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ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTING REPORT FOR  
457, 461 AND 465 WAVERLY AVENUE  
BROWN MEMORIAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT PROJECT  
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK  
CEQR# 91-075K

1991

Prepared for:  
Tunolb Construction Co., Inc.  
619-25 Hancock Street  
Brooklyn, New York 11233

Prepared by:  
William I. Roberts IV  
Greenhouse Consultants Inc.  
54 Stone Street, 7th Floor  
New York, New York 10004

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## **LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

<b>William I. Roberts IV</b>	-	<b>Principal Investigator, Author</b>
<b>Michael W. Davenport</b>	-	<b>Cartographer, Field Technician</b>
<b>Paula M. Crowley</b>	-	<b>Word Processor</b>



## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the archaeological survey of the proposed Brown Memorial Baptist Church expansion was to answer a very specific question generated by the background research conducted for this project. The Archaeological and Historical Sensitivity Evaluation, which was the first phase of research undertaken regarding the Brown Memorial project area, indicated that it was possible that the five houses that once stood within the project area had been constructed with privies in their rear yards (Roberts 1991:9). The documentary evidence indicated only that the five houses had been connected to the sewers by mid-1867 although construction could have started as early as March 1860 (ibid:6-9). The most expedient method of answering the question of whether the houses were connected to the sewers when built or had privies instead was to conduct archaeological test excavations. This was recommended for three of the five houses where occupation did not change from the initial sale until 1867 or later (ibid:12).

The project area consists of the western part of the present Brown Memorial Baptist Church property at the corner of Gates and Waverly Avenues in the Clinton Hill section of the Borough of Brooklyn, New York City. This property is designated Lot 17 on Block 1978 at present. The western portion was formerly Lots 12 through 16, and is currently occupied by a gravel parking lot approximately 102 north-south by 70 feet east-west. See Figure 1 for the location of the project area.

## METHODOLOGY

The subsurface archaeological testing of the Brown Memorial Baptist Church project area in Brooklyn, New York took place on 5 March 1991. As stated in our scope-of-work for the archaeological testing, the technique used to explore the subsurface deposits and thereby determine the presence or absence of the possible historical archaeological resources was the mechanical excavation of trenches. A total of three trenches were excavated by backhoe, and closely monitored by archaeologists. This testing strategy was designed by the principal investigator and approved by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission staff. Mechanically excavated trenches were chosen because the features that were being searched for, mid-nineteenth century privies, are substantial masonry constructions several feet in diameter that would not be seriously damaged if struck by a backhoe bucket; and the backhoe could remove large quantities of earth within a short time. This allowed all three lots to be tested in one day and assured that if negative evidence was produced it would be reliable.

The three backhoe trenches excavated were located at the rear of former Lots 12, 14 and 16. Figure 2 illustrates the location of the trenches within the project area. Trench 1 investigated Lot 16 at the corner of Gates and Waverly Avenues (formerly 457 Waverly Avenue). Trench 1 was 22 feet by 4 feet in size crossing the full 22 foot width of Lot 16 with its east side two feet west of the existing church building. Trench 2 investigated the rear of Lot 14, formerly 461 Waverly Avenue. It crossed the 20 foot width of the lot with its narrow dimension of four feet beginning two feet west of the west wall of the present church. Trench 3 was located in Lot 12, formerly 465 Waverly Avenue. Although it was planned to be the same size and shape as Trench 2, its position in the corner of the present parking lot and the location of a parked car that could not be moved limited access for the backhoe and necessitated a change in size and shape. Trench 3 was 18 feet by 8 feet covering 90 percent of the 20 foot width of Lot 12, and from two to ten feet west of the present church.

Excavation in all three trenches began with removal of the parking lot surface and then proceeded by removing approximately 0.5 feet thick deposits of soil until a depth of at least five feet was reached at one end of the trench. The backhoe then moved back and continued this process in the next piece of the trench until the full length was reached. Soil descriptions were then recorded and photographs of the completed trench taken. All trenches were backfilled after the testing was completed.



Figure 1.

Project area shown on the USGS 7.5 minute series Brooklyn Quadrangle, 1967 (photorevised 1979).



## STRATIGRAPHIC SUMMARY

The strata exposed in two of the three backhoe trenches excavated at Brown Memorial Baptist Church were consistent while those seen the remaining trench exhibited some variation. Three strata were seen in Trenches 1 and 3. The top stratum consisted of grey gravel in a matrix of light grey sand. It was approximately 0.6 feet in thickness and was interpreted as the parking lot surface. Below this was a stratum consisting of silty to sandy loam medium to dark brown in color. A few flagstones were found set into the top of this layer which was about 0.6 feet in thickness. This second stratum was interpreted as topsoil from the former backyards. The bottom of the three strata identified consisted of a matrix which was predominately sand but had packets of clay, patches of silt and sandy silt, and stone inclusions ranging from pebbles through cobbles to small boulders. This layer continued below the bottom of the excavations, so it was over four feet thick. It was interpreted as fill based on the mixed grain sizes and documentary evidence regarding the grades on Block 1978 and the adjacent streets (Roberts 1991:10). See Plates 1 and 4 for illustrations of this stratigraphy.

The top two strata in Trench 2 were identical to those in Trenches 1 and 3. The third stratum, as identified in Trenches 1 and 3, was present at the southern end of Trench 2. The situation in the northern two-thirds of Trench 2 was different. Stratum 3 had been cut and a large pit excavated. A deposit of ash and building rubble was found to the north of the cut line. This deposit existed as a narrow nearly vertical band adjacent to the cut but became a horizontal deposit about 0.5 feet thick at a depth of approximately 4.5 feet below surface. This horizontal ash and rubble deposit tapered off to the north becoming mixed with yellow-brown and brown silty sand. At the base of the vertical ash deposit immediately adjacent to the bottom of the cut line was a brick and mortar wall running east-west only one brick thick. Above the ash deposit north of the wall was a layer of yellow-brown to brown silty sand with cobbles and small boulders. This layer was interpreted as fill placed after the partial destruction of the brick wall. The brick wall was interpreted as the southern boundary of an ash disposal pit. The deposit of ashes and building rubble is seen as the remains of the last load of ashes in the pit mixed with rubble from its demolition. See Plates 2 and 3 for illustrations of Trench 2.

No artifacts or other samples were collected from any of the layers encountered in the three trenches excavated. This decision was based on the fact that no features that could possibly be privies were found, and very few artifacts other than the building rubble in Trench 2 and a few obviously twentieth century items from Stratum 1 were seen.

## RESULTS

The test excavations undertaken at the Brown Memorial Baptist Church project area successfully answered the question that served as the reason for conducting the testing. It can now be reliably concluded that the houses in the former lots at 457, 461 and 465 Waverly Avenue were constructed without privies. The test trenches examined the rear of each lot. This is where privies have been located in lots with these features investigated as part of the MetroTech project in central Brooklyn and other projects. No features of any kind were found in Trenches 1 and 3 at 457 and 465 Waverly Avenue. The only feature found in Trench 2 at 461 Waverly Avenue was interpreted as an ash deposit associated with a brick wall. This feature did not resemble any known privies. Since these houses did not initially dispose of their sewage in privies, it can be safely concluded that they were hooked up to the Brooklyn sewers when constructed. The earliest sale of these three houses was May 1861 when 461 Waverly Avenue was bought by the Wendelken family (Roberts 1991:Table 4). The adjacent house at 463 Waverly Avenue was sold in May 1860 (ibid:Table 3), so it appears that sewers were available under Waverly or Gates Avenue by that date. This information would apply









to the remainder of the west side of Block 1978 and to all of the east side of Block 1977 across Waverly Avenue and probably adjacent blocks.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is our conclusion that the historic archaeological resources sought by this testing, privies dating to the 1860s, do not exist under the surface of the former lots at 457, 461 and 465 Waverly Avenue within the Brown Memorial Baptist Church expansion project area. These were the only features of this time period expected here that were considered potentially significant (Roberts 1991:12). There was no strong reason to believe that features from earlier time periods would exist here, and if any did exist from the 1850s or earlier they would be buried under eleven feet of fill (ibid:11). Therefore it appears highly unlikely that significant cultural resources of any period will be impacted by the proposed expansion of Brown Memorial Baptist Church. We recommend that no additional archaeological testing or mitigation is necessary at this location.

Plate 1:

View of Trench 1 looking north.  
Scale in tenths of feet.

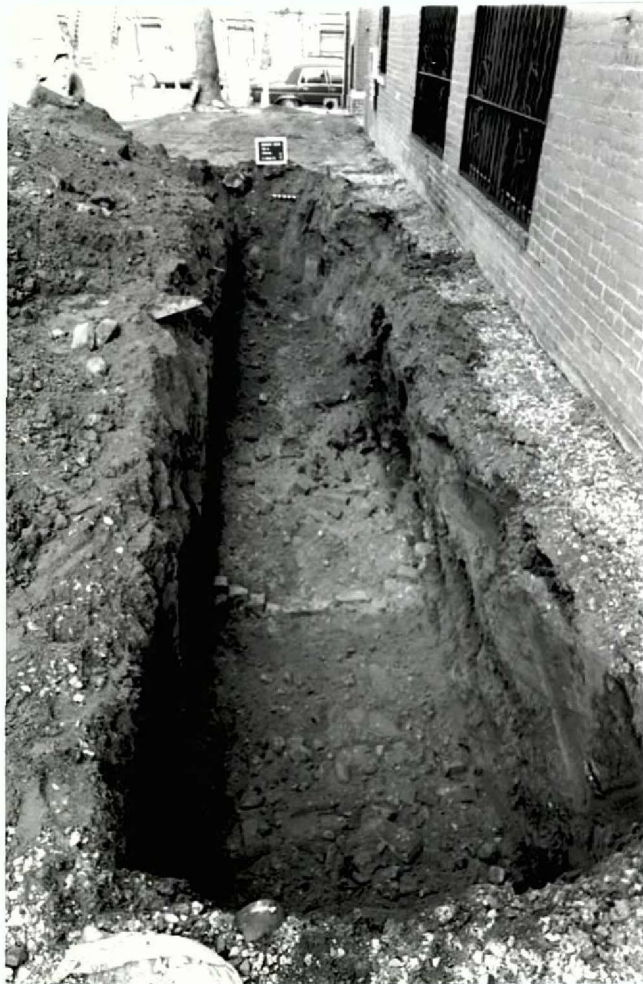
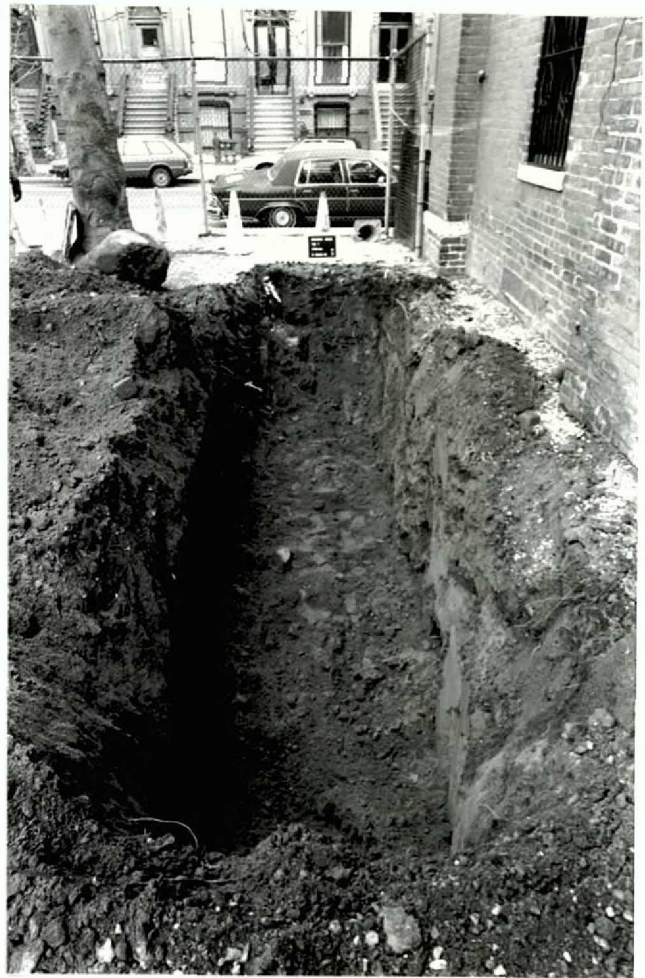


Plate 2:

View of Trench 2 looking north  
showing brick wall with ash deposit beyond.  
Scale in tenths of feet.

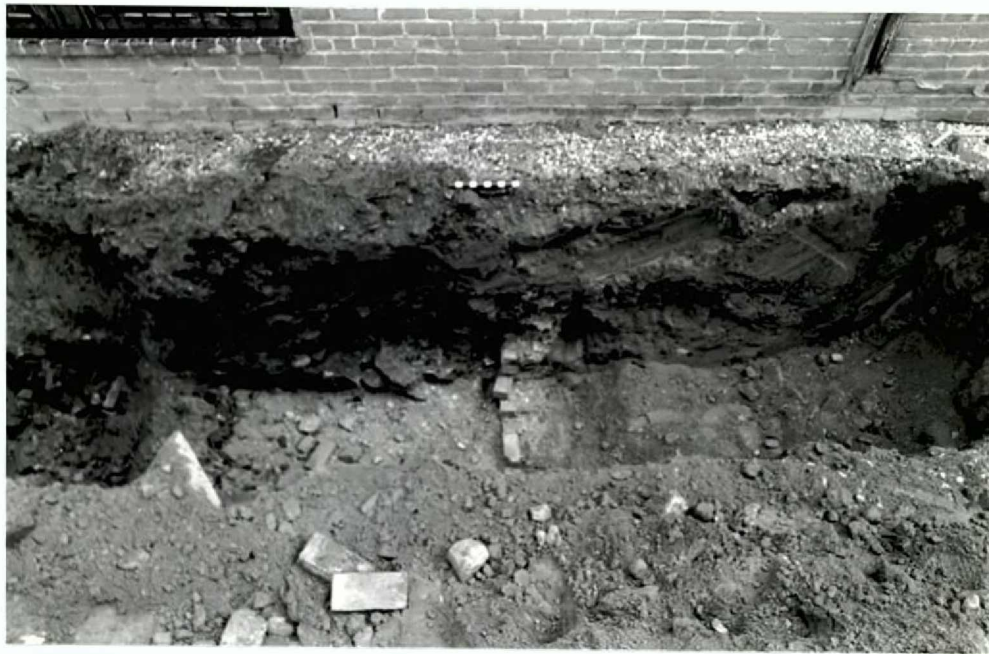


Plate 3: View of east section of Trench 2 showing brick wall and ash deposit. Scale in tenths of feet.



Plate 4: View of Trench 3 looking south. Scale in tenths of feet.





## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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