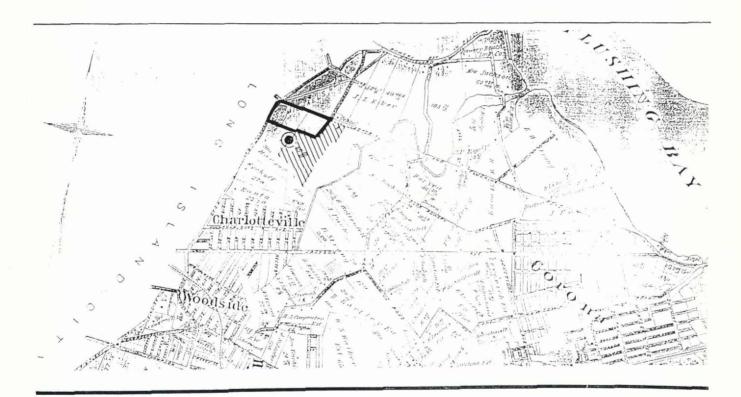
1987 (Fall) SB (Fall)

Documentation of the St. Michael's Cemetery Project Site, Queensnial Review

NOV 2 0 1987

LANDMARKS PRESERVATION
COMMISSION



CEQR No.

88-0980

Prepared for St. Michael's Episcopal Church Through Rosenman & Colin Contact Person: Ms. Jolie Hammer

538

Prepared by Joan H. Geismar, Ph.D. October 27, 1987

Documentation of the St. Michael's Cemetery Project Site, Queens

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

The concerns of the Landmarks Preservation Commission in regard to a 9,053 sq. ft. piece of land now part of St. Michael's Cemetery in East Elmhurst, Queens, have been addressed in this report. Documentary research indicates this property (Block 1016 Lot 450) has no cultural resources that will be impacted by construction of a parking facility proposed by the Bulova Watch Co., grading that occurred sometime between 1903 and 1926 would have destroyed any viable evidence of Native American use, and, while ownership extends back almost 350 years, no development or events of an historical nature occurred on the site. In addition, cemetery records and maps indicate burials were never designated on the project site. In part, this may reflect the fact that from 1912--before any burials occurred on adjacent plots--until 1940, this part of the cemetery was the proposed site of Wilson Avenue, a mapped street that was never run. Based on this information, no further investigation is recommended.

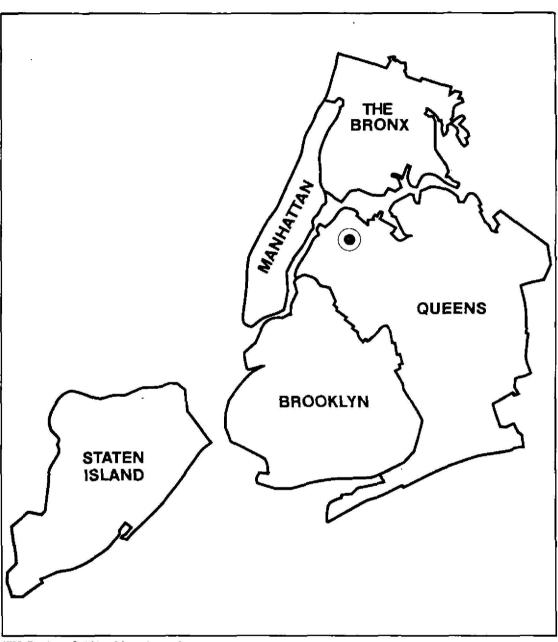
INTRODUCTION

This report presents documentation of the St. Michael's Cemetery project site (Block 1016 Lot 450) in East Elmhurst, Queens (Figures 1 and 2). The research, undertaken as part of a rezoning application, was done for St. Michael's Protestant Episcopal Church, the applicant, through Rosenman & Colin (contact person, Ms. Jolie Hammer). It involves approximately 9,053 sq. ft. of land now part of St. Michael's Cemetery which will be transferred to the Bulova Watch Co., Inc., for use as a parking lot. Research focused on the concerns of the Landmarks Preservation Commission: the prehistoric and historical potential of the site, and an assessment of whether it had ever been used for burials.

The sources researched for this assessment include the archives of St. Michael's Episcopal Church at 225 West 99th Street in Manhattan, the records of St. Michael's Cemetery, and the collections of the Queens Borough Public Library (Long Island Room), the Fiorello H. Laguardia Archives at CUNY, and the New York Historical Society. In addition, research was done in the Topographical Bureau of the Queens Borough President's Office, the Queens County Clerks Office, and through records provided by Frank Patton, Jr., Counsel for St. Michael's Episcopal Church, and Lawrence J. Codraro, General Counsel for the Bulova Watch Co., Inc. Drawings and soil boring information furnished by Eli Jack Held, the architect of the parking facility proposed by Bulova, were also consulted.

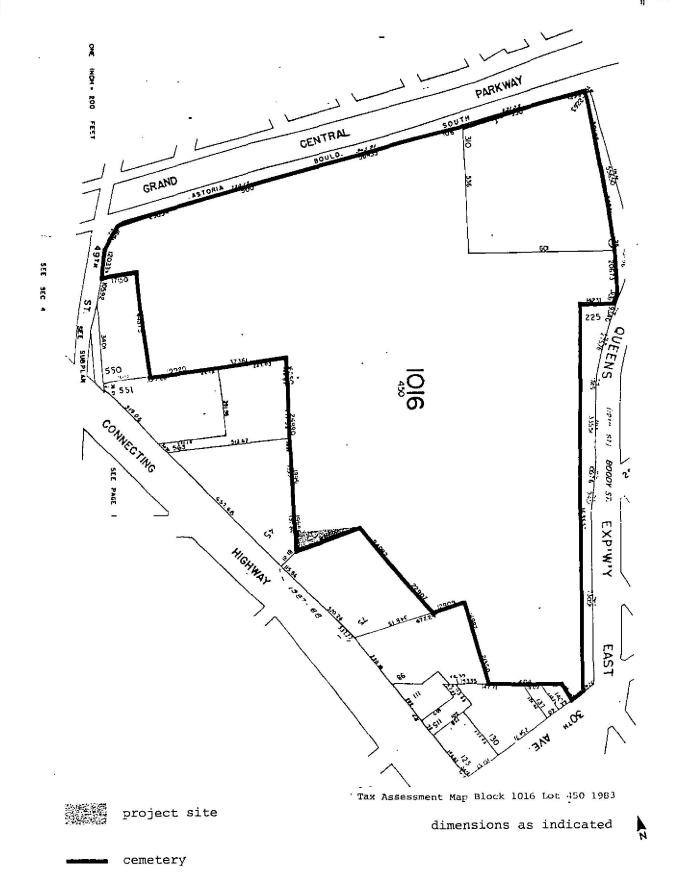
SITE DESCRIPTION

The site property is a triangle bounded south by the north parking lot of the Bulova building, north by a narrow road or lane



NYC Dept. of City Planning nd

project site location, approx.



(unnamed) and Plot L of St. Michael's Cemetery, and south by the extension of this plot identified for this report as Plot L Extension (see Figure 2 and Plates 1 to 6). The parcel is currently enclosed by a chain-link fence, however, there is access from the cemetery where the fence is in need of repair.

During the summer and early fall of 1987, when two site visits were made, the property was covered with dense vegetation that included poison ivy; both this plant and trees that appear to be 30 or 40 years old suggest the area was once cleared or altered. ground surface visible through the vegetation indicates the site has been used as a dumping ground for spoil from other parts of the cemetery as well as for discarded gravestones, also from other areas (Caracola 1987:personal communication). Of interest is the relative flatness of the segment that includes Plot L adjoining the project site to the north: a 1903 contour map--still the base for the city's official topographic map of the area--indicates that a 15 ft. knoll or hill once rose on the site and on Plot L, but this no longer exists (Figure 3 and Plate 3). This map and the high retaining wall found just northwest of the site, behind the New York City Taxi Commission building (Plate 5), suggest that extensive alterations have been made to the site, the active cemetery area to the north, and the lots to the west, beyond the cemetery.

Undoubtedly some of the changes made to the terrain occurred when the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway Connecting road, opened in the early-1950s (Casalotti 1987:personal communication), was constructed, but some may have been related to proposed local roads that were never built (see Section on Site Ownership below). This assessment

Based

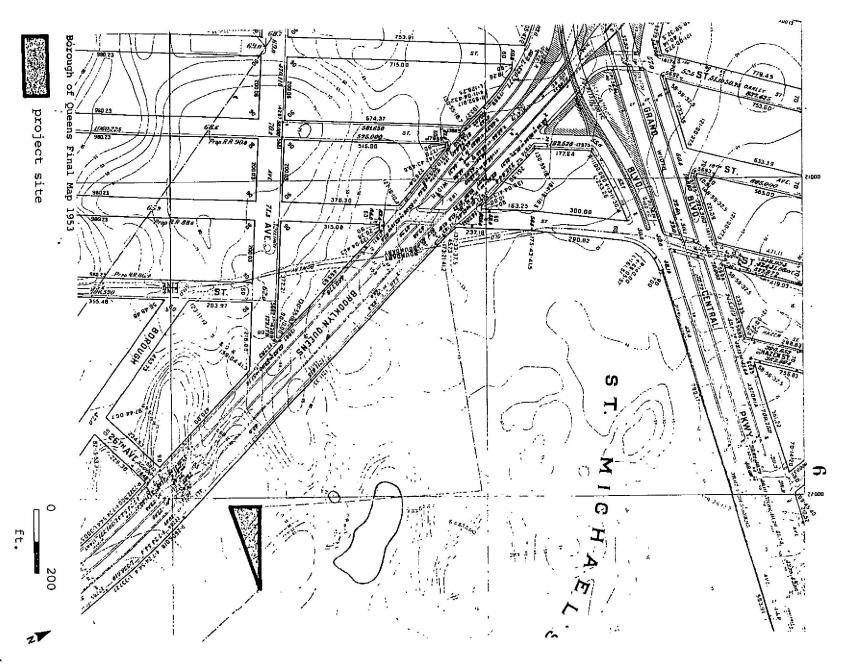




Plate 1. Composite photo showing the project site (arrow) from the Bulova Watch Co. north parking lot. St. Michael's Cemetery can be seen through the trees to the right rear. The Bulova building is to the extreme right. Photo taken from the upper parking area. (photo: Geismar 10/87)



Plate 2. Project site is to the right beyond the chain-link fence. Photo taken from the Bulova Watch Co. north parking lot looking to the west toward the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway Connecting Road. The Taxi Commission building can be seen to the right rear; to the left is the upper part of the parking lot. Note dense vegetation on the site and the uphill grade to the Connecting Road. (photo: Geismar 10/87)

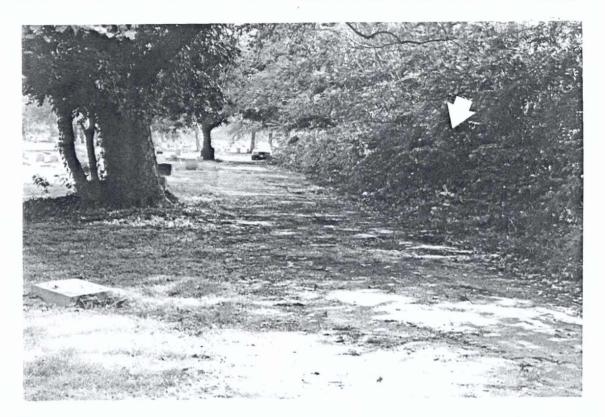


Plate 3. Project site (arrow) to right of unnamed lane or road in St. Michael's Cemetery. Note flatness of cemetery terrain. View is to the east with Plot L to the left. Fallen gravestone can be seen to the left. (photo: Geismar 10/87)



Plate 4. View from Pine Road across Plot L to project site (arrow). Note flatness of Plot L which once had a 15 ft. hill or knoll across it (see Figure 3); also note the dense vegetation on the project site. The view is to the the southwest. (photo: Geismar 10/87)



Plate 5. Western portion of project site (left) from Plot L. Note high retaining wall to the right (arrow) behind Taxi Commission building located north of the Bulova Watch Co.; also note dense site vegetation. (photo: $Geismar\ 10/87$)



Plate 6. An engraved headstone from Grave-site 86, Row 43, Plot L with designation in lower right corner (arrow). Multiple burials occurred at each gravesite; according to the cemetery registry, the earliest one recorded at No. 86 dates from 1927. The last gravesite in this row (No. 87) contains a 1926 burial (see Table 1). (photo: Geismar 10/87)

is corroborated by soil borings drilled prior to construction of the Bulova building (originally built by the Michelin Tire Company) in 1959. These borings document 14 1/2 to 18 ft. of rubble fill throughout the Bulova property, including the northeast portion that abuts the project parcel; however, it appears this fill was removed to create the lower parking lot (see Plates 1 and 2). Plans for the Michelin building drawn in 1959 still indicate a knoll or hill on the project site, but cemetery data suggest this had been graded decades earlier (see section on Cemetery Data). A retaining wall is planned along the northern portion of the proposed parking lot, but it should be noted that the somewhat higher elevation presently found in the site's western portion may be little more than redeposited soil and debris.

PREHISTORIC CONSIDERATIONS

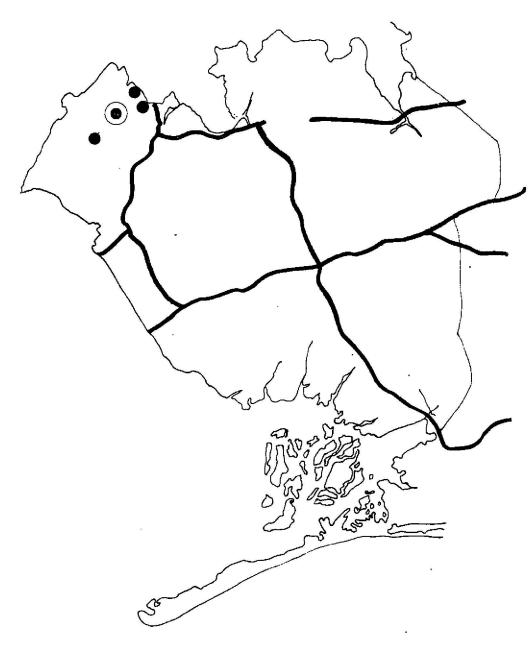
Western Long Island, where the site is located, is known to have been used or occupied by Native Americans before and after European settlement. For example, when Peter Stuyvesant failed to honor mid-seventeenth century land grant petitions, the settlers of Newtown (as the site area was originally called) acquired deeds from local sachems to legalize their ownership (White 1917). Moreover, prehistoric sites are known throughout the area, particularly in the vicinity of North Beach, now the site of LaGuardia Airport. Ralph Solecki of Columbia University excavated many of these sites in the late-1930s and they are documented in the archives of the Queens Borough Public Library (Solecki nd). Some of them are less than a mile from the project area, and it is assumed that inland sections, particularly those near fresh water sources, were

used by Native American hunters and gatherers after the retreat of glacial ice; in the metropolitan New York area, this would have occurred 10,000 to 12,000 years ago.

In the 1920s, Reginald P. Bolton, who used historical documents to locate Indian paths throughout the five boroughs of New York City, compiled maps reconstructing the routes traversed by Native Americans in Queens and the sites then known through archaeology and word of mouth. An adaptation of this map (Bolton 1934: 148) shown in Figure 4 indicates that in addition to sites later documented by Dr. Solecki, at least three Native American archaeological sites were known or excavated near the project site. However, the chances of finding evidence for any Native American occupation or use in the immediate project area would undoubtedly have been obliterated by landscaping and grading undertaken in the first half of this century. As noted previously, this included the grading of a knoll or hill that apparently crossed the project site and extended onto Plot L of the cemetery. This and more recent grading done during construction of the Connecting Road of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway and the Bulova parking lot and building--all in the 1950s--have drastically altered the project area and the site itself. Consequently, evidence of Native American use is not a consideration.

HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The development history of the project site--a small parcel that was part of the area's first patent but was never built upon --warrants only brief historical reconstruction. Therefore, a short general history of the area (based on White 1917 and Riker



- known Native American site in project area no scale 🛦
- project site, approx.
- Native American paths

1852) and a summary of the site's ownership through its purchase by St. Michael's Cemetery is presented here.

General History

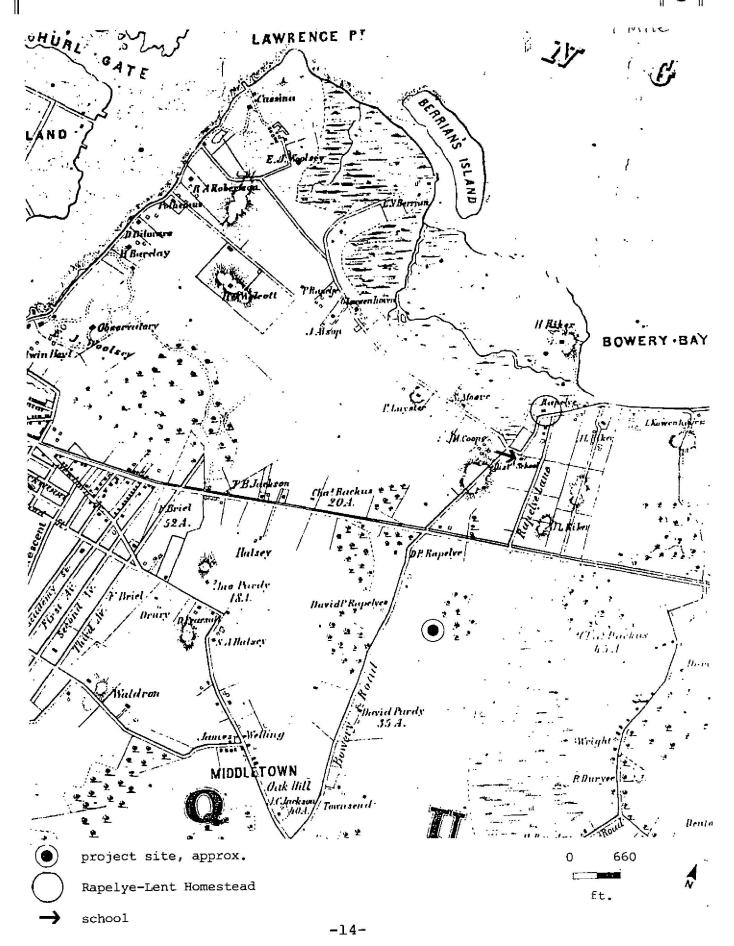
While its earliest settlers were Dutch or French Huguenots (many of them--such as the Rikers, Lents, and Rapelyes--progenitors of families associated with the project site), the large land tract that became the old town of Newtown was patented and repatented to English settlers during the seventeenth century. The first and largest of these patents (13,332 acres) was made by William Kieft, the Dutch governor, to the Reverend Francis Doughty, a dissenting English clergyman who came from New England with twenty-eight followers (Riker 1852:16-17).

In 1642, Doughty and his fellow New Englanders settled at Maspeth (or Mespat). This settlement was located at the mouth of what is now Newtown Creek, the boundary between Queens and Brooklyn, well to the southwest of the project site (it should be noted that individual Dutch settlers, among them Harman Harmanse, an ancestor of families who later owned property that included the project site, had settled north of the project area as early as the 1630s). Doughty's settlement was wiped out in 1643 by Indians incited by Kieft's treacherous dealings with them. When peace was restored, Doughty and several other survivors of the Indian massacre returned to Long Island, but Doughty soon moved to New Amsterdam where he remained for several years. While there, he established an English church at the Dutch fort and was apparently the first minister in New Amsterdam to preach in English (White 1917). After first moving to Flushing, Doughty then went to

Virginia, and the Maspeth colony he tried to establish (and dominate [White 1917]) ultimately dispersed.

A second settlement, begun in 1652, was again peopled by English men and women from Massachusetts. Named Middleburg (later sometimes referred to as Middletown) after a Dutch town where English Puritans had found safety, it was located just southeast of the project area (Figure 5). After functioning for four years under the conditions of Doughty's patent, these settlers petitioned Peter Stuyvesant for their own patent, but were put off. They then sought and were able to purchase deeds from the local Indian sachems, acquiring land that included Doughty's original 13,332 acres with the exception of upland hunting grounds (well south of the project area) reserved for Indian use. Ultimately, after the first English takeover in 1664, and again in 1686, after the Dutch had recaptured and then again lost political control, this patent was regranted and then confirmed by English governors (Nicoll in the first instance and Dongan in the second). Under the English, Middleburg was renamed Hastings; in 1665, the town area was enlarged and it became Newtown, its name until it was consolidated with New York City two and half centuries later.

During the seventeenth century and for part of the eighteenth, the boundaries between what are now Brooklyn and Queens were a source of debate; it wasn't until 1769 that the lines were finally established. Prior to this, several churches and schools had been built; among the latter was a schoolhouse located north of Astoria Boulevard off Bowery Road (see Figures 5 and 6). Called the Bowery Bay school, it dated from 1734 (White 1917:11).

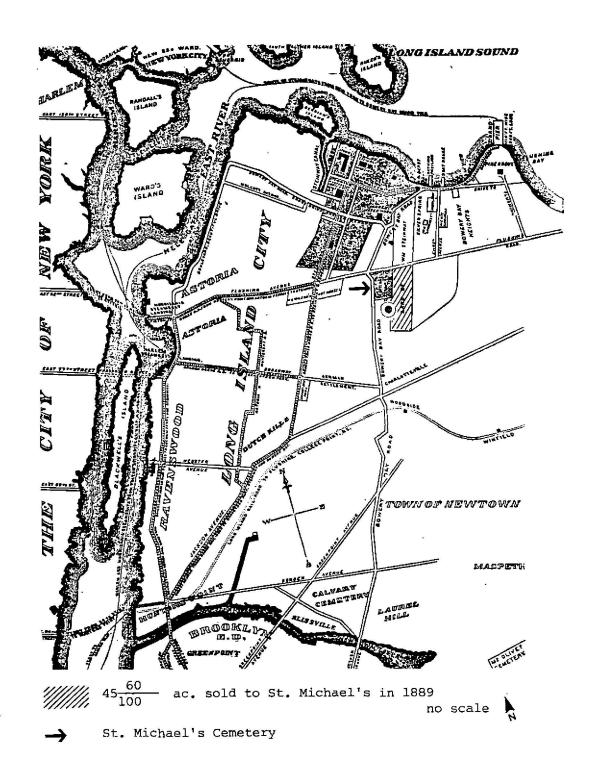




Throughout the Revolutionary War, Newtown, like the rest of Long Island, was in British possession. In a 1917 article commemorating Newtown's charter, Arthur White clearly outlined how family loyalties were divided, with Patriots in exile during the War and Tories in exile after it (in only one case—that of Captain Dow Van Duyn—was land actually confiscated after the War). Under General Howe, the British established headquarters and an encampment well south of the project area.

After the War and through at least three-quarters of the nine-teenth century, the local economy was based on farming; during the second half of the century, particularly following the Civil War, industrial development began. In the early-1870s, the Steinway Piano Company opened factories just to the west in what is now Long Island City (e.g., Anon. 1896:519; Dripps 1874). The Steinways, who had come to New York City from Germany in the 1850s, played an important role both in the development of the general project area (Anon. 1896: 517-525) and, by virtue of land sales, in the expansion of St. Michael's Cemetery.

William Steinway, son of the New York factory's founder, developed Astoria Village west of the project area, creating what was in essence a company town (Taurance 1974:5). Among land purchases made by Steinway in the early-1870s was a 45-acre tract that included the project site (Totten et al. 1872; Figure 7 this report); this parcel was later sold to St. Michael's Cemetery (Liber of Deeds [hereafter LD] 771 1889:204) which had opened in 1852 (Peters 1909; see Ownership History and the section on St. Michael's Cemetery below).



When Queens was consolidated with New York City in 1898,
Newtown became the Second Ward of the new borough (WPA 1938:560).
The opening of bridges, tunnels, train lines, and subways during
the first three decades of this century spurred the industrial as
well as the residential development of the borough (WPA 1938:560).
Today, the project site and St. Michael's Cemetery are bordered by
low-rise industrial buildings, and nearby housing is mainly if not
wholly middle- to lower-income--a far cry from the large colonial
and nineteenth century farmsteads and late-nineteenth century summer homes of the wealthy that once dotted the area.

Site Ownership and History

As noted previously, the names linked to the site's early ownership are those associated with Newtown's earliest history. Both the 1642 Doughty Patent and the later (1686) Tuder Patent included the project site (e.g., Riker 1852:115). The families identified with this area intermarried through the generations, with land ownership passing within and between them (for detailed information about these families and their land ownership, see Riker 1852).

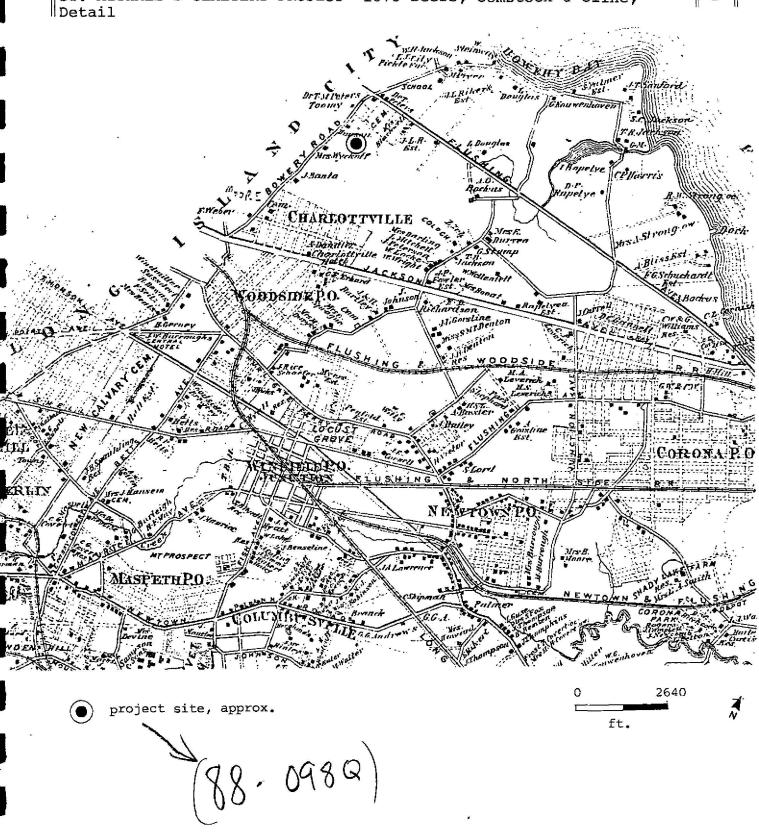
By the early-nineteenth century, the project site was included in a large, undeveloped tract owned by Isaac Rapelye. Rapelye was a farmer whose Huguenot ancestor had come to the New World on the <u>Unity</u>, the Dutch West India ship that brought the first colonists to New Amsterdam in 1623 (Riker 1852:267). During the first half of the nineteenth century, Rapelye owned and occupied the former Lent House, a New York City landmark structure built north of Astoria Boulevard near Bowery Bay in 1729 (LPC 1979: 74; see Figures 5 and 6)².

When Rapelye died intestate in 1850 (Riker 1852:276; Totten et al. 1872), he owned a large tract of undeveloped land south of Astoria Boulevard--probably mainly woodland--that included the project site. At his death, Rapelye's estate passed to his immediate family: his wife (and cousin), Margaret Polhemus Rapelye, his son, Jacob P., and his two daughters, Ann Eliza Totten and Aletta V. A. Rapelye, who subsequently married Charles Van Wyck (Riker 1852:276; Totten et al. 1872).

By 1872 Margaret had died, and Rapelye's three children sold much of their inherited property to William Steinway who was then amassing land north and south of Astoria Boulevard in the project area: he apparently acquired seven parcels of farmland north of Flushing Avenue [Astoria Boulevard] in 1871 (Lieberman and Lieberman 1983:61); this 440-acre tract was in addition to the property to the south that he purchased the next year (Totten et al. 1872; see Figure 7) and later sold to St. Michael's Cemetery (Liber of Deeds [hereafter LD] 771:204).

Twenty years before Steinway's 1872 purchase, Isaac C.
Rapelye, Isaac's nephew (Riker 1852:277), had sold 7 acres at the intersection of Bowery Road and Astoria Boulevard to Dr. Thomas Mc C. Peters, a representative of St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Manhattan (LD 112 1852:278). This parcel was the first to comprise St. Michael's cemetery. Other parcels were subsequently added (Figure 8), but the largest was the 45-acre tract bought from Steinway (Figure 9)³.

While no structures ever stood on the site, from 1912 to 1940 the City considered this part of the cemetery for road construction





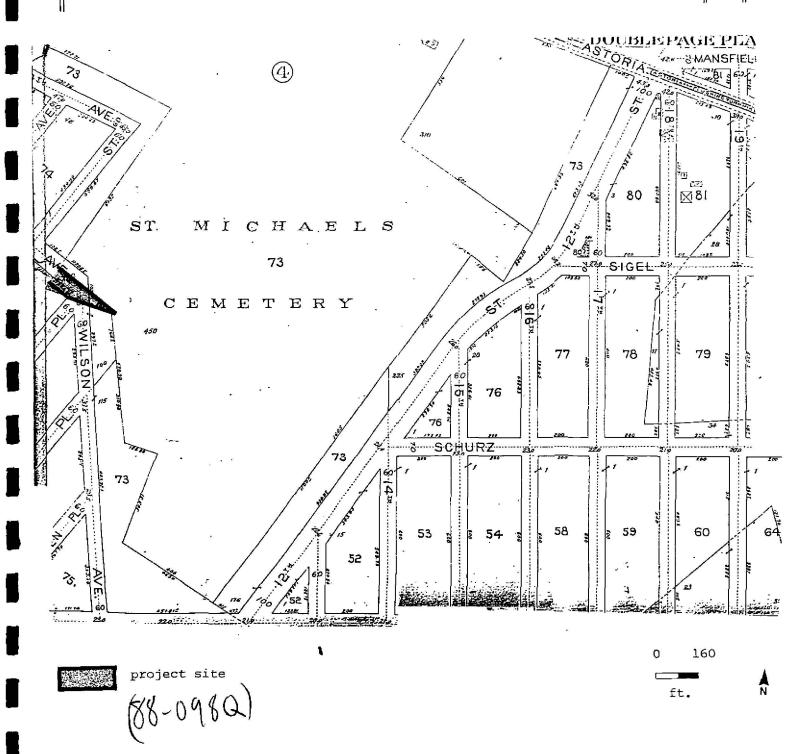
(e.g., Hyde 1915, Figure 10 this report). Named Wilson Avenue on paper, in 1938 it was included in a network of roads planned in connection with the 1939 Worlds Fair (Hyde 1938, Figure 11 this report). But these plans never materialized, and in 1940 Wilson Avenue was eliminated from the city records as a mapped street (Index of Alteration Maps 1940:#2721)⁴.

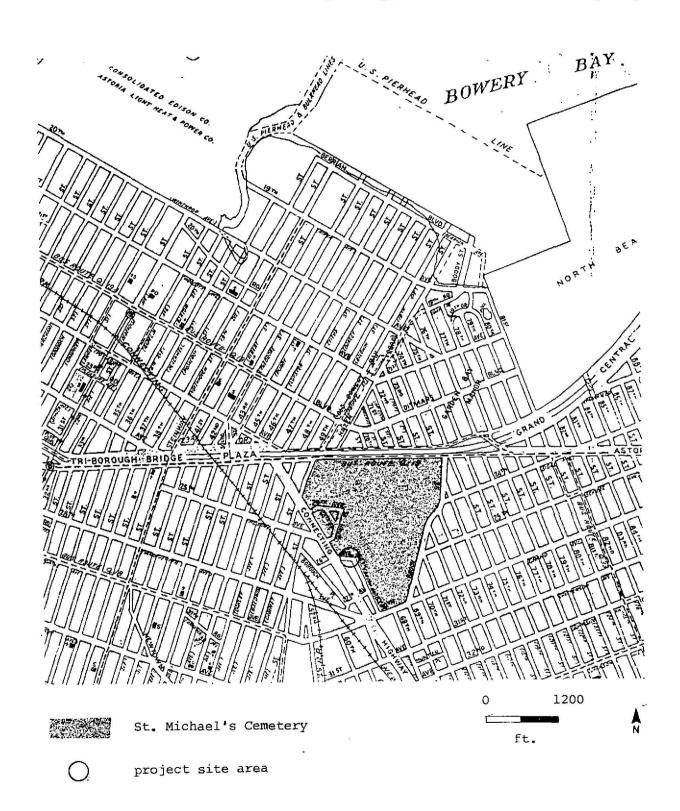
Since no historical development or events are documented on the project site, historical structures or features are not an issue in its cultural resources potential.

CEMETERY DATA

As noted above, a 7-acre purchase made by the Reverend Thomas Mc C. Peters secured the initial parcel that formed St. Michael's Cemetery. This mid-nineteenth century transaction was meant to establish a burial place for the poor from the city's free churches and institutions, but one connected to a religious institution (Peters 1907:447, 451).

In 1852, Peters transferred the 7 acres to St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Manhattan (LD 112 1852:278); this plus other parcels and the Steinway tract constitute the 70-odd acres that comprise the cemetery today (mid- to late-nineteenth century maps indicate St. Michael's--or Dr. Peters--also owned property north of Astoria Boulevard, beyond the project area [see Figures 8 and 9]). Over time, several cemetery plots have been sold or leased to various institutions, and many are reserved for public burial. This latter situation is the case in Plot L and L Extension, the plots bounding the project site to the north and south.



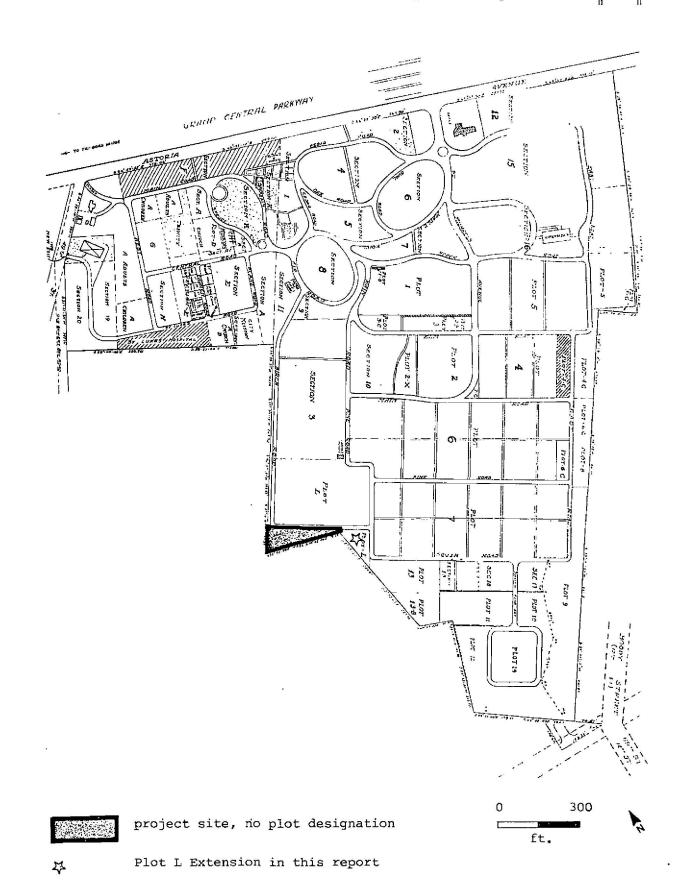


Burial Data Related to the Project Site

As noted in the introduction, one of the issues to be addressed in this assessment was whether the project site was ever used for burials. It should be noted the site shows no evidence of burials, and cemetery personnel (Caracola 1987:personal communication) and the attorney for St. Michael's (Patton, Jr. 1987:personal communication) are certain there are none on the site. Information found in cemetery records and proposed plans to use the site for a city street support this contention.

In order to document the use of the parcel, an examination was made of the cemetery's burial records. Mainly, this comprises a card file that records all burials and a map showing designated burial sections or plots and gravesites. While the cards in the file are old (cemetery personnel could not date the file), they obviously are not the cemetery's original records but contain entries copied from the original register books. For example, the cemetery's earliest burial—that of Molly Maize buried in Section E Gravesite 330 on May 26, 1852—is in the file. The recording system is based on alpha-numeric section or plot designations, with plots often, but not always, organized by ranges (rows). All gravesites are numbered.

The current cemetery plan, based on an earlier, undated plan (Figure 12), does not indicate any section or plot designation for the project site. The plot directly to the north, across an unnamed road or lane, contains 46 rows and is designated Plot L. An extension of this plot lies south of the road or lane and, as mentioned previously, is referred to as Plot L Extension for this report.



Plot L Extension contains 15 rows, all of them numerical continuations of Rows 1 to 15 in Plot L. Each of these rows has burial cards. In contrast, the project site has no designation on this map or the official cemetery map used to locate and assign gravesites, and no burials are recorded in rows 16 to 46 south of the unnamed road or lane (see Table 1).

As noted earlier, the project site and Plot L to the north were apparently graded sometime after 1903. The earliest burials in Rows 29 to 45, the area adjacent to the unnamed road where the 15-ft. high knoll or hill once stood, all date from 1926 or later, suggesting grading occurred between 1903 and 1926. (No dates are recorded for four stillborn burials in Row 46 which is an irregular row.) It is possible that grading was done in anticipation of running Wilson Avenue on the site (as noted earlier, until 1940, this was a mapped street that was never constructed). The proposed running of Wilson Avenue may explain why the project site remained unused even after areas next to it became burial sites (in the northern portion of Plot L, burials date to 1914 [see Table 1], suggesting grading in this area occurred between 1903 and 1914). map in the cemetery archives specifically notes the project area was "not to be used" as it was to be "taken by the City for Wilson Ave." (Figure 13 this report).

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The concerns of the Landmarks Preservation Commission in regard to a small parcel now part of St. Michael's Cemetery in East Elmhurst, Queens, have been addressed in this report. Documentary research indicates this property has no cultural resources that

Table 1. ST. MICHAEL'S CEMETERY Burial Data, Plots L & L Ext.*

Range (Row)#	# of Potential Gravesites in Row	w in Plot L		in Plot L Ext.		Earliëst Burial Date in Row (Plot L)
		#	Date $^{\mathrm{l}}$	#	Date 2	
						*
1	123	75	1927	76	1927	1918
2	124	79	1922	80	1927	1914
	124	78	1922	79	1927	1914
3		77	1922	78	1928	1914
4	117	76	1922	77	1927	1914
5	111	76 76	1922	77	1927	1914
6	108		1922	77	1927	1914
7	105	76	1986 3	77 -	1927	1914
8	99	76X		77		1915
9	99	76	1926		1927	1915
10	. 95	76	1922	77	1927	1915
11	92	76	1922	77	1927	1915
12	88	76	1922	77	1927	1915
13	86 .	77	1922	78	1927	1915
14	84	78	1922	79	1927	
15	81	79	1922	80	1953	1915
16 🧡		80	1922			1915
17	. 81	80	1922			1915 1916
18	82	82	1922			
19	82	82	1923			1916
20	83	83	1923			1916
21	85	83	1923			1916
22	85	84	1923			1915
23	85	84	1923			1916
24	85	84	1923			1916
25	85	85	1923			1916
26	85	85	1924			1916
27	86	86	1924			1916
28	86	86	1924			1916
29	86	85	1926			1917
30	87	86	1927			1917
31	87	87	1925			1917
32	87	87	1922			1917 .
33	87	87	1925			1917
34	87 -	87	1927			1917
35	87	87	1925 ⁴			1917
36	87	87	1987			1917
37	87	87	1925			1917
38	87	87	1927			1918
39	87	87	1925			1917
40	87	86	1925			1918
41	87	87	1925			1918
42	87	87	1927		-	1918
43	87	87	1926			1918
44	87	87	1927			1920
45	82	82	1927		med.	1920
46	82 9 ⁵	68	?			?

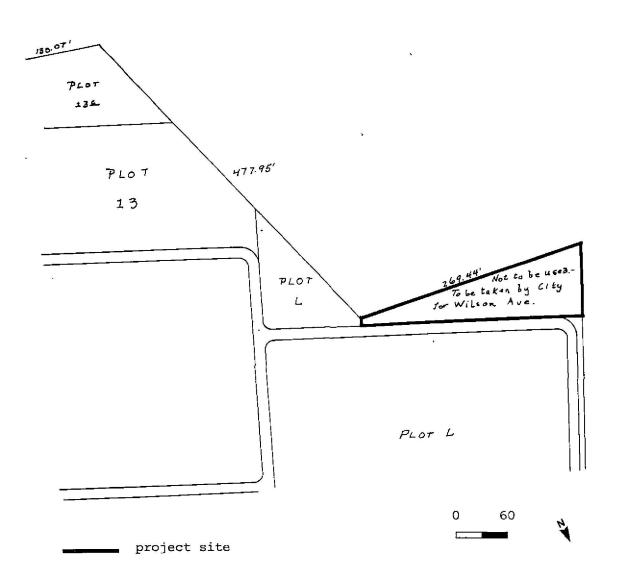
^{*} Data taken from the records of St. Michael's Cemetery, 72-02 Astoria Blvd.,

East Elmhurst, NY 11370. No gravesites are designated on the project site which is adjacent to Rows 16-46.

¹ Gravesites contain multiple burials; dates given are ealiest recorded in a gravesite. 2 Most burials date from 1927 or later; the exception is Row 5 which has a 1921 burial.

<sup>Burials adjacent to Row 8, Gravesite 76A date from 1922.
Burials adjacent to Row 37, Gravesite 87 date from 1925 and 1926.</sup>

⁵ Four undated stillborn burials are the only ones recorded in this short row.

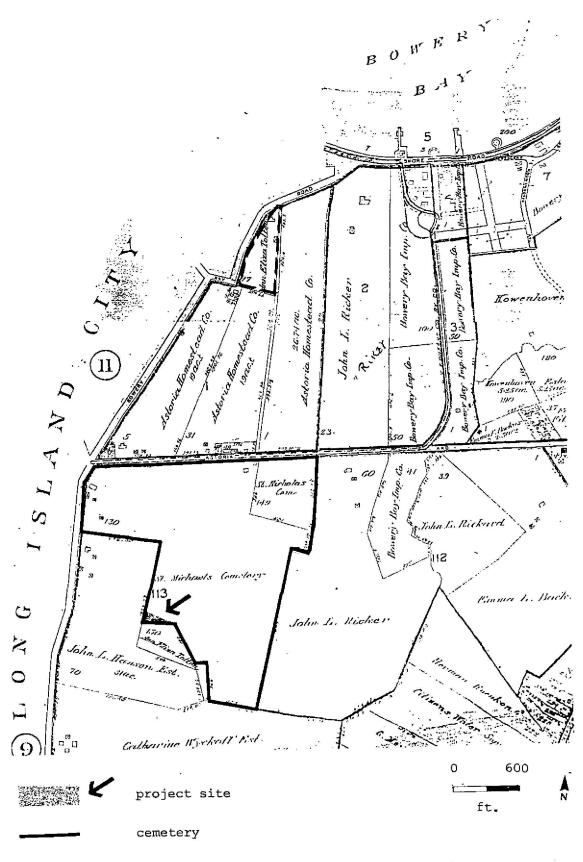


will be impacted by construction of a proposed parking facility: grading that occurred sometime between 1903 and 1926 would have destroyed any viable evidence of Native American use, and, while ownership extends back almost 350 years, no development or events of an historical nature occurred on the site. And finally, cemetery records and maps indicate that no burials were ever designated on the project site; in part this may reflect the fact that from 1912--before any burials occurred on adjacent Plot L--until 1940, this part of the cemetery was set aside for Wilson Avenue, a mapped street that was never run.

Based on this information, no further investigation is recommended.

NOTES

- 1 Tuder was a New York attorney and later the city recorder. Two years after obtaining his patent, he sold it, and through subsequent subdivision, it was included in the farms of Isaac Rapelye and others (Riker 1852:114).
- ² To illustrate the close and often complicated ties of the early local families, it should be noted that Lent was a name taken by some of the second generation Rikers, another important family of early settlers (Riker 1852:300). Apparently Isaac Rapelye and the Rikers were related, and Rapelye bought the Lent homestead in 1797 (WPA 1939:566).
- When Steinway sold this tract, he kept the land north of Astoria Boulevard for speculation. This land, handled by the Astoria Homestead Co.--Steinway's organization dealing with properties personally owned by him rather than his company (Steinway Historical Publications nd)--surrounded at least two sides of Rapelye property retained by Eliza Ann Totten (Figure 14)
- 4 Though a mapped street, the property for Wilson Avenue was never acquired by the city (Casalotti 1987:personal communication).



Rapelye property in possession of Ann Eliza Totten

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