

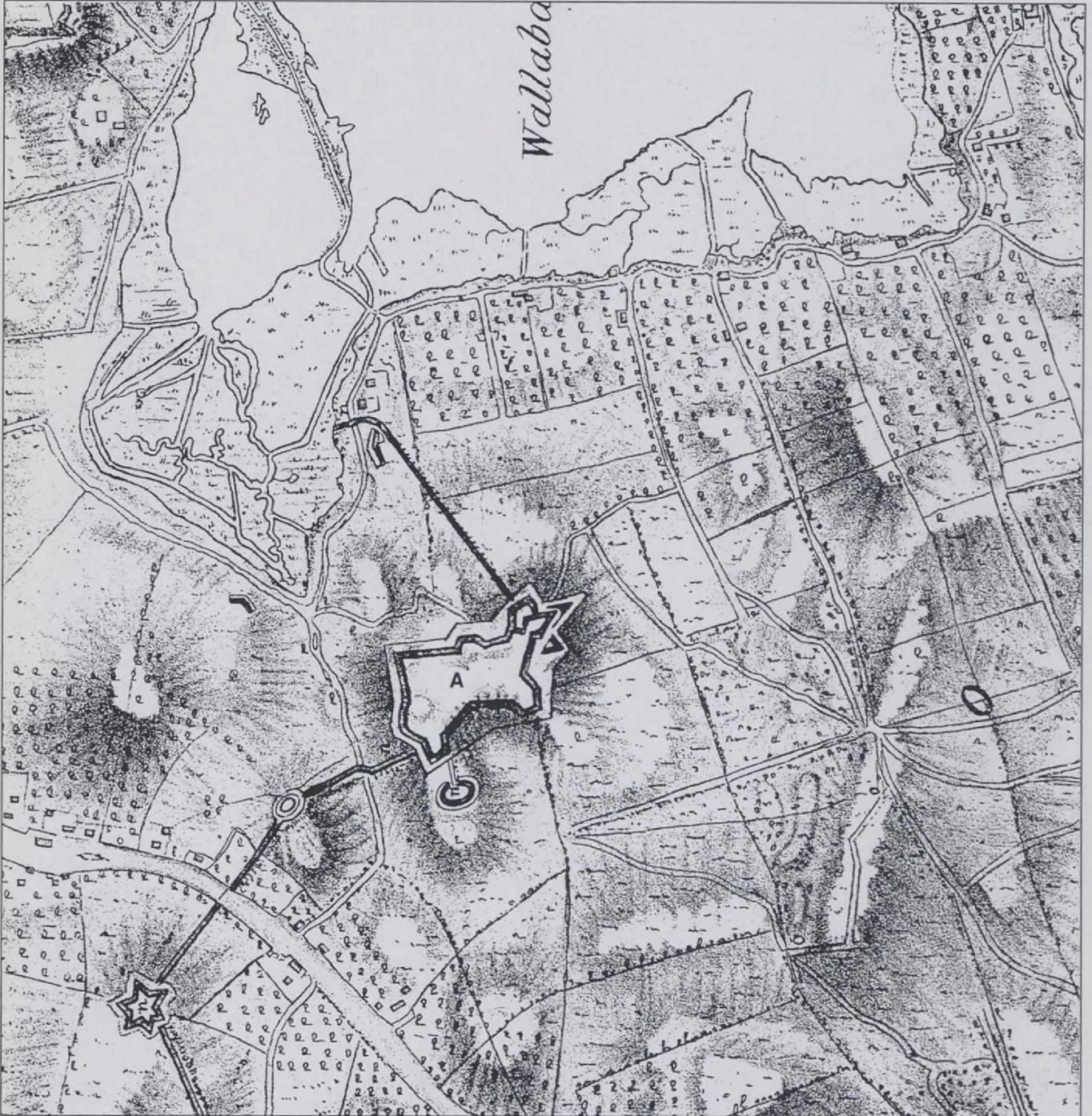
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Geismar  
2005

The Restoration of Portions of the Prison Ship Martyrs Monument

# Fort Greene Park, Borough of Brooklyn Archaeological Assessment

Contract No. B032-103M



British Headquarters Map 1782, detail (Stevens 1900)

Prepared for the New York City Department of Parks  
Through Gandhi Engineering, Inc.  
Prepared by Joan H. Geismar, Ph.D.  
March 2005

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## ABSTRACT

This archaeological assessment of Fort Greene Park (Block 2088), Brooklyn, New York, was prepared for The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation through Gandhi Engineering, Inc. It was undertaken in anticipation of proposed restoration of the park's 220-foot square memorial plaza designed by the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White in 1905. The memorial honors the thousands of Americans and others who perished on British Prison Ships anchored in nearby Wallabout Bay during the Revolutionary War. In addition to a review of existing data and original documentary research, the assessment included limited field investigations. A literature search documented the site's development from a fortification during the Revolutionary War to a public park in 1847, and its subsequent reconstruction by noted architects, Olmsted and Vaux in 1867 and McKim, Mead and White in 1905.

Extensive ground disturbance and grading documented in the plaza area was confirmed by field testing. Consequently, the proposed rehabilitation, which includes stabilization of the plaza wall, shallow drainage, restoration of statuary and lighting, and the removal of selected trees, is not expected to have an adverse effect on archaeological resources. Of archaeological and historical concern, however, is residential development that briefly occurred on the pre-park site in the 1840s. This development comprised a cluster of small houses, or shanties, in the northwest corner of the park site on Myrtle Avenue and St. Edwards Street and improved house lots in the southeast corner near DeKalb Avenue. The potential sensitivity of these two areas should be a factor in determining where trees now growing on the memorial plaza will be relocated, and avoidance is recommended. Should tree relocations occur in these potentially sensitive areas, testing is recommended to the depth of the excavation required for the planting. This would determine whether field investigations prior to tree relocations, or monitoring during the relocations, is necessary.

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Graphics: Amy Geller

## INTRODUCTION

This archaeological assessment of Fort Greene Park (Block 2088), Brooklyn, New York (Figure 1), was prepared for The New York City Department of Parks (Parks) through Gandhi Engineering, Inc. It was undertaken in anticipation of proposed restoration of the park's memorial plaza designed by the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White in 1905. The research and assessment were carried out by Joan H. Geismar, Ph.D. assisted by Shelly Spritzer, M.A. Research initially focused on the plaza, but ultimately extended to the rest of the park where trees now growing on the plaza may be relocated. In addition to a review of existing data and original documentary research, the assessment included limited field investigations comprising four hand-dug shovel test pits located on either side of the plaza's north-west running wall and one backhoe-dug test pit on the plaza side of this same wall.

The purpose of the documentary research and field testing was to determine if the proposed undertaking, mainly stabilization of the plaza wall, shallow drainage, restoration of statuary and lighting, and the removal and relocation of selected trees on the plaza, would adversely impact archaeological resources. These resources could comprise the remnants of earthen fortifications initially built during the Revolutionary War and known as Fort Putnam and rebuilt during the War of 1812 as Fort Greene. Research undertaken for this assessment also identified the potential to encounter domestic deposits associated with homes or shanties built just prior to creation of the park. The Fort Greene Historic District, which includes Fort Greene Park, was designated a New York City Landmark on September 26, 1978 (LPC 1978; Diamonstein 1989).

To address the park's potential archaeological sensitivity, research ultimately focused mainly, but not entirely, on the following aspects of its development: fortifications, brief residential development, creation of the park, and major park reconstruction, first by Olmsted, Vaux and Co. in 1867 and then by McKim, Mead and White in 1905. Of these major developmental phases, its residential development was hitherto unknown or at least unexplored.

## RESEARCH METHOD

A great deal of information regarding Fort Greene Park, or Washington Park as it was originally called, has been amassed by Parks. Much of this information was previously gathered through the efforts of Linda Lawton of Parks and by Quennell Rothschild Associates, Landscape Architects, who, in 1988, developed one of many reconstruction plans proposed for the park. Not only have historical data been compiled, but also the design proposals and some construction plans and related writings of two renowned architectural firms, Olmsted, Vaux and Co. and McKim, Mead and White, have been located and been made available for this study through John Krawchuk, Project Manager of the Fort Greene Restoration Project, and through research undertaken for this assessment. The purpose of this review and research was to determine the effect of the many changes made to the park site over time, several of them major, many of them merely cosmetic, all of them causing some degree of ground disturbance.

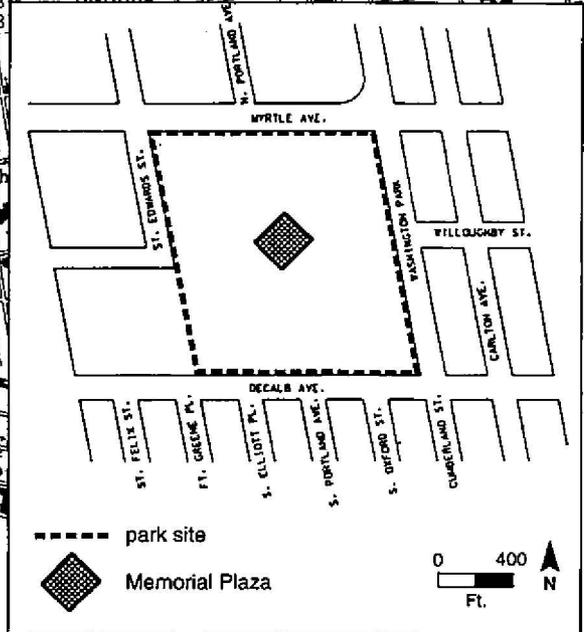
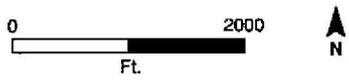
What remains elusive despite intensive research are graphic representations of two major facets of the park's development: a topographic rendering of its condition just prior to its creation

FORT GREENE PARK Project and Site Locations (USGS Brooklyn Quadrangle 1967-1979/Gandhi 2000)



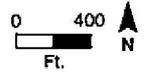
Project Location

 project and site location



Site Location

 park site  
 Memorial Plaza



in 1848, and the park plan followed to create Washington Park between the spring of 1848 and the fall of 1849.<sup>1</sup> It was this plan that prevailed until 1867, when the park's first reconstruction--the Olmsted and Vaux design--was implemented.

Ideally, comparison of pre-park conditions with the original design and subsequent redesigns would offer the best information regarding the likelihood of encountering archaeological resources during the currently planned restoration. Research has revealed elements of existing conditions in 1847; only the park's original plan remains undocumented, but various resources have provided information in this regard.

In order to obtain material for this assessment, the following repositories, research institutions, and agencies were either visited or contacted. Reviewed reports are cited in the text: Brooklyn Assessor's Office, Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, Brooklyn Collection of the Brooklyn Public Library, Bobst Library (NYU), King's County Clerk's Office, CUNY Graduate Center Library, National Archive Records Administration (NARA) Northeast Region, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Municipal Archives, Municipal Reference Library, New York Botanical Gardens, New York City Department of Parks (Arsenal), New York City Department of Parks (Olmsted Center), New York Historical Society, New York Public Library, New York Society Library, Olmsted Historic Site (National Park Service, Brookline), Prospect Park Alliance, Register's Office, Topographical Bureau of the Brooklyn Borough President's Office, and Wave Hill. One major research institution, the Brooklyn Historical Society, was unfortunately closed for renovation during this research.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

Fort Greene Park's 30.168 acres comprise the equivalent of eight city blocks bounded by Myrtle Avenue on the north, Cumberland Street on the east, DeKalb Avenue on the south, and the Brooklyn Caledonian Hospital and St. Edwards Street on the west (see Figure 1). Today, the park's 220-foot square elevated memorial plaza is dominated by McKim, Mead and White's 145-foot high columnar monument to the Americans who died on the infamous British prison ships anchored in the Wallabout, a bay of the East River to the north, during the Revolutionary War. On the second landing of steps below the plaza on the Myrtle Avenue side of the plaza is the access to the Martyrs' tomb, an underground crypt that contains caskets with as many as 11,000 bones of these Revolutionary War burials, now in their fourth resting place. Time and vandalism have reduced some of the grandeur of the plaza design, and urban development has replaced its original outlook over Wallabout Bay with a spectacular view of the Manhattan skyline. While its setting has changed, and now includes housing projects to the north and west rather than the patches of open space and the various residential and civic structures and institutions that lined the neighboring blocks soon after the park was created, its splendid sense of space and loftiness and its outlook have remained unique.

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<sup>1</sup>While no exact date for the park's opening has been found, it has been determined that work had begun by February 1848 (Simon 1973:136), and in the spring of 1849, greenery on the park's "recently seeded slopes" was mentioned (Simon 1973:138), suggesting that work was then basically completed

## RELEVANT HISTORY: FROM FORT TO PARK

The earliest known development of the park site occurred during the Revolutionary War when the Americans incorporated the site into a network of earthen fortifications that extended from the Wallabout to Red Hook, this particular segment named Fort Putnam. Describing the fort at the time of the Battle of Brooklyn on August 27, 1776, Henry Stiles, the preeminent 19th-century Brooklyn historian, tells us it was:

A redoubt, mounting five guns, and called *Fort Putnam*...erected upon a heavily-wooded hill overlooking the Wallabout, now known as *Fort Greene*, or *Washington Park*. When cleared of its trees, this was a fine position, commanding the East River and the roads leading into Brooklyn (Stiles I 1867:251; italics Stiles).

Stiles goes on to say:

This hill, at the time of the Revolution, belonged to John Cowenhoven, sen., his son, Rem Cowenhoven, and Casper Wooster, and was known, from its heavy timber, as "Cowenhoven's *boschje*, or woods (Stiles I 1867:251 Note 1).

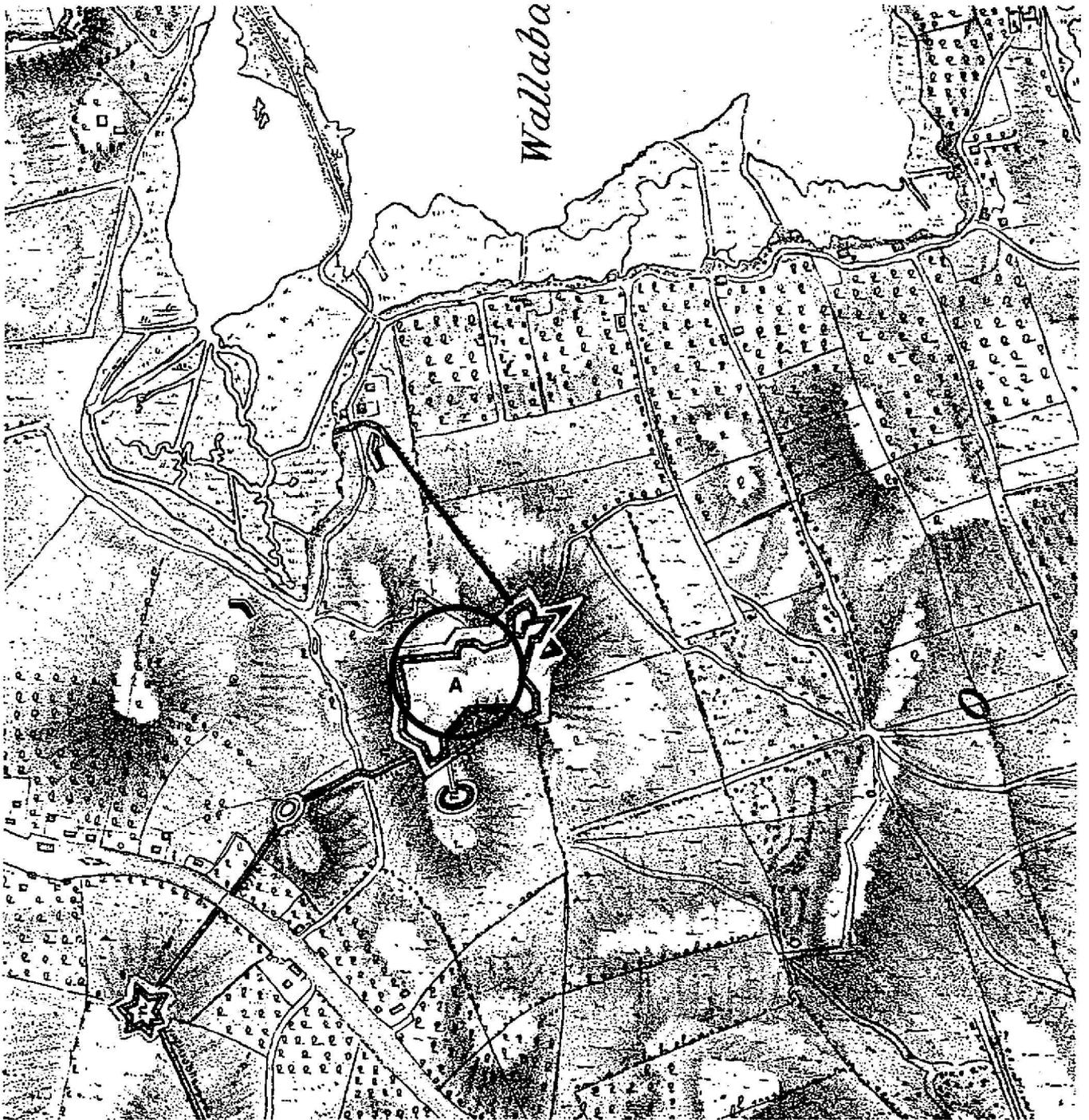
The trees cleared from the fort hill in anticipation of the impending assault were apparently left untrimmed and their barb-like branches used to block the assumed attack route. By pointing the felled timbers toward the enemy, an impenetrable barricade was created that saved the fort but denuded the hill just before a fierce but short fight (e.g., LPC 1978:7; Stiles I 1867:260ff). Despite this rebuff, the British quickly won the Battle of Brooklyn.

The star-shaped fort is documented on the 1782 British Headquarters map (Stevens 1900; Figure 2). According to this map, considered highly accurate, the fort was rebuilt and perhaps enlarged by the British in 1782 (see note A on Figure 2). Later, during the War of 1812, when the land was owned by William Cornell, two powder houses were erected on the fort hill (Stiles II 1869:167), and earthen Fort Putnam was rebuilt yet again as Fort Greene by the local citizenry (Whitman in Christman 1963:87), but no action ever occurred here or elsewhere in the vicinity of New York City.

Over time, the rural character of the area changed, and nearby development after the park was created included a hospital and, later, the city jail, a mission,<sup>2</sup> and an arsenal (e.g., King 1905:65, 67; WPA 1939:14). But prior to the park's construction, the area became home to what Walt Whitman, a proponent of the park, called "the less privileged people," most of whom were Irish immigrants then living in the "densely populated area of East Brooklyn" (Whitman cited in LPC 1978:8).

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<sup>2</sup>St. Phebe's (Phoebe's) Mission, at 125 DeKalb Avenue, was established in 1883 to aid the sick and destitute in hospitals and tenements (King 1905:67). The City Jail, Brooklyn's "Tombs," was a medieval looking structure with castellated turrets built in 1880 to replace an 1839 jail on the same site; it was still in use in 1939, but even then was considered "obsolete, inadequate, and unsanitary." When the main structure was completed in 1880, it was discovered that it lacked a front entrance, an omission blamed on the architect, William A. Mundell, and the Board of Supervisors (WPA 1939:452-453).



park area (approx.)

A

described as "A large Fort begun in the Summer of 82 by Order of Sir Guy Carleton upon the principal Height the Rebels had occupied...": Fort Putnam, later Fort Greene



Research undertaken for this assessment revealed that just prior to the park's creation, between 1841 and 1848, but mainly after 1845, residential development had occurred directly on the park site, but not in the high plaza area. In describing the Fort Greene area in 1847, Whitman reported on "a colony of squatters, whose chubby children, and the good natured brightness of the eyes of many an Irishwoman, tell plainly enough that you are wending your way among the shanties of the Emeralders" (Whitman quoted in Brasher 1970: 68). It is more than likely he was remarking on a cluster of small squatters' houses once nestled near the fort.

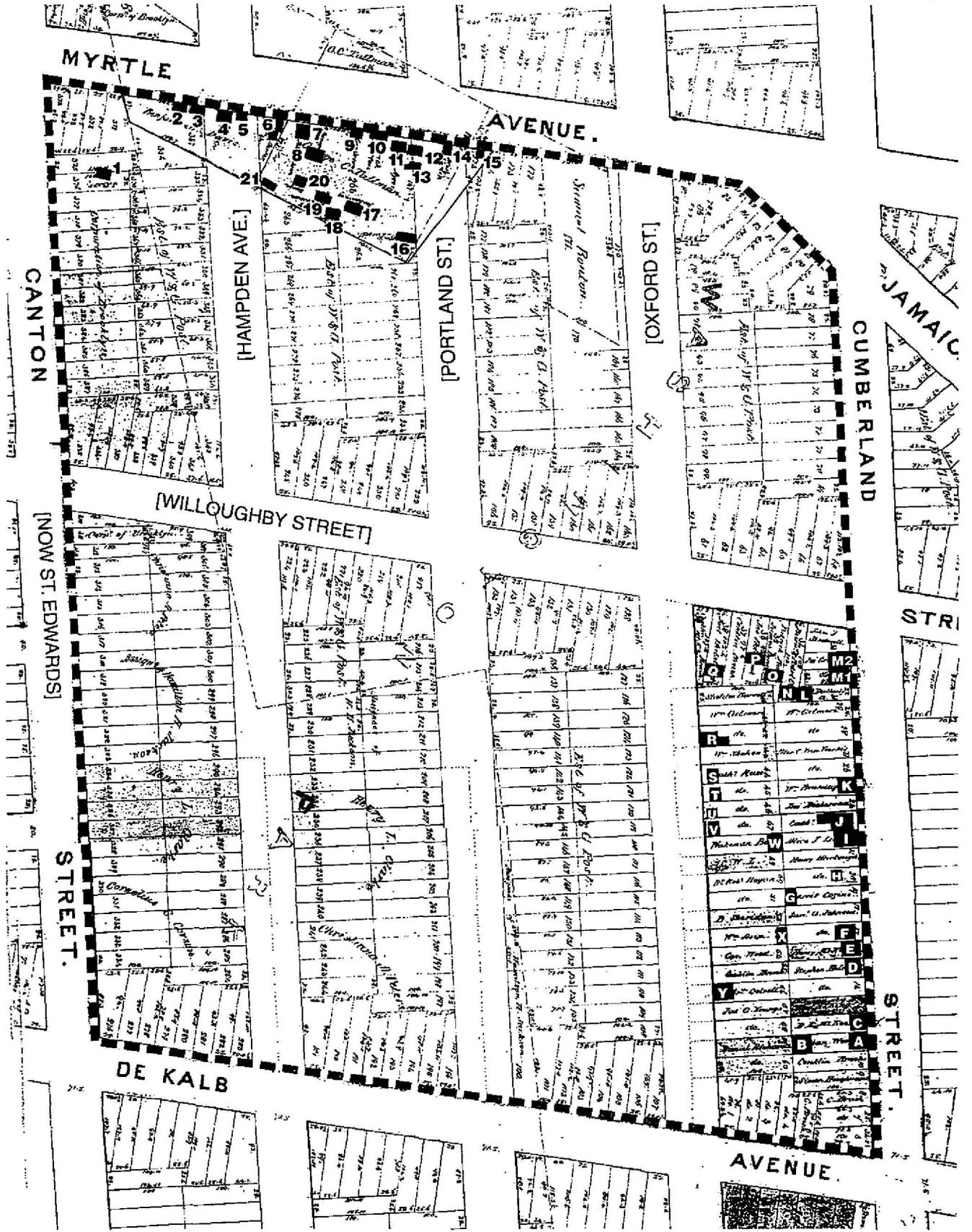
Whitman's mention of this colony of squatters was in an editorial in the *Brooklyn Eagle* on August 16, 1847. In it, he described a walk along Myrtle Avenue that passed from a rural area with "milk manufactories" at its eastern end to streets that were "regulated, paved, lighted and pumped" (Whitman in Brasher 1970:68; Whitman's italics) in the vicinity of Fort Greene. The "shanties" he mentions seem to refer to a number of small houses found on an 1847 survey prepared for opening the park. This cluster included one larger, privately owned house on a triangular lot that belonged to Aaron Dexter (Stoddard 1847; see Figure 3). The owners of the rest of the land where the houses stood were George Tallman and Benjamin W. Davis, both of whom lived elsewhere in Brooklyn (*Brooklyn Directories*, misc; Stoddard 1847).

While the small houses in the cluster may have been occupied by "squatters," as can be seen in Table 1, many of those named in the cluster are listed in the *Brooklyn Directories* of the time, suggesting they were relatively substantial. Among their listed occupations were a carpenter, a seaman, a cabman, a shoemaker, and three laborers (see Table 1). According to the 1847 Whitman editorial, the "squatters" were permitted to remain "until the ground shall be wanted, to live rent free, as far as the land is concerned" (Whitman quoted in Brasher 1970:68). Based on directory listings, if this description applied to those in the cluster, it did so until 1848 when work on the park was well underway (see Table 1). Unfortunately, city condemnation records, which might have shed light on the removal process, could not be located.

By 1839, about a decade before the park was created, the Commissioners had laid out eight subdivided blocks on paper within the confines of what would become Washington, or Fort Greene, Park (Cheever and Tiffany 1839; Figure 4; Stiles II 1869:252). The aforementioned 1847 Stoddard survey, mapped to open the park,<sup>3</sup> indicates that twenty-six of these traditional building lots had been developed as home sites on a block bounded on paper by DeKalb Avenue, Cumberland Street, Willoughby Street, and Portland Avenue (the latter two streets were never actually run in the park area). Most were owner occupied, although some were rented properties (Conveyance Index; see Table 2). It should be noted that the aforementioned cluster of twenty small houses built on Myrtle

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<sup>3</sup>Washington Park was originally planned at "Atlantic street Flatbush avenue, Fulton avenue, and Canton street," but the increasing development value of this site, combined with the difficulty involved in grading the former fort site and the growing need for a park "for the people" of East Brooklyn, caused a rethinking of the park's location (e.g., Quennell Rothschild Associates 1988:1.2). An act passed on April 25, 1845, relocated Washington Park to the Fort Greene site and empowered the mayor and common council to "take and appropriate" this land for a public park. It also discontinued the streets originally laid out by the commissioners on the park site (State Law 1845). Two years later, on April 27, 1847, the State Legislature passed an act "for the opening of Fort Green (sic) as a public park" (Teale 1848-9:94).



-  future Fort Greene Park
- 1** Myrtle Avenue cluster (shanties)
- A** DeKalb Avenue homes



Table 1. Directory Listings NE Part of Block 2088 Myrtle and Canton (Stoddard 1847; see Figure 3)

ID*	Name	Directory Information**	Remarks
<b>Canton Street</b>			
1	S. Carr	?	
<b>Myrtle Avenue</b>			
2	Campbell, Mary (S)	1847-1848 Widow, Myrtle n Cumberland 1849, Widow, Myrtle b Cumberland and Canton†	
3	Morse, Eva (?) (S)	?	
4	Mckee, Davis (S)	?	A David L. Mckee owner elsewhere on block (see Table 2)
5	Unnamed		
6	Dexter, Aaron	1844, Constable, Myrtle n Division; then lives elsewhere in neighborhood; various occupations: city marshal; soap maker,	Owens property; deed rec. 6/5/1843 LD 110:492; after 1844, absentee owner?
7	Wilson, John (S)	1846, no occupation, Myrtle n Division 1847, Laborer, Myrtle n Division	
8*	Savage, A. (S)	1848 (Alexander), cabman, Myrtle n Raymond 1849, (Alexander), no occupation, b Canton†and Cumberland	
9	Greene, George (S)	1847, Seaman, Myrtle n Cumberland	
10	Britton, Patrick (S)	1847, Laborer, Myrtle n Cumberland 1848, Laborer, Myrtle n Fort Greene (Teale 1848)	
11	Ayres, John (S)	?	
12	Unnamed	--	
13	Unnamed	--	
14	Kevlin, Michael ®)	?	
15	Gilroy, Mrs. B.	1847-1848, Widow, Myrtle n Cumberland 1848, Widow, Myrtle n Cumberland	"Bridget" in Teale 1848
16	Pursall, William	1848, Laborer, Myrtle n Fort Greene (Teale 1848)	
17	Kearny, John ®)	?	
18	Cragin, Patrick ®)	?	
19	Crinnier, Joseph ®)	?	
20	Savage, -- ®)	1848 (John?), Shoemaker, Myrtle n Canton†/211 Myrtle	Only listing Teale 1848
21	McCauley, Mrs. ®)	?	

\*Refers to numbers on Figure 3 \*\*from Hearne 1848 unless cited as Teale 1848; this Teale reference is to the *Brooklyn Directory*, 1848, not the *Municipal Registry* which is cited in the text as Teale 1848-9. †Canton Street is now St. Edwards Street.

Note: there are 3 houses with unnamed occupants; with the exception of Aaron Dexter, none of the properties are owned by residents b=between; LD=Liber of Deeds; n=near; rec.=recorded; (R)=rear; (S)=street

**Table 2. Owner/Occupants SE Part of Block 2088 DeKalb and Cumberland (Stoddard 1847; see Figure 3)**

ID*	Name <i>re</i> 1847 Stoddard Map	Residency, Occupation, Directory Information**	Remarks
A	Weed, Susan	1846, carpenter, Cumberland n Myrtle [Silas G. Weed]?	Deed rec. 4/17/1847 LD 162:176; absentee owner by 1847?
B	"	? Back house, occupant unknown	Rented?
C	McKee, David L.	1847, Gardener, Myrtle n Cumberland	Deed rec. 7/9/1845; LD 133:321; resident, 1 year; absentee owner before and after?
D	Helmes, Steven	1845-1847, no occupation, Cumberland n Myrtle 1848, Blacksmith, Cumberland n Myrtle	Hellms on deed; deed rec. 2/24/1845; LD 127:411 or 414
E	McNeil, Henry	1845, no occupation, Cumberland n Myrtle 1846, no listing 1847, no occupation, Cumberland n Bedford 1848, pattern maker, Cumberland n Myrtle	Deed rec. 3/12/1844 LD 117:319
F	Johnson, Samuel	1846-1848, Mason, Cumberland n Myrtle	No deed recorded; renter?
G	Cozzine, Garrit	1845, Comb maker, Cumberland n Myrtle 1846-1847, Comb maker, Cumberland n Myrtle 1848, no occupation, Cumberland n Myrtle 1849, no occupation, Cumberland n Willoughby	Garrett in directories and in deed; deed rec. 7/22/1844 LD 134:90
H	Hartough, Henry**	1841-1842, Blacksmith, Cumberland S of Myrtle 1843, Grocer, Cumberland n Myrtle 1844-1849, Grocer, Myrtle n Cumberland	Harteau in directories after 1842; Hartaugh in deed; deed rec. 6/29/1840; LD 90:213
I	Lush, Alice	1845-1847, no occupation, Cumberland n Myrtle 1848, Accountant, Cumberland n Willoughby	Thomas R. Lush in directories; deed to Alice J. Lush; deed rec. 1/14/1844; LD 122: 149
J	Russ, Catherine	1845, USN, Cumberland n Bedford 1846, no listing 1847-1848, USN, Cumberland n Bedford	John A. Russ in directories and deed; deed rec. ¼4/1845; LD 126: 344
K	Brundage, William	1846, Shipman, Cumberland and Myrtle 1847, no listing 1848, Shipman, Cumberland and Myrtle	Deed rec. 12/12/1845 LD 141: 23
L	Dortharty, Patrick	1847, soap stone worker, Cumberland n Myrtle	Dougherty in directory; Dortherty in deed; deed rec. 2/3/1846 LD 143:65; Resident for 1 year; absentee owner before and after?

(continues)

**Table 2. Owner/Occupants SE Part of Block 2088, DeKalb and Cumberland (Stoddard 1847;see Figure 3)**

Map No.	Name re 1847 Stoddard Map	Residency, Occupation, Directory Information**	Remarks
M <sup>1</sup>	Graham, John	1846, Painter, Myrtle n Cumberland 1847, no occupation, Cumberland n Willoughby 1848, Printer, Cumberland n Myrtle	Deed rec. 7/22/1846; LD 150:241
M <sup>2</sup>	"	Poss a double house occupied by Graham and a renter	
N	Clark, Barnard and Patrick	1848, Laborers, Cumberland n Myrtle	Deed rec. 7/25/1846 LD 150:333 Residents for 1 year; absentee owners before and after?
O	Burns, Patrick and James Denigen	?	Deed rec. 7/10/1845 LD 133:358 Absentee owners?
P	Holebrook, John	?	No deed recorded; renter?
Q	Halstead, Joel	1848, Ferryman, Cumberland n Myrtle	Renter?
R	Gilmore, William	1845-1847, Butcher, Myrtle n Cumberland 1848, Livery stable Hicks n Atlantic h Myrtle at Cumberland (Hearne 1848)/ Butcher, Myrtle n Carlton (Teale 1848)	Deed rec. 4/11/1845; LD 129:510 By 1849, h Myrtle n Carlton
S	Russ, Catherine	?	See J above
T	"	?	See J above
U	"	?	See J above
V	"	?	See J above
W	Burr, Wakeman	?	Deed rec. 5/24/1845 LD 131:484 Absentee owner?
X	Asip, William	1848, Carpenter, Myrtle and Cumberland (Teale 1848)	Deed rec. 7/15/1845 LD 133:441. absentee owner before 1848?
Y	Colvill, Abraham	1848, Rigger, Cumberland n Myrtle (Teale 1848)	Poss. Abraham Colwell; Deed rec. 12/12/1845 LD 141: 17; absentee owner?

\*Refers to letter on Figure 3 \*\*from Hearne 1848 unless noted as Teale 1848; this Teale reference is to the *Brooklyn Directory* 1848, not the *Municipal Registry* which is cited in the text as Teale 1848-9. \*\*\*Henry Hartough (Hartaugh, Harteau) is the earliest and longest documented resident/owner in the study

h=home; LD= Liber of Deeds; n=near; poss.=possible; rec.=recorded

Avenue ignored the Commissioners' block and lot pattern (see Figure 4). While the federal census offers information about household composition, the block's residential development, which began as early as 1841, accelerated after 1844, and ended late in 1848 or early in 1849, is not documented in these records.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, most of the information about the occupants of these houses comes from the *Brooklyn Directories* and the block's conveyance index.

Based on a composite of the 1847 Stoddard survey and the 1839 Commissioners' map (Figure 5), it appears that residential development within the confines of the park site did not occur directly on the fort hill and, therefore, is not an issue in the proposed plaza restoration. Instead, the development appears to have abutted the remnants of the earthwork fort built by "the men and boys of New York and Brooklyn [who] had turned out voluntarily with 'pickaxes, shovel, and spade' " thirty years before and "worked under officers appointed to oversee them" (Whitman in Christman 1963:87).

Jumping ahead, extensive excavation that began in 1913, and continued for several years, occurred in the vicinity of the former Myrtle Avenue cluster when the New York City Water Supply introduced a Croton Water Tunnel into the park. Restoration of this area in 1916, included raising the grade (Quennell Rothschild 1988:2.1).

According to Walt Whitman, writing in 1861, some of the highest earthen walls then in the park, and therefore apparently in evidence prior to the Olmsted and Vaux reconstruction, were "literally the ground thrown up by the patriotic hands of the [aforementioned] men and boy volunteers—those banks being very properly left as they were, and included in the plan of the park" (Whitman in Christman 1963:88). Whitman's description, and newspaper articles calling first, for a park planned by Andrew Jackson Downing (*Brooklyn Eagle* July 24, 1848) and then, when this did not happen, for a park fashioned in his natural style that used native trees as advocated years earlier by Andre Parmentier,<sup>5</sup> suggest what the original park may have been like.

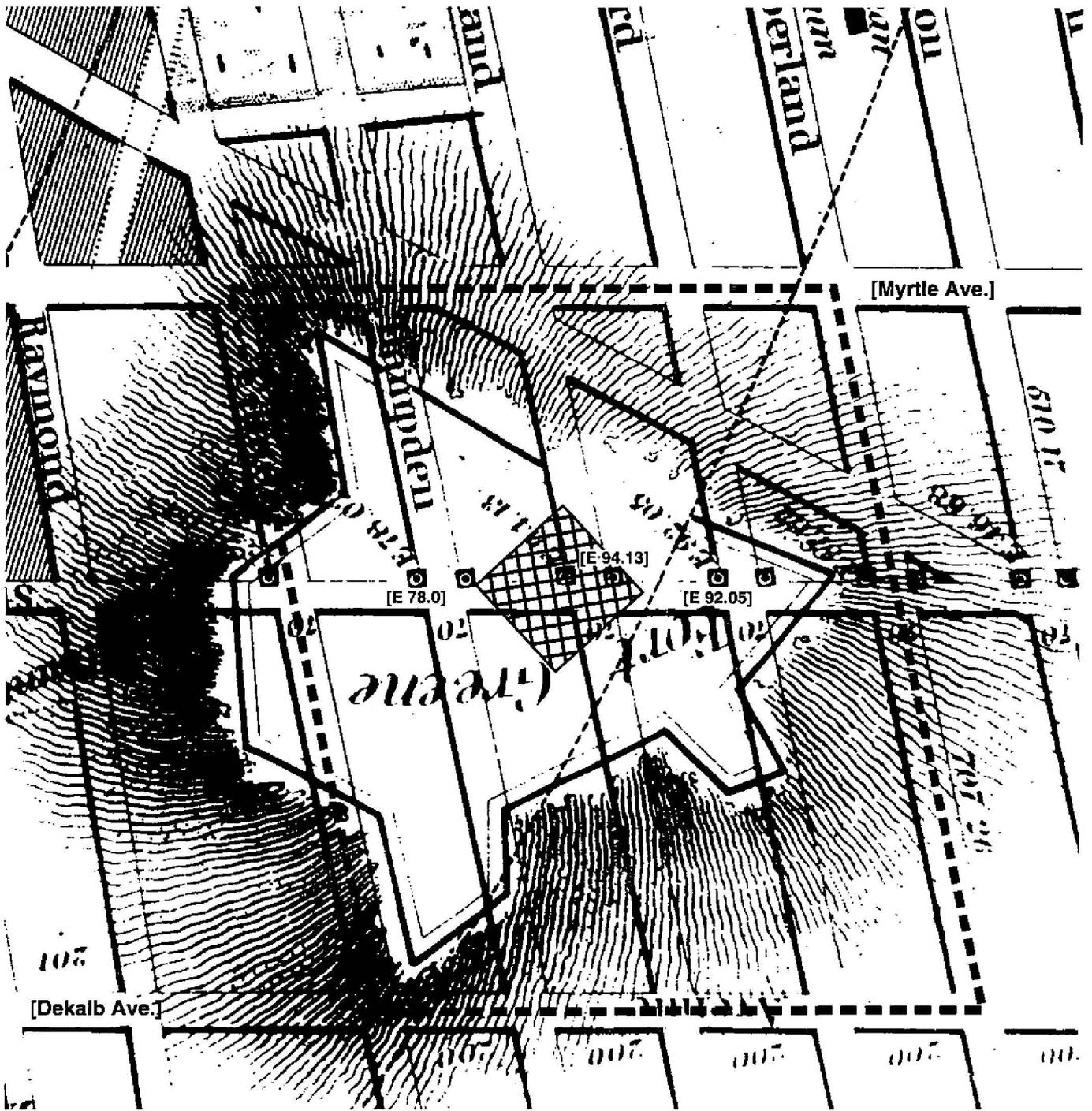
While no topographical maps have been located showing pre-park or early park conditions, several sources provide clues to the terrain and subsequent changes. Foremost among them are the aforementioned references to the presence of the earthen walls of Fort Greene in the park's original plans. These walls apparently persisted despite removal of soil from the fort hill in the mid 1840s to fill the nearby, low-lying site of City Park, Brooklyn's first official city park, now Commodore Barry Park (e.g., Judd 1954:154; Simon 1972:136; Quennell Rothschild Associates 1988).<sup>6</sup> In addition, when intersection elevations found on the 1839 *Map of the City of Brooklyn* (Cheever and Tiffany 1839; see Figure 4) are compared with current elevations (e.g., Gandhi 2000; Figure 6), it appears

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<sup>4</sup>A survey of recorded conveyances made on the block between 1840 and 1850 indicates a total of 146 transactions, 63 or 43% of them occurring in 1845, the most active year in the decade for land transactions (Conveyance Index, Block 2088).

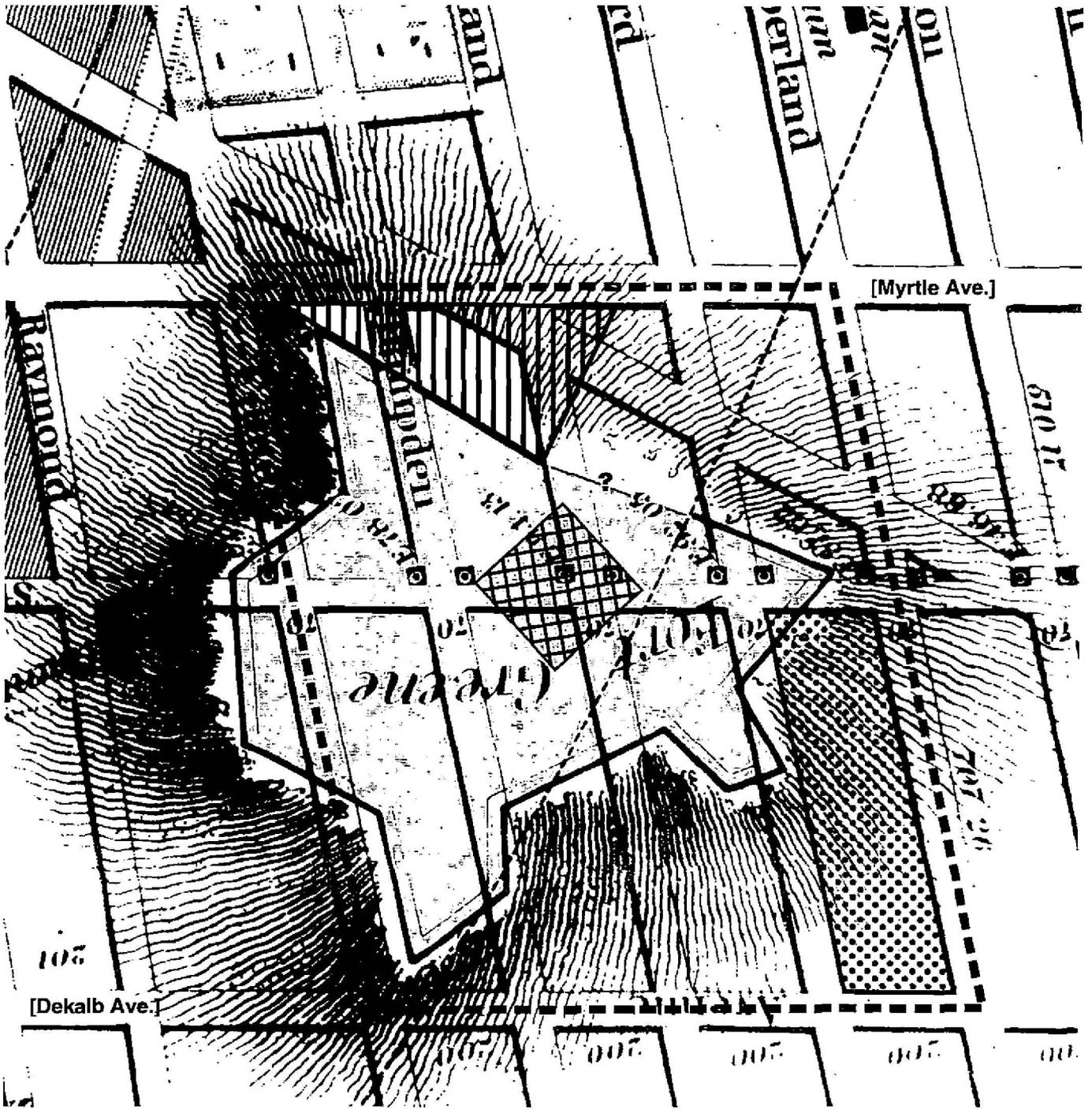
<sup>5</sup>See Stiles II 1869:173 regarding Parmentier, a Belgian-born botanist who made his home in Brooklyn..

<sup>6</sup>Although Parks' literature identifies Fort Greene Park as Brooklyn's first park, this was not actually so. It was, however, its first "real" park in terms of its setting and recreational facilities (e.g., Simon 1972:136).

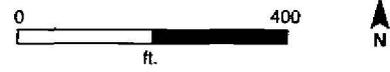


-  earthen fort
-  future park limits
-  Memorial Plaza superimposed (approx.)





-  earthen fort
-  future park limits
-  1905 Memorial Plaza superimposed (approx.)
-  1840s Myrtle Avenue cluster
-  1840s DeKalb Avenue house lots
-  fort 1839; ? indicates unclear segment



that over 5 feet of fill have been added to the highest documented pre-park elevation located near the center of the present park plaza (100 to 101 feet versus 94.13 feet).

Washington Park, which may have been envisioned by Whitman as the peoples' park, provided the impetus for development to the south and east that included the area's finer homes and villas built mainly between 1855 and 1875; in the 1890s, it was described as a "silk stocking district" (Diamonstein 1988:399; WPA 1939:452). This residential development was in addition to the aforementioned hospital, mission, and jail built next to or near the park between 1850 and 1883.

#### THE OLMSTED, VAUX AND CO. PARK

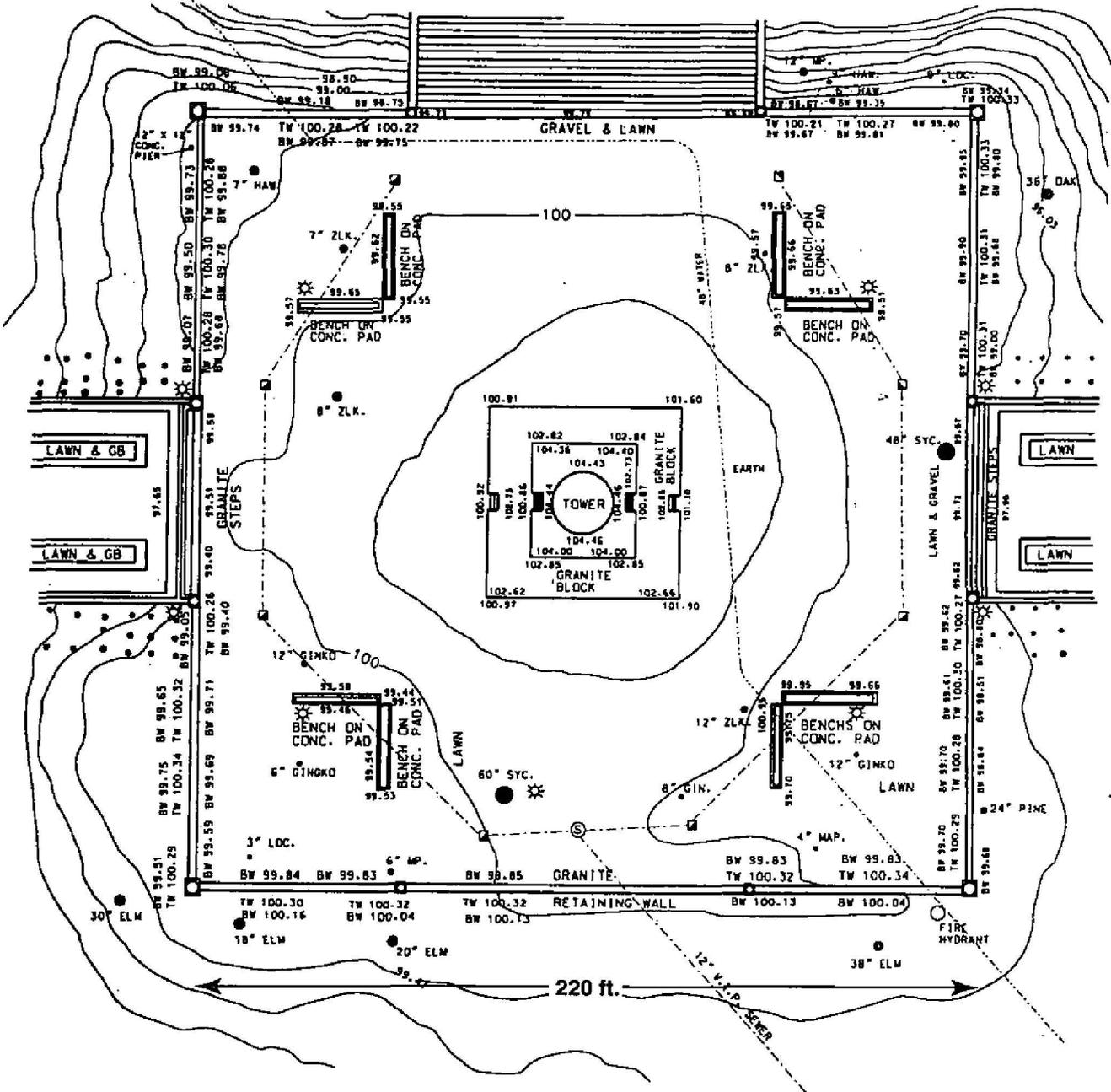
In 1867, during the creation of Prospect Park by Olmsted, Vaux and Co., the Commissioners of Prospect Park became the overseers of several small Brooklyn parks, including Washington Park. By then, the park had fallen on hard times, and Olmsted and Vaux were asked to develop a reconstruction plan. As indicated in Calvert Vaux's proposal (Vaux 1867; *Eighth Annual Report of the Commissioners of Prospect Park* 1868:224-228), and as shown on two versions of Vaux's plan (Figures 7 and 8), its several elements included the grading and sculpting of the grounds (with the apparent obliteration of much if not all the remains of Fort Greene), the creation of an open area for public meetings, the introduction of two playgrounds, one for boys and one for girls and children, and a saluting ground at a higher elevation. Above this, on a high plateau reached by a series of steps, a 148-foot, cross-shaped trellis was completed in 1870 that was described by Vaux as an extensive "Vine-covered Walk" (*Eighth Annual Report of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners* 1868:227; *Eleventh Annual Report of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners* 1871:447). A photo of the park taken in 1904, and a detail of the trellis, will be found in Figures 9 and 10). In 1873, a tomb for the Prison Ship Martyrs was created in the stepped approach to the plateau (*Fourteenth Annual Report of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners* 1874:10-11,38-39; *Harpers' Weekly* 1873:605; see Figures 11 and 12 below).

#### THE PRISON SHIP MARTYRS' TOMBS

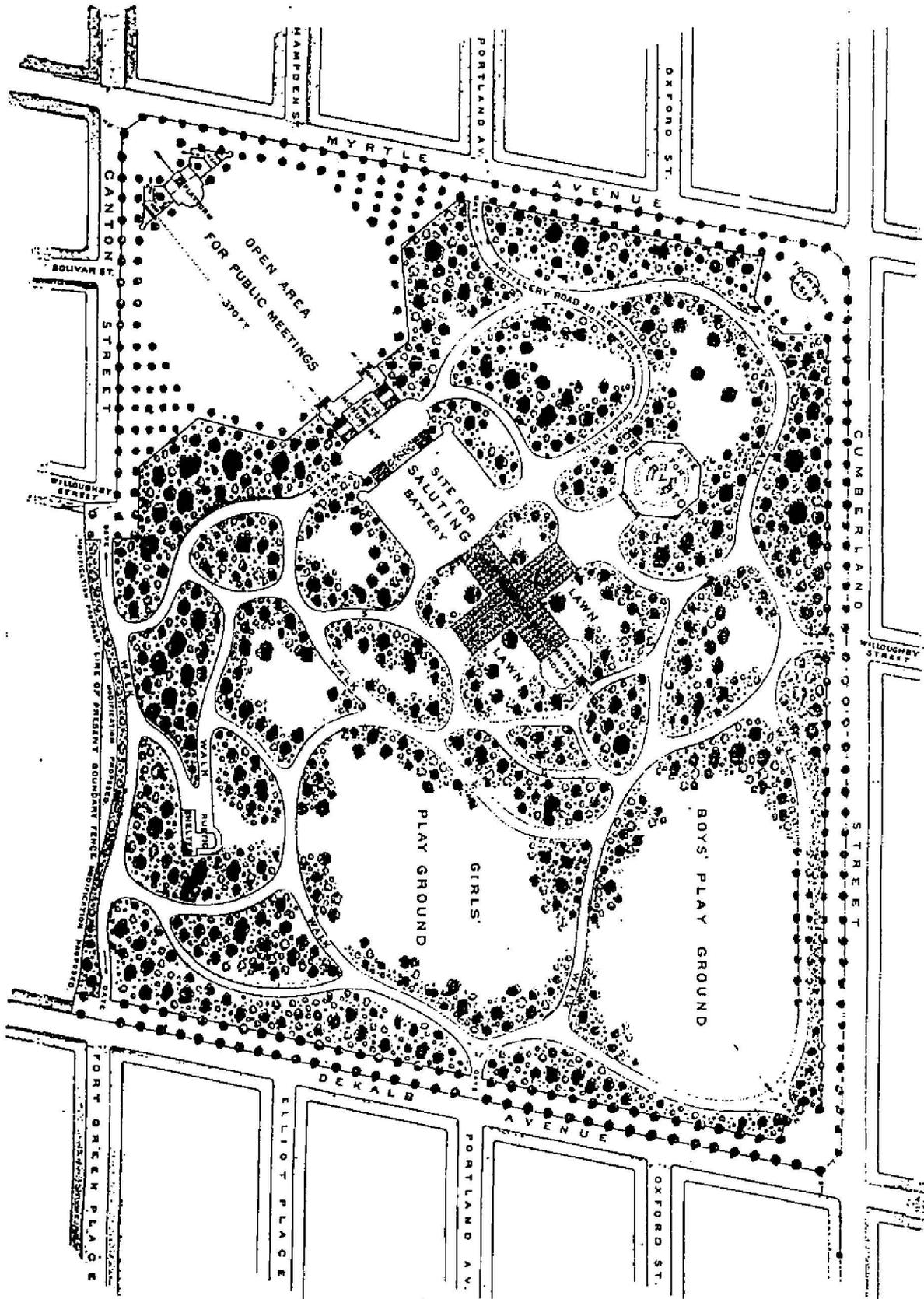
The complicated history of the Prison Ship Martyrs' remains is beyond the scope of this assessment.<sup>7</sup> However, extracting from several sources (e.g., Geismar and Oberon 1993:30-33; Teale 1848; Stiles 1867 I:363-365, 367-376; Whitman in Christman 1963:32-36), it can be summarized as follows: the bodies of the thousands of American men, and also of women and children, who died under the abominable conditions of the British prison ships during the Revolutionary War were first buried on the sandy shores of the Wallabout--mainly the western--shore, where tidal action often washed the bones from their shallow graves. John Jackson, who acquired property on the western side of the Wallabout after the War, exposed many of these graves while cutting into banks on the shore. Once the profusion of improperly buried bones became general knowledge, attempts were made to get the government to back suitable burial.

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<sup>7</sup>Walt Whitman's accounts, which were written in 1861 and reprinted in Christman (163:36-38, 82-83) predate the detailed description given in Stiles. An even earlier account will be found in the *Municipal Register and the Manual of Brooklyn* published in 1848 (Teale 1848-9).

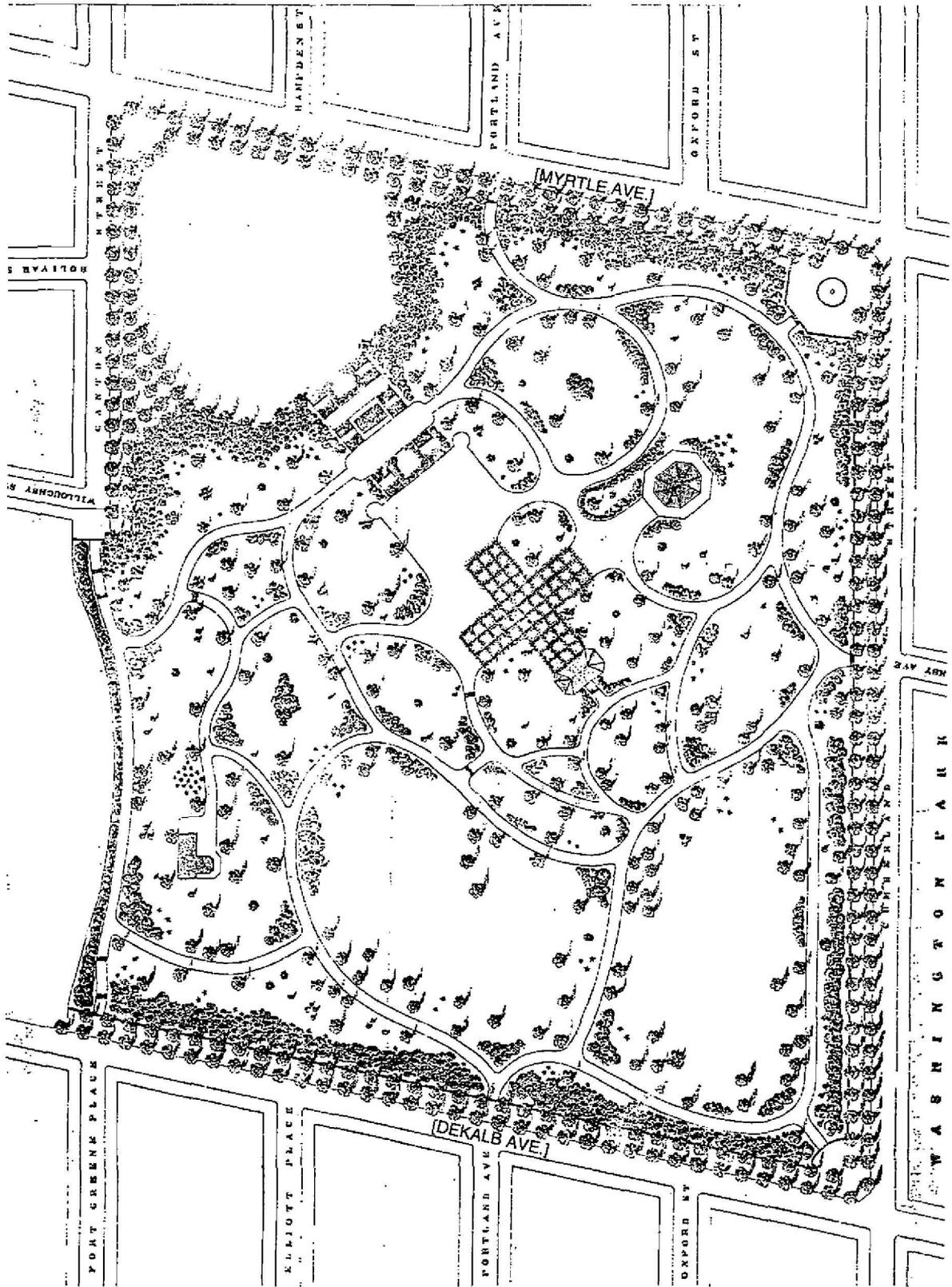


**FORT GREENE PARK** Design for Laying Out the Grounds Known as Fort Green (sic) or Washington Park in the City of Brooklyn 1867 (Olmsted, Vaux and Co. 1867)

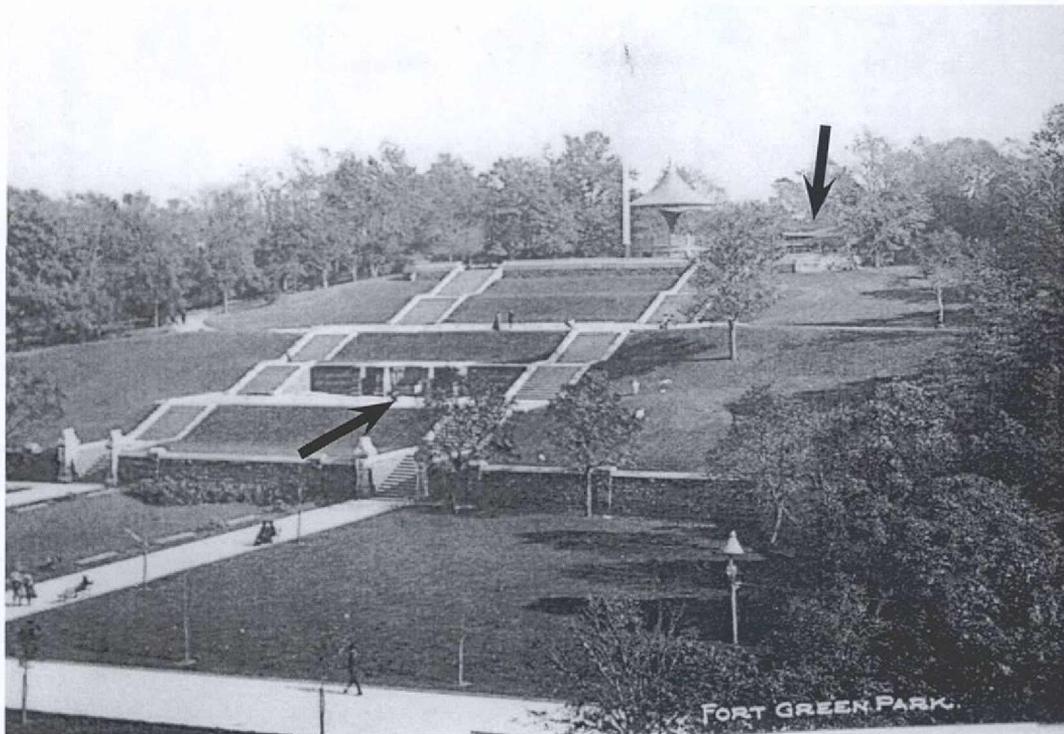


DESIGN FOR LAYING OUT THE GROUNDS KNOWN AS FORT GREEN OR WASHINGTON PARK, IN THE CITY OF BROOKLYN

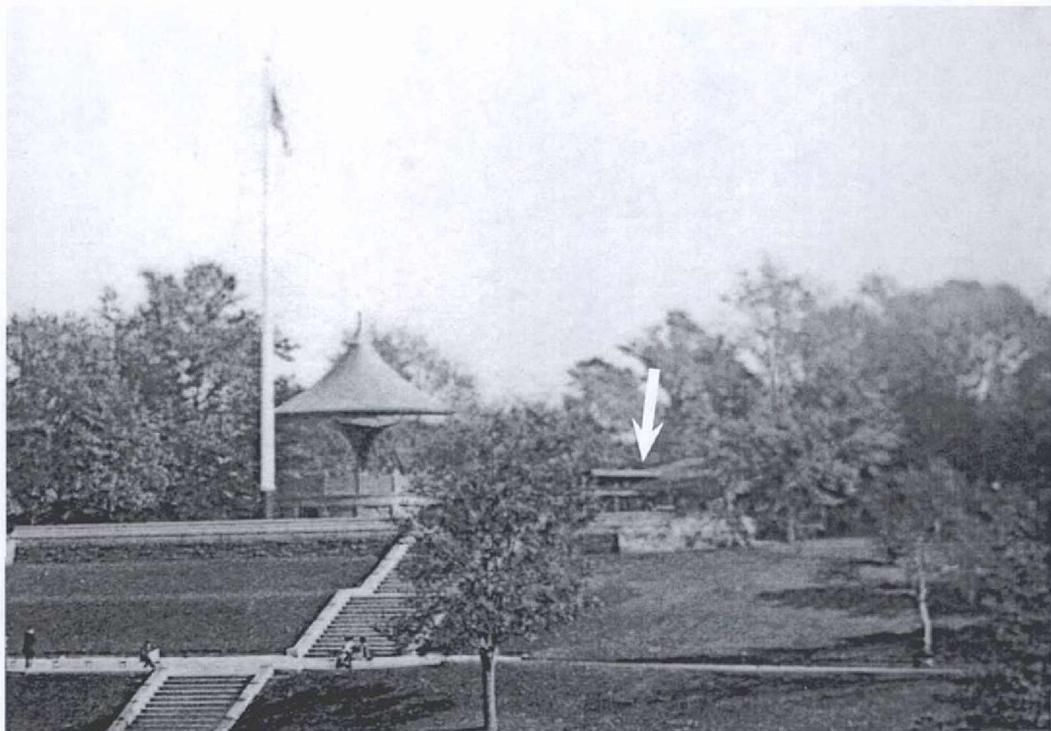
no scale 



no scale  
N



**9** Fort Greene Park in 1904 showing the 1873 Martyrs' tomb (lower arrow), the pergola, and the trellis (upper arrow) on the plateau (courtesy of the Brooklyn Collection, Brooklyn Public Library).



**10** Detail of the upper plateau showing the pergola and trellis (white arrow), the former built in 1881, the latter completed in 1870.

In 1803, Jackson rebuffed attempts to bury the bones in the grave yard of the Dutch Reformed Church preferring that he and the Tammany Society, of which he was a prominent member, reap the political benefits of the undertaking. Instead, he donated a small triangular plot adjacent to the Navy Yard property on what is now Hudson Avenue to the Tammany Society to be used as a tomb and memorial site. However, no action was taken, and the bones, purchased and safeguarded by Benjamin Acyrigg, lay dormant until 1808 when, with great pomp and oratory, the Tammany Society undertook removal of more than 11,000 bones in thirteen caskets to the new Hudson Avenue tomb site (see Figure 11 for location). Plans to erect a suitable memorial were never realized, and, in time the site was allowed to deteriorate. Later, Benjamin Romaine, a sachem of the society and himself a survivor of the prison ships, funded the rehabilitation of the tomb on Hudson Avenue; he also erected a monument on the site with the stipulation that he too would be buried in the crypt when he died. Yet again, the monument site was allowed to deteriorate. Writing in 1861, Walt Whitman, who deplored the condition of the Hudson Avenue site, noted that:

At one time and another, there have been movements made for putting up some memorial worthy of the martyrs of the prison ships in Brooklyn. The one most likely to be carried out...is that for raising an appropriate monument on the highest point of old Fort Greene, Washington Park (Whitman in Christman 1963:38-39).

In 1873, Whitman's prediction became a reality, and the first Martyrs' tomb in Fort Greene Park, then still officially Washington Park, was created to receive the transferred bones in 22 boxes (Figures 12 and 13).

The fourth and final move occurred when the Olmsted and Vaux-designed park, renamed Fort Greene Park in 1897, was redesigned by McKim, Mead and White. In addition to the 220 by 220-foot elevated plaza with its 145-foot high memorial column topped by a gas-lit eternal flame, yet another tomb was incorporated into the redesigned steps leading to the plaza. The design called for a Guastavino tile arch over the crypt (Building Permit 1907:3; Leavitt 2000:personal communication). As specified in the advertised scope of work prepared by McKim, Mead and White in 1907, the procedure to be followed in this removal was the antithesis of the hoopla that marked the reinterment of the bones in 1808 (McKim, Mead and White 1907:Part 1 Page 5).

#### THE MCKIM, MEAD AND WHITE PARK

Spurred by the efforts of the Martyrs' Monument Association under the guidance of its president, Steven V. White,<sup>8</sup> the prestigious New York City architectural firm of McKim, Mead, and White was given the commission to redesign Fort Greene park in 1905. It was a plan that had been in the works for at least eleven years as evidenced by a reference to a McKim, Mead and White proposal for the Martyrs' Monument dated January 14, 1896 in the Fort Greene file at the New York Historical Society. Plans for this reconstruction, also located at the New York Historical Society and

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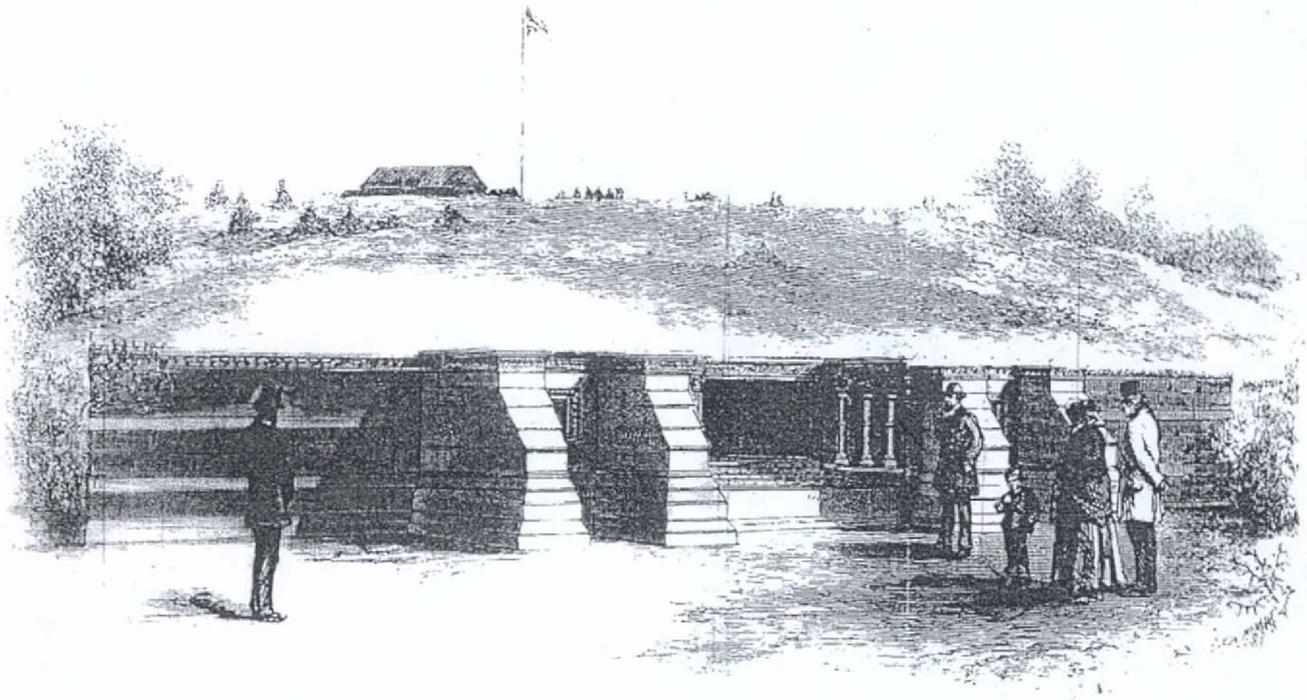
<sup>8</sup> Steven V. White and Stanford White were not related.



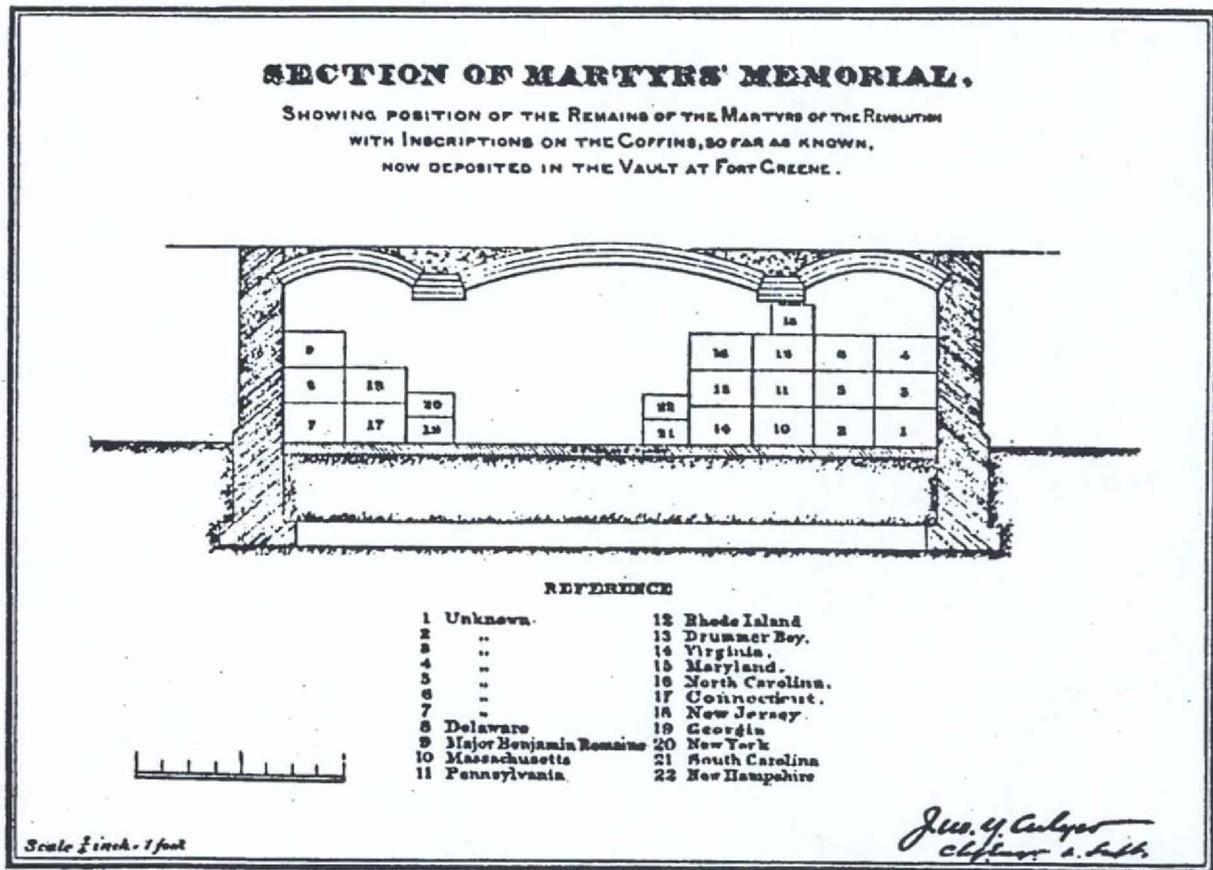
based on Perris 1855

- monument
- ▨ structures
- - - Monument Lot (first Martyrs' tomb)





12 The "new" Martyrs' tomb in Washington Park, Brooklyn (*Harper's Weekly* July 12, 1873:605).



13 Section of Martyrs' tomb 1873 (*Fourteenth Annual Report of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners* 1874: opp 39).

made available through Parks, indicate that extensive grading was part of the McKim, Mead and White plan in 1905. Of particular interest in this archaeological assessment is the proposed regrading that entailed removing quantities of earth from the steps and adding approximately 2 feet of fill to the existing plateau to create the memorial plaza (McKim, Mead and White 1907:Part 1, Page 1; McKim Mead and White 1905; Figure 14). The redesigned park, with its Guastavino tile arch in the crypt of the Martyrs' tomb, was dedicated by President-elect, William H. Taft in 1908. It is this reconstruction, modified somewhat over time and, again, vandalized, that will be restored.

## FIELD WORK AND RESULTS

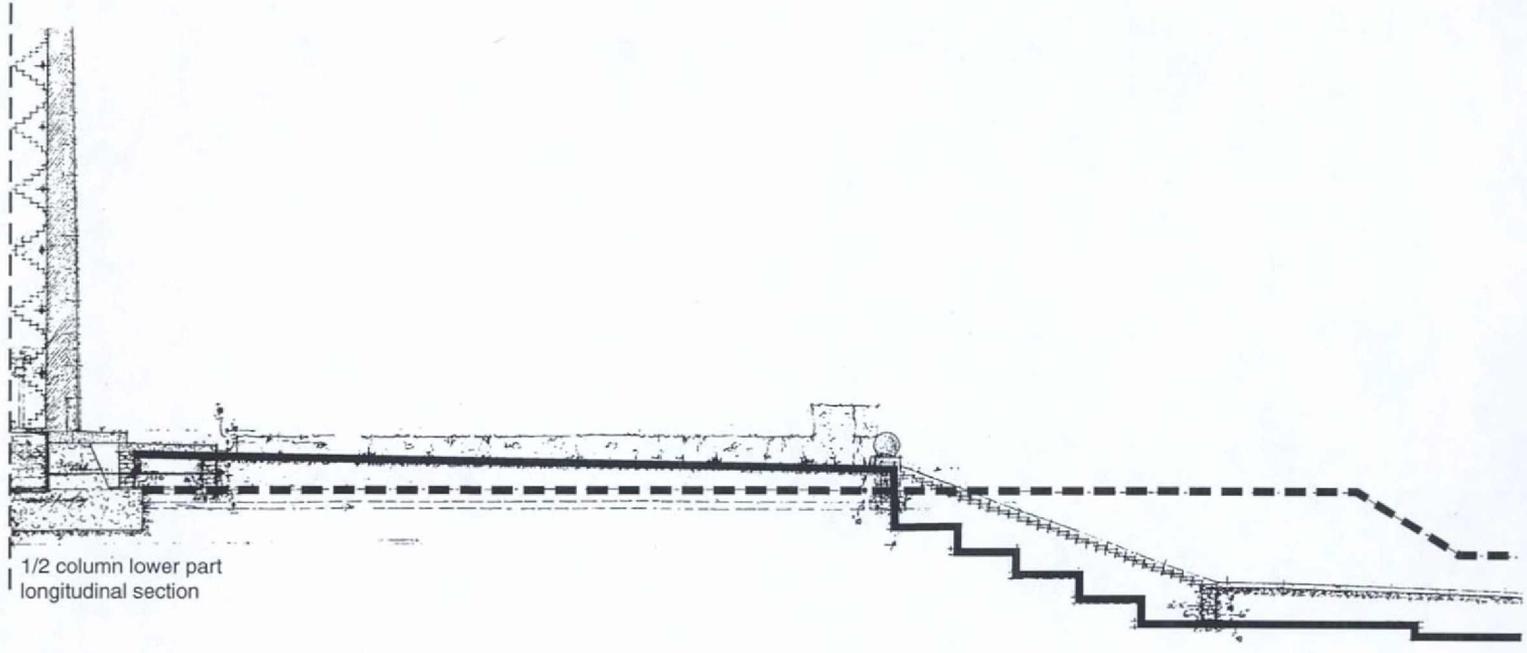
A major concern in this assessment was the nature of the soil that would be disturbed in restoring the existing plaza wall, and the likelihood of encountering archaeological resources during the repair process. The issue of tree removal and relocation also became a concern. Based on original site conditions and the documented site disturbance that has occurred over time, particularly with implementation of the Olmsted and Vaux and McKim, Mead and White, and subsequent reconstruction plans (e.g., Clarke c. 1936; Bye c 1972), undisturbed deposits did not seem to be an issue on the plaza. Monitoring of limited design-driven field investigations was carried out to verify this assessment.

To address the issue of site disturbance, and to determine the structural condition of the plaza walls, on February 24, 2000, one shovel test (TP1) was excavated outside the north corner of the plaza and three others (TP2, TP3, and TP4) were placed on either side of the low wall running west from this corner (the wall is shown in Figure 16). The deepest test pit, TP1, extended down 3.2 feet below the wall's coping and terminated at the top of the concrete foundation of the corner's granite pylon. The three other test pits were terminated at shallow depths when they encountered large tree roots or modern pipes. In addition, a backhoe-excavated test pit (BHTP1), approximately 6 feet by 4.5 feet and 4.9 feet deep, was located on the plaza just inside the same wall on March 15, 2000. This test pit was taken to the bottom of the existing wall, or about 1 to 1.5 feet deeper than the proposed wall repair. After exposing the wall's "leveling pad" at about 3.4 feet below the plaza floor (ground surface), it extended down another 1.5 feet and determined that the soil next to and under the wall was fill (see Figures 15 - 17 for photos). Excavation of a second backhoe test pit (BHTP2) was attempted to expose more of the wall and its foundation where TP1 had been explored earlier by hand, but shallowly-laid underground wiring was encountered almost immediately, and the test was terminated.

All tests documented disturbance and/or fill to the depth of excavation, although the lower fill in BHTP1 was cleaner than the upper fill, and even soil that appeared somewhat stratified was relatively uncompacted and often contained some debris. A schematic profile of the south wall of BHTP1, opposite the plaza wall, will be found in Figure 18; test locations are shown in Figure 19.

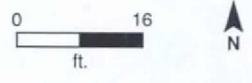
## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of archival research, a review of existing data, and design-driven field testing, the proposed rehabilitation of the memorial plaza, which includes stabilization of the memorial plaza wall and shallow drainage, and restoration of statuary and lighting, is not expected



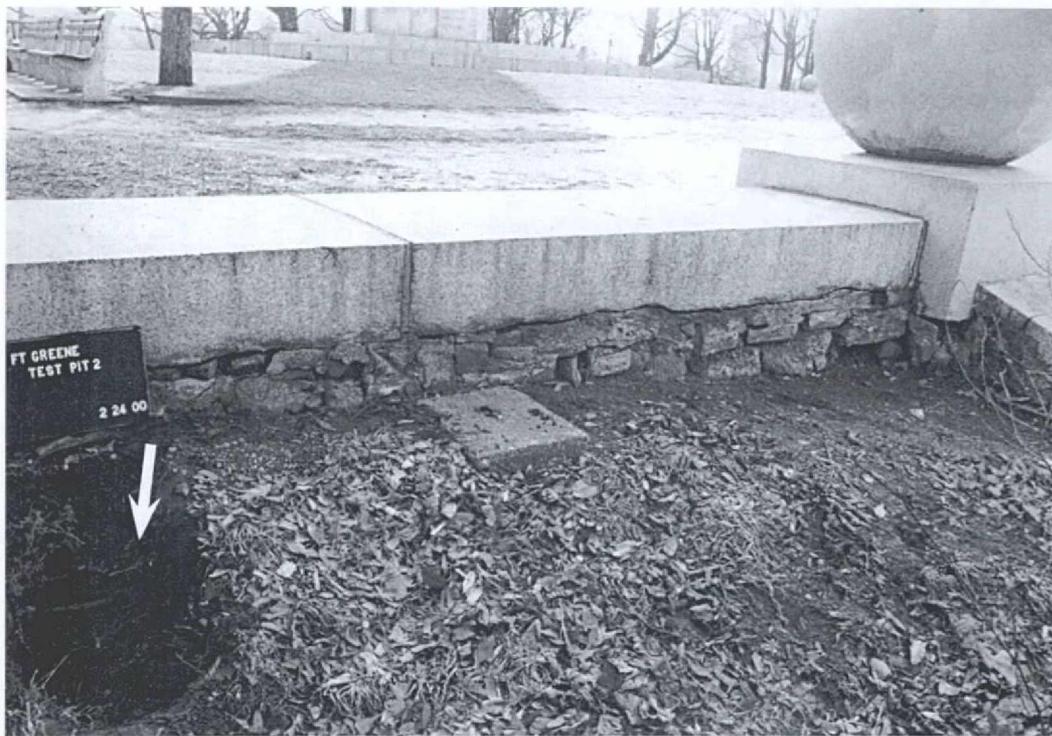
1/2 column lower part  
longitudinal section

- proposed grade and steps
- - - Olmsted & Vaux grade

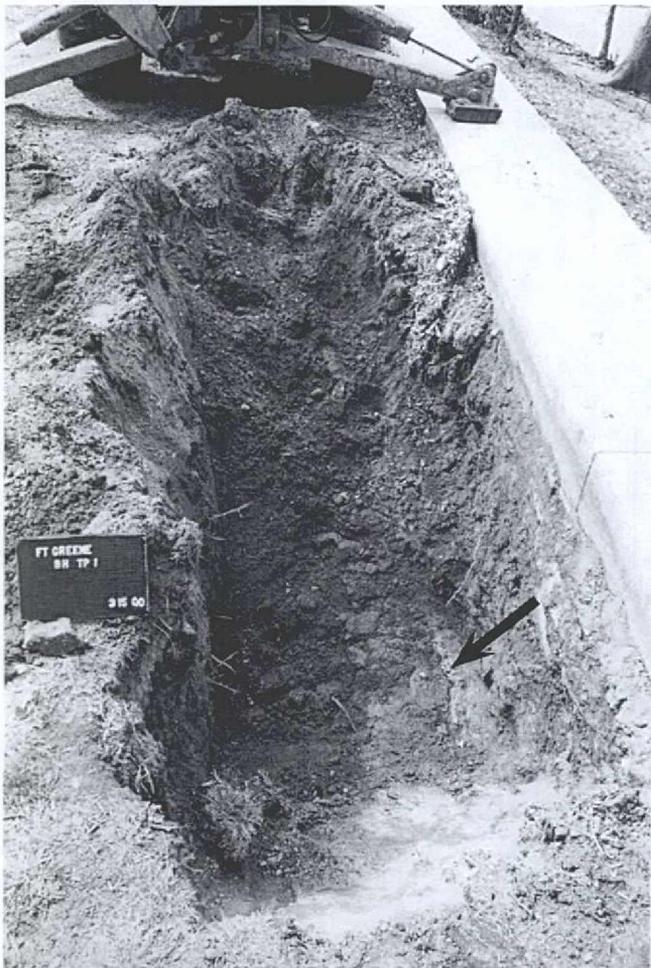




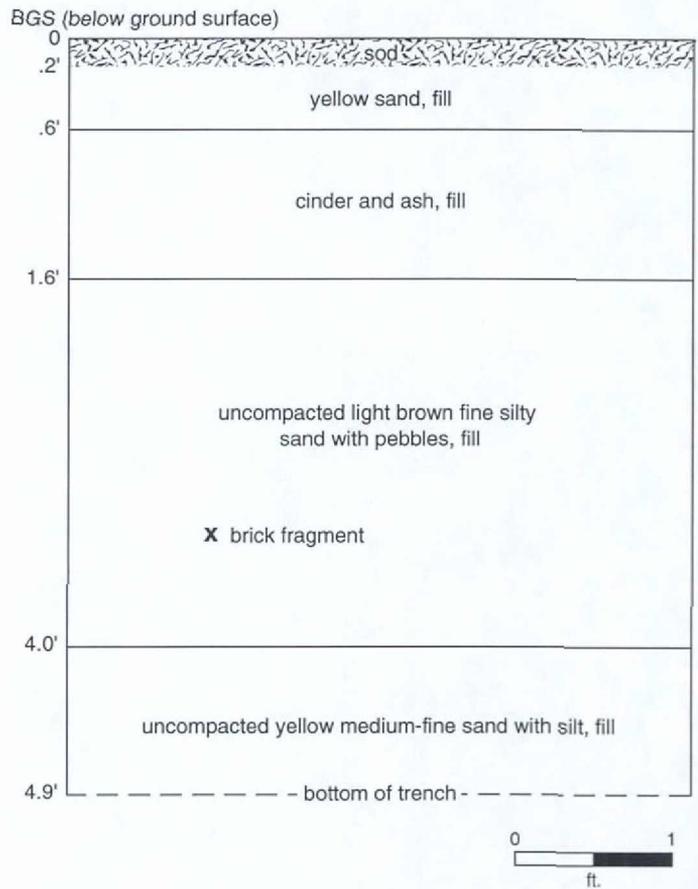
**15** Test Pit 1 (TP1, white arrow) outside the north corner of the memorial plaza. The excavation extended down 3.2 ft. below granite base. Note exposed brick (black arrow) under the base. (Geismar 2/24/00)



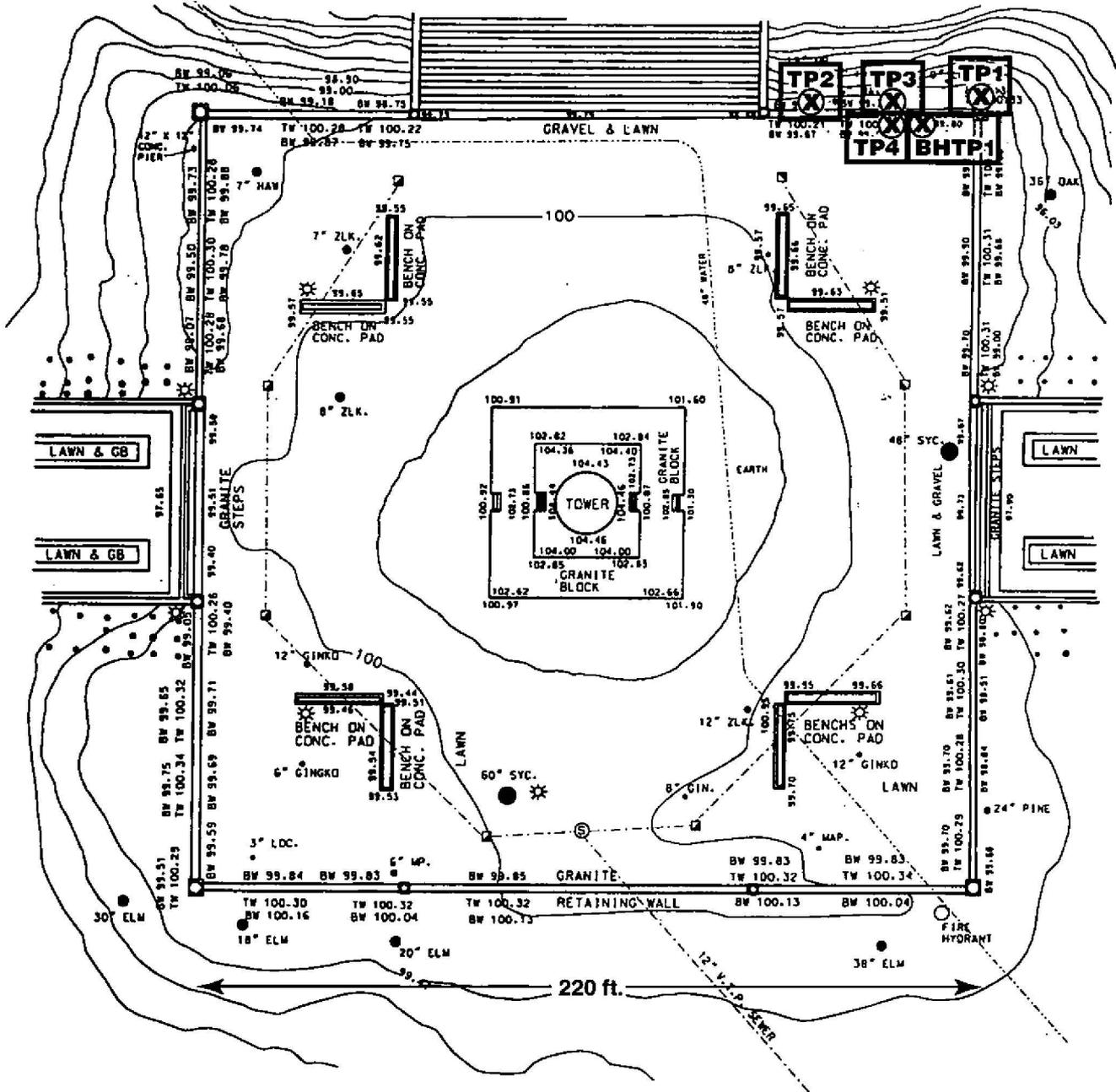
**16** Test Pit 2 (TP2, arrow), a shallow test near the plaza steps (right). This test was terminated when tubing and roots were encountered close to the surface. Note the exposed brick under the wall's coping, a focus of the reconstruction. (Geismar 2/24/00)



**17** Backhoe Test Pit 1 (BHTP1) looking west inside the memorial plaza wall (right). Excavation has extended below the wall's "leveling pad" (arrow). (Geismar 3/15/00)



**18** BHTP1 South Wall Profile (schematic).



test location (approx.)

no scale

to impact on any archaeological resources. Nor is the removal of trees from the plaza expected to be an issue. However, the relocation of the trees may present an archaeological problem if their new positions are where houses that existed near the fort hill in the 1840s were located (see Figures 3 and 5).

Of particular archaeological and historical concern is the former location of a cluster of small houses, or shanties, in the northwest corner of the park on Myrtle Avenue and St. Edwards Street, formerly Canton Street (see Figure 3). While disturbance occurred in the area when a Croton Water Tunnel was introduced in the early part of the 20th century, it is conceivable construction affected only part of the former cluster site. Consequently, the archaeological potential of at least some of the structures and yards that comprised this domestic cluster is a possibility. This is also true of the southeast corner of the park where the equivalent of a block of traditional house lots were owned, improved, and occupied in the 1840s. Based on directory information, the livelihoods of those living in the two developed areas of the park site were similar; the key difference appears to be property owners on or near DeKalb Avenue versus possible squatters on or near Myrtle Avenue.

The potential sensitivity of these two areas should be considered in determining where trees will be relocated and avoidance is recommended (see Figure 20 for Areas of Potential Sensitivity). Should tree relocation occur in these potentially sensitive areas, testing should be undertaken to assess subsurface conditions to the depth of the excavation required for the planting. This would determine whether field investigations prior to tree relocations, or monitoring during the relocations, is necessary.



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