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CULTURAL RESOURCES SENSITIVITY SURVEY

OF THE

FOREST PLAZA PROJECT SITE
STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK

by

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February, 1986

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Project Description

A proposed shopping center is planned for an eleven-acre parcel of land located on Forest Avenue, Staten Island, New York. This development is called "FOREST PLAZA" and will consist of a supermarket, department store, satellite or retail stores, and parking facilities.

This proposed project was reviewed by The City of New York Landmarks Preservation Commission. The Commission's comments pertaining to the Forest Plaza site are as follows (Woodruff 1985):

1. "The adjacent Staten Island Granite Company Site (former)....may be of significance as an historic site. The effect of the proposed project on this site should be addressed."
2. "The project zone is in an area developed in the 1850's. Prior to that, it was an area of Indian habitation. Near the project zone are the...Indian sites of Goodrich, Old Place, Bull's Head, and Bloomfield. An archaeological documentary study is required to assess the site's archaeological potential."

This report presents the results of a cultural resource sensitivity survey of the proposed Forest Plaza development site conducted by Sheffield Archaeological Consultants of Wayne, New Jersey for Sanford Nalitt and Associated Companies of Staten Island, New York. The purpose of this survey was to evaluate the archaeological potential of the project area; that is, to locate or determine the possible existence of prehistoric or historic sites within the study area that might be affected by the proposed construction of the shopping plaza, and to recommend appropriate measures with respect to such sites if they exist.

Archaeological remains are vital and irreplaceable resources for future research and for an objective approach to cultural interpretation of any community or region. Historical or prehistoric resources represent the tangible remains of past ways of life, the study of which can provide us with a better understanding of human culture in this region. This cultural resource survey is a contribution to such better understanding in its attempt to locate, record, and preserve the vestiges of our historic past.

B. Study Area

The proposed Forest Plaza shopping center site is located in the Mariners Harbor-Graniteville section of northwestern Staten Island. Specifically, it is on the south side of Forest Avenue, between Van Name Avenue on the east and Bruckner Avenue on the west. The site can be located on the Elizabeth, New Jersey, and Arthur Kill, New York-New Jersey Quadrangles, United States Geological Survey Maps, 7.5' series. (See FIGURE 1.)

The study area is an eleven-acre parcel of land with approximately 875 feet of frontage on Forest Avenue. It is bounded by residential dwellings on the east, and vacant land to the west and south. The Baron Hirsch Cemetery is also located on the south side of the site. The Forest Plaza project area has seen considerable use in historic times. This historic land use together with a description of the property will be presented later in this report.



FIGURE 1: Portions of U.S.G.S. maps, Elizabeth and Arthur Kill Quadrangles, showing location of the Forest Plaza Project Area.

II. ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH DESIGN

This cultural resource sensitivity survey was carried out in three basic steps:

A. Background Research

In an attempt to identify known or potential prehistoric and historic cultural resources, an intensive search of the literature was carried out at the Archives of the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, the Richmond Borough Hall, and at the Staten Island Historical Society, Richmondtown, Staten Island. From the outset, the accumulation of historical documentation of all types pertaining to the project area was considered to be of primary importance. Maps of the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries formed the basis for the start of the sensitivity survey.

Several contacts were made with individuals knowledgeable in the history and prehistory of the area. Interviews were conducted with historians, local residents, and avocational archaeologists/collectors to elicit information about the location and nature of prehistoric sites, and to determine land use within the project area. Primary data was sought from all of the sources consulted including archaeological site reports and personal knowledge of site locations.

B. Field Survey

A careful walk-over reconnaissance of the Forest Plaza site was conducted to locate and identify visually any existing sites and to evaluate the archaeological potential of the area. This aspect of the research design had to address several problems or conditions that were present within the project area.

First, the field survey had to contend with a dense ground cover in most of the entire study area. As a result, the reconnaissance survey was hampered by areas of low visibility due to the presence of phragmites, leaves, shrubs, goldenrod, rye grass, and other flora. However, all areas were examined closely several times during the course of this project. Secondly, some of the study area has undergone considerable disturbance in the past as a result of dumping, construction, and destruction activity.

In summary, it was not possible to detect the presence of prehistoric remains over much of the area because of the ground cover. Nevertheless, all areas that were exposed through erosion, travel (paths), or other natural or cultural agents were carefully examined. The areas of disturbance will be described later in this report as well as the effect of such activities on the integrity of potential cultural resources.

C. Environmental Analysis

The prediction of prehistoric site locations involves the use of various kinds of information including environmental, archaeological, historic, and ethnohistoric data. Based upon an analysis of the data in each of these categories, a determination was made regarding the degree of archaeological sensitivity of the Forest Avenue construction site. At this particular site, environmental and geomorphological conditions were important criteria in developing a hypothesis regarding the presence or absence of prehistoric cultural resources at the site. In making this determination, the following environmental factors were considered:

1. Topography: Variables within this category include landform, location of the project area within the landform, and elevation. This information was derived from the U.S.G.S. topographic map and our own field reconnaissance.

2. Geology and Soils: The factors considered here are type and areal extent of bedrock formations and soils. The permeability of the soil within the site is also considered.

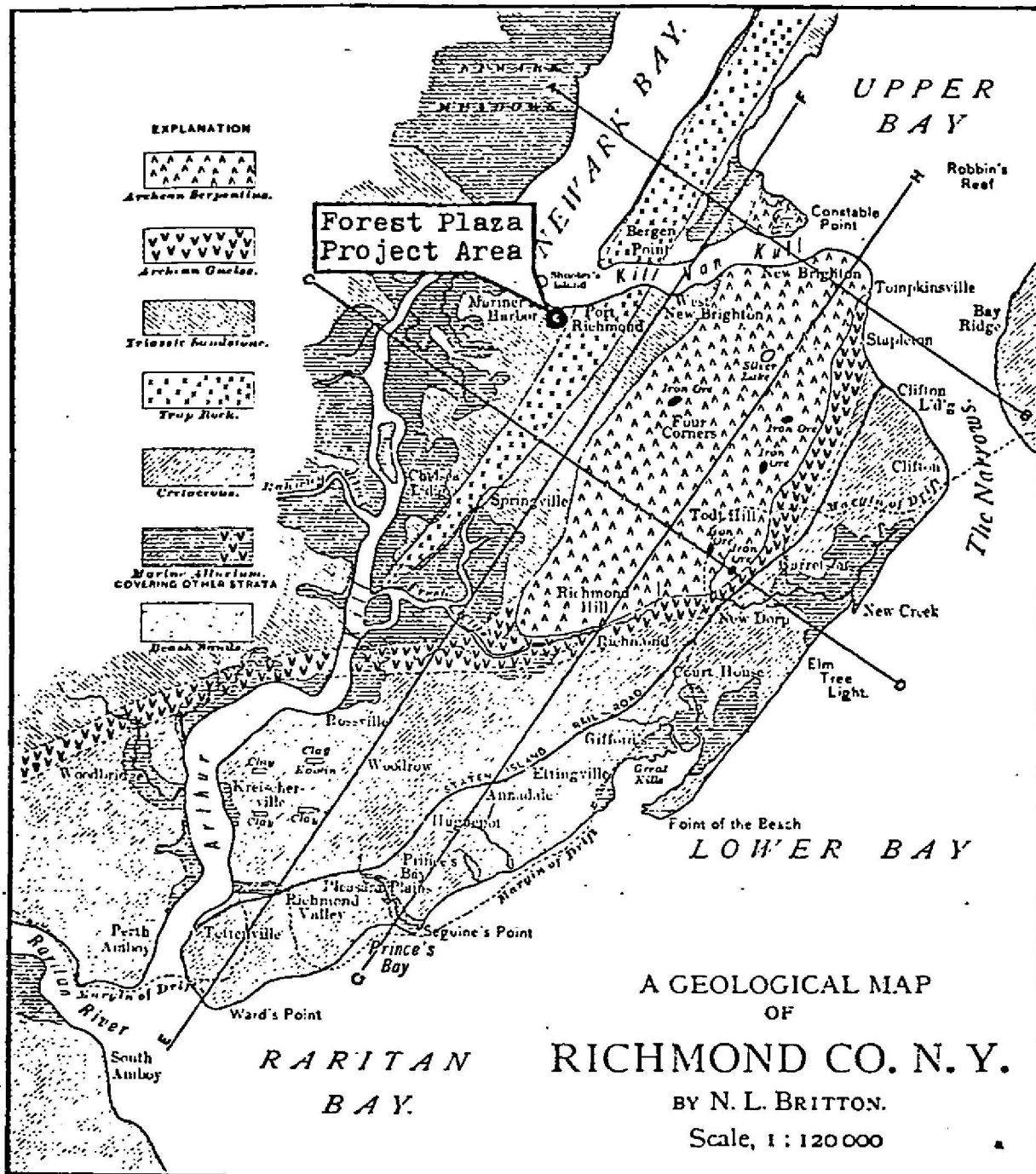
3. Vegetation: Considered in this category are the present floral zones including types of trees and ground cover.

4. Water: Under this category are variables concerning the nature and location of water supply.

III. ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The surface of Staten Island is made up of many varied and interesting landforms. Each land feature originated through the action of some past or present geological process which has led to a variety of indigenous flora and fauna. In turn, these factors have had a tremendous impact on early man and his settlement and subsistence patterns in this area. The following narrative is a synopsis of the major natural environmental characteristics of the study area.

Geologically, the Forest Plaza Project site is considered a part of the Coastal Plain physiographic province. The bedrock geology is Triassic sedimentary sandstone of the Newark Series which is covered with Pleistocene glacial sediments and marine alluvium (FIGURE 2, Leng and Davis 1930: 14). However, an outcrop of Palisades Diabase intrudes into the strata and can be seen approximately three hundred feet to the east of the project area. Loose



FROM ANNALS NEW YORK ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, 1882

FIGURE 2: From Leng and Davis 1930.

red, orange, tan, gray, and black sands and clay are found in the area.

Continental glaciation affected the surficial geology of Staten Island as the glacier advanced and receded at least three times in the last million years. The study area consists of glacial outwash composed of material deposited by streams from the melting ice sheet. These deposits are present throughout the area where rivers and streams carried debris from the receding glacier. An occasional glacial erratic or boulder was encountered in the project area, and these boulders are a vivid reminder of the former presence of the glacier.

The topography of the Forest Plaza Project site is generally low and flat, but the terrain does slope slightly from the north and east toward the southwest corner of the site. The highest elevations occur along the northern border of the site, along Forest Avenue, as well as near its eastern edge. The elevation of the site is approximately twenty feet above mean sea level.

The modern terrestrial plant habitats of this section of the Outer Coastal Plan consist of salt marshes, fresh water marshes, swamps and floodplains, and uplands and flats that are not excessively drained. In general, the site is open and flat, with a small wet area near the southwestern corner. The dominant vegetation is reed grass, or Phragmites australis. Many sections of the project are covered with goldenrod and rye grass. There are also a few trees scattered throughout the area -- namely, oak, maple, birch, beech, and weeping willow. For the most part, these trees are of fairly recent growth. The land was undoubtedly "wooded off"

or cleared of trees several times in historic times during the settlement of the area and the development of agricultural activities.

During this cultural resource survey, pheasants, woodcock, and a variety of other bird species were observed in the study area. Rabbits and rodents were also observed at the site. The latter are probably the predominant forms of mammals at the site since dumping has taken place in some sections, and the site is surrounded by residential and commercial development.

IV. CULTURAL BACKGROUND

A. Prehistoric Period

The prehistory of northwestern Staten Island has been researched and documented to a large extent, and the published data has provided excellent background material with which to assess the project area. A search of the literature on the project area, which includes Skinner 1909, Skinner and Schrabisch 1913, Parker 1920, Bolton 1920, Anderson 1964, Kardis and Larrabee 1977, Lenik 1983, and the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences' Indian Sites Records, has identified several perhistoric sites in close proximity to the Forest Plaza project area. Furthermore, additional information was obtained through personal contact with local informants and collectors who have extensive knowledge of the project area. These documented sites, although directly outside our immediate project zone, give us a good picture of aboriginal settlement and subsistence patterns. The prehistoric sites in northwestern Staten Island have yielded a variety of cultural material from the Paleo Indian period through the Woodland period.

A brief summary of the cultures of these prehistoric periods is as follows:

The Paleo Indian Period (c. 10,000 B.C. to 8,000 B.C.)

Early man arrived in the New World sometime before 12,000 years ago. These early Americans, whom we call Paleo Indians, migrated from Siberia across the Bering Land Bridge to Alaska during the Late Pleistocene or Ice Age. They undoubtedly came down from Alaska during the Two Creeks Interstadial around 10,000 B.C. when an ice-free corridor opened up between two massive glaciers that covered Canada. During this period, the Indians relied heavily on large pleistocene herbivores for food, such as mammoth, mastodan, caribou, and musk ox. These Indians were hunters and gatherers, a nomadic people who roamed widely in search of food, and their settlement pattern consisted of small temporary camps. The diagnostic artifact of the Paleo Indian period is the fluted projectile point. However, these people made other sophisticated tools as well, such as gravers, steep-edge scrapers, knives, drills, and other unifacial tools.

The Archaic Period (c. 8,000 B.C. to 1,000 B.C.)

The Archaic Period produced a major shift in the settlement and subsistence patterns of early man. Hunting and gathering were still the basic ways of life during this period, but the emphasis in subsistence shifted from the large pleistocene herbivores, who were rapidly becoming extinct, to smaller game and plants of the deciduous forest. The settlement pattern of the Archaic people indicates larger, more permanent habitation sites. These people were increasingly more efficient in the exploitation

of their environment. The hallmarks of this period are grinding implements, ground stone tools, and, toward the end of this period, or Terminal Archaic, the use of stone bowls.

The Woodland Period (c. 1,000 B.C. to 1600 A.D.)

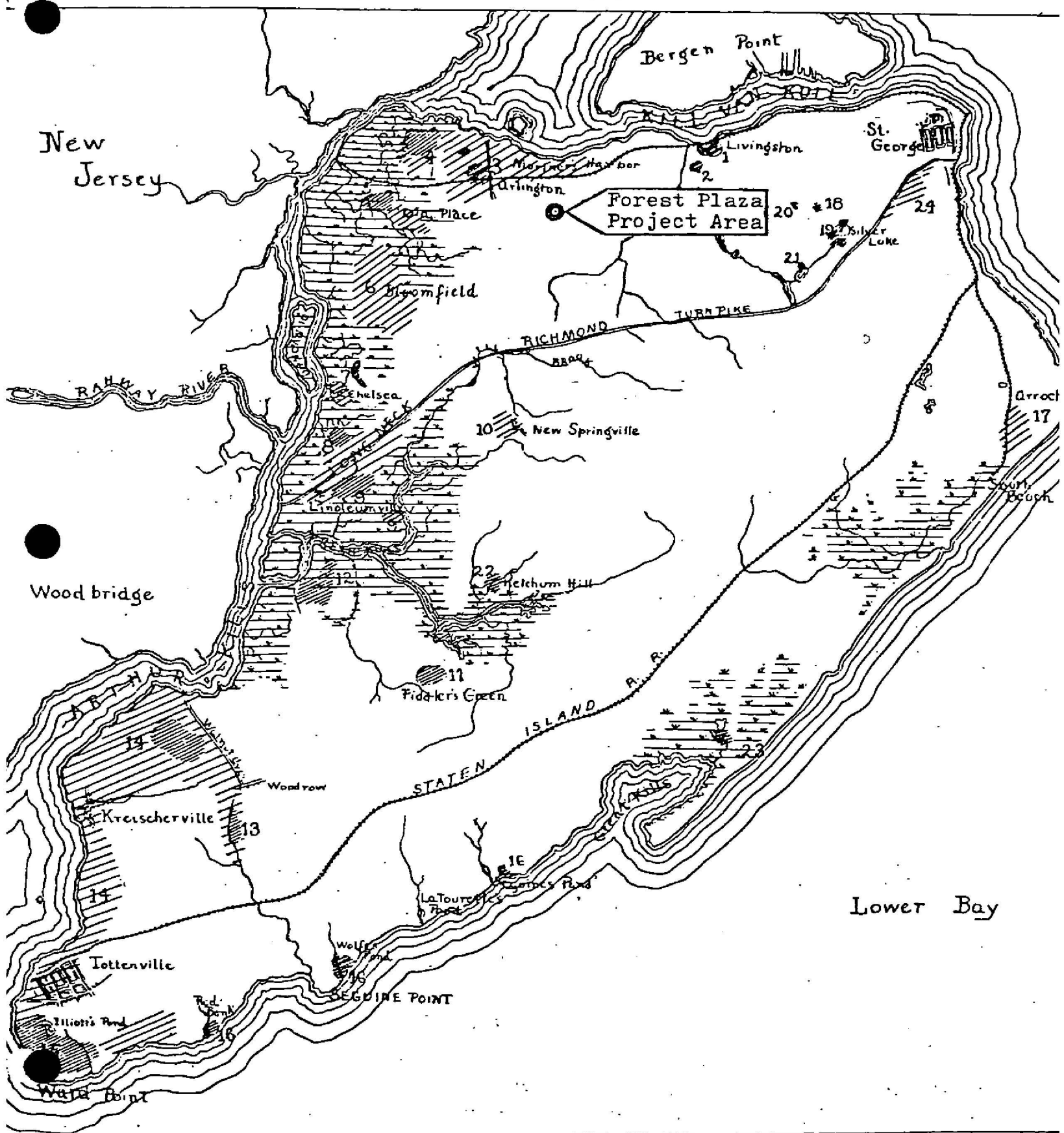
In general, the hunting and gathering way of life persisted in this period, but several important changes took place. Horticulture began during this period and later became well established with the cultivation of maize (corn), beans, and squash. Clay pottery vessels replaced soapstone bowls, and tobacco pipes and smoking were adopted. Also, the bow and arrow replaced the spear and javelin during this period. The habitation sites of the Woodland Indians increased in size and permanence as these people continued to extract food more efficiently from their environment.

Documentary Research

In prehistoric times, the general area to the north and west of the Forest Plaza project area was apparently one of intense occupation and use. In 1909 Alanson B. Skinner of the American Museum of Natural History recorded and described four major prehistoric sites in this area. These sites are known as Arlington in Mariners Harbor, Bowman's Brook, also in Mariners Harbor, Old Place, and Bloomfield or Watchogue. (See FIGURE 3.)

At the Arlington Site, Skinner reports finding a variety of stone tools, pottery, clay pipes, and shell pits. Among these artifact recoveries were projectile points, scrapers, hammerstones, grooved axes, celts, a grooved adze, a gouge, a metate, and a "couple of bannerstones," which are presently referred to as atlatl

FIGURE 3: From Skinner 1909.



weights (Skinner 1909: 5, 6). This cultural material indicates that the Arlington site was occupied by several groups of people from the Late Archaic through Woodland Periods. These artifacts further suggest that the prehistoric people engaged in several activities at the site including hunting, food processing, wood-working, and the manufacture of stone tools.

Skinner also conducted extensive archaeological investigations at the Bowman's Brook site in Mariners Harbor. This site is located northwest of the Forest Plaza project area and is one of the most important sites on Staten Island. Skinner reports that "from fifty to one hundred pits were exposed" at the site along with several skeletons (Skinner 1909: 7). Artifact recoveries from the Bowman's Brook site were abundant and included stone, bone and antler tools, and pottery. The majority of the pottery fragments recovered from the site were described as "typical Algonkin type." However, some were "Iroquoian in design" (Ibid: 7). This latter type has become known as Bowman's Brook Incised pottery and consists of collarless vessels with broad lines of incising (Staats 1974: 1). Bowman's Brook with its Incised pottery is an extremely important type-site and an equally important aspect of Woodland Period aboriginal history in the coastal region of New York.

The third major site recorded by Skinner is known as Old Place, which he describes as a "large village site" (Skinner 1909: 8). Skinner indicates that "fireplaces" or hearths, shell pits, pottery, and European trade goods were found at this site. In the early 1960's, the Old Place site was excavated by Albert J. Anderson and his associates. Anderson reports finding bifurcated projectile points that date to the Early Archaic Period, Bare

Island and Poplar Island-type projectile points that date to the Late Archaic Period, several broad spear points including Perkio-men, Susquehanna, and Snook Kill types, which date from the Terminal Archaic to Early Woodland Periods, and a Levanna point that dates to the Late Woodland Period (Anderson 1964: 50-52). In addition, several types of pottery were found at the site, plus drills and scrapers. This data indicates that the site was occupied intermittently from around 6,000 B.C. to c. 1600 A.D.

Indian relics were also reportedly found at the Bloomfield or Watchogue site (Skinner 1909: 9). Skinner reports that a variety of artifacts had been found on "all the dunes and sandhills including grooved axes, pottery, pipes, and projectile points." Most of the Bloomfield site was probably destroyed during the construction of the West Shore Expressway. Recently, archaeological testing and reconnaissance were conducted in the Bloomfield site area; but no evidence of prehistoric occupation was found (Lenik 1983: 34-42).

The Goodrich site is also located in the northwest corner of Staten Island in the Mariners Harbor section. This site is located to the west of South Avenue and lies between the Arlington Railroad yards and Forest Avenue. The Goodrich site is approximately one mile northwest of the Forest Plaza project area. This site was excavated professionally by six different groups between 1969 and 1972. The site has been temporally and culturally assigned to the Late Archaic Period, c. 3,000 B.C. to c. 1,000 B.C. (Eisenberg 1982: 37).

Another prehistoric site was formerly located southeast of the Bloomfield or Watchogue site near the community of Bull's Head and is known as the Bull's Head site. This site was referred to as a "burying ground," and several grooved axes were reportedly found here (Parker 1920, plate 211: 681-682). Parker reports that attempts were made to locate any remaining graves, but this effort was unsuccessful. In 1982, another attempt was made to locate the Bull's Head site in an area to the north of Victory Boulevard but was also unsuccessful (Lenik 1982: 63).

In summary, our documentary research has revealed that a number of prehistoric sites are located in northwestern Staten Island. However, they all are located well outside of our immediate project area.

B. Historic Period

Staten Island was first settled by Dutch farmers in the 17th century. Later, French Huguenots and English settlers were attracted to the area by its rich and varied natural resources. Staten Island's colonial settlement pattern reflects these several periods of immigration. Land was divided into patents, and in many cases such land was unimproved. The primary occupations of these early settlers were fishing and farming.

A composite map of Staten Island, which covers the Revolutionary War period from 1775 to 1783, shows that there was no settlement in the Forest Plaza project area during the 18th century (McMillan 1933). This map was compiled from three sources: The Hessian Map c. 1777, Plan No. 31 du Camp Anglo-Hessois dans Staten Island de 1780 a' 1783, and the Taylor-Skinner Map of 1781. It shows that the principal area of settlement was along the north

shore, particularly at Decker's Ferry (now Port Richmond), with a scattering of houses along major road networks.

In 1788, Staten Island was broken up into four townships -- namely, Northfield, Southfield, Westfield, and Castelton (Schneider 1977: 30). However, these political boundaries did not result in any particular clustering or settlement. During the late 18th century local saw and grist mills were established along with stores, blacksmith shops, and other service crafts (Leng and Delavan 1924: 14). However, these business establishments were not located in the project area.

In the 19th century, several hamlets and villages were established on Staten Island, and this development was linked in part to transportation networks -- i.e., ferries and landings and roads, and later to commercial and manufacturing operations. Graniteville, located immediately to the east of the Forest Plaza project area, is an example of such development. This community was located at the intersection of Plank Road and Morning Star Road and was linked to the local trap rock stone resources.

Graniteville, or Granite Village appears on the 1853 Map of Staten Island drawn by James Butler. The name of this community originated with the trap rock or diabase quarries located in the area. The trap rock quarrying industry was established in 1835 or 1838 (Leng and Davis 1930: 343, 623). This 1853 map shows two quarries linked by railroad to the north shore, plus a store, church, and several houses in the village. The map also shows a house belonging to a "J. Decker" located on the south side of Plank Road (present day Forest Avenue), a short distance to the west of the village and quarry. (See FIGURE 4.) This Decker house was

located within the Forest Plaza project area.

By 1874, the name of Plank Road had changed to Washington Avenue. The Beers (1874) Atlas of this area shows that the project area property continues to be owned by a "J.R. Decker." This map indicates that Decker owned ten acres of land on the south side of Washington Avenue, lying approximately between Van Pelt Avenue on the east and Union Avenue on the west. A house is also shown on this property. The 1870 Census of the Town of Northfield lists the occupation of John R. Decker as an "oyster dealer."

The 1887 Beers Atlas of Staten Island shows the property as being owned by a "J. Parker Merrill" (FIGURE 5). This 1887 map continues to show a house on the ten-acre tract. However, by 1898, the Merrill property had been reduced in size to eight acres (Robinson 1898). The Robinson (1898) Atlas indicates that the house was a frame structure and that there was a small brick building and a stable at the rear. According to the 1890 directory of the north shore of Staten Island, Parker Merrill is listed as a milk dealer (Webb 1890-91: 261).

By 1907, the former Decker-Merrill property on Washington Avenue was now owned by a "Thos. B. Comfort" (Robinson 1907). The 1917 Bromley Atlas of the City of New York continues to show Thomas B. Comfort as the owner of the property (FIGURE 6). This 1917 map shows the house as a two and one-half-story building, and a wagon shed is shown directly behind the house. The 1917 map also depicts two barns, a short distance southwest of the house. The 1917 Sanborn insurance map confirms the layout and construction of the house, wagon shed, and barn on the property. The Sanborn map indicates that the barn was a one and one-half-story frame

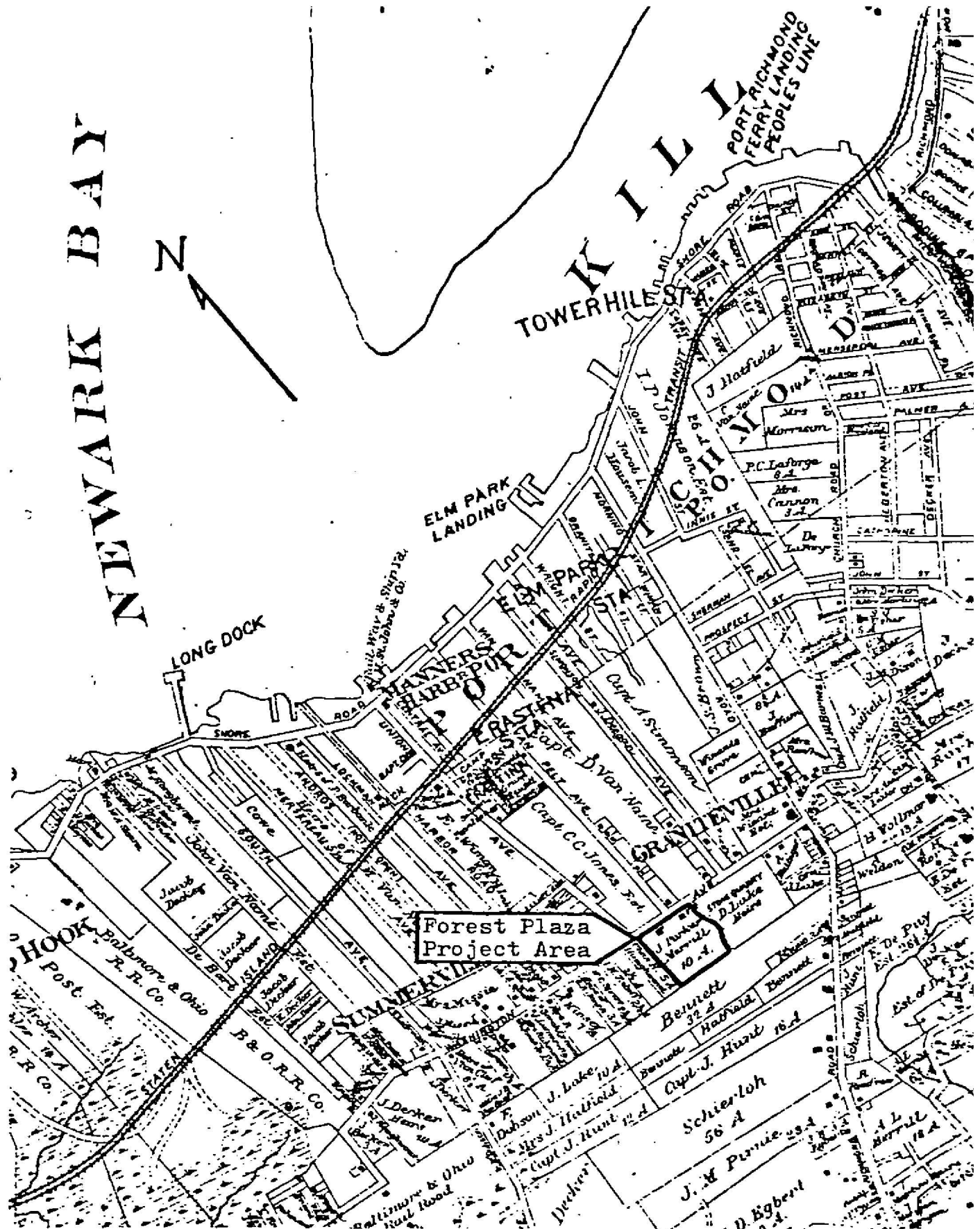


FIGURE 5f Portion of Beers (1887) Atlas of Staten Island showing location of project area.
Scale: 1500 ft. = 1 inch.

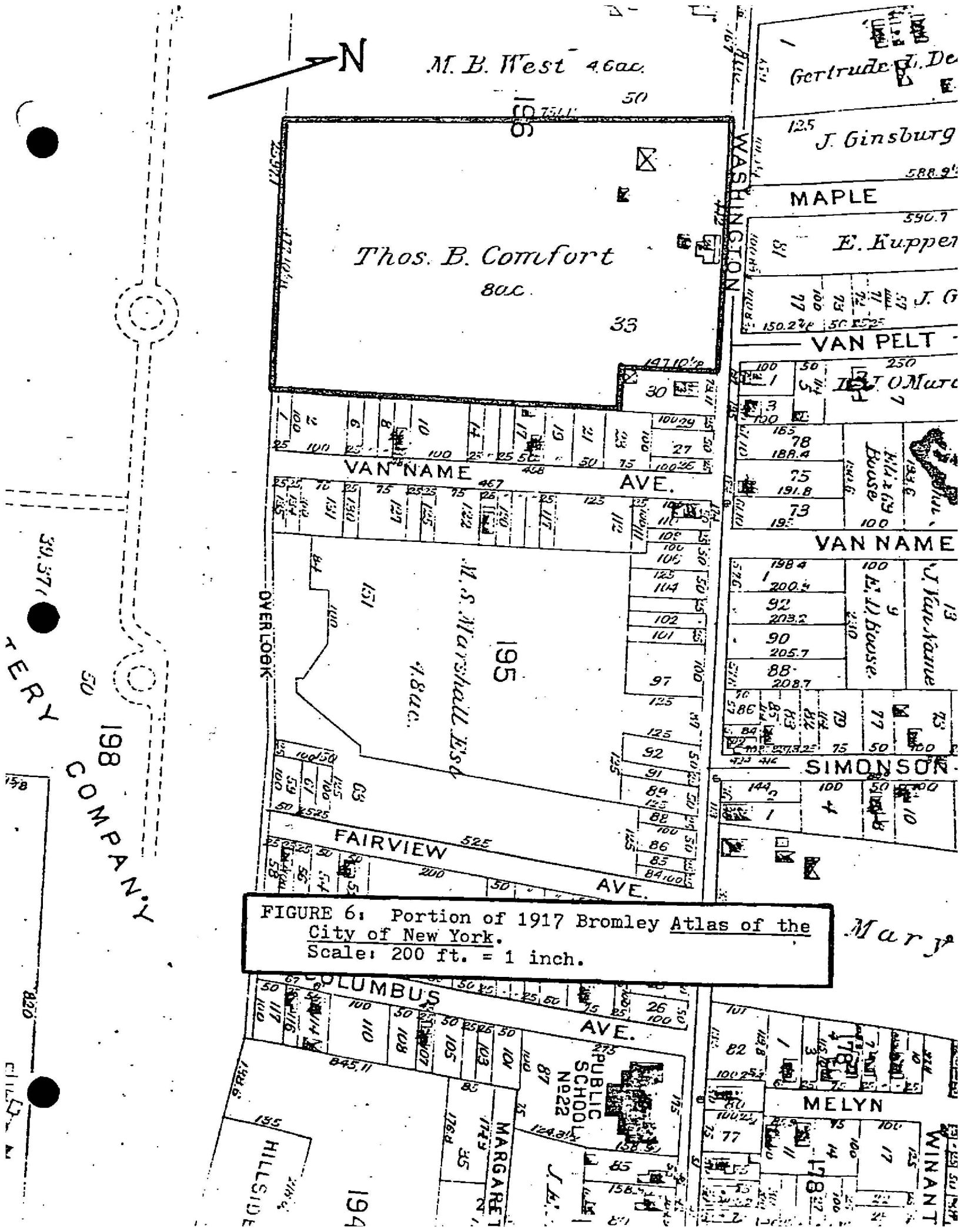


FIGURE 6: Portion of 1917 Bromley Atlas of the City of New York.
Scale: 200 ft. = 1 inch.

structure.

According to the Staten Island Real Estate and Fire Insurance directory of 1906, the occupation of Thomas Comfort was that of a "foreman" (Libby and Wood 1906: 69). This same directory lists "Julius Weiss" as a dairy man residing on Vedder Avenue, Port Richmond (Ibid: 340). Around 1913, the Weissglass family rented a Mr. "Zeloff's farm at 296 Washington Avenue" but continued to reside on Vedder Avenue (Weissglass n.d.: 112). A short time later, the Weissglass family also rented a farm at 224 Washington Avenue "from a man named Comfort" (Weissglass n.d.: 112).

In 1914, Max Weissglass purchased the Zeluff farm from Eliza E. Zuluff (Richmond Borough Deeds: Book 437: 74). Around 1917 or 1918, the Weissglass family also purchased "The Farm," and surrounding area (Weissglass n.d.: 112). This purchase undoubtedly refers to the Comfort property at 224 Washington Avenue for the Weissglass family moved into the house at this address (Ibid n.d.: 59). According to the New York City Health Department's records, Julius Weissglass was reported to have 20 cows at this location in 1918.

The J. Weissglass and Sons Dairy continued to grow and prosper. From 1920 onward, Joseph, Charles, and Oscar Weissglass, sons of Julius, took over the administration and operation of the milk business. By 1933, the construction of a new pasteurizing plant was completed on Forest Avenue; and the business became formally known as the "Weissglass Gold Seal Dairy Corporation" (Weissglass n.d.: 140).

Since 1933, when the original dairy was completed, five additions were built to facilitate processing and storage of milk

products (Anonymous n.d.). The expansion of the Weissglass plant on Forest Avenue can readily be seen on the 1937 Sanborn Company insurance map (FIGURE 7). The original Decker-Merrill-Comfort-Weissglass house is not shown on the 1937 map. It was undoubtedly destroyed during the construction of the milk processing plant.

The Weissglass Dairy continued to grow and expand with 50,000 gallons of milk, butter, and other dairy products produced each day (Anonymous n.d.) The company at one time employed over two hundred persons (FIGURE 8). However, in April 1975 the Weissglass Dairy plant ceased operations as a result of increases in operating costs and the loss of its once sizeable New Jersey business (Houseman 1975). Shortly thereafter, this once major local industry was torn down, and the site was leveled.

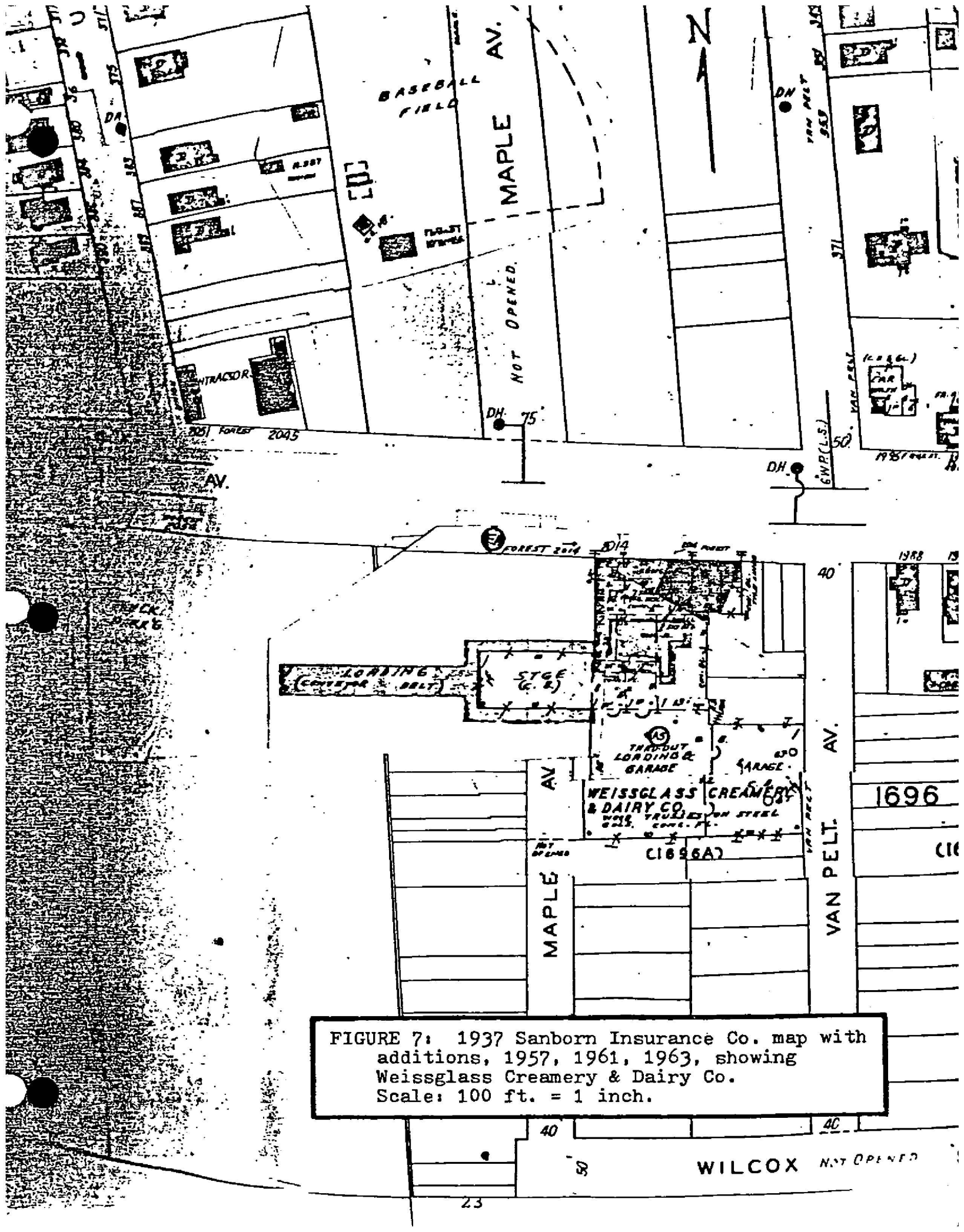


FIGURE 7: 1937 Sanborn Insurance Co. map with additions, 1957, 1961, 1963, showing Weissglass Creamery & Dairy Co. Scale: 100 ft. = 1 inch.

WEISSGLASS *Gold Seal* DAIRY CORP.
2014 FOREST AVE. • MARINERS HARBOR

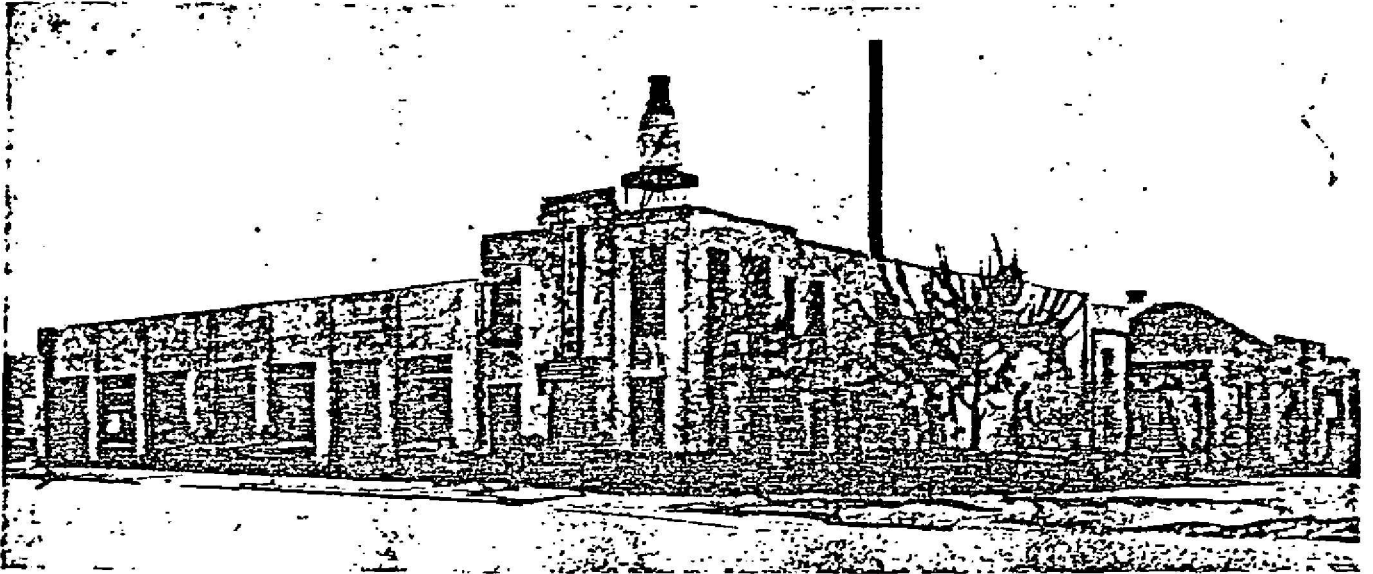


FIGURE 8: Weissglass Dairy c.1944, (From Staten Island, New York, 50th Anniversary Booklet, Chamber of Commerce).

V. FIELD SURVEY

An intensive pedestrian survey or field reconnaissance was conducted within the entire project area in an attempt to locate prehistoric or historic cultural resources and to evaluate the archaeological potential of the area. The entire project area was covered by foot, and the results of this field work are as follows:

The proposed Forest Plaza project site is an eleven-acre generally rectangular-shaped property with approximately 875 feet of frontage on Forest Avenue. A considerable amount of dumping has taken place within the northwest quadrant of the property. Some of the trash observed in this area includes tires, concrete blocks, wood, and furniture. Near the southwest corner, there are a number of piles of earth and concrete, plus other construction debris.

The easterly side of the project area is bordered by residential dwellings and their backyards. Several large piles of construction debris are located in this area as well. We observed the presence of tires, paint cans, car rims, lath, bricks, clapboard siding, cement blocks, sheet metal, and boulders.

There is a large rubble pile along the south side of the project area, near its center, along with several abandoned cars. For the most part, the entire site is covered with rye grass, weeds, and phragmites or tall reed grass.

Finally, large sections of macadam pavement were observed in the north-central portion of the property. These remains represent the former truck and automobile parking areas of the Weissglass plant.

In general, the project zone is flat, low-lying, and somewhat wet or marshy near its southwest corner. A few small trees are scattered throughout the site. It is clear that the landscape at the project site has been considerably altered in historic times. The land has been subjected to intensive construction and destruction activity in the 20th century along with some recent dumping.

The nearby "granite" or trap rock quarry was examined in the course of this field survey as well. This historic period quarry is located to the east of Van Name Avenue, directly behind or to the rear of several private homes. It is approximately 300 feet to the east of the Forest Plaza project zone and will not be affected by that project.

In summary, our field survey failed to locate or identify any extant cultural resources within the project area.

VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The documentary research and field reconnaissance of the Forest Place site have failed to identify any evidence of prehistoric occupation within the area. The nearest documented prehistoric site is the Goodrich site, which is located approximately one mile northwest of the project zone. Furthermore, our analysis of the environmental and geomorphological conditions indicates that the site would not have been particularly desirable for human occupation in prehistoric times. The lack of potable water at the site plus the lack of nearby aquatic or marine food resources would have made occupation in this specific area difficult, although not impossible. Furthermore, the site's close proximity to quarry hill on the east, which has an elevation of approximately 50 feet above mean sea level, suggests that the Forest Plaza site might have been subjected to water run-off from the hill, resulting in wet or damp conditions.

Our documentary research indicates that a historic structure was once located on the Forest Plaza property. This was the 19th century Decker-Merrill-Comfort House. However, this house was destroyed at some time between 1920 and 1933 during the construction of the Weissglass Dairy. The Weissglass Dairy building itself was demolished around 1975. Thus, there are no extant structures within the project zone.

Finally, our field reconnaissance has clearly established that extensive alteration of the landscape has taken place at the site. A large dairy building was constructed on the property, expanded several times, and then demolished. The site has been bulldozed, and piles of earth and rubble are present in several loca-

tions. In recent years, some dumping has also taken place on the site.

In summary, this cultural resource survey has determined that the Forest Plaza Project site is culturally non-sensitive. The construction of the proposed shopping plaza will have **NO IMPACT** upon the cultural resource base of the area.

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