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(STATEN
ISLAND)

**GATEWAY
MILLER FIELD**



NATIONAL RECREATION AREA/NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY

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ARCHEOLOGICAL TESTING FOR TWO MILLER FIELD ROAD IMPROVEMENTS,
GATEWAY NATIONAL RECREATION AREA, STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK,
GATE PACKAGE 185

by

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MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

Final archeological clearance for two Miller Field road projects is recommended. The newly-discovered resources are not considered significant according to criterion (d) of the National Register of Historic Places. Further data recovery is not recommended for the minor road improvements in the northern and southern extremes of Miller Field. The non-significant resources were generally found in the top 2.5 ft (below 1989 grade) in five small tests performed in June, 1989. Preliminary clearance was originally granted in a July 12, 1989, Archeological Requirements Memorandum.

The focus of this report is the disturbed soils and the Vanderbilt-related artifacts encountered in the northern road improvement. The disturbance was created by the Army's razing of the Vanderbilt estate between 1920 and 1939. The soils contained recreational, domestic, architectural, and transportation debris that mainly date to the recent part of the 20th century. Fragments of the Spanish Tile roof that represent the razing of former Vanderbilt buildings were found in the fill starting at 1.5 ft and probably continuing deeper than 2.7 ft below the 1989 grade.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Mapping and Dating the Vanderbilt Facilities	3
Documented Ground Disturbance	11
Soil Associations	13
Summary	19
Compliance Recommendations	20
References Cited	22

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Project Location Map	4
Figure 2. Historic Drawing of Miller Field	6
Figure 3. The Vanderbilt Estate in 1898	9
Figure 4. The Construction Corridor of the Northern Road Improvement	16

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Field Description of Soils and Artifacts in Four Shovel Tests	14
Table 2.	Soil Descriptions and Artifact Summary of Shovel Test #9	15

APPENDIX

Plate I.	The Vanderbilt Mansion in 1920	26
Plate II.	The Vanderbilt Gardener's Cottage and Greenhouse Complex in 1920	27
Plate III.	The Vanderbilt Water Tower and Army Housing in 1921	28

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the results of the archival, field and laboratory investigations related to the National Park Service's (NPS) construction of two road improvements on Miller Field, Gateway National Recreation Area, Staten Island, New York. The purpose of the archeological investigations was to maintain compliance with Sections 106 and 110 of the amended National Historic Preservation Act. The investigations were designed to discover and evaluate cultural resources in the northern and southern road improvements on Miller Field. The road improvements will facilitate traffic flow for the visitors using the NPS recreational facilities at Miller Field.

This report contains six sections that focus on the soils and recovered artifacts that are associated with the Vanderbilt estate. This "Introduction" presents the purpose (preceding paragraph), methods, and a brief historical sketch. The second section summarizes information about the location and dates of the buildings existing on the Vanderbilt estate in 1919. The third section describes the Army construction that disturbed the earlier Vanderbilt estate at Miller Field. Descriptive details of the soil conditions are presented in the fourth section. A summary of the investigations is presented in the fifth section. The final section contains compliance recommendations for the newly-discovered archeological resources.

The field methods consisted of four shovel tests that were excavated in June, 1989, in the longer, northern road improvement and one test in the shorter, unpaved portion of the southern improvement. The tests were roughly circular and measured about 1 ft. in diameter and generally penetrated to about 2.5 ft. below the 1989 grade. The excavated soil was screened through 1/4 in. hardware cloth. Collected artifacts were returned to the laboratory.

Historical documents from NPS files at Miller Field Headquarters, from the map archives of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, from the Canarsie Historical Society, and from the Library of Congress were studied. Reports on file at the Eastern Applied Archeology Center and at its parent organization, the Denver Service Center, were also utilized during the background search. These materials were collected and analyzed before, during, and after the June, 1989, field work.

The Miller Army Air Field Historic District is listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its post-1900, military, and transportation themes. The 3.05 acre District includes the seaplane hangar, the Elm Tree Beacon, and the adjacent area in the southern extreme of Miller Field. The "National Register Inventory-Nomination Form" mentions both the Vanderbilt country estate as a potentially significant historic archeological site and its razing for the expansion of the air field (Greenwood and Torres-Reyes 1980: item 8, p. 2).

The present site of Miller Field was owned and operated as a farm and horse breeding station from ca. 1843 to the early 1900's by Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt and his descendants (Unrau and Powell 1981: 4-5). In 1919, the holdings were sold to the United States Government and, after many improvements, became known as Miller Field which is the shortened, military name for the Air Coast Defense Station at New Dorp, Staten Island. Since 1973, Miller Field has been part of Gateway National Recreation Area, a unit of the National Park Service, as shown on Figure 1. The Vanderbilt buildings described in the following section are located on the present NPS site of Miller Field.

MAPPING AND DATING THE VANDERBILT FACILITIES

Nine major structures and building complexes were part of the Vanderbilt estate in 1919. In that year, the Vanderbilt family sold the farm that consisted of 186.7 acres and of the following nine facilities (Green 1922, as cited in Unrau and Powell 1981: 4-5):

1. the mansion or white house,
2. radio building,
3. a large stable complex consisting of a hay barn, a carriage house, and stable,
4. ice house and adjoining masonry bull pen,
5. old water tower,
6. gardener's cottage and adjacent greenhouses,

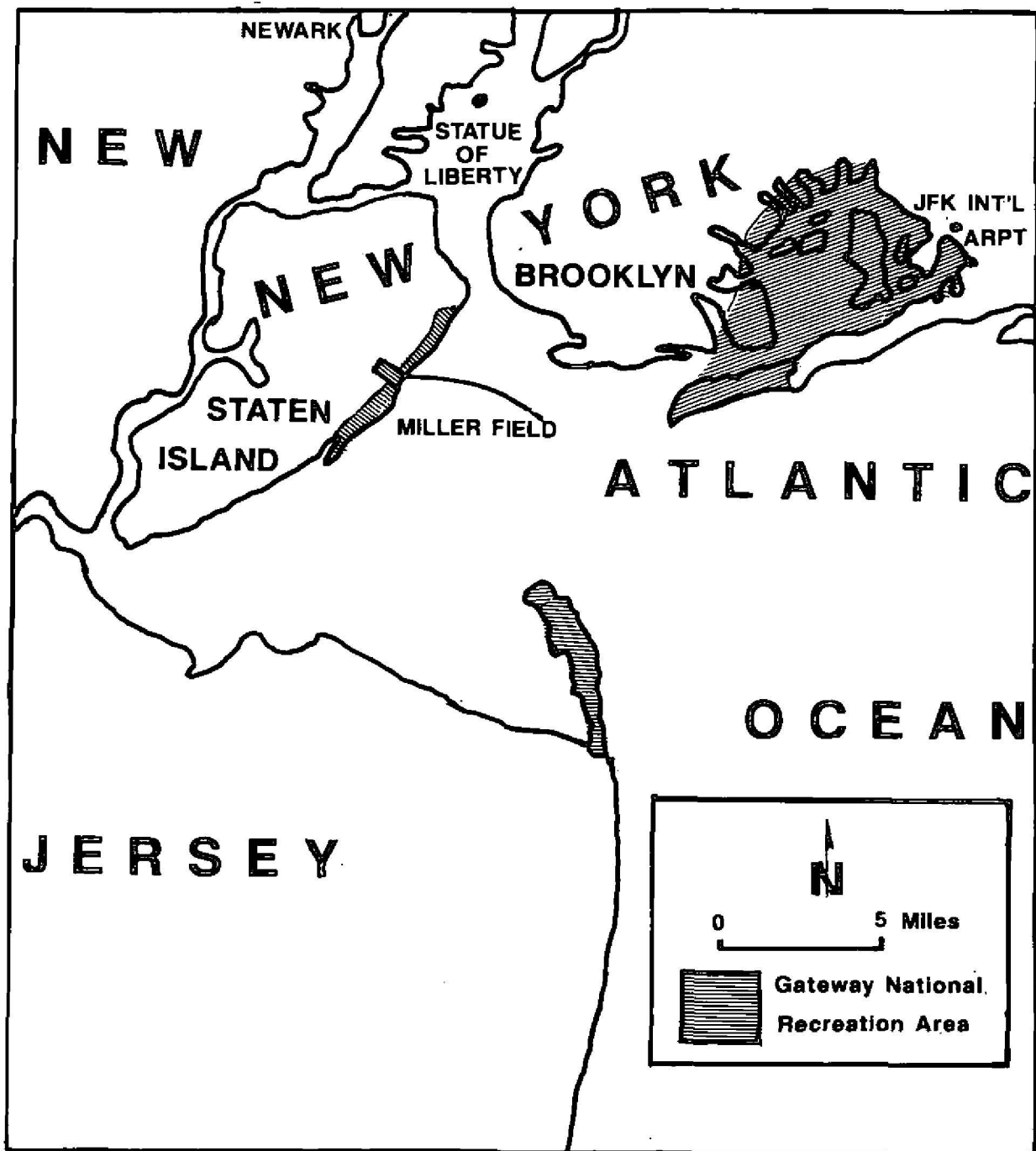


Figure 1. Project Location Map

7. the small old pumping station,
8. dairy house, and
9. dock.

The four shovel tests in the northern road improvement (the "Construction corridor" on Figure 2) were located in the area of the first seven Vanderbilt facilities (above). The mansion was located toward the center of Miller Field, isolated slightly from the remaining clusters of Vanderbilt facilities. The next three facilities (the radio building, and the stable and ice house complexes) comprised a cluster in the northwestern area of Miller Field. Facilities numbered 5-7 (the water tower, gardener's complex, and pumping station) formed a group in the far northern area of Miller Field. In the southern area, the dairy house and dock were located quite distant from the southern road improvement (labelled as ST #11 on Figure 2). A Vanderbilt trotting course and clubhouse complex dating to 1874 in the southern part of the estate (Anonymous 1874) was probably destroyed by 1898 (Robinson 1898). ST #11 was located at the site of this horse complex, while the remaining shovel tests were generally located approximately 700 feet from the nearest Vanderbilt facility.

Concerning construction dates, the mansion (Plate I, Appendix) was built soon after Cornelius Vanderbilt acquired the land in 1843 (Unrau and Powell 1981: 2). The construction of the remaining facilities generally occurred after 1874 (Anonymous 1874).

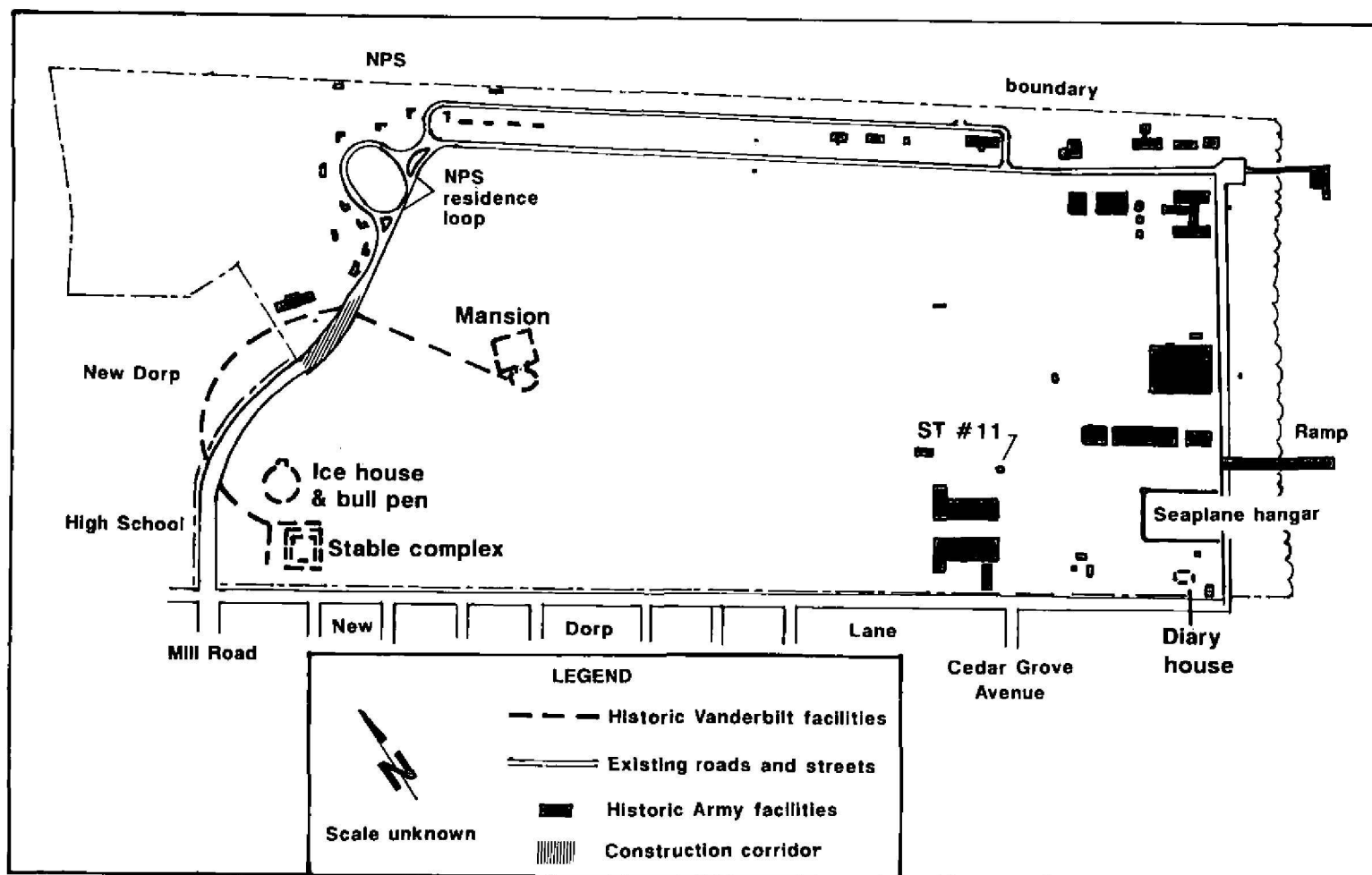


Figure 2. Historic Drawing of Miller Field (based on Unrau and Powell 1981: Figures A and D)

The stable complex ". . . was one of the last buildings erected during the Vanderbilt's time." (Unrau and Powell 1981: 4). All Vanderbilt buildings except the greenhouses and the main residence had roofs made of Spanish Tile. Many buildings on the estate were built of brick (Plates II and III, Appendix).

Concerning razing dates, all Vanderbilt facilities were demolished between 1920 and 1939. The first Army contract to mention demolition was awarded on June 26, 1920. A 1939 drawing showed no standing Vanderbilt buildings (Unrau and Powell 1981: 24 and 67, Figure C). The following summary of Vanderbilt facilities follows the order of the above 1919 listing.

The mansion or white house was the main family residence. It was moved to the interior of their property (Figure 2) between 1875 and 1897 from the earlier location at the intersection of Mill Road and New Dorp Lane in the northwestern area (Anonymous 1874 and Robinson 1898). The mansion was adaptively re-used as an Officers' Club by the Army (Unrau and Powell 1981:23) and was dismantled in 1936 (Staten Island Advance 1936b and Milner 1978:67).

The radio building, with its tile roof and irregular elevation, (Whitelaw #93; see citation note in "References Cited" section) was also part of the northwestern grouping of Vanderbilt buildings. It was probably the building with an irregular foundation outline

that was adjacent to the stable complex on Figure 3. The locations of the stable and ice house complexes was illustrated on Robinson's (1898) map and are labelled on Figure 2.

In the northern cluster, the greenhouses and the old water tower were also clearly identified by Robinson (Figure 3). The gardener's cottage and greenhouses were demolished between June 26, 1920, and June 30, 1921. The latter date marked the final payment for the general contract that specified their demolition. The gardener's cottage was a two-story building with a central, ridgeline chimney. The razing of the water tower was begun by January 18, 1936, as shown in a Staten Island Advance photograph of the same date.

The detached square building close to the greenhouses on the Robinson map may be the pumping station, because its shape matched that shown on a 1920 photograph (Whitelaw #58). The Vanderbilt pumping station may have been the same building that was identified as the power plant in Army correspondence (Green 1922). If so, the pumping station was destroyed with the greenhouses and gardener's cottage by June 30, 1921. The adjacent, U-shaped building, was also unidentified by Robinson (1898).

In the southern area, the dairy house was located (Figure 2) near the shoreline along New Dorp Lane (Green 1922 and Milner 1976: 67). Unrau and Powell (1981: 65, Figure A) also showed two nearby buildings that may have been part of the dairy complex in 1919.

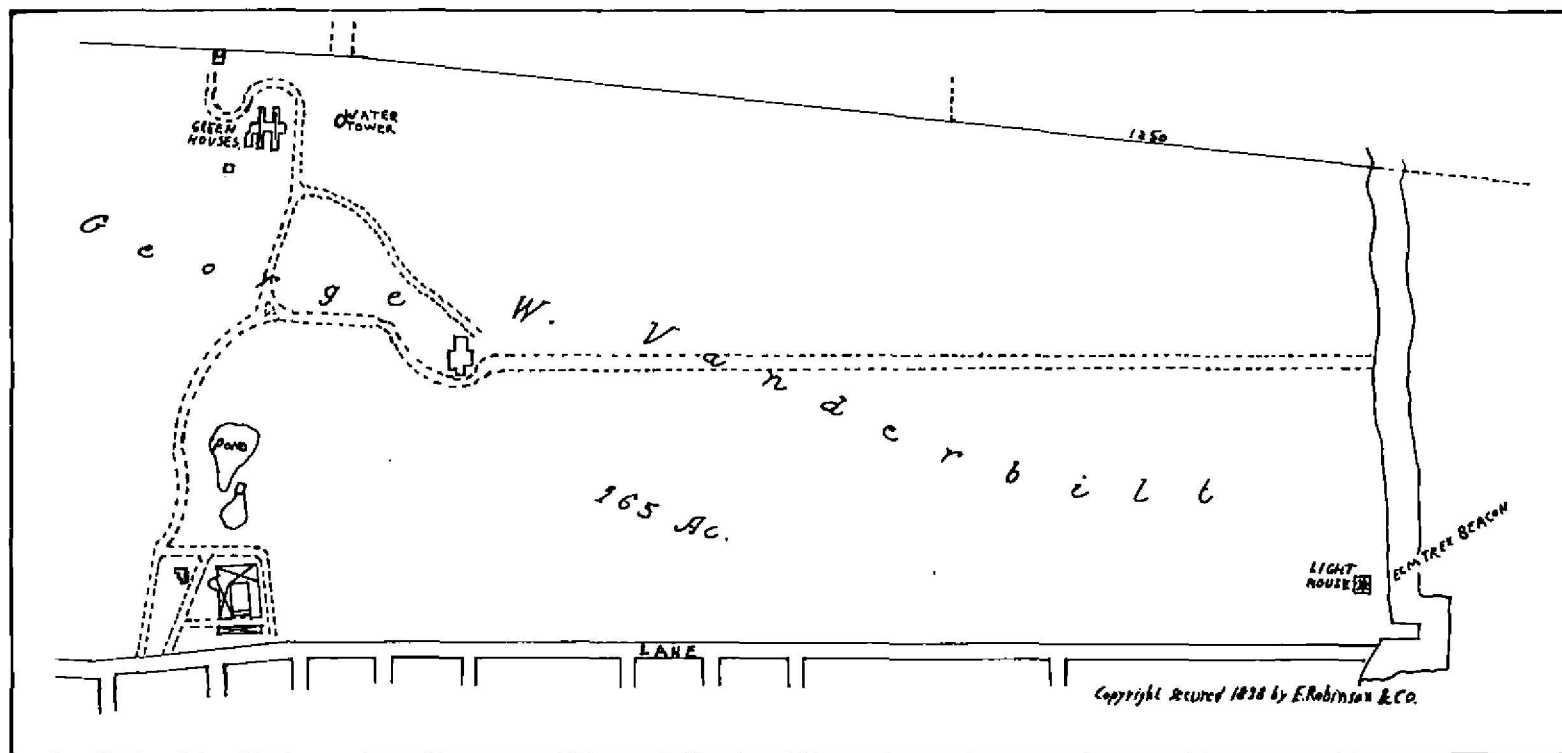


Figure 3. The Vanderbilt Estate in 1898 (a tracing of Robinson's 1898 sketch)

A Vanderbilt dock was located (Whitlock 1910: 13) in the vicinity of the Elm Tree Beacon (Figure 3). The dock may have been destroyed during the construction of the seaplane ramps in 1920. The Beacon was a navigational aide that was in operation before the Vanderbilt period and was still in use during the 1919-21 construction of Miller Field (Greenwood and Torres-Reyes 1980: item 7, p. 2; and Green 1922).

Four Vanderbilt facilities--the mansion, stable complex, ice house/bull pen, and dairy house--were adaptively re-used in various ways as part of the Air Coast Defense Station beginning as early as 1919. Modifications for the adaptive re-use of these four facilities was accomplished under the same construction contract as the razing of the pumping station (viz., power plant), gardener's cottage, greenhouse (Unrau and Powell 1981: 23-24). The dairy house and stable complex also served as temporary construction offices respectively for the Army and for the contractor's personnel beginning in 1919 (Unrau and Powell 1981: 23-5 and 78-9). All Vanderbilt buildings were demolished by 1939 (Unrau and Powell 1981: 67, Figure C), resulting in ground disturbance that is the subject of the following section.

DOCUMENTED GROUND DISTURBANCE

The Army's 20th century construction of approximately 44 new buildings (Unrau and Powell 1981: 78-89) on Miller Field disturbed portions of the pre-existing Vanderbilt estate. On-site construction of the Army's hangars and support facilities in the southern area began on November 17, 1919 (Unrau and Powell 1981: 24). Construction of most residential buildings began after the award of the second contract of June 26, 1920.

In the northwestern area, two Vanderbilt facilities (the stable and ice house complexes) were rehabilitated for the Army's use. Utility connections, as well as Army roads, security fences, and landscaping were possible sources of ground disturbance in this area.

The construction of Army housing in the northern area around the NPS residence loop (Figure 2) created serious disturbances to the Vanderbilt estate. The first disturbances in this area were the razing of the gardener's cottage/greenhouses and of the pumping station. This razing was followed by the construction of about 17 Army houses (Plate III, Appendix) that were completed by June 30, 1921. Sewer connections for the Bachelor Officers Quarters (Unrau and Powell 1981:28), as well as the 1936 demolitions of the water tower and mansion, were other disturbances.

In the southern portion of Miller Field, the Army construction disturbed the dock, dairy house, and remnants of the trotting complex. The dock near the Elm Tree Beacon was probably destroyed by the construction of the seaplane ramp into New York Bay. Utilities for the rehabilitated dairy house, its subsequent razing, and the below-grade foundations of newly constructed aviation buildings (Unrau and Powell 1981: 25) created in-ground disturbances of the Vanderbilt farm landscape and trotting complex. Cinders and concrete were used initially for paving different areas surrounding the newly-constructed hangars (Unrau and Powell 1981: 31-32).

Ground leveling of the Vanderbilt rural farm landscape for the construction of the original sod runway was probably minimal for several reasons. First, Miller Field was part of the relatively flat Coastal Plain Province which Milner (1978: 4) has described with such terms as ". . . minimal relief and slope [and] largely a continuation of the featureless Continental Shelf. . ." Secondly, Major General Menoher, Director of the Army Air Service, described the existing conditions in 1919 thusly: "This field can be used as it now stands for a landing field. . . . This site is practically level and would require [a] minimum amount of fill for either temporary or permanent construction." (Menoher 1919, as cited in Unrau and Powell 1981: 16-17). Third, plowing of the farm fields during the Vanderbilt occupancy may have contributed to the flatness of Miller Field. Whitelaw's photographs supported Menoher's claim of the general flatness of the land.

SOIL ASSOCIATIONS

Three soil levels in the shovel tests represented the 1920-1939 period of razing of all Vanderbilt buildings, based on finding four Spanish Tile roofing fragments in association with 20th century debris in the same levels (Tables 1 and 2). In ST #3, the lower soil level that contained the roofing fragment occurred from 0.85 to 2.3 ft. below the 1989 grade. In ST #6, two roofing fragments were found in the profile of the same soil stratum at depths of 1.5 and 1.8 ft. below grade. In ST #9, the deep level with the roofing fragment was between 2.35 and 2.7 ft. below the 1989 grade. These sandy soils were slightly compacted or even loose and brown to mottled brown in color.

These tests that contained Vanderbilt roofing fragments were centrally located among the the former northern and northwestern clusters of Vanderbilt buildings. Two (#6 and #9) of these three tests were located on raised ground overlooking the cut for an abandoned road that formerly connected the parking lot for New Dorp High School and the NPS residence loop (Figure 4). ST #3 was located on the downslope into this road cut; the probability of erosion on this downslope invalidated the soil depth at which the roofing fragment was found. ST #1 was located in the shoulder of the earlier, temporary road. This lower ground continued to the north beyond the boundaries of Miller Field.

TABLE 1. FIELD DESCRIPTION OF SOILS AND ARTIFACTS IN FOUR SHOVEL TESTS.

LEVEL	DEPTH* (ft. bgs)	SOIL CHARACTERISTICS	ARTIFACT SUMMARY
SHOVEL TEST #1			
1	0-.6	Brown, stony, compact	Road gravel, coal
2	.6-1.1	<u>Slightly</u> lighter brown; stony; compact	--
3	1.1+	Road gravel, densely packed	1 sherd-refined earthenware
SHOVEL TEST #3			
1	0-.85	Brown, stony, not compact	Road gravel, coal, post-1900 bottle fragment, historic ceramic sherds, sewer pipe fragments
2	.85-2.3+	Brown; not stony, like a plow zone all the way down; not compact	Road gravel, coal, Span. Tile fragment
SHOVEL TEST #6			
1	0-.65	Brown, compact	Road gravel, plastic
2	.65-2.4+	Brown with some lighter brown mixed in; much less compact toward bottom, stony.	2 Span. Tile fragments, road gravel, coal, white earthenware, brick
SHOVEL TEST #11			
1	0-.25	Brown, stony topsoil	--
2	.25-.6	Mottled brown to yellow brown; compact	Modern assemblage, oyster shell
3	.6-1.3	Very compact, stony, mottled brown and light brown	--
4	1.3-2.3+	Reddish-brown beach sand and gravel	--
* Depths are expressed in feet below the 1989 ground surface (ft. bgs).			

TABLE 2. SOIL DESCRIPTIONS AND ARTIFACT SUMMARY OF SHOVEL TEST #9

LEVEL	DEPTH (ft. bgs)	FIELD DESCRIPTION	MUNSELL DESCRIPTION	ARTIFACT SUMMARY
1	0-.45	Brown topsoil, compact	10YR 3/3 Very dark gray	Cellophane
2	.45-.85	Mottled light brown, stony, compact	10YR 6/4 Light yellowish brown	Coal
3	.85-1.3	Mottled reddish-brown, stony	7.5YR 5/6 Strong brown	Road gravel, coal, wire nail
4	1.3-1.6	Brown-yellow/brown, mottled, stony	10YR 6/6 Brownish yellow	Coal
5	1.6-2.35	Brown/light brown, mottled, stony, less compact	10YR 5/6 Yellowish brown	Road gravel, coal
6	2.35-2.7+	Mottled browns stony, almost loose	10YR 5/4 Yellowish brown	Road gravel, Span. Tile fragment
<p>Depths are expressed in feet below the 1989 ground surface (ft. bgs).</p> <p>Readings were made on dry samples under florescent lighting on December 6, 1989.</p>				

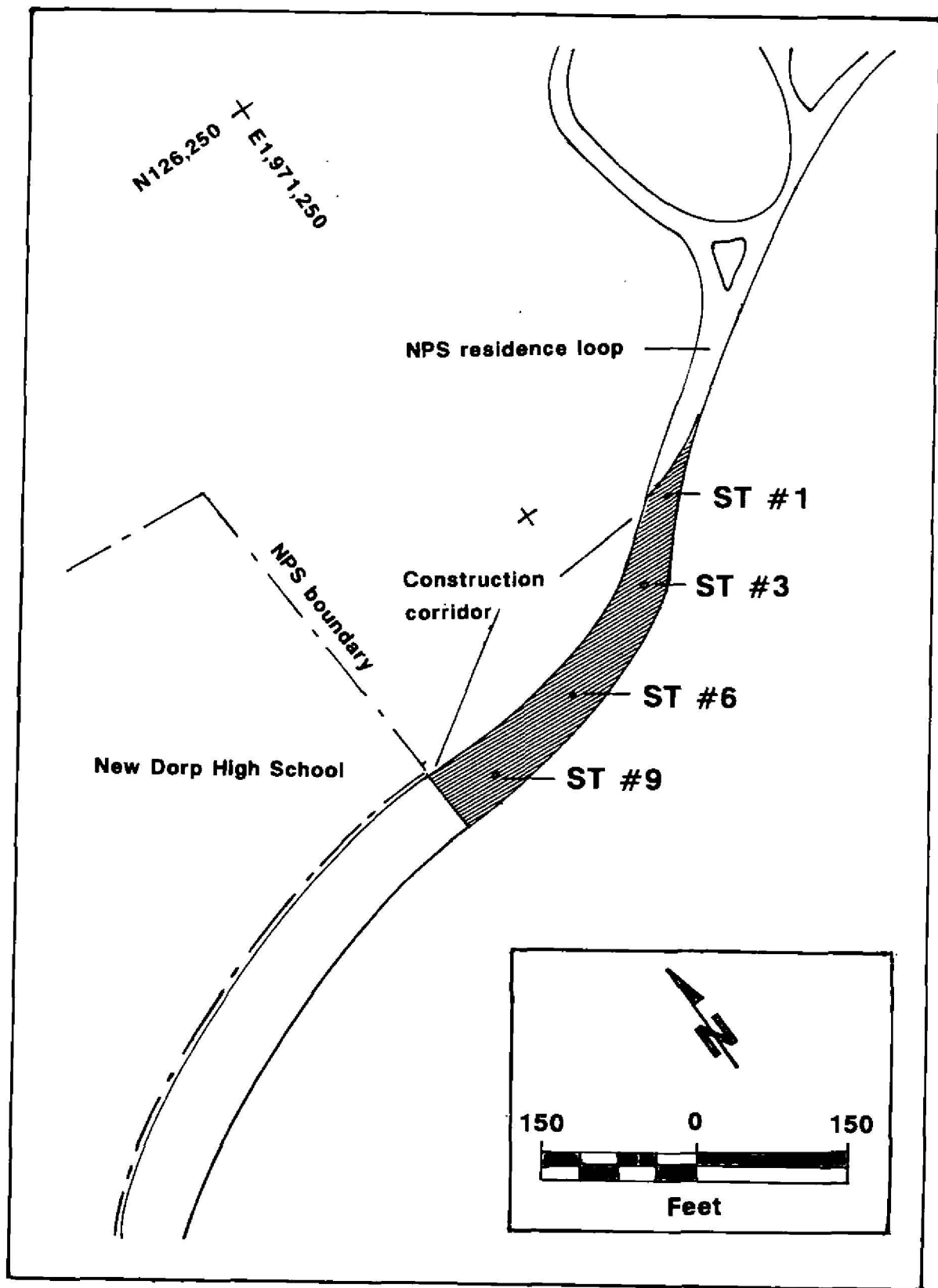


Figure 4. The Construction Corridor of the Northern Road Improvement (modified from NPS drawing 646/41,108; sheet 3/33; June, 1989)

The three levels that represented the 1920-1939 period also contained road gravel and coal. The coal was possibly used as heating fuel for the Vanderbilt buildings or for the Army housing. Level 2 of ST #6 contained Vanderbilt roofing fragments and also yielded a small brick fragment. Brick was commonly used for exterior walls and for chimneys in the Vanderbilt buildings. The roofing fragments were small and thumb-nail sized with the characteristic curvature, thickness, and reddish-orange color of Spanish Tile.

The higher soils without roofing fragments in ST #6 and #9 were generally more compact than the deeper soils with the roofing fragments. These higher, more compact soils probably reflected the use of this area as an overflow parking lot for New Dorp High School and for the NPS athletic fields. All soils in ST #3 were loose, representing the exposed, eroding, and softer edge of the cut for the former connecting road.

Located in the southern part of Miller Field, ST #11 possibly contained the only undisturbed soil (in level 4) in the five tests. This deep level consisted of reddish-brown beach sand and gravel, a description that partially matched Menoher's (1919) statement that the subsoil was gravel. In contrast to the two higher soil units, level 4 did not have the mottled characteristic of dredged sands and also did not contain historic artifacts. This possibly undisturbed level 4 started at 1.3 ft below the 1989 grade and continued to at least 2.3 ft deep.

Shovel test #11 differed artifactually from ST #3, 6, and 9 to the north primarily because of its absence of Spanish Tile roofing fragments. This absence may be attributable to the fewer Vanderbilt buildings in the southern location of ST #11. This test also differed from the northern tests because of its unique presence of oyster shell and its unique absence of the coal and road gravel that were found in all other tests. The modern assemblage of bottle fragments and pull-tabs in the higher level 2 of ST #11 suggests very recent recreational use of the adjacent athletic fields.

Shovel test #11 was located in the center of the former Vanderbilt horse complex, but neither equestrian- nor Vanderbilt-related artifacts were encountered. ST #11 was also located among the southern cluster of Army buildings where cinders were originally used as paving. However, cinders were not encountered in ST #11 (nor in any other test conducted in 1989). No evidence of Army construction of the many aviation support buildings in the southern extreme of Miller Field was found in ST #11. Apparently, the Army construction debris was removed. This test was also in the area of the intersection of Cedar Grove Avenue and New Dorp Lane, where the 17th century Britton Cottage was located (Milner 1978: 68). However, corresponding 17th century artifacts were not encountered in the 1989 testing.

SUMMARY

The Army's historically-documented razing of Vanderbilt buildings occurred in the 1920-39 period. The razing was archeologically represented in three soil levels that most reliably measured between 1.5 and 2.7 ft. below the 1989 grade in a 250 ft. length of the northern road improvement. The mixture of Vanderbilt building materials with 20th century debris in the middle and lowest soil levels is evidence of the 20th century razing. The razed remains of tile roof or brick Vanderbilt buildings that were located in the central, northwestern, or northern areas were represented in these soil levels. The 1843-1919 period of Vanderbilt ownership, including the original construction of the buildings, was probably not represented in the relatively shallow tests that were done in 1989.

The higher soils overlying those associated with the Army's razing represented compacted fill material from the post-1939 period. This fill was compacted by 1) Army heavy machinery and 2) by automobile parking for New Dorp High School and for the NPS recreational facilities.

Concerning the southern test, level 2 of ST #11 represented the recent recreational use of the National Park Service's athletic facilities on Miller Field. No Vanderbilt-related evidence was found in this test. Undisturbed soils (with no cultural remains) may have been reached in the sandy gravels of level 4.

Overall, the Army's disturbance to the northwestern Vanderbilt facilities was less than in other areas of the estate because of the lack of new Army construction in the northwestern cluster. Possible buried foundations of the radio building, the original location of the mansion, and the ice house and stable complexes may still exist beneath the 1920-39 soils. The Army created maximum disturbance in the northern and southern clusters of Vanderbilt facilities by its program of demolition and new construction.

COMPLIANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

The artifacts discovered in the 1989 shovel testing are not considered significant in terms of criterion (d) of the National Register. The materials were located in disturbed contexts and were dominated by recent 20th century debris. The Vanderbilt artifacts in particular did not result in any new knowledge about the Vanderbilt estate, but simply confirmed information that is documented in the historical record. Thus, the newly-discovered, in-ground materials have already yielded the maximum information that they contain.

The disturbed Vanderbilt artifacts discovered in the 1989 testing were created by the Army's demolition of the Vanderbilt estate. The newly-discovered materials that archeologically represented the demolition are not considered significant in National Register terms. No military items that pertained to the themes of the Miller Field

Historic District were discovered during the 1989 shovel testing. The field testing and the documented Vanderbilt buildings were located beyond the boundaries of the Miller Field Historic District. For the above reasons, the archeological resources discovered during the in-ground testing of 1989 are not considered eligible for the National Register. Further compliance-related, archeological investigations for these two Miller Field road improvements are not necessary.

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Whitlock Realty Co.

1910 Promotional brochure, unknown title. On file at the Miller Field Headquarters, Staten Island Unit, Gateway National Recreation Area.

NOTE: A number of historic photographs were cited by name and number, e.g. Whitelaw #56. Major M. Whitelaw was the Constructing Quarter Master of Miller Field on January 20, 1920, and that information is part of an original inscription on each photograph. The number (e.g. #56) was an identification number for the filing of photographs at the Miller Field Headquarters. This filing number was not part of the original photograph, but was used herein to cite the photographs.

APPENDIX

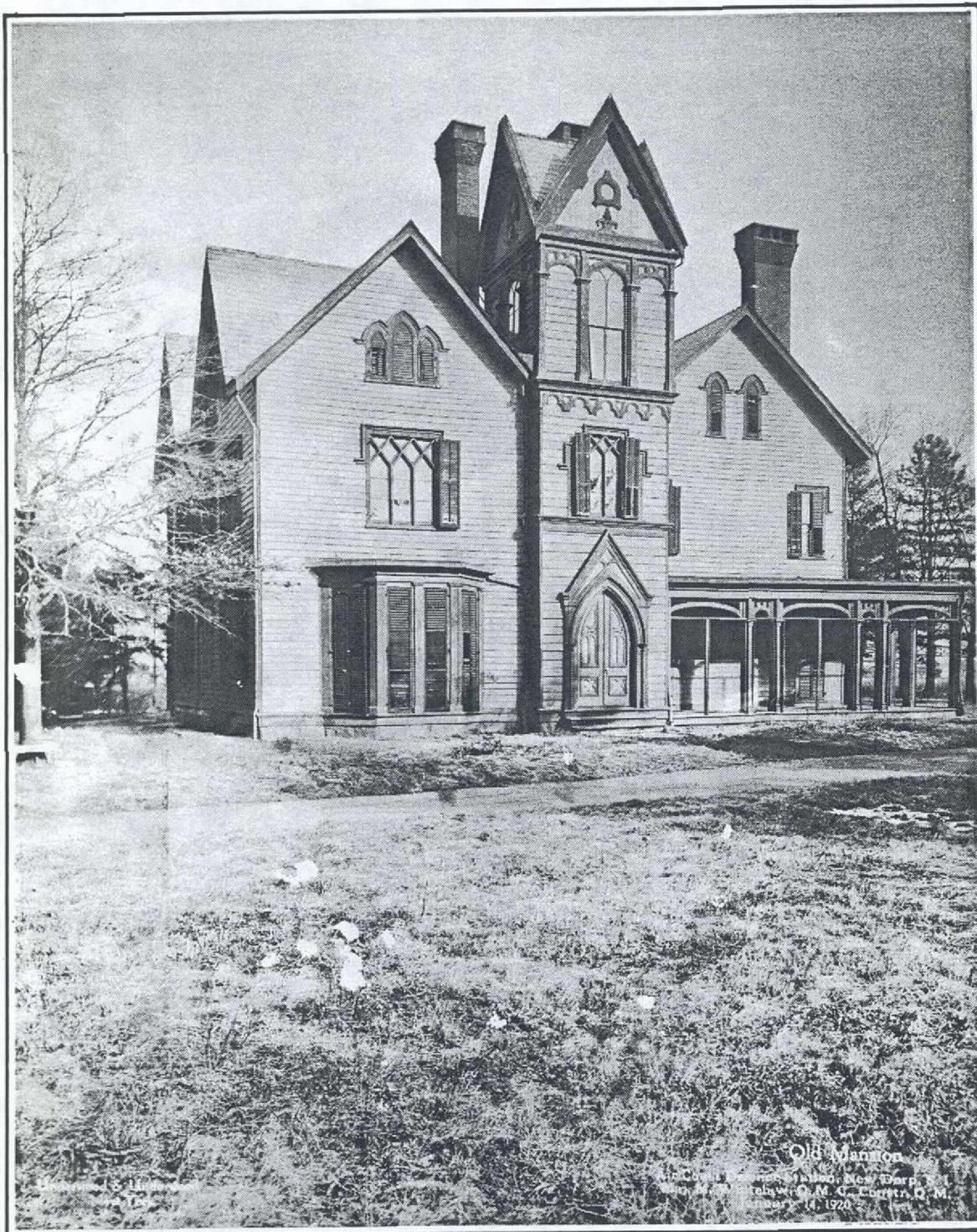


Plate I. The Vanderbilt Mansion in 1920 (Whitelaw #56).

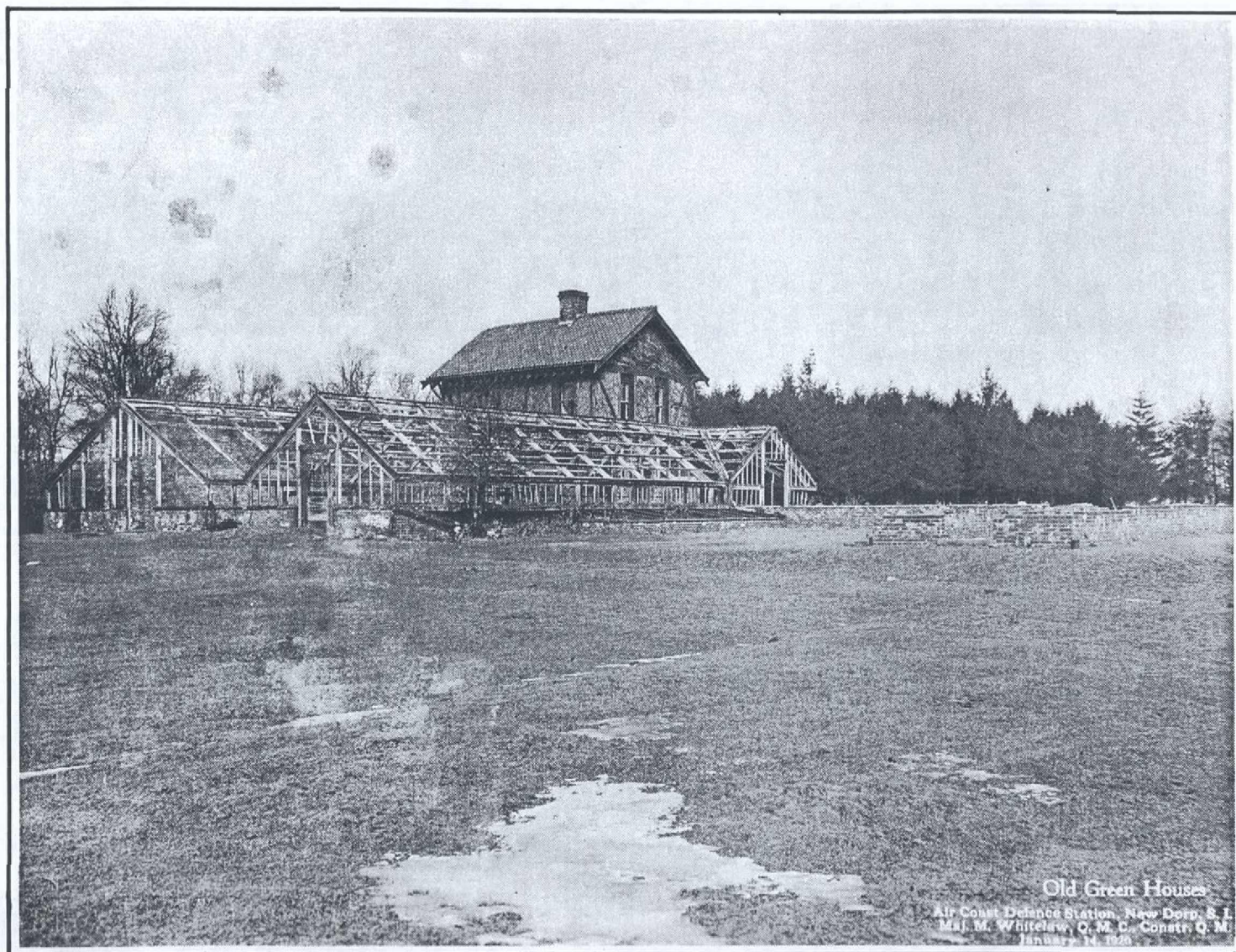


Plate II. The Vanderbilt Gardener's Cottage and Greenhouse Complex in 1920 (Whitelaw #64).

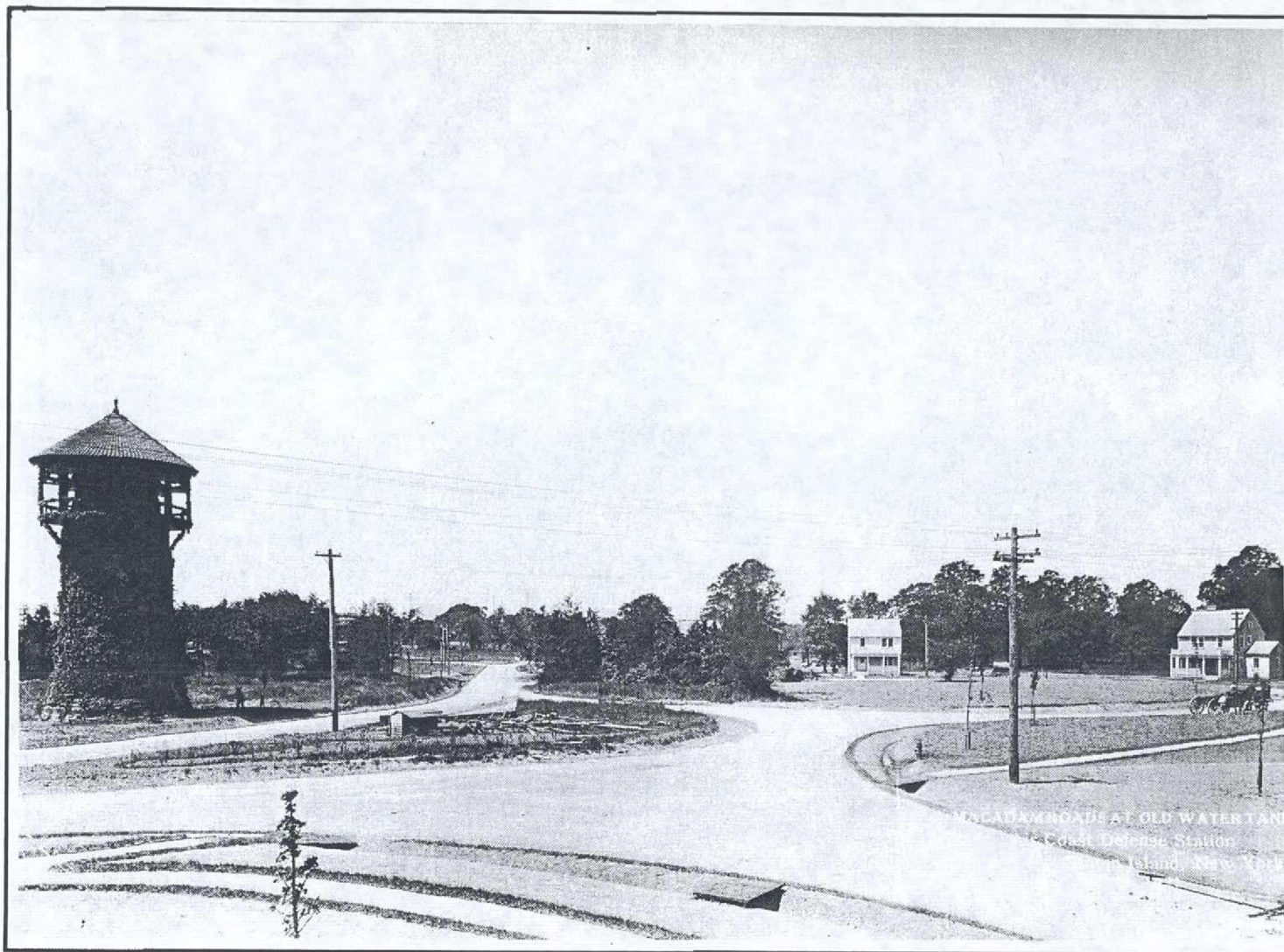


Plate III. The Vanderbilt Water Tower and Army Housing in 1921 (Whitelaw #96).

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities to protect and conserve our land and water, energy and minerals, fish and wildlife, parks and recreation areas, and to ensure the wise use of all these resources. The Department also has major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.