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SUMMARY OF ARCHITECTURAL DATA

THE WESLEYAN CHAPEL

Women's Rights National Historical Park
Seneca Falls, New York

By

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INTRODUCTION

This report is a summary of information known about the Wesleyan Chapel. Data was drawn from preliminary investigations conducted by the North Atlantic Historic Preservation Center; the Historic Structure Report, Historical Data Section, by Sharon Brown; the Historic Structure Report, Preliminary Draft Architectural Data Section, by Elayne Anderson with Terry Wong; and the Historic Structure Report, Archeological Data Section, by Paula Zitzler.

As the following report indicates, a number of questions about the Wesleyan Chapel remain unanswered. Much more physical research will be needed in order to provide those answers.

1848 APPEARANCE OF THE WESLEYAN CHAPEL

The appearance of the Wesleyan Chapel in 1848--the year of the Woman's Rights Convention--was presumably very similar to its appearance as built in 1843. Therefore, the data obtained for the period 1843 is considered to apply to the period 1848, as well.

A. Exterior Elements

Dimensions

The dimensions of the 1843 Wesleyan Chapel were 43 feet, 4 inches wide by 64 feet long. These figures are supported by documentary, archeological, and architectural evidence. Two entries in the True Wesleyan mention the building's dimensions: the first, on July 22, 1843, gives them as "43 by 64," while the second, on October 28, 1843, says they were "44 by 64."

Archeological investigation located the north wall, and the northeast and southeast corners of the original foundation. The extant east and west walls are thought to be in their original locations, confirming the width measurement. The original north end of the chapel also is marked by a joint in the present east wall, visible due to failing posthistoric parget on this wall, and a truss in the attic that has masonry stains and no joist pockets in its north side (corroborating its original role as a north-wall end truss).

Foundations

The composition of the original foundation walls varied, possibly on the basis of their relative visibility from the street. The east foundation wall, along Mynderse Street, had four courses of dressed stone on a rubble base. The west foundation wall consisted of both dressed and rough-cut stones set in mortar, but without a rubble base. The north wall apparently was all rubble

set in mortar. The south foundation wall was mostly destroyed in 1917, but the southeast corner retains a portion of large, rough-cut stones on a mortared rubble base. The grade at that time was about 1.9 feet below the existing grade.

All of this information was obtained from the archeological investigations described in the Archeological Data Section.

Walls

The 1843 walls were of brick simply designed, according to a November 4, 1843, entry in the True Wesleyan. They were three bricks thick, judging by the extant east and west walls. These two walls were load-bearing, in that they carried the wooden trusses of the roof structure. The original south and north walls were not load-bearing.

Doorways

There were multiple doorways in 1848, according to an account of the 1848 Woman's Rights Convention. No physical evidence has been found of their locations. The Historic Data Section records that a stoop was added in 1865, along with "a walk from the stoop to the gate." This implies that there was only one doorway served by the walk, and that it was an important doorway, being connected to an existing gate in a fence presumably along one of the two streets. Because Fall Street was the more important street, it is likely that the doorway discussed here was on the south facade of the chapel. If a stoop was needed in 1865, some other means of accessing the doorway would have been required before that time.

Windows

The east and west walls each had five bays, with windows on the first and

second floors being aligned. This is based upon the brickwork evidence for the locations of the original windows, which apparently were 11 feet, 7 inches on center. Considering that the east and west facades were 64 feet long, five bays per facade seems likely. There is no information as to window locations in the missing original south and north walls.

The original first-floor windows measured 3 feet, 5 inches wide by 6 feet high. This is based upon one window opening that--although boarded up--appears to remain fairly intact from 1843. The window is located on the west facade, just south of the freight elevator. It displays original mortar and no signs of alteration. The second-floor windows measured 3 feet, 5 inches wide by 14 feet, 6 inches high. This is deduced from bricked-in window openings on the second floor of the west facade. They now have arched heads, but these arches probably were cut out of the brickwork over existing windows in 1890. This is based upon the observation of careful detailing and original-looking mortar of the brickwork around the windows below the springing-line of the arches, and of sloppy construction and different-colored mortar of the brickwork above the springing-line.

The lintels and sills of both first- and second-floor windows presumably resembled those of the extant first-floor window, i.e, a brick jack-arch lintel and a _____ sill. This idea is substantiated by the existence of brick jack-arch lintels over first-floor infilled windows on the east wall, uncovered when the pargeting on this wall failed.

Roof Structure

The Wesleyan Chapel had a gable roof, as attested by old drawings on maps.

It is assumed that the south half of the extant gable roof is historic, but there is a remote possibility that it was built in 1872. (See the section, "EXTANT HISTORIC ARCHITECTURAL MATERIAL.") The original gable roof was supported by six ~~hand-hewn~~ trusses resting on the east and west side walls. Four of the trusses remain today; two were lost when the southern two bays of the gable roof were lowered in 1872 to match the flat roof of the south addition. The original north and south end trusses were embedded about 3 inches into the brick north and south end walls, as indicated by masonry stains on the north side of all members of the extant original north-wall truss. To quote from the Architectural Data Section:

This indicates that the historic north end wall and this last truss were incorporated together to help provide lateral stability to the structure and to have the truss carry the roof load instead of the end wall.

The wooden roof trusses of the Wesleyan Chapel had, according to the Architectural Data Section, wood-pinned connections from the web members to the top and bottom chords. The main vertical web member of each truss also had a metal strap connecting it to the bottom chord of the truss. This information is based upon the four remaining original trusses. It is assumed, but has not been actually proven, that the metal straps were original to the trusses.

The ends of the trusses rested on 8 by 11-inch ~~hand-hewn~~ wooden plates laid on top of the east and west brick walls; these plates remain today. On top of the plates, between the trusses, sat 6 by 8-inch beams that also are extant. The 2 by 6-inch rafters had notched feet that sat on the 6 by 8-inch beams. This is known because most of the original rafters remain today. (A few have deteriorated and been replaced.) Midway up the rafters was a

line of purlins; these were let into the trusses, and were supported further by diagonal braces running at a 45° angle up from the trusses.

All of this information has been obtained from roof-structure elements thought to be original remaining in the attic.

Roof Covering

The rafters carried sheathing boards approximately 10 inches wide that were roughly finished: the edges of the boards still bore their bark. This is based upon the extant sheathing boards in the 41-foot-long section of gable roof thought to be historic. The sheathing boards were covered with white-pine wooden roof shingles, of random widths ranging from 3 to 8 inches, and laid with a 5-inch exposure. These shingles, fragments of which were found recently in the attic, were circular-sawn, smoothed on one surface, and attached with cut nails. The use of wooden shingles is confirmed by the nailing pattern remaining in the top surface of the sheathing boards.

Cornice

The cornice had a soffit that was mitered at the corners, judging by such a corner remaining at the northeast corner of the original building.

Chimneys

There were two exterior chimneys on the north facade, based upon drawings of the chapel on old maps. This is confirmed by the presence of two notches cut into the south side of the northernmost original truss, which relate to two interior stovepipes seen along this wall in an early interior photograph.

Grounds

As indicated in the section on doorways, it is thought that the chapel

had--at some point before 1865--a fence with a gate along Fall or Mynderse streets. The Historical Data Section suggests that Fall Street was not paved in 1848. It probably had a sidewalk: the Historical Data Section says that in 1850, a new sidewalk was built here to "correspond in width with the walk already built thereon." There probably also was a board sidewalk along Mynderse street in 1848, since the chapel's trustees resolved on April 3, 1848, to build a board sidewalk there. Based on this information, it is likely that the 1848 sidewalk along Fall Street also was of boards laid cross-wise.

B. Interior

General Layout

According to the archeological findings, the 1843 Wesleyan Chapel had no basement, but only a crawl[^]space. The building must have consisted of one large, two-story room. The Historical Data Section implies that there may have been a separate "vestibule" (p. 39). A gallery ran around three sides of the room, based upon references of July 22 and October 28, 1843, in the True Wesleyan. This was corroborated by the discover^y of joist pockets in the brick walls in the appropriate location for the gallery. The level of the pockets suggests that the floor at the back of the gallery came within 10 to 11 inches of the bottoms of the second-floor windows, but this issue will require more investigation. The front of the gallery may have been carried on slender cast-iron columns, judging by the one such column remaining in the first-floor garage area. The gallery probably ran around the east, south, and west walls, based on the joist pockets and common church[^]-building practices of the day. The location of one or more stairs to the gallery is unknown, but the Historical Data Section implies that access may

have been available outside the main room (p. 39). The Historical Data Section also states that the pulpit was at the "extreme end of the house opposite the gallery..." i.e., probably on the north wall. There was no center aisle between the pews, judging by the only early interior photograph of the chapel, taken between 1858 and 1871.

Ceiling

The ceiling of the chapel was undoubtedly of lath and hair plaster, based upon remnants of lath nailing strips, bits of hair, and plaster stains on the undersides of the four original roof trusses.

Walls

The walls also probably were of lath and hair plaster, based upon the one early interior photograph and sections of wall plaster found in the attic in situ on the original east wall.

Utilities

Gas lighting would not have been used in the chapel in 1848, not having been installed until 1858. Stoves were used to heat the chapel; the congregation regularly received bills for coal, coke, and wood, and two stovepipes can be seen on the north wall in the early interior photograph.

Finishes

It is likely that the walls of the chapel were whitewashed in 1843. This is supported by documentary references to whitewashing, and to the October 28, 1843, True Wesleyan description of the building's interior as "well-finished, though...plair." A monochromatic wall scheme is seen in the early interior photograph, which also suggests that vertical lines may have been applied for decoration. In this photograph, the north wall behind the altar or platform

features a dark-colored area apparently enclosed in a frame. This may be the blackboard mentioned in the Historical Data Section (p. 39).

MAJOR PERIODS OF ALTERATION

A. 1857: Possible Construction of the First North Addition

Although the Historical Data Section contends that the first 19-foot north extension of the Wesleyan Chapel was built in 1872, there is a possibility that it was erected by the Wesleyans during a period of "extensive repairs" in 1857-58. According to the Architectural Survey, Women's Rights National Historical Park (Pearson, 1984), the documentary support for the 1872 date is questionable. Evidence for the 1857 date includes a 1872 newspaper article about the remodeling of that year that makes no mention of a north addition. Also, church minutes for 1858 include references to two new rooms not mentioned previously--a "conference room" and a "prayer room."

More physical investigation, particularly of masonry and mortar samples, should be performed in order to resolve this question.

B. 1872: Enlargement for Johnson Hall and Stores

William Johnson bought the Wesleyan Chapel in 1872 from the man who had purchased it from the Wesleyans in October 1871. According to the Historical Data Section, a two-story, flat-roofed addition was built across and overlapping the south end of the chapel, and the southern two bays of the original gable roof were removed down to the same level. The remaining part of the gable roof may have been raised 7 to 8 feet (see section, "EXTANT HISTORIC ARCHITECTURAL MATERIAL, Roof Structure").

It is also likely that the first north addition was built at this time, accord-

ing to the Historical Data Section. The original north end wall of the chapel at second-floor level probably would have been removed, to create a larger public hall. The wall at first-floor level may well have been retained, to make a separate back room.

On the inside, a second floor was built, with a stage at the north end. This hall was the scene of numerous dramatic performances, according to the Historical Data Section. The first floor was used as stores by businesses such as a cooperative grocery and a furniture dealer.

more to come

EXTANT HISTORIC ARCHITECTURAL MATERIAL

The Wesleyan Chapel has undergone more than a half-dozen changes in use since it was built in 1843. Each time, extensive changes were made. As indicated in the Architectural Data Section, there is a significant amount of reused building material located throughout the entire structure, including floorboards, wall studs, etc. Some of this material may date to the 1843 construction of the chapel, but much additional research would be required to even attempt to identify original pieces. In sum, the elements discussed below are those thought to be original. Other elements not mentioned may prove in the future to be equally historic.

A. Exterior

Foundation

The original portions of the east and west facades retain their 1843 masonry foundation walls. The foundation of the north wall presumably remains buried beneath the floor of the garage, since part of it was found by the archeologists. A small portion of the south-wall foundation survives at the former southeast corner of the chapel; a similar portion may exist at the former southwest corner, which was not excavated archeologically.

Walls

The section of east brick wall extending northward 41 feet from the joint in the brickwork marking the original north wall of the chapel is original. Some 58 feet of the west brick wall also is original.

Windows

The general locations of the historic second-floor west-wall windows are

marked by patches in the brickwork. The boarded-up first-floor window south of the freight elevator is an intact historic window opening with jack-arch lintel and _____ sill. This window should be opened up to see if the historic sash or any exterior paints remain in place. On the east wall, infilled first-floor windows retaining their jack-arch lintels can be seen behind the parget. Presumably, brickwork patches similar to those on the second floor of the west facade also remain under the parget on the second floor of the east elevation.

Roof Structure

As mentioned in the section, "1848 APPEARANCE OF THE WESLEYAN CHAPEL," it is thought that most of the roof structure members in the southern half of the attic are historic. These members include the four wooden king-post trusses; the 8 by 11-inch wooden plates of the east and west walls, on which the trusses rest; the 6 by 8-inch beam sections on top of the plates, between the trusses; most of the 2 by 6-inch rafters; and the purlins and their braces.

Judging by the relationship and methods of attachment between these members, the extant roof structure has not been altered since it was built. It is assumed that the roof structure is historic, ~~because it includes hand-hewn members, and~~ because part of it was removed in 1872. However, a newspaper account from 1872 indicates that the building's roof was to be raised 7 to 8 feet at that time, presumably to make sufficient headroom for Johnson Hall.

There are two possible explanations that could accommodate both ideas. The most plausible of the two is that the original chapel roof--minus the two southern bays--was raised in 1872 in one piece, with brick infill being added below the old east- and west-wall plates. There should be ample phys-

ical evidence remaining of this work if it did occur. The less-likely explanation is that the present roof is not historic, having been built in 1872 in a higher location than the 1843 roof. Again, analysis of mortar, nails, and milling marks should be able to determine this. That information should be obtained and included in the Preliminary Draft of the Historic Structure Report's Architectural Data Section.

Of course, William Johnson could have decided after the newspaper article was published not to raise the roof of the old chapel.

Roof Covering

The extant sheathing boards are thought to be contemporaneous with the roof structure, based on the absence of other nail holes in the boards and the rafters to which they are nailed. The fragments of white-pine shingles found in the attic are important evidence for determining the historic roof covering of this structure, as is the nailing pattern for them remaining on the sheathing boards.

Cornice

The mitered soffit corner located where the northeast corner of the 1843 chapel occurred is original material. This wooden element may still have early paint layers on it, which could help determine original exterior finishes.

Chimneys

The two notches in the south side of the northernmost attic truss are significant evidence of the existence of two chimneys on the original north wall of the chapel.

B. Interior

General Layout

Joist pockets in the brick walls have been found after the removal of portions of the current second-floor structure. The pockets are described in the Architectural Data Section as being 16 inches on center, measuring $3\frac{1}{2}$ by 11 inches, but reducing to $3\frac{1}{2}$ by 8 inches "in the middle of the wall," indicating that "the balcony depth probably decreased at this point." A wooden bearing beam is in the brickwork under the joist pockets, to help distribute the load. Both the diminishing size of the pockets and the relationship of the bearing beam to the brick walls suggest that the pockets originally carried the joists of the chapel's gallery. However, their location would have meant that the balcony floor would have been only 10 to 11 inches below the bottom of the second-floor windows. This situation would have been highly unusual, based on common building practices, and should be researched further.

Alternatively, the joist pockets could remain from the second floor installed in 1872 but removed in 1917.

Another feature that may relate to the original gallery is the fluted, cast-iron column remaining at the south end of the first-floor garage. This element should be researched further.

Walls

The section of plastered wall on the east wall of the attic may be original, although it appears to be the same in both the original part of the building and the first north addition, thought to date to 1857 or 1872.

Finishes

The section of plastered attic wall mentioned above bears traces of early whitewash, colored calcimines, a stenciled floral design, and three layers of wallpaper.