

## William Halley, Millstone Maker (508-512 King Street)

William Halley was one of the earliest inhabitants of the 500 Block. He lived in a two-story brick house with his family and six slaves from about 1780 to the early 1800's (Magid 1982: 62). A Deed Book transaction dated June 28<sup>th</sup> 1791 recorded a slave sale between James Taylor and William Halley that provides some insight into the fate of at least two of his slaves: "Negroes are to serve Halley and heirs for specified number of years, after which they are to be emancipated and free. Charity: 6 years, Bob: 20 years, Jacob: 23 years" (Sinberg Baker, Alexandria Archaeology Files). Whether or not he replaced them in 1797 is unsure, but by the 1799 City Census, Halley owned four slaves (Terrie 1979). Further records indicate that in 1800, 1801, and 1802 he emancipated three slaves named Harry, Susanna, and Andrew respectively, after a number of years of service. The latter two had also formerly served William's father, Nathaniel Halley (Sinberg Baker, AAF).

According to historian Phillip Terrie, by 1801 Halley was one of the wealthiest men in town (1979). A successful businessman, he was also elected Street Commissioner in 1800 (Magid 1982: 62). He owned the lot on which he resided, as well as the lot next door (514-516 King Street) which he rented out to third parties until he sold it to Adam Lynn in 1805 (Terrie 1979; Mitchell, AAF). Halley died in 1808, leaving the house to his wife Esther (Sinberg Baker, AAF). Esther Halley must have moved out soon after since the 1810 Census listed a baker named Frederick Koones as residing at that address (Terrie 1979). She maintained ownership of the lot until 1832, when she sold it to William Morgan (Mitchell, AAF).

The brick-lined shaft which was discovered on his property was the earliest context found on the entire site (Fig. 1; see [Site Map](#)). Although it was badly disturbed and only a few levels remained, it nonetheless yielded a significant amount of artifacts, ceramics especially.



Fig. 1: Top view of the privy, AX 1 Ft.Y (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION).

It is unsure whether it was originally used as a well or built specifically as a privy. The presence

of sand at the very bottom of the shaft may indicate an effort towards filtration, in which case it may indeed have been used as a well initially. In any case, it is clear from the fecal material and the quantities of waste that was found within it that it was converted into a privy and trash receptacle soon after.

Ceramic analysis showed that it was used as a refuse disposal between ca. 1785 and 1810. As far as ceramics are concerned, it contained a large majority of European imports (91.6%), followed by Chinese (10.1%), Alexandrian (6.2%), and finally a minority of other American wares (2.2%) (Magid, AAF).



Fig. 2: Chinese Porcelain platter, AX 1 Ft. Y (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)



Fig. 3: Pearlware mug with Chinese designs, AX 1 Ft.C (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION).

Figure 2 features an example of a Chinese export. This hand painted porcelain platter depicts a large warehouse in the center with a group of boats floating in the harbor (Magid 1982: 63).

Chinese porcelain was highly prized and very popular. In an effort to imitate it, the English invented pearlware in 1779, a white refined earthenware whose blue tint resembled the bluish cast of Chinese porcelain. Accordingly, Chinese blue on white patterns were most popular on pearlware items (Magid 1982:62-63). Examples of these were found in Halley's well, many of which resembled the example shown in Figure 3.

Another extremely popular ceramic type was creamware, a cream colored white earthenware invented in England in 1762. It was first imported to America in 1768 and was manufactured until about 1820 (Magid, AAF).

Figures 4 and 5 below feature undecorated examples of items that may well have been used every day. To the left are a cup, a sugar bowl, and a coffee can. To the right are a tureen cover with a molded rim, a plain saucer, and a dinner plate, also with a molded rim.



Fig. 4: Creamware cup, sugar bowl, and coffee can, AX 1 Ft. Y (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION).



Fig. 5: Creamware tureen cover, saucer, and plate fragments, AX 1 Ft.Y (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION).

(Written by Amanda Iacobelli, 2006)

## References

Unless otherwise indicated, all artifact identifications were made by Barbara H. Magid, Alexandria Archaeology. Historical information was extracted from the Alexandria Archaeology Files (AAF) and mostly compiled by Ruth Sinberg Baker, Sara Revis, Vivienne Mitchell, Nancy Sennewald, and Jodi Rubin.

Magid, Barbara H. "Alexandria Archaeology: Evidence of the China Trade." In The 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Washington Antiques Show. 1982.

Terrie, Phillip. "Alexandria's Main Street Residents: A Social History of the 500 Block of King Street." Alexandria Archaeology Manuscript, 1979.