

Site History

**Sharswood/Blumberg Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan – Sharswood
Redevelopment, Ridge Avenue, City of Philadelphia
ER #2014-0213-101-F
Block Bounded by W. Oxford Street, N. 20th Street and Ridge Avenue
Philadelphia, PA**

On June 16, 2016, the Bureau of Historic Preservation of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) requested additional information on the Sharswood/Blumberg Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan – Sharswood Redevelopment, Ridge Avenue, City of Philadelphia (ER #2014-0213-101-F). Specifically, PHMC recommended the submittal of additional exterior photographs of the extant buildings and a determination as to how the proposed project will affect these buildings, as well as the surrounding area. In addition, PHMC requested that a historical documents study be completed to assess whether a Phase IA archeological survey would be necessary. This survey is typically conducted to determine the potential existence of any significant archeological resources within the project area. To comply with the above requested work, Powers & Company, Inc. completed the following report through primary source research, including historic and contemporary maps, historic photographs, GIS data and archeological site records. Additional exterior photographs of the extant buildings were also taken.

The subject property is portions of the block bounded by W. Oxford Street to the north, N. 20th Street to the east and N. 21st Street and Ridge Avenue to the west. The addresses of the six extant buildings within the subject boundary are 2001-2011 Ridge Avenue (Photographs #1 and 2), 2051 Ridge Avenue (Photographs #9-11), 2063 Ridge Avenue (Photographs #12-14), 2125 Ridge Avenue (Photographs #22-25), 2007 W. Jefferson Street (Photographs #4 and 5) and 2019 W. Jefferson Street (Photographs #6 and 7). The remaining portions of the subject property are open grass and dirt lots with areas of mature and newly planted trees, concrete sidewalks and wood fencing (Photographs #3-21). There are also three former streets within the property boundary that are no longer in use: Redner Street (previously known as Hubbs Street), which runs from east to west (Photographs #17, 18 and 20), and N. Lambert (previously known as Dott Street) and N. Woodstock (previously known as Bartram Street) Streets, which run from north to south (Photographs #18 and 19) (see enclosed Aerial Map).

The current proposal for the subject property involves the demolition of the few extant buildings and the redevelopment of the site, which is 6.1 acres (see enclosed Draft Sketch). This includes the construction of an office building, a supermarket, two tracts of residential units, open green space and parking lots. The office building, which will provide for consolidated administrative space for the Philadelphia Housing Authority, will be located on Ridge Avenue, between W. Jefferson and W. Master Streets, which is currently open space. The supermarket will be located on the northeast corner of Ridge Avenue and W. Master Street, in the approximate location of 2051 and 2063 Ridge Avenue. The residential units will be located on the N. 20th Street between W. Jefferson and Redner Streets and on Redner Street between N. 20th and 21st Streets. Neither location contains any extant buildings. The two triangular plots of land on Ridge Avenue, including the location of 2125 Ridge Avenue, will remain as open space, along with the parcel located at the intersection of N. 20th Street and Ridge Avenue, approximately in the location of 2001-2011 Ridge Avenue. The remaining areas will be open surface parking lots and will include the locations of 2007 and 2019 W. Jefferson Street.

Within the subject boundary, Ridge Avenue is the most prominent thoroughfare, historically a major commercial corridor in northeast Philadelphia. One block east of the site is the Lower North Philadelphia Speculative Housing Historic District (NR 1999) and one block south is the Girard Avenue Historic District (NR 1985). Also one block south is Girard College (1848, NHL 1969, NRN 1974), which is an independent boarding school founded by Stephen Girard that offers education to anyone from a single-parent, low-income family at no cost. The larger surrounding neighborhood is primarily populated by vacant lots and low-scale residential buildings, which range in age from the late 19th century to large swaths of late 20th century public housing.

The earliest map showing the project area block dates to 1862 (Figure 1). Unfortunately, this map only shows the outline of the block and none of the building within it. As other structures are shown on the map, this likely means that no buildings had been constructed on the block by the time of the survey. An 1875 Hopkins Atlas shows that construction has been completed on all of the extant buildings except for 2001-2011 Ridge Avenue, which contains a marble yard and 2125 Ridge Avenue, which is an empty parcel (Figure 2). The remainder of the subject property has been divided into lots with construction present on the majority of parcels. The non-residential buildings included within the property boundary are a police station, a public school, a paint factory, a window shade factory and a marble yard. An 1888 Baist Atlas shows no substantial changes from the 1875 map.

An 1895 Baist Atlas shows the construction of a building at 2125 Ridge Avenue although it does not have the footprint of the current building. It also shows the replacement of the window shade factory with residential buildings and the construction of an electric light factory. The atlas is also useful as it shows the building outlines for the first time (Figure 3). Those buildings fronting on W. Oxford Street, N. 20th Street and Ridge Avenue are primarily the typical L-shaped buildings that often front onto major streets. Where the streets intersect at an odd angle, some of the building footprints are similarly non-traditional. Those buildings fronting the smaller streets, such as Redner, N. Lambert and N. Woodstock Streets are the typical rectangular buildings that often front onto secondary streets. Backyards for each row of buildings are located on the interior of the block. A 1901 Bromley Atlas and a 1907 Smith Atlas show no substantial change from the 1895 Baist Atlas, other than a slight increase in commercial buildings with larger floor plates.

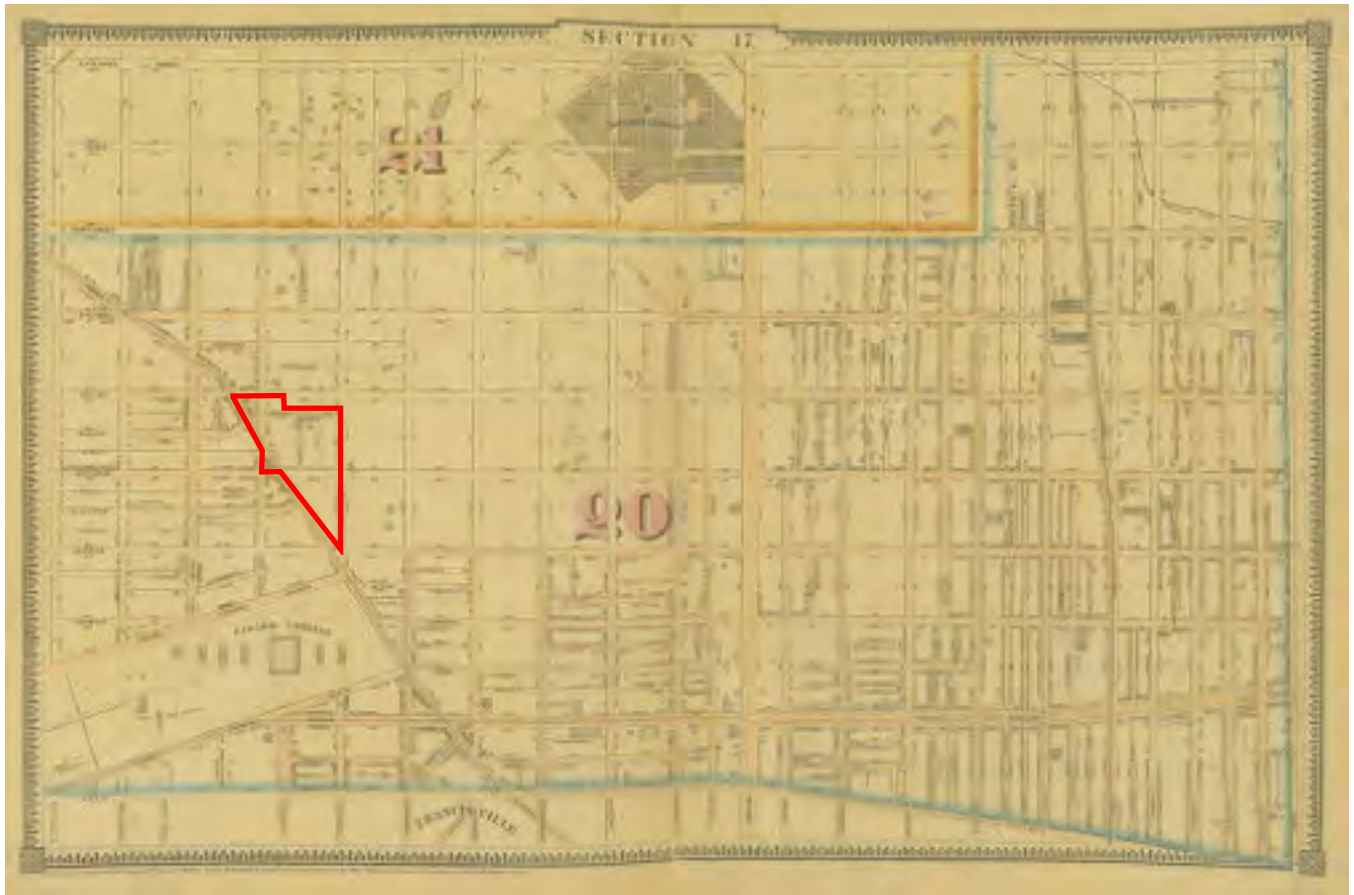
An 1918 Sanborn Fire Insurance Survey shows two significant changes (Figure 4). The former building located at 2125 Ridge Avenue has been demolished and the current building has been constructed, as well as a group of 3-story buildings at 2001-2011 Ridge Avenue. The survey also provides a higher level of detail. All of the extant buildings within the property boundary had commercial operations on the 1st floor and residential units on floors 2 and 3, with the exception of 2007 and 2019 W. Jefferson Street, which were exclusively residential. A 1922 Bromley Atlas shows no significant changes from the 1918 Sanborn Fire Insurance Survey. A 1942 Philadelphia Land Use Survey also shows no significant changes from the earlier maps but provides an ongoing level of detail with all buildings having a commercial use on the 1st floor and single- or two-family dwellings above, with the exception of only 2007 W. Jefferson Street, which remained entirely residential. A 1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance Survey shows a block in a configuration and use similar to the existing (Figure 5). The commercial function of 2019 W. Jefferson Street is clarified as “undertaker.” The footprints of all buildings, with the exception of 2001-2011 Ridge Avenue, which had not yet been constructed, match those of the existing buildings.

In c. 1960, the 1-story concrete building located at 2001-2011 Ridge Avenue was constructed. Although it is in keeping with both the subject property in general and the lot in particular as a small-scale commercial building, it has no historic value.

In conclusion, 2051 Ridge Avenue, 2063 Ridge Avenue, 2007 W. Jefferson Street and 2019 W. Jefferson Street were constructed in c. 1875. 2125 Ridge Avenue was constructed in c. 1915. 2001-2011 Ridge Avenue was constructed in c. 1960. With the exception of 2001-2011 Ridge Avenue, the five extant buildings within the project boundary appear similar in age, style and construction of buildings found within the neighboring Lower North Philadelphia Speculative Housing Historic District to the east of the site. Of the buildings that have been demolished within the project boundary, they were the first buildings constructed on the block and there has been no new construction on the site since the time of their demolition, beginning in c. 1940. The lack of development or other significant activity on the site before c. 1875 and after their demolition minimizes the potential for any significant findings on the site. It is however likely that some remnants of the late 19th century residential buildings, such as foundation walls, remain below grade. Because these potential findings would most likely relate to small-scale residential buildings typical of other buildings within the adjacent historic district, rather than an industrial complex of note, for example, they are unlikely to yield any discoveries of great significance. In our opinion, given the information obtained through this study, it is our recommendation that a Phase I archeological testing should not be required for this project.

Additionally, because so much of the neighborhood surrounding the subject property has been compromised by large tracts of new construction and because so much of the limited surrounding historic fabric has already been incorporated into the adjacent historic districts, it is extremely unlikely that the project site in particular or the larger neighborhood in general would be determined as having enough integrity to be eligible as an independent historic district.

Figure 1



"Atlas of the City of Philadelphia." 1862, Samuel L. Smedley.



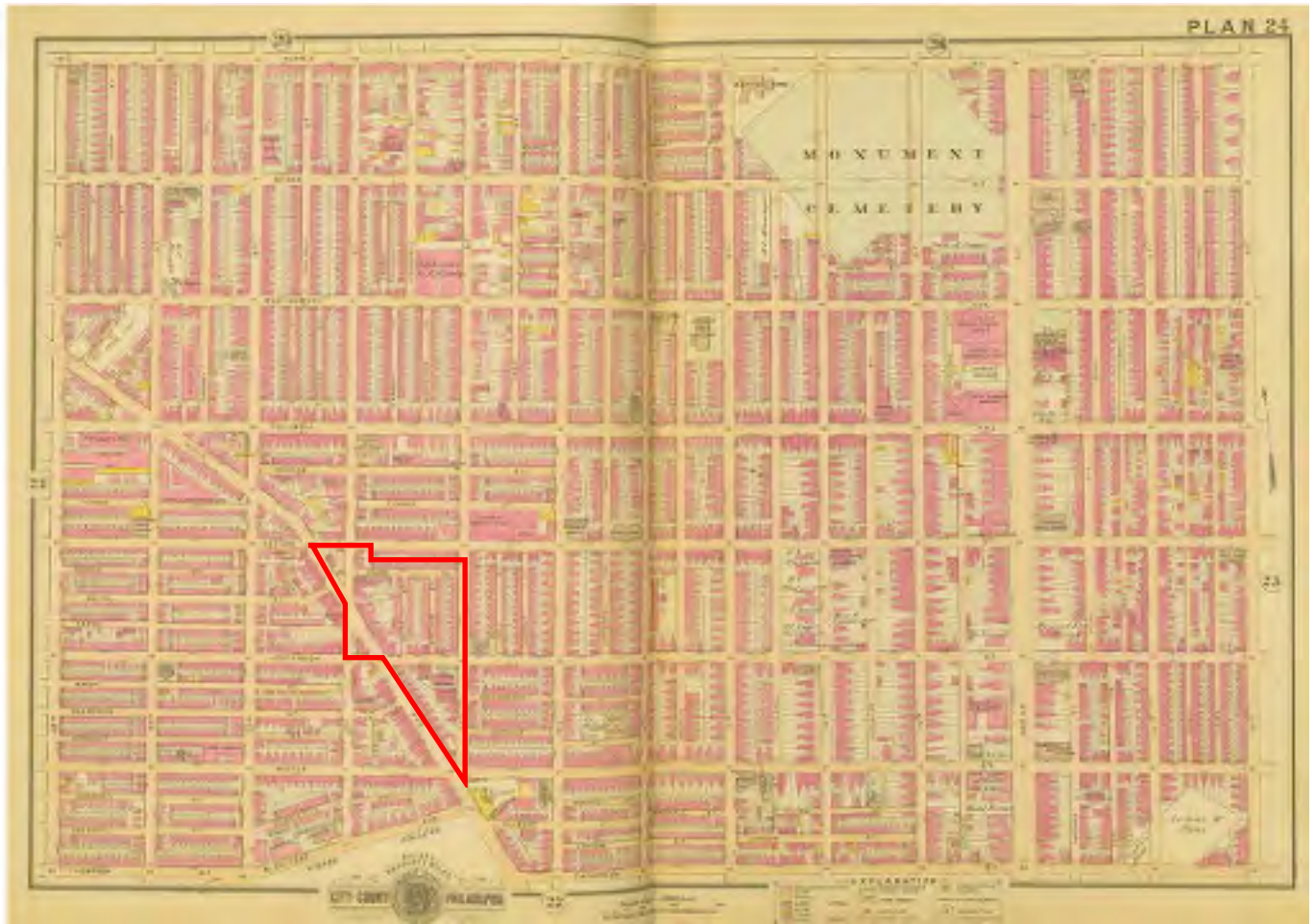
Figure 2



"Atlas of Philadelphia." 1875, G. M. Hopkins.



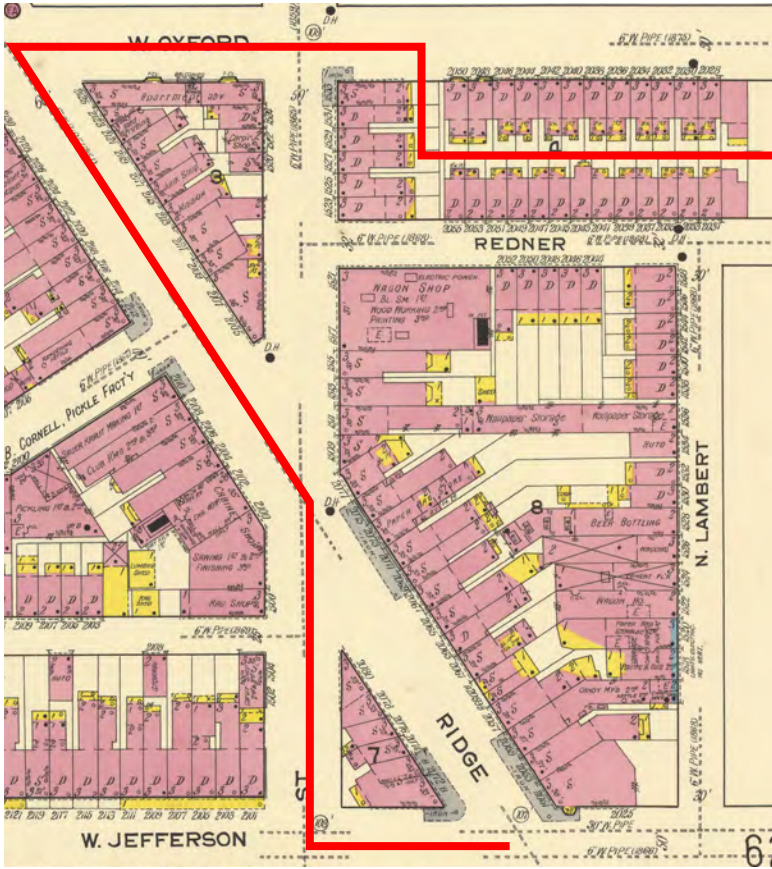
Figure 3



“Property Atlas of the City and County of Philadelphia, Penna.”
1895, George William Baist.



Figure 4



“Sanborn Fire Insurance Survey.” 1918.

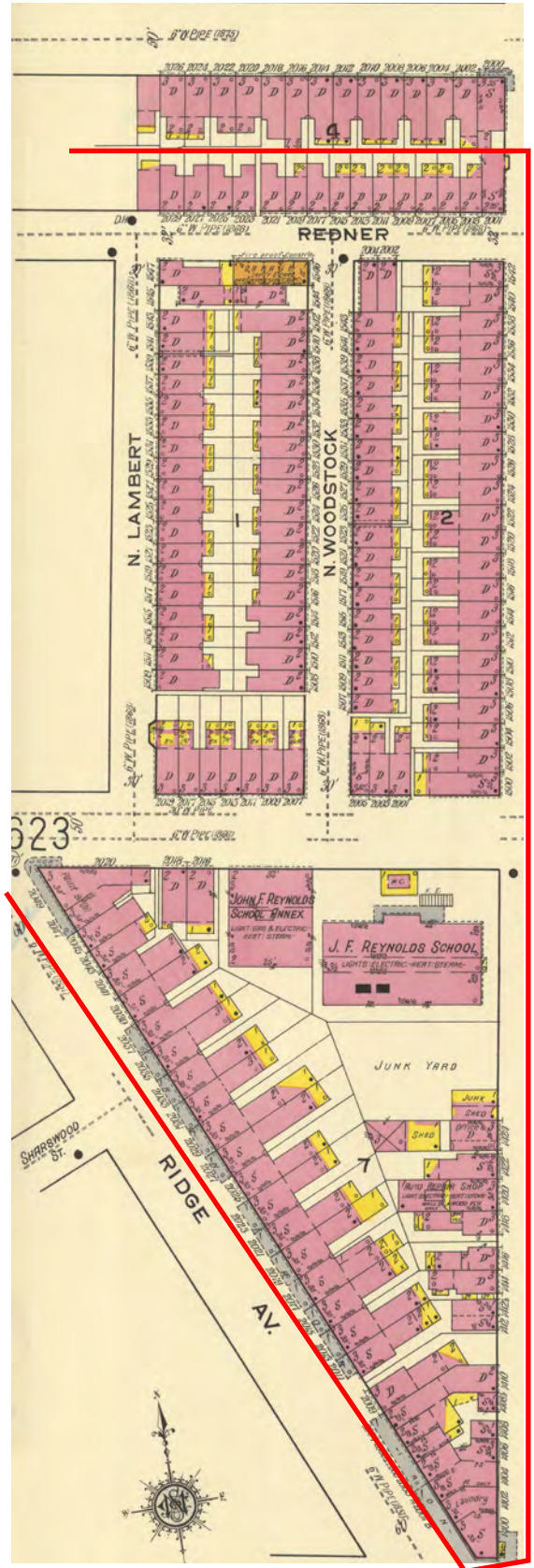
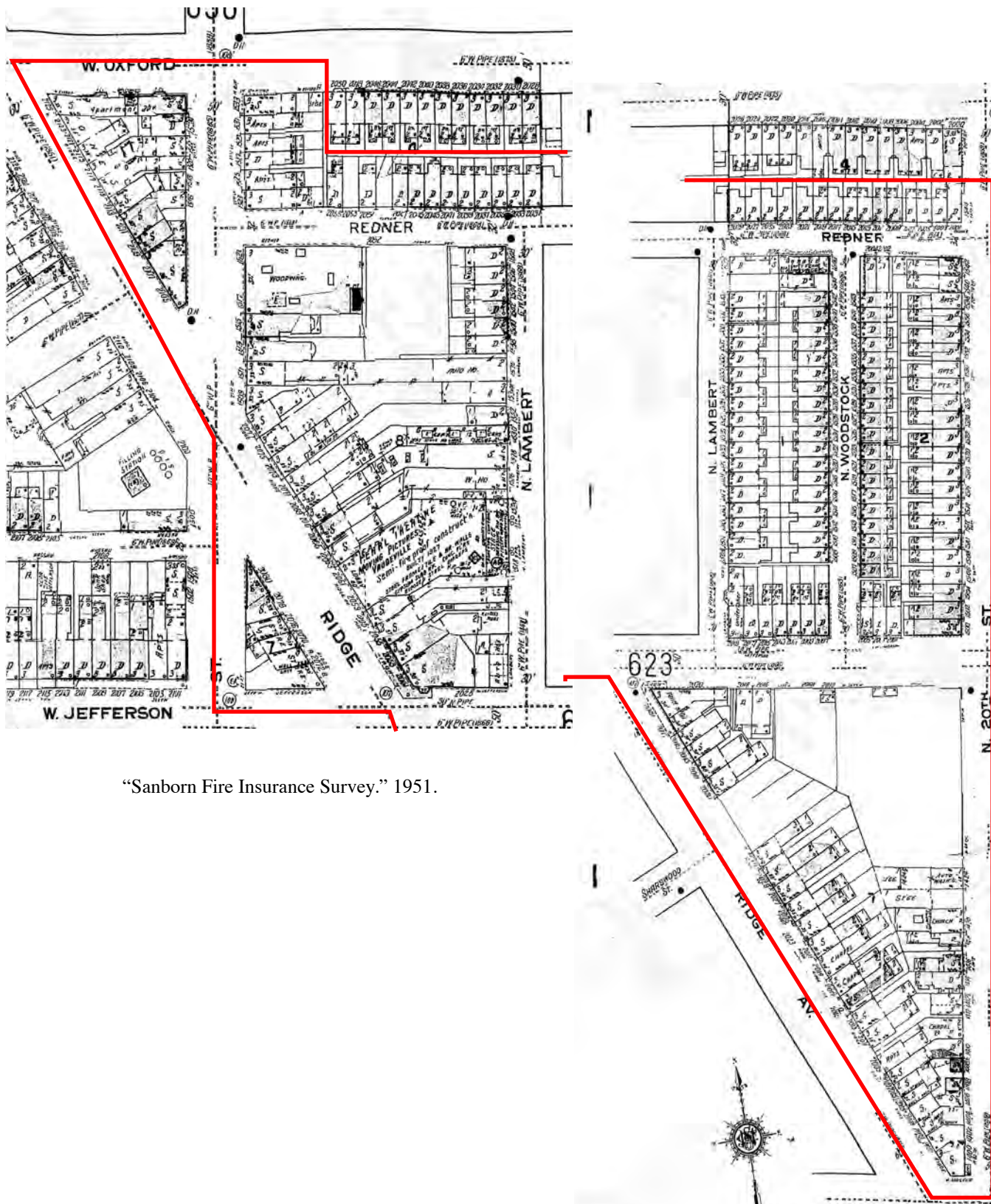


Figure 5



“Sanborn Fire Insurance Survey.” 1951.