

PRELIMINARY DRAFT

Notes on Barrel-vaulted Feature inside Farmers National Bank

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At Pringle Symonds request, Steve Harris and I inspected, photographed, and measured the barrel-vaulted feature found inside the front door of Farmers National Bank at Church Circle. The feature was uncovered as work began on a new entrance lobby that necessitated removing the floor and installing a new set of stair steps. At the request of Historic Annapolis, the bank President, Mr. Thomas G. Moore, and Senior Vice President, Mr. Louis A. Supanek, inspected the site with us and then graciously provided us with the opportunity to photograph and measure. This brief report will summarize what we found and how this feature articulates with other features associated with Reynolds Tavern.

This feature was brought to our attention by Paul Pearson early yesterday morning, and after looking at it, I called St. Clair Wright who set in motion its further study. The top of barrel vault #1 appeared at a height of 2.5 feet above street level and lay immediately below the modern lobby floor. There were no remains of any brick floor covering the barrel-vault itself although it is possible that this was removed prior to our on-site visit. The floor would have been at a level equivalent to first floor of Reynolds Tavern.

The truly provocative questions surrounding this feature and its parallel at Farmers National Bank revolve around their age and their function. Are these fragments of eighteenth century Annapolis buildings used by William Reynolds in some way in his role as a rising merchant? Or are these fragments of nineteenth century Annapolis linked in some way to the commercial activities of an early nineteenth century bank? Are they connected to the need for a "banking house" recorded in the minutes of the Bank's Board of Directors for April 29, 1812?

Steve Harris, who took many of the original photographs of the feature inside the basement of Reynolds Tavern, immediately recognized the one inside Farmers National Bank as a close copy. A drawing of this is attached (Figure 1) and marked to show the extent of the barrel vault found at the Bank. Note that the Tavern feature's length is much longer (but also note that we only found a fragment of the second feature--i.e., one vault--and so cannot determine its full dimensions)

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and that it is carefully set inside the basement walls with its barrel vaults (of which two exist) beginning at a depth considerably below street level.

The interior width of the barrel vault was 6 feet and its interior length was 10 feet; the depth of the barrel vaults was 2.5 to 3 feet. The exterior walls were almost two feet thick. The mortar used in its construction was shell; the bricks were hand-made of variable size (some 9" long, some 8" long; some 4 1/4" wide and others 5" wide) and the bonding on the east wall was English bond. All of this is consistent with late eighteenth or early nineteenth century construction. In front of it, but further towards West Street, laying perpendicular to barrel vault #1 is the remains of a second barrel vault (barrel vault #2). The arch on this barrel vault was cut when the stair steps (installed sometime in the 20th century) were put in place. Details of its construction and articulation with barrel vault #1 are hidden by a poured concrete foundation. Bank officials have also told us that a poured concrete foundation in the basement covers other components of this unusual feature, although its presence (and perhaps some of its dimensions) can still be detected.

The first step in any archaeological study of a feature is to date it, but there have been problems dating the feature inside Reynolds Tavern for the artifacts associated with it provided no clear-cut answers to the question of its possible age. The fill inside it (placed there when it was no longer in use) was relatively sterile but did contain some early nineteenth century material, while almost nothing was recovered from its builder's trenches. Dr. Richard J. Dent's interpretation of it to date has been that it was probably an eighteenth century feature - a storage vault of some type used to store furs or other perishable materials and that the barrel-vaults used in its construction provided an air-buffer between the storage unit itself and the damp earth.

At this point, with the discovery of the similar feature to the west of Reynolds Tavern, this assumption must be re-examined. What I would like to do is present what firm facts we possess, note what type of information would be helpful and where it could be procured, and then discuss whether we should attempt to do a very limited amount of archaeological excavation near the Farmers National Bank feature (assuming this is a viable possibility).

1. Reynolds Tavern was built in the 1740s by William Reynolds who died in the 1770s. His inventory does not specifically mention outbuildings except for a "little new room" X. Joe Dent's reading of the inventory suggested to him that at least one storage unit did exist (presumably the one in the basement).

If we conclude that there is no relationship between the placement of barrel vaults #1 and #2 and the 'wing' and/or present bank building, then we might assume that Reynolds also had an above ground storage facility on the Circle to the west of the present building.

REYNOLD'S TAVERN
FEATURE

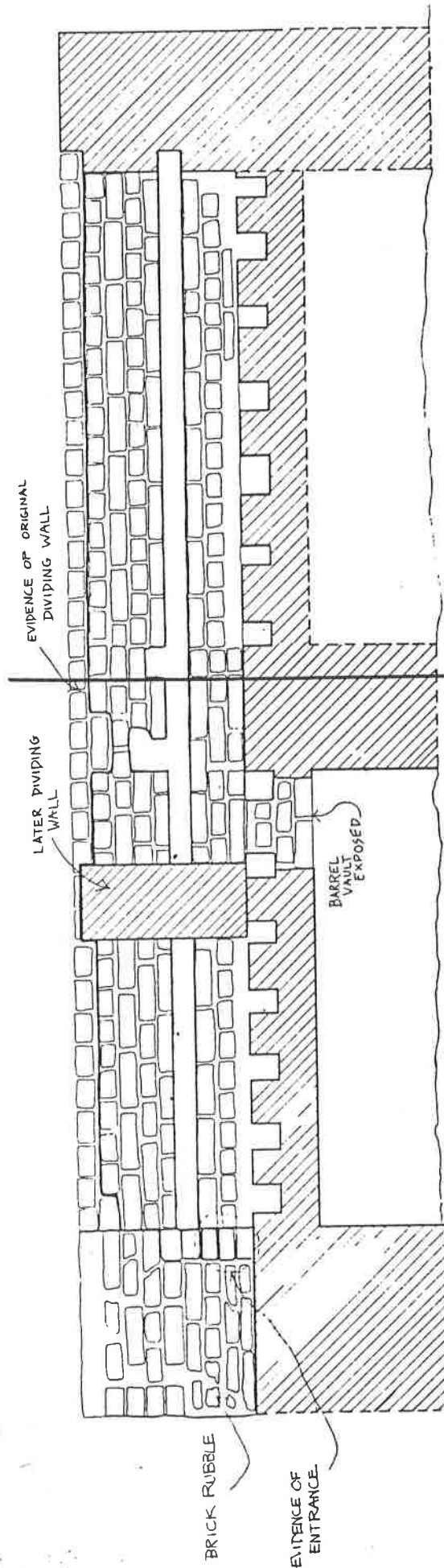
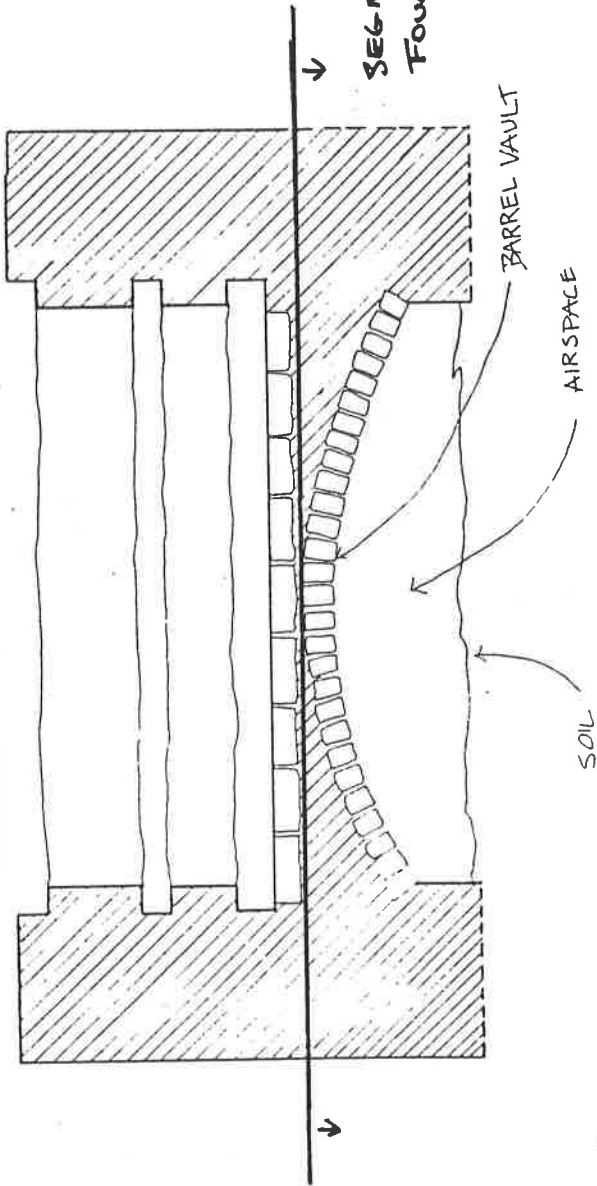
AUGUST 1 1984

1" = 1'-0"

FIELD DRAWN BY
BETH FORD

SEGMENT BELOW ↓ IS THE PORTION
FOUND AT FARMERS NATIONAL BANK

SECTION
CROSS AXIS



SHADED AREAS INDICATE SOLID WALLS/
FLOORS CUT BY SECTION PLANE
--- LIMITS OF STRUCTURE ARE NOT EXPOSED

B

A

it is unclear whether we have A or B in the segment found in the Bank

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2. The 1798 tax list does not mention the 'wing' added to the building on its western side. However, Russell Wright's examination of this suggests it was built XXXXXXX. There are at least two separate, interior entrances to the 'wing' that provided interior access for someone from Reynolds Tavern to the 'wing' or to the bank.
3. The present three-walled front to the Farmers National Bank was built in 18 ; it post-dates the 'wing'.
4. While barrel-vault #1 would have fit within the confines of the front wall of the 'wing' (assuming a straight-line for its footprint extending from its ghost on the Tavern's west sidewall), barrel-vault #2 would not have fit within this space.
5. It is possible that barrel vault #2 might have fit behind the space between the present front wall of the bank, but further architectural analysis is necessary to be positive of this fact. Knowing what the configuration of the basement is would be of great help with regard to this possibility.
6. It is also possible that the barrel-vaults are associated with activities carried out in the earlier 'wing'. In this regard, it would be useful to see a projected floorplan of the wing with the storage features superimposed (and containing information from the basement).

The base level of the barrel-vault #1 appears to lie slightly below the present sidewalk level. Archaeological testing by Kenneth Orr (Orr, 1978) indicates that subsoil was encountered roughly four feet below the sidewalk on the bank's side of the Tavern, facing the Circle. Between the subsoil and the sidewalk paving three other levels were found: (1) a dark brown loam (of fudge-like consistency) between 1 and 1.5 feet deep that was landscaping fill presumably laid down when the Tavern was built and (2) an oyster shell layer that formed a gutter and contained artifacts dating c. 1770 (creamware) overlain by (3) a layer of sand presumably related to the construction of Farmers National Bank, but possibly relating to the barrel-vaulted feature. Orr's report provides no discussion of any artifacts found in this sand layer.

The fill in the base of barrel vault #1 is a medium brown fill containing very little cultural material; it is hard-packed at its surface layers and much looser at its base. My own opinion is that it would be relatively easy and would take little time for two people to excavate a narrow trench within this to subsoil and that if we knew what layers the foundation lay upon we would have a better idea as to its age and whether its function was related in some way to the early history of Farmers National Bank (giving us information on early nineteenth century banking activities not recorded in documents) or to a prior use of the lot.