

# Onondaga Lake historical documentary to premiere Friday



Courtesy of Onondaga Historical Association

"Beneath the Surface: The Storied History of Onondaga Lake" will detail the lake's involvement in the salt industry.

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One hundred years ago, Onondaga Lake was an industrial hub. Today, the Onondaga Historical Association has partnered with Otto Media to present a detailed history of the lake.

# THROUGH THE YEARS

## ● LATE 16TH CENTURY

- Founding of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy
- Birthplace of the United States form of government

## ● LATE 19TH CENTURY

- Advent of Onondaga Lake Resorts like Maple Bay and Long Branch Park. The last resort closed in 1938.

## ● EARLY TO MID 20TH CENTURY

- Sewage from industrial production and waste produced from production of organic chemicals and chlorine gas pollutes the lake, making the water unusable for swimming (1940) and fishing (1970).

## ● 1970S

- Work begins to restore quality of water, as part of larger environmental environment.

## ● 2015

- Water quality has improved enough in the northern two thirds of the lake to allow swimming.

The film “Beneath the Surface: The Storied History of Onondaga Lake” will premiere Friday, showing the history and impact of Onondaga Lake across several centuries. The event takes place at the Palace Theatre from 7:30 to 10 p.m.

“The film is about Onondaga Lake,” said Gregg Tripoli, executive director of the Onondaga Historical Association. “In reality, the film is about American history. The story of the lake mirrors American history — you’re talking about Native American beginnings, you’re talking about the growth of an industrial city.”

Mark Eischen, the writer and director of the film, came up with the idea and worked through Otto Media. Eischen said that he was inspired after reading a brief article about the history of the lake, and was surprised by how little he knew.

“We are all familiar with the recent history (of the lake), the pollution, but I felt there was a much bigger story to be told. So we went ahead and covered seven centuries or so in this film,” Eischen said.

Production began four years ago, and was planned to wrap in a year and a half. Eischen said the more the production team researched, the more stories they found and wanted to tell.

The responsibility of OHA is to collect catalogues and store the history of Syracuse and Onondaga County and to share that history, Tripoli said. By sharing the history of Onondaga Lake with Otto Media, the Association is able to instill pride in who they are and in what they contribute to the world around them.

The film covers a detailed history of the lake: the beginnings of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the lake as a resort attraction, the industrialization of the lake’s salt and its current state today. According to Tripoli, Onondaga Lake’s role in the throughout history has had a national and international impact.

“You’re talking about the birthplace of Western democracy,” said Tripoli. “That happened in one place — and that was here.”

The film will also go into detail on the lake’s contribution to the salt industry. Tripoli said at one point in time the lake produced over 80 percent of the country’s salt.

“(Salt) was white gold,” Tripoli said. “In many cultures it was used as a currency. When you’re talking about the most (salt), there’s only one. No one came close to this sort of production.”

Tripoli said the story of the lake is being shown through film as a way to make the history more tangible.

A trailer for the documentary is available on the Onondaga Historical Association’s website, as well as a link to purchase tickets, which are \$20 each.

*Graphic by Emma Comtois*

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