

Moquette Row Housing  
Moquette Row North and Moquette Row South  
Yonkers  
Westchester County  
New York

HABS No. NY-6263

HABS  
NY  
60-YONK,  
6

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MID-ATLANTIC REGION NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MOQUETTE ROW HOUSING

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Location: Moquette Row North and Moquette Row South, Yonkers, Westchester County, New York

Present Owners & Occupants Individual Householders

Present Use: Residential

Significance: The two Moquette Rows, even though truncated, remain a unique example of industrial housing in Westchester County, and are reminiscent of architectural precedents in the industrial cities of Scotland, the home of Alexander Smith, whose company built this Row housing.

Their siting, simple forms, and generous backyards are reminders of a paternalistic aspect of American capitalism, during that period of rapid industrial expansion which occurred in the north after the Civil War.

PART I - HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of construction

The Moquette Row Housing was built between 1886 and 1889.

2. Architect

The architect, if any, is unknown.

3. Original and subsequent owners

In the 1889 Pidgeon's Atlas of the City of Yonkers, (E. Robinson, N.Y.) \* both sets of structures appear as being on the property of Warren S. Smith. However, from the date of their construction, the two-story brick buildings were under the control of the Mill management. Workers had to apply to live in the houses, although they were often passed down within families from one generation to the next. Foremen were selected to live in

\*See photograph NY-6262-11

the larger corner houses with oriel windows at the eastern ends of the Rows, now destroyed. Maintenance of both the houses and the roadbed between each set was provided by crews from the carpet shops.

On April 28, 1947, the company turned over the right-of-way of Moquette Row North and South to the City of Yonkers (Yonkers City Special Ordinance No. 99-1947). In 1950, the company sold the Moquette houses to the tenants living in them, many of whom stayed in the buildings when the carpet mills closed in 1954. Those in the Eastern houses were displaced in 1974 for demolition in preparation for the widening of Nepperhan Avenue. The remaining houses are all privately owned.

#### 4. Alternations and Additions

The portion of each row of houses within the right-of way of the proposed Nepperhan Arterial has been acquired by the State of New York and the houses demolished. The remainder of each row is intact, ending in a new wall applique fronting on the Nepperhan Arterial right-of-way.

This new end wall treatment consists of a false wall of brick, with decorative insets corbelled and racked to reflect spandrel beams at the floor level and express a chimney flue at approximately the location of the interior chimney breasts.

#### B. Historical Events & Persons Connected with the Buildings

The Moquette Row Houses are an offshoot of the Moquette Textile Mills established in 1845 by Alexander Smith in West Farms, New York. In 1856, Smith, along with Halcyon Skinner, had developed and patented a power loom for weaving tufted and pile carpets. This new loom, called either an Axminster loom or a Moquette loom, greatly accelerated the process of carpet manufacturing, producing strong and durable fabrics in which a variety of colors could be introduced. The Moquette power loom revolutionized the carpet industry, and the Alexander Smith & Sons Carpet Company assumed the lead in the market.

Two separate fires, one in 1862 and the second in 1864, destroyed the West Farm plant. After the second fire, Alexander Smith moved the operation north to the growing village of Yonkers, building a factory at the junction of Palisades and Elm Streets, on the banks of Saw Mill Creek.\* The company, whose growth was spurred by a further improvement of the Moquette loom in 1877, expanded throughout that decade, not only acquiring

See photograph NY-6263-13, center panel

adjacent land for additional mill buildings, but about 1870, purchasing a larger parcel of land in the Saw Mill River Valley on Saw Mill River Road, on the east side of the river, upon which to develop a new mill complex.

Between 1871 and 1876, Smith acquired land on the west side of the Saw Mill River, on property today bounded by Nepperhan Avenue. The new site provided access to the water of the river for the various manufacturing operations and space in the valley for the expansion of the mill. (See photograph NY-6263-10.)

The enormous success of Skinner's moquette looms spurred a major construction project at the north end of the Smith properties bounded by Orchard Place extension and Nepperhan Avenue. By 1886 the east side of Nepperhan Avenue was lined with three new 4-story and basement brick buildings supported by boilers and machine buildings, a spinning mill and a picker building. (See photograph NY-6263-12.)

In the first years of the operation in Yonkers, the period from 1865 to 1885, the carpet mills employed large numbers of Scottish, Irish and English workers, many of whom had worked in English carpet factories. These immigrant groups settled in particular communities located in close proximity to the two carpet mills and others nearby industrial operations. The Scots lived close to the Elm Street plant, in Nodine Hill, a neighborhood nicknamed "Little Dundee". During the same period, the Irish populated Hogg Hill, south and west of the Nepperhan Avenue Buildings.

In 1885, a strike occurred in the carpet mills that forced their closing. The workers at the Smith shops, following the lead of textile workers in New York and throughout the country, remained off the job for a period of five months.

Shortly after this strike, the company began construction of company housing for the increasing numbers of mill employees. Some time between the years 1876 and 1885, Smith had acquired several acres of land on the west side of Nepperhan Avenue across from the mill buildings. On an 1876 map,\* the land, then the property of Sampson Simpson & Leo, has been subdivided for residential development in typical longitudinal lots with narrow frontages on Nepperhan Avenue and Orchard Street.

One portion of this property became the site of the two Moquette Rows. Three rows, of 21 brick buildings each, and one, the southernmost, of 18 buildings, were constructed on the west side of, and perpendicular to, Nepperhan Avenue. These brick buildings, collectively known as Moquette Row, were probably built between 1885 and 1889. In the three part illustration in Scharfs History of Westchester County\* published in 1886, Moquette

\*See photograph NY-6263-10

\*\*See photographs NY-6263-13, 14, 15

Row South seems to be shown as a set of foundations suggesting that it is in construction during the period that the drawings were made.

From the date of their construction, the brick buildings were under the complete control of the Smith Company. As noted above, workers had to apply to live in the houses, which were often passed down within families. Rents were the lowest in the city, amounting to \$20 per month for five or six rooms prior to World War II. Shortly after the War, the company installed steam, supplied from the mill boilers, and electricity, and raised the rent \$1.45 per month. Maintenance of both the houses and the roadbed between each set was provided by crews from the carpet shops.

Few descriptions remain detailing living conditions within the houses while the mill was in operation. An article in the New York Herald of 18 September 1893, discusses the town of Moquette, a suburb of the City of Yonkers, as full of great rows of frame and brick houses, for the most part two stories in height, lining the west side of the river valley. This article, written in exaggerated language to create the maximum sympathetic effect for the plight of the worker in the reader's mind, describes Moquette Row as unattractive to the eye and as concealing unspeakable wretchedness and suggested that Moquette Row is a typical street in a town of Moquette. While detailing the excesses of management, the writer does point out the company had not evicted any unpaying tenants during the layoffs of 1893.

A masters degree thesis by Miss S. Greenblatt for Columbia University mentions the houses in terms of company paternalism. This 1945 document remarks that leniency had always been shown toward the tenants of company tenements, know as "The Rows" and "The Flats" (larger brick buildings on Orchard Place and Orchard Street constructed between 1906 and 1908) and that rents were the lowest in the city.

The first residents of Moquette Row were Irish immigrants, and carpet workers of Irish descent remained in the majority of the buildings until the mill closes in 1954. Today, the residents of Moquette Row are predominantly white with many mill workers of Irish heritage remaining.

PART II - ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character

Moquette Row consists of two groupings of two-story brick row houses that, running perpendicular to Nepperhan Avenue, follow the contour of the incline at the west side of Saw Mill Creek and the Smith Carpet Mill Complex.

2. Condition of Fabric

Except for the houses in that portion of each row adjacent to Nepperhan Avenue which were demolished for the widening of the Avenue, the houses of Moquette Row remain, to a large extent, in their original conditions. A few of the cornices of the original 84 buildings have been covered with siding, and some of the lintels have been painted.

Each individual house, approximately 17 feet wide, or 20 feet on the South Row, bonds to its neighbors to create a continuous row along the hill slope. Simple wooden cornices, decorated by three pairs of blocky-cut brackets define each modular unit within the group.

Unadorned rectangular limestone lintels over each doorway and window are the only other decoration on the utilitarian brick buildings which are laid up in common American bond. The backs of the buildings resemble the fronts with the exception of a simpler cornice decoration. The end bays at the Orchard Street side have no return of the cornice or other additional decoration. The houses at the Nepperhan Avenue corner, as well as those directly west, now destroyed, which were homes for the mill supervisors, were both larger than the typical house and more elaborately decorated. Cornices here followed around to the west side of the buildings, running above a two story oriel window.

Each bay oriel was angled and had a heavy cornice with brackets at the top. At the bottom of the upper window was an angled skirt of cut fishscale shingles; below the lower window were three inset square panels. The Moquette Row South bay oriels rested on reverse umbrella forms of wood.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Dimensions: The basic row house of Moquette Row is 29' - 0" by 16' - 0" wide, interior measurements, and 23' - 6" high from door sill, while the southernmost row of houses is 29' - 0" deep by 20' - 0" wide, permitting three openings on the facade. Distance from sill to sidewalk varies with slope of hill

2. Foundations: Stone

3. Wall Construction: 7½ brick wall

4. Structural System: 3" x 9" lateral joists  
at 24" on center

5. Stoops: originally of wood, now post + slab concrete with concrete steps, iron pipe railings
6. Openings: (Plate 8)
  - a) Doors: Wood doors, wood framed, two light window over door, stone lintel.
  - b) Windows: Six-over-six wood double hung windows, wood frames, stone sill & lintels.
7. Roofs:
  - a) Shape: Flat with built up roofing
  - b) Wood cornice supported by 3 pair wooden brackets.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans. Each house contained four bedrooms on the second floor, and two rooms on the first floor. In the southern three rows of houses the kitchen was part of one first floor room, leaving the other as parlor. In the northernmost rows of houses the kitchen was in the "Basement", which opened onto the back yard, as permitted by the northwards slope of the topography. In each house the bathroom was in the basement.

2. Stairs: Wood stairs
3. Floors: Wood flooring
4. Walls and ceiling: plaster on wood lath
5. Doors: Wooden doors & frames
6. Mechanical Equipment: Originally coal stoves in kitchens provided heat, then in late forties hot water heating was supplied from factory.

Presently: Individual furnaces.

D. Site:

1. General Setting & Orientation

The two Moquette rows are located at the northern end of the former Smith Mills complex, west of Nepperhan Avenue. The site slopes not only from west to east, but less steeply from south to

north. It is this slope that allows the northernmost row of houses to be three stories in height.

The brick facade of the mills opposite each row is broken by a slight variation, that opposite the south by a projection capped by a pediment that opposite the north by a six bay wide tower at the center, rising slightly above roof level.

## 2. Landscape

The "backs" of the Moquette row houses are in the traditional pattern of row houses with a yard-alley-yard layout. Moquette row is distinguished by the generous dimensions of these features, each yard 16' - 0" in width (the width of the house) by 45' - 0" in depth. The alley is 15' - 0" wide from back fence to back fence.

It should be noted that at the time of construction until the early years of this century, those yards on the upper, or western half of the Rows looked east across the mill tops to the wooded ridge on the east side of the river, which even in 1982 are thickly planted with trees around single family suburban houses.

Part III. Sources of Information

1. Old Views

Photographs

NY-6263-13 through 15 are reproductions of a full size line illustration in Scharf's "History of Westchester County, Volume II, Published by L.E. Preston & Co. Philadelphia in 1886.

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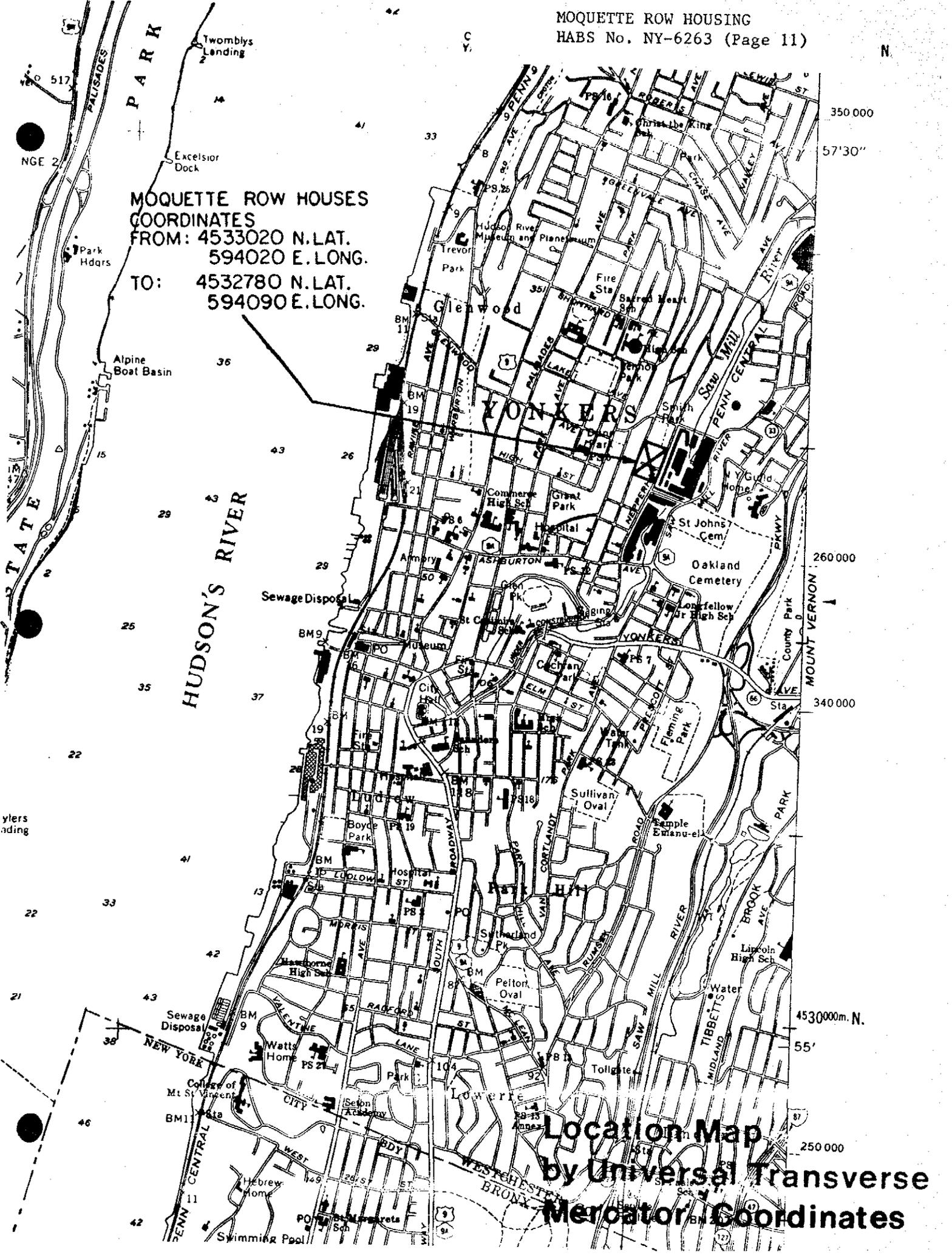
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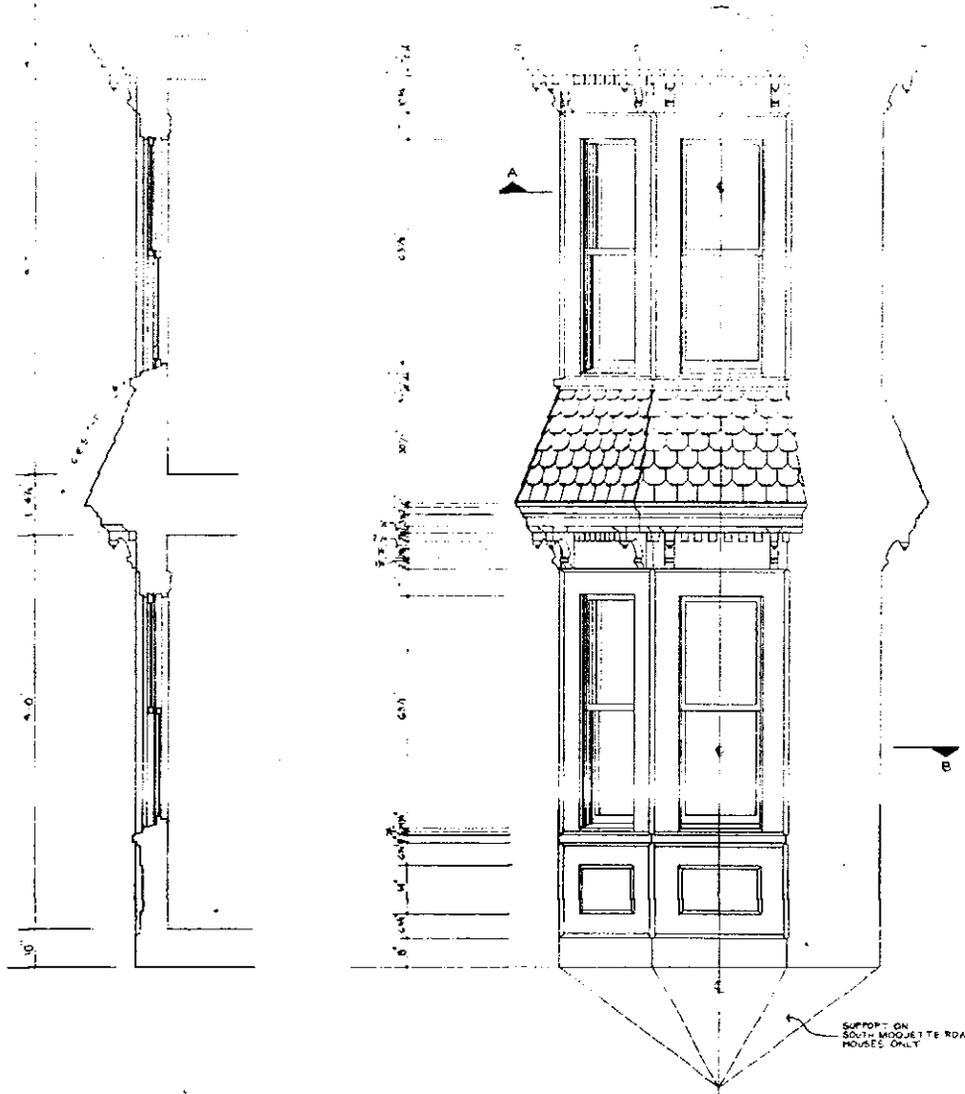
Part IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Funding for demolition of end structures of the Moquette Rows and construction of sections of the Nepperhan Avenue Arterial is to be provided by the Federal Highway Administration. Under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, mitigative documentation was undertaken in September 1982 by Francis Booth, Architect, of Tippetts-Abbett-McCarthy-Stratton (TAMS), Engineers, Architects and Planners.

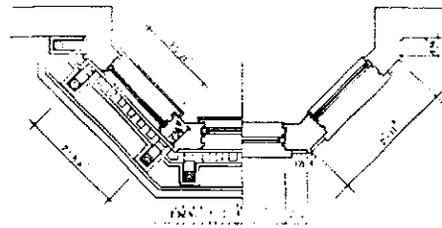
MOQUETTE ROW HOUSES  
COORDINATES  
FROM: 4533020 N.LAT.  
594020 E.LONG.  
TO: 4532780 N.LAT.  
594090 E.LONG.



Location Map  
by Universal Transverse  
Mercator Coordinates



SECTION AT G



SECTION C A SECTION C B

BAY WINDOWS (TYPICAL)  
FOREMAN'S HOUSES  
MOQUETTE ROW  
YONKERS, N.Y.  
NOV. 1978

