sidewalk was uniformly paved, additional fill was brought in to raise the street level by 14 to 17 centimeters (0.5 to 0.6 ft) (Stratum III). It is not known if the brick pavers were still in existence at this time or if they had been removed, but numerous brick paver fragments were found within the surrounding fill, thus it is probable that the pavers were removed when the fill was brought in to level and raise the area prior to paving. Several fragments of this 1904 pavement were found just above Stratum III. Photographic evidence shows that the block was still at the interface of the street and the sidewalk at this time.

Likely as part of the 1917 installation of a new curb and gutter system throughout downtown, the city sidewalks were widened in this area thus encapsulating the block within the sidewalk matrix rather than at the street interface. In the mid-twentieth century, yet another layer of fill was brought in to this corner measuring 7–15 centimeters (0.2–0.5 ft) (Stratum II), thus raising the street to its current level. According to City of Fredericksburg staff, the current grey sand and brick sidewalk was installed around 2000 (Stratum I).

The physical history of the streets in this area and the block can be deciphered based on the data retrieved during the work. The use of the block, however, requires more analysis. Specifically, limited research was conducted on the potential of the object to be a carriage step, auction platform, or other feature.

The location of the block at the actual corner of the intersection and sidewalk does not appear to have been a common site for carriage steps throughout town. Most evidence of blocks believed to have been established for use as carriage steps were placed in line with the main entrance or gateway to some of Fredericksburg's finer historic residences and other establishments (Figure 35 and Figure 36, p. 67). The size of carriage "upping stones," as they have also been called, also tend to be as wide as the tread of a typical staircase or larger to facilitate use (see Figure 35 and Figure 36). The shape, size, and placement of the block at the corner of William and Charles Streets does not lend to its use as a carriage step. At the time it was erected, the stone would have been approximately 28 centimeters (0.9 ft) taller than it is now above the ground surface, thus the total block height visible above the surface would have been 98 centimeters (3.2 ft)—much too tall for use as a step. The cut in the stone on the west side appears to not have been original to the installation of the object, thus there was no way to get on top of the block other than the use of a stand-alone stool. In addition, the block is at

the immediate corner of the intersection where stopping a carriage to load and unload passengers would have been challenging due to the angle and the use of the streets.

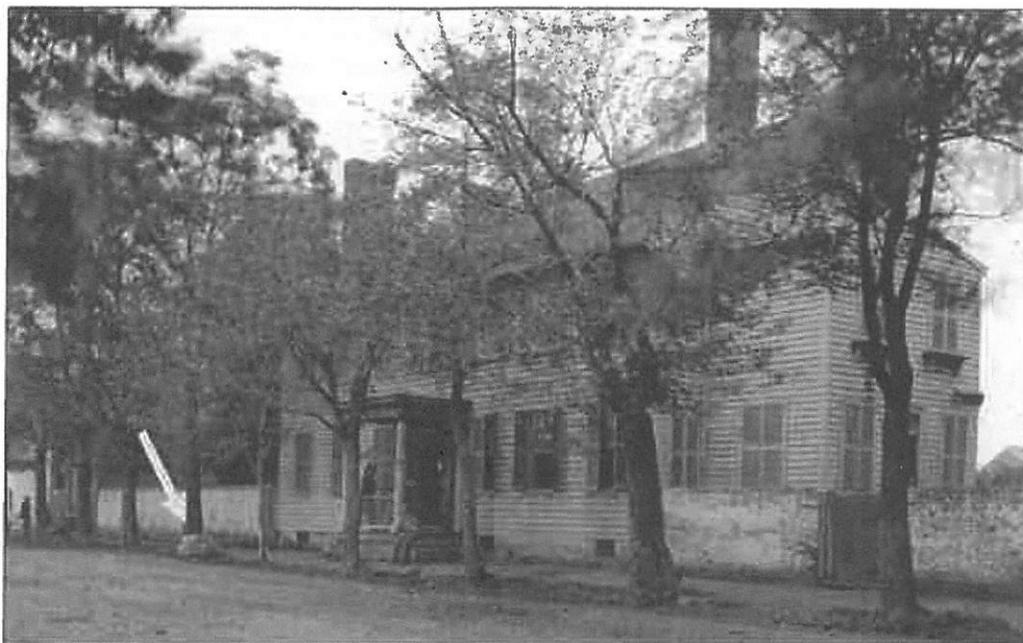


Figure 35: Detail of May 1864 Photograph of House on Caroline Street Showing Carriage Step By Front Porch Noted by Yellow Arrow (Gardner 1864).



Figure 36: Detail of 1888 Stereograph Taken from St. George's Church Steeple, View Looking West Along George Street Showing Carriage Steps Noted by Yellow Arrows (Hennessey 2011).

The use of the block as a tool to auction goods and individuals was also explored. When depicted in mid-nineteenth sketches, engravings, or photographs, auctions and auctioneers are often shown to be standing at an elevated height above the crowd, presumably to bear better witness to interested buyers and to provide the audience with a clearer image of the items being sold (Figure 37). Sketches of slave auctions in the American South were of particular interest in the nineteenth century and were frequently depicted in newspapers throughout the world (Figure 38, p. 69). One sketch, drawn by G.H. Andrews for *The Illustrated London News* circa 1861, illustrating a slave auction in Richmond, Virginia (Figure 39, p. 69), was accompanied by a narrative describing the event:

The auction rooms for the sale of Negroes are situated in the main streets, and are generally the ground floors of the building; the entrance-door opens straight into the street, and the sale room is similar to any other auction room... placards, advertisements, and notices as to the business carried on are dispensed with, the only indications of the trade being a small red flag hanging from the front door post, and a piece of paper upon which is written... this simple announcement--'Negroes for sale at auction'.... [The Atlantic Slave Trade and Life in the Americas 2015].



Figure 37: Detail of "Slave Auction on Cheapside, [Lexington,] Kentucky" Showing Auctioneer Standing in a Carriage (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture 1940).

Places where slaves were auctioned in the south are diverse and include market buildings, specific rooms, stages, and blocks of varying size. One photograph of a slave auction block in Campbell County, Virginia, recorded in the Historic American Building Survey (HABS) noted that, "According to tradition, these original stone features were used in the auction and sale of slaves. The smaller of the two elements was used by the auctioneer while the stone table was used to display the best qualities of the slaves. The authenticity of this story has not been documented" (Figure 40, p. 70) (HABS 1960). Also recorded as a "slave auction block," a stage located inside the St. Louis Hotel in New Orleans, Louisiana, prominently positioned

was recorded circa 1906 (Figure 41, p. 70) (Detroit Publishing Company 1906). However large or small, the artifacts, images, and places that serve as historic documentation reveal only a glimpse of the breadth and scope of the places, spaces, and people impacted by the practice of slavery in America.

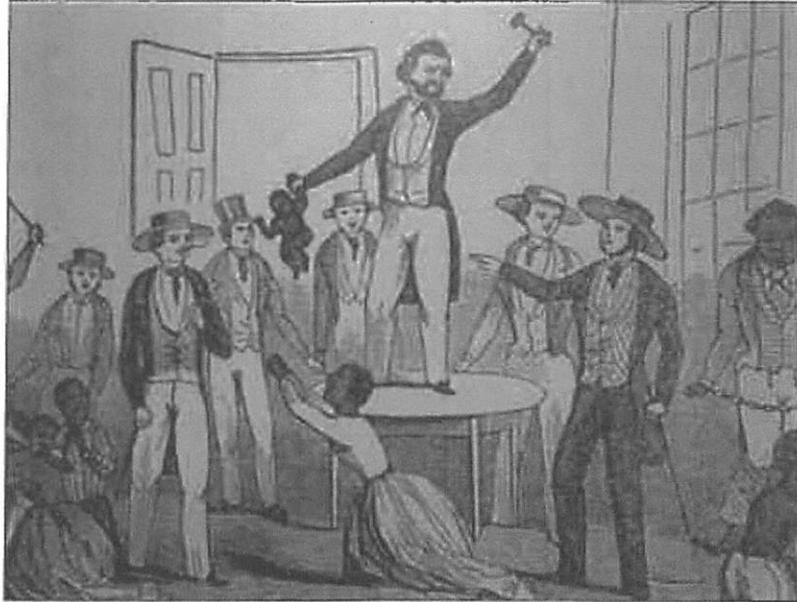


Figure 38: “Sketch of a Slave Auction” Attributed to the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture (Brown 2018).

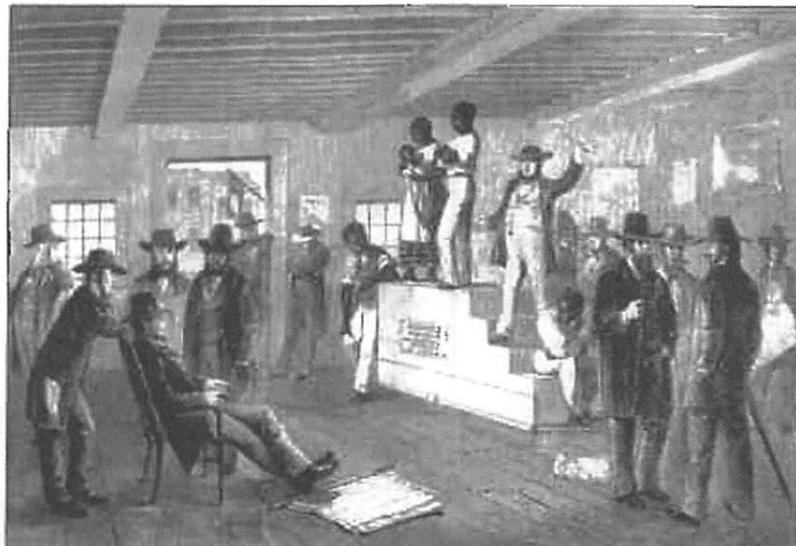


Figure 39: Historical Sketch by G.H. Andrews Captioned “A Slave Auction in Virginia” (*The Illustrated London News* 1861).



Figure 40: "Green Hill Plantation, Slave Auction Block, State Route 728, Long Island, Campbell County, VA" (HABS 1960).



Figure 41: "New Orleans, La., old slave block in St. Louis Hotel" (Detroit Publishing Company 1906).

While the block was likely not purposefully intended for use as a standing stool for carriages or for auctioneers or goods, it may have had a more tangential association with the auction industry and thus achieved its moniker through oral tradition. The purposefully cut square hole in the center of the block likely once held an iron rod, and the rod could have functioned as a sign post. The sign may have announced upcoming auctions and other social events held at the adjacent hotel. Details on events and sales, including the trade of enslaved individuals, may have been posted here, thus helping to achieve an association with the slave industry. No direct evidence of this use has been found to date; however, physical evidence of the stone's construction clearly suggests that it was placed in this area around the same time that this area was developed and the adjacent hotel was built, in the 1830s and 1840s. Its placement here could be the direct result of the construction of the United States Hotel in 1843 or it could simply represent the movement of Fredericksburg commerce west from Caroline and Princess Anne streets to a higher elevation and an up-and-coming part of town.

In addition to the previous notions that this object was a carriage step or an auction block, other uses were explored. This object may also have been used as one of many stones installed at street corners to delineate the street system. Several City-published initiatives in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century state the presence of wooden and stone markers along the street to denote the street edge and street names. A photograph taken of this intersection during the 1880s shows what may be a mirroring stone on the opposite corner of William and Charles Street perhaps alluding to the former presence of numerous blocks once placed along Fredericksburg's streets (Figure 42).



Figure 42: Detail of an 1880s Image of the Intersection of William and Charles Street (The Albert Kern Collection at Dayton History 188-). The Block is behind the telephone pole noted by a yellow arrow. Also note a possible second stone block on the opposite corner noted by a pink arrow.

As the block was likely erected as part of the larger design of the adjacent United States Hotel (111-0050/111-0132-0236), it has been recorded as a secondary resource associated with the adjacent building rather than as an individual resource. The current research and archaeological studies have determined that, regardless of original use, the block is significant as a historic object to Fredericksburg residents and visitors. Starting at least as early as the 1890s, the block had achieved cultural consciousness as a place for selling enslaved individuals—a practice that was common in Virginia and throughout the South and directly representative of the atrocities of slavery. It has remained in the public memory as such for over a century and is a frequent visual image presented in historical documents. In addition, the hotel and block have interesting architectural fabric that render them emblematic of their period of construction and good representations of mid-nineteenth century material usage. As such, **the hotel and the block are recommended to remain contributing elements to the surrounding Fredericksburg Historic District under Criterion A for their association with the postbellum and twentieth-century commemoration of antebellum life and the practice of slavery in Fredericksburg and under Criterion C for their architectural merit.** Additional research on the hotel itself is needed to determine individual eligibility of this resource.

Although the adjacent hotel has been owned by and used by some of Fredericksburg's most notable citizens, there is no evidence of a direct tie between these individuals and this site, thus **it is recommended not eligible under Criterion B.** Archaeological studies have shown that intact subsurface deposits and features exist below the surface in this this area, but the information that is available regarding the installation of the stone and subsequent street changes is limited and has been obtained through this limited study. In addition, very few artifacts were recovered during the work, thus the subsurface deposits have little potential to shed light on the use of this area and the individuals who worked and lived in this area. Since the site has limited data potential, **it is suggested that the site is not eligible under Criterion D.**

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Dovetail conducted archaeological testing of the George Street tunnel and at the intersection of Charles and William Streets in the City of Fredericksburg, Virginia, during November 2018. The testing, undertaken at the request of VDOT, in partnership with the City of Fredericksburg, consisted of geophysical survey and the excavation of six test units at the George Street tunnel and the excavation of a single test unit adjacent to the auction block at the intersection of William and Charles Streets. The purpose of the work was to assess the integrity of any archaeological sites recorded in either area and to make NRHP recommendations. Work was conducted at both project areas in relation to proposed pedestrian improvements in downtown Fredericksburg. The intersection of Charles and Williams Streets, around the auction block, is the proposed site of traffic calming improvements, while the George Street tunnel is located within the public right-of-way, below the sidewalk, slated for pedestrian improvements. Prior to the archaeological testing, detailed archival and background research was conducted on both project areas to contextualize and help evaluate the archaeological findings. Fieldwork consisted of a visual inspection of both project areas, geophysical survey at the George Street tunnel project area, the excavation of test units, and selective testing of features.

Excavation at the George Street tunnel identified site 44SP0785, a sub-sidewalk vault constructed in the early-nineteenth century and used into the twentieth century (Additional research is needed to evaluate the hotel and associated block for individual NRHP eligibility. Table 3, p. 74). Although the archaeological studies uncovered intact cultural features, the deposits and features have been impacted by construction and other earth-moving activities over time. In addition, only a low to moderate quantity of artifacts were recovered, thus limiting the data potential of this site. More intact archaeological sites exist elsewhere in Fredericksburg that represent subsurface historic deposits that can provide important information on area history. As such, it is recommended that site 44SP0785 is not eligible for listing in the NHRP under Criterion D. The architectural matrix of the storage area, however, is a unique representation of urban storage in downtown Fredericksburg. Built as part of the structural system of the adjacent building, the storage vault is a good architectural example of a storage solution in a densely built environment—construct a space under the city sidewalk. For this reason, the storage space was recorded as a secondary resource to the adjacent building (111-0007/111-0132-0404). **The main building, and the added secondary storage space, should remain contributing elements to the surrounding Fredericksburg Historic District under Criterion C for their architectural merit.** Further research on 826 Caroline Street itself is warranted to ascertain individual eligibility of the building and the associated vault.

Archival research and archaeological study at the resource colloquially known as the “auction block” or “slave block” revealed that the stone was put in place during the 1830s or 1840s, likely concurrently with the construction of the nearby United States Hotel (later known as the Planter’s Hotel) in 1843. It may have been used as a sign post associated with the presentation of data on upcoming auctions and events, as highlighted by the cut hole in the center used for an iron rod. Evidence suggests that it was not used as a carriage block or built as a platform to showcase objects during an auction as it is too narrow, was much taller historically, and would not have been an easy place for standing. The archaeological study did uncover evidence of the construction of the block, but very few artifacts were found and the deposits have little data

potential beyond the information already gleaned from the strata. **It is recommended that site 44SP0786 is not eligible for the NRHP under Criterion D as it does not have the potential to reveal additional data on area history.** Although the archaeological deposits are limited, the studies revealed a distinct connection between the block and the construction of the United States Hotel; as such, the block was recorded as a secondary resource associated with the hotel building (111-0050/111-0132-0236). The block also has a distinct connection to the cultural memory of slavery in the area. While research shows that the block itself was not used a standing surface for the sale of enslaved individuals, it became emblematic of the larger practice, which likely took place within the hotel. For these reasons, **the hotel and block should remain contributing elements to the Fredericksburg Historic District under Criterion A for their association with the public memory on the institution of slavery and Criterion C for their architectural merit.** Additional research is needed to evaluate the hotel and associated block for individual NRHP eligibility.

Table 3: NRHP Recommendations.

Site	Type	Eligibility Recommendation
44SP0785/ 111-0007/ 111-0132-0404	Wellford House Storage and Tunnel	Not individually eligible as an archaeological site; Vault is secondary resource associated with the Wellford Dwelling & Commercial Complex; Contributing element to the Fredericksburg Historic District
44SP0786/ 111-0050/ 111-0132-0236	United States/Planter's Hotel Auction Block	Not individually eligible; Block is secondary resource associated with the United States/Planter's Hotel; Contributing element to the Fredericksburg Historic District