

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places **DRAFT** Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Wading River Radio Station  
 other names/site number Owen House, Benson House  
 name of related multiple property listing N/A

**Location**

street & number 408 North Side Road  not for publication  
 city or town Wading River  vicinity  
 state New York code NY county Suffolk code 103 zip code 11792

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,  
 I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.  
 In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:  
X national \_\_\_ statewide \_\_\_ local

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government \_\_\_\_\_

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Classification

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only **one** box.)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

| Contributing | Noncontributing |              |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1            |                 | buildings    |
|              |                 | sites        |
|              |                 | structures   |
|              |                 | objects      |
| 1            | 0               | <b>Total</b> |

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

N/A

6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC / Single Dwelling

DOMESTIC / Institutional Housing

DEFENSE / Military Facility

RELIGION / Office

7. Description

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

NO STYLE

foundation: Stone

walls: Shingle

roof: Asphalt

other:

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### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

#### Summary Paragraph

The Wading River Radio Station is located at 408 North Side Road in the hamlet of Wading River on the western edge of the Town of Riverhead, Suffolk County. Sound Avenue, one of Riverhead's primarily agricultural roads, runs through the center of the hamlet, which is bounded by Middle Country Road to the South and Long Island Sound to the North. The hamlet, which remained small into the mid-twentieth century, remains predominantly open land, including agricultural fields, conservation areas, marshland, and the Calverton National Cemetery. Twentieth century subdivisions and residential development are primarily located north of Sound Avenue. North Wading River Road, the central road of this portion of the hamlet, leads to North Side Road, which leads north to and parallels Long Island Sound.

The Wading River Radio Station is located on the campus of Camp DeWolfe, which is located on a 19-acre parcel on Long Island Sound. Much of the property is heavily wooded, and generally slopes upward to a bluff which soars over 100 feet above the beach and Long Island Sound. A historic gravel road approaches the Wading River Radio Station, which sits at the edge of the bluff, from the south. The station shares the property with over 25 other structures ranging from dining halls to seasonal cabins that make up Camp DeWolfe, the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island's summer camp and year-round retreat center. Primarily constructed during the mid-twentieth century, the Camp postdates both the construction of the house and its use as radio station. While the property as a whole, which was attractive to the FBI for its openness and seclusion, no longer retains integrity to its historic appearance due to this later construction, the station itself and its setting on the bluff retains integrity. The nomination boundary was drawn to include the Wading River Radio Station and a portion of the landscape around it and corresponds to the natural contour of the landscape and other distinctive physical features of the site. (See item 10).

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### Narrative Description

Constructed ca. 1912, the Wading River Radio Station is a two-and-a-half story, three-bay by two-bay frame house with a side-gabled roof. The building features some Colonial Revival style elements, but is otherwise a typical early twentieth century regional vernacular building. While the house retains its historic fenestration pattern, the windows throughout are contemporary replacements. The house is covered in shingles and rests on a parged stone foundation. Due the building's orientation toward both the road and the view, it does not have a clear primary façade.

The house's south elevation, oriented toward the road, features a central two-story one-bay by one-bay tower which projects from the façade and is capped by a front-gable with a deep, full pediment. The tower is lit by two windows on the first floor and one on the second floor. A one-story, hip-roofed enclosed porch with six fixed four-pane windows and glass and wood panel door is located in the southwestern corner. Two windows light the eastern end of the first floor, and a single window lights each bay on the second floor. A cornice band runs under the roofline and ends with cornice returns on the east and west elevations. Two small hip-roofed dormers with single windows and two interior brick chimneys extend from the roofline.

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The east and west elevations have fire escapes which were added some time in the early 2000s to accommodate building code as a retreat house. The west elevation is lit by two windows on each floor, and two more closely spaced windows in the gable. The east elevation has identical fenestration, with the addition of a small central window on the second floor.

The north, bay-facing, elevation has a façade-length enclosed porch on the first floor. The original square porch columns remain visible between the modern fenestration. The central bay, which has a contemporary door and sidelights, is highlighted by a full pediment. A second-story one-bay by one-bay central projection with a full pediment extends from the roof of the porch, mirroring the projection on the southern elevation. It is lit by a window on each of its sides. A cornice band runs under the roofline and ends with cornice returns on the east and west elevations. Two hip-roofed dormers with single windows project from the roofline.

On the interior, the house remains substantially intact, generally retaining its historic plan, central staircase, flooring, doors, and trim. The basement generally retains its original character as one open space. While the radio equipment used by the FBI was removed when they left the building, concrete foundations poured to support this equipment remain in place. The first floor is divided into a central hallway, two parlors, a kitchen, and two offices. The central stair hall retains its original Greek Revival style staircase, baseboards, trim, and narrow wooden floors. Contemporary French doors lead from the stair hall to the enclosed porch. Both parlors also retain original baseboards and door and window trim. The eastern parlor retains its original brick fireplace with a stepped brick mantelpiece. The kitchen and offices are located on the southern end of the building. While these spaces have seen more change, such as the addition of ceiling tile and paneling, they generally retain their original configuration, baseboards, and window trim. The second floor is divided into a central stair hall, a parlor in the enclosed second-story projection, and four bedrooms. The third floor is divided into three bedrooms. While there have been some modifications to the plan to make the building serve more effectively as a retreat house, the historic staircase, flooring, and much of the trim has been retained on the upper floors.

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8. Statement of Significance

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Military History

**Period of Significance**

1942-1945

**Significant Dates**

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The period of significance for the Wading River Radio Station extends from 1942-45 to include the years that the building was used as a secret FBI radio transmission station.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Wading River Radio Station is significant under Criterion A in the area of military history for its covert use as a FBI radio transmission station between 1942 and 1945. The Owen family purchased the 71-acre property in an isolated area in Wading River and built their summer house on the edge of the cliff during the early twentieth century. In 1941, FBI Special Agent William Gustave Friedemann began taking steps to establish a secret radio station on Long Island. Friedemann had recently been approached by Jorge Mosquera, a Spanish businessman who had been coerced by Abwehr, the German military intelligence service, to work as a spy. Mosquera had no love for the German government and wanted to serve as a double agent. After completing their vetting, the FBI assigned Mosquera codename ND98 and helped him set up the secret radio station the Germans had charged him with establishing; the Germans had intended that his station be used to broadcast and receive information directly from a site in Hamburg. Working with Richard Millen, a trailblazer in radio engineering, the FBI found and rented the Owen property in Wading River.

In January 1942, Millen and a team of engineers installed radio equipment in the house, hid a large antenna in the woods, and devised a diesel-powered generator to avoid local suspicion about the house's energy use. In February, FBI agent Donworth Johnson was assigned to manage the operation at the house. He lived on the property with his family, as well as two or three radio operators. The first floor was maintained as a family home, while the second and third floors were primarily used for the FBI operation. For the duration of the war, the radio operators impersonated German agents to collect valuable information and stayed almost exclusively on the property. Information from Mosquera, as well as correspondence received by this station, was critical to inspiring the United States' development of an atomic bomb. The station was also involved in the Operation "Bodyguard," which used counterintelligence to confuse and mislead the Nazi government about the upcoming Allied invasion of Europe. In June 1945, the operation was closed and the equipment was dismantled. Soon after the operation was closed, the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island purchased the property and transformed it into Camp DeWolfe, a retreat center and summer camp. Camp buildings now dot the formerly heavily wooded property around the house, but the house itself and the land around it remains intact.

### Early History of Wading River

Wading River takes its name from the Native Americans who originally inhabited the area and designated it "The place where we wade for thick, round-shelled clams" or "Pauquaconsuk." Settlers briefly used other names for the settlement, however the simplest English translation of the Native American name survived.<sup>1</sup>

The settlement at Wading River, which was comprised of eight families, was formally established on November 17<sup>th</sup> 1671.<sup>2</sup> The area was attractive for its abundant fresh water, rich soil, and the availability of natural resources on land, such as its woods and meadows, and sea.<sup>3</sup> Wading River's early settlers were primarily subsistence farmers. The village was located near a few meadows that were used for the feeding of livestock and where "Indian corn", rye, and buckwheat were grown with success. This led to the development

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Rowley Meier (Wading River Historical Society), *The Wading River. Pauquaconsuk* (Riverhead, NY: LeValley Press, 1955), 3

<sup>2</sup> Meier, *The Wading River*, 1; Elisabeth S. Lapham, *Wading River: Three Hundred Years of Wading River History* (Ridge, NY: George's Printing Service, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> Meier, *The Wading River*, 1.

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of grist and lumber mills in the early 1700's. Farmers would travel miles to bring their grain to be ground at the mills, and hides to be tanned at the local tannery.<sup>4</sup>

The first road in Wading River, completed in 1710, ran East to Southold, and at times ran along the beach. In 1728, a new road, now known as "North Country Road" connected Wading River to Mount Sinai in the West. These roads largely connected farmlands, throughout the surrounding countryside, to mills that were located in the larger coastal settlements. Due to the thickly wooded countryside, transportation to and from Wading River was primarily by boat. These two factors led to the rise of the cordwood industry in Wading River during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> Cordwood, or "Fire Wood" was the primary source of fuel at the time and was cut from the woodlands, brought to the beach landing, and transported by boat, to places such as New Haven and New York. The shipyard continued to develop in Wading River at this time, building "sloops and small boats" for the growing costing business. This business made it normal for approximately 150 boats to be sighted in the waters of the "North Sea" just off Wading River at any given time during the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

### Owen Family in Wading River

After the Long Island Railroad extended its North Shore branch to Wading River in 1895, the community began to attract tourism and seasonal residents. Its dynamic landscape, location along the shore, and woods made it attractive for private owners as well as for the development of camps for religious and social groups.<sup>7</sup> Gabriel S. Owen (1833-1915) worked in Orange County as a carriage maker for much of his life, where he raised a large family with his wife, Ann. His oldest son, William W. Owen trained as a doctor and moved to Manhattan to practice by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. William was successful; by 1905, he was living at 150 East 127<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan along with his father, two sisters Sarah T. and Louise L., and his niece Helen. City living didn't suit Gabriel. By 1909, perhaps after discovering it during a summer trip, he purchased a large, rural parcel in Wading River on Long Island Sound as a retirement home.<sup>8</sup> Newspaper accounts suggest that Helen moved to Wading River to live with her grandfather and report that William, Sarah, and Louise visited often, mostly during the summer, to spend time with them and enjoy the property. After Gabriel died in 1915, his children, who had grown fond of the property, decided to keep it.<sup>9</sup>

Sarah Owen and her sister Louise began living at the house full time by 1930, if not sooner. At that time, the census reported that the house was valued at \$25,000, far more than those nearby on the road. Sarah was the house's last full-time occupant. After her death in 1940, the house passed to her niece Mrs. Helen Owen Howell (1895-1972). Through her visits to the area with her family, Helen had become familiar with the community. Helen married Albert M. Howell (1891-1980), a local farmer, in 1918 and lived nearby with their son. By 1930, Albert had become established at a farm on Manor Road in Riverhead. While Helen may have been Sarah's closest relation, her family had no real need for the 71-acre property and appear to have been in

<sup>4</sup> Meier, *The Wading River*, 6,19-20, 37.

<sup>5</sup> Meier, *The Wading River*, 25-26.

<sup>6</sup> Meier, *The Wading River*, 40.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Alcorn and Mary Ann Oberdorf, *Shoreham and Wading River* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2012), 8.

<sup>8</sup> 1860, 1880, 1910 Federal Census, New York; 1905 State Census, New York; "Plate 006: Brookhaven and Riverhead," *Atlas of Suffolk County, Long Island, New York, Sound Shore* vol. 2 (New York: E. Belcher Hyde, 1909); "Wading River," *The County Review*, October 11, 1912.

<sup>9</sup> "Wading River," *Port Jefferson Echo*, September 5, 1914; "Wading River," *The County Review*, August 28, 1914; "Gabriel S. Owen," NYC Municipal Deaths, 1795-1949.

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the early stages of deciding what to do with the old family home when a surprising offer came to them.<sup>10</sup>

## The FBI on Long Island

For the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) the Second World War began in 1938 with a failed counterespionage operation known as the “Crown” affair. The case involved a collection of naturalized German – American citizens who had been supplying military and industrial secrets to the German military intelligence service for years. When the FBI uncovered the plot it launched an investigation which turned up dozens of conspirators. Before they could be arrested and charged, however, the FBI’s ham – handed approach allowed all but four spies to flee the United States and make their way safely to Europe.

Despite this embarrassment the case had important long-term consequences. It served as a wake-up call for a significant strengthening of security surrounding vital military/industrial secrets. At the same time it highlighted the need for a more robust counterespionage approach to the problem of spying and stronger coordination between the military services and the FBI. In the words of one historian “it took a botched investigation ... in New York by an unprepared FBI to convince President Roosevelt that J. Edgar Hoover should be empowered to become the first modern spymaster.”<sup>11</sup>

What resulted was a presidential order issued in June 1939 requiring cabinet departments to forward all espionage, sabotage or subversion reports to the FBI for investigation. Within weeks of the president’s order the FBI together with the war and the navy departments formed the Interdepartmental Intelligence Conference to coordinate policy and establish ground rules for going forward.

The Crown case also served as an education for the FBI when a mystery man arrived in New York City from Europe in 1940 with a strange story of recruitment into spying by the Abwehr, Germany’s military foreign espionage arm. His name was William Gottlieb Sebold, a naturalized American citizen, who had immigrated to the United States in the 1920s after service in the German army during the First World War. Over those intervening years he wandered around the country working as a machinist in various aircraft factories all the while learning the English language, acculturating himself to American mores and marrying an American citizen. When he returned to Germany in early 1939 to visit his mother he was forced into espionage by the Abwehr under the dual threat of not being permitted to leave Germany and harm to his family. “He would never go through with [espionage]” an FBI report later noted “but [knew] that he had to do something in order to get out of Germany alive.”<sup>12</sup>

His agreement to cooperate led to espionage training which included rudimentary instruction in radio communications and orders to purchase the necessary radio parts in the US. He was then to locate a site where he could secretly communicate with Hamburg, Germany. Before departing his Abwehr handlers also gave him the names of four German agents in New York including Herman Lang, a naturalized American citizen of German origin.

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<sup>10</sup> Federal Census, New York, 1920-40; “Take Over Spy Hide-out,” 1947, newspaper clipping in collection of Camp DeWolfe; “Bible Classes Take Over L.I. Spy Hide-Out,” 1947, newspaper clipping in collection of Camp DeWolfe.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Duffy, *Double Agent: The First Hero of World War II and How the FBI Outwitted and Destroyed a Nazi Spy Ring* (New York: Scribner, 2014), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Duffy, *Double Agent*, 4.



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In 1940 the Carl Norden Company located in Lower Manhattan was manufacturing a device that one historian later described as the “most important military secret project under development.” It was a revolutionary new bombsight capable of guiding bombs to targets with pinpoint accuracy from planes flying at high altitudes. When the FBI identified Lang shock waves reverberated through the top-brass of the military right up to the Oval Office. As the head of security for the Norden Company Lang was responsible for safeguarding the bombsight and its blueprints from prying eyes.<sup>13</sup>

Sebold became the FBI’s first double agent and in the months following his return to America. FBI agents led by Special Agent Richard L. Millen began hunting for a radio site that combined clear transmission conditions and security. Millen was uniquely qualified for this assignment. A native of Indiana, he had attended University of Indiana where he completed a graduate degree in physics. Later he became a professor at the university while coaching the baseball team. Millen, a mere three-year veteran of the FBI, was assigned to the Radio Engineering Section of the FBI’s Laboratory Division. In the months running up to US entry into the Second World War he busily crisscrossed the country from Puerto Rico to Alaska installing communications towers in anticipation of the coming war. For the Sebold radio site he found a tiny bare bones bungalow (no running water and a wood burning stove) that sat beside a sleepy dirt road obscured by dense trees on a cliff overlooking the harbor at Centerport, Long Island. Starting on May 18, 1940 the FBI began secret radio communications with the Abwehr’s Hamburg station who believed that they were in touch with a disaffected German and ham radio operator (In effect FBI Special Agent Maurice H. Price) recruited by Sebold.<sup>14</sup>

Over the next thirteen months more than seven hundred messages passed through the airwaves. What they revealed lifted the scales from the eyes of US policymakers to the vast extent of German espionage in America along with minute details of their intelligence objectives, and, equally startling, the extent of German cooperation with the Japanese intelligence services. By June 1941 the FBI had identified more than thirty German espionage agents operating in the United States and fifty more in Europe, Asia and Latin America. The June 29, 1941 arrest of the US contingent and their later conviction awakened the American public to the threat of German spying but more importantly broke the back of German intelligence gathering in the US six months before the American entry into the war.<sup>15</sup>

That autumn as the German spy trials were underway in Brooklyn federal court the FBI received word from the Department of State that a native of Argentina named Jorge Mosquera had walked into the US consulate in Montevideo, Uruguay with a story of his recruitment into German espionage. Just weeks later, Mosquera who spoke only German and Spanish, found himself sitting in an FBI office in New York chatting with Special Agent William Friedmann, an Oklahoma native raised in a German farming family. His story was similar to Sebold’s. A Buenos Aires native, Mosquera started his business career in Argentina selling textiles and then moved to Germany in the 1920s where he opened an import/export business. By 1939 with the winds of war beginning to blow in Europe he decided to liquidate everything and return to Argentina. Like Sebold, however, the price for his passage was cooperation with the Abwehr. Also like Sebold, his job was to collect intelligence secrets in the US and transmit the results by secret radio.

<sup>13</sup> Duffy, *Double Agent*, 14.

<sup>14</sup> Raymond J. Batvinis, *The Origins of FBI Counterintelligence* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 237.

<sup>15</sup> Batvinis, *Origins*, 256.

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## Establishment and Contributions of the Wading River Radio Station

With the Centerport station now known to the world, Millen found himself once again on the hunt for a new location. By January 1942 he had stumbled upon the Owen House located in the tiny fishing and farming hamlet of Wading River, New York. Located eighty miles east of New York on Long Island's North Fork the spacious three story building sat on a cliff bordered on one side by Long Island Sound and acres of dense trees on the other three sides, and the only approach to the station was a bumpy, rutted quarter mile path. Even by today's standards the house is not easy to find. In 1942 it would have been nearly impossible.

A Myron Howell, Helen's son, later reported that the interest in the vacant house had come as quite a surprise to the family. After a man stopped by their farmhouse asking if the Owen place was for rent, Helen was concerned:

That was the height of the war scare and we wondered why anybody wanted to live in such an isolated house. "After the man went away mother said, 'He's a nice-spoken man, but I think we ought to tell the FBI.' A couple of days later the man came back and told us he was the FBI." His family was sworn to secrecy, Mr. Howell said, and the government's secret operative took over the Owen place.<sup>16</sup>

Millen quickly got to work installing Special Agent Donworth Johnson along with his wife and infant child into the house as permanent residents. A three-year Bureau veteran with a college degree and navy radio training the tall thin Johnson with a "tubercular" appearance posed as a wealthy lawyer who needed the fresh air that the site provided. He would live at the house with his wife, child, and an ill-tempered German shepherd named "Clifford" who guarded the entrance road. His cover also gave rise to local worries about the spread of his tuberculosis which the FBI found useful in discouraging visits from curious neighbors who wondered why he was not in uniform.<sup>17</sup>

Wading River radio station was also used for radio communications of three other double agents as well. Each operation was separate from the other and required its own radio operator. Johnson and his family slept on the second floor while the others occupied the third floor which was also used for receiving and transmitting as well as, office and storage space. Millen designed and installed the first Rhombic Type radio antenna at the site in January 1942. In his reflections, he describes the process of installing the antennas and equipment in the dense woods well out of sight of the nearby road:

The location was on the north side of Long Island, near Wading River. It was concealed in a forest of large trees. My first problem was to stay warm. A gale came in off the water, up the cliff and through the trees. By transit, I marked out an area which would resemble an elongated diamond, 70 feet off the ground. The transit work was no fun in the thick woods. Having established the corners, I marked the trees and began the talk of clearing the path for the antenna wire to be pulled up. The wire was #10 steel with a black enamel coating. In the wind and cold, 10 degrees, it was onrey (sic) to handle. I got three fingers frostbitten. The antenna was pulled up, anchored and a birdhouse constructed at the end to conceal the terminating resistor. Feed lines were constructed from the other end of the antenna to the house

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<sup>16</sup> "Take Over Spy Hide-Out."

<sup>17</sup> Raymond J. Batvinis, *Hoover's Secret War against Axis Spies* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2014), 185; FBI SA Richard Millen reflections, in the collection of Camp DeWolfe; Ray Batvinis, "Benson House: A Secret Revealed," *The Grapevine* (2014): 5-9. Available at <[http://fbistudies.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Benson\\_House\\_Batvinis.pdf](http://fbistudies.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Benson_House_Batvinis.pdf)>.

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where concealed feed through porcelain insulators were installed to carry the energy in and out of the operating room. I had been told before I came up that the old Duquesne Case transmitter was available in that agents from the NY office had put it into wooden boxes when that case was over. To my dismay, I found that I had about 20 boxes of parts! The agents had cut all the wires, unscrewed everything they could and even cut off wires coming out of transformers for instance. With no wiring diagrams, etc., I pieced the transmitter back together. Kirkland and I both crossed out fingers when it was turned on the first time... I also installed additional equipment. While there, the office became involved in another double agent radio spy case. Several cases from this site, using separate equipment all contacted control points in Germany. A total of 2,829 messages were sent and 824 were received. I finished the station work by installing a power plant in the basement with a muffled exhaust going out into a window well.<sup>18</sup>

Operating radios of that size and power required a great deal of electricity. In order to reduce suspicion of the local power company questioning why a quiet married couple was using such huge amounts of electricity Millen installed a Buick car engine in the basement to offset the power supplied by the local utility company. An initial problem was engine vibration causing it to walk across the basement floor. Millen and his crew quickly anchored the engine to a concrete block in the floor with the exhaust vented through the nearby basement window. The block with four mounting bolts remains there today as the only visible evidence of the radio station's existence.

While Mosquera (now assigned the codename *ND98*) was undergoing training, he had a conversation with Hans Blum, the German officer handling his case. Blum warned him that his would be a long-term mission requiring patience, caution and attention to the FBI which had "already arrested some individuals in America."<sup>19</sup> Blum then pressed him on a topic that he had never heard of. It was essential that he search out intelligence regarding the status of American advancements in atomic research – what Blum called "experiments performed in the United States relative to shattering atoms." Germany's military leaders, Blum revealed, were anxious to develop high explosives from atom sources. In what was almost a premonition of the future he confided to Mosquera that the victor in this war "will be the one which has accomplished the task of shattering the atoms and applying the results thereof."<sup>20</sup>

The instructions that Mosquera carried with him to America produced a "gold mine" for useful information. They contained details for building the radio station complete with broadcast times, frequencies, call letters, emergency keys and transposition codes. There was also a list of intelligence requirements. Among others were demands for statistics on raw materials along with types of fabricated products such as machine tools made in the United States and Canada and delivery schedules for fighter aircraft and artillery shells produced by the Bethlehem Steel Corporation. And then one final ominous order to "deduce artificially the uranium or other alloy which may be substituted thereof (sic) as an atom constructor."<sup>21</sup>

The Wading River Radio Station sprang to life with its first broadcast to Hamburg on January 28, 1942 and operated continuously until the end of June 1945. Just days later in what has been described as an "amazing display of audacity" the Abwehr once again reminded Mosquera of the importance of atomic research ordering him to collect "information ... relative to experiments being conducted in the United States with Uranium 235" especially "all types of information dealing with atomic experiments."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> FBI SA Richard Millen reflections, in the collection of Camp DeWolfe.

<sup>19</sup> Batvinis, *Hoover's Secret War*, 186.

<sup>20</sup> Batvinis, *Hoover's Secret War*, 187.

<sup>21</sup> Batvinis, *Hoover's Secret War*, 188

<sup>22</sup> Batvinis, *Hoover's Secret War*, 188.

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There is little doubt that the orders radioed to the Wading River Radio Station for Mosquera and his instructions before he departed Germany were conveyed to James Conant the president of Harvard University and Vannever Bush, the head of the Carnegie Institution who had been appointed the director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development (OSRD) which was established by President Roosevelt to make preparations for war. A worried Conant on March 9, 1942 told President Roosevelt that while Germany may be pursuing the development of an atomic weapon he had no indications of the status of the enemy program. Two months later, in a top-secret gathering of leading OSRD scientists Conant reviewed the evidence of a German atom bomb program “which now included new indicators of German espionage activity.” First he outlined British intelligence reports that the Germans had access to heavy water. Next were sensitive defector revelations that the German army had taken over the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin; Germany’s most important scientific research facility and were hard at work on a bomb. Finally he turned to the issue of German spies in the United States. Recently intercepted instructions to their agents in this country, he explained, “shows they are interested in what we are doing.” In *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, Richard Rhodes Pulitzer Prize winning history of the development of the atom bomb, Conant is quoted as believing “this last evidence was the best.”<sup>23</sup> On June 17, 1942 Bush recommended going forth with atomic bomb production. President Roosevelt, gave his approval the same day.<sup>24</sup>

One of the most memorable stories emerging out of World War II was the successful Allied invasion of Europe on June 6, 1944 along a narrow stretch of beach at Normandy, France. The surprise attack, which caught the German army completely off guard, was due in large measure to a sophisticated deception scheme that British and American planners had initiated beginning in January 1944. The operation, codenamed *Bodyguard*, was massive in size complete with phony radio broadcasts and artfully created rubber tanks, trucks and planes: all in support of imaginary armies spread throughout England, Scotland and Northern Ireland ready to pounce somewhere in Europe along a line stretching from Norway to Spain’s border with France.

A key element of *Bodyguard* was a collection of men and women living in Great Britain who were supplying the Germans with intelligence on Allied moves and intentions. In fact, all of them were double agents controlled by the British counterespionage service. Since 1942 they had been feeding the Nazis a steady diet of truth and lies which Hitler’s military completely swallowed. In what history now remembers as the *Double Cross System* these sources, relying on secret radio transmissions, offered a smorgasbord of plausible yet confusing information about troop locations and strategic intentions.

Throughout the winter and spring of 1944 as German planners began focusing on the Pas de Calais as the main point of attack, *Bodyguard* sources refined their web of lies in an effort to convince the Nazi that their decision to concentrate their forces in the Calais area was correct. When the actual attack took place more than a hundred miles south on June 6, 1944 so thoroughly believed were these sources that they continued to successfully reassure the enemy that the Normandy assault was merely a “diversion” designed to draw off strength from the Calais area.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 408.

<sup>24</sup> Gregg Herken, *The Brotherhood of the Bomb: The Tangled Lives and Loyalties of Robert Oppenheimer, Ernest Lawrence, and Edward Teller* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), 60.

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Today we know that the Wading River Radio Station played an important role in this massive strategic deception initiative. Over the course of the war Mosquera and another FBI double agent, codenamed Koehler, both using separate radio circuits at the property, reported intelligence cataloguing a litany of eavesdropping on barroom scuttlebutt between soldiers and sailors about troop movements and upcoming assignments with particular attention to shoulder patches with division insignias. In Mosquera's case he also reinforced his credibility with the Abwehr by reporting the replacement of a senior British commander in England weeks before it actually was announced to the public.

Most important for the American contribution to the Double Cross deception was the stable of fictitious Mosquera and Kohler sources within key government departments and industry. For example Mosquera regularly relayed information from "Wasch" a high level War Department official and "Nevi" who held a post in the Brooklyn Navy Yard with access to critical Navy Department secrets. Then there was "Rep" who leaked vital aircraft production figures from Republic Aircraft Company at Farmingdale, New York and "Officer," another bogus source, who moved in high level military circles while traveling between New York and Washington, DC As for Koehler, he controlled the non-existent "Holtz" an employee at the Brooklyn Navy Yard described by one author as the "largest shipyard facility in the world" with more than one hundred thousand employees, together with "Otto" and "Herman" both government workers in sensitive posts.<sup>26</sup>

Koehler pinpointed a buildup of forces in Iceland suggesting an attack against Norway or Denmark by a fictitious Allied army stationed in Scotland. At the same time Mosquera seemed to aim south in an attempt to reassure Wehrmacht leaders that Calais as the point of attack was a sound one. Illustrative of this point were a series of misleading messages sent through the Wading River Radio Station starting on January 6, 1944. Wasch reported staggering War Department orders for "85000 landing craft of all types." Furthermore more than 4000 contractors and 20000 sub-contractors had received "urgent instructions to expedite" production which "should be built by next spring or summer." To flummox enemy estimates regarding the timing of the invasion Nevi described serious production delays of landing craft along with hints of mysterious troop movements. Wasch then supported Nevi with descriptions of British complaints about the slow buildup of American forces in England which arrived with "little or no training in the organization and tactics of the Germans." As D-Day drew closer befuddlement efforts steadily increased. On May 2, 1944, the Wading River Radio Station signaled a Wasch message describing General Dwight D. Eisenhower's (the Supreme Allied Commander of the invasion forces) "fury" after learning that vitally needed landing craft, already in short supply, were being diverted to the Pacific area thus delaying British initiation of a "forthcoming operation in the Balkans" described as "predominant." Just four days before the invasion the Wading River Radio Station again sent a message: this time calculated to ease German anxieties about an imminent attack. "Wasch just reported information appearing of highest importance and possibly indicating a change of plan. It appears that a force consisting of a number of infantry and armored divisions originally scheduled for the United Kingdom are being diverted for special operations." And so it went. In the days, weeks and months that followed, the agents in Wading River kept up the deception pressure. As Allied troops struggled to break out of Normandy Johnson's team tapped – out reports designed to hold German forces at Calais. They included one describing six American divisions, four infantry and two armored, undergoing training in river crossing and bridge operations suggesting "strong indications of a major attack through Norway, the Mediterranean and the

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<sup>25</sup> Ben Macintyre, *Double Cross* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 226-227.

<sup>26</sup> Thaddeus Holt, *The Deceivers: Allied Military Deception in the Second World War* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 446-451.

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Balkans.” Within hours of sending one of the messages a now desperate Hamburg frantically replied “Please rush more detail.”<sup>27</sup>

Europe, however, was not their only target. Throughout the war, the Wading River Radio Station routinely relayed information to the Germans for passage to the Japanese concerning the Navy’s plans for offensive action in the Pacific Theater of war. Over a series of months, the station offered tantalizing tidbits picked up by Nevi concerning a major attack planned for the Northern Pacific Ocean against the Japanese home islands. In a November 2, 1943 report, the station warned Tokyo that during a recent gathering of high level U.S. naval officials “a naval officer made an inadvertent remark from which Nevi believes that there is now being planned a large scale attack against the Kurile Islands. The probable day of the attack was not disclosed but he believes it will happen soon and in conjunction with a *large scale feint attack later this month.*” [Italics Added]. In fact, this and other related messages were part of a deception operation designed to draw off major portions of Japanese naval forces from the “feint attack” in the Central Pacific area when, in fact, this so-called feint was the main invasion of the Marshall Islands.

The Wading River Radio Station also participated in *Bluebird*, the most extensive and elaborate all – American deception mounted for the planned invasion of Okinawa. The goal of Bluebird was to convince the Japanese that American forces planned to invade Formosa and the south coast of China. Wasch warned the Japanese through the Germans that there were “conflicting views among high officials as to the next move against Japan.” He then described a decision to increase the production of new B-29 long range bombers in anticipation of escalated attacks on Tokyo when bomber bases had been secured in China. Another message in support of the ruse described the construction of sophisticated rubber models of the islands of Formosa and the adjacent China coast “in great detail.” To add to both Japanese and German confusion, the Wading River agents sent an emergency December 1944 warning from Wasch that army supplies destined for the Formosa operation had been abruptly diverted to Europe to staunch the German surprise Ardennes offensive.

The war in Europe ended with the signing of the surrender documents at Reims, France on May 8, 1945. The Wading RiverPa radio technicians remained at their posts for another month and a half on the possibility that the Germans government would flee to the Bavarian Alps to an Alpine redoubt where they would continue a guerilla war.<sup>28</sup>

For obvious reasons the entire Wading River operation was originally cloaked in the utmost secrecy. An FBI memo recognized the difficulty of the conditions that the agents at the Wading River Station faced:

In the continental United States, we have a highly confidential station at Wading River, Long Island, where we have several radio operators assigned who are impersonating enemy agents, and these operates have practiced and perfected this impersonation almost to the ultimate point. They must live in an isolated cottage under difficult conditions in that they must remain at the station 24 hours a day, six and seven days a week it being impossible for them to go into the next town for meals. They must keep absolutely under cover in order that no suspicion as to the activities being carried on at this station will leak out to unauthorized persons in the vicinity.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Batvinis, *Hoover’s Secret War*, 188.

<sup>28</sup> “Jorge Mosquera,” FBI Headquarters File 65- 37233, FOIPA; Batvinis, *Hoover’s Secret War*, 196.

<sup>29</sup> L.B. Nichols, “Memorandum for Mr. Glavin,” April 24, 1943. In the collection of Camp DeWolfe.

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Due to their care, almost seven decades passed before the nature and importance of their work to the Allied victory was even discovered. Sadly, witnesses to the Wading River Radio Station's role are now all gone. But perhaps in the future as additional classified records become available for research even more will be learned about the historical importance of this remarkable site. One hint, however, of its importance came from Colonel Truman Smith, the US army officer who ran the American deception program with the British. In a memo to J. Edgar Hoover he trumpeted the "important part [ND98] played in the successful operation of the Allies on the coast of Normandy." And then there is the fact that until the last days of the war as British forces closed in on Hamburg the Germans were still radioing the agents in Wading River with offers of thousands of dollars to ND98 for information. In the words of one historian "German faith in [Mosquera] never wavered."<sup>30</sup>

### Later History of the Wading River Radio Station

In early 1945, *The House on Ninety-Second Street*, a movie which showed the FBI's guarding of military and industrial secrets, was partially filmed in and around the house.<sup>31</sup> In June 1945, the Wading River Station was dismantled and the FBI ended their lease of the property from Helen Owen Howell.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout the years, the leadership of the Diocese of Long Island had discussed the need of finding land and housing to accommodate everyone who wished to come to its youth conferences. In his annual address to the clergy at the 79<sup>th</sup> Annual Diocesan Convention, on May 21, 1946, in Garden City, Bishop James P. DeWolfe said:

The conferences for our young people held during the summer last year (1945) crowded out our accommodations both at Wading River and at Sayville. Attendance at the conferences this summer promise to be even larger. Our need of an adequate Diocesan center which can be used by the (newly created) Department of Youth for camping facilities, as well as by other groups for other Diocesan gatherings grows more and more urgent as increasing numbers of men and women in the Diocese respond to our Diocesan program.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, under the guidance and motivation of Bishop James P. DeWolfe, the search for new land in the Wading River area began in real earnest. The effort was aided by a bequest given to the Diocese in 1918 by Mary Benson. Mary was an active member of Grace Church Brooklyn Heights and daughter of Arthur Benson, real estate developer and entrepreneur. She devoted much of her time and estate to furthering the cause of the Freedmen's Bureau. Active in social ministry, she desired that her means be used to support like causes after her death. She bequeathed a trust of \$50,000 to the Diocese of Long Island. In 1947, Bishop DeWolfe allocated Mary Benson's trust to purchase 72 acres of land in Wading River, 4 miles from the Baiting Hollow Scout Camp, and began preparations to hold Camp DeWolfe's first summer of program. The Camp's program began that year, serving youth from the Diocese of Long Island for multiple weeks each summer. As the program developed, more buildings were added to the facility to improve and increase the Camp's services. In 1948, Father John Davis became the Camp's first full-time direction; he held that position until 1968.

The Wading River Radio Station, renamed the Benson House, serves as the lodging for camp administration,

<sup>30</sup> Batvinis, *Hoover's Secret War*, 218.

<sup>31</sup> Elisabeth Lapham, "Spies and Counter-Spies in Wading River," *Echoes from the Past*. In the collection of Camp DeWolfe.

<sup>32</sup> "Take Over Spy Hide-Out."

<sup>33</sup> 79<sup>th</sup> Annual Diocesan Convention in Garden City, Minutes, May 21, 1946, 121.

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clergy, and non-counselor staff. Platform tent areas are erected on the west side of the waterfront property in order to house male campers. Webster Hall, a dining and recreation space, is built directly south of Benson House. A shed is repurposed for the arts and crafts program and cabins are built to house female campers and some male campers. An outdoor chapel is built directly west of Benson house, facing the water. Daily Eucharist would be held here with logs for pews, and stumps for kneelers. A concrete altar is place with a wooden cross. Additionally, a prefabricated building is erected as the "first chapel." It is used for many years not only as a worship space but also for religious education, some arts and crafts, and other activities

To recognize the significance of the Wading River Radio Station, the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI held a special gathering and installed a plaque on Benson House on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day in June of 2014. The plaque reads:

From January 1942 to June 1945 FBI agents and radio technicians secretly living and working at Benson House, broadcasted radio messages to the Germans in Hamburg who believed they were communicating with their espionage agents in the United States. Working closely with military deception planners, the FBI sent hundreds of accurate and fictitious reports designed to confuse and mislead the Nazi leadership regarding Allied military plans and intentions.

Among Benson House's most significant World War II contributions was the receipt of a German message in April 1942 instructing its spies to obtain information about American atomic bomb development; an order that helped influence President Franklin D Roosevelt's decision to pursue an atomic weapon. Messages transmitted from Benson House helped deceive the German high command about the timing and location of the June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944 Allied invasion at Normandy while others misled Japanese forces about US advances in the Pacific Theater of operations.

This plaque is erected by the Society of Former Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation to remember Benson House and to pay tribute to the FBI personnel who worked here for their wartime sacrifices and contributions. June 6, 2014.



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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** .31 acres  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

|   |                                     |  |   |   |                                     |  |   |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|---|---|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| 1 | <u>18</u><br>Zone                   | <u>681703</u><br>Easting               | <u>4537459</u><br>Northing              | 3 | <u>                    </u><br>Zone | <u>                    </u><br>Easting | <u>                    </u><br>Northing |
| 2 | <u>                    </u><br>Zone | <u>                    </u><br>Easting | <u>                    </u><br>Northing | 4 | <u>                    </u><br>Zone | <u>                    </u><br>Easting | <u>                    </u><br>Northing |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

After the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island purchased the Owen property in 1947, they constructed a number of buildings to serve the property's new use as a youth camp. The Diocese retained the historic road and the Wading River Radio Station (Benson House). However, the cleared land and youth camp buildings impact the overall sense of isolation that the property had during the 1940s. As the entire parcel no longer retains integrity to the historic period and other resources are located close by, an artificial boundary has been drawn around the house. The boundary extends south to the curve of the historic road and north to the edge of the bluff. The boundary also incorporates remnant open land to the east and west of the house. As no natural features exist to attach these boundary lines to, they have been drawn to include the land surrounding the house and avoid nearby non-historic resources (a ranch house to the east and a swimming pool to the west).

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Wading River Radio Station  
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408 North Side Road  
Wading River, NY 11792



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



Radio Station



Parks, Recreation  
and Historic Preservation



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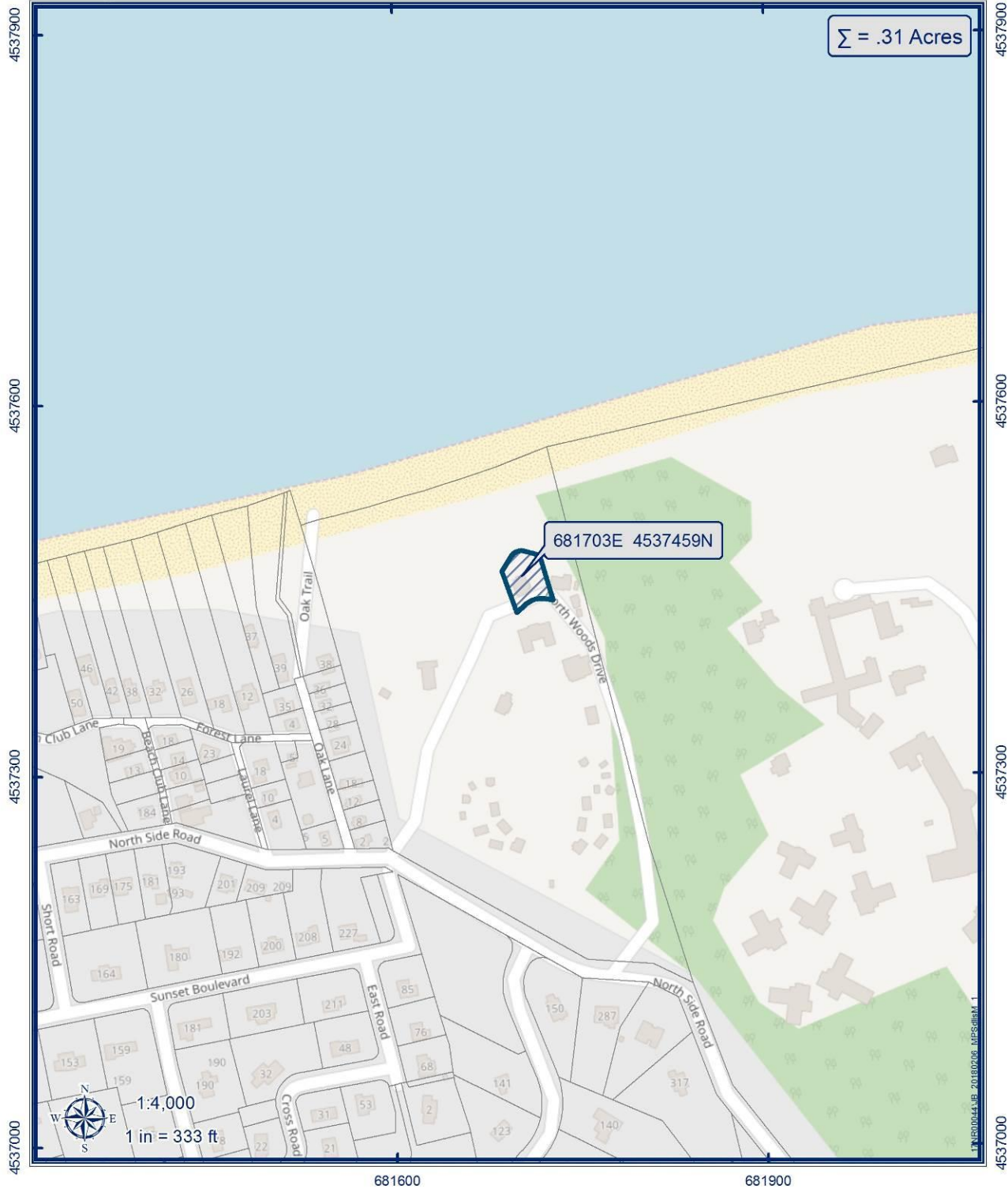
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ray Batvinis and Matt Tees, edited by Jennifer Betsworth (NYSHPO)  
organization Camp DeWolfe date February 2018  
street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_  
e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.  
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Wading River Radio Station

City or Vicinity: Wading River

County: Suffolk State: NY

Photographer: Jennifer Betsworth

Date Photographed: May 2, 2017

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

NY\_Suffolk Co\_Wading River Radio Station\_0001  
South and West elevations and landscape, facing north

NY\_Suffolk Co\_Wading River Radio Station\_0002  
South and West elevations, facing north

NY\_Suffolk Co\_Wading River Radio Station\_0003  
North elevation, facing south

NY\_Suffolk Co\_Wading River Radio Station\_0004  
East elevation, facing west

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NY\_Suffolk Co\_Wading River Radio Station\_0005  
East elevation and view, facing west

NY\_Suffolk Co\_Wading River Radio Station\_0006  
Bluffs, facing west

NY\_Suffolk Co\_Wading River Radio Station\_0007  
Interior, rear porch, facing south

NY\_Suffolk Co\_Wading River Radio Station\_0008  
Interior, first floor, facing northwest

NY\_Suffolk Co\_Wading River Radio Station\_0009  
Interior, first floor, facing southeast

NY\_Suffolk Co\_Wading River Radio Station\_0010  
Interior, second floor, facing northwest

NY\_Suffolk Co\_Wading River Radio Station\_0011  
Interior, projecting second floor sitting room, facing northwest

NY\_Suffolk Co\_Wading River Radio Station\_0012  
Basement, corner where FBI equipment was stored, facing northwest

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



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Figure 1. Wading River Radio Station, ca. 1942. Richard Millen reflections.



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Figure 2. Wading River Radio Station, ca. 1942. Richard Millen reflections.



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Figure 3. Wading River Radio Station, ca. 1942. Richard Millen reflections.



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