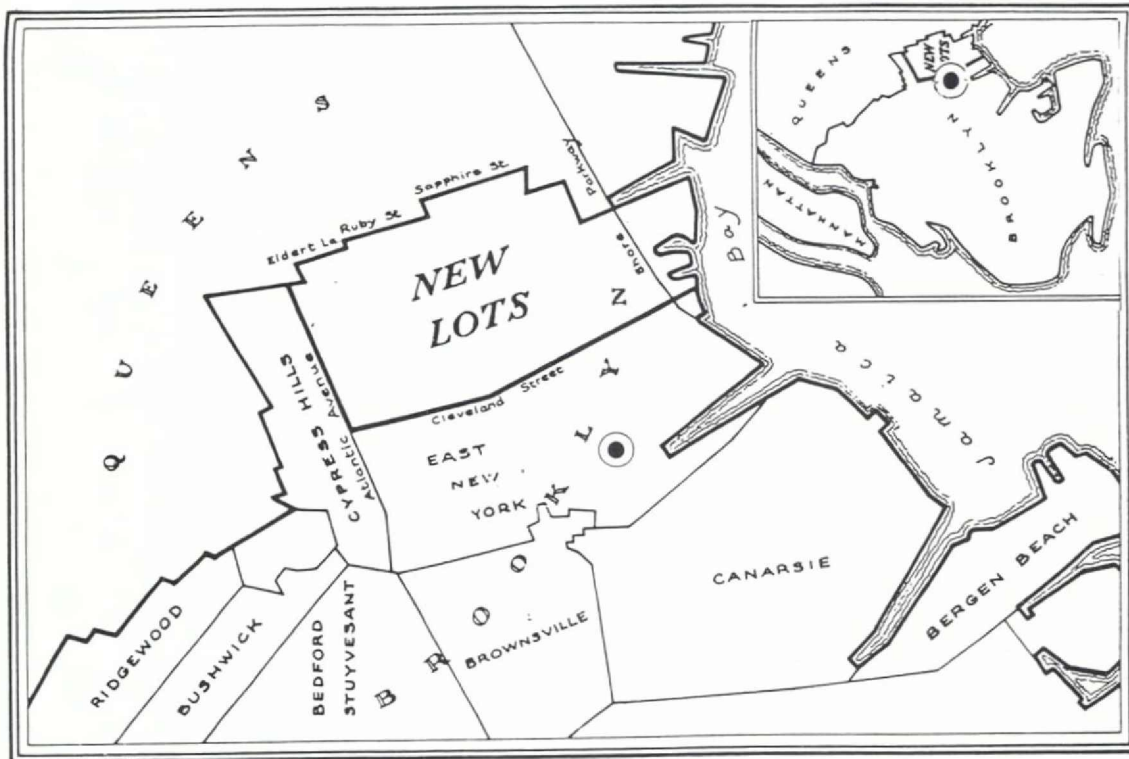


1988

Documentation of Block 4322 Lot 24 in the East New York Section of Brooklyn (formerly a village in New Lots)

1935 Linden Blvd.



CEQR No. 87-238K

prepared for the Mobil Oil Corporation

prepared by Joan H. Geismar, Ph.D.

August 30, 1988

154

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

Although ownership in the project site area can be traced to the 1670s, and although it is located where there is prehistoric site potential, neither documentary research nor soil borings suggest archaeological sensitivity. Consequently, no testing phase is recommended prior to alteration and construction of the service station that will remain on the site. It should be noted, however, that should the Landmarks Preservation Commission feel there is any question about the site's archaeological sensitivity, the Mobil Oil Corporation, owner of the site, has offered to sponsor archaeological monitoring of excavations that will extend beyond the 3 to 7 ft. fill level documented in borings.

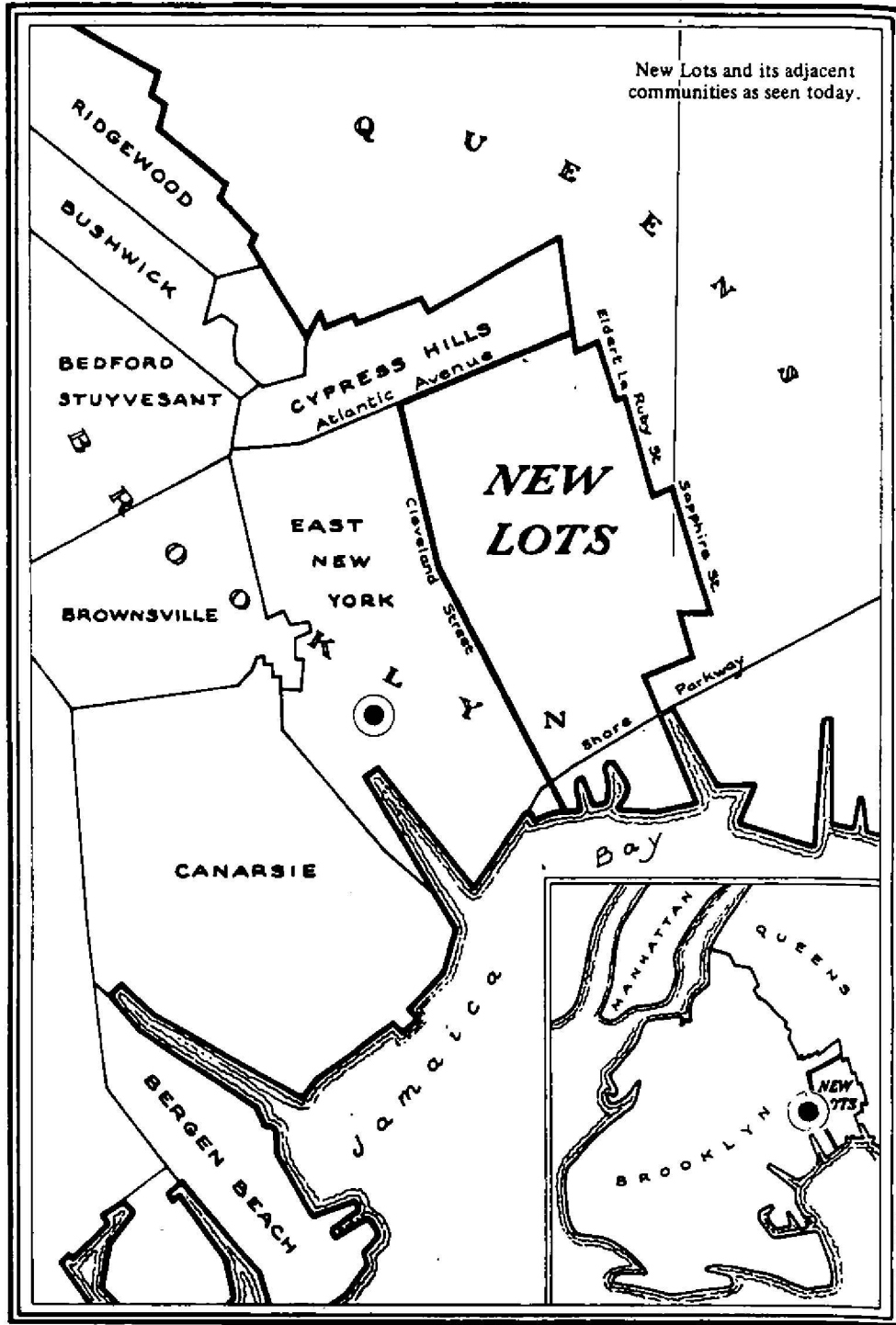
INTRODUCTORY SUMMARY

This report presents documentation of Block 4322 Lot 24, approximately a .58-acre Mobil service station site in the East New York section of Brooklyn (Figure 1). The research was undertaken to fulfill part of a City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR), and its aim was to determine the site's history and archaeological potential.


The project site is bounded east by Pennsylvania Avenue, south by Linden Boulevard, west by Sheffield Avenue, and north by a vacant lot fronting on Sheffield Avenue and a four-story apartment building at 744 Pennsylvania Avenue (Figures 2-7).

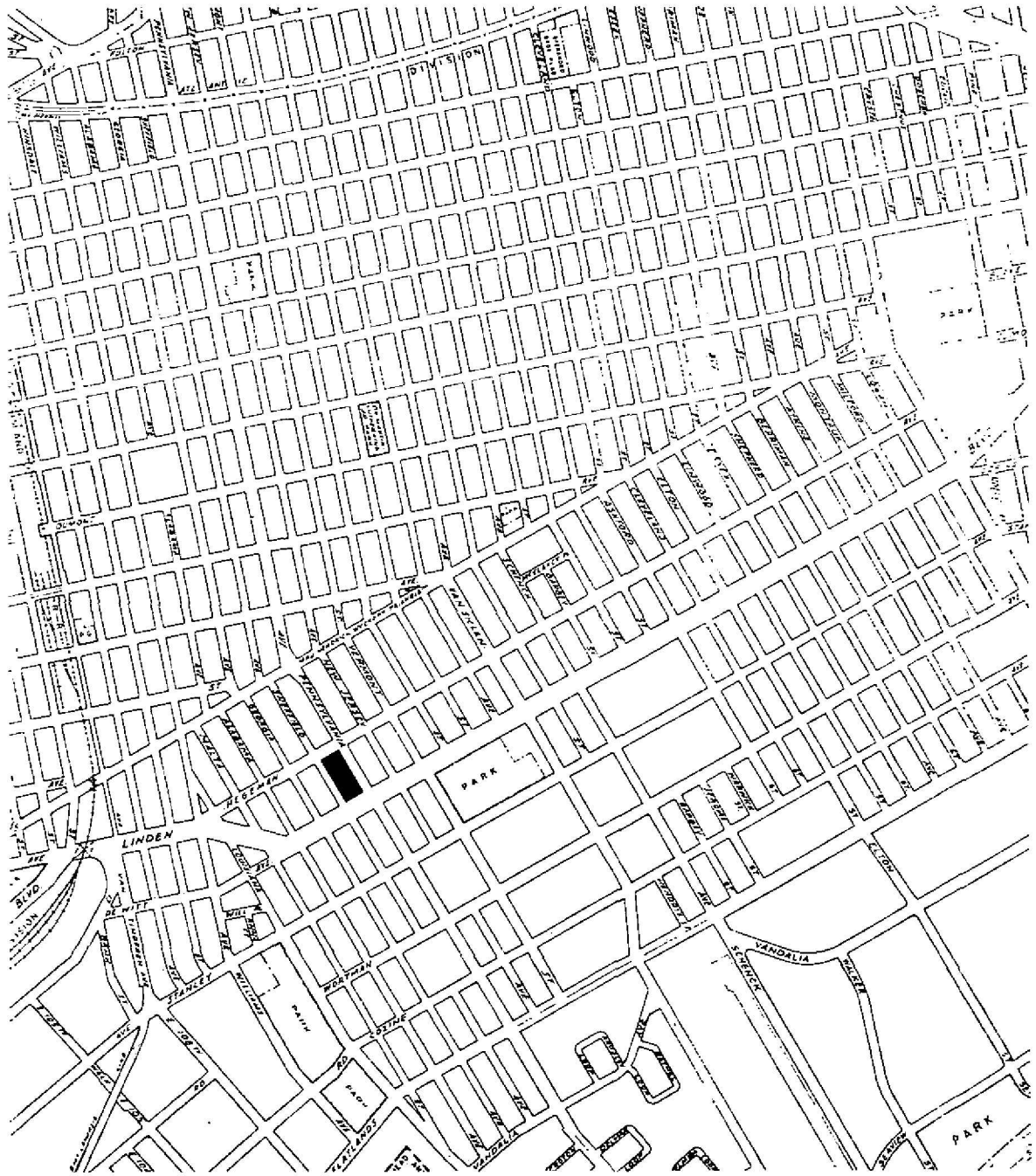
Originally part of the Dutch town of Flatbush, by the mid nineteenth century East New York had become one of three villages in the newly incorporated town of New Lots. In 1886, New Lots was annexed to the city of Brooklyn, becoming its 26th ward. With subsequent incorporation of the five boroughs in 1898, the project area became the East New York Section of the Borough of Brooklyn.


Although local land patents go back to the 1670s when English rule was becoming established, the project area comprised undeveloped farm, meadow, and woodland until the beginning of the twentieth century. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, its associations were with the Rapelje family, longtime residents of Kings County who settled in New Lots prior to the Revolutionary War.

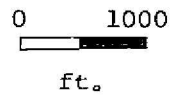


● project site location (approx.)

no scale 

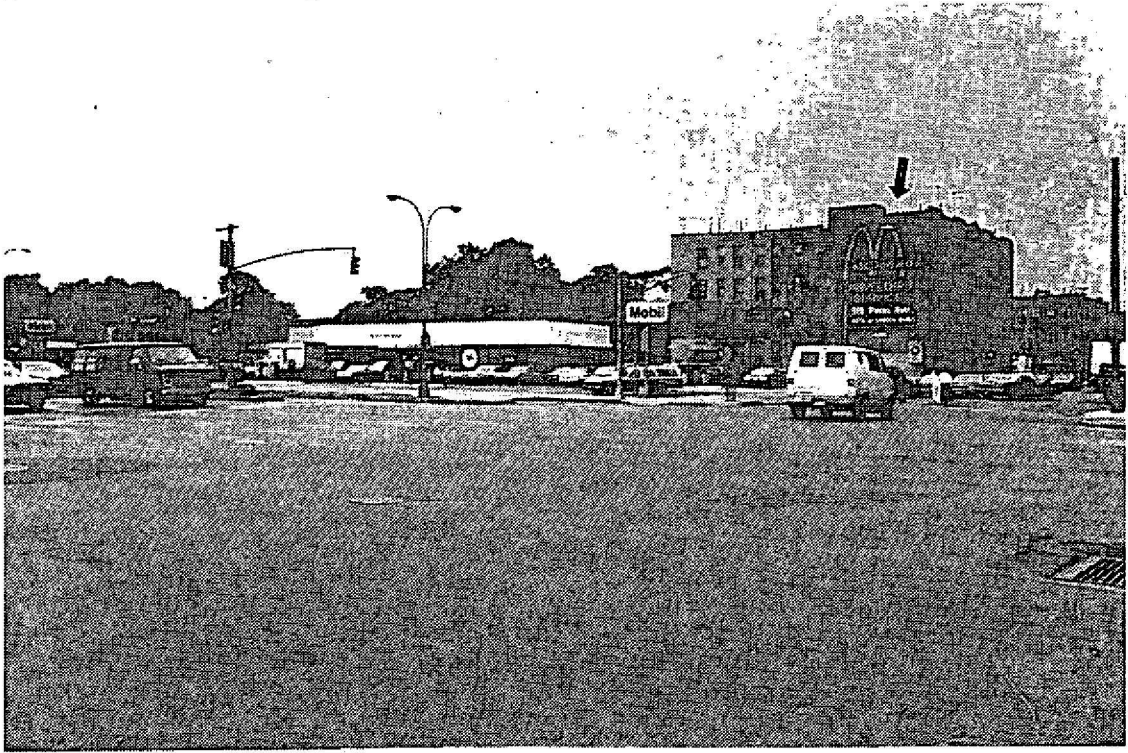


 project block



DOCUMENTATION OF BLOCK 4322 LOT 24 View Across Linden Boulevard
to Project Site Looking Northwest

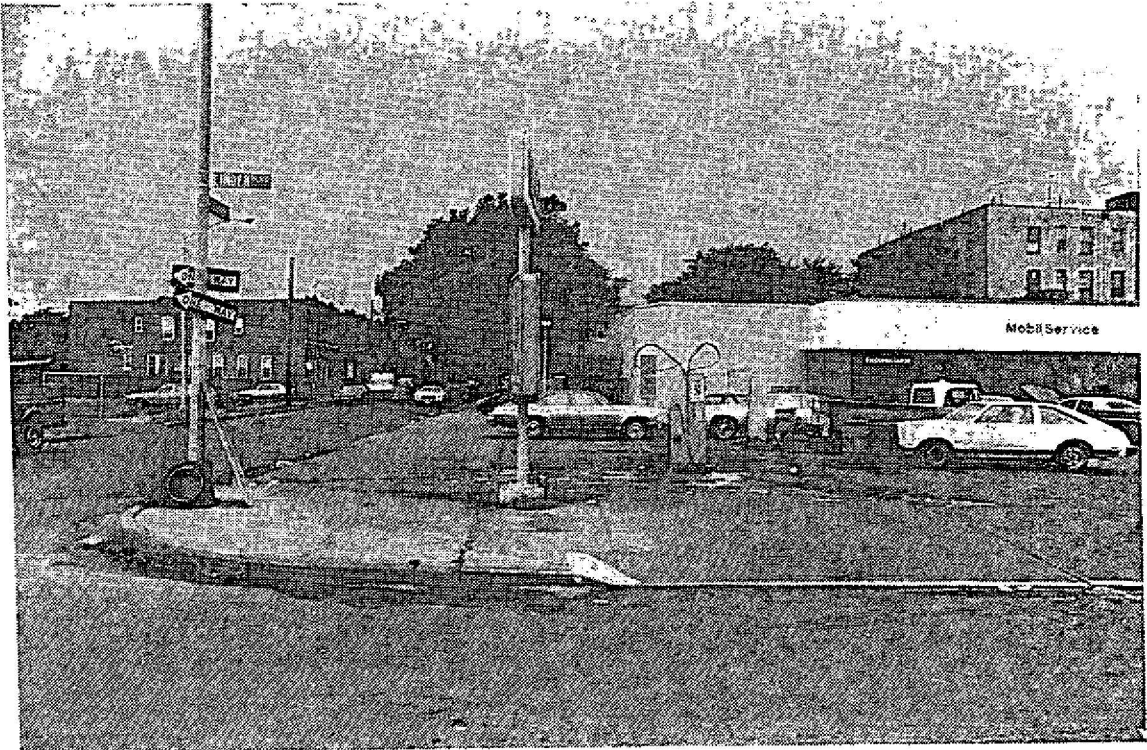
3



Note 1940 apartment building on Pennsylvania Ave. (arrow) (Geismar 8/17/88)

DOCUMENTATION OF BLOCK 4322 LOT 24 View from Southwest Corner of
Project Site Looking North Up Sheffield Avenue From Linden
Boulevard

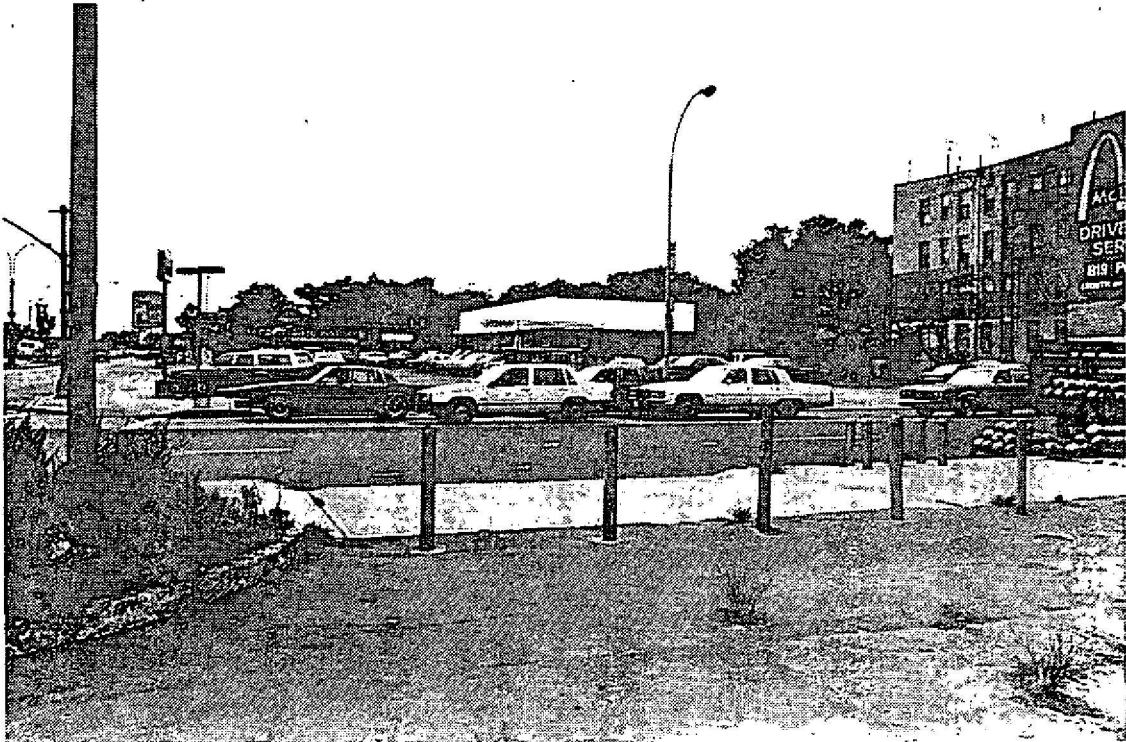
4



Left foreground is proposed site of 5 4,000-gal. tanks (Geismar 8/17/88)

DOCUMENTATION OF BLOCK 4322 LOT 24 Looking West to Site from the East Side of Pennsylvania Avenue. Linden Boulevard to Left

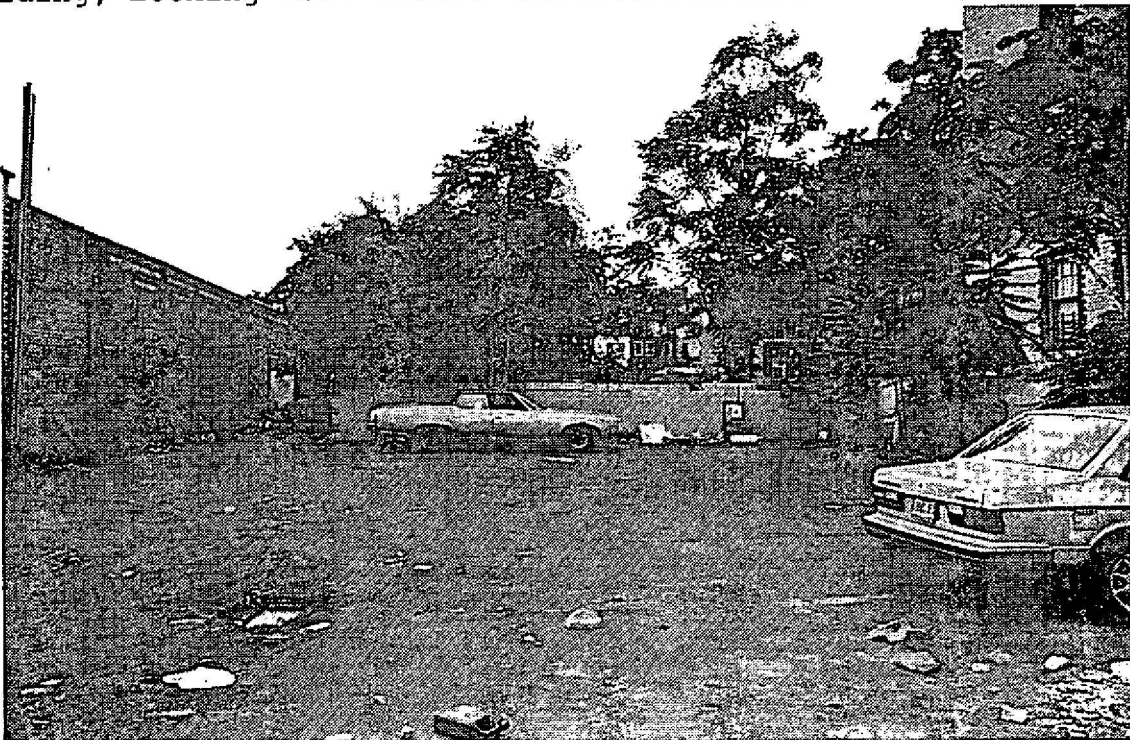
5



View from closed Exxon gas station (Geismar 8/17/88)

DOCUMENTATION OF BLOCK 4322 LOT 24 View Behind Current Station Building, Looking West Toward Sheffield Avenue

6



This will be site of new station (Geismar 8/17/88)

DOCUMENTATION OF BLOCK 4322 LOT 24 Composite View Looking South
Across Linden Boulevard from the Front of the Service Station
Building

Pennsylvania Ave.-Linden Blvd.
intersection

Starrett Housing

Coco Cola Bottling Plant building

Sheffield Ave.-Linden Blvd. intersection

E

W



(Geismar 8/17/88)

The streets surrounding the site were laid out, at least on paper, by the early 1870s, but only Sheffield Avenue appears to have been open by the last decade of the nineteenth century; since their opening, all have have been altered in some way (for example, the widening of Linden Boulevard sometime between 1923 and 1929 removed 100 ft. from the original block front, and Sheffield Avenue, an old road, was shifted eastward). Prior to construction of a service station around 1930, the site's only structural development was a two-story brick dwelling built between 1900-1901 and demolished to make way for the service station. The planned development relocates the station building, pumps, and gas tanks, but does not change the site's function.

Research into deeds, tax assessments, historical maps, wills, published histories, and unpublished reports indicates the site has no historical significance. Moreover, although the State Museum notes three prehistoric sites within a one-mile radius based on a 1922 questionnaire survey, no prehistoric sites are documented in the immediate project area, nor does information from soil borings or the site's original terrain--unwatered, gently sloping woodland--suggest cause for concern.

While the project area has been flagged by both the city and the state as having potential archaeological sensitivity (because of its natural setting), certain prerequisites for use as a Native American habitation site or even a camp site were never present. These include an on-site or immediately accessible fresh water source and a location and terrain that

allows direct access to or observation of marine and land food resources, conditions that existed to the southwest and southeast but not directly on the project site. (It should be noted that no sites are documented in the immediate site area despite twentieth century street grading which often reveals archaeological deposits).

Based on this information, it is not anticipated that the planned construction and alterations will impact any significant cultural resources. However, should there be any question about the site's archaeological sensitivity, the Mobil Oil Corporation, the property owner, has offered to sponsor monitoring during excavations that will extend beyond the 3- to 7-ft. fill level noted in soil borings. (It should be noted that petroleum contamination of the soil is a possibility.)

The summary and conclusions presented here are detailed and documented in the following sections.

PREHISTORIC CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to the concerns of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, the New York State Museum has noted that the project area has significant archaeological potential for prehistoric Native American sites (Wellman 1988: personal communication). This assessment is based on its location near Jamaica Bay, a source of shell and fin fish, and its proximity to both Fresh Kill and the smaller Second Creek. The Fresh Kill (also called First Creek) has now been bulkheaded and channeled (Black 1985:54) but in its natural state ran about one-quarter mile southwest of the site (see Figure 14) and emptied into Jamaica Bay; Second Creek has also been altered.

A permanent Native American settlement does not appear to be an issue. Carlyle Smith in his archaeological study of coastal New York notes that "Nearly all of the permanent settlement sites are situated on tidal streams and bays on the second rise of ground above the water" (Smith 1950:101), not the gently sloping ground described in the literature and depicted on an 1897 USGS map. Moreover, it appears that permanent local Native American settlement was mainly, if not entirely, a phenomenon caused by the economics of European contact (e.g., Ceci 1977); as such, these settlements were usually recorded or noted historically.

Since the retreat of the last glacier 10,000 to 12,000 years ago, sea level has risen considerably, suggesting that the project site would have been even further from the bay in the far distant past than it was in historical times. Black's history of Jamaica Bay, prepared for the National Park Service, notes the lack of natural uplands near the bay in the project area; it also notes that wide expanses of marshland prevented an "intimate association" with the water (Black 1981:52)¹. In addition, fresh water, a prerequisite to settlement, was lacking in the immediate project area; this has apparently been a deterrent to early historic as well as prehistoric settlement or longterm occupation (see below). However, it is possible the project site was used as a temporary camp although even this kind of site is not usually found on sloping meadows or wood-

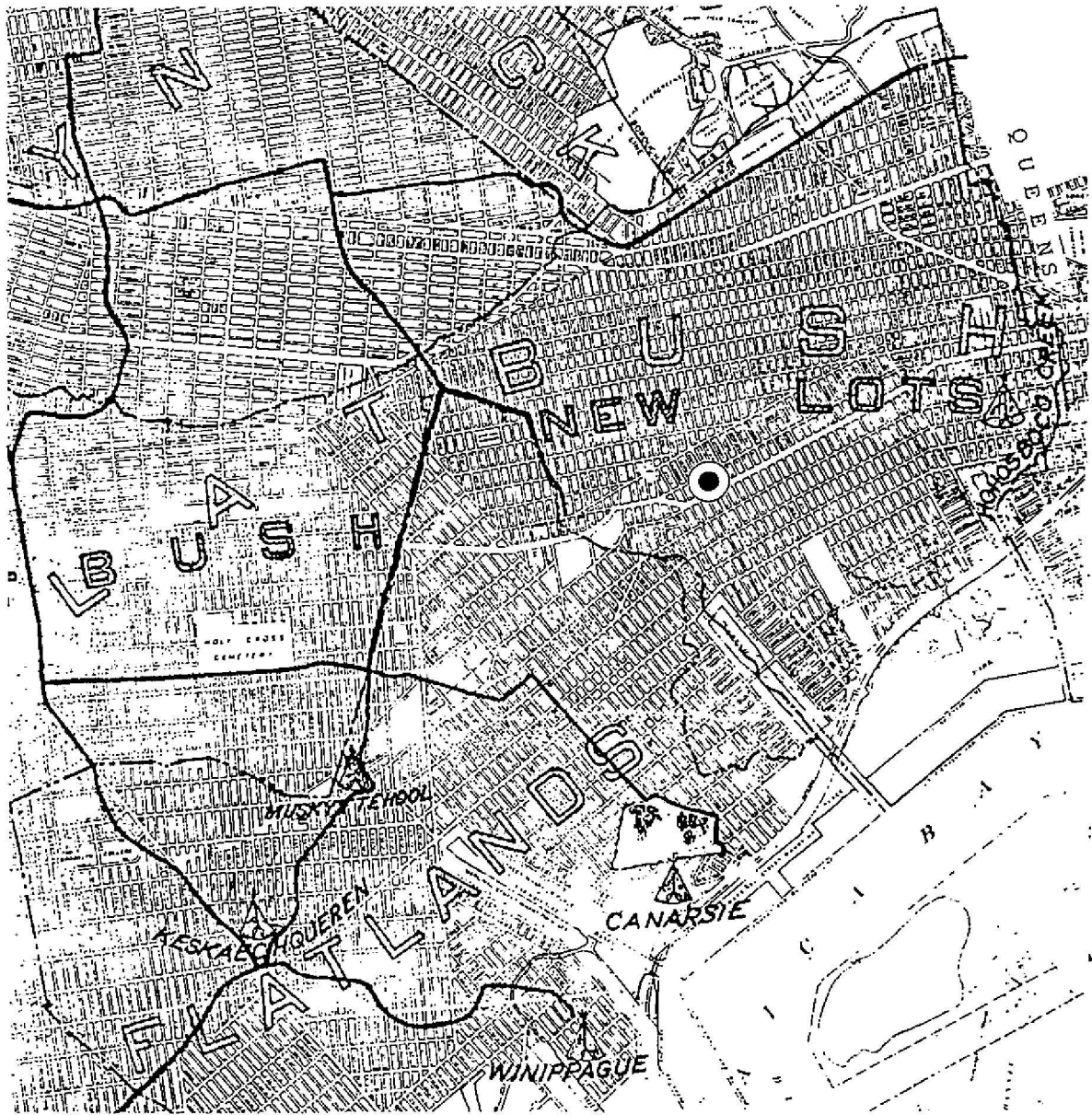
¹Since 1959, the creation of the Pennsylvania Avenue landfill has shifted the site even further from the bay than would naturally be the case [e.g., Black 1981:54, 80]).

land, but on a rise that offers both protection and a place to spot game (e.g., Geismar 1985:33).

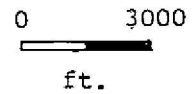
The files of the New York State Museum as well as the writings of late eighteenth and early twentieth century archaeologists indicate sites near the tidal creeks that empty into Jamaica Bay but not on or adjacent to the project site (e.g., Kelly 1946, Figure 8 this report; Bolton 1934, Figure 9). Three sites located within a mile of the project site are on file with the state. Comprising a camp site on the west side of the Fresh Kill near Jamaica Bay (NYSM Site #3610), a "village" site on the east side (NYSM Site #3609), and shell heaps in the vicinity of what was Second Creek (NYSM Site #3607), these site recordings are based on a questionnaire circulated by Arthur C. Parker in the 1920s and are therefore somewhat vague (Wellman 1988: personal communication). However, all the sites appear to be located along the tidal creeks south of the site, near the bay (see Figure 9), in settings unlike the sloping, unwatered woodland that comprised the project site's original setting.

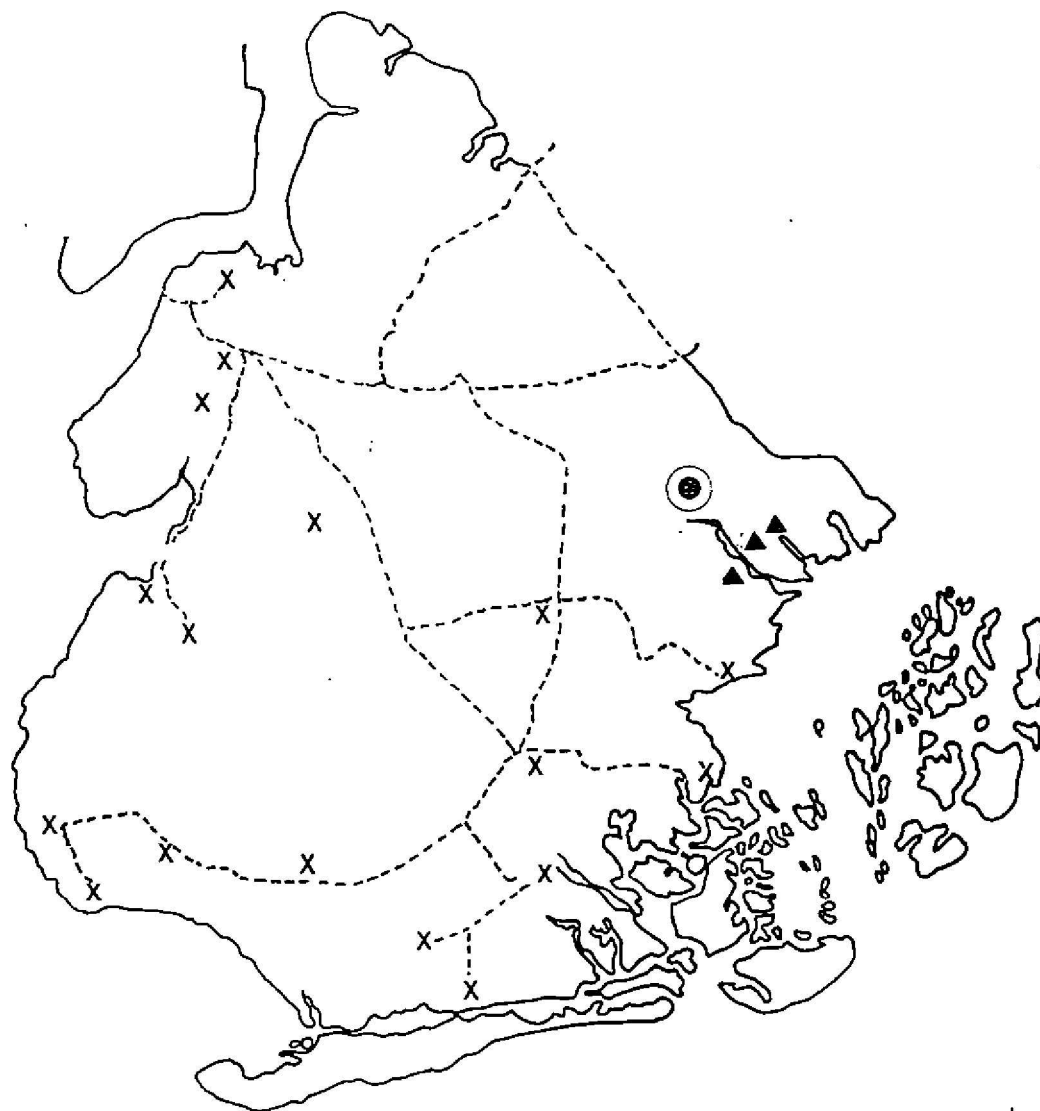
Although the project site remained undeveloped until the turn of this century (see below), no evidence of Native American use has been noted in the contemporary archaeological literature. This is despite street grading and widening, activities that revealed many sites in upper Manhattan in the late 1800s and the first decades of this century (e.g., Skinner 1915: 15). In addition, Bolton's reconstruction of Indian paths in Brooklyn--based on historical information as well as survey--does not place any on or very near the project site (Figure 9).

BLOCK 4322 LOT 24 DOCUMENTATION Project Site in Relation to Indian Villages, Paths, Ponds and Places in Kings County (Kelly 1946)



● project site location





⊙ project site location (approx.)

no scale N

X known Indian sites

---- Indian paths

▲ Prehistoric sites relevant to the project
area recorded at the New York State Museum
(Wellman 1988:personal communication)

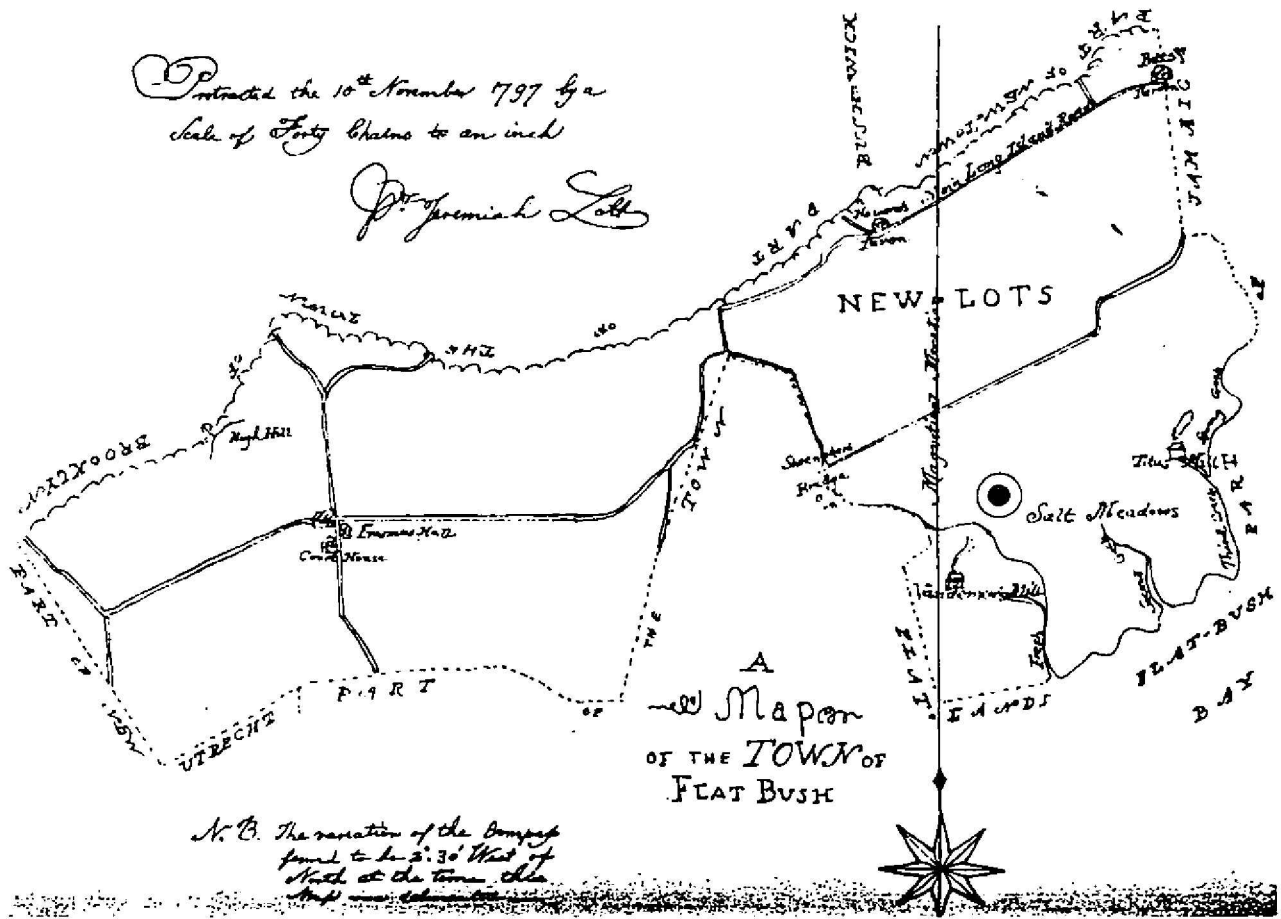
As indicated by the sites recorded in the State Museum files, shoreline areas have proven highly sensitive in terms of prehistoric sites, however, the project site's conditions and original terrain would not be conducive to finding significant prehistoric archaeological deposits. But it is possible that isolated tools or hunting equipment lost while tracking game may remain on the site. Since at least 3 to 7 ft. of fill have been documented through recent soil borings, the chances of finding an isolated stone tool lost or discarded while hunting, the most likely artifact that may be found here, is negligible.

HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In 1677, Sir Edmund Andros, then the English governor of the reclaimed Dutch territory of New Netherland, granted a separate patent for land situated in the eastern part of the town of Flatbush (Figure 10). One of the five original Dutch towns², Flatbush (t'Vlack Bos or Mitwout) may have been settled as much as 20 years before a formal grant was made in 1651 (Stiles 1884:213-214). It was these settlers or their descendants who were later granted the parcel of land to the east called the "New Lots" of Flatbush; this tract comprised over 1,426 acres and included the project site (see land ownership history below).

Most eighteenth century development of New Lots concentrated north of New Lots Avenue, and therefore north of

² The others being Breuckelen (Brooklyn), Nieuw Utrecht (New Utrecht), Boswiyck (Bushwick), and Flatlands (Nieuw Amersfoort) (e.g., Stiles 1884:214; Flint 1896:66).



● project site location (approx.)

no scale

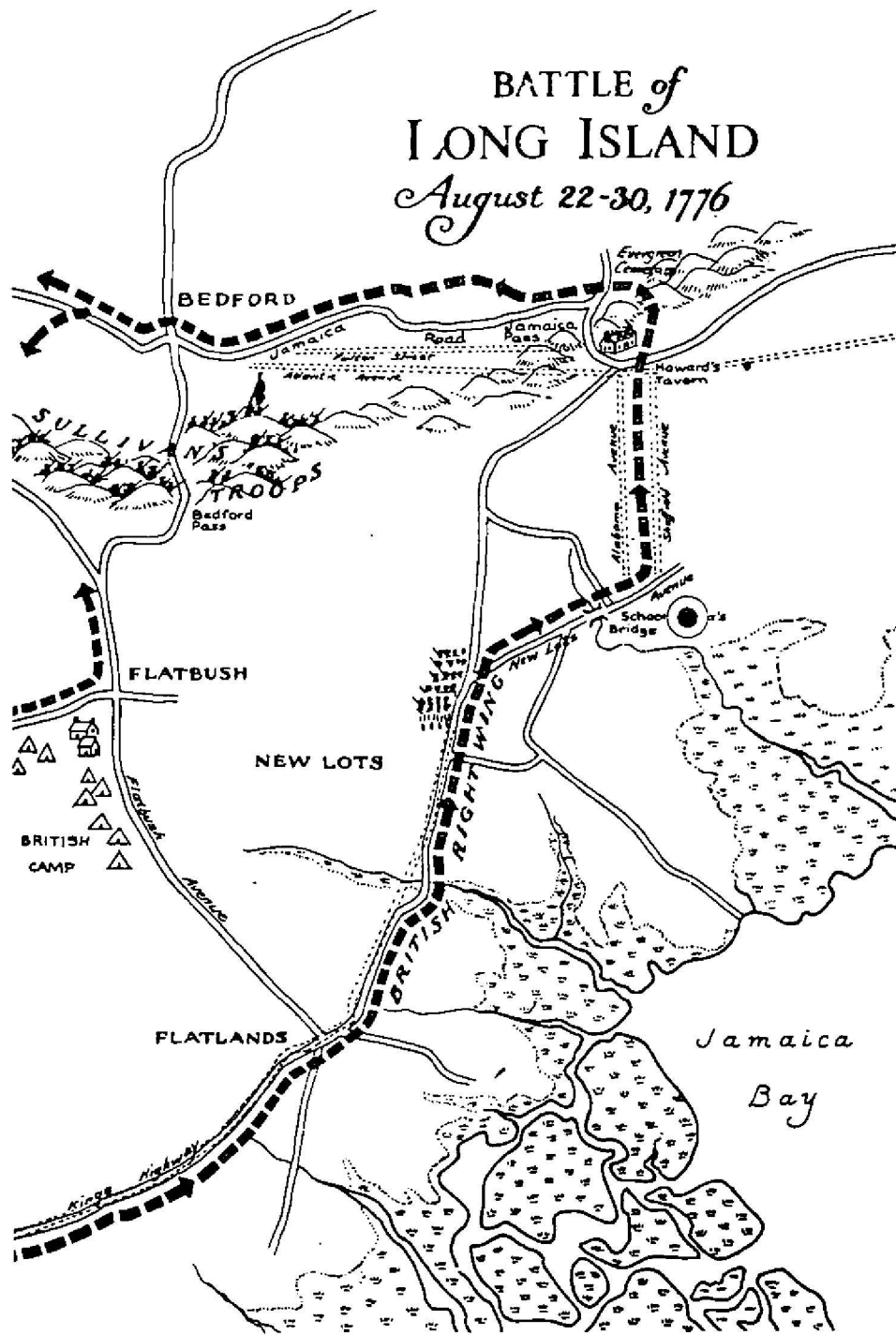


the project site (an exception was the late seventeenth century Vanderveer's Mill and mill pond on Fresh Creek to the southwest noted on Figure 10 [Landesman 1977:25]). The main claim the project site has on history is its proximity to the route followed by the British in the capture of Brooklyn during the Revolutionary War (Figure 11). However, there is no evidence for any actual war activity or encampments on or near the site (perhaps the lack of water and its terrain noted as a deterrent to prehistoric use also determined its involvement, or non-involvement, in the Revolutionary War).

A mid nineteenth century deed indicates that the project area and site were then still woodland (Liber of Deeds [hereafter LD] 255:53). It could have been cleared for farming following this purchase, but this has not been fully established (based on census data, Rapelje's "improved" land increased from 65 acres in 1845 to 130 acres in 1855 [Landesman 1977:66], but the location of this land remains unknown).

During the 1830s John R. Pitkin, a wealthy Connecticut merchant, initiated a grand scheme to create a city in New Lots to rival New York. Appropriately, based on its location and intent, he named his ill-fated venture "East New York." However, it never became more than an unincorporated village in New Lots and still identifies the section of Brooklyn where the project site is located.

Apparently the panic of 1837 helped defeat Pitkin's plans (Stiles 1884:307). Had they succeeded, the project site



project site location (approx.)

no scale



would undoubtedly have been part of this new metropolis.

Instead, it remained undeveloped until the twentieth century.³

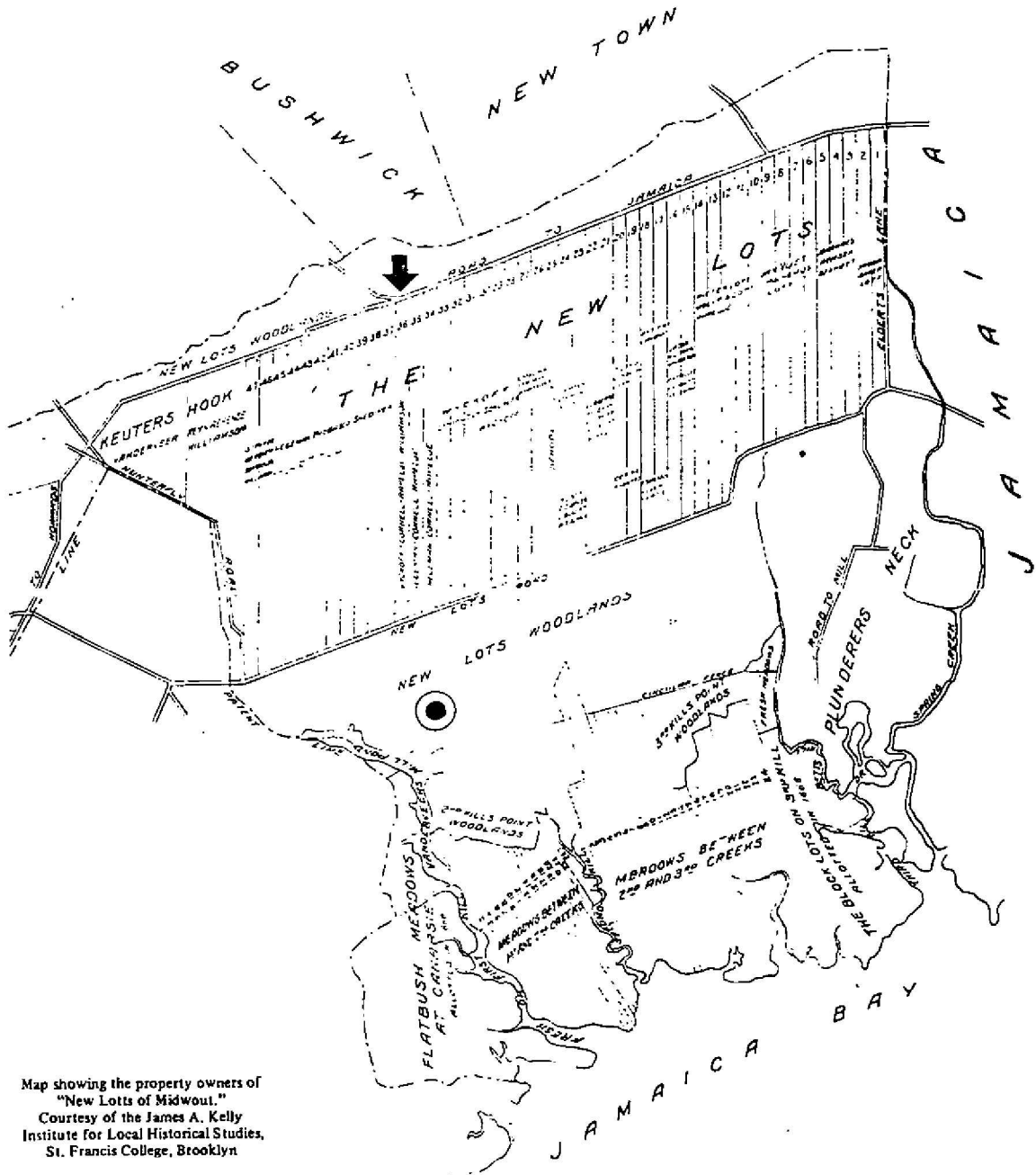
Land Ownership History

As noted earlier, beginning in 1677, three years after the final English takeover of New Netherland⁴, land patents that may have included the woodland and surrounding meadows of the project site (these were not mentioned in the English grant) were issued to numerous patentees then living in the western part of Flatbush. Based mainly on Landesman combined with deed and will information, an attempt has been made to reconstruct original and subsequent early ownership of the site property, but it remains somewhat questionable.

It is conceivable the site's first patentee was Krom [Cram] Floras Williamsen (Conveyance Index 1660-1899; LD 1:1; also, block summaries at the Brooklyn Historical Society:Block 4322), although Landesman notes that Williamsen originally received a patent for Lot 2 situated well east of the project site (Figure 12). Based on location, it is more likely that the patentees of Lots 34, 35, or 36--Catherine Hegeman or Adriaen Reyerse (Landesman 1977:16)--would have had claim upon the adjacent woodlands. However, the woodlands were supposedly held in common until 1701 when they were surveyed (Landesman 1977:

³ To commemorate the 300th anniversary of the granting of the forty-seven lots of New Lots to Dutch settlers in Flatbush, Alter F. Landesman compiled a detailed history of New Lots which is recommended to anyone seeking more detailed information.

⁴ New Netherland, including New Amsterdam and the Dutch towns on Long Island, first fell to the British in 1664; the Dutch briefly recovered this territory in 1673 only to lose it again about a year later (e.g., Stiles 1884:90).



Map showing the property owners of "New Lots of Midwout." Courtesy of the James A. Kelly Institute for Local Historical Studies, St. Francis College, Brooklyn



project site location (approx.)



possible patentees of project site area

no scale



17); yet the index of deeds for the project block lists at least nineteen transactions recorded between 1679 and 1700, a situation that complicates reconstruction of ownership.

Between 1700 and 1816, only one transaction is listed in the conveyance index and block summaries; this is a deed between members of the Probasco family (probably from father to son) recorded in 1716. One hundred years later, an 1816 deed between Nicholas Williamson and Simon Rapelje--his son-in-law --(LD 39:288) established the Rapelje ownership which persisted until the turn of the twentieth century.

The Rapelje Family and Block 4322

The Rapeljes, who Landesman describes as "prolific and influential," settled in New Lots early in the eighteenth century (Landesman 1977:23). The common ancestor of the Brooklyn Rapeljes was Joris, a French Huguenot who emigrated to this country in 1623, going first to Albany, then New Amsterdam, and finally, in 1637, to the Brooklyn settlement. His great grandson, Johannes, settled in New Lots, and Johannes' son, Daniel, a British sympathizer, was among those from New Lots in exile during the Revolutionary War (he had opened his home on New Lots Road [now Avenue] to the British during the above-mentioned capture of Brooklyn). Daniel's son, Simon, was the father of Williamson Rapelje (Stiles 1884:319; Landesman 1977: 23) who acquired the site property during the nineteenth century. This acquisition was made partially through purchase in 1852 (LD 275:53) and partially through inheritance (no will is recorded for Simon, but the western part of the project

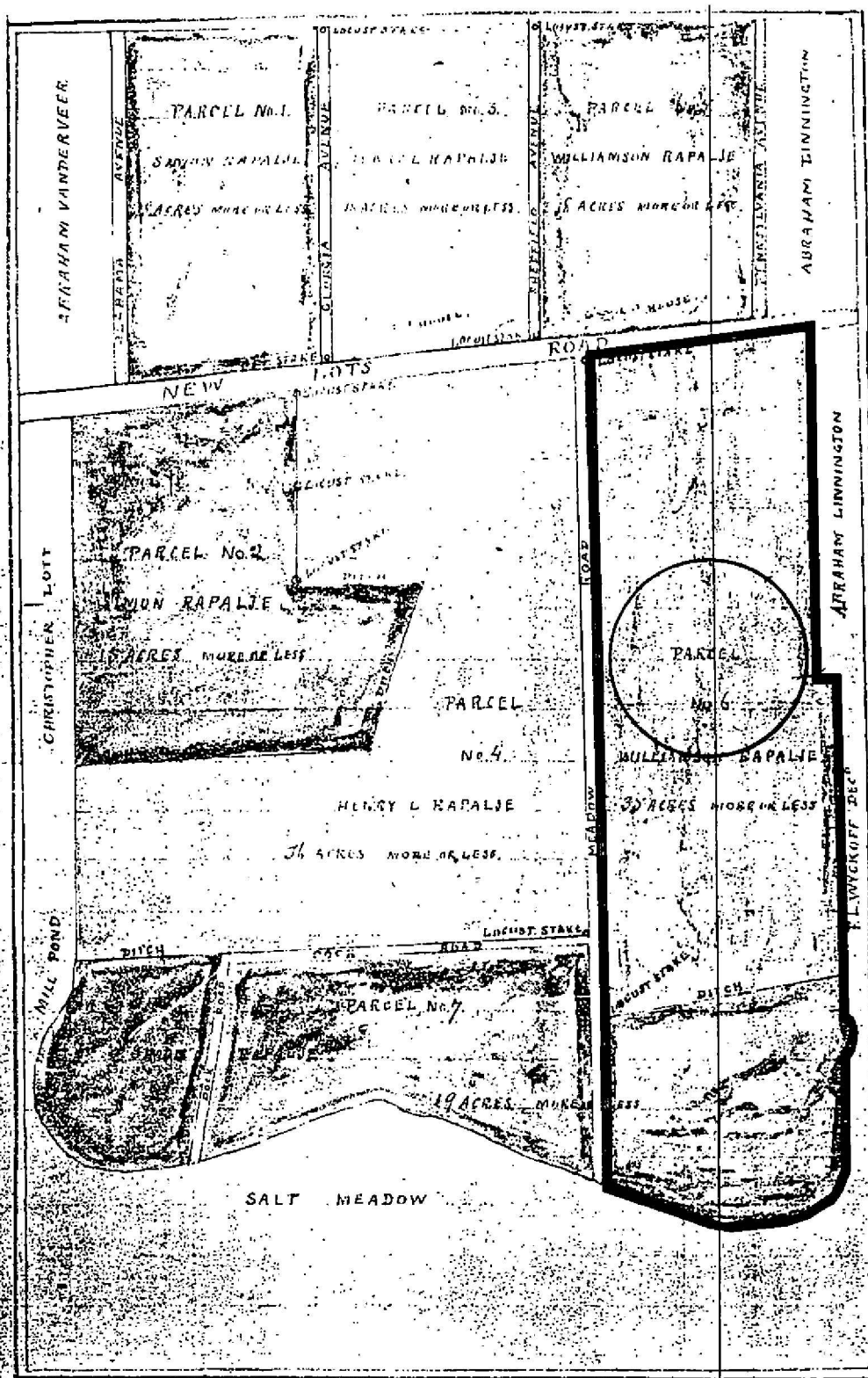
property was the land he purchased in 1816 that presumably was inherited by Williamson).

Williamson died in 1885 (Liber of Wills [hereafter LW] 113:357-365), leaving property to five of his six surviving children (a son who lived in China [Stiles 1884:320] received only money). Two of his daughters⁵ inherited houses on New Lots Road (what later became 341 New Lots Avenue at Sheffield Avenue was built for Margaret Ann who never married), and his sons Simon, Henry L., and Williamson [Jr.], were left large land parcels north and south of New Lots Road. It was Williamson [Jr.] who inherited Parcel No. 6 that included the project site (Figure 13).

It is probably no more than coincidence that Williamson Rapelje's 1852 land acquisition that included the eastern part of the project site occurred the same year that New Lots was incorporated as a town (e.g., Landesman 1977:206). A Commissioners' Map from about 1871 (at the Topographical Bureau of the Brooklyn Borough President's Office) indicates a street grid in the site area with familiar names such as Pennsylvania and Sheffield Avenues (only Linden Boulevard, which was originally Van Brunt and then Lorraine or Vienna Avenues, has experienced name changes). However, these were only paper streets since a map included in Williamson Rapelje's will made in 1868 does not show any streets south of New Lots Road (see Figure 13)⁶.


⁵ A third daughter, Helen, predeceased her father, dying in 1869, one year after the will was made.

⁶ The conveyance index for Block 4322 indicates that the streets bordering the site were opened between 1912 and 1929.



— parcel 6 (Williamson Rapelje [Jr.]

○ project area (approx.)

no scale 

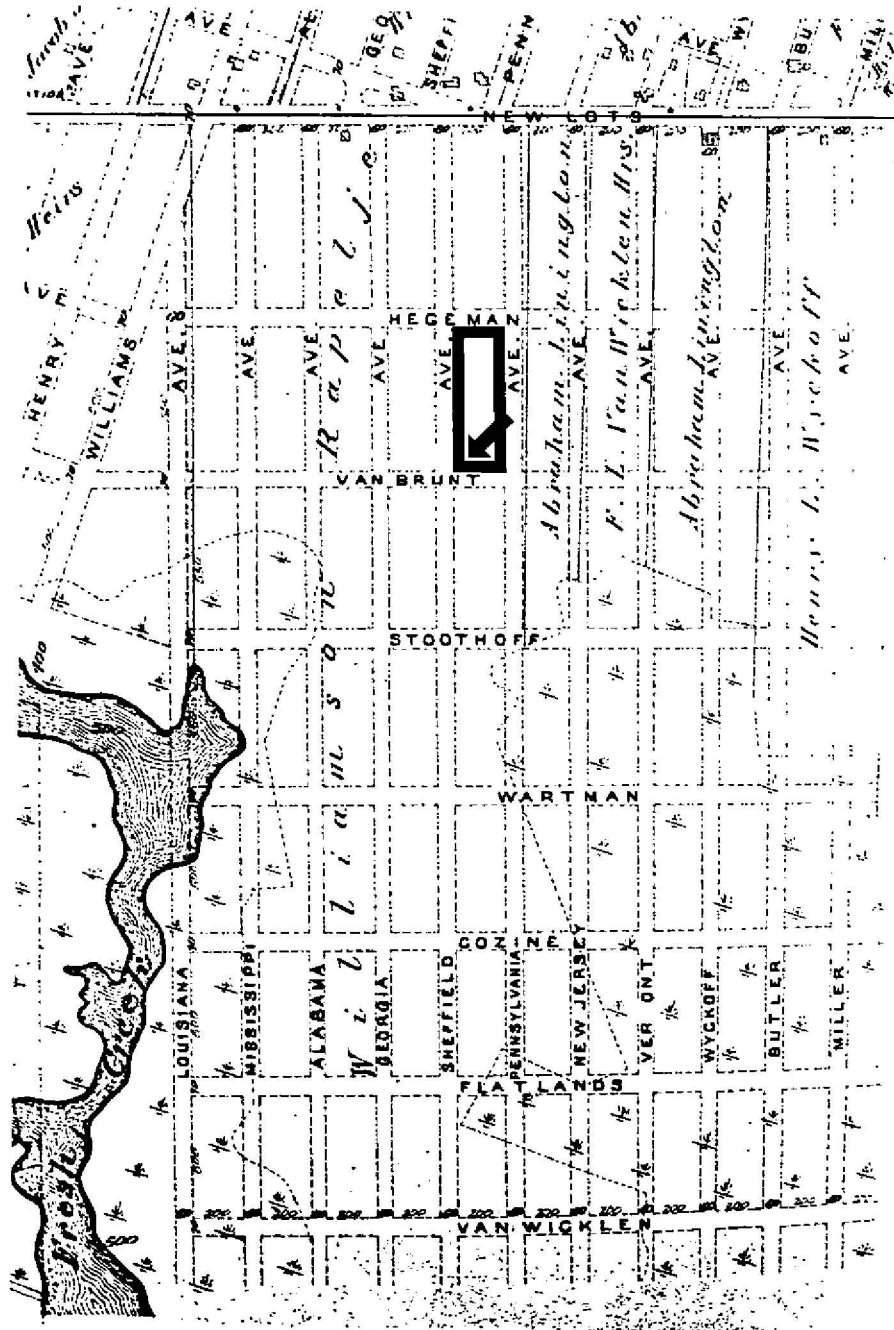
In 1886, a year after Williamson's death, the town and its village of East New York was annexed to Brooklyn as its 26th Ward (Landesman 1977:206). A contemporary map again indicates named streets (Robinson 1886, Figure 14 this report) as does the estate map for Williamson Rapelje [Jr.] (Meserole 1899) who died in 1897 (LW 226:211-223)⁷. This latter map (Figure 15) also shows subdivisions; in 1900, tax assessment records document that the only portion of the project site to be developed prior to its use as a service station had then been sold (Tax Assessment Records [hereafter TR] 1900:Block 813 [now 4322]).

TWENTIETH CENTURY DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT SITE

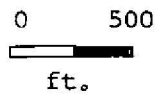
Since the turn of the century, the project area changed from a quiet farming community to a mixed commercial-residential area. The buildings on Linden, though now commercial, are mainly, if not all, one-story structures (see Figures 3 to 7).

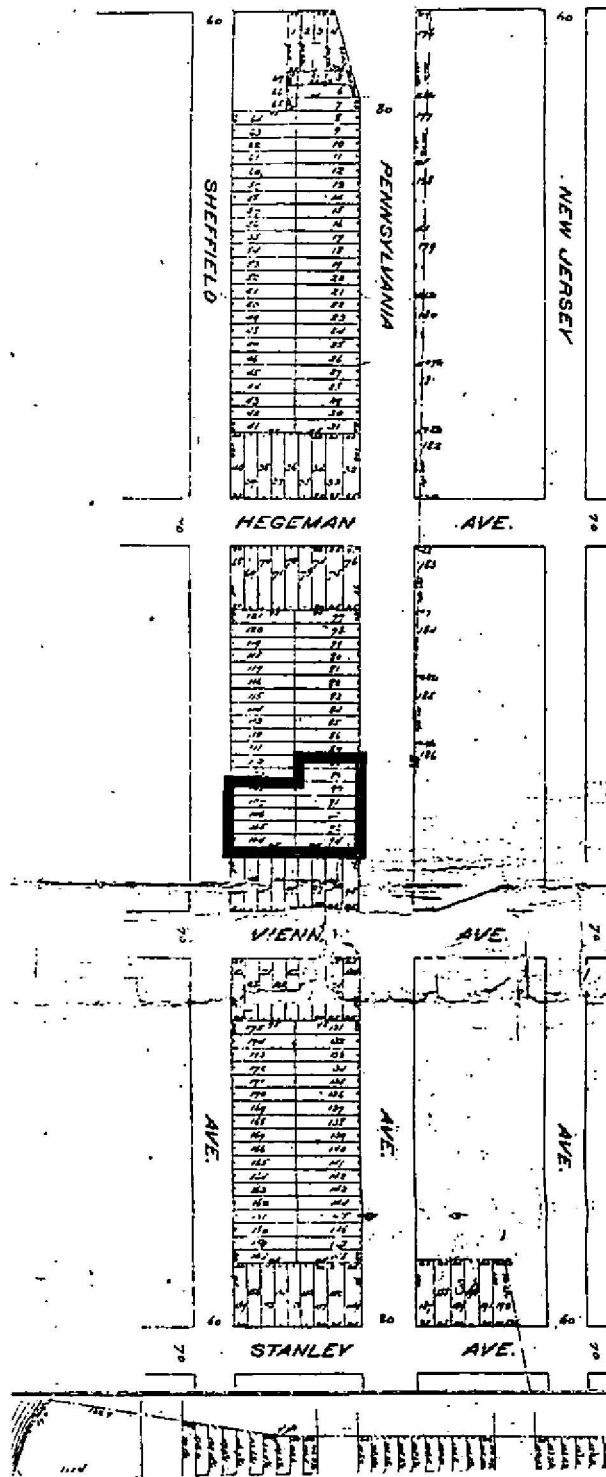
Eventually, when a closed Exxon Station reopens on the northeast corner of the Pennsylvania Avenue-Linden Boulevard intersection, three corners of this intersection will be service stations (a Shell station is now located diagonally across this intersection). A Wendy's Hamburger restaurant is situated across Linden Boulevard, covering the block front between Pennsylvania and Sheffield Avenues, and a Coca Cola Bottling plant building (now a warehouse and garage) is located one block west, also on Linden Boulevard. A radiator and tire repair shop and parking

⁷ An 1894 road map of Kings and Queens Counties shows only one road below New Lots Road in the project area (Servoss 1894:Figure 16); this unnamed street appears to be Sheffield Avenue.

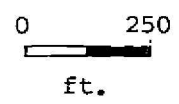


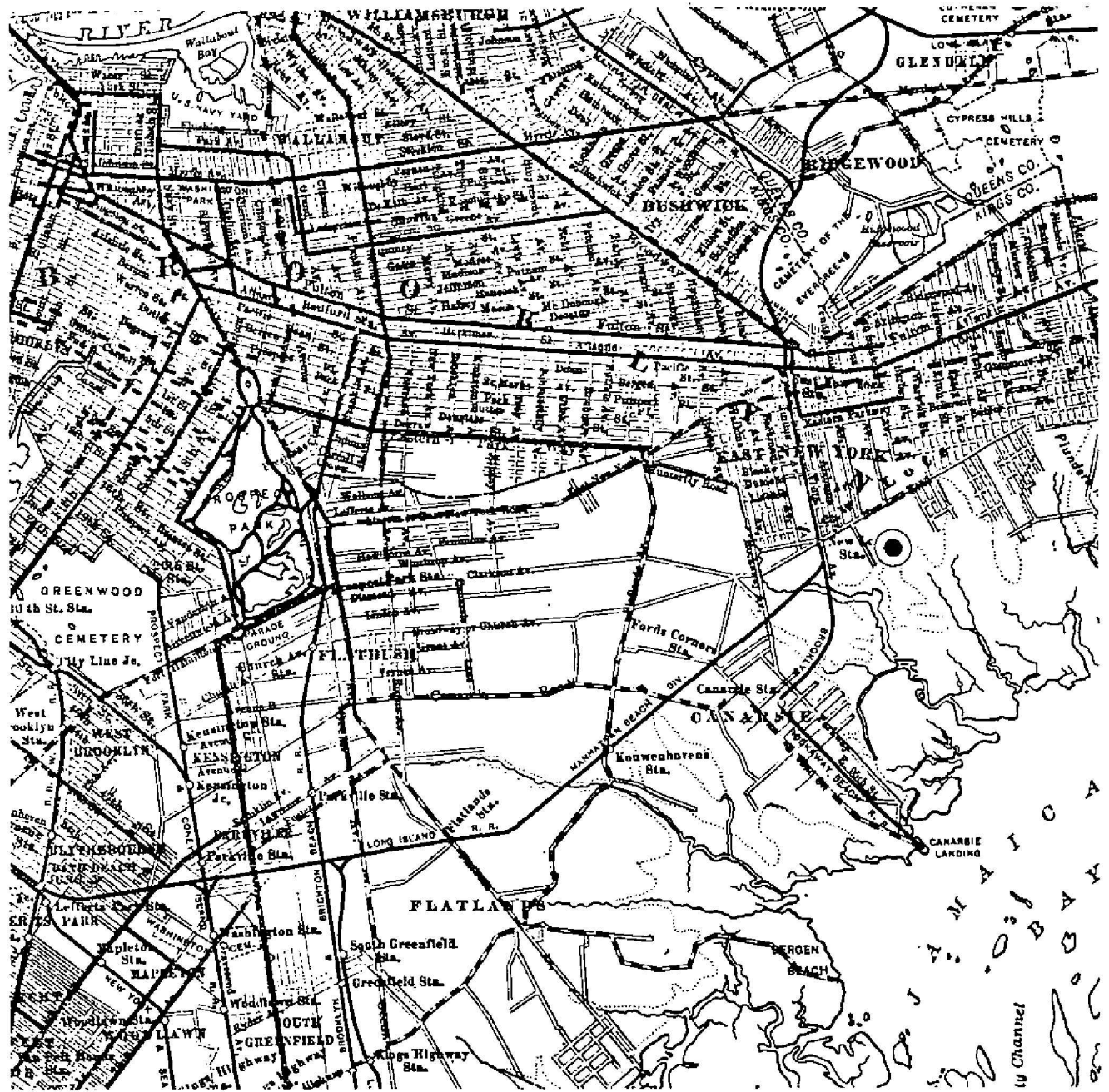
- project block
- ➔ project site





— project site





● project site location (approx.)



mile

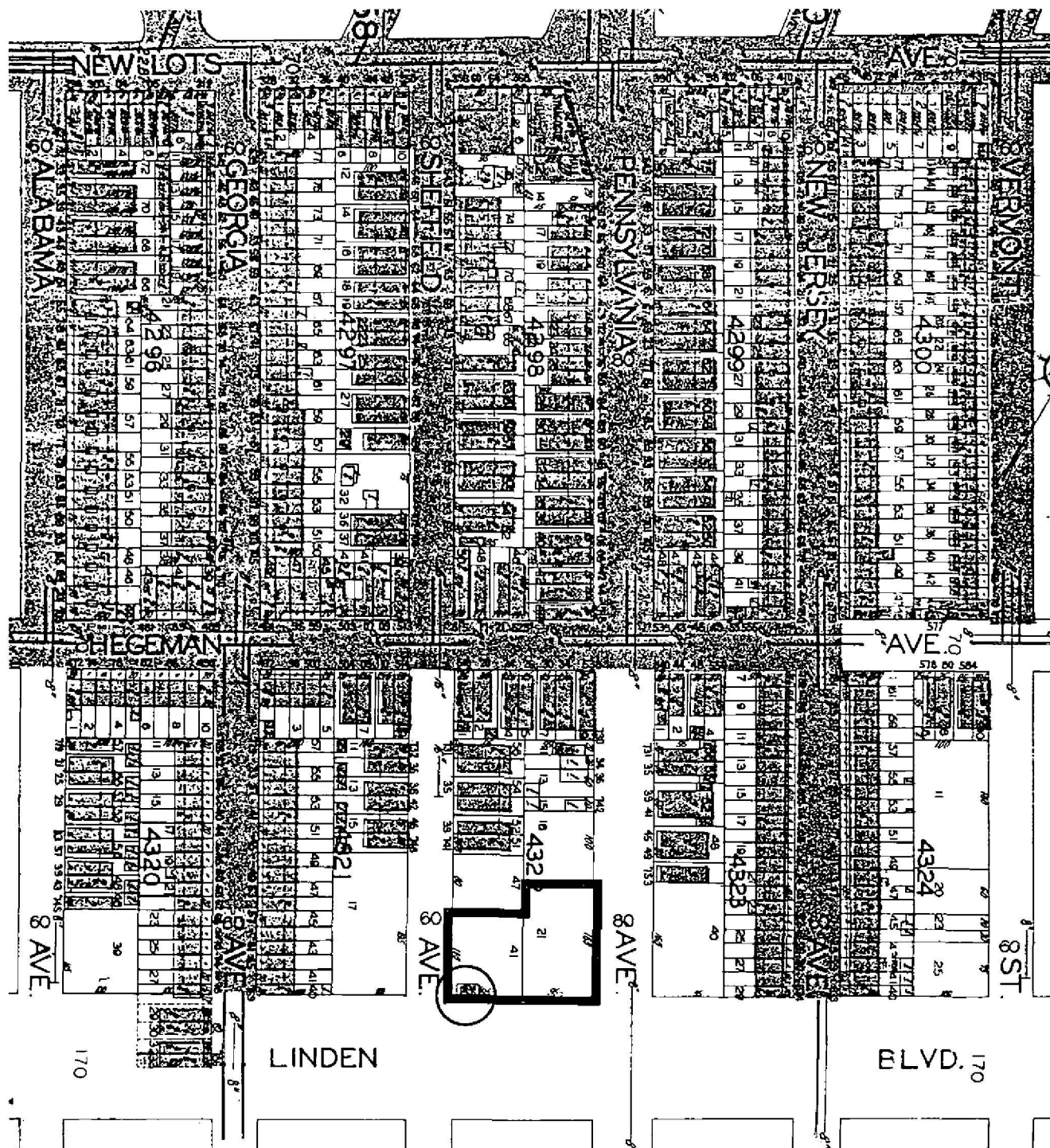




lot are situated on the corner across from the Mobil station on Sheffield Avenue and Linden Boulevard (Becker 1988:personal communication). Two-story brick houses are documented on Sheffield Avenue since at least 1929 (see Figure 17) and, with the construction of 744 Pennsylvania Avenue, a four-story apartment building, in 1940 (TR 1940), the current site setting was established.

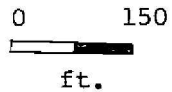
Sometime between 1923 and 1929, 100 ft. were removed from the project block to widen Linden Boulevard, now a six-lane thoroughfare with one lane service roads (see Figure 15 for the position of the project site in relation to the original block).

The 1901 tax assessment for what was then Block 813 (now block 4322) indicates that a two-story brick dwelling with a one-story frame extension had been built on what became the southwest corner of the project area once Linden Boulevard was widened (see Figure 17). A 1905 atlas indicates adjacent frame stables or garages to the rear of the house (Hyde 1905:Plate 23, left), which later disappear (see Figure 17). In 1930, this house was demolished to make way for gas tanks and, by the next year, a service station (TR 1930:1931). The Mobil Oil Corporation (originally cited as the Standard Oil Co. of New York City, then the Socony-Vacuum Oil Co., and finally, as Socony-Mobil in the deed record) has owned the site and station since the 1930s (LD 5173:350; 5578:45; 5639:199; 8761:326).

The service station structure currently on the site, which will be removed and replaced, has a 6-ft. crawl space (Hadersbeck 1988:personal communication) which means excavations have extended at least to, if not beyond, the 7 ft. of fill documented at this location through soil borings (see boring B-3 below). In addition



-  project site
-  2-story dwelling

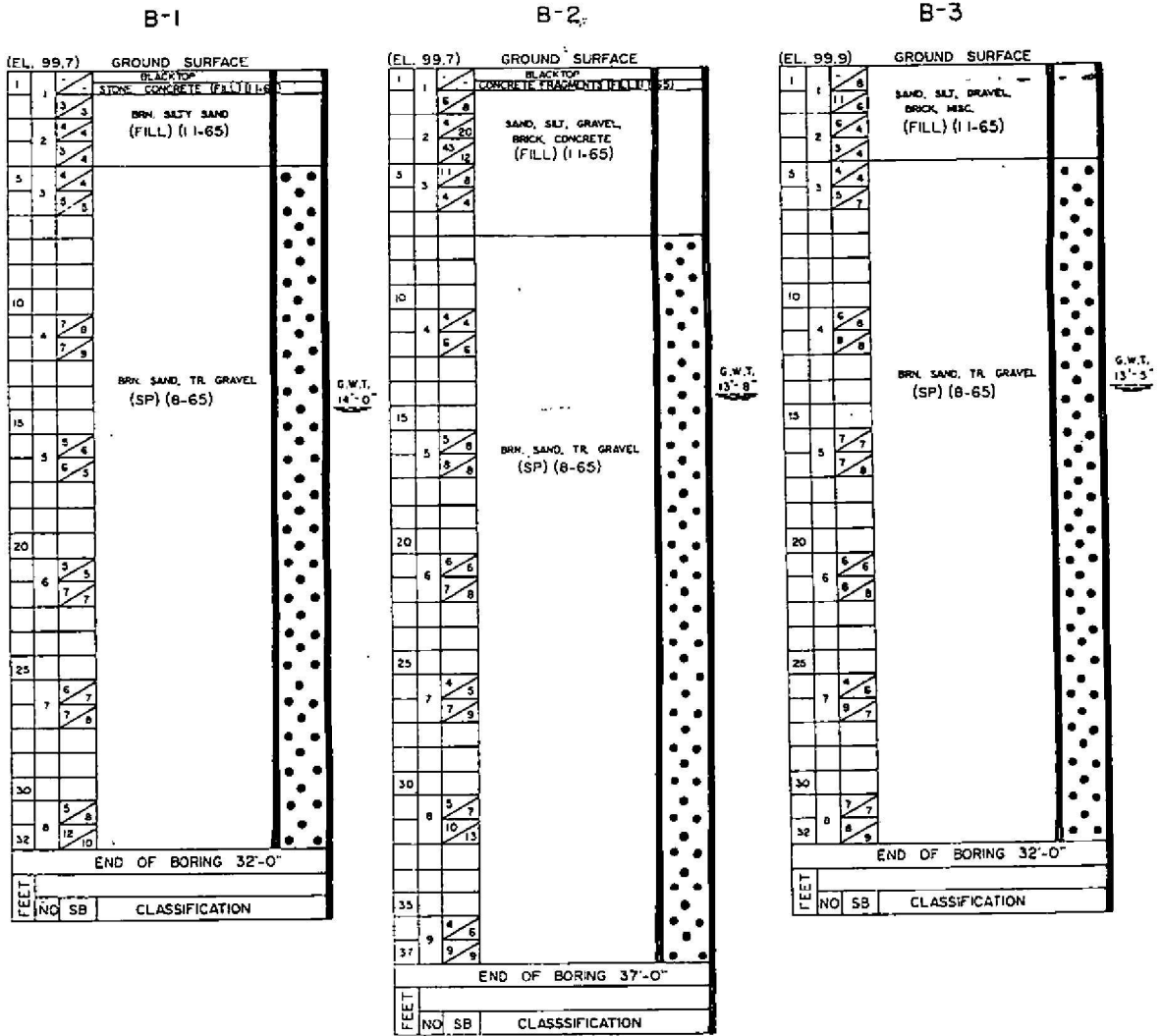


to the demolished house and outbuildings, the service station structure, and fifteen pumps, the site has also been disturbed by installation of a 4,000-gal. gas storage tank and a 55-gal. waste oil tank. There are also drains documented throughout the site, and undoubtedly underground utilities will be encountered during construction (Survey Map 1982:file 99-79).

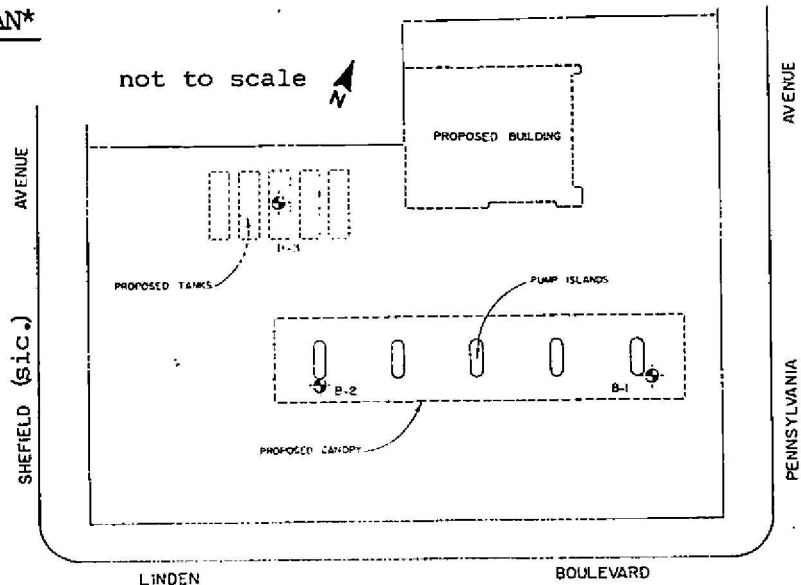
SOIL BORINGS

Three soil borings drilled in June of 1987 provide information about subsurface conditions (Soil Mechanics Drilling Corp. 1987:drawing No. 87R3323). For example, they indicate that 3 to 7 ft. of fill (comprising sand, silt, gravel, brick, concrete, and misc. material) are present and that the underlying soil is a brown sand with a trace of gravel (Figure 18). They also document ground water between 13.5 and 14 ft. at all three locations. It should be noted that two of the three borings (B-1 and B-3) were continuously drilled through the fill level and into the subsoil which is helpful in making an archaeological assessment; on the other hand, the drillers were not aware of the information needed to make an archaeological evaluation (for example, shell fragments in the upper level of the subsoil might indicate Native American shell heaps or "middens," and pockets of ash or charcoal in this virgin soil could indicate a campsite).

Although the sampling spoon was small (2-in. diameter) and therefore not ideal for recovering samples for an archaeological assessment, no evidence of shell or other materials that might indicate prehistoric use were recorded.



LOCATION PLAN*

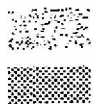
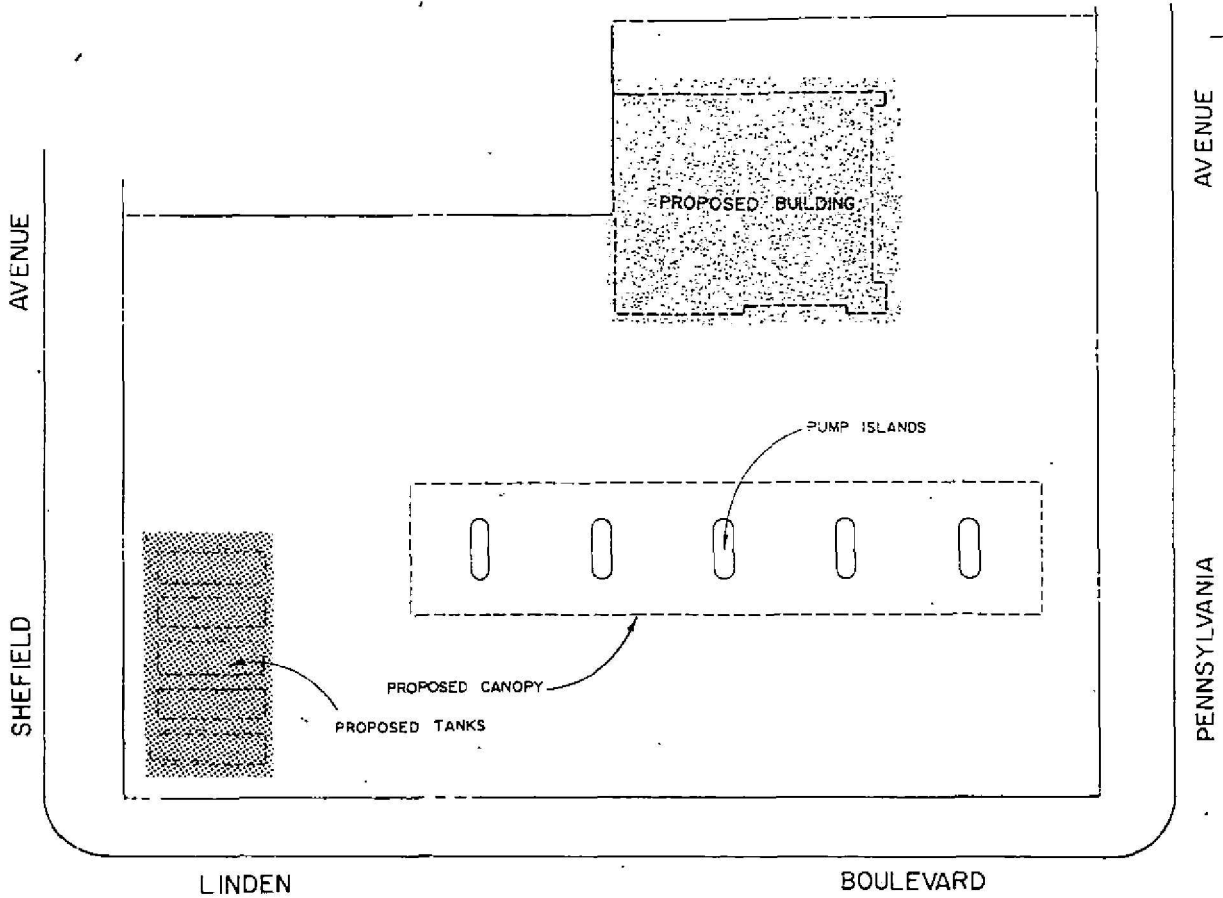


*see Figure 19 for new location of proposed tanks (Aug. 1988)

Based on the data provided through this limited sub-surface testing, there is no indication of archaeological sensitivity on the site.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the project site has long historical associations, including ownership that may date to the late 1600s, it remained undeveloped woodland or farmland until the turn of this century. Moreover, despite its location within an area flagged for its prehistoric site potential, neither the archaeological literature nor soil boring data suggest it has any archaeological significance. Consequently, no testing is recommended prior to alteration and construction of the service station that will remain on the site. However, should the Landmarks Preservation Commission feel there is any question about the site's archaeological sensitivity, the Mobil Oil Corporation has offered to sponsor archaeological monitoring during excavations that will extend beneath the 3 to 7 ft. of fill documented in the borings. A graphic that identifies areas where proposed excavations may extend this deep has been provided (Figure 19). It should be noted that this identification is based on construction drawings provided by the Mobil Oil Corporation (dated 3-1-82) and personal communication with its representative, J. E. Hadersbeck (August 17, 1988). Should monitoring be required, it is suggested that these locations be confirmed prior to excavation.



area where footings will be dug
 area of proposed gas tanks (as of Aug. 1988)

not to scale



Note: any area that will be excavated beyond 3 ft.
 below grade should be considered for monitoring
 if this kind of field work is deemed necessary

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