

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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 from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Bethel Burial Ground

Other names/site number: Bethel Burying Ground, Bethel Church Burial Ground, Bethel Colored Burial Ground, Queen Street Burial Ground, Mother Bethel Burying Ground, Weccacoe Square, Weccacoe School Garden, Weccacoe Playground

Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 405-425 Queen Street

City or town: Philadelphia

State: PA

County: Philadelphia

Not For Publication: NA

Vicinity: NA

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this x 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 x meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:
 national statewide x local Applicable National Register Criteria: xA B C xD

Signature of Certifying Official/Title:

Date

Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission

State or Federal Agency/Bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting Official/Title:

Date

State or Federal Agency/Bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register

 determined eligible for the National Register

 determined not eligible for the National Register

 removed from the National Register

 other (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
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 | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| <u> </u> | <u> 1 </u> | buildings |
| <u> 1 </u> | <u> 1 </u> | sites |
| <u> </u> | <u> </u> | Structures |
| <u> </u> | <u> </u> | objects |
| <u> 1 </u> | <u> 2 </u> | Total |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0 (*The property is within the boundary of the Southwark Historic District, but neither the playground nor the burial ground are mentioned in the 1972 nomination, and the areas of significance do not overlap.*)

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)

FUNERARY / cemetery

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION and CULTURE / outdoor recreation

RECREATION and CULTURE/ sports facility

FUNERARY / cemetery

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions.)

NA

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: NA

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Bethel Burial Ground lies under the current Weccacoe Playground in the National Register-listed Southwark Historic District in Philadelphia. The 1972 nomination for the district was not comprehensive in recording resources, and while this property is within the district boundary, it is not mentioned in the narratives, maps, or supporting documentation. Bethel Burial Ground is a site roughly within the southwestern corner of the current Weccacoe Playground, and consists entirely of below-ground features. Above ground is a modern playground facility (non-contributing site) with a non-contributing 1924 recreational building, late 20th century tennis courts and playground equipment, and mature trees, all within an iron fence (c.1924). The burial ground is believed to have been in use from 1810-c.1864.

The Southwark neighborhood is among the city's oldest. Today it consists primarily of 19th century two- and three-story row houses interlaced with small businesses, occasional churches, schools and other institutional buildings, and remnants of early industries. The 1960s construction of Interstate 95 resulted in major physical and visual impacts to the eastern edge of the neighborhood, along the Delaware River. Weccacoe Playground is located in the west-central portion of the listed Southwark District. It is bounded by Queen Street to the south, Lawrence (formerly Cobb) Street to the west, Catherine Street to the north, and Leithgow (formerly Weccacoe) Street to the east (Figs. 2-3). It occupies just over three-quarters (0.78) of an acre and is surrounded by a tall iron fence (c.1924) and concrete sidewalks. The burial ground lies below the playground's southwest corner and, at 0.28 of an acre, accounts for roughly one-third of the playground's substrate. Only on its western side does the burial ground extend beyond the playground, continuing under the adjacent sidewalk to a point at or near the east curb line of Lawrence Street. Along its southern boundary, the burial ground aligns with the playground's perimeter fence, which dates from c.1924. The burial ground's northern and eastern borders are essentially those of the original 1810 parcel (Fig. 7) and were confirmed during recent archaeological investigations. Much of the burial ground's southern half lies beneath the playground's 1924 Shelter Building and its additions, now known as the Recreation Building (Photos 3-5). Just west of this structure lies a narrow concrete shuffleboard court; to the north a tennis court extends approximately 20 feet onto the burial ground site. Mature trees stand near the southeast and northwest corners of the Recreation Building. The remaining area above the burial ground is paved with asphalt; no visible evidence indicates that human remains lie beneath any portion of the playground.

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

Documentary evidence and recent physical investigations (described below) suggest that the boundary currently established for the burial ground is fairly accurate. If further investigation or research indicates the presence of burials beyond the identified graveyard wall or fencing, the boundary of the site should be adjusted accordingly.

The Weccacoe Playground's potential National Register significance has not been investigated. Future research may determine that the Playground is eligible, perhaps for an area such as Recreation. The purpose of this nomination is limited to establishing the significance of the Burial Ground during the early and mid-19th century. The future contributing status of the burial ground would depend on areas and periods of significance developed for the Playground, as appropriate, or amendments or clarifications to the Southwark Historic District.

This nomination draws heavily upon the historical research and archaeological investigations of Douglas Mooney, Kimberly Morrell, and their colleagues at the URS Corporation (now AECOM), as well as on the research of historian Terry Buckalew. Their works and related communications are cited below.

Narrative Description

The Property Today

Bethel Burial Ground has at times been both abused *and* protected by the various designers, builders, and users of the recreational spaces that succeeded it. All above-ground evidence of the graveyard has vanished but subterranean features appear to be largely intact. After the lot ceased to be used for interment (c.1864), it was neglected and then given over to new uses, first as a sugar refiner's freight yard, then as a park, an educational garden, and a playground. If memory of its burial function persisted into the 20th century, it had little or no effect on the City's plans for the site. Nor have these plans been the sole source of topographic change there. In 1975, an engineering survey of the playground recorded various "cave-ins," all of them occurring above the graveyard (Fig. 17). Whether these depressions stemmed from subsurface erosion or, more likely, from grave-shaft subsidence is unclear. Yet, in describing such changes, it is easy to overstate their extent. Archeological investigations undertaken in July of 2013 indicate that, aside from disturbances by tree roots, minor infrastructure such as water pipes, and construction of portions of the Shelter Building and a nearby former water feature, the graveyard remains largely intact. The shuffleboard and tennis courts that cover parts of the site do not seem to have affected the graves themselves, which sit beneath layers of fill. Despite the loss of above-ground features such as grave markers, earlier enclosures, or memorial plantings, the graveyard retains its integrity and significance. Unlike many other burial grounds in the oldest parts of Philadelphia, this one was never targeted for removal.¹ Its survival is no less remarkable for having occurred by accident.

The burial ground today is covered by an active city-owned playground. Current "improvements" that are located directly above the graveyard include a 1924 building (with a 1970s-era addition), mature trees, a shuffleboard court, and portions of a tennis court. The graveyard is believed to extend slightly beyond the western side of the 1924 fence that encloses the playground. The burials were historically covered with layers of fill to level the ground and provide the opportunity to add more burials to the site during its

¹ Some sense of how many burial grounds have been removed from the oldest parts of the city may be gleaned from René L. C. Torres, "Cemetery Landscapes of Philadelphia," M.S. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1997.

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

decades of use. Additional fill was likely added after interment activity ceased, and the property evolved for other uses. Those layers of fill and subsequent paving effectively encapsulated the burial ground under the present recreational facility.

The Physical Evolution of the Property

Timeline

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Pre-1810 | Apparently open space in sparsely-developed Southwark neighborhood |
| 1810 | Purchased by Rev. Richard Allen and Trustees of Bethel AME Church for use as a burial ground |
| 1810-c.1864 | Actively used for burials |
| 1864-1869 | No longer in use for burials, essentially abandoned |
| 1869 | Bethel trustees rent the land to a local sugar refiner for storage of wagons and drays with condition that burials not be compromised |
| 1873 | Tenant released from lease |
| 1873-1889 | Burial ground remains neglected and unused |
| 1889 | Sold to City for development of a park, to be known as Weccacoe Square |
| Post-1895 | Improvements made and additional land acquired to actually develop and expand park to current footprint |
| 1904-1905 | Weccacoe Square used as a school garden and playground; area over burial ground primarily recreational use |
| 1905-today | Continuing alterations for playground and contemporary recreational uses |

As originally laid out in 1810, Bethel Burial Ground occupied a rectangular lot on the north side of Queen Street in Southwark, a sparsely-developed area on the city's southern fringe. The deed through which trustees of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (known colloquially as Bethel Church and, since 1953, as Mother Bethel) obtained the parcel describes it as measuring "one hundred and twenty one feet two inches and one third of an inch" along Queen Street "and extending in depth northward one hundred and three feet or thereabouts" – dimensions inverted on some early maps.² Given the prevalence and dread of bodysnatching at this time, the site was probably fenced at an early date. However, the first known reference to such a fence appears in an 1873 agreement obligating a lessee of land to enclose it. By this time, burials had ceased for nearly a decade.³

Early-nineteenth-century subdivision and construction proceeded rapidly in what was then a semi-rural neighborhood. In 1839, the new Weccacoe (later renamed Leithgow) Street bisected the eastern half of the block on which the burial ground stood, providing new frontage for rowhouses. A year or two later, Cobb (later renamed Lawrence) Street was opened along the graveyard's western flank. The resulting blocks – now three instead of one – were soon subdivided into house lots and built upon. Further residential infill created continuous rows in the years leading up to the Civil War (Fig. 8). Perhaps in response to this urbanization, the burial ground's stewards surrounded it with brick walls on stone

² City Deed Book IC 28, p. 471, Matthew Waring and wife to Bethel Church, 28 April 1810.

³ Douglas Mooney and Kimberly Morrell, "Phase IB Archaeological Investigations of the Mother Bethel Burying Ground, 1810 – Circa 1864, ER No. 2013-1516-101-A," a report prepared under the auspices of the URS Corporation, 11 October 2013, pp. 1.1, 2.2, 2.10, 4.5; Terry Buckalew, "Weccacoe: Burying Ground, Garden, Park, and Playground – A Historical Sketch and Timeline from 1800 – 2012 (TMs 2012), 1-8.

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

footings at mid-century.⁴ However, the decision to erect a more substantial enclosure may also have stemmed from a more proximate cause: heavy use of the site for its intended purpose. Estimates based on combined data from bills of mortality and death certificates put the number of dead arriving at Bethel Burial Ground between 1810 and 1830 at 1,716. There is little reason to suspect a sharp decline in this rate over the next decade or two, meaning that, by the time interments ceased in the mid to late 1860s, somewhere between 3,000 and 5,000 burials could have occurred there.⁵ Key to achieving this density was the deposition of large amounts of fill between the years 1842 and c.1864. As the site's grade rose – as much as five feet in some areas – new graves were stacked upon older ones.

We currently know little about the ways Bethel Burial Ground's landscape was organized and adorned. Many graveyards of the period featured a central pathway with graves arranged in a grid to either side, but, if such a design was implemented at the Queen Street site, it was likely obscured or obliterated by subsequent layers of fill and haphazard modes of burial.⁶ Recent archeological investigation suggests that inexpensive wood coffins were the standard containers for Bethel's dead, not all of whom belonged to the church but most of whom were poor. Some signs of greater expenditure have turned up, such as decorative metal screw caps on a coffin and part of a marble headstone belonging to one Amelia Brown (see Figure 21). Mounds and modest monuments commonly marked the graves of the "lower sort" (and Quakers) in other parts of the city, and there is good reason to suspect their presence here at one time. At the Queen Street site, though, subsequent uses and transformations of the property have made it difficult to tell what practices prevailed and what evidence of those practices remains.⁷

Based on review of death certificates and other records, it is believed Bethel Burial Ground stopped being used for interment around 1864, for uncertain reasons. It is possible that after years of use and even with layers of fill added to create more space, the site had reached capacity. Following 1849, when the privately-owned Lebanon and Olive Cemeteries were opened, it appears burials at the Bethel Burial Ground began to decline, as the city's African American residents now had new options for burying their dead previously unavailable. These new options and trends in burial practices may have influenced the future of the site, and it is possible that the congregation of Bethel A.M.E. was no longer interested in operating a cemetery. After 1864, observers bemoaned the site's disorderly appearance with increasing frequency. In the summer of 1872, less than three years after church trustees began leasing the property to sugar refiner Barnabas Bartol for equipment storage, prominent A.M.E. bishop Benjamin Tanner described "A most shameful spectacle – old hogsheads, and barrels and lumber of every conceivable shape. Not a gravestone unbroken, not a grave to be seen...."⁸ Bartol terminated his lease prematurely the following year, agreeing to fence the property in the bargain as a condition for early release. In March of 1889, a columnist for the *Philadelphia Tribune* wrote reproachfully: "The grounds now furnish a playground for the boys of the neighborhood, who romp over the graves of the dead with the freedom they would exercise on a baseball ground."⁹ By then, however, plans were underway for more orderly public uses.

⁴ Archeological investigation puts the wall construction date between 1842 and 1864; see Mooney and Morrell, "Phase IB," 4.1, 4.3.

⁵ Mooney and Morrell, "Phase IB," 2.9 - 2.10, 4.3.

⁶ See, for instance, Jean K. Wolf, *Lives of the Silent Stones in Christ Church Burial Ground: 50 Family Profiles* (Philadelphia: Christ Church Preservation Trust, 2003), 2, 5.

⁷ Mooney and Morrell, "Phase IB," 4.4, 4.5.

⁸ See Tanner's *Christian Recorder* article of 3 August 1872, quoted in Mooney and Morrell, "Phase IB," 2.10; Buckalew, 8-9.

⁹ As quoted in Mooney and Morrell, "Phase IB," 2.13.

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

The conversion of Bethel Burial Ground into a small park named Weccacoe Square took several years. District Surveyor Thomas Daly's 1889 plan of the property (Fig. 9) showed only its dimensions and new moniker but, after the City of Philadelphia took title in December of that year, efforts to make the grounds "ready for Promenaders" moved forward.¹⁰ By 1895, short paths from Queen and Cobb Streets converged on a central *rond-point*, likely landscaped with shrubs or flowers (Fig. 10).

As early as 1895, the City Parks Association embarked on plans to expand Weccacoe Square to the edges of the block, a move that would displace dozens of families whose houses lay in the way. The eastern flank fell first; by 1901 the park stretched to Leithgow Street (Fig. 11). Residents to the north were less compliant and had to be forcibly removed before the corresponding push to Catherine Street could occur. The large parcel created by this campaign was soon radically transformed. With municipal backing, supporters of the Garden School Movement divided much of the site into 250 garden plots, tended by local seventh and eighth graders who received tags emblazoned with their lot numbers (Fig. 12). This project, which ran from 1904 to 1905 under the auspices of the Public Education Association, excluded the southern third of the park and appears not to have affected the graveyard. There, the playground function reappeared in the form of "a softball field, basketball nets, a ring-toss area, and a punching bag."¹¹ (These changes appear to have had little or no direct impact on the graves below.)

Site modifications that followed the school garden experiment were of a more conventional variety. The Philadelphia Playground Association and various City agencies oversaw Weccacoe Square's refitting for park and playground purposes – a merry-go-round in the northwest corner by 1912 (Fig. 13), see-saws and similar equipment by 1915. A major renovation in 1924 brought with it more lasting adjustments: a comprehensive re-grading that lowered the park's surface by roughly one foot; a Shelter Building designed by the City Architect, John Molitor; and, in all likelihood, the iron fence that surrounds the property today (Figs. 14-15). Resting on sixteen concrete footings that extended forty-two inches below grade, the Shelter Building occupied much of the burial ground's southeast quadrant. Brick-lined pits beneath the boys' and girls' toilets ran the same depth but their concrete-slab floors went one foot deeper. The 1924 project was the first of four playground remodeling campaigns separated by generation-length intervals. The others, occurring in 1954, 1979, and the early 2000s, brought new equipment, various athletic courts, more trees, and additions to the Shelter Building that made it into today's Recreation Building (Figs. 16-18). This building and the nearby 1954 spray pool presumably had the greatest impact on the burial ground site, but only demolition and archaeology – themselves highly disruptive interventions – could reveal the full extent of the damage wrought by these changes.¹²

Integrity Assessment

There is no existing above-ground evidence of Bethel Burial Ground. At times, there have been depressions or cave-ins, presumably due to subsidence of grave shafts, but these have been regularly filled. More serious disturbances may have been caused by the growth of tree roots, the laying of water pipes, and construction of the Shelter Building and Spray Pool. Aside from these intrusions, the site appears to have fared well. Archeological investigations performed in 2013 indicate that the graves

¹⁰ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 August 1890, quoted in Buckalew, 11; see also pp. 9-10, and Mooney and Morrell, "Phase IB," 2.13.

¹¹ Mooney and Morrell, "Phase IB," 2.13, 2.18 (quotation), 4.5; Buckalew, 11-13; "Current Events," *Friends Intelligencer* 61, no. 19 (14 May 1904): 314; *U.S. Department of Agriculture Annual Report of the Office of Experiment Stations for the Year Ended June 30, 1905* (Washington, D.C.: Govt. Pr. Office, 1906), 356-357.

¹² Mooney and Morrell, "Phase IB," 2.18, 2.26, 4.5; Buckalew, 14-16.

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

themselves remain largely intact because intervening layers of fill buffered them from most of the changes described above. The northern and eastern locations of the original wall have been established. (This and other findings are detailed in the URS Phase 1 and 1B reports [see bibliography and summaries in Section 8 narrative] and are available in the State Historic Preservation Office files and the City's Parks and Recreation Department.) Despite the loss of above-ground features such as walls, grave markers, and lot adornments, the subterranean evidence retains integrity and significance.

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
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.)

- ☒ 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions.)

Archaeology / Historic – Non Aboriginal

Ethnic Heritage / African American

Social History

Period of Significance

1810 – c.1864

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

Significant Dates

1810

Significant Person (Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

NA

Cultural Affiliation

African American

Architect/Builder

NA

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Bethel Burial Ground was established by Rev. Richard Allen and trustees of Philadelphia's Bethel A.M.E. Church in 1810. Though physically separate from the church building, a National Historic Landmark at Addison and South Sixth Streets, the graveyard's historical ties to the congregation (now commonly known as *Mother Bethel*) are strong. Its development also tells an independent story of African-American burial trends in Philadelphia, and of forgotten graveyards scattered across the city. The site appears to be the city's oldest religiously affiliated African-American burial ground that is not a churchyard (that is, a graveyard adjacent to a church). Interment there was not limited to congregation members, but was open to the larger Black community. The site was developed through the efforts of African Americans to create a burial ground for their use and under their control. As such, it represents the culmination of a decades-long effort by that community to secure a burial space of its own – a matter of great importance to a populace whose dead were generally relegated to potters fields and left vulnerable to vandals and bodysnatchers. It holds the remains of individuals important to Mother Bethel's history and that of the larger African-American community.

Recent archival research has yielded an outline of Bethel Burial Ground's history. Archeological investigations have identified some perimeter walls, fill layers, grave shafts, and coffin materials. The findings demonstrate that the site is significant for African American heritage, historical archaeology, and social history, with a period significance extending from 1810 to c.1864, the dates the burial site was known to be in use. Further study will add to our understanding of burial practices of the period, of the African American residents of Philadelphia and how they fit into the city's 19th century life, and an understanding of how these urban graveyards became parks, playgrounds, or sites for residential, commercial, civic or other development. Further study and comparisons may also establish that the site could be eligible for listing under Criterion B, for association with individuals buried there, and may possess statewide or national levels of significance for any of the listed criteria. The site meets Criterion Considerations A and D as a graveyard formerly owned by a religious organization, deriving significance from important historical associations.

A Note on This Site's Name and Related Terminology. Until the 1820s, Americans generally referred to respectable public burial places as "graveyards" or "burying grounds." The term "cemetery" is Greek in

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

origin. It had some currency in late-18th-century Europe but Americans adopted it only when their notions of the afterlife aligned with the root meaning: “sleeping chamber.”¹³ Bethel Burial Ground predates this innovation and was rarely if ever called a cemetery during the period of its active use. The primary author of the nomination has chosen to use the term “burial ground” as the site’s name throughout this nomination. “Burying ground” appears often in historic records also, as do (less frequently) other variations of the name (see page 1 of the nomination for a partial list). The site was listed in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places as “Bethel Burying Ground” on June 14, 2013.

In this nomination, three burial grounds are referenced that are linked to Bethel A.M.E. Church. The earliest is the churchyard at the church’s primary property at Sixth and Lombard Streets. (A churchyard is a graveyard adjacent to a church building.) The second is the burial ground at Queen Street, the subject of this nomination. The third is a small churchyard associated with Bethel A.M.E.’s mission church in the Northern Liberties neighborhood, known as Union A.M.E. or Union Mission. At various times each of them may have been cited in certificates or maps as “burial” or “burying” grounds, or “graveyard.” In an attempt to create clarity here, the burial site at the main Bethel A.M.E. church location will be identified as “Bethel Churchyard;” the Queen Street site as “Bethel Burial Ground;” and the third site as “Union Mission Churchyard.”

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

In colonial America, Blacks were generally denied the right to interment in graveyards overseen by white churches. In cities, their remains were consigned to ragtag public lots known as potter’s fields or to the grounds adjacent to almshouses. These spaces were the province of outsiders, and in them African Americans were laid to rest alongside the indigent poor, convicted criminals, the mentally ill, persons who belonged to no organized church, foreigners, and other non-resident “strangers.” As the final destination of the socially marginal, these places were typically untended, unregulated, and over-crowded. Deceased persons whose families could not afford the price of a coffin or gravestone were frequently interred without them. In Philadelphia, the major repositories of such remains were the almshouse burial ground and Southeast (now Washington) Square, the city’s principal potter’s field. The latter was a scene of frequent and sometimes violent conflict between friends of the recently deceased and bodysnatchers seeking cadavers for medical dissection.¹⁴

At the close of the 18th century, leaders of the city’s African-American community sought legal and physical protection for “their” portion of Southeast Square. Their instrument of choice was the petition, submitted to state and local officials over a period of at least nine years. Petitioning was, of course, a symbolically charged act, suggesting the extent to which the city’s African-American community had imbibed the republican spirit of the age. But while the language of the pleas was secular, the underlying sentiments were spiritual. As historian Gary Nash observes, racial injustice in the graveyard “may have

¹³ David Charles Sloane, *The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 55; Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 53.

¹⁴ Billy G. Smith, “Death and Life in a Colonial Immigrant City: A Demographic Analysis of Philadelphia,” *Journal of Economic History* 37, no. 4 (December 1977): 867-874; Simon P. Newman, *Embodied History: The Lives of the Poor in Early Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 125-131; J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884* (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts & Co., 1884), v. 3, p. 2355; Steven Robert Wilf, “Anatomy and Punishment in Late Eighteenth-Century New York,” *Journal of Social History* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1989): 509-514; Mooney and Morrell, “Phase IB,” 2.1-2.2.

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

been especially grievous to Afro-Americans, whose African heritage emphasized dignifying the dead.” Underscoring the religious connotations of their work, the petitioners’ last recorded request (1791) was that “the north west corner of the Ground called Potter’s Field may be granted to them for the Purpose of erecting a Church.” These formal pleas were among the first civil and political statements by the city’s Black community – bids to participate in the public sphere at a time when Philadelphia served as the nation’s capital. Had the campaign succeeded, it would have established an official Black graveyard in the midst of “the Athens of America.” Like the emergence of Philadelphia’s new “African” churches and nondenominational Free African Society, the creation of such a space would have supported the notion that people of African descent were by that time no longer strangers but a permanent part of Philadelphia’s and the nation’s history and social fabric.¹⁵

Following the Yellow Fever epidemic of 1793, Southeast (now Washington) Square was closed to new interments. The city’s first Black graveyards were established soon afterward on land next to Bethel A.M.E. and St. Thomas African Episcopal Churches.¹⁶ Bethel’s congregation grew rapidly in these years, as did Philadelphia’s Black population more generally. Annual bills of mortality show that the remains of at least 285 individuals had been buried in Bethel’s small churchyard, on Sixth Street above Lombard, by early 1810. As space there ran out, the church’s noted founder, Reverend Richard Allen, and fellow trustees paid the substantial sum of \$1,600.00 for a lot fronting Queen Street between 4th and 5th Streets. This parcel became the first privately owned Black burial ground in the city physically detached from a church, in this case by a distance of seven blocks.¹⁷

The National Register nomination for Eden Cemetery, in Delaware County, PA, suggests that there was an additional burial ground for Bethel A.M.E. congregation members in the Northern Liberties neighborhood, and some have confused that site with the one on Queen Street.¹⁸ The Church had established a small mission church in Northern Liberties c.1813, the Union A.M.E. or Union Mission Church, and it is likely that some of its members were buried in that small churchyard, but it does not appear the property was intended to serve primarily as a burial ground. Rather, the lot (the size of two row houses) was purchased to hold a church building, with limited space for burials. The Union Mission Church was located on the south side of Coates Street (now Fairmount Avenue) near 4th Street (at or near the present 444 Fairmount Avenue). Newspapers indicate that the churchyard was in use in the 1840s. As this was a very small graveyard, it can be assumed that after 1849 many burials would have been directed to Lebanon or Olive cemeteries. In or about 1884 the church property was sold when the congregation moved further west. It is not known if any attempt was ever made to relocate burials from that property.

¹⁵ Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia’s Free Black Community 1720 – 1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 94; Philadelphia City Council Minutes, 1789-1793, pp. 415-424, as quoted in Mooney and Morrell, “Phase IB,” B.2. On the broad significance of these efforts, see W.E.B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996 [originally published 1899]), 19-22, 415; Nash, 94 -133; David G. Hackett, “The Prince Hall Masons and the African American Church: the Labors of Grand Master and Bishop James Walker Hood, 1831-1918,” in David G. Hackett, ed., *Religion and American Culture: a Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 295-296; Leslie J. Pollard, “Black Beneficial Societies and the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored Persons: A Research Note,” *Phylon* 41, no. 3 (3rd Qtr., 1980): 230.

¹⁶ Mooney and Morrell, “Phase IB,” 2.2, B.2. See also Rebecca Yamin, *Digging in the City of Brotherly Love: Stories from Philadelphia Archaeology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 100-105.

¹⁷ Mooney and Morrell, “Phase IB,” 2.2; Buckalew, 2-4.

¹⁸ Eden Cemetery National Register nomination, p.12. See also Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 198-199, and Nash, 263.

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

In 2013 the site was destroyed for the construction of a new residential building, and it is not known if any intact burials were present on the property at the time of demolition.

Owned until 1889 by Bethel A.M.E. Church, the graveyard on Queen Street (the subject of this nomination) operated between 1810 and c.1864. Archives have so far yielded few details about the property's appearance and management. Minutes kept by the Union Benevolent Sons of Bethel (1826 - 1844), a burial assistance charity established by Richard Allen, have survived in fragmentary form. They record the routine cycles of mutual aid society operation: listing of members, election of officers, collection of dues, and the levying of fines for minor offenses such as absenteeism. Collectively, however, they demonstrate Rev. Allen's conviction that providing proper Christian burial for even the poorest members of his community was a basic obligation of his church.¹⁹

In the absence of the church's burial records, public death certificates represent the best source for identifying individuals interred at Bethel Burial Ground. These records, too, are incomplete and, had they survived in full, still would not have documented every death in the city, much less in its poorest communities. Using these materials, historian Terry Buckalew has counted 2,380 interments at the Queen Street site between 1810 and 1864. But study of another record group, the city's annual bills of mortality, suggests that interment figure could be far too low. Combining the two data sets and extrapolating from the years 1827 - 1830 (the last years in which these figures may be cross-referenced) it appears that somewhere between 3,000 and 5,000 bodies may have been buried at the site during its period of active use. Regardless of the precise tally, the graveyard had evidently reached capacity by the mid-1860s. Among the interred were early leaders of the Black community, including several of Richard Allen's associates in the ministry.²⁰

On January 1, 1869, having closed the property for burials, church trustees entered into a 10-year lease with sugar refiner Barnabas Bartol, allowing him to use the property as a storage area provided "that the remains of the dead who are interred in the said lot of ground are to be allowed to remain there undisturbed."²¹ When Bartol sought release from the arrangement four years later, the trustees consented in return for a cash payment and Bartol's promise that he would erect a good fence around the property. By this time, articles had appeared in a prominent Black newspaper, *The Christian Recorder*, condemning the trustees for neglecting the graveyard. However, while Black leaders evidently saw the site as an embarrassment and its treatment as a desecration, its stewards remained unwilling or unable to address the situation. By the mid-1880s, they were considering selling the lot and transferring at least some of the remains to Olive Cemetery, one of two non-sectarian graveyards operating under African-American management in Philadelphia.²² (Established in the mid-19th century, Olive and Lebanon cemeteries adopted the conventions of the "rural" cemetery movement; in so doing, they updated the burial reform tradition that the Southeast Square petitioners had begun and Richard Allen and other Bethel trustees had continued.) No evidence suggests that any of the Bethel Burial Ground's remains were moved. Soon,

¹⁹ Mooney and Morrell, "Phase IB," 2.8; Buckalew, 2; microfilm records of Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church, 1760-1972, reel 8, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

²⁰ Buckalew, 2.8-2.10. Leading members of the early Black clergy interred at Bethel Burial Ground include James Champion (1766-1813), Stephen Laws (1754-1814), Jacob Tapisco (1770 - 1820), and Belfast Burton (1774-1849). All except Laws are discussed in Nash, 229, 233, 244, 264.

²¹ City Deed Book JTO 209, p. 30.

²² Buckalew, 8-9. On Olive and Lebanon cemeteries, see Scharf and Westcott, vol. 1, p. 693, vol. 3: p. 2360; Roger Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia & Ours: On the Past and Future of the Black City in American* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 106-110.

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

Philadelphia's Board of Health began receiving nuisance complaints about Bethel's grounds and expressing concern about a "defective retaining wall" there. When the congregation finally opted to sell, it did so at least partly under pressure from the City. But there was a silver lining: the resulting funds aided construction of the new church at Sixth and Lombard Streets, which has been designated a National Historic Landmark.²³

The subsequent transformation of Bethel Burial Ground, first into Weccacoe Square (1890), then into Weccacoe School Garden (1904), and finally into Weccacoe Playground (1910), gradually erased the graveyard from public memory. But the march toward amnesia was disruptive, even violent, with families forcibly removed from their homes as lots were acquired by eminent domain. It began with the reform-minded impulse to create "small parks" in Philadelphia, a trend soon seen in other cities. Like many of the era's densest neighborhoods, Southwark hosted a burgeoning immigrant population; in this case it consisted largely of Russian Jews. Patrician reformers connected to the City Parks Association wished to bring light, air, and, perhaps, a mix of ethnicities into the slums, and they persuaded city government to join them. Weccacoe Square thus became "the first park acquired by purchase under the 'small parks' movement," but this was only a first step. The site joined one or two others of similar size and location as "entering wedges," intended "to be enlarged from time to time by tearing down buildings known as 'rookeries.'" In this manner, some of the targets of reform became its victims. Any recollections of living adjacent to the old burial ground were likely lost amid the tumult.²⁴ As the site continued to evolve, its school-garden phase was notable experiment in urban farming. (Potential significance and an integrity assessment for the complete playground site's additional areas of significance under Criterion A were not explored based on existing limited documentation at this time, but could possibly be pursued in the future.) From the perspective of graveyard preservation, educational and recreational use of the site has been a mixed blessing. While these adaptations appear to have left most of the burial ground (or at least many of the graves themselves) undisturbed, tree planting campaigns and the construction of amenities such as a shelter building (1924, with additions) and a spray pool water feature (1954) have taken a physical toll.

Almshouse Cemeteries and Potter's Fields in Philadelphia

During the earliest years of Philadelphia's existence, the primary burial locations for both enslaved and free African Americans were the potter's field in Southeast (later Washington) Square and the Alms House burial grounds. Specific portions of these sites appear to have been designated for African Americans. Even after the first independent black churches were established, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many of the least-fortunate members of the African American community continued to be interred in the various potter's fields and almshouse grounds established throughout the city and its outskirts. The Appendix for the Phase 1B archeological investigation for Bethel Burial Ground provides a list and accompanying map summarizing current information available related to the location, periods of use, and current preservation status of the public burial grounds of Philadelphia. Sixteen potter's fields or almshouse graveyards in Philadelphia are identified in the Appendix. The

²³ Minutes and Financial Book of the Trustees of Bethel A.M.E. Church, 1863-1894 (Corporation), 2 December 1889, as transcribed and communicated to the author by church archivist Margaret Jerrido.

²⁴ "Parks" editorial, *Forest Leaves* 3, no. 2 (June 1890): 23 (first quotation); "The Small Parks of Philadelphia," *Garden and Forest* 6, no. 276 (7 June 1893): 248 (second quotation); Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), ch. 2 (esp. pp. 80-85), 196, 199. As Cranz, 63-64, makes clear, the "small park" and playground movements were closely intertwined. Thanks to the efforts of horticulturist-reformer Thomas Meehan, Philadelphia's contributions to this cause preceded the "pioneering" ones of Boston (1890) by at least five years; see Buckalew, 8.

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

majority are considered to be at least partially intact, although some have been completely destroyed and most have buildings located on top of at least a portion of the site. (See Fig 5 for map of identified almshouse cemeteries and potter's fields.)

African American Burial Grounds in Philadelphia

The Appendix for Bethel Burial Ground's Phase IB archeological investigations includes a list of known African American churches and associated graveyards and burial grounds that date between 1780 and 1849. Although a good amount of research into the history of black churches in the city has been conducted in recent years, almost no effort has been made so far to document the various graveyards created by and associated with these congregations, or any potential independent burial grounds established by the African American community. The Appendix provides a summary of the known research regarding Black burial sites in Philadelphia during this period and an accompanying map (Figure 6). Given the relative lack of burial options available to African Americans during this period, it is possible—if not likely—that many of the churches listed did create their own graveyards, or burial vaults, at some point in time. The information provided in the Appendix should not be considered exhaustive or comprehensive but it does provide some perspective for understanding the history and role of Bethel Burial Ground.

The summaries provided in the Appendix for some of the known churches and cemeteries include cases where previously “forgotten” burial grounds were rediscovered during major construction projects, such as the Vine Street Expressway in 1985, resulting in exhumations and reburials. Throughout the 1800s as the City grew, urban burial grounds were increasingly facing development pressure, overcrowding, and unsanitary conditions. Congregations could not always maintain the ones they owned, especially after use had ceased due to exhausted space, populations shifted, or burial trends changed as more modern and “rural” cemeteries became common in the later 19th century. The burial grounds were sometimes abandoned and sold to new owners, with and without relocation of remains, and their existence forgotten as the sites began to serve new purposes. While those interred in many private urban burial sites were often relocated to new cemeteries at the city edges, in some cases the graves were left in place, and eventually built over. There are many instances in Philadelphia's recent past of forgotten burial grounds and cemeteries being disturbed by demolition and construction projects, including the Vine Street Expressway, Queen Lane Apartments, and the National Constitution Center.

By the mid-1800s non-denominational African-American cemetery companies began forming to serve the larger needs of the African-American community. Cemetery sales or closures in the 1800s often resulted in reburials in the Olive or Lebanon Cemeteries. Both established in 1849, the 11-acre Lebanon and 8-acre Olive Cemeteries became the primary burial grounds used by African Americans who were denied access to other established cemeteries. When the Lebanon and Olive Cemeteries (located respectively at 19th and Passyunk Streets and 44th and Girard Streets), opened they sold lots to private individuals, fraternal and benevolent societies, and churches.

Lebanon operated until 1899 when it was condemned by the City to allow for road improvement projects. The property was sold in 1902 and the following year all burials were relocated to Eden Cemetery in Delaware County. Olive was condemned by the City and sold in 1903; twenty years later, its graves were moved to Eden as well. Often the 20th century reburials of African Americans took place in the Eden Cemetery in Delaware County, west of the city limits (listed in the National Register in 2010). Founded in 1902, Eden continued the tradition of Lebanon and Olive cemeteries—resources founded and operated by African Americans to serve the African-American community. Bethel Burial Ground might be seen as

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

the pre-cursor for Lebanon and Olive, an early example of the agency of African American citizens in Philadelphia.

Associated Individuals and Those Known to be Buried Here

Bethel A.M.E.'s Rev. Richard Allen was instrumental in the decision to purchase the property for use as a burial ground to serve the community. Among the cross-section of the City's African American residents buried here are leaders including (to date): James Champion (1766 – 1813); Stephen Laws (1754 – 1814); Jacob Tapisco (1770 – 1820); Caesar Worthington (1764 – 1826); Simon Murray (1800 – 1840); Richard Heppard (? – 1841); Joseph Cox, (1789 – 1843); Richard Williams (1770 – 1844); Levi Ganges (1758 – 1846); Belfast Burton (1774 – 1849); Ignatius Beck (1774 – 1849). It is possible that with further research and context, a Criterion B argument could be made for Bethel Burial Ground, for its association with individuals prominent in Philadelphia's African-American community.²⁵

Recent Archeological Investigations

In July 2013, the URS Corporation (URS) conducted a Phase IB archaeological investigation of the burial ground site.²⁶ This investigation was performed in advance of planned renovations to Philadelphia's Weccacoe Playground property (not yet implemented). URS's complete reports are available in the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office's files and in the City's Parks and Recreation Department. Archeologist Doug Mooney, one of the lead investigators and report authors, granted permission for the report's content to be excerpted and summarized for use in this nomination. The first objective for investigation was to ensure that no burials were impacted during the subsurface investigation of the burial ground, and to that end, no intact human skeletal remains were uncovered during field testing. The exposure of burial remains was not necessary in order to achieve the project's goals. A secondary, but no less important goal was to define the minimum vertical occurrence, and the maximum horizontal extents of the burial ground and evidence of the burials within it.

Phase IB testing involved the excavation of four backhoe trenches within and along the boundaries of the burial ground (see figures 19-20). Trench excavations only extended to the point below surface at which archaeological evidence associated with the burial ground was encountered. In most instances, the burial-related evidence identified consisted of well-preserved grave shaft features; however, in a handful of cases, trench excavation was halted when decayed, intact coffin wood was exposed. At no point during this investigation were intact human skeletal remains exposed, uncovered, or disturbed. Trench excavations succeeded in producing a significant amount of information related to the burial ground. In particular, testing was able to determine that soils containing evidence of intact burial features are present immediately below the playground asphalt and gravel sub-base. While the depth below surface at which

²⁵ Richard Allen was the leading founder of Bethel Burial Ground and the most famous individual associated with it. He is not buried there, however, but at the burying ground adjacent to Mother Bethel Church. Names of notables interred at the Queen Street site are still coming to light; see <http://bethelburyinggroundproject.com>. For background information on those listed here, see footnote 20, above, and V. Chapman-Smith, "Philadelphia and the Slave Trade: The Ganges Africans," *Pennsylvania Legacies* 5, no. 2 (November 2005): 20.

²⁶ Information in this section is excerpted and summarized (with permission of Douglas Mooney) from Mooney and Morrell's 2013 report "Phase IB Archeological Investigation of the Mother Bethel Burial Ground, 1810-Circa 1864." A complete copy of the report is available for public review at the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office, and is available online through the City of Philadelphia's website at: <http://www.phila.gov/ParksandRecreation/PDF/Bethel%20Burying%20Ground%20Report.pdf> and the Philadelphia Archeological Forum's website: <http://www.phillyarchaeology.net/research/project-report-index/>.

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

burial evidence was identified did vary somewhat across the burial ground, the shallowest depth at which grave shafts appeared was approximately 1.8 feet below the present surface. Evidence of intact burial remains was identified at depths of between 2.5 and 3 feet below the surface. Additional findings from this investigation included:

- the identification of the intact north and east walls bounding the burial ground;
- no indication that burials extend beyond the known limits of the burial ground and its perimeter walls;
- evidence that the site was filled in and leveled—most likely in the mid-nineteenth century, toward the end of its period of active use;
- the determination that intact burials are contained within these later fill soils;
- historical documentation suggesting that the burial grounds could contain a significantly greater number of burials than originally thought; and
- evidence suggesting that some unknown number of burials have been disturbed during prior construction and renovation activities within the playground

The strategy for the 2013 investigation was developed in consideration of the known history of the entire site—the playground and the burial ground. In particular, it took into account evidence of extensive prior subsurface disturbance attributable to the historical occupation of all but the southwest corner of the block, as well as modifications to the block during its adaptation into a functional play space. It also incorporated information generated during previous geophysical and archaeological investigations of the property. The specific testing approach employed was formulated in consultation with the Weccacoe Playground project partners, representatives from Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church, and archaeologists with the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission. The number of trenches completed, and the placement of those test areas, was established to balance the need to thoroughly address project objectives and, at the same time, to minimize disruptions to the burials themselves. Additional details regarding testing and results of analysis are provided in the report.

The term “grave shaft” as used in the Phase IB report refers to the hole dug into the ground for a burial, and into the bottom of which a deceased person’s remains were placed. The term “burial remains” in the report refers to the physical evidence of the burial itself, including preserved parts of the wooden coffin, associated coffin hardware and decorations, and human skeletal material. During this investigation, no intact human skeletal remains were exposed; however, in a small number of cases, evidence of decayed coffin wood was identified.

This investigation follows an earlier Phase IA study (Mooney 2013) of the larger Weccacoe Playground property that sought to generate preliminary information about below-ground conditions within and around the burial ground. Previous work involved the initiation of consultation with the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, conduct of a ground-penetrating radar (GPR) study of the entire playground parcel, and limited subsurface testing at a single accessible location within the boundaries of the burial ground. It also incorporated a review of existing historical background documentation related to the burial ground, as well as a detailed review of historic maps and playground site plans to document the transformation of the study area over time.

Historic map research helped to refine the precise placement of Bethel Burial Ground in the southwest corner of the playground, and indicated that it actually likely extends somewhat outside the limits of the active playground. On its western side, the site extends beneath the adjacent sidewalk, to a point at or near the east curb line of Lawrence Street. Along its southern margins, the site boundary corresponds with the

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

existing iron fence line bordering Queen Street. The northern and eastern boundaries of the site were estimated based on the known size of the original 1810 parcel, and were firmly established during the course of the Phase IB investigation.

The GPR survey extended over the entire playground space and delineated a series of subsurface anomalies that were interpreted as being associated with nineteenth-century domestic residential structures, active utility lines, possible individual burial shafts, and possible clusters of graves. Potential burial-related anomalies were delineated throughout the limits of the burial ground, as well as in areas that extended well outside the boundaries of that parcel. The analysis of historic maps and earlier playground plans, however, suggested that many—if not all—of the anomalies located beyond the burial ground boundaries could be reasonably accounted for by non-burial-related factors. Some of these anomalies fell within the locations of former historic basements or where former residential buildings had been located, prior to their purchase and removal as the Weccacoe Playground expanded, while others were situated within former backyards and could be associated with privy (outhouse) shafts or other common historic features. Still others clustered in parts of the study area that had been extensively and repeatedly disturbed during previous playground renovations.

Phase IA subsurface testing was limited to a single 2-x-3-foot hand-excavated test pit, situated near what had been the north-central portion of the burial ground. Excavations at this location showed the upper 2.5 feet of ground to consist of fill soils, but encountered a remnant of the burial ground's original historic ground surface (A horizon) immediately beneath the fill. At approximately 3 feet below surface, evidence of an intact grave shaft was identified, and subsequent excavations within this shaft encountered decayed coffin wood and coffin nails at a depth of 4.4 feet below the playground surface. Although no intact skeletal remains were exposed in this test, the presence of coffin wood and absence of obvious prior disturbance to the grave shaft indicated that preserved interments still remained in this section of the site. Based on these findings, it was presumed that the entire Burial Ground was preserved substantially intact below the present playground surface.

The Phase IB investigations were able to generate a large amount of additional information regarding the Burial Ground and the human burials still preserved within it, and successfully answered all of the specific questions it set out to address. In at least one instance, new data was useful in changing preliminary interpretations resulting from the earlier Phase IA study. Critical findings have helped to accurately locate the site within the existing playground. Trench excavations have allowed a detailed characterization of the subsurface conditions within the boundaries of the burial ground and the depth below surface at which evidence of intact interments is likely to appear.

Previous background research established that the burial ground was located in the southwest corner of the current playground, and earlier Phase IA comparative map analysis suggested that the western edge of the burial ground extended under the eastern sidewalk of Lawrence Street. Findings from this investigation have both confirmed and further refined the placement of the burial ground in space, and positively identified the northern and eastern limits of that property inside the playground. Investigations in Trenches 3 and 4 uncovered, documented, and mapped the burial ground's outer walls in very nearly the exact location at which they were anticipated to be found. The location of these two points, taken in concert with the known historic dimensions of the burial ground and available historic survey data, have confirmed that the site does in fact extend westward under the adjacent Lawrence Street sidewalk to a point at or very near the eastern curb line of that road. To the south, the edge of the burial ground site aligns closely with the existing southern fence line for the playground.

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

The burial ground walls themselves additionally provide information regarding their likely appearance and the timing of their construction. The exposed sections of walls consisted of both mortared stone and brick components. The stone portions probably represent the below-ground foundations for this enclosure, while the above-ground parts were made of brick, in order to provide a neater, more orderly outward appearance. Though it cannot be confirmed at this time, the brick section of the wall may have additionally incorporated a decorative iron fence at its top when initially built. This wall may have replaced an earlier enclosure around the site, but the nature and appearance of any such earlier fence or wall remains unknown.

The fact that the wall is not anchored into the underlying subsoil—but rather sits on top of the buried historic ground surface—and is bounded on either side by visually distinct fill deposits—strongly suggests that this enclosure was originally constructed at or about the time that fill soils were deposited both inside the burial grounds and in the adjacent backyards, in order to fill up low-lying areas and level the ground surface. Based on findings from the Phase IA investigation, it was previously thought that this fill was perhaps brought in after the burial ground was closed—possibly during the tenure of Barnabas H. Bartol (1869–1873) or in conjunction with the city’s first improvements to Weccacoe Square in the early 1890s. However, information from the Phase IB study now suggests that this fill material was probably put down at a time relatively late in the period that the burial ground was still in use. Artifacts collected from the yellow-brown fill that caps the historic ground surface of the site include one fragment of a white graniteware or white ironstone plate, a type of ceramic that was first manufactured around 1842. The presence of this artifact in the fill suggests that this layer of soil was deposited within the burial ground sometime after that date. A similar sherd of white graniteware was also recovered from these same fill deposits in EU 1, during the earlier Phase IA investigation.

The establishment of a *terminus post quem* (TPQ) date, or earliest possible date, of 1842 for the upper burial ground fill is corroborated by artifacts recovered from the midden layer and intact ground surface in the historic backyard portion of Trench 3. The latest dated ceramic from that assemblage is represented by a fragment of sprig-painted whiteware, in chrome colors, which has a manufacturing start date of 1835. The presence of this artifact in that backyard indicates that overlying fill material there must have been deposited after that date.

Evidence indicating that the burial ground was still in active use when this fill was deposited comes from the identification of grave shafts within and extending through this soil layer. The dating of fill deposits on either side of the walls to sometime between 1842 and circa 1864 means that the walls themselves must have been constructed during this time frame. Evidence from the excavations indicates that the surface of the burial ground and the surrounding backyards was originally not uniformly level, and that lower-lying areas eventually requiring filling were present. In Trench 2, the remnant historic ground surface of the burial ground was identified at a depth of 2.5 feet below the present playground surface.

However, in Trench 4, the ground surface in the adjacent backyard was approximately 3.5 feet deep, and in Trench 3 the backyard A horizon was identified some 4–4.5 feet below the asphalt. Even after accounting for differences in the present surface of the playground, this information suggests that the original ground surface of the burial ground was probably highest to the west and near its center. From the center, the ground sloped down noticeably to both the north and the east. The fact that the burial ground was filled in and leveled at some time is not at all surprising or without precedent. Historian John Fanning Watson noted that the process of depositing massive amounts of fill in this part of Philadelphia

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

was well underway by the third decade of the nineteenth century, and recorded that “most of the ground in the south-western direction of the city, and Southwark, having been raised by two to three feet, has generally caused all the streets in that direction to be formed of earth filled-in there” (Watson 1830: 213).

The filling-in of the site would have created perhaps 4–5 feet, or more, of new ground in previous low-lying areas, and would have established additional space within which people could be interred. In effect, the in-filling of the burial ground may have helped to extend its use-life. Interments represented by grave shafts appearing in the overlying fill represent the very last interments made before the church closed the burial ground c.1864.

In terms of the burials within the site, each of the four trenches completed uncovered evidence of intact burials. This evidence came in the form of grave shaft outlines and, in a handful of instances, of decayed coffin wood with associated coffin nails or lid screws. In total, the excavations resulted in the identification of at least 36 individual burials, all of which were oriented west to east in accordance with common Christian burial practices. Grave shafts and coffin evidence was found both within the original soils of the burial ground (Trenches 1 and 2), as well as within the overlying fill deposits (Trenches 3 and 4). In Trench 4, the identification of decayed coffin wood and coffin nails indicates that, in some parts of the burial ground, intact burial remains are contained *within* this fill.

By the time the burial ground ceased being used for interments, it was certainly filled to maximum capacity. This is demonstrated by the 18 closely spaced and overlapping grave shafts found in a 5-x-7-foot space in the floor of Trench 2. Given the small size of the site, and the large number of people known or estimated to be interred in it (at least 2,380 but perhaps closer to 5,000) burials in this ground are no doubt stacked one on top of the other, possibly to depths of perhaps 10–12 feet below the present surface of the playground. While the earliest graves would have been organized into neat, orderly rows, the addition of more burials over time would likely have served to obscure and complicate this internal order. While all of the grave shafts found during this investigation marked the final resting place of individual people, it is entirely possible that larger burial pits containing the remains of multiple persons, perhaps the victims of epidemic diseases, could also be present in other parts of the parcel.

Evidence suggests that most, if not all, of the people interred in this ground were buried in hexagonal wooden coffins. Because many of those buried here would have been from the poorest segment of Philadelphia society, it can be expected that a large percentage of the burials would have been comparatively simple affairs, and were associated with coffins that were undecorated and attended with little extravagance. At least one of the graves uncovered in Trench 1, however, involved a coffin constructed with decorative white metal screw caps adorning the screws used to seal the coffin lid. Considering that not-insignificant numbers of people in the black community during this time were more financially well-off, including members of the church clergy and leadership, it should be expected that a wide range of decorative elements would be present on many of the coffins preserved here. John Bliss’s coffin, for one, was reported to have been decorated “in a costly manner.” None of the burial artifacts observed during this investigation (screw caps, nails) were removed from the ground, or from the grave with which they were associated.

The only funerary artifact removed from the site was the partial headstone for Amelia Brown. (See Fig 21) Her marker was not found in association with her grave (having been broken and likely displaced at some point following her burial, probably due either to vandalism or during addition of fill or surface grading), and so the exact location of her remains within the site is not known. Amelia died in the late

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

winter/early spring of 1819, and her passing was not documented by way of a surviving official death certificate. Though the authors of the Phase IB report and Terry Buckalew have conducted some additional research to learn more about her, to date her exact identity, the details of her life, the members of her family, and the cause of her death remain unknown. The fact that she or her family could afford the cost of a headstone does suggest that she was not among the poorest members of the local community, or it could indicate that providing grave markers was one of the regular services the church performed for individuals too poor to purchase one themselves. The headstone, at their request, was turned over to representatives of Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church for safe-keeping and possible reconstructive preservation. Current plans are for the church's historians to use Amelia Brown's grave marker to help interpret and tell the story of this important burial ground. While this headstone was the only one of its kind found during this investigation, there is no doubt many others like it are still preserved in the ground beneath the playground.

Another question the Phase IA and B investigations sought to answer was whether or not burials extend outside the known boundaries of the site. The Phase IA GPR study did initially suggest that burials could be located across large areas of the playground, but subsequent map analysis demonstrated that a variety of past non-burial-related activities could have created subsurface anomalies that might account for these findings—including the digging of trash, privy, and other pits in backyards, as well as the installation and removal of earlier playground features. Direct testing beyond the walls of the burial ground was limited in scope during the Phase IB investigation, but found no evidence to suggest that burials were made outside the walls of the Burial Ground. Of course, it cannot be said with certainty that no graves are outside the burial ground's identified boundaries; however, based on the information collected during this study, that possibility seems unlikely. Historic records show that the Burial Ground was bordered by at least some residential properties from early in its history, and these would have served to restrict the practice of interring people beyond the property boundaries. It is also likely that at least some sort of rudimentary fence or other enclosure would have been built around the site from its founding in order to set that land apart from the neighborhood and help protect the grounds from unwanted trespassing, desecration, or destruction. If evidence is discovered in the future that establishes that there were in fact burials beyond the known walls of the burial ground, the boundary should be updated accordingly.

In addition to the information above, the findings of the Phase IB investigation also include evidence of past disturbances within the burial ground. Specific disturbances were varied in their extent and likely cause, as well as in their possible effects on intact burial remains. The most extensive disturbance identified was exposed in Trench 1. There the construction of a spray pool in the 1950s, and its subsequent demolition and removal in the 1970s, has resulted in impacts that extend to a depth of at least 3 feet below the surface of the playground. This location was also impacted by the installation of a terra cotta drainage pipe at some point in time, although it is uncertain if this pipe was originally associated with the adjacent Recreation Building or some other past feature of the playground. The trench for that pipe further disturbed the site to a depth of about 4.5 feet below ground. It is likely that the installation of this pipe, if not the spray pool as well, did result in the disturbance of an unknown number of burials; however, no dislocated human skeletal remains were found in the soil of that excavation. At this time, the full horizontal extent of these related disturbances is unknown, but it is thought that they are probably localized to the immediate vicinity of Trench 1.

Other known disturbances were significantly more restricted in size and included the natural burrowing of rodents (Trench 4), tree planting (Trench 3), the installation of posts (Phase IA test pit), and the repair of "cave ins" (Trenches 2 and 3), possibly resulting from the gradual subsidence of grave shafts. Excepting

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

the rodent burrow, all of these disturbances extended to depths sufficient to impact the ground of the site, but it is not known if intact burial remains were affected.

Testing also found no trace in the burial ground fill of a plowzone or other sign of the ground having been previously used for agricultural purposes, as portions of Weccacoe Square were in 1904 and 1905 for the school garden program. The absence of this evidence suggests that the upper portions of the burial ground soil may have been removed during past surface grading efforts. While it is unlikely that these activities resulted in the disturbance of intact burials, it has left all burials perhaps 1–1.5 feet closer to the surface than they were originally. Other likely disturbances, which were not directly documented during the investigations, include the construction and expansion of the Recreation Building and the installation of utilities to that building. Although past renovations of the playground have been extensive and repeated, most of the work associated with the installation and removal of play equipment appears to have been conducted outside the boundaries of the burial ground.

Lastly, while the detailed analysis of historic artifacts from the backyard portions of Trenches 3 and 4 is beyond the scope of the recent investigation, some interpretations were offered. The north section of Trench 3 fell within the rear yard of the house at 412 Catharine Street. It is believed that the stone foundation wall uncovered along the west wall of that trench was associated with a small frame structure of unknown function built at the back edge of the property during the nineteenth century. The presence of buildings in this general location are suggested on the 1849 Sydney map, and it is presumed that this structure was likely built around that time. It is interesting to note that this foundation was not picked up during the earlier GPR survey. Yard midden deposits exposed in the trench, which most likely predate the construction of this building, include a variety of fragmentary glass and ceramic artifacts that provide a TPQ date of 1835. Artifacts from the midden also include large quantities of butchered and modified faunal bone, including bone button blanks, and suggest that one of the occupants of this property may have been engaged in some business that involved the slaughtering or processing of animals.

Trench 4 crossed over into the rear yard space of 816 Weccacoe Street. Excavations here resulted in the recovery of a small number of glass, ceramic, and faunal artifacts that provided a TPQ date of 1842 (based on a single sherd of white graniteware plate) for the yard deposits. A brick structure of uncertain size was uncovered along the north side of the trench and may be a foundation associated with an underlying brick privy (outhouse) shaft or small outbuilding. This structure could have been one of the anomalies picked up in this area during the earlier GPR survey. The narrow gap between this brick structure and the adjacent stone burial ground's wall may represent the remnants of a small interior alleyway indicated on historic maps. A check of online city directories through the mid-1860s returned no information related to this address or its possible occupants.

Ongoing Research Questions

The 2013 investigations were able to confirm Bethel Burial Ground's location, identified the existence of an original or early wall, and provided details about the extent and types of burials contained in this site. Many other questions remain. Further study of the property may provide the following types of information:

1. Better understanding of number of burials within the graveyard. The current estimate is between 2,500 and 5,000.
2. Clearer picture of how the site developed, and associated fences, walls, landscape elements such as whether markers were common, and if mounds or memorial plantings or other burial customs may have been common here.

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

3. Valuable information about burial practices of the time and specific practices for this segment of Philadelphia's population.
4. Valuable information about the people buried here, and their social/economic statuses and cultural influences.
5. Osteopathic research could disclose medical information about the individuals buried here, though that it is not an anticipated area of study as disturbance of graves is to be avoided.
6. Better understanding of how private burial grounds evolved as space in the City became more and more valuable and burial grounds/cemeteries were sold for development; condemned by the city for infrastructure projects; struggling congregations abandoned burial grounds; or for other reasons the sites evolved to serve new functions and their role as burial grounds or cemeteries was largely forgotten.

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

Primary Sources

Maps (accessed via <http://www.philageohistory.org> unless otherwise noted):

Bromley, George W. *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1895.

_____, and Walter S. Bromley. *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Complete in One Volume*. Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1901.

_____, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1910.

Daly, Thomas. "Plan of Weccacoe Square in the Third Ward." Manuscript map, 1889. City of Philadelphia Streets Dept., Survey and Designs Bureau.

Hopkins, G. M. *City Atlas of Philadelphia*. Vol. 6. Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins, 1875.

Paxton, John A. *New Plan of the City [Philadelphia] and its Environs*. N.p., 1810

Smedley, Samuel L. *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1862.

Sidney, J. C. *Map of the City of Philadelphia together with all the surrounding Districts*. Philadelphia: Smith & Wistar, 1849.

Architectural Drawings

Molitor, John. "Improvement & Development of Weccacoe Playground – Plans, Elevations & Details [of the] Shelter Building." Sheet no. 1, dated 1 October 1924. City of Philadelphia Dept. of Recreation.

Magazine and Newspaper Articles

Bennett, Helen C. "The School Garden: A New Method of Nature Study." *Appleton's Magazine* 5 (January-June 1905): 468-478.

"Current Events." *Friends Intelligencer* 61, no. 19 (14 May 1904): 314.

"Parks" editorial. *Forest Leaves* 3, no. 2 (June 1890): 23-24.

"The Small Parks of Philadelphia." *Garden and Forest* 6, no. 276 (7 June 1893): 248.

Stewart, Seth T., ed. "Philadelphia Playgrounds." *The Playground* 15, (June 1908): 5-10.

Christian Recorder

29 June 1872, 4

6 July 1872, 4.

3 August 1872, 4.

12 June 1873, 6.

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

Philadelphia Inquirer

25 Oct 1842, 2.

14 March 1848, 2.

20 August 1890, 1.

[Philadelphia] *Times*

24 April 1892, 9.

Philadelphia Tribune

30 March 1889, 4.

Deeds and Leases (City of Philadelphia Deed Book References):

IC 28, p. 471 and ff., 28 April 1810

JTO 209, p. 30, 1 January 1869

Government Documents

Philadelphia Board of Health Minutes (Philadelphia City Archives):

5 May 1885; Nuisance 1521, p. 273.

Philadelphia Board of Health Registration of Deaths, 1803 - 1915 (Philadelphia City Archives): 1806-1850.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Annual Report of the Office of Experiment Stations for the Year Ended June 30, 1905
(Washington, D.C.: Govt. Pr. Office, 1906).

Minutes

Minutes and Financial Book of the Trustees, 1863-1894, microfilm records of Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church,
1760-1972, reel 2, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Minutes of the Union Benevolent Sons of Bethel, 1826 - 1844, microfilm records of Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church,
1760-1972, reel 8, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Secondary Sources

Barker, Charles R. "A Register of the Burying Grounds of Philadelphia" (1943). Manuscript, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Beck, Carolyn S. *Our Own Vine and Fig Tree: The Authority of History and Kinship in Mother Bethel*. New York: AMS Press, 1989.

Buckalew, Terry. "Weccacoe: Burying Ground, Garden, Park and Playground - A Historical Sketch and Timeline from 1800 to 2012." TMs 2012. <http://preciousdust.blogspot.com>

Chapman-Smith, V. "Philadelphia and the Slave Trade: The Ganges Africans." *Pennsylvania Legacies* 5, no. 2 (November 2005): 20.

Cooperman, Emily T. *Inventory of African American Church Resources, 1787-1949, City of Philadelphia*. Report prepared for the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia. ARCH Historic Preservation Consulting. 2008.

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

- _____, and Matthew S. Hopper. "African American Churches of Philadelphia, 1787-1949." National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form. Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. 2010.
- Cotter, Roberts and Parrington. *The Buried Past: An Archaeological History of Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.
- Cranz, Galen. *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982.
- DuBois, W.E.B. *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996 [originally published 1899].
- Dunbar, Eric Armstrong. *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Geo-Graf, Inc. *Geophysical Investigation Report, Cemetery Mapping, Weccacoe Park, 409 Catharine St. Philadelphia, PA*. Report prepared for the URS Corporation, Burlington, New Jersey. Report Prepared by Geo-Graf, Inc., West Chester, PA, 2013.
- Hackett, David G. "The Prince Hall Masons and the African American Church: the Labors of Grand Master and Bishop James Walker Hood, 1831-1918." In David G. Hackett, ed., *Religion and American Culture: a Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 291-314.
- The History of Eden Cemetery* - <http://www.edencemetery.org/History/about.htm>
- Klepp, Susan E. *The Swift Progress of Population: A Documentary and Bibliographic Study of Philadelphia's Growth, 1642-1859*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1991.
- Lane, Roger. *William Dorsey's Philadelphia & Ours: On the Past and Future of the Black City in American*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- McCarthy, John P. "Material Culture and the Performance of Sociocultural Identity: Community, Ethnicity, and Agency in the Burial Practices at the First African Baptist Church Cemeteries, Philadelphia, 1810-41." *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*. Winterthur Museum, 1997.
- Mooney, Douglas. *Phase IA Archaeological Investigations of the Weccacoe Playground and Mother Bethel Burying Ground*. Letter report prepared for the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. URS Corporation. 2013.
- _____. Kimberly Morrell. *Phase IB Archeological Investigation of the Mother Bethel Burying Ground, 1810-Circa 1864*. Prepared for the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, October 11, 2013.
- Nash, Gary B. *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community 1720-1840*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Newman, Richard S. *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers*. New York: New York University Press, 2008.
- Newman, Simon P. *Embodied History: The Lives of the Poor in Early Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

Parrington, Michael and Daniel G. Roberts. "The First African Baptist Church Cemetery: An Archaeological Glimpse of Philadelphia's Early Nineteenth-Century Free Black Community." *Archaeology* 37, no. 6 (November/December 1984): 26-32.

Payne, Daniel. *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville: Publishing House of the A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1891).

Pollard, Leslie J. "Beneficial Societies and the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored Persons: A Research Note." *Phylon* 41, no. 3 (3rd Qtr., 1980): 230-234.

Rankin-Hill, Lesley M. *A Biohistory of 19th-Century Afro-Americans: The Burial Remains of a Philadelphia Cemetery*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1997.

Smith, Billy G. "Death and Life in a Colonial Immigrant City: A Demographic Analysis of Philadelphia," *Journal of Economic History* 37, no. 4 (December 1977): 867-874.

_____. *The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800*. Cornell University Press, 1994.

Splain, Shelby Weaver and Craig Stutman. *Eden Cemetery* National Register Nomination. National Park Service, 2010.

Weigley, Russell F., ed. *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1982.

Wilf, Steven Robert. "Anatomy and Punishment in Late Eighteenth-Century New York," *Journal of Social History* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1989): 507-530.

Winch, Julie. *A Gentleman of Color: the Life of James Forten*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Yamin, Rebecca. *Digging in the City of Brotherly Love: Stories from Philadelphia Archaeology*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

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 # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other Name of repository: City of Philadelphia Archives, 3101 Market Street, Philadelphia

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.28

UTM References Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☒ NAD 1983

Zone: 18 S

1. Easting: 487101.47

Northing: 4420871.00

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Bethel Burial Ground lies under the Weccacoe Playground in the Southwark National Register Historic District of Philadelphia. The playground is bounded by Queen Street to the south, Lawrence (formerly Cobb) Street to the west, Catherine Street to the north, and Leithgow (formerly Weccacoe) Street to the east (Figs. 1-2). It occupies just over three-quarters (0.78) of an acre and is surrounded by a tall iron fence and concrete sidewalks. The graveyard site lies below the playground's southwest corner and, at 0.28 of an acre, accounts for roughly one-third of the playground's substrate (Fig. 2-3). Only on its western side does the burial ground extend beyond the playground, continuing under the adjacent sidewalk to a point at or near the east curb line of Lawrence Street. Along its southern boundary, the burial ground aligns with the current iron fence line along Queen Street. The burial ground's northern and eastern borders are essentially those of the original 1810 parcel and were confirmed in the course of 2013 archaeological investigations. The nominated boundary of the historic burial ground is shown on Figures 2 and 3.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary for Bethel Burial Ground is based on a combination of historical and archaeological information. Historic map research helped determine the presumed location of Bethel Burial Ground in the southwest corner of the playground and indicated that it extended beneath the adjacent sidewalk, to a point at or near the east curb line of Lawrence Street. The northern and eastern boundaries were estimated based on the known size of the original 1810 parcel, and were firmly established during the course of the Phase 1B archeological investigation in 2013. No funerary resources or landscape features formerly associated with the burial ground have been excluded (no landscape or above-ground features remain). Based on existing information and recent archeological investigations, no burials extend beyond the historic wall of the property. If in the future evidence is discovered that suggests otherwise, the boundary should be amended accordingly to account for the entire site of burials. This boundary is based on solely on Criterion A and D for the burial site, based on existing research, and not for any potential area of significance pursued in the future for either the burial ground or the Playground.

11. Form Prepared By

| | | | |
|---------------|--|------------------|---|
| name/title: | <u>Aaron Wunsch, drawing on original research and investigations by Douglas Mooney, Kimberly Morrell, and Terry Buckalew; with assistance from V. Chapman-Smith, Margaret Jerrido, Sheila Jones, and Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office staff</u> | | |
| organization: | <u>PA SHPO</u> | street & number: | <u>400 North Street</u> |
| city or town: | <u>Harrisburg</u> | state: | <u>PA</u> zip code: <u>17103</u> |
| e-mail: | <u>afrantz@pa.gov</u> | telephone: | <u>717-783-8947</u> date: <u>07/20/2015</u> |

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Bethel Burial Ground
City or Vicinity: Philadelphia
County: Philadelphia State: PA
Photographer: Aaron Wunsch

Date Photographed: July 20, 2014

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 Southeast corner of Weccacoe Playground.
- 2 Southern flank of Weccacoe Playground, looking east.
- 3 View of Recreation Building (former Shelter Building), looking southwest.
- 4 Northwest corner of Recreation Building.
- 5 Shuffleboard court west of Recreation Building, looking south.
- 6 View through Weccacoe Playground, looking southwest toward Recreation Building.

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.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State



Fig. 1. Bethel Burial Ground location shown on 2013 USGS Map.
UTM (NAD 1983): Zone: 18 S 1. Easting: 487101.47 Northing: 4420871.00

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

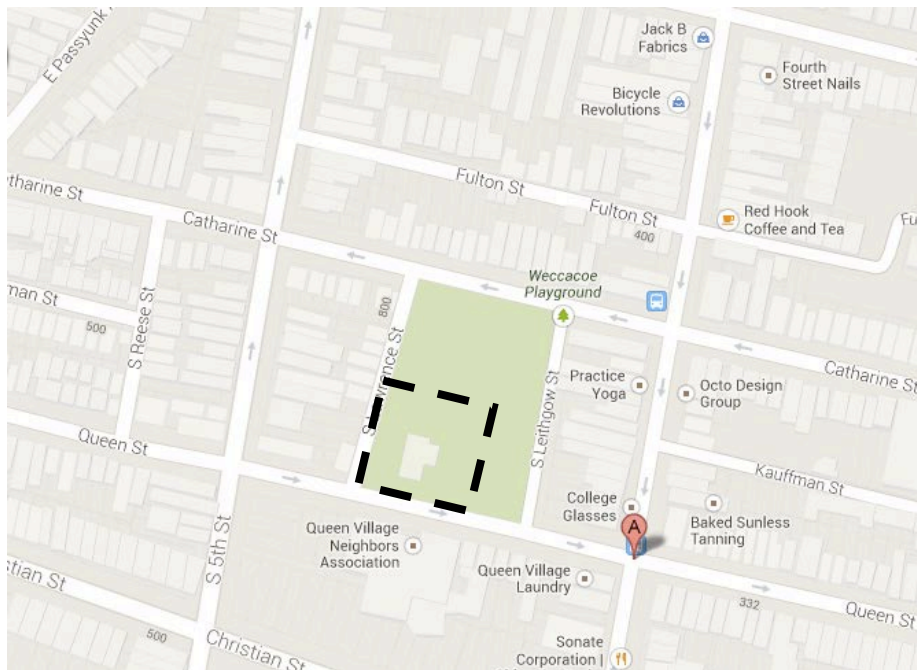
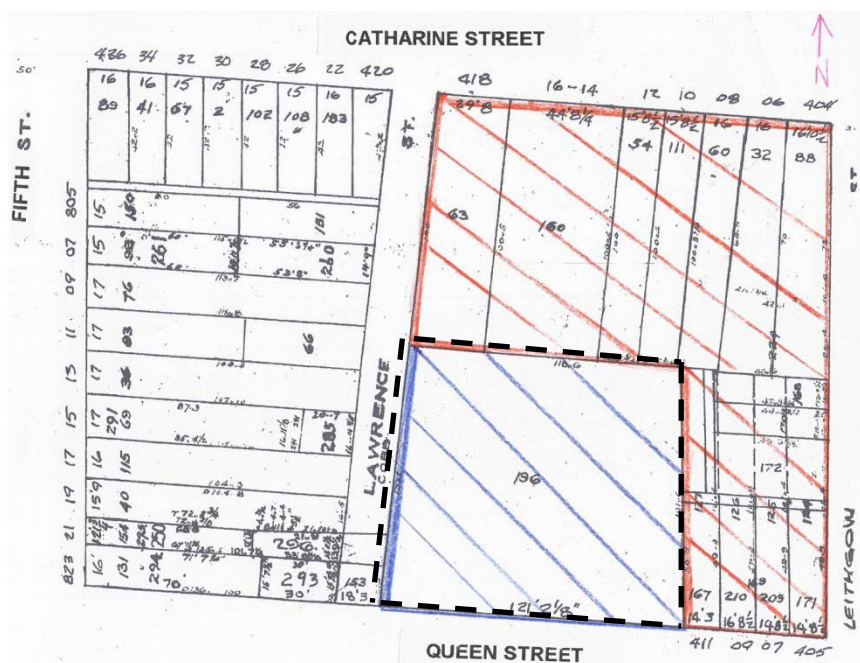


Fig. 2a. (above) 2014 Google Map. Bethel Burial Ground is located under the southwestern corner of the current Weccacoe Playground, owned by the City of Philadelphia, shown here in the center of the map (approximate boundary of the graveyard site indicated by the dashed line). Currently on the property, over a portion of the graveyard site, is a 1924 recreation building.

Fig. 2b (below) Map submitted with nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, showing (in red) tax parcels acquired to expand the Playground after the burial ground was acquired by the City. Burial Ground site within dash line.



Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State



Figure 3: Current birds-eye aerial views of the Weccacoe Playground, showing the approximate boundary of the burial ground site in the lower southwest portion of the Playground. www.bing.com/maps

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

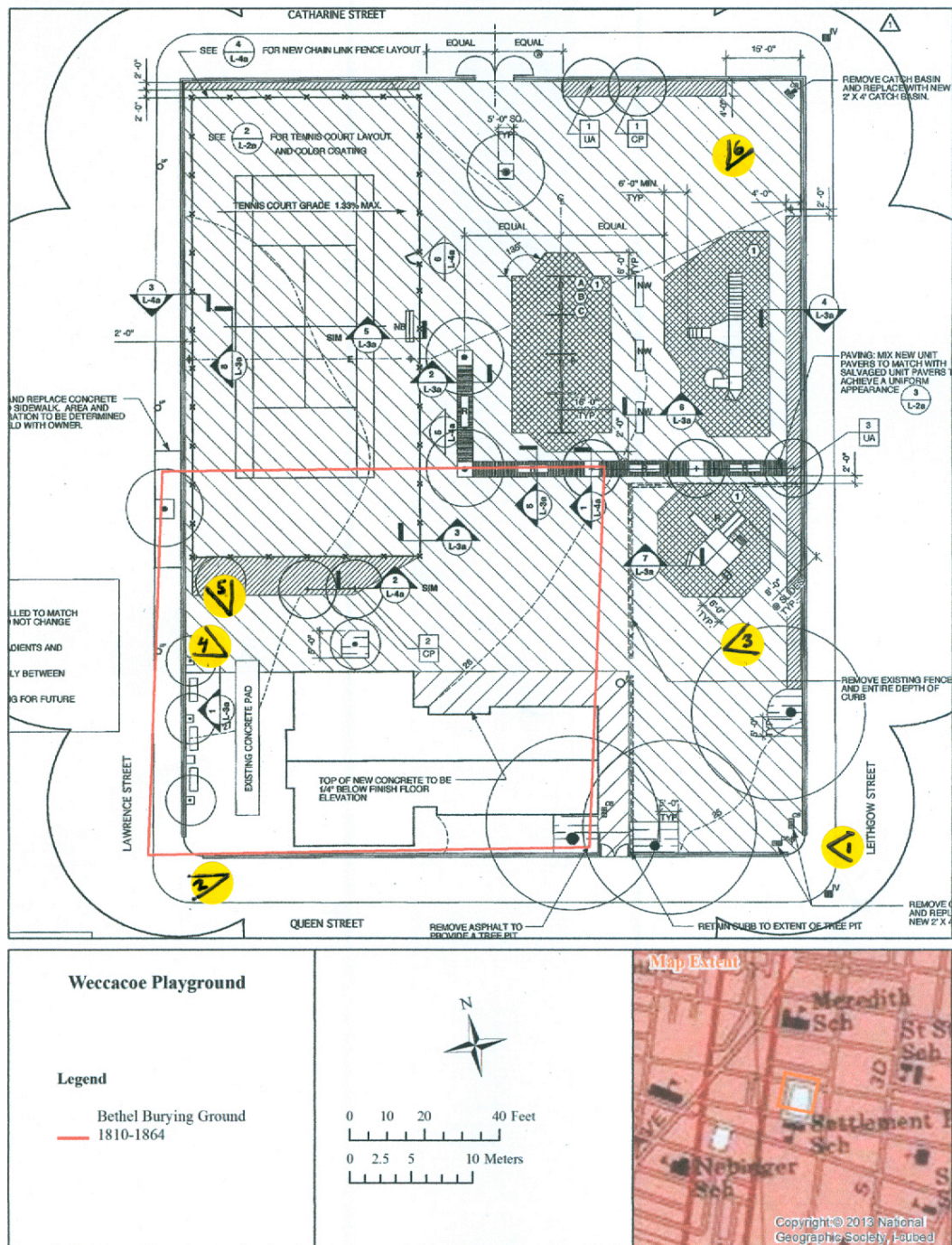


Figure 4: Photo key. Current photo locations shown on 2001 proposed site renovation plan for Weccacoe Playground.

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

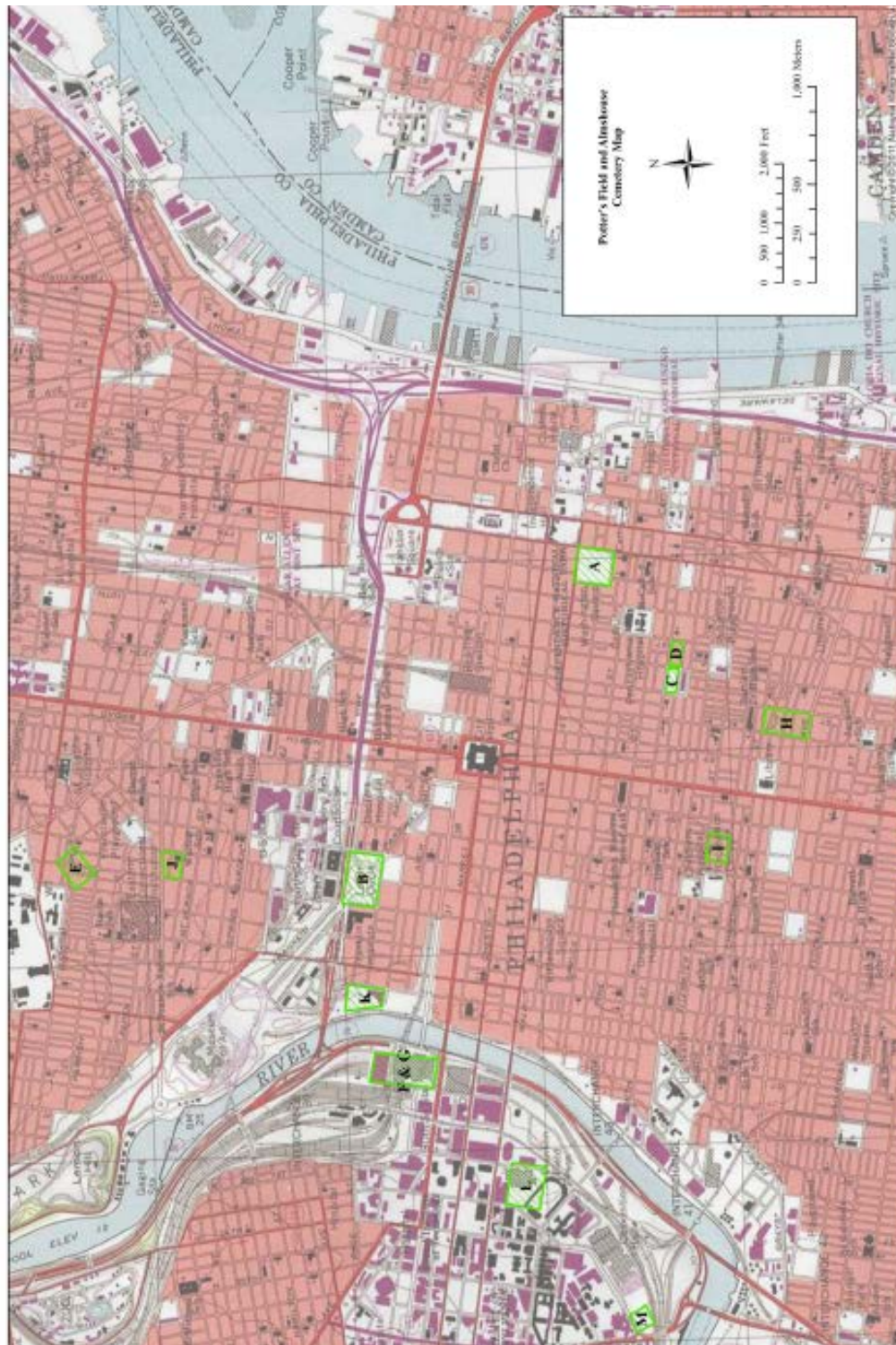


Figure 5: Locations of various Philadelphia potter's fields and almshouse cemeteries, c.1705-1849. This map was provided in, and additional related information can be found in, the report summarizing the 2013 archeological investigations by Mooney and Morrell and team.

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

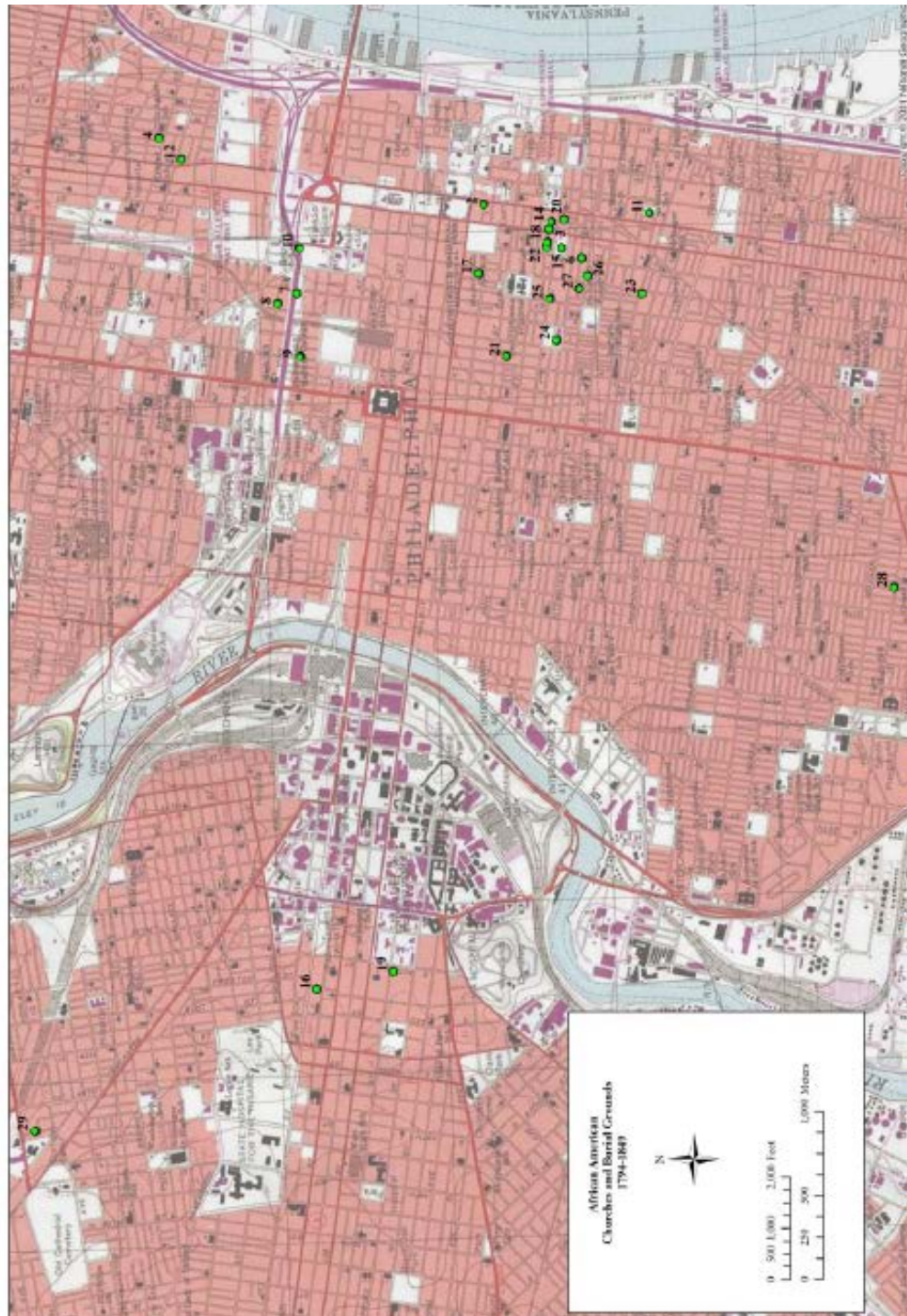


Figure 6: Identified African American churches and burial grounds, 1794-1849. This map was provided in, and additional related information can be found in, the report summarizing the 2013 archeological investigations by Mooney and Morrell and team.

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State



Fig. 7: Bethel Burial Ground as shown on 1810 Paxton Map. At this point in the City's history, the Southwark area is not yet densely developed. Cobb and Weccacoe Streets have yet to be added on either side of the burial ground site.

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

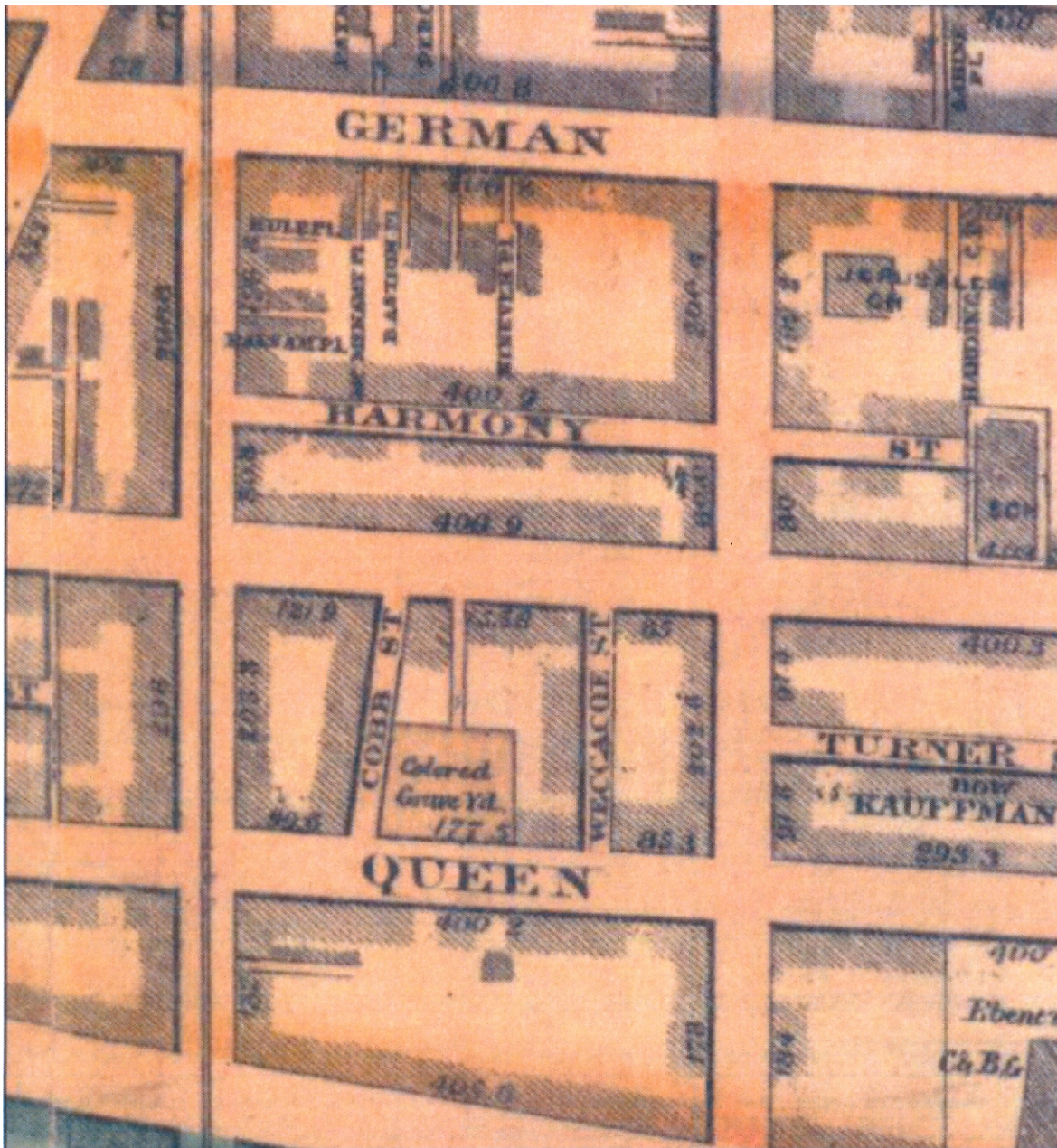


Fig. 8: Bethel Burial Ground as shown on the 1862 Smedley Map as the "Colored Grave Yd." Rowhomes and backyards now surround the burial ground. Cobb and Weccacoe Streets have been added.

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

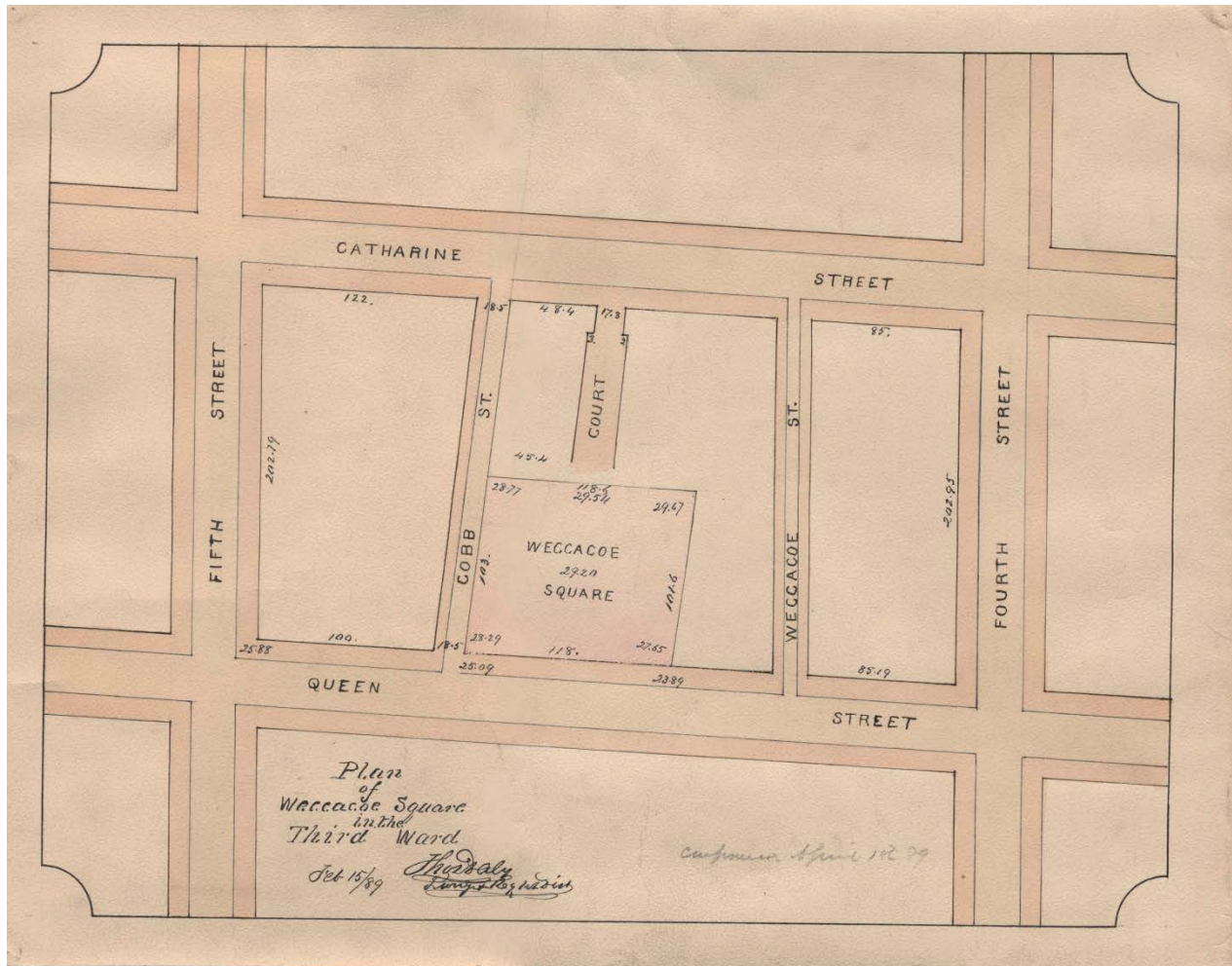


Fig. 9: Thomas Daly, "Plan of Weccacoe Square in the Third Ward," 1889. The burial ground has now been acquired by the City for recreational use. At this point, the boundary for Weccacoe Square still matches the burial ground site's boundary.

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

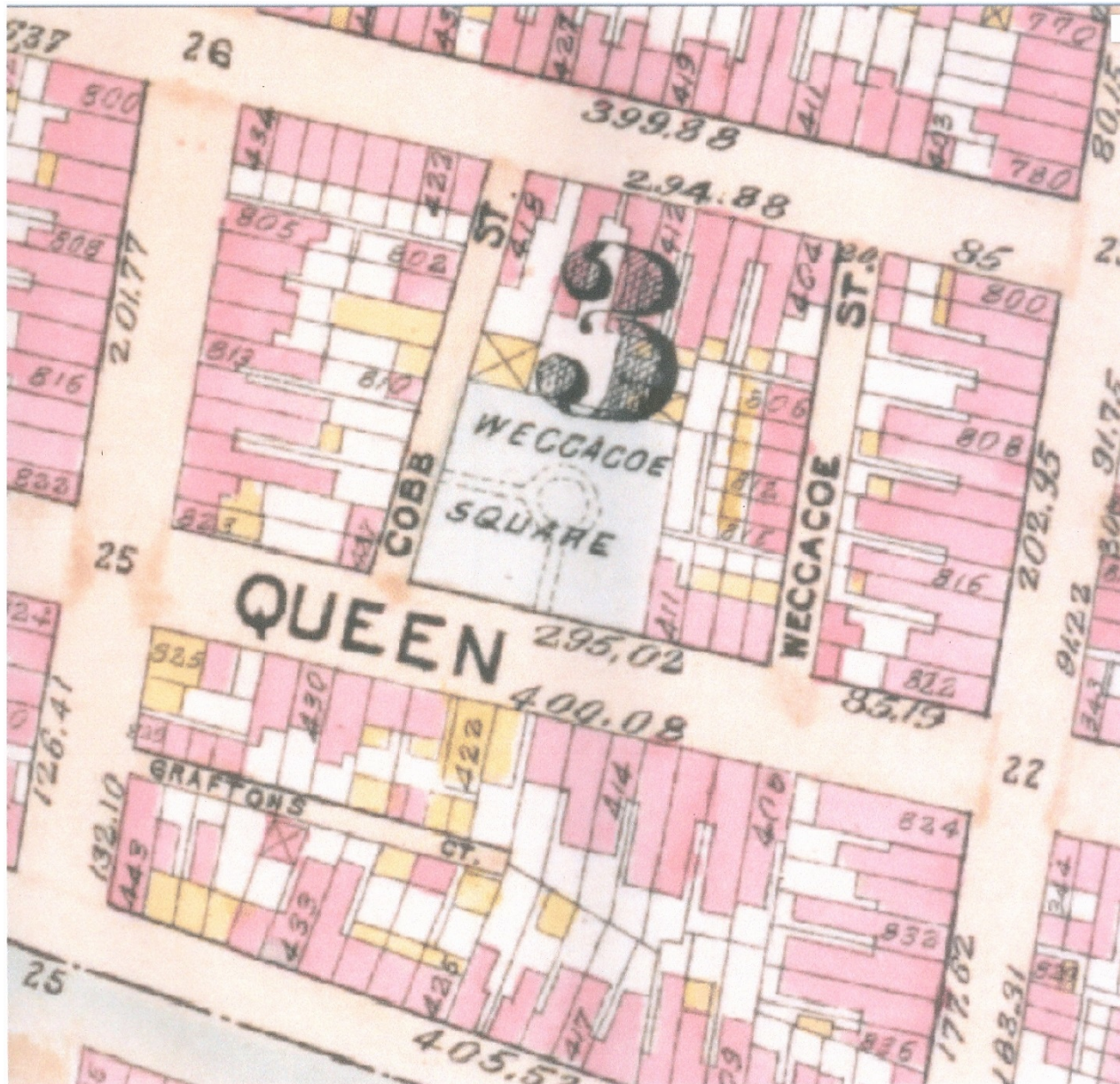


Fig. 10: Weccacoe Square as shown on 1895 Bromley Map. It does not appear the Square has expanded beyond the burial ground site.

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

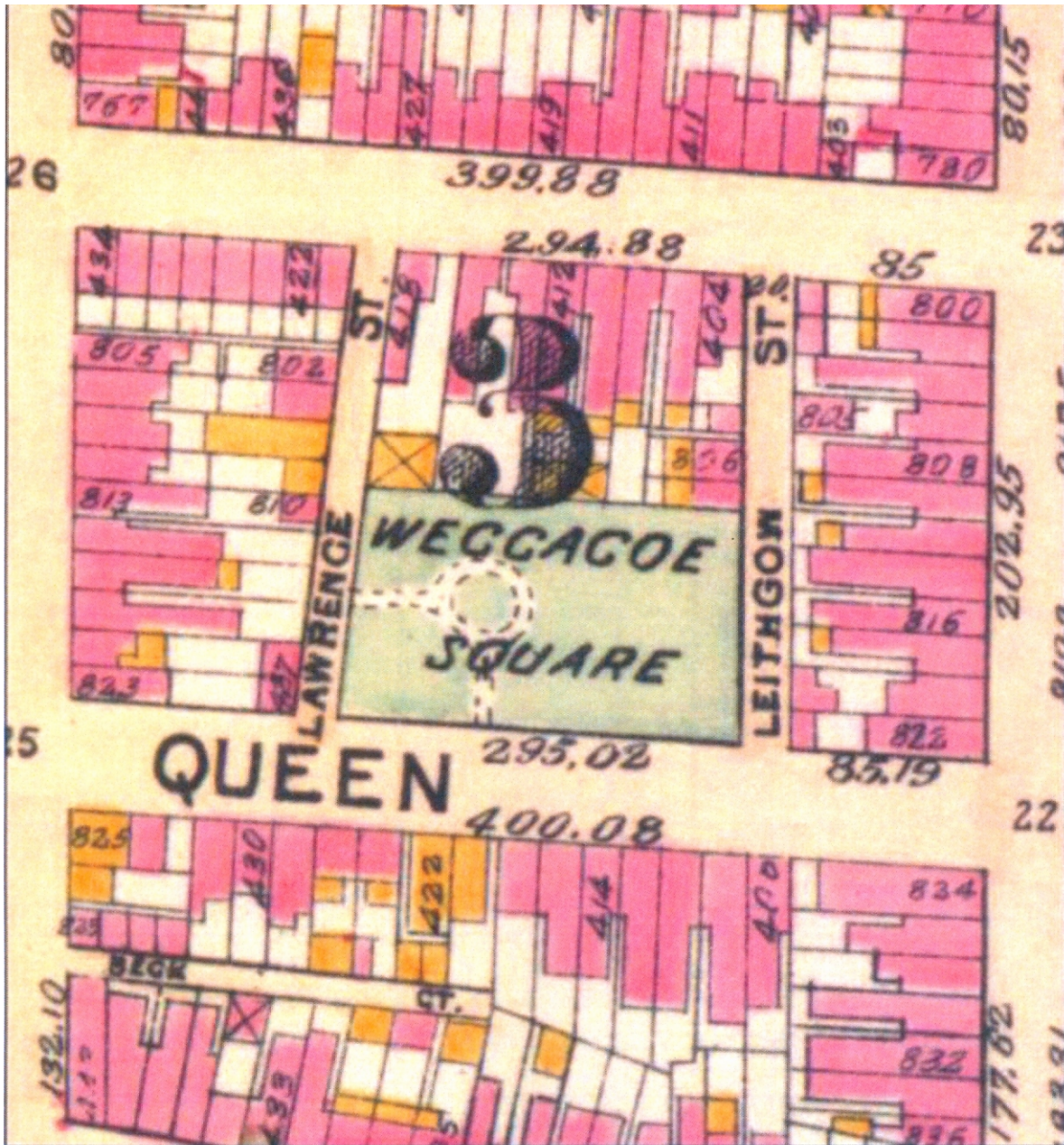


Fig. 11: Weccacoe Square as shown on 1901 Bromley Map. Boundary has been expanded east to Leithgow Street (formerly Weccacoe Street) resulting in the demolition of private homes. It would later expand north to take the homes along Catharine Street. Cobb and Weccacoe Streets have been renamed (now Lawrence and Leithgow, respectively).

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State



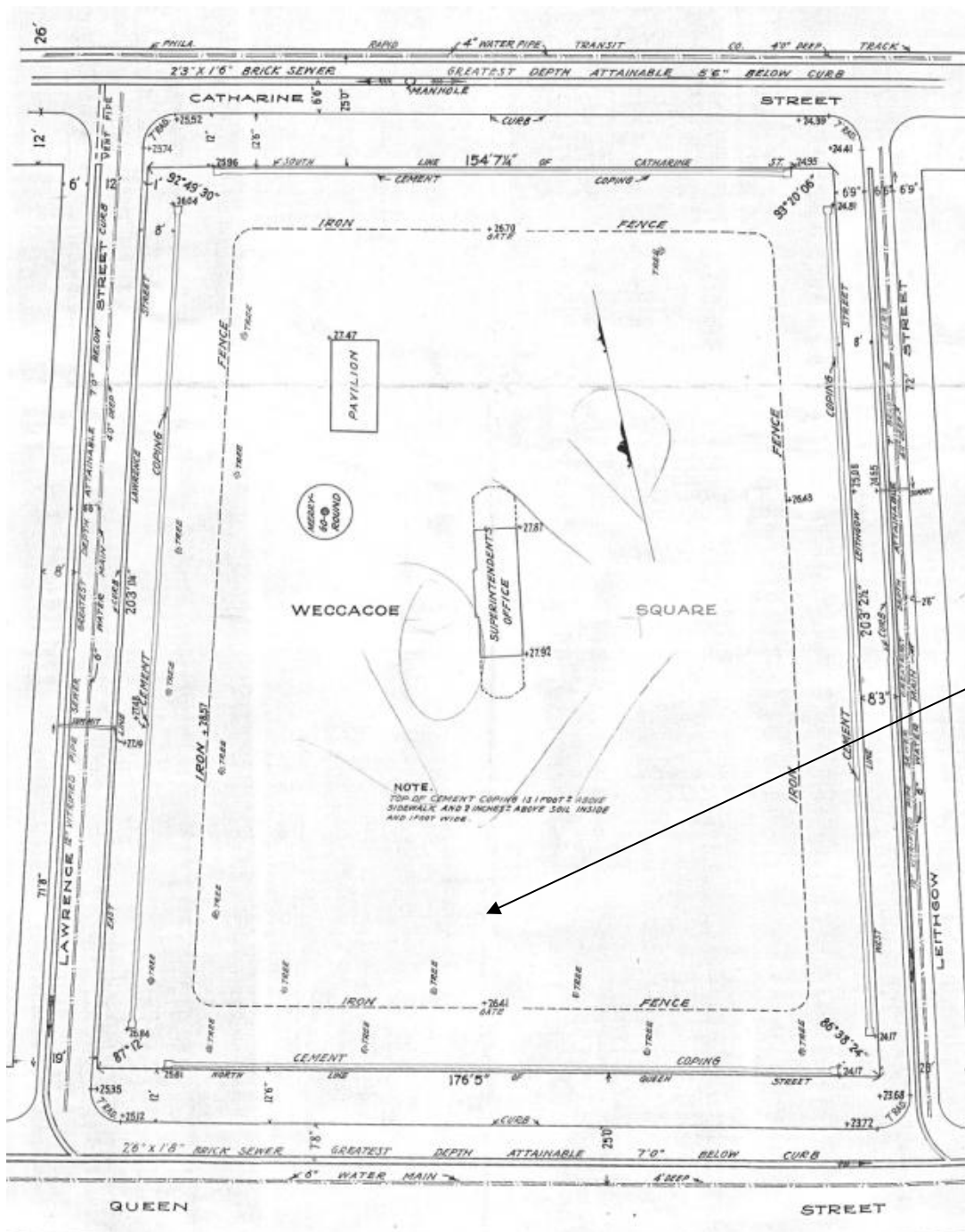
Fig. 12: Weccacoe School Garden as illustrated in *Appleton's Magazine*, 1905. The property had expanded north to Catharine Street by this time. The garden, only in use for a few years, was primarily developed over newly-acquired land, formerly housing rowhomes, while the burial ground space held a ball field and playground equipment. The entire garden area later became playground and sports space. (From Phase 1B report, by Mooney and Morrell)

Bethel Burial Ground

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State



Future location of 1924 Shelter Building

Figure 13: 1912 survey map of Weccaoe Playground. (From Phase 1B report, by Mooney and Morrell)

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

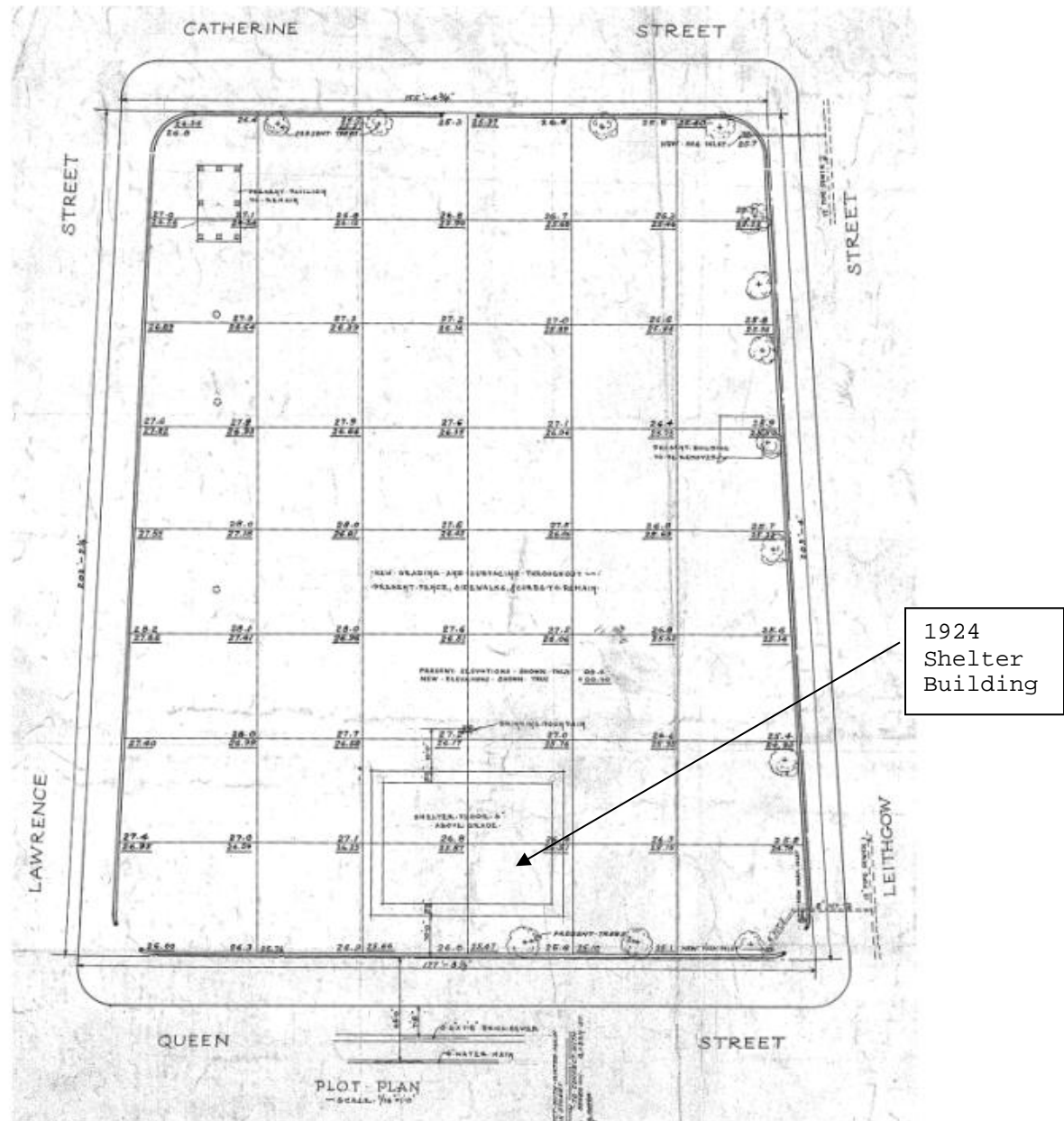


Figure 14: 1924 survey map of Weccacoe Playground. (From Phase 1B report, by Mooney and Morrell)

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

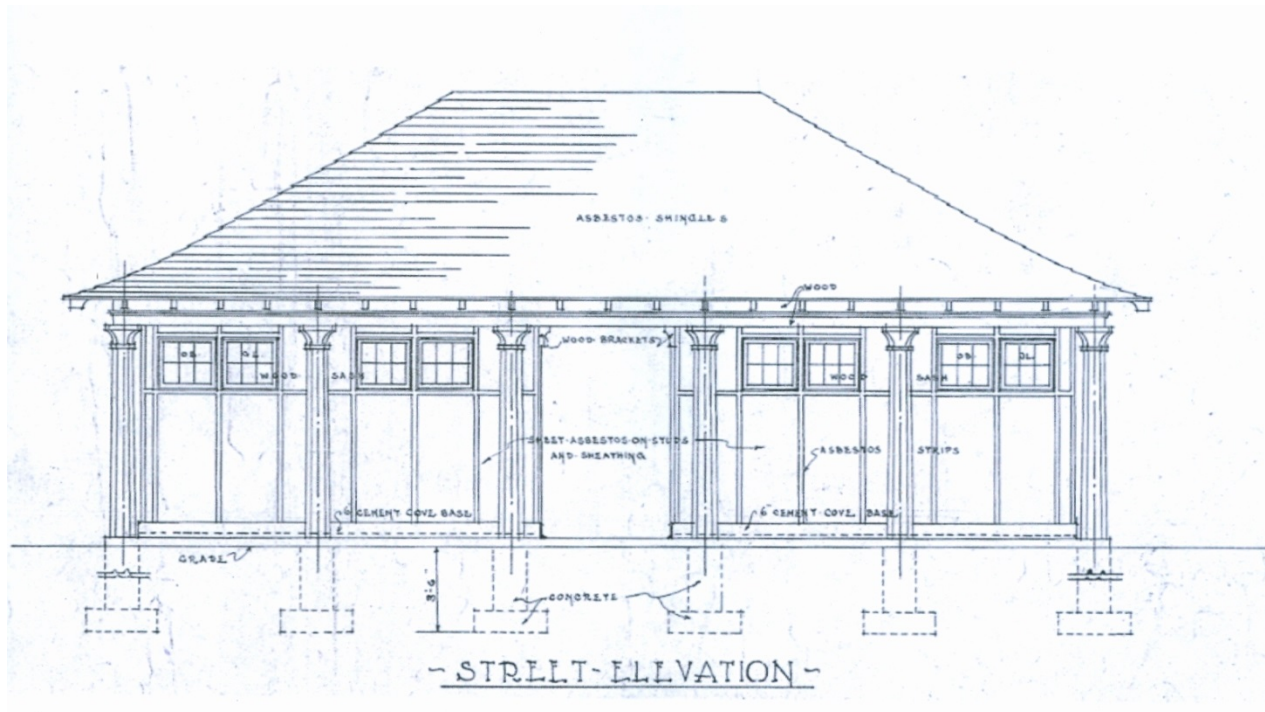


Fig. 15: Street Elevation of Shelter Building drawn by architect John Molitor, 1924. This building remains, with a 1970s addition, and stands on a portion of the burial ground. (From Phase 1B report, by Mooney and Morrell)

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

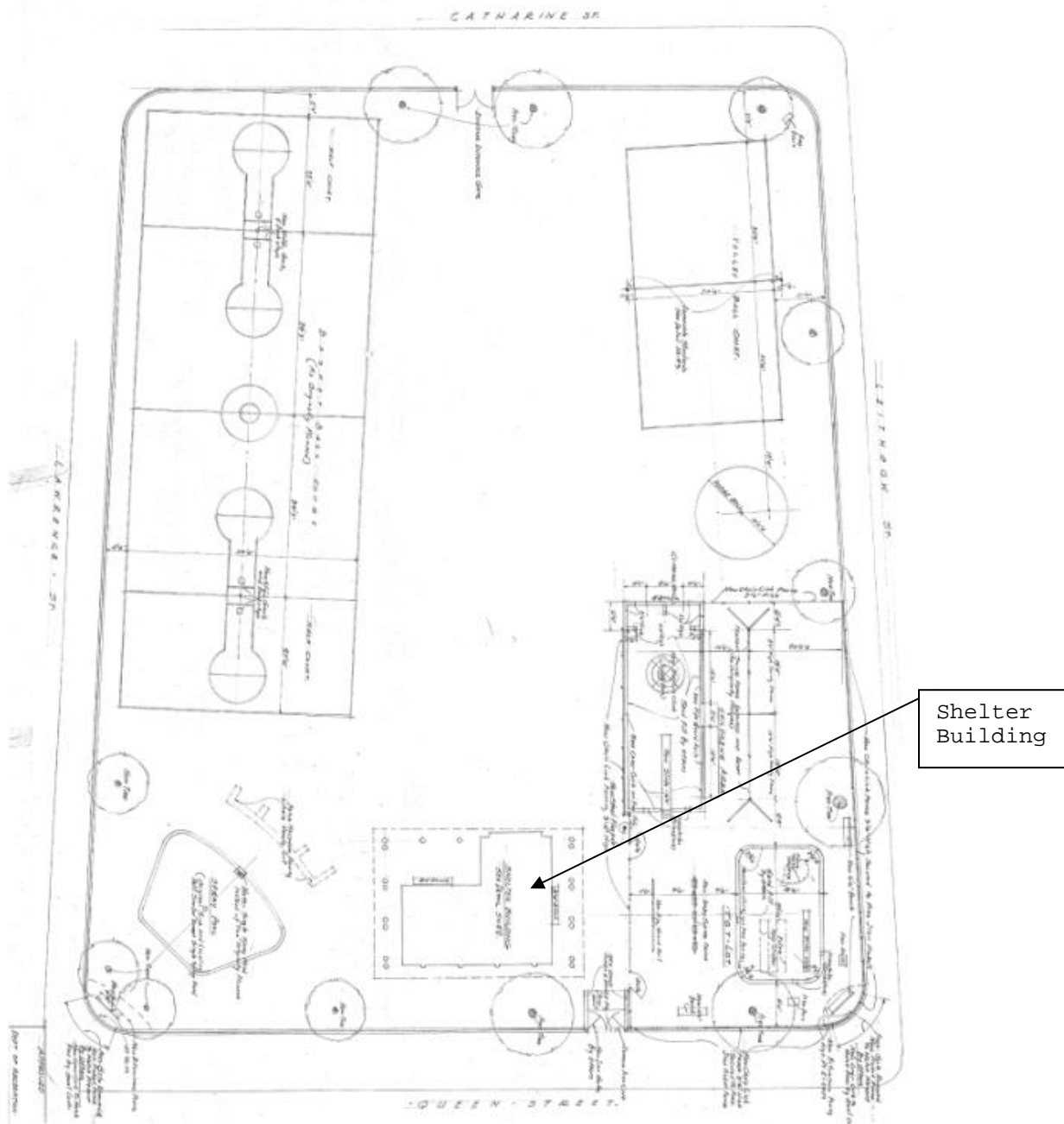


Figure 16: 1954 plans for Weccacoe Playground renovation. (From Phase 1B report, by Mooney and Morrell)

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

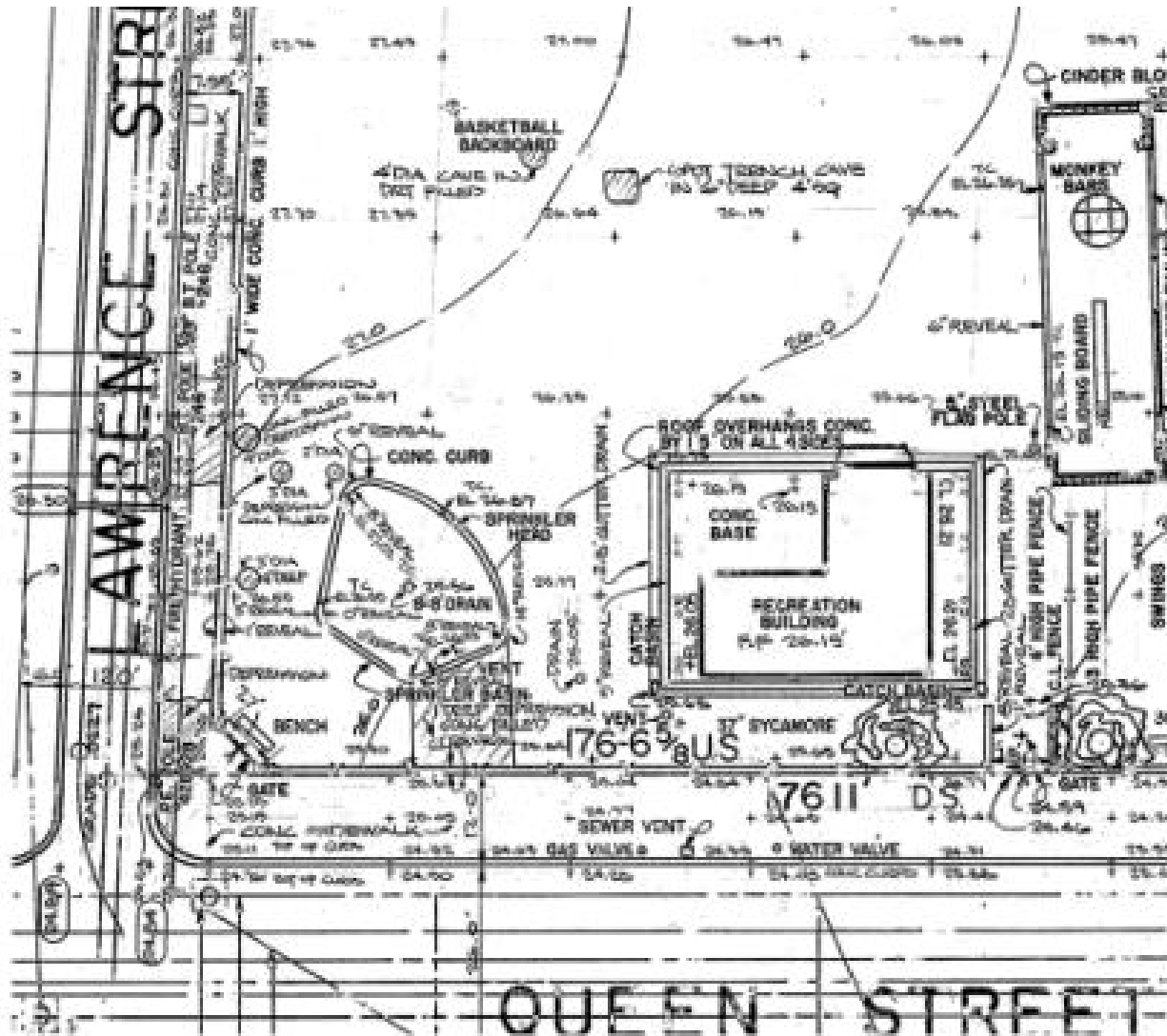


Figure 17: Detail of 1975 playground survey showing location of cave-ins and depressions in need of fill, Recreation (formerly Shelter) Building, and water feature with sprinklers and drains west of building as well as other equipment and features. (From Phase 1B report, by Mooney and Morrell)

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

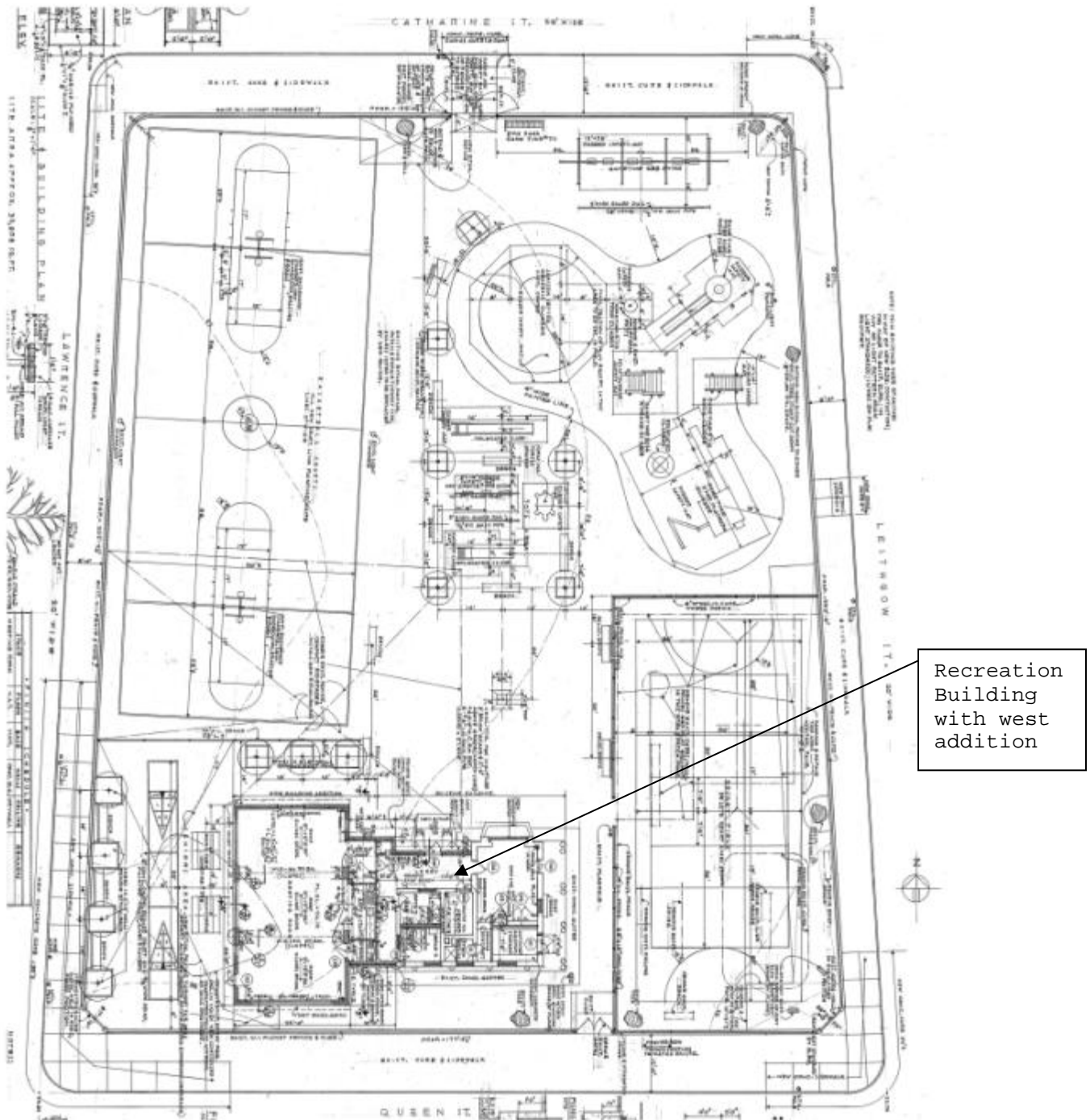


Figure 18: 1979 Playground Renovation plans, showing water feature replaced with shuffleboard court and addition to Recreation Building. (From Phase 1B report, by Mooney and Morrell)

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State



Figure 19: Site map showing location of 2013 Phase IB trenches applied over a current aerial view (from Mooney and Morrell, 2013).

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

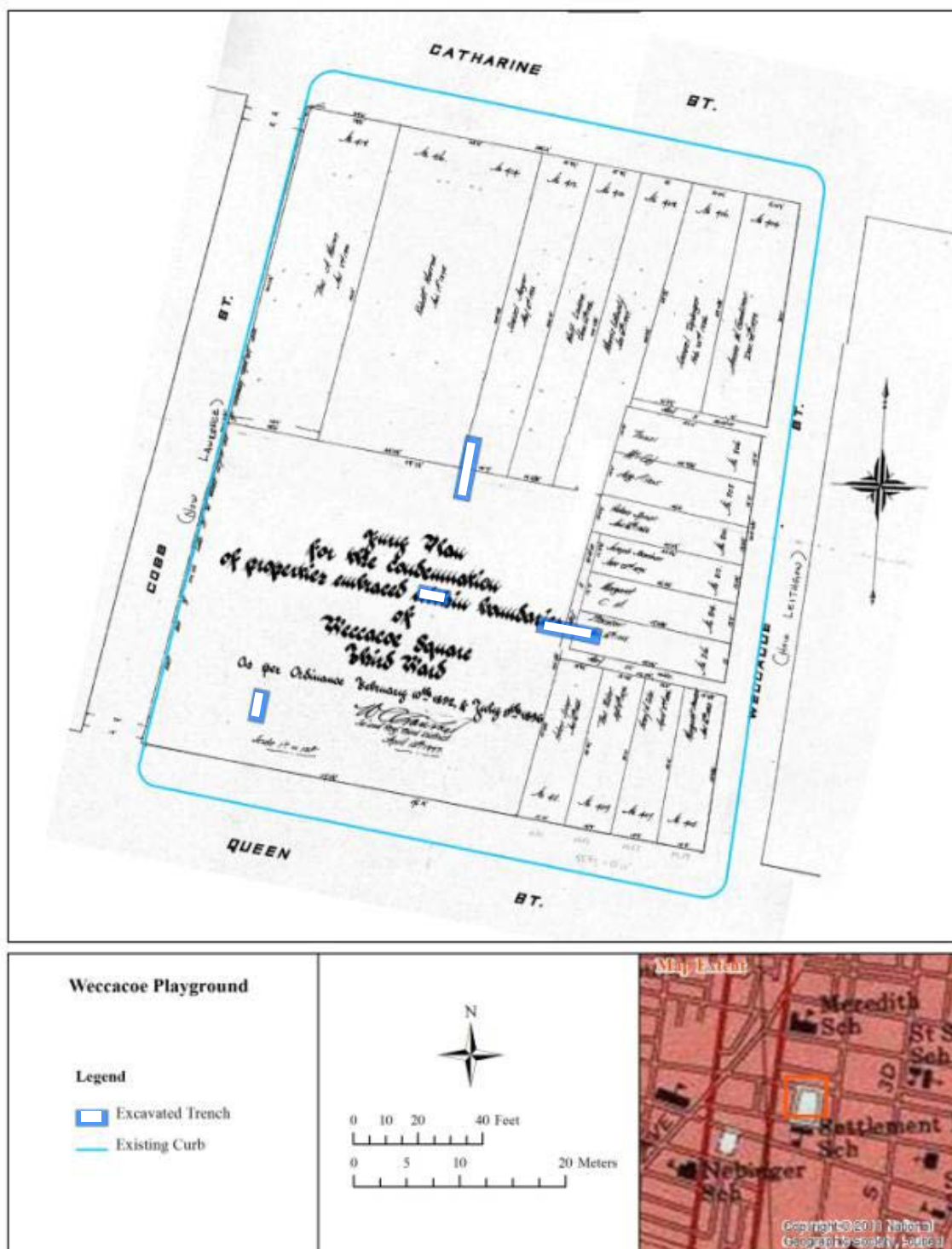


Figure 20: Map showing location of 2013 Phase IB trenches with respect to identified burial ground walls and adjacent house lots (later acquired and demolished by City for playground expansion). Historic map from Phase IB report (Mooney and Morrell).

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State



Fig. 21. (above) Overview of the south half of Trench 3, looking north, showing the north burial ground wall, identified grave shafts, and partial Amelia Brown gravemarker. (below) Detail view of fragment of Amelia Brown gravemarker.

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State



Figure 22: URS Archeology crew members mapping identified grave shafts in Trench 2, during 2013 investigations. Additional information about investigations and findings can be found in the resulting report by Mooney and Morrell.

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

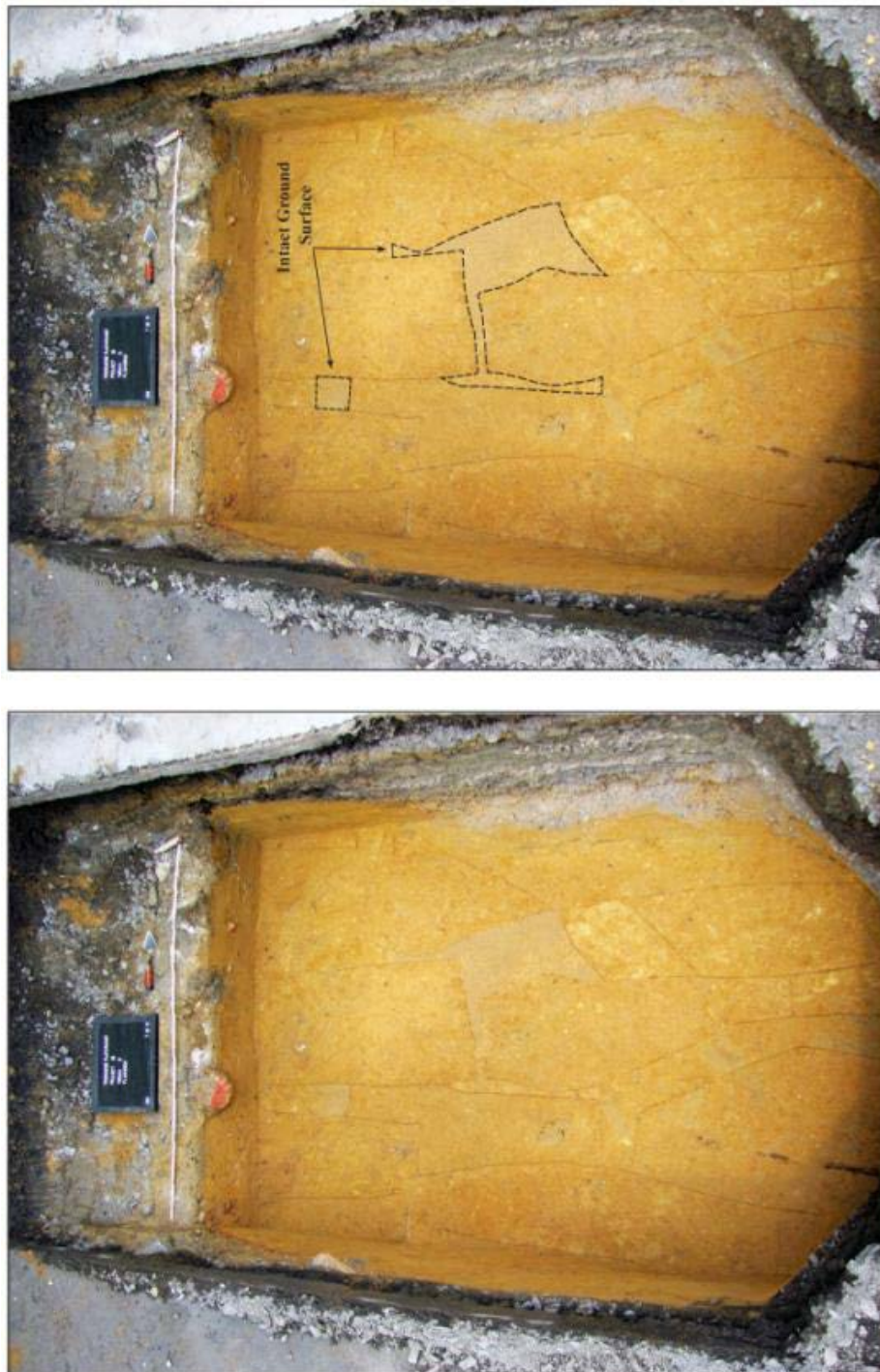


Figure 23: West overview of Trench 2, showing remnant intact historic ground surface and identified grave shafts, from 2013 investigation. Findings are detailed in the Phase IB report by Mooney and Morrell.

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State

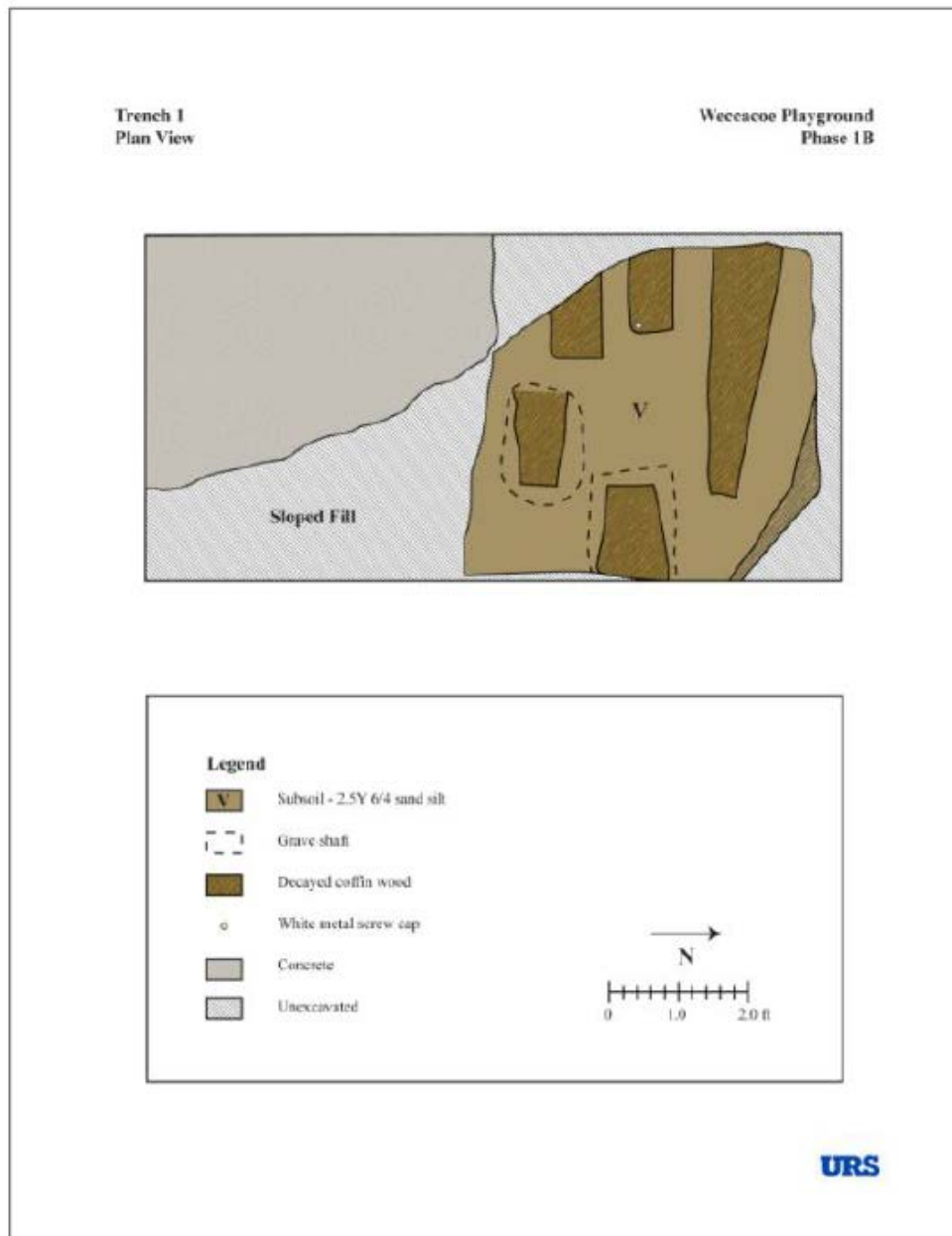


Figure 24: Artifact Tables and Test Trench Plans and Profile Maps can be found in the 2013 Phase IB report by Mooney and Morrell.

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State



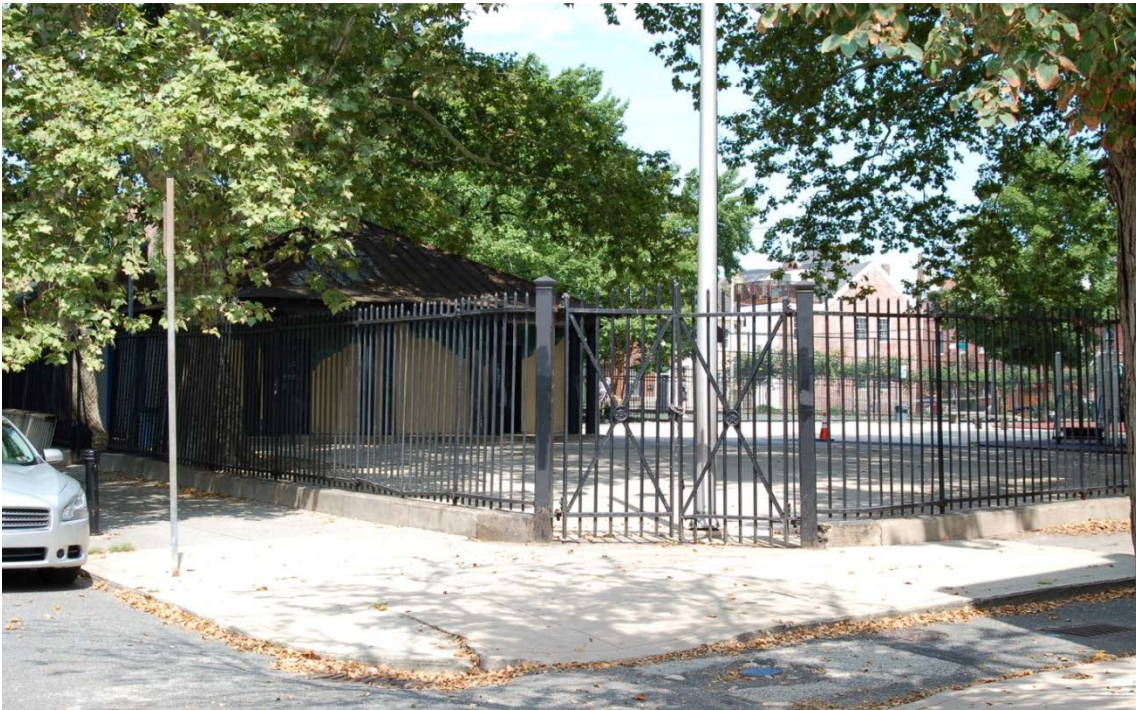
Figure 25: URS archeologists addressing visitors to site during the 2013 investigation. Building directly behind visitors is the 1924 Recreation Building.



Figure 26: Archeologists backfilling a trench after 2013 investigation was completed (adjacent fence is along tennis court; building in rear is Recreation Building). The southern portion of the tennis court, and the entire Recreation Building, are over the burial ground site.

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State



Current Photo 1: Southeast corner of the Weccacoe Playground, from Queen and Leighgow Streets facing northwest. The existing iron fence surrounding the Playground is believed to date c.1924.



Current Photo 2: Southern edge of the Weccacoe Playground, along Queen Street, facing East. The existing iron fence surrounding the Playground is believed to date c.1924. In this location it is believed to be placed above the original burial ground wall.

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State



Current Photo 3: The Recreation Building, facing Southwest, which was constructed over the burial ground. The 1924 building includes a late 1970s addition on the west side. The patch of dark pavement with the orange cone in the right side of the image is the location of one of the 2013 trenches investigated to establish the location of the original burial ground wall. See Figure 25.



Current Photo 4: The Northwest corner of the Recreation Building addition, facing Southeast. The addition to the building dates to the late 1970s.

Bethel Burial Ground
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA
County and State



Current Photo 5: Shuffleboard court west of Recreation Building is the light-colored pavement surface in the center of the image. The addition to the Recreation Building dates to the late 1970s. This area is above the burial ground site.



Current Photo 6: View through Weccacoe Playground, looking southwest toward Recreation Building and burial ground site. The area with the swings and other playground equipment was constructed over former rowhome sites, not the burial ground.