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SECONDARY LEVEL DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH  
BLOCK 2380 LOTS 6-8 AND BLOCK 2382 LOT 20  
MELROSE COMMONS U.R.A.  
BRONX, NEW YORK  
CEQR 88-087X

prepared for:  
Department of Housing Preservation and Development  
City of New York  
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## LIST OF PERSONNEL

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Paula M. Crowley	-	Word Processor



## INTRODUCTION

The Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Area is located in the southwestern part of the Bronx. It is bounded on the south by East 156th Street, East 157th Street, East 158th Street, and East 159th Street; East 163rd Street on the north; Melrose Avenue, Courtlandt Avenue and Park Avenue on the west; and Brook Avenue, Third Avenue and St. Ann's Avenue on the east.

The scope of work for this study includes Lot 6 on Block 2367, Lots 6 through 8 on Block 2380, and Lot 20 on Block 2382. Block 2367 Lot 6 was recommended for testing for possible prehistoric resources (Greenhouse Consultants 1993:19). The reasons for testing this lot are given in the 1993 report, and no further study is needed. In the Archaeological and Historical Sensitivity Study for this project, further study of Lots 6, 7, and 8 on Block 2380 and Lot 20 on Block 2382 was recommended (Greenhouse Consultants 1993). This recommendation was accepted by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. This report provides the results of that further study.

Parcel 1 of the project area for this study consists of Lots 6 and 8 on Block 2380 in the Borough of the Bronx, City of New York. This parcel measures approximately 100 feet north-south by 75 feet east-west. It lies on the southeastern corner of Melrose Avenue and East 159th Street. Parcel 2 of the project area consists of Lot 20 on Block 2382. It measures approximately 50 feet north-south by 100 feet east-west. Parcel 2 lies on the west side of Elton Avenue south of East 161<sup>st</sup> Street. See Figure 1 for the location of the project area. These locations were chosen for further study because the rear yards of these lots were never built upon. Water mains were installed adjacent to the project area circa 1878 and sewers became available circa 1893 (Greenhouse Consultants Inc. 1993:13).



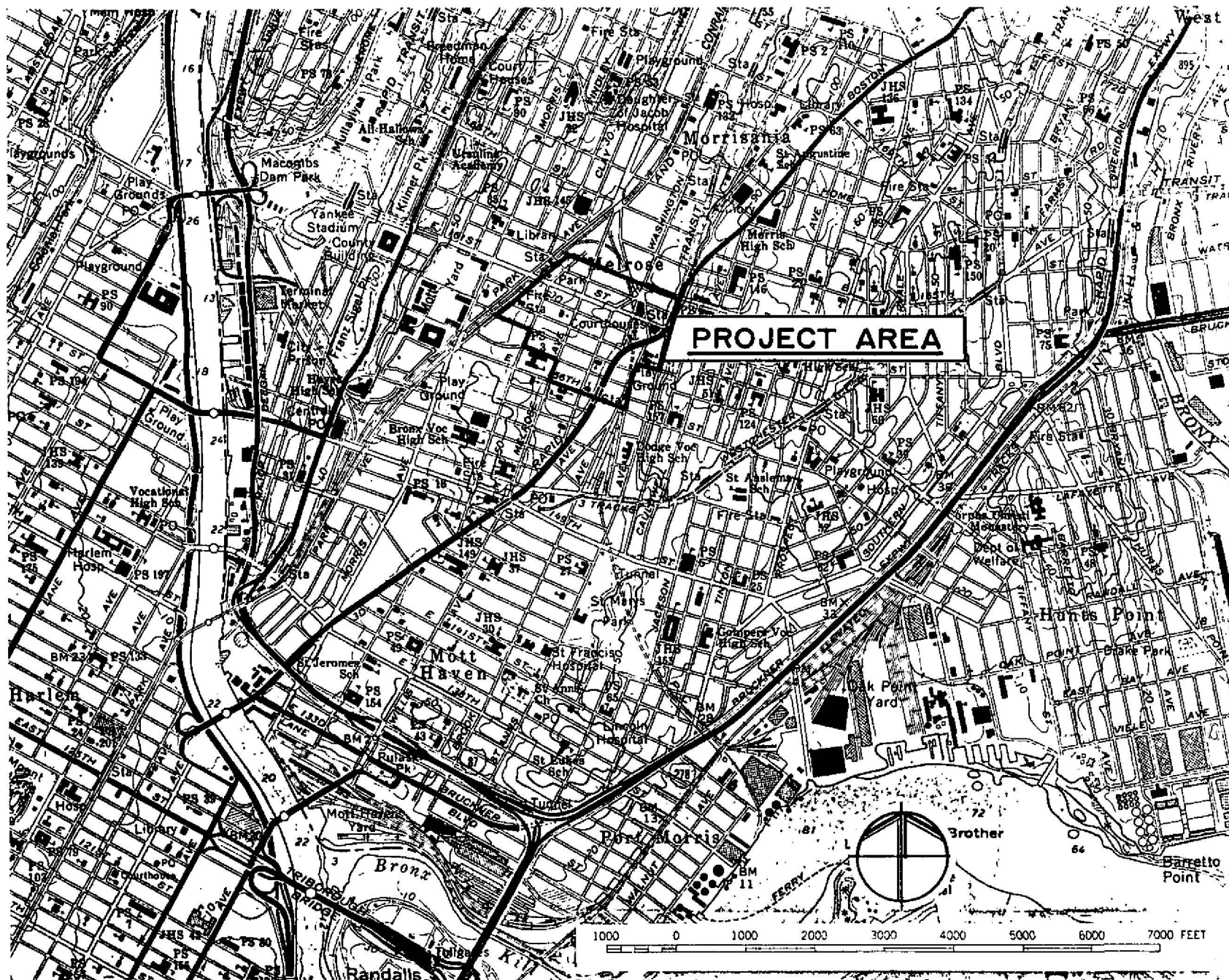


Figure 1

Location of the Melrose Common Project Area on U.S.G.S.  
7.5 minute series, Central Park, New York.



## HISTORIC SENSITIVITY

### Cartographic Evidence Parcel 1

Maps depicting the project area during 1860 through 1965 were examined as part of this research. The 1860 Beers map shows that Melrose Avenue did not yet exist. The current 159th Street is labeled Waverly Street. Only one building is shown on the south side of Waverly Street in the vicinity of the project area. This structure is in a large square lot. It is labeled *Jno Bells*. See Figure 2. The lot owned by the Bells appears to consist of Lots 7, 8, 9 and 10 on Block 2380. Using the 1965 Bromley Atlas for comparison, the house appears to be on Lots 8 and 9.

The 1872 Beers Atlas does not provide any details of structures. The 1879 Bromley Atlas was examined but could not be copied due to its fragile condition. Melrose Avenue is shown with dashed lines. Several structures lie within its path, showing that this street had been laid out but not yet built. The project area is shown as all of one lot, 50 feet wide and the eastern half of a second 50 feet lot. The eastern side of Melrose Avenue runs through this second lot. The project area includes two structures. One lies along the western edge of Lot 7 within the north half of the lot. The entire eastern half of this 50 feet lot, future Lot 8 is vacant. The second structure is in the north center of the second 50 feet wide lot, half within Lot 6 and half within the bed of Melrose Avenue.

Figure 3 is taken from the 1887 Robinson and Pidgeon Atlas. Two structures are shown within the project area. Melrose Avenue is still indicated with dashed lines and there are still some buildings in its path. There is a structure in the northern part of the future Lot 6. It covers the full width of the lot encroaching slightly on the eastern edge of Melrose Avenue. The western half of this lot, labeled Lot 4, is within Melrose Avenue. Future Lots 7 and 8 appear as Lot 6. One structure is shown near the northwestern corner of the lot. The remainder is vacant.

The 1891 Sanborn-Perris map shows the project area as three adjacent lots on the southeastern corner of Melrose Avenue and East 159th Street. There are two story structures at the northern end of all three lots. The buildings are numbered 652, 654 and 656 East 159th Street. See Figure 4. Comparison with the 1860 Beers map indicates that the Bell structure has been removed and that the three structures must date to between 1860 and 1891.

Figure 5 is taken from the 1965 Bromley Atlas. The structure in Lot 6 is now gone. Those in Lots 7 and 8 remain. The rear yards of all three lots remain open.

In summary, a structure exists in Lots 8 and 9 by 1860. It has evidently been removed by 1879 when structures appear in Lots 5/6 and 7. The structure in Lots 5/6 has evidently been moved into Lot 6 by 1887. The structure in Lot 7 remains. A structure was added to Lot 8 by 1891. The structure in Lot 6 is demolished by 1965.

### Cartographic Evidence Parcel 2

The 1860 Beers map shows the streets presently known as Elton Avenue and East 161st Street. They are labeled Washington Avenue and William Street, respectively. The G.B.

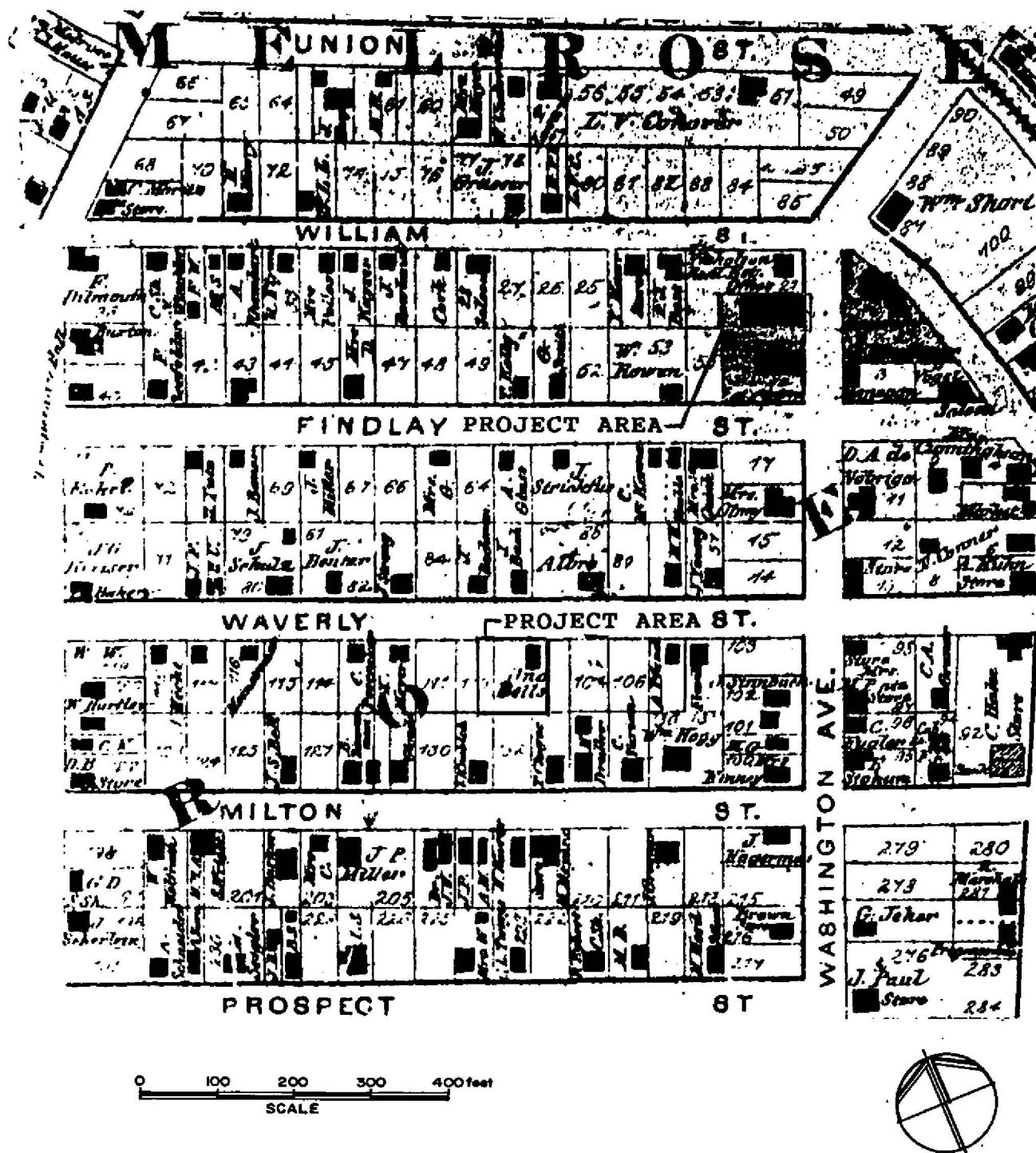


Figure 2 From the 1860 Beers map.

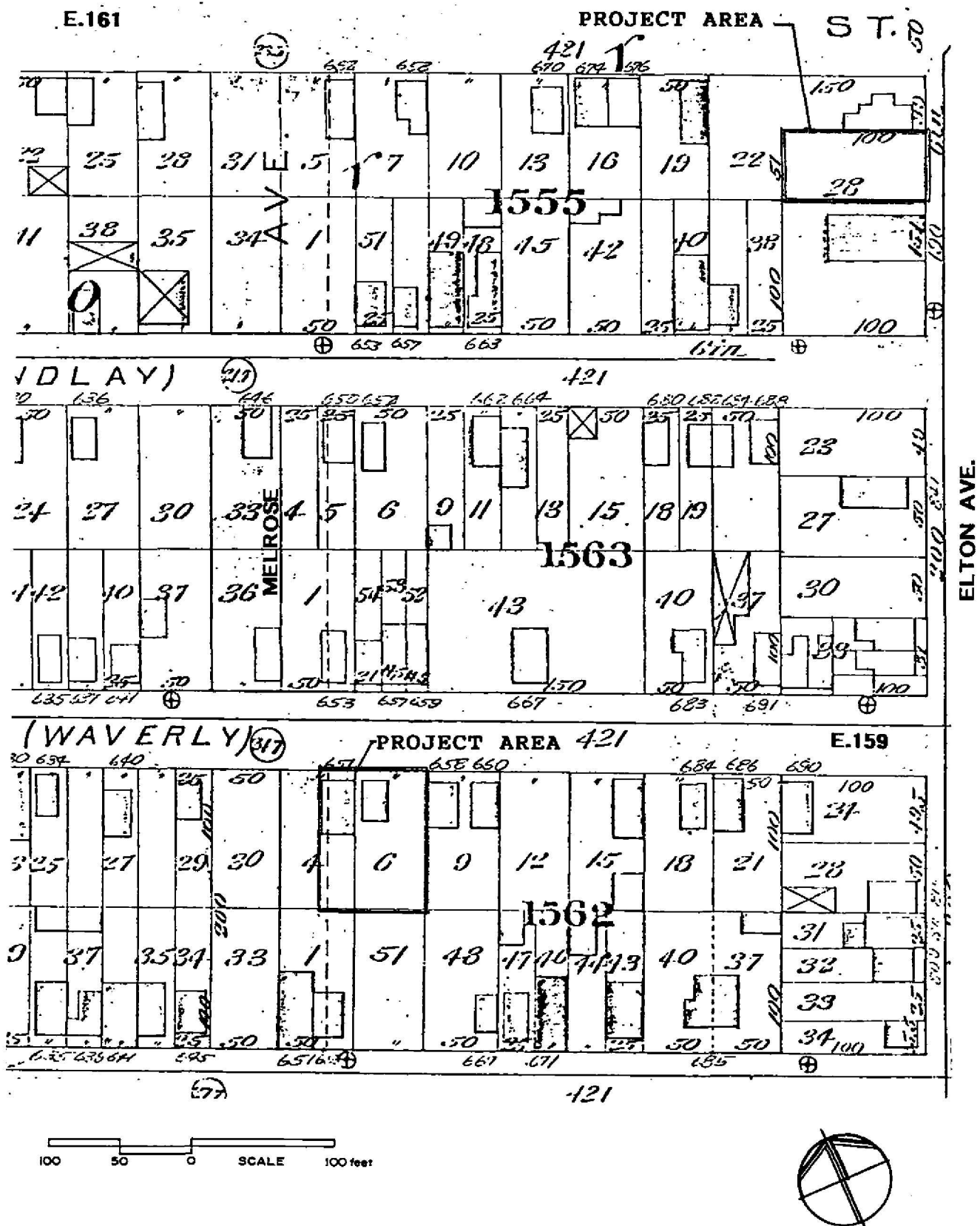


Figure 3 From the 1887 Robinson Atlas.

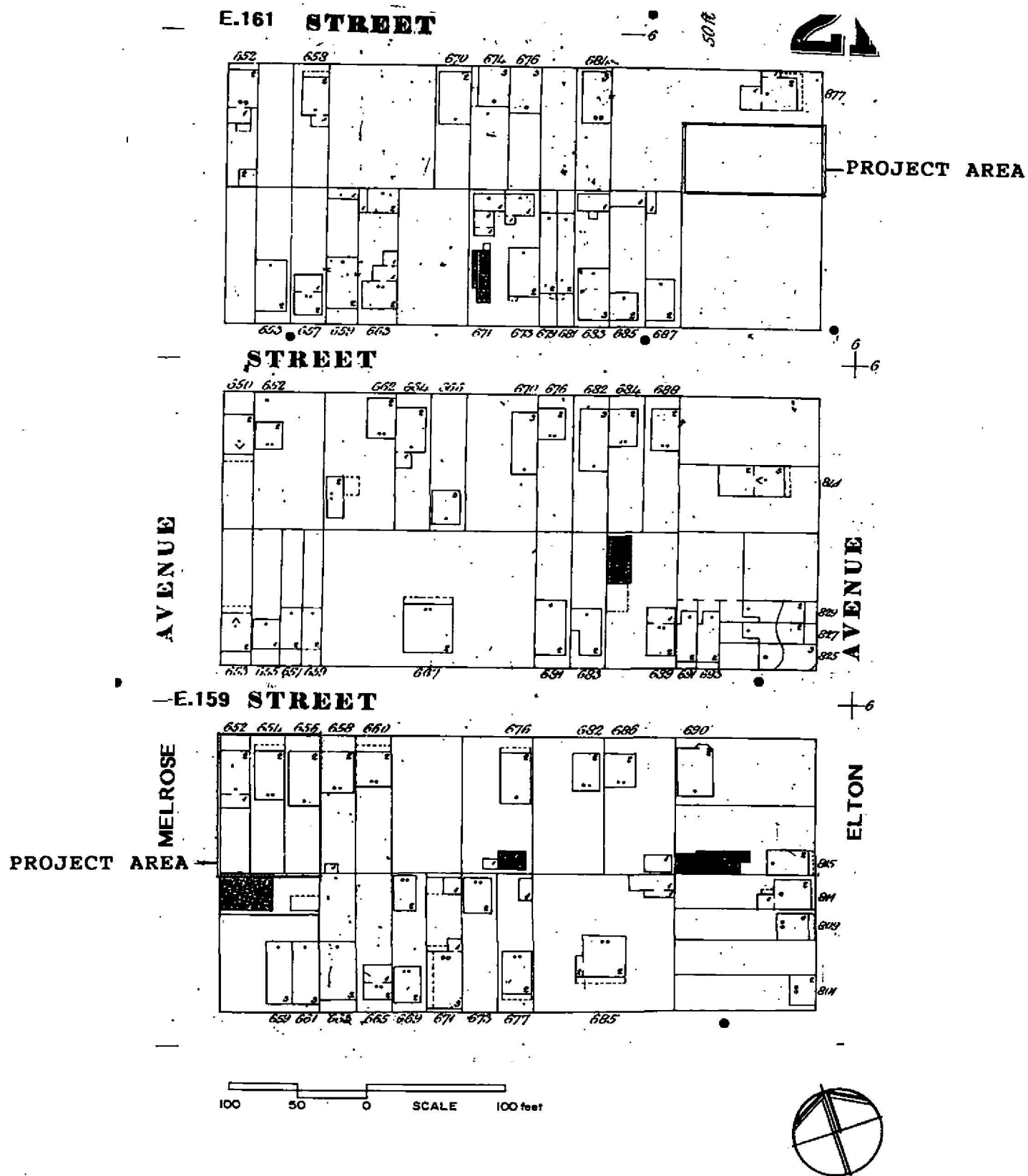


Figure 4 From the 1891 Sanborn-Perris map.



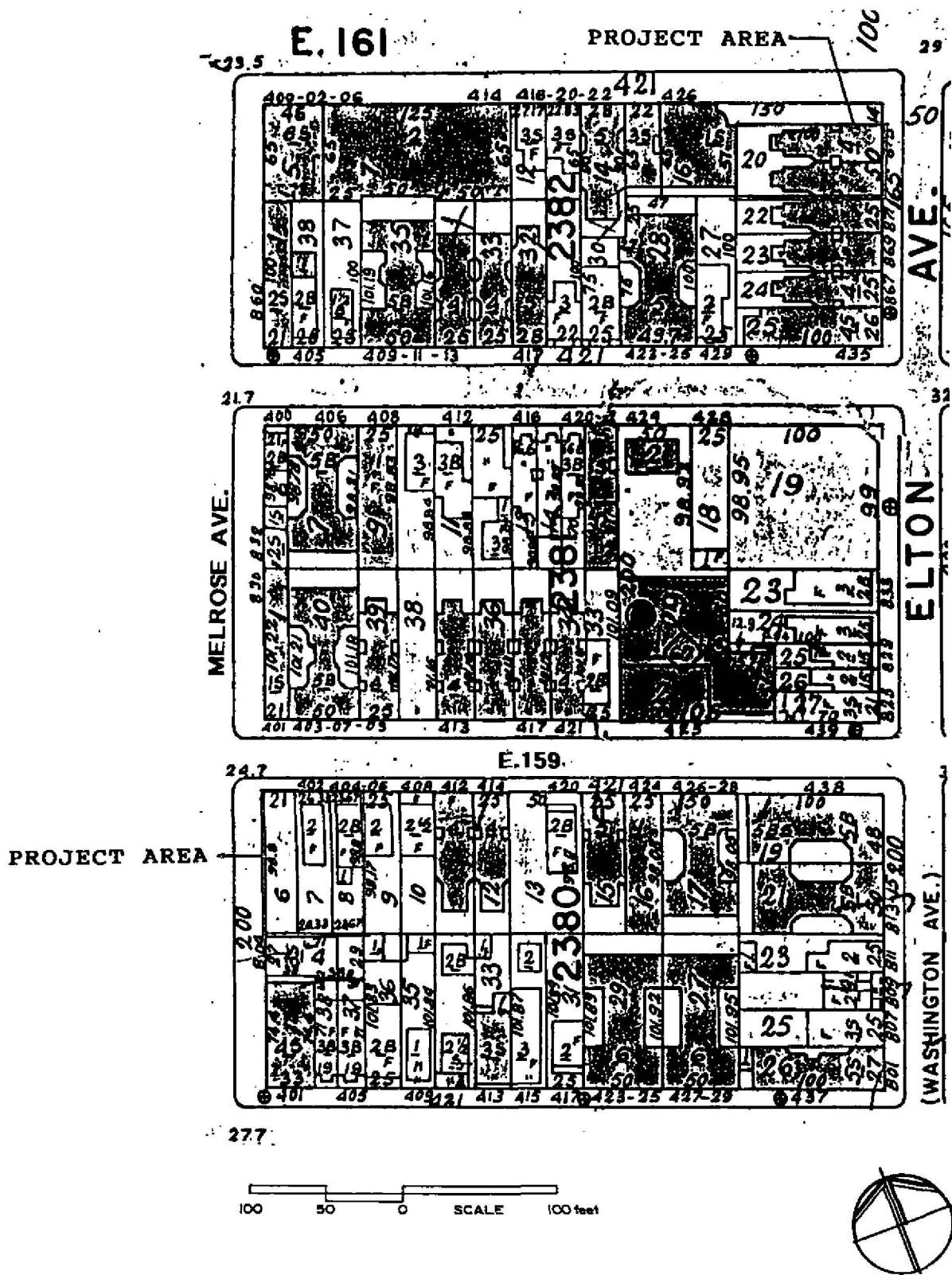


Figure 5 From the 1965 Bromley Atlas.



Brewery is shown in a large lot on the west side of Washington Avenue. Comparison with the 1965 Bromley Atlas shows that this large lot includes Lots 20 through 25 in 1965. There are two structures here in 1860. The northern structure is within the 50 foot wide Lot 20 in 1965. The southern structure is within Lots 23 and 24 in 1865. Bruckner's Brewery also had structures across Washington Avenue, in part of Lot 48 on Block 2382. Two structures are shown, one evidently a lagerbier saloon. These structures are labeled G. *Bruckner Brewery*. See Figure 2.

The 1875 Perris and Brown map shows a *Lager-Bier Brewery* on the west side of Elton between 160<sup>th</sup> and 161<sup>st</sup> Streets. This map was bound in a volume too large to be copied.

The 1879 Bromley Atlas shows that the two structures seen in 1860 have been removed. The brewery location is now vacant. This map was too fragile to be copied.

The 1887 Robinson Atlas continues to show Lot 20 as vacant. New structures have been constructed in the lots to the north and south. See Figure 3.

Figure 4 is taken from the 1891 Sanborn-Perris map. It shows Lot 20 as vacant. The structure seen to the south in 1887 has been removed.

The 1965 Bromley Atlas shows a series of new apartment buildings in Lot 20 and Lots 22 through 25 to the south. All are four stories and cover the eastern three-quarters of the lots. This leaves the rear yard of Lot 20 open. The yard measures approximately 25 by 50 feet. See Figure 5.

*Summary:* The cartographic evidence shows that Bruckner's Brewery had a structure in Block 2382 Lot 20 in 1860. It was removed by 1879. The lot is vacant in 1887 and 1891. By 1965 a four story apartment building has been constructed. This structure covers the eastern 75percent of the lot. The rear yard has evidently never been built on.

#### Deed Evidence Parcel 1

Deed records for Block 2380 Lots 6 through 8 were sought in the Office of The City Register for the Borough of the Bronx. Lot 6 was sold by Peter Peck and Amanda M. Peck to Eliza Bach and Jacob Bach during January 1891 (Liber 2:12). Eliza Bach sold the lot to Jacob Rosenthal during May 1919 (Liber 222:458). Lot 7 was sold by Esther and Joseph Wittgenstein to George E. Taylor during May 1881 (Liber 1598:418). It remained in the Taylor family until its sale by Susan A. Taylor to Daniel Conway during May 1891 (Liber 2:211). It remained in the Conway family until January 1921 when Mary A Conway sold it to the Julius Fajans Realty Corporation (Liber 290:449). No records were found for Lot 8 prior to 1941. It appears to have been conveyed with Lot 7 prior to that time. Since the project area was part of Westchester County prior to 1873, deed records on file with the Westchester County Clerk's Office were consulted. A purchase by Peter Peck from Isaac Adrience (Referee) was found dating to March 1868 (Liber 659:318). This sale was made for the descendants of William Morris after a court case. The Grantee Indices for 1680 through 1898 were searched for Wittgenstein. No records were found.



Grantor	Grantee	Record Date	Liber:Page	Lots
Peck, Peter and Amanda M.	Eliza and Jacob Bach	January 1891	Liber 2:12	Lot 6
Bach, Eliza	Jacob Rosenthal	May 1919	Liber 222:458	Lot 6
Wittgenstein, Esther and Joseph	George E. Taylor	May 1881	Liber 1598:418	Lot 7
Taylor, Susan A.	Daniel Conway	May 1891	Liber 2:211	Lot 7
Conway, Mary A.	Julius Fajans Realty Corp.	January 1921	Liber 290:449	Lot 7
Isaac Adrien	Peter Peck	March 1868	Liber 659:318	

*Summary.* This research established that Lot 6 was owned by the Peck family from 1868 through 1891, and by the Bach family from 1891 through 1919. Lot 7 was owned by the Wittgensteins prior to 1881, by the Taylor family from 1881 through 1891, and by the Conway family from 1891 through 1921. Lot 8 was apparently conveyed with Lot 7 during the late nineteenth century.

#### Deed Evidence Parcel 2

The deed records for Block 2380 Lot 20 were in the Office of The City Register for the Borough of The Bronx. This lot was sold by the Port Morris Land Improvements Company to Sylvester L.H. Ward during February 1869 (Liber 152: 260). The land was held by Ward until December 1899. It was then divided into two parts and sold to E. Howard Leggett and Clinton H. Leggett (Liber 33:208 and Liber 33:210). The Leggetts held the property until August 1924 when both parts were sold to Lewis O. Heck (Liber 464:181 and Liber 464:183).

#### Census Evidence Parcel 1

The 1890 Police Census for New York City was then consulted. This document provides lists of occupants for each street address. The 1891 Sanborn-Perris map shows Lots 6 through 8 as 652, 654, 656 East 159<sup>th</sup> Street. Records were found for both the first and second floors of 652 East 159<sup>th</sup> Street.

Census	Address	Name	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
1890	1 <sup>st</sup> floor 652 E. 159th	Bach, Jacob	51		
		Bach, Eliza	48		
		Bach, Lidia	18		
		Bach, Clara	13		
		Bach, Estella	10		





Census	Address	Name	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
1890	2 <sup>nd</sup> floor 652 E. 159th	Gibson, Brooks M.	30		
		Gibson, Mary	29		
		Rogers, Henrietta	22		
		Rogers, Caplolia	20		
		Rogers, Grace	19		
1880	E. 159th	Bach, Jacob	40	Laborer	Prussia
		Bach, Lizzie	38	Keeping house	New York state
		Bach, Lydia	8	at school	New York state
		Bach, Clara	3		New York state

Both 654 and 656 East 159<sup>th</sup> Street were apparently vacant, or no one was at home. The next listing is for 658 East 159<sup>th</sup> Street (1890 Police Census Book 927). The 1890 Police Census was able to confirm the residency of the Bachs, and provide evidence of the Gibsons and Rogers on the second floor, but it does not include the place of birth or occupation. The 1880 census stated that the parents of both Jacob and Lizzie Bach were born in Prussia (1880 United States Census Enumeration District 667:24). The indices to the 1880 United States Census were also searched for Brook Gibson. This search included checking all Gibsons in New York County. No mention of Brook Gibson was found.

#### Directory Evidence, Parcel 1

New York City directories were consulted to search for evidence that the Bach, Gibson and Rogers families lived at 652 East 159<sup>th</sup> Street during the years before and after 1890. Nearly all the directories published from 1879 through 1899 were examined.

Year	Address	Name	Occupation
1883	652 E. 159th	Jacob Bach	Driver
1885	652 E. 159 <sup>th</sup>	Jacob Bach	Laborer
1886	652 E. 159 <sup>th</sup>	Jacob Bach	Driver
1887	652 E. 159th	Jacob Bach	Laborer
1888	652 E. 159th	Jacob Bach	Laborer
1892	652 E. 159th	Jacob Bach	Laborer
1893	612 E. 159th	Jacob Bach	Laborer
1894	612 E. 159th	Jacob Bach	Laborer
1895	612 E. 159th	Jacob Bach	Laborer
1896	612 E. 159th	Jacob Bach	Laborer
1898	612 E. 159th	Jacob Bach	---



Year	Address	Name	Occupation
1892	612 E. 159 <sup>th</sup>	Brooks Gibson	Porter
1893	612 E. 159 <sup>th</sup>	Brooks Gibson	Porter
1894	612 E. 159 <sup>th</sup>	Brooks Gibson	Porter
1895	612 E. 159 <sup>th</sup>	Brooks Gibson	Porter
1896	612 E. 159 <sup>th</sup>	Brooks Gibson	Laborer
1897	612 E. 159 <sup>th</sup>	Brooks Gibson	---

The 612 East 159<sup>th</sup> Street listing for Jacob Bach from 1893 through 1898 may have been a typographical error (Trow 1879-1899). No listings for Rogers on East 159<sup>th</sup> Street were found in the directories of 1884 through 1890 (Trow 1884-1890).

#### Directory Evidence, Parcel 2

New York City directories dating from 1872 through 1887 were searched for evidence regarding Bruckner's Brewery. This period covers from before the annexation of this portion of the Bronx by New York City until the date of the 1887 Robinson Atlas which shows Parcel 2 as vacant.

No mention of Bruckner's Brewery was found in any of the directories, or in the accompanying Commercial Registers. One mention of George Bruckner was found. The directory for 1878/9 includes George Bruckner with no occupation listed,, and a house address of Elton Avenue at the corner of 161<sup>st</sup> Street (Trow 1878:181). Two other Bruckners were found who worked as brewers and lived in the Melrose area. Louis Bruckner was found in the 1878/9, 1880/1 and 1883/4 directories. He is consistently listed as a brewer, but his home address is different in each listing:

Trow (1878:181)	Washington Avenue near 161 <sup>st</sup> Street
Trow (1880:191)	167 <sup>th</sup> Street near 3 <sup>rd</sup> Avenue
Trow (1883:708)	Fulton Avenue near East 168 <sup>th</sup> Street

John A. Bruckner was found in the 1884/5, 1886/7 and 1887/8 directories. All three list him as a brewer with a home at 670 East 161<sup>st</sup> Street (Trow 1884:214; Trow 1886:239; Trow 1887:239).

During the research for the first documentary report on Melrose Commons, further mentions of the same three Bruckners and the Bruckner Brewery were found in directories of 1860, 1869 and 1872. The 1860/1 directory includes *George Bruckner Lagerbier Saloon* (Hutchinson 1860). The small business directory included with the 1860 Beers map includes under Breweries: *Bruckner, Geo Lager, Washington Av. corner of William St.* The 1869/70 directory includes listings for George, John A. and Louis Bruckner, all brewers (Curtin 1869). John A. and Louis Bruckner both appear in the 1872/3 directory, also as brewers (Curtin 1872).



## RESULTS

### Parcel 1

The cartographic evidence shows that Parcel 1 of the project area includes land that never had structures. All maps from 1860 through 1965 show the rear yards of Lots 6, 7 and 8 on Block 2380 as open. These maps show that any potential archaeological deposits in these rear yards could survive to the present.

Water mains were available by circa 1878 and sewers circa 1893, so privies could have gone out of use during the mid-1890s. Cisterns could have been abandoned somewhat earlier, but could well have stayed in use until after the sewers were available, since the installation of indoor toilets would have been an important reason for obtaining a water main hook-up. Houses built after 1878 likely never had cisterns since water mains would have been available. The 1891 Sanborn-Perris map shows houses in all three lots. The 1890 Police Census provides evidence that the Bach family was already living there prior to buying the lot in January 1891. Directories indicate that they remained in residence until 1898. The second floor was occupied by the Gibson family from 1890 through 1897 based on the Police Census and the directories. During 1890 the second floor also housed the Rogers sisters. They were not listed in the directories. The 1880 United States Census shows that the Bachs were from Prussia. Jacob Bach was a laborer or driver. The directories show that Brooks Gibson was a porter or laborer. He could not be found in the 1880 United States Census, so ethnic background could not be established.

The research indicates that 652 East 159<sup>th</sup> Street was constructed between 1872 and 1879. Since there is no evidence that it stood prior to 1878, a cistern is unlikely. However, it was clearly built before 1893, so it must have had a privy. This privy would likely have been filled shortly after 1893. The house was occupied by the Bach and Gibson families at this time. Jacob Bach was a laborer or driver. His family and his wife's family were from Prussia. The Bachs owned the property from 1891 through 1918. Brooks Gibson was a porter or laborer. The origin of his family could not be established.

### Parcel 2

The cartographic evidence shows that Parcel 2 includes land that was never built upon. All maps from 1860 through 1965 show the rear portion of Lot 20 on Block 2382 as vacant. Nothing on the maps indicates that archaeological deposits would not survive.

The map evidence also shows that a brewery used this land from 1860 or earlier until 1875 or later. The 1860 Beers maps shows that this was the G. Bruckner Brewery. The lot is vacant by 1879. Although the later directories did not include specific mention of Bruckner's Brewery, they did include a George Bruckner and two other Bruckners working as brewers, all in this neighborhood. It appears quite likely that they were of German background, due to the use of the German spelling of the word *bier* in map references to the brewery.

Water mains became available circa 1878 and sewers circa 1893, so the brewery must have had a privy, and a cistern as well. These shaft features would likely have been filled when the brewery left this lot, probably between 1875 and 1879.



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Parcel 1

It is our conclusion that a privy may be preserved in the rear yard of Block 2380 Lot 6 within the Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Area in the Bronx, New York. This privy would likely have been filled during the 1890s by the Bach and Gibson families.

We recommend that a backhoe trench be excavated at the rear of Lot 6 to search for evidence of this privy. This archaeological testing must take place prior to any construction activities within Lot 6.

It is also our conclusion that no other shaft features linked to particular families or groups of people exist in the remainder of Lot 6 or in Lots 7 and 8 on Block 2380. No further work is recommended in these locations.

### Parcel 2

It is our conclusion that a privy and possibly a well or cistern may be preserved within the rear yard of Block 2382, Lot 20 within the Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Area in the Bronx, New York. This privy would likely have been filled during the late 1870s by the operators of Bruckner's Brewery.

We recommend that two backhoe trenches be excavated within the rear of Lot 20 to search for evidence of shaft features. This archaeological testing must take place prior to any construction activities in Lot 20.



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