

2606R

CULTURAL RESOURCE RECONNAISSANCE
5-30 GRILLE COURT, STATEN ISLAND
(BLOCK 7120, LOTS 160, 165, 170,
175, 180, 185, BOROUGH OF RICHMOND)
NEW YORK, N.Y.

CEQR NO. 87-233R

Prepared for
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September 1987

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I. Administrative Information

A. Purpose of Study

This survey was requested by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission under the City Environmental Review, and is identified as CEQR 87-233R. The need for preliminary assessment by documentary study was based on a knowledge that the study area was within a few thousand feet of several prehistoric archaeological sites which have been reported or tested in the Rossville-Smoking Point-Kreischerville area. The potential for the existence or preservation of such evidence here could not be assessed without a preliminary examination of the tract and a study of the existing archaeological and historical literature.

B. Description of the Project

It is proposed to build an industrial park consisting of six buildings on a small street to be created called Grille Court. This will occupy a tract which is about 200 feet wide (east-west), fronting on Arthur Kill Road, and which extends south for about 300 feet from that road. The property consists of Lots 160, 165, 170, 175, 180 and 185 of Block 7120, Borough of Richmond. Before subdivision, the entire tract was Lot 4 (See Figures 1 & 2).

C. Method of Study

The background literature for prehistoric sites in this portion of Staten Island was examined, and the location of nearby sites was plotted on available maps. For historic development, the published sources were searched, and historic maps of the area were collected. We are particularly indebted to Mr. Carl Hempel of the Topographical Bureau, Map and Records Unit, Borough Hall.

Field inspection of the study area was performed on 10 September 1987. Following this we prepared a synthesis of the documentary and cartographic evidence. Background research is described in Section II of this report, current conditions in Section III, and a summary conclusion is presented in Section IV. It is our opinion that this study area once had a moderate probability of containing archaeological evidence, but that the thorough levelling and grading has disturbed any intact soil profiles.

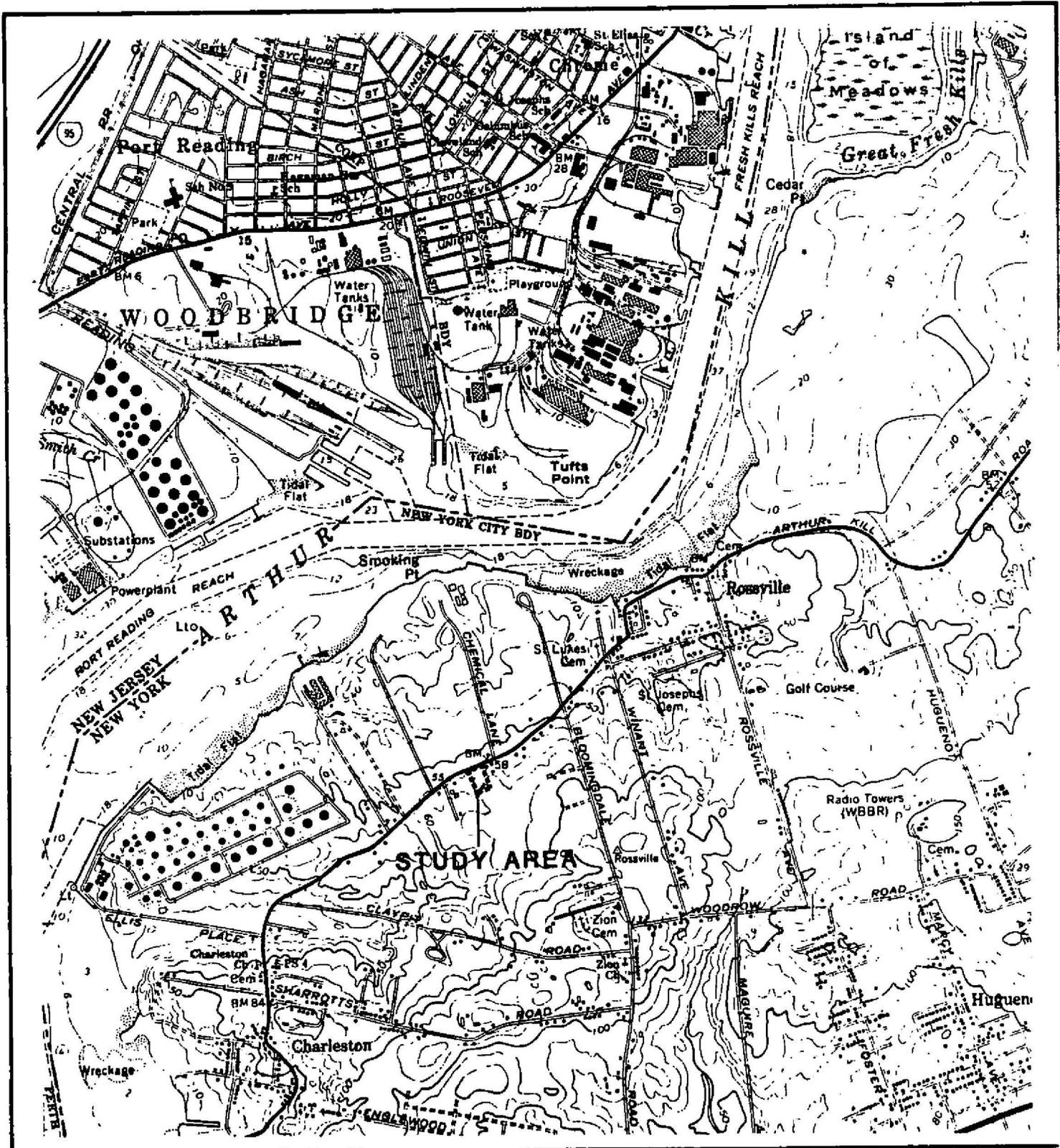
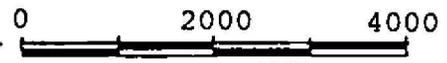


FIGURE 1.

LOCATION MAP

Base is U.S.G.S. Arthur Kill Quad, 1966

Scale: 1 inch = 2,000 feet



SCALE IN FEET

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. Topography

The study area is near the north part of the southwestern projection of Staten Island, about 3,000 feet away from the nearest shore of the Arthur Kill, which curves around the Island both west and north of the study area (Figures 1 and 10). The terminal moraine of the Wisconsinan glaciation, known as the Harbor Hill moraine, runs on a southwest to northeast alignment through this region as the high ground of Perth Amboy and Woodbridge in New Jersey, and across the Arthur Kill as the equivalent high land which forms the backbone of Staten Island. Immediately north of this broad ridge there are extensive wet lands in the central part of the island, draining west through the Fresh Kills system into the Arthur Kill.

Local communities or place names which have featured in studies of the area are Smoking Point, Rossville, Woodrow and Kreischerville. Smoking Point is on the shore of Staten Island where the Arthur Kill bends northwest and then southwest. Rossville is a historic community which developed on the shore where the north slope of the moraine met the marshes and wetlands of the Fresh Kills area, at a right angle westward of the bend on the Arthur Kill. Woodrow was a small village about one mile south of Rossville, near the crest of the moraine hill, at about 100 to 130 feet elevation. Kreischerville (now called Charleston) developed in the later 19th century around a clay pit or mine district, two miles southwest of Rossville, near a western protrusion of the island into the Arthur Kill. A road which ran roughly parallel to the Arthur Kill connected Kreischerville and Rossvil-

le, and is now called Arthur Kill Road. While crossing various drainages, this road dips to lower elevations, but near the study area it is running from southwest to northeast along the northwest flank of the hill, and follows closely above the 50 foot contour line. The study area was about midway between Kreischerville and Rossville. It lies on the northwest slope of the moraine, halfway between the crest of the hill and the Arthur Kill in both elevation and distance.

Soil conditions vary along the moraine, but the best known deposits nearby are the kaolin and other clay beds between Kreischerville and Woodrow, and the sandy soils along drainage courses, particularly in the vicinity known historically as Sandy Ground, near Rossville.

Surface details of the study area before grading are shown in a Borough Topographic map of 1913 (Figure 8). This indicates that there was an even slope, with the high point near 75 feet at the southeast corner and low point at about 53 feet at the northwest corner. The nearest stream was 300 to 400 feet to the east.

B. Prehistoric Occupation

An early reference to prehistoric sites near the study area is in Skinner's report on the Indians of Staten Island (1909:10-11). There he described finds at Woodrow (Site 13), along Sandy Brook, and in the Rossville area (Site 14). He stated that "there are sites all along the shore to Kreischerville...All the sandy fields along the shore yield relics" (Skinner 1909:11). The map accompanying this report places generalized shading along

the shore of the Arthur Kill in such a way that it includes the study area but the more intense shading of Woodrow and Rossville does not cover the study area.

A decade later, three loci was shown in the area, at Rossville, Bogardus Corners, and Woodrow (Bolton 1920:317 & map, Sites 80, 81 & 82). All three were described as "explored by Alanson Skinner." The Bogardus Corners site is called a "Village-site at Sandy Ground", and the site at Woodrow is an "extension of No. 81." It is clear from both sources that finds were generally associated with sandy soil, cultivated fields, and particularly with the area known as "Sandy Ground" near Rossville.

A significant find was made when Paleo-Indian artifacts were discovered in the area now covered by an oil tank farm, at Port Mobil. This has been reported on in several sources (Ritchie 1969:xvii-xviii, Kraft in Funk & Hayes 1977:1-19). Bulldozer scraping had occurred, so the evidence from this site is in a disturbed context. Artifacts from this site have been analyzed for comparison with material from other Paleo-Indian sites in the Delaware and Hudson River area (Eisenberg 1978:71-79).

An early Archaic component was found in situ at one site near Smoking Point (Ritchie & Funk 1971). Other, more recent, sites have been located at the Wort Farm (Deustua 1969, Horowitz 1971, Williams 1968), at Smoking Point (Rutsch 1968, Rubertone 1974) and at Harik's Sandy Ground (Lavin 1980). A site has been registered with the New York State Historic Preservation Office by Bert Salwen, adjacent to Chemical Lane.

These finds fall within the general area of the Rossville finds described early in the 20th century, extending from the

upper elevations of the hill as it slopes down to the north. None of these excavations have been closer to the study area than about 1,500 feet.

In the early historic times, or the period of contact between native Americans and European settlers, Staten Island was occupied largely by groups associated with the Raritans and Hackensacks of adjacent New Jersey. After Governor Keift's War of 1640 to 1645 most of the survivors moved to safety in interior New Jersey, and were replaced by other Delawaran speaking groups from western Long Island. By 1670 the remaining land rights on Staten Island had been sold to the English, and the majority of Indians left the island. Small groups and isolated families remained until the late 19th century, in a pattern similar to that found on other nearby portions of the Atlantic coastline (Grumet 1981:2-3, 12, 44-45, 54-55).

C. Historic Development

European settlement on Staten Island was started before 1640 by Dutch colonists. The heavy losses incurred during Governor Keift's war resulted in abandonment of these early communities, and permanent European occupation did not begin until after 1660 (Bayles 1887:53-59, Morris 1900:34-41). The first communities were on the north and east shores. Settlement along the Arthur Kill (called the Sound, or Staten Island Sound) came later, starting near Tottenville in the 1680's.

The first maps which show meaningful detail for this part of Staten Island date from the American Revolution. In 1781 the area which is now Rossville was shown as "Disosway's House and Ferry", and no roads were shown (Fig. 3). A more detailed map of the same date indicates that the predecessor of Arthur Kill Road existed, but that houses were mostly along the shore (Fig. 4). The word "Ferry" is at modern Rossville. No settlement or cross roads are near the study area.

By the end of the 18th century the Rossville area is shown as "Old Blazing Star Ferry" (Fig. 5). A detailed depiction of roads here omits the Arthur Kill Road alignment, which suggests that if it did exist, it was not a major thoroughfare. No farm houses of other structures are near the study area.

Sometime before 1840 the small village where the Dissosway's house and Blazing Star Ferry were had been renamed Rossville, in honor of Colonel William E. Ross (Smith 1970:227). The first major industrial development in the vicinity began in the mid-19th century, with the discovery of high quality kaolin clay. In 1854 Balthazar Kreischer began extraction of this clay and by

1876 he had moved his operations completely out of Manhattan. This factory made "fire brick, drainpipe, gas retorts, & other refractory ware" (Leng & Davis 1930:19-20, 620, Morris 1900:471). A rail line ran from one of the clay pits to the brick works and docks at the shore, and is shown on a map of 1874 (Fig. 6). The area around these brick works and clay pits became known as Kreischerville (see Fig. 10, which keeps the names of 1880-83). During the anti-German sentiment of World War I this was changed to Charleston, which appears on the modern U.S.G.S. map (Fig. 1). One of the earlier Kaolin Pits was about 1,000 feet southwest of the study area (Fig. 6).

Detailed historic maps which are available for the late 19th and early 20th century show the study area as vacant and undeveloped during that period. In 1881 the area was part of one of the long strips of land into which old surveys had divided Staten Island (Fig. 6). It belonged to "J. Dissosway", a member of the family which had founded Rossville. Farm houses were scattered along the Fresh Kills Road, but none were immediately adjacent to our study area. By 1898 the land belonged to Daniel W. Dissosway (Fig. 7). Other members of this family owned nearby strips of land. The small lot to the east, where a 20th century house now stands, belonged to a Mrs. Williams in 1874 and 1898.

The most accurate historic depiction is a topographic map which is part of the detailed survey made in the Borough of Richmond in the first and second decades of the 20th century (Fig. 8). This map showed that the site had an even slope and "wooded" cover. To the west were a strip of woods, then an

orchard and cultivated fields. Woods covered the land extending uphill to the south, while the adjacent land to the east was open, with a farm and chicken houses or similar structures. Farms or open land covered most of the property across Fresh Kills Road, and a driftway or dirt track ran along the east edge of the study area. A spring was about 500 feet southeast, in a partly tree covered lot.

The property lines and ownership of land are shown almost contemporaneously in a map of 1917. Daniel Dissosway owned the 20 acre lot which included the study area, and J. C. Dissosway owned, across the road, the equivalent strip which stretched downhill to the shore. Again, no houses or development are shown on the study tract. A New Jersey State Atlas Sheet, surveyed in 1880-'83, but with major roads updated in 1955, shows the general appearance of this part of Staten Island before the next major rush of urban development (Fig. 10). It emphasizes the relative isolation of the study area at that time.

Finally, a property map made a decade ago shows the condition at the time land was acquired for the Clay Pit Pond State Park (Fig. 11). The study area was shown, with "asphalt pavement", belonging to Bobrab Realty. The school bus yard evidently already existed south and east of the tract, and on a small lot to the east was the house and garage shown in the photographs. This small property is the one shown as belonging to a Mrs. Williams, as early as 1874.

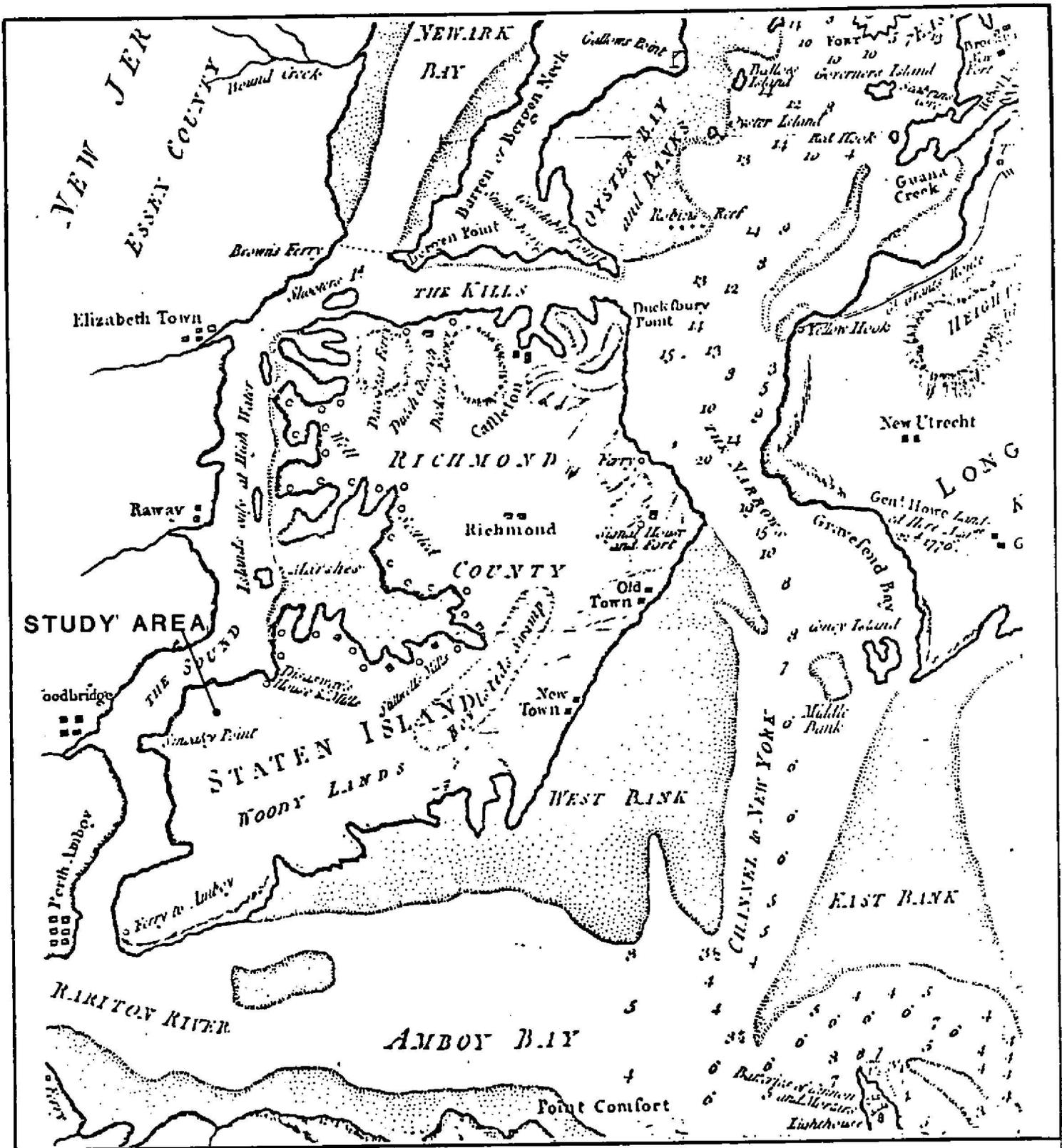


FIGURE 3.

1781 HARBOR MAP
 Base is Chart & Plan of the Harbor of New York
 Anonymous, 1781 No Scale



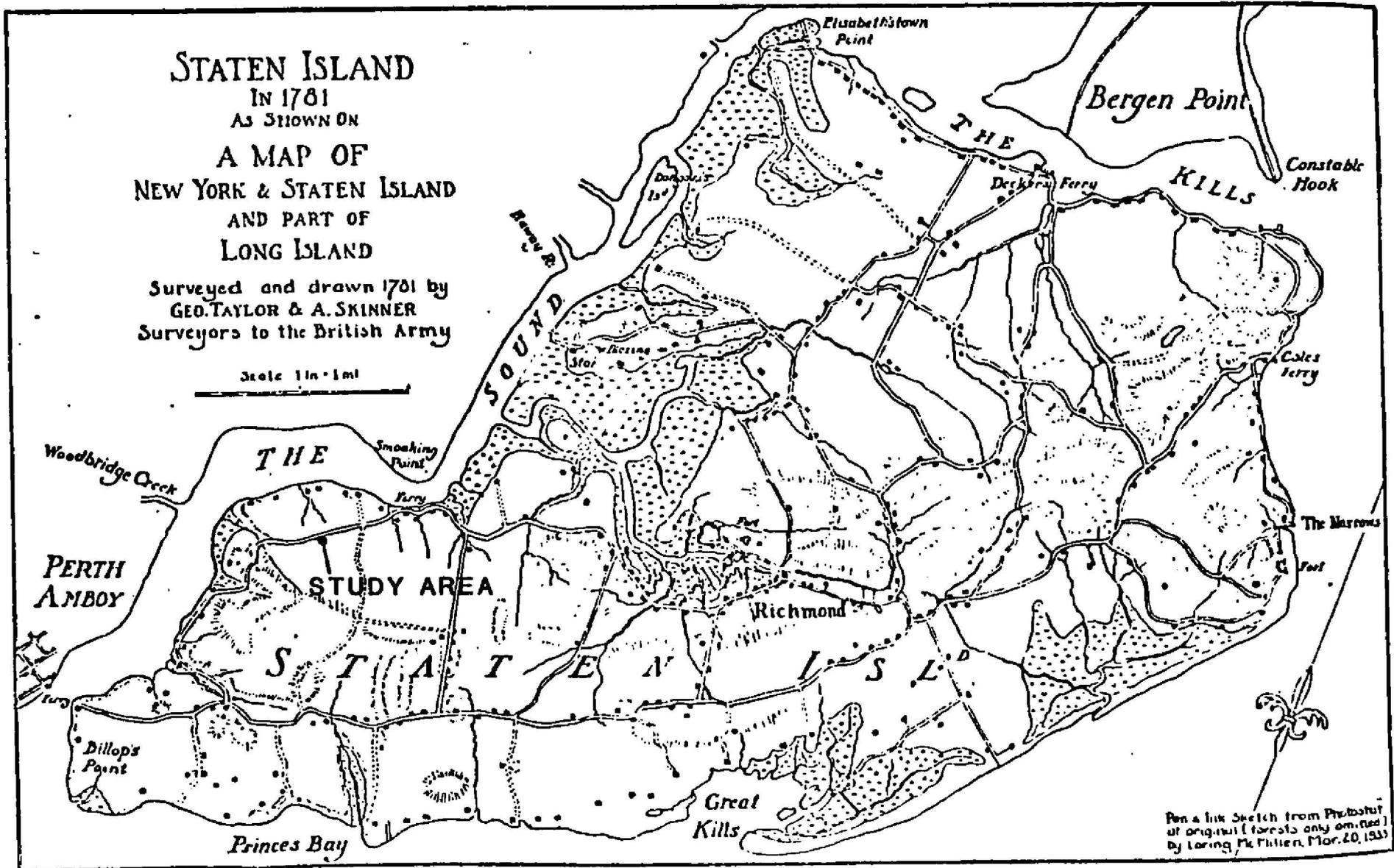


FIGURE 4. 1781 STATEN ISLAND MAP
 Base is A Map of New York & Staten Island and Part of Long Island
 Taylor & Skinner, 1781
 as reproduced by McMillen, 1933
 Original Scale: 1 inch = 1 mile
 Reduced Scale: 1 inch = 1.3 miles

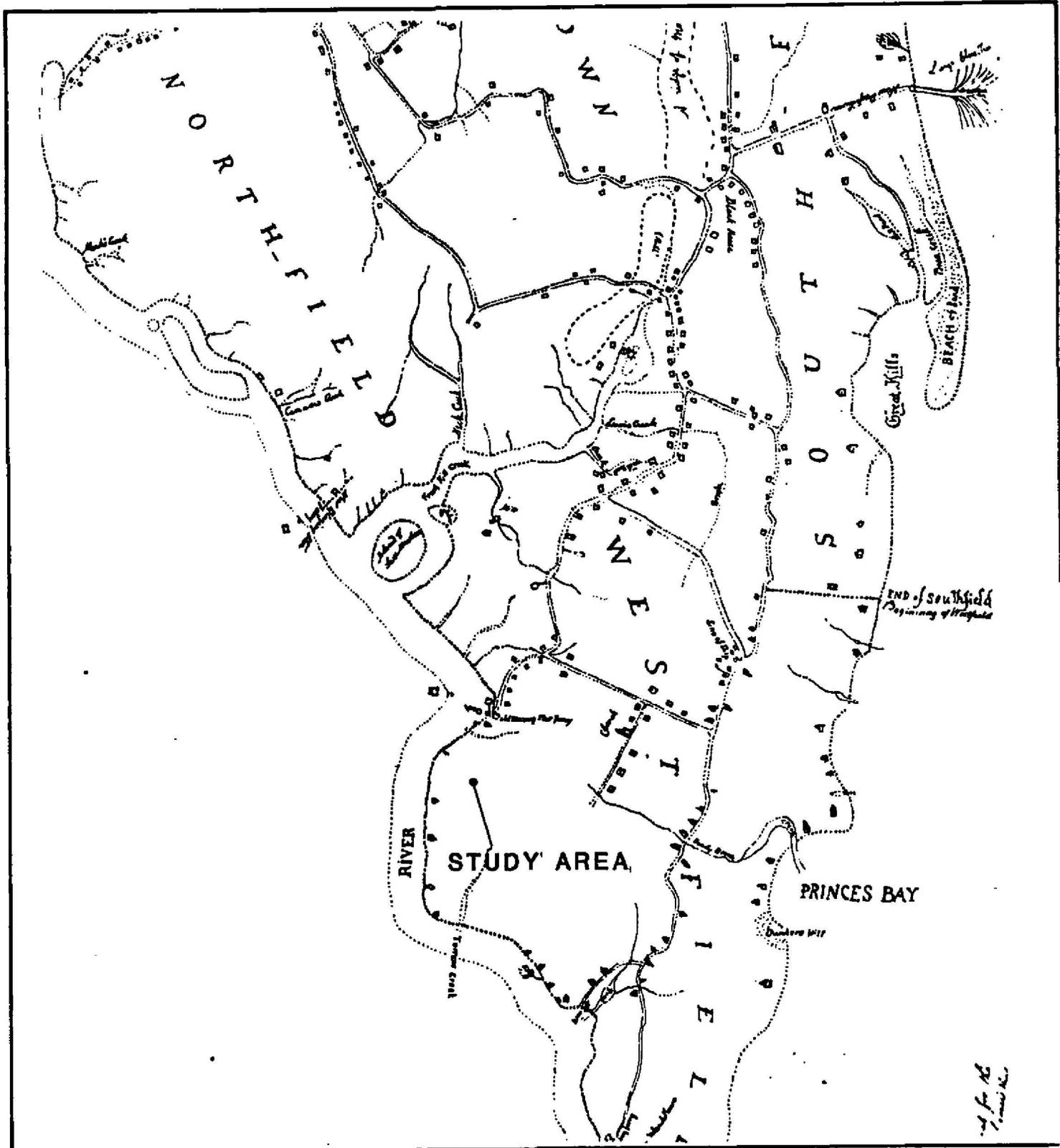
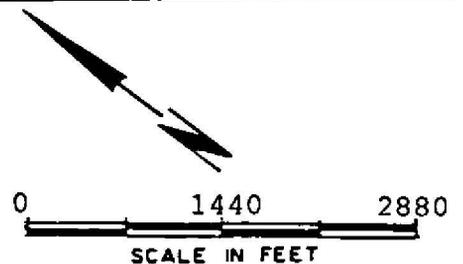


FIGURE 5. 1797 MAP

Base is "A New and Correct Mapp
of the County of Richmond made in the Year 1797..."
reproduced in The Earliest Volume of
Staten Island Records 1678-1813
by the Historical Records Survey, 1942
Original Scale: 1 inch = 40 rods (640 feet)
Reduced Scale: 1 inch = 90 rods (1440 feet)



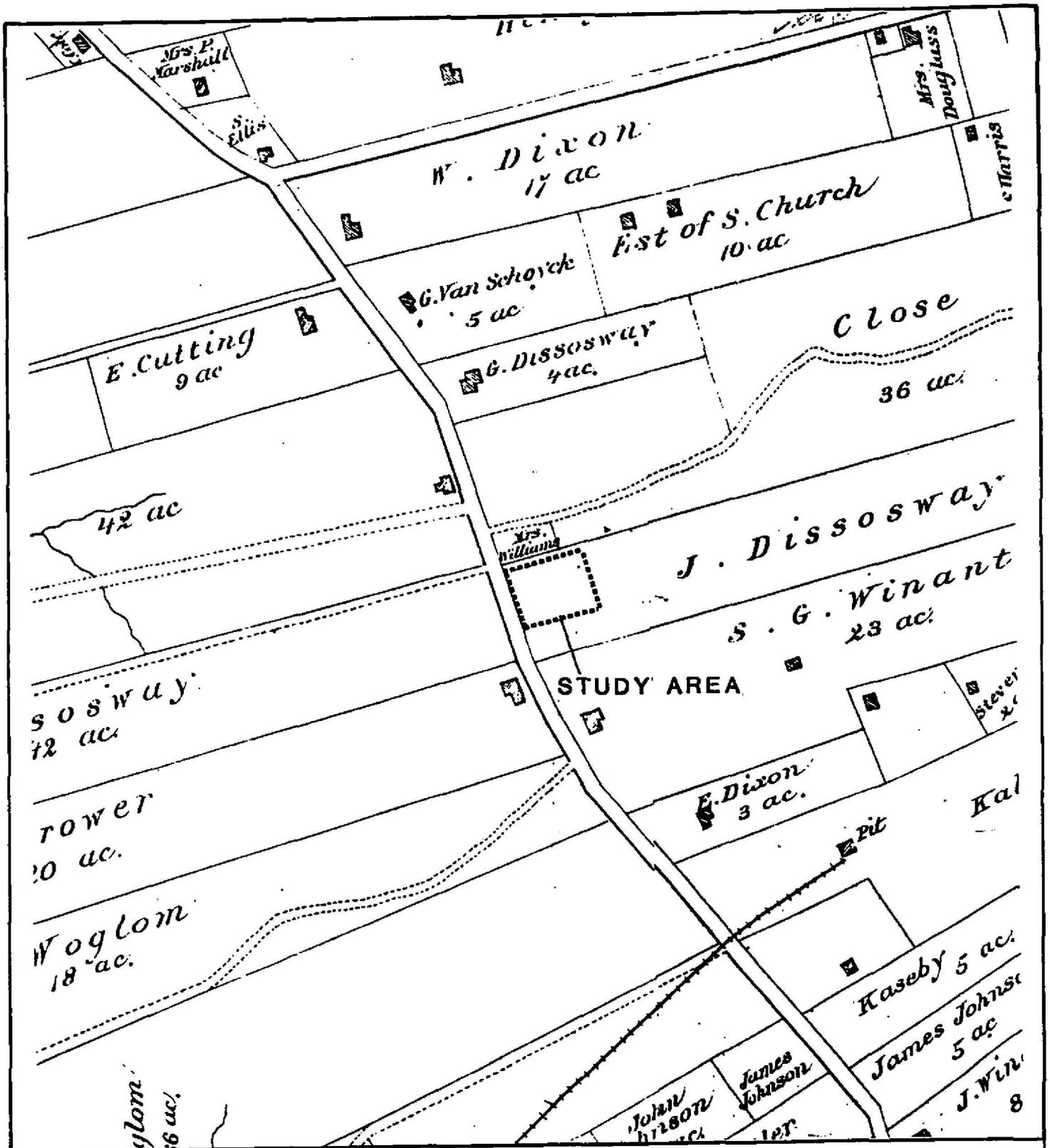
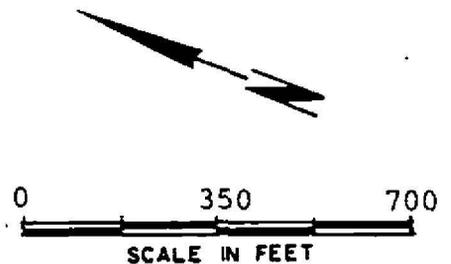


FIGURE 6.

1874 MAP
 Base is "Westfield" (Section 23)
 in Atlas of Staten Island
 F.W. Beers, 1874
 Scale: 1 inch = 350 feet



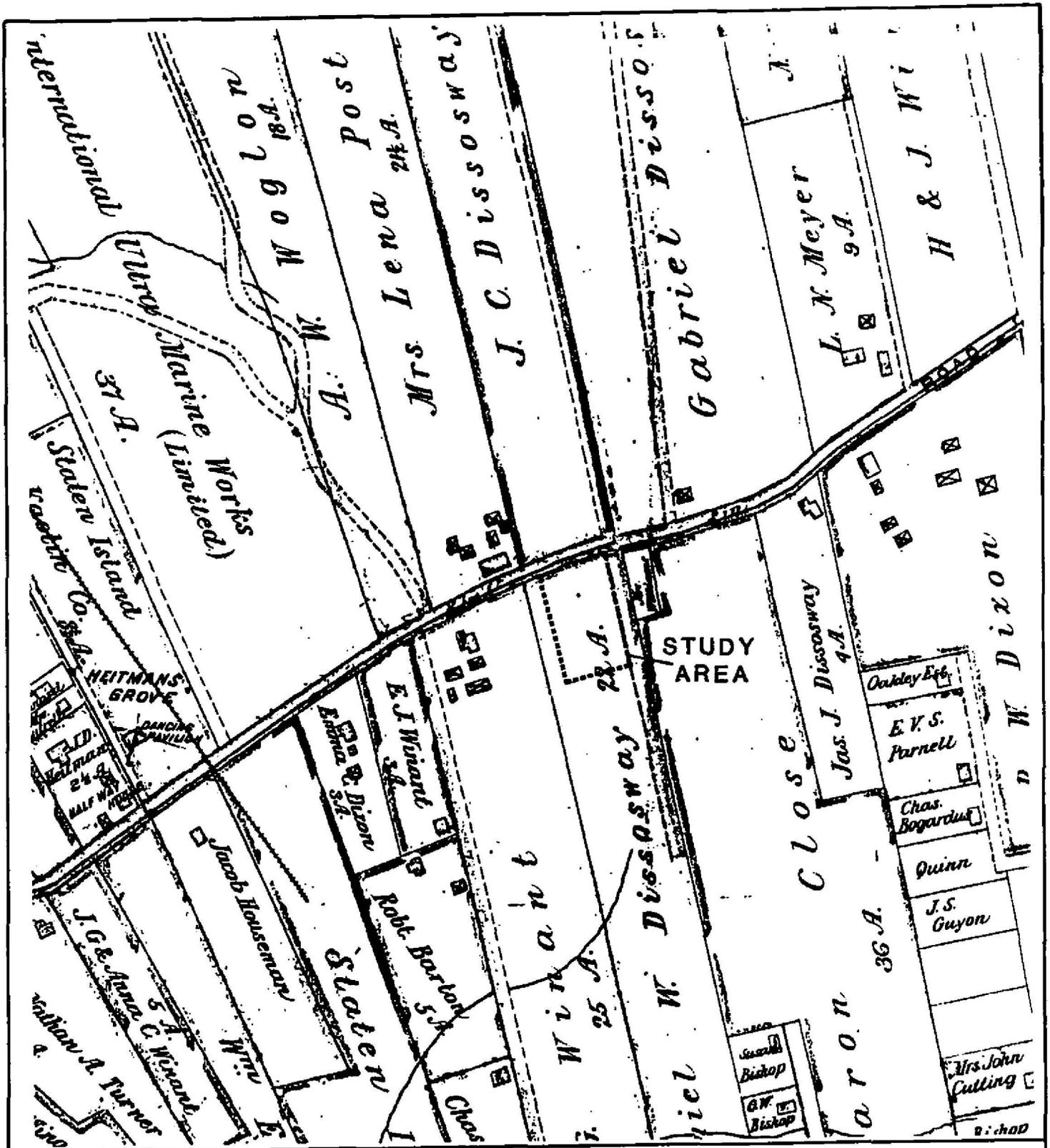


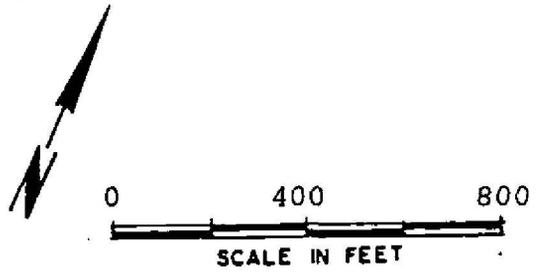
FIGURE 7.

1898 MAP

Base is Robinson's Atlas of the Borough of Richmond, New York, Plate 25

Robinson, 1898

Scale: 1 inch = 400 feet



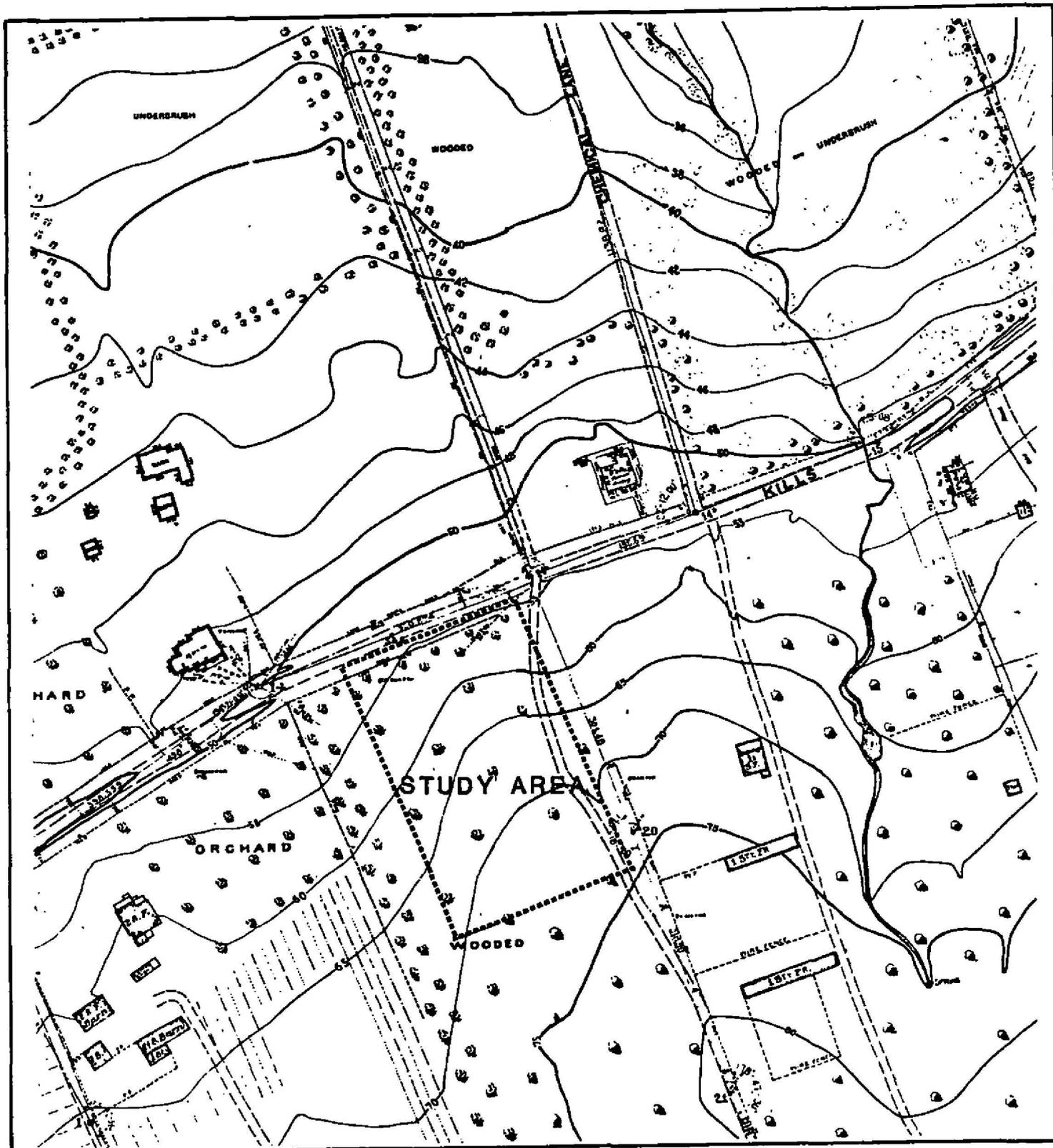


FIGURE 8.

1913 MAP
 Base is Borough of Richmond
 Topographical Survey, Sheet 74
 E.C. Bridgman, 1913
 Scale: 1 inch = 150 feet



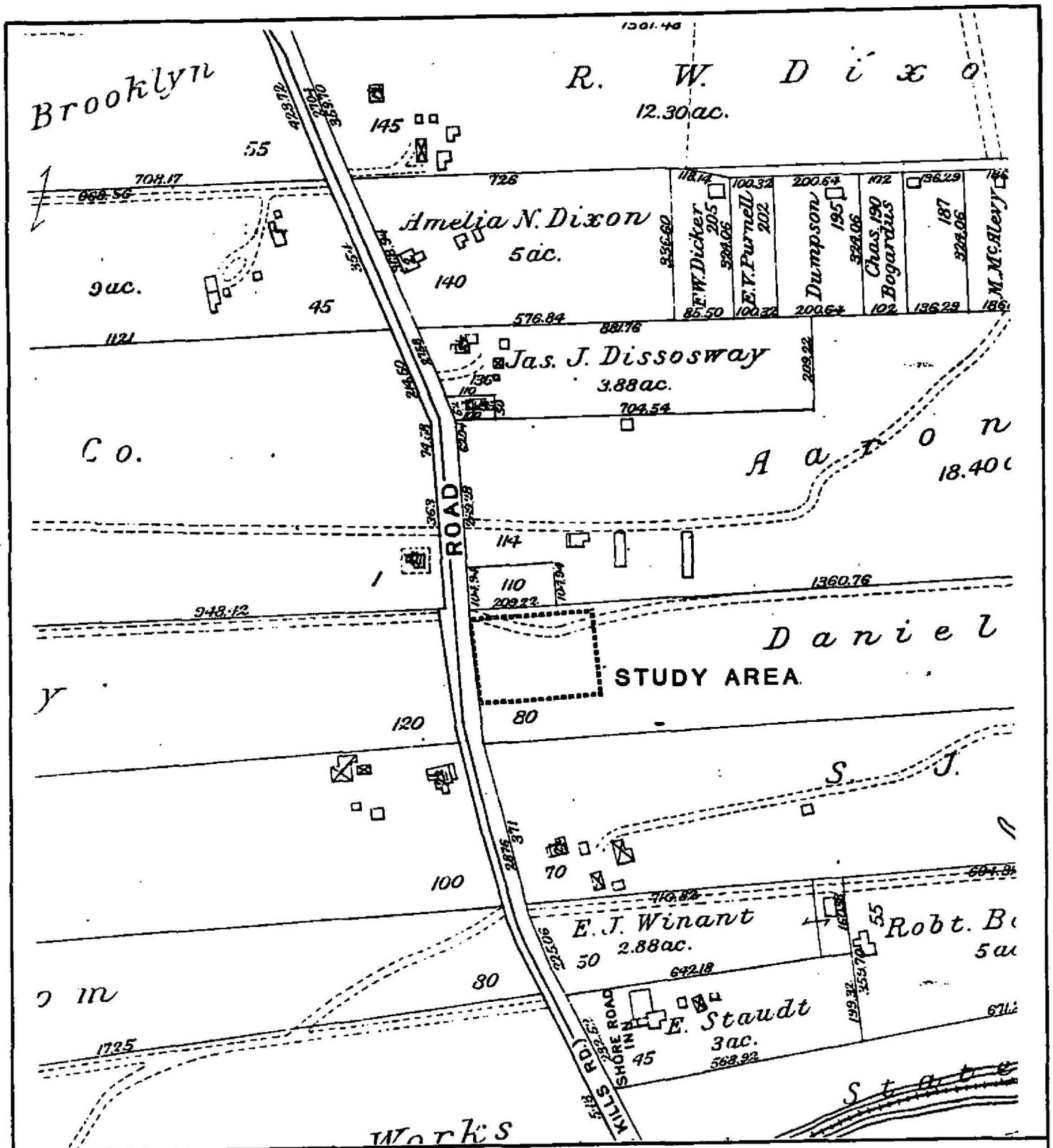


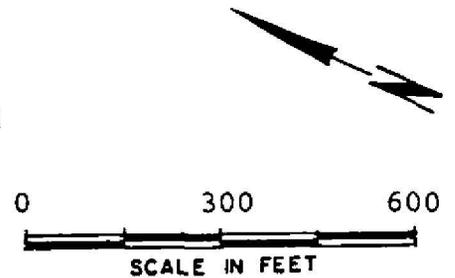
FIGURE 9.

1917 MAP

Base is Bromley's Atlas of Staten Island, Plate 42

G.W. Bromley, 1917

Scale: 1 inch = 300 feet



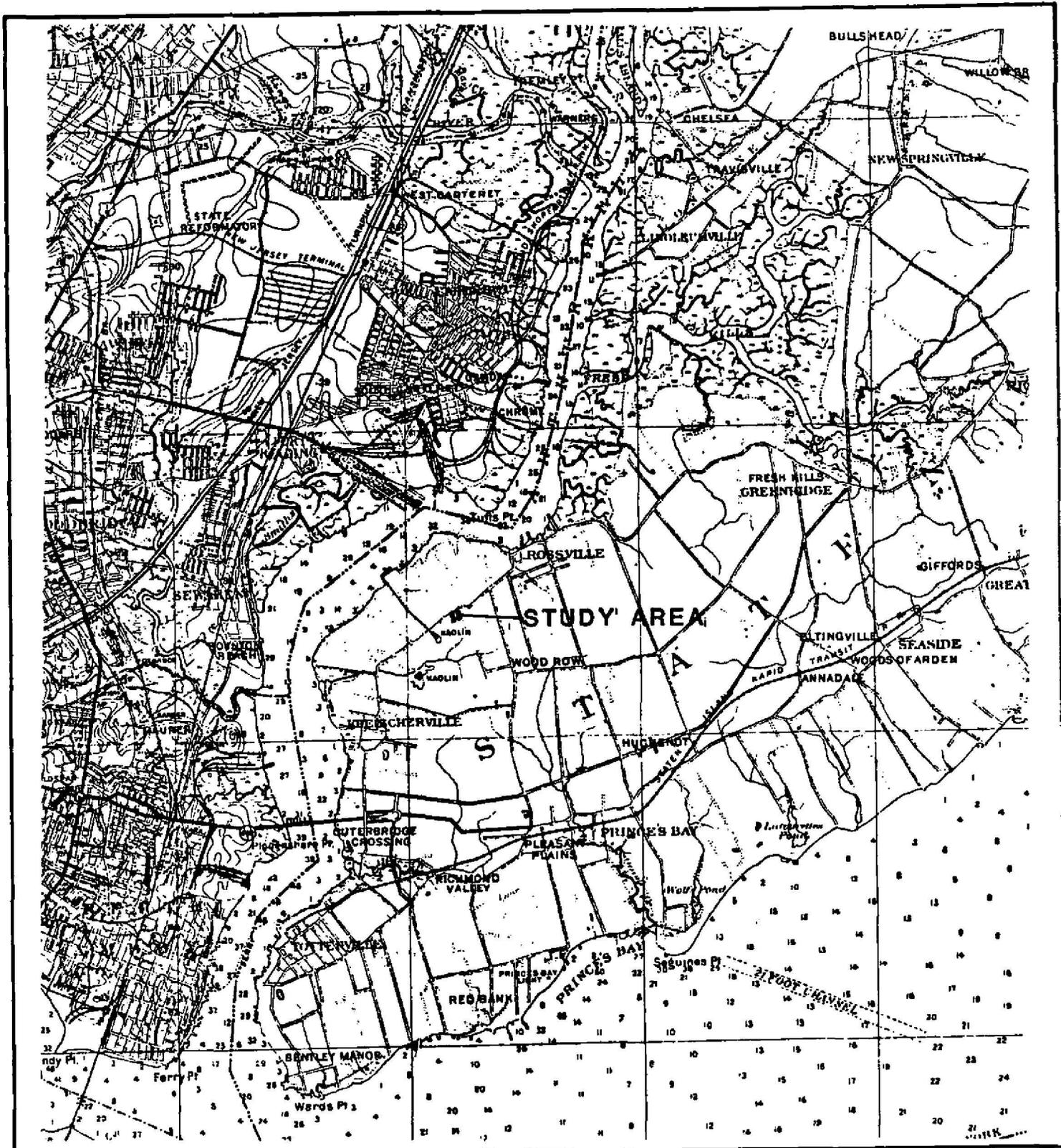


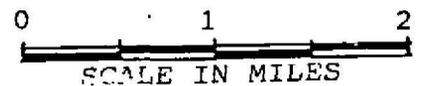
FIGURE 10.

1955 MAP

Base is New Jersey State Atlas Sheet 26

C.C. Vermeule 1880-83, revised 1955

Scale: 1 inch = 1 mile



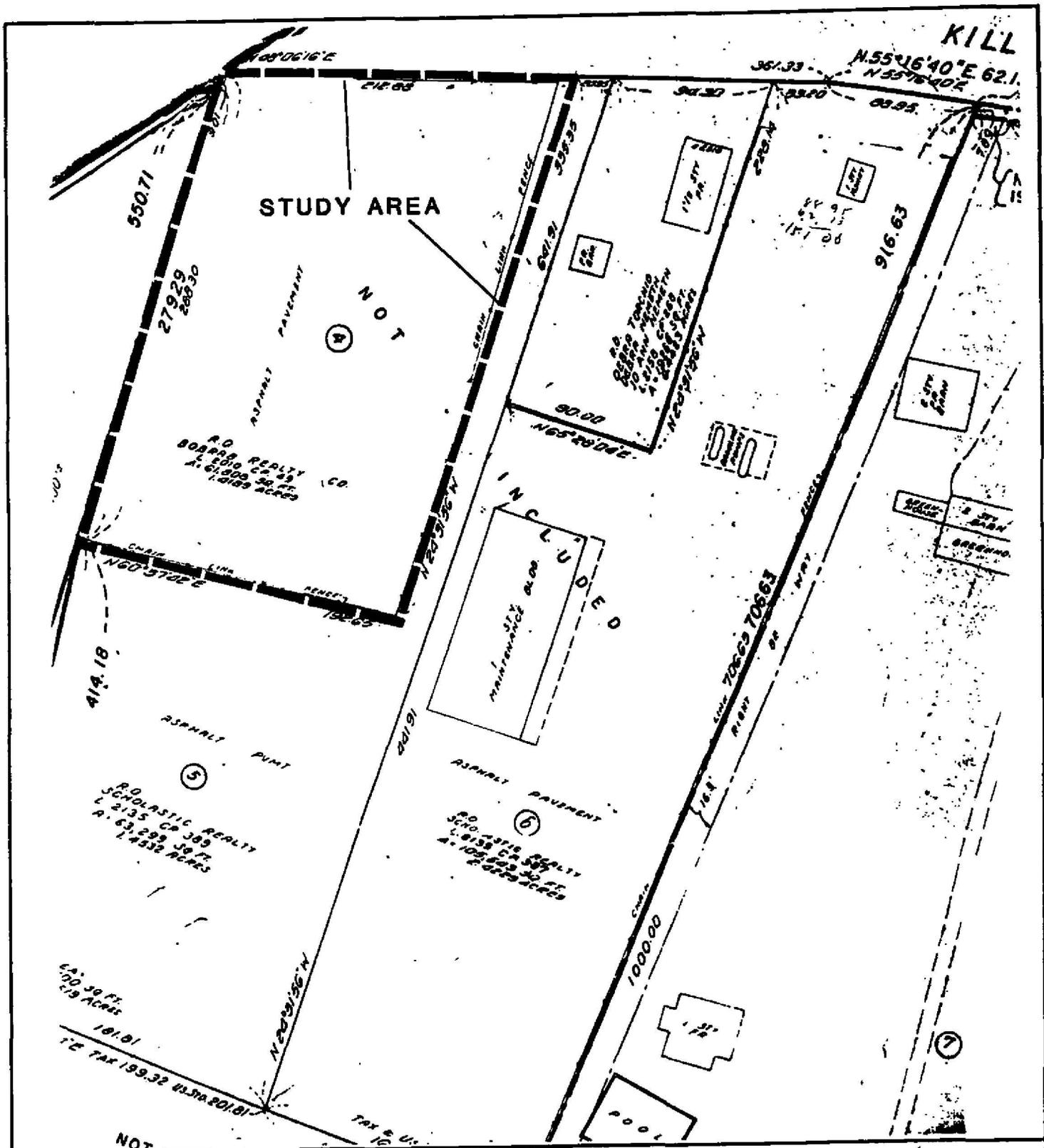
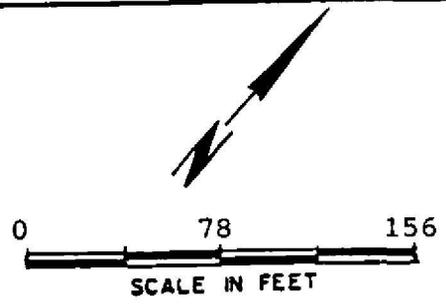


FIGURE 11.

1977 MAP
 Base is Land Aquisition Map
 Clay Pit Pond Park
 Ettinger & Procassini, 1977
 Original Scale: 1 inch = 50 feet
 Reduced Scale: 1 inch = 78 feet



III. FIELD STUDY

At present the study area is level, with metal fence along the street at the north end and the drive which runs south along the east side (Plate 1). A construction trailer is placed near its northwest corner. There is a frame house with a garage and several sheds on the next lot to the east, and a school bus parking lot and maintenance garage is behind (south of) the study tract, and also extends to Arthur Kill Road east of the house, with an access drive separating the house from the study tract.

Several stages of former rural land with modern urban development are visible in the surroundings. Across the road to the northeast are woods with full grown trees, including oak, maple, & sassafras (Plate 2). Directly across the road to the north is cleared land, with a large warehouse project downslope toward the Arthur Kill. Northwest of the study area, across Arthur Kill Road, is an auto wrecking yard, and an AID Auto Supply Store.

The lot immediately west of the study tract is wooded, like the land across Arthur Kill Road to the northeast (Plate 3). This neighboring woodland is part of Clay Pit Pond State Preserve, and has preserved a portion of the natural slope downhill from southeast to northwest which was recorded on the 1913 Borough Map (Fig. 8).

In contrast to that slope, the study area itself is nearly level (Plates 2 & 3). Its surface has evidently been scraped, and sections of construction gravel and broken asphalt paving are visible, as well as piles of sand and rock intended for construction use. Sections of concrete curb were seen near the east side

of the lot. In no place was there a visible natural soil surface. The unfinished concrete foundation of some industrial structure fills the entire western third of the tract, stretching about 250 feet south from the road to near the back line, and about 70 feet wide. This is divided into various sections with cross walls, and soil has been placed within these foundations to create a level dirt floor (Plate 3).

It is noteworthy that near the northwest corner of the tract, which originally was the lowest point, the concrete foundation walls stand at least 6 feet high above the adjacent slope in the wooded Natural Preserve. As the walls run south toward the uphill portion of the wooded lot, they are only 2 to 3 feet high. A slight downhill slope is visually apparent within the graded study lot (Plate 2). However, it is nothing like the 15 to 20 foot drop which was recorded on the 1913 topographic map.

Visual reconnaissance indicates that the uphill (southeast) corner has been lowered, and the lowest (northwest) corner has been raised with fill to create the existing nearly level effect. It is not possible to determine whether the soil removed from the cut was deposited for the fill, but this seems likely. In any case, there are no natural surfaces evident now, and it seems that as much as 6 feet may have been removed at the uphill end, and a similar depth of soil added to the downhill end. Foundation trenches have been dug, and cement foundation walls poured in large parts of the property, creating additional disturbance.

IV. CONCLUSION

Background research show that several prehistoric sites have been reported in the vicinity, but none immediately adjacent to the study area. Most of the finds have been near the Arthur Kill, on bluffs above the shore, or in sandy soil and fields near springs and along the drainage that runs north from Woodrow to Rossville. There is no spring or drainage within the study area. This suggests that before development there was a modest probability that prehistoric evidence existed here.

No early historic development or major historical events occurred on this land. By the time detailed maps are available in the latter 19th century, there were a few farms along Fresh Kills (now Arthur Kill) Road, but none in the study area, and the land was wooded and undeveloped. Cartographic evidence indicates that no farm or residence ever stood on the study area.

Sometime after the 1950's and before 1977 this lot was graded and paved with asphalt. At a later date this paving was removed, and recently a concrete foundation was built along the west side, and additional grading occurred. This disturbance appears to have destroyed any natural surfaces and moved soil in such a way that no original context remains.

We conclude that it is very unlikely that prehistoric archaeological evidence is preserved, buried under construction fill and foundations near the northwest corner, and not at all likely that evidence is preserved toward the uphill end of the lot, where as much as 6 feet of soil has been removed. No further study is recommended.



PLATE 1. View of the street front of the study area, looking across Arthur Kill Road. The steel fence and construction trailer are on the tract, while the frame house, built after 1917, is on adjacent land to the north. (Looking southeast, 10 September 1987).



PLATE 2. View across the study area from the back line of the property, looking toward Arthur Kill Road, which is marked by the telephone poles. This shows the 20th century house and garage on the adjacent property, and the graded land in the foreground and middleground. Concrete foundation is visible at the lower right and the left side of the picture (Looking northeast, 10 September 1987).

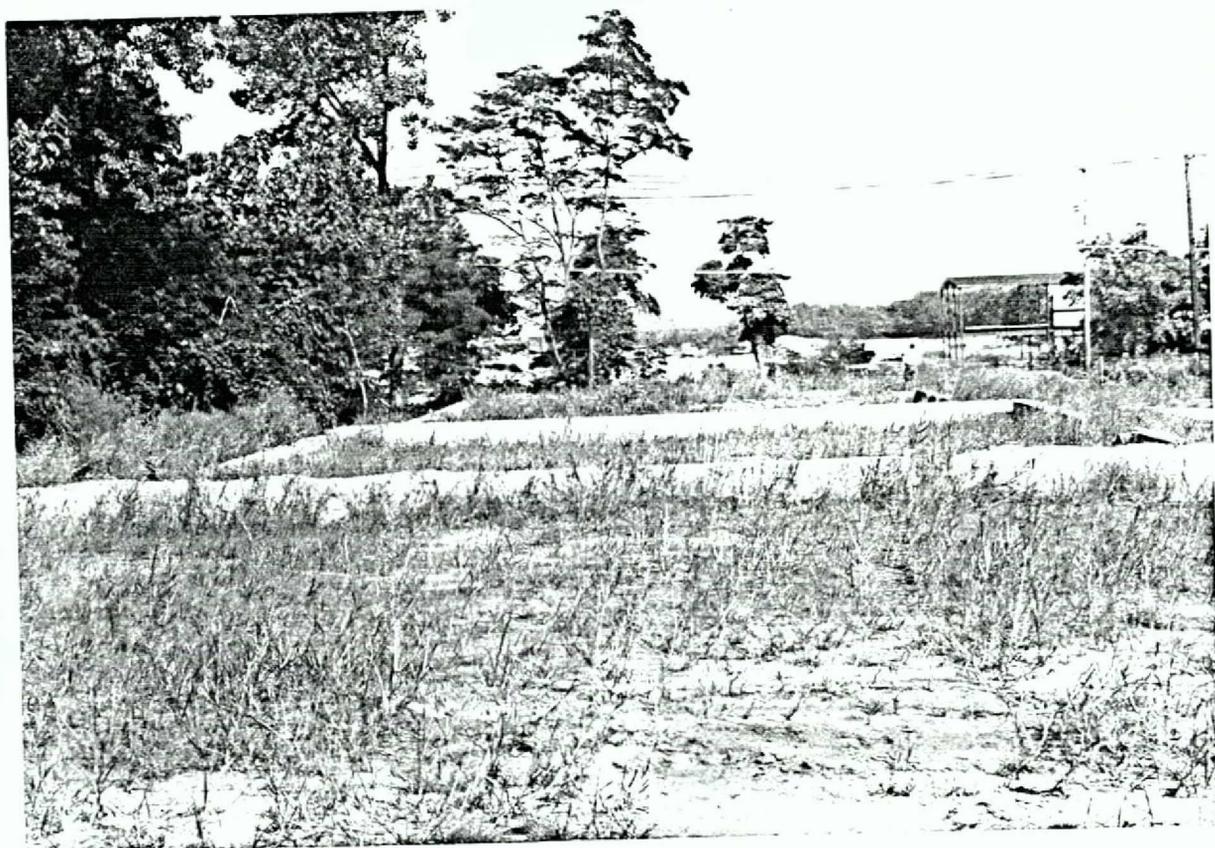


PLATE 3. View from near the back of the study area, looking toward Arthur Kill Road. This shows the concrete foundations which have been built along the entire west side of the tract. Subsequently, they were filled with soil, to create a level surface. At the left side of the picture is undeveloped land (part of the Clay Pit Pond State Preserve) which is 4 to 6 feet lower than the surface of the study area. In the far distance this view looks across the Arthur Kill toward Woodbridge (Looking north, 10 September 1987).

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