

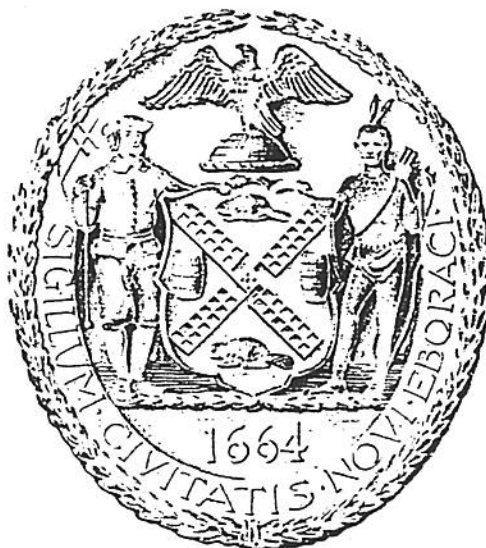
COLLECTION

Document

Division Natural Resources

Gateway National Recreation Area

THE FUTURE OF JAMAICA BAY

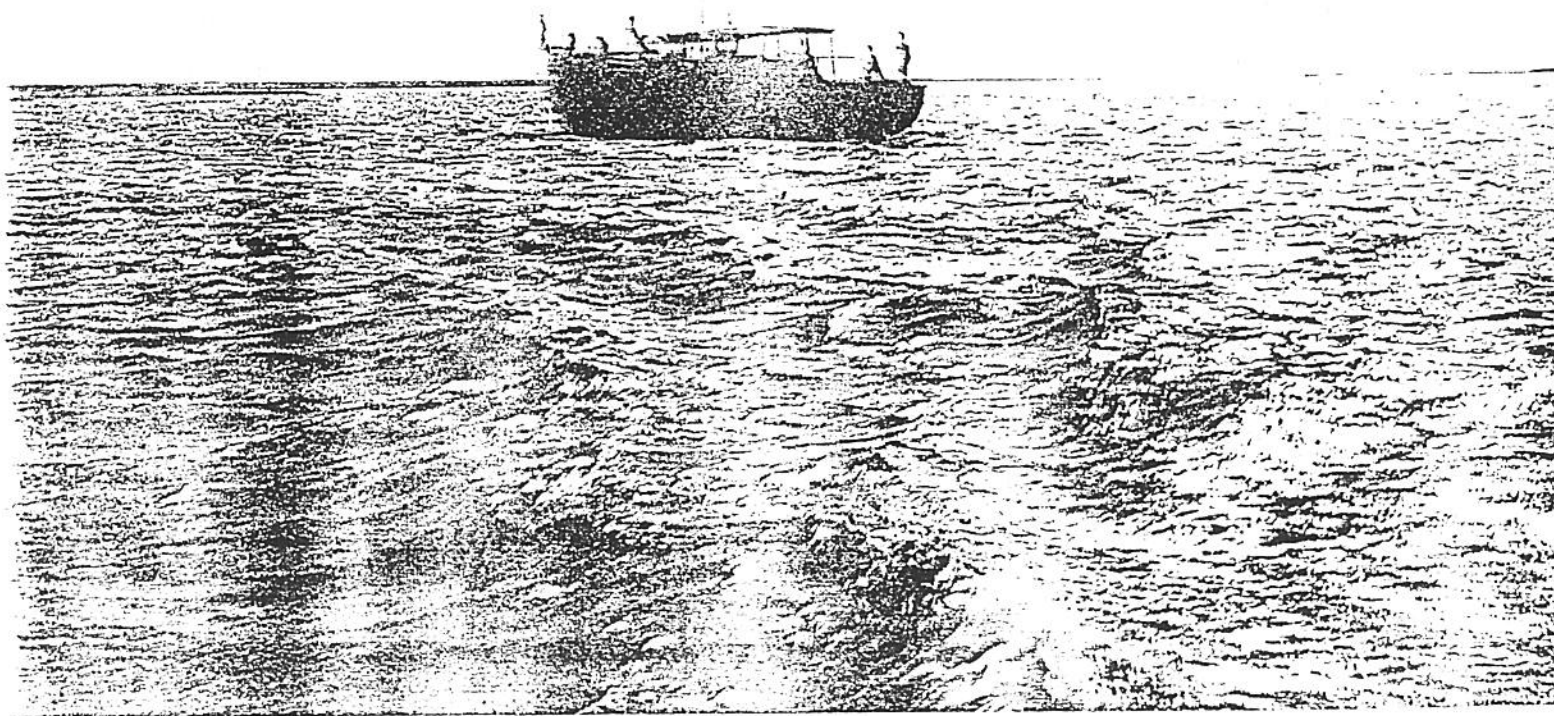


DEPARTMENT OF PARKS
CITY OF NEW YORK

JULY 18, 1938

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ROBERT MOSES
COMMISSIONER



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS

ARSENAL
64TH STREET AND FIFTH AVENUE
CENTRAL PARK
NEW YORK CITY

ALLYN R. JENNINGS
GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT
WILLIAM H. LATHAM
PARK ENGINEER
GEORGE E. SPARGO
ASSISTANT TO THE COMMISSIONER
JAMES A. DAWSON
SENIOR PARK DIRECTOR
JAMES A. SHERRY
CHIEF CLERK

July 18, 1938

Hon. FIORELLO H. LAGUARDIA
Mayor of the City of New York
City Hall
New York, N. Y.

DEAR SIR:

Thirty years ago the first plan to transform Jamaica Bay's 18,000 acres of water, marsh and meadowland into a vast industrial port and ship terminal was proposed in a report to the Board of Estimate by the Jamaica Bay Improvement Commission. In 1922, as the result of much propaganda and pressure from interested property owners, speculators and commercial interests, and in the absence of any disinterested investigation, the city adopted a plan under which the water and marshlands in the bay were to be substantially blotted out by two large islands approached by a system of navigation canals, bordered by mile after mile of industrial piers and wharves. A quarter of a billion cubic yards of fill were to be dredged to make the islands, and the cost of bulkhead construction alone was estimated at over \$15,000,000. The advocates of the plan boasted that the completed Jamaica Bay port would be greater than the combined ports of Liverpool, Rotterdam and Hamburg.

This plan still appears on the official map of the City of New York, although the status of Jamaica Bay as a seaport is not perceptibly different today than it was thirty years ago. Industrial and commercial activity has been confined to a relatively small section around Mill Basin on the mainland near Avenue U, and the attempt to foster harbor development at Canarsie by the construction of a large pier proved abortive. Several minor commercial enterprises have sprung up at isolated spots along the north shore of Rockaway Beach, but in the main over 95% of the entire Jamaica Bay area, as far as industrial development is concerned, has not advanced a step toward the grandiose scheme of 1922.

In the meantime, and particularly in the last three years, the recreational and residential development of the bay and its environs has proceeded apace. The reconstructed Jacob Riis Park; the great new Marine Parkway Bridge extending Flatbush Avenue across Rockaway Channel; the widening of Cross Bay Parkway now under

way: the Rockaway Beach rehabilitation scheduled for completion in June, 1959; the development of Marine Park; the new Circumferential or Shore Parkway for which rights of way have actually been acquired by the city and for which detailed specifications are being drawn; the wiping out of the old dilapidated Canarsie amusement area and the expansion and improvement of a new Canarsie Beach Park; and finally the active use of Floyd Bennett Airport, are all integral parts of an enlightened program looking toward residential and recreational usage of the entire Jamaica Bay area. Is this program, on which millions are today being expended, to be blighted by failure to carry it to its logical conclusion?

The conflict between the deflated industrial plan of 1922 and the residential and recreational program of 1958 is basic and irrepressible. There can be no compromise between the two, and the time has come for the city to settle this question intelligently, realistically and in the interest of the people of this and coming generations. This is not a question to leave to land speculators and crackpot industrial theorists. The industrial plan of 1922, if persisted in, will never be successful, but it will ruin Jamaica Bay for housing and play. As a matter of fact, there is adequate port space for expansion for a great number of years to come in the New York area, exclusive of Jamaica Bay, particularly along the shores of Staten Island.

Jamaica Bay is the only large remaining area in New York City whose character is undetermined, the only one in which a tremendous public improvement can be insured with comparatively small expense by prompt official action. First, the plan for the industrial development of the bay now on the city map should be scrapped. It offers an irresistible incentive to all sorts of undesirable schemes and no better proof of this can be found than in the recent attempt of the Sanitation Commissioner to begin large-scale dumping of garbage and refuse in the bay in conformance with the old plan of eliminating water and marshland, and replacing them with filled-in islands. This and other similar destructive proposals are bound to crop up unless the 1922 plan is entirely eliminated and a new sensible, feasible and attainable plan for the preservation of Jamaica Bay for recreation and residence is substituted.

This new program is now presented to you by the Park Department. It calls for the complete rezoning of the bay and its surrounding area; transferring all islands to the Park Department for recreational use, including protection of scenery and waters; encouragement of swimming, fishing, boating and preservation of wild life; public use of the meadowlands adjoining Cross Bay Boulevard, including Big Egg Marsh, upon the expiration in 1945 of the existing outrageous lease to a real estate speculator—a lease under the terms of which the city was unable recently to obtain use of its own land necessary for the improvement of the Cross Bay Boulevard bridge except through condemnation; and finally purification of the polluted waters of the bay in accordance with the comprehensive sewage disposal plan of the Department of Public Works. Maps, photographs and illustrations with appropriate captions outlining this program appear in these pages.

As to zoning, the principal problem involves the question of the use of the marginal city land on the north side of Jamaica Bay now set aside for industry. Under the new program, this entire strip of meadowland is set aside for residential and recreational usage, with the exception of an adequate industrial area in the vicinity of Mill Basin and another in the vicinity of the so-called Jamaica Sea Airport at the east end of the bay near the Nassau County Line. Careful studies of the problem indicate that these areas will be sufficient to take care of the industrial needs of the territory indefinitely. Past experience shows that interests requesting the zoning of areas for industrial purposes usually ask for several times as much as is necessary or justifiable. The marginal land along the north side of the bay will also serve to provide a route for a future bay drive, which will branch off as a spur from the Circumferential Parkway at Howard Beach, continuing easterly around the head of the bay to a connection with a southerly extension of the Queens Cross Island Parkway connecting Far Rockaway with the Whitestone Bridge.

All upland and islands in Jamaica Bay now under Dock Department supervision, except the industrial areas above referred to, should be transferred to the Department of Parks. A request for this transfer is now being prepared. Appropriate action by the State Legislature will also be necessary to clarify the city's title to the bay islands, and such legislation should be drafted for submission at the next session of the Legislature.

This program to preserve Jamaica Bay in its natural state for recreational and residential purposes has its complete parallel in the Great South Bay in Nassau and Suffolk Counties, where the most important islands and lands under water between Jones Beach State Park and the mainland have been dedicated to the state for park purposes so that their unique natural beauty and charm may be unimpaired and their future preservation never be in doubt. The state and local authorities in these counties have profited by the mistakes of New York City where unrestricted, promiscuous development of the waterfront has resulted in mushroom growths, contamination of waters, destruction of natural scenery and advantages, the stifling of desirable and sound improvements and the collapse of permanent taxable values. As an additional safeguard, the Nassau County Sanitation Commission created by the State Legislature in 1954 was set up for the purpose of protecting the waters along the shores of the county from sewer pollution. This act was established pursuant to a study made in 1931 by a special sanitation committee for Long Island, appointed by Governor Roosevelt.

Here in Jamaica Bay lies the opportunity for a place within the limits of the city where the strain of our city life can be relieved, where the nerves of tired workers may be soothed, where the old may rest and the young may play. One of our leading newspapers said recently of Jamaica Bay: "It is the one great remaining body of water within the city limits still capable of being reclaimed for bathing, fishing and boating. The very wildness and sense of waste and isolation which led to its being zoned for industrial uses are, now that communications are being opened up, among its greatest assets as a recreational ground for the millions cramped in the brick and steel of civilization.

Its wide skies, its long water reaches and low, grassy and mysterious-seeming islands make Cross Bay Boulevard (despite the shacks and hot-dog stands which already too much disfigure it) an avenue into a strange corner of primitive romance of a kind one would hardly expect to come upon between Ozone Park and the Rockaways."

Jamaica Bay faces today the blight of bad planning, polluted water, and garbage dumping. Are we to have here another waterfront slum, depriving millions of future inhabitants of Brooklyn and Queens of the advantages of boating, fishing and swimming in safe inland waters? Must we continue the construction of expensive, artificial swimming pools in this region, where the waters of Jamaica Bay, protected from pollution, can meet the problem as nature intended it to be met?

As to boating facilities the present depth of channels in the bay is adequate for motor-launch navigation, with the exception of a relatively short section in the north-eastern part of the bay. Here a ten-foot channel 200 feet wide can be provided at a cost of about \$200,000. By way of comparison, dredging under the old plan for industrial development of the bay would necessitate deep and wide channels, estimated in 1922 to cost twenty million dollars.

The adoption of the new program for Jamaica Bay will definitely put a stop to recurring attempts to make an obnoxious, insanitary and unhealthful dump of the bay. It seems incredible that after the recent experience of this Administration in reclaiming Rikers Island and Flushing Meadow, an attempt should be made by a member of the same Administration to create a worse situation in an equally important recreational area. Having spent millions to remove two great dumps at Flushing Bay before the World's Fair, are we so stupid as to fill up the middle of Jamaica Bay with garbage, rubbish and ashes, carted around the rough waters of Coney Island by way of the Atlantic Ocean and Rockaway Inlet, with the fantastic accompaniment of fire, smell and smoke to harass nearby residents on the mainland and the beach? Our inheritance at Jamaica Bay is too precious, our investment, present and prospective, in parks, parkways and recreation on its borders is too large to jeopardize them by indifference and bad judgment. We talk a great deal about city planning. What we need in this context is a little common sense.

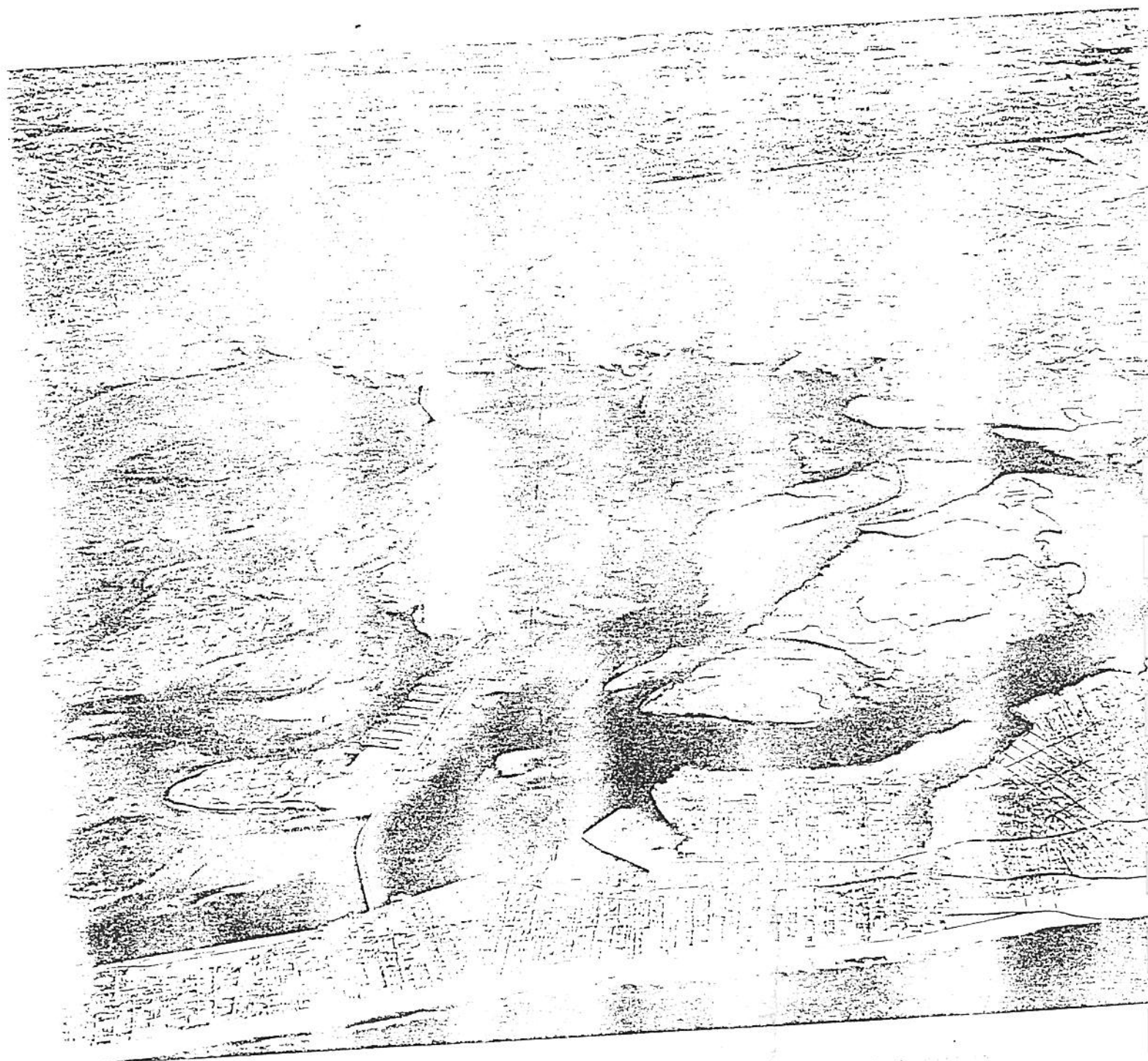
May I ask that this program be referred promptly to the Board of Estimate and to the City Planning Commission for the necessary changes in zoning and City plan, and for the transfer of city-owned property from the Dock Department to the Park Department in accordance with these recommendations.

I wish particularly to acknowledge the assistance of Mr. Sidney Shapiro, Assistant Chief Engineer of the Long Island State Park Commission, in the preparation of this report.

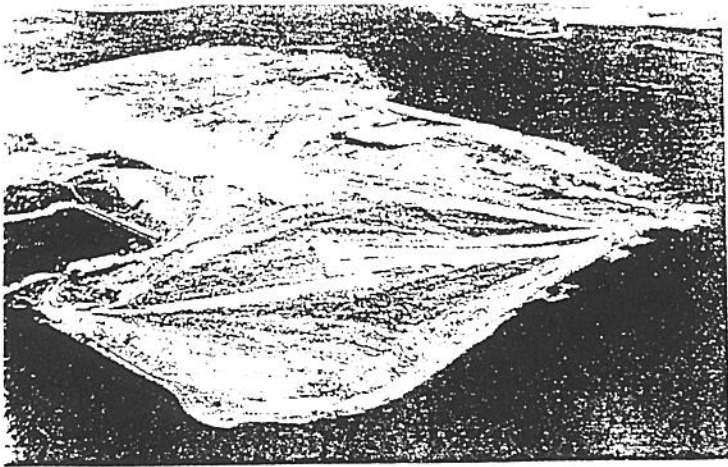
Very truly yours,

ROBERT MOSES,

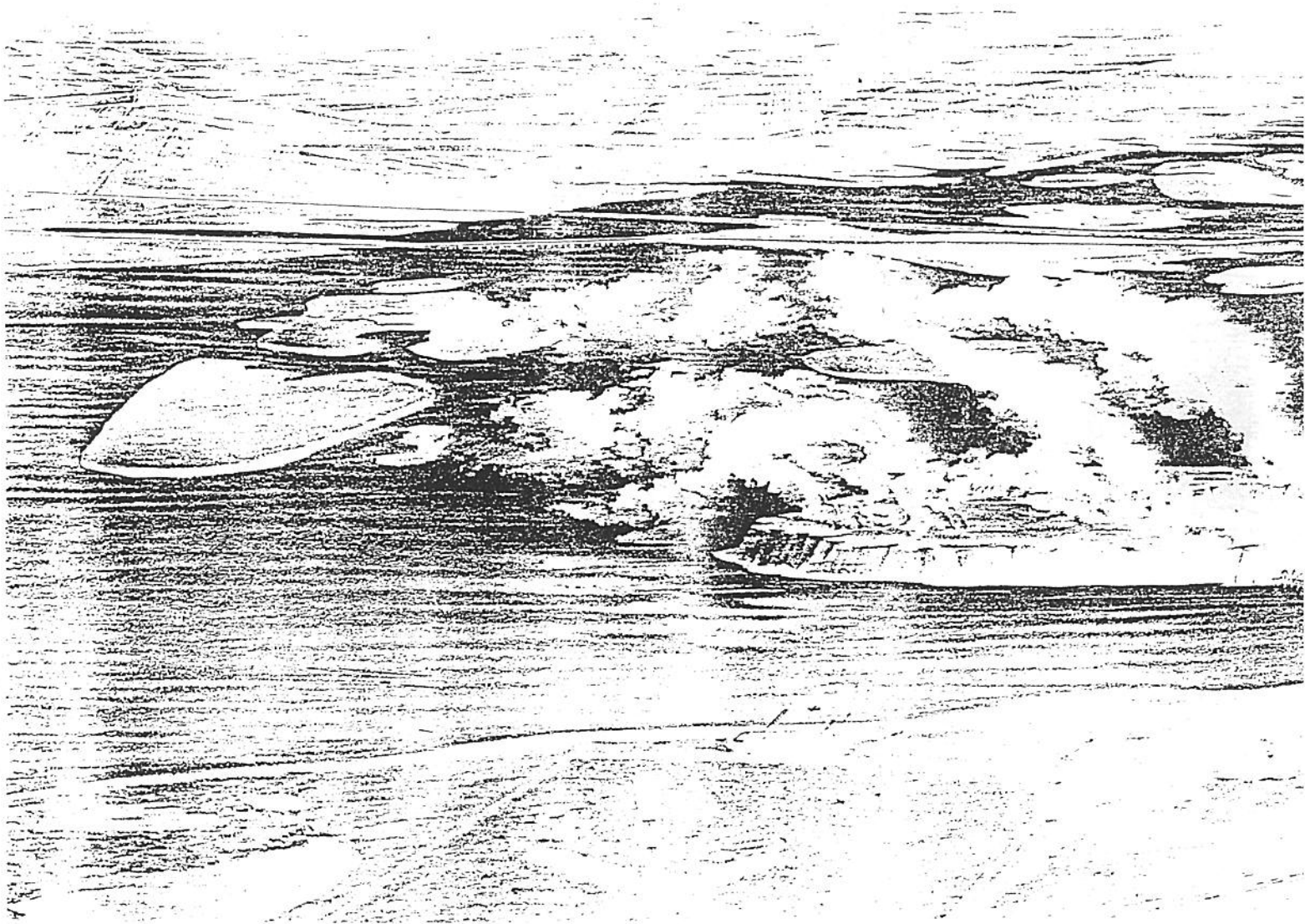
Commissioner.



EIGHTY-THOUSAND ACRES . . . water, marsh and meadows . . .
30,000 acres . . . the . . . more . . . for . . .
for . . . and
and
.



RIKER'S
ISLAND
DUJAP



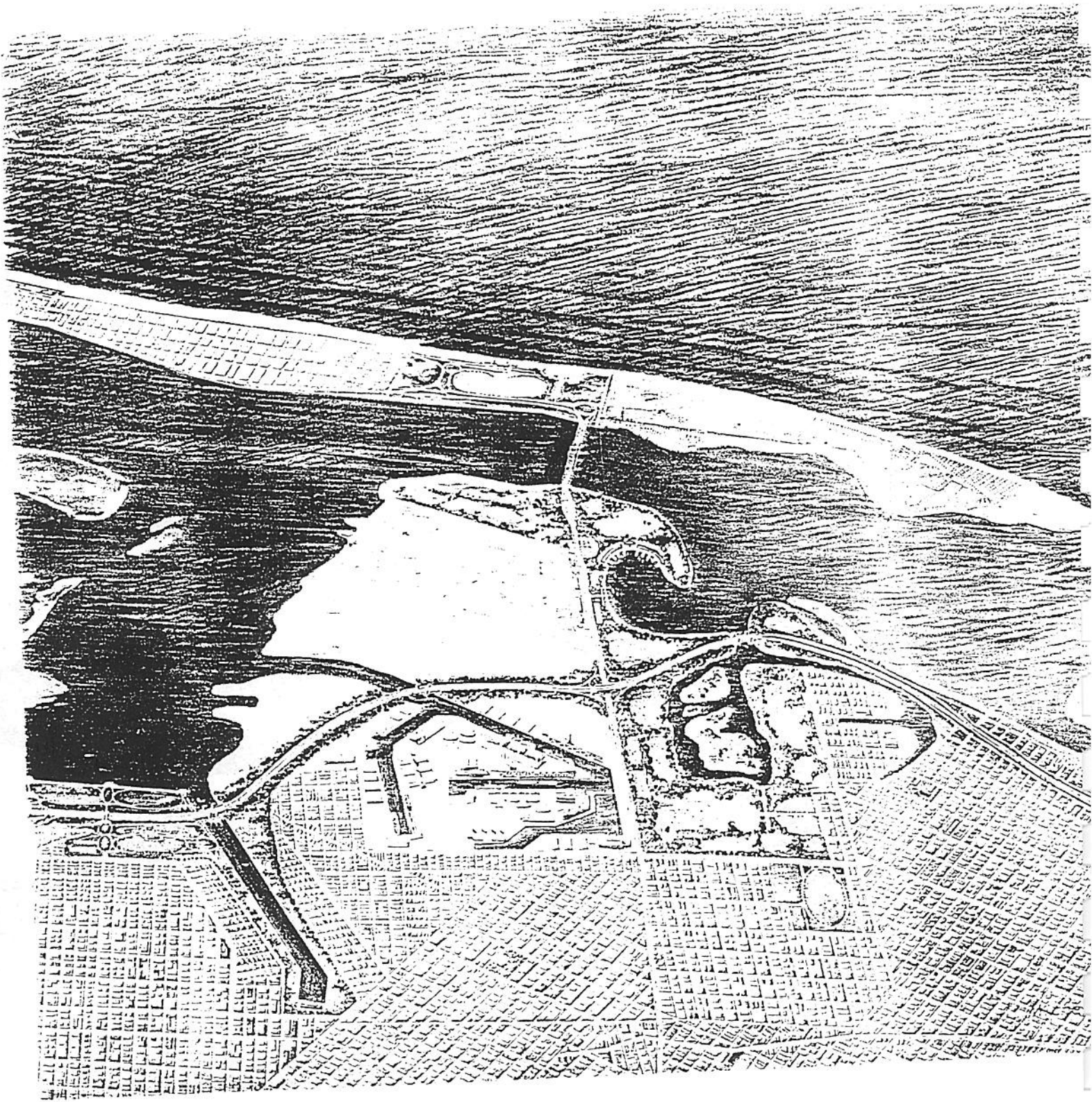
CIVIC NIGHTMARE . . . Artist's conception of what Jamaica Bay would look like if the proposal to establish a huge refuse dump in the bay were to become a reality. It seems incredible in view of the unfortunate and costly experiences with dumps at Riker's Island (upper left) and in the Flushing Meadows (lower right) that similar proposals to destroy Jamaica Bay should keep coming up.



OLD
WASHING
MEADOW
DUMP



THE FUTURE OF JAMAICA BAY . . . Since 1978 the trend toward recreational and residential development of its bay and its surrounding shore frontage has been emphasized by the completion of the great new Marine Parkway Bridge, the reconstruction of Jacobus Park, the widening of the Cross Bay Boulevard Bridge now under way, the reconstruction of Rockaway Beach scheduled for completion in 1982, the Shore



Parkway for which rights of way have already been acquired by the city, the expansion and improvement of a new Canarsie Beach Park, the development of Marine Park and the active use and improvement of Floyd Bennett Airport. This program on which millions are today being spent must be carried forward to its logical conclusion.

JAMAICA BAY . . . Showing the system of existing and proposed arterial highways and parkways linking the bay with the homes of the seven million residents of the City of New York.



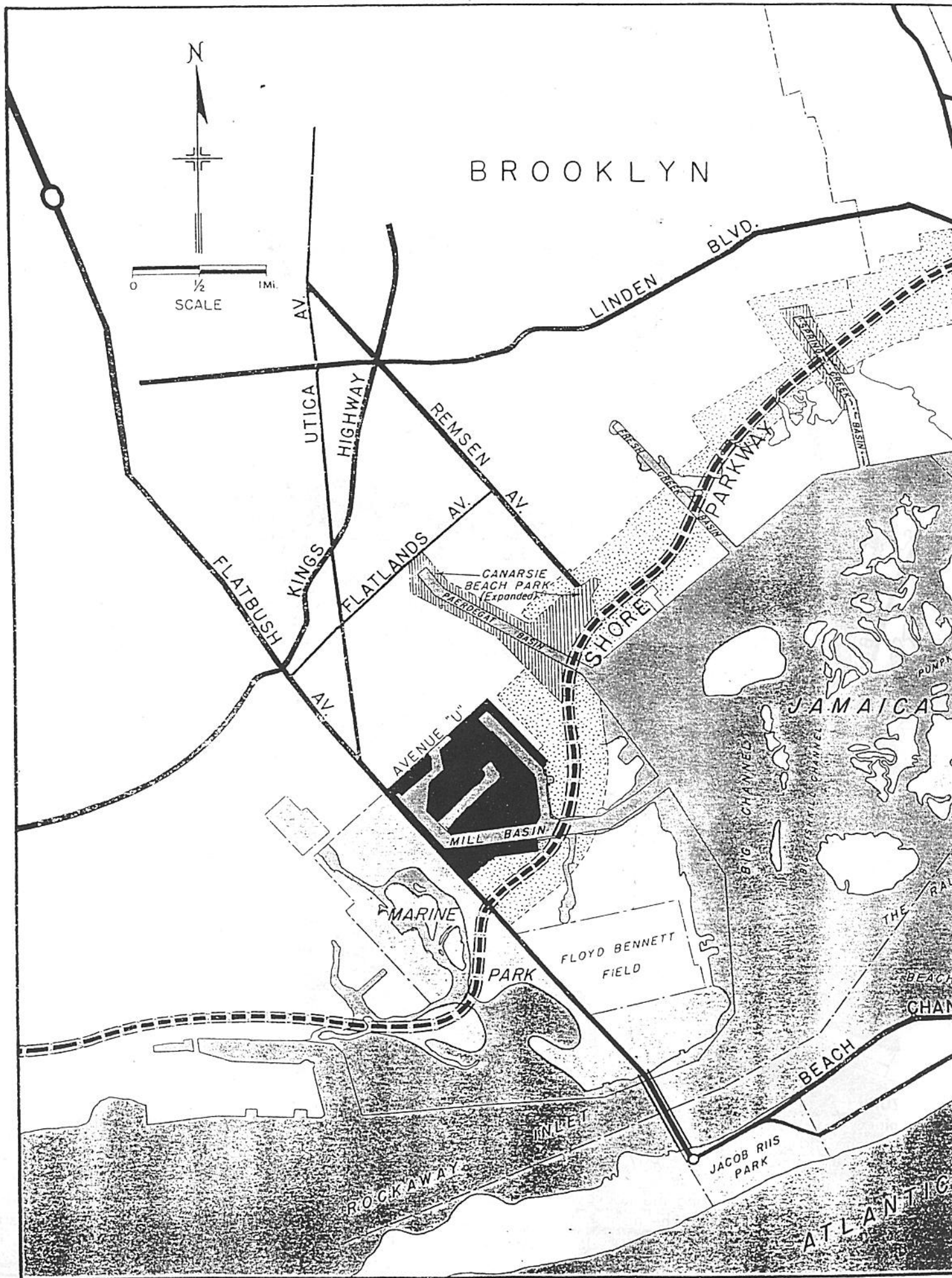
Monday, June 6, 1938

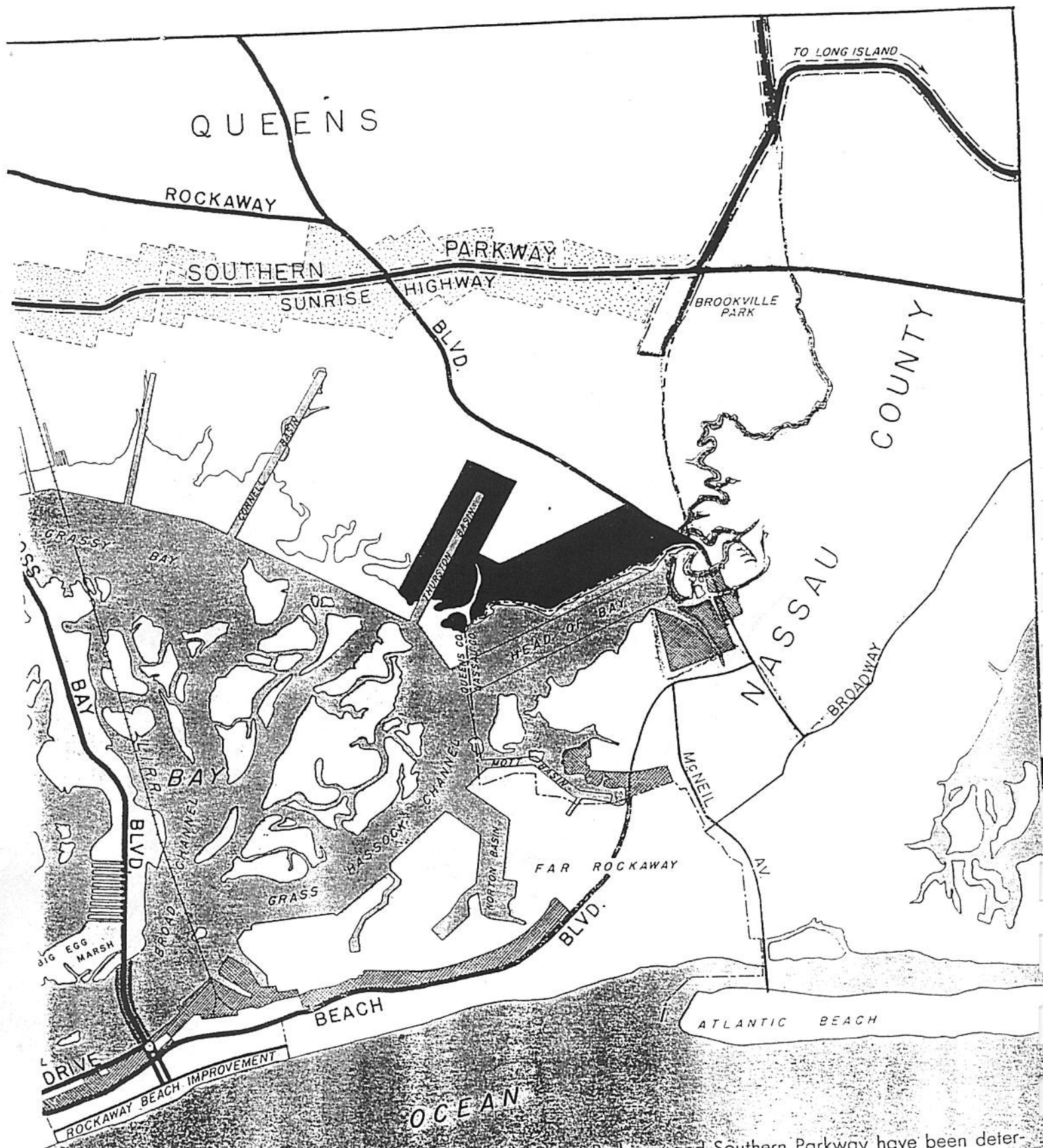
Sanitation and Yellow Bar Hassock

Commissioner Carey of the Sanitation Department still clings to his belief in the feasibility and unobjectionability of his plan to use the marsh islands of Jamaica Bay as the new city refuse dump. But he has shown himself willing to listen to argument on the subject. In the mean while scores of civic associations in Brooklyn and Queens have banded in defense of the bay's amenities. Borough President Ingersoll has stressed the importance of preserving the region for recreational use, while Mr. Moses, whose characterization of the subject, is preparing a report on the subject, until the whole subject of city will take no irreparable step with the dumping project and its future has been thoroughly canvassed.

Jamaica Bay is the one great remaining body of water within the city limits still capable of being reclaimed for bathing, fishing and boating. The very wildness and sense of waste and isolation which, now that being zoned for industrial uses are led to its being the millions cramped in the brick and steel of civilization. Its wide skies, its long water reaches and low, grassy and mysterious-seeming islands make Cross Bay Boulevard (despite the shacks and hot-dog stands which already too much disfigure it) an avenue which a strange corner of primitive romance of a kind one would hardly expect to come upon between Ozone Park and the Rockaways.

Commissioner Carey contends that his proposed method of dumping behind retaining dikes will obviate pollution and leave the recreational opportunities undamaged. It is possible, but one cannot help wondering whether processions of refuse scows and the dust and noise of dumping would make a suitable center around which to develop a natural park area; while one cannot but retain a sentimental attachment for the flavorsome names—Yellow Bar Hassock, Pumpkin Patch Channel, Canarsie Poi, The Raunt, Old Swale Marsh—of the quaint geography which the dumping operations would affect or obliterate. The question is a broad one of regional use; it must turn, of course, upon detailed consideration of relative possibilities in the several plans of development, but the point is that it should be decided on no narrower ground. Jamaica Bay is an asset of a kind which we have at last learned not lightly to throw away.

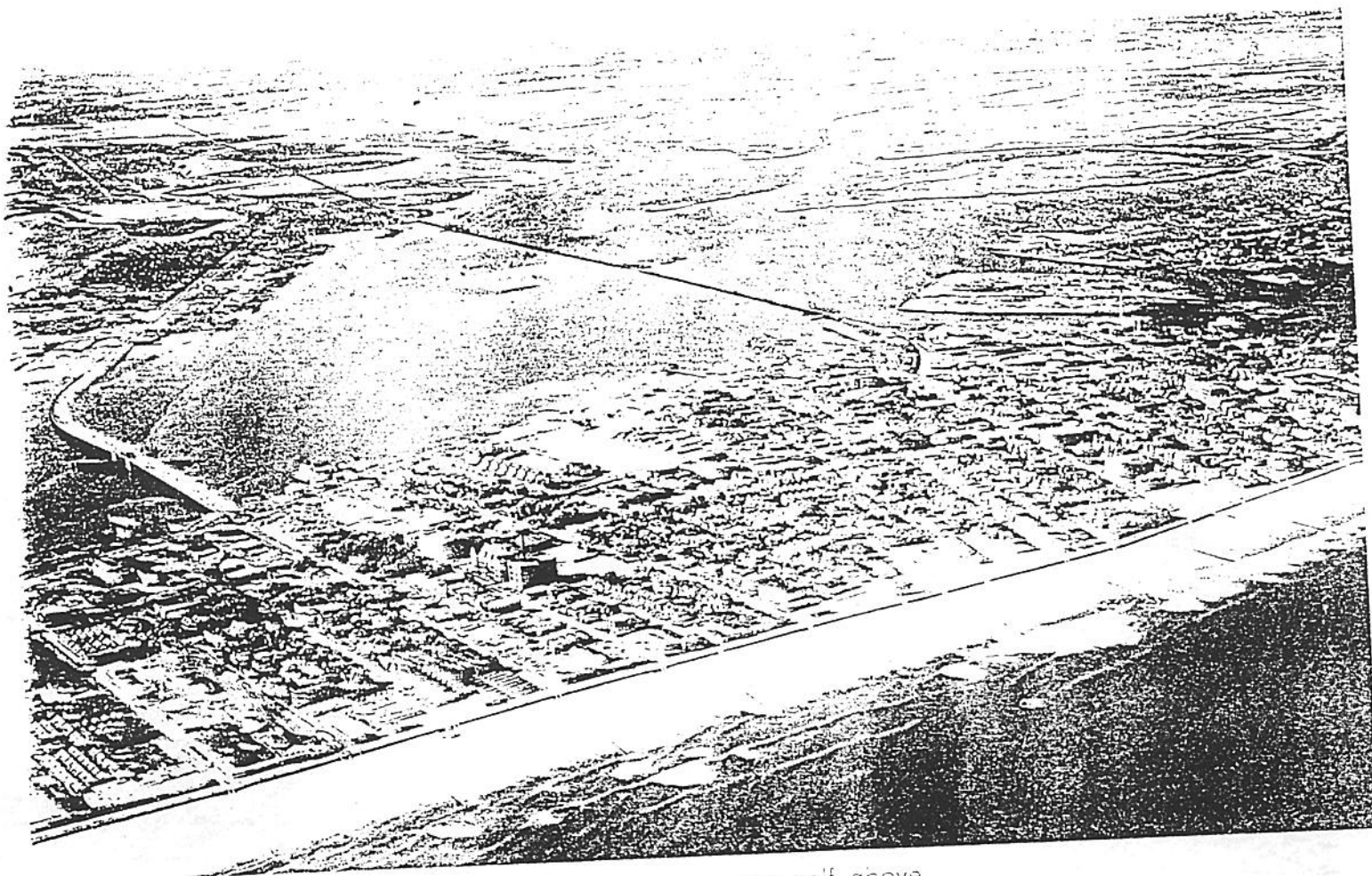




ZONING • • The dotted bands along each side of the Shore Parkway and Southern Parkway have been determined as a residential district in order to protect these parkways and to promote a desirable residential development next to them. The two solid black areas indicate proposed industrial centers; one situated at Mill Basin and the other at the head of the bay near the Nassau County line. Both of these are logical industrial sites, and are adequate in size to provide for industrial expansion for a great many years to come. In addition there are existing business districts along the Rockaway peninsula shown in black cross-hatching on the map. The remainder of the region bounded on the north by the Shore and Southern Parkways, on the south by Jamaica Bay, on the east by Rockaway Boulevard, and on the west by Flatbush Avenue and Marine Park, should be zoned predominantly for residential purposes, exclusive of the waterfront and bay which should be devoted to recreation.

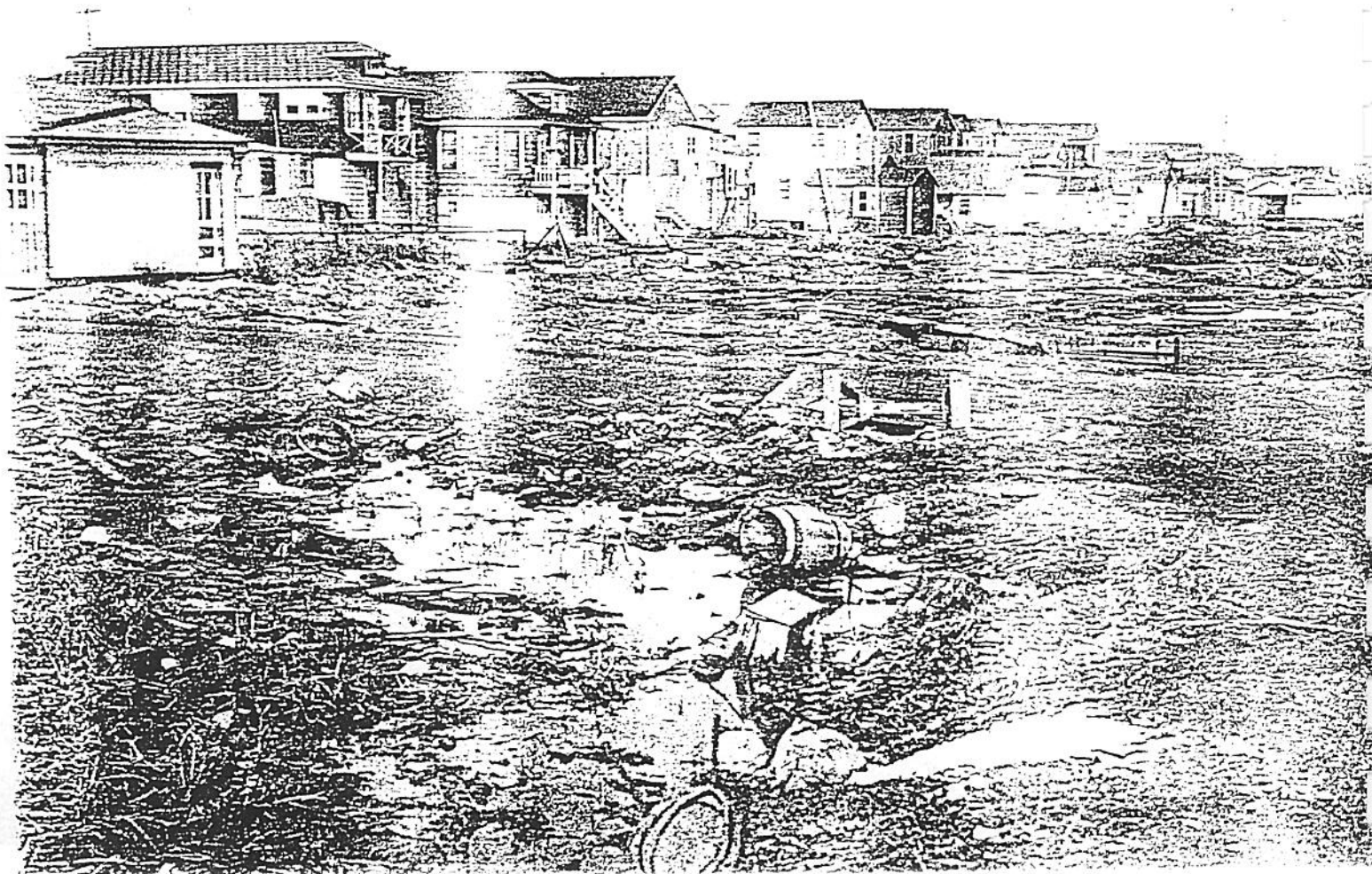
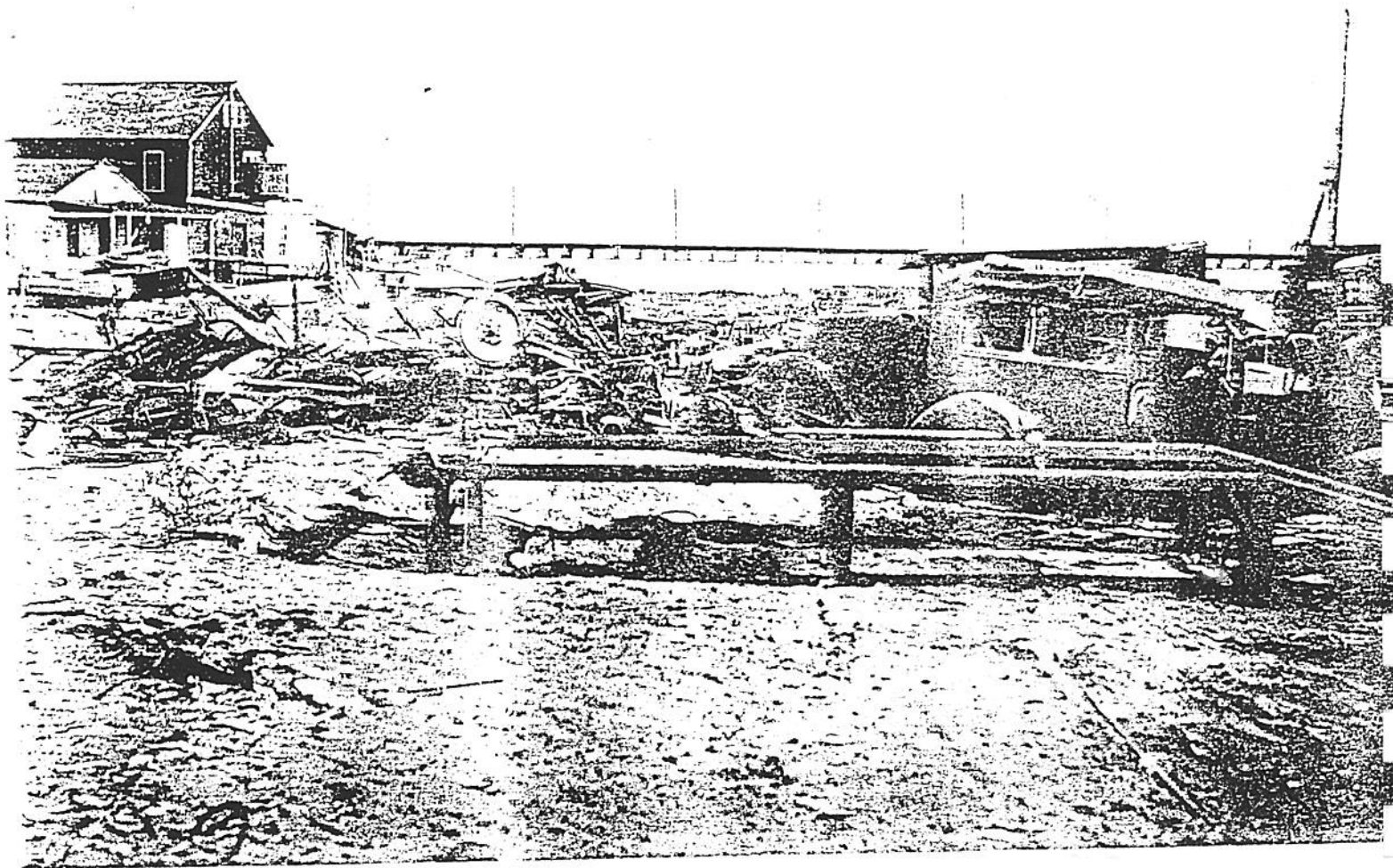
POLLUTION . . . The black waters on this map are at present unfit for bathing because of pollution. Under the harbor purification program of the City Department of Public Works most of Jamaica Bay will be free of contamination by 1939, and the rest will be cleaned up shortly thereafter. The new sewage disposal plants to be constructed around Jamaica Bay are shown with an "X".

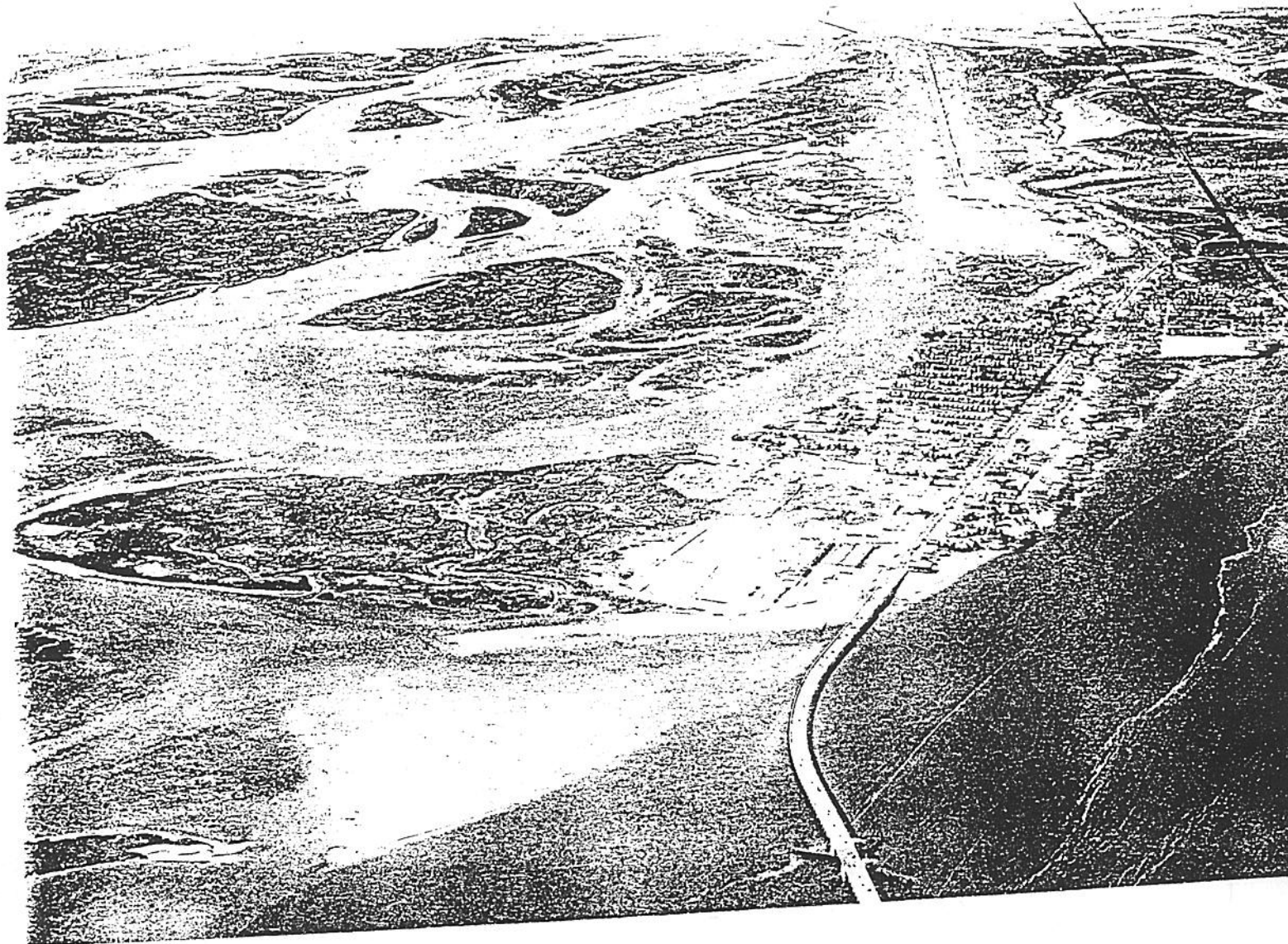




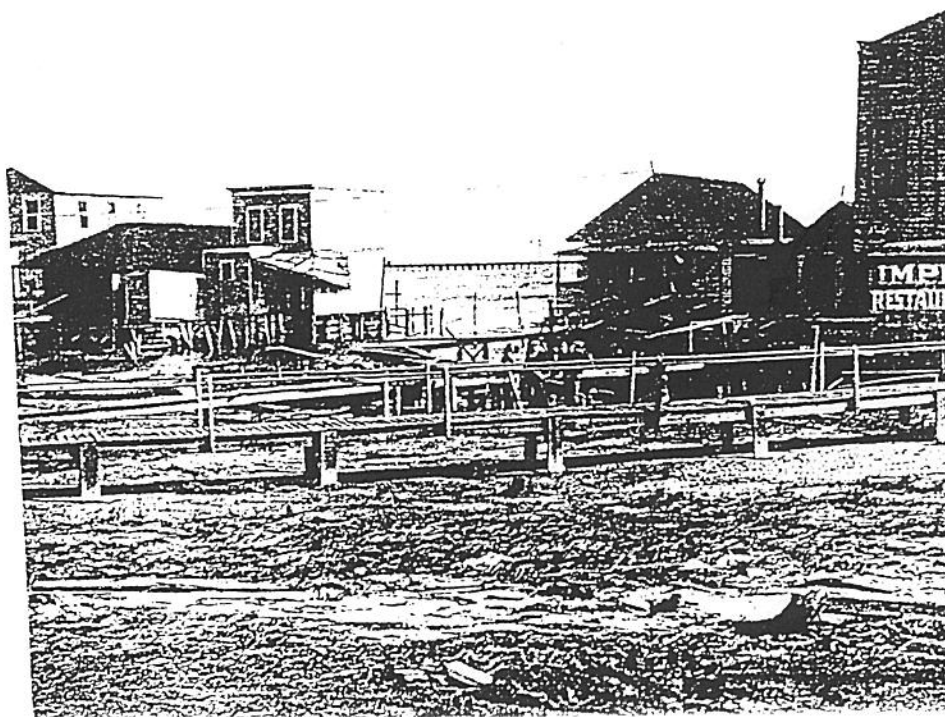
JAMAICA BAY • • east half, above
west half, below

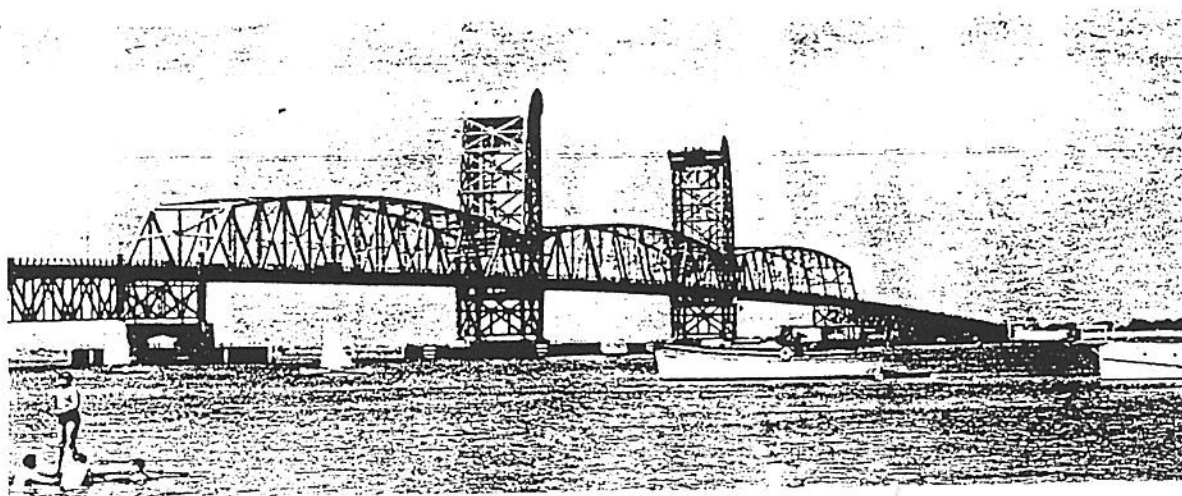




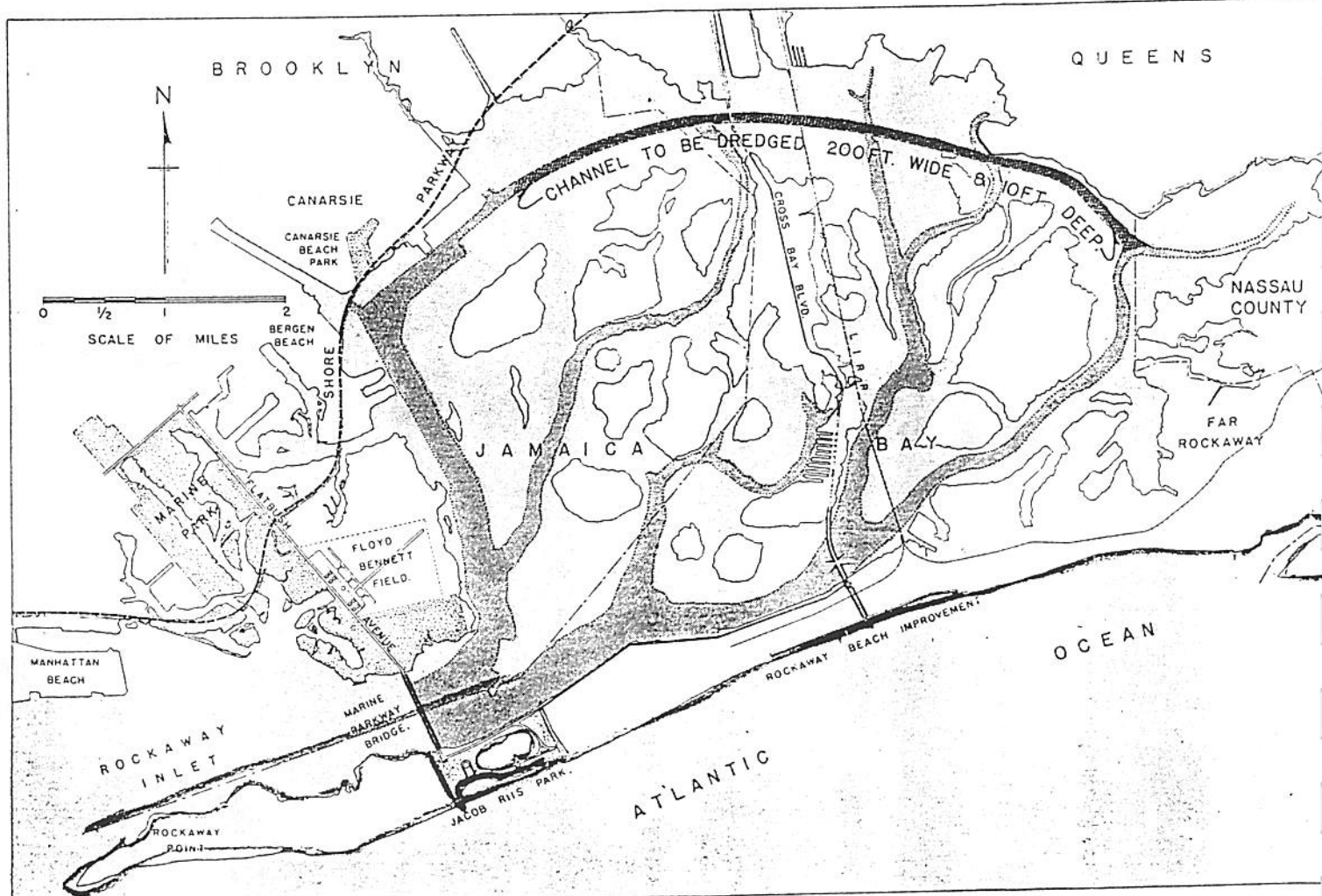


BIG EGG MARSH . . The egg shaped island as seen from the air is shown above. The scenes on the facing page and at the right depict conditions that exist in the mushroom development located on this island—city-owned land leased to a real estate speculator by a previous administration. Public use of the land is restrained until this lease expires in 1945. The city recently had to resort to condemnation to obtain the use of its own land for the proposed improvement of the Cross Bay Boulevard Bridge.

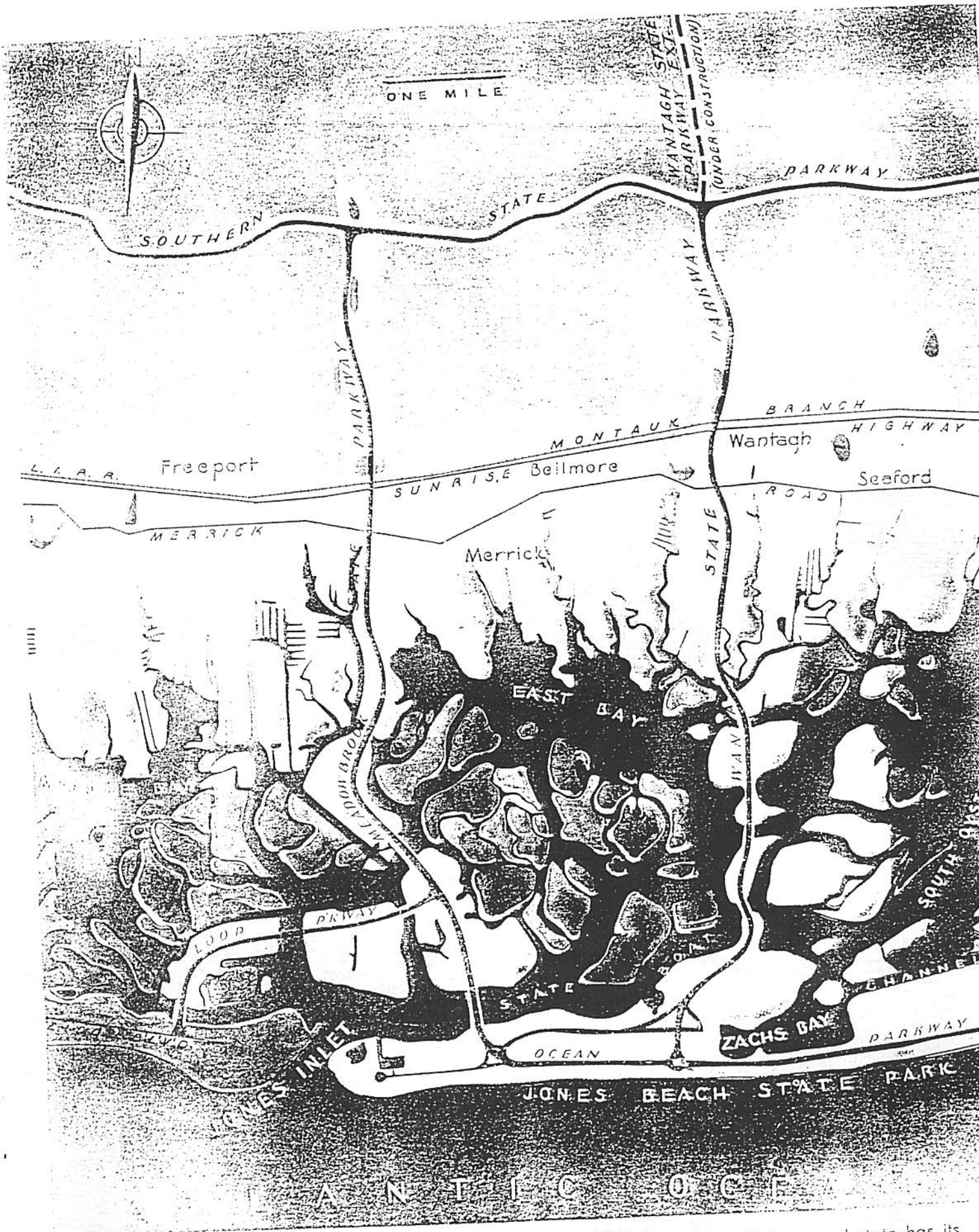




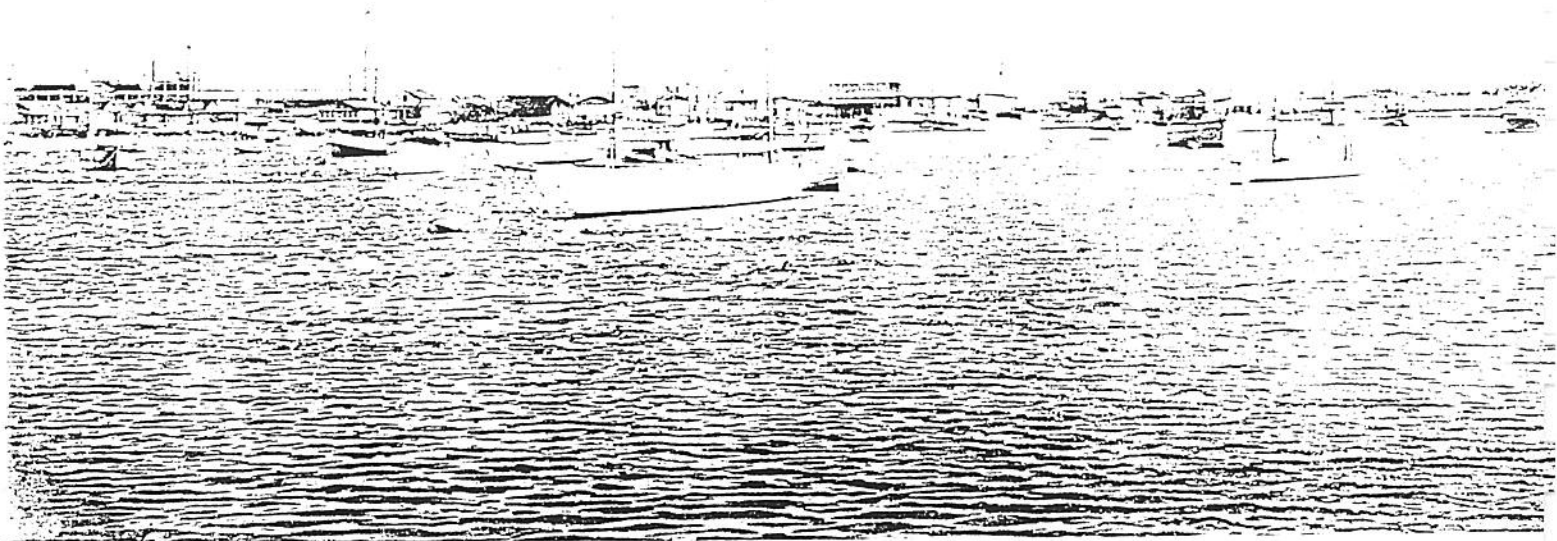
MARINE PARKWAY BRIDGE



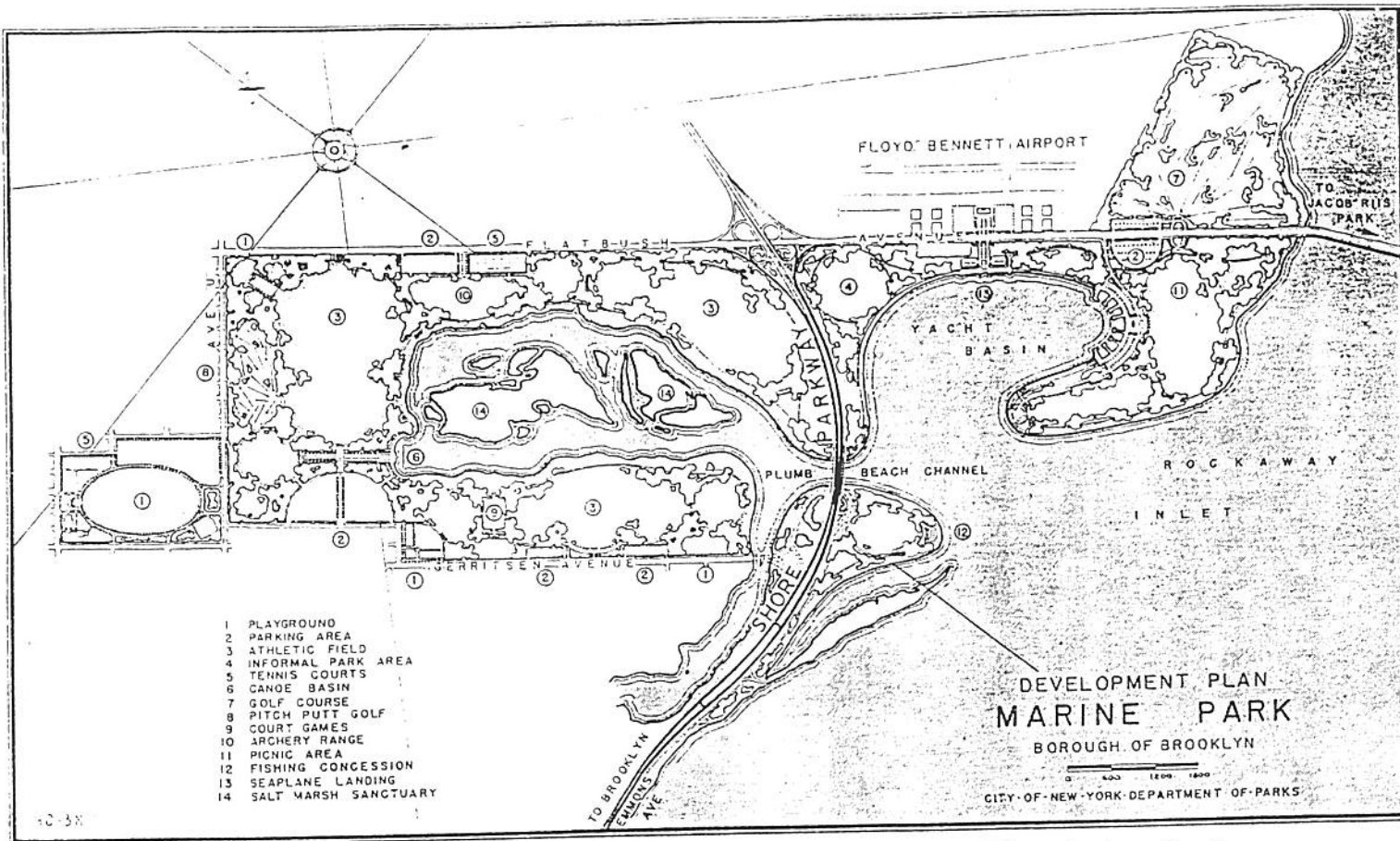
BOATING • • The present channel system, inadequate for deep draft tug boats and commercial vessels, is of sufficient depth and entirely satisfactory for the average small pleasure boat, with the exception of a relatively short section in the northeastern part of the bay. By dredging the channel shown on the map 10 feet deep and 200 feet wide, at a cost of \$200,000, a complete circulatory channel system for motor launches will be provided. The cost of dredging alone under the industrial and commercial plan now on the city map is estimated at approximately \$20,000,000.



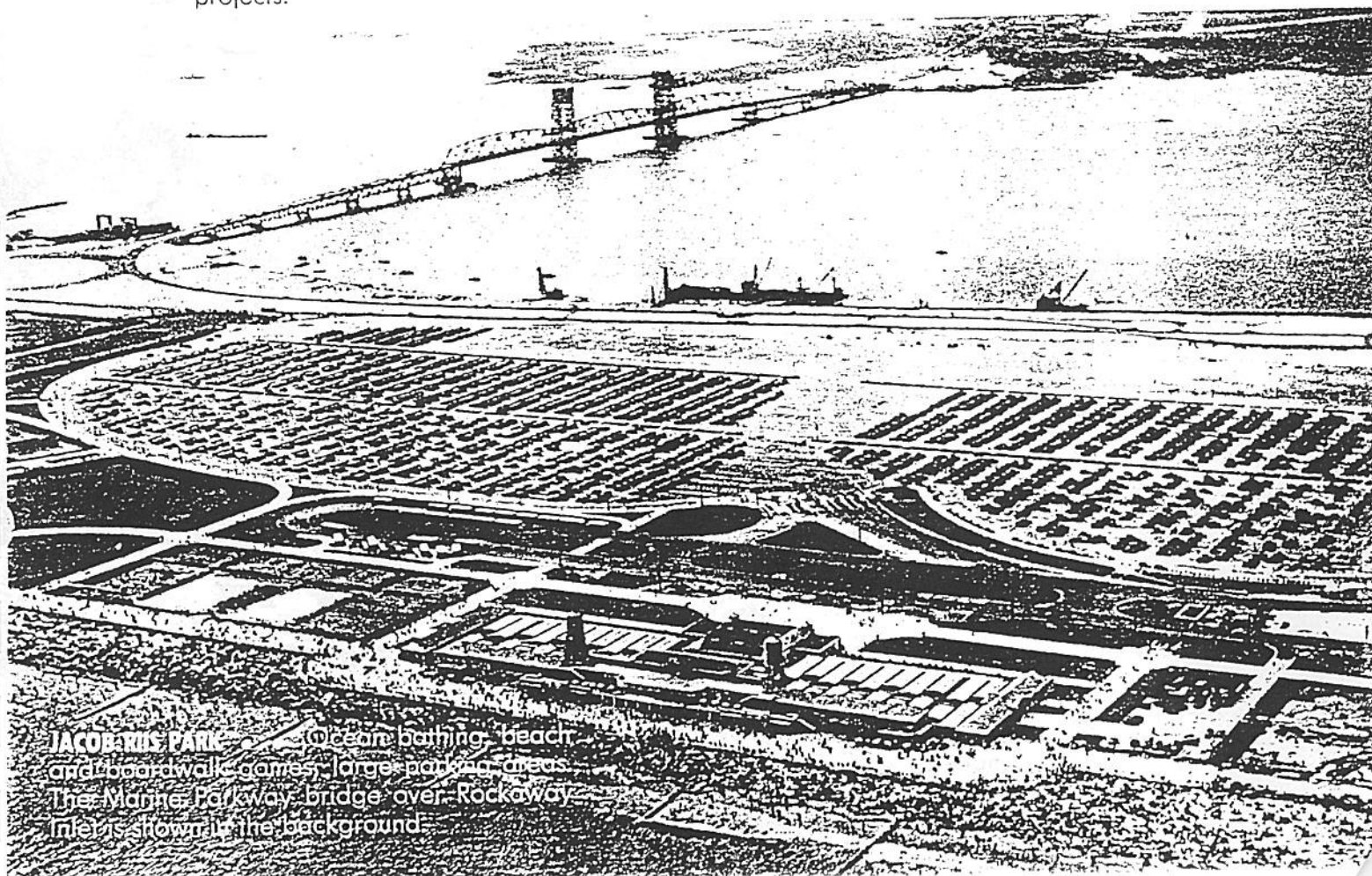
JONES BEACH • • The plan to preserve the islands in Jamaica Bay in their natural state has its parallel in the Great South Bay in Nassau and Suffolk Counties where the most important islands have been dedicated to the state for park purposes. This map shows the islands (in white) between the mainland and the ocean which will forever be preserved in their present state.



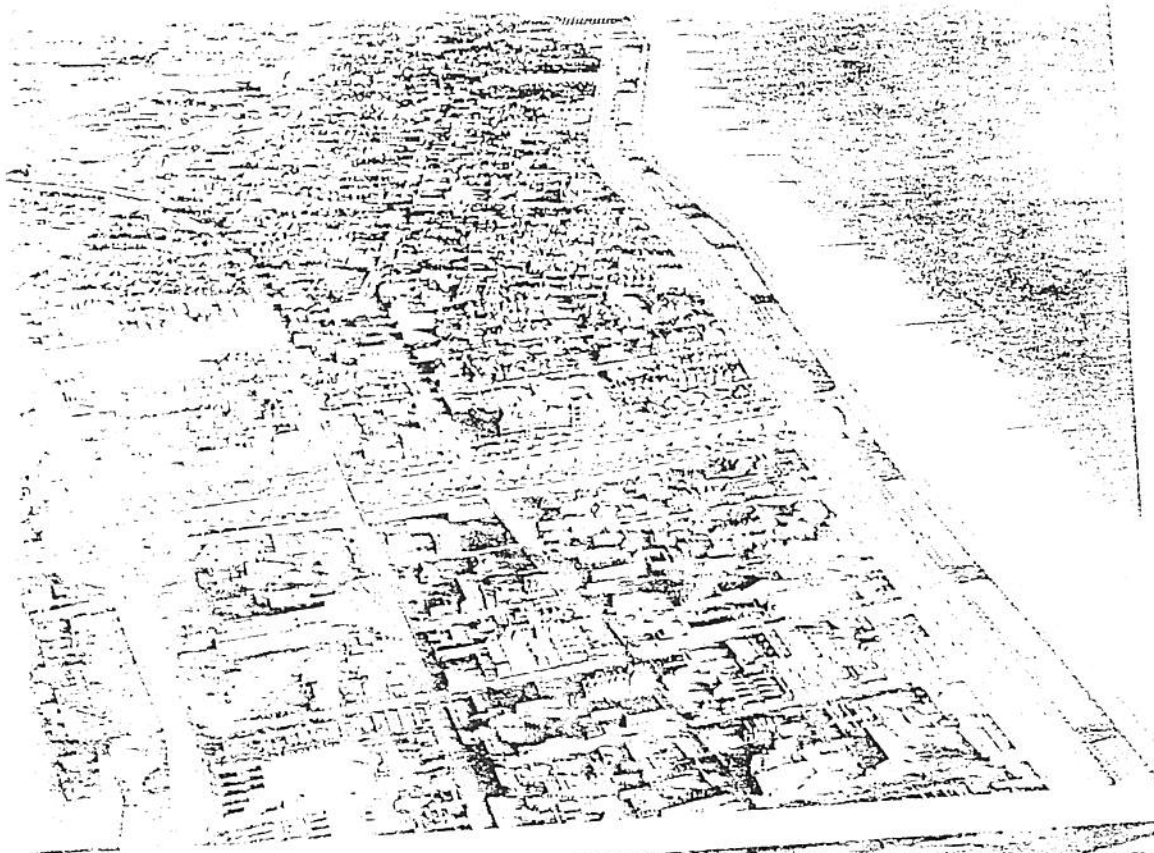
PUMPKIN PATCH MARSH



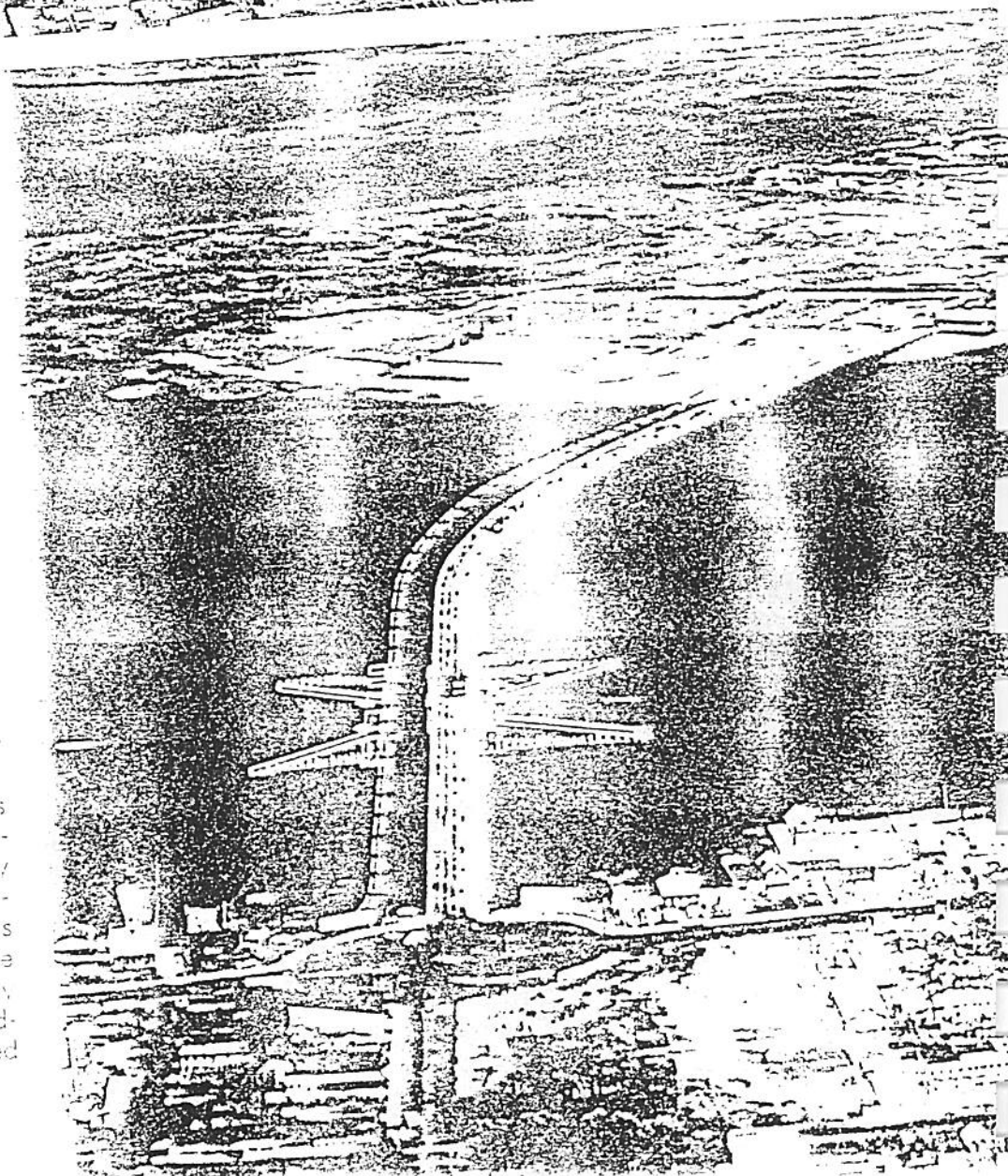
IMPROVEMENTS . . . Many public improvements completed since 1934 in the Jamaica Bay area, and others under way and proposed, have set a definite pattern for recreational and residential development. The views on this page and the next show some of these important projects.



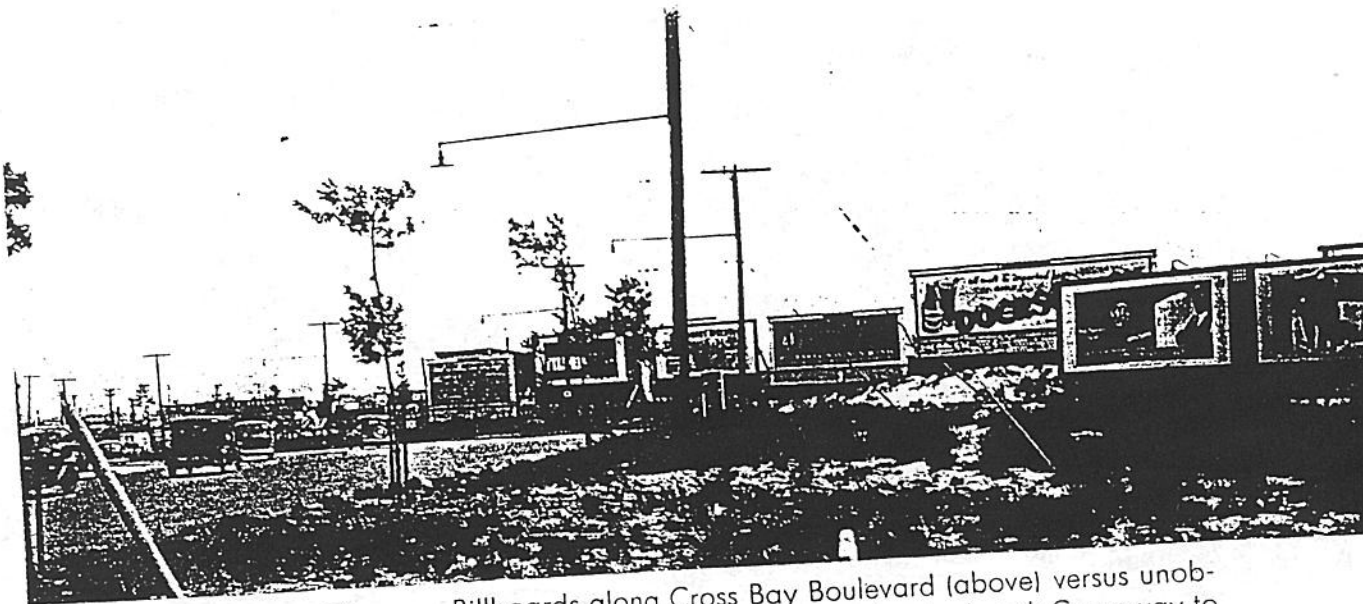
JACOBUS PARK — Ocean bathing, beach and boardwalk games, large parking areas. The Marine Parkway bridge over Rockaway Inlet is shown in the background.



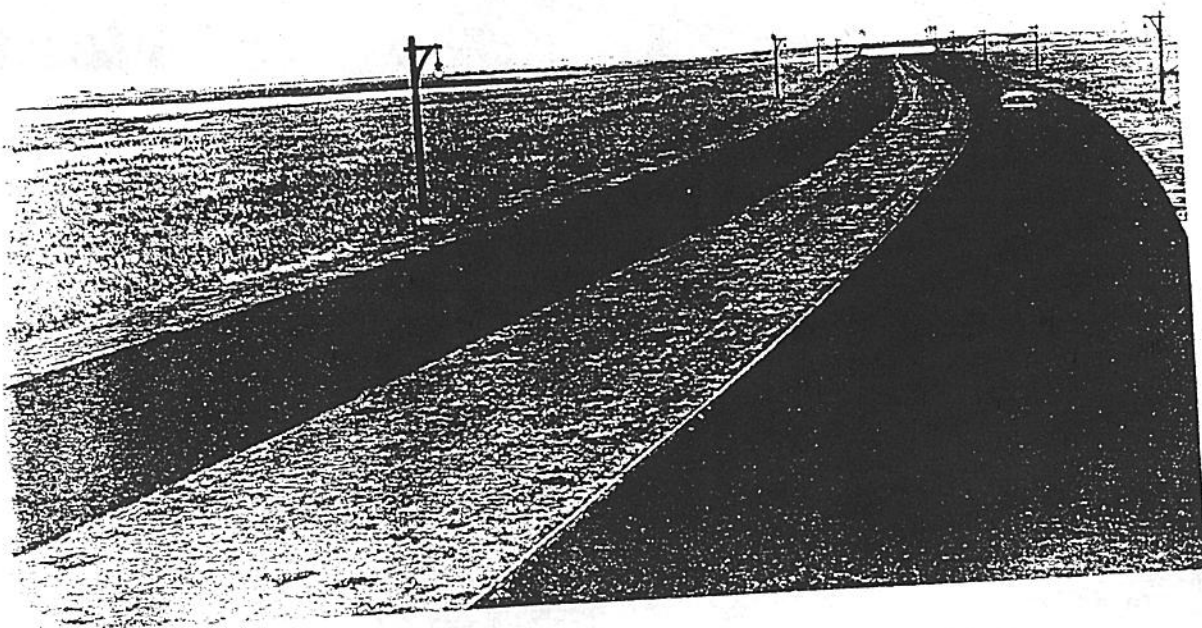
IMPROVEMENT
PLAN for
DOCKLAND
BEACH



DOCKLAND BEACH. The vic-
arage of the Cross Bay
Boulevard bridge front
over Baiton Channel is
part of the plan for the re-
habilitation of Dockland
Beach shown above. Ac-
tively work on this project is
now under way by the
City of New York Parkways
Department and is sched-
uled to be completed
early in 1969.

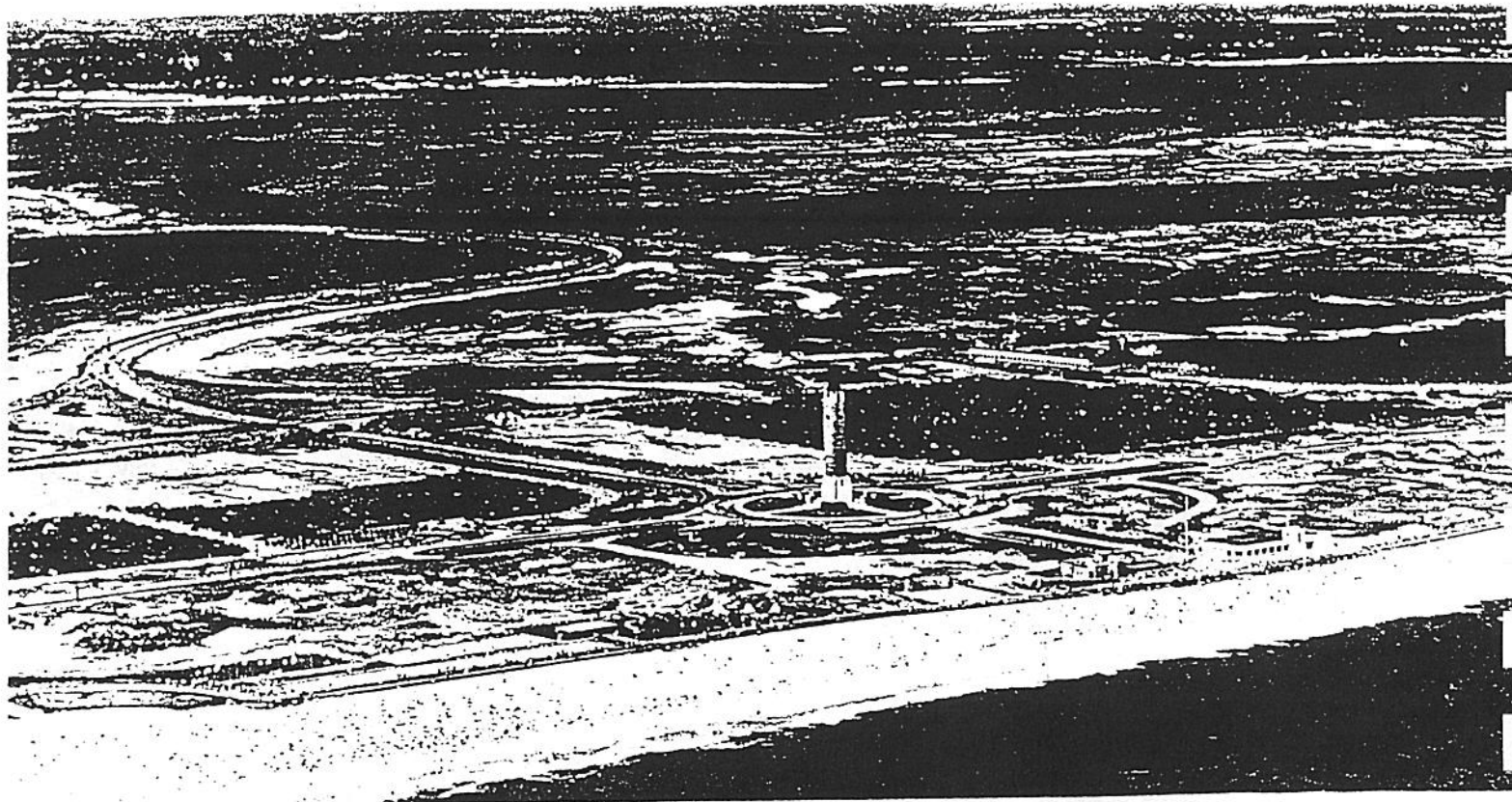


CONTRAST • • Billboards along Cross Bay Boulevard (above) versus unobstructed view of natural scenic landscape along Meadowbrook Causeway to Jones Beach (below).



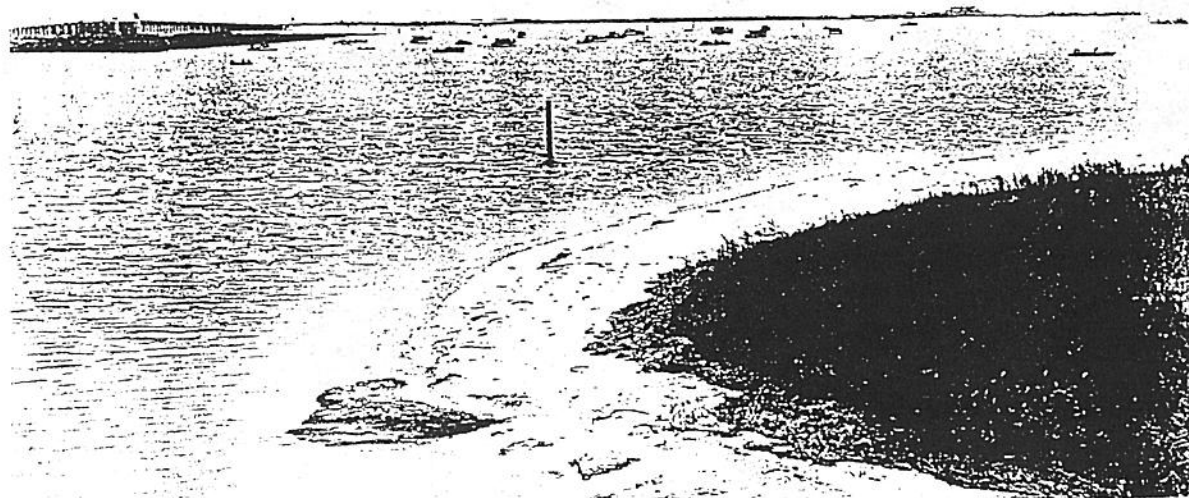
MEADOWS • • Marsh islands and meadows (below) along the Jones Beach boat channel in Suffolk County have been zoned by the Town of Babylon against industrial development.





JONES BEACH . .
Background of islands
and boat channels
north of the park
(above).

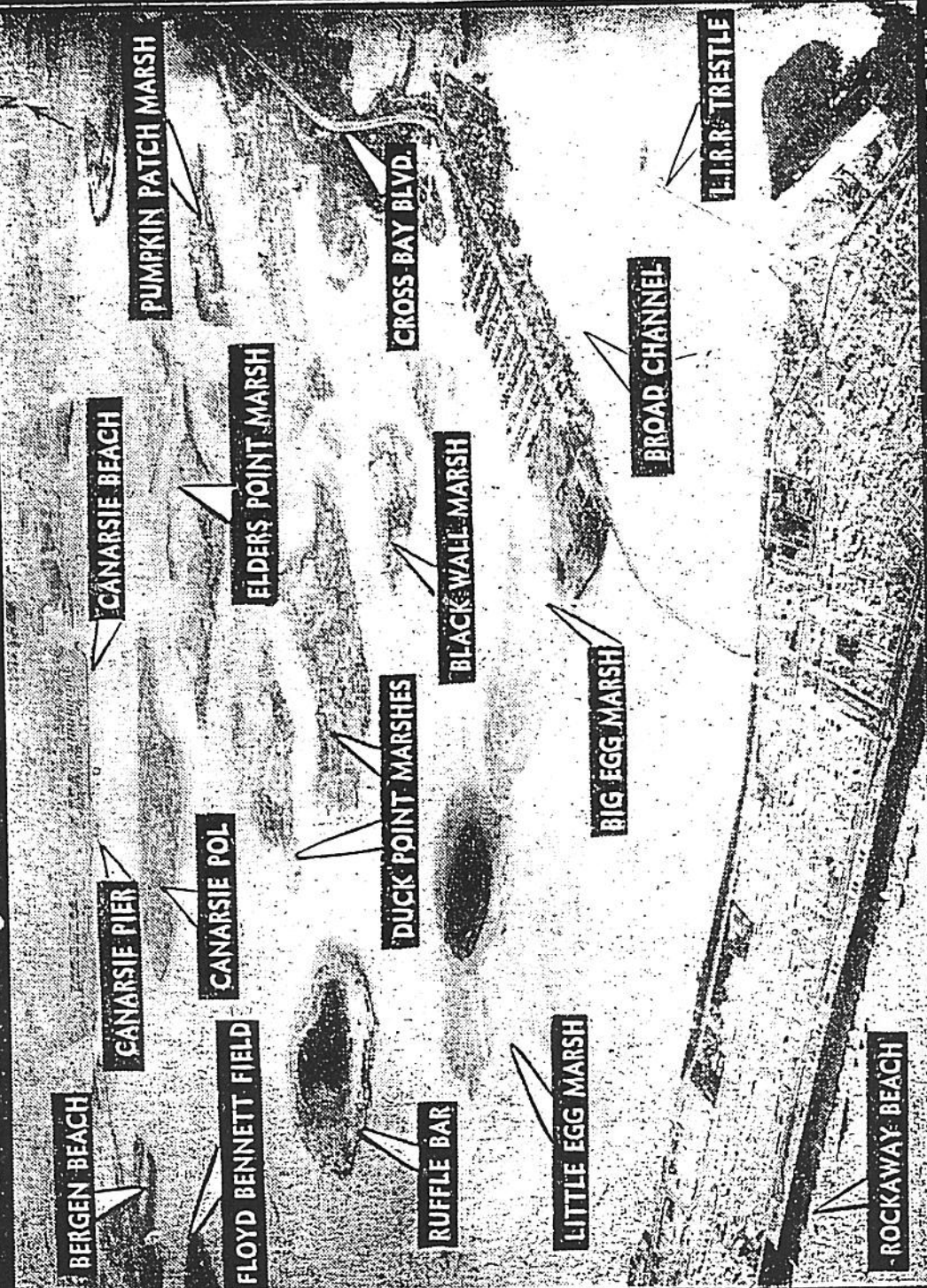
Fishing between the
islands (left).



ZACHS BAY . . Boating
between beach and is-
lands (right).



Jamaica Bay To Be Vast Recreation Area



Aerial photo by Ted Kell
View of Jamaica Bay, where city will build 12,000-acre playground on land, water and marshes entirely within the city limits

St. John's, N.Y., and the Bay, C. and the Bay Optimistic Over Possibilities of Sanctuary

By John O'Reilly

The Commission on the Conservation of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service has been called to the task of the protection of the wildlife preserve on the marshy islands in the center of Jamaica Bay. The wildlife sanctuary is one phase of the program now being pushed to conserve the 12,000 acres of Jamaica Bay into New York City's largest natural area.

The Commission made its first trip to the islands last week and already has given tentative recommendations. The Commission will meet again in the near future.

Commissioner of the Department of Conservation, John C. O'Sullivan, said that the Commission's first trip was a reconnaissance mission. It was to determine the feasibility of establishing a wildlife sanctuary on the islands.

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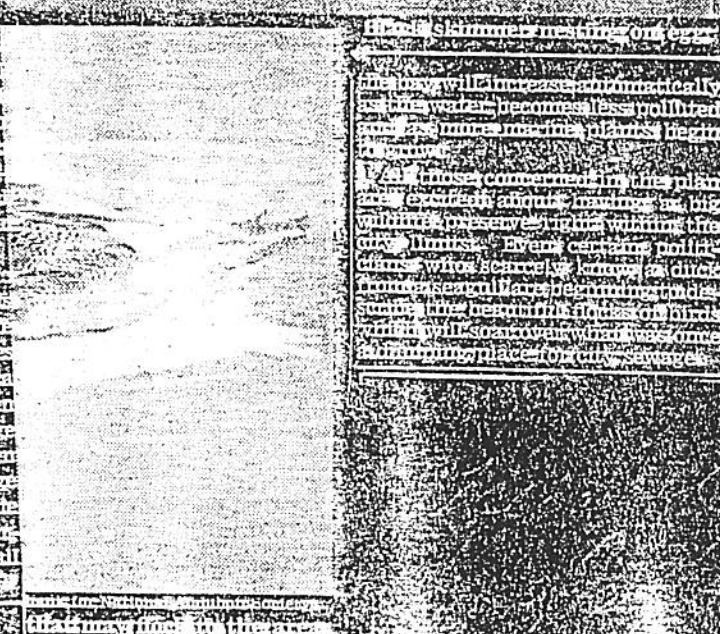
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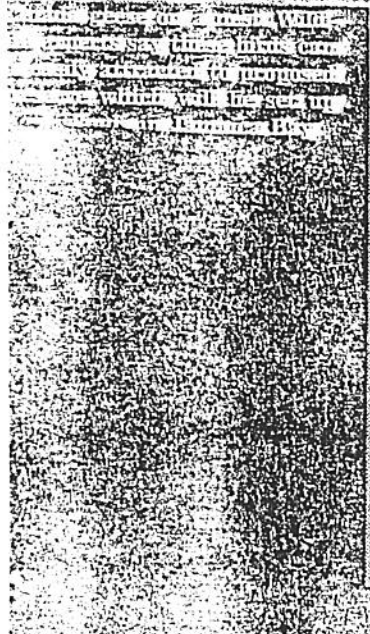
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