

May 2009

Prepared for:
MTA/NYC Transit

**Archaeological Monitoring for the
37th Street and Park Avenue
Ventilation Facility,
East Side Access Project**

New York City, New York

Prepared by:

URS

Burlington, New Jersey

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Prepared for:

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New York, New York

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Abstract

This report details the findings of archaeological monitoring that URS Corporation (URS) conducted of construction activities in support of the installation of a ventilation shaft as part of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's East Side Access Project, located in the borough of Manhattan, New York, New York. The ventilation is situated at the southwest corner of Park Avenue and East 37th Street, within the sidewalk and roadway that fronts the Union League Club at 48 Park Avenue. Archaeological monitoring occurred from March 26, 2009 through April 9, 2009.

A previous Phase IA archaeological assessment determined that the project area had a moderate potential for locating intact historic cultural deposits and a variety of features once associated with the Murray mansion and farm. A Stage IB investigation, in the form of archaeological monitoring, was recommended and approved by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, in order to determine the absence or presence of potential intact cultural deposits.

Monitoring of excavation activities confirmed that there has been a significant degree of disturbance to the project area. The construction of the Union League Club, with its associated brick vaults, likely disturbed any cultural remnants from earlier structures associated with the Murray farm that may have once been present. In addition, the excavation associated with various modern utility installations and upgrades further disturbed any remaining evidence of this earlier period. In consideration of the high level of disturbance that is clearly evident within the project area from previous utility and other construction works, no further cultural resource work is recommended for this portion of the project area.

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Introduction and Project Description

URS Corporation (URS) conducted archaeological monitoring of construction activities in support of the installation of a ventilation shaft as part of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's East Side Access Project, located in the borough of Manhattan, New York, New York. The ventilation shaft will be situated at the southwest corner of Park Avenue and East 37th Street, within the sidewalk and roadway that fronts the Union League Club at 48 Park Avenue (Figure 1.1). Archaeological monitoring occurred from March 26, 2009 through April 9, 2009.

A Phase IA archaeological assessment determined that the project area had a

...moderate potential for locating intact historic cultural deposits and a variety of features once associated with the Murray mansion and farm. If subsequent activities have not impacted these deposits and features, then they have the potential to address research issues regarding the nature of early residential and farmstead occupation and lifeways in this section of the city. The types of deposits and archaeological features that may potentially provide valuable information are foundation remnants of the mansion or outbuildings, fence posts, paths, traces of landscaping, and sheet-midden scatter (yard trash) [URS 2007].

A Stage IB investigation, in the form of archaeological monitoring, was recommended and approved by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NY SHPO), in order to determine the absence or presence of potential intact cultural deposits.

All work for this project was conducted in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's "Protection of Historic and Cultural Properties" (36 CFR 800). In addition, the study was performed in compliance with the City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) (Executive Order No. 91 of 1977). This work was also conducted pursuant to the New York state guidelines for such projects, and pursuant to the City of New York – Landmarks Preservation Commission's (LPC) established guidelines for Stage IA archaeological work in New York City, dated April 12, 2002. The cultural resource specialist who performed this work satisfied the qualifications specified in 36 CFR 61.

Alyssa Loorya, M.A., RPA, served as Principal Investigator on this project and performed the archaeological monitoring. Edward Morin served as Program Manager and reviewed the report content. Scott Hood prepared the graphics for this report, and Paul Elwork edited the text for style and consistency.

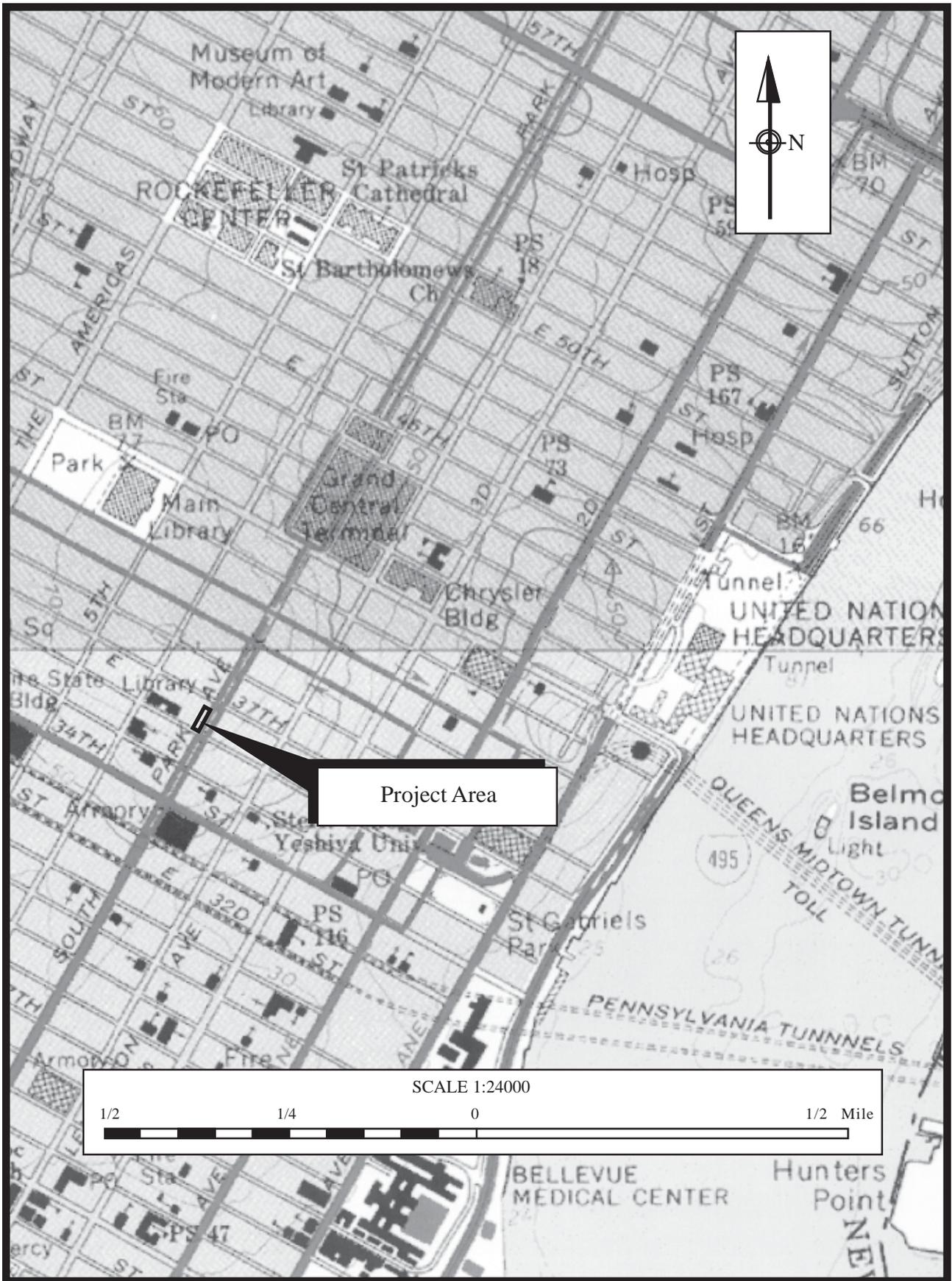


Figure 1.1 Project area location (Source: Portion of 7.5 Minute Topographic Map, Central Park and Brooklyn, New York Quadrangles, Maptech 1979).

2 Prehistoric and Historic Background¹

Prehistoric sites on Manhattan Island are rare. Constant development has meant that most prehistoric sites have been destroyed. Although this project area was located on a hilltop (as depicted on an 1859 topographic map of the city), the LPC did not identify it as being sensitive for prehistoric cultural resources when they commissioned a comprehensive survey of Native American sites and their potential locations for Manhattan (NYCLPC 1982). Areas such as hilltops are generally considered potentially sensitive for Native American remains. However, due to its distance from a freshwater source (0.8 miles) and subsequent development within the project area that consisted of laying out new streets, associated utility lines, and the construction of structures, this particular area was not considered to be potentially significant.

The historical background research indicated that the project area and its vicinity was once a patchwork of eighteenth-century farms and country estates owned by wealthy New Yorkers. There was ample cartographic and historical evidence that showed the proposed location for the ventilation shaft within the original site of Inclenberg, the country mansion of Robert Murray. Murray built the house on the crest of the highest hill on Manhattan in 1760. The farm and house became renowned for playing a part in the Battle of New York during the Revolutionary War. When the street grid was superimposed over the Murray farm in 1811, the house was located within Fourth Avenue (now Park Avenue). The street grid remained solely on paper, and the Murray farm remained a farm until the house burned down in 1834 or 1835. Around the same time, the New York & Harlem Railroad laid down its double tracks up along Fourth Avenue and through what would eventually be called Murray Hill.

The proposed Park Avenue shaft at the southwest corner of Park Avenue and East 37th Street is located under the sidewalk and roadway that today fronts the Union League Club at 48 Park Avenue. Throughout the 1850s, the west side of Park Avenue between 36th and 37th Streets remained vacant (Perris 1857–1862). The area on the southwest corner of Park Avenue and East 37th Street—currently occupied by the Union League Club—was originally the site of four buildings (34, 36, and 38 East 37th Street and 48 Park Avenue) (Bromley 1897). Robert Winthrop, a banker and stockbroker, owned the house that occupied the southwest corner (38 East 37th Street). The proposed Park Avenue shaft is situated along the original buildings at 38 East 37th Street and 48 Park Avenue.

In 1926, J. P. Morgan acquired the property. Morgan was very active in the acquisition of properties on the block. Some have assumed that Morgan wanted to control the development on the block where his residence and library were located. Initially, Morgan’s plans called for 15-story apartment house to be built on the southwest corner, but instead the site was sold to the Union League, a prominent social club of which he was a member, to build a new club building. The four townhouses on the property were torn down at the end of 1929 and the extant structure was built in 1931.

1. Excerpted from *Stage IA Archaeological Assessment for the 37th Street Ventilation Facility, East Side Access, New York City, NY* (URS 2007).

Results of Field Monitoring

Construction was located at the southwest corner of Park Avenue and East 37th Street. The excavation extended the width of the existing sidewalk and less than one traffic lane of the roadway along Park Avenue. It extended the length of the Union League Club building, approximately 95 feet south from the corner. As per the Scope of Work, monitoring was to occur within the first 4 feet of excavation, with soil removal occurring in 1-foot lifts through the use of a backhoe.

Prior to excavation, 26 piles at 8-foot intervals (Figure 3.1) were drilled to an average depth of 130 feet to allow for the installation of deck plating in order to facilitate excavation in excess of 6 feet below modern grade. This drilling indicated the shallow depth of the bedrock in this area, ranging from 6.5 to 15.5 feet below surface.

Excavation occurred in two phases: the first phase consisted of the section from the corner of 37th Street and Park Avenue to the approximate mid-point of the excavation, between Piles 1 through 6. Following the installation of deck plating, the remainder of the project area was excavated.

The modern surface of the project area consisted of concrete pavement atop an asphalt and gravel underlayment measuring approximately 6 inches (see profile below). Excavation revealed the area to have been subject to significant disturbance due to modern utility works.

General Stratigraphic Profile

Pavement – concrete	0 – 4”
Gravel underlayment	4” – 10”
Sandy loam	10” - 28”
Sandy loam w/rubble and or large pockets of ash or sand	28” – 48”
Sandy loam	48” – 60”
Bedrock	60”+

The area between Piles 4 through 6 contained the remnants of a brick vault (Photograph 3.1). The vault had been impacted by previous excavation work, as its walls were already disturbed. Large portions of disassociated brick wall were observed in the area. The areas surrounding the vault consisted of several different soil types, including clean sand and large pieces of mortar and cement.

The form of the vault exposed in the profile showed it to be constructed of nineteenth-century brick; its ceiling, located 3.5 feet below surface, was two courses thick and the sidewall four courses thick (Photograph 3.2).

A total of two brick vaults were uncovered in this area. The second vault was in a similar state of deconstruction. Both structures were identical in shape, size, and construction material. As with the first vault, the second vault was completely disturbed.

One of the vaults was opened and it was possible to view the interior. Inside the vault were various amounts of debris, consisting of sand, ash, and blocks of cement or mortar. This fill was most likely placed there when the vaults were originally abandoned (Photographs 3.3 and 3.4).

Despite the extensive disturbance to the area, a general profile consisting of six layers was discernible (Photograph 3.5).

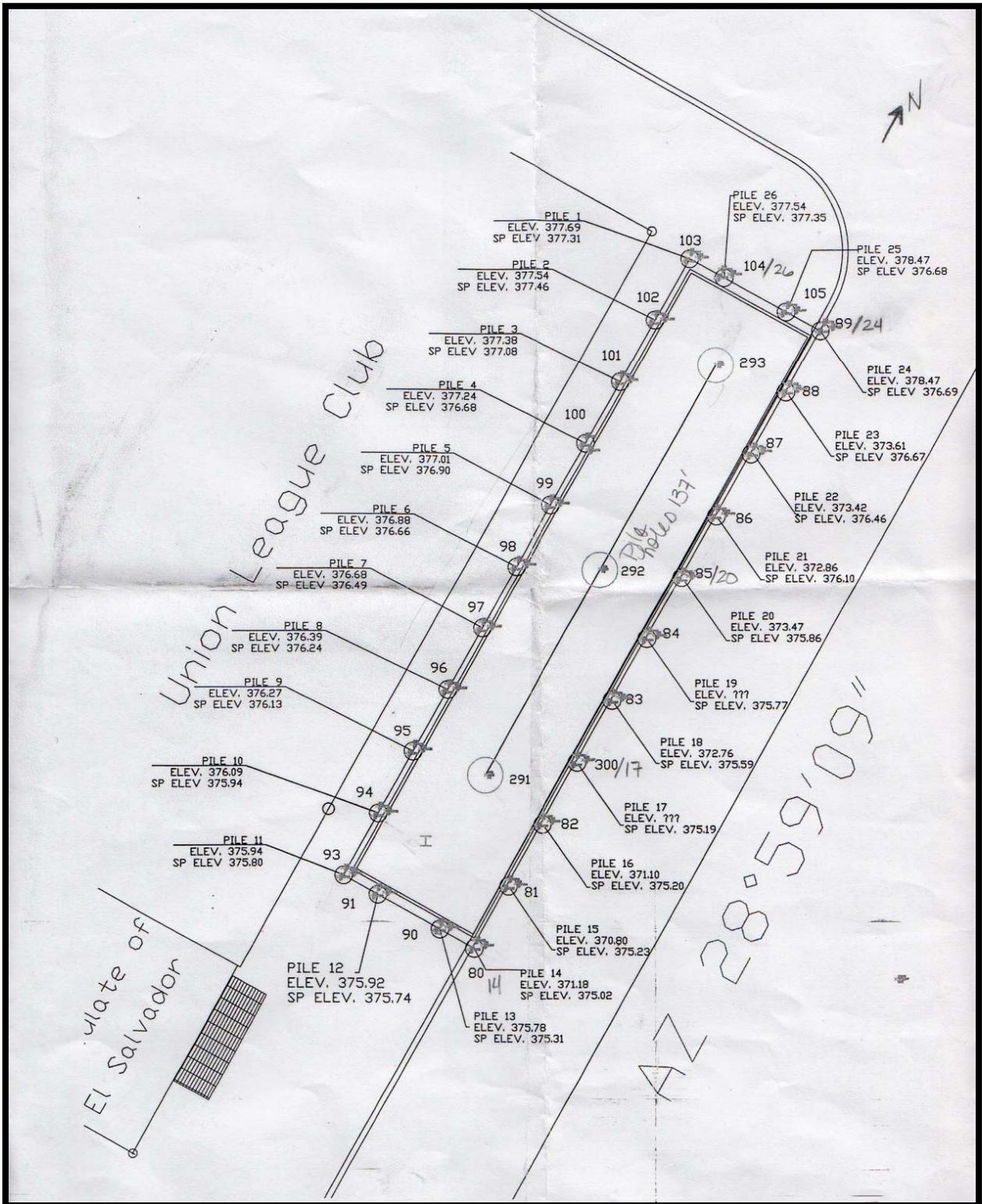


Figure 3.1 Plan map showing pile locations.



Photograph 3.1 Initial exposure of brick vault, view looking northwest.



Photograph 3.2 Profile of Vault 1, view looking west.



Photograph 3.3 Profile of Vault 2, view looking southwest.



Photograph 3.4 Rubble fill within and adjacent to the two brick vaults.



Photograph 3.5 Typical stratigraphic profile of excavation, view looking west.

Throughout the area, there was evidence of modern deposits, including plastic beverage bottles. Only two artifacts contemporaneous to the vaults were observed: a late-nineteenth-century bottle and an ornate Bakelite electric lighting fixture (Photograph 3.6).



Photograph 3.6 Bakelite electric light fixture.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Monitoring of excavation activities confirmed that there has been a significant degree of disturbance to the project area. The construction of the Union League Club, with its associated brick vaults, likely disturbed any cultural remnants from earlier structures associated with the Murray farm that may have once been present. In addition, the excavation associated with various modern utility installations and upgrades further disturbed any remaining evidence of this earlier period. In consideration of the high level of disturbance that is clearly evident within the project area from previous utility and other construction works, no further cultural resource work is recommended for this portion of the project area.

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Appendix A
Management Summary

Appendix A: Management Summary

SHPO Project Review Number (if available):

Involved State and Federal Agencies (DEC, CORPS, FHWA, etc): *FHWA and MTA/NYC Transit*

Phase of Survey: *Phase IB-Archaeological Monitoring*

Location Information

Location: *37th and Park Avenue, New York, NY*

Minor Civil Division: *Manhattan*

County: *New York*

Survey Area (Metric & English)

Length: *24m (80')*

Width: *4.5 m (15')*

Depth: *1.8m (6')*

Number of Acres Surveyed: *N/A*

Number of Square Meters & Feet Excavated (Phase II, Phase III only): *N/A*

Percentage of the Site Excavated (Phase II, Phase III only): *N/A*

USGS 7.5 Minute Quadrangle Map: *Central Park and Brooklyn, New York Quadrangles*

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*

Results of Archaeological Survey

Number & name of prehistoric sites identified: *0*

Number & name of historic sites identified: *0*

Number & name of sites recommended for Phase II/Avoidance: *0*

Results of Architectural Survey

Number of buildings/structures/cemeteries within project area:

Number of buildings/structures/cemeteries adjacent to project area:

Number of previously determined NR listed or eligible buildings/structures/cemeteries/districts:

Number of identified eligible buildings/structures/cemeteries/districts:

Report Author(s): *Alyssa Loorya*

Date of Report: *May 2009*