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A glossary of definitions for the Love Canal



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Background Information

Love Canal is probably the country's most notorious and infamous hazardous waste site. It wasn't the first. It wasn't the worst. But it did grab headlines, draw attention, and stimulate scientists, industrial leaders, politicians, government officials, and grassroots activists.

The Love Canal neighborhood is in the southeast section of the La Salle area of Niagara Falls, New York. William T. Love, an 1890's visionary and entrepreneur, sought to develop a planned industrial community, Model City, in the area. Waters from the Niagara River were to be routed around the Niagara escarpment (the other famous attraction of the region, Niagara Falls) to produce cheap hydroelectric power.

Model City never happened, but work on the canal to transport waters from the Niagara River did. In 1942, Hooker Chemicals and Plastics Corporation purchased the site of the Love Canal. Between 1942 and 1953 Hooker Chemical disposed of about 22,000 tons of mixed chemical wastes into the Love Canal. Shortly after Hooker ceased use of the site, the land was sold to the Niagara Falls School Board for a price of \$1.00. In 1955, the 99th Street Elementary School was constructed on the Love Canal property and opened its doors to students. Subsequent development of the area would see hundreds of families take up residence in the suburban, blue-collar neighborhood of the Love Canal.

Unusually heavy rain and snowfalls in 1975 and 1976 provided high groundwater levels in the Love Canal area. Portions of the Hooker landfill subsided, 55-gallon drums surfaced, ponds and other surface water areas became contaminated, basements began to ooze an oily residue, and noxious chemical odors permeated the area. Physical evidence of chemical corrosion of sump pumps and infiltration of basement cinderblock walls was apparent. Subsequent studies by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry would reveal a laundry list of 421 chemical records for air, water, and soil samples in and around the Love Canal area.

In April of 1978 the New York Department of Health Commissioner, Robert Whalen, declared the Love Canal area a threat to human health and ordered the fencing of the area near the actual old landfill site. In August, the Health Commissioner declared a health emergency at the Love Canal, closed the 99th Street School, and recommended temporary evacuation of pregnant women and young children from the first two rings of houses around the site. Within a week, Governor Hugh Carey announced the intended purchase of all "Ring 1" houses (later expanded to 238 houses in Rings 1 and 2). President Jimmy Carter simultaneously announced the allocation of federal funds and ordered the Federal Disaster Assistance Agency to assist the City of Niagara Falls to remedy the Love Canal site.

Amid this setting, individuals (most notably Lois Gibbs, Dr. Beverly Paigen, and Sister Margeen Hoffmann, OSF) and local neighborhood (such as the Love Canal Homeowners Association) and community groups (such as the Ecumenical Task Force of the Niagara Frontier) became concerned about the situation. Their primary concern was the actual extent of the chemical contamination and its impact on the health of Love Canal residents. Second, and perhaps more important, was the lack of readily available information to explain the science: the levels of uncertainty, political and corporate agendas, manipulation of the media -- in general an overall paucity of reliable information that would answer the simple question, "Is it safe?"

-- From the exhibit Love Canal @25 created by Fred Stoss and Carole Ann Fabian, August 1998

Disclaimer

If you have knowledge of, concerns about individuals that lived in Love Canal and have subsequently left the region, or you suspect may have or are suffering adverse health affects, you should contact the New York State Department of Health's ongoing Love Canal Long-term Health Study available online at http://www.health.state.ny.us/environmental/investigations/love_canal/



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Love Canal Chronologies

[Niagara Gazette, 1894-1980](#) | [ETF, 1836-1984](#) | [LCHA, 1978-1980](#)

The Niagara Gazette Love Canal Chronology, 1894 - May 1980

- **1894** William T. Love begins the man-made canal that he envisions linking the Niagara River to Lake Ontario, providing water and hydroelectric power for a model industrial city.
- **1942-1952** Hooker Chemical and Plastics Corporation takes over the 15-acre site in 1942 and by 1952 has buried over 20,000 of tons of toxic chemicals there.
- **May 7, 1953** Hooker Chemical sells the canal for \$1 to the Board of Education (City of Niagara Falls, New York) and writes into the deed a disclaimer of responsibility for future damages due to the presence of buried chemicals. The board subsequently builds a school there and sells off land that is developed with residences.
- **October 3, 1976** *The Niagara Gazette* reports that materials from a chemical landfill between 97th and 99th streets have been seeping into basements of homes in the area. Reports of illness and injuries to human, animal and plant life.
- **November 2, 1976** *The Niagara Gazette* reports chemical analyses of residues near the old Love Canal dumpsite indicated presence of 15 organic chemicals, including three toxic chlorinated hydrocarbons.
- **November 4, 1976** *The Niagara Gazette* reports that toxic chemicals seeping into cellars of homes are being carried through city storm sewers and improperly discharged into the Niagara River.
- **September 1977** U.S. Representative John J. LaFalce (Democrat, Town of Tonawanda) and the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) begin looking into problems at Love Canal. *The Niagara Gazette* continues investigations its own and urging governmental action.
- **April 1978** The New York State Health Commissioner, Dr. Robert Whalen orders the County Health Department to restrict access to the area and begin health studies.
- **May 1978** The US EPA concludes from air sampling in basements at Love Canal that toxic vapors are a serious health threat. State Health Department reveals plan for medical studies of residents.
- **June 1978** State continues studies and does some house-to-house sampling and collecting of blood samples for analysis. Pentagon officials deny any knowledge of records pertaining to possible disposal of U.S. Army wastes at Love Canal.
- **July 1978** New York State Governor Hugh Carey signs legislation granting additional emergency powers to New York State Health Commissioner, Robert Whalen, to deal with Love Canal problems and appropriates \$500,000 for long-range health studies.
- **August 2, 1978** Acting under wider powers, New York State Health Commissioner, Robert Whalen declares a state of emergency exists at the Love Canal and orders closing of 99th Street School and evacuation of pregnant women and children under the age of two.
- **August 7, 1978** United States President Jimmy Carter approves emergency financial aid for the area so New York State can start buying homes of 236 families eventually relocated at a cost of \$10 million.
- **November 10, 1978** 200 tons of dioxin, a lethal chemical are reported buried in the canal. Residents fears heighten.
- **November 22, 1978** Over 200 chemical compounds are identified as being buried in the canal.
- **December 8, 1978** Reports of findings of dioxin and other chemicals and state's refusal to relocate another 54 families the outskirts of the contaminated area bring vehement protests from residents. One protest leads to the arrest of seven Love Canal homeowners. Charges are later dropped.
- **January 23, 1979** Dr. Beverly Paigen, a cancer researcher at Roswell Park Memorial Institute in Buffalo, urges evacuation of more families in light of her study revealing a high rate of birth defects and miscarriages among Love Canal residents.

families.

- **January 29, 1979** The Federal Disaster Assistance Administration rejects a state appeal to reimburse it for \$22 million spent on the Love Canal relocating residents and cleaning up the site.
- **February 8, 1979** New York State announces it will pay temporary relocation costs for about 30 families with either pregnant women or children under age 2 between 97th and 103rd Streets after documenting claims of birth deformities and pregnancy-related problems outside the first ring of the Love Canal.
- **March 21, 1979** A House Sub-committee begins hearings into Love Canal problems. Hears residents and others argue that the state underestimated the scope of health problems and failed to respond in an efficient and timely manner.
- **March 29, 1979** Bruce Davis, executive vice president of Hooker Chemical's Industrial Chemicals Group, tells the Senate Sub-committee it has no legal liability for last summer's Love Canal environmental disaster. The State Legislature grants a property tax rebate for Love Canal residents for five years, retroactive to 1978. ...releases Operation Bootstrap, a 1977 company management study of the Niagara Plant documenting obsolete equipment, substandard environmental conditions and massive discharging of waters into sewers leading to the Niagara River.
- **April 11, 1979** U.S. Representative Albert Gore (Democrat, Tennessee) charges Love Canal was avoidable had hooker paid attention to danger signals. He cites an internal Hooker Chemical memorandum, dated June 18, 1958, which described three to four children burned by materials at the Love Canal.
- **April 14, 1979** Reports that dioxin levels at Love Canal are 100 times higher than previously reported. Reports that contaminant is also found at Bloody Run Creek near Niagara University.
- **April 24, 1979** EPA approves \$4 million for remedial work at the Love Canal. City receives \$1 million in Federal Disaster Assistance Administration funds to help pay debts incurred at the Love Canal.
- **May 4, 1979** State finds traces of highly-toxic chemicals around 93rd Street School and orders more tests to determine extent of contamination.
- **May 26, 1979** Fifteen bids are received for abandoned Love Canal homes. Future of sales and relocation of houses in doubt as former residents protest action.
- **June 14, 1979** New York State Legislature extends property tax exemptions to another 300 families in area of Love Canal. Carter Administration reveals plans for a \$1.63 billion Superfund for hazardous waste clean-ups across the country. Fate of that plan still hasn't been resolved, although funds were proposed from the 1981 budget.
- **July 12, 1979** EPA announces creation of a special task force to aid in identification and clean-up of toxic waste sites, including 36 on the Niagara Frontier (Western New York).
- **August 30, 1979** The City of Niagara Falls Board of Education closes 93rd Street School pending the outcome of further studies of chemical contaminants. Students are transferred to various schools throughout the City.
- **September 4, 1979** Over 200 canal residents take up residence at Stella Niagara Education Park (Route 18F, Lower River Road, Lewiston, New York) over the Labor Day weekend after being moved out of hotels and motels in the area. They had left the canal area after complaining of noxious odors from the remedial work.
- **September 13, 1979** State Supreme Court orders extension of state-funded relocation of residents for a few days to allow the residents time to submit statements signed by physicians that they are unable to live in their homes due to remedial work.
- **September 26, 1979** The first Love Canal lawsuits naming Hooker Chemical and three public agencies are initiated.
- **October 3, 1979** State Supreme Court rejects a \$2.5 billion lawsuit filed on behalf of 900 Love Canal residents.
- **October 5, 1979** Actress Jane Fonda and activist husband, Tom Hayden visit Love Canal.
- **October 14, 1979** House subcommittee recommends relocation of another 140 families after reviewing research by Dr. Paigen that chemicals from the Love Canal are migrating.
- **October 31, 1979** Over 800 lawsuits have been filed naming Hooker Chemical, the city, county and Board of Education totaling \$11 billion.
- **November 1979** A federal report indicates the odds of Love Canal residents contracting cancer is as high as 1 in 10.
- **November 6, 1979** Remedial work on canal is said to be completed and state says 110 families temporarily relocated can return.
- **December 20, 1979** Federal Justice Department initiates a \$124 million lawsuit against Hooker Chemical in connection with chemicals buried at four sites in the city.
- **December 23, 1979** Albert Elia Construction Company awarded a contract to operate an on-site treatment facility at the Love Canal for one year.

- **January 1980** The city sells \$6.5 million in bonds to pay for remedial work in the south portion of the Love Canal.
- **February 1980** EPA announces it's found four chemicals suspected of causing cancer in air samplings at Love Canal.
- **March 1980** New York State declines participation in a Love Canal revitalization program initiated by the city.
- **April 1980** New York State files a \$635 million lawsuit against Occidental Petroleum and two of its subsidiaries Hooker Chemical Corporation and Hooker Chemical and Plastics Corporation claiming they are responsible for Love Canal disaster.
- **May 13, 1980** Niagara Falls City Council creates the Love Canal Area Revitalization Authority (LCARA), a non-profit corporation. The Town of Wheatfield later joins.
- **May 17, 1980** EPA announces chromosome damage has been found in 11 of 36 residents tested in the Love Canal.
- **May 19, 1980** Demanding immediate action on evacuation of another 710 families, angry residents detain two EPA officials for about six hours at the Love Canal Homeowner's Association offices. They urge the declaration of a national emergency.
- **May 21, 1980** President Carter declares Love Canal a national emergency paving way for relocation of another 710 families. Niagara County Legislature incurs wrath of Love Canal residents by again refusing to join the Love Canal Revitalization Authority.

-- reprinted with permission from the *Niagara Gazette*, May 23, 1980

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Ecumenical Task Force Chronology, 1836-1984

Chronology prepared by the ETF in three separate documents: Progress Report I, Progress Report II and "A History of Disasters -- A Chronology of Events"

- [Chronology 1836 - July 1980](#) 
ETF Progress Report, March 20, 1979 - August 1, 1980
- [Chronology August 1980 - September 1981](#) 
ETF Progress II Report, August 1, 1980 - Sept. 15, 1981
- [Chronology September 17, 1981 - August 18, 1984](#) 
"A History of Disaster -- A Chronology of Events"
-  [PDF of the all the chronologies combined together](#) (70 pages)

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Love Canal Homeowners Association Chronology, 1978-1980

- Love Canal Homeowners Association, Love Canal Chronological Report, April 1978 to January 1980 (37 pages)
-  [PDF of the entire document](#)