
Riverside Buildings

24-30 Joralemon Street
(Block 258, Lot 17)
Borough of Brooklyn

Archaeological Memo Report



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Prepared for Joralemon Realty
Prepared by Joan H. Geismar, Ph.D., LLC
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ARCHAEOLOGICAL MEMO REPORT

To: Michael Berfield/Joralemon Realty
From: Joan H. Geismar/ Joan H. Geismar, Ph.D., LLC
Re: Riverside Buildings, 24-30 Joralemon Street, Borough of Brooklyn
Report Date: January 2009

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with a conversation with Amanda Sutphin, Directory of Archaeology for the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (NYCLPC), and an agreement with Michael Berfield of Joralemon Realty, this memo report presents the findings of research conducted to develop a disturbance analysis of the courtyard of the above-referenced Riverside Buildings in the Borough of Brooklyn (Figure 1). While a memo report, by definition, is less detailed than a 1A documentary study, the analysis required reconstructing the site's development history to determine how its development over time might be reflected in potential archaeological resources. In particular, it addressed how construction of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (BQE) in the early 1950s related to the site's development history. To construct this elevated highway, the western segment of what had been a U-shaped apartment complex erected at Joralemon Street and Columbia Place in 1890 was demolished. The three, 6-story apartment building complex was the work of Alfred T. White, a philanthropist and tenement reformer. The subsequent inclusion of these buildings in the Brooklyn Heights Historic District, designated in 1965 (e.g., Diamonstein 1998:488), provided Landmark status to the remaining components of this ground-breaking, multifamily, housing complex that is still cohesive if truncated.

The focus of the study was the courtyard of the Riverside Buildings, that is, the area of potential effects (APE), where the NYCLPC has approved construction of a one-story, underground garage (Figure 2). The proposed construction will entail replacing the existing courtyard with a garden atop the new subterranean garage structure. The courtyard, a unique feature of the late-19th-century building complex, was once the location of a band stand for summertime concerts and elements of the original fountain remains at this writing (see Figures 3 and 4 for photos of the project area and the existing condition of the courtyard). In the past, clothesline strung from Y-shaped wooden supports circled the yard for the use of tenants on the three lower floors¹ (Figure 5). Trees of undetermined age stand throughout the yard at this writing. At present, the paved courtyard, its western limit now defined by the city's permanent right-of-way and the wall of the northbound lane of the BQE, no longer displays its original, somewhat bucolic character. However, maps and a newspaper photo indicate that construction of the expressway directly impacted only the southwest part of the original courtyard (see Figure 6 for a 1953 newspaper photo documenting construction of the BQE on the west side of the courtyard after demolition of the western segment of the building complex).

METHOD

To conduct a disturbance analysis of the yard, the site's development history was reconstructed from historical maps spanning the years 1766 to 1886 and information found in Henry Stiles'

¹ The tenants on the three upper floors used rooftop clotheslines (Hoogenbaum 1989:9).

three-volume *History of Brooklyn* (1867-1870). Deeds, Brooklyn City Directories, files in the Topographic Bureau of the Brooklyn Borough President's Office, and the holdings of the Brooklyn Historical Society were also researched. A table created from this information documents the site's development history (Table 1), as does a graphic representation of this history, albeit one that is very complicated and admittedly somewhat speculative² (see Figure 16). In addition, Michael Berfield of Joralemon Realty provided a geotechnical report that included soil-boring and test-pit data that offered limited but useful information about the courtyard's subsurface conditions (URS 2004).

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

The site's development history begins when Philip Livingston, at the time a resident of New York City, and later a signer of the Declaration of Independence, purchased the property from the Remsen estate prior to 1762³ and erected a molasses distillery. Situated on the low-lying shore of an East River cove, the distillery building, as depicted the following year on the Ratzler map (Ratzler 1767; see Figure 7), utilized only the northern portion of the project site. Although the city of New York subsequently granted Livingston the right to adjacent land under water between the high and low water mark (Stiles 1867:73), an 1801 survey of the property does not document any land reclamation (Loss 1801; see Figure 8).

According to Stiles, Livingston's molasses distillery was confiscated by the British during the Revolutionary War to produce "spruce-beer" for the wounded (Stiles 1867:307-308). Also during the war, the British abandoned a war ship driven ashore "at the foot of Joralemon Street," but its exact location remains unknown. While scuttled ships sunk to serve as cribbing for landfill are archaeologically documented (e.g., Geismar 1983), an account by John Cole cited in Stiles suggests this was not the fate of this particular hulk. After the war, it seems that Cole used wood from the abandoned (and exposed) ship's keel to make a pair of wheel hubs for a man traveling by wagon to Kentucky (Stiles 1869:131-132).

Livingston dies in 1778 and, in 1787, his distillery is destroyed by fire (Stiles 1869:131). After this, the site appears to remain vacant until it is sold by Livingston's heirs and executors to Hezekiah B. Pierrepont in 1803 (LD 382:443). Pierrepont erects what Stiles describes as "the celebrated 'Anchor Gin' distillery" on the site, a complex that includes several wooden storehouses and a windmill erected on filled land west of the project (Stiles 1869:307 fn; Figure 9). An 1823 survey in the Brooklyn Historical Society collection depicts the distillery site and its features, which include a distillery building and a cow barn on the project site (Figure 10). This survey, and the 1819 map of the Village of Brooklyn that serves as the base of the Commissioners' Map in the Topographic Bureau of the Brooklyn Borough President's Office (1819-1968; not illustrated), indicate that Pierrepont introduced landfill west of the site between 1803 and 1819. The site is also depicted in a lithograph published in 1828 (Milbert 1828; Figure 11), although by this time the distillery had been sold and converted into a spermaceti (candle) factory (LD 14:331; Stiles:1869:131).

² Variation in the degree of map accuracy, often an unknown, makes an exact placement virtually impossible.

³ Cited in the 1803 deed to Hezekiah Pierrepont (LD 382:443).

Table 1. RIVERSIDE BUILDINGS Chronology of Site's Industrial Development

Year	Deed	Grantor	Grantee	Comments
1706	5/8/1706 5:96	Brooklyn Patentees	Joris Remsen	Site in Remsen family, possibly until 1762; Remsen family members still part of site block until 1825
By 1762	-----	Joris Remsen	Philip Livingston, the Signer	Noted in 1803 deed to Hezekiah B. Pierrepont (LD 382:443)
1766	-----	-----	-----	A Mr. Jones builds Livingston a molasses distillery on the site 1766 (Stiles 1867:397 fn; Ratzler 1767); British produce spruce-beer during Revolutionary War (Stiles 1869:307-308); Livingston dies 1778
1785	7/5/1785 6:381, 388 (Rec 1787)	Trustees of Philip Livingston, Dec'd/ Daniel McCormick	Daniel McCormick/ Philip Philip, Walter, William and Thomas Livingston	Trustees of Livingston will, Philip Philip, Isaac, Robert C. Livingston, sell to Daniel McCormick who, the same day, sells to Philip Philip, Walter, William, and Thomas Livingston; distillery mentioned in deed as is act of 2/25/1785 relating to high water mark (see LD 382:443). Distillery burns in 1787 (Stiles 1867:307). ["yard of former distillery" cited in 1803 deed (LD 382:445)]
1787- 1802	-----	-----	-----	Philip Philip Livingston dies 4/1787. Will, published in form of law, includes naming exec'rs for Island of Jamaicaand "All that land formerly in the estate of Philip Livingston, Esq, dec'd, grandfather of Philip Henry Livingston wherein a distillery was formerly erected in the town of Brooklyn." Suggests distillery not yet rebuilt.
1803	6/28/1803 382:443 (Rec 1854)	John Livingston & Philip H. Livingston of Rhinebeck, Exc'rs of Philip Philip Livingston (dec'd)	Hezekiah B. Pierrepont Of New York City, merchant	Hezekiah Pierrepont builds a new distillery "Pierrepont's Anchor Gin Distillery"; discontinued 1819 (Stiles 1869:131)
1824	4/15/1824 14:331	Hezekiah B. Pierrepont	Jethro Mitchell	Deed mentions mill, distillery, stores, fences etc; becomes spermaceti (candle) factory(Stiles 1869:131, 220)
1831	10/4/1831 31:442	Jethro Mitchell	John G. Hicks, Jeffery Smith, Distillers, and John Schenck, Merchant	Deed cites lot, land under water, and wharf of property formerly known as the New York Anchor Gin Distillery Co. Becomes a distillery again, and, one year, later, is again destroyed by fire (Stiles 1869:237) but is rebuilt
By 1855	-----	-----	-----	Grain Distillery [Schenck & Rutherford] (Perris 1855)
1856- 1866	-----	Ann Smith, heir of Jeffery Smith, et al	James Rutherford & William J. Schenck	1856-1865 several deeds to Rutherford & Schenck
1866	3/6/1866 704:165	Rutherford & Schenck	John A Livingston & Richard W. Hurlburt	Sugar refinery by 1867 (Brooklyn City Directories 1867-1868)
1877	5/1/1877 1279:246, 250, 253	Rutherford & Schenck	Burger, Hurlburt, Healy & Livingston	
1880 - 1884	-----	-----	-----	"Livingston's Steam Sugar Refinery" (Bromley 1880; Robinson 1886). Last listing 1884 in Brooklyn City Directories.
1884	9/12/1884 1573:165, 167	Firm of Burger, Hurlburt, Healy & Livingston	Frank H. Platt	
1886	3/5/1886 1654:348	Frank H. Platt	Thomas Minford	1886 Robinson still documents the sugar refinery
1889	1/4/1889 1853:485	Thomas Minford	William A. White	William A. White was the brother of Alfred T. White, builder of the Riverside Buildings in 1890 (NY Times 1921)

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1889	1/4/1889 1853:485	Thomas Minford	William A. White	William A. White was the brother of Alfred T. White, builder of the Riverside Buildings in 1890 (NY Times 1921)

In 1831, the property was sold to John G. Hicks, Jeffery Smith, distillers, and John Schenck, merchant (LD31:442), and again became a distillery. Despite another fire in 1832 (Stiles 1869: 237), it remained a distillery until 1866. In that year, the property was acquired by yet another Livingston (LD 704:165) who opened "Livingston's Steam Sugar Refinery" (e.g., Brooklyn City Directories 1867), its function from 1867 until 1884, when it again changed hands.

Although the refinery is shown on the 1886 Robinson map (see Figure 15), it is last listed in the 1884 Brooklyn City directory. In 1889, William A. White purchased the site (LD1853:485;) and, in 1890, his brother Alfred T. White⁴ built the Riverside Buildings, his third and most successful Brooklyn tenement housing project (Hoogenbaum 1989:9; see Table 1 for details of the site's ownership and development history).

The earliest maps available (Ratzer 1767 and Loss 1801; Figures 7 and 8) indicate or suggest original conditions, while subsequent maps document the episodic land reclamation that occurred west of the site and directly on its southern part (e.g., Stiles 1869 purportedly depicting 1816; Anonymous 1823; Perris 1855; Dripps 1869; Bromley 1880; Robinson 1886; see Figures 9, 10 and 12 to 15).⁵

The site's development is illustrated in Figure 16, a graphic that incorporates information from all the historical maps noted above except the 1869 Dripps and the Stiles map purportedly depicting 1816 (Stiles 1869). The graphic, which is very complex, indicates the approximate location and relationship of the site's known structures. This includes the somewhat speculative location of Livingston's original U-shaped molasses distillery on the 1767 Ratzer map and buildings shown on the 1823 survey of Pierrepont's multi-structured gin distillery complex. Most prominent in this figure is the Schenck & Rutherford "Grain Distillery." Established in 1831, it is depicted on the 1855 Perris map, an insurance map remarkable for its detail and relative accuracy.

The site's industrial complexes expanded overtime and structures ultimately covered much of it. However, a pocket of historic development potentially remains relatively pristine. This is where remnants of a Pierrepont distillery building, identified as a cow barn (Anonymous 1823; see Figure 10), and a later kiln site from the 1831 Schenck & Rutherford distillery shown on the 1855 map of the complex (Perris 1855; Figure 12) might remain as viable archaeological features. There may also be mid-18th-century fill brought in to prepare the site for development. In addition, landfill structures, particularly those introduced near or beyond the historic low water mark on the southern part of the site, and the landfill itself, could be of archaeological significance (it should be noted that map data for the original shoreline are variable).

SUBSURFACE CONDITIONS

As mentioned earlier, soil boring and test pit data, eight of the former and three of the latter, were made available for this analysis (see Soil Boring and Test Pit Locations URS 2004; Figure 17). However, the boring method used, that is, sampling at 5-foot intervals in the upper levels, did not address archaeological concerns. The borings did, however, document 8.5 to 18.5 feet of

⁴ The relationship is mentioned in a 1921 *New York Times* article about his \$15,000,000 estate that documents White's death by drowning in an upstate ice skating accident (NY Times 1921).

⁵ An archaeological report prepared by Ralph Solecki (1981) indicates that land west of the project site was reclaimed from the East River in about 1846 (Solecki 1981:120). Another report, this one by Raber et al., also notes landfilling in the project vicinity (Raber et al. 1984:22-23), a finding that is borne out by historical maps.

fill, attesting to filling of and around the originally low-lying site (see Figure 17 for a soil boring and test pit location plan coordinated with available shoreline data).

Demolition of former structures is suggested by the presence of brick fragments in the site's fill levels (all but B4, in the northeast corner of the site, document brick fragments in the fill; see Figure 18 for the location of the soil borings and test pits in relation of the site's development). The borings also document subsurface conditions, such as the presence of clay and organic silts, that suggest land reclamation (e.g., B7; see soil boring logs this report). The three test pits were meant to determine the depth of existing foundations, that is, the foundations of the north and east components of the Riverside Buildings. However, although the machine-excavated pits extended down 10 feet, the exact depth of the foundation walls remains undetermined at this writing.

Subsurface testing on the northern edge of an identified area of potential archaeological sensitivity documented about 13.5 feet of fill (B2 and B7). With a water table that ranges from about 11.7 to 12.9 feet below the current ground surface (URS 2004:2-3), testing in the areas of potential sensitivity is viable. It is also warranted since construction as planned entails footings that extend approximately 13 feet below grade (Berfield 2009:personal communication).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Analysis of the proposed underground garage site documented an intensively developed industrial site. Development that began in 1766, and sequentially included a molasses distillery, a gin distillery, a candle manufactory, another gin distillery, and a sugar refinery, ended with construction of the Riverside Buildings, a model apartment complex, in 1890. The most recent development on the site was construction of a retaining wall for the BQE that eliminated the western segment of the original apartment complex. Yet there is reason to believe that remnants of the site's industrial past and evidence of its landfill history could persist beneath the surface of the 1890 courtyard, the location of the proposed garage development (see Figure 19 for potential areas of archaeological sensitivity).

Building foundations that may survive from Livingston's historical 1766 molasses distillery and Pierrepont's 1803 gin distillery would be archaeologically significant for the construction details they could provide. This is also true of kilns associated with the 1831 Schenck & Rutherford gin distillery illustrated on the Perris map. In addition, the use of Livingston's molasses distillery as a brewery during the Revolutionary War suggests that artifacts from the British occupation of Brooklyn may survive. And, finally, features associated with land reclamation, and the fill itself, could determine when the episodes of landfill that created the site as it appears today were introduced and how this land reclamation was accomplished.

To address these identified issues, monitored, machine-assisted (backhoe) testing is recommended. The goal is to determine if potential archaeological features or resources survive, to assess the integrity of any such features and resources, and to document them. Following the established protocol, a scope of work should be developed that provides an archaeological assessment plan for review by the Landmarks Preservation Commission. To allow adequate time for an archaeological assessment and documentation if warranted, and to ensure that construction schedules are not disrupted, it is recommended that testing in identified areas of potential archaeological sensitivity be carried out prior to any construction.

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