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130 COURT STREET

B286 L21

Brooklyn, New York

Phase IA Archaeological Assessment



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## I. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT SITE AND PLANNED DEVELOPMENT

The project site assessed for archaeological sensitivity in the present report is a portion of Block 286, lot 21 in the landmarked Cobble Hill Historic District of Brooklyn (front cover). This block is bounded on the north by Atlantic Avenue, on the west by Clinton Street, on the south by Pacific Street, and on the east by Court Street. Lot 21 fronts on both Atlantic Avenue and Court Street. On the corner, the Renaissance-style South Brooklyn Savings Bank, built in 1923, occupies an area measuring approximately 15,800 sq. ft., with 175 feet of frontage on Atlantic Avenue (figs. 2 and 3). Immediately to the west of the bank is a parking lot, which contains the area that is the subject of this assessment (figs. 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8). Two Trees Management Corp. is seeking a special permit from the City Planning Commission for a modification of applicable height and setback regulations in order to construct a new 72-foot high building on lot 21 (fig. 9). The proposed building would occupy 90,338 sq. ft. and include a total of 21,161 sf of ground floor retail, 3,792 sf of community facility space, and 76 dwelling units. The project entails demolishing a 1-2 story extension of the bank building that stands over approximately the rear half of 190-192 Atlantic Avenue, as well as a 22 by 80 foot building on lot 17, which adjoins lot 21 on the west (figs. 4 and 8, 82 Atlantic Avenue). Below the parking lot in front of the extension there is an underground vault that is part of the bank, and this portion of the parking lot can therefore be eliminated from consideration for archaeological sensitivity (figs. 2 and 4). Accordingly, the area of concern in this study is the remainder of the parking lot, corresponding to the three former house lots at 184, 186 and 188 Atlantic Avenue and measuring a total of 75 feet by 80 feet in depth. This is the area that will be referred to below as the "project site". The Landmarks Preservation Commission has flagged it as potentially sensitive for the recovery of remains of 19th century occupation.

Designated in 1969 and with an extension designated in 1988, the Cobble Hill Historic district is bounded by Atlantic Avenue on the north, Court Street on the east, Degraw Street on the south and Hicks Street on the west as far as just north of Congress Street, where the boundary steps eastward to just east of Henry Street and then steps back westward to just east of Hicks Street at Atlantic Avenue. The area is known for its row houses, in various styles and its two "model tenements", the Home and Tower buildings, erected by Alfred T. White in 1876 and 1878 to provide

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healthful accommodations for the working class (Dolkart and Postal 2004, 230). Also of architectural note are the two Gothic revival style churches: Richard Upjohn's Christ Episcopal Church of 1840-41 and the Strong Place Baptist Church, now Saint Francis Cabrini R.C. Chapel, by Minard Lafever, erected 1951-52.

## II. HISTORY OF THE PROJECT SITE AREA

Governor Kieft issued patents for the gently rolling land containing the project site in 1640. Although the hills have been leveled and the streams filled, the land still slopes down from north to south -- more steeply along Clinton Street than along Court, where the gradient is quite gentle -- and falls away on both sides of Clinton Street approximately one inch in every six feet along Atlantic Avenue in front of block 286 (Final section maps). The first record in the deeds and conveyances for block 286 is by Kieft to Claes Jansen (recorded in 1690). The area was known as Ponkiesberg, which in English translation became Coble hill, after the steep-sided, conical hill that once stood on or next to the project site, near the intersection of Atlantic and Pacific Avenues and Court Street (figs. 10 and 11; Stiles 1867, 252; Steinke 1969, 3).

On the 1766-67 Ratzler map, this little eminence is called "Cobleskill" (fig. 10). Also shown on this map is "Red Hook Lane", which in a later, straightened form became Court Street (Steinke 1969, 3). During the 18th century, the Deeds and Conveyances indicate that the property on block 286 was changing hands primarily among the members of the Remsen and Livingston families. The Patchen family comes into the records from 1804 on. Running off Red Hook Lane just east of "Cobleskill" was Patchen's Lane, named after Ralph Patchen, whose house and dock stood at the foot of the Lane. Originally from Connecticut, Patchen was an "old Fly Market Butcher" who bought the distillery and land of Isaac and William Cornell, respectively, and made a success of the business (Stiles 1869, 161; Steinke 1969, 4; the distillery shown on 1766-67 Ratzler map, at the foot of later Joralemon Street, belonged at that time to Livingston, Stiles 1867, 45). Beginning in the early 19th century, Patchen's farm, which extended "from Congress to District Streets" included the project site (Stiles 1869, 160; Steinke 1969, 4). The border of his land, according to the 1855 Colton map, ran along Patchen's lane, directly south of the project site. This lane was originally three rods wide, just under 50 feet (Stiles 1869, 154, n.1). It was laid out as a public road to the landing on April 7, 1714. According to Stiles, when Brooklyn was incorporated into a village in 1816, Patchen's Lane became part of District Street, which formed the southern boundary of the village (Stiles 1869, 154, n. 1; Brooklyn 1816; see the dotted outline of the "Lane" on the 1880 Bromley and 1903 Hyde maps, figs. 14 and 16). The lane traversed the southern half or center of block 286; it is unclear whether

it actually ran over the southern edge of the project site or not. District Street was renamed Atlantic [Street or Avenue] by ca. 1838.<sup>1</sup>

During the Revolutionary War, the Americans built a platform with three cannon emplacements atop Cobble Hill. Also known as “Corkscrew Fort” because of the spiral trenches that ascended it, Cobble Hill fort was one of a line of fortifications that extended from the Wallabout to the Head of Gowanus Creek (Stiles 1867, 252). During the Battle of Long Island, Washington and Putnam watched from Cobble Hill the disastrous “rout and slaughter” of Smallwood’s Maryland Regiment, commanded by Lord Stirling, and Washington uttered the famous words: “Good god, what brave fellows I must lose this day!” (Stiles 1867, 279). The fort was higher than Fort Sterling in Brooklyn Heights and during the occupation, the British leveled it so that it would not command the other fort. In 1814, Brigadier General Joseph G. Swift supervised the rebuilding of the fort for the war of 1812 as part of a new defensive line (fig. 11; Stiles 1867, 252, n. 1). It then came then to be known as Fort Swift. The infantry companies of Captains Skillman, Schenck and Dean, and the artillery company of Captain Brouwer provided the labor (Stiles 1867, 402). During the war, Fort Swift was occupied by two companies (Ibid.) According to legend, the area was haunted by the spirit of a murdered man (Stiles 1867, 252, n. 1).

In 1818, there were still no houses on Atlantic Street. To the north was the farm of Judge Joralemon, and to the south, the estates of Isaac Cornell and Ralph Patchen (Colton 1855; Stiles 1869, 196). The street was only partly built up by 1845 with buildings in “detached clusters”: Reverend Sewall S. Cutting observed, “on this side of Atlantic street I recall no instance, in the streets running either way, unless near the river, where any street was built for one corner to another” (quoted in Steinke 1969, 5).

It was not until the opening in 1836 of the South Ferry service between Atlantic Avenue and Whitehall Street that Cobble Hill began its transformation from farmland into an urban, residential district of Italianate, Greek Revival and Anglo-Italianate style row houses (Dolkart and Postal 2004, 230). The oldest house in the district, according to the LPC’s Designation report, is at 122 Pacific

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<sup>1</sup> A map of Brooklyn inserted in the 1834-35 City Directory names the street Atlantic, but addresses in the listings still call it District. “Atlantic” also appears in the address listings in the 1838-39 Directory.

Avenue and dates from ca. 1833. The streets around the project site block, Clinton and Court Streets and Atlantic Avenue, were mapped in 1835 (Final section maps). But the three lots on the project site were apparently first developed only in 1846, as part of a row of eight Gothic revival houses built for Elizabeth Rapelye (Steinke, 1969, 16). The 1869 Dripps map shows a row of eight identical buildings, but the 1855 Perris map has ten brick houses on the lots from 178 to 196 Atlantic Avenue (figs. 13 and 12, respectively). At mid-century, the character of the block was decidedly upper middle class, judging by the professions of the occupants listed in the City Directory of 1849-50: James Bullock, an accountant, lived at no. 182; William Topping, an auctioneer, lived at no. 186; the merchant Alfred Hoyt lived at no. 190; Joseph Parkes, a book keeper and commissioner of deeds for the Eagle office, lived at no. 192. The very large house on the corner of Atlantic Avenue and Clinton Street was occupied by the commission merchant G.B. Lamar, among the wealthiest residents of Brooklyn and brother of the ex-president of Texas (Lomas & Peace 1847, 27).

Following the incorporation of the Nassau Water Company in 1855, work began in 1856 on the excavation of a reservoir in the area of present-day Prospect Park. But it was not until 1859 that water from the reservoir was introduced into the city mains (Manufacturers 1886, 60).<sup>2</sup> Public cisterns provided water for the fire department but were not very convenient for daily household use. The nearest cistern to the project site, listed in the 1845-46 City Directory (p. 158), was located at the corner of Atlantic Avenue and Smith Street. Sewer service became generally available in Brooklyn from ca. 1860 and downtown Brooklyn, including the project site area, would have been one of the first areas served. But the sewer connection records for the project site, in book 1, are lost and we therefore do not know the exact date when the old row houses were connected. The first book of the sewer connection record books still extant is book 4, which begins in 1867. Consequently, we may assume that the project site houses were probably connected in the early 1860s. They would therefore have been initially equipped with privies and cisterns in their backyards.

A few remarks about the Atlantic Avenue railroad are in order to round out this historical overview of the project site's neighborhood. In 1834, the Brooklyn and Jamaica Railroad Company

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<sup>2</sup> The first 36 inch water main from the Ridgewood reservoir was laid in 1858; a second, 48 inch main was added in 1867; Ostrander 1894, 146.

built a road from the East River along Atlantic Avenue to Jamaica, but leased its road to the Long Island Railroad in 1836 (Report 1897, 214). The latter company was given the authority, in 1844, to construct a tunnel through Atlantic Avenue (Report 1897, 177). Some consider this the oldest subway in the world. Because of protests by real estate owners along its route, the tunnel was closed in 1859 and the steam railway removed from Atlantic Avenue after 1861 (Report 1897, 197, 215). As part of the agreement, the company was required to restore the street to its proper grade and to move its terminus to Hunter's Point.

### III. LOT HISTORIES

#### *184 Atlantic Avenue, old lot 12 (1903) then 18 (1929)*

The three-story building at 184 Atlantic Avenue erected ca. 1846 remained unchanged at least through 1869 (fig. 13), but on the 1886 Sanborn map it appears to have already acquired a rear, one-story extension (fig. 15). Between 1904 and 1915, a frame structure was erected that filled most of the rear yard (figs. 17 and 18). This part of lot 21 is therefore not considered archaeologically sensitive for 19th century remains. J.M. Woodward, a shipping agent whose office was at 71 Merchants Exchange in New York, resided at this address in 1853-54. In 1872, the building was occupied by Hoffman & Co. Dry goods shop (*Eagle* 1872A, 4). In 1879, Max Griefeldt and his mother-in-law Mrs. Horn (and presumably other family members) lived at this address (*Eagle* 1879A, 4). By 1883, the *Eagle* Employment Office was installed here, and the building was still being used by an "Employment Off." in 1904, according to the Sanborn map of that year (*Eagle* 1883A, 5; 1888, 3).

#### *186 Atlantic Avenue, old lot 13, then 19*

In ca. 1906, the three-story building with basement at 186 Atlantic Avenue was enlarged by a 12-foot extension that covered almost the entire rear portion of the lot (block and lot file, alteration document 2883, August 15, 1906; fig. 18). This part of the project site is therefore not archaeologically sensitive. The earliest resident traced was the auctioneer, William Topping, who was listed at this address in the 1849-50 directory (but not in 1847-48). The South Brooklyn Savings Bank started business in 1850 at this address and remained here four years before moving to the Athenaeum building.

#### *188 Atlantic Avenue, old lot 14, then 20*

The configuration of the three-story brick building with basement at 188 Atlantic Avenue and its rear yard apparently survived until the building was demolished between 1929 and 1939 (figs. 19 and 20). The dimensions of this building are recorded in the tax assessments for 1876-1880 as 25 X 40 feet, although in the block and lot file for its identical neighbor at 186 Atlantic Avenue,

alterations documents note the dimensions as 25 X 25 X 35 feet deep (block 286, lot 19). The maps, on the other hand, consistently show the building's depth as approximately 45 feet! In any case, the backyard area was a minimum of 35 feet deep and after the building was demolished, the lot was not subsequently built upon. Its former yard is therefore potentially sensitive for 19th century remains of a privy or cistern.

The earliest resident at this address that could be traced was the widow Maria Spader, who lived here between ca. 1848/49 and ca. 1867/68, although she is not listed in every City Directory during those years.<sup>3</sup> A Jeremiah V. Spader is also listed at 188 Atlantic Avenue between ca. 1849 and ca. 1865. In 1849, his profession was given as hardware dealer. His business address was at Kent Avenue near Flushing Avenue (1852-54). In 1855-56, his company's name appeared for the first and only time as Johnson, Spader & Co. Between ca. 1857 and ca. 1865, he was listed as a lumber [merchant] with a business on Kent Avenue at the corner of Hewes, home at 188 Atlantic Avenue. A second Jeremiah V. Spader, possibly the lumber merchant's father (and Maria's brother?) was listed at 188 Atlantic Avenue after the separately listed lumber merchant moved out in ca. 1865, until 1867-68. If 188 Atlantic Avenue was only erected in 1846, the Spaders may have been the first occupants.<sup>4</sup>

Stiles mentions a Jeremiah V. Spader as one of the trustees of the Wallabout school instrumental in reviving that institution during the 1830s, and a J.V. Spader among the "new scholars" that the new teacher, Mr. Barnes, subsequently turned out (Stiles 1870, 871). There was also a Captain Jeremiah V. Spader who served in the 29th regiment of the New Jersey Volunteers in 1862-63. In neither case can we be certain that these are the same person as the one who lived at 188 Atlantic Avenue. It is certain however, that our Jeremiah V. Spader, who went into the storage business in his later career, declared bankruptcy in 1877 with \$160,000 in liabilities (Eagle 1877, 4; City Directory 1867-68). He was a member of the Produce Exchange of New York and had

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<sup>3</sup> Spader Maria, wid. or Spader M. wid. was listed at 188 Atlantic Avenue in 1847-47, 1847-48, 1848-49, 1850-51, 1851-52, 1859-60, 1860-61, 1861-62, 1866-67, 1867-68.

<sup>4</sup> The earliest resident found in the directories living in one of the row houses from 178 to 196 Atlantic Avenue was J.M. Catlin, who was listed at number 178 in the 1847-48 directory. The block was therefore certainly built up and numbered by that date.

his place of business there, but seems to have made his money in building. By the time of his bankruptcy, he lived in a mansion on Oxford Street and was a very wealthy man.

After the Spaders, the history of 188 Atlantic Street's occupation becomes difficult to trace. The owner between 1873 and 1899 was listed in the tax assessments as Albert Woodruff, but he did not reside at this address. In 1872 the "dry goods and millinery & c." shop of Journey & Burnham took out an advertisement that gave their address as 186 & 188 Atlantic Avenue (*Eagle* 1872B). But early in 1875, Lorre's German agency moved to, and also advertised at, 188 Atlantic Avenue (1875A, 3; 1875B, 5). The German Agency was still operating under that name at 188 Atlantic Avenue in 1886, although a junk dealer, William Hill, also apparently kept a shop here in 1883 (1883B, 3). The Lorres resided at this address, above their business, from at least 1879 (*Eagle* 1879B, 3; 1882, 3) and Mr. and Mrs. Reiner Lorre were still living at this address in 1891 (*Eagle* 1891, 14).

In sum, the known occupants of 188 Atlantic Avenue are:

Maria Spader	ca. 1848 - ca. 1868
Jeremiah V. Spader	ca. 1849 - ca. 1869
Journey & Burnham dry goods	ca. 1873
Lorre's German Agency	ca. 1875-1886 William Hill, junk dealer ca. 1883
Lorre family	ca. 1879-1891

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The former backyards of the 19th century dwellings at 184 and 186 Atlantic Avenue were negatively impacted by subsequent construction and may be eliminated from consideration for potential archaeological sensitivity. But the former backyard of the Gothic row house that stood at 188 Atlantic Avenue was not disturbed by any building activity, either during the building's lifetime or following its removal, between 1929 and 1939 (Sanborn maps). Between ca. 1846 and ca. 1860, at the earliest, when sewer service first became available, the residents at this address used a privy and cistern in their backyard for sanitation and water. We know the name of possibly the first occupant at this address, the widow Maria Spader, and of her brother and possibly his <sup>son</sup>, who lived here between ca. 1848 and ca. 1869. The socio-economic character of the block during these decades is revealed by the professional status of Spader's neighbors ca. 1850. Clearly, this was a well-to-do area and, consequently, it is likely that the material culture associated with the occupation of this block in the mid-nineteenth century would represent a broad array of items and include some of the choicest household goods then available in the market place. The interest of such an assemblage is that it could provide a unique insight on the lifestyle of Brooklyn's upper middle class during the critical historical juncture when the city was undergoing its transformation from farmland to urban metropolis.

In general, little is known about the processes that inevitably resulted in the filling of cisterns and privies with refuse. Thus, the excavation of such features has scientific value over and above the potential historical significance of the finds, as it offers archaeologists the possibility of testing hypothesis about the infilling processes through the observation of stratified deposits. Installations of early date that were in use over a relatively long period of time and moreover can be related to a particular set of occupants are especially valuable in this regard. It is presumed that cisterns did not serve as trash receptacles until after they went out of use, but on the other hand, householders probably did throw garbage into their privies while they were still being used as privies. This means that there is a possibility of discovering stratified remains corresponding to the time of a dwelling's earliest period of occupation in its privy deposits, which means, for 188 Atlantic Avenue, from the later 1840s and 1850s, when the Spader's lived there. The completion of the filling of the privy, and

the filling of the cistern, would have occurred after these installations were no longer in use. In the case of 188 Atlantic Avenue, this would probably mean during the 1860s and possibly 1870s, although it has been observed that the accumulation of refuse in defunct 19th century privies and cisterns often continued for many decades, well into the 20th century.

This report therefore recommends that archaeological testing be performed on that portion of lot 21 corresponding to the former backyard of 188 Atlantic Avenue, in order to locate and to determine the state of preservation of the cistern and privy that no doubt existed here in during the 19th century. Depending on the integrity of the remains, the investigation could then proceed to a full excavation of the installations.

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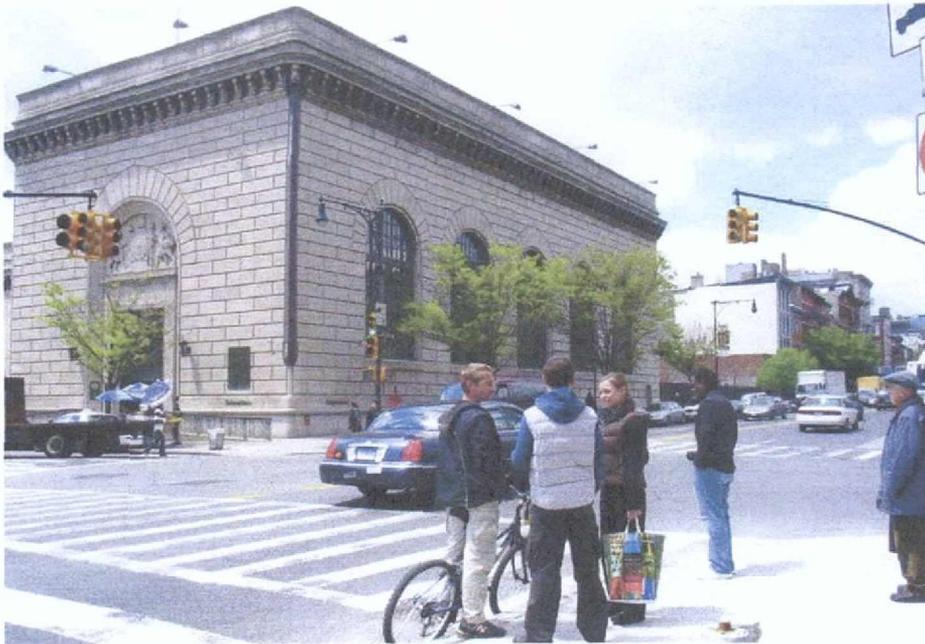
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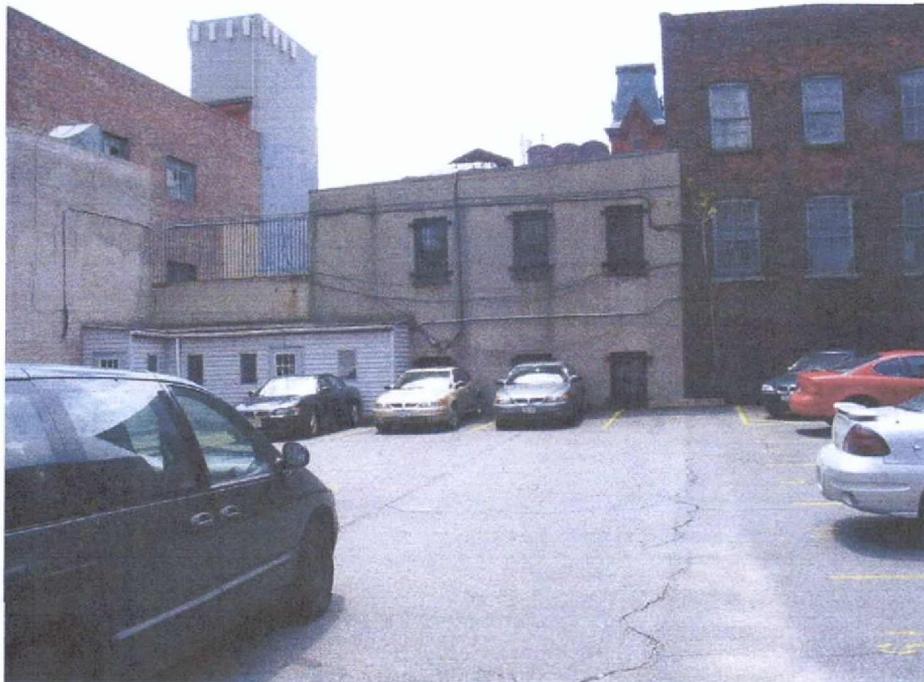
**Fig. 3. View of the South Brooklyn Savings Bank and beyond it, the project site, from the northeast corner of Court Street and Atlantic Avenue**



**Fig. 4. View of the east side of the project site**



**Fig. 5. View of the east side of the project site**



**Fig. 6. View of center and south side of the project site**



**Fig. 7. View of the center and south side of the project site**



**Fig. 8. view of the west side of the project site**

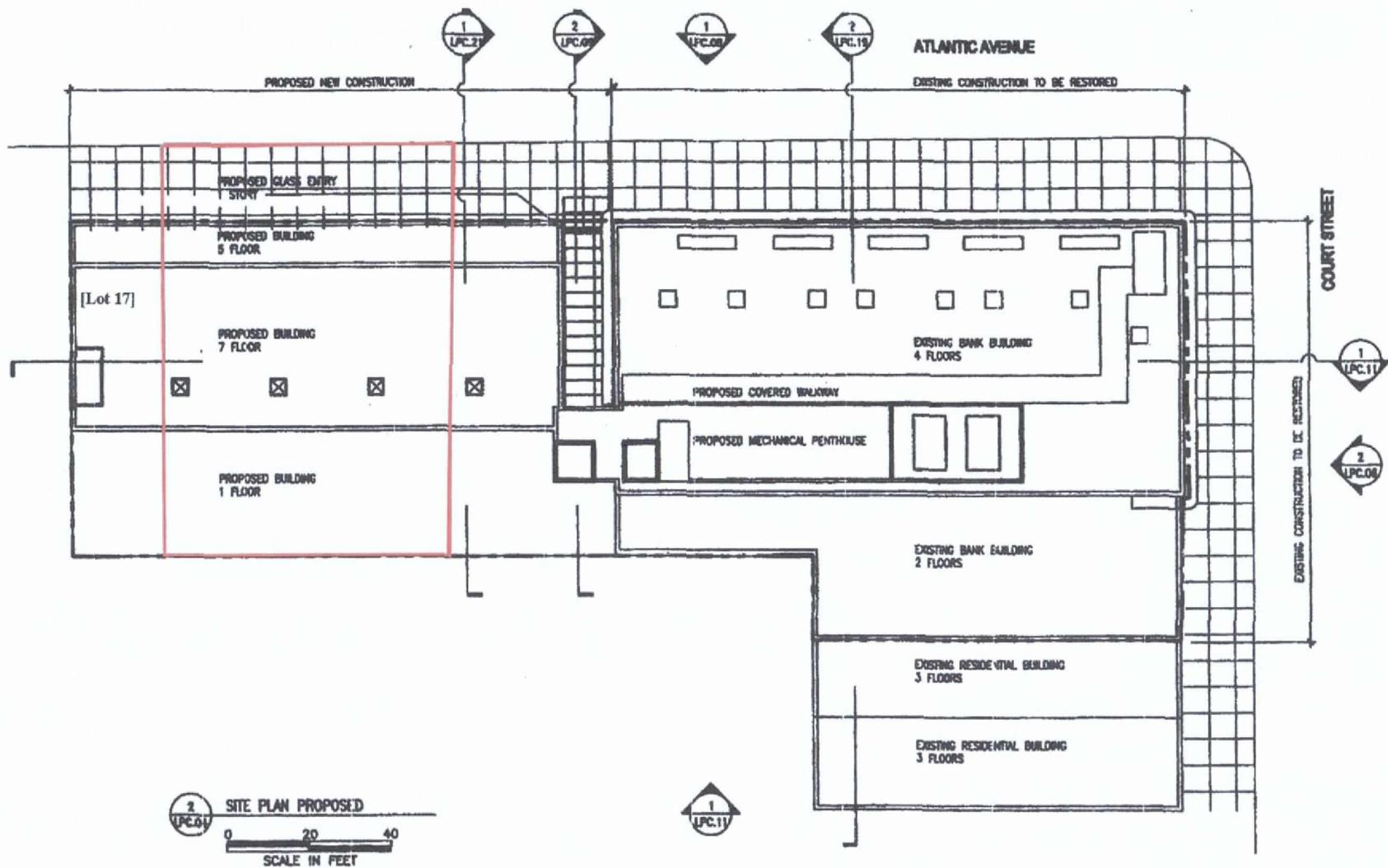


Fig. 9. Plan of proposed development showing the project site

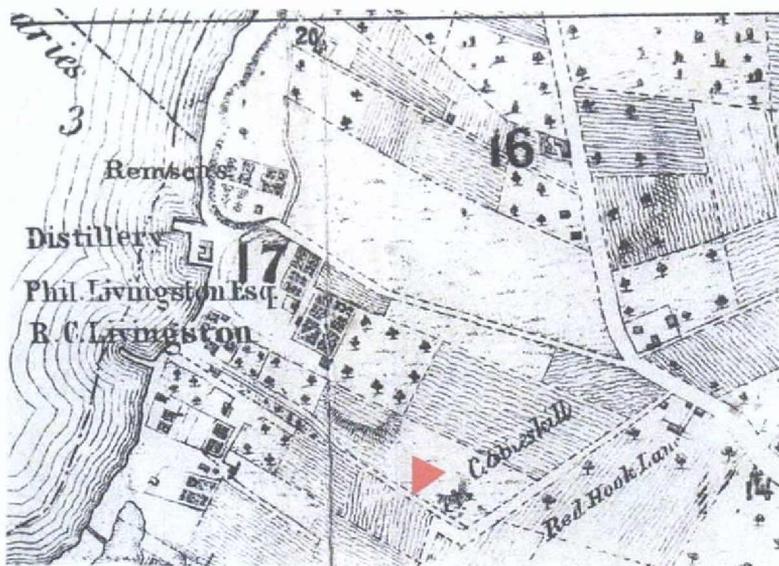


Fig. 10. 1766-67 Ratzler map showing the location of the project site

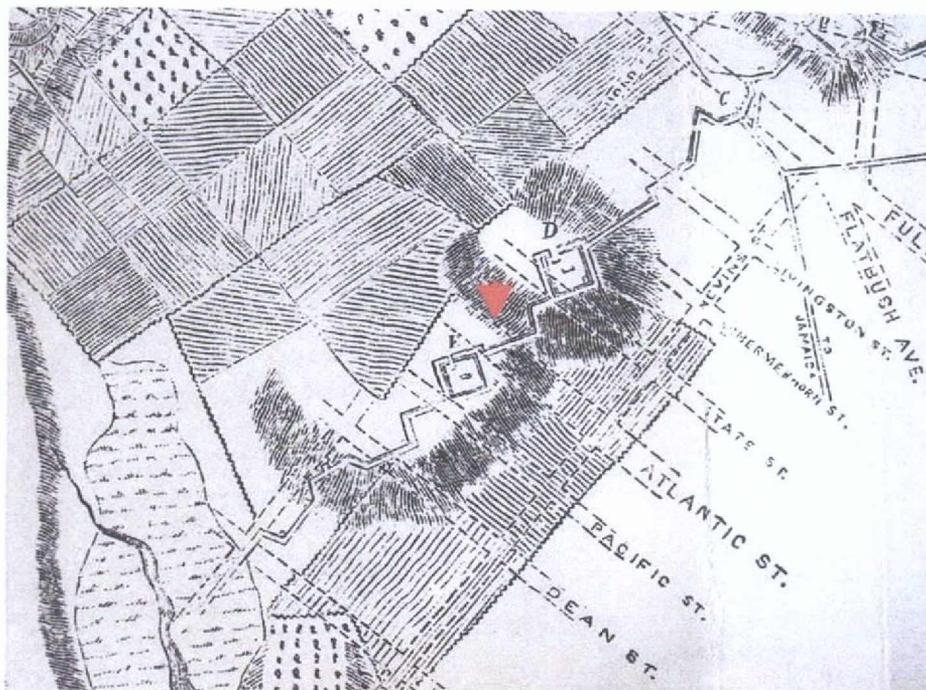


Fig. 11. "Plan of Ft. Greene and line of Intrenchments ...1814", showing the location of the project site, from Stiles 1867, facing p. 25

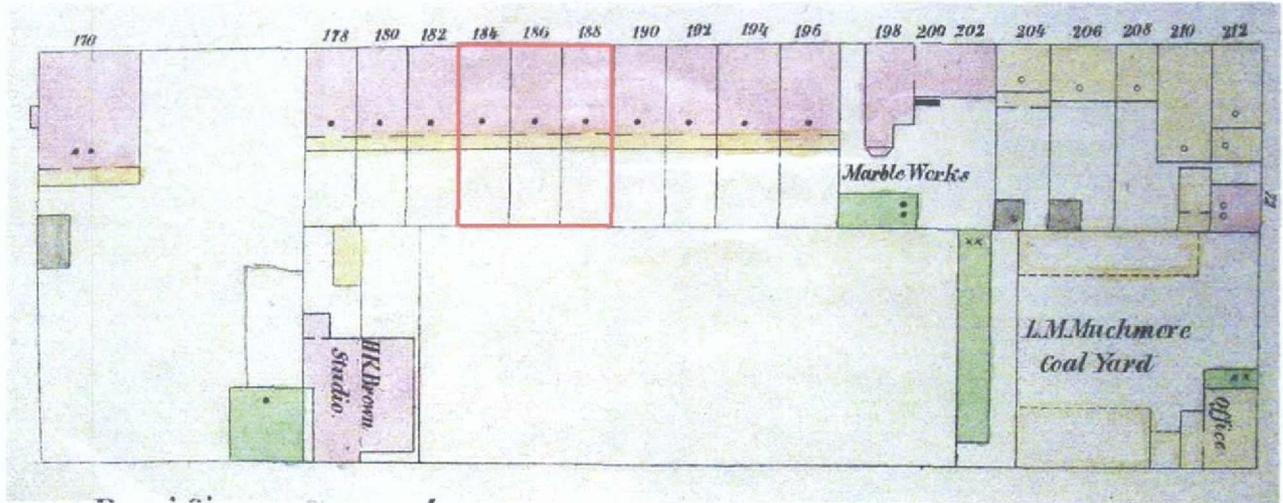


Fig. 12. 1855 Perris map showing the location of the project site

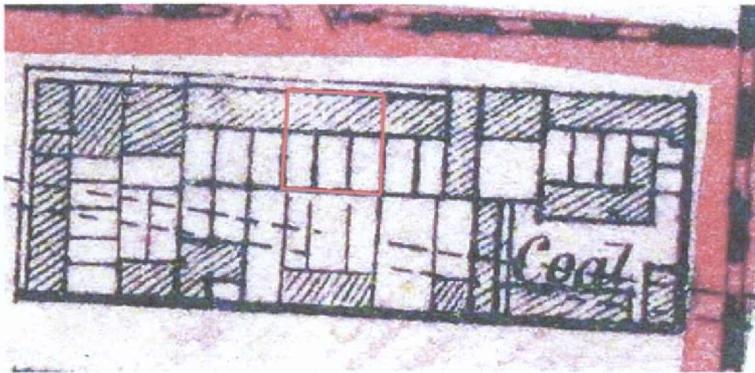


Fig. 13. 1869 Dripps map showing the location of the project site

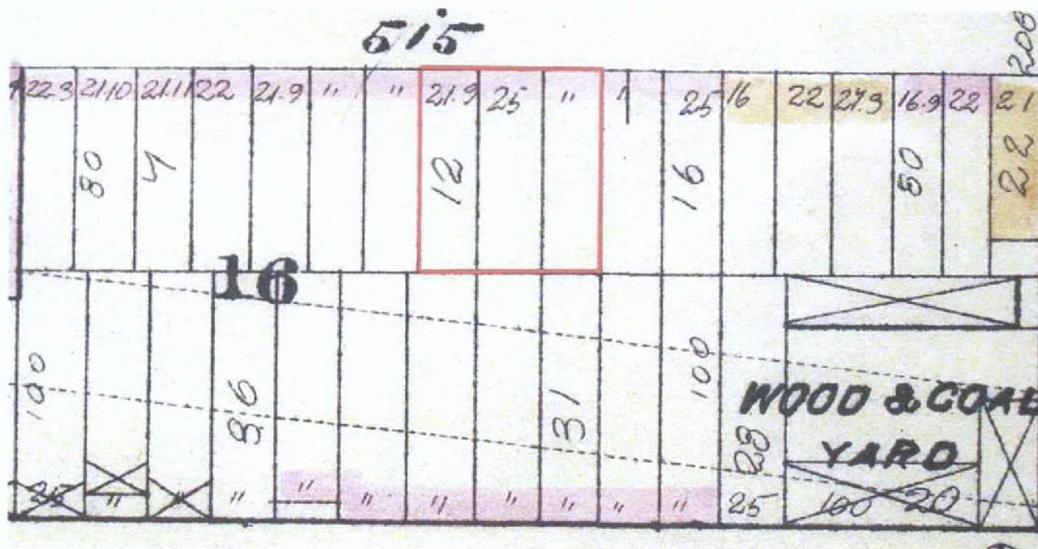


Fig. 14. 1880 Bromley map showing the location of the project site

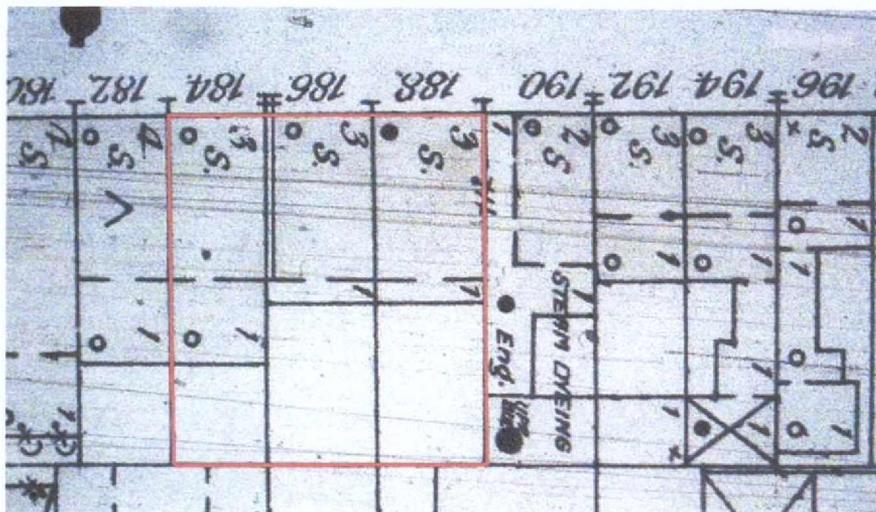


Fig. 15. 1886 Sanborn map showing the location of the project site

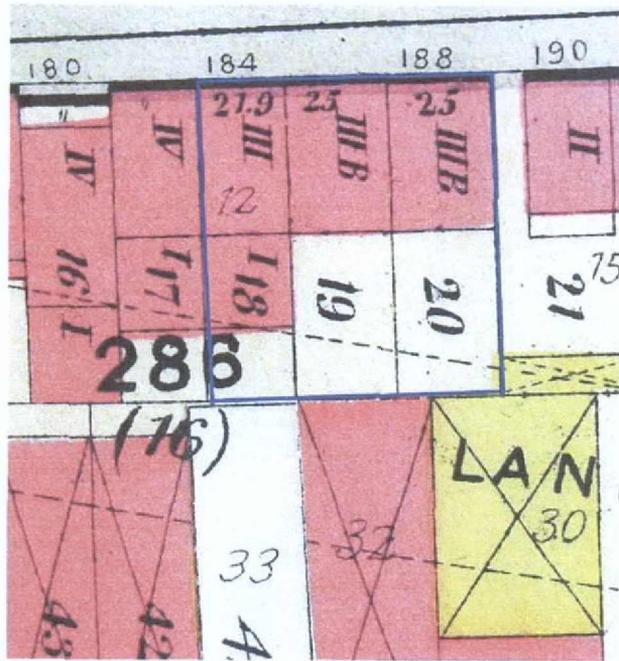


Fig. 16. 1903 Hyde map showing the location of the project site

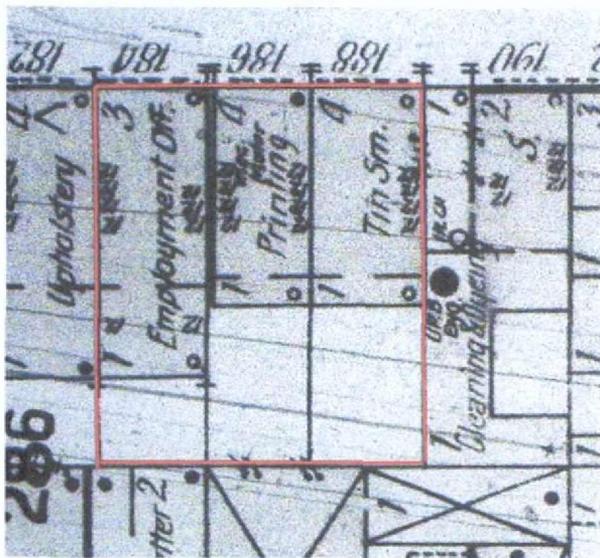


Fig. 17. 1904 Sanborn map showing the location of the project site