

The Camp Fire Girls Arrive in Fairport

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

A new book arrived at the Fairport Public Library in January of 1914, and it caused quite a stir. Girls in the village raced there, to examine the handbook of a recently formed organization called The Camp Fire Girls. Within a few weeks, a group of girls assembled at the home of Sybil Warren, a 10th grade student at Fairport High School. Her father had recently opened a dry goods store in the Bown building on South Main Street, and the family relocated here from Newark.



The Onetah Tribe of the Fairport Camp Fire Girls and their parade float, circa 1915.

Photograph from the collection of the Perinton Historical Society.

For a time, Fairport's Camp Fire Girls called themselves the Onetah Tribe, named for their leader, Onetah DeLand, a granddaughter of Fairport royalty. It was her grandparents, Daniel and Minverva Parce DeLand, and their recipe for saleratus, essentially baking powder, which caused a large factory to be built on the bank of the Erie Canal, known as D.B. DeLand and Company. Onetah's uncle was Henry DeLand, and her father was Levi DeLand. Her family did more than any other to put Fairport on the map.

The caption of this photo, part of the collection of the Perinton Historical Society, reads: "Camp Fire Girls camping at Lake Bluff July 1915. Miss Onetah DeLand, leader."



Fairport's Camp Fire Girls met at the homes of its members, and sold candy during baseball games at the school grounds. They spent some of their earnings on materials, for whenever a parade offered the opportunity, the girls put together a float. Some of their candy sales helped to fund camping trips on the shores of Lake Ontario. Celebratory suppers were enjoyed, hosted by the families of girls in the tribe. One such event at the elegant farm home of Charles and Elizabeth Clark at 249 South Main Street, served to recognize the fourth birthday of the Camp Fire Girls in America. After dinner, the girls passionately delivered eloquent speeches, painstakingly written, as proud mothers beamed.



Camp Fire Girls and Boy Scouts on the stage at the Town Hall (today's Village Hall) on February 21, 1916. Photograph from the collection of the Perinton Historical Society.

Boy Scouts from Fairport's Troop 1 consented, perhaps under duress, to perform in a stage production, "The Symbol of Peace" with their Camp Fire Girls counterparts, held on February 21, 1916. The venue was the second floor of the practically new Town Hall at 31 South Main Street, built less than nine years earlier. This was the community center of the time, with an elaborate stage at one end, and as many seats as could be squeezed into the space. Advance tickets were sold, and reserved seats were available. Two days after the performance, the weekly newspaper offered a glowing review, and confirmed that every seat in the house was filled. And without a doubt, proud mothers beamed.