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HP 2005

STAGE 1B FIELD SURVEY
WEST-CHAMBERS STREET
PROJECT
MANHATTAN, NEW YORK



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STAGE 1B FIELD SURVEY

**WEST-CHAMBERS STREET PROJECT
(LOT 9, BLOCK 142)**

MANHATTAN, NEW YORK

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I. INTRODUCTION

The West-Chambers Street Project site is located on a portion of Lot 9 at the western end of Block 142 in Manhattan. The 34,257-square-foot site is bordered by West Street to the west, Warren Street to the south, and Chambers Street to the north (Figure 1). West-Chambers Street Associates, LLC (WCSA) plans to develop the project site with a 29-story, mixed-use building of approximately 402,289 gross square feet (gsf). The approximately 300-foot-tall building would also contain ground-floor retail, a community facility, and an as-of-right below-grade accessory parking garage with 95 spaces.

Located on the western portion of the block bounded by West, Chambers, Greenwich, and Warren Streets, the current project site was once part of Site 5C in the former Washington Street Urban Renewal Area (WSURA¹). Previously used for City vehicle storage, the project site is currently a paved surface lot used as a parking facility. After September 11, 2001, the site was used as a staging area for World Trade Center (WTC) clean-up efforts and for a temporary AmeriCares facility. The site also previously hosted a vacant 4-story building at 179 West Street that was demolished by the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development in the Spring of 2003 to allow for the continuing activities related to Route 9A improvements.

A preliminary archaeological assessment conducted by Historical Perspectives, Inc. during January 1984, found that the project site—the former WSURA Site 5C—might have the potential for the presence of below-ground cultural material (Historical Perspectives, Inc. 1984; Figure 2). As noted in the 1984 report, “This block [the current Block 142] was both made land and natural land. After the waterfront was pushed westward beyond the project site bounds, it was covered by many types of structures” (page 33). Soil boring data, as well as interviews with residents of the time, indicated the presence of wood/timbers in the fill, which ranges from 7 to 40 feet below grade (page 39). In addition, there was no available documentation on a below-grade foundation within the project site (pages 33-34). The report, therefore, identified the location of the current project site as having the potential to contain archaeological resources specifically

¹ The WSURA project plans expired in January 2002.

associated with the former Hudson River waterfront. Given the lack of recorded historical development on the backyard area of the former house at 179 West Street, buried waterfront resources located on the project site might have remained relatively undisturbed.

Because documentary evidence does not securely constitute "ground truth," Stage 1B archaeological testing is designed to verify or deny the conclusions of the initial assessment by establishing the actual presence or absence of cultural resources on the site. In order to accomplish this task, field investigations were undertaken on the WSCA project site during February 2005. Testing, based on a protocol approved by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) on May 14, 2004, was not conducted in locations where known disturbance had occurred. A large test trench was explored and documented in order to determine the context and integrity of the soil strata present, as well as to further ascertain whether or not resources associated with the Hudson River waterfront were extant. The appropriate field notations, drawings and photographs were made during fieldwork (see Figures 3-5; Photographs A-H).

II. ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The WCSA project site is located on a portion of Lot 9, Block 142 in the Borough of Manhattan (see Figure 1). The site fronts on West Street with the Hudson River to the west. Historical maps indicate that the project area was located along the irregular shoreline of the Hudson River. The topography of the project area has changed because of the intentional landfilling along the shoreline of the Hudson River and the imposition of the City's street grid system on the landscape. The desire for new commercial/industrial waterfront real estate spurred this landfilling activity. By the second half of the nineteenth century, a few structures had been built on the current study block and the development of this area continued until a mixed urban neighborhood filled the landscape.

A recent U.S.G.S. topographical map shows the project area as a well defined urban industrial/residential neighborhood at an elevation of approximately 10-20 feet above sea level (see Figure 1). At present, the surface of the open project site is covered by asphalt, concrete and a large amount of modern trash (Photograph A).

III. FIELD METHODOLOGY

The preliminary archaeological assessment of the former WSURA Site 5C identified the site of the backyard area of the former house at 179 West Street as sensitive for potential waterfront resources (HPI 1984; 1990; see Figure 2). For the current WCSA project, this sensitive portion of Lot 9 was flagged as the Area of Potential Effect (APE). The testing procedure created in May 2004 for the APE specified the monitoring of the removal, by heavy machinery, of the modern overburden, followed by the excavation of a single test trench (approximately 65m x 20m in size). It was planned that HPI personnel would be present during the removal of the asphalt and overburden in order to ensure that only extraneous materials were removed by the backhoe. The proposed size of the test trench was determined by the need to allow for the sides to be canted during excavation as the available boring logs indicated that the depth of fill is at least 7.4 feet or more below the surface. Investigating a trench of this size would provide a window large enough to expose and explore potential waterfront features.

The LPC-approved protocol further noted that should any land retaining features be encountered, the excavation and evaluation of such features is a relatively standard and confined process (e.g., shovel shaving and/or hand excavation testing methods). Any features located would be sufficiently sampled so as to indicate if further testing is necessary. The testing protocol allowed for the installation of retaining walls if deep archaeological resources were discovered.

As detailed in the protocol, field archaeologists would direct the machine operator to remove only shallow increments of soil when nearing the location of a possible buried cultural surface. When distinct soil changes were encountered, subsurface archaeological testing would confirm these changes by shovel shaving a portion of the stratum in order to record an accurate description. The appropriate drawings and photographs would be made of each of the test areas and soil strata during the course of fieldwork.

Direct communications would be made by HPI personnel to representatives of LPC to discuss the conditions of the site testing and the realistic possibilities of intact resources.

IV. RESULTS OF INVESTIGATIONS

The Stage 1B archaeological testing of the site took place during February 2005. The primary objective of the Stage 1B testing was to ascertain the presence, or absence, and nature of any buried cultural resources on the site. In order to achieve this goal, a number of field procedures were undertaken at the site that are briefly described as follows: 1) the location of the test trench was chosen based on the information derived during the Stage 1A report; 2) the machine-excavated test trench was studied and mapped (field investigations were restricted to the location identified as sensitive for possible archaeological resources, the APE); and 3) soils in all test units were removed according to cultural levels.

No waterfront features or evidence of historical shoreline features were encountered during the archaeological investigation of the test trench (see Figure 3). The appropriate drawings and photographs were made of the test trench and soil strata exposed during the course of fieldwork (Figures 4 and 5).

The archaeological test trench was placed within the backyard area of the former house at 179 West Street on Lot 9 (see Figure 3). The trench was approximately 19 meters wide and 65 meters long. After removal of the surface asphalt and gravel bedding, excavation revealed a compact fill layer that was composed of architectural demolition debris and coarse reddish brown (5 YR 5/3) sand (see Photographs E, F, and H). The trench was divided into two sections (east and west) by the presence of a former, partially intact, undocumented foundation wall (see Figure 4; Photograph F). There was a single thick fill layer on the west side of the trench but on the east side of the trench, two layers of fill were identified. The uppermost compact fill layer on the east side contained large mortared brick foundation fragments and concrete blocks (see Photographs B and C). This stratum was underlain by a similar fill layer that did not contain large architectural debris and brick fragments (see Photographs E and F). This stratum was comprised mostly of compact reddish brown sand (5 YR 5/3). It is interesting to note that no small domestic artifacts (ceramics, bottle glass, plastic, metal cans) were observed within the fill (see Photographs B - H).

A thin brick floor was identified beneath the fill on both the east and west sides of the foundation wall within the trench (at depths between 2.8 and 3 meters beneath the surface). The un-mortared floor was not completely intact and broke apart easily during excavation (see Photographs E, F, and H). On the east side of the trench, the brick floor was on top of a thin layer of coarse sand (5 YR 4/6 yellowish red). Only a thin lens of this sand layer was visible beneath the brick floor on the west side of the trench.

Throughout the trench a thick layer of very dark grayish brown river sand (10YR 3/2) was exposed beneath the fill. No wood fragments or cut stones were identified in the sand. The water table was encountered at approximately 4.6 meters below the surface within this layer. During the excavation of this layer, deep tests were completed in order to affirm that no waterfront features were present.

At this point, HPI archaeologists contacted LPC to inform them that the investigation: 1) *had extended into the former river sand stratum (below the water table) and did not reveal any evidence of waterfront features*; 2) uncovered disturbed soil strata (a previously undocumented basement foundation) within the WCSA project site; and, 3) did not indicate that further testing would likely produce significant data. Excavation was halted between the depths of 4.6 and 5.1 meters beneath the surface.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

No evidence of pre-twentieth century waterfront features was identified during the archaeological testing at the WCSA site. Instead, testing revealed fragments of an undocumented crude addition to the former building at 179 West Street. The addition was found to have a basement that extended to depths of almost three meters beneath the surface. No evidence was found that indicates that any cultural resources were once present beneath the addition. A review of archaeological field investigations in the immediate project site vicinity indicate a similar lack of buried waterfront features (e.g., Greenhouse Consultants, Inc. 1986)

In summary, Stage 1B testing found that the current project site lacks sufficient integrity to produce significant archaeological resources. Therefore, due to the disturbed nature of the soil strata, the presence of an undocumented addition, and the lack of any evidence of waterfront features, *further archaeological consideration for the site is not warranted.*

VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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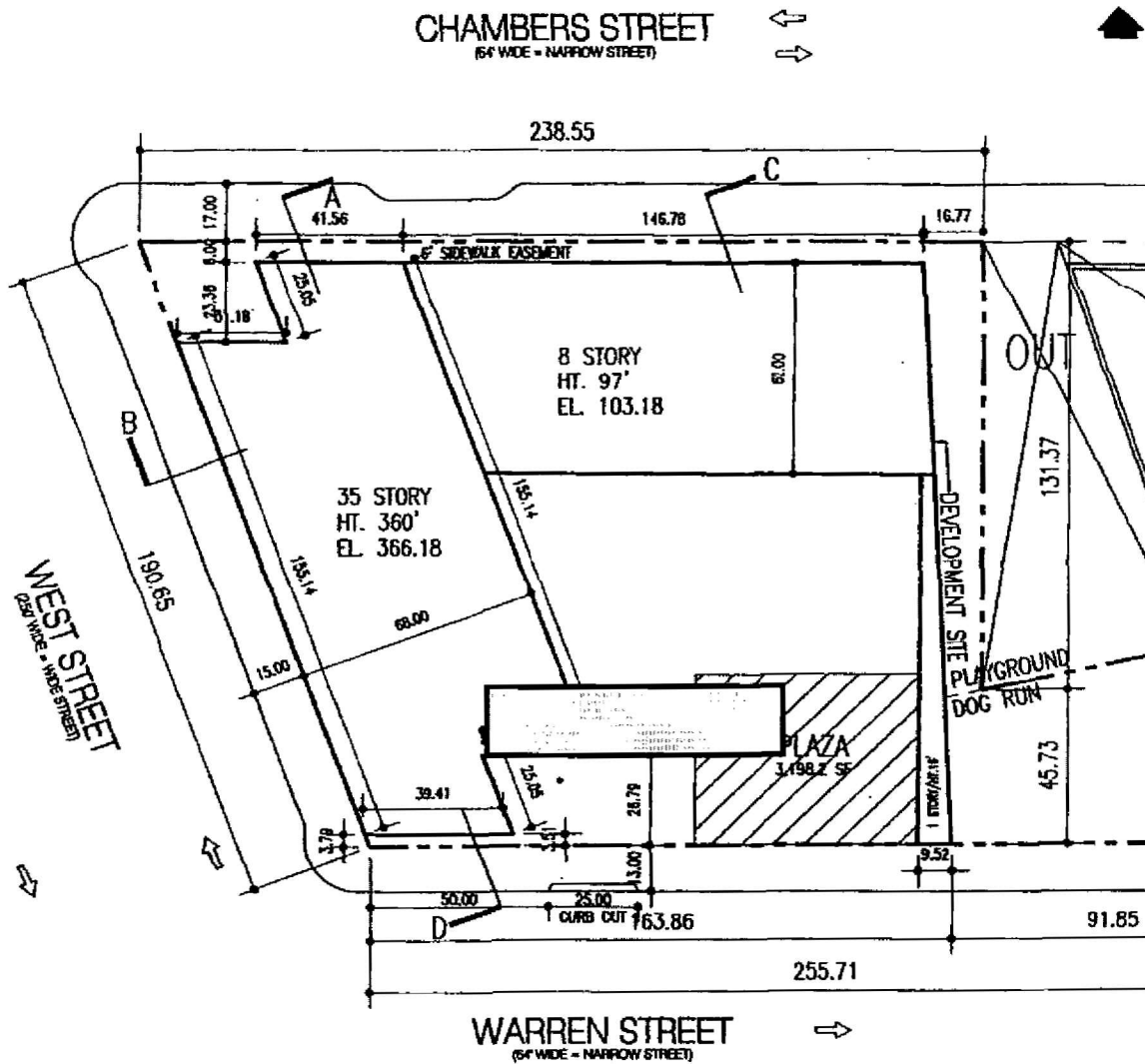
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Location of Archaeological Sensitivity

Figure 2. Block 142, Lot 9. Location of Archaeological Sensitivity.

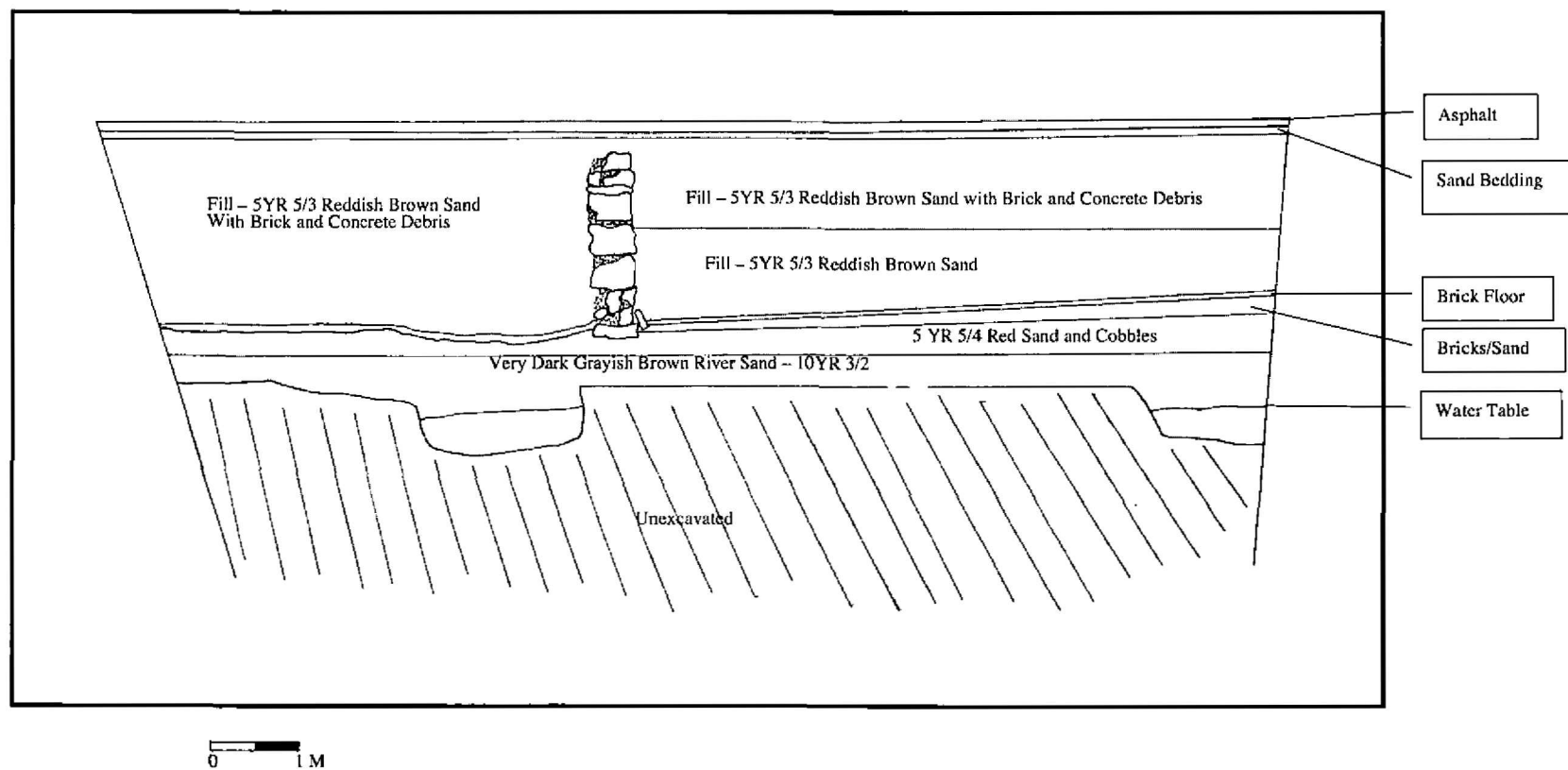


Figure 4. Profile of the North Wall of Test Trench.

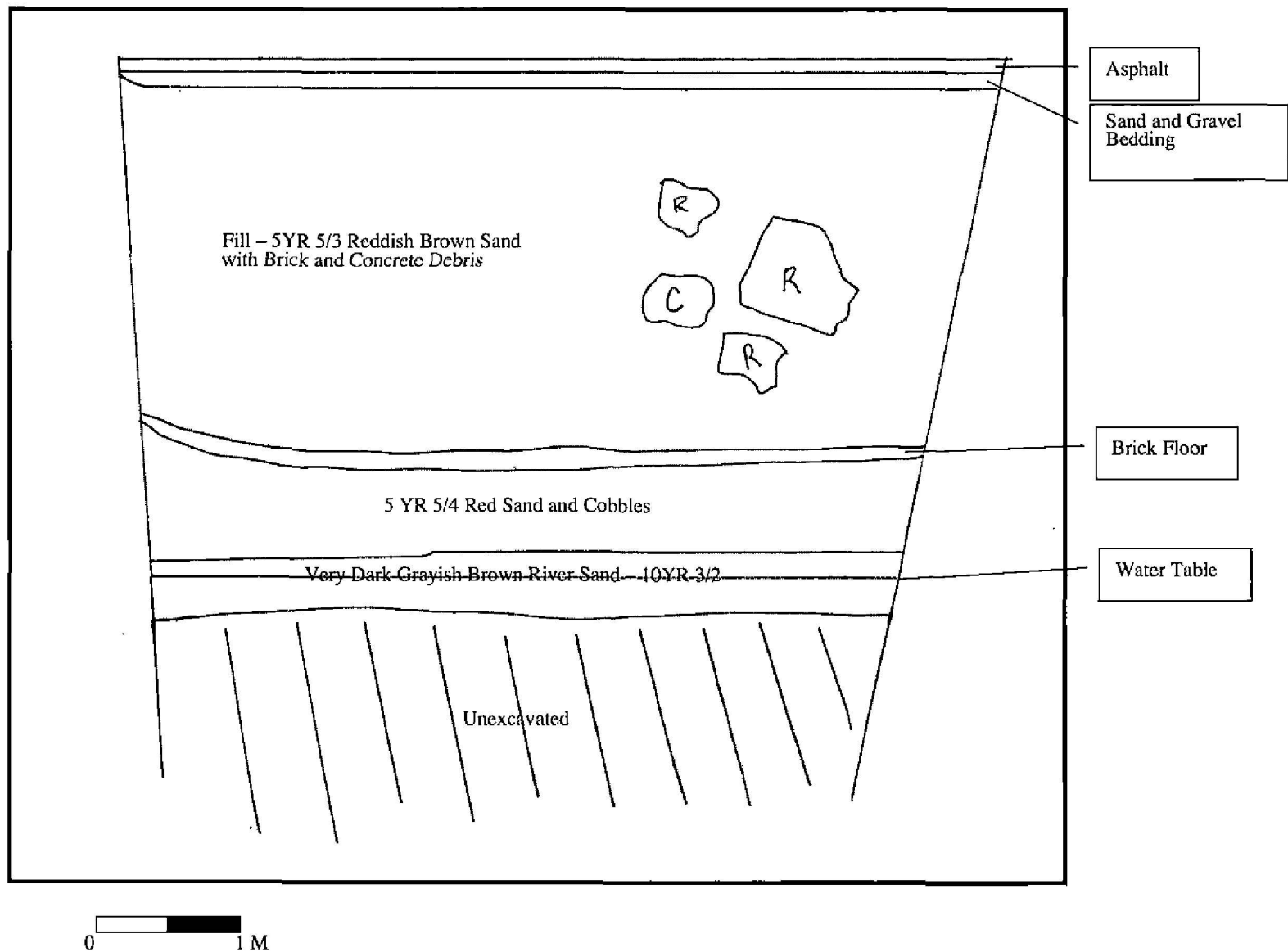


Figure 5. Profile of the East Wall of Test Trench.



Photograph A: Paved Parking Lot within the Project Site.



Photograph B: Large Fragments of Architectural Debris Were Identified in the Fill.



Photograph C: Large Fragments of Architectural Debris (Brick Foundation, Pipes, Cut Stone).

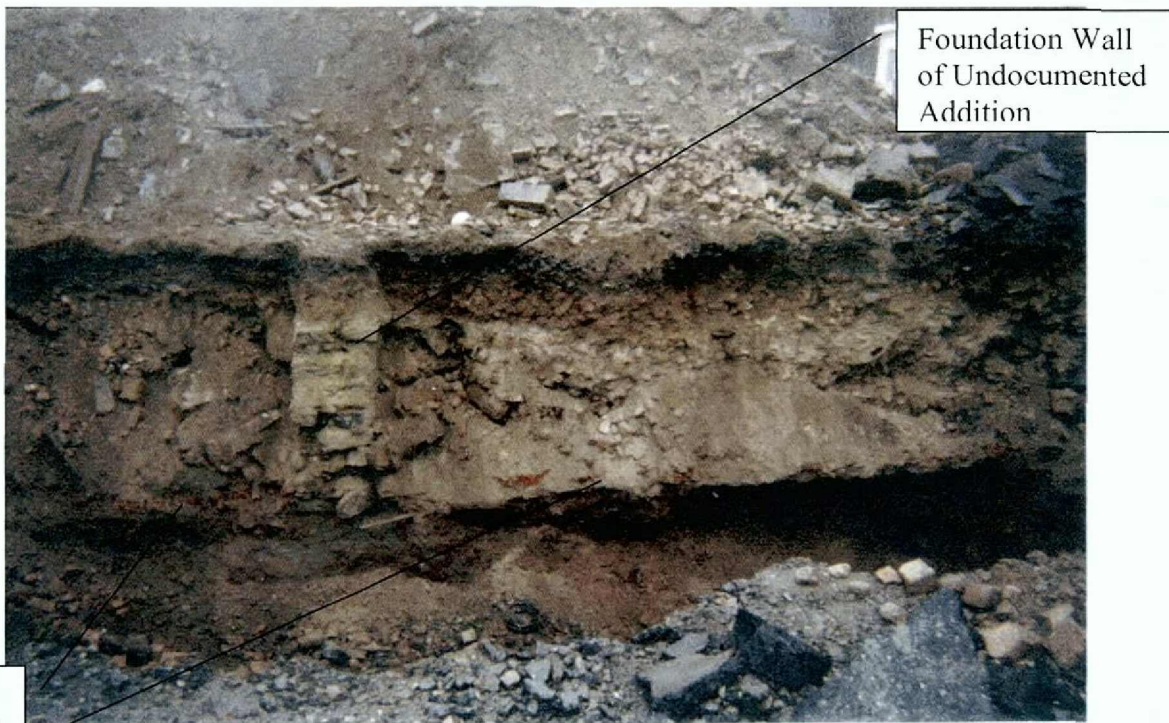


Brick Basement Floor

Photograph D: Stratigraphic Sequence at Northeast Corner of Trench During Excavation.



Photograph E: Final Profile of North Wall at Northeast Corner of Trench.



Photograph F. Profile of North Wall at the Center of the Trench.



Foundation Wall of
Undocumented Addition

Water Table

Photograph G. North Wall During Excavation of Trench.



Brick Basement Floor

Water Table

Photograph H. Profile of the North Wall at Northwest Corner of Trench.