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STAGE 1A ARCHAEOLOGICAL/HISTORICAL  
SENSITIVITY STUDY

CASTLE HILL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT  
BRONX, NEW YORK

USF 2184X

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

FEB 19 FEB -- 1988

DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING

Prepared For:  
Ethan Eldon Associates  
40 Cutter Mill Road  
Suite 401  
Great Neck, NY 11201

Prepared By:  
William I. Roberts IV and  
Anna V. Farkas  
Greenhouse Consultants Inc.  
54 Stone Street, 7th Floor  
New York, N.Y. 10004

January 1988

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#### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

William I. Roberts IV	-	Principal Investigator/Co-Author
Anna V. Farkas	-	Documentary Researcher/Co-Author
Nancy A. Stehling	-	Editor/Word Processor
Michael W. Davenport	-	Cartographer
Julie A. Hunter	-	Word Processor
George Myers Jr.	-	Site Photographer
Joshua Nefsky	-	Photography and Printing



## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this IA Stage Sensitivity Study is to document the potential prehistoric and historic sensitivity of the Castle Hill Development Project in the Bronx, New York through the review of existing archival, cartographic and published references. In order to provide a context for evaluating any identified resources within the parcel itself, this survey shall include a synthesis of published and unpublished prehistoric and historic resources in the immediate locality surrounding the project area.

The project area is bounded to the north by Norton Avenue, to the east by Zerega Avenue, to the west by Pugsley's Creek and to the south by Castle Hill Park. The elevation ranges from twenty feet above mean sea level to sea level at the shoreline. See Figure 1 for the location of the project area, and Plates 1 and 2 for views of its present condition.

## PREHISTORIC SENSITIVITY

As part of the project evaluation process, this sensitivity study has surveyed published and unpublished resources in the files of the N.Y.S. Museum Division of Historical and Anthropological Services, the Research Branch of the N.Y. Public Library, and the Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau of the N.Y.S. Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

A total of ten confirmed prehistoric sites are located within 2 miles of the project area. Four of these sites were reported by former N.Y.S. Archaeologist Arthur C. Parker, who described them as traces of occupation, shell middens and one village with burials. Unfortunately, no description of artifacts recovered are included, so assignation of date ranges or cultural affiliations is not possible (Parker 1922). Judging from Parker's description of the College Point Site in Queens County as a village, it is probable that this site dates to the Woodland period, but no information exists to confirm this. All four sites are located close to fresh water courses that flow into the East River. See Figure 2 for the location of these sites relative to the project area. See Table 1 designations A, E, G, and J for site numbers, references and brief descriptions.

Four of the ten prehistoric sites are located adjacent to one another forming two larger site complexes. The two Clason Point sites designated 'B' and 'C' in Table 1 and Figure 2 are probably both part of the same site. Unfortunately no estimate of date range can be made since no description of the artifacts from these sites is available. The Morris Estate and Schurz Sites designated 'E' and 'F' in Figure 2

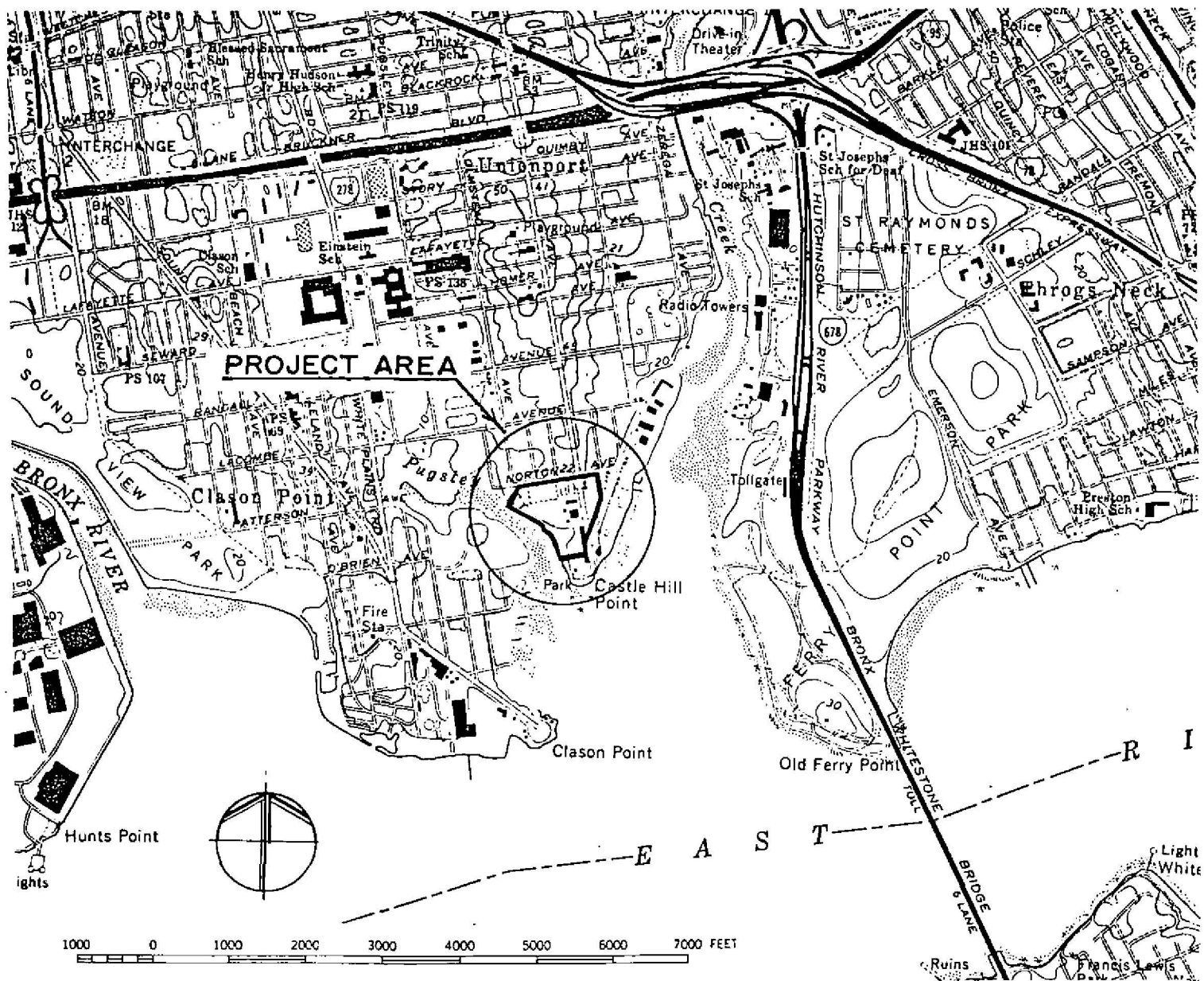


Figure 1: Location of Project Area indicated by bold line within circle shown on 1966 (revised 1979) U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute series Flushing, New York Quadrangle Map.



Figure 2: Known Prehistoric sites within 2.0 miles of Project Area shown on portion of U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute series Flushing, New York quadrangle map (1966, revised 1979).

TABLE 1: PREHISTORIC SITES IN THE VICINITY OF CASTLE HILL

SITE NAME	NYSM#	PARKER #	OTHER #	REFERENCE	PERIOD(S)	DESCRIPTION
A Snakapins	-	-	-	Skinner:1919	Late Woodland- Contact	Occupation, Burials
B Clason Point	2840	ACP-BRNX-18	-	Parker 1922:490	-	Midden
C Clason Point	713	-	HAR 5-4	-	-	-
D Old Ferry Point	716	-	HAR 8-4	-	-	-
E Morris Estate	5326	ACP-BRNX	-	Kaeser 1963:13-21	Early to Middle Woodland	Midden, Occupation
F Schurz	715	-	HAR 7-4	Lopez 1955:6-16 Bolton 1976:111-125	Transitional to Contact	Midden, Occupation, Burials
G College Point	4527	ACP-QUNS-4	-	Parker 1922:672	-	Village, Burials
H Quinnahung Hunts Point	-	-	-	Bolton 1975:79-80	?Woodland	Midden, Occupation
I Hunts Point	-	-	-	Bolton 1934:137	-	-
J Weir Creek, Throggs Neck	2825	ACP-BRNX-3	-	Skinner 1919	Transitional to Contact	Midden



and Table 1 form another site complex. This extensive occupation and burial site also included large middens. It dates to the Transitional through Contact periods based on descriptions of the artifacts recovered (Kaeser 1963:13-21; Lopez 1955:6-16).

Based on a Dutch Colonial report, R.P. Bolton describes Castle Hill itself as a fortified settlement. The actual location of this settlement may have been the former Wilkins House, which is about 350 feet north of the project area, or another knoll located about 3000 feet north of the project area. These are the only two locations on the point close to 60 feet in elevation, which conforms with Bolton's description of the settlement as being on "the crest of a hillock, 60 feet high" (Bolton 1975:80). Bolton also describes cultivated fields and shell middens to the south of the settlement, possibly within the project area. Alanson Skinner located a shell midden and debris from the manufacture of "sewan" (wampum) during 1918. These are described as being on the extreme point within what is now Castle Hill Park (Bolton 1975:80; Grumet 1981:8). Unfortunately no archaeological evidence or reliable historic description exists firmly locating this site.

In terms of potential prehistoric sensitivity, the project impact area was evaluated from two points of view:

- 1) the proximity of known prehistoric sites in or near the project area; and
- 2) the presence of fresh water drainage courses in general, and particularly the identification of river or stream confluence situations, where two or more drainages come together, providing access to both the water and food supplies of both systems.

This survey has documented the recorded or published location of 10 prehistoric archaeological sites within 2 miles of the Castle Hill project area. None of the locations are within or immediately adjacent to portions of the project area. All these sites are near present or former stream courses. Evidence exists for stream courses on or adjacent to the project area. Since fresh water resources are indicated for this location, as well as access to the marine resources of the East River, it would appear that the project area is likely to preserve evidence of prehistoric occupation.





## HISTORIC SENSITIVITY

### The Cartographic Evidence:

Castle Hill Neck, and the "palisaded" Indian village that crowned it, were first sighted by the Dutch explorer, Adrian Block, during his navigation of the East River and Long Island Sound in 1614-1615. According to Bolton, the principal Indian settlements in Westchester County "were located upon Castle Hill Neck and about Bear Swamp in the Parkchester section of the Bronx. The former is said to be an Indian Castle" (Bolton 1881:II, 264). Castle Hill Neck, which lies between Pugsley's and Westchester Creeks, is called so "because the Weckquaesgeek Indians had a large castle, or stockade, on the high land between the creeks" (Jenkins 1912:18). All the Histories of Westchester County and of the Borough of the Bronx examined maintain this explanation of the neck's appellation (see Bibliography). As a footnote to the passage cited above, Bolton states that the aborigines maintained possession of Castle Hill as late as 1789 (Grumet 1981:8).

Although archaeological excavations at Castle Hill conducted by Alanson Skinner in 1918 "located a shell midden, a number of unidentified artifacts, and debris associated with the manufacture of 'sewan' shell money," the existence of a palisaded or fortified village at Castle Hill Neck has not been attested by archaeological or documentary evidence (ibid.). In any event, the fortified village -- if there in fact was one upon Castle Neck -- would have presumably been located to the project area's north where the neck's highest ground lay. A 1969 aerial photograph of the area shows that by that date this area of high ground had been developed, absorbed by the still expanding town of Unionport.

Although archaeological evidence for a fortified village at Castle Hill is lacking, studies concerning Indian paths in New York City and vicinity indicate that some form of Indian settlement was located on the neck (see Grumet 1981:69, after Bolton 1922). A village of Mannhattans was located at Spuyten Duyvil Neck, and another at Nepperham, present day Yonkers, "while above the latter were the villages of the Weckquaesgeeks, all members of the Mohican tribe" (Jenkins 1912:18). Communications between these villages and with their neighbors on Manhattan Island, by way of the "wading place" eventually led to the formation of "a plainly marked trail extending from Paparinemo (at the northernmost tip of Manhattan, later incorporated into the Marble Hill section of West Bronx) to Castle Hill" (ibid.). This trail was used by the area's early settlers, and was called the "Westchester Path" in Nicoll's grant of the ten farms (Wells 1927 III:342).

Castle Hill Neck lies within the town of Westchester which, like the adjoining lands, was originally purchased by the Dutch West India Company in 1640 from the Monegan sachems and other Indians who claimed



it (Bolton 1881II:263). On November 14, 1654 Thomas Pell of Fairfield, Connecticut, obtained a second grant from the aboriginal proprietors, which also embraced the present town (ibid.). Records show that thirty years later the sachems (chiefs) Maminepoe and Wampage conveyed to the inhabitants of Westchester "all that tract of land on the east side of the Bronckses river" (ibid.).

The town of Westchester "was probably first settled in 1642, by a Mr. John Throckmorton and thirty-five associates, who came to New England, with approbation of the Dutch authorities (op.cit.: 264). The Dutch named this area "Vredeland," or "Land of Peace," an appropriate title for a place that offered refuge for those seeking freedom to practice their religion (ibid.).

The county of Westchester was formed November 1, 1683. The county's western boundary was the Hudson River; its northern, Dutchess (now Putnam) County; its eastern, the Connecticut colony and Long Island Sound; its southern, the East and Harlem Rivers and Spuyten Duyvil Creek (Jenkins 1912:1). The Borough of the Bronx was included within the County of Westchester until 1874 for the western part of the Borough, and until 1895 for the eastern part. In 1788 all the counties were divided into townships. The township of Westchester included about half of the present Borough of the Bronx. The town was further increased by the ascension of Morrisania, on February 22, 1791. It remained intact until May 13, 1846, when the township of West Farms was formed out of its territory (op.cit.: 5).

At the election of November 6, 1894, the question of the Greater New York was submitted to the inhabitants of the localities of Westchester, Eastchester, Pelham and the City of Mount Vernon. On July 1, 1895, the whole section east of the Bronx River became a part of the county of New York, forming part of the twenty-fourth ward (op.cit.: 7). The charter of the Greater New York went into effect on January 1, 1898, and the whole annexed section north of the Harlem River became officially known as the Borough of the Bronx.

#### The 17th and 18th Centuries.

The earliest record concerning Castle Hill Neck dates to 1685, when "John Cromwell and Elizabeth Cromwell, his wife, exchanged six acres of meadow with Thomas Hunt, for eight acres of upland, situated upon Castle Hill Neck" (Wells 1927 III:339). The neck was therefore also known, for some time, as "Cromwell's Neck" (ibid.). The property then passed to a younger branch of the Underhills, descendants of "the redoubtable Captain John Underhill, whose surprise and massacre of the Indians at Mianus broke up the Indian war of Kieft's administration" (Wells 1927 III: 339).





The next property owner on Castle Hill Neck was Isaac Wilkins. Born in Jamaica and brought to America as a child, Wilkins married Isabella, sister of Gouverneur Morris. They lived at Morrisania for a time, and then "Wilkins bought an estate known as 'Castle Hill Neck'" (Griffin c. 1946 II: 318). This estate undoubtedly comprised most of the neck and included the lands covered by the Castle Hill Development site. Isaac Wilkins was one of the leaders of the conservative forces in the last provincial assembly, representing the Borough of Westchester in the colonial legislature during the four closing years (1772-75) (op.cit.: 319; Shonnard and Spooner 1900: 289). For a time he was suspected of being the author of the noted Tory pamphlets known as the "Westchester Farmer," which were signed A.W. Farmer (ibid.). He acted as spokesman for "the motley adherents of 'Great George, our King,' at the county meeting at White Plains in April, 1775, and two months later fled to England" (Shonnard and Spooner 1900: 289). He later went to Nova Scotia; but returned in 1798, and was soon after called to the partial rectorate of St. Peter's Church, Westchester. He died in the rectory of St. Peter's Church, February 5, 1830 (Griffin 1946: 319).

Isaac Wilkins' final resolve to leave the country in 1775 came in response to the pressures of public resentment toward him, a resentment which was apparently "so deep, and . . . manifested with such activity" (Shonnard and Spooner 1900: 300). In an open letter addressed to "My Countrymen", dated May 3, 1775, Wilkins stressed the sacrifices he was making, leaving behind "everything that is dear to me -- my wife, my children, my friends, and my property" (ibid.). According to one literary source, Isaac Wilkins' home "was destroyed" after his departure (Griffin c. 1946: 319). However, other sources examined indicate that his home and property remained intact and that his house was still standing as late as 1927 (Cook 1913: 121; Wells 1927 III: 339).

The house, "built, supposedly, about 1765," but possibly earlier, by the Underhills, or even the Cromwells, apparently featured a "hiding place" (Wells 1927 III: 339). It was in this building's "secret chamber" that three loyalist clergymen, Rev. Myles Cooper, president of King's College, Rev. Chandler of New Jersey and Rev. Samuel Seabury of St. Peter's Church in Westchester concealed themselves during the early days of the Revolution (Cook 1913: 121). The "curious hiding place" may have been originally constructed "for protection from the Indians, or more likely, as a place for the storage of smuggled goods" (Wells 1927 III: 340). Early proprietors may well have engaged in contraband trade, an occupation not uncommon in this period, which would have undoubtedly been suited to the house's proximity to the water. It is likely that Isaac Wilkins' property escaped confiscation to the state under the laws of 1779, sequestering the property of loyalists, because of political and family influences. In his case family ties, which were more influential and potent in those days, certainly carried some weight as his wife was a half-sister of Lewis, and a full sister of Gouverneur Morris, two famous Whigs (Shonnard and Spooner 1900: 301).



Isaac and Isabella Wilkins had four sons and five daughters. The oldest, Martin, was a distinguished member of the New York Bar Association, and the next proprietor of Castle Hill Neck (Bolton 1881 II: 398). Town records of Westchester show that approximately 400 acres of land on Castle Hill Neck, on the west side of Westchester Creek, were granted to the town by the charter of Feb. 28, 1721 to be used for sheep pasture (Wells 1927 III: 338). The freeholders of the town were entitled to "free pasturage for 25 sheep for each individual" (ibid.). The sheep pasture or "Commons," as it was later called, apparently adjoined the Wilkins property to the latter's north, and is now covered by the town of Unionport.

#### The 19th and 20th Centuries.

In 1825 the trustees of the town sold the Commons as undivided lands belonging to the town, to Martin Wilkins (ibid.). This substantially enlarged property then apparently "passed through several hands," including those of his son, Gouverneur Morris Wilkins, who paid \$300,000 for it (op.cit.: 339). In 1851, Gouverneur Morris Wilkins sold the lands that had comprised the abovementioned "Commons" (as well as the Louwerre farm which Wilkins had bought for \$25,000) to a building association. The Industrial Home Association Number Two was responsible for the establishment of the village of Unionport there (ibid.).

The nineteenth and early twentieth century cartographic evidence depicts the gradual development and expansion of Unionport, to the project area's north, and consistently shows the project area as part of a large estate, often designated "Castle Hill," up until the late 1920's (see Figures 3-6). Burr's 1839 Map of the County of Westchester portrays much of the project area as swamp or marsh. This map shows a road running south from Eastchester P.O. to an undesignated structure, located just north of the project area. A structure at this location also appears on later nineteenth and early twentieth century maps and may be safely assumed to be the property of Martin Wilkins at the date of Burr's (1839) map.

Sidney and Neffe's 1851 Map of Westchester County shows the structure noted above on the Burr 1839 map which is here designated "G.M. Wilkins." This map dates to the year in which Gouverneur Morris Wilkins sold a large part of his holdings which would become the site of Unionport. This area of land is in fact already designated Unionport on the 1851 map, which depicts its proposed streets, to the project area's north. Sidney and Neffe's 1851 map also shows a structure (possibly two) which appears to be located within the project area's northwestern portion designated "Farm House."





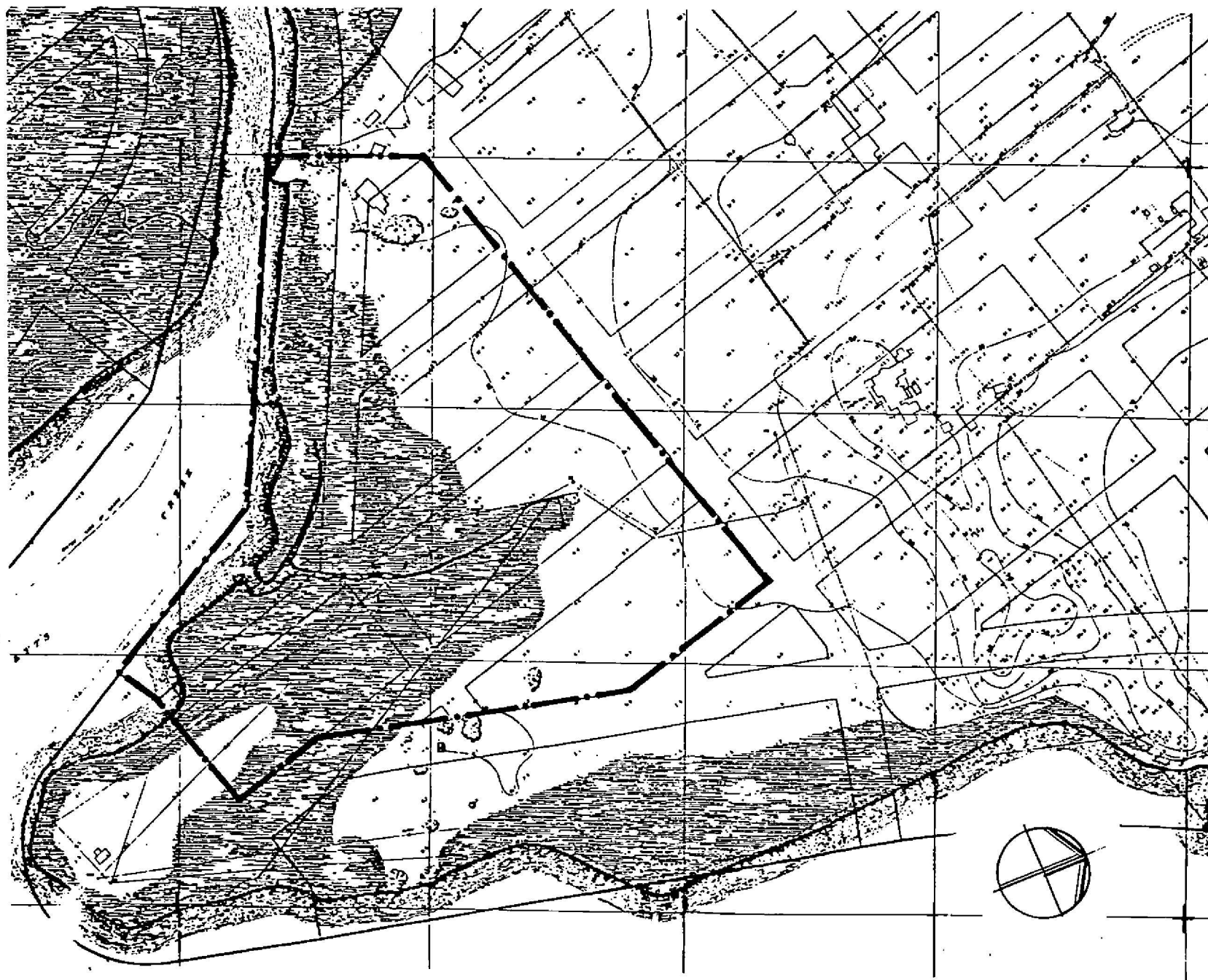


Figure 5: Project Area, indicated by bold dashed line, shown on 1905 Topographical Survey of the Borough of the Bronx. Note associated structures appearing in the northwesterly portion of the Project Area.



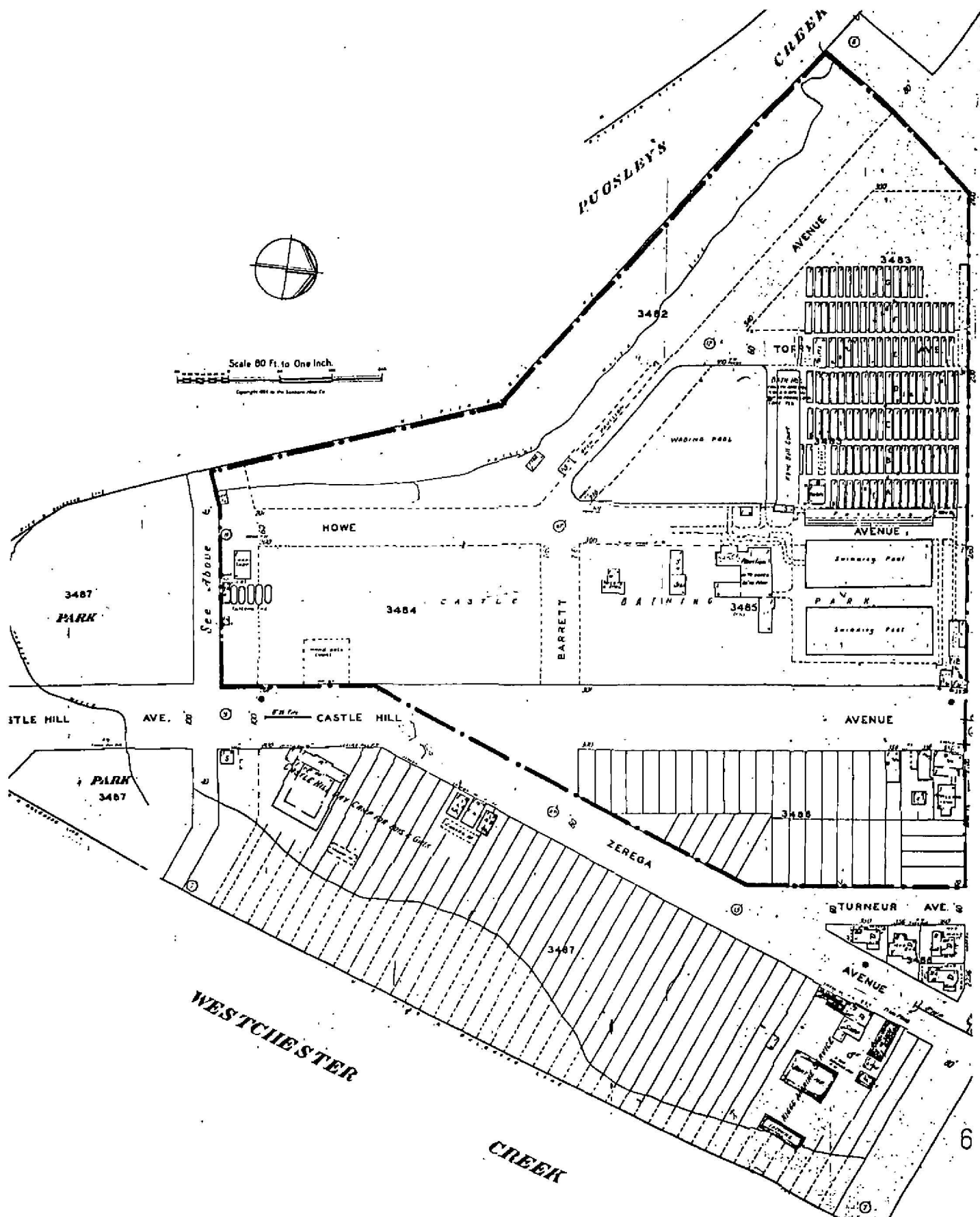


Figure 6: Bold dashed line indicates boundaries of the Project Area on a portion of Sanborn's 1929 Insurance Map of the City of New York.



The farmhouse shown on this 1851 map may well represent the earlier home of Gouverneur Morris Wilkins' grandfather, Isaac. A county historian, writing in the 1920's, describes two structures (or sets of structures) then standing on Castle Hill Neck (see Wells 1927 III:339-40). One of these is described as Gouverneur Morris Wilkins' "mansion," with the appearance of a "gentleman's country place" (op.cit.: 339). This description undoubtedly refers to the structure(s) shown on nineteenth and early twentieth century cartographic sources and located approximately 350 feet north of the project area's northern boundary, on what then was the neck's highest ground (See Dripps 1853; Bromley 1881, Bien 1893; Figures 3, 4 and 5). The description of Castle Hill Neck cited above continues as follows: "If when we come to the end of Castle Hill Road we turn to the right we can follow a lane . . . to the farmyard of the ancient home of the Reverend Isaac Wilkins, built, supposedly, about 1765" (op.cit.: 340). As noted above, this house may have been constructed by earlier occupants of the Neck and thus possibly dated to the late seventeenth century. The farmhouse, located at least partially within the project area's northwestern portion, is also depicted on later nineteenth and early twentieth century maps and atlases.

Dripps' 1853 Map of Westchester County designates Gouverneur Morris Wilkins' 340 acre estate "Castle Hill," and depicts a set of structures at this location, to the project area's north. The 1853 maps also shows the abovementioned farmhouse within the project area's northwest corner, which is shown with three farm-related structures (see Figure 3). Beers' 1867 Atlas of New York and Vicinity depicts two structures at "Castle Hill," the site of G.M. Wilkins' home, but does not show the farmhouse noted on earlier maps (see Figure 4). However, Beers' 1872 County Atlas of Westchester shows both the Wilkins' "mansion" (342 acres) and the farmhouse to the former's southwest.

Following Gouverneur Morris Wilkins' death in the late 1870's, the Castle Hill estate passed to his son-in-law, John Screven (Bolton 1881 II: 398). The neck was consequently known locally as "Screven's Point" for a time. One literary source notes the Screven's property commanded a "fine view" as the "mansion stands on a bluff near the end of the neck overlooking a stretch of meadow" (Jenkins 1912: 339). Bromley's 1881 Atlas of Westchester County shows the former Wilkins "mansion" as the property of John H. Screven (382 acres) and also depicts the farmhouse noted on earlier maps as located within the project area's northwest portion. Bien's 1893 Atlas of Westchester County shows that the size of Screven's property had been reduced to 231 acres, and depicts both his home and the farmhouse already noted on earlier cartographic sources.

The 1905 Topographical Survey of the Borough of the Bronx shows a great deal of the project area as characterized by swamp or marshy lands (see Figure 5). This map shows a structure near the neck's point, within an excluded area, to the project area's south, as well as the two sets of



structures noted on earlier maps and atlases, located to the project area's north and within its northwestern portion (Figure 5). The 1905 survey which provides grater detail on a larger scale, shows one large structure located in part within the project area's northwest corner and three related structures located just outside the project area, one of which may represent a boathouse (see Figure 5).

Bromley's 1910 Atlas for the Borough of the Bronx does not depict the structures noted on earlier maps. It shows the layout of proposed streets running through both the project area and lands to its north. This 1910 atlas shows that the project area and much of the neck to its north was then owned by J.W. McDonald. The neck's southernmost point (excluded parcel) is already designated "Public Place" by this date (Bromley 1910). Bromley's 1927 Atlas of the Borough of the Bronx shows that Castle Hill and Zerega Avenues had been laid out by this date. No structures are shown within the project area on the 1927 atlas, and proposed streets shown here crossing the area were never laid out. This atlas does, however, indicate that landfilling operations must have taken place between 1927 and the present, along the project area's western shore (along Pugsley's Creek). Although the 1927 atlas apparently depicts a high water line, a comparison of this atlas with later cartographic sources attest to some degree of change in the project area's shoreline (See Figure 7).

The farmhouse depicted on earlier maps dating up to 1905 and located partially within the project area's northwestern portion is not shown on Bromley's 1927 atlas nor on later cartographic sources. As it is not shown on Sanborn's 1929 Insurance Atlas, which generally provides greater structural detail and information, one may assume that the abovementioned farmhouse was demolished some time between 1905 and 1929 (See Figure 6)

Between 1928 and 1986 the Castle Hill Development project site was the site of the Castle Hill Beach Club, which "had up to 12,000 members during its heyday in the 1930's," and claimed to be New York's largest outdoor recreational club (Bronx News 1986). The club's extensive facilities included two pools, 200' by 75', a 2/3 acre kiddie lake, racquet ball, handball, paddle ball and softball fields. Many of these facilities were functional by 1929, as they are illustrated on Sanborn's atlas of that year (See Figure 6). These as well as the club's 3,500 dressing rooms (now somewhat damaged by neglect and vandalism) presently characterize the project area.





## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The above text has documented that the Castle Hill Development project area potentially may preserve archaeological evidence from both the prehistoric and historic periods. This location is considered sensitive to the preservation of prehistoric remains because it is topographically similar to several locations of documented prehistoric sites. Ten such sites exist within a two mile radius, and nearly all are on the shore of the East River near fresh water streams, a description which characterizes the Castle Hill Development Site. Although no prehistoric artifacts have been recovered from the specific project area, it is our opinion that its' topographic location/conditions would have been conducive to the use and/or occupation of at least a portion of the project area during prehistory, particularly in the Woodland and Archaic Periods.

It is also our conclusion that one small location within the project area may be sensitive to the preservation of historic archaeological evidence. This northwestern corner of the project area probably corresponds to the location of the farmhouse shown on the map of 1853 (Figure 3). A detailed comparison of the topography of the project area in 1905 with the present conditions indicates that probably nearly all of the former ground surface has been covered with fill ranging in thickness from two to over twelve feet. The deepest fill deposits appear to be concentrated along the east side of the project area (See Figure 7).

We recommend that a Stage IB archaeological survey be undertaken within the project area to determine the presence or absence of the Mid-Nineteenth century farmstead, as well as to search for any prehistoric site(s) that potentially may be preserved at this location. We recommend that testing is necessary for all of the Castle Hill Development project area where the original surface prior to filling may be impacted by the planned construction and related activities. This would be done primarily to test these portions of the tract for the presence of aboriginal occupation, given the presence of ten prehistoric sites within two miles of the project area.



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1967 7.5 Minute Series, Brooklyn, N.Y. (photo-revised 1979) and  
Jersey City, N.J.-N.Y. (photo-revised 1981) Quadrangles.

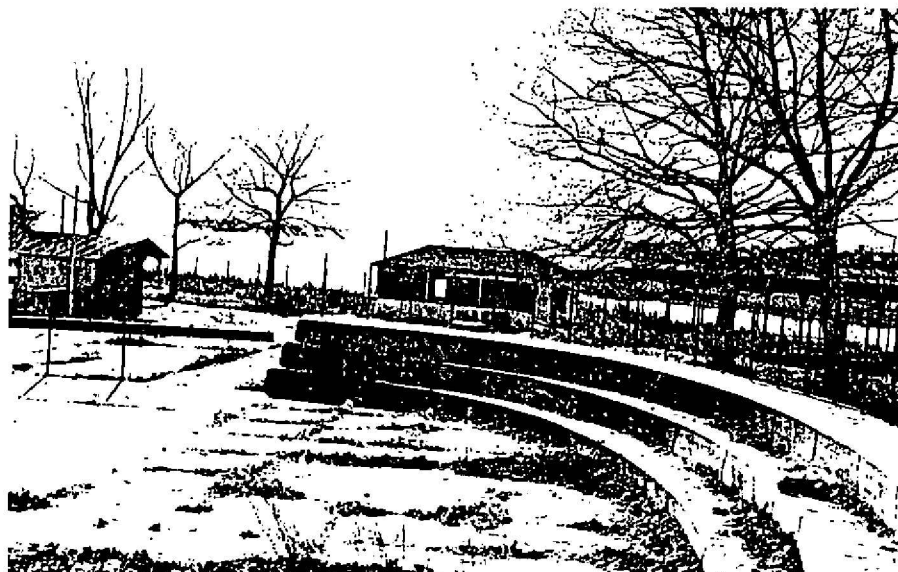


Plate 1: View of project area looking southwest showing concrete benches, two small sheds, and part of Pugsley's Creek in background.



Plate 2: View of project area looking north showing frame lockers or changing rooms.