

BUILDING-STRUCTURE INVENTORY FORM

DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
NEW YORK STATE PARKS AND RECREATION
ALBANY, NEW YORK (518) 474-0479

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

UNIQUE SITE NO. 10305.000712
QUAD _____
SERIES _____
NEG. NO. _____

WB 4

YOUR NAME: Town of Islip/SPLIA DATE: February 1990
Town Hall, 655 Main Street
YOUR ADDRESS: Islip, L.I., N.Y. 11751 TELEPHONE: 516.224.5450
ORGANIZATION (if any): Dept. of Planning, Housing, and Development

IDENTIFICATION

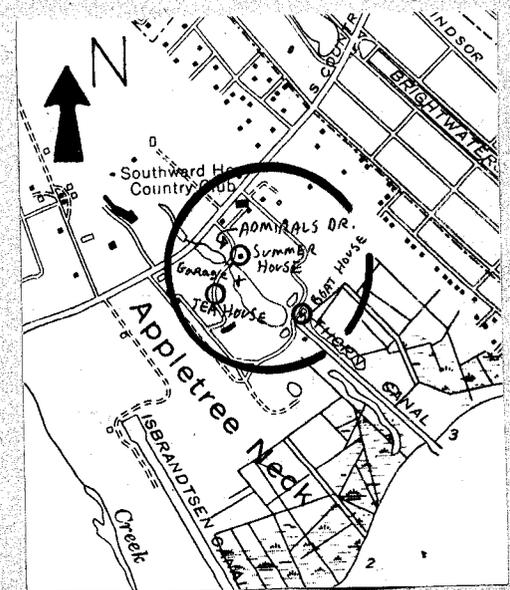
- 1. BUILDING NAME(S): Langdon K. Thorne Estate Bldngs, & Landscape Plan
- 2. COUNTY: Suffolk TOWN/CITY: Islip VILLAGE: West Bay Shore
- 3. STREET LOCATION: 550 South Country Road
- 4. OWNERSHIP: a. public b. private
- 5. PRESENT OWNER: "The Admiralty" ADDRESS: 550 South Country Rd.
- 6. USE: Original: estate property Present: condominium development
- 7. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: Yes No
Interior accessible: Explain by appointment

DESCRIPTION

- 8. BUILDING MATERIAL: a. clapboard b. stone c. brick d. board and batten
e. cobblestone f. shingles g. stucco other: cement
- 9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM: a. wood frame with interlocking joints
(if known) b. wood frame with light members
c. masonry load bearing walls
d. metal (explain) _____
e. other _____
- 10. CONDITION: a. excellent b. good c. fair d. deteriorated
- 11. INTEGRITY: a. original site b. moved if so, when? _____
c. list major alterations and dates (if known): _____

Multi-unit condominium development built on site.
Mansion demolished.

- 12. PHOTO: Neg. KK VI-31, fm. E Overall view of landscape layout in garage/arcade area at driveway court.
- 13. MAP: NYS DOT Bay Shore West Quad



14. THREATS TO BUILDING: a. none known b. zoning c. roads
 d. developers e. deterioration
 f. other: _____
15. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS AND PROPERTY:
 a. barn b. carriage house c. garage
 d. privy e. shed f. greenhouse
 g. shop h. gardens
 i. landscape features: specimen plantings, terraces, walled
 j. other: areas, tea house, boat house, summer house
16. SURROUNDINGS OF THE BUILDING (check more than one if necessary):
 a. open land b. woodland
 c. scattered buildings
 d. densely built-up e. commercial
 f. industrial g. residential
 h. other: man-made ponds, natural wetlands/marsh
 (The Nature Conservancy)
17. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS:
 (Indicate if building or structure is in an historic district)
 The former Thorne Estate buildings and part of the landscape plan have been preserved within the condominium development with the exception of the mansion house. The estate remnants are scattered among the low-rise attached condominium houses in a community of large lawns.
18. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING AND SITE (including interior features if known):

Refer to photographs on continuation sheets.

SIGNIFICANCE

19. DATE OF INITIAL CONSTRUCTION: 1920's
 Buildings - Wm. F. Dominick
 ARCHITECT: Landscape Plan - Umberto Innocenti & Ferruccio Vitale
 BUILDER: E. W. Howell Co., Babylon

20. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:
 This handsome estate was widely admired and frequently published. Although the destruction of the mansion was greatly lamented, the preservation of the landscaping and outbuildings is regarded as a good example of how to preserve a large estate.

21. SOURCES:
 Shopsin, William. Saving Large Estates. NYSCA, 1977.
 Kuss, Betty. Building-Structure Inventory Form, 2/10/1976.
 The Nature Conservancy. "Thorne Sanctuary", 1982.
22. THEME:
 Research by the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities - KEK

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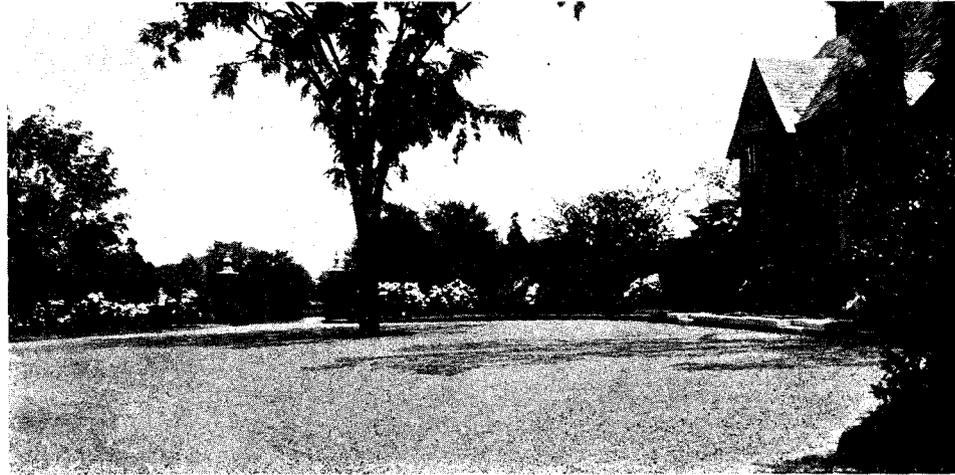
Write for Catalogue

SEDGWICK

MACHINE WORKS

164 West 15th Street : : : New York, N. Y.

E. W. Howell Co., "Notable Long Island Buildings," 1933.



*Forecourt Mr. Landon K. Thorne
Bay Shore, N. Y.*

*Ferruccio Vitale,
Landscape Architect*

LANDSCAPE CONSTRUCTION

by

W. C. McCOLLOM

LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR

ISLIP

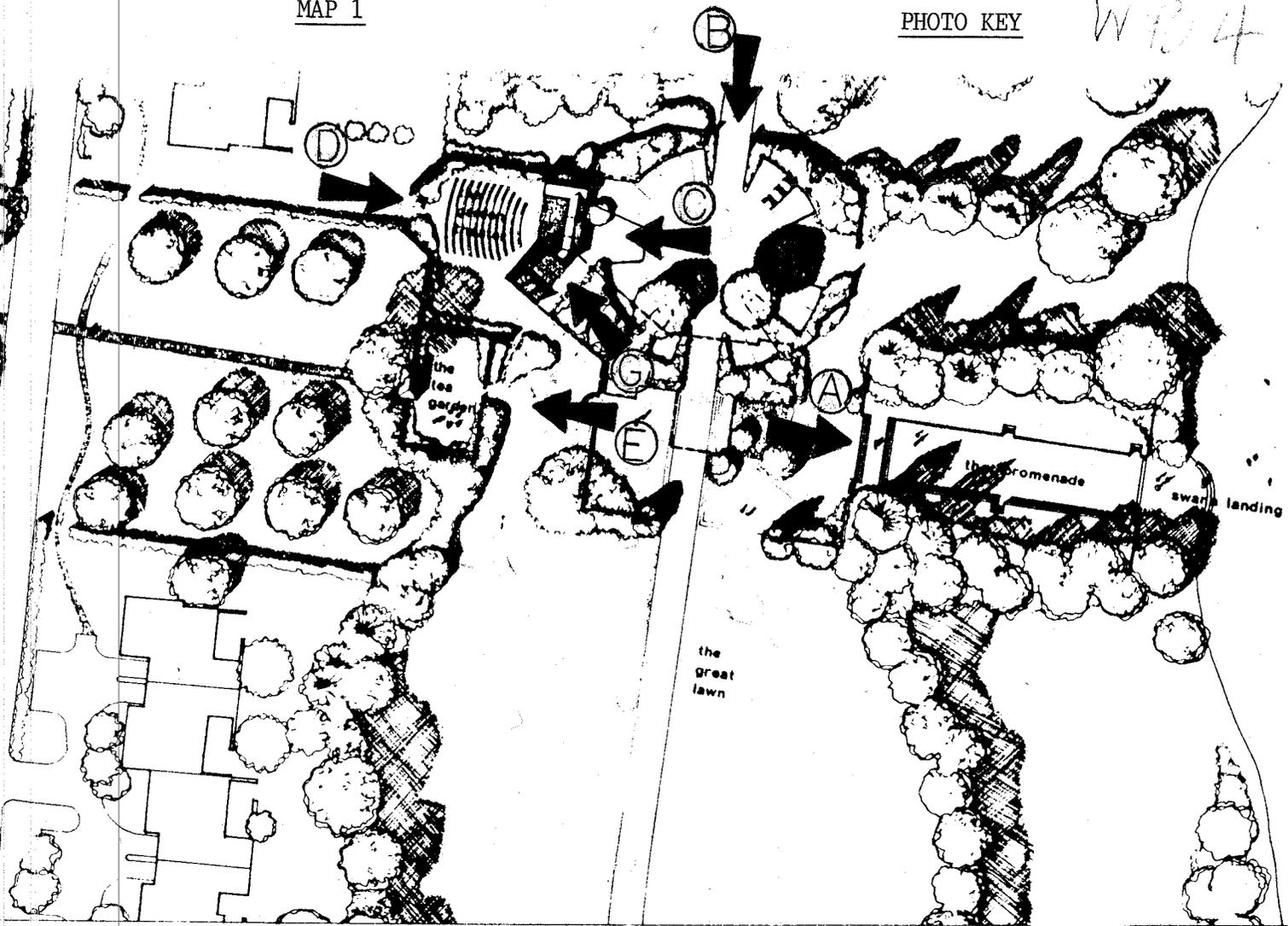
LONG ISLAND

Continuation Sheet
L.K. Thorne Estate Buildings & Landscape Plan

MAP 1

PHOTO KEY

WB 4



theAdmiralty

- Photo A - Neg. KK VI-33
- Photo B - Neg. KK VI-32
- Photo C - Neg. KK VI- 1
- Photo D - Neg. KK VI- 36
- Photo E - Neg. KK VI- 34
- Photo F - Neg. KK VI- 30
- Photo G - Neg. KK VI- 35

Map reproduced from Shopsin, W.C. Saving Large Estates, NYSCA, 1983.

MAP 2

- A - Neg. KK VI-33
- B - Neg. KK VI-32
- C - Neg. KK VI-31
- D - Neg. KK VI-36
- E - Neg. KK VI-34
- F - Neg. KK VI-30

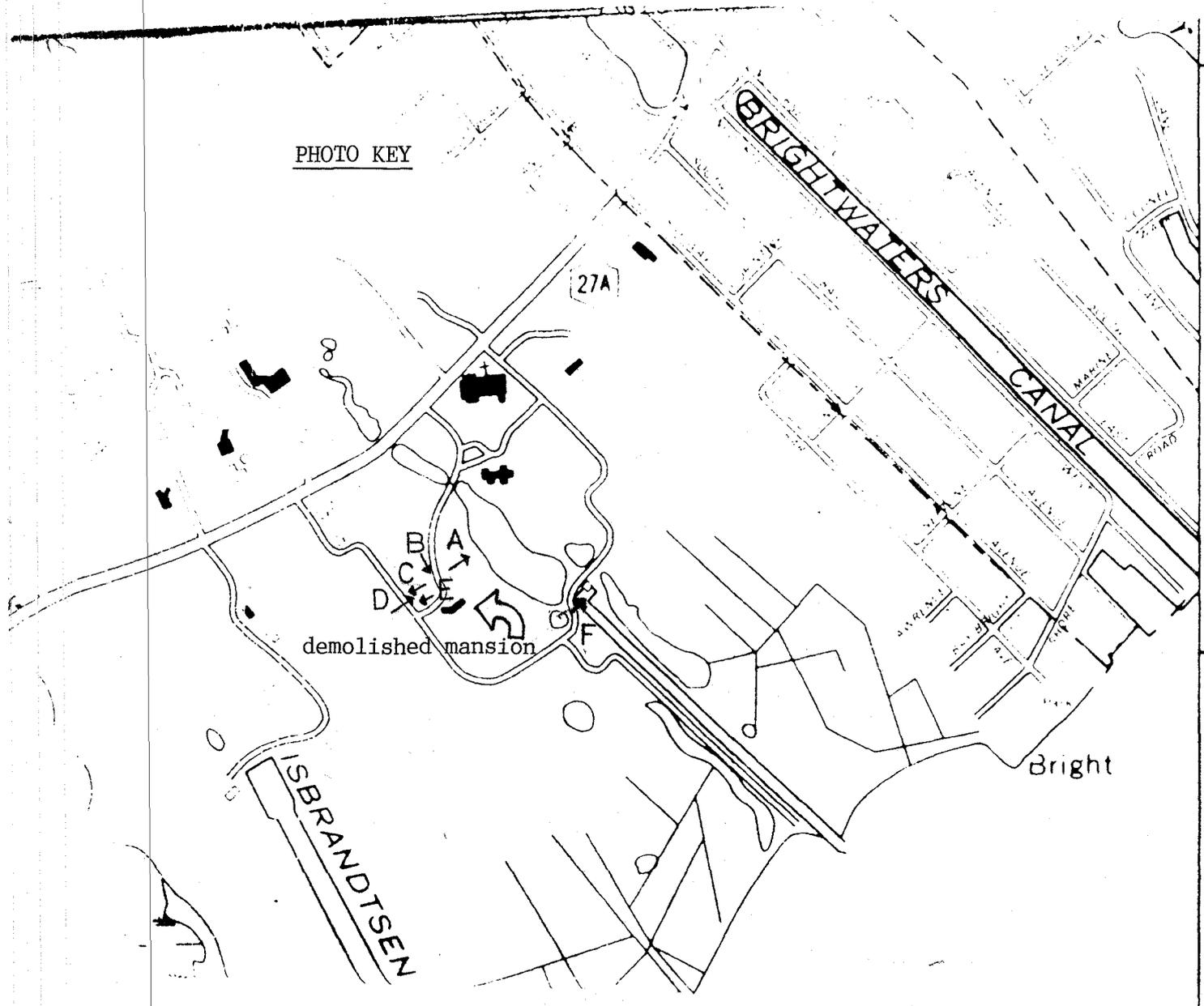




Photo A

Neg. KK VI-33, fm. W. Terraced axial garden leading to pond, view from driveway court.



Photo C

Neg. KK VI-I, fm. NE. Detail of garage and brick arcade.



Photo D

Neg. KK VI-36, fm. W. Garage/arcade from W., towards driveway court through breezeway.



Photo G

Neg. KK VI-35, fm. SE. Arcade, view from south of driveway court. The garage and brick arcade garden is a one story, gable roof, single bay garage with a single brick arch attached to the north and a brick arch U-shaped arcade attached to the south set diagonally to an arcaded gable roof breezeway. The components, with an open lawn to the rear, are fronted by a circular drive court marked with curved brick walls and posts with concrete urn motifs. Two of these demarcations flank the main road of the condominium development and one flanks the entrance to the axial garden that leads to one of the man-made ponds.



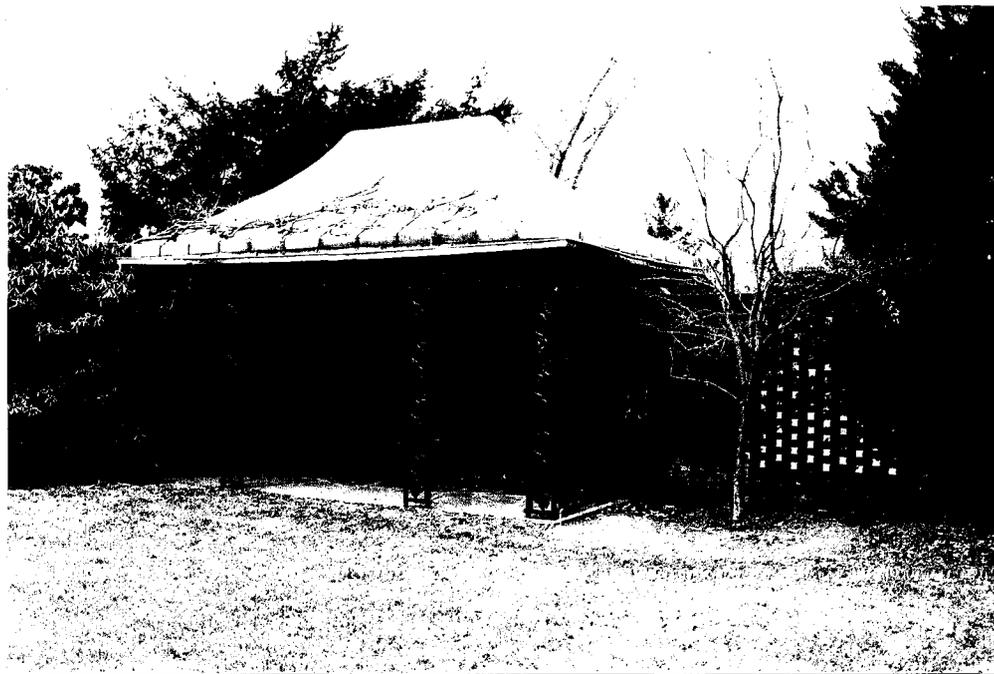
Photo B

Neg. KK VI-32, fm. E. View into driveway court towards garage/arcade.



Boat House
Photo F

Neg. KK VI-30, fm. S/SW. Large, double bay, gable and hip roof boat house with four equally spaced windows on the broad facades.



Tea House
Photo E

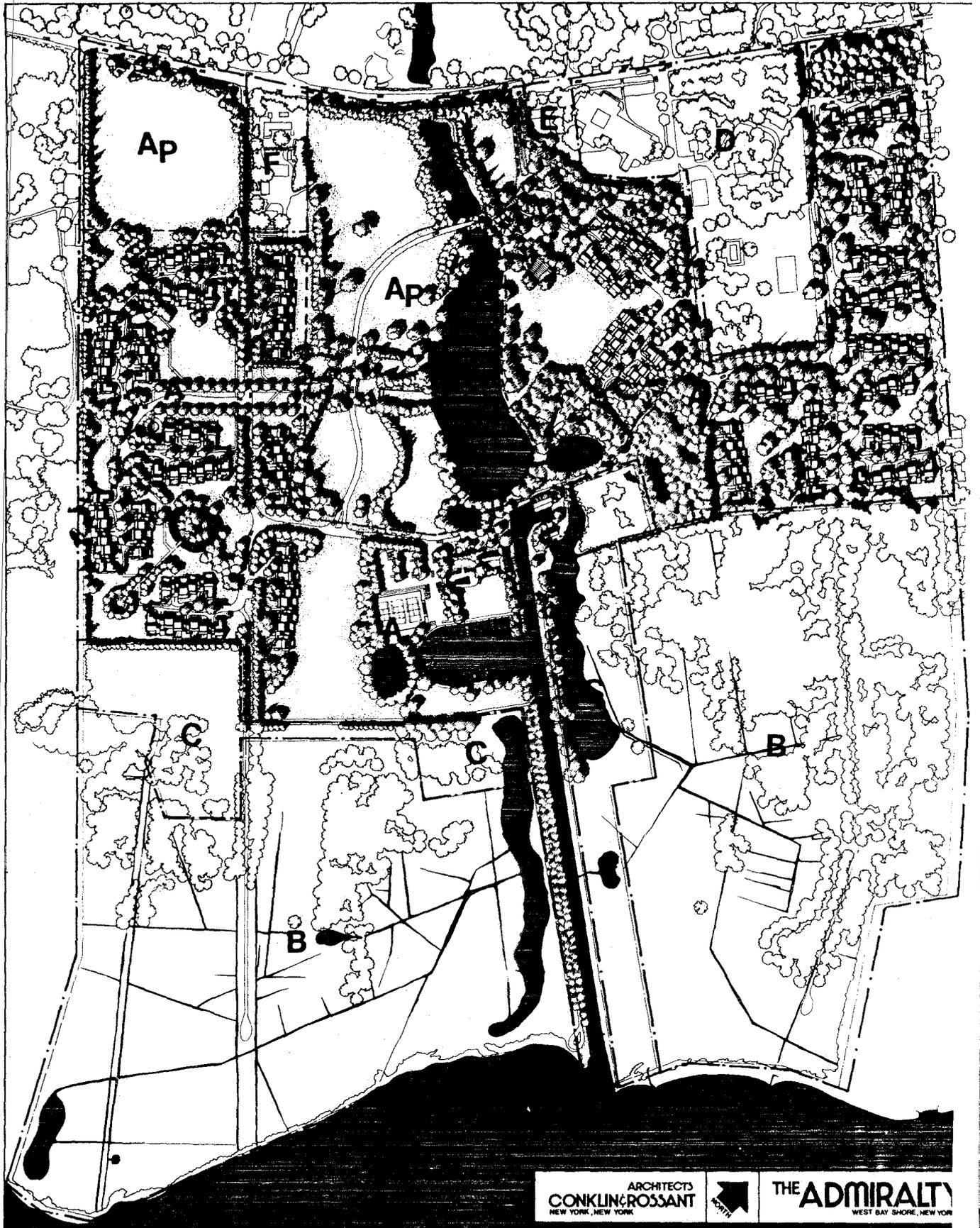
Neg. KK VI-34, fm. E/NE. Small, one story, bowed hip roof Japanese brick tea house with foliated iron grill posts and fascia. A lattice brick walled garden flanks the building.

original landscaping of an estate overlooking Great South Bay, even though the mansion was demolished.

ORIGINAL LANDSCAPING

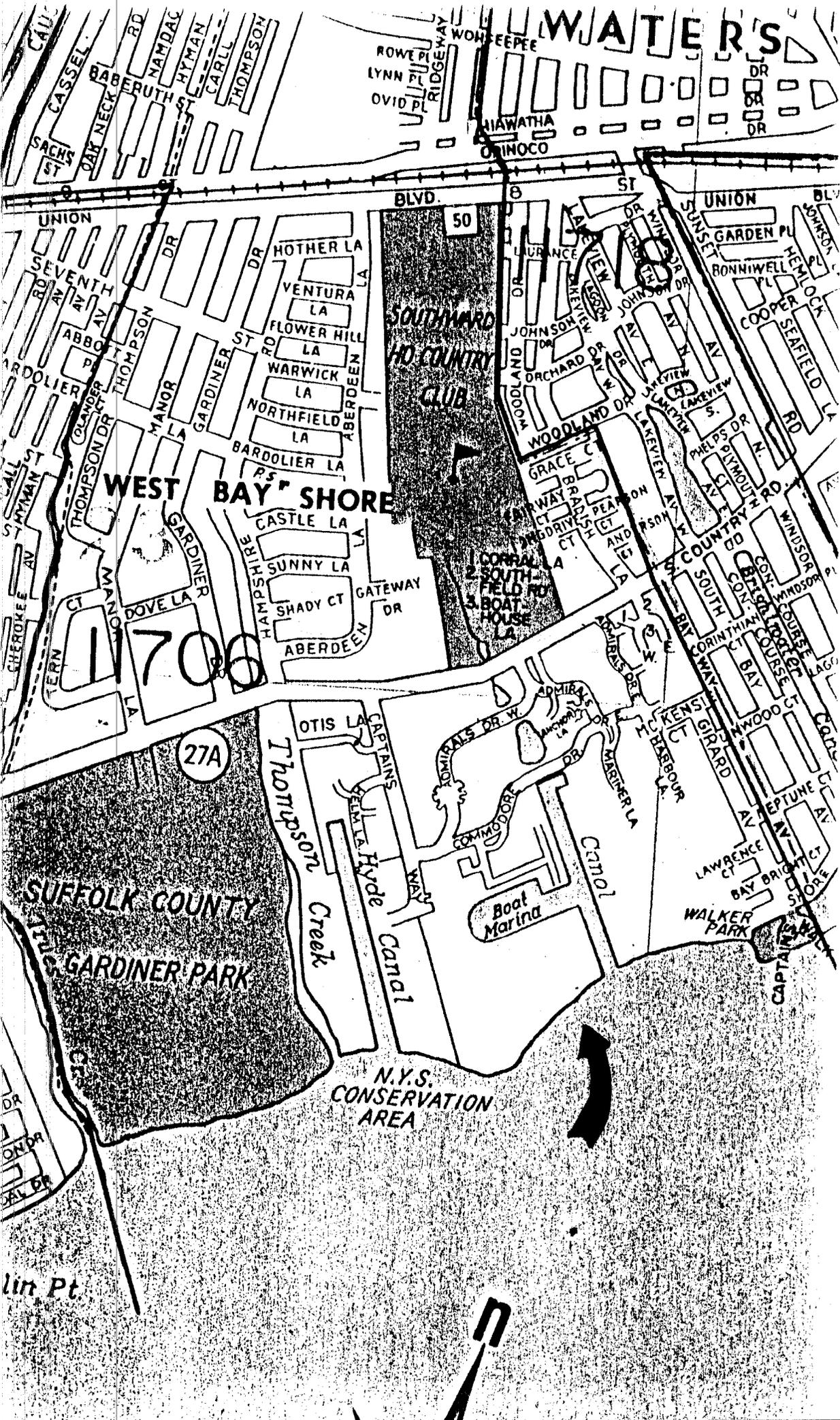
Aerial view, Great South Bay at the top





Shopsin, William C. Saving Large Estates. NYSCA, 1977.

Map of property showing location of new townhouses.



Hagstrom Map Co. 1983 (enlarged)

The Estate

Langdon K. Thorne, a noted industrialist, investment banker and railroad man acquired the 230-acre property in the early 1900's in its natural state—barren farmland and wooded upland with a small stream bisecting the land. A saltwater marsh with many varieties of marine and wildlife lay to the south on Great South Bay. In the 1920's, Thorne hired Umberto Innocenti, a landscape architect who had studied for many years with Ferruccio Vitale, then a leader in the field of landscape architecture. Working with the Thornes, Innocenti created a man-made environment consisting of eight ponds varying in size and function, each landscaped and connected by water falls, subterranean aquifers and the direct surface flow of the original stream. The pond system was designed not to interrupt the natural flow of fresh water, vital to the marshlands south of the estate.

He also created several landscaped areas to suit different moods. A Japanese garden sat quietly in the midst of woodland, surrounded by flowering plants and a variety of trees, ferns and evergreens. A section of the wooded upland was cleared of underbrush to create a pine grove surrounded by rhododendrons reaching heights of more than fifteen feet. Lily ponds, alleys of birches, wood fences trailing with roses, and open fields framed by trees further added to the beauty of the estate.

Built in 1928, the thirty-room mansion was a rambling brick Tudor structure composed primarily of many small rooms. Thorne cleared the forested lands south of it to allow an unobstructed view of Great South Bay and Fire Island from anywhere in the house or on the great lawn extending from its rear facade. The formal landscaping surrounding the mansion included a sunken promenade connecting it with the largest of the ponds, a quiet tea garden with a kiosk reflecting the style of the mansion and a topiary sculpted to resemble a peacock with spread tail-feathers. Over the years, a large collection of specimen trees and shrubs were planted.

A gymnasium and pool house were built shortly after the mansion in a similar style. The Thorne family later gave them to St. Peter's Episcopal Church and constructed the existing simple pool house and guest house. Surrounding the pool itself is a lush array of exotic plants, including the Thornes' extensive orchid collection. An 1,800-foot canal brought their yacht to the foot of the estate, where they had constructed a boathouse to protect it. The yacht's captain lived in a simple wood shingled residence at the head of the canal. Additional outbuildings included a gatehouse and chauffeur's house.

History

After Mr. Thorne's death in 1964, Mrs. Thorne dedicated 114 acres of the marshland property to The Nature Conservancy, a non-profit conservation organization, so that it would remain a natural wetland in perpetuity. She continued to maintain the rest of the estate with a small indoor staff and fourteen to twenty-five people on the grounds. When she died in 1974, the 117-acre property went on the market. The Town of Islip considered acquiring it as a town park (it had also acquired another estate, Brookwood Hall, for town use). But the property's high cost, hesitation over its removal from the tax rolls, and the desire to stimulate lagging construction in the area caused the proposal's subsequent rejection.

Meanwhile, Mr. Jerry Kramer, a builder with considerable experience in Suffolk County, realized the property's potential for a creative approach to land-use and purchased it outright for \$1.2 million even though his application for re-zoning had not yet received the approval of the Islip Town Board. The annual taxes on the property when he took title in March, 1975, including town, highway, special districts, county and school taxes amounted to \$80,031.17, or about \$700 per acre, reflecting its undeveloped status.

While working out several proposals for the property, Mr. Kramer conducted an extensive public relations campaign, which he believes was essential to getting approval for a change in zone from Residential 3A (one unit per acre) to Residential A (four units per acre). He wrote over 5,000 letters, and appeared frequently before service organizations, clubs, schools, churches, and civic and business groups over a period of two years. He explained that the failure to allow a higher density of single-family dwelling units in cluster form would leave the land vulnerable to a conventional development of ninety-nine four and five bedroom houses, ruining the spectacular landscape which had taken years to create. He assured skeptics that his plan would require no additional municipal services and would best preserve the unique landscaping of the site, the important open spaces and visual appearance of Montauk Highway in the area, and the town's tax base. In addition, the Town of Islip Planning Department had prepared statistics to show that a greater number of pupils but lower school-tax revenue would be generated by conventional development.

After rejecting Mr. Kramer's application for a higher density (220 units), the Town Board on March 16, 1976 approved a plan for 160 single-family units clustered on sixty-eight acres, with twenty-seven acres to be left in their existing state and another twenty-two acres to be conveyed to The Nature Conservancy as a buffer zone between the residential area and the

approved the cluster zoning. In addition, Mr. Kramer agreed to waive the right to apply for a reduction in assessed valuation on those portions of the property which will remain in their present state, to limit units to three or fewer bedrooms, and to set up a homeowners' association to be responsible for the payment of taxes and the future maintenance of the park and open spaces. No restrictions were placed on the use or removal of any structures, nor were there any aesthetic controls relating to new construction. The project will cost about \$12 million. It is estimated that the property when completed will generate about \$350,000 per year in tax revenue.

The Plan

The builder retained the New York City architectural firm of Conklin and Rossant to do the planning and design work. A community of 160 units, grouped in thirty-one buildings of four to six units each clustered around center courts, will be built on the edges of the property, mainly in open fields used to grow crops during World War II. Conklin and Rossant have made a concerted effort to keep all new construction away from the landscaped center of the original estate, leaving those areas as open space park to be enjoyed by all residents. They have sited the units to take advantage of the magnificent views, including the central pond with its flock of geese. The houses are one and two stories with brick and shingled exteriors. Varied rooflines both create a sense of unity in each cluster, and, with low brick walls, provide privacy for backyard patios, making fences unnecessary. Another unusual feature is that the houses are connected by side-to-side garages which are two cars in length, not width.

Plan of a typical cluster of houses



A--The Admiralty.

The area shown for the Admiralty is composed of two sections. Section "A" defines the area in which housing has been located. Sections "Ap" are areas which have been set apart for preservation of the original estate's landscaping. It may also be noted that in many portions of the area denoted with the letter "A," large portions of the original landscaping have also remained untouched. In the areas marked "Ap," however, it was agreed that no "physical" structures would be erected.

B--The Nature Conservancy.

These areas bordering the Thorne Canal were the original donation of property to The Nature Conservancy by the Thorne family and now bear the name "Thorne Preserve."

C--Additions to The Nature Conservancy.

These areas will be deeded to The Nature Conservancy.

D--St. Peter's Protestant Episcopal Church.

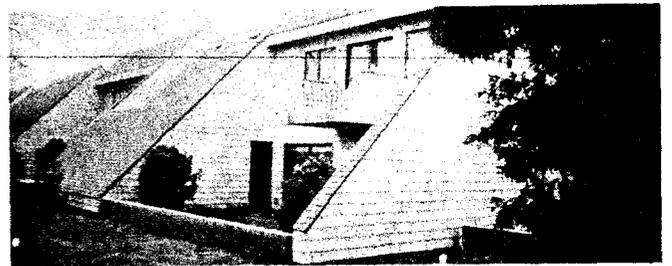
Portions of this property were originally part of the Thorne Estate and were donated to the Church along with the first Pool House and Gymnasium built by the Thornes.

E--Original Gate House and Chauffeur's Cottage.

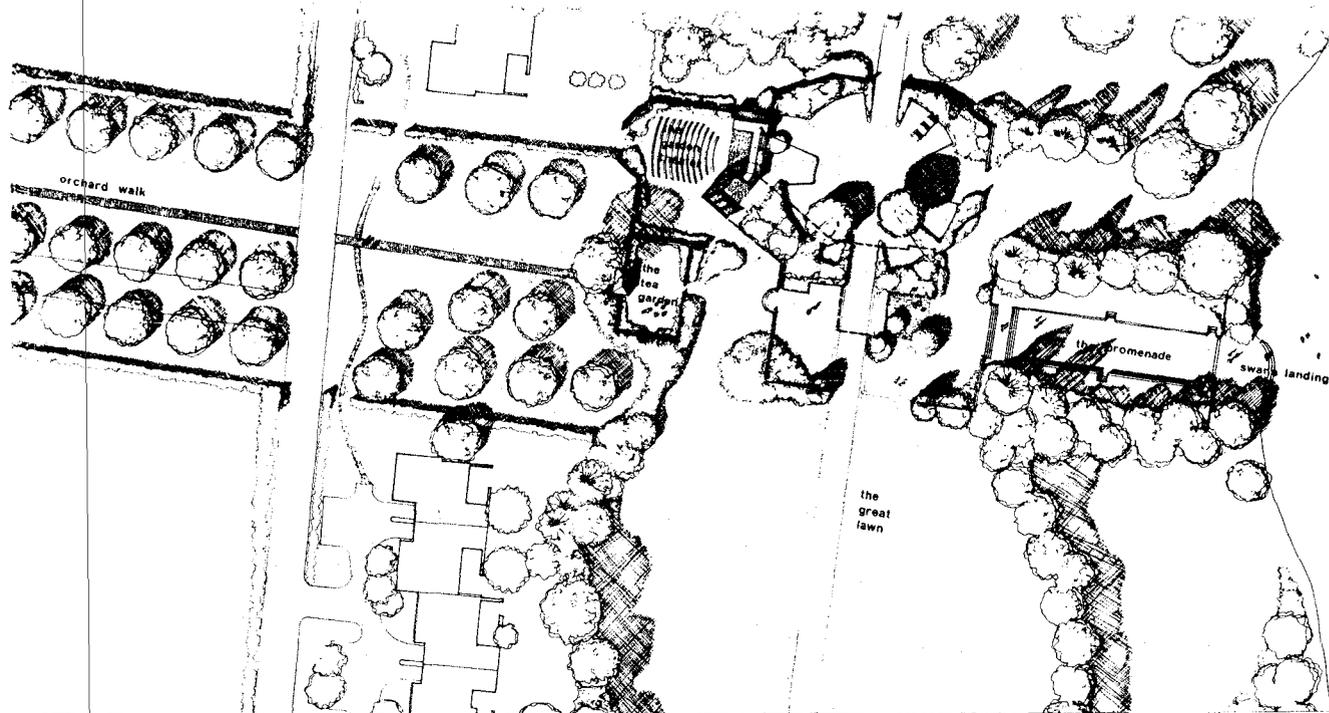
This portion of the estate was deeded to St. Peter's Episcopal Church after the purchase of the Thorne Estate by Mr. Kramer.

F--Property of Mr. William Alexander.

This property was given to Mr. Alexander upon the death of Mrs. Thorne. Mr. Alexander had been the head gardener for the Thorne Family.



Private yard of a typical house



CCR 5-6-76 1"=30'

theAdmiralty 

Several of the outbuildings on the estate will be re-used. The Thorne canal and boathouse will be the site of a marina with mooring for sixty boats. The Commodore Yacht and Tennis Club will use the shingled boat captain's house, located on the canal, with a wing added for use as a lounge by the club's members. The builder has acquired the former poolhouse/greenhouse and will continue to reside on the property. The chauffeur's house has been given to St. Peter's Episcopal Church to be used as a Sunday school building. A new swimming pool and tennis courts will adjoin the clubhouse.

Above: Site plan indicates landscape features incorporated with new cluster houses.
Below: Thorne boathouse is still in use.



Shopsin, William C.

After considering various possibilities for re-using the Thorne mansion, the developer concluded that its central location made institutional use a liability for the success of the community and that its layout, location, and heating and maintenance costs made it unsuitable for use as a clubhouse. It has therefore been demolished and replaced by a landscaped promenade which connects the existing tea garden, apple orchards, sunken garden and ponds with the houses in the western fields. The western portion of the mansion and its connecting arcade will be refurbished to provide a backdrop for an outdoor garden theater.

Landscaped walkways will encourage pedestrian traffic, while a one-way system primarily using the existing estate drives lessens the amount of new construction within the landscaped areas. Additional roadways in the housing areas will handle internal traffic.

The houses sell for between \$59,000 and \$84,000 with additional monthly common charges for maintenance estimated at \$73 to \$93. Despite a sluggish local market, four weeks after the opening of the model houses, 125 had already been sold. Most purchasers are in at least a fifty percent tax bracket and many are older people with no children.

Comments

The development of the Thorne estate presented a difficult choice of a kind which will have to be made about other large properties. Is the house worth saving? Or are the grounds the significant part of the property? Not everything can or should be saved, and reality often dictates the necessity to make these choices. In this case, the house was architecturally undistinguished while the landscaping was extraordinary. The developer and the Town of Islip both considered various uses for the house, but in the end it appeared to be a liability in reaching the goal of preserving the property in a self-sustaining way.

THORNE PRESERVE
Bay Shore
Suffolk County
87 Acres Wetlands



Dennis Puleston

Of Interest The preserve forms the east end of some 400 acres of natural shore front on Great South Bay. It embraces a sandy shore (strewn with seaweeds, sponges, and eelgrass) salt marsh, salt-water and brackish ponds, meadows, streamfed freshwater swamp, thickets, woodland, drainage ditches and a boat canal which divides the preserve into an east and west section.

This rich diversity of habitat accounts for a great variety of plant life. Cord grass is the dominant vegetation on the salt marsh and freshwater cord-grass may be found in the transitional zones. Water and shore birds are a common spring and summer sight, as well as woodland birds particularly during migration seasons.

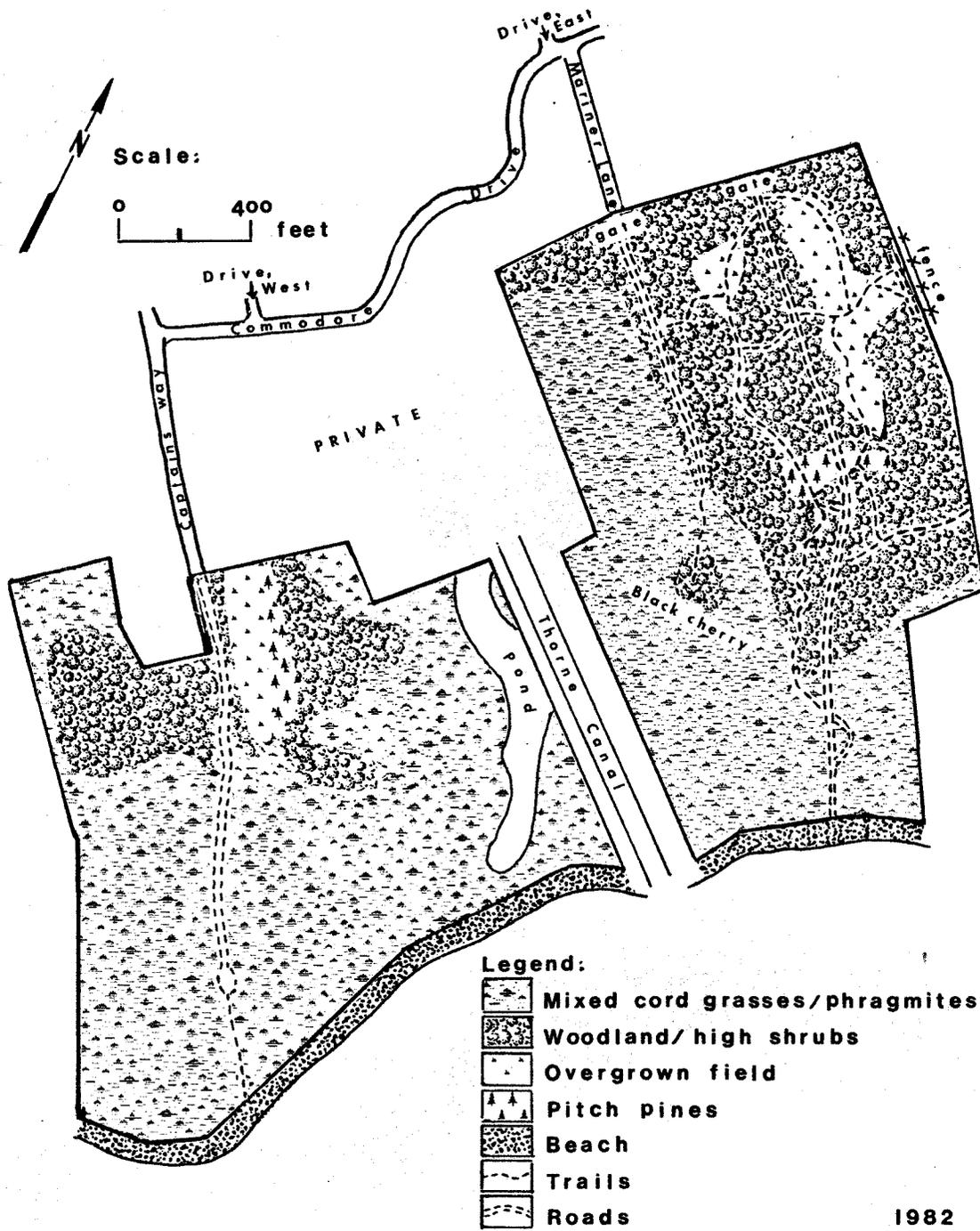
History This area was purchased from the Secatoag Indians in the early days of the 18th Century. In 1924, Landon K. Thorne, a millionaire banker and philanthropist, acquired the property for his estate. In 1972, Julia Loomis Thorne, his widow, donated the preserve area to the Conservancy.

Admission to Preserve Like other preserves, this area is open to individuals and groups who obtain prior permission from the Conservancy and who abide by the Conservancy's policies on preserve use. Because access to the preserve is through the Admiralty Town House development to the north, it is necessary to obtain prior permission from the Long Island Chapter office in Cold Spring Harbor. Because of the fragile nature of the salt marsh, special arrangements must be made if large groups wish to visit the preserve.

Directions The main security gate of the Admiralty is on the south side of Route 27A in West Bay Shore. To visit the east section of the preserve, check in at the gate and turn to the left onto Admiral's Drive East and continue to Mariner Lane. At the south end of this Lane park in designated parking area. To visit the west section, turn to the right beyond the main security gate onto Admiral's Drive West to Commodore Drive, turn right, then left onto Captain's Way. At the south end of Captain's Way continue on an unpaved extension until reaching the preserve south of the fence. Park on either side of the road as appropriate.



Thorne Sanctuary



The Nature Conservancy, 1982.

CHAPTER

THE THORNE SANCTUARY

by Arthur McManus

Each sanctuary of the Long Island Chapter of The Nature Conservancy radiates a charm and character all its own. The 90-acre Thorne Sanctuary in Bay Shore, Suffolk County, is no exception. Opposite Fire Island Inlet and fronting on the widest and deepest part of Great South Bay, it exhibits an openness and diversity that few Long Island preserves or estates can match.

Among other pleasing features, the sanctuary is unique in that access is gained through the handsomely landscaped Thorne estate—with its spacious main house, mature trees, lawns, meadows, shrubbery, fresh water ponds and flower-bordered paths. Hundreds of Canada geese, mallards, pheasants and quail make their home there.

The sanctuary then embraces a sandy shore strewn with seaweeds, sponges and eelgrass, salt marsh, meadows, brackish ponds, stream-fed fresh water swamp, thickets, woodland, moss-clad drainage ditches and a boat canal dividing the property into east and west sections. This diversity accounts for the great variety of plant life. A total of 378 flowering and non-flowering species was recorded there during the spring, summer and fall of 1973 and part of the spring and summer of 1974.

The fresh water streams feeding southward into the sanctuary originate in the high water table of a section of the Ronkonkoma glacial moraine.

The rich diversity of habitat attracts birds of equally varied feeding habits as they migrate along the Atlantic flyway. About thirty great blue herons have been wintering there for some years, probably because of the proximity of the land to the great expanse of protected marsh extending westward from Captree Bridge beyond the Kennedy Wildlife Refuge at Jones Beach. Egrets, black-crowned night herons, green herons and marsh hawks are a common sight in summer, as are shore birds and warblers in their migrating seasons.

Because the comparatively high ground near the shoreline breaks the daily tidal flow required by the tall salt-marsh cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*), this species is represented by only a few colonies near the canal. This phenomenon applies also to the marshes of the nearby Isbrandtsen Preserve and Gardiners Park. The dominant marsh grass of all three properties is the low-growing, matted salt-meadow grass (*Spartina patens*), once used for hay by early Long Islanders. On the other hand, there is a small stand of slough grass or fresh-water cordgrass (*Spartina pectinata*), with its saw-edged leaves, growing in the transitional zone of the Thorne Sanctuary's marsh. This species is rather rare on Long Island. Conspicuously missing because of drier soil conditions are marsh elder or high-tide bush (*Iva frutescens*) and glasswort or pickleweed (*Salicornia* spp.).

One of the anomalies of the preserve is the pitch pine mentioned earlier, which flourishes in the often wet soil between the marsh and the meadow, although normally this species prefers sandy or barren soil. Not too far north of it is a single specimen of scrub or bear oak (*Quercus ilicifolia*), a typical pine barren inhabitant. In the vicinity of the pitch pine and along the drainage ditches are a number of moisture-loving plants such as Canadian burnet (*Sanguisorba canadensis*), also comparatively rare on Long Island, with its attractive spike of white flowers in mid-summer; saltmarsh fleabane, marsh St. Johnswort, Canadian St. Johnswort, purple gerardia, marsh or sea-pink, marsh fern, cross-leaved or marsh milkwort, Nuttall's lobelia and a large patch of cranberries. The hospitable soil for these species is explained by the fact that the water from the bay rushes over part of the meadow during flood and storm tides. When I visited the sanctuary just after the record-breaking rainfall of October 29, 1973, which was caused by tropical storm Gelda arriving in conjunction with a moon tide, I found the marsh inundated and the west field flooded past the ditch paralleling the east-west road.

A puzzle confronted me in early spring of 1973. Scores of daffodils were perking their

ACTIVITY

heads at random not only in the grassy fields southwest of the landscaped gardens of the estate, but well within the sanctuary itself. I learned later that these were relics of World War II days when Dutch farmers, fearing for the safety of their bulb economy as the German armies swept westward, shipped tulips and other bulb strains to this country for preservation. Two local nurserymen were given permission to use sections of the Thorne property and the land was heavily fertilized for cultivation of these European refugees.

The moist grassy area just west of the canal is enlivened in July by an unusual profusion of Virginia meadow-beauties (*Rhexia virginica*), with their four magenta petals and golden anthers. This is a member of a tropical family that has ventured northward. A little later appear the tall purple-tinted flower clusters of Joe Pye-weed and the golden plumes of the goldenrods.

In sum, the Thorne Sanctuary deserves to be cherished and protected as a unique property, particularly in view of its vulnerability to *natural and developmental hazards*.

Note: A 220-unit Town-House proposal now threatens the 117 acres north of the preserve.



Lady Slipper

Doris Ackerman

Ebony Spleenwort

Doris Ackerman

