

**Great Neck
Ipswich, Massachusetts**

A History

compiled by Doris H. Wilson

Printed for The Association of Great Neck, Inc.
1984
(The Town's 350th Anniversary)

Printed by
Defiance Graphics Corporation
Rowley, Massachusetts
1984

History of Great Neck, Ipswich, Massachusetts

Great Neck is a tract of three hundred and fifty acres of bluff, hill, upland, and beach with presently more than four hundred and forty homes, located three miles from the center of Ipswich and thirty miles from Boston. It is skirted on three sides by water — Plum Island Sound, Ipswich River, and Eagle Hill River. Its hills command a view of the Atlantic Ocean from Cape Ann to Mount Agamenticus in Maine. From the very beginning of the Town's history, this great, isolated tract has been the most noteworthy portion of the old common lands. Its forests were an important asset, its value as a safe and extensive pasture was very great, and the fishing station on its beach and hillside was a large factor in the industrial development of the Town. After the first decade of the eighteenth century, it held a unique position as the only valuable portion of the old common lands which was retained by all the Commoners in a body.

But its history goes back over 10,000 years. "Prior to the 1950's, it was generally assumed that man in the Northeast was a fairly recent arrival, perhaps within the last four or five thousand years," explains John Grimes of the Peabody Museum. Ipswich is rich in history — 350 years of colonization and growth as a nation. But few historians realize the Town is also rich in prehistory — that infinitely longer period preceding written records. In early 1950 stone artifacts and a fluted projectile point, similar to points found near the bones, which dated around 8,500 B.C., of extinct mammals in the western United States were found at Bull Brook in Town and on Great Neck. By piecing together evidence from numerous scientific fields, archeologists can theorize about the environment and the culture of the early Americans, who existed at a time of great geographical transition following the retreat of the Ice Age. Ten thousand years ago, sea levels were still rising in southern New England, and the tundra landscape was slowly transforming to forestland.

During the Ice Age, the ice covering Great Neck was thousands of feet thick. The hills (drumlins) of Great Neck were formed by glacial drift. Around 8,000 B.C., the climate moderated, conifers appeared, huge animals disappeared. Family groups gathered into bands of fifty or so for survival. They hunted small game and deer. Middens on Great Neck, Little Neck, Treadwell Island, and Eagle Hill indicate that these areas may have been summer camping grounds of Paleo-Indians. Deciduous trees appeared between 2,500 and 1,000 B.C. Controversial megalith sites on Great Neck (dolmens) plus patterns in stone indicate visits of Vikings or Celts.

It is said that the Mayflower stopped here and then went on in 1620. Before the settlement of Ipswich was begun in 1633 by John Winthrop, William Jeffrey, who had come over in 1623 in the company of Robert

Gorges and settled in Weymouth, had purchased for a very small sum from the Indians a title to the great neck of land which then bore his name. Winthrop's band, however, assumed possession of the Neck; and in 1666 the General Court confirmed the Town's right to it and gave Jeffrey five hundred acres of land elsewhere.

Huge heaps of clam shells on Eagle Hill, Treadwell Island, and Great Neck indicate summer camping sites of the Agawam Indians. Puritans and pilgrims did not eat clams, regardless of the extent of their hunger.

Although grants of land on the Neck were made to individuals during the first years of the settlement, by 1639 the whole tract had been set apart as a common pasture. The Town Report contains many entries regulating the use of the pasture and the taking of wood from the great forests which covered the hills.

In 1655, sheep were allowed to go on Jeffrey's Neck with the working cattle and saddle horses. In 1660, there were about four hundred sheep on the Neck, and a shepherd was appointed annually. No dogs were allowed and orders were given to kill any that were found.

The care of the forest which covered a considerable portion of Great Neck was a constant problem and there were many rules and regulations for the cutting of trees, which were well enforced. Thus with utmost care the Town was anticipating the modern move for the conservation of the forests in the most minute and exacting fashion. After 1759 no mention was made of these regulations; presumably, the forest growth had completely disappeared. Prior to that there were regulations mentioned for old wood and dead wood.

Beginning around 1641, the Neck area was dedicated to fishing — catch unloaded, dried, salted, and stowed on sailing vessels to go to Europe. By 1696, a thriving fishing station was in operation on the Neck. Wharves and fish houses had been built along the waterfront, and stages for the drying of fish stood on the hill still known as Stage Hill. Ships from many countries anchored in the sheltered cove to take on cargo from this fishing station, which flourished for a century. Salt water fishermen did not need to serve in the militia.

In 1710 the common lands of Ipswich were divided and over four hundred persons drew rights in the area of Great Neck. Two-fifths of the lands were divided among the descendants of the original settlers and three-fifths among the more recent Commoners. The numbering of lots began on the western side of the "North Ridge" as it is named in the Anderson map of 1832, or the "Great Hill" or "Manning's Hill" as the ancient deeds recite. The lots that bear the highest numbers were located on the slope of the hill, where the fishing stages were located. The land occupied by the fish flakes or stages was not granted to the fishermen in the divisions of 1710, and their tenure was only "during the pleasure of the proprietors." This caused frequent disagreements

regarding the ground rent for the fishing privilege as well as ownership. According to later legal research, certain rights were not issued so that if the committee issuing the rights had overlooked any descendants of the original Commoners, then there would be rights available to satisfy any claims by such descendants. The holders of the rights treated the land as common undivided land and no holder of a right attempted to assert a title in fee to any specific or defined locus.

A bridge at the creek across the causeway was provided for at the annual meeting in March, 1775; and in the following year, it was voted that every person bringing a load of hay or gravel from the Neck should be obliged to bring a load of gravel to the causeway to make it passable.

In 1777, Rev. Nathaniel Shitaker of Salem petitioned for a grant of a large section of "sunken marsh" that he might erect and carry on large salt works, "which all must see is most necessary for the Publick Safety in the Present crisis." Favorable action was taken but the scheme lapsed.

Beginning with the year 1786, thistles were invading the Neck to such a degree that the pasturage was much impaired. Men were paid ninety cents a day in 1797 for cutting them down.

In 1788 the Ipswich Commoners voted to grant all their interest in all real estate within the Town of Ipswich to the Inhabitants of the Town of Ipswich under condition that the Town sell the same as soon as it could and pay the debts of the Commoners and apply the balance to the town debt. This apparently referred to the debt which was assessed against all towns to defray the expense of the Revolutionary War. In the lists of sales, after accepting the gift, however, no mention is made of any sale of Jeffries Great Neck Pasture in the list of sales by the inhabitants of Ipswich.

Early in the 19th century, the drift stuff along the shore attained a market value. In 1830, the practice was inaugurated of laying out the seaweed and drift stuff in three sections. No. 1 included the south side of the Neck to Indian Spring; No. 2 from Indian Spring to the run below Butler's point; No. 3 from the run to Little Neck. It was then sold at auction to the highest bidder.

In 1837, the owners of rights in Great Neck organized under Chapter 43 of the Revised Statutes as a corporation known as The Proprietors of Jeffries Neck Pasture. The land continued to be used as a pasture and for almost a century livestock from all parts of Essex County was sent there to graze from May to November. In 1891, the Corporation built a road from the mainland across the marshes and over the hills of Great Neck to the shore opposite The Bluffs. The next year, the Town took under consideration a plan to buy Great Neck as a park site, but the project fell through. Mr. Alexander B. Clark had gradually bought the interest of the Proprietors, and at the meeting of the Corporation on

August 20, 1896, he held four hundred shares, only four other shares being represented. It was voted to sell the whole real estate to him. He claimed sole possession under his deed, and the long standing variance with the Town was soon revived.

In 1903 the Town of Ipswich brought a bill in equity against the Proprietors of Jeffries Neck Pasture and Alexander B. Clark, claiming to have an ownership in the area by virtue of the unissued rights in the

common lands, which were retained by the Commoners in 1710, and then sold by the Commoners to the Town of Ipswich in 1788. The Town claimed to own certain rights in Great Neck by virtue of unissued rights of the Commoners being in the Town through the sale.

The Supreme Court in 218 Mass 487 stated that the deed to Alexander B. Clark was not good because it did not recognize the rights of the Inhabitants of the Town of Ipswich in the unissued rights.

In 1927 the Proprietors of Jeffries Neck Pasture were reactivated by vote of the proprietors and certain lands were given to the Town of Ipswich and certain lands were given to Alexander B. Clark. Cross deeds of release were filed with the Land Court in Boston. Pavilion Beach was part of the land given to the Town.

Alexander B. Clark had roamed the hills and marshes of Great Neck as a young boy gunning for shore birds. His mother had little sympathy for this idle waste of time, but Alec assured her that some day he would own the place. Young Alec Clark had been apprenticed to a tanner and became a leather measurer. He had a keen eye and a quick brain and made the complicated calculations fast and soon was sought by leather manufacturers for his speed and skill. With the aid of his young wife, Mary, he accumulated capital to start his own tannery. His first and second attempts failed but his third was successful, and the A. B. Clark Co. of Peabody became the largest tannery in New England; and he was



Cows on Jeffrey's Neck Road. Date taken unknown. Courtesy of Mona Mulholland Snyder.

called the "Sheepskin King." During the summer of these years, he had brought his family to Little Neck; but the great bare hills to the north held his interest. What had been a mere sport to the boy became a deep and serious study of birds and their habits. In 1901, Mr. Clark presented to the Peabody Museum in Salem, where it is still displayed, the first and for many years the only American Avocet taken in this part of the country.

Mr. Clark developed a gunning pond, which is now Clark Pond, by damming up the marsh at the foot of the hill and building gunning blinds along the shore. He built in the side of the hill underground living quarters where a party of sportsmen could be accommodated. There was a flock of wild geese, sometimes as many as several hundred, kept in pens and released as decoys when the migrating geese flew overhead. During the winter, ice blocks would be cut from the pond for use during the summer months and stored in an ice house, which stood on shore near the Bowdoin Road area.



Looking north from Clark Pond toward the Clark residence. Date taken unknown, probably early 1900's. Courtesy of the Ipswich Historical Society.

Although the Clarks lived in Peabody, a two-and-one-half hour carriage ride away, Mr. Clark decided that the women should share in the activities and he built a summer home on Great Neck, now the Ipswich Bay Yacht Clubhouse. He chose a site at the top of the bluff, a spot with easy access to the water and a commanding view of the sound. The house was made of long timbers, and a porch surrounded it entirely to catch the cool breezes. A road was constructed, branching off the road from Ipswich to Little Neck where North Ridge Road now does but it went through the valley between the hills, along the north side of the pond and up over the hill to the new house. There was a path or road from the new house down to the pond which later became Bowdoin Road. There were also barns for the horses and carriages and several out buildings, as well as houses for the men who worked on the property. Years after, several of these houses from the Quay Road area were

moved to the beginning of North Ridge Road on the waterside. One was moved farther out on Jeffrey's Neck Road and became a store called "The Ho Hum", which was later moved across the road and made into a residence. The barn for the horses had been moved down from the top of the hill. It had belonged to the house which Judge Sayward rented from a man named Strought and which burned in 1914. It was moved again, ever so slightly by friends of Elizabeth and Harold Balch, who made it into a residence in 1939 and who live there now at 7 Clark Road. The timbers from the coach barn were used to build the Mulholland-Balch house at 111 North Ridge Road in 1946 where Elizabeth Balch, Mr. Clark's only living grandchild, still resides.



Steamer "Carlotta", Grape Island. Date taken unknown. Courtesy of Ipswich Historical Society.

In May 1898, the year the new summer home was finished, the Clark's son, Samuel, died from Bright's Disease at age twenty-nine, leaving a young widow. He had been the center of much of the family's activity and there was no heart for the house. It was rented to the Myopia Hunt Club of Hamilton, and for two seasons members enjoyed their water activities there. The two Clark daughters, Mary Alice Clark Boyle and Eliza Clark Mulholland, were married; and there was a grandchild, Mary (May) Mulholland Bartlett, followed by four more, one boy and three girls. With them, the big house was enjoyed by the family. The "May M" rode at anchor in the sound or steamed up the Parker River to overtake Captain Burnham's "Carlotta". There was a large building for Mr. Clark's boats, and railroad tracks were used in launching if necessary. Many friends came to enjoy the summer and the fall gunning. It is interesting to note that a black woman worked for the Clark family then and she was the only one in Essex County.

Mr. Clark's daughter, Mary Alice, who had no children, summered with her husband at what is now 6 Bowdoin Road; and several of his grandchildren later lived in houses at 2, 3 and 12 Bowdoin Road.

Although the widow of Alexander B. Clark Mulholland, Sr. still owns No. 3, the others have different owners today and have been rebuilt. Mr. Clark died in October 1912 at Mary Alice's cottage, his wife having died almost three years earlier. They and other members of the family are buried in Saint Mary's Catholic Cemetery, Salem.



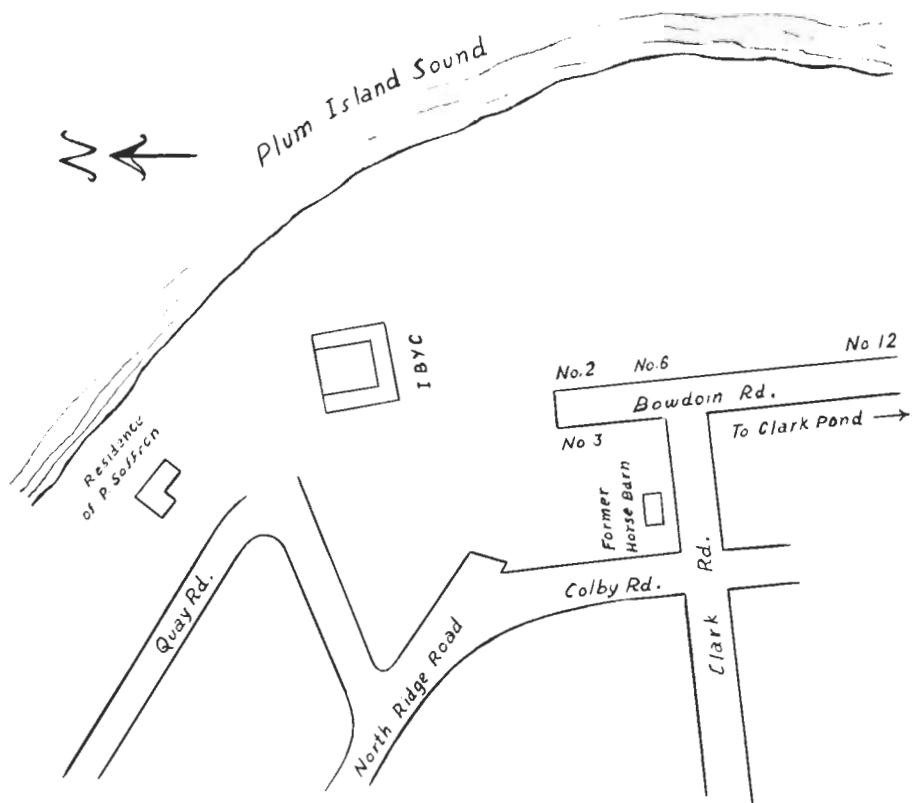
Aerial View of Bowdoin Road area - c. 1960. Courtesy of Carl Johansson.



View of Mary Alice's cottage looking south - c. 1937. Courtesy of Carl Johansson.

Overleaf: Aerial view of Great Neck, Ipswich, taken November 2, 1962 by Lawrence Lowry. Courtesy of Elizabeth Mulholland Balch.





Drawing of area surrounding Alexander B. Clark's summer residence, now the Ipswich Bay Yacht Club (IBYC)

At Mr. Clark's death, Great Neck became a part of the trust set up under his will for the benefit of his grandchildren. His trustees continued the leasing of lots and opened new sections of Great Neck to tenants. In 1909, Mr. Clark had built a road to Little Neck, along which he laid out lots for lease as sites for summer cottages, from which the later real estate development stems.

In the early 1900's, sites for summer cottages were available for lease in sections of Great Neck. North Ridge offered a fine view of Plum Island Sound, the ocean beyond, and the marshes and hills of Rowley and Newbury. Stage Hill was skirted by Little Neck Road. Its subdivision, Bay View, adjoined a sandy beach and directly overlooked Ipswich Bay. Clark Head, opened for the season of 1940, occupied the highest section of the Neck and commanded a panoramic view of ocean and country side. Lots then were leased, never sold. Cottages had to comply with regulations of size, design, and color laid down by The Proprietors, and kept properly maintained. Following a practice not unusual for that period, tenants were carefully investigated and only

THIS
IS
GREAT NECK . . .



those were accepted who met the standards of a “first-class Christian American community.” The yearly land rent per lot at North Ridge and Stage Hill, including Bay View, was twenty-five dollars and thirty-five dollars at Clark Head plus a sum equivalent to the land tax levied by the Town of Ipswich. Each tenant also paid the tax levied by the Town on his buildings. The old road to the big house had been abandoned and North Ridge Road was built over the crest of the hill to provide access to the area. Skytop Road and Mulholland Drive, the newest streets on the Neck, were developed in the 1960’s and the 1970’s respectively.

Mr. Clark's daughter, Mary Alice, died in 1923 and after his older daughter, Eliza, died in 1938, the trust was dissolved and Great Neck passed into the ownership of Mr. Clark's grandchildren, who organized as The Proprietors of Great Neck, Inc. in 1939 and took over the management of Great Neck, leasing and later selling building sites for both summer and all-year suburban living. The first lot to be sold was 8 Bowdoin Road in September 1951, having been previously leased to the buyer. Today there is scarcely any buildable land remaining and Great Neck is becoming an area of substantial privately owned year-round homes, as additions are made to existing houses and some new ones are built.



View from hill across north lawn of A. B. Clark residence showing oar house and The Bluffs beyond.



A. B. Clark residence



Ipswich Bay from North Ridge Road, Ipswich, Massachusetts - c. 1950. Courtesy of Ipswich Historical Society.

The Mulhollands continued to spend summers in the big house after Mr. Clark's death, and eventually Mrs. Mulholland made it her year-round home until she advanced in years. In 1938, Grace Leland, a daughter, opened the empty house as an Inn, The Jeffrey House; and in 1940 the pier was built by The Proprietors. For several seasons, Elizabeth Balch, another daughter, and her husband operated it



The family of swans on Clark Pond

as a guest house and gave hospitality to the boating group that had been organized as the Ipswich Bay Yacht Club. The present oar house of the Yacht Club was moved down from farther up the hill where it had been used as a little one-room school house for Elizabeth and Grace, when Mrs. Mulholland prevailed on Miss Cora A. Jewett, who lived on East Street in town and taught in the school on Grape Island, to be the teacher of her two youngest children. With the coming of World War II, the big house was taken over by M.I.T. as living quarters for the men working on the pioneer radar project on the hilltop. With the return of peace, the Yacht Club was reborn and again sought quarters in the house, and since then has occupied it as a clubhouse. The Yacht Club purchased the house in 1976 from Peter N. Soffron, who had bought it from The Proprietors of Great Neck, Inc. in 1964 and built a house, where he presently resides, on a former piece of the property.

The pioneer radar project is still operating under the United States Air Force. Much research is going on at this Ipswich Testing Facility, which several years ago moved into a new large building. It fronts on what is now Skytop Road.

The Association of Great Neck, Inc. was formed in 1975 and incorporated in 1977. The organization is a non-profit, charitable corporation formed for the promotion of social, recreational, educational, and civic activities for the benefit of Great Neck residents and for the protection of natural resources. Any property owner or resident of Great Neck may become a member simply by paying annual membership dues.





A. B. Clark Beach and Marshes

On June 1, 1983, The Proprietors of Great Neck, Inc. deeded to The Association of Great Neck, Inc. the beach including Clark Pond and land surrounding for permanent future use by all residents and property owners of Great Neck. It was purchased for a nominal price and The Association of Great Neck, Inc. is grateful to The Proprietors of Great Neck for their concern and generosity. The beach is to be known as the A. B. Clark Beach, in honor of Alexander B. Clark, the boy from Peabody who foresaw his ownership of the hills of Great Neck and the development of them so that many could enjoy their beauty.

As quoted from the publication, "Jeffrey's Neck and the Way Leading Thereto", dated 1912 of the Ipswich Historical Society:

"Some trees have been planted, and a few have attained considerable size and vigor but with these slight exceptions, the great uplands and the water worn, boulder strewn slopes and gulleys remain as they have been since the ancient forest disappeared, still furnishing pasturage to the great herd of cattle and a few sheep and horses."

"But these bare moorlands, with their grand outlook over leagues of land and sea, their fertile soil, easily accessible over a substantial and attractive road, some day, it is to be hoped, will be utilized for the summer homes of many who love Nature, and need the joy and refreshment Nature is waiting to bestow."

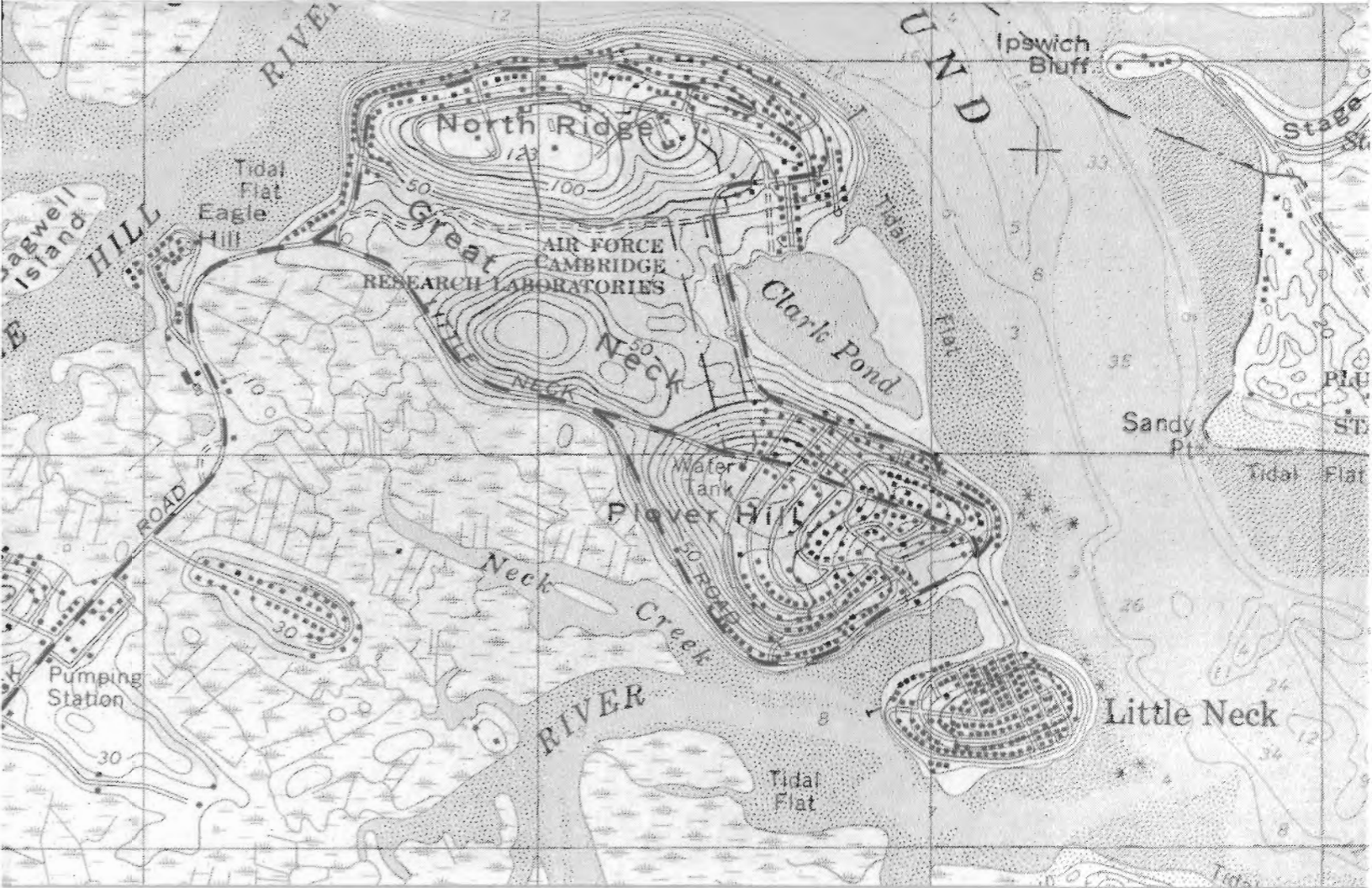
And today, 1984, it appears that the hope of 1912 has been more than realized.

History compiled by Doris H. Wilson, 8 Bowdoin Road, Ipswich, Massachusetts

May 1, 1984

Reference Resources:

1. Lecture on October 15, 1983 (Ipswich River Watershed Association) by Sarah Fraser Robbins, Naturalist
2. "Essex Life", Summer 1983
3. "Beverly Times", January 2, 1979
4. Lecture on April 22, 1981 (Ipswich Historical Society) by George H. W. Hayes, Attorney
5. "Jeffrey's Neck and the Way Leading Thereto" by Thomas Franklin Waters, 1912
6. Ipswich Assessors Office
7. Essex County Registry of Deeds
8. Title Search Report, Great Neck — The Proprietors of Great Neck, Inc.
9. "The Ipswich Bay Clipper", August 2, 1955 (Ipswich Bay Yacht Club Newspaper)
10. "Ipswich Speaks", Great Neck Tapes No. 52 and No. 53
11. "Ipswich Chronicle", September 20 and October 11, 1912
12. Talks with:
 - a. Alice Cora Mulholland Devaney (1903-1976)
 - b. Elizabeth Mulholland Balch
 - c. Mona Mulholland Snyder (Widow of Alexander B. Clark Mulholland, Sr.)



RIVER

UND

Ipswich Bluff

Stage

Bagwell Island

Tidal Flat
Eagle Hill

North Ridge

AIR FORCE
CAMBRIDGE
RESEARCH LABORATORIES

Clark Pond

Little Neck

Sandy Pt.

Tidal Flat

ROAD

Flover Hill

Water Tank

Neck

Creek

Pumping Station

RIVER

Little Neck

Tidal Flat