

Camp Onanda

In 1907, the Village of Canandaigua's Board of Trade (Predecessor of the Canandaigua Chamber of Commerce) penned a booklet titled "Canandaigua – Its Advantages, Growth and Beauty" to "call attention to many of Canandaigua's leading features." In that effort, in its Introduction, it stated "In recent years the Village has become more than ever popular as a summer resort, and along the tree embowered and vine clad shores of the loveliest of Western New York lakes has grown up a summer colony which finds in the bracing air, the limpid beauty of the waters and the rugged glory of the hills, a welcome relief from the stifling bounds of encircling walls and glaring pavements."

Through the first few decades of the 1900s, before paved roads and SUVs, before electric lines and Ma Bell, before \$3000 per foot shoreline prices, and before modern affluence, life on Canandaigua Lake was laid back and simple. Groceries were delivered by boat, as was the mail, especially towards the steeply hilled south end. The steamboats made regular stops at many of the points. Names like Hope Point, Tichenor Point, Menteth Point, Foster's Point, Point Rochester, Seneca Point, Granger Point, Woodville, Cook's Point, and Black Point were regular stops by the big, smoke belching steamers. Red Dock, Bay View, Lapham's Point, Davidson's Landing, and Main Top also had wooden docks with flag poles for signaling the need for a steamer. Most sites were either hotels or family cottages without electricity. As with all the Finger Lakes, the roads that accommodated horse and buggy and early autos, such as West Lake Road, were dirt or gravel. Canandaigua's Highway Superintendent, Ira Cribb, was the first in upstate New York to develop and successfully implement the oil and stone application on rural roads. At that point in time, West Lake Road was narrow and twisting and not conducive to any speed. To the residents it was a "dead-end" road. Ontario County maps as late as 1920 show West Lake Road as an "improved highway" only from the City limits to Tichenor Point.

Children's laughter echoed from the swing-sets and beach picnic tables at the district school on the corner of Butler Rd. A great deal of activity could be seen at the riding academy at the Denton farm. Many children and young adults enjoyed hikes and sports at the numerous camps along the west side of the lake including the natural science camp at Tichenor Point.

The Board of Trade's booklet also declared that "It is difficult to describe the beauties of the lake itself and of the surrounding country without running the risk of inducing incredulity in the average reader, but the fact remains that many who have had opportunity to view the famous resorts of this and other countries concur in saying that for attractive features Canandaigua Lake is surpassed by few small bodies of water either in this country or abroad. . . As the traveler proceeds up the lake his eye is regaled with an ever changing vista, showing gradually less and less of the characteristics of the agricultural landscape and merging into a delightful confusion of lofty hill sides covered with the primeval growth and as yet practically unscarred by the implements of industry. . . There are a number of good resorts along the lake where pleasant rooms and good board may be obtained at a reasonable rate and attractive cottages may also be rented during the summer."

Canandaigua Lake had long been a summer mecca for many families dating back to the mid 1800s. In fact, most residents in those times and through to WWII were primarily summer residents, starting as soon as school was out in late June, and then packing up and heading home on Labor Day weekend. They came by steamboat, horse and buggy, and early autos (to the extent that they could navigate the narrow, steep one-lane roadways).

Enter upon the scene "Camp Onanda." "Onanda" is an American Indian word meaning tall fir or pine, a symbol of strength and simplicity. In 1911, William Foster, an early owner of the site, had passed away. Later in that year, the YWCA of Rochester and Monroe County, NY began renting the home and grounds as a place where adult working women could rest and enjoy recreational activities. In 1919 the YWCA purchased the property, known as "Shale Rock," from the W. L. Foster Estate. Over the next several years, many of the buildings that exist there today were constructed, and in the 1930s the YWCA began using the camp for junior campers as well as adult women.

The park has a rich history including its original purpose as the YWCA Leisure Time School, starting in the early 20th century, and, at one time, the site of Camp Good Days and Special Times. A cooperative purchasing effort in 1989 by the Town of Canandaigua and the New York State Department of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and the Department of Environmental Conservation was successful in an effort to improve recreational opportunities and access for the public. It was opened

as such in 1990. Fishing, swimming, family picnics and gatherings have proven popular at this year round recreation area.

Located on West Lake Rd. (County Rd. 16), today's Onanda Park is an exceptional and unique property about 8 miles south of the City of Canandaigua - truly a gem in the middle of the Finger Lakes. Today it encompasses 80 acres, seven of which are lake side including 8 cabins, 2 pavilions, and 2 lodges available to the public. The 73 acres of hillside running along Barnes Road and Barnes Gully contain a two-mile hiking path, 3 pavilions, 7 cabins, winter sledding and over-flow parking.

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