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### Site Proposal: 45 Prospect

#### **History of the Site**

Ground was broken for the construction of the Corliss-Brackett House in 1875.

Residence began in 1879, but construction continued until 1882 (National Register). The house was, from a design and structural standpoint, extremely unique: its central heating (Mitchell), rudimentary air conditioning, internal wall piping, extensive indoor plumbing, and hydraulic elevator were evocative of its innovative, industrious architect, George Corliss (Gilbert). The house itself stands four stories tall and is connected via hallway to what were once servant quarters and a carriage house. The relatively modern comforts built into the home were intended to “bring Bermuda to Providence” for Corliss’ ailing second wife (Mitchell).

The vast majority of these modern features have no contemporaneous counterparts: they remain unique characteristics of the building, with most if not all still existing and operating to this day (Durkee).

Corliss died in 1888, survived by his widow and a daughter from his first marriage. The two women as well as their staff lived in the home until their deaths in 1929. Charles Brackett, a distant nephew of Corliss and famous director, became owner of the estate upon the deaths, and, in 1955, pledged to donate the building to Brown University come his own death. Brackett died in March of 1969, and the University obtained the property in 1970.

Renovations and repairs were made on the building between 1970 and 1973. In 1973, the College of Office Admissions made its permanent home in the Corliss-Brackett House. (Gilbert). It remains the Office of Admissions to this day.

The most recent renovation projects have been mainly restricted to outdoor, garden areas and have consisted almost entirely of landscaping work.

### **Trench Location**

The Corliss-Brackett House sits directly on the corner of Prospect and Olive Streets and has three green spaces directly adjacent (Figure 1). The house presents an extremely unique location: its immediate neighbors, such as Robinson Hall, were built contemporaneously (Mitchell) under the direction of the University itself. The Corliss-Brackett-House, however, was built by private means for private use and thereby presents a parallel yet distinct history to its more historically Brown-affiliated neighbors.

As the house itself is currently in use, trench location is perhaps best suited to the gardens directly east, west, and southwest of the house (Figure 3). All of the gardens have been subject to extensive modern landscaping, but the garden marked A (Figure 2) was landscaped within the past 24 months. Furthermore, the garden itself receives very little foot traffic. As such, there is very likely a dearth of material culture to be found via excavation.

The garden to the immediate east of the building (top right corner in Figure 3) is perhaps the area of greatest interest: currently, it is a garden bisected by the building's accessibility ramp. As such, it receives the most foot traffic of any green space near the house. Furthermore, the garden itself is close to the area that was once the carriage house and servants' quarters (Gilbert). This history is likely to add more variety to the possible finds.

The site's pre-Brown construction efforts can be referenced via local historic district zoning (RI National). The zoning is also likely to demarcate utilities lines and perhaps even historic drainage areas. Further, the zoning information can be used for safety purposes, such as locating and thereby avoiding gas mains. All construction done post-Brown acquisition can be obtained via the planning office/facilities management.

### **Archaeological Significance**

The Corliss-Brackett House as an archaeological site presents a wide-variety of possible inquiries of interest. Most notably, an excavation could likely explore the change in material culture associated with the transition from a residential to an administrative use after Brown's acquisition of the property. Furthermore, an excavation could shed light into Brown's relationships with its immediate neighbors throughout its history. For example, the house's immediate neighbors are also its contemporaries but have histories much more directly linked with Brown's development (Mitchell).

An excavation could also be useful in exploring urban and technological development: Corliss-Brackett had, for all intents and purposes, a level of material and technological culture far, far above any of its contemporaries. Therefore, an excavation of this kind could very likely explore the process by which a building and its technologies transition from state of the art, to standard, to obsolete. An excavation near a known former drainage area would likely present a compelling site, and Corliss-Brackett provides drainage areas consistently in use for longer times than other sites on the Brown University campus.

Of particular note, the Corliss-Brackett house has been recognized multiple times for its pristine level of preservation (Durkee). Although it certainly appears and operates differently in the past, with its transition from residential to administrative as well as its feeling of the

inevitable effects of technological advance, the house and its surrounding properties have been well cared for, and a particular focus has been placed on the retention of original materials found in the house (Durkee).

Furthermore, on a purely symbolic level, an exploration into the past of the Office of College Admissions presents an interesting project as each member of the excavation team has had a direct, significant interaction with the site, even without yet physically stepping foot on it.

### Figures



Figure 1 An abundance of green space exists just outside the walls of the house. They extend from the western side to the eastern side of the house, and a slightly more isolated green space exists to the building's immediate southwest. (*Courtesy: Author's Collection*)



Figure 2 The site annotated A is the green space most recently subject to modern landscaping. The site is also subject to relatively little foot traffic. As such, the site may be lacking in material to be excavated. However, the area is relatively further from the building itself and is not known to be above any utilities lines. As such, it remains a compelling possible site. (*Courtesy: Google Maps*)





Figure 3: Areas annotated in yellow represent historic garden/green areas. Though subject to recent landscaping, they are likely the most utilizable spaces for excavation. The garden to the direct east experiences the most foot traffic and is also located near the former servants' quarters and carriage house. The materials to be found in this area are very likely to be more diverse than the relatively untraveled west and southwest green spaces. (*Courtesy: Google Earth*)

### Works Cited

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