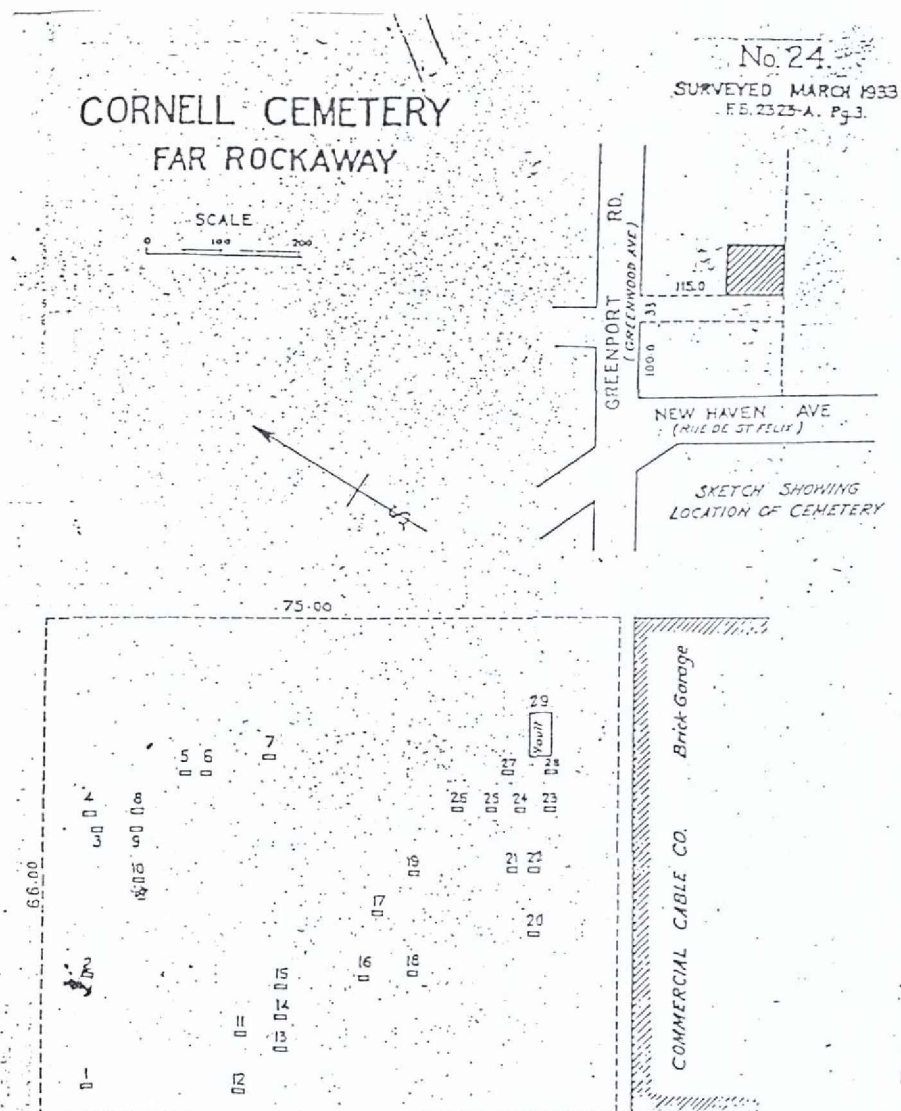


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Historical Report and Archaeological Recommendations

Richard Cornell Graveyard, Far Rockaway, Queens, New York



LP-0741

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ABSTRACT

Historical research on the Cornell Graveyard in Far Rockaway, Queens, New York (Tax Map Bock #15574, Lot #10) suggests that the 75 by 67 foot site was used as a family burial ground in the 18th and early 19th century. Maps and other materials used in this research indicate that the site has not been used as a cemetery since 1821. The recommendations regarding archaeological activity in this report have considered recommendations from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. Limited archaeological testing and surface collection have been recommended in response to specific research questions and to provide information for the development of a site conservation plan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funding for this project was provided by The Fund For Architecture and The Environment Inc. Many thanks are extended to employees of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, including Laurie Beckelman, Chair, Janet O'Hare, Director of the Facade Program, Joan Olshansky, Chief of Staff, and Merin Elizabeth Urban, Executive Director. Thanks also to Emil Lucev, who provided a lot of source material, along with Mrs. Mary Cornell.

INTRODUCTION

This study was conducted under the auspices of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, at the request of the Cornell Cemetery Corporation. The Corporation, which consists of members of the Queens Historical Society and Cornell descendants, was advised by the Landmarks Preservation Commission to "prepare and publish a report on [the] history of [the] cemetery" prior to any archaeological activity at the site. An historical study was conducted and recommendations regarding archaeological activities were made based upon the historical findings. Research focused on whether the site was used as a burial ground and, if so, when. It also addressed another concern of the Landmarks Preservation Commission: to formulate "specific research questions" prior to any archaeological activity.

The repositories used for this study were: The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, the Queens Borough Public Library (Long Island Room), the New York Historical Society, the Queens County Clerks Office, the Topographical Bureau of Queens, Saint George's Episcopal Church in Hempstead, Long Island, and the New York Public Library. Additional materials were provided by Emil Lucev, a member of the Cornell Cemetery Corporation, and by Mrs. Mary Cornell. Source materials included church records, deeds, wills, maps, books, newspapers, periodicals, and oral accounts.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The 75' by 67' Richard Cornell Graveyard (Figure 1) is located in the middle of a block bounded by Gateway Boulevard, Caffrey Avenue, New Haven Avenue, and Mott Avenue in Far Rockaway, Queens (Tax Map Block #15574, Lot #10). Adjacent to the site is a 100' by 200' vacant lot, where the Commercial Cable Company Station Building stood from 1913 until it was demolished in 1980. It was one of the earliest submarine cable landing facilities in America.

The Cornell site is currently enclosed by an iron picket fence and does not resemble a cemetery, since there are no visible gravestones or markers. The condition of the site suggests that it has been used as a dumping ground, with modern debris and architectural material from the demolition of the Commercial Cable Company Station Building in evidence. A partially buried fence section lies in the western quadrant. There is a gentle rise in elevation, with the Gateway side being higher. Scattered vegetation is present (including a number of trees), though the earth is exposed in places due to recent cleanup efforts. A section of the western fence, which separates the lot from a residence located at 14-63 Gateway Boulevard (formerly Greenport Road), appears to have been moved a few feet, encroaching on the Cornell site.

GEOLOGY AND PREHISTORY

The Rockaway Peninsula is approximately nine miles long and one mile wide. It is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the south, Jamaica Bay to the North, and Nassau County to the east. It is sandy, with a number of marshes, streams, and lakes (see Powell's 1931 map, Figure 2). Rock strata or other formations are absent from the area (Bellot 1917:8). The peninsula was occupied by Native Americans long before Europeans settled into the area. Queens County was home to a number of tribes: Merrikokes, Marsapeagues, Canarsies, Matinecoc, and (Algonkian) Rockaways. A study conducted by Grossman and Associates for a report on the Sea Girt Boulevard Development does not indicate the presence of a prehistoric site in the immediate vicinity of the Cornell site* (Grossman 1989:5), nor does the 1934 Bolton map (Figure 3). It is important to note, though, that two Native American camps were located within a mile of the Cornell site. Though the available literary evidence and archaeological data do not suggest that Native American remains are likely to be encountered at the site, the possibility of such can not be ruled out.

HISTORY OF THE SITE

The name Rockaway was taken from the Native Americans who lived in the area when the European settlers arrived. Warfare between the Europeans and the Queens County Natives was common,

with the Native Americans usually suffering defeat (Furman 1874:32). As early as 1639, the Rockaways began deeding their land to white settlers who came to live in the area. They sometimes retained their right to fish, hunt, and cultivate (Onderdonk 1865:3).

A tract of land, known today as Far Rockaway, was deeded to a New York City resident, John Palmer, in 1685. Palmer, who received his purchase license from New York Governor Colonel Thomas Dongan, bought the land "lying and being on the south side of L.I. [Long Island] called by the name of Rockaway" from Natives Tackapousha Sacomaker, of Long Island, and Paman, of Rockaway, for thirty pounds and ten shillings (Lobel 1938:13). In 1687, Palmer sold the land to Richard Cornell, a Quaker from Cornbury, Queens (Bay Side), for an undisclosed sum (Rev. Cornell 1902:146-47). This was not the only land deal between Cornell and Palmer (see Liber B1:115 for another land deal between the two).

Richard Cornell was born in Essex, England, in 1625. His father, Thomas Cornell, brought the family to Boston around 1636. The family, sometimes identified as Cornwall or Cornwell, lived in Rhode Island before moving on to New York. Richard "maintained an honorable position" by serving in such posts as justice of the peace for Flushing, New York, in 1665 (Chapman 1896:39). By 1690, Richard Cornell had built a house in Rockaway and was living with his family on a "homestead" overlooking the Atlantic Ocean (Bellot 1917:12). No "settlers" are believed to have lived in the Rockaways before the Cornells, indeed there were less than 4,000

non-Native Americans in the entire county in 1690 (Mandeville 1860:25).

Richard Cornell's will, dated November 7, 1693, reveals that he was a fairly wealthy man. His possessions included land, enslaved Africans, stock, "utensills [sic] of husbandry," and cash money. When he died, in 1694, his land was divided amongst his children and grandchildren. The land that his son William inherited, "bounded north by the old fence" and "running east to Hempstead line, south by sea," may have included the burial ground under investigation. At least twenty eight family members, along with patriarch, Richard Cornell, have been buried in the Cornell Cemetery (Cornell:152, 161, & 404).

The prominence of the Cornell family continued after Richard's death, as exemplified by his son and grandson, who both served in the State General Assembly. Evidently, the family did not continue in the Quaker faith, since membership in the Church of England is cited in historical sources (Onderdonk 1865:2, 33, & 35). The records of St. George's Episcopal Church in Hempstead, Long Island, indicate that family members began baptizing their children there as early as 1730 (Haight 1932: 223). This may have some bearing on the cemetery, since Quakers erected "no monuments to the memory of the dead" (Spafford 1813:96).

Legal documents signed by Cornell family members in 1870 and 1899 cite the property under investigation as the family burial ground. A 1963 court order stipulates that Lot #10 is not subject to taxes or assessments, owing to its status as a cemetery and

that the owners of Lot #6 must allow free access to the cemetery. Said access to the cemetery was further documented in the papers transferring ownership of Lot #6 in May, 1963.

A 1917 history book describes the cemetery as a 75 by 70 foot lot "railed in on all sides by a good iron fence," with "well grown and ancient pine trees" (Bellot 1917:59-60). It also states that the following stone markers were still present:

Thomas Cornell,	1703-1764
Abigail Cornell,	1762
June McPherson,	1783-1816
Benjamin Cornell,	1821
Rebecca H. Lockwood	1807
Ebenezer Lockwood	1813
Henry Foster	1768
His Wife	1797

The 1933 Powell survey of the Cemetery (Figure 4) lists these plots, and another twenty one too! It also provides locations. It is possible that the site was used for additional burials.

The burial records of St. George's Episcopal Church in Hempstead, Long Island, do not absolutely confirm any burials at the Richard Cornell Graveyard, but they do indicate that one of the individuals, Rebecca Lockwood, was buried in a Far Rockaway cemetery (St. George's Episcopal Church Records Document: 113B). The records also indicate that the family began using other cemeteries, including St. George's, in 1824 (St. George's Episcopal Church Records Document: 123). This is consistent with the Cornell cemetery last being used for a burial in 1821.

Inscriptions on the gravestone fragments recently returned to the Cornell Cemetery Corporation partially confirm information

cited in secondary sources. Inscriptions on a piece of a brown sandstone match those of burial #29 in Powell's 1933 survey. Inscriptions on two smaller fragments appear to match those of #23 and #25.

Maps dating back to 1873 clearly show the boundaries of the site and indicate that it was vacant (older maps list the site as Lot #6, rather than Lot #10), though they do not indicate that it was a cemetery. The Beers map (Figure 5) indicates that the block on which the site is located already contained a number of buildings by 1873, as did the surrounding area. A 1901 Belcher map (Figure 6) shows the site, as does a 1909 Bromley map (Figure 8). The Bromley map provides the dimensions of the lot (73' by 69'6") and indicates that substantial building had gone on in the area since 1891, when the Wolverton map (Figure 7) was made. The 1912 Belcher map (Figure 9) provides all four dimensions for the lot (73' by 69'6" by 75'5" by 66'). The 1933 Sanborn map (Figure 10) shows the Commercial Cable Company Station Building and the house directly to the northwest of the site.

LANDMARKING

The Richard Cornell Graveyard was designated as an individual landmark (LP-0741) by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission on August 18, 1970. The site was found to be "one of the few surviving 18th century cemeteries in New York City" and "the oldest burial ground in Far Rockaway." With

landmark status came publicity and attention. Major newspapers periodically reported on the site's status and the vandalization it endured. Local historians who have followed the activities claim that at least six complete gravestones were removed from the site since it was designated. Fragments of the missing stones have since been returned anonymously. Despite landmark status and the restoration attempts made by local historians, Cornell Family members, and community leaders during the last decade, the site has deteriorated. Refuse dumping at the site is of particular concern. Recent efforts of the Cornell Cemetery Corporation to preserve the site have been supported by the Landmarks Preservation Commission. As a result, the site has been cleared of overgrown vegetation and debris. This report is another product of this collaborative effort.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Archaeological testing of the cemetery is warranted by its historic significance, landmark designation, and the need for additional information to develop a conservation plan for the site. The Landmarks Preservation Commission recommended that digging only be done under the direction of an archaeologist certified by the Society of Professional Archaeologists and that such field work answer "specific research questions." The primary goals of archaeological testing should include confirming the use of the site as a cemetery, validating the accuracy of Powell's

1933 survey map of the site through an attempt to locate the vault (reference #29 in the survey), and determining the over-all pattern, depth, and nature of cultural and natural fill.

Secondary goals should include recording evidence of religious and mortuary practices and iconography through an analysis of evidence pertaining to the alignment of burial plots, as well as their shape, decoration, and building material.

Field Test Plan

Archaeological testing based on Powell's 1933 survey is proposed. Seven to eight shovel testing units are recommended (see Figure 12):

- Four units targeting the area where the historical evidence suggests the presence of an 18th century vault (southeast quadrant).
- One targeting the cemetery entrance (northwest quadrant).
- One focusing on a 19th century burial plot (northeast quadrant).
- One in the center of the lot, since this area should have the least construction and demolition debris.
- The location of the optional eighth unit to be selected based upon information gathered during testing.

The size of shovel testing units must be limited to 1' by 1', to a depth of 3' (or until sterile soil is reached), so that disturbance to the site is limited. This depth is deemed sufficient to reveal 17th and 18th century strata, based on probable alluvial and wind deposits. These tests may provide useful archaeological information (artifacts, soil staining, etc.), as well as information on land use. The proposed archaeological investigation, supplemented by historical

research, will facilitate the development of an appropriate preservation and landscape treatment for the site.

It may be appropriate for a monument be placed at the site. Such monuments often require a sunken foundation, so archaeological excavation may be necessary due to the potential impact on archaeological resources. If a location is selected before the recommendations cited above are initiated, an additional excavation test should be done at the proposed location of the monument.

It is worth noting that burial sites, tombstones, and subterranean vaults can be located with the use of remote sensing equipment. Proton magnetometer sensing, for example, has been shown to be effective in locating burial plots in an unmarked turn of the century cemetery. This technique is most effective where soil matrixes are homogeneous (Brock and Schwartz 1991:78-90). This site is likely to have mixed and anomalous soil deposits, which might render this technique ineffective. It does not seem reasonable to use such expensive methods in this particular case.

Field Procedures

Before archaeological testing can be properly undertaken, preliminary mapping and photographic documentation of the site must be completed and appropriate procedures established:

- Set up a field note book so that all observations are dated and recorded in a standard format.
- Establish a datum off-site, providing elevation control for all future excavation work.

- Stake out a numbered, rectangular, grid pattern on the site.
- Production of a topographic map of the site should be considered. Though a labor intensive process, such maps provide a three dimensional representation of the site which can yield valuable information. The location and patterns of surface depressions and rises can give an indication of archaeologically significant sub-surface features.

Field Work

The results of the following collection and excavation activities are to be recorded and mapped per the procedures outlined above:

- Collect surface artifacts and record provenance first.
- Shovel test to a depth of 3'.
- Record changes in stratigraphy.
- Sift soil using a 1/4" screen.
- Place any and all artifacts that are recovered in bags labelled with corresponding provenance information.
- Compare strata noted in the separate test excavations and record any conclusions.

All artifacts recovered from the site are to be removed to a laboratory for processing and analysis at the end of each field day. Should a tombstone, coffin, or obvious human remains be encountered during excavation, digging in that particular test unit is to cease and the City Archaeologist is to be notified.

Laboratory Work

Artifacts should be assessed, washed if appropriate, catalogued, and marked. Diagnostic artifacts should be identified and dated. The relative frequencies of specific material categories within soil matrixes should be determined. Recommendations for the conservation of artifacts should be made, along with arrangements for their eventual curation and storage.

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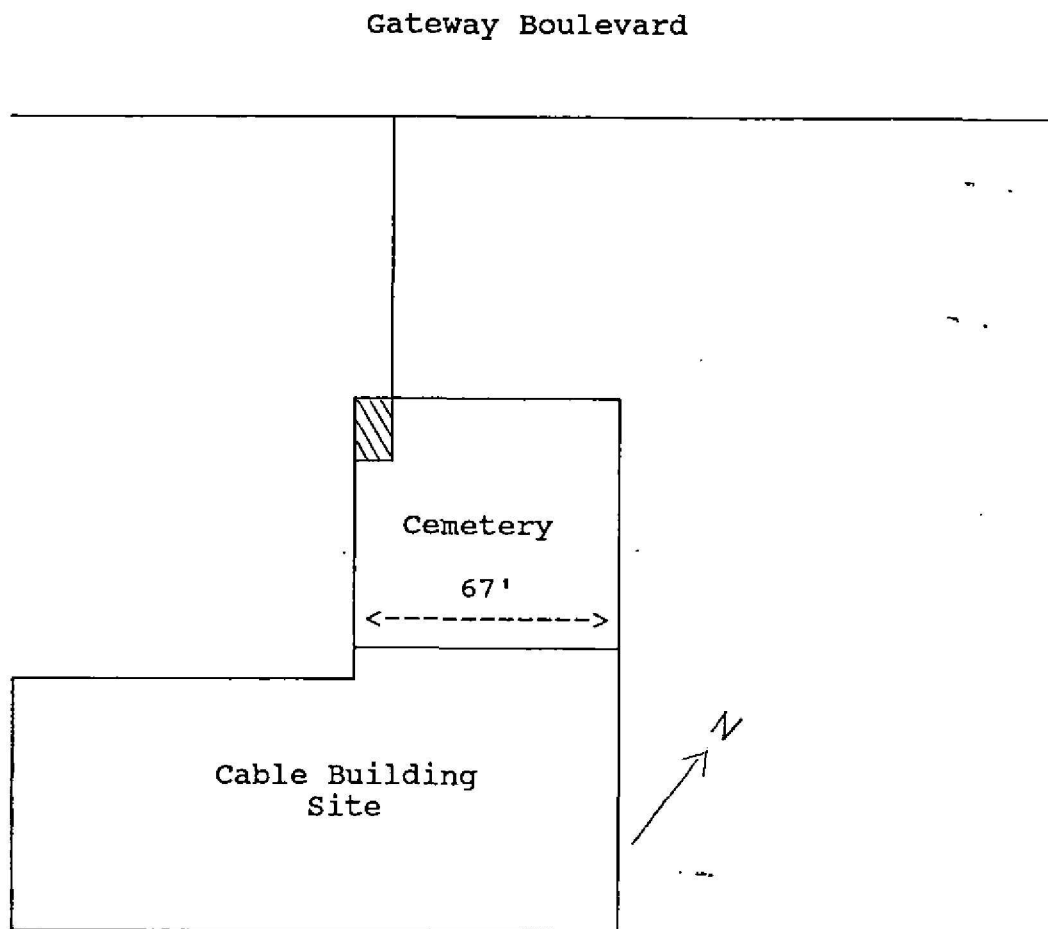
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Figure 1
Drawing of the site (not to scale)



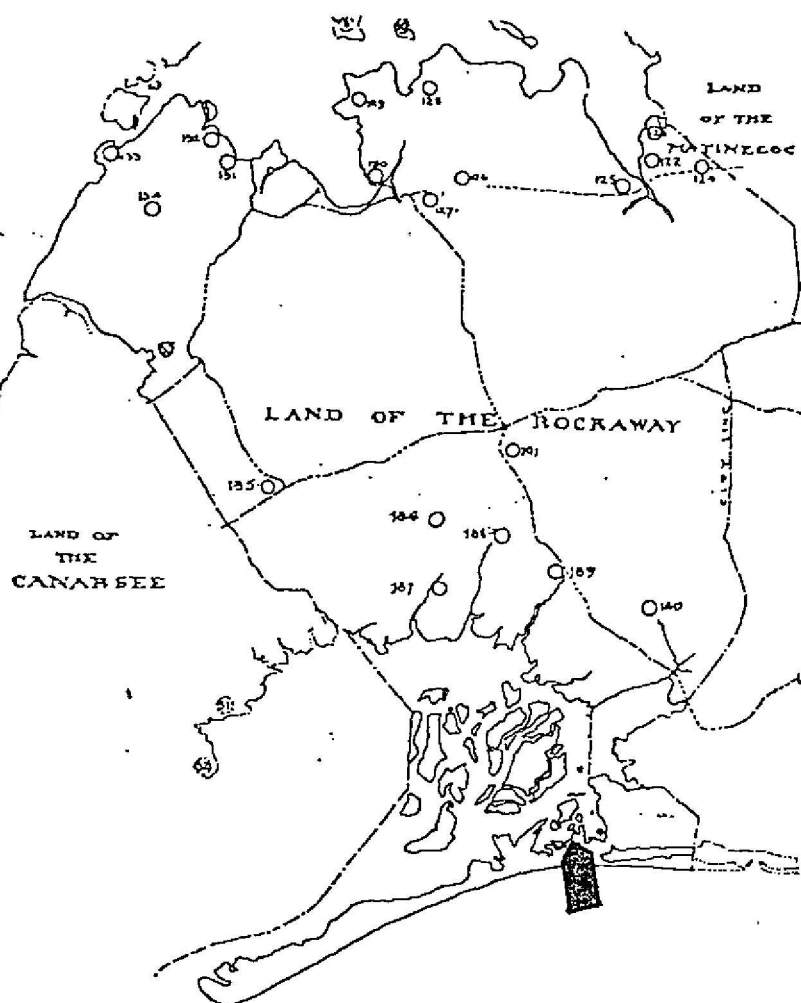
Area of apparent encroachment by adjacent property

Figure 2
Map of Queens with cemeteries
Powell, 1931



Site

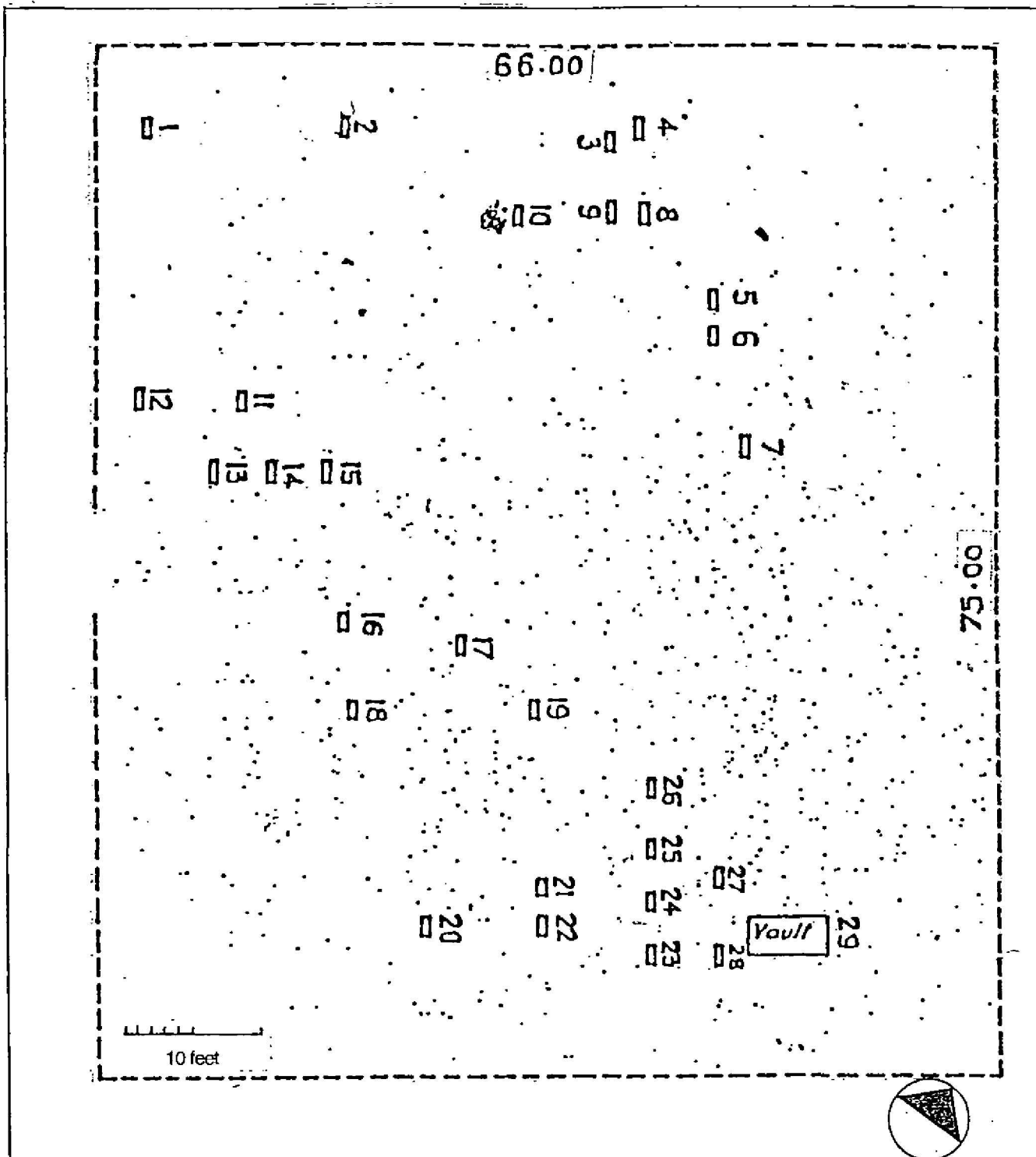
Figure 3
Bolton map showing Indian sites in Queens



INDIAN SITES IN THE BOROUGH OF QUEENS

 Approximate Site Location

Figure 4
 Reproduction of Charles Powell's 1933 survey of Richard Cornell
 Graveyard, Far Rockaway, Queens. Scale: approximately 3/32"=1'




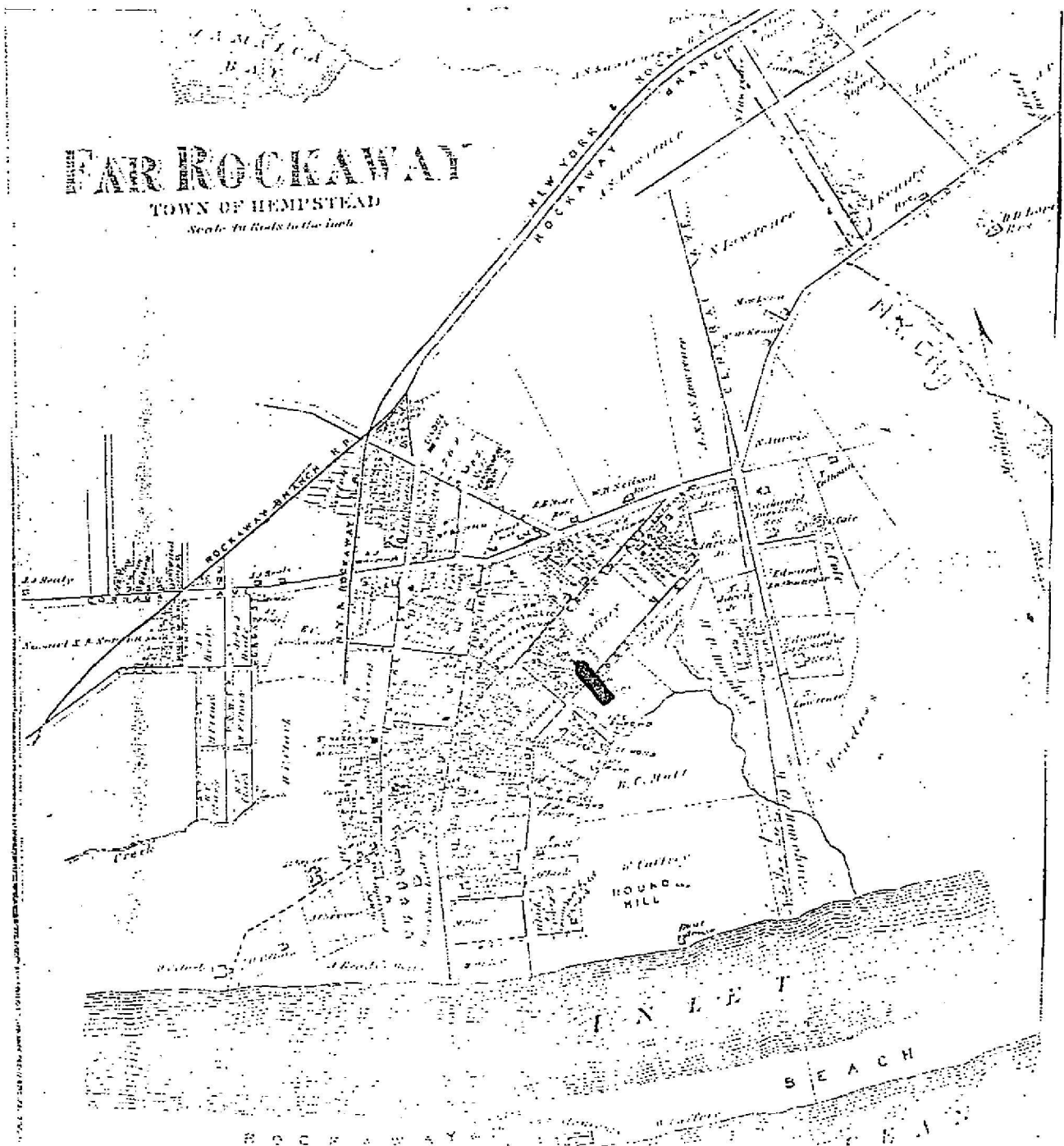
 Burial Plot

Figure 5
1873 F. W. Beers map showing the area




 Approximate Site Location

Figure 6
Rendering of 1901 Belcher map

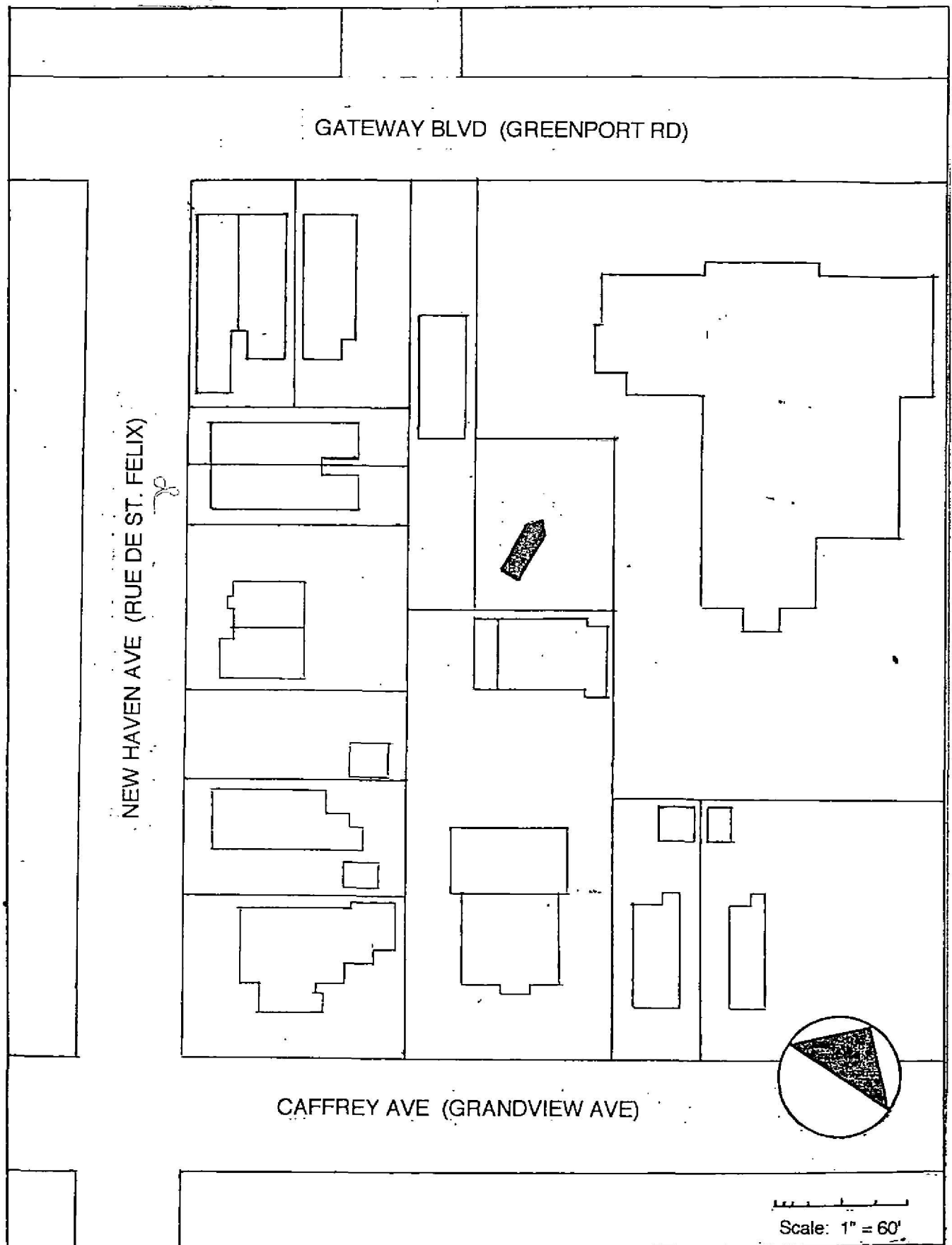
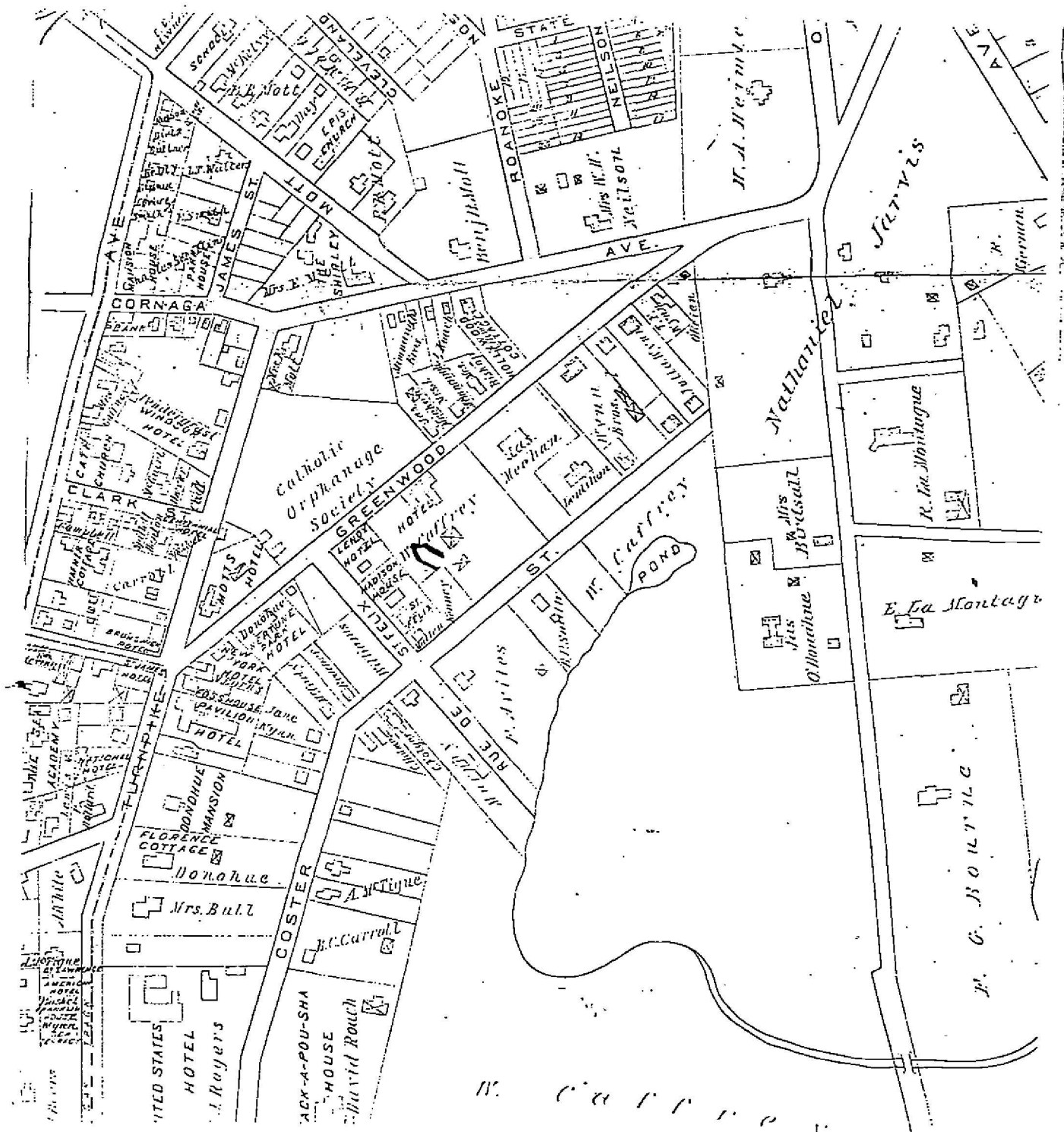


Figure 7
1891 Wolverton map showing the block of the site

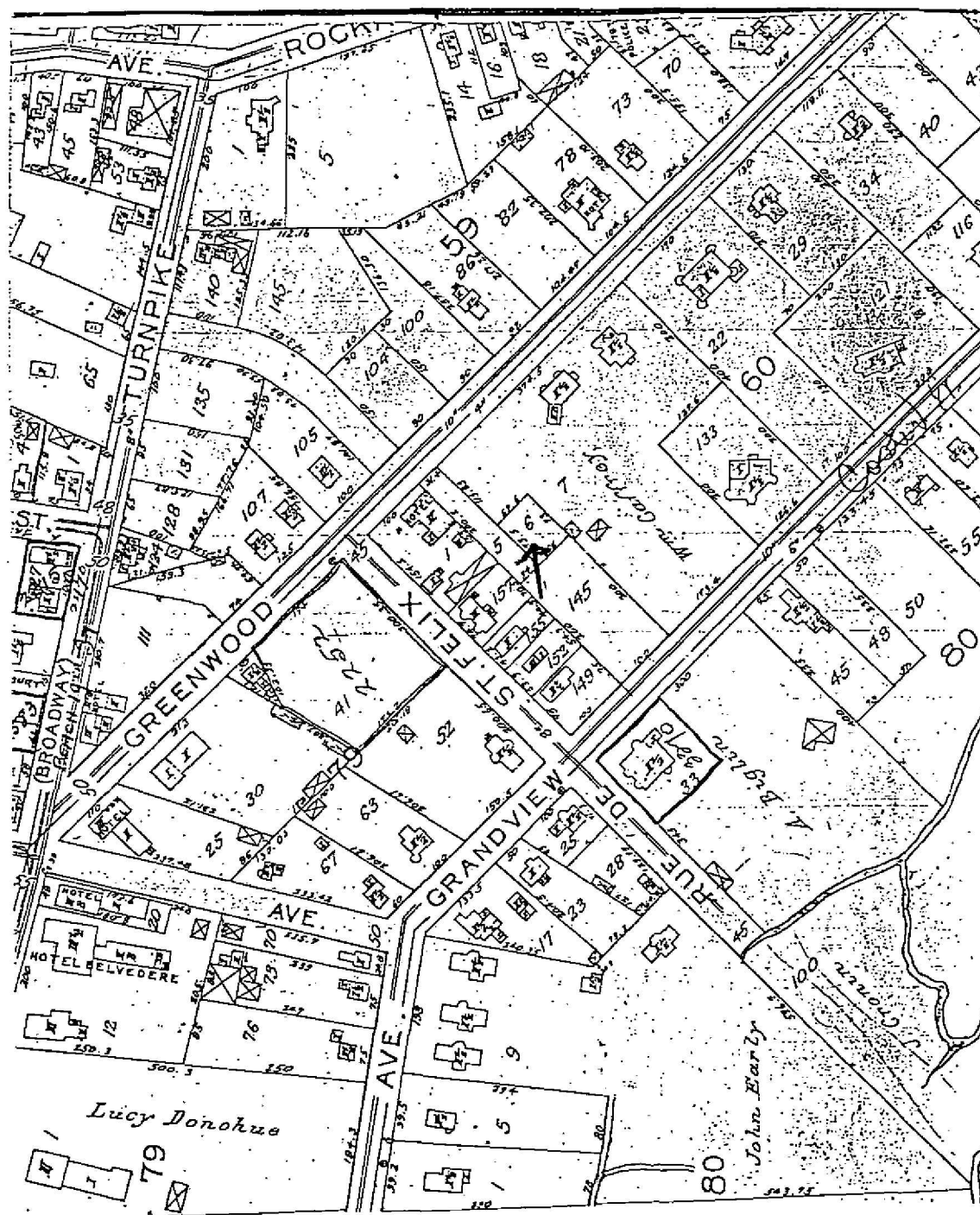


>Approximate Site Location

The map is a detailed topographical representation of a neighborhood in New York City. It features a dense network of streets, including Mott St, Central Ave, James St, Cornago Ave, Clark St, Lockwood Ave, Turnpike Ave, and others. A large body of water, likely the Hudson River, is shown on the right side, with a bridge crossing it. The map is labeled with various names and addresses, and includes a scale bar at the bottom left. The text 'site' is written at the bottom left of the map.

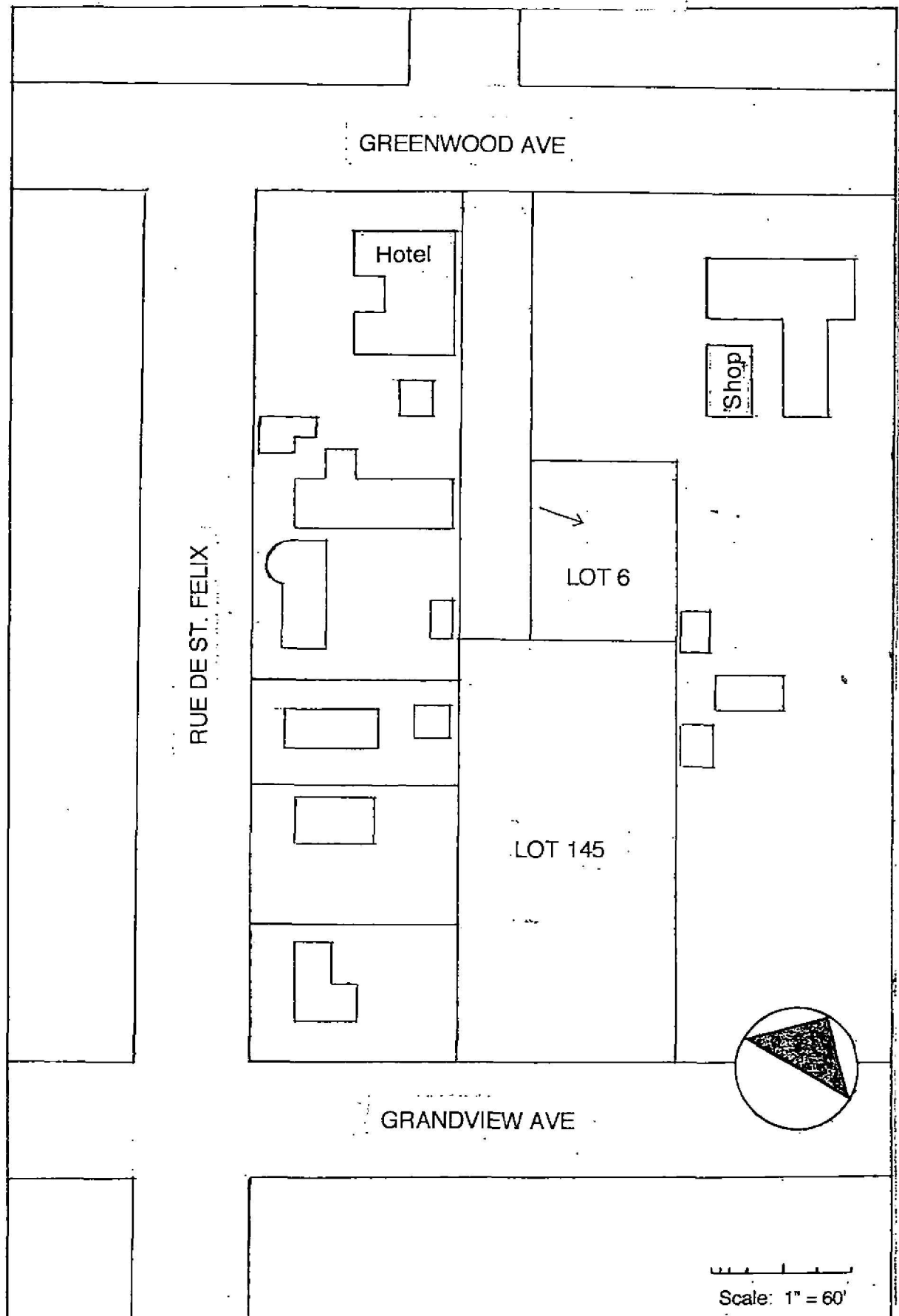
site

Figure 9
1912 Belcher map showing the site as Lot #6



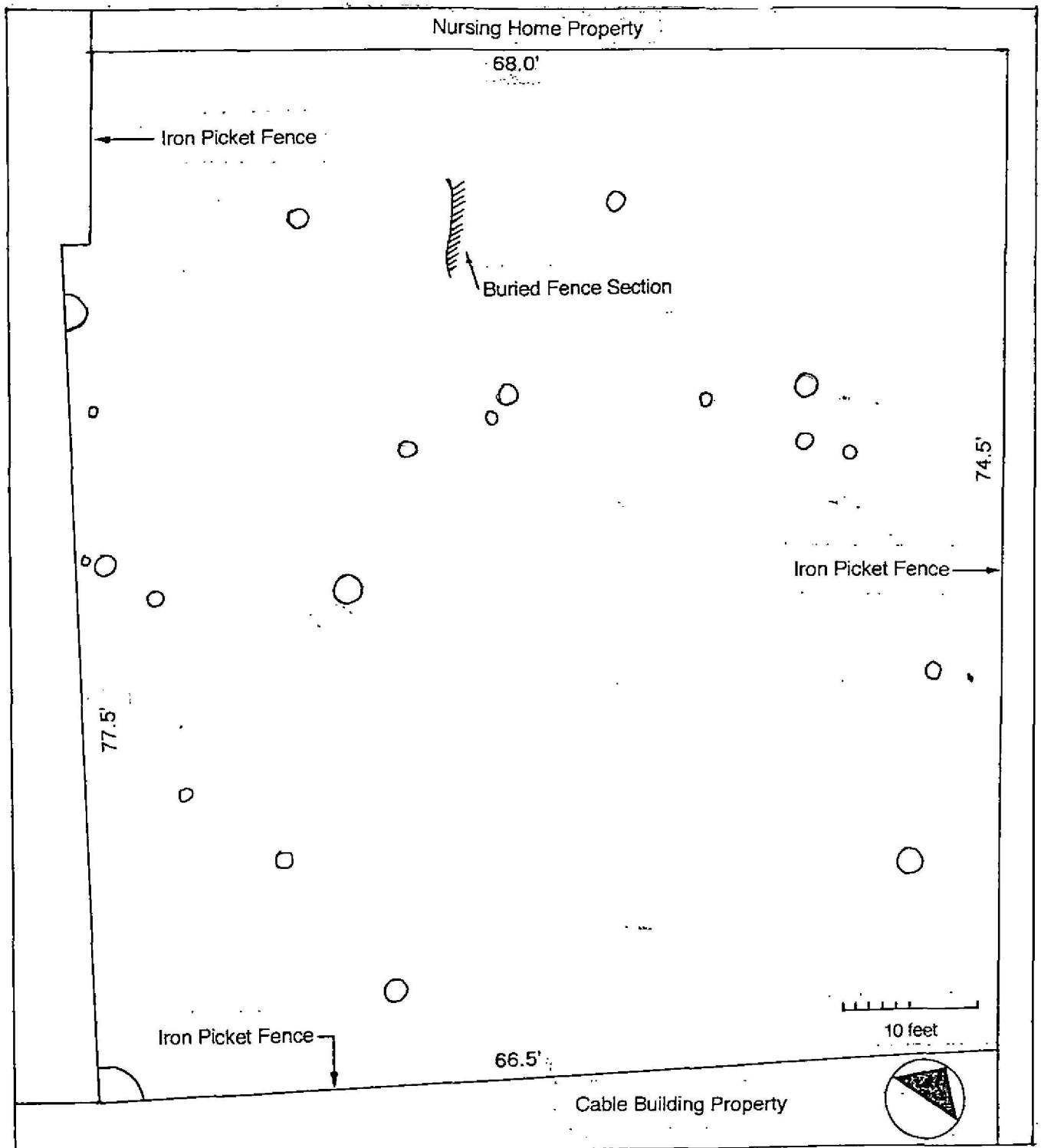
→ site

Figure 10
Rendering of 1933 Sanborn map showing the site



→ Site

Figure 11
 Preliminary map of the site (Mark Redding 10/30/92)
 Scale: 3/32"=1'

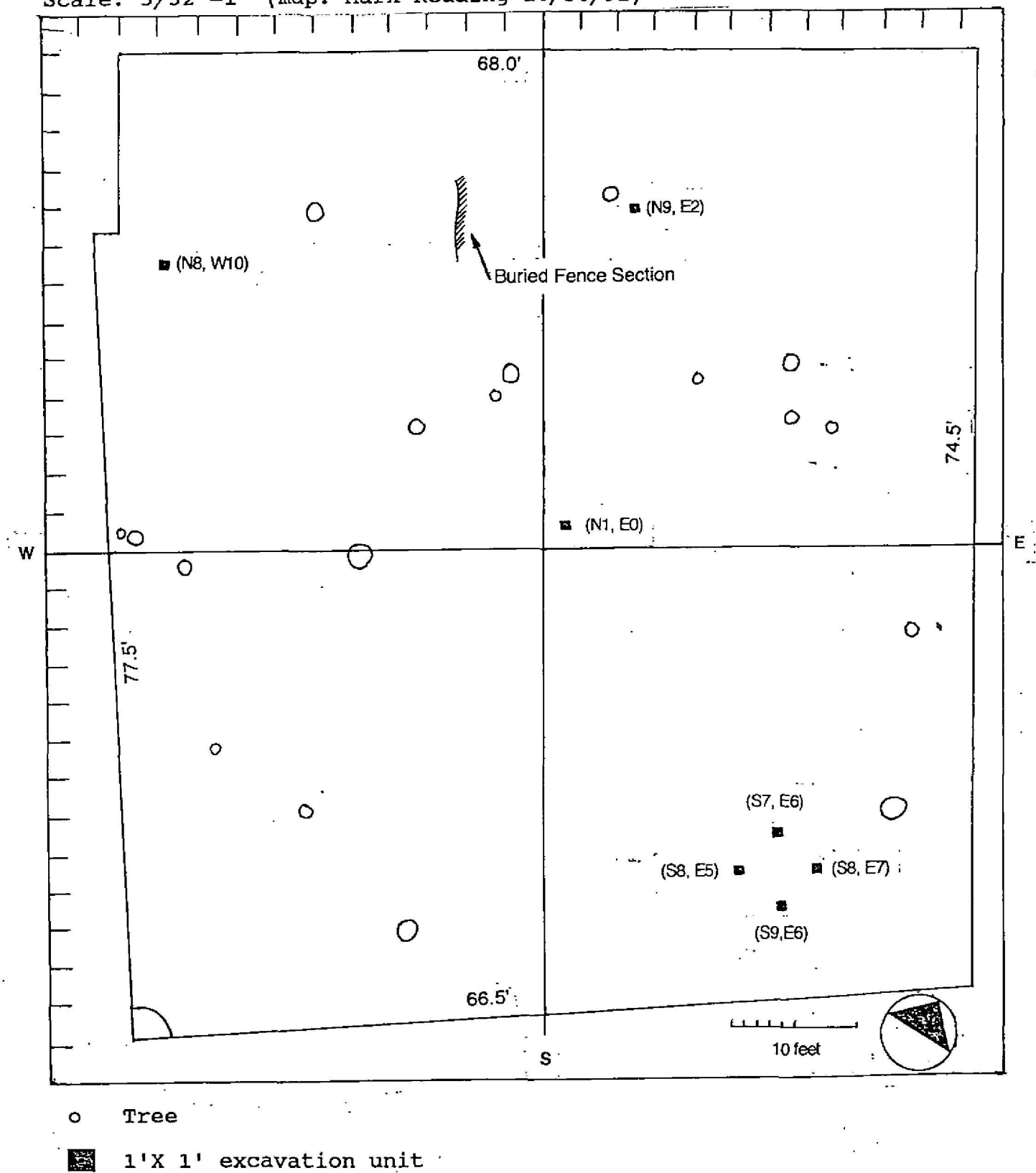


o Tree

Figure 12

Proposed location of archaeological testing units

Scale: 3/32"=1' (map: Mark Redding 10/30/92)



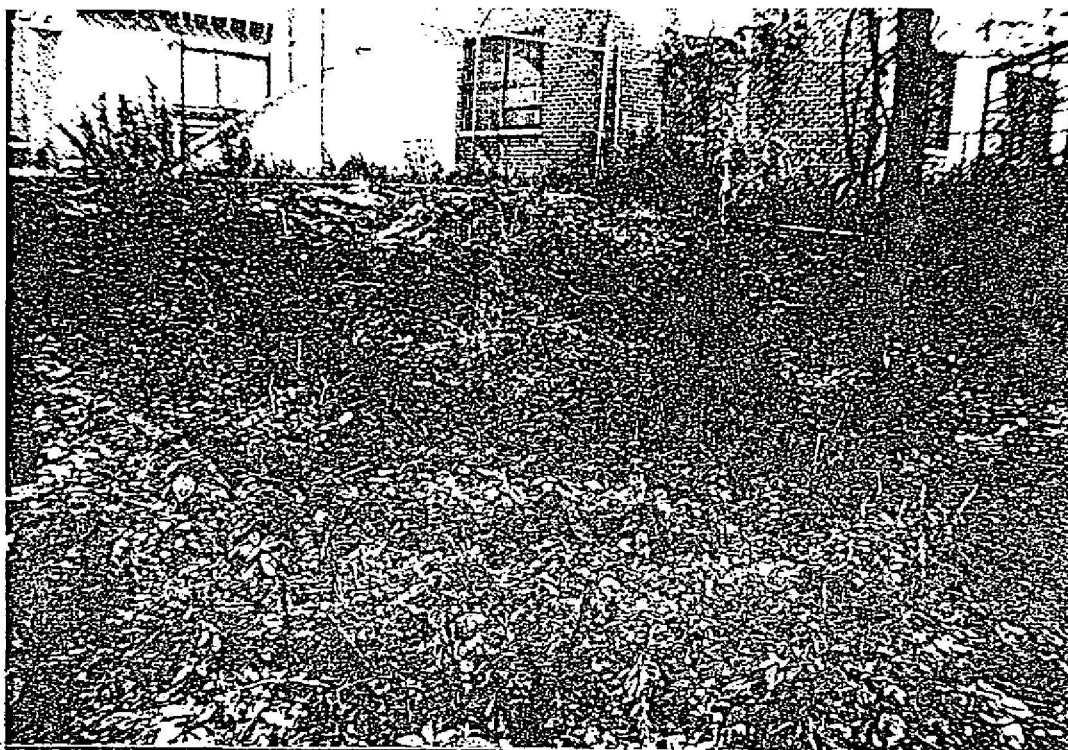


Plate 1. Northeast view of site
Photo: Mark Redding

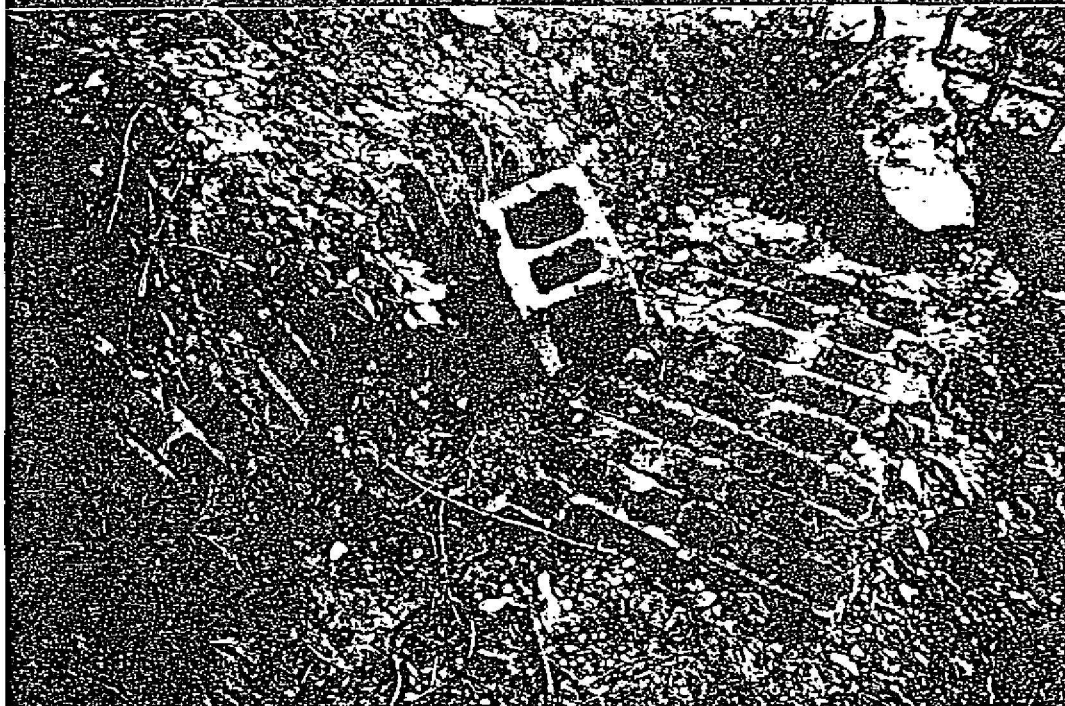


Plate 2. Close up view of southeast wall
Photo: Mark Redding

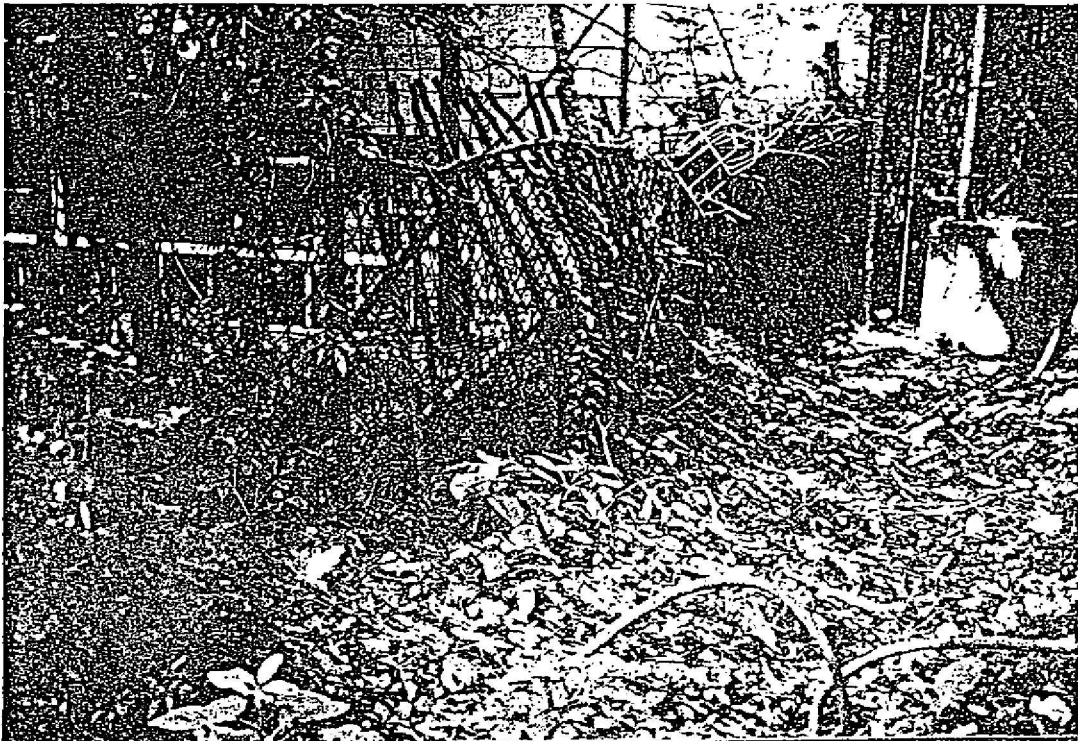


Plate 3. Close-up view of northwest wall
Photo: Mark Redding

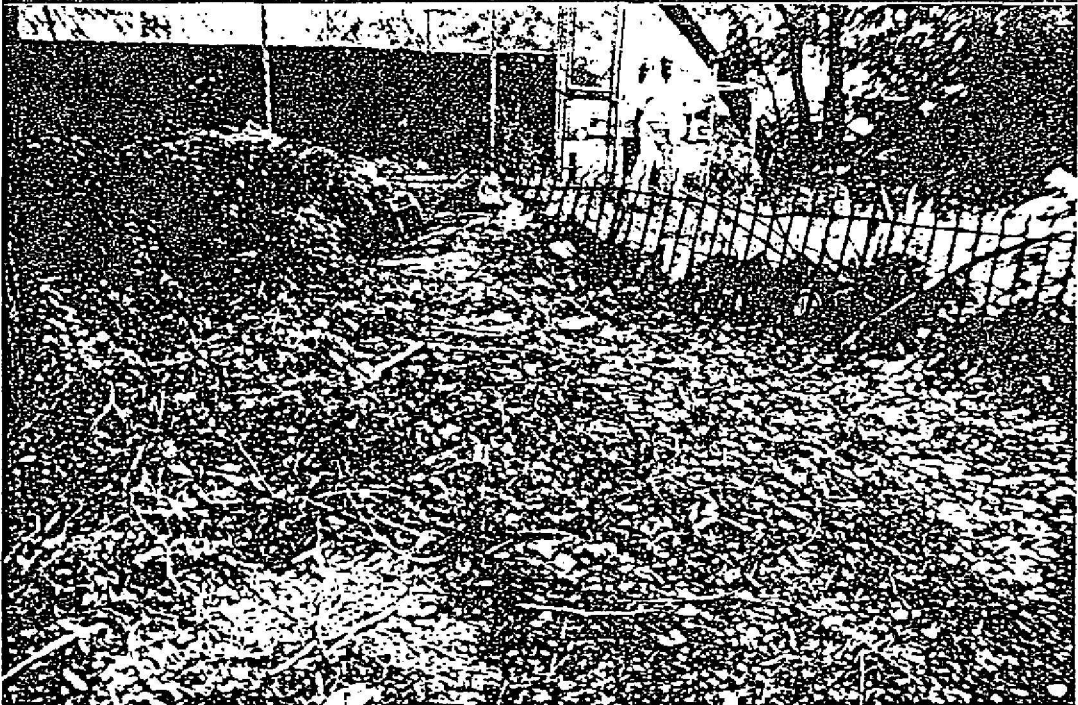


Plate 4. Southwest view of site
Photo: Mark Redding



Plate 5. Southwest view of site
Photo: Mark Redding

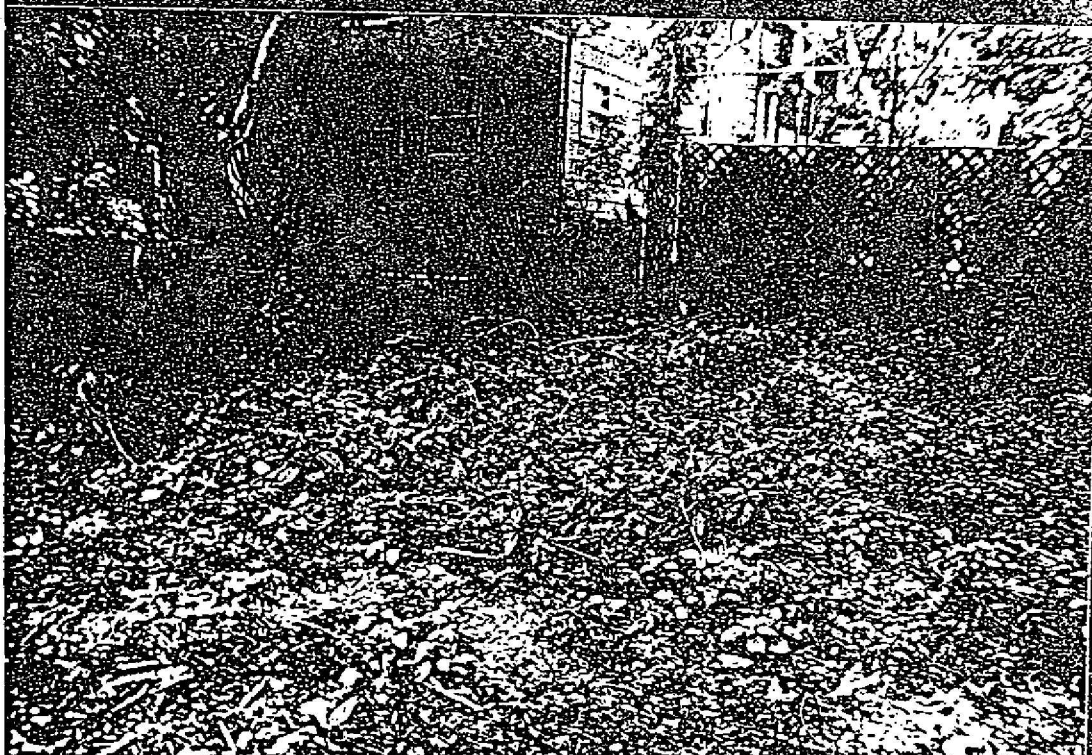


Plate 6. Northwest portion of site
Photo: Mark Redding



Plate 7. View of site from the Commercial Cable Company Building lot. Photo: Mark Redding