



THE SENTINEL

Vol. 24, No. 2

The Newsletter of the New Scotland Historical Association

Winter 2015

Ice Harvesting: A By-gone Industry

By Sherry Burgoon

With Special Thanks to Willard Osterhout, Dennis Sullivan and Homer Warner for their generous contributions

For those of us who have had the luxury of electricity and refrigeration, ice harvesting is a little-known industry very much a part of our local history. Everyone needed ice: the dairy farmer, the butcher, the local tavern keeper, and every homemaker in town, to name a few. While the winter months provided a natural way to keep milk and meat from spoiling, it was the summer that presented a problem. The ice harvesters provided the answer.

By the late 1800s, the ice industry thrived along the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers. But ice harvesting could also be found on Warner's, Thompson's and Helderberg Lake, as well as ponds and creeks throughout the town. Every business, farm, or residence had a storage place of some sort. Each year, the local residents and businessmen would determine when the harvesting would begin. The ice houses needed to be filled to capacity by the end of the season, ensuring that the ice harvested would last until the next winter. Late January and February were when the temperatures were the lowest but the ice thickest. Periodic testing of the ice would take place to see what kind of yield could be counted on. For the residents of Voorheesville, LaGrange's mill pond at the juncture of Krumkill and Normanskill Roads was one of the best and most reliable sources of ice. The pond, 65 feet in diameter and 12 feet deep, always provided a plentiful supply. In addition, the Black Creek, the Vly and Tygert's pond in Guilderland were equally valued as sources of ice. The Severson farm, along the Vly in the village, had a large ice house. My sister Patty recalls that it was still being used in the early 1960s, when my mom would harvest while we were in school. Apparently, there were still homes or businesses relying on ice 50 years ago.

Generally, village businessmen took charge of organizing the team of harvesters. A number of these men maintained ice houses from which area residents were assured a steady supply of ice year round. The number of ice houses began to grow in the early 1890s. Frank Bloomingdale built his in mid-January, 1892; and in early 1895, the Joslin brothers built an ice house adjacent to the meat market they were renting. Seven years later they erected a second ice house, probably much larger than the first, announcing they would sell and deliver ice to residents during the summer months. Another noted ice house, still standing today, can be found behind the former Presbyterian Church (now Old Songs) on Main Street.



Before the steam engine was developed, ice was cut by hand with a saw. Later, steam engines were used drawn by a team of horses. The method of cutting into blocks depended on the size of the water way. More than likely, what Homer Warner experienced growing up on Warner's Lake was what could be expected in the

rural communities. There was a sled of some kind, rigged up with a gas-powered buzz saw, which could be lowered down into the ice so that it would cut the ice into blocks as it was pushed along the ice. The blocks were then moved along in channels by pike poles until they were near shore. At the shore, a raised platform was set up that included an inclined elevator. This lifted the blocks of ice by chain, much like a hay bale elevator works today. At the lake, power for the elevator was provided by an automobile. Once on the platform, the blocks were loaded on to a truck. Of course, teams of oxen or draft horses were used in the years before automobiles to transport the ice to storage facilities.



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**NEW
SCOTLAND
HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION**

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President's Letter

Dear Members and Friends,

We are in the middle of the holiday season; and hopefully, for everyone, there is time to relax and enjoy special moments with family and friends.

Of course, at this time of year in northeast New York, there is always a worry about wintry weather and how it will affect our daily lives. However, as the Sentinel team did research for this issue, it became very clear that there was a time when winter ice did not always bring negative thoughts. Ice was important in many ways: ice harvesting, ice fishing, ice boxes, and ice skating, to name a few. We hope you enjoy reading about some of the positive aspects of winter ice!

We are going to put additional photos and information about the articles in the newsletters on our Facebook page in the future. Please "Like" our page **New Scotland Historical Association** if you would like to see more than we can fit in the newsletter. We will also post information about upcoming programs and events to keep you as informed as possible.

I wish everyone a wonderful holiday season, and hope you can join us for our winter programs.

Debbie Mahan

INCLEMENT WEATHER?

In the event of stormy weather on a meeting night, or if you are unsure whether the meeting has been cancelled, please contact one of our officers listed on this page. We will always cancel if the Voorheesville CSD after-school programs are cancelled. We will post closings on our website and Facebook page. Also, e-mails will be sent to anyone who is on our e-mail list.

IN MEMORIAM

Arthur N. Applebee

NEW SCOTLAND — Arthur N. Applebee, a husband, father, and grandfather, was a leading scholar of literacy and language learning and earned international renown for his seminal work on how students become literate thinkers. He died on Sunday, Sept. 20, 2015, in New York.

Museum Closed

December 27, 2015

January 3, 2016

March 27, 2016 (Easter Sunday)

Mission Statement

The Town of New Scotland Historical Association preserves, protects and promotes history in the Town of New Scotland through the stewardship of material culture directly related to the town. The purpose is to promote an appreciation of local history, heritage and culture through research, publications and educational programs.

Memories of our Ice Box By Jane Brennan

Although we hardly give it a thought today, there was a time not long ago that keeping food cold was not an easy task. As a very young girl in the early 1930's, I lived in Albany in a house that was built by my grandfather in 1926. This beautiful new house had an area in the "back hall" for our ice box, located at the top of the stairs leading to the cellar. The hallway also had a side door that opened to the driveway, making it possible for the "Ice Man" to deliver our large, heavy chunk of frozen water directly into the top compartment of the ice box. Ice was delivered once a week. We felt very lucky to own one of the newer "inventions" of the time – a pipe that allowed the melted ice water to drain into the basement. We did not have to empty a tray of water every day like most of our neighbors!



The ice box was small with little capacity to hold a family's food needs. My grandmother needed to shop every day for the meat that we would have for dinner. We had a produce man, Santo Graziano, who would drive his truck down our street every Monday, Wednesday and Friday to deliver our fruits and vegetables. We would store a limited amount of milk in the icebox, but if we had a storm with thunder and lightning, the milk would sour. Nana would quickly make a Sour Milk Cake when that happened. In the warm summer months, we would churn rock salt in our ice-cream maker to make delicious ice cream. Because there was no room in the ice box to store this treat, it had to be eaten right away. Ice-cream was a luxury; Sunday guests for dinner might mean that we would walk to Wagar's at the corner of Western Avenue and Quail Street to buy a quart of ice-cream, rush home quickly and eat the frozen delight at once.

Leftovers from our Thanksgiving meal would never fit in the ice-box. Usually the temperatures were cold enough outside that we would cover the food and leave it outside on the porch. I'm not sure how my mother kept the food safe from the animals in our yard, but it was always there the next day!



In the late 1930's, we bought our first *Monitor Top GE Refrigerator*, and we felt very wealthy. The ice man no longer needed to stop at our house, my mother converted the back hall into a coat closet, and the old ice box was history.

Our new refrigerator was small, but we had two ice-cube trays and could store ice-cream, meat and milk. My weekly job was to empty and clean the refrigerator, melting the accumulated ice around the cooling unit. I did this on Thursday, and we bought our weekly grocery needs on Friday. It wasn't until 1970's, when the self-defrosting refrigerators were introduced, that the job of keeping food cold in the home became much easier. I still clean my refrigerator every week, but now it makes and dispenses the ice-cubes automatically!



Above Image of GE Monitor Top is from *Electric Refrigerator Recipes and Menus*, By Miss Alice Bradley, General Electric Company, 1927.

Ice Skating in the 1950s By Linda Crouse Bathrick

When I was asked to share my memories of ice skating as a child, I literally had a slide show flashing through my mind. Most of my skating memories are from age seven to age twelve, growing up on a small farm on Upper Flat Rock Road in Clarksville in the 1950s.

In those days, ice skating was one of our main winter activities. Television was in its infancy and "electronics" did not exist. Outdoor adventures were fun, healthy, pastimes for kids. In early winter, we would anxiously await our Dad's approval that the ice was now "safe" for skating. We had a farm pond located a short distance from our house. It was on the small side, and the ice would seem to "sink" slightly in the middle. To this day I'm not quite sure why. This made skating around the perimeter a little tricky since we would inevitably end up in the middle. But this slight problem did not phase us what-so-ever. We would have been happy to skate on a puddle. My most vivid memory connected to our farm pond does not have a very happy ending. We loved to play the game "whip". To play this game, a long line of skaters would hold hands and skate as fast as we could, whip the whole entire chain, causing the last person in line to almost take flight from the speed. The tragedy occurred with an honorary uncle who at the time was probably seventy at least. We thought it would be great fun to place him at the end of the whip line to give him a little excitement. Well, the poor old fellow lost his grip and was literally catapulted into the bank of the pond. Sadly, he ended up with cracked ribs. My sister and I still feel very guilty for the whole thing. But he was always such a good sport and took it all in stride. I don't think he ever brought his skates along on visits again!

The second location for some skating fun was at Myer's farm on Upper Flat Rock Road. Their old apple orchard/pasture would flood and freeze over, making for a wonderful skating obstacle course around the trees, bushes and "cow patties". We were cautioned to be very careful not to fall through the ice. However, at best the depth was only three or four inches. We did have a much bigger problem than that. There was a very mean bull who resided in this field. He did not like people! We were to learn that the hard way. One of us would stand guard watching for the bull. A very loud, petrified scream signaled the time to head for the electric fence. With only seconds to spare, we would scoot one after the other under the barbed wire, hoping not to catch our bulky coats. I'm guessing my Mom knew exactly where the "winkle hawks" (L shaped tears) came from in our coats. We had many close encounters with that bull!



The third skating venue was Gregory's Pond on North Road, which was well known to the kids from the Clarksville area. Mr. and Mrs. Gregory welcomed the skaters. This was back in the day when folks did not worry about liability. Mostly the skating took place in the evening. A large spotlight on the back of their house lit up the pond. The older boys would often build a bonfire. My parents were a bit nervous to give us permission to skate there since the word had gotten around about the older boys getting a bit rowdy. But as long as I was with my sister, we were allowed to go a few times each year. Someone would always organize group skating games, such as Red Rover. Of course, the notorious "whip" was a given. I don't recall any injuries with the younger tail end "victims".

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It's All Good By Judy Kimes

Around here, folks seem to deal with winter in various ways. Some escape it, some hibernate through it, and some embrace it. One group that has always embraced winter with great enthusiasm is that of the ice fishermen.

Reveling in the great outdoors with its plummeting temperatures, blowing snow, and thickening ice, these fishermen head out to enjoy their sport.

Ice fishermen have been "Swiss-cheesing" the surfaces of our local lakes and ponds for generations, Warner's, Lawson's, Thompson's, and Helderberg lakes being popular destinations.

Using ice bars, ice saws, hand, or, nowadays, power augers, holes are drilled through 20 inches (sometimes more, sometimes less) of ice. Bait or lures are affixed to lines then lowered into the holes. Now the waiting begins. Some sit on a chair or overturned bucket next to a hole and "jig" the line up and down to attract the fish. Some use tip-ups with spring-loaded flags at the ends to announce a strike. Since the open field of ice can be very blustery, many ice fishermen use shanties. These might be just skinny sheds with holes in the ice floor, or they may be quite elaborate with wood or propane stoves and other creature comforts. Shanties may be moved around on sled runners or might stay put, but, by state law, they must be removed from the lakes by March 15th.

With any luck, the intrepid ice fisherman is rewarded by a catch of perch, blue gills, sunnies, or crappies. He may be especially fortunate and pull up something larger, such as walleye, pickerel, or Northern Pike.

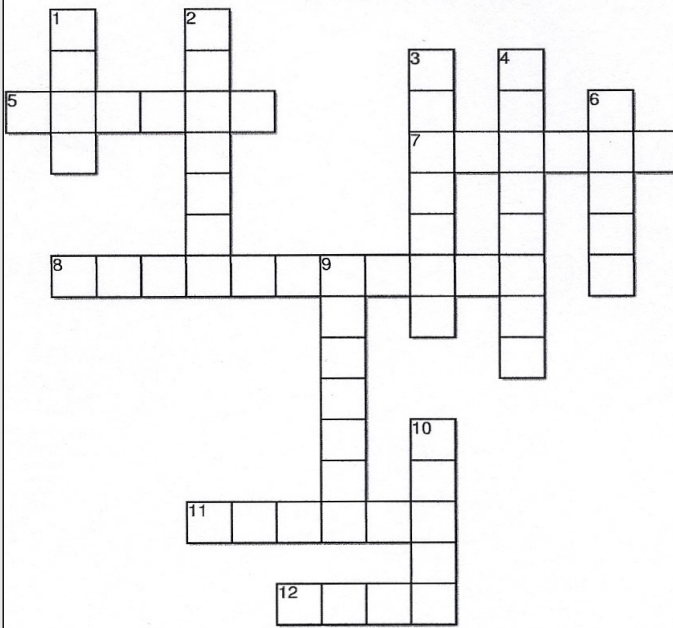
Ice fishing attracts a select group. Most of us shiver at the thought! But, winter to an ice fisherman, past or present, is just a time to bundle up, to wait for thick ice, and to hope that the fish bite! It's all good!

- with heartfelt thanks to Willard Osterhout for the information and the photos.



The Big Freeze

Complete the crossword below



ACROSS

5. Who cometh?
7. Early refrigerator
8. Local place where ice was harvested
11. Ice season
12. Baby ice block

DOWN

1. Tool used to chip pieces off an ice block
2. Nationality of flavored ice shavings
3. Put under ice block to catch melting ice
4. I scream, you scream, we all scream for ..
6. Tool used to lift and carry ice blocks
9. Insulating material ice was packed in
10. Power for an ice wagon

**(Answers will be posted next time...
or on our Facebook page)**

Memories of the Great Ice Storm – December 4, 1964

One of the worst ice storms to hit the northeastern United States in my lifetime occurred on Friday, December 4, 1964.

I was ten years old, in fifth grade; and although it was over fifty years ago, I vividly remember the sight of the glistening ice on the tree limbs. As my sisters, friends and I walked home from school that Friday afternoon, we were amazed at the beauty that surrounded us. The ice that now covered every tree branch looked like diamonds reflecting the sunlight. It was a memorable sight!

The sense of amazement disappeared almost immediately when we arrived home and found out that those beautiful trees were also snapping and falling on power and telephone lines everywhere. We had NO POWER!

The weekend that followed was one I will never forget. My parents and siblings, numbering eight, loaded into the family car and drove to my grandparents' house. Although they lived not more than a mile away, their neighborhood did not lose power, and we were able to stay with them; sleeping on chairs and the floor for a few days. For me, it was an adventure, but I know the storm caused a lot of damage. It was estimated that over 75,000 homes in the northeast were disrupted by the storm. Crews worked tirelessly for days to repair power lines and restore power. It is only a memory now, and we have had ice storms since then, but those of us who lived through that storm will always remember the sight.

By Debbie Mahan



The ice storm occurred during my first year teaching in Guilderland School District. I was living at home, and this is the view we had outside our windows on Badgley Lane. A friend of my dad's was helping to bring firewood inside for the fireplaces.



By Marion Badgley Parmenter

Corporate Appeal

It is through donations that the New Scotland Historical Association can fund the programs it provides to the community. Many thanks to local businesses that support our mission through our "Corporate Sponsors" program. In December, we will be contacting local businesses for new "Corporate Sponsor" memberships and renewals. Please contact **Sarita Winchell** (see below) for more information.



Jane Brennan and friends

If you would like to become a member, please do so!

NSHA Membership Form

____ \$10 Individual
____ \$15 Family
____ \$25 Sustaining
____ \$100.00 Life (per person)

Name _____
Street _____
City, State, Zip _____
Phone _____
Email _____

Make checks payable to NSHA.

Please send dues to:

Sarita Winchell
NSHA Membership Chair
279 Helderberg Pkwy
Voorheesville, NY 12186

Ice Harvesting (Continued from Page 1)

Don Meacham, who grew up on Indian Ladder Farm, recalls the trucks coming from Thompson's Lake loaded with ice. He would often ride the blocks up the elevator into the ice house. These barns were usually erected with double walls with a space from 8 to 12 inches between the walls. Sawdust, hay, straw or whatever was available was used as insulation. A 10-inch layer of sand with a layer of sawdust on top would insulate the floor. As ice was stacked, the layer of sawdust topped each row. This aided in keeping the cakes separate so they wouldn't melt into each other. Throughout the warmer months, the ice remained frozen until it was needed. Don knew this was the best place to get relief on a scorching hot day.

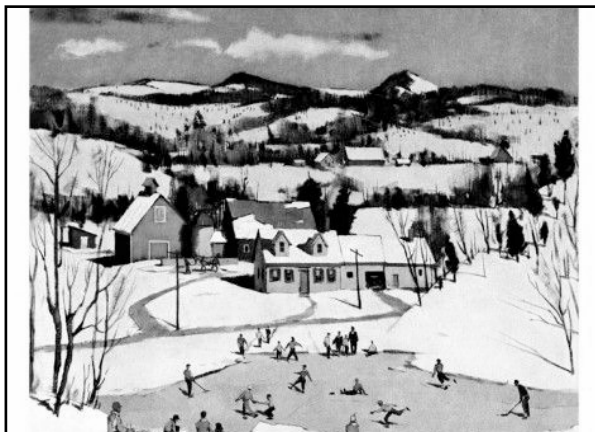
Sanitation was always a concern in the ice harvesting industry. With horses being used on the ice, the droppings had to be removed as quickly as possible. In the summer, the ice might be used in drinks or a favorite activity was sucking on a chunk of ice like a popsicle. Outbreaks of typhoid were always a concern.

The appearance of the first electric refrigerator in 1916 was a promising solution to these sanitation issues. It took until 1941 for the price of this modern necessity to become affordable for the average household. Thanks to the ingenuity of our ancestors, the by-gone ice harvesting industry no longer exists.

Ice Skating in Clarksville, New York in the 1950's (Continued from Page 4)

Skating was so much fun that we would often stay out until we had no feeling in our toes. I would gimp into the house, shivering from head to toe, but smiling from ear to ear. Peeling off layers of clothing and socks, I would slide a chair up to the wood stove. Then I would sit perched there baking my feet and ankles in the open oven until red splotches appeared. Mom would often have a warm treat for us such as home baked molasses cookies and a glass of cold goat's milk to complete a perfect winter day. I could have skipped the goat's milk. I was never a fan, especially in summer when the goats ate burdock. YUCK! It tasted funny.

My final memory about skating was as a parent of grown children. My daughter invited me to go skating with her at the South Mall. Foolishly, I decided to try skating backwards. It was a bad idea! I took a pretty hard fall resulting in a chipped bone in my wrist. I often say to my daughter that she took me out to play and broke me. Of course, she had absolutely nothing to do with my lack of common sense. One of my Dad's favorite sayings was, "There is no fool like an old fool". Well, I guess I proved that!



As I sit here reflecting on some of my best childhood memories, I would never ever trade growing up in a time when we made our own fun outdoors in spring, summer, fall, and yes, winter too.

Please Join Us for this upcoming program at the Wyman Osterhout Community Center

Feb. 2, 2016 (7:30 p.m.) – The Treasures of New Scotland New Scotland Town Historian Bob Parmenter will give a “cook’s tour” of New Scotland’s most historically significant and interesting structures.

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Museum Hours

**The museum is
open year-round
on Sunday**

from

2:00 P.M. - 4:00 P.M.

Handicap Accessible

THE SENTINEL

New Scotland Historical Association

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