

## BUSHNELL'S BASIN: The Canal Creates a Community

### *Second of two parts*

Bushnell's Basin prospered and grew as a result of the Erie Canal, but, as in any time of change, there were concerns. Charles Dickinson and Cyrus Leonard were fearful that the wild "canawlers" were endangering their children's morals, and gathered neighbors together to sing hymns and read scripture. In 1831 they built a small white clapboard church in the center of town and also attempted to restrict canal traffic on Sundays, publishing a manifesto that attempted unsuccessfully to garner support. The building, which served as both a lecture hall (possibly hosting a Susan B. Anthony lecture) and a church for various congregations over the years, more recently has been used for commercial purposes. It was rebuilt in 1873 and has had several additions since.

Changes also came to the Basin as other methods of transportation began to overtake the canal. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Rochester and Eastern Rapid Railway came through the hamlet, connecting Rochester with Geneva and also making possible easy access to and from the city for workers. As a result, the hamlet became more and more a suburban community. The rail station was on Pittsford-Victor Road just to the west of today's Exxon-Mobil Station and the line passed over the canal just to the east of Richardson's Inn (the abutments are still visible). After World War II, Bushnell's Basin, like many other rural areas, attracted suburban development. By the 1960's, the decline of the canal as a commercial entity, the building of Route 490, and the growth of the strip mall and suburban subdivisions threatened what had been a quiet canal-side hamlet. Many of the small early 20th century homes had been demolished, were in a state of disrepair, or were in danger of being replaced by malls or office buildings, and farmland was fast disappearing. The old Richardson's Tavern, for example, was in such a state of disrepair that it was scheduled for demolition. Some decisions had to be made.

In 1983, a Bushnell's Basin Community Plan was jointly drawn up by the Perinton Town Board, the Bushnell's Basin Merchants' Association, and the Bushnell's Basin Planning Committee. The plan encouraged rehabilitation of buildings and an organized approach to future development while recognizing the unique nature of this canal hamlet and farming community.

In 1986, an organization calling itself "Historic Bushnell's Basin" was formed, "dedicated to the promotion and preservation of the cultural and architectural heritage of Bushnell's Basin..." This group was strongly supportive of Perinton's Historic Preservation Ordinance and was instrumental in getting Bushnell's Basin designated as an historic district in order to maintain its historical integrity as a canal hamlet and early agricultural community and to prevent further deterioration. Happily for Bushnell's Basin and Perinton, the historic Richardson's Tavern was restored through the generosity and work of Andrew Wolf and his wife Vivienne Tellier and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Four or five smaller buildings at the west end of the hamlet have been restored and form what is known as the Canal Walk. New construction is compatible with the old. Recently, dockage for boaters and an area for walkers and picnickers has made the Bushnell's Basin canal frontage a welcoming destination.

The Town of Perinton continues to work closely with property owners in the district to maintain the small scale personality and charm that makes Bushnell's Basin attractive and to guarantee that future changes to the area will be in keeping with the unique charm and vitality of this historic hamlet.



*Richardson's Inn and the Rochester & Eastern trolley & trolley bridge*