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

(CEQR #89-008R)

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VICTORY BOULEVARD DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

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evaluating any identified resources within the parcel itself, this survey shall include a synthesis of published and unpublished prehistoric and historic resources in the immediate area surrounding the project area.

The Victory Boulevard Development project area is located in western Staten Island. The project area parcel is bounded to the southeast by Victory Boulevard, to the south by other properties fronting Cannon Avenue, to the southwest by Meredith Avenue, and to the northwest and northeast by other properties. The Victory Boulevard project area is located on the northern side of the village of Travis. See Figure 1 for the location of the project parcel.

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

GEOGRAPHY AND PHYSICAL SETTING

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

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

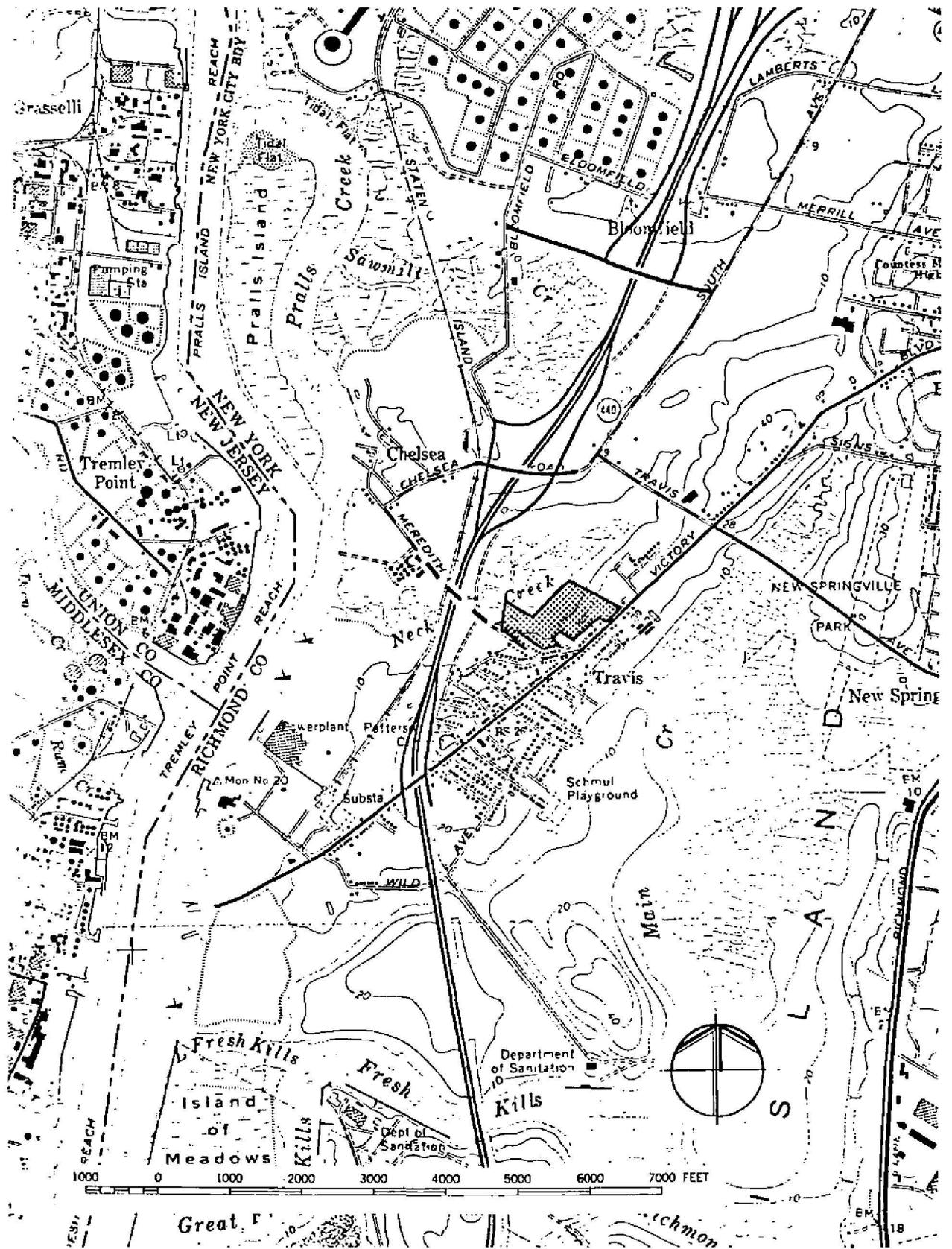


Figure 1: Project Area (indicated by dot pattern) shown on portion of U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute Arthur Kill Quadrangle, 1966, photorevised 1981.



During December 1987, the Principal Investigator and other members of the Greenhouse Consultants staff visited the Victory Boulevard Development project area in Staten Island. During this visit, a pedestrian survey was utilized to inspect the project area. The majority of the project area is presently disused, with debris piled in places and much growth of reeds, low grasses and a few small trees.

PREHISTORIC SENSITIVITY

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

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

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

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

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



Figure 2: Known Prehistoric Sites and Areas of Prehistoric Sensitivity within a 2 mile radius of Project Area shown on U.S.G.S 7.5 minute Arthur Kill Quadrangle 1966, photorevised 1981.

TABLE 1: Prehistoric Sites in the Vicinity of Victory Boulevard

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



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

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

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

- 1) the proximity of known prehistoric sites in or near the project area; and
- 2) the presence of fresh water drainage courses in general, and particularly the identification of river or stream confluence situations where two or more drainages come together, providing access to both water and food supplies of both systems.

This survey has documented the recorded or published location of no less than nine sites within a 2 mile radius of the Victory Boulevard Development Project area. Although sites have been identified in the general region of the proposed project impact area, none are known to exist within the project area itself. No evidence, positive or negative, based on previous survey work is available. It would be inappropriate, however, to characterize this region as without prehistoric sensitivity.



HISTORIC SENSITIVITY

The 17th and 18th Centuries:

Staten Island was called Eghquaous, Motanucke, Monockong or Aquehonga by the bands of Unami Delaware who inhabited the territory. The island was purchased from the Indians by the Dutch Director General in 1626. By 1630, a patent of the Island was granted to Michael Pauw. Two years later, the Directors in Holland ordered Cornelius Melyn to establish a colony. In turn, Melyn conveyed his right to title to land on Staten Island to the Dutch West India Company, which in turn granted land to "several French Waldenses and to a greater number of Huguenots" (Pickman 1978).

In 1664, Nieuw Amsterdam was ceded to the English. The final purchase of Staten Island from its aboriginal inhabitants was accomplished by the English Governor Francis Lovelace on April 13, 1670. By this time, however, there were a number of Dutch, French and English settlers on the Island who had obtained first Dutch and then English permission to settle. No surveys had been made, however, "and the boundaries of their lands, as well as their title to them, were quite indefinite" (Leng and Davis 1930:741). Governor Lovelace ordered land surveys to be undertaken and this task was completed under Governor Andros by 1677.

Frederick Skene's 1907 Map of Staten Island, tentatively delineating Colonial land patents between 1668-1712, places the project area within land granted to John Casse, comprising a total of 80 acres patented November 4, 1697 (see Figure 3). John Casse (Casier, Cassee) was the son or grandson of Philip Casier, who came to New Netherland from Calais in the "Gilded Otter" in April, 1660 (Leng and Davis 1930 II:874).

In 1668, the settlements comprising Richmond County were divided into four towns. The project area became part of Northfield. Although the eighteenth century cartographic sources examined do not depict any structures within the Victory Boulevard Development project area, they do indicate that its general locality was, to some extent, settled by the beginning of the Revolutionary War. The Plan (No. 31) Du Camp Anglo-Hessois dans Staten Island, 1780-1783, shows the project area within the locality of Long Neck and located approximately one mile from the New Blazing Star Ferry (see Figure 4). Long Neck is mentioned in "land papers in draught of patent granted to John Garretson in 1675" (Morris 1898 I:397). The section of Victory Boulevard that runs through this stretch of land was originally called Long Neck Road (See Leng and Davis' 1896 Map of Staten Island with Ye Olde Names and Nicknames).

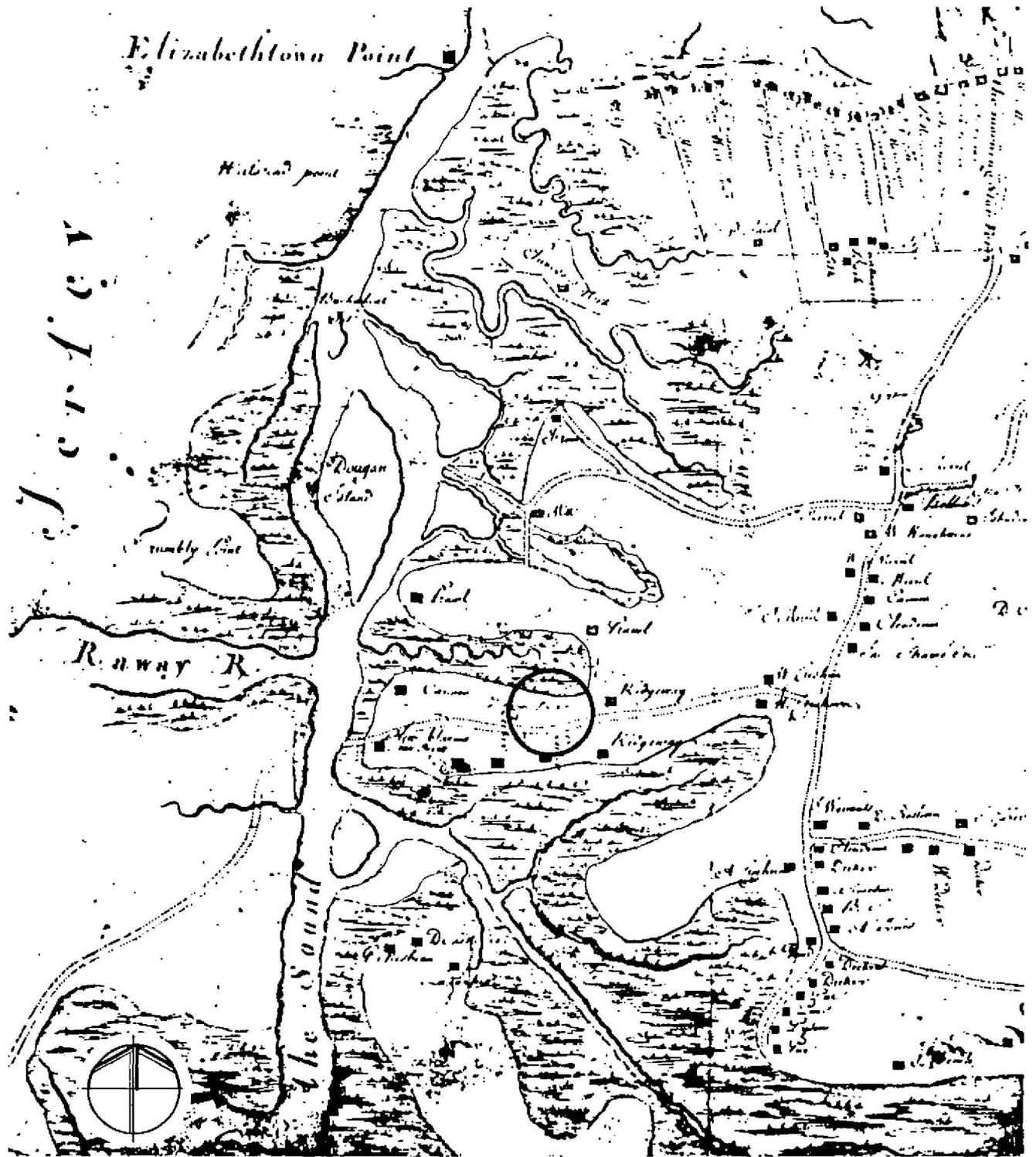


Figure 4: Approximate location of Project Area indicated by circle on a portion of Plan No. 31 Du Camp Anglo-Hessois du Staten Island 1780-1783.



The early route of the portion of Victory Boulevard that runs along and near to the project area's southeastern boundaries is depicted on the Taylor and Skinner 1781 map and on the Plan (No. 31) Du Camp Anglo-Hessois (also on McMillen 1933; Figure 4). Staten Island road records show that this section of what is today Victory Boulevard was officially laid out August 2, 1777 (McMillen 1946:14). One cannot, however, assume that this was the road's original opening date since many early Staten Island roads "were used as may be learned from the records itself prior to the official recording" (ibid.).

Victory Boulevard had become an important transportation route by the 1770's. During the nineteenth century increased traffic along this road led to improvements and it became known as the Philadelphia or Richmond Turnpike. During the historic period, Victory Boulevard's early route served as the post and stage road to Philadelphia. The portion of the turnpike from its junction with the Little Clove Road to Arthur Kill was laid out in 1815 and 1816 by the Richmond Turnpike Company (Davis 1896:58). At the western terminus of the turnpike (approximately one mile southwest of the project area) stages were transported across the "Sound," and this ferry was named the New Blazing Star (Clute 1887:234). The early route of this road is shown on a map finished October 12, 1793, and filed February 7, 1852 where it is designated the New Blazing Star Road (Davis 1896:58). The Turnpike was sometimes called the Governor's Road as Governor Tompkins was instrumental in having it laid out (ibid.). The Taylor and Skinner Map (1781) and the Plan (No. 31) Du Camp Anglo-Hessois dans Staten Island (1780-1783) both note the site of the New Blazing Star Ferry landing.

The Plan Du Camp Anglo-Hessois (1780-1783) also depicts farmsteads in the project area's general vicinity and provides names of property owners. This map shows that Long Neck's early settlers included members of the Ridgeway, Prall (Prawl), and Decker families (see Figure 4). Two structures designated Ridgeway are shown to the project area's east and northeast, located on either side of present day Victory Boulevard (Figure 4). The Ridgeway "mansion" is described by one late nineteenth century local historian as "one of the most noted stone houses on the island, dating from Colonial times" and situated "on the rising ground overlooking the salt meadow and that arm of the Fresh Kill known as Main Branch" (Davis 1889:14).

Across the turnpike road from the mansion "was the family burying ground with gravestones erected before the Revolution" (Leng and Davis 1930 II:980). Joseph Ridgeway, of Huntington, Long Island, settled near present-day Travis in 1750 (op. cit.:943). Gravestone inscriptions at the Ridgeway cemetery, recorded in 1889, shown that Joseph Ridgeway and his wife, who both died in 1771, are buried there (Davis 1889:14-5). This burying ground was used as late as 1851 and in it rest Ridgeways of later generations and members of the following other families: Travis, Alston, Wood and Egbert (Leng and Davis 1930 II:980).



Joseph Ridgeway's son, Thomas, inherited the estate and was in possession of it during the Revolution "when it was the scene of part of the engagement of August 22, 1777" (op. cit.:943). On that date the American armies stationed in neighboring New Jersey "conducted what was to be the most ambitious and successful attack made on Staten Island during the American Revolution" (McMillen 1976:106). The attack by more than 1,000 men was led by Major General John Sullivan. These forces were divided into two, so that half the men crossed over at Blazing Star (Rossville) while the other half landed at New Blazing Star and presumably advanced along what was then known as New Blazing Star Road (present day Victory Boulevard) (ibid.). McMillen's 1933 Map of Staten Island During the Revolution notes that Colonel Von Bose with three Hessian Companies were stationed at or near New Blazing Star Ferry Landing. Although the major confrontation between these companies and the attacking American forces undoubtedly took place at or very near to the Ferry landing, it is likely that skirmishes also occurred in the vicinity of the Victory Boulevard Development site and that the Ridgeway house was in some way involved in the events of this military action. The Ridgeway mansion was standing until 1924 (Leng and Davis 1930 II:980).

The 19th and 20th Centuries:

On the U.S. Coast Survey Charter of New York Harbor (1836-1839) the project area is shown to consist of portions of cultivated fields and of marshland. Cannon Avenue, stretching from the turnpike (Victory Boulevard) and leading to what was then the Cannon estate, is also depicted here. This survey, published in 1845, does not show any structures within the project area (see Figure 5). In fact, the nineteenth and early twentieth century cartographic sources examined consistently indicated that the land covered by the Victory Boulevard Development site was never developed (see Figures 5-9). These maps and atlases do, however, provide property information concerning the project area as well as other changes in its vicinity.

Butler's 1853 Map of Staten Island shows a marked growth in settlement in the project area's vicinity (Figure 6). Structures are shown to be concentrated along Cannon Avenue and Victory Boulevard near their junction. Five structures are shown just outside the project area along Cannon and Meredith Avenues and are designated K. Decker, D.R. Decker, B. Miller, W. Decker and Store (Figure 6). As was noted above, members of the Decker family had settled on Long Neck, in the project area's vicinity, by the onset of the Revolutionary War (see Figure 4). The earliest definite record of a member of this family on Staten Island is that of Matthew Decker, whose cattlemark was recorded in 1704 (Leng and Davis 1930 II:886). Within two centuries of this date the Decker family had become "by far the most numerous on the Island" (ibid.). Decker's



Figure 5: Portion of U.S. Coast Survey Charter of N.Y. Harbor 1836-1839 published 1845, showing approximate location of Project Area indicated by circle.

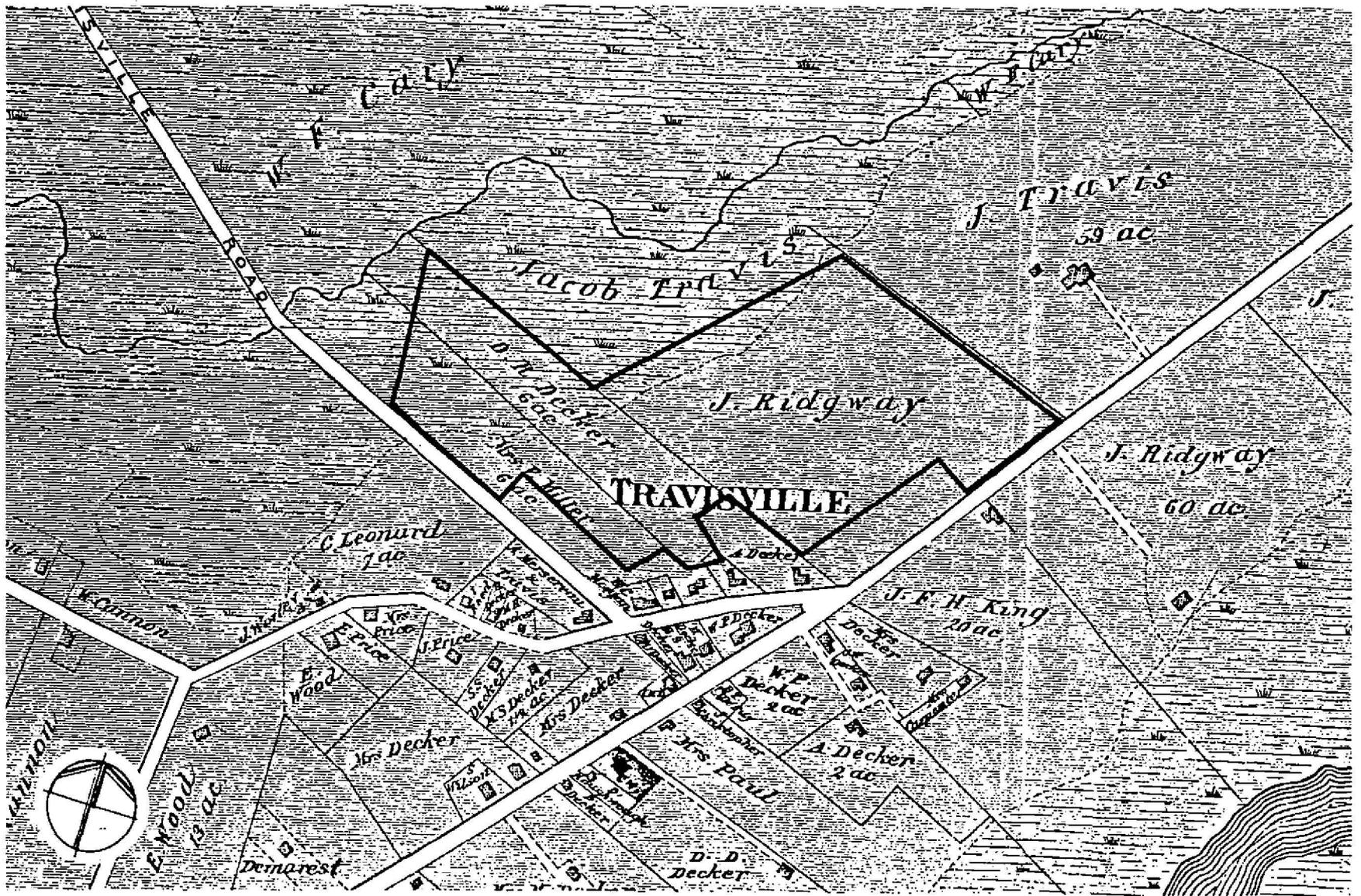


Figure 7: Section of Beers' 1874 Atlas of Staten Island, Richmond County, New York showing approximate boundary of Project Area as bold line.



Figure 8: Approximate boundary of Project Area indicated by bold line on section of Beers' 1887 Atlas of Staten Island, Richmond County, New York.

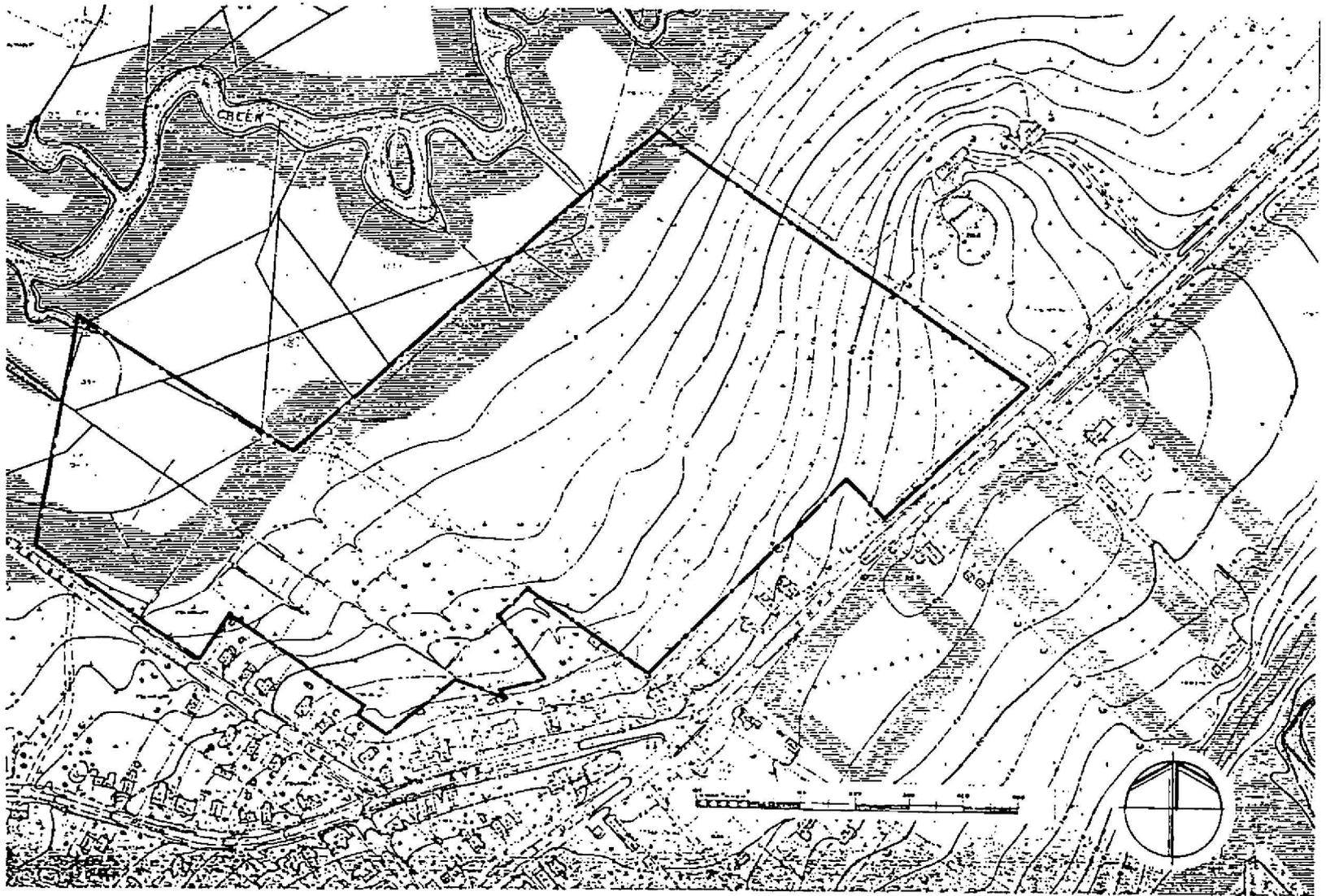


Figure 9: Portion of Sheet #36 from the Borough of Richmond 1912 Topographical Survey of New York. Bold line indicates approximate boundary of Project Area.

Ferry, an old name for Port Richmond, is one of the many Staten Island place names that recall their prominence. Another, more pertinent, example of this family's importance is the designation "Deckertown," a nickname for the project area's present day locality, now known as Travis, which resulted from the fact that "so many people by the name of Decker reside in the place" (Davis 1896:75).

Another family name that appears on the 1853 Butler map and on later nineteenth century maps and atlases in the project area's vicinity is Cannon (see Figures 5-8). Andrew (Andros) Cannon was on Staten Island at least as early as 1680, when his name appears in court records (Leng and Davis 1930 II:873). He was undoubtedly the progenitor of the Cannons that settled "the meadow district about Linoleumville (now Travis)," an area that "was the seat of many of the early families then inhabiting the Island, and (whose) . . . customary occupations . . . were those of farming, timbering and oyster fishing" (op. cit.:192). The Cannon family flourished during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and has given its name to Cannon's Creek and Cannon Avenue (op. cit.:873). The former is located approximately half a mile west of the Victory Boulevard project site, as was the old Cannon homestead; a portion of Cannon Avenue runs adjacent to the project area's southern boundary (Figure 6).

Butler's 1853 map also depicts the two Ridgeway structures noted on late eighteenth century maps (see Figures 4 and 6). One of these, located southeast of Victory Boulevard, to which it is shown to be linked by a path, is also designated Ridgeway on the 1853 map. The second structure, set back from the opposite side of Victory Boulevard and to the project area's northeast, is designated J. Travis on the 1853 map (Figure 6). The designation undoubtedly refers to Colonel Jacob E. Travis who, "before the Civil War, established his home on Long Neck" (Leng and Davis 1930 II:963). By 1853 the Ridgeway cemetery had therefore become part of Travis' property.

A structure designated "School Po" (sic) on the Butler 1853 map is shown near Victory Boulevard across from the project area's eastern corner (Figure 6). Although a structure at this approximate location is also shown on Beers' 1887 atlas and on the 1912 Borough of Richmond Topographical Survey, it is not depicted on Beers' 1874 atlas (see Figures 6-9). One cannot therefore assume that the school building noted on the 1853 map which, is to some degree inaccurate, is the same structure depicted at this location on post-1880 cartographic sources. Walling's 1859 Map of Staten Island replicates, for the most part, information noted above on the Butler 1853 map. Similarly to Butler's 1853 map, Walling's map depicts five structures adjacent to the project area along Meredith and Cannon Avenues, and the structure designated Travis on the 1853 map is designated Capt. J. Travis on Walling's 1859 map.



Beers' 1874 Atlas of Staten Island is the earliest of the nineteenth century cartographic sources examined to delineate property lines and designations within the project area (see Figure 7). Settlement within the project area's general locality appears to be centered along and near the junction of Victory Boulevard and Cannon Avenue, and is designated Travisville on the 1874 atlas (Figure 7). No structures are depicted within the Victory Boulevard Development project area which, on the 1874 atlas, is shown to consist of portions of properties owned by the following individuals: J. Ridgeway, D.R. Decker, Mrs. P. Miller, and Jacob Travis (marshland) (see Figure 7). Structures in the project area's vicinity that were noted above on the Butler 1853 and Walling 1859 maps are also depicted on the Beers 1874 atlas. Adjoining the project area, to its northeast, Jacob Travis' 59 acre property is shown to contain one large structure and a smaller, possible barn, structure to the house's rear. The 1874 atlas shows J. Ridgeway's 60 acre property and "mansion" on the other side of Victory Boulevard, opposite the project area.

Beer's 1887 Atlas of Staten Island shows that the area designated Travisville on Beers 1874 atlas (and previously known as Long Neck Village) is by that date divided by Victory Boulevard into Travisville, to the road's northwest, and Linoleumville, to the road's southeast (see Figure 8). The appellation "Linoleumville" was derived from the Linoleum Company--American Linoleum Manufacturing Company--which was then in operation, south of present day Travis. The 1887 atlas shows the project area to be comprised of portions of properties owned by J. Ridgeway (17 acres), E.F. Decker, and J.H. Decker (Figure 8). On the 1887 atlas only three, or possibly four, structures are depicted along Cannon Avenue, just outside the project area's boundaries. Other structures and property owners noted on the Beers 1874 atlas in the project area's vicinity, appear unchanged on the 1887 atlas (see Figures 7 and 8).

Robinson's 1898 Atlas of the Borough of Richmond does not show any structures within the Victory Boulevard Development project area. It shows portions of the project area as parts of properties owned by J. Ridgeway and J. Travis. The property noted on the Beers atlases as owned by Jacob Travis and adjoining the project area's northeast boundary, is designated David Cannon on the Robinson 1898 atlas. Within this property one large structure and a barn are shown as was also noted above on the Beers 1874 atlas (Figure 7).

The 1912 Borough of Richmond Topographical Survey does not show any development within the project area (Figure 9). Numerous structures are shown in the project area's immediate vicinity lining Chelsea (Meredith) and Cannon Avenues and Victory Boulevard on the 1912 Survey. The 1912 Survey is the only cartographic source examined to delineate and note the cemetery on the Ridgeway/Travis/Cannon property noted above. It is



shown approximately 100 feet northeast of the project area (see Figure 9). Other structures within this property, which were noted above on the nineteenth century maps and atlases, are depicted on the 1912 Survey and described as a 2 1/2 story frame dwelling and a 2 story frame barn (Figure 9). The cartographic evidence examined indicates that this dwelling may date to Revolutionary war times or earlier (see above; Figures 4-9). The Ridgeway mansion, also noted above as a colonial structure demolished in the 1920's, is depicted on the 1912 Survey. It is shown approximately 350 feet southeast of the project area and is described as a 2 1/2 story stone building with a 1 story frame component (Figure 9).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

It is also our conclusion that the northern portion of the project area may be sensitive to the preservation of historic archaeological evidence dating to the Revolutionary War period. As noted above in the historic sensitivity section, a house located approximately 350 feet southeast of the project area was the site of part of a 1777 military engagement.

We recommend that a Phase IB archaeological survey be undertaken within the project area to determine the presence or absence of this mid-nineteenth century farmstead, as well as to search for any prehistoric site(s) that may be at this location. We recommend that testing is necessary for all of the Victory Boulevard Development project that may be impacted by the planned construction and related activities, where such testing is possible. This would be done primarily to test the entire tract for the presence of aboriginal occupation, especially burials, given the presence of the Burial Ridge complex 7.2 miles to the southwest of the project area and nine other prehistoric sites within two miles of the project.



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