

CREEDMOOR STATE HOSPITAL

HABS No. NY-6343

~~(Creedmoor Psychiatric Center)~~

80-45 Winchester Boulevard (site bounded by
Union Turnpike on the north, Hillside Avenue
on the south, Winchester Boulevard on the
west, and 240th, 24st, and 242nd streets
on the east)

Queens
Queens County
New York

HABS
NY
41-QUEE,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service

Northeast Region

Philadelphia Support Office

U.S. Custom House

200 Chestnut Street

Philadelphia, P.A. 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
CREEDMOOR STATE HOSPITAL (Creedmoor Psychiatric Center)

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1-

HABS No. NY-6343

Location: 80-45 Winchester Boulevard (site bounded by Union Turnpike on the north, Hillside Avenue on the south, Winchester Boulevard on the west, and 240th, 241st, and 242nd streets on the east) Queens, Queens County, NY 11426

Present Owner: New York State Department of Mental Health

Present Use: Psychiatric Hospital

Statement of

Significance: Creedmoor State Hospital was opened in 1912 as a small farm colony. During the 1920s and early 1930s the grounds were developed into a major psychiatric center housing thousands of patients and staff members in a series of substantial Colonial- and Byzantine-inspired buildings. This construction reflects the major expansion of New York State's psychiatric hospitals during the third and fourth decades of the 20th century, as the state became increasingly involved in psychiatric care.

PART I: HISTORY OF CREEDMOOR STATE HOSPITAL

New York State first became involved in the care of the indigent insane in 1806 when the State Legislature authorized the contribution of \$12,500 per year, for fifty years, to the Society of The New York Hospital which treated psychiatric patients at its hospital in New York City, founded in 1771.¹ The New York Hospital, a private institution with a Board of Directors representing the city's social and financial elite, was the first institution in the state to offer humane care for the insane. The state's contribution to the hospital was increased by \$10,000 in 1816 in order to aid the hospital in the construction of a new rural facility known as the Bloomingdale Asylum (located at what is now Broadway and West 116th Street, New York City; now the site of Columbia University).²

The Bloomingdale Asylum was never large enough to care for all New York State residents suffering from mental problems and the hospital was never anxious to accommodate too many indigent patients who could not pay for their care. The problems of caring for the indigent insane increased, until finally, in 1843, the state established the State Lunatic Asylum in the upstate city of Utica. The Utica asylum was inconvenient for many state residents, especially those living in the New York City area. Thus several county-funded asylums were organized in the next few years, notably in New York County and Kings County (Brooklyn); these later became state institutions. In addition, the state's system of mental institutions expanded rapidly between 1869 and 1890, with the inauguration of six new hospitals.

In 1890, the New York State Legislature passed the State Care Act which sought to centralize the care of the mentally ill in large institutions, each of which would serve a separate geographic area. It was hoped that a few large hospitals would be more economical to run than a larger number of small hospitals and, it was thought that patients would receive better care because a

¹ A thorough history of New York Hospital's service to those with psychiatric problems, at its main hospital, at the Bloomingdale Asylum, and at later buildings, can be found in William Logie Russell, *The New York Hospital: A History of the Psychiatric Service 1771-1936* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945).

² Much of the history of New York State's mental institutions is based on Judith Botch, *A History of Mental Health Care Institutions in the United States and New York State* unpublished draft report (New York: The Bureau of Field Services New York State Department of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation, 1986).

large institution could deal with a greater variety of problems. The act also renamed the asylums as "hospitals." This act was to have a far reaching affect on New York's mental institutions well into the twentieth century and it was this philosophy of large hospital complexes that led to the development of Creedmore Hospital in the 1920s and 1930s.

The 1890 State Care Act permitted municipal and county asylums to apply for entry into the state system. In 1896, hospitals in the New York City area became part of the system. Between 1890 and 1910, the number of institutionalized mental patients in New York State more than doubled (31,280 in 1910; 90% in state institutions), but the organization of new hospitals and construction of new buildings did not keep pace. The one new hospital that did open in the early twentieth century was a small branch of the Long Island State Hospital in Brooklyn which would develop into Creedmoor State Hospital.

The hospital that was later to be named Creedmoor was initially authorized by the New York State Legislature in 1908 and opened in 1912. The hospital was organized as a farm colony for the Long Island State Hospital in Brooklyn. Farm colonies, where patients grew agricultural products, were common at state hospitals. These farms not only provided a therapeutic work environment for patients, but also supplied fresh produce to the hospitals, improving patient's diets and cutting hospital costs. Creedmoor Hospital continued to maintain a working farm, probably into the 1950s. The farm was located to the north of the central portion of the hospital's property, on the north side of Union Turnpike (hospital construction began in this area in 1956).

The Long Island State Hospital was founded as the Kings County Lunatic Asylum in about 1850. As has been noted, this county establishment became part of the state system in 1896. The hospital's farm colony was located in a relatively rural section of northeastern Queens County. The property was part of the old Creed family farm.³ The Creed property had been divided into smaller parcels in the 19th century, including one used as a rifle club and as a National Guard rifle range. The rifle range was located on what is now the western portion of Creedmore Hospital. The National Guard erected several small buildings on the site and adapted a farmhouse of c.1890 for its needs. Streets in the vicinity were given names relating to firearms,

³ Steven Ruttenbaum, "Historic and Natural Districts Inventory Form: Creedmoor [sic] Psychiatric Center," prepared for the Division of Historic Preservation, New York State Parks and Recreation (1983).

including Winchester Boulevard, Musket Street, and Range Street. When the farm colony moved onto the property, the house and the guard buildings were simply adapted for the relatively modest needs of the small number of patients and staff members assigned to the farm community (see map 1).

In the 1920s and 1930s, New York State undertook an unprecedented expansion of facilities at its mental hospitals. The state came to realize that its hospitals were too small and facilities were not up to modern standards. This was accentuated in 1923 when a fire at Manhattan State Hospital killed several patients and hospital workers. Following the fire, the State Legislature passed a \$50,000,000 bond issue for new construction at the mental hospitals.

It was during this period of expansion that Creedmoor developed into a major psychiatric center. Originally known as the Creedmoor Division of Brooklyn State Hospital, Creedmoor became an independent institution in 1935. Almost all of the buildings on the Creedmoor campus date from the 1920s and the early 1930s. The construction of the hospital's first permanent buildings began in 1922 with work on two buildings for patient housing, as well as a kitchen and a power plant (now North Group, Buildings O and P, kitchen No. 1, and power house 6; see map 2). These four buildings, designed under the auspices of New York State Architect Lewis F. Pilcher, are all lowrise brick structures with modest Romanesque-inspired ornament; the kitchen and patient buildings are arranged in a planned court-like unit with the kitchen building at the head of a courtyard and dormitories extending in front. The scale, materials, style, and planned arrangement of parts were to be repeated in later buildings.

Substantial additional construction, including patient housing, staff housing, an administration building, a kitchen, and support facilities, began in 1925 under the supervision of State Architect Sullivan W. Jones. Jones' buildings are also lowrise brick structures (generally three stories tall) set in planned units. Most of his buildings were designed in a Colonial Revival style, although a few make use of the Romanesque features employed by Pilcher. Sullivan was succeeded in 1928 by William E. Haugaard, under whose supervision the number of buildings at Creedmore more than doubled. Haugaard also designed lowrise complexes in the Colonial Revival and Neo-Romanesque styles. Among the later are the "employees group" that includes buildings X, Y, and Z. Buildings X and Y and the large interconnected complex of patient rooms, kitchen, and offices located to the north, were erected in 1931-32; Building Z was erected a few years later, in 1933-34. These building are located at the southeast corner of the property, extending the built up portion of the hospital grounds towards the institution's eastern boundary.

The buildings erected in the 1920s are sited close to Winchester Boulevard where the main entrance to the hospital is located (see map 2). They are aligned with the angle of the street. The complex erected in the early 1930s is generally aligned with the earlier structures (it is just slightly off alignment). These later buildings, however, are near the eastern edge of the complex, with the staff housing adjacent to Hillside Avenue, at a point where Hillside angles to the northeast. The placement of the staff buildings leaves a triangular area at the southeast corner of the campus. This "left-over" site does not appear to have ever been put to a formal use. It is laid out as a lawn with trees and fences along the perimeters and appears to have been used for informal activities, such as patient and employee recreation and neighborhood baseball games.

Creedmoor's expansion slowed after 1932, although a few new structures were erected in the late 1930s and early 1940s. During the 1930s, part of the campus was landscaped, largely with funds contributed by the WPA. Unfortunately, when WPA funding was discontinued in the early 1940s only a portion of the planned landscaping had been completed. Some of the evergreen trees, plane trees, and other relatively mature plantings at Creedmoor may date from the WPA period. This may include the plane trees that line Avenue F in front of Building Y.

Recent decades have witnessed dramatic changes in psychiatric care; new medicines to control patient behavior, the deinstitutionalizing of the majority of people with psychiatric problems, etc. However, Creedmoor continues to serve as a state institution serving a needy population. In the early 1990s rehabilitation work had been completed or was being undertaken on many buildings, including Building Y, where work was underway in the summer of 1993 (HABS No. NY-6343-A). In addition, construction began in 1993 on a senior citizen housing project on the lawn at the southeast corner of the property (shown in photographs).

Part II. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Primary and unpublished sources:

Creedmoor State Hospital, *Annual Reports, 1937-1957.*

Kings County State Hospital, *Annual Reports, 1915-1936.*

Ruttenbaum, Steven. "Historic and Natural Districts Inventory Form: Creedmoor Psychiatric Center," prepared for the Division of Historic Preservation, New York State Parks and Recreation (1983).

B. Secondary and published sources:

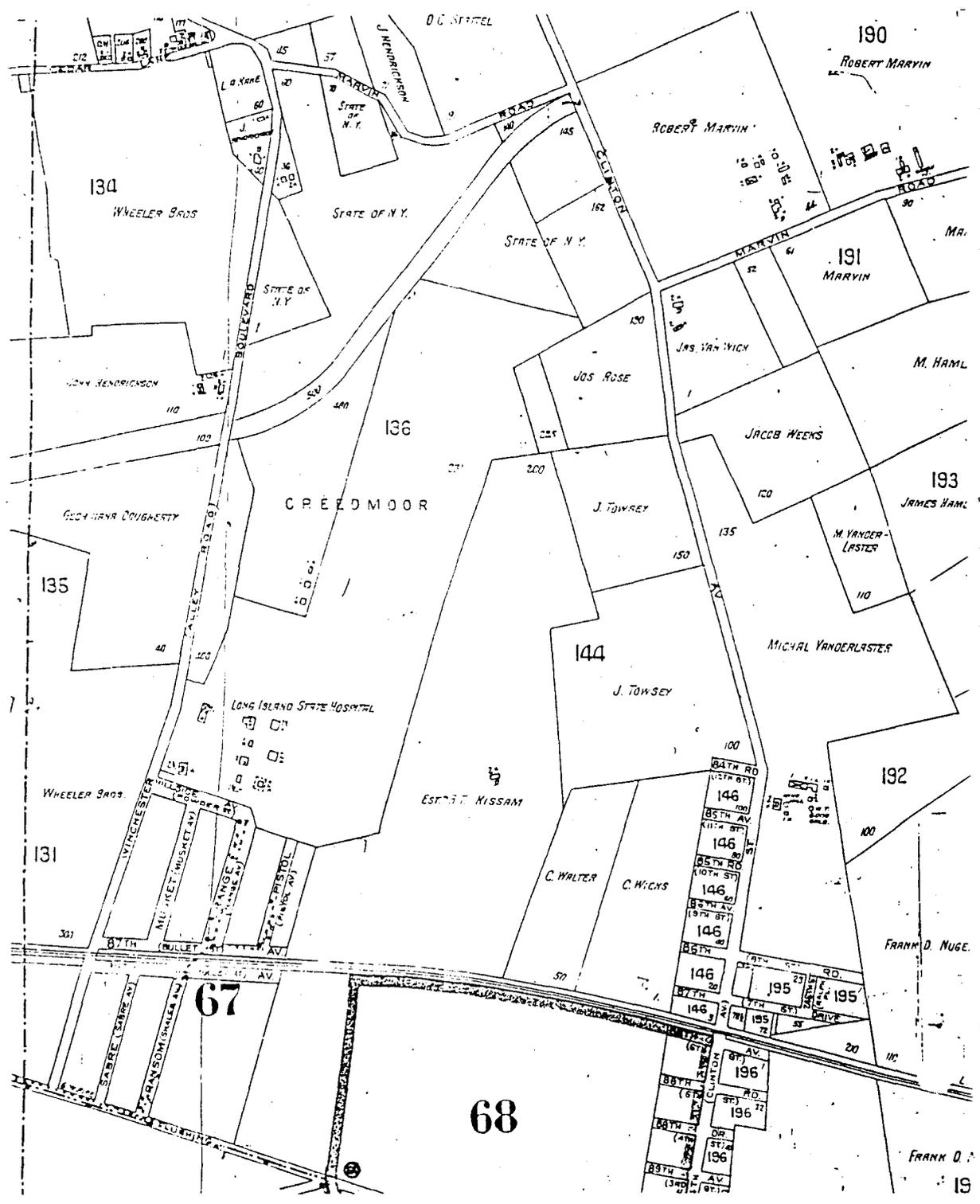
Botch, Judith. *A History of Mental Health Care Institutions in the United States and New York State* unpublished draft report (New York: The Bureau of Field Services New York State Department of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation, 1986).

Hurd, Henry M. *The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1916).

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

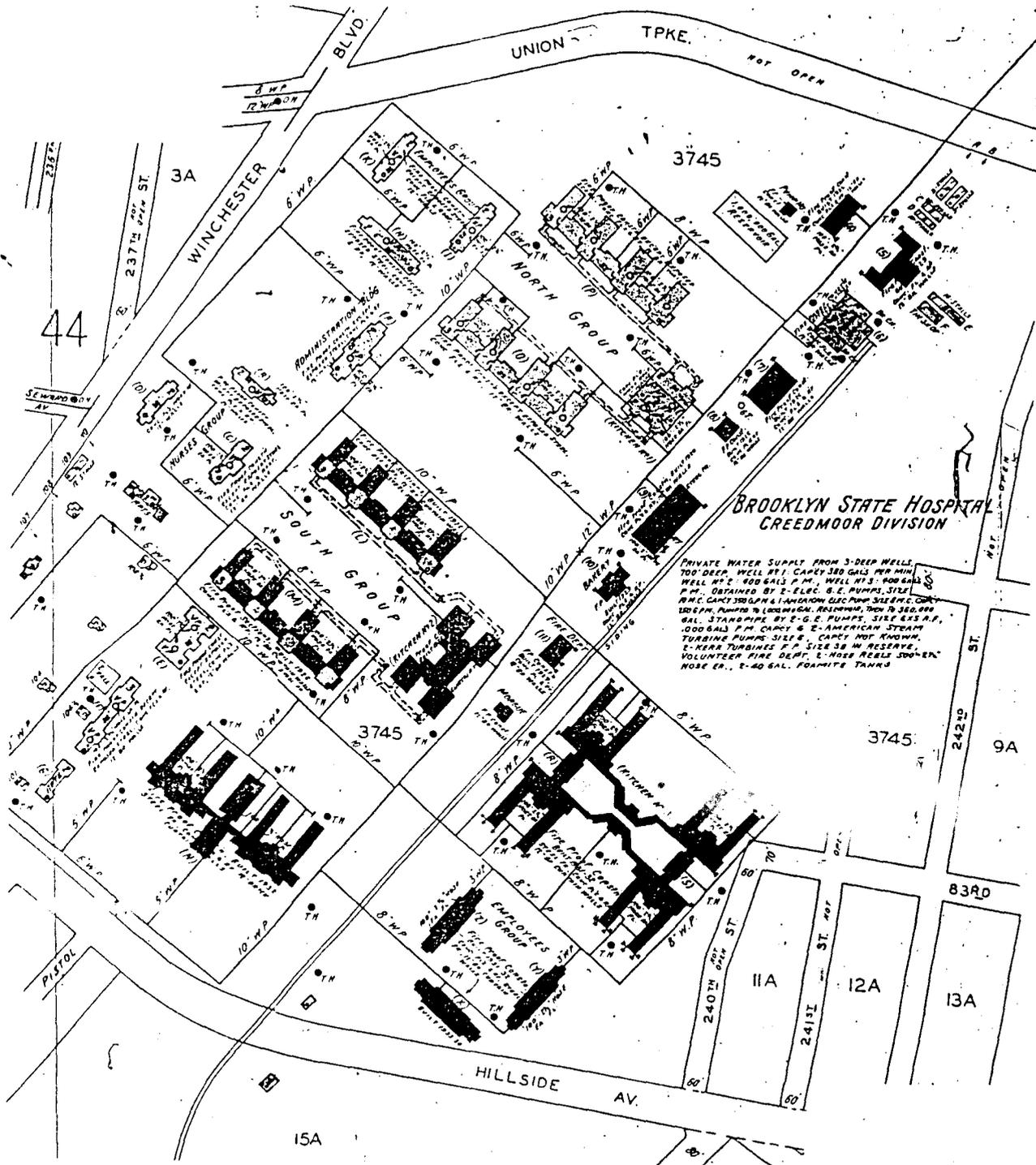
This project undertaken in compliance with an agreement between the National Parks Service and the New York State Office of Historic Preservation as a mitigative effort permitting the construction of housing for senior citizens on a lawn located at the southeast corner of the Creedmoor site. The HABS documentation was completed in 1994 under the supervision of Belmont Freeman of the architectural firm of Freeman & Pizer. Historic data was completed by architectural historian Andrew S. Dolkart. Plans were prepared by Freeman & Pizer. Photographs were taken by Christopher Wesnofske. The data was edited and prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by Tina LeCoff in the HABS office, Philadelphia, PA.

CREEDMOOR STATE HOSPITAL
HABS No. NY-6343 (Page 7)



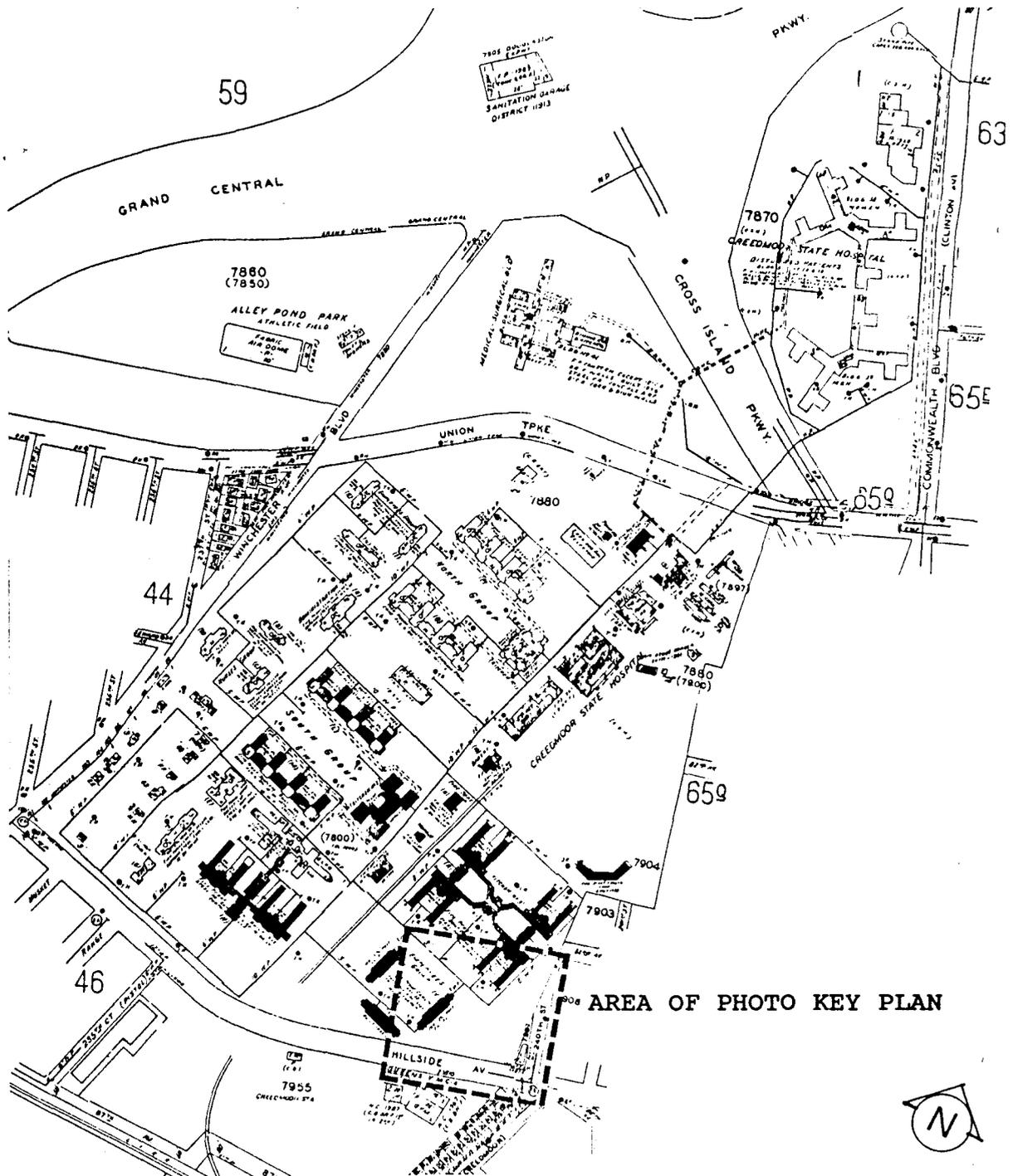
Map 1. Sanborn Atlas of Queens County, vol. 12, plate 66, 1917

CREEDMOOR STATE HOSPITAL
HABS No. NY-6343 (Page 8)



Map 2. Insurance Maps of the Borough of Queens, City of New York
vol. 22, plate 60 (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1934)

CREEDMOOR STATE HOSPITAL
HABS No. NY-6343 (Page 9)



Map 2. Insurance Maps of the Borough of Queens, City of New York
vol. 22, plate 60 (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1993)