



Chapter 1

Seeds of an Organization

EACH SPRING MILLIONS OF ALEWIFE—most would call them minnows—spawn in the Little Reed Pond estuary. They are a crucial part of the local aquatic food chain, and their only route into Lake Montauk and beyond runs through a single pipe under East Lake Drive. That’s the good news. Because in 1970, the chairman of the East Hampton Zoning Board of Appeals, Eugene D. Haas Jr., proposed damming Lake Montauk just south of the Yacht Club and then cutting a new inlet through Little Reed Pond out to Block Island Sound by Shagwong Point. He also wanted to build 1,400 houses on the 1,000-acre historic home and burial ground of the Montaukett Indians—known as Indian Field¹—adjacent to Big Reed Pond. That would have been very bad news for the alewife—as well as the Montauk community.

MONTAUKERS FORM GROUP, declared the headline in the July 16, 1970 *East Hampton Star*. “A new committee calling itself Concerned Citizens of Montauk was formed last week to oppose a recent proposal

1. The terms Indian Field and Indian Fields have been used interchangeably in documents.



Little Reed Pond is a critical finfish nursery, but it was almost replaced by a new inlet to Lake Montauk in 1970.

for the development of the Indian Field–Lake Montauk area.” The article went on to state that the committee included Mrs. Samuel H. Joyce Jr., president of the Montauk Historical Society, and that it had placed an ad in the newspaper opposing the development of Indian Field. It quoted what would become a far-sighted warning by Hilda Lindley, the initiator of the group and owner of a home in Indian Field: “Mass development poses a real threat to the available water supply, in addition to destroying some of the area’s most precious natural resources.” From this small beginning, the advent of the movement to preserve Montauk’s open space and unspoiled water was heralded.

In 1970 Montauk was a community of 3,000 year-round residents, swelling to 18,000 in the summer. Most of the peninsula was still open space: forests and harbors, and a good deal of unspoiled land. The idea of developing Montauk as a resort wasn’t a new one. Some in the business community at that time thought that the additional homes would bolster the economy and increase the tax rolls.



The last two miles of Long Island is covered with parkland. Theodore Roosevelt County Park in the foreground; Montauk Point State Park on the left; Camp Hero State Park upper left.

The Indian Field development proposal became a call to action for Hilda Lindley. A remarkable, energetic single mother of three who had been summering in Montauk with her family for many years, she considered Haas's plan an environmental assault. Having seen and been appalled by the destruction of the dunes by developers at nearby Culloden Shores, with its Leisurama cookie-cutter houses, she saw that this concept could easily produce a similar result.²

Lindley's home in Indian Field was a former World War II submarine spotting station disguised to look like a farmhouse, with cement clapboard, which she purchased in 1951 as Army surplus. It was located on a high hill near an Army radar station. "It had a clapboard finish they did with cement. The house still had the little holes for the

2. One resident recalls that in preparation for the building of the subdivision in the Culloden Shores area, bulldozers had decimated it so that "it looked like the Gobi Desert."



The house of CCOM founder Hilda Lindley sits alone in the center of Theodore Roosevelt County Park. If CCOM had failed in its first cause this house would have had 1,400 neighbors.

guns.... She [Hilda] was an editor and she was here every weekend and had someone to stay with [the children] during the week, so the children stayed the summer,” recalled Carol Morrison, who was a good friend of Lindley’s. (Morrison, an economist, had purchased her Hither Hills home in 1967.) According to Hilda’s son John, Hilda considered her humble little house “the real home for my family.”

First Steps

Within days after the July publication of the Haas plan, Hilda Lindley took action. She called upon her closest neighbors on East Lake Drive, Helen Winberg and Mildred Shapiro, to discuss her concerns about the outcome of the plan. The women met around a handsome wooden table built by another neighbor, Sam Joyce, to consider their options. The women named themselves the Concerned Citizens of Montauk, and decided to run an ad in the *East Hampton Star*. “We really didn’t have a plan at that point,” Lindley was later quoted as saying in a *New York Times* story of July 1971. “We felt that we might get some support



The house of CCOM founder Hilda Lindley was built in WW II to look like a summer cottage, but the concrete walls are two feet thick and the windows more suitable for gun sites than viewing the sunset.

because the housing plan could endanger Montauk’s fresh water supply—we rely entirely on well water.”

DO YOU LOVE MONTAUK? that first ad asked. It asked those who thought that Indian Field should be saved to send their name, address, and five dollars.

“We were just overwhelmed by the replies to the ad,” the *Times* article quoted Mildred Shapiro, who was to become publicity chair for the group. “We got 80 letters and \$400, enough to pay for the ad.” Helen Winberg added, “Equally important, we found out that there were more than three of us who wanted to save Indian Field. That was tremendously heartening.”

Encouraged by that response, the women, along with restaurant owner John Gosman and Theodore Monell, an executive for the International Nickel Company, called for a public meeting in August. More than 100 people turned out for the meeting. They included some of Lindley’s neighbors who lived on East Lake Drive: William Burke, John and Rita Gosman, Tom and Kay Carley, and William and Rita McKernan.



Hilda's House looking west: CCOM founder Hilda Lindley lived in this WW II "bunker house" now in the center of Theodore Roosevelt County Park. Note houses bordering park.

"People either responded to the notice or by word of mouth," recalls Rita McKernan, who became membership chair of CCOM. Her daughter Rita Gosman, and her husband John, a well-known Montauk restaurateur and fish wholesaler, became active as well.

One of the letters responding to the initial ad was signed by sisters Dorothy and Lillian Disken, both schoolteachers in Brooklyn and Queens. They had bought their home in 1963. Dorothy described that next CCOM meeting. "There were about 100 people who met behind the Historical Society, and we were swatting mosquitos. [Later] Hilda said to me, 'Dorothy, you'll be treasurer.' I said I can't manage my own checkbook. She said, 'you'll be fine.' That's how officers were selected." Tom Carley became Vice President, Kay Dayton was named Recording Secretary, and Helen Winburg was designated Corresponding Secretary. John Gosman became a board member, as did Carol Morrison, Helen Sarvis, and James Proctor, among others.

“Hilda was an impressive woman. She knew her own mind and gathered many people together to defend the beautiful area she lived in,” Rita McKernan asserts. Kay Dayton confirms this impression: “Hilda was a very beautiful, interesting woman. She was quite dynamic—you could tell the minute you got involved with her.”

Carol Morrison remembers that “Nothing daunted her. To give an example, we used to drive back and forth to New York City Friday night and go back Sunday. One Friday it was pouring rain. We got to Montauk and I said, ‘Hilda, you don’t want to go up the hill to your house. Come to my house and I’ll take you first thing in the morning.’ Uh-uh. She wouldn’t hear of it. She wanted to go up in the pouring rain. I let her off on the dirt road in high heels and city clothes. It was a mile walk—a good healthy walk. But when she made up her mind about something, she made up her mind.”

At the first official meeting on September 6, 1970, a letter was formulated and presented for the attendees to sign. It was addressed to New York State Assemblyman and Montauk resident Perry Duryea,³ and stated the group’s opposition to the development plan. There were 330 signatures attached.

Efforts Toward Growth

Within the year, Kay Carley was commended for her efforts in helping to develop a membership of 350 people. Membership continued to grow every year. Carley recalls how this was accomplished: “Hilda was outspoken.... When Hilda spoke, everybody listened.... She went to Town Board meetings to show we were a force.... We’d go to all the neighbors’ houses. She’d come back waving a check.” CCOM also began to hold monthly public meetings on environmental topics.

A confirmed believer in political action, in that first year Lindley inspired the group to inaugurate a drive for registering summer people to vote in Montauk. “Would you like your vote to count?” asked the letter sent out to potential voters. Zoning fights, battles over land use,

3. Duryea is often called one of the most powerful Republicans in the state, having served as Assembly speaker for a lengthy period.

pollution problems, real estate speculations, vested interests, and politicians with hidden agendas would all become hot topics for discussion in the years ahead. The summer population would soon become a significant voting block.

“It was a turning point—the smartest thing they ever did because it didn’t take that many votes to turn it around,” said John Lindley.

Local voting registration is still an important issue. As CCOM President Bill Akin wrote in his newsletter column titled “Second Home, First Love” in June 2002: “... second homeowners, while representing the majority of property ownership and the majority of town revenue as measured by tax dollars, are the least represented by town government. The reason is simple, most second homeowners don’t vote here.” He goes on to say that “If you are discouraged by seemingly mindless behavior on the part of politicians, register to vote in this town. Local elections are often won or lost by extremely close margins.”

There would, however, be a backlash from the effort to enlist second-home owners. According to environmentalist and longtime East Hampton Town Natural Resources Director Larry Penny, “I think they [the locals] felt that CCOM was mainly a bunch of people from the city; they didn’t make their living out here.... [they were] kind of elitist.” That perception would be one that had many lasting implications for the organization.

Rita McKernan reflects, “They said that we were a bunch of Democrats. That just wasn’t true; we were environmentalists. People wouldn’t talk to us. They said, ‘You people come here and want to change things—why don’t you go back where you came from.’”

CCOM did very grassroots organizing in these beginning days. “We went house to house... and took our chances on who would be with us and who wouldn’t,” Kay Dayton recalls. “Every year we’d study the new tax rolls to see any new owners and write to them and send literature. It just grew and grew, and every year we had a party. People came to that and brought a new person.” Dayton noted that it was the later arrivals to the area who became the backbone of the group—they had seen how the rest of Long Island had deteriorated because of overdevelopment. Says Russell Stein:

Why did I join? I went to a couple of Montauk Village Association meetings because I was so unhappy with what I was seeing in Montauk... lots of construction going on... a lot of things for sale. Compared to now it was nothing... it looked like Montauk was going to be ruined. I remember trying to bring that up at the MVA [Montauk Village Association] and nobody was impressed with it.

The Battle for Indian Field Joined

The minutes record that after receiving the letter of opposition, Perry Duryea attended CCOM's October 1970 meeting. He said that a Lake Montauk dam was unfeasible, that in any case the lake bottom belonged to East Hampton Town, and also that there was no serious pollution. Moreover, he claimed, neither state, local, nor county government could provide the \$40–50 million needed to buy Indian Field. He suggested working through the state for development of historical sites which could lead to the acquisition of Indian Field in the name of the Town.

But Lindley wasn't about to give up. States John Lindley, "My mother was a person who was very tenacious and who never thought anything was impossible." Kay Carley evidently agrees with his assessment and tears up as she describes Hilda Lindley. "She [Hilda] was a real fighter... I was backing her because I agreed with her. Here she's up there all alone—you had to admire her."

Though the members of the nascent organization were taken with the stunning beauty of the 1,100 acres of former grazing land that was Indian Field, it was obvious that the magnificence of the area wasn't going to be enough to persuade the county to purchase it. Something concrete was needed to help buttress the argument against development. Hilda Lindley found that something thanks to the newly formed Group for America's South Fork, founded in 1972. She immediately became an active board member in the later-renamed Group for the South Fork.

That something was groundwater. "The Group for the South Fork started as a research organization and was giving us material for what we wanted to prove—that the land was worth saving," according to Carol Morrison. "She [Lindley] knew that water was scarce there, and

to put 1,400 houses—she just couldn't figure out how that could work. The theme of water [as an issue for CCOM] started from there.”

Although Lindley appealed to the federal government as well as the state government to purchase Indian Field, it was from the county and County Executive John V. Klein that she eventually got a sympathetic ear. The county finally approved the purchase of Indian Field on July 18, 1972, having first postponed the purchase until the airport and a “fillet” strip of 40 acres was carved out to remain as private property owned by Perry Duryea.⁴

But first there was also a battle over Hilda Lindley's right to remain in her house on that land. That story made the headlines in the *New York Times* on November 12, 1972. It read: WOMAN'S SUCCESS IN DRIVE FOR L. I. PARK MAY LEAD TO HER EVICTION.

CCOM's newsletter (instituted by the board from the very inception of the group) told the dramatic story of the machinations that had been going on in its January 1973 edition:

For several weeks prior to the end of the year [1972], the executive board of Concerned Citizens... was engaged in supporting the efforts of our president, Hilda Lindley, to maintain her home in Indian Field, as she was assured a year ago by Suffolk County Park Commissioner Charles Dominy. Although this assurance was backed up by an offer from County Attorney George Percy, on November 1, 1972, of 35-year occupancy for Mrs. Lindley and her children if she would donate the property to the county and pay maintenance, insurance and taxes, on November 3 the four-man

4. Remarkably, Klein delayed the taking of the title until an appraisal survey had been completed, since he believed that rising land values placed a higher price than the \$4,000,000 that the county had allocated for the purchase of Indian Field. The CCOM newsletter of January 1973 states that “It is obviously more sensible to get an appraisal before voting money for an expensive parcel. CCOM hopes that as the result of the publicity surrounding the Indian Field purchase, the county will institute a new policy for parkland acquisition that will be fair to and understood by both the public and county officials.”



Four members of CCOM's original Board of Directors—Rita McKernan, Dorothy Disken, Kaye Carley, and Lillian Disken (left to right)—are honored for 30 years of service (2000).

Suffolk County Park Committee, headed by Thomas Strong, voted unanimously to evict her.

On November 14, twenty-four members of CCOM—many of them taking time off from their jobs—journeyed to Hauppauge, the county center, to urge the 18-member Suffolk County Legislature to allow Lindley to stay in her home. Dorothy Disken recalls, “We took the day off to go; so did others.... We were there to show that others cared about the issue. They tried to imply she had ulterior motives.”

“Following that meeting,” the CCOM article continued, “Strong met with Lindley and her attorney [Saul Wolf of East Hampton], and offered to work out an agreement by Friday, November 17, but on November 16, he, his committee [and Commissioner Dominy] again voted unanimously to evict her.”

On November 28, County Executive Klein asked the legislators to again meet with Lindley to try to work out a compromise. A stormy session followed in Riverhead on December 7, with an intransigent John Strong insisting that Lindley be evicted despite the fact that other

families were allowed to stay in their homes on other lands that were purchased to become county parklands.

It was revealed at that meeting that the Parks Committee had adopted a new eviction policy in January of 1972, but had not informed the Parks Commissioner, the County Executive and his deputy, the Legislature, and the county. Everyone but the Parks Committee was unaware of the new policy—and the committee admitted that Lindley was the first to have the new policy applied to her.

INDIAN FIELD: WHY NOT 1,400 HOUSES?

The 1,157 acres that is now Theodore Roosevelt County Park is not only one of the most scenic places on the entire East Coast of the United States, but it is also one of the most ecologically diverse. The 53-acre Big Reed Pond alone is designated by the U.S. Department of the Interior as a National Scenic Landmark. The broad-leaf cattail marsh at the western boarder of the pond is considered the best example of this type of community on Long Island. The National Heritage Program has identified several rare wetland plant species, wild flowers, and dependent wildlife that thrive in the Big Reed ecosystem.

At other locations in the park visitors will find a pristine, and extremely fragile, dune community that contains several flora and fauna species unique to this type of environment. One of the last remaining meadows of maritime grasslands spreads across the open hills, and along with the forest of hickory, beech, red oak, and scarlet oak it is home to red tail fox, white tail deer, rabbit and at least 85 species of breeding birds.

Annually the park is a temporary resting place for dozens of migrating birds, while the beaches provide some of the best striped bass surf-casting between Cape Cod and Cape Hatteras. The Little Reed Pond estuary is the prime breeding ground for tiny alewife minnows that migrate through a pipe under East Lake Drive and become the foundation of the food stock for dozens of local commercial and game fish for which Montauk is famous.

And to think, all this could have been 1,400 home sites.

“It was revenge,” Dorothy Disken stated unequivocally.

The editorial page of the November 30, 1972 issue of the *East Hampton Star* conjectured:

It would appear that someone on the county level simply decided to teach Mrs. Lindley a lesson, a lesson perhaps intended for the edification of others who might feel like asking probing questions. To the argument that private homes don't belong within parks, one can point to the Fire Island and Cape Cod National Seashores, where long-term tenancy provisions were easily worked out between the government and isolated homeowners, and the Cedar Point County Park, where the failure to work out such an arrangement has resulted in the utter vandalizing of Cedar Island Light, a historic landmark. This, no doubt, is what will happen to Mrs. Lindley's house at Montauk, unless it is transformed into a hunting lodge for county bigwigs.

Some suspected that the basis for the “revenge” was Hilda's being an outspoken political partisan. Says Carol Morrison, “Hilda was a Democrat and [she] felt that politics was very, very important.” CCOM's reputation was that it was identified with the Democratic Party because Perry Duryea, the Republican leader of the State Assembly, was against the acquisition of Indian Field.

She continues, “That's why many people wouldn't admit they were a member of CCOM. ‘You shouldn't do that because Duryea wouldn't like it.’ That's where [CCOM] got its partisan reputation. Even though at that time we had a guy like Neal Mahoney, a great guy and a Republican committee person. Tom Carley [who would succeed Lindley to the presidency] was a Republican; Dick Johnson was a Republican. We had Republicans on the board, but that didn't make any difference.”

There were other views about Lindley as well. As the organization she'd founded gained momentum, her motivation was called into question. This fact is still painful for John Lindley to remember. Dorothy Disken recalls that during the battle to save her home, some people would say “‘Who does she think she is?’ or ‘She just wants a private park.’”

In an article by Jack Graves in the November 15, 1972 issue of the

Woman's Success in Drive for L. I. Park May Lead to Her Eviction

By DAVID A. ANDELMAN
 Special to The New York Times
 MONTAUK, L.I., Nov. 12—
 For nearly five years Hilda Lindley led the fight for a 900-acre county park overlooking Block Island Sound here. Now that fight has been won and the park created, but for Mrs. Lindley the success of the fight may mean eviction from the home she has occupied for 22 years on two acres of land right in the middle of the park site.

The home is a six Montauk blockhouse, built during World War II as a semiretired sporting station on a knoll in the center of what will become Montauk Park.

Although Mrs. Lindley offered last month to give her cottage and two acres of land to the county without charge, it takes her permission to continue living on it for 20 years, the County



Mrs. Hilda Lindley outside her home at Montauk Point, L.I. The area is to become a 900-acre county park.

Legislature parks committee rejected her offer last week and voted instead to acquire it at a cost of up to \$150,000. The County Legislature is to act on the matter on Tuesday, and Mrs. Lindley may lose her property then unless her friends and attorneys can persuade the county and its voters the other way.

She and the Colonial Citizens of Montauk, one of Long Island's leading environmental organizations, which Mrs. Lindley founded, will insist, however, to fight for her house despite their having won the battle for the park and the land-back concept.

“Mrs. Hilda Lindley outside her home at Montauk Point, L.I. The area is to become a 900-acre county park.” —*New York Times*, 11/13/1972

East Hampton Star, at a very disappointing time in the proceedings a “despondent” Hilda Lindley is quoted as saying,

I feel I am being victimized; the surrounding private properties will increase in value. Those owners are being greatly enriched [by having a county park adjacent to their properties], while I’m being deprived of my home and land through condemnation, which carries a price much lower than market value. I will have to sell at a loss and lose occupancy; it’s a cruel reward for one who’s worked so hard to preserve this land.

A lot of people say I’m being stupid, that I should take the money, but the things I care about are things money can’t buy. If I had it to do all over again, knowing that it would end this way, I still would have done it. People need this land; it will be a place they can go to recover from their tensions. It will be a much better tourist attraction for Montauk than motels.

Mary Ella Reutershan of Amagansett, who would later become an East Hampton Town councilwoman, appeared on Lindley’s behalf before

the County Legislature on November 28. Two days later the *Star* reported that she asked the following:

- For an explanation of “the strange shape of the taking area [of the Indian Field park] and the apparently careful exclusion of certain rather valuable properties.”
- Why the Proximar development in which she said State Assembly Speaker Perry B. Duryea, Jr. was “allegedly” a partner, had been deleted from the taking area.
- Whether “the county in fact plans an expansion of the Montauk airstrip and the full-scale development of a county airport,” using 43 acres surrounding the airstrip that it had acquired for “county purposes, not for the park.” Mr. Duryea was a founder of the airstrip.
- How the Legislators had arrived at the purchase figure of the park land, \$4,035,000.

On December 12, 1972 the Legislators finally voted 14 to 0 to authorize the County Attorney to negotiate an occupancy agreement with Lindley based on her initial proposal that if the county would buy the land, she would give her house to the new park when she died. The *New York Times* quoted Lindley as saying: “The best I can hope for is some arrangement for lifetime use. I shouldn’t mind, because the important thing is that an area I love is going to be kept untouched. My own inconvenience is a small enough price to pay.”

CCOM board member and attorney Hal Lary negotiated for Lindley to obtain occupancy of the house for a number of years. He started negotiations with a 99-year occupancy. That was the standard agreement when the federal government took control of the homes which would become a part of the Cape Cod National Seashore. The settlement worked out by Lary was for an occupancy of 35 years, according to Carol Morrison. (Morrison remarked on the irony that Hilda Lindley died of cancer a mere seven years after the settlement was worked out.)

“My mother gave up her house—her only asset and her favorite place on earth—to preserve this land,” lamented John Lindley.

“Hilda had intelligence, energy and political savvy,” recalls former CCOM President Richard Johnson. “She was often tearful when she

went before the county in pleading to save both Indian Field and her home. At one point, she involved Charles Lindbergh, whose several books she had helped publish when she worked for Harcourt Brace. Not only did he address the County Legislators, but he put his arm around Hilda to comfort her when she was visibly upset.”

As John Lindley recalls it:

There were an incredible series of events. My mother had been working for the *New York Times Book Review*, and a friend suggested the eviction would make an important story. It landed on the front page of the Saturday *New York Times*. The condemnation of the house, presented as policy, was in reality a vindictive act. It caught the eye of Senator James Buckley, a conservative and a Libertarian. He was incensed, and called my mother to offer help. He hooked her up with Dan Mahoney, an attorney who then represented her. He knew “the Albany guys” in the game. He negotiated with the county for acceptable terms, and afterward refused to take her money.

A *New York Newsday* column in September of 1973 by William F. Buckley, Jr. (brother of Senator James Buckley) was headlined DEFENDING A BLOCKHOUSE IN EASTERN SUFFOLK. It fell perfectly in line with Buckley’s libertarian political position. He described it as “a human story, the individual against the state.” Buckley noted the blockhouse had been bought,

...for the peanuts it was worth by Mrs. Hilda Lindley, a young woman whose marriage broke up a few years later. There, without alimony or help of any kind from anyone, Mrs. Lindley spent every weekend with her three children, leaving to go to work in a publishing house in New York City on the 5:30 A.M. train on Mondays. She saved every penny she earned, sent her children to fine schools, and built up her beloved blockhouse and, in her spare time, importuned the elders of Suffolk County to take over the adjacent 800 acres as part of the land bank program.

She must have argued the case very eloquently, because said elders suddenly felt the acquisitive imperative, and decided a year



A fresh water lake, Big Reed Pond (foreground), and a brackish lake, Oyster Pond (center) are home to huge populations of migrating waterfowl. Big Reed is in Theodore Roosevelt County Park, and Oyster Pond forms the western boundary of Montauk Point State Park.

or so ago to take over not only the 800 acres of wild land, but also the two acres that belonged to poor Mrs. Lindley.

Buckley concluded with this caveat to the county:

If they say no [to Lindley's plea for reciprocal privilege], they had better watch out.... When the agents come to take it, they will perish under a rain of arrows shot through the machicolations of Mrs. Lindley's dream house by her friends, who will gather there to make the point that even as in the past the price of liberty was eternal vigilance against German submarines, now the price is vigilance against unfeeling gentlemen from the County Legislature.

The editor notes that this was sent by Buckley to Dan Mahoney, the lawyer John Lindley mentioned who was also chair of the New York State Conservative Party.

“People were saying terrible things about Hilda. That all she wanted was to live in her house surrounded by a park. They also didn’t like the fact that she was a woman [initiating this]. One time she came back to Montauk and found some of her windows had bullet holes in them,” Lillian Disken recalls.

The January 1973 CCOM newsletter included this commentary after Lindley’s occupancy agreement had been finalized:

Mrs. Lindley wishes to thank all CCOM members who helped her so generously in this six-week struggle, particularly the members of the executive board who gave so unstintingly of their time, money and presence. Her victory is a wonderful demonstration that people working together are stronger than any single individual, and in saving her home we see another example of the impossible being achieved—the same impossible that some skeptics predicted when we set out to save Indian Field from the rape of the bulldozers.

CCOM Incorporates

In July of 1971, with the help of attorney Joseph Duffy, the CCOM executive board met to approve recasting itself as a not-for-profit corporation. Such a designation meant being unable to take political stands. Duffy advised leaving that to individuals, and instead making statements based on “information and belief.” CCOM has assiduously followed that advice to this day. As a result, when board members have run for political office or held politically appointed positions from either party—members such as Helen Sarvis, Richard Johnson, Russell Stein, and Lisa Greci—they resigned their CCOM organizational offices.

“Our focus has always remained environmental and not political,” states Richard Johnson. Citing the 6,000 votes the organization got out during the critical time with Indian Field, and the 15,000 letters that would be sent to Washington several years later protesting offshore oil drilling near Montauk, Johnson summarized the group’s approach: “We were never a political party, but we knew how to use politics to get our end.”

From the first, Hilda Lindley sought alignments with other organizations, including the East End Council of Organizations (EECO). That organization included The Baymen's Association, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the Ladies' Village Improvement Society (LVIS). Kay Dayton, who became CCOM representative to the EECO, observed that "Every little corner of the Hamptons seemed to erupt into a group like us." For instance, in 1970 a suit against the Town concerning Indian Field was joined with the Suffolk County Defenders of the Environment, the Preservation Society of the East End, and the Springs Civic Association. There would be more suits to come.

The mission statement at the time of incorporation as a not-for-profit organization read:

- To preserve the environment and ecology of Montauk.
- To support and aid projects which benefit and preserve the natural resources of Montauk.
- To apprise the citizens and governing bodies of the necessity and duty under the law to protect and preserve the water, land, air and wildlife of Montauk.
- To propose and support legislation which will enhance, promote, and foster the preservation of the environment and ecology of Montauk.
- To enlist the aid of the governing bodies and the courts to enforce those existing laws which pertain to the preservation of the environment and ecology of Montauk.

When the group incorporated in that important month of July, it also embarked upon a major membership drive. In the letter she included with a clip-out membership form, Hilda Lindley wrote:

In one short year we have already accomplished many things that most people said couldn't be done:

- Helped save Indian Field from developers' bulldozers for a county park.
- Persuaded the Town to take action in cleaning up Ditch Plains Trailer Park, long a community eyesore.
- Succeeded in stepping up the program of policing Town waters.

- Attended every East Hampton Town meeting to present our members' views on matters of concern to Montauk.
- Conducted monthly public meetings at which qualified speakers have informed the community on vital issues.
- Published a monthly newsletter alerting our members to matters of current concern.
- Provided an organization which can get action on matters that might often be difficult for one individual to achieve.

Therein reads a testament to the work achieved “in one short year” by this small, energetic group of Montauk environmentalists and their dynamic president, Hilda Lindley.

HILDA'S HAND-ME-DOWNS

Ever since its inception, CCOM has abided by the philosophy and principles of Hilda Lindley. In shorthand, they are *Hilda's Hand-Me-Downs*:

- Members are encouraged to attend all governmental town meetings—Town Board, Planning Board, Zoning Board.
- Members should read the local papers, especially the legal notices about development applications, official notifications of Town plans, etc.
- Members should be prepared to speak up and be active at Town meetings.
- CCOM will take legal action as necessary—lawsuits can be used as a final weapon in CCOM's fighting arsenal.
- Board members must be prepared to travel to Albany and/or Washington D.C. to lobby lawmakers about environmental concerns.
- Hold public forums on environmental topics to educate the public.
- Facilitate political discussion before each Election Day through an annual Meet the Candidates event.
- Do community outreach and participate in the community through public events like Earth Day, Field Day, and the local school's environmental programs, etc.
- Recruit environmentally responsible members of the community to CCOM's Board of Directors.
- Have parties!