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PHASE IA
ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SENSITIVITY SURVEY
FOR THE
PROPOSED RICHMOND AVENUE AND FOREST AVENUE
SHOPPING PLAZA, STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK

1986

86-096R

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Phase I Sensitivity Study is to document the potential prehistoric and historic sensitivity of the proposed Forest Ave./Richmond Ave. Shopping Center Development Project, through the review of existing archival, cartographic, and published referenced and then to make recommendation regarding possible further testing. In order to provide a context for evaluating any identified resources within the parcel itself, this survey include a synthesis of published and unpublished prehistoric and historic resources in the immediate area surrounding the proposed development location. This sensitivity evaluation is organized in the following manner: first, an overview of the physical setting of the project area; second, a review of prehistoric findings in or immediately adjacent to the proposed project area; third, a discussion of the historic sites on or immediately adjacent to the proposed project area; and finally, the conclusions and recommendations.

PHYSICAL SETTING

Geographically, Staten Island is part of New Jersey from which it is separated by the Kill Van Kill 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). Local glacial deposits may be overlaid by fill as well as beach, marsh, dune, swamp and estuarine deposits (ibid).

The project area is located in the northwestern quadrant of Staten Island, bounded to the north by Forest Avenue, to the south (in part) by Vedder Avenue, to the west by Richmond Avenue, and to the east by the service road to the Willowbrook Expressway.

The elevation of the parcel today ranges from 26-40 feet above mean sea level. The project area slopes downward to the south and east. The entire project area covers 340,767 square feet, or 7.82 acres.

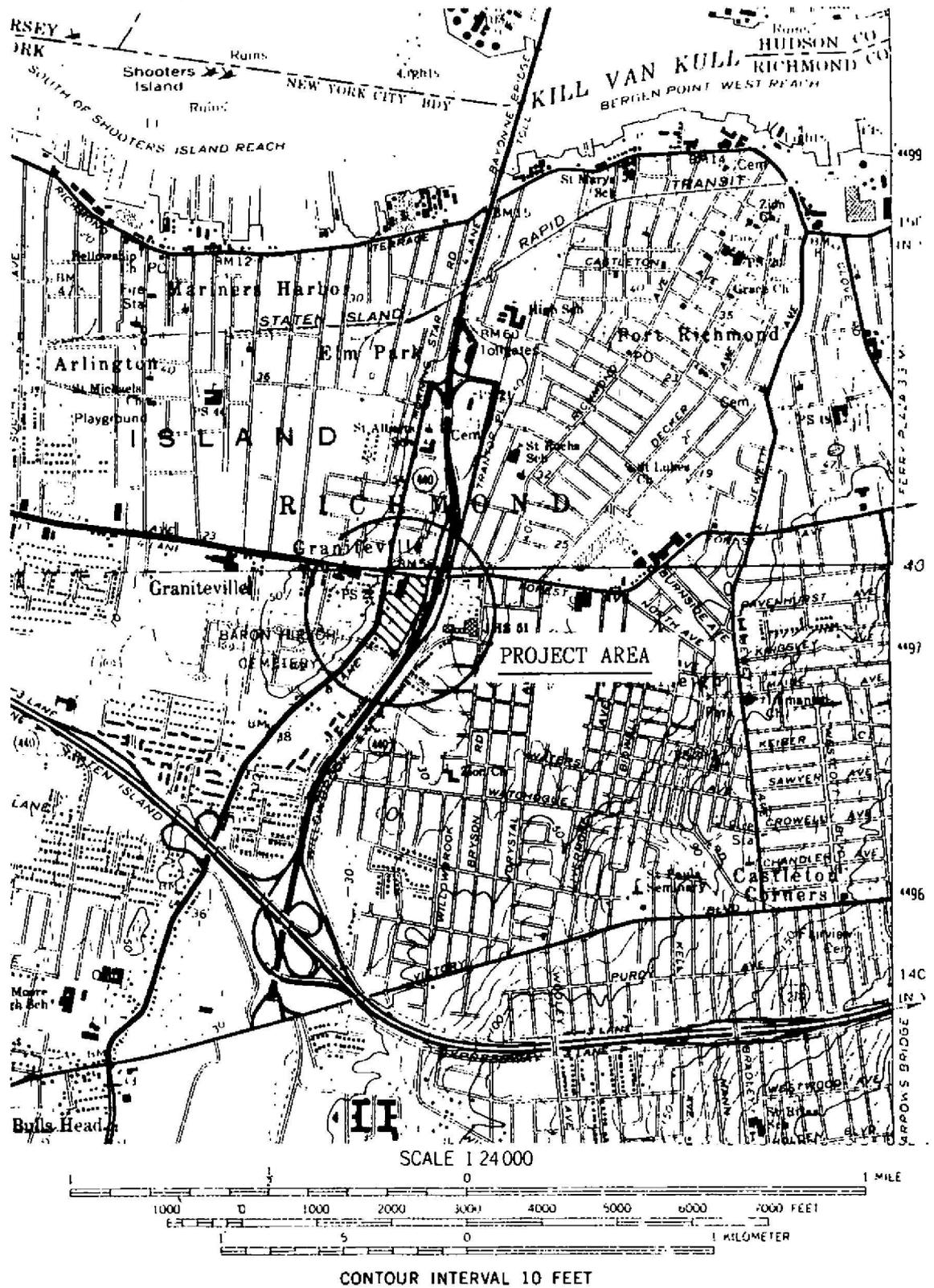


Figure 1 Portions of the USGS 7.5 minute series Elizabeth, N.J. and Arthur Kill, N.Y. Quadrangles showing the project area (hatched area within circle)



There are two distinct out-parcels excluded from the above defined project area. The first is at the extreme northwest corner of the parcel, at the intersection of Forest and Richmond Avenues. It is rectangular in shape and contains standing structures. The second is to the extreme south of the property, fronting onto Vedder Avenue. It is arc shaped and also contains standing structures. See Figure 7 for a plan of the project area and the out-parcels.

PREHISTORIC SENSITIVITY

As part of the project evaluation process, this sensitivity study has surveyed published and unpublished resources in the Archives and Library of Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences (SIIAS), and the New York State Historic Preservation Office (NYSHPO). Most prehistoric archaeological work undertaken by both professional and avocational archaeologists has historically been concentrated on the southwestern portion of Staten Island (Baugher 1985, pers. comm.).

This survey of northwestern Staten Island has documented the recorded or published location of no less than four sites within a 1 1/2 mile radius of the proposed Richmond Ave./Forest Ave. Shopping Center site. Three other sites are located between 1 1/2 and 2 miles from the 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. This does not imply that Indians did not inhabit this portion of Staten Island. No evidence, positive or negative, based on actual survey work is available. Although no sites have been identified on the actual parcel, it would be inappropriate to characterize the northwestern region of Staten Island as without prehistoric sensitivity.

A total of seven prehistoric sites have been reported within 2 miles of the Richmond/Forest Ave. Shopping Center site. The closest prehistoric site, the Goodrich site, is located approximately 1.1 miles northwest of the project area. This site was initially located by several avocational archaeologists during the mid-1960's. Professional archaeologists tested the site during 1969 and found 18 projectile points, but no ceramic remains (Ottesen & Williams 1969:2-5, ms.). Five more professional excavations, carried out from 1969 through 1980,



confirmed that this site dated to the Late Archaic period, based on the diagnostic bifaces found and the conspicuous lack of ceramic remains. The finds were primarily from the third layer below the surface, which consisted of orange sand and extended from 7 inches below the surface down to the water table (Ottesen & Williams 1969:2-5, ms.) (Eisenberg 1981:19-20, Fig. 1).

Approximately 1.2 miles northwest of the project area, Skinner reported finding (in May, 1902) a group of 6 shell pits from 4 to 6 feet in diameter and up to 6 feet deep, as well as some surface shell deposits less than 0.5 feet deep. These features have been designated as the Arlington Station site. They contained pottery and stone artifacts dating to the Woodland Period (Skinner 1909:5-6). The Arlington Station Site has been designated A085-01-0138 in the files of the NYSHPO (Ewing 1986, pers. comm.).

The Arlington Avenue site, which is approximately 1.4 miles northwest of the project area, was noted by Skinner on this 1909 map, but is not mentioned in his text or elsewhere. No data exists on stratigraphy, date range or the integrity of this site (Skinner 1909: 6, Fig. 1).

The fourth known site located within a 1.5 mile radius of the project area is the Arlington Place site. This site was worked during the mid-1960's by Donald Sainz. He reported finding Woodland Period artifacts in the disturbed topsoil, much of which had already been removed. Approximately 1 foot below this was an occupation zone from 0.5' to 0.7' thick, which yielded over 50 projectile points dating to the Late Archaic through Woodland Periods. Sainz reported that this site was entirely destroyed by July 1966 (Sainz 1966:ms.) (Ritchie 1980:147-8). The Arlington Place Site has been designated A085-01-0139 in the files of the NYSHPO (Ewing 1986, pers. comm.).

Within a 2 mile radius of the Richmond/Forest Ave. Shopping Center site the locations of three further prehistoric sites have been recorded. They are: Bowman's Brook, Gertie's Knoll, and Ascension Church. All three sites are located within approximately 1.6 miles of the project area; Bowman's Brook and Gertie's Knoll to the northwest, and Ascension Church to the northeast. The larger of these three, and the largest of all seven sites noted here, was the Bowman's Brook site. The Bowman's Brook site was discovered during construction work on the former Milliken Brothers' iron foundry in March, 1903, by Alanson Skinner. Skinner worked on this site intermittently



until 1918. The Bowman's Brook Site was located to the west and north of the project area on land between 8 and 24 feet above Richmond high water as of 1911. At least 35 features, predominantly pits and burials, were excavated. These were mostly within 4 feet of the surface although a few were noted as extending to a maximum depth of 6 feet below the surface. The majority of the finds dated to the Woodland Period (Skinner 1909:6-8; 1925:70-81). Some further work was carried out by Donald Sainz and Albert Anderson prior to 1964, in a partially disturbed area formerly covered by a foundation of one of the foundry buildings. Five occupational horizons were identified by their relative depth and artifacts found within them, although only one could be differentiated by soil color and texture changes. These horizons were not superimposed, hence the validity of any sequence arrived at from this data is open to question. A number of projectile points of the Late Archaic period were found. Virtually this entire site was extensively leveled by bulldozers at this time (early 1960's), indicating that the possibility of any features or artifacts surviving in situ is very low (Ritchie 1980:146-8).

The site of Gertie's Knoll is included on Skinner's 1909 map, but no reference is made to it in his text. An archaeological site survey form for Gertie's Knoll states that by November 1973, virtually the entire knoll had been destroyed by bulldozers and that only scattered surface finds remained. These included pottery, bone and shell. It can be concluded from the above data that this site dated to the Woodland Period. Virtually no possibility exists that any finds remaining from this site could be in situ (Rubertone 1973 ms) (Skinner 1909:6, Fig. 1).

The Ascension Church site, located on the site of the Parish House of Ascension Church, consists of a village and burial site. This site was reported to the New York SHPO by Dr. Salwen of New York University, where it is listed as site number A085-01-0004 (Ewing 1986, pers. comm.). It was originally recorded by Skinner, who mentions shells, skeletons and implements (including pottery, a 3 pitted hammerstone and stone axes) found during foundation excavations for the Parish House during Spring of 1903 (Skinner 1909:5). Judging by its description as a village and the presence of pottery, this site dated to the Woodland Period.

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

- 1) the proximity of known prehistoric sites in or near the project area; and



2) the presence of fresh water drainage courses in general, and particularly the identification of river or stream confluence situations where two or more drainages come together, providing access to both the water and food supplies of both systems.

As detailed above, there are no known prehistoric sites on the project area, or within 1 mile of it. There are no confluence situations or even any streams presently on the Forest Ave./Richmond Ave. project area, nor do any of the historic maps indicate that there were any there previously. The nearest water source for prehistoric populations appears to have been a stream probably called Palmer's Run (Leng & Davis 1968), that runs south and east of the project area. It is located approximately 1100 feet south of the southern edge of the project area and 2500 feet east of its eastern edge. The project area itself ranged in elevation from 24. to 40 feet above mean sea level in 1911, and it is likely that the southern end of the parcel was rather marshy as drainage channels had been cut along the field boundaries there (see Figure 7). This indicates that the southern end of the project area was not well drained in the past, a condition which is still evident today. The best drained land in the past would most certainly have been the knoll that formerly existed approximately where the northern edge of the project area is now (see Figure 3). This landform was leveled by the mid 19th century, and no traces of it remain on the 1911 topographic map (Figure 7) or any later maps.

We consider the project area to be somewhat sensitive to preserving to prehistoric cultural resources, but note that the most sensitive zone has been removed.

HISTORIC SENSITIVITY

The Cartographic and Documentary Evidence

The earliest evidence of historic use of the Forest Ave./Richmond Ave. project area is Frederick Skene's map of Staten Island (1907) indicating Colonial Land Patents from 1668-1712 which places the project area within the patent of Cornelius Coursen "and others", dated Dec. 30, 1680 (see Figure 2). The designation "Soldiers Lots" also appears within this patent.

In 1675, an order to bring warrants to the Fort in New York had been issued so that Staten Island could be surveyed and grants



issued. In 1680, after repeated notice, many petitions were brought in, including the following one:

Great Playne: Cornelius Corsen and Company, to whom cattlemark was issued; John Taylor, sargent, John Fitzgarett, Daniel Thomas. The last three were soldiers so their allotments became known as the "Soldiers lots" (Leng and Davis:124-5).

Captain Cornelius Corsen died in 1692, after holding civil as well as military positions. His civil positions included those of Constable and Justice. Throughout the eighteenth century his numerous family were active and prosperous (op. cit.).

The U.S. Coast Survey of New York Harbor, conducted 1836-1839, does not show any structures within the project area (Figure 3). It does show a knoll located, at least in part, within the project area, near its northern boundary. This map shows the layout of roadways that persists throughout the nineteenth century and, in a somewhat altered form, to the present. These roads include what is now called Richmond Avenue, the project area's western boundary. According to Leng and Davis' Map of Staten Island with Ye Old Names and Nicknames (1896), this road was used prior to 1797. Leading from Port Richmond to New Springfield, this old highway is a direct continuation of Morningstar Road. During the history of its use the road changed name several times: "It was known at first as the Church Road, then as the Port Richmond Plank Road, then as Stone Road, and now called Richmond Avenue" (Leng and Davis:59).

On Butler's 1853 Map of Staten Island the project area is bounded on the west by Plank Road and its general locality is designated "Granit Village" (see Figure 4). Granite Village, or Graniteville, appears on maps of 1850 and later, the name originating with the quarries which began to be worked in the area during the late 1830's (op. cit.). Although Graniteville derived its name from it, the rock that was quarried is actually not a granite, but a coarse crystalline diabase.

By 1853 there were two quarries in active operation, one at the head of John Street, Port Richmond, the other on Washington Avenue, Graniteville. They each had a dock on the north shore, connected by roadway with the quarry, and "shipped many tons of rock to New York, Charleston, and elsewhere for street paving, marine walls, etc." (Leng and Davis:623-4). Butler's 1853 map



shows both quarries (Figure 4). The "Graniteville Quarry" is shown to lie just west of the project area, near to the intersection of Plank Road and what is now Forest Avenue. A Quarry Rail Road is also shown running between the quarry and a north shore dock designated Staten Island Builders Granite Company. By 1896, the quarries were no longer in active operation, and some time during the following decade operations came to a complete halt (op. cit.).

Butler's 1853 map also shows a structure designated Baptist Church which is located on the west side of Plank Road (Richmond Avenue), adjacent to the project area. Literary sources reveal that a "Graniteville Church" did exist and function at this location between 1830 and the early 1870's (Leng and Davis; WPA 1942; Morris). The church at Graniteville was an offshoot of the old "Clove Meeting House" (a licentiate of the First Baptist Church of New York dedicated on Oct. 24, 1809), and was built to satisfy the desires of the Mariners' Harbor members to have a church of their own nearer to their houses (WPA 1942).

Ground for a building site, on the Richmond road at Graniteville, was given by Jerediah Winant, in 1829, and a building, thirty-one by forty-one feet, and twenty feet high, was erected on it. This edifice was opened on July 22, 1830. It stood upon what is now the burial ground known as "Hillside Cemetery," on the Richmond road, directly opposite the Graniteville school-house. (Morris:313)

During the 1870's a new house of worship was built by the Church at Graniteville at Mariners Harbor. The Baptist Church also appears on Walling's 1859 Map of Staten Island, but was probably demolished some time before 1874, as it does not appear on Beers 1874 and 1887 atlases or any other later maps and atlases examined.

The "Hillside Cemetery" that Morris refers to in the passage cited above appears on later maps and atlases (Beers 1874, 1887; Robinson 1898; Topographical Survey 1911), as well as on a 1980 Pocket Atlas of New York City (Hagstrom).

The "Graniteville school-house" should, according to Morris' description, correspond to a structure shown on Butler's map as just opposite the Baptist Church and within the project area (Figure 4). As an act establishing the public school system in Staten Island had been passed on June 19, 1812, the Graniteville



school was probably built shortly after that date and was therefore already functioning when the church was built in 1830. The same structure appears on Walling's 1859 map and is designated School #4. Beers' 1874 atlas also shows a lot and structure as School #4, within the project area's northwest quadrant and opposite a cemetery (undoubtedly "Hillside Cemetery"). Robinson's 1898 atlas and the Borough of Richmond Topographical Survey (1911) both show the school with its lot and, on the latter map, the addition of a structure behind the school designated "toilets" (see Figure 7). However, the school is now designated Public School #22. Bromley's 1917 atlas of the Borough of Richmond, Staten Island also designates the public school no. 22. On the Sanborn insurance atlases of 1917 and 1937 this lot appears vacant, due perhaps to the institution's tax exempt status.

Bromley's 1917 atlas also shows a large brick building west of the project area, on the corner of Washington and Columbus Avenues, which is also designated Public School no. 22. This second, larger structure appears on later maps and atlases through to the most recent one examined (Hagstrom 1980). The literature provides only two references to the Graniteville school. One confirms the existence of a public school in Northfield listed as "District No. 4" (one teacher), and the other lists no. 22, Richmond Avenue, Graniteville, as one of the public schools operating in the Borough of Richmond in 1898 (Leng and Davis; Morris, respectively).

Once the larger school had been erected, some time between 1911 and 1917, the smaller P.S. #22 located within the project area must have gradually fallen into disuse, after a period of coexistence with its larger, successor school. One must conclude that it was demolished some time between 1917 and 1966, as it does not appear on the 1966 U.S.G.S. map (Figure 1).

Due to the relative inaccuracy of Butler's 1853 map, it is difficult to determine the actual location of structures shown there as possibly lying within the project area. Only one, as has already been suggested, may correspond to the school structure documented by both literary and cartographic sources.

The Beers 1874 atlas shows six structures within the project area (see Figure 5). Two are located in the area's northwest corner along Richmond Avenue; their proprietors' full names are not given, only the initials L.E. and W.E. The remaining four structures are also located along Richmond Avenue, within the



project area's southwest quadrant. The northernmost of these four lots with structures is designated C.A. Parker. Following southward, the next lot shows school no. 4, and the following two lots are designated P. Houseman and J.W. Houseman respectively.

Parts of the remaining area of land covered by the Richmond/Forest Ave. Shopping Center site are shown here as owned by J. Simonson, L. Butler and (to a smaller degree) H. Vollmar. A large part of this remaining area appears to be meadowland. The 1887 Beers atlas shows only one change, that of property from Simonson to A. Weldon.

Robinson's 1898 atlas shows much the same configuration of lots and structures as those noted above in the Beers atlases. The most notable change is the appearance, in the project area's northwest corner, of a factory with related structures designated Ettliger & Sons, in the large lot shown on Beers (1874) atlas as owned by J. Simonson. A part of the factory's main building and two smaller related structures appear to lie within the project area. The only other change in property ownership attested by Robinson's atlas concerns another lot shown as owned by J. Simonson on the Beers 1874 atlas and here designated L. Ettliger Jr. (only the northwest corner of this lot lies within the project area).

The 1911 Borough of Richmond Topographical Survey shows no real change in the overall configuration of lots and structures contained within the project area as established through the examination of earlier maps and atlases (Figure 7). It does, however, reveal a dirt road running parallel to Richmond Avenue (here Old Stone Road) designated Butler Avenue, adjacent to the project area's eastern boundary. The road runs approximately 375 feet south from the project area's northern edge and then ends. This map also reveals two structures along the project area's eastern boundary, on the western side of Butler Avenue. The project area's eastern boundary (as illustrated in Figure 7) appears to cut through the two structures outlined here. The northernmost of the two structures is located approximately 50 feet south of the project area's northern boundary. The project area's central portion of land appears here as undesignated meadowland.

The 1911 survey also delineates the course of a channelized stream which runs near the central portion of the project area's eastern boundary and then within its southeast quadrant, forming roughly a 90 degree angle in relation to the eastern boundary.



This portion of channelized stream probably represents a part of a larger land drainage system implemented in the area at this time. The channelized stream appears on Sanborn's 1917 Insurance Atlas, but on no other maps or atlases examined (Figure 8).

The same map shows Vedder Avenue adjacent to the project area's southern boundary, which now runs between Richmond Avenue and the Willow Brook service road.

Butler's Tavern, an establishment with a long and colorful history dating back to pre-Revolutionary times, was located somewhere near Butler Avenue. Its exact location is difficult to determine as literary sources only place it as at a "short distance from Washington Avenue" (Morris:190). However, as the two structures shown lining Butler Avenue on the 1911 Topographical Survey do not appear on earlier maps and atlases examined, one can not assume that either of them represent Butler's Tavern.

The 1917 Sanborn Insurance Atlas shows few changes in the project area's lot and structural makeup. These are seen, namely, in a few minor alterations or extensions, and in the appearance of a third house along Butler Avenue -- here called Leadley Place (Figure 8). The factory, which lies partially within the project area's northeastern quadrant, is described here as Louis Ettlinger & Sons, Manufacturing Jeweler's Boxes. The same atlas also shows Forest Avenue as a continuation of Washington Avenue. The 1937 Sanborn Insurance Atlas does not show any changes in the configuration or character of the structures within the project area.

Bromley's 1917 Insurance Atlas differs from Sanborn's of the same year in only two respects: it designates the school lot no. 22 and shows its structure, and secondly, it names the owner of the project area's large central portion as Hanover Land & Dock Co.

The 1966 U.S.G.S. map shows three structures within the project area. It is unlikely that any of these structures correspond to those noted on earlier maps and atlases examined. One can therefore assume that the structures that characterized the project area during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as documented by the cartographic and literary sources, were demolished some time between 1937 and 1966. In the case of the Graniteville Public School, demolition could have taken place any time after 1917.

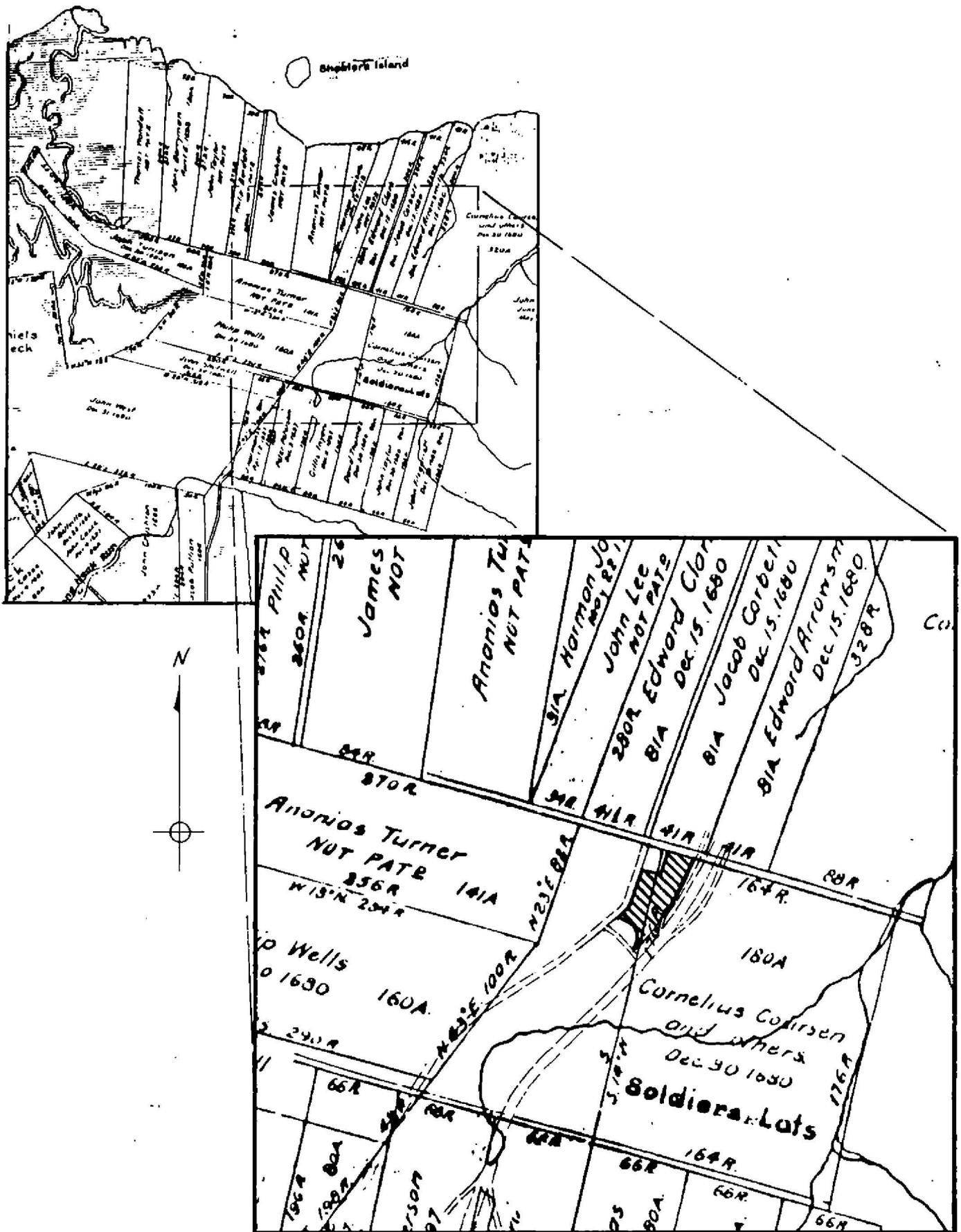


Figure 2 Upper left shows portion of Skene's 1907 Map of Staten Island, Richmond County, N.Y. showing the Colonial Land Patents from 1668-1712. Lower right enlargement of inset shows approximate location of project area in hatchure with Morning Star Road on west and Willowbrook Expressway on east (indicated by dashed lines).

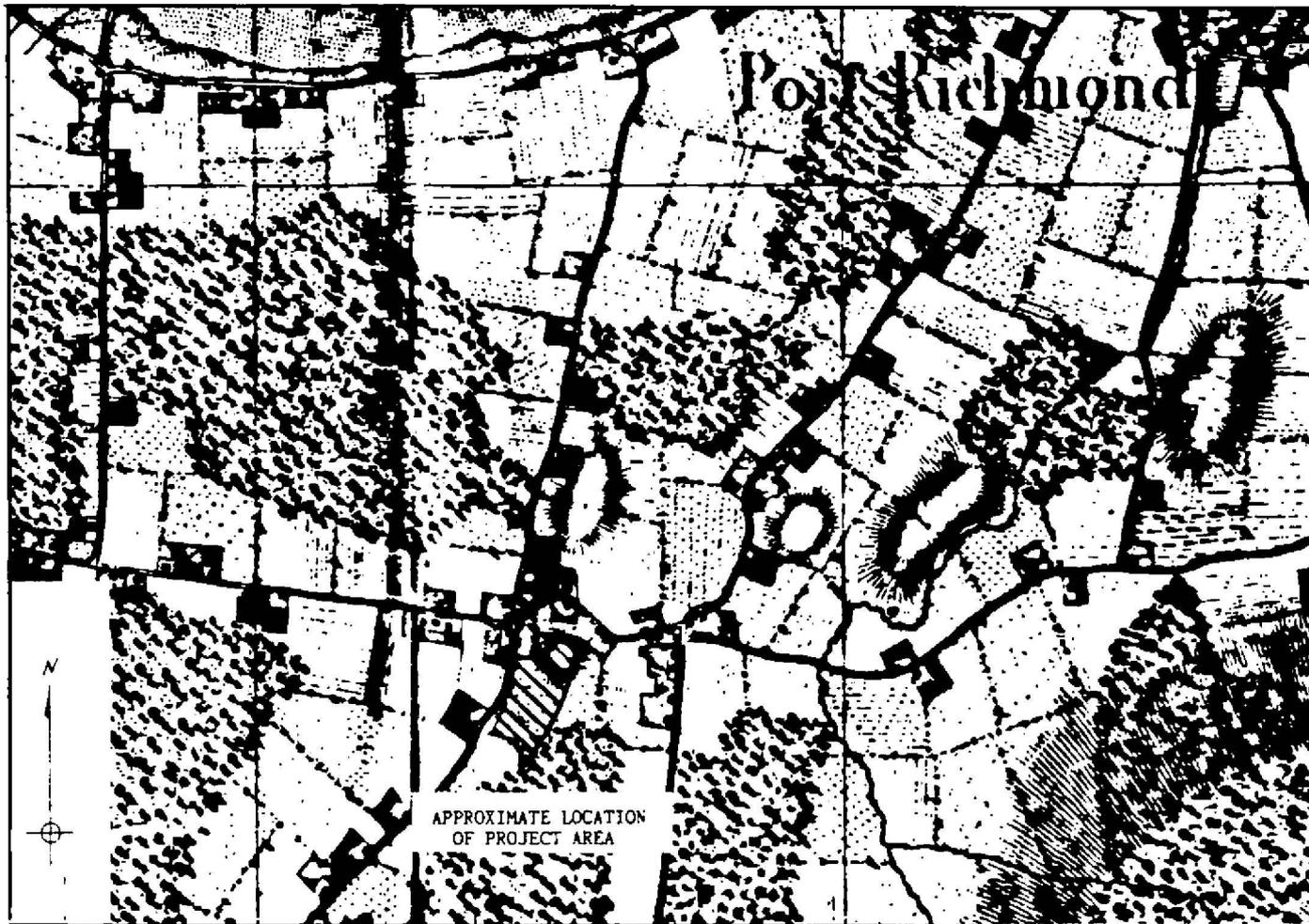


Figure 3 From the U.S. Coast Survey Charter of N.Y. Harbor 1836-39 showing the vicinity of the project area



Figure 4 Portion of Butler's 1853 Map of Staten Island or Richmond County showing vicinity of project area (indicated by arrow).

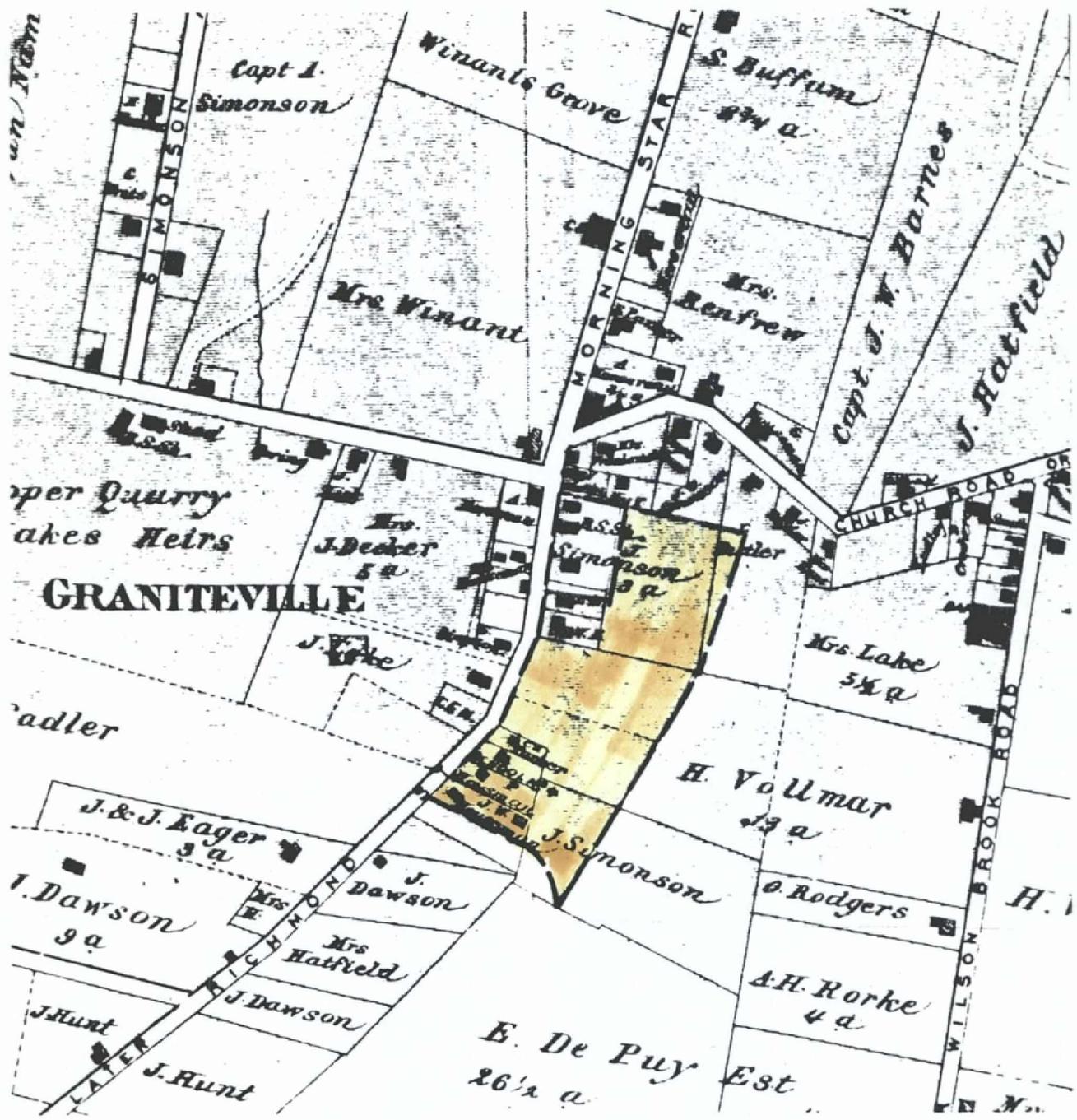


Figure 5 Portion of 1874 Atlas of Staten Island, Richmond County, N.Y. by J.B. Beers and Co. showing approximate boundaries of project area in yellow.

NEWARK BAY



Figure 6 From J.B. Beers and Co. 1887 Atlas of Staten Island, Richmond County, N.Y.. The approximate extent of the project area is indicated in yellow.

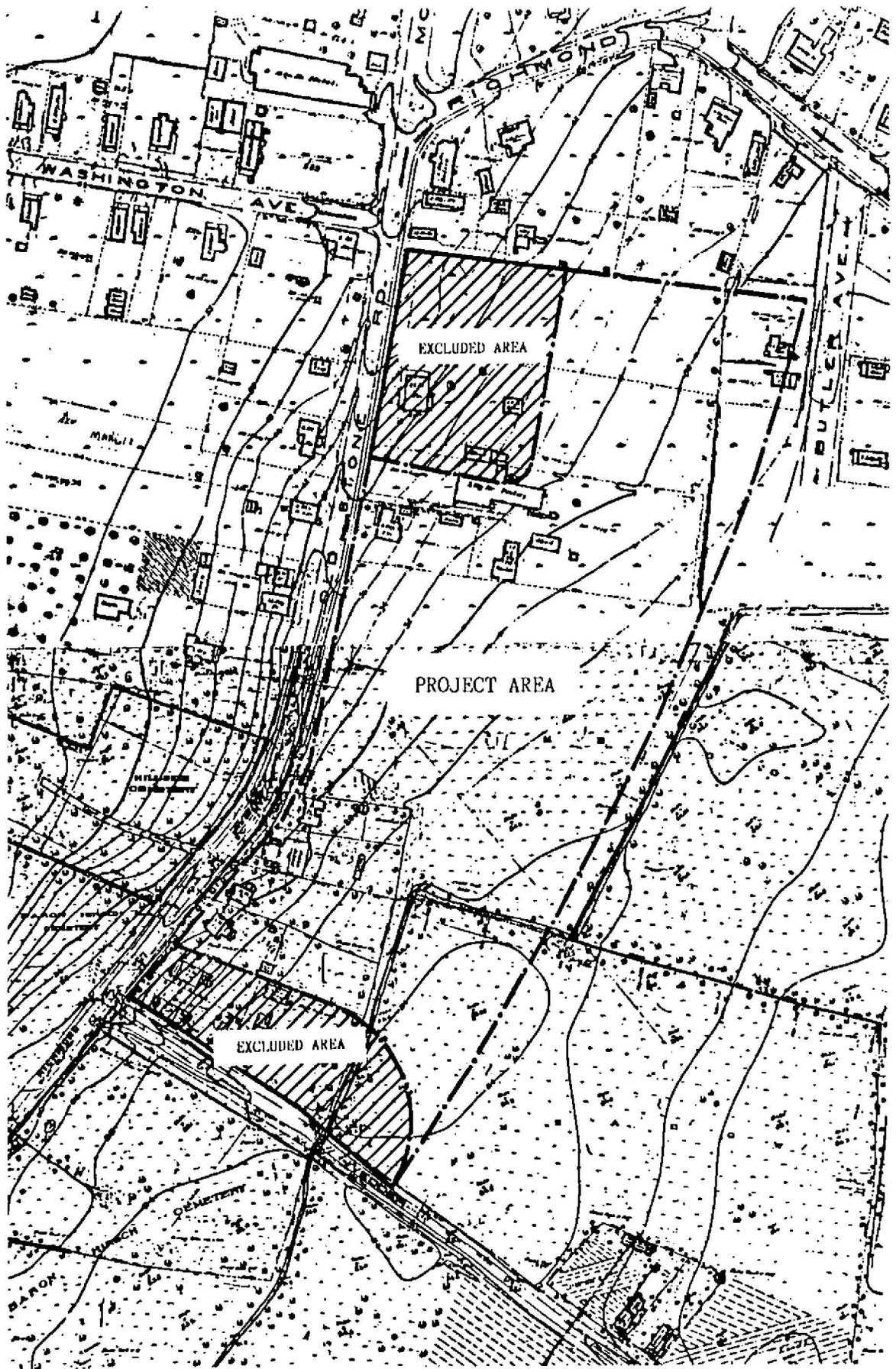


Figure 7 Portions of sheets 15 and 22, Borough of Richmond 1911 Topographical Survey of N.Y., Sept 1911 showing the project area.

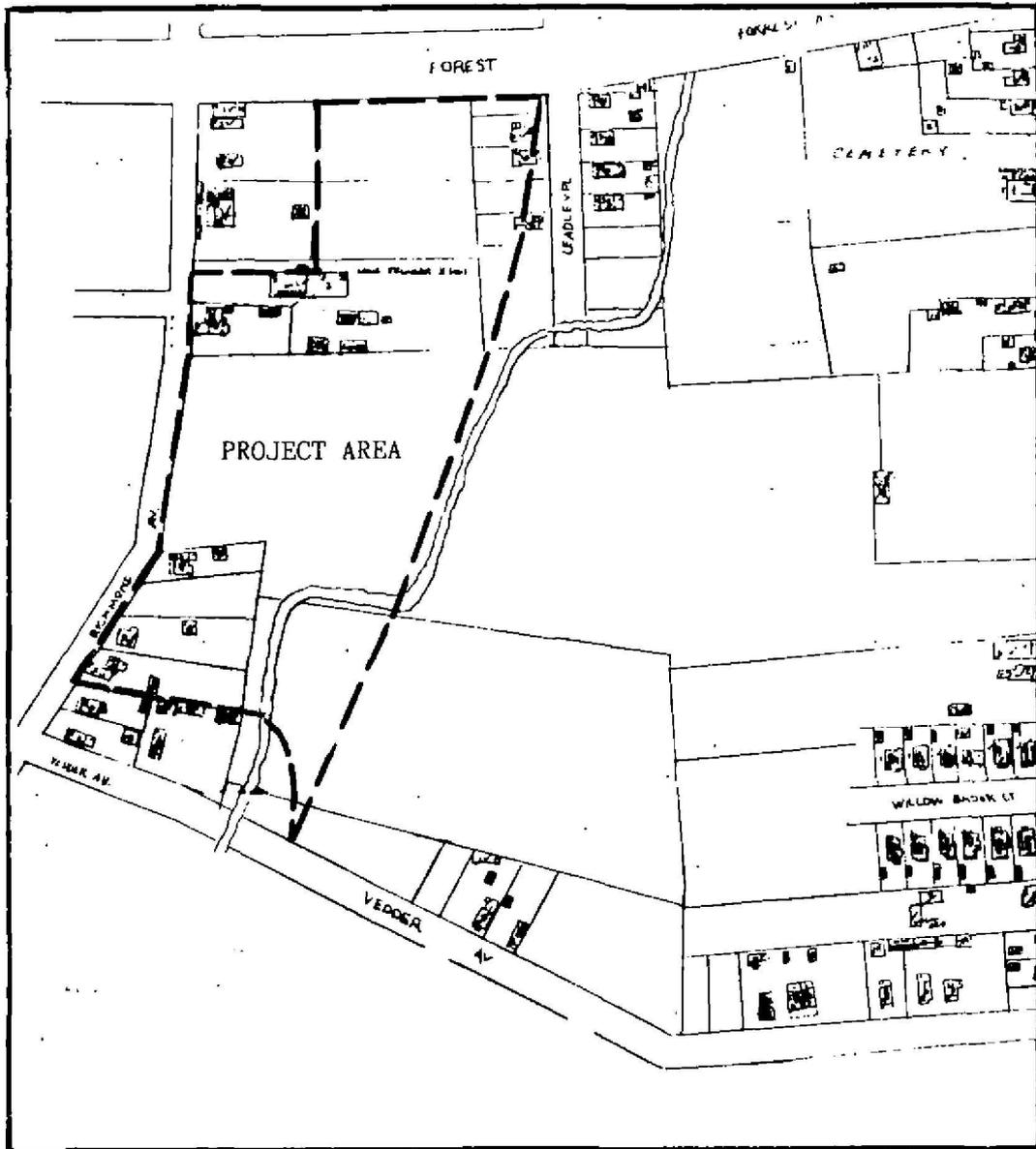


Figure 8 Tracing from portion of Sanborn Map Co.'s 1917 Borough of Richmond; Insurance Maps of Staten Island, N.Y. Volume 2. Bold dashed line indicates the approximate boundary of the project area.



IMPACT ANALYSIS

Analysis of the historic cartographic and documentary resources indicates that the Forest Avenue/Richmond Avenue project area has been impacted several times during the past. The earliest and probably the most extensive impact was the removal of the knoll at the northern end of the property. This knoll is clearly shown on the United States Coastal Survey Charter of New York Harbor 1836-1839 (Figure 3) but does not appear on later maps (Figures 4-7). The bend in Forest Avenue adjacent to the location of the knoll remains evident up to the 1911 Topographical Survey (Figure 7), but has been removed by 1917 (Figure 8). The other fairly major impact to the Forest Avenue/Richmond Avenue project area in the past has been the removal of all the nineteenth century structures by the mid 1960's as shown by comparisons of the earlier maps with the USGS map of 1966 (See Figure 1 and the discussion in the Historic Sensitivity Section above).

During the afternoon of June 6, 1986, the Principal Investigator conducted a pedestrian survey of the project area. During this visit it became evident that further impacts had taken place recently. The central zone covering approximately 70% of the parcel had been covered with a layer of fill about 4 feet thick and graded with bulldozers, as can be seen in Plate 2. The layer of fill includes numerous modern artifacts such as plastic flowerpots, aluminum beverage containers and even some foliage that was still green, confirming its recent deposition. The northern zone of the parcel, to the east of the out-parcel at the intersection of Richmond and Forest Avenues, exhibits a much lesser degree of recent disturbance. This area is still largely wooded, although a few trees have been removed during the presumably recent grading activity (see Plate 3). Similar evidence of grading and tree removal can be seen along Richmond Avenue on the western edge of the project area (see Plate 1). The southeastern zone of the project area is very wet at present. Standing water was observed there during the pedestrian survey and is illustrated in Plate 4. This is most certainly the result of alterations to the drainage pattern that occurred during the filling and grading of the parcel.

It can now be safely concluded that approximately 95% of the project area has been disturbed as a result of a series of impacts to the property from the mid nineteenth century until the present.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It can now be concluded that the Richmond Avenue/Forest Avenue project area is moderately sensitive to the existence of prehistoric cultural resources. This is due to the existence of at least seven prehistoric sites within a two mile radius of the project area, several of which were located on sandy knolls. It is the former presence of such a knoll on the northern end of the project area that provides justification for considering this location as a zone sensitive to the existence of prehistoric cultural resources. It can also be concluded that the Richmond Avenue/Forest Avenue project area is not particularly sensitive to the existence of historic cultural resources. Only agricultural use of the fields making up the project area can be inferred for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The earliest structure built on the parcel was Public School #4, which was constructed sometime between 1812 and 1830. By the middle of the nineteenth century a number of other structures were constructed on the project area, indicating mixed residential and light industrial use (Wallings 1859 map). None of these properties could be associated with identified persons or events important to the history of Staten Island in particular or the northeastern region in general.

The impact analysis for the Richmond Avenue/Forest Avenue project area has shown that approximately 85% of the parcel has been disturbed by various cutting, filling and grading operations during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A further 10% of the project area is presently under standing water. This leaves perhaps 5% of the parcel that could possibly be tested for the existence of cultural resources. Due to the fact that the area most sensitive to the existence of prehistoric cultural resources, the knoll, has been completely removed, it is the recommendation of the Principal Investigator that no subsurface testing be performed on the Richmond Avenue/Forest Avenue project area.



Plate 1: Western boundary of project area, looking south along Richmond Avenue.



Plate 2: Fill in central zone of project area, looking southeast from Richmond Avenue.



Plate 3: Northern end of project area, looking south, showing evidence of recent grading.



Plate 4: Standing water in southern zone of project area, view is to the east.



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