



Phase IA Archaeological Assessment NYCHA Chelsea Houses Addition Block 723, Lot 15 New York, New York

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Prepared For:

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March 2007

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

SHPO Project Review Number (if available): none

Involved State and Federal Agencies: New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)

Phase of Survey: Phase IA Archaeological Assessment

Location Information

Location: Block 723, Lot 15, New York, New York. The project site is located on the northwest corner of Ninth Avenue and West 25th Street. Minor Civil Division: 06101, Manhattan County: New York

Survey Area

Length: 100 feet Width: 100 feet

USGS 7.5 Minute Quadrangle Map: Jersey City

Archaeological Survey Overview Number & Interval of Shovel Tests: N/A Number & Size of Units: N/A Width of Plowed Strips: N/A Surface Survey Transect Interval: N/A, urban area with paved surfaces

Results of Archaeological Survey

Number & name of precontact sites identified: None Number & name of historic sites identified: None Number & name of sites recommended for Phase II/Avoidance: None

Report Authors(s): Julie Abell Horn, M.A. R.P.A., Historical Perspectives, Inc.

Date of Report: March 2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) is proposing to construct a 20-story building with 128 units, 19,470 square feet of neighborhood retail and below grade parking for at least 33 cars in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan. The project site is located on Block 723, Lot 15, on the northwest corner of Ninth Avenue and West 25th Street (Figures 1 and 2). The 9,870 square foot site is presently used as parking for 22 cars associated with NYCHA's Chelsea Houses development. It also holds two compactors and bulk container dumpsters. Historically, the project site included lots 29-36. Historic lots 29 and 30 fronted West 25th Street and historic lots 31-36 fronted Ninth Avenue. Because the proposed project includes the complete 100 by 100 foot property, the entire project site is considered the Area of Potential Effect (APE).

Historical Perspectives, Inc. (HPI) has undertaken a Phase IA Archaeological Assessment of the Chelsea Houses Addition project site in order to: 1) identify any potential archaeological resources that might have been present on the site, and 2) examine the construction history of the study site in order to estimate the probability that any such potential resources might have survived and remain on the site undisturbed.

Based on the degree of disturbance to the project site from construction of the former buildings, there is virtually no likelihood that the natural landform and original ground surface of the property survives beneath the present parking lot. The soil boring data from 1959 and 1961 do not indicate an upper organic stratum (or A horizon) beneath the fill layer, suggesting that the natural ground surface was obliterated by later earthmoving. Due to this extensive disturbance, any potential precontact resources would likely have been destroyed. For these reasons, HPI concludes that the project site does not possess precontact archaeological sensitivity.

The archival research also indicated that historic period archaeological sensitivity is low. Although there were two structures on the project site for over five years prior to the introduction of municipal water and sewers, occupants of these houses could not be traced in the archival record, and later building episodes appear to have obliterated the former yard areas where any potential archaeological resources (such as shaft features) would have been located. The project site lots were reconfigured and new houses built after 1847, and it is probable that these buildings were hooked up to available city water and sewers at the time they were crected, negating the need for rear yard shaft features. Although the original buildings along West 25th Street would not have had access to city sewers when they were first built, requiring use of rear yard privies and/or cesspools, the later buildings constructed on these lots almost completely covered the former yard areas, presumably destroying any remains of these potential features.

To conclude, the only former yard areas where shaft features may have been located (behind the buildings fronting Ninth Avenue closer to West 25th Street prior to 1847, and the rear yards of buildings fronting West 25th Street from ca. 1848-1856) were later built over with large structures containing basements. Construction of these basements (and the large builder's trenches necessary for them) would have destroyed any potential privies or cisterns, which usually were not excavated more than 10-15 feet below grade at most. Soil borings note that the modern water table depth was only about 15 feet below the existing ground surface (and may have been higher during the nineteenth century), suggesting that any potential wells in this portion of the project site, which would have been excavated as deep as the historic water table, probably also were destroyed by later building episodes. Finally, excavation for the adjacent Chelsea Houses complex in 1962 may also have affected this portion of the project site.

Based on these findings, HPI recommends no additional archaeological investigations for the NYCHA Chelsea Houses Addition project site.

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- 2. Project site showing detail of surface parking lot with iron fence surrounding property. View looking west from sidewalk on Ninth Avenue with West 25th Street in background.
- Project site showing detail of dumpster/compactor area with parking lot in foreground. View looking north across intersection of Ninth Avenue and West 25th Street.

I. INTRODUCTION

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) is proposing to construct a 20-story building with 128 units, 19,470 square feet of neighborhood retail and below grade parking for at least 33 cars in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan. The project site is located on Block 723, Lot 15, on the northwest corner of Ninth Avenue and West 25th Street (Figures 1 and 2). The 9,870 square foot site is presently used as parking for 22 cars associated with NYCHA's Chelsea Houses development. It also holds two compactors and bulk container dumpsters. Historically, the project site included lots 29-36. Historic lots 29 and 30 fronted West 25th Street and historic lots 31-36 fronted Ninth Avenue. Because the proposed project includes the complete 100 by 100 foot property, the entire project site is considered the Area of Potential Effect (APE).

Historical Perspectives, Inc. (HPI) has undertaken a Phase IA Archaeological Assessment of the Chelsea Houses Addition project site in order to: 1) identify any potential archaeological resources that might have been present on the site, and 2) examine the construction history of the study site in order to estimate the probability that any such potential resources might have survived and remain on the site undisturbed.

This Phase IA Archaeological Assessment was prepared to satisfy the requirements of New York State's environmental review process and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and complies with the standards of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (NYSOPRHP) (New York Archaeological Council 1994; NYSOPRHP 2005) and the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) (LPC 2002). The HPI project team consisted of Julie Abell Horn, M.A., R.P.A., who assisted with the research and wrote the report; Nancy Dickinson, who conducted the site visit and the majority of the research; and Cece Saunders, M.A., R.P.A. who managed the project and provided editorial and interpretive assistance.

II. METHODOLOGY

The present study entailed review of various resources.

- Historic maps were reviewed at the Map Division of the New York Public Library and using various online websites. These maps provided an overview of the topography and a chronology of land usage for the study site.
- Selected deeds and other records pertaining to the property were reviewed at the Manhattan Borough City Register's Office. Emphasis was placed on nineteenth-century records.
- New York City Department of Building (DOB) and selected nineteenth-century tax assessment records for the property were reviewed at the New York City Municipal Archives and additional building records were reviewed at the Manhattan Borough Department of Buildings.
- City directory and federal census records pertaining to the property's former owners and occupants were reviewed at the New York Public Library and using online resources.
- Soil borings were provided by NYCHA. These borings are discussed below and included in their entirety as Appendix A.
- Photographs and other materials relating to the Chelsea Houses development were reviewed in the NYCHA Collection, housed at the LaGuardia and Wagner Archives at LaGuardia Community College (CUNY) in Long Island City, Queens.
- Previous archaeological sites and surveys were reviewed using data available from the NYSOPRHP and the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC).
- Last, a site visit was conducted on February 7, 2007 to assess any obvious or unrecorded subsurface disturbance (Photographs 1-3).

III. BACKGROUND RESEARCH

A. CURRENT CONDITIONS

As described in the Introduction, the project site, an approximately 100 by 100 foot parcel, is presently used primarily as a surface parking lot for the Chelsea Houses complex (Photographs 1 and 2). The northeastern portion of the project site contains two compactors and bulk container dumpsters, which at the time of the field survey were

covered by roofing and scaffolding (Photograph 3). The project site is enclosed on the Ninth Avenue and West 25th Street frontages by an iron fence. Beyond the compactors and dumpsters to the northeast, the property is bounded by the 10-story (with basement) Heywood Building. The northwestern side of the project site is bounded by more of the surface parking lot, and Building 2 of the Chelsea Houses complex (which is 21 stories high with a basement) is located just beyond the parking lot.

B. TOPOGRAPHY AND HYDROLOGY

According to Viele's 1865 Sanitary and Topographic Atlas of the City of New York (Figure 3), the project site was originally a low-lying area located immediately adjacent to a drainage that emptied into the Hudson River. The surrounding area was all shown as meadowland. The intersection of Ninth Avenue and West 25th Street was shown to be at elevation 13 feet and the intersection of Ninth Avenue and West 26th Street at elevation 18 feet. During the twentieth century, these intersections were mapped at elevations 18 and 19 feet, respectively, suggesting that the ground surface was raised several feet by filling over time (Sanborn 1930, 1951 [see Figures 7 and 8]).

C. GEOLOGY

Manhattan Island lies within the Hudson Valley region and is considered to be part of the New England Upland Physiographic Province (Schuberth 1968:10). The underlying geology is made up of gneiss and mica schist with heavy, intercalated beds of coarse grained, dolomitic marble and thinner layer of serpentine. During the three known glacial periods, the land surface in the Northeast was carved, scraped, and eroded by advancing and retreating glaciers. With the final retreat during the Post-Pleistocene, glacial debris, a mix of sand, gravel, and clay, formed the many low hills or moraines that constitute the present topography of the New York City area (USDA 2005).

D. SOILS

In 2005, the Natural Resources Conservation Service published its first comprehensive soil survey for New York City. Much of lower Manhattan, including the project site, is mapped as "Pavement and buildings, outwash substratum, 0-5 percent slopes." This mapping unit is described as:

Nearly level to gently sloping, highly urbanized areas with more than 80 percent of the surface covered by impervious pavement and buildings, over glacial outwash; generally located in urban centers (USDA 2005:14).

Prior to construction of the present Chelsea Houses public housing complex on the block, a number of soil borings were completed (NYCHA 1959b, 1961b). These soil borings are reproduced as Appendix A. None of the soil borings were located specifically within the project site, since there were still buildings located on the property at the time, but it is useful to note the conditions found in soil borings immediately adjacent to the project site.

A number of borings were located within the future footprint of Building 2, located just west of the project site (NYCHA 1961b). The closest of these borings to the APE showed that the upper soil stratum consisted of mixed fill, to depths of 11.5-13 feet below grade. Below the fill was a stratum described as medium to coarse brown sand, with gravel and traces of silt, which was about 9 feet thick. This stratum was probably part of the natural soil column, although likely was not the original ground surface, but rather a lower stratum. The third stratum was noted as fine brown sandy silt, and extended another 15 feet. Bedrock was encountered at about 40 feet below grade. The water table was measured at about 15-17 feet below grade.

A second set of borings was located along the block's sidewalks (NYCHA 1959b). The two closest borings to the project site, one along West 25th Street and one along Ninth Avenue, showed similar conditions to those on the interior of the block, with fill noted to depths of 8-13 feet below grade, bedrock between 37-47 feet below grade, and the water table at 16-18 feet below grade.

E. ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES WITHIN A ONE MILE RADIUS

Research conducted using data from the NYSOPRHP, the LPC, and the library of HPI revealed no precontact period archaeological sites within the project site or within a one mile radius. However, there are several historical sites within a one-mile radius of the project site. These sites are listed below.

NYSOPRHP Site Number	Site Name/Description	Location	Site Type/Time Period
A06101.009530	Baruch College Site	Southeast of 25 th and Lexington Ave.	19 th century horse stable, brick drains and cobble floor
A06101.001273	Sheridan Square	Christopher Street	18 th /19 th century features
A06101.013209	219-227 W. 4th Street	219-227 W. 4th Street	Unknown
A06101.013210	229 W. 4 th Street	229 W. 4 th Street	Unknown

F. HISTORY OF THE PROJECT SITE

Historic documents and maps identify the project block as once being part of the Mary Clarke farm, but undeveloped (Holmes 1869). Clarke was the widow of Captain Thomas Clarke, who had acquired much of what is now known as the Chelsea neighborhood in 1750. Mary Clarke was the owner of the first "Chelsea House," which was built in 1777 just south of what would later be West 23rd Street, between Ninth and Tenth Avenues (Kouwenhoven 1953:253). Clarke's heirs dispersed her landholdings to various buyers, although the purchasers of land that included the project site are unclear. In 1823, however, deeds indicate that William Barnes, a cabinetmaker and ironmonger, purchased the entire project site (now noted as lots 29-36) from James Hamilton, a Master in Chancery (Liber 168, 1823:52). At about this time, Barnes also acquired a number of other lots on the block; by 1845 he had about 25 lots on Block 723 alone (Liber 455, 1845:550). However, William Barnes never appears to have lived on the project site or block. City directories note his residence on Greenwich Street for the 1820s and 1830s.

An undated tax map for the 16th Ward indicated that the project site contained four lots (rather than the eight smaller lots noted in deed records), all fronting Ninth Avenue, and were attributed to William Barnes. The first available tax assessment records were made in 1836, and indicate that in this year the southern two lots (closest to West 25th Street) had houses on them while the remaining two lots were undeveloped. Tax records continued to note the two houses and two vacant lots through at least 1842. In 1845, the tax records indicated that there was only one house on the project site, and three vacant lots.

In 1847, William Barnes distributed his landholdings on the project site among his family (Liber 492, 1847:255-265). An updated tax map, made in 1851, showed that the project site now was divided into eight lots, and that each one was owned by a member of the Barnes family. In 1848, tax records showed that the two lots along West 25th Street and the northern three lots along Ninth Avenue had been developed with houses, while the remaining three lots fronting Ninth Avenue were still vacant. By 1851, all eight of the lots contained houses. In 1860, the last year in which tax records were reviewed, the data showed that the houses fronting West 25th Street were each 2 stories high, and measured 16.5 feet wide (the width of the lot) and 26 feet deep (the lots were about 50 feet deep). The houses on the six lots fronting Ninth Avenue were each 3.5 stories high, and measured 16.5 feet wide (the width of the lots) and 46 feet deep (the northern three lots were 100 feet deep and the southern three lots were 67 feet deep).

A review of federal censuses and city directories through the 1850s suggests that none of the Barnes family members, who collectively owned the project site lots through at least the 1880s, ever lived in any of the houses on the project site; rather it appears that the houses were rented to tenants. Unfortunately, it was not possible to trace the names of these renters in the archival records, and it is possible that many of them were short-term occupants.

Beginning in 1851, historic maps show the project site lots and their buildings. The 1852 Dripps map (Figure 4) shows the configuration of the eight project site lots and the houses on them. The 1859 Perris map (Figure 5) confirms the placement of the houses, and shows that the buildings facing Ninth Avenue were made of brick, while the two houses along West 25th Street were frame and were sited slightly in from the street. Maps made through the 1880s continued to show this identical layout (Bromley 1879; Robinson 1883, 1885). However, by issuance of the

1890 Sanborn map (Figure 6), the two frame houses along West 25th Street had been replaced with five-story buildings sited flush with the street. Additionally, some of the structures along Ninth Avenue, noted as four stories, now had additions illustrated. Sanborn maps made in 1911, 1930 (Figure 7), and 1951 (Figure 8) confirm that all the buildings on the project site had basements, and that the structures along Ninth Avenue were used both as stores and dwellings, whereas the structures on West 25th Street were exclusively residential. These maps also show that over time, a number of the buildings on the project site had additions built, eliminating more of the former yard areas on the properties.

The structures on the project site began to be demolished by the late 1950s. A survey of the future Chelsea Houses public housing complex site on the block made in 1959 showed that the southern three structures along Ninth Avenue and the two along West 25th Street had already been razed and the area was used for parking (NYCHA 1959a). The remaining buildings along Ninth Avenue appear to have stood until ca. 1963. DOB records indicate that a permit was filed for the demolition of the buildings in April 1961. However, a photograph of the Chelsea Houses complex already under construction, dated November 1962, shows that these buildings had not yet been demolished (NYCHA 1962).

Since demolition of the various nineteenth-century structures on the project site from ca. 1959-1963, there has been no additional construction on the property. Plans for the present parking lot, filed by NYCHA in 1961, show that there were to be various drainage lines under the parking lot, but otherwise no additional construction on the APE (NYCHA 1961a). Since the 1960s there is no indication that the property has been used for any purpose other than a surface parking lot and the dumpsters/compactors location.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

A. PRECONTACT SENSITIVITY AND DISTURBANCE RECORD

Based on the degree of disturbance to the project site from construction of the former buildings, there is virtually no likelihood that the natural landform and original ground surface of the property survives beneath the present parking lot. The soil boring data from 1959 and 1961 do not indicate an upper organic stratum (or A horizon) beneath the fill layer, suggesting that the natural ground surface was obliterated by later earthmoving. Due to this extensive disturbance, any potential precontact resources would likely have been destroyed. For these reasons, HPI concludes that the project site does not possess precontact archaeological sensitivity.

B. HISTORIC PERIOD SENSITIVITY AND DISTURBANCE RECORD

According to tax assessment records, the project site was originally divided into four 25-foot wide lots fronting Ninth Avenue, and prior to 1847 the two lots closest to West 25th Street had houses somewhere on them. Although it is not possible to know exactly where on the lots these houses were sited, it is probable that they were located near the Ninth Street side of the lots. By ca. 1847 the project site had been reconfigured to include six lots along Ninth Avenue and two lots along West 25th Street, and the original houses on the wider lots had all been demolished. After 1847, the eight lots that then comprised the project site all were redeveloped with structures; five of the lots had new building by 1848 and the remaining three lots had new buildings by 1851.

Public water was available under both Ninth Avenue and West 25th Street at some point between 1842-1850 and sewers were laid under Ninth Avenue in 1845 and West 25th Street in 1856 (Anonymous 1850; Board of Aldermen 1857). Prior to 1847, when the project site contained two houses fronting Ninth Avenue, residents would have relied exclusively on rear yard shaft features such as wells, cisterns, and privies for their water and sewage needs. However, when the lots were reconfigured and new structures constructed after 1847, it is probable that these buildings were hooked up to available city water and sewers at the time they were crected, negating the need for rear yard shaft features. Although the original buildings along West 25th Street would not have had access to city sewers when they were first built, requiring use of rear yard privies and/or cesspools, the later buildings constructed on these lots almost completely covered the former yard areas, presumably destroying any remains of these potential features.

Unfortunately, the archival research was unable to identify past occupants of the various houses on the property, either prior to 1847, or between 1847-1860. This is because the project site historic lots were owned by members of the extended Barnes family from the 1830s through the 1880s, but none of these people ever lived in the buildings they

owned and appear to have rented the structures to tenants who could not be traced using archival records. Therefore, specific occupation of the buildings on the project site during the nineteenth century is unknown.

The configuration of the structures on the eight historic lots remained constant through the 1880s, although by 1890 the two houses along West 25th Street had been replaced with larger buildings. After 1890, many of the buildings had extensions built off their back sides, shrinking the size of former yard areas where potential historic period archaeological resources would have been located. Of particular note, the areas that would have once been yard areas for the southern two 25-foot wide lots where houses were located prior to 1847 were almost completely obliterated by buildings after 1847 and building extensions after 1890.

Figure 9, an overlay of previous lot configurations and building episodes on the project site, reveals that areas that still contained undisturbed open yards through the twentieth century were behind the buildings that fronted Ninth Avenue closer to West 26th Street. However, because these lots were only developed after 1847, when residents would have had access to municipal water and sewer services, there is less likelihood that any rear yard shaft features would have been located in these former yard areas.

The only former yard areas where shaft features may have been located (behind the buildings fronting Ninth Avenue closer to West 25th Street prior to 1847, and the rear yards of buildings fronting West 25th Street from ca. 1848-1856) were later built over with large structures containing basements. Construction of these basements (and the large builder's trenches necessary for them) would have destroyed any potential privies or cisterns, which usually were not excavated more than 10-15 feet below grade at most. Soil borings note that the modern water table depth was only about 15 feet below the existing ground surface (and may have been higher during the nineteenth century), suggesting that any potential wells in this portion of the project site, which would have been excavated as deep as the historic water table, probably also were destroyed by later building episodes. Finally, excavation for the adjacent Chelsea Houses complex in 1962 may also have affected this portion of the project site.

Based on these findings, HPI concludes that there is little to no historic period archaeological sensitivity remaining on the project site.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

As described above, HPI assigned the project site both a low precontact and historic period archaeological sensitivity. As such, HPI recommends no additional archaeological investigations for the NYCHA Chelsea Houses Addition project site.

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FIGURE 1: Project site on 1979 Brooklyn, 1982 Jersey City, 1988 Central Park and 1989 Weehawken U.S.G.S. 7.5 Minute Quadrangles.



0 500 1000 1500 2000 2500 FEET

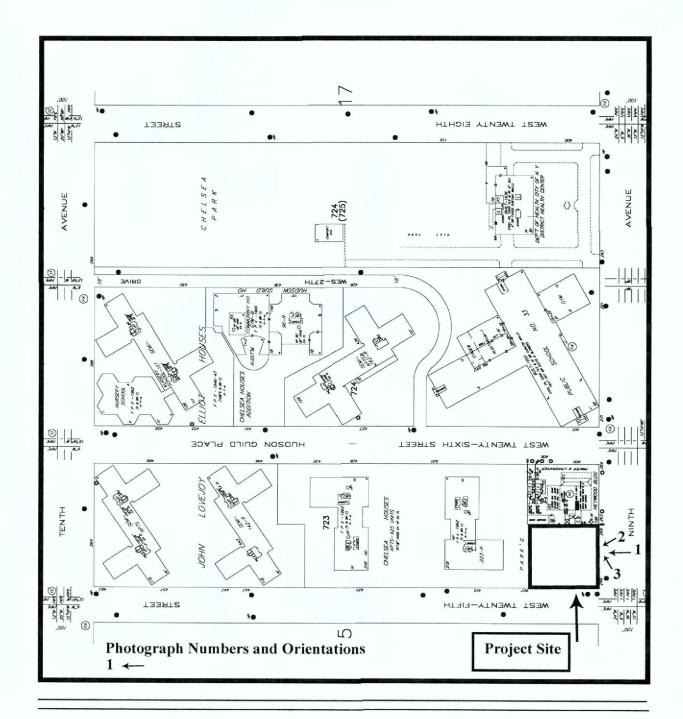


FIGURE 2: Project site and photograph locations on modern Sanborn map.



150 FEET 250

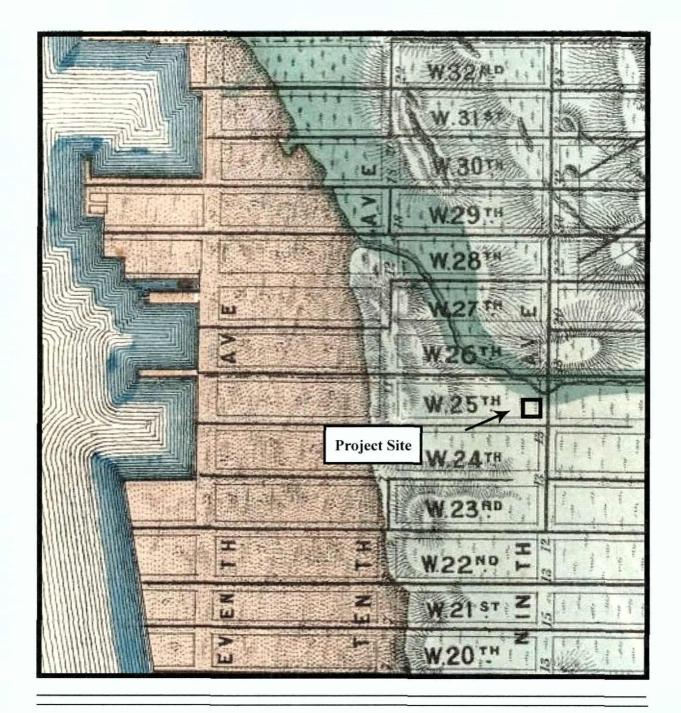


FIGURE 3: Sanitary and Topographic Atlas of the City of New York (Viele 1865).



1600 FEET 1200

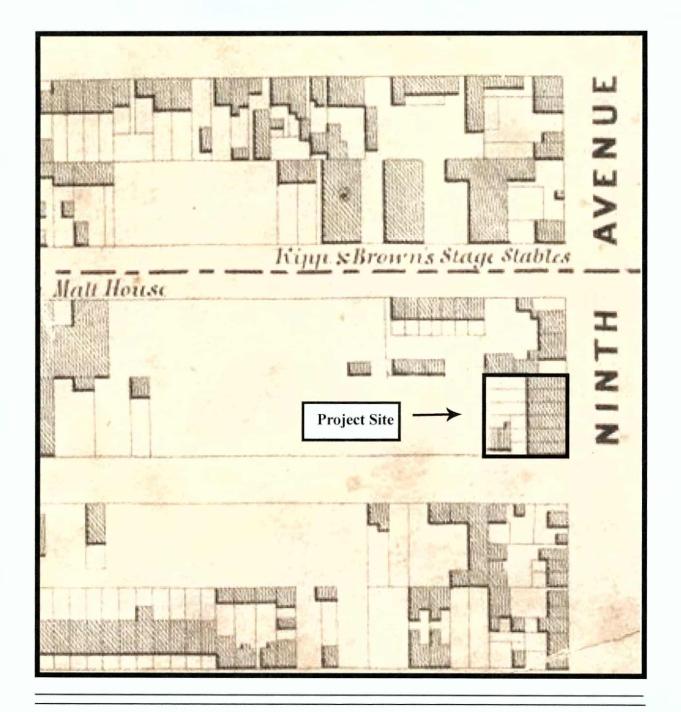


FIGURE 4: Map of the City of New York Extending Northward to 50th Street (Dripps 1852).

250 FEET 150 50 200

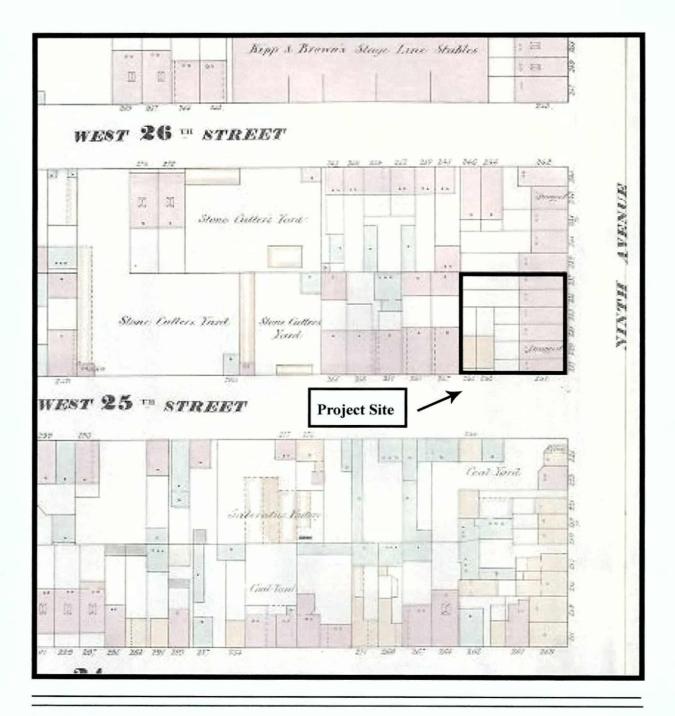


FIGURE 5: Maps of the City of New York (Perris 1859).

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250 FEET 100 150 200

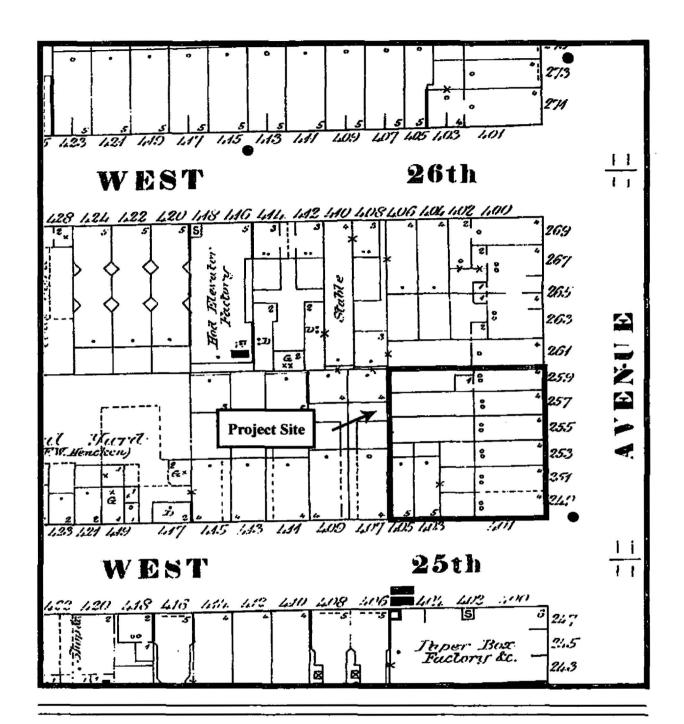


FIGURE 6: Insurance Maps of New York City (Sanborn 1890).

50 150 200 250 FEET

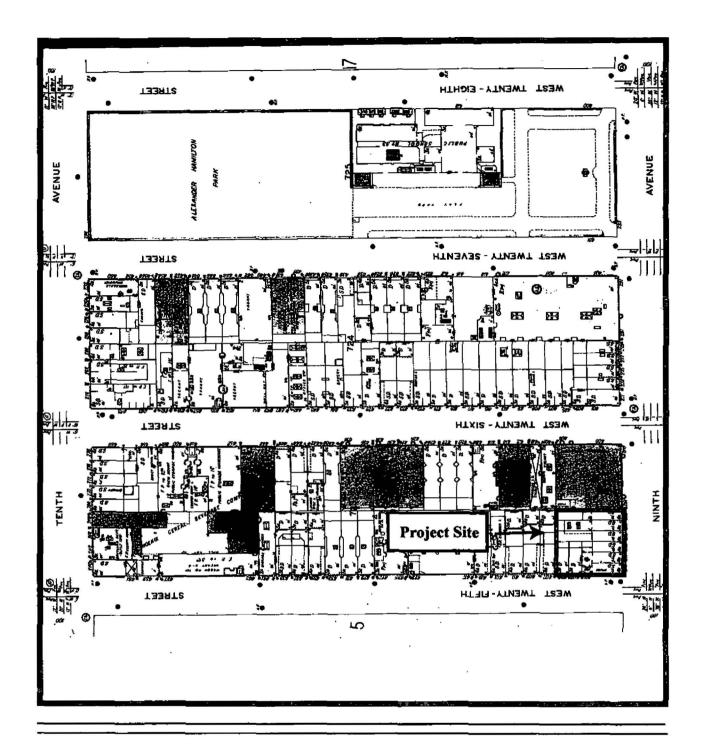
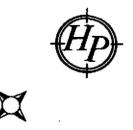


FIGURE 7: Insurance Maps of New York City (Sanborn 1930).



59 193 150 200 250 PZPT

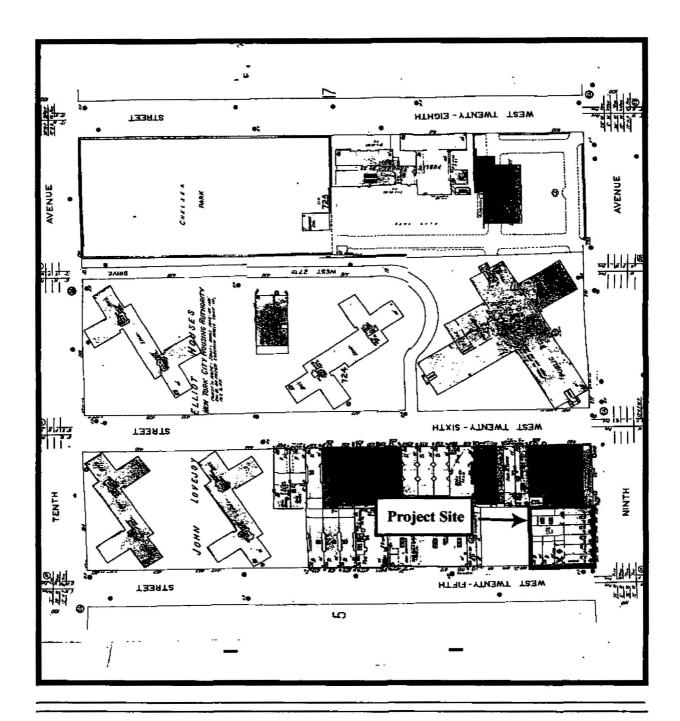


FIGURE 8: Insurance Maps of New York City (Sanborn 1951).

I

FLET 158 250

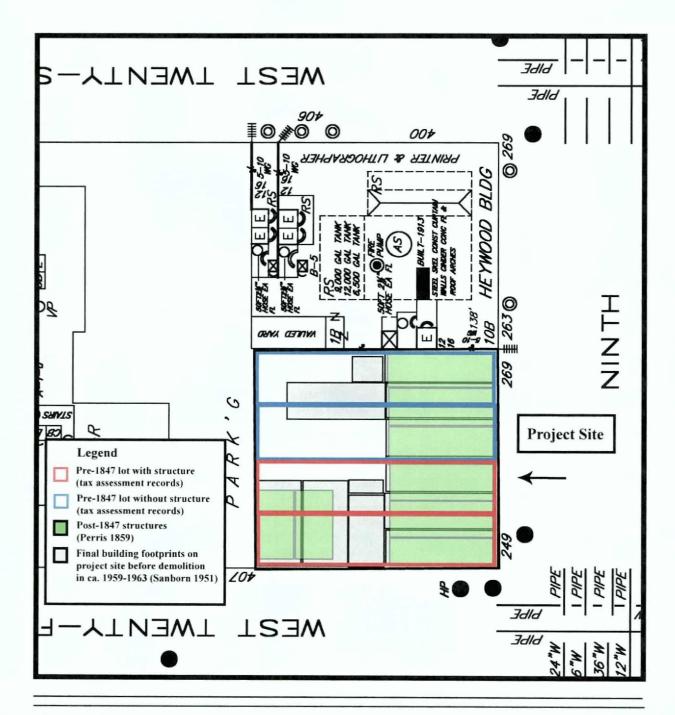


FIGURE 9: Composite Map-Documented Structures Overlay (modern Sanborn).



100 FEET 60



Photograph 1: Project site showing surface parking lot in center and dumpster/compactor area on right. Note Chelsea House Building 2 in background. View looking northwest across Ninth Avenue at West 25th Street.

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Photograph 2: Project site showing detail of surface parking lot with iron fence surrounding property. View looking west from sidewalk on Ninth Avenue with West 25th Street in background.



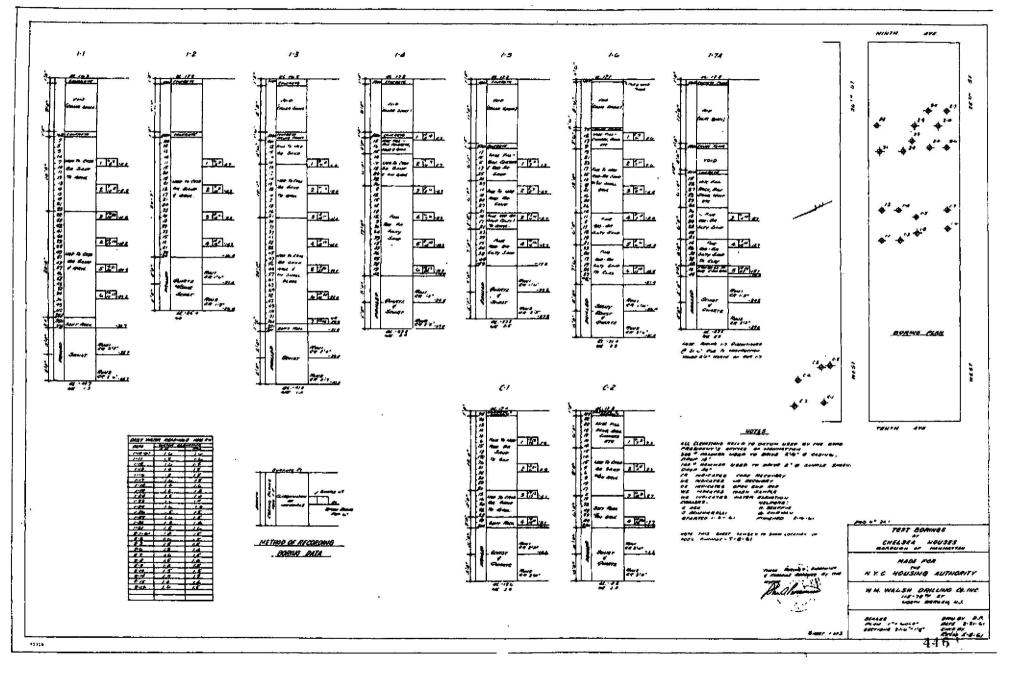
Photograph 3: Project site showing detail of dumpster/compactor area with parking lot in foreground. View looking north across intersection of Ninth Avenue and West 25th Street.

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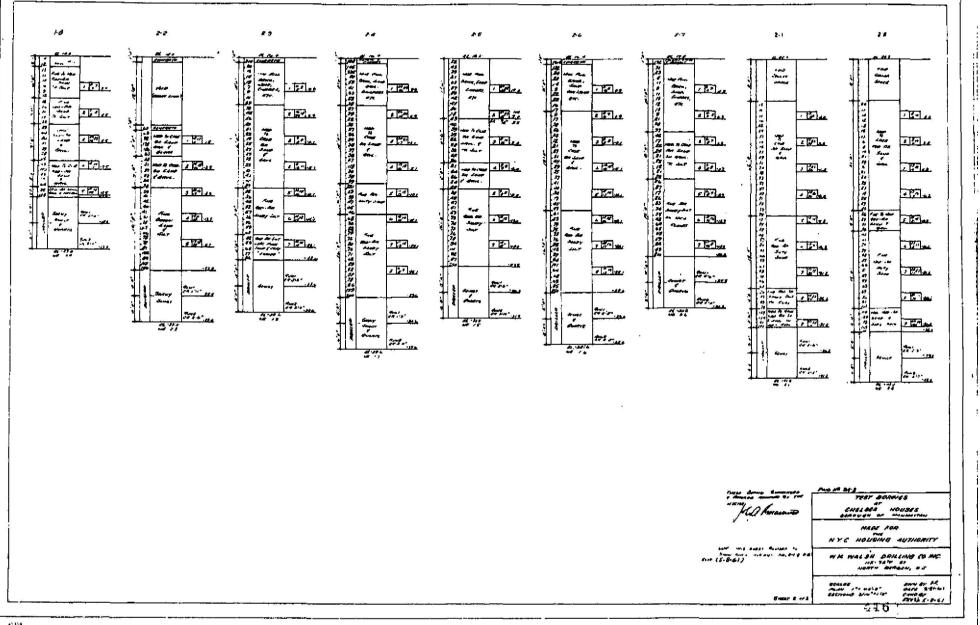
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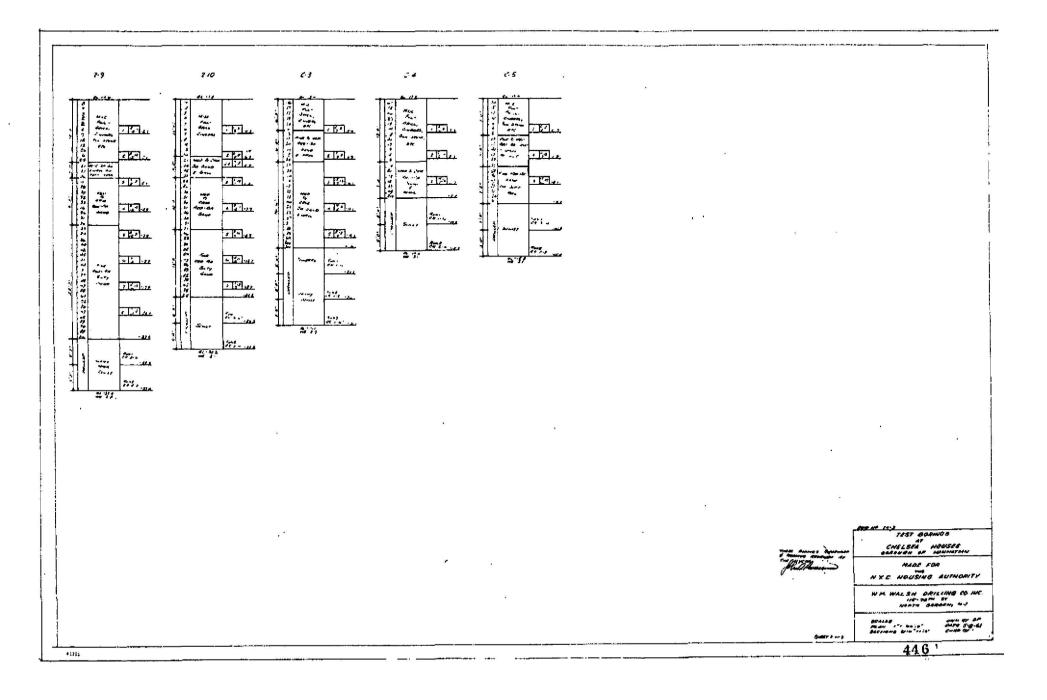
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