

**HISTORICAL**  
**PERSPECTIVES** INC.



**Archaeological Documentary Study**

**186 St. George's Crescent  
Block 3313, Lot 12  
Bronx, New York**

**LPC Project # 09BSA109X**

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Prepared For:

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

North Manhattan Construction Corp. proposes to construct an eleven-story and cellar multi-family residential building at 186 St. George's Crescent in the Bronx. The project site is on Block 3313, Lot 12 (Figures 1, 2, and 3). Block 3313 is bounded by Grand Concourse on the west, Mosholu Parkway South on the east, Van Cortlandt Avenue East on the north, and East 206<sup>th</sup> Street on the south. Block 3313 is bisected by St. George's Crescent, and Lot 12, an irregularly-shaped parcel, is located on the east side of St. George's Crescent.

As part of the 186 St. George's Crescent project, sponsors submitted project materials to the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) for an initial archaeological review in accordance with New York City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) regulations and procedures. Additionally, a letter was sent to the LPC dated June 15, 2009 by District Manager Fernando Tirado of the Borough of the Bronx Community Board 7 to the Board of Standards and Appeals, noting that:

“...as per the Bronx Historical Society, the proposed site is most likely the location of a Revolutionary War fort named the “Negro Fort” and we believe that there may be items of significant cultural and historical value located underneath” (Tirado 2009).

The LPC then recommended “that an archaeological documentary study be completed to further assess this potential as per the CEQR Technical Manual” (Sutphin 2009). The present report, prepared by Historical Perspectives, Inc. (HPI) comprises the Archaeological Documentary Study for Block 3313, Lot 12.

Research conducted for this Archaeological Documentary Study has indicated that the former “Negro Fort,” which probably was built in the fall of 1776 and may have stood for several years before being abandoned in the fall of 1779, appears to have been located across the street from the project site. The fort was in an area formerly covered by a house belonging to John Corsa by at least the 1840s, and which stood until just after the turn of the twentieth century. Today, this former house site is covered almost entirely by multiple-story apartment buildings with basements, suggesting that the small, earthen “Negro Fort” itself has been obliterated by modern development.

The project site is located on a northeast facing hillside overlooking the former Boston Post Road. Based on its position between the former fort and the road, it seems less likely that archaeological features associated with the fort, such as fireplaces for troop housing, would have been located on this exposed slope. Rather, if any archaeological materials associated with the fort were deposited on the project site, it seems more likely that they would consist of garbage tossed down the hill by troops stationed on the summit. Further, the presence of at least some unspecified fill on the property suggests that there is an unclear amount of disturbance to the ground surface that could preclude preservation of any such materials. However, it is also possible that the fill could have preserved some older historical layers.

Based on these conclusions, HPI recommends that a limited program of archaeological testing be undertaken on the project site in order to ascertain whether any Revolutionary War deposits are present on the property. The extent of the exposed rock outcrops, as well as the relatively shallow bedrock in much of the Area of Potential Effect (APE) argues against extensive testing. A limited testing strategy should be designed by project archaeologists, in consultation with LPC, to determine the most effective means to accomplish these goals.

For example, since there is no specific area of the project site where potential archaeological resources might be concentrated, one or two ca. six-foot long trench locations could be selected by archaeological personnel based on field conditions. The first task would be the removal (at grade) of the very thick vegetation that covers the trench locations. Since there could be up to 5 feet of fill on the property, as well as shallow bedrock in many places, the excavation might include a combination of approaches that have worked well on military encampments and urban parcels.

Any archaeological testing requested by LPC should be conducted according to applicable archaeological standards (LPC 2002). Professional archaeologists, with an understanding of and experience in urban archaeological excavation techniques, would be required to be part of the archaeological team.

Last, despite the paucity of archival data concerning the “Negro Fort,” it does seem clear that such a fort did exist along what is now St. George’s Crescent, and had some association with African Americans who had joined the British forces in the fall of 1776. Regardless of the results of the archaeological testing program on the project site, HPI further recommends that a plaque commemorating this fort be placed either on the project site or on St. George’s Crescent itself, to mark the former location of this important cultural resource.

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5. View of project site showing slope of parcel, recently felled trees, bedrock outcrops, and garbage on ground surface. View looking north from interior of lot. Source: North Manhattan Construction Corp., September 13, 2006.
6. View of project site in winter, showing slope of parcel, recently felled trees, bedrock outcrops, and garbage on ground surface. View looking south from interior of lot. Source: North Manhattan Construction Corp., September 13, 2006.
7. Enlargement of photograph taken in 1936 showing project site in center of image, behind stone wall. View looking southeast from intersection of Grand Concourse and St. George's Crescent. Source: NYPL.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

North Manhattan Construction Corp. proposes to construct an eleven-story and cellar multi-family residential building at 186 St. George's Crescent in the Bronx. The project site is on Block 3313, Lot 12 (Figures 1, 2, and 3). Block 3313 is bounded by Grand Concourse on the west, Mosholu Parkway South on the east, Van Cortlandt Avenue East on the north, and East 206<sup>th</sup> Street on the south. Block 3313 is bisected by St. George's Crescent, and Lot 12, an irregularly-shaped parcel, is located on the east side of St. George's Crescent.

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The LPC then recommended “that an archaeological documentary study be completed to further assess this potential as per the CEQR Technical Manual” (Sutphin 2009).

The present report, prepared by Historical Perspectives, Inc. (HPI) comprises the Archaeological Documentary Study for Block 3313, Lot 12. This lot is also referred to as the Area of Potential Effect, or APE. This lot is a modern tax lot designation, created in 1966-1967 when historic lots 12, 14, and 15 were combined. This study complies with the guidelines of the LPC (CEQR 2001; LPC 2002). The HPI project team consisted of Julie Abell Horn, M.A., R.P.A., who conducted the majority of the project research and wrote this report; and Cece Saunders, M.A., R.P.A., who assisted with the project research, oversaw the project, and provided editorial and interpretive assistance.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

This archaeological documentary study, in direct response to the specific concerns expressed by LPC, has concentrated on establishing the potential “Negro Fort” occupation of and later disturbance to the APE.

The project site is located on the steep slope of a hill and likely because of this topography, was never developed, according to nineteenth and twentieth century maps. Since there was no development on the project site over time, many of the standard archival resources normally consulted for an Archaeological Documentary Study were not applicable, including Department of Buildings records, tax records, city directories, and census records. Additionally, because archival information concerning the “Negro Fort” proved to be so sparse, interviews with experts on Bronx and Westchester County history, African-American history in New York City, and the

archaeology of Revolutionary War resources in New York City were invaluable in locating possible archival sources for review, and for ruling out other archival and secondary sources that were either not relevant to this site or provided erroneous information.

Experts consulted for this project included:

- Lloyd Ultan, Bronx County Historian and author of numerous books and articles on Bronx history;
- Christopher P. Moore, Research Coordinator, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library;
- Michael Cohn, Timeline Associates, author of *Fortifications of New York during the Revolutionary War, 1776-1782*;
- Alan Gilbert, Professor of Anthropology, Fordham University;
- Paul Huey, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; and
- Thomas X. Casey, East Bronx History Forum.

Numerous repositories were visited, contacted, or their online resources viewed for this project. In some cases archivists or librarians from these repositories (noted in brackets) were consulted to ascertain the presence or absence of pertinent materials in their collections regarding the “Negro Fort.” The repositories included:

- New York Public Library [Matthew Knutzen, Assistant Chief, The Lionel Pincus & Princess Firyal Map Division];
- New York State Library and Archives;
- Library of Congress;
- Bronx County Historical Society [Laura Tosi, Librarian];
- Westchester County Historical Society [Patrick Raftery, Assistant Librarian];
- New-York Historical Society [Reference Librarians];
- Manhattan College Library;
- Borough of the Bronx, New York City Register;
- Borough of the Bronx, Tax Map Unit;
- Borough of the Bronx Topographical Bureau [Gjela Prenga, Topographic Planner];
- New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; and
- Websites: davidrumsey.com; ancestry.com, Google Books.

A site visit was conducted on August 5, 2009 by Julie Abell Horn of HPI to assess any obvious or unrecorded subsurface disturbances, although the site had dense foliage and the ground surface could not be seen. The project sponsor provided additional photographs of the project site taken during the winter, when the ground was bare, and these images are included as well (see Figure 2; Photographs 1-7).

### **III. ENVIRONMENTAL/PHYSICAL SETTING**

#### **A. Current Conditions**

As noted above, the APE is a steeply sloped parcel located on the northeast side of St. George's Crescent. There are high rise apartment buildings located immediately to the south and to the northeast. A gasoline station and a surface parking lot are situated to the north and east. The APE is enclosed by a chain link fence, with a gate on the St. George's Crescent side of the parcel (Photograph 1). At the time of the 2009 site visit, the entire APE was very heavily overgrown with thick foliage, precluding any observation of the ground surface (Photographs 2 and 3). However, photographs provided by the project sponsors of the property in 2005 and 2006, when there was no foliage (Photographs 4, 5, and 6), show that the ground surface formerly contained a number of mature trees (shown here as recently felled), and despite what the soil boring data claim, below, does have a number of large rocks and/or bedrock outcrops on the ground surface. According to the project sponsors, in many places bedrock is only about two feet below the ground surface (Heiman 2009). In 2005 and 2006, the slope was littered with debris, presumably from dumping by local residents over the years.

#### **B. Topography, Hydrology and Soils**

The APE is on the northeast side of a former hill, and as such is primarily a sloped landform. The earliest topographic maps available for this area show that the APE was between approximately 140-160 feet above sea level (Grant 1873; Bien and Vermeule 1891). The official map of grades adopted in 1895 for the Bronx shows that the APE ranged from between 140-150 feet above sea level at the lowest point, to just over 160 feet above sea level at the highest point (Risse 1895; see Figure 4). A topographical survey made of the APE in 2006 (and printed in 2008) indicates little overall change to the APE elevation over time, with the exception of the southeastern corner of the lot, which has been graded down to 137 feet above sea level, and is supported by a retaining wall (Figure 3). The sidewalk bordering the property on St. George's Crescent is near the top of the original summit of the hill. According to the Bronx Topographical Bureau, the legal grade of St. George's Crescent bordering the project site is 162 feet above sea level.

Prior to landfilling in the area, there were two branches of a perennial creek, which emptied into the Bronx River, to the east and south of the project site. One branch ran roughly along the route of the modern Mosholu Parkway and the other ran along the approximate line of modern 204<sup>th</sup> Street. MacNamara (1993) notes that the drainage along Mosholu Parkway was called "Schuil Brook" and its name later was anglicized to "School Brook."

The USDA soil survey for New York City indicates that the APE falls within a large area mapped as "Pavement & buildings, till substratum, 0 to 5 percent slopes." It 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 till; generally located in urban centers (USDA 2005:14).

Despite this designation, it should be emphasized that the project site is in fact quite sloped.

In 2004, two soil borings were completed on the APE (International Geotechnical/Structural Laboratories, Inc. 2004). Boring B-1 was located 7 feet east of the property line along St. George's Place near the southern end of the property and Boring B-2 was located 15 feet east of the property line along St. George's Place near the approximate center of the property. The borings were excavated in 5-foot increments and basic soil descriptions were recorded for each increment. Only one soil type was recorded for each 5-foot increment, and if there were different soil strata within the increments, they were not noted on the boring logs. In both borings, the first 5-foot increment was noted as "brown backfill." No inclusions were recorded within this stratum to indicate whether the soil was modern introduced fill that had been deposited on the property or local soils that had been disturbed and then redeposited in place. Beneath the "backfill" were increments of brown, gray, or grayish brown fine or medium sand with gravel or fine or medium sand with "silt/clay." Refusal (or bedrock) was noted at 13 and 25 feet below grade in Boring B-1, and 20 feet below grade in Boring B-2. No groundwater was encountered in either boring.

#### **IV. PROJECT SITE HISTORY**

The project site and vicinity falls within the original Fordham Manor grant, initially obtained by John Archer in the 1660s. Fordham Manor encompassed some 1,250 acres, extending from the Bronx River on the east to the Harlem River on the west, and roughly between present Kingsbridge on the north to the Manor of Morrisania on the south (about West 169<sup>th</sup> Street). The lands of the manor including the project site were mortgaged by John Archer in 1676, and later passed to the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1759, local landowner Lewis Morris purchased a large portion of the former Fordham Manor, but through a series of transactions the land ended up back with the Archer family in 1766 (Scharf 1886). The original Boston Post Road, which later was known as Van Cortlandt Avenue East and now survives only in fragments, as much of the original road is under the Jerome Reservoir in this part of the Bronx, was along the line of an old Native American trail, and was officially named in 1673 (Bolton 1922; Jenkins 1912). This road runs along the northern border of Block 3313. However, despite the presence of this road, there is no indication that the project site ever was developed during the colonial period.

The first documented use of the general project vicinity was during the Revolutionary War. In May 1775, when fighting was still confined to areas around Boston, the Continental Congress first proposed building fortifications at Kingsbridge, which was noted as a strategic point between the island of Manhattan and the Westchester County mainland. In late August 1775, a large number of cannon were taken from the Battery at the tip of lower Manhattan and moved to Kingsbridge for safekeeping. The cannon were placed along a line north of Isaac Valentine's House (now the Valentine-Varian House, home of the Bronx County Historical Society and located on the north side of the original Boston Post Road), in an area roughly parallel to what is now known as Gun Hill Road. A number of these cannon were spiked (damaged by inserting spikes into holes meant for gunpowder) in January 1776, but were repaired that spring and mostly moved back to Manhattan in June 1776 (Ultan 1983).

At the same time that the cannon were being moved off Isaac Valentine's property, General George Washington visited Kingsbridge and selected seven sites in the area where he ordered forts to be built. Two battalions from Pennsylvania arrived on June 21, 1776 to begin

constructing the forts, and work continued through the summer of 1776. The closest American built fort to the project site was Fort Independence (later renamed Fort Number 4 by the British), located on what is now Giles Place to the northeast of the project site. In October 1776, General Heath of the American forces, who was in charge of the operations at Kingsbridge, ordered additional works built to strengthen the fortifications, including a redoubt above Williams Bridge to the northeast of the project site. However, when the British forces under General Howe approached Kingsbridge in late October after the Battle of Harlem Heights, the Americans still felt that their position there was too vulnerable and so evacuated troops to White Plains. By October 23, 1776, the forts in Kingsbridge were essentially abandoned, allowing the British forces to occupy them. They subsequently were renamed Forts 1-8 (Ultan 1983).

The history of the “Negro Fort” in the project site vicinity appears to have begun in November 1776. After the British forces moved into the Kingsbridge area and occupied the now abandoned American forts, they set to work repairing the forts. Lloyd Ultan, the Bronx County Historian, writes:

It is likely that, on this occasion, the troops threw up a small earthen fortification on a hill on the Valentine farm overlooking the Boston Post Road near Isaac Valentine’s stone house. (It later came to be called “Negro Fort,” so called from a black detachment in British pay being headquartered there, and was near where Van Cortlandt Avenue East and the Grand Concourse cross today, atop the hill at St. George’s Crescent) (Ultan 1983:24-25).

A review of numerous primary and secondary archival sources failed to reveal details about the construction of the “Negro Fort” or about its specific association with African-Americans. Communications with local Bronx, Revolutionary War, and African-American history experts, including Lloyd Ultan, Michael Cohn, Christopher Moore, and Thomas Casey, all revealed the same information: that there is no known recorded reference to the construction of the “Negro Fort.” Michael Cohn in particular stressed that in his work researching Revolutionary War forts in the New York City area, he had thoroughly read all of the military “orderly books” at the New York Historical Society and the New York Public Library and that none of them mentioned the “Negro Fort.” A number of these orderly books were reviewed for this study as well, including orders by British General Howe and diaries of several of his assistants, the diaries of George Washington and the memoirs of American commander General William Heath. Again, none of these primary sources revealed any information about the construction of the “Negro Fort.”

The assumption by all of the local experts interviewed for this study, and certainly by many of the secondary sources consulted as well, is that the “Negro Fort” was small compared to other forts in the Kingsbridge area, and that it was made of earth. The term “fort” is a bit misleading here; a “redoubt” or “outpost” would probably be a more accurate way of describing the structure, which likely was no more than a half-moon shaped defensive work capable of supporting less than 30 men (Cohn 2009).

The first mention of the “Negro Fort” that could be found (and which the local experts agreed was the earliest notation they had seen as well) was in General Heath’s memoirs (Heath 1901). He provides a description of the attack of the American forces on the British forces at

Kingsbridge in January 1777, and indicates that the “Negro Fort” was part of the British holdings at the time. When noted, the “Negro Fort” often was mentioned in conjunction with Valentine’s House. For example:

January 17: Those who fled from Valentine's and the Negro Fort were fired at as they ran, but none were killed: one, who could not run so fast as the rest, was taken prisoner.

January 19: The enemy cannonaded from the fort, and killed one American, as the guards were relieving at the Negro Fort.

January 25: Emboldened by this success, about 10 o'clock A.M. they made a powerful sally towards Valentine's, instantly driving the guards and pickets from the Negro Fort and Valentine's house; pushing on with great impetuosity, keeping up a brisk fire, the balls passing at Williams's house sufficiently strong to do execution.

Most of the secondary sources reviewed for this study (e.g. Dawson in Scharf 1886; Comfort 1906; Jenkins 1912; Hufeland 1926) repeated the information provided by Heath but added few new details. Edsall (in Scharf 1886:753) notes that the British forces kept an “outgard” at the fort over the winter of 1776-1777, but provides no reference for this statement.

Maps made during the Revolutionary War era also failed to show the location of the “Negro Fort,” in some cases because it was not yet built, in others because coverage did not extend this far east (focusing on the forts in and around Kingsbridge instead), and presumably in other cases because it was not important enough to note. A list of maps reviewed for this project is provided at the end of this report, and includes those made by Sauthier, Erskine, and those with no known author (e.g. Anonymous 1777 [Figure 5]). Curiously, a number of secondary sources claim that the “Negro Fort” is shown on the British Headquarters Map of 1782, when in fact it is not, as the map does not extend far enough east to cover this area (Figure 6). It appears that after the first source made the claim, the others followed suit. For example, Jenkins (1912:128) writes:

The British Headquarters map of 1782 (or 1783) shows seven other redoubts lying south of Number Four along the Fordham ridge, making eleven in all from the Hudson to the shore of the Harlem abreast of Fort George on Manhattan. In addition, there are shown entrenchments across the Boston Road to the east of Number Four and a small redoubt, called the Negro Fort, about half-way between Fort Independence and Williamsbridge. It was so called because, so it is stated, it was garrisoned by negroes from Virginia; it was situated just south of the old Boston Road—this part of it now called Van Cortlandt Avenue,—about where the new Concourse joins Mosholu Parkway.

An article by John MacNamara, published in 1974, says:

Military dispatches mention the Negro Fort in January, 1777, and it was noted on the 1782 map. But aside from this, very little is known of the number of Negro soldiers it housed, or the length of their tenancy. All that is known is that the black soldiers hailed from Virginia, and were presumably “free men of color.”

MacNamara’s assumptions that the black men were soldiers and free both are open to debate. It was well known that many black slaves had run away to join the British forces, whom they hoped would give them refuge. In 1775, Virginia’s Governor Lord Dunmore had promised freedom to those slaves willing to support the British cause (Burrows and Wallace 1999). Numerous secondary sources claim that the black men for whom the “Negro Fort” was named came from Virginia, but no clear evidence in primary sources could be found to support this assertion. It is known that the British arrived in New York in August 1776 with about a thousand “refugees and blackamoors from Virginia” (Jones 1879, Vol. I:103; Scharf 1886, Vol. I:400). Other local blacks, both slaves and freemen, had joined the British forces from the greater New York City area (Burrows and Wallace 1999). Some became soldiers and others did not. It is not clear whether the black men associated with the “Negro Fort” were soldiers, or if they were being utilized in other capacities, such as carpenters or laborers. According to Lloyd Ultan, it is possible that these black men for whom the fort was named were in fact also the builders of the fort (Ultan 2009).

Since no maps made during the Revolutionary War era could be found that clearly sited the “Negro Fort” on the landscape, the question arises as to whether the project site vicinity was in fact the actual location of this fort. The secondary sources all state that the hill now traversed by St. George’s Crescent was the fort’s former location, and two maps of the area reconstructed years later (Edsall 1886 [Figure 7] and Hufeland 1926 [Figure 8]) show the location, but few primary sources could be found that definitively place the fort here. One primary source that provided some information is the McDonald Papers manuscript on file at the Westchester County Historical Society. The McDonald Papers contain interviews by Judge James MacLean Macdonald from 1844-1851 with 241 elderly residents about their experiences during the Revolutionary War in Westchester County. Two of the residents interviewed by MacDonald were Dennis Valentine and Andrew Corsa. Valentine was a descendant of Isaac Valentine, and Corsa was the landowner who later acquired the project site.

The interview with Dennis Valentine noted the location as:

Negro fort about a mile and a half from Dennis Valentine’s (No. ?) on John Corsa’s land (that is, a son of Andrew Corsa) so called from a detachment of the Negroes in the British pay, being quartered there, commanded by Captain Cook (McDonald Papers 1844, Vol. 1:113).

The first interview with Andrew Corsa indicated the location as:

Negro fort or Cook's fort stood about two hundred yards south of Isaac Valentine's stone house on the old Post Road on the left as you go to Kingsbridge and on a round hill near the road (McDonald Papers 1844, Vol. 1:103).

A second interview with Andrew Corsa noted:

The cannon were spiked in 1776, at Cook's or the Negro fort, which stood exactly where my son's house now stands about a quarter of a mile and perhaps a little more south of the stone house built by Isaac Valentine and adjacent to the old post road (McDonald Papers 1844, Vol. 1:520).

Clearly, there was consensus among the two men, who were interviewed together on August 26, 1844 by MacDonald, that the commander of the "Negro Fort," at least for a time, was a Captain Cook. However, perhaps due to the low rank of the commander, his name did not appear in any of the contemporary sources reviewed for the report.

Interestingly, Andrew Corsa believed that the spiked cannons were located at the "Negro Fort," rather than the area north of the Valentine House near modern day Gun Hill Road, as described by Ultan. It seems unlikely that the small, earthen "Negro Fort" would have contained any cannons, being intended as an outpost and manned at least initially by African Americans, and this recollection may be the result of an elderly man conflating two disparate events many years after they occurred (Cohn 2009).

In terms of locating the "Negro Fort," however, both Dennis Valentine and Andrew Corsa agreed that the "Negro Fort" was on land owned by John Corsa in 1844, and this statement seems to place the fort in the project site vicinity. Edsall (1886:753) likewise notes that the fort was located on the Corsa farm, and that the location of the fort now had a house on it. The earliest historic maps found as part of this project that show any structures in the project site vicinity were those made beginning in the 1850s. The Sidney and Neff map from 1851 (Figure 9) shows a structure just west of the APE, south of the Boston Post Road, and the Connor map from 1853 (Figure 10) confirms that the tract that the structure was on belonged to "Corsa." The 1868 Beers map (Figure 11) noted the same structure as attributed to "Jno. Corsa." Thus, it appears that the "Negro Fort" was, in fact, located in the project site vicinity and those reconstructed maps of the area during the Revolutionary War era that show the "Negro Fort" in this location likely are mostly accurate (e.g. Edsall 1886; Hufeland 1926).

How long did the "Negro Fort" remain standing? The answer is unclear. As noted earlier, none of the maps reviewed for this project made during the eighteenth century appeared to show the "Negro Fort." A number of the maps, including one made in 1777 and the 1782 British Headquarters map, did not extend coverage far enough east to include the project site. Those maps that did include the APE, such as the Robert Erskine road map from 1779 and the Christopher Colles road maps from 1789, did not show the "Negro Fort," either. According to the McDonald Papers, the "Negro Fort" was still standing in January 1778, when Captain Emmerick of the Hessian forces conducted "operations" there (McDonald Papers, p. 93). And

probably it was used by various additional forces during the remainder of 1778 and 1779, when the British were still encamped in the Kingsbridge area.

By the early fall of 1779, however, the British began moving their base of operations out of the Kingsbridge area to consolidate efforts in Manhattan and other theaters of war. They demolished nearby Fort Independence from August-September 1779 and used the building materials and arms elsewhere (Ultan 1983). It is probable that the “Negro Fort” was abandoned at this time as well, although since presumably the redoubt was small and earthen, rather than wood or stone, there would have been less to demolish at the time. It is likely that some remnants of the “Negro Fort” remained visible beyond this period, although the lack of documentation on maps of the time argues that whatever remained was not significant.

The Corsa family acquired the land containing the former “Negro Fort” and the project site during the nineteenth century, although since deeds from this period are not well indexed, the precise time is unknown. However, it does appear that John Corsa built his house directly over the former “Negro Fort” site (e.g. Edsall 1886:753). Corsa’s house seems to have remained standing until the early years of the twentieth century, although Corsa sold the farm in 1871 to George Opdyke, whose family then had the tract subdivided into building lots in the 1880s and sold to individual owners (Liber 781, 1871:314; McNamara 1993). The former Corsa house appears on the 1879 Bromley map, the 1885 Robinson map, the 1900 Sanborn map (Figure 12), and the 1901 Hyde map. However, by 1909, when the official “damage map” was made for officially acquiring St. George’s Crescent for the City of New York, the Corsa house had been razed (Figure 13). Today, the former Corsa house location and lot contains a 5 to 6-story apartment building with a basement, which covers essentially the entire footprint of the former summit of the hill (see Figure 2). Additional 4- and 5-story apartment buildings with basements cover the remainder of the area once containing the hill, on the west side of St. George’s Crescent.

As noted above, the project site is located on the other side of St. George’s Crescent from the presumed location of the “Negro Fort.” Due perhaps to the steep nature of the terrain, the APE was never developed. A photograph taken in 1936 (Photograph 7) shows that there was once a stone wall marking the edge of the APE along St. George’s Crescent, and that the property seems to have been used at least partially for storage of building materials at that time. Based on the data from the two soil borings, the APE appears to have been used for some dumping activities as well, perhaps associated with nearby construction of the apartment buildings.

## **V. DISTURBANCE RECORD AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SENSITIVITY**

There are two issues to consider in determining the archaeological sensitivity of the project site for potential remains associated with the “Negro Fort.” The first is whether any potential resources would have been located within the project site at all, and if so, what they might be; and the second is whether these potential resources could still be present within the project site after more than 200 years.

It seems evident from the archival research that the “Negro Fort” was located across the street from the project site. That area was the summit of the hill through which St. George’s Crescent

now runs, and would have been the natural spot on which to site a fort. According to interviews with local residents, the fort was situated in the location where John Corsa's house once stood, which corresponds to Block 3313, Modern Lots 77 and 84.

However, while the fort itself appears to have been located off the project site, it seems reasonable to expect that troops would have occupied and used more than just the footprint of the actual fort, likely extending their camps, guards, and patrols to the area surrounding the fort on the hill. In his descriptions of archaeological excavations at a number of Revolutionary War forts and camps in the Bronx and upper Manhattan, Bolton (1916) repeatedly describes finding certain types of former fort features embedded in hillsides surrounding known fort sites, most notably fireplaces that often were associated with small huts. Since the "Negro Fort" would have been sited to monitor traffic and/or attacks along the Boston Post Road to the north and northeast of the project site, it seems less likely that the project site, being located between the fort and the road, would have been chosen as the location to put fireplaces and troops' huts. However, it is not impossible that these types of features could have been placed in this vicinity.

More likely, though, the project site could have been a location where troops tossed their garbage, as hillsides are frequently used for such purposes. Bolton (1916) notes that artifacts associated with Revolutionary War forts have, in places, been found to be extensive. Recovered artifacts at war sites such as Fort Independence, Fort Number 4, Fort Swartwout, and the camp of Emmerick's troops included military items such as bullets, pike and bayonet parts, and gun flints; as well as camp-related materials such as barrel hoops, pot hooks, ceramics, tableware, and glass bottles (especially rum bottles); personal items such as buttons and smoking pipes; and building materials such as nails, carpenter's tools, and hardware.

There clearly has been some disturbance to the project site, although the extent is not well understood. The two soil borings excavated near the St. George's Crescent side of the property noted "backfill" from 0-5 feet below grade. However, because there were no inclusions recorded within this arbitrary stratum to indicate whether the soil was modern in nature or perhaps from historic dumping episodes, it is unclear to what degree this upper layer of soil would preclude the recovery of potential Revolutionary War features or artifacts, should they exist here.

Topographical surveys note little change in overall elevations on the project site over time. A Phase I Environmental Assessment for the project site noted no known contaminants or buried oil tanks (Singer Environmental Group, LTD 2005). Bedrock depths on the site range from at grade to at least 20 feet below grade, with much of the site having shallow bedrock at about 2 feet below grade.

## **VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Research conducted for this Archaeological Documentary Study has indicated that the former "Negro Fort," which probably was built in the fall of 1776 and may have stood for several years before being abandoned in the fall of 1779, appears to have been located across the street from the project site. The fort was in an area formerly covered by a house belonging to John Corsa by at least the 1840s, and which stood until just after the turn of the twentieth century. Today, this former house site is covered almost entirely by multiple-story apartment buildings with

basements, suggesting that the small, earthen “Negro Fort” itself has been obliterated by modern development.

The project site is located on a northeast facing hillside overlooking the former Boston Post Road. Based on its position between the former fort and the road, it seems less likely that archaeological features associated with the fort, such as fireplaces for troop housing, would have been located on this exposed slope. Rather, if any archaeological materials associated with the fort were deposited on the project site, it seems more likely that they would consist of garbage tossed down the hill by troops stationed on the summit. Further, the presence of at least some unspecified fill on the property suggests that there is an unclear amount of disturbance to the ground surface that could preclude preservation of any such materials. However, it is also possible that the fill could have preserved some older historical layers.

Based on these conclusions, HPI recommends that a limited program of archaeological testing be undertaken on the project site in order to ascertain whether any Revolutionary War deposits are present on the property. The extent of the exposed rock outcrops, as well as the relatively shallow bedrock in much of the APE argues against extensive testing. A limited testing strategy should be designed by project archaeologists, in consultation with LPC, to determine the most effective means to accomplish these goals.

For example, since there is no specific area of the project site where potential archaeological resources might be concentrated, one or two ca. six-foot long trench locations could be selected by archaeological personnel based on field conditions. The first task would be the removal (at grade) of the very thick vegetation that covers the trench locations. Since there could be up to 5 feet of fill on the property, as well as shallow bedrock in many places, the excavation might include a combination of approaches that have worked well on military encampments and urban parcels.

Any archaeological testing requested by LPC should be conducted according to applicable archaeological standards (LPC 2002). Professional archaeologists, with an understanding of and experience in urban archaeological excavation techniques, would be required to be part of the archaeological team.

Last, despite the paucity of archival data concerning the “Negro Fort,” it does seem clear that such a fort did exist along what is now St. George’s Crescent, and had some association with African Americans who had joined the British forces in the fall of 1776. Regardless of the results of the archaeological testing program on the project site, HPI further recommends that a plaque commemorating this fort be placed either on the project site or on St. George’s Crescent itself, to mark the former location of this important cultural resource.

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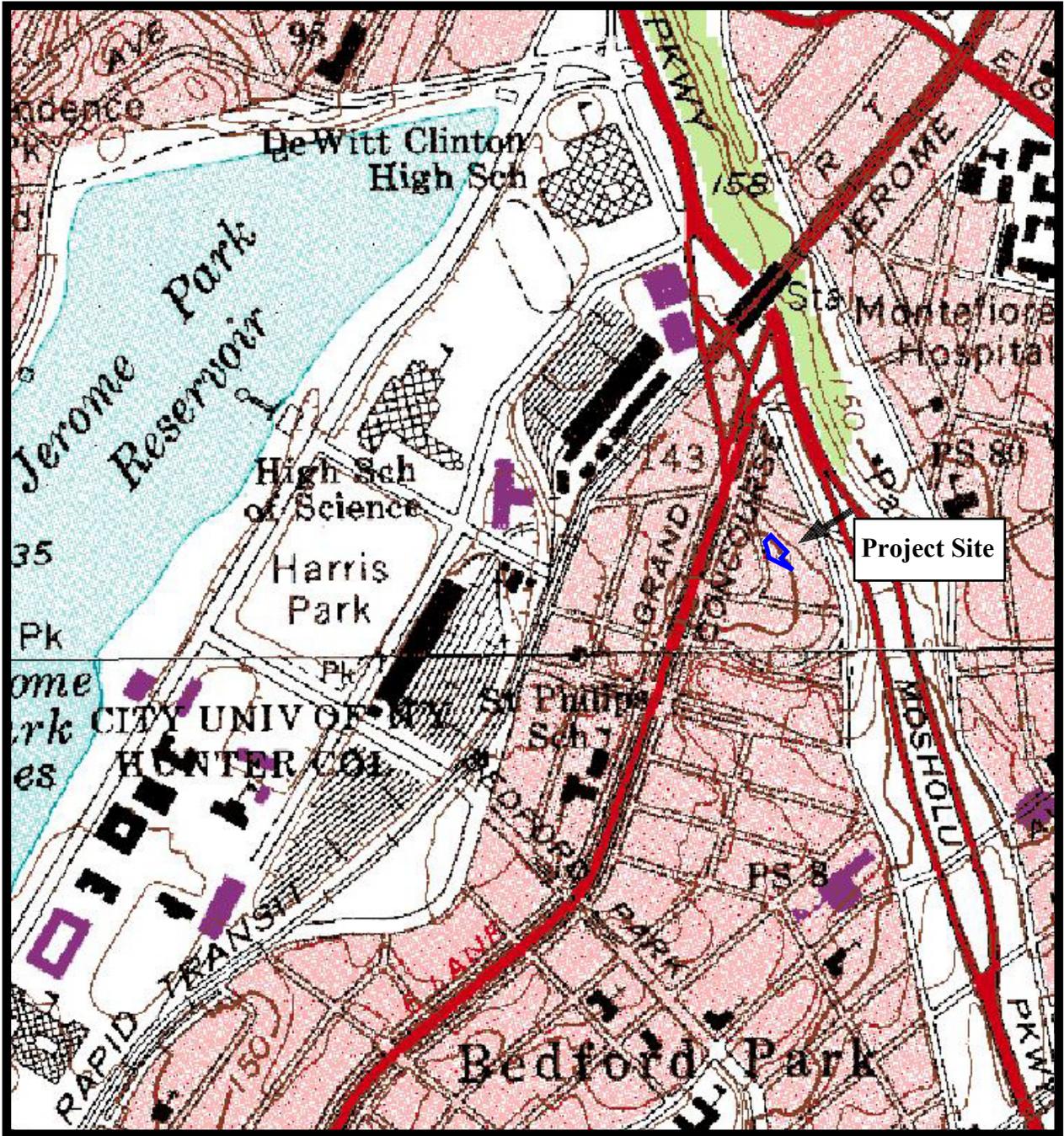
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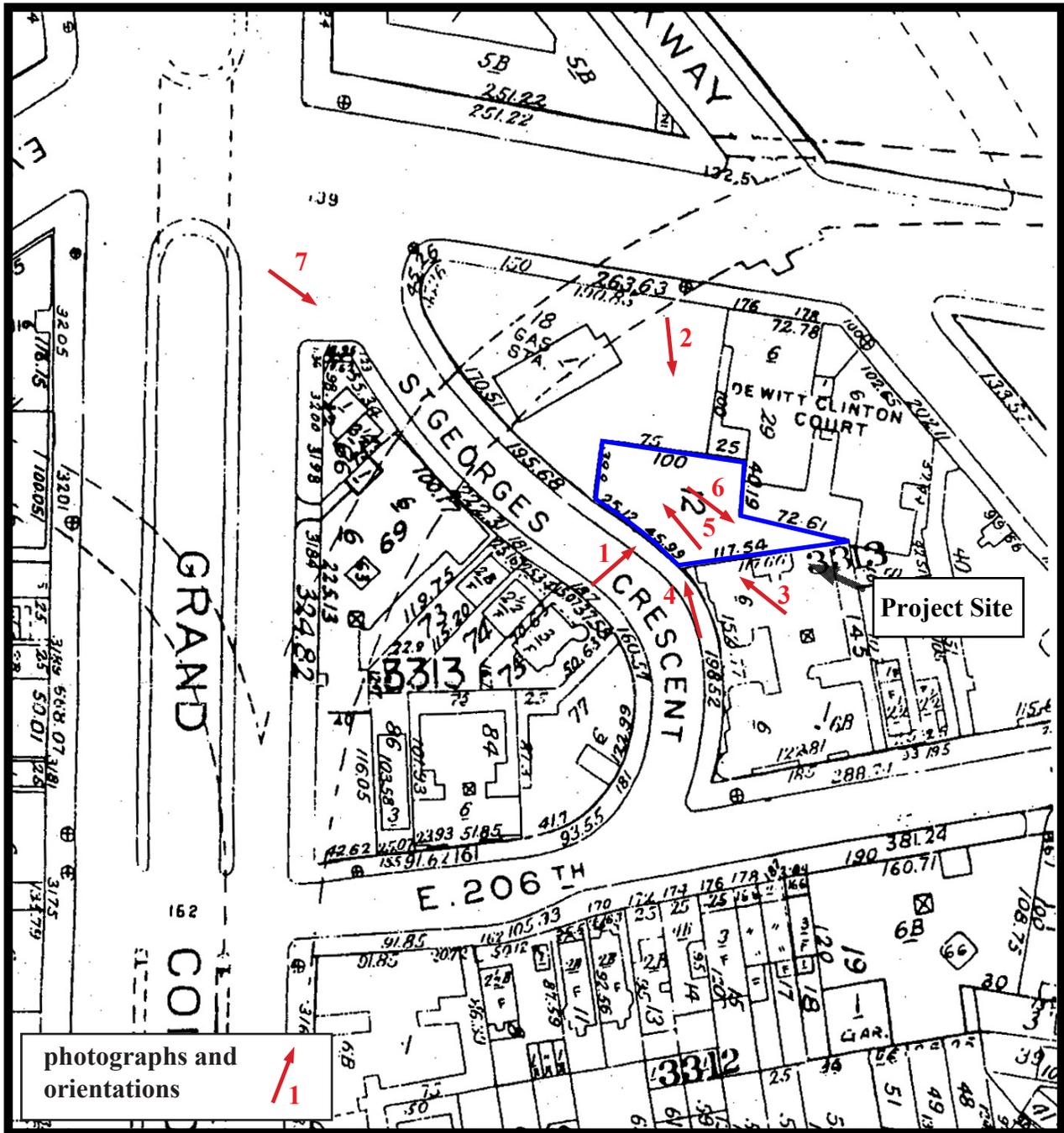


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Figure 1: Project site on *Yonkers and Central Park, N.Y. 7.5 Minute Quadrangles* (U.S.G.S. 1988 and 1992).

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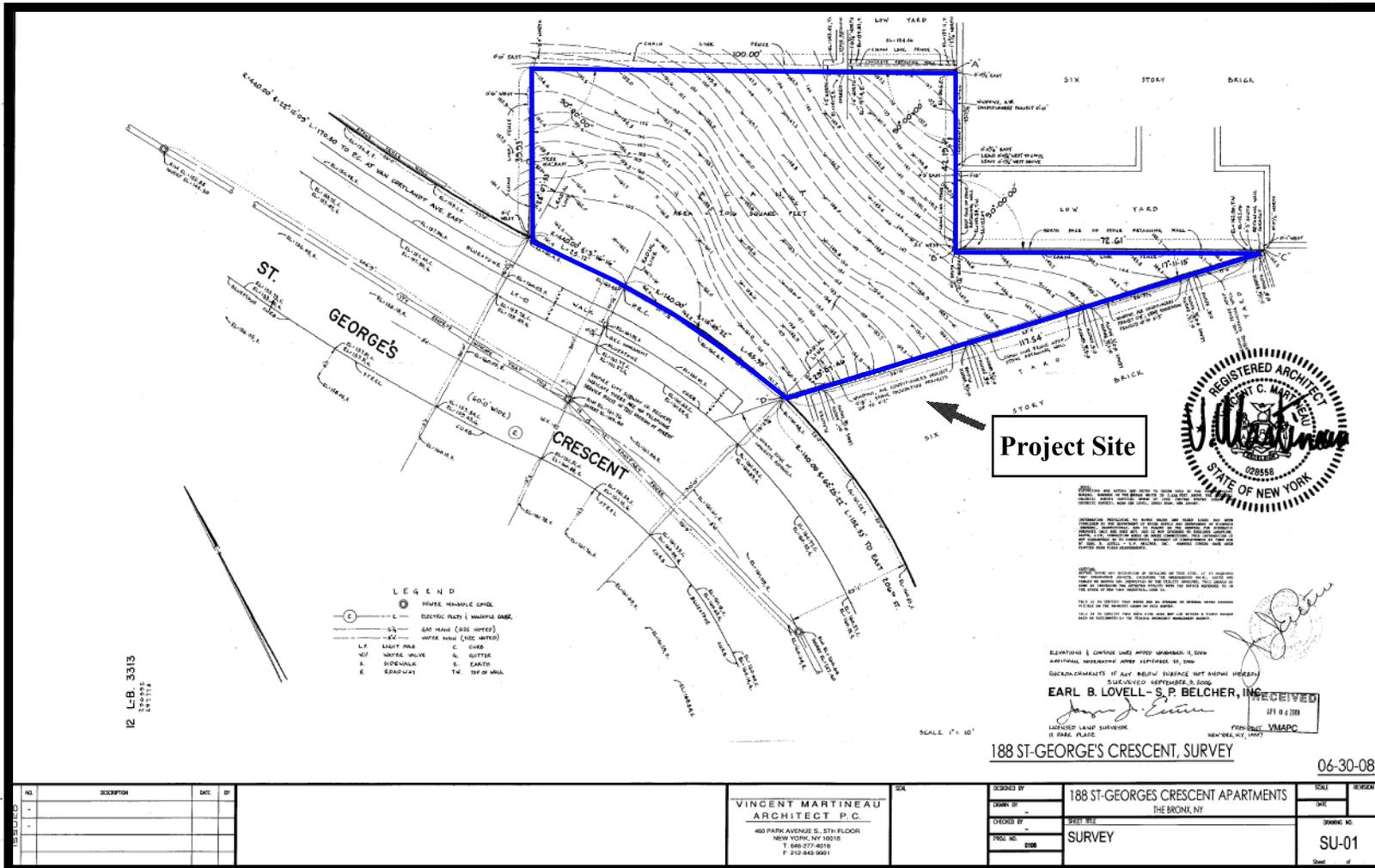


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Figure 2: Project site on modern Bromley map.

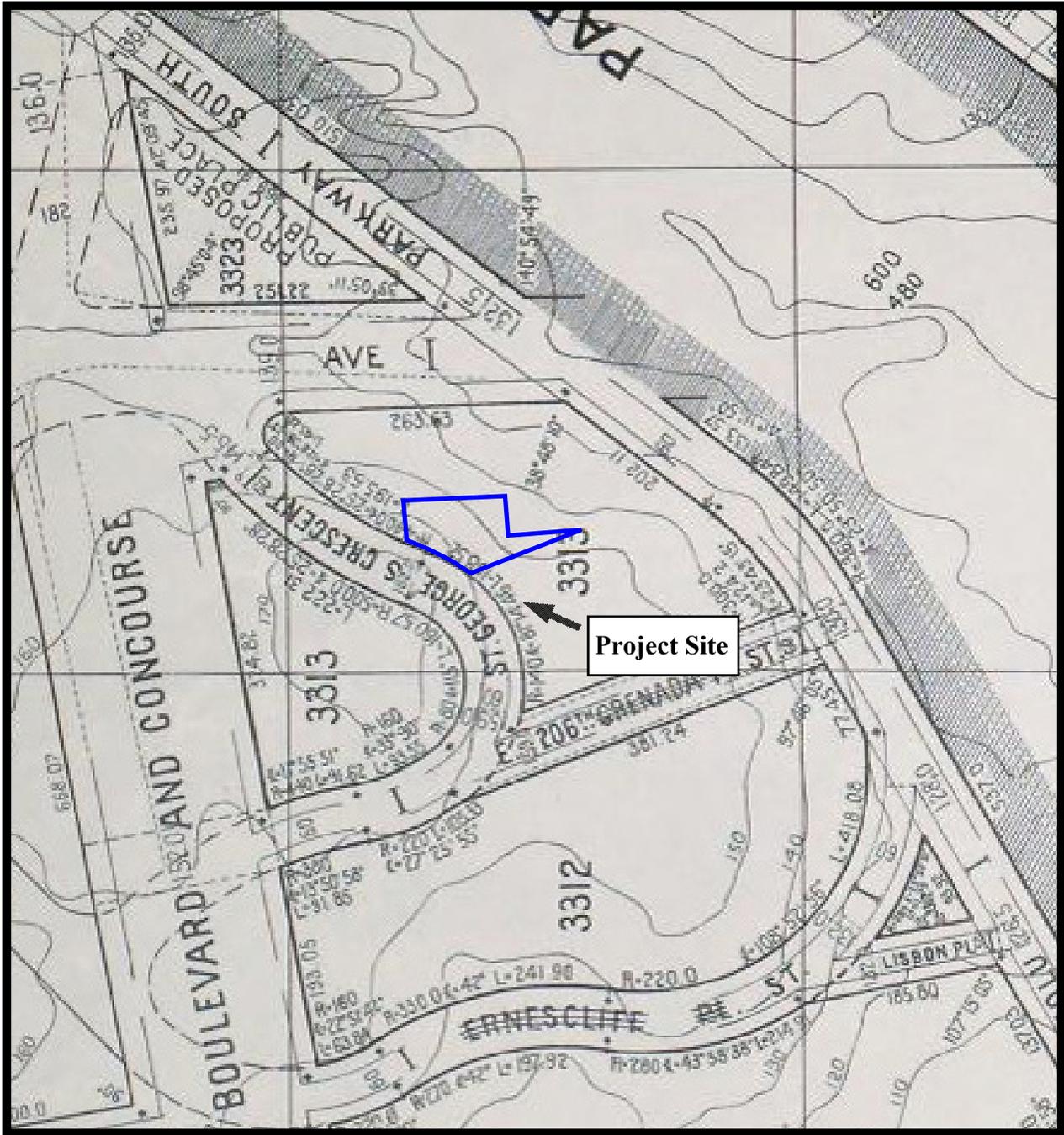




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Figure 3: Project site on modern survey (Earl B. Lovell-S.P. Belcher, Inc. 2008).





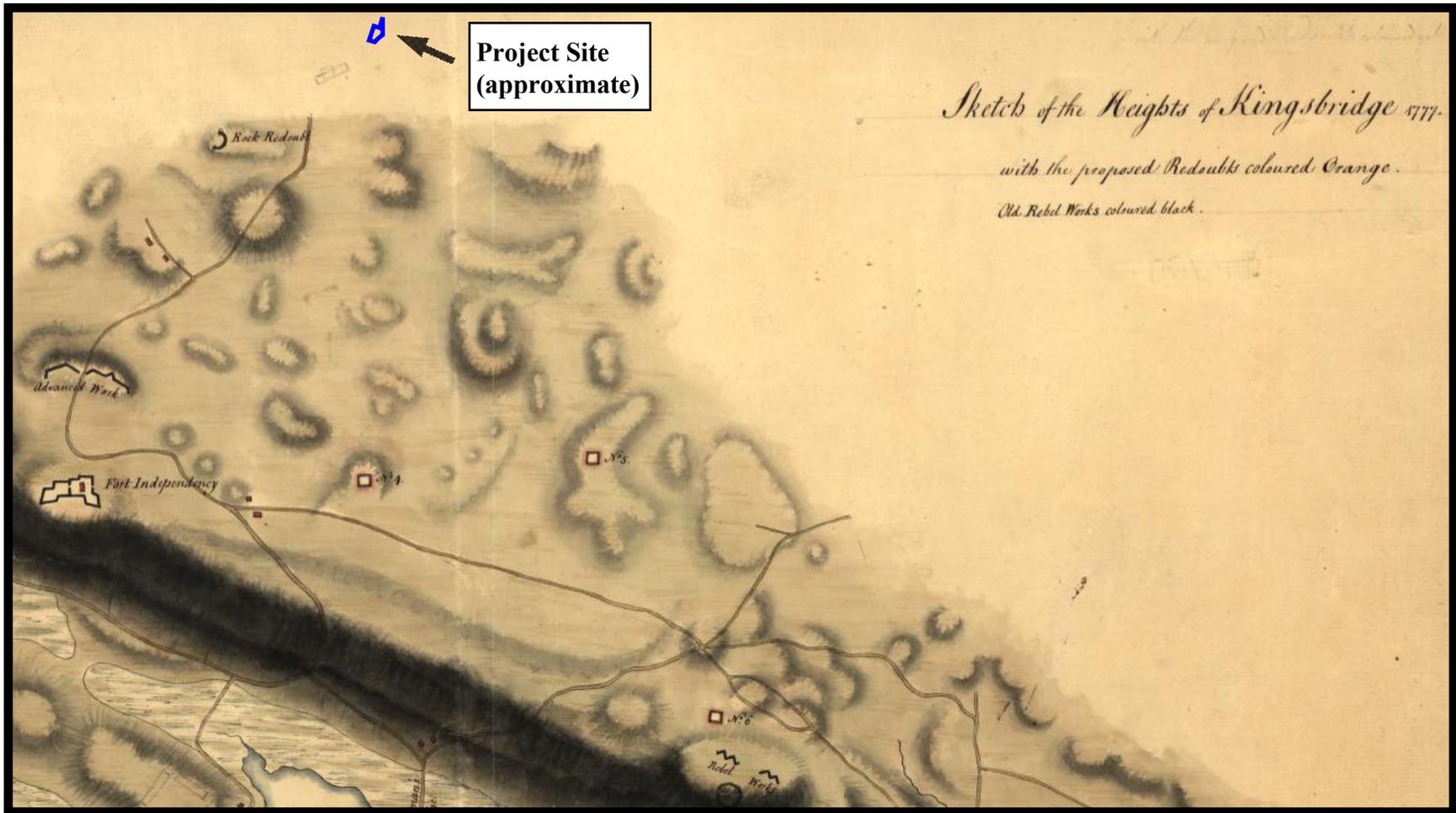
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Figure 4: Project site on *Maps or plans and profiles...* (Risse 1895).

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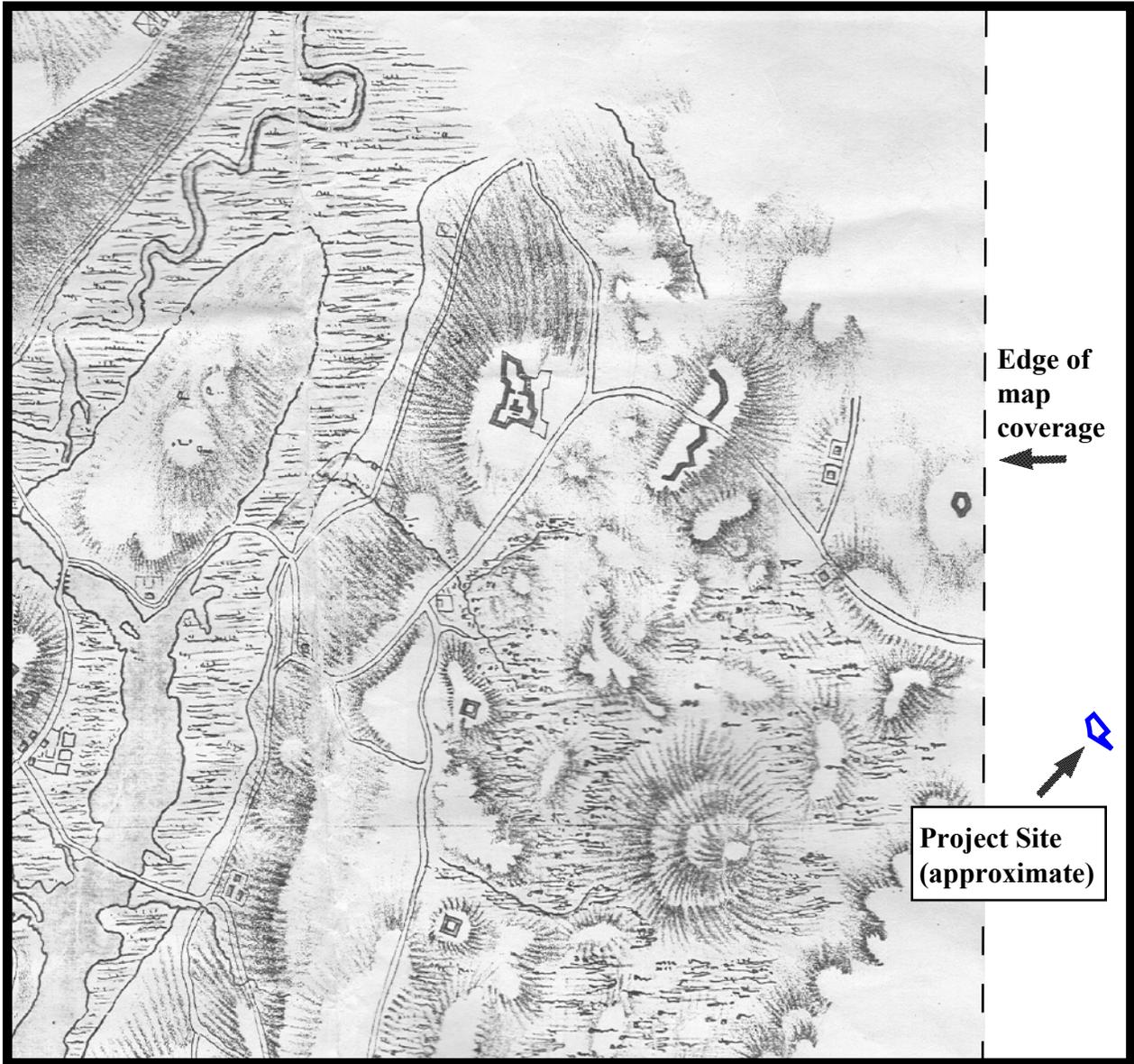


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Figure 5: Project site on *Sketch of the Heights of Kingsbridge 1777*, with the proposed redoubts coloured orange. Old rebel works coloured black (Anonymous 1777).

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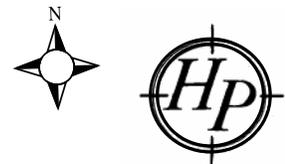
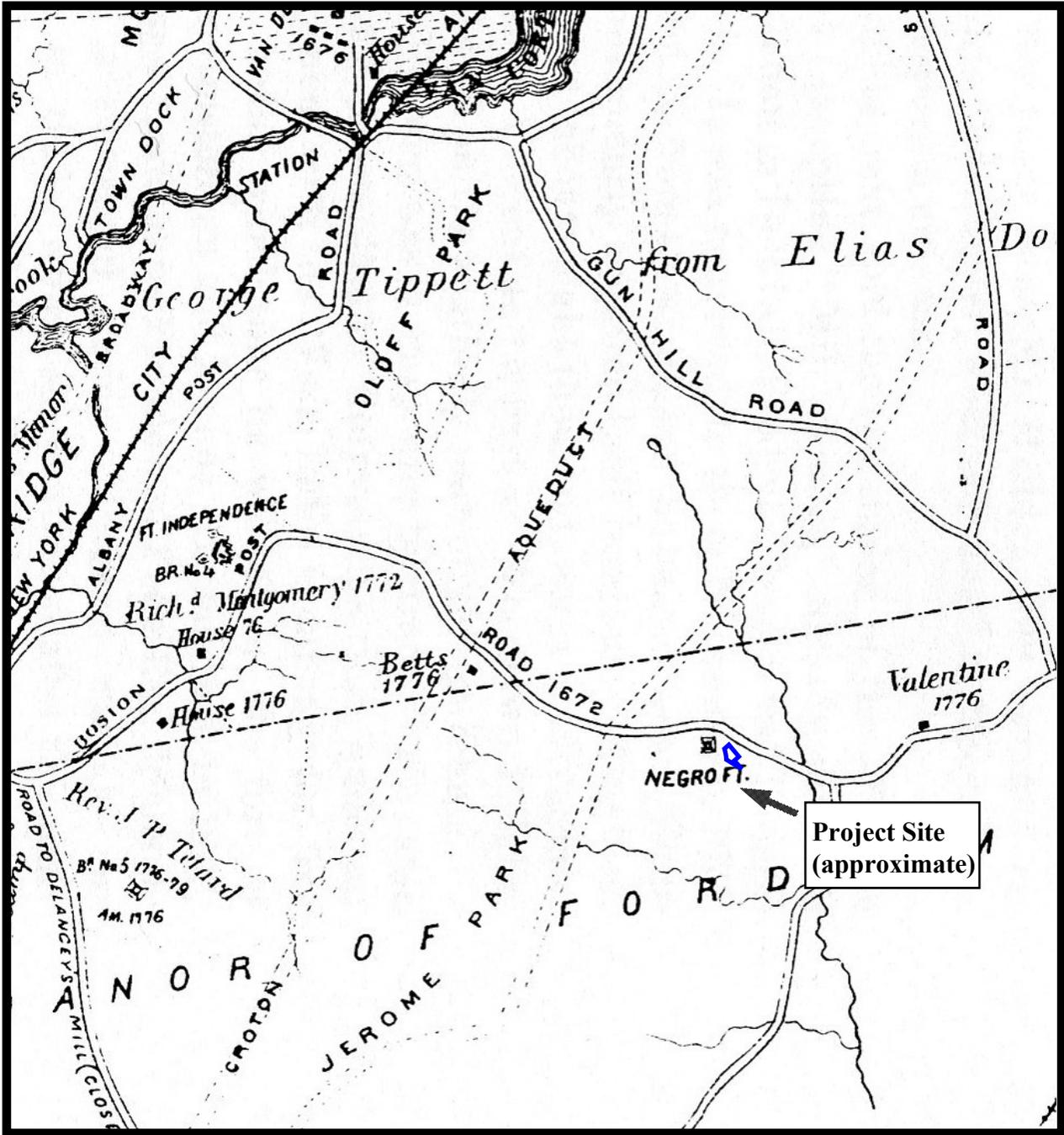


Figure 6: Project site on *British Headquarters Map* (British Headquarters 1782).

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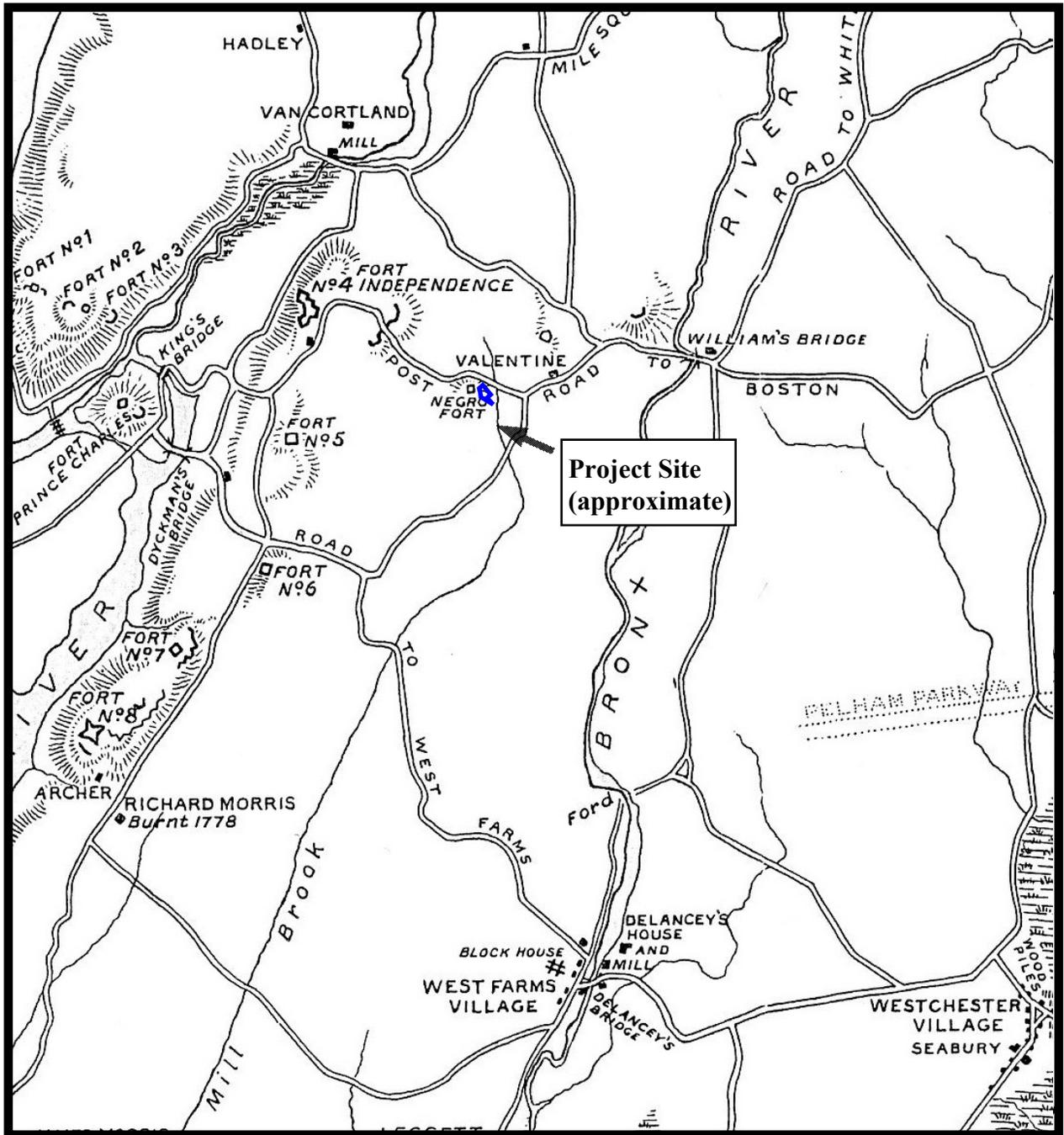
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 Bronx, New York



Figure 7: Project site on *Historical Sketch Map of Kings' Bridge, 1645-1783* (Edsall 1886).

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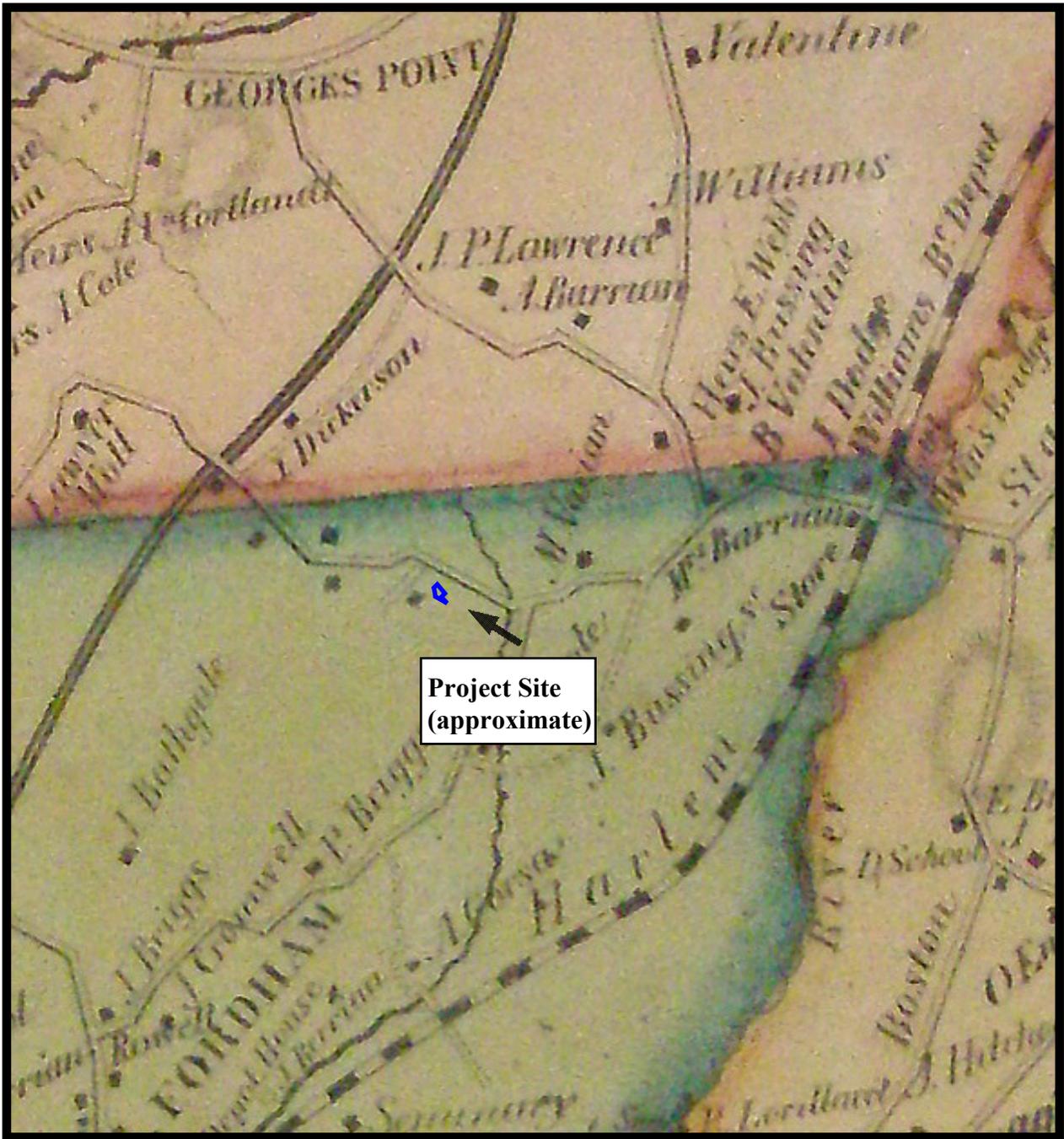


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Figure 8: Project site on *Lower Part of Westchester County, now the Bronx Borough of New York City* (Hufeland 1926).

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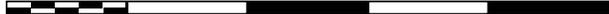


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Figure 9: Project site on *Map of Westchester County New York* (Sidney and Neff 1851).

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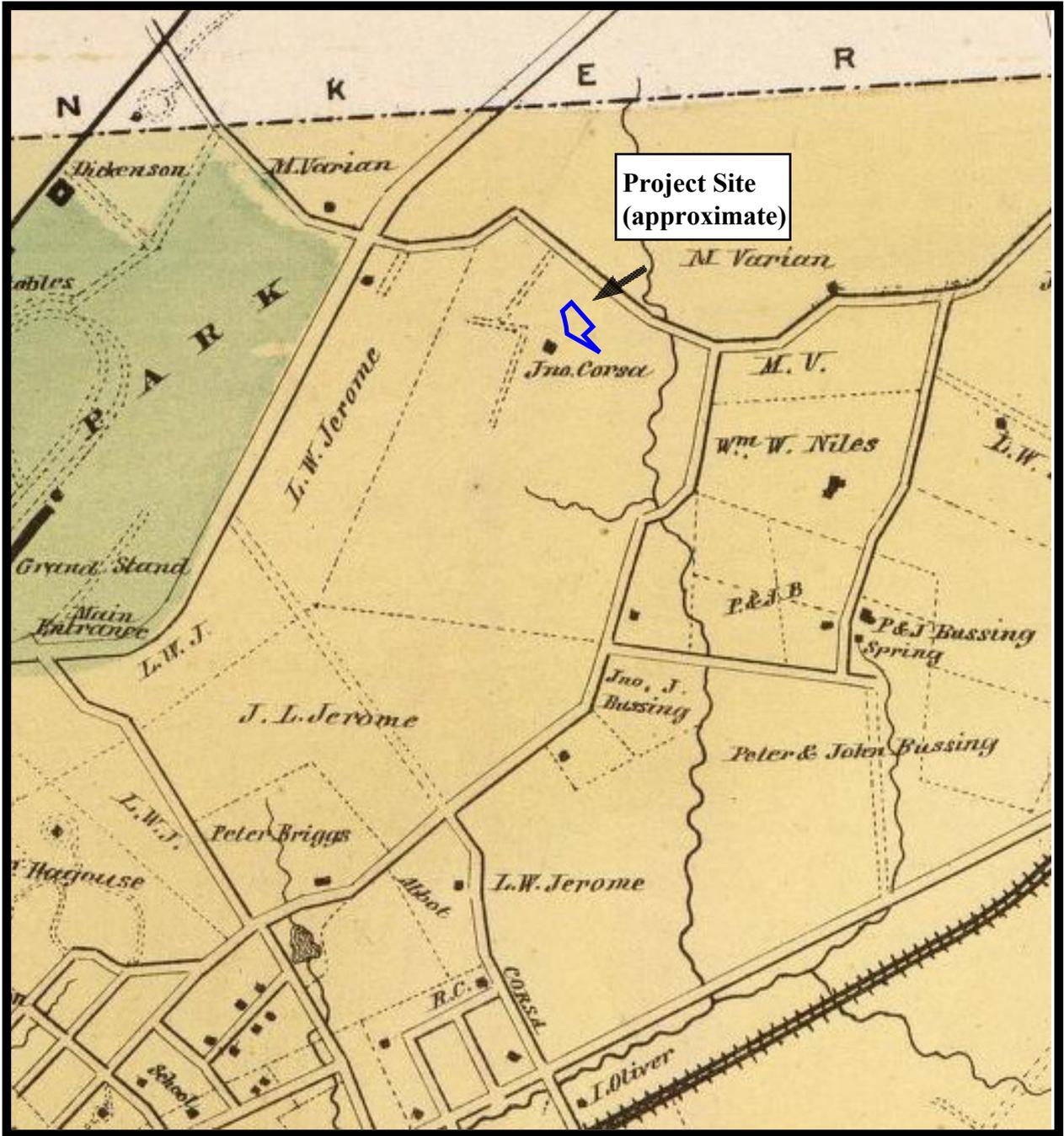


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Figure 10: Project site on *Map of the Southern Part of Westchester County, New York* (Conner 1853).

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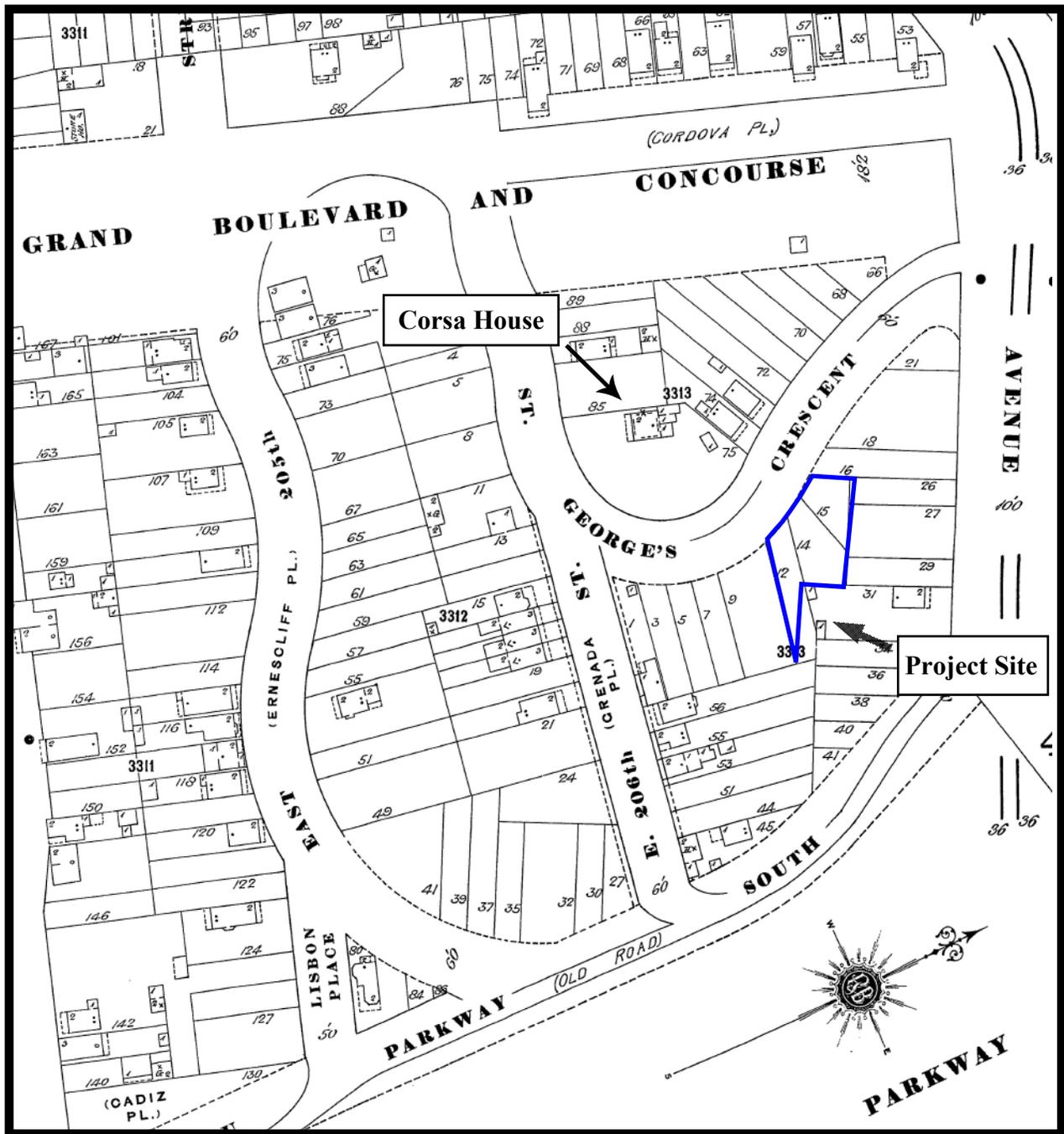


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Figure 11: Project site on *West Farms, Atlas of Westchester County, New York* (Beers 1868).

0 500 1000 2000 3000 4000 FEET



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Figure 12: Project site on *Insurance Maps of the City of New York: Borough of the Bronx* (Sanborn 1900).

0 100 200 300 400 500 FEET

Approved:

President of the Borough of The Bronx.

Office of the President of the Borough of The Bronx  
Topographical Bureau

### Draft Damage Map

in the matter of acquiring title to  
**St. George's Crescent**  
between E. 206<sup>th</sup> St. and Van Cortlandt Avenue  
in the 24<sup>th</sup> Ward, Borough of The Bronx  
City of New York.

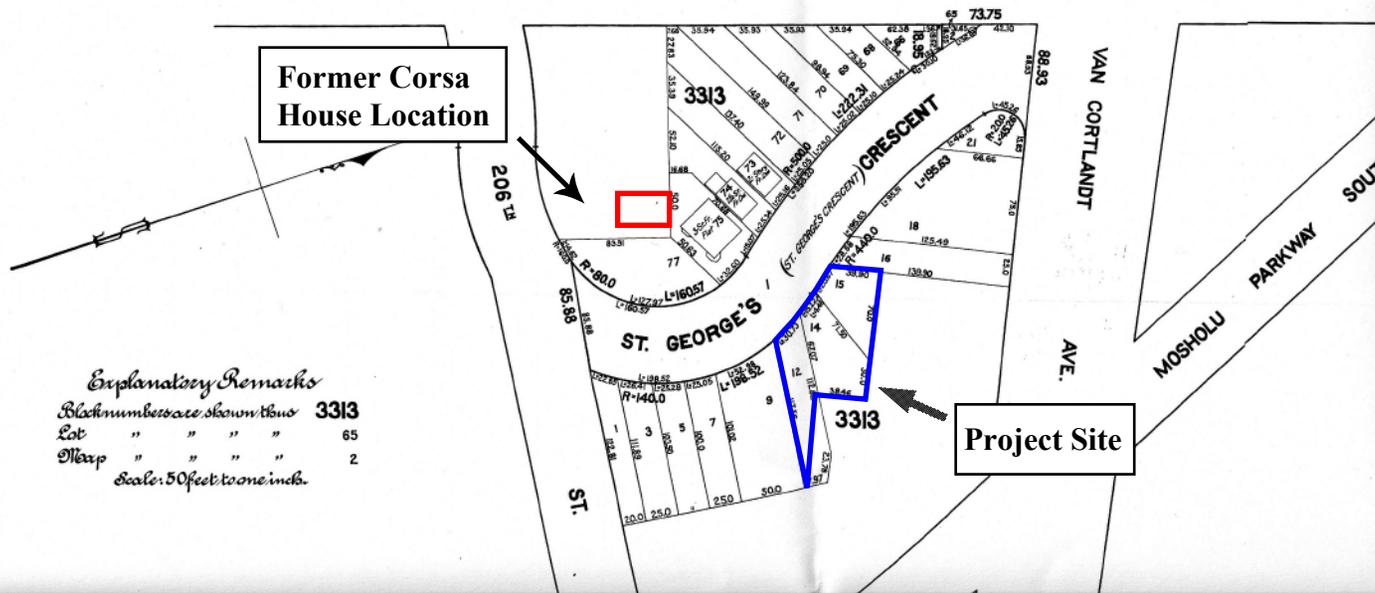
Dated: New York, June 18<sup>th</sup> 1909.

*J. C. Henry*  
Acting Topographical Engineer

Chief Engineer  
of the Borough of The Bronx.

MAP NO.	LOT NO.	OWNER	AREA IN SQ. FT.
1		Unknown (Streeting)	26853.61
2	65	Fannie Taylor	291.38
TOTAL			27144.99 OR 10,858 C

GRAND BOULEVARD AND CONGOURSE



*Explanatory Remarks*  
 Block numbers are shown thus 3313  
 Lot " " " " 65  
 Map " " " " 2  
 Scale: 50 feet to one inch.

Archaeological Documentary Study  
 186 St. George's Crescent  
 Block 3313, Lot 12  
 Bronx, New York



Figure 13: Project site on *Draft Damage Map in the matter of acquiring title to St. George's Crescent...* (Bronx Topographical Bureau 1909).

0 100 200 300 400 500 FEET



Photograph 1: View of project site beyond chain link fence, with apartment building on right. View looking east from St. George's Crescent. Source: HPI, August 5, 2009.



Photograph 2: View of project site in background, with apartment building on left. View looking southwest from Van Cortlandt Park East. Source: HPI, August 5, 2009.



Photograph 3: View of interior of project site showing dense foliage. View looking north from adjacent apartment building. Source: HPI, August 5, 2009.



Photograph 4: View of project site showing slope of parcel on right and garbage dumped on ground surface in foreground. View looking northeast from St. George's Crescent. Source: North Manhattan Construction Corp., January 19, 2005.



Photograph 5: View of project site showing slope of parcel, recently felled trees, bedrock outcrops, and garbage on ground surface. View looking north from interior of lot. Source: North Manhattan Construction Corp., September 13, 2006.



Photograph 6: View of project site in winter, showing slope of parcel, recently felled trees, bedrock outcrops, and garbage on ground surface. View looking south from interior of lot. Source: North Manhattan Construction Corp., September 13, 2006.



Photograph 7: Enlargement of photograph taken in 1936 showing project site in center of image, behind stone wall. View looking southeast from intersection of Grand Concourse and St. George's Crescent. Source: NYPL.