



## ICE HARVESTING

By Nancy Young

Beginning in the early 1800s, ice was harvested on lakes and ponds throughout the Adirondacks. Ice was a valuable commodity in those days before mechanical refrigeration made it possible to keep perishable food items cold throughout the year. The activity was referred to as a harvest because it involved the gathering of a cold-weather “crop.” Large operations such as the Lake George Ice Company would take as much as 20,000 tons out of Lake George in order to supply the Delaware and Hudson Railroad.



*Clarence Holman and Elinor Achenfel working ice blocks through a channel just off the steamboat dock*

Closer to home, in the town of Hague, smaller crews toiled daily during the cold winter months to provide ice to local homes, hotels, and stores. Once the lake had frozen to a depth of at least 10-12 inches, a work area was cleared. In

the early years, this was done with horses shod with cleated shoes called calks. The horses were attached to a scraper, which cleared the area of accumulated snow and debris. By the 1920s, the horses were replaced with trucks. Workmen used augers and saws to create a grid

and then cut through the ice to create blocks. Each block was about 22 inches long and weighed between 250-300 pounds. After the block was cut, long-handled tools were used to maneuver the ice in the open water. Tongs allowed the men to pull the ice out of the water and onto a wagon or truck. Blocks were then scraped and smoothed in order to clean and make handling them easier. After being loaded onto a sleigh, the blocks of ice were transported to shore and then on to their final destination.

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### UPCOMING EVENTS

(Hague Community Center)

- March 18, 7 pm: Show & Tell
- June 25, 7 pm: Annual Meeting and Presentation
- August 5, 7 pm: The USA Celebrates 250 Years



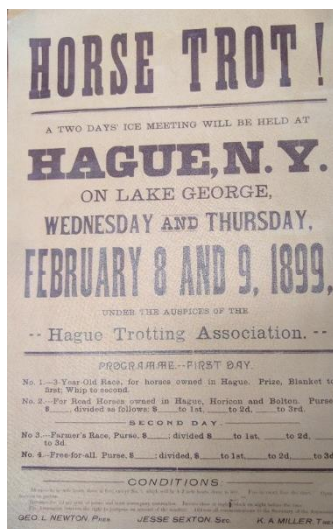
*Harvesting ice near Island Harbor House*

Most homes, hotels, and stores in the area maintained their own icehouses or large coolers. A well-maintained icehouse could keep ice frozen for up to a year. But for some, a hole in the ground, measuring six to seven feet and covered by boards, had to suffice. Sawdust provided insulation and kept perishable goods from spoiling. All of this required teamwork and was not without much risk to the workers and their horses.

It's a good thing we no longer depend on the lake in such a way. Our changing climate has made it impossible. Ice conditions vary from year to year, and in some recent years the lake never froze at all. For those of you who might be interested, the Lake George Association has been documenting dates regarding Lake George ice for more than 100 years. [Visit their site](#) for more information.

## ICE HARNESS RACING

*By Ginger Henry Kuenzel*



Ice harvesting was hard work, but the people of Hague also knew how to have fun out on the ice. In an interview with former Town Supervisor Dick Bolton in 2006, Pat McDonough, a past president of Hague Historical Society, and Chris Ianson learned about the popularity of horse racing on the ice at the turn of the century. R.J. Bolton, Dick's adopted father and proprietor of the Trout House Hotel, was a promoter of harness races. These were held on an oval track on the plowed ice in front of his establishment every Saturday and Sunday as long as the lake remained frozen. Generally about 15-20 horses, from as far away as New Hampshire and Vermont, raced. The horses were shod with special race shoes. The winner received a whip, and the second place finisher won a horse blanket. To keep things even

more interesting, there was betting going on. [From *What's Cooking in Hague, Recipes and Reminiscences*, published by the Hague Senior Citizens Club for Hague's Bicentennial].

In his book about Graphite, Willford Ross notes that the Trout House was known from coast to coast and was prominent in the North Country. "Like the other hotels, the Trout House was full all summer, but unlike the other hotels, Mr. Bolton opened up his hotel during the winter, for the month of January. During that time, he sponsored horse racing and harness racing on the ice on Lake George. Race tracks would be cleared on the ice, which would be from over 18 inches to 35 inches in thickness. It was a great winter event. Meals were served, and there was dancing in the evening. Banjo and violin music was provided for the dancers. The big hotel was packed. People came from all around the area, some staying for the duration of the great event, some for only a day or two."



Ralph Balcom's 1904 journal for February 18 reads, "We . . . went to the horse trot this P.M. They only had one race. Bolton's horse won. There was quite a gang of drunken men around and



fighting." And Caperton Tissot, author of *Adirondack Ice, a Cultural and Natural History*, writes that the towns of Lake George, Bolton, Hague, and Ticonderoga were among the better-known locations for ice harness races in the Adirondacks. He explains in his book how these races became so popular: "In the late nineteenth century, most people owned one if not more horses which were muscular, accustomed to cold weather, and used to

hauling farm equipment, sleds, and coaches. ... Frozen lakes offered perfect and easily accessible sites for racing. One need only plow the snow away to create a level track. No clearing of woods and rocks was needed. ... Encouraged by special reduced railroad rates, spectators flocked to these events from as far away as New York City. Crowd sizes were impressive, numbering anywhere from 400 to 4,000 spectators. To get a feel of the action, imagine standing on the ice, all bundled up, stamping your feet to keep warm, a frigid wind lashing your face as you listen to the drivers snap their whips and urge their horses on. Through icy eyelashes you try to focus on the action as the crowd's roar reaches a fevered pitch. At the same time, no doubt, you may be looking forward to returning to the welcome warmth of both a hot stove and drink at the end of the day."

## HAGUE: HARD TO GET THERE, HARDER TO LEAVE

By Ginger Henry Kuenzel

If I was asked to come up with a motto for our little town, it would be: “Hague: Hard to get there; harder to leave.” It’s hard to get here because of the long drive and because of that pesky Tongue Mountain that has to be navigated before finally arriving in town. But even harder than getting here – I think we can all agree -- is leaving when the time comes.

And although leaving Hague will always be hard, getting here has become a whole lot easier since Hague first began attracting tourists. In her book *Sweet Peas and a White Bridge*, Elsa Kny Steinbeck describes the journey to Lake George in the 1880s. “Hudson River night boats left their piers at the foot of Canal Street, New York City, at 6 PM arriving at Troy or Albany next morning. The traveler then went by rail to Moreau Station in South Glens Falls, where a transfer was made to a line of fast stagecoaches which pass through Glens Falls.”



The stagecoaches delivered passengers to Lake George Village, where they boarded a steamer for the trip to points north along the lake, including Hague. As the popularity of Lake George blossomed, the railroad decided to extend its tracks to Lake George Village. By 1882, travelers could make the entire journey from New York City to Lake George by train.

The train station was conveniently located right next to the steamship dock in the village, making the transfer ever so easy. Conveniently, the railroad company – Delaware & Hudson – also owned the Lake George Steamboat Company as well as the nearby Fort William Henry Hotel. Luke Dow of the Lake George Steamboat Company recently posted on Facebook information about the *Horicon II* (1910-1937), the “longest and fastest passenger-carrying vessel ever to sail on Lake George.” The *Horicon II* could transport up to 1,500 passengers between Lake George Village and Ticonderoga, with many stops along the way. “She had an elegant dining room, a saloon, and several small cabins built on her decks. In the 1920’s she was even modified to carry small automobiles between landings in the stern section of her first deck.” As someone posted in the comments, “My great grandparents took the train from NYC to LG Village. Then, the *Horicon* to Silver Bay, where they were picked up by horse and wagon to get to our cottage. What a trip! My grandmother told of being allowed to change into her bathing suit-- all wool, leggings, and a skirt. Then she and her brothers dove off the back of the *Horicon* and were tumbled around in the current before they surfaced!!



By the 1920s, more and more visitors owned automobiles. The road over Tongue Mountain was completed in about 1927, and the trip to Hague became faster and easier, at least for those with a car. Of course, the roads weren't what they are today, as shown here!

The point is, if you're looking forward to your return to Hague but dreading the long drive, just think how much easier it is to make the trip today than it was for the early tourists. Of course, when it comes to leaving Hague, that is just never going to get any easier!



## GROWING UP IN HAGUE IN THE 50s AND 60s

### My formative years and more

*By Michele Denno Gautreau (Shelly)*

So, here I am, 69 years young and still living in Hague!

#### **My Ancestors**

My great grandfather Spaulding resided in Silver Bay with his family on property at the Watts homestead, working for the Watts family. He and his son, Myron, were reported as drowned in Lake George in June of 1914, though their bodies were never recovered. Myron's sister was my grandmother, a devoted full-time mother of 12. Due to her father's and brother's drowning, she had a fear of the lake, which carried down to some of the offspring. She married my grandfather Robbins, who worked many jobs, including keeping a garden for R.J. Bolton's Trout House, and they lived in Hague.

My great grandfather Denno and family lived in Graphite, where he worked at the Graphite mine. He died in 1905, a young man of 33, having come down with TB, due to his work conditions. My grandparents Denno lived and worked in Hague, he as an electrician and plumber, she as a baker selling her pies. She later became a nurse.

I did not have the honor of knowing all my grandparents as they passed before I was born or when I was too small to understand the concept of life and death. I spent a great deal of time with Grandmother Denno. She was a gentle, silly soul who loved to dance to Jerry Lee Lewis, catch fish and have a beer! In the late 50s, she moved from Hague to Glens Falls. When I spent

a weekend with her, she would buy a box of a cereal, which I rarely had, and a big container of blueberries. She would tell me they were mine, just because I was special.

Dad and Mom both attended Hague Central School. They were well-liked and respected residents in Hague. Dad worked at various local jobs until he started at IP Mill. Mom worked in housekeeping and took in laundry. They gave life to 15 children. I am number seven! I lived with all but one sibling, as she was born after I left home.

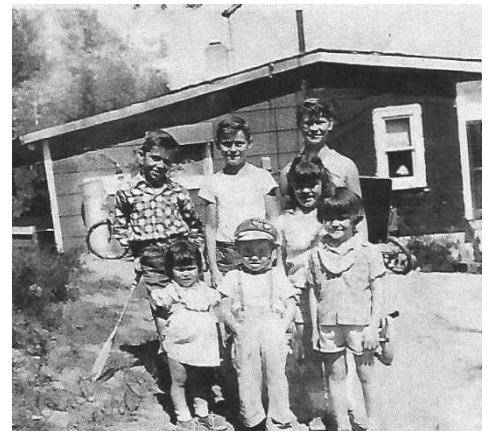
### **Growing up on Split Rock Road**

We had no hot water, (no running water at times), no working bathroom facilities (the outhouse was kept very clean), wood and kerosene heat. We shared a four-and-a-half-room home -- at one point, with ten children and two adults! We called the room we all shared to sleep in “the little room,” with boys on one side and girls on the other. (A small area was petitioned off with curtains for the oldest sister for privacy). Mom and Dad had a small, separate room that they slept in. The second floor, consisting of four bigger bedrooms, was added when I was about three.

We took turns bathing in the winter in a large metal tub set upon two chairs beside the woodstove, a kettle of hot water added each time a new child entered the tub. Once I reached age nine, I took “sponge baths” and washed my hair in the kitchen sink. In warmer weather I could wash off in the rain (what fun) or swim in the pond up the road. I was taught that cleanliness was of the utmost importance, which included our bodies, teeth, clothing, living spaces and anywhere food was prepared.

We all had special duties, girls and boys alike, assigned based on age and ability. We had farm animals that provided essentials such as meat, eggs, milk and cream. Once, Dad let me go to the barn with him to milk the cows. He hoisted me up on her back as I was very small and fit just right. The cow bucked and, frightened, I cried, so Dad took me down. I don’t remember going to milk with him again.

Dad, the boys and dad’s friends went ice fishing in the winter. We all fished in the warm weather, and I was very proud when I contributed to that night’s supper. We always had a pet dog, a cat and sometimes two of each! And our neighbors were always there to lend a helping hand, share their knowledge and, at times, keep us kids in line.



*Shelly (front left) with her older sisters and brothers*

## School Days

School was very important in our family. Every year, Mom would trace the outline of my feet on cardboard and go off to Ticonderoga. When she returned, I would have a new pair of shoes, new underclothes and possibly a new dress. I could tie my own shoes, count to 100, recite the alphabet and spell Ticonderoga when entering kindergarten. The bus ride to school was one of the few gas-powered rides I would be on each week. In school I learned fun things like roller skating and tap dancing, and I enjoyed all the sports I could join in.

I especially liked art, and it seemed kindergarten was one continuous art class! I once won a drawing contest, and our group got our picture in the paper. My poster was about healthy eating and exercise, with a picture of



Winners receiving awards in the recent Health Poster Contest were, front row, left to right, Kim Norton, Samuel St. John, Marsha Delarm, Michele Denno, Steven Tucker, Douglas Landree and Rudolph Green; second row, left to right, William Johnson, Wayne Sica, Gary Smasset, Charles Coffin and Kathleen Sweeney.

vegetables skating on a pond! I loved to sing in the concerts that the school held, and lunch was especially fun. My Great Aunt Bea worked in the kitchen, and sometimes I would get just a bit extra on my plate. I also got treated numerous times with a nickel ice cream cone from my “boyfriend” Doug in kindergarten.



Halloween: Shelly as Peter Pan

A dentist came to school and took care of my teeth. It seemed to hurt a lot as pain medication was rarely used. I got my immunization shots in school also. Once per year, a photographer would come to the school and parents could purchase a variety of photo packages. One special holiday at school was Halloween. There was always a parade, with every child dressed in wonderful costumes and prizes for various categories. My mom always made our costumes, and many times she also made them for other children. In kindergarten, I was dressed as a bride, and Timmy Watts was my groom. We won a prize, and I was very proud!

## Religion, Reading, Recreation

I attended church every Sunday. That automobile ride was very uncomfortable as my siblings and I squeezed into our parents’ car and had little room to wiggle. I also went to other homes with Mom to do “prayers.” I did not like those times at all. I really wanted to stay home with Dad, especially on Sunday. But that was only allowed when I was sick.

I loved to read, and Mom would bring home National Geographic magazines that were given to her at work. Sometimes I was lucky, and she would bring “Little Big Books,” which I would read over and over. Oh, the places I would go to in my mind. I even spent imaginary time on “magic carpets” touring the wonders of the world!

Summer was a wonderful time, spent outside. I could rarely be by myself as there were just too many of us. But we played together, and those were the very happiest times. It was so much fun to crawl through the tall grass pretending to be a small animal, usually a rabbit, with brother and sister rabbits! I could watch the tiniest creatures near their homes or taste a piece of wild sauerkraut or chew tree resin gum Dad had gathered.

As a family, we went to Hague beach regularly. It was always in the evening, and there were not many people there. I loved to jump off my dad's shoulders into the water. I was able to go downtown with my family once to watch the outboard boat races. I believe I was nine, and it was noisier than anything I had thus far experienced.

We had an old car, which had no roof and only a frame with a floor, front seats and an engine. We would pile on, hang on tight and ride up the hill to Jabes Pond. We had the most wonderful time swimming, fishing, catching turtles and eating the delicious picnic Mom would bring. I spent hours upon hours with my whole family gathering blueberries, strawberries and apples. Dad kept bees, and I loved honey. As a very small child I attended the Gibbons Camp in Horicon for a few weeks in the summer with my older siblings. It was a daytime religious camp and was quite an experience. A school bus transported us to and from.

Fall was a time to play in the leaves and to help gather wood and butternuts for the winter. Winter was hardest because it was so cold. I had to use a hot water bottle sometimes to keep my feet warm. But I did get outside to enjoy sledding, snowball fights and building snow caves. Spring was a time to get back outside and explore the world again, warm and new. I especially loved to hear the sweet chatter of the birds and the happy voices of my siblings as they did their own thing.

The holidays were so full of special times, traditions and sharing with others. I cannot stress how important each seemed to my parents and siblings at this time. But I knew then, as a child, that each holiday held a wonder all its own. Everything my parents did to bring joy to their children, even as they went without, was special and something I would cherish all of my days.

### **My 'Firsts'**

I saw my first movie in my fifth summer. I went to Hudson Falls to stay overnight with an uncle, and he took his family and me to a drive-in. We sat on the hood of the car and watched a Godzilla movie. It scared me. That night, the cousin I shared a room with took out his glass eye (a cat scratch injury) and placed it in a glass of water. He then pointed it at me and talked about the movie. I never stayed with that uncle again! I went to my first "restaurant" with an aunt on a Sunday after church when I was four years old. It was Bywater or Grimes's as we called it, located right in the center of Hague. I did not understand the word "flapjacks," so I had scrambled eggs with sausage. Later I found out my favorite breakfast food –pancakes -- had been offered. Oops – too young!



**From Childhood to Who I am Today**

I truly miss the innocent time of those years -- birth to ten. Even though I can remember the hard times, the times of pain and turmoil, I deeply miss the family time, my brothers and sisters, mother and father, cousins, aunts and uncles and the special moments we shared. I knew nothing of yearning for other things. I had what I had, and my world seemed like a happy place to be. I did not realize or care about how poor I was until I was entering my preteen years. I went through a period of embarrassment only when a friend would come for an overnight or when I went to their home, and I temporarily got to enjoy things I had never had. I am proud of the life my parents gave me, and I do believe it made me a better person. I worked hard to make things better for my children, with the gentle hand of my best friend Tim and the guidance my parents gave, perhaps unknowingly. My children and grandchildren have their own stories, but I know they are happy to hear my tales because they grin or gasp or laugh each time I relate one to them. Life was and continues to be one adventure after another!

Like most people, I have memories that bring me comfort, are fun to look back upon and even sometimes console me. Hague, this small special place in a big world, has always been “home” and is a part of me and all the memories I hold dear.

**Hague Historical Society Membership**

**Individual membership:** \$20

**Family membership:** \$40

How to join or renew your membership:

[Join and pay online](#) or

**Join via mail:** See form on the next page

Your membership enables us to preserve and promote Hague's rich and fascinating history. Of course, we are also happy to accept larger donations.

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## Membership/Renewal Form

Membership dues are \$20/person. Your check can be made out to "Hague Historical Society" and mailed with this form to: HAGUE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, PO BOX 794, HAGUE, NY 12836

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