ANNALS OF BIOGRAPHY

THE CITY-SHAPER

As New York City celebrates its centennial, the author of "The Power Broker" tells how he came to write the definitive book about the man who changed the city forever—often at a terrible cost.

BY ROBERT A. CARO

BEYOND Jones Beach, the great park Robert Moses had built when he was young, was a little private community called Oak Beach, and Moses said our first interview would be in his summer cottage there. So I drove out from the Bronx that day in 1967, over bridges he had built (the Henry Hudson and the Triborough) after generations of city officials had been unable to build them, and over expressways he had built (the Cross-Bronx and the Major Deegan and the Bruckner) by ramming them straight through the crowded neighborhoods of New York, and over parkways he had built (the Grand Central and the Cross-Island and the Southern State and the Meadowbrook) when the most powerful forces in the state had sworn he would never build them.

When I reached Oak Beach, and turned in through wooden gates that hung ajar, the colony seemed deserted in the preseason May chill: the little cottages set among the high dunes were empty and boarded up, and the narrow, graded road through the dunes had been covered by drifting sand, so there was no sign of life. And then I came around a curve. Suddenly, in a circle of dunes below a modest house was a long, gleaming black limousine, and, beside it, a black-uniformed chauffeur and three armed and booted parkway troopers. The chauffeur was lounging against the car, but although the troopers, members of an elite two-hundred-member unit that was in effect Moses' own private police force, were only there on an errand, they stood rigidly erect, as if they feared he might be watching them from the house above.

As I stepped out of my car, a tall woman—his wife—came out on the deck of the house and said that Com-

missioner Moses was ready to see me, and I climbed the stairs; and, with Mrs. Moses holding the door open, entered a large living room. It was plainly furnished, but most of its far end was glass—a huge picture window. Through the left portion of the window could be seen, about a mile beyond the house, the long low steel roadway and high center arch of the bridge that linked Long Island to the Fire Island barrier beach—the Robert Moses Causeway. Through the right portion could be seen, jutting into the sky, the partially completed two-hundred-foot-high red brick tower that was the centerpiece of the five-mile-long park at the end of Fire Island—the Robert Moses State Park. And in front of the window, in a big easy chair, sat Robert Moses. Looking up at me, framed by his monuments, he said, "So you're the young fellow who thinks he's going to write a book about me," and, standing up, he came toward me with a wide, warm grin on his weathered face.

ALTHOUGH I had been working on his biography for almost two years, this was the first time I had met Robert Moses, the man who, more than any other individual, shaped modern New York, whose first century as a unified city we begin celebrating this week. Getting to meet him had not been easy. Although he had been the most powerful figure in New York City and New York State for more than forty years—more powerful than any mayor or any governor, or any mayor and governor combined—the only previous "biography" of him was a totally adulatory book written fifteen years before under his literally line-by-line supervision. Despite many other attempts, no writer had been able to do another book about him, and when I, then a reporter at Newsday, had written

Robert Moses photographed by
Arnold Newman in 1959: For forty years, he built an image, burnished by an adoring press, of the very antithesis of a politician.
him in 1965 to propose the project, I was
told that I wasn't going to do one, either.
His two top public-relations aides, Mur-
ray Davis and Edward V. O'Brien, in-
formed me—in two separate conver-
sations, to make sure I got the idea—that I
would have absolutely no access to his
family, friends, or aides, to any state or
city officials, or to his documents, or to
him. Therefore, they said, they presumed
I would be forgetting the idea of writing
a biography of Commissioner Moses.
And for almost two years he had, with
some success, done his best to make sure
that this prohibition stood. He was then
at the very height of his power, with abso-
olute discretion over the awarding of
contracts by city or state in every field
of public works, and the word had gone out
that no architect, engineer, or contrac-
tor who spoke to me would receive
another such contract. I had, however,
drawn, on a piece of paper, a series of
concentric circles around a dot that repre-
sented him. The innermost circle was his
family, friends, and close associates, and I
was prepared to believe that he could
keep me from seeing them, and probably
the persons in the next circle or two, also.
But surely, I felt, there would be people in
the outermost circle—people who knew
him but were not in regular contact with
him—who would be willing to talk to
me. And, in fact, there were, and, as I was
later to be told, Commissioner Moses
was more and more frequently encoun-
tering people who, unaware of his feel-
ings, said that this young reporter had
been to see them. I was, moreover, spend-
ing a lot of time going through docu-
ments, including the papers of Moses' great
patron in the nineteen-twenties, Governor
Alfred E. Smith, in the New York State
Archives in Albany, and noth-
ing that went on in Albany escaped his
notice. And one day in May, 1967, his
daughter, Jane, had telephoned me to say
that "Papa Bear" would see me. The aide
closest to him, Sidney M. Shapiro, later
told me the reason for his change of
heart—or, at least, a reason. Because Mr.
Shapiro and I were eventually to spend
a great deal of time together, and he ap-
ppeared to regard me with affection, this
explanation may be too complimentary
to me; however, no one ever gave me any
other. He said that "RM," learning of my
stubbornness despite his strictures, had
concluded that at last someone had come
along who was going to write the book
whether he cooperated or not.

I had first been drawn to Robert Mo-
ses out of curiosity, in a very idle,
feeling form. As a new reporter at New-
day during the early nineteen-sixties, I
would, as the occupant of an extremely
low rung on the city-room totem pole,
occasionally be assigned to write a
short article based on one of
the press releases that poured in a
steady stream from one or an-
other of the twelve governmental
entities he headed, and as I typed
"New York City Park Commis-
sioner Robert Moses announced
today..." I would wonder for
a moment what that title had to do
with the fact that he was also
building something that was not
a park, and was mostly not even
in the city—the Long Island
Expressway. I would type "Tribor-
ough Bridge and Tunnel Author-
ity—Chairman Robert Moses" and
it would cross my mind that he
was also chairman of some other
public authority—actually, the
New York State Power Author-
ity—that was building gigantic
hydroelectric power dams, some of
the most colossal public works
ever built by man, hundreds of
miles north of the city, along some
place with the romantic name of the "Ni-
agara Frontier." It gradually sunk in on
me that in one article or another I was
identifying him as chairman or "sole mem-
ber" of quite a few authorities: the Beth-
page State Park Authority, the Jones Beach
State Park Authority, the Henry Hudson
Parkway Authority, the Marine Parkway
Authority, the Hayden Planetarium Au-
thority—the list seemed to go on indefi-
nitely. And as, within a few months of my
coming to Newsday, my interest began to
narrow to politics, I began to wonder what
a public authority was, anyway. They were
always being written about simply as non-
political entities that were formed merely
to sell bonds to finance the construc-
tion of some public work—a bridge or a tun-
nel, usually—to collect tolls on the work
until the bonds were paid off, and then to
go out of existence, and, in fact, a key ele-
ment of the image of Robert Moses that
had for forty years been created and bur-
nished by him and by an adoring press
was that he was the very antithesis of the
politician, a public servant uncompromis-
gingly above politics who never allowed
political considerations to influence any
aspect of his projects. After all, the rea-
soning went, he built most of his projects
through public authorities, which were
also outside politics.

No journalist or historian seemed to
see authorities as sources of political
power in and of themselves. I remember looking up every article on public authorities that had been written in newspapers, magazines, and scholarly journals for some years past; there was not one that analyzed in any substantial way the potential in a public authority for political power. Yet, in some vague way, they certainly seemed to have some. Moreover, Robert Moses held still other posts—city posts, such as New York City Construction Coordinator, and chairman of the city's Slum Clearance Committee; and state posts, such as chairman of the State Council of Parks, and chairman of the Long Island State Park Commission. I began to feel that I was starting to glimpse, through the mists of public myth and my own ignorance, the dim outlines of something that I didn't understand and couldn't see clearly but that might be, in terms of political power, quite substantial indeed.

Then I was drawn to Robert Moses by my imagination—by an image that lodged in it, and grew vivid.

The more I thought about Robert Moses, and about the power he exerted, and about my ignorance—and, it seemed to me, everyone's—concerning the extent of his power, and the sources behind it, the more apparent it became to me that trying to determine the extent and identify the sources, and then to explain what I found, was something beyond the scope of daily journalism; no newspaper, in the journalistic practices of that day, would give you the time to conduct such an exploration or the space to print what you found.

It would be necessary to do a book. And, while I was trying to decide whether I really wanted to write one on Robert Moses, I began reading material about him, and one of the things I read, in a typescript in the Columbia University Oral History Collection, was the oral history of Frances Perkins, who would later be Franklin Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor, but in 1914 was a young reformer, who often spent her Sundays walking around New York City with another young reformer, Robert Moses.

Born on December 18, 1888, to a wealthy German Jewish family active in the settlement-house movement, Moses had been educated at Yale and Oxford, and returned to New York to earn his Ph.D. in political science at Columbia and join a municipal-reform organization.
book), I realized that what Robert Moses had been talking about on that long-ago Sunday was what I knew as Riverside Park and the West Side Highway—the great park and road that, as long as I could remember, had formed the western waterfront of Manhattan Island. Although many other plans had been conceived for the waterfront, this immense public work would be built by him—in 1937, almost a quarter of a century after the ferry ride. And it would be built—this urban improvement on a scale so huge that it would be almost without precedent in early-twentieth-century America, this improvement that would, in addition, solve a problem that had baffled successive city administrations for decades—in very much the same form in which he had envisioned it as a young municipal reformer just out of college.

At the same time, moreover, from other oral histories, and brief references in articles, I was learning how Robert Moses had envisioned it—where he was standing when he did so, even what he might have been wearing. He lived then with his parents on Central Park West, but often, after work, he would tell his taxi-driver to take him instead to Riverside Drive, at the end of Seventy-sixth Street, overlooking the Hudson. And then, as the sun set behind the Palisades across the river, he would get out and stand staring down at the smog-covered wasteland below him. He was a striking young man—tall, very slim, darkly handsome, with olive skin and deep, burning eyes, elegant and arrogant—and fond of white suits, wearing them from early spring well into the autumn. And he was passionate when, defending his plan for civil-service reform, he talked night after night before hostile, Tammany-packed audiences, speaking into storms of invective—so passionate that another reformer was to say, "Once you saw him on those nights, you could never forget him." In my mind, I saw him now, staring down in the evenings on the Hudson waterfront, and I couldn't forget him. Sometimes, in my imagination, I saw him from below—a tall, handsome, haughty figure in white, standing on the edge of a high cliff and gazing down on a vast wasteland with the eyes of a creator, determined to transform it into something beautiful and grand. Sometimes, I saw him from behind—a tall black silhouette against the setting sun.

Robert Moses gazing down on Riverside Park lodged in my imagination and, in my imagination, became entangled in a mystery. I had previously been aware only of the Robert Moses of the nineteen-fifties and sixties: the ruthless highway builder who cut his roads straight through hapless neighborhoods, the Robert Moses of the Tilt I urban-renewal scandals—some of the greatest scandals of twentieth-century New York, scandals almost incredible both for the colossal scale of their corruption (personally "money honest" himself, Moses dispensed to the most powerful members of the city's ruling Democratic political machine what one insider called "a king's ransom" in legal fees, public-relations retainers, insurance premiums, advance knowledge of highway routes and urban-renewal sites, and insurance-free deposits in favored banks, to insure their cooperation with his aims) and for the heartbreaking callousness with which he evicted the tens of thousands of poor people in his way, whom, in the words of one official, he "hounded out like cattle." Now I saw something very different: the young Robert Moses, the dreamer and idealist. How had the one man become the other?

And, finally, I was drawn to Robert Moses by something that wasn't imagination at all but, in some ways, its opposite: by an insight, a hard, cold, and, I believed, rational calculation about what I wanted to do with my own work, and how it was through Robert Moses that I could do it.

As I began, little by little, to understand the magnitude of his impact on New York, I was beginning to feel that he could be a vessel for something even more significant: an examination of the essential nature—the most fundamental realities—of political power.

One of the reasons I believed I had become a reporter in the first place was to find out how things really worked and to explain those workings, and, as my focus had narrowed to politics, that reason had become to explain how political power
really worked. And during the few years I had been a reporter I had convinced myself, in part because of the easy gratifica-
sions that go with the journalist's life—
bylines; the gratitude of the wary respect or fear that the subjects of your articles had for you, the awareness of friends or neighbors of what you were doing; the feeling that you were at the center of the action—that I was succeeding in doing what I had set out to do.

But the more I thought about Rob-
et Moses' career, the more I under-
stood that I had been deluding myself. In
the terms in which I had always thought about New York politics, elected officials—mayors and governors in particular—were the principal repositories of the political power that plays so significant a role over our lives: in a democracy, after all, ultimate power theoretically comes from the ballot box. But Robert Moses had never been elected to anything. And yet Robert Moses had held power for forty-four years, between 1924 and 1968, through the administrations of five mayors and six governors, and, in the fields in which he chose to exercise it, his power was so enormous that no mayor or governor contested it. He held power, in other words, for almost half the century we observe this week—the century that began when, on January 1, 1898, the five boroughs were united into a single city (which became, with that unification, the greatest city in the New World). And during that century he, more than any mayor or governor, molded the city to his vision, put his mark upon it so deeply that today, thirty years after he left power, we are still, to an astonishing extent, living in the city he shaped.

The legislative act that unified New York created a city of five boroughs, but only one of them—the Bronx—was on the mainland of the United States; so the new city was really a city of islands. It was Robert Moses, more than any legislator or any other individual, who tied those islands together with bridges, sol-
dering together three boroughs at once with the Triborough Bridge (and then tying two of them, the Bronx and Queens, even more firmly together with the Bronx-Whitestone and Throgs Neck Bridges), spanning the Narrows to Staten Island with the mighty Verrazano, tying the distant Rockaways firmly to the rest of the metropolis with the Marine and Cross-Bay spars, uniting the West Bronx and Manhattan with the Henry Hudson. Since 1917, seven great bridges have been built to link the boroughs together. Robert Moses built every one of those bridges.

He built every one of the expressways that cut across the city, carrying its people and its commerce—five expressways, plus the West Side Highway and the Harlem River Drive. If a person is driving in New York on a road that has the term "expressway" in its title, he is driving on a road built by Robert Moses.

He built every one of the parkways that, within the city's borders, stretch eastward toward the counties of Long Island, and he built every one of the parkways that, beyond those borders, run far out into those counties, thereby shaping them as well as the city. There are eleven of those parkways in all. And he either built or rebuilt—reconstructed it so completely that they became largely his creations also—five parkways stretching toward, or within, Westchester County, so that he built a total of sixteen parkways. In New York City and its suburbs, he built a total of six hundred and twenty-seven miles of expressways and parkways.

He created—or re-created, shaping to his philosophy of recreation—even in the city, adding twenty thousand acres of parkland (and six hundred and fifty-eight playgrounds) in a city that had been starved for parks and playgrounds; since he left power, several new parks have been built, and several older parks—most notably Central Park—have been restored to their pre-Moses form, but most of New York's parks are still, today, essentially the parks of Robert Moses. And for the use of the city's residents he created, outside the city's borders, on Long Island, another forty thousand acres of parks, including not only Jones Beach, which may be the world's greatest oceanfront park and bathing beach, but other huge parks and beaches—Sunken Meadow, Hither Hills, Montauk Point, Bethpage, Belmont Lake, Hempstead Lake, and eight others.

And bridges, roads, parks, and beaches are only a part of the mark that Robert Moses left on New York. During the time in which he controlled—controlled absolutely—the New York City Housing Authority, the authority built 1,082 apartment houses, containing 148,000 apartments which housed 555,000 people more than, at the time, lived in Minneapolis. Those apartments are mainly for persons of low income. For persons of higher income, he created, under urban-renewal programs, tens of thousands of additional apartments. He was the dominant force, moreover, behind such supposedly "private" housing developments as Stuyvesant Town, Peter Cooper Village, Concord Village, and Co-op City—and such monumental features of the New York landscape as Lincoln Center, the United Nations headquarters, Shea Stadium, the New York Coliseum, and the campuses of Fordham, Pratt, and Long Island Universities. He changed the city's very shape, enlarging it by adding to its shoreline more than fifteen thousand acres of new land, tying together small islands within its borders with rock and sand and stone, so that, for example, Ward's Island and Randall's Island were united, and Hunters and Twin Islands were joined to Rodman's Neck, so that their combined area would be big enough to hold the mile-long crescent of his Orchard Beach creation. He built public works that, even in 1968 dollars, cost $27 billion (a figure that would have to be multiplied many times to put it in today's dollars). He was the greatest builder in the history of America, perhaps in the history of the world.

He shaped the city physically not only by what he built but by what he destroyed. To build his expressways, he evicted from their homes two hundred and fifty thousand persons, in the process razing the centers of a score of neighborhoods, many of them friendly, vibrant communities that had made the city a home to its people. To build his non-highway public works, he evicted perhaps two hundred and fifty thousand more; a 1954 City Planning Commission study of just seven years of Robert Moses' eviction policy was to call it "an enforced population displacement completely unlike any previous population movement in the City's history." And, since the people he evicted were overwhelmingly black, Hispanic, and poor, the most defenseless of the city's people, and since he refused, despite the policy of the city's elected officials, to make adequate provision (to make any substantial provision at all, really) for their relo-
cation, the policies he followed created new slums almost as fast as he was eliminating old ones and, tragically, were to be a major factor in solidifying the already existing ghettoization of New York—the dividing up of its residents by color and income.

Immense as was Robert Moses' physical shaping of New York, however, his influence on the city's history cannot be measured merely by the physical. All told, during the decades of his power he used that power to bend the city's social policies to his philosophical beliefs, skewing, often despite the wishes of its mayors and other elected officials, the allocation of the city's resources to the benefit of its middle, upper middle, and upper classes at the expense of the city's lower middle class and its poor, and particularly at the expense of the new immigrants. These were blacks and Puerto Ricans, mainly, who had begun arriving in New York in substantial numbers not long after he came to power in the city. His power also has to be measured by zoning policies on Long Island that guaranteed suburban sprawl, and by decades of systematic starvation of the subways and commuter railroads that he viewed as rivals for his roads and the revenue they produced, a policy that exacerbated the highway congestion that has made traffic jams an inescapable part of New Yorkers' lives.

The more I thought about Robert Moses' career, the more I realized that his story and the story of New York City were, to a remarkable degree, one story. And the more I thought about Moses' accomplishments, the more I realized that I had no ideas—apparently, no one had any ideas—of what the political power was that had enabled him to achieve them, of how he had acquired that power, or, aside from the sketchiest details, of how he had used it. And therefore I came to feel that if what I had for so long wanted to do was to discover and disclose the fundamentals of true political power—not theoretical political power but the raw, naked essence of such power—then perhaps the best way to do that was through portraying the life of Robert Moses.

Whatever the reason, or reasons, that he finally agreed to see me, my interviews with Robert Moses—there would, over the next year, be seven of them; long interviews, one lasting from nine-thirty in the morning until well into the evening—were worth any trouble it had taken to get them. They were less interviews, perhaps, than monologues. Questions were not encouraged, I would raise a subject, and Moses would thereupon embark on a discourse about it that might take an hour or more, and if I attempted to interrupt to clarify a point, the interruption might or might not be acknowledged.

But, at least at first, who wanted to interrupt? I had thought I understood something—had thought I understood quite a bit, in fact—about the inner processes of political decision-making, and about urban planning and government in general. From the moment Robert Moses started talking, I never thought that again.

He seemed to remember every vote—even votes from forty years before—and why it had been cast. "On the Jones Beach appropriation, it was eight to seven against us in Ways and Means," he would say. "But the key was this little upstate guy [and he named some long-forgotten state assemblyman], and he had a mortgage coming due on his farm, and the mortgage was held by a bank up there, and the key to the bank was Hewitt [Charles]. Hewitt, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee], and the Governor knew how to get to Hewitt, so it was eight to seven for us."

He seemed to remember every decision, and how decisions had been changed—how, for example, the use of liquor had been helpful in effecting some changes, particularly during the Prohibition Era, with upstate Republican legislative leaders who liked to drink but who would never be forgiven by their rabidly dry constituents should it be learned that they did so, and who were therefore all the thirstier at the weekend parties that Al Smith, the Democratic governor, threw for them at the Long Island sites for which Moses wanted legislative appropriations ("They hated my guts," Robert Moses told me, with that wonderful smile. "But they all loved the Governor, so they came"), and at which, as Moses put it, sitting in front of the big window, "we fed them liquor."

One such reception was attended by the State Senate Majority Leader, John Knight, who had been blocking Moses' appropriations for two years; who during the just completed 1925 legislative session had accused Moses, his voice shaking with rage, of "lawlessness and a violation of sacred constitutional property..."
Cor created by mam: the Verrazano Bridge was meant to be part of a projected Shorefront Drive connecting Staten Island to the tip of Long Island.
right”, and who, when a reporter asked him if there was any possibility of his relaxing his opposition in future sessions, had replied, “I don’t change my mind very often, do I?”

“We were opening a bathhouse at Sunken Meadow,” Moses recalled. “We had cases of Scotch and bourbon that we were feeding to the fellows and Knight disappeared.” Trying to enter the bathhouse, Moses said, he had found the door jammed, and when he finally pushed it open he discovered that what had been blocking it was Knight, who was sitting on the floor, dead drunk, trying to hold the door shut with his foot while he poured “a whole bottle” down his throat. “I said, ‘You lousy bastard.’ He was so embarrassed he didn’t know what to say”—and thereafter, if Knight didn’t formally change his mind, his fear of exposure led him to drastically soften his opposition.

Moses remembered subtle; and more brutal, means of decision-changing, too. Once, in an infrequent interruption, I asked him about one of Mayor Robert F. Wagner’s deputy mayors, Henry Epstein. Epstein had long been a Moses ally. A very able lawyer,” Moses had said earlier. “Outstanding lawyer. I had known him a long time.” But in 1953 Epstein was standing in Moses’ way, telling Mayor Wagner that there was no rational reason for Moses to shove the Cross-Bronx Expressway through the East Tremont neighborhood of the Bronx on a route that, in just one mile, would require the demolition of fifty-four separate apartment houses when there was another, parallel route, which would require the demolition of exactly six small brownstone tenements, just two blocks away. And then Epstein had abruptly changed his mind, and had written a letter to Wagner saying he had been wrong and that Moses’ route was better.

I asked Moses why Epstein had changed his mind.

He changed it, Moses said, “after he was hit over the head with an axe.”

When I asked him what he meant, he said, “I won’t tell you what we did to him.” But in the course of the interview he did tell me, if obliquely.

He had, he said, put “our bloodhounds”—the team of investigators who compiled the dossiers on other city officials which Moses leaked to newspapers if an official opposed him—on Epstein. And then, he said, he had had a talk with Epstein, who was married, and the conversation had included some references to a woman. “A lot of personal stuff got into it,” Moses recalled. “I said, ‘This woman, this chum of yours.’ He said, ‘She’s not my chum.’ I said, ‘Oh, yes, she is. She’s your chum, all right.’”

“So,” Robert Moses said, with his broad, charming smile, “Henry wrote his letter.”

And he remembered things a lot bigger than votes, or decisions, and in the remembering taught me about something much larger than the workings of politics: about a particular type of vision, of imagination, that was unique and so intense that it amounted to a very rare form of genius—not the genius of the poet or the artist, which was the way I had always thought about genius, but a type of genius that was, in its own way, just as creative: a leap of imagination that could look at a barren, empty landscape and conceive on it, in a flash of inspiration, a colossal public work, a permanent, enduring creation.

As I had thought about Robert Moses gazing down at Riverside Park, my imagination had been filled with the picture of Robert Moses as dreamer. Now Robert Moses taught me about dreams, all right, including a dream much bigger than Riverside Park. Suddenly coming up out of the big chair, seizing my arm in a grip that belied his seventy-eight years, he drew me out of the Oak Beach cottage, down the steps, and up to the top of a sand dune, from which I could see down the Great South Bay and the barrier beach. “There was nothing there then,” he said. “Nothing.” And, standing there on the dune, a broad-shouldered old man with very young gray eyes, the wind whipping his sparse white hair around his olive face, Robert Moses told me how he had first thought of a park on Jones Beach.

In 1922, Al Smith, who had rescued him from oblivion—four years before, at the age of thirty, Robert Moses, his dreams for Riverside Park and civil-service reform shattered, was standing on line outside the city hall in Cleveland, Ohio, applying, in vain, for a minor municipal job; it was the next year that Smith gave him his first taste of power—had assigned Moses as his “observer” at the Good Government organizations that wanted parks outside the cities for the urban masses who suddenly, with the advent of mass-production technology and the resultant shorter workweek, had leisure time to enjoy the countryside and, with the invention of the Model T Ford, automobiles to get to it. No one in the United States, however, seemed able to conceive of parks large enough, or of means to get people to them, and on the mainland of Long Island the problem seemed particularly insoluble. Virtually every foot of desirable beachfront was in the hands either of local municipalities, determined to bar them to the city’s immigrant “foreigners,” or of America’s robber barons, who had established their great strongholds on the Island’s Gold Coast. Their immense wealth had brought them immense political power, and on Long Island the roads were kept deliberately narrow and unpaved. But during the summer of 1922 Robert Moses had rented a vacation bungalow in Babylon, on Long Island’s South Shore, and had, he told me now, “fallen in love” with the bay, with the whole South Shore. Purchasing an old, broad-bottomed, very slow motorboat, partly covered with an awning—a vessel his wife named the Bob—he spent the summer exploring the bay, often so lost in reverie that he would forget time and tide, and find himself stranded on a sandbar. He told me how sometimes he would sail out to the barrier beach (“about over there,” he said, pointing down the bay), which was then just a strip of dunes and beach grass and wild marshes about five miles offshore (it had been named after a seventeenth-century privateer, Major Thomas Jones) and looked like a low line on the horizon, and he would pull the Bob ashore and step out.

Often, when he did so, he would step into a world in which there was not a single other person in sight. All there was, stretching before him for miles until it disappeared at the horizon, was that strip of spotless white sand, sloping on one side into the ocean, rising on the other into
The genius of which he was giving an understanding was, furthermore, a vast in scope—a creative, shaping imagination on a scale so colossal that individual projects, even projects as monumental as the West Side Highway or Jones Beach, were only details within its sweep, an imagination broad enough so that it could take as its medium an entire city and the city's far-flung, sprawling suburbs, and not just a city but the greatest city in the Western world: New York, Titan of cities.

Two of my interviews with Robert Moses were conducted in an office he had on Randall's Island—where he was also framed in a big window by one of his monuments, this one the toll plaza of the Triborough Bridge—and dominating that office was an immense map of the New York region. When he began talking to me about his accomplishments and his plans for future accomplishments, he often stepped out from behind his desk and stood in front of the map, pointing at the relevant places with a sharp-pointed yellow pencil in his hand, and, standing there, he was the artist in front of his canvas. The pencil would make big, sweeping gestures over the map, or sharp, precise jabs toward it: "You see, if we put the road there, there'll be room for parks there and there—see that, just a ribbon park, but big enough to do the job—and over there we'll have room for the baseball diamonds, and if we do that, then the housing can be here...." The canvas was gigantic—a metropolitan region of twenty-one hundred square miles in which there lived in 1967 fourteen million people. And the pencil waved over all of it at once as he discussed Staten Island and Suffolk County, Manhattan and Montauk, SoHo and Scarsdale, in the same sentences. I realized that the man standing before me saw the whole canvas—city, suburbs, slums, beaches, bridges, tunnels, airports, Central Park and vest-pocket parks—as one, a single whole, which he wanted to shape as a whole. When Robert Moses talked like that, standing in front of his beloved map, I was as thrilled as Frances Perkins must have been thrilled that day on the ferry, and I understood better the mind that could look down from Riverside Drive on a mudflat and see a great highway and a great park. I also understood better the mind of a sculptor who wanted to sculpt not clay or stone but a whole metropolis: I saw the genius of the city-shaper.

When he talked, moreover, you saw...
how the dreams—and the will to accomplish them—were still burning, undimmed by age.

Often, when Robert Moses sat reminiscing to me at Oak Beach, he did so half turned away from me in the big chair, staring out the long picture window. I had thought he was staring at the bridge named after him and the park named after him—at the things he had accomplished.

Then, one day, he started talking about the park, and said that the thing to remember about it was that it was just "a gateway...to other areas." I realized that he was talking about a highway—a four-lane highway atop an eighteen-foot-high dike—he wanted to build the length of Fire Island, from Robert Moses State Park, at its western end, to Smith Point, near its eastern end—some twenty miles—where it would link up with another big causeway that would carry it back to the Long Island mainland, where it would run through the Hamptons and all the way out to Hither Hills and Montauk State Parks, which he had created during the nineteen-twenties. Intense opposition from Fire Island communities—opposition entirely understandable, since the broad highway would destroy the very qualities of peacefulness and beauty that made the narrow island precious to its residents—had stopped the project some years before, and the communities believed it had been stopped permanently.

That, however, I now realized, was not Robert Moses' opinion. "The road is going to come," he said firmly. "It's got to come."

Looking at me, he said, I guess, that I was unconvinced, and stood up and walked out onto the deck facing the park and Fire Island, gesturing to me to come with him, and, standing there, pointing at Fire Island, he began to explain that the twenty miles of road on Fire Island was an integral part of something much bigger: a great Shorefront Drive, all the way from Staten Island to Montauk Point—a distance of a hundred and sixty miles—which he had planned in 1924. Parts of that drive—expressways on Staten Island, the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, the Belt Parway, in Brooklyn, the Ocean Parkway along Jones Beach—were already built, but there were still gaps, including that gap on Fire Island.

And then Robert Moses saw that I still wasn't agreeing, and he whirled on me. Suddenly you forgot the punch and the liver spots. All you could see were those eyes. He grabbed my right arm above the elbow. To this day, I can feel the grip of those fingers as Robert Moses, showing his face close to mine and glaring at me, said, "Can't you see there ought to be a road there?" Driving home that night, I realized that when Robert Moses was looking out the window at the bridge and the park he hadn't been thinking about them—about the things he had built.

He had been thinking about the things he hadn't built.

He had unveiled a plan of bridges, tunnels, expressways, parkways, and parks for the metropolitan region almost forty years earlier, on February 25, 1930, when, before five hundred civic leaders assembled in the Grand Ballroom of the Hotel Commodore for the Park Association's annual dinner, he pulled a drape away from a huge map of New York City hanging behind the dais—a map covered with red lines indicating highways and bridges and tunnels, and green areas representing tens of thousands of acres he wanted to acquire for new parks. For almost forty years, he had been filling in that map, turning lines into concrete, green ink into green spaces. But in 1967 his outline was still far from completed. He had built a network of great urban roads—far more urban roads than any other man in history—but there were gaps in that network: gaps on Manhattan Island, where a Lower Manhattan Expressway, across Broome Street, and a Mid-Manhattan Expressway, across Thirtieth Street (an eight-lane highway a hundred feet in the air, above some of the busiest streets in the world, through a forest of skyscrapers), and an Upper Manhattan Expressway, at 125th Street, would, he was sure, solve the metropolitan region's worsening traffic congestion, and other gaps, like the one on Fire Island. On that porch, I had felt the force of the determination of this seventy-eight-year-old man to fill in those gaps. Since he had decided to cooperate with me, he had let it be known that others could talk to me, too, and now I found it easier to believe that they had not been exaggerating when they described the savage energy Robert Moses had put behind his dreams, and his fury when they were checked: how mapping out strategies for overcoming obstacles, he would pace back and forth across his office, hour after hour; how the palm of his big right hand would smash down, over and over again, on the table as he talked; how he would hunch out of his chair and begin, as one aide put it, "waving his arms, just wild," pick up the old-fashioned glass inkwell on his desk and hurl it at aides so that it shattered against a wall; how he would pound his clenched fists into the walls.

"They're dividing into three groups, Sir. Infantry, cavalry, and media."
hard enough to scrape the skin off them, in a rage beyond the perception of pain.

During the same months in which I was interviewing Robert Moses, however, I was interviewing people whose lives had been touched by Robert Moses.

Some of them were in the East Tremont neighborhood, with whose fate Henry Epstein had been involved.

One of the implications of Robert Moses' career that I was examining was the human cost of the fifteen massive expressways he had built within the city itself. What had been the effect of these giant roads on the neighborhoods in their paths, and on the residents of these neighborhoods? I had decided to try to show this by focusing on one neighborhood, and had selected East Tremont, through which, during the nineteen-fifties, he had built the Cross-Bronx Expressway on that route which had demolished a solid mile of six- and seven-story apartment houses—fifty-four of them—themselves destroying the homes of several thousand families, although there was available just two blocks away the parallel route that would have required the demolition of only six tenements—but which would have also required the demolition of the "Tremont Depot" of the Third Avenue Transit Company, in which several key Bronx Democratic politicians had hidden interests, and which they didn't want condemned.

Up until the day—December 4, 1952—on which the eviction notices signed by "Robert Moses, City Construction Coordinator" and giving the recipients ninety days to move, arrived, East Tremont had been a low-income but stable community of sixty thousand persons, predominantly Jewish but with sizable Irish and German populations. Its residents had been poor—pressers, finishers, and cutters in the downtown garment district—and their apartment houses were old, some without elevators and almost all with aging plumbing. But the rooms were big and high-ceilinged—"light, airy, spacious" was how the residents described them to me—and the apartment houses were precious to the people who lived in them, because, rent-controlled as they were, their residents could afford, so long as they kept them, to live in their community. As long as they had those apartments, they had a lot—a sense of community and continu-

ity, in some of those buildings, two and three generations of the same families were living; young couples who moved away often moved back. "The reason we moved back to that area was that we loved it so much," said one young woman who had moved back shortly before the notices came. "There was no reason for an older person to be lonely in that neighborhood," said one who lived there. If they lost their apartments, they knew, they could not afford to live in the city and would be scattered to the winds. And then the notices from Moses arrived. "It was like the floor opened up underneath your feet," one woman told me. "There was no warning. We just got it in the mail. Everybody on the street got it the same day.

A notice, We had ninety days to get out... We all stood outside—"Did you get the letter? Did you get the letter? Three months to get out?" (There was no need for such haste: construction of the East Tremont section of the expressway would not, as Moses was aware, begin for three years. The ninety-day warning was merely "to shake 'em up a little and get 'em moving," a Moses aide explained to me.)

The community tried to fight. It was an era before community protests became newsworthy, and the protests they made received scant notice in a press that in those days did not give much space to such protests, but they fought hard, led by a young housewife, Lillian Edelstein, who had never imagined herself in such a role but felt she had no choice ("What if we were separated? What would Mom do? I was fighting for my home. And my mother. And sister. And daughter. I had a lot to fight for") and who turned out to possess not merely energy and determination but an indefatigable, and inspiring, air of command. And since every one of their elected officials—their assemblyman and their state senator, as well as Bronx Borough President James J. Lyons and Mayor Wagner—was, at first, on their side, they thought they had a chance. In the New York City of the nineteen-fifties, however, when it came to the construction of large-scale public works projects, what counted was not what elected officials wanted but what Robert Moses wanted, and in a very short time the residents lost—and Moses immediately began to apply the "relo-

cation" techniques he had perfected on other projects.

As soon as the City Real Estate Bureau took title to the buildings, the heat and the hot water were cut off in many of them, and for much of the ensuing winter the only warmth for the families trying to remain in their apartments came from small, inadequate electric heaters they themselves bought or gas ranges turned on all the time. The building superintendents had been fired, so there were no services. Some of the tenants began to move, and as soon as the top floor of an apartment house was empty, the roof and that top floor would be torn off. "While we were still living in it, they were tearing it down around their heads!" Mrs. Edelstein told me. When an apartment on a lower floor was vacated, its windows were boarded up—a signal to looters that there were empty premises to be broken into. All requests for watchmen, as for heat and hot water and superintendents, were referred by the city agencies to Moses, who simply ignored them. The looters came at night, the remaining tenants could hear them tearing the pipes out of the wall to be sold for scrap. A few small frame houses that were on the route were torn down, and their lumber stacked in their back yards—and fires were set. When the first apartment houses were completely emptied, their basements were left as garbage pits filled with broken glass and jagged shards of steel. Despite parents' pleas, no fences were built around them, and the parents lived in fear that their children would fall into them. Demolition on so immense a scale had other consequences—"The rats were running like cats and dogs in the street," Mrs. Edelstein was to recall. Grime filled the air so thickly that sometimes the neighborhood seemed to have been hit by a dust storm.

In a very short time, the fifty-four buildings were gone. Then, after construction started, there came month upon month and year after year of earth-shaking dynamite blasts, since the expressway was, in that neighborhood, being cut through a trench in solid bedrock. The air was filled with rock dust from the great excavation—a deep gash in the earth a hundred and twenty feet wide and a mile long, through which rumbled mammoth earthmoving ma-
chimes and herds of bulldozers and dump trucks—and the gritty dust seeped into rooms even through doors and windows that had been closed and sealed with towels. East Tremont had, of course, been cut in half by the road, and the southern half was isolated from the shopping area along East Tremont Avenue, and it was hard for the remaining residents to get to stores. The residents of the apartment houses that bordered the mile-long excavation on both sides—perhaps one hundred buildings—began to move out, and as more and more moved one of the principal reasons for staying—friends who lived near you—began to vanish, and so did the sense of community. Still more tenants disappeared from East Tremont. Some landlords were happy to see them leave the rent-controlled apartments, and replaced them with welfare families, who demanded fewer services and moved more often, so that rents could be raised more often. The gyre of urban decay spiralled and widened, faster and faster, and more and more residents began to move. East Tremont became a vast slum.

I spent many days and weeks, terrible days and weeks, walking around that slum.

I had never, in my sheltered middle-class life, descended so deeply into the realms of despair. When I entered those buildings, on the floors of their lobbies would be piles of animal or human feces, and raw garbage spilling out of broken bags; the floors were covered so thickly with shards of broken glass that my feet would crunch on it as I walked. The walls would have been broken open and the pipes ripped out, for sale by junkies. An atmosphere of fear hung over East Tremont, of course. I remember one elderly man, with a kindly face, sitting on a stoop; “You’re going to be out of here by dark, aren’t you?” he asked me. When he feared he hadn’t made himself clear enough, he added, “Don’t be around this place after dark!” I remember the people who lived in these buildings; almost all were black or Hispanic. Wanting to interview them to find out what living in East Tremont was like, I would knock on the doors of apartments. Over and over again, in my recollection, the same scene would be repeated. At my knock, there would be a scurry of children’s feet behind the door, but no reply. If I persisted in my knocking, I would hear footsteps coming to the door, and then a voice—in my recollection it was always the voice of a little boy—would ask, through the closed door, the same question: “Are you the man from the welfare?” Usually, when I said I wasn’t, the door wouldn’t be opened. Sometimes, however, it was, and I would be allowed inside—and sometimes that was worse. To this day, I see, in my mind, a black woman, about thirty years old, sitting with several little children around her; no matter what question I asked, she replied, “I’ve got to get my kids out of here. I’ve got to get my kids out of here.”

If the days I spent interviewing residents of the great East Tremont slum were terrible, the days I spent interviewing former residents of East Tremont—people who had lived there before it became a slum—weren’t much better. These people had lived in East Tremont when it had been a neighborhood, their neighborhood, and they had been driven away by Robert Moses, either by the demolition of their homes or by the neighborhood’s consequent deterioration. Their stories, too, were part of the human cost of this highway, and I wanted to find as many of them as possible and interview them.

I found them in a great variety of locales. Some—the luckiest or the most affluent ones—had found apartments in sterile high-rise middle-class housing developments in far reaches of the Bronx. Some, less affluent, were living in small—many cases, too small—apartments in various neighborhoods in the Bronx or in Queens or in Brooklyn. Others were living with their children in the Westchester or Long Island suburbs. And still others, the unluckiest, had come to rest in “the projects,” the city’s immense, low-income, quite dangerous public housing.

I asked these couples—or widows or widowers—to compare their present lives with the lives they had had in East Tremont, and the general picture that emerged from their answers was a sense of profound, irretrievable loss, a sense that they had lost something—physical closeness to family, to friends, to stores where the owners knew you, to synagogues where the rabbi had said Kaddish for your parents (and perhaps even your grandparents) as he would one day say Kaddish for you, to the crowded benches on Southern Boulevard where your children played baseball while you played...
In the bottom of my shoulder bag I found a subway token from about eight tokens back, that makes it long ago, a monumental oddity. What’s it made of? Bronze-copper beveled and a dull shining inside gold. The “NYC” insignia like a secret fraternity emblem. Brings to mind! Lively morning stench, hot steel rails, the crowds I used to sink in.

I could get up and down subway steps, I wasn’t dying, I loved dirt and torn-up newspapers, I was able to walk. I wrote, it was like a church, like a godless tabernacle was God. That was young. Whirling past the Coney Island darkness, into flared faces on the platform, the token rides my hand in the crush.

The old New York system. I remember a black guy in a baseball cap, two legs gone, coming through aisles, on a platform on skate wheels, dignified and with a beautiful voice. People dropped quarters and tokens in his basket. He wasn’t sanctimonious or drugged on crime, or we didn’t know it.

A token of the incommensurate. (Even if wrong) I wasn’t dying then and could afford to think in big words.

—JANE MAYHALL

DURING those same months in which I was interviewing Robert Moses, however, I was also going through papers: the files of Governors Alfred E. Smith and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, of Fiorello LaGuardia and other mayors; and the private papers of reformers, urban planners, and politicians who had been involved with Moses in one way or another, years or decades before.

Some of the files had lain untouched for decades, since, at the end of a governorship or a mayoralty or a private career, they had been packed away. Some of the papers of Al Smith had been kept in envelopes, and occasionally when I opened an envelope and unfolded the pages within, they crumbled in my hand, so long had it been since they had been unfolded. And while much of what Robert Moses had been telling me not only was fascinating but was confirmed by the information in those files, on some points—including some crucial points—there were rather sharp discrepancies between his accounts and the written record, so it was necessary for me to start asking him to reconcile his account with that record.

One striking discrepancy concerned two curves in the Northern State Parkway, which Robert Moses had been building eastward out through Nassau and Suffolk Counties in 1929 and 1930, during Roosevelt’s governorship. In two spots—Old Westbury, in Nassau County, and Dix Hills, in Suffolk County—the parkway swerved inexplicably south toward the middle of the island before, on the far, or eastern, side of those areas, it curved back and resumed its eastward course.

Moses, who during his entire career had eloquently and persuasively portrayed himself as uncompromising—as a public servant who was above politics and would never compromise with what he felt was right—had used the Northern State Parkway to demonstrate that point in his interviews with me. He had told me, quite eloquently, that its route was the one he had originally chosen, that he had refused to compromise over that route—a statement that, of course, meant that the two curves had always been planned.

In going through files, however, I had
come across maps showing the proposed
parkway without those curves—maps on
which the parkway, in a substantially
different route from the one it actually fol-
lowed, ran in a generally straight line
through the beautiful hills in the north-
ern part of Long Island. And in Roo-
sevelt's papers I had also come across a
series of letters and telegrams that had
been sent to him during 1929, the first
year of his governorship.

One letter was from Grenville Clark,
a noted attorney, who was representing
the Old Westbury robber barons in their
fight to keep Moses’ parkway, and the
city massed the barons disposed, away
from their estates. It referred, in obscure
terms, to an arrangement between Moses
and the multimillionaire Otto Kahn,
which, Clark wrote, on March 29, 1929,
if “finally brought to light will not make
a creditable chapter in the history of this
State.” Other letters and telegrams I
came across, in various files, showed that
Clark was not exaggerating. They re-
vealed that the Northern State Parkway
had originally been supposed to run
through the middle of an eighteen-hole
golf course that Kahn had con-
structed for his pleasure on his Dix Hills
estate. In 1926, the legislature was refus-
ing to allocate funds to Moses for any
purposes connected with the parkway, so
that he didn’t even have enough money
for surveys. The letters showed that
Kahn had offered to secretly donate
ten thousand dollars to the Park
Commission for surveys, provided
that some of the surveys found a
new route for the parkway—one
that would not cross his estate at
all. And they revealed that Moses
had secretly accepted the money,
had used it for surveys, and had in-
deed found a new route—one that
avoided Kahn’s estate. South of
Kahn’s estate lay the estates of other
powerful robber barons, so the route
was shifted south again—more
than three miles south—so that it
ran down the center of Long Island,
through a group of small farms.

Clark delivered an ultimatum to
Roosevelt, telling the Governor
that “the parkway’s route was not
to be changed to avoid both estate areas,
in Old Westbury as well as Dix
Hills, the public would be informed
of how a millionaire had given ten
thousand dollars to keep his private
golf course untouched and how Moses
had accepted the money and used it
to throw farmers off their land. Moses
thereupon agreed to a compromise,”
which was not really a compromise at all
but a complete surrender, under which
the parkway would make the two south-
ward curves, so that it would avoid
the estate areas, and under which Moses
also agreed that instead of building parks
along and at the end of the Northern
State Parkway, as he had originally
planned, there would not be a single park
anywhere along that parkway, or any-
where in the section of the North Shore
that the barons controlled, so that their
Gold Coast would remain underfied by
the city masses. And, in return, the Kahn-
Moses transaction was kept secret—and
it had remained secret, when I came
upon it, for almost forty years.

When the time came for my sev-
exth interview with Robert Moses—
on April 27, 1968—I knew I could no
longer postpone asking him about the
arrangement with Otto Kahn. And there
were many other questions that my re-
search had raised about which I had to
ask him—hundreds of questions, really.

I got to ask him only one, however.
I worded my first question about
Kahn and the Northern State Parkway
as politely—and, indeed, as obliquely—
as possible, but Robert Moses’ mind
worked very fast, and I was later to con-
clude that with my very first mention of
Kahn’s name he knew that I had seen the
crucial letters and telegrams. I could see
his eyes harden. There was not a word of
verbal reaction; he simply changed the
subject and, very shortly thereafter, said
he would have to cut the interview short
that day.

Every time, during the remaining five
years I was working on “The Power Bro-
ker,” that I tried to arrange another inter-
view, his secretaries said he was busy, and
I never talked to him again.

While my interviews with Moses
were over, however, my research
was not. I decided to try to find the
farmers through whose land the parkway
had finally run, to see if they could cast
any additional light on the subject.

Finding them was not easy. Though
the huge estates of the great barons were
all labelled by name on Moses’ maps (fa-
mous names: not only Kahn but Whit-
ney, Vanderbilt, Phipps, and Morgan,
among others), the farms, being much
smaller, appeared on the map as mere
dots or slivers; there wouldn’t have been
room for names even if someone had
wanted to put them there. And during
the forty years since their land had been
taken most of the farmers had died or
moved away. When I did find them—to
be more accurate, when they found me:
my wife, Ina, the only researcher I had

“Ah, Mr. Bromley. Nice to put a face on a disease.”
on "The Power Broker" (and the only researcher I have had on all my books), and I tracked down several of the farmers or their children—I didn't learn anything new about the Kahn-Moses transaction. In fact, they had never heard of it; they believed that the parkways had come through their farms solely because of the reason that Moses' representatives had given them—that engineering considerations made the route the only one feasible.

I did, however, learn about them.

I will never forget talking to Helen Roth, the widow of one of those farmers, James J. Roth, and to her son, Jimmy.

As I was asking Mrs. Roth and her son about the parkway's route, Jimmy started talking also about the parkway's effect—on their lives—and after a while his mother, in a very soft voice, I can still hear today, chimed in.

When James and Helen Roth bought their farm—forty-nine acres in Dix Hills—in 1922, much of it had been covered with woods, and all of it had been rocky. It had had to be cleared, and since Roth's team of horses couldn't budge many of the stumps, he—and, many times, his wife—pulled beside their horses, hauling at the ropes, while their son, as soon as, at the age of five, he was old enough to do so, handled the team, sitting on one of the horses and kicking him forward. By 1927, however, the land was finally cleared, and despite their discovery that the soil on the southern fifteen acres of the farm would never be any good for planting, the remaining thirty-four acres were rich and fertile. Life was grueling for all three members of the family; there was no money for a hired man. At harvest time, Roth, who had been up before dawn working in the fields, would load up one of his two wagons and drive to market while Helen and Jimmy loaded the other. Every minute mattered to a man trying to work thirty-four acres without a hired man, and so when Roth returned he would hurriedly unharness the team, hitch it to the loaded wagon, and drive to market while Helen and Jimmy reloaded the first wagon. But by 1927 the farm had finally begun to pay.

"We felt pretty secure," Jimmy said. "We had a nice farm. In those days, a farm wasn't just real estate, like it is now. In those days, a farm was your living. It was your home. And we had a nice farm."

And then, in 1927, after Moses struck his deal with Otto Kahn, one of Moses' aides drove up to the Roths' farm one day and told them that the Long Island State Park Commission was condemning fourteen acres from the center of the farm for the Northern State Parkway.

Taking fourteen acres from the farm's center meant taking fourteen of the farm's only thirty-four fertile acres. And cutting the farm in half with a parkway meant that getting from one half of the farm to the other would require driving off the farm to the nearest road that crossed the parkway, thereby making it far more difficult to work the part of the farm that remained. There was, however, a solution that would not hurt the Roths nearly so much: moving the parkway forty hundred feet south—less than a tenth of a mile. If the Long Island State Park Commission did that, the land taken would be taken from the barren part of the farm, and, since that land wasn't worked much anyway, the splitting of the farm by the parkway wouldn't matter nearly so much.

James Roth pleaded with Moses' representative to take that route. All he was asking, he said, was that the road be moved less than a tenth of a mile; that wouldn't matter to drivers using the road—and it would lessen the harm not only to his farm but to all the other farms involved. Moses refused even to consider the plea, saying that the route had been determined by engineering considerations that could not possibly be changed.

"My father was really rocked by this," recalled Jimmy Roth, who as a little boy had sat on a horse watching his father's and mother's backs bent into the ropes.

"And I don't know that I blame him. I'll tell you—my father and mother worked very hard on that place, and made something out of it, and then someone just cut it in two."

The fourteen acres were condemned; the condemnation award "never came to much," Mrs. Roth said. And since the farm now consisted of two separate, rather small pieces instead of a single big one, they couldn't even sell it.

Working the farm, moreover, became much harder. It took the Roths at least twenty-five minutes to get their team to the nearest road that crossed the parkway and then double back to plow the other side of the farm. Each round trip took about fifty minutes, and these were fifty-minute segments chopped out of the life
of a man to whom every minute counted. "It was quite a ways," Mrs. Roth said, in her quiet voice. "It was quite a ways for a fellow who was working hard already."

Many other farmers—twenty-one in the Dix Hills area alone (I don't think I ever counted the ones in the Old Westbury area, but there seem to have been more than twenty-one there)—were similarly ruined by the Northern State Parkway. To those farmers, the day they heard that "the road was coming" would always be remembered as a day of tragedy. One consideration alone made the tragedy more bearable to them—their belief that it was necessary, that the route of the parkway had been determined by those ineluctable engineering considerations.

But I knew, from the telegrams and letters, that it hadn't been necessary at all. It would, in fact, have been easy to move the parkway. Besides, for men with power or the money to buy power, Robert Moses had already moved it. It was running across James Roth's farm only because Otto Kahn hadn't wanted it to run across his golf course, and could pay to make sure it wouldn't, and because the Vanneys and the Morgans had power that Moses had decided to accommodate rather than challenge. "For men of wealth and influence," I was to write, Moses "had moved it more than three miles south of its original location. But James Roth possessed neither money nor influence. And for James Roth, Robert Moses would not move the parkway south even one-tenth of a mile farther. For James Roth, Robert Moses would not move the parkway one foot."

I can't honestly say, particularly after so many years have passed, that it was during my conversations with the farmers and with the people of East Tremont that my concept of the kind of book I wanted to write changed. I don't really remember exactly when it changed. But these conversations with the Long Island farmers had brought home to me in a new way the fact that a change on a map—Robert Moses' pencil going one way instead of another, not because of engineering considerations but because of calculations in which the key factor was power—had had profound consequences on the lives of men and women like those farmers whose homes were just tiny dots on Moses' big maps. I had set out to write about political power by writing about one man, keeping the focus, within the context of his times, on him. I now came to believe that the focus should be widened, to show not just the life of the wielder of power but the lives on whom, and for whom, it was wielded; not to show those lives in the same detail, of course, but in sufficient detail to enable the reader to empathize with the consequences of power—the consequences of government, really—on the lives of its citizens, for good and for ill. To really show political power, you had to show the effect of power on the powerless, and show it fully enough so the reader could feel it.

At the time of my last interview, although I didn't know it then—and I'm not sure Robert Moses fully realized it, either, though the realization was starting to sink in—he was being removed from power, in a vicious struggle with Nelson Rockefeller, who had succeeded, on March 1, 1968, in merging the Triborough Authority into its newly formed Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

Moses believed (as did others involved in the negotiations) that, in return for his support of the merger, Rockefeller had firmly promised him that he would retain all his old power over Triborough within the new agency; and that in addition he would be put in charge of projects he had long been planning, most notably the huge Sound Crossing, a six-mile-long bridge he wanted to build across Long Island Sound between Oyster Bay and Rye in Westchester County; the next (but not the final) link in the chain of bridges—the Triborough, the Whitestone, the Throgs Neck—joining Long Island with the mainland that he had planned decades before. But as the months passed, and the only position Moses was offered with the M.T.A. was a "consultantship," and as the bridge, despite repeated assurances by the Governor, remained unauthorized, I realized that Robert Moses' days of power were over, and to the complex mixture of my feelings about him was now added a wholly new one: pity. For, as one of his secretaries, Harold Blake, told me, "He had just as much energy as ever. And what was he going to do with it now?"

An architect who knew him well, Arnold Voillem, said, "The idea of this great mind having nothing to do—that's the most awful thing." And his wife, Rebecca Voillem, who also knew Moses well, said, "It's horrible. For him, that would be hell." I had gotten to know Robert Moses well enough to know that last statement was true.

During the next five years, as I continued to work on my book, he continued to fight and scheme to get power back, swallowing his pride to go hat in hand to Nelson Rockefeller, rallying his allies among the contractors and labor union leaders who were realizing that the city could not build big jobs without him. ("They want him to get tired and go away and get lost," Peter Brennan, of the Building and Construction Trades Council, reported to me. "But I say, Forget it! This guy don't blow away!") Although he shrank in height, his physical vigor was still remarkable. (In 1969, a News reporter wrote, "He's a big man, not so much in height and weight as in presence, and even now, on the eve of his eighty-fourth birthday, he's got enough vitality and power to become the instant center of attention when he walks into a room... Even now, it's easy to see why they called Robert Moses a giant.") But all his fighting and scheming was for naught, and when I heard from some of his assistants, still cooperating with me, about how the old man would pace the deck outside the Oak Beach house for hours, staring across at Fire Island, I would feel like crying, as sometimes I felt like crying about the people the old man had crushed when they stood in his way. He never got to build anything again.

When my book, "The Power Broker," was published in 1974, he issued a thirty-five-hundred-word statement attacking it—and me—written with all his acerbic brilliance of phrase. In one place, he said: "Charges of arrogance, contempt for the so-called democratic process, lack of faith in plain people, brutal uprooting and scattering of those in the way are as old as recorded history. In such periods, the left wings, fanatical environmentalists and seasonal Walden Ponders have a field day." He never ceased denouncing me, in speeches and countless letters. He died on July 29, 1981, at the age of ninety-two. Although I wanted very much to attend his funeral, I felt that his family and friends would not want me to be there, so I didn't go.