

Boyhood Reminiscences: Skating On Thanksgiving

By ROY W. MOGER

For a number of years now our summers have lasted long into the fall, and our winters have been very mild. At least mild to us who lived in Roslyn a decade or so after the turn of the century.

I was thinking of this the other day and reminiscing about my boyhood in Roslyn. I was thinking that November was upon us, and that it would soon be Thanksgiving Day.

When I was a boy, Thanksgiving Day was often a week later than it is now. It used to be on the last Thursday of November and of course it should be a bit colder, but cold enough to freeze the ponds so that one could go skating on Thanksgiving Day?

Nowadays it hardly seems possible. I thought perhaps it was my imagination getting the best of me so I decided I had better check the facts.

I began to wonder how I could find out if it was cold enough to freeze the ponds in Roslyn that Thanksgiving Day in 1917, when Carl Nelson and I went ice skating. The Bryant Library came to my rescue and produced the New York Times for that date so that I could check the weather. Sure enough, the Times reported the temperature at 27 degrees F.

I first went to school in September, 1914; there I met Carl Nelson and he and I became fast friends. Carl and I were together at every opportunity, so that it was not surprising that we planned to be together Thanksgiving afternoon.

Both our families had planned a traditional Thanksgiving

dinner centered around a roast turkey with all the trimmings; mashed potatoes, boiled turnips, creamed onions, canned beans, and cranberry sauce. This was followed by pumpkin, apple and mince pies.

As I recall, in my house, children were to be seen and not heard and at Thanksgiving this was not a problem for me. I loved to eat and everything on the menu was a favorite of mine, so I had little to say and enjoyed every bit of the dinner. My problem at such times was after dinner.

The adults in the family; my mother, my father, my aunt and uncle, were usually interested in a nap, a thing furthest from my mind. I had, therefore, asked if I could go over to Carl's house for the afternoon.

I suspect that they were glad to have me out of the house for the afternoon. In any case, I was allowed to go with the usual rule that I be home before dark.

Off I went. I ran down the hill (Remsen Avenue) as I always did, across the Mill Dam (Old Northern Boulevard between the present Post Office and Lumber Road).

As I passed the Mill Pond, I noticed that it was covered with ice and looked very inviting. I then went down what is now Lumber Road (in those days private property, a part of Hicks Lumber Yard) and took a short cut to Mott Avenue where Carl lived.

When I arrived at Carl's house, they too had finished their dinner and Carl was ready for adventure. I told him about the ice on the Mill Pond. He said, "Let's go skating."

We boys were worldly-wise and knew better than to talk about ice skating in front of grown-ups or even older brothers and sisters, so this discussion took place out of hearing of anyone but ourselves.

There was no use in my considering going home for my skates, because I knew that my parents would not let me go skating so early in the season. Carl knew that his mother would not let him go skating either.

Accordingly, we snuck out to the shed on his back porch and tried on various pairs of skates which were there, and which in the past had belonged to his two older brothers and older sister.

We found two pair of skates which fit us. All we needed to do now was to get them out of the house without anyone's knowing about it.

Fortunately, his big brothers and sister had gone out to visit friends and his little brother, Alfred, and his little sister, Helen, were busy playing with their toys in the parlor. This very special room was used on important days such as Thanksgiving and was heated by a large coal stove with much nickel trim and isinglass windows in the door so that one could see the glowing coals inside.

His mother and father were also in the parlor reading the newspaper so all were accounted for. With the ice skates under our coats we headed for the Mill Pond.

As I have said, we boys were worldly-wise, so we didn't just rush out on the ice, even though it looked as though we could. No, we carefully walked along the edge of the pond, each daring the other to try the ice.

We knew that the ice right at the shoreline was the weakest part, so we looked for a board that we might use to get out on the ice where it would be thicker. We found a board and put it on the ice just resting one end on the shore.

We took turns stepping out on the board and taking a couple of steps on the ice. It held one of us.

We could put on our skates, so

we sat on the shore and did just that. Then we walked on the board to the ice. Now, we were ready to skate.

Two boys on the ice were heavier than one boy, but the ice still held. We thought we ought to test the ice by jumping on it. We did and the ice began to crack in all directions.

In less time than it takes me to write this, two boys had gotten ashore by way of the board. The ice hadn't really broken, but we had had enough of the Mill Pond.

We sat on the shore looking at that wide expanse of ice. It made us want to skate more than ever. Perhaps the Mill Pond was just too big. We decided to explore some other ponds.

The pond on the north side of the road, where Henderick Onderdonk had kept his fish, was smaller, but this pond was not yet frozen — it had too many springs. We decided to look some more.

There was an even smaller pond north of the Roslyn Water District Pumping Station and north of the present Viaduct, near where Albertson Hicks, Roslyn's first mayor, was to build his home some years later.

This pond was completely frozen and upon testing, held us both without cracking. We put on our skates, and although the pond was much smaller than the Mill Pond, we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves skating the rest of the afternoon.

Yes, Carl Nelson and I went skating in Roslyn on Thanksgiving Day 1917. Our problem was that we didn't dare tell anyone about it. We felt sure that our parents would not approve of what we had done.

We slunk back to Carl's house and carefully returned the skates to where we had found them. Soon after that I left for home.

Fortunately our parents were too stuffed with turkey and "fixings" to be alert to what their sons had been up to that afternoon. What was even more fortunate was that our parents had taught their sons to be alert to danger and to use extreme care when we were involved with the unknown.

'Our Town'

A Saturday guided bus and walking tour of Roslyn will be conducted by Roy W. Moger on Nov. 3 from noon to 4 p.m. Mr. Moger, who is well known as the town historian, will take participants through Roslyn's historical spots, and in general, conduct a leisurely overview which will allow those attending to better understand the families, homes, and events, in past and present times, of the Roslyn area. According to the adult catalog, few people have the background and communicative ability of the esteemed village historian who will guide the tour.

Another bus trip scheduled for Monday, Oct. 29, to visit the Secaucus shopping area, has been over-subscribed for some time.

10-25-84 R.N.