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CULTURAL RESOURCE STUDY
of a tract at the northwest corner of
89th AVENUE AND PARSON'S BOULEVARD
JAMAICA, QUEENS, NEW YORK CITY

CEQR No. 86-332 Q

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ORIGINAL

PHOTOS

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I. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

The study area consists of six lots (Nos. 41, and 43 through 47, Block 9762, Queens, New York), at the northwest corner of the intersection of Parsons Boulevard and 89th Avenue (see Figures 1 and 2). These comprise an area about 144 by 75 feet. It is located in the Jamaica area of Queens about 3 miles north of the John F. Kennedy International Airport interchange on the Southern Parkway, and 2 miles east of the east end of Forest Park. In more local terms it is two blocks (1,000 feet) north of Jamaica Avenue, and two blocks (700 feet) south of Hillside Avenue, on the west side of Parsons Boulevard.

Topographically, this places it on a broad outwash plain about 1,000 feet south of the Wisconsinan Glaciation terminal moraine, and one half mile north of the former location of Beaver Pond, which existed into the 19th century in the southern part of the Village of Jamaica. Elevation is approximately 60 feet above sea level.

This survey was requested by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission under the City Environmental Review, and is identified as CEQR No. 86-332Q. The need for preliminary assessment was based on knowledge that this fell within the grounds of the former Rufus King estate. The potential for existence, and preservation, of archaeological resources such as outbuildings or tenant houses and other features associated with the period of that historic site could not be assessed without a preliminary examination of the site and study of the existing archaeological and historical literature.

Methods of study used consisted of gathering historic references and maps showing the study area. The published descriptions of prehistoric and contact period Amerindian occupation sites and localities within New York were examined. Field observation of the study area was performed on 20 November 1986. Following this the documentation was synthesized to prepare a historic development sequence for the study area and vicinity. Background research is set forth in Section II of this report, current conditions in Section III, and a summary conclusion is presented in Section IV. It is our opinion that there is a very low probability that archaeological resources ever existed here, and the evident disturbance of the small tract makes it unlikely that any such deposits would be preserved.

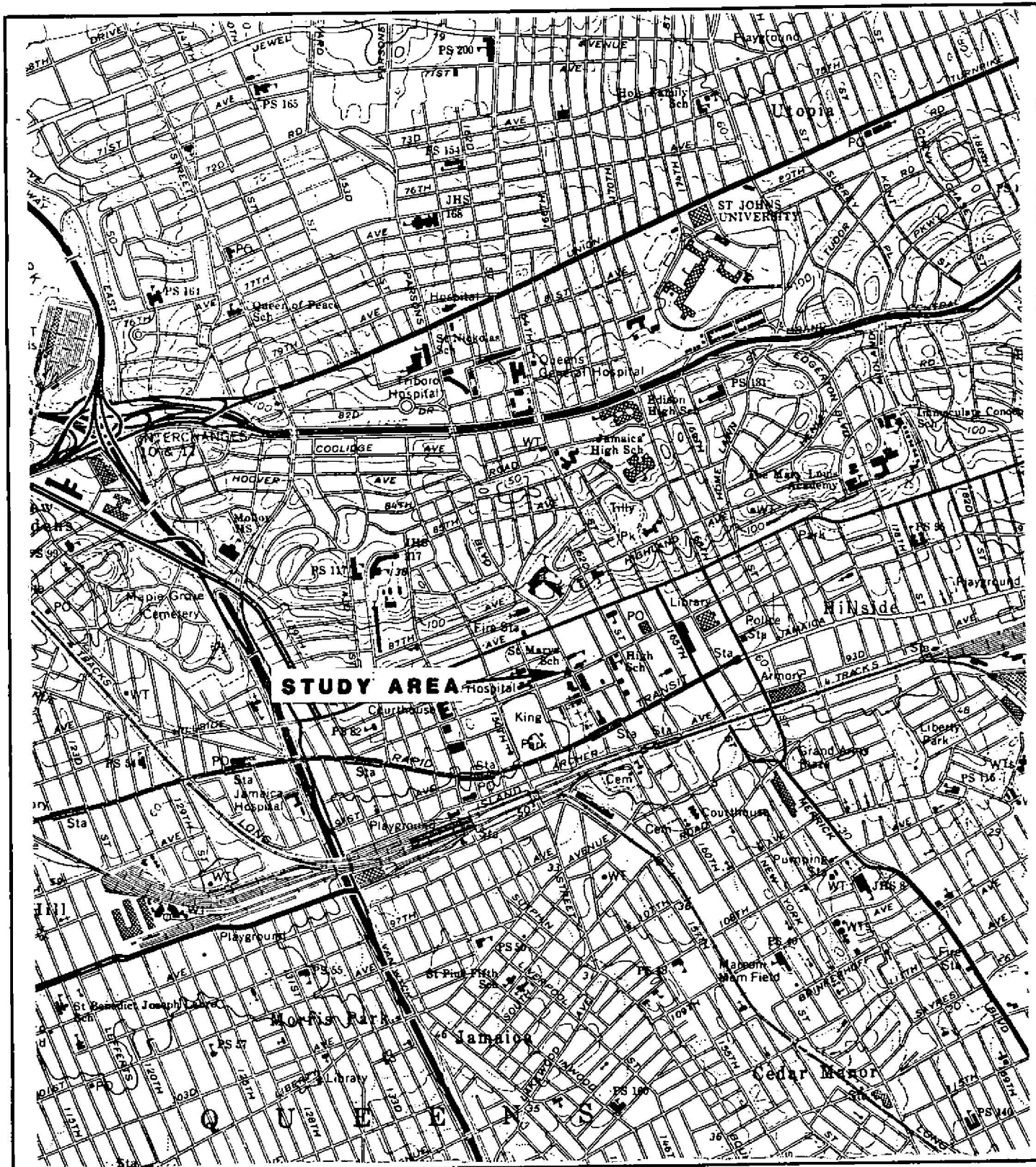
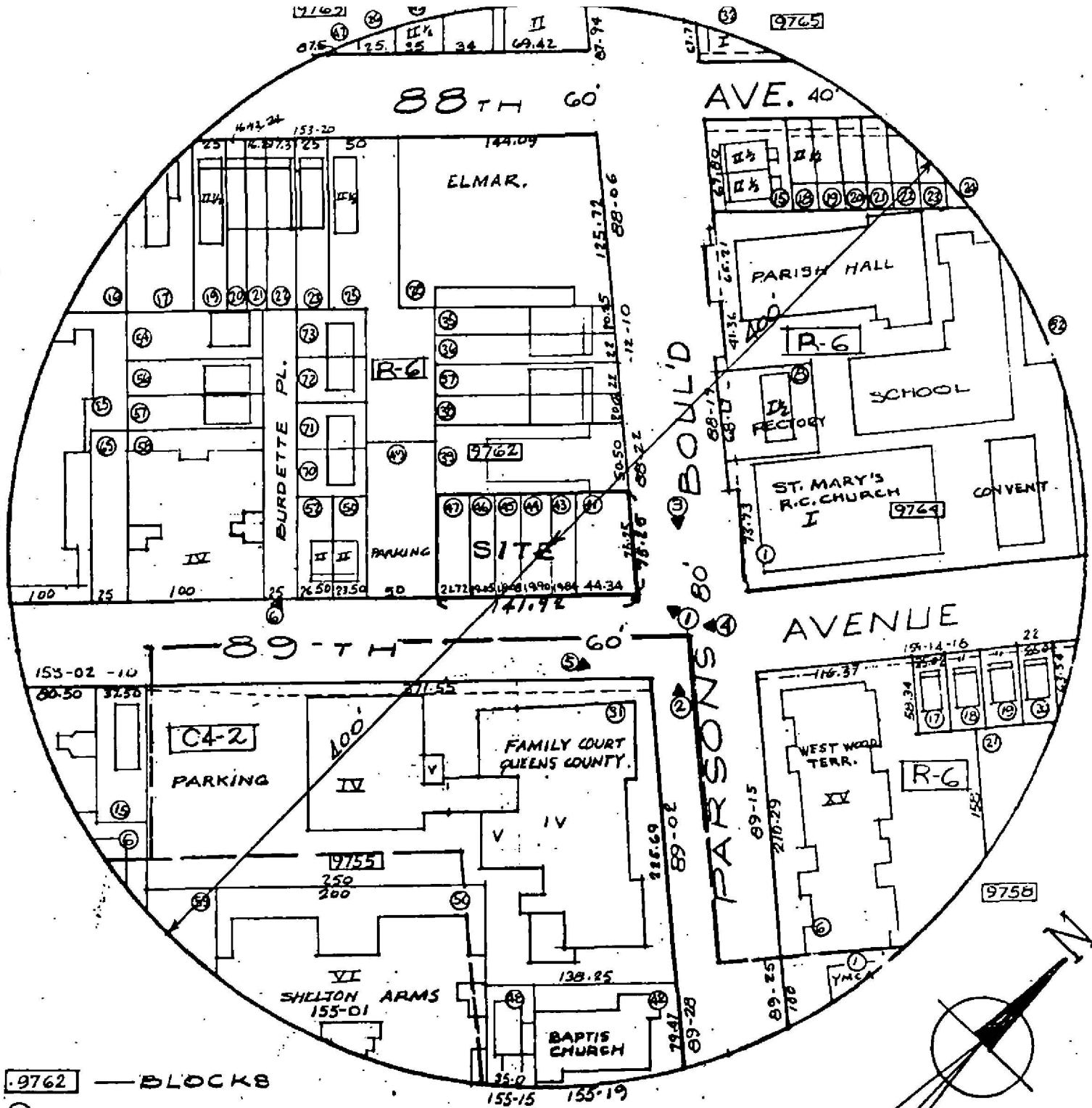


FIGURE 1 LOCATION MAP
 USGS Jamaica, N.Y. Quad
 1966 revised 1979
 scale 1 inch = 2,000 feet

1000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 FEET N
 'CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET



- .9762 — BLOCKS
 ① — LOTS
 ○ — PHOTO POSITIONS

400' RADIUS DIAGRAM
 1" = 100'-0"

4-28-86

LEGEND

- | | |
|-----------|--------------|
| II | STORY HIGH |
| F | FRAME |
| BK | BRICK |
| D | DWELLINGS |
| S | STORES |
| V | VACANT LOTS |
| GAS STAT. | GAS STATIONS |
| R-6 | RES. ZONE |
| C7-2 | COMM. ZONE |



LOCATION
 N.W.C. 89TH AVE & PARSONS BLVD
 JAMAICA NEW YORK

FIGURE 2 STUDY AREA PLAN
 400' Radius Diagram
 H. I. Sigman 1986
 scale 1 inch = 100 feet

II. CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUDY AREA

A. PREHISTORIC OR CONTACT PERIOD SITES

There are no Native American archaeological sites recorded in the literature for the immediate study area (Beauchamp 1900, Bolton 1920, 1922, Parker 1922). What is now Jamaica Boulevard, two blocks to the south, was part of the King's Highway. According to Bolton this developed on an Indian trail known as MECHAWANIENCK, which was Delawaran for "Old Path" (1922: 155, Grumet 1981: 33, 71). The nearest settlement was called "Jameco", referring to a Beaver Pond (Bolton 1922: 235, Parker 1922: 672 No. 8, Grumet 1981: 16). In general the Jamaica area of Queens falls into land occupied by the MASSAPEQUA at the time of first European records. They were a Delawaran speaking group who occupied the southern side of the western end of Long Island, east of the Canarsee (Grumet 1981: 29-31). Early historic maps and those indicating underlying topography show the study area on a level plain, with no drainage courses, ponds, or natural features nearby which would have made it a likely habitation site, or one used for a special resource exploitation. Based on the lack of references to archaeological sites in the vicinity, the absence of ethnohistorically known occupation or aboriginal place names, and the featureless topography, we believe that there is only a low probability for prehistoric resources in this area.

B. HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The historic settlement of Jamaica is the southwesternmost town in Queens County. It is bounded on the south by Rockaway Beach, a narrow neck of land belonging to Hempstead; on the west by the towns of Flatlands and New Lots, on the north by Newton and Flushing, and on the east by Hempstead.

In ethnohistorical terms, the Indian inhabitants of the area to the southwest of the town prior to white settlement were the Canarsees and the Rockaways, with the area of Jamaica and east occupied by the Massapequa. An early deed between White settlers from Hempstead and the local Indians was signed in 1655.

Permission for establishment of a new town was granted by Peter Stuyvesant on March 21st 1656. A more ample charter was granted by the Governor in 1660, at which time the town was referred to as "Rusdorp". A village charter for Jamaica was obtained April 1814, and later again in 1855.

The study area can be identified historically as falling in the north east corner of the Rufus King Estate, near its boundary with the Oliver Bronson property. The King estate, the main house of which is still standing, was built at the end of the 18th century or during the beginning of the 19th century. It represents a fine example of a Dutch gambrel-roofed house. It was purchased by Rufus King in 1805 for \$12,000. The original purchase is said to have consisted of 59 acres (Venables 1986 ms); and was later expanded to 90 acres (Anomonus 1984). The present house and grounds contains about 11 and 1/2 acres (Venables 1986 ms). The estate house was approached along Jamaica Avenue, be-

lieved to have been an old indian trail. The location of 90th street (formerly Grove Street) may have been the approximate location of a farm road that would have come west from what is now Parson's Boulevard (Venables 1986 ms).

Rufus King was a graduate of Harvard University, an Army Major and aid to General Glover during the American Revolution, a signer of the Constitution (for Massachusetts), a United States Senator, Ambassador to England under Presidents Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and John Quincy Adams, and founder of the Bank of the United States and the Bank of New York (Venables 1986 ms, Anonymous 1984)

Although there is much interest in the mansion house and the accomplishments of Rufus King, we have little in the way of records regarding the uses of the outlying acreage of the estate. Our best picture of the development of this section of Jamaica comes from a series of historic maps showing the graphic development of the land up to the present.

1782 (Figure 3) The 1782 Clinton Map shows the project area as part of a large estate (undeveloped), and the historic settlement of Jamaica to the south of Jamaica Boulevard. What is now Parson's Boulevard exists, with a distinctive curve which is still present where it climbs the terminal moraine. The study area which is half-way between that curve and Jamaica Avenue, falls either in the north edge of an orchard, or in open field north of that.

1842 (Figure 4) shows the study tract as part of the large landholdings of the John A. King estate. A small cemetery and church face Jamaica Avenue, as does most of the settlement to date. That church and graveyard are about one thousand feet south of the

study area. Outbuildings of the King Estate are north of the main house, approximately in the line of later Grove Street or 90th Avenue. A house owned by John Simonson, Carpenter, stood across Parson's Boulevard, then called Flushing Road.

1868 (Figure 5) shows the King Estate subdivided by several paper streets. Outstructures, perhaps a farm, abutt Grove Street which now runs behind the mansion. The study tract is still undeveloped; however the area east of Flushing Avenue (now Parson's Boulevard) is greatly subdivided and developed. The Simonson place of 1842 is now the location of the P.H. Burnett residence.

1873 (Figure 6). This Beers map shows that a situation exists similar to that in 1868. The main development of the village remains south and east of the King Estate. One structure is shown north of the study area, in part of the Oliver Bronson tract. Mrs. P.H. Burnett is shown owning the house across the street.

1891 (Figure 7) This map of Jamaica Village shows that a few houses have now been built on part of the Rufus King property, but none on the study tract. The Burnett residence across Flushing Road from the study area, is now shown as the site of Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church. Property lot lines within the study area are depicted as running east-west to front on what is now Parson's Boulevard.

1895 (Figure 8) This bird's eye view lithograph of Jamaica shows the study tract as vacant, but surrounded by other structures. The neighborhood has largely been filled by this time. Saint Mary's Church is a prominent landmark.

1901-08 (Figure 9) A 1901 Sanborn insurance map, updated to 1908,

shows a series of dwellings separated by common walls facing Street. These are the first structures on the property, and were erected between 1899 and 1908. This row of residences, indicated as two and one half story domiciles of frame construction, occupies the middle portion of each lot, with about 20 feet in front of each structure and 15 to 20 feet behind (north of) each structure.

These structures were removed in 1980, and the property has stood vacant since that time. According to Mr. Charles Young, who was taken into the cellar of one of these residences by his father, a building inspector, the structures in the row were similar in appearance, so it is assumed they all had basements, which would have disturbed most of each lot. According to building cards obtained by M. Sigman, most of the buildings were altered in 1966, they were ordered vacated in 1978, and demolished in 1980.



Scale of Yards.

100 200 300 400 500

FIGURE 3 1782 A Map of the Pass at Jamaica Long Island
George Taylor, Capt. of Guides for
General Sir Henry Clinton, R. B. 1782
scale 1 inch = 10 chains (220 yards)

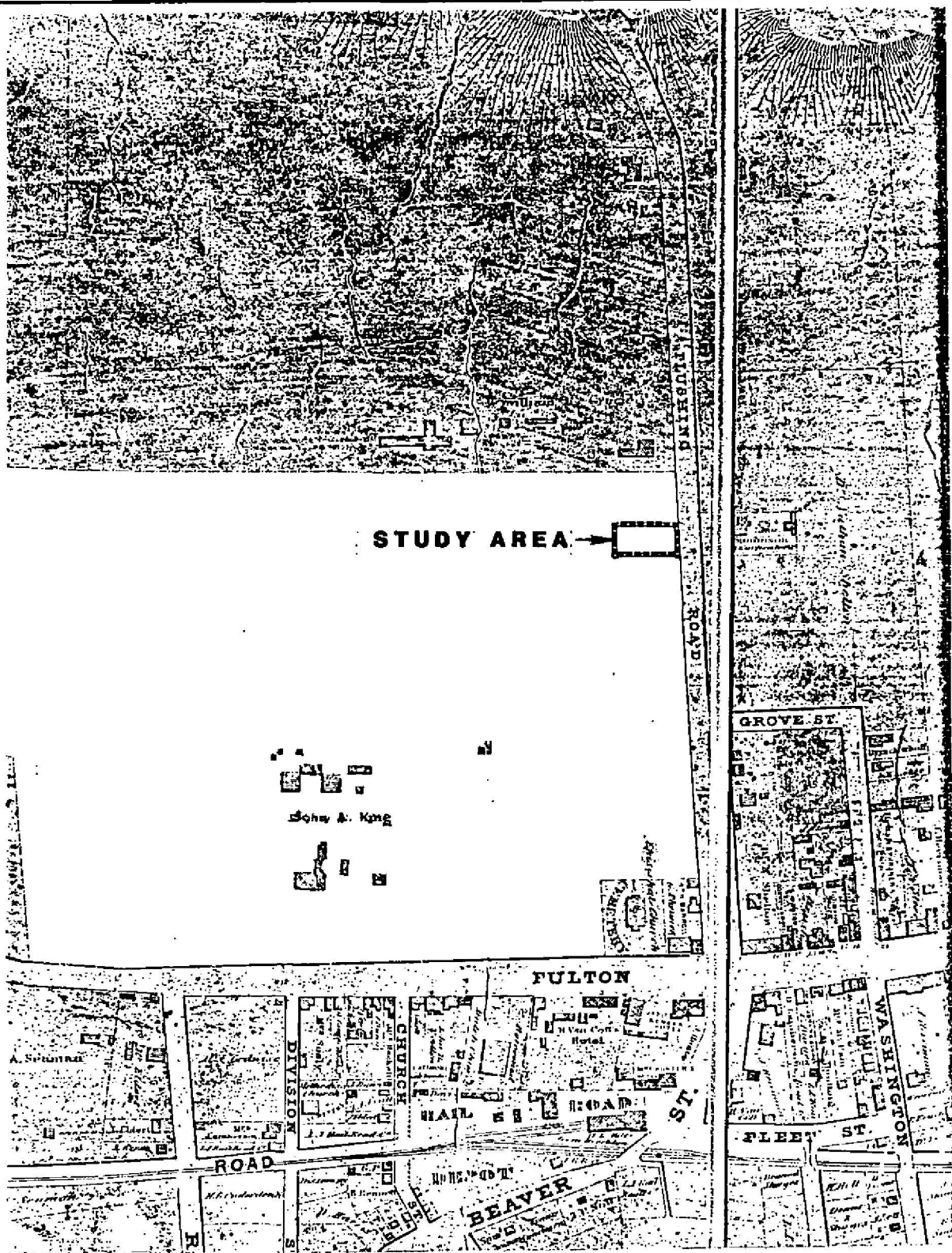


FIGURE 4 1842 Map of the Village of Jamaica
Queens County Long Island
Martin G. Johnson 1842
original scale
1 inch = 4 chains (264 feet)

0 100 500
SCALE IN FEET

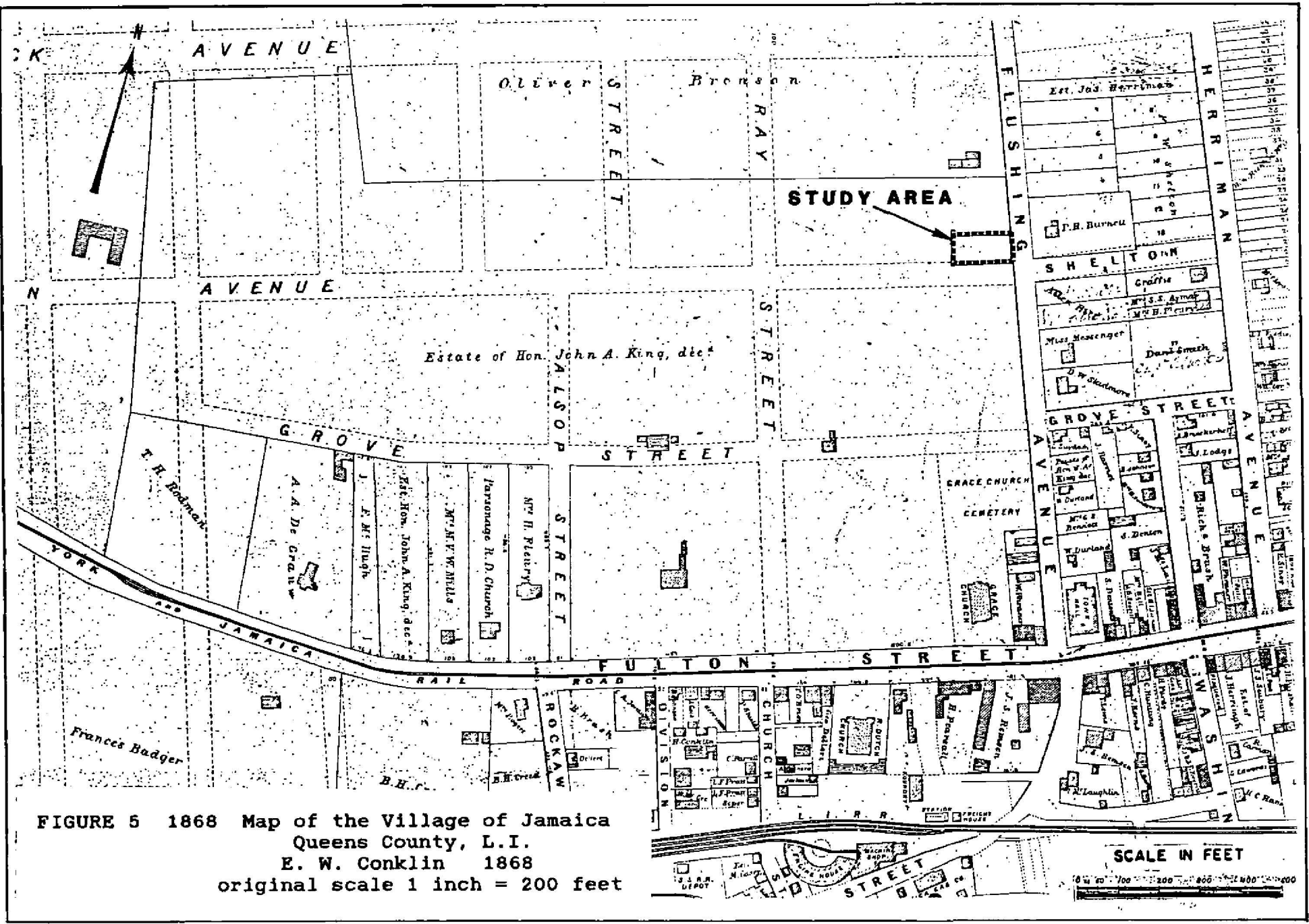


FIGURE 5 1868 Map of the Village of Jamaica
Queens County, L.I.
E. W. Conklin 1868
original scale 1 inch = 200 feet

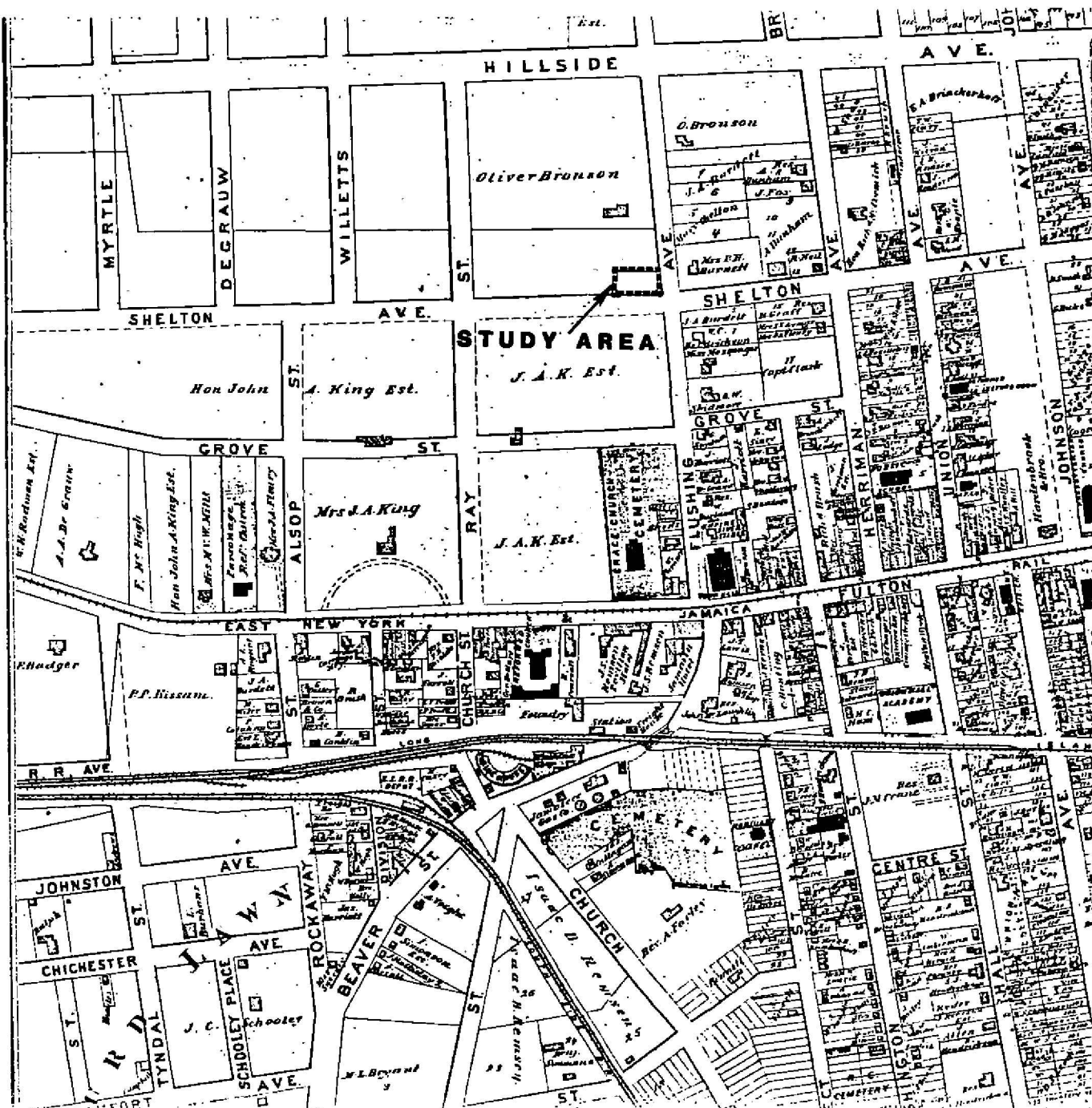


FIGURE 6 1873 Jamaica Village Queens Co. L.I.
F. W. Beers 1873
original scale
1 inch = 18 rods (297 feet)

0 297 594
SCALE IN FEET



FIGURE 8 1895 "Jamaica" Birdseye View
G. H. Bailey & Co., Lithographers
D. L. Hardenbrook, Publisher 1895
no scale

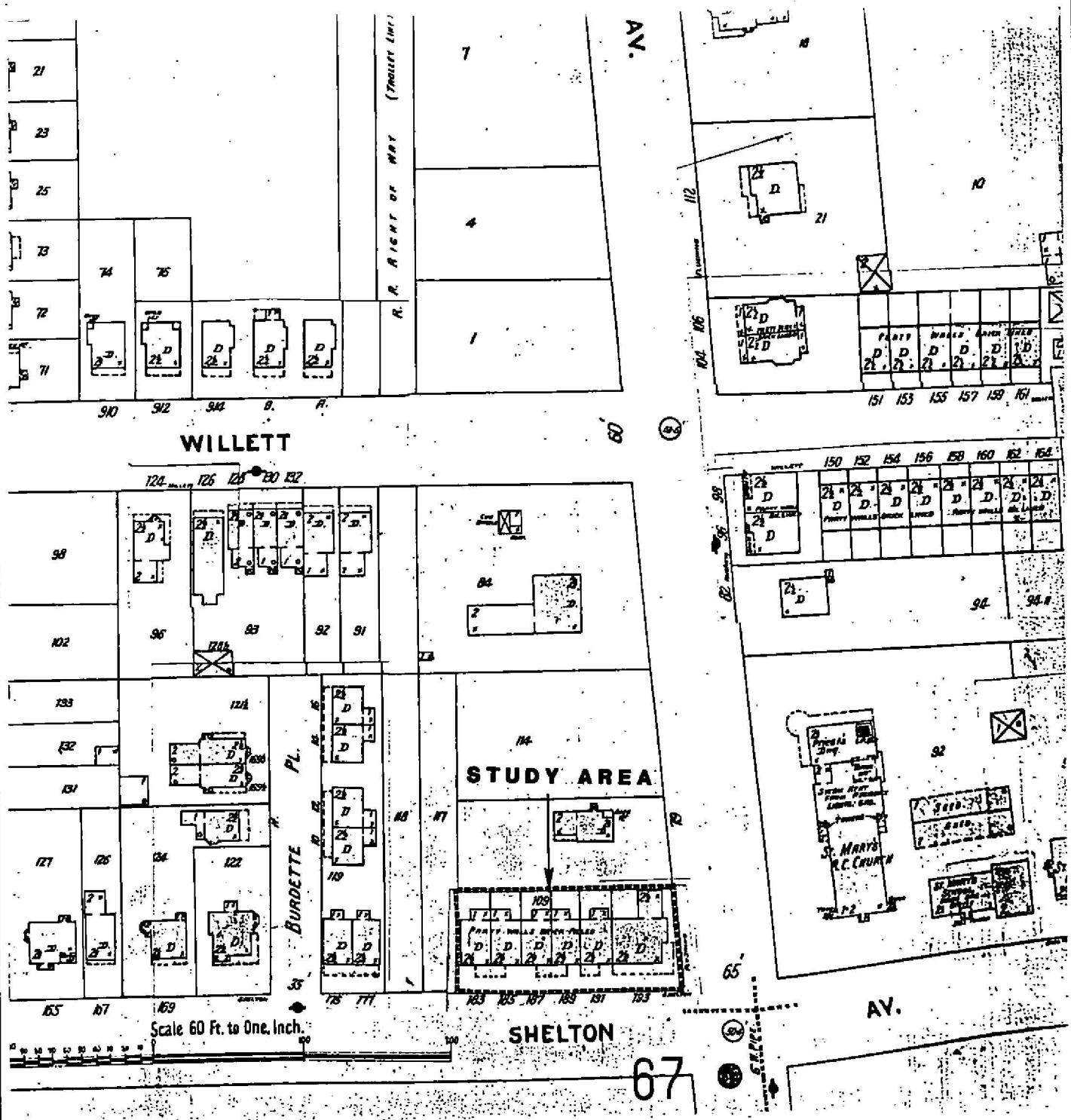
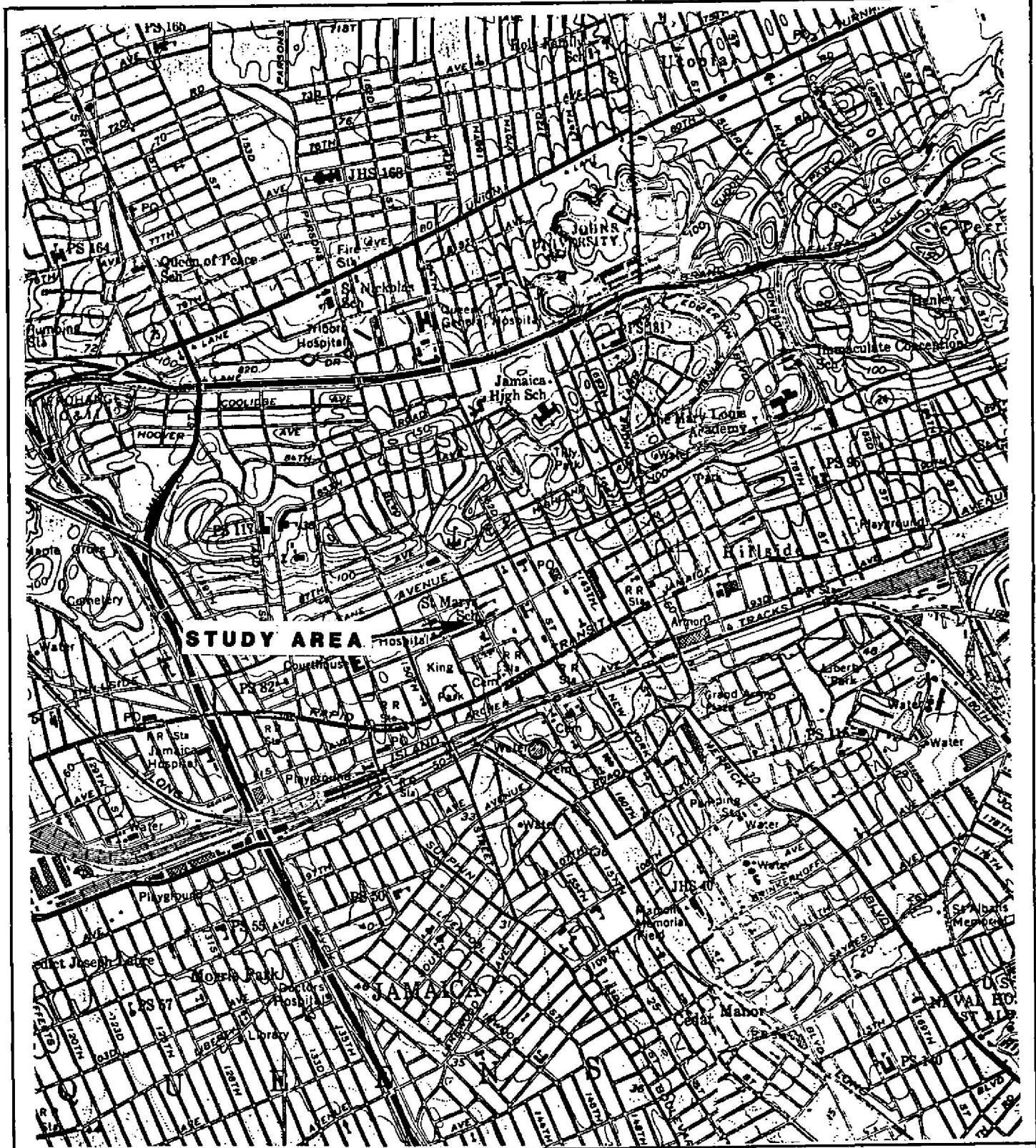


FIGURE 9 1908 Sanborn Insurance Map
of the Borough of Queens
vol. 4 sheet 63
1901 revised 1908
original scale 1 inch = 60 feet





1000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 FEET

CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET

FIGURE 10 1957 USGS Jamaica, N.Y. Quad
1957 scale 1 inch = 2,000 feet

III. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

At present the study area is vacant, as a result of demolition of the early 20th century structures in 1980. It measures about 144 feet east-west (along 89th Avenue) by 75 feet north-south (along Parson's Boulevard). The ground slopes up from the southeast corner, by the street intersection, to the northwest corner, with a ridge of dirt about 2 feet high along its north side (Plate 1). The parking lot immediately west of the study area has been cut down to street level, so that the northwest corner of the study area (the rear of Lot 47) is several feet higher than the adjacent parking lot (Plate 2). Fragments of rubble and rotting wood are visible on the surface, indicating that these lots were graded after demolition with parts of the destroyed buildings buried. Since no abrupt cut or break appears in the surface where former cellar holes would have been, it appears that the entire study area surface has been subjected to some disturbance.

Remnants of the early 20th century residential development of the neighborhood are still standing, represented by box shaped frame houses, immediately west of the study area, and north of it along Burdette Place, which is a dead-end alley in the middle of the block formed by 88th and 89th Avenues and 153rd Street and Parson's Boulevard (Plates 1 and 2). Across Parson's Boulevard are other turn of the century frame structures at the corner with 88th Avenue, then the Saint Mary's Parish Hall built in 1909, a slightly later rectory, and the existing Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church, built in 1922 (Plate 3). This replaced an earlier church of the same name which was on the same land, but was

oriented north-south (Figures 8 and 9). That predecessor church was erected after the 1873 Beers Map was made, but before the 1891 map of Jamaica Village (Figures 6 and 7).

Cater-corner across the street intersection stands Westwood Terrace, a multi-story apartment structure which does not appear on the 1957 USGS map, but is on the 1966 version. It must date from the early 1960's. Across 89th Avenue to the south of the study area is the Queens County Family Court House, with a cornerstone dated 1928 (Plate 4). A private residence constructed between 1873 and 1891 previously occupied this corner.

Immediately adjacent to the study area on the north is Lovatt Hall, a six story brick apartment building with an ornamental rustic brick facade, in Art Deco style. This was probably built about 1930. North of that, also facing on Parson's Boulevard, are four brick bay-front houses (Lots 35 through 38), evidently built after the 1908 update to the Sanborn map (Figure 8). North of these, at the northeast corner of the block, is the Elmar, a brick apartment block which appears to date from the First World War period.

Six story apartments from the 1930's exist west of the study area, and a hospital is one block northwest. In summary, the physical appearance is that of an area where residences were built in the early 20th century, followed by commercial apartment construction starting shortly before 1920. Institutional structures were built after that, and then large apartment units. There is no visible evidence of early historic structures, and there is no cartographic record that any ever stood here.

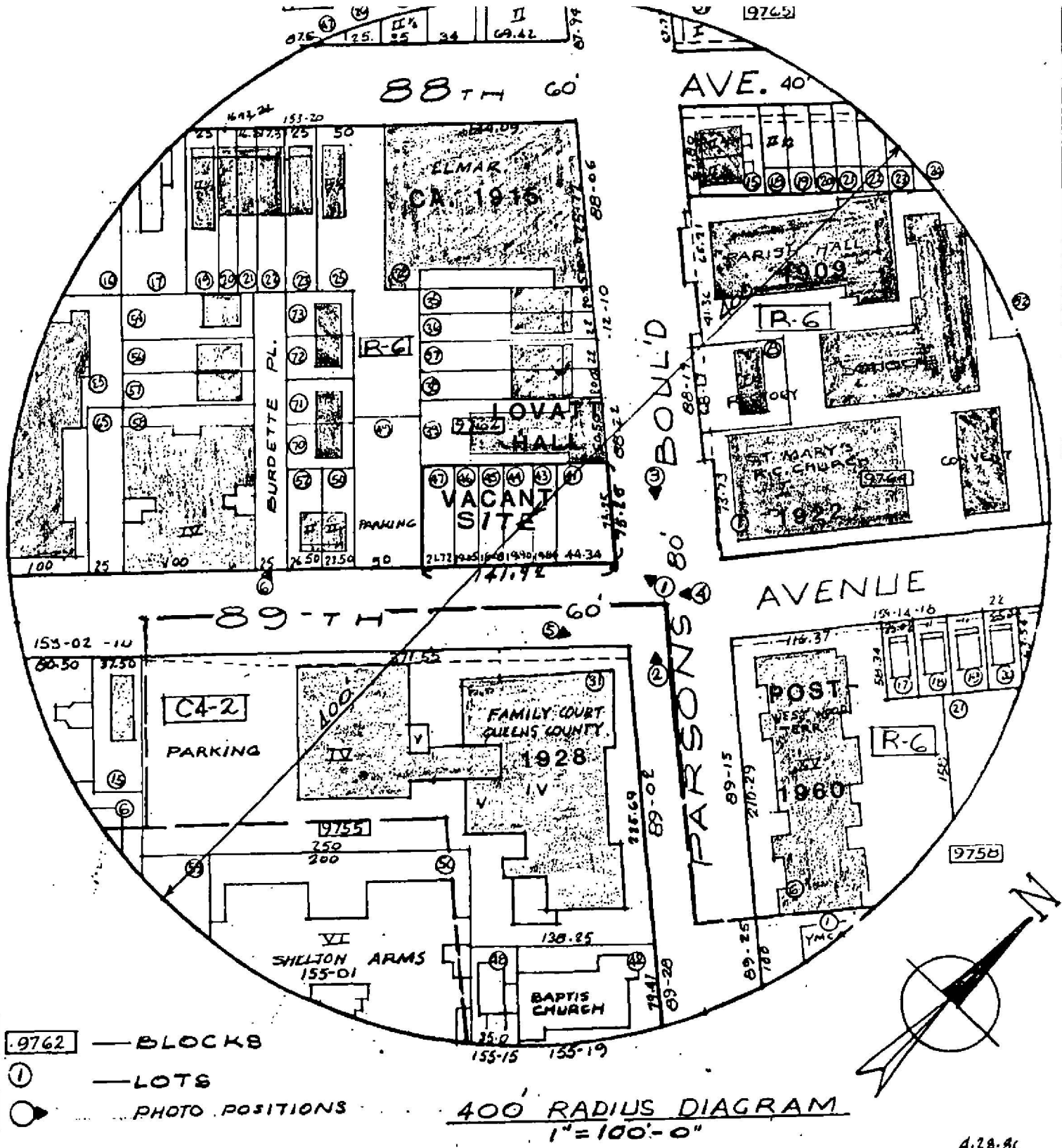




Plate 1: The project area consists of a vacant lot at the corner of 89th Avenue and Parsons Boulevard. This view looks southwest across Parsons Blvd., with 89th Avenue shown in the far left. An early 20th century frame building west of the study area is in the center, and "LOVATT HALL", built ca. 1920's, is at the right side of the picture.

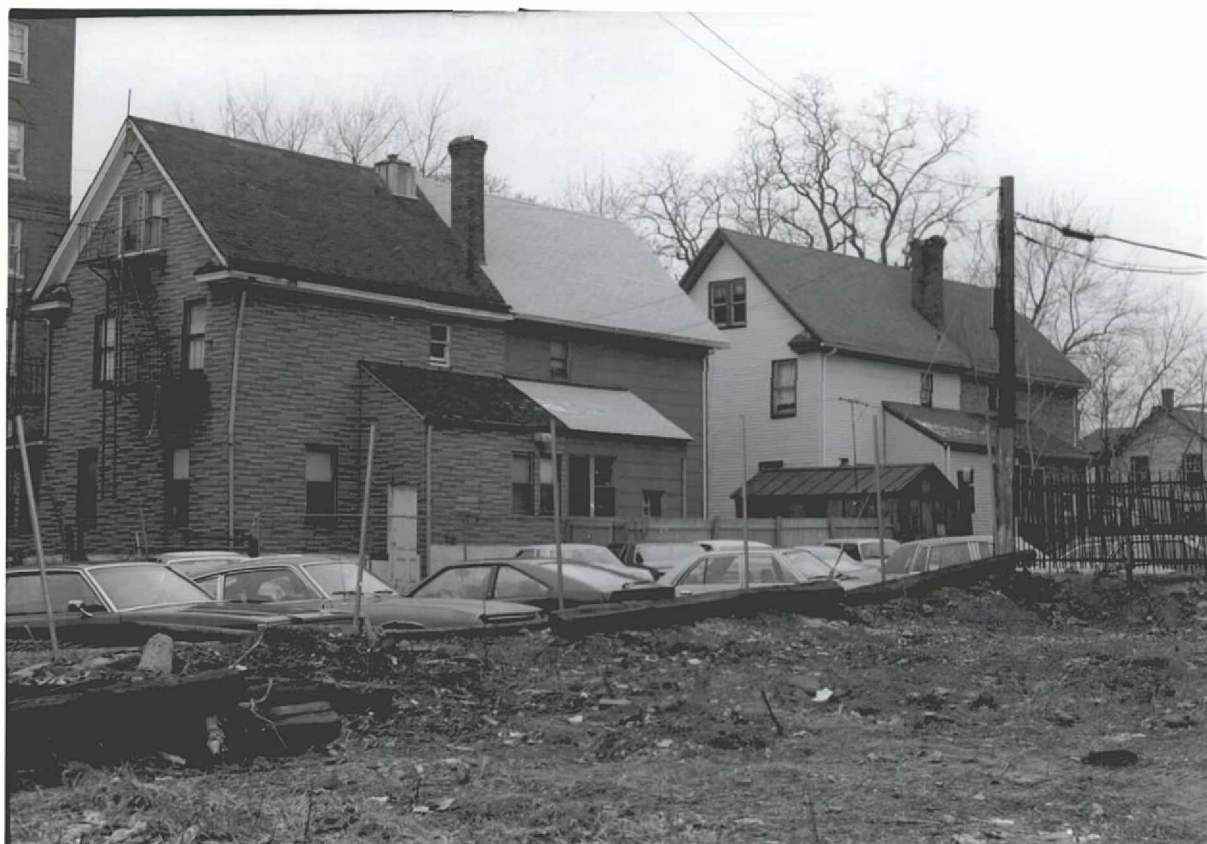


Plate 2: A detail of the western end of the lot shows that the present ground level, where buildings have been removed, is several feet higher than the parking lot to its west. Several adjacent early 20th century houses are visible, now surrounded by multi-story apartment houses. View looks northwest.

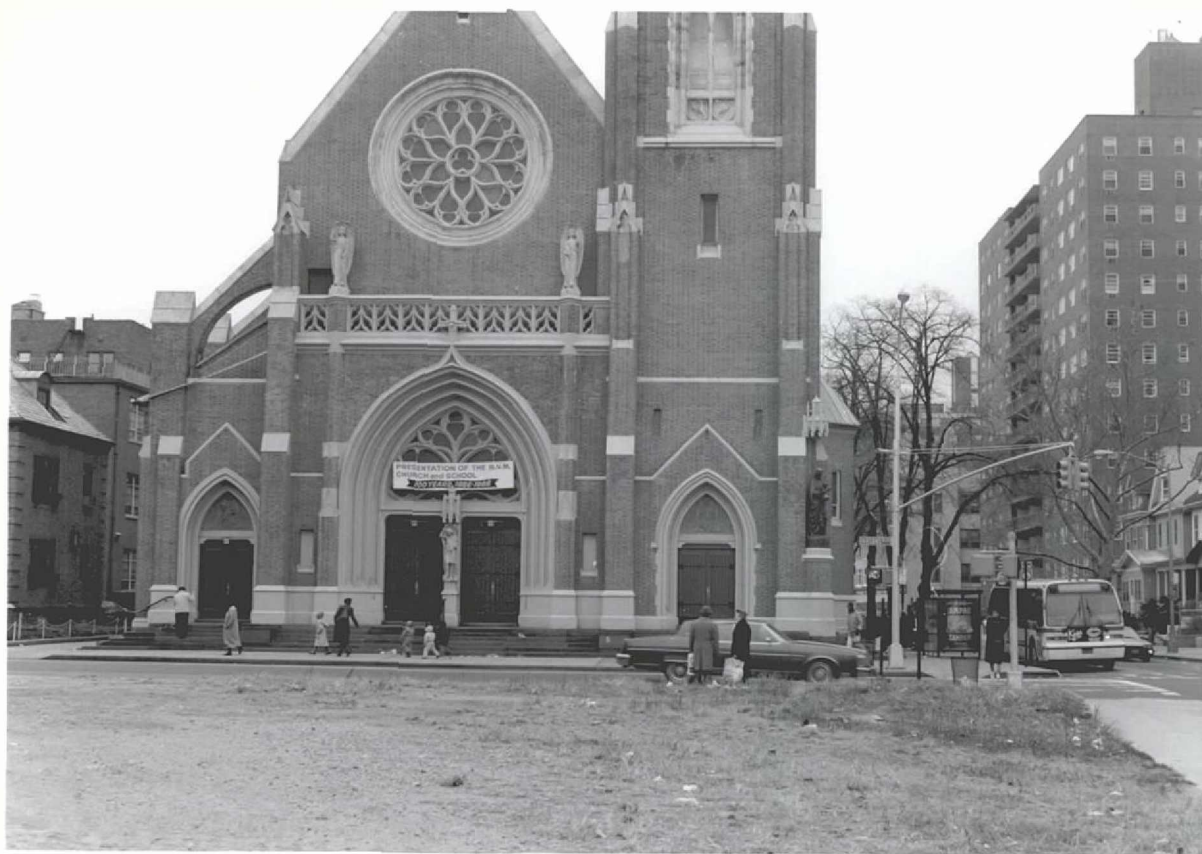


Plate 3: The study area vacant lot shows in the foreground, looking across Parson's Blvd. toward the 1922 St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church on the opposite street corner. View looks north-east.



Plate 4: The southern edge of the lot borders on 89th Ave. The opposite corner is occupied by the Queens County Family Court-house, built in 1928. View looks southeast.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study has shown that no prehistoric or contact period archaeological sites are recorded on or near the study area. In the late 18th and early 19th century it fell within property of what is known as the Rufus King Estate. A convincing sequence of historic development has been constructed which shows that the study area lay near the far northeast corner of that property, in land which was used only for agriculture or orchards.

This land was not developed during the late 19th century urban growth of Jamaica Village, although neighboring properties had residences by the turn of the century. Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church was built across the street during the period between 1873 and 1891, replacing an earlier house. Between 1901 and 1908 frame houses were built on the study area. According to all evidence these were of inexpensive quality, were in bad repair by the mid 20th century, and were demolished in 1980. The site was levelled, bulldozed, and left vacant.

There is no evidence that a prehistoric archaeological site ever existed here, and no topographic features which would make one likely. There is very low probability that a historic archaeological site associated with the Rufus King Estate ever existed in this distant corner of the property. Subsequent construction of houses with cellars in the first decade of the 20th century, and demolition and levelling in 1980, make it very unlikely that any undisturbed deposits would have survived. On this basis we do not feel that development of this area will disturb any archaeological resources, and we do not recommend any further study.

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LIST OF HISTORICAL MAPS CITED, IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

- 1782 A Map of the Pass at Jamaica Long Island
George Taylor, Capt. of Guides for
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original scale 1 inch = 60 feet
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1966 revised 1979
scale 1 inch = 2,000 feet

PERSONS CONTACTED DURING THIS RESEARCH

Mr. William Asadorian, Archivist, Long Island Division, Queens Borough Public Library.

Mr. Al Clark, Borough Engineers Office, Queens Borough Hall

Mr. Vincent Seyfried, local historian, author of The Illustrated History of Queens.

Mr. Charles Young, Division Head, Long Island Division, Queens Borough Public Library.