



HUDSON VALLEY

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September 14, 2021

Chairwoman Loretta Taylor
and Members of the Town Planning Board
Town of Cortlandt
1 Heady Street
Cortlandt Manor, NY 10567

Re: Palisades Fuel
2056-2060 E. Main Street
Town of Cortlandt, Westchester County

Dear Chairwoman Taylor and Members of the Planning Board:

Hudson Valley Cultural Resource Consultants (“HVCRC”), submits this letter in response to the comments issued at the August 31, 2021 Public Hearing, regarding the Palisades Fuel project (the “Project”) at 2056-2060 E. Main Street (“Project Parcel”). Among other things, this letter discusses: (i) the availability of staff to be present at the public meeting, (ii) the research process for the Phase 1A Literature Review and Sensitivity Assessment, completed in July of 2021, (iii) the probability of a burial ground on the property, and use of Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR), and (iv) the condition of the interior of the structure at 2056 East Main Street (“Brick Structure”).

MEETING AVAILABILITY AND ATTENDANCE

We acknowledge the Board’s request to have a member of HVCRC staff attend the public and Project related meetings. Unfortunately, HVCRC currently has six (6) projects before various Town Boards. Currently one is meeting the first Tuesday of every month, and these meetings have been ongoing for several months. This created the conflict that prevented HVCRC staff from attending the August 31, 2021 meeting. I am the member of HVCRC staff who carries the Historic Preservation credentials and due to other ongoing meetings, I am not available to attend the October 5th 2021 meeting. I would be pleased to schedule a time to meet with the Board to answer any questions and clarify any points as needed, but as stated I have a current commitment on Tuesday the 5th of October 2021.

While, another staff member from HVCRC could be present, Ms. Gilleland currently holds the 36CFR 61 qualifications as an Archaeologist. She would be able to respond to the Board’s questions as they pertain to identifying cemeteries and the use of GPR, but would not be able to address matters pertaining to the building and historic preservation.

PHASE 1A LITERATURE REVIEW AND SENSITIVITY ANALYSIS REPORT

The Phase 1A Literature Review and Sensitivity Analysis Report (Phase 1A Report) completed in July of 2021 complies with the current New York State Standards.¹ In that regard there are standard sections that are included in the report. However, the research for this project was expanded to include deed research ² and extra effort was exerted to identify resources that would have relevant information as it pertains to the Brick Structure. As outlined in the report, the deeds currently housed at the Westchester County Records Office were

reviewed, local historical repositories ³ and online forums ⁴ along with the published histories of Westchester County were reviewed to gather information as it pertains to the brick structure and the Project Parcel.

LOCATION OF A BURIAL GROUND ON THE PROJECT PARCEL

The Board members have raised a concern about the presence of a burial ground within the boundaries of the Project Parcel. No record of a burial ground within the Project Parcel, or adjacent to its boundaries was encountered during the expanded research completed for the Phase 1A report. The historic landowner maps do not identify a cemetery within the vicinity of the Project Parcel. ⁵ Nor did a review of County Cemetery records suggest that burial ground was located within or adjacent to the Project Parcel. ⁶ Should the Board be willing to furnish HVCRC with the source of the information indicating that a burial ground is located within the Project Parcel, I would be willing to complete further research on this topic.

Prior to the mid-nineteenth century large rural cemeteries were uncommon. The trend at the time was for the deceased to be buried in a family or church plot. These family plots were located in a variety of environments and in different locations on family property. While burial grounds do occasionally occur near houses, they are strategically placed to avoid contamination of the wells, both for livestock and human occupants. ⁷ As a result of the potential for contamination, burial grounds were commonly located further away from the wells and structures that were regularly inhabited.

Did the expert do more than walking the site?

A surface reconnaissance of the property was completed. Most historic burial grounds tend to lack headstone markers, either they have eroded or rotted, are unidentifiable as they consist of unmarked natural stones, or have been moved or relocated.⁸ When natural stones are used, they are flat pieces that are arranged as headstones and footstones, or put upright in the ground as headstones.⁹ Another indicator of a burial ground is grave subsidence. Grave subsidence is caused by the natural settling of soils after burial, and decay and collapse of the coffin. These deep linear depressions are identifiable on the ground surface. None of these indicators of a burial ground were noted within the Project Parcel.

The surface reconnaissance revealed that there are large boulders located within the area disturbed by the construction of the Bear Mountain Parkway, and in the slopes that ascend to the properties fronting along Floral Road. The existing nature of the ground surface, sloped with eroding bedrock and boulders, makes this an unlikely location for a burial ground.

In addition, there has been significant prior disturbance within the Project Parcel, as a result of previous activities by the occupants of the Brick Structure. The landscape to the north of the building has been cut and graded. Currently there is sharp change in elevation between the hill side and the level patio on the northwestern side of the building. This sharp change in elevation also exists on the northeastern side of the building. To the west of the current parking area, cutting and filling from the construction of the Bear Mountain Parkway has altered the landscape.

Was ground penetrating radar used?

Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) is a remote sensing technique that can be used as non-invasive method for examining subsurface cultural features. The results of the GPR survey depends on a variety of factors, including surface conditions, soil type, moisture content, and the particular targets that are being investigated. Natural features, such as rodent burrows, boulders and tree roots can create clutter within the results. ¹⁰

GPR surveying requires a precise grid overlying the known or suspected location of a burial ground. As no evidence of a burial ground was identified in the historical records, there was no reason to proceed with a GPR

investigation. GPR surveys can be an unreliable method as tree roots, rocks, shallow bedrock, fill soils and the overall moisture composition can interfere with the antenna's ability to receive a pulse, and the pulse reflected to the receiver will vary and is likely to create subsurface anomalies that may be mistaken for buried cultural material. In addition, the antenna needs to be in close contact with the ground surface. GPR pulses cannot penetrate bedrock. The shallow depth of bedrock will produce reflections that will prevent the identification of historic features. Furthermore, rock on the ground will prevent the antenna from making sufficient contact with the ground surface to send a pulse for the receiver to read.

Without a reference of the cemetery, or information pertaining to its location, a GPR study is not optimal. In addition the surface conditions within the parcel make it unlikely that a conclusive result would be the outcome of such a study.

Were there any test bores done?

A test trench was completed on the western side of the building on September 13, 2021. The careful monitoring of mechanically excavated trenches is a common practice to determine if a burial ground is present.¹¹ The location was chosen as it represented a level area that would have been the most likely location of a community burial ground. The soil profile identified consisted of 2.5'-3' of fill soils (top soil mixed with asphalt, asphalt dust and gravel) overlying glacially sterile soil (C horizon). The existing soil profile indicates that at one time the original top soil was removed, and the area was leveled and graded with soils brought in from another area. Bedrock was reached at 6' below grade in this location. Photographs of this test trench are included as Exhibit B. Test pits completed elsewhere within the Project Parcel by the Applicant's Environmental Consultant indicate that the depth to bedrock is roughly 2'-4' below grade. This shallow depth of bedrock, mixed with the numerous boulders makes this an unlikely location for a burial ground.

CONDITION OF THE INTERIOR OF THE BRICK STRUCTURE

The interior of the building has been examined. Photographs of the interior are included in Exhibit A.

Did the historical expert go into the school house?

The interior of the house was assessed. Based on the continuous changes to the building all that remains from its original construction is the brick shell and exterior roof material. Only one 19th century window was noted, and it is unclear if it is original to the building. The dormers on the second floor, as well as the apartment, are later 20th century additions. The additions to the northwestern corner, and north wall, and the kitchen and entry addition on the southern elevation are also 20th century additions.

The original coal stove has been removed, along with any interior features that may have existed in the 19th century when the building was first constructed. Mid to late 20th century dividing walls and bathrooms have been added to the interior of the first level of the Brick Structure. The flooring material is no longer original to the building, and numerous iterations of ceilings were noted. The most recent being a drop ceiling that houses HVAC components, and hides mid twentieth century ceiling tiles, over ship-lap style boards.

Interior walls are constructed with sheet rock. In the northern addition, the interior finish materials have significantly deteriorated, and the wall boards have collapsed away from the roof and brick wall. The southern addition consists of the former restaurant kitchen, and entry way and is a late 20th century addition. The second floor has been fully altered in the mid to late 20th century to function as an apartment. This renovation included the addition of two dormers on the western side of the building. The southernmost dormer is no longer sealed against the elements, and significant water damage has caused deterioration of the interior. There is notable bowing in the exterior of the roof on the southern side of this dormer. The northernmost dormer is the location

of the apartment's kitchen. This area has also experienced significant water damage, as the northern wall is bowing inward, and does not appear to be structurally sound.

The foundation of the Brick Structure has been constructed of mortared brick which has been parged over with a layer of cement. Currently there is more than two feet of water within the basement of the structure. The basement features cast iron supports, on which the floor joists rest. These supports are covered with rust. The numerous pipes and mechanical components in the basement also exhibit deterioration and corrosion. The floorboards were black with rot and contained substantial amounts of mold and fungus.

With the exception of the brick walls of the building there does not appear to be any historical elements associated with the building's historic use and intent. Steam radiators were added in the late 19th and early 20th century. The windows were also replaced at various times throughout the past few centuries, with only one 19th century window noted.

Historic preservation is about not only the structure, but also its function and its history.¹² This historic intention was irreversibly abandoned by change in the use of the building in the 20th century. The historic intention and function of the building was as a school house. Overall the historic intent and function of the building has been lost. The structure no longer retains the integrity of its original purpose.

Thank you sincerely for your thoughtful consideration to this matter, and if you require any further information to facilitate your review of the Project, please do not hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Beth Selig". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Beth Selig
President, Hudson Valley Cultural Resource Consultants (HVCRC)

¹ *Standards for Cultural Resource Investigations and the Curation of Archeological Collections* published by the New York Archeological Council (NYAC) and recommended for use by New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP).

² Deed Research is recommended only for Phase 2 Investigation Level Reports. See note 1.

³ Peekskill Local History Collection, the Colin T. Naylor, Jr. Archives and & Peekskill Museum at Herrick House.

⁴ Abandoned Peekskill Facebook Group, Newspapers.com, Heritage Quest Census data, Ancestry.com.

⁵ Phase 1A Literature Review and Sensitivity Assessment. Palisades Fuel. Town of Cortlandt, Westchester County, New York. July 2021. Figures 5-9.

⁶ Patrick Raftery. 2009, *Westchester County Cemetery Index*. Westchester County Archives.

⁷ Jessie Lee Faber. 2003, Early American Gravestones. *American Antiquarian Society*.

⁸ J. Wilson Poucher, and Helen Wilkinson Reynolds, 1939. *Nineteen Thousand Inscriptions. Collection of the Dutchess County Historical Society, Volume II. Poughkeepsie, NY*. Ross W Jamieson, 1995 “Material Culture and Social Death: African American Burial Practices.” *Historical Archeology*. Vol. 29 (4):39-58.

⁹ Ross W Jamieson, 1995, “Material Culture and Social Death: African American Burial Practices.” *Historical Archeology*. Vol. 29 (4):39-58.

¹⁰ Lorenzo H., V. Perez-Garcia, A. Novo, J. Armesto, 2010, Forestry Applications of Ground Penetrating Radar in Forest Systems. 19(1)-1-15.

¹¹ Guidelines for the use of Archaeological Monitoring as an Alternative to Other Field Techniques NYAC adopted 4/26/02

¹² Theodore Prudon, *Preservation of Modern Architecture*, (New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, 2008):161.

List of Exhibits:

Exhibit A: Interior Photos of the Brick Structure

Exhibit B: Photographs of the Test Trench

EXHIBIT A: INTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHS

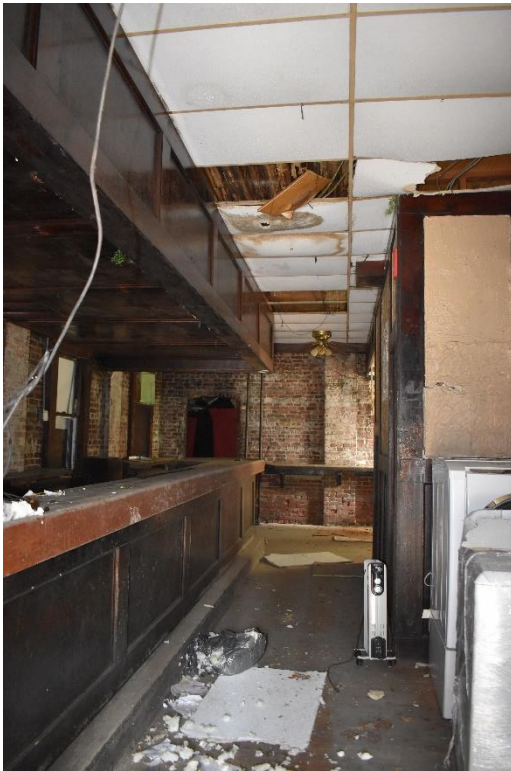
1. Interior-view to the east of the northeastern corner of the Brick Structure. Window dates to 19th century.



2. View to the south of the interior of the brick structure.



3. View to the north of the interior of the brick structure. Interior walls and drop ceiling are modern additions.



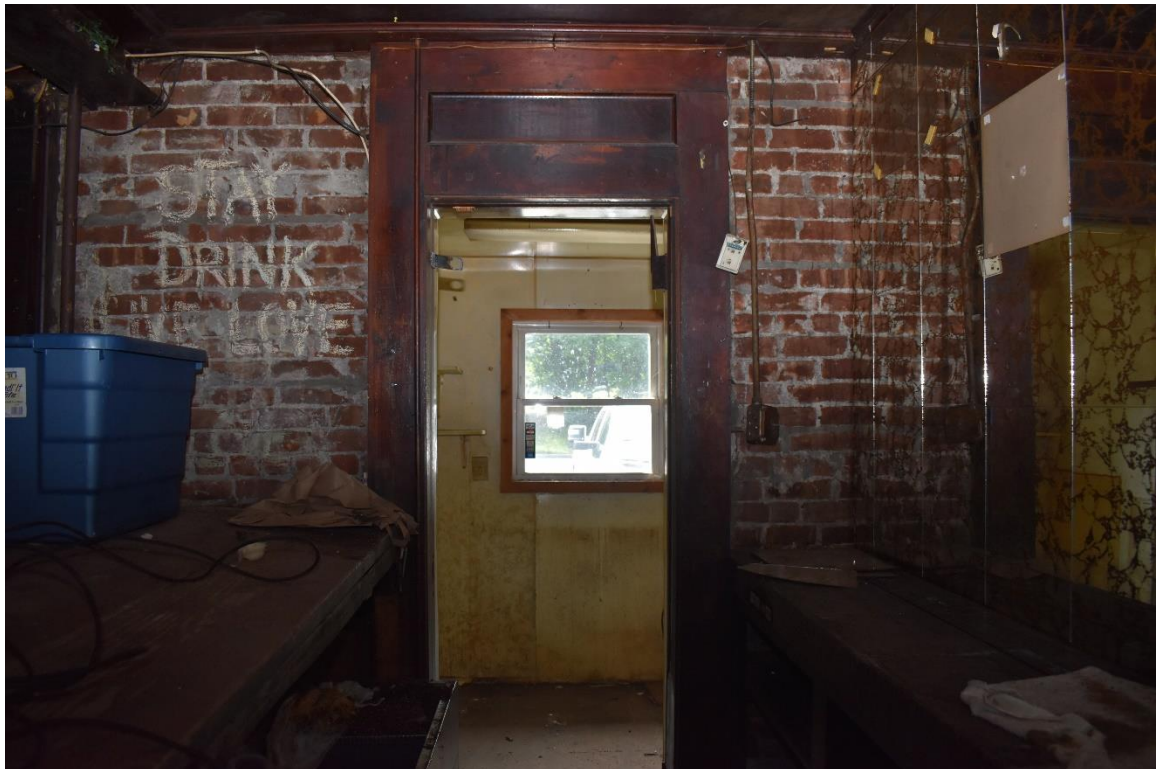
4. View to the west of the northwestern portion. Steam radiators are later additions.



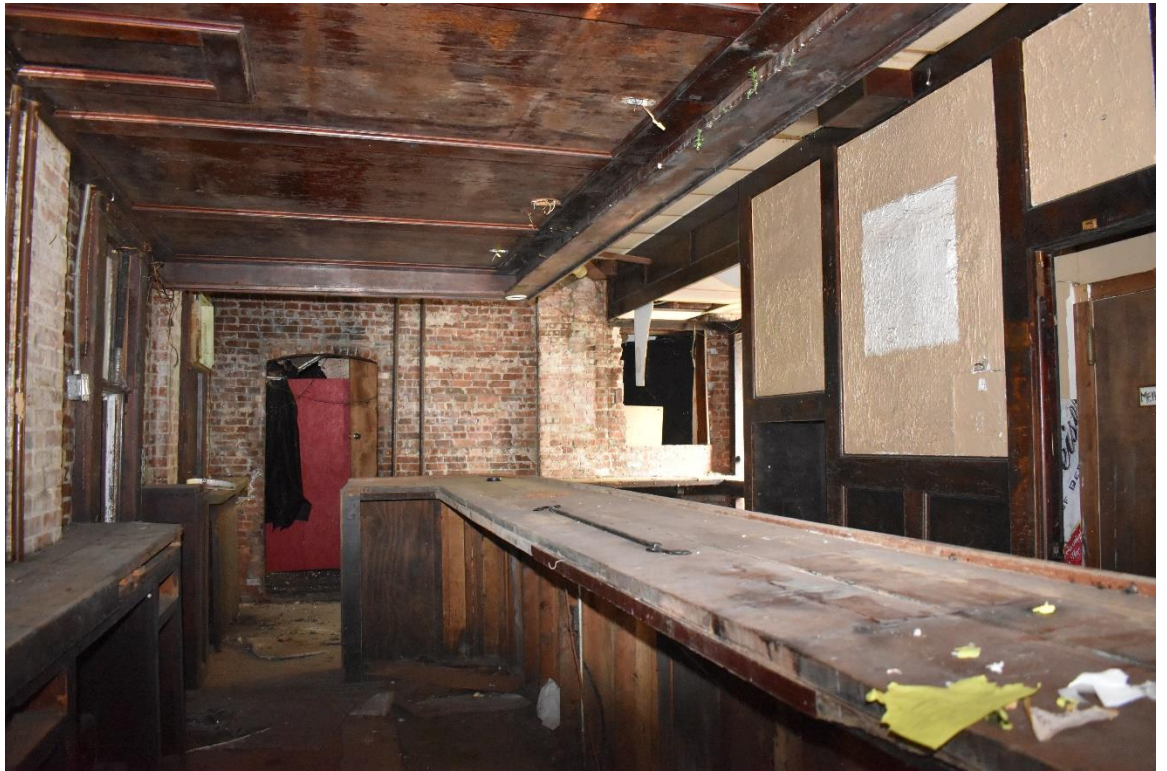
5. View to the northeast of the northern addition. The interior of this space is deteriorating.



6. View to the south toward the kitchen addition on the southern side of the building.



7. View to the north from the southwestern corner of the brick structure.



8. View to the west of the northern addition.



9. View to the north of the northern addition. Lumber indicates a mid-late 20th century construction date.



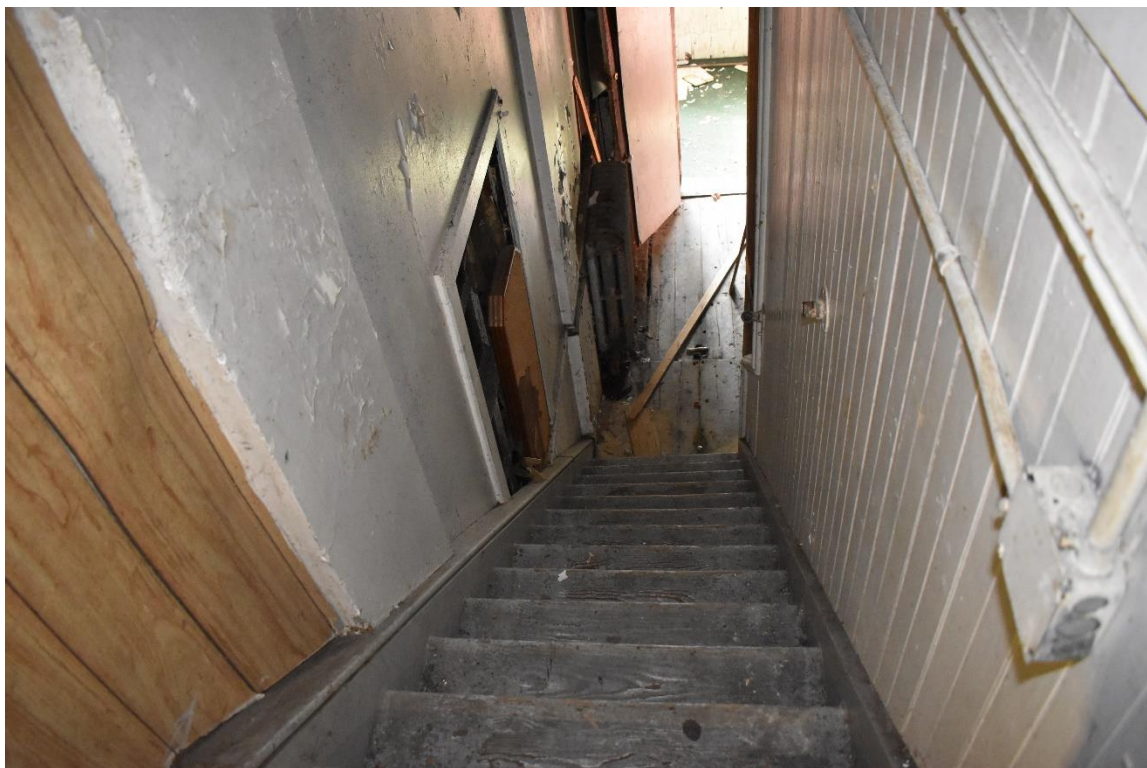
10. The interior of the northern addition has completely deteriorated. View to the southeast.



11. Bathroom in the interior of the brick structure. View to the west.



12. Stairs leading to the second floor. View to the south.



13. Bathroom on second floor. View to the southwest.



14. View to the southwest of southern window. Window is a modern vinyl replacement.



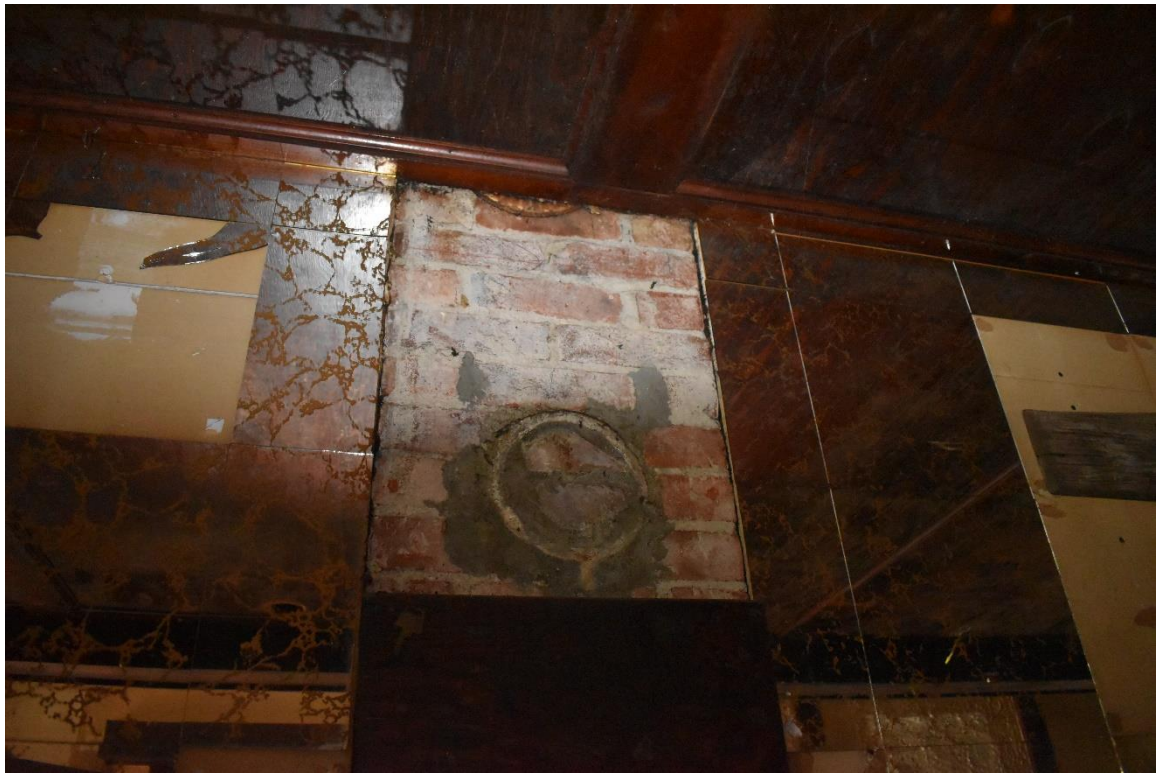
15. View to the west of the northern dormer and addition on second floor. Shiplap to the right in photos is collapsing inward.



16. View to the southwest of the southern dormer. Note the significant water damage.



17. The original stove and piping have been removed.



18. Drop Ceilings cover earlier iterations of ceiling materials and house HVAC components.



19. Second bathroom in interior of brick structure.



20. Pipes and mechanicals are located in the basement of the structure.



21. Foundation is constructed of brick and parged with cement.



22. Substantial amounts of water were noted in the basement.



23. The water infiltration has caused the pipes and floor joists to deteriorate.



24. A significant amount of rot, mold and fungus were noted in the floor joists.



EXHIBIT B: TEST TRENCH PHOTOS

1. The test trench identified fill consisting of soil, asphalt, gravel and asphalt dust.



2. The fill material is located on top of glacial subsoil.



3. Bedrock was encountered at a depth of 6' below grade.



4. The test trench was 15' in length, on the western side of the brick structure.

