

CHAPTER FOUR

OUR PEOPLE AND LEISURE TIME

With more and more people spending their leisure time in the vast outdoors, Conservation Authorities throughout the province play an important role in providing recreation facilities. In this regard the Upper Thames was among the leaders with its large Fanshawe and Wildwood parks, its dozen smaller areas throughout the watershed and a developing program at Woodstock.

While recreation was not mentioned in the original Conservation Authorities Act, the government, recognizing its value to the people of the Province, amended the Act in 1954 to provide grants for recreation development on Authority properties. This provided statutory approval for the precedent set at Fanshawe in 1952.

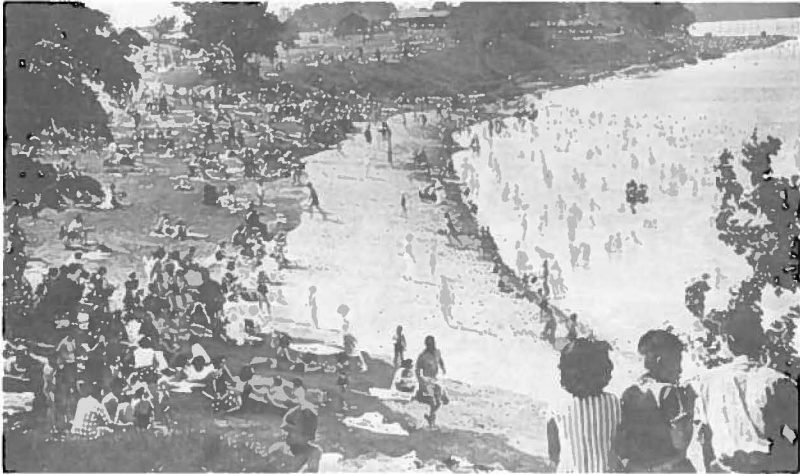
FANSHAWE RECREATION AREA

Planning for Fanshawe Park was started in 1948 when a committee, outside the Authority, was appointed to study the area. Dr. E. G. Pleva was chairman, and associated with him were E. V. Buchanan, Roy Garrett, R. L. Stratton and Arnold Fraser. Two university students surveyed the area, and the services of Gordon Culham, consultant to the London planning board, were retained on a part-time basis. Mr. Culham presented a tentative sketch in January, 1952.

Another committee, composed of Orlo Miller, chairman; Leslie Gray, and Dr. J. J. Talman, was asked to consider a name for the area. In 1954 the park was named the J. Cameron Wilson Park and the beach the A. H. Richardson Beach. In 1955, when the pavilion was built, it was named the Watson Porter Pavilion. All three of the men so honored were present at a ceremony held in October, 1955, and each was presented with an oil painting of the dam and lake, executed by artist Clare Bice.

The first supervised beach, 500 feet long, was opened to the public in June, 1953, and a second one, 600 feet long, was added in 1954. In 1954 the Authority also took a big step forward when it

approved a \$75,000 program of park development. A board of administration for park management was appointed, composed of G. W. Pittock, N. A. Bradford, Charles Kirk and William Goddard.



Typical Summer Scene at Richardson Beach, Fanshawe.

Originally the entrance to the park was at the end of concession 5, London Township, and there was parking accommodation for about 750 cars. Later expansion boosted this to 2,300 vehicles. A new and more attractive entrance was opened in 1964, about 1,000 feet south of the original one to serve both the park and the Pioneer Village. A service building was erected near the Village the same year.



J. Cameron Wilson Park, a Popular Spot.

Plans for the cottage site and trailer-tent camp were laid out in 1954, the same year as the bathhouse at the beach was built. The cottage site, located across from the beaches, on the east side of the lake, had accommodation for 60 cottages. The first cottage was built in 1954; in 1968 there were 39. Each site has 100 feet of lake frontage.



Home Away from Home at Fanshawe Trailer Camp.

The trailer-tent camp was opened in 1955, with accommodation for 55 registrants. Expansion over the years brought the number of sites to 289. The original service building was replaced by a more modern one in 1958 and this was enlarged in 1964. Still another service building was opened in 1966 to serve a new area. Use of the trailer camp increased from 99 camp days in 1955 to 14,000 in 1967. Success of the camp operation was due, in no small measure, to the diligence of its supervisor, Mrs. Ada Johnston.

While Authority policy prohibits motorboats, other than service or lifesaving craft, from using the lake, exceptions have been made on rare occasions. The London Centennial committee was granted permission to hold powerboat races on the lake on one day during the 1955 celebrations. Native son Guy Lombardo, famed band leader and powerboat enthusiast, was the chief attraction. Docks were required and were built at the expense of the city. Later, through the good offices of N. A. Bradford, the docks were presented to the Authority and were used by the Yacht Club until 1965 when a program of installing permanent docks was started by the Authority and completed in 1967.



Yacht Basin on Fanshawe Lake.

The Yacht Club was organized in 1955 and started operations the following season, using a small contractor's hut as a clubhouse. In 1960, when a new building was opened at the golf course, the original pro-shop was given to the Yacht Club and the building first used by the yachtsmen went to the Cricket Club. The Yacht Club expanded its facilities in 1966 by erecting a picnic pavilion. The Junior Sailing Club also used the senior club's facilities.

In July, 1952 the London Amateur Athletic Association was given permission to use the lake for sculling. This group later gave way to the London Rowing Club. The club keeps its craft in a barn on the south shore, east of the dam. Another organization, the Navy League, began using the lake in 1966, while the London Model Power Boat Club utilizes a lagoon at the northeast corner of the dam.

Group camping is also popular at Fanshawe with such organizations as the YM-YWCA, Girl Guides, Brownies and Boy Scouts. Our Lady of London Camp, while not on Authority property, was provided with a swimming area on the lake. This is now used less frequently since a pool was built on the camp site.

The Cricket Club was formed in 1956, with facilities near the trailer camp. The Thames Valley Archery Club came to the park in 1962 and occupied a site on the west bank.

In 1954 a section of Authority property, near the Thorndale bridge, was leased to the Department of National Defence for military exercises.

A sizable nursery was established at Fanshawe, providing trees and shrubs for planting all over the watershed. In 1957 a row of red oak trees was planted near the Pioneer Village, as the start of a memorial forest in honor of deceased members of the Authority.

Much of the development work was carried out by the Authority's own staff, under the direction of Parks Superintendent Rex H. Bishop. While the Authority provided its own lifeguards at the beaches, valuable assistance in crowd supervision and water safety came from the Provincial Police, Legion of Frontiersmen, St. John Ambulance and Red Cross Society.

WILDWOOD RECREATION AREA

With the Wildwood dam and reservoir completed late in 1965, no time was lost in moving toward recreational development. A preliminary land-use plan was prepared by Mr. Bishop, and later the services of a professional planning consultant, J. A. J. Knox, of Canadian Mitchell Associates, Bramalea, were retained. A master plan was produced in 1967.

In the interval steps were taken to provide limited facilities for boaters, bathers and picnickers. A road was built to the lake, an area was staked off for bathers and a number of picnic tables were installed. As an experiment no restrictions were placed on the type of watercraft using the lake, and sailboats, powerboats, canoes, rowboats and water skiers use the facilities. A section of the park was opened to the public for the first time in May, 1966. Successful water skiing meets and powerboat races have been held on the lake.

A new pavilion, near the beach, was constructed in the fall of 1967 with a picnic shelter, food concession, sanitary facilities and a change room for bathers. A trailer camp, with 62 sites, and a service building, were ready for use in 1968. A cottage site area on the north side of the lake, divided into 24 lots was staked out and a number of lots leased.



Boating, Water Skiing, Picnicking at Wildwood.



Leisure Moments at Wildwood Trailer Camp.

Camp areas were allotted to the Perth County Scout Association and the Stratford YM-YWCA and areas set aside for the Wildwood Sailing Club and for the powerboating fraternity. To better serve the boaters a marina was built in 1968.

WOODSTOCK RECREATION AREA

By 1968 development of the area around the Gordon Pittock dam and reservoir at Woodstock, for recreational purposes, was taking form at an expected outlay of approximately \$75,000 for the year.

The plan called for the greater part of the development to take place on the north shore. Projected were picnic and swimming areas, with pavilion, change rooms for bathers, and food concessions; boat launching ramps, including provision for the Oxford Sailing Club; overnight camping area; wildlife sanctuary and nature trails. On the south shore provision was made for a public beach and for camps such as those operated by the YMCA, YWCA, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides.

Timing of the area's development was a thorny problem between Woodstock city council and the Authority. Council pressed for recreational planning while the dam and reservoir were under construction, but an agreement with the contractor, that there was to be no outside interference while construction was in progress, precluded such a step. Further it could not be determined until the project was well advanced what areas would be available for recreation.

Initial discussions on development began in November, 1965, through a joint committee, with Harold Mighton and Monty Wherry representing the city, and T. J. Dolan, Robert Rudy and Grant Sutherland, the Authority. Ald. Phillip Poole was added later as a city representative. Woodstock expressed a willingness to contribute \$2,500 toward a planning consultant's fees. By May, 1966, construction of the dam and reservoir was sufficiently advanced to permit a start on area development. Consultants were asked to provide quotations on the cost of preparing a master plan, and in December the bid of Canadian Mitchell Associates was accepted. Steps were also taken to obtain an amended property plan.

Inclement weather during the winter delayed the taking of aerial photographs, and these were not available to the planner until the spring of 1967. A preliminary plan was received in December and, following revisions, copies were distributed to eight direct benefitting municipalities for comment and recommendations. These municipalities agreed to accept special direct levies toward the cost of initial development.

Opinions were also invited as to the use of powerboats on the lake and as a result of resolutions from the city of Woodstock and the townships of Blandford and East Zorra favoring them, powercraft were allowed to operate for the 1968 season, the policy to be reviewed early in 1969. The three municipalities about the lake and represent the majority of the population.

FANSHAWE GOLF COURSE

Having in mind the provision of additional facilities for the patrons of Fanshawe Park, the Authority lent a ready ear when the London Public Utilities Commission indicated, in 1954, that it might like to build a golf course on Authority property. A committee, composed of N. A. Bradford, chairman; Charles Kirk, M. A. Brock and L. N. Johnson, was named to negotiate with the PUC. A site was chosen and an 18-hole course was planned, to open in 1957.

The Authority had 80 acres of land available, with an option on an adjoining 55 acres, owned by W. J. Broome. When Dr. Richardson advised the Authority that it might not be able to

construct a golf course under the Conservation Act, the option on the Broome property was taken up by the PUC. An agreement was reached whereby the PUC would build, equip and operate the course, with the Authority reimbursing the PUC over an eight-year period. The maximum payment by the Authority was to be \$10,000 a year, with interest of 4-1/2 per cent on the unpaid balance. Maximum cost of the project was to be \$80,000.

The first sod was turned on March 22, 1956 by J. Stewart Killingsworth, PUC chairman, and Mr. Bradford. Laying out of the course was directed by John Innes, professional at the PUC-owned Thames Valley Club, and his assistant John Moffat. The latter became the club's first professional. By January, 1957, the PUC reported that the expenditure had reached the \$80,000 mark and another \$20,000 would be required to complete the course.



At Fanshawe Golf Club Opening, left forefront, John Innes; swinging club, John Moffat.

The first nine holes of the \$100,000 course were opened July 11, 1957 by Campbell Calder, PUC chairman. Joe Coley, 79, a charter member of the Thames Valley Club, drove the first ball and won praise for his ideas and advice in constructing the Fanshawe course. Others participating in the opening ceremonies were Gordon W. Pittock, Authority chairman; Mayor Ray Dennis of London, and Reeve John Gillies of London Township. By September an additional five holes were in play, and the remaining four holes were ready for the 1958 season.

The first pro-shop on the property was a converted construction company office from a London building site. It was dismantled and reassembled on the golf course in 1957. In 1959 the Authority purchased a large H-hut that stood on the air force base at Crumlin. Half of it was sold, and the remainder moved to Fanshawe to provide a combined club house and pro-shop. The club house was presented to the PUC on June 22, 1960 by Mr. Bradford. Chairman Killingsworth, Commissioner Earl Nichols and General Manager V. A. McKillop represented the PUC.



At Official Opening of Club House. Left to right, J. J. McHale, Jr., T. J. Dolan, Mr. Bradford, John White, MPP, Mr. Killingsworth, Mr. McKillop, Mr. Nichols.

The story of the operation of the course by the PUC has been mostly one of expenses overriding profits, but the property is being well maintained. While the agreement between the two bodies expired in 1964, the PUC continued to operate the course. Discussions have been under way since 1965 on a new agreement, but nothing concrete resulted. In June, 1966 the PUC expressed a willingness to buy the course from the Authority for \$98,000, payable over 15 years. By August, however, the PUC had a change of heart and suggested that the Authority take over operation and pay the PUC the amount of its investment, about \$55,000. Discussions continue intermittently. At the end of 1967 the Authority had an equity in the course of \$80,400.

Members of the Parks and Recreation advisory board: T. J. Dolan, chairman; Grant Sutherland, Dr. H. C. Parrott, C. M. Riddle, F. H. Flitton, Charles Kirk, G. L. Mavity, Dr. Wilfrid Jury.