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STAGE 1A ARCHAEOLOGICAL/HISTORICAL  
SENSITIVITY EVALUATION OF THE  
JOHN STREET PROJECT  
BOROUGH OF RICHMOND, NEW YORK

RECEIVED  
ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

MAY 08 2000

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March 2000

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to document the potential prehistoric and historic sensitivity of the proposed project area on John Street near Richmond Terrace in the Borough of Richmond, New York, through the review of existing archival, cartographic and published references. Recommendations will be made, based on this review, for further testing. In order to provide a context for evaluating any identified resources within the parcel itself, this survey will include a synthesis of published and unpublished prehistoric and historic resources in the immediate area surrounding the project area.

The project area parcel is located in the northwestern portion of Staten Island, bounded on the west by John Street. The eastern boundary is a line parallel to John Street. The parcel forms a rough parallelogram. It includes Lots 16 and 19 on Block 1116. See Figure 1 for the location of the project area.

The nearest New York City Landmark is the Stephen D. Barnes House at 2876 Richmond Terrace in the Mariners Harbor section of Staten Island. This building is approximately 0.6 miles west of the project area (New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission 1979:79). There are no New York City Landmarks within or adjacent to the project area.

This study is organized in the following manner: first, a section describes the geography and physical setting of the project area; second, a section follows on the prehistoric sensitivity of the area; third, a review of the historic sensitivity of the area; and fourth, the conclusions and recommendations.





## GEOGRAPHY AND PHYSICAL SETTING

Geographically, Staten Island is part of New Jersey from which it is separated by the Kill Van Kull and Staten Island Sound (Skinner 1909:3).

The geomorphology of Staten Island consists of landforms and deposits of glacial origin. The sediments were deposited by the Wisconsin Ice Sheet 55,000 to 10,000 years ago and generally consist of ground moraine, terminal moraine and outwash sediments (Jacobsen 1980:5). The shoreline area in this portion of Staten Island is comprised of sandy embankments of beach sand adjacent to and at times overlying the area's geologically earlier deposits of Cretaceous formations of sand and clay (Weingartner 1967:41). Local glacial deposits may be overlaid by fill as well as beach, marsh, dune, swamp, and estuarine deposits (Jacobsen 1980:5).

The Principal Investigator visited the project area during March 2000. A pedestrian survey was used to inspect the majority of the property. The land slopes gently from east to west. The project area consists of one large lot fronting John Street. A dwelling exists in the front part of the northern end of the lot. There is a shed consisting of a freight container behind the house. The southern two-thirds of the lot is vacant. This portion is surrounded by chain link fencing.



## PREHISTORIC SENSITIVITY

Since the subject of this report is immediately west of the location of our Nicholas Avenue and Richmond Terrace study, the background research on prehistory completed for that project was used to assess the John Street project area.

The project area is located within two miles of ten known prehistoric sites (Greenhouse Consultants 1999:3-8). Fresh water would have been available from a stream to the south and east. This stream was approximately 500 feet from the project area. This stream would also have attracted game. The marine resources of the Kill van Kull were within 300 feet. The project area may have been used as a hunting or fishing camp. However, the extensive use of this location during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would likely have disturbed or destroyed any prehistoric remains here.



## HISTORIC SENSITIVITY

The historical background for this location can be found in our Nicholas Avenue and Richmond Terrace report. The John Street project area is immediately west of the location studied in that report, so its summary of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries is applicable to this property (Greenhouse Consultants 1999:9-12).

Figure 2, taken from the 1845 United States Coast Survey of New York Harbor, was surveyed during the years 1836 to 1839. This map shows that John Street has not yet been laid out.

Filed Map 60 from the Richmond County Clerk's office is the source of Figure 4. This map was surveyed december 1847 by Samuel S. Doughty. Its purpose was to subdivide property owned by George W. Sands, James Hook, Howlar R. Sherman and William W. Woodworth. This map depicts John Street with a railroad track running along its centerline. The project area consists of Lots 6, 7 and 8 along the east side of John Street. There are two structures shown. One building about 20 feet square is shown just south of the Lot 7/8 boundary adjacent to John Street. A probable shed, about 15 feet by 20 feet is in the northeastern corner of Lot 7. Lot 6 is vacant. Lots to the north are owned by John Lisk.

The 1853 Butler map shows structures along the east side of John Street. Three names are listed: J. Lisk, an illegible name, and C. King. These appear to be south of the project area, but the map is not accurate enough to say with certainty. See Figure 5.

Both the 1874 and 1887 Beers atlases show the project area as including three structures. There are no changes within the project area during this period. The 1887 atlas shows the Staten Island Rapid Transit Railroad. See Figures 6 and 7.

Figure 8 is taken from the 1898 Robinson Atlas. There are still three structures within the project area. Lots 6 and 7, the northern two-thirds of the project area, are owned by C. Platch. Lot 8 is included with lot 9, but no owner is listed. Water pipes are shown under John Street.

The 1898 Sanborn-Perris map is the earliest map to show details of the structures. The northern most building is within old Lot 6. It is a two and one-half story dwelling with a small one-story extension in the rear. This house is numbered 9 John Street. A three-story dwelling with a brick first story is shown in old Lot 7. It is unnumbered.



Figure 2 From the United States Coast Survey Charter of New York Harbor, 1836-1839 (published 1845).



APPROXIMATE LOCATION  
OF PROJECT AREA

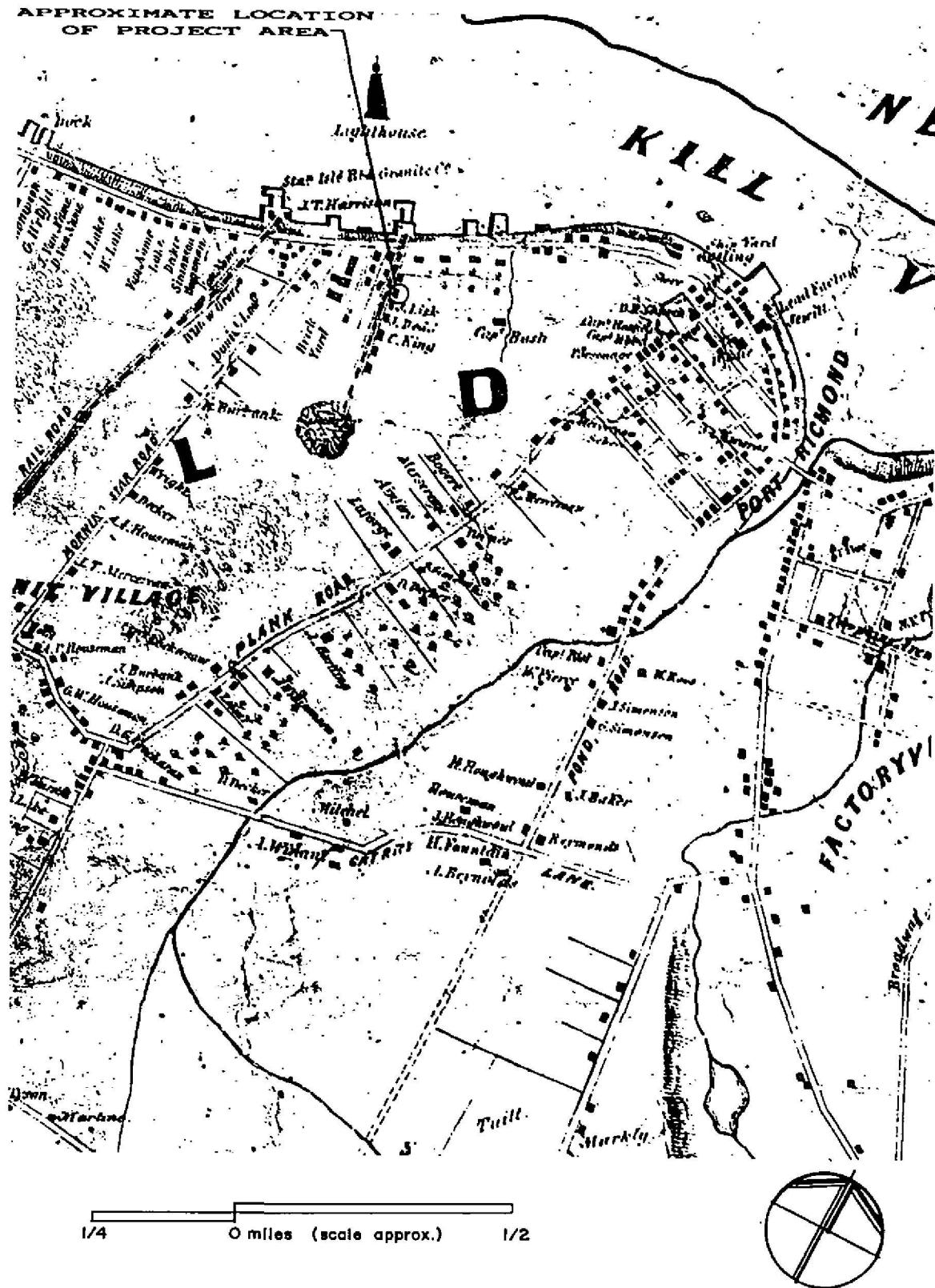


Figure 4 From Butler's 1853 Map of Staten Island.

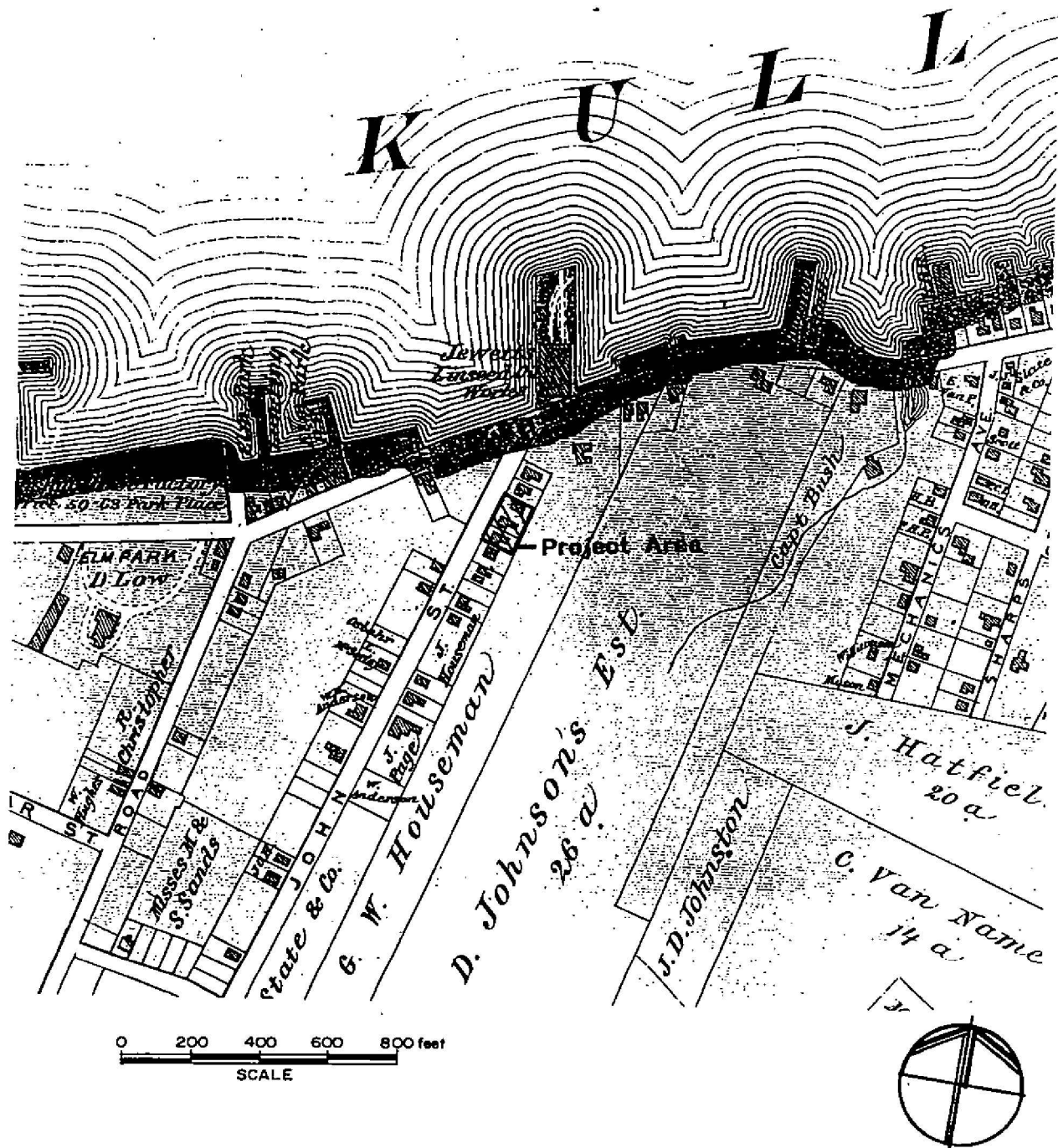


Figure 5 From Beers' 1874 Atlas of Staten Island.



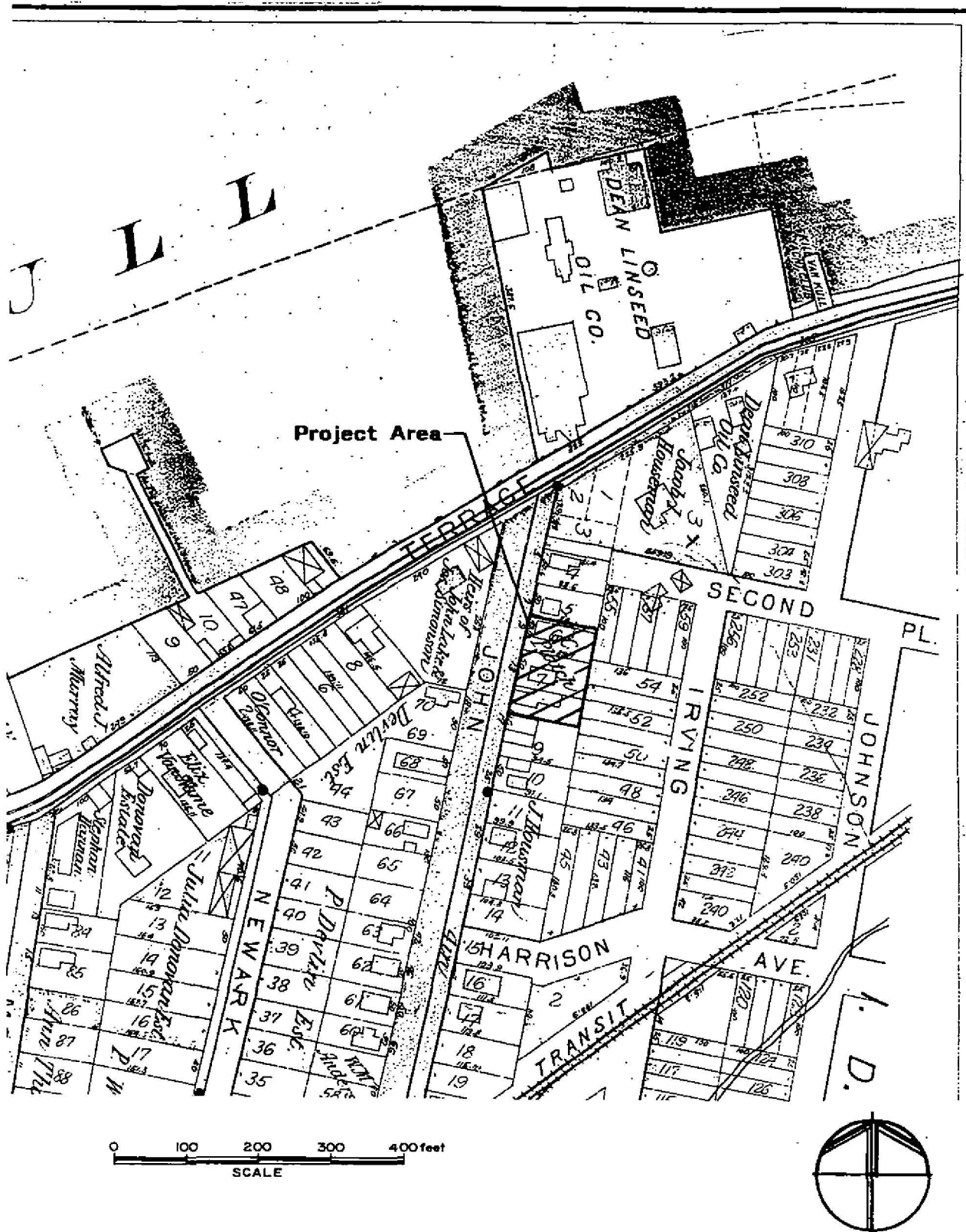


Figure 7 From Robinson's 1898 Atlas of the Borough of Richmond, New York.





Old Lot 8 includes a three- and four-story saloon with a brick first floor. It also has a one-story rear extension. The saloon is 17 John Street. See Figure 9.

The 1909 Topographical Survey is the source of Figure 10. The same three main structures are shown. The northern structure is a two-story frame house. There are two outbuildings behind it, one labeled shed. The middle structure is a two and one-half-story house. One outbuilding is shown behind it. This outbuilding abuts the southern structure. This structure is also frame and has three stories. The rear portion, which extends to the rear lot line, is labeled shed.

Figure 11 is taken from the 1917 Sanborn map. The northern structure is now numbered 21 John Street, its current designation. It is a two and one-half story dwelling with a one-story front porch. Only one outbuilding is shown behind it.

The 1917 Sanborn map updated to 1926 was examined but is not reproduced here. It shows only one change from 1917. An addition has been made to the outbuilding behind 21 John Street. The 1917 Sanborn map updated to 1936 shows that all the structures at 29 and 31 John Street were demolished between 1926 and 1936.

The 1937 Sanborn map is presented in part as Figure 12. It shows the same situation as in 1936 with one exception. The outbuilding behind 21 John Street has been replaced by a one-story garage.

Figure 13, taken from the 1990 REDI-Sanborn map, shows that no changes have been made since 1936. The house and garage at 21 John Street remain. The remainder of the project area is vacant.

The cartographic evidence shows that the project area was developed during the late 1840s. During the late 1830s John Street did not exist. It appears by 1847 when the project area consisted of Lots 6, 7 and 8. One main structure and an outbuilding exist by this time. By 1874 the project area includes three main structures. These all stand until sometime between 1926 and 1936 when the southern two are demolished. The three structures were a two or two and one-half story frame house at 21 John Street, a two or three-story frame house at 29 John Street, and a three to four-story frame and brick saloon at 31 John Street. The house at 21 John Street still stands. The only name associated with the project area is C. Platch.

Information on the ownership of the project area was then sought at the Richmond County Clerk's Office. An attempt was made to trace the chains of title for Lots 16 and 19 on Block 1116. It proved possible to trace Lot 19 back from 1999 to sales from

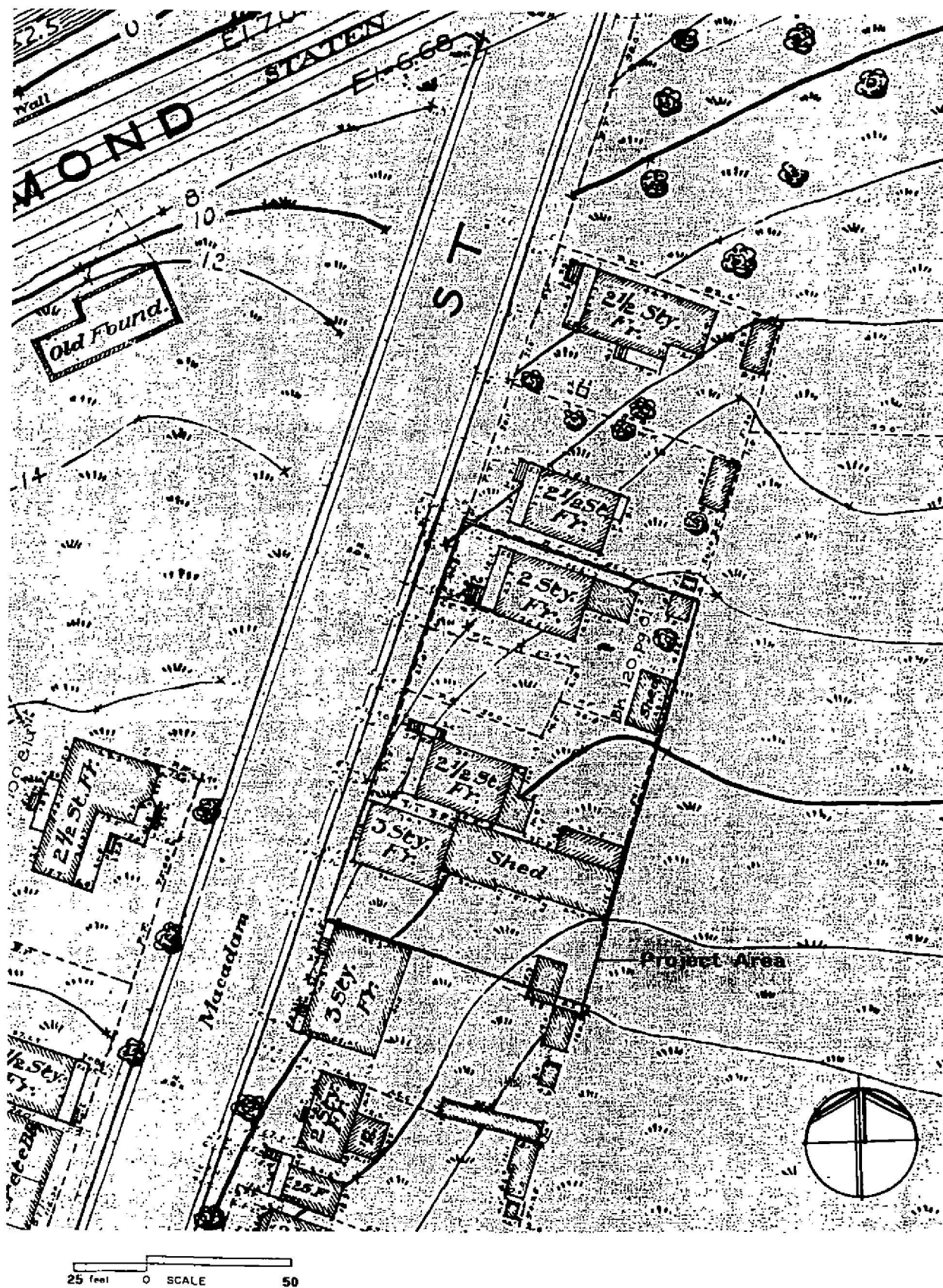


Figure 9 From the Borough of Richmond's 1909 Topographical Survey.





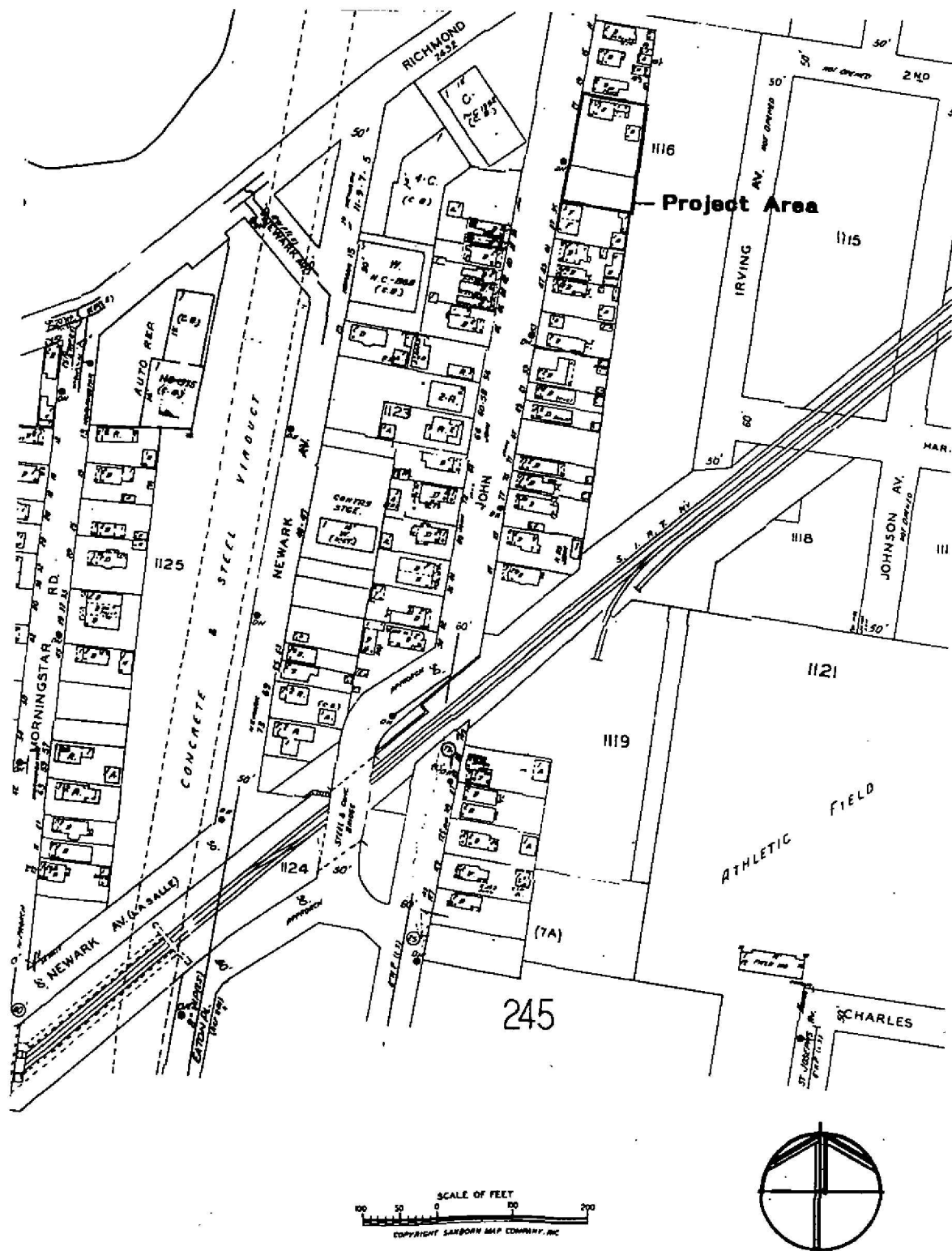


Figure 12 From the 1990 REDI-Sanborn maps.



Howland R. Sherman during the 1850s. Sherman was one of the owners listed on the 1847 subdivision map. See Table 1. No information was found regarding Lot 16.

TABLE 1  
Chain of Title for Block 1116, Lot 19 (Original Lots 6 and 7)

Grantor	Grantee	Date	Liber:Page
Gallazzini, Silvio	Cascio, Salvatore Valenziano, Salvatore	July 22, 1999	9385:79
Helgeson, Charles R. Helgeson, Dolores M.	Gallazzini, Silvio	February 2, 1989	1842:29
Owen, Mary	Helgeson, Charles R. Helgeson, Dolores M.	January 31, 1961	1520:47
Dowd, James Dowd, Catherine	Owen, Mary	July 23, 1959	1470:81
Whittet, James G. Whittet, Jennie	Dowd, James Dowd, Catherine	October 23, 1954	1297:197
Cook, William E.	Whittet, James G. Whittet, Jennie	March 6, 1952	1188:403
Cook, Katherine A.	Cook, William E.	June 9, 1951	1159:324
Heirs of John Cook Cook, Charles Cook, Melba Cook, Catherine Cook, Joseph H. Cook, May Cook, William Cook, Anna Schuman, Anna Louise Illere, Margaret Elizabeth	Cook, Elizabeth	September 26, 1930	714:101
Sherman, Howland R. Sherman, Catherine	Cook, Leonard	June 5, 1855	36:465
Sherman, Howland R. Sherman, Catherine	Cook, Leonard	May 6, 1852	26:242

Note: Liber 714, page 101, indicates that this is the same property inherited by Catherine Cook, later Catherine Platch, and devised by her to her son John Cook for life, and conveyed by his heirs to Elizabeth Cook.



The chain of title proves that Lot 19, originally Lots 6 and 7, stayed in the Cook family from May 1852 until March 1952. C. Platch was formerly Catherine Cook who remarried. She obtained the lot from her father-in-law, Leonard Cook. The deeds examined note that several of the Cooks were residing on the lot at the time of the transaction. This proves that the Cook family owned Lot 19 for a century, and that family members lived there for at least part of this time.



## RESULTS

The section on prehistoric sensitivity has documented that the Nicholas Avenue project area was probably used during prehistory. It is within two miles of at least ten known sites, and fresh water would have been available to the south and east. It is unlikely that any prehistoric remains could survive undisturbed in this location due to extensive construction and demolition of structures during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The section on prehistoric sensitivity shows that the project area includes the locations of two houses and a saloon facing John Street. The saloon was probably there in part by 1847. The two houses existed by 1874 and possibly by 1853. The northern house still stands while the other house and saloon were demolished by 1936. Water lines were available by 1898 and sewers probably somewhat later. The two houses were owned by the Cook family from 1852 through 1952, and there is evidence that they lived on the property for at least part of this time. They must have had cisterns and privies. The maps show that no later structures with deep foundations were ever built on the probable cistern and privy locations.



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The above text documents that remains of the former Cook family houses may exist within the northern portion of the John Street project area. Cisterns and privies filled during the end of the nineteenth century could exist in both properties as could refuse pits. The Cooks were probably middle or artisan class since they owned their own homes and property along John Street.

We recommend that a series of backhoe trenches be excavated prior to any construction activities here to search for potential remains. Trenches should be located adjacent to the rear walls of both houses, as well as further behind the house locations.



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