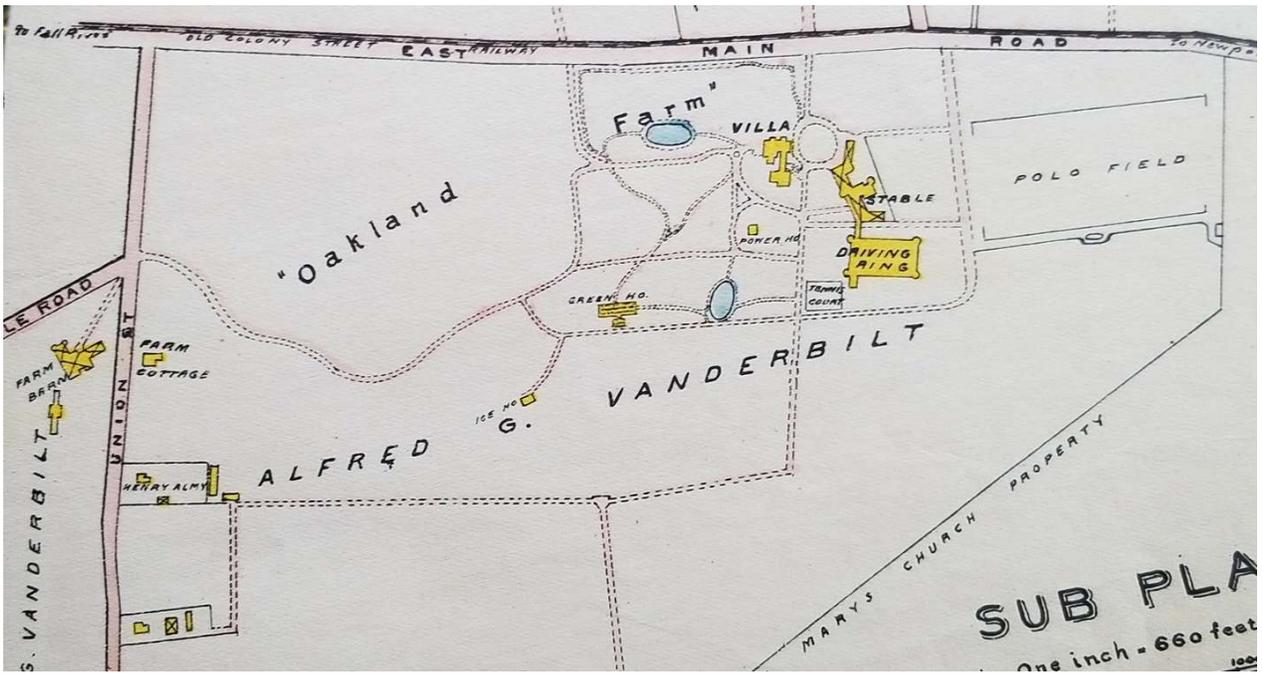




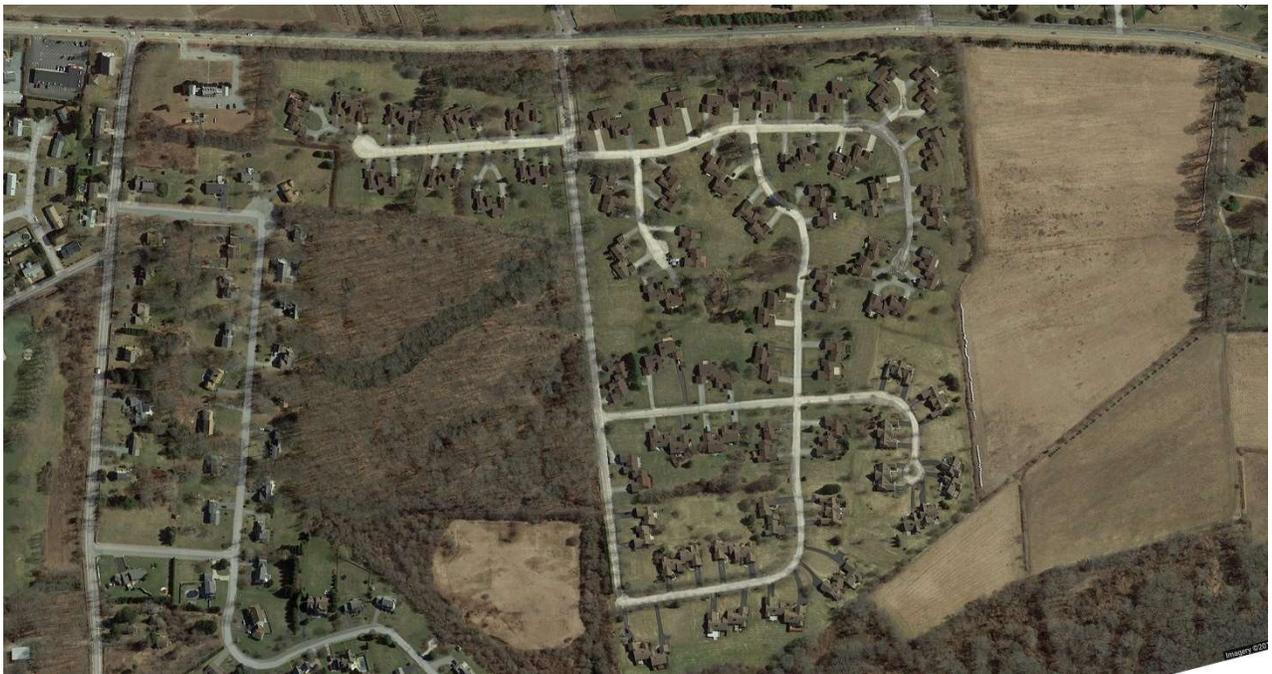
*Now and Then*



OAKLAND FARM, PORTSMOUTH.  
PROPERTY OF CORNELIUS VANDERBILT.



1907 Map at the Portsmouth Historical Society



2018 – Satellite imagery - Google Maps

The map and image have been scaled and aligned so you can compare “then and now”.

*Cover Photographs – Current entrance and Oakland Farm in 1888*



The land Oakland Farm is located on, was part of 100 acres granted to Thomas CORNELL in 1644. Cornell and Rhode Island founder Roger Williams were contemporaries. The Cornell family grave can be found on the turn of Young Drive at the bottom of the hill under some small trees in Oakland Farm II.

During the Revolutionary War in early Aug 1778, a skirmish was fought between British and American troops on the corner of what is now Union St and East Main Road in the opening of the Battle of Rhode Island. Trees in the area were cleared by the British for fuel during their subsequent occupation – all early photographs show almost no trees in the area.

In 1796 the land was bought by Newport merchants George GIBBS and Walter CHANNING.

The Gibbs and Channing Farm fell on hard times in 1807 due to the Embargo Act which killed off Newport as a trading port. William Ellery Channing (grandson of William Ellery who signed the Declaration of Independence) lived on the farm in this period. The farm remained in the Gibb's family till 1867 when it was sold to August BELMONT of New York. He bought another plot across East Main Road.

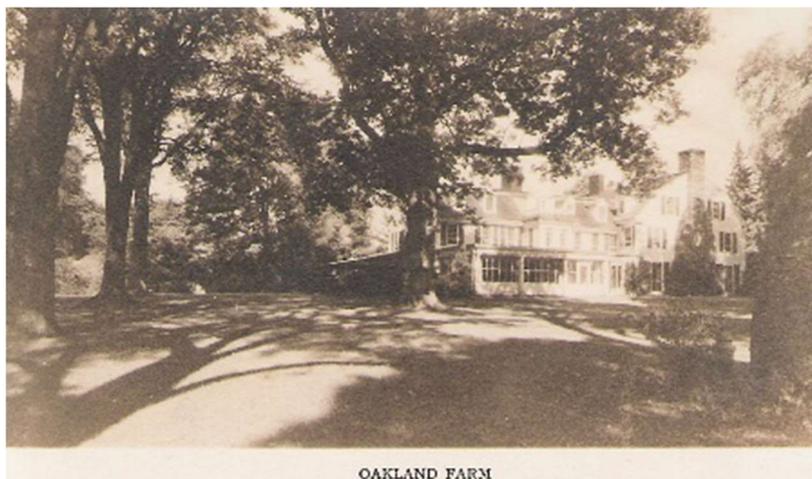


Dr. Channing's Summer Residence, Oakland, R. I.



In 1886 the farm was bought by Cornelius Vanderbilt II. Alfred Vanderbilt inherited the farm from his father in 1889 and significantly improved it. You can see the white wood gates to the original Oakland farm main entrance on the East Main Road wall between 60 and 84 Belmont Drive. The original driveway is now a grass avenue.

The matching gates to the opposite plot of land are across East Main Road. They are now closed off with a stone wall between the gate posts.



OAKLAND FARM

The main driveway led to a circle with the main residence centered on what is now the corner of Belmont and Young.



The main "Villa" was a series of additions built around the colonial era core. It was continuously developed during its lifetime.

The current main entrance that we use was the working "back door" to the farm.





The farm became a "Gentleman's Farm", breeding show horses, cattle and crops for competition.

The largest horse driving ring in America was located at the end of the present Belmont Drive.

The 90 horse stables and carriage barn were along what is now the northern side of the end of Belmont Drive. Barns and ring were linked with a steam heated arcade which meant the horses could be kept undercover in inclement weather.



The polo field was located on what is now the farmland to the south of the present property line.



The cattle barns were at the corner of Middle Road and Union St – at the end of what is now the Green Valley Golf Course. Some remains of the foundations can be seen in the scrub on the corner.

The house opposite on Union St (at time of writing painted yellow) was the dairy and still has elements of its purpose incorporated into its conversion to a house.



There were two ponds on the estate. The upper one near East Main Road was located at about 32 Belmont Drive. It no longer exists.



There are pictures of formal gardens of the period – but we have not been able to determine their location. Possibly between the main house and the upper pond for a water supply. The now weed choked pond in the center of the estate – screened with hedges back in the day - was almost certainly the cesspool for the stables uphill!



A horse graveyard is rumored to be in the hollow on the upper right part of Storm King Drive. "STORM KING" was one of Vanderbilt's "Famous Gray Road Four" carriage horses. The others being Vanity, Vogue and Viking.

The Old Colony Streetcar linking Portsmouth and Newport ran along East Main Road in this period.

Alfred and his wife died aboard the LUSITANIA when it was torpedoed in 1915 during WWI. His will made provision for the continued maintenance of the farm before it passed to his son William on his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday in 1924.

In 1936 the family donated a plot of land to the State where the present State Police barracks sit. The horse ring was razed in 1937 as being too difficult to maintain and insure. The closing of the Newport County Fair in 1932 was also a factor. During Navy war service in 1943 William announced this decision to sell the farm – though he stayed in residence till 1946.

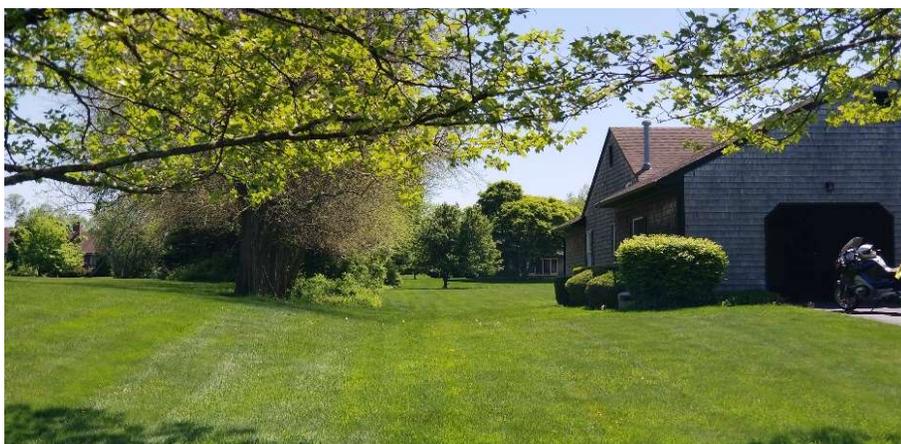
The farm was sold to Robert YOUNG in 1947 and he dispersed the livestock. The stables were demolished in 1948 – the timber being used to build 5 houses in the area. The main residence – heavily damaged by snow - was torn down in 1949. The farm remained unimproved till the property was sold on in 1984 to Regine Enterprises who developed the present condominiums.

The old steam power house is under the foundation for 27 Young Drive. The Tennis Courts were under what is now 38/40 Young Drive.



The Greenhouses were located on the large flat area halfway down the present Oakland Farm Road.

The remains of the 1907 bottom farm road can be seen in the form of a tree lined dip between 138 and 148 Oakland Farm Road extending through to Young Drive.





Turn around and you can see the old road extends north along the present field edge as a trail in the direction of Union St.

The bottom part of Oakland Farm Road headed west is an original farm road originating at this intersection.

In 1998 – plans to develop the last corner to the north west were forestalled by public subscription to purchase and preserve the forest under the guardianship of the Aquidneck Land Trust.



If you follow the trails through the forest and come across a “bunker” like structure – it is the old ice house – the last remaining intact structure of the old estate.

*Sources:*

*Land and Satellite Maps.*

*“Gentleman Farms of Portsmouth” – James Garman – Portsmouth Historical Society – 2003*

*Web search pictures. Wikipedia*

*Own photography.*

*Kerry Anne Daley & Graeme Smith – 112 Belmont Dr, May 2018*

## Revisions

Document v2 – Revised June 2019

May 2019

- Satellite Image on Page 2 updated from newer winter imagery. Better shows the Rhododendron Avenue through remaining Oakland Forest and how it relates to the 1907 map.
- A 1904 gardening journal referring to Linden Lane opposite the present Oakland Farm entrance reports:

“The walls have been curved at the entrance to give the driveway a better effect, and on both sides of the drive, from the road to the Taylor mansion, young linden trees have been put out to make the way ornamental as well as shady. V.A. Vanicek, of the Rhode Island nurseries, furnished the trees **and also six car loads of hardy rhododendrons for Mr. Vanderbilt’s Oakland Farm.**”

(Post online at Portsmouth History Notes 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019)

August 2018 - Chat with Phil Young whose company currently paints the woodwork in the present Oakland Farms Condominiums. Phil recalls walking his dog in the grounds in the early 1980’s immediately prior to the redevelopment. He stated the formal gardens from the Vanderbilt estate were still extant – though wildly overgrown and had “jumped” their boundaries into the surrounding fields.

The top retention pond was still there and fed the fire main for the old estate.

The area was a popular camp for people sleeping rough and there was a small community of “hobos”.