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### Discovering Watertown Part 3

[MUSIC]

**Narrator:**

**From its beginning and through the years, generations have dedicated their lives to improving Watertown.**

[MUSIC]

Narrator: On part three of “Discovering Watertown” ... the landscape and economic structure of Watertown may have changed over the years, but the indestructible spirit of the Watertown people still rings through to this day.

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Announcer: Major funding for Discovering Watertown is provided by the Daisy Marquis Jones Foundation. Dedicated to improving the well-being of communities by helping disadvantaged children and families.

Additional support provided by: White’s Lumber and Building Supply,

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Slack Chemical Company.

New York Air Brake

T. Urling and Mabel B. Walker

and

Jefferson County Economic Development.

[Music]

**Patrick Lapierre, SUNY Canton Professor of History:**

“Post WWII to the present in terms of economic history is incredibly complex and interesting. I mean one of the things that is interesting is the incredible change that happens in the country. In 1945 the war is over. United States is producing over 50% of the world’s goods and in some areas has very little competition. It’s not scarred physically by WWII in the ways that other major industrialized nations were, so there was a period there where it was really unrivaled. It was the only super power and it was the only country for a while that had atomic weapons. It

benefitted from a lot of the destruction that had happened in the rest of the world. It maintained that privilege for a while. But by the mid '60s certainly things had changed.

**Jeffrey Graham, Former Mayor of Watertown: Changes in Watertown's Economic Change, Departure of Industry**

"All the problems everywhere from you know, the textile mills in New England to the rug mills in Amsterdam, New York. All of these industries were closing, moving out, or downsizing, and Watertown was no different. I mean, a lot of the paper industry was moving away. New York Air Brake, which had been a mainstay for a long time, was an aging facility, and other plants were either downsizing or closing as well. Some of them survived like Knowlton Paper. Some local people invested in that and kept it going. The Air Brake made a metamorphosis when the Germans bought it out, and the Knorr Company and Mr. Thiele breathed new life into it, so that survived. Some other industries came into being like Car Freshner, which obviously is a well-known international product, so Watertown's industrial economy was generally less vibrant, but it was still there."

**Thomas Baker, SUNY Potsdam Professor of History:**

"These places that once were fairly thriving. I mean you see the sizes of the houses in town and you think, "Wow, some rich people lived here." You look at the size of the factories, you look at the hotels and you think, "Wow, this was a pretty happening place. But that industry that made it run, left. And like mill towns everywhere and mill towns everywhere, when that leaves town the only people who stay are people who can't afford to leave. And I think that cycle that Watertown probably hit its prime sometime in the early 20th century like a lot of Northern New York towns that were associated with these industries."

**Narrator : Another challenge for Watertown came in the form of Urban Renewal. Started by President Lyndon B. Johnson, this movement encouraged the removal of older and aging facilities to make room for a new era of buildings and architecture. The objective was to create demand for new buildings, and thus, new construction jobs. But the movement failed, because the suburbs were already developed, and what business was evicted from the inner city simply found a reason to develop in the suburbs. So large city blocks got demolished, but then sat vacant for decades.**

[MUSIC]

**Glenn Curry - Interview**

"They tore down City Hall, which had been built in 1898. It was already being torn down in the mid- '60s. Lyndon B. Johnson, he created this new bill to get rid of the old and create a whole new world. And with that, a lot of buildings from the 19th century in America, not just in Watertown, were put on the demolition block. A lot of them were just considered too old. We want a whole new space-age look. We want buildings with no windows. We want concrete pillars and all this stuff that would improve our cities."

“Everything that happened here happened elsewhere. Urban renewal was from one coast to the other. It seemed like the cities that were most affected by it were the existing cities that had more structures on them because we’re in the Northeast; the oldest part of this country is the Northeast. As a consequence, a lot of old 19th-century buildings were considered old and useless. But back in the day in the 1960s, a lot of these buildings were no more than 60, 70, or 80 years old. The thought was get rid of them and start fresh. Unfortunately, it didn’t work out that way.”

**T. Urling Walker, Former Mayor of Watertown:**

“Well the urban renewal took place here with the idea that that was going to help Watertown. It did just the opposite of that. It tore down a lot of the old buildings. That might have been some help. But it changed the pattern downtown and sort of left us with a skeleton. That wasn’t a very, very good move. I think it was a way of government saying we can do it better than you can, so therefore we’ll help you out.”

**Jeff Graham, Former Mayor of Watertown:**

So urban renewal got rid of a lot of dilapidated buildings, probably didn’t live up to some of the expectations. But on the other hand, there were a lot of things that were built new. I mean, demolishing the train stations, demolishing the old city hall, there are things you look back at and say, ‘well, that wasn’t such a great idea,’ but on the other hand, the world changes. It was an industrial city at a time when industries were fading, and by the time the early 80’s came around, Watertown had very, very high unemployment. This area was up around 20 percent. And things weren’t very good. I mean, property values were like dirt-cheap. I remember buying a house on Arlington Street for \$20,000 back then. You don’t do that today. And it was a nice house. And then obviously Fort Drum came in and that was a lot of excitement and growth, and it sort of changed the economy to what it is today, which is less so industrial but more service oriented, more just consumers and so on. It’s evolved, I mean the city’s evolved, but it’s still a nice place to live.

**Narrator - As Watertown continued to adapt to the challenges brought on by the downsizing or departure of industry and urban renewal, another presence began to expand near Watertown, profoundly affecting its future for the better.**

**Carl McLaughlin: Fort Drum - Economic & Social Impact on Watertown throughout the years**

“Watertown’s history with Fort Drum is extensive and it actually goes way, way back beyond the period of the First World War. The actual land mass that we now think of as Fort Drum, then was known as Pine Plains, and it was Teddy Roosevelt who actually recognized the need for something in the North East and he chose this site for what they called in those days a concentration camp. It meant it’s a place where we can concentrate, bringing militias, the state National Guard and reserves together to train in large numbers. So, about in the early 1900’s we started having units of about 8,000 here for multiple weeks of training.”

**Narrator: In 1908, Brigadier General Frederick Dent Grant, the oldest son of President Ulysses S. Grant, found the area, known locally as Pine Plains to be an ideal place to train troops. [Cannon shot] Pine Camp formally opened on June 11, 1908.**

**With the outbreak of World War Two, Pine Camp was expanded by 75,000 acres, displacing 525 local families and entirely eliminating five villages. During the war, three divisions trained at Pine Camp, and the post also served as a prisoner of war camp. Pine Camp became Camp Drum in 1951, named after Lieutenant General Hugh A. Drum, who commanded the First Army during World War Two. The post was designated Fort Drum in 1974, and a permanent garrison was assigned. On September 11, 1984, the army announced that Fort Drum would be the new home of the 10th Light Infantry Division.**

**Carl McLaughlin: Fort Drum - Economic & Social Impact on Watertown throughout the years**  
 “In 1988, with a two brigade division, and roughly 10,000 soldiers, they were putting into the economy about 221 million dollars a year. After the expansion, it was up to about 600 million dollars. Two years later, 2008 it had doubled to 1.2 billion dollars. It has been well over a billion dollars a year since then. [Cannon shot] 2015 the last fiscal year we have figures for, it was again back to 1 billion 221 million dollars. Significant, significant number, of that over a billion was payroll. It is the economic engine of the North Country, hosting 15, 16, 17 thousand soldiers and their families and the civilians that support them. That ‘s what drives our economy.”

**T. Urling Walker, Former Mayor of Watertown:**

“Fort Drum has certainly added quite an economic boom to Watertown. It’s another company, you might say, that’s moved into the area. They march to a different tune than the civilian population, but we’ve been able to cross that border of working with the Fort and the Fort with the city and the county to I think a very satisfactory condition. It has no question been a very good move. In this day and age, when all other businesses are in trouble, it looks like war is going to be with us forever.”

**Narrator – Soldiers from all over the U.S. are stationed at Fort Drum. But there are also homegrown heroes from Watertown who achieved great honor while serving in the military. Medal of Honor recipient George Taylor was one of them.**

**Mark Crandall: Former Senior Chief, United States Navy**

“The Medal of Honor is the highest award that can be awarded upon any service member in any of the branches. George Taylor was born, raised, and grew up here in the city of Watertown back in 1830; is when he was born. He ended up in the United States Navy and serving onboard the USS Lackawanna. The Lackawanna’s major engagement was in the battle of Mobile, Alabama. He was an armorer onboard the ship. During the battle, it took extensive damage from enemy fire, several broadsides, and the ship caught on fire. It was spreading towards the armory. George Taylor went down below decks after being wounded from the attack, put the fire out with his bare hands, sustaining more injuries, went back to his duties, and continued to

battle. During that action, George Taylor received the Medal of Honor for his actions that day onboard the ship for saving his crew and his ship. The reason things like this are so important is because it's our heritage; it's where we come from. Our past, and our history, and sacrifices people make shouldn't be forgotten."

**Narrator: The expansion of Fort Drum not only had an impact on our local economy, but also on its educational systems and community. With soldiers from all over the country moving to Watertown and the surrounding region, the number of children enrolled in the public school systems has increased, leading to a more diversified community, Jefferson Community College, a two-year college located in Watertown, was founded in 1961 on Coffeen Street. The college enrolls almost 4,000 students, 45 percent of whom are military or military-related. The college even offers courses for military personnel on post.**

**Carol McCoy, President of JCC:**

"Well, Jefferson Community College is a little bit older than 50 years old. Um, it was founded by a referendum of citizens of this community, who wanted to have a community college. It started out in the Lansing Street school in Watertown with you know, a couple hundred students, and a few years later, they had acquired a campus, and started to build buildings, and the college has just grown and grown and grown. Jefferson is an integral part of this community. We have had about 22,000 graduates, not to mention about 90,000 people have taken some kind of class there. So you can't walk through the streets of Watertown and talk to anyone, or even walk through anywhere in Jefferson County, and not meet people whose lives were changed because of the college. We're very much a social hub, a cultural hub as well, certainly it is the educational hub of the community."

**Narrator: Another central hub of the Watertown community opened its door in 1881 with a total of five beds. It was able to care for 33 patients in its first year. Today, Samaritan Medical Center has 294 beds and serves the populations of Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence Counties.**

**Born in 1900, Irish American Alex Duffy was nicknamed "Mr. Watertown" and worked as a stone mason for nearly 60 years. Alex Duffy believed in the importance of strong community ties. In his younger years, he was a player on the Red and Black Football team and later served as the president of the Jefferson County Fair for 29 years. In 1978 the fairgrounds was named after Alex Duffy. Today, the Fairgrounds and its arena are still the central hub for the Watertown community to gather and enjoy sports and various recreation activities. It's also home every year to the Jefferson County Fair, the longest continuously running county fair in the United States.**

**Mel Bustler, Television Sports Anchor:**

"When you have a Fairgrounds named after you, you gotta think that the person was pretty important. And that's Alex. He was a big part of the Watertown Red and Black. And I don't mean 2000s, I mean the early 1900s. He played for the Red and Black. He was slight in build, and this tells you how much the game has changed, but he was a big contributor. And he could

tell you stories about who he played with. His memory of the early part of the century was unbelievable. As far as his knowledge of the area, and having all the answers, he was the man to see. Alex Duffy was a sage.”

**Narrator:**

**One of the many teams that called the Fairgrounds home was the Watertown Red and Black football team. Founded by Watertown mayor J.B. Wise, it is the oldest semi-pro football team in the United States, and has been inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, for its contributions to football.**

**Coach Ashcraft:**

“I had the opportunity to try out for the team. Made the team as a linebacker and played in 1973-74. Then, in 1975 I broke my ankle in two places and it ended my playing career. But, my wife and I, we came to every home game after that. Ever since then, I’ve been a part of it. 1990 I got on the board of directors. ’91 I became the head coach and twenty-five years later I have been part of over three hundred games, about two hundred and five wins, a hundred and five losses, two ties. The City’s really been good to us. We rent the facilities. The best grass field that we play on is right here in Watertown. Parks and Rec people do a great job on it. We don’t get paid. You know, nobody gets paid doing this. If at the end of the year, you ended up able to pay your bills, you’re just, you’re as happy as you can possibly be and that’s what it’s all about. Most of your men, that play ball from this area, they are working men. And they are tax-paying people. They are what makes this area be what it is. There are people that actually moved here to play football years ago that kept their family life here after they got through playing. There’s something to be said about being a part of something that is 120 years old. And I take great pride in saying that we can carry on a tradition of football ... it’s just been a great ride.”

**Narrator: Watertown also has deep roots in the sweet science.**

**Johnny Pepe, Head Coach, Watertown Boxing Club:**

“You know, the history of boxing in Watertown dates back to the 1930s, 1940s. You know, I could see back in the days when Sugar Ray Robinson fought, the smoke filling the room, the cauliflower row where people watched the fights, where you could see the action right there.”

**Mel Bustler, Television Sports Anchor:**

“You know, boxing in Watertown has a big history. There used to be a roller rink down at the fairgrounds, and they would hold boxing events. Of course, the boxing club where it's located now is at the P&M Construction over on Starbuck Avenue. Its claim to fame there was a gentleman by the name of Ray Robinson who, by the way, took the name Ray Robinson that night from someone else. Because he wanted to fight, he was underage. He fought that night, kind of wowed the crowd, and there was a woman sitting behind a sports reporter for the Watertown Daily Times by the name of Jack Case, and the woman said, ‘that boxer is so sweet.’ Jack Case said, ‘Yeah, sweet as sugar,’ bang! Goes back to the Times, writes a story, Sugar Ray Robinson. That's how, that’s how his nickname came about. It wasn't even his real name, he

had borrowed that night to fight, Ray Robinson, and it ends up the rest is boxing history, with Sugar Ray pretty much being born at the Starbuck Arena.”

**Johnny Pepe, Head Coach, Watertown Boxing Club:**

The Starbuck Arena, where we’re located now and where we call our new home, it’s the home of our heart and soul now here. Good things have happened out of boxing. You know it’s a tough sport but, it really, really focuses on the heart and brings the best out of people. So this is not just a building. It’s not just four walls that you train in and sweat. It’s a family, it’s a home, it helps kids out when maybe they have trouble at school, maybe the kids had trouble with other kids. Maybe they just want to feel good about themselves and I’m very humbled and glad to be training in the same place as Sugar Ray Robinson and even the times I’m closing up the gym and I’m saying, “Goodnight Champ”. You know, I just feel his presence here and it feels great. It feels good to have a home that’s heart and soul of boxing for us here at the Watertown Area Boxing Club.”

**Narrator: Watertown has seen a wide range of sports over the years. In the early 1930’s, Lou Gehrig and the ‘Great Bambino’ Babe Ruth came to town to play ball.**

**The abundance of retail options, a plethora of activities for outdoor recreation, proximity to the 1000 Islands, and an on-going love affair with local and regional sports all combine to bring thousands of tourists to Watertown every year. It seems the beauty and recreational opportunities that Watertown, Lake Ontario, and the St. Lawrence River have to offer are too much to resist. Transportation has also changed over the years.**

**For several decades, Public Square was Watertown’s retail center. The Beehive Department Store the Globe store, and A Beyer Department stores, were mainstays of the downtown economy. Empsall’s department store was a Watertown icon for eighty-six years. In 1986, the opening of the Salmon Run Mall on outer Arsenal Street helped spur development along Arsenal Street.**

**Completed in 1971, Route 81 travels through six states, and connects the capital of the United States – Washington, D.C. – with Canada’s capital, Ottawa, Ontario. The interstate highway made for easier trade and transportation of goods, as well as an influx of visitors who come here to enjoy the beauty of nature.**

**Transportation has also changed throughout the years. The City bought the land for the Watertown Airport opened in 1928. The Airport opened in 1929. The F.H. Taylor, Incorporated Fleet carried approximately 8000 passengers that year. Despite bad runway conditions that the airport had at the time, there was never a single accident.**

**Thomas Brouty, retired Mechanic:**

“The airport was owned by the City of Watertown at that time. So the tax base for the operation of the airport was very small. So the City of Watertown could not do a lot of updating or whatever, to the airport. They managed it, they did the best they could with the

resources they had. When Jefferson County took over the airport and then that expanded the tax base of course. And what – you know, they had much more money to work with. And so they were, they brought it to what it is today.”

**Steve Gerstenschlager, Retired Airport Employee:**

“We went from an airport that was going nowhere. Um, it looked like they were getting ready to shut her down. And then we went to a county that wanted to do something with the airport, expand the airport. And they came up with a lot of plans. And they’re following through on the plans.”

**Narrator: There’s an old saying. The more things change, the more they stay the same. To some, it may feel as though everything has changed. And yet somehow, everything has stayed the same. The landscape and economic structure of Watertown may have changed over the years, but the indestructible spirit of the Watertown people still rings through to this day.**

**Jeffrey Graham, Former Mayor of Watertown:**

“There’s a lot of things, you know, to look at here. The whole Thompson Park experience, with that being an Olmstead park, I think gives a certain flavor to the community. There have been a lot of improvements to the roads, buildings, new construction, and all of that over the years, and I’d like to think that Watertown is sort of the Capitol of the North Country. It’s the place where people go for commerce, education, healthcare, and recreation. I think we’ve done a good job to make it a decent place to live.”

**T. Urling Walker, Former Mayor of Watertown:**

“I think it has a good future here. I think we have Fort Drum as a background. We still have a viable agricultural background here. We have an excellent hospital system here. And then you’ve got the tourism business that is cyclic, but that’s the way in the tourism business is.”

**Joseph Butler, Mayor of Watertown:**

“Watertown is the economic hub of the North Country. We have a flourishing retail sector, we have Jefferson Community College, we have the nearby Airport, we have a nice downtown, we have a military base, the 10th mountain division. From an economic standpoint, significant investment in the downtown corridor unlike what we’ve seen in previous years. Going forward, our goal is to revitalize downtown, connect the riverfront with the downtown. So that’s our focus right now. So I’m very optimistic in how we can develop it, bring new businesses here, create jobs, and have a social life that’s active. It really hasn’t changed since I was a young child. You still have neighborhoods, historic homes, you go trick or treating in the neighborhoods and you have a great time. You have playgrounds nearby, you have a library, a hospital, the amenities and quality of life things that are close by and that are important. And that brings back that appeal that I always enjoyed when I was grown up, which is Small Town USA. We’re a kind-hearted people, we’re compassionate, we look out for others, and there’s so many families that have a tremendous amount of history here. And when you go out, whether it be grocery shopping, getting some gas, or going to church, you’re always seeing people that



you have history with. And I like my roots deep. And they're very deep in Watertown for many families that have been a tremendous benefit to our community. People just wanting to make Watertown better, whether they volunteer, or whether they work to do it, there are so many good things that people have done for our city of Watertown. And I'm proud to represent such a great class of people."

**Narrator: From the early 1800's, Watertown has evolved from Native American hunting lands to an industrial powerhouse in the 19th and 20th centuries, and to now where its regarded as an agricultural, tourism, and military-based defense community. From its beginning and through the years, generations have dedicated their lives to improving Watertown. And even now, there are people here who strive to make this a place they are proud to call home. Imagine what Watertown might look like in 200 more years. The landscape and industry will surely change. The spirit of philanthropy, of giving back, is still very much a part of the fabric of our community. But the pioneering spirit of its remarkably resilient people will always persevere.**

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