

“The Annual Outing of the Niagara County Anglers’ Club, 1893”



The Artist, A. Raphael Beck: Augustus Raphael Beck was born on November 16, 1858 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania to a family of artists. He was named after the famous painter, “Raphael.” His father, Augustus, designed the bas-relief at the base of the Washington Monument. Raphael studied art under his father and then at age 20 he left to study in Munich and Paris. In 1880, Beck returned to the U.S. and settled in Lockport where he married Frances Hall. During the 1890s he and his wife lived in Europe while Beck painted in various countries including Holland, Switzerland, Austria and France. In 1900 Beck opened a school for artists in Buffalo while continuing to reside at 479 Willow Street in Lockport. His studio was located at 52 West Chippewa Street at the top of the Calumet Building. Every year on his birthday, Beck would walk the twenty-three miles from his home in Lockport to his studio in Buffalo. In the first decade of the 20th century, many expositions were held in the United States to commemorate events. Beck won the logo competition for three of these Expositions. His famous drawing of two robed women representing North and South America and joining hands at Central America became the logo for the 1901 Pan American Exposition in Buffalo. He also won the competition for the 1902 Lewis and Clark Exposition logo as well as the 1903 Louisiana Purchase Exposition logo. Beck went on to paint portraits of many local and national figures as well as landscapes and large murals. His murals decorate churches, schools, clubs, public buildings and commercial establishments. The mural, “The Opening of the Erie Canal, October 26, 1825” was commissioned in 1925 by the Lockport Exchange Bank for their new building on Main and Pine Streets and was later moved to Lockport High School. This mural is now the focal point of the Erie Canal Discovery Center on Church Street in Lockport. Beck continued to paint up until his death on May 29, 1947 at the age of 88 years old. Beck’s daughter, Phyllis Van De Mark of Lockport, donated this painting to the Niagara County Historical Society.

The Niagara County Anglers’ Club: “There was a large and enthusiastic meeting of the Anglers at the office of David Millar, Esq. in the Hodge Opera House (Lockport, NY) Monday evening,” read *The Niagara Democrat* newspaper of March 13, 1886. It continued, “Remarks were made by a number of the piscatorial gentlemen present, as well as whopping big fish stories told.” A week later officers were elected with David Millar as its first president and the initial membership fee was set at \$2.00 with annual dues at \$2.00 as well. Notifications of the formation of the Club were sent to “parties at Tonawanda, Youngstown, Olcott, Wilson and other points...” The Club grew quickly “with a splendid attendance, showing the deep and growing interest that is being taken by gentlemen of this city and Niagara County for the successful formation of an Anglers’ Club.” By May 1886 the Club had 107 active members and was making arrangements to procure a yacht for an excursion on the Niagara River with the Audubon Club of Buffalo, and for a minnow cart in Youngstown. The purpose of the Club was not only to catch fish but to protect them as well. New York State Fishing Commissioner Seth

Green praised the Club for their efforts at conservation. “It demonstrates the people are alive to the great importance of protecting and increasing our fish supply and that they appreciate the value of artificial propagation, without which many of our more valuable varieties of fishes must become extinct before the lapse of many years.” In 1893, at the time this painting was done, it was reported by the *Niagara Falls Journal* in their Youngstown section that “On Tuesday last another large catch of fish was made by fishermen and about one ton was caught.” The Anglers’ Club went on for many years but eventually disbanded. In 1982 a new Niagara River Anglers Association was founded and is currently in operation.

Fort Niagara in 1893: Following the Civil War, Fort Niagara underwent something of a transformation. The “old” fort was determined to be an indefensible position. Focus shifted to outside the “old” fort walls and the mission changed to more of a training center than a defensive military post. By 1893, the year this painting was done, the interior of the “old” fort appeared very much as it does today. The prominent building in the center of the painting is the “French Castle,” a fortified stone structure built by the French in 1726. This structure was remodeled in the 19th century to the appearance it has in the painting. It was later restored to its 18th century appearance between 1928 and 1933. The two smaller buildings were fortified redoubts built by the British in the 1770s. A necessary addition to the post in 1893 was the construction of a new Life Saving Station on the riverside of the fort that would eventually become the present Coast Guard Station. Although not pictured here it stood at the extreme right of the painting behind the tress. This Station gave the fort a boost and a new reason for visiting the post. The addition of a new guardhouse built just outside the “old” fort near the lighthouse was another enhancement. As the *Niagara Falls Gazette* reported on December 24, 1892, “These improvements about Fort Niagara do not in any way lessen its importance as a military post, but, naturally, serve to increase its worth, and show that the government recognizes the fact that the post at the mouth of the Niagara River is an excellent point to improve.” Also in the summer of 1893 the “new” fort (where the present State Park is today) was bustling with the Annual Rifle Competition. This event attracted servicemen from military posts under the Army’s Department of the East. The *Niagara Falls Gazette* of August 22, 1893 stated, “The Fort Niagara rifle range is claimed by most of the men here to be the finest range in the United States.” The top prize was a medal containing \$118 worth of gold. The fort continued to serve as a military post until its final decommission in 1963. It is now a New York State Historic Site operated by the not-for-profit Old Fort Niagara Association located within Fort Niagara State Park.

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