

The Archaeology of College Hill | Fall 2023



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Introduction to the List Art Building site

Archival information

The object of our excavation is a former house that stood at 58 College Street. Archival sources indicate that a house was first constructed on the lot in the mid-1800s, perhaps around or shortly before 1840. The precise date of construction is unknown, but a policy record from 1840 describes a 34' by 26' wooden two-story dwelling with two additions on the back. A 1940 tax assessment of the property describes its approximate date of construction as 1850.

It seems as though the house was subdivided into several apartments beginning (at least) in the early 1900s. The 1900 census records six people living in the house in three different units, including a woman named Evangeline Larry, a concert violinist and teacher who advertised lessons at the studio in her residence in 1900 editions of the *Brown Daily Herald*. The *Brown Daily Herald* also gives hints that at least one of the apartments at 58 College Street was a rotating apartment for Brown students: many issues of the BDH between 1900-1910 contain advertisements for rooms to rent, "suitable for two students." The 1910 census records a whopping 13 people living in the house: Reuben and Hattie Randall (Reuben is listed as the homeowner from 1902 onward), their son William, Hattie's mother Sarah, Randall's sister Vashtie, and a servant named Annie Cunningham, as well as seven male lodgers.

FOR RENT.
A suite of rooms, bedroom and sitting room, suitable for two students, at 58 College street; steam heat, separate entrance, furnished; moderate price.
3t 01

1907 Brown Daily Herald advertisement of rooms to rent at 58 College Street.

In the 1920s, the house was owned by Hattie Randall, since Reuben passed away in 1919. According to the 1920 census, only three people lived in 58 College: Hattie (who was the manager of a tea room), her son William (an overseer at a textile mill), and their servant Annie Cunningham. In the 1930s, it appears as though College Street became home to several Brown fraternities—a 1936 BDH article reports a "rubbish fire" breaking out between 58 College and the "Phi Delt house." According to the *Encyclopedia Brunonia*, 58 College briefly housed the fraternity Alpha Tau Omega in 1938, which subsequently became inactive in 1940.

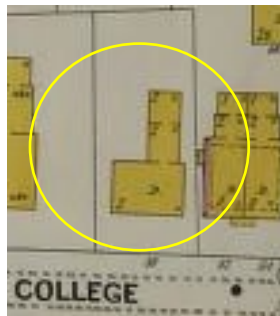
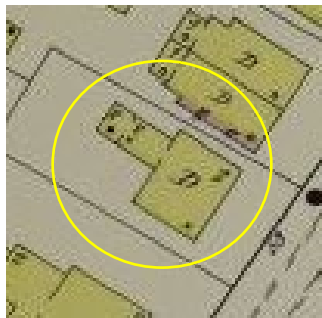
Also in 1936, John Arakel Stone purchased 58 College. John Stone was an Armenian immigrant who was born 1886 in Harput, modern eastern Turkey. At the time of his birth, the area was under the control of the Ottoman Empire and the nation-state of Armenia did not exist, so although he was certainly Armenian and sources list him as such, his birthplace is now in Turkey. John was widowed sometime before 1940, as the census lists him as such. In 1940, nine people lived at 58 College spread across four units: John Stone and his 25 year old son, Richard; Wanda Zajac and Jean Concordia, two women in their mid-20s (described as “head of household” and “partner” – interesting); Oscar (37), Esther (33), and Judith (8) Knipe; and Austra Hermanson and Dorothy Staff, two women in their mid-20s again described as “head” and “partner” respectively. John Stone also appeared to have a connection to Brown University: a 1942 BDH article names John Stone as the “official fitter” of class jackets for junior boys and instructs them to go get fitted at 58 College Street. Since John’s occupation on the census is listed as “tailor,” this makes sense!

The 1950 census records twelve people living at 58 College: John Stone (his son had moved out); Maryon Donohue and her mother Lula Hughes; Dalton Moore (26, described as “head of household”) and five male students (possibly/probably Brown students); Robert Hamilton, a 32-year-old teacher at a “design school” (RISD?); and John (23) and Margaret (21) Bascomb. John Stone passed away in 1952 and ownership of 58 College was passed to his son, Richard. In 1961, the house was sold to Brown University.

Brown received a donation from Albert and Vera List for a new art building in 1966 and ground was broken on what would become the List Art Center in 1969. I haven’t yet been able to find a record of when the house at 58 College was torn down, but it was sometime between its sale to Brown in 1961 and the groundbreaking in 1969. List was completed in 1971. The tearing down of the house at 58 College for the construction of List can be seen as emblematic of a larger conflict between Brown and the wider Providence community at the time. A 1974 Brown alumni magazine article describes the conflict between Brown and the Providence Preservation Society (PPS), which “has devoted much of its energy since 1957 to monitoring Brown’s encroachment on historic parts of the East Side”. Ronald Wolk, then vice-president for development and public relations, said “Mrs. Downing [member of PPS] wants to save every three-story, wood-frame Victorian house in Providence, regardless of its historical value, as a tribute to the days of gracious living. Brown is not in the business of house restoration, except where there is definite historical value to the property. It’s the age-old problem of yesterday versus tomorrow.”

Building information

As mentioned previously, the earliest record we have of a house at 58 College Street is an 1840 policy record, which describes a wooden, two-story structure measuring 34' by 26'. There are two additions on the back, described as "occupancy for a DH [domestic helper??]" and a "woodhouse." This description matches the Sanborn insurance maps we have for 1889 and 1900.



Left to right: Sanborn insurance maps from 1899, 1900, and 1920-21.

The 1920-21 Sanborn map shows the addition of another structure appended to the back of the house, likely another room for lodgers. In 1936, John Stone (who had just purchased the home) applied for a building permit to subdivide the interior space, presumably to create even more rooms for lodgers.

A 1940 residential assessment record of 58 College gives lots of details about the house. It was described to be in "fair" condition and had the following features: hardwood flooring, copper roof drains/flushing, three fireplaces and chimneys, a rough-dressed stone foundation, basement with either quarry stone or brick walls and a concrete floor, an oil-burning heating system, and both gas and electric lighting/fixtures (likely holdovers from earlier phases of construction).

In April 2023, geophysical survey was conducted at the site to determine if any structural remains were identifiable. After surveying the area using ground-penetrating radar (GPR), four 'anomalies' were identified. An anomaly refers to an area where the ground has been disturbed, e.g. by building foundations, utility lines, wires, etc. At the List site, at least two of the four anomalies are believed to be associated with the foundations of the old house at 58 College.

College Hill Fall 2023

Research questions

Since this is our very first year excavating at this site, there is so much yet to learn. As such, the research questions guiding our work at the site this year will focus on establishing the basics:

- What were the primary construction materials of the house? Can we identify different phases of construction?
- What were the primary site formation processes that have shaped how the site appears to us today? How was the house demolished?
- Can we identify different interior spaces at the property?
- What types of objects did the inhabitants of the house buy and use? What can this tell us about their daily practices? Their identities?
- What can the archaeology at 58 College Street reveal about Brown student experiences throughout the decades? About the early 20th century immigrant experience? About the lives of people living in crowded boarding houses?

Community engagement

ARCH 1900 is designated as a Community-Based Learning and Research (CBLR) course, which means that our course involves communication and collaboration with the broader Providence community. Interaction with the community has traditionally been a huge part of College Hill. In the past, this has taken a variety of forms, including holding an open excavation day for International Archaeology Day/Brown's Family Weekend, participating in the *Providence: Year of the City* series, giving tours and excavation opportunities to school groups from local schools, hosting high school students who want to shadow archaeologists, and more. We also have an online presence: College Hill has a Facebook page that has a decently large following and that you will each post on at least once during the semester. This year, we will also launch a College Hill Instagram page. We are very much open to suggestions about other ideas for virtual/social media-based outreach! Further, if any of you are especially interested in community engagement/outreach, you will have the option to pursue that interest for a final project. We will be creating a few outreach-oriented projects to give as options for the final project, but you are also welcome to propose your own.

Fall 2023 season plans

Based on the results of the geophysical survey and the historic maps, we will be opening four trenches at the site this fall, one for each anomaly. Each trench will measure approximately 2 x 2 meters. Five students will work in each trench at a time..

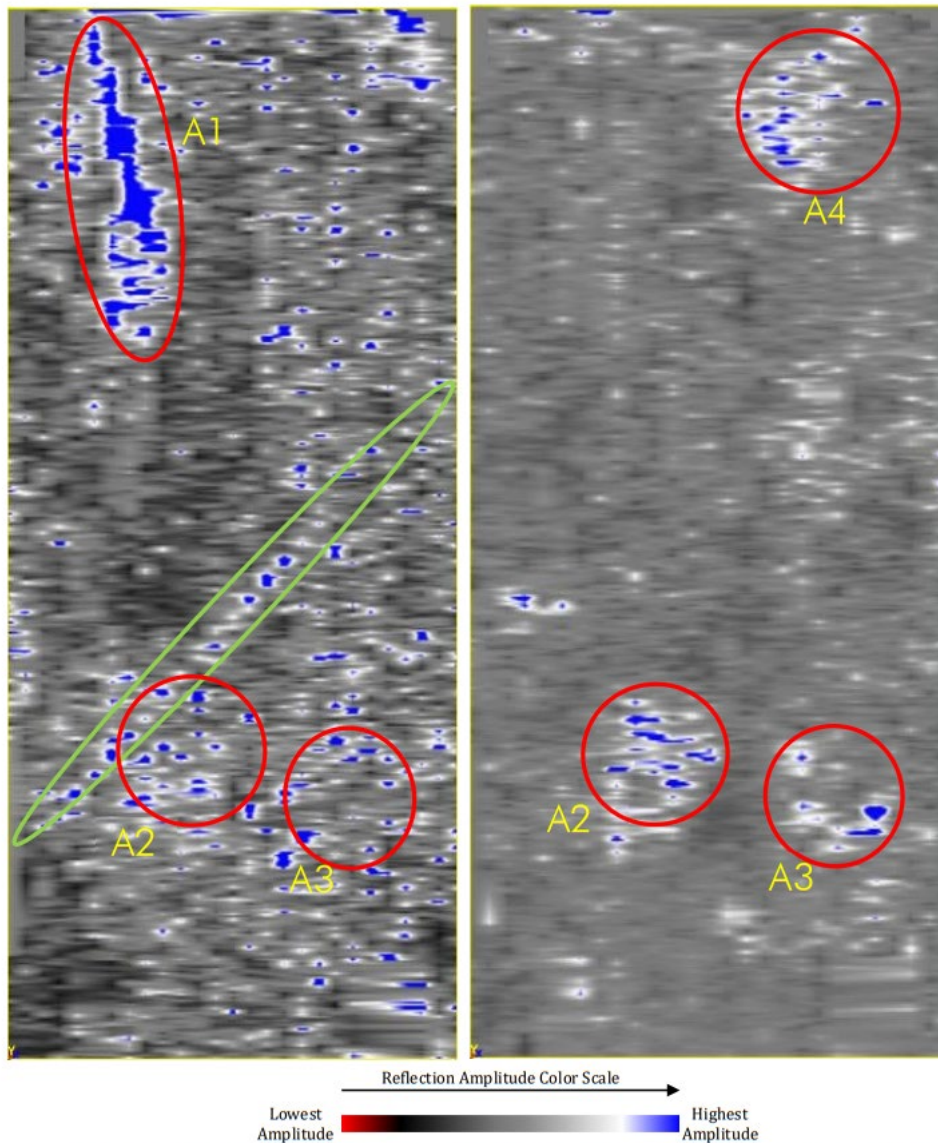


Figure 4-2. GPR Slice data, Right depth 0.6 m, thickness 0.2 m; Left depth 0.9m, thickness 0.2m.

Practicalities

Our daily routine in the field is relatively simple. Each dig day, you will be divided between the three trenches as evenly as possible, depending on how much/what type of work is needed in each trench. You will be responsible for excavating the trench and sifting the soil that comes out. In the first part of the semester, after class enrollment has

settled, I will draw up a schedule to make sure everyone gets a chance to dig in each trench. Later, you can choose the trenches you are most interested in (as long as each trench has enough students). Additionally, one student per trench will be in charge of the iPad documentation system for the whole class period (this counts in place of taking notes in your personal notebook for the day). Everyone will get at least one chance to manage the database in the field. About twenty minutes before the end of our excavation period, we will all collaborate to clean up, put away equipment, and report on the day's progress. These wrap-up reports ("trench talks") will be given by the person in charge of the iPad that day. These trench talks will be filmed by me and posted to Canvas (not visible to the public), both for the purposes of documentation and so that in the event of absences, everyone can stay up to date on the progress of the excavation.¹

We will most likely excavate until early November—after daylight savings time, it becomes too dark (and, often, too cold) to effectively work outside. After this point, we spend our Wednesday afternoons in the lab. Soon after this transition, we will backfill our trenches (i.e. put all the dirt back in), since that becomes a much more difficult process if the dirt pile is frozen solid.

Lab will be held in Rhode Island Hall 108. The lab is where we wash, sort, and catalogue all of the artifacts that we excavated earlier in the semester. First, objects must be washed/cleaned (metal, wood, fabric, etc. objects do not get washed with water) and set out to dry. Once this is done, we begin processing artifacts. Processing and cataloguing includes sorting artifacts collected in bulk by type (ceramic wares, flat vs. vessel glass) and counting/weighing the artifacts. After processing, we photograph the artifacts and (time permitting) start doing further research and analysis. How the whole lab process will work in reality, however, is largely dependent upon the quantity and type of artifacts we excavate, which cannot be predicted in advance—especially since we have never excavated at this site before. Flexibility and willingness to go with the flow and do whatever is needed is key!

Equipment: The only equipment you need to purchase for this class is a notebook for your fieldnotes. I am partial to the weatherproof options from [Forestry Suppliers](#), but any notebook will do. All other equipment will be provided by the Joukowsky Institute.

¹ If anyone is not comfortable with this, for whatever reason, please let me know and we can figure out an alternative.

Conduct:

Our excavations will be a fun activity for everyone involved—a primary goal for the course is for students to develop a strong sense of teamwork. However, there are also a few basic principles of archaeological fieldwork that need to be understood in order for the course and our collaborative archaeological research to be successful:

- Safety will always be our top priority, be it in the field, lab, or classroom. While we should all expect to work in close proximity to one another, no one should hesitate to bring issues of safety to the attention of their classmates and instructors. **Unsafe, inappropriate, or harassing behavior will not be tolerated in the class.**
- Students must be dressed appropriately in order to participate in fieldwork. **Close-toed shoes (preferably hiking or work boots) are required** for all outdoor fieldwork. Wear clothes that you don't mind getting (very) dirty. As is often the case in archaeology, we have limited time and we may work in adverse weather conditions. Be prepared with appropriate rain gear, footwear, sunscreen, hats, water bottles, etc.
- Archaeological fieldwork is physically demanding and can involve heavy lifting, shoveling, and prolonged periods of working outdoors in squatting or bent postures. **Please notify the instructor of any injuries or existing physical limitations** within the first week of class (or as they arise) so that we can make any necessary accommodations. For more information about fieldwork accommodations, please refer to the "Inclusive, Accessible, Archaeology" PDF guide available on Canvas.
- We will be excavating trenches to depths of up to 1 meter. Be aware of the location of the trenches to prevent injury and be aware of your surroundings (especially your fellow classmates!) when using tools. Never lean or sit on the edge of the trench due to the possibility of collapse and keep all materials and tools away from the edge of the trench to avoid falling object injuries.
- Archaeological fieldwork and lab work demand careful attention to detail, and, above all, patience. We are never in a rush to excavate soil or materials from the ground before they are properly documented *in situ*. Students must follow the excavation instructions given by the instructor and teaching assistant. Always take the initiative to ask questions, even if something seems rudimentary.

- Keep track and take care of equipment at all times. Be sure to pick up after yourself and to stow equipment in the storage location after the day's work is completed. Everyone must contribute equally to cleaning up the site after each day of fieldwork before anyone can depart— archaeological fieldwork is first and foremost a group effort, and no one is done until everyone is.
- Finally, the Archaeology of College Hill is representing Brown University to a broader public. Please treat one another with respect and take the time to speak with visitors courteously. Foul language, inappropriate behavior, and tampering with the excavation areas or materials unaccompanied by the instructor or teaching assistant will not be tolerated.

Introduction to Excavation and Recording Methods

Archaeological excavation and recording have similar basic principles wherever you go: within a designated area, you dig down from the top of a stratigraphic sequence (meaning the most recently deposited material gets removed first) and systematically record what you do and what you find. Confusingly, many different terms are used to describe basically the same process. At the List Art Building site, the trenches that we will be digging are called **units** (although I will probably often refer to them as trenches; other projects call them areas; the main point is that they are the bounded spaces within which we dig). They are all given names that start with LAB (i.e., List Art Building) and end with a sequential number. This fall we will open LAB01, LAB02, LAB03, and LAB 04. Within the unit, there are **loci** (singular 'locus'); on other projects these are often called contexts or stratigraphic units. Archaeologically, these are the remains of discrete events that occurred at some point in time. For us they are usually either deposits (layers of dirt with stuff in them) or architecture. Each locus gets a unique name that is the name of the unit, a dash, and a sequential 3-digit number, e.g., LAB01-001, LAB01-002, etc. Don't worry if not all of this makes sense. It should after a week or two in the field and an introduction to archaeology discussion section.

The process of excavation & tools of the trade

Excavation begins by laying out the outlines of the trenches using measuring tapes and triangulation and then stripping all the sod off with shovels. This will be done by grad students before you arrive on site to give us as much time actually digging as possible.

Then we dig. The main tool you will use here is the **trowel** (a flat masonry trowel, not a gardening trowel). Your trowel is your best friend because you can use the flat side

edge to peel away the layers of dirt without missing locus changes or breaking artifacts. To watch a video on troweling techniques, follow this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZEUzOux7RA>

In loci without many artifacts where we can move a lot of dirt quickly, we may also use **shovels** and **hand-picks** to dig. Once we get to complicated stratigraphy or delicate artifacts however, these are a no-go as we risk destroying loci and objects. Other excavation tools include **clippers** to remove pesky roots (that way you don't potentially disrupt stratigraphy by pulling up deep roots), **dust pans** to transfer dirt from the ground to **buckets**, and **brushes** to brush loose dirt off features or exposed artifacts (great for getting better visibility, not so great at actually moving dirt).

All dirt that is removed from the trench gets screened through wire mesh, and the artifacts in it are collected and bagged. It is important to only screen dirt from the same unit and locus at one time because that way we can be confident in associating objects with their archaeological context and can draw sound conclusions. Most artifacts recovered, we collect and bag in bulk, meaning all objects of a certain type from one locus go in one bag together. Historically, the most common bulk-collected artifacts are nails, pieces of slate roof tile, pieces of brick, glass shards, and ceramic sherds. Each bag, regardless of the type of artifact, gets a unique **collected material/LAB number**, which consists of the locus ID and a sequential number (e.g., LAB01-001-1, LAB01-001-2, etc.), and all of the artifacts inside are associated with it. This number gets written on the bag in sharpie, along with the material. Unique or otherwise important artifacts are called '**small finds**'; they are bagged separately and get their own collected materials numbers.

Whenever we encounter a soil change or an architectural feature, we define it as a new locus. This requires tidying up the trench to take photos, taking measurements of the new locus (we will learn to use RTKs and to take measurements with a line level and plumb bob), creating a new locus in the database and filling out all the fields (see below) and updating the dayplan (see below). Then the process of excavation and collection can begin all over again.

At the end of the season, we will backfill our trenches, which means we put all of the dirt we excavated back into the trenches. Backfilling is essential for preserving the site and protecting it from the elements (plus, Brown landscaping miiiiight not like having four gaping holes in the List lawn).

Recording with the digital database

For recording, we will be using software called Kiosk, developed by JIAAW's Professor Laurel Bestock and Lutz Klein, a researcher and software developer at Brown. Kiosk has an iPad-based recording side and a browser-based database/file management side. Below is a quick guide to the main components of the database and how we use it to record in the field. Like excavation, this will all make more sense with practice.

The most important rule: **one iPad per trench per day**. Since the database does not sync in real time (a huge benefit for remote archaeological projects that do not have wifi), all the information recorded for one unit has to be done on the same iPad the entire day. Otherwise, we end up with the same numbers being assigned to different loci and artifacts, which creates general confusion. The other most important rule is to log in with your own username when you record and log out when you finish. That way, you will get credit for the recording you do.

For specifics on how to navigate the iPad interface, please watch the "Introduction to Database Recording" video available on Canvas, under Files -> Resources.