

The Clubhouse at the Oxbow

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

Alongside the tiny makeshift canal cottages and boathouses dotting the shoreline of Perinton's oxbow in 1915, a large new building came together, board by board. As with the neighboring cottages, reclaimed boxcar lumber was a primary component of the Fairport Rod and Gun Club's new clubhouse.



A view from August of 1915 of the oxbow, looking to the north. The shoreline to the right is believed to be the path of the canal as first constructed. The straightening of the canal in later years resulted in the small lake seen here, now mostly filled by islands, the result of dredging begun in the 1940s. While difficult to see, the clubhouse of the Fairport Rod and Gun Club is in the center of this photo, where the Olde Orchard subdivision off Hulburt Road is located today

Two years earlier, a group of hunters and anglers met at Perinton's Town Hall, picked officers, and adopted a constitution. At first, the Fairport Rod and Gun Club mainly held trap-shooting competitions on undeveloped land east of the village, near the Rochester, Syracuse and Eastern trolley bridge over the canal. The club's membership grew quickly, with over sixty members by the summer of 1914. They also held shoots near the canal bridge at Fairport Road, an area earlier known as Fullamtown.

Seeking to establish a clubhouse at the oxbow, the club negotiated a deal to purchase an old barge retired from use in canal construction. The plan was to refashion the barge for the club's use, but soon the club's officers changed course, in favor of constructing a new building on the canal. They sold the old barge to 41 year-old William Van-Wormer, a plumber's helper. He transformed the barge into a houseboat, and there he and his family lived for several years.



The clubhouse of the Fairport Rod and Gun Club is visible to the right in this oxbow photo, circa 1915.

By the spring of 1915, the clubhouse began to take shape, along with additional cottages that were also under construction at the oxbow. It took some confidence to build there, because New York State's plans were to dump the spoils of canal construction at the location, which would effectively fill in the small lake. The Fairport Rod and Gun Club led a drive to block the plan. They gained the support of local government and the Chamber of Commerce, and finally the plan to dump at the oxbow was abandoned. Instead, the soil from widening and deepening the waterway was distributed at many locations along the banks of the canal, and the oxbow was saved.

The Fairport Rod and Gun Club's biggest years were prior to 1920. The clubhouse eventually disappeared, replaced by small cottages. By the 1940s, islands began to appear in the little lake at the oxbow, the result of canal dredging by the state. Eventually the wide waters of the oxbow mostly disappeared, replaced by the growing islands. The last of several dozen cottages burned in 2014. Paddlers, hikers and dog-walkers can scarcely imagine the oxbow as it once was; Perinton's little lake, with dozens of modest cottages, and the home of the Fairport Rod and Gun Club.

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