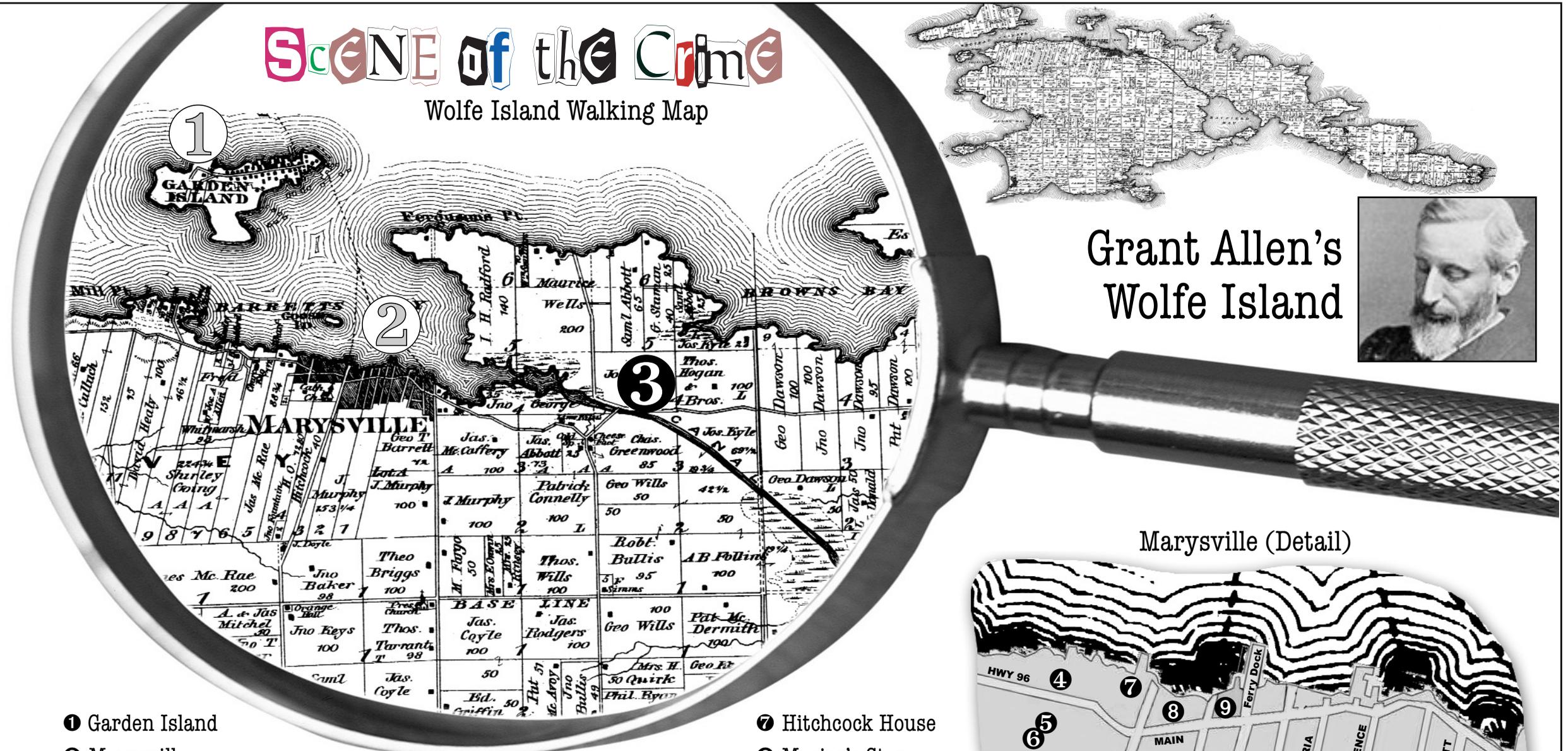


Scene of the Crime

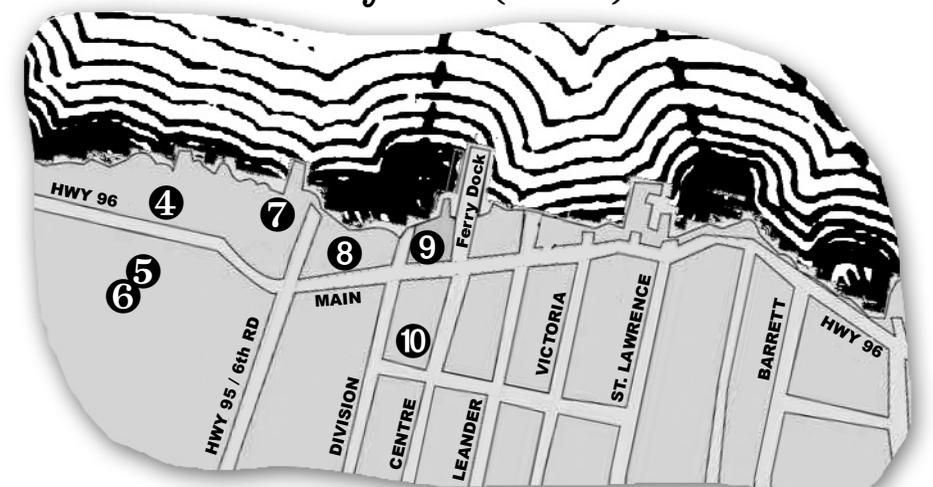
Wolfe Island Walking Map



Grant Allen's Wolfe Island



Marysville (Detail)



- ① Garden Island
- ② Marysville
- ③ Wolfe Island Canal
- ④ St. Margaret's Hall
- ⑤ Trinity Anglican Church
- ⑥ Trinity Anglican Cemetery
- ⑦ Hitchcock House
- ⑧ Mosier's Store
- ⑨ Fargo's Store
- ⑩ Town Hall

(See other side for details ...)

Grant Allen, International Man of Mystery

Born in 1848 on Wolfe Island, Grant Allen is an important figure in Canadian literary history. The first Canadian to write crime stories professionally, he also made a significant contribution to the genre in international terms.



Allen lived on the Island at Ardath Chateau, the manor of the Baron de Longueuil family, until he was 13. The family's local connection dates back to the early 19th century, when Allen's great-grandfather, David Alexander Grant — who later married Marie Charles Joseph Le Moyne de Longueuil — bought a large chunk of the Island.

Allen always remembered his boyhood on Wolfe Island. In May 1887 he wrote an essay called "Among The Thousand Islands" in which he talked of being "raised (as we say, beyond the Atlantic) on the biggest and longest of the Thousand Islands ... where I spent a rustic boyhood with the raccoons and the sunfish." There, Allen recalled, "sweeter flowers blow ... than anywhere else on this prosaic planet; bigger fish lurk among the crevices; bluer birds flit between the honeysuckle; and livelier squirrels gambol upon the hickory trees than in any other cases of this oblate spheroid."

We like to think Allen's talent for adventure stories came from his childhood on the Island, for he was educated at home. The life of an Islander in the mid-1800s, even one from an eminent family, was rugged and robust. There were no roads, sleds drawn by oxen were the main mode of travel, and fish and game fed most families.

Sadly Ardath House — the home base for Allen's family and known to locals as "the Old Castle" — mysteriously burned to the ground in 1929.

- 1 Garden Island, a privately owned 30-acre island between Kingston and Wolfe Island, was a centre for lumber shipping and shipbuilding during Grant Allen's day, boasting its own flour mill and telegraph office. The area continues to be popular with scuba divers because of the number of sunken ships in the area, some of which would have been sent below by violent storms during Allen's life on the Island.
- 2 Village of Marysville, named after Mary Hitchcock, born in 1789. The first postmistress from 1845 until her death 32 years later, she would have handed young Grant Allen his letters from the large milk pan used to store them, and his change from a tea-cup kept in a plain cupboard still intact in the Hitchcock House. Allen would also have known Mary as the island's midwife and only healer. Documents tell us that among her patients was Allen's mother, the daughter of the fifth Baron de Longueuil, so it is very likely that Mary delivered Allen at his birth.
- 3 Wolfe Island Canal. In 1857 the Longueuil-Allen family completed the canal from Barrett's Bay to Bayfield Bay to ship passengers and goods from Kingston to Cape Vincent, NY. In the 1870s the canal was abandoned by its owners, almost certainly the result of bank failures in Ontario and an economic decline on Wolfe Island as the farming population fell and the family's rent roll diminished. With this down-turn in its fortunes, the family could not, or would not, pay Grant Allen a living allowance any longer. Allen, who had a semi-invalid wife to care for, made ends meet by private tutoring work. He continued to struggle financially until he turned to lucrative fiction writing.
- 4 St. Margaret's Hall, built on land donated to the Island by Allen's family and site of the annual Scene of the Crime Festival church supper in Allen's honour.
- 5 Trinity Anglican Church, built in 1845 on land granted by the Longueuil family. Grant Allen was the second son of Wolfe Island's first Anglican minister, the Rev. Joseph Antisell Allen, who had married into the family. The Reverend Allen's wife Catharine Ann Grant was the only daughter of the fifth Baron de Longueuil. The Rev. Allen seems to have been a poet, and the author of "Daydreams by a Butterfly in nine parts." Perhaps this influenced his son's interest in writing.
- 6 Trinity Anglican Cemetery, burial site of Charles W. Grant, Baron de Longueuil, (died July 5, 1818, aged 67 years); Carolina Grant, Baroness de Longueuil, (died June 2, 1868, aged 83 years); and Hiram O. Hitchcock, 1826-1889.
- 7 The Hitchcock House, now privately owned, was built in 1832 of locally quarried stone, site of the first post office and the original ferry dock. Grant Allen would have descended from the ferry at the site after visiting his family's other home in Kingston, Alwington House. (During the period when Kingston was Canada's capital (1841-1844), Alwington was designated vice-regal residence and home to Governors Sydenham, Bagot and Metcalfe.)
- 8 Mosier's Groceries & Convenience, formerly Baker's store. In 1836 Michael Baker opened the Island's first store, which his son, Edward, moved to this site, then a brand-new building, in 1878. The Mosiers are one of the oldest original families on the Island, contemporaries of the Allen family.
- 9 Fargo's General Store, originally opened by C. Cummings, was the location of the Island's first telephone in 1889.
- 10 Wolfe Island Town Hall, built from locally quarried limestone in 1859 and still functioning in its original intended use. The first mention of a municipal meeting was 1826 at "Mr. Petrie's Tavern." Wolfe Island municipal council had its first meeting in 1850. In those days, five elected councillors chose the reeve — but the influential Longueuil-Allen family would have paid close attention to local politics!