

## A Brief History of the NEW YORK ORDNANCE WORKS

(A U.S. Government-Owned War Project)

On December 11, 1941, Germany declared war on the United States. Three months later, 250 families living between the Oswego and Seneca Rivers (on and round the Radisson site) were ordered by the Army Corps of Engineers to evacuate their homes. Eight thousand acres of land were depopulated by the orders, and all roads into the area were blocked. Within a month, construction of a huge ordnance plant began, with more than 3,000 workers employed at the peak of construction. By January 1943, less than a year later, the plant was in operation.

The plant was under heavy security. Ten miles of chain link fencing with strategically located guard towers protected it. At night, floodlights played on all perimeter areas.

Inside were 88 main buildings and more than 20 miles of roads. Eight thousand men and women worked there. They made, processed and shipped dinitrochlorobenzene, more familiarly known as "Explosive D." It was used in armor piercing shells, and it and its processing were deadly business.

"Explosive D" was made, basically, from a peaceful enough coal tar derivative used for dye making. But, by the time the Works got through treating it with nitric and sulphuric acids, boiling it and cooling it and, finally, shipping it, it was anything but peaceful. It was stored in concrete magazines located generally in the area of what is now the Game Management Preserve, along Sixty Road.

The most dangerous operations were conducted in buildings along the east side of Radisson's drumlin. This was done so that in the event of an explosion, Baldwinsville would be shielded from danger. The concrete foundations along the east side of the drumlin, off Willett Parkway, were part of that main manufacturing area. They supported acid vats used in processing the explosive. The architectural sculpture that identifies Radisson's main entrance at Route 31 was conceived in 1974 by Sergi Yevich of Baldwinsville who was an architect and planner for Radisson. He used the shape of the cradles that supported those vats as the basis for his design. The actual cradles were half the size of those in the finished sculpture. There were five of these areas along the face of the drumlin.

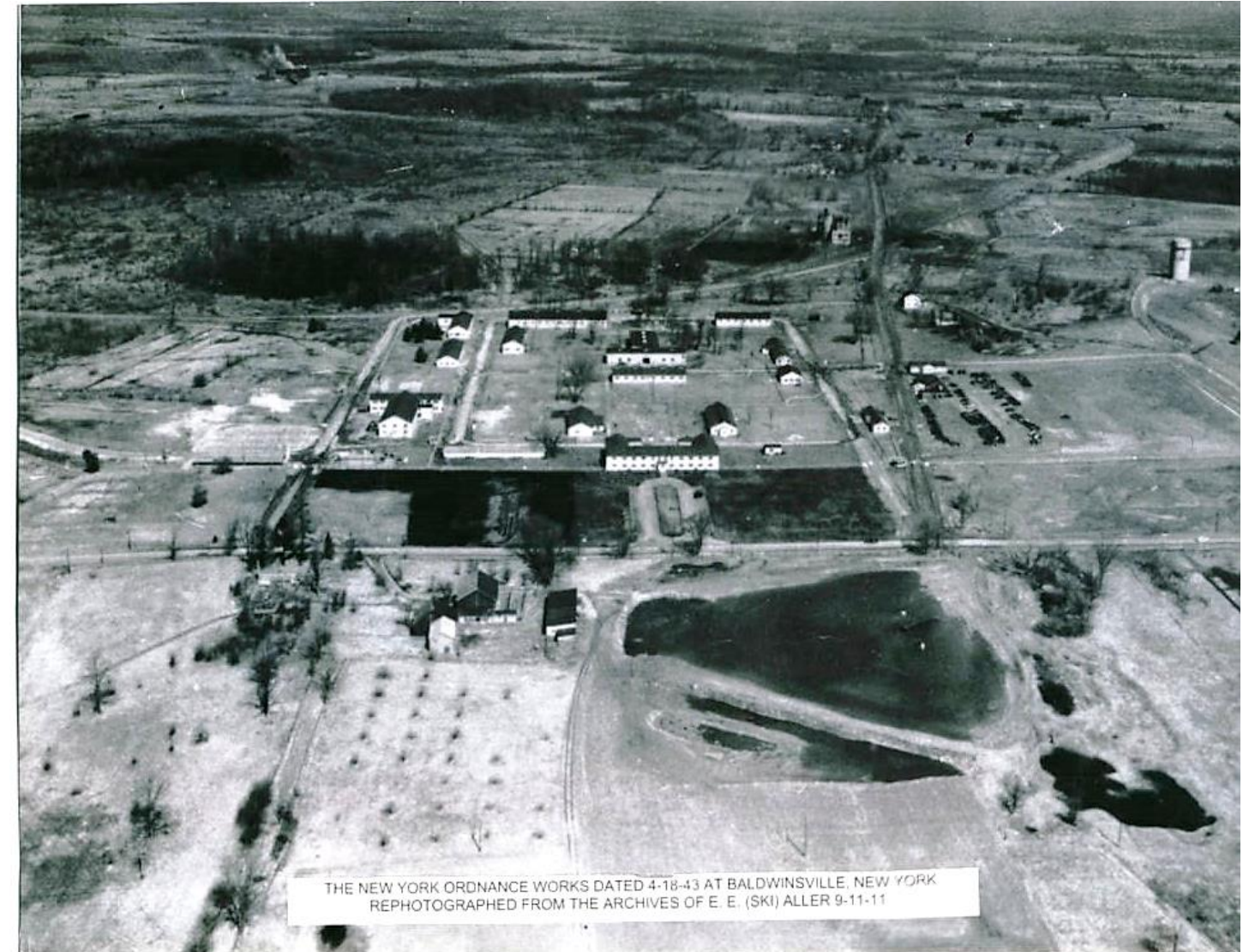
A year and two months after production began, it was stopped. Following the War, the property was declared surplus, and the Works were abandoned. Over the next few years, the Works were dismantled or destroyed and the property disposed of. Only the administration buildings near Rt. 31 and some of the larger concrete buildings remained.

Some farmhouses and cottages left from before the War were offered to the public for lease. A plan to use the larger buildings for veteran' housing fell through. Over 5600 acres went into the land bank and was eventually sold. State officials looked into the possibility of relocating the State Fair there but decided not to. Syracuse University began renovating some of the buildings for student housing, but the work was never completed.

The State Conservation Department purchased 3000 acres in the north end of the property for a Game Management Preserve. Later, in 1952, the trustees of the William Waldorf Astor estate bought 2000 acres for residential and commercial development. This never took place. For the next 20 years, the land stood idle.

In 1969, the Urban Development Corporation (UDC) purchased the site, and in 1971 they began developing a Planned New Community. It is now called Radisson, the name being derived from a mid-17<sup>th</sup> Century French explorer of the Syracuse area, Pierre Esprit Radisson, who was also a co-founder of the Hudson Bay Company.

## WALKING TOUR OF RADISSON



Aerial view of the Administration Buildings. NEW YORK ORDNANCE WORKS 4-18-

Inside this brochure you will find a map of Radisson with numbered stops, and a list of the history of what you can see at each stop.

On the back cover you will find a summarized history of the New York Ordnance Works (NYOW).

Detailed maps are available for viewing at the Town of Lysander historian's office or the Baldwinsville Public Library, showing the initial purchase by UDC plus additional parcels purchased around perimeter later. You can find historic maps and photographs of the Ordnance Works on the New York Heritage Digital Collections website: <https://nyheritage.org/>



# Walking Tour of Radisson: List of Numbered Stops:

**1 NORTH SIDE OF RT #31, WEST OF WILLETT PARKWAY, OPPOSITE SCULPTURE:** Although somewhat altered, Willett Parkway basically follows what was once called Chestnut Ridge Road. About where the Radisson sculpture is located stood the Administration Building for the ordnance works (aka NYOW).

**2 NORTH SIDE OF RT #31 NEAR VALLEY VIEW; SUBDIVISION ENTRANCE:** Originally part of the ordnance works, this land was purchased and developed after World War II. Structural framing was to be steel in lieu of wood but a prolonged steel strike after the construction of initial models changed that. Price was under \$10,000, which included a carport. Large house on the opposite side of Rt. 31 was bought from the ordnance works early on and moved to its present location, as were several other buildings.

**2A DEEP GLADE DR. WEST OF CRIMSON KING CIRCLE:** Note open area to north and to south which was formerly part of E. Patrol Rd.

**2B TOWN CENTER RD. NORTHEAST OF ROYAL SCARLET DR.:** Note part of raised former railroad bed to the north.

**3 WEST SIDE OF NORTH ENTRY RD. AT WALKWAY LEADING WEST UP DRUMLIN:** Walk up the walkway to observe ruins near the top of the drumlins. Note tank supports which were the design inspirations for the sculpture at Radisson entrance.

**4 TOWN CENTER RD. AT SOUTHEAST SIDE OF WILLETT PARKWAY NEAR INTERSECTION WITH WILLETT:** Note abandoned ordnance road leading uphill to southwest. This was part of the ordnance road at the southeast end of the drumlin ruins. [NOTE: this is almost obliterated by the pine tree growth going up the hill.]

**5 WILLETT PARKWAY NORTHEAST OF THE POWER LINE CROSSING:** Note the open area between the trees to the east. This was part of the roadbed of the original Carpenter Road which predates the ordnance works.

**6 GREY BIRCH AND DRAKES LANDING INTERSECTION:** Grey Birch east and immediately west of the intersection coincides with the original Carpenter Rd. Note the large maple trees.

**7 WALKWAY AT CROSSING OF RIVER RD.:** Walkway coincides with the original Carpenter Rd.

**8 GLACIER RIDGE RD BETWEEN RIVER RD AND DRAKES LANDING:** This was originally part of Potter Rd. and predates the ordnance works.

**9 POTTER RD WEST OF GLACIER RIDGE RD.:** This is the original part of Potter Rd. except near the intersection.

**9A GLACIER RIDGE RD AT WALKWAY CROSSING, EAST OF WEST END OF WANDERING WAY:** Walkway to south follows original E. Patrol Rd.

**10 NORTH ENTRY RD NEAR GLACIER RIDGE RD.:** Remains of original Carpenter Road paving is under the power lines. Original Chestnut ridge Rd also remains.

**11 POND AT EAST SIDE OF SIXTY RD, NORTH OF WEST ENTRY RD:** Original pond remains. Abandoned Patterson Rd is opposite pond. This road predates the ordnance works.

**12 EAST SIDE OF SIXTY RD JUST SOUTH OF POWER LINE CROSSING:** Lew Olmstead's original said: Note abandoned ordnance ruins from Sixty Rd. (land is posted) [NOTE: as of 2014 - These ruins have now been demolished prior to new development.]

**13 POWER LINE CROSSING AT SIXTY RD.:** This is the approx. boundary between Radisson and State Game Management.

**14 POTTER RD EAST OF SIXTY RD, NEAR CREST OF HILL:** Note hollow to north side of Potter Rd. and clearing to south side. This was probably a trolley roadbed in the 1920s and possibly early 1930s, running between Baldwinsville and Phoenix. The last trolley came through January 24, 1931. The north side is restricted but you may currently walk south where the roadbed becomes a dike at the pond.

**15 POTTER RD EAST OF STOP 14:** Side road leads north to the former ordnance works storage buildings (partly underground). It is restricted beyond the gate.

**16 POTTER RD EAST OF STOP 15:** Note the open area to the north between the trees where there was an ordnance road parallel with that at stop #15. There is an abandoned roadbed and adjacent ditch to the south. The ditch is not currently restricted.

**17 POTTER RD AT CHESTNUT RIDGE RD:** Note the open area to the north where Chestnut Ridge Rd. Extension formerly existed.

