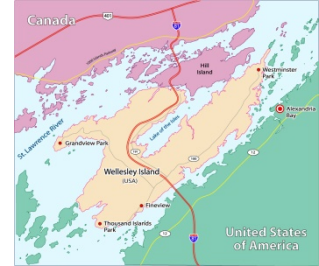
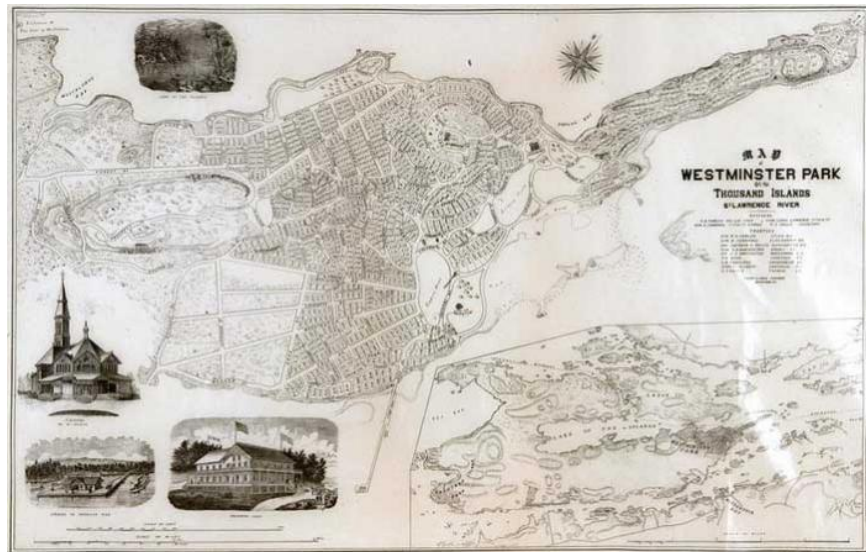


Sherman Phelps' Last Business Venture: Westminster Park

According to a newspaper account, Judge Phelps was involved, in the summer of 1878, on developing a new business called "Westminster Park". This park was a resort community to be built on the eastern end of Wellesley Island in the Thousand Islands. The center of this resort was directly across from Alexandria, New York. Sherman Phelps was a cautious businessman, which is why so many of his investments were profitable. Westminster Park was surely a guarantee of financial success. He had made money speculating on land in both Pennsylvania and New York, but he lacked experience in developing a planned community with a casino.



The Westminster project was announced in the *Oswego Palladium* on August 1, 1877 in an article, "The Purchase of Westminster Park Decided On". The article does not list the gentlemen involved, but it stated that the meeting was held at Alexandria Bay on July 30th during which the terms of purchase were agreed upon. At this same meeting measures were adopted for going forward, keeping the interests of the enterprise for immediate development.



As part of the new wealth created for Northerners during the Reconstruction and Gilded Age eras following the American Civil War, a desire grew for resorts that mirrored exclusive Newport, Rhode



Island. Investing in such a vacation resort was a sound use of money. Many, like Westerly in Rhode Island, were to have a casino as its center with individually owned "cottages" for the use of part-time residents. Having a conveniently placed point in Alexandria for boat transportation to Wellesley Island kept the resort both exclusive and easily accessible for residents and approved guests. A beautiful dock was built in 1875 on Wellesley Island for the accommodation of residents.

Unfortunately, Sherman died while this project was in its beginning stages. Stock was sold to fund it, but it never was fully developed. Even today the south end of Wellesley Island, especially in the Thousand Island Park on the southwestern end of the Island, is more inhabited. The casino was never built, but a few roads were developed. There are newspaper accounts of summer homes in the early 20th century being used at Westminster Park for summer vacations. In 1891, *The Watertown Daily Times* reported that a telegraph box was constructed on Wellesley Island and the Westminster park hotel by the Great North Western Telegraph company. Another article in the same column states that the Westminster Park Hotel was having another very successful season, managed by H. F. Inglehart, with every room and the cottages occupied.

While Sherman's health continued to decline during the summer of 1878, further evidence of at least some building comes from the *Rome Sentinel* of July 9, 1878 when it was announced that Hon. Norris Winslow and John Winslow, of Watertown, built a cottage at Westminster Park. The article, "St. Lawrence River Ripples" claims:

"The occupants of Westminster Park are increasing daily. Many parties are pitching their tents upon the various public lots as well as upon individual lots."

"Excursion parties to Westminster Park find free access to the grounds, and parties not owning lots have free use of public grounds for camping purposes, while a first-class supply store is at hand, making this a favorite resort for campers."

"As the season is now just fairly opening the ferry arrangements between the Bay and Westminster Park have been made very complete affording every necessary facility for conveying passengers and teams.

The same edition reports that the Board of Trustees at Westminster Park passed a resolution opening the park free to excursions. Furthermore, the Westminster Park House is nearly filled with guests, many of whom are staying the entire season. In an article in *The New York Press* (July 10, 1912) the Westminster Park Hotel is the only hotel in Westminster Park. A Utica newspaper reported, in 1881, that the hotel could accommodate 235 guests, and that there were 15 cottages. The earliest known photo of the hotel makes one wonder where they were putting all those guests.



The hotel continued to entertain guests through at least part of the 1930s. The *St. Lawrence Plaindealer* (Canton, NY) on July 27, 1937 reported that E. J. Noble, President of Live Savers, as trustee was negotiating the purchase of the Westminster Park Hotel. He already owned much of the better land on Wellesley Island, as well as his own summer home and Boldt Castle. As for the Phelps family, both Arthur and Robert inherited stock shares of Westminster.

During WWII, many of the hotels in the St. Lawrence seaway area saw very difficult times with a large decrease in visitors. Like many hotels in the area, the Westminster Park Hotel was torn down. Some of the family-owned cottages still remain.

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