PORCH PRECEDENT REPORT

FOR THE

WILLIAM BROWN HOUSE
AT HISTORIC LONDON TOWN AND GARDENS

ARCHITECTS
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Intent of this Report

This report engages a combination of historical information, evaluations of buildings existing within the same region and time period as the William Brown House, archaeological data, and a visual architectural analysis of the house as it exists today in order to make recommendations for the historically accurate reconstruction of the porches on the William Brown House. Due to the fact that there is no known documentation of the original porches, the research completed allows for the development of a well-informed, but conjectural assessment of the appearance of the original porches on the home.

This report also provides information regarding the building code and accessibility requirements pertinent to the William Brown House, and supplies recommendations as to how to improve both the code compliance of the house's entries and the handicapped accessibility of the house's main floor.

Overall Findings

This investigation has determined that the southeast, or main, entrance to the William Brown House should largely remain unaltered due to its historic accuracy and relatively good condition. Minor maintenance will be required at this entrance in order to retain its condition and a code compliant guard rail should be added in such a way that it intrudes minimally on the historic fabric. The three remaining entrances should be reconstructed as simply detailed wooden stairs. Our research has indicated that, for the most part, the reconstructed stairs will not appear drastically different than those that exist today, with the exception of the northeast entrance. The northeast entrance should be reconstructed in a manner similar to the southwest entrance and should not contain a covering structure, as it is highly unlikely that a covering structure similar to that present today existed during the time of the home's construction. All reconstructed entrances should contain code compliant hand and guard rails.

An accessible entrance should be added to the William Brown House in the form of a ramp at either the northeast or southwest entrance, or a limited use lift at the northwest entrance. Should an accessible entrance be deemed too detrimental to the historic character of the home or financially not feasible at this time, it is advised that the wooden stairs be reconstructed such that they are able to receive an accessible entrance in the future. In this vein, all entry threshold conditions should be modified to comply with accessibility requirements. Doors anticipated to be used for an accessible point of entry should be retrofitted with ADA compliant door hardware. Finally, the elevated rooms on the main level of the home should remain unaltered due to their historic nature. Accessibility should be provided to these rooms via programmatic access in conjunction with the museum's recent interactive programming effort.

Referenced Documents

1952 Early American Architecture by Hugh Morrison
1971 Building Archaeology at the London Publik House by Contract Archeology, Inc.
1971 Historic Houses of America edited by Beverly da Costa
1971 The American Heritage History of Notable American Houses by Marshall B. Davidson
1984 Ambition in Brick: The William Brown House by Margaret A. Brown
1997 Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic by Gabrielle M. Lanier and Bernard L. Herman
HISTORY

The late eighteenth century marked the introduction of the Georgian style as the new vernacular for the rising middle class in America. The style gradually became universal, assisted by its dissemination through pattern books such as Isaac Ware’s *A Complete Body of Architecture*. Despite the style’s homogeneous nature and the further consistency lent to it by the use of pattern books, each of the American colonies interpreted the style through the lens of its own vernacular. As one author stated, “each region imported its own accent to the common language of classical forms.” Due to the regional distinctions of the Georgian style in colonial America, to truly understand the context for the William Brown House an understanding of Georgian Architecture as it existed in the Tidewater Region of Maryland is essential.

The Tidewater Region of Maryland

Throughout the majority of the eighteenth century, trade in the Chesapeake region was thriving, and the city of Annapolis was widely considered to be the economic and cultural center of Maryland. It was in this setting that many merchants and colonial officials chose to display their newly acquired wealth through the construction of homes in the contemporary Georgian architectural style. Correspondingly, in the 1750s, the western shore of Maryland saw a significant rise in the building of the academic double pile, detached Georgian style house. The style evolved quite rapidly, arguably reaching its height during the 1760s with the development of the “Full Georgian” center passage double pile plan. Constructed beginning in 1758, the William Brown house was on the forefront of the rise of this scheme.

The William Brown House

The William Brown House was completed in 1764, built with the intention of becoming both a tavern for visitors to the bustling port of London Town and a residence for Brown. The home’s design was largely derived from moderately sized, late eighteenth century English four room plan houses. It is extremely likely that, as cabinetmaker and having undertaken several house construction projects throughout his career, Brown had access to the English pattern books circulating during the period, thus accounting for his extensive knowledge of this plan variety. However, at the time it was typical in Maryland and Virginia to use these books solely as a basis for design; builders and architects often adjusted and adapted their elements to suit the vernacular traditions of the region. William Brown’s house is consistent with this pattern. The plan of Brown’s house, while very similar to plans in several design books available during that period, did not replicate any of them exactly. However, while following tidewater tradition in its aversion to the duplication of designs found in pattern books, Brown’s house was nearly an exact duplicate of the nearby Upton Scott House in both exterior appearance and floor plan. It is widely speculated that Brown served as the undertaker for the construction of the Upton Scott House, thus inspiring his own home design.

It is evident through this historical research that William Brown closely followed the Tidewater building practices of the early eighteenth century, using homes specifically in the Annapolis region as direct precedents for the design of his own home. Thus, it follows that other Georgian homes built in and around Anne Arundel County during the late eighteenth century can reasonably considered as precedents that can be studied in order to discern the original form of the porches on the William Brown House.
Due to the regional specificity of the Georgian style as it existed in late eighteenth century Maryland, the speed with which the style was iterated in the region, and the distinct correlation of the William Brown House to other Georgian Homes of its time, this report utilizes Georgian precedents located in the Tidewater region of Maryland, primarily those built in and around Anne Arundel County between 1742 and 1781, as a basis for study. Upon analysis of these precedents, a number of patterns emerge and a high degree of similarity between the homes of this era can be detected, thus allowing the extrapolation of a series of details considered to be common for the time. Thus, the following images can be used to develop, with a reasonable degree of certainty, an idea of what the porches of the William Brown House looked like during the time of its construction.

The following precedents were studied along with the source material listed at the beginning of this report to make recommendations as to the reconstruction of the porches on the William Brown House. All precedents studied were built in a similar time period, style, and region as the William Brown House. A brief investigation was made into the report accompanying the homes' listings in the National Register of Historic Places in order to determine whether or not the porches on these homes were believed to be consistent with those original to the homes. The following list notes each home in chronological order and any relevant notes indicating the perceived accuracy of the porch structures. However, as new information is regularly uncovered and new archaeological developments are made, it is distinctly possible that the evidence below could be disproven. This is, in no way, to be understood as a comprehensive and definitive assessment as to the originality of the porches on the listed homes.
**Tulip Hill / Anne Arundel County, MD / 1756**

The National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination form indicates that, while the building’s portico was added between 1787 and 1790, the remainder of the exterior is little altered.

**Mount Clare / Baltimore City, MD / 1763**

The Easement Report for Mount Clare makes no indication as to the authenticity of the building’s entrances.

**Upton Scott House / Anne Arundel County, MD / 1763**

The National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination form indicates that the Doric pedimented porch on the garden facade, as well as the stone steps present at both the garden and street entrances are original.

**William Paca House / Anne Arundel County, MD / 1763**

The National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination form indicates that the home has been restored as closely as possible to its original form, this ostensibly includes the porches.

**John Ridout House / Anne Arundel County, MD / 1765**

The entrances on both the street facade and garden facade of the home are mentioned in the HABS report conducted in the 1930s, but there is no mention as to whether these entrances are consistent with those original to the home.

**Whitehall / Anne Arundel County, MD / 1766**

The National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination form indicates that the north entrance, which “led to an open porch, one-story above ground level, with steps descending on each side to a landing from which they proceeded at right angles to the ground” are consistent with those that originally existed on the building, as the original plans for the home were discovered in 1950 and the entire home has been restored to its 1764-69 appearance.

**Chase-Lloyd House / Anne Arundel County, MD / 1769**

The National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form indicates that the first floor of the house is little-altered, noting that the only exterior alteration is a three story-wooden screened porch that has been added to the south end of the house.

**James Brice House / Anne Arundel County, MD / 1772**

The National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination form indicates that the wooden steps and stoops were reconstructed based on an 1863 photograph of the home. This photograph is believed to have shown the original entrances.
PORCH ANALYSIS + RECOMMENDATIONS

Southeast Elevation

In keeping with Tidewater building tradition, the main entrance facade of the William Brown House is given primary decorative treatment. As such, the stair used to access this primary entrance would have been the most formal and decorative of the four, indicating that the brick and stone steps that currently exist at the southeast entrance of the William Brown House are of an appropriate level of formality. Concurrently, precedent images of other late eighteenth century Georgian buildings in the Annapolis area consistently show brick and stone steps leading to their primary entrances. In the report done by Contract Archeology in 1971 on the William Brown House, significant archaeological evidence was found indicating that, “the front stoop…was constructed entirely of brick and was the same width as the front door entrance, approximately 4’ 7”." Further, on-site observations did not uncover evidence present on or around the building to indicate that the brick and stone steps are inconsistent with those originally present on the building.

Recommendation

It is our recommendation that the stoop and steps on the southeast elevation of the William Brown House remain, as they are in relatively good condition and are consistent with what likely would have been present on the home when it was constructed in the late eighteenth century. In order for this stair to remain in good condition we advise that this stair undergo minor maintenance in the form of repointing and repair of any damaged bricks and stones.

Remaining Elevations - Overview

While the southeast facade is clearly the most primary due to its detailing and decorative elements, the remaining three facades project a great deal of status as result of the formal brick bond used and raised elements shared with the primary facade. As such, the building's architecture indicates that the three remaining entrances should all be considered as secondary.

Archaeological evidence uncovered in the 1971 Contract Archeology investigation indicates that these three secondary entrances were most likely constructed with wood. Multiple reports have noted the consistent simplicity of the wooden detailing in the home as a whole, one stating, “the William Brown House falls far short of other ‘four room plan’ houses in the Annapolis area, in terms of decorative finish. While the exterior masonry is very finely executed, the wooden exterior trim and the inside finishing, are, by contrast very simple.” It is likely that the detailing of the stairs would have been consistent with other simple wooden details in the home.

Recommendation

Per the symmetry and regularity typical of the Georgian style, it is recommended that these three secondary entrances be treated and detailed similarly. Further, it is recommended that the detailing of the stoops and stairs of the three secondary entrances be simple in order to remain consistent with the other simple wooden details in the house.
William Brown House Northeast Elev. / Anne Arundel County, MD / 1758

Upton Scott House / Anne Arundel County, MD / 1763

John Ridout House / Anne Arundel County, MD / 1765

Tulip Hill / Anne Arundel County, MD / 1756
**Northeast Elevation**

The Contract Archaeology Report of 1971 uncovered significant evidence regarding the original construction of the northeast porch. Two small brick support piers were discovered, which are believed to have been supports for the original frame and carriage structure of the stoop and stairs. The position of these piers indicated that the original stoop was approximately 8’ wide, 6’ deep, and was centered on the door. Aligned with these piers were two joist pockets cut into the lower portion of the northeast wall, likely created to eliminate two frame and carriage support posts against this wall. While no evidence of these brick support piers against the northeast wall was found due to the later construction of the concrete support footing at its base, the cut-in construction of the joist pockets suggests that they were of a later date than 1764. The Contract Archeology investigation also uncovered a 5’ long jack timber 11’4” from the northeast wall of the building, indicating the original location of the base of the stairs. The timber's length of 5’ indicates that the stair carriages were of that width, with the treads and risers extending approximately 1’6” on either side. The present porch on the northeast wall contains three brick piers supporting the front edge of the stoop, and has retained the cut-in joist pockets to support the rear edge of the stoop, a construction that is inconsistent with the above archaeological findings.

As for the remainder of the northeast porch, there was no archaeological evidence found in 1971 to support the presence of a roof above the porch on the original building. The report states, “the evidence associated with the one porch roof in existence today and studied in detail proves that it was constructed ca. 1850 and rebuilt a number of times through the twentieth century.” The building’s original architectural features work to further support this theory regarding the lack of an original covering structure. The doors on the northeast and southwest elevations of the building contain transom windows in order to bring light into the cross hall; a roof over these doors would have negated the effects of the transom windows. Thus, it is unlikely that the original stoop was covered by a roof.

Evidence found in precedent images of other late eighteenth century Georgian buildings in the Annapolis area offer further insight as to the original appearance of the northeast porch. While the Upton Scott House, John Ridout House, and several other precedents contain covering structures over their porches, the majority of the doors underneath these porches either do not have adjacent windows or have large adjacent windows, few have small transom windows. These precedents further support the conclusion that the roof above the northeast stoop is unlikely to have existed at the time of the building’s construction.

**Recommendation**

It is recommended that the base of the northeast porch be reconstructed in accordance with the findings Contract Archeology report. The porch should be 8 feet wide, 6 feet deep, and should utilize four wooden posts on four brick piers as the support for the stoop structure. The stairs should begin approximately 11 feet from the northeast wall, and should contain a five foot wide carriage with the treads and risers extending 1’6” on either side of this structure.

Both archaeological findings and architectural insight indicate that it is unlikely that the original stoop was covered by a roof. As such, the reconstruction of porch should eliminate the present covering structure. Precedents such as the Chase-Lloyd and William Paca Houses show uncovered stair and stoop elements that align both with both the simplicity of the wooden details in the William Brown House and the archaeological findings in the 1971 Contract Archeology Report. Thus, is recommended that a stair and stoop design be developed in accordance with both the Contract Archeology report and the precedents noted in order to be consistent with the time period in which it was built.
Southwest Elevation

Little archaeological evidence has been found to indicate the original form of the southwest entrance. However, it is conjectured that, due to the Georgian tendency toward regularity and symmetry, the entrances at both ends of the cross hall were similar.

Recommendation

Due to the regularity and symmetry typical of Georgian architecture, it is recommended that the southwest elevation be reconstructed to correspond with the northeast elevation.
Northwest Elevation

Little archaeological evidence has been found to indicate the original form of the northwest entrance. However, due to its proximity to the kitchen and other back of house operations, it is likely that the stair was relatively simple. A number of precedents, including the William Paca House, Whitehall, and the James Brice House, have been located showing a stair similar in form to what was likely present on this elevation.

As a result of the 1937 HABS photograph of the William Brown House showing a lack of stairs on this elevation, there has been some speculation as to whether there were stairs originally leading to the northwest entrance, or if there was simply an exterior porch extending from the northwestern door. The Contract Archeology report, however indicates that there were, in fact, “entrances on all four sides to the main floor level, and an entrance to the north[west] side under the stoop which gave access to the ground floor level.” This hypothesis is further confirmed by the precedent study, which did not uncover any homes containing a porch without stairs leading down to the ground. Finally, observation indicates that it would have been a practical requirement to have a stair connecting the back of house functions on the ground level to the front of house functions on the upper level. Thus, it is highly likely that there were stairs leading to the northwest entrance from the ground level.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the northwest stair and stoop be reconstructed in accordance with the simple details typical of the William Brown House and with the back stairs typical of eighteenth century Georgian homes, shown in the precedent images.
ACCESSIBILITY ANALYSIS + RECOMMENDATIONS

Basement Entry Doors
Currently, the basement has one exterior door located on the northwest facade. Some modifications would be necessary to utilize this as an accessible entry including the provision of a new trench grate with compliant openings, creating a compliant threshold condition, and modifying door hardware.

Recommendations
We recommend that the trench grate and threshold at the basement door be modified to be code compliant. We also recommend that accessible door hardware be provided on the basement door.

First Level Entry Doors
The hardware at all of the exterior doors does not comply with the requirements of the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design. Hardware on doors deemed to be along an accessible route should comply with the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design, Section 309.4, which requires that operable parts shall be operable with one hand and shall not require tight grasping, pinching, or twisting of the wrist. Additionally, the force required to activate operable parts shall be five pounds maximum.

Recommendations
We recommend that new, accessible hardware be provided at any entrance intended to become part of an accessible route into the building.

Interior Stairs
Inside the William Brown House, stairs connect the basement, first, and second floors. These stairs are open to adjoining spaces on all floors. No elevator is provided in the building.

Recommendations
The possible installation of an interior lift at this stair was reviewed as a means for the provision of an accessible route through the interior of the building. However, it was determined that a lift at this location would not be feasible due to the significant impact that it would have on the historic fabric of the building.
Entry Stairs

Exterior doors currently exist on each of the four sides of the William Brown House allowing for entry into, and exit from, the elevated first floor. None of these first floor doors are currently accessible, as each is elevated from the exterior grade and accessed via exterior stairs only. Additionally, existing stone steps at each door of approximately 5 inches do not conform to existing accessibility requirements.

The historic main entry faces southeast, and the stairs at this location are constructed of brick and stone. This entry is currently used as the primary point of visitor access into the building. Exterior stairs at the other three sides of the house are constructed of wood. The existing guardrails and handrails at all four exterior stair locations are not compliant with current code.

Recommendations

We recommend that an accessible entrance be provided to the first level of the building in order to meet code requirements. There are multiple solutions that could accomplish this recommendation; however, all of them will have some impact on the historic fabric. If it is determined that these accessible interventions are unable to occur at this time due to financial, aesthetic, or other reasons, it is recommended that the porches be designed such that an accessible entrance to the building could easily be added in the future.

The stairs to the southeast entry are the most historically accurate and currently require the least amount of renovation work, thus, it is advised that this entrance remain unchanged. While this entrance contains the least amount of grade change between the ground level and the first level entrance, the ramp required would need to accommodate approximately 55 inches of elevation change. At 1:12, the sloped portions of the ramp would be a total of 55 feet in length and the ramp would require an intermediate landing, thus having a significant impact on the historic fabric of the building’s primary entrance.

It is our recommendation that either the northeast, northwest, or southwest entrance be reconstructed to accommodate an accessible point of entry. Due to the smaller grade change between the ground and the northeast and southwest entrances relative to the northwest entrance, it is recommended that one of these entrances receive an ADA accessible ramp. The northeast entrance has the smallest grade change of the two and contains topography that could aid in the construction of a less visually intrusive ramp, thus, this entrance is preferred. If it is deemed that a ramp would affect the historic character of the building too significantly at this juncture, it is recommended that both of these stairs be reconstructed such that they are able to receive an accessible addition in the future. Specifically, it is recommended that the porches on the northeast and southeast are constructed such that their top elevation aligns with the top of the 5” stone step at these entries, thus eliminating the current stepped threshold condition. It is also advised that these porches are built such that they could easily receive a ramp in the future, thus minimizing the construction costs of a future intervention.

Alternatively, the northwest entry could be reconstructed to accommodate a limited use lift. This location is recommended so that the lift can be utilized to connect the first floor and basement portions of the house tour; also, the lift could be more easily concealed at this location than at other entries. The existing exterior stair should be rebuilt so that the stair and lift could share an upper landing, eliminating the existing stone step and the door. It should be noted that the exterior use of limited use lifts can prove difficult to maintain, especially in challenging environments adjacent to water, and this should be factored in to any decision to utilize an exterior lift. Should a lift be deemed not financially feasible at this time, it is recommended that the northwest stairs be rebuilt such that they might receive a lift in the future, thus minimizing the construction costs of a future intervention.

Further, it is recommended that all three wooden stairs be rebuilt such that their hand and guardrails conform with current code requirements. For the northeast entrance that will remain largely the same, it is advised that new guardrails be added to this entrance in such a way that there is little physical or visual impact to the historic fabric.
First Floor Elevated Rooms

The William Brown House currently contains four elevated rooms (the Planter’s Room, River Room, Bedchamber, and Parlor) located in the four corners of the first floor. Each of these rooms is raised approximately 5.5 inches above the entry level. These elevated rooms are a significant feature of the original house design and construction, as the floor structure for these rooms is observed to be at a higher level than the floor structure for adjacent spaces. This floor structure is visible from the basement and ties directly into the masonry walls.

These rooms, essential to the visitor's experience, are not currently physically accessible to individuals with disabilities. However, these rooms are largely visually accessible. The majority of these spaces can be viewed from each room’s respective entry, two of the four rooms containing multiple entryways that further enhance the visual experience of the space. In addition, at the present moment, these rooms do not contain any elements that are required to be seen up close or interacted with in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the space or time period.

Recommendations

There are multiple options to resolve this condition, however our recommendation is to rely on technology (programmatic access) to enhance existing views as well as provide additional and/or hidden views of the elevated rooms to those visitors who are unable to enter them. This solution is recommended because it has no impact on the historic fabric. It is possible that this programmatic access could occur in conjunction with the museum’s recent interactive programming effort.

Exit Signage

There is currently a small, unilluminated exit sign mounted above the basement exterior door, and this sign is not in conformance with current code requirements. On the first floor, an illuminated ceiling-mounted, combination exit sign is provided. Per IEBC 1205.12 (Exit Signs), the code official may accept alternative exit sign locations where such signs would damage the historic character of the building or structure. By code, such signs shall identify the exits and exit path.

Recommendations

Based on Chapter 12 of the IEBC, the code official should be consulted regarding required exit signage. It is likely that additional exit signage will be required, particularly in the basement. This can be accomplished sensitively and with little visual impact.