

56-2086

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

name of related multiple property listing N/A

### Location

street & number Merkel Lane

city or town Shelter Island

state NY

code NY

county Suffolk

code 103

zip code 11964

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

not for publication

vicinity

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide X local

Ross Daniel Wemy  
Signature of certifying official/Title

12/14/17  
Date

DSHPD  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

X entered in the National Register

\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_ removed from the National Register

\_\_\_ other (explain:)

Oliver Abernathy  
Signature of the Keeper

2-2-18  
Date of Action

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
 (Check as many boxes as apply.)

**Category of Property**  
 (Check only **one** box.)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
 (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	private
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

<input type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
0	0	sites
2	0	structures
0	0	objects
2	0	<b>Total</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
 (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

**Current Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

LANDSCAPE / Bridge

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LANDSCAPE / Bridge

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**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

**Materials**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

AMERICAN MOVEMENTS / Japanesque

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foundation: \_\_\_\_\_

walls: \_\_\_\_\_

roof: \_\_\_\_\_

other: Reinforced Concrete

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**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

**Summary Paragraph**

The Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge is located on a waterfront piece of land which measures approximately 3.82 acres in size and is situated on the south shore of Shelter Island, Suffolk County, New York. The nominated bridge, sea wall with dike, and lock represent the surviving components of a protected and naturalistic “lagoon” created in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as part of Francis Marion Smith’s summer estate. The nomination boundary was drawn to include all the components of the lagoon; however, the most important component is its centerpiece, the bridge.

The nominated property is irregular in shape and bordered by Smith Cove (historically known as Clark’s Cove) to the south, the Merkel Boat Basin to the north, a narrow piece of adjoining land on the east, and a channel and path on the west. A boat channel measuring about 40’ wide is centered roughly on the property, providing access for small watercraft into the boat basin from Smith Cove; this channel was added ca. 1960. The original access into the basin was a channel beneath the bridge at the west end of the property. Although that channel is now infilled, evidence of it survives, as do the stone walls which line it. Access to the nominated property by land is gained from the west across a 10’ wide path (which is the historic access to the bridge from land) that extends upward from the Japanese Bridge to Merkel Lane, and from the east via Thompson Road.

The property, which is flat and grassy with scattered trees, is close to sea level and preserves sections of a reinforced concrete sea wall along Smith Cove along the sides of the original channel and lagoon. A narrow sandy beach stretches along the base of the sea wall where it faces Smith Cove. Formerly a part of Francis Marion Smith’s c. 1900 “Presdeleau” summer estate, the Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge and adjoining parcel were preserved as a “beach reservation” in 1958 when the estate was subdivided into residential building lots; many of the surrounding residences reflect this later development. The nominated property is now owned by the South Ferry Hills Association, a property association composed of local homeowners whose houses occupy the former Smith estate, and the town of Shelter Island.

The two historic structures preserved on the nominated property – the bridge and associated sea wall – are constructed of reinforced concrete and were the work of the renowned engineer and inventor Ernest L. Ransome. The bridge, despite areas of deterioration due to the partial exposure of its iron reinforcing rods, is in good condition, whereas the sea wall exhibits areas of failure and material loss due to tidal action and erosion. The remnants of a dike separating the lagoon from the basin and a lock where the historic channel met Smith Cove are part of the sea wall and together these features created the lagoon. Both the wall and the bridge demonstrate the viability of the original construction materials, however, and have withstood the negative effects of adverse weather and numerous hurricanes, such as that of 1938, which led to the demolition of the estate house, “Presdeleau.” In addition to the bridge and the sea wall, a narrow concrete foot path stretches from the foot of the bridge in an easterly direction, terminating at the sea wall where a wharf was formerly located.

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While the wooden wharf no longer exists, clear evidence survives showing where it was joined to the wall. The boundary was drawn to encompass the path leading to the bridge, the Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge, the seawall, dike, and lock associated with the lagoon, and the seawall which extends along Smith (Clark's) Cove (see labeled feature map).

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## **Narrative Description**

### Shelter Island: Geographical Context

Shelter Island is both an island and a municipality and is part of Suffolk County, New York, although it is separated from the mainland on three sides by Shelter Island Sound and on the fourth (east) by Gardiners Bay. The nominated property borders on Smith Cove, a small body of water on the south shore of the island within Shelter Island Sound. Shelter Island measures a little over twelve square miles, or approximately 8,000 acres in size, about one third of which is land preserved from development by The Nature Conservancy. The island shares its geological origins with that of Long Island as a whole, which was formed from continental glaciation during the Pleistocene Epoch. Present-day Long Island, including Shelter Island, lies at the forward edge of the Laurentide Ice Sheet, which last retreated (melted) between 8,000 and 10,000 years ago, creating two terminal moraines or ridges of glacial material (Ronkonkoma and Harbor Hill) that mark the southernmost extent of the glacial advance.

Shelter Island's irregular shoreline and sub-surface, which took shape during this dynamic prehistoric period, is littered with glacial "till" or rounded rocks of varying sizes that were pushed in advance of the ice front and later deposited as the ice retreated. The natural configuration of Smith Cove and the adjacent shoreline, which had become low-lying marshland by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, offered an ideal setting for creating the protected and naturalistic "lagoon" in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as part of Francis Marion Smith's summer estate.

### Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge: Physical Setting

The Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge is preserved within its original and intended physical setting, on the shore of Smith Cove and astride the remains of a boat basin or "lagoon" created shortly before its construction. The shoreline rises sharply to the west, north and east of the lagoon, accentuating the apparent naturalistic and secluded setting of the bridge. The lagoon was evidently formed through the dredging and widening of a tidal creek and marsh, the resulting configuration of which was recorded by E. Belcher Hyde's *Atlas of a Part of Suffolk County, Long Island, New York* (1916). Earlier maps generated by the U. S. Coast Survey (1838, 1884) documented a low-lying stretch of shoreline but not a boat basin or lagoon, the first appearance of which may be seen in E. Belcher Hyde's *Map of Eastern Long Island* (1896). Francis M. Smith, whose name also appeared on the 1896 map, was in the early stages of assembling his summer estate at that time.

By 1904, the boat basin or "lagoon" had reached its current size and configuration according to the U. S. Geological Survey's *Shelter Island Quadrangle*, though no outlet to Smith Cove is shown. From map records, it appears that Smith began by dredging the marsh in the late 1890s and that the outlet to the cove was introduced

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after 1904, thus creating the opportunity – if not the necessity – for building the bridge. Historic photographs date the bridge to c. 1905. With the outlet dug, a means for containing sea water was required within the boat basin or “lagoon” to prevent it from draining at low tide. As an extension of the sea wall constructed c. 1905 to encircle the land mass between Smith Cove and the lagoon, a dike was installed to trap the water at high tide. Remnants of the structure remain today (labeled erroneously as “remains of concrete foot bridge” in 1958). Though severely deteriorated, portions of the lock historically built to control the water flow into the outlet from the Cove also remain.

While the former “lagoon” survives, it was subdivided along with what remained of the Smith estate and designated as the “Merkel Boat Basin” in 1958, along with fifty-eight house lots and the “Beach Reservation” parcel, which preserves the Japanese Bridge and sea wall. Ownership of the boat basin has since passed to the town of Shelter Island.

### Japanese Bridge: Design & Dimensions

The design of the bridge is simple and elegant. The span is shaped in a low-slope bell curve, with open railings or balustrades and cap rails with minimal embellishment, terminating in substantial circular end posts with large ball finial tops. Construction of the bridge used reinforced concrete technology that was uncommon in its day, employing iron reinforcing bars composed of twisted “rebars” known as “Ransome bars,” which had a square cross-section, set in hand-mixed concrete, and hand-formed and cast in place. The surface of the bridge deck is cast concrete impressed with a brick pattern. The balusters alternate with elongated, rounded openings arranged vertically to follow the curve of the bridge deck. The cross section of the balusters includes a reverse  $\frac{1}{4}$  round edge detail on both interior and exterior sides. The caps are undecorated.

The bridge measures approximately 60’ long by 6’ wide at each end. The arched deck narrows to 4’ wide at its center, where it reaches a height of about 10’ feet above the water. The deck is arched not only from end to end, but also from side to side, enabling water to flow downward into drains located adjacent to the posts. Each of the four turned concrete posts situated at the base of the bridge stands 4’ high and the balustrades that extend along each side of the deck are 3’ high. The balusters are spaced 12” on center. The “bricks,” which are impressed as a pattern in the deck, measure 2  $\frac{1}{2}$ ” by 9.”

### Japanese Bridge: Structural Conditions

A recent conditions assessment concludes that the walking deck of the bridge is structurally stable due to the likelihood that the iron reinforcing bars were set at an increased depth in the poured concrete, thereby reducing and inhibiting their potential exposure to the deteriorating effects of water contact and carbonation of the concrete. By contrast, the design of the balustrades employed a minimal thickness of concrete, thus reducing their protection from moisture significantly over time and resulting in areas of exposure, corrosion and expansion of the iron reinforcing bars. Both balustrades therefore exhibit cracking and spalling of the concrete, especially in sections of the balusters and in each of the large corner posts. Prior repairs were also observed.

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Beneath the bridge deck, the supporting abutments at the waterline exhibit minimal deterioration due to erosion but no signs of settlement. Despite these visible signs of deterioration, the overall condition of the Japanese Bridge is relatively good; importantly, its structural integrity has not been significantly compromised by the loss of concrete and exposure of the reinforcing bars. Visually, the bridge retains a high level of integrity and preserves the design elements and material components that distinguish it as an example of innovative reinforced concrete.

### Sea Wall: Structural Conditions

The embankment or sea wall that encircles sections of the property is built of reinforced concrete exhibiting the same combination of construction materials – cast concrete and reinforcing iron rods – as seen in the Japanese Bridge. An additional feature of Ransome’s sea wall is the use of “deadmen,” which are blocks or plates buried in the ground and tied to the exterior face of the wall. These act as anchors that retain the integrity of the structure. A series of iron discs set at regular intervals may be seen along sections of the wall, and where one particular area has eroded, the connecting rod behind the wall may also be observed.

The wall averages 18” to 24” in height and approximately 8” in thickness and retains a textured surface which appears not to be the result of weathering but rather the impression of the forms used in its construction. Spaced at 10’ intervals are vertical “V” indentations which serve as control joints in the concrete. The condition of the sea wall varies and the wall disappears entirely in some areas of the property. The wall extends the length of Smith Cove on the south side of the property, where sections have now been encapsulated behind a later bulkhead constructed for the boat channel. The visible sections of the wall on this side of the property are weathered but intact, with evidence surviving of where a wharf once connected to the wall and extended out into the cove.

A section of the wall survives adjacent the west end of the bridge where the original channel to Smith Cove was located, and a longer section extends from the east end of the bridge, following and retaining the curvilinear property line that defines the northern boundary fronting the boat basin. This latter section of sea wall, which is more protected than the wall fronting south onto Smith Cove, is best preserved.

### Summary

The nominated property, which is located on Smith Cove, Shelter Island, New York is composed of an elongated and irregular piece of land situated close to sea level on which significant structures, the c. 1905 Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge and associated seawalls, are preserved and maintained. Both resources are constructed of reinforced concrete and were designed by Ernest L. Ransome, the renowned engineer and inventor whose name is closely associated with the early use of this innovative construction material. The bridge design, which follows a low bell curve in profile, is based on Japanese inspired precedents and its situation within the landscape was intended to enhance the recreational value and enjoyment of the artificially created lagoon which provides a visual and historical context for the Japanese Bridge.

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The reinforced concrete construction of the Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge and sea wall employs the primary or “signature” characteristic of the inventor’s innovative technology – his so-called “Ransome bar” – which is an iron bar that is square in section and twisted along its length. The bars bonded better with the concrete in which they were embedded than others of the period, providing extra strength in compression, tension and shear when compared with other reinforcement techniques. The durability and longevity of Ransome’s innovative system of reinforcing concrete construction at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century contributed to the rapid adoption of the building material for industrial buildings in the United States, which laid the foundation for European modern architecture. The Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge – an atypical design for Ransome, whose work is most associated with factory buildings – is a rare example of Ransome’s use of this material for a recreational structure.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

Engineering

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

ca. 1905

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

ca. 1905

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Ernest Leslie Ransome

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The period of significance is tied to the construction of the Ransome Japanese Bridge in ca. 1905.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**



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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge located on Shelter Island, New York (Suffolk County), was built c.1905 as an ornamental landscape feature on the summer estate of Francis Marion Smith, the owner of the Pacific Coast Borax Company. Designed by engineer and inventor Ernest L. Ransome, the bridge is significant under Criterion C for its architectural design, engineering, and reinforced concrete construction. The bridge exemplifies Ransome's innovative reinforced concrete method of construction, but the delicate, Japanese-inspired design is unusual among Ransome's commissions, which primarily focused on industrial buildings. The structure and an adjoining concrete sea wall around a designed lagoon are the only surviving trace of Smith's turn-of-the-century estate, whose principal buildings were damaged in the Hurricane of 1938, and are therefore a testimony to the strength and durability of this once novel construction technology.

Francis Marion Smith (1846-1931), nick-named the "Borax King," established an East Coast manufacturing plant and distribution center for his products in Bayonne, New Jersey, in 1897. Smith employed Ransome to design his west and east coast refineries, which were built of reinforced concrete. Ernest Leslie Ransome (1852-1917), an English inventor, engineer and architect whose father had patented a process for producing artificial stone in the 1840s, brought the experience of working in the family factory to America in 1870; there he began experimenting with reinforced concrete. Ransome secured a patent for his system of construction in 1884 and completed several important commissions in the material prior to his work for Smith, including the Alvord Lake Bridge located in San Francisco, California in 1889.

The Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge was designed and built at the height of Ransome's career, incorporating the inventor's signature "Ransome bars" in its reinforced concrete construction. Unlike the simple, functional bridges and factories he had designed before, the design of this bridge embodied the "Japan Craze" of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, an aesthetic movement that swept the West after Commodore Matthew C. Perry's well publicized incursion into the island nation in 1853, and which later influenced the fine and decorative arts, as well as sculpture, architecture and the performing arts. Graceful in its contours and essentially ornamental in purpose, Francis M. Smith's bridge and its waterfront setting characterized the essence of the Japanese garden, an evocative and contemplative place that transformed as it celebrated its naturalistic setting. The bridge was the centerpiece of the design. Today, the majority of the lagoon survives, including its form, the concrete walls that outline it, remnants of the lock and dike that created the enclosure and the Japanese inspired concrete bridge with delicate balusters and concrete deck formed to resemble bricks. Although slightly deteriorated, the lagoon and bridge can be exactly matched against historic photos, thus accurately representing the small ornamental estate features.

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## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### Early History of Shelter Island

Situated between the North and South Forks of eastern Long Island, Shelter Island is an 8,000-acre land mass with an irregular shoreline that fronts on three bodies of water: Gardiners, Shelter Island and Peconic Bays. Settled by Nathaniel and Grissel Sylvester in 1652, the island's early history is unusual for the region in that it was not settled by adventurers or groups of settlers seeking refuge from religious persecution or sufficient land for creating their own communities. Rather, Nathaniel Sylvester and three partners purchased the island from the indigenous Manhasset Indians to serve as a staging area for trade with Barbados and for its natural stand of primeval white oaks, which were invaluable in creating the barrels that were essential for transporting their primary commodity, sugar. Nathaniel's brother, Constant Sylvester, and two partners were engaged not only in trading sugar but also in tobacco, molasses and rum. Nathaniel's wife, Grissel, was the daughter of Thomas Brinley, who served as Keeper of the Accounts to both Charles I and II. She was the younger sister and ward of Anne Brinley, who had married William Coddington of Rhode Island in England in 1650. She was 16 years of age at the time of her marriage to Nathaniel Sylvester in 1651.<sup>1</sup>

Population growth on the island was slow, owing primarily to its dynastic beginnings. By 1673, possession of the entire island had come into the possession of Nathaniel and when he died in 1680, title passed to his five sons, of whom only two, Giles and Nathaniel II, would gain control. Each of these sons later sold extensive land holdings to other families – Giles parted with one-quarter of the island to William Nicoll of Islip in 1695, and Nathaniel II sold 1,000 acres to George Havens in 1700 – and by the 1730s there were as many as twenty families living on Shelter Island. William Nicoll II was elected as the first supervisor. These early families – especially the Nicolls, Havens, and Derings – continued to dominate the political, economic and social life of the island throughout the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Shelter Island saw the construction of its first meetinghouse in 1743, a schoolhouse by 1790, and a grist mill in 1810. An agrarian lifestyle prevailed, with the overlay of “gentleman farmer” reserved for a few major land owners whose farms were largely cultivated for their profit by tenant farmers and slaves throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The British occupation during the Revolutionary War was devastating to the local economy; however, a majority of the residents, who fled the island to Connecticut during the war, returned from the conflict to find their livestock, farms and other possessions decimated. As the population recovered, other opportunities for employment and economic advancement developed, especially in the maritime trades. With centers of the whaling industry located close by in Sag Harbor and Greenport, many of the island's young men went to sea, some becoming captains, while others found employment in related trades such as shipbuilding. It is said that more than twenty departed for California in the Gold Rush in 1849. And by the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, another “industry” emerged that would have a profound effect on the island's economy and social life: tourism.

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Like much of eastern Long Island, seasonal visitors seeking relief and recreation in the country away from urban centers would transform life on Shelter Island on many levels and would ultimately lead to new patterns of land ownership and the re-assembly of large parcels into summer estates.

The new age of tourism that dawned on Long Island in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century created major social and cultural changes on localities such as Shelter Island, which remained relatively isolated from urban centers until that time. The impact of the railroad's arrival in nearby Greenport and on many other Long Island communities was largely responsible for this phenomenon. The Long Island Railroad reached Greenport village on August 5, 1844.<sup>2</sup> Ironically, it was not planned to benefit either year-round residents or summer visitors to Long Island, but rather to connect travelers between New York and Boston. Beginning with its incorporation as the Brooklyn and Jamaica Rail Road in 1832, the first leg connected Brooklyn residents between the East River and Jamaica, Queens. But the railroad's chief engineer, Major D. B. Douglass, soon planned a continuation of the line and visualized an eleven-hour, rail-and-steamship combination that would connect the two major eastern cities. (The all-land route through Connecticut was considered impassable at the time due to the hilly countryside and river valleys.) Douglass attracted wealthy New Yorkers and Bostonians to invest in the scheme and received a charter for the Long-Island Rail-Road Company in 1834. Because the line was not meant to serve local Long Island communities, it avoided the existing population centers along the north and south shores and was built along the spine of the island instead, where the island was largely free of inhabitants and enjoyed a relatively flat grade. The exception was Greenport, which became its eastern terminus in 1844.

Despite the original intention of the railroad, which was to provide efficient transportation for travelers between New York and Boston with ferry service connecting the island's North Fork with Stonington, Connecticut, urban residents soon discovered its advantages for reaching closer destinations such as the rural and scenic communities of Long Island's coastline. The discovery was fortuitous; by 1849, a successful all-land route was built through Connecticut and the Long Island Railroad was forced to turn its attention to servicing the local population. Shelter Island benefitted by being within close proximity of the road's original terminus at Greenport. Other scenic destinations, such as the maritime villages along the island's south shore, would wait another decade before the railroad extended branch lines to serve them.

In the aftermath of the railroad's arrival to eastern Long Island, when tourism was confined at first to travelers and seasonal vacationers seeking relief from the heat and discomfort of city life, a new breed of "visitor" with the financial means to set down permanent roots emerged. Having frequented the island's boardinghouses and hotels, some of which achieved considerable size and lavishness, the more affluent tourists aspired to something more. The unheated summer shanties and larger "cottages" of the 1860s and '70s set the stage for the palatial homes of the wealthy, oftentimes set on extensive grounds in the '80s, '90s and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Shelter Island Heights had its own monumental hotel built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – the Prospect House built in 1871 and lost to fire in 1942 – which was visible and easily accessible from Greenport. The heights also hosted the Shelter

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<sup>1</sup> W.W. Munsell, *History of Suffolk County, New York*, "Shelter Island," (New York: W.W. Munsell & Co., 1882), *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin F. Thompson, *History of Long Island* (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1918), *passim*.

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Island Grove and Camp Meeting Association of the Methodist Episcopal Church, laid out in 1872 by a group of Brooklyn clergyman and laymen whose summer colony grew to nearly 100 cottages by the 1880s. And the island witnessed its share of summer estates; one cluster of such “cottages” built by wealthy yachtsmen sprung up at Dering Harbor, while others were scattered on large land holdings across the island. The estate of Francis M. Smith, which was assembled and developed between 1892 and 1906, was especially notable for its size (over 500 acres), as well as its landscape features and accessory structures.<sup>3</sup>

Francis Marion Smith (1846-1931)

In building his Shelter Island estate, Presdeleau, Francis Marion Smith became one of the most influential figures for his time on the island.<sup>4</sup> He represents the influence that wealthy, urban, non-native inhabitants had on patterns of local land ownership and lifestyle at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a phenomenon that swept Long Island from the 1880s through the Great Depression of the early 1930s. Estate-building in this period left an indelible mark on the Long Island landscape, not only for creating major country houses and outbuildings set on extensive grounds, but also in changing the socio-economic composition of the population as a whole. Smith’s impact on Shelter Island was felt both as a result of his re-assembling numerous parcels of land and transforming a pre-existing 19<sup>th</sup> century dwelling into a country estate – in effect, reversing the contemporary evolution of land ownership which typically saw the subdivision of land holdings into smaller and smaller parcels – as well as in activities such as introducing exotic deer to create a private deer park and sponsoring charitable events to benefit local civic causes. His wife, Mary Rebecca (Thompson) Smith (1846-1905) organized the annual harvest festivals, for example, that benefited the public library – social events that brought the local population and “summer people” together.

Smith made his fortune in the West by mining the mineral borax, which he processed and marketed nationwide for a variety of uses under the “20 Mule Team Borax” brand, which remained the industry leader for many decades. His business interests stretched over many decades, beginning with his prospecting adventures near Candelaria, Nevada, in 1872. Born on February 2, 1846, on a farm in Richmond, Wisconsin, Francis Marion Smith left home after graduating from Milton College in 1867. He prospected for five years in Montana, Idaho, and Nevada before discovering what became the largest known deposit of borax at the time and the source of his future fortune:

... looking to the northwest, he was able to glimpse the gleaming white surface of a place called Teel’s Marsh... It soon turned out that Smith had found the richest borax deposit in western Nevada. By speedily filing his locations, he gained title to the marsh and before the end of the year had a small refinery in operation. This was

<sup>3</sup> The preparer is indebted to Edward and Patricia Shillingburg, whose research into the lives of Francis and Mary Smith and the contemporary historical context of life on Shelter Island in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was invaluable. See Edward and Patricia Shillingburg, “Frank Smith, the Borax King, on Shelter Island,” available at <<http://www.shelter-island.org/smith/index.html>. 2003>.

<sup>4</sup> George Herbert Hildebrand, *Borax Pioneer: Francis Marion Smith* (San Diego, CA: Howell-North Books, 1982), *Passim*.

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the true dawn of the borax industry in the United States... During those years he pioneered borax mining in Death Valley, switched ore recovery to underground mining, and made himself a multi-millionaire.<sup>5</sup>

Smith was not only quick to secure his claim and begin mining, but was also innovative in promoting and marketing his product. In 1875, during a national depression, he opened a retail store and office at 185 Wall Street in New York City to expand the borax market. Smith's marketing under the "20 Mule Team Borax" trademark was named for the way in which he transported the mineral out of the Nevada and California deserts where it was mined. Advertising claims that borax would "clean black cashmere, cameos and coral," "keep milk and cream sweet" and prevent "diphtheria, lung fever and kidney trouble" may have been exaggerated, but they helped to popularize the cleaning product in a prime market and in a period when sales were slumping nationwide. Smith's Pacific Coast Borax Company, having emerged as the industry leader in the 1890s as the result of its founder's entrepreneurial instincts, dominated both national and worldwide markets for the product until well into the next century.

Borax became significant in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century because of its affordability and many domestic and industrial applications. Used primarily as a household detergent and cleaning booster, it served as powdered hand soap and a tooth bleaching formula as well as a flux for welding iron and steel and softening water. Borax is also a component in cosmetics, enamel glazes and fire retardants.

To expand the processing of raw minerals that formed the borax product, Smith worked with the nationally significant engineer and reinforced concrete innovator Ernest L. Ransome, who designed two refineries for him in West Alameda, California, and Bayonne, New Jersey.<sup>6</sup> Ransome's California refinery was built in 1889 and is credited as the first structure of its kind to be built with reinforced concrete. It was followed in 1896 by the concrete Ferry Building in San Francisco, an integral part of Smith's transportation system. Soon after, the two men formed the Ransome Concrete Machinery Company of Dunellen, New Jersey. Having secured numerous patents for manufacturing and applying reinforced concrete in the construction industry, Ransome perfected and patented a novel system of concrete construction in 1902 that paved the way for modern-day, concrete-framed factory construction.

Great national and international success in the borax industry gave Smith the time and means to pursue other interests, including the creation of an integrated transportation infrastructure serving Oakland, California. He and his wife built a mansion on 25 acres in Oakland known as "Arbor Villa" in 1893. Over a period of twenty years, he oversaw the creation of a multi-layered, public transportation system linking Oakland with the neighboring metropolis of San Francisco by utilizing rail lines, electric streetcars and improved ferry service that exploited the natural topography of the area.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Hildebrand, *Borax Pioneer: Francis Marion Smith*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Reyner Banham, *A Concrete Atlantis: U.S. Industrial Building and European Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 65-79.

<sup>7</sup> Hildebrand, *Op. cit.*

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“Borax” Smith and his wife, Mary, came to Shelter Island for the first time in the early 1890s, at about the time they were planning their Oakland, California, estate “Arbor Villa.” Their introduction to the area was probably due to Frank Colton Havens, a business partner in Oakland, California, whose father, Wickham Havens, was a Sag Harbor resident and whose family had lived on Shelter Island for many generations.<sup>8</sup> By the 1890s, Shelter Island had become a popular summer destination for urban dwellers, and Frank and Mary first stayed at the Manhasset House on Dering Harbor in 1892. Not content to remain tourists, they soon bought property and began forming the Presdeleau estate. Their first purchase was a 42-acre tract in the southwesterly area of the island that included a late 18<sup>th</sup> century house overlooking the water then owned by Hannah W. Cartwright, the widow of Captain Maltby P. Cartwright. A sequence of acquisitions followed in the 1890s: a stretch of adjoining Nicoll family land, giving them control of the entire cove, and multiple parcels acquired from the Clark, Cartwright, Rogers, Griffing, Conklin and Havens families, all descendants of longtime Shelter Islanders and many of whom had moved to Riverhead, Brooklyn and elsewhere. By 1906, Frank and Mary Smith had assembled nearly 500 acres of land: the Presdeleau estate, encompassing 260 acres on Clark’s Cove (Smith Cove), and an additional 235 acres to the north of the highway on Sachem’s Neck.

Frequent reporting in the *Suffolk Times* during the late 1890s and after the turn-of-the-century reveals that Frank, his family and their entourage traveled cross-country to occupy Presdeleau on Shelter Island during the summer months each year. Tragically, Mary died in San Francisco of a stroke in 1905.<sup>9</sup> Frank, then aged 59, remarried his secretary, Evelyn Kate Ellis; the couple had four children between 1907 and 1913. Although life continued much as before, Smith suffered severe business reverses in 1913 due to overextended loans and tightened banking regulations that caused the loss of his borax mines as well as land investments and transportation infrastructure in California. While the family continued to visit Presdeleau, it was not until the 1920s that Smith regained his fortune through the discovery of another borax mine in Nevada.

As part of a 1921 court settlement, the Central National Bank of Oakland (California) forced the sale of his real estate holdings in Suffolk County to resolve outstanding indebtedness dating back to 1913. The large Sachem’s Neck parcel was auctioned to satisfy Frank’s obligations to the California bank, although the Presdeleau estate was held in his wife’s name and was therefore beyond the reach of the courts. After parlaying his business connections and acumen once again into a controlling interest in the newly formed West End Mining Company, Smith suffered a series of strokes and left the firm in 1926, having amassed a second fortune by the age of eighty. He died five years later in 1931, aged eighty-five.<sup>10</sup>

### Presdeleau

Presdeleau began as a farm house – apparently Greek Revival in style and dating from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, to judge by early photographs – and grew into a rambling country estate with a main block and portico that

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<sup>8</sup> Shillingburg, *Op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> *The San Francisco Call*, January 2, 1906, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Shillingburg, *Op. cit.*

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mirrored that of the original dwelling and a large circular porch at the opposite end. The original house was owned by Hannah W. Cartwright, the widow of Captain Maltby P. Cartwright, who descended from an old Shelter Island family. A *porte cochere* connected the two buildings, the newer of which was three stories high, and in total the house consisted of 35 rooms. A local resident, Elias Havens Payne, is said to have constructed the Smith House additions. Decades later, when the original house was taken down, the Smith era structure still measured 50 by 150 feet. But more impressive than the size of the house was its setting, facing south toward Clark's Cove (Smith Cove). The Japanese bridge was constructed as part of a protected and naturalistic "lagoon" nearby the house during the early twentieth century. Other estate structures occupied the property as well: a boat house, carriage house, bath houses, docks and a cabin on Cedar Island for clambakes.

After sustaining damage from the Hurricane of 1938, the main house, which was then in the possession of Smith's second wife, Evelyn, was taken down. The estate barn and lookout tower had burned in 1930. What remained of Presdeleau after World War II was sold and subdivided.<sup>11</sup> Title to the Presdeleau estate passed from Evelyn Smith to Margaret Foltis (1950) and then to Interstate Enterprises, Inc. (1951), Herbert A. Laage (1956), and finally to Mer-Kel Realty Corporation, which developed the estate as building lots known as South Ferry Hills between 1958 and 1969. The "Beach Reservation" of 2.84 acres, on which the Japanese Bridge and associated concrete sea wall are located, was conveyed by Mer-Kel Realty Corporation to the South Ferry Hills Association ("a membership corporation of the State of New York") on May 14, 1969.<sup>12</sup>

## ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

### Concrete as a Building Material

Concrete was known to the Romans, who discovered that lime putty and *pozzolana*, a fine volcanic ash, would harden after mixing under water. This "hydraulic cement" became a significant building material throughout the ancient world, especially in the construction of bridges and aqueducts. In the New World, a form of concrete known as "tabby" was introduced by Spanish colonists in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and the technology soon spread to the English settlements of the southeastern coast.<sup>13</sup> But real progress and more widespread acceptance of the material was not achieved until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, as exemplified by the use of hydraulic cement in constructing the Erie Canal in upstate New York (1817-1825), and later in the publication of O. S. Fowler's *A Home for All* (1853), in which the author advocated for "gravel wall" construction in conjunction with his equally novel, 8-sided house plans. As Fowler explained:

The gravel wall is made wholly out of lime and stones, sand included, which is, of course, fine stone. And pray what is lime but stone? Made from stone, the burning, by expelling its carbonic acid gas, separates its particles,

<sup>11</sup> Shillingburg, *Op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> *Deed Liber 6562, Page 131*. Suffolk County Clerk, County Center, Riverhead, NY.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Gaudette and Deborah Slaton, "National Park Service Technical Brief No. 15: Preservation of Historic Concrete," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 2007); see also: Nick Gromicko and Kenton Shepard, "The History of Concrete," available at <[www.nachi.org/history-of-concrete.htm](http://www.nachi.org/history-of-concrete.htm)>.

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which, slaked and mixed with sand and stone, coats them, and adheres both to them and to itself, and, reabsorbing its carbonic acid gas, again returns to stone, becoming more and still more solid with age, till, in the lapse of years, it becomes real stone... to mold into whatever form we like.<sup>14</sup>

The U.S. Government also played a part in promoting the use of concrete construction by employing the material for frontier military posts soon after the Civil War and in building coastal fortifications along the Atlantic, Pacific and Gulf coasts in the 1890s. These latter structures, some requiring walls as thick as 20 feet, were massive but constructed without internal reinforcement.

One of the earliest applications of reinforcing concrete in construction is documented in the United States in an 1860 patent issued to S. T. Fowler; by the early 1870s, however, it remained the subject of experiment, as seen in the William E. Ward House in Port Chester, New York (NR listed), constructed between 1873 and 1876 by the owner and his architect friend, Robert Mook. The house is regarded as the first known reinforced concrete house in the nation. Ward, a mechanical engineer, is said to have constructed the house to demonstrate the viability of concrete as a building material, but in their use of Portland cement reinforced with lightweight, iron I-beams and rods, he and Mook accomplished something much more significant in the history of architecture. Two stories tall beneath a high mansard roof, the house boasts a four-story tower and wrap-around porch, all cast in reinforced concrete. The accomplishment garnered the attention of architectural publications by 1875, a year before completion, and was celebrated by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers in 1883. Whether Ernest Ransome knew of the Ward House is unknown, but his professional involvement in the Technical Society of the Pacific Coast, a San Francisco-based trade organization organized in 1884, suggests that he was cognizant of contemporary advances and experiments in the field.

Reinforced concrete had earlier origins abroad.<sup>15</sup> Joseph Lambot constructed a small boat of the material and received a patent for it in France in 1855, and another Frenchman, Francois Coignet, published a book describing applications for the material in 1861. Coignet had constructed his own house in reinforced concrete in 1853 and fellow Frenchman Joseph Monier, who operated a commercial nursery in Paris, acquired patents for iron reinforced concrete tubs (1867), tanks (1868), flat plates (1869), bridges (1873) and stairways (1875). While Monier lacked the technical background and knowledge to describe his "Monier System," this deficiency was addressed at about the same time in the United States by the inventor Thaddeus Hyatt (1816-1901), who began experimenting with reinforced concrete beams in the 1850s.

Hyatt's early success and fortune derived from a novel method of constructing sidewalks, and in this particular his career was linked to that of Ernest Ransome.<sup>16</sup> Hyatt first patented an "illuminating vault cover," which combined small glass disks into an iron panel designed to cover cellars beneath urban sidewalks and allow light

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<sup>14</sup> Orson Squire Fowler, *A Home For All or the Gravel Wall and Octagon Mode of Building* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, Publishers, 1854), 18-19.

<sup>15</sup> Fei Wang, "The Birth and Use of Concrete and Reinforced Concrete," *Advanced Materials Research*, Vols. 712-715, 955-960.

<sup>16</sup> Sara E. Wermiel, "California Concrete, 1876-1906: Jackson, Percy, and the Beginnings of Reinforced Concrete Construction in the United States," *Proceedings of the Third International Congress on Construction History*, Cottbus. 2009.



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to filter underground. Later moving to England, he experimented with iron-reinforced concrete floors, roofs and pavement slabs, which he published as a pamphlet in 1877. Although Hyatt's work in reinforcing concrete for sidewalk construction had little impact in England, it was recognized and marketed in the United States by Peter H. Jackson (1829-1908), an iron manufacturer who moved from New York to San Francisco in 1875 and began selling Hyatt's patent illuminating sidewalk tiles and reinforced concrete products.

The west coast city was an ideal setting for these products; relatively new and growing quickly, San Francisco's wide streets were laid out to enable the cellars of commercial buildings to stretch beneath the sidewalks to the edges of the street. First built of wood, the city's sidewalks were gradually replaced with more durable materials, leading to the widespread adoption of reinforced concrete slabs for this purpose. It was here that Ernest Ransome began by improving on the design of the iron rods that reinforced the concrete pavements, the first of many patents and commissions that would launch the inventor's career and label him by some as the "doyen of reinforced concrete." Building on his initial success and notoriety established with the improved sidewalks in San Francisco, Ransome applied his ingenuity and use of reinforced concrete to the construction of industrial buildings, earning him both the respect and recognition of his contemporaries, as well as that of later scholars who have traced his early career.

#### Ernest Leslie Ransome (1852-1917)

Ernest L. Ransome, an English-born inventor, engineer and architect whose father, Frederick Ransome, had patented and manufactured a type of artificial stone in the 1840s known as "concrete stone," immigrated to the United States in 1870 to help promote the family business.<sup>17</sup> Instead, he began developing methods of reinforcing concrete in construction, of which his Alvord Lake Bridge (1886-7) in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, is the oldest surviving and most notable example (NR Listed 2004 as part of the Golden Gate Historic District). Ransome's career would stretch over three decades, during which time he secured numerous patents for concrete design, mixing equipment and construction systems. In 1884, he experimented with reinforcing concrete sidewalks, and in the same year secured a patent for his "Ransome bar," an iron reinforcing rod that was twisted along its entire length, thus making a rigid bond with the surrounding concrete and resisting the tendency of the iron to stretch.<sup>18</sup>

Ransome's first contact with Francis M. Smith appears to be in designing Smith's Pacific Coast Borax Refinery in West Alameda, California in 1889. The factory was designed to crush, reduce and refine raw colemanite, from which the finished borax product was derived. The factory was one of the first of its kind to use reinforced and pre-cast concrete in the construction of its walls, floor, and interior supporting posts. Smith may have had even earlier contact with Ransome, however, and one authority has suggested that he previously financed the inventor. Later, the two men formed a partnership to create the Ransome Concrete Machinery Company in

<sup>17</sup> See: F. Ransome, Esq., C.E., London. *Patent Concrete Stone for Building Purposes* Baltimore, MD: William K. Boyle, 1866.

<sup>18</sup> Banham, *Op. cit. Passim*. See also: Amy Slaton, *Reinforced Concrete and the Modernization of American Building, 1900-1930* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), *Passim*.

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Dunellen, New Jersey. Ransome's west coast commissions included the Arctic Oil Works in San Francisco (1884), the Torpedo Assembly Building on Yerba Buena Island (1891), Roble Hall and the Leland Stanford Junior Museum of Art at Stanford University (1891 and 1894), and four city reservoirs in Portland, Oregon (1894-1911). But it was his second Pacific Coast Borax Refinery (1897) constructed for Francis M. Smith in Bayonne, New Jersey, that proved to be his most influential commission.

Ransome holds the distinction of being the designer and builder of the first two reinforced concrete buildings in the world and each was a borax refinery built for F. M. Smith: the first in 1889 and the second in 1897-98 (a small remnant of each of the large complexes appears to remain). The later of the two was Smith's Pacific Coast Borax Refinery in Bayonne, New Jersey, which employed Ransome's latest innovations in reinforced concrete technology:

The time is so recent and reinforced concrete buildings are now so common [1912] that it is difficult to appreciate the boldness of the conception to construct a 4-story building, to sustain actual working loads of 400 pounds per square foot besides heavy machinery even on the top floor, out of a material until recently used almost exclusively for foundations, and considered capable of resisting only compressive loads.<sup>19</sup>

Despite Ransome's success and growing reputation during the 1890s, skepticism still remained regarding the long term viability of his novel construction technology. Final acceptance would come in 1902, after a devastating fire at Smith's Bayonne plant in which the reinforced concrete frame saw little damage. The reinforced concrete walls of the 1898 factory survived and were later retained in the reconstruction, thereby vindicating Ransome's innovative construction methods:

The Pacific Coast Borax fire was, it appears, the triumph and vindication of Ransome's professional life. That Company's building at Bayonne, erected in 1897, had been his first work on the East Coast and is also reputedly his first complete reinforced concrete factory to be erected on that side of the country. The fire and Ransome's great and growing reputation as an inventor and constructor combined to give a kind of charisma to reinforced concrete as a material of the new industrial age; and Ransome was only one of a number of forceful new engineering personalities who appeared upon the scene as exponents and exploiters of this seemingly miraculous material... More to the point, he was also poised on the edge of the most extraordinarily creative part of his career in the actual design of buildings, the years between 1903 and 1906, in which he delivered the fireproof, daylight, concrete-framed factory in what was to prove to be its canonical form.<sup>20</sup>

The Bayonne plant and its second phase, constructed in 1903, not only confirmed Ransome's professional reputation but also undoubtedly deepened his relationship with Francis M. Smith, whose borax factories on both coasts demonstrated the ingenuity of the architect/engineer as well as that of the forward-thinking businessman.

<sup>19</sup> Atlas Portland Cement Co., *Reinforced Concrete in Factory Construction*, (New York: the Atlas Portland Cement Co., 1913,) 181.

<sup>20</sup> Reyner Banham, *A Concrete Atlantis: U.S. Industrial Building and European Modern Architecture 1900-1925* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 65, 68.

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Smith's association with the engineer extended to the domestic sphere as well; Ransome's innovative Japanese Bridge, constructed c. 1905 at Smith's "Presdeleau" at the height of his career, is evidence of their friendship. In addition to Ransome's Japanese Bridge at Presdeleau, it is thought that the engineer also designed a concrete sea wall that surrounds Cedar (now Taylor's) Island in Coecles Harbor (Shelter Island), formerly a part of Smith's estate. The bridge, while not typical of Ransome's use of reinforced concrete in the design of industrial buildings, incorporates a monolithic deck that is comparable technologically to the concrete floors and slabs that the engineer employed in such buildings. This feature alone – the gently curving arch of the bridge floor – exhibits the superiority of reinforced concrete in its adaptability to new shapes and applications.

Further vindication for Ransome's innovative construction methods occurred shortly after the Japanese Bridge project, when two of his reinforced concrete buildings at Stanford University survived the 1906 San Francisco earthquake with little damage while newer, more conventional masonry buildings were destroyed. Other commissions from this time period – for example, the United Shoe factory buildings, Beverly Massachusetts (1902) and the Ingalls Building, Cincinnati (1903) – added to his reputation, but Ransome devoted his later career to developing and patenting concrete mixing equipment, formwork and building systems. He co-authored *Reinforced Concrete Buildings* with Danish-born Henry Alexis Saurbrey in 1912 and his *Reinforced Concrete in Factory Construction* was published by The Atlas Portland Cement Company in 1913. Handbooks also appeared espousing his improved concrete equipment and methods, many of which remained under patent. After Ransome's death in 1917, his son, Frederick L. Ransome, wrote, "From my father was probably inherited or learned a fondness for mechanical work, some recognition of the importance of systematic and conscientious industry, a realization of the importance of truth and personal integrity, and a sense of impartial justice."<sup>21</sup>

The Japan Craze: Aesthetic Influence in the Victorian Age

The Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge was inspired by the "Japan Craze," or *Japonisme*, which pervaded Western culture in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> The style was fueled in large part by the exotic nature and source of artworks, porcelain and other objects which found their way to European and American markets. Notable among these were *ukiyo-e*, Japanese woodblock prints, which became an inspiration for Western artists because of their use of color, dramatic foreshortening and asymmetrical composition. Impressionist painters and contemporary designers such as Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933) were especially influenced by Japanese art and design, and Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), who collected *ukiyo-e* prints and organized a Japanese print exhibition in Paris in 1887, was also a major proponent.

Van Gogh's contemporary, the impressionist painter Claude Monet (1840-1926), was inspired by the craze and may have been familiar with Josiah Conder's *Landscape Gardening in Japan*, published in 1893.<sup>23</sup> Monet's garden at Giverny, laid out that year, featured a Japanese footbridge spanning a pool of water lilies and became a

<sup>21</sup>Edson S. Bastin, *Biographical Memoir of Frederick L. Ransome* (National Academy of Sciences, 1941), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Hannah Sigur, *The Influence of Japanese Art on Design* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2008), *Passim*.

<sup>23</sup> Josiah Conder, *Landscape Gardening in Japan* (London: Kelly & Walsh, 1893), *Passim*.

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subject that the artist painted numerous times. The bridge itself, which appears to be built of wood with simple railings, spans the pond in a shallow arch and, while reminiscent of the Japanese type known as *sori bashi*, is in reality only one of many types which were also flat and built of various materials, including stone and logs. The enduring and graceful profile of Monet's "Japanese" footbridge established a prototype, however, and Ransome's bridge on Shelter Island found its precedent in this form.

The inspiration for the Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge on Shelter Island may also be traced to an important event that took place in San Francisco a decade earlier: the California Midwinter International Exposition of 1894. The "Midwinter Fair" was created by Michael H. de Young, a San Francisco native who served as a commissioner to the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and who decided to stimulate the economy of his native city by creating a similar event. The fair took place from January until July of 1894 in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park and encompassed more than a hundred temporary structures throughout the park's two hundred acres. Coincidentally, one of the surviving structures within the park is Ernest L. Ransome's first reinforced concrete bridge dating from 1886; another, the Japanese Village and Tea Garden, may have inspired the Japanese Bridge and lagoon constructed a decade later on Smith's Shelter Island estate. The Japanese Village and Tea Garden encompassed man-made lakes, a waterfall, native plants and a *taiko bashi* or "drum bridge." Smith, a prominent resident of San Francisco and an active member of its business community, would have visited the fair and experienced the bridge and its naturalistic setting firsthand. The family's habit of spending winters in San Francisco and summers on the East Coast support this theory. More steeply arched than the Shelter Island bridge, the two structures nevertheless share a precedent in traditional Japanese design prototypes and are both small-scaled footbridges built to complement tranquil settings in which water features, paths, plantings and hand-propelled watercraft were an integral part.

#### Later History of the Bridge: Restoration & Preservation

The Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge and the waterfront property on which it is located – the so-called "beach reservation" – became the property of the South Ferry Hills Association in 1969. It is maintained by the organization as a shared amenity for a community composed primarily of seasonal property owners. Periodic efforts have been launched to repair the bridge. Photographic evidence suggests that by the early 1950s the balustrade of the bridge had begun to evidence symptoms of failure. A photograph dated c. 1951, for example, shows that seven of the spindles or balusters on the west balustrade had partially or completely disintegrated, exposing the vertical reinforcing bars that gives them internal support. This condition has been attributed to the narrow profile of the balusters, which makes them vulnerable to water infiltration, whereas the bridge deck has remained structurally sound due to its thicker concrete cover of the re-bar.

Whether Ransome intended to test the viability of his reinforced concrete technology by creating balusters of this design, or whether it was his client's conception of how a Japanese-inspired bridge should look that dictated the detail remains unknown. In either case, the innovative material was subjected to excessive stress and partial failure; remarkably, given the exposure and setting of the bridge at the water's edge and lack of any roof

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covering, its overall condition and structural integrity remains relatively high, and its foundational supports and deck intact. According to a recent assessment conducted by Steward Preservation Services, Inc.:

A previous conditions review of the bridge was carried out in 1993... to address ongoing deterioration of the bridge. At that time significant deterioration was noted as being observed, including cracking, loss of surfaces and exposure of ferrous rebar to salt/moisture, with a recommendation to provide repair through removal of deteriorated materials and replacement with specific proprietary restoration products (e.g. patching compounds, restoration primer and breathable paint coatings). In 1997 repair of the bridge was carried out, apparently incorporating these recommendations; however, it is not clear regarding the extent of repair targeted (from the contractor's proposal). It should be noted that the level of detail currently observed from the executed work suggests that a less detailed approach was followed. As such, replication of the original aesthetic detailing was apparently not included in that work, but rather an attempt to focus solely on replacement of deteriorated surfaces with a new coating.<sup>24</sup>

Ongoing preservation and maintenance of the historic Japanese Bridge and its waterfront setting remains a priority of the South Ferry Hills Association.

## CONCLUSION

Built c. 1905, the Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge on Shelter Island, New York, is constructed of reinforced concrete. While a majority of Ransome's turn-of-the-century concrete factories are no longer standing, the Japanese Bridge is preserved in its original, naturalistic setting. The bridge was an integral part of Francis Marion Smith's summer estate, Presdeleau. Smith, a native San Franciscan and owner of the Pacific Coast Borax Company, which branded the successful "20 Mule Team Borax" product, employed Ransome to design and construct two factories: the first, built in West Alameda, California, in 1889, and the second in Bayonne, New Jersey, in 1897. Both factories employed the engineer's innovative reinforced concrete technology in their construction and each is regarded as significant in the early development of industrial architecture in the United States; neither survives. Characteristic of its time, the Japanese Bridge drew upon a popular stylistic trend for its design. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century fascination for Japanese culture and aesthetics known as *Japonisme* informed not only the style of the bridge but also the transformation of its setting, a pseudo-naturalistic landscape in which water played a pre-eminent role. As a decorative feature of Francis M. Smith's Shelter Island estate, the Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge served as an integral component, enhancing the recreational value of his property while displaying the owner/builder's cognizance of contemporary fashion and design.

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<sup>24</sup> Steward Preservation Services, *Conditions Assessment and Engineering Recommendations*, 2017.

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Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge  
Name of Property

Suffolk County, NY  
County and State

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Wang, Fei. "The Birth and Use of Concrete and Reinforced Concrete." *Advanced Materials Research*, Vols. 712-715 (2013): 955-960.

Wermiel, Sara E. "California Concrete, 1876-1906: Jackson, Percy, and the Beginnings of Reinforced Concrete Construction in the United States." *Proceedings of the Third International Congress on Construction History*. May, 2009.

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):  
\_\_\_\_\_



Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge  
Name of Property

Suffolk County, NY  
County and State

---

**10. Geographical Data**

---

**Acreage of Property** 3.82 acres  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>18</u> Zone	<u>725359</u> Easting	<u>4547922</u> Northing	3	<u>          </u> Zone	<u>          </u> Easting	<u>          </u> Northing
2	<u>          </u> Zone	<u>          </u> Easting	<u>          </u> Northing	4	<u>          </u> Zone	<u>          </u> Easting	<u>          </u> Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

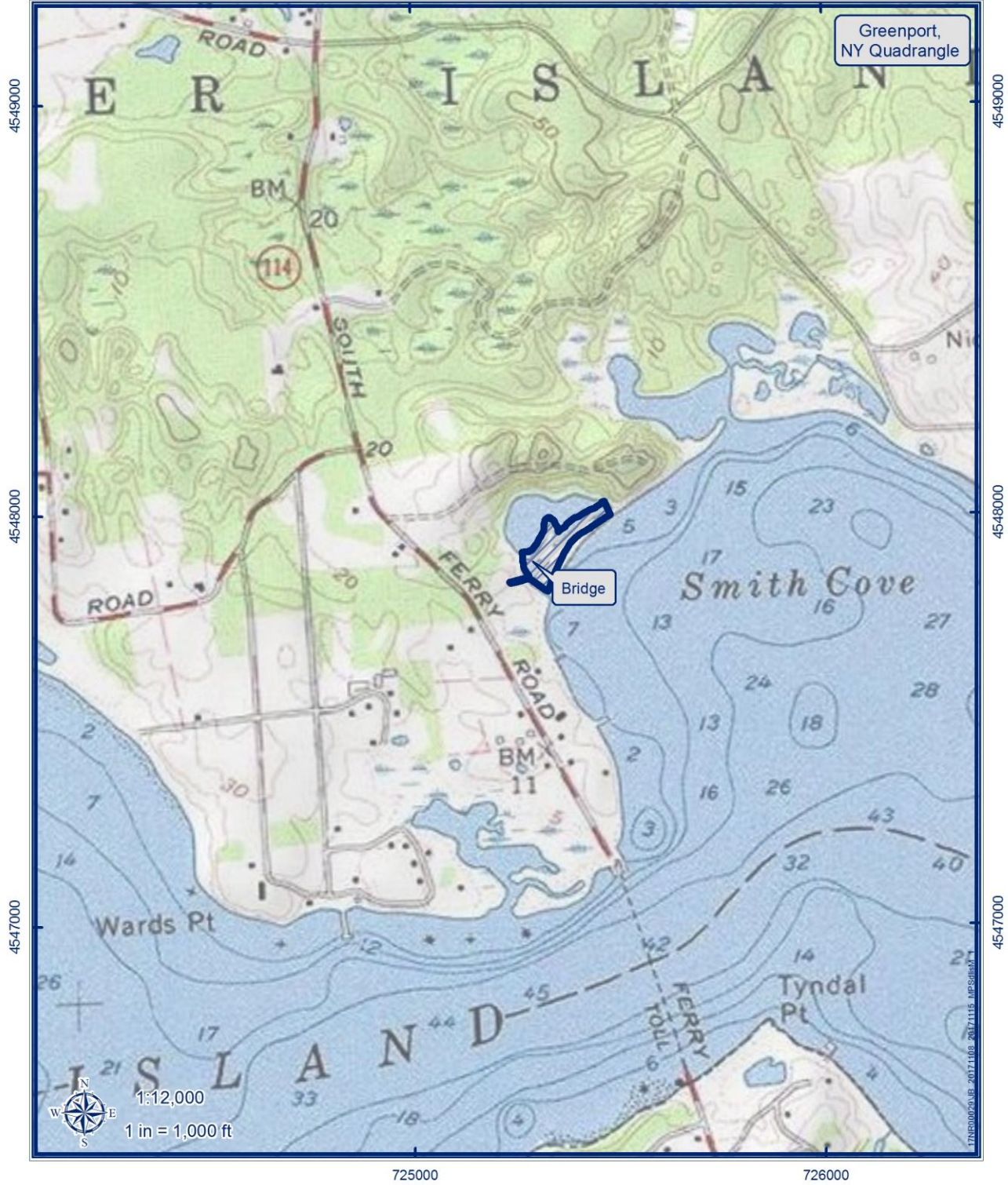
The boundary for the Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge was drawn to include the entire surviving lagoon, bridge and related historic features; these include the original grassy footpath leading to the bridge, the Japanese Bridge itself, the inlet with its concrete seawalls and remnants of a historic dike and lock, and the beach reservation parcel lined by concrete seawalls along Smith Cove.

Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge  
Name of Property

Suffolk County, NY  
County and State

### Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge

Shelter Island, Suffolk County,  
New York



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter





Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge  
Name of Property

Suffolk County, NY  
County and State

### Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge

Shelter Island, Suffolk County,  
New York



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



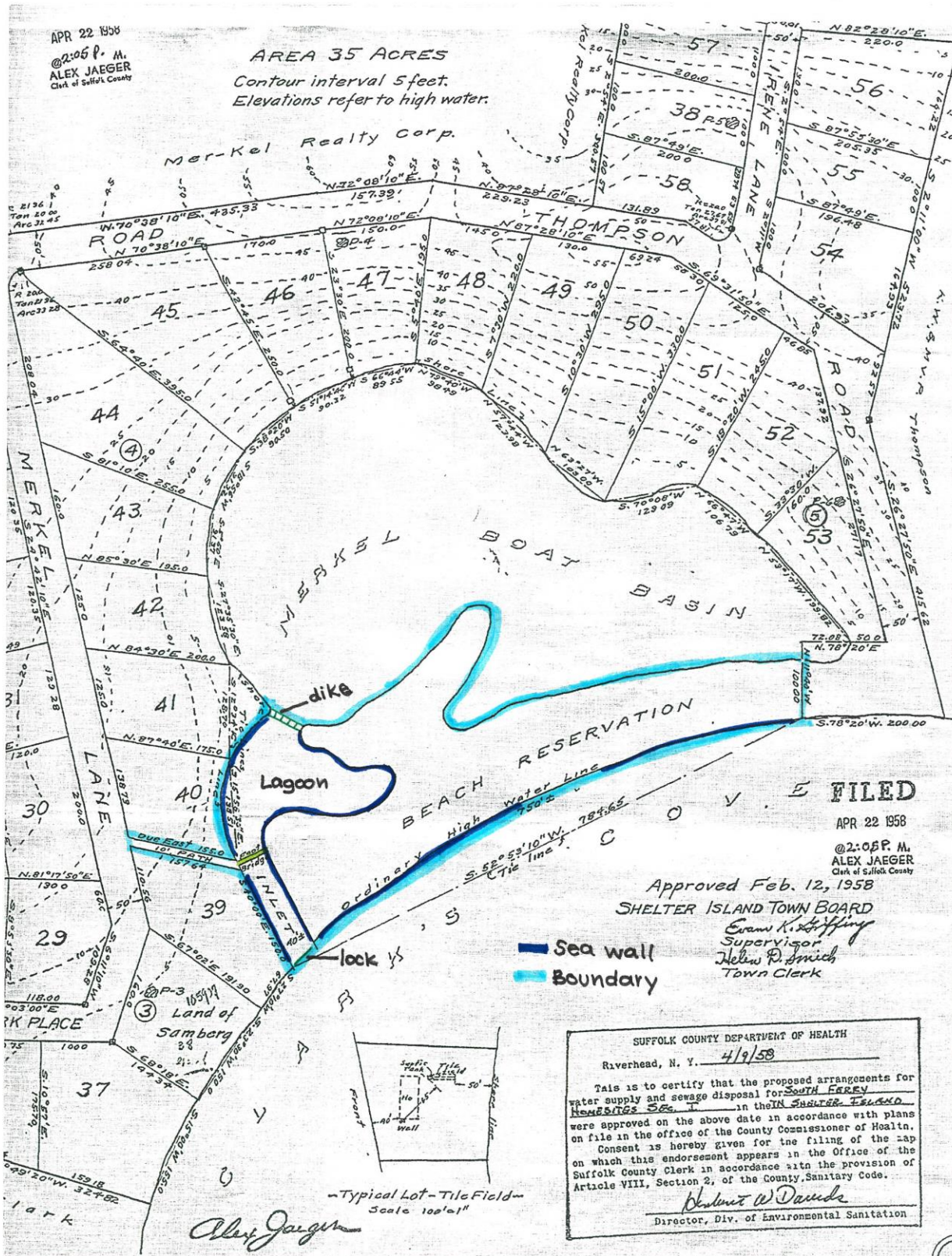


Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge

Suffolk County, NY

Name of Property

County and State



Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge  
Name of Property

Suffolk County, NY  
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Zachary Studenroth, edited by Jennifer Betsworth (NY SHPO)  
organization \_\_\_\_\_ date November 2017  
street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_  
e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.  
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge

City or Vicinity: Shelter Island

County: Suffolk State: New York

Photographer: Jennifer Betsworth and Zachary Studenroth

Date Photographed: June and October 2017

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

NY\_Suffolk County\_Smith Ransome Japanese Bridge\_0001  
Bridge and Inlet, facing northwest (JB)

NY\_Suffolk County\_Smith Ransome Japanese Bridge\_0002  
Bridge and Lagoon, facing northeast (ZS)

NY\_Suffolk County\_Smith Ransome Japanese Bridge\_0003  
Bridge and Beach Reservation, facing east (ZS)

Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge

Suffolk County, NY

Name of Property

County and State

NY\_Suffolk County\_Smith Ransome Japanese Bridge\_0004  
Bridge, facing west (ZS)

NY\_Suffolk County\_Smith Ransome Japanese Bridge\_0005  
Bridge, facing northwest (ZS)

NY\_Suffolk County\_Smith Ransome Japanese Bridge\_0006  
Bridge and Inlet, facing north (ZS)

NY\_Suffolk County\_Smith Ransome Japanese Bridge\_0007  
Inlet and Lagoon, facing southeast (ZS)

NY\_Suffolk County\_Smith Ransome Japanese Bridge\_0008  
View of Lagoon from Bridge, facing north (JB)

NY\_Suffolk County\_Smith Ransome Japanese Bridge\_0009  
Lagoon with Bridge in the background, facing east (ZS)

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge

Name of Property

Suffolk County, NY

County and State

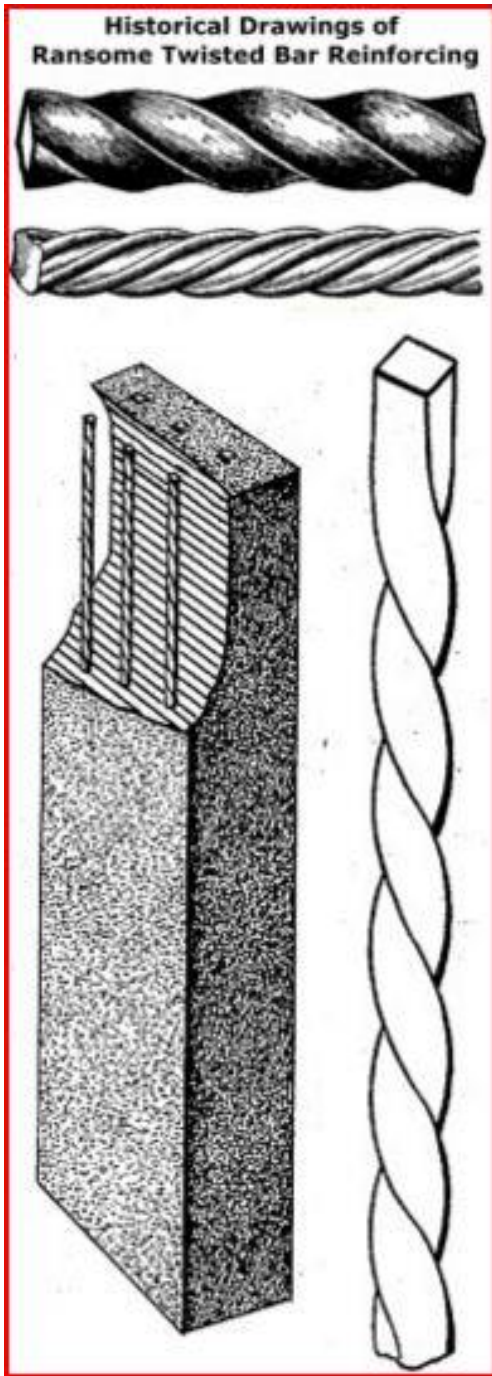


Figure 1. Ransome Bar diagram



Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge

Name of Property

Suffolk County, NY

County and State



Figure 2. Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge, ca. 1908-12



Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge

Name of Property

Suffolk County, NY

County and State

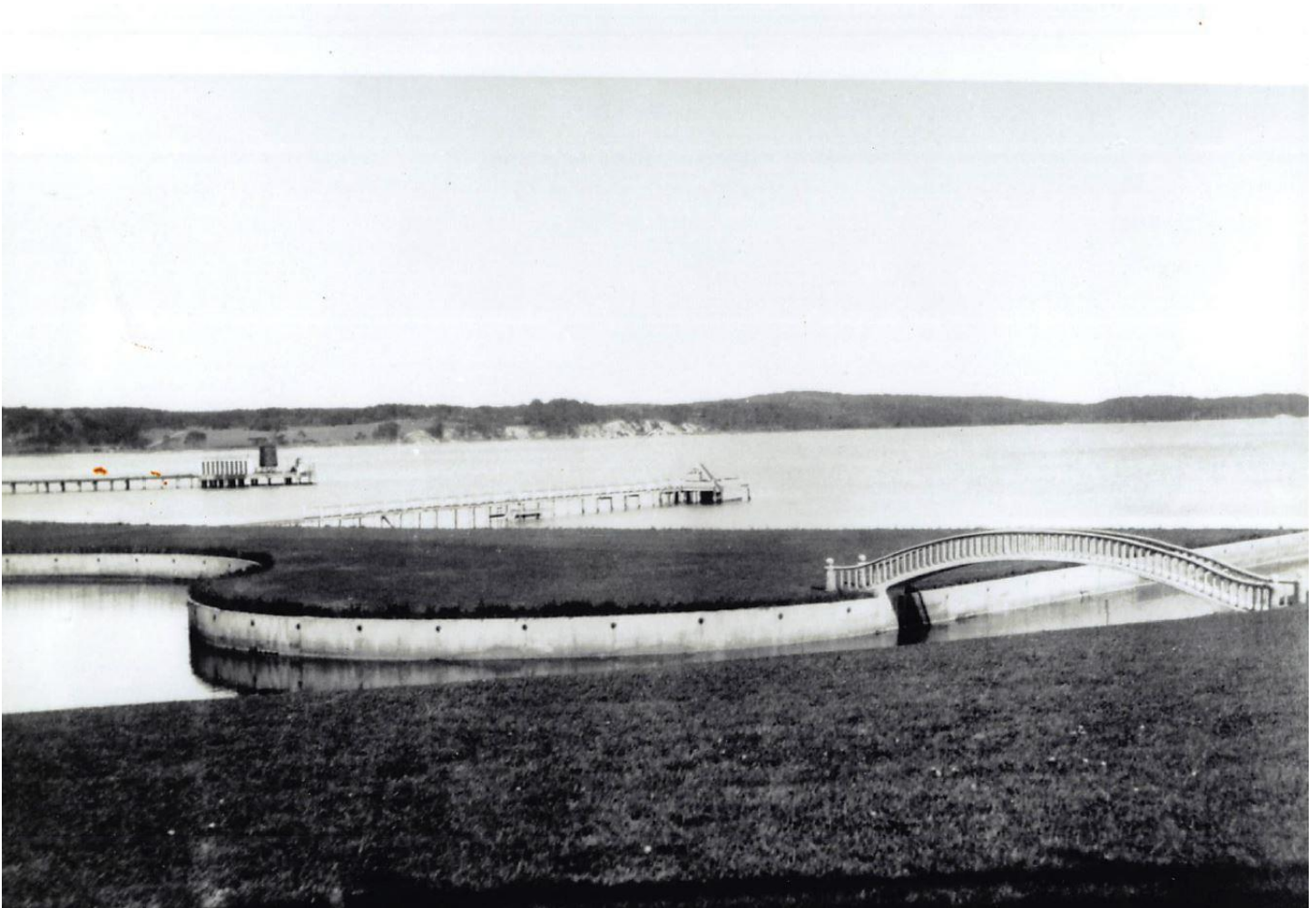


Figure 3. Bridge and Lagoon, Undated.

Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge

Name of Property

Suffolk County, NY

County and State



Figure 4. Bridge and Lagoon, 1951.













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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 12/19/2017      Date of Pending List: 1/29/2018      Date of 16th Day: 2/13/2018      Date of 45th Day: 2/2/2018      Date of Weekly List: 2/2/2018

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

Accept       Return       Reject      2/2/2018 Date

Abstract/Summary  
Comments:

Recommendation/  
Criteria

Reviewer Alexis Abernathy      Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2236      Date \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION:    see attached comments : No    see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



THE ASSEMBLY  
STATE OF NEW YORK  
ALBANY

COMMITTEES  
Ways and Means  
Education  
Environmental Conservation  
Oversight, Analysis and Investigation  
Transportation

FRED W. THIELE, JR.  
Assemblyman 1<sup>st</sup> District

CHAIR  
Committee on Small Business



December 4, 2017

*Supporter*

Michael F. Lynch, P.E., AIA  
Director, Division for Historic Preservation  
NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and  
Historic Preservation  
P.O. Box 189  
Waterford, NY 12188

Dear Mr. Lynch,

I am writing to urge you to approve the inclusion of the Ransome Japanese Bridge on Shelter Island on the National and State Registers of Historic Places. This bridge is highly significant as one of only two known surviving bridges built by Ernest L. Ransome, a pioneer in reinforced concrete construction.

This closed-spandrel arch bridge, which sits over an inlet and connects to a pedestrian walkway, was reportedly built in the late 19th or early 20th Century. It is located at "Presdeleau", the summer estate of Francis Marion Smith, who was a leader in the mining and marketing of borax, a whitening agent that was popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Smith and Ransome were in business together. Ransome, a renowned engineer and reinforced concrete innovator designed two refineries for Smith so that the miner could expand the processing of raw minerals that formed the borax product. That business association extended to the private domain when Ransome built a Japanese-inspired bridge with reinforced concrete for Smith's Shelter Island estate.

The historic Ransome Japanese Bridge offers a unique slice of American history and one that is worth preserving. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this nomination.

Sincerely,

Fred W. Thiele, Jr.  
Member of Assembly

FWT/csl



**OFFICE OF THE SUPERVISOR**

Town Hall  
P.O. Box 970  
38 North Ferry Road  
Shelter Island, NY 11964-0970

**James Dougherty**  
*Supervisor*

Phone (631) 749-0015  
Fax (631) 749-0728  
jdougherty@shelterislandtown.us

November 22, 2017

Kathleen LaFrank  
National Register Coordinator  
New York Historic Preservation Office  
PO Box 189  
Waterford, NY 12188-0189

Re: Ransome Japanese Bridge  
Shelter Island, Suffolk County

Dear Ms. LeFrank,

I have your letter of November 15 and Deputy Commissioner R. Daniel Mackay's letter of November 7 regarding the proposed nomination of the property noted above to the National and State Registers of Historic Places.

The Town of Shelter Island does not object to the proposed listing. Indeed, we support the listing as we feel the Ransome Japanese Bridge occupies a cherished place in the history and heritage of Shelter Island and the Town believes the Ransome Japanese Bridge deserves recognition for its historical, architectural and landscape features and the protection that a listing in the National and State Registers of Historic Places would provide.

Sincerely,

cc: Deputy Commissioner R. David Mackay  
Hon. David Lichenstein



# Shelter Island Historical Society

**Acting President**

Janet D'Amato

November 17, 2017

**Vice President**

John D'Amato

**Vice President**

Emil DiLollo

Jennifer Betsworth

Historic Preservation Specialist

NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation

Peebles Island State Park

P.O. Box 189

Waterford, New York 12188

**Secretary**

Thomas Milton, Jr.

**Treasurer**

Michael L. McClain

**Trustees**

Lawson Brigham

William Y. Clark III

D. Jean Dickerson

Frank Emmett

Kathleen Gooding

Lily Hoffman

Belle Lareau

Stephanie Lebowitz

Martin Levenstein

Dear Jennifer,

The Shelter Island Historical Society wholeheartedly supports the South Ferry Hills Association's application to the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Since the late 1950s the Association has owned and maintained the historic "Japanese style" arch bridge bordering on Smith Cove here on Shelter Island.

The bridge is historically significant as it was built in the early 20th Century on property owned by Francis Marion Smith who maintained a summer residence in what is now South Ferry Hills. Known as "The Borax King" for his having formed the Pacific Coast Borax Company, Smith acquired a large area of land on Shelter Island that he developed with an estate called "Presdeleau." His story and his estate greatly impacted the development of Shelter Island.

On this estate Smith had architect / engineer Ernest Ransome design and build what became known locally as the "Japanese bridge". The bridge is famous for being made of steel-reinforced concrete, which Ransome pioneered using in construction at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today the bridge is essentially all that remains of the Smith estate. It is thus an important historical monument to Shelter Island's past and one of its influential leaders.

The Shelter Island Historical Society applauds the South Ferry Hills Association for its current efforts in seeking to preserve and list the bridge on the State and National Register of Historic Places.

Please contact me should you need additional information.

Sincerely yours,

Nanette W. Lawrenson

Executive Director

**Honorary Trustees**

William Anderson Jr.

Carolyn Denning

Louise T. Green

Janet Hawkins

Lauretta King

Phyllis Wallace

**Executive Director**

Nanette Lawrenson

**Bookkeeper**

Laura K. Colfer

**Collections****Manager**

Lora Lomuscio

**Communications/****Donor Development****Coordinator**

Ebeth Lones



**Parks, Recreation  
and Historic Preservation**

DEC 19 2017

ANDREW M. CUOMO  
Governor

ROSE HARVEY  
Commissioner

14 December 2017

Alexis Abernathy  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places

Mail Stop 7228

1849 C Street NW  
Washington DC 20240

Re: National Register Nominations

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to submit the following twelve nominations, all on disc, to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

John and Sarah Trumbull House, Dutchess County  
New Guinea Community Site, Dutchess County  
George W. Bellows House, Ulster County  
Wampsville Presbyterian Church, Madison County [not owned by religious]  
Lipe -Rollaway Corporation Building, Onondaga County  
Ridgewood Reservoir, Kings and Queens Counties  
Greenacre Park, New York County  
*Lanai*, New York County  
Smith-Ransome Japanese Bridge, Suffolk County  
Old Town of Flushing Burial Ground, Queens County  
Saxe Embroidery Company Building, Bronx County  
Kingston City Almshouse, Ulster County

Please feel free to call me at 518.268.2165 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank  
National Register Coordinator  
New York State Historic Preservation Office