

#### Part Four: the Oxbow's Last Stand

Florence Rutter arrived at the oxbow in 1947, at 21 years of age. At the time, there was somewhat of a renaissance underway. Social life was documented in a weekly newspaper feature called the Oxbow Briefs. A small tavern served food and drinks to patrons. Families were moving in, and boats were plentiful. But the oxbow had also gained a reputation with some as a place that should be avoided, a place where trouble could be found. Occasional incidents reinforced the image.

An Oxbow Association was formed to bring together residents for common causes. Dues were collected to fund maintenance projects and other community activities. Donations were also collected from the Oxbow residents for area charities. Maintenance of the unpaved Oxbow Road was a big issue. It was considered a private road, meaning maintenance and plowing were the responsibility of the residents. The state owned the land on which the cottages were built, and residents paid an annual lease fee. Cottage owners also paid town and school taxes, and believed they were receiving inadequate services.

Debbie Wyman moved to the Oxbow in 1967 at the age of six, with her mother and two brothers. They had previously lived in the elegant building in Bushnell's Basin known today as Richardson's Canal House, at the time a dilapidated boarding house. When it was condemned, the Wyman family relocated to 38 Oxbow Road. Debbie recalls that other children often looked down on kids from the Oxbow, and her brothers defended her from their abuse. Oxbow residents were sometimes called "squatters" and other derogatory names by those outside the little community, and it bothered her, knowing that her mother worked hard and paid taxes just like other property owners.

A lack of sanitary toilet facilities continued to exist when the Wyman family arrived at the Oxbow. It was necessary to carry buckets of sewage to a septic tank located across the Oxbow Road. Others used alternative methods for disposing of the waste, adding to the negative image sometimes attached to the Oxbow.

Debbie Wyman lived at the Oxbow until 1980, while her mother stayed until her death in 2002. She has fond memories of growing up in the unique waterfront community, steps from Minerva Deland School. Debbie considered a neighbor, Bruce Christman, as her adopted father. He passed away in 2009. The homes of Christman and her mother were burned by arsonists a few years ago. Had that not happened, the state probably would have had the cottages removed, as they did when others relocated or died. While the leases allowed the residents to remain on the property, there was no provision for them to sell or transfer the cottages to others.

A newspaper article from 1969 described Florence Rutter's cottage as being *"as attractive as any its size on Canandaigua Lake."* But still, the reputation of the Oxbow haunted its residents. While the article touched on the ongoing perception of danger and distasteful activity, it also went on to describe the efforts of those at the oxbow to defend their community: *"They want people to know they are trying. They want people to appreciate their positions and realize that they are doing the best they can."*

Florence Rutter died in 2012, sixty five years after her arrival at Fairport's canal side community. Known as the Oxbow Lady, she was the last waterfront resident of a place once called Fairport's newest resort. Her cottage stands alone, the last reminder of what once was a booming resort on the Erie Canal.

**Caption**

Bob and Bill Wyman fishing from the front porch of their Oxbow home in 1968.



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