

16. PARKS, CULTURAL AFFAIRS, AND CONSERVATION

The Suffolk County Department of Parks, Recreation & Conservation was created by Local Law I of 1966 and Article XXVIII of the Suffolk County Charter.

Departmental Mission & Responsibilities

The Department's mission is to

- Develop and maintain all park areas for public use;
- Recommend, institute and implement programs to preserve the greenery, wildlife, natural resources and habitats of fish, birds and other animals;
- Organize recreational activities and develop recreational facilities and programs;
- Provide interpretive tours and instruction by the Parks Department staff;
- Provide for the restoration and interpretive tours of historic properties under the jurisdiction of the Department;
- Eliminate artificial barriers and provide recreational opportunities for handicapped individuals;
- Meet on a regular basis with constituent organizations to further improve recreational opportunities in the County Parks;
- Establish a security plan to provide a safe environment in the parks for patrons.

The Department of Parks & Receptions is now responsible for over 37,000 acres of parkland, wetlands, and pine barrens. The parcels range in size from one acre at the Yaphank Historic site to 2,293 acres at Smith Point County Park. This acreage includes 14 major parklands with numerous facilities, 4 golf courses, 3 marinas, 7 campgrounds, bay and ocean-front beaches, nature trails, preserves, horseback riding trails, boating facilities and bird sanctuaries.

One of the top priorities of the Parks Department has been the preservation and protection of our most precious resource - our environment. With the help of the Open Space Acquisition Resolution in 1986, the County has acquired over 4,815 acres of land, and approximately 11,191 acres were acquired under the Drinking Water Protection Program. Furthermore, over 3,488 acres of land have been dedicated to the Nature Preserve.

The Department also maintains an Office of Historic Services which now administers ten Historic Trust areas and 247 historic buildings. The major function of this division is the administration, restoration and maintenance of historic properties and landmarks owned by Suffolk County.

The Commissioner of the Department is appointed by the County Executive subject to the approval of the County Legislature, and serves at the pleasure of the County Executive. The Board of Trustees of Parks, Recreation and Conservation consists of eleven members, one member to be appointed by the County Legislature from each of the ten towns of Suffolk County, upon recommendation of the Supervisor of each town, and one member to be appointed at large by the County Executive, subject to the approval of the County Legislature. The term of each member is five years. The County Executive and the Presiding Officer of the Legislature serve as *ex-officio* members of the Board with voting rights.

County "Green Key" / Tourist Key Card and Reservation System. The Suffolk County Parks Green Key Card is a Park pass that not only allows access to Suffolk County Parks, but ensures that the holder pay reduced fees reserved for Suffolk County residents. In addition, the Green Key Card is also needed to make golfing and camping reservations. The Suffolk County Parks Tourist Reservation Key offers tourists (non-residents) access to the reservation system on a limited basis.

General park information notices of upcoming events and reservations for golf and camping can be obtained by calling (631) 244-PARK (7275) on a touch tone phone.

SUFFOLK COUNTY HISTORIC TRUST

The Suffolk County Historic Trust, an agency of Suffolk County government, maintains historic properties owned by the County. Its governing body is the Suffolk County Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) (see Chapter 15, Environmental Control).

The CEQ is advised, in turn, by a Historic Trust Subcommittee composed of leading Suffolk County historians and preservationists. The Trust is administered by the Division of Historic Services in the Parks Department.

When a property is dedicated to the Trust by formal action of the Suffolk County Legislature and the County Executive, it is enrolled as a cultural, educational, and tourist resource for the benefit of Suffolk County citizens and visitors. Formal dedication protects the property from inappropriate use or encroachment, facilitating restoration and rehabilitation by the Trust. Any change in the use or appearance of a dedicated property must receive the approval of the Trust and any change in ownership must be approved by the public in a voter referendum.

The need for a Suffolk County Historic Trust was recognized in the 1960s. Enabling legislation was contained in the Suffolk County Environmental Bill of Rights which received overwhelming voter approval in a 1970 referendum. This bill established a modern role for Suffolk County government in environmental management. In part, the bill called for the creation of a "County Historic Trust" to protect County-owned properties "having distinctive historical significance."

The first dedication to the Historic Trust took place in 1981 with the Blydenburgh Park National Register Historic District in Smithtown. The second dedication, in 1982, was "Meadow Croft," the former John E. Roosevelt Estate in Sayville. There are now over 100 historic buildings and hundreds of acres of land dedicated to the Historic Trust. These include Native American archaeological sites, natural sites, farmsteads, and estates. Many Trust properties are listed on the National Register of Historic Places in Washington D.C. Most are located on County parkland, and all are owned by Suffolk County.

Restoration of Trust properties is conducted by Suffolk County in cooperation with New York State, local governments, historical societies, and preservation groups. The Friends for Long Island's Heritage is a citizens support group that also helps raise funds for the Historic Trust restoration program. The St. James General Store and gift shops, for example, are operated by the Friends for Long Island's Heritage with all profits going toward the restoration and maintenance of Trust properties. Many Trust properties, such as Deepwells Farm in St. James, are used for interpretive activities. Some have community organizations that open historic sites such as Coindre Hall in Huntington, Meadow Croft in Sayville, and the Hawkins Jacobsen House in Yaphank to the public and provide programming and fund-raising for these properties.

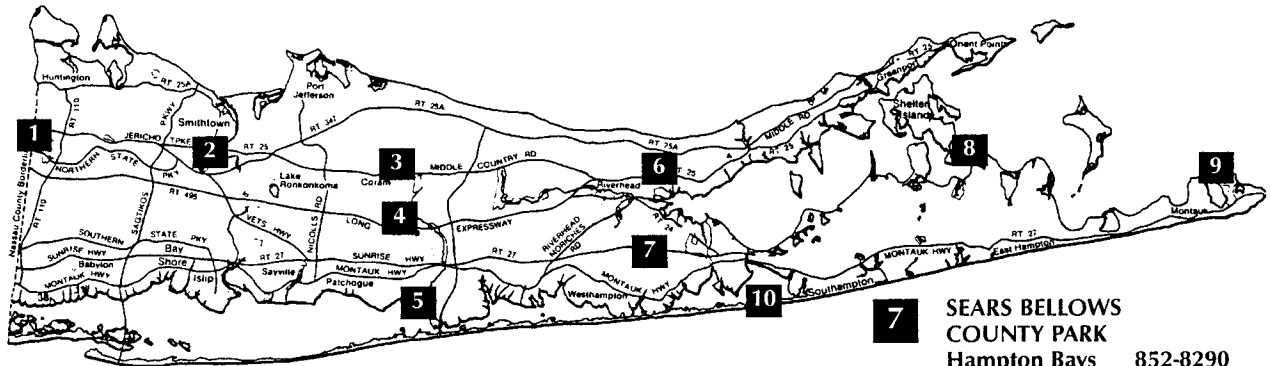
VANDERBILT MUSEUM AND PLANETARIUM

The Vanderbilt Museum Commission maintains and operates the Vanderbilt Museum and Planetarium in Centerport. At his death in 1944, William K. Vanderbilt II bequeathed his mansion and 43-acre estate to Suffolk County. A trust fund was set up under the terms of the will to be administered by an Executive Director and Board of Directors subject to the policy guidance of the Suffolk County Legislature.

One of the last mansions of the so-called "Gold Coast," the Vanderbilt estate dates back to the early 1900s. The 24 rooms of the estate, most of which have been restored to their original condition, reflect the unusual tastes of Vanderbilt. The estate, in addition to the mansion, is home to a marine and natural history museum, a park, and the Planetarium.

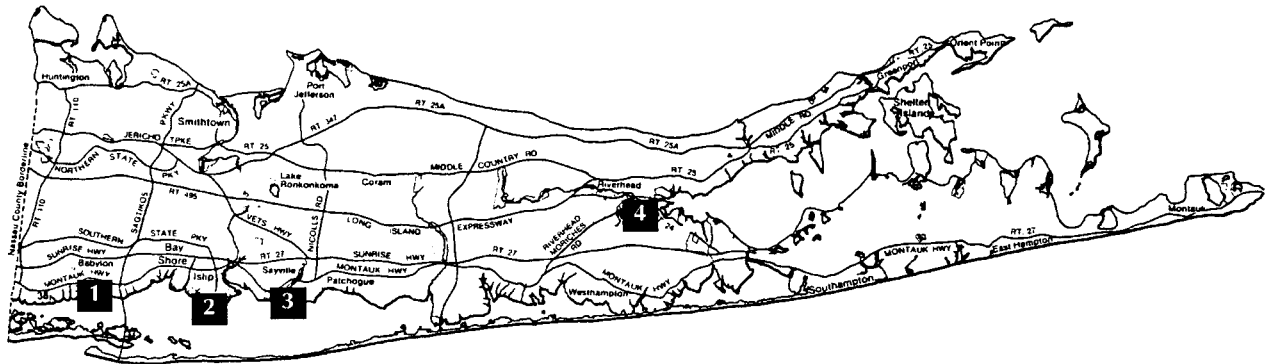
The Planetarium, which is one of the largest in the nation, opened in 1971. The 14,000 square-foot building that houses it was constructed and equipped with funds from the Vanderbilt Trust. Laser light shows and other special shows are staged at the Planetarium on a regular basis. The Vanderbilt is open year round, and is visited by over 200,000 persons annually.

FIGURE 16.1 MAJOR COUNTY PARKS



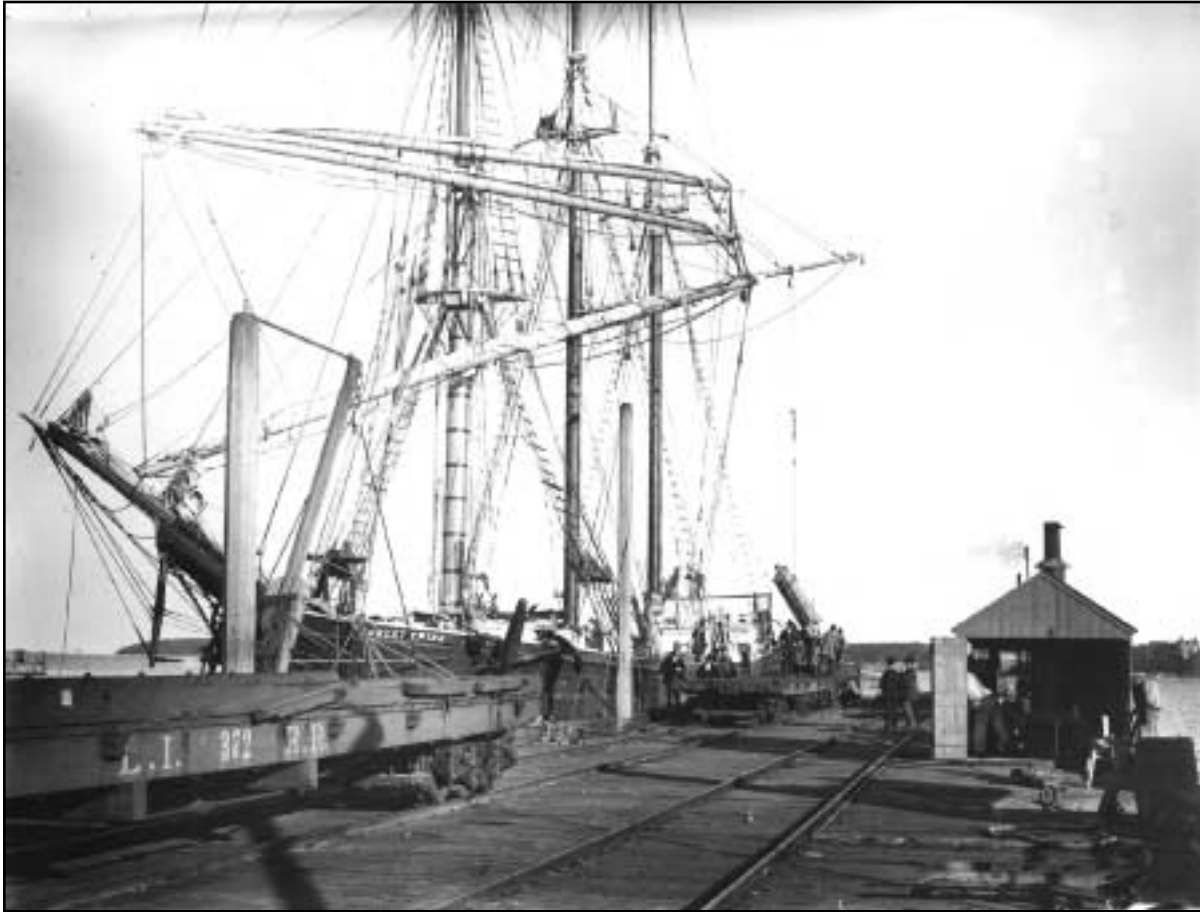
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| 1 WEST HILLS COUNTY PARK
Huntington 854-4423 | 4 SOUTHAVEN COUNTY PARK
Brookhaven 852-1414 | 7 SEARS BELLOWS COUNTY PARK
Hampton Bays 852-8290 |
| 2 BLYDENBURGH COUNTY PARK
Smithtown 854-3713 | 5 SMITH POINT COUNTY PARK
Shirley 852-1316 | 8 CEDAR POINT COUNTY PARK
East Hampton 852-7620 |
| 3 CATHEDRAL PINES COUNTY PARK
Middle Island 852-5500 | 6 INDIAN ISLAND COUNTY PARK
Riverhead 852-3232 | 9 THEODORE ROOSEVELT COUNTY PARK
Montauk 852-7878
Seasonal 852-7879 |
| | | 10 SHINNECOCK EAST COUNTY PARK
Southampton
Seasonal 852-8899 |

FIGURE 16.2 COUNTY GOLF COURSES



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| 1 BERGEN POINT COUNTRY CLUB
Bergen Avenue, West Babylon | 3 WEST SAYVILLE COUNTRY CLUB
Montauk Highway, West Sayville |
| 2 TIMBER POINT COUNTRY CLUB
Great River Road, Great River | 4 INDIAN ISLAND COUNTRY CLUB
County Road 105, Riverhead |





*Photo by Hal B. Fullertom
Courtesy of Suffolk County Historical Society, Riverhead*

Unloading railroad ties at Long Island Railroad dock, 1897, Greenport, NY