

## Surprising Weeds in Bushnell's Basin

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

We may think that the use of marijuana is a phenomenon of our more recent history. In fact its use can be traced to ancient times. And while the 1960s and 1970s are associated with widespread use of marijuana, the plant had a presence in our town decades earlier. Along with the usual variety of weeds and wildflowers, marijuana thrived along the canal and adjacent fields in Bushnell's Basin. Thousands of marijuana plants were discovered in the southwestern corner of Perinton, where it was said to be growing wild on private property and New York State lands in the late 1930s.



*This aerial view of the Bushnell's Basin area from 1922 shows Kreag Road in the foreground and the canal beyond.*

According to Perinton Justice of the Peace Herbert P. Ward in a 1939 Fairport Herald-Mail article, federal and state authorities had for thirty years previous surveyed the United States for the illegal plant, and when found, made efforts to eliminate its growth. The newspaper reported that "Perinton has been upset of late due to the discovery of the narcotic weed marijuana, the weed from which reefer cigarettes are made". Town of Perinton workers uprooted thousands of plants said to be growing wild in the Basin, and hauled them to an incinerator for burning. Imagine for a moment being on that work detail.

Two years later, in 1941, another discovery of large quantities of marijuana plants in Bushnell's Basin resulted in an early harvest and burning of the weed, again at a local incinerator. Our town wasn't alone, as authorities across America had great anxiety regarding the plants, concerns voiced by the United States government and medical experts. Assistant U.S. District Attorney J. Skelly Wright was engaged in a drive to ban the weed, and preached the following terrifying message regarding its use: "Within thirty minutes, the crude cigarette rolled by a marijuana smoker can transform a normal person into a raving maniac who obeys every impulse arising from current or previous suggestion." The attorney continued, explaining that muggle (with apologies to Harry Potter fans, that's what they sometimes called pot in those days) "afflicted it's users with hallucinations of terrifying extent, he is liable to run amok, leaving a trail of crime – even murder, in his wake."

Assistant U.S. District Attorney Wright was apparently well versed in medicine as well, for he concluded his statements with the following: "Eventually, continued smoking brings on complete medical collapse and insanity for which there may be no cure."

*Written by Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian*

*Fairport-ER Post, 02/25/2016*