



# MEMO

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Re: 40 N. High Street; Informal Preservation Review of Stone Wall

## INTRODUCTION

Located in Historic Dublin on the second block north of Bridge Street, 40 N. High Street is a lot stretching between N. High Street and N. Blacksmith Lane. The site can be divided visually into thirds. A one-story, 1950s building sits at western-most end, facing N. High. A single lane drive sits to the north and south of the building, providing vehicular entrance and egress. At the rear of the building sits a graveled parking lot, with cars parked at the eastern end, facing a couple feet of vegetation before a limestone retaining wall drops down at least 6'-3" to the area below. This wall runs predominantly north/south, with a ninety degree, twenty-plus foot return at the southern end (dead-ending or passing behind the 1934 stone shelter/privy belonging to the lot immediately south). There is a short return on the northern end as well. The rear third has a slight slope down towards Blacksmith Lane, covered mostly with grass, vines, and an older tree located a few feet from the stone wall. According to local lore, the stone wall was originally built by the Wing family, who were stone masons and for whom Wing Hill Lane is named. Forest Wing built the outhouse on the neighboring lot for his mother.

New work has been proposed for this property, and a structural engineer from Korda/Nemeth Engineering conducted a structural assessment of the existing stone retaining wall. In early May, Preservation Designs LTD was contacted by the City of Dublin's Planning Department to assess the integrity of this retaining wall using an Engineer's Assessment as the basis in order provide thoughts on its preservation, its removal/reconstruction, or its demolition. It is important to note that Preservation Designs is not providing a full review including background research of the site and its history, nor comments regarding proposed site changes and additions. Instead, this report is specifically limited to the information provided in the engineer's assessment and applying this reviewer's understanding of the City of Dublin's historic zoning districts code and its preservation guidelines to this stone retaining wall in making a recommendation on its preservation. These comments do not (and cannot) identify every issue that may be of concern to the City of Dublin and its various review boards. As always, the final determination of these issues lies with the City of Dublin.

## THOUGHTS on this STONE WALL and its PRESERVATION

Per the City of Dublin Historic and Cultural Assessment (HCA), the site is inside the Proposed Dublin High Street Historic District Boundary Increase as well as the new Historic Zoning District – Historic Core. As such, this places the stone wall within an area subject to regulations derived from the Secretary of the

Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, "with the goal of protecting and enhancing Historic Dublin's unique historic character" (Historic Dublin Development Guidelines Preservation Philosophy). Dublin's unique character is not only of its buildings, but also its landscape. Natural and altered-by-man features give a sense of place as well as a sense of history, as their presence affects and reflects characteristics making Dublin unique. For example, the natural slope of the site can be seen along Wing Hill Lane between High Street and Blacksmith Lane, yet the site's topography has been altered by the placement of the stone wall. This alteration shapes how the site is used, both historically and currently, as the retaining wall provides parking to the 1950s building.

The National Park Service developed criteria to determine the historic or architectural significance of a property, and these criteria are generally used by architectural historians and historic preservationists to determine if a property is considered historic (National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation). Applying National Register of Historic Places criteria is a tool that can help determine if this stone wall is significant and if it has integrity, or the ability of a property to convey its significance. Both of these factors will help determine what should and should not be done to this wall from a historic preservation perspective.

As the 2017 City of Dublin Historical and Cultural Assessment (HCA) notes, "*stone walls are reminders of Dublin's origins as a rural agricultural village, and are a distinctive feature of the landscape. Although largely decorative in purpose today, Dublin's stone walls represent the use of a naturally occurring and abundant resource to construct necessary tools on any farmstead—the livestock fence and the field/property boundary* (HCA 128)." These stone walls also reflect the profession of some of the early settlers, who were stone masons such as the Wing family, and created a tradition unique to Dublin (HCA, 128). From historic maps and county auditor property records, we know that the Wing family owned the property at 40 N. High Street from ca. 1872 (Caldwell Atlas) up until the 1950s (Historic Parcel Sheet, Franklin County Auditor Website). As such, we can assume that the stone wall was constructed by one of the many local masons (the Wing family) mentioned throughout Dublin's history. And the retaining wall probably served a purpose of making the land more level and therefore more usable for either buildings/outbuildings on the site or to mark a border. It is also important to note that a retaining wall of this height and type is unique to historic Dublin, as the HCA makes no mention of similar walls in its catalogue. Moreover, the retaining wall was put in place prior to 1934 (when the stone privy was built) based on the fact the height of the soil at the privy would have had to have been raised prior to building the two-story structure and that the stone and mortar does not match the rough-coursed, mortar-free original retaining wall. As such, the stone wall at 40 N. High Street is considered significant under National Register Criteria A (associated with important events) and C (embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction) since it contributes to the historic landscape of Dublin.

However, for a property to be considered historic, it must not only be associated with an important historic context, but it must also retain historic integrity, or the ability of a property to convey its significance. The value of a building, landscape, or structure comes from its integrity, which also helps guide its preservation since retaining as much of its aspects of integrity allows a structure to convey its significance. In order for the stone wall to retain all or most of its aspects of integrity, it must preserve all or nearly all of these aspects. Removing one or more aspects of integrity threatens the historic significance. According to the National Register, there are seven aspects of integrity—location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association—all of which the stone wall at 40 N. High still retains:

1. Location. The wall sits in its original location; it has not been removed or destroyed regardless its current condition. The relationship of the stone wall to the overall property of 40 N. High is important in understanding why it was created. Further research could determine why (and when) this particular property begot this unique feature; overall, it has good integrity by the fact of its continued existence and use.

2. Design. The design of this retaining wall is the combination of its overall form, plan, structure and style. Part of the design includes the cumulative appearance created by smaller and larger rectangular to tabular stones placed in rows or courses, with larger rock-faced stone along the top. This dry-laid limestone wrapped the middle portion of the property and served as a boundary. The rough facing and lack of detail speaks the vernacular nature this wall shares with the shorter, local-limestone, free-standing walls located throughout Dublin to separate different land uses. Overall, the original design and its related function are there, but the alterations, modifications, and deteriorations threaten its design integrity.

3. Setting speaks to the character of the site and its surroundings. The stone wall's setting is of good integrity presently as it continues its original function of providing two distinct areas of low slope on either side while holding back a large portion of earth on its western side. Its integrity is challenged by the current vegetation on and near the wall, the parking on the higher portion of the site (for which the wall was never designed), and the drainage systems added (the engineer's assessment calls out the corrugated drainage pipe at the parking area's southeast corner). Setting includes examining nearby elements, such as the stone privy built onto the stone wall (although residing on 38 N. High's property). If the outcome of the proposed work affects the stone wall, we highly recommend studying the impact on nearby elements.

4. Material. The wall's original material is its dry-laid limestone. This material is generally intact, except where there is physical damage, such as the sewer penetration near the southern end of the eastern wall, or damage due to cracks, thermal expansion, rain water accumulation or any of the other reasons listed in the engineers report. This damage is only to the collective whole; the individual stones are still there, and the wall could be restored by removing mortar/tuckpointing and pipes, provided a solution to its structural issues could be found. The pattern of the stones and their placement is also part of material integrity. Using local stone in Dublin's tradition of wall building helps provide a sense of time and place. Most, if not all, of the original limestone is there.

5. Workmanship. Related to materials, the workmanship of the original stone masons is evident by this wall standing for at least eighty-seven years. The placement of each stone to create the interlocking pattern to resist lateral soil pressure demonstrates the knowledge and skill the original masons had when constructing this wall. The current state of deterioration did not come from original builder's poor workmanship; the engineer's report explains that additions such as the sewer pipe installation and infilling joints with mortar have created most, if not all, of the damage. The untouched stone areas are evident of the original good workmanship.

6. Feeling. Regarding feeling, the wall's aesthetic is not that of modern construction. As the engineering report points out, a modern wall replacement would work better in bearing the greater loads created by the proposed structures and modern needs such as parking. He equates the wall as the appropriate design option for building a wall in the 1800s/early 1900s. Feeling comes from the presence of multiple

features that together speak to the historic character. The location in Dublin's historic core, the overall design and layout of the wall, the setting relating to adjacent structures such as the stone privy, utilizing local stone—the same stone used in creating Dublin's many free-standing walls, having good original workmanship, retaining the original limestone—these give the feeling of history and character specific to Dublin.

7. Association. Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property. According to local lore, the stone wall at 40 N. High was built by the Wing family, who owned the property and for whom Wing Hill lane is named. As such, the stone wall is associated with the tradition of stone masonry construction in Dublin and is part of this distinctive feature of the Dublin landscape. Since the wall is still standing relatively unchanged after all these years, it still retains excellent integrity of association.

As far as the engineering report is concerned, the engineer proposes the option of deconstructing and rebuilding of the wall to ensure stability. The benefits include keeping the wall in its original location, and helping to preserve its setting. There is a potential loss of historic integrity with changes or additions to the overall design and how the proposed drainage system would impact it. There is also a risk to the original materials as re-laying stone may result in chipping and reshaping the original stones, giving the whole wall a different appearance. This would also take away the workmanship from the original builders. However, losing original stone and muddying what the original workmanship with modern workmanship potentially diminishes the historic significance of the structure. If this option is chosen, the work should be done by stone masons skilled in the preservation of historic masonry construction to lessen the impact on the wall's integrity.

With the second option, the engineer advocates for replacing the stone retaining wall and installing a new engineered system that can better address the increased loads of the proposed construction. Removing the wall automatically removes all historical significance of the wall. Additionally, it threatens the historical significance of nearby buildings and structures, such as the two-story stone privy as well as the stone wing wall to the north of the property. This is the least desirable of the two options. Other potential "fixes" of a similar nature, such as installing the new engineered system that has the exterior appearance of the existing stone is not desirable as it creates a false sense of the history.

From a preservation point of view, the best option is to re-examine ways to repair and rehabilitate the original wall while minimizing the amount of demolition needed and keeping the layout of the properties as unchanged as possible, so not increasing the load bearing capacity beyond what the stone wall can bear. As the engineer has pointed out the areas of deficiencies and how to best solve them, a skilled, professional stonemason may have methodologies that would reduce the amount of demolition and reconstruction needed. Ideally, both of these experts working together may create the least expensive and preservation-friendly option of all. Any building additions should not impact the wall physically via excessive loading or by affecting any of its aspects of integrity. It must be noted that poor repairs and neglect over the decades have resulted in the problems noted in the engineer's report. Whether intentional or not, demolition by neglect would deprive Dublin of an important piece of its history.

## **For Additional Information on Stone Walls and their Maintenance:**

### 1. Preservation Briefs

<https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm>

There are several publications available on-line that address historic masonry, but usually exterior walls of buildings. There are also some on historic landscapes, which may address the dry-laid stone walls in Dublin, which are a character-defining feature of the area.

### 2. Preservation Tech Notes

<https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/tech-notes.htm>

These are similar to Preservation Briefs, but even more technical (for architects & engineers) and offer individual case studies. However, I do not think they specifically address dry-laid stone walls such as the ones in Dublin.

### 3. National Trust For Historic Preservation

<https://savingplaces.org/preservation-magazine/issues#.YFFTzq9KiUk>

The Preservation Magazine sometimes addresses issues of construction.

But, more importantly, they used to have a Preservation Press that published books on the rehabilitation of old buildings, historic building interiors. etc. There is a book on historic masonry that may be of help:

<https://www.amazon.com/Masonry-Historic-Brick-Respectful-rehabilitation/dp/0891331255>

### 4. Dry Stone Conservancy

<https://www.drystone.org/>

And they have links to several related organizations (such as the National Park Service and the National Trust For Historic Preservation)

<https://www.drystone.org/helpfullinks>