Landmarks Preservation Commission
March 21, 1995; Designation List 262
LP-1924

LEWIS H. LATIMER HOUSE, 34-41 137th Street, Flushing, Queens.
Built c. 1887-89.

Landmark Site: Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 4953, Lot 1 in part consisting of the parcel of land bounded by a line described as follows: beginning at the corner formed by the intersection of the westerly side of Leavitt Street (60 feet wide) with the northerly side of 137th Street (60 feet wide); running thence northwesterly along the northerly side of 137th Street 252 feet 5⅛ inches to a point; thence easterly along a line which forms an interior angle of 54°-59'-45" with the last mentioned course 28 feet 4½ inches to a point; thence easterly along a line which forms an interior angle of 154°-59'-45" with the last mentioned course 193 feet 7¼ inches to the westerly side of Leavitt Street; thence southerly along the westerly side of Leavitt Street 135 feet 6⅛ inches to the point or place of beginning.

On February 14, 1995, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Louis Latimer House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twenty-four witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of the Lewis H. Latimer Fund and the Department of Cultural Affairs, the owners of the building and the site, as well as a representative of Queens Borough President Claire Shulman. The Commission has received a number of letters and other expressions of support in favor of this designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

The Lewis H. Latimer House was the home for twenty-six years of the African-American inventor who is renowned for his work and writings in the field of electric lighting. This Queen Anne style frame house (fig. 1), built c. 1887 to 1889 for Emma and William Sexton, was acquired by Lewis and Mary Wilson Latimer in 1902. It was the only house the Latimers owned in New York, and Latimer himself designed two additions to the house. The house not only offered a comfortable home for the Latimer family, but it was also a meeting place for prominent African-American civic and cultural leaders. Latimer (1848-1928) worked with Alexander Graham Bell in the preparation of the patent application for the telephone in 1876, and in early 1880s, as an engineer with the United States Electric Lighting Company, he was responsible for numerous inventions, including his most important discovery, a method of producing long-lasting carbon filaments that made the production of light bulbs both practical and affordable for the average household. He was hired as a patent expert by Thomas Alva Edison around 1885 and worked in the legal department of the Edison Electric Lighting Company, later the General Electric Company, for over twenty years. Latimer was a prominent member of the African-American community in turn-of-the-century New York and an early advocate of civil rights and black cultural identity. As Latimer's long-time home, this house remains the most significant site in New York City associated with Latimer, and it was owned by the Latimer family until 1963. In 1988, when the house was threatened with demolition, it was moved to its present site across the street from the Latimer Gardens housing project, which had been named in Lewis Latimer's honor (fig. 2). Plans are underway to restore the house and open it as a house museum, under the management of the Lewis H. Latimer Fund.

Lewis H. Latimer: His Early Career and Inventions[1]

Born in Chelsea, Massachusetts, in 1848, Lewis H. Latimer (fig.3) was the son of George and Rebecca Latimer, former slaves who escaped to freedom.[2] Lewis Latimer attended the Phillips Grammar School in Boston until family circumstances forced him to leave school at age ten. He then worked a variety of odd jobs until the outbreak of the Civil War, when at age fifteen he enlisted in the Navy as a cabin boy on the gunboat, U.S.S. *Massasoit*. Following the war he found employment as an office boy in the firm of Crosby & Gould, patent attorneys. Fascinated by the drawings prepared for patent applications, Latimer taught himself mechanical drawing and eventually became the firm's head draftsman. In 1876, Latimer made the initial drawings and worked with Alexander Graham Bell in the preparation of the patent application for the first telephone. In 1874, while he was with Crosby & Gould, Latimer received his first patent, which he developed with a partner, W.C. Brown, for an improvement to water closets used on trains.

In 1879 Latimer moved to Bridgeport, where he became the draftsman and assistant to inventor Hiram S. Maxim, the chief engineer at the United States Electric Lighting Company, one of the first such businesses in the country.[3] In an autobiographical sketch written some thirty years later, Latimer recalled his early days with United States Electric when he was "busily following my vocation of mechanical draughtsman and acquainting myself with every branch of electric incandescent light construction and operation."[4]

Electric lighting was in its infancy in 1879.[5] The first development in the field was the arc lamp, which evolved after Sir Humphrey Davy demonstrated in 1809 that an electric current bridging a gap between two carbon rods forms an arc, giving off a bright light. Early lamps of this type were made with open arcs; by the late 1870s the lamps were enclosed in glass, making them more practical. In 1879 the Brush Electric Light Company first used carbon arc lamps for street lighting in Cleveland. The same company installed the first public electric lighting system in New York on Broadway between 14th Street and 34th Street in 1881, which gave rise to the name "Great White Way" (fig. 4). The United States Electric Lighting Company was also a leader in the field of arc lighting and much of Hiram Maxim's, and therefore Lewis Latimer's, energies were devoted to perfecting the arc lamps the company was manufacturing and installing in a number of American cities (fig. 5).

Despite its early successes, arc lighting was of limited utility because its intense light was difficult to regulate. In order to produce an electric light suitable for homes and offices, inventors began exploring the possibility of incandescent lighting, in which a filament of resistant material was heated electrically until it glowed, producing a light similar in intensity to that of a gas or oil lamp.[6] Experiments with incandescent lighting date back to at least 1840, but the technical difficulties were so great that it was not until the late 1870s that inventors began to hope to produce a marketable lamp. In August 1878 Thomas Alva Edison announced that he was working on the incandescent light with a team of scientists at Menlo Park, New Jersey. A number of other inventors were already at work on the incandescent light, including Hiram Maxim, who patented his first design for an incandescent bulb in September 1878, though it proved to be unworkably short-lived. In the last week of December 1879, Edison filed a patent for a glass bulb with a carbonized cardboard filament in a vacuum atmosphere which was recognized as the beginning of practical incandescent lighting.[7]

In the early spring of 1880 the United States Electric Lighting Company moved its operations to New York City.[8] Latimer moved to New York with the company; his chief work site was the company's laboratory at Sixth Avenue and West 25th Street, where, in addition to acting as chief draftsman, he began to conduct his own experiments. Between 1881 and 1882 he filed patents for three inventions: a new type of bracket for arc lights, a new method of mounting carbon filaments in incandescent bulbs, and, most importantly, a new method for manufacturing carbon filaments. The problem of producing strong, durable filaments was critical to the commercial success of the lighting industry since the filament in Edison's original lamp had a life of no more than a few hours. Carbon filaments were made by heating at very high temperatures pieces of fibrous material such as cardboard, wood, or textiles under conditions that precluded the admission of oxygen until the cellulose in the material broke down leaving a hard carbon skeleton. (This method was known as carbonization.) During 1880 and 1881, as the United States Electric Lighting Company and the newly formed Edison Lamp Company prepared to put their bulbs into production, their laboratories experimented with a variety of new materials (such as bamboo),

new molds, and new methods. It was Lewis Latimer who observed that during carbonization, the metal molds that held the fibrous material in place expanded, while the fibrous material contracted, resulting in many broken or misshapen filaments. Latimer suggested that the molds be replaced with cardboard envelopes that would expand at the same rate as the fibrous material. His method produced substantially stronger filaments and significantly lowered production costs. This method was widely adopted by the lighting industry, though Latimer did not realize any financial gain since his royalties were assigned to the United States Electric Lighting Company.

In addition to his patented inventions, Latimer was responsible for many inventions that were not patented but that, as one scholar has noted, "improved designs for virtually all the other equipment and steps involved in the lampmaking process,"[9] including:

> *the oven that baked the filaments; the preparation of phosphoric anhydride (a chemical used for drying the inert gas that filled the bulb and prolonged the filament life); glassblowing equipment to produce bulbs; and a new socket and switch.*[10]

The United States Electric Lighting Company was so small and experimental that Latimer was involved in many aspects of the company's operations.[11] As he later wrote:

> *I had qualified myself to take charge of producing the carbons for lamps when I was not drawing and worked through the day helping to make lamps and at night locating [installing wiring for] them in stores and offices.*[12]

In 1880 Latimer assisted Maxim in installing the first incandescent lighting system in New York City in the vaults and reading rooms of the Mercantile Safe Deposit Company in the Equitable Building. Other sites in New York where Latimer was involved in the installation of arc and incandescent systems included Fisk & Hatch, Caswell & Massey, and the Union Club. As the company expanded its operations in 1881, Latimer assisted Maxim in installing the first electric generator and lighting system in Philadelphia in the offices of the Philadelphia Ledger. Latimer was then put in charge of fitting up the Hochelagad railroad station and yard in Montreal with incandescent and arc lighting. His knowledge of every aspect of the manufacture of electric lights led to his being sent to England in the spring of 1882 to set up the first lamp factory for the company's British affiliate. By the time he returned to America, late in 1882, the United States Electric Lighting Company had undergone a reorganization and his mentor Hiram Maxim was no longer affiliated with the company; Latimer found no place in the new organization and was forced to search for a new job.

Patent Expert for General Electric[13]

After working briefly with several firms, Latimer was hired around 1885 by Thomas Alva Edison as a special assistant to the Edison Electric Company's counsel. During the next two years he traveled the country gathering information on new inventions which might potentially conflict with Edison's patents. In 1886 he appeared as an expert witness on behalf of Edison in a suit brought by Hiram Maxim and the Westinghouse Corporation (successor to U.S. Electric) claiming primacy in the invention of the incandescent light. Latimer's testimony regarding the chronology of Maxim's invention was crucial to Edison's ultimate victory in 1892. In the late 1880s Latimer worked in the firm's engineering department, then transferred to the newly established legal department following the consolidation of Edison's various enterprises into the Edison General Electric Corporation in 1889. As the corporation's chief draftsman and patent expert, Latimer performed patent searches, gathered information for law suits, inspected electrical plants that were believed to have infringed on Edison's patents, prepared drawings for court cases, and testified as an expert witness. He also was responsible for the company's library and translated several scientific articles and patents from French and German for general use and as exhibits in court cases. In 1890 he described the Edison system in his book, *Incandescent Electric Lighting,* which remained the most important text on the subject until the 1920s. In 1892, Edison General Electric Corporation merged with the Thomson-Houston Company, the country's leading manufacturer of arc lights, to form the General Electric Corporation. The electric industry continued to grow, and the company developed new products such as machinery to power textile mills and equipment for cable cars and trolleys, providing new opportunities for Latimer to use his expertise.

In 1896 concerns about costs and the uncertainties of litigation led General Electric, which controlled about fifty percent of the market, to enter into an agreement with the sixteen other producers of electric lighting equipment to fix prices and allot a

share of business to each company. At the same time General Electric and Westinghouse, which together controlled the market in non-lighting related electrical equipment, agreed to pool their patents, granting licenses to each other and splitting license fees from other companies according to a fixed ratio. To administer these arrangements and resolve disputes, the companies agreed to establish the Board of Patent Control, headed by William Jenks, the former head of General Electric's legal department. Latimer also moved over to the Board of Patent Control as its draftsman and expert witness. His responsibilities were similar to those he held at General Electric, and he spent considerable time studying new technologies since one of the primary roles of the Board was to analyze new inventions and to set licensing fees. Latimer remained with the Board of Patent Control until 1911, when it was dissolved under pressure from the Justice Department for violations of the Sherman Antitrust Act. Latimer then became a patent consultant for Edwin W. Hammer, a New York City engineer and patent attorney, who had been the chief technical assistant on the Board of Patent Control. Latimer was associated with Edwin Hammer (and later the firm of Hammer & Schwarz) until poor health forced him to retire at age 76 in 1924.

Latimer in New York: Artist and Activist[14]

Lewis Latimer took an active part in the cultural and social life of turn-of-the-century New York. He played the violin and flute, painted portraits, and wrote poetry and plays, often publishing his work in prominent African-American journals. (One of Latimer's poems was set to music by J. Rosamond Johnson, co-composer of "Lift Every Voice and Sing.") Latimer also used his writing skills in the cause of civil rights, petitioning Mayor Seth Low in 1902 to restore an African-American removed from the Brooklyn School Board in response to racist political pressures and publishing a particularly impassioned statement in connection with the 1895 National Conference of Colored Men in which he called for:

> *Equality before the law, security under the law, and an opportunity, by and through maintenance of the law, to enjoy with our fellow citizens of all races and complexions the blessings guaranteed us under the Constitution.*[15]

Latimer's other activities included membership in the Edison Pioneers, an organization of electrical engineers (whose twenty-eight charter members had been business or technical affiliates of Thomas Alva Edison or one of his companies prior to 1885) formed to carry on Edison's ideals and goals, and volunteer teaching at the Henry Street Settlement House. His circle of friends included Richard Theodore Greener, dean of the law department at Howard University; Arthur Schomburg; and author-civic leader W.E.B. Dubois. Latimer was also a corresponding member of the Negro Society for Historical Research, an organization founded in 1911, which proposed "to make New York a cultural and intellectual center for the promotion of research work and the collecting of literary and art items by and about Negroes from all over the world."[16]

When Lewis Latimer and his wife Mary Wilson Latimer first moved to New York in 1880 they leased living quarters in a house at 152 West 32nd Street (demolished) in a mixed residential and industrial district that was home to many African-Americans.[17] After living in England, they returned briefly to this neighborhood, renting quarters at 319 West 33rd Street (demolished), then moved across town in 1887 to a racially and ethnically mixed working class neighborhood where they rented a house at 324 East 55th Street. (The house was extensively altered in the 1920s.) The Latimers were able to move to more congenial surroundings in 1893 when they leased a house in Fort Greene section of Brooklyn, one of the few middle-class neighborhoods in the city with a substantial black presence at the turn of the century.[18] There, the Latimers occupied a two-and-one-half-story brick rowhouse at 186 Adelphi Street (then No. 184) on a pleasant residential street between Willoughby Street and Myrtle Avenue. The Latimers occupied the Adelphi Street house until 1902 when Lewis Latimer was able to purchase a house for his family in Flushing, Queens. Turn-of-the-century Flushing had a sizable African-American population which included a number of community leaders and professionals,[19] and Flushing High School had been racially integrated since the 1880s. The Latimers took an active role in their new community. In 1908, Lewis Latimer was one of the founders of the Flushing Unitarian Church, and he served for many years as an officer in the local chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), a Civil War veterans' group. The Latimers' Flushing home became a gathering place for black cultural and political leaders including W.E.B DuBois, author Jessie Fauset, composer Harry T. Burleigh, author-composer James Weldon Johnson, composer J. Rosamond Johnson,

civic leader Eugene Kinkell Jones, and actor-musician Paul Robeson.[20]

The House[21]

The house which was to be Lewis Latimer's residence for over a quarter of a century was originally located on the north side of Holly Avenue, about 250 feet west of Kissena Boulevard (figs. 6, 7). Located about one-half mile from the Flushing Long Island Railroad Station, the neighborhood was served by several trolley lines which made it possible to commute conveniently to Manhattan or downtown Jamaica. The area developed gradually over a twenty-year period, and was largely built up with substantial freestanding frame dwellings surrounded by gardens; related commercial buildings such as the neighborhood grocery and a hotel were located on Kissena Boulevard. The house was constructed on a 50 foot by 100 foot lot which Emma Sexton purchased in 1887 and improved by 1889.[22] In 1890 she bought the adjoining lot to the west of her property which made it possible to surround the house with gardens. Emma Sexton and William Sexton, a house painter, occupied the house until it was sold to Lewis Latimer in 1902.

Set back about ten feet from the street and flanked at the sides by about twenty-five feet of garden, this two-and-one-half-story L-shaped frame house had a twenty by thirty foot main section and a ten by twenty foot rear wing which was slightly lower than the main portion of the house. Historic photographs show that the house was originally faced with clapboards and featured such Queen Anne details as bay windows, decorative vergeboards, bracketed eaves, and fish-scale shingles on the front gable (fig. 1). Asymmetrically placed windows were set off by molded lintels and shutters and the upper sash had small multipane lights (some of stained glass) bordering the sides and top of a single clear pane. Extending across the front of the house was a open wood porch with a gable above the western entrance bay.

A few years after acquiring the house, Lewis Latimer added a large one-story frame addition which wrapped around the rear and northwest corner of the house and contained a passage and the room Latimer used as a studio and study. Early photographs of the house (figs. 8, 9), show that the study was shed-roofed and had a large projecting bay and freestanding chimney on the west wall. Latimer's granddaughter, Dr. Winifred Norman, remembers that this room contained Latimer's books, drafting instruments, a drafting table, and a chamber organ (this addition was demolished in 1988). In 1912 Latimer enlarged the attic by adding two shed-roofed dormers at the sides of the main roof.[23] Latimer designed the addition and prepared the axonometric drawings of the house which were filed with the Department of Buildings in Queens (fig. 10); the actual construction was carried out by M.F. Johnson, a builder who lived next door to the Latimers on Holly Street. It is not known how this space was used during Latimer's lifetime.

Following Lewis Latimer's death in 1928, the house passed to his daughters, Louise Latimer and Jeanette Latimer Norman.[24] Louise Latimer, who was an artist, continued to occupy a portion of the house while generating income by renting rooms to students and older people. To create a studio and living space for herself on the first floor, she enclosed the front porch and removed the lower portion of the front wall, making one large room of the former porch and front parlor (fig. 11). Presumably, the window opening on the southeast corner of the house was enlarged at that time and the shed-roofed dormers on the rear wing were added. (These dormers are no longer extant.) It seems likely that the house was refaced with asbestos shingles when the porch was enclosed.

When Louise Latimer died in 1963 the house passed to Jeanette Norman's widower, Gerald F. Norman, and their two children, Judge Gerald L. Norman and Dr. Winifred L. Norman.[25] The house, which was the principal asset in the estate, was sold to a neighbor, Yolando Nuccio, and later passed to the Seltzer family. The Seltzers modernized the first floor interior, replaced a number of windows, and added storm doors and storm sash, but left much of the second story interior intact. In 1988, Mrs. Seltzer sold the house to a developer who planned to raze it to erect two two-family dwellings on the lot. Within a few months, the Committee to Save the Latimer House was formed and under the leadership of Rev. Timothy Mitchell, pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, and Dr. Norman, began raising funds to move the house.[26] Queens Borough President Claire Shulman provided $25,000 to cover a major portion of the move, and the Queens Historical Society agreed to take title to the house, which the developer donated. Rev. Mitchell arranged to have the house moved to Leavitt Field, a city-owned recreation field, across the street from the Latimer Gardens housing project, which had been named in Lewis Latimer's honor. In 1994 the house was set

on permanent foundations, the rear gables were refaced with clapboards, and the roof was replaced over both the main wing and rear ell. The attic windows on the rear ell were also eliminated (figs. 12, 13, 14, 15). A parcel of ground at the southeast corner of Leavitt Field was transferred to the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs as a permanent site for the house. The house is currently owned by the Lewis H. Latimer Fund, which is in the process of donating the building to the Dept. of Cultural Affairs. Plans are underway to restore the house and open it as a house museum, under the management of the Lewis H. Latimer Fund.[27]

Description

The Latimer House is located on a large irregular lot at the intersection of 137th Street and Leavitt Street, just south of the Leavitt Park Athletic Field and Playground. The property is surrounded by a chain link fence, and the house is sited about ten feet from Leavitt Street and about twenty feet from the northern property line. Set on a concrete foundation in 1994, the two-and-one-half-story frame house has a main section measuring twenty by thirty feet and a rear wing measuring ten by twenty feet which is slightly lower than the main portion of the house. The gabled roof over the main section of the house has overhanging eaves supported by decorative brackets and shed-roofed two-window-wide dormers. In 1994 the rear portion of the house was altered to reverse changes which had been made subsequent to Lewis Latimer's death: the slope of the gabled roof was lowered, the dormer windows were removed, the box cornices beneath the eaves were replaced, and an attic window on the rear gable was closed. Both roofs were also reshingled with wood shingles. At the time of designation, the building's original clapboards were concealed by asbestos shingles, except on the rear gables and sides of the dormers where the clapboards were replaced in conjunction with the work on the roof in 1994. As a security measure, the windows and the large opening where the former studio addition was removed are sealed with wood.

Report prepared by *Gale Harris*
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NOTES

1. This section on Lewis Latimer's early life and career is based on Glennette Tilley Turner, *Lewis Howard Latimer* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:Silver Burdett Press, Inc. 1991); *Blueprint for Change: The Life and Times of Lewis Latimer,* ed. Janet M. Schneider and Bayla Singer (New York: Queens Borough Public Library, 1995); and the materials on Lewis Latimer in the Long Island Division, Queens Borough Public Library and the Middleton "Spike" Harris Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library, Box 28, folders 1-12.

2. George Latimer was the subject of a famous fugitive slave case which inspired John Greenleaf Whittier's poem "Virginia to Massachusetts" and the first published writings of Frederick Douglass.

3. For Hiram Maxim and the United States Electric Lighting Company see *Blueprint*, 35, 65-69; "Hiram Stevens Maxim," *Dictionary of American Biography*; P. Fleury Mottelay, *The Life and Work of Sir Hiram Maxim* (London: J. Lane, 1920); Dolf L. Goldsmith, *The Devil's Paintbrush: Sir Hiram Maxim's Gun* (Toronto: Collector Grade Publications, 1989; H.S. Maxim, *My Life* (London and New York, 1915); Robert D. Friedel and Paul Israel, *Edison's Electric Light: Biography of an Invention* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 115, 193-194.

4. Lewis H. Latimer, 1911 logbook, page "Nov. 16." Lewis H. Latimer wrote a brief account of his life in two yearbooks dated 1911 and 1912. Latimer turned the books upside down so that the pre-printed dates at the bottom of the pages appear in reverse chronological order. The original books are in the collection of Dr. Winifred Latimer Norman, currently held in the Queens Borough Public Library. A photographic copy is available in the "Spike" Harris Collection, Box 28, folder 4.

5. This section on the early development of arc lighting is based on Friedel and Israel, 192-194; *Blueprint*, 70; "Lighting," *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, ed. William Bridgwater and Elizabeth J. Sherwood, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1959), 1134.

6. On incandescent lighting see "Lighting"; Friedel and Israel, passim; "Thomas Alva Edison," *Dictionary of American Biography*, ed. Dumas Malone *et al.* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964).

7. Throughout 1879, Edison in Menlo Park, Maxim in Bridgeport, William Edward Sawyer in New York, and Joseph Swan in England, and their research teams, had labored to produce the first workable incandescent lamp. Many improvements were still needed to make lamps viable for commercial production and in the next few years the inventors that had been working on the incandescent light continued to do so, each hoping to make a discovery that would provide his company with the technological edge to control the newly emerging electric lighting market.

8. This section is based on *Trow's New York City Directory* (New York: John F. Trow, 1880-82); Turner, 34-40; *Blueprint*, 37-39, 61-71; Friedel and Israel, 115-117, 155-158; United States Patent Office, Patent no. 247,097, Joseph V. Nichols and Lewis H. Latimer, "Electric Lamp," Sept. 13, 1881; Patent no. 255,212, J. Tregoning and L.H. Latimer, "Globe Supporter for Electric Lamps," Mar. 21, 1882; Patent no. 252,386, Lewis H. Latimer, Process for Manufacturing Carbons, Jan. 17, 1882.

9. *Blueprint*, 38.

10. Ibid.

11. For Latimer's involvement with the United States Electric Lighting Company's electrification projects see, Latimer, 1911 Logbook, pages "Nov. 16," "Nov. 15," "Nov. 14," "Nov. 13;" *Blueprint*, 38-39; Turner, 41-46.

12. Latimer, 1911 Logbook, page "Nov. 16."

13. For Latimer's years with the Edison Electric Company and General Electric see, Turner, 47-60; *Blueprint*, 41-43, 71-77; Leonard S. Reich, *The Making of American Industrial Research: Science and Business at G.E. and Bell, 1876-1926* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 42-82.

14. On Latimer's writings and role in the early civil rights movement see Turner, 66-68, 75-86; and the copies of Latimer's correspondance in the "Spike" Harris Collection, box 28, folder 3.

15. Quoted in Turner, 78. Latimer encountered employment discrimination because of his race throughout his career; see *Blueprint*, 45-46; Turner, 99-101; and Latimer, 1911 logbook, "Nov. 13," "Nov. 12."

16. Quoted from Claude McKay, "The Negro Historical Society of New York," an unpublished essay prepared for the WPA New York Writers Project [typescript in the Schomburg Collection] by Christabel Gough in her testimony on behalf of the Society for the Architecture of the City in support of the designation of the Latimer House, February 14, 1995. See also Arthur Schomburg, *Racial Integrity: A Plea for the Establishment of a Chair of Negro History in Our Schools and Colleges, etc* (New York: Negro Society for Historical Research, 1913), 16-19. An international organization founded by John Edward Bruce, Arthur Schomburg, David Fulton, and William Ernest Braxton, with members in Africa, Europe, and North and South America, the Society owned a collection of 300 books and pamphlets relating to black history that were exhibited in 1925 at 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library. This exhibit led to the purchase of Schomburg's personal collection and the establishment of "the Negro Division" of the New York Public Library, now the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

17. For the Latimer's residences in Manhattan see *Trow's* 1880-1892; *Atlas of the City of New York and Part of the Bronx* (New York: E. Robinson, 1885), pls. 14, 18. The African-American community in the West 30s was displaced in the early 1900s by the escalating land values brought on by the development of Pennsylvania Station. See Landmarks Preservation Commission, *St. Philip's Protestant Episcopal Church Designation Report*, prepared by Charles Savage (LP-1846) (New York: City of New York, 1993), 5.

18. *Lain's Brooklyn Directory for the Year Ending May 1 ...* (Brooklyn: Lain & Co. 1893-1902); *Atlas of the City of Brooklyn, N.Y.* (N.Y. :E. Robinson, 1886), pl. 5; *Atlas of the City of Brooklyn* (Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley, 1893). For an account of the African-American presence in Fort Greene, see Fort Greene Landmarks Preservation Committee, "Historic Fort Greene: A Proposal for the Designation of Fort Greene as an Historic District," 1973, III 8-10, V-84.

19. This material on turn-of-the-century African-Americans in Flushing is based on Mable Carleton, *Black Education in New York State from Colonial to Modern Times* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1979), 234-235.

20. This information regarding the many black leaders who made up the Latimers' circle of friends is based on interviews Dr. Winifred Norman conducted with Mrs. Frances Cohen on June 7, 1965, and Dr. Robert Leslie Oct. 29, 1969. Dr. Norman's notes from these interviews are currently on loan to the Long Island Collection of the Queens Borough Library.

21. For the Latimers' residence in Flushing see Cityscape Foundation, Inc. "The Lewis H. Latimer House," Report prepared by Michael Henry Adams and Christabel Gough, 1992 (available in the LPC, Lewis H. Latimer House Research File); Vincent F. Seyfried and William Asadorian, *Old Queens, New York, in Early Photographs* (New York: Dover Press, 1991), 8; Queens County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 705, p. 417; Liber 848, p. 118; Liber 1296, p. 300; *Atlas of the Third Ward of the Borough of Queens, City of New York* (Brooklyn: Belcher Hyde, 1904), vol. 2, pl. 6.

22. *Flushing Directory* (Poughkeepsie: Boyd Directory Co., 1889). The property was part of a six-block long tract between Kissena Boulevard (then Jamaica Avenue) and Colden Avenue which was mapped and lotted for Edward Spooner and John Tousey in 1886.

23. New York City, Department of Buildings, Queens, alteration permit, 620-1912.

24. Queens County, Office of the Surrogate, Estate of Lewis H. Latimer, file no. 1239-1936.

25. _____. Estate of Louise R. Latimer, file no. 5104-1963; Cityscape, "Latimer House," s.v. "Winifred Norman's Recollections."

26. This account of the efforts to save the Lewis Latimer House is based on "Souvenir Journal of the Lewis H. Latimer Fund Celebration of Achievements Luncheon," Oct. 24, 1992 (available in the LPC, Lewis H. Latimer House Research File); Liza Jaipaul, "A Drive is on to Save Historic House," *Daily News*, July 25, 1988; Joseph P. Fried, "A Campaign to Remember an Inventor," *New York Times*, Aug. 6, 1988; "Group is Seeking to Have Inventor's Home Landmarked," *Amsterdam News*, July 30, 1988; Esther Iverem, "Latimer House Finds A New Home," *Newsday*, Nov. 14, 1988; John Marzulli "Moving Day for an Historic House," *Daily News*, Dec. 14, 1988; "Latimer House Ground-Breaking," *Queens Historical Society Newsletter* , Winter 1994/95, 5. William Asadorian of the Queens Borough Public Library initially learned of the impending demolition and notified Tom Lloyd of the Storefront Museum who contacted Rev. Mitchell; they in turn notified Winifred and Gerald Norman.

27. See Department of General Services, Division of Design and Construction Management, "Lewis H. Latimer House Study and Restoration, Capital Project PV467-II, Preliminary Report" prepared by Joseph Pell Lombardi and Associates, 1995. Funds for the restoration have been provided by the Queens Borough President, Claire Shulman.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of the building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Lewis H. Latimer House has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest, and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Lewis H. Latimer House was the home for twenty-six years of the African-American inventor who is renowned for his work and writings in the field of electric lighting; that this Queen Anne style frame house, built c. 1887 to 1889 for Emma and William Sexton and acquired by Lewis and Mary Wilson Latimer in 1902, was the only house the Latimers owned in New York; that the house not only offered a comfortable home for the Latimer family but also was a meeting place for prominent African-American civic and cultural leaders; that Latimer himself designed two additions to the house; that Latimer worked with Alexander Graham Bell in the preparation of the patent application for the telephone in 1876, and in early 1880s as an engineer with the United States Electric Lighting Company he was responsible for numerous inventions, including his most important discovery, a method of producing long-lasting carbon filaments that made the production of light bulbs both practical and affordable for the average household; that he was hired as a patent expert by Thomas Alva Edison around 1885 and worked in the legal department of the Edison Electric Lighting Company, later the General Electric Company, for over twenty years; that Latimer was a prominent member of the African-American community in turn-of-the-century New York and an early advocate of civil rights and black cultural identity; that as Latimer's long-time home this house remains the most significant site in New York City associated with Latimer; and that it was owned by the Latimer family until 1963.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Lewis H. Latimer House, 34-41 137th Street, Flushing, Queens, and designates Tax Map Block 4953, Lot 1 in part consisting of the parcel of land bounded by a line described as follows: beginning at the corner formed by the intersection of the westerly side of Leavitt Street (60 feet wide) with the northerly side of 137th Street (60 feet wide); running thence northwesterly along the northerly side of 137th Street 252 feet 5⅛ inches to a point; thence easterly along a line which forms an interior angle of 54°-59'-45" with the last mentioned course 28 feet 4½ inches to a point; thence easterly along a line which forms an interior angle of 154°-59'-45" with the last mentioned course 193 feet 7¼ inches to the westerly side of Leavitt Street; thence southerly along the westerly side of Leavitt Street 135 feet 6⅛ inches to the point or place of beginning, Borough of Queens, as its related Landmark Site.

Fig. 1: Lewis H. Latimer House, c. 1920
Latimer-Norman Family Collection

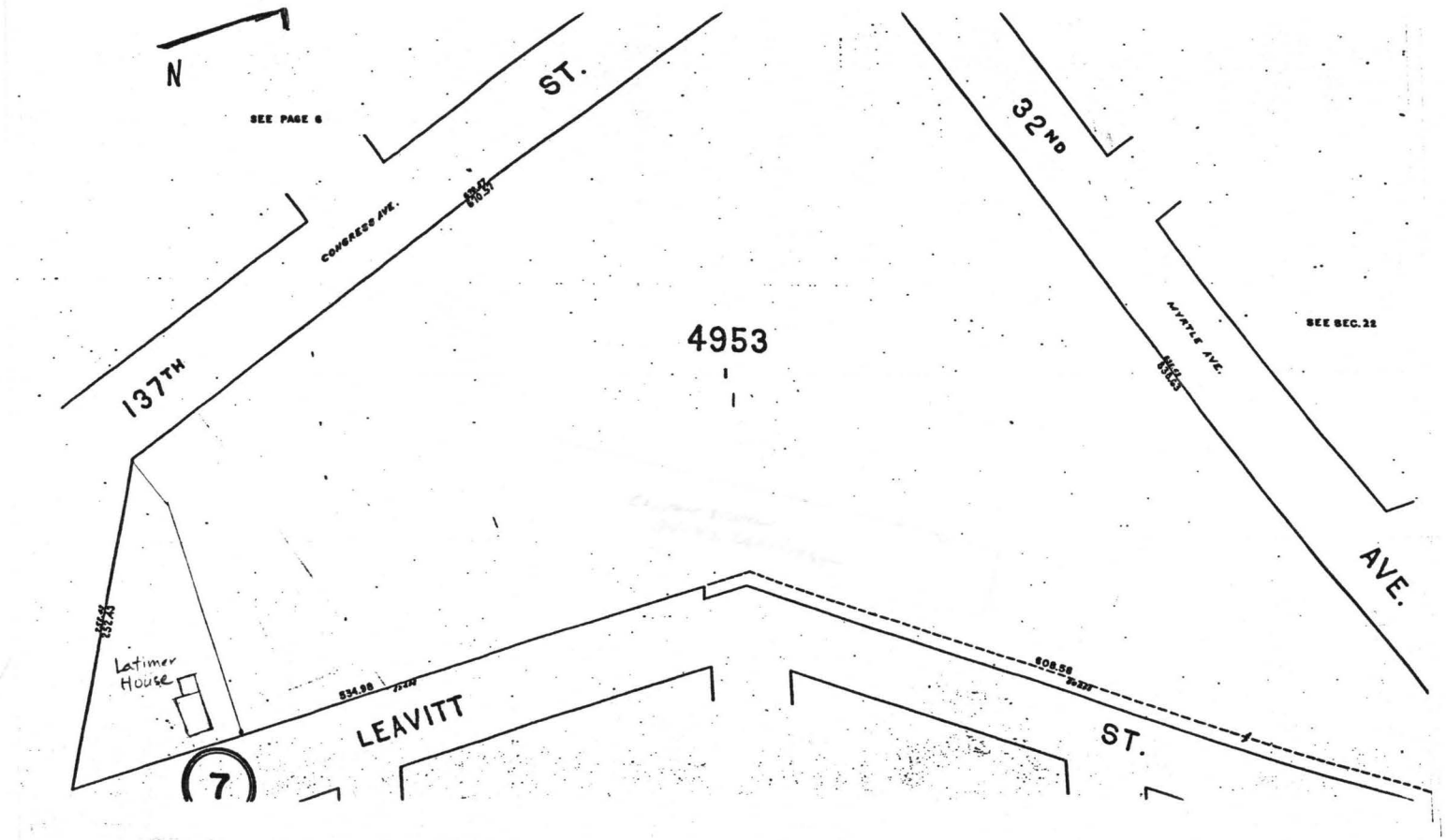

Fig. 2: Landmark Site, Lewis H. Latimer House
34-41 137th Street, Flushing, Queens
City of New York, Office of the Surveyor

Fig. 3: Portrait of Lewis H. Latimer, 1882
Queens Borough Public Library

Fig. 4: Brush Arc Lights on Broadway, 1880

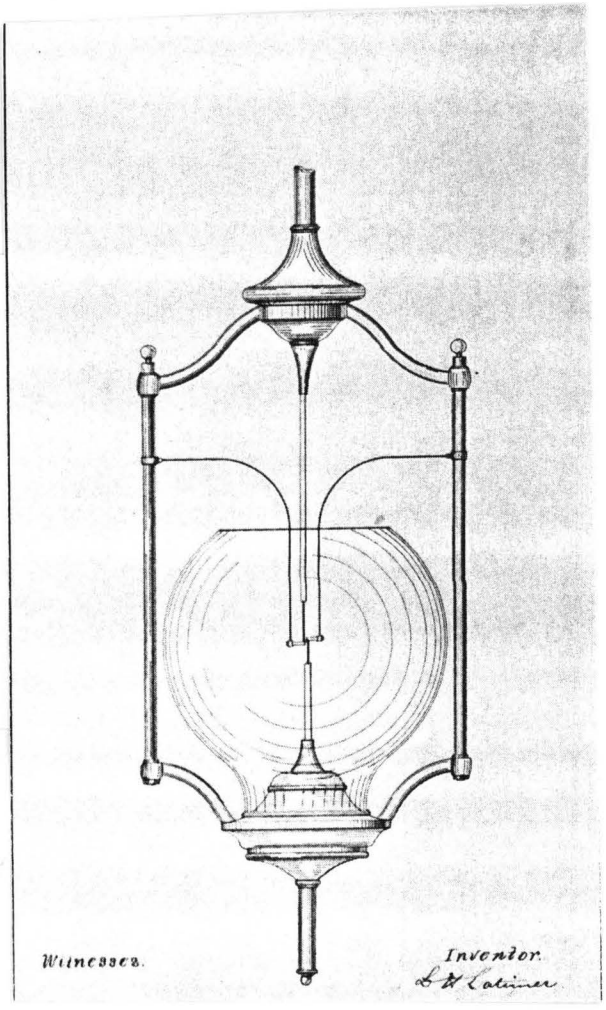

Fig. 5: Lewis H. Latimer
Design for an Arc Lamp, 1881
Queens Borough Public Library

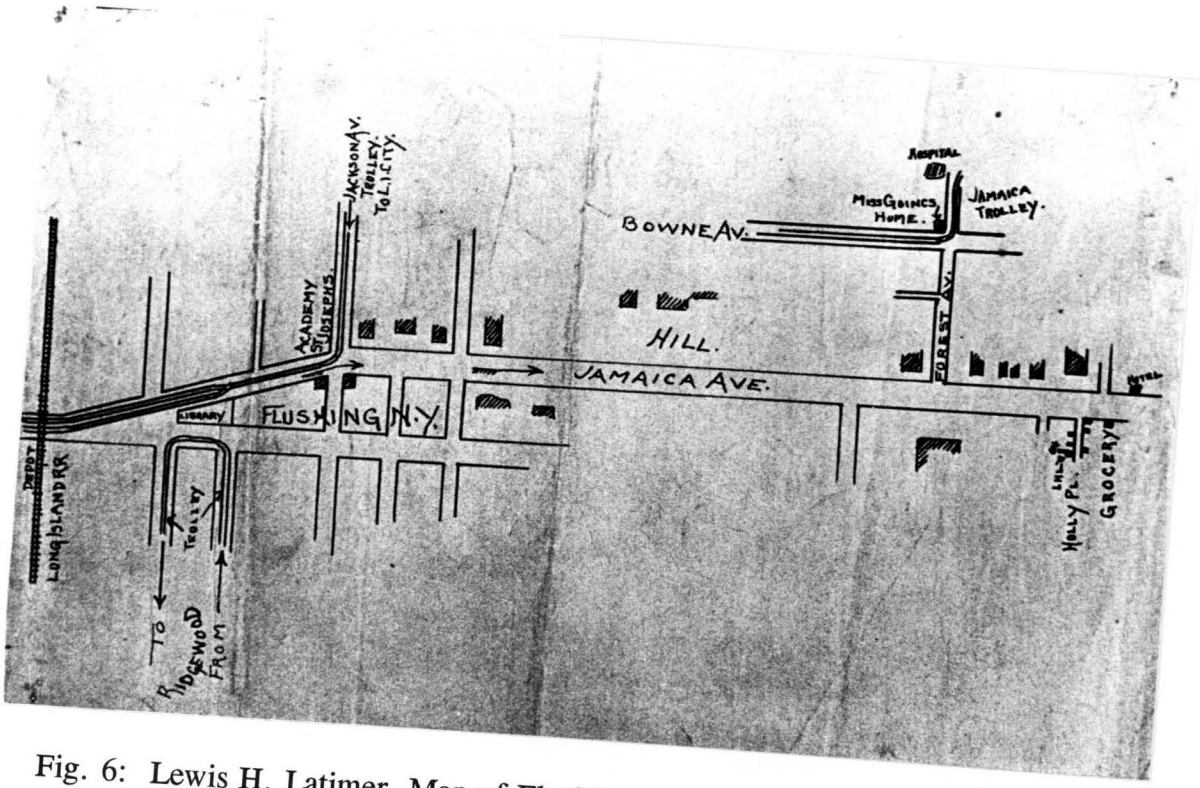

Fig. 6: Lewis H. Latimer, Map of Flushing showing location of 64 Holly Street
Queens Borough Public Library

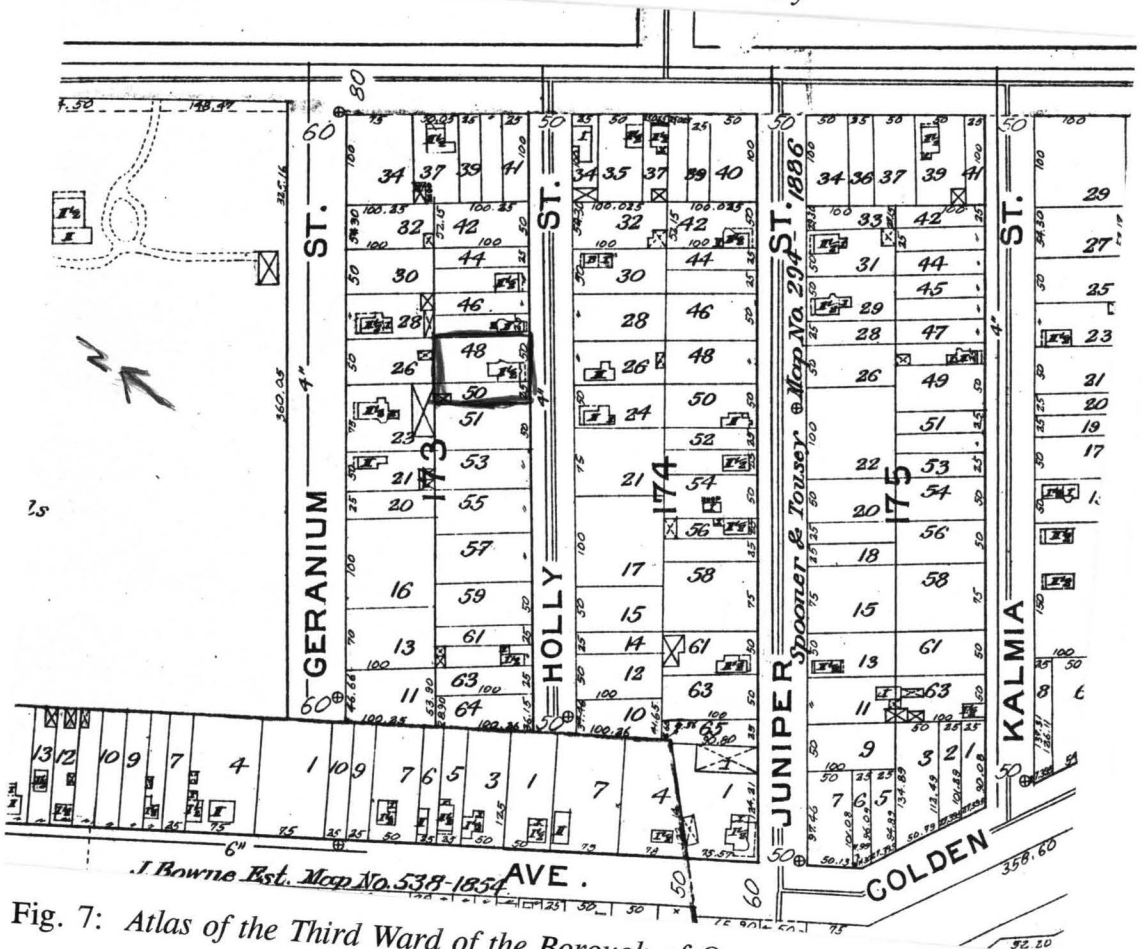

Fig. 7: *Atlas of the Third Ward of the Borough of Queens, City of New York* (Belcher Hyde, 1904), vol. 2, pl. 6.

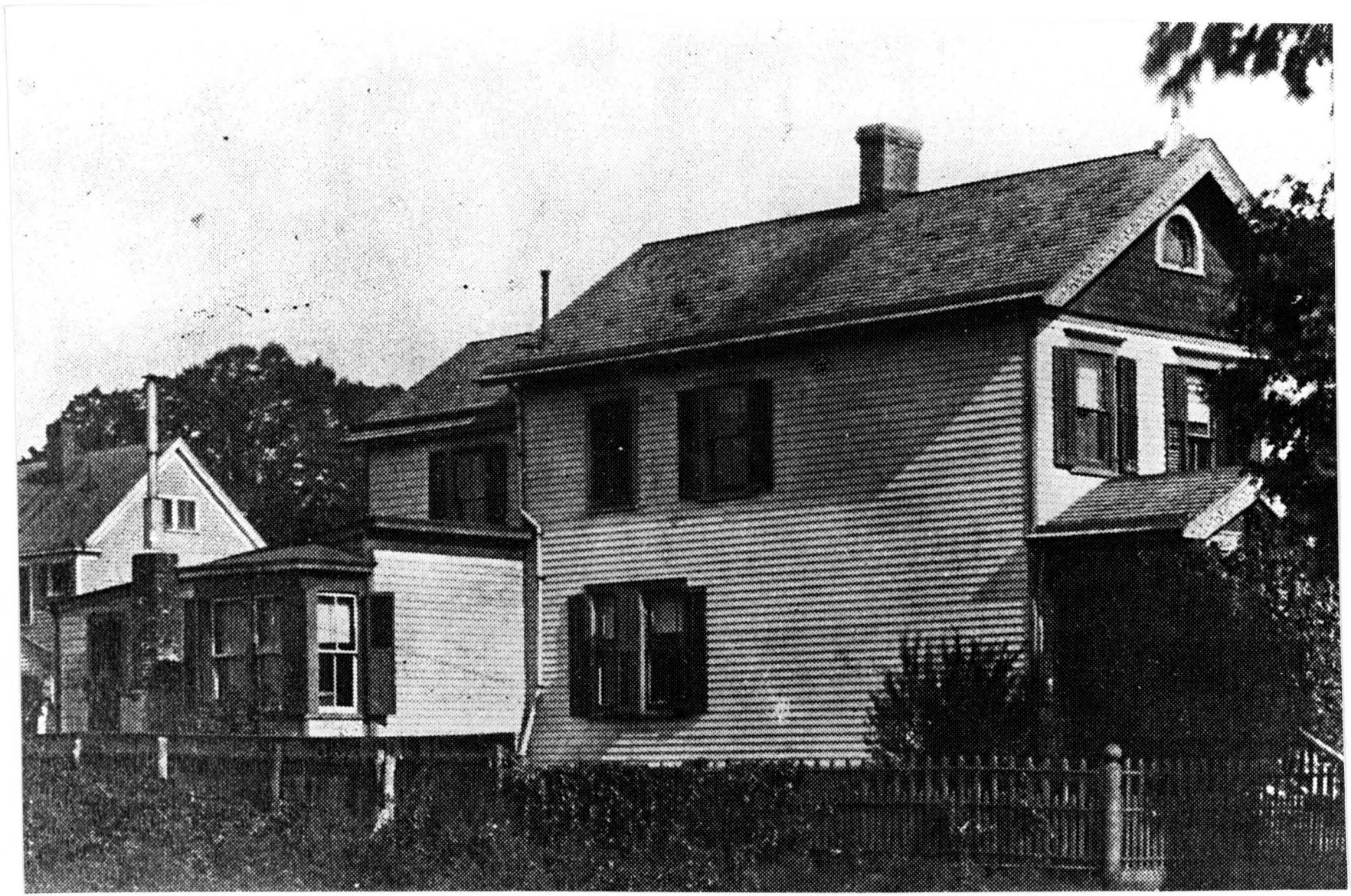

Fig. 8: Lewis H. Latimer House, c. 1902-1912, showing studio addition
Queens Borough Public Library

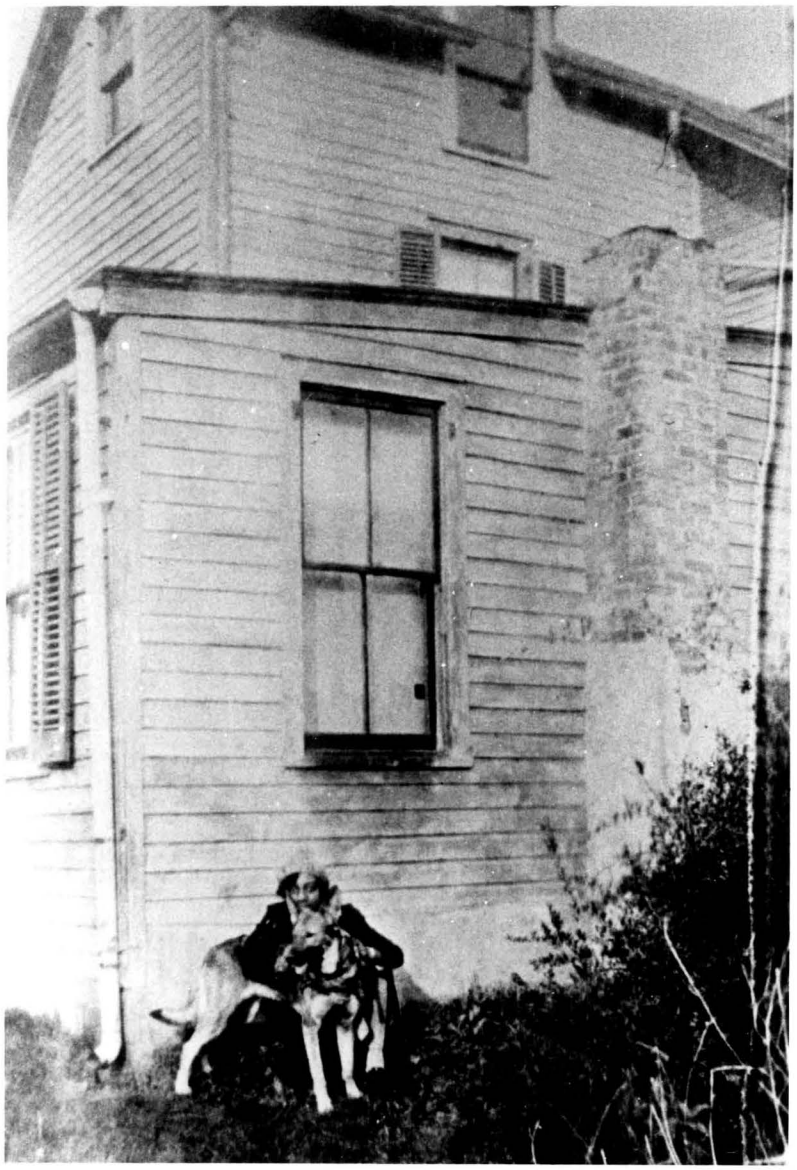

Fig. 9: Lewis H. Latimer House, c. 1930?
Photo showing a family friend posed beside the studio addition
Latimer-Norman Collection

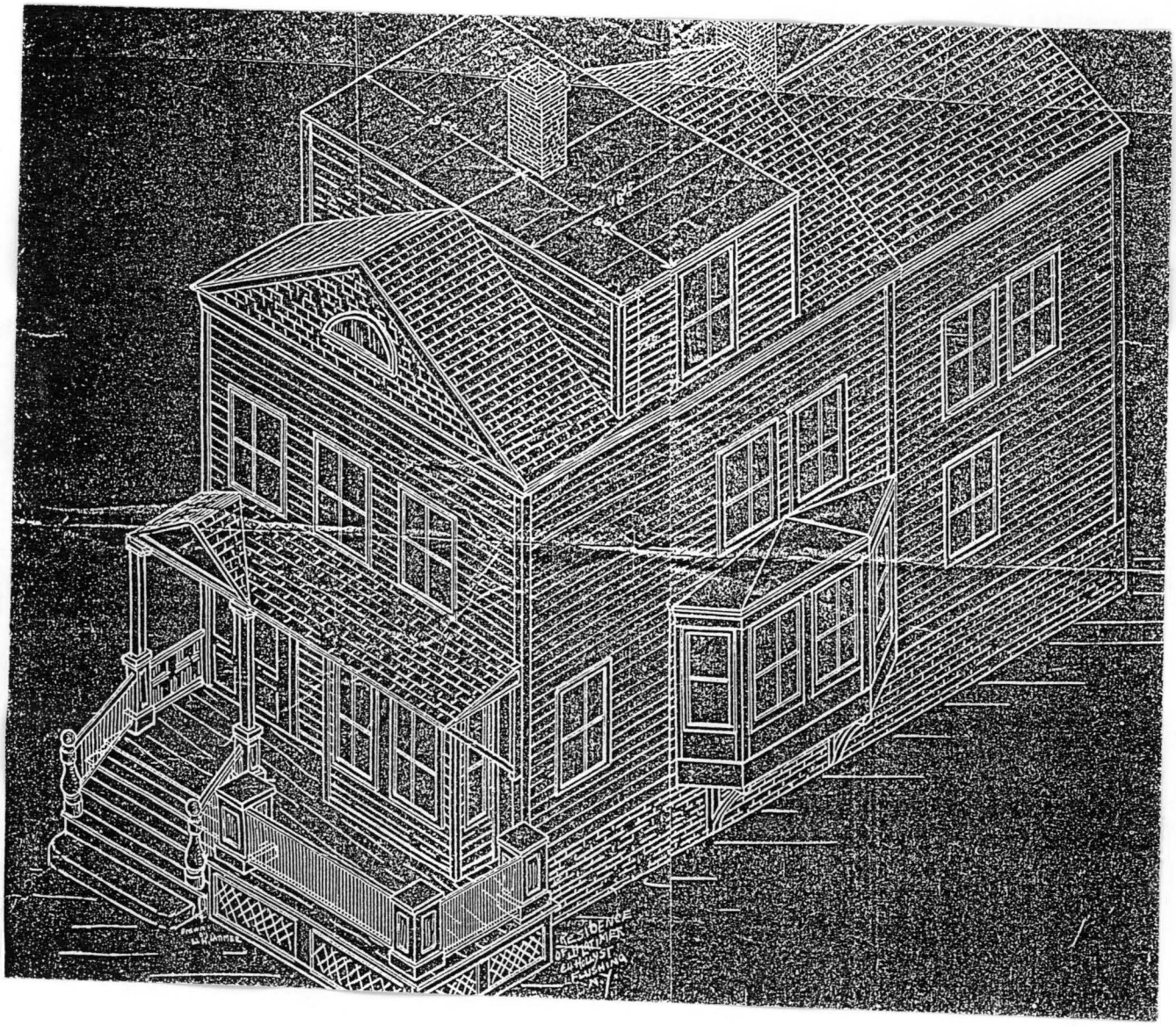

Fig. 10: Lewis H. Latimer
Axonometric Drawing for 1912 Alteration
Queens Borough Public Library

Fig. 11: Lewis H. Latimer House being moved from 84 Holly Avenue, December 13, 1988
Photo: Janet O'Hare

Fig. 12: Lewis H. Latimer House, 34-41 Flushing Avenue (looking southwest)
Photo: Carl Forster

Fig. 13: Lewis H. Latimer House, 34-41 Flushing Avenue (looking northwest)
Photo: Carl Forster

Fig. 14: Lewis H. Latimer House, 34-41 Flushing Avenue (from rear)
Photo: Carl Forster

Fig. 15: Lewis H. Latimer House, 34-41 Flushing Avenue
Brackets beneath the over-hanging eaves on the main portion of the house
Photo: Carl Forster