

Archaeological Monitoring Spring Street Roundhouse Site New Haven, Connecticut

Background research for the New Haven Rail Yard project indicated that the proposed Church Street South Extension would impact the site of a ca. 1870 railroad roundhouse. Fulfilling a Memorandum of Understanding among the Federal Highway Administration, the Connecticut Department of Transportation, and the State Historic Preservation Office, archaeologists and an historian from AHS monitored the construction phase of the project so as to expose and document significant features and artifacts associated with the roundhouse.

The project required close cooperation between archaeological and construction personnel so as to maximize the recovery of information while at the same time avoiding any delays to ongoing construction. Because the Church Street Extension required a metal truss bridge to be hoisted in place by a huge traveling crane, timeliness was essential. In May 2001, the archaeologists investigated the locations where three of the bridge's tall piers would be constructed, using a combination of shovel test pits and surface stripping of the existing paving. Two of the piers were determined to occupy areas of disturbance and one revealed the presence of a brick radial wall and repair pit from the roundhouse. The wall and pit were cleaned and record photographs were taken. Construction of the bridge piers began immediately thereafter. In April 2002, additional archaeological monitoring preceded the construction of temporary footings for the truss. A portion of the roundhouse perimeter wall was exposed, along with additional repair pits; these features were cleaned and photographed.



Architectural and food-related artifacts were also recovered at these locations. Finally, in October 2002, construction of the foundation for the traveling crane was preceded by the exposure of a large portion of the stone retaining wall for the roundhouse's 52-foot-diameter turntable pit. Additional cultural material was recovered from the fill, including a bottle once filled with a popular "medicinal" opiate. The archaeological work took place over just two days, after which construction resumed.

Important data emerged from the archaeological monitoring. The dimensions and materials of the roundhouse became evident and the phases of construction and demolition were clarified. Only a few comparable roundhouse sites have been investigated archaeologically, so recording this relatively early example is important for documenting the history of American railroad roundhouses in general.

