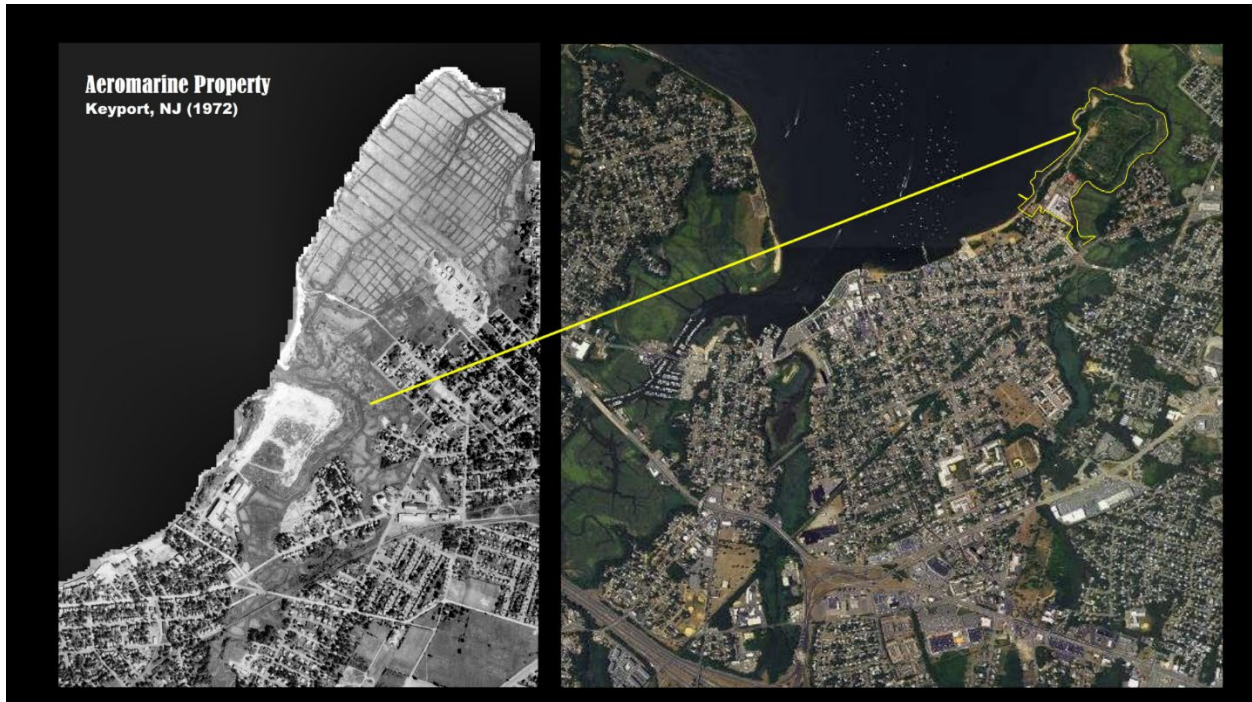


## CREATION OF THE KEYPORT SANITARY LANDFILL *by John Schneider (5-6-26)*



Here are aerial photographs of the landfill area on the former Aeromarine property in 1972 (left) and recently.

By the early 1960s, the communities surrounding Raritan Bay were facing a growing problem that many postwar American towns struggled to manage: what to do with increasing amounts of garbage in rapidly expanding suburban neighborhoods built along marshes, creeks, and waterfront meadows. In Keyport and Union Beach, the answer that emerged was the creation of a sanitary landfill system — one that would permanently alter portions of the Bayshore landscape and leave behind environmental questions that persist to this day.

A remarkable series of articles published in *The Keyport Weekly* between 1960 and 1968 now provides a detailed contemporary record of how those landfill operations were conceived, justified, expanded, and debated in real time. Taken together, the articles reveal far more than ordinary garbage disposal. They document the transformation of tidal meadowlands into dumping grounds, proposals to reroute creeks, growing complaints from nearby residents, and increasing involvement by county and state health officials as the Bayshore searched for long-term waste solutions.

The story appears to have begun publicly in 1960, when *The Keyport Weekly* reported that the Keyport Board of Health was urging the Borough Council to establish what officials described as a “sanitary landfill project.” At the time, sanitary landfills were widely promoted across America as modern alternatives to open burning dumps and illegal garbage piles. Municipal officials often described them not only as waste-disposal systems, but as engineering projects capable of reclaiming marshes and wetlands for future development.

The language used in the newspaper reflected that thinking. One article explained that reclaimed acreage could eventually support “desirable light industry and tax ratables such as electronics and

research plants.” Another described plans to reclaim nearly 90 acres of meadowland on both sides of the Maple Place bridge.

State officials quickly became involved. According to *The Keyport Weekly*, representatives from the New Jersey State Department of Health met with the Keyport Board of Health and Borough Council to outline the “advantages of a sanitary landfill project, maintained and operated under state regulations.” The articles identified Dr. Warren Rednor of the environmental health division and John Zemlansky, principal sanitarian for the state Health Department, as participants in those discussions.

The newspaper accounts show that officials were evaluating multiple sites around Keyport and Union Beach. One article specifically noted that landfill areas under consideration included land “at the rear of Aeromarine Corp. Co.” Another explained that Chingarora Creek, which flowed through the marshland, would potentially be straightened to improve drainage and reduce stagnant water, mosquito breeding, and odors.

The references to Aeromarine are particularly significant.

By the early 1960s, Aeromarine was already an established industrial complex in East Keyport. In one of the clearest articles in the series, published January 18, 1962, *The Keyport Weekly* reported:

“Arrangements are being made to open a new sanitary landfill dump area on the Aeromarine property in East Keyport.”

The article further stated that arrangements were being made with Bushwick Realty, Inc. of New York, identified as the property's owners. The landfill area was described as adjoining “the Aeromarine industrial complex of 10 factory buildings on a 60-acre site.”

Officials assured the public that the landfill would operate “under the strict supervision of the local board of health and under the regulations set down by the State Department of Health.”

Another article acknowledged that Keyport’s lack of a public dumping facility had encouraged illegal dumping throughout the borough. In discussing possible solutions, *The Keyport Weekly* reported that “the successful dumping operation being conducted by the Bushwick Realty Co. at the Aeromarine property was cited.”

What began as a local garbage issue quickly evolved into a broader regional problem involving multiple Bayshore communities. County planners worried that existing landfill capacity would soon be exhausted. One article warned that an “existing landfill used by six municipalities may be filled in five years.”

The proposed solution became increasingly ambitious. Monmouth County planners discussed a regional landfill strategy centered around the East Point peninsula in Union Beach. Municipalities potentially tied to the project included Atlantic Highlands, Highlands, Holmdel Township, Keansburg, Keyport, Matawan, Matawan Township, Raritan Township, and Union Beach.

But even as officials promoted the landfill system as modern and sanitary, problems began appearing almost immediately.

Residents along Walnut Street complained about garbage trucks traveling through residential neighborhoods to reach the dump. Union Beach residents complained about odors. Articles repeatedly referenced concerns about garbage washing into nearby waterways during storms and high tides.

One of the most revealing passages appeared in an article discussing a proposed joint meeting between Keyport and Union Beach planning boards. According to the newspaper, officials discussed the possible relocation of portions of the dump “to prevent garbage from washing ashore on Pebble Beach.”

The article continued with an extraordinary detail:

“...garbage, apparently carried by high tides, floated from the landfill area and washed up on the Union Beach portion of East Point.”

Another article confirmed that Pebble Beach had actually been closed by health authorities after garbage littered the shoreline following high tides.

The newspapers also reveal early discussions about the kinds of materials entering the landfill system. A 1965 article discussing a Union Beach landfill proposal referenced crushed automobile wrecks, demolition debris, and materials described as “industrial wastes.”

The article stated:

“It was admitted the board of health had not yet had its say on the ‘industrial wastes.’”

That phrase stands out today because it suggests that even at the time, questions existed regarding what kinds of materials might ultimately enter Bayshore landfill operations.

By 1968, according to another *Keyport Weekly* article, landfill availability had become “an acute problem” across the Bayshore region. County planners continued searching for additional sites while municipalities struggled with increasing waste volumes, environmental complaints, and limited remaining space.

Viewed together today, these articles from *The Keyport Weekly* provide a rare contemporaneous record of how landfill development unfolded across Keyport and Union Beach during a period of rapid suburban growth. They document official policy discussions, state involvement, creek modifications, marshland filling, public complaints, and environmental concerns as they were happening — not through hindsight, but through the ordinary reporting of a local newspaper chronicling the transformation of its own community.

Perhaps most importantly, the articles demonstrate that long before modern environmental investigations and public controversy, residents, planners, and health officials were already wrestling with the difficult balance between development, garbage disposal, waterfront ecology, and public health along the shores of Raritan Bay.

## **ARCHIVAL EXCERPTS FROM *THE KEYPORT WEEKLY***

### **July 14, 1960 — “Landfill Project Urged In Keyport”**

“...designed to clear out private dumping areas and reclaim nearly 90 acres of meadowland north and south of the Maple Pl. bridge.”

“Two other sanitary landfill areas under consideration are between Route 35 and Maple Pl., at the rear of Aeromarine Corp Co.”

### **September 8, 1960 — “Sanitary Landfill Is Explained To Board”**

“Representatives of the State Department of Health Thursday outlined advantages of a sanitary landfill project, maintained and operated under state regulations...”

### **Early 1960s — “Lack Of Public Dumps”**

“The successful dumping operation being conducted by the Bushwick Realty Co. at the Aeromarine property was cited.”

### **January 18, 1962 — “Landfill Dump At Aeromarine”**

“Arrangements are being made to open a new sanitary landfill dump area on the Aeromarine property in East Keyport.”

***“It adjoins the Aeromarine industrial complex of 10 factory buildings on a 60-acre site.”***

### **Mid-1960s — “Keyport, Union Beach Plan Boards To Meet”**

“...garbage, apparently carried by high tides, floated from the landfill area and washed up on the Union Beach portion of East Point.”

### **Mid-1960s — “Seek Joint Meeting On East Point Dump”**

“Pebble Beach was ordered closed by Union Beach health authorities this summer after garbage littered the beach after high tides.”

### **September 16, 1965 — “Union Beach Landfill Site For Junk Cars”**

“...the dumping would only be of crushed-up abandoned auto wrecks, demolition materials from torn-down structures and ‘industrial wastes.’”

### **October 24, 1968 — “Board Studies Landfill Sites”**

“Landfill sites in the bayshore are an acute problem...”

*NOTE: Thanks to Kevin Lehman for compiling these articles from The Keyport Weekly.*