

Government ignores landfills

by Don Ames

Few of us who moved to the suburbs north of Niagara Falls since 1950 realize how these towns 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 Land Ordinance Works (LOOW). This map shows the huge area taken from these adjoining towns.

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

The former owners were given 30 days to move all of their possessions and find 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 was relocated from Creek Road to Third Street in Youngstown.

A flood of over 7,000 workers came into the area and the construction of over 300 buildings was begun that snowy winter. The main TNT explosive plant, office centers, a hospital, service structures, dormitories and a large water tower soon took shape.

Thirty-three miles of roads were laid as well as miles of railroad sidings. A pumping station was built near the river and water lines were installed.

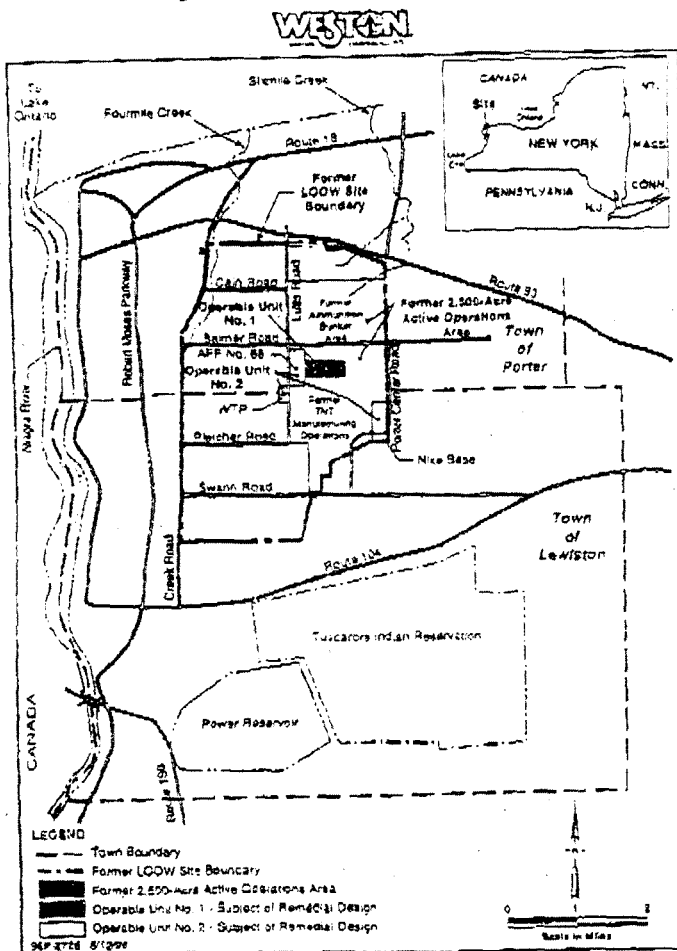
Most of the above activities took place south of Balmer Road but a large number of storage igloos and other units were built to the north of that road.

Once this \$3 million complex was in production, it proved to be very efficient. The igloos were filled with TNT and the entire facility was closed down on July 31, 1943.

Local people had kept busy providing food and drinks and acting as enemy aircraft spotters.

In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had been informed about the possibility of making an atomic bomb. By the summer of 1943, plants were under construction at Oakridge, Tenn. as part of the secret Manhattan Project. Later, some local people thought that the LOOW site may have been the first choice for the atomic plant. Perhaps the extreme winter weather forced a change in plans.

By 1944, the area of the LOOW had been reduced to 2,400 acres.



The balance of 5,100 acres was put up for sale. This was the property to the east of Creek Road and west of Luttis, Harold and Model City Roads.

In 1955, the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) took over the Manhattan Project and 516 acres north of Pletcher Road.

The AEC obtained the needed radium ore, known as pitchblend, from the African Mental Co. of Belgium. This ore was refined by Linde Air Co. of Tonawanda and other companies in Niagara Falls. The remaining radioactive sludge was brought to the Pletcher Road site and deposited in the old water tower (part of the old LOOW). Thus began Lewiston's legacy from the Atomic Age!

The Department of Energy (DOE), formerly the AEC, transferred much of its property to other agencies and retained only 190 acres north of Pletcher Road.

During the war years and later, many chemical plants were built in Niagara Falls. Huge quantities of

hazardous materials were by-products. These were often burned, dumped into sewer lines or the river or in a convenient area such as the old Love Canal. At least by 1970, the old LOOW site looked like a good spot to get some of this material out of sight.

In 1975, Chem-Trol Pollution Services purchased about 240 acres south of Balmer Road. Many tons of this waste were trucked there, treated to some extent and then buried.

By 1975, the Service Corp. of America (SCA) had purchased the above land and ore for a total of 700 acres. Hazardous waste was trucked there from over 200 industries. Most of the material was put in 55 gallon drums (thousands of them) and buried in five acre mounds. These were known as "Secure Land Fills."

Government regulations for the disposal of this hazardous waste gradually became more rigorous.

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When Chemical Waste Management purchased the SCA property in 1984, a careful study was made of the area, decontamination work was done and a whole new complex for receiving, sorting, decontaminating and handling of the liquid and solid wastes was set up.

Other parts of the LOOW property were purchased by Washuta for Sanitary Land Fills and are now used by Modern Disposal.

More of the sludge had been placed into the old water tower and the structure had weakened and it was encased in a new outer wall.

Local environmentalists protested against this material being located here. Many attempts were made to convince the government that it should be removed, but to no avail.

Finally in 1985, the contents of the tower were removed, the tower was dismantled and everything was placed in a holding area about a mile north of Pletcher Road. The old Hooker building nearby was decontaminated, and its contents were put with the other material.

This contaminant structure is a clay-lined, clay-capped and grass-covered storage unit encompassing approximately 10 acres. It is covered with three feet of compacted clay covered by 1.5 feet of topsoil and grass. Approximately 255,000 cubic yards of contaminated materials are stored here.

The Department of Energy maintains this area and provides environmental surveillance.

Now as we drive down Lewiston Hill, we can still see one old building and huge grass-covered land fills which will be lasting memorials to those turbulent war years at the old Lake Ontario Ordinance Works.