

e. Toronto Island: 1930-1950:

From now on, social and political history became enmeshed. Although the major social and physical developments are emphasized here, political developments are mentioned where appropriate.

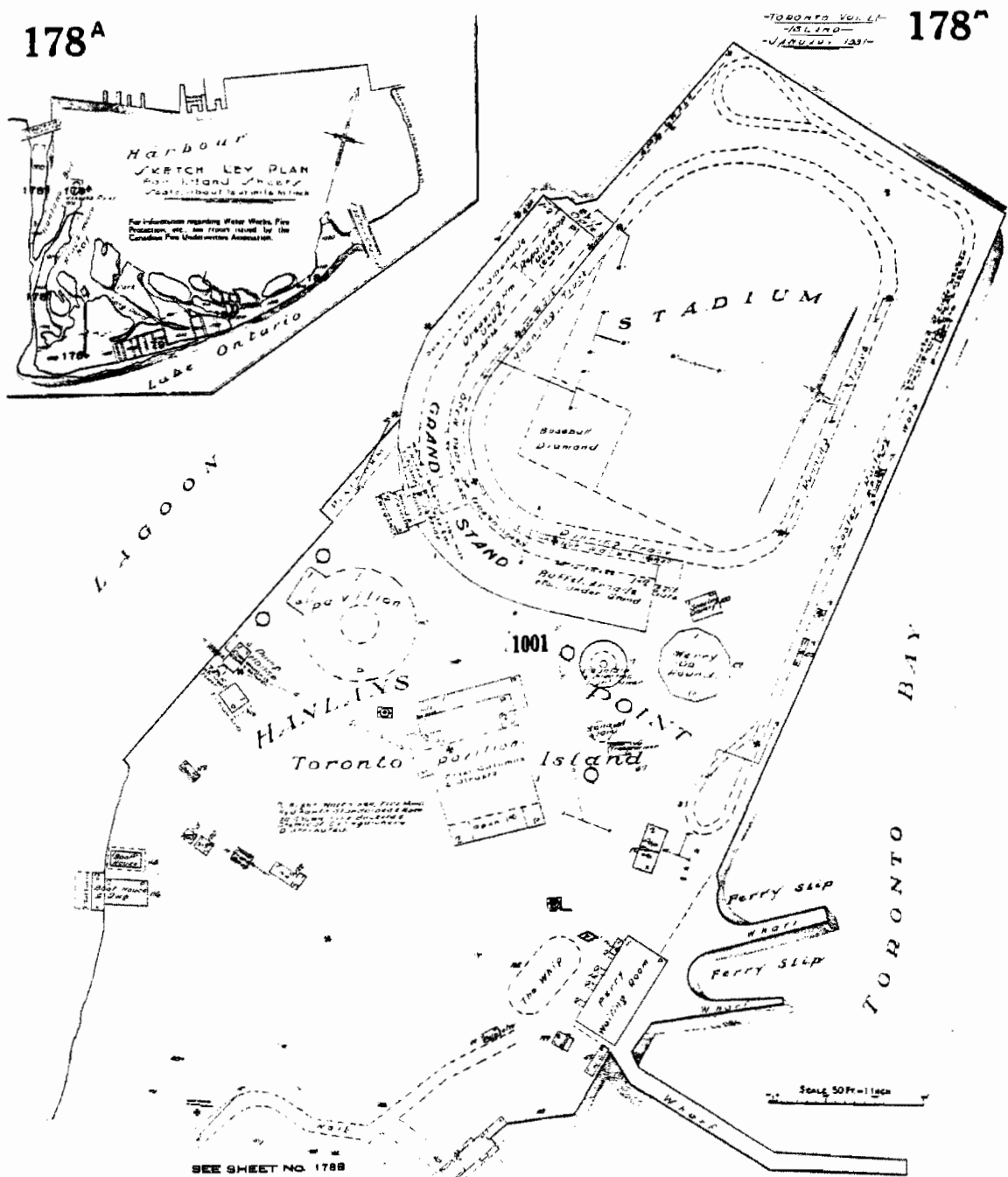
The Island in the 1930's continued to be very popular. Alan Howard estimates that the Island summer population reached its zenith of about 8,000 (estimates range as high as 12,000) in the late 1920's or early 1930's and held that level through until about the mid-1940's. But the Island witnessed a number of major changes in this decade: a changing social mixture on Centre, the development of cottages on Ward's, the building of the airport which destroyed part of Hanlan's Amusement Park and led to the development of Algonquin Island and the growth of the winter community.

Although Hanlan's Point Amusement Park probably attracted fewer visitors after the mid-twenties it remained popular and important right up to its final demise in the late 1950's at the hands of the Metro Parks Department. (See Maps 15 and 16.)

Centre Island was changing. The "Main Drag" was in full swing (see Map 17) and many young people rented rooms or apartments nearby to enjoy the fun:

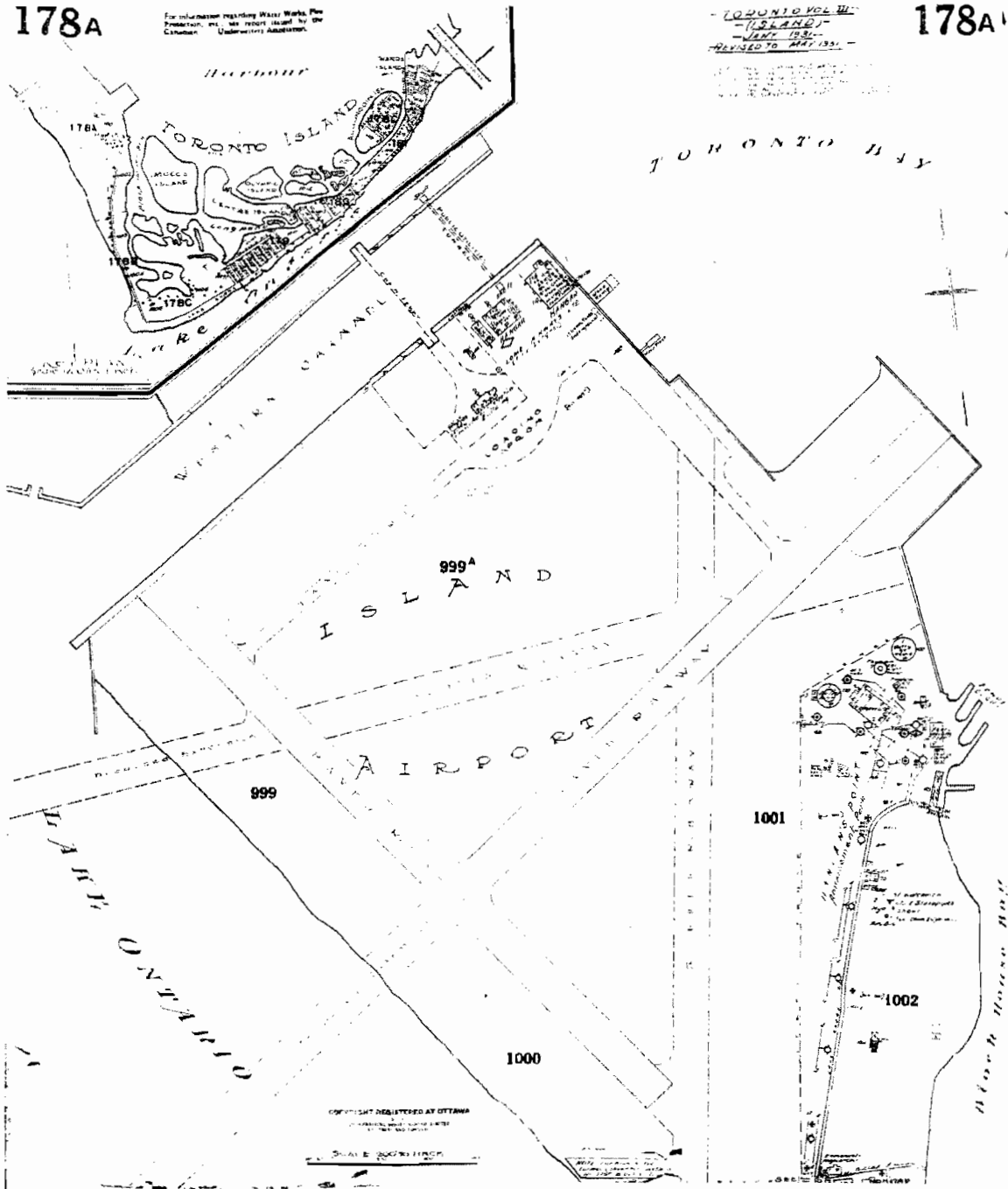
The summer colony is a strange mixture. Only a few old families like the Gooderhams still go back year after year to their big houses on the Lakeshore. About three-quarters of the residents are business people and most of them seem to be young. Since rents at the Island are high, you'd find them living as many as three, four and five to a room in the old-fashioned wooden houses which line the Lakeshore and the streets running off it. "You're only in your room to sleep", the landlady invariably says to a prospective customer....This is almost true--at Centre anyway. Those who can afford to, get bicycles, and after office hours the streets are alive with them. For all its informality, Island life follows a certain routine. At five o'clock, even when the Lake is cold, the

HANLAN'S POINT AMUSEMENT PARK, 1931



From Underwriters' Survey Bureau Ltd., Insurance Plan of the City of Toronto, January 1931, Plate 178A. University of Western Ontario.

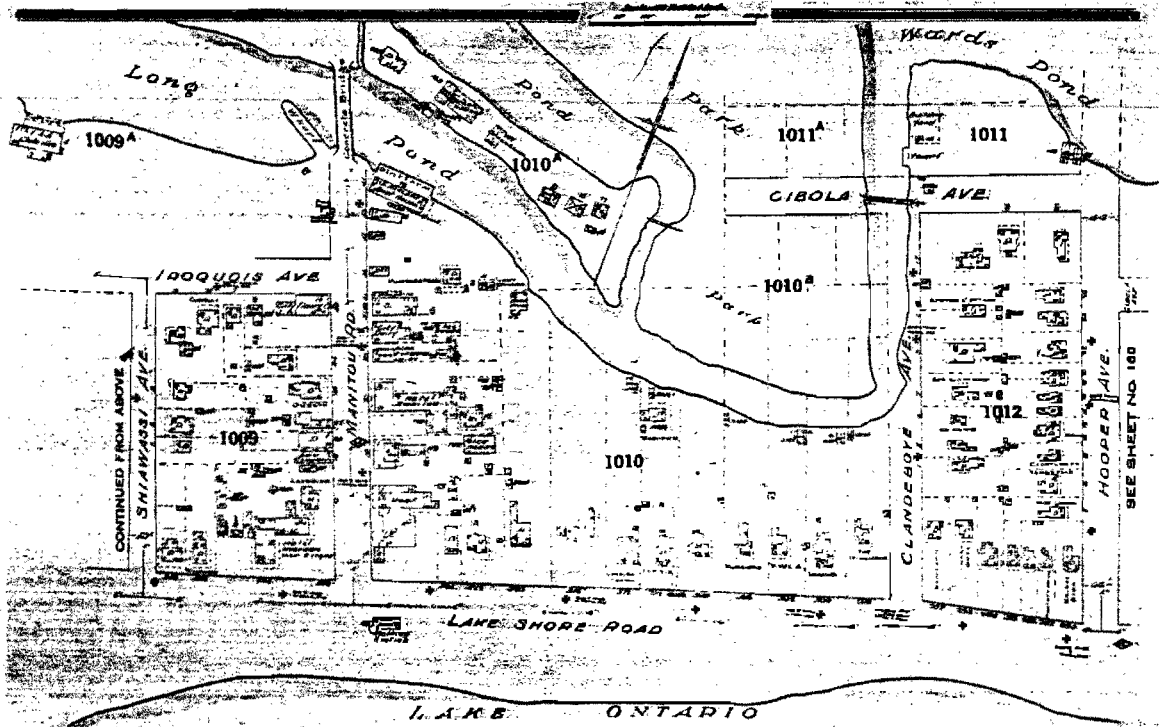
HANLAN'S POINT AMUSEMENT PARK, 1951



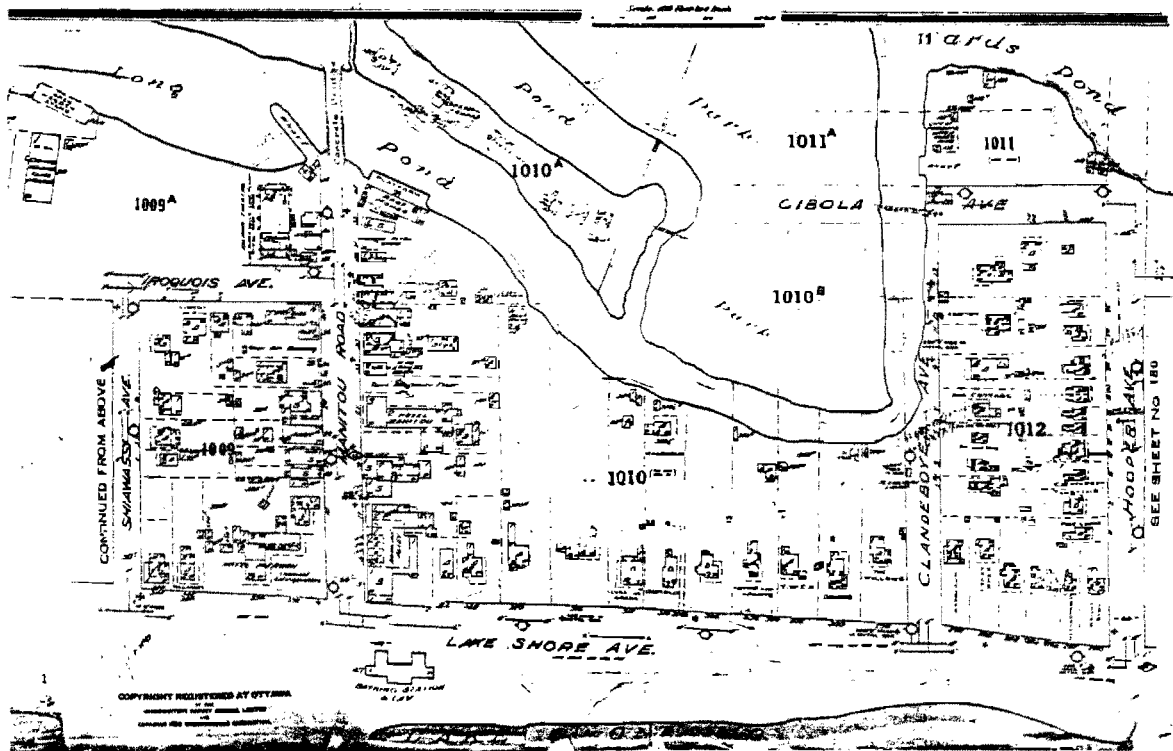
From Underwriters' Survey Bureau Ltd., Insurance Plan of the City of Toronto, January 1931 revised to May 1951. University of Western Ontario.

MAP 17

MANITOU ROAD - "The Main Drag"  
1931 and 1951



From Underwriters' Survey Bureau Ltd., Insurance Plan of the City of Toronto,  
January 1931, Plate 179. University of Western Ontario.



From Underwriters' Survey Bureau Ltd., Insurance Plan of the City of Toronto,  
January 1931 revised to May 1951. University of Western Ontario.

beaches become crowded. As soon as the crowd thins out there, the restaurants fill up. From then until midnight the Island hums with activity. Some people play tennis or badminton, others bowl or bicycle. There is always a steady stream eddying up and down the Main Drag--between the Manitou Bridge and the Lakeshore. Here Islanders eat and drink and gossip and sit around under the trees in front of phonographs dropping nickles in the slot to hear their favourite dance pieces.<sup>1</sup>

Ward's Island was changing as well. For years, Ward's Island tenters had been trying to get permission from the City to build houses. When their requests were refused, they found ways to build what were in effect houses disguised as tents. "Daddy Frank" Staneland recalls:

A lot of us fooled them. We put the canvas outside and had wood inside with windows and they thought we had only canvas, and we had wood inside at each end. In the wintertime we'd take it down.

Then, in the early 1930's, the City granted permission for the first house and in a few years many tenters had built summer cottages and signed leases with the City. (See Map 18, which compares the "tents and shacks" of 1931 with the wooden cottages of 1938.)

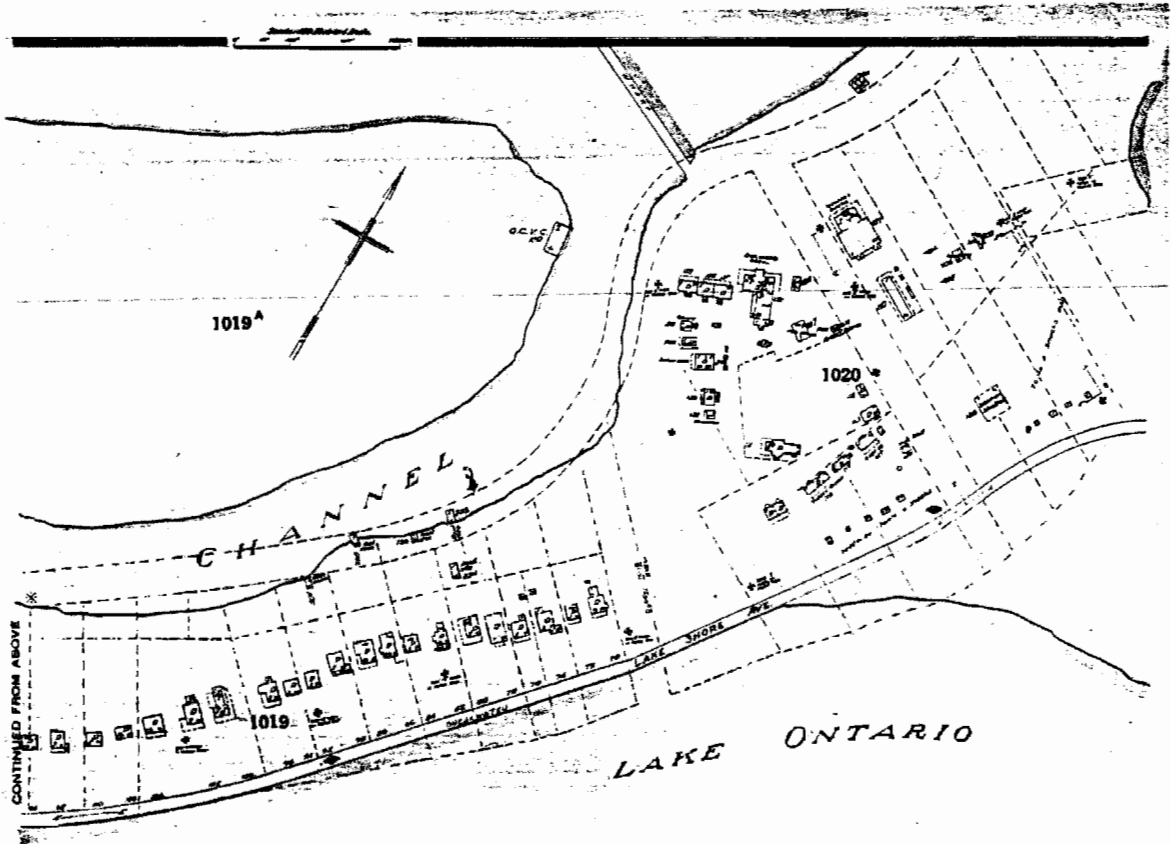
In 1937, the City decided to build the Toronto Island airport at the western end of the Island, partly on land cleared of buildings and partly on land to be created. As a result, the baseball stadium and part of the amusement park were to be demolished, the Regatta Course was to be filled in and fifty-four houses on West Island Drive along the Western Sand Bar had to be either demolished or moved. West Island Drive residents acquiesced in the decision and turned their energies toward finding acceptable new sites for those houses which could be moved. By October, the City decided to develop Sunfish as a summer residential community with 103 50' x 150' lots.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, about 40

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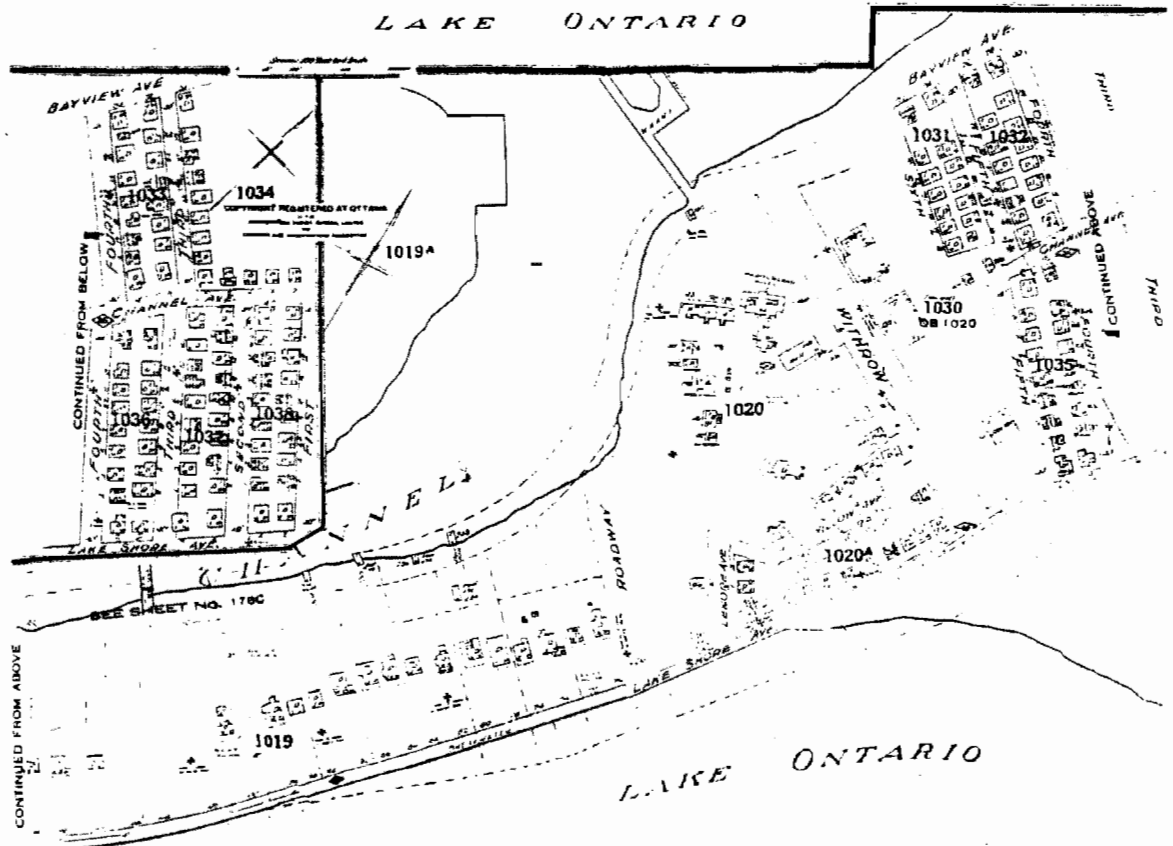
<sup>1</sup>Telegram, August 19, 1938.

<sup>2</sup>"Two Schemes Are Approved For Islands," Globe and Mail, October 5, 1937.

WARD'S ISLAND  
1931 and 1938



From Underwriters' Survey Bureau Ltd., Insurance Plan of the City of Toronto,  
January 1931, Plate 181. University of Western Ontario.



From Underwriters' Survey Bureau Ltd., Insurance Plan of the City of Toronto,  
January 1931 revised to August 1938. University of Western Ontario.

houses from Hanlan's Point were floated down to Sunfish Island which was renamed Algonquin Island. Jimmy Jones, who was a boy at the time, remembers watching this extraordinary process in fascination:

They moved the houses on rollers. Horses would walk in a circle and a cable was on the house and the house was on rollers, so that the horses would walk on this turnstile. And then they would stop and they would move the horses and the turnstile way ahead and rearrange the wires on another house and start again and as a roller would drop out the back end, they would move it around to the front end, and they kept it going this way. They put them on barges and floated them down the first part of the Lagoon, put them in the park and they sat there. And then they put them in another barge on the other side of the Lagoon, which is Blockhouse Bay, and took them down here to Algonquin.

These Hanlan's Point houses were placed in the most desirable perimeter lots and formed the start of what grew to be the Algonquin community. (See Map 19.) But the growth of this community was not as rapid as the City had hoped. It is no wonder, for Algonquin at that time was "sand, just sand", as one reporter described it.<sup>1</sup> The City signed 21 year non-compensation leases with Algonquin residents and gave them three years' free ground rent to compensate them for having been forced to leave Hanlan's Point.

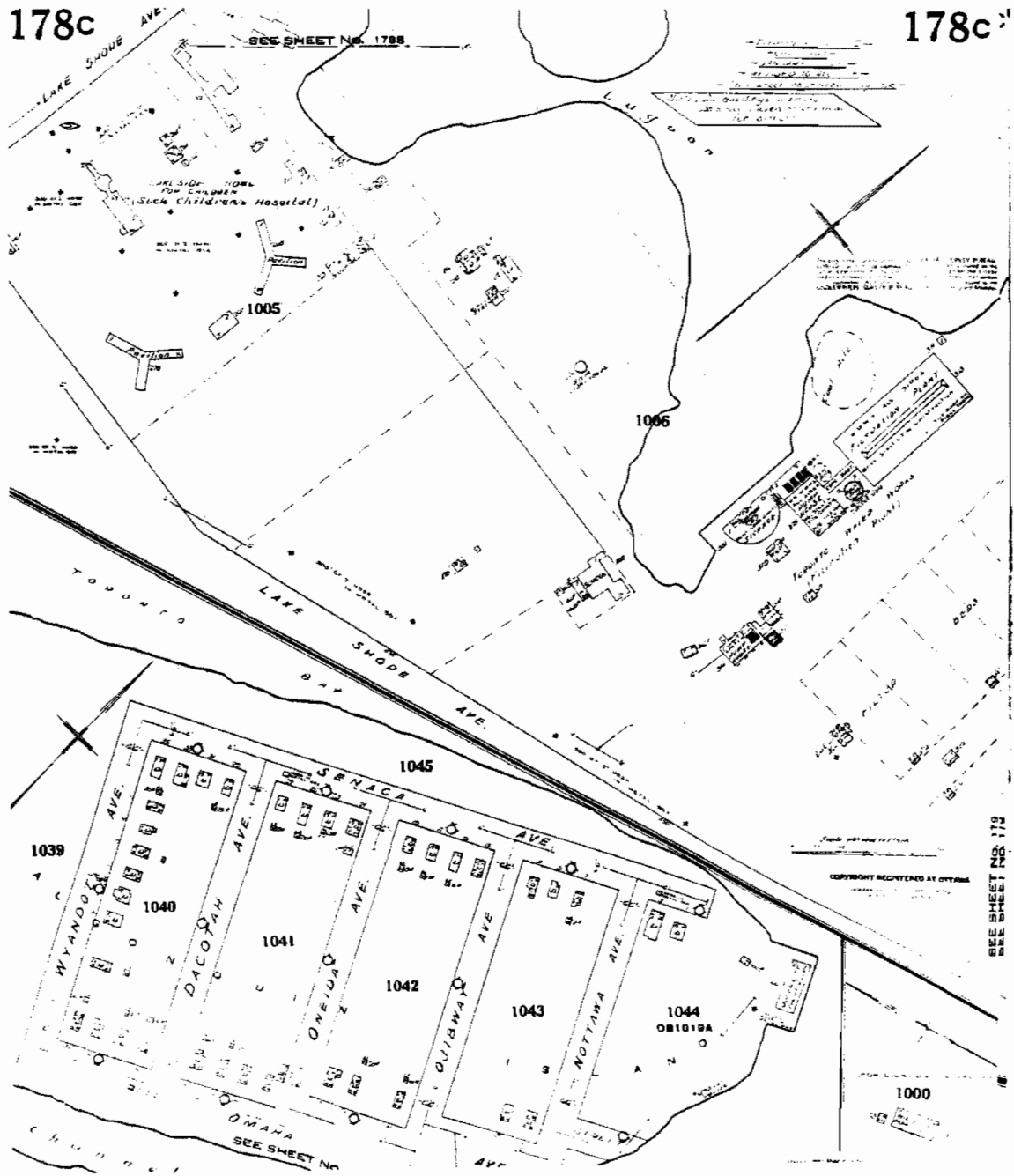
Until the end of the 1930's, the winter community grew rather slowly. In 1933, there was a colony of about a hundred families, or about 300 people, living almost exclusively on Hanlan's and at Centre. The main drawbacks to winter life were the infrequent boat service, the lack of a winter water line, the lack of entertainment for young people and the lack of adequate fire protection. The issue of

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<sup>1</sup>"Algonquin Island To Cost \$75,000, Few Seek Land, Few Desirable Lots Available at Algonquin," Globe and Mail, July 19, 1938, p. 5 and "City Officials Disappointed by Response," Globe and Mail, July 19, 1938, p. 5. By August 1938, only 38 houses were located on Algonquin Island. (See Map 19.) By 1951, however, Algonquin Island was virtually completely developed. (See Map 20.)

MAP 19

ALGONQUIN ISLAND, 1938



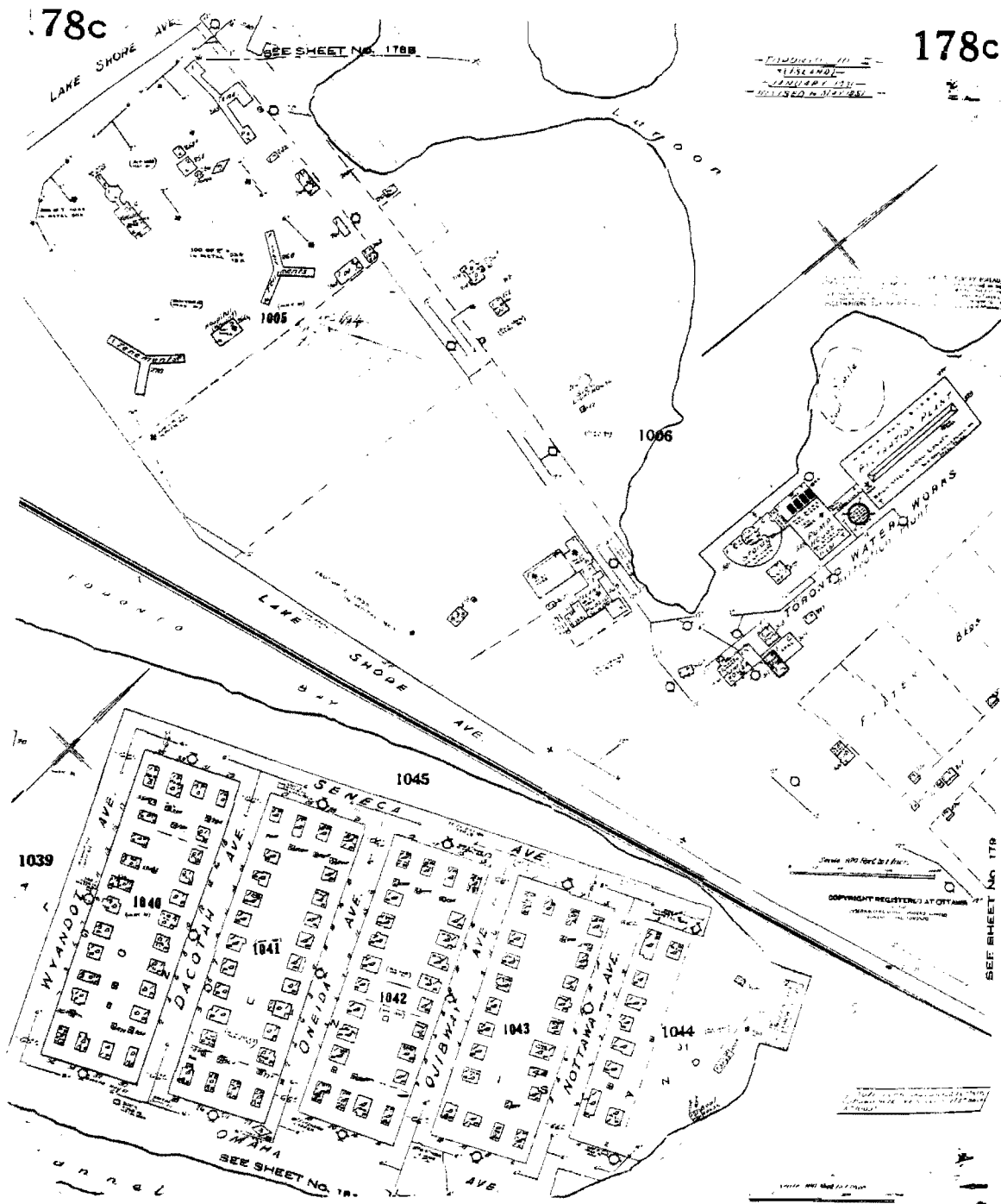
From Underwriters' Survey Bureau Ltd., Insurance Plan of the City of Toronto, vol. 3

1931 revised to August 1938

Source: University of Western Ontario

MAP 20

ALGONQUIN ISLAND, 1951



From Underwriters' Survey Bureau Ltd., Insurance Plan of the City of Toronto,  
vol. 3, 1931 revised to May 1951.

Source: University of Western Ontario

inadequate fire protection became acute in 1939 after the Island Aquatic Yacht Club burned to the ground. But City politicians, who regarded the Island as a summer resort rather than a year-round community, were reluctant to spend money on improving fire, or other, services, which had been requested by winter residents.<sup>1</sup>

During the war years, the Island continued to be popular, both summer (when there was gas rationing and leaving the City was difficult) and winter (when the housing shortage increased, reaching "crisis" proportions in the immediate post-war years).

During the summer, the ferries regularly carried well over a million people to the Island each year. (See Appendix F, "Ferry Statistics".) On a hot, popular day, one reporter noted in 1944, the congestion aboard the Bluebell and the Trillium was "something to frighten a sardine".<sup>2</sup> The pleasures of the "Main Drag" were a magnet for Islanders as well as City dwellers. Jimmy Jones, who grew up on Hanlan's Point, recalls:

Centre Island was the playground and you'd go there to whoop it up. Whatever you wanted to do, you went to Centre Island to do it. You didn't do it in your own backyard.

During the 1940's, the Island was inundated twice by abnormally high waters--in 1943, when "park benches, normally high and dry, [could] now be reached quite easily--by canoe"<sup>3</sup> and in 1947, when the Main Drag

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<sup>1</sup> "Firefighting Service on Island Not Adequate Alderman Phillips Says," Globe and Mail, January 20, 1939. By 1946, when the post-war housing crisis was becoming acute, City politicians reacted differently and moved swiftly to improve fire services in order to enable and encourage people to winter on the Island.

<sup>2</sup> "30,000 Crowd Ferries In Flight From Heat," Globe and Mail, August 14, 1944.

<sup>3</sup> "Centre Island Appears As Water Babies' Haven," Globe and Mail, June 16, 1943.

began to look more like a canal than a main street.<sup>1</sup> (See Illustration 16.) Floods had distinct political aspects, but, in contrast to 1952 and 1973, in the 1940's, it was the Islanders, not the politicians, who were on the attack, claiming that the City had been negligent in not providing adequate protection.<sup>2</sup>

The major development of the 1940's was the growth of the winter community. The size of this community grew from about 300 at the beginning of the decade to about 1,800 at the end.<sup>3</sup> A contemporary observer described the winter community as a "quiet winter Utopia" where some 500 people have "rediscovered the satisfaction of small-town life" and extolled the friendly atmosphere:

Another young woman, moved over first this winter because of the housing shortage, vows she is going to stay there. "I've made more friends since I've been over here than I did in all my life in Toronto", she says. She has a small, snug upstairs apartment heated by a Quebec heater and double windows that look straight out over the angry water.<sup>4</sup>

It was this housing shortage that sent many people over to the Island

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<sup>1</sup>"Worst Flood In Twenty Years Scourges Toronto Islands - Lawns, Walks Inundated," Telegram, June 9, 1947.

<sup>2</sup>"Island Folk Up In Arms - Charge City With Neglect in Flood Protection Work," Telegram, June 14, 1947. Contrast this with the situation in 1952 when Mayor Lamport, eager to be rid of Island residents, created a false health scare and threatened to clear the Island of winter residents. (See pp. 145 .)

<sup>3</sup>Newspaper estimates are erratic. But "Hopping Mad Islanders May Battle With Votes," Star, January 7, 1948 estimated only 300 people lived on the Island during the winter in 1942 and 1,800 in 1948. Estimates ranged as high as 3,000 (Arthur Cole, "Tugs Flout Zero, Crash Ice On Daily Runs," Globe and Mail, January 10, 1947), but most estimates fall around 1,500-1,800. Both the Ferry statistics (Appendix F) and School Enrolment figures (Appendix H) indicate that the population began to increase sharply after the War. (See also Appendix G, "Problems in Estimating Island Population".)

<sup>4</sup>"Island Folk Find Rural Quiet At City's Front Door - Make Their Own Amusements," Telegram, February 17, 1945. (See also Illustration 17.)



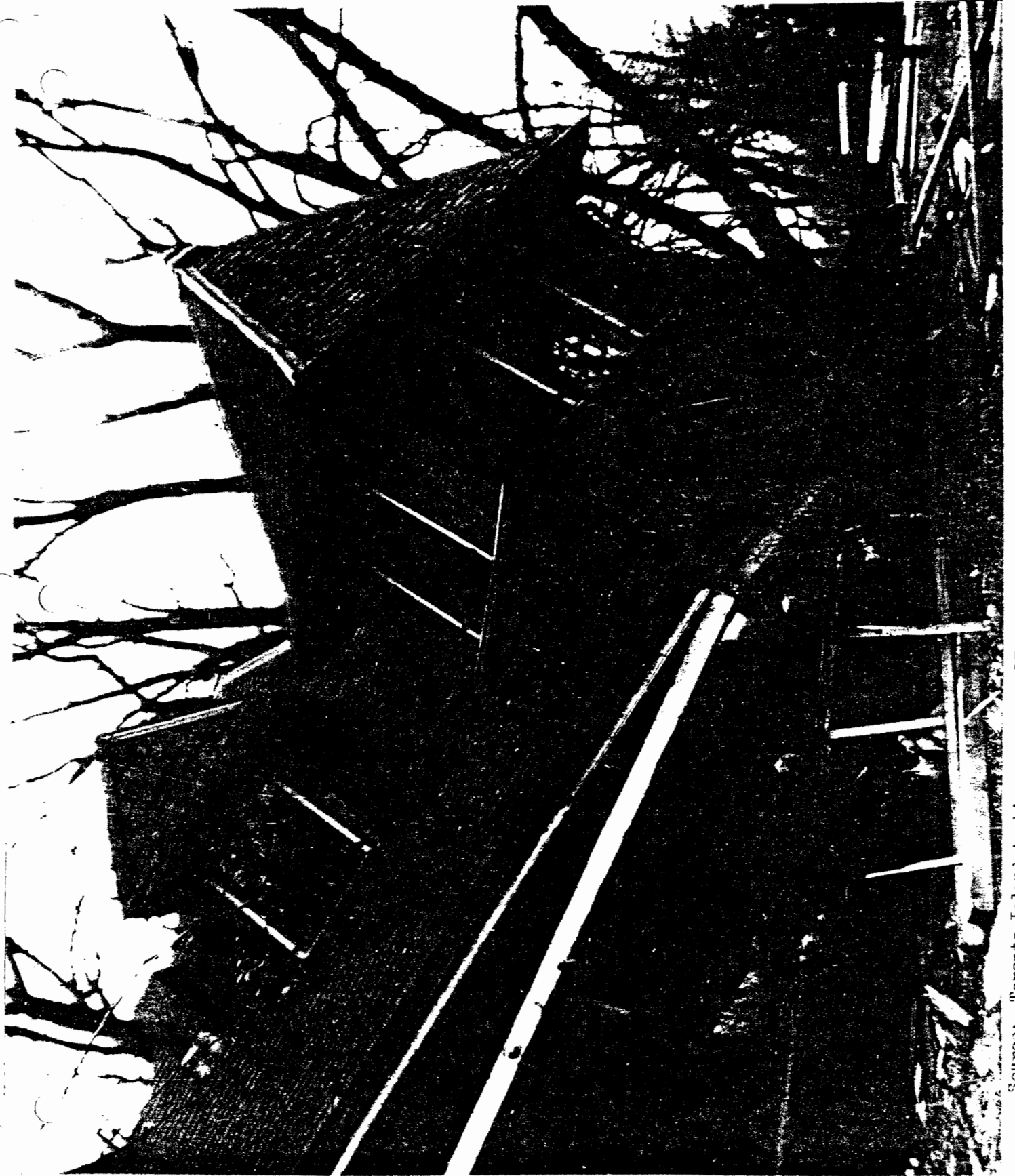
"High Water On Manitou Road-1947 or '48" by Al Schoenborn Source: Toronto Island Archives

No-1452



Manitou Road In Winter, Centre Island  
Photograph by Mrs. Buttler  
Source: Toronto Island Archives

ILLUSTRATION 18



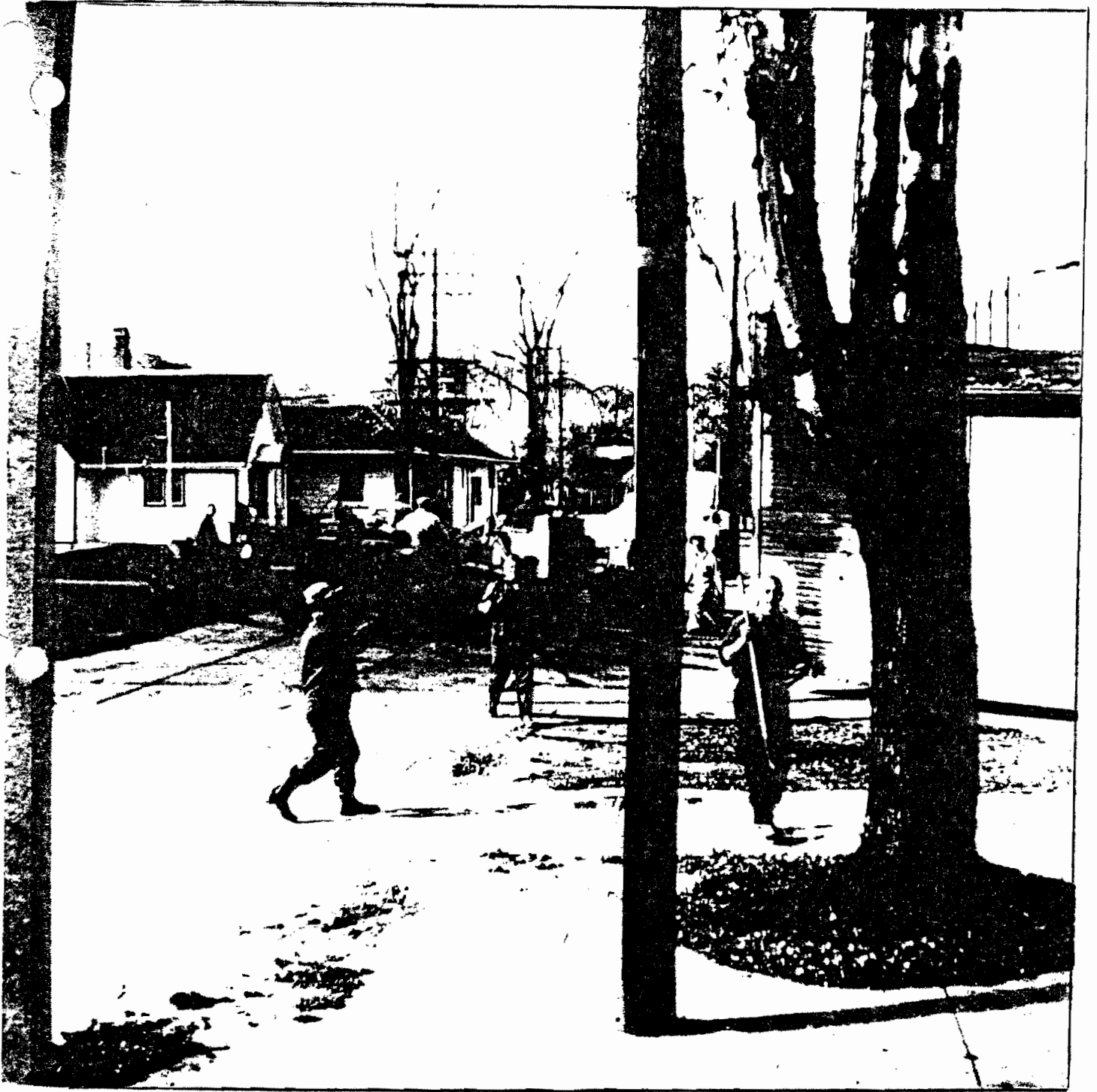
DEMOLITION

Source: Toronto Island Archives



Source: Toronto Island Archives

Bulldozers At Centre Island



WRECKING CREW ON THE MAIN  
DRAG.

POLICE STATION AT LEFT.

in search of housing and not all were as lucky as this young woman. A number of families decided to stay in houses which had not been winterized and where even the water had been turned off, but "they [had] nowhere else to go."<sup>1</sup>

Inadequate winter transportation (which was provided by three snub-nosed tugs) was the major drawback to winter life in the 1940's and on into the 1950's. For a journalist, a tug trip might be a very colourful adventure,<sup>2</sup> but for those relying on it for daily transportation, the infrequent, often irregular, over-crowded service, was a real problem:

Women, particularly, object to the winter service, as they say it makes them feel cut-off. Men resent having to catch a ferry that gets them to work half an hour or an hour early, and forces them to rush out of the office in the evening lest they be marooned in town until well after dinner.<sup>3</sup>

But, in spite of all the problems, most Islanders, it was reported, would never consider moving to the City:

"I don't mind working there" [in the City], said one pretty miss. "But", her eyes widened, "I'd never want to live there." All Islanders are funny that way.<sup>4</sup>

The Island became an increasingly political issue and every aspect of Island life, such as summer and winter transportation, high water and flooding, the need for a better seawall and so on, had political aspects. Over the next few years, the Islanders, who increasingly regarded the Island as "home" and as a "permanent community",

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<sup>1</sup>David Crawley, "Vacant Houses," Globe and Mail, October 3, 1946.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur Cole, op. cit.

<sup>3</sup>David Crawley, op. cit.

<sup>4</sup>"'Hopping Mad' Islanders May Battle With Votes," op. cit.

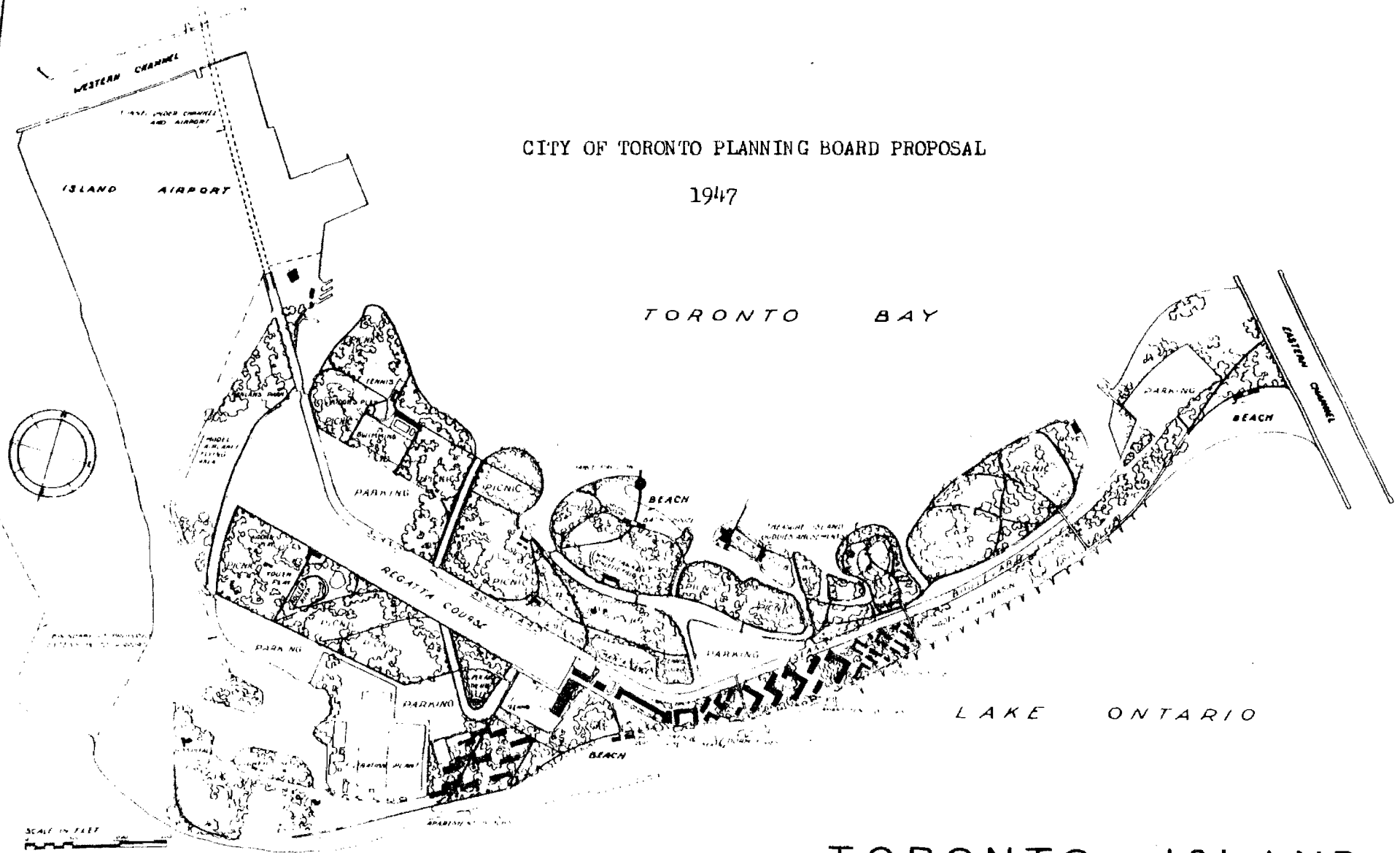
became more vociferous and more demanding and the politicians, who began to revert to regarding the Island as a "summer resort community", became less sympathetic.

From 1947 until Metro took over the Island in 1956, a number of plans and schemes for the future of the Island were issued by a variety of groups. In 1947, the City Planning Board presented "for discussion" a proposal, which included the substitution of permanent residences (including apartment buildings) for the existing frame cottages, the development of additional parkland, the construction of a highway (including a tunnel under the Western Gap) and provision of parking for about 5,000 cars. (See Map 21.) In 1949, the Islanders, now represented by the Inter-Island Council, issued a counter-plan, which in essence supported the status quo--i.e., maintaining the existing residential areas, keeping the Island free from cars, and developing the wilder parts as parkland. (See Map 22.)

Planning for the Island intensified in the early 1950's. In 1951, the Toronto Planning Board and Toronto Harbour Commissioners issued a joint plan, which was similar to the earlier Planning Board proposal of 1947. (See Map 23.) Mayor Lamport entered the lists with his 1953 plan for warehousing and additional dock facilities, as well as a roadway, parkland and cottages. (See Map 24.) The Inter-Island Council, supported by large delegations of Island residents, responded to both of these plans with another plan which reflected their earlier one. Finally, after Metropolitan Toronto was created in 1953, Metro Chairman Fred Gardiner, eager to build up the power of the new level of government, became interested in the Island, declaring that it was a Metro problem and announcing that if Metro took it over, it would be

CITY OF TORONTO PLANNING BOARD PROPOSAL

1947

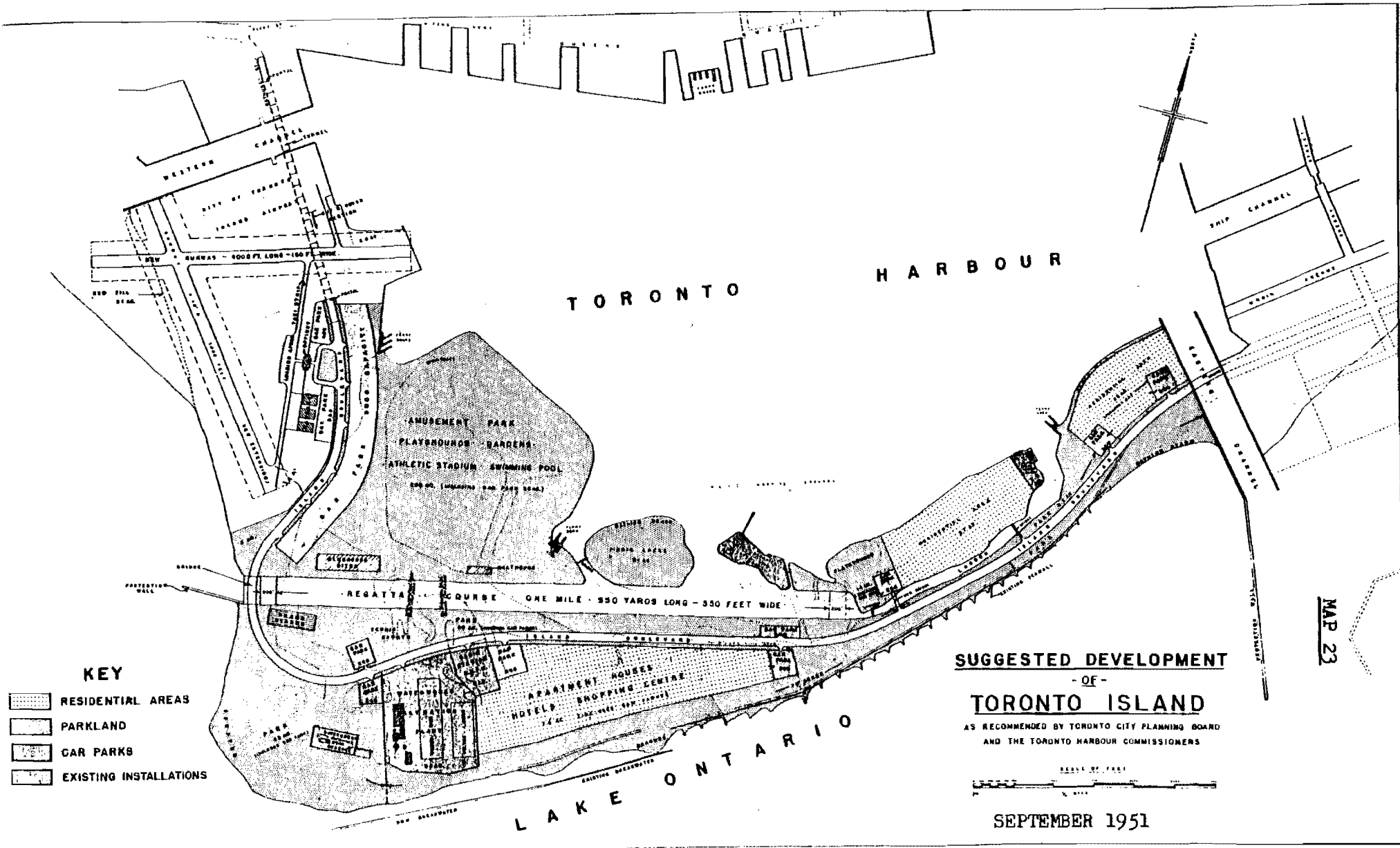


MAP 21

A LONG TERM PROPOSAL FOR REDEVELOPMENT  
TORONTO ISLAND

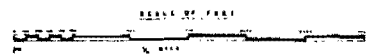
Source: City of Toronto, Toronto's Island Park Neighbourhoods, September 1973, Map 5.





MAP 23

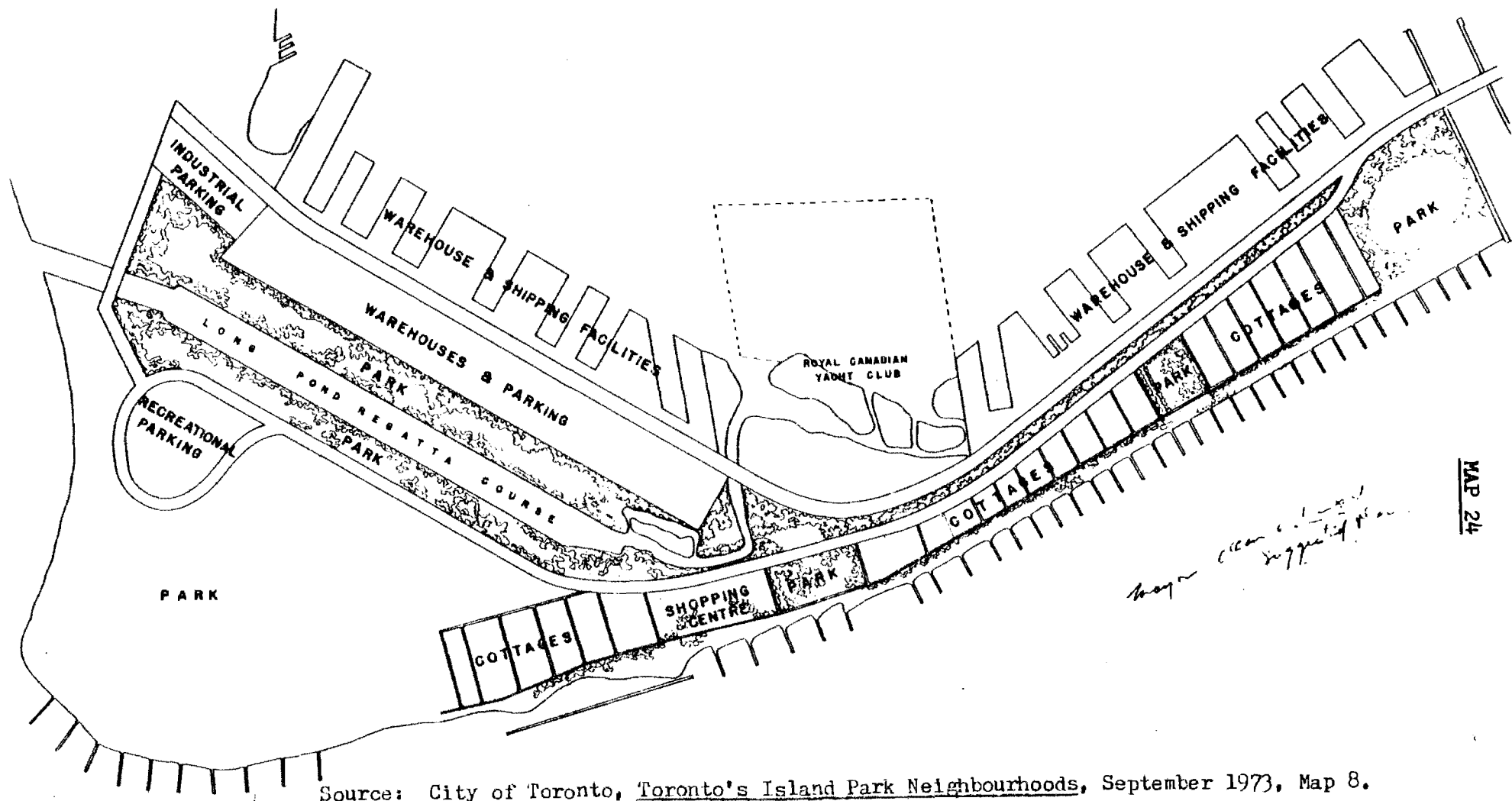
**SUGGESTED DEVELOPMENT**  
 - OF -  
**TORONTO ISLAND**  
 AS RECOMMENDED BY TORONTO CITY PLANNING BOARD  
 AND THE TORONTO HARBOUR COMMISSIONERS



SEPTEMBER 1951

Source: City of Toronto, Toronto's Island Park Neighbourhoods, September 1973  
 Map 6 (incorrectly dated as 1952).

MAYOR LAMPORT'S PLAN--1953



Source: City of Toronto, Toronto's Island Park Neighbourhoods, September 1973, Map 8.

devoted to "parks purposes only". City politicians, for a variety of reasons (including the desire to be rid of the ferry deficits and of the general nuisances involved in operating the Island and dealing with Islanders) voted on February 22, 1954 to ask Metro Toronto to assume the Island for parks purposes only and, on March 22, 1955, Metro Council voted to accept it. Metro assumed control over the Island on January 1, 1956. (See Map 25.)

f. Toronto Island: 1950-1970:

The history of the Island during the 1950's may be divided into the pre-Metro and post-Metro periods. In the pre-Metro period, the year-round community continued to grow and the two major issues were high-water and flooding (1951 and 1952) and winter transportation (1954-1955).

The winter community continued to grow through 1954. Then, after Metro made its decision to take over the Island and after the first demolitions took place, the population dropped precipitously. Perhaps the most reliable guide to the rise and fall of the population is the Island School, which grew steadily until it reached a peak in September 1954 of 587 pupils (Appendix H) and thereafter declined, slowly at first when one room was closed in 1955<sup>1</sup> and then rapidly when 10 of 17 rooms were closed in 1956.<sup>2</sup> The pattern is clear: the community grew until mid-decade and shrank rapidly afterwards.

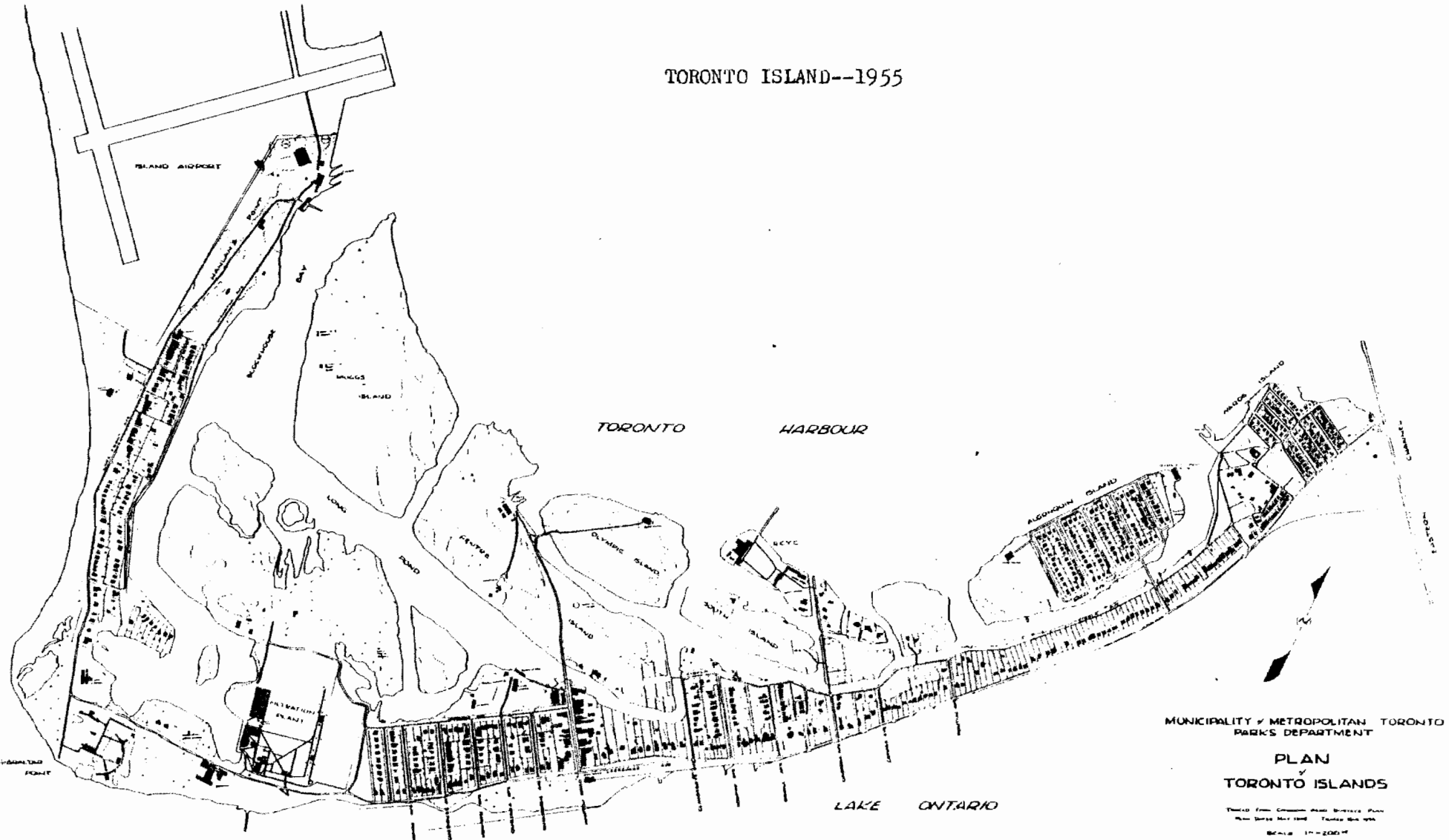
In the early 1950's, nature took a hand in the political drama

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<sup>1</sup>Morris Duffy, "Islanders Say Fares Part of Plot to Oust Them. Blame Lampy," Star, January 22, 1955.

<sup>2</sup>Alden Baker, "Playground is \$4,000,000 Gamble," Globe and Mail, May 21, 1956.

TORONTO ISLAND--1955



MAP 25

MUNICIPALITY OF METROPOLITAN TORONTO  
PARKS DEPARTMENT

PLAN  
OF  
TORONTO ISLANDS

TRACED FROM CHAS. H. HARRIS'S PLAN  
"THE ISLANDS OF TORONTO" TORONTO 1914  
SCALE 1"=2000'

Source: City of Toronto, Toronto's Island Park Neighbourhoods, September 1973, Map 3.

being played out on the Island. There were storms and abnormally high water in both 1951 and 1952, when the level surpassed the previous high of 1947. In February 1952, faced with a new record high for the time of year, Islanders threatened a tax strike unless the City built up the seawall. In response, Mayor Lamport raised the spectre of a health hazard on the Island and proposed evacuation of winter residents. The more cynical among the Islanders wondered if the Mayor was less concerned with their welfare than with forcing them off the Island.<sup>1</sup> This view was given support when the Medical Officer of Health reported that there was no health menace.<sup>2</sup>

The other main issue in the first part of the decade was winter transportation. Even without any added problems, the service provided was far from ideal.<sup>3</sup> But when the TTC decided to triple the fares (from 10¢ to 30¢), Islanders became enraged. They held meetings;<sup>4</sup> they organized deputations; some even resorted to refusing to pay the increase and once or twice to pushing TTC employees around.<sup>5</sup> Finally, on January 7, 1955, the Islanders staged what came to be known as the

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<sup>1</sup>"Trying To Scuttle Island, Residents Will Fight Ban," Telegram, March 20, 1952. The water set a new record later this year and was a hazard to residents, business people and visitors alike. Ultimately, the City did build up the seawall, which proved to be effective. And, by 1953, the Lake level returned to normal.

<sup>2</sup>"No Menace To Health MOH Assures Island," Telegram, March 25, 1952.

<sup>3</sup>Ian M. Ball, "Unhappy Islanders Jam Tugboats in Winter," Globe and Mail, January 5, 1955, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>"Islanders Jam Session to Fight Ferry Rates," Globe and Mail, December 15, 1954; "Plan Joint Meeting on Island Fares," Globe and Mail, December 30, 1954.

<sup>5</sup>"Can't Expect Fares - Islanders Incensed By TTC Ferry Delay," Star, January 7, 1955.

"Great Tugboat Mutiny",<sup>1</sup> which made front page headlines. On the fateful morning of January 7, one tug broke down, causing the other boats to run behind schedule. The early morning commuter crowd waiting for a boat at Hanlan's grew to over a hundred as several fully-loaded boats passed by without stopping. When the H.J. Dixon finally docked at Hanlan's, a large crowd of angry Islanders swarmed aboard; the Captain refused to set sail in an over-loaded boat; Islanders refused to budge; and the Harbour Police were called to try to straighten things out. Eventually other boats came to the rescue and Islanders were carried to the City, where many rushed through the turnstile without paying.<sup>2</sup> In response, the TTC--most notably TTC Vice Chairman and former Mayor Allan Lamport--threatened to halt the service. The City later reprimanded the TTC for the threats and feverish negotiations were held between Islanders and City officials over how to resolve Islanders' complaints. Meanwhile, on the Island, the effects of both the fare increase and the pending Metro take-over were being felt. A number of people had already moved or were thinking of moving; business was down; and much of the Islanders' resentment was directed at Lamport: there was a general feeling that raising the fares was part of a plot to get them off the Island.<sup>3</sup> Eventually, the 10c fare was restored and peace returned, briefly, to the Island.

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Westall, "The Great Tugboat Mutiny," Globe and Mail, December 16, 1959.

<sup>2</sup>"Can't Expect Fares," op. cit.

<sup>3</sup>"Islanders Say Fares Part of Plot to Oust Them, Blame Lampy," Star, January 22, 1955.

1955, the year that Metro Council finally voted to assume Toronto Island for parks purposes, marked the turning point for the Island. Precisely what the change in control meant was not entirely clear initially. There was no agreed-upon plan for park development and no final decision had been made about whether residents would be allowed to continue on the Island.<sup>1</sup> But the effects of the Metro decision and the continued uncertainty surrounding it, were felt immediately. The Main Drag, "once as colourful and busy as any resort centre in Muskoka"<sup>2</sup> was closing up: the "aristocratic Pierson Hotel" was almost empty; the Casino, which once attracted crowds of dancers to swing to name bands, was a bowling alley, closed in summer; an open air dance floor was a "neglected patch of cement"; and the Wayside Inn, "looking like a colonial mansion" was also empty--its back-rooms "a graveyard for rusty bicycles" which used to be rented to visitors. And even before Metro officially took over the Island on January 1, 1956, demolitions began. In September 1955, Metro not only rejected the proposal that short-term (monthly) leases be granted to people whose leases expired between then and 1956, but also decided that any buildings acquired should be demolished.<sup>3</sup>

Early in 1956, the newly-appointed Parks Commissioner Tommy

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<sup>1</sup>"Popular Spot Finally Promised Some Action On Park Development," Globe and Mail, April 14, 1955.

<sup>2</sup>David Lancashire, "Fares, Metro Blamed for Decline of Island," Globe and Mail, July 23, 1955. All quotes about the Main Drag are from this article.

<sup>3</sup>"Island Homes To Be Wrecked, Metro Decides," Globe and Mail, September 14, 1955; "Back Demolitions of Island Homes," Globe and Mail, September 21, 1955.

Thompson, produced his first, of many, plans for the Island.<sup>1</sup> When the Federal government refused to finance the proposed tunnel,<sup>2</sup> Metro cut the plan drastically (from \$14 million to about \$4 million) to include purchasing property and raising the level of Centre Island.<sup>3</sup> In May, the first demolition permits were issued, for houses on Lakeshore, Hiawatha and St. Andrews Avenues.<sup>4</sup> But no official opposition to Metro was expressed by Islanders at this point. By January 1957, 125 buildings purchased by Metro had been demolished, including such Island landmarks as the old Casino, the Gooderham house, the carousel on Hanlan's Point and the Wiman Lodge on Ward's Island. "Few blocks had not lost at least one building";<sup>5</sup> while other blocks had almost completely vanished: "The Island, as it is known by Torontonians who proudly call themselves Islanders, is vanishing quickly."<sup>6</sup> As demolitions continued, some Islanders became somewhat bewildered by the whole process; and others sounded what was to be a familiar theme

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<sup>1</sup>The Parks Department was created in the spring of 1955 and Thomas Thompson was hired in the summer of that year. Gordon Bleasdel, "Park, Family Resort to Cost \$14,500,000 - Toronto Island Plan," Star, February 10, 1956 describes the plan.

<sup>2</sup>Len Schrag, "Tunnelophobia-Metropolitan Toronto," Globe and Mail, May 10, 1956 and Peter Simpson, "No Tunnel Aid From Ottawa-Winters," Telegram, March 25, 1956.

<sup>3</sup>"Metro Shelves Plans For Tunnel to Islands," Globe and Mail, April 25, 1956; "Tunnel Must Wait; Island Park Plan Cut to \$4,080,000," Globe and Mail, May 5, 1956; and Alden Baker, "Playground Is \$4,000,000 Gamble," op. cit.

<sup>4</sup>"Will Demolish Houses," Globe and Mail, May 19, 1956.

<sup>5</sup>Colin McCullough, "Island Houses Buried As Metro Bulldozers Make Over Play Areas," Globe and Mail, January 10, 1957.

<sup>6</sup>"Begin Work to Raise Centre Island Level," Globe and Mail, May 11, 1957.

through the 1960's--complaints about low compensation.<sup>1</sup> But, whether bewildered, dissatisfied or angry, the Islanders accepted the clearing of the houses to make way for the Metro park as a fait accompli. They raised virtually no concerted, group opposition. And the demolitions proceeded. (See Illustration 18.)

Although the demolitions occurred in spots all over the Island, Centre took the brunt of the attack. (See Illustrations 19 and 20.) By early January 1959, it was "practically dead"<sup>2</sup> and only forty families were left. The closest Islanders came to opposing Metro was at this point, when they asked Metro to postpone acquiring these forty remaining houses until after the end of the school year in June.<sup>3</sup> Metro agreed to let most of them stay on for the few extra months,<sup>4</sup> but then those houses were demolished as well. By the end of the decade, over a third of the houses had been demolished, the population had dropped drastically, and even the winter tug boat service which had been progressively dwindling since December 1955, was temporarily eliminated.

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<sup>1</sup>"Metro Plan Bewildering To Residents On Toronto Island," Star, October 2, 1958.

<sup>2</sup>Albert Waeson, "Centre Island's Ghost Town: Only Forty Families Remain," Globe and Mail, March 25, 1959, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>"Islanders Ask Delay to June," Globe and Mail, January 3, 1959.

<sup>4</sup>"Defer Island Evictions," Telegram, March 24, 1959, and Waeson, op. cit.

<sup>5</sup>Westall, "The Great Tugboat Mutiny," op. cit. The tug boat service was eliminated on December 13, 1959 and Islanders then had to travel by "cable-fed barge" from the Airport over the Western Gap. This complex and difficult service was described by Stanley Westall, "Ward's Voyage An Adventure," Globe and Mail, December 23, 1959. The cable service soon proved to be inadequate and the tug service was restored in January 1960.

During the 1960's, planning and developing the park continued,<sup>1</sup> but opposition stiffened. This opposition was accompanied by complex political manoeuvring which was orchestrated primarily by the Islanders' politically shrewd alderman, David Rotenberg, who was first elected in 1962. It was reflected in the slowed pace of demolitions. Between 1955 and 1959, 262 properties were acquired and demolished, but between 1960 and 1966 only 70 more were demolished and between 1967 and 1969 another 53 fell. (See Appendix I, "Demolition of Island Properties".) The final 262 homes on Ward's and Algonquin, of course, were not acquired at all.

The pace may have slowed, but, as one political battle after another was lost, the bulldozers continued to sweep eastward along Lakeshore Avenue until they were finally halted at Lenore Avenue by the Islanders' major political victory of the decade. On May 31, 1967, Islanders were able to save the 262 homes that remained on Ward's and Algonquin Islands. After a seven hour, emotional debate, attended by several hundred anxious but polite Islanders, Metro Council granted these holders of non-compensation leases an extension until August 31, 1970.<sup>2</sup> This was the first of several extensions which prolonged the life of this part of the community through the 1970's. It was, however, only a partial victory, since Metro Council, at the same time, refused to extend the life of the last of the big Lakeshore houses. In October 1967, Alderman Rotenberg was able to gain a temporary reprieve

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<sup>1</sup>Various elaborate plans were proposed, but not passed. The Avenue of the Islands--a formal garden on the site of the old Main Drag--various amusements, and large expanses of picnic areas were created.

<sup>2</sup>This was one of many long, emotional debates held during the 1960's and attended by large numbers of Island residents.

for some of these houses until 1968, but this was the last reprieve granted to these houses. Not all the Lakeshore residents left quietly or on time. People remained in eleven of the houses when the August 31, 1968 deadline passed. By this time, it should be noted, relations between the residents and Metro officials were extremely bitter.<sup>1</sup> The battles of the 1960's between Islanders and politicians and Metro officials have left a legacy of bitterness that provides the context for more recent political events.

By the end of the decade, only the houses that still remain on Ward's and Algonquin Islands were left standing. (See Map 2.) All others which had once stretched from Hanlan's Point through Centre Island, along the western part of Ward's Island up to Lenore Avenue were only a memory. But they were a particularly vivid memory to those who knew them and to those who saw them demolished. Some former residents have never returned to the spot where their houses used to stand. The experience would be too painful. But, as indicated in the first chapter, the houses live on in their memories. (See Alan Howard, p.22.) Other people who still live on the Island from time to time pass the place where they used to live and powerful memories may be evoked. (See quotations, pp. 23-24 .) Actually watching houses being demolished was a very vivid, even searing, experience. (See Illustration 21.) Ruth Putt, who lives on Algonquin Island, recalls seeing

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<sup>1</sup>See for example: Cameron Smith, "Destruction and Desolation Where Once Was Happiness," Globe and Mail, May 30, 1968; "Angry Ward's Island Holdouts Still Trying to Delay Bulldozers," Star, August 31, 1968; Don Delaplante, "Park Chief Moved Into Island House Before Metro, Owner Reach Settlement," Globe and Mail, September 3, 1968; "Anger Over Ward's Island Ousters," Telegram, September 3, 1968; "11 Island Residents Defy Metro, Won't Leave," Star, September 3, 1968; "No Metro Move Yet To Oust Islanders," Telegram, September 4, 1968.



ILLUSTRATION 21

SOURCE: TORONTO ISLAND ARCHIVES.



Island houses being demolished:

I'll never forget the sound. It [the wrecker] seemed like something prehistoric, you know, like a big animal—that you see in those science fiction movies--that go into a city and just wreck everything. I'll never forget it. It's just one of those things that's like a nightmare...It was just as if it was going right through me. It had big teeth on it and it was jointed like an elbow and wrist and it could reach out, with these claws, and it would just go into a roof and CRASH. It's an awful crashy, crashing, crunching sound. All the wood splintering and if it came down on the way and ripped out glass, there'd be all the panes of storm windows and windows all crashing. And I'd see all this DESTRUCTION. Wanton Destruction. Absolutely. Thousands of dollars. And the people who had lived there and had had to get out--they'd stand there. You could just tell that this was the end of it. They didn't know what they were going to do.

Well, as soon as they'd get them wrecked, they'd run the bulldozer over them and crush it all down and scoop it all up in a pile and they'd set fire to it. And it would never be erased from your mind, ever. Because this was the end. You just felt so terrible. There was just nothing there anymore. This was the final thing.<sup>1</sup>

Islanders carry with them these memories as well as general knowledge of the Island's unique history.

iii. Sense of History - Defense of Place:

Islanders' strong sense of history has clearly had an impact on the nature of their defense of place. And defense of place, in turn, has had a marked impact on their sense of history.

a. Impact of Islanders' Sense of History On Their Defense of Place:

Islanders' and their political supporters, especially since about 1973, have argued that Metro should not destroy a well-established,

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary for TIRA slide show, Public Meeting, St. Lawrence Centre, March 20, 1974. See also Peter Cridland's description of the deep impression this destruction made on his and other Island Children. (See Sense of Change, p. 385.)

historic community.<sup>1</sup> For example, prior to the December 11, 1973 Metro Council decision to terminate Island leases, at three public meetings sponsored by the City, each Toronto Island Residents Association (TIRA)<sup>2</sup> spokesperson made a point of emphasizing the historic nature of the community. Peter Atkinson, for example, said:

Relatively few people are familiar with the Toronto Island community. Few realize that a community existed on the Island well before Confederation [1867]....[A naive visitor to the Island] would hope that the remnants of our past would be encouraged. That a part of the City's soul would be lost by Metro's voting to destroy the Island community.<sup>3</sup>

After the December 11, 1973 vote and faced with the stark threat of losing their homes, their community and "their Island" at the end of the following August, Islanders organized a massive Spring Campaign to change the Metro decision. Throughout this Campaign, Islanders again emphasized the historic nature of the Island houses and community. In February, Islanders organized a Winter Carnival with an historic theme: Islanders dressed in period costume, and their posters invited Mainlanders to "Come Across to the 1974 Toronto Island Winter Carnival: Celebrate 150 Years of Homes, Families, and Friends Living in Toronto Harbour".<sup>4</sup> On March 6, 1974, the 140th birthday of the City of Toronto, a

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<sup>1</sup>The historic preservation argument is closely related to the general neighbourhood or community preservation arguments, which came into prominence after the December 1972 municipal election when David Crombie and a large number of City (and a few Borough) politicians were elected on neighbourhood preservation platforms.

<sup>2</sup>TIRA was formed in 1969, when the last of the Lakeshore houses had disappeared, as a political organization to defend the remaining community with its 250+ houses and 700+ residents.

<sup>3</sup>Peter Atkinson, Speech, November 14, 1973.

<sup>4</sup>The figure of 150 years perhaps creates an exaggerated image of the historical nature of the community since there were only scattered fishermen's huts on the Island in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, not a "community" in the usual sense of the word.

group of Island women, again dressed in period costume, presented City Council with a large, home-made birthday cake from the Island community and took the opportunity to emphasize (in a newsworthy fashion) their own sense of history. Spokesperson Maureen Smith said:

The Island Community has been under siege for many years and the islanders have a fine sense of history. Two weeks ago we celebrated our 150th anniversary and today we congratulate Toronto on its 140th birthday.<sup>1</sup>

A March 20 public meeting at the St. Lawrence Centre was entitled "Death At 150 Years?" TIRA representative Bill Metcalfe emphasized Islanders' strong sense of community and sense of history:

We are bitter because the decision to destroy our homes is absolutely senseless and totally unnecessary. Our community has roots that go back before Confederation, roots that go back long before there were such things as suburbs. Perhaps that's why we are particularly bitter with Metro politicians from the suburbs, because they are the ones most anxious to pull out the last of our roots.

Much of the publicity sent out during the Campaign emphasized the historical nature of the community. Advertisements proclaimed:

Help!! They're Killing Our Community

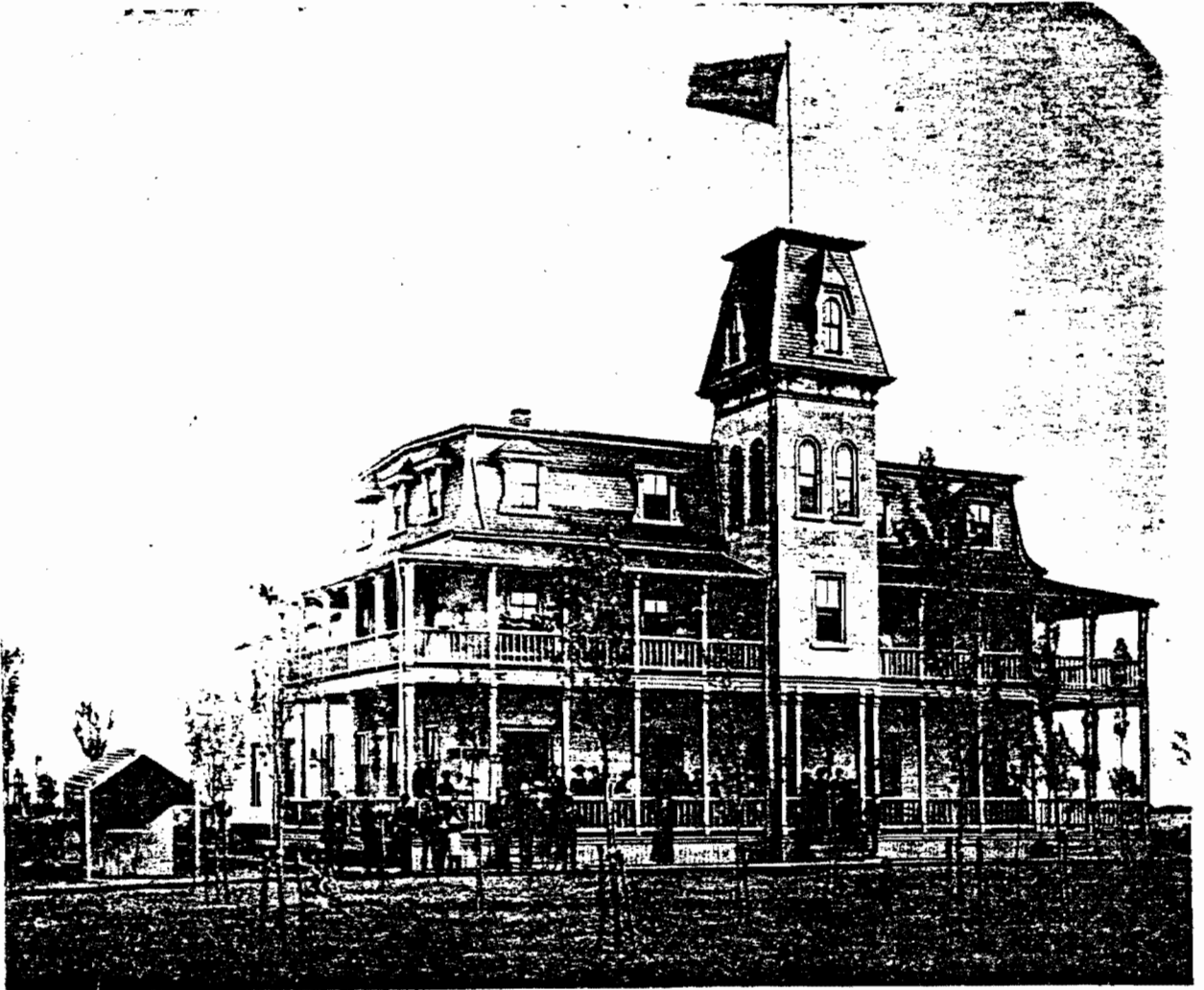
On August 31, 1974, if "they" have their way, the last families will have to leave the Toronto Islands. A community which began before Confederation will be dead....

"No City that aspires to greatness can afford to trample on its past on its way to the future", wrote Toronto Star in an editorial last year. The Toronto Island homes are part of this city's past. And we don't want to get trampled on.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Quote in Ken MacGray, "Toronto Honors 10 Citizens On Its 140th Birthday," Star, March 7, 1974.

<sup>2</sup>A handsome poster with a sepia photograph of the old Ward's Hotel which had been demolished in the 1960's, and this quote from the Star beneath it, was also produced. The poster was doubly ironic since the Star had been in favour of destroying the Hotel as well as the homes on the Island. (See Illustration 22.)



Demolished in 1966

Ward's Hotel, built 1883

## Keep the Toronto Island Community

No city that aspires to greatness can afford to trample its past on the way to the future. A community's historic buildings – baroque, beautiful, follies of one kind or another – are the grace notes that provide continuity with the past as well as offering the necessary contrast with towers of steel and glass all around.

Toronto Star, June 22, 1973.

The Save Island Homes question and answer booklet (put together as part of the Spring Campaign and distributed for several more years) responded to the question, "Is it right for people to be living in a park?" by saying:

The land on which the Island residents live has never been parkland. It would be more to the point to ask: Is it right for a government to destroy a happy well-established community in order to create a park? For that is exactly what happened. People have been living on Toronto Island since before Confederation, and their community was an accepted part of Toronto life....<sup>1</sup>

The Island Spring festival (scheduled for May but never held because of the wet weather) was also organized around an historic theme. Islanders planned to hold an historical pageant (reenacting a portage across the "Toronto Spit" by fur traders<sup>2</sup>), unveil an historical plaque<sup>3</sup> and construct a special pavilion "devoted to the Island Community's history and struggle for survival",<sup>4</sup> which was to have large blow-ups of photographs of early life on Ward's Island (e.g., views of the tents and of people brushing their teeth while clustering around the outside water taps). And, finally, the August 31, 1974 "Island New Year" celebration (held on the day the leases were supposed to expire) was billed as an event which "in true Island tradition will usher in our 150th New Year, to celebrate our past history and Day 1 of another 150 years to come!".

After the 1974 Spring Campaign, Islanders continued to emphasize

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<sup>1</sup>Toronto Island Residents Association, Save Island Homes (Toronto: Coach House Press, April, 1974), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>They attached a detailed "History of the Island Portage" to their Press Release about the Festival.

<sup>3</sup>This plaque was finally dedicated in August, 1974.

<sup>4</sup>Island Spring, Press Release, p. 2

the historic roots of the community. For example, in 1975, the first clause of the motion presented by City Alderman Art Eggleton, which was defeated by Metro Council on April 8, 1975, read: "Whereas a residential community has been part of the Toronto Islands for nearly 150 years." In 1980, once again faced with imminent eviction by the sheriff, Islanders pasted posters all over downtown Toronto. The poster showed a three-generation Island family in front of a Ward's Island house and proclaimed July 2:

#### EVICITION DAY

The Island Community is more than 100 years old. It is home for the people shown here - Rose Wilson, her children, her grandchildren, and 750 residents....On eviction day, come to Ward's Island and help oppose this mindless destruction.

And at a July 1, 1980 rally to demonstrate public support, which attracted over 2,000 people, Islanders set up a photographic exhibit which included pictures of early life on Ward's Island, hung a banner which declared that "History Lives Here" and sold a "Save The Toronto Island Community" poster which was based on an old photograph showing an "Island Beauty" standing in front of tents on Fourth Street in 1928.

In conclusion, Islanders' strong sense of history has had a distinct impact on their defense of place. Throughout the more recent period of their political history (from about 1973 on), Islanders have emphasized the historic nature of the homes and the community not only because they feel it is important (a reflection of their own sense of history), but also because they think that other people--politicians and members of the general public--will feel it is important and will join forces to try to preserve the historic community.

b. The Politicians' Response:

Islanders' political supporters, for their part, have been sympathetic to Islanders' sense of history and, more generally, to historic preservation arguments. In contrast to such political opponents as East York Controller Howard Chandler, who observed (in 1975), "I think there's a place for history in our society, but I also think there's a place for history to disappear", and Metro Chairman Paul Godfrey, who commented (in 1975), "I don't know what they mean by 'historic'". Many of Islanders' political friends have believed that the Island community is "part of Toronto's past", as historian and former City Alderman William Kilbourn expressed it. For example, in April 1973, Mayor David Crombie told the Metro Executive, "You just don't knock out a community that's been there since 1917."<sup>1</sup> During the first Metro Council debate of the issue after the December 1972 municipal elections, in May 1973, North York Controller Barbara Greene commented, "I support wholeheartedly the retention of the Island community, because it's a valuable, a unique part of the cultural mosaic and heritage of Toronto. It has been a part of my environment and a part of the environment of my parents and grandparents for many, many generations." At Metro Parks and Recreation Committee in November 1973, Alderman Elizabeth Eayrs suggested, "The Islands were inhabited and have been inhabited always, as far as the City of Toronto [which was created in 1834] is concerned; so that what we [Metro] are doing now is removing--or about to remove if this motion carries--the last remaining small number of residential uses on the

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Alden Baker, "Take Island Homes By May 23, City Told," Globe and Mail, April 28, 1973.

Toronto Islands." And, at the Metro Council debate on December 11, 1973, she commented sadly, "Well, I think it's going to be very lonely for the Islands out there. For the first time in perhaps 150 years, next winter the Islands will be sitting there without a single soul living on them." At the same debate, Mayor Crombie, in an emotional speech, expressed similar sentiments, "We can produce land there if we need more parkland. We've been producing land there through the Harbour Commission since 1912. We can't produce another community that's been there for 90 years....Obviously, I think the Island should be preserved, the Island community. It has adorned this City and this Metropolitan area for a long, long time."

c. Impact of Islanders' Defense of Place On Their Sense of History:

Islanders' defense of place, in turn, has sharpened and expanded their sense of history. David Amer, for example, one of the founders of the now defunct Goose and Duck newspaper, emphasizes that one of the reasons that the Goose and Duck was founded in 1971 was to make Islanders aware of their history, their neighbours, their environment and so on, so that they would fight to preserve the Island as they knew it. The editors, therefore, published old pictures of earlier Island life and interviews with old Islanders who remembered the tenting days or life on Centre Island in the pre-Metro era (as well as pictures of contemporary life and advice on how to cope with various Island problems, etc.). He attributes his own strong interest in Island history directly to being involved with the Goose and Duck.

Simply doing research for the various publications and political events directly associated with the defense of the Island has forced a number of Islanders to look into the Island's history more deeply than

they would have under other circumstances. They have looked into the portage route and the church's history in order to gain historical plaques; found old photographs for the proposed "Bulldozerama" (1974 Spring Festival) and other political booths at various events; and dug up facts and photographs for political booklets and posters (like the Ward's Island Hotel poster of 1974). The fruits of this research have been spread across the Island as well as the Mainland.

Fear of losing the Island as they know it has also undoubtedly sparked Islanders' interest in documenting their history "before it does disappear", as Jenny DeTolly remarked. The Island Archives was established in the spring of 1974 precisely for this reason. Faced with the imminent destruction of the last residential area and the dispersal of the last residents (many of whom had known earlier eras and had large collections of photographs and memorabilia), a group of Islanders decided to tap this resource and to gather as much information as possible before it was too late. This group, after gathering the material, has held exhibitions both on the Island and on the Mainland.

Finally, actually seeing much of the Island's physical fabric fall victim to bulldozers has also undoubtedly sharpened Islanders' sense of history, as Mary Madrick's statement in the Introduction indicated.

In conclusion, although Islanders may well have had a strong sense of history in earlier years, certainly in more recent years, when they have mounted a series of defenses of place in response to severe outside threats, their sense of history and their defense of place have been mutually reinforcing.