55 WEST HOUSTON STREET
WEST HOUSTON, WOOSTER AND GREENE STREETS DEVELOPMENT
MANHATTAN, NEW YORK
ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTING REPORT

CEQR# 98-BSA-007M and 008M

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LIST OF PERSONNEL

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Richard Clark	-	Field Technician
James Florio	-	Backhoe Operator

INTRODUCTION

The subject of this archaeological investigation is the 55 West Houston Street on Block 514, formerly Lot 18, in the Borough of Manhattan. This lot is part of the planned West Houston, Wooster and Greene Streets housing development. See Figure 1 for the location of the project area.

The general purpose of archaeological testing is to document the presence or absence of potential prehistoric and/or historic archaeological resources through the use of physical testing techniques. Secondly, the potential significance of a site's resources, if any, need to be assessed according to the National Register of Historic Places eligibility criteria as described in the CEQR Technical Manual. The specific purpose of testing at 55 West Houston was to for the presence or absence of activity left by Miss Randolph's assignment house, present in 1855 and 1856. The particular resource being sought in this case is a privy feature. It is expected that this feature would be located under the present surface, a parking lot, near the rear of the lot (Greenhouse Consultants 1997:20-21).

The program of archaeological testing based on the background research report was designed by Greenhouse Consultants Inc. and approved by the staff of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. This program includes one backhoe trench approximately six feet wide by 25 feet long. This trench will cover the full width of the former Lot 18. It will be located as close as possible to the rear of the lot. Since this trench will be adjacent to a standing structure, care will be taken so as not to damage the foundation.

Research Issues

The primary research question is whether or not a privy used during the late 1850s is still in the ground with in the rear of former Lot 18. Finding refuse disposed of by Miss Randolph or her employees would serve to advance our knowledge of the history of prostitution in the SoHo area of Manhattan during the 1850s. Although this area along Broadway was a center for the trade during the 1850s and 1860s, what has been written has been based on biased historical records: moral reformers, sensationalist news media, as well as police and court records. Little is known how the occupants of brothels or assignment houses lived. As noted in the conclusions of our background research report, it is possible that the survival of particular items of material culture may derive from the trade and/or also indicate the class of brothel or assignment house that occupied the site. Finding such a feature could serve to advance our knowledge of social, economic, medical and sanitary practices of members of the higher end of the prostitution business.

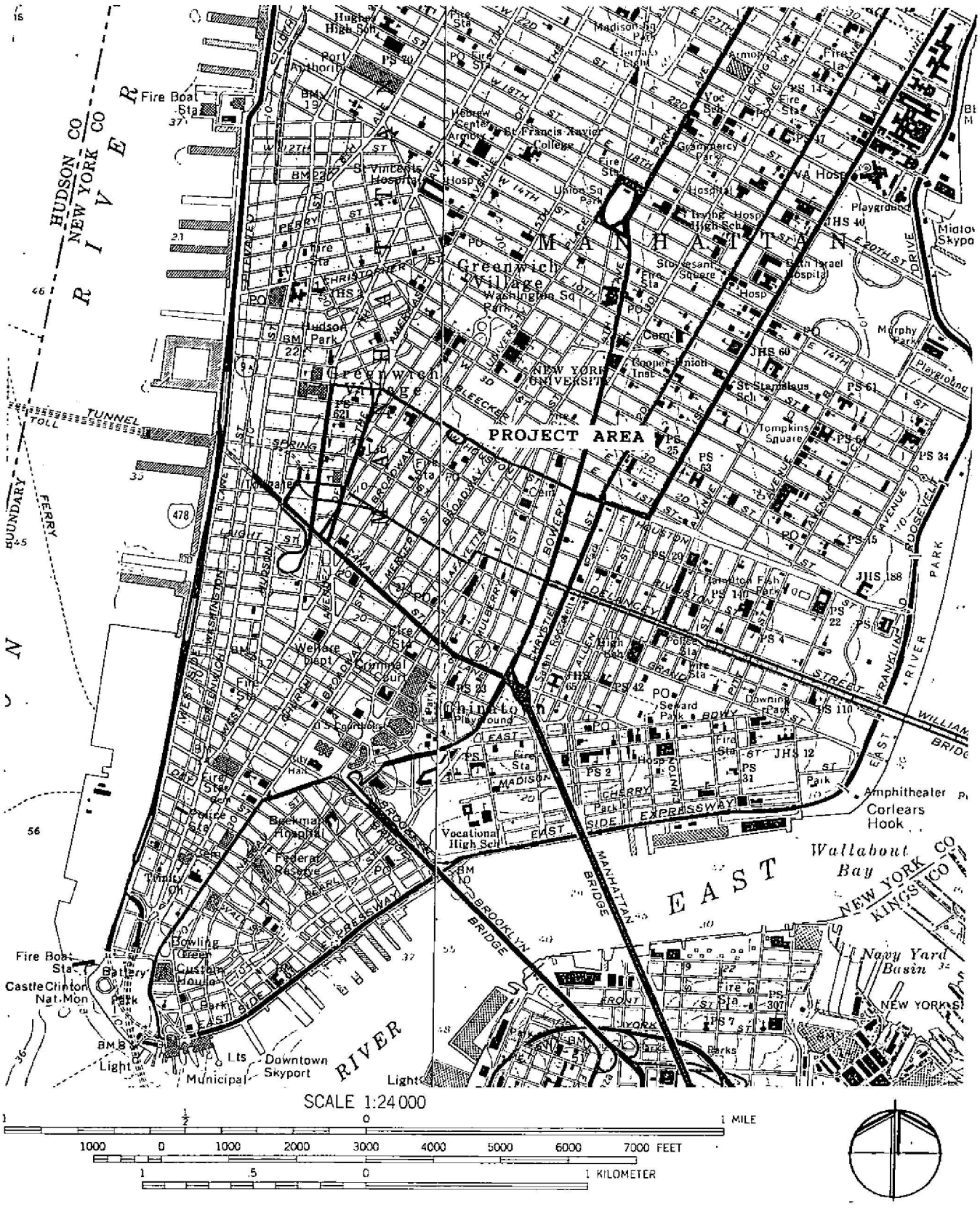

Figure 1 Location of the project area shown on portions of U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute series Brooklyn, N.Y. quadrangle (1967, photorevised 1979) and Jersey City, N.J.-N.Y. quadrangle (1967, photorevised 1981).

FIELD METHODOLOGY

The subsurface archaeological testing of the 55 West Houston Street project took place on January 6, 1998. As stated in the scope-of-work for this testing, the technique used to examine buried deposits and thereby determine the presence or absence of archaeological resources was the mechanical excavation of one trench augmented by manual excavation where possible. One trench was excavated by backhoe. See Figure 2. The results were closely monitored by archaeologists. This testing strategy was designed by the principal investigator, and approved by the staff of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Soil samples were to be selectively removed from any deposits that had the potential to include refuse from the earlier occupations. This would be done by manually excavating a portion of the layer when the trench was no deeper than 6.5 feet. If the trench was deeper, a sample would be removed with the backhoe bucket. This soil would then be screened through ¼-inch mesh in order to recover artifacts. Artifacts were also recovered when they were observed in the trench by directing the backhoe operator to selectively remove them with the backhoe bucket. Soil strata were measured, described, and recorded. The trench was backfilled immediately following excavation and the recording of data.

The use of mechanical means of excavation expedites the removal of large quantities of fill. See Plate 1 for a view of the backhoe trenching operations. A total of approximately 552 cubic feet of soil were removed from the trench, the dimensions of which were 22.5 feet long, five feet wide and 4.7 feet deep. Probable subsoil was reached in the trench.

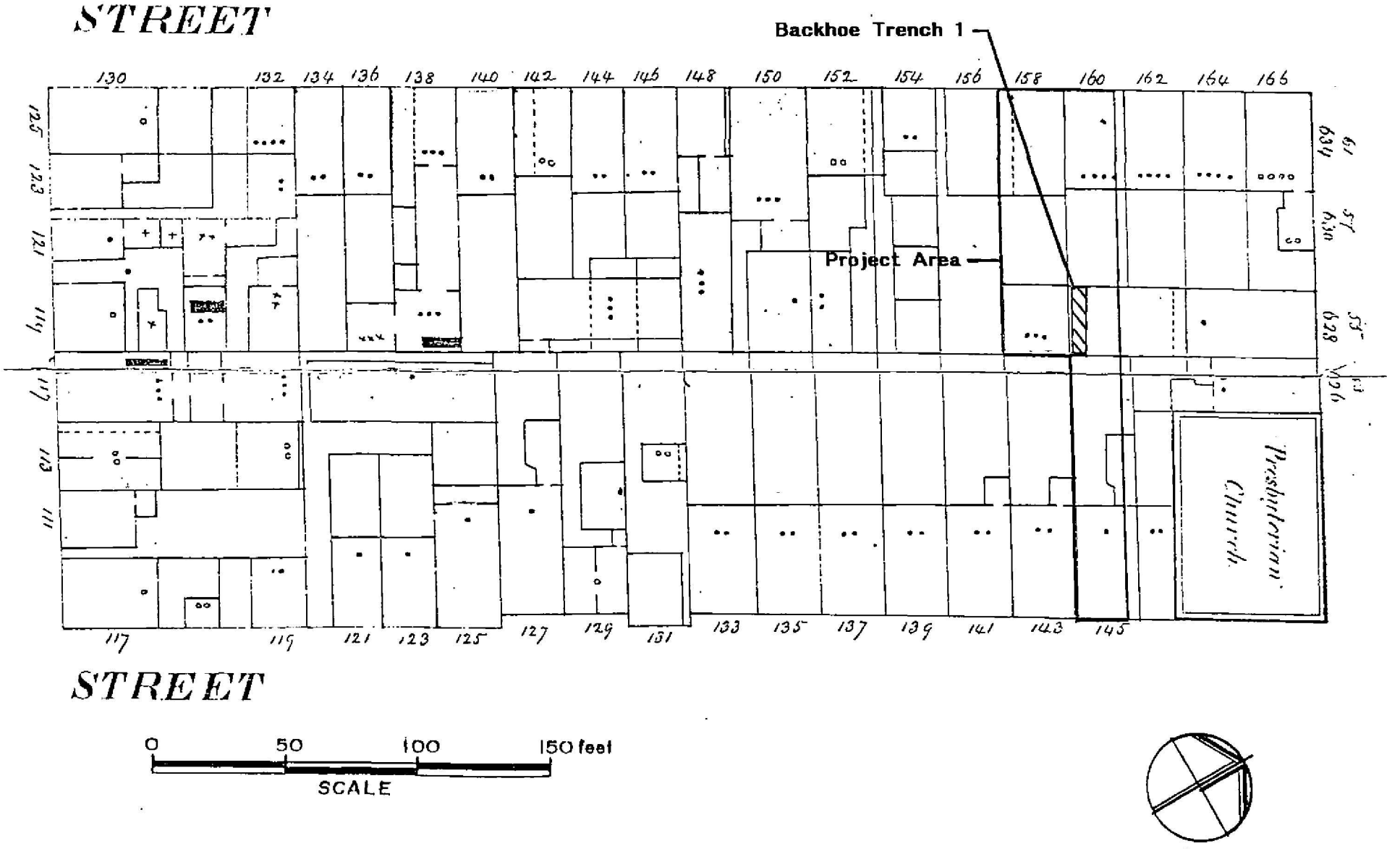

Figure 2 Location of Backhoe Trench 1 within the project area shown on 1857 Perris map.

STRATIGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Seven layers were recorded in the backhoe trench. The top layer consisted of asphalt and was 0.1 feet thick. Below this was a layer of concrete fragments in coarse gravel. The color was grey and the thickness 0.7 feet. These top two layers were identified as the pavement of the parking lot and the gravel laid to prepare the area for paving.

Below this was a layer of brown sand without any obvious inclusions. It was 0.3 feet thick. Beneath this was a layer of grey sand with concrete fragments. This second sand layer was 0.1 feet thick. The fifth layer consisted of reddish brown sandy silt. This was 1.0 foot thick. It may represent the surface of this former backyard during the early twentieth century.

The sixth layer was a thin deposit of very dark greyish brown sand with cinders and coal ashes. It was 0.1 foot thick. The seventh and deepest layer encountered was a brown sand. It began at 2.3 feet below grade and extended to at least 4.7 feet below grade in the southeastern portion of the trench. It was identified as a probable subsoil. At the northwestern end of the trench a similar deposit of sand was found. This sand could be subsoil or clean sand fill.

In addition to the seven soil deposits, three walls were identified. Two consisted of red bricks and hard mortar. The other wall was of stone. The stone wall and thicker brick wall to its northwest both were approximately on the rear lot line. The thinner brick wall was parallel to this line but approximately 2.0 feet closer to West Houston Street. Part of this wall was removed and the sand subsoil was found beneath it.

ARTIFACT PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

Laboratory Methodology

The artifacts recovered from the field work were returned to the Greenhouse Consultants Laboratory in New York City for processing. The cultural material was washed in room temperature tap water, dried, marked, and catalogued. The drying procedure was slow air drying on screens in the laboratory processing area. The artifacts were labeled with their appropriate context number.

Artifacts were identified using a modified form of the Cultural Material Data Base Taxonomy of the National Park Service. Artifacts were coded for their functional group, class and material. Technological and stylistic manufacturing ranges were assigned when an artifact exhibited a datable attribute. Establishing the range of manufacture of artifacts provides a time frame for establishing dates after which the refuse deposits were made. This information was recorded on a tyvek label which was inserted with the artifact into a clear polyethylene ziplock bag. The bags were also labeled with context and catalog numbers.

Subsequent to cataloguing, the information from all artifacts with their appropriate codes were inventoried using Paradox, a relational database software, which provides sorted inventory lists for contexts and artifact groups.

Contexts were assigned series numbers in accordance to the type of data recovery method. Trenching is assigned by the 4000 series.

Analysis

One medicine bottle was retrieved from layer 5 of the trench. It is a machine made bottle from the twentieth century. Sloped down shoulders and a rectangular body with a rounded applied lip characterize the 4 oz. bottle. No label or embossing are present to identify the contents further.

RESULTS

The one backhoe trench excavated did not produce any evidence of a privy or any refuse deposits associated with Miss Randolph's assignment house of the late 1850s. No artifacts from this time period were recovered. The only artifact collected was a glass bottle made during the early twentieth century. The excavation did produce evidence that the lot boundaries existed where predicted based on the cartographic evidence.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is our conclusion that no potentially significant cultural resources were found within the mechanically excavated test trench. Based on this subsurface testing, we further conclude that it is highly unlikely that any significant cultural resources will be impacted by the proposed housing project on Block 514. No evidence regarding the use of this project area during the 1850s was found.

We recommend that no additional archaeological testing or mitigation is necessary within the 55 West Houston Street lot in the West Houston, Wooster and Greene Streets project area.

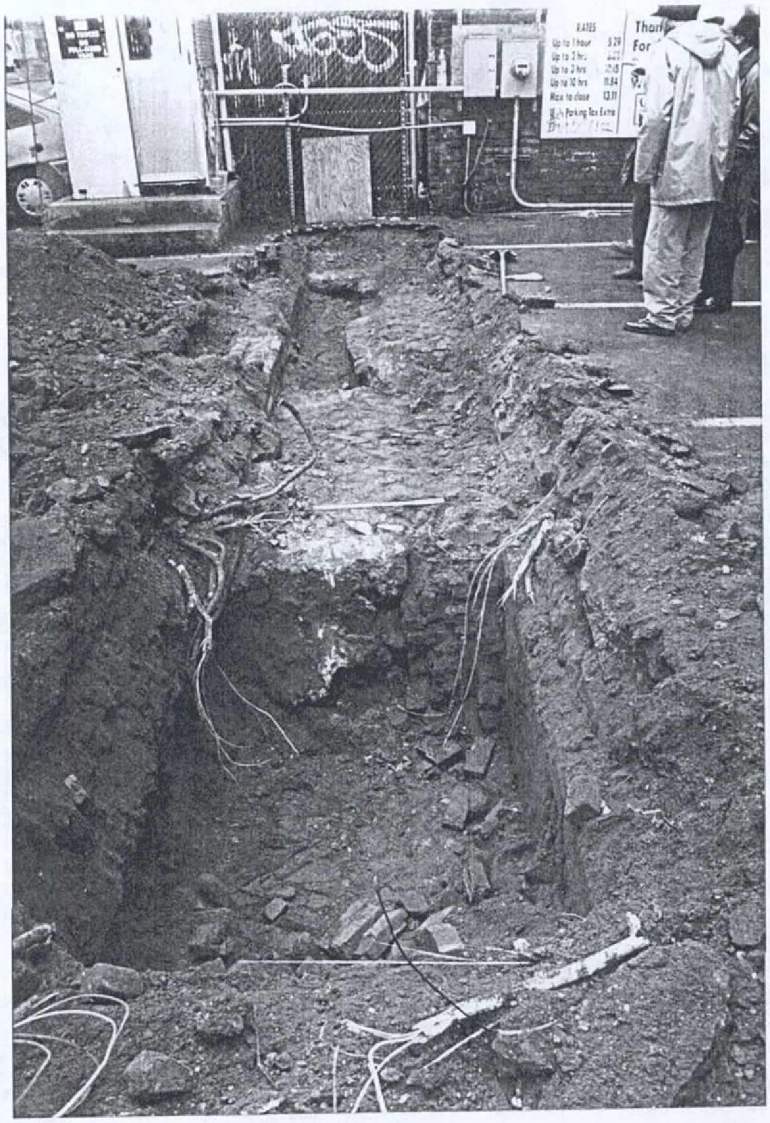

Plate 1 View of Backhoe Trench 1 looking southeast.

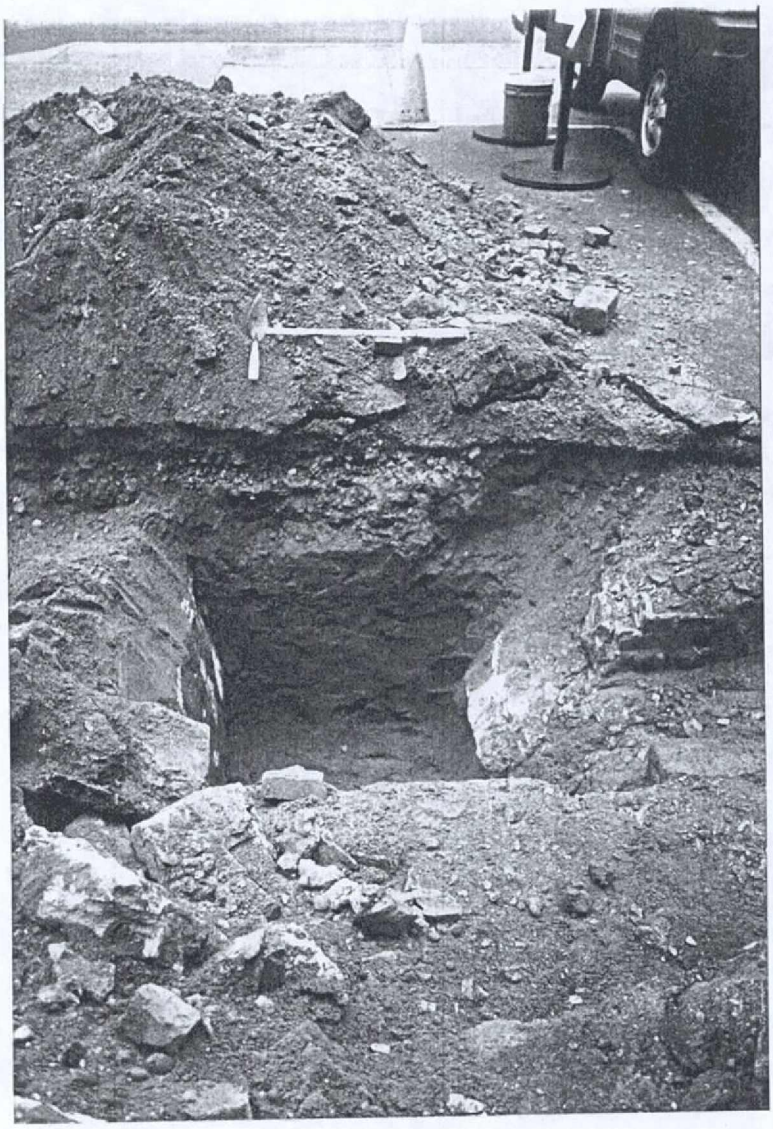

Plate 2 View of Backhoe Trench 1 looking northeast showing deep excavation. Scale is two feet long.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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1997 Archaeological/Historical Sensitivity Study of the West Houston, Wooster, Greene Streets Development, Manhattan, New York. CEQR# 98-BSA-007M and -008M. Prepared for Robinson Silverman Pearce Aronsohn & Berman L.L.P., N.Y., N.Y. Prepared by William I. Roberts IV and Paula M. Crowley, Greenhouse Consultants, Inc., N.Y., N.Y.

APPENDIX 1

FIELD RECORD FORMS

SURVEY RECORD SHEET : Postholes, Auger holes, Shovel tests

PROJECT : 55 W. Houston St.			COORDINATES : See Plan		
SITE :	SUPERVISOR : WR	EXCAVATOR : RC	SCREENED ? No	DATE : 6 JAN. 98	TEST TYPE AND NO. : B T. 1

STRATIGRAPHY. :

LAYER	DEPTH *	DESCRIPTION	COLOR	CULT. MAT.	NOTES
1	0 ~ 0.1'	Asphalt	Black 10 YR 2/1		
2	0.1' - 0.8'	Concrete + heavy gravel	10 YR 5/1 Grey	Concrete	
3	0.8' - 1.1'	Sand	7.5 YR 4/4 Br.	N. C. M.	
4	1.1' - 1.2'	Sand w/ Concrete Frags	10 YR 6/1 Grey	Concrete	
5	1.2' - 2.2'	Sandy Silt	5 YR 4/4 Red Br.	Clear Glass Bottle (Fully Machine Made) 4 oz. embossed,	
6	2.2' - 2.3'	Sand w/ Ashes + Cinders	10 YR 3/2 V. Dk Gr. Br.	cinders	
7	2.3' - 2*	Sand	7.5 YR 4/4 Br.	N. C. M.	
8					

* Give depths relative to ground surface

General Notes : (Note if cult. material retained, and if soil samples are taken.)

All Cultural Material discarded except bottle.

* Stopped @ 4.7 Ft.

Cross Refs :	
Plan Yes.	Photos Yes : N + E
Section	Notebook

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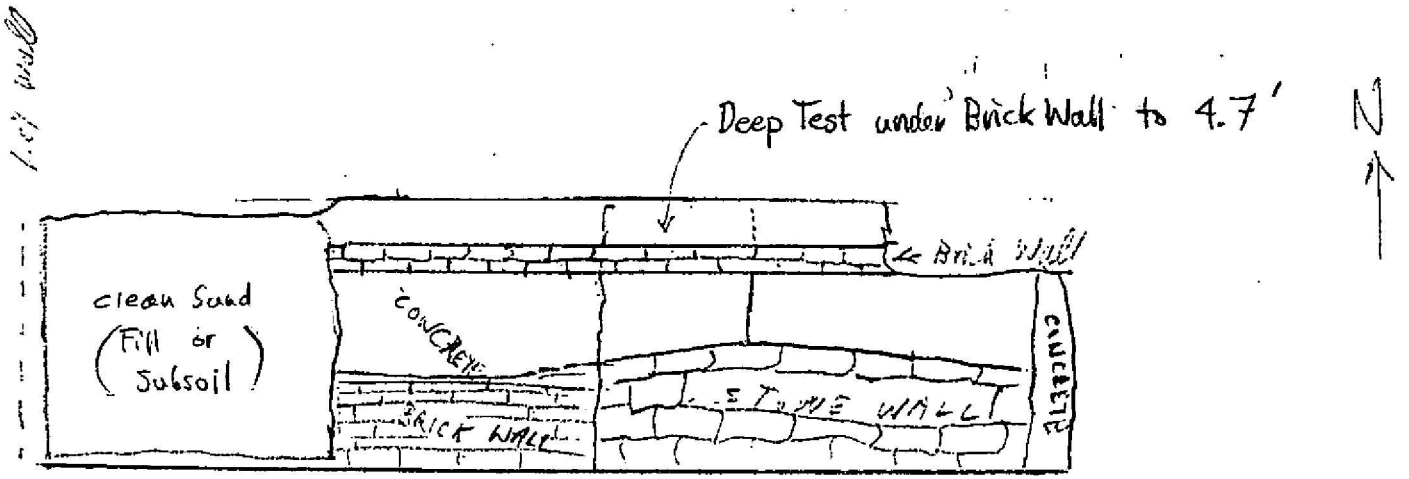

0 5 ft.
SCALE

6 JAN 1998

NR / RC