

The Rathfon Inn: A History
10805 Lakeshore Rd, Port Colborne, Ontario



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Summary

This report presents the history of the Rathfon Inn, located today at 10805 Lakeshore Rd, Port Colborne, Ontario. The Rathfon Inn is currently a private family home, situated on a spacious nine-acre property on the rocky shores of Lake Erie, and has served as a gathering place for the community on many special occasions. It is situated within Wainfleet Township, Welland County, where settlement began as early as the 1780s.

The Rathfon has seen many changes to its construction over the years but was originally built as a Pennsylvania Dutch (German) style farmhouse, with two-foot-thick stone walls supported by large white logs and attic beams joined with pegs. It was built in the early 19th century by the Graybiels; a family of Mennonite immigrants from the United States who settled in Niagara in search of a new life. They played an important role in Wainfleet's early years as a township, providing blacksmithing services and involved in local politics and administration. Their foundational legacy for the Rathfon Inn was built upon by subsequent generations to live there. The home was purchased by the Augustine family in 1874, who continued the property's long Mennonite farming tradition. The site's namesake entered the scene in 1891 upon his marriage to Priscilla Augustine, and the Rathfon family inhabited the home for another thirty years.

As Niagara advanced throughout the 20th century, the old stone house found itself under new ownership numerous times, and changes were made to both the home and its surrounding lands. A garage made of matching material and a limestone wall surrounding the property were added in the 1920s, at which point it became known as part of the larger "Rathfons Point" subdivision. The home was abandoned for a brief period during the Great Depression and brought to new life again mid-century by the Zielski family, who turned the Rathfon Inn into a locally renowned tourist destination. By the 1980s, ownership changed hands once again, but the Rathfon in its most recent past has continued to host visitors from all walks of life for a variety of occasions.

The site serves as a unique example of Niagara's Mennonite farming history and is ingrained in the hearts of countless locals with fond memories attached to summers at the Rathfon. The Rathfon's proximity to both the lake and to the main travel route along the lakeshore, its well-documented colonial history, and the existence of Indigenous artifacts around the property point to the fact that this is a site with extraordinary cultural heritage value. It is one of those special places that holds value not just for the property owner, but for the community as a whole.

Primary historical sources were examined for this report to determine the history of ownership and occupation of the property. The Abstract Index of Deeds, Ontario decadal censuses, historical maps and aerial photos were consulted throughout the course of this study, and local newspaper articles helped to round out the site's more recent history. Many of these sources are housed in the L. R. Wilson Heritage Research Archives in Port Colborne as well as the Brock University Archives & Special Collections, and the university's Map, Data & GIS Library.

Pre-Contact Indigenous History

The pre-contact era of southern Ontario is divided into cultural periods based on archaeological research. Most archaeologists recognize these as the Paleo-Indian, Archaic, and Woodland periods. In the Late Woodland era, the Niagara peninsula was inhabited for around three hundred years by Iroquoian-speaking people known as the Attawandaron, or the Neutral Confederacy. In addition to hunting and trading, the Attawandaron engaged in agriculture in parts of Niagara township, but were wiped out by the mid-17th century. They formed the main east-west travel routes throughout the region which are still widely used today along the shores of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie, as well as the base and crest of the Niagara Escarpment, connecting those living north of Lake Ontario to the Haudenosaunee in western New York. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, the Haudenosaunee regularly crossed the Niagara River to hunt for furs that they would then trade with Dutch and English merchants. These well-worn paths were later augmented by the Mississauga Nation who inhabited the lands between York (Toronto) and the Head of the Lake (Burlington), travelling through the peninsula on their way to the Niagara River.

In the 1764 Treaty of Niagara, the Seneca agreed to cede to the British government the entire Niagara River, including a four-mile strip on the west side between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. Two decades later, the British government purchased much of the land situated to the west of the four-mile strip from the native Mississauga people in a 1784 agreement that was updated and solidified in 1792 as the "Between the Lakes Treaty (No. 3)." This land included the township of Wainfleet, in which the Rathfon Inn is presently located. The Inn was built on the northern shore of Lake Erie in Wainfleet Township, with the mouth of the Grand River to the west and the Niagara River to the east. As such, it is located on a path that has been traversed for centuries by people on their way to and from the major points of trade and commerce along the Niagara River; particularly the industrial powerhouse that was Buffalo, NY.

The site's rich Indigenous history has resulted in the deposit of countless artifacts dating back to these early settlements. In fact, provincial heritage designation was requested in 2003 to protect not only the integrity of the historic stone house itself, but also its surrounding nine-acre property and the unique cultural history it guards. Prior to the designation process, the property owners attempting to sever the lot and rezone in preparation for development were faced with a decision to either avoid the artifacts or remove them, but ultimately could do neither. A local news article from that time shared: "...they couldn't avoid them [the artifacts], because there's too many, and they couldn't remove them because there's too many. So they just left them."¹

¹ Shelah Brooks, "Rathfon Inn has historical value," *The Tribune*, no date, L. R. Wilson Heritage Research Archives, accessed January 12, 2024.

Post-Contact History

Niagara, Welland County, and Wainfleet Township

The treaties of the late 18th century opened Niagara to settlement. These first settlers were called United Empire Loyalists (UELs) and were granted parcels of land by the British government for their devotion to the Crown during the American Revolution. Land was either granted or purchased from the Crown by settlers who were given title to a designated parcel, usually around 100-200 acres in size. Lieut. Philip R. Frey surveyed the various Niagara townships between 1787-89, including Wainfleet. Wainfleet Township was eventually given its name by Upper Canadian Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe, who named the Niagara townships after places in England; Wainfleet, UK being a particularly marshy area as well.

By 1817, Wainfleet Township contained 72 inhabited houses and approximately 468 residents. At that time there were no places of worship, no medical practitioners, two schools, one store, one tavern, and one sawmill.² It was far less developed than the rest of the region, due to underpopulation and the 22 square miles of marshland that divided the township into two different settlements – one on the shore of Lake Erie and the other on the south side of the Welland River.³ Yet, by the 1880s the influx of immigrants (mostly from Ireland) helped Wainfleet's population rise to over 3,000 individuals.⁴

Urban centres grew by the mid-1800s, spurred by the establishment of the feeder canal, railway lines, improved roads, and steam powered mills. As the century progressed, people began moving out towards nearby urban areas like Brantford, Hamilton, and Toronto. Farm life was difficult in this rural southern Ontario township, and Wainfleet's population actually decreased in the early 1900s as people left to look for better opportunities. However, things changed once again in the 1920s and 30s as local tourism evolved, the shores of Lake Erie were subdivided and developed, and gradually became cherished vacation spots. While more and more 20th century Wainfleet residents worked in nearby cities like Port Colborne and Welland, a portion of the population remained employed in agriculture. Successful farmers consolidated land and while the total number of farms decreased over time, the size of farms in general has increased, aided by the introduction of more powerful modern farm equipment.

History of the Rathfon Inn within Wainfleet Township

The Ramey Family (1798 – 1804)

The first documentary evidence of the property on which the Rathfon Inn is located is found in the Abstract Index of Deeds showing a land grant from the British Crown to Casper

² Robert Gourlay, *Statistical Account of Upper Canada: compiled with a view to a grand system of emigration*, (London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1822), 456, accessed from the Internet Archive, https://archive.org/details/cihm_35937/page/n507

³ Gourlay, *Statistical Account of Upper Canada*, 451.

⁴ Township of Wainfleet, "History," accessed January 8, 2024, <https://www.wainfleet.ca/en/recreation-and-culture/history.aspx>

Ramey in 1798 for 250 acres in Lot 8, the Broken Front Concession bordering Lake Erie, as well as all of Concession 1, and part of Concession 2, in Wainfleet Township (Figure 1).⁵

TOWNSHIP OF WAINFLEET, LOT No. 8 in 1 st Concession.										
No. of Abstract	No. of Volume	No. of Instrument	Instrument	Its Date	Date of Registry	GRANTOR	GRANTEE	Quantity of Land	Consideration or Amount of Mortgage	REMARKS
1		11	Patent 16 th May	1798		Crowne	Gasper Renee	250 aas		Lot 8 in The Front Con. & front part of con 2
2	A	11	Br. B.	20 th Feb'y	1804	Casper Ramey	Michael Graybiel	182 aas. one rood and eighteen perch.		
3	W	11	6666 Br. B.	14 th Aug	1825	Michael Graybiel	John Graybiel	100 aas & 1/2 th Rood part of 7/8		

Figure 1 – Abstract Index of Lot 8 Concession 1, in Wainfleet Township, showing that Casper Ramey was granted 250 acres in Lot 8 in the Broken Front Concession bordering Lake Erie, all of Concession 1, and part of Concession 2. <https://www.onland.ca/ui/59/books/40964/viewer/732969899?page=9>

Many of Niagara’s Loyalist-era immigrants settled on land before being granted actual title by the registry office, so although the registered patent date is 1798, the Ramey family may have already settled there a few years prior. Casper Ramey (1757-1848) was originally from Pennsylvania and remained loyal to the British cause during the American Revolution.⁶ He and his wife Catherine Jemima (Van Blarcombe) Ramey along with their two young children found refuge in Welland County in 1788 near Humberstone township (modern day Port Colborne) next to their friends, the Zavitzes.⁷ While they owned the land, they did not build the large stone house that sits there today.

The Rameys ultimately chose to sell part of the land and settle elsewhere in Wainfleet, while still maintaining ownership of Lot 8 Concession 2 (Figure 2). Casper Ramey sold 182 acres of his Wainfleet Township farm on February 20th, 1804 to Michael Graybiel, a Pennsylvania German Mennonite blacksmith (Figure 1).⁸ This sale would have included Lot 8 in the Broken Front Concession bordering Lake Erie, as well as all of Concession 1. The Abstract Indexes show that soon after, Graybiel purchased a few other lots as well, including Lots 7, 9, and 17 in Concession 1 in Wainfleet Township.

⁵ Abstract indexes are property records created by the staff at the provincial Land Registry Office intended to serve as a guide to assist landowners, lawyers, and other individuals or institutions to locate the deeds and other documents related to any given property.

⁶ Records indicate multiple spellings of his name including “Caspar Reamy,” “Casper Remy,” and “Gasper Renee.”

⁷ A list of Upper Canada Land Petitions can be found online, transcribed by Robert R. Mutrie, *The Niagara Settlers*, last modified December 9, 2023, <https://sites.google.com/site/niagarasettlers/home>.

⁸ More specifically, the sale was for 182 acres, one “rood,” and eighteen perches. Rods and perches were British imperial units of measurement.

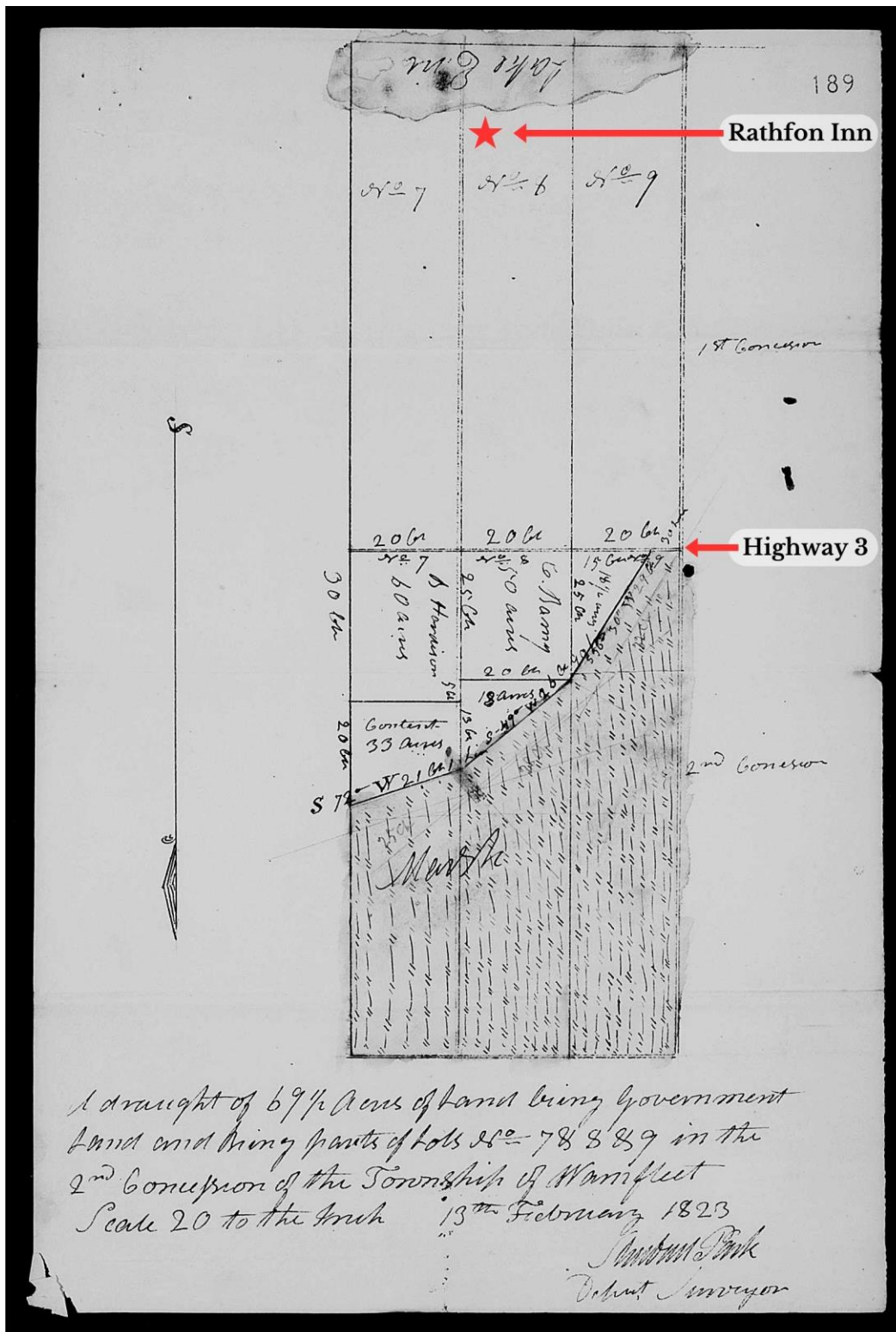


Figure 2 – An 1823 map from the Township Papers showing Lots 7, 8 & 9 in Concessions 1 & 2, Wainfleet Township, drafted by District Surveyor S. Park, with the Rathfon Inn and Highway 3 indicated. Casper Ramey, the original patentee for Lot 8 Concession 1 on which the Rathfon Inn sits, is still noted here as the owner of Lot 8 Concession 2. <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/185567>.

The Graybiel Family (1804 – 1874)

Michael Graybiel built a large stone house on the lakeshore, where he and his wife Mary (Hershey) Graybiel (m. 1806) lived with their children who were all born between 1807 – 1821.⁹ The grand home, known today as the Rathfon Inn, was made of local limestone which was abundant in that area as part of both the Onandoga and Bois Blanc geologic formations. Its floorboards were most likely sawn at the nearby Zavitz mill, which provided lumber to homes throughout the Sugarloaf Settlement.¹⁰ The house boasted massive logs beneath these floorboards, large attic beams joined by wooden pegs, and exterior amenities including a water well constructed in 1807.¹¹ The architectural design is essentially Georgian; a traditional Pennsylvania Dutch-style house with simple, natural symmetry and thick stone walls.

The date of construction is still a matter of debate. Many people have recognized the year 1797 as the official date, but there is little evidence to support this claim. Other records including local newspapers and print advertisements have suggested an interesting variety of different dates ranging from as early as 1777 to as late as 1805. The most trustworthy source on the home's construction date should be the Ontario Heritage Trust, which in 2004 provided the very general "dates of construction for the original house vary from 1777 through 1805."¹² Of course, when advertising a rustic old inn, an 18th century timestamp has a distinct charm. Technically, one could say that the Rathfon Inn property was settled by United Empire Loyalists in the 1790s. However, research points to the actual date of the stone house's construction being closer to 1805. Michael Graybiel, his widowed mother Barbara (Bowman) Graybiel, and his younger siblings immigrated to Upper Canada around 1803. Therefore, the house could only have been built in those early years of arrival.¹³

According to Michael's ledger which still exists today at the L.R. Wilson Archives in Port Colborne, the Graybiel family was heavily involved in local industry, providing blacksmith services to most of the families in the Sugarloaf Settlement area from 1804 to 1816.¹⁴ The value of his occupation as a blacksmith cannot be understated, as this job would have connected him with everyone in town who needed such services. From fixing wagons and broken weapons, to forming horseshoes, andirons and axes, many people in the Sugarloaf community benefitted from Graybiel's presence. In addition, Michael Graybiel was a squire for the town, meaning he

⁹ The 1842 Census of Canada, Upper Canada/Canada West lists Michael "Greybiel" as having lived in the province for 42 years, meaning he moved there from Pennsylvania around the year 1800. https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/item/?app=Census1842UC&op=img&id=004569584_00580

¹⁰ The Sugarloaf Settlement refers to modern day Port Colborne and the eastern part of Wainfleet Township.

¹¹ Donald G. Anger, *Scruples of Conscience: The War of 1812 in the Sugarloaf Settlement*, (2008), 15, L. R. Wilson Heritage Research Archives, accessed January 12, 2024.

¹² Corporation of the Township of Wainfleet, "By-Law No. 002-2004," accessed January 8, 2024, <https://www.heritagetrust.on.ca/en/oha/details/file?id=10179>

¹³ Anger, *Scruples of Conscience: The War of 1812 in the Sugarloaf Settlement*, 14. Anger cites that this construction date of 1805 has been "backed up by family tradition."

¹⁴ Donald Anger, "Jonathan Doan, The Patriarch of Yarmouth," *Canadian Quaker History Journal* 79 (2014): 20, accessed January 8, 2024, <https://cfha.info/journal79p11.pdf>.

held influence in local economic matters involving land ownership, settling disputes within the community, financial administration, and potentially even governance roles in local justice or law enforcement.¹⁵

Due to its strategic location along the lakeshore trail as well as its twelve spacious rooms, this home served as a resting place for many weary travellers.¹⁶ Sources suggest that Graybiel was a supporter of William Hamilton Merritt, the founder of the Welland Canal, and that he visited the property at times during the construction of the feeder canal in the 1820s.¹⁷ Even James Bruce, the Earl of Elgin and Governor General of the Province of Canada (which comprised parts of modern-day Ontario and Quebec) is reported to have stayed at the Graybiel residence while on a visit to the area in 1849 to “investigate dissension concerning the waterways.”¹⁸ During his term from 1847-1854, Bruce played a key role in introducing responsible government to Canada, meaning he emphasized the responsibility of the colonial government to be accountable to the people via their elected officials.

Local lore has connected other famous individuals to the site, including Marilyn Monroe during her filming of *Niagara* in 1952, and even notorious prohibition-era gangster Al Capone. Fact and fiction often blur when it comes to the stories of 200+ year-old old homes, tales uttered haphazardly like a game of telephone, and the Rathfon Inn is no exception. Perhaps the most common community legend is the claim that Upper Canadian Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe visited the farm on occasion to collect the settlement’s tax money from Graybiel. While Governor Simcoe did travel on foot down the Lakeshore Road from Fort Erie to Detroit twice during his tenure from 1791 – 1798, he does not mention a visit to the Graybiels in any of his accounts, despite often mentioning the names of the families with whom he and his traveling party engaged wherever they stopped to eat and rest.¹⁹ Simcoe returned to Britain in 1796 for health reasons, never to return. The glaring issue of the Graybiel family not actually living in Wainfleet until the 1800s also poses a problem with this story.

Not long after settlement, the residents of Niagara became faced with yet another war. During the War of 1812, many of the people in Wainfleet were pacifists, some receiving exemptions from service due to their being “manonists” aka of the Mennonite faith. A certificate exists for Michael’s sixteen-year-old brother John Graybiel, signed by three members of the

¹⁵ Harold Nigh, “The Lost Tribes of the Niagara Plain Folk,” *Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario* 4 no. 2 (1986): 15, accessed January 8, 2024, <http://www.mhso.org/sites/default/files/publications/Mennogesprach4-2.pdf>

¹⁶ The 1891 Census of Canada, Ontario, lists the occupants of the Rathfon Inn living in a two-storey stone house with 12 rooms. https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/item/?app=Census1891&op=img&id=30953_148156-00442

¹⁷ Wainfleet Historical Society, *Chronicles of Wainfleet Township: 200 years of history*, (1992): 554, courtesy of Local Histories Collection, Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary, accessed January 1, 2024, <https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/archive/Chronicles-of-Wainfleet-Township---200-years-of-history-2R3BF1FPLEHA0.html>.

¹⁸ Harold Nigh, “The Lost Tribes of the Niagara Plain Folk,” 15.

¹⁹ These travels along Lakeshore Road from Point Abino to Long Point and back took place in 1795. Ernest Cruikshank, “Lieutenant Governor Simcoe in Canada: A Chronological Record,” *Ontario Historical Society Papers and Records* 26 (1930): 34, accessed from Internet Archive January 13, 2024, <https://archive.org/details/papersrecords0000unse/mode/2up>.

congregation, exempting him from military duty.²⁰ In 1824, Michael Graybiel partitioned some of his land, selling the northern section of Lots 7 & 8 in Concession 1 to this same brother (Figure 1). Michael also had a son named John (1809-1873) who, like his father, was very involved in the affairs of the town. John was appointed a Niagara District Magistrate and member of the District Municipal Council, serving Wainfleet Township for over 25 years “in various capacities of assessor, collector, commissioner and warden.”²¹

Upon Michael’s death in 1851, the remaining 120 acres in the south part of Lot 8 which included the Graybiel’s grand stone home, along with some adjoining land in Lot 9, was passed to his oldest son Benjamin. Thus, the home remained in the Graybiel family for another generation. In the 1850s, land was sold in the northern portion of Lot 8 Concession 1 so that a railway line could be built through it. This conveyance was purchased by the Buffalo Brantford & Goderich Railway Co., which later became the Buffalo and Lake Huron (B & LH) line running from Buffalo, NY to Goderich, ON. This, along with the Great Western Railway line that went through Marshville, offered freight and passenger service to the rural areas of southern Niagara.

The B & LH line through the Graybiel property is visible in the 1862 Tremaine map of Welland County (Figure 3). The map also indicates the lakeshore road passing through just north of where the family’s grand stone house stood on the shores of Lake Erie. According to the 1861 Census of Canada West, Benjamin Graybiel lived there with his wife Barbara and their young daughter Jessie. His elderly, widowed mother Mary Graybiel lived with them, and they are listed as living in a two-storey stone house.²² Most houses in Wainfleet at this time were made of frame or logs, so this home would have been considered a luxury.

Sadly, Jessie Louisa Graybiel died in 1864 at age nine, and her father Benjamin a year later. Their 120-acre farm which spanned from just south of the railway tracks all the way down to the lakefront, with the adjoined land in Lot 9, was deeded in his will to his wife Barbara whom he appointed sole executrix. Barbara’s mother-in-law Mary moved out soon after, moving in with her daughter Catherine (Graybiel) Moldon and the Moldon family who lived just north of the railway tracks (Figure 4).²³ This left Barbara alone in the Graybiel stone home.

In 1874, Barbara Graybiel sold the family’s 142-acre farm which included parts of Lots 8 & 9 in Concession 1 to Jonas Augustine for \$7,600 (Figure 5). Like the Graybiels, the Augustines had lived in Wainfleet for decades at this point, and the families likely knew each other. Thus began the next era of life for this grand property.

²⁰ Port Colborne Historical & Marine Museum, “Mennonite Exemption Certificate – John Graybiel, 1812,” accessed January 8, 2024, <https://images.ourontario.ca/portcolbornemuseum/70082/data>.

²¹ Corporation of the Township of Wainfleet, “By-Law No. 002-2004.”

²² 1861 Census of Canada, Canada West, https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/item/?app=Census1861&op=img&id=4391954_00385

²³ The 1871 Census of Canada, Ontario, relates 88-year-old Mary “Grabell” living with the John & Catherine “Moulton” and 16-year-old Adelaide, farmers who lived in the northern part of Lot 8 Concession 1.



Figure 3 - Detail of Tremaine's map of the Counties of Lincoln and Welland, Canada West, 1862 showing Benjamin Graybiel as the landowner of Lot 8 Concession 1 and the Broken Front, as well as part of Lot 9, highlighted in yellow. There is no residence indicated on this map, but the red arrow points to where it would have stood. Digital reproduction: Library and Archives Canada, National Map Collection: NMC-19014. Brock University Map Collection, [Tremaine's map of the Counties of Lincoln and Welland, Canada West \(brocku.ca\)](http://brocku.ca)

Page 25 } Province of Ontario } District No. 18 } Sub-District G. N-2 }
 Census of 1871. } Schedule No. 1.—Nominal Return of the Living.

Numbered in the order of visitation.						Sex	Age	Born within last twelve months	Country or Province of Birth	Religion	Origin	Profession, Occupation or Trade	Married or widowed	Married within last twelve months	Instruction			Deaf & dumb	
Yards	Stables	Dwell- ing houses in con- struction	Dwell- ing houses with- in last year	Dwell- ing houses in- habited last year	Female										17	18	19		20
1						Margaret	F	25	0				M						
2						Alexander	M	3											
3						Ida	F	1											
4			182	102		Georg's Samuel	M	37	0	Baptist	German	Farmer	M						
5						June	F	40			English		M						
6						Leonidas	M	14											
7						Armentha	F	11											
8						Mary	F	7											
9						Baronada	F	3											
10						Alice	F	5											
11						Mary	F	77			German		M						
12			103	103		Grace Mary	F	52		Mennonite			M						
13			104	104		Woulton John	M	58		German	Catholic	German	Farmer	M					
14						Catherine	F	50	0	Mennonite			M						
15						Adalinda	F	16	0										
16						Grabel Mary	F	88					M						
17			105	105		Grabel Peter	M	23				Farmer	M						

Figure 4 – The 1871 census of Ontario lists Mary “Grabel” (Mennonite, born in Ontario, of German origin) age 50, widowed. Barbara Graybiel would have been a 50-year-old widow living on her own at this time, and she does not appear in the 1871 census, so this is perhaps a recording error. The other Mary “Grabel” (Mennonite, born in Germany, of German origin), age 88, widowed, was Barbara’s mother-in-law, the wife of the deceased Michael and mother of the deceased Benjamin. https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/item/?app=Census1871&op=img&id=4396746_00219

21	J	1107	Rochy	11 Aug 1874	12 Aug 1874	Barbara Graybiel	Jonas Augustine	142 acres	\$7,600	1101 above
22	J	1109	R. R.	11 Aug 1874	12 Aug 1874	Barbara Graybiel Widow	Jonas Augustine	142 acres	\$7,600	142 acres of lots 8 & 9 Concession 1 devised to the said Barbara Graybiel by the late Benjamin Graybiel except 15 acres sold to John Moldon
23	J	1109	Priny	11 Aug 1874	12 Aug 1874	Jonas Augustine	Barbara Graybiel	142 acres	\$7,600	1108 above
24	J	1701	Priny	23 July	Aug 3	John M. C.	D. D. A. D.			

Figure 5 – Abstract Index of Lot 8 Concession 1, in Wainfleet Township, showing Barbara Graybiel (widow) with a bargain & sale in 1874 to Jonas Augustine for 142 acres for \$7,600. The land included “the whole of those parts of lots 8 & 9 Concession 1 devised to the said Barbara ‘Graybol’ by the late Benjamin ‘Graybol’ except 15 acres sold to John Moldon.” <https://www.onland.ca/ui/59/books/40959/viewer/730938026?page=11>

The Augustine Family (1874 – 1892)

Jonas Augustine did not own the property outright. Rather, he mortgaged part of the farm from Barbara Graybiel for \$4,300 at a 6% interest rate, paying it off by 1882.

The 1876 Illustrated Historical County Atlas map of Wainfleet Township shows a residence and associated cultivated land on the Rathfon Inn property between Lakeshore Road and Lake Erie (Figure 6). This is the first time the stone house is shown on a map, despite written evidence that it existed long before this.²⁴ Soon after this atlas was published, the 1881 Census of Canada lists Jonas Augustine, German Mennonite farmer, age 67, with his wife Elizabeth (Fares) Augustine, age 55, and daughters Elizabeth, age 36 and Priscila, age 34, living on the farm.



Figure 6 – Illustrated Historical Atlas of the Counties of Lincoln and Welland, Ont. Toronto : H.R. Page & Co., 1876. Rathfon Inn indicated, Lot 8, Concession 1, [The Canadian County Atlas Digital Project \(mcgill.ca\)](http://mcgill.ca).

²⁴ In addition to the 1862 Tremaine map shown on page 9, the house does not appear on popular early 19th century maps including the 1815 Map of the District of Upper Canada by Lieutenant W. A. Nesfield, the 1818 “The Niagara Frontier: by Francis Hall, or the 1819 “Plan of the central part of the Province of Upper Canada shewing the seat of war in the years 1812, 1813, & 1814.” Unknown author.

Jonas Augustine leased gas drilling rights to his property in 1890 to the Provincial Natural Gas and Fuel Company (PNG & Fuel Co.). The PNG & Fuel Co. laid pipes throughout the southern parts of the Niagara peninsula including Wainfleet, Port Colborne, and Fort Erie, supplying gas to surrounding areas and even as far as Buffalo.²⁵ Augustine's neighbours formed similar agreements with the gas companies around this time, such as the Erie County Natural Gas & Fuel Co., the Bertie Natural Gas Co. and the Mutual Natural Gas Co.

In 1891, Jonas and Elizabeth Sr. with their two adult daughters Elizabeth Jr. and Priscilla lived in the grand stone home on the lake along with two young domestic labourers. George Doland, age 21, was employed as a farm hand and young Louisa Crysler, age 23, was employed as a "general servant" completing household tasks. Domestic servitude was common at this time and the aging Augustines who were in a financial position to afford the help, no doubt needed the extra assistance on the farm. In fact, this was not even the first time that hired help was employed there. In the 1842 census there was one "male servant" listed in the Graybiel family.²⁶

Things changed once again when Priscilla Augustine married American Mennonite preacher and widowed father John Rathfon Jr. in 1891, residing together a year later in her family's large stone lakefront home.

CENSUS OF CANADA, 1891. Province: Ontario. District No. 94, March. S. District 1, Township of Wainfleet. Enumerated by me on the 18 day of April, 1891. Charles Hauer, Enumerator.

Males					Females					Profession, Occupation or Trade										Institutions					
Age	Sex	Married	Single	Widowed	Age	Sex	Married	Single	Widowed	Profession, Occupation or Trade	Employment	Wage Earned	Completed	Unemployed	Boarding	Hotel	Wagon	Ship	Other	Other	Other	Other	Other	Other	Other
1																									
2																									
3																									
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Figure 7 – 1891 Census of Ontario for Wainfleet Township showing Jonas Augustine, age 77, and wife Elizabeth Augustine, age 65, living with their daughters Elizabeth 46, and Priscilla 44, as well as the two Ontario-born, Mennonite domestic labourers George Doland 21 and Louisa Crysler 23. They lived in a two-storey stone home with twelve rooms. https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item/?app=Census1891&op=img&id=30953_148156-00442

²⁵ By 1926, there were approximately 466 natural gas wells functioning throughout Welland County, plus an additional 150-200 privately owned wells. Niagara Region, *Niagara Region Archaeological Management Plan: APPENDIX B – Historical Thematic Analysis*, 2021, accessed January 1, 2024, <https://www.niagararegion.ca/projects/archaeological-management-plan/pdf/historical-thematic-analysis.pdf>

²⁶ 1842 Census of Canada, Upper Canada/Canada West, https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item/?app=Census1842UC&op=img&id=004569584_00580

The Rathfon Family (1892 – 1925)

When John Rathfon moved to Canada from the United States, he was approximately fifty years old. He had already lived a very full life up to that point – a veteran of the Civil War by his early twenties, a Mennonite church leader at age twenty-six, and having fathered thirteen children by his early forties. When his wife Annie passed away, leaving him with many little ones to care for, it was Wainfleet’s Priscilla Augustine who stepped in.

RATHVON, JOHN Sept. 19, 1844- s John-Wid. Catharine Pfoutz	6. Ezra, July 10, 1875-
m Mar. 16, 1865 Anna Elizabeth Erb, Apr. 26, 1844-May 11, 1886. dau. John-Maria Witmer.	7. Horace, Aug. 24, 1877- m Dec. 3, 1903 Anna Kramer, May 29, 1879- dau. David-Margaret
1. Anna M., Jan. 9, 1866-Mar. 19, 1880	8. Elmer, Aug. 24, 1877-Sept. 13, 1877
2. John F., Mar. 16, 1867-Apr. 15, 1890	9. Ida, July 4, 1879-May 3, 1889
3. Catherine J., Nov. 16, 1868- m Feb. 10, 1896 Emanuel Reeb, Apr. 22, 1862- s Andrew-Margaret Perlett.	0. Benjamin, July 11, 1880-
4. Levi, Feb. 7, 1872-July 22, 1872	a. Clayton, Aug. 18, 1881-
5. Clara, May 4, 1873-June 23, 1897	b. Alice, Dec. 31, 1883-
	c. Lillie, Mar. 22, 1885-
(OVER)	-Herr Gen. #5079, p.507,8

Figure 8 – This record from the Lancaster, Pennsylvania, U.S., Mennonite Vital Records, 1750-2014 lists the thirteen children born to John Rathfon and his wife Anna Elizabeth Erb Rathfon between 1866-1885.

John and Priscilla Rathfon continued to farm the land on their property, aided by six of the original thirteen Rathfon children. In addition, Priscilla’s older sister Libbie (Elizabeth) Augustine continued living with them, listed in the 1901 Census of Canada as a “lodger.”²⁷ John himself was listed as a “thresher & farmer,” his son Ezra (25) was also a thresher, and son Horace (23) was gas driller. Both boys were employed outside the home in these capacities but were likely involved in daily chores on the farm, along with their younger brothers Benjamin (20) and Clayton (19), who were listed simply as “farmers sons.” This busy family also included two daughters named Alice (17) and Lily (16), as well as one domestic labourer, a 17-year-old Irish Canadian Methodist girl named Gertrude Elliot (Figure 9).

By their mid-sixties, John, Priscilla, and Elizabeth remained living in the home, and all the children had moved out. It was a quiet household once again. When the first Canadians left to fight overseas in WWI, John was pushing 70. Despite being a Mennonite, he is recorded as having completed service in the 44th Ohio Volunteer Infantry as a young man during the American Civil War. At that time, it was not unheard of for some Mennonites to take up arms, despite their pacifist roots (Figure 10).

²⁷ 1901 Census of Canada, Ontario, <https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item/?app=Census1901&op=img&id=z000066571>.

Sex		Color		Religion		Married		Year of birth		Country or place of birth		Year of immigration to Canada		Year of naturalization		Racial or Tribal origin		Nationality		Profession, occupation, trade or name of firm of each person		Wage corner	
1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10		11		12	
11	W	W	W	Head	M	13	Mar	1844	56	London	1866	✓	Irish	English	Methodist								
				Wife	F	11	"	1838	63	Irish		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	14	Nov	1869	31	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	23	"	1878	25	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	14	Jul	1887	12	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	29	Jul	1880	20	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	3	Feb	1899	21	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	18	Dec	1887	18	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	10	Mar	1881	24	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	25	Nov	1863	37	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	17	Dec	1880	30	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	11	Mar	1880	27	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	19	Oct	1874	26	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	1	Dec	1874	24	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	20	Feb	1871	26	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	10	Jan	1879	24	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	2	Apr	1880	28	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	11	Jul	1880	29	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	16	Apr	1871	17	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	31	Dec	1853	17	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	22	Mar	1855	16	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	11	Apr	1883	17	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	14	Feb	1878	26	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	2	Nov	1861	49	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	4	July	1878	26	"		✓	"	"	"								
				Son	M	30	Jul	1870	24	"		✓	"	"	"								

Figure 9 – 1901 Census of Ontario for Wainfleet Township showing John Rathfon, age 56, and wife Priscilla Rathfon 54, living with sister Elizabeth “Libbie” Augustine 56, and John’s children Ezra 25, Horace 23, Benjamin 20, Clayton 19, Alice 17 and Lily 16, along with Irish Canadian Methodist domestic labourer Gertrude Elliot 17. <https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item/?app=Census1901&op=img&id=z000066571>

RESIDENCE	NAME	AGE IN 1862	WHITE OR COLORED	PROFESSION, OCCUPATION OR TRADE	MARRIED OR UNMARRIED	PLACE OF BIRTH (Naming the State, Territory, or Country)	FORMER MILITARY SERVICE	REMARKS
Clark County	Raymond Henry	22	White	Laborer	Single	Virginia	44 th O.V.I.	1
"	Heed Calvin	27	"	Woodsman	Single	Ohio	1 st Miss Buff.	2
Bethel Tp	Ross David	32	"	Farmer	"	"	110 th O.V.I.	3
"	Ross Joseph	28	"	"	Single	"	16 th O.V.I.	4
"	Rhoden John	33	"	Laborer	Married	"	33 rd O.V.I.	5
"	Rathfon John	20	"	Farmer	"	Pa	44 th "	6
"	Rau Joseph	35	"	Laborer	Single	Ohio	Carabry	7
"	Roll Isaac	28	"	"	"	"	110 th O.V.I.	8
"	Ruhl Christoph	33	"	"	"	Germany		9

Figure 10 – 1863 American Civil War draft registration list for Bethel, Clarke County in the state of Ohio showing farmer John Rathfon, age 20, having served in the 44th Ohio Volunteer Infantry. <https://www.ancestry.ca/discoveryui-content/view/1379229:1666>

In 1918, the Township of Wainfleet improved the Lakeshore Road passing through their property, purchasing part of it from them for \$200.²⁸ The land along the shores of Lake Erie were becoming more desirable by the 1920s, and Priscilla Rathfon divided six small sections in the very southwest corner of Lot 8 Concession 1, granting them to six different buyers in 1924, each with a “right of way to Lake Erie” according to the Abstract Index. The Rathfons lived there for a little while longer, finally in their old age deciding to sell the property in 1925 for \$16,000 and moving a couple kilometres away to the small hamlet of Bethel, Port Colborne, and acting as mortgagees for a new subdivision in Lots 8 & 9, Concession 1.²⁹

The Hyman Family (1925 – 1935)

The Peace Bridge was completed in 1927, and the rise of the automobile allowed families to travel longer distances. Tourism along Niagara’s beaches boomed in the ‘20s as steamships carried tourists from places like Toronto, Hamilton, and Buffalo to piers and parks in Grimsby, Port Dalhousie, and Crystal Beach. Beachfront properties popped up near the Rathfon Inn in the 1930s, visited by Canadians and Americans alike. Bernard and Eva Hyman were two such Americans. He was a property developer from Buffalo who purchased the property and surrounding area to create a subdivision containing 84 separate lots within Lots 8 & 9 Concession 1 (Figure 11). They named the subdivision “Rathfons Point.” Concerned about the class of neighbours that would soon be joining them in the new subdivision, Eva Hyman asked her husband to reserve the lots across the street “so that shacks would not be built on them.”³⁰

The Hymans, also known as the “Hyndmans,” kept the Rathfon house as a summer home, moving there in 1928 and making a few improvements including a four-car garage of matching material and a grey limestone wall around the property which still stands today and is included as part of its heritage designation as being “of architectural and historic value and interest” (Figures 12 & 13).³¹ This thick wall became a landmark in the area, being “set on a deep foundation and stones were hauled in, some by horse and wagon, to complete it.”³²

Bernard Hyndman declared bankruptcy in the great stock market crash of 1929 and lost the house. He and Eva divorced soon after, and legal battles ensued over rightful ownership of the property. The house remained empty for the next decade and was exposed to vandalism, the windows boarded shut, lawn overgrown, and most of the home’s fixtures either damaged or stolen.³³

²⁸ The Abstract Index of Lot 8 Concession 1 in Wainfleet Twp., Book B, page 389, cites the Grant being part of the “Lakeshore Rd. adjoining for a highway,” <https://www.onland.ca/ui/59/books/40943/viewer/998443912?page=139>.

²⁹ The Abstract Index of Lot 8 Concession 1 in Wainfleet Twp., Book C, page 326, cites that in 1925, John & Priscilla Rathfon sold to Edward J. Hill part of Lot 8 for \$3,500 and the other part to real estate broker Ward A. Winger for \$12,500. <https://www.onland.ca/ui/59/books/40977/viewer/696461498?page=25>

³⁰ Hyman v. Hyman, 1934 CanLII 324 (SCC), accessed January 13, 2024, <https://canlii.ca/t/gw9kz>.

³¹ Corporation of the Township of Wainfleet, “By-Law No. 002-2004.”

³² Wainfleet Historical Society, *Chronicles of Wainfleet Township: 200 years of history*, 97.

³³ Sokal, Darius. “It’s had many occupants but Rathfon still a special place.” *The Tribune*. April 9, 1992. L. R. Wilson Heritage Research Archives. Accessed January 12, 2024.

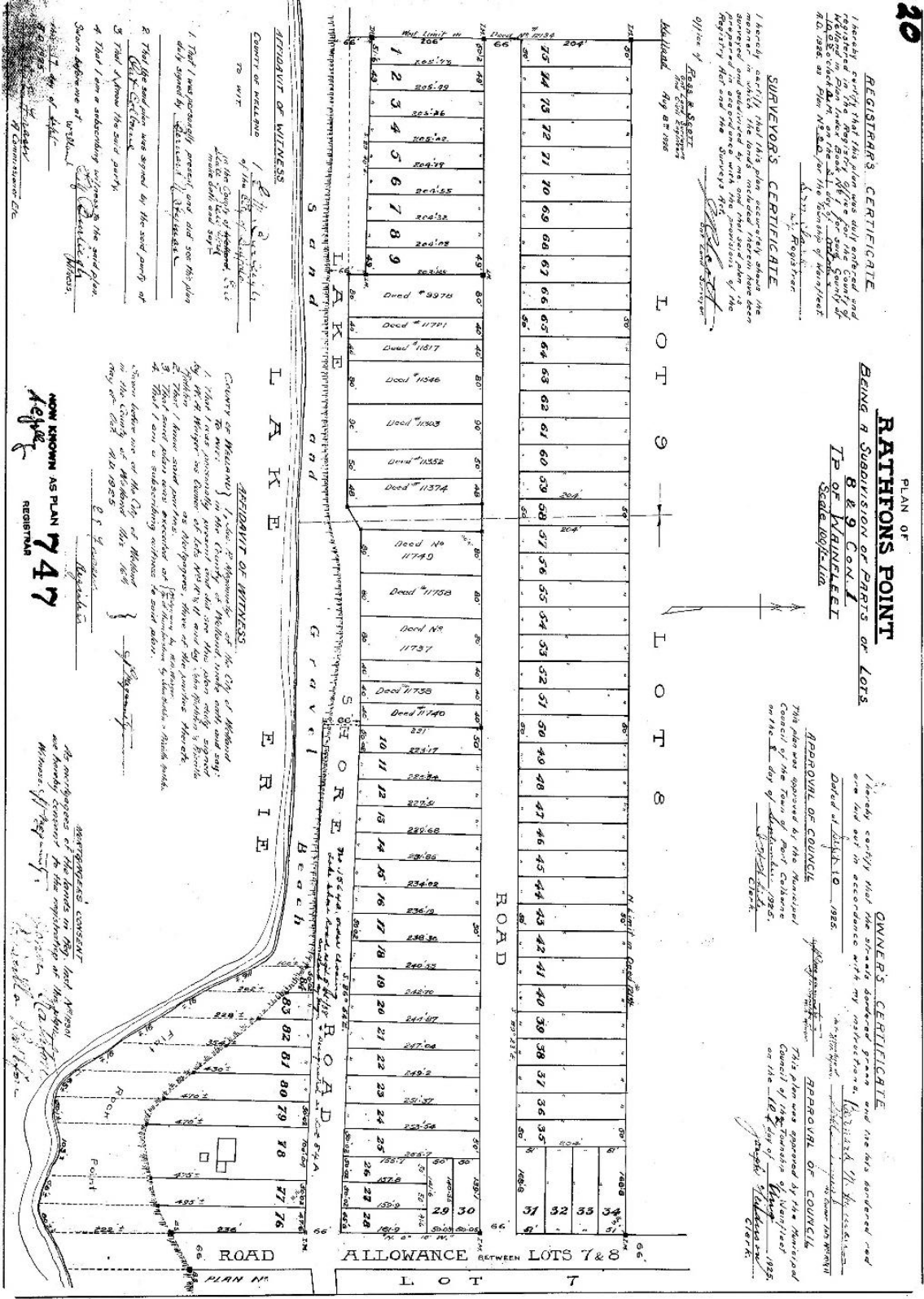


Figure 11 – LRO Plan (PL747) for a subdivision in parts of Lots 8 & 9, Concession 1, in Wainfleet Township called “Rathfons Point,” purchased through Onland. <https://www.onland.ca/ui/>

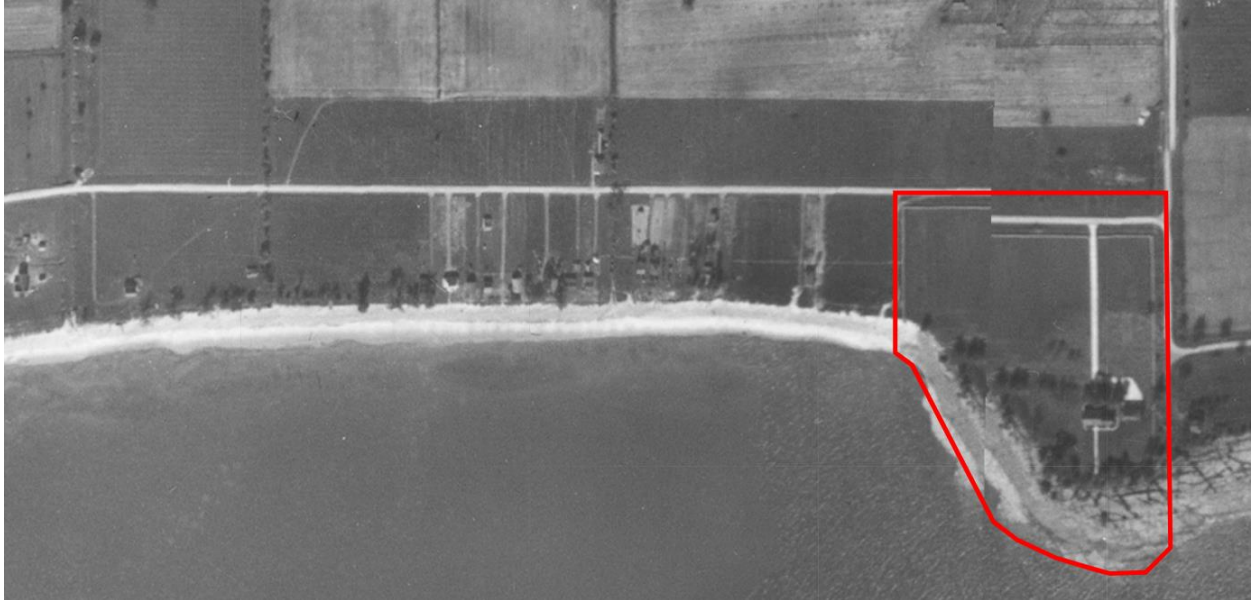


Figure 12 - Detail of Google Earth image from 1934 aerial mosaic, prior to the construction of the subdivision at “Rathfons Point.” The Rathfon Inn is visible, as well as the garage and limestone fence additions (built c. 1925). Brock University Map, Data & GIS Library. Niagara 1934 Aerial Mosaic. <https://arcg.is/1HLbqa>



Graybiel House/Rathfon Inn, early 1940's after connecting link to garage (built 1925) was added.
Courtesy of Miss Nora Reid.

Figure 13 – Photograph of the Rathfon Inn in the early 1940s after the connecting link from the house to the garage was built. Wainfleet Historical Society, *Chronicles of Wainfleet Township: 200 years of history*, (1992): 555, courtesy of Local Histories Collection, Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary, accessed January 1, 2024, <https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/archive/Chronicles-of-Wainfleet-Township---200-years-of-history-2R3BF1FPLEHA0.html>.

Whilst abandoned, the Rathfon home found itself in the centre of a scandal as a group of individuals were captured there by police and found in court to be in breach of the Excise Tax Act. On July 14, 1936, a seizure was made of a large commercial still found in the garage. In addition, police found on the premises three 1,000-gallon vats containing 2,000 gallons of mash, 75 gallons of spirits, and “numerous other articles.”³⁴ Apparently, suspicion was aroused when passersby were able to detect the smell of the home brew. In addition, neighbours noticed dogs on the premises, despite the house being abandoned, and two three-inch pipes were discovered leading from the house into the lake.

A new oil burning furnace, which would have been expensive at that time, heated the garage while electric motors pumped the refuse from the still through the pipes and into the lake. Four men were arrested including Joseph Clark of Toronto, Theodore Meyers of Buffalo, Max Frederick of Fort Erie, and Ridgeway real estate agent William Bowen. Bowen ran away during the arrest and was later picked up by police, leaving behind a coat with receipts for \$1,000 that proved he was renting the premises. According to the RCMP report: “Charges were laid against all four, resulting in the conviction of Meyers, Clark and Bowen. Meyers was fined \$200 and costs or four months; Clark \$500 and costs or six months; and Bowen \$750 and costs or six months, but was later successful on appeal against his conviction, with a reversal of the decision. The charge against Frederick was dismissed as he was able to prove a bona fide reason for being on the premises, his claim being that he was merely repairing the water pump.”³⁵

The Zielski Family (1941 – 1981)

The next couple to leave their mark on the Rathfon Inn were Edward and Margaret Zielski, who purchased the dilapidated house and accompanying nine acres in 1941 for \$7,800.³⁶ They took four years to restore the home including its guest rooms and impressive dining room, and combined the house and garage to create more space (Figure 13).³⁷ They turned the property into an inn, using the Rathfon name as a tribute to the last family to have lived there. They upgraded the outdoor gardens and added a sundeck overlooking the beach (Figure 14). They also added a third floor to the house to meet the growing customer demand, so that there were now seventeen rooms, each with a private bathroom. One of the most impressive changes was a large gas well drilled there in the 1950s, which heated the entire inn and allowed for year-round operation. This would have been a huge upgrade from the out-of-style woodburning fireplaces that heated the house prior to this time. They updated the main entranceway as well, lining the drive with Japanese crab apple trees that brought forth beautiful blooms each spring (Figures 15 & 16).

³⁴ Dominion of Canada, *Report of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for the Year Ended March 31, 1937*, (Ottawa: J. O. Patenaude, I. S. O., 1937), 131, accessed January 13, 2024, <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/lbrr/archives/rcmp-rrcmp-1937-eng.pdf>

³⁵ Dominion of Canada, *Report of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for the Year Ended March 31, 1937*, 132.

³⁶ This included lots 18-30 and lots 76-84 in LRO Plan (PL747) in Wainfleet Township called “Rathfons Point.”

³⁷ Wainfleet Historical Society, *Chronicles of Wainfleet Township: 200 years of history*, 554.

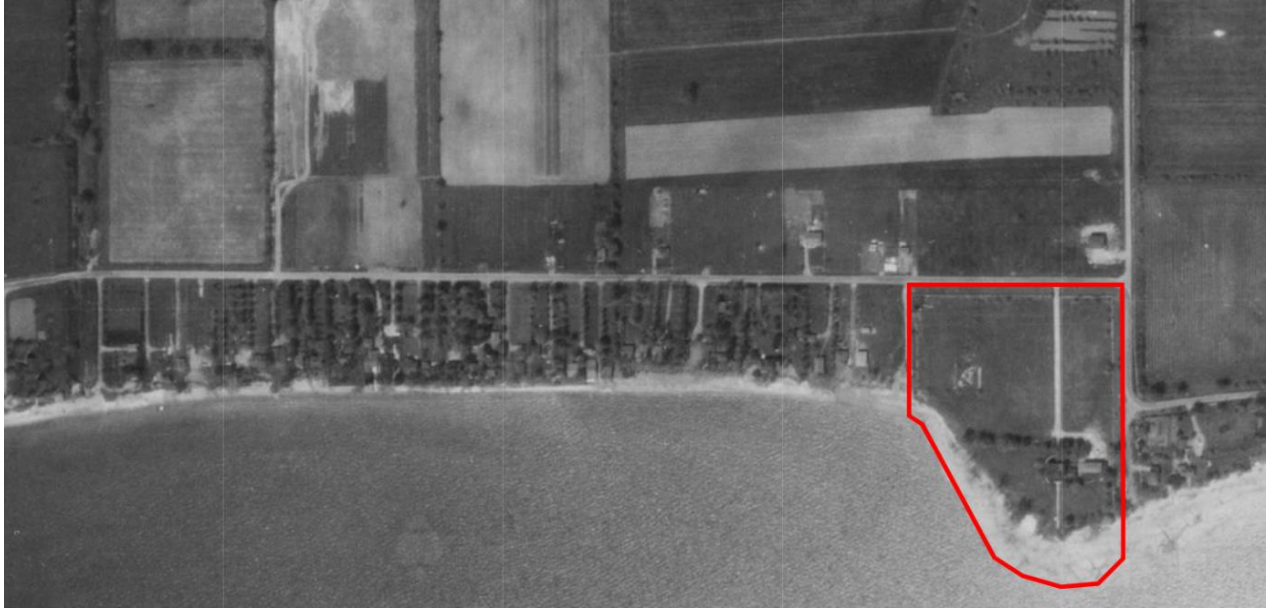


Figure 14 - Detail of Google Earth image from 1954 aerial photo. There are a few minor differences from 1934, including the addition connecting the house to the garage, some landscaping, and the construction of a terrace on the cliff's edge. <https://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=0118429cf26941419d0bbf43a3908058>

The Zielskis advertised the new Rathfon Inn using postcards, newspaper ads, and tourist guidebook publications in both Canada and the US throughout the mid-20th century (Figures 17-21). Here is an example from the *Buffalo Courier Express*.

May 30th, 1963- "*The Rathfon Inn... If you haven't yet made any plans for summer holiday... or if you are just in the mood for an early summer relaxing weekend... why not plan to drive over with Mother to Rathfon Inn... make a special occasion of your dinner party and then investigate the charms of this unique spot on the shores of Lake Erie? We are sure you will approve the special mood that is Rathfon... made warm and delightful by the hosts... Margaret and Eddie who have a way of pampering their guests all year round... The rooms and suites are very attractive and the utmost in comfort... there are spacious lawns and trees for gazing and a sun deck high up over the lake... Everyone who goes to Rathfon Inn comes away enthusing about the meals... prepared in Margaret's kitchen and served in that many windowed dining room. They even pack delicacies for guests who want to take trips and picnic to spots near by... French Style Service.*"

One of the themes permeating this era is the communal nature of the site, and the fact that it was enjoyed by so many different people. This included weddings, anniversaries, family reunions, corporate retreats, conferences, and more. Brock University faculty met there several times in the 1960s, members of the Ontario Waste Management Corporation met there for a two-day seminar in 1983, and Michael Graybiel's fourth great-granddaughter even chose the Rathfon Inn as her wedding reception location.³⁸

³⁸ Brock University Archives & Special Collections, "Spring conference 1966-1967, 1969," Office of the University President Sous fonds: Dr. James A. Gibson, accessed January 9, 2024, <http://hdl.handle.net/10464/4016>, Lovell,



Figure 15 – A postcard from the Hultink Family collection showing the main driveway, c. 1960. The back reads “This view shows the Japanese Crab-apple trees in a display of breathtaking red and pink as they line the drive from the main entranceway. The Rathfon offers superb cuisine in the elegant dining room and caters to banquets and conventions. The ‘Old Canada’ touch of the building and lounge is further enhanced by the spacious floral gardens leading to the lake and private beach. Rathfon Inn is located in the fabulous Erie East region and is less than 30 minutes from the International Peace Bridge.”



Figure 16 - Detail of Google Earth image from 1965 aerial photo. The Japanese crab apple trees clearly line the driveway, and the parking lot has been extended. <https://map.library.brocku.ca/airphoto/1965/JPEG/19346-108.jpg>

Ken, “Bulldozers Chart Rathfon Inn Course,” Email, September 3, 2006, L. R. Wilson Heritage Research Archives, accessed January 12, 2024, and Ontario Waste Management Corporation, Industrial Waste Management Community Seminar, Port Colborne, Rathfon Inn June 17-18, 1983: Seminar Report, 1983.

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 Ont. 21 Miles
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 Bridge off High-
 way Number 9,
 on Lake Erie.

Figure 17 – Advertisements from the *Buffalo Courier Express* throughout the 1950s and 60s.

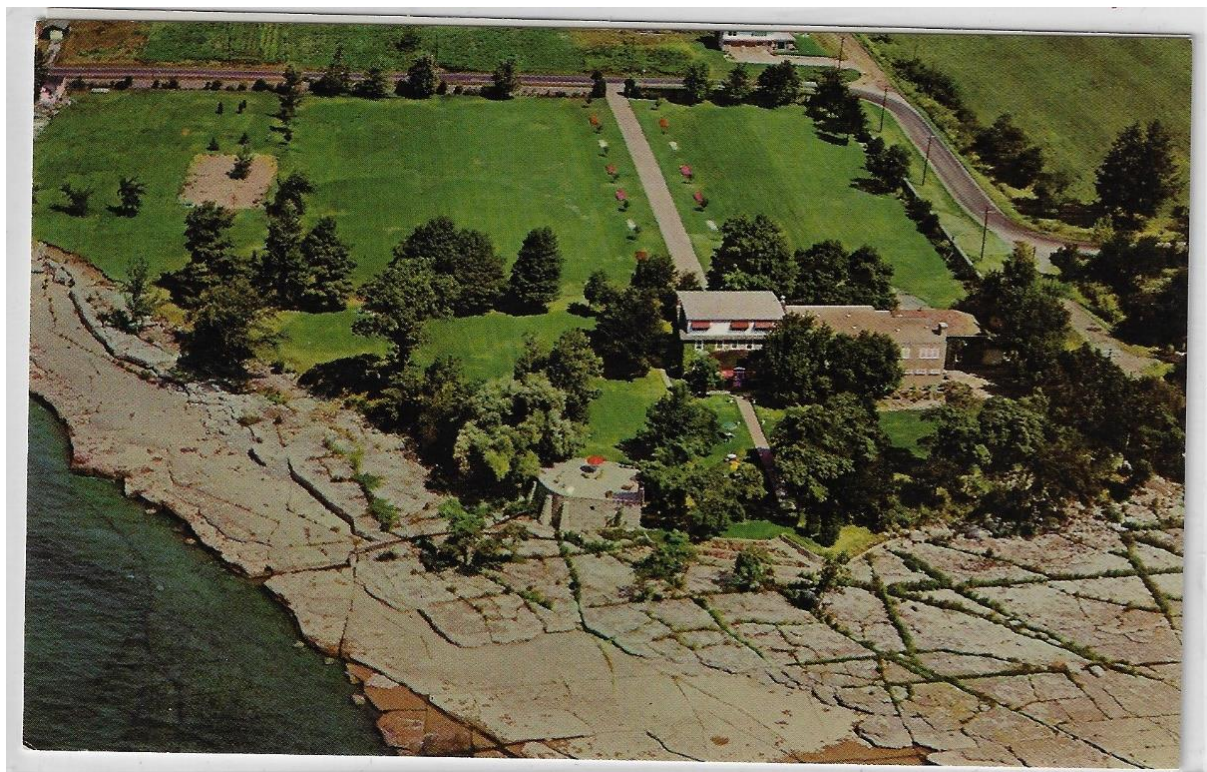


Figure 18 – A postcard from the Hultink Family collection with an aerial photo of the Rathfon Inn, facing north, c. 1960. The back reads “This aerial view shows the Rathfon Inn and the 9 acres of spacious grounds surrounding it. Lush foliage, beautiful lawns, and a new sun deck patio overlooking an excellent and safe swimming area, all combine to give the best facilities for a never-to-be-forgotten vacation.”



Figure 19 – A postcard from the Hultink Family collection showing the updated dining room, c. 1960. The back reads “Shown here, is the main dining room overlooking beautiful Lake Erie, where a party of 2 or 200, can enjoy the finest food available, served in an atmosphere of modern elegance, with a touch of old Upper Canada graciousness. This dining room offers the ultimate in fine cuisine and comfort for guests and visitors alike.”



Figure 20 – A postcard from the Hultink Family collection showing the updated guest suites, c. 1960. The back reads “This is one of the many large and tastefully decorated guest rooms, with full windows overlooking the lake. Completely soundproofed, fully-tiled baths with pastel fixtures, and comfortably furnished, these rooms leave nothing to be desired by guests, whether for a week or a day. In the evening, the cool breezes from the lake will lull you to sleep and make your visit one never to be forgotten.”

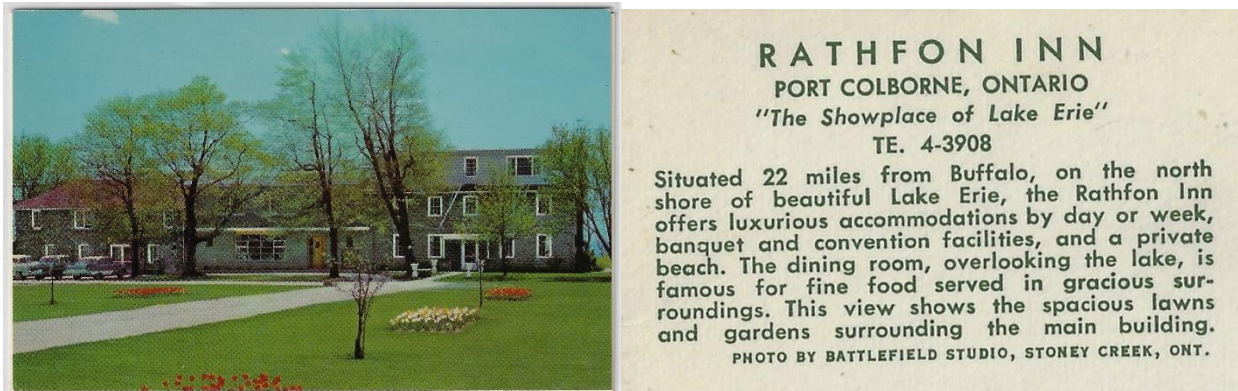


Figure 21 – A postcard from the Hultink Family collection showing the front façade of the Rathfon Inn, and accompanying text on the back, c. 1960.

The Rathfon Inn also catered to different women’s groups during the Zielski era. For example, the Women’s Literary Club of St. Catharines, a non-profit social organization composed of women from the St. Catharines and surrounding areas, visited and took photos in their classy attire in front of the house during the mid-20th century.³⁹ Another noteworthy individual who visited the Rathfon Inn was Miss Canada 1956, Dorothy Moreau of Quebec. She was a professional singer and had dinner with local politicians at the Inn prior to her opening the Jaycee’s Home Show in Port Colborne. This event was captured in the local newspaper.⁴⁰



³⁹ Brock University Archives & Special Collections, Women’s Literary Club of St. Catharines, Item Set, accessed January 9, 2024, <https://exhibits.library.brocku.ca/s/women-s-literary-club-of-st-catharines/item-set/4085>.

⁴⁰ No author, “Those at the Dinner,” *The Tribune*, no date, L. R. Wilson Heritage Research Archives, accessed January 12, 2024.



Figure 21 – Undated mid-20th century photographs showing a group of women from the Women’s Literary Club of St. Catharines visiting the Rathfon Inn as one of their club pilgrimages. Brock University Archives & Special Collections. [Women’s Literary Club of St. Catharines Item Set](#).

The Past Four Decades (1982 - 2024)

In the 1980s, Edward and Margaret Zielski sold the Rathfon Inn, and the property passed through the hands of various new owners, restaurant managers and investor groups for years afterwards. Each one ran the site as an Inn, still drawing a clientele from throughout Niagara and Western New York, all of them promising to update, refurbish and turn the Inn into a successful business once again.

At first, it was Fred and Roberta Cash who purchased the property in 1981. They did not stay for long and not much is known about those years, other than that during the production of an ‘81 movie, the Cashes claim that American actor Chad Everett and his colleagues stayed at the Inn.⁴¹ In 1983, the Rathfon Inn was sold to Toronto hotelier Ray Domenico and

⁴¹ Joan Ellsworth, “The History of Port Colborne’s Rathfon Inn,” *The Port Colborne News*, January 19, 1983, L. R. Wilson Heritage Research Archives, accessed January 12, 2024.

management difficulties forced it to close a year later. It was given new life once again by the Lorenzi Group, who owned the Inn from 1986-1990 and added some modern touches such as air conditioning.⁴² In '86, a couple could stay at the Inn, sunbathing on the stone terrace and enjoying the heated pool or a cool lake swim, for \$60 per night.⁴³ The Rathfon Inn was sold once again in 1990 to the trio of Mike Kalezic, Jim Sinclair, and Bob Jomborvic, who subsequently sold it to Toronto investor Myer Betel in 1991. By this time, only one of the original four fireplaces remained, with its chimney removed. Originally the house had "four fireplaces placed kitty-corner in four rooms so that one chimney served them all."⁴⁴ During Betel's brief ownership, the Inn's restaurant area adopted an Asian flare under the management of Tina Chan and her husband Wayne. Elegant hand painted murals illustrated both the larger and smaller dining room walls; the traditional artwork flown in directly from China. Later in the '90s, the inn's manager Lee Carr, president of the Rathfon Development Group Inc., reached out to the community, asking for mementos of the home. These photographs, diaries, postcards, letters, and other memorabilia were to be reproduced as décor for the building, as keepsakes and memories of the house's almost 200-year history.⁴⁵

Needless to say, these were some tumultuous times for the Rathfon Inn as it faced years of rapid turnover, change, and uncertainty. The old stone home somehow survived years of desertion in the 1930s and years of instability in the 1980s and 90s and remains today as an extraordinary testament to Niagara's early colonial history, having served as a family farm and a community gathering place for over two centuries. In addition, the nine acres of property remains relatively untouched, safeguarding thousands of years' worth of Indigenous artifacts. For these reasons, it is a Niagara gem and a place worth visiting.

The property has been owned by the Hultink family since the 1990s, and they have maintained ownership since then. They made several upgrades to the interior, and turned the coach house into a separate living quarters. The home has continued to host large groups of people over the past three decades for occasions including weddings, anniversaries, proms, picnics, and more. Today there are thirteen bedrooms, each with its own bathroom, a 2-bedroom apartment, a 2-bedroom owner suite on the 3rd floor, and the coach house. Historically, the Rathfon Inn has proven to function best when used as a family estate, well-loved and cared for by the people living there. Similarly, it thrives as a host location for the community, an idyllic place for people to come together and enjoy one another's company. Lord willing, may there be many more memorable times to come.

⁴² No Author, "Rathfon Inn changes hands but keeps tradition," *The Guardian Express*, January 13, 1990, L. R. Wilson Heritage Research Archives, accessed January 12, 2024.

⁴³ Harvey Curell, "Rathfon Inn a Restful Stop," *Toronto Sun*, September 17, 1986, L. R. Wilson Heritage Research Archives, accessed January 12, 2024.

⁴⁴ Wainfleet Historical Society, *Chronicles of Wainfleet Township: 200 years of history*, 554.

⁴⁵ No Author, "Rathfon Inn Looking to Retrieve History," *The Tribune*, no date, L. R. Wilson Heritage Research Archives, accessed January 12, 2024.

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