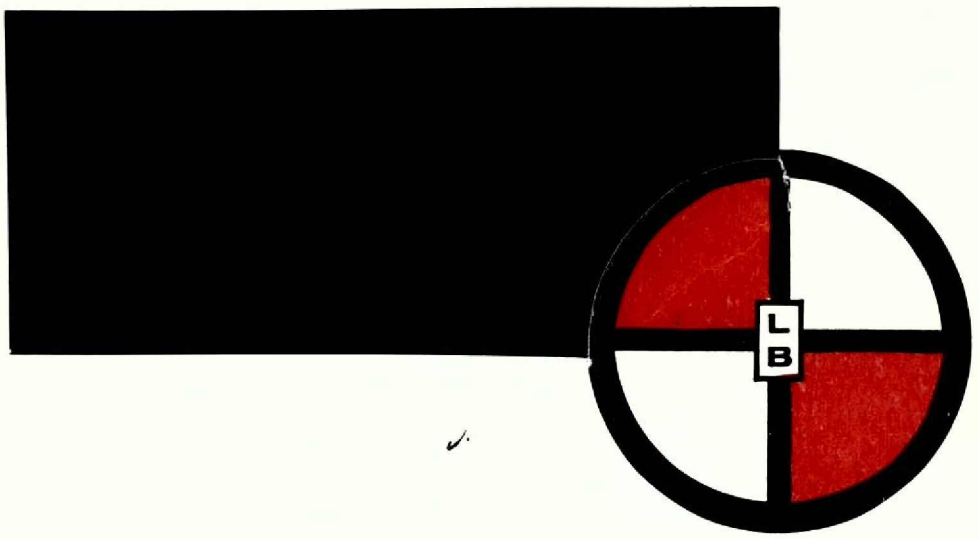

LOUIS BERGER & ASSOCIATES, INC.

100 Halsted Street
East Orange, New Jersey 07019

ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTING OF THE PROPOSED EGRESS STAIR AND DRY WELL EXCAVATION, VAN CORTLAND MANSION, VAN CORTLAND PARK, BRONX, NEW YORK

PROJECT NO 1016

1985

Prepared For:

LAKE CONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION, NEW YORK

Prepared By:

THE CULTURAL RESOURCE GROUP
LOUIS BERGER AND ASSOCIATES INC.

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INTRODUCTION

On July 15, 1985, the Cultural Resource Group of Louis Berger & Associates, Inc. (LBA) conducted an archaeological testing program of the area adjacent to the west portion of the south wing of the Van Cortland Mansion, Broadway and 242 Street, Van Cortland Park, Bronx, New York. This work was performed under contract with Lake Construction and Development Corporation (Contract No. 1016). The mansion is an archaeologically and architecturally significant site, currently designated as a landmark property by the City of New York. The purpose of the testing was to identify and investigate any significant archaeological deposits associated with the site that would be potentially impacted during Stage 1 of the reconstruction of the Van Cortland Mansion. This reconstruction involves the installation of an egress stair and a dry well leading into the existing herb cellar of the mansion. The reconstruction work is to be conducted by Lake Construction and Development Corporation under contract to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (Contract X-92-485).

FIELD METHODS

The testing program specified in the scope of work, was to involve the excavation of three shovel tests to sterile soil. The area of investigation measured 19 feet by 7.5 feet and was located along the west portion of the south wing of the building. At the time of investigation however, the south portion of the impact area was inaccessible for testing due to the presence of dense bushes and a large slate pavement (3 feet by 10 feet) leading to an historic marker (Figure 1). Furthermore, the northern portion of the impact area contained trees, bushes, and a historic plaque which interfered with placement of shovel tests at consistent intervals. For these reasons the three shovel tests specified in the scope of work were not placed at equal intervals, but in such a way as to fulfill the requirements for maximum coverage. Two shovel tests were excavated in the northern half of the stair and dry well area, and one test was placed in the west central portion. All shovel tests were excavated to sterile subsoil. The excavation proceeded by natural stratigraphy and arbitrary levels within natural stratigraphy. All excavated sediments were screened through 1/4 inch mesh hardware cloth, and all cultural material was recovered for laboratory processing and analysis.

FIELD RESULTS

All soil profiles display significant consistency in sediment types and relative strata depth. The thin top soil (10YR 2/1, black silty loam) of the project area is underlaid by a layer of dark brown silty loam (10YR 3/3) extending to a depth of 0.6-0.9 feet below ground surface (Figure 2). Both strata have a signifi-

FIGURE 1
VAN CORTLAND MANSION
AREA OF IMPACT

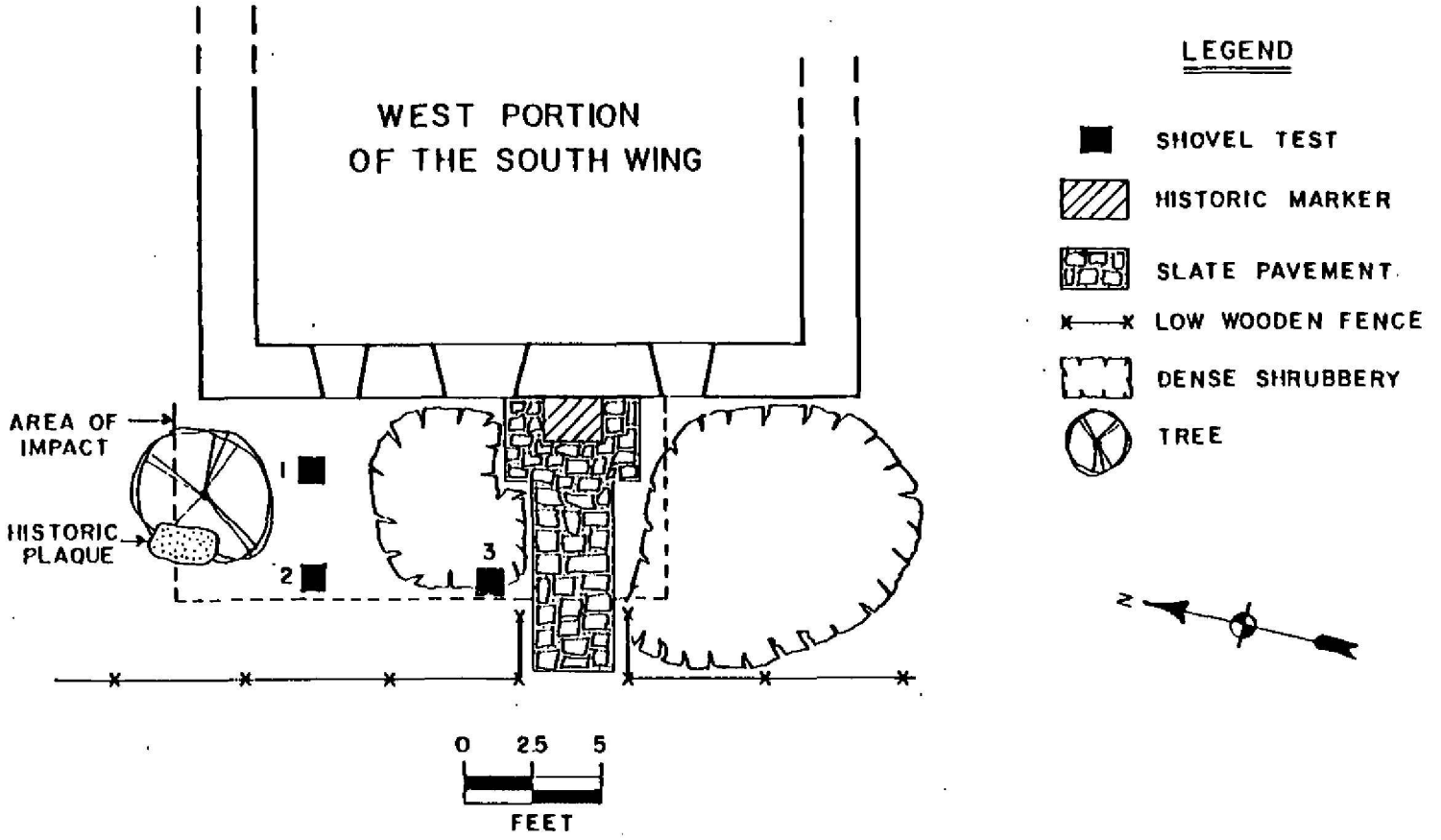
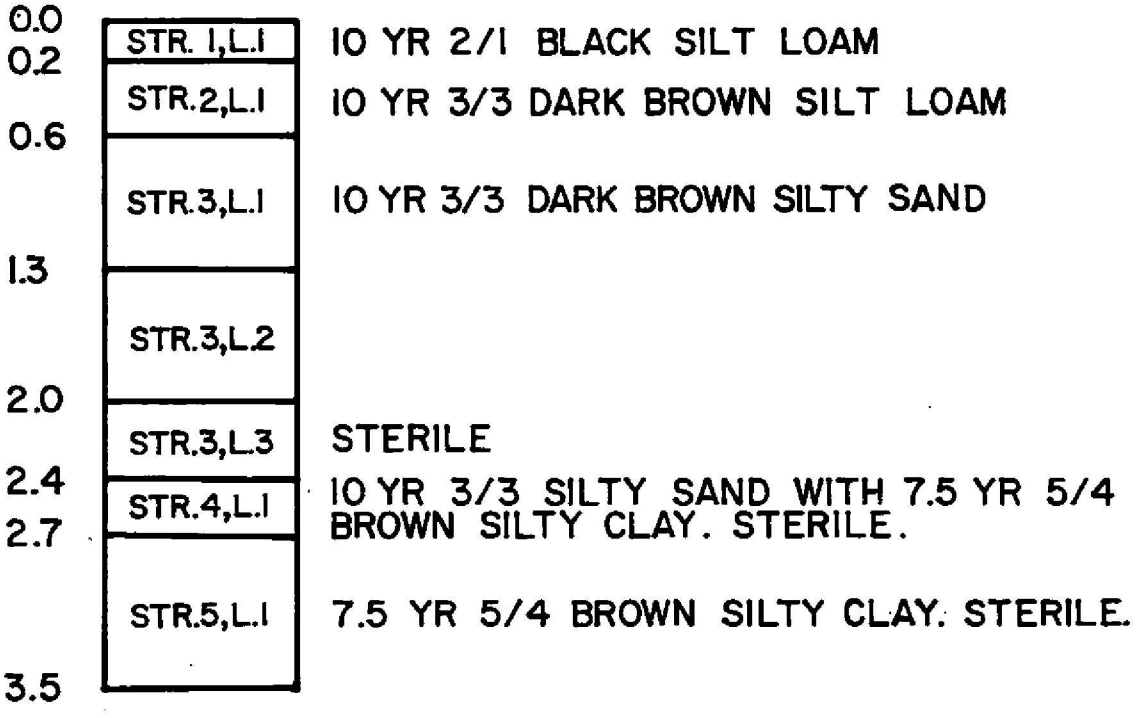


FIGURE 2
VAN CORTLAND MANSION
SHOVEL TEST 2
SOIL PROFILE



cant organic content, resulting from the current use of the area as a flower garden. These sediments rest on a thick, readily distinguishable layer of dark brown silty sand (Stratum 3, 10YR 3/3) which extends to a depth of 1.9-2.4 feet. The upper layers of all shovel tests produced a very low frequency of artifactual materials. These materials are small in size and weathered (e.g. exhibiting spalled and cracked surfaces). The majority of artifacts are non-diagnostic (brick, shell, coal, slag, plaster, slate, nail and metal fragments, glass and redware sherds). The artifact distribution is not associated with any distinguishable cultural stratigraphy, and extends to depths ranging from 1.9 feet to 2.1 feet. Generally, the artifact density appears to be consistent throughout all upper deposits and does not occur in definable clusters (See Appendix A.). The silty sand layer in the Shovel Test 3 yielded two diagnostic artifacts - a fragment of oriental export porcelain and a blue-on-white delft sherd. The lower portion of the exposed deposits consists of a transitional sterile layer (Stratum 4, 10YR 3/3 dark brown silty sand mottled with 7.5YR 5/4 brown silty clay), and a hard packed brown silty clay (Stratum 5, 7.5YR 5/4).

The soil profiles of the project area do not suggest a normal long-term pedological development of in-situ sediments. Specifically, the texture and hue difference between Strata 3 and 5 (Figure 2) is very significant, and the clay content of Stratum 5 is not likely to have been produced by leaching from overlaying soils. Furthermore, a clear cut stratigraphic boundary exists between Strata 3 and 5. These data suggest that the brown silty clay layer (Stratum 5) represents a zone of clay accumulation relating to a previously existing sediment sequence, with the upper portion of this old soil profile no longer extant. The removal of these overlying materials may have been associated with alteration of terrain during the construction of the mansion. The highly mottled Stratum 4 probably represents a trampled surface, contemporaneous with construction activities. The dark brown silty sand layer encountered in all shovel tests is almost certainly a man-made fill. This is demonstrated by absence of pedological development, the predominance of sand (a sediment with superior drainage characteristics) and the clear cut boundary separating the stratum from overlaying, modern organic layers. Most importantly, the weathering and random distribution of artifacts clearly indicate that the cultural material found in this layer represents displaced refuse.

The southern portion of the impact area, although not tested directly due to obstructions, is likely to feature similar cultural and stratigraphic characteristics. The reasons for this conclusion lie in the relationship between the area of impact and the mansion itself. All of the impact area is adjacent to the same structural feature - the original west wall of the south wing of the building. This thick wall of dressed mortared rock delineates the residential portion of the house and contains no entrance. It is, therefore, unlikely that this location experienced substantial traffic or was used for refuse disposal

during the historic period. Furthermore, the examination of the interior face of this wall in the herb cellar revealed an absence of any structural components extending outward into the outside sediments. This suggests a low probability for the occurrance of any outside subterranean features associated with the cellar.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The testing of the project area did not expose any intact and *in situ* archaeological deposits. The cultural materials retrieved during the testing were from a displaced refuse context, and have little potential to provide important information pertinent to the history of the Van Cortland Mansion. Also, the potential for buried subsurface features is low. The proposed stair and dry well excavations will therefore not impact any significant cultural resources.

APPENDIX A. ARTIFACT CATALOGUE

SHOVEL TEST 1

STRATUM	LEVEL	ARTIFACTS	DEPTH*	SOIL DESCRIPTION
2	1		0.2-0.9	10YR 3/3 dark brown
		2 slate fragments		silty loam
		1 coal fragment		
		1 slag fragment		
		1 piece of concrete		
		1 square nail fragment		
		1 glazed earthenware, sewer pipe fragment		
		1 oriental export porcelain rim shed		
3	1		0.9-1.7	10YR 3/3 dark brown
		3 clear curved bottle glass fragments		silty sand
		1 green flat glass fragment		
		2 coal fragment		
		1 square nail fragment		
		2 unidentifiable metal fragments		
3	2		1.7-2.1	
		1 brick fragment		
		4 flat glass fragments - 3 green, 1 clear		
		1 unglazed redware sherd		

* In tenths of feet

SHOVEL TEST 2

STRATUM	LEVEL	ARTIFACTS	DEPTH	SOIL DESCRIPTION
1	1	1 slate fragment	0.0-0.2	10YR 2/1 black silty
		2 mortar fragments		loam
		1 glass fragment		
		1 square cut nail fragment		
2	1	3 curved bottle glass fragments	0.2-0.6	10YR 3/3 dark brown silty loam
		1 flat glass fragment		
		1 safety glass fragment		
		1 square cut nail fragment		
		1 brick fragment		
		1 slag		
		2 coal		
		1 bottle cap - metal		
		2 limestone fragments		
		1 metal toy steering wheel (?)		
3	1	1 flat glass fragment	0.6-1.3	10YR 3/3 dark
		2 slate fragments		brown silty sand
		2 coal		
		5 brick fragments		

SHOVEL TEST 2 (Cont'd)

STRATUM	LEVEL	ARTIFACTS	DEPTH	SOIL DESCRIPTION
3	1	1 clam shell fragment	0.6-1.3	
		3 unidentifiable nails		
		1 glazed stoneware pipe fragment		
3	2	2 slate fragments		
		1 coal fragment		
		4 brick fragments		
		1 bone fragment		

SHOVEL TEST 3

STRATUM	LEVEL	ARTIFACTS	DEPTH	SOIL DESCRIPTION
1	1	1 unidentifiable nail	0.0-0.4	10YR 3/2 very
		fragment		dark grayish
		1 oriental export porcelain		brown silty sand
		sherd blue decoration		
2	1		0.4-0.9	10YR 3/3 dark
		1 curved bottle glass fragment		brown silty sand
		2 brick fragments		
		2 slate fragments		
		1 coal fragments		
		1 mortar fragments		
		1 clam shell fragment		
		1 unglazed redware sherd		
		1 square cut nail fragment		
2	2	1 delft sherd - blue on white	0.9-1.4	
		1 clear curved bottle glass		
		1 brown curved bottle glass		
		1 pipe stem fragment 4/64"		
		1 unidentifiable nail fragment		
		2 unidentifiable nail fragments		
		3 unidentifiable metal fragments		

SHOVEL TEST 3 (Cont'd)

STRATUM	LEVEL	ARTIFACTS	DEPTH	SOIL DESCRIPTION
2	3	2 brick fragments	1.4-1.9	
		1 coal fragment		
		1 plaster fragment		
		2 clear curved bottle glass		
		1 green flat glass		