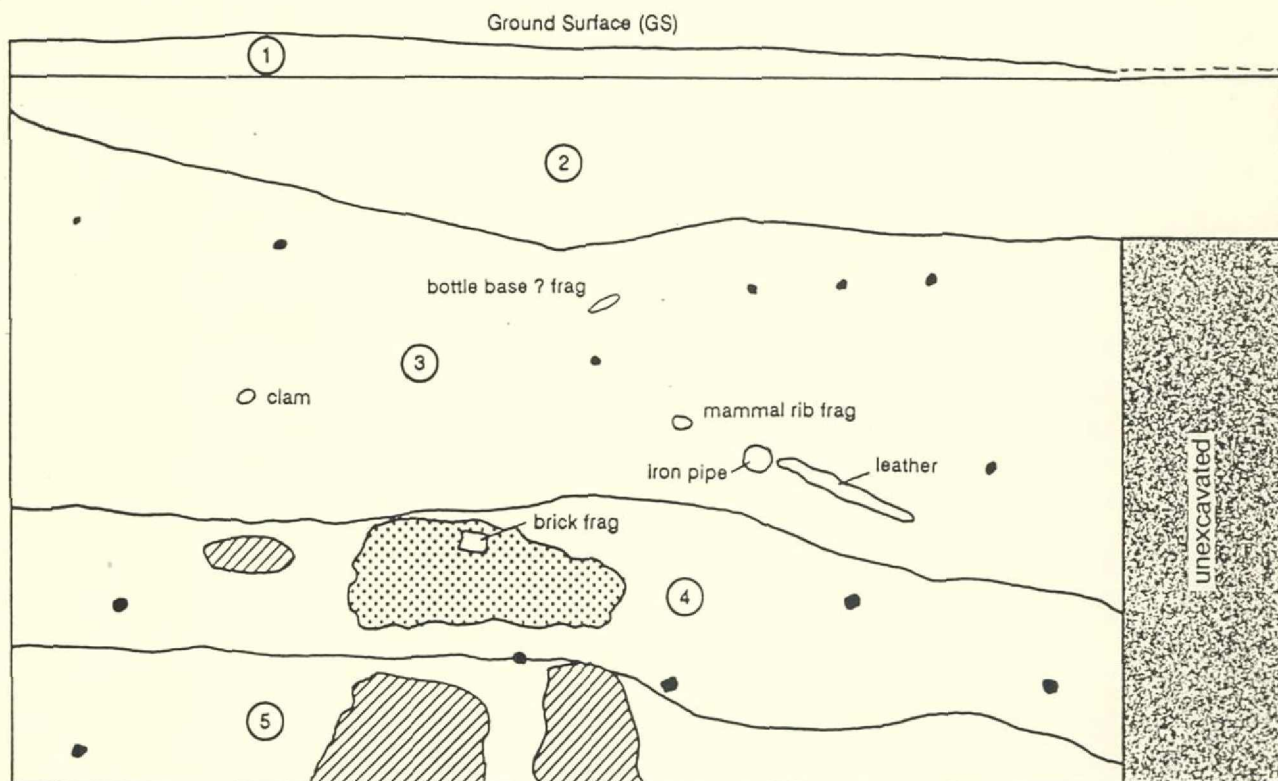


USF 1259K

1994

# Saratoga Square Urban Renewal Area, Brooklyn, New York

Field Testing June 1994



CEQR No. 89-232K

Prepared for the City of New York  
Department of Housing Preservation and Development

Prepared by Joan H. Geismar, Ph.D.  
August 1994

164

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many individuals who helped make archaeological field testing at the Saratoga Square Urban Renewal Area site possible. Among them are Beverly A. Reith, Director of Environmental Review, Division of Architecture and Engineering, Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), and Mitchell Kaplan, City Planner, and Peter Taras, General Supervisor of Building Maintenance, Environmental Review of the same division. Also helpful and key to expediting the testing program were Charles Curry, Associate Staff Analyst, and Paul Davis, General Building Supervisor of Brooklyn HPD. Once again, I am also extremely grateful to Reverend Joe L. Parker, Pastor of the Wayside Baptist Church, who provided overnight parking for the backhoe throughout the testing program. I also thank neighborhood residents who provided information, and, especially Mr. Walker who helped me when I was locked out of my car. I also thank Bob Wogish, the backhoe owner/operator, and of course, my field crew--Shelly Spritzer, John Killeen, and Cas Stachelberg.

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Graphics: Amy Geller

Photographs: Joan H. Geismar



## INTRODUCTORY SUMMARY

This report presents the results of a second phase of archaeological field testing undertaken at the Saratoga Square Urban Renewal Area (URA) project site in June 1994. In a sense, it is an extension of the December 1993/March 1994 field report. The testing program was carried out under the auspices of the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). It was directed by Joan H. Geismar, Ph.D., the author of this report, assisted by Shelly Spritzer, John Killeen, and Cas Stachelberg; Robert Wogish was the backhoe owner/operator.

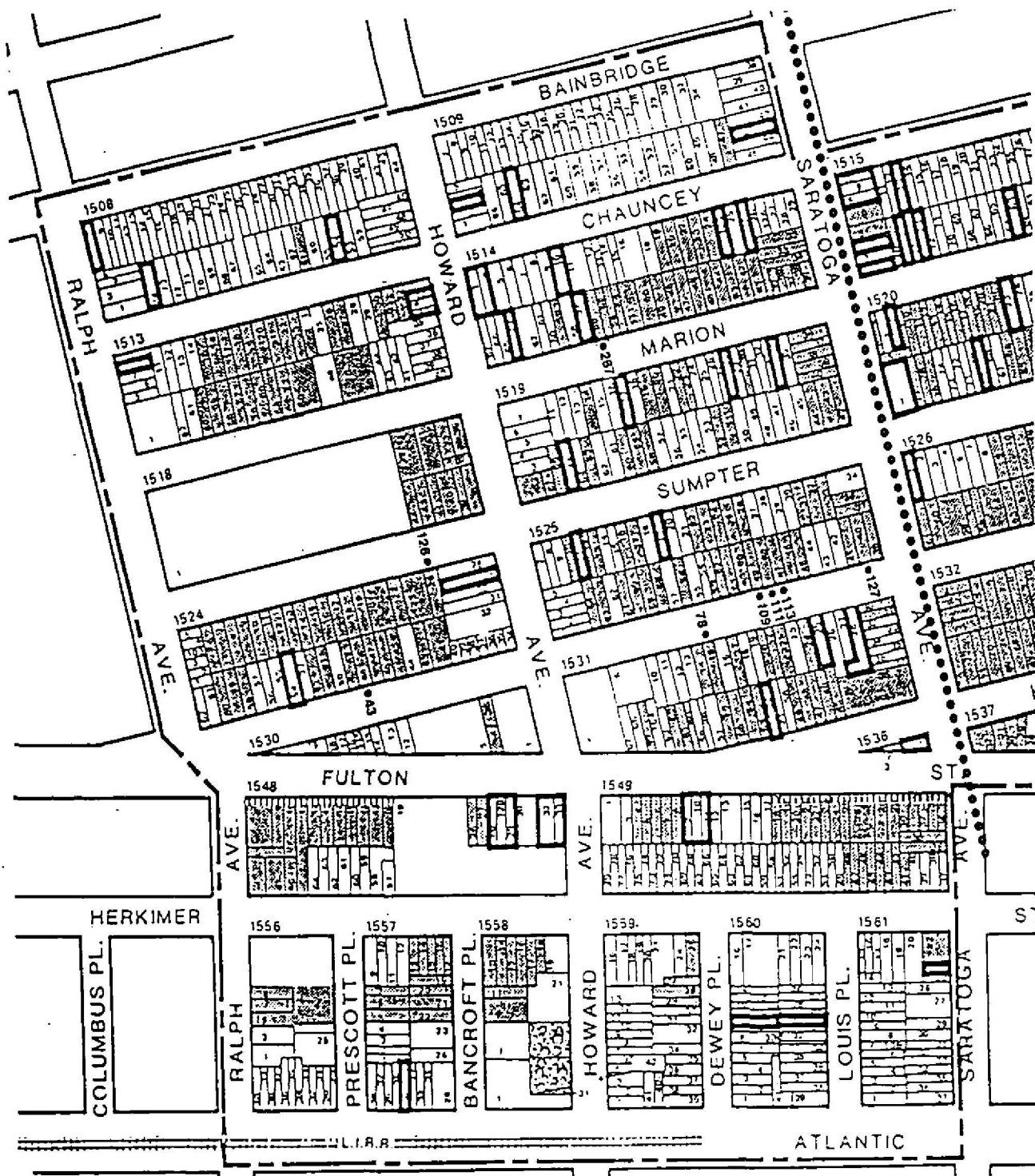
The project site is a thirty-block residential development that combines new construction and the rehabilitation of existing structures. Of the more than 1000 building lots included in the site, fifteen were selected for testing based on documentary research (Geismar 1993). Fourteen of these were chosen for their historical potential: the yards of these lots were likely locations for abandoned and sealed water cisterns and outhouse privy pits that often yield household debris that provide historical information. In this case, the original houses on these lots were part of the village of New Brooklyn, a mid-19th century settlement developed and promoted by German-born entrepreneurs. It was a community of tailors, tradesmen, and merchants, most of them also of German origin although other nationalities and occupations are represented in the historical record. The remaining lot was selected for its potential for evidence of Native American use based on the nearby location of a fresh water spring documented in 19th-century deeds. The rationale for these choices is outlined in a documentary study and its addendum (Geismar 1993). According to city records, each of the tested lots was 25 by 100 ft. although field measurements varied somewhat.

A first phase of field testing was completed in October 1993 and reported on in December 1993/March 1994. Seven of the fifteen lots were fully tested during this first field phase, while three were partially tested. The second phase documented here, which addressed the archaeological potential in all or part of seven lots, completed the recommended testing. A modification was made to the test sample prior to field work: 313 Sumpter Street, which is currently occupied, was dropped from the sample, and 113 Sumpter Street, which is also occupied, was only tested in the rear of the yard to avoid damage to the integrity of the house structure. A total of fourteen lots were excavated. As in the first test phase, the goal was to locate and identify the above-mentioned backyard features; artifact recovery was not part of the scope. To expedite this field program, and to avoid the delays and pitfalls encountered during the October test phase--including two occasions when yard trash and debris punctured the backhoe tires--yards to be tested were cleared by the city just prior to the June test program. This greatly facilitated field work.

As noted above, seven yards were fully or partially tested to complete the modified testing program (Exhibit 1a and 1b). Eight test trenches (TT) and five test pits (P) were excavated by machine (backhoe) and hand (shovel and trowel), and one test trench (at 194

**SARATOGA SQUARE FIELD TESTING** Summary of Lots Tested (10/93 and 6/94)  
West of Saratoga Avenue

1a



- 1506 project boundary
- block and lot numbers
- new construction site (incomplete)
- rehab site (incomplete)
- commercial site

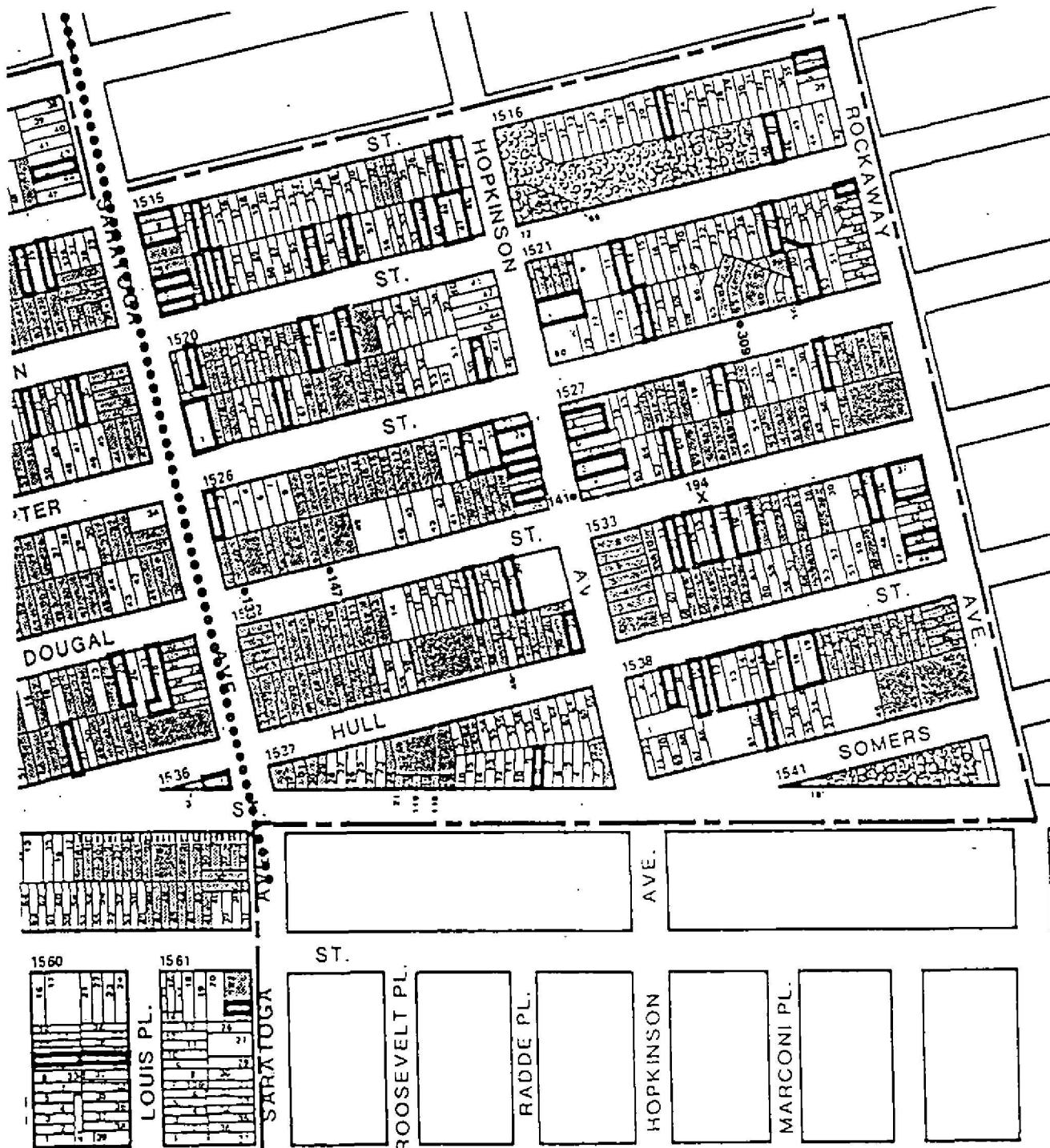
- open space
- 111 tested lot (10/93 &/or 6/94) historical
- • • • • match line

no scale



**SARATOGA SQUARE FIELD TESTING** Summary of Lots Tested (10/93 and 6/94)  
East of Saratoga Avenue

1b



project boundary

block and lot numbers

new construction site (incomplete)

rehab site (incomplete)

commercial site



open space

• 147

tested lot (10/93 &/or 6/94) historical

X

194

tested lot (6/94) for Native American archaeological potential

.....

match line

no scale



MacDougal) was hand excavated (the backhoe could not access the yard where this trench was to be dug). Testing identified eight construction-related features, but no water cisterns, privy pits, or wells were uncovered.

A summary of the field testing program and its results are presented in the following sections.

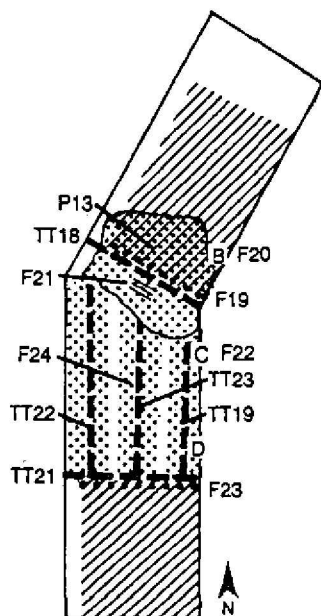
#### FIELD METHOD

The tested lots are briefly discussed in order of excavation. Test units and feature locations are illustrated in Exhibit 2, and a summary of details--features (in this case, construction elements), size of test units, soils, etc.--is presented in Tables 1 and 2. Field findings were documented with 35mm slides (e.g., Exhibits 3 and 4), and Test Trench 20 (TT20), which was hand excavated in the backyard of 194 MacDougal Street, was profiled (see Exhibit 5) as well as photographed (see Exhibit 3). All test pits and trenches were back-filled after being documented.

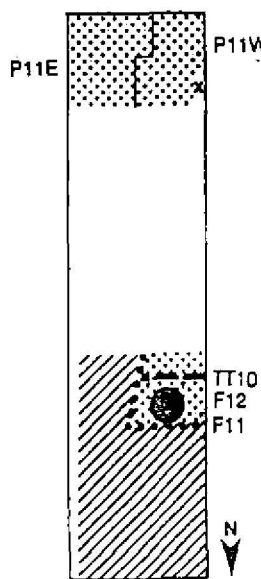
141 Thomas Boyland (Block 1527, Lot 1). This vacant lot, located on the northeast corner of the intersection of MacDougal Street and Thomas Boyland Avenue (formerly Hopkinson Avenue), was partially excavated in October 1993. At that time, several building elements were located, but no cistern or privy features were encountered. Excavation of the southeastern corner of the backyard, an area where a privy pit might have been located, was hampered by a cement slab. Removal of the slab prior to testing in June permitted testing to proceed, and a test pit (P9) was opened in the southeast corner of the lot, but no features were located. In sum, this lot was devoid of both cistern and privy features.

153 Thomas Boyland (Block 1533, Lot 4. P10, a large test pit that extended almost entirely across the back yard of this vacant lot, was opened, but no features of any kind were located. A large, old cherry tree growing in the southeast corner of the yard prevented excavation in this area, but testing was extensive enough to determine that there was no privy pit located in its vicinity. Random stones found throughout the upper levels of the pit may have been the remnants of a former stone privy feature, but there was neither stone patterning nor soil differences to suggest the presence of such a feature (a homogeneous sand to sterile soil was found). The soil indicates that the stones occurred naturally.

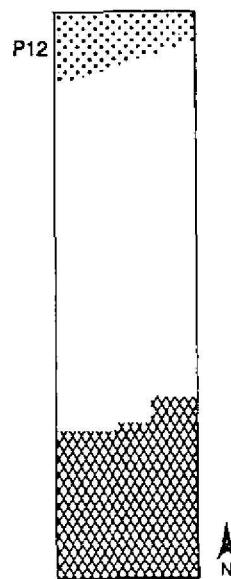
Two test trenches were opened in the vicinity of the former house structure, one parallel to its back wall as indicated on historical maps (TT16), the other perpendicular to this wall on the north side of the lot (TT17). While miscellaneous large foundation-type rocks were noted, they did not define a wall, nor was a cistern feature found. A concrete floor or floors at a depth of about 2 1/2 to 3 ft. below the current ground surface, as well as debris that included portions of cars, hindered excavation of these trenches and, ultimately, the larger excavation area opened beyond the trenches. Conditions in this part of the lot are summarized as being debris-



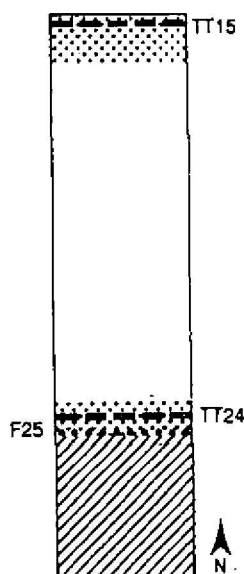
309 Sumpter  
Block 1521  
Lot 63



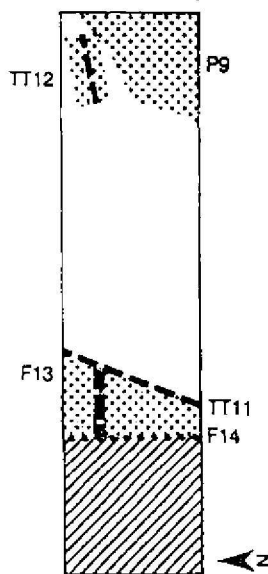
126 Sumpter  
Block 1524  
Lot 43



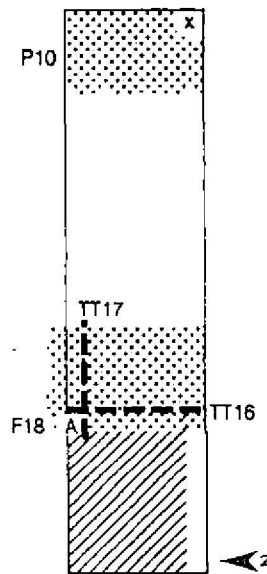
113 MacDougal  
Block 1525  
Lot 47



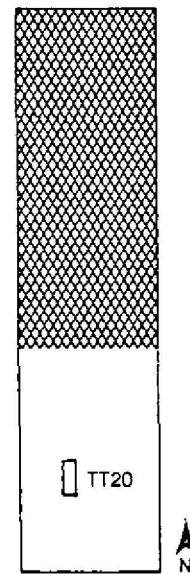
133 MacDougal  
Block 1526  
Lot 60



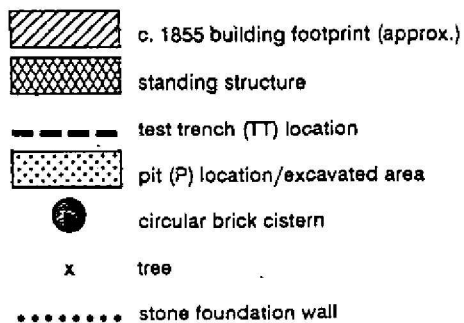
141 Thomas Boyland  
Block 1527  
Lot 1



153 Thomas Boyland  
Block 1533  
Lot 4

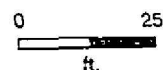


194 MacDougal  
Block 1533  
Lot 16



- ≡ steps ("modern")
- A c 5 x 1.5-ft mortared brick wall, unid.
- B brick construction
- C concrete wall
- D tumble of large rocks/modern debris

note: scale of features approximate



**Table 1. SARATOGA SQUARE FIELD TESTING** Summary of Testing 6/7/94-6/9/94

Address/Block/Lot	Testing Status/Features Located
309 Sumpter/Block 1521/Lot 63	Concrete/stone walls & constructions (F19/20); cellar steps (F21); cement wall frag (F22); mortared stone foundation wall of former backhouse (F23); concrete walkway (F24); no cistern or privy pit located.
126 Sumpter/Block 1524/Lot 43	(Partially tested 10/93)* no privy features located in tested rear yard
113 MacDougal/Block 1525/Lot 47	No features located in tested rear yard.
133 MacDougal/Block 1526/Lot 60	(Partially tested 10/93)** no cistern located near former house structure
141 Thomas Boyland/Block 1527/Lot 1	(Partially tested 10/93)*** no privy feature located
153 Thomas Boyland/Block 1533/Lot 4	Unid. mortared brick wall (F18); no cistern or privy features located
194 MacDougal/Block 1533/Lot 16	No features located; yard disturbance documented in hand-dug trench (TT20); trench profiled

\* brick cistern (F12) located 10/93; cement slab that prevented testing for privy pits in rear yard removed for this test phase

\*\* rear yard tested 10/93, but no privy feature located

\*\*\* tested for cistern 10/93 and in part for privy; building wall (F14); cement slab that prevented further testing at that time was removed for this test phase

Note that Thomas Boyland Ave. was formerly Hopkinson Ave.

#### Summary of Table 1

No backyard features (cisterns, privy pits, or wells) documented in the seven tested yards

1 cement faced brick steps (F21 [modern?])

1 cement walkway (F24; extension of F21 and possibly part of F22)

6 walls or wall complexes (F18, F19, F20, F22, F24, F25)



Table 2. SARATOGA SQUARE FIELD TESTING Test Unit Dimensions (see Exhibit 2 for Locations)

Address/Block/Lot	Unit	Dimensions (in ft) [LxWxD]	Soil Description/Remarks
309 Sumpter/Block 1521 Lot 63	P13	20 x 20 irr x 6+	Rubble-filled basement in N part; E-W stone foundation wall (F19) c 40 ft S of N building line; brick construction, possible fireplace (F20), located on E side of foundation; extensive nest of large cockroaches exposed.
	TT18	c 20 x 8.4-10.4 x 5-8	Cellar steps (F21) in center of rear foundation wall (F19); TT ultimately large, irr excavation, extension of P13; adjoining concrete walkway (F24) later revealed in TT23; minor concrete wall (F22) in TT18 possibly part of F21/24.
	TT19	28.8 x 2.5-3 x	2.5-3 ft from, & in line w/, E property wall; F22 (minor E-W concrete wall) 2.5 ft BGS (approx. same depth as driveway at 311-313 Sumpter in this vicinity); dark debris-laden soil in N part of TT; sandier and cleaner as TT extended S from house foundation; concentration of large rocks mixed w/ modern debris (garden hose, etc.) 25 ft S of F19; corner of stone foundation (F23) for house formerly on Sumpter St exposed.
	TT21	c 16 x 2.5 x 4.5-4.8	E-W trench at/N of F23; stone foundation wall (F23); ash under rubble, then sterile (4.5-4.8 ft BGS); joins TT19.
	TT22	c 14 x 3.5 x 4.2	E of W property line; ash under rubble, then sterile.
	TT23	27.8 x 6 x 4.2+	Concrete walkway & curbs (F24) 3 ft BGS in center of TT23; an extension of F21 and p/o F22?; copper water pipe & larger pipe 1 ft below bottom of walkway. Excavated into sterile soil.
126 Sumpter/Block 1524 Lot 43	P11E/ P11W	23.16 x c 23 x 4.2-c 5	P11 excavated in 2 parts (P11E, P11W) after removal of concrete floor by HPD: tree in NW corner; .75-1 ft layer of ash under concrete; dark soil under; yellow sterile soil at c 4.5 ft (see Exhibit 3).
113 MacDougal/Block 1525/ Lot 47	P12	20.6 x 11.6-5 x 6.5 (NW corner)	E-W pit; same soil conditions as in 111 and 109 MacDougal; level) at 3.5 BGS, .7 ft thick in center; thickens as it extends N; no features located.
133 MacDougal/Block 1526/ Lot 60	TT24	24.5 x 5.2 (E)- 7 (W) x 5.4-8	E-W TT, exposed rear building wall (F25); 1.5 ft of debris, then clean sandy soil w/ some rocks, 1 large boulder in E part; no backyard features located.
141 Thomas Boyland/Block 1527/ Lot 1	P9	24 (N-S) x 15 1/2 irr x 8.5 (NE corner)- 5.4 (SW corner)	Fill to c 3 ft; reddish sand below; few artifacts; hardpan at c 5 ft; no features encountered.
153 Thomas Boyland/Block 1533/ Lot 4	P10	17.5-24 x 15.5 6.5 (rear)-4.5	Pit across back of yard extending E-W; tree in SE corner; fill to c. 3-4.5 ft; reddish sand beneath fill; isolated stones and rocks throughout, but no pattern/features.
	TT16	c 21 x 3-4 x 2-4	Rubble & rocks, trash-laden; possible rear stone wall of former structure 25 ft E of W property line; no backyard features.
	TT17	21 x 2.5 x minimally 2-3.5 (also deeper but unmeasured)	N side of yard; 5-ft segment of 2-ft thick brick wall (F18) w/ finished edges; ultimately, 19 x 25-ft area tested, extended N of property line (to trace F18). Worked-over, trash-laden fill (including car parts); concrete & debris hampered testing; brownish/red, worked-over soil.

(continues)

Table 2. **SARATOGA SQUARE FIELD TESTING** Test Unit Dimensions (see Exhibit 2 for Locations)

Address/Block/Lot	Unit	Dimensions (in ft) [LxWxD]	Soil Description/Remarks
194 MacDougal/Block 1533/ Lot 16	TT20	7 x 2.3 x 4	Disturbed soil under trash cover and humus; "modern" artifact concentration at c 2.5 BGS; "A Horizon" (original GS) eliminated in the past; natural soil a tan/orange, orange/tan, or brown sandy silt; see profile, Exhibit 5.

BGS = Below Ground Surface; GS = Ground Surface; irr = irregular; P = Test Pit; TT = Test Trench; unid = unidentified

Test trenches (TT) were initially c 2.5 ft wide, but almost all were widened during testing, many of them irregularly (see Exhibit 2). During this test phase, all located features comprised building components, not yard features. Where these features were lacking, excavations extended into sterile soil (mainly a yellow/orange sand) approximately to depths of 5-6 ft See Exhibit 2 for locations of test trenches (TT), pits (P), and building features.



filled and well worked over. A brick wall remnant (F18) extended beyond the northern lot line near where the back wall of the former dwelling would have been located. This was the only notable feature encountered. While excavation in this part of the lot was hampered by subsurface conditions, a very disturbed lot was documented that did not appear to contain a cistern feature.

126 Sumpter Street (Block 1524, Lot 43). As noted in the documentary study (Geismar 1993), the former building on this lot was home to transient German-born immigrants throughout the nineteenth century. In the 1870s, it was also home to at least two African-American families (Geismar 1993/1994 Addendum:5-6). Testing in October 1993 had uncovered a filled beehive cistern with its domed top missing (F12). In June, a test pit (P11) was placed in the rear portion of the yard where a cement slab, the remnant of a former shed, had been removed to facilitate testing. Virtually clean sand devoid of features was found under an ashy deposit (see Exhibit 3).

113 MacDougal Street (Block 1525, Lot 47). Access to this yard had been unattainable in October when the house, one of the few original structures standing in the test area, was vacant. In June, it was occupied, and, as noted earlier, testing was limited to the rear portion of the yard. An extensive test pit (P12) was placed adjacent to the rear property line, but, as had been the case in the adjoining lots (109 and 111 MacDougal Street), no features of any kind were located in this part of the yard. Here, as in the neighboring lots, a "meadowmat" layer of dark sand was documented above sterile soil.

309 Sumpter Street (Block 1521, Lot 63). Access to this vacant lot had been limited by the amount of debris it contained, but cleaning just prior to the June testing alleviated this problem. Of all the yards tested, this was the most complex. Its construction history included two houses, one fronting on the now-defunct Jamaica and Brooklyn Plank Road, the other on Sumpter Street, with a yard between them. While cisterns would have been placed adjacent to rear building walls, privy pit locations in this situation were unknown.

Ultimately, one large test pit (P13) and five trenches (TT18, TT19, TT21, TT22, TT23) were excavated by backhoe augmented with hand shoveling and troweling. These test units were placed so that unexcavated portions of the yard were limited to two strips, each about 2 ft. wide. One was located between TT19 and TT23, the other between TT23 and TT22. Since excavations in yards throughout Brooklyn and Manhattan have documented privy pits and cisterns that are minimally 4 ft. in diameter (e.g., Geismar 1992), these excavations would have revealed at least some part of these features had they been present, but none were found.

Once again, the only features encountered were building remnants, including the back wall of the house that fronted on the Brooklyn Jamaica Plank Road (F19), a brick construction inside the eastern building wall (F20) that was possibly a fireplace foundation, stone-faced cellar steps (F21) in the center of the rear wall of this

building, a segment of concrete wall just south of this rear wall (F22), the rear stone foundation wall of the dwelling on Sumpter Street (F23), and a concrete walkway (F24) that ran down the center of the yard and appears to have been associated with the cellar steps (and possibly with F22).

Excavation inside the former structure on the northern part of the lot disturbed a nest of large cockroaches. The cellar of this demolished building was filled with construction debris, and the roaches had apparently never abandoned it when the building was razed. In addition, excavation in TT23 in the center of the yard between the two structures produced strong petroleum odors, perhaps a result of junked or working cars once stored on the vacant lot. A rock tumble mixed with modern debris was located in TT19 that ran parallel to the eastern property line. No cisterns or privies were located in any of the excavations

133 MacDougal Street (Block 1526, Lot 60). Only the rear part of this vacant lot had been tested in October, and no features were found. In June, TT24 was excavated in the vicinity of the rear wall of the former building as indicated on historical maps. Care was taken not to disturb a vegetable garden put in by Mr. Walker who had been so helpful during the October excavations and continued to be so in June. While the rear stone foundation wall of the former building on the lot was found, no cistern or other backyard feature was located.

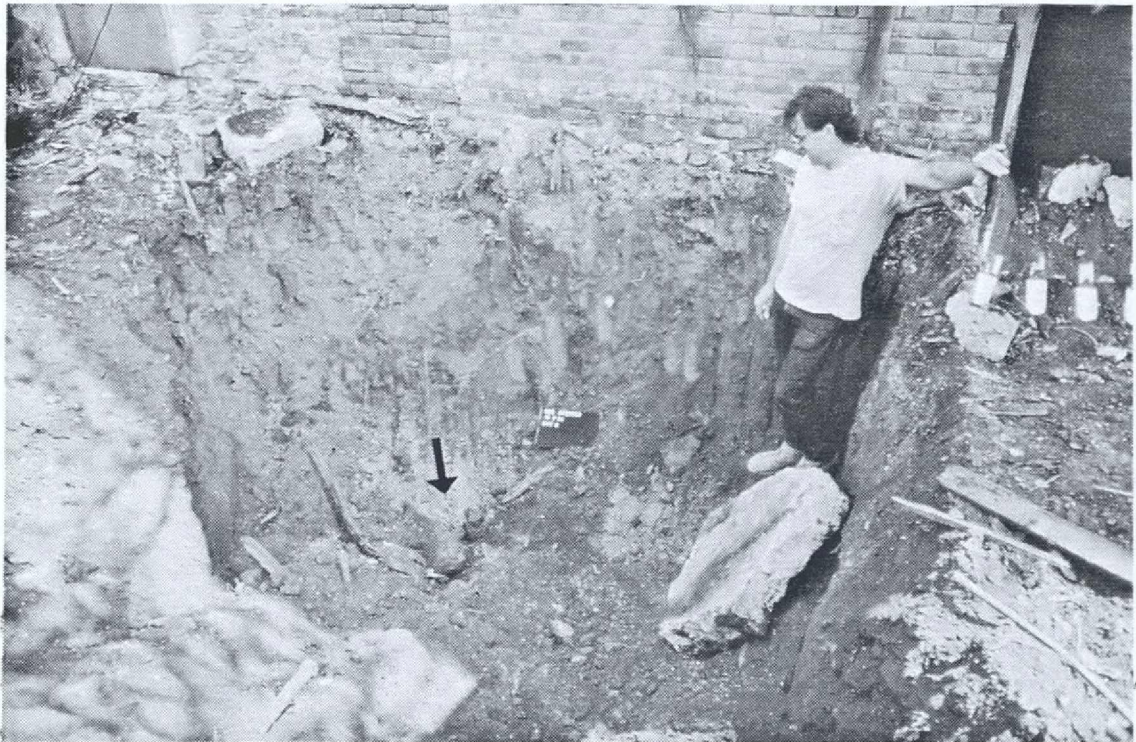
194 MacDougal (Block 1533, Lot 16). A vacant tenement building stands on this lot, and the yard was full of building debris that had to be consolidated to permit testing. Moreover, the yard configuration precluded use of the backhoe to excavate the proposed trench intended to determine stratigraphy and the likelihood of finding Native American deposits here or elsewhere in the immediate vicinity. Consequently hand excavation was called for (Exhibit 4). The resulting 7-ft. by 2.5 ft. trench, which was 4 ft. deep, revealed the absence of the original yard surface (the "A Horizon"), the soil level most likely to contain Native American deposits. This level was undoubtedly eliminated during construction of the tenement now on the lot. Ground disturbance, in the form of isolated artifacts and a concentration of "modern" debris at a depth of about 2 1/2 ft. (see Exhibit 5), was documented; sterile soil was reached at a depth of about 3 3/4 ft. Subsurface conditions suggested that Native American deposits were not an issue.

#### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Archaeological field testing undertaken from June 7 to June 9, 1994, completed the testing program recommended for the project site. A summary of the findings of this field work and the dimensions of test units will be found in Tables 1 and 2. No backyard features, such as privy pits or water cisterns, were located during this second phase of testing.

The findings and recommendations based on the first testing phase completed in October 1993, remain unaltered. The archaeolog-



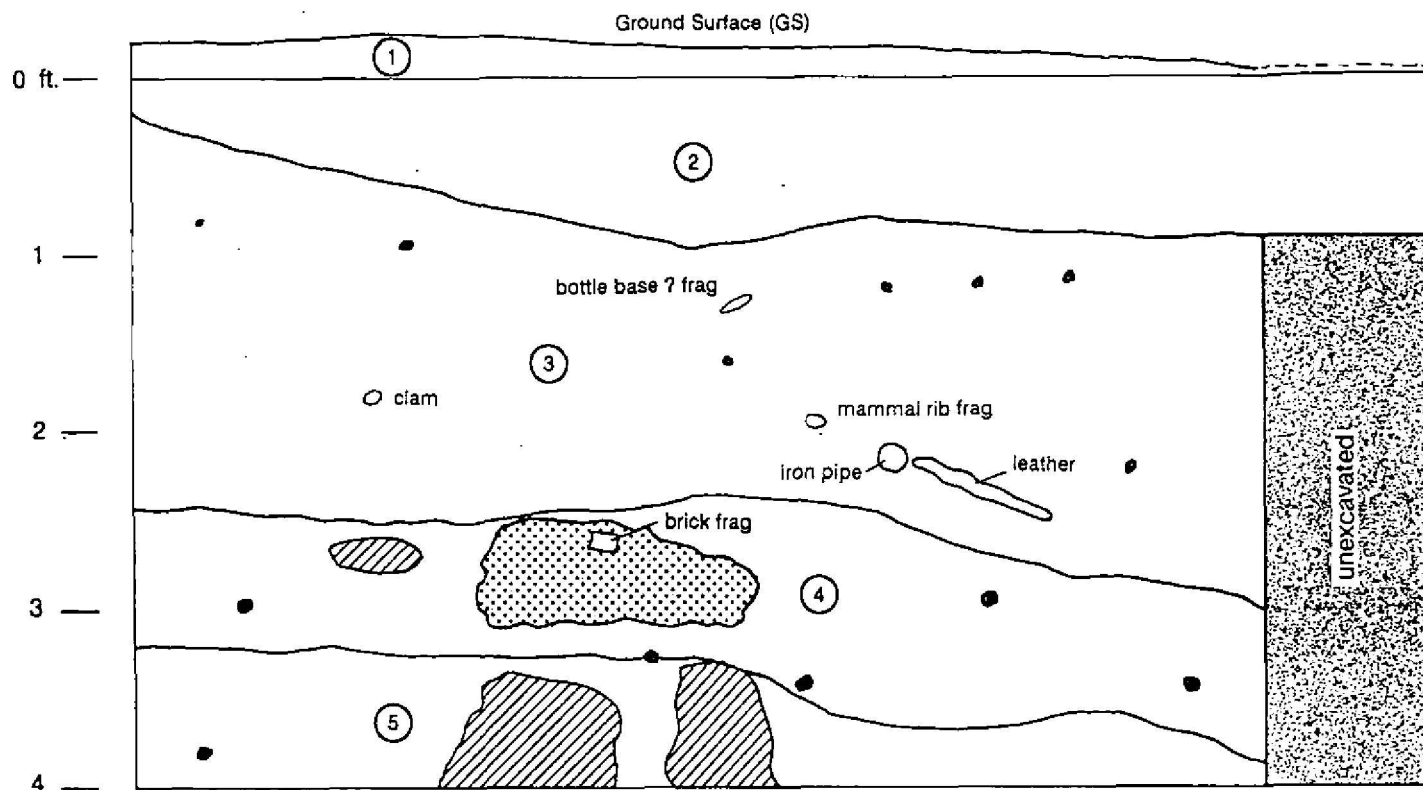




**3** Pit (P) 11 partially excavated, looking south. A cement floor, the remnant of a shed, was removed to access this part of the yard at 126 Sumpter St., but no evidence of a privy pit was found although the excavation extended into sterile yellow soil (arrow). (photo Geismar 6/7/94)



**4** Test Trench (TT) 20 at 194 MacDougal St. during hand excavation. This testing revealed that the yard, located in the vicinity of a spring documented in deeds, had been highly disturbed and would not harbor evidence of any prehistoric Native American use. Note the trash concentrated near the building in the background. The test area had been cleared prior to testing to facilitate the archaeological investigation. (photo Geismar 6/8/94)





- ① surface scatter (misc. trash with brown soil)
- ② humus, dark brown
- ③ sandy silt, tan/orange
- ④ sandy silt, orange/tan
- ⑤ sandy silt, med. brown, wet
-  rock
-  artifact concentration (misc., mainly "modern")
- roots

ical issues continue to focus on two dry-laid stone features identified as privy pits (F1 and F6, the latter one possibly looted) and four brick cisterns (F2, F4, F8, and F12; see Geismar 1993/1994 for feature locations). Both F1 and F6 (the privy pits) were located on lots that also had brick cisterns (F2 and F8), but, as noted previously, their location on the lots did not follow any obvious site-specific pattern (for example, privies to the right rear, cisterns to the left near the house or some other predictable placement). They did, however, follow the broader pattern for these features; that is, privies at the back of the lot, cisterns near the house.

As already mentioned (Geismar 1993/1994), the lack of a discernible placement pattern for these yard features is opposed to what has been found elsewhere in Brooklyn, but it is not known if this is more common than one might expect. It does tend to indicate individual choice in the placement of these features in the Village of New Brooklyn rather than planned patterning. Moreover, it remains a question whether the lack of sanitation-related backyard features is an effect of yard disturbance or sanitary practices: it is possible that barrel cisterns were used to collect water and that human waste was merely deposited on the surface of the yard or in shallow, unstructured pits destroyed in subsequent yard clearing. It should be remembered that many of the 19th-century residents on the site were from non-urban areas in Germany where waste disposal and water collection may have been different from the urban pattern documented in Manhattan and elsewhere in urban Brooklyn, but this is a question. It is perhaps noteworthy that a typical cistern-privy pit configuration was found at 127 MacDougal Street, once the house lot of the most affluent, and perhaps most sophisticated, family in the site sample (August Haegel was a grocer born in Baden).

Nothing was found during this testing program to alter the findings and recommendations made based on the October 1993 testing phase. It was then recommended that the contents of identified privies (F1 and F6) and cisterns (F2, F4, F8, and F12) be tested and, if warranted, excavated (F8, a capped cistern, may never have been filled). However, it is the writer's experience that cisterns used in the mid-nineteenth century were filled in one episode, mainly with ashes and clinkers (burned coal) and a few artifacts with a terminus post quem (the date after which the deposit was made) that suggest relatively recent filling (e.g., Geismar 1992). While cisterns are subject to filling in a single episode, privy pits often provide evidence of multiple fill episodes and contain remnants of debris cast-off over time. Sampling would determine if this is the situation at the Saratoga Square Urban Renewal Area site.

It was also recommended that the privy pit located at 127 MacDougal Street (F1) be excavated as soon as possible. This feature did not appear to have been looted (unfortunately, privy pit features, a source of saleable antique medicine and beverage bottles, are often looted, destroying the invaluable social and economic information these features can provide). It was also recommended that F6, the privy pit at 78 MacDougal Street, be tested to determine if, in fact, it had been looted as suggested by the presence of a large piece of modern garden hose protruding from the deposit.

#### REFERENCES CITED

Geismar, Joan H., 1994. Proposed Scope of Work for Testing the Saratoga Square Urban Renewal Area, Brooklyn, New York. CEQR No. 89-232K. Prepared for the City of New York, Department of Housing Preservation and Development. March 1994 as revised due to altered field conditions (313 Sumpter Street was eliminated from the testing plan and testing at 113 MacDougal was limited to the rear portion of the yard; houses on both properties were occupied at the time of testing).

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