

“Who Killed Happy Valley?”

Air Pollution and the Birth of an Ontario Ghost Town, 1969-1974

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Résumé de l'article

Bien qu'il existe de nombreuses villes fantômes disséminées en Ontario, l'histoire de Happy Valley, située dans la région de Sudbury, est unique. Pendant des décennies, ce hameau d'une centaine de personnes a souffert de la pollution de l'air produite par les activités industrielles avoisinantes de Falconbridge Nickel Mines Limited (FNM). Après des années de pression pour remédier à cette situation, au début des années soixante-dix, le gouvernement de l'Ontario a facilité l'abandon de Happy Valley en collaboration avec la municipalité régionale de Sudbury et FNM. Cette décision controversée a fait les manchettes; c'était le premier cas où le gouvernement provincial a financé le déménagement d'une communauté à cause de la pollution atmosphérique. Dans l'article qui suit, nous mettons en lumière la manière dont tous ces facteurs ont façonné l'affaire Happy Valley et nous démontrons que la décision du gouvernement était justifiée étant donné les circonstances.

"WHO KILLED HAPPY VALLEY?"

Air Pollution and the Birth of an Ontario Ghost Town, 1969-1974

by Scott Miller

In June 1970, a congregation of citizens from Happy Valley, Ontario presented a list of grievances before the Falconbridge Township council. This unorganized hamlet of a mere twenty-three houses was located south of the Falconbridge townsite, which itself was situated about fifteen miles northeast of the city of Sudbury. In a ten-page brief, the people of Happy Valley lamented the declining water levels in local wells, abysmal road conditions, and an absence of fire protection and drainage facilities. In addition, they expressed concern over the difficulty experienced in growing and maintaining any sort of plant life in the area. This was attributed to both unreliable water sources and the sulphur fumes emitted from the nearby min-

ing operations of Falconbridge Nickel Mines Limited (FNM). The council responded "with a promise that answers to their questions will be given" at the next monthly meeting.¹ Unbeknownst to the Happy Valley community, within a few years the need for these amenities would be irrelevant. The land on which the villagers had built their homes was soon deemed unsuitable for residential use because of the air pollution produced by FNM. Indeed, by 1974, under the direction of the provincial government, most inhabitants had accepted compensation for their homes and left forever, while those remaining faced continued pressure to relocate or risk the possibility of expropriation. Happy Valley became what some contemporaries called "the

¹ "Happy Valley Residents Not Happy," *The Sudbury Star*, 3 June 1970.

Abstract

While there are many ghost towns scattered across Ontario, the history of Happy Valley, located in the Sudbury area, is unique. For decades, this hamlet of about one hundred people suffered from air pollution produced by the nearby operations of Falconbridge Nickel Mines Limited (FNM). After years of pressure to do something about this situation, in the early 1970s the Ontario government facilitated the abandonment of Happy Valley in cooperation with the Regional Municipality of Sudbury and FNM. The controversial decision made headlines; it was the first instance in which the provincial government financed the relocation of an entire community because of air pollution. This article highlights how all of these factors shaped the Happy Valley affair and demonstrates how the government's resolution was justified given the circumstances.

Résumé: *Bien qu'il existe de nombreuses villes fantômes disséminées en Ontario, l'histoire de Happy Valley, située dans la région de Sudbury, est unique. Pendant des décennies, ce hameau d'une centaine de personnes a souffert de la pollution de l'air produite par les activités industrielles avoisinantes de Falconbridge Nickel Mines Limited (FNM). Après des années de pression pour remédier à cette situation, au début des années soixante-dix, le gouvernement de l'Ontario a facilité l'abandon de Happy Valley en collaboration avec la municipalité régionale de Sudbury et FNM. Cette décision controversée a fait les manchettes; c'était le premier cas où le gouvernement provincial a financé le déménagement d'une communauté à cause de la pollution atmosphérique. Dans l'article qui suit, nous mettrons en lumière la manière dont tous ces facteurs ont façonné l'affaire Happy Valley et nous démontrerons que la décision du gouvernement était justifiée étant donné les circonstances.*

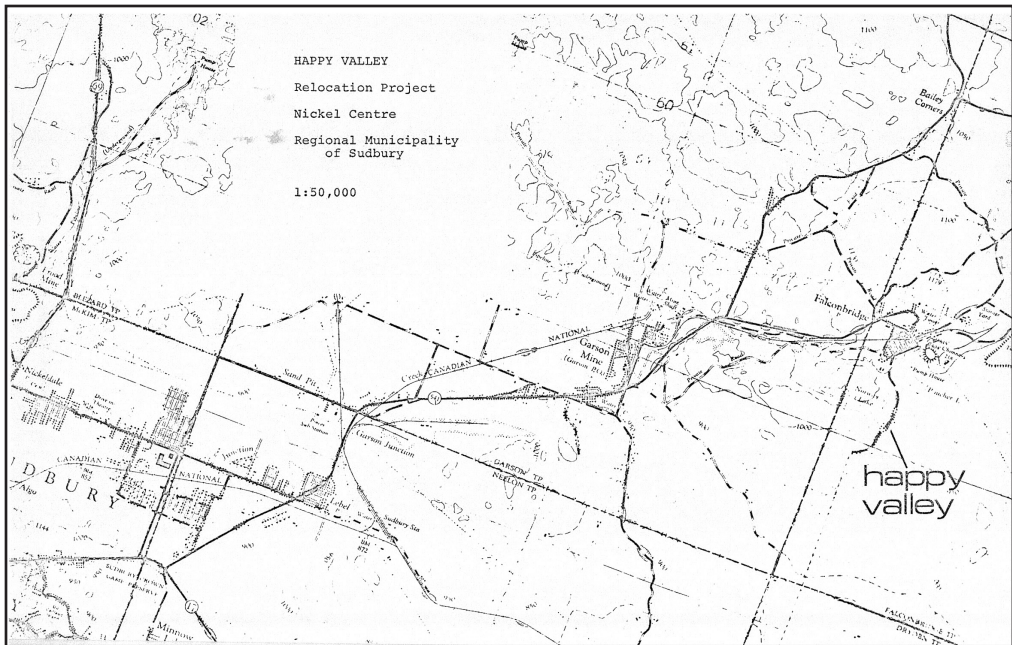
first pollution ghost town.”²

While various scholars have examined the details of the environmental degradation and subsequent re-greening efforts in Sudbury, the lesser known episode of Happy Valley's demise has

received virtually no attention.³ By the 1970s, after decades of relentless mining and smelting operations, the Sudbury region was home to a barren landscape that was largely devoid of vegetation. Fortunately, this period also marked the be-

² Marq de Villiers, “Who Killed Happy Valley?: How a town withered and died while pollution soared and flourished,” *The Globe and Mail*, 19 October 1974.

³ Mark Kuhlberg and Scott Miller, “Protection to the Sulphur-Smoke ‘Tort-feasors’: The Tragedy of Pollution in Sudbury, Ontario, the World's Nickel Capital, 1884-1927,” *Canadian Historical Review* 99:2 (June 2018), 225-57; Matt Bray, “The Province of Ontario and the Problem of Sulphur Fumes Emissions in the Sudbury District: An Historical Perspective,” *Laurentian University Review* 16:2 (1984), 81-90; Daniel Bouchard, “Pollution et Destruction de la Nature à Sudbury (1883-1945)”: Dernière l'écran de fumée (Université d'Ottawa, PhD diss., 2003); Don Munton, “Fumes, Forests and Further Studies: Environmental Science and Policy Inaction in Ontario,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 37:2 (2002), 130-163; Don Munton and Owen Temby, “Smelter Fumes, Local Interests and Political Contestation in Sudbury, Ontario, during the 1910s,” *Urban History Review* 44:1-2 (2015-16), 24-36; D.N. Dewees and Michael Halewood, “The Efficiency of the Common Law: Sulphur Dioxide Emissions in Sudbury,” *University of Toronto Law Journal* 42:1 (1992), 1-21.



Map 1: Historical maps of the Happy Valley area. Archives of Ontario. RG43-2, General 39: Nickel Centre, - Happy Valley, B233046.

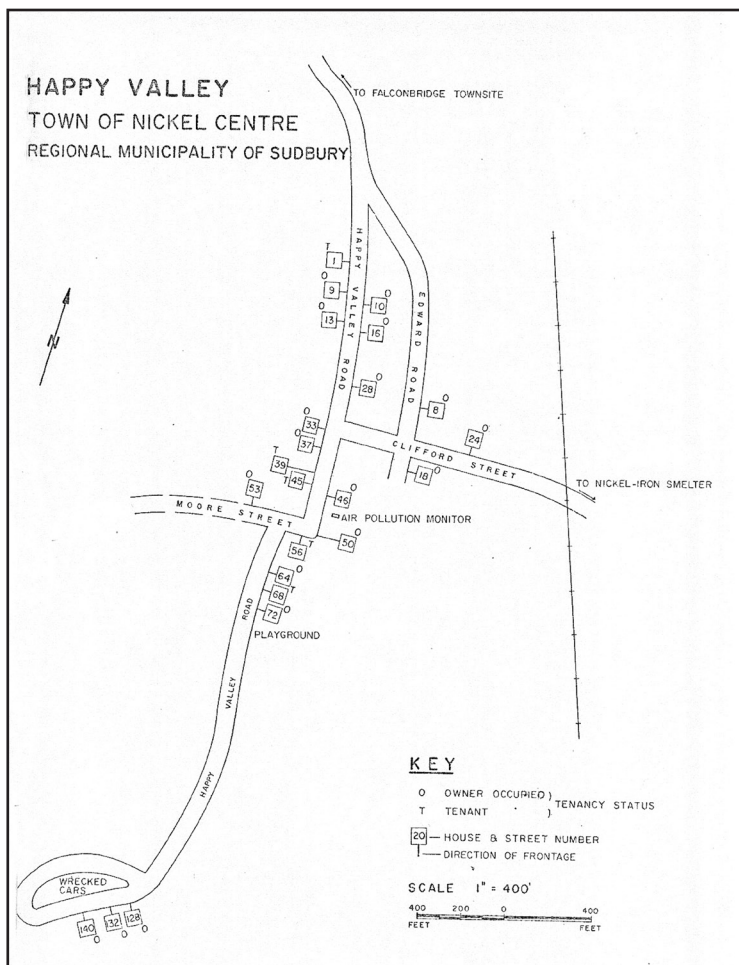
ginning of Sudbury's now infamous land reclamation project, which resulted in the planting of millions of trees, stricter environmental controls, and an overall healthier local environment. In fact, the city has received international praise for its transformation, including recognition from the United Nations.⁴

Moreover, Happy Valley has, for the most part, gone unnoticed by historians who study the politics of displacement and belonging in Canadian communities. In *Moved by the State: Forced Relocation and Making a Good Life in*

Postwar Canada, Tina Loo analyzes five government-led relocation projects that took place across the country from the 1950s to 1970s. She contends that these measures—which were often coercive and unsuccessful in achieving their objectives—were generally driven by a faith in the ability of the interventionist state to improve citizen's lives. Her work also indirectly reflects on “the experience of those who were displaced, on their trauma, their resentment, and occasionally, their resistance.”⁵ Likewise, in his book *One Job Town: Work, Belonging, and Be-*

⁴ Nicola Ross, *Healing the Landscape: Celebrating Sudbury's Reclamation Story* (Sudbury: City of Greater Sudbury, 2008), 32-121; John M. Gunn, ed., *Restoration and Recovery of an Industrial Region: Progress in Restoring the Smelter-Damaged Landscape Near Sudbury, Canada* (Springer-Verlag New York Inc., 1995).

⁵ Tina Loo, *Moved by the State: Forced Relocation and Making a Good Life in Postwar Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2019), 5.



Map 2: Historical maps of the Happy Valley area. Archives of Ontario. RG43-2, General 39: Nickel Centre, - Happy Valley, B233046.

of Happy Valley out of obscurity. Carried out by the recently elected Progressive Conservative (PC) government of Premier William G. "Bill" Davis (1971-1985) as part of the "Big Blue Machine" that dominated provincial politics for over forty years, the decision to dismantle Happy Valley in partnership with FNM was met with controversy. Although the Ontario government asserted that it was acting in the interest of public health, there were some who suggested the plan was really just a political ruse to allow unabated air pollution in the area and to avoid having to provide

trayal in Northern Ontario, Steven High demonstrates that feelings of hopelessness are all too common when people in small, peripheral towns that depend on a single employer or industry suddenly find themselves caught in the crossfire of deindustrialization or major operational changes.⁶

This article seeks to fill these gaps in the historical literature and lift the story

Happy Valley with municipal services. In reality, practically all the residents of Happy Valley were willing to move, but had understandable worries over alternate living arrangements and how they would be compensated for their properties. There were other reasonable points raised by supporters and detractors alike, mainly focusing on funding and the initiatives' wider ethical implications. More

⁶ Steven High, *One Job Town: Work, Belonging, and Betrayal in Northern Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 3-18.

broadly, the case of Happy Valley raised questions about the nature of modern environmental politics, the welfare state, government-business relations, the role of journalists and the media, and corporate social responsibility.

This article highlights how all these factors shaped the Happy Valley affair, and illustrates that the Ontario government's resolution, though certainly not perfect, was necessary given the circumstances. Political scientist Mark S. Winfield has observed three distinct waves of public concern for the environment in Ontario since the Second World War, the first of which occurred from the late-1960s to mid-1970s. Winfield notes that the Davis government, along with its PC predecessors, generally adopted a "facilitative and managerial" approach to environmental policy, tackling relevant initiatives as "they become politically or practically necessary."⁷ Happy Valley fits squarely within this paradigm. The enclave had been a subject of contention for years, with the majority of its population wishing to relocate. As the Ontario government shifted toward tighter environmental regulations in the early 1970s, it could no longer ignore the health, social, and economic problems associated with Happy Valley. After much deliberation, the province arranged with FNM and the Regional Municipality of Sudbury to get the job done once and for all. While legitimate issues arose along the way, in the end even the Ontario government's most

stringent critic seemed satisfied with the result. Happy Valley's legacy thus serves as a unique episode in Ontario's environmental history, one that culminated in the birth of the province's first—and perhaps only—pollution-induced ghost town.

The history of Sudbury and its surrounding communities is intimately tied to the mining industry. Development of the Sudbury area and its rich mineral deposits began in the 1880s when railway workers inadvertently uncovered copper ore bodies. The realization that this ore also contained nickel, or "devil copper," later sparked a boom in Sudbury once it was discovered that nickel-steel alloys had revolutionary military and industrial applications. By the eve of the Great Depression, the International Nickel Company (INCO) dominated nickel production in Sudbury, allowing the company to become the world's foremost producer of the mineral. A viable challenger to INCO's monopoly position emerged in 1928, when FNM was founded after acquiring a nickel-copper deposit in the Falconbridge township, which had been first staked by Thomas Edison in 1902. For the next few decades, both INCO and FNM provided the Sudbury region with opportunity and growth, with the mining sector accounting for nearly a quarter (about 18,000) of all jobs in the Sudbury district in 1971. By the time the Regional Municipality of Sudbury

⁷ Mark S. Winfield, *Blue-Green Province: The Environment and the Political Economy of Ontario* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 5-6.

was formed in 1973, the population had reached 162,700. This included many of the outlying communities that had developed in the vicinity of Sudbury, including the small locale of Falconbridge. From 1958 to 1973, Falconbridge operated as a prototypical company town, with FNM owning the houses, sewers, water, and electrical systems.⁸

Happy Valley's establishment and growth was far less spectacular than the rest of Sudbury. Settlement began in the early 1930s, when a local farmer started selling subdivided plots from a property he had acquired south of Falconbridge years earlier. Located within close proximity of FNM's smelter, which itself was erected in 1930, Happy Valley was, at its peak, home to no more than one hundred people. For the entirety of its existence, it was an unorganized town without basic public services or infrastructure, which apparently had attracted some people there in the first place because of its low taxes. The people of Happy Valley eventually lobbied the Falconbridge council, composed mainly of FNM employees, for access to water and sewage systems, but the proposition was dismissed because it was deemed prohibitively expensive.

Villagers depended on wells, outhouses, and septic tanks instead. There were no shops, churches, or community centres in Happy Valley.⁹ Most importantly, the location of the valley itself happened to be an ideal spot for FNM's sulphur discharge to settle; the consequences were severe. In 1973, one reporter painted a bleak picture of daily life in the hamlet:

The homes—which range from shacks to neatly stuccoed and wood-panelled bungalows—lie at the bottom of a blackened, sparsely shrubbed [sic] valley. At the top of the hill, a sign directs To Nickel Refinery. At the base, the road becomes two: one is Happy Valley Road, the other leads to the refinery. The recreation area—for the valley's 45 children—consists of seven swings and a picnic table resting on black gravel. There is almost no shade in the area—dry sticks pass as trees.

This visitor dubbed Happy Valley “the most misnamed place in the country.”¹⁰ Notwithstanding its perceived desolation, three different PC cabinet ministers approved subdivision plans in the Happy Valley area during the 1950s.¹¹

That being said, the daily image of a landscape blackened by mining pollution was not foreign to Sudburians. Indeed, the city as a whole has a lengthy environ-

⁸ Kuhlberg and Miller, 229-31; John Deverell and the Latin American Working Group, *Falconbridge: Portrait of a Canadian Mining Multinational* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Publishers, 1975), 22-38; Oiva W. Saarinen, *From Meteorite Impact to Constellation City: A Historical Geography of Greater Sudbury* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University, 2013), 135-36; Dieter K. Buse, “The 1970s” in *Sudbury: Rail Town to Regional Capital*, edited by C.M. Wallace and Ashley Thomson (Toronto: Dundurn Press Limited, 1993), 243-46.

⁹ “Neighbourhood blighted by mine to be bought out and destroyed,” *The Globe and Mail*, 28 July 1973; Saarinen, 135-36.

¹⁰ “Not everybody eager to escape pollution of Happy Valley,” *The Globe and Mail*, 4 September 1973.

¹¹ J.F. Brown, Letter to J.A.C. Auld, 7 January 1974. RG12-45, Air: Happy Valley Air Pollution (1974), B363859. Archives of Ontario (hereafter referred to as AO).

mental and legal history with the issue. Beginning in the late 1880s, sulphur dioxide fumes emitted from local mining and smelting activity began spreading across Sudbury and had an immediate impact on both the environment and human health. The period between 1888 and 1929 was particularly harsh, as the primary means of separating nickel-copper ore bodies was “heap roasting,” a process by which massive beds of logs layered with ore were set ablaze for months at a time. The noxious fumes released by the roast beds were devastating.¹² From as early as 1899, observers described in vivid detail the insufferable living conditions caused by the emissions, noting that it gave people incessant coughs and even led to bleeding noses and lungs.¹³ Others were left aghast at the destruction it caused to trees, grass, and vegetation.¹⁴ The damage caused to crops and other forms of personal property by the smoke led to multiple lawsuits by landowners against the mining operators in the early twentieth century. In the 1920s, however, the Ontario government passed legislation that was remarkably favourable to the industry, leading to the creation of an extrajudicial process that suspended the common law rights of claimants by imposing mandatory arbitration with a state-appointed mediator. Unsurprisingly, even after the mining

companies abandoned heap-roasting altogether, over the next number of decades unrestrained industrial pollution ravaged the city. By the 1970s, Sudbury was the biggest single source of sulphur dioxide pollution in the world, and its reputation became associated with acid rain and a rocky wasteland.¹⁵

Environmental issues figured prominently in Ontario public policy from the mid-1960s onward, and this dynamic ultimately had a profound effect on the Sudbury area in particular. In 1971, the provincial government formed its first Ministry of the Environment, and also passed the comprehensive *Environmental Protection Act*. This legislation consolidated the *Air Pollution Control Act* (1967) and *Waste Management Act* (1970), and provided the Ontario government with more general authority over all sources of pollution. Consequently, during the 1970s both INCO and FNM were required to reduce significantly their sulphur dioxide emissions. In February 1970, for instance, it was announced that FNM had agreed to reduce its sulphur dioxide output by 56 per cent within five years. Furthermore, in 1972 INCO built the now iconic 380-metre “superstack,” a decision that improved air quality in Sudbury by dispersing pollutants from its smelter over a wider area.¹⁶

¹² C.M. Wallace, “The 1880s” in *Sudbury: Rail Town to Regional Capital*, edited by C.M. Wallace and Ashley Thomson (Toronto: Dundurn Press Limited, 1993), 27-29.

¹³ “Consistency, Etc.,” *Sudbury Journal*, 5 October 1899.

¹⁴ “Manitoulin and North Shore Railway: Mining and Farming in Algoma,” *The Globe*, 12 October 1902.

¹⁵ Kuhlberg and Miller, 231-32, 245, 253.

¹⁶ Winfield, 21-24; Buse, 257; “Falconbridge Air Pollution to Be Halved in Five Years,” *The Sudbury*

This would not be enough, however, to quell long-standing trepidations about the toll FNM's activities were taking on the people of Happy Valley.

From as early as 1969, the Ontario government began seriously considering the possibility of relocating Happy Valley citizens due to the ongoing nuisance of sulphur smoke. In November of that year, representatives from the Department of Municipal Affairs, FNM, and the Falconbridge Township met to discuss the endeavour. The company and the town council had virtually identical interests in the matter, viewing Happy Valley as an unwanted expense. FNM expressed reluctance to physically move each of the families in the community, citing high costs and the fact that only about half were directly employed by the company. Likewise, Falconbridge Township felt it would be counterintuitive to provide the neighbourhood with any sort of meaningful infrastructure due to the significant expenditure required and the overall uncertainty surrounding its long-term existence. The possibility of provincial funding for a relocation project was broached, as well as the hypothetical issue of residents refusing to leave if it were to be carried out. With regard to the latter point, it was explained that the Falconbridge Township

could pass a by-law whereby Happy Valley would be re-zoned for industrial use, thereby making the existing buildings in violation of municipal planning codes. Lastly, the idea of FNM, in partnership with the township, simply buying out the property owners was considered. However, all three parties agreed that "if any mention is made about the Company's intentions to purchase the land or assist the Township in the relocation of the people, complications could result ... It was then decided that the matter be kept in strict confidence until some workable solution could be found."¹⁷

A prominent figure in the unfolding of events from the early stages was Elie Martel, New Democratic Party (NDP) Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) for the riding of Sudbury East, which included Happy Valley. In 1969, Martel went before the Ontario Legislature to seek assistance for Happy Valley, but nothing was immediately resolved.¹⁸ He was relentless and wrote many letters to various figures he thought could help or whom he felt were failing to fulfil their duties. In November 1970, for example, he contacted the minister of Energy and Resource Management, George Kerr, professing his belief that FNM "wants these people to move. However,... they will not buy them out, and the municipality provides no services to speak of."

Star, 4 February 1970; "Public concern growing on the environment: Davis," *The Globe and Mail*, 24 August 1971.

¹⁷ K. Sowa, Letter to D.F. Taylor, 25 November 1969. RG44-19-1, Land offered Ontario Housing Corporation – Home Ownership Made Easy – Falconbridge Twp. – Happy Valley (1969). B284569. AO.

¹⁸ "Report to Management Board," 17 July 1973. RG43-1, General 39: Nickel Centre – Halley Valley (1973), B233046. AO.

Martel, therefore, urged the ruling government to “lean a little on the company” and draw awareness to the fact that the noxious fumes were jeopardizing these families’ health. The northern MPP’s tone became predictably less patient over time. Almost exactly one year later, Martel informed Kerr that “the game between the local Council in Falconbridge and the Company has gone on for long enough.” He demanded that the Tories, who had acknowledged that “the quality of life is impaired in this area,” instruct FNM to move all of the families out of Happy Valley.¹⁹

The whole debacle incensed Martel, which he viewed as the fault of both careless public administrators and uncompromising mining developers. In November 1970, he penned a letter to the Department of Municipal Affairs in which he criticized both FNM and the Falconbridge Township for their treatment of Happy Valley. Martel maintained that the township never had any intention of aiding these people, as evidenced by the fact that whenever a family would move from the valley voluntarily it would quickly buy and then sell the property “very cheaply” to FNM. In addition, he pointed out that FNM was in the process

of constructing another “very large plant adjacent to these homes.” Martel once again strongly advised that FNM either reduce significantly its pollutants or pay for the evacuation of Happy Valley.²⁰ In July 1971, Martel forwarded a letter to Kerr signed by the people of Happy Valley that affirmed that “We... have fully agreed to a complete relocation, house for house, but [Falconbridge] Council would not comply with this request.”²¹ The local council had ascertained that it was not “interested in relocation but is willing to discuss the possibility of purchasing individual properties.”²²

The matter reached a crucial turning point in 1971, when the results of the Ministry of the Environment’s air quality monitoring in Happy Valley became widely known. That year, the ministry’s Air Management Branch installed an air pollution index (API) system in Happy Valley. At least one source has suggested that it did so after the residents filed an unsuccessful lawsuit against FNM, but the evidence available provides no clear indication of this specific legal dispute.²³ Regardless, the API was designed to measure the concentration of sulphur dioxide and air-borne particles in an effort to curtail FNM’s pollution output.

¹⁹ Elie W. Martel, Letter to George Kerr, 12 November 1970; Elie W. Martel, Letter to George Kerr, 6 November 1971. RG12-45, Air Management Branch – Happy Valley (1971), B237512. AO.

²⁰ Elie W. Martel, Letter to Don Taylor, 27 November 1970. RG12-45, Air Management Branch – Happy Valley (1971), B237512. AO.

²¹ “Residents of Happy Valley,” Letter to George Kerr, 19 July 1971; Elie W. Martel, Letter to George Kerr, 26 July 1971. RG12-45, Air Management Branch – Happy Valley (1971), B237512. AO.

²² K. Sowa, Letter to D.F. Taylor, 7 September 1971. RG12-45, Air Management Branch – Happy Valley (1971), B237512. AO.

²³ Saarinen, 136.



One of the twenty-three houses that once stood in Happy Valley. Archives of Ontario. RG43-2, General 39: Nickel Centre, - Happy Valley, B233046.

This was measured using a numerical index, with any figure above a score of “32” deemed unacceptable. An unsightly machine, the API was “a small white trailer with several bell-shaped arms” that sent its readings electronically to the Ministry of the Environment in Toronto.²⁴ Within one year, the dire status of air quality at Happy Valley had become public knowledge. As *The Sudbury Star* reported on 19 May 1972, Floyd Laughren, NDP MPP for Nickel Belt, had obtained samples from the meter in Happy Valley which showed monitor readings as high

as 64. He also noted that there were periods of up to 28 hours in which the pollution index continuously surpassed the maximum level.²⁵

The Ontario government realized it had a difficult political situation at hand. In response to the news of poor air quality in the town, Minister of the Environment James Auld reiterated the agreement it already had in place with FNM, which dictated that when the API “reaches 32, [FNM] reduce[s] production by 10 per cent, when it reaches 40 they reduce it by another 10 per cent... and

²⁴ de Villiers, “Who Killed Happy Valley?”

²⁵ “Air at Falconbridge Said Worse Than City,” *The Sudbury Star*, 19 May 1972.

after it goes over 50, they shut down.”²⁶ Privately, Auld was much less confident in this arrangement. “Relocation of the residents has been under discussion... for some time,” he told the Treasurer of Ontario Charles S. MacNaughton on 20 October 1972. However, Auld asserted that the “situation has now become even more serious and urgent since it appears unlikely that Falconbridge Nickel Mines will be able to comply with the Minister’s Order to reduce sulphur dioxide emissions at the required rate.” He therefore felt that “the situation at Happy Valley is sufficiently serious to warrant our joint re-examination of the possibility of relocating the residents.” MacNaughton concurred with Auld in his reply three weeks later, positing that the provincial and local governments might be able to take the required steps “if we could find a way for the Company to agree to pick up a substantial part of the cost, perhaps through the purchase of the cleared sites at more than normal market value.”²⁷

Within a matter of months, the Ontario government had devised its plan of action. Notably, on 1 January 1973, following a major municipal reorganization and the subsequent formation of the Regional Municipality of Sudbury, Happy

Valley was now part of the town of Nickel Centre. Following a visit to Happy Valley by senior members of the Ministry of the Environment and Ministry of the Treasury, Economics and Intergovernmental Affairs just days later, it was concluded that “a joint mine-municipal-provincial operation” would be initiated to arrange for FNM to purchase all of Happy Valley’s buildings. Under this agreement, FNM and the provincial government would contribute financially, while the municipality would use its powers under *The Planning Act* to assist with the redevelopment and expropriation of the area. In this capacity, the town would not be contributing any funds to the project, only providing personnel and administrative expertise as required. A survey of Happy Valley’s real estate and living standards was authorized in March.²⁸ The province would fund the study and contribute some manpower, while the region “was in no way obligated to contribute towards the relocation project” itself.²⁹

Happy Valley received unflattering coverage in the press after residents received letters in April notifying them of the pending survey. By this point, no one had yet been asked to leave the Nickel

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ J.A.C. Auld, Letter to Charles S. MacNaughton, 20 October 1972; Charles S. MacNaughton, Letter to J.A.C. Auld, 13 November 1972. RG12-45, Air: Happy Valley Air Pollution (1973). B284777.

²⁸ J.F. Brown, Letter to J.A.C. Auld, 5 February 1972; J.F. Brown, Letter to D.F. Taylor, 5 March 1972; John White, Letter to J.A.C. Auld, 6 April 1973. RG43-1, Community Renewal, Happy Valley – Sudbury (1973-74). B233054. AO.

²⁹ “Draft—Happy Valley Social Survey: A Report Based Upon a Survey of the Residents of Happy Valley, Nickel Centre, Regional Municipality of Sudbury,” Ministry of Treasury, Economics, and Intergovernmental Affairs, May 1973. RG43-1, General 39: Nickel Centre – Happy Valley (1973). B233046. AO.

Centre neighbourhood, but the final outcome seemed inevitable to most.³⁰ Ontario's leading newspapers featured *exposés* on the topic, with one claiming that the pollution in Happy Valley "is so bad that grass grows brown, the dogs grow green and red snow fell last night."³¹ On 16 April, *The Toronto Star* published an article that included interviews with numerous long-time inhabitants. Most were willing to leave in order to escape the harsh conditions, with one man calling it "one of the worst places to be." A married couple confirmed the presence of red snow caused by sulphuric acid and added that a "neighbour has a black dog that turns red from pollution on bad days." A few other homeowners were discontent with the uprooting of their lives, and were concerned whether they would be paid fairly for their homes. In retrospect, most shocking of all, however, were the few who felt there was nothing to worry about in Happy Valley. An elderly man who had lived in the area since 1952 told *The Star* that the sulphur pollution did not adversely impact his well-being:

'yes, there's lots of pollution around here. In the summertime, your hands are kind of red. My eyes get sore. When the sulphur smoke blows this way, it's an awful smell... It makes you sneeze and the tears come out of your eyes. But I don't think my health has been affected by pollution. I'm able to eat three

good meals.'

Another woman in the area insisted that she would not leave Happy Valley, rationalizing that "Nobody forced us down here... I don't know why people complain of pollution. It was here when we came. If you get sick, it doesn't matter where you are."³² Evidently, Ontarians had different perceptions of pollution and its significance, even if it had a seemingly detrimental effect on their daily lives.

Although Martel was satisfied to see the Ontario government finally address the situation in Happy Valley, he was troubled with its approach. Upon discovering that the municipality had notified Happy Valley's landowners that the survey would involve "questions about your financial status," an outraged Martel wrote to Auld to express his dismay. "I am extremely upset at the Municipality's request... for full financial disclosure. This has absolutely nothing to do with the problem," argued Martel. He exclaimed that "the real issue is that [FNM] has destroyed the environment and is impairing the safety of the residents of Happy Valley. Their financial situation is totally irrelevant." Martel voiced his suspicion that this financial information would be used as leverage in settlement negotiations, an accusation which was not unreasonable at the time

³⁰ "Badlands: Study begins of way to move families from pollution-plagued Happy Valley," *The Globe and Mail*, 13 April 1973.

³¹ "Happy Valley's gone bad – so Ontario will wipe it out," *Special to The Star*. Undated. RG43-1, Community Renewal, Happy Valley – Sudbury (1973-74). B233054. AO.

³² "Happy Valley: Maybe it stinks but it's home," *The Toronto Star*, 16 April 1973.

but seems doubtful given the offers that were later accepted. He also deemed the involvement of the local government as “irresponsible” on behalf of the province. Martel was adamant that the land appraisal of Happy Valley take into consideration the destruction caused by decades of mining pollution: “The area has been devastated and ravaged by the company, a great huge pit is located nearby, and a railway line separates the houses from the townsite... [thus] the market value is lowered considerably.” For these reasons, he contended that FNM alone must bear responsibility for funding the relocation. Martel boldly declared his theory that this was all part of a “devious plot to shaft these people.”³³

By mid-1973 the Ontario government had developed a clearer picture of how it would bring an end to Happy Valley. The regional and provincial governments completed their joint survey in May, which referred to this “land clearance project” as the result of the failure of a nearly decade-long effort to control air pollution in the area. The survey included interviews with nearly every household in Happy Valley, with only two or three

of them allegedly holding a strong desire to remain in the community.³⁴ The final version of the report, released in June, conveyed the Ontario government’s concern for the environmental conditions in Happy Valley; it nonetheless claimed that residents had long been aware of the problems associated with the nearby FNM smelter. The report recommended that all the roughly 100 persons relocate and confirmed that all the buildings purchased would be demolished and the land barred from future residential development. Anyone who resisted would face potential expropriation. It was determined that the total cost of acquiring the real estate in Happy Valley and subsequently moving its occupants would cost just under \$400,000.³⁵ By the summer, FNM had agreed to pay \$250,000 to purchase the land and buildings in Happy Valley, while the Ontario government would contribute \$130,000 to cover legal, demolition, and administrative fees, as well as the costs of locating alternative accommodations “over and above ‘fair market value.’”³⁶ Municipal urban renewal staff would aid with the acquisition of the lands and buildings, along with the

³³ Elie W. Martel, Letter to J.A.C. Auld, 12 April 1973. RG12-45, Air: Happy Valley Air Pollution (1973), B284777. AO.

³⁴ “Draft—Happy Valley Social Survey: A Report Based Upon a Survey of the Residents of Happy Valley, Nickel Centre, Regional Municipality of Sudbury,” Ministry of Treasury, Economics, and Intergovernmental Affairs, May 1973. RG43-1, General 39: Nickel Centre – Happy Valley (1973). B233046. AO; J.A.C. Auld, Letter to Charles S. MacNaughton, 27 November 1972. RG12-45, Air: Happy Valley Air Pollution (1973), B284777. AO.

³⁵ John White, Letter to J.A.C. Auld, 22 May 1973. RG43-1, General 39: Nickel Centre – Happy Valley (1973). B233046. AO; “Happy Valley people are urged to move in regional report,” *The Sudbury Star*, 21 June 1973.

³⁶ J.F. Brown, Letter to J.A.C. Auld, 7 January 1974. RG43-1, Community Renewal, Happy Valley – Sudbury (1973-74), B233054. AO.

relocation of residents. The demolition of Happy Valley's twenty-three homes would "mark the first time the province has financed the removal of a community from the path of air pollution."³⁷

The arrangement was met with considerable negative publicity, something that the provincial government followed closely. On 28 July, *The Sudbury Star* included a piece which questioned the fairness of the entire deal, stating that the budgeted funds "works out to \$13,000 per house, if averages mean anything to the expropriators... Where is [anyone] going to buy a lot in the Sudbury district for \$13,000? [Homeowners] just may be asking for quite a bit more than the average to move from [their] happy valley."³⁸ *The Globe and Mail* offered a similar perspective, publishing a story on 4 September about Jean McLean and her family of seven who rented a house in Happy Valley for \$50 per month. Fearful that they would be unable to afford housing in any other part of Sudbury, McLean went on the offensive:

The road [in Happy Valley] was paved last year and street lights were installed. 'We had a ratepayers association here; I was the head of it,' Mrs. MacLean says. 'We had two guys on the council, but the others were men who

worked for Falconbridge. They were afraid for their jobs, and voted against us every time we criticized the company. We gave up... Falconbridge wants the land. They want it for sand pits, or something. People have lived here for more than 50 years, and now they're worried about our health?'³⁹

Provincial officials felt that the article contradicted interviews conducted with McLean and other Happy Valley residents months earlier.⁴⁰ Another *Globe* piece criticized the Ontario government for spending taxpayer money on the relocation and argued that FNM should pay the full cost, yet laid blame for the whole ordeal at the feet of both parties.⁴¹ Premier Davis himself compared Happy Valley to the small town of Blue Water near Sarnia, which years earlier had supposedly been cleared because of its proximity to "polluting industries." Davis noted that local government alone had been responsible for dismantling Blue Water, while this time the province would be the only level of government financially involved. He explained that the Ontario government was responsible for aiding with Happy Valley because of its authorization of three subdivision plots there between 1950 and 1959, decisions which Davis acknowledged would not

³⁷ "\$250,000 to be spent for Happy Valley homes by Falconbridge Nickel," *The Sudbury Star*, 28 July 1973.

³⁸ "Grows fine produce at Happy Valley: 'Won't move because of pollution in air; it's people who don't care for property,'" *The Sudbury Star*, 28 July 1973.

³⁹ "Not everybody eager to escape pollution of Happy Valley," *The Globe and Mail*, 4 September 1973.

⁴⁰ Dave Guscott, Letter to J.F. Brown, 4 September 1973. RG43-1, General 39: Nickel Centre – Happy Valley (1973). B233046. AO

⁴¹ "Cheap ride for a company," *The Globe and Mail*, 8 September 1973.

⁴² William G. Davis, Letter to George Ellis, 30 October 1973. RG43-1, Community Renewal, Happy Valley – Sudbury (1973-74). B233054. AO.

meet current standards.⁴²

Pressure continued to mount as new revelations came to light. On 20 July 1973, in a radio interview that was then published in *The Sudbury Star*, a provincial environment inspector by the name of C. Ross Mackenzie accused an unnamed senior engineer of the Air Management Branch of soliciting and accepting bribes from companies they inspected. Mackenzie was later fired from the civil service for failing to provide evidence related to the charges.⁴³ While the article did not explicitly mention Happy Valley or FNM, the timing of this corruption investigation undoubtedly called into question the internal workings of the Ministry of the Environment. One month later, the air pollution index at Happy Valley recorded a reading of 94, the second highest level ever documented in the province. The highest, which the Ministry confirmed reached well over 100, had occurred in Happy Valley in 1972. This had not been advertised at the time due to an alleged technical issue. The concentrated strength of the pollution obliged FNM to operate temporarily at a reduced scale and slash its production by 57 per cent.⁴⁴ As a vital player in the Canadian economy and an employer of thousands of people in the Sudbury

area, FNM did not welcome the repeated slowdowns. For example, when Don Collins, Regional Chairman of the Regional Municipality of Sudbury, wrote to FNM's legal counsel in late 1973, he emphasized that "close downs of [FNM's] operations hurts [sic] the economy. The problem of 'Happy Valley'... is one of public action and, in this instance, in co-operation with private enterprise."⁴⁵

In the meantime, the government of Ontario focused on tying up some loose ends, with John White, Treasurer of Ontario, playing a leading role. In October 1973, White authorized the designation of Happy Valley as a "redevelopment area" pursuant to *The Planning Act* and officially approved the Regional Municipality of Sudbury to acquire, hold, and clear the land therein.⁴⁶ On the recommendation of White, the Management Board of Cabinet approved the reduction of FNM's funding commitment to the appraised or arbitrated cost of land and buildings in Happy Valley, now pegged at about \$230,000. As White himself reasoned in a letter to FNM management in February 1974, this reflected "an equitable and reasonable decision since the actual costs are not yet known, although we are agreed that the probable level is, more or less, in the order of \$230,000."⁴⁷ White

⁴³ "Sudbury environment inspector fired over charges," *The Sudbury Star*, 8 November 1973.

⁴⁴ "Happy Valley pollution reading second highest," *The Sudbury Star*, 23 August 1973; "Air pollution forces cutback at Falconbridge," *The Sudbury Star*, 23 August 1973.

⁴⁵ Donald J. Collins, Letter to Mr. Runciman, Legal Counsel, 6 September 1973. RG43-1, General 39: Nickel Centre – Happy Valley (1973). B233046. AO.

⁴⁶ John White, Letter to L. Sage, 22 October 1973. RG43-1, General 39: Nickel Centre – Happy Valley (1973). B233046. AO.

⁴⁷ John White, Letter to L.H. Bresnahan, 4 February 1974. RG43-1, Community Renewal, Happy Valley – Sudbury (1973-1974), B233054. AO.

simultaneously ensured that FNM would receive title to the land in Happy Valley once it was cleared in order to guarantee that no grievances would be launched against it in the future:

The mine is paying for the land, not the Province. As a result, the Mine has every right to control the cleared land so that no future development will take place that might aggravate the pollution problem. Finally, I cannot understand why the Province would want to buy and own virtually worthless land in 'Happy Valley'.⁴⁸

The entire arrangement at last received legislative backing in March 1974 with the passage of an order-in-council spelling out the obligations of each party. Money could now flow to the regional government to execute claims with owners in Happy Valley, about half of whom had already agreed to settlements.⁴⁹

With all the pieces in place, the bulk of the Happy Valley migration took place rather smoothly. The first property had been settled with the municipality in August 1973.⁵⁰ Only six landowners remained by the turn of the new year, and with more excessive API readings and curtailment orders against

FNM in March and April, only two of those still resided there by the summer of 1974. Martel told *The Sudbury Star* that most Happy Valley residents were satisfied with the move, and that there had "been no major problems," though in his opinion the total cost was destined to exceed the allocated budget. Despite expectations to the contrary, the Ontario government was hesitant to expropriate land from those who chose to remain in Happy Valley, and instead preferred to "inform them that they do so at their own risk and that they have no further claim on the Province... they would have to negotiate with [FNM]."⁵¹ The Premier himself had for a while maintained that the "Ontario Government has no plans to expropriate property in Happy Valley or to compensate the residents for damage they may have suffered as a result of mining operations. The Government feels that this is the responsibility of the mining company."⁵² The API would be removed from Happy Valley once everyone had left. Martel insisted that it remain near the town of Falconbridge to ensure a close monitoring of FNM's emissions, a stipulation to which the Ministry of the

⁴⁸ John White, Letter to J.A.C. Auld, 13 September 1973. RG43-1, Community Renewal, Happy Valley – Sudbury (1973-1974), B233054. AO.

⁴⁹ W.W. Wronski, Letter to Sidney B. Handleman, 18 March 1974; J.F. Brown, Letter to John White, 15 March 1974; J.F. Brown, Letter to D.J. Collins, 26 March 1974. RG43-1, Community Renewal, Happy Valley – (1973-1974), B233054. AO.

⁵⁰ de Villiers, "Who Killed Happy Valley?"

⁵¹ "Happy Valley almost empty; six bargain," *The Sudbury Star*, 8 January 1974; "Homes are disappearing as Happy Valley near Falconbridge being erased," *The Sudbury Star*, 12 January 1974; "Pollution halts work at Falconbridge Nickel plant," *The Sudbury Star*, 24 April 1974; L. Shenfeld, Letter to T.W. Cross, 13 March 1974; Neville Barnett, Letter to Jack Brown, 16 July 1974. RG12-45, Air: Happy Valley Air Pollution (1974), B363859. AO.

⁵² William G. Davis, Letter to Mr. G. Ellis, undated. RG43-1, Community Renewal, Happy Valley – Sudbury (1973-74). B233054. AO.

Environment conceded.⁵³ From 1971 to 1974, the API in Happy Valley had led to over 20 curtailments at FNM.⁵⁴

The Happy Valley saga was not yet over, however. On 2 August, *The Sudbury Star* printed a story about its last six residents, who chose to remain anonymous. Described as the “first community in Ontario doomed to extinction due to air pollution,” the remnants of Happy Valley now included four or five houses, “Splintered boards, empty window frames and the steel skeleton of a set of children’s swings.” The average settlement price on the first eighteen homes was reported at \$14,825. Those still living in Happy Valley were upset with unfavourable media depictions of their living standards, which they felt contributed to subpar housing appraisals. Others deemed Falconbridge town council’s refusal to provide water services in Happy Valley as being equally responsible for the sparse vegetation as air pollution, and they seemed remarkably accepting of the latter. There was a general consensus that FNM had wanted Happy Valley eliminated all along so it could use the land for further development, that “politics is involved in their displacement,” and that the Ontario government failed to adequately warn them of its decision to move them all out. Nobody seemed able to elaborate or provide proof to substantiate these convictions. Their frustration appeared to stem from feelings of powerlessness and sadness for

having to leave their homes: “I never had any say whether I wanted to move or not or whether the pollution bothered me... I’ll never have a property like this again. It’ll never be the same.”⁵⁵

The most jarring coverage came in the fall of 1974, when *The Globe and Mail* produced a scathing indictment of Happy Valley’s downfall. On 19 October, Toronto writer Marq de Villiers’ article “Who Killed Happy Valley?” called into question the true motives of both FNM and the Ontario government: “Is there a new-found zealotry in guarding the health of citizens?... Or is this a cozy deal between government and company at citizens’ expense?” The author stated that the entire Happy Valley project was concocted by FNM, which did not want its operations curtailed any longer. Prior to the 1973 amalgamation, FNM was not interested in treating Happy Valley like a company town by providing it with services such as water and sewage, either. It therefore urged the Ontario government to expropriate the villagers. When the provincial government countered that this would be too costly both financially and politically, de Villiers asserted that “they made a little deal.” According to de Villiers, the move orchestrated between FNM, the province, and the regional government was therefore born out of deceit, propped up by a false sense of regard for health and safety. He questioned whether FNM would have any reason to

⁵³ Elie W. Martel, Letter to Michael Loney, 17 July 1974. RG12-45, Air: Happy Valley Air Pollution (1974), B363859. AO.

⁵⁴ de Villiers, “Who Killed Happy Valley?”

⁵⁵ “Last residents lament need to relocate homes,” *The Sudbury Star*, 2 August 1974.

control its emissions once Happy Valley and the API were gone for good. The second plant FNM had just constructed adjacent from Happy Valley, de Villiers explained, had been inoperable for the past year because its pollution control systems failed. "These are not happy days, then, in Happy Valley," de Villiers opined.⁵⁶

The two remaining homeowners spoke candidly with de Villiers about their experience. Both John Gizzi and Clarence Whitford stubbornly refused to leave Happy Valley, balking at the hazards associated with sulphur smoke. Gizzi, for instance, told de Villiers "I work in it eight hours, live in it the rest, it never bothers me... I fix the house up pretty. I grow vegetables. I raise rabbits. I have pigeons to eat." Whitford, on the other hand, angrily avowed that "This business about pollution is bullshit. The company doesn't care about pollution, nor does the government. The company wants the land for their own use. Mark my words, there'll be another plant soon, right there where you're sitting." An FNM official interviewed by de Villiers said that the company had no plans to build a new plant on Happy Valley's grave; it was buying the land only to "keep other people off." Gizzi had declined multiples offers from the municipality for his properties (he owned three homes in Happy Valley). The offers were insufficient, and he was not willing to take out another mortgage at his age. Neville Barnett, urban renewal coordinator with the regional gov-

ernment, explained to de Villiers that the \$360,000 combined budget "is already exhausted... We wanted to avoid expropriation. It is messy and expensive. But we cannot match what Gizzi wants. The province will have to decide."⁵⁷

Marq de Villiers' allegations did not go unnoticed by FNM, which published a strongly-worded response in *The Globe* weeks later. W.L.W. Taylor, a manager with FNM whom de Villiers had interviewed, wrote on behalf of his employer. He denounced the piece as "yellow journalism" which was "by and large a product of Mr. de Villier's imagination" because the writer realized that "after having talked to all the parties concerned with the situation... that it could not be developed into an interesting article." Taylor defended the decision not to provide Happy Valley with municipal services, stating that the local council concluded it was unwarranted to burden all of Falconbridge with the increased taxes that would have been required. He added that FNM's new plant, which had been erected to produce an iron and sulphur product, was shut down "because the conversion of iron oxide to metallic iron could not be accomplished," not due to the failure of its pollution constraints. He also clarified that the Ontario government had approached FNM about eradicating Happy Valley, not *vice versa*, and claimed that the company never requested expropriative measures. Taylor refuted de Villier's suggestion that FNM would not

⁵⁶ de Villiers, "Who Killed Happy Valley?"

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

meets its obligations to improve its present smelting practices and comply with government sulphur dioxide emissions standards once Happy Valley was wiped from the map. This was “strictly not in accordance with the facts, of which Mr. de Villiers was quite aware,” argued Taylor, as the “amount of particulate matter that is emitted from Falconbridge stacks is within the limits established by the Ministry of the Environment.”⁵⁸

The heated public exchange between de Villier and Taylor was a fitting capstone to the Happy Valley affair. This southern Ontario-based reporter encapsulated the often-sensationalized tone that the media had adopted when covering this particular story. Although de Villier and others who wrote about Happy Valley should certainly be given credit for bringing the human element of the situation to light, at times their work dramatized the relocation project as a consequence of inept public decision-making or even unbridled cronyism. Taylor, conversely, stuck to the script that had been echoed by corporate and public officials over the previous few years. In hindsight, one could easily criticize FNM for squashing efforts to provide Happy Valley with more municipal services, as well as for its less than stellar environmental record. Hypothetically, the Ontario government, too, could be admonished for not forcing FNM to drastically reform its practices in a way that would allow Happy Valley to remain intact. This would be

to ignore the contemporary context of the Happy Valley project, however. Governments across the globe had only just begun to come to terms with the environmental mandates thrust before them, and the government of Ontario was no different. The men, women, and children of Happy Valley were being exposed to harmful toxins every day, and most were prepared to leave immediately. Sudbury’s air pollution problem in general and the vulnerability of Happy Valley in particular had been ignored for far too many years. Realistically, then, the former required a gradual transition, and the latter a swift resolution.

Today, the memory of Happy Valley has faded from the minds of most people in the Sudbury area. The Ontario government never followed through with expropriation, as John Gizzi lived in Happy Valley until the late-1980s when he willingly moved.⁵⁹ The land has passed through corporate hands in recent years: Falconbridge Limited (previously FNM) was purchased by the Swiss-based mining company Xstrata in 2006, which was then bought out by Glencore, a British-Swiss multinational, seven years later. The houses that once lined Happy Valley have long since been completely levelled. The area is off limits to the public and protected by a large barbed-wire fence. Nestled in an unassuming Falconbridge neighbourhood and within eyesight of Glencore’s operations, passersby

⁵⁸ W.L.W. Taylor, “Happy Valley,” *The Globe and Mail*, 7 November 1974.

⁵⁹ Saarinen, 136; “Gone but not forgotten: Sudbury’s ghost towns,” *The Sudbury Star*, 2 August 2004.



A portion of the fence that now encloses the former Happy Valley townsite. Photo provided by author (2019).

enclosure, the chances of ever catching a personal glimpse of Ontario's first pollution ghost town are essentially nonexistent.

Nearly fifty years later, the Ontario government's decision to relocate twenty-three families out of Happy Valley should be framed as a difficult but warranted public management decision. In 2004, a report by the Panel on the Role of Government, commissioned by the government of On-

can walk up the unmarked Happy Valley Road and view the barricade entrance for themselves. A sign with bold red lettering warns "Private Property: Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted." Well beyond the chain link fence some roads, driveways, and house foundations, as well as old inoperative railways, can still be found.⁶⁰ Unless one is employed directly by Glen-core or dares traverse its imposing steel

tario and chaired by Ron Daniels of the University of Toronto, put forth recommendations on the future roles that the government should fulfill, including in northern, rural, and remote communities in Ontario. One of its many conclusions advised that the provincial government should "accept, and in some cases hasten, the death of some of these communities as a necessary evil." In its coverage of the

⁶⁰ "Everyone's gone," *The Sudbury Star*, 4 August 2007.

report, *The Sudbury Star* specifically referenced Happy Valley as an instance in which the Ontario government was justified in “mercifully killing communities that have outlived their usefulness.”⁶¹

While in most cases such measures would likely be too harsh or unpopular, Happy Valley is indeed an appropriate example. Guided by a pragmatic, facilitative, and managerial approach to the emerging field of environmental politics, Premier Davis’ government did what it deemed politically and practically necessary after consultations with business interests, local government, opposing

politicians, and the people of Happy Valley themselves. Happy Valley was a sort of canary in the coal mine—or nickel mine—which drew additional attention to the impact of sulphur dioxide emissions on Sudbury’s actual livability, not merely their effects on the physical landscape. This article does not intend to diminish or trivialize the stress and struggles experienced by the dozens of people who once called this forgotten ghost town their home. Instead, it is meant to highlight, on a microscopic scale, how imprudent environmental stewardship can lead to human displacement.

⁶¹ “Do-it-yourself cities: The province has been challenged to rethink rural and Northern development,” *The Sudbury Star*, 27 April 2004.