

BUILDING-STRUCTURE INVENTORY FORM

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

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

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

IDENTIFICATION

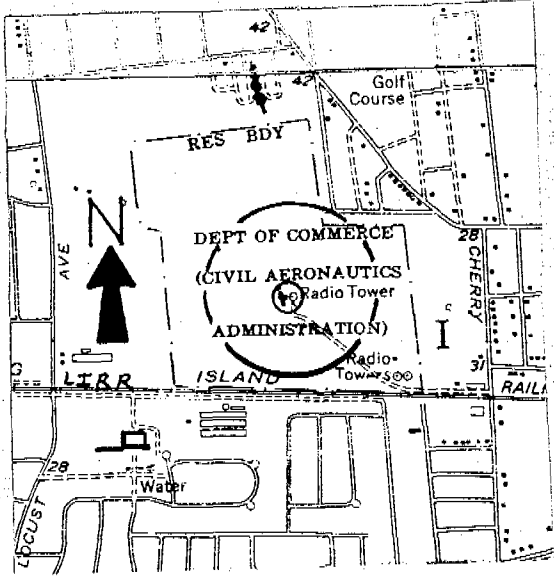
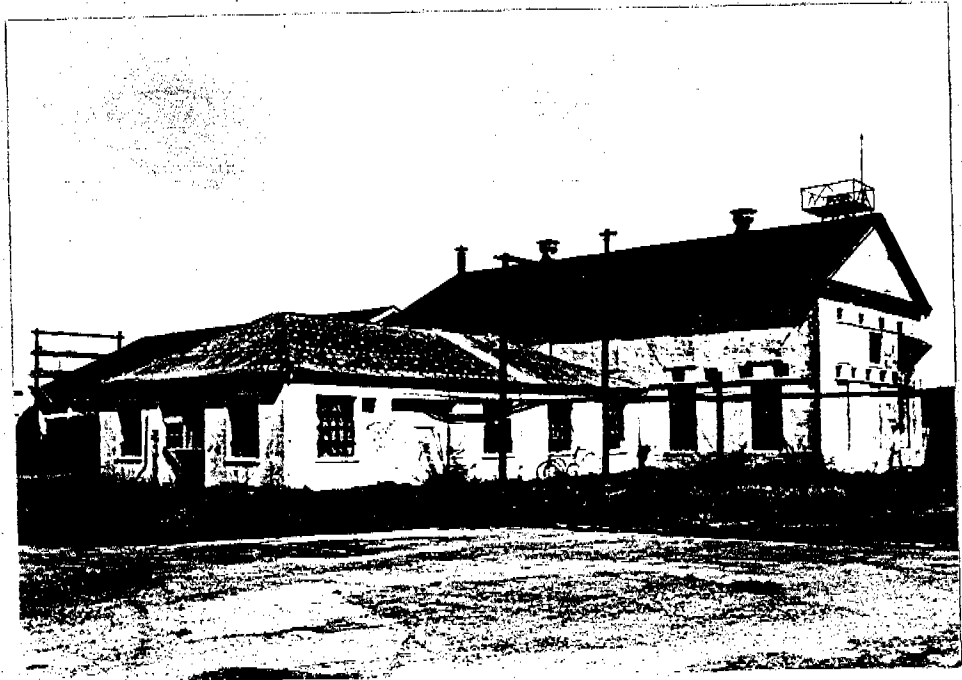
- 1. BUILDING NAME(S): Telefunken/Atlantic Communication Co. Wireless Station
- 2. COUNTY: Suffolk TOWN/CITY: Islip VILLAGE: West Sayville
- 3. STREET LOCATION: Cherry Ave., west side, north of LIRR tracks, west of Locust Ave.
- 4. OWNERSHIP: a. public b. private
- 5. PRESENT OWNER: U.S. Government ADDRESS: _____
- 6. USE: Original: wireless station Present: FAA transmitting station
- 7. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: Yes No
Interior accessible: Explain U.S. Gov't. restricted property

DESCRIPTION

- 8. BUILDING MATERIAL: a. clapboard b. stone c. brick d. board and batten
e. cobblestone f. shingles g. stucco other: _____
- 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): _____

12. PHOTO: Neg. KK XXV-3, fm. SE.
This 2½ story building is the original 1911 power house designed by I.H. Green. Builder was the local company of Bason Bros.

13. MAP: NYS DOT composite Patchogue/Sayville Quads



14. THREATS TO BUILDING: a. none known b. zoning c. roads
vandalism d. developers e. deterioration
f. other: possible surplus property designation by U.S. Gov't.

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: Federally listed endangered plant
j. other: refer to continuation sheets

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 surrounding areas
h. other: scrub growth, field plants

17. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS:
(Indicate if building or structure is in an historic district)

Refer to continuation sheet

18. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING AND SITE (including interior features if known):

Refer to continuation sheet

SIGNIFICANCE

19. DATE OF INITIAL CONSTRUCTION: 1911

ARCHITECT: I.H. Green, Sayville

BUILDER: Bason Bros., Sayville

20. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:

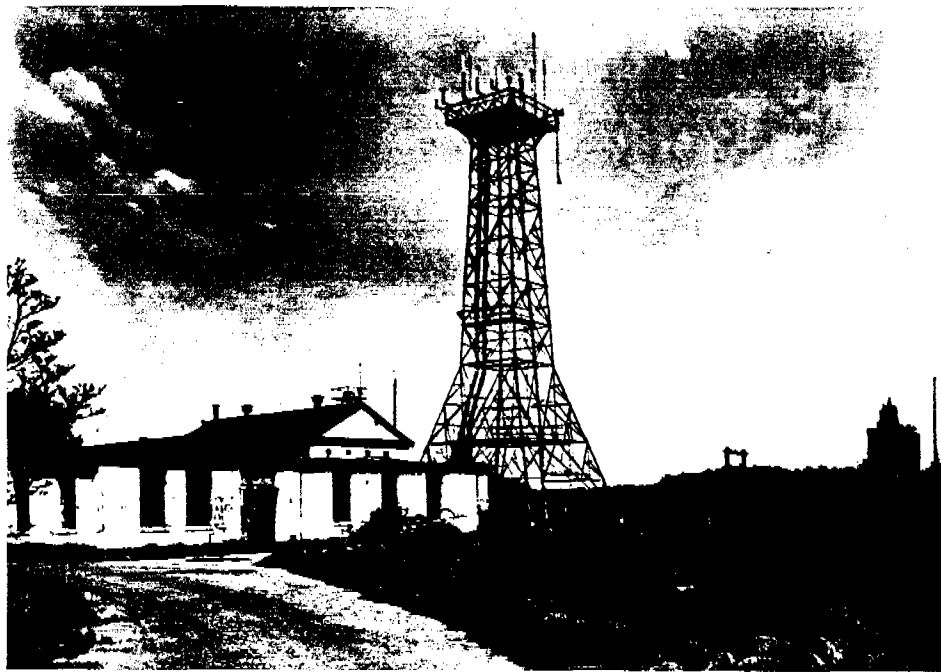
Refer to continuation sheet

21. SOURCES:

Refer to continuation sheet

22. THEME:

Research by Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities - KEK



Neg. KK XXV-4, fm. SE, showing FAA tower at center, portion of power house behind building at left, and concrete guide-wire base from 1913 tower at right.



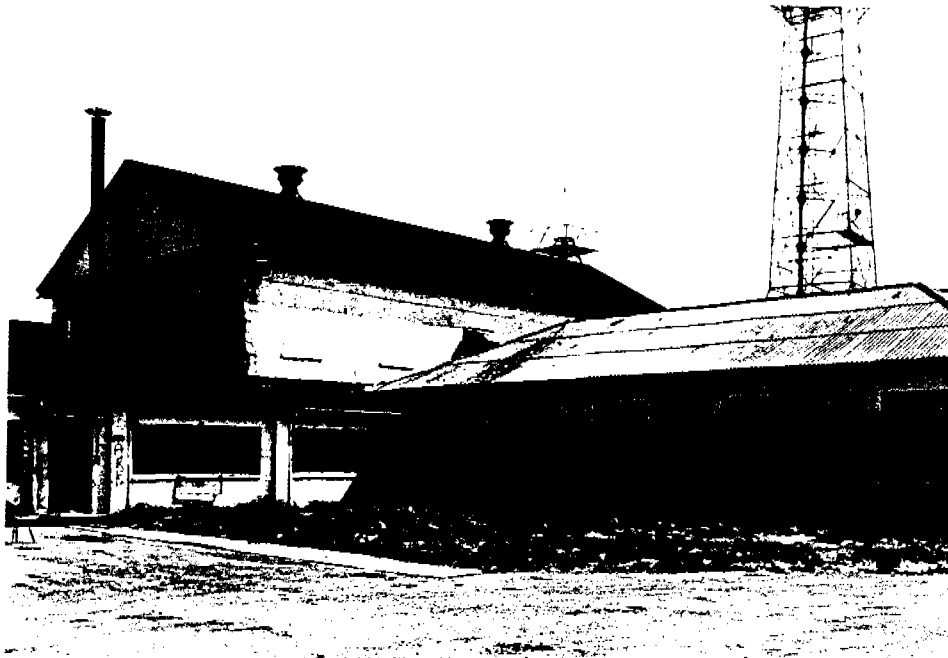
Neg. KK XXV-12, fm. SE, showing power house and smaller hip roof building. The two large gable roof concrete buildings in the background are connected by a one-story link.

— 1911 power house at the right —



Neg. KK XXV-8, fm. SE, showing west wing of power house.

This section was added c. 1962.

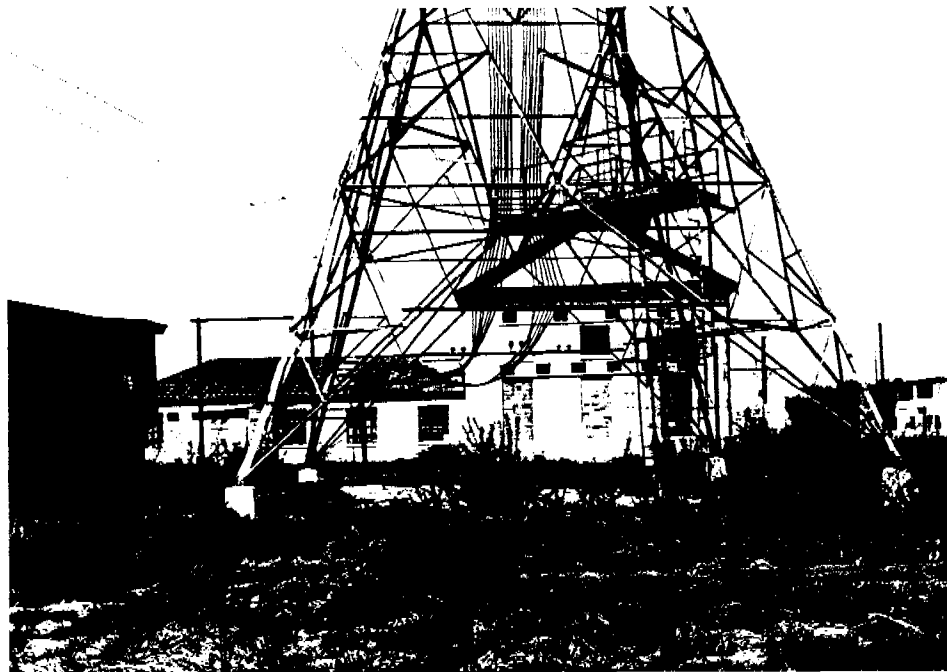


Neg. KK XXV-10, fm. SW, showing east wing of power house, hip roof building to the south, and FAA tower base at right.

— This is the original 2½ story
power house (40' x 60'), built 1911. —

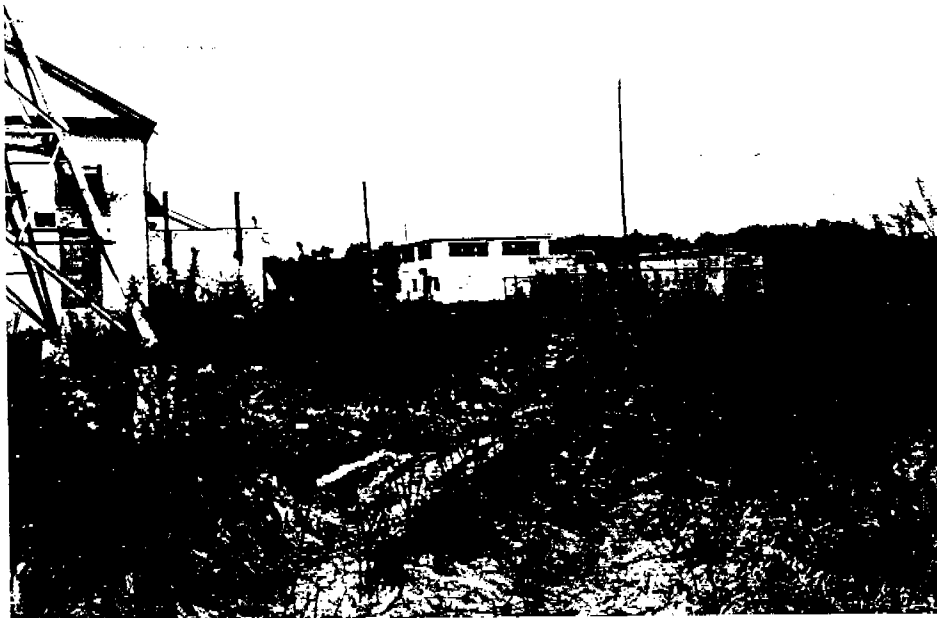


Neg. KK XXIII-29, fm. SE, showing wire poles on the site.

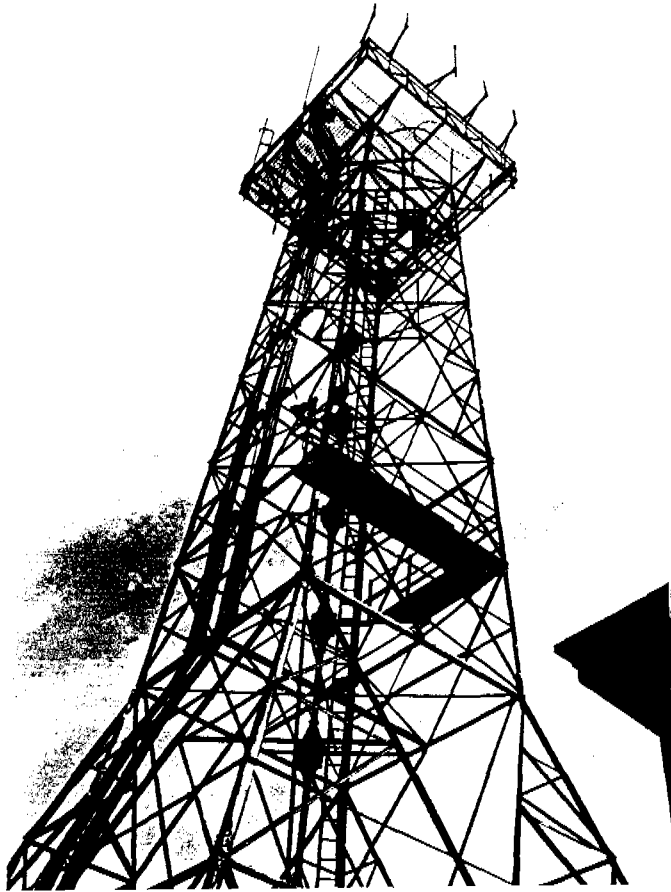


— 1911 power house in the background —

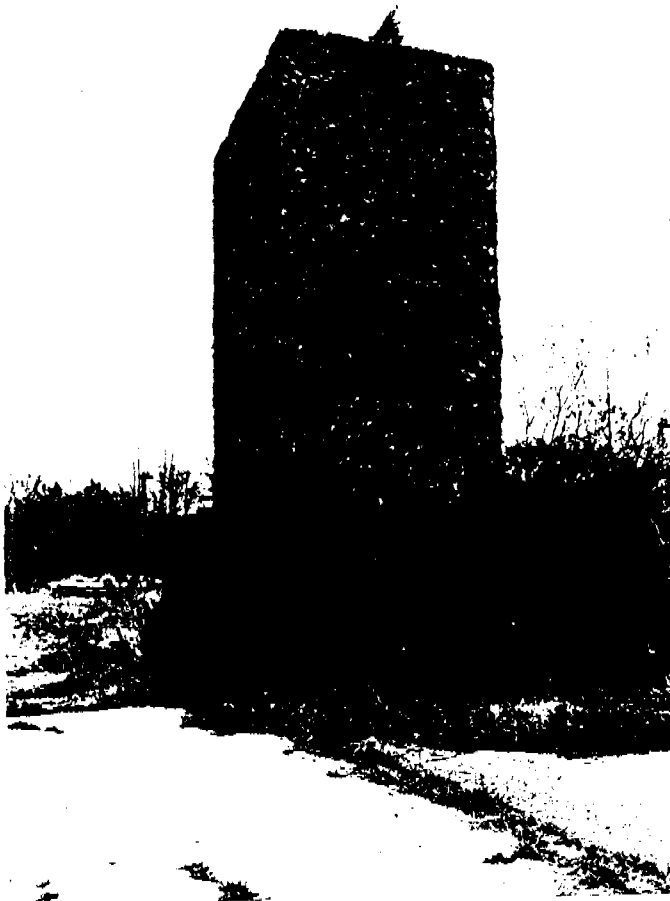
Neg. KK XXV-14, fm. E, showing base of tower with power house in the background, clapboard building seen in Neg. XXV-7 & 13 at left, and concrete block building seen in Neg. XXV-16 at right.



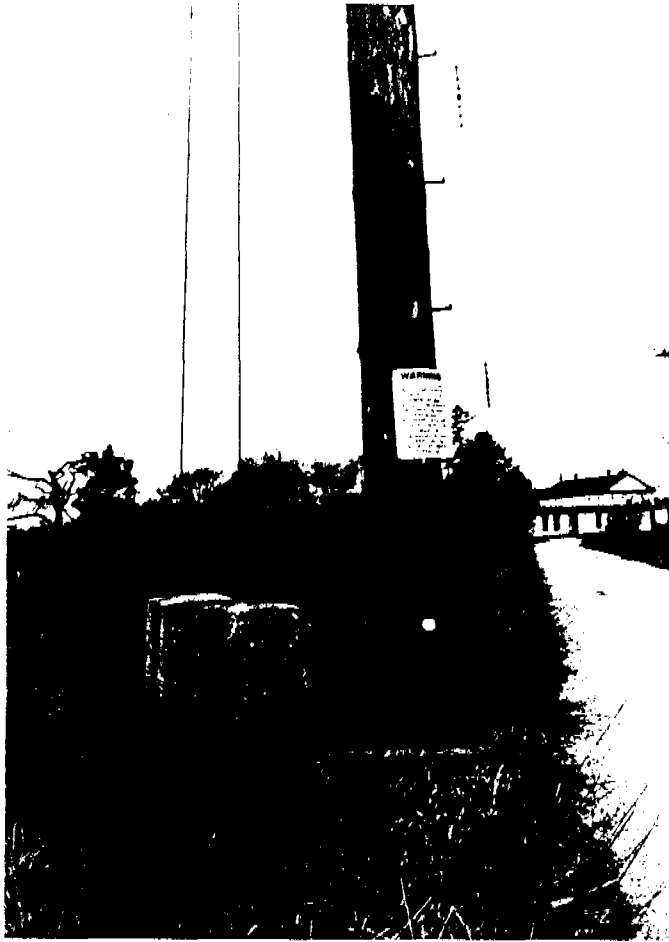
Neg. KK XXV-16, fm. E/SE, showing concrete block building N of power house.



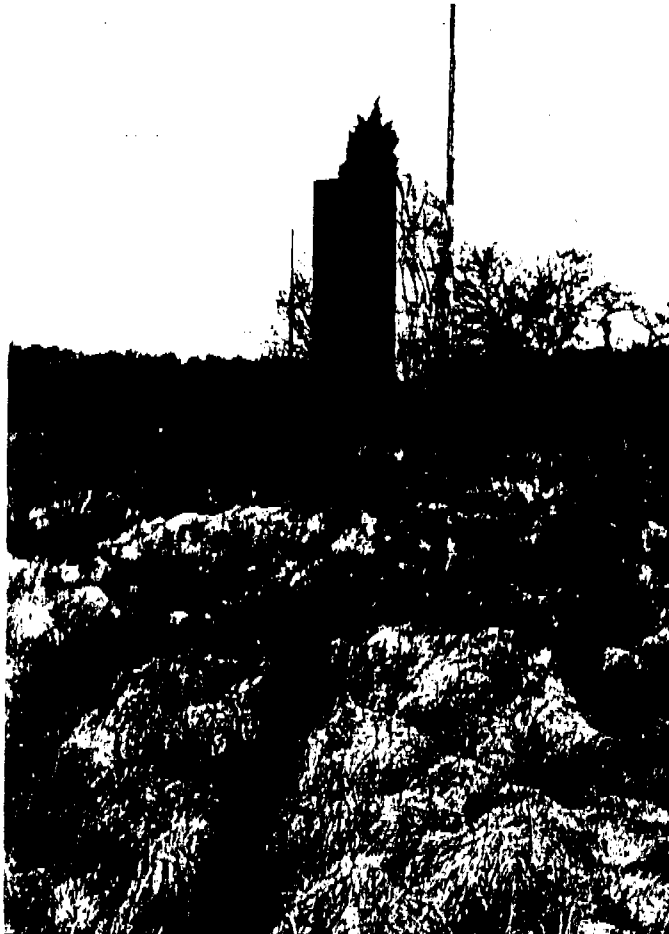
Neg. KK XXV-18, showing
superstructure of FAA
tower.



Neg. KK XXV-11, showing
concrete guide wire base
(ivy covered) of former
1913 tower.



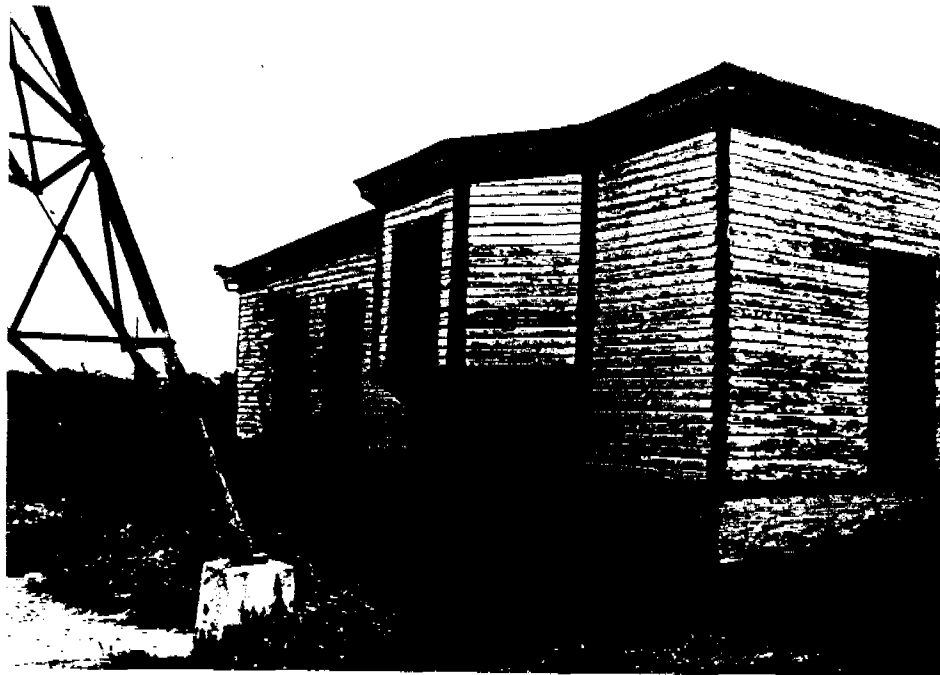
Weights on pulleys to keep taut the antennae that are stretched between the poles.



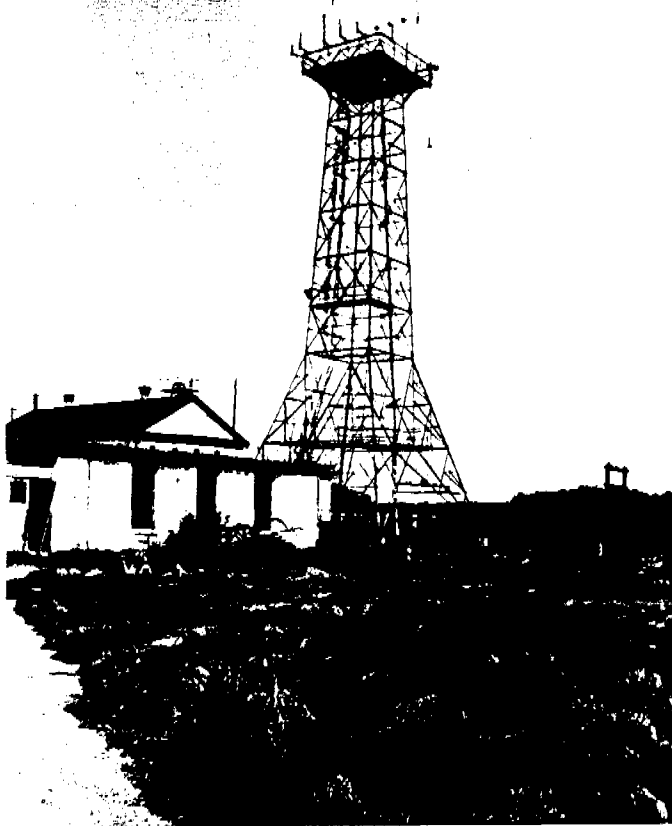
Another guide-wire base for original tower.



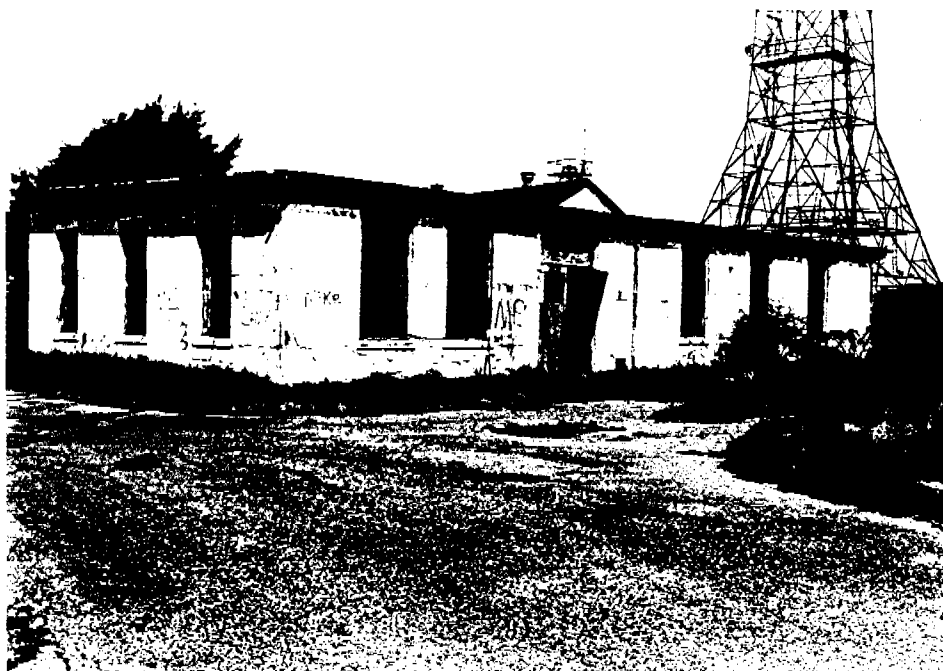
Neg. KK XXV-7, fm. SW, showing base of FAA tower and clapboard building with a brick foundation east of the power house.



Neg. KK XXV-13, fm. NW, showing clapboard building near FAA tower seen in above photograph.



Neg. KK XXV-5, fm. SE,
showing FAA tower,
gable peak of power
house east wing, and
portion of concrete
building in photo below.



Neg. KK XXV-6, fm. SE, showing base of FAA tower and concrete building
SE of power house.

17 -

The former Telefunken/Atlantic Communication Co. Wireless Station, now owned by the Federal Government and operated by the Federal Aviation Administration, occupies a 120 acre parcel north of the Long Island Rail Road tracks between Cherry Ave. on the east and Locust Ave. on the west. The site contains a large power house and several outbuildings grouped near a modern Remote Communication Air To Ground (RCAG) tower. The power house and related outbuildings date from the early 20th century. Several large concrete guide-wire bases remain from the original 1913 wireless tower that stood near the present antenna. A concrete block building with a flat roof dates from the mid 20th century and stands north of the group. The remaining acreage is primarily meadowland with scattered trees and supports a wide variety of local plant and wildlife species, including the rare and endangered "Sandplain Gerardia" wildflower.

The Sandplain Gerardia (agalinas Acuta) is regarded as the rarest form of plant life on Long Island. Of these plants on Long Island, 75% grow in West Sayville. The plant was classified as Federally Endangered October 7, 1988.

18 -

This is an important historic site. The German government bought the property c. 1911 and erected "the most powerful wireless station in the world" in 1912. A similar station was erected in Germany and most of the messages were sent in code. In 1915 President Wilson seized the German station and it has belonged to the Federal Government ever since. After WW I it was leased to Mackay Radio and Telegraph Co.. In 1939 the FAA took it over. In 1961 80 additional acres were acquired. The present antenna now broadcasts to international air flights.

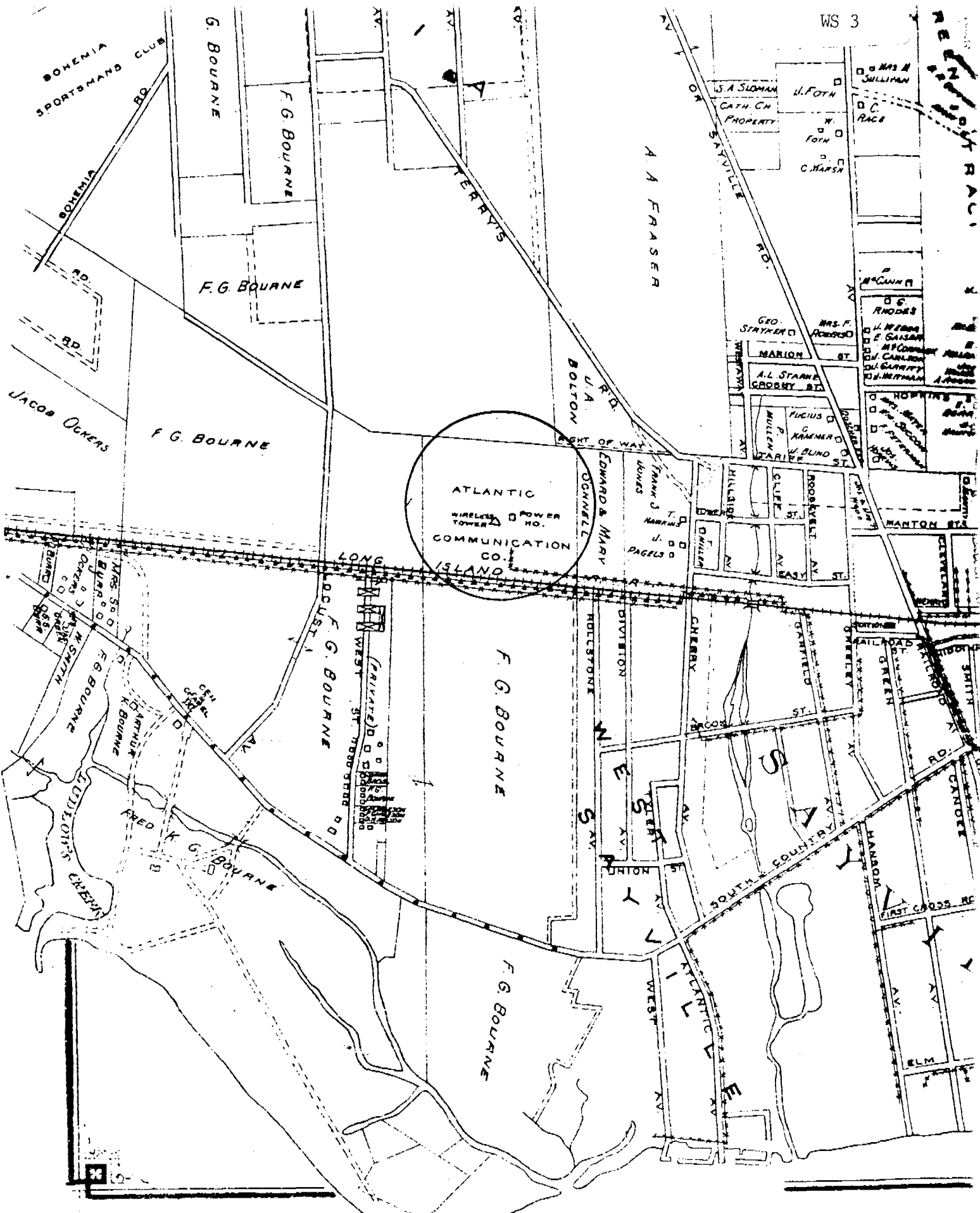
The main power house was designed by the prominent Sayville architect, I.H. Green, and that building is an outstanding feature on the property today. The facility is still in active use but it is unmanned which unfortunately invites vandalism.

This facility is one of the few remaining transatlantic transmitting stations anywhere. Once on Long Island there were huge acreages devoted to overseas radio transmission. Mackay had an important set-up in Smithtown just north of Brentwood. It is now a major industrial park. RCA had a 500 acre facility in Rocky Point - which RCA has turned over to New York State as a preserve. A second RCA site was south of Riverhead in Southampton Town. These facilities all operated with high towers and miles of low wires strung on poles not far above the ground. This latter operation is still in use here in West Sayville. The antenna from these low poles enters the power house through the rows of small square openings.

That this historic facility has remained is miraculous, and it may be that it would be considered eligible for the National Register.

The original spark-gap transmitter has been replaced with a single side band high power voice transmitter.

- 21 - Newsday, 1/9/1990, p. 23, & 3/20/1990, p. 28.
Interview, Tim Foster, FAA, 5/1990.
NY Times, 6/11/1989.
E. Belcher Hyde. Atlas of the Ocean Shore of Suffolk County, L.I. (westerly section), 1915.
Community Living, The Record, 7/13/1989.
The Record, 5/5/1989.
Kruh, Louis. The Family Guide to Long Island, 1976, p. 99.
Dickerson, Charles. A History of the Sayville Community, 1975, p. 99.
American Heritage, December 1965, p. 63.
Research by Constance Currie, 6/1990. 43 Sayville Blvd., Sayville, 11782.
Isaac H. Green Account Book.
Interview, Carl Heller, FAA Engineer, 516.737.3617.
Interview, Aidyl C. Bason, 160 Garfield Ave., Sayville, 11782, 7/1990.
Suffolk County News, 12/29/1911.



E. Belcher Hyde. Atlas of the Ocean Shore of Suffolk County, L.I. (west), 1915.

**CHAPTER XVII.
SAYVILLE WIRELESS STATION
MACARTHUR FIELD
FAA AIR CONTROL STATION**



Back in the year 1911 Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany decided to build in America the most powerful wireless station in the world. He sent a company of engineers called the Telefunken Co. to America and they selected an area north of the rail road in West Sayville as the ideal location. The station with three 600 foot towers was completed in 1912. Kaiser Wilhelm then erected a similar station in Nauens, Germany and for many years the only wireless communication between North America and Europe, was between Sayville and Germany. Most of the messages were sent in German code.

In 1914 came World War I and many American ships were sunk by German submarines while we were still a neutral country - this despite the fact that the ships left New York "blacked out" and with no published schedule; also despite the constant protests of President Wilson and William Jennings Bryan who was Secretary of State. President Wilson arranged to have a young man from Sayville - named Sewell Thornhill, Jr. - who was interested in wireless, to decipher the secret German code. The Lusitania was sunk May 15, 1915. A message from Sayville had read "Grandmother died at 11 A.M. this morning" but when deciphered it read "The Lusitania sailed past Sayville at 11 A.M. this morning." President Wilson sent a company of marines to Sayville and seized the German station. It has belonged to the Federal Government ever since. After World War I the station was leased to Mackay Radio and Telegraph Co. In 1939 the station was taken over by the Federal Aviation Agency for its international flight transmitting service. In a major expansion program in 1961, when about 80 additional acres were acquired, it was made one of the most powerful radio transmitting stations in the world.

In 1943, during World War II, the Federal Government sent out a notice that any community that would provide the suitable land area, they would build an airport. The Supervisor of Islip Town, Charles Duryea, answered the notice. There was a large tract of about 1300 acres of tax sale land north of Sayville bisected by Johnson Avenue. An arrangement was made with the US Government to close Johnson Avenue, and build a new airport there. The government completed the airport in 1944 at a cost of about \$5,000,000. After the war the airport was returned to the Town of Islip. At a cost of several millions of dollars, the Town in 1963 erected a seven story air control tower, and in 1967 erected a large ticket office and administrative building. The Town purchased additional land to extend the runways for the largest planes. Also the Town has built several large hangars.

TO BE TWICE AS HIGH

Telefunken Wireless Tower To
Go Up 480 Feet

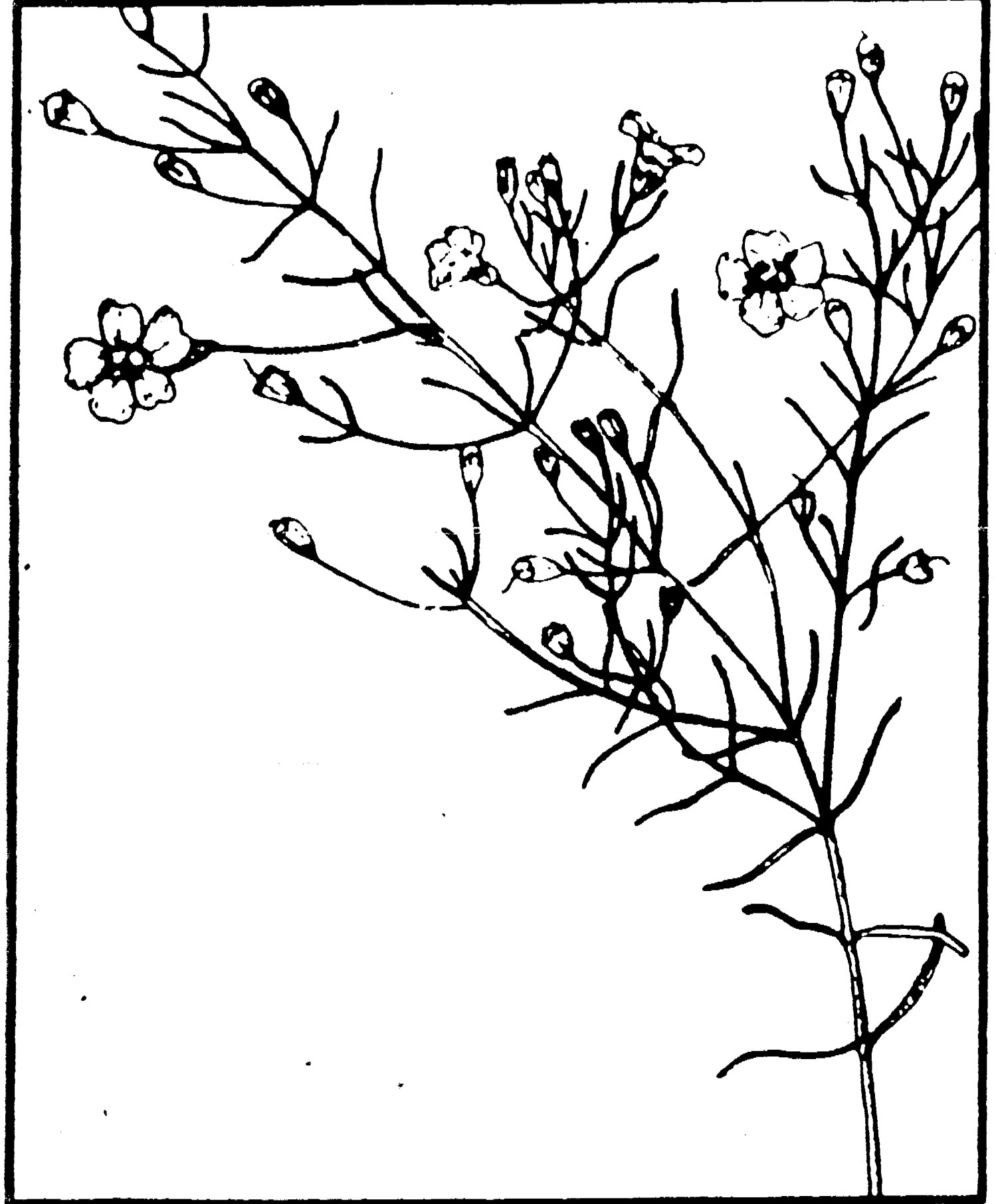
12-8- ~~1911~~ 1911
MAY BE FOR WIRELESS PHONE

Local Builders Now Estimating on
Brick Power House 45x100—Tower
To Stand on Insulating Plates of
Glass, 18 Inches Thick.

The new plant of the Telefunken Wireless Telegraph Co., which is being erected near the railroad a short distance west of this village, has not made very rapid progress of late, the weather being unfavorable for iron work at that altitude. The thin little tower, which has now reached a height of about 270 ft., sways perceptibly in the wind, and some of the workmen on the job, although accustomed to taking all sorts of risks, have little hesitation in saying they don't like this job. It certainly requires men of the dare devil type to erect structures of this kind. For we are reliably informed that the plans call for this tower to go to almost twice its present height, or to be more exact, 480 ft. The tower at present stands on jack screws but some heavy plates of glass 18 inches in thickness are now at the Sayville station and are to be used for insulating purposes.

Plans have been prepared by Architect I. H. Green for a two story brick building 45x100 ft., which is intended, we believe, for a power plant, and plans and specifications for this structure are now out among the builders, who are preparing estimates. Other buildings, especially some cottages for the accommodation of operators, are now being talked of, but nothing definite about them has been done as yet.

According to one rumor experiments in wireless telephoning are to be made from this plant. In any case, it is quite certain that this new undertaking will add much to Sayville's fame in all parts of the world.



The Nature Conservancy, L.I. Chapter

Sandplain gerardia

Record, 5/5/1989.

What's 'The Rarest Living Thing' On LI?

By Carole Paquette *Record* 5/5/89

A rare wildflower is playing a large role in the development of the 100-acre Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) site on Cherry Avenue in West Sayville, a parcel whose fate has changed numerous times since it was declared surplus property by the federal government last September.

The tiny purple flower is considered "the rarest living thing on Long Island," says Andrew Walker, director of the Long Island chapter of the Nature Conservancy. Small as it may be, it is standing tall against proposed projects for the parcel "as the site of the flora is under federal mandate not to do anything to destroy

the species," Mr. Walker says.

The sandplain gerardia is a member of the snapdragon family and can be found in open sandy areas. It blooms from August to October and is currently in the "dead stage," according to Robert Zaremba, director of monitoring management research for the New York State Nature Conservancy. Mr. Zaremba traveled from Albany last Thursday to visit the plant site.

"It's a small, wimpy sort of a plant," he says, adding that it poses a problem to botanists in that "we don't know how to move it and we don't know how to transplant it."

"The plant is so small you would never know it is there, but it's the largest known population of the plant

in the world," says Chuck Houghtby, manager of the FAA field office at MacArthur Airport.

The grassland wildflower is only "one of four other rare plant species on the FAA site," says Mr. Walker. It was labeled a federally endangered species last year, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has written a recovery program for it. The flower was believed to be extinct worldwide for nearly 60 years until it was simultaneously rediscovered in 1964 in Massachusetts and in Long Island by conservancy scientists, he says.

The West Sayville parcel, mostly meadowland, has four buildings on 20 acres which originally housed an international flight-service transmitting station until

SEE RARE THING, PAGE 18

Feds Struggle To Protect Wildflower

RARE THING, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the FAA decided to move the facility to Barnegat, New Jersey, this spring. It was first classified not suitable and then reclassified suitable for housing for the homeless by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) this past February. This was done as a mandate of the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 which requires the government to make under-utilized federal property available to house the homeless.

However, according to Robert Fisher of the General Services Administration, the property, though suitable, is "on hold at the moment." It was not offered for screening by homeless housing advocates as there is "an overriding federal interest" which involves the new weather station, he says, adding the government will sell approximately 80 acres after the FAA relocates its equipment to New Jersey.

So far, several groups are expressing a "passing interest" in the parcel, including Islip Town, which hopes to acquire it for soccer fields; Dowling College; the Board of Cooperative

Extension Services, which already has property abutting the parcel; and the Nature Conservancy, Mr. Fisher says.

It is unlikely the conservancy will buy the property "as its value for development is very steep," says Mr. Walker. However, the conservancy hopes to have managerial rights to the valuable flora which, according to Mr. Fisher, is typical in the case of an endangered species.

Currently the FAA is in the process of vacating and razing the four buildings on the property, says Mr. Houghby. A national weather radar system and tower will be installed on 20 acres of the site, he says. The tower's proposed location, originally intended for the northeast portion at Cherry Avenue and Tariff Street, was recently changed to the northwest corner near Mobile Street and Locust Avenue. The northeast site is a grassy meadowland which contains the largest number of the rare flower.

The relocation was most likely made to keep the tower away from the residential area and to protect the flower, says Mr. Houghby.

As the federal government tries to

divide the property into halves, east and west, the nature conservancy would rather see the radar system located in the first (eastern) site as they would have more control over the plant's protection — either by purchasing the property or having managerial rights to it.

"We would prefer to see [the tower] back on the eastern site, but I suppose if the site is well monitored [the western location] is the best area," says Mr. Walker. When the plant was first discovered in 1964, the conservancy launched an intensive search, and eight sites were found, says Mr. Walker.

"Six are located on Long Island in quite small and highly vulnerable sites," he says, adding the sites are in Brookhaven and Islip. However, the organization won't release the locations as they are negotiating with the private owners for management rights to the plant sites.

The Nature Conservancy is a private non-profit organization that identifies and protects important natural areas containing endangered species. Mr. Walker said the group



A photo of the sandplain gerardia, from the book *Wildflowers of the U.S., North Eastern States*.

has protected 18,000 acres, 150 sites, on Long Island either through purchase or long-term management agreements. ■