



Historically Speaking

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NO. 3

ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY AND POWER PROJECT HOW IT CHANGED THE VILLAGE AND SHORELINE OF WADDINGTON

This is the third in a series of newsletters that have revisited the construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway more than 70 years ago and the changes the village and town of Waddington experienced as a result of the construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway more than 70 years ago. Previous articles discussed the overall changes proposed to impact the community and the school system. This newsletter will explore the changes to the village shoreline and streetscape along the present day St. Lawrence Avenue and Lincoln Avenue.

From the early 1800's to 1958, you could stand anywhere along the present-day Island View Park area and your view across the river to Ogden Island would include the historic Ogden Island mansion. The destruction of this landmark built by the founders of Waddington was a loss to our community and was highlighted in the following article by Carlton Olds that appeared in the Power and Seaway Edition of the Massena Observer.

HISTORIC WADDINGTON ISLAND HOUSE MUST GIVE WAY TO ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY WORK

August 8, 1955

By Carlton B. Olds

The Island House, Waddington, is in the path of the Seaway and it is expected the structure will be destroyed.

Since 1880 it has been the property of the Crapser family having been purchased by the Hon. E. S. Crapser from the heirs of the Ogden estate.

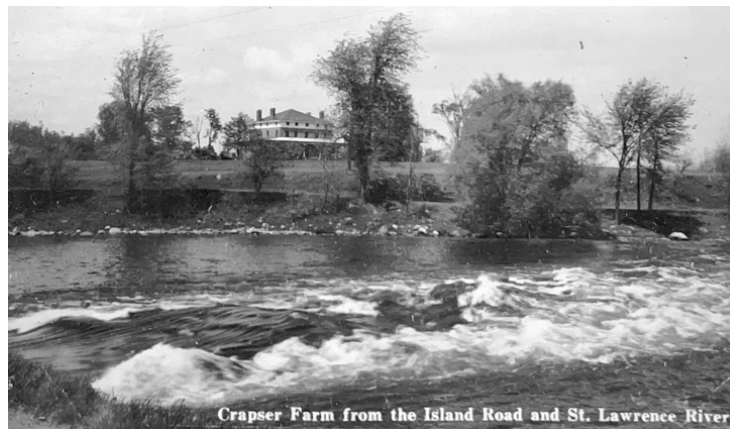
The Crapser family made it their residence until 1941, spending most of the year there. Though it suffered fire from lightning that year, the damage was repaired and it is still used by one of its owners, a grandson of E.S. Crapser, Joel M. Howard, who, with his family, spends the Summer there.

The mansion, built by David A. Ogden in 1808, was constructed 50 x 50 ft. with massive stone walls 3 ft. thick, sturdy as a fortress. Some time after 1830, wings were added to the sides and 10 foot wide verandas were built surrounding the house. The wide central hall with fanlight over the door, the large rooms with lofty ceilings, the gallery halfway up the broad staircase are features impressive in their grandeur.

Near the house is a well with oaken buckets which bring water up from the cool depths many feet below.

Taken from the advertisement of the auction sale of the mansion on Oct. 6, 1880 is a description which still applies. After stating that the property consists of a large stone mansion with fine garden and stone outbuildings beautifully situated on the finest island in the St. Lawrence river, the description continues:

"The house was built by the Hon. David A. Ogden as a country seat, and with every outlay as a gentleman's



Crapser Farm from the Island Road and St. Lawrence River.

residence. The house being 50x50 feet, with two wings, large rooms, high ceilings, solid and substantial, and capable of being converted into a hotel or place of Summer resort of unequalled attraction."

"The waters adjacent are all navigable and furnish the best fishing grounds on the St. Lawrence River, and having every facility for boating and pleasure excursions. Also the place is available for a park island, excelling every island in fertility, beauty of its groves and high elevated lay of its land, furnishing fine views of great attractiveness."

"The land adjacent, consisting of 156 acres—40 acres of which are a grove of large hard wood timber. The balance is all usable land of the best quality in the county."

The land now owned by the Crapser family has been increased to about 600 acres and there are three farms with houses and barns, in addition to the mansion.

In July of 1956, Waddington Historian Ethel C. Olds composed the following article about the "Island House" for the St. Lawrence County Historical Association Quarterly. Similar to her husband Carlton's article, Ethel helps to explain the significance of this structure and what it meant to the community.

THE "ISLAND HOUSE" OF THE OGDENS

By Ethel C. Olds

By the time this issue of The Quarterly reaches its readers, the initial stages of the river project in the immediate vicinity of Waddington and Crapser Island will be in progress. Little River, sometimes known as the South Channel, the existing waterway lying between the large island and the New York shore, will be closed by coffer dams at the head and foot of the island. When the river project reaches completion much of the original island will be submerged or rebuilt.

The present South Channel will be pumped dry during operations and excavated to a greater width and depth. When completed, shipping will be directed through this new channel. The whole operation on a large scale, will then be performed on the north side of the channel to prepare the future main channel. When the river project reaches completion the water level in this section of the St. Lawrence River will be raised twenty feet. The original island will be submerged for the most part or rebuilt by dredging and excavating. The present site of the historic Island House will lie seventy five feet within the new channel. Today the initial clearing of trees and brush is in progress on the island. By fall, probably, the square stone mansion which has stood on the island for 150 years will be demolished.

When the Island House is destroyed, the North Country will lose one of its more important and interesting historical structures. The construction of the mansion would not lend itself to being moved, and if preserved, restoration would involve very considerable funds. The Island House is linked to some of the most vital figures who have played roles in the history of Northern New York. It is itself history. Its square forms has been woven and interwoven into the folklore of the people who have looked across the Little River to the Island. Like Constable Hall in Lewis County, it has been through the years a symbol of those who ventured fortunes and the lives of their families in the vast wilderness north of the Mohawk.

The birth of the Island House was rooted in events which occurred years before its actual construction. On June 6, 1796 four men, inhabitants of New York City and northern New Jersey, purchased a ten-mile square listed as Madrid on the existing state maps. Madrid, bordering on the St. Lawrence River, was one of the Ten Towns first erected by a legislative act in the wilderness. The price was \$60,000. Abraham Ogden, a New Jersey Tory, together with his sons, David A. Ogden and Thomas Ludlow Ogden, and a nephew, Josiah Ogden Hoffman, were the purchasers. By 1803 the two sons became sole owners. They then took as their third partner, Joshua Waddington, their brother-in-law, a Tory brewer of New York. These proprietors moved among New York City's leaders. They had attended King's College, now Columbia. They were prominent lawyers, associated with Alexander Hamilton, who returned to legal practice following his term as Secretary of Treasury in Washington's cabinet. With Hamilton's death in the famous duel with Adam Burr, the events leading to the birth of Island House gathered momentum. David Ogden, so prominent in New York circles, became a frequent visitor to the northern lands he owned. As agent for his family's vast holding he became more than an absentee owner interested only in speculation. Some charm of the untenanted land must have captured his imagination. In 1804, a wing dam was erected in the south channel of the St. Lawrence. Grist and saw mills were built and a new settlement crept into being on the south river bank. The Ogdens named this little community Hamilton as a tribute to the brothers' late partner.

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The Island House shown with the cupola.



Aerial view of Ogden Island. Red circle indicates location of the Island House.

THE "ISLAND HOUSE" OF THE OGDENS *Continued*

In 1808 or 1809, David Ogden issued orders to have land cleared on the island. Here he planned to build a mansion for his home. A causeway built above the power dam provided access to the island. In 1811, Ogden became the sole owner of the island, mills and water rights, as well as of the village. How the mansion was constructed remains a matter of conjecture. Evidence exists indicating that stone for the two-foot walls came from a riverside quarry nearby. Mortar, too, was mixed from the limestone deposits on the land.

Actual construction was supposed to have begun in 1811. Possibly the war of 1812 caused temporary interruption. Tradition says that Judge Ogden met incoming vessels at Montreal to obtain skilled craftsmen coming to the New World from Scotland, England, and Ireland. Labor costs for the Island House were \$100 a day, the story goes, in a time when a first-rate carpenter received \$1.00 a day.

No one knows for sure how the Island House was furnished. It stands to reason, however, that a cultured gentleman of means like David Ogden brought to his wilderness home the pieces of the fine cabinet makers of New York. In those days much Chippendale, Hepplewhite, and Sheraton furniture were imported from England by well-to-do people. The high-ceilinged rooms with their fine fireplaces and door lintels must have housed the best in furnishings. In Waddington homes today are found occasionally fine antique pieces that tradition says came from the Island House. Transporting fine furniture in those days was a task of gigantic proportions. If brought from overseas, it came first to Montreal and then was reshipped up the St. Lawrence in smaller vessels. If it came overland from New York, it jolted over rough roads through the forests on cart drawn by oxen. David Ogden's family came through the forests, over the rough roads to a home which provided a marked contrast with pioneer-like surroundings. Here Rebecca Edwards Ogden, his wife, and his children lived during the warm months of the year.

In 1816 the Island House was supposed to have been completed. It rose fifty-four feet square, of the gray-yellow native stone, three stories in the air. At the basement windows were iron bars. Four great chimneys added to the height of the building for inside the house twelve fireplaces provided heat. The family's meals were prepared in the kitchens in the basement. Here also the household servants had their quarters. On the main floor of the house, some six or eight feet above ground, were the large center hall and its well-hole stairway. The four rooms on either side of the hall were spacious with wide marble fireplaces and twelve-foot ceilings. The woodwork and old moldings marked the skill of these imported carpenters and witnessed to the formal style of life to which the Ogdens adhered. Under the spacious gallery which opened halfway up the stairs at the rear was the butler's pantry. Here the food prepared below was carried and from here it was served in the family dining room. At the north end of the house underground were five great arched chambers. What they were used for in the early nineteenth century, no one knows. Up the large stairway from the entrance hall on the second floor was another center hall. From this led large bedrooms, each with a fireplace. Still more rooms were found on the third floors.



Two of the first floor rooms of David A. Ogden's Island Mansion home that was frequented by many travelers from downstate New York and New Jersey.



The Island House became known for its hospitality. These members of the New York aristocracy entertained lavishly for visitors. They entertained the great and near-great of that era who chanced to wander into the northern lands. Washington Irving is supposed to have been their guest. Ramee, the European architect who spent several months with the Parish family in Ogdensburg, is said to have been a visitor and to have laid out plans for landscaping the grounds of the Island house. President Monroe, who visited Waddington on July 31, 1817 was probably a guest on the Island. The Ogdens entertained other leading families of the North Country: the Fords, Clarksons, Harrisons, Morrisises, and Van Rensselaers. David Ogden, with his brother, became one of the patrons of the early settlers. He gave every assistance to those people who sought to establish themselves in the newly settled country. In 1814 he became a member of the Assembly and then went to Congress as a Representative from 1817 to 1821. He became a county judge in 1811 and served in that capacity for many years.

THE "ISLAND HOUSE" OF THE OGDENS Continued

After David Ogden's death in 1829, changes occurred in the Island House itself and in the lives of its inhabitants. Soon thereafter, Mrs. Ogden, because of financial difficulties, was forced to give up residence on the island. With her family and servants she moved to the mainland. A new family moved to the Island House. Isaac Ogden was a brother of David. He married his cousin, Sarah Ogden Meredith of Philadelphia, the year before his brother's death. Perhaps it was at this time that the two wings to the east and west of the house were added. At this time also a large veranda was built. The east wing was divided to make two rooms. In the door of the east wing opening onto the veranda is still found the enormous lock and key which were the original hardware.

Life in the island House maintained its reputation for hospitality. All visiting clergymen were invited to stay in the "Bishop's Room" as the northeast bedroom was called. The mistress of the house moved about her duties accompanied by a maid who carried a small basket of keys which opened all the household cupboards. The Isaac Ogdens helped the inhabitants of Waddington as had their predecessors. (The name of the village had been changed to honor David Ogden's brother-in-law, one of the landholders with Ogden.)

With the death of Isaac Ogden and his wife, the Island House was left in the hands of the Ogden family. Before the death of Mrs. Ogden, land on the island had been sold to make several farms. The house itself and 156 acres remained in the Ogden name until 1880. Of the Ogden children, only two survived their parents and both moved to other parts of the country. The house was vacant until purchased by Ebenezer S. Crapser, a businessman of Brasher, who served as a supervisor from the town of Stockholm for many years.

Although the Ogdens were gone from the North Country, the Island House remained. Gradually it assumed a special place in the stories of Waddington even though it remained the summer home for the Crapser family. In time, it became enhanced with an aura of folklore, those legends which so easily accrue to a place which has dominated the history of the community. The house on Ogden Island even had a ghost, so the children of Ebenezer Crapser were led to believe. It was an actice one, Miss Euince Crapser relates, wailing on windy September nights. But that ghost never appeared although if any of the children dared to sleep in the northeast rooms they were sure it would.

The romantic tales of the Island House are legion. In the family cemetery is the grave of the twenty-nine year-old son of Issac Ogden who fell in the Civil War in Tennessee. The legend persists that he was visiting in the South when war was declared and enlisted on the Confederate side with his southern cousins. On his grave is the inscription of his last letter to his mother: "I can not in the hour of peril turn my back upon friends of so many years." Near him in the family plot lies his sister, Gertrude; she married Walford Briggs in the Island House and died a year later to the day. According to the old tale her untimely death was foretold when a bird flew in the open window of the library as she sat at the wedding feast.

Lost even deeper in the legend and the past is the true purpose of the curious arched chambers which extend underground from the north wall of the old mansion. Five in number, they were level with the basement of the old mansion. Yet no doorway connected the mysterious chambers to the main building when the Crapser family bought the property. The only entrance was to crawl down a ladderlike flight of steps from the east end of the veranda.



The Island House prior to the fire in June 1941 that affected the cupola, roof and third floor.



Sitting on the front porch of the "Island House" with their vintage vehicles parked on the front lawn.

THE "ISLAND HOUSE" OF THE OGDENS *Continued*

All sorts of conjecture have been made as to the original purpose of these rooms. One of the most practical is that they provided storage place for crops harvested on the island. Others have claimed that they served as a kind of dungeon for family slaves who had committed misdemeanors. Other legends maintain that there were hidden slaves in the great underground railroad of the pre-Civil War days. Others claim that they were for protection from the British or Indians in the early days. Still another tale has it that the caverns were used in a smuggling operation. At one time, pieces of Mexican silver were found during renovations and from this came the tale that they had operated once a great counterfeiting business.

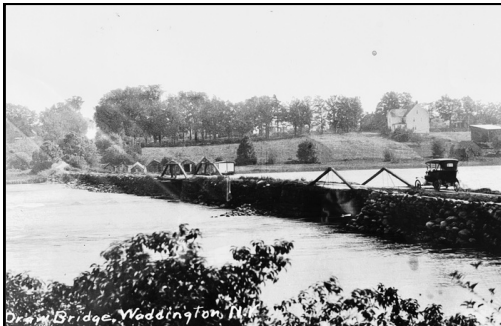
The waters of the St. Lawrence will soon swirl over the walls of the Island House. Within a few years its very solid substance will become as mysterious and fraught with romance as are the tales which have grown out of its long life. Within another generation the Island House will itself be a legend with a few paragraphs of written record. Yet during its time the house has played a vital dramatic part in the story of Northern New York. Indirectly its own story has been linked with the greater history of the establishment of the whole nation. For the men who had the courage and the gambling instinct to buy the great tracts of wilderness which were once this whole North Country, were part and parcel of the coterie of men who evolved the foundation upon which the entire country grew. Among them were the great merchant princes of New York and the leading politicians and statesmen of the new country. Some attained lasting fame in the annals of the country. Others like David Ogden left their imprint upon a community or locale which they envisioned, fostered, and nourished during its early days.



These photos show the Ogden/Crapser Island House in the distance as the Seaway construction work begins in 1957.



More photos of the Ogden/Crapser Island House taken prior to the Seaway construction. Middle photo shows a view from Canal Street looking toward Ogden Island and shows the mansion at the far left.



Photos of the causeway connecting the Island to the mainland at Maple Street until the Seaway construction removed it.

THE SEAWAY MEANT REROUTING ROUTE 37 THROUGH WADDINGTON

Many members of the current generation would be unfamiliar with an issue that became a topic of discussion prior to Seaway construction and actually was one of division within the village. It had to do with the rerouting of Route 37. Prior to 1955, travel from Ogdensburg to Massena would have taken you down Maple Street and along St. Lawrence Avenue through what is now Whittaker Park over through the new development on St. Lawrence Crescent and then it would hug the shoreline toward Massena. This November 1955 article explains more about the unsuccessful attempt by village residents to stop the State plan.

79-55 VOTE OPPOSES STATE PLAN FOR REROUTING ROUTE 37 IN WADDINGTON

Waddington citizens, by the margin of 13 votes, have voiced opposition to the proposed rerouting of State Highway 37 through the heart of the community and view the plan as being 'most detrimental to the present interests and future development of the village.

At a mass meeting held last night at the Town Hall, 79 persons lined up against the plan drawn up by the State Highway Dept. and the New York Power Authority, to extend Route 37, from a point at the western boundary of Waddington, east through Lincoln Ave., through the center of the village and village square, and linking up with the present highway east of the community.

Sixty-six persons by their vote, expressed themselves as willing to go along with the State on the location of the road.

At present, Route 37 follows an easterly route from Ogdensburg along the St. Lawrence to Waddington. At the western limit of the village, where 37 connects with Lincoln Ave., the main highway veers left at almost 90 degrees for one block to St. Lawrence Ave., then south on the main street.

Under the plan prepared by the state, the curve would be eliminated and the road would follow Lincoln, on a direct line through the village.

The proposed relocation of the highway stems from problems created by the St. Lawrence River and Power projects. When the river projects are completed, the north side of St. Lawrence Ave., and Route 37, will be under water, and east of the village in the vicinity of the Waddington Creamery, the main route will be below the water level.

It was brought out by those advocating a change in rerouting, that the Lincoln Ave. highway would run directly past the grammar and high schools and that children would be compelled to cross and recross the busy highway. Also it was emphasized that a large portion of the taxable property in the village would be taken by the St. Lawrence projects, and that this deficiency in revenue must be made up by future expansion of homes and businesses.

It was further agreed last night that with the river bounding the village on the north, any expansion would have to be to the south, and that a highway paralleling the river only two blocks to the south of it, would be a most serious handicap to any development.

Joel M. Howard, supervisor for the Town of Waddington, acted as moderator, and appointed Miss Isabelle Logan, secretary for the meeting.

Continued on the next page...



Work being done on the new Route 37 near Oak Street



79-55 VOTE OPPOSES STATE PLAN FOR REROUTING ROUTE 37 IN WADDINGTON *Continued*

What further action the village will take in the matter has not been established. It was decided at the meeting that copies of the proposal be forwarded to Governor Harriman, John Johnson, head of the State Public Works Dept.; Robert Moses, chairman of the New York Power Authority; Sen. Robert McEwen of Ogdensburg, Assemblyman Allan P. Sill, Massena, and Robert Sweet, district engineer of Dist. 7, Watertown.

The resolution opposing the rerouting also declared:

"We likewise firmly believe that a state improvement of this nature which so largely affects a community, should not be definitely undertaken and unless the community affected is consulted, therefore be it resolved that we in town meeting assembled do hereby vigorously protest the proposed location of Route No. 37 on Lincoln Ave. through the village of Waddington and request that the Department of Highways consult further with our community concerning a possible change in the routing of such highway.



The New Route 37 ran parallel to Old Route 37. The St. Lawrence-Norwood railroad line is shown intersecting the roads in the lower half of the photo.



Relocating Route 37 - Aerial view of the new road going through Waddington toward Massena over a new bridge on Big Sucker Brook. The photo gives you an idea of how much land had to be taken along the river after the new road was opened.



Building the bridge across Brandy Brook on the relocated Route 37.



Rerouting Route 37; two more photos showing the construction of the new bridge over Brandy Brook.

"Historically Speaking" is our way of sharing information about Waddington's rich history with those who have supported us with annual memberships. In addition to quarterly newsletters members also receive early notice of upcoming events and an invitation to our Celebration of History in October.

WHA's MISSION: *"To be the caretakers of our community's history for present and future generations"*

EMAIL:
info@waddingtonhistory.com

Website:
www.waddingtonhistory.com

Message Phone: 315-388-3041

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Page Editor: Mary Hamilton
Page Administrators: Kathy Putney and Mary Hamilton
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Mailing Address for WHA and Historian/Museum
PO Box 221
Waddington, NY 13694

Historian & Museum Director:
Kathy (Badlam) Putney
Town Hall Museum is open by appointment.
Call: 315-388-3041
Email: waddhistorian@gmail.com

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WHA Meetings: 4th Tuesdays
6:30 PM - Town Hall Museum
on Main Street
All are welcome

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