

Stony Point: A History

Written by Florence Smith

Above the protected water of Irondequoit Bay a wooded cliff faces north toward the vast expanse of Lake Ontario. Visible through the trees clutching the sharply descending cliff walls is the narrow sandbar protecting the bay from the lake, a sandy shoreline that curves westward a good 10 miles to the Genesee River and Braddock Point. The narrow shoreline below this cliff extends westward also, until it turns sharply south. Stony Point guards this turn and has lent its name to a new community stretching along the ridge of this cliff.

How many have stood here to treasure and absorb this view? Surely the Seneca and other native Iroquois found this point. Did the French explorer LaSalle stand here in 1669 scanning the water for boats carrying his companions and supplies? Did Caleb Lyon penetrate the woods to this vantage point while he was laying out Webster's new Bay Road in 1812? It is said that sometime before 1880 a stevedore named Dunbar had a boat landing at the foot of this cliff's largest gully or hollow which opened out to a small beach. It offered Dunbar a pathway for carrying his goods to and from a small house at the top of the gully where "Dunbar Road" led to Dickinson and Bay Roads.

In 1882 when William DeWitt purchased 54 acres of this land including Dunbar's hollow and landing. There was a "hotel" at this landing with a natural spring flowing from the cliff wall. Like other "hotels" that sprang up around Irondequoit Bay from the 1850s on, it was a simple wood structure. Citizens of nearby Rochester and even farther away liked boating and "camping" on the bay for days and even weeks during the summer. Perhaps they fished, cooked dinner at a campfire by the landing or spent the evening at one of the grander hotels such as the Newport House. Local residents also came regularly in their boats from the sandbar to collect drinking water from the spring. William DeWitt built another small cabin at Dunbar's landing and rented out both hotels to summer visitors for a number of years. In the 1930s a man named Julius Frederick rented these buildings in order to hold political gatherings. Some local residents remember that as many as 1,000 people parked their cars at the top of the gully and walked down for these events - even in the winter.

Dunbar Road went from the top of the gully to Dickinson Road where two families lived, the Dickensons and the DeWitts. The DeWitts had a chicken house and orchards full of peaches, plums, apples and cherries. On the more open ground further west along the cliff top was an alfalfa field. As the family grew, sons Roy and Frank built homes nearby, and by 1915 the road connecting them to Bay Road was renamed DeWitt Road.

After William DeWitt died in the 1920s, Roy and Frank started raising chickens in earnest, building 8 or 9 brooder huts and another chicken house for hens that lay as many as 1,000 eggs a day. They added a kitchen to the original house and a bathroom to replace the outhouse. Cistern water was collected for most household needs but their drinking and cooking water still had to be carried up from the spring at the bottom of Dunbar Hollow until World War II when a well was dug by the house.

Around 1928 the DeWitt brothers bought a truck and started a sand and gravel business. The Town of Irondequoit was one of their customers. Sand was dug out of the eastern side of Dunbar Hollow just above the landing. Gravel was taken from the cliff at the west side of the landing near where the spring was located until digging made the cliffs too unstable. In the early 1930s a new sand and gravel pit was opened up in the former alfalfa field and in 1937 young Mel DeWitt joined his dad and uncle, Roy and Frank, in the business.

Eventually the gravel petered out but postwar building demand for sand kept the business going until 1982 when Mel DeWitt decided it was time to retire and sell his land. One person who noticed

the "For Sale" sign was Jay Zukoski, a Webster builder searching for some property on which to build his own home. But when he contacted the realtor he learned that another group of buyers calling themselves Horizon Associates was negotiating for the property.

Horizon Associates were four men, Ethan Welch, Earl DeRenzo, Richard Bott and Ted Richman. They, too, were looking for a place on Irondequoit Bay to build their homes. Ethan Welch realized that the waterfront location of the DeWitt property was special. The opening of Irondequoit Bay on August 14, 1985, after removal of the railroad tracks and low bridge at the bay's outlet into Lake Ontario, meant that sail and power boats would once again have access into and out of this quiet bay. Envisioning more than well designed living spaces with a beautiful view, he first had in mind two condominium towers rising majestically from the sand pit, giving every resident a water view. Here was an opportunity to develop an entire community with lots of open space for both residential and recreational use.

Jay Zukoski learned of Horizon Associates' plans and suggested that he could build such a community if all the necessary approvals were obtained. After interviewing 4 other builders, Horizon Associates agreed that Jay Zukoski understood their vision and was the builder to work with. They agreed to maintain their option on the land until all approvals were obtained. Thus began a long 3 years of design and redesign, meetings, surveys, petitions, and zoning changes that were only the beginning steps in realizing the establishment of Stony Point.

If the plan for Stony Point had been for 50 single family homes on this land, the Town of Webster would have given quick approval. The town was not ready, however, for condominium towers and a planned urban development. Certain that an integrated development of mixed private housing and waterfront dockage was the best use of this land, Horizon Associates changed the condominium towers into more acceptable ranch and two-story units of 3 and 4 townhomes each. To give the nearby homes a buffer zone, all the land directly behind Dickinson Road was set aside for single family homes. Even so, the new plan required 3 zoning changes and the Town Planning Board had to be persuaded that this was a good idea.

In addition, the Cultural Resource Survey program required a field study for archeological sensitivity. The staff of the Rochester Museum and Science Center dug 500 test holes on the property and all came down with severe cases of poison ivy - but discovered no important fossils or debris. The marina required approval from all three towns surrounding the bay - Webster, Penfield, and Irondequoit - as well as from the Army Corps of Engineers, the Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Coastal Management organization. Issues concerning the steep sandy cliffs above the shoreline, designated as "forever wild," involved the State Environment Conservation Agency. Filling in the sand pit with earth from the bank of soil between it and the bay was another concern, prompting the Town of Webster for the first time in its history to require a vision impact statement. The statement came in 4 volumes, the largest proposal ever received by Webster town officials.

All together Horizon Associates had to get approval from 23 different agencies. In addition they had to meet with representatives of the 1400 neighbors who signed a petition against approval for the development. Many of these folks used the land as a "park without any jurisdiction" for walking, dirt biking, and target practice. All had to be convinced that the new development would enhance Webster and the value of their own homes. Clockwise from top left - Docks under construction, 1989; Tennis courts, 1990; Clean-up Day, 1993 (M Sales); Midship Circle, 1990 Keeping the plan together for three years and financing the various stages of approval was a much greater risk than the four men of Horizon Associates had ever imagined. But finally in 1986 the plans were all approved. Jay Builders bought the property from them and began to build Stony Point.

Preparing the land for roads, utilities, and lot divisions required clearing away tangled shrubbery, old hen houses, a barn, and sagging fences. The Dickinson's house remained in its original location, just to the west of the LaSalle entrance to Stony Point. The DeWitt's house, sitting where an Admiralty Drive private home would soon be built, was another matter. Jay Builders made an offer to an interested contractor - he could have it for one dollar if he would take care of moving it.

The house was jacked up and, despite a torrential downpour that threatened to mire down the transporting rig, the house was moved two blocks away to DeWitt Road. As an after thought the buyer asked about the old DeWitt outhouse. Jay Builders obligingly sold it for fifty cents.

The first area developed was at the east end where North Cove Drive circles off the beginning of Admiralty Way. Dr. Welsh's home was built and by 1988 three buildings containing 11 town homes were ready for occupancy. The road up Dunbar Hollow was relocated at the top for an easier exit onto Admiralty and named Dunbar Trail. In April of 1989 aluminum docks were installed at the bottom of the hollow.

Further west on Admiralty the land was cleared for the second stage of development, where the first of seven buildings containing 30 townhomes along the outer edge of Mariner Circle was ready in 1989. Two tennis courts were completed in 1990 at the eastern end of Mariner next to Dunbar Trail and the Army Corps of Engineers finally dredged a deep keel channel from Stony Point docks out to the main Irondequoit Bay channel.

For Jay Zukoski one of the most difficult challenges in building Stony Point was the earth work required for filling the sand pit in the third and last section of the development. The engineers who planned the development had determined it would take 165,000 cubic yards of dirt to fill the pit. He ended up moving 325,000 cubic yards which he figures would fill 24.6 miles of 10-wheel dump trucks bumper to bumper. The west end of Admiralty Way was then built on top of 40 feet of this fill along the southern edge.

After a slowdown in the building and banking industries, plans for the inner section of Mariner Circle were redesigned in 1995 to include 19 patio homes instead of townhomes. This change required approval from the Stony Point homeowners as well as from the town board but the first patio home was finally occupied in 1997.

Ownership of the land and government of the community was taken over from Jay Builders by the Stony Point Homeowners Association in 1995, run initially by five elected board members. In 1996 the board expanded to nine members. Using the services of a management company, the Association develops the yearly budget based on homeowner fees and oversees maintenance and improvements to the development.

As the dust settled and landscaping began to soften the new construction, the special qualities of Stony Point became more apparent. Jay Builders added a heated swimming pool and whirlpool in 1996 on the edge of section three with a sweeping view of the bay and Lake Ontario. Slowly townhome sales revived and spacious private homes with columned entryways and brick facades emerged all along Admiralty Drive. Richard Bott bought a townhome in the second section and both Ted Richman and Jay Zukoski built the homes they had dreamed of at the west end of Admiralty. By 2001, thirteen years after the first foundations were dug, all the townhomes were sold and only a few patio and single family home lots were still available.

In contrast to the building slowdowns and time consuming challenges, the community spirit and social life that the members of Horizon Associates had envisioned for Stony Point came quickly to life. The summer picnic that Jay Zukoski set up at the dock in 1989, complete with tent, grills and dancing music, became an annual event. Christmas caroling, coupled with the "hanging of the wreath" on some conspicuous construction site or another, also became an annual event.

The first annual Christmas Dinner Dance was held at Empire Lanes Bowling Alley, followed for many years by similar gatherings there and in later years at the Newport House and the Rochester Yacht Club.

Boat owners began traveling together to various ports around Lake Ontario, beginning with Sodus Bay and Fairhaven in 1990. In 1992 a group went up the Rideau Canal. Another group went to the

1,000 Islands in 1993 and in 1991 and 1994 a flotilla of boats tied up together along the wall at Hanlan's Point in Toronto. In January 1991 an entire bus load of neighbors went to Toronto to see "Phantom of the Opera" and the Toronto Boat Show. Extraordinary events such as the Ice Storm of 1991 and the Blizzard of 1993 were met with neighborly ingenuity and sharing of light, heat, and fuel until electricity was restored.

Residents also entertained each other in their homes. In the spring of 1989 a series of Sunday afternoon parties hosted by various homeowners began with a Hat Party. Party themes over the next three years included Halloween, a Wild Tie Party, a St Patrick's Day Party, a Fifties party, and a Pink Ticket Party based on historic happenings around Irondequoit Bay.

Social gatherings at Stony Point became less frequent as the community grew larger and some original neighbors moved away. Instead there have been tennis Round Robins and picnics around the pool. A bimonthly newsletter helps keep the approximately 150 households informed and the new Community Center that opened in spring of 2001 has provided space for neighborhood events from a craft sale to a "Meet the Candidates Night."

Looking back, Ethan Welch is very pleased with how the project that Horizon Associates envisioned has turned out. Melvin DeWitt is pleased too, and Jay Zukoski sums it up by saying that Stony Point is a unique project. There will never be another development combining the size and diversity of homes with tennis courts, a swimming pool and waterfront docks that provide access to waterways all over the world quite like Stony Point in Webster, New York.

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