

PHASE 1A CULTURAL RESOURCE ASSESSMENT
PROPOSED JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER,
EAST NEW YORK, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

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I. DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this assessment is to determine whether or not the project area contains or has the potential to contain significant prehistoric and historic cultural resources. This assessment complies with the City of New York Executive Order No. 91 of August 24, 1977 (City Environmental Quality Review). The methodology of the study has included a review of archaeological site files, published and unpublished reports, and other archival materials. Repositories visited or contacted for these documents included the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation; the New York State Library and Museum; the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission; the Department of Buildings in Brooklyn; and the New York Public Library.

Based on archaeological and historical research and a preliminary field reconnaissance, this assessment will recommend whether future research is needed to avoid or mitigate any potential adverse effects of construction on significant cultural resources.

B. NATURAL SETTING

The 2.9-acre Brooklyn parcel is located within the Atlantic Coastal Lowland on the western end of Long Island (Thompson 1977:Figure 9). The Brooklyn site is about three miles northwest of Jamaica Bay and four miles southeast of the East River (Figure 1).

Traces of the last North Atlantic glaciation (Wisconsin) in the New York City area are found in the form of a terminal moraine on Long Island. Glaciers began to retreat from the region some 17,000 to 15,000 years ago. Glacial scarring created a variety of habitats, including estuaries, salt and freshwater marshes, bogs, uplands, and midslope zones. Glacial soils contained a diversity of particle sizes, allowing for good drainage and adequate water supplies for developing plant and animal communities.

Humans first inhabited the New York City area about 12,000 B.P., when sea levels may have been 300 feet lower than those of today, and when the Atlantic shoreline had regressed approximately 60 to 90 miles from its present position (Kraft 1977). Contemporary ocean levels were probably reached -- through glacial melting -- at 6000 B.P.; however, minor fluctuations of 10 to 20 feet may have occurred after this date (Bruun 1962; Fairbridge 1977). These geological data indicate that Paleoindians, the first inhabitants of coastal New York, could have settled along shore areas now covered by the transgressive Atlantic Ocean.

C. CULTURAL SETTING

1. Prehistoric Cultural Resources

Files at both the New York State Museum and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation indicate that no documented prehistoric archaeological sites are present within two miles of the Brooklyn project area. Earlier in this century, Bolton (1934:144-147) compiled a list of prehistoric and ethnohistoric Native American sites in Brooklyn, but none are in the immediate vicinity of the project tract. Still, Bolton places the project area within the "Land of the Canarsee" Indians, another group of Munsee-speakers (Goodard 1978:214-215). Several recent surveys by contract archaeologists in various sections of Brooklyn have reported finding some historic period artifacts but no prehistoric remains (e.g., Greenhouse Consultants, Inc. 1986; Solecki 1976). Test excavations at the Pieter Claesen Wyckoff house (which dates to ca. A.D. 1650), the only historic archaeological site within two miles of the project tract, also failed to yield any prehistoric artifacts (Kardas and Larrabee 1977; Salwen et al. 1972). Apparently, modern construction has destroyed most traces of Brooklyn's prehistory (Historical Perspectives 1985:6).

2. Historic Cultural Resources

Brooklyn, under Dutch control until 1664, was established circa 1635 by Jan Evertsen Bout et al. In 1636, Jacques Bentyn and William Adriance Bennett bought a 30-acre tract at Gowanus from the Canarsee Indians and Jansen de Rapelye purchased a large tract on Wallabout Bay (Wuttge 197X:1). By 1647, the Dutch governor, Kieft, had granted all the lands along the Brooklyn shore to various individuals (Bailey 1840:8). A ferry was established between New Amsterdam and Brooklyn by 1640. During the mid-seventeenth century, the Dutch established settlements in the Brooklyn vicinity at Flatbush, Flatlands, New Utrecht, and Bushwick. Gravesend, another Brooklyn settlement, was established by New Englanders during this time period. A road was soon laid out from the Brooklyn Ferry to the settlements of Flatbush and Jamaica; the former was second in importance to Brooklyn amongst the Long Island towns. Kings County, when established in 1683, contained the towns of Bedford, Brooklyn, Bushwick, Flatbush, Flatlands, Gravesend, and New Utrecht.

In 1677, the inhabitants of Flatbush obtained a patent for a new settlement, called New Lots, to the east. New Lots covered the area presently bounded by Ralph Avenue, the Queens County line, Fulton Street, Cemetery Hills, Canarsee, and Jamaica Bay (Landesman 1977:11).

Occupation at New Lots had occurred by the time of the patenting of lands. It was divided into 47 farm lots and allotted mostly to Flatbush inhabitants. Each farm lot was accompanied by a meadow

lot near Jamaica Bay. Woodland was initially held in common but the community's growth necessitated its subdivision into wood lots. New Lots' farmers settled along New Lots Road from Cemetery Hills to Canarsie. They raised wheat, corn, oats, rye, barley, peas, and fruits, especially apples and pears (Landesman 1977:76). Most of the farm produce was sent to market in New York City, but local markets were also established at Jamaica and Flatbush.

Eventually, three villages developed within the town of New Lots: East New York, Cypress Hills, and Brownsville. Brownsville was founded by Charles S. Brown about 1866. He laid out city lots and 50-foot-wide streets. Brownsville's close proximity to Brooklyn enabled its population of mechanics (machinists) to prosper. The community of Cypress Hills formed around the nucleus of John I. Snediker's hotel, circa 1844. The Jewish and Cypress Hills Cemeteries were located within the village and an extensive marble works was established (Stiles 1884:307).

The project area is currently located within East New York. East New York, the largest of the New Lots villages, was the brainchild of Connecticut Yankee entrepreneur, John R. Pitkin. In 1835, Pitkin visited the town of New Lots and was impressed by the expanses of level land in such close proximity to New York City and Brooklyn. He developed a plan to build a city in New Lots to rival New York, calling it East New York. Pitkin's prospectus contained a complete description of the proposed city, including buildings, markets, a manufacturing district, parks, schools, and private and public improvements. He quickly acquired several farms and laid out the requisite streets and city building lots, which sold for 10 to 25 dollars. Pitkin's grand scheme was deflated by the Financial Panic of 1837. Forced to sell off a large amount of his "manufacturing district," Pitkin nevertheless continued to promote sales of his 12,000 city-sized building lots. East New York's first period of growth occurred in the mid-nineteenth century when a large number of German immigrants settled in the village. The majority of these new immigrants worked in their homes as tailors, doing piecework for the expanding New York City ready-made-clothing industry. John R. Pitkin, himself, stimulated the economy of East New York by establishing the East New York Boot and Shoe Manufacturing Company on the corner of Pitkin and Williams Avenues.

Other businesses operated within the town of New Lots included: Unexcelled Fireworks; Miles Brothers Brush Factory; Nelson and Kleuber's Torpedo Factory; Davis & Son's Starch Mills; Cummings & Sons Moulding and Planning Mills; Rickitt's Pencil, Whip and Toy Factory; Schultz's Tin Toy Factory; Piel Brothers Brewery; Jewell's Flour Mills; McGuigan's Shoe Buttonhole Factory; James Lyons Lamolight Factory; and Diederich's Cannery (Landesman 1977:104).

The development of East New York and Cypress Hills and the overall population growth of New Lots resulted in the town's

separation from Flatbush in 1852. New Lots was eventually annexed to the City of Brooklyn in 1886, becoming the 26th Ward of New York City. Brooklyn's consolidation with New York was achieved in 1897, bringing about a suburban development boom in the New Lots area. New ethnic groups, such as East Europeans, Italians, and White Russians, predominantly Jewish, began to settle in East New York and Brownsville. These groups were gradually replaced by Blacks and Hispanics, who moved into the area after 1925. The 1960s witnessed the mass exodus of the remaining white population.

Early maps indicate that the project area retained its rural character until the 1870s. The project tract appears to have been in open agricultural land associated with the farmstead of the Suydams, an old Dutch family. During this period of time, the nucleus of East New York expanded eastward, its westernmost boundary formed by Alabama Street and the State Military Parade Ground, which extended as far west as Vansinderen Avenue, some distance east of the project area (Figure 2). Although the street grid system was in place by 1877, actual occupation did not occur until sometime later. Eastern Parkway, Centre Street, and Baltic Street were later renamed Pitkin Avenue, Chester Street, and Bristol Street, respectively (Dripps 1877). The Suydam farm appears to have been subdivided and occupied before either of the adjacent blocks to the east or west. As late as 1898, only half of the building lots on the project site were occupied. The majority of structures were residential, with a few shops fronting East New York Avenue (Sanborn 1887; Ullitz 1898).

The effect of suburban development at the turn of the century is apparent in the project area. Nearly all the lots of Block #3498 were occupied by structures, with the exception of those fronting East New York Avenue (Figure 3). Commercial establishments fronted Pitkin Avenue and Bristol Street, on which were located two commercial liveries (Ullitz 1898, 1912, 1916). By the late 1920s, the lots along East New York Avenue were also occupied by stores. The remainder of the block was a mixture of commercial, light industrial, and residential structures. A synagogue was located at 17-19 Bristol Street (Sanborn 1928). The conversion of the project area into commercial and light industrial properties was nearly complete by 1950, when only a half dozen dwellings and two synagogues remained on the block (Sanborn 1950).

3. The Built Environment

The project area encompasses most of a long, narrow trapezoidal block bounded by East New York Avenue on the north, Chester Street on the east, Pitkin Avenue on the south, and Bristol Street on the west. The block is vacant, except for a row of buildings fronting on Pitkin Avenue at the south end (see below), and is piled with weeds and debris (Plates 1 and 2).

The streetscapes facing the project area are quite varied. The west side of Bristol Street is dominated by the large new brick

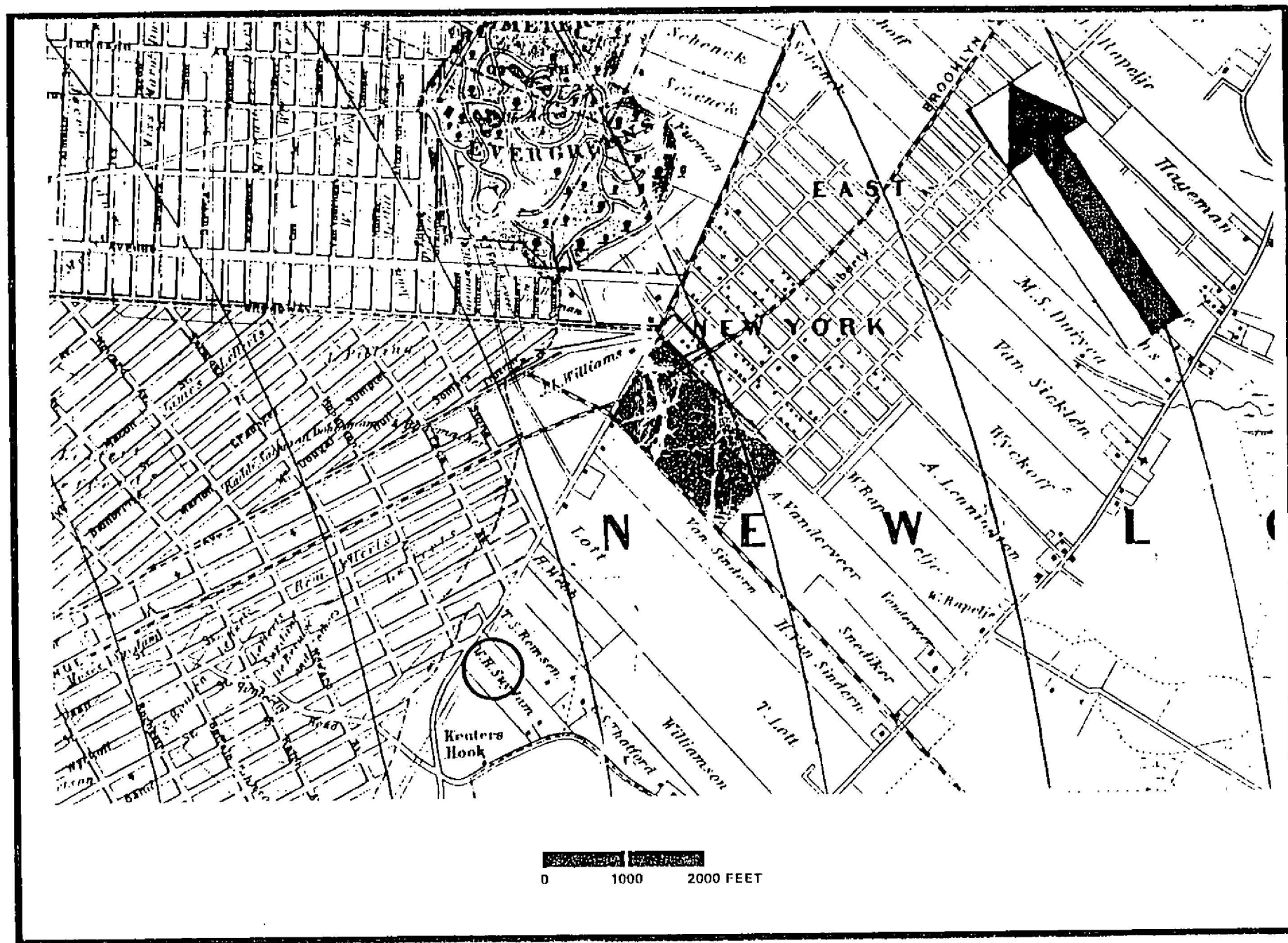


FIGURE 2: Project Vicinity in 1868

SOURCE: Dripps, 1868

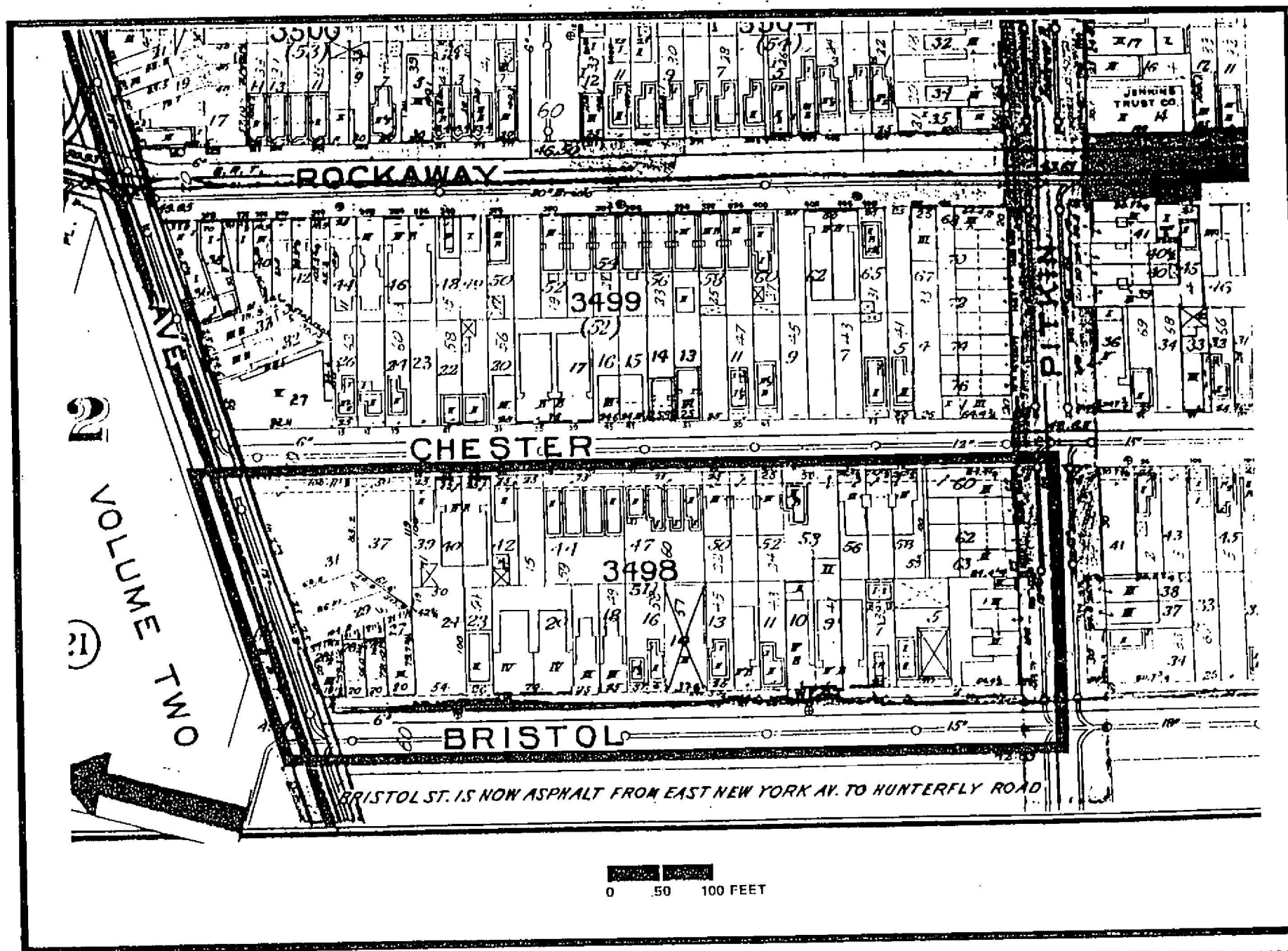


FIGURE 3: Project Area at Turn of Century

SOURCE: Ullitz 1905; Revised 1912

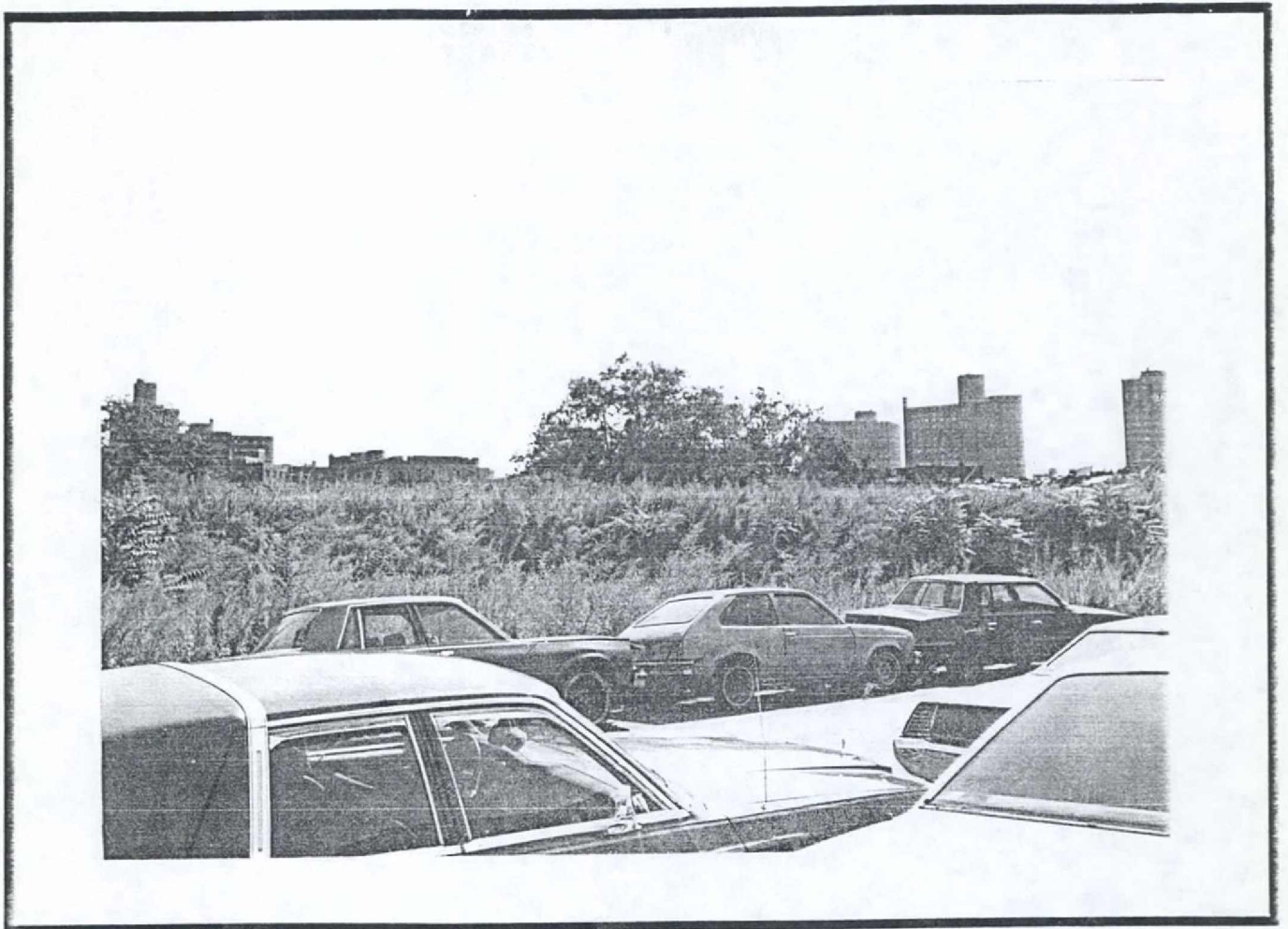


PLATE 1: View Southeast From Bristol Street Toward Project Area

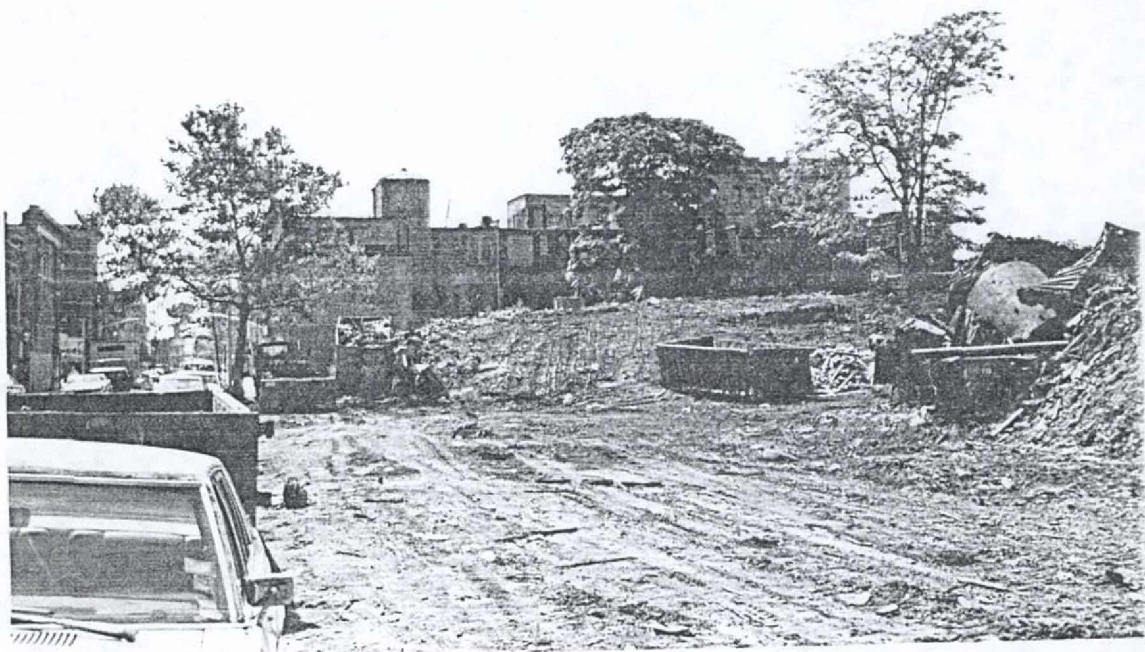


PLATE 2: Project Area, View to South

and concrete facilities of New York City's 73rd Police Precinct, which fronts East New York Avenue (Plate 3). The remainder of this block along Bristol is vacant, except for a small one-story warehouse with flat, largely unarticulated, brick facade, near Pitkin Avenue (Plate 4). Similarly, large portions of Chester Street facing the project area are either vacant or occupied as parking lots (Plates 5 and 6). Toward Pitkin Avenue is a large one-story brick and concrete warehouse, set back from the street behind a concrete apron, and a two-story building with symmetrically-arranged five-bay facade. It is ornamented with round-arched windows and an overall geometric treatment achieved with vertical and horizontal corbel strips (Plate 7). A short distance north of the warehouse is a single three-story residential block, with three-bay facade of rusticated tan brick and overhanging metal cornice (Plate 8). The fenestration follows a pattern observed elsewhere in the area (Pitkin Avenue, see below), in which round-arched windows are used to mark the uppermost story.

In the short block of East New York Avenue facing the project area, the dominant element is the New York Avenue elevation of a large polygonal apartment building that occupies the acute angle formed by East New York Avenue, Park Street, and the Eastern Parkway Extension (Plate 9). Flat brick walls are articulated with corbelling at cornice level and by panels of dogtooth brickwork. The building is vacant, and window openings are filled with concrete block or wood panels painted to resemble window sash. Adjacent to the east is a three-story brick building with boarded shopfront and round-arched entry leading from the street to the upper floors; and a one-story concrete block garage, the facade of which is clad in brick similar to its neighbor (Plate 10). Past a short alley opposite Chester Street is another three-story, three-bay brick building, the ground floor of which has been remodeled and clad with permastone (Plate 11). The facade above features tan brick with deeply incised mortar joints, geometric brick-spandrel panels, splayed concrete lintels with keystones, and a bracketed false mansard of sheet metal pressed to resemble clay tile.

At the south end of the project area, Pitkin Avenue is an active commercial thoroughfare. Much of the block between Bristol and Chester Streets is lined on both sides with three-story brick buildings, the facades of which evidence a stripped-down neoclassicism popular toward the end of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries (Plates 12, 13, and 14). Facebrick is used in a rusticated manner to articulate fronts above plate-glass shops, and many second- and third-story windows (those not hidden behind large signs) display prominent keystones. Use of round-arched windows on third stories is a common theme, as is the preference for bracketed metal cornices ornamented with Adamesque swags at the frieze. The building in the northwest quadrant of the Pitkin Avenue-Chester Street intersection displays many of these characteristics, and in addition takes



PLATE 3: Precinct Facility, View Southwest From Corner of East New York Avenue and Bristol Street



PLATE 4: Warehouse, Bristol Street Near Pitkin Avenue, View to Southwest

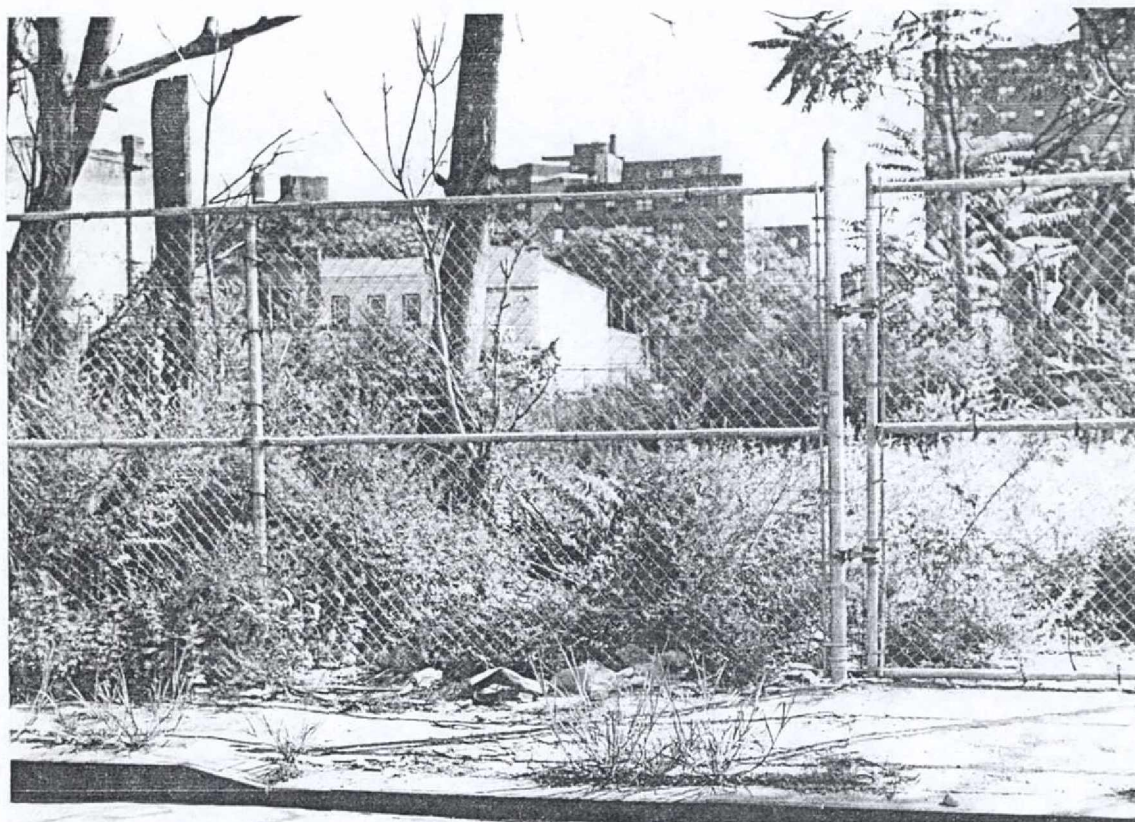


PLATE 5: Vacant Lot, East Side of Chester Street, View to East



PLATE 6: Parking Lot, Southeast Corner of East New York Avenue and Chester Street, View to Northeast



PLATE 7: East Side of Chester Street, Toward Pitkin Ave., View to Southeast

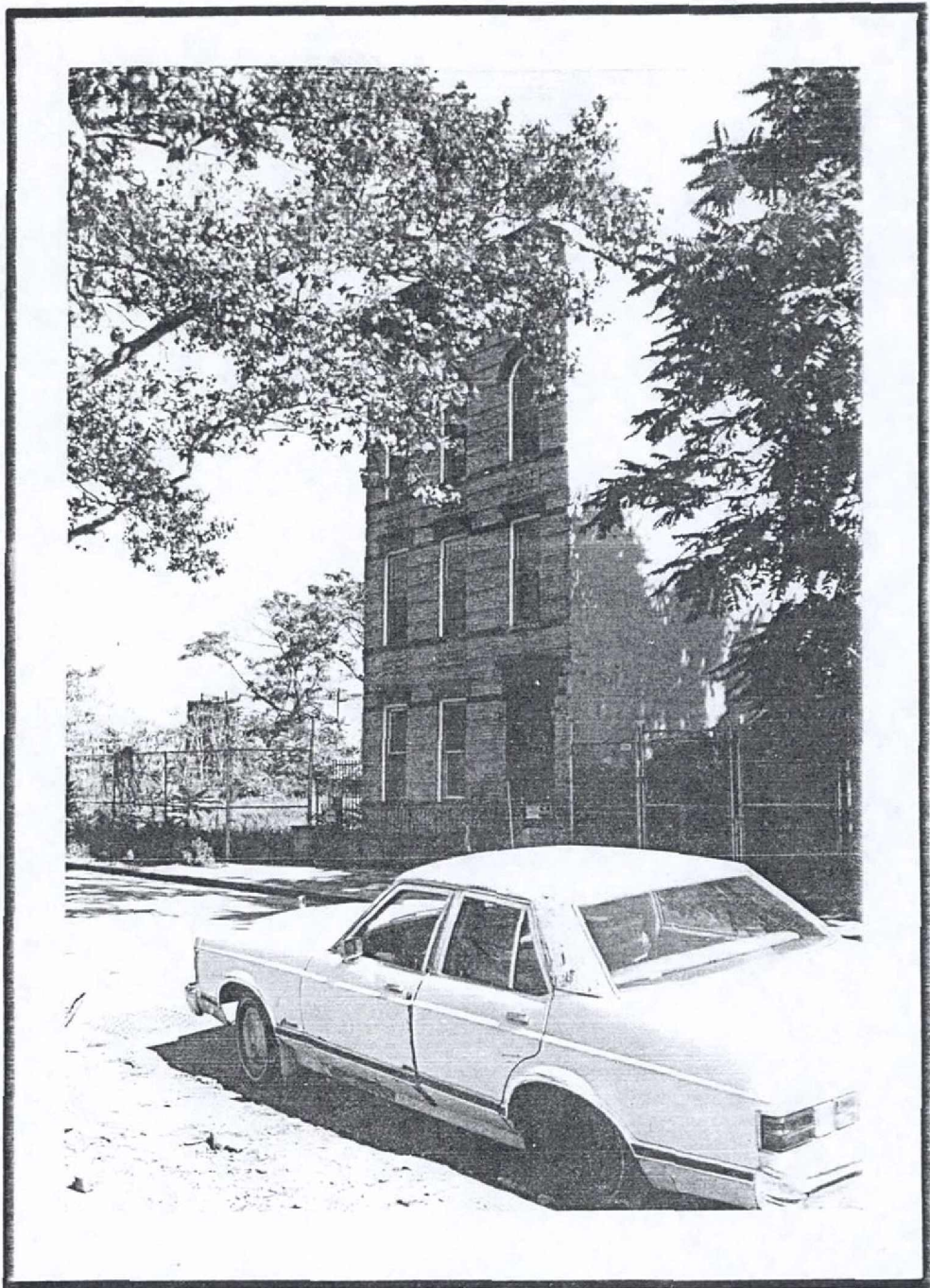


PLATE 8: East Side of Chester Street, Midblock, View to Northeast

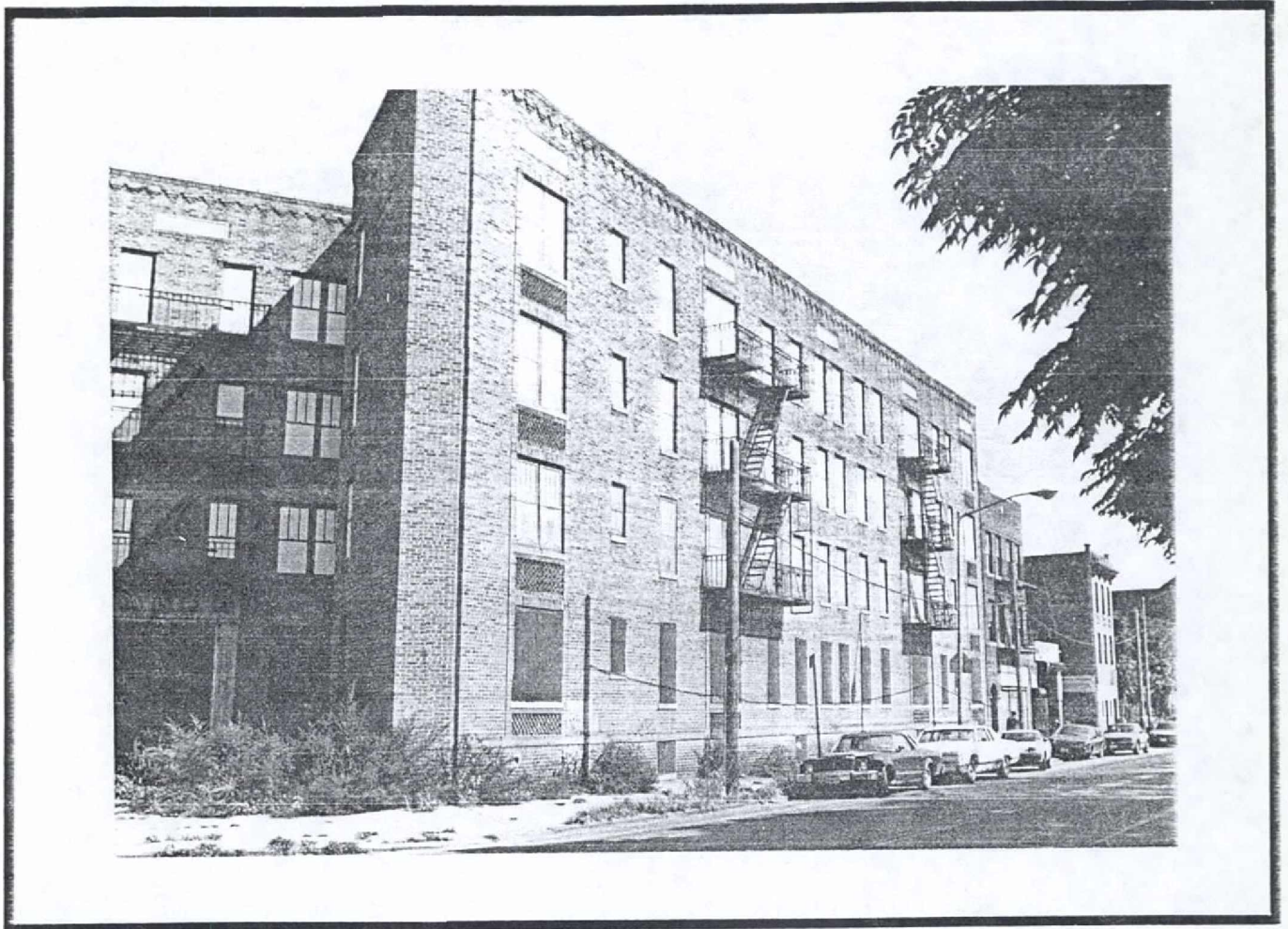


PLATE 9: North Side of East New York Avenue, View to Northeast

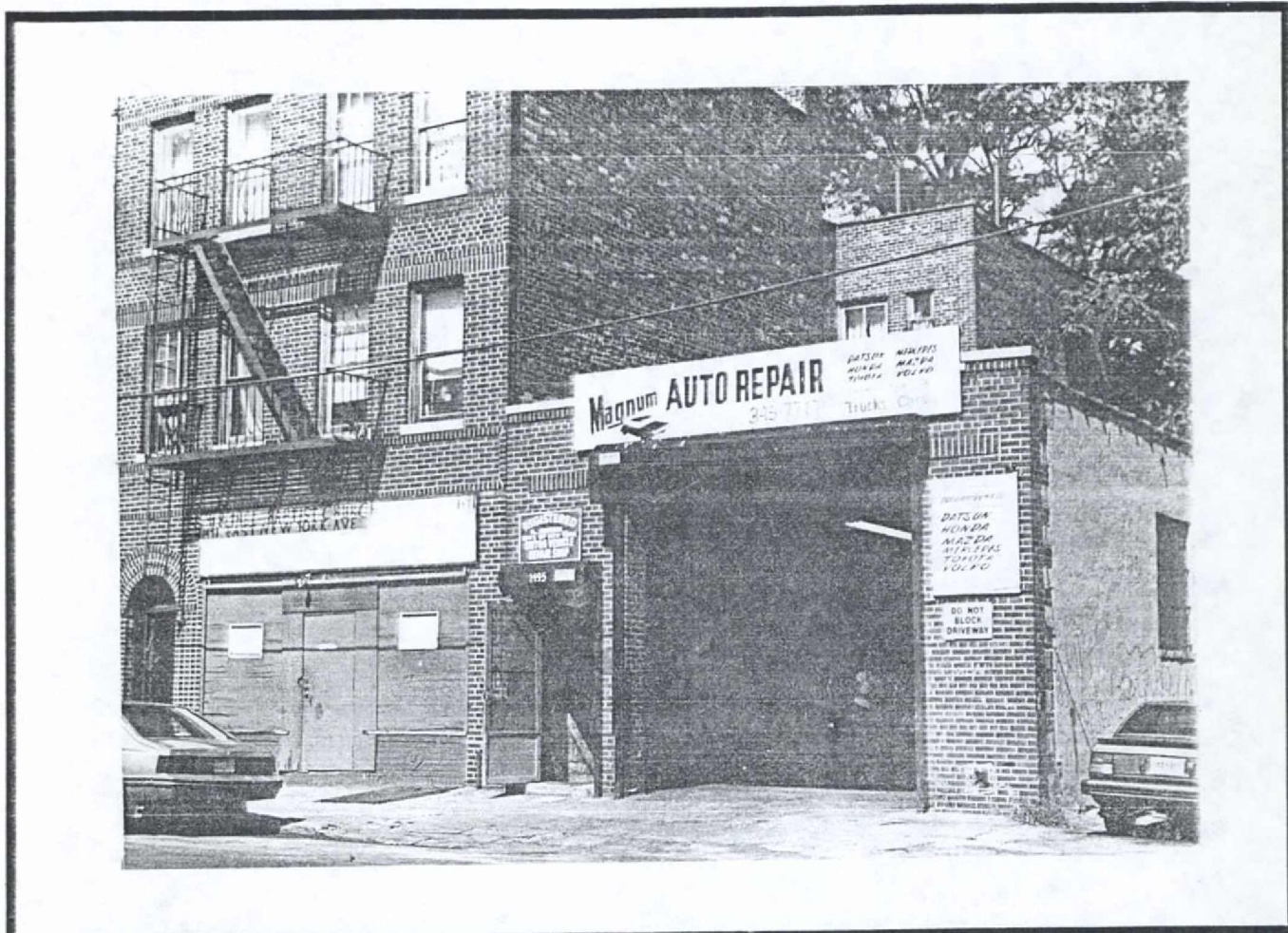


PLATE 10: North Side of East New York Avenue

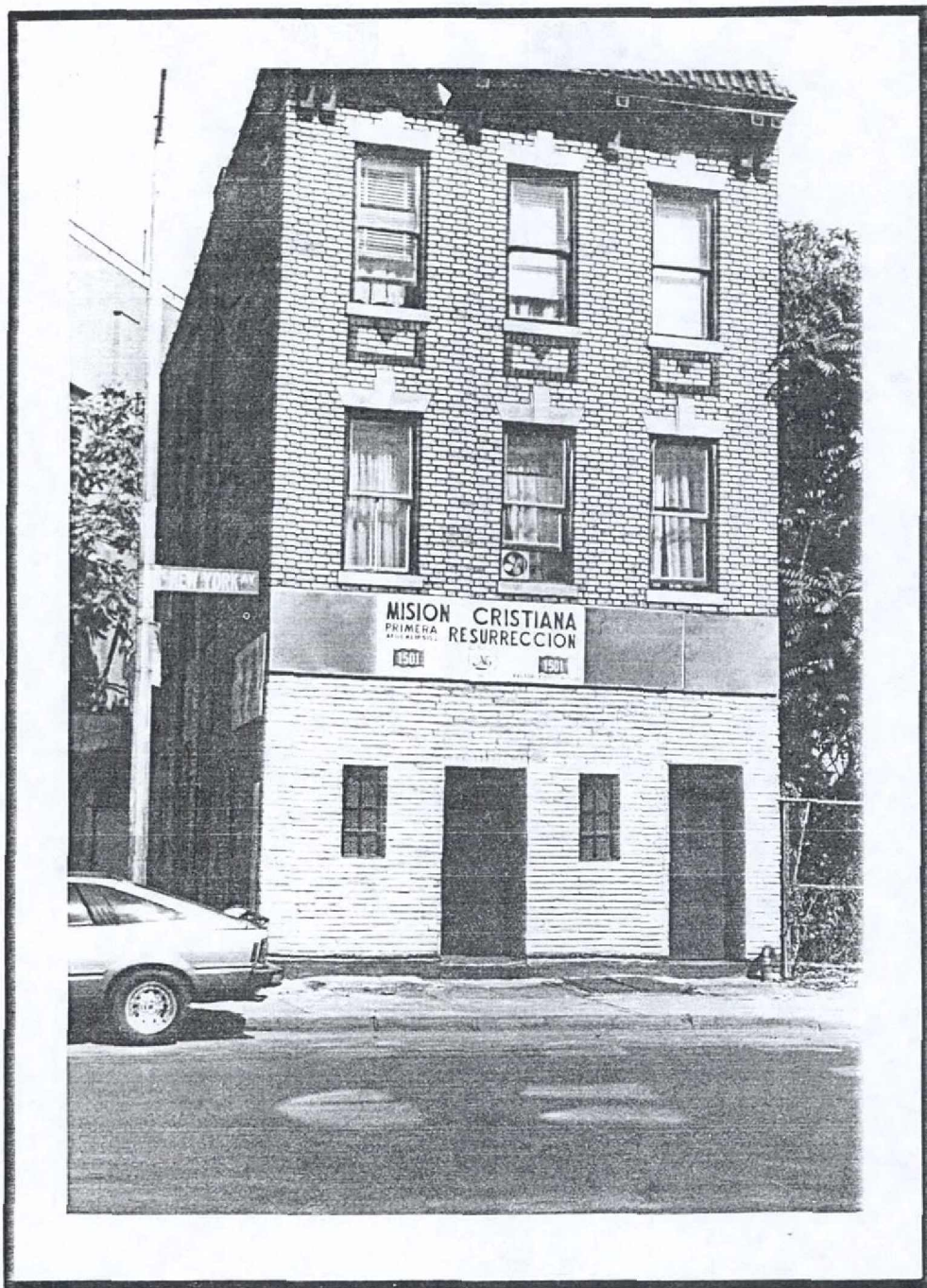


PLATE 11: North Side of East New York Ave., From Chester St.

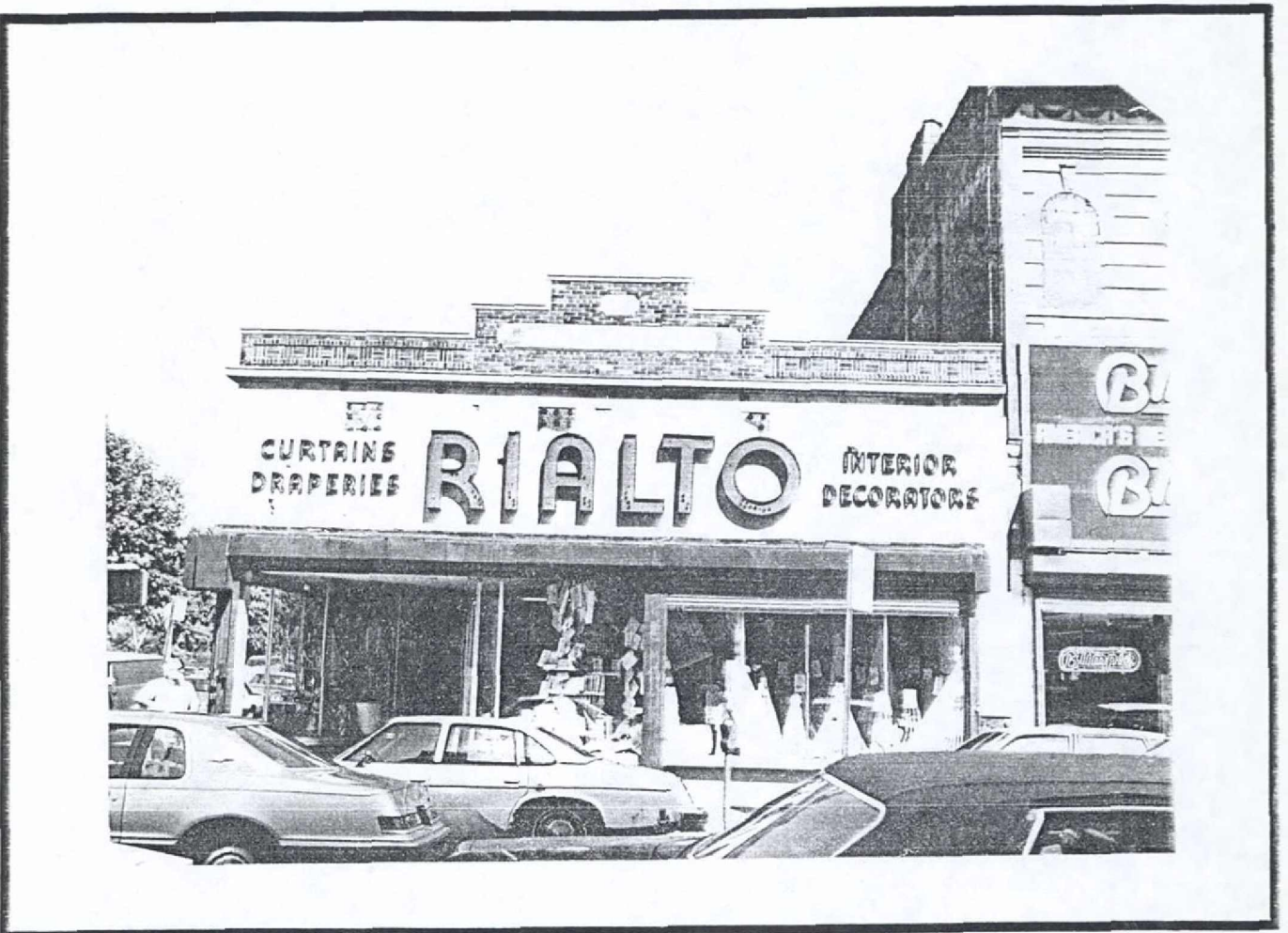


PLATE 12: Building Facades, North Side of Pitkin Avenue Between Bristol and Chester Streets

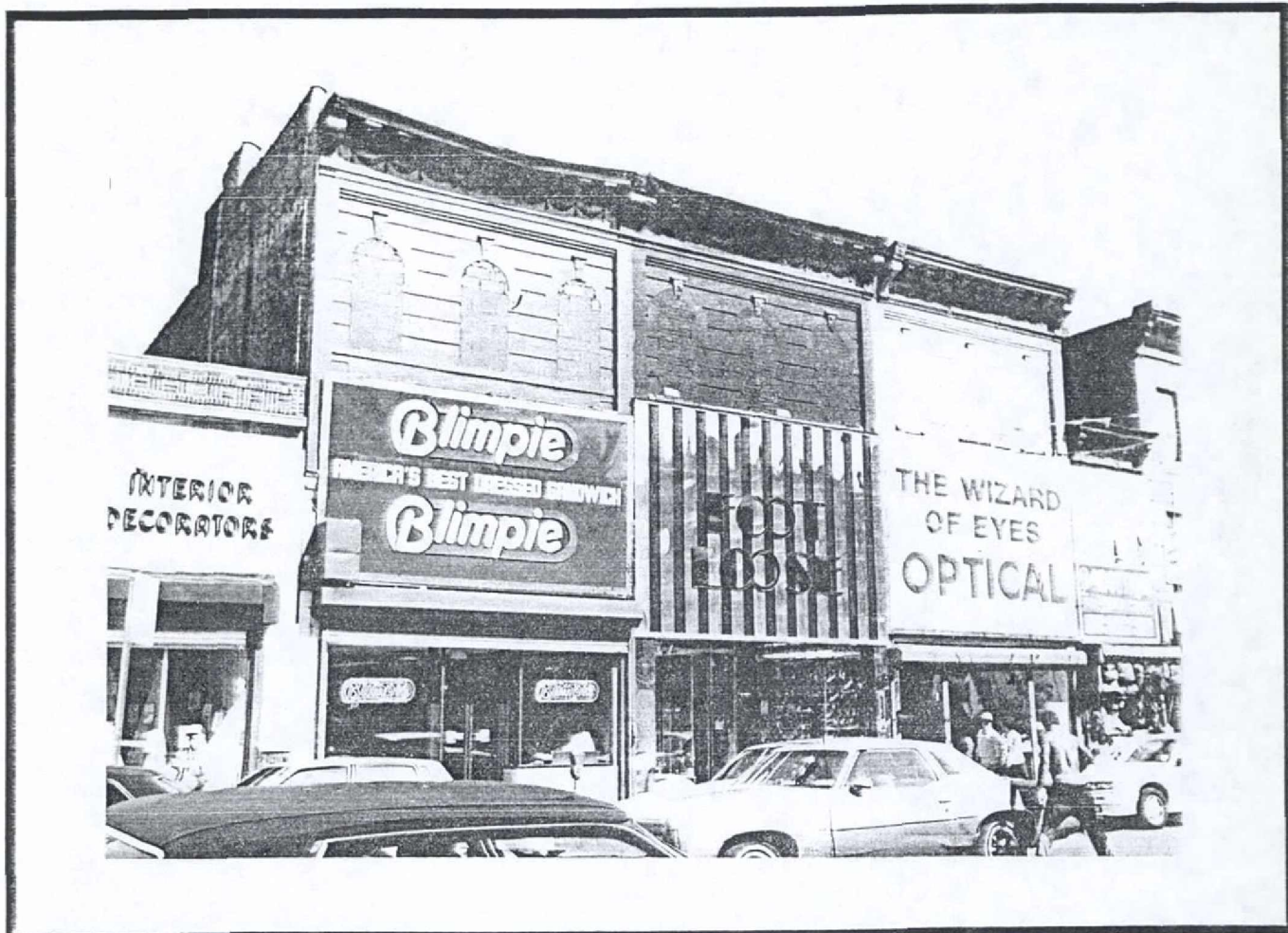


PLATE 13: Building Facades, North Side of Pitkin Avenue



PLATE 14: Building Facades, North Side of Pitkin Avenue Between Bristol and Chester Streets

advantage of its location to project a full-height semicircular bay from the corner (Plate 15). Directly opposite this building, across Pitkin Avenue, is another corner block which curiously combines pronounced neoclassicism with a commercialized "Tudor" theme (Plate 16). Above the plate-glass shopfronts, patterned brickwork with accents in cast concrete and glazed terra cotta is used to create pointed arches above third-floor windows and variously shaped parapets that crown the busy facades. At the northeast corner, however, the polychrome "Tudor" theme is completely dropped in favor of tall, thin stone-clad piers with molded caps, above which is a broad Doric style cornice. Although arguably the liveliest building, this is not the dominant element of this block of Pitkin Avenue. That status is reserved for the seven-story office building at the opposite end of Pitkin (at Bristol), which features monochrome tan brick facades discreetly ornamented with patterned brickwork in a very simplified Art Deco style (Plate 17).

No designated New York City Landmark, or National Register Properties are located within the project area or in the vicinity thereof.

4. Subsurface Cultural Resource Potential

A field reconnaissance of the Brooklyn project area was conducted by Dr. Gary Shaffer. Vegetation in the tract consisted of weeds and several trees that were relegated to the block's fenceline. The interior of the project area was covered by modern trash and building rubble to heights of 4 to 16 feet.

As far as prehistoric archaeological potential is concerned, neither the Brooklyn project tract nor its vicinity contains known (1984) have found that locations near shorelines and streams were generally the preferred sites of prehistoric settlement in Brooklyn; and it is to be recalled that the project tract is three miles from the nearest large water source: Jamaica Bay. With respect to historic archaeological potential, no documented sites occur in the project block.

According to the existing block and lot records (viz., for non-demolished structures along Pitkin Avenue) in the Brooklyn Department of Buildings, cellars in the project block may have reached minimum depths of 4 to 5 feet below curb level. Thus, any once extant prehistoric remains would most likely have been destroyed within the areas of these cellars. As noted above, the overall potential for prehistoric sites on the block is low. The early installation of a water system (Sanborn 1887:194) also makes the potential for finding significant, deep artifact bearing features quite low. Therefore, the block has little potential of yielding important historic archaeological remains.

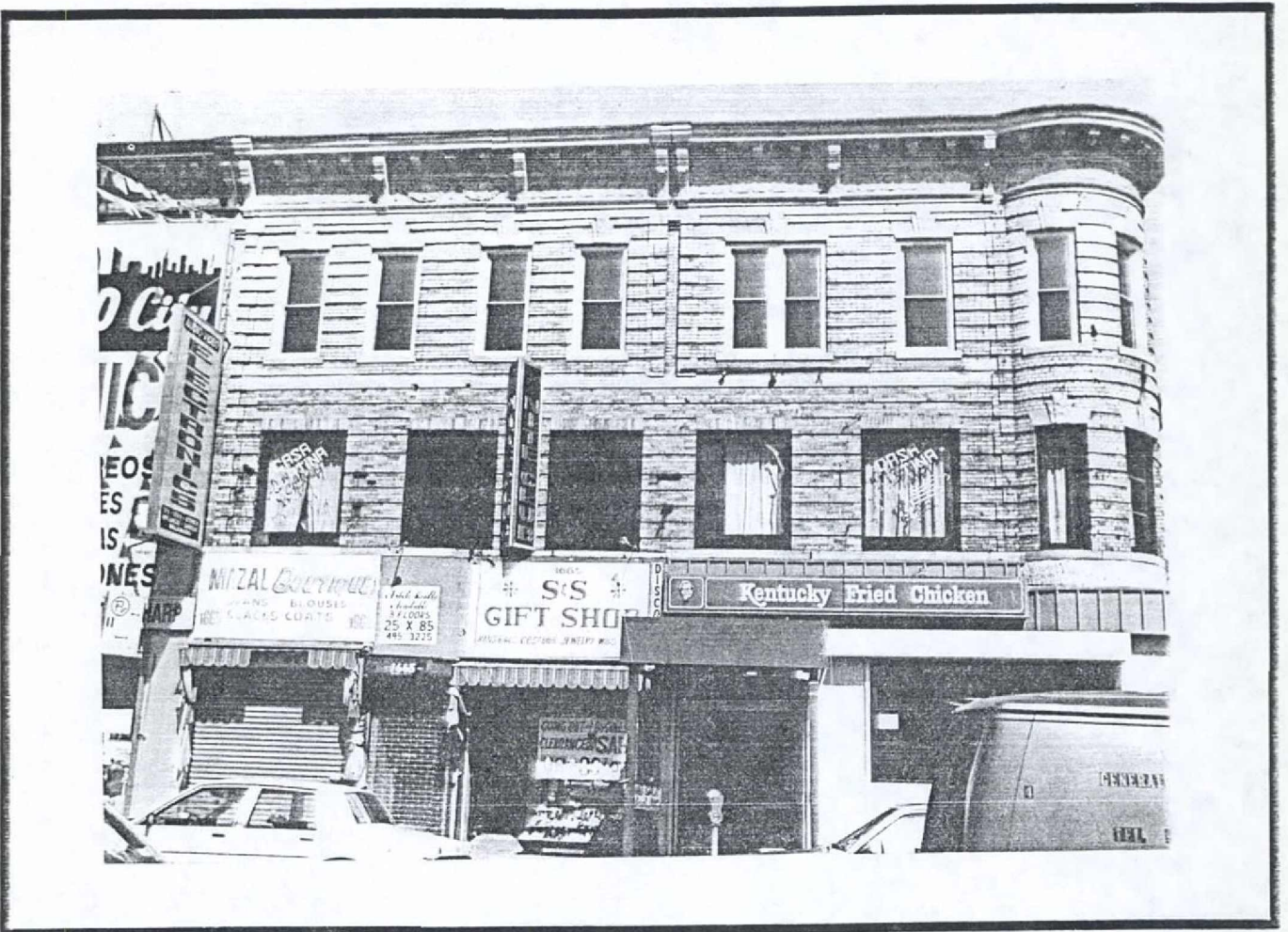


PLATE 15: Building at Northwest Corner, Pitkin Avenue and Chester Street, Pitkin Avenue Facade



PLATE 16: Building at Southwest Corner, Pitkin Avenue and Chester Street, View to Southwest



PLATE 17: South Side of Pitkin Avenue, View to Southeast From Bristol Street

II. IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The proposed Juvenile Detention Center will not impact significant archaeological resources. There are no documented pre-historic sites within the project area; and the relatively inland location would not have been the most attractive for settlement. Additionally, the early installation of utility systems reduces the potential for finding significant historic period deposits. It is concluded, therefore, that no additional archaeological study is needed for the Brooklyn tract.

With respect to standing structures, the proposed construction will impact no significant architectural resources. On an adjacent street, Pitkin Avenue, there are several buildings of potential historic architectural importance. However, the proposed project is expected to have no material effect upon such resources.

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APPENDIX 1

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