

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



797

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property:

historic name The Old Stone House of Brooklyn

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number Washington Park/ JJ Byrne Playground, 3rd Street at 5th Avenue ☐ not for publication

city or town Brooklyn ☒ vicinity

state New York code NY county Kings code 047 zip code 11215

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Kurt A. Purpoint DHP 10/27/11
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

☒ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register.

☐ removed from the National
Register.

☐ other, (explain:) _____

Edson H. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

9.19.12

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

5. Classification**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private
- ☒ public-local
- ☐ public-State
- ☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
- ☐ district
- ☐ site
- ☐ structure
- ☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: Museum

7. Description**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

COLONIAL REVIVAL

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Stone, brick.

roof Metal

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation Sheet

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

Section number 7 Page 1

Description

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn is in the middle of Washington Park/JJ Byrne Park, in the heavily urbanized Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn. The house itself is a two story limestone and brick building with a one and half story brick wing, parged over with stucco; both blocks are set on a single poured concrete foundation. The main block is three bays wide, single pile, with brick stepped gable ends and end chimneys. The wing is two unequal bays wide by one deep, has a gable roof and a brick end chimney. The roofs of both blocks are covered in standing seam metal.

The main elevation of the house has five openings on the stone block and four on the wing. Fenestration is unequal and consists of a large center door and four windows on the stone block and an offset door and three smaller windows on the wing. Window and openings on the first floor of the stone block are surmounted by arches executed in brick voussoirs. Those on the upper floor are surmounted by splayed brick lintels. All four windows on the main elevation of the stone block are of unequal size and flanked by wooden shutters. The openings on the wing do not have decorative surrounds, but they do have similar wooden shutters.

Fenestration on the gable end of the stone block consists of two unequally placed doors and a single upper story window. The door on the lower story is surmounted by a brick arch matching that already described. A flight of external wooden stairs, covered by a small entry porch, accesses a door in the upper half story. The single window opening on the elevation is a smaller, rectangular opening surmounted by a decorative stone lintel and flanked by heavy wooden shutters. Ornamentation on this elevation includes tumbled *muisetanden* (mousetooth) coursing of the brickwork along the roofline, pattern diapering in the brickwork of the stepped gable and iron numbers that read "1699." Fenestration on the rear elevation is more regular and consists of a single offset door and five window openings. Both the upper and lower story openings have decorative surrounds of the type already described (arched on the lower, splayed on the upper) and heavy wooden shutters, also of the type already described. The rear elevation of the wing has three irregularly placed window openings; two light the lower story and one the upper. The gable end of the wing has a pair of large center doors accessing the building's basement and two rectangular windows lighting the upper half story. The gable end of the stone block rises above the wing on this elevation; it does not have any openings, but it does have another set of the "1699" iron letters.

Other contributing features include a surrounding bluestone patio and a small rear work-yard. Both of these features were part of the 1934 City Parks Department design for the house.

Interior

The interior of the Old Stone House is arranged to serve the house's function as a community center, exhibit gallery, recreational facility and educational space. The main room on the first floor is a large exhibit gallery with a tiled floor, plaster walls and ceiling. The main space on the upper story is a large community/educational space. This room has a varnished tongue and groove floor, plaster walls and a plaster ceiling with exposed wooden framing members and truss. At the gable end is a large non-functional partially open hearth fireplace with a faux Delft tile surround. Other rooms include a small office for the staff, storage space and a small kitchenette. The basement of the building contains public bathrooms, a boiler room, and a partially finished storage space.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

Section number 8 Page 1

Significance

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn is historically significant as an early twentieth century commemorative of the Vechte-Cortelyou House and the Revolutionary War Battle of Long Island (Brooklyn).¹ As a commemorative monument, the Old Stone House symbolizes the importance of the Battle of Long Island to the local residents of Brooklyn and is a cultural expression of both their patriotic sentiments and of decades of preservation and commemoration efforts. As an educational center the building serves as a visible focal point for local residents' understanding of the important pre-industrial past of the Park Slope area, which is now heavily urbanized. The creation of the Old Stone House house was part of a series of local efforts to save and commemorate Brooklyn's colonial and Revolutionary War history and heritage and the property has since become an important part of the historic identity of the area. In the late nineteenth century various booster organizations tried unsuccessfully to preserve the original 17th century structure as part of the enshrinement of the Battle of Long Island. The house was ultimately buried by debris and lost from the visible landscape, but efforts to preserve the memory of the battle and promote pride in Brooklyn's Revolutionary heritage continued. During the Great Depression, federal money helped locate and excavate the remains of the house, which were located in a city park. The New York City Parks Department built the nominated Old Stone House in 1935 as a comfort station for James J. Byrne Park. Byrne Park was one of five "Model Playgrounds" in city built by relief workers; each park was tailored to its specific locale in order to maximize the appeal to the local population. Given the long history of the interest in commemorating the site as a Revolutionary War shrine, the city chose to base the new building on the colonial appearance of the Vechte-Cortelyou House. These intentional design choices invested the Old Stone House with symbolic value and gave it its own historical significance as a representation of the value the local residents place on their history.

The nominated building is not a reproduction of the exact form of the 17th century Vechte-Cortelyou house based on archaeological or historical evidence and is not being nominated as a reconstructed property. Although some of the original fabric from the excavated Vechte-Cortelyou house was used in the current building, it was not used in an attempt to accurately execute a copy of a vanished building. The builders incorporated some features of the original house as documented by period photographs—such as the diapered brick pattern, the iron "1699" letters and the stepped parapet gable roof. The interior, however, is not based on historical plans or usage, but is clearly the product of Depression-era public works design ideals. The interior admirably melds the two functions of the building—comfort station and educational center; in this respect, the building is both utilitarian and aesthetic in nature. The Old Stone House was built approximately 250' feet from the site of the original Vechte-Cortelyou and was given a contrived, colonial revival setting of a flagstone patio and small work-yard.

It should also be noted that the house is not being nominated for a direct historical connection to the Revolutionary War or the Battle of Long Island. The original Vechte-Cortelyou played a tactical role in the August, 1776 Battle of Long Island. During the assault American General William Alexander, Lord Stirling, and 400 Continentals from Col. William Smallwood's 1st Maryland Regiment attacked a numerically superior British and German gun position in and around the house; although they ultimately failed to capture the house and drive the British from the field, their valiant rearguard action covered the American retreat and allowed the majority of the American army to escape. The current building has no direct relationship with those historical events, but it was because of the importance of this battle to the Revolutionary War as a whole, and to the local residents of Brooklyn, that the decision was made to excavate the remains of the Vechte-Cortelyou House and construct a memorial to the battle.

¹ The engagement is historically known as the Battle of Long Island, but locals, boosters and some historians have argued that re-naming it the Battle of Brooklyn more accurately reflects where the action took place. At the time of the engagement, August 1776, Brooklyn was a township and tiny village.

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

8 Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria considerations

(mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- ☒ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography**

(cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey
- # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering
- Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1935

Significant Dates

1935

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

Primary location of additional data

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn

Name of Property

Kings County, New York

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than 1 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 585820 4502956
Zone Easting Northing
2

3
Zone Easting Northing
4

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Travis Bowman
organization NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation date August 2, 2011
street & number PO Box 189 telephone 518-237-8643 x 3259
city or town Waterford state New York zip code 12188

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name New York City Department of Parks and Recreation
street & number The Arsenal, Central Park, 830 5th Ave. telephone _____
city or town New York state NY zip code 10065

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

Section number 8 Page 2

Historical Background
Battle of Long Island²

In the summer of 1776, the British assembled a massive invasion force of over 400 ships, 34,000 soldiers and sailors and a large quantity of artillery. With the British navy providing complete control of the waterways around New York, George Washington was well-aware that he would be hard-pressed to properly defend the city. His 23,000 troops were spread too thin over too many areas and most were poorly equipped and too ill-trained to stand-up to British Regulars. The August 27, 1776 Battle of Long Island took place in modern-day Brooklyn and was largest engagement of the Revolutionary War in terms of numbers of soldiers involved on both sides.

British General William Howe landed 15,000 men at Gravesend Bay on August 22, preparing to invade the city. American General Israel Putnam spread his forces along ridge known as Heights of Guan or Guana, a defensible high ground in modern-day Brooklyn. The Guana Heights could be accessed via four passes—Gowanus Road, Flatbush Road, Bedford Pass, and Jamaica Pass. On August 22, Howe feinted towards Flatbush and Bedford, causing Putnam to reinforce his center and right flank. Inexplicably, however, the American far left flank at Jamaica Pass was left undefended. Through intelligence gathered from British officers stationed in New York prior to the war and loyalists in the city, the British learned that the fourth pass was undefended and prepared an invasion plan designed to roll the American flank. British Major General James Grant would attack the American right, commanded by General William Alexander, Lord Stirling, to check the flank and prevent reinforcement against the main assault. A second demonstration of German troops under Hessian General Leopold Philip de Heister would press the Flatbush Pass near the American center under Sullivan. Howe's forces would march secretly through the night, gain the heights by means of the undefended Jamaica Pass and surprise the American left flank, thus completing an encircling move on the defenders. Howe managed to move his troops undetected on the night of August 26/27 and smashed into Putnam's flank on the morning of the 27th. Putnam's men broke under heavy fire and began retreating towards the American fortification lines on the Brooklyn heights. Holding the right, Stirling was ordered to defend the American withdrawal.

As the main body of American troops retreated, Lord Stirling's brigade faced a direct frontal assault from Grant's troops and was slowly being encircled by the approach of Howe on his flank. As the engagement developed, Stirling's 2,000 men were constantly reduced by casualties, while the British numbers grew from reinforcements. Despite being caught in a pincer maneuver, Stirling managed to hold his position in regular battle lines in an open battlefield against overwhelming odds. Unfortunately, British General Cornwallis arrived at Stirling's rear and seized the Vechte-Cortelyou stone house, which commanded the American escape route. Stirling rushed 400 men to face the 2,000 British and German troops and artillery that now held the thick-walled stone house. In order to prevent a complete annihilation of the retreating American lines, Stirling ordered his men to attack the house. The maneuver initially surprised Cornwallis, who shrank back, but the British quickly regrouped. Six times the Marylanders, under William Smallwood, Francis Ware, Thomas Price, Mordecai Gist and General Stirling, charged the stone house, facing withering fire each time; Cornwallis would later report that General Stirling "fought like a wolf." As fresh British reinforcements arrived, the final assault of the Americans finally broke and began to flee for safety. Most of Stirling's command was killed or captured; of the 400 Marylanders, 256 were killed, over 100 were wounded and only 10 managed to make it to safety. Stirling himself was captured by Hessians and later exchanged for a British prisoner of war. While the rearguard action had cost Stirling dearly, the bravery of the general and his men gave the

² The synopsis is drawn from: Barnet Schecter, *The Battle for New York: The City at the Heart of the American Revolution* (Walker & Co.: New York, 2002.); David McCullough, *1776* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 2006.); John J. Gallagher, *The Battle of Brooklyn 1776* (Castle Books: Edison, NJ, 2002.); Henry Whittemore, *The heroes of the American Revolution and their descendants: Battle of Long Island* (The Heroes of the revolution publishing co., 1897) <http://books.google.com>.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

Section number 8 Page 3

American army enough time to retreat—only seven men were lost in the evacuation across the Gowanus Creek, and they all drowned. When Washington witnessed the Marylanders repeatedly charging the stone house, he reportedly remarked to General Putnam “Good God, what brave fellows I must this day lose.” Later, Washington was quoted as saying their heroic stand was an “hour more precious to American liberty than any other.”³ Washington regrouped in Brooklyn Heights with reinforcements, but he quickly realized his position was untenable. Facing the possibility of losing his escape route into Manhattan to the British Navy, Washington needed an opportunity to execute a strategic withdrawal. Luckily, Howe elected to build siege lines rather than pressing the advantage, letting Washington escape into the fog on August 29. Historians, tacticians and armchair generals have been questioning Howe’s decision ever since; had he pushed, he may well have captured or annihilated Washington’s force.

Vechte-Cortelyou house, Farm Era (1699-1853)⁴

The original Vechte-Cortelyou house was built in 1699 by either Claes Arentsen Vechte or his son Henderick Claessen. The Vechte family remained in the house during the British occupation of New York, with several members signing loyalty oaths to King George III in November, 1776. When Nicholas Vechte died in 1779, his grandson Nicholas R Cowenhoven inherited the family farm—with the exception of burial plot, which he split with his aunt, Gerritje Tiebout, Nicholas Vechte’s daughter. In 1790, when he came of age, Nicholas sold the farm to Jacques Cortelyou. Records indicate Jacques purchased the house and farm for the use of his son, Peter J. Cortelyou; the Cortelyous were early European settlers of Nayack in the 1650s and had a family homestead at nearby New Utrecht. Peter committed suicide in 1804 and his son, Jacques, inherited the house and half of the farm from his grandfather in 1815. Jacques and his wife, Ann Maria Fowler, lived in the house until Ann’s death in 1852. Jacques and his family were the last to live in the house. He sold the farm and the stone house to land developer Edwin Litchfield in 1853.

History of the Vechte-Cortelyou House 1853-1935

The house and its surrounding farmlands were in a low, swampy area prone to flooding. After the sale to Litchfield, the Vechte-Cortelyou farm evolved into an open area known as Washington Pond, which became popular with ice skaters; an 1862 lithograph of skaters on Washington Pond showed the house in the background. Despite the popularity of Washington Pond as a recreation area, the real estate in the Park Slope section of Brooklyn was too valuable to remain undeveloped during the rapid urbanization of the Gilded Age. The area around Washington Pond began to be heavily developed in the decades after the Civil War, and Brooklyn historian Henry Stiles was among the first to lament that the Vechte-Cortelyou house would eventually be lost to progress. In his 1869 work, *A history of the city of Brooklyn*, he wrote: “The Cortelyou house, or Vechte, house [is] destined to soon disappear.” Exactly when the house disappeared, however, is unclear in the historic record. The area’s newspapers, from 1859 until December of 1938, indicate the house was likely slowly buried as the area experienced rapid growth and development in the late nineteenth century.

A November 11, 1878 *Buffalo Daily Courier* article noted that a storm had blown the roof off the house around that time.⁵ If this was correct, all the photos of the house with the historic roofline would date to before 1878 (see continuation sheet). The loss of the historic roof was noted in later articles. An April 17, 1882 editorial in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* noted “the old Cortelyou house on Fifth Avenue...It is not much of a ruin in size—only four stone walls, roofless and fast going to pieces.”⁶ Development pressure encroached on the edges of the Washington

³ Ryan Polk, “Holding the Line: The Origin of the “Old State Line” Maryland State Archives, 2005. <http://www.aomol.net/html/oldline.html>.

⁴ William Parry, “Life at the Old Stone House” (William Parry & the First Battle Revival Alliance: Brooklyn, 2000.)

⁵ “Historic Relics in Brooklyn [from] NY Tribune,” *Buffalo Daily Courier*, November 11, 1878. www.fultonhistory.com.

⁶ “Recalling a Historical Event with Which Lafayette was Directly Connected,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 17 1882. www.fultonhistory.com.

United States Department of the Interior
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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

Section number 8 Page 4

Pond area and eventually the flooded swamp was drained—Washington pond became Washington Park. It was the growing popularity of baseball that saved the Vechte-Cortelyou house and the Washington Park from complete urbanization. During the 1860s the Washington Pond area began to host increasingly popular baseball games, including ice baseball, which was played on skates.⁷ With the formal creation of the Brooklyn Base Ball club in 1883, Washington Park (and thus the stone house) became the home field for the club. The Brooklynns, the precursor to the Dodgers, brought capital improvements to Washington Park, including a new grandstand that seated 2,500 people, and a 13' high fence around the whole park. The club also took advantage of the low-lying terrain; Fifth Avenue sloped down almost 45° for twenty-five feet, creating a natural amphitheater that seated an additional 2,000 people. The Vechte-Cortelyou house was used by the team as a clubhouse for storage and changing rooms, and a review of the documentary record showed that the club put a new roof over the structure; a *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* article noted: "the solid, old time building yet remains...though its ancient high roof and dormer windows have been replaced by a more modern roof and the inside partitions have been removed."⁸ The grandstand and seating at Washington Park was expanded to seat 8,000 in 1887, and the 1888 Sanborn insurance map shows the Vechte-Cortelyou house—labeled as "clubhouse"—in the Washington Park ball grounds. The fence and new grandstand caught fire in 1889; the uniforms and equipment of the team, now nicknamed the Bridegrooms, were saved by virtue of the fact they were stored in the stone house. The team ended its lease on the property in 1892 and, despite a petition signed by Brooklyn fans, moved to another location. With the loss of formal baseball, the Vechte-Cortelyou house and Washington Park were once again exposed to development pressures. Within approximately a decade of the team leaving, the house was lost from the visible landscape.

Evidence from period newspaper articles suggests that grading and dumping in the 1890s were most likely responsible for the loss of the Vechte-Cortelyou house. In an 1890 *New York Times* article detailing the 94th birthday of Jacques Cortelyou, the author noted that Jacques "was born in his father's old stone farmhouse, which stood at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Third Street, Brooklyn" and that "a portion of it is still standing and is enclosed in the present Washington Baseball grounds." After the Bridegrooms left, an article published in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in the spring of 1893 spoke to the speed at which Washington Park was filling up: "The old Washington park ball grounds at Fifth avenue and Third street will soon pass out of existence...Work on filling the ground, preparatory to building, was begun a few days ago and soon a row of dwellings will take the place of the park which has several historical connections."⁹ Two weeks later the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* noted: "The energetic builders and contractors have begun the filling up of the old Washington park base ball grounds and if they keep on as rapidly as they have started it will be the matter of only a few months when even Charlie Byrnes [owner of the Brooklyn baseball team] would not recognize the place."¹⁰

In 1895 the State of Maryland undertook formal commemoration efforts of the Battle of Long Island. Like most efforts of the day, however, the focus was on memorialization, not preservation.¹¹ Monument building and the placement of commemorative plaques were the keys to these late nineteenth century efforts. The Maryland chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) paid to place a thirty-nine foot, Stanford White-designed, column on Lookout Hill in Prospect Park to honor Col. Smallwood and the Marylanders. Local efforts consisted of the organizing of the Brooklyn Citizen's Reception Committee, which at first concentrated its efforts on playing good hosts to the Maryland SAR. Col. Loomis Langdon of the Brooklyn Committee sent the Maryland SAR a piece of

⁷ Neil deMause, Phil Lowry, "Washington Park," http://www.covehurst.net/ddyte/brooklyn/washington_park.html.

⁸ "The Old Gowanus Road," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 11, 1887. www.fultonhistory.com.

⁹ "There is Joy in Town For the Brooklyn Ball Tossers Will soon be with Us," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 1, 1893. www.fultonhistory.com.

¹⁰ No Title, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 16, 1893. www.fultonhistory.com.

¹¹ John Pentangelo, "Glory Enough: The Commemoration of the Battle of Brooklyn 1895-1935." MA Thesis. Cooperstown Graduate Program, SUNY Oneonta, 2005.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

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granite from the Vechte-Cortelyou House, which was in turn donated to the Maryland Historical Society. Because the piece of granite was obtained from the house, at least a portion of the structure must have been above-ground or reasonably accessible at that time.

After the Maryland celebrations, the Brooklyn Committee funded two memorials of its own; these were a stone marker on 3rd Ave., at the site believed to be the mass grave of the Marylanders who died in the fighting, and a bronze plaque about the Vechte-Cortelyou House. The latter plaque was not placed on the house itself, but rather on a nearby tailor shop, as a *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* article recorded: "The larger of tablets will be placed on the building on the southwest corner of Third-ave. and Fifth-st. this being the nearest available spot to the site of the old Cortelyou house it is possible to get to-day..."¹² The Vechte-Cortelyou house was visible at the time, but barely so—it was obscured in an empty lot behind a fence. A December, 1896 article of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* noted that "the Vechte house stands directly back of the Fifth avenue and Third street corner, close to the modern building, but low down, as the grade of the street has been much raised since the Vechte house was built."¹³ Edwin Litchfield, the owner of the lot and the house, objected to having the tablet placed on the house itself because the tablet was also inscribed with the name of the Brooklyn Committee members. Litchfield had previously had a dispute with former mayor and committee member, Charles A. Schieren, over back taxes. When asked by the Brooklyn Committee to place the commemorative tablet on the Vechte-Cortelyou house, Litchfield wrote a letter that read in part: "I have, naturally, no objection to placing thereon a suitable tablet to commemorate the Battle of Long Island. But under no circumstances will I consent to placing the name of Charles A. Schieren upon any of my property..."¹⁴

The Maryland celebrations and subsequent Brooklyn celebrations did not spark a movement to save the house from the pervasive dumping and grading that was slowly entombing it. One article in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of October, 1899, was more concerned about the old ball field than the old stone house:

If the present plans of several property owners in South Brooklyn are successfully carried out the famous old Washington Park base ball grounds, covering the block from Fifth to Fourth avenue and Third to Fourth street, will be cut through before next season comes around. The old plot has been rapidly filled up of late, and will soon be ready for the improvement of grading, etc. The famous old base ball diamond and cinder track are buried under many tons of earth and rubbish and ere long it is said the old landmark of sports will be no more.¹⁵

A 1900 *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* article entitled, "Demolishing Houses Famous in History," noted "[t]he little left of the old Cortelyou stone house and the Cortelyou willow at the corner of Third Street and Fifth Avenue, is likely to soon be buried or pulled down." The author of the article indicated the house was still visible if one knew where to look, but again no effort was made to save it. This is the last definitive reference to a standing structure thus far found in the newspapers, but an article in 1904 strongly implied the house was still standing:

Chief Engineer George W. Tilson, of the Borough President's force, has reported to his chief in favor of the purchase by the city of the property bounded by Fourth and Fifth avenues, Third and Fifth streets, for a

¹² "Likely to be Postponed/The Unveiling of Memorial Tablets to Stirling's Patriots/A Meeting of the Committee to be Held on Friday—What the tablets are and Where they are to be Placed," *New York Daily Tribune*, February 17 1897. www.fultonhistory.com.

¹³ "Maryland Memorials," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 18, 1896. www.fultonhistory.com.

¹⁴ No Title. *New York Sun*. 12 March 1896. www.fultonhistory.com.

¹⁵ No Title, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, October 29, 1899. www.fultonhistory.com.

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public pleasure ground. The property was formerly used for baseball purposes and there are no permanent buildings on the lawn except the Cortelyou house, which was the headquarters of General George Washington when he effected his masterly retreat after the battle of Long Island in the Revolutionary War.¹⁶

Evidence suggests that the Vechte-Cortelyou house disappeared from the visible landscape around this time. The house did not appear on the 1906 Sanborn Insurance Map—it *could* have been left off, but that scenario is unlikely given the thoroughness of these maps. Various travelling circuses used the lot from about 1906 to 1922, and it continued to be a venue for large public events.

Serious preservation efforts at saving the Washington Park plot did not begin until after the Vechte-Cortelyou house was gone. 1907 brought the first official attempt at preserving the plot, when the Board of Aldermen heard a resolution for the city to buy the plot of land for a park. The resolution read, in part: "...This plot has historical interest...The increasing business along the Gowanus Canal is adding largely to the population of this section of the Borough. This population needs just such a reception ground."¹⁷ The sponsoring alderman, John D. Gunther, stated that he "did not care particularly whether the land is used for park purposes or not, but that it should not remain as it is now."¹⁸ If the park proposition failed, Gunther proposed opening and extending Fourth Street. The issue of turning the land into a park would be heavily debated for the next fifteen years—often pitting development-minded business owners against nascent historic preservationists. The resolution for the city to buy the land did not pass, but Fourth Street was not extended either. The first concerted efforts aimed at the preservation of the house as an historical artifact began in 1909 with the publication of Georgia Fraser's *The Old Stone at Gowanus*.

Georgia Fraser

Fraser began her book with a desire to locate the Vechte-Cortelyou house as it was depicted in an 1846 oil painting she inherited from her uncle. If one does the math in Fraser's introduction, she started looking for the house in either 1907 or 1908 and located the site of it after about a year of research.¹⁹ When Fraser discovered the site in 1908 or 1909, the house was completely covered over, but the lot had not been developed entirely:

Through the fortuitous circumstances previously indicated, the plot on which stood the Stone House, and the entire stretch of the meadow before it as far as the creek or canal, an in width from Third to Sixth Street—is still unoccupied, though pressingly surrounded on all sides by buildings. It would yet be possible to uncover the spring and brook, and to unearth and set up the Washington House, the Old Stone House of Gowanus. With turfed surface, bordering trees, and flowers where once stood the garden, this spot might again be able to be made bloom as during the Colonial and Revolutionary occupancy. Washington Park, long its name, could be restored to it, and the house serve not only as a place of abiding interest itself, but as a museum of Colonial and Revolutionary artifacts.²⁰

Fraser claimed this effort represented "an opportunity for historic preservation unequalled at the present time in America."²¹ The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reviewed the book and gave it high praise, and this was followed shortly

¹⁶ "Park for South Brooklyn/To be Located on Site of the Old Baseball Grounds," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 17 1904. www.fultonhistory.com.

¹⁷ "Want Old ball Grounds for a Pleasure Park," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 3, 1907. www.fultonhistory.com.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁹ Fraser wrote "The picture had been in my uncle's [Thomas Easton] possession forty-one years [1867-1908], and he received it from his uncle, George Andrews, of Brooklyn, in whose possession it had been twenty-one years, and to whose order it was painted [1846-1867]. Fraser, *The Old Stone House*, 13.

²⁰ Georgia Fraser, *The Old Stone House at Gowanus*. (Witter & Kintner: New York, 1909), 147.

²¹ *Ibid*, 148.

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thereafter with an art exhibition of images of “old” Brooklyn designed to raise awareness of the place’s history. The paper published a photograph of the willow tree that had stood next to the Vechte-Cortelyou house and noted that the foundations and “lower part” of the house remained buried in the empty lot.²² A similar photo in Fraser’s book (see continuation sheet) confirms that the house was not visible at that time. Over the next couple of years there were heavy lobbying efforts to unearth the house and create a museum or a park. Various civic organizations became involved, and the challenge of turning the “Old Stone House” into a museum was answered by local businessman Charles Higgins.

Charles Higgins

Higgins initiated a campaign during which he delivered a speech entitled “Brooklyn’s Patriotic Sacrilege and Shame” and handed out copies of Fraser’s book. Higgins’s speech challenged the traditional labeling of the battle as “the Battle of Long Island,” noting in his speech that the “Battle of Bunker Hill might as well be called the Battle of Massachusetts” under that logic; Higgins’ boosterism led him to claim that the Battle of Brooklyn was far more important to the Revolution than Bunker Hill or Saratoga, and, in his opinion, was actually the single-most important engagement of the Revolution.²³ In his campaign to memorialize and preserve the sacred ground of the Revolution he called for the excavation and restoration of the Vechte-Cortelyou House, the preservation of the surroundings as “Battle Park,” and the construction of an enormous battle monument. The enthusiasm generated by Higgins did lead to preservation efforts. In 1911 the Board of Estimate and the mayor’s office once again seriously contemplated purchasing the undeveloped lot as “Gowanus Park.” The city park would “commemorate the point where the most severe fighting in the Battle of Long Island took place, viz., surrounding the ‘Old Stone House’ at Gowanus Canal” and included the possibility of “a restoration of the Old Stone House.”²⁴ As with the efforts five years earlier, the city did not act on the purchase and the property remained undeveloped and in private ownership.

The Kings County Historical Society celebrated the 140th anniversary of the battle in 1916, and the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* ran the following paragraph in its commemoration article “Ground Should Be Acquired by State or City.”

If the city or State is not now able to buy this ground for this historic and patriotic purpose it is possible that some of our wealthy and public-spirited men or some great patriotic societies can combine to accomplish this good purpose.²⁵

The article continued by suggesting even public subscription to purchase the site—anything to “absolve Brooklyn from the extraordinary historic and patriotic neglect which it has heretofore shown in this matter.” Much of the rhetoric and history for the article appears to have been supplied by Charles Higgins.

The next year, a new association formed “for the purpose of opening a playground on the plot of land between Third and Fourth Streets and Fourth and Fifth Avenues” as a memorial to the battle of Brooklyn.²⁶ In an article Georgia Fraser laid out the principles of the newly formed “Stirling Memorial Association” and its desires for the property. Fraser contended that a playground would be as “fitting a monument as a shaft or stone” for commemorative purposes and “would confer infinitely greater benefit on the immediate neighborhood”—which

²² “Historic Brooklyn Shown in Pictures,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, February 20, 1910. www.fultonhistory.com.

²³ *Brooklyn’s Neglected*, as quoted in John Pentangelo, “Glory Enough”, 33.

²⁴ “President Steers’ Statement,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June, 21 1911; See also “Now For Gowanus Park,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June, 24 1911 and “Inspect Battleground Here. Report Soon to be Made on South Brooklyn Property,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, October 4, 1911 www.fultonhistory.com.

²⁵ “Brooklyn to Celebrate the Battle of Long Island,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August, 27 1916. www.fultonhistory.com.

²⁶ Georgia Fraser, “Urges Playground as Memorial to Battle of Brooklyn,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, February, 2 1917. www.fultonhistory.com.

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was lacking a proper playground. The Old Stone House should be “unearthed and set-up as a museum [building]” which could also serve as comfort station; it would contain a “mother’s room” and an exhibit room “devoted to memorial purposes” with old prints and portrait of General Stirling. From this playground and museum, the Stirling Memorial would become a “center from which shall radiate qualities of good citizenship.” The reasons given for creating both a recreational space and an educational museum center were filled with patriotic sentiments that were especially poignant during the dark days of WWI and fears of the Fifth Column. Fraser eloquently asks: “Why should Brooklyn not have a memorial to the old stone house, whose walls sheltered so loyally those who fought that we might have the glorious independence of this country today?” The Stirling Memorial Association was asking only “for the preservation of a part of the stone house property, and the resurrection of the house itself, or the erection of new one, in which those for whom General Stirling and his men fought and offered their lives may be made into better citizens.” Fraser’s words encapsulate the real purpose of the Old Stone House—it might have just as easily been a statue or a tower or another style of monument, the house is merely the form chosen for the memorial. It is meant to commemorate events that took place there, celebrate the heroes of the Revolution and interpret the history for future generations of citizens. As Fraser wrote: “The little ones to be made happier and healthier and instructed in the duties and opportunities of American life: and the older ones to be brought to a realization of what it meant to those who offered this harbor of freedom called the United States to the poor and oppressed of the earth.”

Like Higgins, Fraser called for government action. Fraser wrote that the proposed Stirling Memorial Playground “should not appeal to Brooklyn alone” and not just to “greater New York.” She wrote: “General Stirling and his heroic work on the 27th of August, 1776 must become the command of the people of the United States, and the pleasure of its Government as well.”²⁷ Although City Park Commissioner Raymond Ingersoll agreed the neighborhood needed a proper playground, the city took no action on purchasing the property. In the wake of WWI, the federal government also disagreed with Higgins and his fellow boosters’ opinion that the Battle of Brooklyn was the most important engagement of the war. In 1920, the US War Department surveyed American battlefields to institute a preservation and commemorative tablet program—Brooklyn was deemed worthy of neither.²⁸ When the city, state and nation failed to take action, Higgins purchased a plot in Greenwood Cemetery and privately funded the creation of his own monument in 1920. His outrage was palpable when he was quoted in an article by the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*: “Boys now play ball on the vacant ground, the soil of which was dyed with the blood of patriots, but none of them think, few of them know what great events transpired there. In the springtime the circus pitches its ‘big top’ on the sacred land and clowns in painted faces and grinning monkeys hold sway where once men died for high principle and freedom.”²⁹

There were scattered calls for preservation over the several years, but the real pressure came in 1922 when the Litchfield family attempted to sell the property. Preservation groups once again lobbied hard for the city to buy the lot, but instead the Brooklyn Edison Company purchased the lot—expecting to build a power plant. The Kings County Historical Society opposed the sale, arguing that “not only was a public playground needed in the locality, but that it was historic ground, where an important part of the Battle of Long Island was fought.”³⁰ There was intense debate over the issue over the sale and, eventually, public pressure by the various citizens groups forced the city to purchase the lot. One *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* correspondent rejoiced that after years of “cold indifference and

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Pentangelo, “Glory Enough,” 53.

²⁹ Edward Riis, “Brooklyn’s Most Historic Spot Still Unmarked by Monument after 144 years,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May, 16 1920. www.fultonhistory.com.

³⁰ “Edison Co. Buys Old ball park on 4th Ave./Sale Disposes of Movement to Make Public Park on Historic Site,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June, 8 1922.

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official apathy and neglect something has been done at last in the movement to set aside as a park and national shrine Brooklyn's most historic ground—as historic a spot as any in the nation.³¹ The newspaper article included a photograph of the empty lot that contained the buried remains of the Vechte-Cortelyou House (see continuation sheet) and noted that the city's plans were to clear the buildings and, in conjunction with the Brooklyn Heights Forum, to create a memorial park complete with stadium, monuments and a playground. The city's plan called for the old stone house to be excavated and restored for use as a museum for historical objects.³²

The preservationists' victory was short-lived. Faced with public protest over the cost of building a memorial park and local residents having to bear the \$256,000 assessment of the land, the city offered to sell the plot to the Polytechnic Institute in 1926. Again faced with public pressure, the city ultimately made the excavation and restoration of the "old stone house" a condition of sale. Municipal officials seemed to genuinely believe that they had happened upon an ideal solution. The Polytechnic Institute was a major educational organization that was offering to locate in the heart of Brooklyn, and it had agreed to bear the cost of bringing the old stone house back to the neighborhood.³³ Since the construction of the college would prohibit the memorial park/playground plan, the preservation groups actively opposed the sale; a reading of newspaper accounts over the next five years shows that the debate became particularly acrimonious at times. The Board of Estimate approved the sale, but a series of lawsuits, delaying tactics, and injunctions prevented transfer of the title and, later, any development on the site. The preservationists continued to try and raise funds and to keep public control of the land. In 1929 U.S. Senator Royal Samuel Copeland (1868–1938) even introduced a bill for the federal government to acquire the property as a national historic site, though it never passed.³⁴ Funding the memorial and bearing the cost of the assessment were the major issues. Borough President JJ Byrne, who opposed the park, was quoted in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*: "It is all very well to comment, but no one wants to pay the assessment, for a park or playground."³⁵

An ill-timed effort to memorialize Brooklyn's Revolutionary War role on a large scale took place in 1929. The Brooklyn Bridge Plaza Association proposed plans to create a memorial to George Washington in the area around the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge. The Washington Memorial Portal was to feature statuary, a plaza, and the portal itself and was aimed at creating national recognition for the Battle of Brooklyn. Unfortunately for the association, its kick-off fundraiser was held on October 24, 1929. The start of the Great Depression five days later certainly impacted the ability to fundraise for such an enormously expensive (and basically superfluous) project like the Washington Portal. Paradoxically, however, it was the Great Depression that finally provided the funding and will for the city to excavate the house and create a public park. Federal money, federal labor, and Robert Moses, a city parks commissioner committed to developing public works, proved to be the correct combination of factors. The sale to the Polytechnic Institute was never realized, so Moses instituted a park plan he believed was right for the neighborhood.

In the spring of 1933, workmen from the New York City Parks Department and the Federal Emergency Work and Relief Bureau began digging. Using old maps and records and living memories of locals, engineers projected

³¹ Edward Riis, "City Decides at Last to Purchase the Historic Spot in South Brooklyn Where Main Engagements of the Battle of Long Island Was Fought and Maryland Soldiers Died," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June, 24 1923. www.fultonhistory.com.

³² "A Monument Worth Having," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June, 18 1923. www.fultonhistory.com.

³³ See "Patriots to Fight Poly's Attempt to Acquire Park Site. Organize to Preserve City-Owned Block for Revolutionary Memorial," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, February 28, 1927; "Byrne Urges Bill for Sale to 'Poly' of Gowanus Park," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 24, 1927. www.fultonhistory.com.

³⁴ "Asks US to Buy Stone House Here as 1776 Memorial," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 15, 1929. www.fultonhistory.com.

³⁵ "Byrne Hits Suit To Bar Sale of Gowanus House. No Money Is Available to Convert Site Into a Playground He Says," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 9, 1930. www.fultonhistory.com.

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(incorrectly) where the building should be found. After six weeks of digging, no remains of the Vechte-Cortelyou house were found. Officials then decided to consult with local residents, who knew exactly where the building had stood. The building's foundations were revealed on May 4, 1933 (see continuation sheet). City Engineer Major Waldo E. Palmer examined the mortar content of the walls and declared it to be lime mortar mixed with local brown sand, which was consistent with historic construction.³⁶ The remains of the building were shown to Robert Cortelyou, a descendant of the last owners to live in the house, who pronounced them to be correct. Both the parks department and advocates of the old stone house seemed satisfied, and the find was lauded by all as the culmination of decades of yearning and "continuous agitation" on the part of preservationists.³⁷ Every article included an obligatory sentence or paragraph about the importance of the house in the Battle of Long Island and how this history needed to be told.

The question of what to do with the excavated foundations fell to the parks department. Although the land had been set aside as a municipal park in 1923, nothing was actually done other than leveling the buildings. In February of 1934, the Kings County Historical Society asked New York City Parks Commissioner Robert Moses to restore the Old Stone House, and Moses's plans were revealed that spring (see continuation sheet). A "replica" was planned. "The Old Stone House is not to be rebuilt...instead the stones of this historic old building which figured so conspicuously in the Battle of Long Island will be utilized in building a smaller reproduction."³⁸ Moses released an artist's conceptual drawing (see continuation sheet) and it was noted that the park would be a \$500,000 model playground. One-hundred laborers funded by the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration would be utilized in the construction, which would include a playground, pool, handball courts, bocce courts, 175 planted trees and a baseball field in addition to the Old Stone House.³⁹ The Old Stone House itself was to serve as a community center with rooms for boys and girls to play, a second floor "mother's room" and a space for exhibitions; the whole plan was remarkably similar to that proposed by the Stirling Memorial Association in 1917.

Rather than construct the building where the original was found, Moses and parks department chose to build the Old Stone House about 250' away. By moving the building towards the center of the park, rather than the street corner, a more appropriate "colonial" setting could be achieved. It was obvious from the parks department's plans that the building itself was to be set-off from the park around it. The building was surrounded by a bluestone patio and given a small work-yard surrounded by a fence.

The reasoning behind building a smaller "replica" and not attempting to reproduce the original was spelled out in a series of newspaper articles. The idea of finding the entire house completely buried under years of fill was disabused—workers found only foundations, piles of stones and some low walls.⁴⁰ The excavated levels of foundations and walls of various heights looked like something out of the "Inca Empire" according to one account.⁴¹ Engineer Palmer felt the stones, buried at depth of 10 to 25 feet, were "too low for the purposes of exhibition" and that the remains would have to be torn down and rebuilt at a better location.⁴² The inappropriateness of faking a reproduction was even outlined in one article:

³⁶ "Gowanus House Excavation Gains," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 5, 1933. www.fultonhistory.com.

³⁷ "Gowanus Stone House Located," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 4, 1933. www.fultonhistory.com.

³⁸ "Old Stone House Replica Planned," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 4, 1934. www.fultonhistory.com.

³⁹ "Old Stone House Recreation Field Ready Labor Day," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 18, 1934. www.fultonhistory.com.

⁴⁰ "The Stone House of Gowanus," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 20, 1934. www.fultonhistory.com.

⁴¹ "Old Landmark Comes to View," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 11, 1933. www.fultonhistory.com.

⁴² "Gowanus House Excavation Gains," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May, 5 1933. www.fultonhistory.com.

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[E]ven though the city could afford to rebuild it, some its historical significance would be lost because of the necessity of securing stones elsewhere...[a] smaller reproduction will serve the purpose of promoting the ideals of Americanism and memorializing the deeds of the 300 Maryland troopers who lost their lives there...just as much and probably far greater than...the larger and more costly building.⁴³

Work progressed on the park and Old Stone House for about a year. Although neither the park nor its memorial Old Stone House were completed, the Brooklyn Heights Forum sponsored patriotic events in the park on July 4th of 1934 and the Kings County Historical Society celebrated the 158th anniversary of battle with memorial services for the fallen.

On May 20, 1935, the Old Stone House and its surrounding Model Playground were formally dedicated by the Society of Old Brooklynites and the New York City Parks Department.⁴⁴ Approximately 15,000 people attended the ceremony, which included civic, fraternal and patriotic organizations. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* noted:

In a colorful ceremony in which color guards of the Police Department and the Old Guards of New York State participated the flag was raised over the house. Other organizations represented included the Grand Army of the Republic, the United Spanish War Veterans, the Gold Star Mothers, the American Legion and its auxiliary, the 114th Regiment, N. Y. N. G., and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Speeches from the day emphasized patriotism. Henry Redfield, the president of the Old Brooklynites, was quoted as saying:

We honor ourselves in rededicating the Old Stone House...Let us remember with religious awe that as citizens we should rededicate ourselves to the sentiments of Washington and the 'Declaration of Independence.'"

Another speaker of the day asserted:

Our better natures respond to the deeds of those great men who made America what it is today...We are all hero worshipers, whether we care to admit it or not. This is but an outward example of patriotic pride and gratitude. There is no difference between the patriotism of today and that of Revolutionary days except in its manifestations...the love in American hearts for Washington and his soldiers for their deeds on this spot will live forever.⁴⁵

The Old Stone House as a Commemorative

For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, formal scholarship relating to the original Vechte-Cortelyou House was lacking. Newspaper accounts and published sources often erroneously labeled the house as either Washington's or Stirling's headquarters for the battle (it was neither), and there was a great deal of debate over the importance and significance of the Battle of Long Island. For a few years in the early twentieth century, Stirling and the Marylanders' brave rearguard action against 2,000 British and German troops was labeled as the "American Thermopylae" when some overzealous supporters credited Stirling with holding off the entire attacking force of 20,000. Had this level of boosterism occurred before the original house was lost, there may have been a more

⁴³ "The Stone House of Gowanus," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 20, 1935. www.fultonhistory.com.

⁴⁴ "Dedicate Stone House, Model Playground," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 20, 1935. www.fultonhistory.com.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

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concerted effort to save it. Such patriotic sentiment had fueled early preservation efforts in America, starting with the 1850 preservation and restoration of Washington's Headquarters, in Newburgh, NY, and Mount Vernon in 1853. Colonial buildings were especially revered for their direct associations with political and military heroes. After the Civil War, veterans' organizations like the Grand Army of the Republic created a virtual civic religion around the concept of promoting patriotism and the veneration of the sacrifices of the American soldier. The 1876 centennial only furthered post-Civil War America's desire to enshrine its monuments of the past—perhaps the most prominent example was the restoration of Independence Hall.

On the face of things, the Vechte-Cortelyou house had the necessary pedigree. It was undeniably a colonial building; it had direct historical associations with Lord Stirling and a seminal event of the Revolution, and (as Charles Higgins liked to point out) American blood was shed there. Despite this, the house did not attract the concerted nineteenth-century preservation efforts that saved other historical American buildings. According to one researcher, the 1876 centennial itself was barely noticed by Brooklyn, with the exception of a series of articles in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*.⁴⁶ The state of Maryland initiated the first formal and organized memorial and commemorative efforts of the site in the 1890s, a time when newspaper editorials suggest that many of Brooklyn's residents cared more about baseball than history. There were scattered calls for the Vechte-Cortelyou house's preservation spanning about forty years, and there were several articles that decried its passing, but none seemed to shame or motivate a significant campaign to save it. The evidence suggests there was no concerted effort to save the Vechte-Cortelyou house until after it was gone. After the house itself had been buried or lost, preservationists and boosters did much to prevent the surrounding lot from being lost to development. After the publication of Georgia Fraser's book and Charles Higgins's subsequent involvement, there were twenty years of sincere (and ultimately successful) efforts to have the locale saved for posterity as a memorial park. The recreated Old Stone House became the anchor of that memorial park and serves as a focus for local residents to learn about, understand, celebrate and venerate the Revolutionary history of what is today a heavily urbanized neighborhood.

Although commemorative in nature, the Old Stone House was invested with design and symbolic value to the local residents of Brooklyn. The property as a building is a memorial that reflects the beliefs and values of these early twentieth century residents. As previously noted, the house itself *is* the memorial. Rather than erecting a column or a sculpture, the Old Stone House was the shape chosen. Using witness stones imbued with relic value, the form of the colonial house was chosen to commemorate events that took place there, celebrate the heroes of the Revolution, and interpret that history for future generations of citizens. The Old Stone House is not a convincing seventeenth-century replica—nor was it meant to be—but it evoked a positive and significant emotional response from its community that transcended its accuracy. The Parks Department sited the Old Stone House in a contrived location, more convenient to the needs of the surrounding park, and the building itself is undeniably a product of its time. Nonetheless the Parks Department sincerely attempted to recreate some well-known and salient features of the historic building, recognizing the importance of that history to the local residents. Rather than putting up a standard Depression-era comfort station, the department chose to incorporate the historic stones of a Revolutionary War archaeological artifact in an interpretation of a colonial building. Period newspaper accounts clearly document the motives behind both the excavation and the design choices made for the structure. It was the local residents who pressured the Parks Department to build this monument in this appearance. The Old Stone House reflects their ideals and conveys the clear cultural expressions of their shared perception of the noble character and valor of the Revolutionary War soldiers and the cause for which they fought. It simultaneously venerates the battle, commemorates the fallen, and provides a functional and aesthetically pleasing recreational

⁴⁶ John Pentangelo, "Glory Enough."

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space. In the turbulent years of the Great Depression and WWII, the house served as a focal point for the perpetuation of the memory and history of sacrifice, and helped instill patriotic fervor. For several years after its dedication, the residents of Brooklyn used the nominated house as a monument and gathering point for patriotic and memorial celebrations. This long-standing cultural identity of the property is the compelling factor for its significance; it illustrates the Old Stone House possesses significance based on its own value, not the value of the Battle of Long Island.

The Old Stone House remained a beloved recreational facility and community resource that sponsored programs, exhibitions and educational events until 1974, when budget restrictions cuts led to the loss of the staff. New York City Parks began a renovation of the building in 1976, installing new doors, windows and replacing the failing roof. In 1990, community members and a group of historians banded together to revitalize the park and the Old Stone House. The Old Stone House of Brooklyn, Inc. (OSH), a non-profit organization, has helped promote the site, acted as a community liaison and worked with New York City Parks to steward and operate the house museum and JJ Byrne Park. The core of OSH's mission is its educational programming, which serves more than 6,000 students annually; OSH sponsors a monthly reading series, a summer Shakespeare Program, local garden programs and works with volunteers and students to keep the park clean. The OSH also sponsored the installation of a museum exhibition on the Battle of Brooklyn in 1997 and continues to interpret the history of the house, the Revolutionary War and Brooklyn through publications, interpretive panels and historic objects.

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"Patriots to Fight Poly's Attempt to Acquire Park Site. Organize to Preserve City-Owned Block for Revolutionary Memorial," February 28, 1927.

"Byrne Urges Bill for Sale to 'Poly' of Gowanus Park," March 24, 1927.

"Asks US to Buy Stone House Here as 1776 Memorial," November 15, 1929.

"Byrne Hits Suit To Bar Sale of Gowanus House. No Money Is Available to Convert Site Into a Playground He Says," January 9, 1930.

Smith, Garland. "Gowanus House Checked British," January 26, 1930.

"Gowanus Stone House Located," May 4, 1933.

"Gowanus House Excavation Gains," May 5, 1933.

"Old Landmark Comes to View," June 11, 1933.

"Old Stone House Replica Planned," April 4, 1934.

"The Stone House of Gowanus," April 20, 1934.

"Old Stone House Recreation Field Ready Labor Day," May 18, 1934.

"The Stone House of Gowanus," April 20, 1935.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

Section number 9 Page 3

“Dedicate Stone House, Model Playground,” May 20, 1935.

Other newspaper articles from www.fultonhistory.com:

“Historic Relics in Brooklyn [from] NY Tribune,” *Buffalo Daily Courier*, November 11, 1878.

New York Sun. March 12, 1896.

“Likely to be Postponed/The Unveiling of Memorial Tablets to Stirling’s Patriots/A Meeting of the Committee to be Held on Friday—What the tablets are and Where they are to be Placed,” *New York Daily Tribune*, February 17 1897.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

Section number 10 Page 1

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

As indicated by the heavy black line on the attached boundary map, the nominated property is drawn to include the footprint of the Old Stone House, an original bluestone patio, and a small work-yard to the east of the house. The house is contained within Lot #1, Block 981, Borough of Brooklyn, Kings County, NY.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

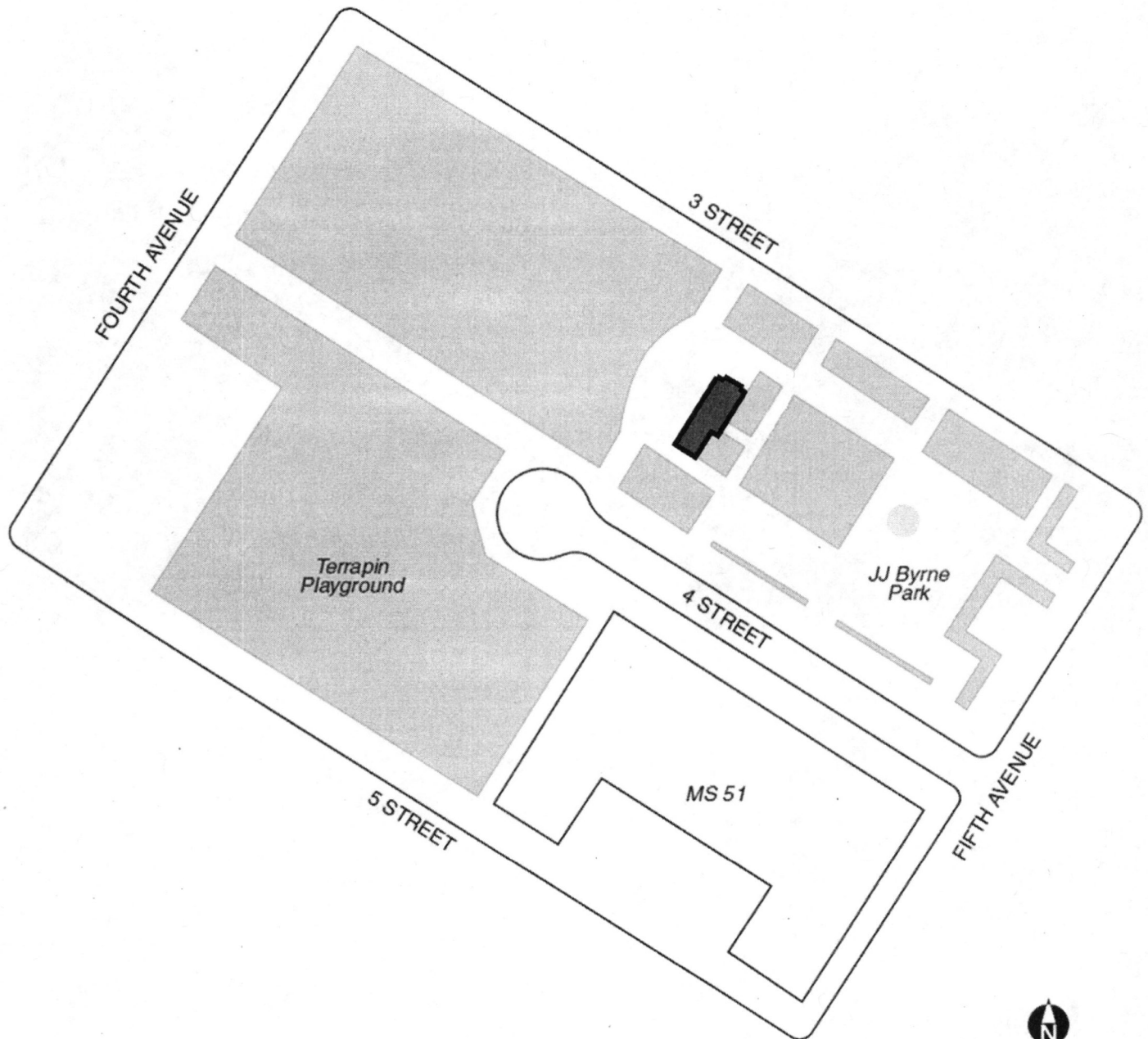
The nominated property includes only those visible features that retain integrity to the 1935 period of significance. The house, the bluestone patio and the small work-yard are still extant features from the original Parks Department design for the commemorative property, and it was obvious from the 1930s designs that the house was to be visually separated from the park itself. While the open space of the surrounding park remains important to the setting of the Old Stone House, the relevant historical features from the period of significance have since been removed, and the park itself no longer has sufficient integrity to reflect its 1930s historical significance. The nomination does not include the archaeological remains of the original Vecthe-Cortelyou House; as noted in the body of the nomination, the Old Stone House was not built in the same location as the Vechte-Cortelyou house and it is unknown if parks department workers completely destroyed the site when they excavated it in 1933.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

Section number 10 Page 2

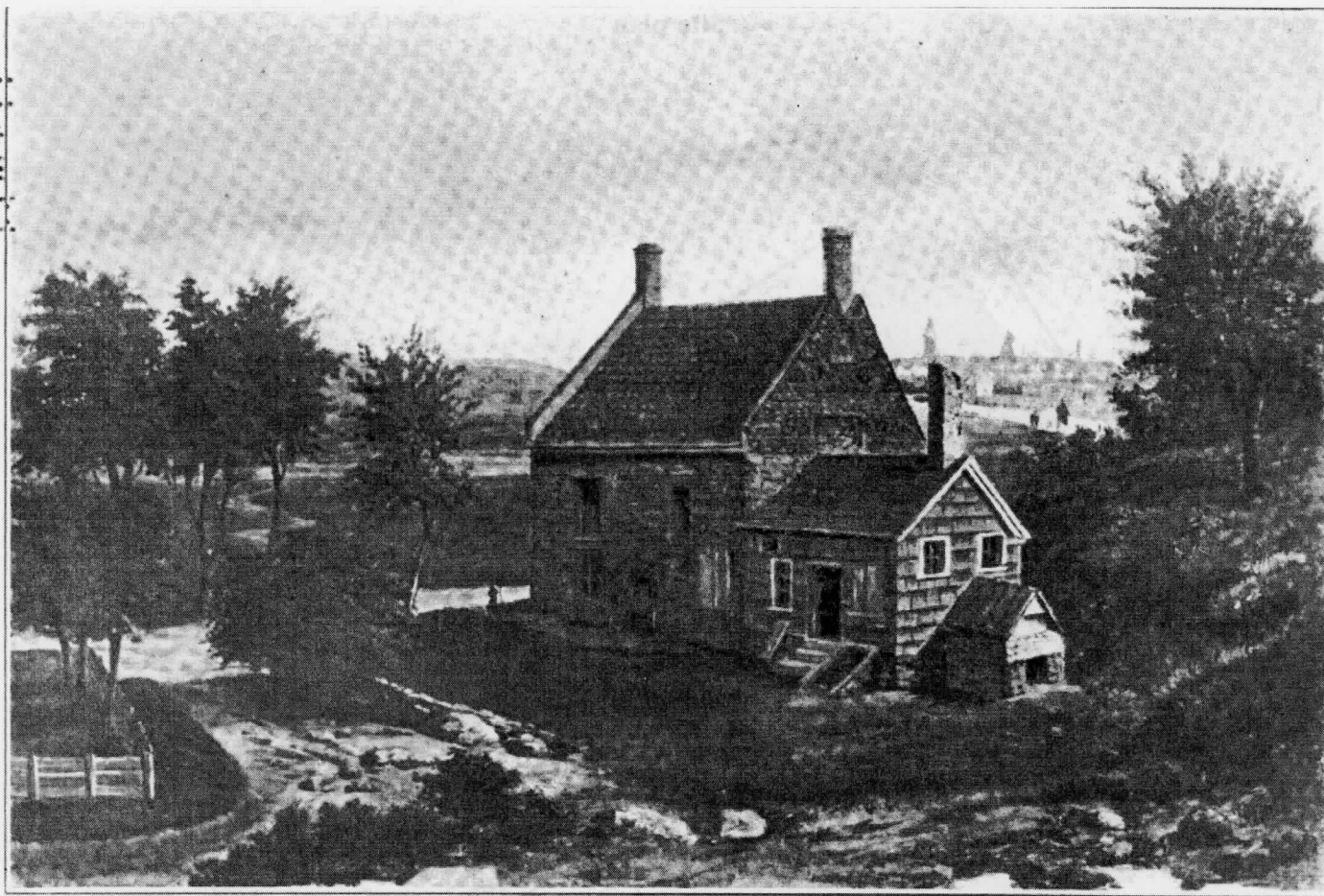
Site plan



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

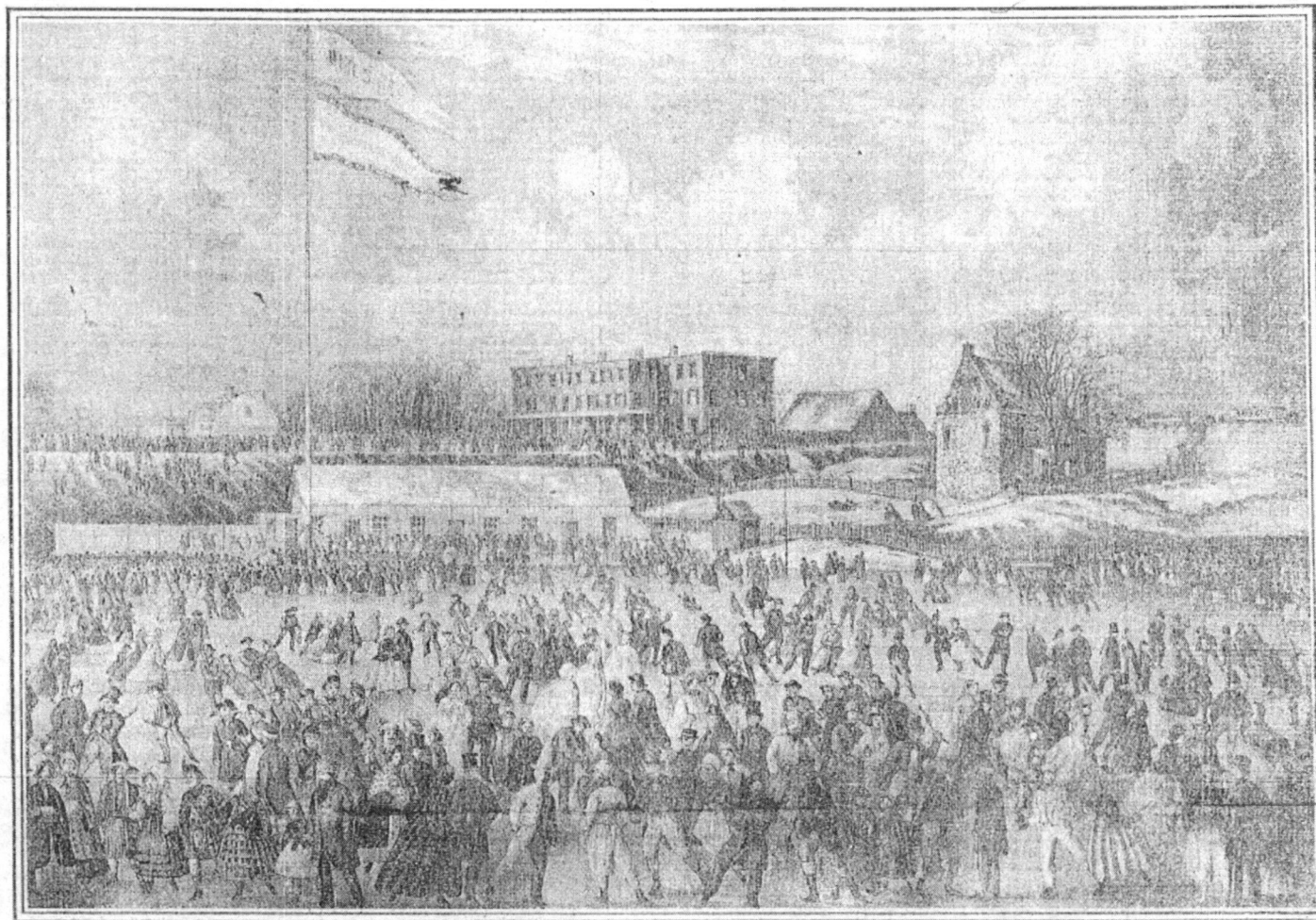
1846 Painting of the Old Stone house from Georgia Fraser's book.



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

1862 print republished in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* June 24 1923

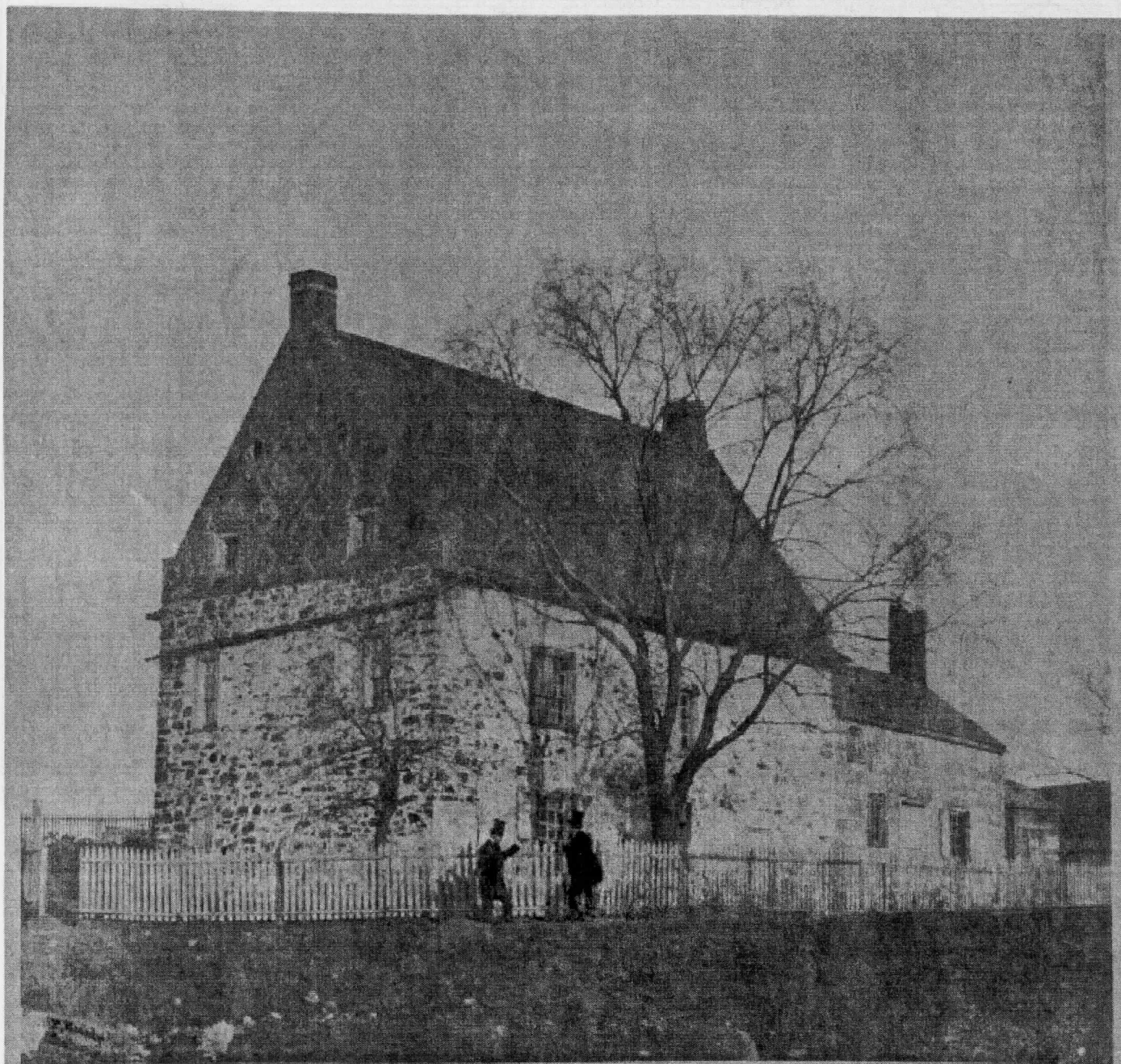


This old print shows a dress carnival of the Washington Skating Club, held in Brooklyn, at a rink near the Gowanus Stone House, on February 10, 1862. The fact that the Civil War was well under way did not apparently prevent the occasion from being a real success. The president of the club was O. F. Bateman, J. A. Gelston was treasurer, and W. B. Cronyn, secretary. The owner of the print from which this copy is made, is David V. W. Brown, of Merrick, L. I.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

Undated (likely the late 1860s) image of the house published in 1925.

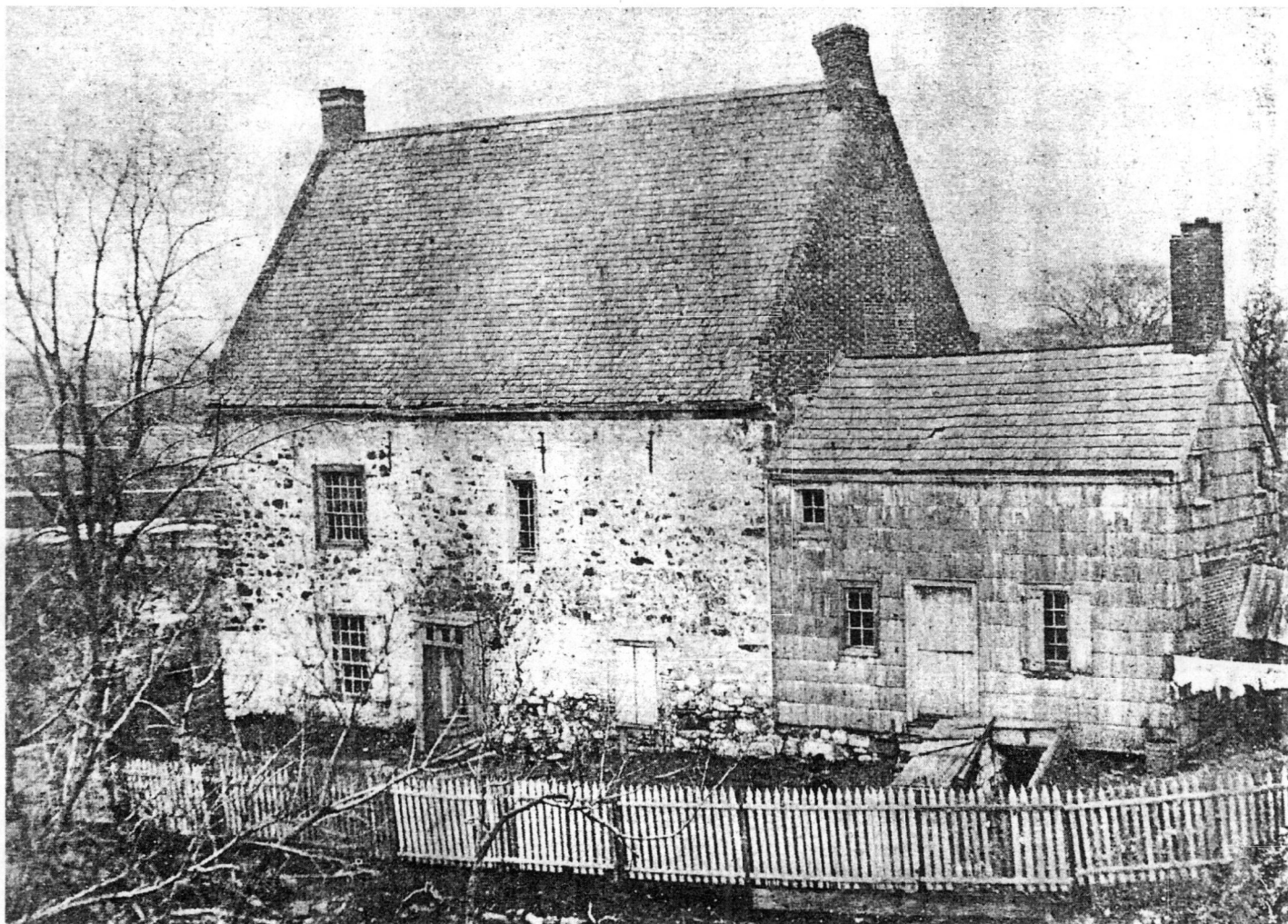


CORTELYOU HOUSE. SOUTH BROOKLYN.
built 1699
Corner 5th Av and 3rd Street

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

Undated Photograph of house by John L. Pierrepont in the collection of the Brooklyn Historical Society



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

Brainerd stereoview from c1877.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

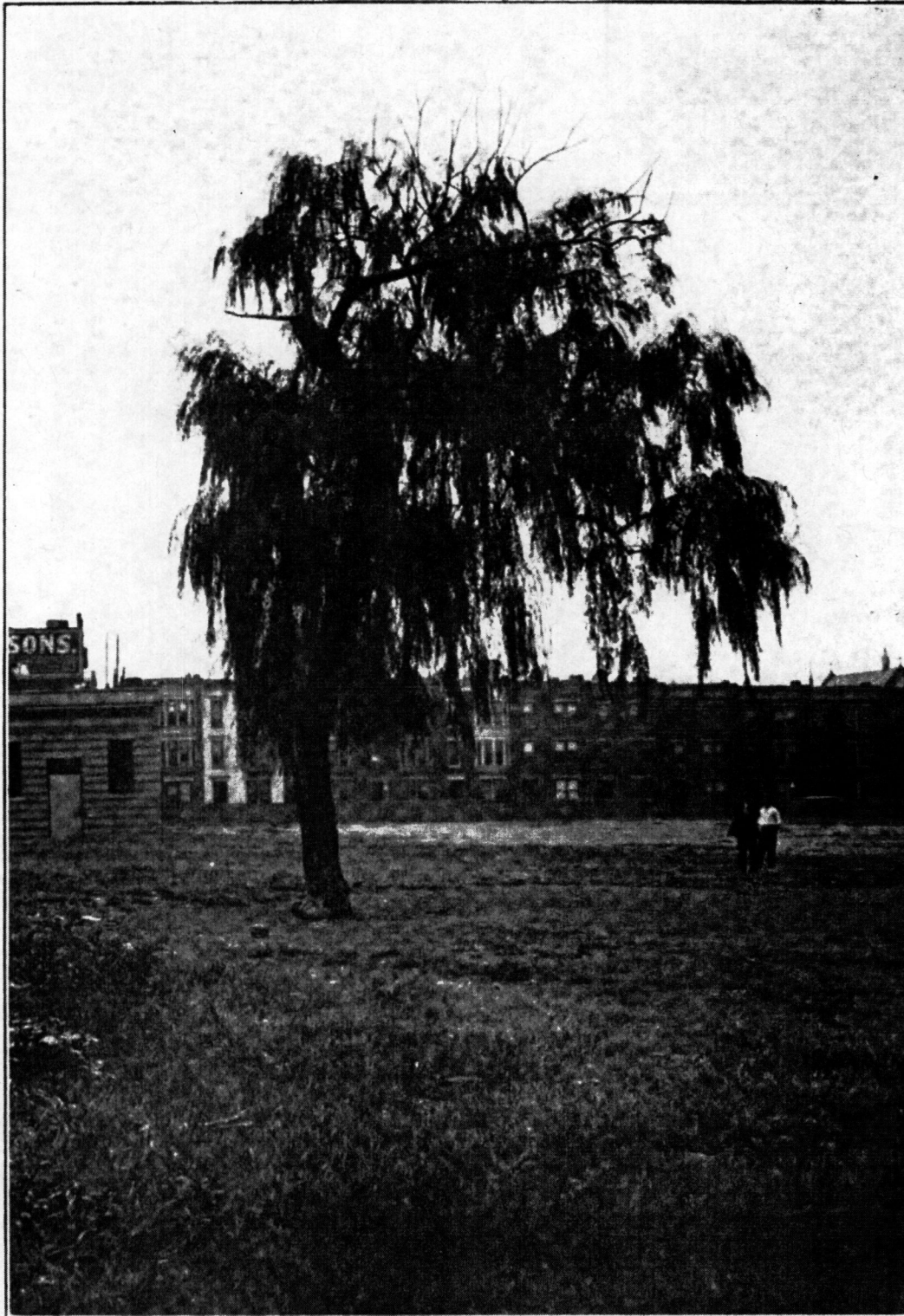
Image of house (or ruins?) published in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 16, 1900



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

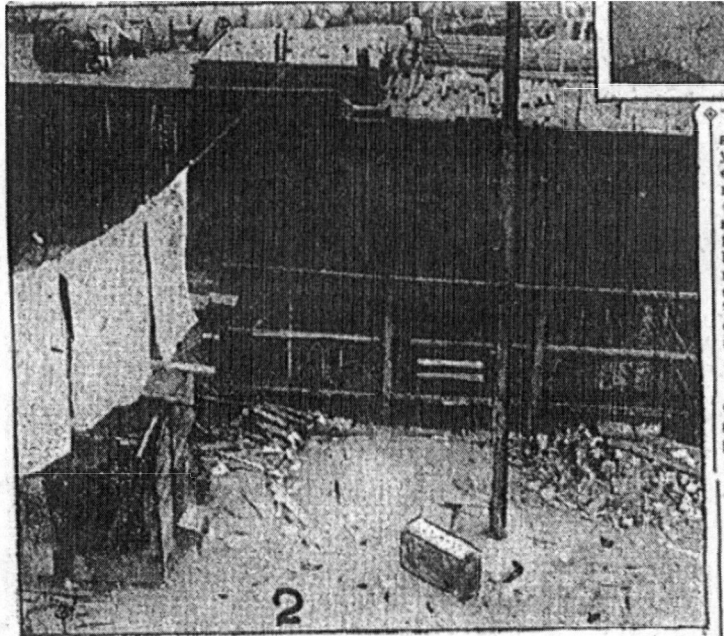
1909 image of house's location from Georgia Fraser's book *The Old Stone House*



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

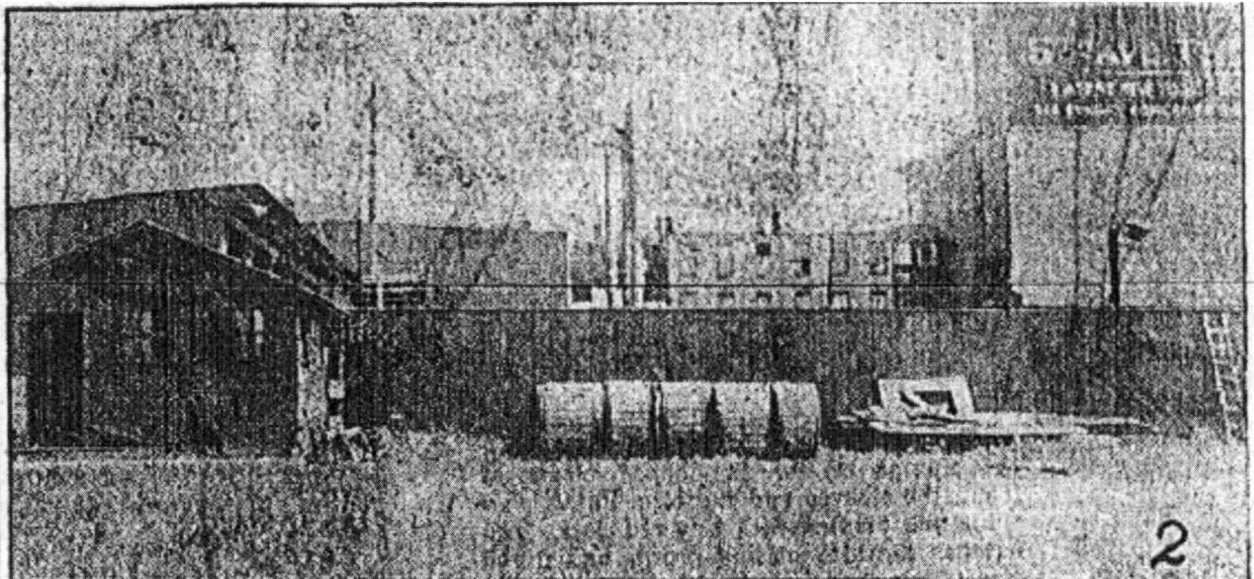
Both of images below are of the lot as published in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of August 26, 1926, before the house was excavated. Only image #2 in the caption is shown below.



No. 1 shows the old stone house as it looked a hundred years ago. At the time of the battle the wooden addition was not a part of it.

No. 2 is a view of the backyard which marks the point about where the stone house stood. The stone house is said to be buried a number of feet under the ground.

No. 3 is the picture of the park as it would look under the plan of the Brooklyn Heights Public Forum with the memorial column and the stadium.



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

Image of the first day of discovery as published in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 4, 1933.

EXCAVATORS BRING UP COLONIAL RUINS



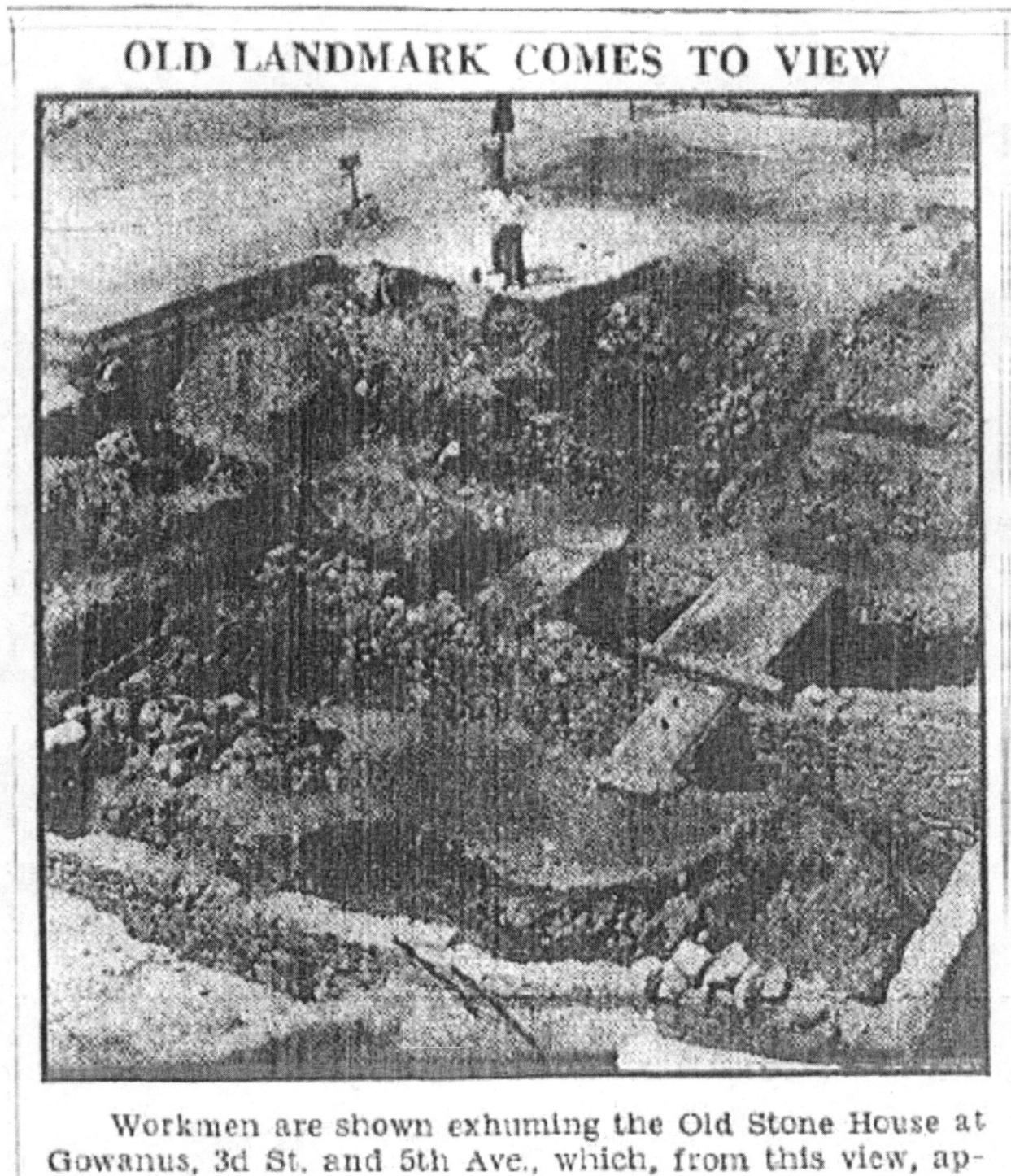
ONE HUNDRED FIFTY

SEVENTEEN

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

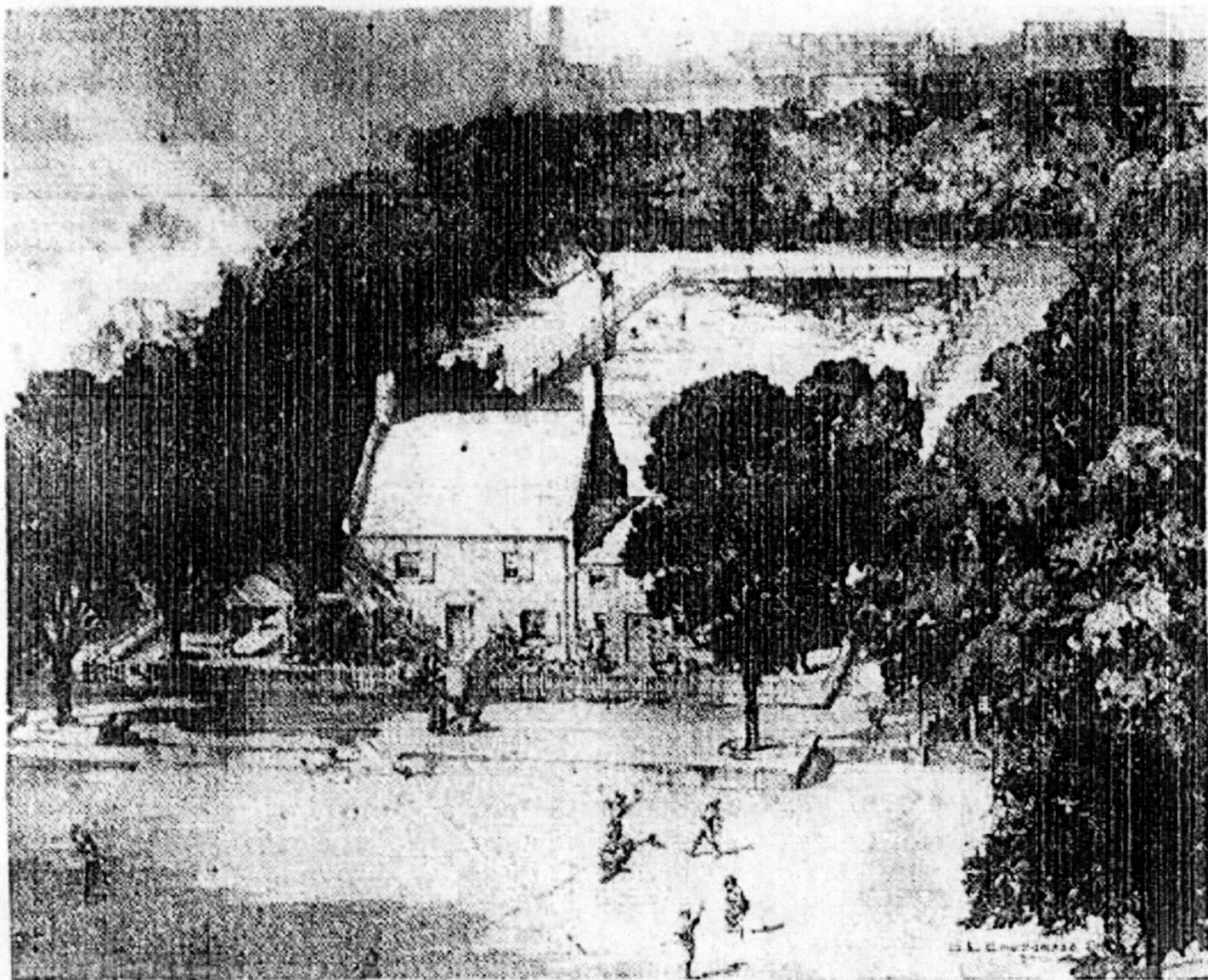
Image of the first ruins as published in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 11, 1933.



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

New York City Parks Department's architect's sketch for the memorial.
Released by Moses and published in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 21, 1934



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings County, New York

Photo Log (Prints from Digital Photos)

Name of Property: Old Stone House of Brooklyn

Location: Kings County, New York

Photographer: Kathy Howe

Date: November 15, 2007.

Location of Negatives: CD-R Included

NY_KngCo_OdStnHs

PHOTO LOG

PHOTO	DESCRIPTION
0001	Exterior view, S; $\frac{3}{4}$ view.
0002	Exterior view, NW; Rear Elevation.
0003	Interior view; Upper floor main room.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Old Stone House of Brooklyn, The
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEW YORK, Kings

DATE RECEIVED: 8/03/12 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 8/31/12
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 9/17/12 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 9/19/12
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 12000797

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT 9.19.12 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in
The National Register
of
Historic Places

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings Co. NY

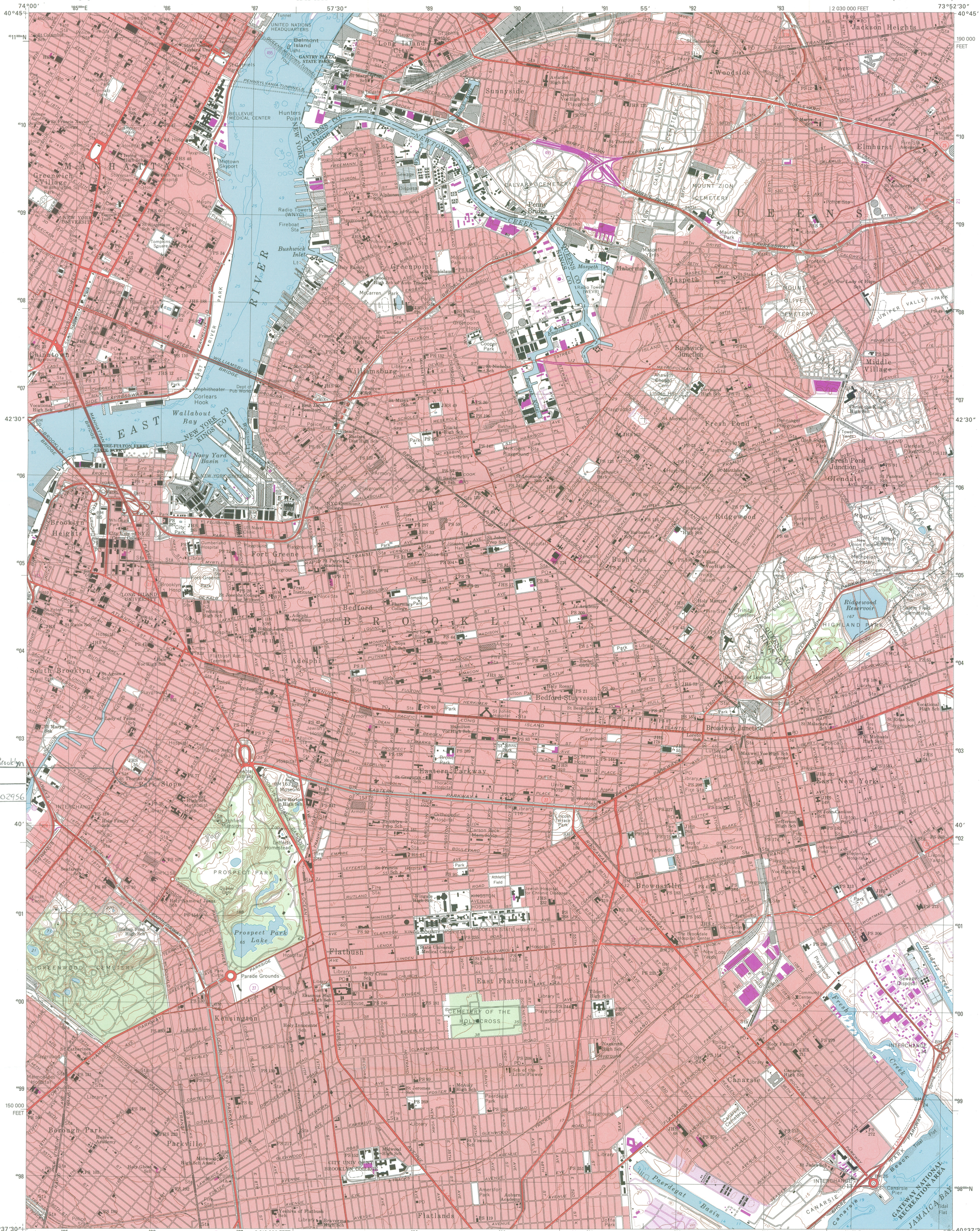
Photo ~~1111~~ 0001



The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings Co. NY
Photo ~~0002~~ 0002

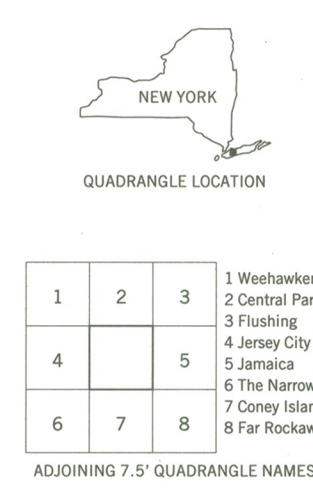
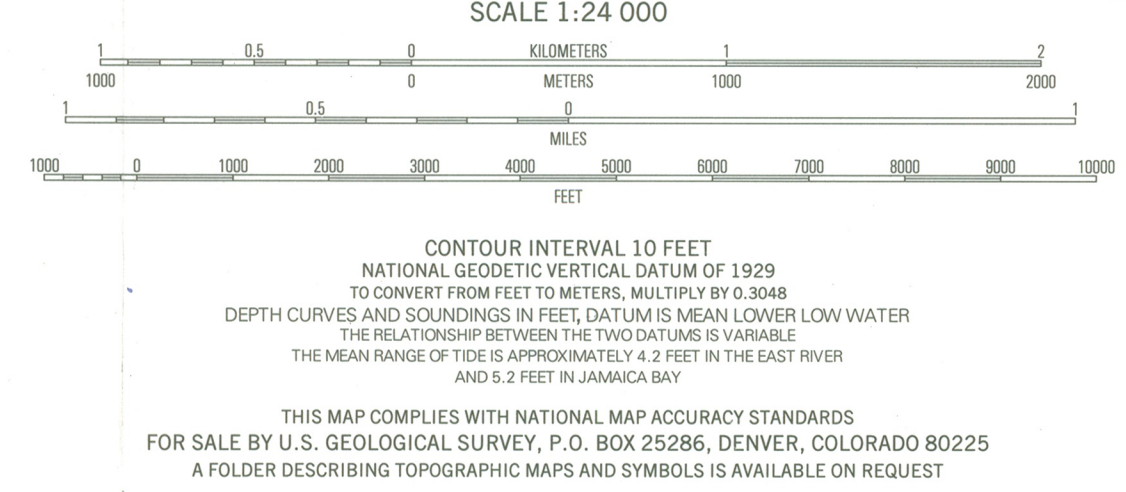
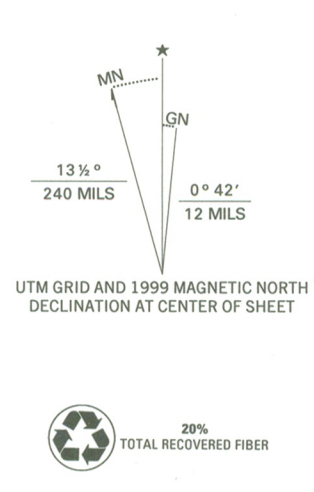


The Old Stone House of Brooklyn
Kings Co. NY
Photo ~~11111~~ 0003



The Old Store House of Brooklyn
Kings Co. NY
UM 18 585820 4502956
Brooklyn Quad

Produced by the United States Geological Survey
Topography compiled 1966. Planimetry derived from imagery taken 1977 and other sources. Photomicroscopy using imagery dated 1995; no major culture or drainage changes observed. Survey control current as of 1967. Boundaries, other than corporate, revised 1999.
Selected hydrographic data compiled from NOS charts 275 (1964), 542 (1967), and 745 (1966). This information is not intended for navigational purposes.
North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27). Projection and 10 000-foot ticks: New York coordinate system, Long Island zone (transverse Mercator).
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 18.
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey NADCON software.
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map.
Entire area lies within New York City.
Information shown in purple may not meet USGS content standards and may conflict with previously mapped contours.



ROAD CLASSIFICATION		
Primary highway hard surface	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface	
Secondary highway hard surface	Unimproved road	
Interstate Route	U.S. Route	State Route

1 2 3
4 5
6 7 8

1 Weehawken
2 Central Park
3 Flushing
4 Jersey City
5 Jamaica
6 The Narrows
7 Coney Island
8 Far Rockaway

BROOKLYN, NY
1995

NIMA 6265 III NW-SERIES V821

ADJOINING 7.5' QUADRANGLE NAMES

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, P.O. BOX 25286, DENVER, COLORADO 80225
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Robert B. Tierney
Chair

August 25, 2011

Kate Daly
Executive Director
kdaly@lpc.nyc.gov

1 Centre Street
9th Floor North
New York, NY 10007

212 669 7926 tel
212 669 7797 fax

Ms. Ruth Pierpont, Director
New York State Office of Parks Recreation
and Historic Preservation
Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau
Peebles Island
P.O. Box 189
Waterford, New York 12188-0189

Re: Old Stone House, 3rd Street at 5th Avenue, Brooklyn

Dear Ms. Pierpont:

I write on behalf of Chair Robert B. Tierney in response to your request for comment on the eligibility of the Old Stone House, located at 3rd Street at 5th Avenue in Brooklyn, to the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Mary Beth Betts, the Commission's Director of Research, has reviewed the materials submitted by the Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau and recommends that the building appears to meet the criteria for inclusion on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Sincerely yours,



Kate Daly

cc: Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Mary Beth Betts





Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor

Rose Harvey
Commissioner

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau • Peebles Island, PO Box 189, Waterford, New York 12188-0189

518-237-8643

www.nysparks.com

27 July 2012

Alexis Abernathy
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
1201 Eye St. NW, 8th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20005

Re: National Register Nominations

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to enclose the following three National Register nominations to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

The Old Stone House of Brooklyn, Brooklyn, Kings County
Brownell-Cornell-Gibbs Farmstead, Pittstown, Rensselaer County
(Pittstown Farmsteads MPDF)
Thomas-Wiley-Abbot Farmstead, Pittstown, Rensselaer County
(Pittstown Farmsteads MPDF)

Thank you for your assistance in processing these proposals. Please feel free to call me at 518.237.8643 x 3261 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank
National Register Coordinator
New York State Historic Preservation Office