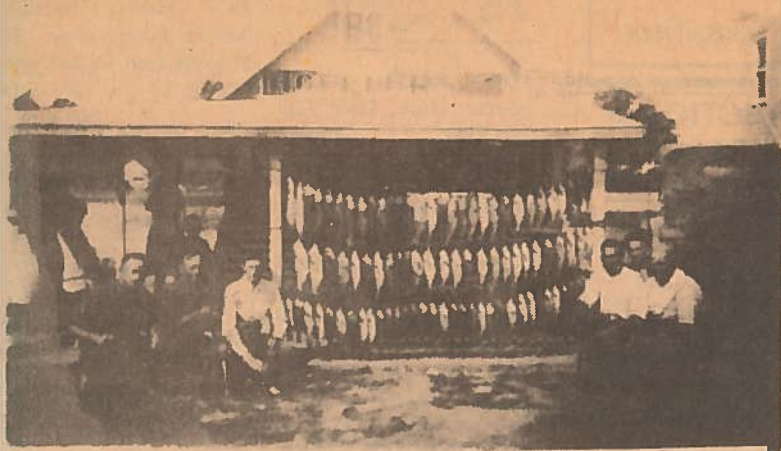


This week it's my pleasure to present an article by the Carlton Town Historian, Lysbeth Hoffman. The accompanying snapshot shows Hoefler's boat livery at Point Breeze around 1930.



Oak Orchard Harbor

by

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Oak Orchard Harbor, our "Home of the King", boasts a long, rich history.

The first groups reaping benefits were ancestors of the Senecas, or later the Senecas themselves, according to local archaeologists. Evidence of these peoples' fishing implements, dating back to 800 A.D. to the mid-1600's, have been found in the vicinity.

One source describes how these early fisherman may have landed their catches: "The men drove stakes across the stream's mouth. They filled the openings between each stake with brush gathered by women and children, thus forming an effective barrier to any fish. Salmon were driven toward this weir and, when they were close to it, another brush-stake net was built upstream. The Indians had trapped their fish. Warriors entered the stream, armed with spears, knives and clubs. They slashed at the salmon, killing or wounding many with each thrust. Downstream, their families collected dead and wounded salmon as they floated past. After several hours, when all salmon were harvested, a feast occurred."

The first pioneers came to settle around Oak Orchard Harbor in 1803. The abundance of salmon, as well as good hunting and fertile soil, were reasons to make these lands attractive for their new lives.

Arad Thomas, interviewing old-timers in 1871 for his book, "Pioneer History of Orleans County", found and recorded: "Salmon in high water would run up Oak Orchard and Johnson's Creek and were caught in small streams as far south as the west part of the Town of Gaines." Of course, there were no dams or other obstructions to impede their journey in those early times.

Later Oak Orchard Harbor would become commercial. The government began grants to improve the harbor in 1836 and by 1838 there were piers built out into the lake. Shipbuilding began in 1848 and soon a sizeable fleet could be found. Ships laden with lumber, salted fish, and grains set out for distant ports.

The lighthouse and keeper's dwelling were built in the early 1870's and the harbor was the most important port of entry between the Genesee River and the mighty Niagara. The position of Customs Collector continued until 1905.

Shipbuilders, H.C. and J. Murray, built the first hotel in the early 1850's. Later the Point Breeze side would have two hotels and two more were built on the Oak Orchard-On-The-Lake side by the mid-1880's.

Oak Orchard Harbor had become a summer resort for the wealthy. The Tally-ho, a coach and four, brought passengers twice daily from inland. Parties were ferried across the harbor, from hotel to hotel, at 5¢ per person. Summer-folk could rent row boats from Taylor Brothers, one of the boat liveries, and many maintained their own sail boats.

One local entrepreneur, Lewis Rogers, owned two different hotels. His first, The Point Breeze House named after the government had designated Point Breeze as the name of the Post Office, burned and he moved across the road to the Cottage Hotel. This business, now The Black North Inn, still retains its original style of a cottage with its long, wide porches.

During the several decades of Victorian glory fishing was an important part of life at the lake. It was served at the hotels, from the kitchens of magnificent cottages, was the basis for several commercial enterprises, and was the prime means of sport. The salmon were by this time gone and it was mainly white-fish being caught.

Just before World War I the great piers and lighthouse were destroyed by lake storms. The cottages and hotels, built in the wooden-frame-stick-style, were ravaged by numerous fires and the Depression and World War II caused further decline of the grand times.

By the 1960's reclaiming the potential of Oak Orchard Harbor had become a prime topic. Environmentalists and sportsmen recalled the past. Within a few years the Department of Conservation began stocking salmon and trout, and they have thrived in local waters. Again fishing has made Oak Orchard a mecca for sportsmen and prize-winning catches has earned it