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CEQR

STAGE 1A DOCUMENTARY STUDY

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING FOR THE HOMELESS
LINDEN BOULEVARD, DEWITT & VAN SINDEREN AVENUES

CEQR #87-183K

for

City of New York Department of General Services

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for

KEY PERSPECTIVES

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INTRODUCTION

This study is designed to fulfill the requirement of a Stage IA documentary survey for Block 3871, Lots 50, 51 and portions of Lots 1 and 101 in the New Lots section of Brooklyn, as required by The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. These lots were flagged for study because they were viewed as being a potential source of significant remains dating to the prehistoric period of Amerind occupation. In addition, block 3871 is located near an area of significant activity during the historic period, bordering as it does the 17th-century settlement of New Lots.

This study consists of an examination, through maps and texts, of the history of the area of Block 3871 and its natural topography. In addition, the building history of the site has been researched and the site visited and examined in its present condition. The records of core-borings done on the site were examined, as well as the core borings themselves. The information is analyzed to determine if a Stage IB archaeological survey should or should not be required, and an appropriate recommendation is made. A Stage IB archaeological survey will be required if, on the basis of the Stage IA documentary research, the site is determined to have the possibility of yielding significant archaeological materials.

The research for this study was conducted at The New York Public Library, the Brooklyn College Library, the Registry of Deeds

and Mortgages at the Municipal Building in Brooklyn, the Brooklyn Historical Society, the office and Manhattan and Brooklyn storerooms of the Subsurface Exploration Section, Engineering Services, Department of General Services, City of New York, and in the authors' personal libraries.

TOPOGRAPHY

The site consists of a roughly triangular plot of land in Block 3871 in the New Lots/East New York section of Brooklyn. Included within the site are lots 50 and 51, as well as portions of lots 1 and 101. The total site area is 108,811 square feet. (See Map 1)

The site is bounded by Linden Boulevard to the north, Van Sinderen Avenue to the east, Avenue D to the southeast, Dewitt Avenue to the south and the Long Island Railroad tracks to the west (Maps 2 and 3).

There are no structures on the site at present and the entire site area is accessible from the surrounding sidewalks. There are some fence-posts standing around the site perimeter indicating that the area was once enclosed. These posts are made of galvanized iron and are of recent type.

The area when visited in December 1987 was covered with weeds and grass. Modern refuse had been dumped in the southwestern corner of the site. This material consists of construction debris and some relatively high (2 - 3 m.) mounds of apparently clean rocky earth fill. This fill was presumably excavated at another site and dumped in the lot, since there are no traces within the generally level area of the development site of past excavations. In addition to this debris, other features on the site that would restrict

archaeological shovel testing are a single track railroad spur that runs along the western border of the site at the base of the Long Island Railroad embankment and an abandoned automobile situated in the central western portion of the site.

The site is generally level except on the west where there is a sudden, steep slope up to the artificially elevated Long Island Railroad embankment. The ground in the central portion is slightly lower than in the surrounding areas. In this central section, the ground surface consists of sand without topsoil. Topsoil is present in the south where, particularly in the southeast, poor drainage leaves patches of standing water. Several large (ca. 0.50 m. maximum dimension) fieldstones were observed, embedded in the topsoil in the south-central part of the site. These were the only features apparent on the site that might conceivably be remnants of previous structures, although the absence of any structures on any of the atlases consulted makes the former presence of any significant architecture within the block most unlikely. (See Plate 1 and 2).

The topsoil layer in the north appears to be thinner than in the south, and the ground surface there in general gives the impression of having been littered and mixed with modern garbage to a greater extent than was the area to the south.

Thirteen core-borings were made on the site in September 1987. They were clustered in the area where the proposed structure is to be built. Twelve of those borings show from two to four feet of fill above deep deposits of brown sand; boring 1 contained twelve

feet of fill over the same sand.¹ (See Map 4)

The site lies to the north of Fresh Kill or Fresh Creek, a water course that flows south into Jamaica Bay. This creek turns westward directly south of Block 3871, to cross Linden Boulevard about 3 blocks west of the site.

1. Engineering Services, Subsurface Exploration Section, Job Number HR-115-1837 B-4. In addition to the Record of Borings, the stored cores themselves were examined at the Municipal Building, Manhattan, and the Municipal Building, Brooklyn on January 12 and January 15, 1988.

PREHISTORY

Prehistoric occupation in the northeast, including the New York City area, has been divided into the following periods: Paleo-Indian, 10,500 - 8000 B.C., Archaic, 8000 - 1300 B.C., Transitional, 1300 - 1000 B.C., and Woodland, 1000 B.C. - historic occupation. The Archaic and Woodland periods have been subdivided into Early, Middle, and Late phases as follows: Early Archaic, 8000 - 6000 B.C., Middle Archaic, 6000 - 4000 B.C., Late Archaic, 4000 - 1300 B.C., Early Woodland, 1000 - 300 B.C., Middle Woodland, 300 B.C. - 1000 A.D., Late Woodland, 1000 A.D. - European contact. Each of these periods is characterized by particular settlement types.

Paleo-Indian sites are often along areas of low, swampy ground or on very high, protected areas.² Within New York City, Paleo-Indian remains have been excavated at the Port Mobile site on Staten Island, and worked stone implements of Paleo-Indian type have been found at additional locations within that borough.³

Paleo-Indian materials have not yet been discovered in Brooklyn. In predicting the location of Paleo-Indian sites, it must be remembered that the topography of Brooklyn and its surrounding region have changed considerably since the beginning of the Neothermal period. The discovery of the remains of

²Ritchie 1980:7.

³Ibid.: pp. xvii f. and map, pp. 4f.

land-based megafauna such as mammoth and mastodon on the Atlantic Ocean floor along the Continental Shelf opposite the New York - New Jersey sea coast⁴ serves as a reminder that the geography of the New York area has been altered considerably since antiquity, and that microhabitats such as the stream that flowed adjacent to the project area may have been radically different during the earlier periods of prehistory.

Although historic atlases and records indicate that the northern bank of Fresh Creek was situated about a block south of the site (still present in 1893)⁵, it is doubtful that this stream in any detail reflects the Paleo-Indian topography of Brooklyn. Considering the general scarcity of Paleo-Indian remains within New York City, the probability of such remains being present on the site is extremely low.

The Early Archaic was characterized by small hunting camps. According the Landmarks Commission study for a city-wide archaeological predictive model, such sites do not have great archaeological visibility, nor are they likely to be associated with particular land forms.⁶ Finds from other portions of the U.S. Northeast indicate that during the Middle Archaic there was a large increase of population. As yet, there is little evidence of this time period in the New York City region and thus it is

4. Chesler 1982:20.

5. Beers, Comstock and Cline 1873: 39; G.W. Bromley 1893: pl.42.

6. Baugher et al. 1982:10

especially important to watch for remains from this era. Discoveries of Middle Archaic components are necessary in order to define occurrence-characteristics and increase the accuracy of future predictions of site occurrence.

For the Late Archaic, sites are most likely to be found in littoral areas.⁷ Block 3871, situated near a stream and marsh area not far from the sea coast would seem then in theory to have high potential for archaic utilization (Map 5).

Littoral areas and the zones along major inland water ways such as the Hudson are also known to have been settled during Transitional times. As yet, there is not a large enough body of information to accurately predict Transitional site occurrence within New York City in anything except the most general terms.⁸

In the Woodland period, many different kinds of settlements existed. Permanent and semi-permanent settlements, villages, as well as seasonal campsites and food gathering/processing stations, are characteristic. Agriculture was practiced, although this development may date only to the end of the Late Woodland period, following the first contact with Europeans.⁹ Shellfish collecting sites at tidal inlets are particularly well represented in this period, although this may simply be a reflection of the fact that the tidal zones were less likely to have been disturbed by

7. Baugher et al. 1982: 10-11, Ritchie 1980:143.

8. Ritchie 1980:150-178 for general characteristics and distribution of Transitional remains.

9. Ceci 1982: 2-36.

subsequent city development than were inland areas.

In the mid-17th century, high hills near streams, rivers and agricultural fields, and fishing places were favored by the Indians for settlement.

At the time of European contact and Dutch settlement, Brooklyn was occupied by Munsee-speaking Delawarean Canarsee who occupied western Long Island and, probably, lower Manhattan. Historically documented settlements of the Canarsee are known at various sites in Brooklyn.¹⁰ The largest of these was Keshaechequereren, a major village situated in Flatbush near 38th Street between Avenues J and K.¹¹ Closer to Block 3871, a village is known at the site of Muskyttehool, now marked by the intersection of Kings Highway and Foster Avenue.¹² There are no known Amerind settlements closer to Block 3871.

10. Jaffee 1979.

11. Grumet 1981:18f.

12. Grumet 1981:36, where the site is misidentified as being positioned along Fresh Kill, when in fact it was on Bestavers Kill to the southwest. Grumet's confusion seems to have stemmed from his erroneously locating Vriesens Hook along Fresh Kill; see Van Wyck 1924, as well as Grumet's maps, pages 67 and 70, where the site is properly located (cf: Map 4).

HISTORIC PERIOD

On March 21, 1677, the English Governor Sir Edmund Andros granted the predominantly Dutch settlers of Flatbush a separate patent for the New Lots lying to Flatbush's east. The original settlement was apportioned into 47 parallel north-south running lots extending between New Lots Road and the New Lots Woodlands Road to Jamaica (Map 6).

Block 3871 lies south of the settlement. Another division the New Lots settlement was established further south at an early but unrecorded date. These southern meadow lots would have been used for the production of salt hay, a valuable fodder (Map 7).

In between the northern settlement and the southern meadow lots, the land was unapportioned and served as natural undeveloped woodlands. Block 3871 lies within the western part of the woodland area.¹³ The northern portion of Fresh Kill came to be called Vanderveers Mill Pond during this period. The mill was situated along the west side of Fresh Kill, to the west of Block 3871.¹⁴

After 1696 the woodlands were divided, at which time Block 3871, still undeveloped, passed through several owners before coming into the possession of Thomas Lott and his descendants, who held the land throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

¹³. Landesman 1977:11-18.

¹⁴. Black 1981:Fig. 3.

(Map 7).

During the Battle of Brooklyn (or Long Island) in August 1776, the British Army marched just west of the site, along Kings Highway to New Lots Avenue, heading north after crossing Shoemakers/Schionmakers Bridge.¹⁵ There is no indication, however, that the site under consideration was used for encampment or any other significant activity during that march.

The land of the block was purchased by the city of Brooklyn in 1893, at which time it was still undeveloped. The Railroad, which has its right of way along the western border of the development site, is noted in the 1873 atlas; for some time these tracks belonged to the New York and Manhattan Beach Railroad.¹⁶ The Long Island Railroad itself is listed as a mortgage holder within the block in 1899. At no time within the historic period is there any indication of development within this block.

15. Landesman 1977:41 indicates that the route passed quite close to the site and over "Schionmaker's" Bridge, which contrasts with Stiles 1884:opposite 50, where the route is indicated further to the northwest and not crossing "Shoemakers" Bridge at all.

16. E. Robinson 1898.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposed development site within Block 3871 consists of that rarest of commodities within New York City: land that has never been developed since the time of European colonization. Nor has the site been tied to a notable historic event. As such, it would be identifiable as a significant archaeological and cultural resource only if its utilization during pre-colonial times could be established. Surface investigation as well as 13 deep subsurface core borings¹⁷ provide no traces of occupation in the form of food remnants, artifacts or charcoal deposits. In light of this absence, and recognizing that Block 3871, as an inland locality, was not optimally situated for prehistoric exploitation, the chance of the block preserving archaeological remains of significance is determined to be low. No further subsurface testing is recommended.

17. City of New York, Department of General Services, Engineering Services, Subsurface Exploration Section, Job HR-115 1837 B-4, September 11, 1988, records labeled "Transitional Housing for the Homeless, Linden Boulevard, Dewitt & Van Sinderen Avenues & L.I.R.R, Borough of Brooklyn."

JINDEN

BLVD.

P.V.T.

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LONG ISLAND RAILROAD

APD (003)

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SEE PAGE 14

SITE

3871

VAN SINDEREN

VAN SINDEREN

AVE

AVE

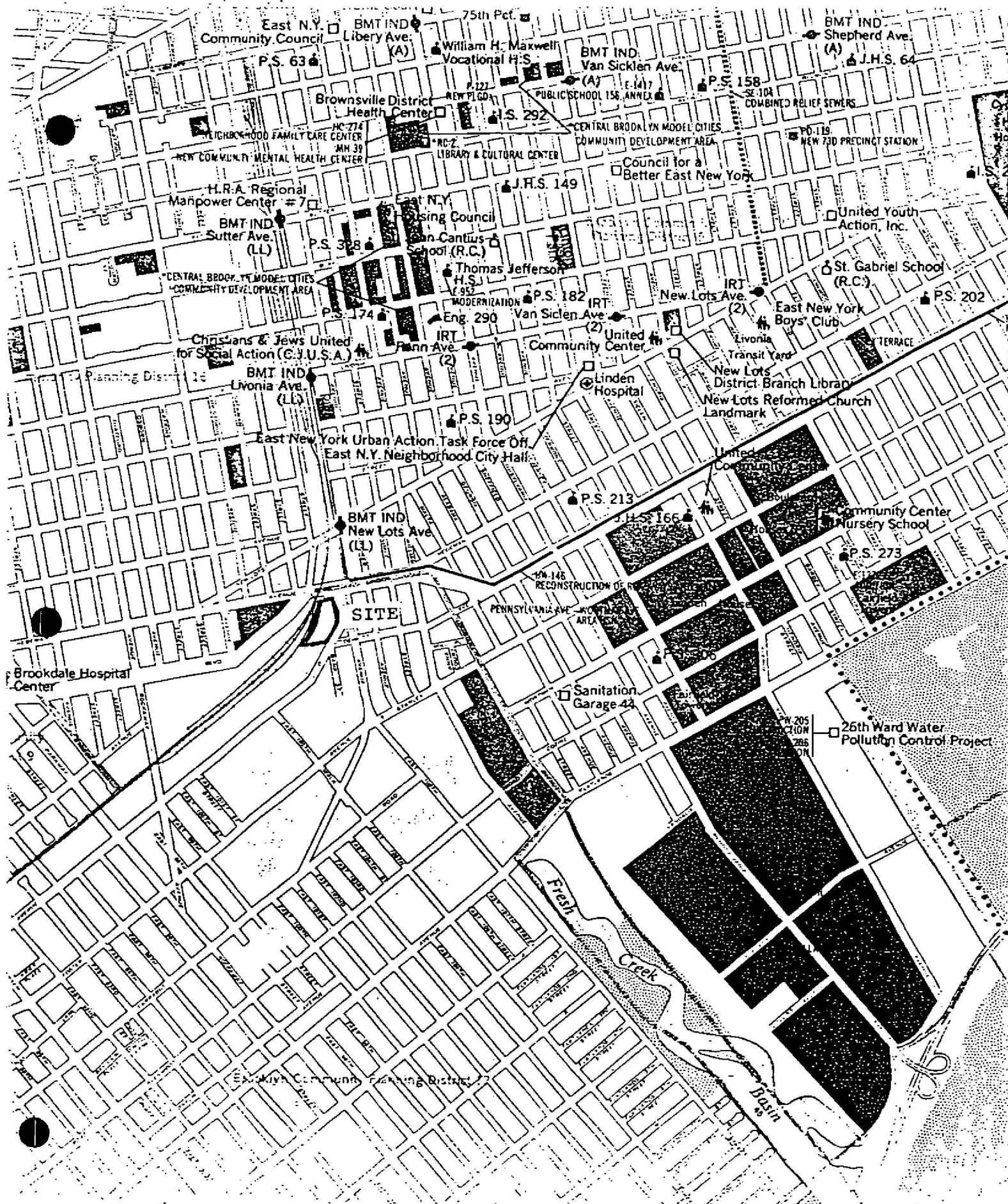
DEWITT AVE

CHEDIKER

3823

MAP 1

Tax Map - provided by DGS



MAP 2 Site Location (New York City Planning Commission Map 1968)

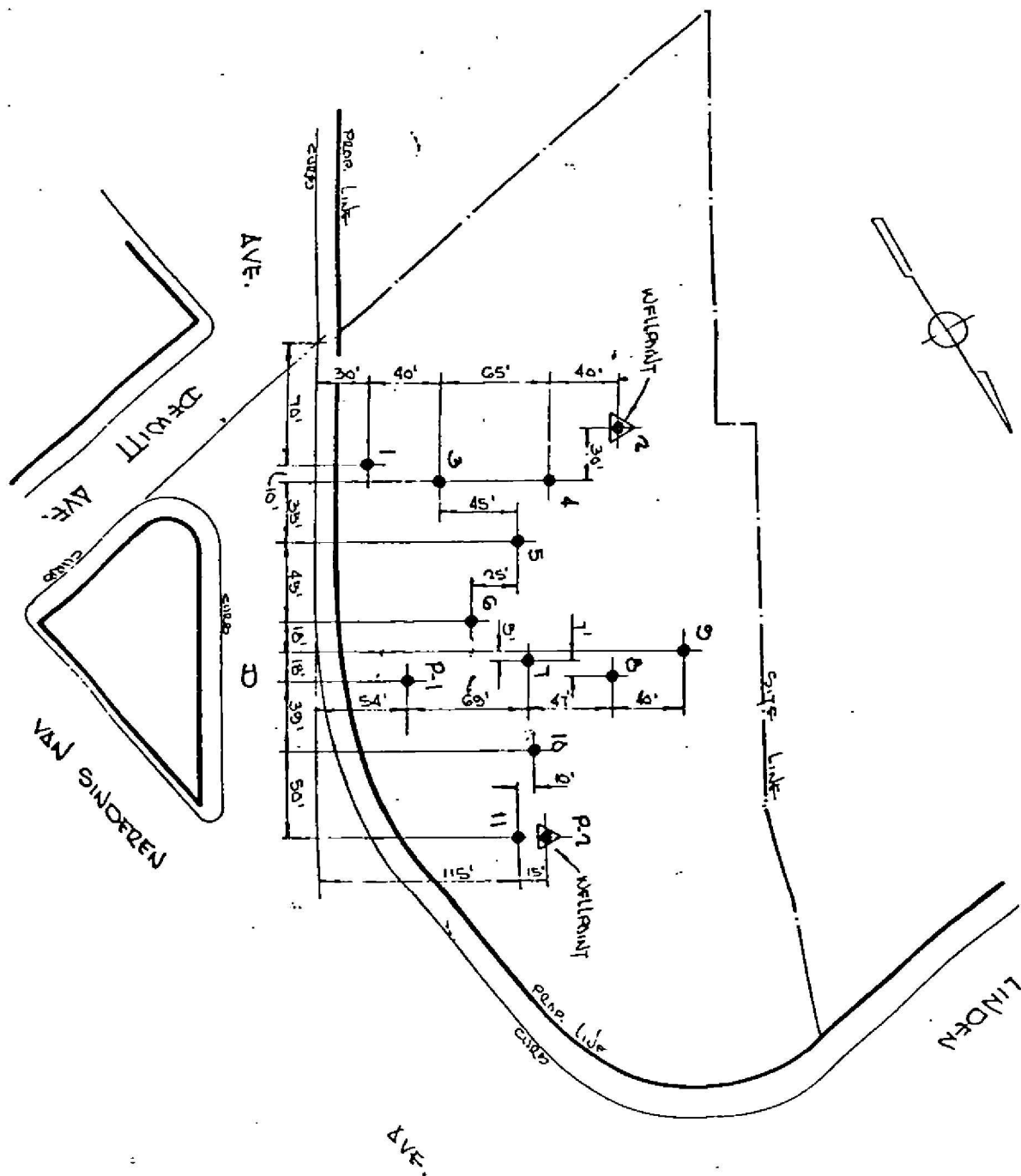


MAP 3

Site Location (Plan for New York City
1968)

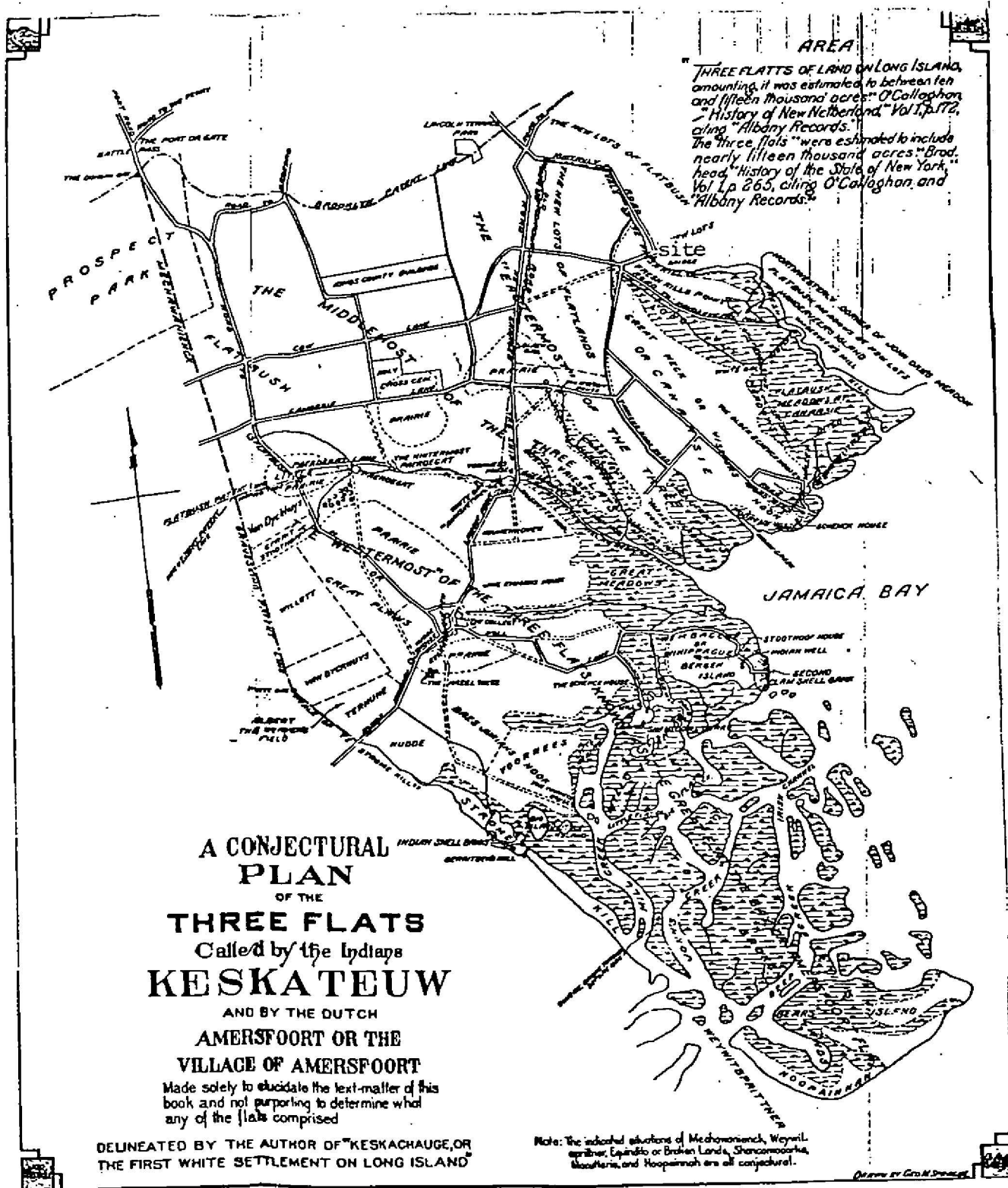
LOCATION PLAN

SCALE: 1"=60'



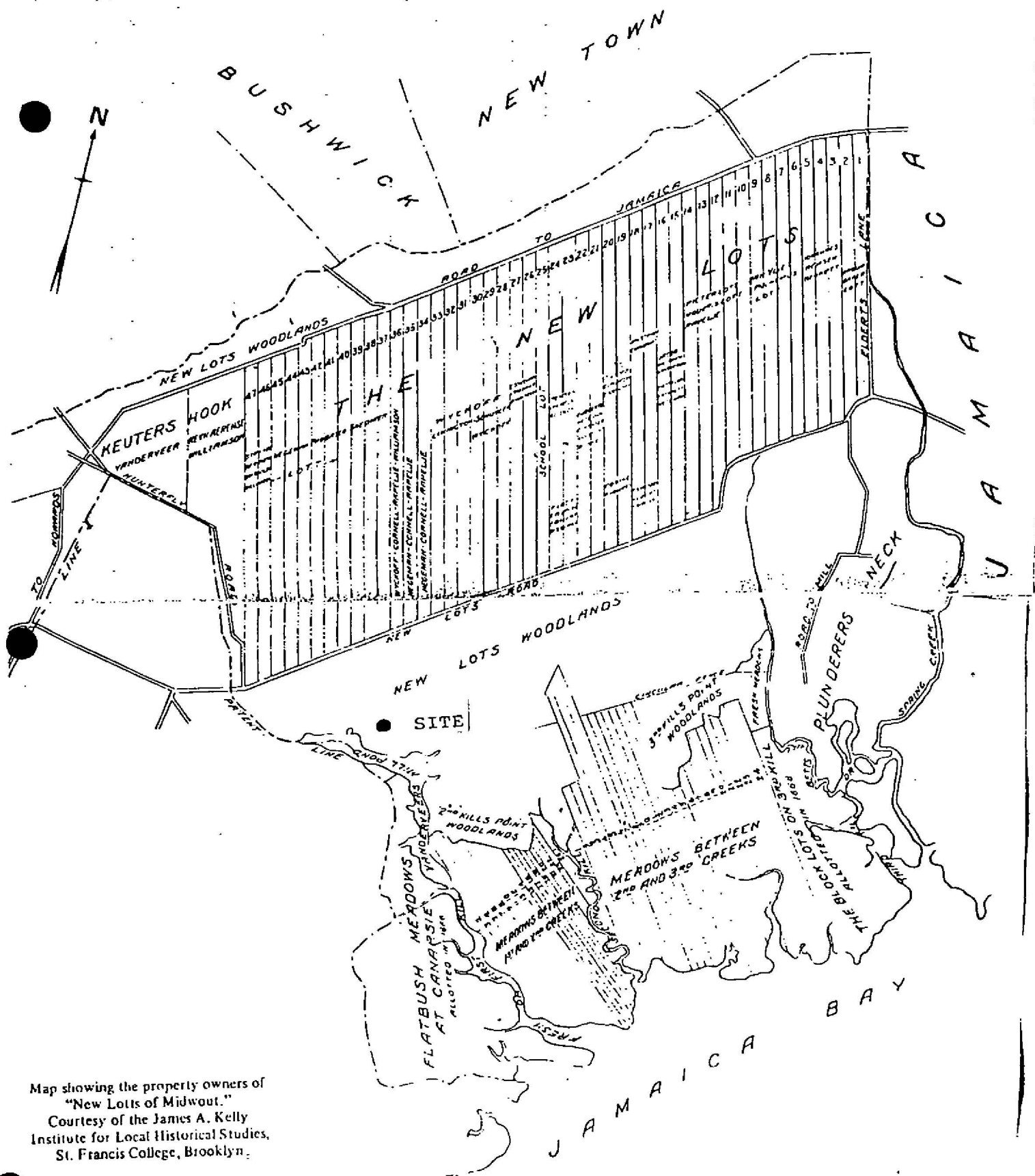
MAP 4

Core boring locations (DGS 1987)



MAP 5

Indian and Early Historic Settlement
 (Van Wyck 1924)



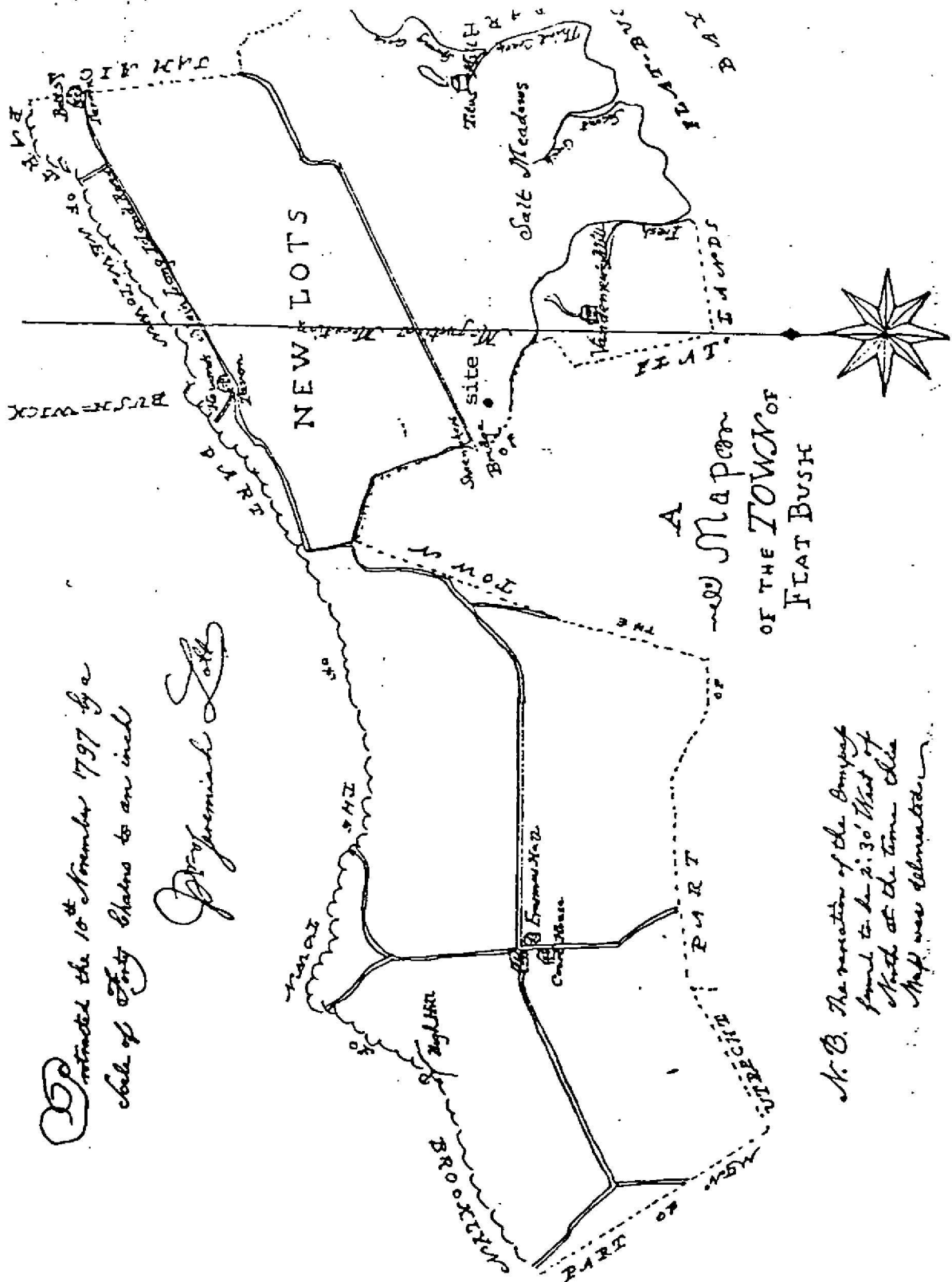
MAP 6

New Lots Patent Map 1665-1678 (after Landesmar. 1977)

Pro-teminal

A
new Map
OF THE TOWN OF
FLAT BUSH

No. 3. The position of the Campylo-
poda to be 2:30 West of
North at the time the
Mall was delineated.



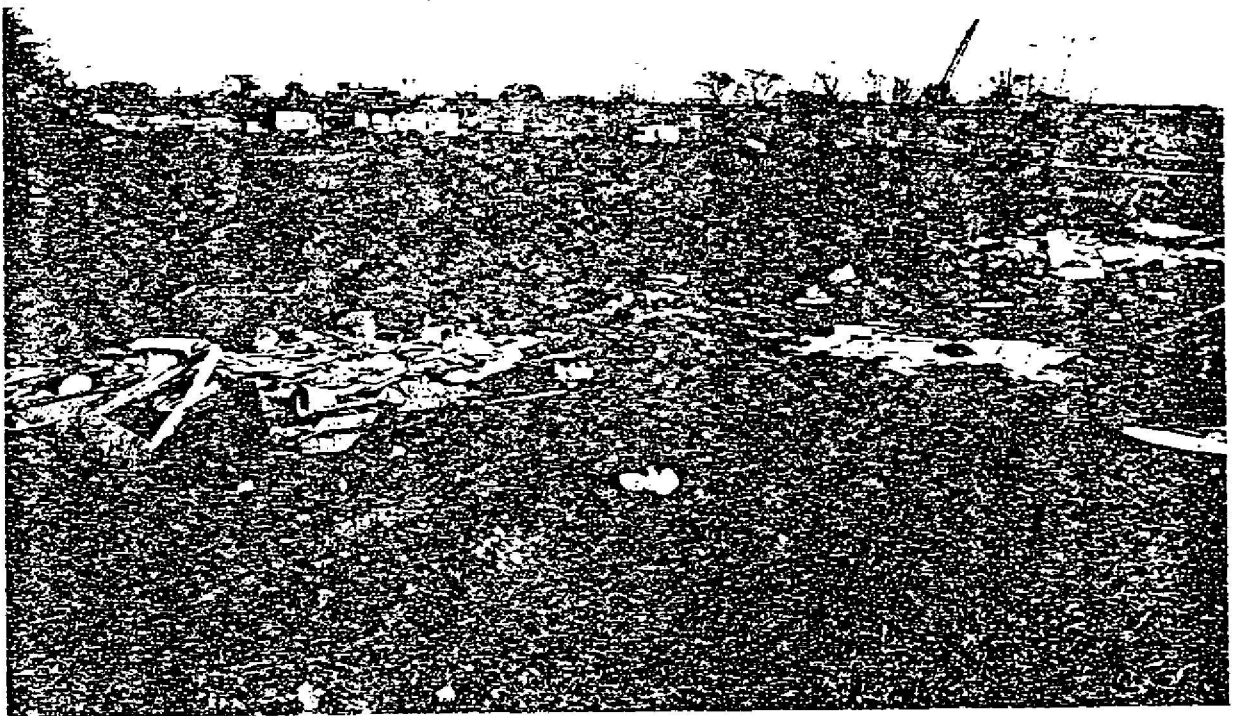
New Lots 1797 (from Landsmen 1977)



View of site from East-central to North-west
(December 1987)



View of site from South-west to East
December 1987



View of site from South-west to North-east
(December 1987)

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