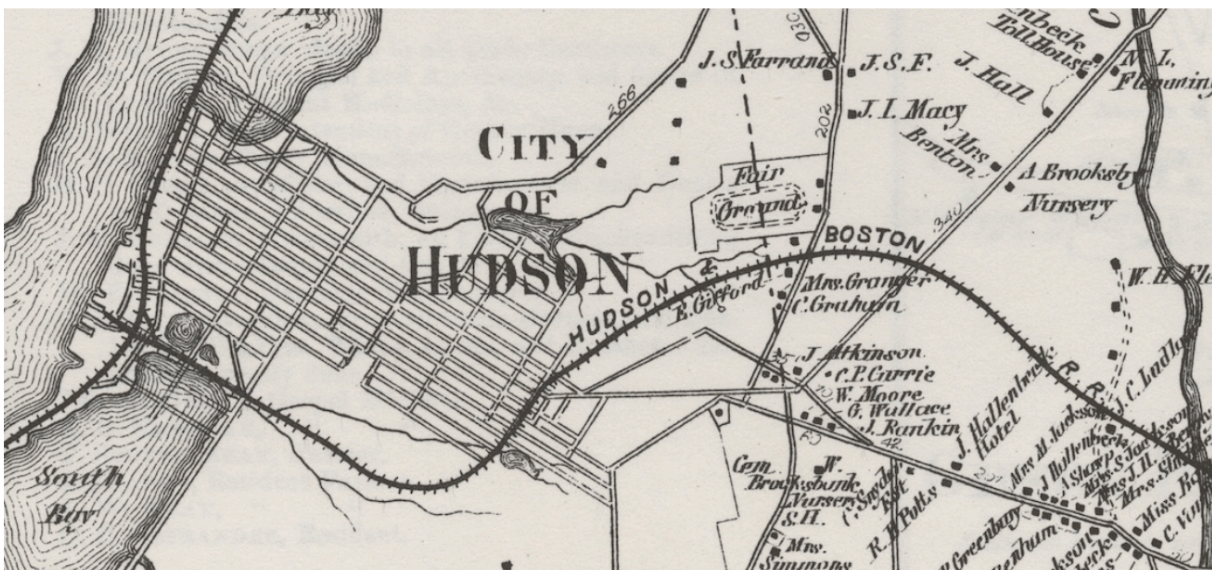


OAKDALE PAST AND FUTURE

**“An inestimable boon and blessing to
thousands of citizens...almost in the heart of the city”**

- *Hudson Republican*, August 29, 1911

What we know as “Oakdale Lake” was once, according to a 1900 edition of the *Hudson Evening Register*, a wild stretch of “hills and ravines” on the outskirts of Hudson. On the 1873 Beers map it’s part of a larger tract owned by Joseph S. Farrand.

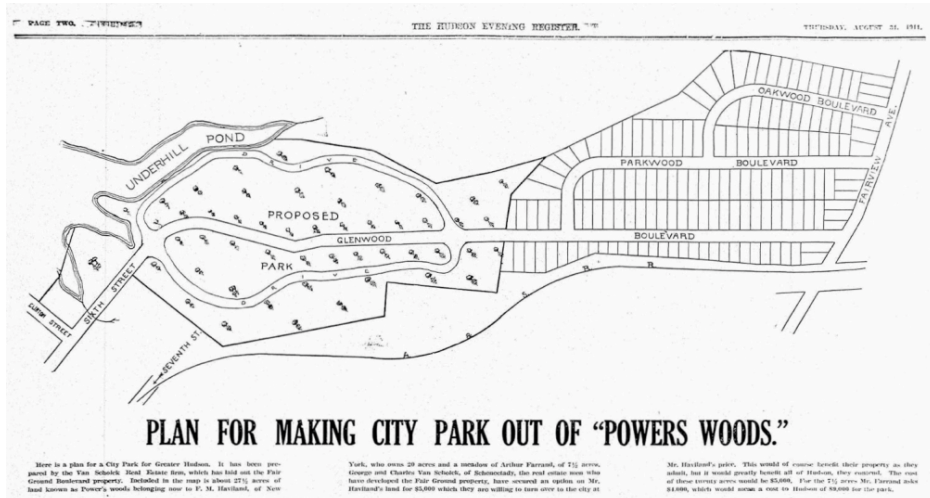


DETAIL FROM THE 1873 ATLAS OF COLUMBIA COUNTY, NY. D.G. BEERS AND CO.

Farrand’s son, Arthur, inherited the property in the 1880s or 1890s. According to his obituary in the February 24, 1924 *Hudson Daily Star*, Arthur gave **“much of his time and attention to the development of the Farrand lands for building purposes. It was through his efforts the Farrand fill was constructed, Oakdale Lake formed and maintained, and real estate in general in that section highly developed.”**

The younger Farrand’s initial plan for his 7½ acres--where the lake is today--was a 20-acre public park. It was to extend north of Glenwood and include parts of Power’s Woods--a 19½-acre lot belonging to F. M. Haviland adjoining Underhill Pond. An editorial and map in the *Hudson Republican* on August 29, 1911, describes Farrand’s proposal for a beautiful, highly capitalized public park in language as relevant now as then:

“Its advantages are apparent; within easy reach of everyone such a tract of land would be an inestimable boon and blessing to thousands of citizens; a playground for the children; a breathing space for the grown ups...Such a park would be a picnic ground and gathering place for the many who can not afford to go away for vacations; almost in the heart of the city...”



ARTHUR FARRAND’S 1911 PROPOSAL FOR A PUBLIC PARK WHERE OAKDALE LAKE IS TODAY, PUBLISHED IN THE HUDSON REPUBLICAN, AUGUST 29, 1911

After Hudson declined to buy Farrand’s land and implement his plan in 1911, he started developing 36 building lots in “Oakdale Park”--so named, by him, for its beautiful oak trees, many of which survive



REVISED PLAN, DATED AUGUST 2, 1915, FILED BY THE OAKDALE PARK IMPROVEMENT CO. AT THE OFFICE OF THE COLUMBIA COUNTY

A thousand-foot wide ravine still separated “Oakdale Park” from North 6th Street, and in June 1913, Hudson voted not to fill the ravine and connect them. That October, Farrand bought Power’s Woods and began filling the ravine on his own.

On October 27, 1914, a *Columbia Republican* article titled **“Busy Improving Beautiful Suburb”** reports that **“The Oakdale Park Improvement Company...is not letting the war abroad interfere with its effort to boom Hudson and improve the beautiful plot of ground that it has opened up east of Underhill pond on the Farrand property.”** It continues: **“The company...is busy grading and filling in the spot east of Underhill pond...so that a good road from the city proper, right up thru the land opened up, will soon be completed.”** The story includes the first mention of a planned lake: **“A lake is to be one of the attractive features of this new section of Hudson, and...will afford a delightful place for canoeing in the summer...All the lowland between the two hills and east of the present pond will be flooded with water from Power’s spring, making a lake of about five acres...”**

The first mention of the finished lake comes on January 9, 1916, in the *Hudson Evening Register*, in a headline announcing: **“Skating is fine on Oakdale Lake.”** The earliest known photographs of the Farrand fill and of Oakdale Lake, from the collection of Arthur Kowee’s collection of Hudson memorabilia are believed to date from 1915 - 1921 and were taken by the Rowles Studio--documentarians of Hudson life for generations.



ROWLES STUDIO PHOTOGRAPHS OF OAKDALE LAKE CIRCA 1915-1921

After Arthur Farrand died in 1924, Oakdale Lake was sold for \$6000 to Dr. Irving Hoffman and Jerry Kline. Over the next two decades, Hoffman and Kline repeatedly attempted to sell the city the lake to fulfill the promise of Farrand’s great plan.

In 1943 Hudson Mayor Colwell formed a committee to look into buying the lake and creating a city recreation board to administer it. After much argument and deliberation, on August 8, 1946, Hudson approved the purchase of Oakdale for \$9,750 and set about preparing the park for public use.

The following day, plans were announced for a wading pool in the northwest corner of the lake, along with a reshaped shoreline, a beach, and a diving platform. In November, the public works department laid dry stone walls around a wading pool and gravel base for the new beach. Water tests confirmed what is still true: Oakdale Lake's source in a natural spring provides it some of the cleanest water in Columbia County. By the summer of 1947, a sand beach was in place. Public swimming began.



ANONYMOUS PHOTOGRAPH OF THE JUST COMPLETED

The following year the beach house was constructed. It was dedicated to WWII veterans on August 23, 1948. According to the *Hudson Daily Star*, a local attorney and assistant secretary to Governor Dewey named Burdell Bixby **“told the assemblage that the citizens of Hudson finally have taken the bull by the horns and have brought about the completion of a project that has been needed in the community for a number of years.”** The bronze plaque above the beach house fireplace was unveiled by Council President Vincent Jarmoska. In 1951 the Youth Bureau began using the beach house as a recreation center.

For decades, Oakdale Lake lived up to the promise of Farrand's 1911 proposal, proving a boon and blessing. It provided a playground for children, “breathing space for the grown ups” and a beautiful, natural community space for residents and visitors.

Through the 1950s-1970s the lake was a cherished family activity hub year round. For generations of Hudsonians, summers were spent learning to swim, fishing, participating in countless community competitions, and throwing parties at Oakdale. Winters were passed ice skating on the lake and warming up around fires in the fireplace in the beach house. Former Youth Department director Dick Tracy recalls Pete Seeger visiting Hudson on his sloop, the *Clearwater*, in the 1980s, and so loving Oakdale Lake that he camped in his sleeping bag in the

beach house. Howard Gibson's photographs of Oakdale in its heyday tell these stories better than thousands of words.



PHOTOGRAPHS OF OAKDALE LAKE FROM HOWARD GIBSON'S ARCHIVES FROM THE 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

In recent years, however, Oakdale has become increasingly run down and underused. Low investment in upkeep has left it shabby, accruing litter, and ill-prepared to function as the community hub it once was.

While volunteers gather annually to collect trash, cinder blocks, cement fragments, metal pipes, and other heavy detritus of years of neglect, litter the lake bottom. Community needs go unmet: there is no "wading pool" for small children, and few recreational elements or encouragements to swim, play, or boat beyond one threadbare floating dock. The beach house, dedicated to veterans, is dark--it has few windows--outdated, and not wheelchair accessible. A chipped cement platform that used to hold diving boards boasts only leftover rebar.

But, Oakdale’s revitalization has begun and Hudson is “**taking the bulls by the horns**” again!

Friends of Oakdale Lake (FOL) worked in 2019 with Columbia University’s Hudson Valley Initiative, seeking youth and community input to create a design concept and renderings for Oakdale. Individuals and companies came together to sponsor this \$10,000 design project. It provides Hudson with an updated visualization of what a valuable, free, well-capitalized public park “**in the heart of the city**” might look like. FOL is in the midst of partnering with the city of Hudson, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Friends of Hudson Youth, the Columbia Land Conservancy, and other organizations to seek planning and funding for the 8 areas of concern:



The entire report can be seen at <https://www.friendsofoakdalelake.com/the-future>.

In 2020, FOL collaborated with the Columbia Land Conservancy to receive a \$100,000 Environmental Justice Grant from the NY State DEC. Through the grant, FOL has contracted with the environmental firm, Great Ecology, to produce a full Watershed and Water Quality Evaluation Study, including citizen science water quality testing, full lake bathymetry, sediment testing, and recommendations for water quality amelioration. The study is halfway complete and preliminary reports have already yielded compelling conclusions.

FOL also received over \$12,000 in funding from the City of Hudson's Tourism Board in 2020, allowing for the purchase of beach umbrellas, providing needed shade plus a safe socially distanced gridwork on the beach, as well as sail shade structures where the wading pool once existed. The funding also permitted expanded lifeguard hours and presence, and contributed to a much improved outdoor, nature, and recreation experience for visitors and residents alike.

Friends of Hudson Youth and the **Hudson Youth Department** have brought dynamic new programming to the summer camp at Oakdale. An expanded nature program provides campers a rich experience of Oakdale's 14-acre outdoor classroom, now enhanced by a new outdoor study platform. It will be greatly enriched by further investment in the trail, walkways over ponds, and interpretive signage.

An in-house training program for lifeguards has increased the number and expertise of our lifeguards so that the beach is now accessible longer hours 7 days a week in the summer. This initiative is supported by the annual Oakdale Plunge, a much loved community event.

A new Bike Coop offers teens recreation, job skills and the opportunity to own their own bike.

Community clean-ups have made great strides removing debris from the woods and lake. The trails look better than they have in years, invasive species are being mitigated, and the water is being treated with natural enzymes instead of chemicals.

The future: It is our time to get involved. Together, we are working towards a 21st-century vision, incorporating state-of-the-art planning, environmentally-sensitive design, community engagement across a diverse section of Hudson, and a lasting commitment to youth and free summer recreation

OAKDALE PAST AND FUTURE originated in 2018 as an exhibition created collaboratively by the Hudson Area Library, Friends of Oakdale Lake and Friends of Hudson Youth. This document was compiled from materials produced for that exhibition.

Special thanks to the many community members who contributed to the project: Tamar Adler, Bruce Bohnsack, John Craig, Peter Frank, Arthur Koweek, Carole Osterink, Nadia Riesshen, Brenda Shufelt and Katrina Stair.

For additional information on how you can get involved contact Friends of Oakdale Lake (tamar.e.adler@gmail.com) or Friends of Hudson Youth (peter@hudsonyouth.org).