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Olympia Theatre

2770 Broadway, New York, NY

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86-223M

**Archaeological Sensitivity
Assessment**

ULURP No. 860726ZMM

438



Olympia Theatre

2770 Broadway, New York, NY

ULURP No. 860726ZMM

CEQR/Conditional Negative Declaration, 9/30/86

Archaeological Sensitivity Assessment

86-223M

Prepared for:

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Introduction

The Olympia Theatre, 2770 Broadway, is the site of a proposed development. See Figures 1 and 2 for the location of the Theatre. The 1985 Conditional Negative Declaration on the proposed "Straus Park Contextual District" (9/30/1986, ULURP NO. 860726ZMM), stipulated that "Should final plans call for basement depths requiring disturbance of soil below previously excavated portions of the Olympia Theatre site [2770 Broadway] or disturbance of previously unexcavated portions of the site, the applicant shall undertake an archaeological survey consisting of documentary research and submit the study to NYCLPC for evaluation and approval, field research and archaeological excavation if required." The CEQR Supporting Statement, signed by J. Ketas and G. Benjamin on 10/18/86, noted that the "Olympia Theater site is located in the historic Village of Bloomingdale, ca. 1701, and there is potential that significant archaeological resources may be found below the existing basement depth of 10 ft. below grade. The documentary study should address subsequent land use through time and landfilling of the site from its earliest history to the present. The study should consider the possibility of archaeological deposits from early periods still being buried on the site."

Pursuant to these stipulations, the current owners of the Olympia Theatre parcel (2770 Broadway Partners), Block 1878/Lot 55, contracted for an archaeological documentary study and assessment of their property prior to finalization of development plans. The following documentary study has been conducted by Historical Perspectives, Inc.

Project Site History

The Olympia Theater is located at the intersection of Broadway and 107th Street. See Figure 2. Although the four historic lots that predate the theater's construction were first developed at the very end of the nineteenth century, the area has a history that predates urban development. According to the earliest maps of this section of Manhattan, the project site was in a slight depression between two terraces, evidently supporting a small north-south stream. Please consult the accompanying table that outlines the cartographic evidence, 1782 – 1887. There are no ethnographic accounts that this area was a Native American habitation site, part of a trail or used for planting fields (Grumet 1981).

The neighborhood around the theater site was formerly known as Bloomingdale, a name used to describe Manhattan's Upper West Side until the middle of the nineteenth century. Bloomingdale is a corruption of the Dutch name *Bloemendael*, meaning vale of flowers (Jackson 1995: 119). It was an area comprised exclusively of farms and small villages, all connected by Bloomingdale Road. Built in 1703 with a width of only thirty-three feet, the Road served as the main thoroughfare for the west side of Manhattan. The Nicholas Jones House, known as Woodlawn, was built in the project neighborhood sometime before 1764, perhaps by C. W. Apthorpe who was an extensive landholder in the area (Stokes VI: 437). The Jones' house, and stone-walled gardens, were 300 feet west of what is now West End Avenue between 106th and 107th Streets (Stokes III: 981-982; Salwen 1989:19). The Jones mansion was a critical site in the 1776 *Battle of Harlem Heights* (Johnston 1897: compilation map). [Apthorpe's own mansion, at what is now 91st and 9th Avenue became Sir Henry Clinton's headquarters for a time.]

The hillocks, exposed bedrock and natural ravines of the project neighborhood played large in the Revolutionary War. According to Johnston's "Position of the American and British Armies near Harlem," there were redoubts and/or earthworks in the general project area but they appear to be west of Broadway (Ibid.). See Figure 3. Peter Salwen's Upper West Side Story includes a description of a skirmish that took place in the project neighborhood. According to Salwen's account, the Knowlton Rangers were an adventurous reconnoitering party sent out by Washington in mid-September of 1776.

First light on the sixteenth found the Rangers advancing stealthily through the woods of Van de Water's Heights. By daybreak they had reached Nicholas Jones's farm, near 106th Street, with still

Table 1

TABLE 1		
Broadway at 107th Street, Olympia Theater Research		
Map and Local History Division, NYPL, June 4th and 5th, 2003		
MAP NAME/DATE:	OTHER BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFO:	DESCRIPTION/NOTES:
New York City 1782	BR. H.Q. #7	The area is mostly wooded with farms - it is impossible to locate the exact site on this map, since its early date also means that it lacks the more modern landmarks that are featured on more recent maps.
Farm Map (Surveyed October 12, 1785)	45 Portion, Surveyed by C.J. Goerck	This map shows the farm divisions (from approximately 107th - 131st streets) that were in place at the end of the 18th century, specifically those of the De Peyster brothers (Nicholas and James). Due to the age of this map, the measurements were taken using chains and the only other geographical features are latitude and longitude coordinates. Using other more modern maps the approximate coordinates of the Olympia site were compared to this map. It seems that the site was not on (or if so on the very edge) of the De Peyster property.
Commissioner's Map of New York City 1807-11		Covering 89th street - 137th street, this map was made before the creation of Central Park. Bloomingdale Road exists, however there is very little development on or around the Olympia Theater site. This map also shows a stream either running through the project site or in close proximity to the site.
Dripps New York City North of 50th Street 1851	#3 of 6	Bloomingdale Road exists, site remains undeveloped.
Certified Copies of Original Maps in New York City 1881	Spielman & Brush, Hoboken New Jersey.	This map indicates that Ann Rogers was the owner of the land that is currently the corner of 107th Street and Broadway.

Map of Property of New York - 1887 (with 1787 topography)	C.J. Hunt	This map illustrates existing structures of 1887, with topographic features as they appeared a century earlier, in 1787. There are few structures on the map, and none exist in the general vicinity of the future site of the Olympia theater. Reading the topography of the area, however, reveals that the site parcel is located in the depression made by two adjacent hills. The map also provides locations of bedrock outcrops, many of which occur near the site (the nearest is shown on 107th street between 10th and 11th Avenues, another is on 106th street). Bloomingdale Road is in place at the time this map was created. A stream is depicting as running through the extreme northeast corner of the project site.
Robinson & Pidgeon Atlas of the City of New York 1890	volume 2, third edition. Published by E. Robinson, 82-84 Nassau Street, New York. Plate # 16.	The site block is sparsely developed - only eight buildings exist, and one is an outbuilding. All are frame structures. A stream is shown cutting through the general vicinity of the site. Old farm lines indicate that Ann Rogers was the previous owner of the land now home to the Olympia.
Bromley Manhattan 1897	Plate 37	The project site remains undeveloped, as does the property directly to its south. Several lots adjacent to the site are occupied by brick structures (on the same side of the street as the theater). One dozen brick tenements line the other half of the block that faces 106th street. At the intersection of 106th street and Bloomingdale Road, a frame structure exists that was built axis than the rest of the mapped structures. It is oriented on an E/W axis, rather than the majority of structures which were built on a NE/SW axis. This could indicate that this building was erected before the reliance upon a city grid system. Finally, this map includes blue lines which represent original farm lines. The Olympia Theater site exists near the edge of a farm line, and the map denotes a stream running through the area.
	Plate 38	This is the next plate, also by Bromley, and is helpful because it depicts more structures and outbuildings (all frame construction) that were built without regard to the city grid system, perhaps due to the fact that it did not yet exist when these structures were built.

Table 1

NOTES:		
<p>Between the years of 1897 and 1902 Bloomingdale Road was renamed "Broadway" and the site of the Olympia theater was developed. There is a gap in map production during this time. The Bromley map of 1897 is followed by the first Sanborn map of 1902. Unfortunately, this period of time was when the city lots at the corner of 107th and Bloomingdale/Broadway were first developed.</p>		
MAP NAME/DATE:	OTHER BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFO:	DESCRIPTION/NOTES:
Sanborn 1902	The Sanborn Library, LLC	This map depicts initial development of the site, although not with the Olympia Theater. This first Sanborn map shows four structures(#s 2770 - 2776 Broadway), all fronting onto Broadway. None of these buildings cover the individual lots, each has a vacant yard behind it, on the eastern half of the lot. The stream that was shown running through the site in previous maps is no longer depicted. There are, however, numerous city water sources in place in 1902, specifically on Broadway, Amsterdam Avenue, and each of the east-west streets.
Sanborn 1912	The Sanborn Library, LLC	This map shows the site with the same four structures from the first Sanborn, however with more detailed information written on the actual map. Each structure on the site is marked with an "S" and "D"(store and dwelling), signifying that these buildings were both commercial and residential. The eastern portion of the site at the rear of these four buildings remains undeveloped.
Sanborn 1951	The Sanborn Library, LLC	The Olympia Theater appears on the site, the former structures no longer remain. The theater takes up almost the entire lot, utilizing the empty space that had not previously been developed. The only area that remains undeveloped is the eastern-most edge of the site (behind the theater on 107th street).

Table 1

Sanborn 1976	The Sanborn Library, LLC	The Olympia Theater remains on the site, depicted as it was in the 1951 Sanborn.
Sanborn 1979	The Sanborn Library, LLC	The Olympia Theater site remains unchanged.
Sanborn 1980	The Sanborn Library, LLC	The Olympia Theater site remains unchanged.
Sanborn 1982	The Sanborn Library, LLC	The Olympia Theater site remains unchanged.
Sanborn 1983	The Sanborn Library, LLC	The Olympia Theater site remains unchanged.
Sanborn 1985	The Sanborn Library, LLC	The Olympia Theater site remains unchanged.
Sanborn 1986	The Sanborn Library, LLC	The Olympia Theater site remains unchanged.
Sanborn 1988	The Sanborn Library, LLC	The Olympia Theater site remains unchanged.
Sanborn 1989	The Sanborn Library, LLC	The Olympia Theater site remains unchanged.
Sanborn 1991	The Sanborn Library, LLC	The Olympia Theater site remains unchanged.
Sanborn 1992	The Sanborn Library, LLC	The Olympia Theater site remains unchanged.
Sanborn 1993	The Sanborn Library, LLC	The Olympia Theater site remains unchanged.
Sanborn 1994	The Sanborn Library, LLC	The Olympia Theater site remains unchanged.
Sanborn 1995	The Sanborn Library, LLC	The Olympia Theater site remains unchanged.
Sanborn 1996	The Sanborn Library, LLC	The Olympia Theater site remains unchanged.

no sign of the enemy, when suddenly there was a burst of rifle fire from a detachment of British pickets a hundred yards down the Road. The rebels had been spotted.

Their recon mission was accomplished, but Knowlton, one of the heroes of Bunker Hill, was in no hurry to withdraw. The Jones farmhouse was a largish stone building, conveniently located on a rise, and as the four hundred or so British reinforcements advanced up the Road, the Rangers took positions behind the house and stone garden walls and returned their fire. For half an hour both sides held their ground, each losing about ten men. Then Knowlton saw more enemy troops closing in from the east – the much-feared Black Watch Highlands, to judge by the skirling of bagpipes – and ordered his men back. ...the Rangers covering one another's movements as they backtracked northward up the Road, over the steep hill known as Claremont (where Gant's Tomb now stands) and across the Hollow Way [a valley extending from 125th Street and 8th Avenue to the Hudson River and 130th Street]. (Salwen 1989:26)

Through the first half of the 19th century the early Bloomingdale landscape remained unchanged. A good part of the area was covered by open fields, vestiges of the Mott, Striker and Van der Heuvel farms. To the west, by the River, rock outcroppings rose high. Squatter shacks and small farming plots were scattered everywhere; these were slowly supplanted as the century wore on. By the 1860s, the city's police force had constructed a precinct house on 100th Street. Bloomingdale Road was renamed as "The Boulevard" in 1871, and again as "Broadway" in 1899 (Jackson 1995: 120). The name Broadway was meant to be a "northern extension from Bowling Green" (White and Willensky 2000: 339).

Several New York Times articles document information regarding the development along upper Broadway and the area around the Olympia Theater, both before and after its construction in the first half of the twentieth century. The first news article, written in 1892, discusses the creation of Bloomingdale Road and the disputes that occurred with each change in the width or route of the road. But, the project site itself remained undeveloped land throughout this time. Please consult the accompanying table that outlines the cartographic evidence, 1782 – 1996. Much of Block 1878 was developed earlier than the Olympia Theatre corner, undoubtedly due to the depressed topography and presence of a

stream at the project site. By 1897, municipal water is available on both Bloomingdale Road and 107th Street. See Figures 4 and 5.

In the immediate project neighborhood, real estate speculation at the turn of the last century was rampant, fueled by the construction and subsequent completion of the Interborough Rapid Transit Line. Large apartment buildings were being added to the Broadway streetscape. For example, "In 1898 and 1899 the entire west front of Broadway from 108th to 109th Street traded four times, finally ending up in the hands of the builders John W. and William Noble" (Gray 1996: Streetscapes). By 1905, the Nobles had completed the 14-story Manhasset apartment building. It was not until after ca. 1906 that the bottom floors of the large apartment buildings on upper Broadway included commercial space (Ibid.).

According to the frequently updated Sanborn maps (1902-1996), it is clear that the site of the Olympia Theatre was not developed until the turn of the last century, and then with only four residential buildings, fronting onto Broadway, which supported at least one 20-inch water main. See Figure 5. Each dwelling had a small rear yard on the east side of the lots. There is no indication on the available atlases that there were outbuildings and/or features in these rear yards.

A 1912 Tristram Coffin article in the New York Times concerned the renaming of Bloomingdale Square to Straus Square, a small triangular park and memorial fountain facing the Olympia Theatre site across Broadway. The proposed renaming of the small park would serve as a memorial to Isidor Straus and his wife, residents of West 105th Street who died when the Titanic sunk. He objects to this name change, noting that although the Straus' were important community figures, the history of Bloomingdale Village has a much longer history and is more deserving of commemoration. Despite Coffin's editorial, the Straus Park, designed by Evarts Tracy, was dedicated in 1914 with a memorial fountain sculpted by H. A. Lukeman (Salwen 1989:344).

Within less than 15 years, the four buildings on the project site were demolished and in 1914 the Olympia Theatre constructed. The Theater, a 23,000 square foot complex, was originally built for \$1,500,000. Although altered somewhat, the theater is still standing today. For example, at some time after 1914, the original coal-fired steam system was replaced with a 3,000-gallon fuel oil heating system (EDR 2002: 2).

In 1923, an article was written which describes a sale on the block on which the Olympia Theatre exists. The "block" on the east side of Broadway (between 106th and 107th streets) was purchased by Samuel Brener. This block contains the Olympia Theater as well as several commercial buildings. This land had previously been "in the same ownership for more

than fifty years". In addition, Mr. Brener purchased the four-story houses to the east of the Olympia Theater, giving him a total of 225 feet of Broadway frontage (NYT 1923: 22).

A 1924 New York Times article noted that Samuel Brener had sold the area just south of the theater site (facing 106th Street) to the Edlar Realty Corporation for \$600,000. Mr. Brener purchased the Olympia Theatre building lease. As can be noted on the cartographic review presented in Table I, despite ownership shifts, the Olympia Theatre complex remains basically unchanged through today.

Archaeological Evaluation

The original concern for cultural resource potential on the project parcel was focused on historic resources, specifically the early village of Bloomingdale. According to maps and documentary sources, there were no structures on or immediately adjacent to the project site prior to 1897.

The Battle of Harlem Heights was an important event that occurred in the vicinity of the project site. However, as discussed above, the earthworks and temporary battle headquarters were removed from the actual project site. Although the project site would not contain high concentrations of artifacts that would be present in an area of extended occupation, such as an encampment or defense structures such as breastworks, there is no question that some evidence of limited military activity may have been left on the project site over 200 years ago. The occasional stray artifact – such as a gun flint or uniform button - possibly was lost or dropped when the project site was traversed as the battle ensued.

The documentary research has established that the project blocks did not host any structures and/or features that date prior to 1897, at the earliest. Municipal water and sewer services were available by 1897, obviating the need for rear yard features such as cisterns, wells, and/or privies. The four ca. 1900 dwellings that were on the four historic Broadway lots for less than 15 years would not have left deeply-buried features, i.e., potential archaeological resources. The only possible resource associated with these early twentieth century structures would be accidental sheet scatter from a limited time period. Such sheet scatter would have been on or near the surface at the time of original deposition. Soil borings taken in 2003 do not indicate that an overburden of fill was added to encapsulate and preserve the ca. 1900-yard surface prior to construction of the Olympia Theatre (FTC 2003).

The Olympia is a substantial, three-story building that is currently divided into separate retail businesses and a movie house. See Site Photograph. The footprint of the original Olympia structure completely covers the project site except for an extremely small, linear fire alley on the east side. This alley abuts a large neighboring structure. There is an extant full basement that is divided into four units for the distinct businesses now operating on the premises. These basements are fully operable for commercial storage and contain fuel tanks and boilers. See Figure 2. There is no potential for any resources associated with prior occupations, regardless of the era, to have survived the massive construction of the Olympia. No further concern for archaeological resources is warranted.

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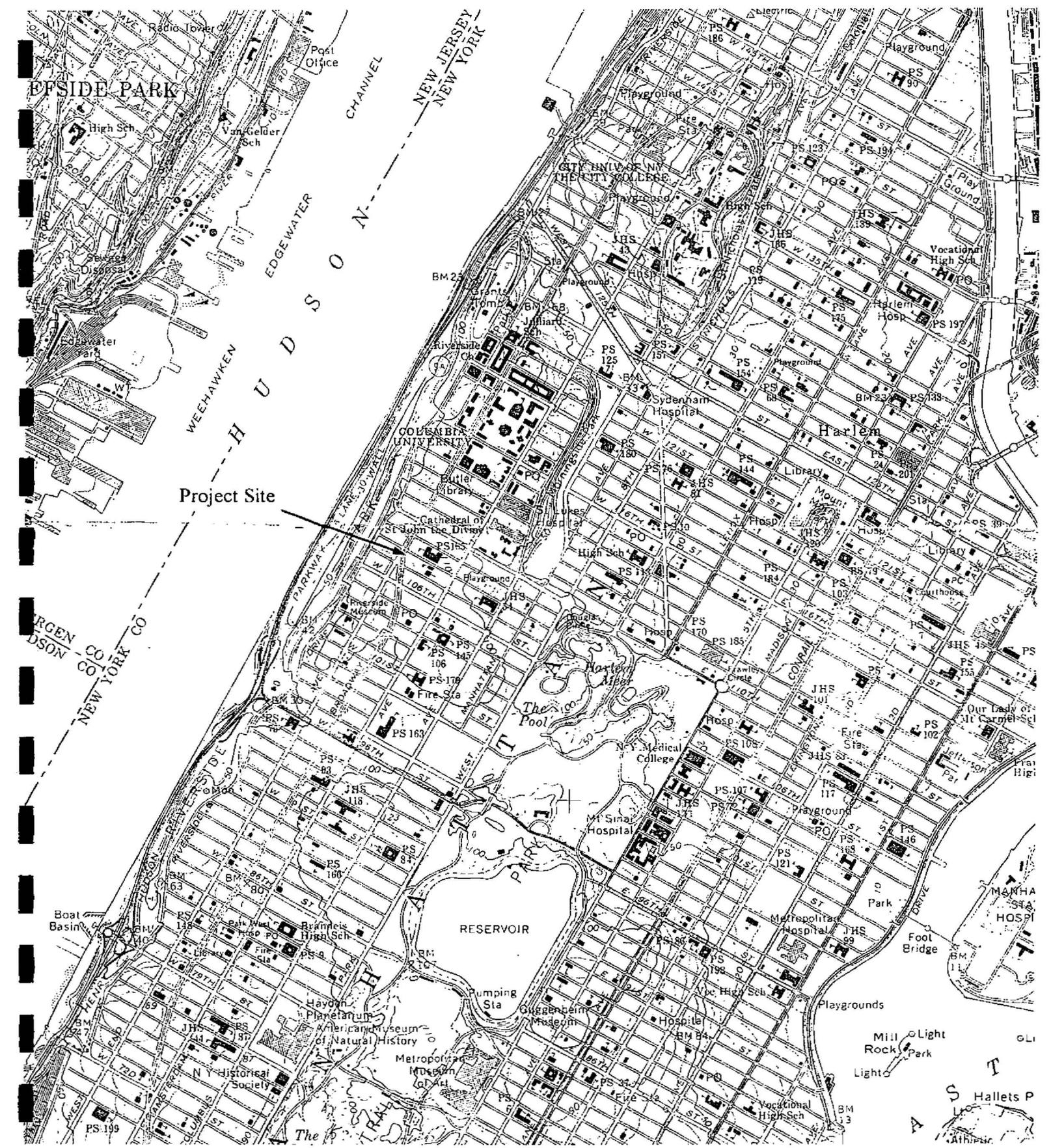
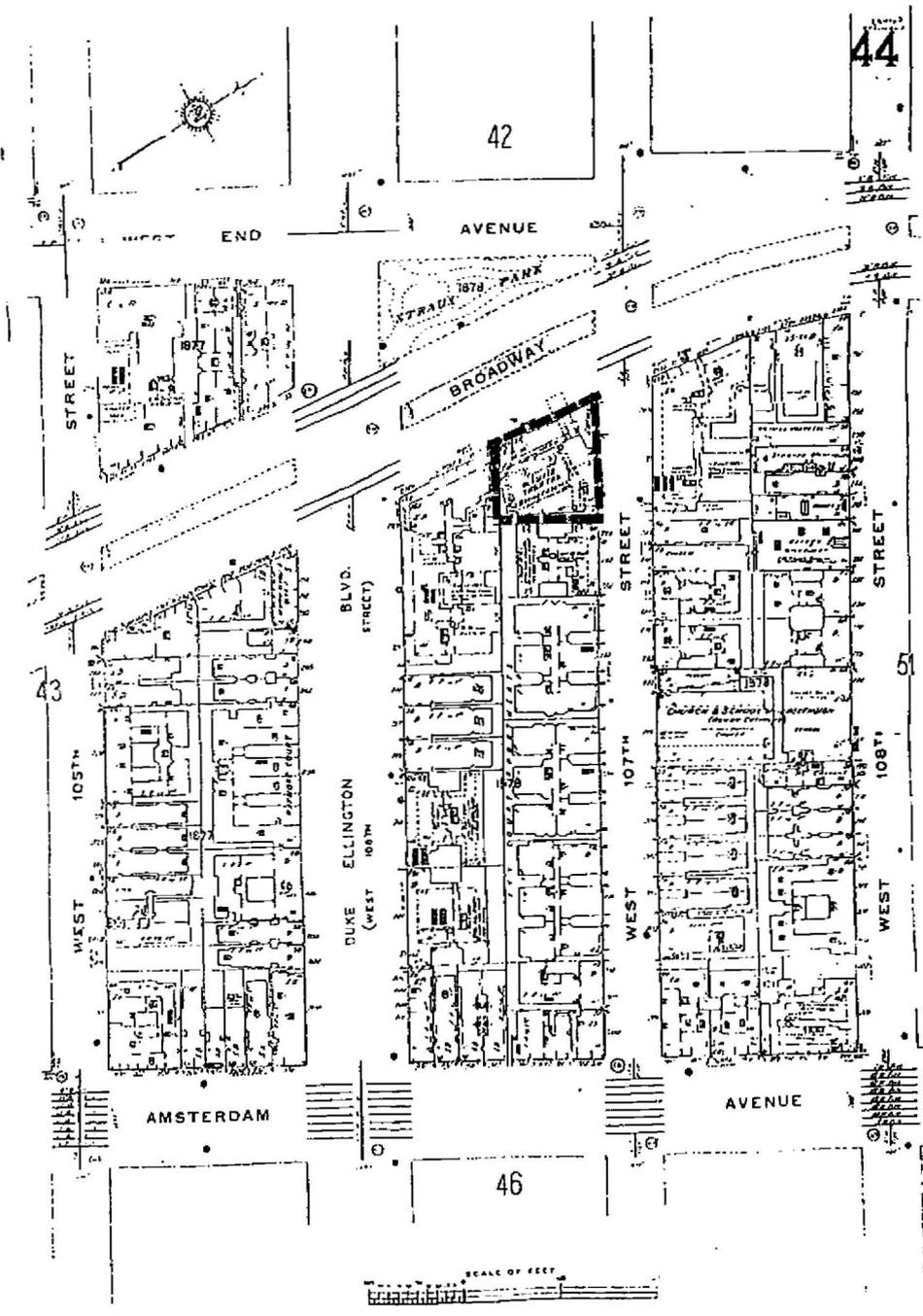


Figure 1. USGS Topographic Map Central Park NY-NJ Quad, 1966 (photorevised 1979), Scale 1:24000.





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Figure 2. Project Site Location

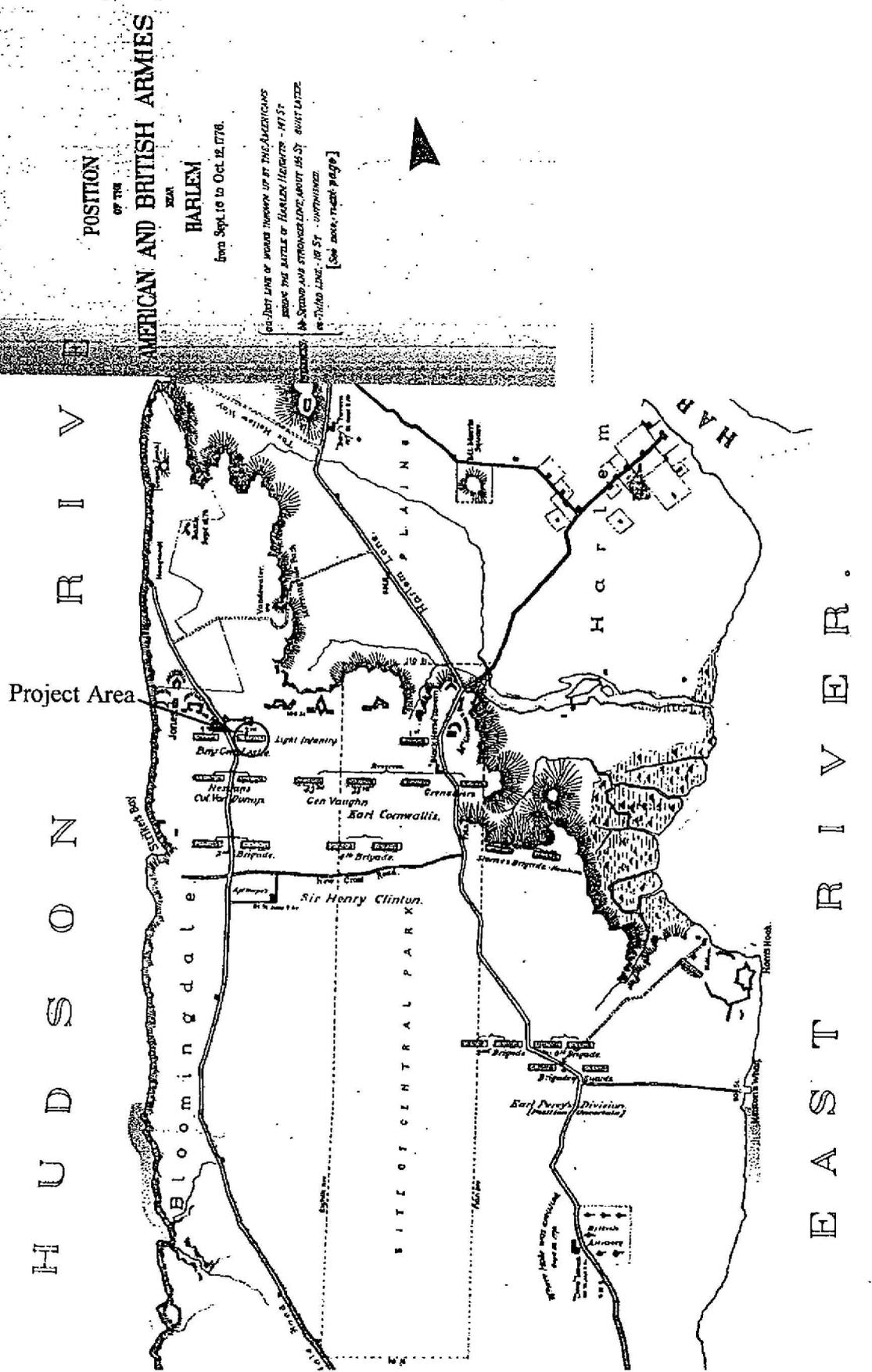


Figure 3. Position of the American and British Armies near Harlem, Sept. 16 to Oct 12, 1776, *The Battle of Harlem Heights*, Johnston, 1897 (Compiled from official charts of the vicinity).

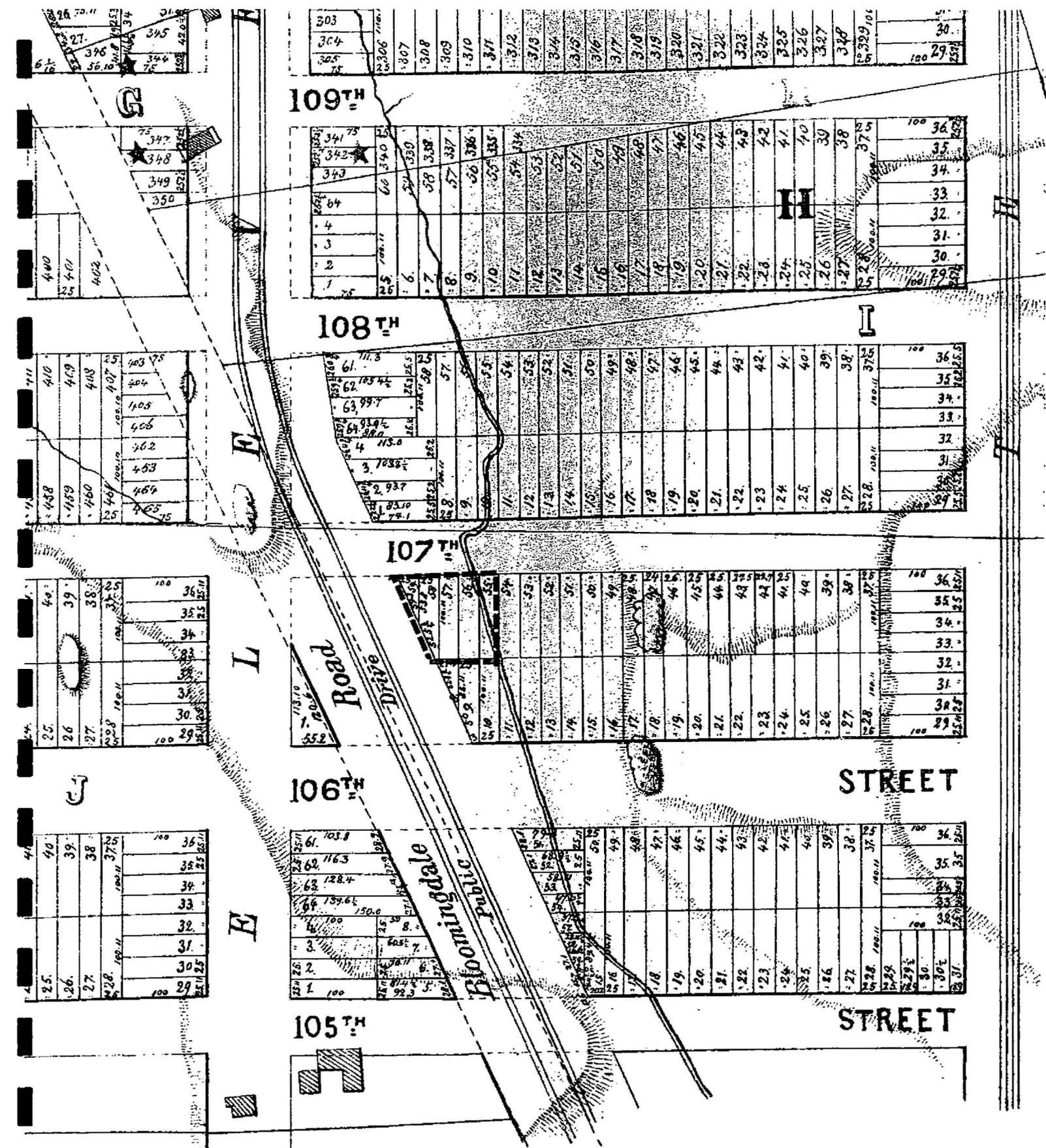
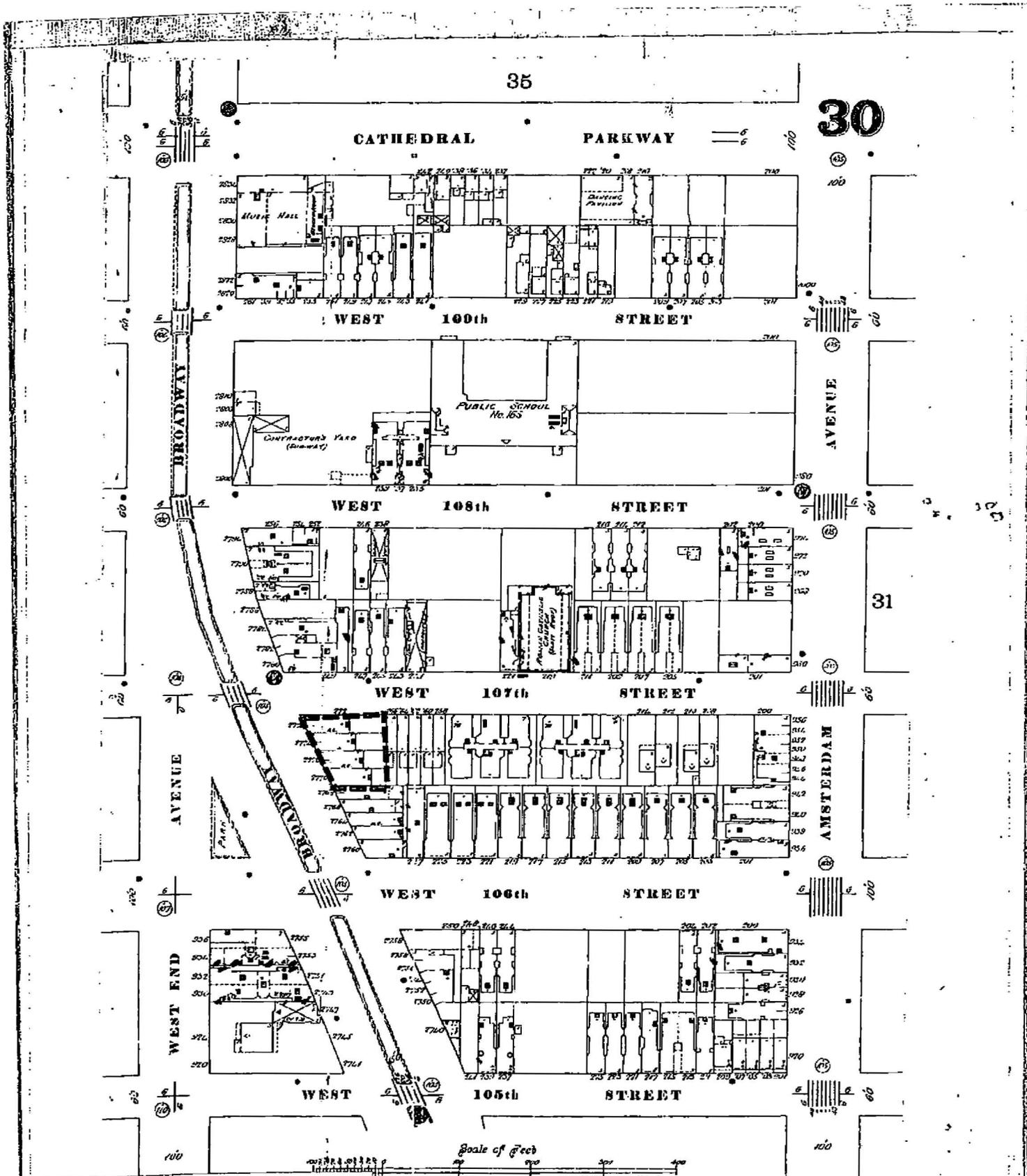


Figure 4. C.J. Hunt Map of Property of New York, 1887 (1787 topography).



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Figure 5. Project site location, Sanborn, 1902.





Photo A. The project site, facing south.