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PHASE IA HISTORICAL/ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SENSITIVITY EVALUATION OF THE
VICTORY ESTATES DEVELOPMENT
STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK

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A.K.A. 91-150R

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VICTORY ESTATES DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Phase IA Sensitivity Study is to document potential prehistoric and historic sensitivity of the proposed Victory Estates Development Project through the review of existing archival, cartographic and published references and then to make recommendations regarding possible further testing. 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evaluating any identified resources within the parcel itself, this survey shall include a synthesis of published and unpublished prehistoric and historic resources in the immediate area surrounding the project area.

The Victory Estates Development project area is located in western Staten Island. The project area parcel is bounded to the northwest by Victory Boulevard, to the southwest and northeast by other properties fronting Victory Boulevard, and to the southeast by the marsh surrounding Main Creek. The Victory Estates project area is located on the northeastern edge of the village of Travis. See Figure 1 for the location of the project parcel.

This study is organized in the following manner: first, a section describes the geography and physical setting; second, a section on the prehistoric sensitivity of the area; third, a review of the historic sensitivity of the area; and fourth, the conclusions and recommendations.

GEOGRAPHY AND PHYSICAL SETTING

The project area is located in the Atlantic Coastal Lowland Physiographic Province of New York State. There is only one other location in the state (Long Island) where this province occurs (Van Diver 1985:34). Geographically, Staten Island is part of New Jersey from which it is separated by the Kill Van Kull and the Staten Island Sound (Skinner 1909).

The surficial geology of Staten Island consists of landforms and deposits of glacial origin. The sediments were deposited by the Wisconsin Ice Sheet 55,000-10,000 years ago and generally consist of ground moraine, terminal moraine and outwash sediments (Jacobson 1980:5). The shoreline area in this portion of Staten Island is comprised of sandy embankments of beach sand adjacent to and at times overlying the area's geologically earlier glacial deposits of Cretaceous formations of sand and clay (Weingartner 1967:41). Local glacial deposits may be overlaid by fill as well as beach, marsh, dune, swamp, and estuarine deposits (Jacobson 1980:5).



During November 1988, the Principal Investigator visited the Victory Estates Development project area in Staten Island. During this visit, a pedestrian survey was utilized to inspect the project area. The majority of the project area is presently a fallow field covered with much growth of grasses and a few shrubs and trees on the higher ground, and reeds on the areas of lower elevation.

PREHISTORIC SENSITIVITY

As part of the project evaluation process, this sensitivity study has surveyed published and unpublished resources in the Archives and Library of the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences (hereinafter S.I.I.A.S.), the library of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, the files of the New York State Museum Division of Historical and Anthropological Services, the Research Branch of the New York Public Library, and the New York State Historic Preservation Office (N.Y.S.H.P.O.). Most prehistoric archaeological work undertaken by both professional and avocational archaeologists has historically been concentrated on the southwestern portion of Staten Island (Baugher 1985 personal communication). Problems of inadequate archaeological survey coverage particularly evident in the interior of the island may also be present in this portion of west-central Staten Island.

Table 1 presents the results of our search for prehistoric sites in the vicinity of the Victory Estates Development project area. Included in the table are nine sites located two miles or less from the project area. The locations of these sites are presented in Figure 2 with letter code identifiers which correspond to those in Table 1.

Of the nine known occurrences of prehistoric occupation within two miles of the project area, none were excavated (recently) under controlled conditions. All nine represent sites located during the early years of this century by two professional archaeologists.

Alanson Skinner, one of the first professional archaeologists to work extensively on Staten Island, characterized the locations chosen by prehistoric populations on the island as follows: "Throughout Staten Island, with very few exceptions, aboriginal sites are confined entirely to the sandy spots." (Skinner 1912:90). Skinner originally reported six of these nine sites near to the project area.

Arthur C. Parker, the former New York State Archaeologist, reported the other three sites not known to Skinner, as well as repeating most of the information regarding five of six sites that Skinner had reported. A comparison of Parker's map and text with Skinner's 1909 text shows that some of the locations of these sites may not be accurately recorded. Although there is certainly enough evidence to state that at least nine

TABLE 1: Prehistoric Sites in the Vicinity of Victory Estates

Site Name	SIIAS #	Parker #	NYSM #	References	Periods	Description
A Long Neck (Travis)	STD-LN STD-28-3	ACP-RICH-8	4598	Parker 1922:682; Scinner 1909:9		Shell Middens, Occupation
B		ACP-RICH	4627	Parker 1922: Plate 211		
C Chelsea	STD-20-3		746	Scinner 1903; Scinner 1909:9		Burials
D		ACP-RICH-9	4599	Parker 1922:682; Scinner 1909:9		Shell Middens, Occupation.
E		ACP-RICH	4626	Parker 1922:Plate 211		Camp
F Bloomfield (Watchogue)	STD-BL STD-27-3	ACP-RICH-6	4596	Parker 1922:681; Scinner 1909:9	Woodland, Contact	Traces of Occupation
G Bull's Head	STD-BU	ACP-RICH-7	4597	Parker 1922:681		Traces of Occupation
H New Springville		ACP-RICH-10	4600	Parker 1922:682; Scinner 1909:10	Contact	Shell Middens, Burials, Camp
I Lake's Island	STD-L	ACP-RICH	4625	Parker 1922:Plate 211; Scinner 1909:10; Salwen 1967		Shell Middens, Occupation



sites existed within our search area during the prehistoric period, the locations on Figure 2 and in the files of the New York State Museum may not be entirely accurate.

Skinner also reported a small village site on Lake's Meadow Island (designated "I" in Table 1 and on Figure 2), also known as Lake's Island, which was located approximately 1 1/2 miles southwest of the project impact area. Lake's Meadow Island was a point of land formed by the confluence of Great Fresh Kills and Fresh Kills and a small shell heap and "early relics of Indian origin", which included "arrowheads", were reported (Skinner 1909:10). The Metropolitan Area Archaeological Survey, Site Survey Sheet recorded by Salwen in 1967 reported the site as a small village and campsite. Lake's Island is now "under the garbage incinerating works" (Salwen 1967). A 1966 letter from Donald Sainz to Ms. Gail Schneider (former archivist with the S.I.I.A.S.) stated that "the entire region has been destroyed" (Sainz April 7, 1966). Through the years, various collectors have recovered artifacts which include burnt stones, projectile points, lithic debitage, shells, scrapers, netsinkers, hammerstones, blanks, a bannerstone, and a portion of a grooved axe. One collector, Peter Decker, "picked up 90 points in a single day's visit to Lake Island" (ibid). As stated above, the Lake Island area has experienced major disturbances since at least the 1940's. The Department of Sanitation "bulldozed Lake's Island sands into a hugh mound" and "the site was first wiped out" prior to the dumping process (Sainz October 16, 1973). The area was bulldozed and a channel was dredged across the island.

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 water and food supplies of both systems.

This survey has documented the recorded or published location of no less than nine sites within a 2 mile radius of the Victory Boulevard Development Project area. Although sites have been identified in the general region of the proposed project impact area, none are known to exist within the project area itself. No evidence, positive or negative, based on previous survey work is available. It would be inappropriate, however, to characterize this region as without prehistoric sensitivity. Main Creek, located from 300 to 500 feet to the southeast of the project area could have supplied fresh water, while the marshes surrounding it attracted game which could easily be spotted from the relatively elevated project area.



HISTORIC SENSITIVITY

The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (Before Revolution):

Staten Island was called Eghquaous, Motanucke, Monockong or Aquehonga by the Indians who had been occupying it before the arrival of the Europeans. In 1626 the island was bought from the natives by the Director of the Dutch West Indian Company. Michael Pauw was given a patent of patroonship in 1630, but he gave it up to the Directors of the Dutch West India Company. The patent was sold to David Peters de Vries who established the first permanent settlement of Europeans on the island in 1638. Under Director Kieft (1640) an Indian War broke out which brought destruction to the settlement. At approximately this same time Kieft set up a rum distillery (the first distillery in North America) so that rum could be sold in return for furs. The Dutch West India Company granted to Cornelius Melyn (1641) all of Staten Island except for the de Vries farm (Historical Records Survey 1942:xiv). Ten years later Melyn granted Baron Hendrick van der Capellan a deed for one third of the island (ibid.:xv). Upon Capellan's death (1659) Melyn sold his interest to the company thus ending the patroon system on Staten Island (ibid.:xvi).

In 1664 the colony of Nieuw Amsterdam was taken from the Dutch West India Company by the British. Governor Francis Lovelace (1670) made the final purchase of Staten Island from the Indians. The English administered all of the island as a single town with Nicholas Stillwell as the first constable. Governor Lovelace created two towns on the island (Old Dorp or Town and New Dorp) and granted patents to several people (ibid.:xviii). Land surveys were initiated under Lovelace and finished during the governorship of Andros in 1677.

Thomas Dongan, the next governor of New York, divided the colony into counties with Staten Island as Richmond County. The island was further partitioned into four precincts (North, South, West, and the "Manor" or "Castletown" (ibid., xix, in Bayles 1887:91). In 1688 the four divisions were known by the names of Northfield, Southfield, Westfield, and Castletown (Historical Records Survey 1942:xix-xx, in Bayles 1887:95). The Victory Estates site lies in the section of the island that was within Northfield (Roberts and Farkas 1988:4)

The site is located in an area called Long Neck which, during the latter half of the nineteenth century, was also referred to as Travisville. The part of Victory Boulevard that is included in this area was known as Long Neck Road (ibid., also refer to Leng and Davis' 1896 map of Staten Island with Ye Olde Names and Nicknames). Long Neck shows up in "land papers in draught of patent granted to John Garretson in 1675" (ibid., in Morris 1898 I:397). In 1685, ten years after the Garretson patent,



Governor Thomas Dongan granted a patent to a certain John Bellville which included a large part of Long Neck to the east and south of the present Victory Boulevard (Reed 1964:5, refer also to Liber V:287 and to Staten Island Patents I:129-130). Skene's 1907 Map of Staten Island shows the patent of Andrew Cannon, also on Long Neck, noting the years 1686, 1697, and 1698 (Figure 3). John Bellville's grant was subdivided and sold in part to a Huguenot, John Cassee (Casier), who was occupying it as early as 1681 (before the Bellville patent) according to a registered cattle mark (Reed 1964:5). Governor Fletcher (1697) granted Casier land upon which he built a stone house (ibid.). Skene's map shows the 1697 grant to Casier in Long Neck (Figure 3). The family name of Casier (Cassee, Casse) vanished from Staten Island records after about 1730 (Reed 1964:5). According to John Jacob Clute, it is possible that Arent Prall owned one-hundred and twenty acres on Long Neck (1694) but no evidence of it shows up on Skene's map (Clute 1877:418, Figure 3).

After ca. 1730 the Casier property went to the LeJay family (relations of John Jay, first Chief Justice of the United States), and ca. 1750 this same land was sold to Joseph Ridgeway (Reed 1964:6). According to Herbert B. Reed, it amounted to several hundred acres (ibid.). The Ridgeway property can be seen just to the south and to the east of the circled area on Du Camp's Anglo-Hessois du Staten Island 1780-1783 (Figure 4). Leng and Davis describe the house of Joseph Ridgeway as having been "on the south of the road with a salt meadow nearby" (Leng and Davis 1930 II:943-944). Both Joseph and his wife died of smallpox in 1771 (ibid., in Reed 1964:6).

The Revolutionary War Period

Staten Island in general, and this site in particular, was the scene of activity during the American Revolution. It was at this time (August 1777) that the part of Victory Boulevard which runs near the site was constructed (Roberts and Farkas 1988:5, in McMillen 1946:14). Isaac Decker, a loyalist, was employed by General Howe to obtain supplies from local farmers who were able to donate sheep and cattle (McMillen 1976:58). The name of Decker appears in several places close to the project area on Butler's 1853 Map of Staten Island (Figure 6). It is possible, therefore, that Isaac owned some property on or near the project area.

On August 22, 1777 an important skirmish took place in the vicinity of the project site. Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Barton led the fifth Battalion of the Fifth Brigade of the Royal Army (approximately 250 men) on an attack upon New Blazing Star Ferry (Morris 1898 I:224, in McMillen 1976:34). Forty soldiers, including Barton, were taken prisoner by the patriots (McMillen 1976:34). Herbert B. Reed, in his "The Old Ridgeway House" (which used to be located two hundred yards to the east of



Victory Boulevard), mentioned that Joseph Jr. (son of Joseph Ridgeway) was taken prisoner by the British and retained under house arrest (Reed 1964:6). According to Reed, Joseph Jr. and his family had to occupy the kitchen while the British soldiers were given the use of the rest of the house, though he is not sure whether Joseph Jr. was in his own house or in another one (ibid.). Colonel Barton was among those who occupied the house while Major Tympany (with Hessians), Colonel Ogden, and Colonel Lawrence were all near (ibid.). One source, known as "Anton's Notes" (1851) records a conversation between a Mr. Abraham Decker and a slave named Pompey Prall who was eighty-one years old (six years old when the British arrived in Staten Island) in which Decker learned some first-hand facts about the activity in the area of the Ridgeway property ("Anton's Notes", Proceedings of the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences 1929-1930:138). This source describes Colonel Barton has having been stationed in Ridgeway's house which was close to the houses of Abraham and Benjamin Prall (ibid.:139). At Abraham's house the officers were quartered in the house itself, while the soldiers stayed in the barns (ibid.). Pompey claimed that he had seen ten thousand soldiers on Joseph Ridgeway's land about a quarter of a mile from his house (ibid.:140). The number is certainly an exaggeration, but it tells us that there was no doubt a large number of soldiers in the area. The narrative goes on to say that Barton was in the house of Thomas Ridgeway (brother of Joseph Jr.) when Sullivan made his attack and that the six-year old Pompey Prall watched and enjoyed listening to the sound of the bullets (ibid.). One other source which discusses Colonel Barton and New Blazing Star Ferry is the Letters and Papers of Major-General John Sullivan, Continental Army. "Major Morris's Testimony" describes General Sullivan's attack on Colonel Barton's Regiment at the New Blazing Star and the capture of Barton (Hammond 1939 XV:no. 10). With the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783, Joseph Ridgeway, who had been held by the British (possibly in his own house), was freed and living with his family in his own home (Reed 1964:6). Joseph died only three years later (ibid.).

The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries:

Certain family names persist in the project area throughout the three-hundred year period under study here. Some of the names first appear in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but most of them were present in the pre-Revolutionary era (see Figures 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8).

The Ridgeway family, the one most closely associated with the project area during the Revolution, continued to play a role in history (Figure 4). We hear of a Captain Joseph Ridgeway III who participated in the War of 1812, became a merchant, and eventually served as U.S. consul (Reed 1964:6). It was Joseph Ridgeway III who made some alterations on the house (ibid.). James Lawrence Ridgeway, a son of Joseph III, was in the shipping industry while another son, Joseph, served in the State

Legislature and in the House of Representatives in Washington (ibid.). There was also a James Ridgeway of Long Neck who planned the construction of a new road from Port Richmond to New Springville and supervised the project along with John Mersereau in 1864 (ibid., in Reed 1965:21). The Ridgeways remained on their property until all of the family members had left Staten Island (Reed 1964:6). According to a map of 1907, the Ridgeways were still on the land, but on a 1917 map they are no longer present (Robinson and Pidgeon 1907:Roll II, Bromley and Bromley 1917 I:Roll:II).

Another name that appears in the vicinity is Alston, a family that arrived not long after the Revolution (Leng and Davis 1930 II:851-852). David Alston, a captain in the Third Battalion of New Jersey Volunteers, was commissioned by General Howe on July 15, 1776 (ibid.). David's name appears on the Census of 1790 (ibid.). One of his grandsons, a certain Moses Alston, was twice sheriff of Richmond County (1861 and 1870) and his great-grandson, Lot Clark Alston (1860-1921), was a justice of the peace in Northfield (ibid.). The Alston property is shown on Butler's 1853 Map of Staten Island immediately to the east of the road which runs along the bold line enclosing the project area in the lower-center of the page (Figure 6).

One of the more recent additions to the families of the area is Travis. The designation "Travisville" shows up on Beers' 1874 Atlas of Staten Island with reference to part of the site (Figure 7). Not long before the Civil War a Colonel Jacob E. Travis settled on Long Neck, thus adding to the geographical nomenclature (Leng and Davis 1930 II:963). On Butler's 1853 map "Travisville" is not named, but the property of a J. Travis appears to the north of the project area designated by the bold line on the lower-center portion of the page (Figure 6). On Beers' 1887 Atlas of Staten Island "J. Travis Heirs" is noted to the north of the project area (bold line) and to the north-east of the site just adjacent to the Ridgeway property (Figure 8).

The Cannon family, early settlers of the area, appears on Skene's map as having been present on Long Neck at the end of the seventeenth century (Figure 3). Cannon appears on the Du Camp map to the west of the project area, not far to the east of the Sound (Figure 4, note circled area in the lower-center of the page). On Butler's 1853 map the property appears, but it is just to the east of Chelsea, some distance from the project site (bold line) (Figure 6, lower-center of page). The Cannons show up on subsequent maps, but they are not in the immediate vicinity of the project area until the early twentieth century (Robinson and Pidgeon 1907:Roll II, Bromley and Bromley 1917 I:Roll II).

The Mohlenhoffs should be mentioned because it was that family who bought the Ridgeway property (Reed 1964:6). Mohlenhoff, a farmer, rented one of the houses on his property to another family (ibid.). This was the last family who occupied the Old Ridgeway house, for it was



demolished shortly after (ibid.). Ridgeway appears on the 1907 Robinson and Pidgeon map, while on the 1917 Bromley and Bromley map, Richard Mohlenhoff shows up in Ridgeway's place (Robinson and Pidgeon 1907:Roll II, Bromley and Bromley 1917 I:Roll II).

Some structures are present on Chelsea (Meredith) Avenue, Cannon Avenue, and on Victory Boulevard in the project area (Roberts and Farkas 1988:8, also see Figure 9). The cemetery on the Ridgeway/Travis/Cannon property is shown on the 1912 Borough of Richmond Topographical Survey as being situated about three hundred and fifty feet northwest of the project area (ibid., Figure 9).

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank the New York Public Library's Map, Local History, and Reference Divisions for their generous help. My appreciation also goes to Carl Hempel of Staten Island's Topographical Bureau, to Hugh Powell of the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, and to the Staten Island Historical Society Richmondtown Restoration where the assistance of William McMillen, Steven Barto, and Majorie Johnson has made the completion of this project possible.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The above text has documented that the Victory Estates 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 archaeological remains because it is topographically similar to several locations of documented prehistoric sites. Nine such sites exist within a two mile radius of the project area, and nearly all are on relatively elevated sandy soils, a description which characterizes the eastern half of the Victory Estates Development site. Although no prehistoric artifacts have been reported from this location, it is our opinion that its physical condition would have been conducive to its use and/or occupation during prehistory, particularly in the Woodland and Archaic periods.

It is also our conclusion that of the project area may be sensitive to the preservation of historic archaeological evidence dating to the Revolutionary War period. As noted above in the historic sensitivity section, a house located within the project area was the site of part of a 1777 military engagement.

We recommend that a Phase IB archaeological survey be undertaken within the project area to determine the presence or absence of both potential Revolutionary War remains, as well as to search for any prehistoric



site(s) that may be at this location. We recommend that testing is necessary for all of the Victory Estates Development project that may be impacted by the planned construction and related activities, where such testing is possible. This would be done both to test the entire tract for the presence of aboriginal occupation, especially burials, given the presence of the Burial Ridge complex 7.2 miles to the southwest of the project area and nine other prehistoric sites within two miles of the project, as well as historic remains dating to the Revolutionary War period.

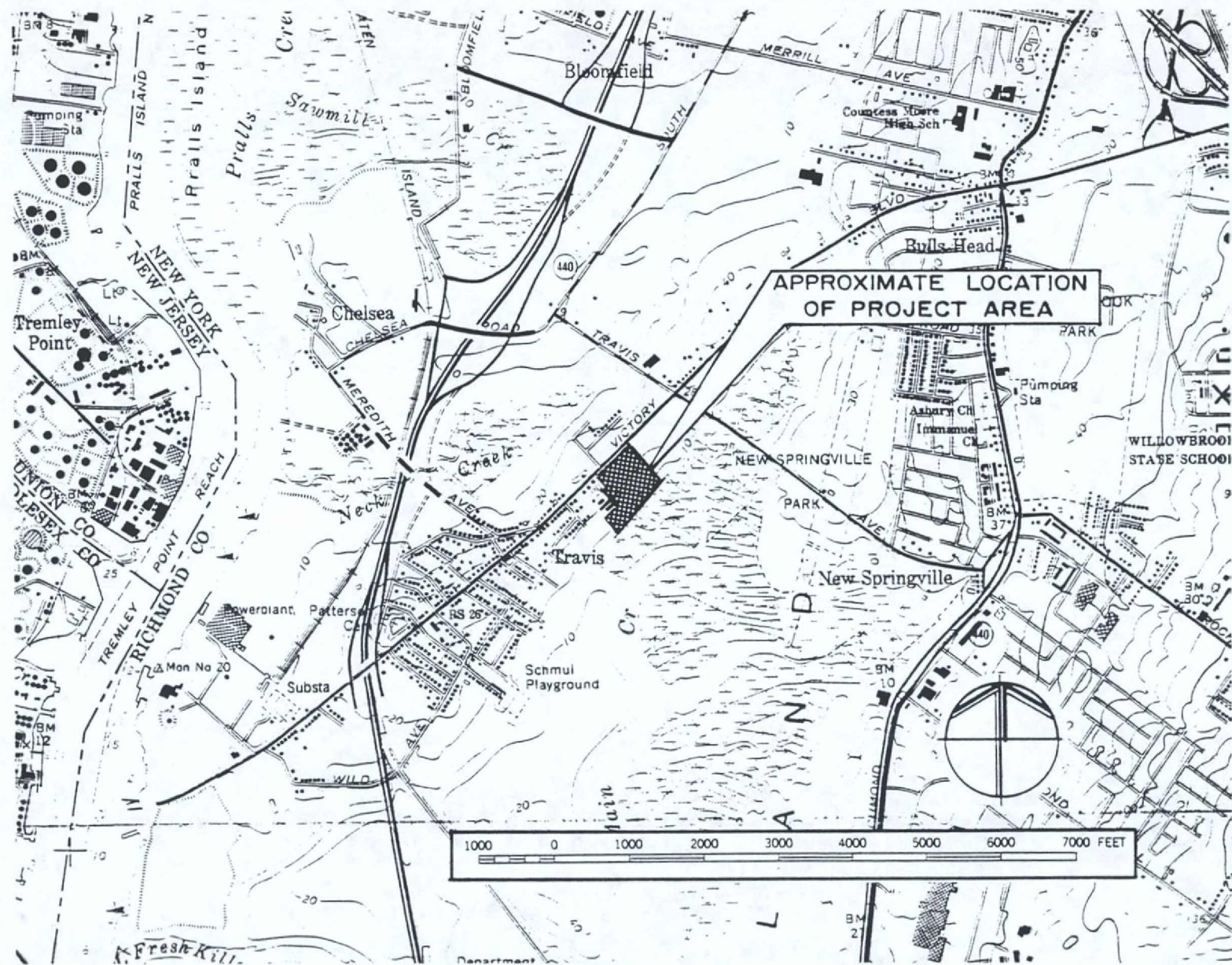


Figure 1 Project area shown on portion of U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute series, Arthur Kill, N.Y.-N.J. Quadrangle, 1966, photorevised 1981.

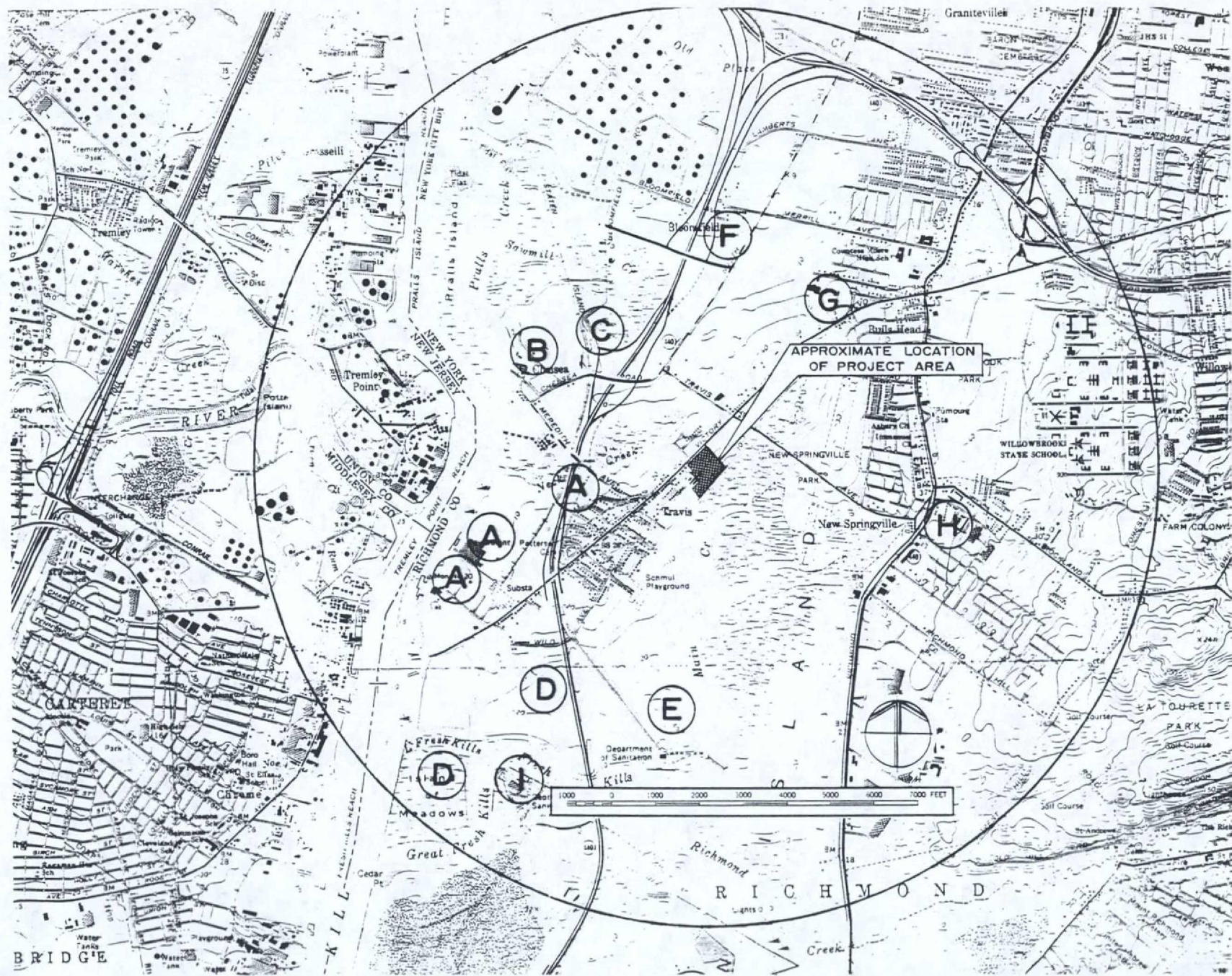


Figure 2 Prehistoric sites located within a 2 mile radius of the project area.

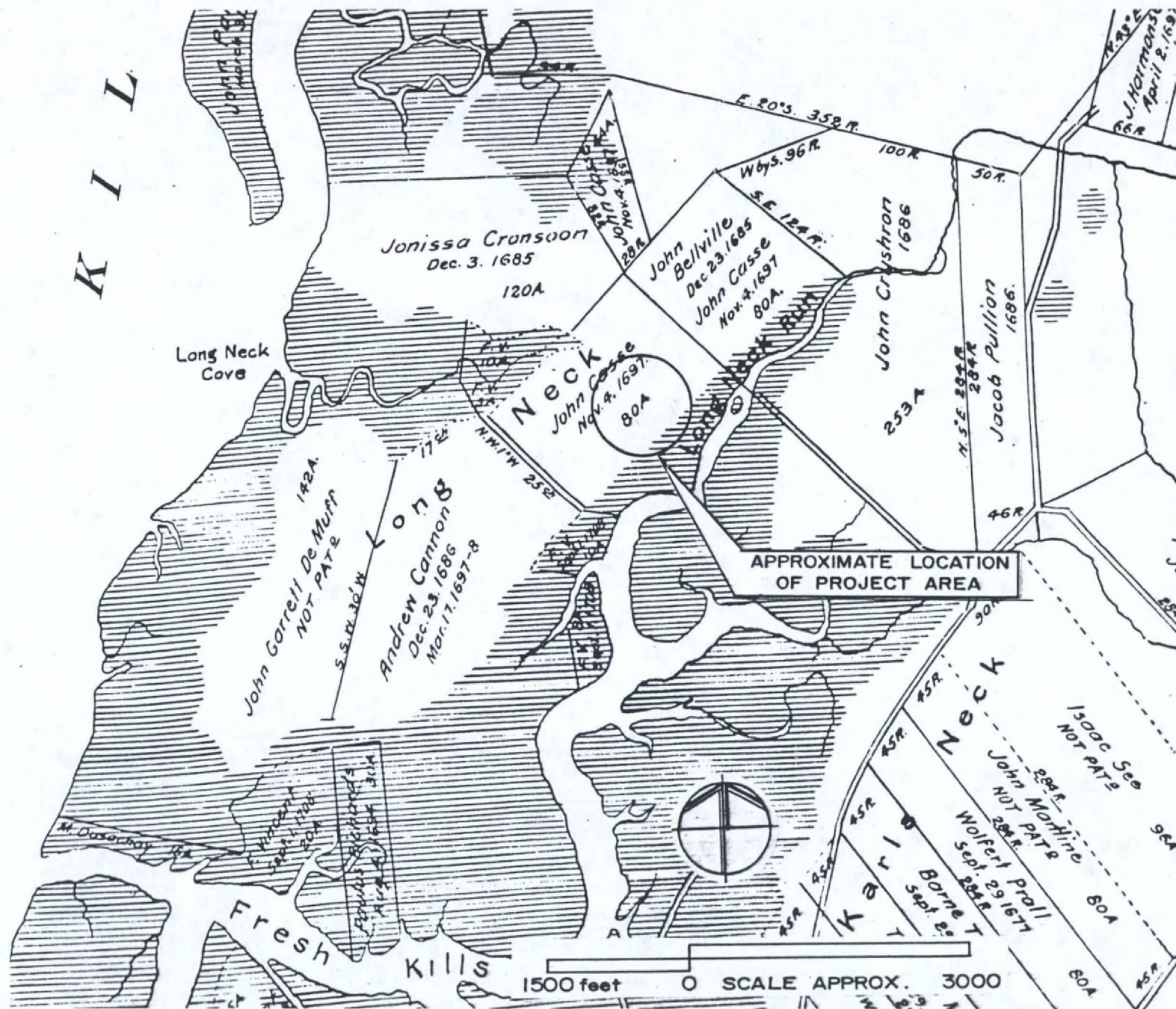


Figure 3 From Frederick Skene's 1907 Map of Staten Island, showing Colonial Land Patents from 1668-1712.

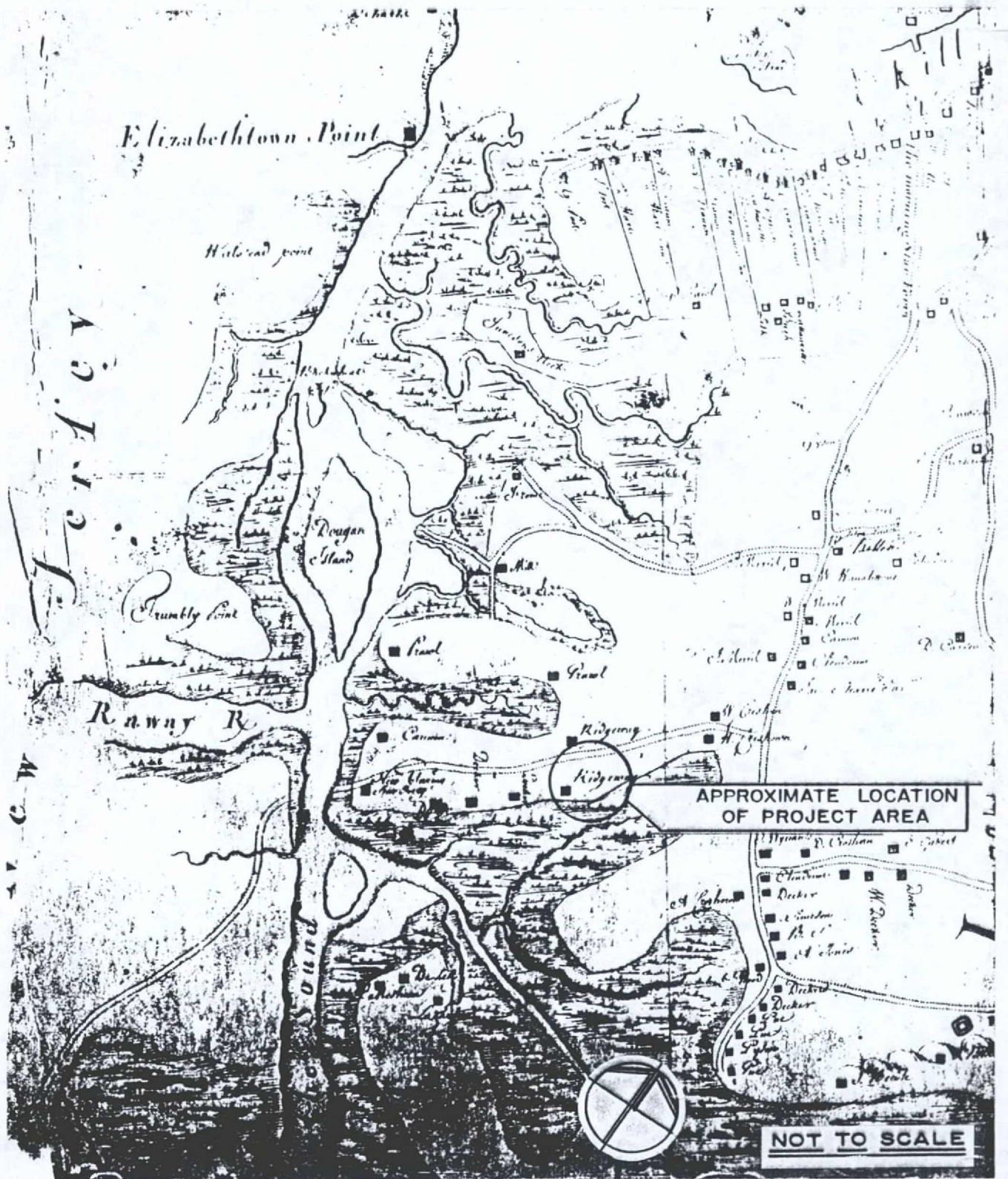


Figure 4 From Plan (No. 31). Du Camp Anglo-Hessois dans Staten Island, 1780-1783.

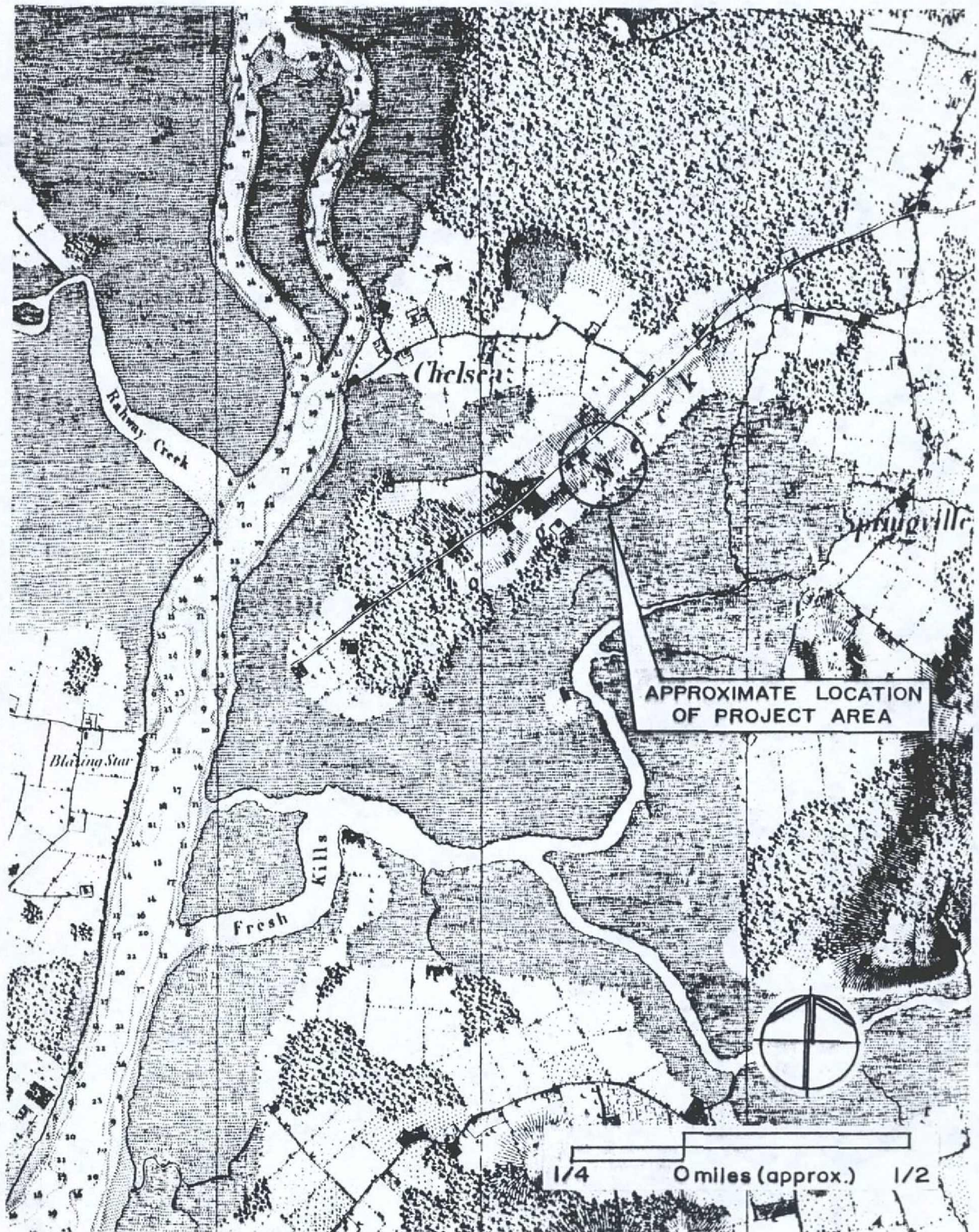


Figure 5 From U.S. Coast Survey Charter of New York Harbor, 1836-1839, published 1845.

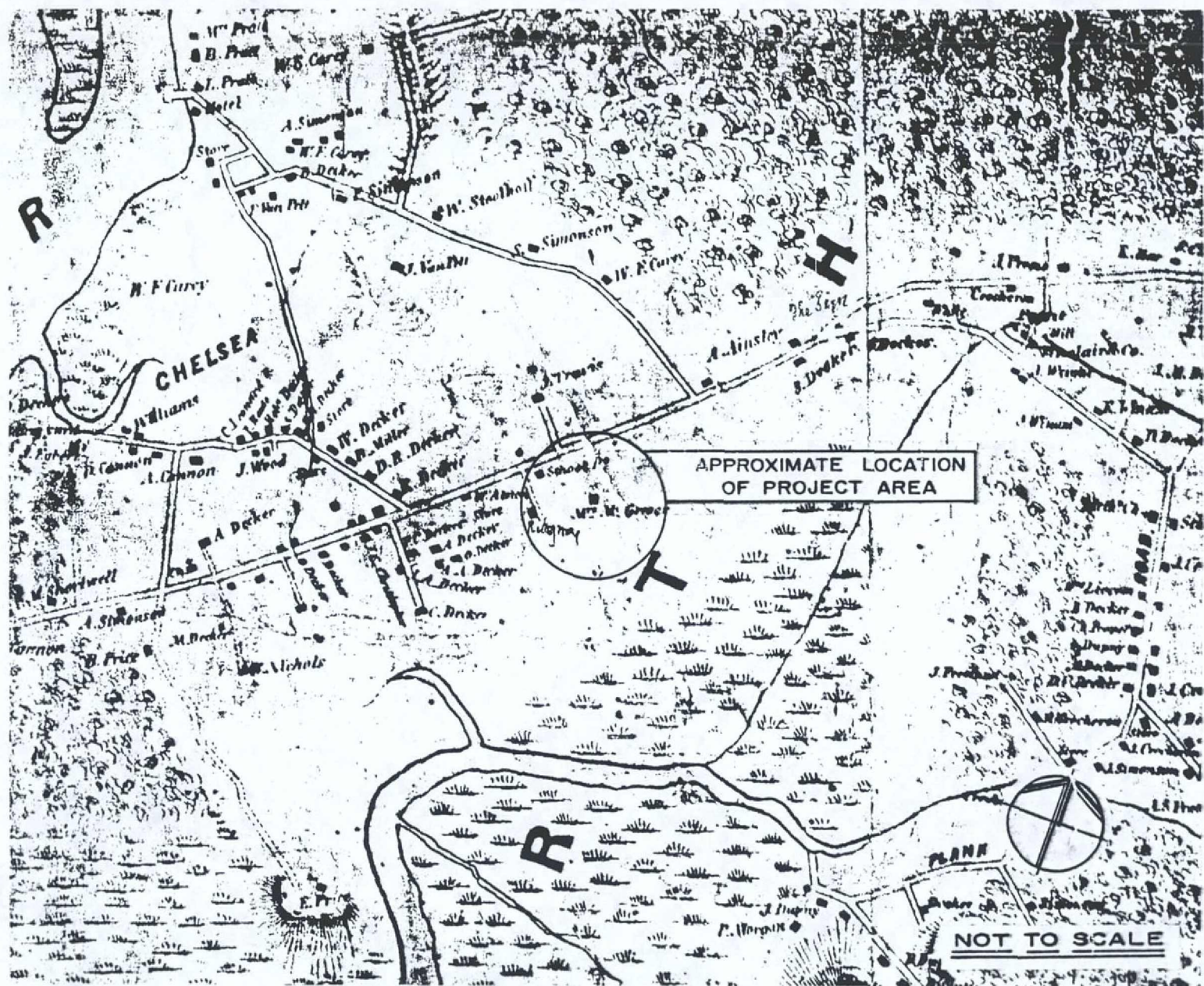


Figure 6 From Butler's 1853 Map of Staten Island or Richmond County, New York.

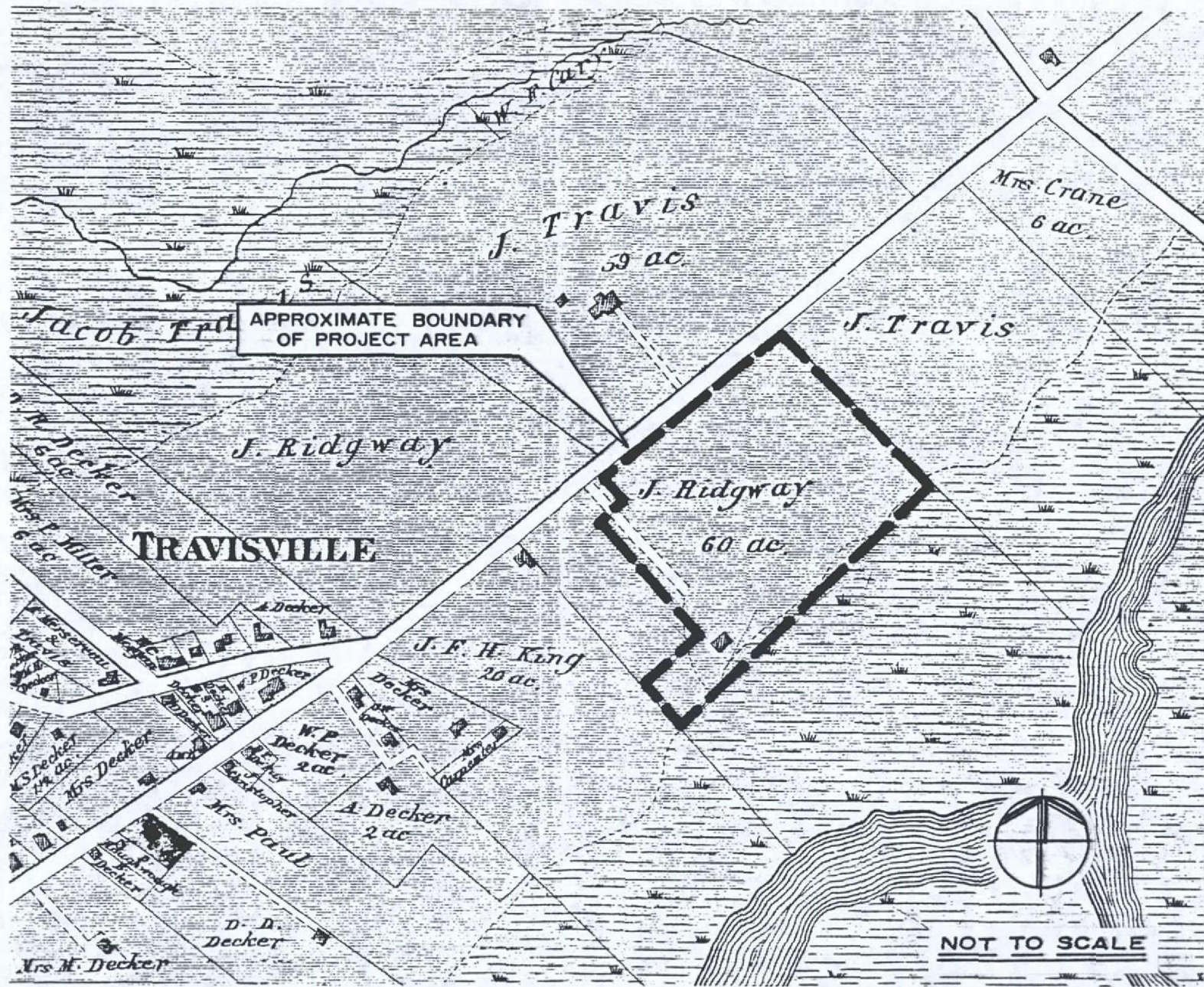


Figure 7 From Beer's 1874 Atlas of Staten Island, Richmond County, New York.

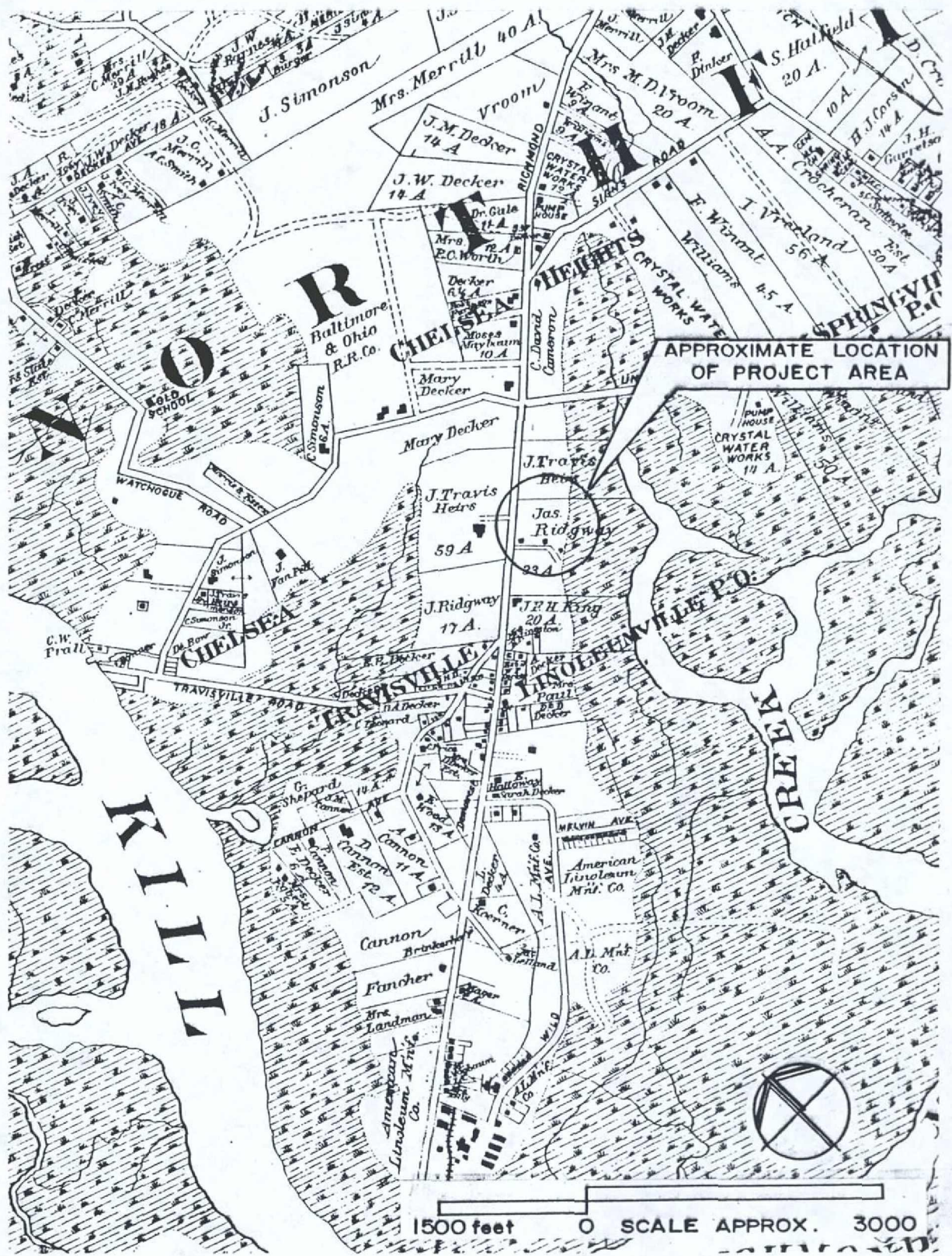


Figure 8 From Beer's 1887 Atlas of Staten Island, Richmond County, New York.

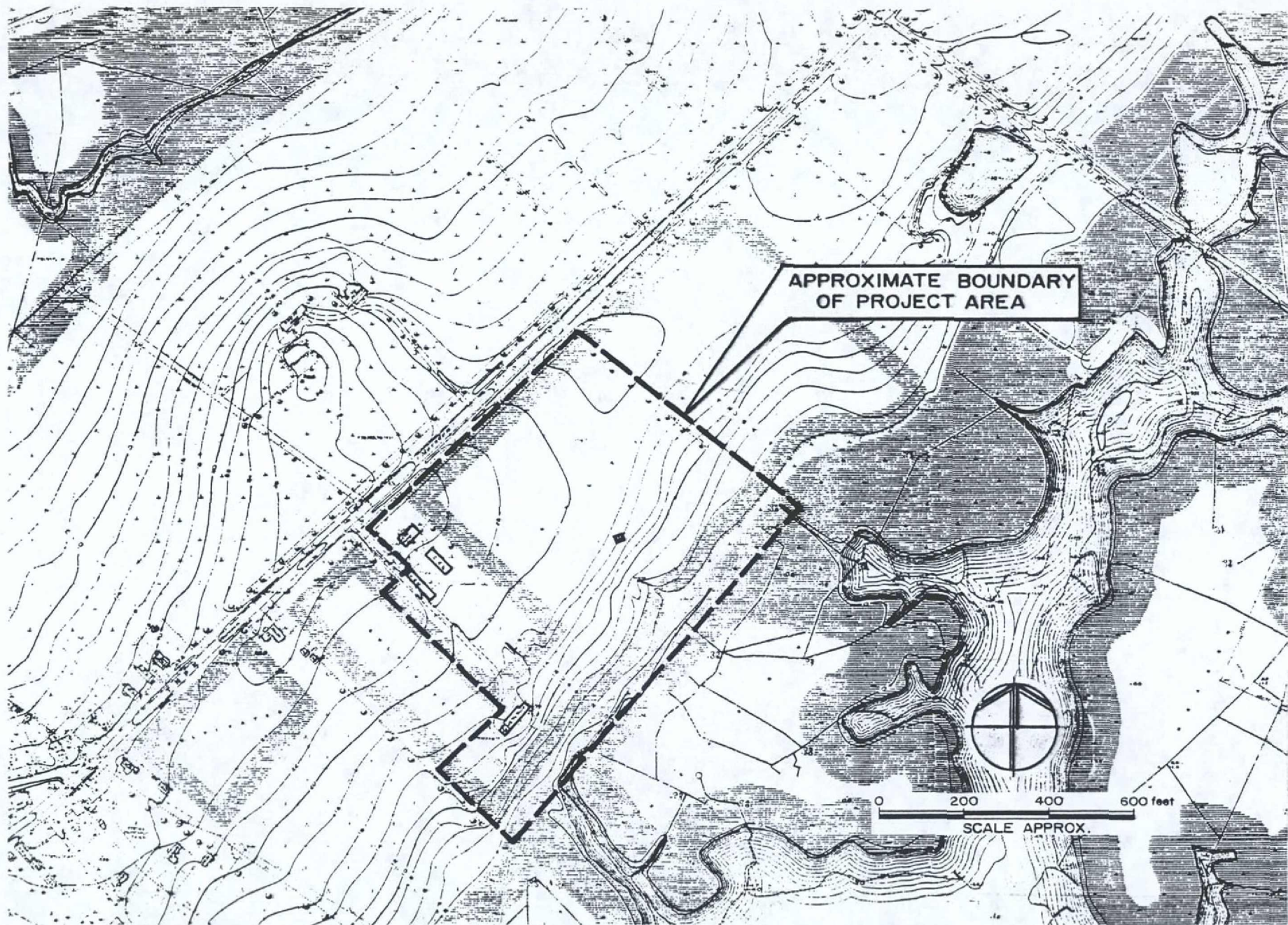


Figure 9 From 1909 Borough of Richmond Topographical Survey, Sheet #36.

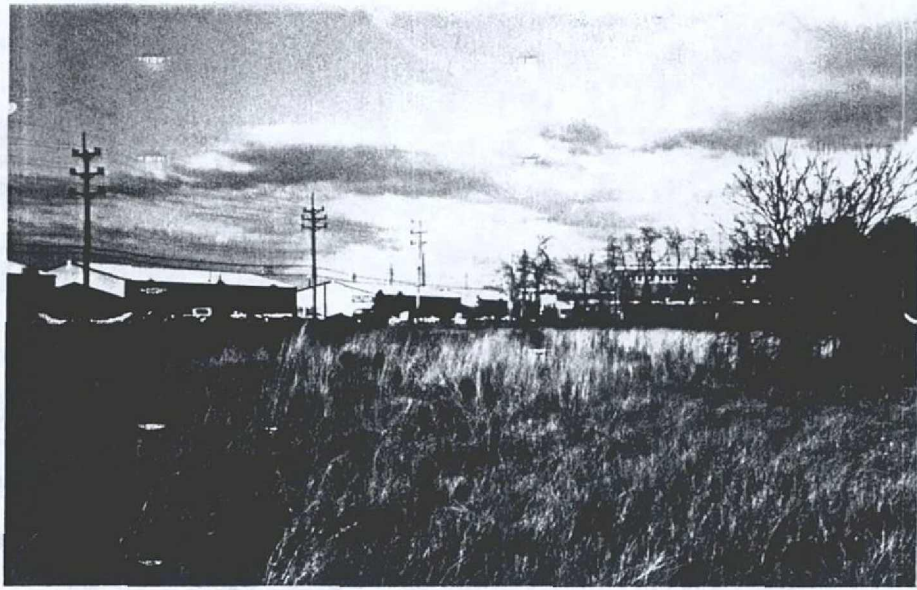


Plate 1 View of northern half of project area looking north, with
Victory Boulevard in the background.

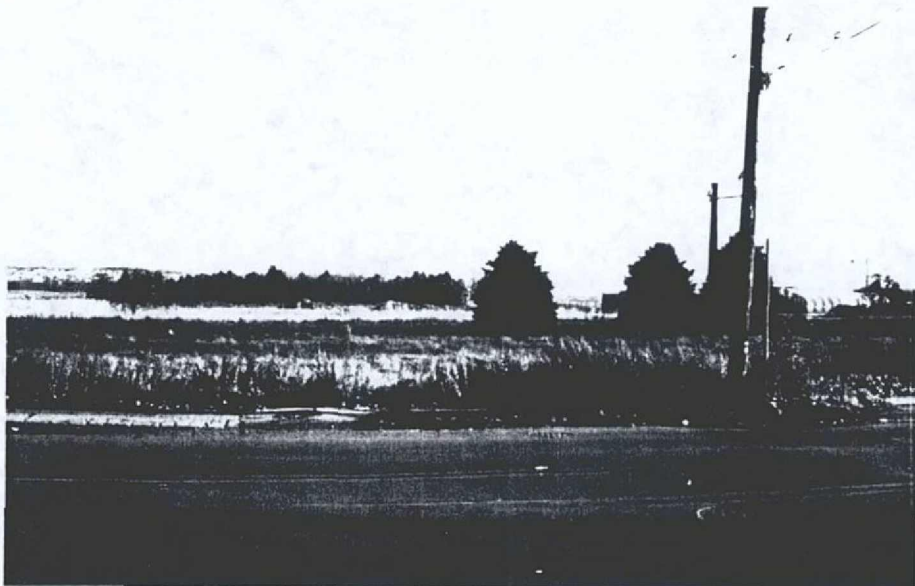


Plate 2 View of southwestern portion of project area looking
southeast, with Victory Boulevard in the foreground.



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