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STAGE 1A ARCHAEOLOGICAL/HISTORICAL SENSITIVITY EVALUATION OF THE OUR LADY OF FATIMA SENIOR CITIZEN RESIDENCE PROJECT BOROUGH OF QUEENS, NEW YORK

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Materials on file at Greenhouse Consultants, compiled for other projects conducted in the Borough of Queens were used in preparing this report. Credit is extended to the document research completed by Mark E. Adams for previous projects.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Phase 1A Sensitivity Study is to document the potential prehistoric and historic sensitivity of the proposed Our Lady of Fatima Residences Project through the review of existing archival, cartographic and published references and then to make recommendations regarding possible archaeological testing. In order to provide a context for evaluating any identified resources within the parcel itself, this survey shall include a synthesis of published and unpublished prehistoric resources in the immediate area surrounding the project area and a summary of the history of this location.

The Our Lady of Fatima Development project area is located in north-central Queens. The project area is located in the northwestern part of the Jackson Heights. It incudes the southern portion of Block 1055. See Figure 1 for location of the project area.

This study is organized in the following manner: first, a section describes the geography and physical setting; second, a section on the prehistoric sensitivity of the area; third, a review of the historic sensitivity of the area; fourth, a section on evidence from soil borings; and fifth, the conclusions and recommendations.

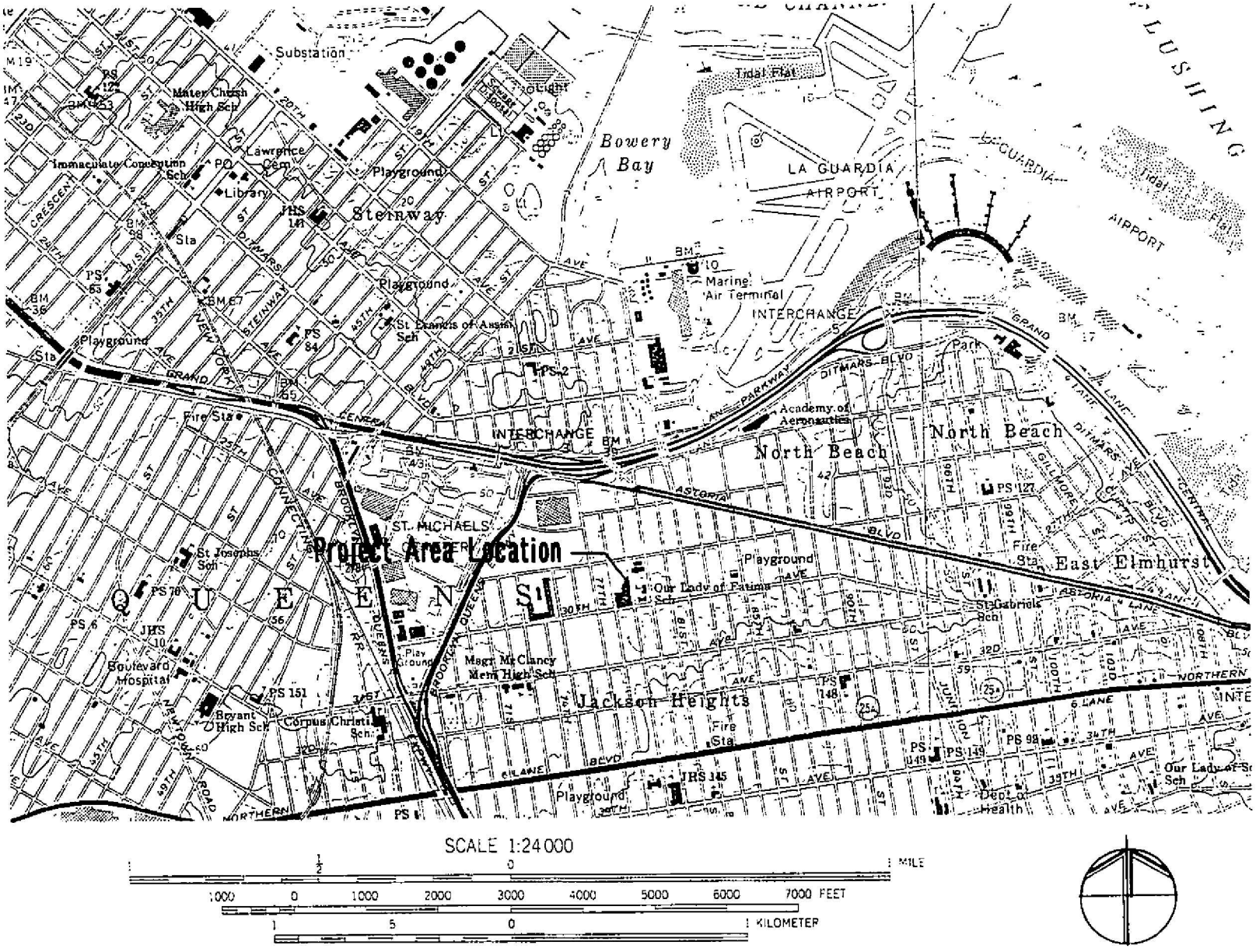

Figure 1 Project area location shown on portions of U.S.G.S. 7.5 Minute Series Central Park and flushing, New York quadrangles, 1966 photorevised 1979.

GEOGRAPHY AND PHYSICAL SETTING

The project area lies on Block 1055 within the Jackson Heights section of Queens. Block 1055 is a rectangle bounded to the south by 30th Avenue, to the north by 25th Avenue, to the west by 78th Street and to the east by 79th Street. The project area consists of Lot 38. Lot 38 includes the entire southern third of Block 1055 as well as an additional piece to the north on the eastern side of the block. The project area occupies approximately 1.26 acres. See Figure 1 for the project area location. The project area, and the remainder of Block 1055, are presently vacant, being covered only by grasses. A low chainlink fence surrounds the block which is nearly level.

The project area lies in Long Island, which is within the Atlantic Coastal Lowland Physiographic Province (Thompson 1966: 34). This province exists within New York State only on Long Island and Staten Island (ibid.: 34, 43). Long Island's fertile soil is good for the production of hay and grains. Farmers on Long Island also raise vegetables, potatoes and fruit.

The climate of Long Island is basically mild and wet during the winters. During the summer it is warm and humid (Thompson 1966: 77). Ocean breezes help cool Long Island in the summer. The mean temperature for January is 30 degrees Fahrenheit. The frost-free season lasts for approximately two hundred days.

PREHISTORIC SENSITIVITY

As part of the project evaluation process, this sensitivity study has surveyed published and unpublished sources in the files of the New York State Museum Division of Historical and Anthropological Services, and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historical Preservation as well as resources on file at Greenhouse Consultants.

Table 1 presents the results of our search for prehistoric sites in the vicinity of Our Lady of Fatima project area. Included in the table are four sites located two miles or less from the project area. The locations of these sites are presented on Figure 2 with letter code identifiers which correspond to those in Table 1.

Three of these prehistoric sites are known primarily through the work of Arthur C. Parker, the former New York State Archaeologist during the first quarter of this century. Parker describes the site as shell middens and a burial site. Unfortunately no detailed descriptions of artifacts recovered from any of these sites are supplied, so no assessments of chronological or cultural affiliations can be made (Parker 1922: 672). The nearest site to the project area is N.Y.S.M. 4533, which is designated "A" in Figure 2 and Table 1. This site is described as a shell midden. The third nearest site to the project area, designated "C" in Figure 2 and Table 1, is also one of the Parker sites. This site, N.Y.S.M. 4532, is described as a burial. The final Parker site, also described as a shell midden, is designated "D" in Figure 2 and Table 1.

The second site found during our search is designated "B" in Table 1 and Figure 2. This site, known as Saint Michael's Cemetery, is located approximately 0.6 miles northwest of the project area. It is listed in the prehistoric site files of the New York State Museum as a cemetery although no additional information such as date range is supplied. A report prepared recently to document a portion of this cemetery was reviewed as part of this research. This report describes the potential prehistoric sensitivity of the cemetery and concludes that although the cemetery location would have been conducive to its use by prehistoric populations, no evidence exists to confirm St. Michael's Cemetery as a known prehistoric site. This location has definitely been used for burials since the middle of the nineteenth century (Geismar 1987), but its listing in the prehistoric site files of the New York State Museum is apparently erroneous.

Documentary evidence from the seventeenth century also indicates that this region was utilized by the aboriginal population. The place name Sackhickneyah was evidently of native origin. The meaning proposed for this term is the "shore path" (Grumet 1981: 48-49). R.P. Bolton, the early twentieth century researcher, places the village of Maspeth in the

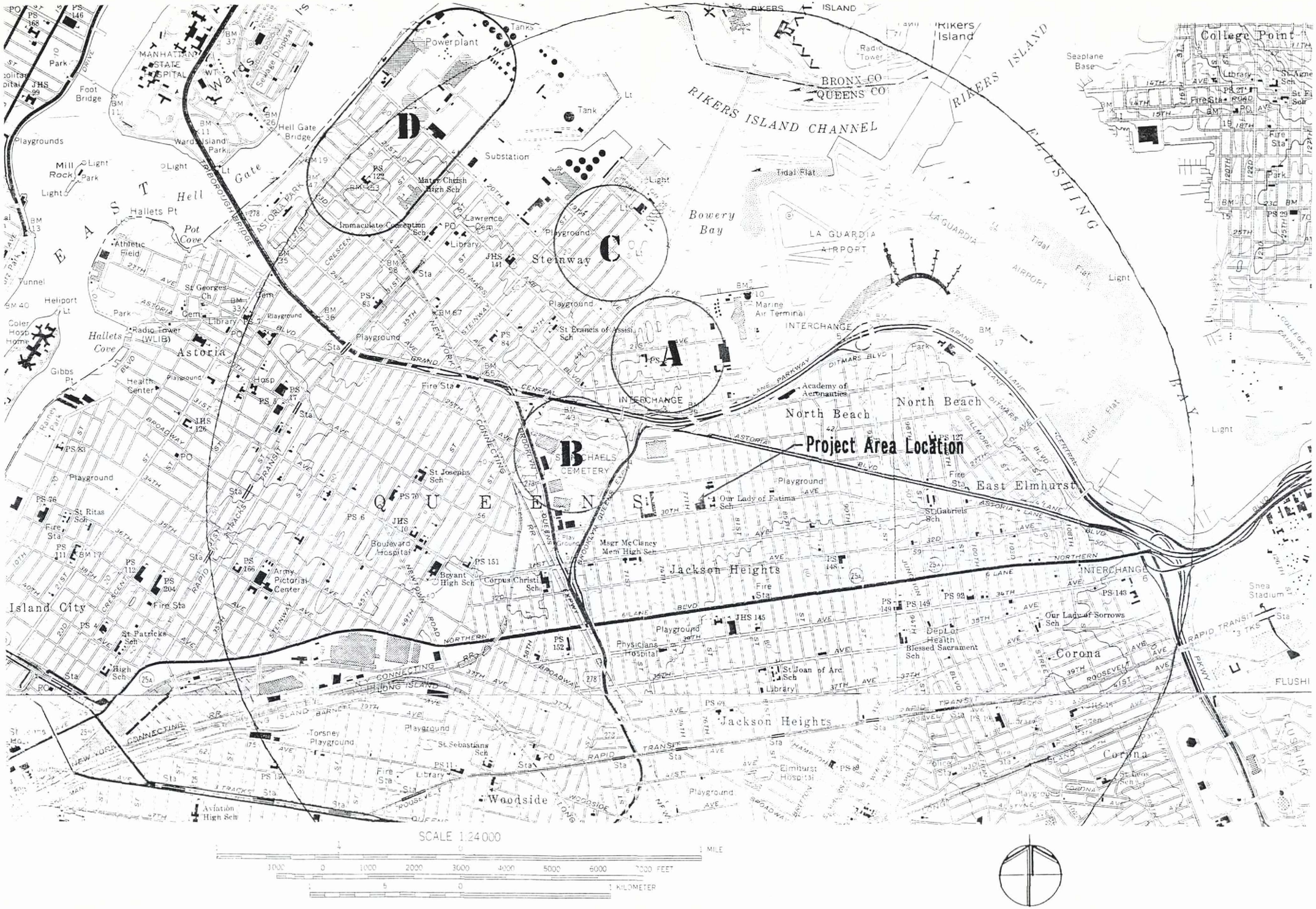

Figure 2 Known prehistoric sites within two miles of the project area.

territory of the Rockaway group (Bolton 1975: 51). There is considerable evidence that the group that occupied this portion of Queens was Delaware speaking (Grumet 1981: 65).

In terms of potential prehistoric sensitivity, the project impact area was evaluated from two points of view:

1) the proximity of known prehistoric sites in or near the project area; and
2) the presence of fresh water drainage courses in general, and particularly the identification of river or stream confluence situations where two or more drainages come together, providing access to both water and food supplies of both systems.

This survey has documented the recorded or published location of at least three sites within a two mile radius of the Our Lady of Fatima project area. Although sites have been identified in the general region of the proposed project impact area, none are known to exist within the project area itself. No evidence, positive or negative, based on previous survey work is available. It would be inappropriate, however, to characterize the area as without prehistoric sensitivity, especially since a stream formerly existed within or near the project area. A small unnamed stream ran off to the north of the project area draining Trains Meadow into Flushing Bay.

This source of fresh water, although no longer evident, may have been utilized by prehistoric inhabitants of this region. The project area is presently nearly level situated from approximately 22 to 23 feet above the Queens Highway datum, and adjacent to the stream. The existence of this land with easy access to fresh water within the project area, combined with the knowledge of the prehistoric sites in the vicinity as well as Contact Period references to occupation in this region, indicates that the project area may preserve evidence of prehistoric occupation. Such evidence would probably consist of a temporary or seasonal hunting camp, since these camps often overlook marshes or swamps where game might obtain food and water.

TABLE 1: PREHISTORIC SITES IN THE VICINITY OF OUR LADY OF FATIMA

SITE NAME	NYSM#	PARKER#	OTHER#	REFERENCE	PERIOD(S)	DESCRIPTION
A.	4533	ACP-GUNS-10	—	Parker 1922:672	—	Shell midden
B. St. Michael's Cemetery	5472	—	14	—	—	Cemetery
C.	4532	ACP-GUNS-9	—	Parker 1922:672	—	Burial
D.	4539	ACP-GUNS	—	Parker 1922:Pl. 208	—	Shell midden

HISTORIC SENSITIVITY

Seventeenth Century

Director-General Kieft of the Dutch West India Company purchased a tract of land east of Rockaway on the southern shore of present-day Nassau County (Flint 1896: 116). Kieft's land extended to the north as far as Martin Gerretsen's Bay. This purchase from the Manhassett Indians was the first known European contact with present-day Queens (ibid.). The Dutch, however, made no organized settlement in the region.

English settlers from New England arrived and established the first colonies in Queens known as the English Towns (Flint 1896: 116). The English colonists of Queens accepted Dutch rule (c. 1640) which extended on Long Island's northern shore as far east as Oyster Bay (ibid.: 118). The settlers had to pay a rent of one-tenth of all their farm produce to the Dutch West India Company each year (ibid.: 131).

New Netherland became English in 1664, and all of Long Island, including present-day Queens, was included within the administrative district called Yorkshire (Flint 1896: 116-117). Yorkshire was subdivided into three divisions known as Ridings: West, East, and North (ibid.: 117). The township of Newton, including the present project area, was part of the West Riding.

Governor Dongan ended the Riding System and the Colonial Assembly set up counties (Flint 1896: 117). In 1683 the colony of New York was divided into twelve counties with Queens County composed of the townships of Jamaica, Newton, Flushing, Oyster Bay, and Hempstead (Hazelton 1925 I: 126). The focus of this section is on the township of Newton, the location of present-day Jackson Heights and the project area.

During 1654 the New Amsterdam authorities granted Abraham Riker a tract of land stretching from the head of Dutch Kills to Bowery Bay and Luyster's Island. This tract included the present project area (The New York City Historical Records Survey 1940 I: V, XVIII).

In 1652 the English settlers arrived at Middleburg, which later became a village of Newton and present-day Elmhurst (Hazelton 1925 II: 1942). The first house at Middleburg was built on present-day Queens Boulevard near Grand Avenue, approximately 1.5 miles south of the project area (ibid.). The first Middleburg settlers purchased 1,376 acres from the Indians at one shilling per acre (Hendrickson 1902: 9). This purchase from the Indians was the only claim that the Middleburg settlers had to their land, since Director-General Stuyvesant did not grant a village patent to them (Kross 1983: 21). By the middle of the 1650s the Middleburg settlements was called Newtown as well as Middleburg (ibid.: 21).

During the early 1660s the settlers of Middleburg supported the English crown against the Dutch of New Netherland (Onderdonk 1865: 5). At this time the name of the Middleburg settlement was changed temporarily to Hastings (Hendrickson 1902: 11). Following the English capture of New Netherland in 1664, "Newtown", a name already in popular use, became official (The New York City Historical Records Survey 1940 I: VIII).

In 1667 Governor Nicolls issued a patent for Newtown. Three years later a Meeting House was erected on what is today the south side of Queens Boulevard (New York City Historical Records Survey 1940 I: VIII). In 1686 Governor Dongan confirmed the original Newtown patent of 1667 (Kross 1983: 58-61). The population of Newtown by the 1680s was still low. Hazelton (1925 II: 939) claims a population at this time of ninety families for the entire town.

The areas of heaviest settlement were near English Kills (Mespat or Maspeth) and along Horsebrook Creek (Newton Village) (Kross 1983: 4). The fresh and salt meadows were considered good for both agriculture and pasturage (ibid.).

Eighteenth Century

Newtown experienced some population growth during the last decade of the seventeenth century and the first decade of the eighteenth. The 1711 Census records 1003 people, including 164 black slaves (Riker 1852: 147). By 1727 the Quaker population increased enough for the construction of a meeting house. By 1733 the influx of Dutch resulted in the building of a Dutch Reformed Church (The New York Historical Records Survey 1940 I: XIII). The population of Newton doubled before the close of the eighteenth century with the 1790 Census listing 2111 (Riker 1852: 262).

Along with population growth came physical developments. In 1703 the Queens County road supervisors constructed roads linking Newton, Flushing and Jamaica. They completed fourteen more by 1722 (Kross 1983: 161).

Newtown was the site of activity during the American Revolution. British Major General Robertson arrived and left Newtown during 1776 without finding any American troops (Onderdonk 1846: 100). After Robertson had left, British Generals Clark and Heister (with his Hessians) remained at Newtown for three weeks (ibid.: 101). British troops marched and encamped in the vicinity of Newton Village. There was an encampment at Trains Meadow to the northwest of the project area, thus indicating the kind of terrain favored for temporary settlement (Onderdonk 1846: 133, Kross 1983: 5). Figure 3, taken from the 1776 Faden plan, shows these encampments in a diagrammatic fashion. The troop positions for September 3, 1776 are all on the west side of a road leading northwest from Newtown Village. All of the troop positions are shown immediately adjacent to the road.

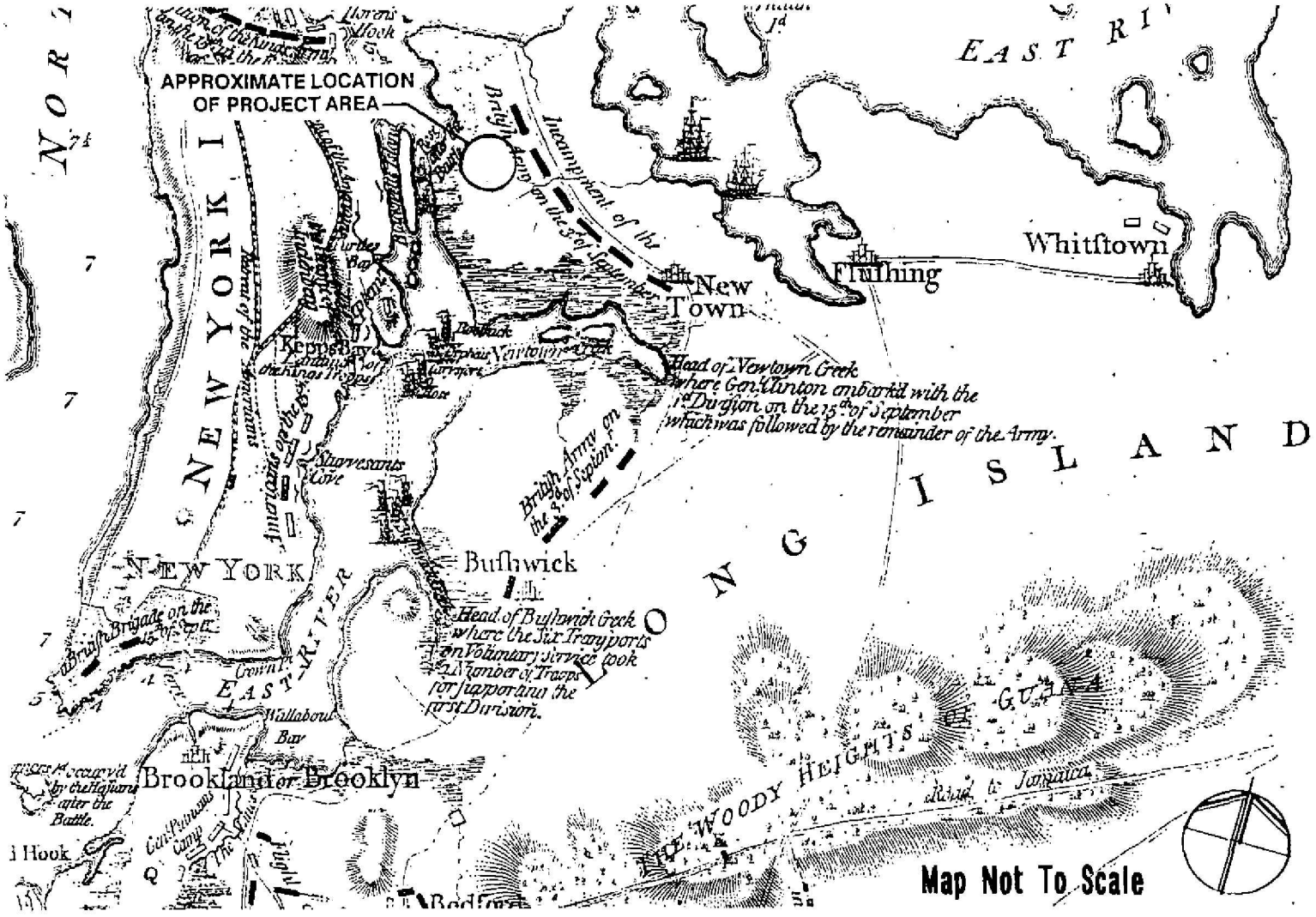

Figure 3 Approximate location of the project area shown on portion of 1776 Faden plan.

The road shown could be Trains Meadow Road, although the actual road course is nowhere near this straight. The British officers almost certainly stayed in the farmhouses, while the troops would likely have stayed in the barns and other outbuildings, or in tents in the farm yards. The project area itself was within Trains Meadow itself at this time, several hundred yards west of the road, and probably too damp for tent sites.

Nineteenth Century

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the project area was still part of a farm owned by the Riker family. Figure 4, which shows the ownership of land in Queens as of 1800, shows the project area as part of a 46 acre farm belonging to Samuel Riker. Samuel Riker was the son of Andrew Riker. Andrew, who died during February 1763 at age 64, was the son of Abraham Riker. Abraham Riker was the son of Abraham Rycken, also known as de Rycke and later Riker. The elder Abraham emigrated to New Amsterdam in 1638, and obtained the original grant for the land including the project area on February 26, 1654. Samuel Riker, the great grandson of the elder Abraham, was born on April 8, 1743 and lived until May 19, 1823. Samuel was active in the patriot cause during the Revolutionary War, but was forced to surrender while hiding at his father-in-law's house. Samuel had married Anna Lawrence, the daughter of Joseph Lawrence during 1769. After the war, Samuel served as a supervisor of the Town of Newtown. He was elected New York State Assemblyman in 1784, and served as United States congressman during 1808 and 1809 (Riker 1853: 301-315).

By 1816 the project area was part of a farm owned by the Barclay family. Anthony Barclay had married Anna Lent, who was a fifth generation descendant of Abraham Rycken (Riker). Two of Abraham Rycken's sons had taken the name of Van Lent or Lent, presumably a place-name reference. Anthony and Anna Barclay had a son, Henry Barclay (ibid.: 318-319). Henry Barclay was evidently the H. Barclay shown as owner of the farm including the project area on both the 1852 Riker Map presented here as Figure 5, and the 1852 Conners and Dripps' Map.

The next map obtained, the 1873 Beers Atlas, shows a change in ownership of the farm. The project area is now part of a farm owned by A.O. Backus. This evidently shows that the Barclays had sold the farm between 1852 and 1873. Assuming that the Backus family did not marry into the Barclay family, this marks the first time since 1654 that the project area was not owned by someone directly descended from Abraham Rycken, or someone married to one of Rycken's descendants. See Figure 6 for a portion of plate 52 from the 1873 Beers Atlas.

The final nineteenth century map obtained as part of this study is the 1891 Wolverton Atlas. Plate 30 of this atlas, presented here as Figure 7, clearly shows the project area

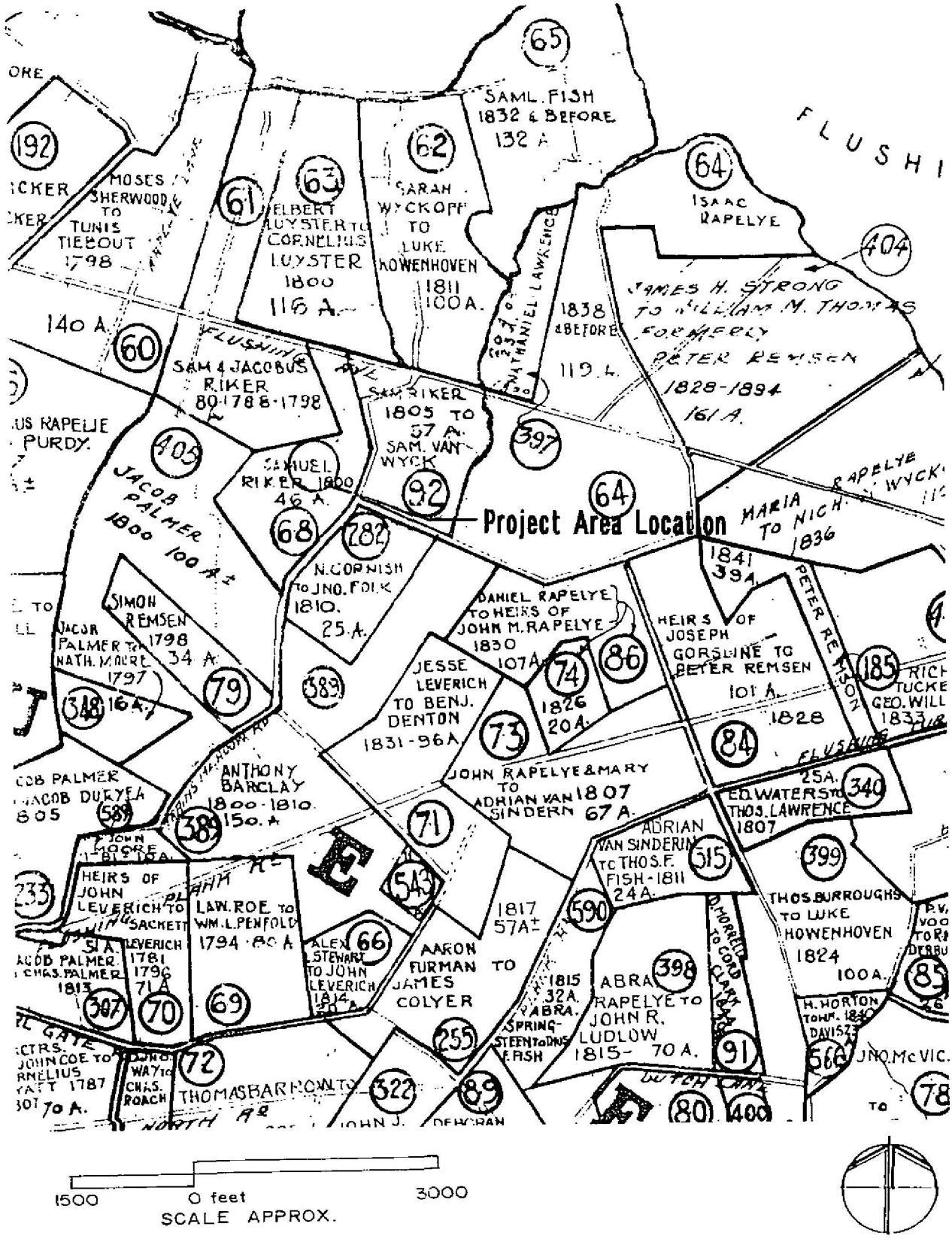

Figure 4 Location of the project area shown on portion of 1935 Queens Topographical Bureau Map of the Borough of Queens Showing Ownership as of the Year 1800.

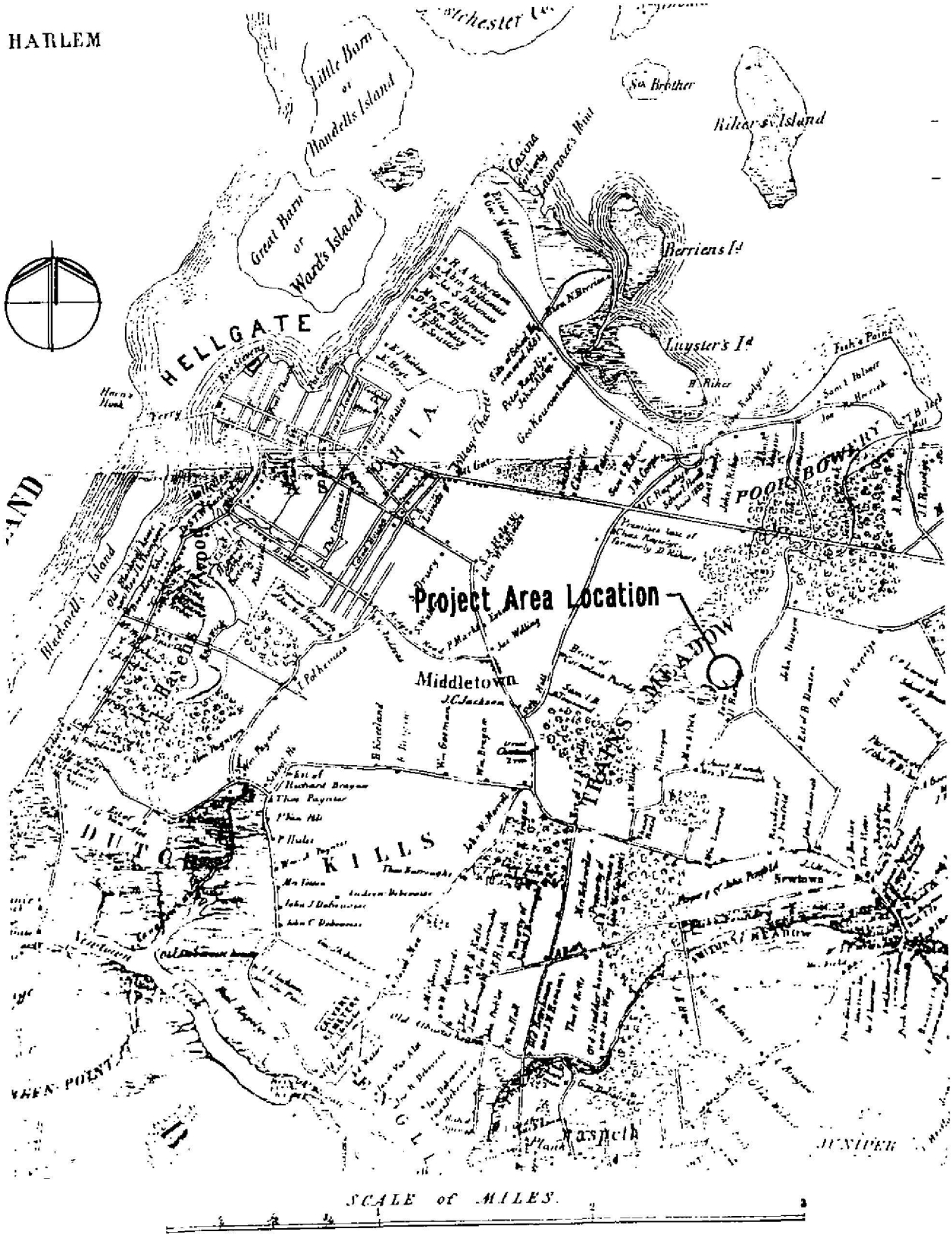

Figure 5 Project area location shown on portion of 1852 Riker Map of Newtown, Long Island.

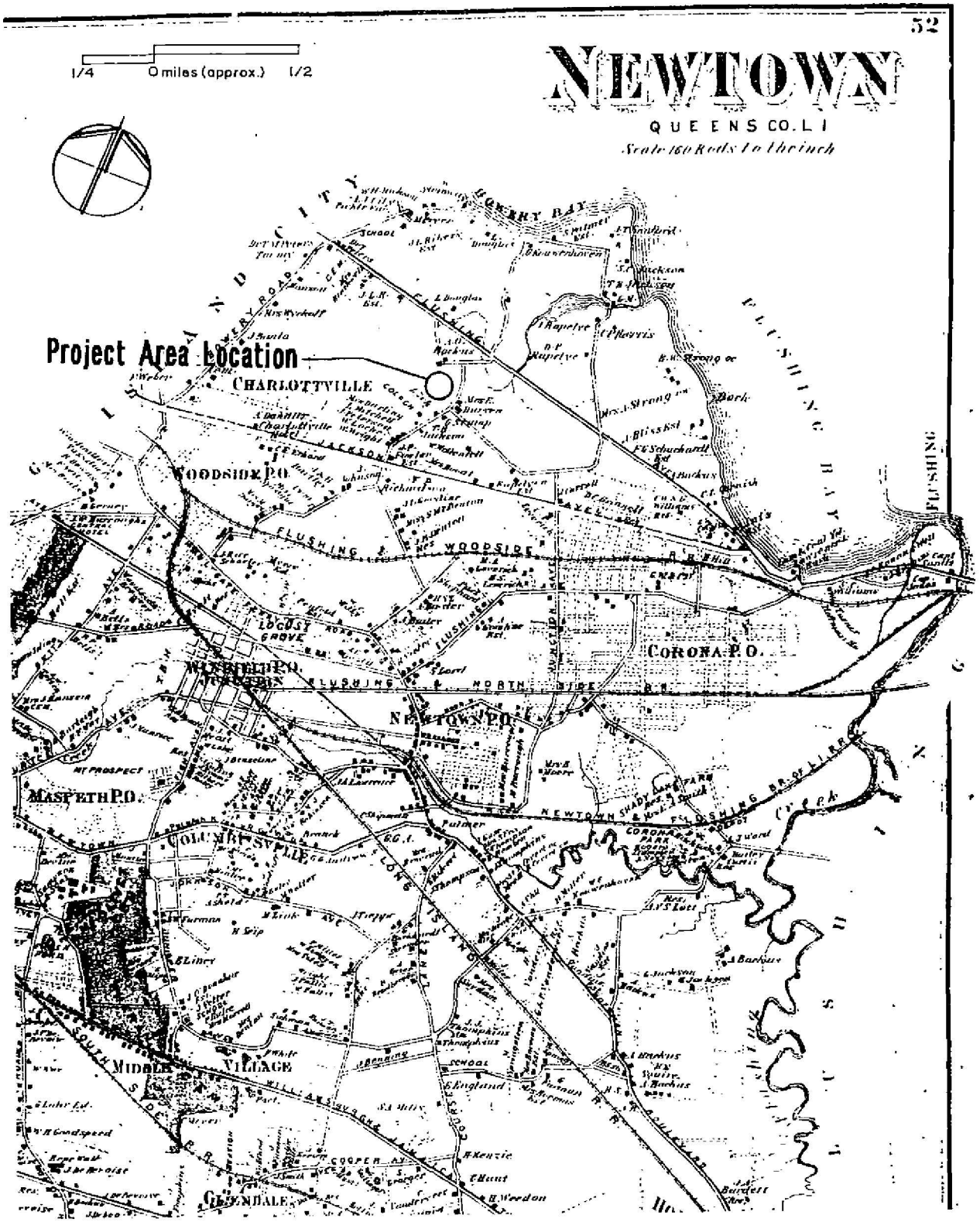

Figure 6 Project area location shown on portion of 1873 Beers Atlas of Long Island, Plate 52.

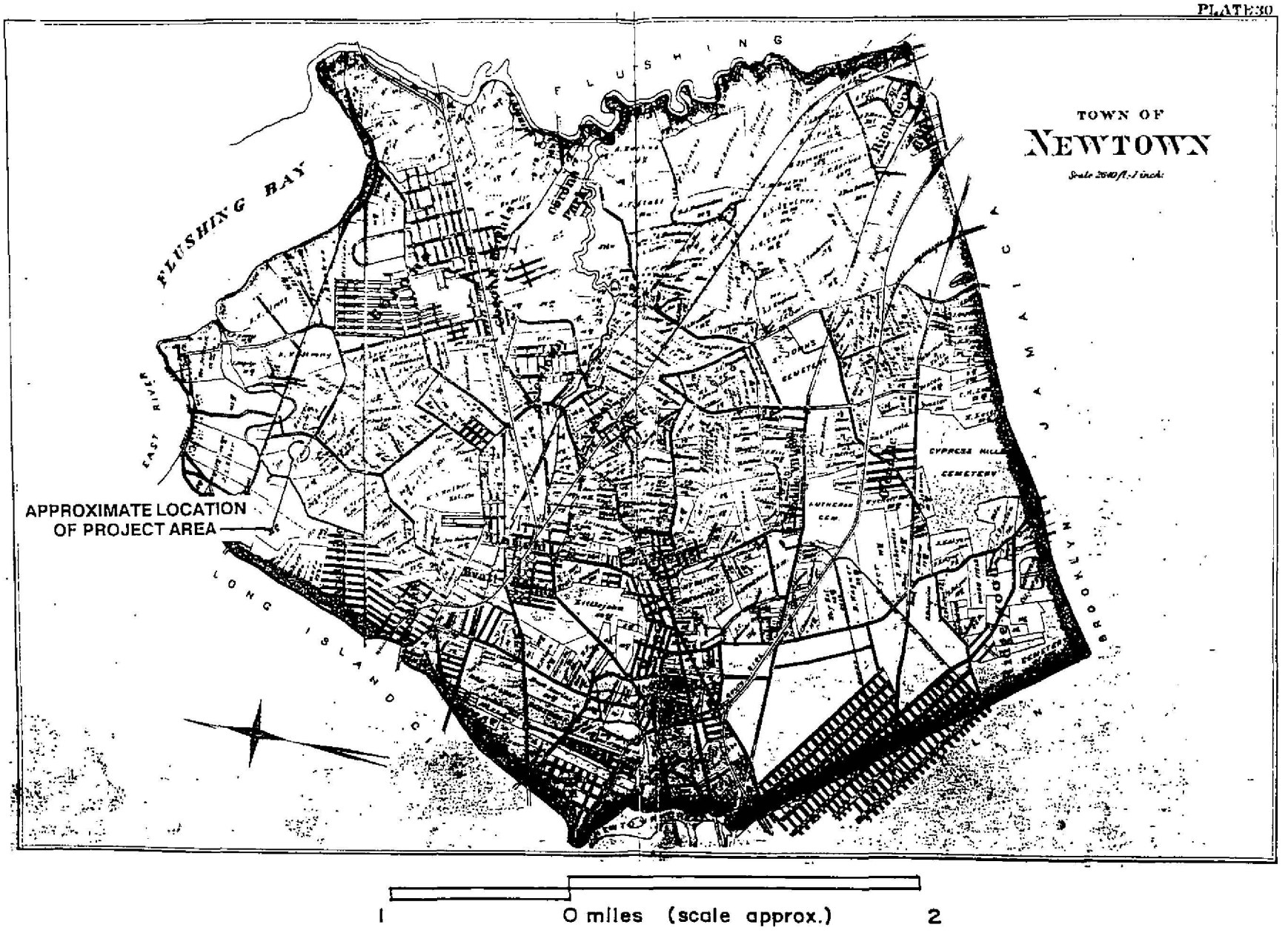

Figure 7 Approximate location of the project area shown on portion of 1891 Wolverton Atlas of Queens County, Plate 30.

as part of a farm labelled A.C. Backus. The farm including the project area is still evidently owned by the Backus family at this time. It appears likely that the Backus family were farmers of German extraction. Many of the smaller farms within present Jackson Heights were owned by "thrifty German truck-farmers," who raised vegetable for sale in the local markets (Stabler 1938: 4).

Twentieth Century

The project area and surroundings have seen more change during the first three quarters of the twentieth century than occurred here during the preceding three centuries. It is during this time period that the neighborhood now known as Jackson Heights was created. As of 1909, this entire locality was still farmland crossed only by hard-packed dirt roads (Stabler 1938). The present street grid was designed by October 1911 and was included on section 9 of the Final Maps of the Borough of Queens, although there is evidence that they were not constructed until over a decade later. Section 9 is presented here as Figure 8. An aerial photograph dated July 1, 1924 was found in the files of the Subsurface Exploration Section. This photograph clearly shows the intersection of Trains Meadow Road and Duryea's Road. The northern portion of what had been Samuel Riker's farm in 1800 has been developed and the new street grid and some houses are visible near Flushing Avenue. The southern and central portions of the old farm including the project area are clearly still farm fields. No structures are visible within or adjacent to the project area. To the south of the project area, the center of the new community of Jackson Heights had been developing for approximately one decade. This development continued through the 1950s (N.Y.C.L.P.C. 1993: 3). The parish church of Our Lady of Fatima, which stands on the block to the east of the project area, was founded during 1948. The church was originally a quonset hut. The church school was the first substantial structure built, followed by the rectory and the present church (Monsigneur Breen 1993: personal communication).

The final map presented here is Figure 9, taken from the 1929 Sanborn updated to at least the early 1970s. Block 1055 including the project area is entirely free of buildings. Much of the block falls within the right-of-way for one of the runways at LaGuardia Airport. The surrounding blocks are completely developed by this time. This is the same situation as currently exists. The project area remains vacant. The only structure on the block is a runway marker light which is to the north of the project area.

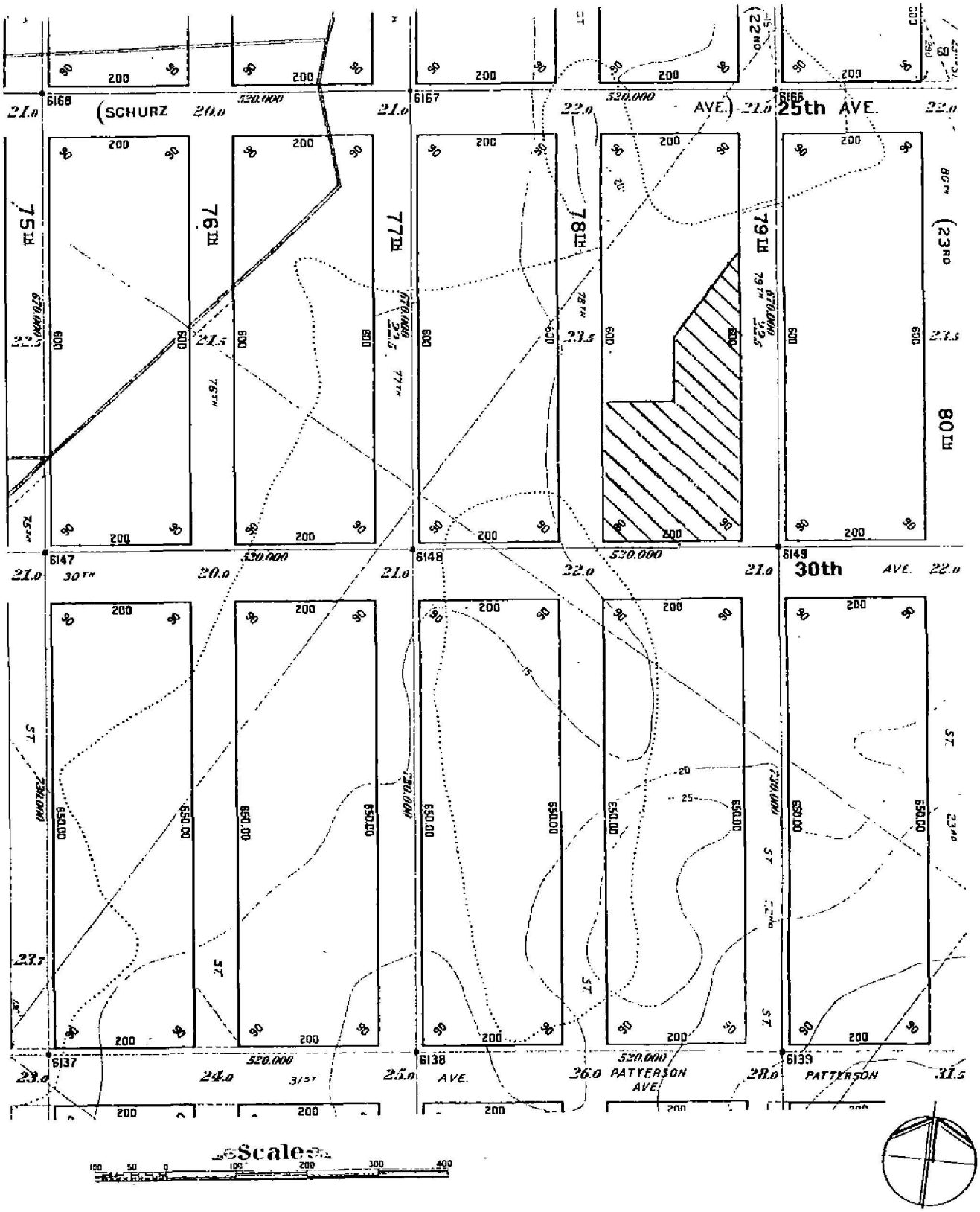

Figure 8 Project area location shown on portion of Section 9 of the Final Map of the Borough of Queens, 1911. Project area indicated by hatchure.

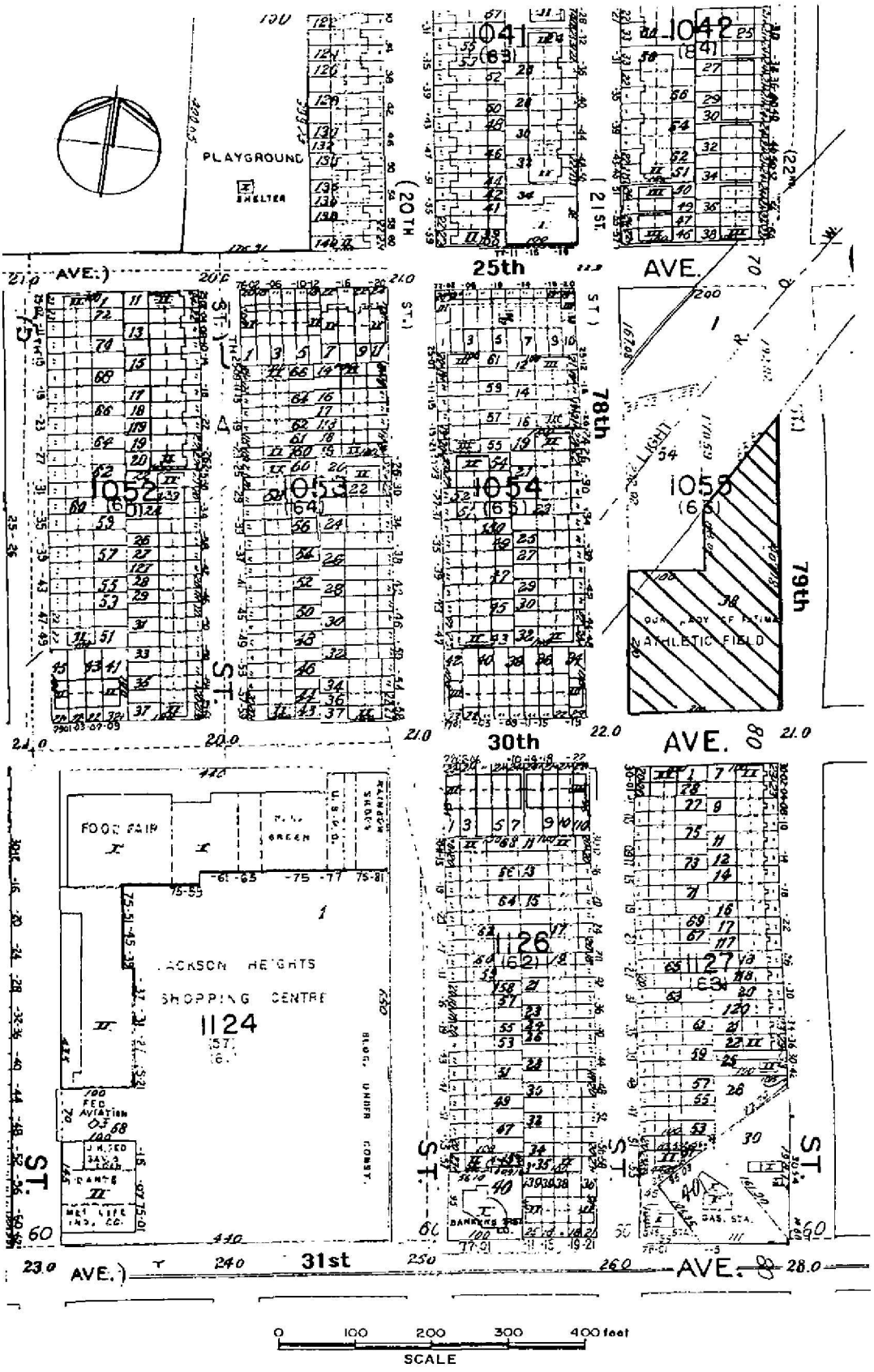

Figure 9 Project area location shown on portion of 1929 Sanborn map updated to show present situation. Project area indicated by hatchure.

ANALYSIS OF SOIL BORINGS

During late November and early December 1993 a series of ten soil borings were drilled to a depth of 41 feet below present grade within the Our Lady of Fatima project area. The borings were sampled every five feet using a two-inch outside diameter split spoon sampler. Analysis of the soils recovered indicates that the top layer in all ten cases is fill. The fill is described as brown sand with traces of brick fragments, cinders and silt. It ranges in thickness from 2.5 to 7.5 feet. Below this in eight of the borings was a brown medium to fine sand with little to a trace of gravel and silt. This layer ranged in thickness from 4.5 to 13.5 feet. Below this layer in four of the eight borings, and below the top layer in the remaining two borings, was a brown fine sand with a trace to some silt.. Below the second or third layers in all ten borings was a layer of brown medium to fine sand with a little gravel and a trace of silt. This layer began from 14.5 to 20.0 feet below grade (Long Island Materials Testing Lab Inc. 1993).

The evidence from these borings corroborates the elevations from this block, on section 9 of the Final Maps of the Borough of Queens dated October 1911 (see Figure 8). This map shows elevations of 22.0 feet and 21.0 at the crossing of 30th Avenue with 78th and 79th Street respectively, but these must be proposed elevations since these were only paper streets at the time. The topographic line for 15 feet above the Queens Highway Datum (2.725 feet above mean sea level at Sandy Hook) runs though the intersection of 30th Avenue and 78th Street. All of Block 1055 is between 15 feet and 20 feet above the datum. A topographical survey of the project area completed during November 1993 shows elevations of 22.02 to 25.68 feet above the same datum, with an elevation of 21.97 at the intersection of 30th Avenue and 78th Street (Bianco 1993). Comparison of the 1993 data with the topographic lines on the 1911 map indicates that nearly seven feet of fill has been added at 30th Avenue and 78th Street. Overall, the fill should range between 2.02 feet to 10.68 feet in thickness, although much may be in the five to eight-foot range. The borings discussed above all show fill within this thickness range.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The above text has documented that the Our Lady of Fatima project area may preserve archaeological evidence from the prehistoric period. The project area is located within two miles of three or four known prehistoric sites. An aboriginal place name for this locality has survived, and fresh water would have been easily available from the stream draining Trains Meadow. The meadow itself would probably have attracted game, making this a possible location for a temporary or seasonal hunting camp.

The section on historic sensitivity provides evidence that this location was used for agriculture from as early as the mid-seventeenth century until after 1924. The only possibility of any other use was the mention of Revolutionary War encampment along Trains Meadow Road. The probability of finding such remains in the project area is low since the road was approximately 1000 feet to the east, and the encampments probably were close to the road. There is no evidence that any structures were ever built within the project area, which remains vacant today.

It is our recommendation that a program of archaeological testing take place here prior to the beginning of construction activities. This testing will search for evidence of prehistoric use of this land. Since the project area is evidently under five to eight feet of fill, a backhoe will be needed to conduct this testing. A series of four backhoe trenches each approximately 5 by 60 feet is suggested. These trenches will be excavated to the maximum depth of the proposed foundations. They will be located within or adjacent to the footprints of the proposed new structures.

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