

## Radioactive and Hazardous materials, haunting legacy of LOOW

by Don Ames

Few of us who moved to the suburbs north of Niagara Falls since 1950 realize how the Towns of Lewiston and Porter were drastically affected by the actions of many Government Agencies since 1941.

At that time 7,500 acres of land was acquired from 149 land owners for the Lake Ontario Ordinance Works (LOOW).

It reached from the Lockport Youngstown Road (Rt 93) on the north to beyond Swann Road on the south and from Creek Road on the west to Porter Center Road on the east.

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The former land owners were given 30 days to move off their land after selling or moving all of their possessions and finding another place to live. It was a time of sorrow and loss for all.

Many houses were moved to new locations or demolished. Even the Lutheran Church building was relocated from Creek Road to Third St., Youngstown.

By the summer of 1943, plants were already under construction at Oakridge, Tenn. as part of the secret Manhattan Project.

The LOOW site was considered for this project. Previously the site had been considered as a possible location for the atomic project. Perhaps the weather became a deciding factor.

By 1944, the area of the LOOW or "Government Reserve" had been reduced to 2,400 acres. The balance of 5,100 acres was declared surplus and was put up for sale. This was the property to the west of Lutts, Harold and Model City Roads and to the east of Creek Road.

The War Department retained the eastern 871 acres north of Balmer Road while the Chemical Warfare Depot occupied the southern 1,511 acres.

Equipment for handling large amounts of water required in the Tennessee project was in short supply. The LOOW equipment was sent to Oakridge along with construction workers to install it.

The Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) took over the Manhattan Project and the 516 acres of the Depot area near Pletcher Road. The AEC obtained the needed radium ore, known as pitchblend from the African Metals Co. of Belgium. This ore was refined by Linde Air Co. of Tonawanda and other companies in Niagara Falls.

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The Department of Energy formerly the AEC, transferred most of the other property to other authorities and retained only the 190 acres near Pletcher Road.

In the 1950's the Cold War with Russia was under way. New materials were needed for the rapidly changing aircraft and missiles.

A large plant was constructed for the Hooker Chemicals and Plastics

Corp. north of Pletcher Road to produce Boron 10, an isotope used to control nuclear reactors.

Olin Matheson was chosen by the Army to construct a large plant where high energy fuel was produced.

Bell Aerospace Co. was designing and making new types of planes and rocket engines. Bell leased a large area north of Balmer Road. The old TNT igloos were used for tests and experiments.

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To protect the industry and Power Plants to the south, 36 Nike anti-missile missiles were located near the corner of Balmer Road and Porter Center Road in 1957. This area became a part of a potential war zone. The Nikes were decommissioned in 1964 as they became obsolete. Other defense units were then installed nearby.

During the War years and later, many chemical plants were built in Niagara Falls producing huge quantities of hazardous materials by-products. These were often burned, dumped into sewer lines or the river or in convenient areas such as the old Love Canal.

By 1970, the old LOOW area looked like a good spot to tuck some of this material out of sight.

What has happened to the old water tower since 1941? More radioactive waste was placed in it without special protection for the workers. It was finally emptied and the dangerous material was pumped into a holding area about a mile to the north.

Local environmental groups are still trying to have all of the dangerous material removed from the area but to no avail. Even the Academy of Science states that it is not safe here, and should be removed.

Environment Impact Studies have been done yearly. A local environmentalist who has fought for total decontamination of the LOOW site for many years states that at least 2,500 acres of it should never be used for human activities!