

**THE BILLINGS FARM AND MUSEUM/ROCKEFELLER MANSION  
WOODSTOCK, VERMONT: A SPECIAL REPORT**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Associate Director Denis Galvin requested a preliminary evaluation of several properties owned, managed, and funded by Laurance S. Rockefeller in Woodstock, Vermont. The Rockefeller Mansion (known as the George Perkins Marsh Boyhood Home National Historic Landmark (NHL) is nationally significant. The adjacent Billings Farm and Museum is a professionally managed cultural facility that interprets Vermont hill country agricultural history. The Special Report contains several recommendations concerning future management and operation of these resources including possible roles for the National Park Service (NPS). The report identifies five alternatives including: 1. Continuation of Existing Institutions; 2. Expand Role of Local/State Institutions; 3. Federal Turnkey Approach; 4. NPS Management of Mansion, Farm, and Museum; and 5. New England Conservation Heritage Project.

Marsh's book, Man and Nature, has become a classic in the history of conservation. It was published in 1864 the same year that Frederick Law Olmsted was in Yosemite Valley formulating his profound thesis of natural beauty.

Paul Brooks

Purchasing the Marsh property was both a wish fulfillment and a significant link in Frederick's (Billings) lasting admiration of George Perkins Marsh, whose pioneering work, Man and Nature, published in 1864 while Marsh was Minister to Italy, established the fundamental principles of conservation and to this day remains the ecologists bible.

Jane Curtis et.al.

In some sense conservation had been a natural area for him (Lawrence Rockefeller) to expand into, not only because of his father's long identification with that cause, but also it was a field that had touched on so many sensitive areas that it was obviously destined to play a significant role in the future life of the nation.

Peter Collier  
David Urowitz

## THE BILLINGS FARM AND MUSEUM/ROCKEFELLER MANSION WOODSTOCK, VERMONT: A SPECIAL REPORT

### INTRODUCTION

At the request of Associate Director, Planning and Development, Denis Galvin in mid-June, Senior Landscape Architect Rich Giamberdine and Supervisory Planner Ron Johnson from the Denver Service Center (DSC) traveled to Woodstock, Vermont on July 23-27 to inspect several properties owned, managed, and funded by Laurance S. Rockefeller. The Associate Director asked for a preliminary professional opinion of the resources as well as recommendations concerning future management and operation of the site including a possible role for the National Park Service (NPS).

These resources include the Billings Farm and Museum as well as Mr. and Mrs. Rockefeller's Woodstock estate overlooking the town of Woodstock in the Ottauquechee Valley. The museum (approximately 10 acres) in operation since 1983 interprets Vermont hill country farm life as well as the restored 1890 farm manager's residence and creamery. It is modelled after similar country estates found in England as well as Carter's Grove, an auxiliary property managed by Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia. The museum is open six months annually. It contains numerous Vermont farm life exhibits interpreting the 1890 period, a Vermont folklife collection, and a library/archives for research purposes. An operating (190 acre) dairy farm featuring championship Jersey cattle is heavily subsidized by Mr. Rockefeller. The facilities attracted 45,000 visitors in 1989. Directly across Vermont highway 12 the mansion and 40 acres used privately by the Rockefellers as a rural retreat, nestles at the foot of Mount Tom. These various cultural resource and landscape components combine to form a synergistic entity reflecting significance, integrity, feasibility, and suitability for possible National Park Service activity.

### EXISTING CONDITIONS

The appearance of Woodstock has remained attractive and has been described as the quintessence of New England. Substantial houses cluster around tree shaded yards and the historic commons. Stone, brick, and clapboard federal, victorian, and classically-styled residential, religious, and commercial structures reflect continuing interest and pride in this village of 3,000 inhabitants. Outbuildings such as barns, sheds, and carriage houses, specimen trees and shrubs, picket fences, fieldstone walls, wrought iron fixtures, brick or bluestone paving accentuate the visual appeal of Woodstock's cultural landscape.

The village nestles between wooded rolling hills with Mount Tom and Blake Hill framing the east/west borders. The Ottauquechee River meanders through the open fields and marshes of the Billings Farm and Museum adjacent to Woodstock's northern outskirts. The river crossings consist of an historic iron truss bridge on Elm Street as well as two wooden covered bridges, one near the village commons, the other four miles north of Woodstock.

The farm and mansion are afforded excellent landscape protection. Lands that abut the farm and mansion consist of other Rockefeller properties or public open space. The sightlines from the mansion's porches and windows are also protected with a view of the Billings Farm and Museum buildings and pastures. The high ground across the river to the east also consists of Rockefeller holdings. The landscape context and adjacent ownership allows the setting to reflect high integrity and

renders a convincing historic scene for the mansion and farm. A few small inholdings adjoin the farm and mansion where the Rockefeller interests have right of first refusal. Both farm and mansion benefit from the implementation of excellent planning and design decisions. The core historic fabric is a convincing 19th century scene. Twentieth century additions to accommodate public use on the farm are executed in a tastefully understated manner. Design, maintenance, and operation practices are exemplary.

## SIGNIFICANCE

The property is nationally significant. The mansion is a national historic landmark designated as the George Perkins Marsh Boyhood Home. Later it was owned by a railroad magnate (president of the Union Pacific), philanthropist, scientific farm owner, and conservationist Frederick Billings. The farm is listed on the Woodstock Village National Register of Historic Places designation as nationally significant. The farm and mansion complex reflects the contributions of Marsh to the intellectual underpinnings of the modern ecology movement, the practical application of late 19th century farm and forest management by Billings, and the efforts made by Laurance Rockefeller in the 20th century to perpetuate these earlier trends by helping preserve a significant cultural landscape. The farm complex clearly demonstrates the impact of the gentleman farmer and the application of scientific methods to late 19th century agriculture and reforestation.

The George Perkins Marsh Boyhood Home represents Theme XXXII Conservation of Natural resources--Subtheme A. Origin and Development of the Conservation Idea to 1870 illustrated in History and Prehistory in the National Park System and the National Historic Landmarks Program. The property also reflects Theme XI Agriculture--Subtheme F. Farming on the East Coast for local Markets (Dairying, Fruits, and Vegetables). Based on the recent study by Robin Winks, it is apparent that the Billings occupancy is co-equal in significance to the Marsh occupancy.

## INTEGRITY

The site possesses substantial integrity. The George Perkins Marsh Boyhood Home has been physically incorporated in the Victorian-era brick Rockefeller Mansion. The layout and appearance of the farm reflects the Billings stewardship, and the 1890 farm manager's residence has been professionally restored. The Billings Farm and Museum facility skillfully melds historic and contemporary development onsite. The surrounding landscape has been protected through various mechanisms including fee ownership, easements, private recreational development, public open space, and strong local development restrictions.

## ISSUES

According to the most recent (7-24-90) mission statement:

The Billings Farm & Museum preserves significant portions of the Billings mansion, farm, and forests--and interprets these to the public as an educational museum of Vermont's heritage and values. These preserved properties reflect the significant roles of George Perkins Marsh, Julia and Frederick Billings, and Mary and Laurance Rockefeller, in the development of an

American conservation ethic. Of special interest to the museum are the related cultural traditions and values of farm families in east central Vermont. Preservation of these properties also furthers the historical and environmental integrity of Woodstock.

Through the preservation and interpretation of this important heritage, the museum seeks to stimulate reflection and insight into the relevance of Vermont's rural values to the present and the future to Americans generally.

In March, 1987 the Billings Farm & Museum prepared a "Long-Range Plan" which contains the following goal:

Our long range goal is to eventually include the mansion, the farm and related facilities, and the forest as an integrated unit substantially as they were at the time of Frederick Billings.... We have. . .moved forward in the preservation of the Billings Farm heritage which was representative of farming in the 1890's and earlier in Vermont by establishing the Billings Farm & Museum. We hope to create a cultural and educational resource for the community and that this will help enhance the historic and contemporary values of Woodstock.

According to the local sources contacted during the fieldtrip, the principal issue at the Billings Farm and Museum is one of providing institutional continuity. Mr. Rockefeller is anxious to insure a professional level of management, operation, and interpretation be maintained at the various sites in the future. Presently the Woodstock Foundation, an entity managed and funded by Mr. Rockefeller, guides and subsidizes the Billings Farm and Museum. A 12 member professional staff organized into six divisions assumes day-to-day operations responsibilities. Over the past several years, the museum complex has operated at approximately a \$600,000 (and larger) annual deficit. There is no assurance that an effective level of funding and professional management can be maintained in the future. Thus Mr. Rockefeller is searching for an effective mechanism to perpetuate the professional management, protection, and operation of the properties. Apparently Mr. Rockefeller may be prepared to establish a sizeable endowment (approximately 10 million dollars according to the president of the Woodstock Foundation). But there is concern that this possible endowment be managed effectively in the future and that a qualified entity operate the property according to the high standards established by Mr. Rockefeller and his professional staff.

The active dairy farm also operates with a significant annual deficit (and apparently has for years). During the past several years the shortfall has run about \$300,000 annually. Apparently farm income is derived from the sale of milk, breeding stock, stock breeding services, and show prizes.

Also there is no guarantee that sympathetic local land protection controls will continue in place in the future to insure the preservation and enhancement of visual resources in the vicinity of the farm and mansion. The pressure of future development in Woodstock could negatively impact the museum and farm's visual qualities.

## THREATS

Currently there are no direct threats to the farm and mansion complex. The physical plant is in good repair. Of course this could change once the direct influence of Mr. Rockefeller diminishes or ceases.



## **MANAGEMENT/LEGISLATIVE ALTERNATIVES**

These possible management alternatives are suggestions made on the basis of a brief fieldtrip to Woodstock. The Denver Service Center professionals only met with the director of the Billings Farm and Museum, key staff, and the president of the Woodstock Foundation, and not with Mr. Rockefeller who was in New York. No public contacts were made.

If this project were to proceed, a viable public involvement program would have to be instituted to ensure buy-in by the Woodstock community in a state well known for its long tradition of local initiative and non-federal involvement. The following alternative futures and other possibilities would have to be tested rigorously through the planning as well as public involvement process.

### **SHARED ELEMENTS OF EACH ALTERNATIVE**

The first three of the following elements have been considered in this "Special Report", while the remaining three items and other special study prerequisites must be addressed in a more in-depth evaluation and analysis of the Woodstock based cultural, natural, scenic, and recreational resources.

- Continuation of the outstanding stewardship of cultural and landscape resources established and nurtured by George Perkins Marsh, Frederick Billings and Mr. and Mrs. Laurance S. Rockefeller.
- Continue to identify and manage historically significant elements of conservation and agricultural themes of the United States.
- Outline responsibilities for each institution(s) for management, development, preservation and interpretation.
- Identify costs to implement each alternative.
- Project capital and operating costs.
- Identify sources of revenue.

### **ALTERNATIVE 1 - CONTINUATION OF EXISTING INSTITUTIONS**

Continue present management and funding by the Woodstock Foundation. There is no assurance that adequate funding and empathetic management will continue in the future. As foundation board members change, so might interests that would place management of the farm and mansion in lower priority over time.

### **ALTERNATIVE 2 - EXPAND ROLE OF LOCAL/STATE INSTITUTIONS**

Under this arrangement two potential scenarios exist. The first being the conversion of the Woodstock foundation from a local endowment to land and facilities manager of the Billings Farm museum and



eventually the Mansion. The objective would be to continue present management and funding by the Woodstock Foundation. There is no assurance that adequate funding and empathetic management will continue in the future. As foundation board members change, so might interests that would place management of the farm and mansion in lower priority over time.

The second prospect is for the foundation to work with the state of Vermont to share management and funding responsibilities to operate some portion of the total complex. The interest of Vermont state parks, University of Vermont, and the Vermont Folklife Center would be pursued under Alternative 2.

The state could be invited to participate in the management and funding of the property in conjunction with the Woodstock Foundation. The state currently manages the Calvin Coolidge birthplace and home at nearby Plymouth Notch in a very effective manner. This site attracts 45,000 visitors annually. Also the state is beginning to develop the 18th century farm with great integrity known as the Theron Boyd property at Quechee, Vermont about six miles from Woodstock. At this point, the state may not have the financial and personnel resources to develop and manage another major property in the Woodstock area.

A major variation of Alternative 2 could address a state only operated complex. If the Woodstock Foundation chooses, it could endow the state with monies to continue operating the farm and museum. Many combinations of utilizing resources could be applied. State or local institutions will pay salaries for staff. The Woodstock Foundation could underwrite construction, maintenance, and rehabilitation.

### **ALTERNATIVE 3 - FEDERAL TURNKEY APPROACH**

Congress could establish a financial/technical NPS role for a specific duration. For instance for a limited interval, the NPS would provide technical assistance, provide staff, and money to the mansion for visitor use. Use of Woodstock Foundation, museum, farm, and curatorial personnel would be part of the extended team to coordinate a development/visitor use plan. After a four to six year period, the NPS role would be transferred to the Woodstock Foundation, state or other designated entity. The legislative approach would identify monies to prepare the mansion for visitor use. The mansion, carriage house, offsite parking facilities, and shuttle services would be developed. Positions for operations, protection, maintenance, and interpretation would be provided under this arrangement. This approach could also be tailored legislatively to have NPS operate the mansion and/or museum for four to six years with an option for a permanent role, based on future evaluation. Such an approach may be palatable to the Vermont political delegation.

This alternative might also work by having the area designated by Congress as an NPS affiliated area. Current ownership and management would remain in present form. Funding, technical assistance, and the application of appropriate standards would then be provided by the NPS.

#### **ALTERNATIVE 4 - NPS MANAGEMENT OF MANSION, FARM AND MUSEUM**

The NPS would be a logical entity to become involved with this site in some capacity due to the feasibility and suitability of these resources. This of course is heavily dependent on bi-partisan political support and an adequate level of funding for management, operations, and maintenance for this to occur.

Perhaps the most effective arrangement would be an overall NHS designation of the entire complex. The NPS would work in concert with the Woodstock Foundation to operate the site with the NPS primarily concerned with the development and management of the mansion at the appropriate time with funding provided by the federal sector. The Woodstock Foundation would continue to operate the Billings Farm and Museum in technical concert with the NPS. This portion of the property would be funded by visitor admissions, sales, membership fees, donations, and an endowment established by the Woodstock Foundation.

As for the modern dairy operation, the Woodstock Foundation could either operate the farm directly or lease it to a willing party. In any case, the operation of the farm should be continued for an effective and interesting visitor experience. Currently there are a number of privately or publicly active agricultural-based museums around the nation including Old Bethpage on Long Island, Sturbridge Village and Plymouth Plantation in Massachusetts, a farmer's museum at Cooperstown, New York, Old World Wisconsin, the Iowa Farm Museum, and agricultural operations at Greenfield Village in Michigan among others.

It does not make sense for the NPS to own and manage the dairy farm. According to informed sources at the Billings Farm and Museum, the dairy operation has to be subsidized heavily by Mr. Rockefeller--there is no assurance that the NPS could support the facility without special appropriations. Currently the NPS operates several farms among them the Oxenhill Farm in Maryland, the goat herd at Carl Sandberg in North Carolina, the Booker T. Washington facility in Virginia, and the LBJ ranch in Texas as well as numerous historic farm sites part of Civil War battlefields. This farm complex is more complicated to operate than farm fields leased for crop or hay production or any living history programs now operating in the system.

Also there is no good reason for the NPS to assume management of the museum portion of the complex. This facility has been professionally managed and operated by the existing staff under direction of the Woodstock Foundation. In addition the exhibits deal with local, state, and regionally significant resources rather than the national story. The current operators are effectively managing the museum.

#### **ALTERNATIVE 5 - NEW ENGLAND CONSERVATION HERITAGE PROJECT**

Due to its cooperative implications beyond Woodstock (as well as the limited focus of this special report), alternative 5 is presented in embryonic format only. New England can proudly boast of many writers, artists, and philosophers that helped shape the American conservation ethic. New Englanders such as Emerson, Thoreau, Olmstead, and Marsh had lasting influence in the development of the conservation movement in the nineteenth century. The impact of Billings and Rockefeller is well known. Consequently the conservation tradition lives today in the form of parks, historic sites, national forests, and greenline areas such as the Adirondak Forest Preserve in New York. Seemingly this

significant national theme could be treated effectively with an intra-regional programmatic approach based on interpretive methodologies rather than traditional site management.

The Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller Mansion fulfills at least one theme conservation of natural resources reflecting the 1870s. Marsh is a pivotal figure in the wellspring of the conservation movement. Frederick Billings advances the story. Laurance Rockefeller is a key figure and renowned conservationist in more recent times. An exciting opportunity exists to tie together numerous facets of America's unique conservation heritage. This site can add a significant role due to the influence of its occupants over two centuries and their exemplary stewardship over the land. At this point George Perkins Marsh is practically invisible at the Billings Farm and Museum as well as at the mansion. This **option** would strive to highlight and interpret Marsh's contributions as well as other seminal figures in the conservation movement.

Alternative 5 calls for an expanded interpretive focus by the site's manager. A considerable collection of landscape paintings by artists is displayed at the mansion that challenges interpreters to enhance the influences that artists had in distinguishing culture with the natural beauty of the United States.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE NPS ACTIVITY**

Given the significance of this site in United States history, the interests of the NPS and the politics at work in New England, it is important to think about our next steps. If the NPS is funded to conduct a study of alternatives, the Washington office should call a strategy session to flush out issues, subjects of concern, and identify a methodology to conduct this study. The meeting would include Director James Ridenour, Associate Director Denis Galvin, Associate Director Jerry Rogers, Regional Director Gerry Patten, and Chief Historian Ed Bearss, Historian Ben Levy, Senior Landscape Architect Rich Giamberdine, and Supervisory Planner Ron Johnson, due to their knowledge of the project. Representatives from the Vermont delegation with specific knowledge about Woodstock should also attend and the agenda should address what, when, who, and how. The delegation would help NPS scope the issues of local politics of Woodstock.

Team composition is very important, as is experience, and background with partnership projects involving an array of institutions and alternative methods of management and protection. In situations like Woodstock, knowledge of the political environment should precede performing actual field work. One or two weeks of making informal contacts with the congressional delegation, state and local officials, local citizens, and Woodstock Foundation would be valuable to understand people, issues, institutions, and local subtleties. It might also be prudent to use the state of Vermont, Woodstock Foundation, or their consultants as the lead on this study with several NPS personnel serving on the team. Without question, NPS has the best credentials and skills to develop a study of alternatives, but there are situations where a study should be managed by those with roots in the area. Consultants are routinely employed by the foundation for planning, design and construction projects. In this instance, we are dealing with people that are familiar and work with processes similar to the NPS approach.

## CONCLUSION

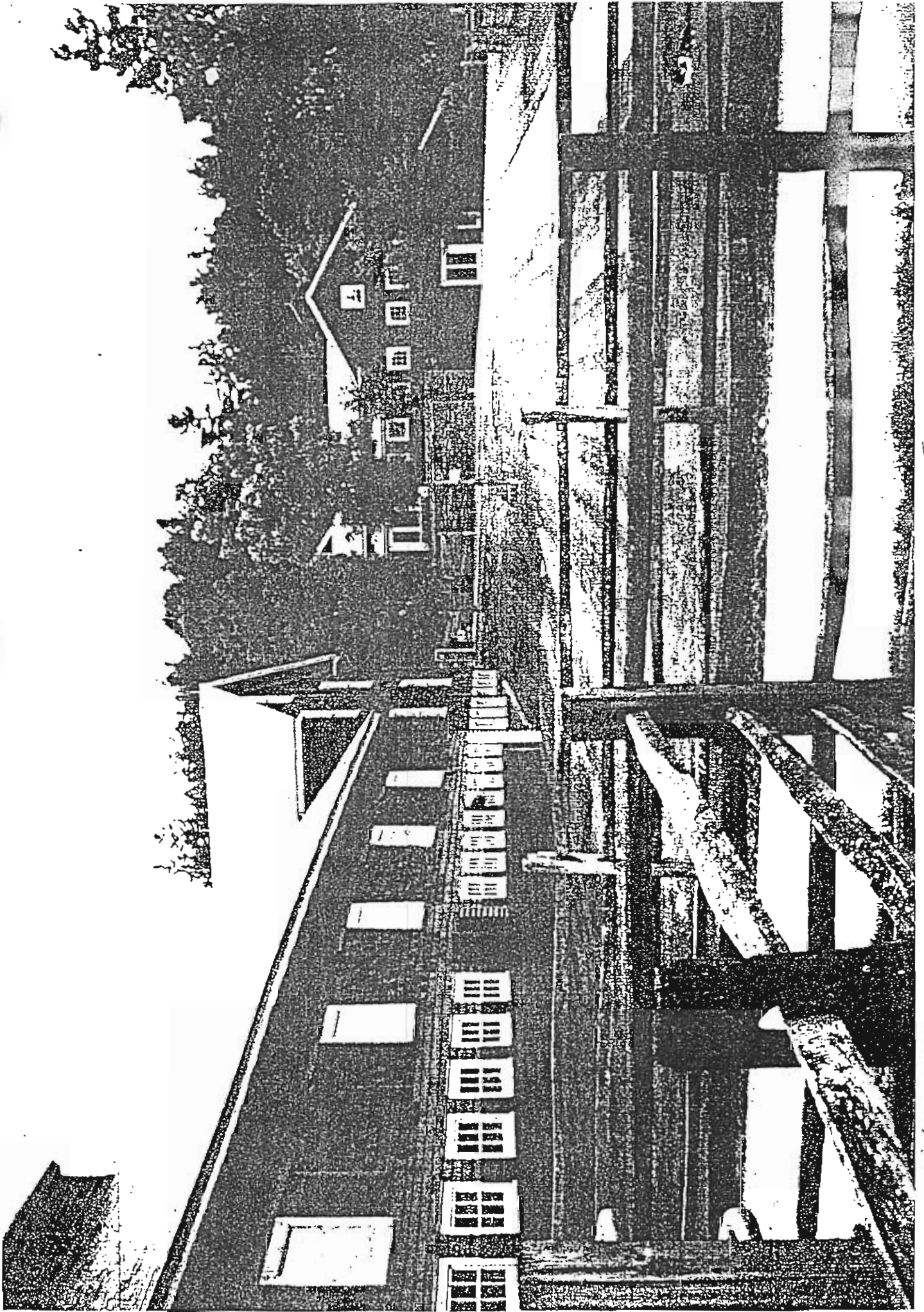
There are few instances to report regarding candidate areas for possible NPS management or involvement wherein visitor use, land protection, historic preservation, maintenance, and interpretation are so well established and professionally managed. Facilities layout and design elements are of high quality with attention given to use of native materials, historic fabric, and ability to blend skillfully with the historic scene.

The NPS has an exciting and timely opportunity to become involved in some capacity with this nationally significant resource. Future project work depends on the quality and experience of planners and technicians assigned to the job to provide a well documented foundation for possible subsequent design and construction activity as well as park operations if so directed. The project must be coordinated effectively with Mr. and Mrs. Rockefeller as well as the Woodstock community to maximize opportunities as well as minimize pitfalls for the NPS.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

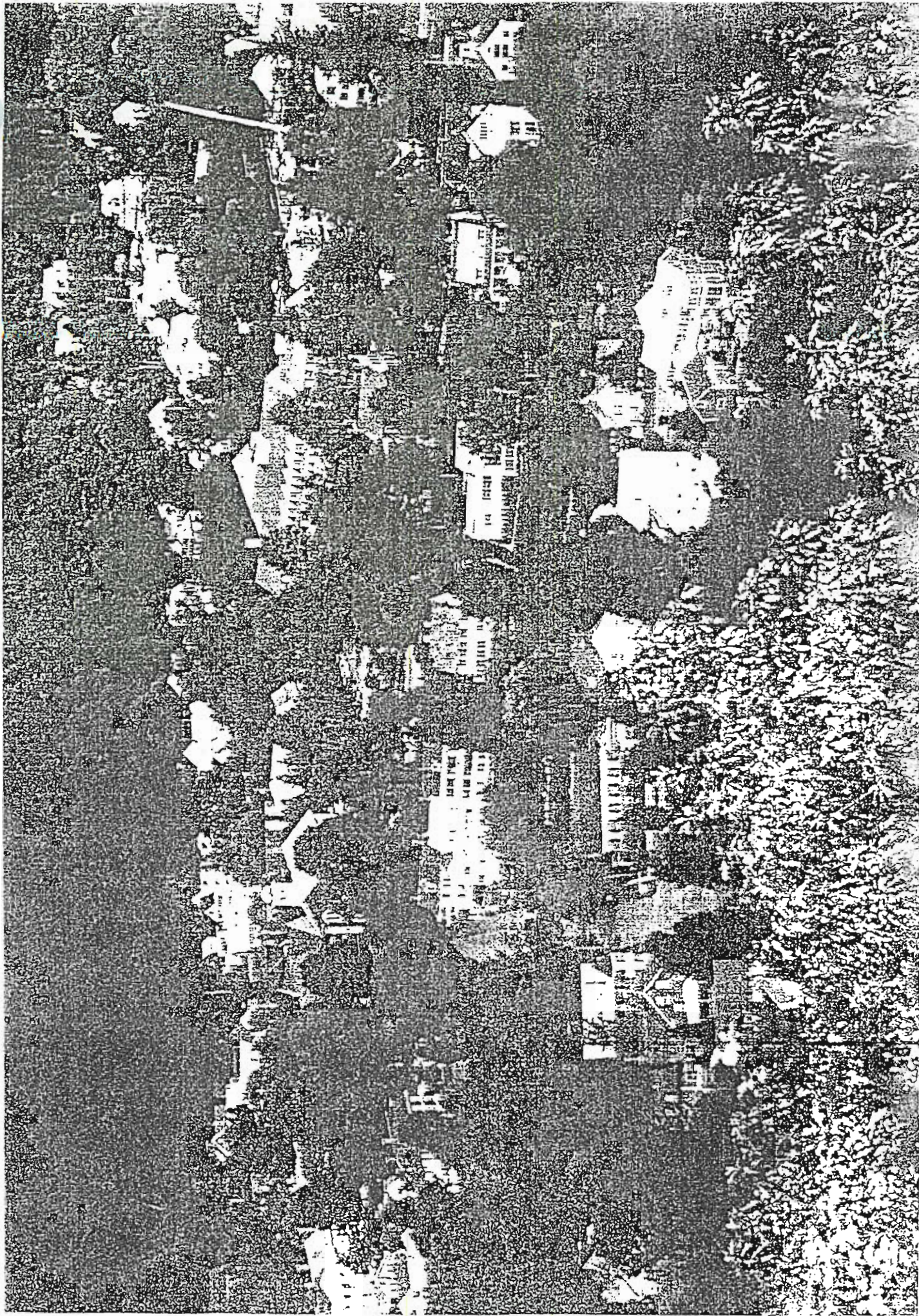






THE BILLINGS FARM MUSEUM ON THE RIGHT, THE BARN IS ON THE LEFT



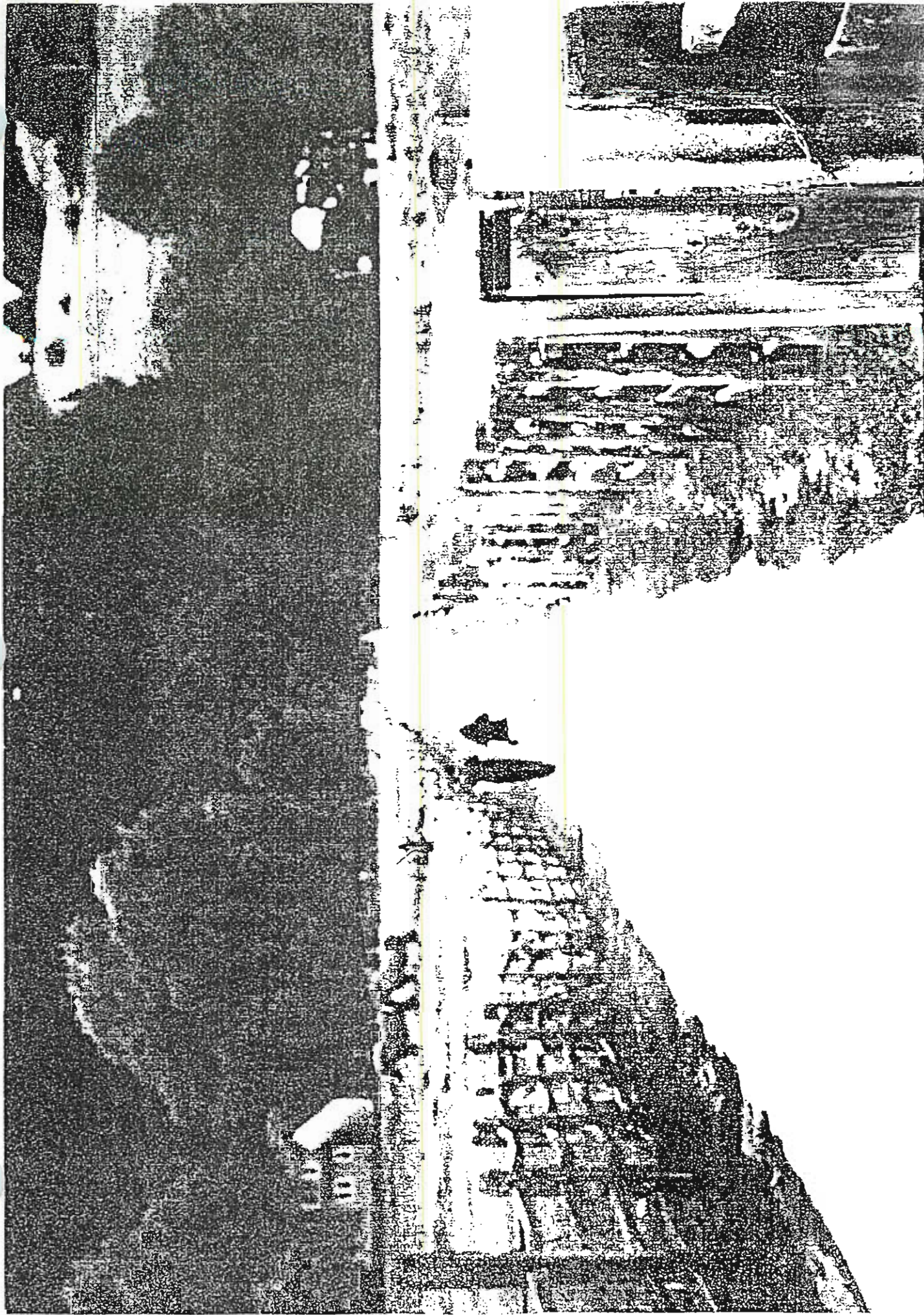


View of tenement district, showing the large houses in the foreground.



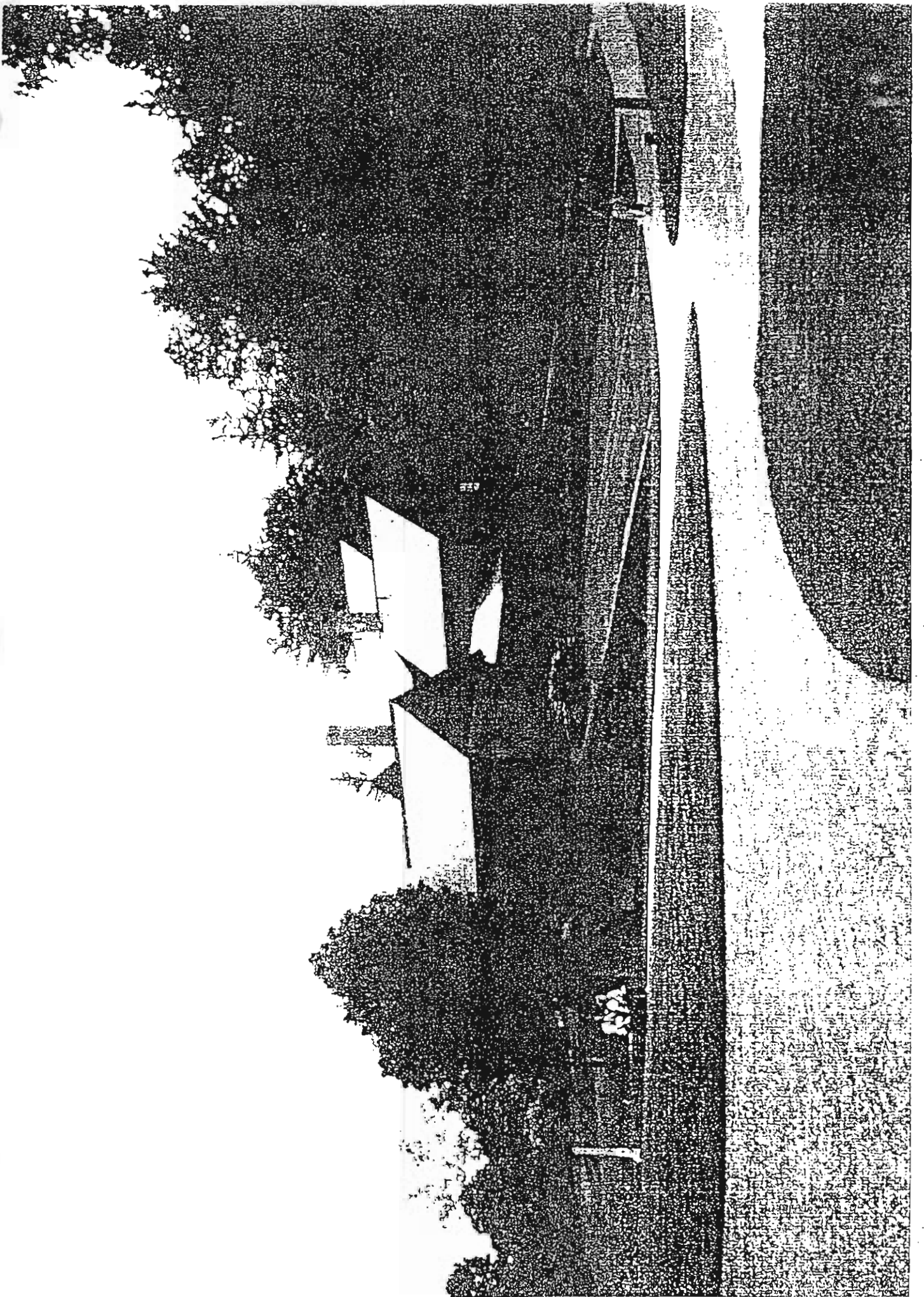




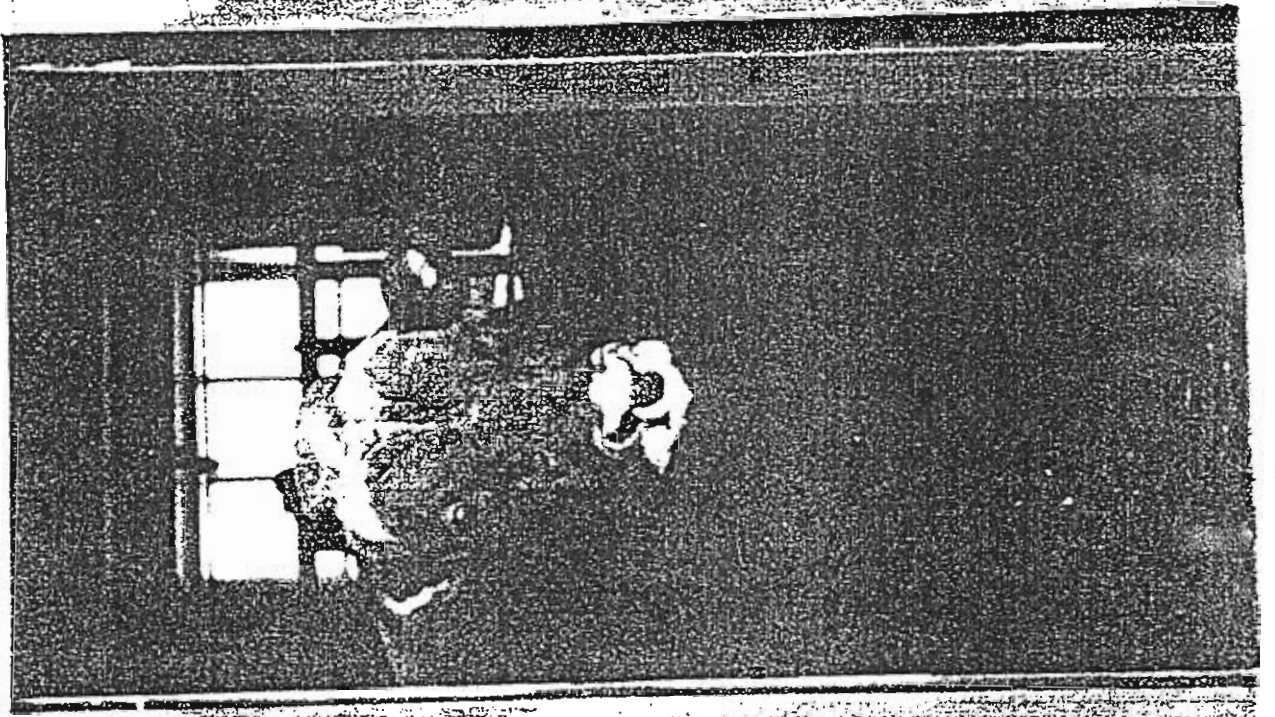
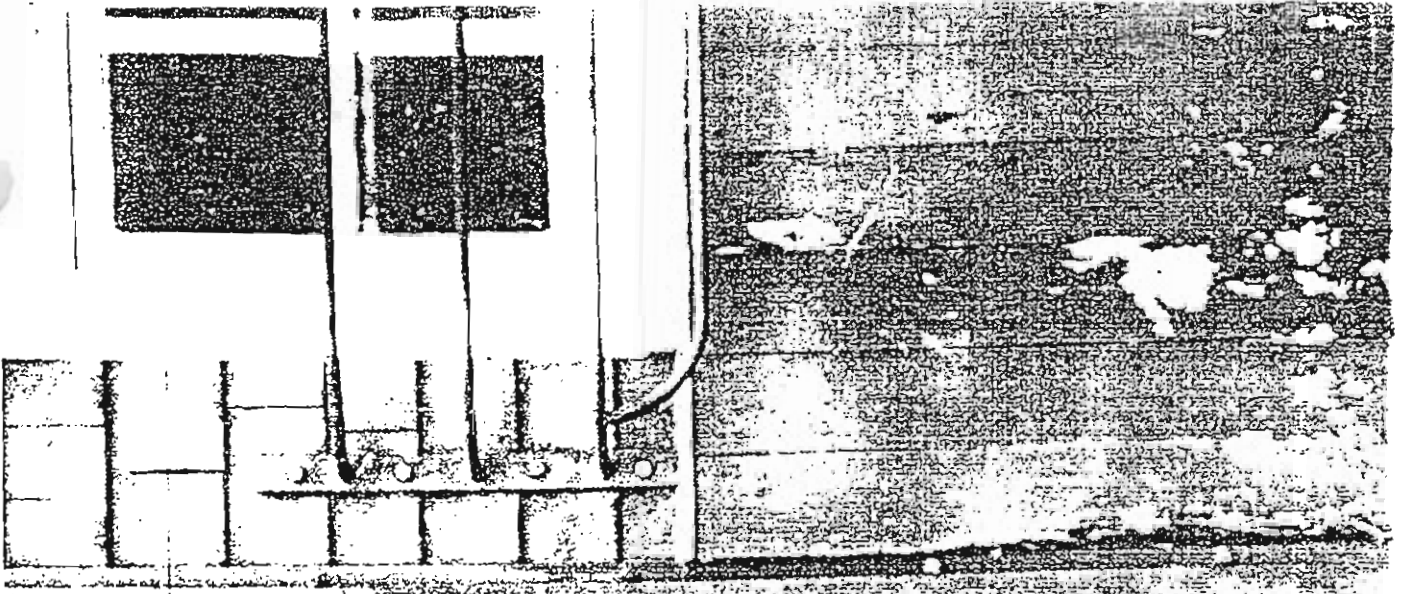


VIEW OF FARM HOUSES WITH COUNTRY LAKE ACCESS



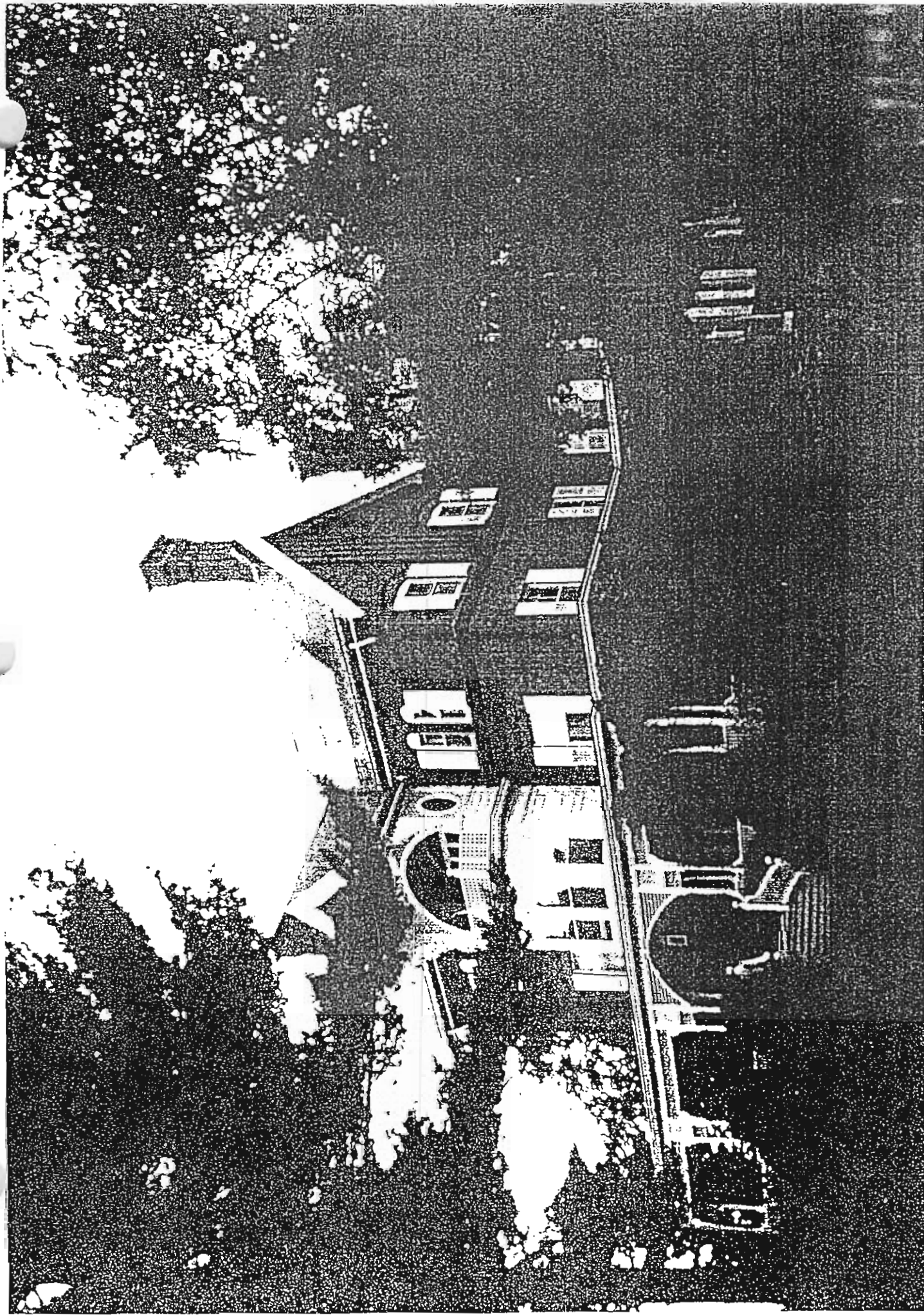


View of the building from the road, showing the large chimney and the surrounding trees.



1/1/71



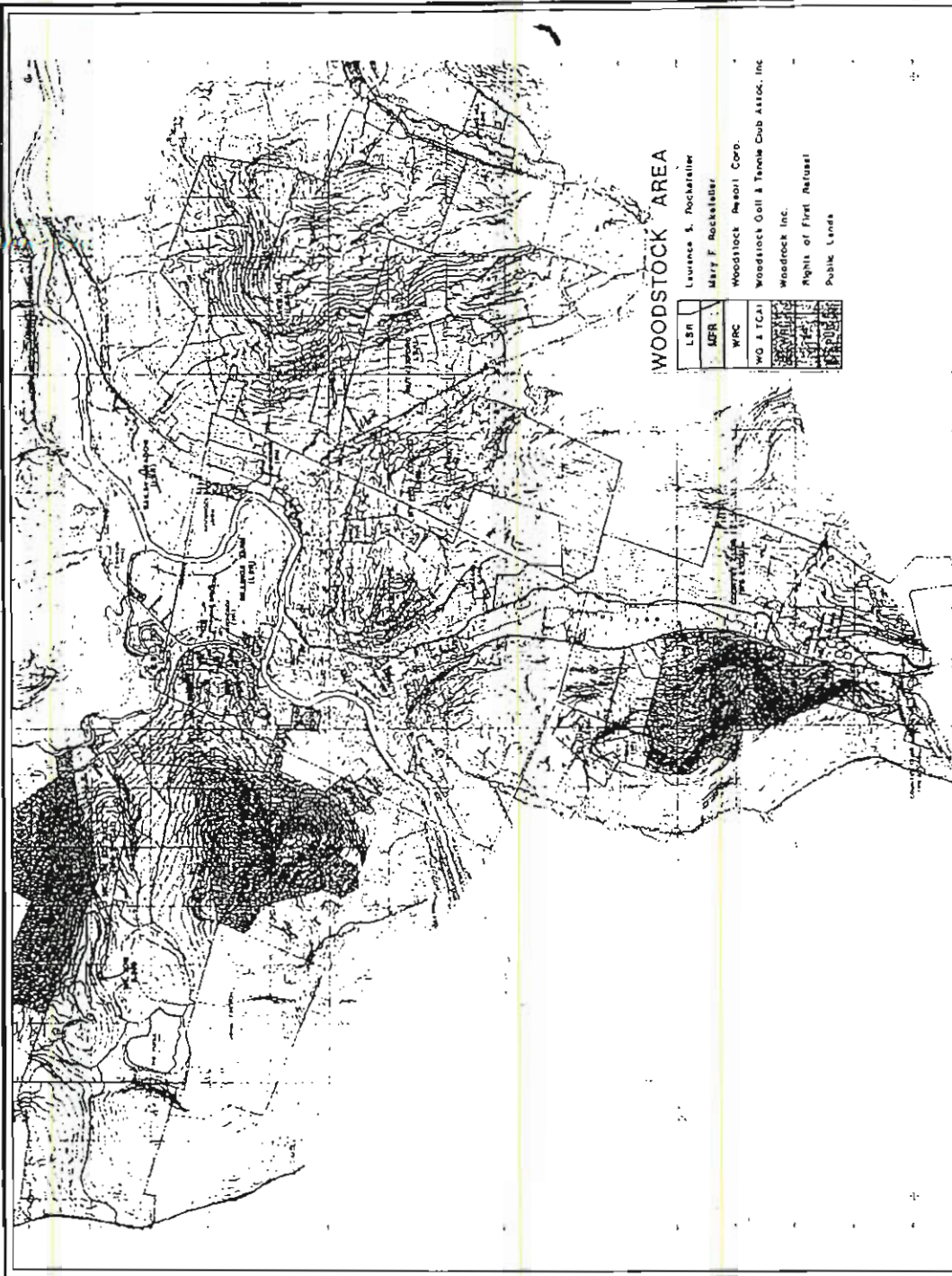


VIEW OF THE MANSION, BUILT BY THE LATE MR. JAMES H. HARRIS, JR., OF NEW YORK CITY. THE BUILDING WAS DESIGNED BY THE ARCHITECT JAMES H. HARRIS, JR., AND WAS COMPLETED IN 1900.

MAPS



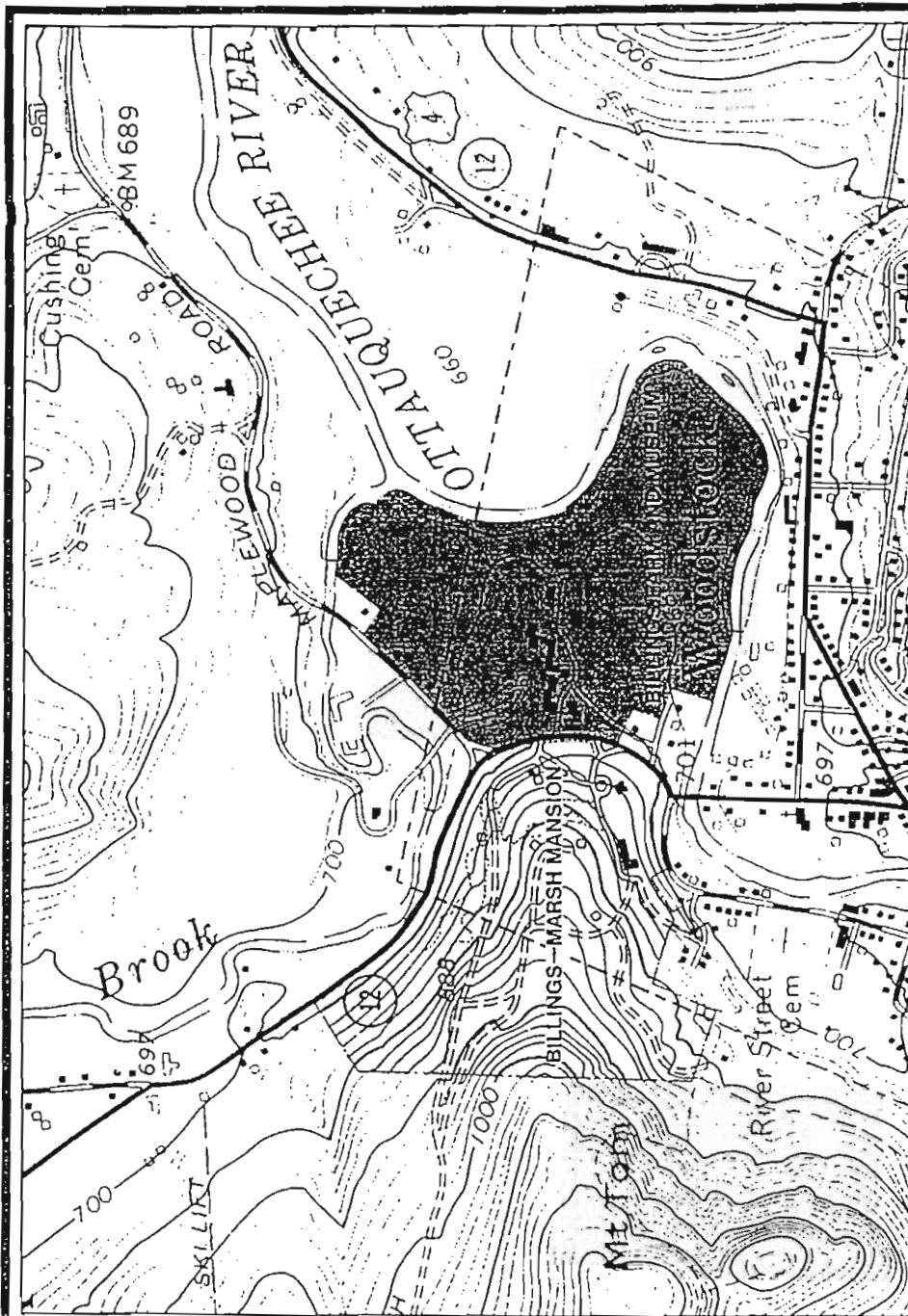




OWNERSHIP

PROPERTY STUDY  
WOODSTOCK, VERMONT

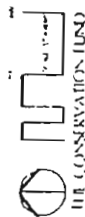
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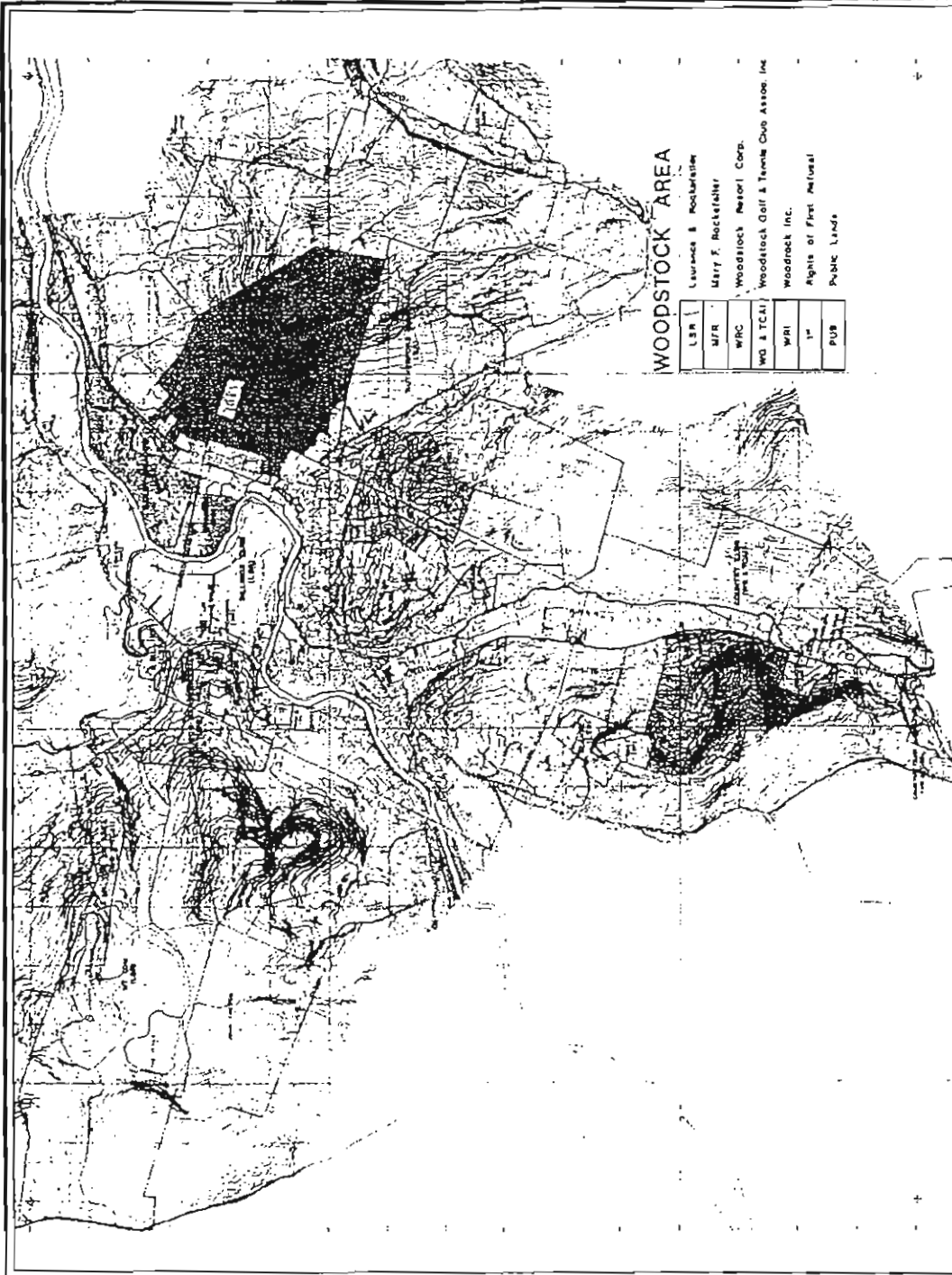


HISTORIC CORE

PROPERTY STUDY  
WOODSTOCK, VERMONT

APRIL 1990





# PROTECTION ISSUES

THE LAND USES OF THE WOODSTOCK AREA

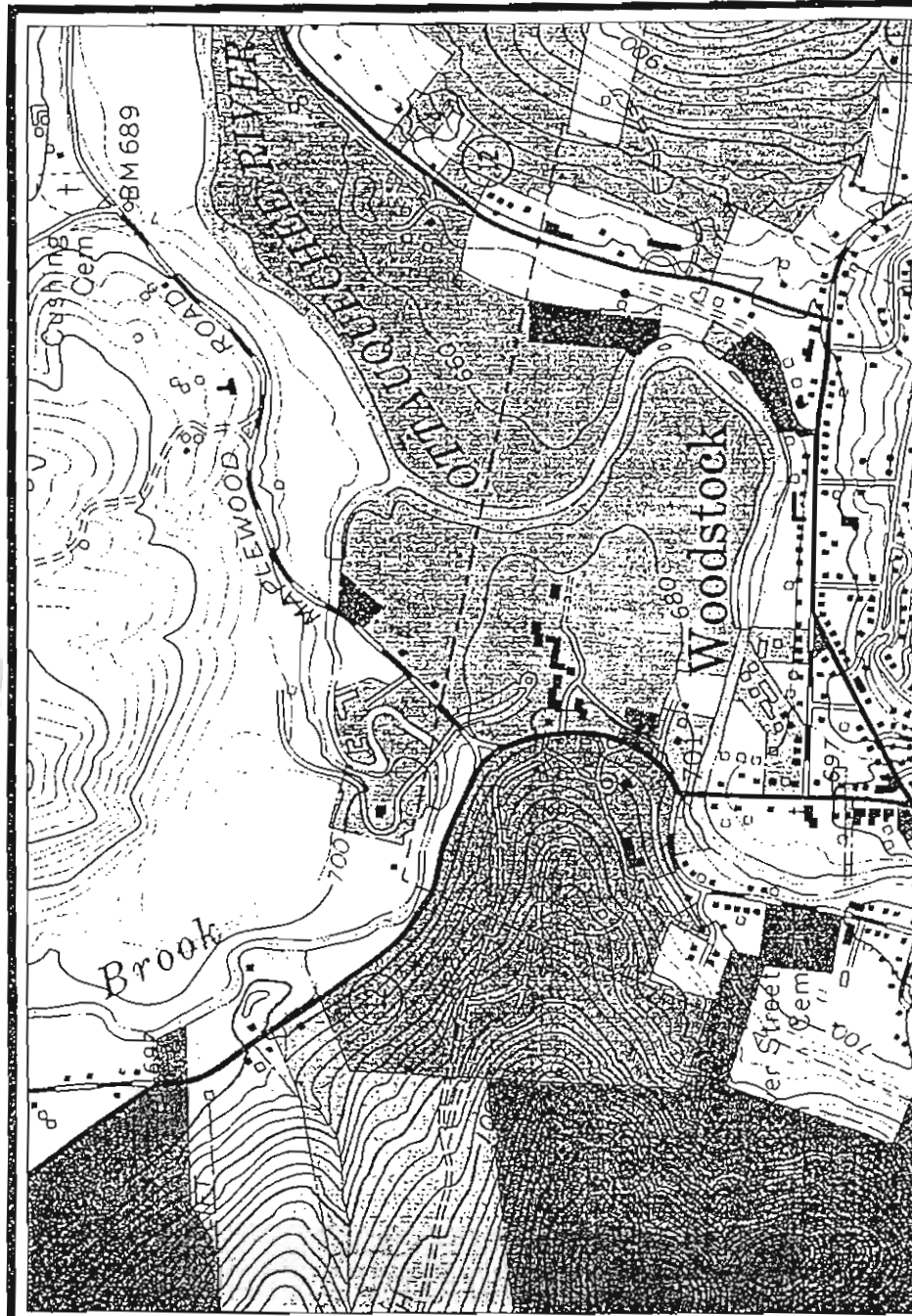
• PRESENT LAND USE

• PROPOSED LAND USE

PROPERTY STUDY  
WOODSTOCK, VERMONT

APRIL 1990

W. WOODSTOCK, VERMONT



# OWNERSHIP

□ LAURANCE S. ROCKEFELLER

□ MARY F. ROCKEFELLER

□ WOODSTOCK RESORT CORP.

□ WOODROCK INC.

■ RIGHTS OF FIRST REFUSAL

■ PUBLIC LANDS

## PROPERTY STUDY WOODSTOCK, VERMONT

APRIL 1990

