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PHASE IA CULTURAL RESOURCES REPORT

87-151Q

Hortz, Riverfront East Development

Louis Berger & Associates Inc

n.d.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The following report summarizes the results of a Phase IA study of the proposed Hartz development located along the East River waterfront in the Hunters Point section of Queens, New York (Figure 1). This development includes a complex of residential structures and a variety of public and private open spaces. The study included a background investigation of relevant documents for the purpose of identifying all known prehistoric, historic, and architectural resources within the 6-acre site and to evaluate the potential for locating additional resources in the project area. The study area is bounded on the east by Vernon Boulevard, on the south by a New York City Board of Education storage and distribution facility, and the New York City Public Development Corporation Site, on the north by a Consolidated Edison maintenance and employee training facility; and on the west by the East River.

The literature search consisted of a review of historic cartographic and documentary sources encompassing the project area. The prehistoric overview of the project area is presented in Chapter II. Results of the background and historical research are discussed in Chapter III. Conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter IV. The Phase IA study resulted in the recommendation that the project area exhibits a very low probability of containing intact, significant cultural resources. Moreover, it does not appear that the proposed complex of residential buildings will have any visual impacts to nearby historic sites.

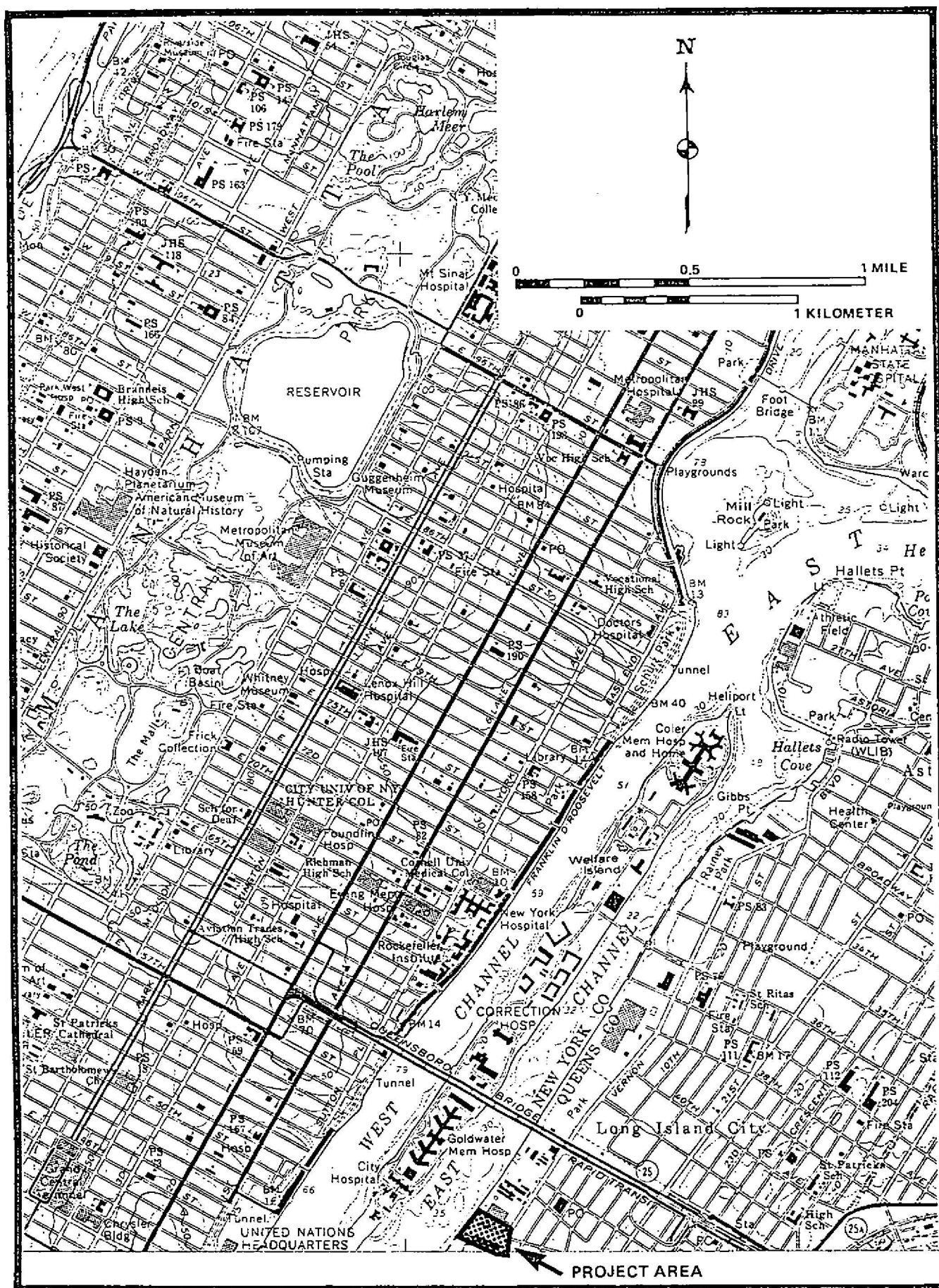


FIGURE 1: Project Area

SOURCE: U.S.G.S. 7.5' Quadrangle, Central Park, N.Y.—N.J., 1979

II. PREHISTORIC OVERVIEW

The earliest known occupation of the Eastern United States occurred during the Late Pleistocene, circa 10,000 BC. The earliest occupants were hunters and gatherers, known as Paleo-Indians, and are distinguished by lanceolate fluted points. It is commonly held that the major economic pursuit of Paleo-Indians centered around the hunting of big game animals such as mammoth and mastodon. Caribou, deer, moose, and elk were similarly exploited.

Paleo-Indian occupation in coastal New York is primarily represented by isolated point finds. Only one Paleo-Indian site, Port Mobile on Staten Island, has been identified in this area. Although the coastal location of the Port Mobil Site would seem to indicate that marine resources may have been a focus of subsistence, the artifact assemblage suggests differently (Eisenberg 1978; Funk 1977). The Port Mobil Site has been interpreted as a small group encampment or foray. To date, there have been no recorded Paleo-Indian sites in Queens.

The actual coastal strand during the Paleo-Indian period is now part of the continental shelf far out at sea. This may explain why sites on the present coast are rare; these environments would actually have been far inland at the time and, presumably, of limited resource potential. If Paleo-Indian groups were inhabiting coastal locations, the remains of their habitation sites would have long since been submerged and/or destroyed by the encroaching sea (Edwards and Merrill 1977; Newman 1977).

The instability of the coastal environments during the Early Holocene may be one reason why, "evidence of significant aboriginal occupation on Long Island, N.Y., prior to Late Archaic times is presently lacking" (Wyatt 1977:400). A few scattered points similar to the Kanawha Stemmed and Lecroy Bifurcate Base types of the Early Archaic (Broyles 1971) have been found on Long Island; however, no intact sites of this time period have yet been identified. Elements of the Laurentian tradition, represented by Vosburg and Brewerton point types, are known on Long Island, but are also scarce (Wyatt 1977:400).

The Early Archaic Period (ca. 8,000 - 6,500 BC) was a time of dramatic environmental change resulting from the glacial retreat. During this period, a wide range of food resources (plants and small animals) increased in frequency and undoubtedly had an effect on human subsistence strategies.

By Late Archaic times (ca. 3,000 - 1,300 BC), the rate of sea level rise and isostatic rebound of the continental margins had been relatively ameliorated (Edwards and Merrill 1977; Newman 1977). This resulted in the stabilization of marine environments

and the flourishing of marine resources. There is considerable archaeological evidence that marine resources were intensively exploited by Late Archaic populations throughout the Northeast and Middle Atlantic regions, including Long Island (see Brennen 1977; Custer and Stewart 1983; Wyatt 1977). The Late Archaic cultures of Long Island are characterized by artifact assemblages that include Wading River points, atlatl weights, and celts (Ritchie 1980:142-145).

On Long Island, evidence of prehistoric exploitation of coastal resources is characterized by shell middens. These middens are typically located around coastal salt marshes and measure about one acre in size (Rockman, Dublin and Friedlander 1982; Wyatt 1977). The relations between these shell midden sites and interior areas, where groups engaged in generalized hunting and gathering, is poorly understood.

Coastal habitation intensified during the Transitional period, circa 1,300 - 800 BC. The Transitional period is represented by artifact assemblages that include broadspears, such as the Susquehanna point type, Fishtail points, and the appearance of soapstone bowls. Prehistoric burials on Long Island first appear during this period, associated with the Orient Phase named for the Orient Site on Eastern Long Island (Ritchie 1969:164-165). The relationship between known burial sites and overall settlement/subsistence patterns on Long Island remains unknown (Jacobson 1980). These prehistoric burial sites could be one clue to the development of complex societies.

The appearance of ceramics in artifact assemblages marks the Woodland Period (ca. 800 BC - AD 1600). Changes in ceramic styles are a tool for dating Woodland sites. For example, the Early Woodland is characterized by Vinette I pottery, a cord-impressed, grit-tempered ware. Another cultural change that occurred during the Woodland is the introduction of domesticated plants. Horticulture would have affected settlement patterns by placing emphasis on areas with fertile soil. As a result, there was a greater degree toward sedentism during this time. Although Late Woodland subsistence strategies involved food production, hunting and shellfishing remained important pursuits on the island.

The prehistoric occupants of the project vicinity may be assigned to the Delaware culture, which covered all of New Jersey and portions of Delaware, eastern Pennsylvania, and southern New York. In particular, the study area was occupied by the Canarsee which was a Munsee-speaking group located in present-day Brooklyn (Goddard 1978).

III. BACKGROUND AND HISTORICAL RESEARCH

A. METHODS

Background research was conducted for information concerning the project area's existing conditions in terms of cultural resources. This included, in part, a review of Sanborn Fire Insurance and Belcher-Hyde Atlases for the years 1898-1950 at the New York Public Library. Maps indicating the location of water and sewer mains were also consulted at the New York City Bureau of Sewers and Water Supply, Queens; Queens Borough Hall; Queens Borough Water Supply, Jamaica; and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, Water Supply Division. In addition the Queens Building Department files were examined for relevant construction, alteration, and demolition records.

B. RESULTS

1. History of Long Island City

The proposed project is located in Queens County, New York. The development of Queens County was closely tied to technological changes in transportation that resulted in more effective linkages between Long Island City and Manhattan. Long Island City was the site of the earliest settlement in Queens County and was first settled by the Dutch between 1637 and 1656. Most Queens residents were farmers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the settlements were small rural villages, similar to those that were scattered all over what is now the metropolitan region. Trading linked these communities to the center of activity that is present-day New York City.

The expansion of New York's commercial sector, which depended on the harbor and the waterways in the early days, generated a need for industrial and warehouse sites on the waterfront. This caused a gradual preemption of the entire eastern shore of the East River for productive activities to the exclusion of residences. The study area gradually accommodated many industrial establishments being placed between the manufacturing district of Greenpoint and the timber-oriented activities of Astoria. This pattern was already established by the early nineteenth century, and the residences that were built were intended primarily for local industrial workers.

New York City grew very rapidly in the nineteenth century. Commuting became a standard practice, and transportation systems were eventually developed to provide such service. This was done first by rail and ferry. Growth in the vicinity of the study area began to accelerate in 1861 when the Long Island Railroad (LIRR) moved its transfer terminus from Brooklyn to Hunters Point to serve passengers traveling to Manhattan on ferries. As a result,

large number of passengers embarked and disembarked from the 34th Street ferry to transfer to the nearby railroad. The character of the area changed as inns and taverns emerged to cater to the travelers.

Long Island City, officially incorporated in 1870, was comprised of the following areas: Hunters Point, Blissville, Dutch Kills, Astoria, Ravenswood, and Bowery Bay. Astoria and Ravenswood were primarily residential while Hunters Point remained industrial in character and served as a major transportation center for Queens.

Until the early 1900s, Long Island City was connected to New York by a number of ferries: 92nd Street, Peck, and James Slips. The opening of the Queensboro Bridge in 1909 was one of the most significant events in the history of Queens and resulted in the industrial and residential growth of the area, especially around the Bridge Plaza. The bridge also opened the way for vehicular access: wagons and streetcars, followed by trucks and automobiles. In 1910, the Pennsylvania Railroad tunnel and the LIRR Sunnyside railroad storage yard, representing 40 miles of track in the middle of Long Island City, were completed. The new job opportunities attracted many more people to the area while strengthening its heavy industrial image. Between 1910 and 1930, the population of Queens quadrupled from 284,041 to well over a million. Similarly, its assessed value of real estate multiplied sixfold from a base of \$300 million.

The Queens Borough was totally dependent on trolley service until the construction of the IRT and BMT subways between 1915 and 1928. Although development activity increased in the 1920s, rampant speculation made the Depression years especially difficult for Long Island City residents. However by the late 1930s, the recovery began and local industries prospered. Some of these industries included food processing (baking), metal work, textiles, paints, woodwork, and stone cutting. Of the 1,700 industrial establishments located in Queens in 1938 (five percent of the City's total), more than 1,400 were located in the 2.8 square mile area of Long Island City. The Worlds Fair in Queens in 1939 to 1940 provided an additional incentive for local businesses to attain new levels of productivity.

Today's access system to Manhattan was completed with the openings of the Triborough Bridge in 1936 and the Queens-Midtown Tunnel in 1940. During 1941 to 1945, Long Island City factories were busily supplying goods and equipment for World War II. By 1955, the area had grown into one of the largest industrial centers in the United States. Manufacturing employment continued to increase through the 1960s focusing on small, low-scale, and consumer market-oriented operations. Although many factors (such as high taxes, crime, rent levels, and the lower cost of land and labor outside the City) have recently contributed to manufacturing firms leaving the larger area, Hunters Point/Long Island City has retained much of its historic vitality.

2. History of the Project Area

Historical research indicates that the project area was in farmland until the last years of the nineteenth century. At this time, the study area was within the W. Nelson farm estate. A frame building of unknown function appears in the central portion of the project area on the Wolverton Map of 1891. This area was occupied by oil and gas tanks in the twentieth century.

The earliest industrial development of the study area is depicted in the Sanborn-Perris Insurance Map of 1898 and indicates that this area was occupied by the James Gillis and Sons Stone Works (Figure 2). The stone works complex included a large frame structure containing a brick boiler room in the northern section of the project area. A two-story frame addition to this building was located to its south traversing a portion of 14th Street. This structure served as office space, a drafting room and, on the second floor, a dwelling. Features located to the exterior of this structure included a hoisting engine, a large cistern and a water tank. The cistern had a capacity of 2,000 gallons and was associated with the stone works. Other structures related to the stone works were located in the southern section of the study area including the Willard F. Meyers Machine Shop, a one-story masons shop, a hoisting engine, and a tin-clad shed.

The Belcher-Hyde Atlases of 1903 and 1912 indicate continued improvement of the project area exemplified by the addition of a total of 9 one-story frame buildings and sheds. By 1919, the one-story wooden frame Queensboro Freight Terminal appears at the northwest corner of the East River waterfront, abutting the U.S. Pierhead Line. This structure appears to have been built on landfill.

In 1928 construction began on a brick garage and automobile repair shop situated along the southern margin of the study area. By 1936, an extensive portion of the project area was occupied by the Warner, Quinlan & Company Oils complex, which included surface and subsurface gasoline tanks, warehouses, loading ramps, and pump houses. The former freight terminal was used as a storage facility at this time. By the early 1940s, the Warner, Quinlan & Company Oils sold their facility to Cities Service Oil Company while retaining the brick garage and automobile repair shop under the name of the Warner-Quinlan Mileage Product Company. The Sanborn Map of 1950 displays these facilities in addition to related construction in the northeastern section of the project area (Figure 3). These companies continued to occupy the study area until 1973. A gas station was also located on the site along Vernon Boulevard near 44th Street. A tennis and swim club presently occupy the project area.

3. Historic Properties

Although no documented historic sites have been identified within the study area, there are several historic properties within 0.5

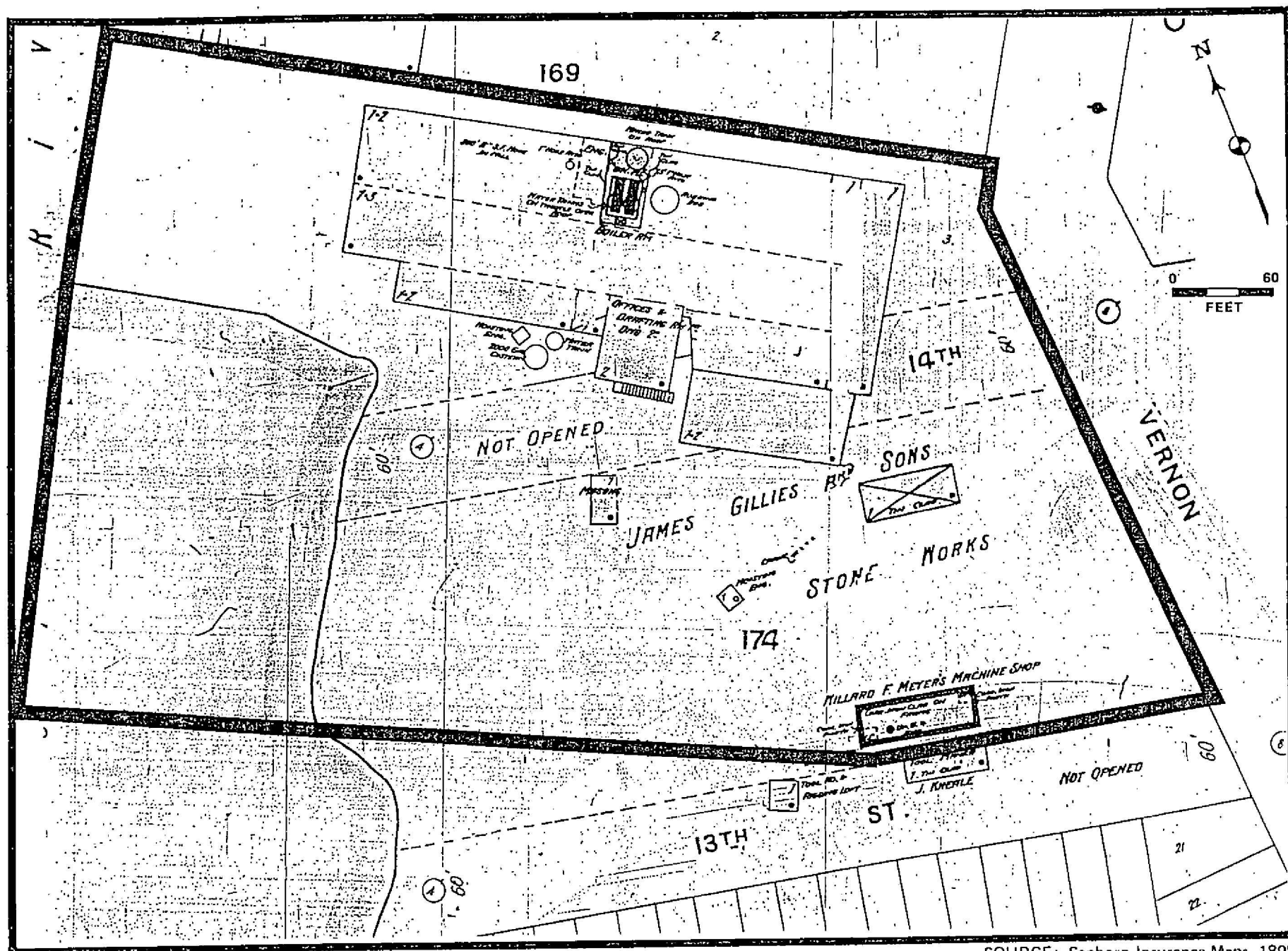


FIGURE 2: Project Area, 1898

SOURCE: Sanborn Insurance Maps, 1898

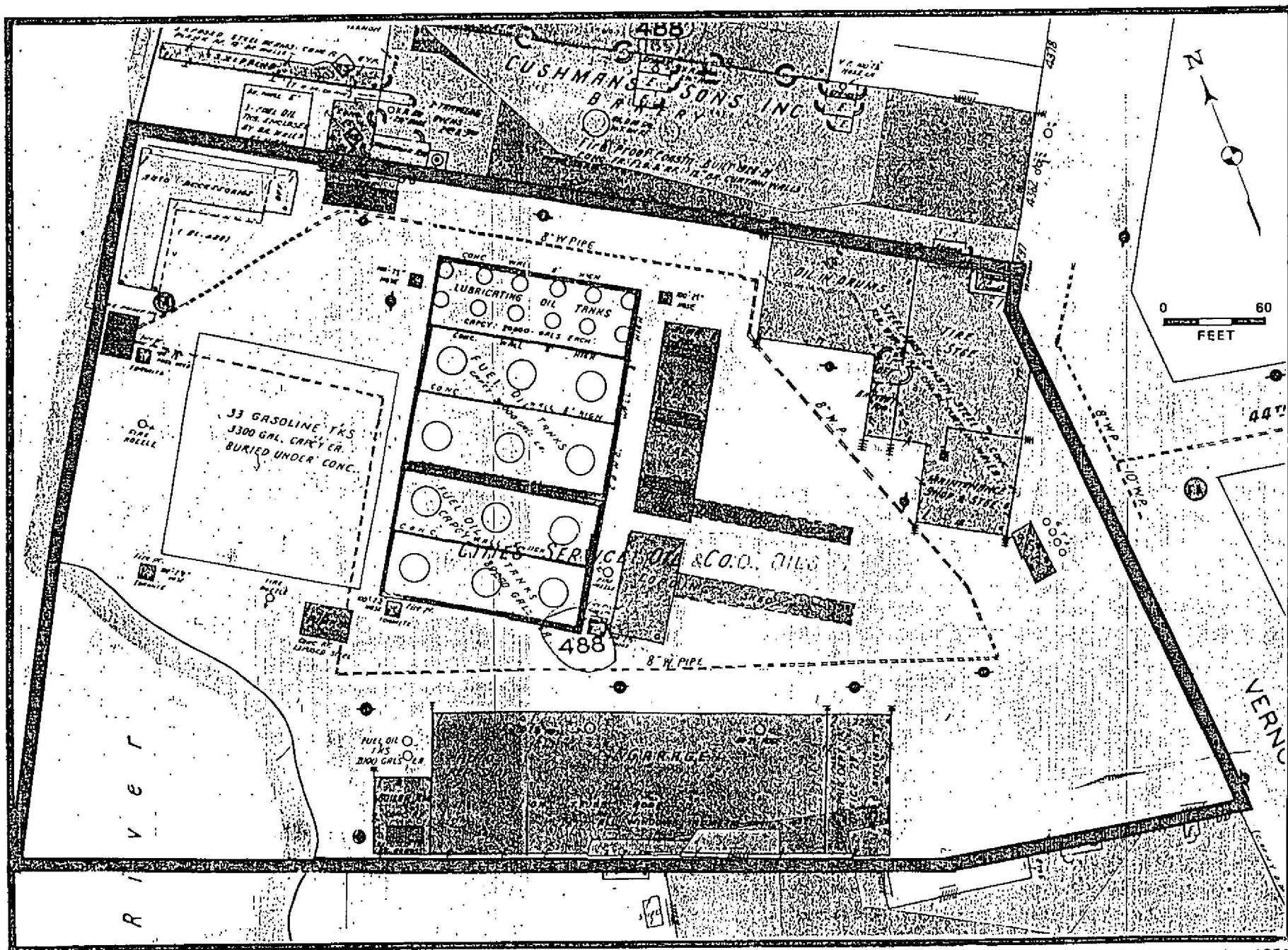


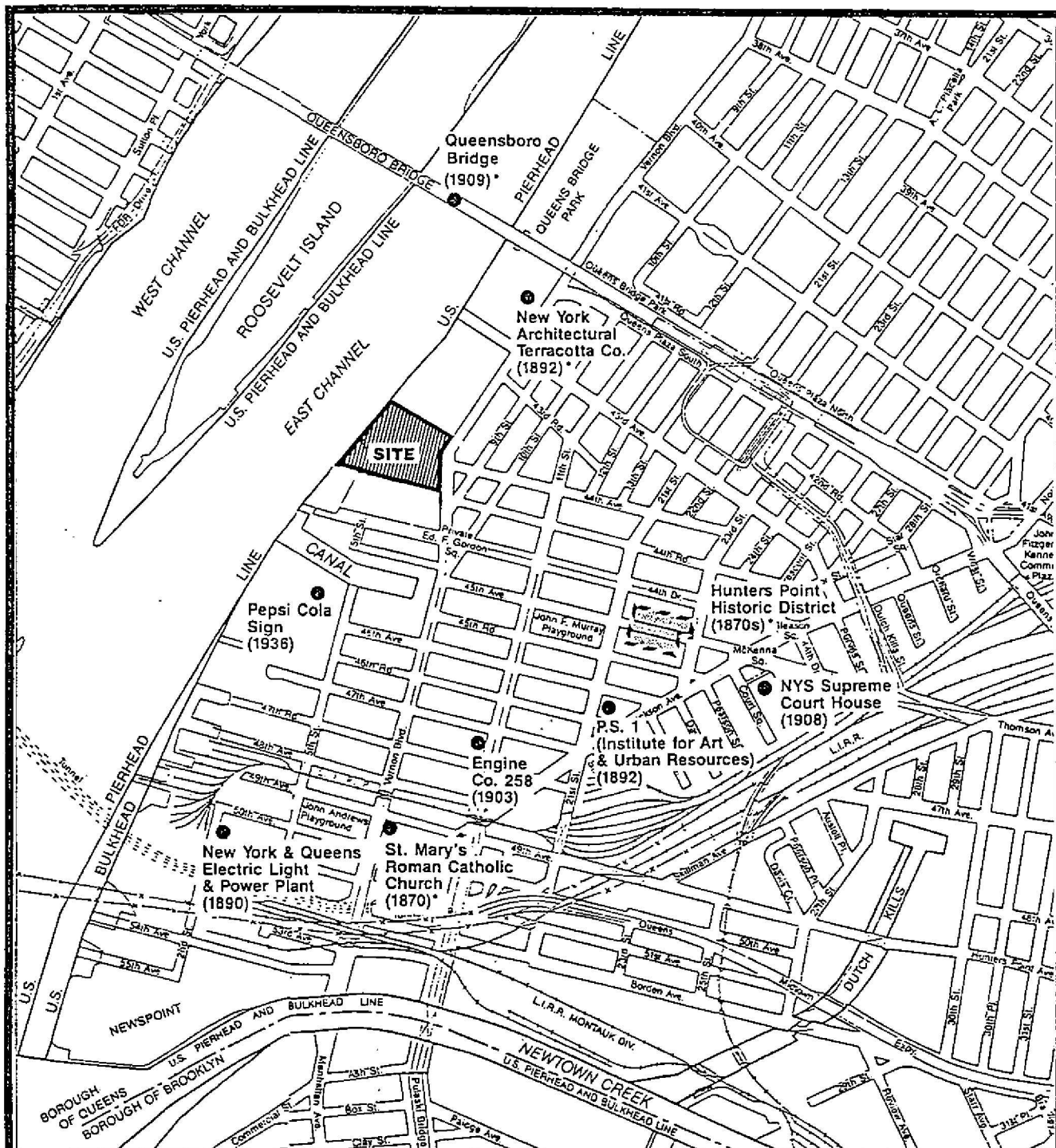
FIGURE 3: Project Area, 1950

SOURCE: Sanborn Insurance Maps, 1915 corrected to 1950

mile of the project site. These as well as other historic properties further from the project area are depicted in Figure 4. Those historic properties located within 0.5 mile of the study area include, in part, two sites situated to its north: the Queensboro Bridge constructed in 1909 and the American Architectural Terracotta Company located between the bridge and 43rd Avenue. The latter was built in 1892 and is a designated New York City landmark. It was responsible for the production of much of the terracotta often seen in turn-of-the-century New York architecture and, itself, is a Tudor Revival style building.

The Hunters Point Historic District is located approximately 0.3 mile to the southeast of the study area. The district is a designated New York City landmark and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It consists of two blockfronts built in the Italianate style of the early 1870s and occupies 45th Avenue between 21st and 23rd Streets with five houses on 23rd Street. These multi-family units are typical domestic architecture of this period and contain neo-Greco and Queen Anne components. The houses in the district are in excellent condition and retain their original detail and character. Another historic structure is located to the southeast of the study area: P.S. 1, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, 46-01 21st Street. This structure was built in 1892 and is a Romanesque Revival school building. It was converted into an art studio in 1976. Engine Company 258, Ladder Company 115, 10-40 47th Avenue is situated west of the art studio and was built in 1903. This structure contains brick and masonry in a Dutch gable style.

Although there are historic sites located in close proximity to the study area, there does not appear that there will be any visual impact to these resources by the proposed construction. This includes the prominent Pepsi Cola sign (built in 1936) on 4600 Fifth Street, located along the Long Island City East River waterfront, and the Strecker Laboratory and former Smallpox Hospital (in ruins) located at the southern tip of Roosevelt Island.



*NYC Landmarks

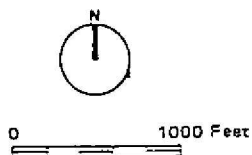


FIGURE 4: Historic Properties in the Vicinity of the Project Area

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results of the background research suggest an extensive amount of disturbance to the project area's subsoil. The origin of the disturbance is related to the study area's industrial development which included the construction of, at least, 33 subsurface fuel tanks in the early twentieth century. In addition, documentary evidence indicates that several structures associated with the Warner, Quinlan & Company Oils complex (e.g., pump house, warehouse) had minimally four-foot deep foundations. Moreover, the installation of utilities across the project tract such as sewers occurred during the late nineteenth century, roughly concurrent with the development of the study area.

The New York State Historic Preservation Officer has determined that the study area is not considered to be potentially sensitive for prehistoric sites. Further, there are no topographic features such as a stream or knoll within the study area, which would indicate a high probability for prehistoric sites. The industrial use of the property and the extent of subsurface disturbance also suggest that the potential for intact prehistoric deposits and features within the project tract (if once extant) is very low.

The historic uses of the project area are not the types that would have produced important archaeological deposits and features. For example, the single documented domestic occupation occurred simultaneously with the installation of utilities. Therefore, no deep features containing domestic materials would have been present.

Although there are documented historic sites located in close proximity to the study area, it does not appear that there will be any visual impact to these resources by the proposed construction.

The Phase IA study demonstrated that the project area exhibits a very low probability of containing intact, significant cultural resources. Additionally, there does not appear to be any visual affects by the proposed construction on nearby historic sites. Therefore, it is recommended that no additional historical or archaeological work be conducted.

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