

The Naked Truth about Bushnell's Basin

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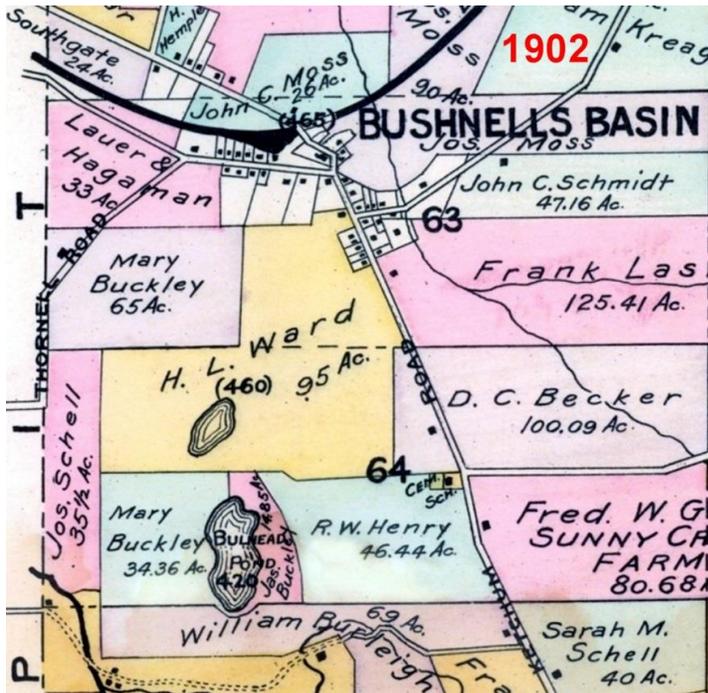
Victor historian J. Sheldon Fisher once wrote, "America is the most fertile field in the world for any new idea, doctrine, or creed". In this case, Fisher's words were in reference to the new found presence in of the Rochester Gymnosophy League in Bushnell's Basin in 1932. In the early 20th century the term gymnosophy was used with regard to a philosophy that included nudism and "natural living" as an accepted condition for the betterment of society. J. Sheldon Fisher, just 25 at the time, reacted to the curiosity and concerns of Bushnell's Basin residents by investigating the organization, and filed a report with the Fairport Herald-Mail in August of 1932.



Richardson's Canal House was known as the Exchange Hotel in the early 1900s, operated by John and Christina Kossow. In 1932 the building was rented to the Rochester Gymnosophy League.

Long before its restoration and acceptance on the National Register of Historic Places, Richardson's Canal House served briefly as the headquarters of the Rochester Gymnosophy League. Young Mr. Fisher was met at the door of the old inn by Doris Newcomb, who escorted him to her husband, William Newcomb, director of the organization. In Fisher's words, "After satisfying himself as to my prejudices, business connections, and acquaintances, he (William

Newcomb) proceeded to outline to me the convictions of his cult.” According to Fisher’s report in the Fairport Herald-Mail, members of the Rochester Gymnosphy League included among their ranks physicians, engineers, lawyers, teachers, and college students. Members paid seasonal dues of eight dollars for men, and five dollars for women. A discounted family rate was also available. The group had previously been referred to as the Rochester Sunbathers Club.



Map from 1902, when Pittsford Victor Road (Route 96) was known as Ketchum Road. Bullhead Pond, now called Lake Lacoma, is shown in the lower left portion of the map.

Fisher went on to detail the principals of the organization, as presented by Newcomb: “Sun, light and air are vital conditions of human well-being. We believe these elements are insufficiently used in present day life to the detriment of physical and moral health. Our goal is the healthy mind and the healthy body”, through the use of “a program of exercises and games in such a way as will result in a maximum of physical and mental benefit.”

In the spring of 1932, the Rochester Gymnosphy League rented forty acres of land on the west shore of Bullhead Pond, a secluded and picturesque location where previous generations harvested ice in the winter, and enjoyed picnics and fishing in warmer months. Bullhead Pond provided League members with a place to enjoy swimming and sunbathing, volleyball, gymnastics and dancing. Evening activities at the nearby inn included dancing, card playing, and motion pictures.

The Rochester Gymnosphy League had a short life. Today their former headquarters is a thriving dining destination in Bushnell’s Basin, and homes dot the shores of Bullhead Pond, better known as Lake Lacoma.