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③ ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY REPORT  
for the  
HESTER - MOTT STREET PROJECT SITE

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387

① HISTORICAL  PERSPECTIVES

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY REPORT**  
**for the**  
**HESTER - MOTT STREET PROJECT SITE**

**FOR: Environmental Solutions, Ltd.**  
**342 Madison Avenue**  
**New York City, NY 10017**

**FROM: Historical Perspectives**  
**P. O. Box 331**  
**Riverside, CT 06878**

**② DATE: JUNE 21, 1985**

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## INTRODUCTION

Environmental Solutions, Ltd., developers of Lot 10 in Block 204 of the Borough of Manhattan, are considering various construction alternatives for the parcel. Situated on the southeast corner of the Hester Street and Mott Street intersection, the project area is within the extended boundaries of both Chinatown and Little Italy neighborhoods. (Fig. 1, 2; see Photos). Additionally, this downtown area was once a part of the early Dutch West India Company's designated farms. The developers, in recognition of the finite and non-renewable nature of archaeological resources, have expressed concern that the proposed construction activities not endanger significant archaeological resources.

Historical Perspectives has conducted a historical and archaeological assessment of the Hester - Mott Street Project site. Special attention was given to the likelihood that the project parcel had been the site of prehistoric activity and Colonial farms and/or industries. Block 204 is known to have hosted nineteenth and early twentieth century immigrant neighborhoods. The following archaeological report assesses the significance of this particular parcel in the history of New York City's immigration patterns.



## PREHISTORIC PERIOD

The island of Manhattan has been inhabited by man since approximately 10,000 - 13,000 years ago. Archaeologists of the Northeast divide this extensive pre-contact period into three sub-periods.

Period Name	Years Before Present (BP)
Paleo-Indian	13,000 - 10,000
Early Archaic	10,000 - 8,000
Middle Archaic	8,000 - 6,000
Late Archaic	6,000 - 3,700
Terminal Archaic	3,700 - 2,700
Early Woodland	2,700 - 2,000
Middle Woodland	2,000 - 1,200
Late Woodland	1,200 - 300

During the Paleo-Indian period, nomadic hunters roamed the southern New York coastal area in search of big game. The sea level of Long Island Sound during this time was much lower than today and the subsequent sea level rise has made in situ archaeological evidence of these first inhabitants scarce. (Saxon, 1973: p. 252) In the coastal and tidewater area of New York the Archaic Stage followed the Paleo-Indian stage and "is represented by numerous, small, nearly always multi-component sites, variously situated on tidal inlets, coves and bays, particularly at the heads of the latter, and on fresh-water ponds on Long Island, Shelter Island, Fishers Island, Manhattan Island and Staten Island." (Ritchie, 1980: p. 143) By the late Archaic stage, the exploitation of shellfish resources was in full force; the coastal shell middens still found today are a testament to this activity. The seasonal and functional migratory patterns of the Native Americans during this period utilized upland sites in addition to the coastal area. (Snow, 1980: p. 182) Important sites of the Snook Kill Tradition, the southern sub-area representative of the transitional time between the Archaic and Woodland Periods, have been located by

archaeologists on high sandy river terraces. (Ritchie and Funk, 1973: p. 342)

The final period of Native American activity prior to the arrival of Europeans is noted for the introduction of hand-thrown clay ceramics and the harvesting of cultigens. Throughout the Woodland Period Native Americans preferred occupation sites situated on well drained terraces or knolls overlooking bodies of water. Most Middlesex Phase sites of Early Woodland times have been "encountered during gravel and sand digging in a knoll or terrace near a river or lake". (Ritchie, 1980: p. 201) Late Woodland period sites of the East River Tradition in southern New York have been noted on the "second rise of ground above high-water level on tidal inlets" and "situated on tidal streams or coves" and on "well-drained". (*ibid.*: p. 264-265)

As evident from the above outline of prehistoric settlement patterns, prehistoric peoples depended on the numerous and valuable resources found at marine, estuarine, and lacustrine locations. Foraging and hunting activities for the floral and faunal resources (e.g., fish, water fowl, tubrous plants, and grasses) of these types of sites lasted for thousands of years before the arrival of Dutch and English settlers. On the basis of archaeological reports, ethnographic data, and knowledge of the pre-1600 topography of Manhattan Island, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission has completed a "predictive model" indicating the locations of high potential for prehistoric sites in the Borough of Manhattan. These high potential site areas correspond to pre-1600 water resources. According to Figure 2 of the Landmarks Predictive Model manuscript, the Hester - Mott Street project area is not marked as an area of high potential for prehistoric archaeological resources. (Baughner-Perlin, *et al.*, 1982: Fig. 2/n.p.)

Native Americans did exploit the resources of areas in what is now considered downtown Manhattan. According to deeds of 1668, the project

area was part of the land called Werpoes by the Indians. (Stokes, 1915-1926, Vol 6: p. 72) It is highly likely that these Native Americans camped on, cultivated crops on, and hunted on the Hester - Mott Street Project area. However, there is no indication that prehistoric peoples would have extensively exploited this particular location. This is not to definitely state that the occasional prehistoric artifact (e.g., stone projectile point or clay vessel) has never been uncovered in the project area or might not be uncovered during any future soil disturbance; however, the potential for significant prehistoric resources on the Hester - Mott Street Project site is not great enough to warrant further investigation.

## HISTORIC PERIOD

The Hester - Mott Street Project site was originally a portion of the Dutch West India Company's Bouwery Number 7. As of April 1625, the company ordered farm 7 to be laid out with a width along the road (approximately the same street route as the current Broome Street) of 55 rods. One of the eight small farms granted to the Company's Negroes, this particular parcel of about 25 morgens was designated for Evert Focken (Fockes, Foppe). Focken died before 1630. In 1638 Thomas Sanders, called "the mad smith" for his uncontrollable temper, purchased this farm. Sanders' tract, called Smith's Hill, was mainly south of Prince Street except for the small area north of the "Hill" made up of the farms granted to the Company's Negroes. (Stokes, 1915-1926, Vol. 6: pp. 70-72) As of 1700, Nicholas Bayard's East Farm tract (135 acres) included the Smith's Hill property. Bayard, born in Holland, married Judith Verleth in 1666. "This young girl while living with her father in Hartford, in 1662, was accused of witchcraft. Through the intercession of Stuyvesant she was released from prison." (Stokes, 1915-1926, Vol. 6: p. 70) The Bayards retained possession of the farm for the next century. (Fig. 3)

This particular section of New Amsterdam/Manhattan was laid out with streets before 1800. Hester Street, formerly called both Nicolas Street and Eagle Street and officially opened in 1784, was named for Hester Rynders, daughter of Jacob Leisler, the governor who was wrongly hanged for treason in 1691. Originally called Wynne Street and officially laid out prior to 1767, Mott Street was named for Joseph Mott, a prosperous butcher who served as Deputy Mayor under DeWitt Clinton. (Moscow, 1978: p. 61, 78; Stokes, 1915-1926, Vol. 6: p. 595) As can be seen on the Taylor-Roberts Plan of 1797 (fig. 4) there is settlement activity on the Project block and a rope-walk enterprise on the block to the west of the Hester - Mott Street parcel.

As can be seen on the accompanying figures (Fig. 5, 6, 7), the Bayard homestead was located to the north of the Hester - Mott Street Project area on a prominent hill overlooking the fresh water pond called The Collect. This pond, situated roughly within the present bounds of Canal, Pearl, Mulberry, and Elm Streets was of considerable importance in the growth of Manhattan. The pond "was a beautiful spot, originally wooded hills surrounding a placid body of water that was thought to be without bottom." (Ulmann, 1901: p. 36: Fig. 8) A sluggish stream along the line of the present Canal Street furnished an outlet from The Collect into the Hudson River. (Real Estate Record Association, 1898: p. 30) There are numerous sources testifying to the polluted condition of the Collect as the Eighteenth Century progressed. (Valentine, 1856: p. 442) We were able to locate one painting that illustrates the Hester - Mott Street Project area in the 1800 - 1810 time period. Figure 9 is a photocopy of a panel done by Chappel, a painter noted for his study of everyday happenings and commonplace neighborhoods, that shows the west side of Elizabeth Street, Block 204. Chappel described one of the buildings as the African Methodist Meeting House.

Variously called Bayard's Mount, Mount Pleasant, and Bunker's Hill, the Bayard homestead at the intersection of Grand and Centre Streets was situated on a knoll elevated 100 feet above the present level of Grand Street. (Stokes, 1915-1926, Vol. 3: p. 965) This particular hill and the surrounding hills succumbed to the real estate demands of nineteenth century Manhattan. Although produced to a scale of 1" = 1000' and difficult to read, the Viele Sanitary and Topographical Map of 1865 shows the western portion of the project parcel to have been the extension of an outcropping or knoll. Between 1800 and 1817 the city undertook the filling of The Collect and the surrounding marshes with soil taken from the leveling of the encircling hills. (Baughner-Perlin, et al., 1982: pp. 59-60) As reported in Lamb's History of the City of New York:

All that was romantic in scenery and prepossessing in cultivated grounds immediately above Canal Street was quickly doomed. The city was on the march, and every form of hill and dale and pleasant valley must be sacrificed. From the Bayard mansion, on the summit of the high point of land between Grand Street and Broome, the views. . .embraced a curious variety of suggestive scenes. The Valley of Canal Street at its foot had been transformed into a busy thoroughfare, no longer presenting a pastoral picture with streams of water flowing through it into both rivers. . . .

The enemy, with its armor of pickaxes, stood back appalled at the strong, firm bold front which the Bayard Hill presented. It seemed invincible. But the assault was finally made, the citadel yielded, and the inhabitants fled. As for the real-estate owners, they were solaced by the rise of property. Fortunes grew while dwellings, stables, flower-gardens, fruit orchards, grassy lawns, summer-houses, lovers' walks, and finely shaded private avenues tumbled promiscuously into the mass of worthless ruin --- and posterity was enriched. (Lamb, Vol. 3, 1877: pp. 369-370)

Figure 10 is a humorous etching of this activity, labeled "corporation improvements." (*ibid.*: p. 370)

The extension and regulation of streets within the generation following this northerly expansion of the City testifies to the frenetic activity of a growing city. (New York City Topographic Bureau Street Card Index Files). The once peaceful Bowery Number 7 became a part of Ward 14 in the nineteenth century. The block experienced rapid development after its division into small, individual lots. The project area was never an elite area and was made up of working class housing. Mid-century maps and atlases reflect this land usage. An 1852 Dripps (NYPL) was the earliest atlas located. It shows seven buildings along Hester and about five along Mott in the project area. William Perris' company did fire insurance maps for Manhattan in 1853 and 1857. (NYPL) (See Figure 11 for a copy of the 1857 map) The drawings show nine parcels between Mott and Elizabeth on Hester whose length is 200'. The

rest of the block is similarly divided and contains a mixture of brick or stone buildings, first or second class, many of which have stores underneath. There are a few framed buildings and a few dwellings. The nucleus of the project area - i.e. the corner of Hester and Mott is noted as "especially hazardous" in 1857. There is little change between 1853 and '57, but the house numbers were not the same as they are today.

The reason that these atlases are so heavily relied on by researchers is that the NYC Buildings Department was not established until 1866, so official buildings records were not kept before that date.

By the year 1876-77, the street numbers have been changed and they hereafter remain fairly constant. According to permits recorded in the New Buildings Index and Docket Books collected and preserved by the NYC Municipal Archives, a second generation (at least) of three buildings were erected from the corner of Mott along Hester for about 70' by Alicia Kerrigan during 1876 and 1877. The corner structure (#166 Hester) extended about 44' along Mott, (Figure 12) and was a tenement housing eight families with a store on the first floor. The next one (#164) was also four storys and was "a first class dwelling of one family." The foundations were stone to a depth of ten feet. The next building along Hester also had a ten foot deep foundation though it was made of brick. It was also four storys tall.

Next door and east of that structure (#156 Hester) a five story building was in place in 1885, though its building date is not known. (Docket Books NYCMA) It is called a "'hall' (public building)" and may be the same "mechanics hall" noted on the 1852 Dripps Mapp. In 1890 Pinkus Nathan built a seven story brownstone "for manufacturing and workshop" which replaced the hall and consolidated numbers 156, 158, and 160 Hester. It is shown as a furniture store on the 1910 E. Belcher Hyde Atlas. Like its neighbors it had a ten foot deep foundation. Another replacement/change of the configuration shown in 1857 was a 1906

six story brick building constructed by Angelo Julian (NB Records in NYCMA) at 110 Mott Street which ran 22'10" along Mott. (See Figure 12)

During the 1880s the study area became almost totally populated by Italians. "Italians and East European Jews, most of whom had arrived in the New World within the decade preceding the census, [1890] were much more 'ghettoized' than were older immigrant groups. Wards Six, Eight, and Fourteen centering around Canal Street were the area residence of 52 percent of New York's Italian population (28, 150 of 54, 334)...the Italians had by 1880 expanded to the north, moving into the Fourteenth Ward, which was then spoken of as 'New Italy.'" (Rosenwaik, 1972: p. 83-84) Figure 13 is a drawing of a scene on Mulberry Street, quite near the project block in the 1890s.

In 1912, the Children's Aid Society moved into a newly constructed eight story (with basement) facility on the corner of Hester and Elizabeth Streets which housed the charitable institution's "Italian School." (See Fig. 14 for location) The Children's Aid Society (hereafter CAS) had been founded in 1854 by Charles Loring Brace in order to combat "one of the most troubling trends in the troubled 1850s," which "was the conspicuous increase in the numbers of vagrant children, boys and girls without schools, jobs or, in many cases, homes." (Spann, 1981: p. 262) "A school for the 'little Italian organ-grinders and statuette-sellers who traverse our streets' was opened soon after this in December, 1855. This was the Italian school which is now situated on Hester Street and one of the Society's best known branches." (CAS 1928: p. 17) Some of these children were street singers who were controlled - nearly enslaved - by adult men called "padrones." In 1873 the CAS was given an award by the Italian Chamber of Deputies for its work against the padrone system. (*ibid.*: p. 25) The school was originally located at 155 Worth St., but in 1912 the city took that property for its new court house. The CAS was given the Hester Street property and a



building erected through the generosity of the D. Willis James family.  
(CAS, 1912 Annual Report)

Sixty years of faithful and conscientious work for the good of humanity in the Five Points district redeemed the place from its early state of sin and degradation. Now we have moved into a new neighborhood and find many of the old conditions exist here, and our Society has before it the redemption of another district of the city, quite as full of crime and misery as the old Five Points was. The streets surrounding our new building are reeking in filth, tenements are old and unsavory, with the rooms dark and cramped, yet crowded with humanity of the lowest type, abjectly poor, and there are many little children to be rescued by us; to be saved from the sin and sickness, the want and suffering that are all about them. Murders and other awful crimes are not uncommon here, and it takes a brave heart and strong determination to help the helpless.

Our beautiful new building stands like a haven of hope and salvation in the midst of the misery and temptation assailing the children. (CAS, 1914 Annual Report)

So successful was this institution that the CAS Annual Report of 1916 reported that the attendance "during the day is 1,100 and in the evening as many more. So important is this educational work among the poor immigrants crowded into that colony, that the Italian Government recognizes it with an annual appropriation continued even during this time of war." By 1925, the CAS expressed in its annual report the desire to provide a playground for the neighborhood children to be located adjacent to the school. The plan was "to buy two tenements, equip them as a club, and use the park as a neighborhood playground." (CAS, 1925: p. 18) Apparently the plans were changed and modified during the next few years. In the late twenties "the entire block front west of our former Italian school building at the corner of Hester and Elizabeth Streets" was purchased, but funds were still needed for the next phase.

A Demolition Permit for 1931 found in the Docket Books stored in the NYCMA seems to show the realization of the dream.

"Demolition Permit 93-91

1931 B204 L 9,10,11,12,12	108 Mott, 112 Mott [skips 110 Mott]
156-64 Hester 166 Hester	5 bldgs, tenement, 3-4 & 2-7 stys.
200 x 200 x 100	Joseph Wasserman, appl. cmcd 5-8-31 compd 3-6-34."

The 1934 CAS Annual Report described the playground this way:

Two new playgrounds in badly congested neighborhoods have reached completion in time for summer use. Both of these were made possible by gifts made prior to the present year. The James Playground at Hester and Elizabeth Street, a gift from Arthur Curtiss James, was officialy opened June 30th. It is the first step in the development of the James Children Center which when completed will comprise a Boys' Club building and a Girls' Club building, with a playground between the buildings. The new playground which is the only play space in the neighborhood, measures 150 feet by 100 feet and is divided into two sections, one for boys and one for girls. It adjoins the site of The Children's Aid Society's former Italian School building which has been modernized for Boys' Club use.

The playground occupied the same space as the project area with the exception of what was then 110 Mott, a 22.10 parcel second in from the corner where the 1906 building mentioned above still stood according to a 1934 G.W. Bromley and Co. atlas (Topo Bureau and NYPL), and another parcel of 25 feet at 114 Mott which became part of the property at an unknown date after 1945 when its appears on the Bromley atlas. No demolition permit for 110 Mott or 114 Mott could be found though we had the personal assistance of Stephan Shea, a NYCD Buildings Department official, during our search.

Harry Kleiderman of the NYC Topographic Bureau remembered that he played basketball on the playground in the 1940s and it was "more that twelve feet down with a fence around it." An illustration from a 1930s

CAS annual report provided a visual corroboration of that recollection. (Fig. 15) The outline of the playground is shown on a 1945 Sanborn atlas (NYC Topo Bureau) and again on a 1955 Bromley when it has the same dimensions as today (NYCPL). Sometime between 1955 and 1967 the playground was filled in and the premises occupied by the Overseas Chinese Mission, Inc. Again, we were aided in our search by Mr. Shea who stated that the records for the lots in question were "all balled up." He checked all his sources, but could not find Building Notice 2060-62 or any other document relating to permission to fill the playground prior to its usage as a parking lot.

By 1967, the Edison Parking Assn. of Newark, N.J. occupied the project area ("106-112 Mott St., 158-164 Hester, Block 204, Lot 7, 10" according to the Alteration Document #450). The Alterations Permit has a drawing showing the parcel with exactly the same dimensions as the project area and it directs the "surface to be graded & paved with Type A asphalt." We contacted Ed Harold Gottesman of the Edison Parking Co. who remembered the property. They got it as a vacant lot and had to stabilize and pave. It was already filled with what looked like demolished building material such as brick bats. Mr. Gottesman vaguely remembers something about knowing the building debris was brought in or allowed to be deposited before the Edison Co. took over.

## CONCLUSIONS

We therefore conclude that there are no extant archaeological resources which would be impacted by construction. Borings taken at 102-104 Mott (document says it was 124 feet south of Hester, thus next to the project site) in 1976 by Warren George Co. recorded ten feet of fill over sands. The only other borings we could find were taken at Baxter and Hester, two blocks west of the study area. There were 25 borings taken; the fill layer ranged from 5' to 12.5' below grade with the average layer being 8 or 9 feet thick. The fill is underlain by sand in all cases. The sand ranges from fine to coarse with some gravel and occasional clay or boulders. (Info from Rock Data Maps, NYCTB) The playground was about 12 feet deep - 2 feet more than the basements it replaced; steril soil occurs in the vicinity of the project area at approximately 8-10 feet below grade. Therefore, excavation for the playground or the basements which preceded it would have destroyed any archaeological resources that may previously have been present.

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INFORMANTS

Kenneth T. Jackson	Professor of History at Columbia University
Stephan Shea	NYC Building Department
John Kuo Wei Tchen	Executive Director and Historian of the New York Chinatown Project
Harold Gottesman	Edison Parking Association, Newark, N.J.
Harry Kleiderman	Borough President's Office - Topographic Bureau

HESTER AND MOTT STREETS WARD 14 BLOCK 204 LOT 10

106-112 MOTT STREET South East Corner, 134.3' on Hester  
124.9' on Mott

ARCHIVES AND DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

New York Public Library

Photo Collection  
Map Room  
Local History Collection

New York City Buildings Department - Manhattan

Block and Lot Files  
Microfilm  
Folders  
Index Cards Entries  
Computer  
Card Files  
Docket Books

New York City Finance Department/Surveying Division Real Property  
Assessment Bureau's Tax Maps

New York City Municipal Archives

Docket Books  
New Building Records Volumes  
Building Alteration Records Volumes

New York City Topographic Bureau - Manhattan

Atlases  
Rock Data Maos  
Viele 1874 Topographic Atlas  
Drainage Plan Folders  
Borough of Manhattan, Street Opening Map  
WPA - Subsurface Conditions

New York Public Library - Annex

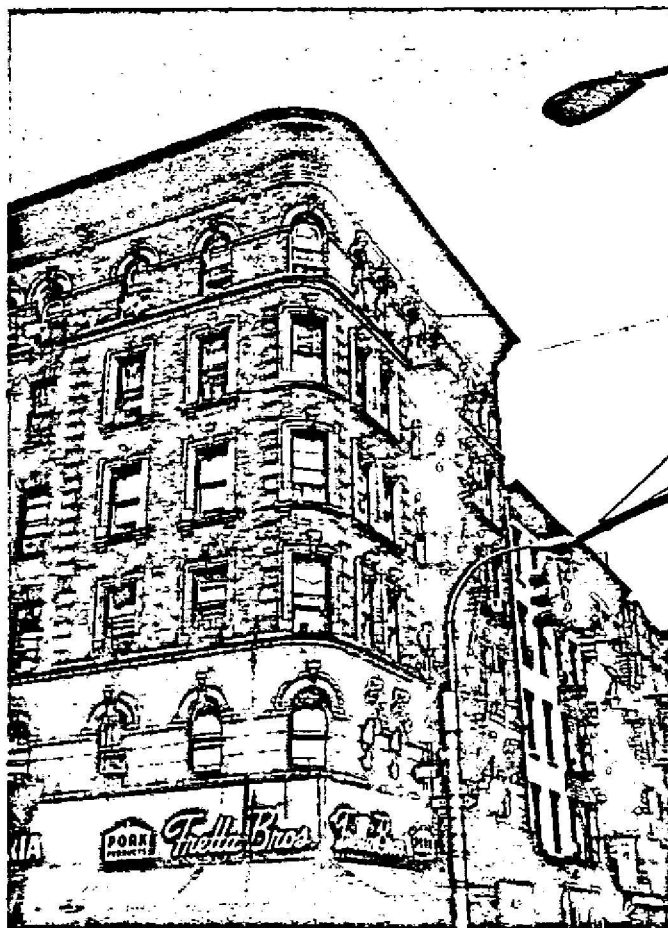
Children's Aid Society Pamphlets  
CAS Annual Report 1903-1939





Hester - Mott Street Project area

view: southwest to northeast of northeast corner  
of intersection of Hester Street and Mott Street



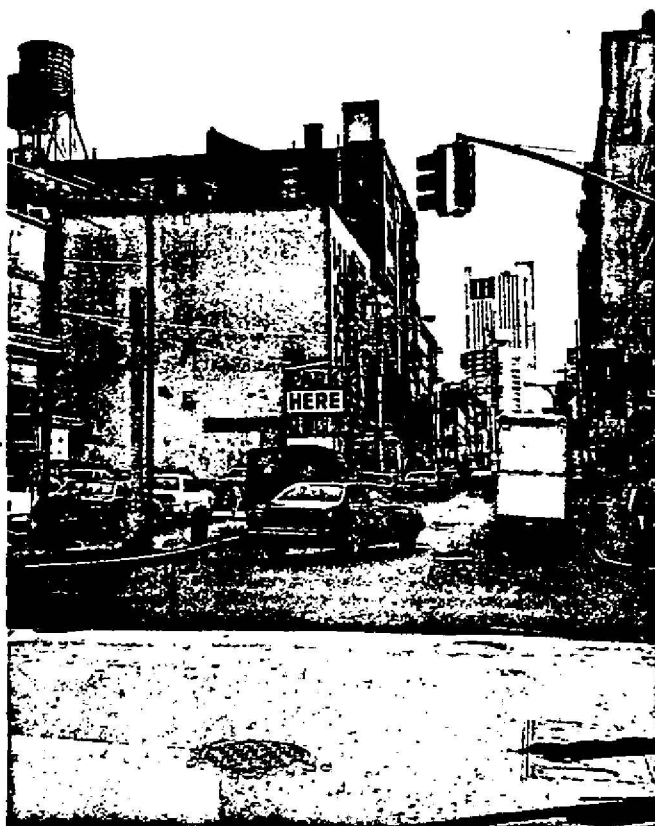
Hester - Mott Street Project area

view: southwest to northeast of northeast corner  
of intersection of Hester Street and Mott Street



Hester - Mott Street Project site

view: northwest to southeast of  
Lot 10, Block 204 - current  
use as parking lot



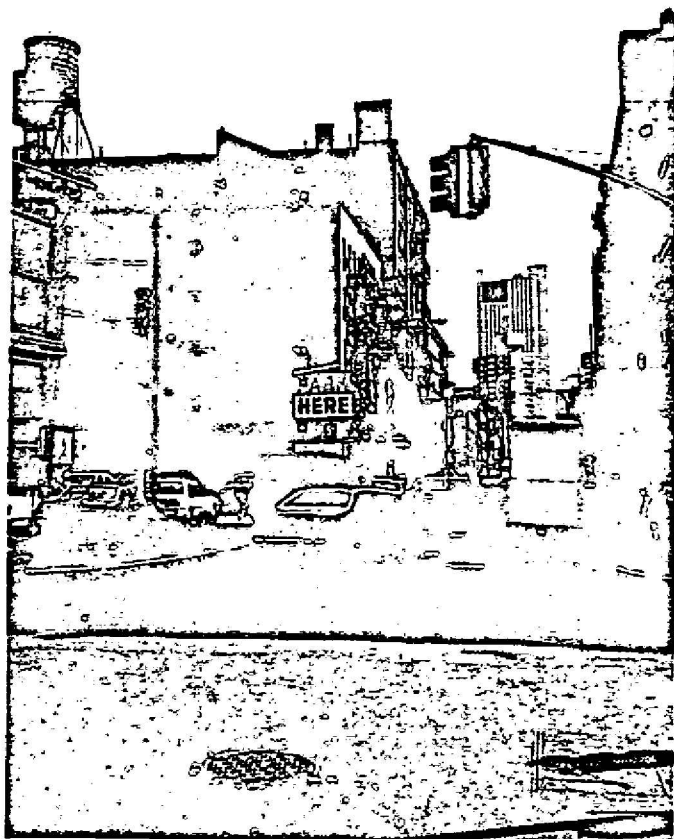
Hester - Mott Street Project area

view: north to south of Mott  
Street - Project site on  
left side of photo (PARK  
HERE)

## Photos

Hester - Mott Street Project site

view: northwest to southeast of  
Lot 10, Block 204 - current  
use as parking lot



Hester - Mott Street Project  
area

view: north to south of  
Mott Street - Project  
site on left side of  
photo (PARK HERE)



Hester - Mott Street  
Project area

view: west to east  
along Hester  
Street



Hester - Mott Street  
Project area

view: south, south-  
west to  
north, north-  
east

Photos



Hester - Mott Project  
area

view: west to east  
along Hester St.



Hester - Mott Street  
Project area

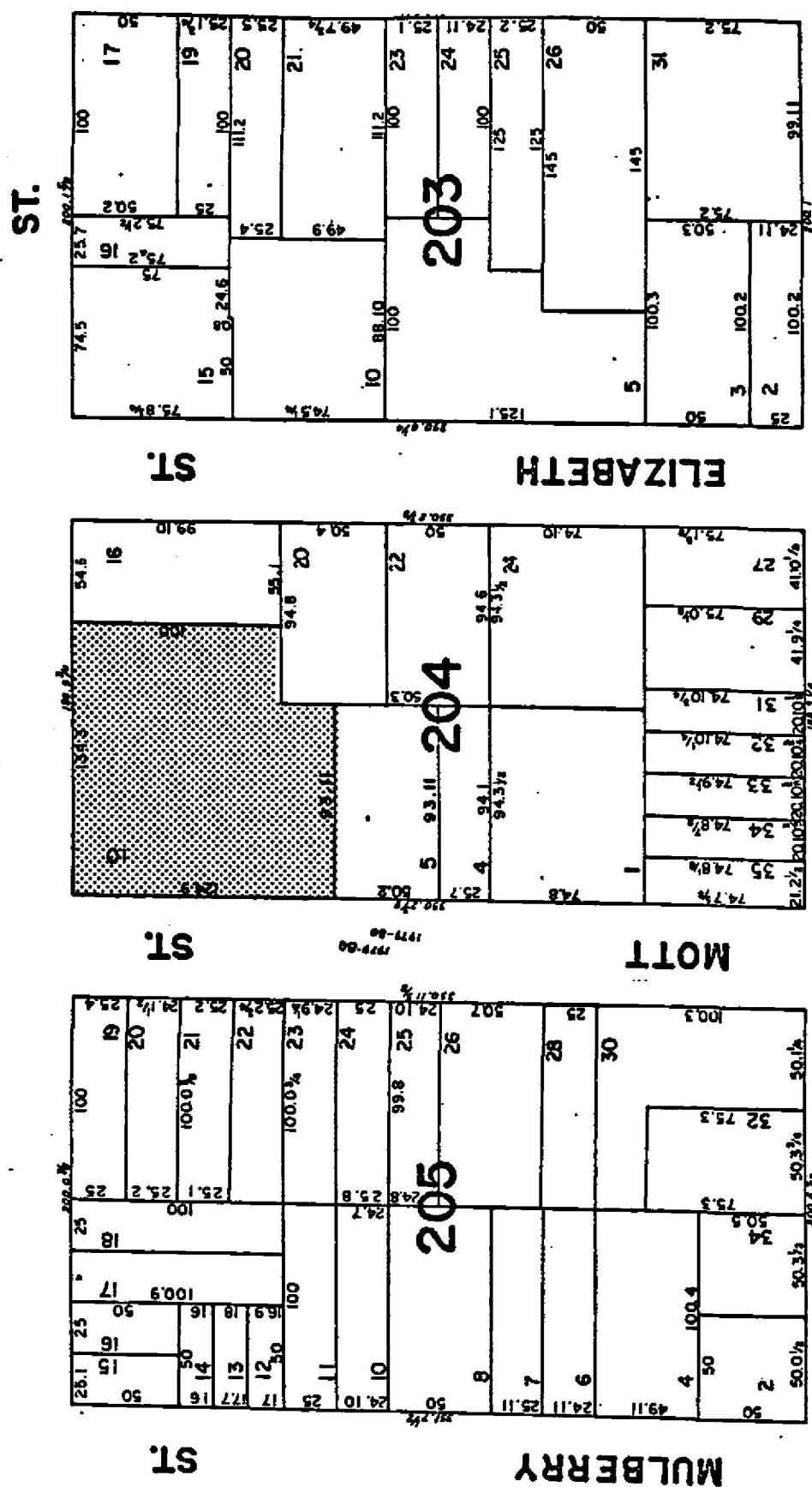
view: south, southwest  
to north,  
northeast



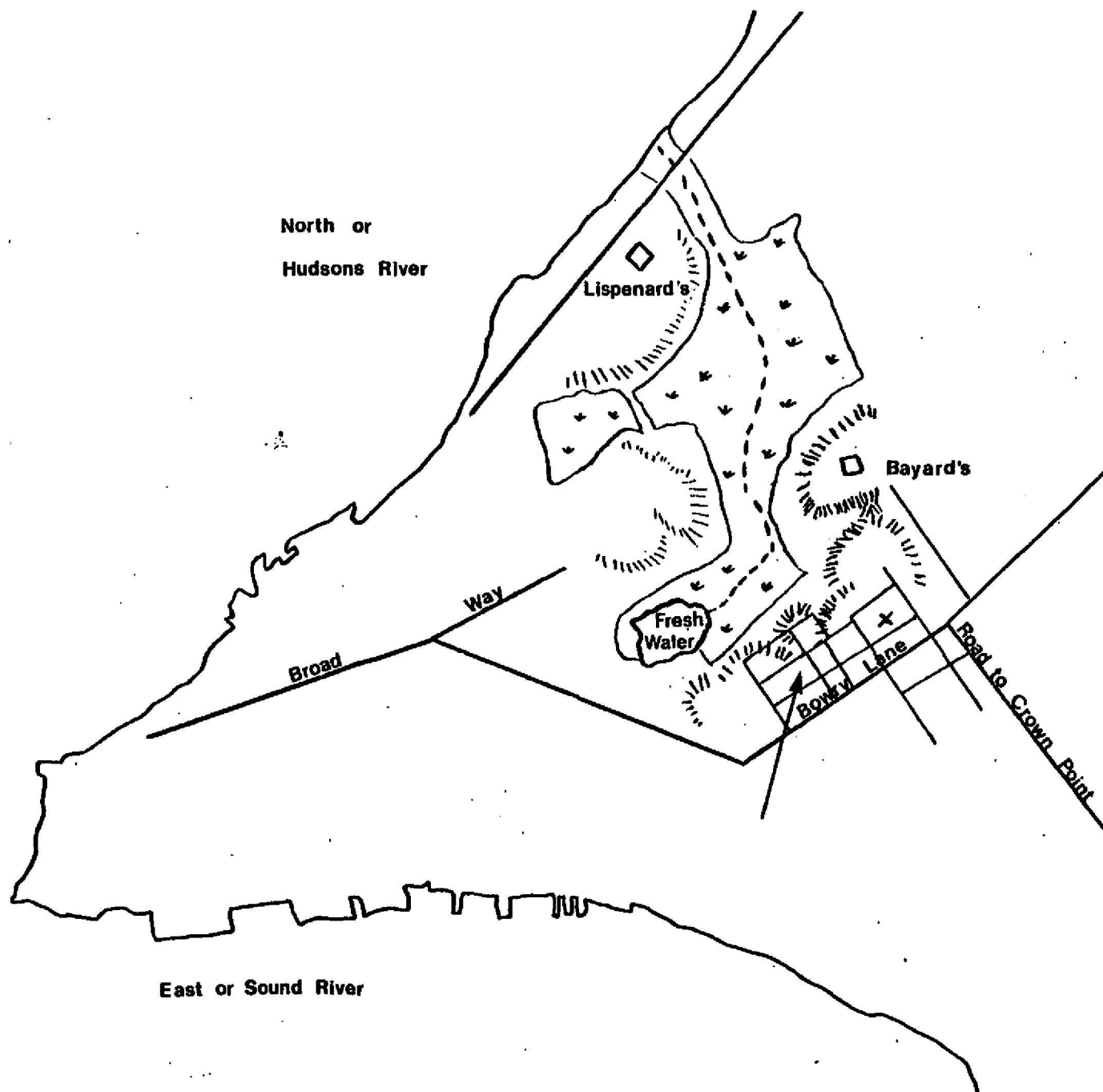


Fig. 1









a tracing of  
 THE MONTRESOR PLAN  
 John Montresor  
 1775  
 from  
 Stokes, Vol. 1: plate 40



A NEW AND ACCURATE PLAN OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK IN THE STATE OF  
NEW YORK (The Taylor - Roberts Plan)

1797

from Stokes, Vol. 1: plate 64

Fig. 5



copy of

GRIM'S GENERAL PLAN, 1742-3-4

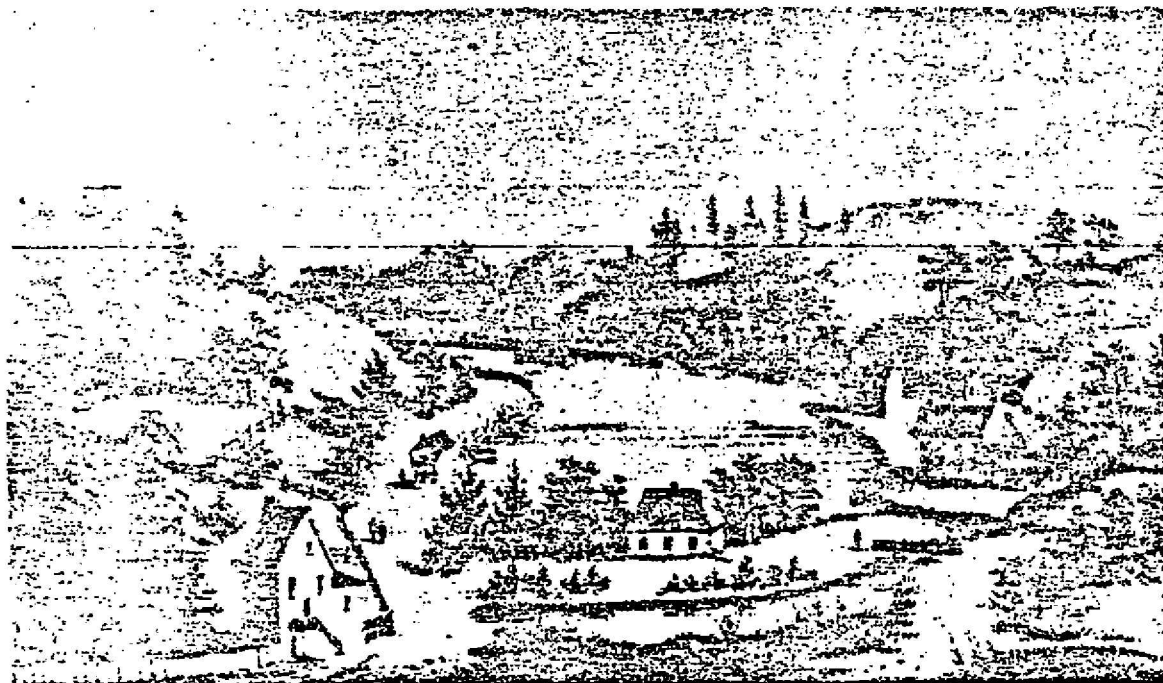
from Stokes, Vol. 1: pl. 32

## 26





Photocopied from A Landmark History of New York  
page 165



Collect Pond, 1800. From an old print.

Photocopied from The Columbia Historical Portrait of New York

"In a very long inscription on the back of this panel Chappel noted that it showed one of the City Watch leaving his watch box on patrol. The picture is of the west side of Elizabeth Street, between Canal and Hester streets, in 1809. The house at left was occupied by 'an industrious Beadsted Maker Named Ingrist.' Set back from the street at right was the Elizabeth Street African Methodist Meeting House where 'occasionally preached the Greatest Learned Doctors.'"



Photocopied from History of the City of New York, Vol. III  
p. 570

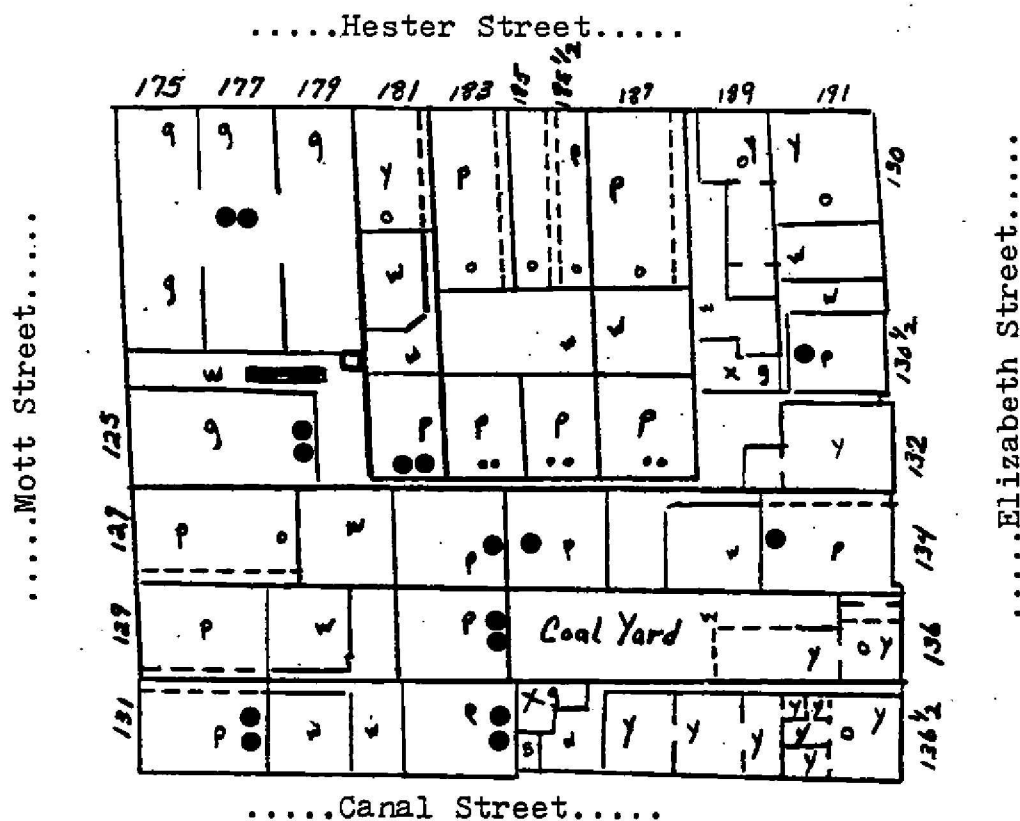


Corporation Improvements.

[From an original etching by John P. Emmet: copied through the courtesy of his son,  
Dr. Thomas Addis Emmet.]



## Tracing of ATLAS OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK, Perris, 1857 (NYPL)



scale: 1" = 50'

## LEGEND:

p - brick or stone

● first class dwelling

●● second class dwelling

○ first class dwelling with stores underneath

g - specially hazardous business

x framed, first class

●● brick, second class

y - framed dwelling

○ framed dwelling with stores underneath

w - vacant land

----- communicating

■ boilers or steam engines

Fig. 12

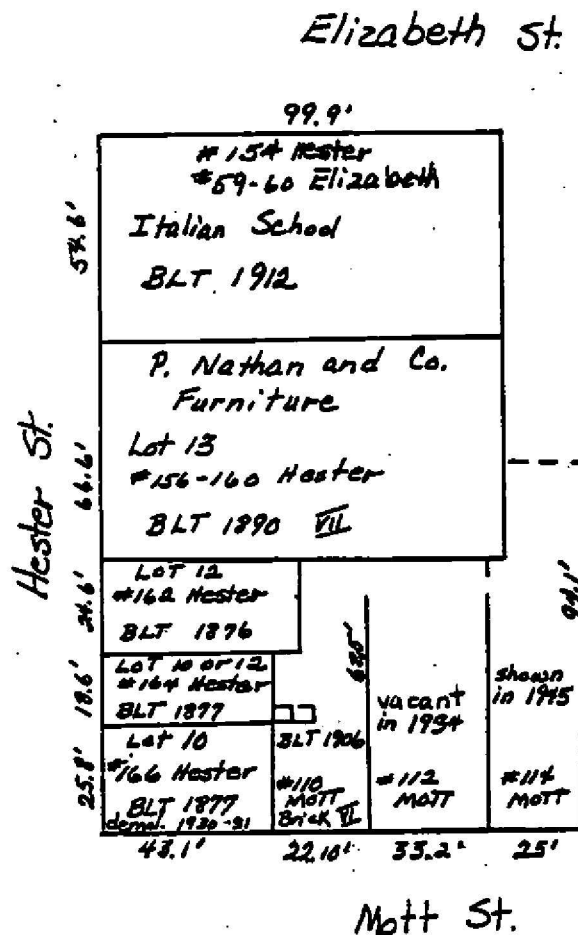
## Hester - Mott Street Project Site Schematic

Information gathered from various sources:

1934 Sanborn Atlas of New York City

1945 Sanborn Atlas of New York City

Docket Books, NYC Department of Buildings



Photocopied from The Columbia Historical Portrait of  
New York


BELOW: "The Italian Colony, Mulberry Bend," was drawn by W. Bengough and published in *Harper's Weekly*, June 29, 1895, as one of the illustrations for his series of articles on "The Foreign Element in New York."


The text describes this as "the most picturesque, squalid, dilapidated, thoroughly interesting, and lively" foreign colony in the city.



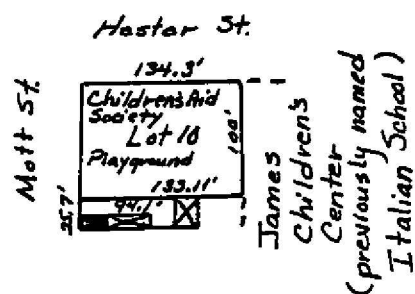
Traced from Sanborn LAND MAP OF MANHATTAN, 1945  
 NYC Topographic Bureau  
 Plate 12

scale: 1" = 160'

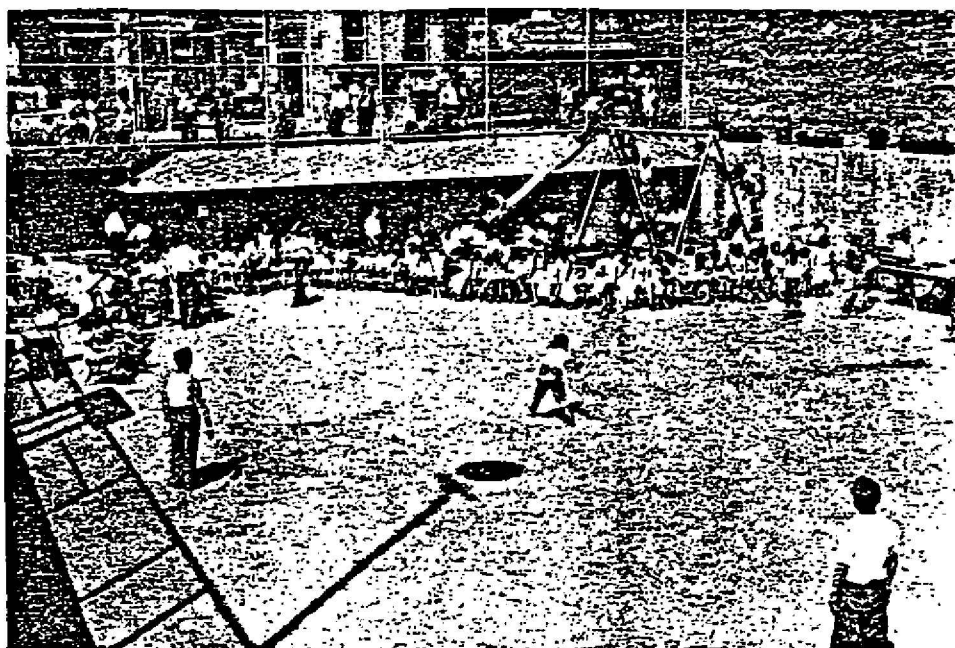
 brick

 outbuilding

Lot 10 listed as vacant land.



Photocopied from Children's Aid Society  
Annual Report  
1930  
p. 23



A CORNER OF THE JAMES PLAYGROUND