

## The Oxbow

### **Part Two: Fairport's Newest Resort**

After the great canal break and riot of 1871, things at the oxbow settled down quite a bit. With the newly reinforced embankment in place, people began to see the oxbow as a place for enjoyment and recreation.

The word spread that there were big fish to be caught at the "bow," such as was recorded in The Fairport Herald in 1885, when a sixteen pound pickerel was reported. Perhaps someone's thumb was on the scale, as state records indicate that this fish would have been twice the size of the biggest pickerel ever caught in New York.

Ice-skating was a popular and sometimes dangerous pastime on the canal. It was especially perilous at the oxbow, where water depth varied a great deal across the wide waters, and this affected the thickness of the ice. In 1897, sixteen year old Frank Myers of Summit Street drowned while attempting to skate across the oxbow. In reports of the incident, newspapers stated that some parts of the oxbow were from 30 to 40 feet deep, and in these areas the canal didn't freeze over. Perhaps the deep water was the result of the canal break years earlier that took so much of the canal's bottom with it. At any rate, young Frank Myers broke through the thin ice and disappeared, while his friends helplessly watched.

While some skated on the ice at the oxbow, others harvested it. Large squares of ice as much as a foot thick and three hundred pounds in weight were removed and hauled to area ice houses for use in the warmer months. George Filkins, shopkeeper, builder, and house mover, for a time kept a busy ice house at the oxbow, employing many men during the winter months. They traded their labor for goods at the Filkins store on South Main Street.

In 1914, with construction underway to deepen and widen the canal, the survival of the oxbow was of great concern to citizens. Residents became aware of a plan to fill in the wide waters during excavation of the enlarged canal. They knew this would be the end of their recreational playground. The Fairport Rod and Gun Club led a petition drive to spare the wide waters and oxbow, gaining support from the Fairport Chamber of Commerce and other leaders in the community. The oxbow was saved, and with renewed confidence, people began to flock to the oxbow as never before.

By the spring of 1915, a rush was on to build boathouses and cottages at the oxbow. The pastures of local farmers bordered the state land on which the cottages were being built, and the only road to the oxbow was privately owned. T.L. Hulburt warned those visiting the "resort" against trespassing on his grounds, claiming that damage had been done to his orchards and other crops: "Patience has at last ceased to be a virtue and the owners have now decided to post their farms against such trespassing and will arrest and prosecute to the full extent of the law." And so began the tenuous relationship between the residents of the oxbow and many of their neighbors.



**Caption for Photo**

In this photo from April of 1918, the west embankment of the wide waters is at the left, and a few early cottages are seen in the distance in the upper right hand corner. The temporary tracks were used for the delivery of material in fortifying the banks of the canal.

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