

**ANALYSIS OF THE PROPOSED HISTORIC DESIGNATION OF 3412-3414  
HAVERFORD AVE.**

Prepared for:

**Mattioni, Ltd.**

In the matter of:

**Nomination of 3412-3414 Haverford Ave. for inclusion on the Philadelphia  
Register of Historic Places**

Report prepared by:

**Gideon Fink Shapiro, Ph.D.**

August 13, 2020

For further information concerning this report, please contact the author as follows:

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## **1. Introduction**

This report has been prepared at the request of Michael Mattioni, Esq., of the law firm Mattioni, Ltd. Mr. Mattioni serves as attorney for the owner of the property at 3414 Haverford Ave., who is contesting the nomination of the property for inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The nomination report, authored by Oscar Beisert, was received by the Philadelphia Historic Commission on Dec. 31, 2019, and issued on Jan. 29, 2020.

The case centers on the historic significance, or lack thereof, of the two-family frame dwelling at 3412–3414 Haverford Ave., which the nomination report, refers to as “The Julia A. A. Blodget Britton Frame Twin” and which shall hereafter be referred to as “the buildings” or “the subject buildings.” The two residences within the buildings shall be named by their respective addresses.

The author has been engaged by the property owner’s attorneys to provide an expert opinion as to the historic significance of the properties relative to the stated period of significance, 1850 to 1853, and specifically to opine on the merit of the claim set forth in the nomination petition, that the properties satisfy the Commission’s criterion (j): “exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.”

## **2. Credentials of the Expert Witness**

- a. The author is a historian of architecture and landscape.
- b. He earned a Ph.D. in Architecture (History and Theory) from the University of Pennsylvania in 2015, and a B.A. in Urban Studies from Columbia University in 2004.
- c. From 2011 through 2014, he was engaged as an instructor of architectural history and theory at the University of Pennsylvania and Temple University, and in 2015-2016 he was a postdoctoral research associate at Yale University.
- d. He has published scholarly articles and book chapters in the field of architectural history, as well as dozens of articles for non-scholarly professional journals. Partial list of publications included below.
- e. He has presented research on architectural history at national and international academic conferences.
- f. He is currently self-employed as a consulting researcher, author and editor in the fields of architectural and landscape history and theory.

- g. Though not a specialist in historic preservation, the author has demonstrated expertise in the interpretation of the cultural significance of historic works of architecture.

### **3. The Data Considered by the Expert in Forming His Opinion**

- a. Review of the nomination report dated Dec. 31, 2019
- b. Historic sources such as maps and architectural guidebooks
- c. Photographs and drone video footage of the subject property in its present state, provided by Mattioni Ltd.

### **4. Findings and Basis of Opinion**

- a. The nomination attributes special historic significance to wood frame dwellings in the mid-nineteenth century.

The nomination report states that the subject property is “one of the few surviving wooden dwellings dating to the mid-nineteenth century in West Philadelphia” and that “the wooden house was a dominant building type in the Quaker City from the time of its settlement until brick and stone became absolute in the late-nineteenth century” (8).

The key claim is restated on page 11: “Being one of the few extant wooden houses from the period, the Julia A. A. Blodget Britton Frame Twin is representative of a common and familiar house type in West Philadelphia. This former concentration of wooden dwellings was built by the earliest individuals and developers in Mantua and the larger context of West Philadelphia, representing the cultural, economic, and social heritage of the city’s working and middle classes in the foundational period of this part of the city.”

However, as shown in the points below, it is doubtful whether the semi-attached buildings are truly “representative” in the ways claimed in the nomination.

- b. Frame dwellings never formed a “concentration” in Mantua or West Philadelphia.

The nomination states that “By 1878, nearly twenty years after the railway was installed, the neighborhood was more densely developed, and, as a result, much of the neighborhood’s wooden housing stock had already been replaced, as there were only about thirty-one wooden houses in Mantua” (10).

The author of the nomination deserves credit for carefully perusing eight plates of the 1878 Scott Atlas to count the number of extent frame dwellings. However, the significance of the 31 frame dwellings that stood in Mantua (north of Lancaster Avenue) in 1878 hinges upon the ambiguous meaning of the term “only.” The author appears to imply, without evidence, that Mantua previously had *more than* 31 wood houses. More likely, Mantua never had more than a few dozen frame dwellings. The hundreds of brick and masonry homes shown in the 1878 Atlas did not primarily replace wood structures. Even if we allow for the possibility that quickening residential development and increasing density following the opening of the Hestonville, Mantua, and Fairmont Passenger Railway along Lancaster Avenue in 1859 may have led to the demolition of several wood buildings between 1859 and 1878, the majority of post-1859 residential development occurred on previously undeveloped land, including on the lots offered by Julia A. A. Blodget Britton.

Mantua was sparsely developed at the time the subject building was constructed. As the nomination states, “the sale of Britton’s lots was slow and didn’t really take off until after Britton’s death” in 1838 (10). By 1848, there were 16 houses on the Britton property, all of which were attached or semi-attached (10), with dozens of lots still open for development. The neighborhood, so to speak, was still suburban, its social character as yet undetermined, and its housing stock mixed. The definitive catalyst for housing development was the opening of commuter rail service in 1859, after the construction of the subject property. As late as 1862, Mantua Village was still “sparsely developed,” as the nomination states.

Therefore the period in question, 1850 to 1853, predates the formative period of Mantua as a working- to middle-class neighborhood. Frame dwellings such as the subject buildings never formed a critical mass, but rather a minor subset of ordinary or vernacular residential construction in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The subject building does not epitomize the predominant working- to middle-class housing type in the neighborhood, but on the contrary, is an outlier among the mass of vernacular dwellings of nineteenth-century Mantua. It is a rare surviving example of frame construction in the former Mantua Village, but this distinction does not make it historically significant or exemplary.

- c. Brick as well as frame dwellings typified the development of Mantua in the mid-nineteenth century.

Wood as a building material does not exclusively typify the heritage of the community during the formative years of development. As the nomination report states, “Between 1809 and 1859, Mantua’s sparse, village-like built environment largely consisted of

detached and semi-detached **brick and frame dwellings** for working to middle class people” (9) (emphasis added).

Brick homes, too, may reflect the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community. Semi-attached and attached brick homes for working-class and middle-class residents, constructed in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, both before and after the opening of rail service in 1859, typify the urban fabric of Mantua today. Therefore the subject buildings stand out as a specific type of architecture or construction, but not as exemplars of cultural heritage, as required by criterion (j).

The legacy of working-class and middle-class residential architecture in Mantua in the mid-to-late nineteenth century remains abundantly intact, albeit in the form of brick and masonry dwellings. Wood, though rare as a structural frame material, is not absent from the predominantly brick buildings; it appears frequently on additions, bay windows, porches, and even as cladding. Given the lack of supporting evidence for the nomination’s claim to the special cultural significance of wood frame construction, one wonders whether the nomination is based on a veiled aesthetic preference for wood and otherwise “unusual” buildings, including highly modified ones, rather than on the stated rationale of criterion (j). Wood provides aesthetic variation, but designating this partially modified twin for its supposed social and cultural importance is not an appropriate way to encourage aesthetic variety.

The streets of Mantua are filled with a variety of humble brick attached and semi-detached homes that effectively communicate the working-class to middle-class origins of the community.

d. The nomination fails to prove its claim to the significance of wood frame dwellings in Mantua specifically, as opposed to West Philadelphia and other Philadelphia neighborhoods.

The nomination report states that around the turn of the nineteenth century, “the construction of frame dwellings was commonly practiced in other parts of the city, with Frankford, Kensington, Northern Liberties, and South and West Philadelphia being areas where this building and construction type prevailed with varying degrees of potency. ‘Mantua Village,’ as it was known, was no exception” (9). The nomination’s Appendix A further elaborates on wooden or frame dwellings on the east side of Philadelphia, near the Delaware River.

Therefore the purported significance of wood frame dwelling construction in the early-to-mid-nineteenth century is not specific to Mantua Village, Mantuaville, or Mantua,

but generic to Philadelphia, outside of Old City and Society Hill. Yet the nomination emphasizes the scarcity of the remaining stock of frame dwellings in Mantua: “three appear to survive to-date” (11).

The nomination report’s Figure 11, showing “Four frame dwellings at Laniganville, near Thirty-Eighth and Poplar Streets, just before demolition c.1903,” should not be misconstrued as pertaining to Mantua. Whereas Mantua Village (Figure 16 of the nomination report) and the Britton property in particular (Figure 13 of the nomination report) were developed speculatively, that is, subdivided into lots for sale or ground rent, the former enclave of Laniganville, which was situated slightly to the north, is thought to have developed in part as a squatter’s village. The building stock of this working-class Irish community included now-vanished “shanty houses,” flat-roofed “frame shacks” or “tumbledown frame dwellings,” according to *West Philadelphia Illustrated* (1903).<sup>1</sup> Some were evidently built of brick rather than wood, as can be seen in the house on the right in Figure 11. The subject buildings in Mantua are not exemplary of the former dwellings of Laniganville.

The nomination arbitrarily changes the scope of focus from Mantua to West Philadelphia and beyond. Whether these inconsistencies represent inconsistent logic or an attempt to bolster claims as to the rarity and significance of the subject property, they weaken the case for designation. On page 8, the nomination states that “The subject property is representative of the early development of **the Mantua neighborhood**,” while on page 11 it calls the subject property “representative of a common and familiar house type in **West Philadelphia**” (emphasis added). The distinction is crucial, because the nomination emphasizes the scarcity of frame dwellings in Mantua specifically, without providing similar metrics for West Philadelphia or the other neighborhoods in which frame dwellings were built in the mid-nineteenth century.

It may well be important to preserve examples of wood frame dwellings in Philadelphia, but neither the subject dwellings nor the stated period of significance (1850–1853) appear to be exemplary of this type. Presuming that the remaining stock of frame dwellings in Philadelphia is larger than the three examples that remain in Mantua, we return to the fact that the subject building is not particularly exemplary of the period and society in question.

- e. Key exemplars of nineteenth-century frame dwellings in Mantua differ from the subject building.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Laffitte Vieira, *West Philadelphia Illustrated: Early History of West Philadelphia and Its Environs; Its People and Its Historical Points* (Philadelphia, Clarke, 1903), 123–125.

The subject buildings bear little resemblance to the building shown in Figure 12 of the nomination report, the William Curl House, thought to be “one of the first houses built in Mantua Village.” The now-demolished Curl House appears to be a single-family dwelling with a flat, non-gabled roofline, unlike the front-gabled form of the subject dwelling. The main feature it shares in common with the subject dwelling is its building material, that is to say, wood frame and siding. But the subject buildings’ asymmetrically modified roofline and non-historic siding material weaken this already-tenuous lineage.

Another precedent shown in the nomination report, Figure 17, “The ‘Residence of R. Glendenning, Sr., Esqr.’ in Mantua,” partially resembles the architecture of the subject property with its gable-front form and “understated Greek Revival details.” But this detached single-family residence is said to belong to Robert Glendenning, Sr., a University of Edinburgh-educated gentleman of some means, who subsequently retired to Powelton Village.<sup>2</sup> Therefore it does not represent the working- and middle-class neighborhood heritage described in the nomination.

- f. The architectural features of the subject dwelling are not exemplary or significant.

The nomination report states:

*“The building contains several surviving details that are particular to the Greek Revival style of residential architect typical of its circa 1850 construction era. There is a heavy entablature at the cornice line; a low-pitched roof with a front-facing pediment; small chimneys; simple moldings; 6/6 double-hung windows; and off-center entrances.”*

While these features do faintly evoke the Greek Revival style, which an authoritative source calls “the dominant style of American domestic architecture during the interval from about 1830 to 1850,”<sup>3</sup> the subject buildings are not strong exemplars of the style. One of the key criteria of the style is symmetry, which no longer characterizes the subject twin frame house following the modification of its roofline, windows, and motley exterior siding. The remaining Greek Revival features, such as the simplified moldings along the modified cornices, are not particularly well articulated, and are so modest as to nearly escape stylistic recognition. The building has no pilasters or other hallmarks of

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<sup>2</sup> An obituary in *The Philadelphia Press*, March 5, 1878, called Robert Glendinning “a well known Philadelphian” who “took an active part” in the establishment of the Third National Bank in Philadelphia.

<sup>3</sup> Virginia McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses: The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015) 250.

the style. It lacks the symmetry and visual coherence to exemplify the style even in a modest, stripped-down form. It is a vernacular structure, but not a particularly emblematic one. Given the prevalence of Greek Revival style home construction in the mid-nineteenth century in Philadelphia, it would not make sense to preserve this modified house as an example of the style. Nor is it a strong example of vernacular construction.

Questions of stylistic integrity may be moot because the case for nomination rests exclusively on criterion (j), which focuses on social and cultural heritage, rather than criteria (a), (c) or (d), which recognize architectural character or significance per se.

- g. Alterations to and degradation of the building's original fabric render it non-exemplary of the stated period of significance.

The subject buildings are far from consistent with what was built in 1850–1853. Visible modifications include a modified roofline, modified exterior cladding materials, non-historic windows, non-historic doors and transoms, and a non-historic concrete slab beneath the porch. The only portion of the exterior that might possibly be original, though it isn't proven in the nomination petition, is the street-facing elevation of 3414. The sides and rear of both buildings show visible modification, with non-historic cladding materials such as asphalt shingle siding. Overall the buildings are not historically intact or well-preserved.

Physical deterioration and degradation of the subject buildings, both visible and invisible, may further render them non-exemplary of the stated period of significance. As stated in the nomination petition, “The eave of the roofline [of 3412] has deteriorated and is largely missing. The roof has sustained severe damage rendering it barely functional” (5). Portions of the exterior also show visible water damage.

Due to modification and deterioration, the subject buildings are not intact products of their time, let alone exemplary or historically significant products of their time.

## **5. Partial List of Publications**

### Scholarly essays and chapters

“Narrating Ornament: Rayyane Tabet’s Arabesque and Alien Property” *The Avery Review* 45, Feb. 2020.

“Entre ingénierie et scénographie: Alphand et les jardins de Paris.” In *Le grand Pari(s) d’Alphand : création et transmission d’un paysage urbain*, edited by

- Yann Nussaume and Jean-Pierre Le Dantec. Paris: Editions La Villette, 2018.
- “City of 7 Billion” (review), *Constructs* (Yale School of Architecture), Spring 2016.
- “Alphand and the Urbanization of Garden Art in Paris,” in *Urban Landscape: Critical Concepts in the Built Environment* Vol. III, Ed. A. Berrizbeitia (Routledge, 2015), 162-175.
- “Division and Classification of Gardens.” Trans. excerpt of Édouard André, *L’art des jardins* (1879), in *Urban Landscape: Critical Concepts in the Built Environment* Vol. II, Ed. Anita Berrizbeitia (Routledge, 2015), 149-163.
- “Pevsner’s Architectural Glossary App” (media review). *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* Vol. 72, issue 4 (Dec. 2013), 601-603.
- “Architecture and the Art of Discovery,” *Mind’s Eye*. MCLA (2013)16-21.
- “The Pruitt-Igoe Myth” (review). *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* Vol. 71, No. 1 (March 2012), 111-113.

#### Non-scholarly articles

- “Kiruna, Forever Changing.” *Places*. August 2020.
- “2020 R&D Awards” (cover story). *Architect* July 2020.
- “Megadevelopments.” *New York Review of Architecture*, No. 8, Feb. 2020.
- “Concrete, Steel, or Wood: Searching for Zero-Net-Carbon Structural Materials.” *Architect*, Jan. 2020.
- “A New Skyline for Brooklyn.” *Domus* 1036 (June 2019).
- “The Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Art Museum.” *Architect*, Nov. 2018.
- “Stealth Building: Work Architecture Company” *Architect* Nov. 2017.
- “How Technology is Changing Historic Preservation,” *Architect*, Apr. 2015, 81-86.
- “Sky Reflector-Net at the Fulton Center,” *Architectural Lighting*, Mar. 2015.
- “Recovering a Master: Paul Rudolph,” *The Architect’s Newspaper*. Sept. 2014.
- “Ed Bacon, The Strategic Idealist” (book rev.). *The Architect’s Newspaper*, Sept. 2013.
- “2013 R&D Awards” (cover story). *Architect* Aug. 2013.
- “The Schmidlapp Gallery and the Museum as Frame,” *AEQAI*, Feb. 2013.
- “Kahn’s Park for Roosevelt, 40 Years Later.” *Domus* 966 (Feb. 2013), Op-ed, VI.

#### Books

- The New Residential Colleges at Yale: A Conversation Across Time*. Co-author with Robert A.M. Stern. New York: Monacelli. 2018.
- Editor of *Re-Living the City*. Catalogue of the 2015 Shenzhen and Hong Kong Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture (UABB). Barcelona: Actar, 2016.

## **6. Prior Testimony of Gideon Fink Shapiro, Ph.D.**

I previously testified as an expert witness on behalf of the plaintiff in the following case:

Kalorama Citizen's Association, et al

vs.

SunTrust Bank, et al

Case Number: 2017 CA 004182 B

## **7. Conclusions**

It is my opinion, based on the above analysis, that the subject buildings are not exemplary of the cultural, social, and economic heritage claimed in the nomination, and therefore do not meet criterion (j) for inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Neither one building individually, nor both taken as a whole, are historically significant exemplars.

The analyses, conclusions, and opinions made in this report are informed by my education, training, and experience as an architectural historian. In the event that additional relevant information becomes available prior to the resolution of this case, I reserve the right to supplement and/or amend this report.



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Gideon Fink Shapiro, Ph.D.

August 13, 2020

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## EXPERIENCE

### **Consulting Researcher, Author, Editor**

2008–present

Client list and references available upon request.

### **Independent Researcher, Author, Editor**

2005–present

Writing published in periodicals including *Abitare*, *AEQAI*, *Architect*, *Clog*, *Domus*, *Gothamist*, *Guggenheim Blogs*, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, *Landscape Architecture Plus (LA+)*, *Next City*, *The Architect's Newspaper*, and several books. Author of the *New York Architecture Guide* app from Domus.

### **Postdoctoral Research Associate**

Yale Digital Humanities Lab, New Haven

2015–2016

“Gathering a Building” web exhibit. In collaboration with UX designer and digital developer. Presenting research on historic and contemporary Yale campus architecture.

### **Instructor of Architecture History & Theory**

School of Design, University of Pennsylvania; and Tyler School of Art, Temple University

2011–2014.

Taught courses on architectural, urban, and landscape history/theory and served as thesis advisor.

### **Curatorial Research Assistant**

Aaron Betsky

2008–2009

Assisted curator with concept development, gallery correspondence, permissions, and installation of “Confines: Extreme Frontiers, Urban Frontiers” at Valencia Institute of Modern Art (IVAM).

### **Project Coordinator**

Amorphic Robot Works / Floating Tree for Anable Basin, New York

2006–2007

Organized project team, community partnerships, and installation of temporary public sculpture.

### **Research and Publications Manager**

Gabellini Sheppard Associates LLP, New York.

2004–2008

Concept and precedent research, project narratives, publicity, and firm monograph published by Rizzoli.

## EDUCATION

### **Ph.D. Architecture (History/Theory)**

University of Pennsylvania, 2015.

Dissertation: *The Promenades of Paris: Alphan and the Urbanization of Garden Art, 1852–1871*

### **B.A. Urban Studies**

Columbia University, 2004.

Thesis: *Landscape of Contradictions: Constructing New Amsterdam, 1626–1664.*

PUBLICATIONS — SELECTED ARTICLES

- “The Island of Urban Cleveland,” **Bookforum**, 21 July 2016.
- “Simulation and Landscape Fiction,” **LA+** (*Landscape Architecture Plus*), Fall 2016.
- “Letters to the Mayor: An Archive of Architecture’s Social Conscience” **Domus Web**, 5 Apr 2016.
- “City of 7 Billion” (exhibition review), **Constructs** (Yale School of Architecture), Spring 2016.
- “Alphand and the Urbanization of Garden Art in Paris,” in **Urban Landscape: Critical Concepts in the Built Environment**, ed. Anita Berrizbeitia, 162-175. London: Routledge, 2015.
- “How Technology is Changing Historic Preservation,” **Architect**, April 2015.
- “Landscape and Everyday Life in Sara D. Roosevelt Park,” **Next City**, Dec. 2014.
- “Recovering a Master: Paul Rudolph” (book review), **The Architect’s Newspaper**, Sept. 2014.
- “R+D Awards” (cover story), **Architect**, July 2014.
- “Ed Bacon, The Strategic Idealist” (book review). **The Architect’s Newspaper**, Sept. 2013.
- “Brutalism and Landscape Desire.” **Clog: Brutalism**, March 2013.
- “Kahn’s Park for Roosevelt, 40 Years Later.” **Domus** 966, Feb. 2013.
- “Books for All. Libraries by David Adjaye in Washington, D.C.” **Domus** 961, Sept. 2012.
- “Manhattan Rainbow. Children’s Museum of the Arts.” **Domus** 958, May 2012.
- “The Pruitt-Igoe Myth” (film review). **Society of Architectural Historians** Vol. 71, No. 1, March 2012.
- “Emotional Landscapes” (Interview with Michael van Valkenburgh) **Guggenheim blog**, Jan. 2012.
- “Order and Adaptation: The New York Grid.” **Guggenheim blog**, Jan. 2012.
- “Museum of the Moving Image, New York.” **Domus Web**, 8 Feb. 2011.
- “Pike Street Loop: Science and Fiction in Digital Fabrication.” **Crit** 69, Spring 2010.
- “Melted Ice: Morphosis at Cooper Union.” **Abitare** 496, Oct. 2009.

PUBLICATIONS — SELECTED BOOKS

- Making Landscape Urban: Alphand and the Promenades of Paris*. U.Penn Press, 2018 (Author).
- The New Residential Colleges at Yale: A Conversation Across Time*. Monacelli, 2018 (with Robert A.M. Stern).
- Re-Living the City: 2015 UABB Catalogue*. Actar, 2016 (Editor).

HONORS, FELLOWSHIPS, PRIZES

- Postdoctoral Research Associate, Yale Digital Humanities Lab, New Haven, 2015-2016.
- Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington, D.C., 2015.
- Penn Humanities Forum, Philadelphia, 2012-2013.
- Pennsylvania Partners in the Arts, Philadelphia, 2012.
- Montalvo Arts Center, San Jose, California, 2010.
- Place in History ‘Long Island City Grounded’ public art competition, 2006.
- Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture, Columbia University, 2004.

SOFTWARE

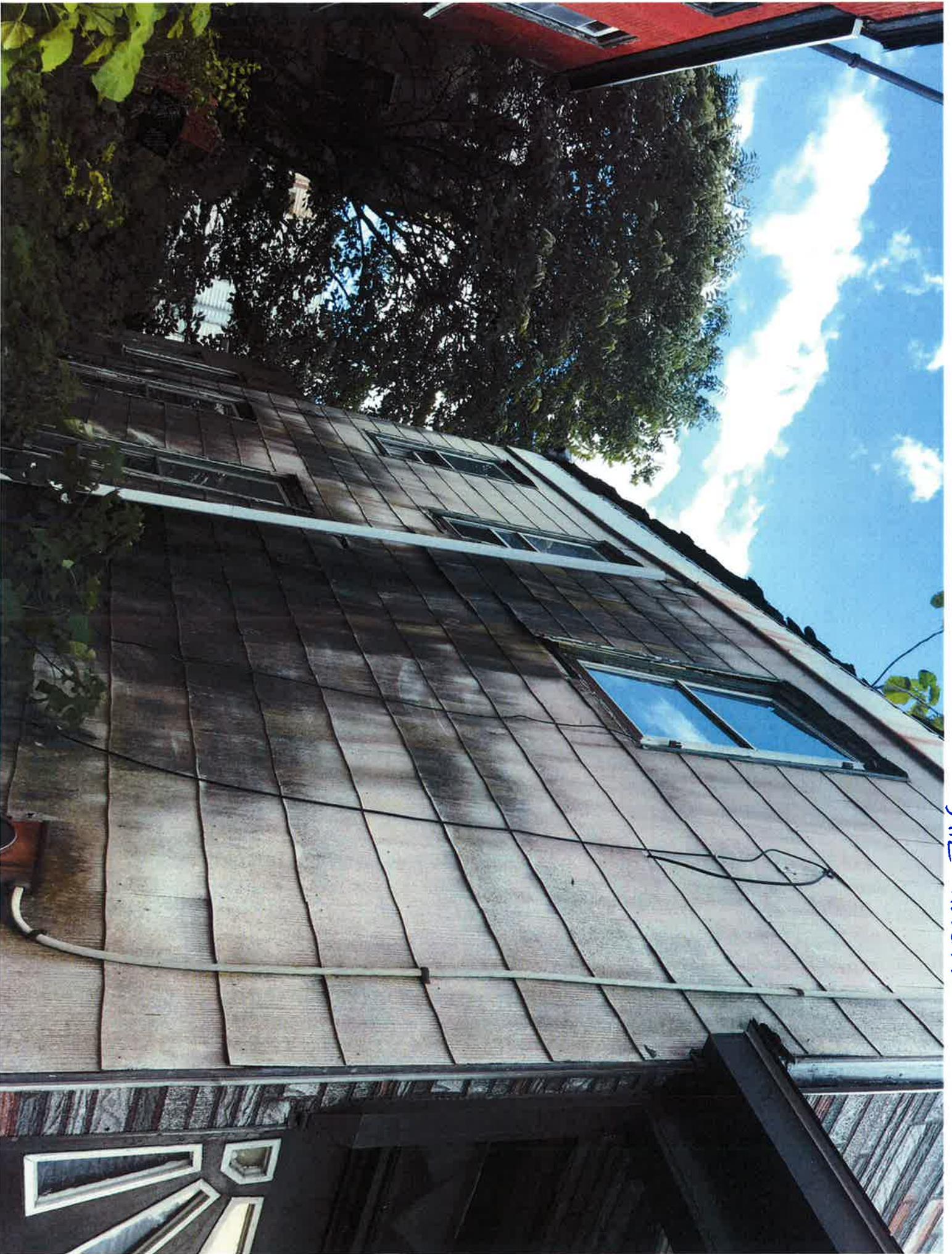
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3412 Haverford



34112 Waverford

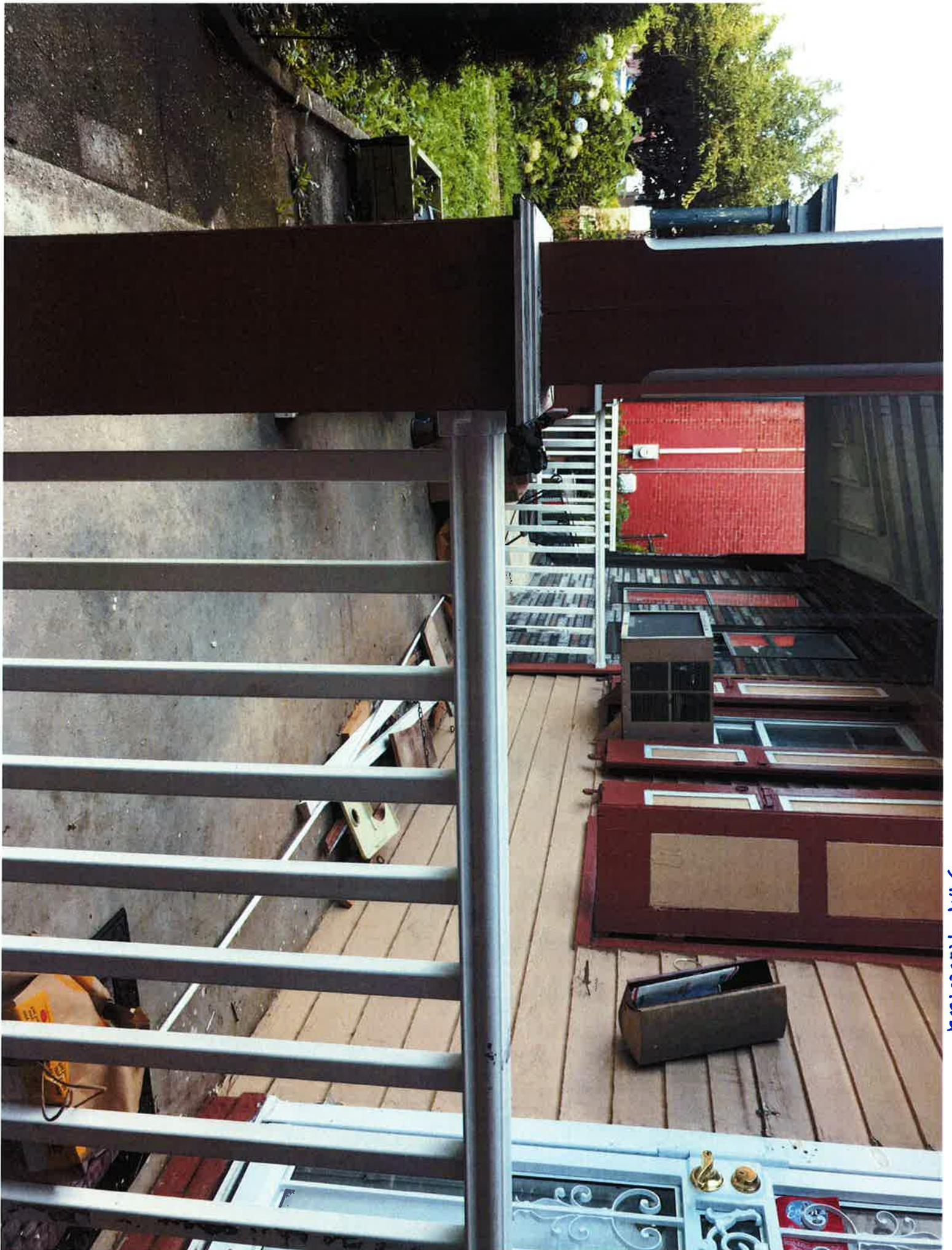


3412 Haverford





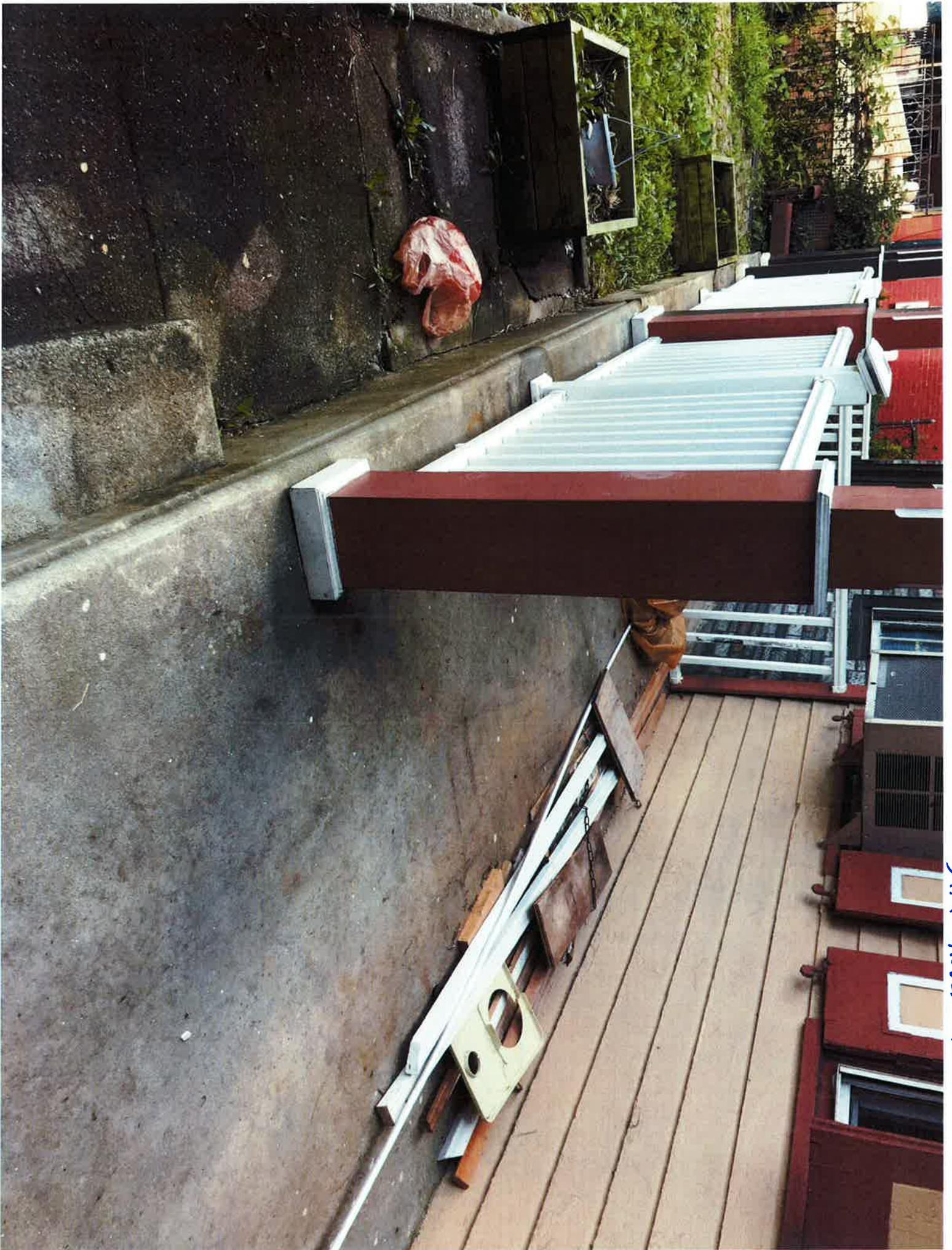
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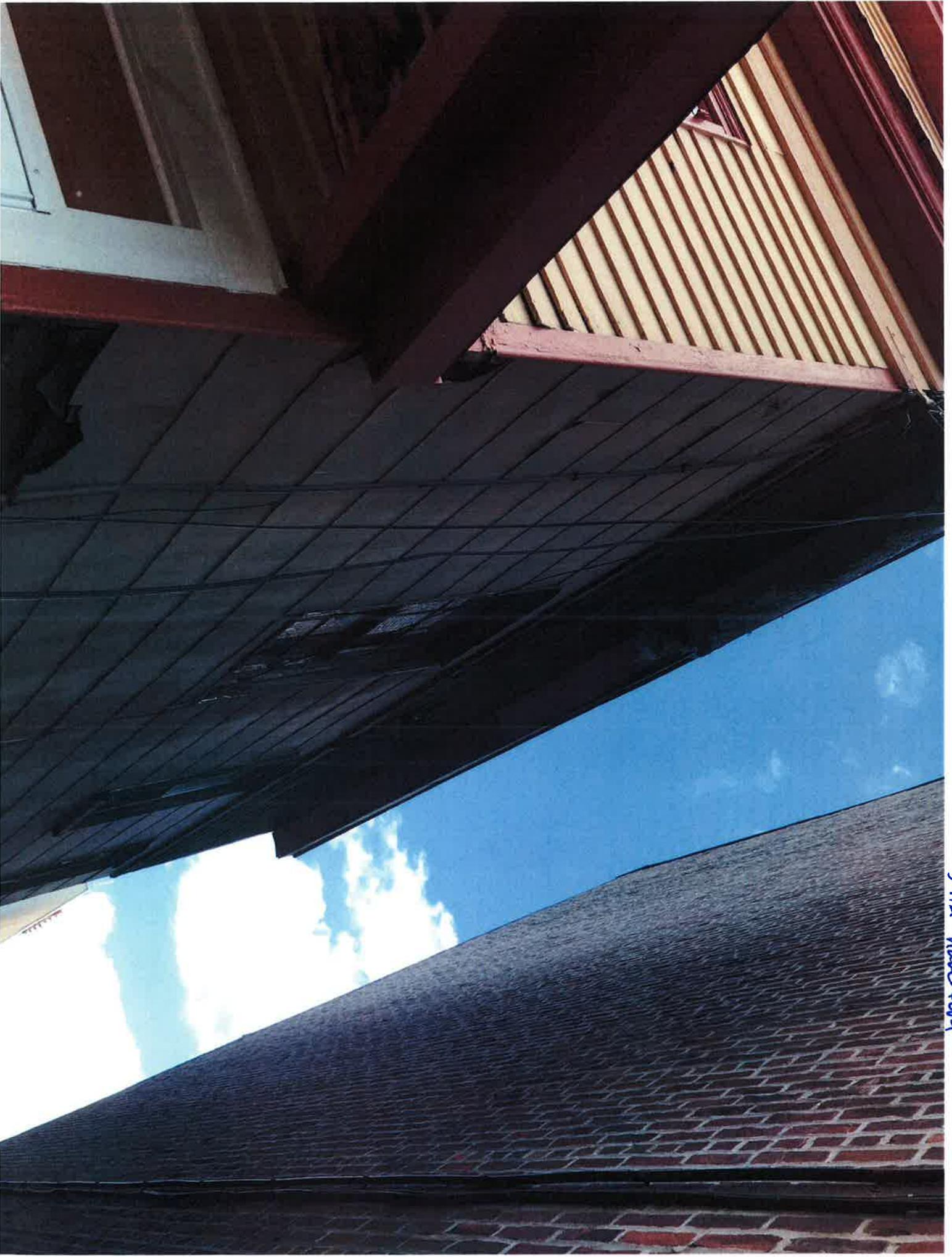
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