

The Genesee Beacon

News from the Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse Historical Society



*Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse
America's oldest surviving
lighthouse on Lake Ontario*

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Fall 2011 Beacon

By Bud Lowell

Editor's Note: We've held this issue of the Beacon a couple of weeks later than we expected so that we could incorporate the results of the Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse Historical Society's October board meeting, and the latest in the city's redevelopment plans for the Port of Rochester.

We'd planned to take a look in this issue of the Beacon at past housing development around the Port of Rochester, figuring there might be some historical connections to be found between history and the city's current planning for a rebirth of the port area. Boy, did that turn out to be a timely thought! A few days after we tossed that idea around, the City of Rochester released its draft environmental impact statement for the Charlotte Port Development Plan. The plan envisions a new Marina Zoning District at the port in Rochester's Charlotte neighborhood. Phase 1 would develop an 80 slip public marina next to the current ferry terminal building on some of the parking space no longer needed for the abandoned fast ferry service. Room for residential development (townhouses or condominiums) and a public square is planned for the land between the new marina and Lake Avenue. That could come in three to six years. Phase 2 would expand the marina to 157 slips. River Street would be relocated and a promenade would link the river front with the city and county trail system. City Environmental Engineer Mark Gregor told the October meeting of the Charlotte Community Association that full build out of the plan could be within 10 to 15 years. The city has \$19.5 million dollars already lined up for Phase 1 of the marina. Residential and commercial development would depend on interest

from private investors. Several are said to be interested.

Several Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse Historical Society trustees who attended that meeting came away with concerns after Rochester City Zoning Manager Dorraine Kirkmire said the new zoning district could potentially allow buildings up to 12 stories tall to be developed north of the CSX Railroad tracks (development along the waterfront would be limited to just two stories). Although Kirkmire said the city's intent is that the lighthouse will have a clear view across the new marina to Lake Ontario, the zoning proposal raises the possibility of high-rise buildings between the lakefront and the lighthouse. The Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse Historical Society went on record a year ago against any such development. Another eyebrow-raiser for the lighthouse society trustees came when city officials said they've asked New York State for grant money to add a pedestrian trail that would ultimately connect the lighthouse with the city and county trail system. Such a trail would involve construction on the lighthouse property, which is both a state and federally-registered historical site.

New commercial and residential development of the port could mean new prominence for the Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse Museum as an attraction in the Charlotte neighborhood. It could also literally put walls between the lighthouse and the rest of the harbor that gives the museum its context. Likewise, a connection to the county trail system could drive a lot of new foot and bike



Port of Rochester. Phase 1 of the Marina Project would be adjacent to the ferry terminal at rear; phase 2 adjacent to the swing bridge.

traffic to the lighthouse. If it's through traffic, that could mean more visitors and more revenue. But if the trail connection turns out to be a cul-de-sac ending at the lighthouse, it could instead become a draw for people looking for an out-of-the-way place to hang out. The Lighthouse Historical Society trustees have organized to make sure the society's concerns on these issues are heard. By the time you read this, they should have already expressed their views on the port development at a public hearing at city hall. The public comment period on the port plan's draft environmental impact statement runs until November 18. Written comments can be filed with the city until then. The final EIS is expected in February, and the Rochester City Council could vote to adopt it in March.

You can read the draft environmental impact statement online at the Rochester city web site, or see it in person at the Charlotte Branch of the Rochester Public Library (downtown at the Rundell Library and at City Hall, too). The city is actively inviting comment. Here's your chance!

President's Column

By Bob Owens



We expected to report in this issue on a proposed new set of by-laws for our society, but that progress was overshadowed by news of the city's proposed Marina District zoning plan/redevelopment project for the Port of Rochester. As you've read elsewhere in this issue, the plan proposes to allow construction of high-rise buildings up to 12 stories tall between the Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse site and the new marina as well as the construction of a "new" Lighthouse Trail across our historic site.

To be clear, the Lighthouse Society does not oppose development of a marina north of the lighthouse. We look forward to seeing more boat traffic on the river, which we've been serving since 1822. We also don't oppose the residential development the City would like to encourage along Lake Avenue west of the ferry terminal. Lighthouse trustees do, however, oppose the proposed height (12 stories) for a new building diagonally across from the Lighthouse that will cut off our view of where the river flows into Lake Ontario. If our view shed is visually compromised, not only will the historic function of the Lighthouse be adversely impacted, but we won't be able to fulfill our mission to teach the story of Rochester's maritime heritage to the thousands of visitors who come to our site each year.

Although city officials say they expect any residential projects around the port to be no more than three or four stories high, the zoning changes proposed with the city's draft environmental impact

statement allow 12. The lighthouse sits on a bluff about two stories above river level. The lighthouse tower itself is about four and 1/2 stories tall from base to the top of its lantern room. That's six and 1/2 stories, seven at most. A 12-story building would block our view lines.

City officials have also announced that they've obtained a state grant for the building of a trail that would begin at Lake Avenue, continue southeast, and cross through the middle of our site and around in front of the Lighthouse Tower. We are truly perplexed as to why the city wants to spend \$150,000 of state funds during this time of concern about deficit spending to build a new Lake Avenue trail when pedestrians (and motorists and hikers and bikers) can already easily reach our landmark complex from Lake Avenue to Latta Road and then east on Latta one short block to Lighthouse Street!

After talking this over, the Lighthouse Society's Board of Trustees has authorized a committee to make known our concerns about these two components of the marina project to city and county officials, preservation groups, and the regulatory agencies that oversee the protection of state and national register landmarks such as the Lighthouse—America's oldest surviving lighthouse on Lake Ontario. We urge the city to meet with us before this plan advances any further.

As for our association's by-laws, we'll get back to those another time.

Charlotte's Summer Cottages

by Jack Kemp

Today, if you drive west down Beach Avenue from Lake Avenue and view the homes along the Lake Ontario shore to the north, you can see some of the most valuable real estate in the Rochester area. Such was not always the case as early pioneers found that land to be comprised mostly of swamp, infested with hungry bugs and deadly snakes. But times changed and the hardy pioneers cleared land and planted crops. The nearby city of Rochester grew as a manufacturing and milling center and its population exploded. Although this growth had many lasting good effects it also had its dark side. Sanitation and



pure food could not be taken for granted. Many suffered, but most of all the children were the victims of heat, impure food and air and the diseases which are their result.

Dr. Edward Mott Moore of Rochester was painfully aware of this blight and took action. He tended many tots and the medical profession by that time had become aware of the healing abilities of fresh air and good food. He purchased a piece of land near the lake, put up some tents and built a small cottage. There he brought some children and caretakers and the Infants Summer Hospital had its birth in 1865. About a year or so after there were 14 cottages and by 1872 there were 74 lots occupied by summer residents in the recently purchased Wilder tract alone.

Many who were there for health reasons slept outside on cots or on the floor of the porch of their cottage.

(continues on next page)

Rochester Rum Runners

by Bud Lowell

Film maker Ken Burns' latest work Prohibition aired on PBS this fall. It told the story of America's "Great Experiment" in banning alcohol and its unintended consequences. Prohibition allowed Canadian distillers like Seagrams and Hiram Walker to make billions of dollars selling illicit liquor to the United States, and it provided an opportunity for enterprising people all along the Great Lakes to claim their own share of that trade by turning Rum Runner. Rochester's maritime neighborhood of Charlotte couldn't help but be involved, largely through the offices of four brothers who grew up on Madison Street. Historian H. Dwight Bliss III got to know them in their later years while working at a Charlotte boat yard after World War Two. He documented their story in a self-published book called Bootlegging on Lake Ontario during Prohibition, and he lectured on the subject earlier this year at the Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse.

The Staud brothers were the sons of George Staud, who served as Rochester's Postmaster from the time of World War One until 1925. Their father shipped the brothers off to work at a Texas ranch when they began "raising hell in their teens," according to Bliss. When Prohibition arrived in 1920, the Staud brothers began to hear how much money could be made by running whiskey across the Great Lakes from Canada. Being from that region themselves, they gravitated back home to see what could be done. Karl "The Bishop" Staud was the oldest. He walked with a limp due to a deformed foot, and he came to handle the money end of the bootlegging business. Edward "Eddie" Staud, recognizable by a bullet scar on his neck, was the second-oldest. He later owned "The Turf Club" in the basement of Rochester's Edison Hotel and raised horses on a ranch off Long Pond Road. George Staud was the gang's enforcer, and the youngest brother, Milton or "Mick" Staud, was the ringleader.

Mick Staud went to Detroit in 1921 and hooked up with the Purple Gang, a violent group who were already running whiskey from southern Ontario Province

across the Detroit River and Lake Erie into Michigan. Bliss says Staud learned the rum running trade from them, including how to forge relationships with the Canadian distillers who supplied the product. Starting with a 40 foot Chris Craft motor boat, they began running whiskey, bourbon and champagne across Lake Ontario from Kingston and from Port Hope in Oshawa, Ontario. They graduated to 50 foot yachts which allowed them to run in all weathers. They carried the liquor in burlap sacks (which would sink if tossed overboard), and they worked out agreements with farmers along the lake shore from Sodus Bay to Orchard Creek for landing their product. A system of signals let them know if it was safe to come ashore, where cars would be waiting to hustle the contraband to speakeasies around the Rochester region. Anyone who infringed on their territory was told "stay out or you'll get a .45" according to Bliss, who adds that the brothers never killed anyone to his knowledge. He says a few people were shot and wounded, and the Stauds did kidnap a federal undercover agent in Charlotte after inadvertently hiring him as a boat handler. They tied him up, threw him into the cellar of the Grove House in Greece and threatened him with a "one way ride to Lake Ontario." The agent escaped, but transferred to Detroit for the rest of prohibition.

Bliss says the Stauds left the liquor distribution to others, and focused on getting their product across Lake Ontario with pauses only for winter weather. Their operations peaked about 1927,

but continued until the repeal of prohibition in 1933. They were often chased on the water by federal agents but relied on their knowledge of the local waters and the weather to evade capture. Only George Staud was ever caught by government agents, who arrested him at Oak Orchard Creek and took him to Buffalo to stand trial. "He must have paid off the judge pretty good," says Bliss, "because he didn't spend any time in jail."

While they were pursued by Internal Revenue Service agents, the Stauds weren't much troubled by local police. Were there agreements between the brothers and local law enforcement to look the other way? "Very little, to my knowledge" says Bliss. By 1925, half a dozen states, including New York, had passed laws banning local police from investigating prohibition violations.

Rum running was a risky business even without the possibility of arrest. Bootleggers were drowned in storms or sunk by running onto ice in the winter. The risk was worth it: Bliss says one of the Staud gang's boats would carry about 300 quarts of whiskey per run. The going price was \$35 to \$40 a bottle, about one week's pay for many working people in the 1920s. The Stauds made enough to survive losses in the stock market crash of 1929 and live through the Great Depression in style. After World War Two they kept boats at the marinas on River Street in Charlotte and told stories of their bootlegging exploits.

"They were pretty sharp fellows," says author Dwight Bliss, "that's all I can say."

Summer Cottages

(from page 2)

Most all of these cottages faced the lake for the benefit of the lake breeze.

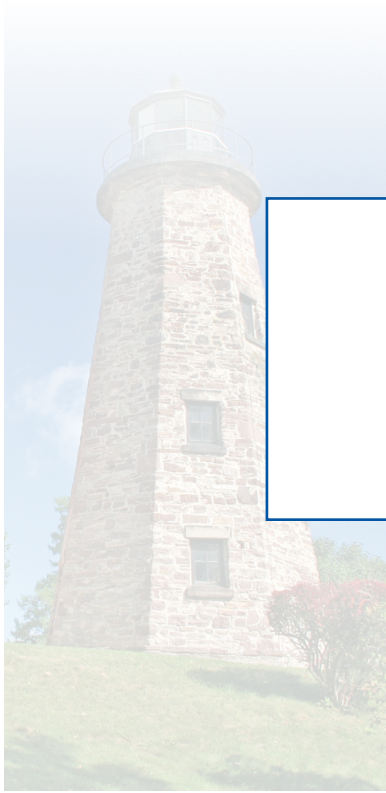
In April of 1874 the Cottage Hotel was completed. It consisted of a number of cottages built on the pavilion plan. There were five double cottages which were connected by a plaza facing the lake, 500 feet long and 12 feet wide.

The hotel which fronted Lake Avenue contained a public restaurant and private dining room for the occupants of the cottages. Its most auspicious day was Memorial Day 1892 when President Benjamin Harrison and party had breakfast there prior to the unveiling of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Rochester.

A fire on November 14, 1914 consumed the hotel and in spite of its being insured, it was never rebuilt.

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The Genesee Beacon
Summer, 2011
Volume 28, Number 2
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The Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse Historical Society is grateful to the following civic and public supporters that have made many of our new programs and projects possible:

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**The Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse Museum is located off Lake Avenue, directly behind Holy Cross Catholic Church.
For more info call: (585) 621-6179.**