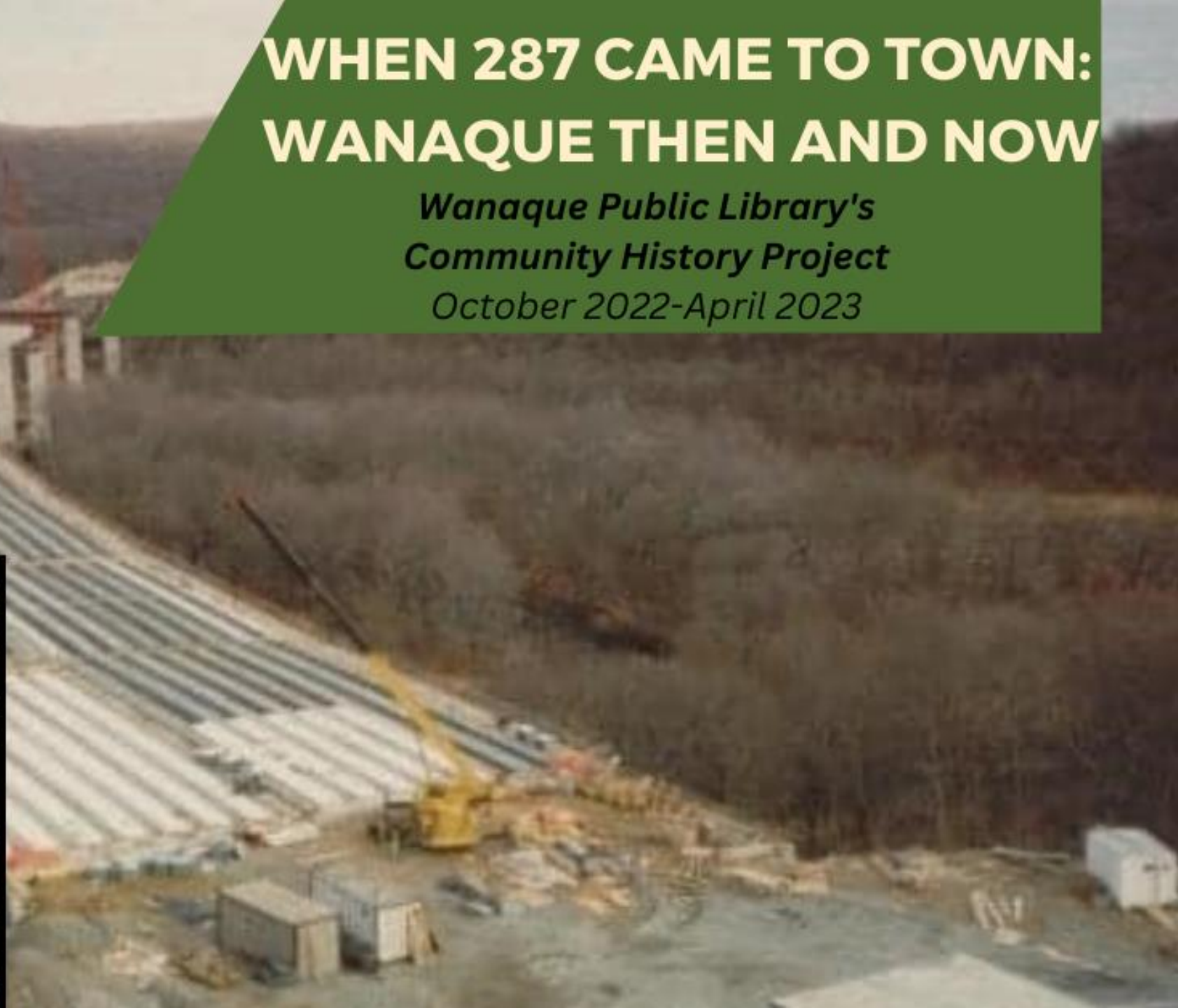


Photo: Ronnie Perry

WHEN 287 CAME TO TOWN: WANAQUE THEN AND NOW

*Wanaque Public Library's
Community History Project
October 2022-April 2023*

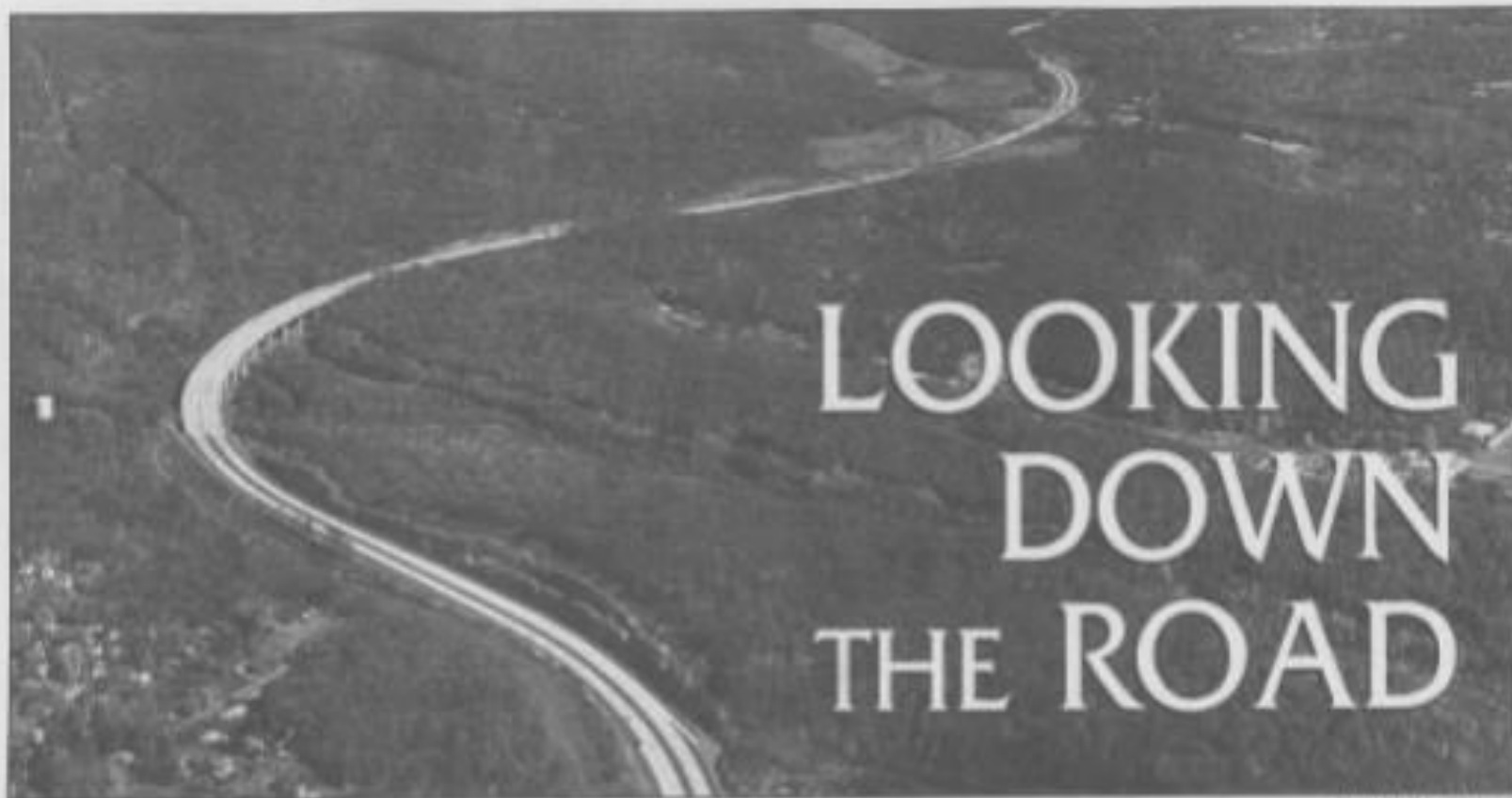


How we connected with the community

- Surveys (20 responses)
- Oral history interviews (6 interviews)
- “Good Ol’ Haskell” Facebook group



After nearly 40 years, the "missing link" of Interstate 287 is finally open. It will cut miles and minutes for commuters and truckers alike, and dramatically affect life in North Jersey -- from housing development to shopping patterns to leisure activities.



In November 1993,
the final 19 miles of
Route 287 opened –

but there was no
Wanaque exit yet.

The Wanaque exit (Exit 55) finally opened in fall 1996 at the intersection of Ringwood and Union Avenues.

Union Avenue to get Route 287 exit ramp

By Colleen Mancino
Record Staff Writer

A controversial Passaic County interchange for Route 287 will be at Union Avenue in Wanaque, not at the locally favored Highland Avenue site, where it would have been the catalyst for a \$300-million mall, office, and hotel complex.

Cost, countywide support, guaranteed federal funding, and a speedier construction timetable tilted the scales in favor of Union Avenue, Transportation Commissioner Thomas Downs said Friday in announcing his decision. The ruling cannot be appealed.

Highland, about a mile north of Union on Wanaque's main artery, Ringwood Avenue, would provide direct access to the 440-acre Pow-

der Hollow tract, site of the proposed mall.

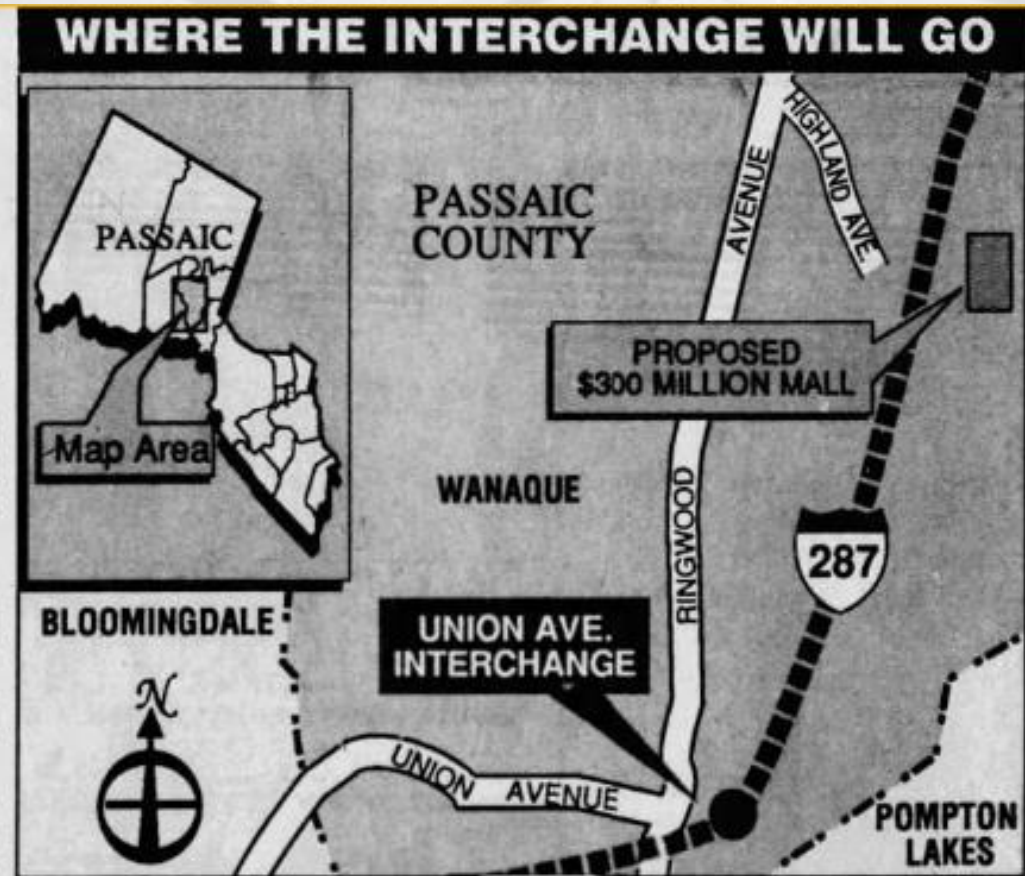
"Construction of the Union Avenue interchange could start in two years," Downs wrote, "while work on Highland Avenue could not begin for at least 10 years, if at all."

Principals of Cali Associates, one of the mall developers, could not be reached for direct comment, but they have said that construction hinged on a Highland Avenue interchange.

In a statement sent to The Record, John Cali said: "We will have to reevaluate our commitment to the project."

Wanaque officials, hoping to reap millions in tax revenue from such a mall, had argued strenuously for the Highland Avenue site.

But the federally funded inter-



LILY LU / THE RECORD

state highway was planned with a Union Avenue interchange, and an environmental-impact study of the site is complete. Highland

Avenue lacks that crucial study, and the added cost and time to complete it were deemed by many officials to be impractical.

The impact on one family

NOVEMBER 21, 1993

LOOKING DOWN THE ROAD:



The impact of a new interstate

FACES OF 287

Salvage dealer fears end of road for way of life

As Route 287 climbs westward out of Oakland and knifes through hilly Passaic County, it is easy to be dazzled by the fresh rock cuts, the 1,800-foot bridge curving over the Wanaque River, and the vistas of the Highlands.

Motorists are not likely to appreciate the beauty of the junkyard with its old cars and tires stacked up just 50 yards from the gleaming new link as it crosses busy Ringwood Avenue in Wanaque.

To John DeDiminiantamio Jr., however, the junkyard is beautiful.

"It's not just a business for us. It's a lifestyle. We created our own lifestyle right there."

The first thing John De, as he's widely known, says as we talk at a cafe just a few blocks away is to correct me. "Don't use 'junkyard.' Use 'auto-salvage business.'"

If there were a Book of Wanaque, the three John De's would account for at least a chapter. John Sr. took a chance in the Depression and bought seven acres on Ringwood Avenue. This was in 1932 and the price was \$4,500. Tall, lanky John Jr., the one with whom I'm drinking coffee, grew

up and spent his working career on the site: between the salvage yard, an excavating business, and being the landlord for 11 sets of tenants who live in small houses on his land adjacent to the yard. He now lives in Ringwood. But red-haired John III runs the salvage yard and lives in one of the houses there.

The De's probably won't own the land much longer, because the state wants it for another exit ramp it will someday build off Route 287. It has already taken an adjacent strip mall.

The De's might be the last family to lose their land to Route 287, and the wait is painful. For now the family nervously consults its lawyer, postpones expanding its business, wonders where it will relocate the salvage yard, and worries about the tenants.

"I'm not suffering and I don't care about myself," says John. "But it's going to be terrible for the tenants. Until they move, they'll have to put up with the 24-hour noise and fumes. The one who lives closest to 287 has a 2-year-old girl."

"And where will they go? One woman has been there 30 years and I give her cheap rent." John fears the state will offer her only that amount when she relocates.

His son, John III, tells me he wants to make his mark on the salvage business by ordering a big-ticket articulated forklift, a



KLAUS-PETER STEITZ/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

John DeDiminiantamio Jr. feels his auto salvage yard is threatened by the opening of Route 287.

three-car flatbed truck, and some more late-model wrecks for parts, but doesn't dare until a decision is made by the state.

"If I spend \$2,000 apiece for 10 late-model wrecks and the state comes along and puts us out of business, who is going to buy them from me?"

John Jr. wants the state not only to settle a price on his land soon but also to use its muscle over local governments so the salvage yard can be moved nearby. Neither Wanaque nor neighboring towns are apt to want the yard elsewhere.

"It is almost impossible to relocate a salvage yard," he says. "Where will they put us, out in the woods someplace?"

John Sr. started the business 61 years ago, three years before

John Jr. was born. In those days part of their land was across Ringwood Avenue, but the state bought that portion — after a court fight — in anticipation of building Route 287. So the salvage and excavating businesses were crammed into the present site.

John Sr. died two years ago, after it was announced that the long-anticipated Route 287 exit ramp would not be built onto Ringwood Avenue, at least initially. Yet land was still being taken for the ramp, leaving John Jr. and his son in limbo.

Is there a timetable? I ask.

"No, the state never tells," says John Jr. "But there is no chance of them going away. My son, a young man and ambitious, his hands are tied; he's being penal-

ized because the state is dragging its feet. Just take it, get it over with."

As there are three John De's, there are three Dorothys in this story. One is John Jr.'s wife. Another is his sister, and she is part-owner of the site.

The third Dorothy is the widow of John Sr. — the matriarch of the De's.

"She's 86 and she lives here and she will be replaced too," says her son. "What is an 86-year-old woman going to do who is still healthy? This is an irreplaceable piece of property — what the hell does money mean to my mother?"

"That's what I mean, this is a lifestyle we worked for that is being taken. To the state people it's a job, a paycheck; but to the people involved, it's a life."

John and Dorothy DeDiminicanthano bought their land in 1932. These photos are from 1935 tax maps.

E, N. J.
 LINE...6.....
 LOT No. Part of 1
 ST. or AVE. Ringwood Avenue

Dominicantanio & Dougherty
with 2 Buildings (Gas Station)



JGH OF WANAQUE, N. J.

0.00..... PAGE...21..... LINE...6.....
 0.00..... BLOCK No. 1-2..... LOT No. Part of 1
 ST. & No. ST. or AVE. Ringwood Avenue
 0.00..... PAVED ST. Yes.....
 OWNER D. De. Deminicanthano & Dougherty
 0.00..... No. OF LOTS ...2...with 2 Buildings

LDING APPRAISAL

YEAR	TAXES	ASS'MTS	AMOUNT
30	36.56	<i>Prop. Land</i>	800 -
31	38.16	<i>Imp.</i>	800 -
32	37.76		800 -
33	37.76		800 -
34	38.24		800 -
35	33.96		400 - 200 -



JOHN DE. INC.



My son



Little Dottie going to work



John & Dottie's 1st house



#happylife



John & Dottie recall memories of the old junk yard, and the dog named Dottie. This dog loved everyone except for John, who he bit and growled. Dottie said, "It hurt like hell when Dottie bit me on the leg and tail, several times."

DE STREET



Dottie remembers Uncle John bringing in a new Mercedes. Dottie and Terry Presumers, and said, "junk it!"







When 287 Came to Town: A Successful Project

