Deerpark Diary

December 2011   Vol. 8   No. 4

Features

- **Old-Time Winter Actvities**
- **Ice Harvesting**
- **Ashworth Blankets**
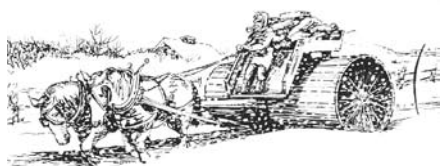- **Saint Nicholas Day**
- **Holiday Gift Ideas**

Introduction

In years gone by, life slowed down considerably during the winter months. It was a time for families and friends to get to-gether around the homestead and neighborhood.

This issue recalls some of the old-time activities that took place during the winter months.

Old-Time Winter Activities

Before the advent of the automobile, sleds were used for transportation in the winter. In-stead of plowing the roads, a roller hitched to horses was pulled over the roads to flatten the snow so there was a smooth surface for the sled runners.

Snow roller for snow "plowing" roads

Ice Sailing

Ice sailing sleds, sleds and toboggans were hand made using wooden runners. Small sleds were used by children to ride down hills. Children also used the sled to carry wood from the woodpile to the house for use in heating the house or cooking meals.

One of the games students played at school during recess in the winter was called "Fox and Goose". The children cleared a big circle in the snow by shuffling their feet. They cleared six or eight lines going into the center of the circle. The snow design looked like a wheel with spokes. The per-son chosen to be the "fox" stood at the very center. The "geese" ran in one direction around the outside ring. The "fox" tried to catch a "goose" by running down one of the paths that went from the outside ring. When one of the "geese" was caught the "goose" became the new "fox".

Ice Harvesting

Every farm had a pond of some kind and during the winter they cut ice to be stored for use during warm weather to keep food from spoiling. A small in-sulated 10' by 10' ice house was built to store the ice.

Ice House

The coldest days were ide-al to harvest ice. When the pond sent out 'gunshot'-like cracks on a cold night, it was time to cut ice. If there was snow on the ice, it was removed. The ice was first marked into a grid by grooving it with an ice plow. The ice plow was about ten inches wide with several sharp saw-like teeth on the side. Each tooth made a quarter inch cut so if the plow had eight teeth, a trip

Ice harvesting in Cuddebackville

across the ice made a two inch cut. Trips were made in each direction across the ice until an area was marked off. A six or seven inch groove was deep enough for ice about a foot thick.

Long saws then were used to cut the first strip of ice. It was important to cut this strip wider at the bottom so it could be sunk and pushed down under the ice to make room to work. Then the rest of the ice was harvested by sawing and breaking off individual cakes with a breaking bar. Long handled hooks and ice tongs were used to lift the ice up out of the water. The workers hoped that it was cold enough so no water would drip from the cakes of ice, otherwise they froze to the surface they were set upon. The ice was taken from the pond to the ice house by sleigh where it would slide along a conveyer into the house. Small deep lakes produced the best ice because the water was pure and if there was a current that was ideal.

Using horses to harvest ice presented a few problems. Sometimes the horses would slip and fall into the water. For this reason each horse wore a choke rope around his neck. If the horse fell into the water, the driver tightened the rope so the horse wouldn't struggle. Another horse or team of horses was used to pull the poor animal out of the water. Then it was quickly rubbed down, blanketed and exercised. Usually there was a quick recovery.

Another problem with using horses had to do with cleanliness. When a horse relieved itself on the ice, it had to be cleaned up immediately. This chore fell to what was called the 'shine sled', a waterproof sled used to carry away the horse manure mess. The affected ice was scraped clean and some formaldehyde was applied to sanitize the spot.

Some land owners, who had a large lake on their property, built big ice houses and sold ice to people who lived in populated places. They delivered ice to homes and businesses. Before electric refrigeration, this industry was important to keep dairy, meats and vegetables cold during the warm months.

Ashworth Blankets

Ashworth Blanket Mill
Westbrookville, NY

Ashworth Blankets were produced from 1887 until 1955 in Westbrookville. Before central heating, manufacturing blankets was an important industry to provide warmth during cold winters.

Ashworth Mill Family Triumph

"In 1887 James E. Ashworth purchased a tannery in Westbrookville which he turned into a blanket factory. Unfortunately eighteen months after Mr. Ashworth began operation the factory burned and had to be rebuilt. Throughout the company's history, the only stockholders in the company were Ashworths, either by birth or marriage. Under the guidance of the Ashworth family, the company prospered. Despite its humble beginnings, the company set the standard for the horse blanket trade in America.

At first the mill was operated by a water wheel on the wooded banks of the Pinekill. There were many operations that went into making an Ashworth blanket. The wool was first taken to be graded and sorted for different quality blankets and then it was taken to a large hot room where several vats were boiling with color solutions that gave the raw wool the richness and color of the finished product. The wool was put into the vats after the color had been mixed carefully and then the whole thing was boiled for some time.

After coloring the wool, it was dried and taken to a long, dark room that housed the picker. The picker mixed the wool and made it fluffy, breaking up the lumps and clots. The wool was fed into a machine which shot it out with great force at the wall where it fell into great billowy heaps to await the next operation.

The carder was the next machine that took a hand at pro-

cessing the wool. This was a machine with many burred wheels. As the wool went through, the burrs and foreign matter were separated from the wool. The wool went in as fluffy bunches and came out as a long silken sheet.

It was then well on its way to being a blanket. It was taken to the spinner which twisted the wool into threads. Next the yarn was warped.

From that point the yarn was put into the loom which created a long piece of woolen cloth that would make twelve blankets. Then the long cloth was claimed by a vat where it was shrunk and washed. From there it was taken to a huge drying room where it was stretched on long racks and heat was applied.

Nearing the end of operations the blanket went through another set of burred rollers which brought up the nap and loosened the surface wool. Then the binding was added to the edges and the finished blanket was ready for market.

Business was good for the Ashworths. For the first forty years of operation the Ashworths manufactured horse blankets. This included the drab, heavy blankets for the milkman's horse to the colorful, sheer, light breezers for the full-blooded track horses. There was always much work. In the summer most of the time was devoted to the making of the line for horses and in the winter when the racing season was slow, other bed blankets were made.

In 1925 the mill burned again. The Ashworths found a mill at Shushan, Washington County, and Richard Ashworth went there to operate it. However

within twenty-four hours after the fire, machinery for a new plant at Westbrookville had been purchased and the first blanket shipment went from the rebuilt factory four months and a day after the conflagration. A diesel engine was installed to furnish power during the approximately three months of each year when the Pinekill was too low and weak to turn the water wheel. With the Shushaan mill the firm did $96,000 worth of business, selling both horse blankets and standard home style blankets. It was not unusual to find the entire family getting up at 3:00 a.m. to start their work day. One can come away with the feeling there is a progressive industry in the county and you have to hand a lot of credit to the Ashworths."

Saint Nicholas Day

Saint Nicholas visiting Dutch children with his white horse.

The story of Santa Claus begins with Saint Nicholas, the fourth-century Bishop of Myra, who showed his devotion to God in extraordinary kindness and generosity to those in need. Saint Nicholas Day was celebrated throughout Europe and the early

Dutch settlers brought their customs with them when they came to America.

The season started on December 5th when Saint Nicholas, dressed in a long white robe and a bright red cape came to visit. He carried a bag of fruit, nuts and other sweets in one hand and a stick in the other. He was assisted by a mischievous helper named Zwarte Piet who checked the behavior of all of the children. This was the primary occasion for gift-giving. Saint Nicholas was called Sinterklaas by the Dutch settlers. The young children put their shoes in front of the chimney and sang Sinterklaas songs. Often they put a carrot or hay in the shoes as a gift to Saint Nicholas' horse. The next morning the children would find small presents in their shoes, ranging from sweets to marbles or some other small toy.

In the time between Saint Nicholas Day and Christmas, the settlers would gather hemlock branches and ground pine to decorate their homes. The women spent many hours baking cookies, pies, cakes and special dishes to celebrate Christmas. Christmas day was spent in a day of rest with the reading the nativity story. The second day of Christmas was spent feasting on many special dishes and visiting friends and neighbors. Sugar covered doughnuts were a holiday specialty enjoyed by everyone.

Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet

SPORTS

If anyone has any information about this picture, please contact the Deerpark Historian's Office 845-856-2702. Wilma Walder donated this picture with her Sparrowbush picture collection.

excerpts
Times Herald Record
April 14, 2006

Bill Tangen byline

Port's basketball tradition dates to 1917

Port Jervis basketball began in 1917 when W. A. Sargent was the head coach. Stakey Flynn, Harold Flanagan, John Patterson, John Finan and Jim Cole were the starting five.

Port Jervis captured the DUSO crown in 1935 with starters George Pepper, Mike Poletnsk, "Chauncy" Fedorka, Bill Garrity and Eddie Dunn. Reserves on that team were Edson Whitney, Savey Orlando, Rocky Petito and "Tweetsie" Adams.

The 1957-58 Raider team coached by Pat Farace was paced by DUSO scoring champion Alex Osowick. Ossie, a 6 foot-4-inch three year starter, fired in 62 points (a DUSO League record) against Monticello in February, 1958.

In February, 1989 Eric Neunzig coached by George Rollman, eclipsed Osowick's all-time Port scoring mark by winding up with 1,512 points in four varsity seasons.

Highschool Hoopers

The Port Jervis High School Girls Basketball Team around 1935.
Left to right: Jo Weiser, center; Alma Ort Penczek, side center; Rose Griffin, guard; Miss Micholson, coach; Cathryn Laurow, captain: Florence Lahey, guard; Rita Conklin, center; Cathryn Babey Romeo, forward.

Holiday Gift Ideas

Visit www.1863schoolhouse.org, the Town of Deerpark Musuem website, to see the complete list of Deerpark history items for sale. There are some great last minute gift ideas for family and friends who are interested in local history.

One of the nicest gift ideas is a fine-art print by nationally recognized artist Peter Koenig.

Schoolhouse Winter Scene
by Peter Koenig

Print
Framed--$65.00
Unframed--$35.00

Books:
Town of Deerpark
Hard cover $40.00
Soft cover $20.00

Images of Deerpark--$20.00

Hawk's Nest--$15.00

◊

Everyone Welcome Community Tree Lighting and Sing-along
Town Hall
December 5, 2011
7:00
Free Refreshments