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Before water filled the Woodland Reservoir, Syracusans picnicked on the wooded site known as Lily's Grove

Published: Thursday, September 27, 2012, 6:15 AM Updated: Thursday, September 27, 2012, 7:47 AM

By **Dick Case, Post-Standard columnist**

Onondaga Historical Association

Photo taken in 1891 shows grove of trees used as a picnic area before the city created the Woodland Reservoir in 1894.

The work on the \$20 million project is under way at Woodland Reservoir, on the South Geddes Street hill.

The 18-month project to build an ultraviolet treatment facility at the reservoir that kills parasites won't spoil the view – one of the city's most breathtaking – and water service will not be disrupted, according to engineers.

The reservoir hill has a special place in the neighborhood (Strathmore) where I live. It's not only a major landmark – the brick standpipe and adjoining reservoir pond — but it has a place in the history of delivering drinkable water to the city of Syracuse.

Woodland's where the first connections were made in the elaborate system that brings city water to our town from Skaneateles Lake. It used to be the site of a picnic area for Syracuse. When it was taken over by the city, the 17 acres were known as Lilly's Grove. It was also called Cawan's Grove.

The name Lilly's Grove apparently connects to the owner of the [property](#), one William Lilly, who lived at Gifford and Geddes Streets.

The Onondaga Historical Association archives, supervised by Pam Priest, are chock-full of tidbits about Lilly's Grove, [dating](#) to the 1870s.

It was described as near the "terminus of the Fifth Ward Railway," at the bottom of Geddes at Elliot Street. Folks who used the park apparently walked up the steep hill. A June 1871 item said the grove "commands a fine view of the city and vicinity. It contains swings, seats, dancing platform in a beautiful wood of 20 acres for picnics and pleasure parties."

In July of that year, we learn "an observatory has been erected at Lilly's Grove," 280 feet above Salina Street and

with a telescope with a range of "country for 30 miles distant."

A Green Corn Dance and celebration were noted at the grove in September 1871 and 1872 with a "band of Indians, with the big kettle, succotash and the entire paraphernalia belonging to the famous festival." Green corn from the kettle was to be distributed to the audience.

This grove saw the end of the long campaign to find Syracuse a new supply of water. At one time, four distinct reservoirs occupied today's Strathmore neighborhood, including Crossett, which was filled in, and Wilkinson, which was renamed Hiawatha Lake and became part of today's Onondaga Park, in the early 20th century.

The new water main to Woodland covered 19¼ miles of hilly landscape between Skaneateles and Syracuse. Workmen buried a 30-inch iron conduit along the way. The reservoir was being excavated in Lilly's Grove at the same time.

Syracuse Mayor Jacob Amos and Sen. Francis Hendricks opened a lever that started the flow from Skaneateles Lake on June 29, 1894. It reached city water mains four days later.

Not many changes have been made at Woodland in the years that followed. In 1932, the original Woodland reservoir was relined with gunite, a concrete product. In 2000, a new building, designed by architect Carl Stearns, was created to surround a new set of modern tools for controlling corrosion and adding chlorinating treatment, on the Stolp Avenue side of the reservoir.

For an update

Visit <http://www.syracuse.ny.us/WoodlandReservoir.aspx> to check on the progress of the Woodland Reservoir project

Bulbs bust-out

It's time for the daffodil bulb give aways, courtesy of folks at the Westcott Community Center, who started the project back in 2003. This is the 10th anniversary year and some 110,000 bulbs have been given out, as the program spread across the city.

Westcott's give away is scheduled for 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Oct. 6, a Saturday, for Westcott residents only. Bags of bulbs are free to those who agree to plant them where "they can be seen from the street for all to enjoy."

In 2010, the project expanded. Bulbs are sold at cost to residents of other neighborhoods. Neighbors on Edgehill Road pooled their resources and ordered 500 bulbs this year, to be added to the 1,200 bulbs planted last year.

Tenants at Franklin Square ordered 300 bulbs to be planted at the West Street ramp.

Skunk City Neighborhood Organization ordered 6,000 bulbs for their neighborhood give away. They'll be handed out Oct. 13 and at a "Big Dig" Oct. 20 at the Harbor Brook Basin. The dig starts at 10 a.m.

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