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1989

Preliminary Documentation of the 330 Jay Street Site

Brooklyn, New York



Prepared for Allee King Rosen & Fleming, Inc.
Prepared by Joan H. Geismar, Ph.D.
August, 1989

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ABSTRACT

Documentary research for the 330 Jay Street Project Site indicated that its nineteenth-century development would have warranted archaeological investigation, but that subsequent construction has undoubtedly destroyed its potential. This potential included exploration of the homestead site of the Reverend Evan Malbone Johnson, an Episcopal minister who played a role in Brooklyn's religious and temperance history. It also might have provided the chance to investigate the lifestyles of the middle-class residents of Jay Street. However, given the site's twentieth-century development--which included the construction of five-story tenements on Pearl Street in 1908 and the Department of Social Services building on Jay Street from 1952 to 1954--this potential has been destroyed. Consequently, no further research or investigation is recommended.

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Graphics: Kathe Gregory
Photos: Joan Geismar

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

1. INTRODUCTORY SUMMARY

This preliminary report of an archaeological evaluation of the 330 Jay Street project site (Block 140, Lot 10; Figure 1 this report) was prepared for Allee King Rosen & Fleming, Inc. It was undertaken as part of an environmental review conforming with CEQR Executive Order 91 and its implementing regulations (6 NYCRR Part 617) and a directive from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission concerning historic-period use of the land. A reconnaissance-level documentation (Geismar 1989) had indicated that although the site, which is bounded by Tech Place (formerly Johnson Street) on the north, Jay Street on the east, Columbus Plaza and a municipal parking garage on the south, and the Family Court building on the west (see Figure 2), might have had some historical archaeological significance, twentieth-century development has obliterated this potential. This report documents the findings of the initial documentation and subsequent research.

To summarize the findings, site development first occurred in 1829, when the Reverend Evan Malbone Johnson built his residence at the corner of Johnson and Pearl Streets (Pearl Street has been closed since the 1950s) in what is now its northwest portion. By 1850, a small unidentified structure was erected on the Pearl Street side of Rev. Johnson's property, but it was gone by 1855. Possibly by 1852, but definitely by 1855, Johnson apparently built a large brick house for his son on the corner of Jay and Johnson Streets. Also by 1855, brick row houses were erected along the Jay Street side of the site (see Figures 9 to 12). The following year, the former Johnson home on Johnson and Pearl Streets became a school and convent.



0 2000



ft.

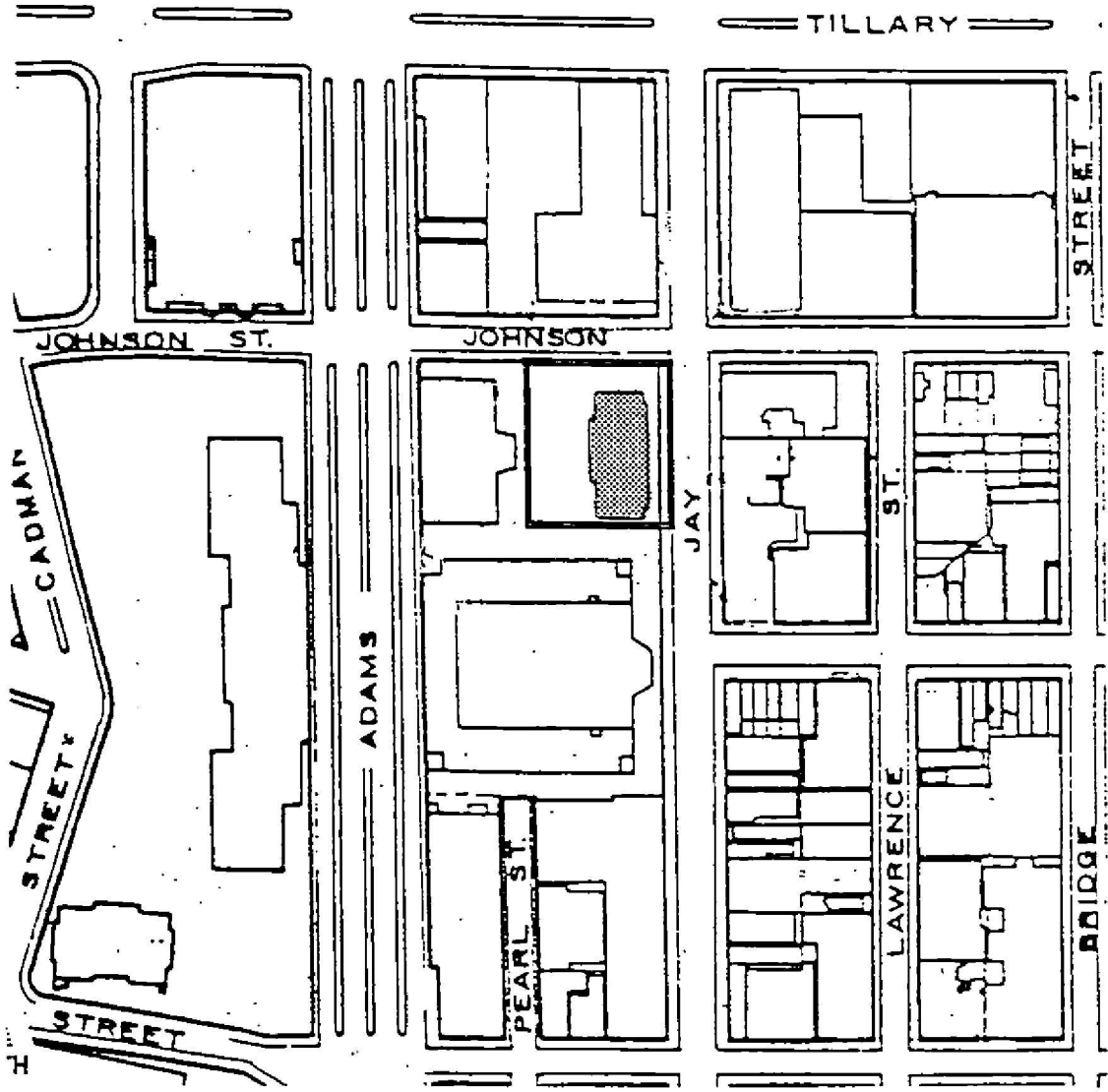


Any or all of these buildings may have had associated wells, cisterns, or privies (outhouse structures) that would have been archaeologically significant, but subsequent development undoubtedly destroyed these features. This development included a row of tenements with basements built on Pearl Street in 1908, and the Department of Social Services building constructed on Jay Street between 1952 and 1954. Given this development, the site does not appear to have any archaeological significance, therefore no further research is recommended.

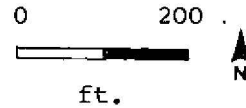
The findings summarized here are documented in the following sections. Data sources include historical and contemporary maps, deeds and wills, tax assessments and other municipal records, directories, archival material at the Brooklyn Historical Society and the New York Public Library, published histories and unpublished reports, newspaper articles, and interviews. In addition, site visits were made in June and July.

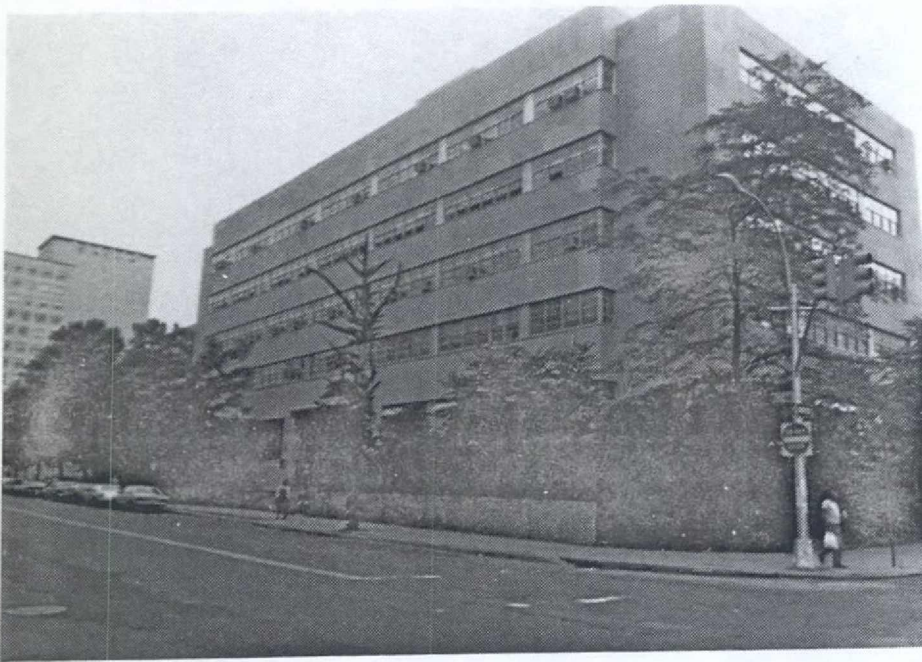
2. SITE DESCRIPTION

The proposed project site is located at 330 Jay Street in downtown Brooklyn (see Figure 1) in an area of mixed institutional and office use (AKRF 1989a:S-1). Currently on the site is the seven-story New York City Department of Social Services building fronting on Jay Street and a parking lot behind it that accommodates twenty-nine cars (Figures 2 to 4); just west of the site, abutting the parking lot, is the Family Court Building (Figure 5). The western site boundary and this building meet approximately where Pearl Street once ran (it was theoretically closed in 1945 [File Map 1945:N-63] but is shown on maps until the 1950s when the City built the above-



project site (approx.)
Department of Social Welfare





3 Department of Social Services building located at 330 Jay Street. (photo 6/89)



4 Composite view showing back of the Department of Social Services building and the 29-space parking lot located where nineteenth and early-twentieth century development occurred. Rev. Evan M. Johnson's home, built in 1829, would have stood in the rear left-hand corner of the photo; this house was replaced by twentieth century tenements that would have covered the left side of the parking lot except where Pearl Street was formerly located. (photo 6/89)

mentioned structures). The Johnson Street entrance to the parking lot is at street grade, but it appears that the lot has been graded down 5 ft. as it runs west (Figure 6); site grading is also suggested by street profiles from 1840 that document an uphill slope of almost 10 ft. between Jay and Pearl Streets (File Maps 1849:206, 208). No evidence of the site's early development is visible.

The proposed development, which will cover the site (Figure 7), runs 206 ft. 9 in. north to south and 207 ft. 4 in. east to west. It includes office and retail space as well as loading and storage areas (Figure 8) in a thirty-three story tower over a one-story base and three levels of underground parking (AKRF 1989a:I-3 to I-4). The proposed construction is adjacent to Brooklyn's Metrotech development and abuts the Brooklyn Renaissance Plaza development currently under consideration.

3. SITE DEVELOPMENT

As noted in the introductory summary and as is more fully described in Section 4, the site's earliest development dates from 1829 when the Reverend Evan Malbone Johnson erected his residence on the corner of Johnson and Pearl Streets. Although it was not developed until this time (e.g., British Head Quarters Map 1782, Figure 9 this report), it is possible the site area was once farmed.

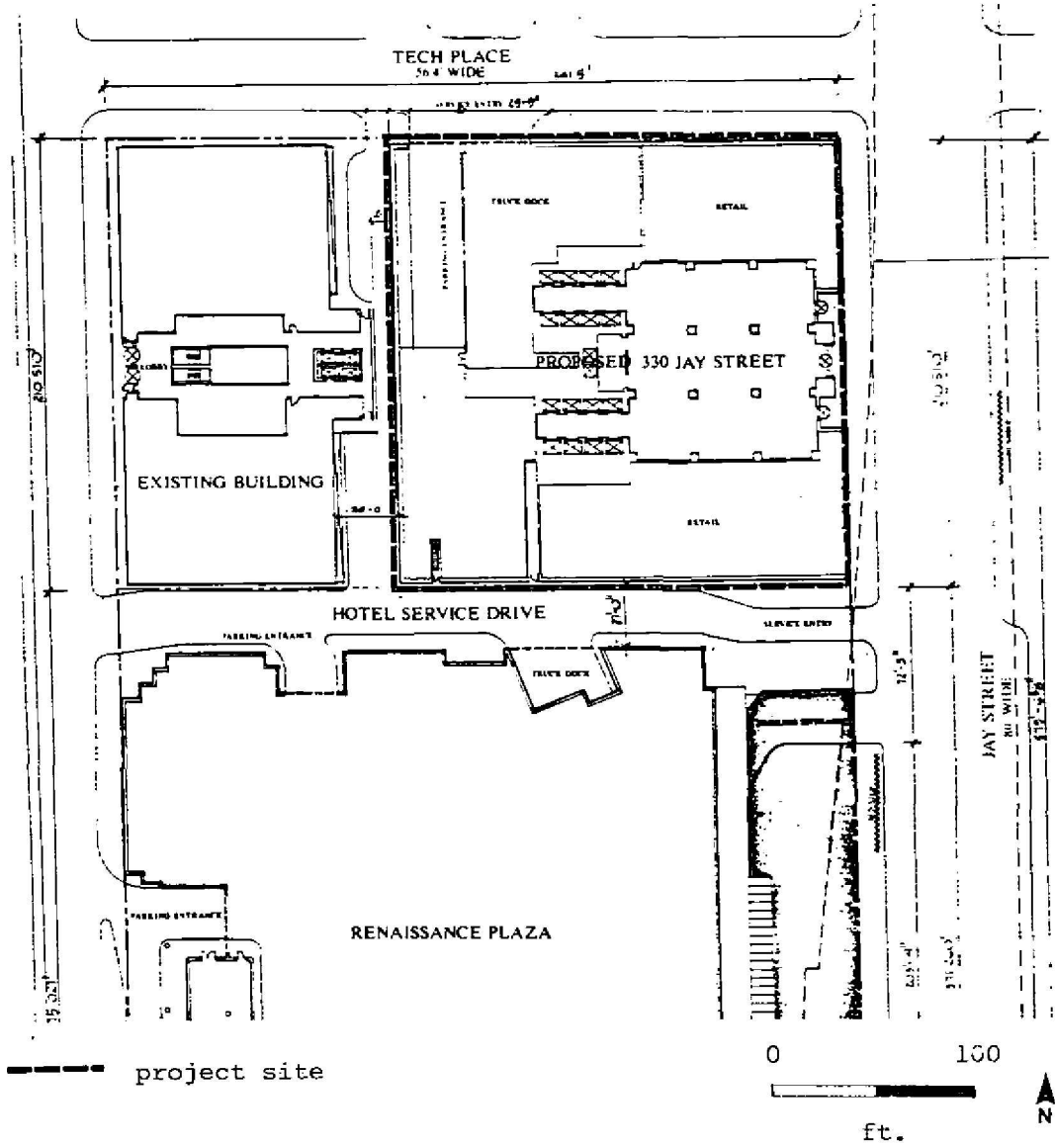
The first cartographic documentation of Rev. Johnson's home, which appeared in 1839 (Figure 10), indicates a large building that seems well suited to its later use as a school and convent (see Section 4). A small, unidentified structure was apparently built on the Pearl Street side of Rev. Johnson's property sometime after 1841 (Brooklyn Street Directory 1841-42) but before 1850 (Dripps 1850,



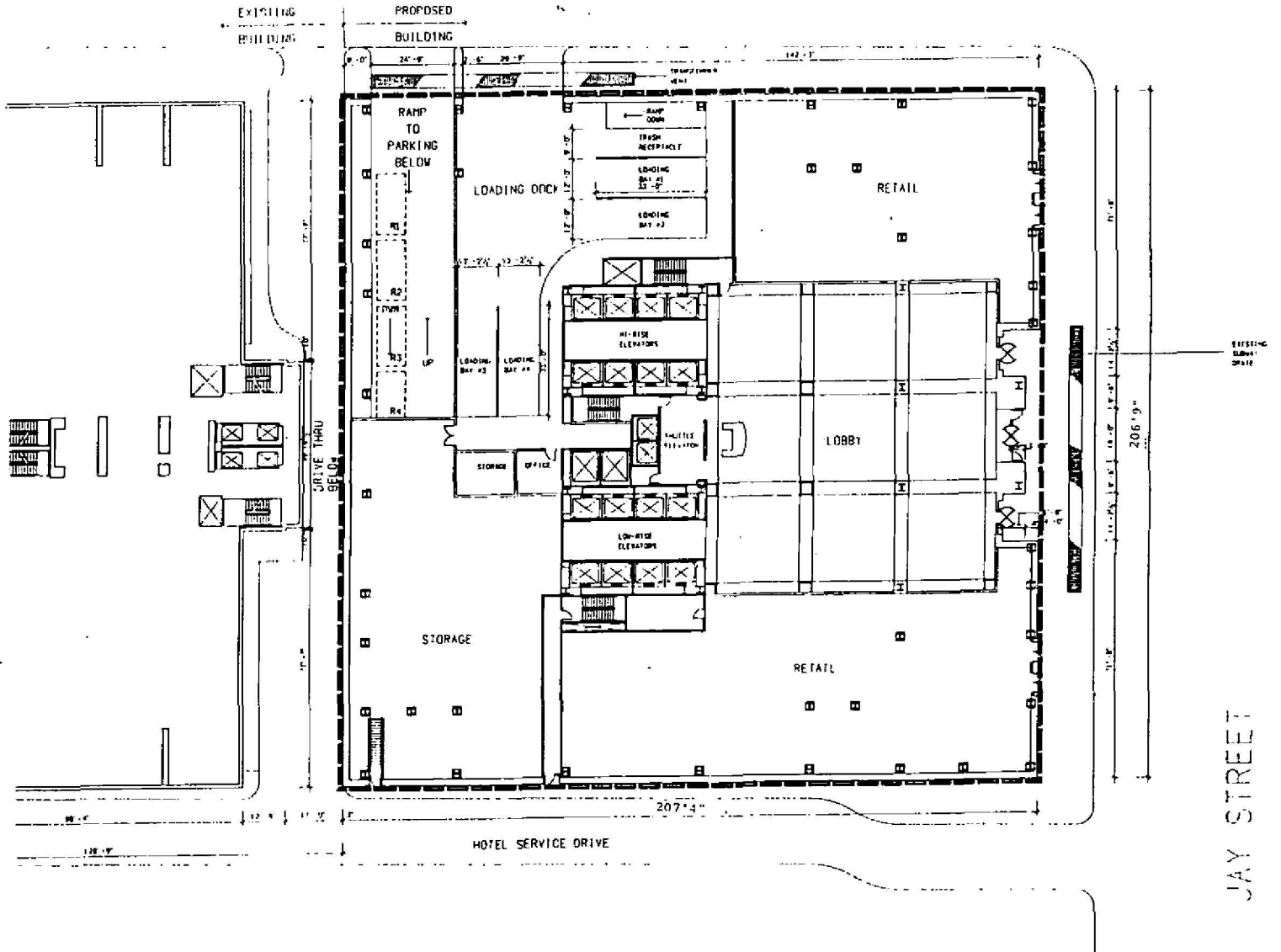
5 Composite view looking toward the Family Court building from the Johnson Street/Tech Place entrance to the parking lot, toward . The street can just be seen to the right of the stone column marking the entrance. In the background are the trees of Columbus Plaza that lie over a municipal parking garage. (photo 6/89)



6 Composite view of the parking lot behind the Department of Social Services building seen on the extreme left. Johnson Street/ Tech Place is on the right, the Family Court building to the rear. The lot gradually grades down to 5 ft. below the street. (photo 6/89)



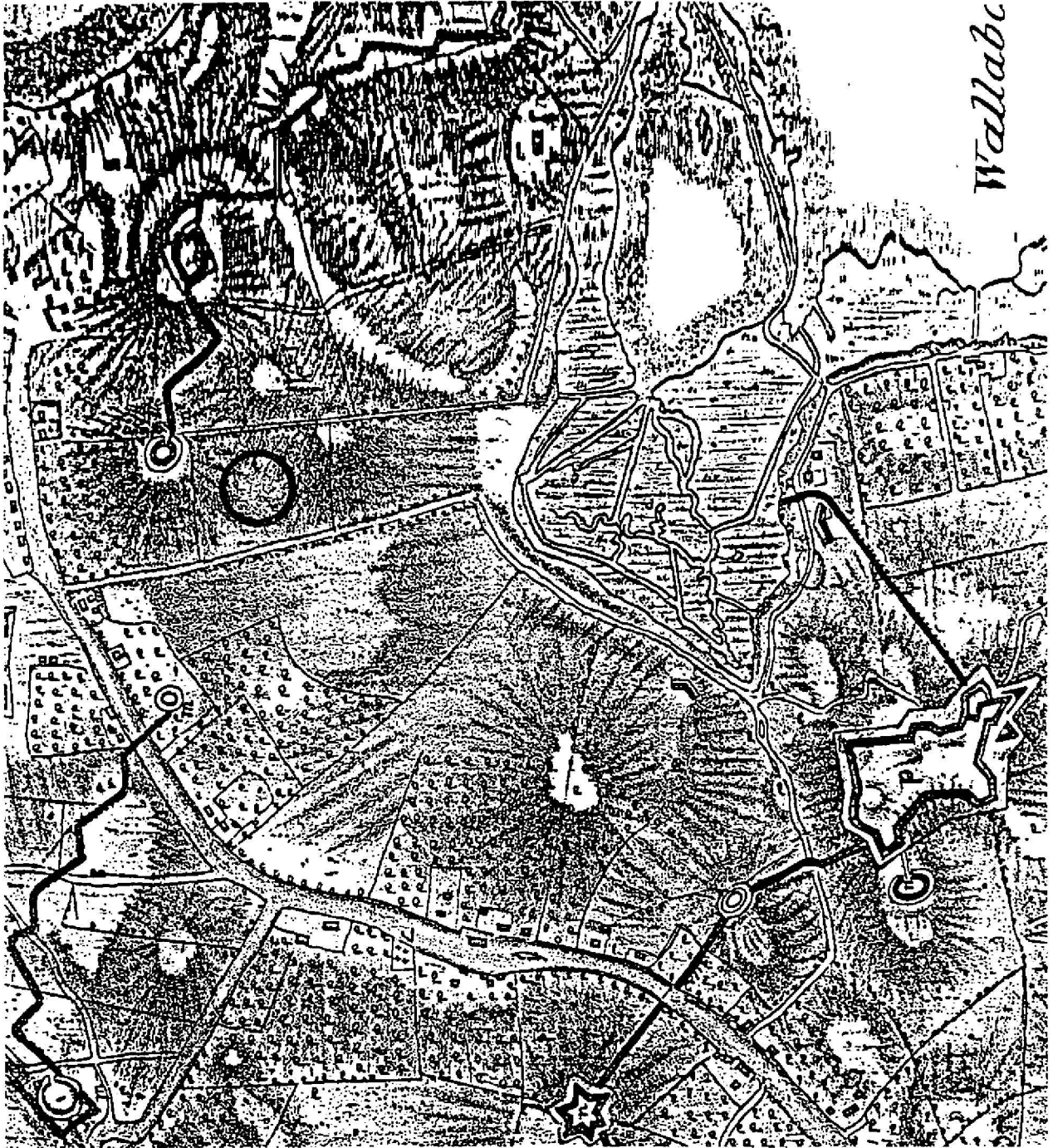
TECH PLACE



--- project site

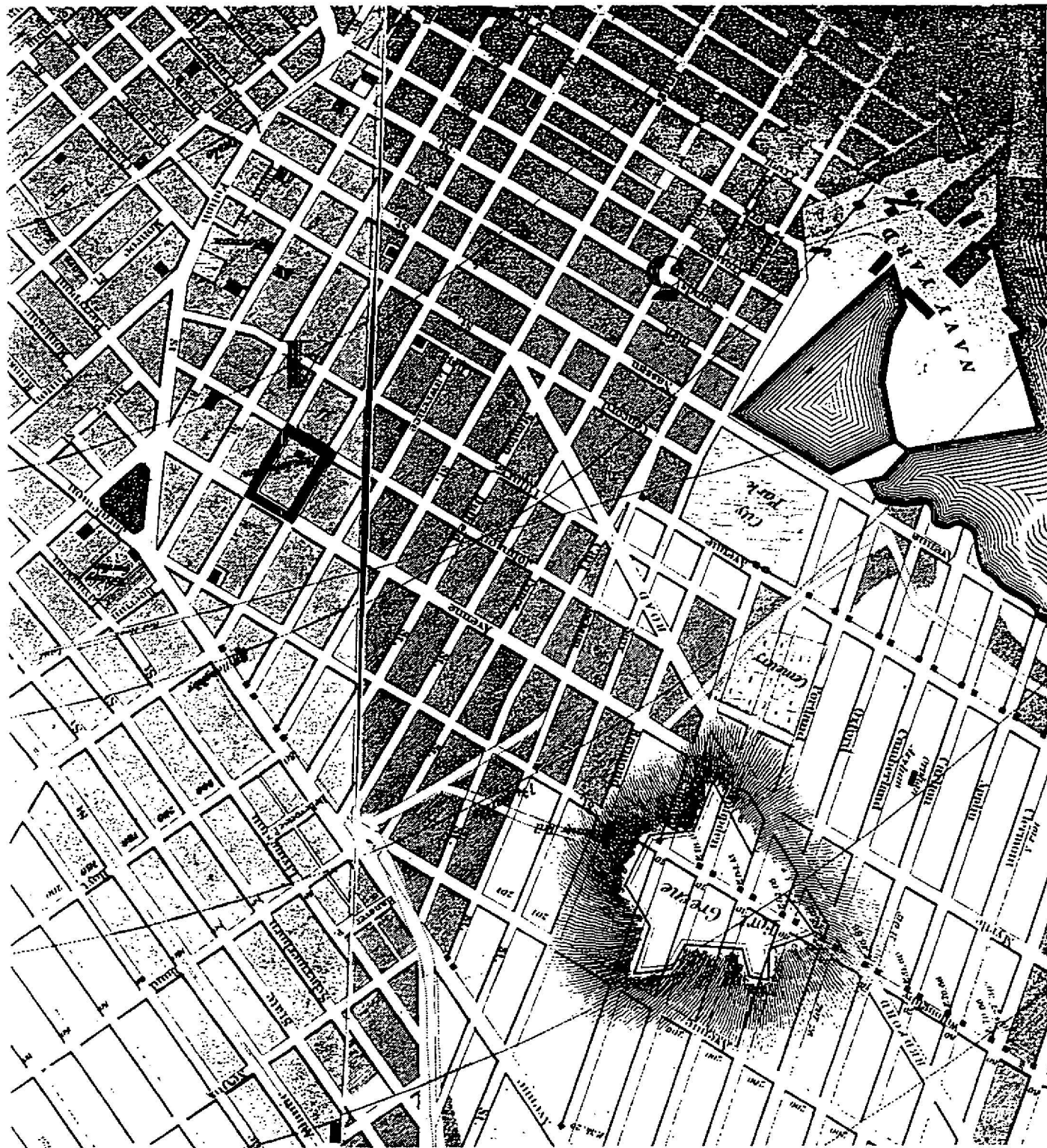
0 50
 ft.

JAY STREET



○ project block area (approx.)

0 c. 1/4
mile N



project block

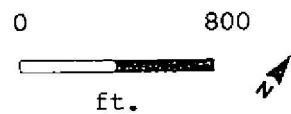


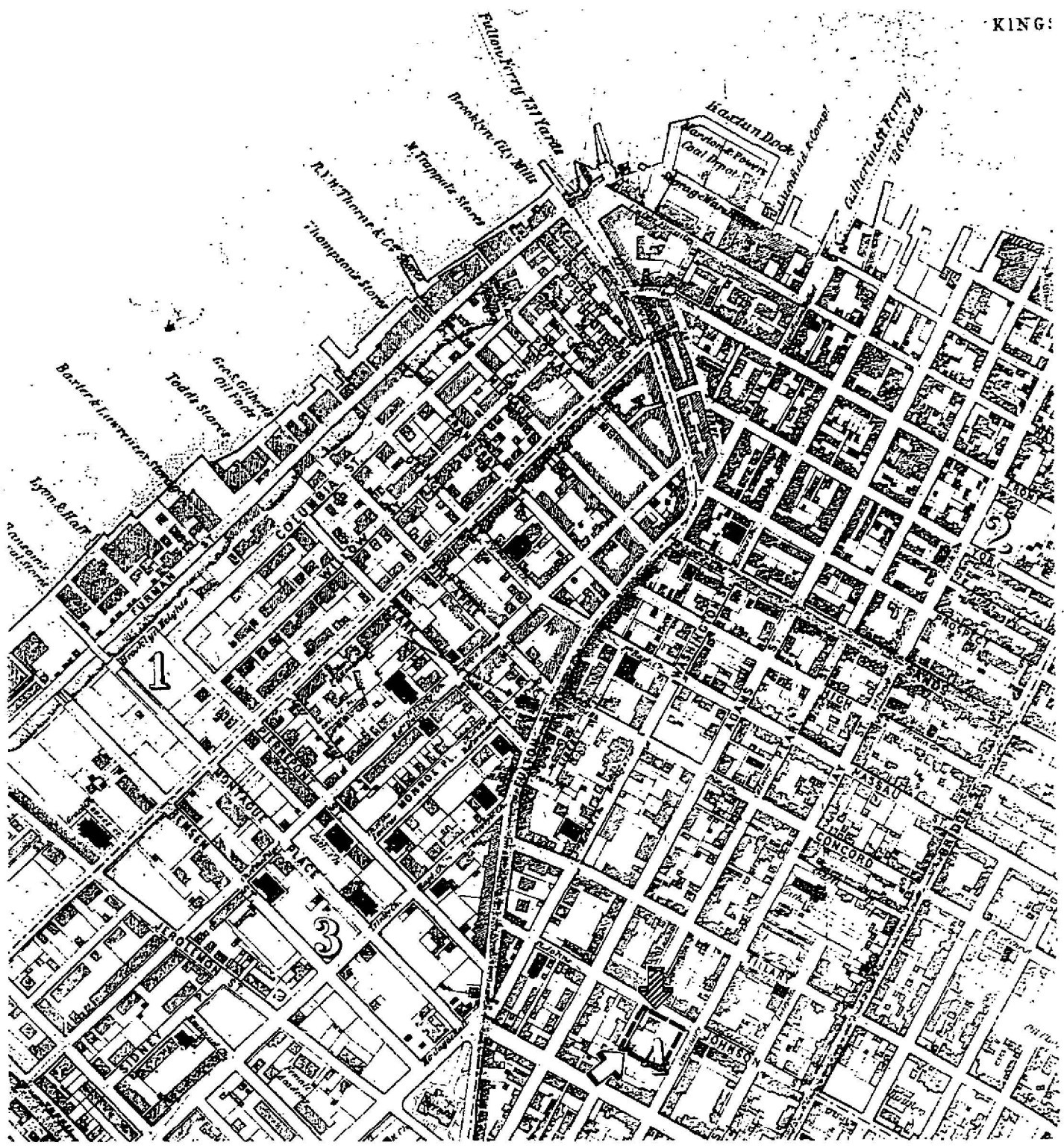
Figure 11 this report). Since no occupation is indicated on this part of Pearl Street in the 1850 census,¹ it is possible this was an outbuilding on the Johnson estate rather than a domicile, but this remains a question. Whatever its function, size, and duration (it is not noted in the 1841-42 Street Directory nor is it shown on the 1855 Perris map of the site [see Figure 12 this report]), any evidence of this structure or its yard features would have been obliterated by subsequent development (e.g, Figure 15 this report).

Possibly by 1852, but certainly by 1855 (see Figure 12), Rev. Johnson apparently built a large brick house for his son, Samuel E. Johnson, on the northeastern corner of the site block at Johnson and Jay Streets (Brooklyn Directories 1852-1855). This building stood until about 1883 since its owner at the time, William Gorden, was then still in residence (Brooklyn Directory 1883). By 1886, this structure had been replaced by smaller buildings on both Johnson and Jay Streets (see Figure 13).

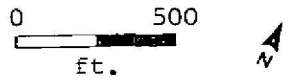
In 1906, the former Johnson property on Pearl and Johnson Streets, which by then belonged to the Catholic Church, had been sold to a development firm (Liber of Deeds [LD] 27:437), and by 1915, tax assessment records and map data indicate six tenements, one with stores on the first floor, and several stores, with and without dwellings above them, on the Pearl Street side of the tract (a small store also fronted on Johnson Street; see Figure 17). Occupation of

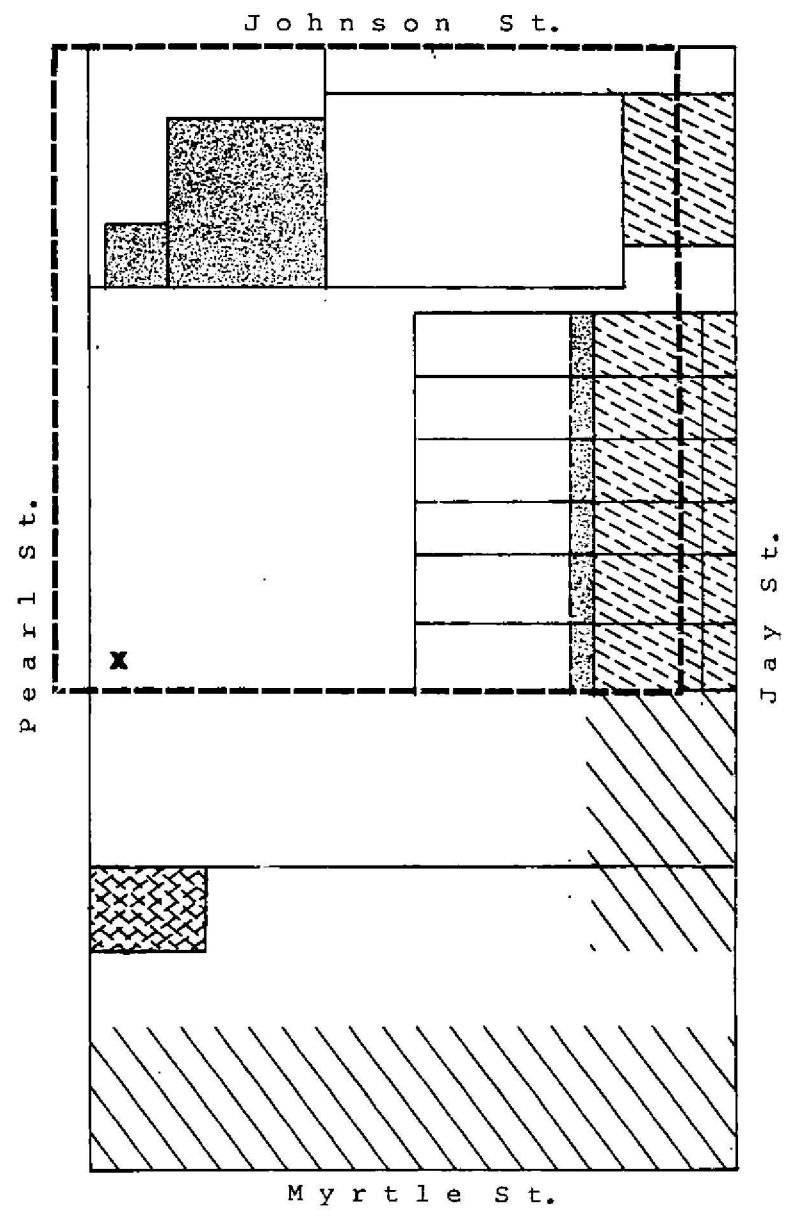
¹ This census lists the family of the Rev. Evan M. Johnson. At the time, he was 51 years old, and although Stiles says Jonson was born in Newport, RI (Stiles 1870:661), New Jersey is given as his place of birth. His wife, Maria, is 50, and his 18 year old son, Harry, is a student; his son, Evan M., is 16 and a clerk, and a daughter, Cornelia, is 10. Also listed were three Irish-born servants: Patrick Howard, 30, a waiter, Bridget Williams, 21, and May Murphy, 50, whose jobs were unspecified. His oldest son, Samuel E., is not listed.




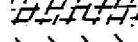


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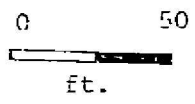



- project site
- ▨ Rev. Evan M. Johnson's home
- unidentified structure





 project site
 brick buildings on site
 frame buildings/ext. on site
 only standing structure (brick) on Pearl St.
 schematic off-site development
 former location of unid. building

 0 50
 ft.

 N



— project site

0 200

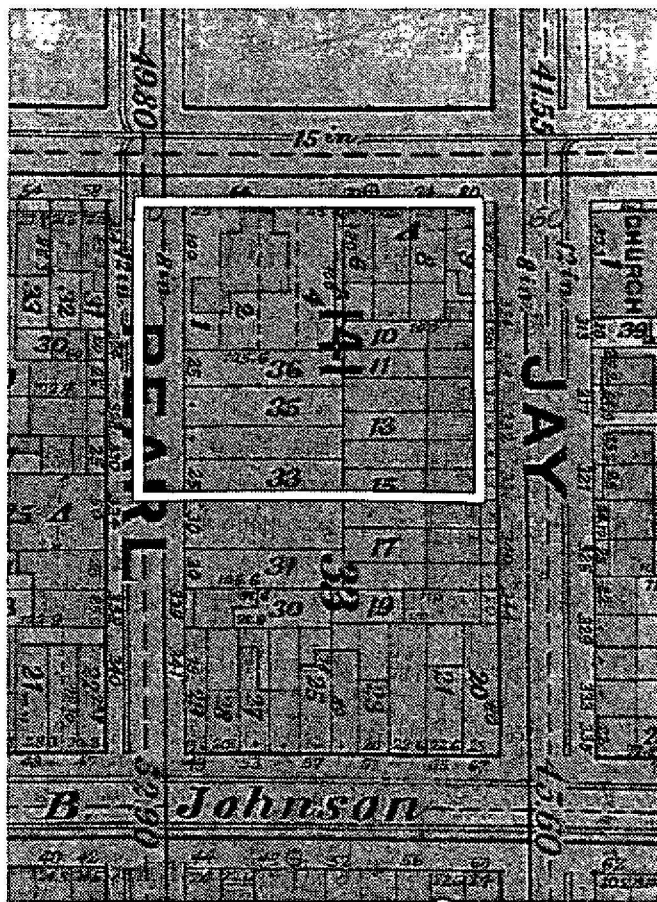
ft.

the tenements is documented in the 1910 Federal Census, and map data indicate they remained standing until 1951 (see Figures 15 to 18).

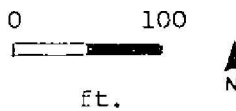
Three late-nineteenth-century Johnson Street structures also persisted until 1951 (see Figures 13 to 18). Since they were built after municipal water and sewers were available (e.g., Stiles 1883: 584-591), they would not have required backyard facilities to supply water and sanitation. But even if they had been erected earlier, the construction of the Department of Social Services building in 1952 would have destroyed evidence of these structures and their backyards. A fourth building that had replaced the brick dwelling shown at the corner of Johnson and Jay Streets from 1855 to 1880 was demolished by 1929 (see Figure 16). This was when Jay Street was widened by taking 20 ft. from the project block (Commissioners' Map 1839-1968; Hyde 1929), and the IND subway was under construction (Hyde 1929; Figure 16 this report). Since it included a 12-ft. basement (Bloch & Hesse 1952:cellar plan), construction of the Department of Social Services building in 1952 would have destroyed all evidence of the yards that had backed the mid- to late-nineteenth century houses on the Johnson Street (Tech Place) and Jay Street sides of the site, much as the earlier erection of tenements on Pearl Street probably had obliterated similar features near Pearl Street.

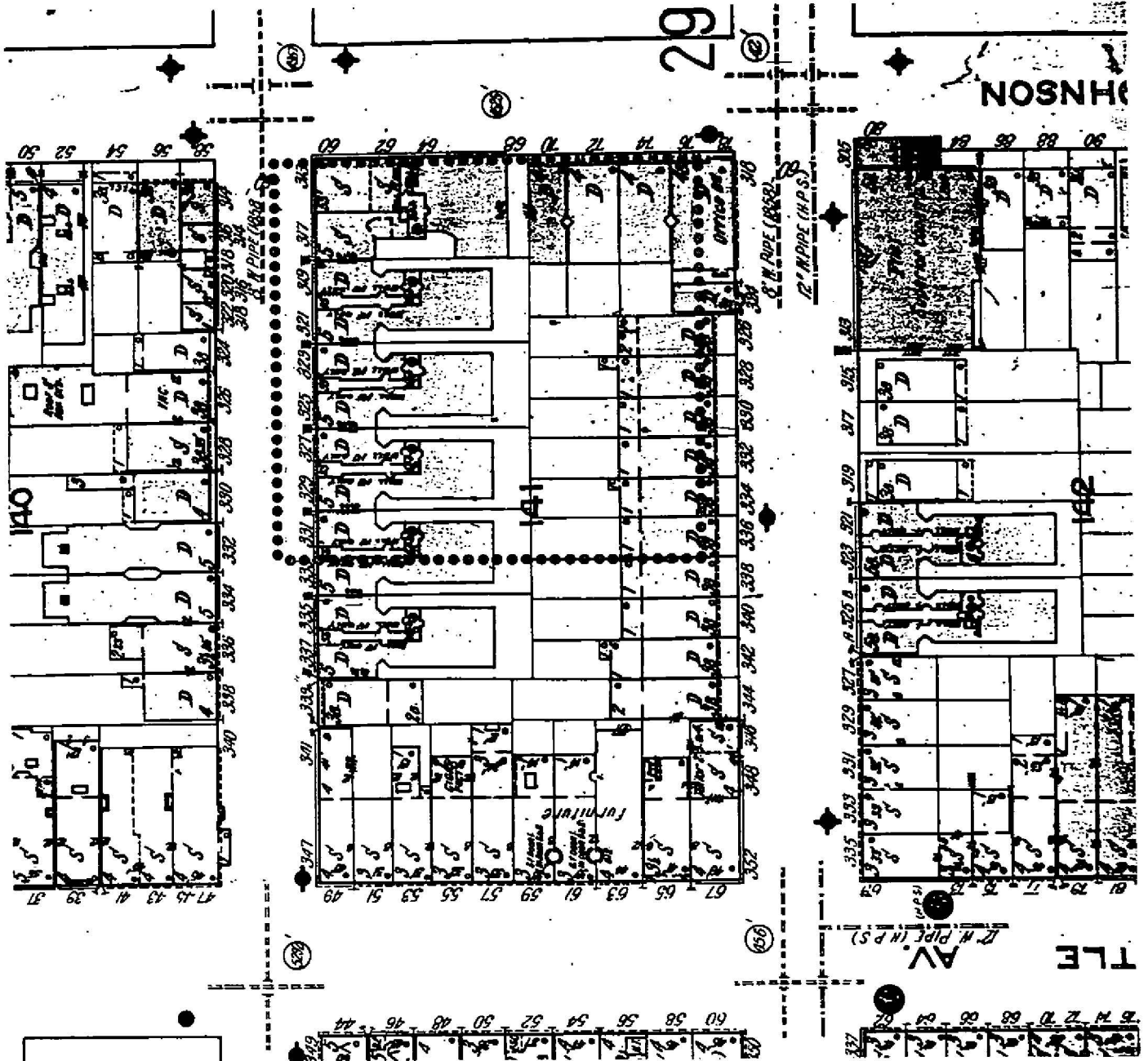
4. DOCUMENTED HISTORY OF THE PROJECT AREA

The project site was part of a forty-acre farm once owned by the Rev. John B. Johnson, a property acquired through purchase of the land from Marten and Elizabet Ryerse in 1755 (AKRF 1989a; see also LD 16:44, filed January 16, 1825). Rev. John B. Johnson was a resident of New York City who was called to Brooklyn in 1802 to be pastor of

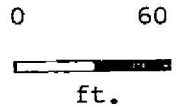


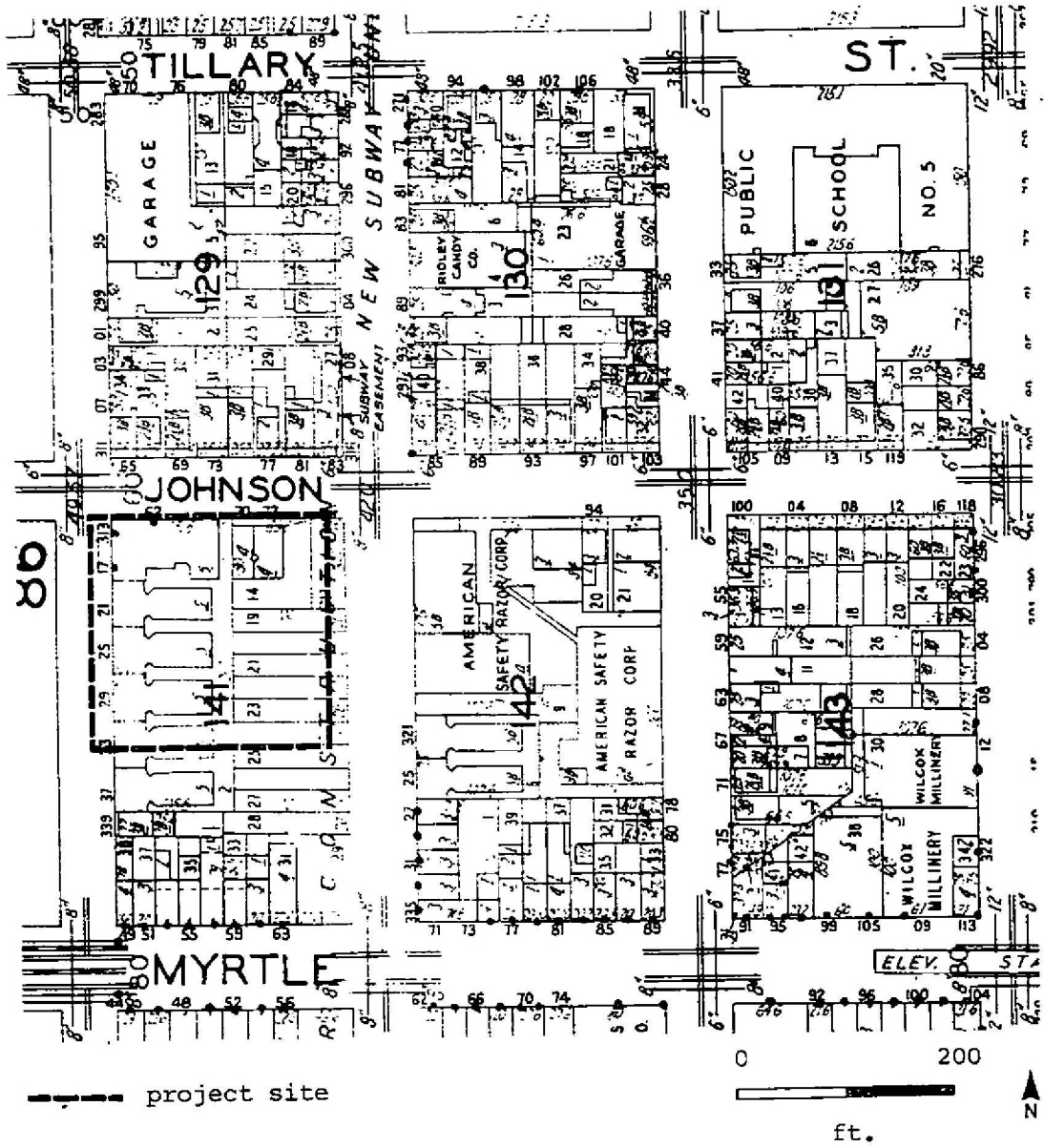
project site
outlined in white

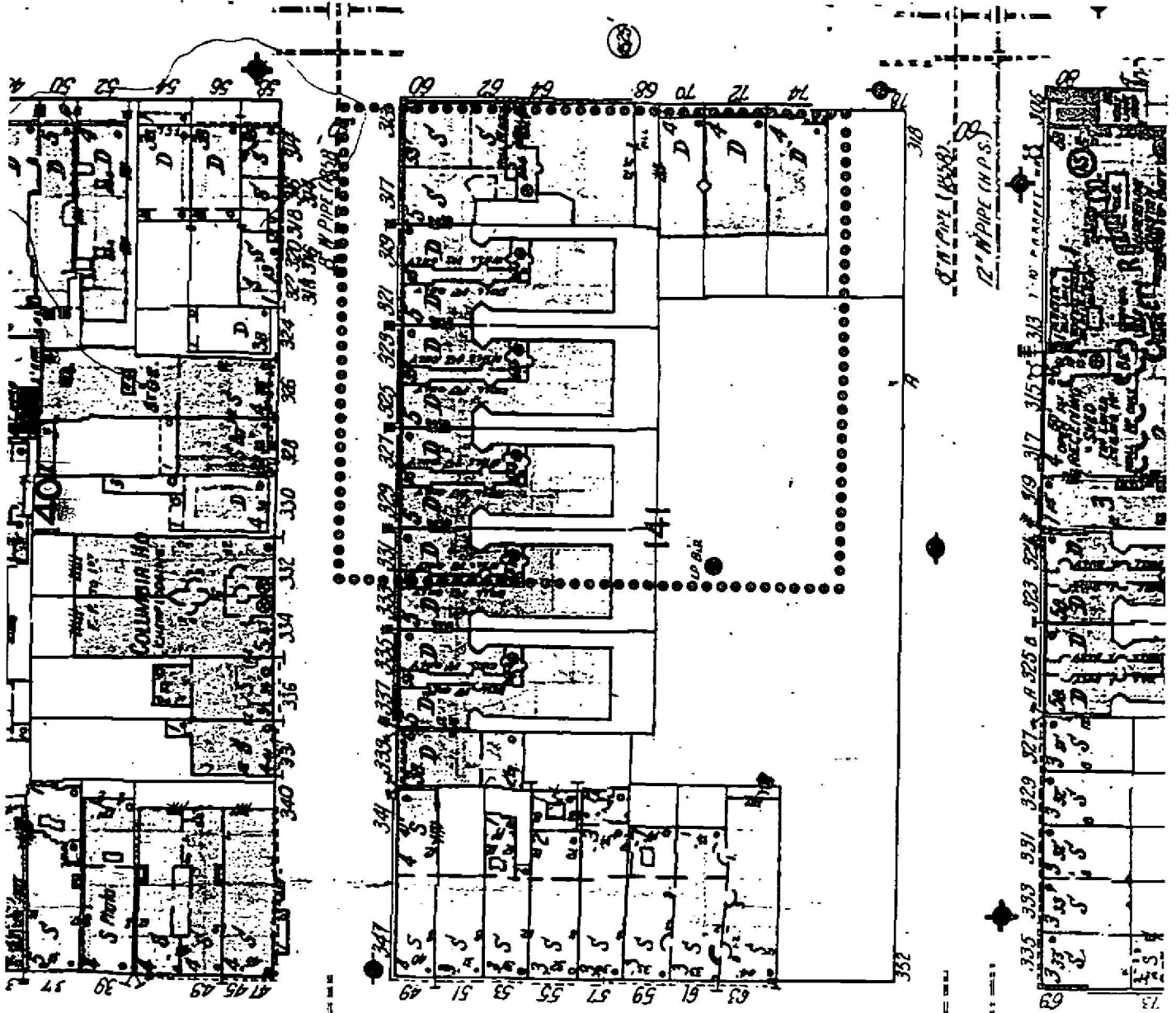




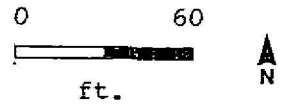
..... project site

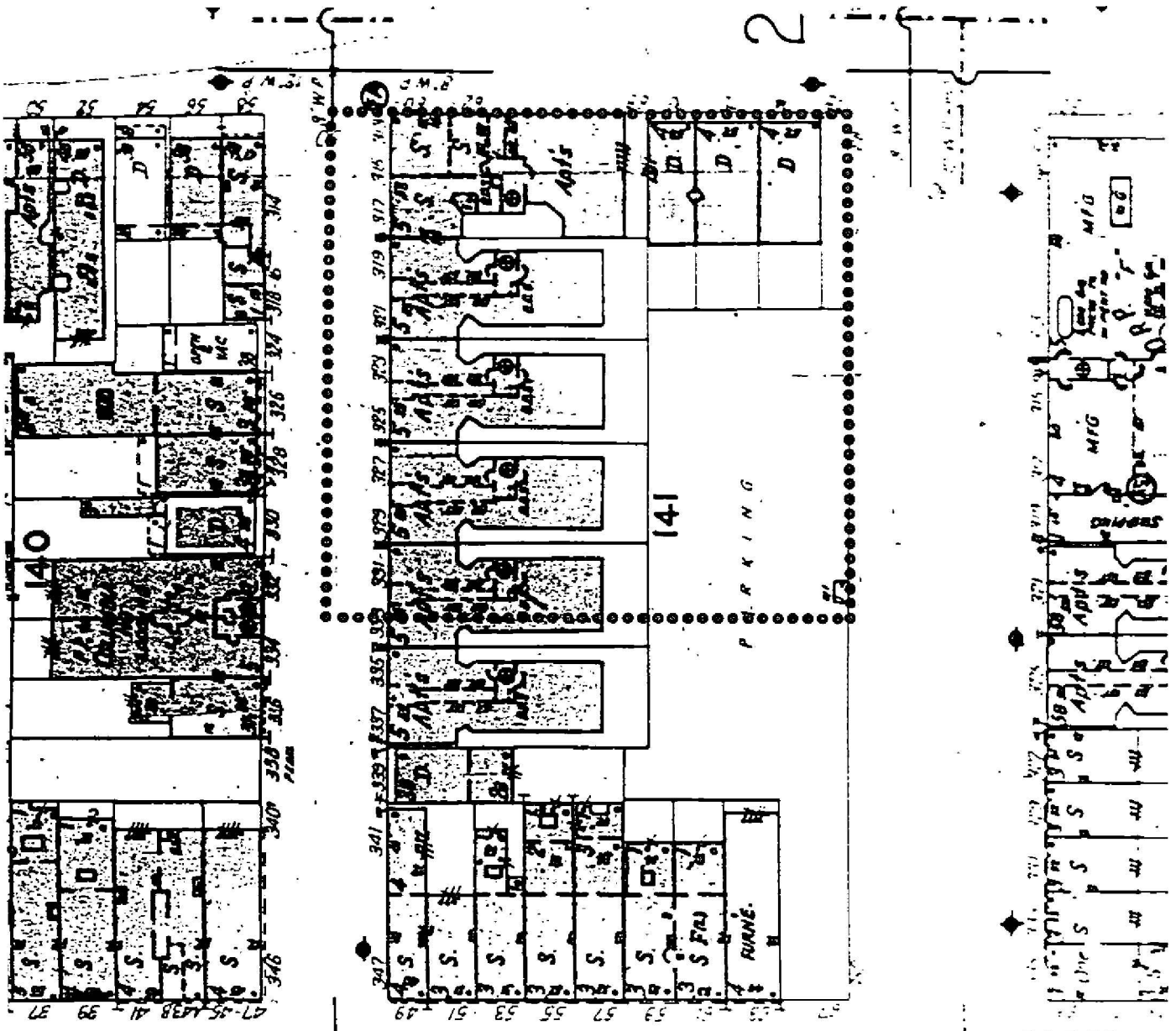






..... project site





..... project site



the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of Brooklyn (Stiles 1870:93). At the time, he was a widower with three small children, Samuel, William, and Maria L. Johnson. By December, 1803, Rev. Johnson had died, leaving in his will thoughtful and detailed instructions for his children's education and guardianship. Aside from bequests to the Dutch Reformed Church and to his many friends, he left the bulk of his estate, including his Brooklyn farmland, to be divided among his children (Liber of Wills 1:381-391).

In 1814, Maria L. Johnson was married to Rev. Evan Malbone Johnson (Stiles 1870:662), an energetic and forward-looking young minister whose career was to become intimately involved with the development and history of the young City of Brooklyn. Rev. Evan M. Johnson (who was no relation to John B. Johnson) may have been born in Newport, Rhode Island in 1792 (Riker 1852:253); however, as noted in Section 3, Footnote 1, New Jersey is listed as his state of birth on the 1850 census and his age was then 51 (if born in 1792, he would have been 58). Whatever his origins and age, he was apparently pastor at Newtown, Long Island, from 1814 to 1826. Through the death of his wife in 1825, he inherited an interest in his father-in-law's Brooklyn estate (Stiles 1870:661-663). The farm was divided between Rev. Evan Johnson and his brothers-in-law, William L. Johnson and Rev. Samuel Roosevelt Johnson, and the three men proceeded to subdivide and develop Johnson Street from Bridge to Adams Streets (AKRF 1989a: II.C-2; LD 36:279).

To serve the needs of this rapidly-growing eastern section of Brooklyn, Rev. Evan Johnson founded St. John's Episcopal Church, which he built on his own land one block west of the project site and

furnished at his own expense. The church opened for worship on September 24, 1826. Rev. Evan Johnson was the first rector of St. John's, serving its thriving congregation without recompense for twenty years (Brooklyn Eagle 1946). In 1847 he withdrew to found St. Michael's Episcopal Church, at High and Gold Streets, which was conceived as a mission to a "crowded and neglected" dockside congregation (Stiles 1870:662; Brooklyn Eagle 1902).

"Dominie" Johnson, as he was also known, was an active reformer who was later described as one of Brooklyn's "most socially-minded citizens and a veritable barb in the sides of the complacent" (Weld 1938:103). A respected and well-loved figure, he was long remembered for his hospitality and generosity to people of all faiths, and for his willingness to perform marriage ceremonies regardless of the convenience of the hour or the social status of the celebrants (Brooklyn Eagle 1930). He was a lifelong proponent of education, a moving force in the opening of Myrtle Avenue and the subsequent growth of an active nineteenth-century commercial area which surrounded it, and a leader of the Temperance movement in Brooklyn.

Construction was begun on Rev. Johnson's residence on Johnson Street, at the corner of Pearl Street on the project site, in the summer of 1829 (by this time, he had taken a second wife, Maria Purdy of Newtown, and his growing family eventually consisted of a son by his first marriage and three children by his second [Stiles 1870:662]). It was reported by the Star on July 16, 1829, that when the frame of the house was erected, "there was no use at all of ardent spirits" (Weld 1938:300 fn 19). House-raising in the temperate

fashion was a reform spearheaded by northern clergymen, such as the Rev. Johnson, in an era when the work place was still characterized by heavy drinking and consequent inefficiency and disorderly behavior (Larkin 1989:298).

By 1830, the Rev. Johnson was in residence at the corner of Johnson and Pearl Streets where he remained until 1856 (Brooklyn Directories). Although he owned the entire project block, only its northwest corner was then developed (Tax Manuscript 1841). Later sources refer to "the ancient farmhouse" and the possibility that Pearl Street was originally the cow-path to the Johnson barn (Brooklyn Eagle 1946), but such descriptions appear to be apocryphal. While no picture has been found, the four-story house built in 1829 has been described as large and imposing, and was considered "one of the showplaces of the infant city" (Brooklyn Eagle 1913).

The Johnson home makes its earliest known appearance on Stoddard's 1839 map (see Figure 10 this report); on the Dripps map of 1850 it is still the only structure on Johnson Street, but, as noted earlier, a small unidentified structure is then shown in the southwestern corner of the project site (see Figure 11 this report). By 1855, the Perris map documents the brick house Johnson apparently built at the corner of Johnson and Jay Streets for his son, Samuel E. Johnson. Samuel, undoubtedly the offspring of Johnson's first marriage, was an attorney (e.g., Brooklyn Directories 1852-1856). At this time, the western side of Jay Street was lined with brick row houses (see Figure 12 this report); as mentioned earlier, all these buildings undoubtedly had associated privies, cisterns, or wells.

In 1856, Rev. Johnson and his wife, Maria [Purdy] Johnson, sold their residence to the Right Rev. John Loughlin, the first

Catholic bishop of Brooklyn (LD 422:90), and the Johnsons relocated to a smaller house on the west side of Pearl Street (Brooklyn Eagle 1913). Bishop Loughlin apparently purchased the property to house Visitation Academy, a monastic order and a school for young women that he had founded in New York City in 1855. The Academy was incorporated by the Legislature of New York under the title of "Female Institute of the Visitation," (Visitation Academy Circular and Catalog 1885:3) and the property was conveyed to the Academy under that name in the same year (LD 614:136).

The building may have been altered when it changed hands, as Lloyd's map of 1867 shows what appears to be an entrance portico added on the Johnson Street side (Lloyd 1867; see also Robinson 1898, Figure 14 this report). A high brick wall was also said to have been built around the property (Brooklyn Eagle 1913). Visitation Academy is described by Stiles as a "conventual establishment ...[which]... embraces also a young ladies academy of a high order, containing one hundred and twenty pupils" (Stiles 1870:739). The Federal Census of 1880 reports the residence of eight female teachers, all of Irish parentage. The neighborhood at the time appears to have been respectably middle-class: according to the census, the houses along Jay Street were occupied by single families headed by wine, milk, and tea merchants, a jeweler, a ship's broker, a widow, and two retired house-holders.

Although he no longer lived on the block after 1856, Rev. Johnson apparently retained ownership of the house on the corner of Johnson and Jay Streets until 1864 when he sold it to John and Mary Pruyn (LD 632:10). The Pruyns occupied the house (e.g., Brooklyn

Directory 1870), then sold it to the county in 1870 (LD 959:6); in 1871, William Gorden, a confectioner, bought it from the county and lived there with his large family and servants: the 1880 census indicates he was then a widower with six children, ranging from 3 to 18, who shared the house with a female servant, a stable boy, and, surprisingly, two possible boarders. His confectionary was then at 325 Fulton Street (Brooklyn Directory 1880)

Between 1880 (Bromley and Robinson 1880) and 1886 (Robinson 1886; Figure 13 this report), three new brick buildings were built on the Johnson Street side of the site; these, and a new structure on the corner of Jay and Johnson, replaced the 1850s home originally built by Rev. Johnson for his son. At this time, and into the 1900s, this property belonged to the Gorden family (e.g., LD 15:293; Tax Assessments 1906-1907).

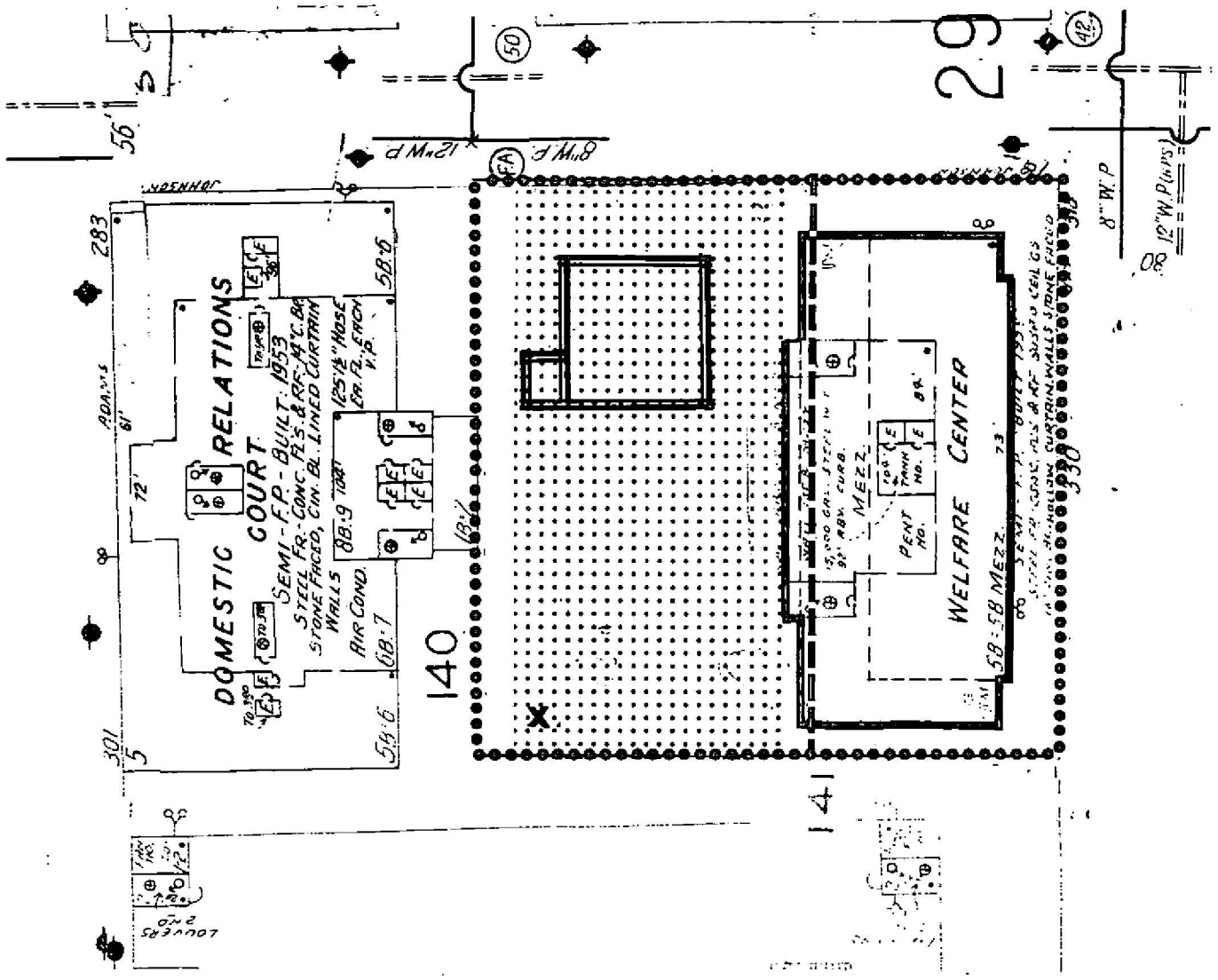
The Institute of the Visitation relocated to 209 Clinton Avenue in 1885, a move partly due to rapid commercial growth in the area (Visitation Academy Circular and Catalog 1885:3). The former Johnson house was then used by the Sisters of St. Joseph as a school for St. James' parish (Brooklyn Eagle 1913). In July 1906, the property, which had passed to Charles E. McDonnell, then the Bishop of Brooklyn, was sold to Realty Associates (LD 27:437) and the building was demolished soon afterward (Brooklyn Eagle 1913). As noted earlier, by 1908, most, if not all, of the lot formerly occupied by Rev. Johnson's home, as well as the block-front on the eastern side of Pearl Street, were the site of five-story tenement buildings.

The houses on the eastern side of the block along Jay Street had been demolished by 1929 and the IND subway line was then under

construction beneath the vacant lots (Hyde 1929; see Figure 16 this report). These lots were still being used for parking in 1951 (Sanborn 1951; see Figure 18 this report). As mentioned previously, Pearl Street, once the western site boundary, was theoretically closed in 1945 although it appears on maps until 1951, and the Department of Social Services building at 330 Jay Street that now covers the eastern half of the project site was completed in 1954 (Sanborn 1989). At this writing, the former tenement sites comprise the parking lot for this building.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the nineteenth-century development of the 330 Jay Street site would have warranted archaeological investigation, subsequent construction has undoubtedly destroyed its potential (Figure 19). This potential included exploration of the homestead site of the Reverend Evan Malbone Johnson, an Episcopal minister who played a role in Brooklyn's religious and temperance history. It also might have included the chance to investigate the lifestyles of the middle-class residents of Jay Street. However, given the site's twentieth-century development--which included the construction of five-story tenements on Pearl Street in 1908 and the Department of Social Services building on Jay Street from 1952 to 1954--this potential has been destroyed. Consequently, no further research or investigation is recommended.



- project site
- tenement development (1908)
- western limit of c. 1855 Jay St. development
- Department of Social Services building (existing)
- ==== Rev. Evan M. Johnson residence site (approx.)
- X site of unid. structure c. 1850 (approx.)

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