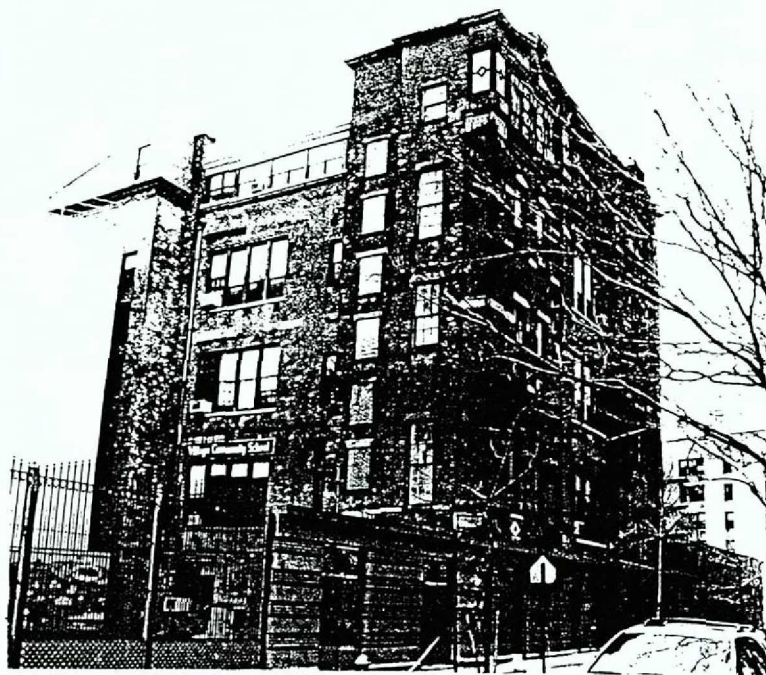


**DRAFT**

**VILLAGE COMMUNITY SCHOOL  
BLOCK 630 LOTS 9 AND 12  
GREENWICH VILLAGE, MANHATTAN  
PHASE IA ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT REPORT**

USF

4601M



Prepared for: Village Community School  
Prepared by: Celia J. Bergoffen, PH.D., R.P.A.  
April 18, 2001

01 BSA 031M

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Source: Dolkart, A.S., *Guide to New York City Landmarks*, Washington: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1992, p. 47.

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## THE PROJECT SITE - PLANNED DEVELOPMENT

The project site is located one block west of the Greenwich Village Historic District, on lots 9 and 12, block 630, at the southeast corner of Washington and West 10th Streets (Fig. 1). The area measures 40 feet 9 inches on Washington Street, 65 feet 5 inches on Amos Street, 57 feet 11.5 inches on the east side and 98 feet on the south side (Fig. 2). A one-story gymnasium, owned by the Village Community School, stands on the site (Fig. 3).

The block has had a school on it for most of the last one hundred and fifty years. The first school on the site of the present-day Village Community School (VCS) opened in 1852 (Fig. 8). Between 1857 and 1867, Public Schools 10 and 29 moved into buildings on the lots now occupied by VCS (Fig. 10). The building that would become the Village Community School -- with some modifications -- was erected ca. 1885 (Fig. 13). It was first Primary School no. 7, a public school, but in the late 1920s or early 1930s became a parochial school called St. Veronica Roman Catholic School. VCS bought the building in 1972.

Presently, in addition to the main building, VCS includes: a small yard on lot 12, used as a playground (Fig. 4) and measuring approximately 22 by 58 feet, and on lot 9, on the corner of Washington and West 10th Streets, a one-story building (without basement) that serves as a gymnasium (Fig. 3). The floor of the gymnasium is 4 feet 6 inches below the level of the sidewalk and is supported on a six- to eight-inch thick concrete slab.<sup>1</sup>

The school proposes to tear down the gymnasium and build a five-storey structure. The semi-basement of this building, whose floor will be 7 feet 8 inches below the sidewalk level, will house an auditorium. The upper stories will contain classrooms. A new gymnasium will be installed on the top floor and the roof will be used as playground space. The area of lot 9 will be impacted by subsurface construction since it is planned to excavate three feet 2 inches below the existing gymnasium floor level for the auditorium. The new entrance and garden which will occupy the small yard on lot 12, however, will not involve any subsurface construction.

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<sup>1</sup> Mellick-Tully and Associates 2000, 1-2; Kathy Smith, Business Manager, VCS, personal communication Apr. 12, 2001.



## GREENWICH VILLAGE: PREHISTORIC TIMES TO THE END OF THE 18TH CENTURY

The Canarsee Indians hunted and fished in this area, which they called "Sapokanican." It was marshland, bisected by a stream called Manetta, (later Minetta Brook, after which Minetta Lane gets its name), an Indian word meaning "devil water." The riverside in the area of present day Gansevoort Street was a landing place for canoes traveling back and forth from New Jersey. Bolton did not feel there could have been a settlement here because of the lack of fresh water nearby.<sup>2</sup> From the Gansevoort landing place, a path led to the Indian's main north-south route across Manhattan: Broadway's predecessor.

The Viele map shows that the project site was originally a little closer to the shoreline than it is today and that the land was at the foot of a hill which was leveled early in the 19th century when the area was first developed (Figs. 5 and 7). In her archaeological assessment of the Greenwich Mews site, located one block east of the project site under consideration here, Geismar pointed out that the leveling of the hills drastically altered and disturbed the original topography of the area. In any case, no native American implements, middens or shell heaps have been recorded in the area of the project site.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, as far as prehistoric archaeological sensitivity is concerned, it is highly unlikely that any such remains would be preserved undisturbed on the project site.

In 1629, under the Dutch, a grant of land that mentions Sapokanican, was made to Wouter van Twiller, the second Director General of New Amsterdam and the first European to farm this area, then called Noortwyck.<sup>4</sup> He had a tobacco plantation here, the Bossen Bouwerie ("farm in the woods").

Under the English, the area developed into a small village (Fig. 6). The first mention of Greenwich Village is in a will of 1696. The first mention in city records is under the designation Grin'wich in the Common Council records of 1713. It appeared on maps for the first time on the Bradford Map of 1730.<sup>5</sup> By the mid 18th century most of Greenwich Village was owned by Sir Peter Warren, Vice-Admiral of the British Navy and commander of the fleet in New York. After this death in 1752, in England, his widow stayed on. Her estate, which included the area of the project site, appears on the 1767 Ratzler map. The Warren mansion was located between present-day West 4th Street, Perry Street, Bleecker Street and Van Nest Place. Other prominent Greenwich Village landowners in the 18th century were Robert Richard Randall, and the Brevoort, Bayard, and de Lancey families. A community of freed African slaves, who farmed parcels of land here, formed near Minetta Lane and Thompson Street.

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<sup>2</sup> Bolton 1934, 53.

<sup>3</sup> Geismar 1989, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Stokes 1998, vol. IV, p. 76.

<sup>5</sup> Stokes 1998, vol. VI, Sept. 15, 1696; vol. IV, March 28, 1713, and 1734.

From the 1780s, when the land was purchased, until 1826, when plans for the present-day Park were hatched, the area of Washington Square was used as a potter's field and public gallows. Newgate Prison stood at the western end of Christopher Street from 1797 to 1829.

The project site remained farmland until the early 19th century and there is therefore no archaeological sensitivity for potential Colonial or Early Federal period remains.

## THE AREA OF THE PROJECT SITE IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Peter Warren's daughter, Charlotte Willoughby, sold her share of her father's estate in 1788 to Richard Amos, after whom West 10th Street was originally named.<sup>6</sup> By 1807, according to the Minutes of the Common Council, Richard Amos had built a house near the project site.<sup>7</sup> The project site was part of Amos' property until 1809 when he and his wife, Elizabeth, sold lots 8 to 11 to Gerardus Woolsey who sold them to John Gibson in the same year.<sup>8</sup> Also in 1809, Richard Amos granted land to the city for a street to run through his property, but "Amos Street" appears in the tax assessments first only in 1817.<sup>9</sup> In that year, Amos subdivided his land into lots no doubt to take advantage of the burgeoning housing market in Greenwich Village,<sup>10</sup> and the 1817 Poppleton map shows that the area west of Greenwich Avenue as far north as Gansevoort Street, where the market was located, was already built-up by that time (Fig. 7).

Fear of the frequent outbreaks of yellow fever in the densely populated areas of Lower Manhattan spurred a large-scale exodus into the healthier rural area of Greenwich Village. Almost overnight, Greenwich village was transformed from a thinly populated farming area to a built-up part of the town. Governmental and commercial institutions moved into the area: the State Prison opened at the foot of what would become Amos Street (West 10th Street) in 1797 (Fig. 7); the Bank of New York arrived in 1799, and the customs house, in 1803.<sup>11</sup> Other banks and a post office followed in 1805. In that year, as many as 50,000 people fled the infected city for Greenwich Village. Many were forced to live in tents, but houses were also quickly put up for the "refugees from the fever".<sup>12</sup> A report in the *Boston Repertory* of September 20, 1805 claimed that the demand for houses in Greenwich Village

...is scarcely greater than the rapidity with which they are raised...where yesterday you saw nothing but green turf, tomorrow you behold a store...By night as well as by day, the saw is heard and the hammer resounds and the consequence is that the village begins to assume the appearance of a town.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Geismar 1989, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Geismar 1989, 19.

<sup>8</sup> Deeds and Conveyances.

<sup>9</sup> Geismar 1989, 19, from the Minutes of the Common Council.

<sup>10</sup> Geismar 1989, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Stokes 1998, vol. 6, September 16, 1803.

<sup>12</sup> Stokes 1998, vol. 6, vol. V, September 13, 1805.

<sup>13</sup> Stokes 1998, vol. V, September 20, 1805.

Between 1825 and 1840, following the outbreak of a particularly virulent outbreak of yellow fever, the population increased fourfold.<sup>14</sup> Individuals who had fled from Lower Manhattan to this salubrious area thinking to remain only a short time, in temporary housing, decided to stay.

As Geismar observed, far from being a blight on the neighborhood, the State Prison attracted interest and stimulated settlement and development in the area.<sup>15</sup> This is particularly true of the project site, which was opposite the prison. It is possible that a house at either 663 or 665 Washington Street existed as early as 1807, since John Gibson, who bought the property in 1809 (present day lots 9 and 12), is listed in Longworth's 1807 directory as "grocer near State Prison". This becomes "grocer upper end State Prison" in the 1811-12 directory. In 1814, John Gibson was listed as the "dep.[uty] keep.[er] opposite State Prison". And finally in 1818-19 he is "dep. Keeper of State Prison Washington", but still without a house number. His duties as keeper did not keep him from his grocery business because he is listed as the owner of a shop on Amos Street in the tax assessments of 1819 (the corner property at 665 Washington was also assessed on Amos Street). The 663 Washington address first appears in Longworth's Directory in 1834-35, as John Gibson's residence, so a building on the project site certainly existed by that time. Evidently, the transference of last of the State prisoners to Sing Sing in 1829 had an impact on Gibson's career and may also have affected his finances because he is not listed in the directories of 1828 or 1829, then reappears in 1830-31 as deputy sheriff at 696 Greenwich Avenue, on the opposite side of the project site block. In 1833-34 we learn that he became the deputy-sheriff of the debtors' jail (but his address is not given). Then in 1834-35 he is listed once again at 663 Washington where he remained until his death in 1844. The 663-665 Washington property remained in the estate of John Gibson through most of the 19th century.

The next tenant at 663 Washington Street was John H. Morrison, who kept a drygoods shop. Next door at 665 was John Eisw (?) a grocer. The lot facing onto West 10th Street that is within the project site (600B on the maps) was first listed as a "new assessment" in 1853, the year after the school moved in next door. But the 1851 Street Directory lists an earlier building on this part of the project site, a stable at 178 Amos Street. Next door to it, at 176 Amos Street, stood a feed shop owned by George Comstock.

On the 1857 Perris map, the building at 178 Amos Street and the one at 665 Washington Street are shown made of brick (Fig. 9). The former was no doubt a new dwelling, built in 1853 as the tax assessments indicate, and it replaced the stables. Note that the 176-178 Amos Street lots are shown still vacant of the 1852 Dripps map (Fig. 8). the building at 663 Washington Street is shown as a frame building on the 1857 Perris map. In the 1858 tax assessments, we finally get the dimensions of the buildings on the project site: the four-story corner building at 665 Washington Street was 20 by 46 feet; the "irregular" three-story building next to it at 663 Washington Street measured an "average" of 20 by 40 feet, and the three-story building at 178 Amos Street was 18.4 by 40 feet. Although the 1867 Dripps map (Fig. 10) does not show the backyard lot of 663 Washington Street, the tax assessments for this year confirm that the

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<sup>14</sup> Ramirez 1995.

<sup>15</sup> Geismar 1989, 33-34.

dimensions of the house was still 20 by 40 feet.

Figs. 11 through 18 show that from the project site's first development until the buildings at 663-5 Washington Street and 278 West 10th Street were demolished in 1945, the configuration of these buildings and their backyard lots remained unchanged.<sup>16</sup>

A 1946 certificate of occupancy for 663-5 Washington Street at 278-280 West 10th Street, lots 8, 9, 10, shows that a "freight terminal and garage for four cars" was erected on the project site immediately after the old dwellings were destroyed (Fig. 19). In 1972, VCS purchased the building formerly occupied by St. Veronica's School and in the following year, 1973, converted the garage to a gymnasium.

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<sup>16</sup> New York City Building Department, Block & Lot File, Permit 445 (demolition), Application No. 718, 1945.

## WATER RESOURCES AND POTENTIAL BACKYARD FEATURES

It is certain that John Gibson's buildings at 663-5 Greenwich were originally equipped with privies and cisterns in their backyard, while the dwelling at 278 Amos Street may not have needed them. The buildings on Washington Street were erected early in the 19th century, long before the installation of the earliest water pipes and street faucets on Greenwich, Amos and Christopher, which followed the opening of the Croton Aqueduct in 1843.<sup>17</sup> The annual report of the Croton Aqueduct Department for 1864, however, noted that street pumps on West 10th Street and Christopher Streets were still in use, which indicates, as Geismar pointed out, that piped-in water was not yet readily available in the neighborhood.<sup>18</sup> The sewer on Amos Street was not built until 1853.<sup>19</sup> On Washington Street, the sewer was laid only in 1874.<sup>20</sup> Geismar concluded therefore that for the Greenwich Mews site, on Amos Street between Greenwich and Hudson Streets, indoor plumbing would not have been available before 1853 at the earliest and possibly not until after 1863.<sup>21</sup> The same is true for the dwellings in the project area, on Washington Street, although here, access to sewers may have even later. The corner building, which was also assessed on Amos Street, may have been connected to the Amos Street sewer, but would 663 Washington Street also have had access to the Amos Street facility? As for the building which stood on the eastern side of the project site, fronting on Amos Street, it was erected in 1853, the same year that the sewer was installed. It is therefore less likely to have had a backyard privy.

In her excavations of the backyard lots of three row houses built in 1844-1845, Geismar discovered two undisturbed privies. These yielded a rich trove of some artifacts, 3,009 of which were catalogued in her study. Such repositories, when studied alongside documentary records such as census data, yield intimate insights into the social, economic and ethnic character of historic neighborhoods.

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<sup>17</sup> Geismar 1989, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Geismar 1989, 37, cited the Annual report of the Croton Aqueduct Department for 1864, 100-102.

<sup>19</sup> Geismar 1989, 37.

<sup>20</sup> Manhattan, Department of Environmental Protection. Water and Sewer Permits and Connections.

<sup>21</sup> Geismar 1989, 38-39.



## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SENSITIVITY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous sections demonstrated first, that the buildings erected on the project site in the early and mid-19th century remained unchanged until 1945, when they were demolished, and second, that certainly the Washington Street houses, but probably also the dwelling at 178 Amos Street, must have been equipped with privies and cisterns. The construction of the present gymnasium in 1973 may have had some negative impact on these features as its floor is 4 feet 8 inches below grade. But the degree of disturbance or possible integrity of the cisterns and privies may only be assessed with certainty by archaeological testing. The areas of potential sensitivity are the former backyard of the dwelling built in 1853 on 278 Amos Street and especially the former backyard behind 663 Washington Street, probably shared by 665 Washington Street, a portion of whose south wall encloses it. These corner buildings were erected early in the 19th century, probably before 1834-35. The backyard of 278 Amos Street measured approximately 20 by 20 feet; the yard of 663-665 Washington Street, approximately 20 feet on its north side, 30.8 feet on its east and west sides, and 19 feet on its south side (Figs. 12 and 17).

Two test borings dug within the existing gymnasium area and extending to depths of approximately 25 feet below the floor were sited in the area of the 19th century buildings, not in their backyards.<sup>22</sup> They report a layer of fill some 13 feet in depth. This could have been created early in the 19th century, perhaps when the hills were leveled prior to development. As we have seen, the houses that were built on the Washington Street side of the block early in the 19th century survived until the middle of the 20th. The current elevation is therefore more or less what it was when John Gibson lived here. Consequently, the soil borings do not provide any data relevant to determine the presence or integrity of the backyard features.

Since, we do not know the level of the original ground surface of the 19th century dwelling's former backyards, and the depth of either a cistern or privy would normally be greater than 4 feet below grade, it is possible that such features may be found under the floor of the gymnasium. The possibility of recovering artifacts associated with the grocery store on Washington Street, which was in the first wave of business to establish themselves in Greenwich Village, and whose owner, moreover, also worked across the street at the prison, would be a unique opportunity.

It is therefore recommended that minimal testing in the specific areas of the former backyards be undertaken after the demolition of the existing building has been completed and the demolition debris has been removed. The testing, to be conducted by shovel clearing, will determine if significant features are present and if these possess archaeological integrity. Such features would be recorded on a map and their contents sampled in order to answer research questions pertaining to the development of the site and the neighborhood.

With the approval of the Landmark Preservation Commission and under the direction of the developer or architect, the writer will prepare a scope of work for limited archaeological investigation of the project site.

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<sup>22</sup> Milick-Tully and Associates, P.C. 2000, pl. 1.

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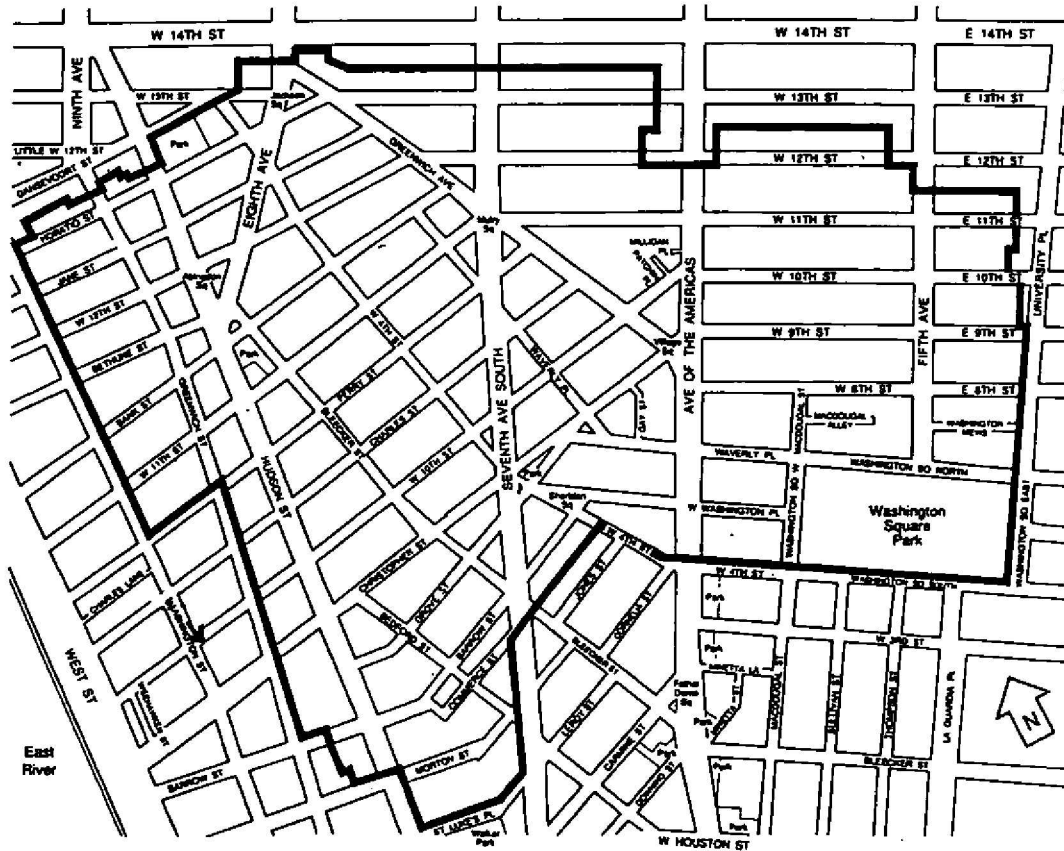
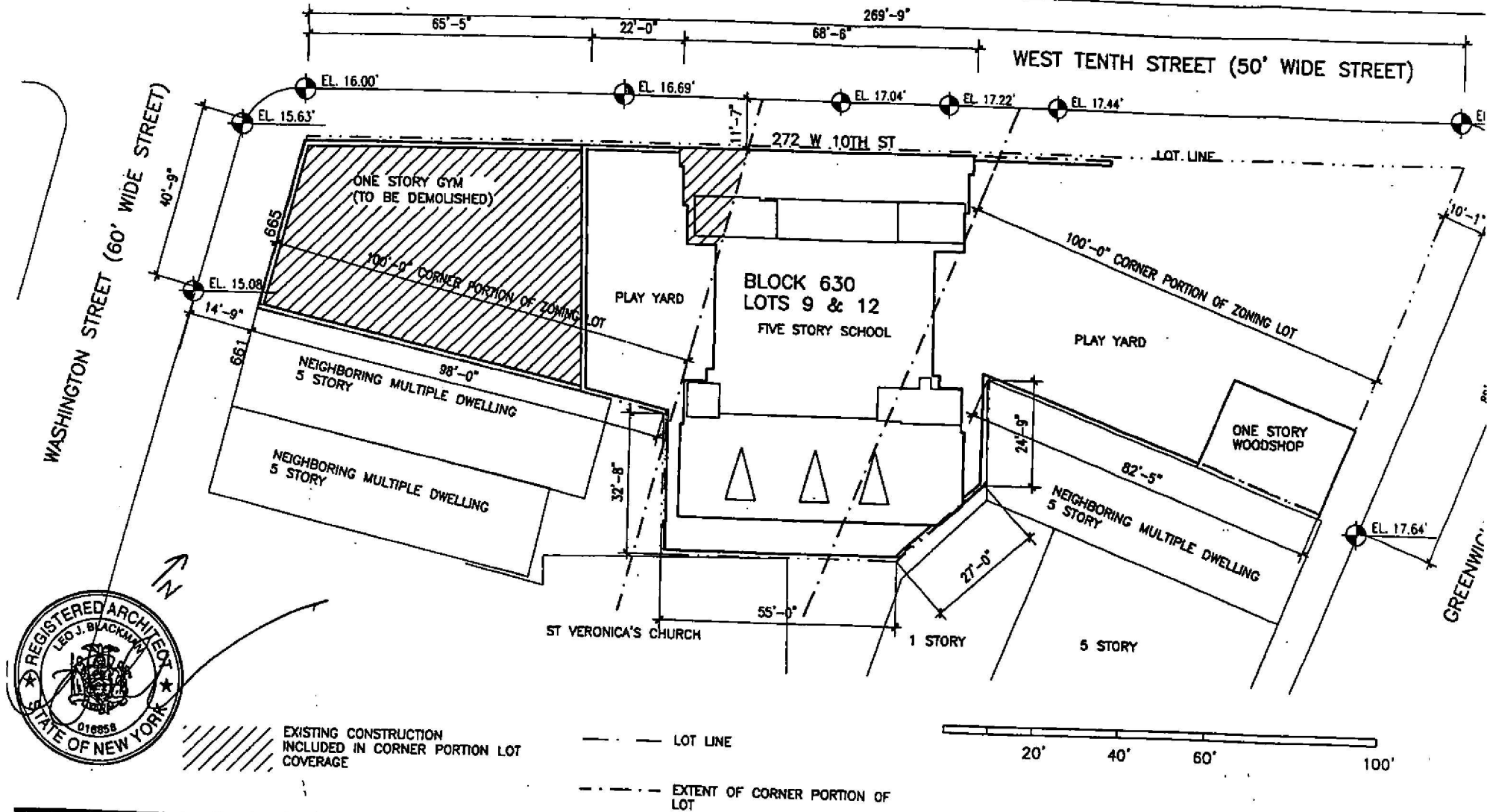


Fig. 1. Map of Greenwich Village historic district showing the location of the project site

Fig. 2. Architect's plan of the project site



**BUTTRICK WHITE & BURTIS**

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**VILLAGE COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

272 WEST TENTH STREET  
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

**BOARD OF STANDARDS & APPEALS  
APPLICATION**

**EXISTING & LEGAL PLOT**

SEPTEMBER 25, 2000





Fig. 3 View of the project site from Washington Street looking southeast

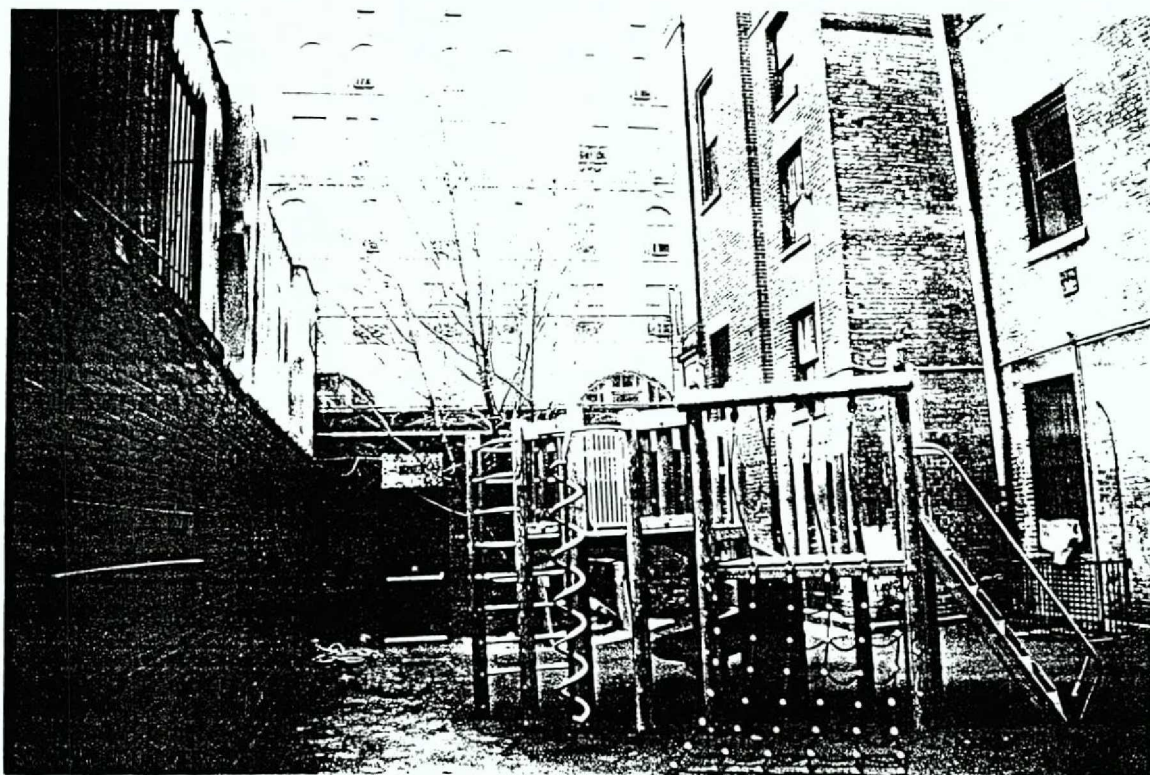


Fig. 4 View of the playground on lot 12 looking towards West 10th Street



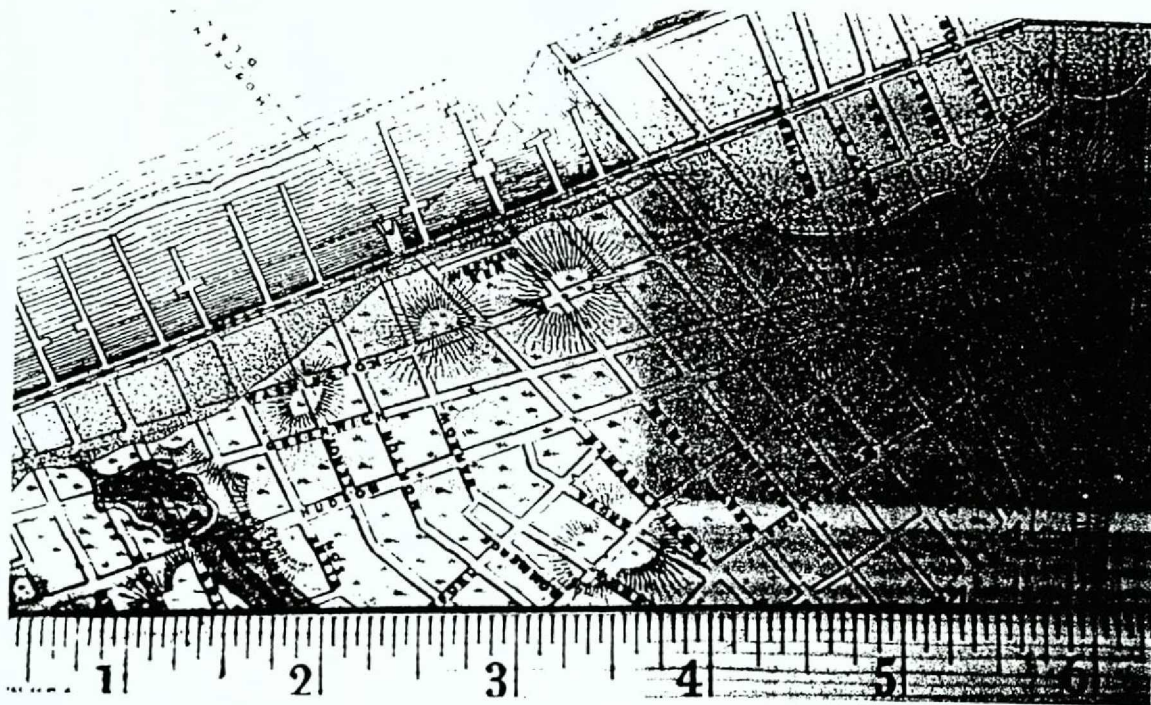


Fig. 5 (above) 1974 V. J. V. map  
showing the location of the  
project site

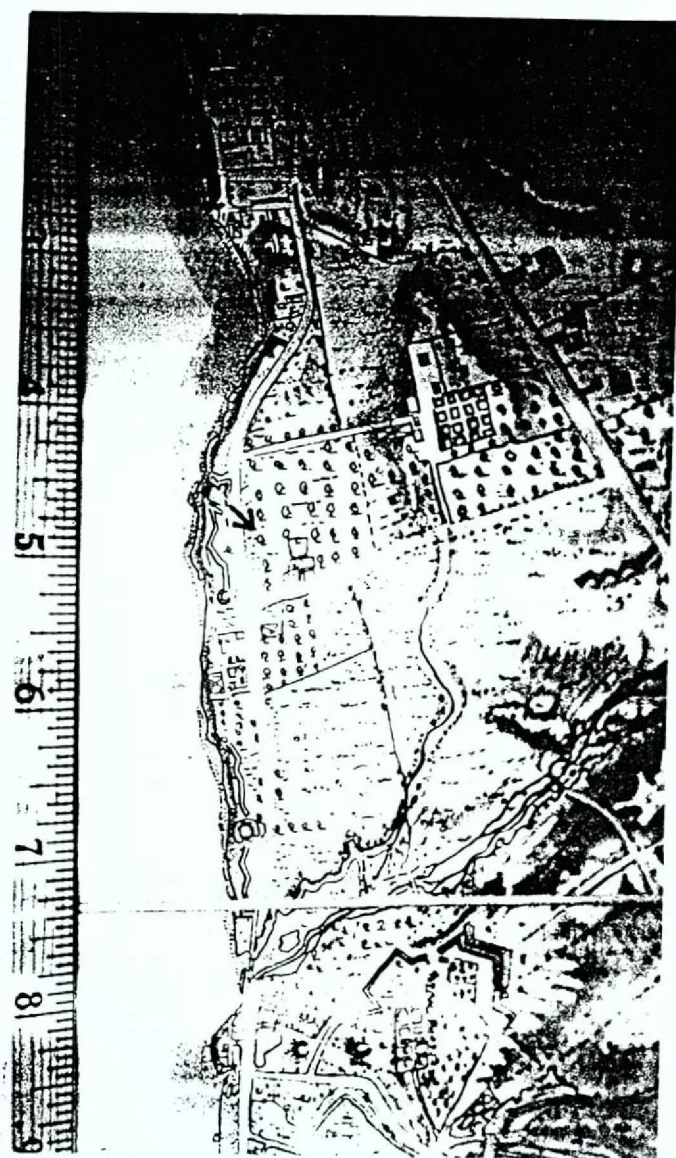


Fig. 6 Revolutionary War map, 1783  
showing the location of the  
project site



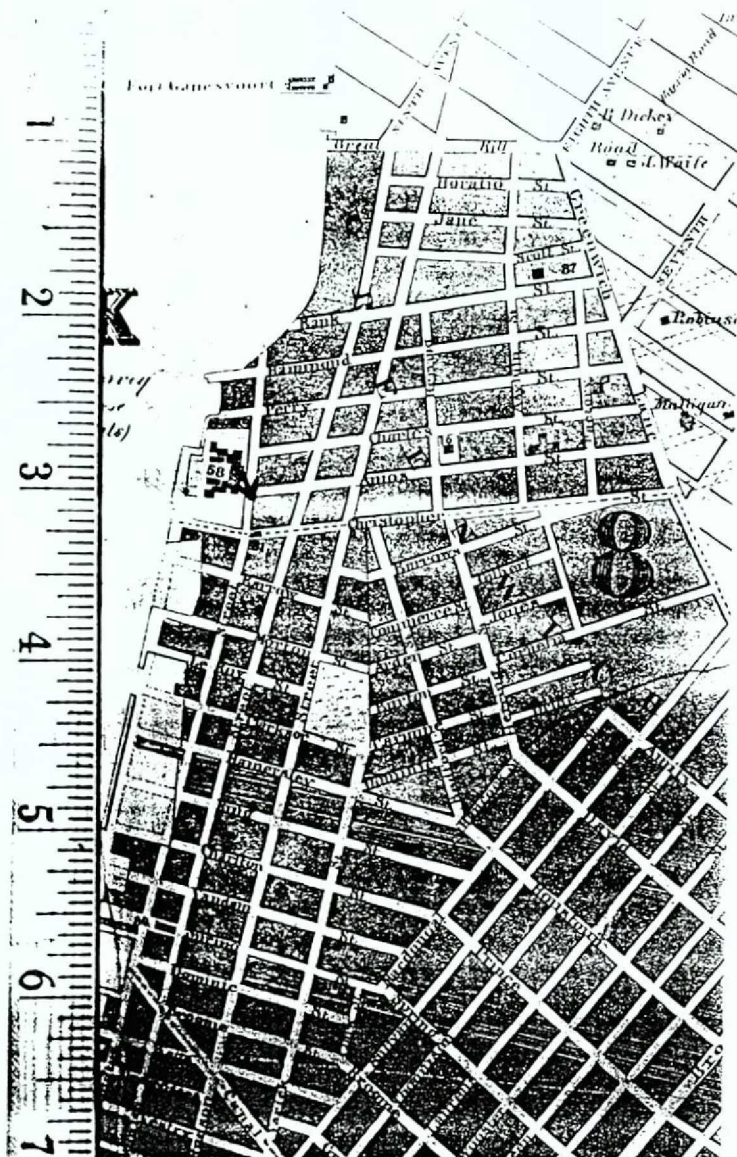


Fig. 7 Poppleton map, 1817  
showing the location of  
the project site

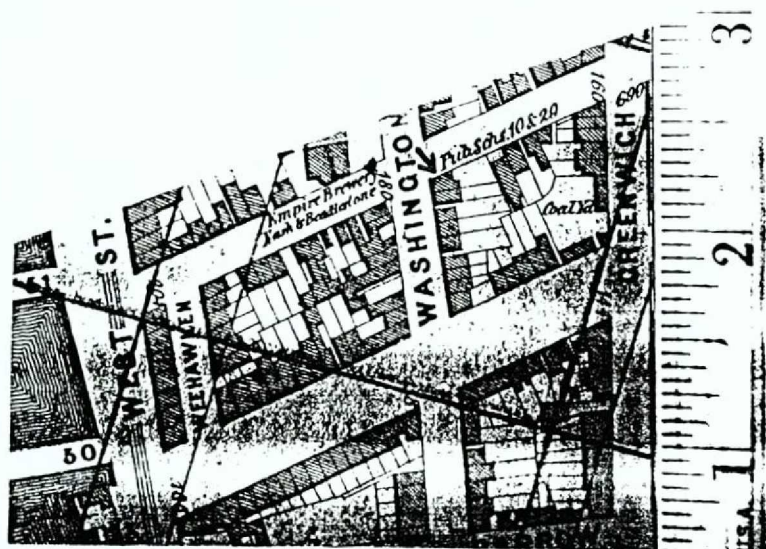


Fig. 8 Dripps map, 1852  
showing the location of  
the project site



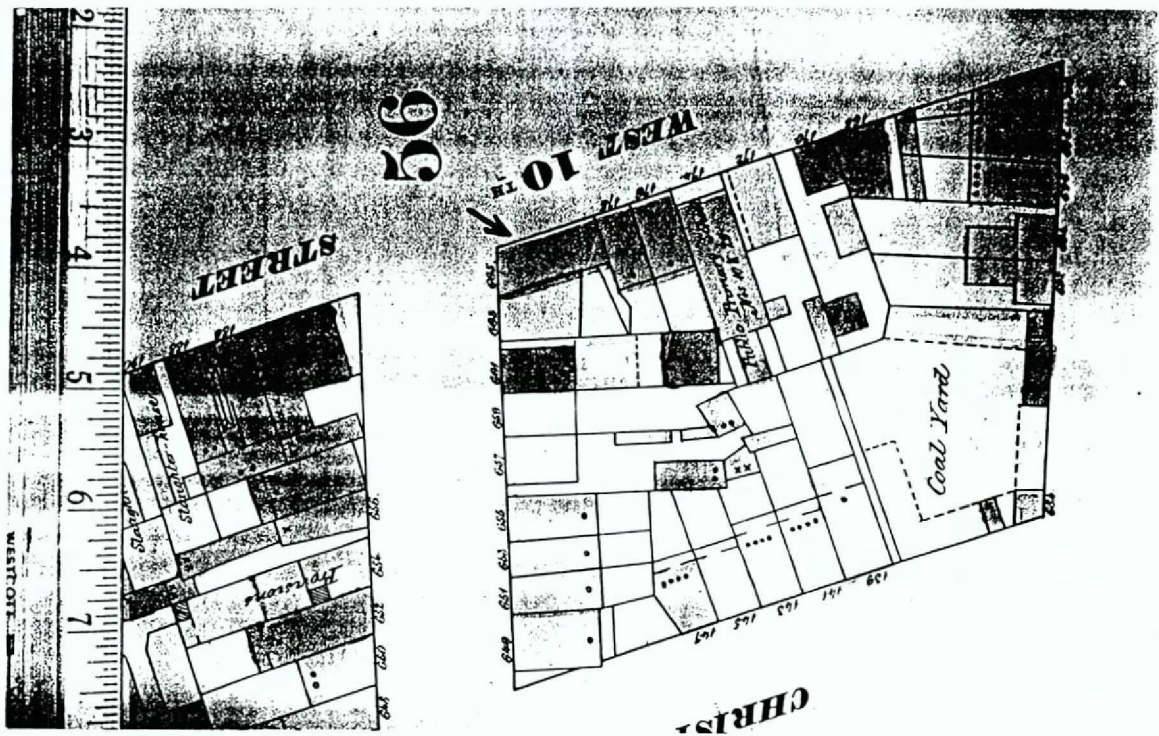


Fig. 9. Perris map 1857, showing the location of the project site

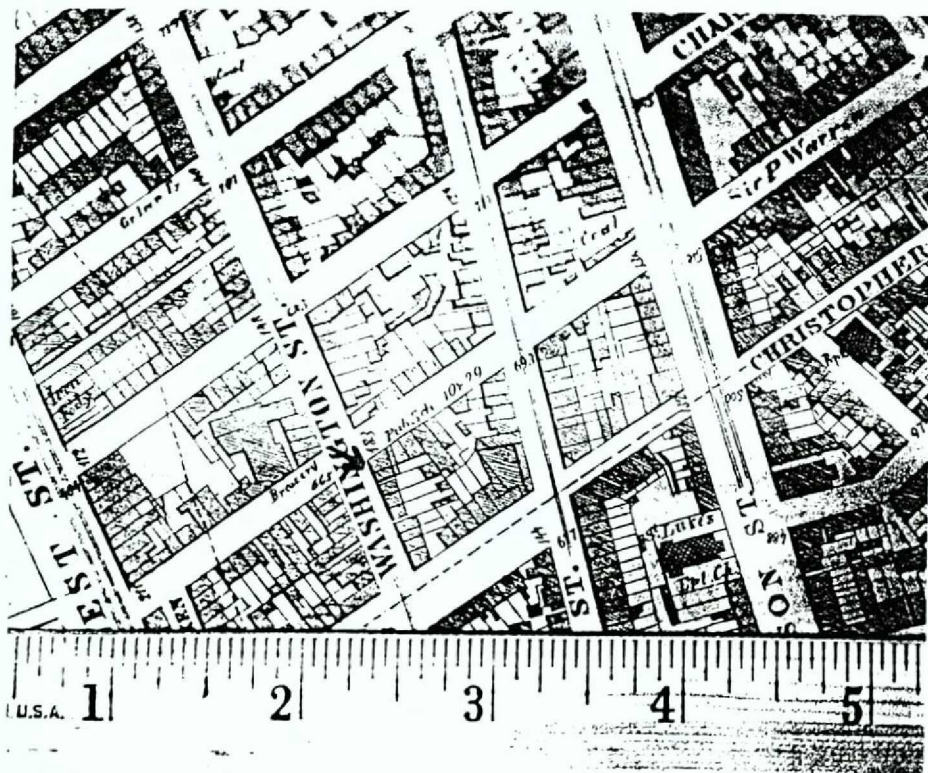


Fig. 10. Dripps map 1867, showing the location of the project site



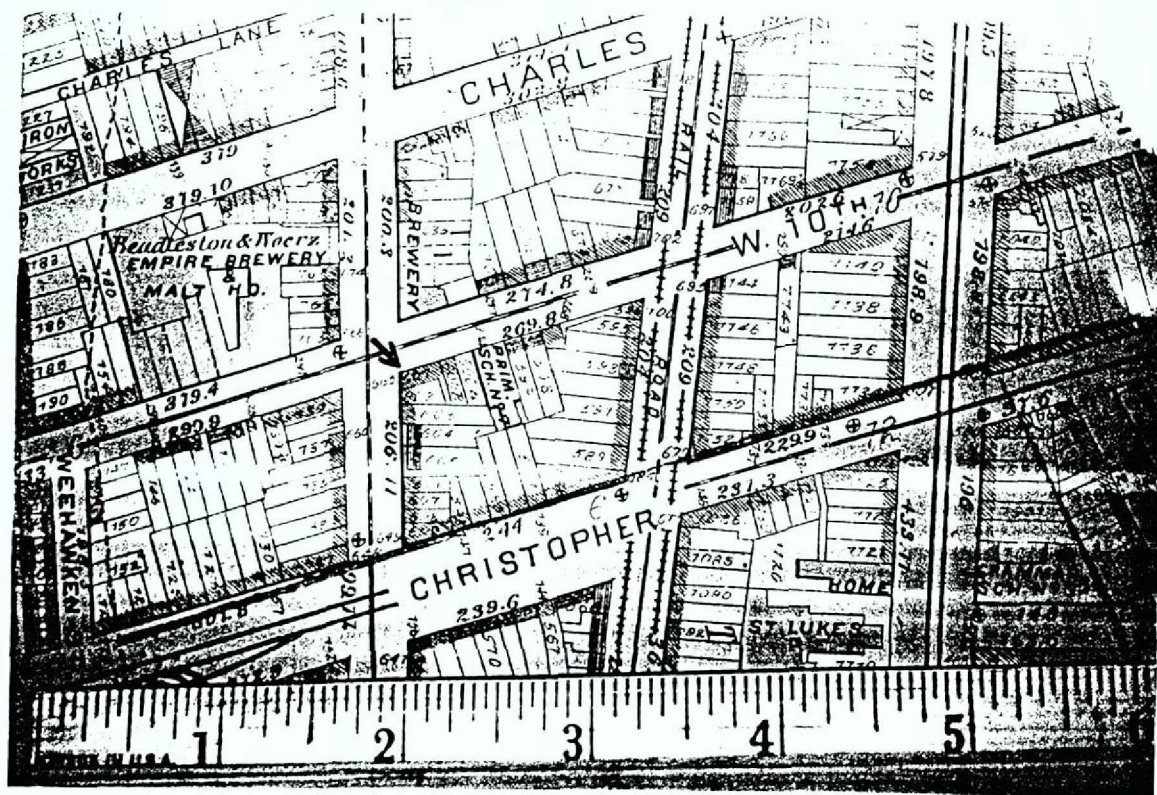


Fig. 11. Bromley map 1879 showing the location of the project site

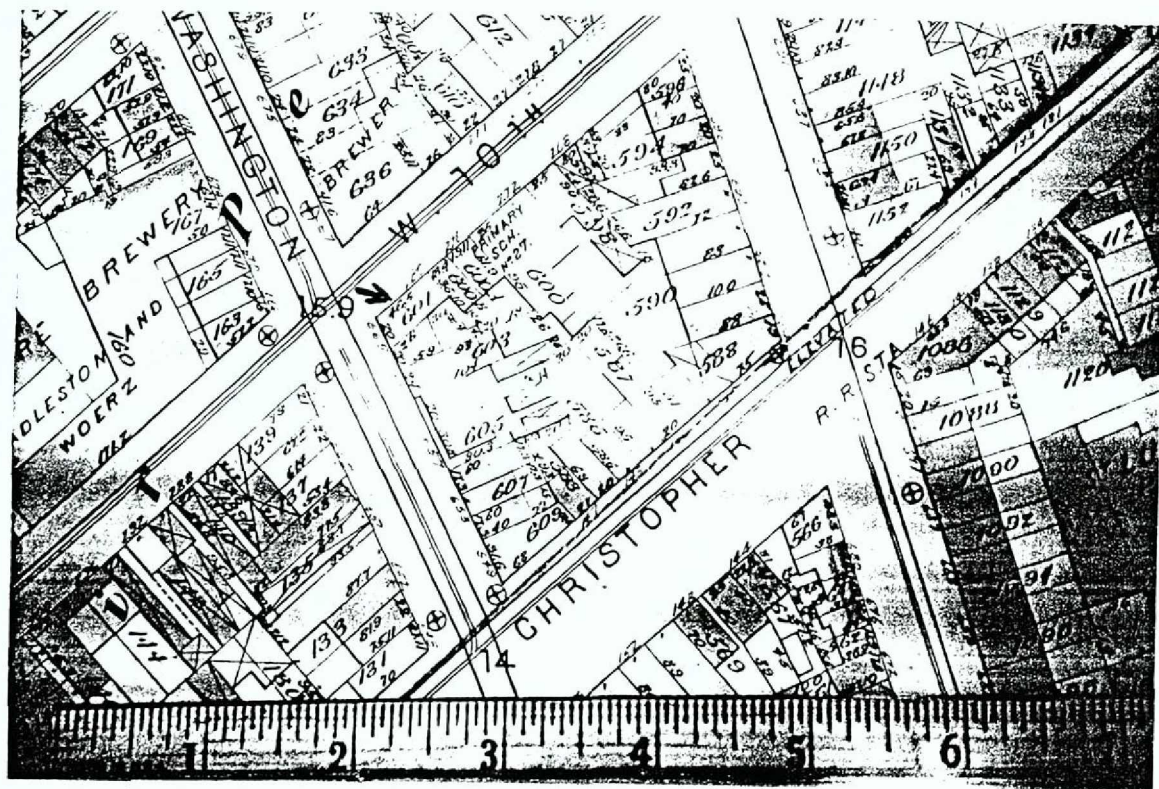


Fig. 12. Robinson map 1884, showing the location of the project site







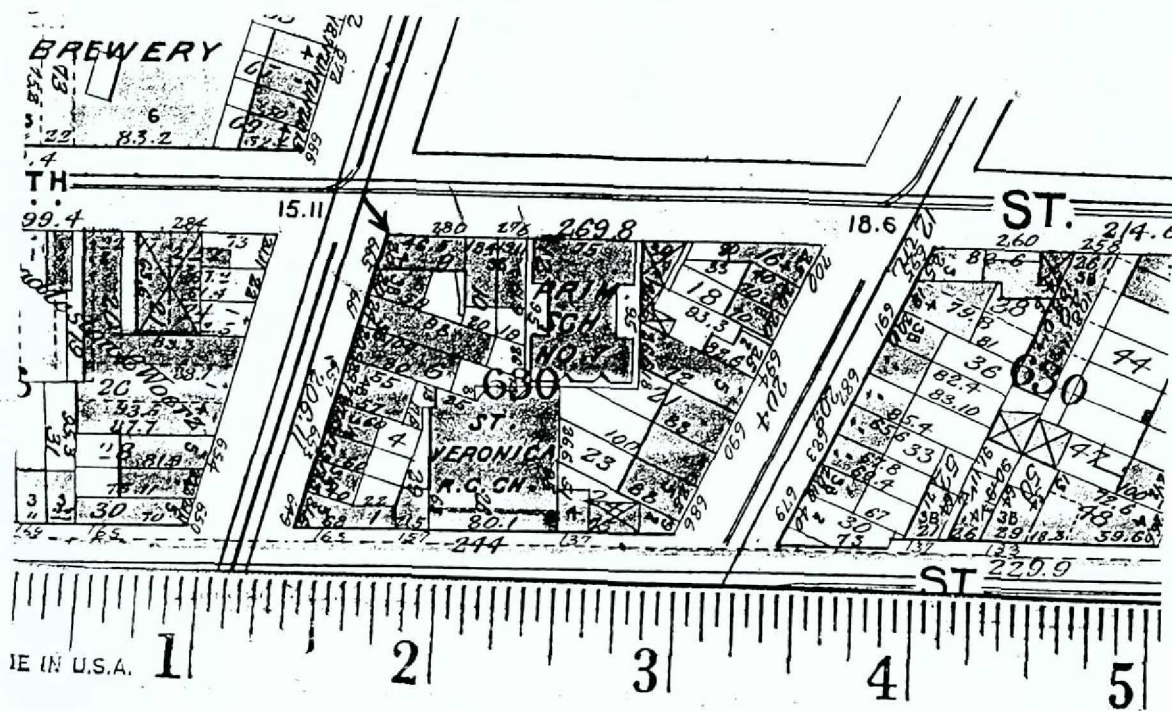


Fig. 15. Bromley map 1897, showing the location of the project site

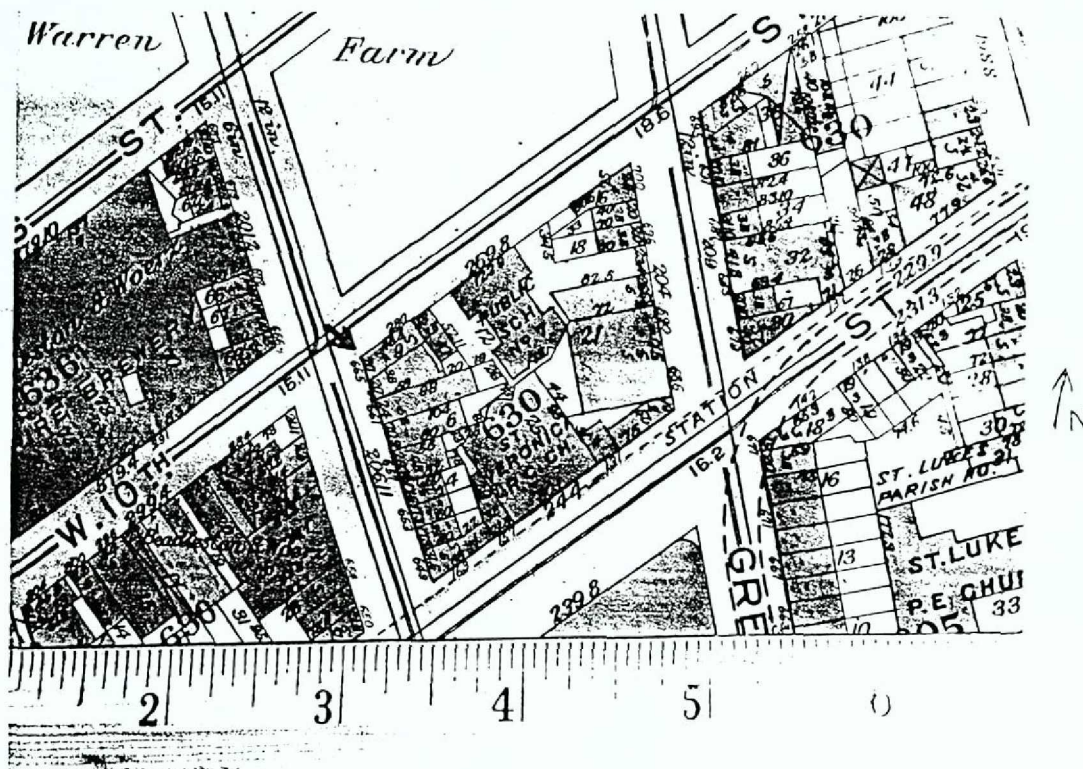


Fig. 16. Bromley map 1911, showing the location of the project site





