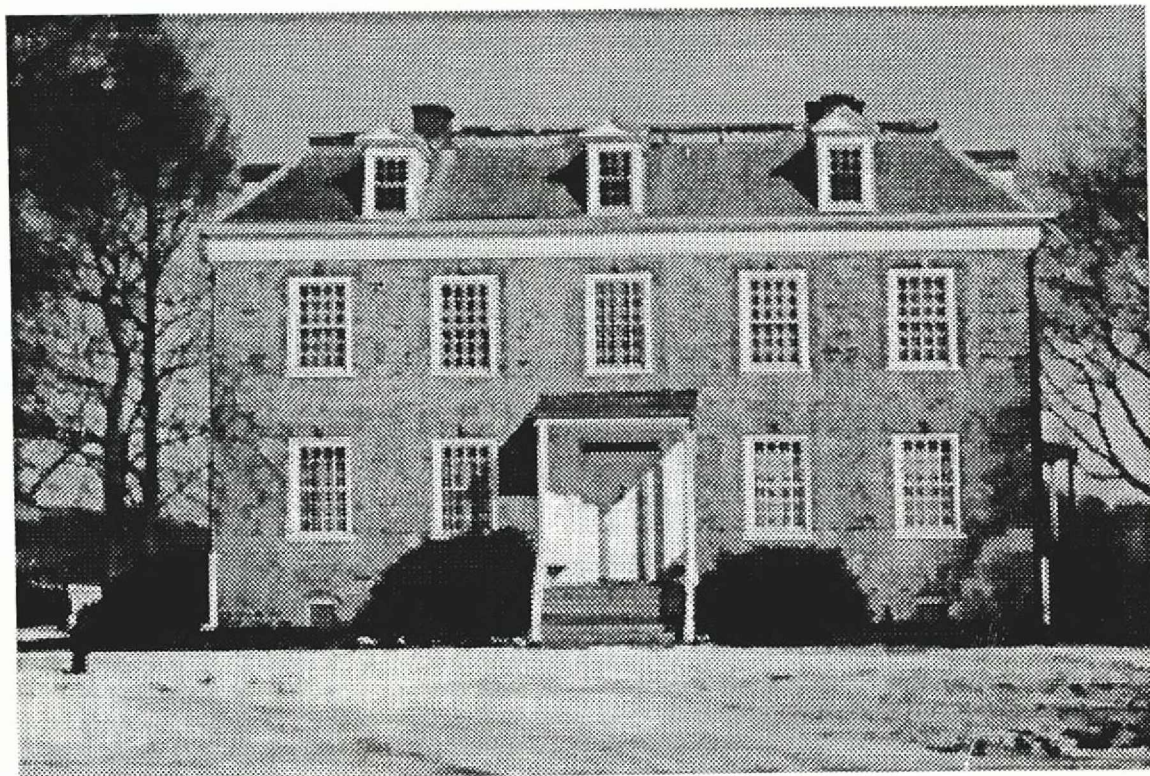


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**From Private To Public:  
The Changing Landscape Of Van Cortlandt Park;  
Bronx, New York In The Nineteenth Century**



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Christopher Ricciardi  
Masters Thesis  
Syracuse University  
Spring 1997

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**A Thesis**

**Presented to**

**The Faculty of the Department of Anthropology**

**Syracuse University**

**In Partial Fulfillment**

**Of the Requirements for the Degree of**

**Master of Arts**

**by**

**Christopher Ricciardi**

**1997**

**APPROVAL SHEET**

**This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Arts**

**Christopher Ricciardi**

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**Approved, Spring 1997**

**Professor Douglas V. Armstrong**

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**Professor Christopher DeCorse**

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**Professor LouAnn Wurst**

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## ABSTRACT

The nineteenth century was a period of great change in America. The growing Industrial Revolution and changing landscape of the environment changed not only the social structure, but the physical make-up of the county.

This thesis will focus on one aspect of change in the nineteenth century and how it can be seen in the archaeological record, the Environmental Movement. This movement, which began in mid century, was directly related to the expanding urban centers, the influx of population, the development of sanitation and the shrinking of the "green" environment of cities.

In the City of New York, all of these factors came into play. It was in New York where the environmental movement began with the construction of Central Park. Once this project was completed other major cities soon followed in creating their own "central" parks.

This movement lead to a curious aspect of large land owners turning their properties, either by sale or gift, over to the city/state for the purposes of using the estates as public parks. In New York, over 5000 acres of lands in the Bronx were obtained by the City for the expressed purposes of turning them into public grounds.

Using the archaeological evidence from excavations in Van Cortlandt Park; Bronx, New York in conjunction with documentary evidence of the time, the thesis will show how this "idea" of the changing landscape from private to public was played out. The Van Cortlandts, one of the wealthiest families in the City of New York sold and deed 850 acres of their land to the City for the expressed purposes of turning it into a park.

This evidence along with the writings of the principle players involved with the environmental movement will provide a better understanding of the changing attitudes of the time period. In turn, this shows how archaeological evidence can be used to add depth to our understanding of social transformations during the mid to late nineteenth century.

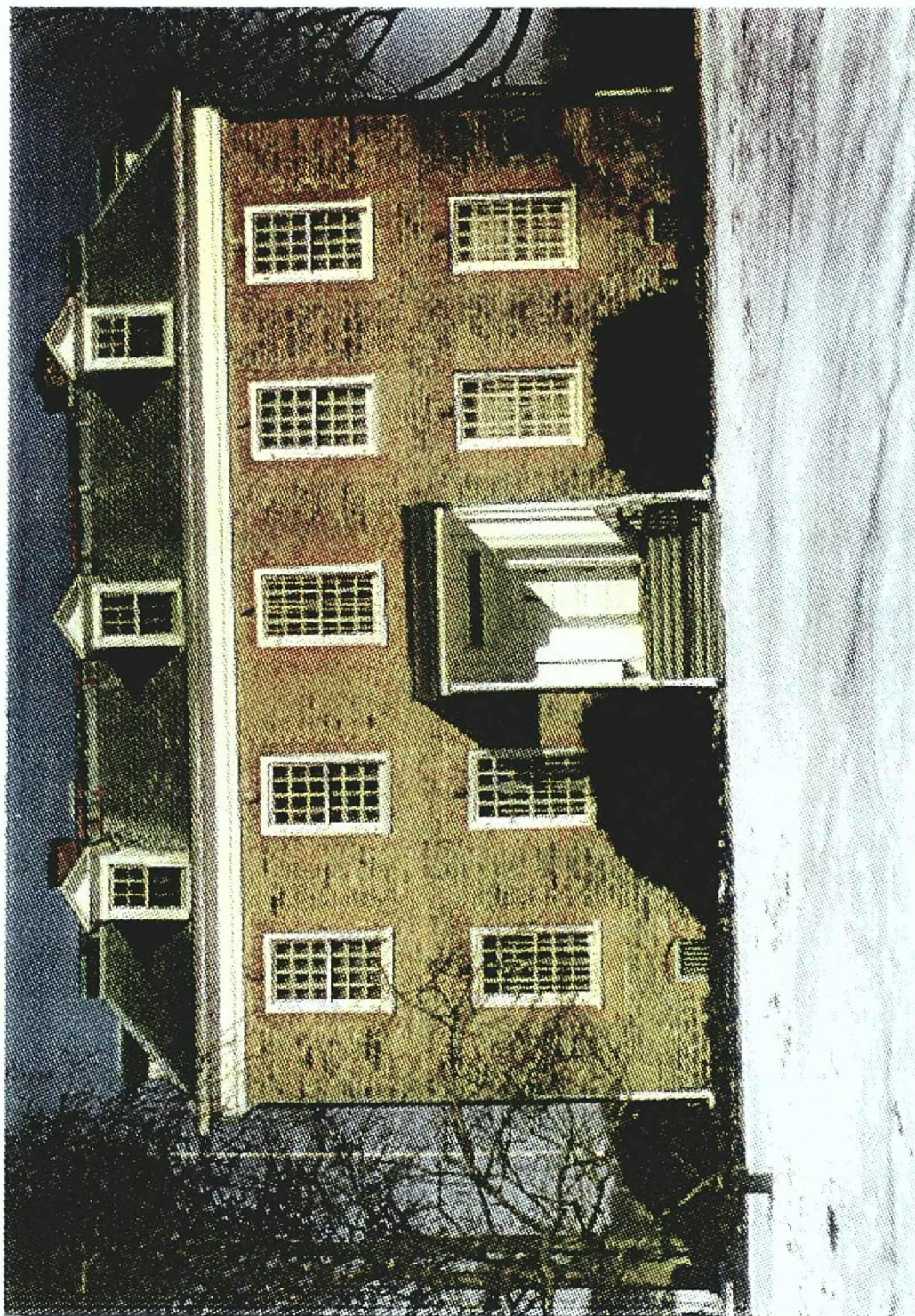


Plate 1: Van Cortlandt Mansion (c. 1748) Van Cortlandt Park; Bronx, New York

the development of such well known landscapes as Central Park and Prospect Park in New York City. While the development of these parks are well documented, the transformation the of Van Cortlandt property land has not been a focus of study. The archaeological data derives from secondary, discrete or tertiary deposits located within two stone features. It would appear that these stone features served one or more of a variety of storage functions and that they were cleaned out periodically as part of these farm related activities. The data shows that when the site was converted to an urban park these features were rapidly filled with artifacts and debris from the park and grounds.



**Plate 2: Looking east from the Mansion**

The environmental movement began in the mid nineteenth century in response to rapid expansion of urban centers and the destruction of the natural landscape. The ideological associations of this movement were derived from the writings and actions of nineteenth century

authors and reformers such as Henry Thoreau, Ralph Emerson, Horace Greely and Frederick Olmsted. Olmsted's work is a key component to define the circumstances in which the transition and transformation from private to public lands, exemplified at Van Cortlandt Park, took place (Olmsted 1859). It was Olmsted who took the rallying cry of the growing environmental movement and created concrete examples of protection and preservation.

Considering the growing environmental movement, many questions come to mind. Why did the Van Cortlandt family deed their house and sell their grounds to the City of New York? What precedents were there for this action? What was the late nineteenth century environmental movement and why did it occur? Why were a large portion of domestic artifacts dumped into the two stone features? Why were these artifacts, which include two, almost complete, sets of ceramic dinnerware, left behind by the Van Cortlandt family? These questions will be addressed by an examination of both the archaeological and documentary records. The answers will provide a broader picture and understanding of the nineteenth century environmental movement through an archaeological example. The examination of Van Cortlandt Park, within this larger context, provides an interesting new look at late nineteenth century municipal landscaping ideology from the perspective of how they *re-worked* the land.

## **Chapter I: The Beginnings of the Environmental Movement**

**"The city is dirtier and noisier, and more uncomfortable, and drearier to live in, than it ever was before. I have had my fill of town life, and begin to wish to pass a little time in the county"** William Bryant, September 1836

**"Manhattan serves as a symbol of power, energy, sophistication, but not as a symbol of an attractive landscape for American family life."** D.W. Meinig, 1979

The nineteenth century was a time of great changes and new ideas in America. The continuation of the ideas of "Manifest Destiny", the birth of the Industrial Revolution, the growth of urban cities and centers, the increase in the socio-economic gaps between groups of people and a major population increase were but some of the major changes to occur during this period (Bridges 1984). There were population movements westward following Jefferson's purchase of almost all of middle America and Lewis and Clark's expedition opened new areas for settlement (Weilentz 1984).

At the turn of the nineteenth century, America was still a country filled with vast areas of wilderness (Schuyler 1986:59). During the first half of the century most people and settlements remained on the East Coast (Christensen 1986). Stories of the west were brought back to the public, often romanticized through explorers accounts (Mitchell 1981:74-75). James Fenimore Cooper became an archetype for the feelings of the period; "How rapidly is civilization treading on the footsteps of nature!" (Cooper as quoted in Schuyler 1986:59).

The expanding Industrial Revolution began to change the subsistence patterns of Americans. By mid century large *nonagrarian* factory businesses had developed causing a major change to the landscape (Gottlieb 1993:54). The major East Coast cities, Washington, DC, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Albany, Hartford, Boston and New York, all expanded in size during this

period. The country's urban population increased by 797% while the country's population as a whole only increased by 226% (Christinsen 1986: 23). City limits expanded as buildings were constructed and the cities welcomed large influxes of immigrants from rural America and abroad (Gottlieb 1993:56).

Transformations in the economic structure created major changes in the environment of all cities. According to Meinig, throughout the history of America, people have had a peculiar ideology towards the land and the environment. The landscape has meaning, not just in the way we look back at it but in the way that people of the past viewed it (Meinig 1979:165-166). People seem to feel that certain "looks" (at various times in history) best exemplify the country. For instance, the idea of the quaint country town in New England was recreated, in towns across America, in layout, form and function (Meinig 1979:166). Likewise, the idea of a "Main Street" was adopted in almost every town/city (Meinig 1979:167).

Wilson claims it was not a mythical look back to the Puritan beginnings of the country that led to people's desire to want to retain these "rural" scenes. He believed it was the violation of the belief that the New World's mission was to attain spiritual perfection by living the life of farmers. Urban growth was causing the death of the land as they knew it (Wilson 1989:13). For Wilson, the idea of a "city practical", the belief that people would use the natural resources of the land until they were used up, was the norm. People would continue to live their lives and exploit the city as long as it served their purposes. This replaced the "city beautiful" idea that kept rural areas "green" (Wilson 1989:2-3). It was the "city beautiful" movement late in the nineteenth century that caused a change in thinking to occur as the ideology of romantic aesthetics replaced the neo-classical notions of factories and development on every acre of land (Wilson 1989:15).

By the early nineteenth century, the City of New York had established a grid system from one end of Manhattan to the other (Kuhn 1996 and Rothschild 1990). A cycle soon developed in the cities: a factory opened, people moved in to work in the factory, houses were built for the people working in the factory and so on. New buildings were being erected on every available plot of land. Within the first half of the century, the City of New York expanded from Lower Manhattan to present day mid-town (Bridges 1984). This expansion, in regard to scale and rate, led to problems that were previously, only faced by the cities of Europe (Graff 1985:6). By the mid nineteenth century New York had the highest mortality rate, due to overpopulation and overcrowding, of any city in the world (New York State Commission 1884:26-27). Andrew Jackson Downing stated in 1850 that, "deluded New York has, until lately, contented itself with the little door-yards of space - mere grassplats of verdure, which form the squares of the city, in the mistaken idea that they are parks....what have been called parks in New York are not even apologies for the things...they are only squares, or paddocks" (Downing 1850:153 and 1851:345).

A result of the growth of urban centers was the rise of the middle class which created a new structured class system (Wurst 1997). Throughout history there have always been classes: people generally fit into either, what could be considered "upper" and "lower" classes (Bridges 1984). However, with the expansion of cities, and the factories within them, occupation in the "middle", management and clerical jobs increased dramatically (Wurst 1997). Neighborhoods soon became segregated based on one's wealth and occupation (Rothschild 1987, 1990; Wall 1994). Sections of New York City, such as the "Five Points", a working to lower class section of New York, according to the historical record (Yamin 1996) developed into overcrowded, crime-



ridden neighborhoods that fostered disease and lost all contact with the agrarian existence that was thought to foster republican virtue (Schuyler 1986:62).

In New York City, members of the upper class continued to migrate north to escape the growing working class neighborhoods of lower Manhattan. This exodus occurred in part to escape the various epidemics that engulfed the city from time to time. By the mid half of the century, the "country estates" of Greenwich Village were recreated as middle and working class neighborhoods as these families moved in (Geismar 1989:10). The elite classes moved to areas north of the City, away from the "urban center" of Manhattan, was viewed as a sign of the wealthy abandoning the lower classes (Meinig 1979:184). Downing believed that public parks had the ability to unite what urbanization had created...segregated economic and social classes (Downing 1848).

The City of New York's population continued to increase. Census Records indicate that New York's population increased from 60,489 in 1800 to 1,206,209 in 1880. It was projected (in 1884) that by 1890 the population would increase to approximately 1,800,000 people (New York State Commission 1884:44-45). The rise of population led to increases in garbage and pollution. One of the created problems faced by urban officials was how to deal with the increased sanitation needs (Metropolitan Board Of Health 1866). The use of outhouses as the sole depository of waste was no longer viable; waste from outhouses polluted drinking water from backyard wells (Howson 1995). The contaminated water and sewage problems resulting from the over-population of the urban center created a great health threat (Metropolitan Board of Health 1866). These factors, in conjunction, created a breeding ground for disease. Parasitic diseases such as cholera and worms, as well as air born viruses such as influzena and pneumonia were rampant in the mid-century (Howson 1995). In various letters, members of the Van Cortlandt family

describe the outbreak of diseases and the death toll it took; the family described “leaving New York for upstate areas to avoid the plagues” (Marie Van Cortlandt 1812).

To alleviate the growing health concerns, the City of New York began to develop both a water and sewer system (Duffy 1968 and 1974). Unpolluted water was piped in from the Croton-Aqueduct system, which ran through the lands of Augustus Van Cortlandt, from upstate New York (Catherine Van Cortlandt 1903:xiii). These lands were purchased from Augustus by the City in 1838 for \$4500.00 (Westchester County Land Deeds Liber 82:192). After the sale Augustus donated an additional five acres to the City to expand the project (Smith 1938 and Ultan 1983). The water flowed into a system of underground tunnels which delivered water to houses fitted with cold water pipes. Sewers were developed and opened by the mid nineteenth century to relieve the pressure of outhouses (Geismar 1989) however, the elite neighborhoods were the first to gain access to them.

### *The movement begins:*

“For a civilization that had begun to notice its first gray hairs, conservation was a welcome tonic for the lands as well as for the minds of its inhabitants” Nash, 1973:38

By the 1850s, people began to feel the oppression of living conditions in the cities (Schuyler 1986:60). In Europe, town planners had hoped to relieve the stress of urban expansion by developing a series of parks within the industrial center to act as zones of escapism; not only for the people but the land itself (Howard 1898). London parks were described as:

“the lungs of London, and so important are they regarded to the public health and happiness of the people, that I believe a proposal to dispense with some of their extent and to cover it with streets and houses, would be regarded in much the

same manner as a proposal to hang every tenth man in London" (William Bryant as quoted in Graff 1985:6).

The green pastures were needed to allow for the flow of oxygen to the rest of the body/city.

Schuyler, recounting travelers accounts, stated that,

"nothing seen in London made our own dear city of New York seem so poor in comparison as these parks....After seeing these oases in the wilderness of streets, one can never be content with the scanty patches of verdure...that (in New York) form the only places of afternoon recreation for the weary, the sad, the invalid, the playful" (Schuyler 1986:63).

The rapid expansion of cities and the problems that went along with this development led some to look to Europe for help and guidance. "There is no feature of the old country that strikes an American with more agreeable surprise than the beautiful gardens of Europe" (Ralph Waldo Emerson 1893:347). Downing, who created one of the first journals dedicated to the environment stated, "Open wide, therefore, the doors of your libraries and picture galleries, all ye true Republicans!....plant spacious parks in your cities, and unloose their gates as wide as the gates of morning to the whole people" (Downing 1850:541).

Prior to the 1850s, it would appear that city officials seemed to think that the urban environment had nothing to do with the natural environment. However, one could (and can) not separate the city from nature since it is an integral part of it (Spirn 1986:433). According to Crumley, ignoring the environment could lead to a possible path of social and political unrest (Crumley 1994:240). The elite's in America did not initially heed Downing's call. Urban expansion increased as city officials ignored all aspects of municipal environmental improvements (Kinkead 1990).

The movement to save the city and its inhabitants from itself began within the authors and philosophers of the time (Kinkead 1990:16). Thoreau, Emerson and Whitman lamented how America needed to save the environment from destruction (Mitchell 1981:1). At the time, few listened. However, their words and ideas were read and the seeds of their thoughts were planted in the minds of the upper class who could afford to read their works (Christensen 1986:22). Thoreau urged simplification in dealing with urbanization and a return to a more naturalistic lifestyle (Thoreau 1893:287). Following a trip to England in 1851 Horace Greeley lamented

“Our city ought to have made provision, twenty years ago, for a series of Parks and Gardens extending quite across the island somewhere between Thirtieth and Fiftieth streets...all that can be should be done immediately to secure breathing-space and grounds for healthful recreation to the Millions who will ultimately inhabit New York” (Greeley 1851).

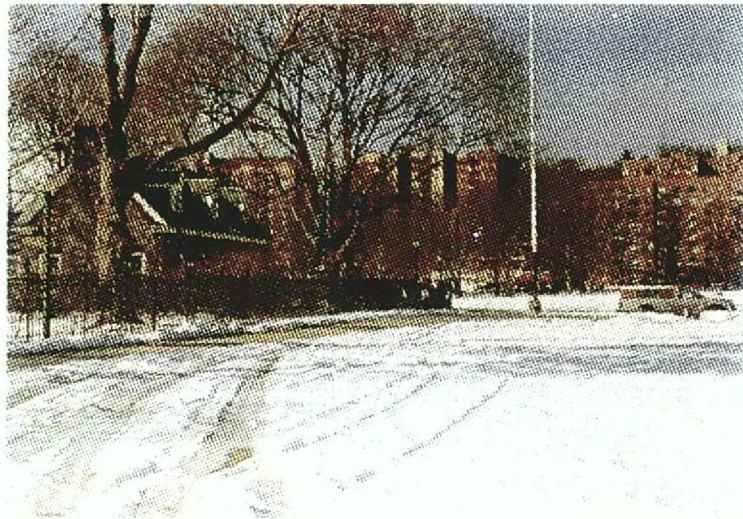
de Tocqueville, in discussing European criticism and American self-doubt regarding the state and structure of American Society and the environment, asks, “should monarchy be allowed to do more...for its subjects than republican civic policy can achieve for a City of Sovereigns?” (de Tocqueville 1847:287). Johann Georg von Zimmermann, a Swiss physician, believed that the best “medicine” for the growing number of ills, “to heal the body is by taking walks in the natural environment...scenes of serenity, whether created by tasteful art or the hand of nature, always convey tranquillity to the mind and body” (von Zimmermann as quoted in Schuyler 1979:127).

By the late nineteenth century people were becoming concerned by the indiscriminate lumbering of the Eastern woodlands and they soon became aware that natural resources were finite (O'Brien 1981:261). By the 1870s, drawings and stories of the great vistas of the west were returning to the crowded east (Gottlieb 1993). Wilson states,

**“Landscape despoliation was not confined to the cities; rural destruction was an indirect result of urbanization. Man mutilated the landscape in a mighty but apparently hopeless effort to appease the ravenous material appetites of an urbanizing population. This type of destruction occurred wherever exploitable resources existed; scenic values received no consideration. So it was that the natural landscape, both in the urban and in the rural areas, was altered.” (Wilson 1989:13).**

Yellowstone Reserve (National Park) served as a cornerstone of the growing environmental movement, although the term “National Park” was not used back then. Nash states that, the closing of the frontier brought a wider acceptance of conservation since people saw, and perhaps feared, the transition from “wild” natural lands to the “tamed” sterile look of cities (Nash 1973:37). Olmsted stated that parks afford beauty in a world of concrete and steel and that they have a tranquil effect on the mind (Olmsted January 24, 1866).

Real actions to protect the environment were undertaken by some members of the same class responsible for the destruction of the environment in urban centers, the upper class (O’Brien 1981:263). Cleveland, who developed Sleepy Hollow Cemetery and was a colleague of Washington Irving, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Ralph Waldo Emerson, envisioned a better legacy (of the upper class) than the money-hungry image they were fulfilling. He implied that the upper class had a moral imperative or social responsibility to the environment. The upper class’ responsibility was to guide the rest of society toward a better life. One way this could be accomplished was by saving and not destroying the natural landscape (Cleveland as paraphrased in Nadenicek 1993:5-6).



**Plate 3: Mansion with apartment housing behind**

Solecki and Welch, however, raise the issue that this notion of altruism was just a ruse. Large parks could create boundaries that would separate different groups of people and economic communities. Parks could function as a passive agent of the upper class to distance themselves from the lower classes by these great expanses. Solecki and Welch view parks, such as Central Park, which was situated at the time in the Northern end of Manhattan Island where only the rich lived, as a form of social control (Solecki and Welch 1995:93-096). In countering their position, Jackson lamented on an issue that could have arisen, but luckily did not; “two distinct and conflicting definitions of the park threatened to meet head-on; the upper class definition with its emphasis on cultural enlightenment and greater refinement of manners, and a lower-class definition emphasizing fun and games. Had either one of them got the upper hand the subsequent history of public parks in this country would have been a very different one” (Jackson 1972:214-215) (plate 3).

Within the City of New York the first move to protect the dwindling landscape was the proposal to create a massive park in the middle of Manhattan called Central Park. The park was

the brainchild of a consortium of people, though many single out Anna Mary Wendell Minturn as the first person to propose the idea (Rosenweig and Blackmar 1992:17). It was a long and hard lobby to get the zoning ordinances, and the money for the City to buy private lands (Kuhn 1996) but, by the late 1850's the grounds that would become Central Park were purchased (O'Brien 1981:261). The total cost to the City and the State was more than \$7.4 million dollars. It should be noted that the sale of Alaska to the United States from Russia only cost the Federal government \$7.2 million dollars (Kinkead 1990:17).

Frederick Law Olmsted was hired to create the park (Kinkead 1990:18). In addition to turning this area into a "playground" for all the people of New York to enjoy, he proposed creating similar parks in each of the outlying regions surrounding New York from Brooklyn to Westchester County. At the time Westchester County included the Van Cortlandt estate (Olmsted 1860a). Olmsted believed that a public park should contain three things: a) an expansive meadow b) rolling woodland and c) a large lake (Hall 1995:155), thus creating a space that was good for escapism from life's daily routine and the general urban turmoil of the time (Hall 1995:242-243). Olmsted argued for the beneficial influences of parks: "influence the mind of men through their imagination...it would induce, by an unconscious process, a state of tranquillity", that he felt was lacking in urban dwellers (Olmsted 1859).

Soon parks developed in Kings County (Brooklyn), Queens and, finally, the Bronx (plate 4). As with Central Park, the state government needed to pass laws allocating funds to acquire lands required to create these parks. By 1890, over fifteen different laws were passed allowing the local government of New York City to buy property and turn them into public spaces (New York City Parks Department 1888), thus reversing the mistakes made, according to Olmsted,



**Plate 4: Aerial view of Van Cortlandt Park looking north towards Westchester County**

when city planners neglected the idea of open spaces in the urban environment at the beginning of the century (Olmsted as quoted in Schuyler 1979: 116).

Following the creation of Central Park the City of New York began to look to other areas, both inside and outside the city limits, that could be obtained to create new parks. It appears that some in the government felt that the need for more parks was the number one priority:

**“Parks, rightly considered, are demanded among great masses of population by the laws of hygiene, by the very necessities of their condition, by their deprivation night and day, and month after month, through all seasons, of the pure air of heaven, except when on Sundays and holidays they are at liberty to enjoy themselves in the green fields, or out in the woods, cleansing their lungs with the pure life-giving atmosphere. Even one day’s recreation in the country strengthens the body and helps it to resist the approach of infectious diseases. Sun and air are as necessary to human beings as to plants, and to none are they more necessary than to the hundreds of thousands of workers and toilers who are shut up all day long and, at times, through a part of the night, in our factories and workshops.....If bathing in clean water is essential, still more so is an atmospheric bath. In a word, we cannot hope to have a healthy population if we disregard the ordinary laws of health. Sun, light, air and physical exercise are the true hygienic factors, and, therefore, every acre added to our park area is a personal benefit to each member of the community”, (New York State Commission 1884:28-29).**



Many citizens wanted to retain America's natural beauty while technologically moving into the next century (Schuyler 1986:64). As "progressive" as Americans were to the ideals of wealth and power, the fundamental ideals of agrarian America with all the images those words conjure up, nagged at the hearts and minds of many people. Earlier in the century a large number of Utopian groups began to crop up in America<sup>1</sup>. Miller states that parks were thought of as little utopian villages; they were the prominent source of relief of everyday urbanization (Miller 1976:179-193). Conservation and preservation was equated with patriotism by the people within this time period. It was an idea that no one could escape, especially around the Centennial anniversary of the War of Independence (O'Brien 1981:266). "A city park conveys a sense of enlarged freedom...(a respite from)...cramped, confined and controlling circumstances of the streets of the city...(they hoped to induce an)...unbending of the faculties..." [from the strains of life] "... (Olmsted as quoted in Fein 1969:182) (plate 5). In a sense it created a symbolism of freedom from the growing oppression of urban life.

With consideration to the growing environmental movement, it is easy to understand the foundations that may have driven the Van Cortlandts to sell their lands and deed their house to the City of New York. In 1870, under an agreement with the State, the City of New York annexed a large portion of Southern Westchester county (with present day Van Cortlandt Park and Pelham

---

1 Utopian groups, movement and literature were on the rise in the nineteenth century. Arguments have been made that the rise in Utopian ideals can be directly linked to the growing industrialization, as well as, the increased population in America during this period. Within New York State several Utopian communities formed including the Shaker and Oneida. For more information on the Utopian movement in this period refer to Robert S. Fogarty, American Utopianism, 1972, V.L. Parrington Jr., American Dreams, 1947, C.N. Robertson, Oneida Community - An Autobiography, 1970 and Frank Rosewater, '96 - A Romance Of Utopia, 1971. Dreams, 1947, C.N. Robertson, Oneida Community - An Autobiography, 1970 and Frank Rosewater, '96 - A Romance Of Utopia, 1971.

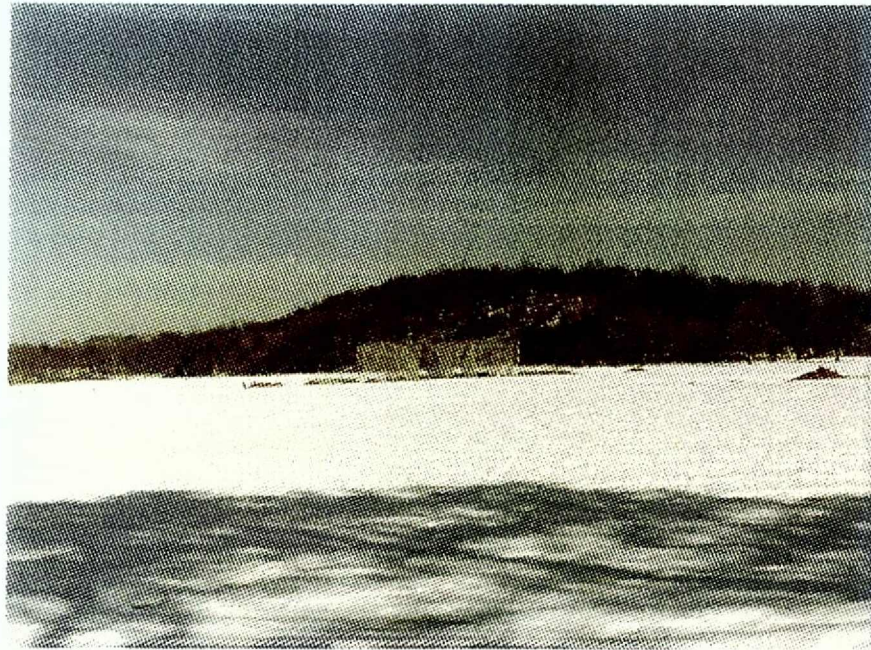


**Plate 5: Enjoying the Park at the turn of the 20th Century**

Bay Park comprising most of the usurp lands) and incorporated it into the Bronx (New York State 1884 and 1888 and New York City Parks Department 1888). The City planned to turn sections of newly acquired lands into wilderness parks for use by the people of the more densely populated Manhattan Island (Kuhn 1996). Unlike Central Park, which for the most part is flat and sculpted by man, both the property of the Van Cortlandt's and the Bartow-Pell's (who owned the present day Pelham Bay Park) were natural landscapes. Their grounds contained rivers, lakes, plains, marshes, and mountains (plate 6). According to the Commission report of 1884, "the Commission is most impressed with the Van Cortlandt Estate, and its immediate surroundings, as possessing, in its varied topography, ample spaces, charming views...natural condition, and peculiar adaptability for park purposes. Over a thousand acres....presenting a remarkable combination of forest, hill and valley, rock and glen, meadow, lake and stream. It is in fact a

combination of forest, hill and valley, rock and glen, meadow, lake and stream. It is in fact a natural park, requiring little outlay to fit it for immediate use” (New York State Commission 1884:76). It was as close to wilderness as one could get in the Lower Hudson Valley (O’Brien 1981:261).

Park records as to exactly what occurred and when do not exist for the period of 1880-



**Plate 6: Looking north across the parade grounds towards Vault hill**

1900. The Parks Department did not keep records of meetings and/or contracts for this twenty year period (Anderson and Kuhn 1996). Unfortunately, a fire in 1912 destroyed most of the late nineteenth century Van Cortlandt family records as well (Leckie 1994). However, outside records from the Commission report exist stating some of the reasons for New York wanting to acquire the Van Cortlandt Estate. Along with the notion that parks serve to unite the growing urban and rural communities (Schuyler 1979:86), and the aesthetics of parks, in terms of enjoyment (Bourassa 1992:31), two main economic reasons were presented at the time for

acquiring the Van Cortlandt Estate. Creating Central Park brought in an estimated \$17,000,000 in revenue to the City's treasury (New York State Commission 1884:72). It was believed that the same economic windfall could occur if the Van Cortlandt lands were obtained. According to McPherson, governments (both national and local) are more likely to create large public projects if the possibility of economic benefit exists (McPherson 1992:41). In regard to the Central Park project, the value of real estate along Central Park increased at an exorbitant rate (Schuyler 1979:140). According to Harriet Beecher Stowe, a resident along Central Park West, the view from her window offered, "all the charms of the city and the country united" (Stowe 1896:472). Secondly, the estate could be purchased for approximately \$1,000,000 dollars, which was \$3,000,000 below the estimated market value of the land (New York State Commission 1884:93). No explanation was offered as to why the City could receive the lands at 75% below its actual value, but one can assume that the Van Cortlandts reduced the price as incentive for the City to purchase them. With that,

"little expense need be incurred beyond that absolutely necessary for the laying out and construction of some miles of additional roads and walks and the maintenance of a proper degree of neatness and order .... opening new paths, grading the grounds, regulating, paving, flagging, guttering and sewerage will be the only needed to ready the park for public use" (New York State Commission 1884:88-93).

From an environmental and health issue point of view,

"the advantage afforded by the Van Cortlandt (Estate) consist not only in its diversified and picturesque landscape, but in the spacious parade ground of nearly one hundred and twenty acres, and a level stretch of land extending in one straight line to a length of over fifteen hundred yards .... the lake of pure fresh water....is in no danger from malaria since the lake is not stagnant, as is the lake in Central Park" (New York State Commission 1884:88-93).

The landscape, of an area like Van Cortlandt's estate, could reaffirm that connection to the rural environment for city dwellers since natural landscapes were continuing to be lost (even after the creation of Central Park) to the decline of inner-city neighborhoods and infrastructures (Spirm 1986:434).

Finally, the last reason given by the Commission for the acquisition of the Estate was one of historical importance (New York State Commission 1884:94). The Van Cortlandt estate was used by General Washington during his retreat from the Battle of Brooklyn. During the course of the War all the records from the City of New York were hidden within the family burial vault for protection. Although the estate was soon captured and used by the British as their headquarters, once the War ended Washington returned to the Mansion to relax and spend time there (Philip Van Cortlandt as quoted in Judd 1976:Volume I and Herrick 1992).



**Plate 7: Van Cortlandt Park July 1, 1900 - Riding past "the barn"**

Ultimately, the family of August Bibby-Van Cortlandt sold his lands and deeded the Mansion to the City of New York for the purpose of turning them into public facilities. In 1884,

the Van Cortlandt family moved out of the Mansion and the Parks Department of the City of New York took control (Catherine Van Cortlandt 1903:x).

There is little doubt that the Van Cortlandts were a wealthy, elite family. However, this fact is an of itself does not explain why they transferred a large portion of their property for a city park. Many wealthy families of the time did not. In order to understand the actions of the family, it is necessary to present a brief introduction to this family and their history. Understanding the family's background and importance as civic and social leaders within the City of New York will provide a clearer picture of who the family was, and this, in turn, allows us to understand their actions.

## **Chapter II: The History of the Van Cortlandt Family and the Park**

With the background to the growth of what was to become known as the environmental movement in Chapter I, we now turn to the family and their history as well as an introduction to the archaeological excavations conducted within the confines of Van Cortlandt Park. The following family history is presented to provide the reader with the understanding of the important role the Van Cortlandts had in all aspects of life York (i.e. civic, social and business) in the City of New. This introduction to the family provides us with the background, supporting evidence that helps to explain why the family eventually donated part of their land to the City.

### *Family History:*

From the seventeenth century onward, the Van Cortlandt family was prominent in the affairs of Fort New Orange/New Amsterdam/New York. Oloff Stevense Van Cortlandt arrived from Holland on March 28, 1638 (Cook 1913:167) and began the Van Cortlandt dynasty. His son Jacobus (1658-1739), in 1694, purchased his first plot of land in the area that would later become Van Cortlandt Park (Westchester County Land Deeds 1694:Liber E:230-231).

Like his father, Jacobus was a merchant. During this period the family money was largely invested in shipping, exporting and importing "various" goods. "In 1699 alone, Jacobus' sloops and brigantines, loaded with Hudson Valley flour, bacon, bread, butter . . . sailed to Antigua, Curatao, Madeira, Jamaica, and Carolina - and with cornmeal, lumber, cowhide . . . to London. English spirits, Holland duck, household goods, money, rum, sugar, and slaves flowed into New York on the return voyages of Jacobus Van Cortlandt's ships." (Fabend 1991:23). Continuing to amass their wealth, the family began farming, brewing and milling grain on the Kingsbridge

property for domestic and overseas sales. (Jacobus Van Cortlandt 1703 and 1706; Mursburger 1990a and Fabend 1991).

By 1732, Jacobus had systematically purchased all the original Van der Donck lands that comprised the Bronx and parts of Westchester (Figure II); thereby placing the lands that would become Van Cortlandt Park under the ownership of the Van Cortlandt family (Westchester County Land Deeds 1691-1733:Liber's E and G:230-231 and 297-302). At Jacobus' death in 1739, Frederick inherited his fathers lands (Jacobus Van Cortlandt's Will 05-12-1739 and Westchester County Land Deeds Liber G:297-300). Jacobus was then buried in the family burial plot on a hill northeast of Tibbetts Brook. The burial plot became known as Vault Hill (Ultan 1983), which it is still called today.

During the years of 1748 to 1749 Frederick began to build, "a large stone dwelling house on the plantation" (Mursburger 1990a) (plate 8 and 9). This is the house presently standing in Van Cortlandt Park, to the east of Broadway at approximately 245<sup>th</sup> street. Frederick died in 1749 before the completion of his house; his son, James then inherited the property and completed construction (Frederick Van Cortlandt Will 1748). Upon his death the property passed to Frederick's other son, Augustus (Herrick 1992).

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century the family was farming, raising livestock and foresting (Catherine Van Cortlandt 1903:vii). Most of the farming occurred on the lands that would become the present day baseball fields (Scharf Volume II 1886 and Mursburger 1990a). A grist and saw mill were active on the lake created by the eighteenth century damn (plates 2 and 10). The mills were in use until the late nineteenth century, when the family moved out of the Mansion. The grist mill was destroyed in 1901 by a lightning strike (Catherine Van Cortlandt 1903:iv). Livestock was raised for domestic and retail use, as was wheat, flax, grains,



and wood. The family produced their own wine and blew bottles with their crests on them (Colonial Dames Association 1911:8). However, no bottles with the family crest were recovered during excavations. For storage purposes, root cellars dotted the landscape (Colonial Dames Association 1911:9).



**Plate 8: Van Cortlandt Mansion (original front entrance)**

Until his death in 1823, at the age of ninety-five, Augustus devoted much of his energies to the administration of the local church. He, and his brother Frederick, owned two rows at their local church, St. Paul's (Bianchi 1969:59). Augustus was a doctor by trade and spent much of his time donating his services to caring for the poor (Scharf 1886:594). His notion of civic duty went far beyond helping people less fortunate than himself. Augustus had also been advancing New York State money to keep the forts in Albany and New York supplied with necessities and that debt owed to him was constantly increasing (Scharf 1886:425). His wife, Catherine, died at the age of sixty-four in 1808. Since he had no male heir, the house and lands passed to his grandson, Augustus White with the stipulation that from here on, all who inherited the house would take

Van Cortlandt as their family name (Augustus Van Cortlandt's Will 1823). In 1839, at the death of Augustus, the house went to Henry, his brother, since Augustus was unmarried (Augustus White-Van Cortlandt's Will 1839). Henry died six months later and the house was then passed to his nephew, Augustus Van Bibby-Cortlandt, who was thirteen at the time of inheritance (Henry White-Van Cortlandt's Will 1839).

Augustus (Bibby) Van Cortlandt married Charlotte Amelia Bayley Bunch in 1852 (Genealogical and Family History, Westchester County Archives 1914:1397-1420). They had six children between 1855-1868 (Scharf Volume II 1886:582). All of the children were sent to Switzerland and Germany for their formal education (to the age of 16) (Mackenzie 1976:Part II). Augustus was very active in civic duties serving as Supervisor of Yonkers from 1853 to 1859 and as a member of the Assembly of Westchester County between 1859 and 1865 (Allison 1896:169). He also provided the money to create the first police department of Yonkers in 1871 (Scharf 1886 Volume II:600).

Beginning in the mid nineteenth century Augustus would allow the public to come onto his lands and use the various lakes as ice skating rinks during the winter months and various groups to use other areas as picnic grounds (Mullaly 1887:47 and Ultan 1983:19, plate 5). This provides the first clue to the family's belief in using their lands for public purposes and recreation. In 1869 Augustus helped to open Oloff Park (named after Oloff Stevense Van Cortlandt) in the southern area of the estate. It is not clear as to whether this area was donated by Augustus or sold to Westchester County for the purpose of turning it into a park. However, whatever the motive, Augustus was active in its naming and development (Allison 1896:47). The house and grounds finally passed to their son Augustus (Bibby) in 1884 with the death of the elder Augustus (Scharf Volume II 1886:582). Four years later, in 1888, the Parks Department took control of the

house and grounds. The last Van Cortlandt event to occur at the Mansion was the marriage of Augustus Bibby Van Cortlandt to Ethyle Wilson in 1890 (New York Social Register 1891). See Figure I for family tree listing.

This brief overview of the family's history provides us with the knowledge that this particular family had a strong sense of civic responsibility. They epitomized the idea of "noble obliga" (Wurst 1997). Without written documents we have to take the actions of the Van Cortlandts as proof of their beliefs. Although one can claim that the family was trying to maintain their upper class image, providing free medical services, donating part of their land for the aqueduct, providing the state with gifts of money to support the militia and finally, taking part of their land to create a park for the neighborhood soon after the opening of Central Park, these actions clearly portray the caring nature of the Van Cortlandt family.



**Plate 9: Van Cortlandt Mansion – 19<sup>th</sup> Century Lithograph**

**Table 1: The Van Cortlandt Family- Names in Bold Represent House Ownership**

Oloff Van Cortlandt = Annetje Lockermans

Stephanus V.C. = Gertruyd (1643-) Mary = James Van Rensselaer (1645-) Johannes V. C. (1648-1662) Sophia = Andries Teller (1651-) Catherine = Frederick Philipse (1652-1730) (1656-1702)

Cornelia = Brandt Schuyler  
(1655-1689)

Jacobus Van Cortlandt = Eva Philipse  
(1657-1739) (1678- )

Phillip Van Cortlandt (-1814) Pierre Van Cortlandt

Frederick Van Cortlandt= Frances Jay  
(1699-1749) (-1780)

Mary Van Cortlandt = Peter Jay

Anna Marie Van Cortlandt James Van Cortlandt = Elizabeth Cuyler  
(1727-1781)

Augustus Van Cortlandt = Elsie Cuyler (1729-1823) Frederick Van Cortlandt (1737 -1761) Eva Van Cortlandt = Henry White (1730-1800) (1737-1836)  
= Catharine Barclay  
(1744 -1808)

Helen Van Cortlandt = James Morris  
(1768-1812)

Anne Van Cortlandt = Henry White jr  
(1766-1814) (1763-1822)

Augustus White-Van Cortlandt  
(1794-1839)

Augusta Van Cortlandt = Edward N. Bibby (1795-1871) Henry White-Van Cortlandt  
(1802-1839)

Augustus Bibby-Van Cortlandt Charlotte Amelia Bayley Bunch  
(1826-1884) (1826-1890)

Augustus = Ethyle Wilson  
(1855-1912) (1867- )

Henry White  
(1858- )

Mary Bayley  
(1860- )

Robert Bunch  
(1862- )

Edward Newenham  
(1864-1910)

Oloff De Lancey  
(1868-1900)

Charlotte Amelia  
(1891- )

Augustus  
(1893- )

Carolyn Bleecker  
(1896- )

*The History of Van Cortlandt Park:*

In 1874, the southernmost part of Westchester, west of the Bronx river, containing the Van Cortlandt lands, was annexed to the "new" City of New York. At this point the total acreage of the family property was cut in half from eight hundred to four hundred acres, as the family began to sell off portions of the land (Anonymous in *Appleton's Journal* 1872:618). In 1888, the Van Cortlandt Family deeded their Mansion and sold their land to the City of New York with the desire of having the area turned into a public park (Business Meetings - Board of Estimate and Apportionment 1889a:177 and Minutes of the Department of Public Parks 1889-1890:90 and 106). At the same time that these lands were formally chartered as a park, other lands from the newly annexed sections of the Bronx were also converted into park spaces. They included, Pelham Bay Park and Bronx Park, and the Bronx, Pelham and the Mosholu Parkways (New York State Law, 111<sup>th</sup> Session 1888 Numbers X2,1d, 33, 39 and 92.)

According to Parks Department Records, several actions were undertaken in 1889 to improve the Mansion and the grounds. Carpenters and masons were hired to repair damaged parts of the Mansion. The Mansion was then re-painted. The lake and mill area were cleaned and new drainage lines were laid. Although no details were provided in the records, there was an entry referring to "resurfacing the parade ground" (which is located in the north field from the Mansion) area (New York City Parks Department Annual Reports 1889b:2391-2392). In 1906 the parade grounds were once again "resurfaced" and the bridle paths were constructed (New York City Parks Department Annual Reports 1906:88-99).

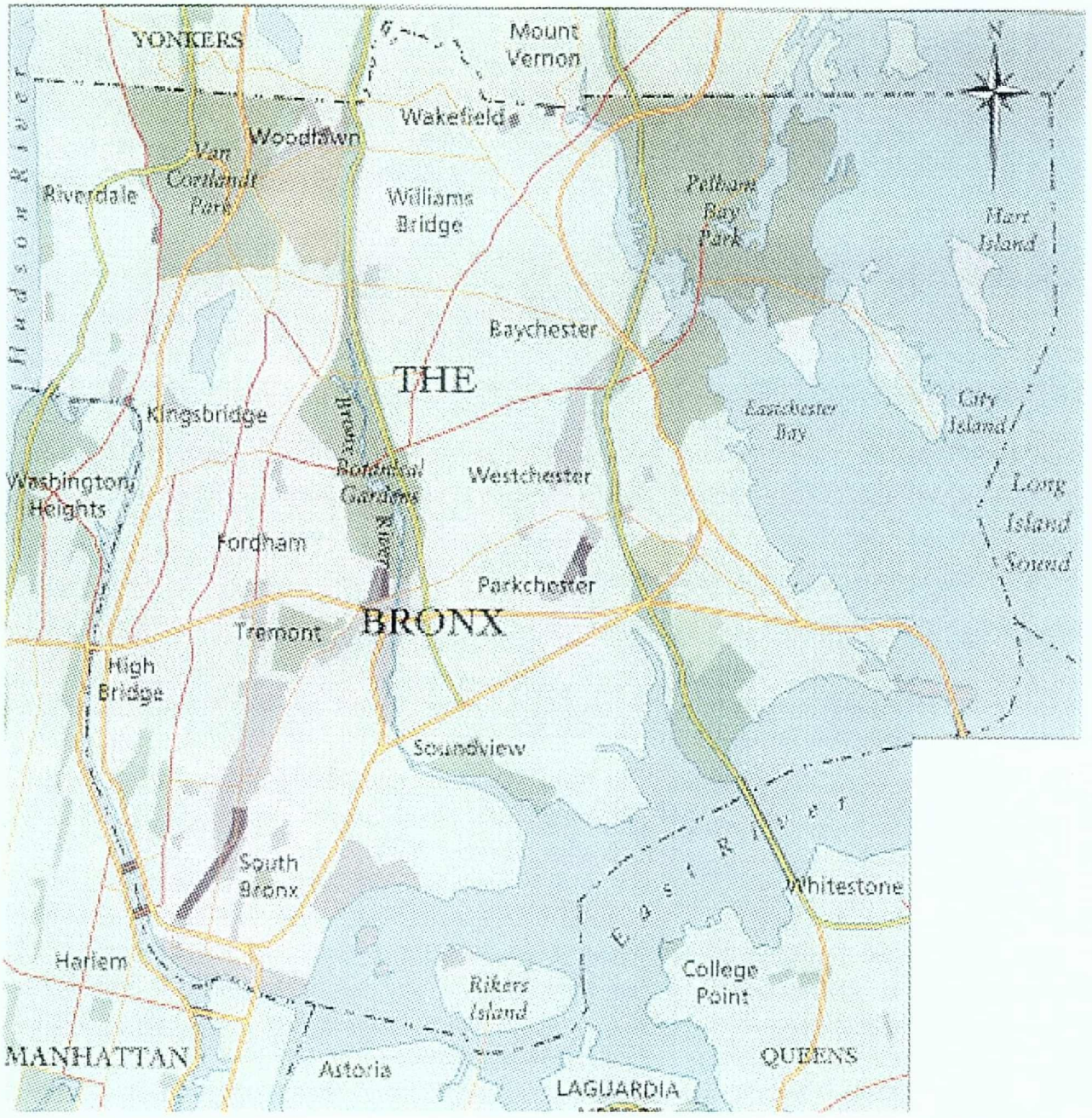
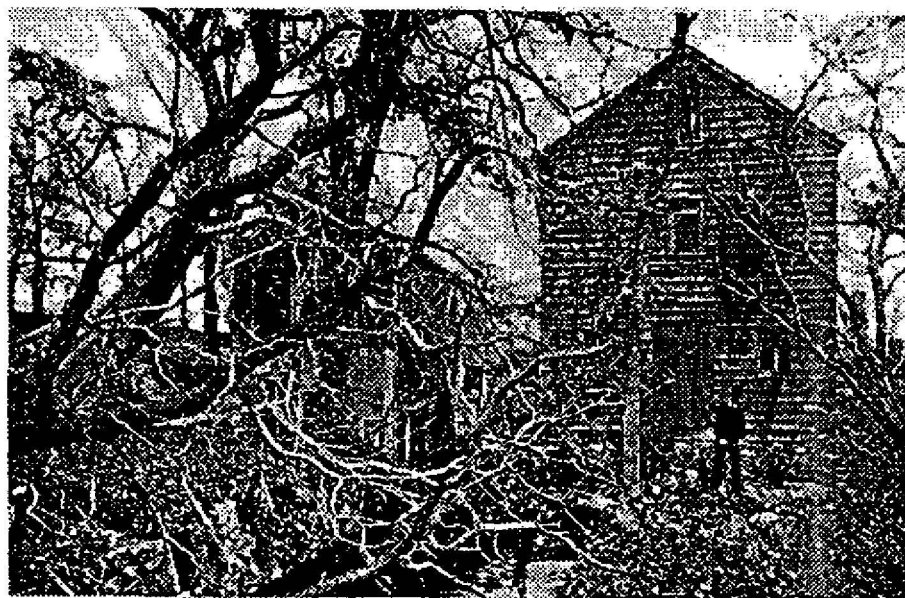


Figure II: Map of the Bronx Page



**Plate 10: The Van Cortlandt Mill (c. 1900)**

Between 1889 and 1896, the house and grounds were occupied by the New York City Police Department, the National Guard, and a large herd of bison which were kept there before being transferred to the Bronx Zoo (Minutes of the Department of Public Parks May 1888 to April 1890:113 and 140 and April 30, 1906:310). In 1896, The National Society of Colonial Dames in the State of New York entered into an agreement with the city to operate the Van Cortlandt House as a public museum. The house was opened to the public a year later (Deed and Notes on Van Cortlandt Park, Bronx, New York, New York City Department of Parks 1914; Herrick 1992 and Mursburger 1990a). Finally in 1970 the Mansion was designated a National Landmark (Diamonstein 1993 and Shaver 1993).

With this brief history of the family now presented, the focus of this work can now focus to the crux of the argument, the archaeological record.

### **Chapter III: The Archaeology of the Park:**

Without family records relating specifically to the conversion of the estate from private to public lands, the archaeological record provides the only available evidence. In particular, the stratigraphic record and the material remains associated with the two stone features suggest that these deposits were created during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The timing of these deposits indicate that their formation was integrally connected to the development of the park. Therefore, the archaeological evidence uncovered at Van Cortlandt Park supports the hypothesis that the grounds surrounding the Mansion were landscaped in preparation for the public park.

To present this evidence, it is convenient to organize the discussion into five subdivisions: the archaeology of the park, the stone features, the site formation process of the features, the artifact remains/dating, and supporting evidence from other sections of the park.

#### *The Archaeology of the Park:*

The archaeological excavations within Van Cortlandt Park were undertaken over a three year period between June 1990 and June 1993. Brooklyn College was asked to conduct an archaeological investigation of the property by Mary Ellen Hern, then director of the New York City Parks Department Historic Houses Division. The investigations had two goals. Archaeological investigations conducted in early 1990 provided further information about the grounds surrounding the house prior to the installation of a new drainage system. The second goal was to answer questions raised about the development of the park and the everyday life of the Van Cortlandts themselves.



The work by Brooklyn College was the first major excavation within the park. The excavations were under the direction of Professor's H. Arthur Bankoff and Frederick A. Winter of Brooklyn College, CUNY. Although the park comprises more than 850 acres, only the area immediately surrounding the Mansion itself was investigated (Figure III). Excavations in the east and west lawn areas attempted to reveal the topography of the site during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. The south lawn contained the possible foundations of the Van Der Donck homestead (plates 12 and 13). To the north of the Mansion, excavations examined not only the topography but, an area where foundation-like field stones uncovered by the Parks Department while laying an electrical conduit. In all, there were 45 units excavated surrounding the Mansion.

The perimeter of the house and the area of the east field were examined to fulfill the contractual nature of the first field season. Both areas turned up little material remains. Most of the remains from the builders trench surrounding the house were of late nineteenth to early twentieth century manufacture. These late materials resulted from disturbance by work on the basement in the early twentieth century as well as the construction of the caretakers wing in 1910. Modern utility pipes intersected two of the four units excavated. Units located in the east field produced two sherds of Native American pottery, some clam and oyster shells, and quartz flakes. Despite local legend of a former Native American village in the vicinity, no other remains to document an occupation site were uncovered. A few European artifacts, mostly nineteenth century ceramics, were uncovered.

The east lawn, west lawn, and north area were all examined to investigate and answer questions that were posed prior to, and because of, the excavation. These questions included identifying the locations of wells, outhouses, refuse dumps, original paths and road surfaces.

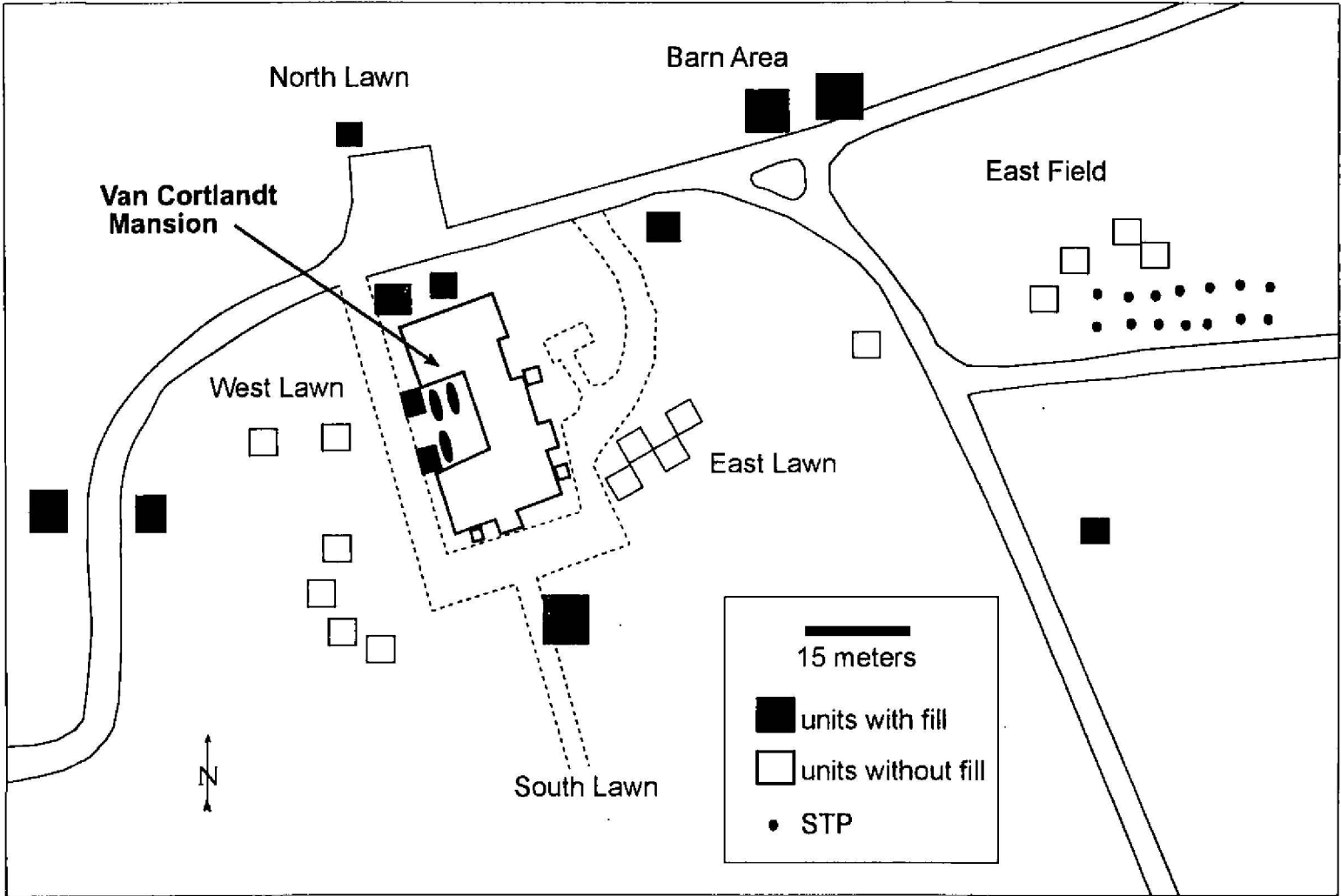
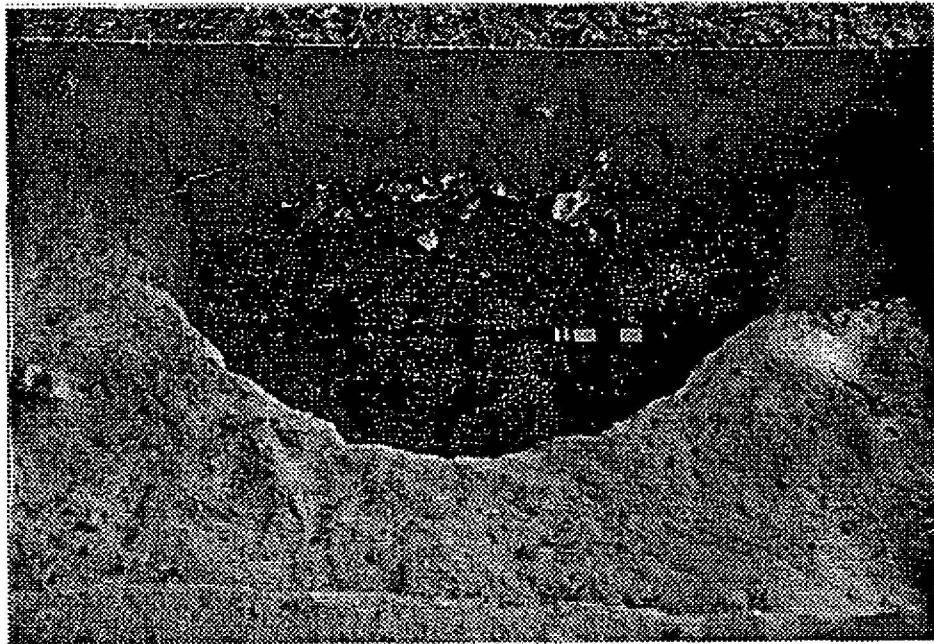


Figure 3: Van Cortlandt Park - Site Excavation Map

Two significant finds included a shell midden (plate 11), dating to the late Woodland period uncovered in the west field, and a nineteenth century dog burial was uncovered in the east lawn. However, the most productive information, in regard to this paper, came from the stratigraphic records of units to the north and west of the property. It appears that a large amount of filling and grading occurred (from one half to one meter in depth) on these two areas surrounding the house (see plates 22 and 23 for examples).



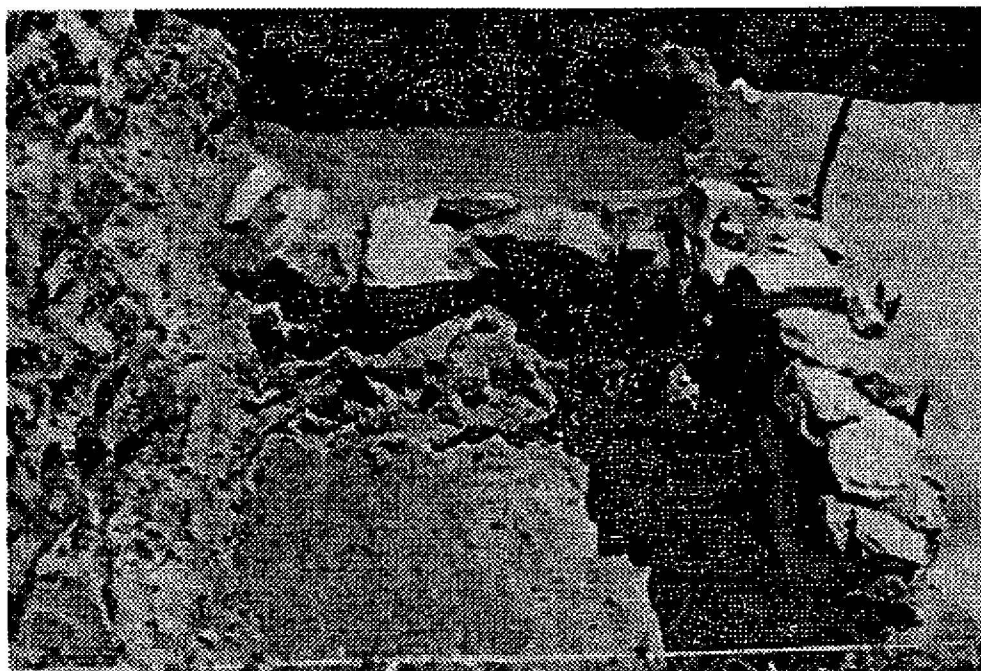
**Plate 11: Shell Midden (west field)**

To the south of the Mansion, foundation walls, presumably, from the house of the original land owner, Adrian Van der Donck, were uncovered (plates 12 and 13). The area of this seventeenth century house was almost devoid of any material remains with the exception of a few pipe stems and bowls. In the early twentieth century, the City of New York ran a sewer line



**Plate 12: Van der Donck's foundation wall (c. 1910)**

through this section of the lawn to aid in drainage from the house. Workers uncovered and gutted the foundations of the seventeenth century house in the process of laying the conduits (Tieck 1968:4). The Museum of Natural History in New York City hired W.L. Calver to investigate the walls and remove the materials found. Material remains included delft and polychrome ceramics, lead glass window casements and Native American wampum beads (Ceci 1977:290). Finally, they filled, not only the foundation walls, but the surrounding area with sand to bring that section of ground up to the surface level of the Mansion (National Society of the Colonial Dames of New York 1912:5).



**Plate 13: Van der Donck's foundation wall (1991)**

An interesting feature was identified in the Herb Garden located adjacent to the west side of the house. A possible well or cistern was uncovered four meters below the surface during the last day of the excavations in 1990. This is the one area where a main primary deposit from the Van Cortlandt family was located. Early to mid eighteenth century materials (ceramics and pipes) as well as red bricks and faunal remains were recovered from these units. A complete excavation of the Herb Garden area was not possible because of time constraints. The Herb Garden was also area where a large amount of fill was present. Approximately two meters of fill was the average uncovered by the units in this area. The deposits show patterns of landscaping which included both the removal of soil as well as areas of re-deposited fill materials as the agent of reshaping the land.

*The Stone Features:*

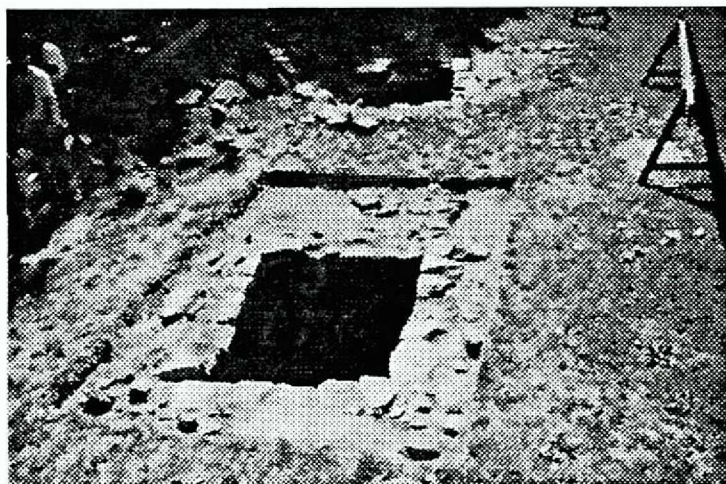


**Plate 14: 19th Century lithograph portraying the Mansion and the barn**

As part of the goal to reconstruct the earlier physical and social context of the Van Cortlandt Mansion and grounds, excavations in 1990 and 1991 investigated an area that a nineteenth century illustration showed to have been the site of a large barn (plate 14). Excavation, associated with construction of an electrical conduit line in the late 1980s, exposed elements of a fieldstone wall or foundation (Berger 1989). The barn was located on the south edge of the present day baseball field. In the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries this barn was used as part of the family farm (Catherine Van Cortlandt 1903:x).

Excavation in this area identified two subterranean stone structures (plates 15, 16, 17 and 21). The features were uncovered within the area of the barn defined by Berger and Associates (Berger 1989), approximately forty meters to the north and fifty meters to the east of the east wing of the house. Each feature is approximately 1.75 meters square, and 3 meters deep (within the interior) and spaced 2 meters apart.

The features (plate 15) were constructed of large field stones. These stones were dry-laid and dressed, with the interior side cut to create a smooth surface. There is a possibility that the stone features were lined; pieces of white, plaster-like material were found attached to the stone walls toward the bottom of the features (between 200 and 300 centimeter below surface).



**Plate 15: Stone features**

Five meter square units were opened around both features in attempts to locate remains of the presumed barn, or any other structure that would have surrounded the open pits. No post molds, foundation(s), impressions, or artifact remains to indicate any structure around the features were uncovered. However, based on the uncovering of a possible foundation wall during excavation of the electrical conduit just to the south of the features and the following documented sources, I maintained that a barn did exist over these features. An engraving from *Harpers Weekly* (1884) clearly shows the barn and a connecting path to the Mansion (*Harpers Weekly* October 14, 1884 Volume 28 Number 1451). A watercolor painting from the mid nineteenth century clearly portrays the house and barn together (plate 14). Finally, a photograph taken in 1900 displays a portion of the barn next to the horse path that is still there today (Tieck 1968:17, plate 7). Further testing in the area could reveal additional remains of the barn.

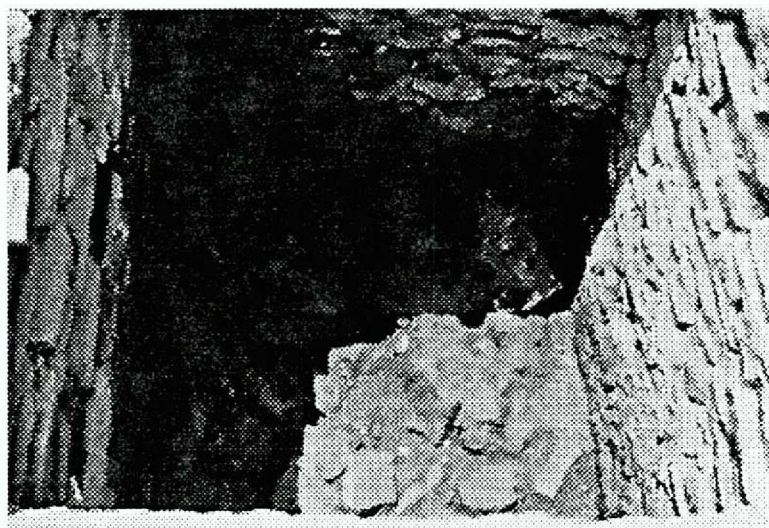


Plate 16: Stone features - exposing the "rocky" interior

Table: IV Depth of the two features:

Feature #1 (Trench 8) <sup>2</sup>		Feature #2 (Trench 9)	
<u>Layer:</u>	<u>Depth in Centimeters:</u>	<u>Layer:</u>	<u>Depth in Centimeters:</u>
1	0-15	1	0-5
2	15-70	2	5-10
3	70-115	3	10-20
4	115-135	4	20-50
5	135-170	5	50-70
6	170-210	6	70-100
7	210-255	7	100-130
10	255-275	8	130-150
11	275-290	9	150-180
12	290-300	10	180-200
		11	200-230
		12	230-250
		13	250-270
		14	270-300

These features were excavated in arbitrary layers (Table IV). Table V presents the total number of artifacts by layer. This graph reveals the possibility of a single major deposition

<sup>2</sup> The arbitrary layer numbers of 8 and 9 in Feature I were not assigned. Feature I was excavated over a two year period, layers 1 to 7 in 1990 and layers 10-12 in 1991. Therefore, layer 10 follows directly under layer 7.



episode. The heaviest artifact concentration occurs at the lower levels of both features. Beginning at approximately one hundred and fifty (150) centimeters, artifact concentration rises sharply. The apparent concentration of artifacts at levels one through three mostly represents late nineteenth to early twentieth century materials. Between these layers and the heavy concentrated artifact layers, were many large cut field stones. The ceramic sherd distribution, shown in Table VI, mirrors that of Table V. Most of the ceramics recovered were between levels 7 through 10 in Feature I and levels 9 through 14 in Feature II (approximately 150 to 300 centimeters in depth below the surface in both cases).



**Plate 17: Insitu artifact finds from Feature II**

Table V: Van Cortlandt Park - Artifact Distribution - Features I and II

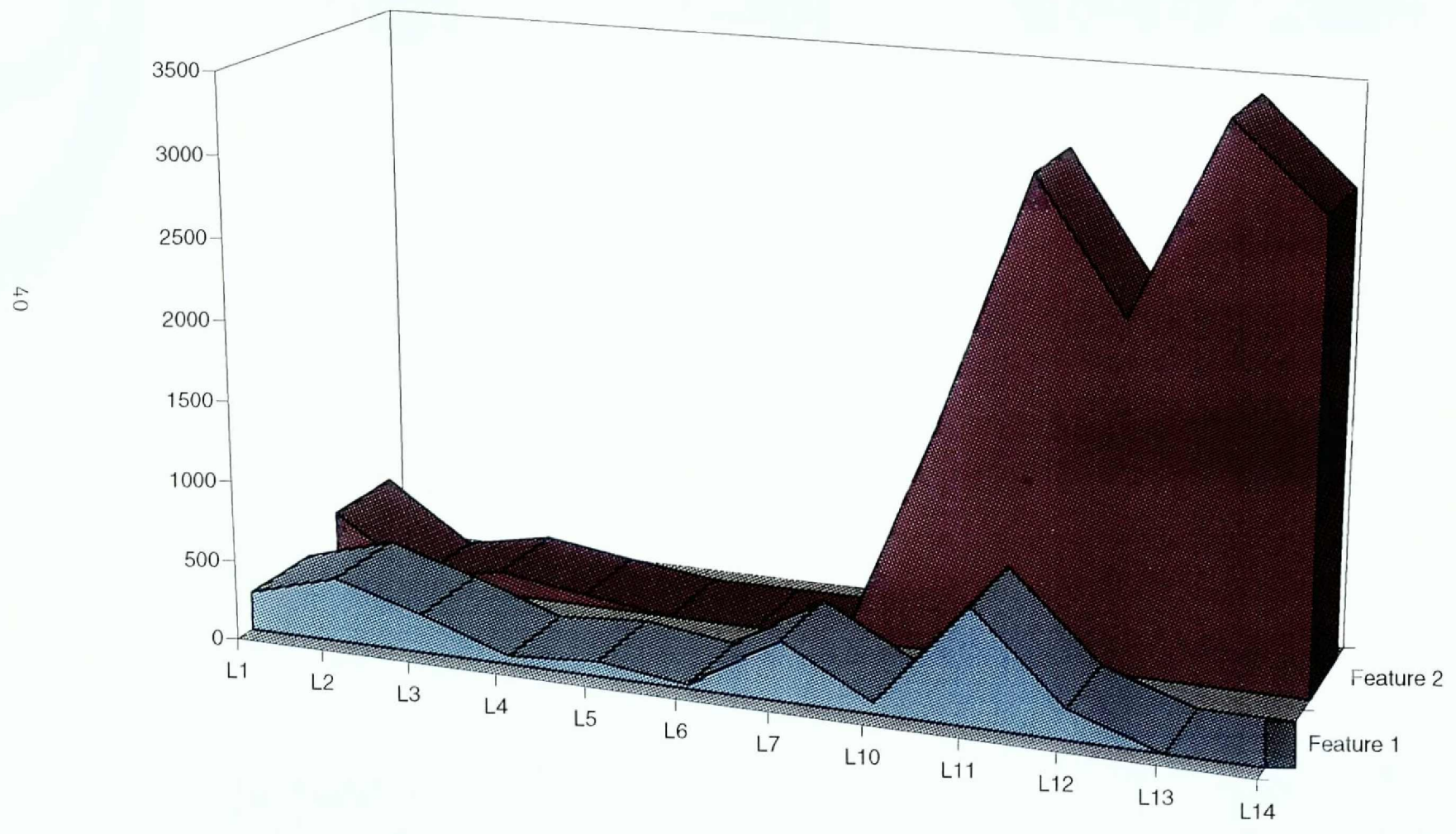
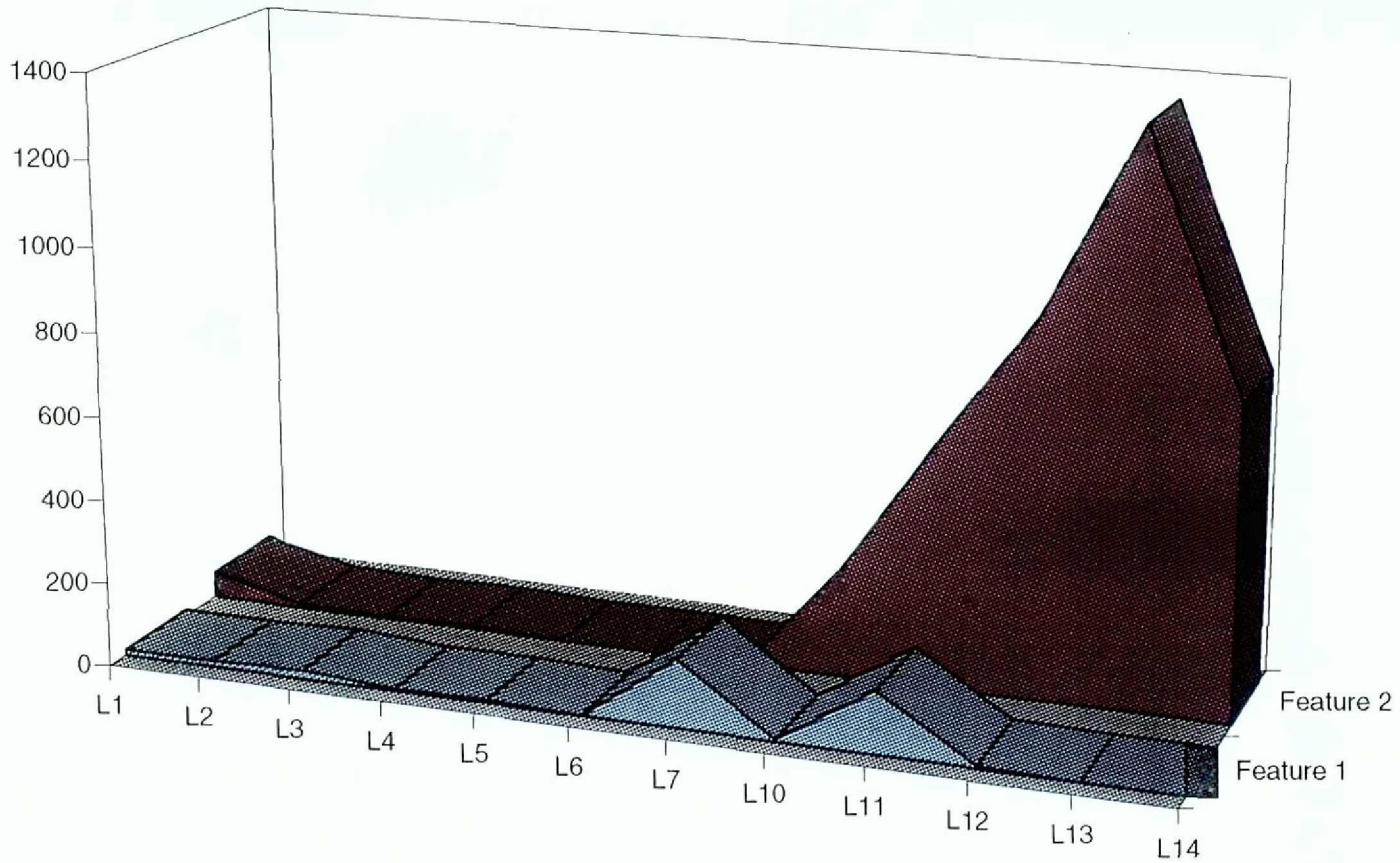


Table VI: Van Cortlandt Park - Ceramic Sherd Distribution - Features I and II



Care was taken during excavation to look for the stratigraphy. The features were excavated in arbitrary levels (20 centimeter increments). There was no obvious soil, color, matrix or fill change from the top to the bottom of the features. The only difference came when the bottom of the features were reached; a layer of sand (approximately 4 centimeters thick) lined the earthen-packed bottoms of the features.

*The Artifact Remains and the Issue of Dating/Time:*

As with the uncertainty of the function of the stone features, the source of artifacts recovered from the two features constitutes a separate question. The collection consists of almost exclusively of domestic artifacts, with food preparation and consumption items, drinking vessels, hygiene related items and children's toys dominating. The material remains were mixed throughout the features from top to bottom and side to side. Ironstone and whitewares that date from the late 1840s onwards (Wetherbee 1996) were found at the bottom of the features lying next to Chinese Canton porcelain plates (which date to the early nineteenth century) and American slipwares (dating from the late eighteenth century). Blown Dutch casement bottles were found near the surface, along with pieces of slipware plates while the top plate of a set of vulcanized false teeth, which was manufactured between the 1850s to the 1870s, (Winter 1995) was found at the very bottom of Feature II. The mixed nature of this assemblage provides evidence to the characteristics of the deposition, namely fill. The date of the fill provides further support for the theory of a single deposition episode.



**Plate 18: Assortment of 19th Century bottles**

Three hundred and twenty complete bottles were recovered (Table VII). The bottle date from the early eighteenth through the late nineteenth century. Most of the bottles were either alcohol or medicinal containers. Bottle manufacture types include: two-piece (144 or 45%), blown (85 or 27%), three piece (70 or 22%), dipped (6 or .02%), patterned (2 or .006%), pressed (2) and turned (2 or .006%). Many of the embossed bottles displayed the names of doctors and pharmacies. Since most of the bottles were two to three piece molds (67%) the bottle collection generally dates between the 1850s to the late 1880s (Jones and Sullivan 1989).

One hundred bottles bear embossed marks such as names (both personal and stores), locations and contents (plate 18). Bottles with pharmaceutical names are represented by 55 bottles (17%), hair tonics (25 or .08%), cocaine (5 or .02%), doctor's names (5 or .02%), and others including soda water and condiments (10 or .05%) comprise the collection. Of the sixty bottles with pharmacy and doctor's names forty five date from 1855-1885. Of the two hundred and twenty unmarked bottles, 85 (or 37%) were blown wine and/or champagne bottles. The large amount of wine and alcohol bottles offers archaeological evidence for Catherine Van Cortlandt's

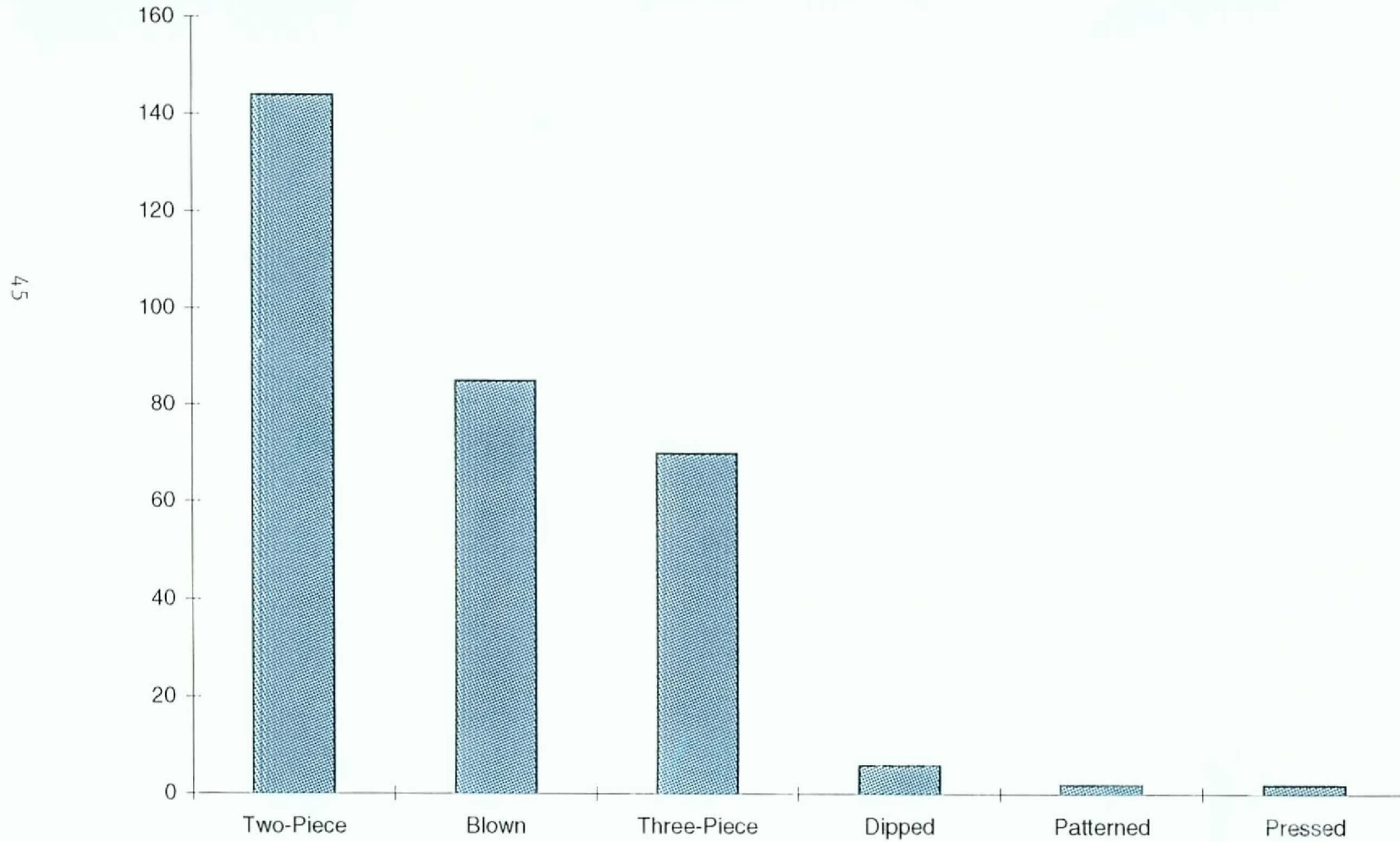
statement that the Van Cortlandts were making their own bottles and bottling wine (Catherine Van Cortlandt 1903:x). Analysis on the possible function of the rest of the unmarked bottles is still ongoing. Examples of wine tasters, whiskey and other related liquor, perfume and ink bottles exist in the assemblage.<sup>3</sup>

A terminus post quem (TPQ) for the features was determined based on several bottles labeled, Roy Topka. According to New York City business directories (Doggerts New York City Street Maps 1851 through 1890) and Dr. Gary Hall from the National Bottle Museum in Ballston Spa, New York (Hall 1993), Roy Topka was in business from 1853 until the early twentieth century. Several bottles from his company have been dated based on addresses embossed on the them. Twelve bottles have addresses and names that date between 1880 and 1890. In Feature I, one bottle was recovered in the third layer while two bottles were recovered between layers seven and ten. In Feature II, five bottles were recovered in layers one and two while five others bottles were recovered from layers ten through thirteen. This fact, that these bottles with late manufacture dates were recovered from throughout the features provides the assemblage with a TPQ of post 1880. This is also strong evidence that the deposits were created in a single episode.

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3 Work on identifying bottle types, function, groups and dates was accomplished with help of works by: Baker 1976; Beck 1973; Brown 1971; Carrillo 1972; Colcleaser 1967; Dumbrell 1983; Hall 1993; Geismar 1989; Gottesman 1954 & 1955; Jones 1971, 1981, 1986 & 1989; Jones and Sullivan 1989; Ketchum 1996; Klamkin 1971; McKearin 1948 & 1949; Miller 1991; Newman 1970; Pollard 1993; Staski 1984 & 1987; Toulouse 1969 & 1971; Walbridge 1920; Watson 1965; White 1978; and Van Rensseler 1921.

Table VII: Van Cortlandt Park - Complete Bottles By Manufacture Type - Features I & II



Based on the various types and patterns of ceramics (including Chinese porcelain (plate 20), transfer-prints, shell edged, delft wares, slipwares, ironstones, whitewares, and yellowwares) the range date for the collections spans from the mid eighteenth century until at least 1862 with an Ironstone Dundee Marmalade jar with a transferprinted label that included the manufacture, the address, the shipper and the registry date (plate 19). The overall mean ceramic date (MCD) for both features was determined to be 1822.<sup>4</sup> Table's VIII and IX represents the breakdown of the range of production and mean ceramic dates by types and levels. If one was to base their interpretations solely on the mean ceramic date of 1822, then it would appear that these features were filled in the early nineteenth century. However, this is not the case. The mean ceramic date cannot be used as a stand-alone test for chronology (LeeDecker 1991). Many of the whiteware, yellowware and Mocha pieces in the ceramic collection were in produced into the early twentieth century. This coupled with the post 1880s production of twelve bottles clearly show the deposits to be of a late nineteenth century filling episode.

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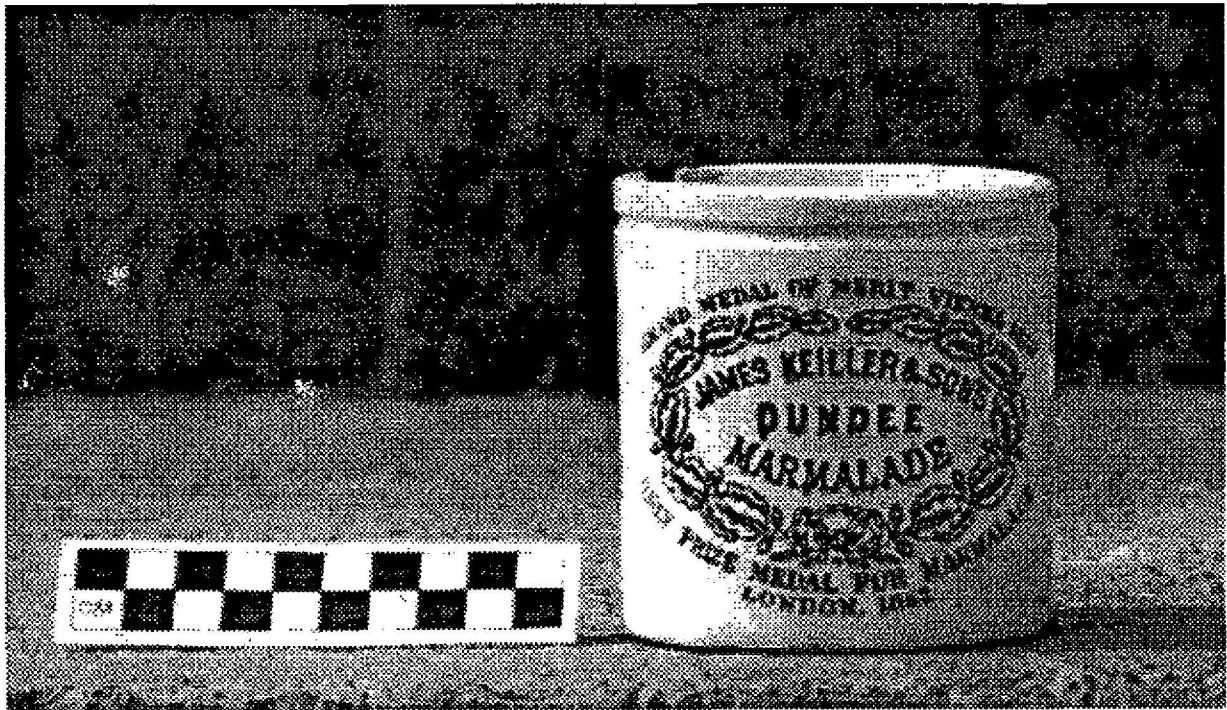
4 Work on identifying ceramic types, function, groups and mean ceramic date was accomplished with help of works by: Adams and Gaw 1977; Apuzzo and Cohn 1982; Baker 1985; Bankoff and Winter 1987, 1988 & 1989; Baugher and Venables 1987; Baugher 1990; Beaudry, Cook and Mrozowski 1991; Bonath 1988; Carson 1978; Celoria 1980; Coysh 1971; Coysh and Henrywood 1971, 1982 & 1989; Cox 1983; DeBolt 1988; Deetz 1977 & 1993; Dickens 1982; Dunnel 1970; Dyson 1982; Fennelly 1955; Ferguson 1977; Fontana 1973; Geismar 1989 & 1993; Godden 1964 & 1992; Goring 1992; Gottesman 1954 & 1955; Griffiths 1978; Howard 1984; Hunter and Miller 1994; Ketchum 1987a, 1987b & 1996; Klein 1991; Kovel 1953; Lavin and Faber 1985; Lee 1984; LeeDecker 1994; Majewski and O'Brien 1987; McGuire 1991; Miller 1980, 1991, 1994 & 1995; Miller and Hunter 1990; Mouthford 1973; Mudge 1981; Noel-Hume 1969, 1970a, 1970b, 1972, 1973 & 1991; Pickman and Rothschild 1981; Price 1979; Quimby 1973; Ramsay 1939; Ricciardi and Loorya 1995; Rice 1987; Rockman Harris and Levin 1983; Rockman and Rothschild 1984; Rothschild and Pickman 1980; Rothschild Wall and Boesch 1987; Sandon 1980; Shackle and Little 1993; Schiffer 1975; Seidel 1990; Shepard 1956; Sinopoli 1991; Snyder 1992, 1994 & 1995; South 1977a & 1977b; Spencer-Wood 1987 & 1991; Spencer-Wood and Heberling 1987; Salwen and Yamin 1990, Sussman 1977 & 1985; Turnbaugh 1985; Turnbaugh and Peabody 1977; Wall 1987, 1991, 1994 & 1995; Watkins 1983; Wills 1980.



Table VIII:

Van Cortlandt Park - Mean Ceramic Date (adjusted)

<u>Composition/Type/Pattern:</u>	<u>medium:</u>	<u>range:</u>	<u>frequency:</u>	<u>totals:</u>
<b><u>Earthenwares:</u></b>				
Creamware	9	1762-1820	* 1791	16119
Delft	3	1700-1800	* 1750	5250
Ironstone	16	1813-1900	* 1857	29712
Ironstone (Asia shape)	2	1880-1888	* 1884	3768
Ironstone (Shelton)	2	1840-1862	* 1851	3702
Ironstone (maker's marks)	1	1838-1842	* 1840	1840
Ironstone (maker's marks)	1	1860-1870	* 1865	1865
Ironstone (Dundee jar)	1	1862	* 1862	1862
Pearlware (tp - Felix & T. Surry)	6	1800-1830	* 1815	10890
Pearlware (tp - Whamboa)	1	1810-1818	* 1814	1814
Pearlware (tp - British Views)	1	1800-1848	* 1824	1824
Pearlware (tp - Canova, Wildrose, Deer) 4		1820-1840	* 1830	7320
Pearlware (tp - India Temple)	1	1820-1824	* 1822	1822
Pearlware (tp - English Cities)	1	1830-1846	* 1838	1838
Pearlware (tp - unidentified)	28	1780-1830	* 1818	50904
Pearlware (tp - polychrome)	3	1820-1840	* 1830	5490
Pearlware (tp - ironstone/unidentified) 1		1840-1860	* 1850	1850
Pearlware (Shell Edged)	9	1780-1820	* 1805	16245
Pearlware (Mocha)	7	1795-1900	* 1843	12901
Pearlware (painted)	8	1780-1820	* 1800	14400
Pearlware (Willow)	22	1795-1840	* 1818	39996
Redware	15	1780-1825	* 1804	27060
Whiteware	36	1840-1900	* 1860	66960
Yellowware	9	1840-1870	* 1854	16686
<b><u>Porcelains:</u></b>				
Canton/Nanking	73		* 1815	132492
	332	1700-1900	*/*	604838
Mean Ceramic Date =	1821.8	or	1822	



**Plate 19: Dundee Marmalade Jar, 1862**

**Table IX:**

**Mean Ceramic Date By Layers:**

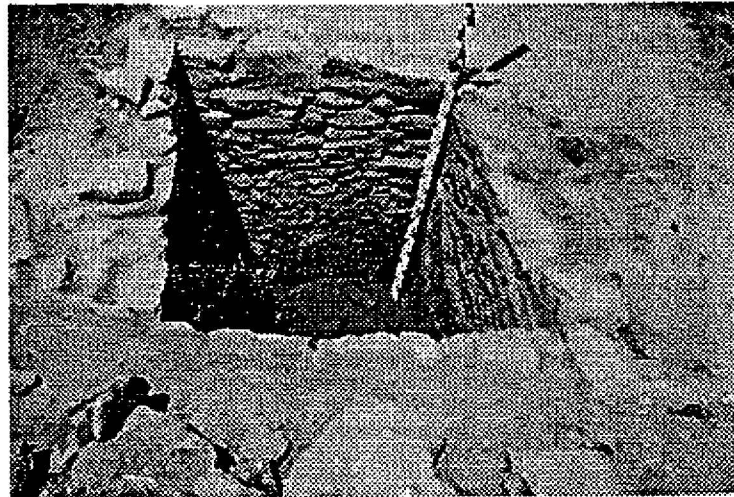
Feature #1 (Trench 8)		Feature #2 (Trench 9)	
Mean Ceramic Date: =	1816	Mean Ceramic Date: =	1823
Layer 3:	1815	Layer 10	1814
Layer 4	1815	Layer 11	1826
Layer 5	1820	Layer 12	1828
Layer 7	1814	Layer 13	1824
Layer 10	1815	Layer 14	1825
Layer 11	1817		
Layer 12	1818		



**Plate 20: Chinese Canton Porcelain plate (c. 18792-1840)**

Though there was a majority of pre 1850s ceramics in the features, the site contains a sufficient mix of later ceramics such as ironstones, whitewares, spongewares and yellowwares. The majority of these ceramics date between the 1850s and 1870s. As with the glass remains, the ceramics were recovered from every area within the feature. Many of the reconstructed complete ceramics were found together, broken apparently in the process of being thrown into the features. Coupling the ceramic information with the evidence of the bottle remains and the dentures negates the MCD as representing the deposition time and strengthens the idea that these features filled in a single episode during the late nineteenth century.

*Stone Features: Use and Re-use:*



**Plate 21: Stone feature at the one meter mark**

The discovery of the stone features raised several questions. What were they? When were the materials recovered from within them deposited? How did the materials get there? When were the features sealed? Although the primary pre-depositional function cannot be completely determined, the archaeological record suggests that the features became a repository of archaeological remains. The answers to these questions then forms an integral component of the argument for a late nineteenth century land transformation. Four possible functions exist that the stone features could have served as: a well, ice house, privy or root cellar.

Since the original function of the features are unknown, it is difficult to control for the various scenarios/possibilities for assemblage deposition. Clearly, the feature fill is unrelated to its original use. There are two scenarios/possibilities to explain this deposition. Fill after the features abandonment or deposition during use. Deposition during use is only possible if the features functioned as privies. The issue of when the stone features were filled with kitchen and toilet

materials is vital to this study. If the deposition occurred over time rather than as a singular episode, the features do not inform on late nineteenth century and transformations.

LeeDecker (1991) states several possible actions that may explain the creation of archaeological pit features. In his adaptation of Schiffer's ideas on site formation processes LeeDecker created six possible criteria for deposition. They are:

- 1) deposition of human waste
- 2) placement of artifacts to serve as percolation fill
- 3) gradual, long term deposition of refuse directly from the household
- 4) accidental loss of objects into the pits
- 5) the re-deposition of refuse from yard contexts within the household property
- 6) rapid deposition of large amounts of material from the household, such as major household cleaning episodes<sup>5</sup>

There was no evidence of human waste within the features. Nigh soil was not present in the features. Without human waste remains in the features, it is unlikely that the reason for the material remains deposited were to act as a percolation agent. The lack of stratigraphy within the feature hinders the support for the third criteria on the list. Although Geismar has reported that the cleaning of privies removes most of the material from within them (Geismar 1989, 1993), the deposition would be recreated once privy use resumed. One may argue that the presence of the large cut fieldstones within the features could have prevented the formation of stratigraphy (Plate 14), however, the date range of the materials recovered are consistent throughout the features. If linear time was a factor in the creation of the site, then some form of depositional record as well as material seriation should have existed. Based on this evidence it is my contention that these features could not have been privies.

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<sup>5</sup> List adapted from LeeDecker 1991:2

LeeDecker, in his study of privies from Wilmington, Delaware, reported that several features contained large amounts of complete and near complete ceramics (LeeDecker 1991). In trying to understand why some pieces were whole while others were not, he postulated that the fourth and fifth criteria of the above list were plausible. Items could have accidentally been dropped into the features during their usage by the family. Following Schiffer's diagram of site formation processes he argues that when ceramics were broken some pieces would be deposited in a feature while other pieces were deposited in other refuse disposal area of the property. Finally, the primary dumps from other areas of the property were then redeposited within the feature once their function ceased. This would then re-introduce sherds, that were once whole, together again (LeeDecker 1991 and 1994).

Although there is some support for this at Van Cortlandt Park, why were there no other material remains within the features except those of the household items? Surely, other broken or discarded items that have been disposed of should have found their way into the features as well? I believe it would be an incredible coincidence if only a few, specific types of artifacts were found in the features and not broader, more general types. Agreeing with this postulate would mean that the family never threw away anything with the exception of their dinner plates, bottles and toys.

Within the features are over three hundred reconstructed ceramic vessels. Most are fully complete. This does however raise the question of why are some pieces complete while others are not? According to LeeDecker, this discrepancy between the complete and incomplete ceramics may be answered using the fifth criteria of deposition.

Accidental loss of objects as well as redeposition from other dump areas of the property is a possible explanation. If material were being re-deposited in these features from other areas of

the property, would it not seem fair to assume that some dirt would have been placed in there as well? If this was the case then there should be some form of stratigraphy present which would negate the notion of the thesis, that the filling episode was in line with LeeDecker's sixth postulation; that of a single dump episode based on a major housecleaning period. However, I maintain this not to be the case. Although the appearance of both complete and incomplete ceramics suggest the notion of linear deposition, the evidence from other materials such as glass bottle remains and a the top plate of a set of vulcanite dentures, as well as the lack of material such as farm implements, supports the single dump theory

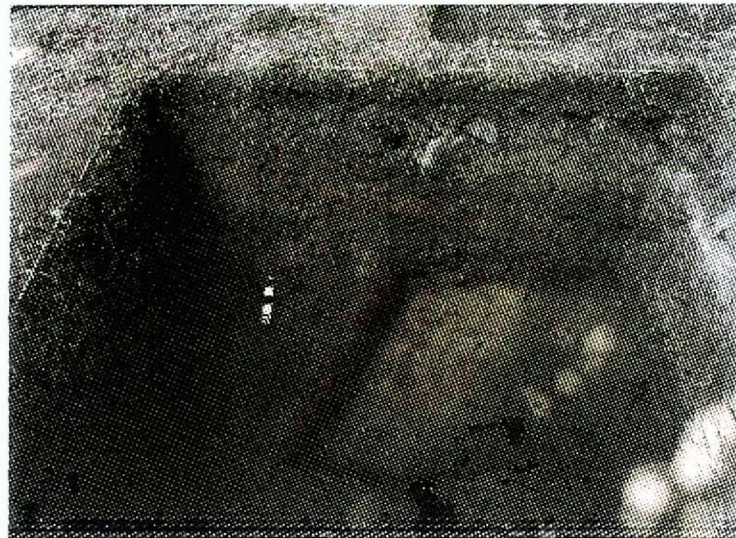
The last piece of evidence from the stone features lie in the cross-mends between the two pits. Three ceramic vessels were cross-mended between the features. Shards recovered from Feature I, layer 7 joined with shards from Feature II, layers 9 and 11. Based on the lack of stratigraphy, the mixed, yet constant, nature of the material remains and the cross-mends, the sixth postulate, that being a single episode, is the most likely scenario for the deposition of materials into the stone features (plate 21).

LeeDecker's sixth postulate provides strong support for use of the stone features as part of the overall evidence for the land transformation in the late nineteenth century. With the issues of function, dating and site formation now address, we can turn our attention to an overview of the evidence from throughout the rest of the park.

*Evidence of the late Nineteenth Century landscaping of Van Cortlandt Park:*

With the exception of the east field, all areas surrounding the Mansion support the notion of a leveling of the landscape. Only late nineteenth century material remains were recovered from within the levels of units determined to be fill.

To the south of the Mansion, facing the swampy area of the lands, large amounts of fill were deposited apparently to raise the level of the land (plates 13 and 24). Approximately two to two and a half meters of sand and soil were used to raise the ground level to that of the stairs of the south side of the Mansion. The sand was also used to fill in the foundation walls of Adrian Van der Donck's homestead uncovered approximately twenty meters to the south of the front door.



**Plate 22: Stratigraphic record - north field**

The stratigraphy of the grounds to the west of the Mansion also reflects the leveling process. However, fill in this area was not as deep as in the south and north fields (plate 22)



Whereas upwards of two meters of fill was used in the south area, the level of fill did not extend further than a quarter of a meter in depth to the north and east. Based on the stratigraphic record, the original ground surface in the seventeenth to mid nineteenth century did not slope away from the Mansion as the level in the south grounds did. A good example of this lack of original slope is the Native American shell midden (plate 9) uncovered approximately a half meter below the twentieth century ground layer. The midden dates to the late Woodland Period (Bankoff and Winter 1991).



**Plate 23: Stratigraphic record - west field**

A large amount of fill was deposited in the Herb Garden. This could reflect two events; the leveling of the grounds around the house in the late nineteenth century and the construction of the caretakers wing in the early twentieth century. The fill in this area measured up to two meters deep and consisted mostly of red bricks mixed in with a layer of red-clay. The red-clay was the intact subsoil. Its presence created problems in interpretation and excavation since this layer usually meant that the excavators were in sterile soil and could stop. It appears however, that the

clay was moved from another portion of the site, possibly from the area around the present day Caretakers wing. It is ironic that soil which was considered to end excavation of a specific unit would in turn provide some of the strongest evidence for relandscaping (plate 23).

To the north of the Mansion, the stratigraphy reflects extensive filling episodes. The fill consists of sand, dirt and rocks. It is possible that the fill originated with the land surface modifications that created the bridle and horse paths in this area.

The archaeological evidence from the stone features as well as the site stratigraphy in the north, west and south areas surrounding the Mansion supports the theory that the lands were purposely reshaped during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Late nineteenth century material remains from within this fill also lends support to the timing of the landscaping.



**Plate 24: Looking south through the original front gate entrance to the Mansion and grounds**

The alteration of the grounds leading up to the Mansion reflects the notion of symmetry that was prevalent in park design of the time. With the park on "even" ground, people would get a sense of levelness that was desired in the ever changing late nineteenth century. Parks were supposed to be peaceful and "open" (Buder 1990). Prior to the filling and leveling process the Mansion dominated the landscape, overlooking the swamp, river, and open fields (National Society of the Colonial Dames of New York 1911 and Bolton 1848). If the park was opened in that configuration, the idea of power, suppression and control would prevail and therefore negate one of the main aspects of what people in the nineteenth century felt a public park should look like (Kinkead 1990:74). Olmsted, in a letter to Henry H. Elliott (committee member in charge of zoning and street planing for the City of New York in 1860), said that parks in cities like New York need to be wide, open, unobstructed and as natural looking, without man-made constructs as possible (Olmsted 1860b). Reporting on the developments of Van Cortlandt Park, Allison, was glad that the area was acquired for the purposes of a public park and that the lands looked "beautiful" once the landscaping was completed (see Plates 1, 3, and 6) (Allison 1986:61). Now, the even-tempered feeling of the park was ready to be put to use for the wilderness starved Manhattanites.

## Chapter IV: Conclusions

**“Americans have no urban history. They live in one of the world’s most urbanized countries as if it were wilderness”** Sam Bass Warner, 1972

In this work, I have suggested that the Van Cortlandt family sold and deeded their land to the City of New York with the express purpose of having the land used as a public park. Based on the evidence presented in the previous chapters, I believe the questions raised in the introduction have been answered. These questions included: why did the Van Cortlandt family deed their house and sell their grounds to the City of New York?; What precedents were there for this action?; Why was a large portion of domestic artifacts dumped into the two stone features?; and finally, and finally, what was the role of the late nineteenth century environmental movement and why did it occur

When the Van Cortlandt family moved away from the family estate in the Bronx, they did so under the wish that the lands be used as a public park. There are several possible motives for this action. First, their status as one of the wealthiest families in the region is well documented. It was from wealthy families like the Van Cortlandt’s that the environmental movement found its strongest supporters. The symbolic status of deeding parts of your land (the idea of civic responsibility) for “everyone’s” use, would have elevated the family even higher (in the eyes of their peers). Secondly, some economic issues could have influenced their decision. The estate was used as a farm. By the late nineteenth century, farming in the northeast was no longer a profitable business for the family. Although there are no records to indicate that the family was losing money, it was obvious that, with the development of the Industrial Revolution, farms in major cities could no longer survive at a profit (Leckie 1996).

The issue of the Van Cortlandts finances have not been addressed in this paper and cannot be evaluated by the data at hand. According to James Folts, director of the New York State Archives, the only tax (both state and local) records to exist for this section of Westchester County are from the years 1801, 1803, 1856 and 1857 (Folts 1996). Four years, with such a disparaging time frame between them, is not enough to make concrete assumptions/assertions of the economics of why the family decided to sell and deed their lands away in 1884. The lack of such tax records prohibit the incorporation of the four existing years of tax information into this work. In Westchester County between 1859 and 1875 real property taxes increased thirty-eight percent (38%) and personal property taxes increased fifty-three percent (53%) (Schwab 1890: 446-447). However Schwab also notes that most of the wealthy families were able to claim exemptions regarding the personal property taxes through loopholes and lawyers (Schwab 1890: 78-81).

Finally the Van Cortlandts were conscious of the possibility, even back in the mid century, of the use of their lands as public grounds. By the late nineteenth century, Augustus allowed local citizens to use the grounds for recreational activities such as ice skating and picnicking. Furthermore, in 1869, he had helped to created Oloff Park (named after the patriarch of the Van Cortlandt family, Oloff Stevense) in the southern portion of the estate. The family added their contribution to Olmsted's ideals when he stated that, "a park is intended to furnish healthful recreation for the poor and the rich, the young and the old, the vicious and the virtuous, so far as each can partake therein without infringing on the rights of others, and no further" (Olmsted, 1859 as quoted in McLaughlin's Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted Vol. 3: 213).

Once the Parks Department acquired the Van Cortlandt Estate they began to change the landscape to fit the ideal vision of a public park property. According to records, the land around

the Mansion was shaped, prior to the transfer to the City of New York, in a traditional Dutch style. The estate had a series of terraces that stretched away from the Mansion and allowed for a grand view of the area south towards the City (New York State Commission 1884:89). Excavations at Van Cortlandt Park revealed significant changes in the landscape. Analysis of the stratigraphic record showed various periods of land filling and shaping by the New York City Parks Department. It is my conclusion that this filling and grading was done to ready the newly acquired lands for use as a public park.

The materials deposited in the stone features provide supporting evidence for this landscaping. Based upon the evidence mixed nature of the deposit, the late nineteenth century manufacture dates of part of the bottle collection and the lack of stratigraphy, I believe that these materials were deposited as a single dump episode. This may have been the result of Parks Department workers cleaning out the house. One might ask why the workers themselves did not keep the materials? A possible reason is that the materials discarded were not in vogue by the end of the nineteenth century (Winter 1995 and Miller 1995). The possibility exists that other items were kept by the workers and therefore not a part of the archaeological record. An argument may also be made that since many of the material remains appear to be traditionally female oriented items (ceramic plates, decorations, children's toys, feminine hygiene materials and a large amount of make-up containers) as opposed to traditional male items (such as knives, tools, etc.) that the male workers for the Parks Department would be more inclined to throw the feminine oriented objects away. It is possible that if such male oriented items were present in the house at the time of transfer to the Parks Department, the workers may have taken these items making this another possible consideration for their absence in the archaeological record.

The growing environmental movement of the mid to late nineteenth century had to have played on the minds of the Van Cortlandts as well as City officials. Drawings and descriptions of places such as Yellowstone were filtering back to the East Coast where calls for preservation reached a fevered pitch. Based on the growing concerns of the loss of natural landscapes, officials of New York State and the City of New York created laws enabling them to buy private property in the outer boroughs of the Lower Hudson Valley region. Lands were purchased in the more rural areas of the Bronx, Westchester, Queens and Brooklyn. In the end it was cheaper to buy and convert these "natural" landscapes into public parks as opposed to the creation of another park via acquisition and construction of various lands as they did with Central Park. The latter was more costly than either the City or the State had envisioned (Kuhn 1996).

The combination of the archaeological record with the historical record allows us to understand the possible motives, circumstances and actions that played a role in the creation of Van Cortlandt Park. Since Parks Department records are sparse from the time period in question, it is the archaeological record that must bear the burden of proof for the intentions that were recorded by historians. In Van Cortlandt Park, that proof exists.

In the last half of the nineteenth century people were more than just concerned with the changing landscape of urban centers. In the "new" New York City, the government was doing "something" about those concerns. In 1880, the Parks Department of New York controlled 1000 acres of land. By 1900, they controlled 6000 acres (Kuhn 1996). The urgency for preservation was rampant. The large tract of land that comprised Van Cortlandt's estate, at the edge of New York's expanding urban sprawl, ceased to function as a farm and was converted to park lands. The lands of the Van Cortlandt family became a cornerstone of environmental protection in New York City. Today, New York City has the largest percentage of park space in any urban

environment (Sisinni and Anderson 1993: 96), comprising 22% of all the lands. This is in part due to the creation of Central Park and the opening of the Van Cortlandts lands as a public park.



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Daniel N. Pagano  
Director of Archaeology - New York City  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
100 Old Slip  
New York, New York 10005

Dear Mr. Pagano,

Enclosed is a copy of the 1997 Masters Thesis that was awarded through Syracuse University. My worked focused on issues of landscape changes, the environmental movement and the archaeological collection from Van Cortlandt Park.

I would be honored if the Landmark Preservation Commission to put this copy into their library of archaeological works relating to the City. I am very proud of thesis...even if there are two glaring typographical mistakes that no one realized until after the thesis was bound!

Thank you very much for this...and for the other information you have passed along to me. I hope that things work out the way each of us would like to see them.

If you could send me the names of those reference books on writing for your dissertation I would greatly appreciate it. I've included my e-mail address at the top of this letter if you prefer that method of communication.

Once again thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Ricciardi", written in a cursive style.

Chris Ricciardi