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ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTING REPORT
THE WEST QUEENS HOUSING PROJECT
ASTORIA, QUEENS COUNTY, NEW YORK
CEQR# 88-201Q

Prepared for:
The Briarwood Organization
36-35 Bell Boulevard
Bayside, New York 11361

Prepared by:
Greenhouse Consultants Incorporated
40 Exchange Place, 13th Floor
New York, New York 10005

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF PLATES

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

William I. Roberts IV	-	Principal Investigator Author
Alex Argiro	-	Field Technician
Paula M. Crowley	-	Laboratory Director Editor Word Processor

INTRODUCTION

The West Queens Housing project area consists of a L-shaped piece of land on Blocks 521 and 528 in the borough of Queens, New York. It is bounded to the north by the line of 33rd Avenue, to the west by 13th Street, to the south by 34th Avenue and a line roughly parallel to and south of 33rd Avenue, and to the east by 14th Street and 21st Street. See Figure 1 for the location of the project area.

The general purpose of archaeological testing is to document the presence or absence of potential prehistoric and/or historic archaeological resources through the use of physical testing techniques. The specific purpose of the West Queens Housing testing was to search for evidence of the presence or absence of two particular categories of archaeological remains. These categories consist of the Old Ridge Road and possible prehistoric remains. The road formed a farm boundary during the eighteenth century (Historical Perspectives, Inc. 1988: 16). The Phase 1A Archaeological Assessment Report recommended that Lot 17 on Block 528 be tested for the presence or absence of the Old Ridge Road and the possible prehistoric remains. This was based on cartographic evidence of the course of the old road and the present street grid and a soil boring completed during 1969 showing only five feet of fill in this location. At the time of the field testing it proved impossible to gain access to Lot 17. One of the trailers serving as a field office as well as all the electrical connections for the field offices were in the way. About 100 feet west of Lot 17 was an open area used as driveway and parking lot for the field offices. A review of the cartographic evidence showed that the Old Ridge Road crossed this location and that the front portion of this lot was shown vacant on all the historic maps from 1873 to date with the exception of the 1927 atlas where a one-story shed is shown (Historical Perspectives, Incorporated 1988: Figure 11). For these reasons it was decided to move the proposed backhoe trench to this new location within Lot 13 on Block 528, which appeared to have the same potential for preserving part of the Old Ridge Road below its surface, and reasonably similar potential for having been used during prehistory. Both Lots 17 and 13 were on the old ridge overlooking part of the tidal Sunswick Creek (ibid.: Figures 4 and 10).

METHODOLOGY

The subsurface archaeological testing of the West Queens Housing Project in Astoria, Queens, New York took place on August 13, 1993. As stated in the scope-of-work for this testing, the technique used to examine buried deposits and thereby determine the presence or absence of archaeological resources was the mechanical excavation of a trench. One trench was excavated by backhoe (see Figure 2), the results of which were closely monitored by archaeologists. This testing strategy was designed by the principal investigator.

The use of mechanical means of excavation expedites the removal of large quantities of fill. A total of approximately 725 cubic feet of soil were removed from the trench, the dimensions of which were 4 feet to 6 feet wide by 28 feet long and up to 8 feet deep.

Excavation of Backhoe Trench 1 was halted at eight feet below grade when probable natural subsoil had been reached. Soil samples were selectively removed from the trench, particularly the deepest layer encountered. This soil was then screened through ¼-inch mesh in order to recover artifacts. Artifacts were also recovered for examination when they were observed in the trench by directing the backhoe operator to selectively remove them with the backhoe bucket. Soil strata were measured, described, and recorded for the trench. The trench was backfilled immediately following excavation and the recording of data. All artifacts examined were redeposited in the trench. They consisted of historic period building rubble including red bricks, red earthenware box tiles, and mortar; as well as coal, coal ash and clinker. None were retained since they were not diagnostic and could not provide evidence regarding the Old Ridge Road or possible prehistoric use of the project area.

STRATIGRAPHIC SUMMARY

The stratigraphy encountered in the trench excavated at the West Queens Housing project area is discussed below. A total of six layers were recorded in the northern half of Backhoe Trench 1. This part of the trench measured six feet wide by thirteen feet long. The top layer consisted of black asphalt 0.2 feet thick. Below this was the second layer of dark yellow brown sand with pebbles and cobbles, which was 0.9 feet thick. It was interpreted as fill deposited to level the area prior to the paving. The third layer was a mottled dark yellow brown and very pale brown sand with gravel. The third layer was 0.5 feet thick. Below this was a dark brown sand with building rubble including red bricks, red earthenware tiles, mortar and stone. It was 2.5 feet thick. The fifth layer consisted of mottled black and dark grey sandy silt with coal and coal ash inclusions. It was also 2.5 feet thick. The third, fourth and fifth layers were all interpreted as fill deposits. From 6.6 feet below grade to the bottom of the trench at 8.0 feet below grade was a strong brown slightly silty sand with pebbles. This sixth layer was interpreted as probable natural subsoil. See Plate 1 for a view of Backhoe Trench 1.

The southern half of Backhoe Trench 1 had the same upper three layers. Below these was a concrete slab which extended beyond the eastern, western and southern boundaries of the trench. An electrical conduit crossed the trench diagonally above the concrete slab. The slab was not penetrated during the testing. Work was concentrated on the northern end of the trench which had the best chance of finding the road. The southern part of the trench measured 4.5 feet wide by fifteen feet long. See Figure 3 for a plan drawing of Backhoe Trench 1.

RESULTS

No evidence of any kind was found that indicated that the Old Ridge Road once passed through this location within Lot 13 on Block 528. No layers were found that could be interpreted as a road surface. No layers of cobbles, paving stones such as Belgian Blocks, asphalt or heavy deposits of gravel were found below the surface in Backhoe Trench 1. Probable natural subsoil was encountered at 6.6 feet below grade. Above this were various layers of fill. Samples of the probable subsoil were screened through ¼-inch mesh to search for possible prehistoric artifacts. No such artifacts were found.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is our conclusion that no evidence of the Old Ridge Road still exists within Lot 13 on Block 528. It appears likely that the surface or surfaces that must have existed when the road was in use were removed or destroyed when the present street grid and buildings facing it were constructed. It is also our conclusion that no other potentially significant cultural resources were found within the mechanically excavated trench. Based on this subsurface testing, we further conclude that it is highly unlikely that any significant archaeological resources will be impacted by the proposed construction of the housing project. We recommend that no additional archaeological testing or mitigation is necessary at this location within Block 528 in Astoria, Queens, New York.

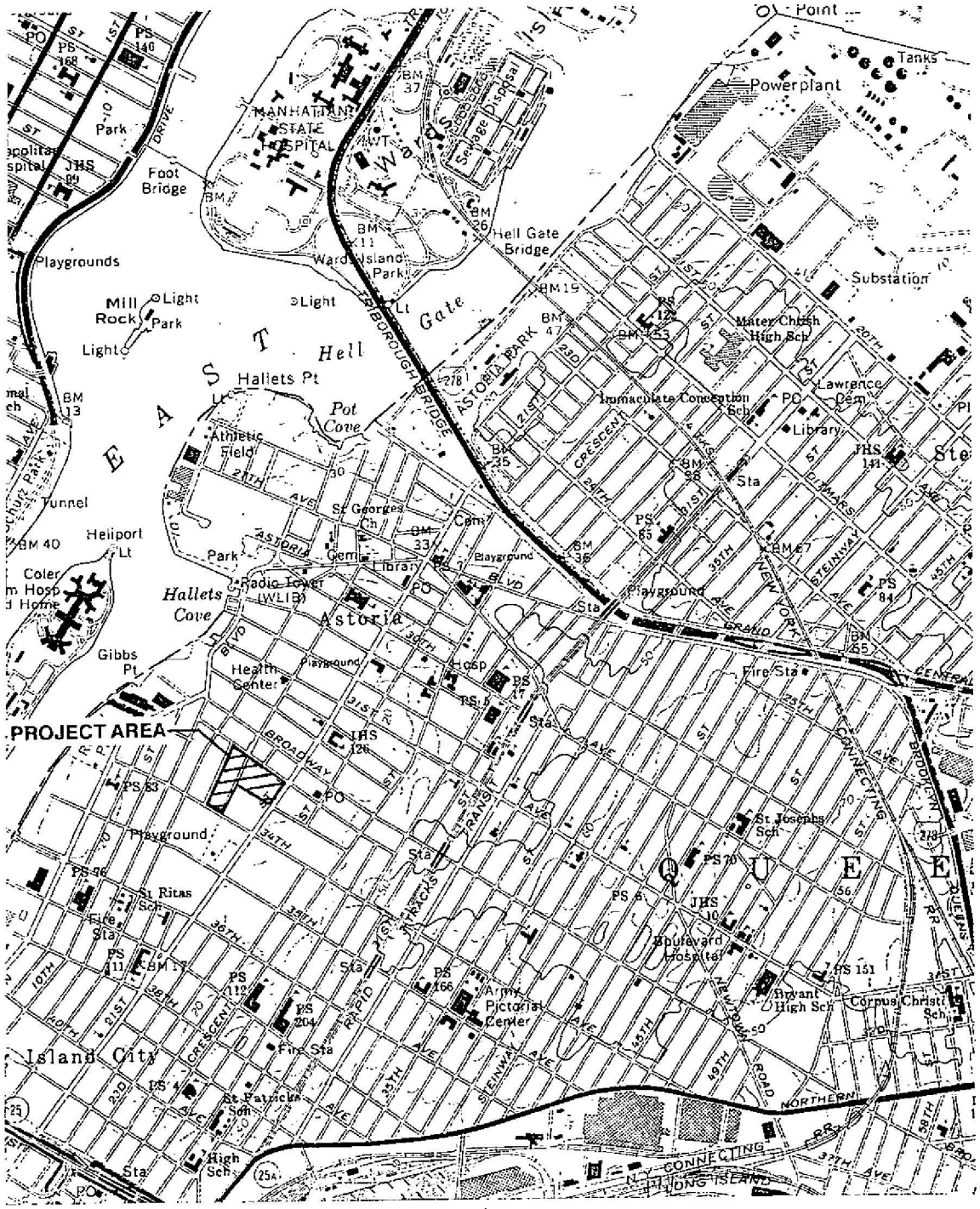

Figure 1 Location of the project area shown on portion of U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute series Central Park, N.Y. quadrangle, 1966 photorevised 1979.

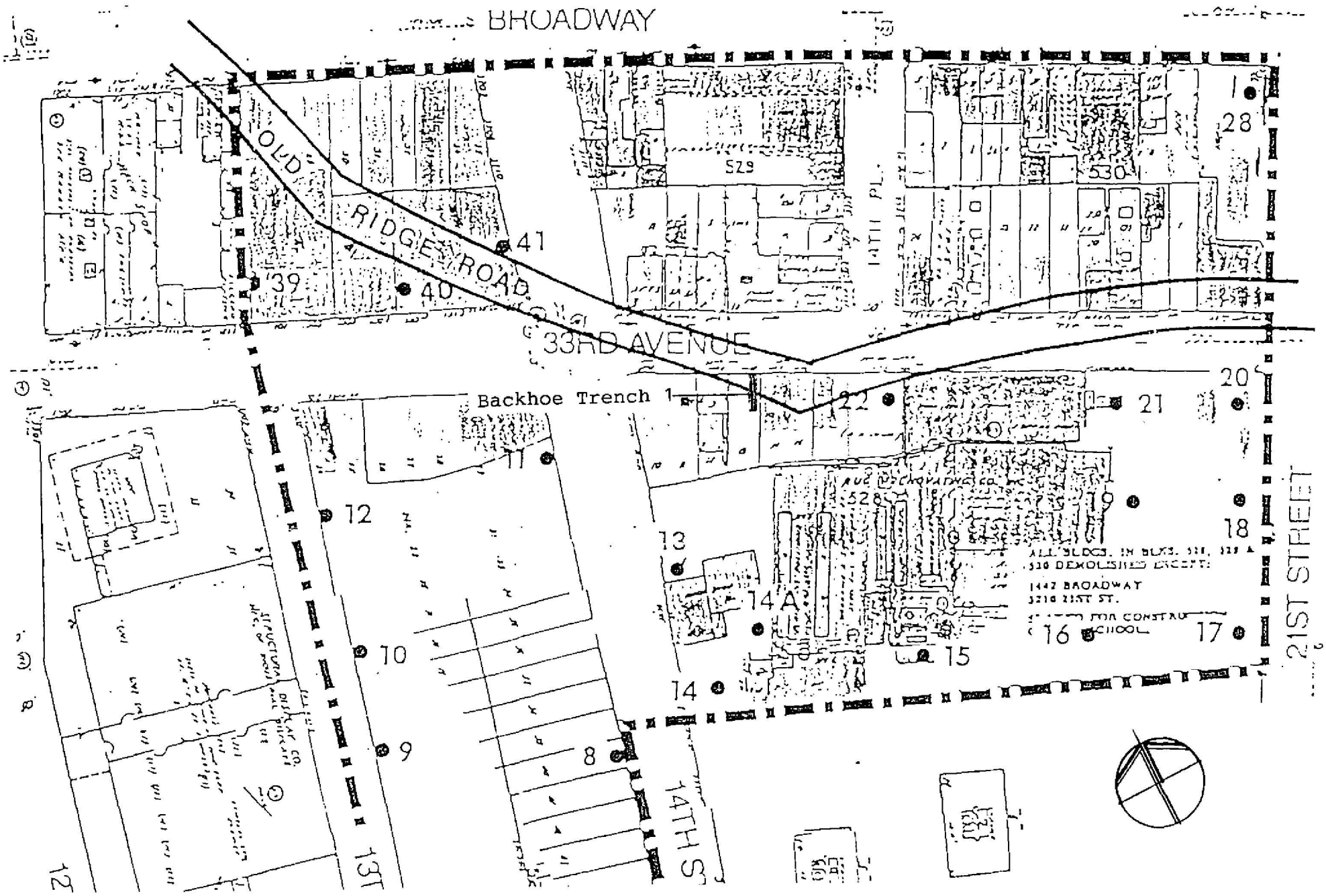

Figure 2 Location of Backhoe Trench 1 shown on portion of West Queens High School and West Queens Housing Project Area Map (Historical Perspectives Inc. 1988:Figure 19). Scale: 100 feet = 1 inch.

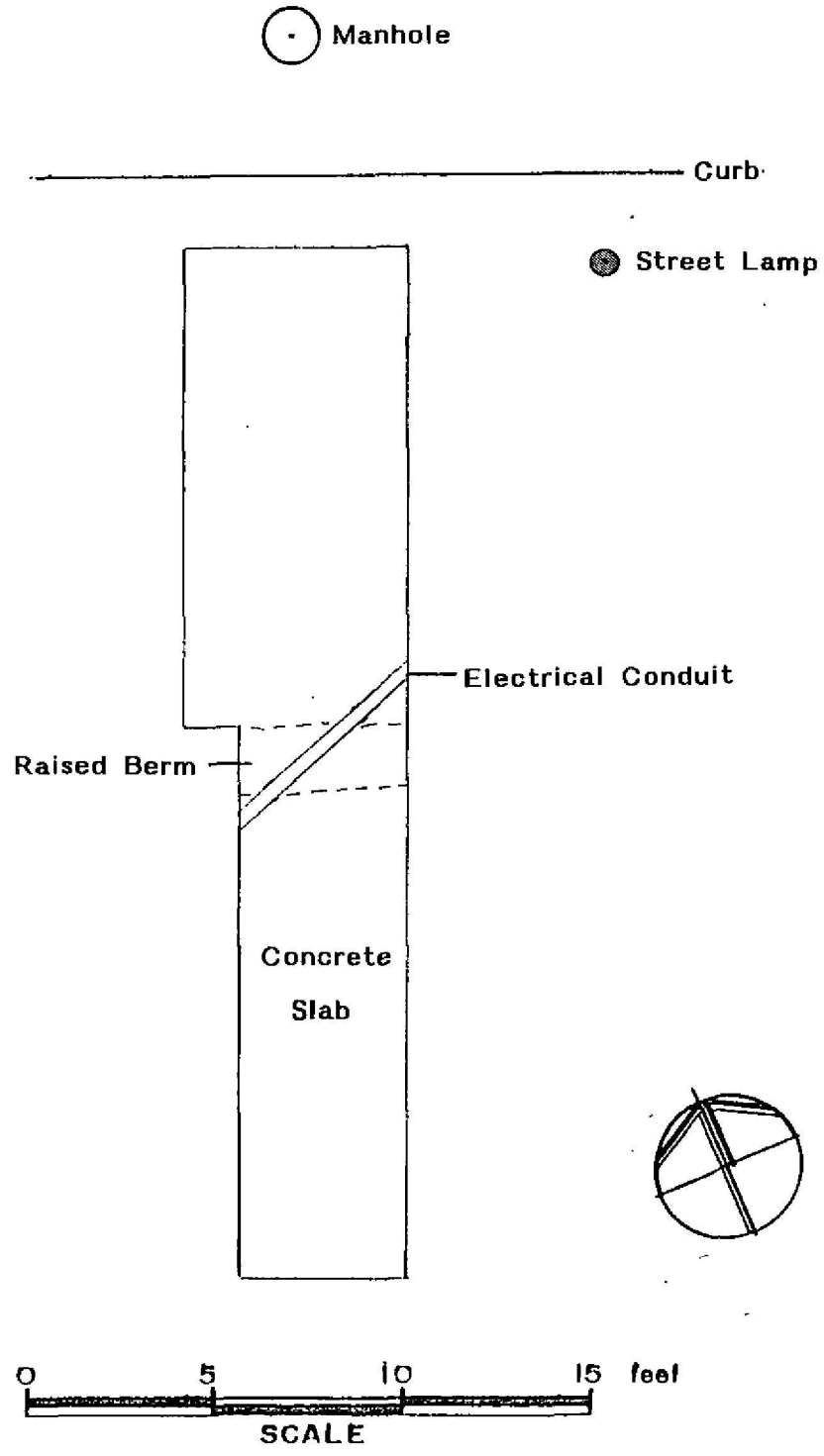

Figure 3 Plan of Backhoe Trench 1.

Plate 1 View of Backhoe Trench 1 looking north. Scale in tenths of feet.

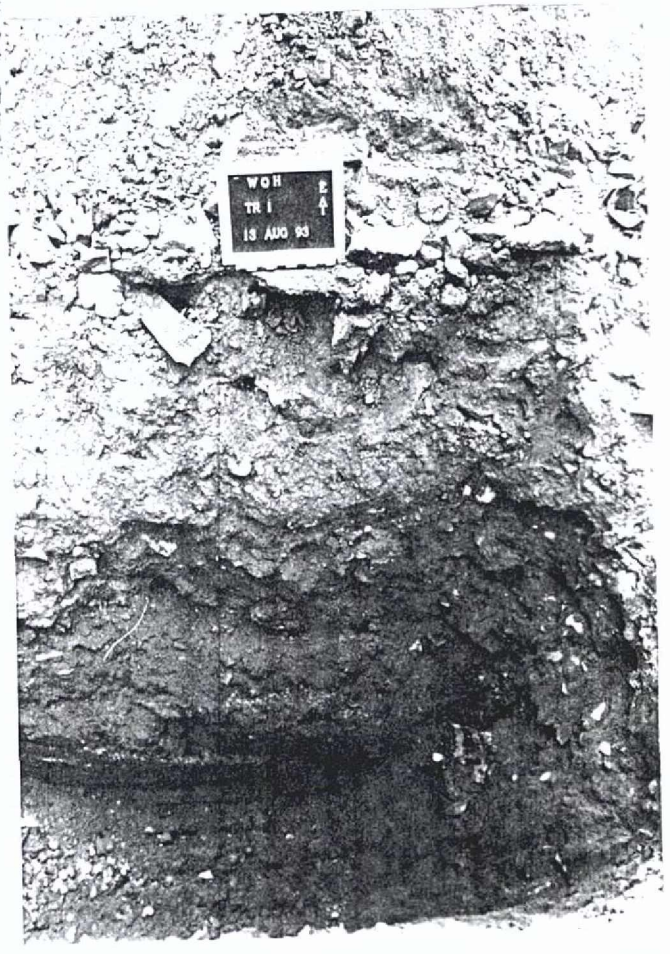

Plate 2 Detail of the east section of Backhoe Trench 1.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Historical Perspectives, Incorporated

1988 Phase 1A Archaeological Assessment Report for the West Queens Housing Site and the West Queens High School Site, Astoria, New York. CEQR: 88-201Q. Prepared for Allee King Rosen & Fleming, Inc., New York, New York. Prepared by Historical Perspectives, Incorporated, Riverside, Connecticut.

United States Geological Survey

1966 *Central Park, N.Y. Quadrangle.* 7.5 minute series topographic map. Photorevised 1979.

APPENDIX 1

FIELD RECORD FORMS

SURVEY RECORD SHEET : Postholes, Auger holes, Shovel tests

PROJECT : West Queens Housing			COORDINATES :		
SITE :	SUPERVISOR : WR	EXCAVATOR : AA	SCREENED ? Y/N Samples Only	DATE : 13 Aug. 1993	TEST TYPE AND NO. : Backhoe Trench 1

STRATIGRAPHY. :

LAYER	DEPTH •	DESCRIPTION	COLOR	CULT. MAT.	NOTES
1	0 – 0.2'	Asphalt	7.5 YR 2/0 Black		Pavement
2	0.2' – 1.1'	Sand w/ some Pebbles & Cobbles	10 YR 4/4 Dk. Yel. Br.		Fill below Pavement
3	1.1' – 1.6'	Sand w/ gravel	Mottled 10 YR 4/4 Dk. Yel. Br. 10 YR 7/3 very Pale Brown		Fill
4	1.6' – 4.1'	Sand w/ Rubble – Red Br. Red Tile, Mortar, Stone	7.5 YR 4/3 Dk. Br.	Red Br., Box Tile Mortar, etc.	Rubble in Fill
5	4.1' – 6.6'	Mottled Sandy silt w/ Coal Ash & Coal	7.5 YR 2/0 Black 7.5 YR 4/0 Dk. Gry.	Coal, Coal Ash, Clinker	Ash Deposit
6	6.6' – ?	Slightly silty Sand w/ Pebbles	7.5 YR 5/6 Str. Br.	—	Probable Subsoil
7					
8					

• Give depths relative to ground surface

General Notes : (Note if cult. material retained, and if soil samples are taken.)

Stopped @ 8.0 feet below grade.

Strata Recorded on West Section on N. part of Trench

Cross Refs :

Plan #1

Section

Photos Roll 1 : 1-4 looking N
5-7 looking W
8-11 looking E

Notebook