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NEW YORK CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION

PROPOSED SCHOOL SITE: BAXTER/GRAND STREET, MANHATTAN  
CEQR 88 - 236M

LANDMARKS PRESERVATION  
COMMISSION

## INTRODUCTION

The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) has requested a preliminary review of certain parcels selected by the New York City Board of Education (BoE) for possible development. These particular parcels have been flagged because of their topographical features and geographical location which indicate, according to known settlement pattern data, that they may possess prehistoric and/or historical archaeological potential. A full Phase 1A archaeological sensitivity assessment could address this concern. However, an expensive and time-consuming Phase 1A study might not be necessary if a preliminary review of the parcel's deep construction history indicates that the proposed building's footprint does not encroach on those areas of the site that might still possess subsurface integrity and, therefore, prehistoric and historical resources. Also, a review of the documented disturbance on a site might limit the perimeters of a subsequent Phase 1A study.

As defined by the scope of the preliminary review, the following analysis of the Baxter/Grand Street Site in Manhattan, CEQR No. 88-236M, has been, primarily, a comparative study - both horizontally and vertically - of past, present and proposed building footprints. Due to the nature of the record-keeping and permit requirements prior to the twentieth century, there are noticeable gaps in the data available for this review.

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## BAXTER/GRAND STREET SITE, MANHATTAN

Block 236 Lots 6 and 12 as determined by 1988 Buildings Department Blocks and Lots designation. The ward numbers, lot numbers, and street addresses have changed over time so that a specific and consistent numbering system is difficult. In 1988 the northern portion of the project site is Lot 12 along Grand Street where the proposed school playground will be; Lot 6 along Baxter Street is the southern portion where the expanded school building will be. (See site plan Map 1.) In 1988 Lot 12 encompasses previous Lots 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15. The 1988 addresses for Lot 12 are 173, 175, 177, and 179 Grand Street and 155 Baxter Street. In 1988 Lot 6 encompasses Lots 6, 7, 8, and 10. The 1988 address for Lot 6 is 145 Baxter Street.

Bounded: on the north by Grand Street, on the east by Mulberry Street, on the south by Hester Street, and on the west by Baxter Street.

Current Condition: Lot 12 at 173-179 Grand and 155 Baxter Streets, on the northern section of the project site, contains vacant, one-story commercial buildings, whose facades at least, seem to date to the 1960s. Lot 6 at 145 Baxter Street, on the southern section of the project site, forms the uneven, asphalt-surfaced playground for Public School 130, the De Soto School, immediately to the south of the project site. (See Photos 1-4.)

Proposed Construction: The BoE is still considering the construction plans for the expansion of P.S. 130. Therefore, this preliminary assessment of the project site assumes, in the worst case scenario, that the construction activity could adversely impact any part of the project site.

Land-use History Overview: The New York City Board of Education (BoE), potential developers of Lots 6 and 12 on Block 236 in District 2 of the Borough of Manhattan, are considering several construction alternatives for the parcel that would be used for an expansion of Public School 130 as well as for a proposed school playground. (See Map 1.) The school playground will occupy Lot 12, on the north, and the extension of the school building will occupy, approximately, the western two-thirds of Lot 6, on the south. The parcel is hereafter called the project site.

The project site has a long history, possibly going back to aboriginal times. There might be a chance for archaeological materials to remain as part of the subsurface cultural resources. In recognition of the finite and non-renewable nature of archaeological resources, the BoE and the New York City Landmarks Preservations Commission (LPC) have expressed concern that the proposed construction activities not endanger significant archaeological resources.

So as to avoid an adverse impact on significant subsurface remains, there is a plan for a preliminary study of the project site to compare past and present "footprints" in an effort to locate potential archaeological resources. These footprint studies indicate whether any further cultural-resource assessments are needed for the project site, thus saving time, effort, and funds should the footprint study indicate the probability that either: 1) no significant archaeological resources would be disturbed; or 2) no significant archaeological resources remain intact.

Such a footprint study refers to the available historical maps, New York City Buildings' Blocks and Lots information, and municipal rock data, as well as other documentary sources, so that LPC and the BoE can understand the changes in land use over at least the last two thousand years and plan for the future footprint of the school-building and playground expansion.

Prehistoric Period. The island of Manhattan has been inhabited by man since approximately 10,000 - 13,000 years ago. Archaeologists of the Northeast divide this extensive prehistoric period into four sub-periods: PaleoIndian, Achaic, Woodland and Contact. These prehistoric peoples depended greatly on the numerous and valuable resources found at marine, estuarine, and lacustrine locations. Foraging and hunting activities for the floral and faunal resources (e.g., fish, water fowl, tubrous plants, and grasses) of these types of sites lasted for thousands of years before the arrival of Dutch and English settlers. The archaeological record also indicates that elevated, well-drained locales were preferred for habitation and burial sites.

On the basis of archaeological reports, ethnographic data, and knowledge of the pre-1600 topography of Manhattan Island, the LPC has completed a predictive model indicating the locations of high potential for prehistoric sites in the Borough of Manhattan. These high potential site areas correspond to pre-1600 water resources. According to Figure 2 of the LPC "Predictive Model" manuscript, the BoE project area is not marked as an area of high potential for prehistoric archaeological resources (Baugher-Perlin, et al., 1982:Fig. 2/n.p.). However, the Viele topographical map of 1874 does show the south-facing slope of a hillock on the northern edge of current Lot 12, with wetlands recorded as close as the Canal and Baxter Street intersection. (See Map 2.)

Native Americans did exploit the resources of areas in what is now considered downtown Manhattan. According to deed of 1668, the project area was part of the land called Werpoes by the Indians (Stokes, 1915-1926, VI:72). According to Alanson Skinner's research at the turn of this century, in southern Manhattan there had been an Indian settlement, marked by extensive shell middens, at the Collect Pond along the east end of Canal Street (Skinner, 1926:51). Block 236 lies less than a quarter of a mile northeast from the site of the now-filled Collect. Grumet's placement of Native American trails, growing fields, and villages does not include the Block 236 area. The "Wixkquaseck Road," a major north-south trail traversing Manhattan, was situated 3 to 4 blocks west of the subject parcel (Grumet, 1981:68).

It is likely that the Native Americans camped on, cultivated crops on, and hunted at the Grand and Baxter Street area. Although there is no indication that prehistoric peoples did extensively exploit this particular location, the potential for prehistoric exploitation of the elevated hillock in close proximity to a fresh-water stream and a wetland is substantial.



The subsequent agricultural, fortification, residential, and industrial developments discussed below destroyed the pre-1600 topographic features of the BoE site. There is no longer any evidence of the Viele-recorded hillock that perhaps once dominated the northern edge of the block and the natural slope to the low, southwest corner of the block. According to street intersection elevations taken over a ninety year span, the southeast corner of Block 236 was also elevated as much as 10 feet above the southwest corner. Between approximately 1871 and 1881 the elevated northwest and southeast sections of Block 236 were leveled by at least 6.5 feet and the southwest corner was raised to a lesser degree. The current USGS topographic map/ Brooklyn Quadrangle lists the site block as relatively level with the 10 foot contour traversing the southeast corner of the site block.

WPA soil boring data on the current school building land, which covers the southwest quarter of the block, recorded between 5 and 12.9 feet of unspecified "filling." Only one boring (#25), just north of the Baxter and Hester Street intersection, did not record a fill overburden. Only three borings, situated in the extreme southwest corner of the block, listed a stratum of loam/loam and sand that was either immediately underneath the street pavement (#25) or underneath a 6-7 foot fill overburden (#27 and #44). However, the (ca. 4 foot) raising of the southwest corner of the block may have been accomplished, in part, by the introduction of clean fill, or loam, which would not have been recorded as fill.

The documentary research did identify various building episodes on the project site, discussed in detail below, which would have also destroyed potential prehistoric resources. There are, however, two small areas within the project site that do not appear to have been built on over the years. One is what once was the backyard of 153 Baxter Street (south of the 177 Grand Street rear yard), approximately 25'x60', presently a portion of Lot 6. It is difficult without soil boring data and construction records to absolutely estimate the prehistoric archaeological potential of this rear yard area. It is most probable that the levelling of the block from 1794 through the last century obliterated all prehistoric cultural resources.

The other site area not to have hosted a substantial above-ground structure is a narrow strip almost at the center of the block, in Lot 6, just north of P.S. 130 and currently part of the school playground. It is estimated that the deep, foundation construction excavations for the school building would have impacted no less than 5 feet from the base of the standing structure. Also, according to the 1966 drainage

construction plans for P.S. 130, this narrow strip that is now covered with blacktop has been adversely impacted by subsurface activities.

As discussed in the following section, the levelling of the hill once in the northern edge of Block 236, the construction and then removal of Revolutionary War earthworks and ditches (Stokes, Vol. V:1312), and the evidence of full cellars (NYCBD:Block 236, L12) and catch basins under present and former buildings on the site lead to the conclusion that no prehistoric cultural material is likely to remain in situ. No further archaeological consideration for prehistoric resources is recommended.

Historical Period. In the 1980s the project site, at the southeast corner of the intersection of Grand and Baxter Streets (Photos 1-4), is in the part of lower Manhattan where the neighborhoods of Little Italy, to the east, and Chinatown, to the south, overlap (Streetwise Manhattan 1984). The project site is within close proximity to some well-known areas of Manhattan. In the late nineteenth century, the project site was part of an area that was, generally, west and north of the street and tenement life of the Lower East Side that concerned reformers. The project site was east of the Soho-Cast Iron Historic District (LPC 1979:7), north, by two blocks, of Rag Pickers' Alley (McCabe 1882:584) and north by three blocks of the infamous Five Points section (Wolfe, 1983:83-84).

Yet the project site has its own history that reflects the broad development patterns of Manhattan as it moved uptown and may even provide archaeological data from one, sometimes multi-racially and multi-family, frame building that also served as a commercial establishment (Doggett 1851, p. 281, and Map 5). According to fire insurance maps and atlases (1857-1959), the frame structure, back yard, and brick back-building show few alterations over a period of 102 years and, therefore, may have intact archaeological resources should the early 1960s parking lot and 1966 playground construction episodes not have disturbed the subsurface cultural resources such as wells, cisterns, or privies.

This preliminary study is much more detailed than is customary because Buildings Department data, the usual source of building "footprint" information, contained many gaps. Instead, there is a heavy reliance on fire insurance maps and atlases, in addition to nineteenth-century commentators, street directories, and guide books, because there is information on only two alterations - the post-1959 parking lot and the 1966 Public School 130 playground - in the Block 236-Lot 6 folder, although

the Buildings Department's computer index notes 24 items (Block 236, Lots 6 & 7: PS 130 Survey/1965; Atl. 1298/1966). The extant records for Block 236-Lot 12 are on microfilm and detail post-1892 above-ground and below-ground alterations to the building stock, particularly during the 1890s, 1930s, and 1960s. Therefore, there is neither Blocks and Lots information between 1866 and 1892 for the Grand Street frontage nor between 1866 and 1965 for the Baxter Street frontage. Municipal record keeping did not begin until 1866.

For the historical period, the story of the project site begins in the early seventeenth century when it was part of a bouwery, that is, a farm or plantation, during the Dutch colonial period (Stokes, 1915-1926: VI; 71-72). Maps through 1767 depict no agricultural or domestic development on the project site so that Stokes' information on original land grants and farmsteads provides details. Stokes notes that the project site was part of Bouwerie No. 7 that William Kieft, Director of the Dutch West India Company, granted to Thomas Sanders in 1638 (Still, 1956:4-6; Stokes, 1915-1926:VI, opp. p. 66). Sanders acknowledged having bought a "house and land", yet where on the landscape it was built is not known (Stokes, 1915-1926:VI, 72). Further land use in 1639 is indicated in contracts that mentioned fencing the plantation, building a tobacco house, and planting tobacco (Stokes, 1915-1926:VI, 72).

Thomas Sanders, who came to be known as "Thé mad smith", left that name with the property. Even in 1697, some 56 years after he vacated the bouwerie, the farm was known as "the Smith's Hill" (Stokes, 1915-1926:VI, 72). Perhaps Smith's Hill corresponds with the hill on the northwest corner of the project site, the predominant natural topographic feature noted on the maps reviewed. That hill was noted on the 1767 Ratzer map seen at the Department of General Services' (DGS) Subsurface Exploration Section. DGS has a twentieth-century transparent mylar street-grid to overlay on the eighteenth-century map so that present-day locations can be pinpointed. Geologists have "had occasion to trust Ratzer" (Lawrence Ebbitt, personal communication, October 24, 1988), and the southwestern slope of the hill on 1767 Ratzer lies within the northwest corner of the project site. (See Map 3.)

The hill on the 1767 Ratzer map serves also to locate Nicholas Bayard's country estate in relation to the project site. Bayard (1763-1798) was a New York City merchant who worked in the City and maintained a country house in the Out Ward much the way the neighboring Lispenards, Harrisons, Dyckmans, and Delanceys did (Bayard; "Ratzer" map with late eighteenth-century additions at the Topographical Bureau). A

late eighteenth-century or early seventeenth-century map with no known provenience, seen at the Topographic Bureau, seems to be based on the 1767 Ratzer, and it has a late eighteenth-century street grid overlaid on it. Both the project site and Nicholas Bayard's formal gardens, driveway, and estate complex are located in close proximity to the hill. The Bayard country house was on an elevated area northwest of the hill and two-and-a-half blocks northwest of the project site.

The project site probably continued to be part of a "gentleman's" farm during the English colonial period, and became part of a primary military fortification during the Revolutionary War. (See Map 4.) Late land transformations in the project area included a leveling of the "Works" after the war (Stokes, 1919:V, 1312) and a reduction of the hill at the northwest corner of the project site (Stokes, 1919:V, 1507).

In the early national period the project site was part of a subdivision and was lotted in accordance with land conveyances that dated from 1797 to 1840 as Bayard's East Farm was dispersed among kin and sold to others (Holmes 1797/1840). Urban development soon followed. A "reverse" or street directory of 1812 lists occupants along both Grand and Baxter Streets, the northern and western boundaries of the project site (Elliott, 1812:lxix-lxxv and xxxiii-xxxiv). By 1851 the 25-foot-frontage lots of the project site were listed in a reverse directory by street number, occupant, and occupation and showed multiple-occupancy in some instances, as well as noted that both the women and men along those two blocks of Grand and Baxter Streets either were in small businesses, were clergy, or worked as a carman or policeman (Doggett, 1851:196 and 281). In addition to commercial and residential development at least as early as 1857 there was a place of manufacture within the project site (Map 5).

After the Civil War the project site continued to be an area of mixed land usage. Nonetheless, there were several changes on the cityscape. From this point on, there will be separate discussions about what in 1988 is Lot 6 on Baxter Street and what in 1988 is Lot 12 on Grand Street.

#### 1988 Lot 6 on Baxter Street

The "Pianoforte Manufactory" of 1857, at what was then 149-151 Baxter Street, was altered and replaced by a "factory" by 1915, on what was then Lot 8 at 149-151 Baxter Street. What had been a brick building with a back yard in 1891 on what was then Lot 6 at 145 Baxter Street, became a "dumb bell" brick apartment building some between 1907 and 1932 (Maps 5, 7, and 8). By 1950

the dumb-bell tenement seems to have been replaced by another brick structure, at the time, filling the entire plot on what was then Lot 6 at 145 Baxter Street (Map 9). Only the frame building with back yard and brick back-building remained relatively unaltered between 1857 and 1959 as shown by the buildings' similar footprints. The address for this frame building remained 153 Baxter Street until after 1959, while the Lot designation changed from 640 to 10 to 6 some time after 1959. (See Maps 5-9.)

In this description of the project site the number of stories of the buildings and the presence of basements has purposely been omitted because of the ambiguous nature of the fire insurance maps and atlases. What does absence of such data mean? Did the frame building discontinue to be a "frame dwelling with store under" after 1857 in light of the absence of such coding thereafter? When did the frame structure become a three-story building with basement as shown on Lot 10, Maps 8 and 9? Can it be assumed that the frame building at 153 Baxter Street had a basement in 1857 although the first time it was so designated was in 1907? What about more than two stories? Not until 1907 did the atlases note that the frame structure had three stories and a basement. While the fire insurance maps and atlases show that the footprints remained similar for over 102 years, their notations about above-ground and below-ground changes, if any, are not clear. This confusion is true not only for the frame building and its brick back-building, but also for the factory and apartment building on the southern part of the project site.

#### 1988 Lot 12 on Grand Street

For the Grand Street frontage there is similar confusion. There are Blocks and Lots data on the addition of a sixth floor to a S. Van Rensselaer Cruger, Esq.'s brownstone or brick building at the southeast corner of Grand and Baxter Streets at 173 Grand Street (1895). Thus, Buildings Department information augments the atlas records and relates an alteration not mentioned on the plan views. (Compare Maps 7 and 8.)

On the other hand, the 1907 atlas notes that the building in question was a five-story brick structure with commercial activity at least at street level. The elimination of the sixth-story does not turn up in the extant Buildings Department records; nonetheless, there is both an application and approval for the demolition of the unsafe, five-story building at 173 Grand Street that at the time contained lofts and manufacturing enterprises (Block 236, Lot 12: App. No. 193, Aug. 21, 1936). Within four months there was a one-story building on the site



with a certificate of occupancy for stores and 35 persons. (Block 236, Lot 12: CO No. 21917, Dec. 3, 1936). The application mentions the demolition of the second through fifth stories, (Block 236, Lot 12: CO application 1634-36 P1726-36). In this instance the atlases corroborate the Buildings Department data. (Compare Maps 8 and 9.)

Besides the uncertainty about the number of stories above ground, there are also puzzles about the vaults and basements below the buildings along Grand Street on the project site. Through 1959 there is no indication that there were basements below 173-179 Grand Street. (See Maps 7, 8, and 9.) Yet there are 1937 plan elevation views of basements below 173-179 Grand Street in the Block and Lot folders. Even though the drawings are not to scale and the dimensions are illegible on the microfilm, they appear to be full basements, and two of them were later altered for a machine shop or factory phase in the 1960s (Block 236, Lot 12: Alt. No. 3563, May 20, 1963, and Per. No. C 129088). It should be noted that there is a 550 gallon fuel tank in the basement of 173 Grand Street, approximately 12 feet from the rear of the building. This was installed in 1963 by Charles Salzberg, owner of the machine shop there (Block 236, Lot 12: Permit No. C 129088).

What does seem clear about the Grand Street part of the project site is that not only did lot lines and building materials change over time, but also what appeared to be back yards until 1932, were fully encroached upon some time before 1950, no doubt during the mid-1930s redevelopment of the half-block into one-story commercial establishments with basements. It seems unlikely that any archaeological resources along the Grand Street frontage remain undisturbed. Therefore, there needs to be no further documentary research or any field testing for Lot 12, the northern half of the project site.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Prehistoric Resources. Historical Perspectives, Inc. (HPI) has conducted a preliminary assessment of the project site and finds that aboriginal or Indian peoples might possibly have used the elevated area in the northern edge of the project site in their seasonal rounds to exploit the natural resources that would have grown, grazed, or lived in or near the stream and marshy area within three city-blocks of the project site. Subsequent development, though, would probably have disturbed any archaeological remains of Indian activities when Revolutionary War primary military fortifications were constructed or else when either the fortifications and "Works" were leveled after the war or the hill at the northern edge of the project site was "reduced". In addition, late eighteenth and early nineteenth century construction and demolition activities would have had an adverse impact on any aboriginal subsurface material culture. It is concluded that no further research needs to be done in terms of potential prehistoric archaeological remains.

Historical Resources. Redevelopment of the project site several times during the first six decades of the nineteenth century included residential, commercial, manufacturing, religious, and educational buildings and back yards. Further alterations and developments in the first six decades of the twentieth century continued the trend for the project site to combine residential, commercial, and manufacturing uses for the land. Between 1959 and 1965 the structures that faced Baxter Street were razed and that portion of the project site became a parking lot. The following year the Baxter Street frontage portion of the project site was redeveloped as a playground for Public School 130, the contiguous lot to the south.

In 1988, while the project site's lot that faces Baxter Street forms an unused, fenced-in playground for Public School 130 - that is, the De Soto School - the lots that front on Grand Street, after several episodes of Depression-era above and below-ground alterations, are vacant single-story commercial buildings.

Combining the evidence from historical maps, Block and Lot information, and "reverse" or street directories, HPI deduces that only the northernmost section of Lot 6 might have historical archaeological potential. A frame structure with back yard and brick back-building persisted there on Lot 6 for over 102 years. The back yard, in particular, has remained relatively the same size and at the time location during that time. However, it is known that the building served, in part, as a commercial establishment as well as being a multi-family

dwelling during at least part of its existence. It is very possible that both the businesses and the residents were transient and their activities unrelated. The presence of privy, cistern and well features does not guarantee they will provide additional information on historic lifeways. If one were to proceed on the limited possibility of back yard features/deposits, further research would have to be conducted to establish the possible significance to the archaeological record of such material remains.

Although this preliminary study is more complete than most, it stops short of a full IA Documentary Study which would exhaust all avenues of study for information contained in archival sources cited above in regard to such subjects as 1) utility placement and date of availability, 2) impact of playground construction, 3) identification of owners/residents of 153 Baxter Street over time, and 4) more detailed information about the frame building which may have existed well before the first known date of 1857. It must be remembered however that the small shopkeepers, artisans, clerics, and municipal workers, as individuals and as family members who lived and worked at 153 Baxter Street, may be visible primarily through the archaeological record and not through the documentary record. The activities around the frame dwelling, back yard, and brick back-building in question probably are representative of a large percentage of New Yorkers. The material correlates of these activities could inform both anthropological archaeologists and social historians but would not likely yield individual-or family-specific data. For the rest of the project site, it is likely that any of the several episodes of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century redevelopment and alterations for above-ground and below-ground structures, on both the Grand and Baxter Street frontages, would have disturbed any subsurface cultural resources.

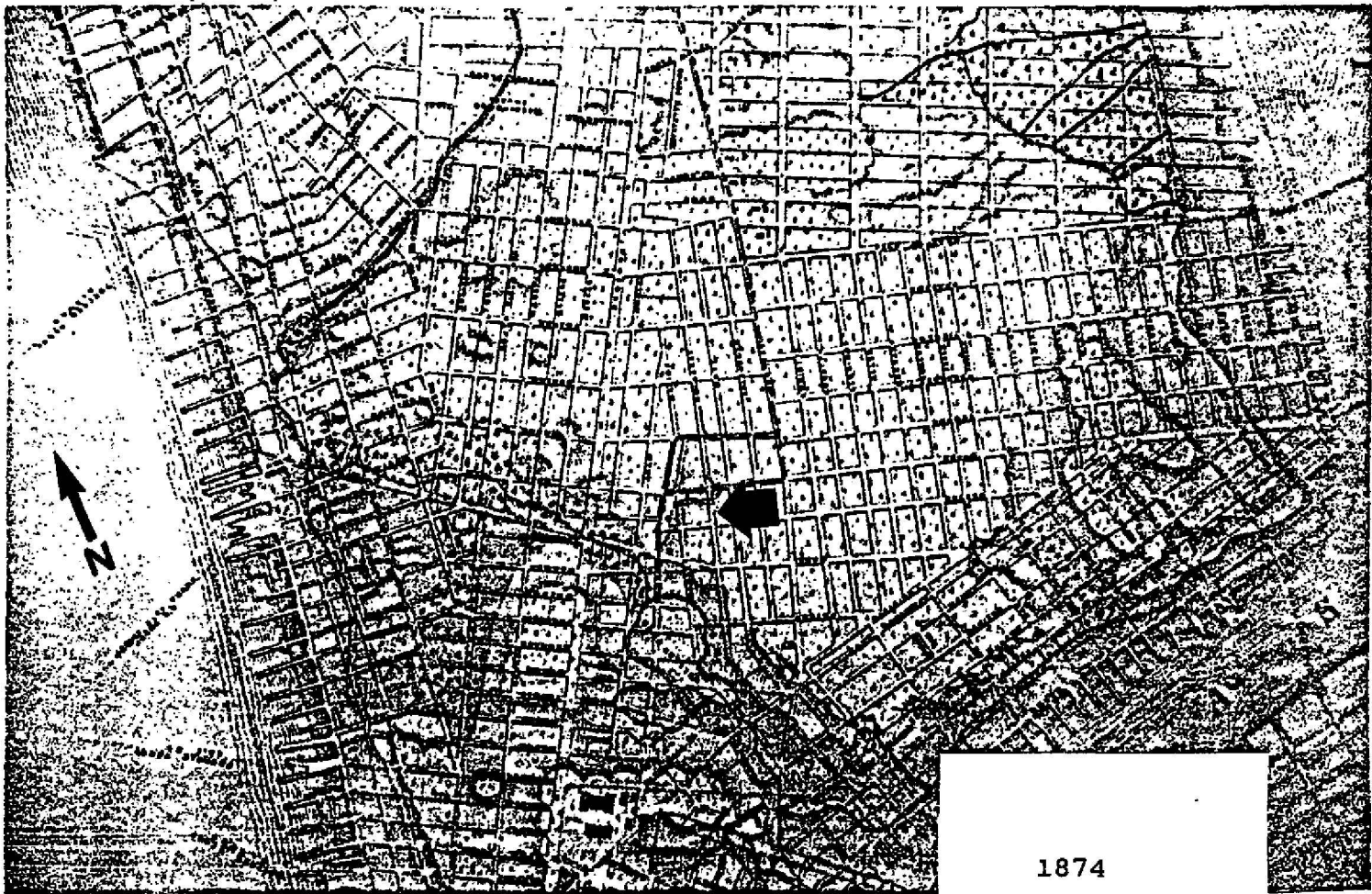
This preliminary analysis was not designed to provide sufficient data to determine the need for field investigations but to recommend whether or not a full Phase IA study is warranted. No further archaeological consideration of the Baxter/Grand Street Site is recommended unless, based on its research goals, LPC wants to further investigate the portion of Lot 6 which was once 153 Baxter Street.



## Site Plan

Supplied by Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, Inc.

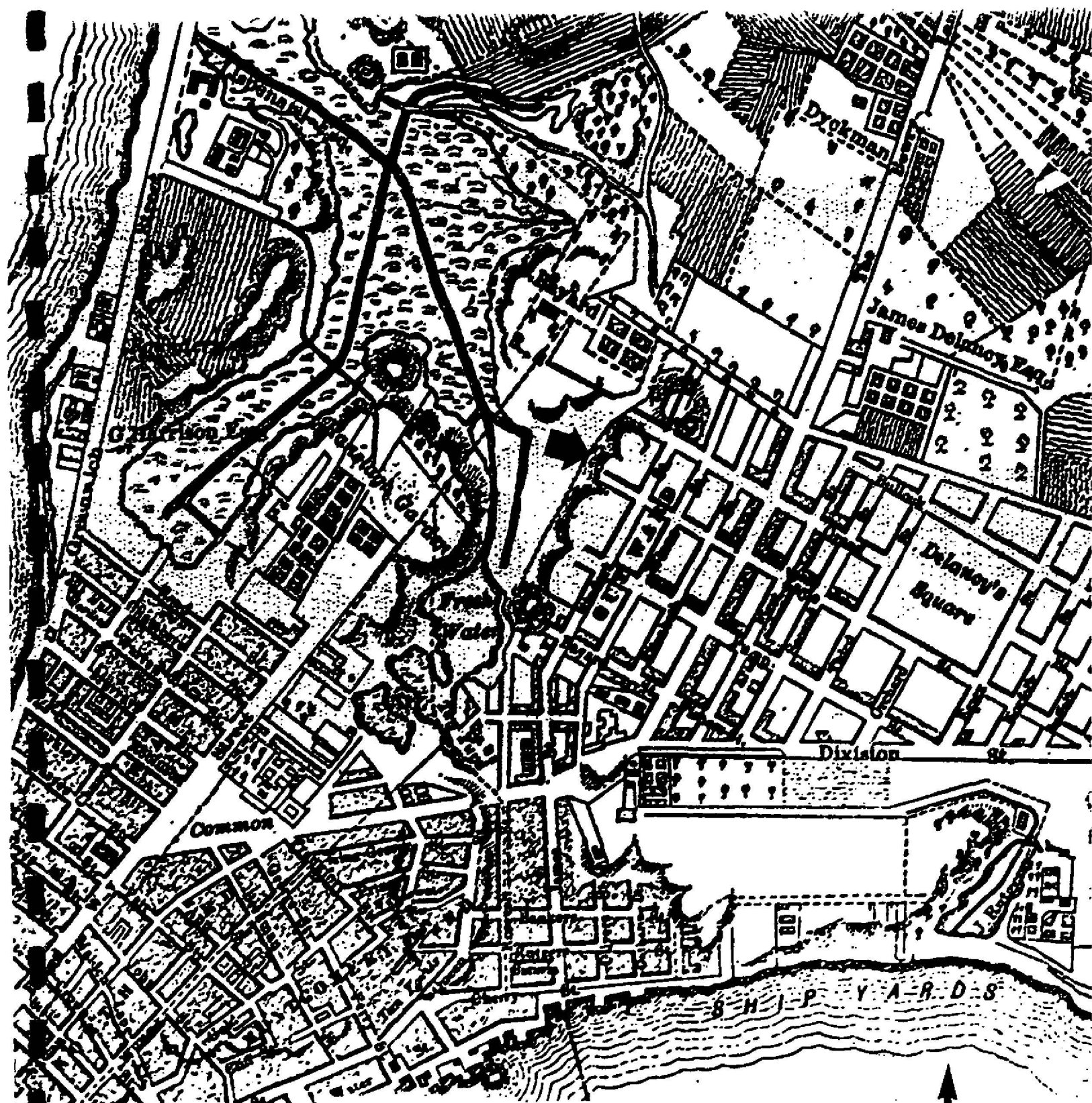




1874  
Viele

Not to scale: photocopy of photograph



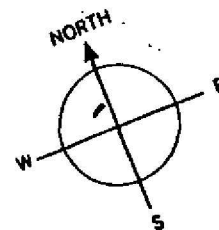
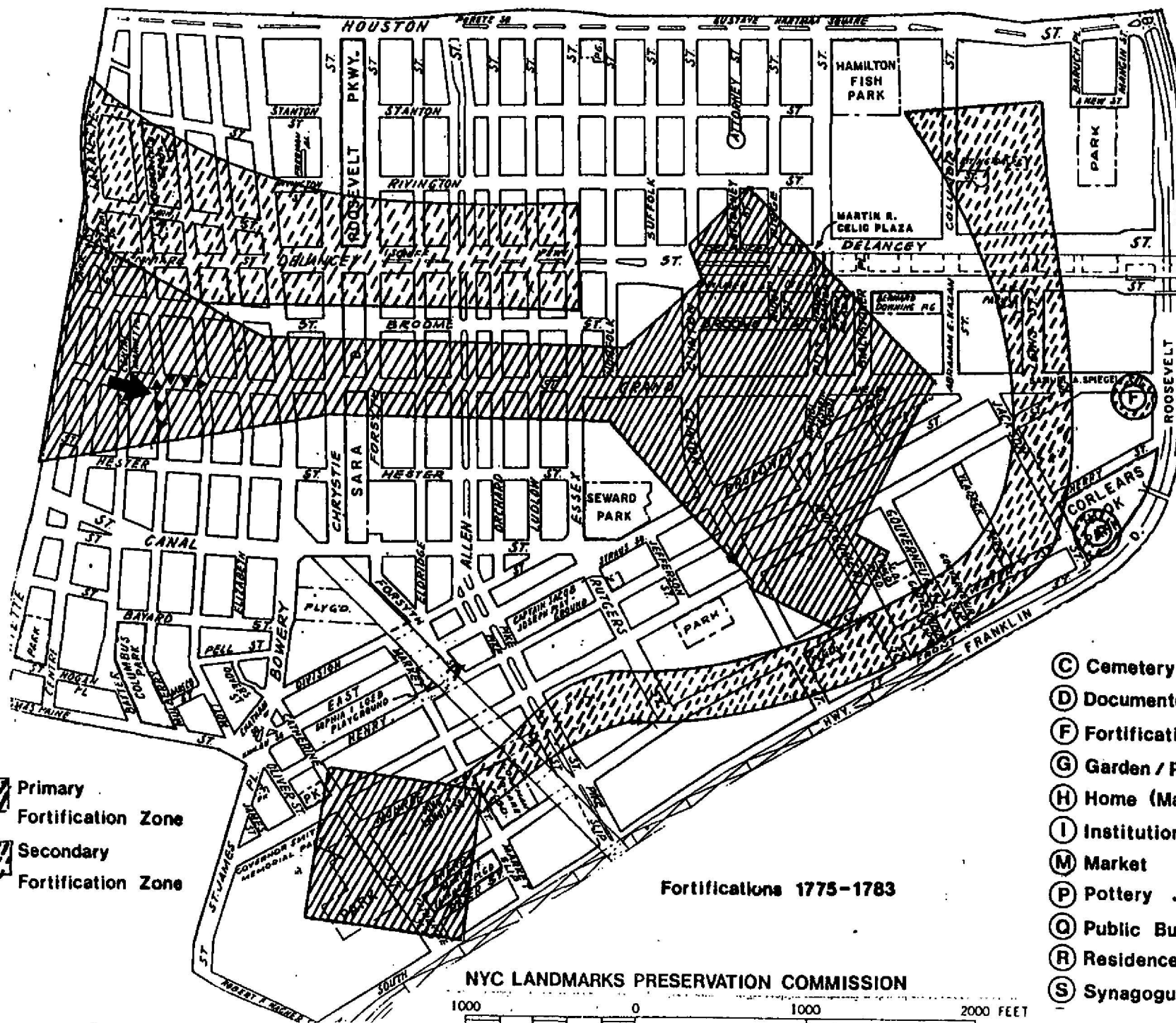


Ratzer

1767

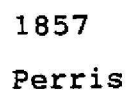


# POTENTIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN THE LOWER EAST SIDE

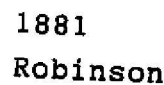


## KEY

- (C) Cemetery
- (D) Documented Indian Site
- (F) Fortification
- (G) Garden / Park
- (H) Home (Mansion)
- (I) Institution
- (M) Market
- (P) Pottery
- (Q) Public Building
- (R) Residence
- (S) Synagogue / Church



Map 5



**Map .6**

Not to scale: photocopy of photograph





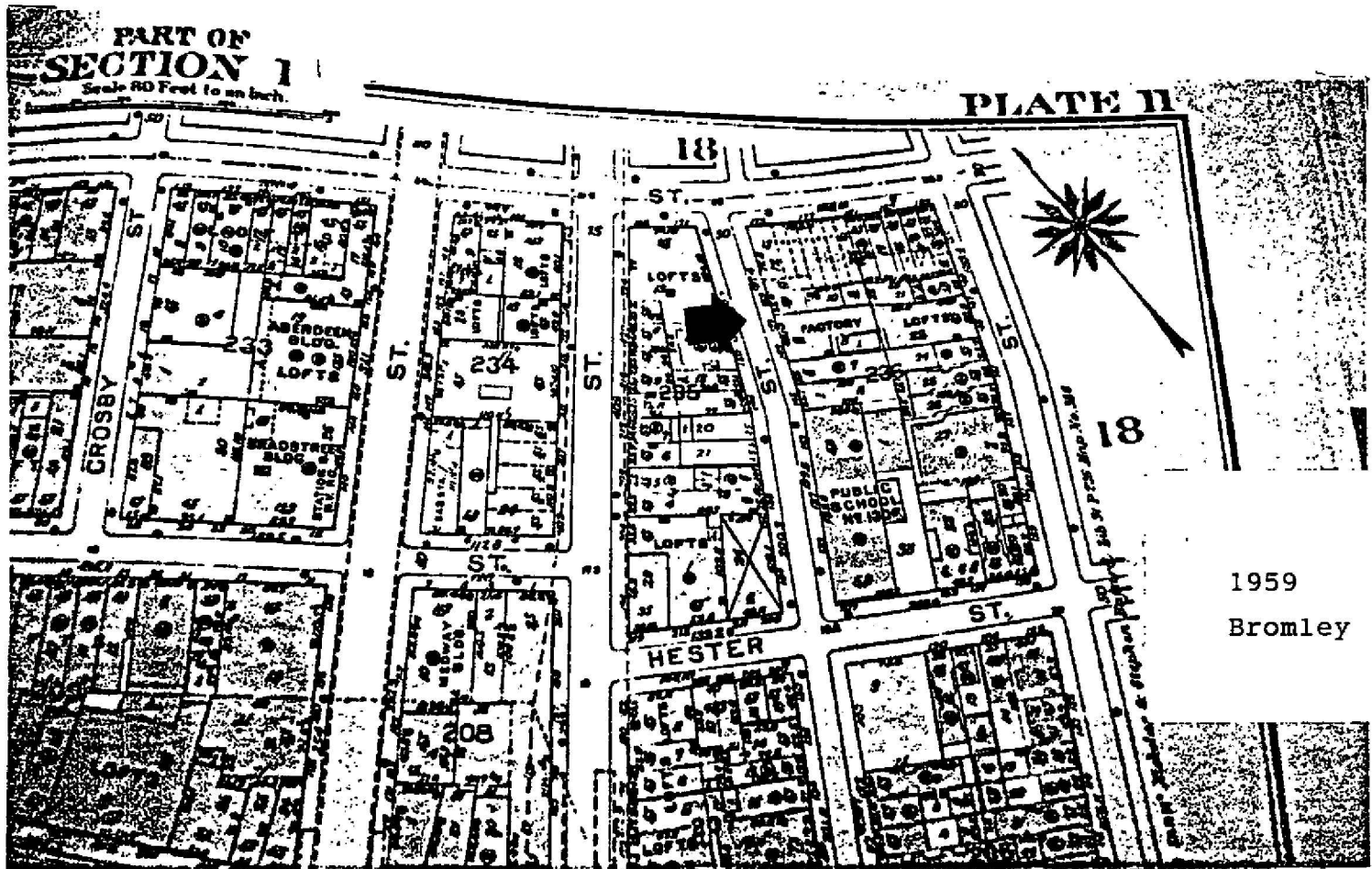
1891  
Bromley

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Photo 1: 173-179 Grand Street and 155 Baxter Street.  
Looking southeast.



Photo 2: Baxter Street with P.S. 130 playground and  
rear of 173-179 Grand Street, Looking northeast.



Photo 3: Playground, showing undulating and collapsing pavement. Looking east from Baxter Street.



Photo 4: Baxter Street, showing elevator doors at rear of 173-179 Grand Street. Looking northeast.

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# MAPS

## Listed Chronologically

Map showing prehistoric sites in Manhattan: excavated sites, unexcavated Contact sites, and high-potential sites  
n.d. prepared by Landmarks Preservation Commission of the City of New York (LPC).

Map showing Manhattan shorelines, rivers and marshes ca. 1609  
n.d. accompanied the LPC manuscript, "Towards an Archaeological Predictive Model for Manhattan: A Pilot Study".

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1735

Maerschallck or Duyckinck Plan - A Plan of the City of New York from an Actual Survey Anno Domini MDCCLV  
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\* Lt. Bernd Ratzer's Plan of the City of New York in North America  
1767 in Stokes (1915-1925), I, plate 41. There is a copy of the 1767 version at the Department of General Services (DGS), Subsurface Exploration Section, Room 2214, Municipal Building. They also have a transparent street-grid overlay to the scale of the Ratzer 1767.

\* Potential Archaeological Sites in the Lower East Side, Fortifications, 1775-1783  
n.d. from NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission.

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\*Included as illustration.

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\* Included as illustration.



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\* Included as illustration.

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