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2001

**STAGE 1B ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD  
RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY**

**LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR**  
**(South Portion of Block 5452)**

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**142 Hollywood Avenue. Borough of the Bronx.**  
**Bronx County, New York**

Prepared For:

**Environmental Project Data Statements Company**  
185 Great Neck Road. Suite 402  
Great Neck, New York 11201

Prepared By:

**CITY/SCAPE: Cultural Resource Consultants**  
726 Carroll Street  
Brooklyn, New York 11215

July 2001

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**LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR  
(South Portion of Block 5452)**

**142 Hollywood Avenue. Throgs Neck  
Borough of the Bronx. Bronx County, New York**

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CITY/SCAPE: Cultural Resource Consultants

## INTRODUCTION

On May 31, 2001 City/Scape: Cultural Resource Consultants completed a field reconnaissance level archaeological survey of the *Little Sisters of the Poor Site*, located at 142 Hollywood Avenue (Block 5452), Throgs Neck, Borough of the Bronx, Bronx County, New York.

Stephanie Roberg-Lopez, Ibis Guzman, Beth Murphy, Kristin Brown and Kris Mierisch completed the archaeological fieldwork. Stephanie Roberg-Lopez, Principal Investigator, completed preparation of the final report, photographic documentation of the site and drafting of the Field Reconnaissance Map. Gail T. Guillet completed preparation of shovel test records and production of the report.

## PROJECT AREA DESCRIPTION AND SITE HISTORY

The project area encompasses the southern portion of Block 5452, located in the Throgs Neck section of the Bronx south and west of the intersection of the Cross Bronx and Throgs Neck Expressway. Monsignor Halphin Place (formerly part of Silver Beach Place) bounds the project area to the north. It is bounded to the east by Throgs Neck Boulevard, to the south by Schurz Avenue and to the west by Hollywood Avenue. (Map 1) The Convent of the Little Sisters of the Poor formerly occupied the land. The convent appears on the Sanborn maps as Poor Clares Monastery. (Map 2) The project area is adjacent to property on the northern portion of Block 5452 and 5453 that is occupied by a church, rectory, convent and school complex. At the corner of Monsignor Halphin Place and Throgs Neck Boulevard is a small dwelling. Looking at the broader neighborhood, the site is set in a residential neighborhood a short distance from the East River and Long Island Sound. Across from the project area, on Block 5503, is a Little League park.

The proposed project area is currently vacant land that is surrounded by a stone wall that varies significantly in height. (Photo 1 & 2) It was constructed to screen the convent garden from the surrounding streets. Some time after 1996, the convent was razed, leaving few traces other than mounded earth and surface debris. (Photo 3) The land on the west side of Block 5452 reaches an altitude of approximately 31 feet above sea level. To the east the land slopes downward to approximately 22 feet above sea level. According to the historic Sanborn maps, the entire project area was vacant prior to the construction of Poor Clares Monastery, which took place in 1931.

## ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION

The project area is located north of the East River and west of the Throgs Neck Bridge. It is currently vacant, and its condition can be described as an urban setting. A substantial portion of the site has been profoundly disturbed by the construction of Poor Clares Monastery and its subsequent destruction. The elevations on the site are consistent with those of surrounding streets and lots, indicating that no substantial episode of filling or

grading has taken place on the site. A site demolition plan map provided by O.A.P.D. documents profound disturbance across more than 50% of the site, caused by sub-surface activity associated with the convent. (See Field Reconnaissance Map)

In earlier times, Hammond Creek and Wier Creek, both of which were associated with extensive salt marsh, flowed in proximity to the project area. Map research, however, documents that the project area has always been fast land. Prior to the many filling episodes and topographical changes that have occurred in the Throgs neck area during the last century, the project area would have been situated on a bench overlooking the salt marshes and Weir Creek.

In its larger geophysical context, the project area is a part of the New England Upland physiographic province. The underlying geology dates to the Cambrian-Ordovician age, with the modern surface conditions the result of the action of the Wisconsin glaciation. Soils in the region are unconsolidated gravel, sand and clay deposits now generally overlain by historic plow zones and urban soils.

The *Little Sisters of the Poor* site has been razed, and the only remaining vegetation is that which survived the demolition of the convent. In the convent garden area, herbs, flowers and shrubs that had been part of the garden landscape endure in a neglected state around the wall perimeter. These plants include roses, Montauk daisy, mint, lemon balm, rhubarb, hosta, daisy and a variety of others. A neighbor passing by during the excavation mentioned that local residents were entering the site and salvaging cuttings and plants in order to remember the kindness of the nuns and the once beautiful oasis of the convent garden. The vast majority of the site is bulldozed soil containing rubble and dumped debris. Apart from the above mentioned plants, evidence of the garden can be seen in a number of large stumps, all that remain of substantial shade trees. A system of concrete walkways still exists in the garden area as well.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF THE PROJECT AREA

In terms of its prehistory, the project area lies within the larger archaeological zone identified as Prehistoric New England. The area is routinely divided for study into major river drainages, as these waterways and their associated lands comprised the geophysical and political boundaries recognized by the indigenous groups themselves. Along with distinct waterways such as the Hudson, the Connecticut and the Housatonic, large inland and peninsular areas such as Long Island and Cape Cod are treated as discrete environmental units (Snow 1980:5). The majority of prehistoric New England is generally treated as a single physiographic unit. Only Long Island, Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard and Cape Cod are identified as being northern expressions of the coastal plain that broadens and dominates the landscape to the south (Snow 1980:6). During prehistoric times, when Long Island Sound was dry land, this coastal plain would have extended toward the Atlantic from what is now the fast land of the Bronx.



The entire land surface of Prehistoric New England, including the Bronx, was covered by the Wisconsin glaciation that receded only 12 to 10,000 years ago. The underlying soils of the project area are a direct result of this glacial episode, being dominated by deep, strongly acid soils that have developed in unconsolidated sand and clay (Snow 1980:6).

Man's presence in the area of the Bronx, Manhattan, Staten Island and Long Island is well documented from the Paleo-Indian Period up to the present, with modern Native American populations still established on the eastern part of Long Island. Research conducted in the preparation of the Stage 1A Literature Review encountered no fewer than 20 sites in fairly close proximity to the project area (City/Scape: Cultural Resource Consultants, January 2001:13-16).

The earliest and most ephemeral occupants of the area were the Paleo-Indians, who are known to have occupied areas surrounding Long Island Sound. Well known Paleo-Indian sites near the project area are Port Mobil, the Cutting site, Kreischerville and Charleston Beach. (Boesch, 1995: 3) Much more common in the area are sites dating from the Archaic Period, from 9000 to 3000 BP. The Archaic people hunted and fished in the waters of Long Island Sound, focusing on shellfish and the abundant anadromous and ocean species in the area. Archaic burials have been recovered on nearby Long Island. Following the long and relatively stable Archaic period was a brief Transitional Phase that marks the beginning of sedentism. In the Northeast, archaeologists identify the use of stone vessels as one of the chief characteristics that separate the Transitional Stage from the earlier periods is the use of stone vessels. With soapstone the most common raw material, these vessels were extremely heavy and were later replaced by pottery vessels of various types. With the coming of agriculture, native peoples of the Northeast began to produce pottery vessels and settle into palisaded farming villages. These first farmers lived during what is known as the Woodland Period (3000 BP to 1600 AD). Basing their agriculture on maize, squash, beans, sumpweed, sunflowers and a variety of other indigenous cultigens, the Woodland people would be those first impacted by the invasion of the Europeans.

The Stage 1A Literature Review identified the probable presence of long standing Indian trails in the vicinity of the project area. The historic "Road to Fort Schuyler" probably corresponds to older Indian paths connecting Weir Creek, Hammond Creek, the East River and Long Island South to the interior. It is likely that several villages as well as agricultural fields on Castle Hill were connected in a similar way. As mentioned above, the Stage 1A Literature identified no fewer than 20 sites in the general vicinity of the project area. Several are located quite close by, among them, the Schurz Avenue site (NYSM #715, 7768, 7769 & 5326), the Milton Place site, the Silver Beach Gardens site and the Sunset Trail site. With this number of documented sites close to the project area, the potential for cultural remains could not be ruled out should undisturbed soils remain on the project area.

In addition to its location within a fairly dense locus of known archaeological sites, the *Little Sisters of the Poor* project area conforms to the predictive model developed by the Landmarks Preservation Commission. This model focuses on environmental and ecological settings that might have been favored by prehistoric peoples; settings located near tidal

creeks, streams and wetland areas. In addition to access to water sources, prehistoric peoples favored high and well-drained settings. As it has been documented that the project area was fast land, its position above the abundant resources of the tidal marsh would make it an optimum campsite. Access to fish, amphibians, shellfish, reeds, and water transportation enhance its potential to have once been used by prehistoric man.

Based on the predictive model, and considering the numerous nearby archaeological sites, the *Little Sisters of the Poor* project area was judged to have a high potential to produce prehistoric cultural resources should undisturbed sediments be encountered in testing.

## TESTING STRATEGY

Testing strategy for the *Little Sisters of the Poor* site was structured around the knowledge that the property possessed a high probability to yield prehistoric cultural resources in those areas not ruled out by disturbance. Areas designated for subsurface testing were identified during a walkover and assessment of the property combined with information presented in the Stage 1A Literature Review. The testing strategy was developed in the following way:

1. All areas in which profound disturbance could be documented or demonstrated through visual inspection were noted and eliminated from testing. After this process was complete, a small area measuring approximately 200' by 250' was identified as having the potential to retain undisturbed sediments.
2. Four transects of three shovel tests each, spaced at 50' intervals, were laid out on the small testing area. Archaeological crew excavated each of these tests to sterile glacial soil.
3. Soils were screened through ¼ inch hardware cloth, and examined for the presence of cultural materials.
4. The entire site was mapped and photographed.

## FIELD METHODOLOGY

The methodology for archaeological field testing in the designated areas involved excavating 36" diameter shovel tests at 50' intervals along transects oriented to the topography of the site, in this case roughly north-south. The unusually wide diameter of the STP's served two purposes; first to recover a sample approximately four times larger than the customary 40 cm diameter shovel test and secondly, to allow for very deep tests excavated in hardpan strata. Soils were passed through a 0.25 inch steel mesh screen and the materials remaining in the screens were carefully examined for historic and prehistoric artifacts. Had cultural materials been recovered, they would have been assigned to the stratum from which

they were obtained. The stratigraphy of each test was recorded, including the depth and the soil description of each layer. (Appendix A: Shovel Test Record)

## FIELD RESULTS

Preliminary documentary and field reconnaissance investigations had narrowed the locus of potentially intact soils to a portion of the convent garden. Within this 200' by 250' area, additional disturbance had been documented with the O.A.P.D. destruction map. The testing strategy was refined to place 12 shovel tests along four transects oriented approximately north-south that would avoid disturbance and produce to broadest sample of tests from the site.

The first shovel tests was excavated as a stratigraphic control. (See Photo 4, also Photo 5-10) Shovel test 1 was placed in the northwest corner of the convent garden, and it produced results that would be consistent throughout the site. A surface stratum of dark brown organic sandy silt reached a depth of 10". Once this first layer had been removed, excavators encountered a second layer that would prove to be exceedingly difficult to dig, since it bore the consistency of hardpan, or light concrete. The diameter of the test was at this time expanded to 36", and the second stratum, reaching a depth of 24", was carefully removed. In this layer, a very light scatter of modern debris was encountered, including plastic, glass, rusted metal, brick clinker and wood. The stratum was yellowish-brown, sandy hardpan. It was immediately clear that stratum 2 was not made up of naturally occurring sediments, and was therefore a fill layer. The next stratum was a dark, organic silty humus with no artifacts of any kind recovered. This stratum had all of the characteristics of historic plowzone, a conclusion confirmed by the presence of typical glacial gravelly sand underneath. This initial shovel test was excavated to a depth of 54" so that a deep sample of the glacial subsoil could be examined, and the presence of deeper cultural layers could be ruled out. Below the hardpan fill layer, no cultural materials of any kind were encountered.

Having established the stratigraphy of the site, the team proceeded to excavate the next two shovel tests along Transect 1. Stratum 1, the organic gardening soil that makes up the top layer, reached a depth of 11" on shovel test 2 and 12" on shovel test 3 indicating that the fill below sloped a bit to the south. The fill stratum reached a depth of 27" on shovel test 2 and 24" on shovel test 3. As with shovel test 1, the fill stratum contained a light distribution of modern debris, however no artifacts of any age or significance were recovered. Stratum 3 along this transect was also consistent with that of shovel test 1, yielding an eight or nine inch historic plowzone underlain by glacial sand and gravel.

The second transect, laid out 50' west of the first, produced a nearly identical soil profile to that of Transect 1. The only significant difference is the depth of the fill layer, which ranges from 3" to 6" shallower along this transect. The fill was evidently applied over the historic plow zone to level the surface of the convent garden.

Transect 3, placed 50' west of Transect 2 produced varied results. Shovel test 7 contained a three-inch second stratum of extremely dark (10YR2/1) sediments rather than the

fill layer ubiquitous on the two eastern transects. (Photo 7) It is likely that this area had been disturbed some time after the garden was constructed. Shovel tests 8 and 9 exhibited the soil profile consistent with Transects 1 and 2.

The final transect, Transect 4 was placed 50" west of Transect 3. Shovel test 10, the northernmost test, yielded a stratigraphic profile similar to those excavated to the east, however shovel test 11 terminated at 6" with a solid brick obstruction, possibly a buried walkway. Shovel test 12, the final test, could not be excavated beyond a few inches as it consisted of jumbled destruction debris. This area was clearly profoundly disturbed, and probably represents a zone of destruction that was not mapped.

Neither prehistoric artifacts of any kind nor historic artifacts dating to a significant earlier period were recovered in any of the shovel tests.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A walkover reconnaissance was completed on the *Little Sisters of the Poor* site located on Block 5452 at 142 Hollywood Avenue, Borough of the Bronx, Bronx County, New York. After reviewing the Stage 1A Literature Review completed for the site, a testing strategy was created for the small area of convent garden that makes up the project area. The testing strategy focused on the possible presence of prehistoric cultural materials should any of the soils remain undisturbed and retain archaeological integrity. An initial stratigraphic test pit was excavated and carefully examined to evaluate the use history of the site. In those areas not disturbed, the stratigraphy across the site was consistent; a ten-inch stratum of organic gardening soil underlain by a layer of hardpan fill, underlain by a historic plowzone and finally, a stratum of sand and gravel that signals the sterile glacial subsoil typical of the area. The fill layer was shallowest to the west and deepest to the east, ranging across the site from approximately three inches to fourteen inches in depth. This graduated fill is consistent with leveling the garden surface, as there was a gentle slope from east to west until the convent garden was constructed.

No prehistoric artifacts of any kind were recovered from the twelve shovel tests excavated on the *Little Sisters of the Poor* site. It is, therefore the opinion of City/Scape: Cultural Resource Consultants that no further archaeological investigation should be undertaken on this site.

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# **APPENDICES**

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Shovel Test Records

Appendix B: Maps & Figures

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**APPENDIX A**

**SHOVEL TEST RECORDS**

**Appendix A: Shovel Test Record****Little Sisters of the Poor (Block 5452) 142 Hollywood Avenue. Throgs Neck. Borough of the Bronx. Bronx County, New York**

<b>Transect</b>	<b>STP Number</b>	<b>Depth in Inches</b>	<b>Munsell</b>	<b>Soil Description</b>	<b>Cultural Material Recovered</b>
<b>TR 1</b>	<b>ST 1</b>	0-10	10YR3/3	organic sandy silt	NCM
		10-28	10YR5/8	disturbed fill	NCM
		28-36	10YR3/4	dark brown sandy silt	NCM
		36-54	10YR3/6	dark yellowish brown sand	NCM
	<b>ST 2</b>	0-11	10YR3/3	organic sandy silt	NCM
		11-27	10YR5/8	disturbed fill	NCM
		27-36	10YR3/4	dark brown sandy silt	NCM
		36-55	10YR3/6	dark yellowish brown sand	NCM
	<b>ST 3</b>	0-12	10YR3/3	organic sandy silt	NCM
		12-24	10YR5/8	disturbed fill	NCM
		24-35	10YR3/4	dark brown sandy silt	NCM
		35-46	10YR3/6	dark yellowish brown sand	NCM
<b>TR 2</b>	<b>ST 4</b>	0-10	10YR3/3	organic sandy silt	NCM
		10-13	10YR5/8	disturbed fill	NCM
		13-27	10YR3/4	dark brown sandy silt	NCM
		27-29	10YR3/6	dark yellowish brown sand	NCM

**Appendix A: Shovel Test Record****Little Sisters of the Poor (Block 5452) 142 Hollywood Avenue. Throgs Neck. Borough of the Bronx. Bronx County, New York**

<b>Transect</b>	<b>STP Number</b>	<b>Depth in Inches</b>	<b>Munsell</b>	<b>Soil Description</b>	<b>Cultural Material Recovered</b>
	ST 5	0-10	10YR3/3	organic sandy silt	NCM
		10-21	10YR5/8	disturbed fill	NCM
		21-25	10YR3/4	dark brown sandy silt	NCM
		25-36	10YR3/6	dark yellowish brown sand	NCM
<b>TR 3</b>	ST 6	0-10	10YR3/3	organic sandy silt	NCM
		10-24	10YR5/8	disturbed fill	NCM
		24-30	10YR3/4	dark brown sandy silt	NCM
		30-36	10YR3/6	dark yellowish brown sand	NCM
	ST 7	0-10	10YR3/3	organic sandy silt	NCM
		10-13	10YR5/8	disturbed fill	NCM
		13-27	10YR3/4	dark brown sandy silt	NCM
		27-29	10YR3/6	dark yellowish brown sand	NCM
	ST 8	0-10	10YR3/3	organic sandy silt	NCM
		10-24	10YR5/8	disturbed fill	NCM
		24-35	10YR3/4	dark brown sandy silt	NCM
		35-38	10YR3/6	dark yellowish brown sand	NCM



**Appendix A: Shovel Test Record****Little Sisters of the Poor (Block 5452) 142 Hollywood Avenue. Throgs Neck, Borough of the Bronx, Bronx County, New York**

<b>Transect</b>	<b>STP Number</b>	<b>Depth in Inches</b>	<b>Munsell</b>	<b>Soil Description</b>	<b>Cultural Material Recovered</b>
	ST 9	0-11	10YR3/3	organic sandy silt	NCM
		11-20	10YR5/8	disturbed fill	NCM
		20-29	10YR3/4	dark brown sandy silt	NCM
		29-34	10YR3/6	dark yellowish brown sand	NCM
<b>TR 4</b>	ST 10	0-6	10YR3/4	Brick obstruction – buried walkway profoundly disturbed	NCM
	ST 11	0-10	10YR3/3	Hard pan demolition debris – profoundly disturbed	NCM
	ST 12	0-12	10YR3/3	Hard pan demolition debris – profoundly disturbed	NCM

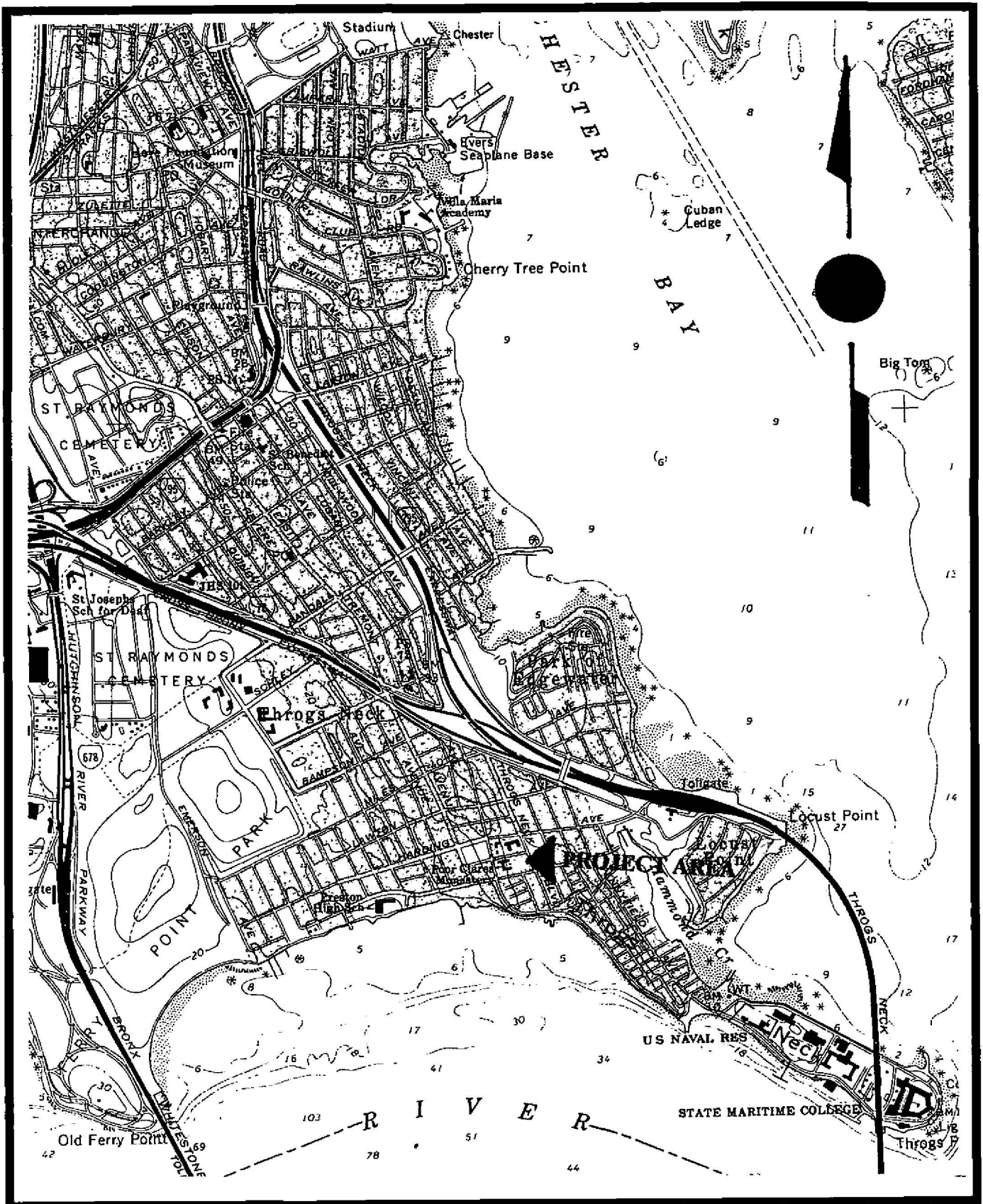
**APPENDIX B**

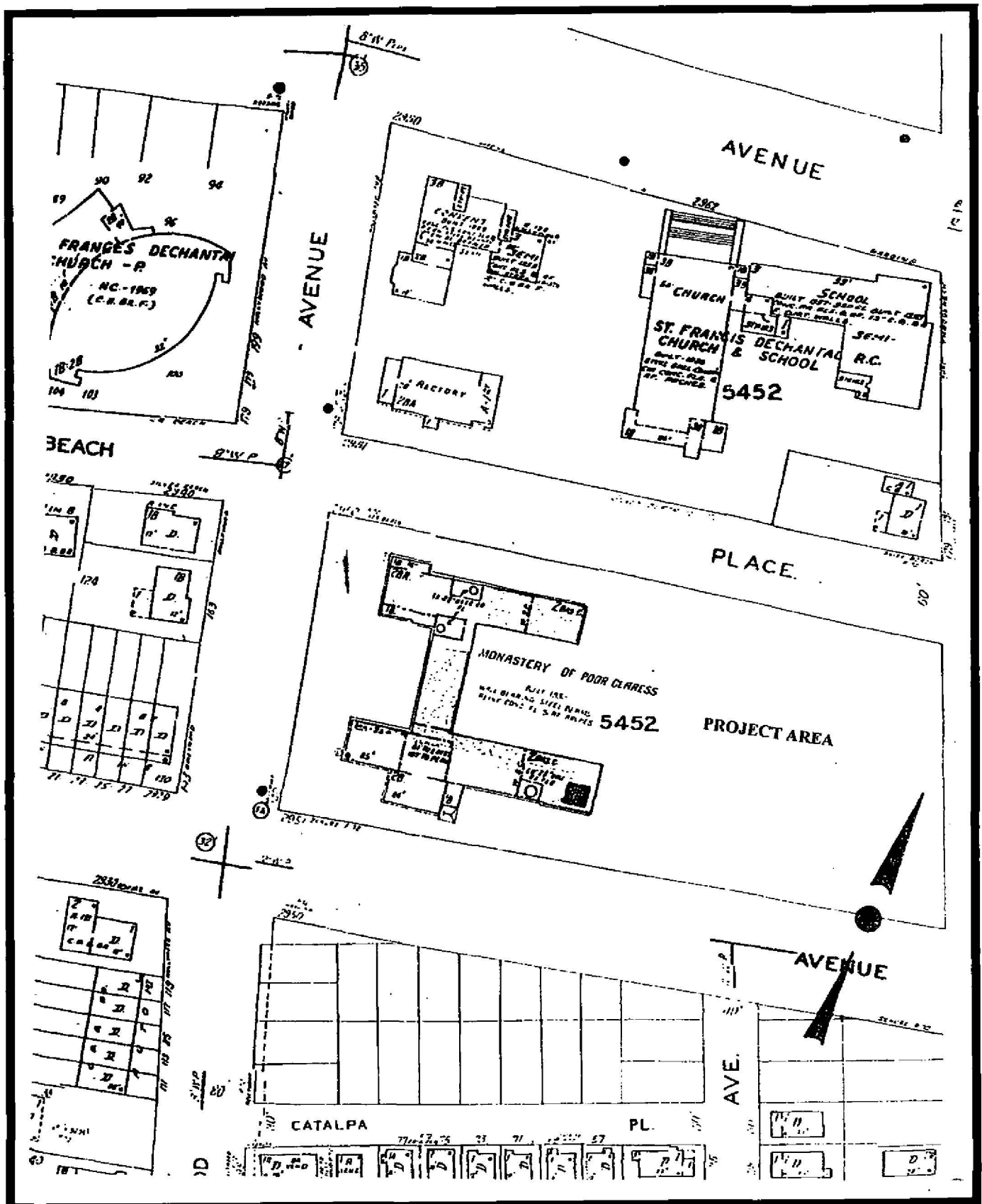
**MAPS & FIGURES**

# **STAGE 1B ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY**

## **MAP LIST**

- Map 1      Location Map including Project Area. USGS Topo. 7.5 Minute Series.  
Flushing Quadrangle. Scale: 1:24,000
- Map 2      1981 Sanborn *Insurance Map. Borough of the Bronx. City of New York.*  
NY City Vol. 21. Plate 72. Scale: 60' = 1"







**APPENDIX C**

**PHOTOGRAPHS**



**Photo 1:** Site is vacant with stone wall of varying heights around it. View is to southwest.



**Photo 2:** View of conditions on south portion of Block 5452. Excavation of shovel tests in garden area of Little Sisters of the Poor site. View to south.





**Photo 3:** Sample of recent debris noted in the fill layer throughout the garden on the Little Sister of the Poor site.



**Photo 4:** Stratigraphic control test. View facing Throgs Neck Boulevard (to the east).





**Photo 5:** Stratigraphic control test showing topsoil, fill layer, and historic plowzone.



**Photo 6:** Expanded shovel tests consistently showed topsoil layer, fill layer, historic plowzone and yellow/red glacial subsoil.





**Photo 7:** Interface between topsoil and fill stratum.



**Photo 8:** Fill layer was hardpan and required a pick to break through it to historic level beneath.





**Photo 9:** The site exhibited 8' to 10' of topsoil layer deposited over fill to create convent garden.



**Photo 10:** Dark lens noted in STP 7 (10YR2/1)