Landmarks Preservation Commission
February 1, 2011; Designation List 438
LP-2415

565 and 569 BLOOMINGDALE ROAD COTTAGES, 565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road, Staten Island. Built c. 1887 and 1898

Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 7020, Lot 4

On August 10, 2010, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road Cottages and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 3). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were five speakers in favor of the designation including a member of the Board of Trustees of the Rossville AME Zion Church, the owner of the property. Other speakers on behalf of the designation included representatives of the Sandy Ground Historical Society, the Preservation League of Staten Island, the Society for the Architecture of the City, and the Historic Districts Council. The Commission has received two letters in support of the designation, including one from the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America. There were no speakers or letters in opposition.

<u>Summary</u>

Constructed between 1887 and 1898 as rental properties by Robert E. Mersereau, the small, frame houses at 565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road, traditionally known as the "baymen's cottages," are rare surviving buildings from the period when Sandy Ground was a prosperous African-American community on Staten Island. Beginning in the 1840s through the early 20th century, this area, called Woodrow, Little Africa, or (more commonly) Sandy Ground, was home to a group of free black people residing in more than 50 houses. For much of that time, many of them were employed in the oyster trade or in farming. Sandy Ground is located is the southern part of Staten Island, not far from the shipping port of Rossville on the Arthur Kill to the north and the prime oyster grounds of Prince's Bay on the south. The first African-American residents purchased property in the area by 1830 and their numbers were bolstered by the arrival of numerous families from Snow Hill, Maryland, who settled in Sandy Ground in the 1840s and 1850s. These were free blacks who had been involved in the oyster trade on the Chesapeake Bay and came to New York because Maryland had passed a series of harsh laws in the 1840s and 1850s that made it difficult for them to ply their trade. The Sandy Ground community thrived for many years, built substantial houses and established successful businesses and institutions, chief among them the Rossville AME Zion Church.

Typical examples of the small cottages erected in late 19th century and early 20th century to house workers in the rural areas of New York, these two houses were nearly identical: two story one-room deep, peaked-roofed frame structures with central chimneys and side hall entrances with shallow stoops and porches. No. 569 Bloomingdale Road, the northernmost of the two houses was occupied from about 1900 to 1930 by William D. Landin, son of Robert Landin, one of the most prominent and successful of the Maryland oystermen who settled in Sandy Ground around 1850. William D. Landin also had an oyster business until about 1920 and later became the first African American man to work at S.S. White Dental Works. His son-in-

law Girard Bevans, who lived here in the 1920s was one of the city's first African American police officers. Subsequent residents included Susan Landin Henry and her daughter, Lois A. H. Mosley, author of *Sandy Ground Memories.* Residents of 565 Bloomingale Road included Josephine Henry, Susan Harmon, Murphy and Frances Landin Moore and Thelma "Nan" Pedro, descendants of Sandy Ground's early African-American families who played a prominent part in the community.

In 1922, Mersereau's heir Gertrude M. Jacobus, sold the property to George H. Hunter, the owner of a local construction and maintenance business, and his wife Celia, who lived next door at 575 Bloomingdale Road. The Trustees of the A. M. E. Zion Church of Rossville (aka Rossville A. M. E. Zion Church) purchased the property in 1981. Today the houses survive as a tangible and visible link to the rich history of the Sandy Ground community.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Development of the Community of Sandy Ground[1]

The Sandy Ground community was founded on a section of high ground near the center of the southern part of Staten Island, halfway between the well-known oyster beds of Prince's Bay on the south and the port of Rossville on the Arthur Kill to the north. This area has been known by various names through the years, such as Woodrow, Harrisville or Little Africa, and its center was at the confluence of what is now Woodrow and Bloomingdale Roads. Since this area is located inland, rather than along the shore, and was still wooded in the mid 1800s, it was not seen as desirable and therefore was not expensive. The name Sandy Ground first appears on records dating to 1779 and refers to the sandy soil of the area, particularly good for growing certain crops such as strawberries and asparagus.[2]

Staten Island was inhabited for thousands of years by Native Americans. [3] Archaeologist Alanson B. Skinner reported finding evidence of a Woodland Period (2700BP-AD 1500) Native American village at the center of what would become Sandy Ground and there are two documented Native American sites on the lot of the AME Zion Church.[4] While most Native Americans left the island by 1700, a few remained and their descendents could be found on Staten Island as late as the early 1900s. At Sandy Ground, several black families claimed Native American descent and Skinner observed that the Native American tradition of grinding corn with wooden mortars and pestles continued at Sandy Ground into the 1890s.

During the colonial period Staten Island was largely settled by Dutch and Huguenot families with a scattering of English and other Europeans.[5] Many settlers brought white indentured servants or black slaves to the island, with slaves making up between 10 to 23 percent of the population. During the first half of the 19th century Staten Island's African-American population continued to grow. Some people who were previously slaves of local residents remained in the area after abolition, while other free blacks came because land was available and inexpensive.[6] Land ownership records indicate that blacks and whites lived peaceably in proximity in this rural part of the island.

The first African Americans became landowners in Sandy Ground before 1830. John Jackson, a free African American from New York, bought 2 ½ acres of land in 1828 and in 1835 he and another African American man, Thomas Jackson (relationship unknown), purchased eight acres. Apparently John Jackson operated the ferry *Lewis Columbia* between Rossville and Manhattan, the only direct method of access at this time.[7]

In the 1840s and 50s, these first settlers were joined by several other African American families who came from an area of Maryland on the Chesapeake Bay called Snow Hill. Although Maryland was still a slave state in these years before the Civil War, it also had a large number of free blacks, many of whom were involved in the oyster trade.[8] Their existence proved to be a bad example for those still living in slavery and during the 1830s, the state passed a series of restrictive laws to control and limit the activities of free black people. These new laws forbade free blacks to captain their own oyster boats or to own guns (which limited their ability to procure food for their families). In response, several African American families involved in the oyster trade moved to Staten Island. The waters off Staten Island were also well known for the fine and numerous oysters they produced and the oyster industry was an important source of jobs for many people on Staten Island throughout the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. As the oyster beds off Staten Island started to become depleted, a constant stream of maritime traffic developed between these two areas, allowing familiarity and an easy movement of people as well as products. Family names of some of these African Americans who came to Sandy Ground from Maryland at this time included Bishop, Henman, Landin, Purnell, Robbins and Stevens, while others, including the Harris and Henry families, came from elsewhere in New York and New Jersey.[9]

The area attracted more and more free residents of color and established its own distinct community in this period before the Civil War, creating at Sandy Ground a very early neighborhood within (what is now) New York City where free African Americans owned their own property.[10] Even before the abolition of slavery in New York in 1827, there had been free blacks in the city, and they tended to live together in small enclaves in different parts of each county, but usually they did not own their own homes.[11] It was generally difficult for newly freed people to earn enough money to purchase land, or to find individuals willing to sell it to them if they could afford it. Only a few other communities of land-holding African Americans have been documented in New York at this time. The first was probably Seneca Village, begun around 1825 when John Whitehead sold off small parcels of his land near what later became Central Park, between 79th and 86th Streets, and Sixth and Seventh Avenues.[12] By 1855, the census listed 264 people at this location, consisting mostly of blacks but also including some whites (mostly Irish and German immigrants), and at least three churches, a school and a cemetery. Against the wishes of the residents the village was destroyed as part of the construction of Central Park by the end of the decade. Another settlement of free blacks began in the 1830s, but was firmly established in 1838 when James Weeks purchased property from the Lefferts family estate in what was (then) the outskirts of Brooklyn, now Bedford-Stuyvesant. More than 100 people lived in this stable African American community throughout the rest of the 19th and early 20th centuries.[13]

At Sandy Ground African Americans African Americans were also able to own property and start their own institutions, such as churches and schools. The origins of the church at Sandy Ground date to May 1849 when William H. Pitts, a Virginia-born African Methodist Episcopal Zion minister, purchased land on Crabtree Lane west of Bloomingdale Road. He built a house and began holding prayer services in his house and in the home of his neighbor, William Stephens. In December 1850 a group of residents gathered at Pitts' home to found the African Zion Methodist Church in the Village of Rossville, now Rossville AME Zion Church, and elect five Trustees. On December 11, 1852, this group purchased land on Crabtree Avenue for a church. A "plain wooden structure" (no longer extant), seating 150 persons, was erected by 1854. A cemetery was established on land to its west. (The Rossville AME Zion Church cemetery is a

designated New York City Landmark.) Other institutions, such as the local school, run by Esther Purnell, accommodated the children of both black and white residents. Local businesses also began, to supply what the community needed, such as the Bogardus general store and the blacksmith shop of William Bishop (begun 1888).

There have often been rumors that Sandy Ground was used as a stop on the Underground Railroad. This was a logical conclusion, since people from here traveled regularly between New York and southern slave states. Additionally, AME churches were often known for their willingness to help escaping slaves. However, since there are so few remaining structures from the original Sandy Ground community, and no written records documenting any occurrence have surfaced, this cannot be conclusively proven.

Oysters and Oystering[14]

Oysters have been an important source of food and commerce in New York since before the white explorers arrived. The Lenapes were harvesting and eating oysters when Hudson arrived (shown by the huge piles of oyster shells or middens they left)[15] and the mollusks helped sustain the early settlers. Oysters were already well-known in Europe, having been popular since the Roman empire. The Dutch, French and British were great lovers of oysters when they arrived in the New World and this food figured prominently in European (and hence American) cuisine of the 17th and 18th centuries, with recipes for oysters included in most cookbooks of that time.[16]

Oysters grow best in "warm, brackish water in intertidal and sub-tidal areas along shorelines."[17] Oysters are quite adaptable and can survive cold winters by hibernating and can also live in water up to 90 degrees Fahrenheit. They are found all along the Atlantic coast, although they grow faster and bigger in warmer water.

In Europe the traditional method of gathering oysters was to wade into the water at low tide with rakes, picking them up by hand. The Lenape showed the settlers how to row out into deeper water and use long-handled rakes with two sets of teeth, called tongs, to grab the oysters and fill their boats. This faster and more efficient gathering process was important since New Yorkers would eat as many oysters as were available. They were popular with all classes of people and large numbers of oysters were served at fancy banquets as well as in the poorest slums of the cities. New York's first oyster cellar opened in a basement of a building on Broad Street in 1763.[18]

Since oysters lay their eggs in spring, oyster harvesting was initially restricted to the fall or winter months, or months with the letter "R" in them. A law to this effect, implemented by the colonial government by 1715, was an early attempt at conservation.[19] New Yorkers, however, were not content to restrict their oyster consumption and before long, they learned to pickle oysters to make them available throughout the year. In 1807, under pressure from local businessmen, New York stopped limiting the gathering of oysters to the colder months and in 1819, in order to be able to eat oysters any time and place, the first oyster cannery opened. The advent of steamships and then the opening of the Erie Canal allowed access to more markets, with purveyors demanding more and more oysters. In response, fishermen harvested more and more of the animals.

The oyster beds around New York had begun to show signs of depletion as early as the mid 18th century, both from overfishing and from pollution. New York City's trash and waste were washed into nearby rivers and streams, befouling waterways, groundwater, wells and beaches. By around 1750, malaria from mosquitoes and cholera from tainted water had become commonplace. Since oysters feed on the organic matter in the water in which they live, they and

other creatures that depended on this habitat began to suffer. In the 19th century, with the progress of industrialization, local rivers and bays were also used for dumping industrial waste, a situation that worsened the condition of local oysters.

The system of "planting" young oysters had been practiced in several parts of the world for many years. It had become common in Europe which had already experienced a drop in production of their oyster beds. Even though fishermen did not understand much about oyster reproduction, they had known for some time that oysters could be grown more successfully in habitat that was different from where they were spawned. There were still plenty of oysters to be gathered in the Chesapeake Bay off Maryland and Virginia, and New York fishermen realized that tiny oysters from these areas could be brought to the barren beds off Staten Island and Long Island that were known for their excellent oyster-growing conditions. Oysters that began life in the warmer waters of the Bay seemed to mature at a faster rate and once fishermen provided appropriate material for the oysters to attach themselves, they would reach an acceptable size for harvesting in one year.

Such tiny oysters were first brought for planting from the Chesapeake Bay in 1820. A schooner with a captain and four-man crew could travel from Prince's Bay in Staten Island to the lower Chesapeake, load 2,500 to 3,500 bushels of seed oysters onto their boat and return in less than six days. Upon his return to Staten Island the captain would hire an additional 12 men to shovel the seed oysters overboard onto a specified area that was leased from the state for this purpose. Staten Island oystermen soon developed special wooden trays or "flats" for the oysters to adhere to while other locals developed the skill of making the wood splint baskets that became the standard unit of measure for the oyster trade. In this way, the oyster trade employed many people and by the 1830s was the most important economic activity on Staten Island.[20]

Sandy Ground Oystermen

While some African-American residents farmed their own land and others traveled to Manhattan to work for whites, many in Sandy Ground earned their living from the oyster industry. Working on board oyster boats and collecting and transporting oysters provided an unusually fruitful method of making a living for blacks in these early days. Even before the end of slavery, it was not unusual for African Americans (both slaves and free) to work aboard ocean-going ships, where there seemed to be harmony with white seamen who apparently were willing to work with multiracial shipmates.[21] Since oystering did not become a major commercial industry with an established hierarchy until the 19th century, African Americans were able to become involved and gain a place in this developing field.[22] It required very little capital investment, yet returned a decent living, allowing the free blacks in the Chesapeake Bay area, as well as those on Staten Island, to create comfortable lives for themselves. In the 19th century the oyster industry was such an important part of the economy of Staten Island that some of those who pursued it became wealthy, while others were able to support their families in a comfortable manner for many years. Work was available at many levels of the operation: on the boats, planting the seed oysters, collecting them, opening and packing them for shipping as well as selling them. Several residents of Sandy Ground were able to purchase their own boats for dredging oysters, while others worked aboard the boats of others. This activity, as well as oyster shucking and processing employed many Sandy Grounders for a long time. The 1880s and 90s were the "Golden Age" of Sandy Ground's African American community and the area had as many as 50 homes.

Indications of severe pollution in the waters off Staten Island began in the early years of the 20th century. The oyster beds were officially closed in 1916, after several outbreaks of typhoid due to eating polluted oysters. The community of Sandy Ground, so dependent on this industry, gradually declined. Some residents were able to find work in local factories or commuted to Manhattan or New Jersey for jobs. Others relied on small farms to feed their families and supply markets in Manhattan. Eventually however, this stable community of free and prosperous African American families declined. Severe fires in 1930 and in 1963 destroyed many houses and much property, although a recognizable community continues to exist in Sandy Ground today. It consists of descendents of people who have lived in the area for more than 100 years.

The Houses at 565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road[23]

In the mid-1870s farmer and village letter carrier Thomas B. DuBois owned a house and 11-acre farm on the east side of Bloomingdale Road about 400 feet south of Woodrow Road. By the late 1870s Du Bois subdivided his land into long narrow lots. This lot, which has a frontage of 104 feet on Bloomingdale Road and originally extended back more than 500 feet from the street, was purchased by Robert E. Mersereau. Based on historic maps it appears that sometime between 1887 and 1898 Mersereau erected two small two-story houses, now 565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road. A third house, which sat well back from the road and was usually known as 569 Rear Bloomingdale Road, was constructed between 1907 and 1913. Built as rental units, these modest houses have traditionally been known as "the baymen's cottages." In 1922, Mersereau's heir and executrix Gertrude M. Jacobus sold this property with its three houses to George and Celia Hunter, who lived next door at 575 Bloomingdale Road. George H. Hunter (1869-1966), the protagonist in Joseph Mitchell's *New Yorker* article "Mr. Hunter's Grave," was a major figure in the community. He served as chairman of the Board of Trustees for the AME Zion Church for over 30 years, was for many years the chief organizer of the church's fund-raising barbeques, and was one of the chief caretakers of the AME Zion Church cemetery. Originally a cook on a fishing schooner, he ran a scavenging/salvage business in the 1910s and in the 1907. He retained ownership of this property until 1945 when he sold it to William and Ruth Diamond of Hillsdale, New Jersey. The Diamonds in turn sold the property to I.D. Drew, Inc., of Newark in 1946. Hunter continued to act as the owner's representative for the houses under the new owners. In 1981 the Rossville AME Zion Church acquired the property. In 1984, the church conveyed the rear portion of the lot to a developer in exchange for a lot at the southwest corner of Bloomingdale Road and Clay Pit Road. Subsequently, No. 569 Rear was demolished and the rear portion of the lot redeveloped. Through the years many of the residents of 565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road have been descendants of many of Sandy Ground's historic families, providing a tangible link to the history of this remarkable enclave.

No. 569

The 1900 census indicates that 569 Bloomingdale Road was occupied by oysterman William Dawson Landin (1867-1947), his wife Ella Bishop Landin, and their daughter Beatrice. Ella [Frances] Bishop Landin (1877-1908) was the daughter of Susan Lake Bishop and Eben Bishop, a Maryland-born oysterman. William D. Landin was the son of Robert Landin (1830-1910) and Sarah Jane [Jackson] Landin, one of the founders of Rossville AME Zion Church. Robert Landin and his brother Dawson were among the most famous and successful of the oystermen from Snow Hill, Maryland, who settled in Sandy Ground. By 1875 both Dawson and

Robert had become oyster growers (planters) and sloop owners (Robert of the *Independence*), who might hire "as many as ten men to work moving seed oysters from the Arthur Kill into Prince's Bay and recovering the mature stock."[24] William D. Landin probably began his career working on his father's boat and later had his own business. He remained in the oyster trade until at least 1920, perhaps fishing the waters off Long Island, as some Sandy Ground oystermen did following the closure of the oyster grounds in New York Harbor.[25] By 1930, however, he had to given up his business. He then became "the first black man to work at the S.S. White Dental Manufacturing Co. in Prince's Bay."[26] It is indicative of the racial prejudice faced by African Americans during the 1930s that despite having run his own business William D. Landin was employed as a porter at the dental works.

In April 1911, three years after the death Ella Bishop Landin, William D. Landin married Mabel Gardner of Manhattan at the parsonage of the Rossville AME Zion Church. They had a son, Gordon, in 1915. By 1920, Landin's daughter Beatrice and son-in-law Girard Bevans and their infant son, Haywood, were living with the Landins at No. 569. Girard was then employed as a laborer at a nearby fertilizer plant. By 1923 he had become a police officer, one of two who lived in the village of Sandy Ground (the other was Japheth A. Henman of 704 Bloomingdale Road). In 1929, there were only 90 African American police officers in the entire city of New York out a total of 18,000, so that Girard Bevans, who was stationed in Harlem for much of his career, received considerable coverage in the *New York Amsterdam News*, including a photograph in January 1930, when he was promoted to patrolman, first grade.[27]

In 1930 the Bevans had a new house constructed at 591 Bloomingdale Road where they moved with the Landins. After the Bevans and Landins moved to their new house, 569 Bloomingdale Road was leased to Geraldine C. and Hugh E. McDonald. Geraldine C. McDonald was the daughter of Alice and Walter L Henman and a descendant of Maryland families that had settled in Sandy Ground in the mid-19th century. Her husband Hugh E. McDonald was from Jamaica, West Indies, and was a factory worker. They had four children − Walter (Buddy), Edna, Gloria and Hugh Enrick (Enny Mac). In her reminiscences of growing up in Sandy Ground, Lois Mosley, who lived at No. 569 rear records that after running water on the same meter was installed in the three houses, the McDonalds at No. 569, the Moores at No. 565, and the Henrys at No. 569 Rear devised a "telephone system" – turning the faucet on and off sharply so that it knocked a certain number of times – the number of knocks alerting a particular neighbor to "stick their head out the door for a message."[28]

The McDonalds resided at No. 569 house until sometime in the 1940s. Lois Mosley's mother, Susan Landin Henry (1905-1948), and her children then moved to the house. Her son Howard Kenneth Henry was listed in the phone book as still living there in 1952. In 1953 Lois Henry Mosley and her husband Glenby Mosley, "a Sandy Ground boy" who had served in the army and played for the Black Yankees in the last years of the Negro League before taking a job with the New York City Department of Sanitation, moved to the house where they resided until 1957.[29] In 1958, after the Mosleys left for larger quarters in Mariner's Harbor, Jennie C. Turner moved to No. 569 where she resided until her death in 1994.[30] Currently the house is occupied Kenneth Cooper, grandson of Rev. Louis Roach, a minister at the Rossville AME Zion Church, and son of Sadie Roach Cooper, who kept a grocery store at 559 Bloomingdale Road, and John Cooper, a construction worker from Virginia.

No. 565

The earliest record for No. 565 is the census of 1910, which lists Eureta Lee, a 70 year-old African-American woman, born in New York State to parents from Delaware, as the lessee for this house. She shared it with boarder Josephine Henry, the daughter of oysterman John Jackson Henry and grandniece of Sandy Ground founder Captain John Jackson and Elizabeth Cornelius Henry. By 1915, No. 565 was being leased to Susan Harmon, the widow of oysterman Fred Harmon. Susan Harmon resided at No. 565 until at least 1920; during that time census records indicate she earned her living as a domestic servant and laundress.

By 1925 Frances and Murphy Moore had moved to No. 565. Frances Landin Moore (1901-?) was the daughter of oysterman Dawson Landin, Jr., and Georgianna Harris Landin, sister of Susan Landin Henry (of No. 569 Rear) and aunt of Lois A. H. Mosley, who knew her as "Aunt Frank." She played piano and organ for the Rossville AME Zion Church. Murphy Moore (1889-?) was from Woodstock, Virginia, and was employed as a stock clerk in the 1920s and a laborer in the 1930s. The Moores had four children: Leonora, Lindwood, Beatrice, and Calvin. Lois Mosley recalled that she, "her brother and sisters, and Aunt Frank and Uncle Murphy's children were raised as one family."[31]

> Uncle Murphy was quite a farmer. We children considered it great fun to help him spade the entire backyard and rake it up for planting. We would level the soil and plant the seeds for various vegetables. Murphy Moore loved to trap. The neighborhood boys used to help him empty the traps that he set down in the woods behind 569. He would catch and skin rabbits and possum. Occasionally he would catch a snapping turtle.[32]

The Moores remained at 565 Bloomingdale until at least 1942 and probably into the 1950s. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the house was occupied by the family of Richard Butler. In the early 1990s it was the home of Thelma "Nan" Pedro, the seventh child of Susan Jane Bishop Pedro and William (Pop) Pedro. Pop Pedro lived to 106, was an authority on the history of Sandy Ground, and was proclaimed the "Honorary Mayor of Sandy Ground" by Borough President Ralph Lamberti in 1979. Nan Pedro made her living by providing day care for neighborhood children. She was active in the Rossville AME Zion Church, where she served as president of the Missionary Society for 19 years, taught Sunday school, served on the Ushers Board, Pastor's Aid Society, and sang in the choir. After the South Shore fire of 1963, she assisted the Red Cross in establishing a distribution center in the basement of the church to assist fire victims. She moved to Jacksonville, Florida in 1995. Presently the house is occupied by John Turner, son of Jennie Turner, who used to reside at 569 Bloomingdale Road.

<u>No 565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road as Workers' Housing</u>[33]

Nos. 565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road are typical examples of the small cottages erected in late 19th century and early 20th century to house workers in the rural communities of New York and New Jersey. Typically such houses were small, sound, minimally-ornamented, two-story, frame dwellings of four to six rooms. Constructed as economically as possible, such housing usually lacked the amenities of indoor plumbing and running water. Originally nearly identical, 565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road are two stories tall, have side halls and two-rooms on each floor, central chimneys, and gabled roofs. Both were faced with clapboards, had paneled wood-and-glass doors, and six-over-six wood window sashes. Both originally had simple shed-roofed porches and stoops in the north bay of their facades. No. 569 Bloomingdale Road was built with an entrance and porch on the south side of the house. Based on an analysis of the

Topographic map of 1913, 565 Bloomingdale Road probably had a rear entrance and porch. By 1940 that porch had been replaced by a shed-roofed rear addition. Now the more altered of the two houses, 565 Bloomingdale Road has an enclosed gable-fronted entrance porch and a gabled rear addition; 569 Bloomingdale Road has three rear additions. Both have been reclad and have replacement doors and windows, but for the most part retain their original form and fenestration pattern. Both have been upgraded to include indoor plumbing and bathrooms, although both houses retain historic well heads in their yards.

Most of the housing in New York City built specifically for workers took the form of tenement houses and rowhouses. Although free-standing houses were common in the less urbanized portions of the city, houses built for workers in a particular industry were far less common. Moreover these houses have frequently been lost to redevelopment due to their modest size and the fact that they were by-and-large built for industries and companies that no longer exist. On Staten Island there appear to be only a few surviving examples of such buildings, notably the Kreischerville Workers' Houses, in Charleston, (71-73 Kreischer Street, built 1890, designated New York City Landmark). Thus the Sandy Ground Baymen's Cottages survive today as rare examples of late 19th century workers housing on Staten Island as well as significant reminders of the Sandy Ground Community.

Description

569 Bloomingdale Road

Historic: Two-story, three-bay front facade; main entrance in northern bay; possibly original door; side gable roof; brick chimney centered on ridgeline; secondary entrance on southern facade; masonry foundation, slightly raised; original fenestration pattern.

Alterations: Asbestos siding (originally clapboard); concrete stoop with 2 steps by main entrance; aluminum awning over door; wooden stair by side entrance; paneled side entrance door; storm doors on both entrances; all windows double-hung vinyl sash (originally double-hung, multi-pane, wood sash); rear addition with various sections, shallow shed and gable roofs, mostly covered with asbestos siding; small section in rear faced with aluminum siding and historic wood, paneled door; tar paper on rear roofs; asphalt shingles on main roof

Site: House faces Bloomingdale Road; historic capped well near sidewalk in front; dirt driveway on southern side of lot; asphalt sidewalk; mature trees; wire fencing around lot.

565 Bloomingdale Road

Historic: Two-story, three-bay front facade; main entrance in northern bay; side gable roof; brick chimney centered on ridgeline; masonry foundation, slightly raised; original fenestration pattern; some 2nd story windows have 6/1 double-hung wood sash; many 1st story windows have wood sash, of various configurations.

Alterations: House faced with asbestos siding (originally clapboard); enclosed, gabled front porch in front of main entrance; rear extension with shallow rear-facing gable roof, contains rear entrance, wood-sash window, enclosed porch; pent roof porch overhang supported on posts; plastic covering over window openings of 2nd floor rear; tar paper roofing on main house and extension; patched walls; through wall air-conditioner on northern facade; pump on concrete base attached to southern side of house.

Site: House faces Bloomingdale Road; historic capped well behind house; mature trees, brick and dirt driveway on north side of lot; 2 small outbuildings in rear of yard; brick barbecue pit in rear yard, split rail fence; driveway and small garage in side yard to north of house.
This site is within the National Register Sandy Ground Archaeological District, designated to recognize the free black community founded in the mid 19th century; designation included archaeological resources as they could illuminate the evolution of the community; therefore the site has the potential to contain significant archaeological resources related to Sandy Ground and to Native American occupation.[34]

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NOTES

[1] This section on the early development of Sandy Ground is based on Lois A.H. Mosley, Barnett Shepherd, et. al., *Sandy Ground Memories* (Staten Island: Staten Island Historical Society, 2003); Joseph Mitchell, "Mr. Hunter's Grave," *The New Yorker* (Sept, 22, 1956); Landmarks Preservation Commission [LPC], *Rossville A.M.E. Zion Church Cemetery Designation Report* (LP-1399) (New York: City of New York, 1985), prepared by Shirley Zavin; William Askins, *The Sandy Ground Survey Project: Archaeological and Historical Research in Support of a National Register Nomination* (New York: City College, City University of New York, 1980); William Askins, *Sandy Ground : Historical Archaeology of Class and Ethnicity in a Nineteenth Century Community on Staten Island* (New York: PhD Dissertation, Graduate Center, City University of New York, 1988); Minna C. Wilkins, "Sandy Ground: A Tiny Racial Island," *Staten Island Historian* 6 (Jan.-Mar. 1943) 1-3, 7 (Oct.-Dec. 1943), 25-26, 31-32; *Holden's Staten Island: The History of Richmond County*, edited and compiled by Richard Dickenson (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 2002).

[2] *Holden's Staten Island*, 481.

[3] This information on Native Americans on Staten Island is based on Askins, *Sandy Ground: Historical Archaeology*, 143; *Indian Notes and Monographs* (New York: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1919), 317; Alanson Skinner, "The Lenapé Indians of Staten Island" in *The Indians of Greater New York and the Lower Hudson*, edited by Clark Wissler (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1909), 37.

[4] The sites are listed with New York State Museum, Site Number NYS 7272, described as "traces of occupation" and Site Number NYS 8497 described as a "village."

[5] On the European settlement of Staten Island and early slaveholding see Phillip Papas, *That Ever Loyal Island* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 9, 19.

[6] Many blacks moved to Staten Island because they felt they were being pushed out of other low-priced homes by the large numbers of poor German and Irish immigrants who flooded into New York at this time

[7] Holden's Staten Island, 482.

[8] According to Askins, *Sandy Ground: Historical Archaeology*, 3, there were about 150,000 free blacks in Maryland by1860.

[9] National Register nomination, sec 8.

[10] The earliest example of landholding among African Americans in New York was probably in the 17th century when the Dutch West India Company gave farms north of the city to some of their "half-freed" slaves. "Gideon and the Great Dock," http://maap.columbia.edu/place/8.html, accessed 12/8, 2010.

[11] For early African American enclaves in New York City see Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City 1626-1863*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 74-77.

[12] The first purchase of land happened between 1825 and 1827 by Diana and Elizabeth Harding. Information about Seneca Village comes from Ray Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and Its People, A History of Central Park* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1992), 66-73.

[13] Today there is only a small physical remnant of this community, the four houses known as the Hunterfly Road Houses (designated New York City Landmarks).

[14] The information on the oyster trade comes primarily from Mark Kurlansky, *The Big Oyster* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2006), as well as newspaper clippings.

[15] Several hundred shell piles or middens have been identified in the New York City area. Kurlansky, 14.

[16] In spite of the similarities, European oysters are from a different genetic family (Ostrea edulis) from those grown off the coast of the United States, which are known as Ostreidae. European oysters look different, reproduce differently and have fewer offspring. Kurlansky, 49-50.

[17] Kurlansky, 63.

[18] Kurlansky, 82.

[19] Kurlansky, 83.

[20] Kurlansky, 118-124.

[21] According to Jeffrey W. Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997), xvi and 6. Bolster reports that by 1803 black men (mostly freemen) formed approximately 18% of seamen's jobs in America.

[22] University of South Carolina, The Conference on Historic Site Archaeology Papers, 1972, V7 (Institute of Architecture and Anthropology, Columbus, SC 1974), 18.

[23] This section on the ownership and residents of 565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road is based on Mosley and Shepherd; Richmond County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 128, 42-46; Liber, 547, 341-342; Liber 918, 496-497; Liber 977, 470-473; Liber2425, 437; United States Census, 1900-1930; New State Census, 1915, 1925; New York Telephone Company, New York City Telephone Directory, Staten Island, Address Telephone Directory, 1952-1986.

[24]Askins, *Sandy Ground, Historical Archaeology,* 108.

[25] U.S. Census, 1920,

[26] Mosley and Shepherd, 99. According to Mosley, Landin commuted to the Dental Works by bicycle, leaving for work each morning at 6 A.M. except for snowy days when he would make the four mile trip on foot.

[27] For Girard Bevan's police career see "Police Department," *New York Times*, July 19, 1923, 30; "In the Courts," *New York Amsterdam News*, Sep. 19, 1923, 2; "Police Department," *New York Times*, Apr. 17, 1924, 38; "Police Department," *New York Times*, Apr. 30, 1924, 39; "Sullivan Law Holds Two for Hearings," *New York Amsterdam News*, Oct. 6, 1926, 18; "The Negro in the New York Fire and Police Departments," *New York Amsterdam News*, Dec. 18, 1929, 12, "Coppers Wreathed in Smiles," *New York Amsterdam News*, Jan. 22, 1930, 1.

[28] Mosley and Shepherd, 93.

[29] Ibid, 122.

[30] "Jennie Turner, 72, Former Computer Operator, *Staten Island Advance*, Mat 4, 1994.

[31] Mosley and Shepherd, 98.

[32] Ibid.

[33] This discussion of workers housing is based on Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Kreischerville Workers' Houses Designation Report*, prepared by Betsy Bradley (LP-1870), (New York: City of New York, 1994), 4-5.

[34] Sandy Ground Historic Archaeological District (AO85-01-2258-DO3) National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form for the United States Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, prepared by the New York State Office of Parks and Recreation and Historic Preservation on August 1, 1982.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of the building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Rossville AME Zion Church has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest, and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Rossville AME Zion Church is a rare and important surviving building from the period when Sandy Ground was a prosperous African American community on Staten Island; that located in southern Staten Island, Sandy Ground was established in the mid 1840s by free African Americans, many of whom came from Maryland and were employed in the oyster industry; that the Sandy Ground African American community built substantial houses and established successful businesses and institutions chief among them the Rossville AME Zion Church; that the church was founded by William H. Pitts, an African Methodist Episcopal Zion minister who purchased land in Sandy Ground in May 1849 and began holding prayer services in his home; that the African Zion Methodist Church in the Village of Rossville, now Rossville AME Zion Church, was formally established in December 1850, purchased land on Crabtree Avenue, near Bloomingdale Road in 1852, erected a no longer extant church building (dedicated 1854), and established the Rossville AME Zion Church Cemetery (a designated New York City Landmark); that by 1890 the congregation had outgrown its first church and purchased the site for this building, which was constructed in 1897 by Tottenville builder-developer Andrew Abrams; that the church has had a number of prominent ministers including the famed abolitionist and civil rights leader Thomas James (1872), Rev. Isaac Burk Walters (1906-07), and the renowned minister, missionary, and suffragist Florence Spearing Randolph (1919-22); that the Rossville AME Zion Church was also renowned for camp meetings, open-air barbeques, clambakes, and other social events that drew hundreds of participants both black and white and over the years played a central role in Sandy Ground community; that the church remains in use and descendants of the original founders are still members of the congregation; that originally a simple clapboarded vernacular frame structure with a gabled entrance porch, the building has been reclad with faux brick siding but retains its original form and fenestration pattern; that it survives today as a tangible and visible link to the rich history of the Sandy Ground community.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Rossville AME Zion Church, 584 Bloomingdale Road, Staten Island, and designates Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 7267, Lot 101, as its Landmark Site

Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Pablo Vengoechea, Vice-Chair;
Frederick Bland, Michael Devonshire, Joan Gerner,
Michael Goldblum, Christopher Moore, Margery Perlmutter,
Elizabeth Ryan, Roberta Washington, Commissioners

565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road Cottages
565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road, Staten Island
Landmark Site: Staten Island Tax Map 7020 Lot 4
Photo: Gale Harris, October 2010

565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road Cottages
Photo: New York City Department of Taxes (c. 1940), Municipal Archives

569 Bloomingdale Road Cottage
View from the southwet
Photo: Gale Harris, October 2010

565 Bloomingdale Road Cottage
View from the northwest
Photo: Gale Harris, October 2010

565 AND 569 BLOOMINGDALE ROAD HOUSES (LP-2415), 565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road
Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island, Tax Map Block 7020, Lot 4

Designated: February 1, 2011

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 09v1, 2009. Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM. Date: February 1, 2011