

Conclusion to the Oxbow Story **The Last 100 Years**

By Bill Poray



A major fire in 1949 destroyed two cottages on the boardwalk, and severely damaged two others.

Firefighters promptly responded, but were hampered by the task of rolling 1,500 feet of hose down the length of boardwalk to reach the blaze.

The rush to build cottages at the oxbow grew with the widening and deepening of the newly named Barge Canal. As the canal opened for the season in spring of 1915, construction on the 31st cottage had begun. Residents and visitors swam, fished and camped, and local companies held picnics and corn roasts for their employees on the oxbow's shore. The newspaper referred to the area as *"an ever increasing Mecca for Fairport residents... scarcely a day passes that the crowd at that place is not augmented by new arrivals."* The editor even proposed a new name for the wide waters, but "Fair Lake" was not embraced by the locals.

In the 1930s, the impact of the Great Depression caused a significant change at the oxbow, as many of the waterfront cottages became year-round homes for those struggling to endure years of financial hardship. While many of the cottages had electric service, there was no running water. Telephone lines were installed, but were of little use to most oxbow residents, as few owned their own phones. The greatest concern was the lack of sanitary sewers or permanent septic tanks.

Bill and Georgia Gleason moved to the oxbow in 1938 with two young children in tow. They set up housekeeping in cottage 41, a very small home of 340 square feet. Bill died in 1941, and soon Georgia and the children relocated to a slightly larger cottage, located with two dozen others on a long sliver of land with water both in front and behind. A boardwalk was the only way to access the homes. It required considerable effort for the residents to keep these cottages stocked with groceries and supplies.

The Gleason children, Bill Jr. and Joyce, had vivid memories of living at the oxbow in the 1940s. To make ends meet, their mother worked long hours at the nearby Hart and Vick Greenhouses, where she made fifty cents per hour.

Although many at the oxbow were poor, as a child, Bill Jr. felt the Jefferson family at 18 Oxbow Road were rich. His recollections included their home's walls adorned with paintings, and statues in their gardens.

Ernie Stewart, another oxbow neighbor, worked as a

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~Vicki Profitt~

From your President

January 15, 2022:

As I sit at my desk with the harmonies of *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme* by Simon and Garfunkel playing in the background, I'm reminded how music can set a tone for the whole day. It portrays joys and sorrows with its melodies. It is a reminder of memories past.

For Christmas, my husband Charles presented me with an Alexa, which can play the 50 million songs in the Amazon Music Library. That is an incredible gift of memories. Today is our wedding anniversary, so we will celebrate with our three children and listen to the songs that were played on the harp and violin at our wedding—*Somewhere Over the Rainbow* as sung by Judy Garland, and *Memories Are Made of This* by Dean Martin.

When our PHS members gathered at the museum on December 7th for the annual holiday party and Yuletide Traditions finale, we listened as Bev Crawford played Christmas carols on the museum pump organ. We also participated in a sing-along and everyone knew the words. It was a powerful moment where the songs and musical instrument from the past and the 21st-century people in the present came together in the most beautiful way. I've always wondered who else from our community sat around that organ long ago listening to the same songs that Bev played that evening.

Marching forward into 2022, your PHS Board of Trustees and its committees are off to a running start. We are pleased to announce the addition of Nancy Slaybaugh to the Board. Nancy has spent the past several years as Assistant Curator of the museum and as a member of the Thursday Morning Crew. She is also a former museum volunteer. Welcome to Jim Morrow (Property Committee), Drew Saum (Finance Committee) and Phillip Sparkes (Finance Committee). Thanks to Dave Wiener, who has been on the Tech Committee for several years, and has now also joined the Membership Committee.

The House Tour Committee will soon begin meeting to plan this year's event, which we hope to hold in person. We are also looking at creative ways to celebrate the bicentennial of the Erie Canal coming through Fairport. Upcoming programs through June are in place, including a return of the newest event, the PHS Members Only Open House.

Thanks to a generous end-of-year donation from a PHS member, we have purchased a point of sale (POS) system to allow the gift shop to accept credit card payments and to track inventory. A separate substantial donation was received to be used on new chairs for the program room.

A third unrestricted donation purchased file cabinets that have been incorporated into the gift shop. Those cabinets will hold ephemera from the attic pertaining to area churches, organizations and education, allowing our volunteers to even better assist researchers in their quests to learn about their family histories. PHS very much appreciates Fulkerson Services, Inc.'s assistance in procuring and delivering the file cabinets and we welcome them as PHS business members. We also thank our generous donors for making these purchases possible.

Despite two years of challenges, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Perhaps we are over the rainbow?

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Perinton Historical Society

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MISSION

To promote interest in preserving and sharing local history through education and accessibility.

The HISTORIGRAM is published nine months per year by the Perinton Historical Society. The content of our newsletter is provided by PHS Board members and committee staff. Opinions expressed in any article in this newsletter are those of the author of the article alone and are not those of the PHS unless expressly stated otherwise.

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It Took a Village —and Then Some—for Yuletide Traditions 2021

By Lucy McCormick

When the museum reopens in March, a few changes are in store. More space is being created on the main floor for historical files, which will be accessible to the public. Downstairs, new chairs are on order for the community room. The file cabinets and chairs were purchased with a generous donation and with the proceeds from Yuletide Traditions.

When the Yuletide Traditions committee began to plan events, it was with a tentative sense: Would we receive sufficient donations to hold a silent auction? Would members come out to events with the pandemic in the background? Would we be able to be a bit hospitable and serve refreshments? Would the Grinch pandemic take a break or retire?

Some programs were offered with limited attendance. Bill Poray's lively presentation on the wealth of the Potter family ran as an evening program and also as an afternoon event.

Other programs were well attended but not crowded, such as the appearance of authors Rollie Adams and J.N. Courtney, and a sing-a-long with Bev Crawford at the pump organ.

A new event was added with a modest start: the Ugly Sweater contest and party with "reindeer games" for adults and children. An historical area of Fairport was highlighted in the silent auction: Businesses of the Cannery were featured along with the history of this area, photos, and artifacts.



During our Yuletide Traditions celebration, kids had a great time creating festive pictures at the PHS craft table.



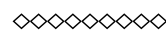
PHS President Vicki Profitt (left) is pictured with Ugly Sweater Contest winner Suzanne Lee, whose llama sweater won hands down—or ears up!



A dozen contestants vied for the distinction of having the ugliest sweater, three of which are pictured here: Kathy Cloonan with her grandsons.

Items for the silent auction trickled in at first, but soon picked up steam. A total of 44 donations yielded a record profit of \$2,641. Other generous donations included freshly baked chocolate chip cookies made by Clawson's Deli.

Yuletide Traditions is certainly about fundraising, which the Perinton Historical Society needs to do, to maintain and enrich the museum and offer quality programs. But Yuletide Traditions is also about fun-raising, creating opportunities for members to enjoy presentations and meet fellow members. It is in that spirit that Yuletide Traditions maintains a special place on the museum calendar.



lift bridge operator in Fairport. Young Bill cherished the memory of being allowed to run the bridge's controls, under the close supervision of Mr. Stewart. Bill Jr. and Joyce both recalled raising ducks and rabbits, and tending a large garden at the back corner of a pasture adjacent to the oxbow, kindly provided by a neighboring farmer. Bill told me of the day he and a young friend went fishing in a small rowboat. Testing the limits of American ingenuity and common sense, the boys started a fire in the wooden boat. Their plan was to cook their fish as soon as they were caught, indifferent to the problems that might arise from such a scheme.

Several years ago, I had a chance to speak with another gentleman who spent his childhood as a resident at the oxbow. Dave Adams was born in 1941 and came to the oxbow with his widowed mother a few years later. Desperate for a place to live, friends helped them transform a small shed built from boxcar lumber into a home. With no insulation, the winter winds penetrated the walls and floor. A tiny stove struggled to heat the small space, and he recalled the relentless feeling of always being cold. Both Adams and the Gleasons spoke of pumping water from a well a good distance away from their cottages. In the winter months, they used a sled to pull the heavy jugs through the snow. That is, when the pump wasn't frozen.

Debbie Wyman moved to the oxbow in 1967 at the age of six, with her mother and two brothers. They had previously lived in the elegant building in Bushnell's Basin known today as Richardson's Canal House, but at the time, a dilapidated boarding house. When it was condemned, the Wyman family relocated to 38 Oxbow Road. Debbie recalls that other children sometimes looked down on kids from the oxbow, and her brothers defended her from their abuse. Oxbow residents were sometimes called "squatters" and other de-

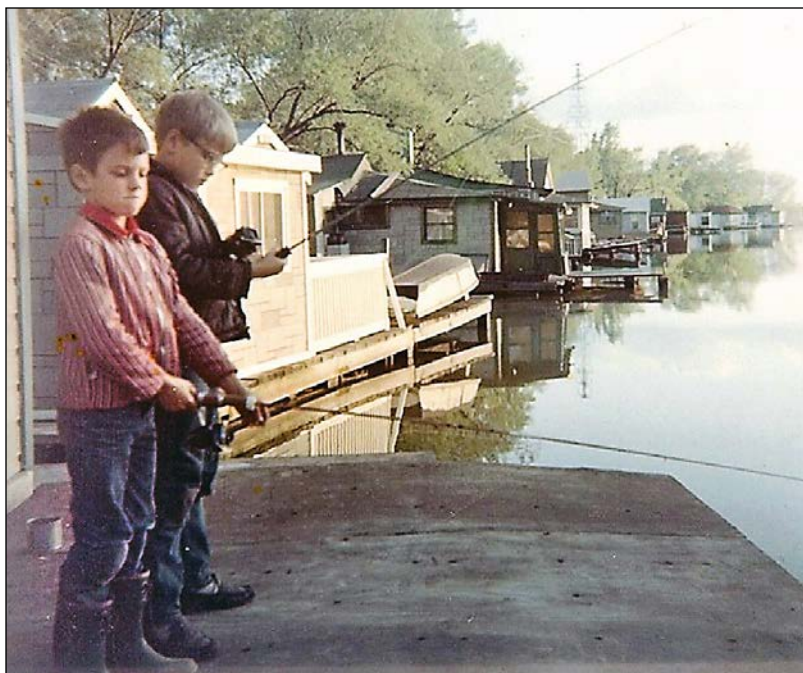


Dave Adams with his bicycle, in front of the home he and his mother shared at the oxbow. They eventually moved into a more traditional oxbow cottage.

rogatory names by those from outside the little community. It bothered her, knowing that her mother and their neighbors worked hard and paid taxes just like other property owners.

A lack of sanitary toilet facilities continued to exist when the Wyman family arrived at the oxbow. It was necessary to carry buckets of sewage to a septic tank located across the Oxbow Road. Others used alternative methods for disposing of the waste, adding to the negative image sometimes attached to the canal-side community.

Debbie Wyman lived at the oxbow until 1980, while her mother stayed until her death in 2002. She has fond memories of growing up in the unique waterfront community, steps from Minerva Deland School. Debbie considered a neighbor, Bruce Christman, as her adopted father. He passed away in 2009. The homes of Christman and her mother were burned by arsonists several years ago.



Bob and Bill Wyman fishing from the front porch of their oxbow home in 1968



Florence Rutter's home at the oxbow. This photo was taken a short time after she died in 2012.

Had that not happened, the state probably would have had the cottages removed, as they did when others relocated or died. While the leases allowed the residents to remain on the property, there was no provision for them to sell or transfer the cottages to others.

Florence Rutter arrived at the oxbow in 1947, at age 21. At the time, there was somewhat of a renaissance underway. Social life was documented in a weekly newspaper feature called the *Oxbow Briefs*. A small tavern served food and drinks to patrons. Families were moving in, and boats were plentiful. But the oxbow had also gained a reputation with some as a place that should be avoided, a place where trouble could be found. Occasional incidents reinforced the image.

In the late 1940s, an Oxbow Association was formed to bring together residents for common causes. Dues were collected to fund maintenance projects and other community activities. Donations were also collected from the oxbow residents for area charities. Maintenance of the unpaved Oxbow Road was a big issue. It was considered a private road, meaning maintenance and plowing were the responsibility of the residents.

The state owned the land on which the cottages were built, and residents paid an annual lease fee. Cottage owners also paid town and school taxes, and believed they were receiving inadequate services.

A newspaper article from 1969 described Florence

Rutter's cottage as being "*as attractive as any its size on Canandaigua Lake.*" But still, the reputation of the oxbow haunted its residents. While the article touched on the ongoing perception of danger and distasteful activity, it also went on to describe the efforts of those at the oxbow to defend their community: "*They want people to know they are trying. They want people to appreciate their positions and realize that they are doing the best they can.*"

Florence Rutter died in 2012, sixty five years after her arrival at Fairport's canal-side community. Known to many as the Oxbow Lady, she was the last waterfront resident of a place once called Fairport's newest resort. Her cottage stood alone, a stark reminder of what once was a popular vacation spot on the Erie Canal. Not long after Florence Rutter's death, her little home was reduced to ashes by an arsonist.

Although all the homes and cottages are now gone, the oxbow remains an interesting and attractive place for nature lovers, dog walkers and runners. Boy Scouts, neighbors, and others have brought new life to the old oxbow. Volunteers have improved the trail and installed several benches. Undesirable and invasive plants have been reduced, while more desired species have been planted and nurtured. The efforts of these people have brought a new sense of life to the area. Although things inevitably change over time, Perinton's oxbow on the Erie Canal remains a quiet, historic asset to the community.

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Upcoming Programs & Events

All program attendees are required to wear masks regardless of vaccination status.

Wednesday, February 9th on ZOOM

10:00 a.m.

Museum volunteers virtual get together on ZOOM

Tuesday, February 15th at the library

7:00 p.m. Registration required. Call 585-223-9091.

Historic U.S. Route 20 Tour

Speakers: Rob & Carole Lillis

Saturday, February 26th

—on ZOOM or at the museum TBD

10:00 a.m.

Volunteer Recognition and Training Seminar

Saturday, March 5th at the museum

9:00 a.m.

The museum opens for the season.

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How You can Support the Perinton Historical Society

- Become a PHS member / give a gift membership.
- Volunteer your time as a museum volunteer or on a committee.
- Donate artifacts to the museum that pertain to Fairport and Perinton.
- Purchase unique gifts from the Fairport Historical Museum gift shop.
- Donate gift cards and gift baskets for Yuletide Traditions silent auctions.
- Donate to the PHS through estate bequests, planned giving, IRA charitable giving, memorial and honor gifts, employer matching contributions, AmazonSmile, ROC the Day.



A Journey on Historic U.S. Route 20

Join presenters Rob and Carole Lillis on Tuesday, February 15th—7:00 p.m. at the library, as they take us on a journey down U.S. Route 20.

Most people in the Rochester/Finger Lakes area call it “5 and 20” because US 20 and New York Route 5 are combined, but only from Auburn to Avon. Route 20 is actually the longest road in the United States and the seventh longest road in the world. It runs 3,365 miles (nearly 1,000 miles longer than famous Route 66) through 12 states and through big cities, small towns, farmland, deserts, and mountains.

Parts of Route 20 follow the Oregon Trail, the California Trail, and the Mormon Trail. Freeport, Illinois, on Route 20, is the site of the famous debate between Abraham Lincoln and Canandaigua Academy alumnus Stephen A. Douglas. Closer to home, Route 20 passes through Seneca Falls, home of the Women’s Rights National Historical Park on the site of the first Women’s Rights Convention held in 1848.

In 2013, Canandaigua residents Rob and Carole Lillis drove their vintage MG roadster the entire length of US20 from Boston to Newport, Oregon. Along the way they visited historic sites and met incredible people with wonderful stories. Rob and Carole will share their adventures and the trip through history they experienced on the trip.

Rob Lillis provides planning, research, and evaluation consulting to school and community-based youth development programs through Evalumetrics Research. Carole recently retired from Keuka College where she taught English and writing for 25 years. They are avid vintage British car enthusiasts and have participated in numerous rallies and historic tours.

All program attendees are required to wear masks regardless of vaccination status. Registration required: Call the library at 585-223-9091 to register.

An Invitation to the PHS Volunteer Recognition and Training Seminar

On Saturday, February 26th, from 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m., current and prospective museum volunteers are invited to attend a socially distanced Volunteer Recognition and Training Seminar at the Fairport Historical Museum. If we are unable to meet in person due to COVID constraints, the orientation will take place virtually via ZOOM. A decision will be made as the date approaches and all registered participants will be notified.

This orientation is an opportunity for volunteers to get to know each other and receive a refresher course on everything from greeting visitors to recording gift shop sales. Volunteers will also be able to view the new exhibits before the museum re-opens to the public on March 5th. Please RSVP by February 23rd to Vicki Masters Profitt at Director@PerintonHistoricalSociety.org.

Museum volunteers work one two-hour shift per month greeting and introducing visitors to Fairport and Perinton history. New volunteers are paired with veteran volunteers for each shift, and training is provided.

The Perinton Historical Society is always looking for new volunteers to staff the museum. If you can give of your time just a few hours a month, please send an email to Vicki at Director@PerintonHistoricalSociety.org.



2021–2022 Special Recognition Level Memberships

As of January 15, 2022

Business (\$100)

Fulkerson Services, Inc.

111 Parce Avenue, Fairport, NY 14450
Phone: 585-223-2541, Website: fulkersonservices.net

Lift Bridge Yarns

24 High Street, Suite 1, Fairport, NY 14450
Dawn Verdugo & Jessie McNaughton
Phone: 585-364-0521, Email: Dawn@LiftBridgeYarns.com

Frank N. Pittinaro, C.P.A.

William Webb & Associates, LLC
404 East Atlantic Boulevard, Pompano Beach, Florida 33060
Phone: 954-943-1650, Email: Frank@webbcpa.com

Canandaigua National Bank & Trust

72 South Main Street, Canandaigua, NY 14424
Phone: 585-394-4260, Website: cnbank.com

Lucien A. Morin II, Partner

McConville Considine Cooman and Morin, P.C.
300 Meridian Centre Blvd., Suite 110, Rochester, NY 14618
Phone: 585-546-2500, Email: lmorin@mccmlaw.com

Barranco's Clothing and Shoes

32 North Main Street, Fairport, NY 14450
Phone: 585-388-1270, Email: BarrancosClothing@gmail.com

Fairport Village Inn

Wayne and Patty Beckwith
103 North Main Street, Fairport, NY 14550
Phone: 585-388-0112, Website: thefvi.com

Salle d' Escrime of Prescott, AZ, A Fencing Club

Patricia Dodge Waples, Owner

DeLand (\$100-\$249)

Carol Ann Britt
Kathleen Desko

Potter (\$250-\$499)

Kathleen Cloonan & Barry Childs
Bill & Pat May

Perrin (\$500 and above)

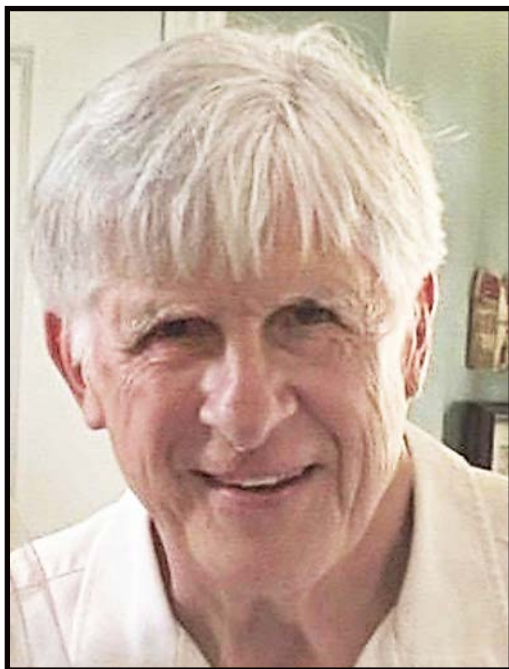
Anonymous

Donations

Last Man Standing Club



Non-Profit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Permit No. 149
Fairport, NY 14450



Perinton Historical Society Trustee and Volunteer Coordinator **John Laurence** (1947–2022) was a man of many talents. John's warmth, humor and ability to connect with people were the traits of a true leader. John will be greatly missed by his family and many friends.

Fairport Historical Museum, 18 Perrin Street, Fairport, NY 14450

The museum is currently closed to the public for the season. It will reopen on March 5th. During this period, you may call Vicki Masters Profitt at **585-233-1204** or email at director@perintonhistoricalsociety.org to book a group tour or do research.

www.PerintonHistoricalSociety.org