

Frolicsome Firemen and Gayly Gowned Girls

When I meet with students, I stress that “something happened here” before we arrived. In fact, quite a bit happened on the south shore of the canal, where Roselawn Avenue and Packet Boat Drive reside today. As mentioned in a previous column, many of our streets have changed names over the years. Roselawn Avenue was once North Street, until it was recognized that North Street was an odd name for a street on the south side of the village.

Jeremiah Chadwick was born in 1817, and even before the village was incorporated in 1867, became one of Fairport’s earliest movers and shakers. Chadwick owned most of the land between North Street and the canal, a parcel that in the early 1960s was developed as Packet Boat Drive. But a lot of history unfolded here long before the two dozen plus homes were built on the street.

Shortly after the conclusion of the Civil War, Jeremiah Chadwick sold a portion of his canal side land to Lewis Jones, who opened a lumberyard and mill. The venture was an instant success, and almost as quickly, burned to the ground. Rebuilt, the business again thrived, under the ownership of James H. Simmons, George Green, and Patrick McAuliffe, among others.

The rest of Chadwick’s canal side property was passed on through marital relations to the Schummers family. In the days before the establishment of municipal parks, large lots such as this were often utilized for public events. For several decades in the first half of the 20th century, the “Schummers lot” hosted firemen’s conventions, traveling circuses and carnivals.



A colorful 1916 headline describes events at Schummers lot, where Packet Boat Drive is located today

In August of 1916 a large firemen's convention came to Fairport. Activities included a parade and races between the attending fire companies. Dinner was served to the visitors in four enormous tents on the Schummers lot, and that evening the crowd was treated to the aerial exploits of A. Johnny Mack, well known daredevil. As his mammoth hot air balloon was elevated high above the Schummers lot, Mack could be seen dangling beneath, eventually parachuting back to earth, to the delight of the crowd below.

Ten years later, the annual convention continued to be held on Schummers lot, but by this time the adjacent road was renamed Roselawn Avenue. Strings of colored lights illuminated West Avenue to Beardsley Street, and on to the canal-side fairgrounds. Fairport's auto dealers displayed their newest models, and carnival rides, including a Ferris wheel, merry-go-round, and airplane rides, delighted the crowd. The highlight of the convention was an exhibition by May Collier, "America's premier fancy and high diver," whose shows made her a national celebrity. She climbed a rickety tower to a height of 78 feet above the Schummers lot, and with much drama and concern from the crowd below, dove into a small tank of water, four feet in depth.

Imagine the surprise of children who live on these streets today, when they learn the secrets of Roselawn Avenue and Packet Boat Drive.