

Caulkers' Houses Significance

The Caulkers' Houses are architecturally significant as rare extant examples of wood frame one-room dwelling units built in industrializing urban areas in America and Europe during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In Fell's Point, these houses were built to address the acute housing shortage brought on by the booming shipbuilding industry. The Caulkers' Houses were part of a row of four one story with loft dwelling units occupied by the city's working classes, each dwelling measuring approximately 12' by 16'. At the end of the eighteenth century, two-thirds of the houses in Fell's Point were wood frame; of these only one fifth were one story tall. The buildings remain as two of only a handful of wood houses in Fell's Point, even rarer for their relative lack of alteration since the nineteenth century. Although in deteriorating condition and in need of rehabilitation, these buildings retain a significant amount of their historic fabric and features.

The Preservation Society is proposing to rehabilitate 612-614 S Wolfe Street to their appearance during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the period of their greatest historical significance and association with African American ship caulkers residing at these properties. The first African American caulkers were active in Fell's Point in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Employed in waterproofing ships, both freed and enslaved African Americans dominated the ship caulking trade during the first half of the nineteenth century. African American caulkers formed the Black Caulkers Association and held a monopoly on the caulking industry for over a decade. The most famous among Fell's Points caulkers was Frederick Douglass, who lived and worked in the area during the 1830s. City directories from the 1840s and 1850s show African American caulkers Richard Jones, Henry Scott, and John Whittington as tenants in the Caulkers' Houses; these directories show a significant concentration of African American caulkers around Wolfe Street in the late 1840s during the period when the Black Caulker Association dominated the caulking industry. By the late 1850s that monopoly weakened as non-African Americans competed for caulking jobs. As the labor demographics shifted, so did the concentration of African American housing which shifted west of Wolfe Street. The Caulkers' Houses represent a unique remnant of this period in African American history in Fell's Point (see Shellenhamer, et al 2020 archeology report: pp. 83-87 for more detailed history of black ship caulkers in Fell's Point).

Stabilization & Restoration Evidence & Methodology

Constructed circa 1797, these two houses were part of a row of four contiguous one story with loft dwellings. Exterior walls are post and beam with brick-nogging infill. The southern end of 614 S Wolfe Street had one window on the first floor and one window in the loft, remnants of which remain as a result of being covered during the first quarter of the nineteenth century when 616 S Wolfe Street was constructed. Paint analysis performed on the exterior of the south wall of 614 S Wolfe Street revealed the existence of stucco covered with whitewash in the area below the top of the window frame that survives in the south wall. The exterior wall above the window frame and extending to the gable peak retains weatherboarding like that found on the exterior west walls of 612 and 614 S Wolfe Street. Where portions of the stucco have fallen away, nail holes exist that are spaced consistent with the spacing of nails in the weatherboarding found on the exterior west walls of 612 and 614 S Wolfe Street indicating that

it was sided prior to the stuccoing. Structural investigations indicate that the east elevation dormer and window opening on 614 S Wolfe Street are original, though the original wood sash would have been six-over-six hung sash (the existing one-over-one sash were not common until the late nineteenth century). The east façade of 612 S Wolfe Street would have mirrored 614, with a smaller window opening than exists now. Based on the window size and one-over-one sash, the existing window dates to the turn of the twentieth century.

Siding: Will replicate the weatherboarding that is found on the west elevation of 612 and 614 S Wolfe Street and the south gable end of 614 S Wolfe Street above the surviving first floor window frame. Based on investigation of a small portion of the east façade of 614 S Wolfe Street after temporarily removing 4 siding boards just to the left of the demising wall between 612 and 614 S Wolfe Street, no evidence of stucco on the brick nogging in that section was found, however, nail holes spaced consistent with the spacing of nails in the rear façade weatherboarding were found in studs located in that same vicinity. The absence of stucco is consistent with the condition found at 604 S Wolfe Street, a structure of similar construction and age when the vinyl siding was removed from that structure as part of its rehabilitation. The façade was not examined for nail holes before early studs were removed.

Roofing materials: It is believed that the surviving wood shingles on the west roof slope of 614 S Wolfe date to the construction of the building because the shingles are affixed to the intact roof boards with hand wrought rosehead nails. Based on a visual inspection of several of the roofboards from below, there appear to be no other nail holes in the boards, suggesting that these shingles were the first and only wood shingles installed on this portion of the roof. The restored roof will be shingled with shingles that replicate the surviving wood shingles.

Original building footprints: The dwelling units were originally one room with loft structures, as indicated by remnants of exterior siding and roofing on the 614's west elevation. It is unclear when the first additions to 612 and 614 S Wolfe St were constructed. The first documented evidence is the 1867 Sanborn map (see Shellenhamer, et al archeology report 2020: pp. 75-76 for the history of the various rear additions). Although additions providing additional living space were likely constructed prior to 1867, the Preservation Society is not reconstructing additions on the west elevation until additional structural and/or archaeological investigations are completed at a future date, to provide further information and informing a more accurate reconstruction of these spaces. The addition on 612 was removed between 1992-2005. The 614 S Wolfe Street addition was removed in Spring 2020.

Exterior Doors: All four original exterior doors are missing. The design of the wood doors proposed in the application are typical of doors found on houses of the period located elsewhere in Fells Point. There is no physical evidence that the size of the door openings in the east façade of the buildings have been changed. The rear door opening of 614 S Wolfe Street was relocated to the center of the rear façade and will be realigned with the front door of that building, believed to be its original location based on the existence of surviving framework that mirrors the framework on the east facade. The rear wall of 612 S Wolfe Street was removed

some time ago but when reconstructed the door opening will be realigned with the front door of 612 S Wolfe.

Dormers: East elevation shed dormers will be restored. The west façade dormer on 614 S Wolfe Street will be removed. Its location indicates that the dormer was built in response to the construction of the shed addition just recently removed and it does not date to the original construction of the building. The dormer is atypical of dormers found in Fells Point; for example, the dormer window opening is approximately 24 inches square to conform to the limited space between the junction of shed roof and ceiling, and the interior ceiling of the dormer was constructed to slope upward toward the window opening. There is no evidence that 614 S Wolfe Street's west façade had any dormer until the addition was built. The rear dormer at 612 S Wolfe Street will be restored consistent with the dormer on the east elevation of 612 S Wolfe Street, unless clear evidence is revealed that it was added after the Caulkers' period as set forth below.

Windows: On all windows excluding the west elevation dormers, addressed above and below, six over six window sashes will be installed, which is typical of the late 18th century period. The window opening on the east elevation of 612 S Wolfe Street will be restored to the size of the opening at 614 S Wolfe Street, which is original.

Cornices: The profile of the cornice that remains intact on the east façade of the houses is consistent with what one would expect to find on a house of this period so it is believed to be original, subject to further investigation relating to the crown moulding, as set forth below. The extant cornice will be replicated for installation on the west façade of the houses.

Fireplace and chimney stack: Removed during the first half of the twentieth century; to be rebuilt, but not as part of the current application.

Areas of Architectural Interest for Investigation during Stabilization

East Elevation: The existing post-Civil War era wood siding on the east façade of both buildings has prevented an in-depth investigation of the east facades and their original construction. Sections of siding have previously been temporarily removed, but additional investigations of the entire façade will allow for additional analysis. Once the extant siding is removed, investigations will focus on surviving evidence of the earliest façade material. Such investigations are of architectural and historic interest because of the existence of brick nogging within all exterior walls.

West Elevation Dormer at 612 S Wolfe Street: As stated above, the west elevation dormer at 612 S. Wolfe Street will be retained and restored, unless evidence uncovered during restoration clearly establishes that it was added after the Caulkers' period. The existing layers of later roofing materials and the structural instability of 612 S Wolfe Street have made examination of

the dormer unsafe and the dormer itself is very badly deteriorated and the rafters it rests upon have shifted and collapsed.

Cornice: It is believed with a high level of certainty that the cornice on the east façade is original. Because the gutter currently hides the crown moulding, upon removal of the gutter, if it is discovered that the surviving crown moulding is different from what is shown on the plans, the surviving moulding will be restored, and the cornice plans altered to conform with what has survived, for replication on the west elevation.

Archeological Monitoring Requirements

Ground disturbance associated with the reconstruction and repair of the foundation and grade beams supporting the south wall of 614 S. Wolfe Street will require monitoring by an archeologist identified by the Friends Group in undisturbed or unexcavated areas of the site. Archaeological investigations in 2019 and monitoring for the demolition of the 614 addition have identified utility trenches running along the south side of 612 and the north wall of 614; ground disturbance in these areas will not require monitoring. Similarly, test units along the west foundation of 612 were excavated in 2019 and these areas do not require additional monitoring. All other ground disturbance within the site will be monitored by an archaeologist that meets or exceeds the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards. Upon completion of the monitoring, the archeologist will incorporate all findings, by addendum, into the 2020 archeological investigation report for the Caulkers Houses (Shellenhamer, et al 2020) prepared by The Herring Run Archeology Project.