

SITE HISTORY OVERVIEW

FEBRUARY 3, 2021



**Former Public School 90 Site
2274-2286 Church Avenue
Block 5103, Lot 58
Flatbush, Brooklyn, NY**



HPI Presentation Agenda

- Provide more detail about the results of prior archaeological testing, additional research, and the analysis and interment of remains.
- Respond to questions posed during or after the first Task Force meeting on December 12, 2020.
- Explain agency involvement, oversight, and summarize pertinent regulations.
- Recommend goals for the Task Force and Descendant Community that will serve to represent the unknown persons originally interred on or near the PS 90 site.

Please be aware that the nature of this discussion involves some disturbing information that we strive to handle and share sensitively and with respect.



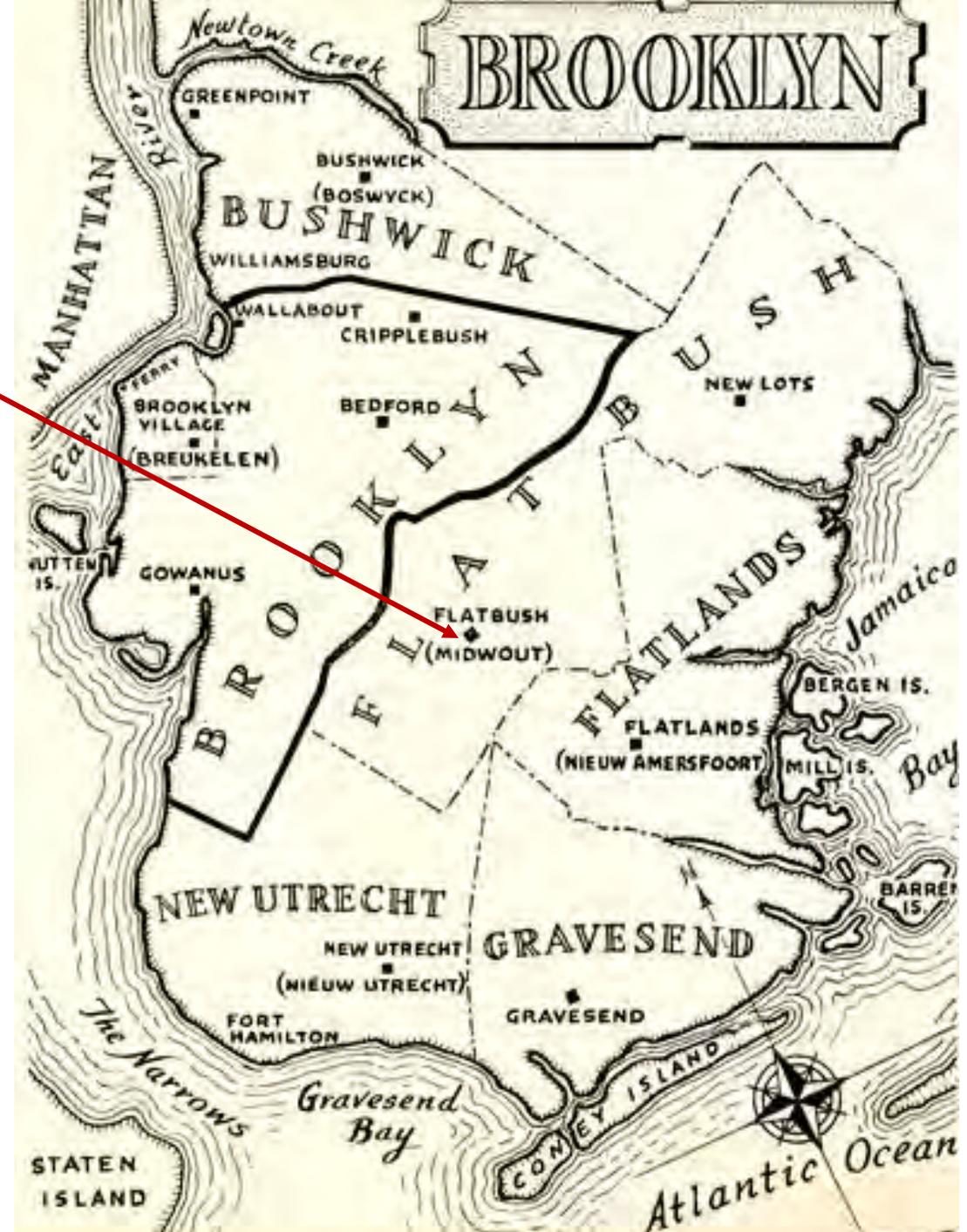
HPI's Involvement

- HPI has completed four separate documentary studies of the PS 90 Site (1998-2019).
- Archaeological testing (2001) found limited human remains within disturbed soils, possibly of African American ancestry.
- HPI developed a *Community Engagement Plan* and an *Unanticipated Discoveries Plan* to address the respectful treatment of human remains should they be found on the site in the future (2019).
- **Current research is focused on persons who were enslaved in Flatbush who may or may not have been buried in the vicinity of the PS 90 Site, and the likely descendant community.**



Historical Context

- Flatbush (Midwout) established ca.1651
- Reformed Dutch Church of Flatbush was founded in 1654 and at one time owned the PS 90 Site.
- Many Flatbush families enslaved Africans; Native Americans were also sometimes enslaved.



Cemetery Research Results To Date

- **New Data:** A map recently made available by the Center for Brooklyn History (BHS) shows the location of the “Negro Burying Ground” as it existed in 1855; the period of use is now estimated as the 17th c. through ca. 1840.
- However, **secondary** references (19th and 20th c.) reported that burials were found further west than this map shows.
 - Human remains were reportedly found in 1842 basement excavations for Flatbush School No. 1 in what is now Church Avenue, and in 1865 when Locust Street (Bedford Avenue) was laid out. These were reportedly reburied in Holy Cross Cemetery, or on land that belonged to the Reformed Dutch Church adjacent to that cemetery.



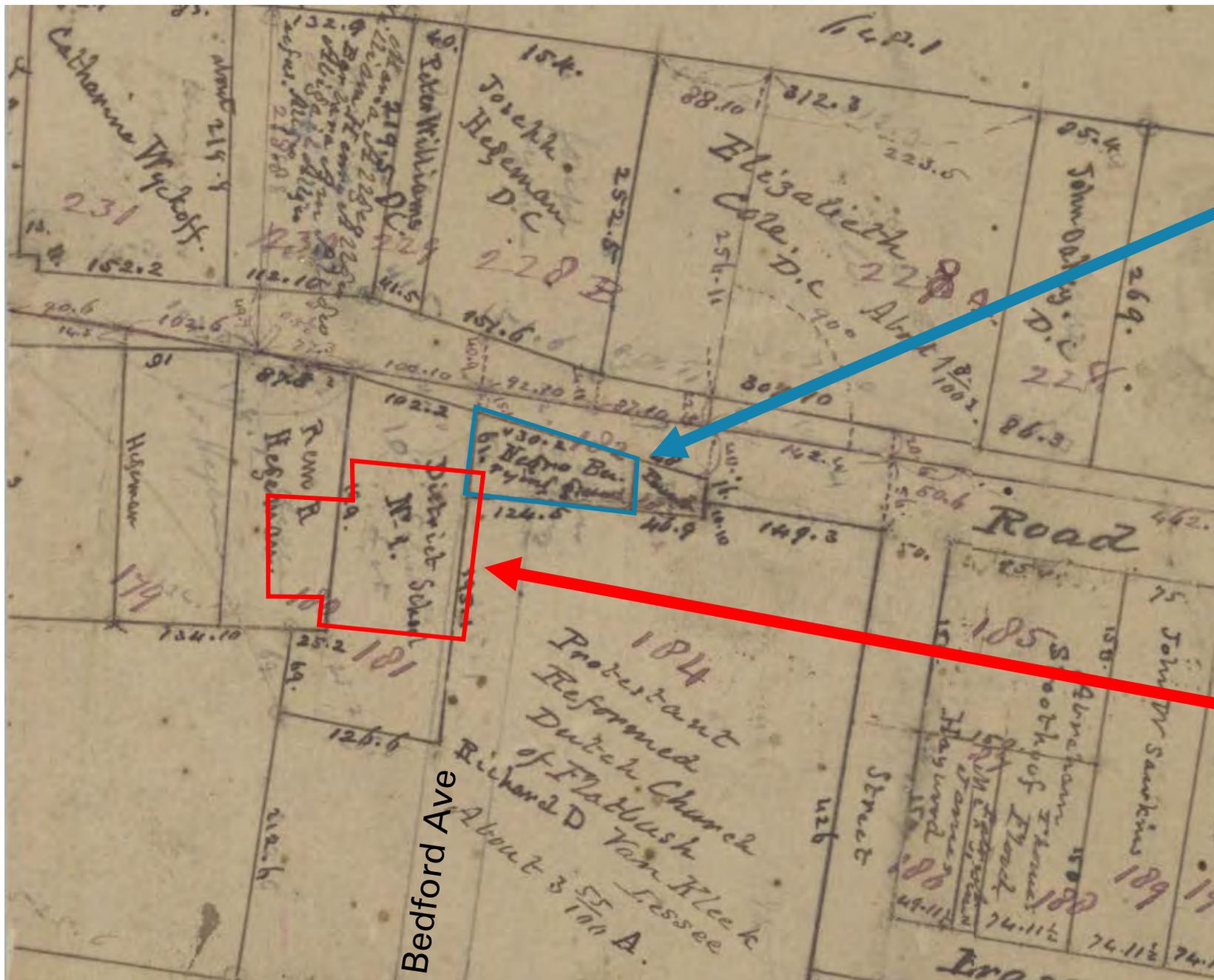
1855 Map

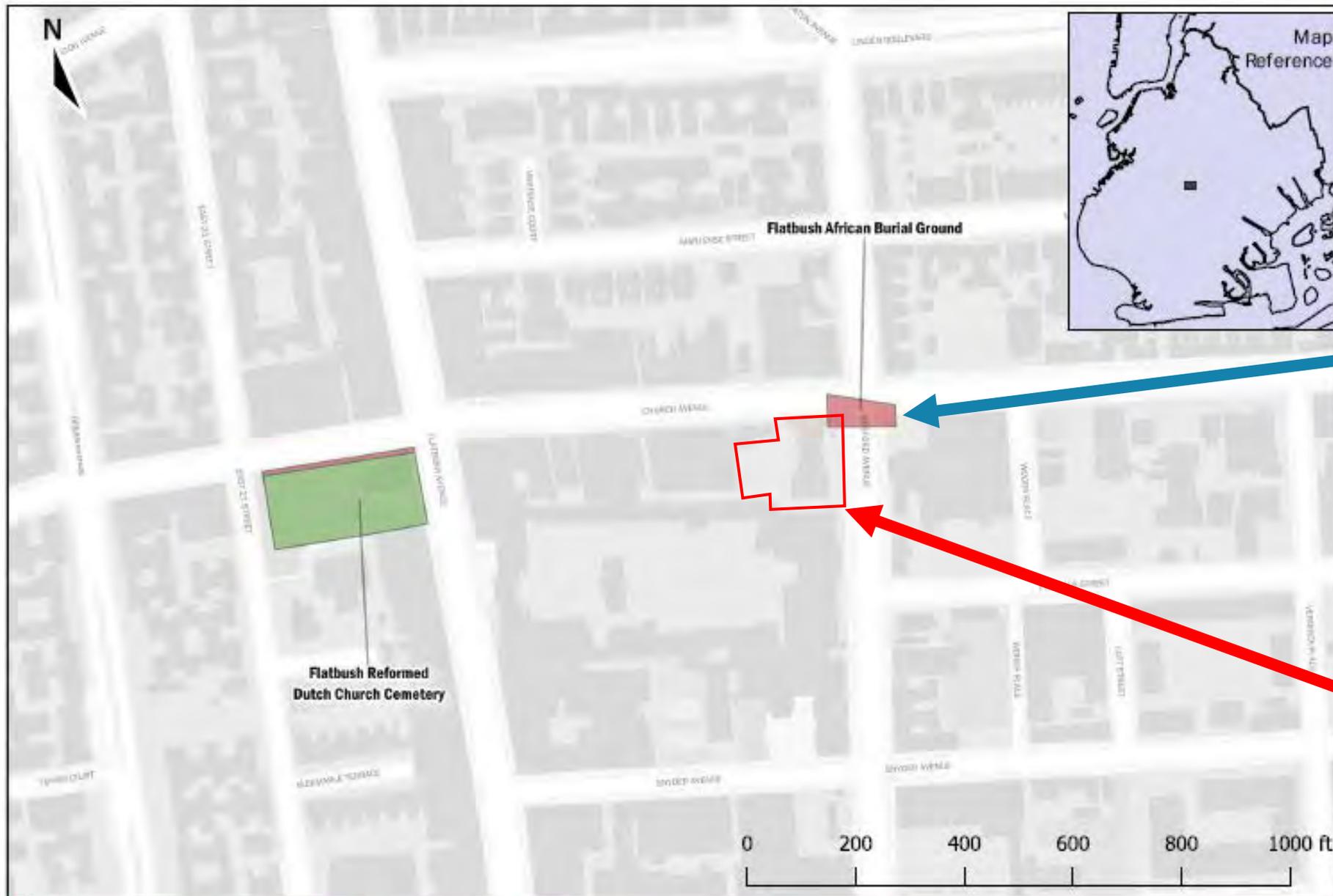
These are the approximate boundaries of the "Negro Burial Ground" as mapped in 1855.

It may have once been larger.

Reportedly burials were encountered in 1842 during basement excavations for Flatbush School No. 1, which stood to the west of these mapped boundaries.

Approximate location of PS 90 Site.





2020 GIS

Elizabeth Meade's 2020 dissertation on lost cemeteries of NYC used GIS to map the approximate location of the "Flatbush African Burial Ground" (as depicted in 1855) on the modern landscape.

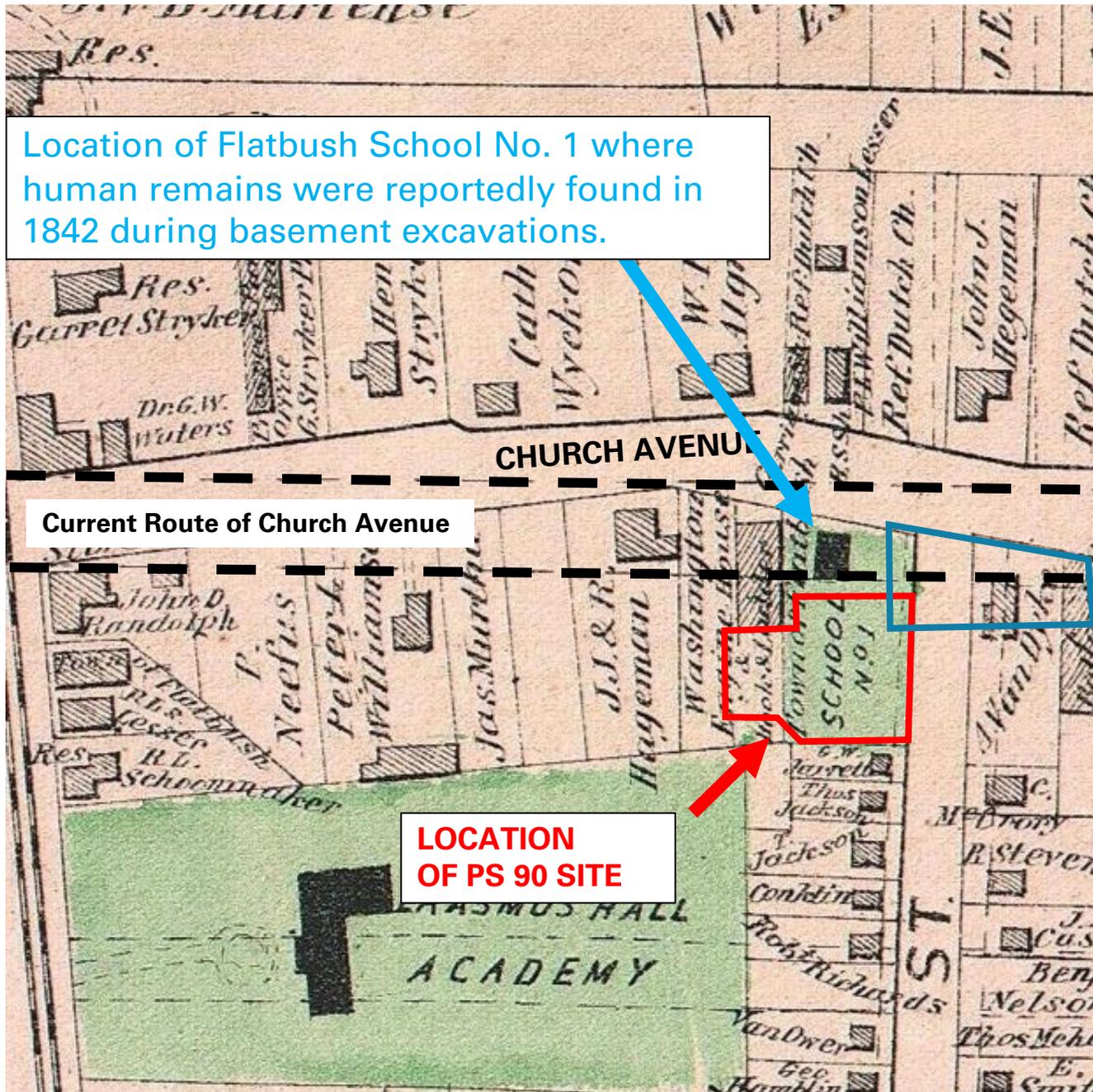
It may have once been larger.

Location of PS 90 Site.

Cemetery Location Unknown
 Active Cemetery
 Obliterated Cemetery
 Preserved Cemetery

Map 2.2-14: Brooklyn Cemeteries





Location of Flatbush School No. 1 where human remains were reportedly found in 1842 during basement excavations.

Current Route of Church Avenue

LOCATION OF PS 90 SITE

This 1873 map shows where Flatbush School No. 1 stood; human remains were reportedly found when its basement was excavated.

Approximate burial ground boundaries as mapped in 1855.



Yellow - Approximate location of former Flatbush School No. 1

Red – PS 90 Site

Green – Approximate 1855 boundaries of the “Negro Burial Ground”



Physical Anthropologist Review (2001)

- Recovered human remains were analyzed by Physical Anthropologists Thomas A.J. Crist, Ph.D. and Arthur Washburn, Ph.D.
- Dr. Washburn is a dental anthropologist with expertise in the analysis of human dental remains.
- No testing of the bone (DNA or other) was undertaken. In 2001 DNA testing was a very destructive technique.



Analysis of Recoveries

- Test Pit: Tooth
 - An adult lower jaw premolar.
 - Represented a young to middle-aged adult (20-35 years old) of unknown sex and ancestry.
- Trench 4: Bone and Teeth
 - The three teeth and lower jaw fragments appeared to represent one person, possibly female.
 - Small defects in the tooth enamel suggested that metabolic stress affected this person early in life.
 - One tooth, the second Lower Molar, showed a minor degree of crenulation (enamel wrinkling) that has been associated with African ancestry.



Reinterment

- The human remains were accepted by the Flatbush Reformed Church for respectful reburial.
- Reverend Daniel Ramm (then at the Church) confirmed that at the request of the School Construction Authority, and as agreed upon in 2002 by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the remains were respectfully reburied in the Flatbush Reformed Church cemetery, one block west on Flatbush Avenue.
- They remain in an unmarked grave.
- If a marker is requested, it would be necessary to speak with the Consistory of the Church.



What Can DNA Analysis Tell Us?

- Mitochondrial DNA could point to the origin of those interred *but will not likely allow us to establish descendants.*
- Several scientists are now working with historic and ancient skeletal material to pinpoint origins using non or minimally destructive techniques.
- References to two relevant articles are included at the end of this presentation.



Who Is The Descendant Community and What Will They Do?

- To date, we do not know the biological kin of the deceased, so we are now trying to identify the descendant community.
- This descendant community can be self-identified people with a vested interest in serving as the voice of those interred. We we hope the Task Force members will be part of this effort, which may come to include others as they are identified through further research and outreach.
- They are often community members that are interested in continuing research and/or working together to:
 - establish a preferred course of action for the respectful treatment, examination, and reinterment of human remains should they be found;
 - establish goals for future memorialization; and,
 - find ways to honor and remember an abandoned past.



Breadth and Depth of Research

- HPI will be involved in this research effort through the Public Meetings through the spring.
- Research will be ongoing long after we are not involved with the project.
- Research to establish the individual names of enslaved people in Flatbush can include:
 - Reading early Flatbush probate records and deeds;
 - Reviewing personal diaries (if available);
 - Diving deep into archives as more material becomes available; and
 - Collecting census data enumerating the enslaved peoples over time.



PS 90 Research Database

- Our hope is for the collected research to become a living document that can be a communal database of the enslaved population.
- This database could be a springboard for the development of educational material, public programming, and also serve as a virtual form of memorialization.
- As more information about enslaved peoples becomes available, the depth and breadth of the information should be revised, expanded, and continued to be shared.
- Collection point: <https://forms.gle/FnQUrM2b6qEEhZYV7>

