A Short History CRANE NECK and the CRANE NECK ASSOCIATION

A Short History of

CRAVE NECK

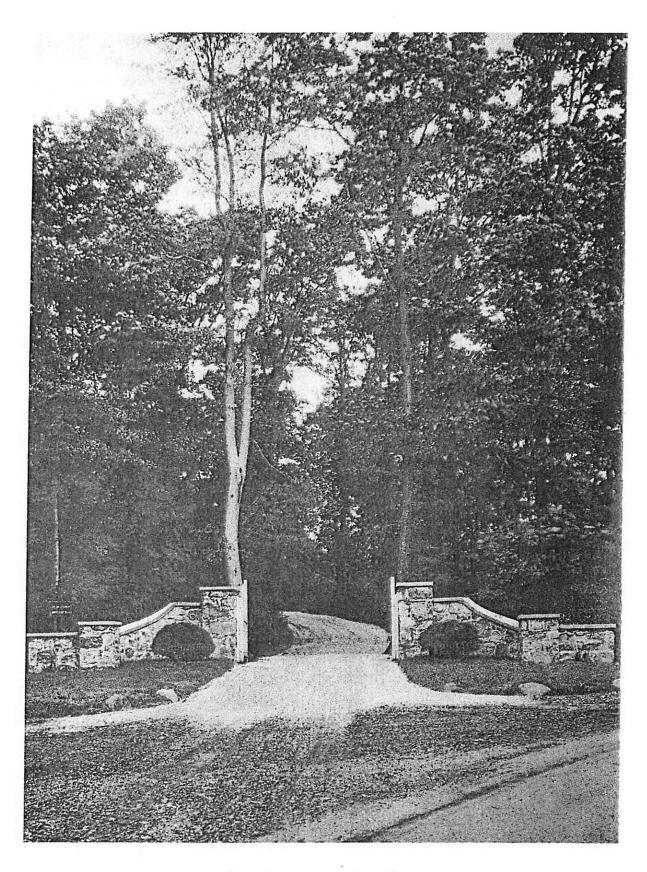
and the

CRANE NECK ASSOCIATION

Compiled by ARTHUR L. DOUGLAS, JR.

SPRING, 1979

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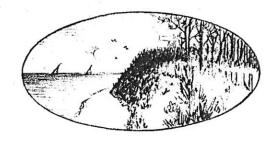


Original entrance to Crane Neck.

Foreword

This booklet has been prepared by the Crane Neck Association for the information and pleasure of its members. It is hoped that the historical account presented herein will add to the feeling of pride in ownership of property on Crane Neck, and that it will help to explain both the responsibilities of the Association and the essential duties it performs.

The information contained in the following pages was derived partly from research of the files in the Emma Clark Library, and from the recollections and personal papers of Eversley Childs Ogden, Margherita Childs Fidao, Sinclair Hatch, and Gertrude and Horace Stewart. Arthur Perles has edited it for greater clarity, and for easier and more interesting reading. With the exception of the two original drawings by Chap Wagner, the pictures come from an earlier publication, "The Crane Neck Farm". Publishing arrangements were made by Will Gray.



In The Beginning

Crane Neck's origin has been traced to the mid-17th century when the Dutch controlled what is now New York City and the English were scattered along Long Island and the shores of Connecticut. At that time the English Crown became concerned with bolstering its surrounding settlements, and with restraining the Dutch as much as possible to the confines of Manhattan Island. One result of the British concern was an expedition, formed in New Plymouth Colony, to inspect conditions in the area of Setauket and to determine what arrangements could be made for additional settlements there.

Consequently, one day in 1655, a small group of English colonists set out from New Plymouth, crossed the Sound, and sailed into Conscience Bay past what is now Strong's Neck. They followed a small creek past the point where the mill pond is now located and found a camp of the Setalcott Indians. After inspecting the countryside and confering with the Indians, the colonists arranged to purchase approximately 30 square miles extending from Nissequoge to Mount Misery (Belle Terre)... payment being an assorted collection of knives, hatchets, hoes, coats, kettles, needles, and similar articles.

Some time later, families moved from Connecticut along with their household effects and settled in the newly purchased territories. Most of these pioneering settlers in the Three Village area built their homes in what is now the central area of the Village of Setauket, but as more British arrived they spread into contiguous areas. Crane Neck, which had been used by the Indians mostly for clamming and fishing — and for obtaining a special clay from which utensils were fashioned — was utilized by the settlers only for cattle grazing and very limited farming.

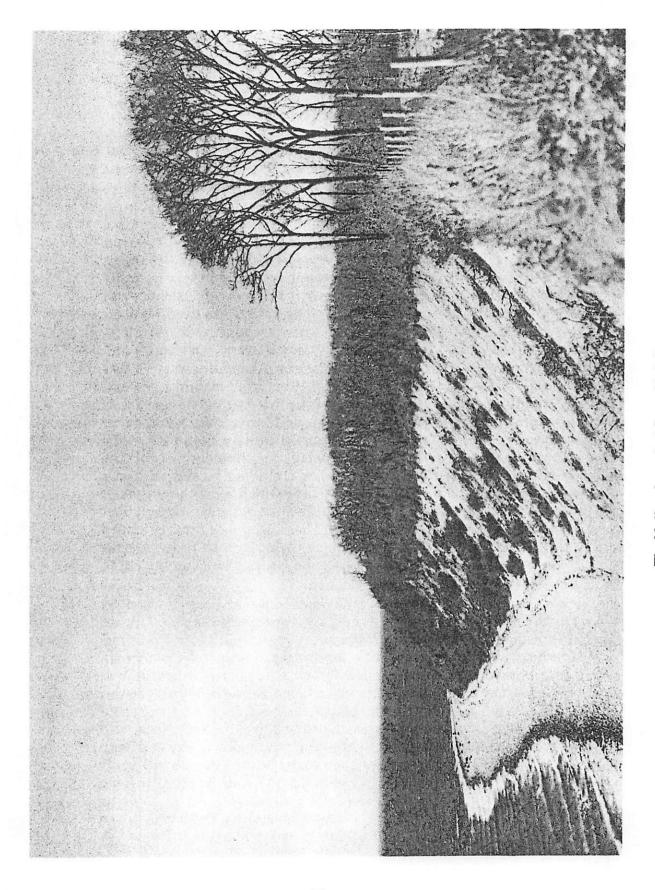
The origin of the name Crane Neck is uncertain. Some say it came from the large number of blue herons that had always congregated there; others attribute it to the shape of the point which old maps of the 18th-century show as sweeping westward from its present extremity in a graceful curve resembling the arch of a crane's neck. In any case, the name is not a new one. . . this location being known as Crane Neck, or Crane's Neck, for many, many years. Flax Pond, which was included in the original purchase, is believed to have received its name from the custom of the surrounding settlers of soaking their flax plants in the pond waters which at that time were fresh. . . the present inlet to the Sound not being created until a much later date.

A view of Crane Neck Point from Smithtown Bay.

Growth came slowly to the Crane Neck area. Even during the Revolution most of the wartime activity took place in the more settled sections of Setauket where the British had converted the then existing Presbyterian Church into a fort. History, however, mentions a pre-dawn raid from Connecticut with whaleboat privateers crossing the Sound and landing on Crane Neck with the intention of attacking and destroying the British fort in Setauket.

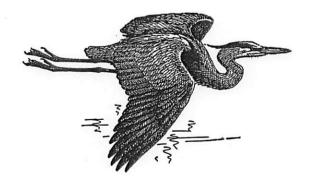
In 1803, a decision was made to break through from Flax Pond into the Sound. It was a difficult undertaking, and even after it had been finally accomplished, those early pioneers discovered what we are still experiencing today; the channel silts up quickly. . . reports indicating that it frequently took 40 men and several teams of horses dragging a scoop to keep the inlet cleared. Later on, industry itself came to Crane Neck. Accounts of 1868 state that gravel was mined from our beach and transported by boat to New York and other cities where it was sold at \$2.00 per ton for use in smelting iron, making glass and sandpaper, and for gravel roofs. Fifteen to twenty thousand tons were reported to have been transported annually for a number of years. Some of this gravel is reported to have been used in the cofferdams that were constructed for foundations of the Brooklyn Bridge in the early 1870's. Until then most of the area's commerce had been carried by ships which plied the waters of Long Island Sound and docked in Port Jefferson or Setauket harbor. Then, in 1873, the Long Island Rail Road was extended to Port Jefferson. . .a development that was to prove a great convenience for residents of Crane Neck, as well as the entire Three Village area.

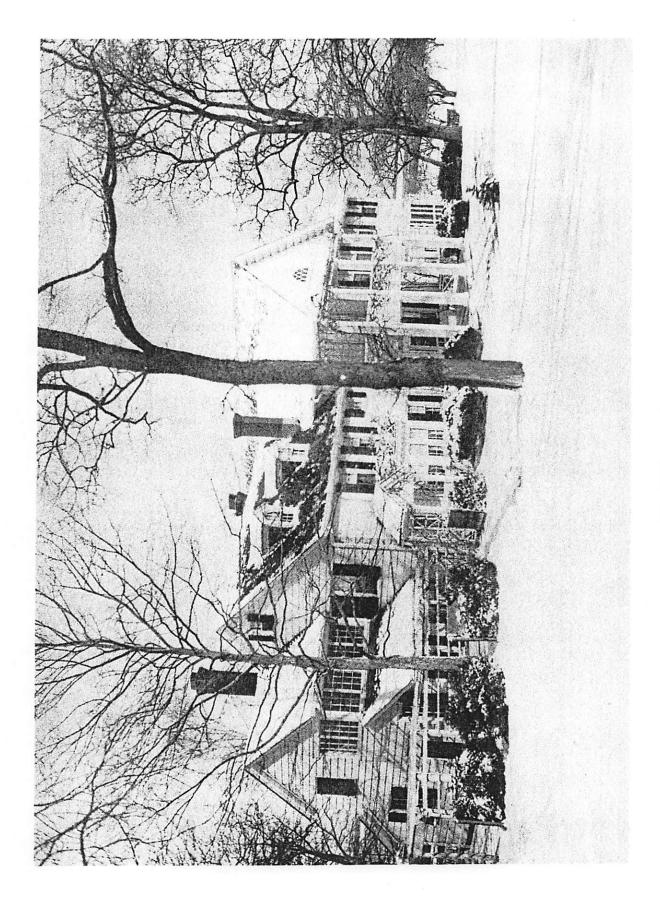
In the 1820's the entire Crane Neck area was owned by members of the Jones family. . .apparently the result of an original grant from the English Crown. But at about that time, records show it was sold to Ambrogio di Spinola, a gentleman whose family originated in Italy. He is reported to have been at one time a general in the Spanish Army, before emigrating to this country and marrying the daughter of an officer on the staff of General George Washington. Settling down on Crane Neck, he is credited with having built the original manor house and barn there. Although this original house burned down, it was quickly rebuilt on the same site. While living on Crane Neck, Ambrogio di Spinola worked as both a shipbuilder and a shipping merchant, and one of his ventures is reported to have involved the shipping of ice from Maine to as far away as India.



In 1821 a son, Francis Barretto Spinola, was born in Stony Brook. He was to inherit the Crane Neck properties and to have a spectacular, if somewhat controversial, career. After being brought up in Crane Neck and Brooklyn, he entered politics and became, progressively: Alderman; State Assemblyman and Senator; and finally a Congressman. One of his private business projects was the securing of rights to — and the installation of mains and pipes to carry steam under the streets of New York City. During the Civil War in 1862 he was appointed a Brigadier General for recruiting and organizing a brigade of four regiments. He was twice wounded in action, and on one occasion was brought home to Crane Neck aboard a U.S. Navy frigate, transported across the beach on a gun-carriage pulled by farm horses, and deposited at his home here to recuperate. It is said that, until recently, initials of some of the sailors who helped in his transport could still be seen carved into the trunks of some of the old beech trees that are still standing near the main house.

Although married, General Spinola died childless in 1891, and Crane Neck passed into ownership of his married sister, Lousia Spinola McKiege. Her son Ferdinand and his wife, Cornelia, were the last owners of Crane Neck before the purchase by the Childs family some years later on. Two items of interest from this period of time that still exist are a baptismal font currently in use at the Caroline Church in Setauket that was a gift of a McKiege, and a stall marker in the Caroline Church carriage shed that bears the name of Mrs. F.P. Spinola. Also in possession of the McKiege family is a portrait of Gen. Spinola in full uniform, painted by the celebrated Stony Brook artist, William Sidney Mount.



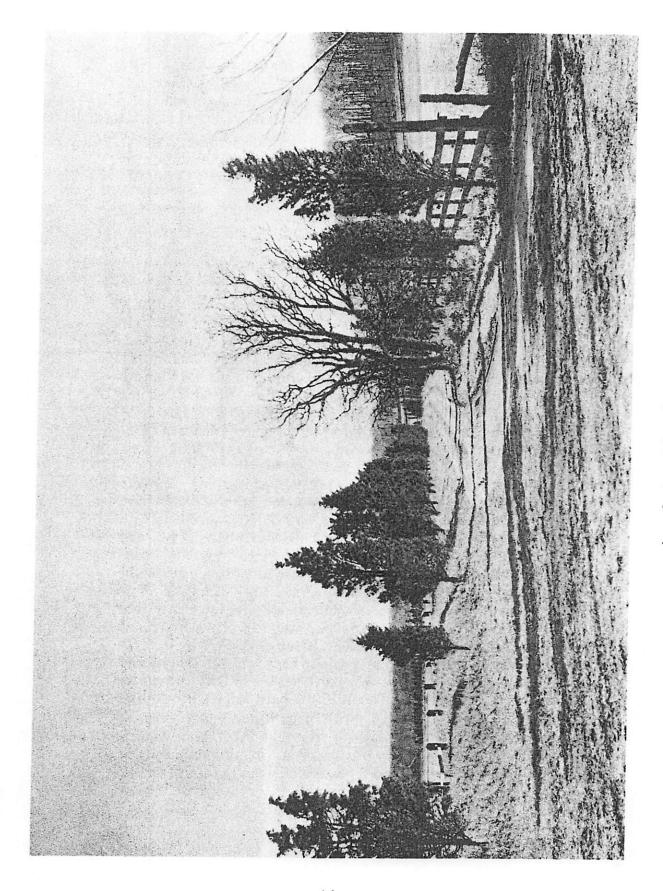


Crane Neck Starts to Develop

Crane Neck began taking on its present-day appearance shortly after the turn of the century when Mr. Eversley Childs, a Brooklyn N.Y. industrialist, became interested in the locality. Mr. Child's love of Crane Neck had actually begun several years earlier due to his interest in fishing and hunting, and a desire to get away from the South Shore winds where the family's summer home was located.

His first purchase, in 1902, was the land surrounding Crane Neck Point then owned by Cornelia and Ferdinand McKiege, consisting of approximately 300 acres and including Flax Pond and the beach. This was followed by other parcels until Mr. Childs had accumulated a total of approximately 500 acres, all of which comprised the area forming the Crane Neck Association's present boundaries. In 1911, the lovely manor house now located on Shore Drive a little west of the present Marine Biology Laboratory was constructed as a residence for Mr. Childs and his immediate family by remodeling and adding to the old Spinola homestead. Also constructed about that time, for his daughter and son-in-law, was the large colonial home on Childs Lane overlooking Smithtown Bay. After his daughter's death in 1935, this property was given to the Salvation Army as a nursery home for disadvantaged infants; but in 1953 it was disposed of by the Salvation Army and once again became, as it still is, a private residence. Many outbuildings surrounded both of these large and comfortable homes, including a wide oldfashioned barn with hand-hewn beams near the main home on Shore Drive, and extensive greenhouses nearby. . . all of which have since been razed. Other buildings dating from those early days include: the house located at the intersection of Crane Neck Road and Shore Drive that was used by the superintendent of the estate; a nearby cottage, used by the chauffeur, that was one of the first Sears Roebuck prefabs; and a gardener's home on the hill opposite the main house. Another building, said to have been used at one time as the local schoolhouse, is located on Shore Drive near Flax Pond, along with another beautiful old barn that is still standing.

During those early years, Mr. Childs found time to form — with some of his neighbors — the Old Field Improvement Association, a community organization which functioned then, throughout Old Field, in a manner similar to that in which our Association now functions in Crane Neck. In those days, as now,

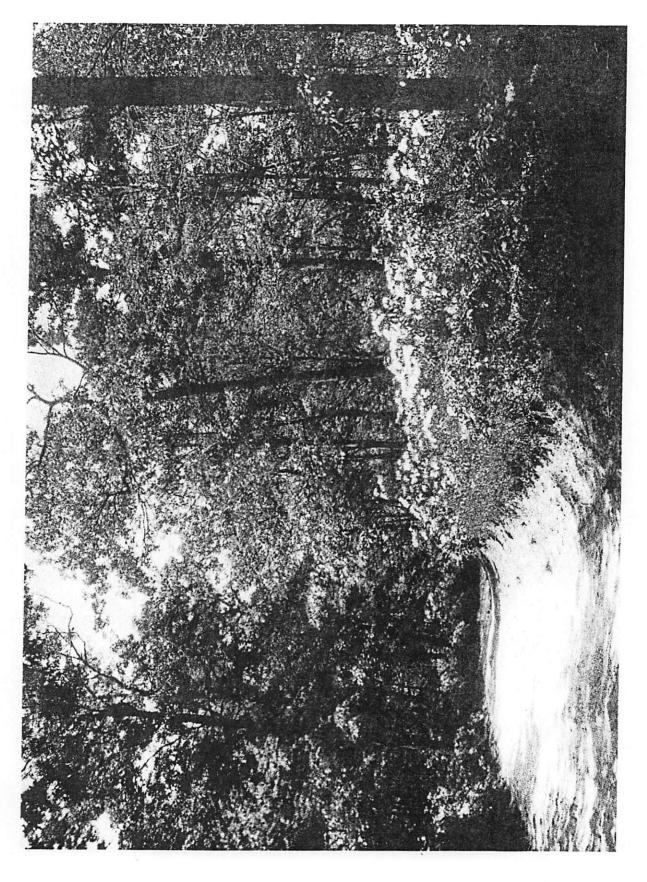


there were roads to be maintained and trees and shrubbery to be kept within bounds. Since the only road at that time in Old Field was Old Field Road, the route to the railroad station went out Shore Drive to Old Field Road, past the Setauket Post Office, down Main Street past the mill pond, and into what is now 25A. One of the first major achievements of the Old Field Association was the construction, in 1903, of Quaker Path from Old Field Road to the railroad station, a shortcut that considerably lessened the travel time for Crane Neck residents. Then, in 1911, Mr. Childs and a close friend and Old Field neighbor, Mr. Johanns, jointly put through Mt. Grey Road from Old Field Road to Quaker Path, a development that further eased travel conditions for local residents. Once Mt. Grey Road was created, Mr. Childs extended Crane Neck Road from the manor house to John's Hollow Road (which apparently serviced "Sunwood"), and the main entrance to Crane Neck was shifted from Shore Drive to the gates on Mt. Grey Road.

In addition to overseeing maintenance of his properties on Crane Neck and continuing his participation in the objectives of the Old Field Association, Mr. Childs found time to engage in local civic affairs. In 1918 he bought the Neighborhood House in Setauket, and presented it — together with Mrs. Childs — to the community along with an endowment. He also constructed the little park and turnaround at the lighthouse, and donated them in 1929 to the newly formed Village of Old Field which had been incorporated in 1927.

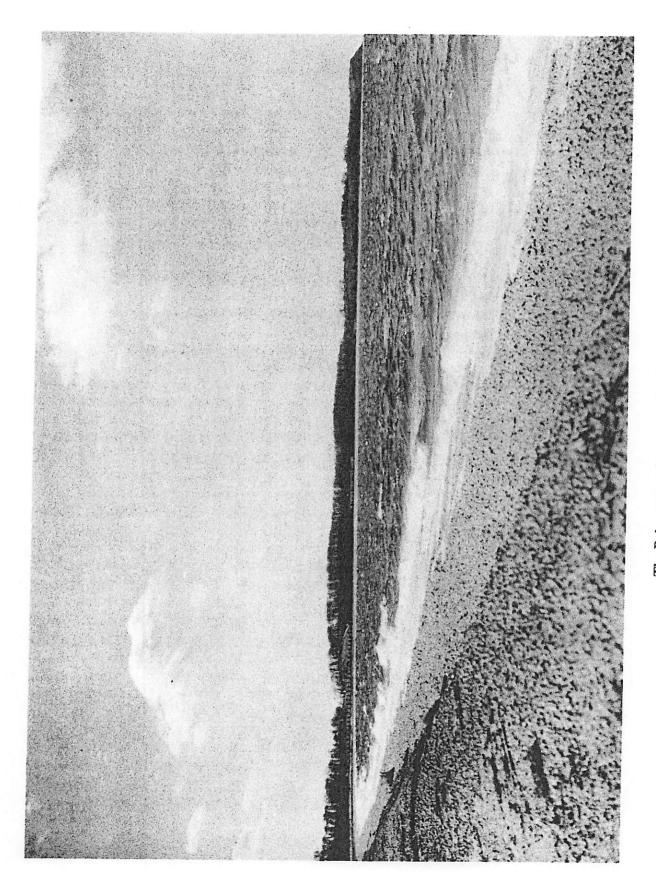
In the late 1930's "Squire" Childs — as he had come to be known in Old Field — began to think that life would become more enjoyable in Crane Neck if others, with outlooks on life similar to his own, could be induced to buy tracts of land from his holdings for the construction of suitable homes. Out of this thinking came a real estate project called "Crane Neck Farm". The plan called for prospective buyers to acquire large areas of land, the amount to be determined by the "logical topographical boundaries" that existed in relation to each site. The minimum size was expected to be about ten acres. There were also other rigid restrictions, including the style of architecture and other building specifications.

The onset of World War II doomed this project, and Mr. Childs later turned to a local real estate developer, Carl J. Heyser, Jr., who laid out a subdivision plan for Crane Neck with



plots mostly of about three acres. This time the plan succeeded, and several pieces were sold. Among the earliest purchasers were Sinclair Hatch, Rusconi Schmidt, Arthur Kiendl, Thomas Eichacker, Arthur Belder, the Franks, the Stewarts, the Forsdicks, the Fidaos, and the Willises. Most of these people later played an important part in the formation and early growth of our Association. The first house in the new development was built by Mr. Hatch at the tip of Crane Neck Point in the spring of 1946. This was followed by Mr. Schmidt's house (which is now Mrs. Linton's) just to the south. During this entire time, and up to the birth of the Crane Neck Association, it is worthy of mention that the Childs family took care of all the details of Crane Neck, including repairing of roads, caring for the mountain laurel and the trees along the roadsides, and payment of taxes on the beach and the roads.





Our Association is Born

This state of affairs came to an end with the death of Mr. Childs in 1953. In his will, however, some of the problems inherent in the Squire's death were anticipated, and provision was made for the transfer of the title for the beach and roads to an association of property owners, if such an organization could be formed. It then became the responsibility of his executors, as well as the residents of Crane Neck at that time, to attempt the creation of such a legal authority. After several meetings, and much correspondence, an agreement was reached which incorporated the Crane Neck Association in September of 1955. The first Directors of the Association were J. Mills Summers, Charles E. Forsdick, Edward LaCagnin, Rusconi Schmidt, and Howard Flesche. . .all owners of property on Crane Neck.

Some time elapsed before the necessary surveys were completed and the actual transfer of title effected; but finally, in June of 1957, the Crane Neck Association, Inc. became the owner of the following four pieces of land:

Crane Neck Road

Crane Neck Lane (This had been the original road to the point, but it ran very close to Flax Pond and had to be abandoned because of flooding. It was subsequently taken over by the State University.)

Beach Path

Crane Neck Beach (Running from Beach Path approximately 1,000 feet to the east and extending about 200 feet - the distance varies - back from mean high water mark; the land to the east and west of this beach was, and still is, privately owned.)

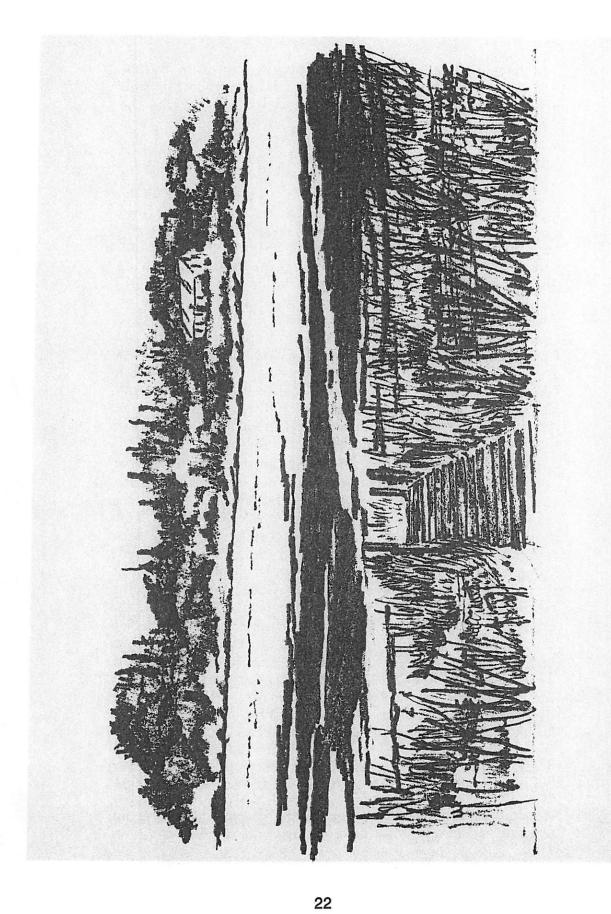
The early years of the Association were difficult ones. Not all the property owners supported the idea, money was far from plentiful, the roads needed repairs, taxes had to be paid, there was no treasury, and there were some non-residents who wanted to test the laws regarding the privacy of our roads and beaches. More than once the January taxes were paid on time only because the Directors, and other individuals, paid their dues early and actually made cash advances to the Association. Confronted with the burden of lawsuits involving the trespass of our beach and the validity of our tax assessments, it is a tribute to the Directors of that time that the Association lived through its first years.



The path to the beach.

In the mid-sixties, Flax Pond itself became a problem. By that time the bed of Flax Pond, and much of the surrounding land including the manor house and gardens, had passed into the hands of a real estate developer who began dredging operations in the channel leading from Flax Pond into the Sound. The objective was to deepen the pond, and to make it navigable by boats of good size. Other parts of the plan were: to remove the saleable gravel; to deposit the remainder of the dredging on the shores of the pond. . .creating a marina; and to divide the filled land adjoining the pond into plots for residences as had already been done in several places on the south shore of Long Island. After many informal discussions and legal proceedings involving the many parties concerned (the Association, the Village of Old Field, the Army Corps of Engineers, the owners of the property, the State of New York, and others), all the land east and north of Crane Neck Road, from Beach Path up to and including the old Childs mansion, passed into ownership of the State of New York as represented by the State University and the Conservation Department. Shortly thereafter, the Marine Biology Laboratory was constructed on Shore Drive. In all of these transactions, the Association played an important part, and acted at all times in the best interests of the residents of Crane Neck.

One other important development occurred in 1972 that concerned the maintenance of the roads in Crane Neck. Over the years, as the community grew, it became apparent that those residents who did not live on Crane Neck Road itself were experiencing a double burden as they contributed to the costs for repairing both Crane Neck Road and the little private roads along which they lived. In addition, it was somewhat difficult for them to organize and raise the money needed for these repairs. Consequently, at the 1972 annual meeting of the Association, the entire membership voted to take over maintenance of all paved roads (excluding private driveways) that were in good condition and fell within the geographical boundaries of the Association. This arrangement worked out well over the years, and shortly thereafter it was extended to the maintenance of Holly Lane as a dirt road. The possibility of deeding Crane Neck Road to the Village, and thereby eliminating maintenance costs from our budget, has been thoroughly explored with the Village. The Village, however, has demanded that the road be improved and brought up to rigid Village specifications before they would accept it. . . and that would mean a project involving sums of money far beyond our means to provide. This idea, therefore, has been put aside, at least for the present time.



Today and Tomorrow

As the Association exists today, its activities are governed by three documents: the Certificate of Incorporation, the By-Laws. and the Beach Rules. Both the Certificate of Incorporation and the By-Laws entrust day-to-day management to a Board of Directors, elected by the entire membership at the annual meeting each spring. The principal duties of the Directors are: to see that our roads and roadsides are properly maintained; to ensure that our real estate taxes are paid on time; and to arrange for the proper handling of such related matters as insurance coverage, liason with Village authorities, the privacy of our beach, etc. The one other area in which the Association is also engaged is a limited program of social activities, of which the major features are a beach picnic in the summer and a reception for new members in the winter. We are not primarily a social club, and the few functions in this area that the Association does sponsor are designed solely to gather the residents of Crane Neck together, and to thereby promote a strong organization of neighbors.

Any new purchasers of land within the geographical boundaries of the Association (viz. Mt. Grey Road, John's Hollow Road, Smithtown Bay, Long Island Sound, Flax Pond Inlet, Flax Pond, and Flax Pond Lane) are prospective members. There are no initiation fees, but annual dues are billed shortly after the first of each calendar year. These dues, which are based on Village of Old Field assessments (with reasonable minimum and maximum limits), are set to raise just enough money for normal yearly expenses with a little left over for contingencies. Experience has taught us over the years that it is expedient to always have an adequate reserve to take care of unexpected and abnormal expenses. . .primarily road repairs and occasionally the complete reconstruction of some roads. . .so as to be sure that there is proper access at all times for fire, police, and other emergency vehicles.

In Crane Neck we have both a heritage and a community to be proud of, as well as an Association dedicated to the preservation of this beautiful environment. The Association's future is assured since the well-being of every property owner depends to a great extent on its continued existence. If we want our roads to be well-maintained and the taxes on our beach paid, there is simply no alternative. So, with the help and support of all its members, the Association can indeed be the means of making life more pleasant for all of us fortunate enough to live here on Crane Neck.

