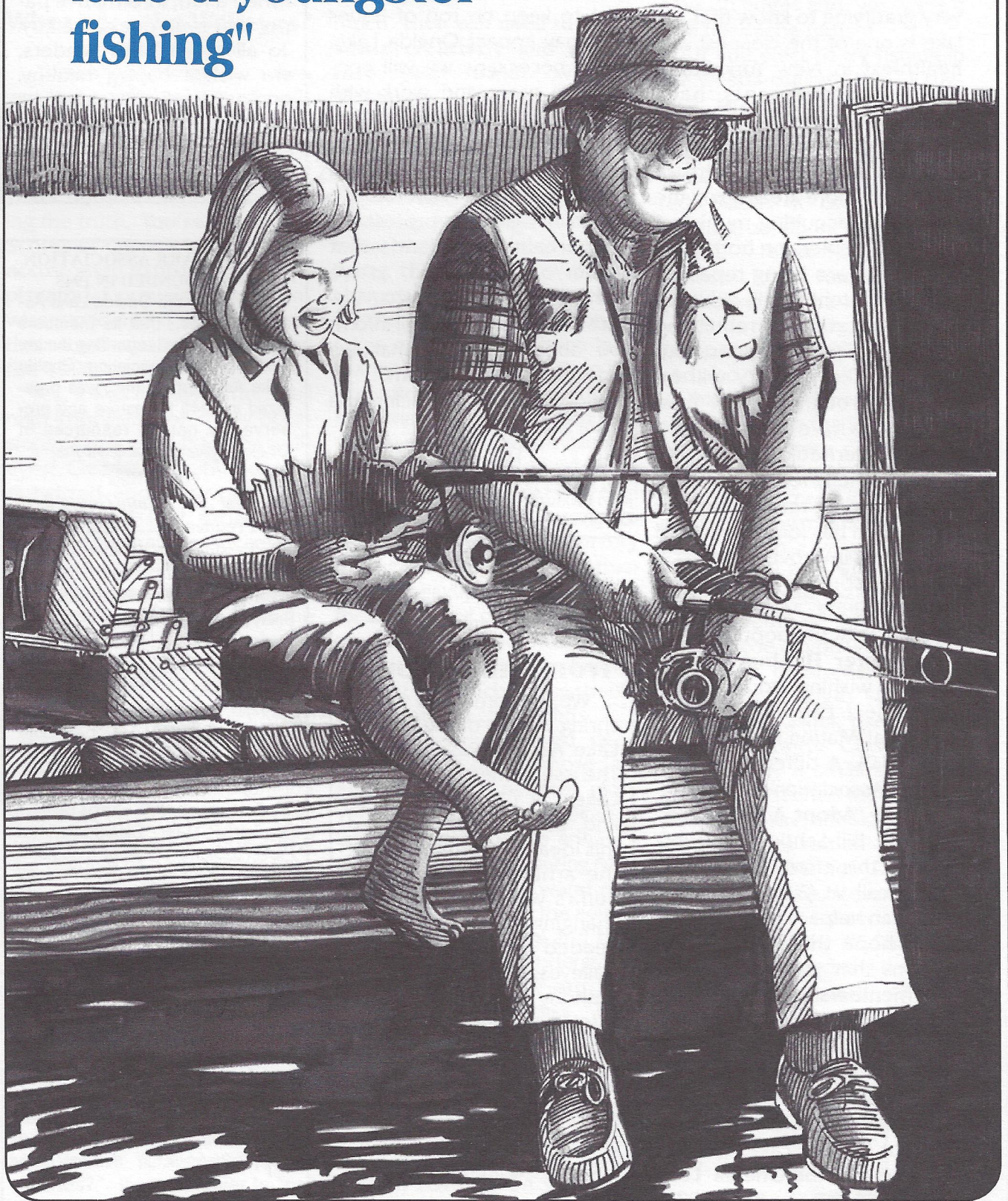


# *The Oneida Lake Bulletin*

SPRING EDITION 1996

**"take a youngster  
fishing"**



## President's Report

*Oneida Lake Bulletin*  
Spring 1996

As our Association moves forward into its 51st year, it is very gratifying to know that our lake is one of the cleanest and healthiest in New York State. Many improvements have helped to enrich the lake and its diverse watershed. Many communities have sewage treatment plants and more areas are in the process of acquiring municipal sewers. The piers on both ends of the lake are being repaired. The new hatchery will aid lakes within our state in rebuilding their walleye populations. Our Oneida Lake pike fry will be stocked throughout New York. Access sites have undergone extensive overhauls. The South Shore Launch, for example, is currently being renovated. Our Association has long advocated all of these improvements.

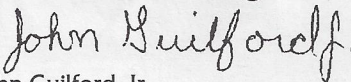
In the spirit of spring, it is time to bring anew. We are bringing back the popular "Take A Youngster Fishing Derby." Anyone wishing to help with this project can contact Jerry Randall at Marion Manor (315-762-4810). A different project that our Association is undertaking is the "Adopt A Shoreline" program. Bill Schriever is coordinating this effort. Please give him a call at (315-676-5908) if you can help.

We hope that you like the bulletins that you receive with your membership. Much effort goes into each publication to guarantee that you are informed about the issues that face our lake. We are still seeking stories about members' experiences on or about Oneida Lake. You can send these to the Oneida Lake Association, P. O. Box 3536,

Syracuse, New York, 13220, or to Jack Henke, P.O. Box 175, Brookfield, New York, 13314.

Your Board of Directors is committed to fostering the lake's protection. We will do our best to keep on top of issues that may impact Oneida Lake. When necessary, we will continue to meet and work with state officials to express our concerns. We will continue to strive to preserve the lake as an awesome natural resource. We will do all we can to protect the few remaining wetlands that border our lake. And, as we monitor the activities that impact Oneida Lake, we will inform you about anything that we consider to be a problem.

I look forward to seeing you at our annual meeting.



John Guilford, Jr.  
OLA President

## From the Editors-

We welcome you to the spring edition of the Oneida Lake Association's Bulletin. The issue's theme is "Oneida Lake - A Changing Scene" and, as such, you will find this idea reflected in most of the articles. Captain Tony Buffa's writing explores the changing fishing techniques needed to catch Oneida's walleyes, Lars Rudstam's and Anthony VanDeValk's scientific prose addresses the lake's ecological transformations, while Richard Colesante's work introduces us to the lake sturgeon program initiated by the Oneida Lake Fish Cultural Station at

Constantia. Personal narratives, Oneida Lake experiences, and local history find expression in other articles. We hope that we have published a fun, informative paper that everyone can enjoy. To all of you, our readers, we wish a happy, healthy, and productive Oneida Lake summer.

Dom Maio  
Jack Henke

## ONEIDA LAKE ASSOCIATION INC, FOUNDED IN 1945

Published by the Oneida Lake Association, Inc., that its members may be informed regarding the activities of the Association. Oneida Lake Association, Inc., was organized in 1945 to restore and preserve the natural resources of Oneida Lake and its environs.

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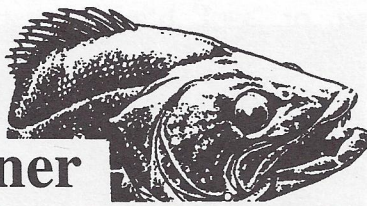
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# The OLA Fishing Corner



## Where Are the Walleyes?

by Capt. Tony Buffa

You cannot remember when you last caught a limit of walleyes on Oneida Lake? Well, either you have a short memory, have not fished in a number of years or, quite simply, are telling the truth. **You're not alone.** Scores of Oneida Lake anglers, accustomed to proclaiming their piscatorial prowess, have likewise wondered if they have lost their touch, particularly during the 1995 season.

Yes, it was a tough time. Well nigh impossible on many occasions. Chalk one up for the walleyes! Clearly, the outfitted were outwitted and were quite unhappy about that experience. Could it be that the success of the previous decade had spoiled us? Mega catches of old marble eyes during that era, and into the early nineties, were commonplace. Could anyone really think that peak fishing could last forever? *Hey, fellow anglers, wake up and smell the fishes!* We expect to catch walleyes while applying our craft on Oneida but, if we limited on every outing, we would soon bring about the demise of a respected fishery.

It's unreasonable and illogical to expect to always achieve large catches. I'm not suggesting, however, that you develop a complacency reminiscent of the spirit of "que sera, sera." Take the problem by the gills and analyze it. Ask yourself, "What have I done differently throughout the previous fishing season to avert a pattern of poor catches?" If the answer is "not

much" then you need to inject some creativity and energy into your basic walleye stratagem. Even if you have fished the lake for a quarter-century and caught all the walleyes you needed by either drifting nightcrawlers or tossing a black jig, you might need to tweak those methods a bit to bring them in line with the changes in Oneida's ecosystem.

The lake's water no longer takes on that algae green hue. Clarity is more the rule than the exception. Weeds now dominate the shallows. Fifteen feet deep weedbeds are prevalent in areas previously highlighted by sparse to moderate weed growth. Walleyes now seem to disperse more uniformly throughout the lake rather than school heavily in any one area for a period of time. I maintain that they are now more constantly on the move. Consequently, your techniques should correspond to their habits.

I particularly enjoyed deep water jigging during those late eighties - early nineties glory years. That same application last year did little to enhance my catch, especially during May, June, and July. Clear water notwithstanding, I made the adjustment to the shallows and their weeds. The keys to understanding walleye behavior are their stomach and their eyes. They strike when hungry, seek cover from sunlight, are not territorial, nor do they protect their young. That makes for a limited window of opportunity. They need to be feeding, and somewhat in cover, to be vulnerable

to any degree.

That's why the weeds played a major role in creating walleye action during 1995. Weeds provided immediate cover, harbored schools of bait, defined ambush edges and, yes, were a true headache to fish!

If you elect to try fishing in the weeds during 1996, I suggest that you begin with a weedless type lure. I recommend the Beetle Spin. It's a small spinner bait with a Colorado blade. It comes with a plastic grub, about one inch in length. I remove the grub and replace it with a four inch black, plastic worm. The added worm length is more forgiving as the lure passes through the weeds and also contributes to the lure's visibility and dynamics. You should retrieve the lure deliberately, using more of a "sweep and pull through" technique. *Don't jig or crank it.* Give it a chance to swim and fall. If it hangs up on a weed, just pull steadily and it should dislodge and remain weedless for the remaining retrieve.

For those of you who are less patient, I recommend exploring the weed edges. Casting a plain nightcrawler, baited on a #4 gold Eagle Claw hook, weighted by a small split shot sinker, all attached to four or six pound test line, should be a productive combination for luring walleyes to your net. Don't discount your favorite crankbait, fished along the weeds' edges, either. I prefer the #5 Shad Rap, the Cotton Cordell Lil O, the Wally Diver, and the Jr. Thunderstick deep diver models. The standard one-quarter ounce jig, tipped with a piece of worm, is also very effective.

Weeds are now an integral part of the big Oneida Lake picture. They are plentiful through

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## **Where Are the Walleyes?**

out the lake. Consequently, the walleyes have plenty of cover. Don't be stubborn or lethargic. If you fish a stretch of weeds for fifteen minutes or so and get no response, move on! Fishier pastures await you.

I'm eagerly anticipating opening day and am no less enthusiastic about the probability of catching walleyes, even though the research community estimates that the adult population hovers around 300,000, versus the 800,000 that was predicted last year. To me, it has all become relative. If we have 300,000 hungry walleyes for any stretch of the season then I'll earn the privilege of catching some, but only if I make a commitment to fish as often and as frequently as I can. That's a covenant worthy of all dedicated Oneida Lake anglers.

Have a rewarding fishing season, my friends. Be sure to share it with youngsters. I'll look forward to seeing you on the water. I'll set anchor now. ■

## **Oneida Lake Angler Diary Program**

*by Anthony VanDeValk*

The Angler Diary Program, in its second year, entered the 1995 open water season with 108 cooperators enlisted. As of January 1, 53 fishermen (49%) had responded to calls for their diaries. This response rate is down from last year's 67%, when 31 of 46 cooperators responded. This lower response rate may be due to the poor fishing experienced by some anglers, which may have decreased their enthusiasm for the program. Despite this, the goal of 50 active cooperators, established at the program's onset,



Anthony VanDeValk preps a Cornell University boat at the dawn of a research day.

was met.

Cooperators recorded 1,442 trips, which totaled 7,668 hours of fishing, 6,518 hours of which targeted walleyes. Anglers caught 3,494 walleyes, of which 2,082 were 15 inches or more in length. Harvest rates were again high, with 93% of the legal catch being creeded. Our impression of fishing quality, developed from various angler contacts, indicated that it was poor. This was especially disturbing considering our pre-season forecast of "a walleye behind every rock." In retrospect, reports of slow fishing were not surprising, considering the actual population calculated from our mark-recapture study. The angler diaries, however, indicated reasonable catch rates that were similar to last year. Rates for trips targeting walleyes were 0.52 fish per hour for all walleyes and 0.32 fish per hour for legal "pike." The New York State Walleye Management Plan suggests catch rates of 0.20 walleye per hour to be above average and 0.50 walleye per hour to be excellent for the state. Evidently, walleye fishing in Oneida Lake in 1995 was good, compared to other New York waters, but was poor by

Oneida's standards. Unfortunately, we don't possess catch statistics for the late 1980's and early 1990's, but we expect that angler catches were higher in those "banner" years.

Oneida Lake continues to produce good catches of smallmouth bass. Cooperators spent 1,105 hours targeting smallmouths, resulting in catch rates of 0.33 bass per hour for all fish and 0.25 "keepers" per hour. These statistics were down a little from last year (0.48 total bass per hour and 0.39 legal bass), but are still considered respectable. Yellow perch fishing proved to be good. The catch rate for perch trips was 3.83 fish per hour, up significantly from last year's 0.75. However, the higher rate was primarily due to catches dominated by young perch. This fact is reflected in a low harvest rate of 42%, indicative of a length distribution favoring smaller, younger fish.

In 1995, we conducted a mark-recapture estimate for walleyes as well as for yellow perch and drum. Mark-recapture is a proven and time-tested technique for assessing fish populations and its accuracy is

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related to the number of clippedfish recovered. This year we had the opportunity to compare two population estimates for walleyes, calculated from independent sources of recapture data, to assess our estimate's accuracy. These sources were 1) by methods implemented by the Field Station and 2) through observations by cooperating anglers. The results were very encouraging. Cooperators examined 1,718 walleyes that were thirteen inches or longer and, of these, 97 were marked. This data translated into a population estimate of 325,600 walleyes that were age 4 or older, a number that differs from the Field Station figure by only 3%. This close agreement is especially satisfying to us because of the support it provides in evaluating our data. Seldom do you get such close agreement from two independent estimates of a fisheries' population.

In conclusion, for those of you enrolled in the program, Lars and I would like to thank you for your diligence and cooperation. We understand that, when the fishing is poor, it's discouraging to enter trips in your diary. This information, however, is as important to us as that which highlights the trips during which you have great success. Conversely, we know that it can be a hassle to enter every fish when the action is "hot and heavy" (yes, there were a few trips recorded in diaries where this occurred!) You'll be receiving a more comprehensive report this spring that details catch results. Your worthwhile efforts have proven extremely valuable to us and to the cause of advancing the understanding of Oneida Lake. For those of you who are not enrolled in the program and would enjoy partici-

pating, we'd love to work with you. Our hopes entail conducting this program for 3 more years. In addition, we want to initiate another mark-recapture study in 1997 and, thus, we'll be asking cooperators to again examine their walleyes for fin clips. If you are interested in joining the Angler Diary program just contact Lars or me at the Cornell Field Station, Shackelton Point. ■

*Editors' Note:* OLA Director Bob Cote shares some warm personal memories with us in the following article.

## **Clearly Imprinted**

by Bob Cote

Born in a Hartford, Connecticut, hospital and then brought home to the shores of Lake Terramuggus, I was imprinted like a salmon, destined to return as an adult.

While I have no vivid memories of living on Lake Terramuggus, as we moved before I was three years old, my mom and dad would tell me how I loved to splash in the lake and throw sticks in the water for Pepper, our dog, to fetch. Sometimes I would go under water, either by accident or with a little help from my dad but, in either case, I would surface, laughing. I do recall going to the Terramuggus beach on many hot, sweltering days. Here, with my family, we would rent a large rubber raft and spend the day in the clear, cool water, further enhancing my imprint.

Around the age of nine I spent several summers with my grandparents, Myles and Jo, in Maine. Their home was located on the shore of Lake Messalongskee, better known as Snow Pond. The pond, one of the Belgrade Lakes, was renowned for its pristine water, its trout, its bass ("Only New Yorkers would want to fish for them,"

sneered the locals), and its fine music camp. The water was six to eight feet deep at the end of my grandparents' wharf. It was so clear that all life and structure were easily viewed. At this spot I would watch large schools of bass making their feeding patrols. Here, a young Connecticut boy could spend countless hours fishing for those "worthless" bass. Here, my friends and I played wonderful games that involved throwing objects into the lake. The water was so clear that the only way you could win was to fling the objects into deeper water. Even there, however, water clarity made almost everything visible.

During an evening's fishing expedition, a short row with our Lone Star boat, the white perch we caught were usually dumped on the boat's floor, at times covering it. Yellow perch were kept in a pail so that they could be discarded with the garbage. These fish were regarded as useless, inedible, and a detriment to the lake.

Days were filled with water skiing and exploring the tiny coves into which little brooks flowed with their cold spring water. These vintage summers further ingrained the imprint from years before.

As a teenager, living in the small village of Barneveld, a short distance from Utica and Rome, my family and I visited and camped in the Adirondack Mountains. Eighth, Tupper, and Raquette Lakes all met my family. These waters were so clear that, while snorkeling, I viewed objects that seemed near but were actually so deep that I couldn't dive to them. Our family visited West Canada Creek, the Black and Bog Rivers, and countless other creeks and ponds.

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## **Clearly Imprinted**

Clear waters, the trout and the good memories - my imprint continued.

Shortly after I graduated from high school, another visit to Connecticut called. College and work interfered with my outdoor wants, but there was time for an occasional fishing trip.

The salmon was fully out to sea.

It wasn't long before Syracuse and Upstate New York became my home. We initially rented a dwelling on Oneida Lake's south shore and, shortly thereafter, purchased a house in that vicinity. My vocabulary and outdoor quests changed. "Wharfs" became "docks." We fished from Starcraft boats, not Lone Stars. We placed our vessel on a boat "hoist" instead of an offshore "mooring." Walleyes, not trout, became our angling objective. The formerly "worthless" bass were now trophies! Yellow perch proved to be a tasty treat. White perch now occupied a lower place in catch preference, while sheepshead and lawyers were the "garbage" fish.

The salmon was coming home. The imprints from long ago were returning.

After living by Oneida Lake for twenty years, it seemed that all my past imprints had resurfaced, except one - clear water. While the lake wasn't polluted, its water quality left much to be desired. At the end of my wharf, I mean dock, the water is only three feet deep and, during my twenty years here, seeing bottom was often a challenge. "School House Bar," "Sugar Loaf," and "Pinnacle" were only names of fishing spots, all of which had unseen bottoms. Oneida Lake became a sea of pea soup two or three times

a summer.

Then the unexpected happened! Clarity arrived! You could see your anchor on the Shackelton Shoals. You could snorkel, enjoying the view of fish and plants. You could easily find lost equipment on the lake's bottom. The zebra mussels, of course, are a major cause of this, but certainly flooding and increased sewage treatment have had their effects. We now have a new, a changed Oneida Lake, one that can be thoroughly enjoyed. May all of you savor this lake as I do.

The salmon has fully returned and his offspring have acquired the imprint. ■

## **Walleyes, Perch, and A Changing Oneida Lake**

by:

*Lars Rudstam, Anthony VanDeValk, and Edward Mills  
Cornell Biological Field Station,  
Shackelton Point*

Most of you were probably out on the lake this summer, fishing, boating, swimming, or just relaxing. You must have observed the clear water. At the Cornell Biological Field Station, we measure water clarity with the Secchi disk technique, which states that the further down in the water that we can see the disk, the clearer the water must be. In 1995 we measured Secchi disk depths of 8 meters (24 feet), which is the clearest Oneida Lake water on record, a clarity reminiscent of an Adirondack lake. There was a spring bloom of diatoms in 1995, but no bluegreen algae blooms, like those in the summer of 1995, occurred. We attribute this unprecedented clear water to grazing by the zebra mussels. Nutrient levels have also declined in the lake since the middle of the 1980's, but

we did not see a strong effect on water clarity until after 1993, when zebra mussels had established themselves. The higher water clarity is due to a decreased algae biomass. Our measure of algal abundance and concentration of chlorophyll-a have diminished and the time trend is a mirror image of the water's increasing clearness. A price to pay for this dramatic change is an acceleration in weed growth, an aquatic vegetation boom that will continue in the future. Our lake's weed beds reached unprecedented sizes in 1995.

Walleye fishing has also changed. Walleyes are sensitive to light and usually hide under structure, in deeper water, or in weeds during daytime. Even light levels at 30 to 40 feet may now be too high for them. Explore weed bed vicinities to find these fish.

This year we did a mark-recapture study of walleyes, yellow perch, and freshwater drum. We marked 20,000 walleyes, 8000 perch, and about 2000 drum in the spring by clipping one of the ventral (belly side) fins. The size of the population was then estimated by examining the ratio of marked to unmarked fish in the specimens that we caught from June through October. You may have heard our electrofishing boat on calm nights in September and October. This study yielded an estimated walleye population of 320,000 age 4 and older fish, 700,000 age 3 and older perch, and 200,000 freshwater drum. We have the most confidence in the walleye estimate because more fish were marked and the estimate based on our angler cooperators supported that from our sampling. The ratio of marked to unmarked fish exam-

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Cornell University Field Station staff members retrieve a gill net, a basic part of the counting process.

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ined by the angler cooperators yielded a population estimate of 330,000, within 5% of our other number. The number of walleyes in the lake was, thus, substantially lower than the 850,000 that we predicted last spring, an estimate based on walleye catches at the Oneida Fish Culture Station in Constantia.

Predictions of walleye population sizes have been based on Oneida Hatchery catches since 1957. The mark-recapture study in 1995 was the first comparison between trapnet catches of walleyes at the new facility during the spawning run and the walleye population present in the lake. Clearly, the old index is no longer valid and we plan to do a mark-recapture study every 2 years, until a good statistical relationship has been developed.

The lower walleye population is more in line with what we expect, given the catch rates by our angler cooperators. These fisherpersons' rates hover at around 0.5 walleye per hour, in-

dicating an excellent walleye fishery for New York State, but probably not as high quality as has been the case for Oneida in previous years. Angler input was an additional reason that prompted our 1995 mark-recapture study.

Age 3 and older yellow perch abundance is low and few young of the year perch were produced in 1995. However, the number of age 1 and 2 perch is high and we predict that the perch population will rebound to between 1.5 and 2.5 million by 1998. Perch growth remains high and we should see an excellent perch fishery within the next two years.

Walleye recruitment (natural production and survival of stocked fry within Oneida Lake) has not been very good during the last three years, however, and we predict that the population will decline further, to about 220,000 by 1998. When the bait fish population is low in Oneida Lake, walleye cannibalism is high (a walleye considers a young walleye to be just another bait fish) and there is only limited recruitment to the older age classes. Numbers of young-of-the-year yellow perch, white perch, and gizzard shad, all primary foods for walleyes, have been low during the last three years.

Oneida Lake's walleye production is ultimately dependent on the lake's fertility and Oneida is not as rich as it was 20 years ago, since the amount of phosphorus in it has declined. As a result, we can expect fewer bait fish and, ultimately, a decline in walleye numbers. Although zebra mussels are a cause for the decline in the water's productivity, they are also contributing to an increase in lake bottom production (insects, scuds, etc.) In addition, the larger weed beds will lead to a higher

abundance of invertebrates. Yellow perch can utilize these food sources once they are big enough, usually in late summer and early fall, during their first year of life. Studies at the Cornell Field Station have documented an increase in these invertebrates in nearshore waters since the zebra mussel invasion. We are now exploring what effect these sources of food will have on the perch and walleye populations.

More details will be forthcoming at the annual meeting. We look forward to seeing you there. ■

## **NEW-Oneida Lake Recollections**

This is the first installment of a new column in your Bulletin. The column will highlight interesting, amusing, and noteworthy experiences that our Association's members have had with their lake. We invite you to send your tales to us. Stories that deal with you or your family's encounters with Oneida Lake, or even yarns and tales that you have heard, are all most welcome. Please send these to Jack Henke, P.O. Box 175, Brookfield, New York, 13314. Typed or long-hand works are perfectly acceptable. And - please do not be concerned about your writing style!

## **An Unforgettable Oneida Lake Duck Hunt**

*by: Arnold Armani*

I recall one duck hunting trip as if it happened yesterday. My uncle, Ed Togni, and I stayed overnight in our family's camp on Beach Road. In those days we had to "rough it," as the camp had no running water, gas, or electricity. Uncle Ed was

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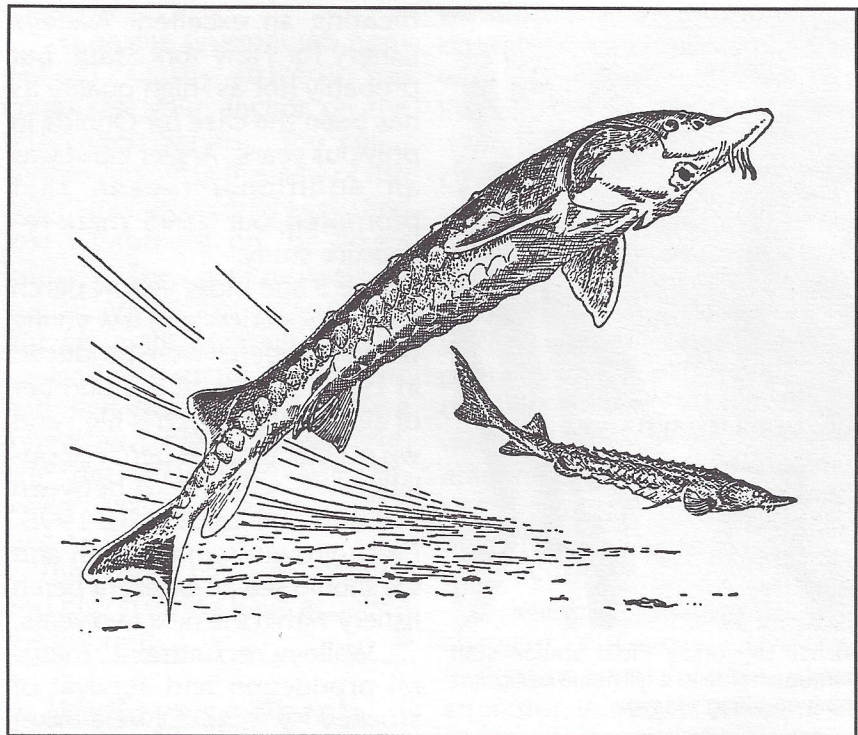
## **An Unforgettable Oneida Lake Duck Hunt**

my idol and mentor. He taught me about hunting, fishing, and the great outdoors. There was one problem with his duck hunting instruction, however - he was a terrible wing shot. With great diligence and prodigious time, he taught me to shoot just as he did. On a typical morning's duck hunt we would burn up two boxes of shells (25 per box) and, on a good day, we might kill two ducks. It was years before I realized that the limit was not one duck apiece.

On this particular trip the temperature was very cold and the lake's surface had started to form an icy skim. We loaded our gear into our old Thompson boat and, with great difficulty, started our "knucklebuster" motor. We broke ice near Peck's Point (now called Long Point) and set up our decoys off Old Man's Point. At daybreak, the ducks started flying. Thousands filled the air around us! Uncle Ed's theory was, "If you can see 'em, shoot 'em, 'cause they're in range." I often questioned why we used decoys, because the ducks seldom flew close enough to be attracted to them. We shot our usual 25 shells apiece, killed our "two duck quota," but had a wonderful time together.

That evening, as we headed for home in Uncle Ed's Model A Ford, we had a feeling that something was wrong. The people that we saw standing near the highway looked unusually somber, almost Zombie-like in their appearance. No one was smiling or laughing. A "distant" expression filled their faces. The scene resembled an episode from the "Twilight Zone."

When we arrived home we discovered the reason for what we had observed. The date of our duck hunt was December 7, 1941. ■



The prehistoric-appearing sturgeon...how long will it be before one of these grows to tackle-busting size in Oneida Lake?

## **Lake Sturgeon At the Oneida Lake Fish Cultural Station**

*by: Richard Colesante and Mark Babenzien*

Lake sturgeon are neat fish. They first appeared on earth 100 million years ago and have remained, somewhat unchanged, since that time. Lake sturgeon can live to be 150 years old and grow to 6 or 7 feet in length. They reach sexual maturity between 12 and 33 years of age and may spawn only once every 4 to 9 years. They are bottom feeders and generally eat small invertebrates, insect larvae, crayfish, snails, freshwater clams, and leeches. The sturgeon prefer shallow areas of lakes and rivers, inhabiting water that is usually less than 30 feet deep. In New York State the lake sturgeon is classified as "threatened," which means that it is very rare and deserving of special protection. Our state's Department of Environmental

Conservation has developed a plan to restore sturgeon to some waters and that scheme got the Oneida Hatchery involved. We were asked to produce fingerling sturgeon for stocking in state waters.

Approximately 100,000 sturgeon eggs arrived at the hatchery on May 11, 1995. These dark colored eggs had been collected from female sturgeon and fertilized. The adult breeding fish were released unharmed. Seven days later, the eggs hatched and tiny sturgeon emerged, resembling white tadpoles. The fish lived off their yolk sac for about two weeks before beginning to feed. On May 26, approximately 40,000 sturgeon larvae (one quarter inch long) were stocked on the north shore, in Frederick and Scriba Creeks. The remaining sturgeon were kept at the hatchery and fed brine shrimp at 5 minute intervals for 24 hours per day, using automatic feeders.

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When the sturgeon fingerlings were about 3 inches long, in late June, they were weaned from a brine shrimp diet to a formulated diet (like that fed to trout). As the sturgeon grew, they were fed this artificial food at the same frequency as brine shrimp, though in greater amounts. The Oneida Hatchery sturgeon grew faster than anyone could imagine. By September (at 4 months of age) the fingerlings were 10 inches long. At that point they were stocked, with 5000 going into Oneida Lake, 5000 to the Saint Lawrence River, and 3000 to Cayuga Lake.

We hope that these sturgeon will survive. Possibly, in 15 years or so, they will be seen spawning in the north shore's tributaries. In the meantime, if you happen to catch one, remove the hook and release the fish as gently as possible. If the hook is too deeply imbedded, cut off the leader and leave the hook in the fish. Survival chances are good under these circumstances. Remember that lake sturgeon are threatened in New York and cannot be possessed. You must release any that you catch.

The Oneida Hatchery's sturgeon program has created a lot of interest. We kept a few of them over the winter and they will be available for viewing this spring, during the walleye run. Be sure to stop and see this natural curiosity.

*Editors' Note:* Sturgeon have been present in Oneida Lake, in an undetermined quantity, throughout recorded history. Rod Hunter's "Sportsman's Corner" column in the *Syracuse Post Standard* on May 18, 1973, cited a four foot long, forty pound sturgeon that had been caught by Charlie Bronner, of Cicero, while trolling with a Mirro-lure in the barge channel

off Frenchman's Island. In that article, Millard Rogers, a long-time Oneida Lake expert and former co-owner of Brewerton Sports, speculated that the fish entered the lake when the downstream locks were left wide open to allow for drainage of the massive amount of water that flowed into Oneida Lake after Hurricane Agnes ravaged New York. In a related incident, on May 5, 1856, the *Syracuse Standard* newspaper contained the following entry: "We under-

stand that a sturgeon, six feet eleven inches long and weighing 104 pounds, was caught in Oneida Lake, near the outlet, on Friday evening last. This monster was taken in a net and the fisherman had great difficulty in getting him ashore. A pen in the lake was made for this 'whale among small fish,' and he was placed under charge of Mr. Shute, the proprietor of the Brewerton House, who will be happy to exhibit the monster to his visitors." ■



Work being performed for the new Oneida Lake South Shore Boat Launch

## **South Shore Boat Launch**

*by: Bob Cote*

In December, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation announced that the long-awaited rebuilding of the South Shore Boat Launch, east of Bridgeport, was to become a reality. The project's cost is approximately \$393,000.

The work was scheduled to start in December and may be completed by mid-June of 1996. During this time frame the launch site cannot be used. Those that frequent the launch must find an alternative access point. The Regional Fisheries Office (607-753-3095 - Extension 231) will provide a list of alternative sites to anyone interested.

Among the features included in the new launch facility will

be parking for 100 cars, aluminum floating docks, a site beacon, a port-a-john, concrete ramps, and a concrete sea wall.

Actual reconstruction began in January 1996. Anglers' patience is requested and will be rewarded. A first-class launch site will soon grace Oneida Lake's shore!

All Oneida Lake Association members should be proud of this launch because it was the Association's efforts that engendered the project. Special thanks go to Assemblyman Mike Bragman for his tenacity in obtaining funding. The Department of Environmental Conservation was also most helpful. ■

## **Oneida Lake and Its Environs, 1896**

*by: Jack Henke*

If we could board a time machine and travel back to the Oneida Lake area, one century ago, what would we observe?

The shoreline's condition would shock us. There would be far fewer trees than we enjoy now. Nineteenth century lakeside settlers intensely logged their land, using the timber for construction, for fire wood, and for market profit. Huge rafts of logs were transported from Oneida Lake, through the downstream river system, to Syracuse and beyond. The cleared, actively cultivated farm land extended down to the shoreline proper. Farming was a prominent occupation, especially on the south shore, and the communities of Bridgeport and Lakeport served as commercial centers for their surrounding agrarian population.

We'd be very interested in the environmental differences between the 1896 Oneida and our lake today. Emergent vegetation was common along the water's edge. Wild rice, various grasses, water lillies and the like created a lush habitat for aquatic insects, fish, waterfowl, freshwater mammals, and amphibians. The "grass beds" served as a spawning mecca for predator fish such as northern pike, pickerel, and largemouth bass. At Lower South Bay, the vegetation punctuated the water along miles of shore and extended over a hundred yards into the lake in places. This pattern was repeated throughout the lake's periphery.

Oneida Lake's fishermen could then pursue a far different catch than we currently do. Walleyes and panfish were popular, but northern pike and pickerel also attracted a large

number of anglers. Tullibees, a whitefish stocked in the lake, thrived and were commercially harvested. Eels were trapped downstream from the lake's Brewerton outlet and, in addition, were speared at several locations throughout Oneida (the eel shoals, off the Chittenango Creek mouth were especially popular). Smoked eel was a coveted delicacy in Central New York then. Sportfishermen found themselves in competition with the Oneida Lake "fish pirate." Many lakeside village residents and their neighboring farmers illegally netted Oneida, selling their catches for important supplemental income. Numerous lake area homes' and even churches' mortgages were financed through pirates' earnings. Sport anglers howled in protest and the Anglers' Association of Onondaga even carried the fight to Albany. Law enforcement problems, however, made catching the pirates a difficult task.

Oneida Lake's water quality a century ago would be far different. In the 19th century, boatmen refused to drink from the lake, citing a peculiar "fever" that resulted from injecting Oneida's liquid. Travelers during this era described the water as being "vile" and often referred to Oneida as "the green lake." Significant algal blooms occurred each summer and, as the algae died and decomposed, the lake's surface turned into a multicolored collage of reds, blues, greens, and whites. These images contrast vividly with the clarity that today's zebra mussel-infested Oneida often exhibits.

What were Oneida Lake's bordering villages like in 1896? We'll explore that point in our next Bulletin issue. ■

## **So You Want It To Be Simple**

*by: Captain Tony Buffa*

In today's world of sophisticated technology, computer-based fishing, GPS tracking, electronic wizardry, more horsepower and, perhaps, fewer fish, let's not forget the corny, but pithy, acronym - "KISS" - "Keep it simple, stupid!"

Have we transgressed so far in the name of gadgetry that the formerly tranquil, unadulterated sport of fishing has become just another prosperous avenue for big business, dictating to us how we are supposed to catch that next fish? I hope not! The temptation is certainly there. Every fisherman wants an edge, especially if that advantage is provided by the latest high-tech device that guarantees a "fish on every cast."

Fishing used to be a simple sport. A can of worms, a hook, line, and sinker were all I needed to catch my first fish at the "unsophisticated" age of seven. Look at the sport now. "Encumbered" is the word that comes to mind immediately and "expensive" trails closely behind it. I still enjoy pursuing those "spiny slimies," but I have so much equipment to maintain that I spend an equal amount of time learning, fixing, replacing, shipping and, of course, paying for it. All those "ings" do, at times, obfuscate the pure pleasure of catching a fish.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not down on the fishing industry or the sport. Technology's onslaught was inevitable. With PC's in our homes, cyberspace on line, and America's insatiable appetite for immediate information, what makes you think that fishing could escape this awesome change? When I'm drifting, casting, or trolling for Oneida's walleyes I want to

*Continued on page 11)*

*Oneida Lake Bulletin*

*Continued from page 10)*

know if there are fish under me - and I want to know immediately. If my spot is fishless, I'll quickly move to a different location. Without my expensive, top-of-the-line combination fishfinder and tracking unit my situation would resemble that of the seven year old, full of an uncharted hope and expectation as he waits for the next strike.

Solunar tables, oxygen meters, temperature sensors, color selectors, spiderwire, line counter reels, vibrating scent-emitting lures, graphite, boron, kevlar rods, segmented leadcore, planer boards, downriggers, outriggers .....will it ever end? Not as long as there are fishermen like us, who pursue their sport with a passion akin to Ahab's in his search for the great white whale.

Whoa! Is fishing really that complicated? It can be, especially if you make it that way. But fishing retains its versatility. In this era of technology, a fisherman can still use a handline, rigged with live bait, and get excited about the challenge of timing his strike with a fish's bite. Never confuse intensity with gadgetry. For example, I can be just as intent on catching an Oneida Lake yellow perch on a simple bait rig as I am trolling for a Lake Ontario salmon, using a full complement of downriggers, dippy divers, and flatlines.

Spring has finally arrived and it's time to go fishing. My quandary is this: will I be "Technical Tony" or will simplicity suffice? Whatever the case, I'm going fishing and that's fun enough.

## **WATER LEVEL UPDATE**

There is still pressure for legislation that adds flood control as a priority

for waterway operating procedures in our area.

For decades, state and federal provisions have guided the responsible agencies to maintain water levels for recreation and commerce purposes. Additionally, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the N.Y. DEC and others have expressed a position that **our lake shouldn't be drawn down any lower or for any longer durations than it has been in the past, in order to avoid environmental and ecological damage.**

Since the Oneida Lake Association has thousands of waterfront property owners and users as members, **we applaud efforts to reduce flooding!** But, we are concerned that legislative changes in priorities could result in future drawdown decisions that would harm our lake. We, therefore, remain **OPPOSED to State Assembly Bill 2134 & State Senate Bill 2304-A**, or any other future bills which call for adding flood avoidance and elimination as management priorities.

## **Oneida Lake History Quiz**

*by: Jack Henke*

### **Easy Inquiries-**

**1-**In the early 20th century, much of the lake's weedy shallows were filled in, as cottages and camps gained popularity. Two game fish, regularly pursued by Oneida Lake anglers then, lost much of their spawning habitat and their

numbers dwindled. What were these fish?

**2-**What fort was built by the British army to guard the lake's Oneida River outlet during the French and Indian Wars?

**3-**What is the nickname for the circular and oval rocks that cluster together on several of Oneida's more prominent shoals? The rocks are rich in manganese.

### **Moderately difficult questions-**

**4-**What newspaper added a nice literary flair to the Village of Cleveland's lifestyle during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?

**5-**What Sylvan Beach hotel served as home to the "Big Bands" during the 1930's and 1940's? Frank Sinatra, Duke Ellington, and the Dorsey Brothers all played there.

**6-**The area surrounding Buoy 113 is sometimes called "Messenger's Shoal." It has another name, one that indicates its navigational hazards. What is that title?

**7-**Who bequeathed the "Xandria" estate, on Shackleton Point, to Cornell University during the 1950's?

### **The ultimate challenges-**

**8-**During the French and Indian Wars the British also had a fortification on Oneida Lake's eastern end. What was it called?

**9-**Give two other names that have been used to refer to Dunham's Island in that isle's recorded history.

**10-**Who was the first Governor of New York State to visit Oneida Lake?

*(Answers can be found on page 13)*

## The Changing Oneida Lake Scene

### The "Ripples" Column of the 1960's

During the 1960's, the Oneida Lake Association Bulletin featured a lively column entitled "Ripples," a motley collection of short subject entries on topics as varied as bullhead fishing and mermaid humor. This fun piece of literature was highly popular with the Association's membership. An examination of "Ripple issues" reflects a few of the tremendous changes that have transformed Oneida Lake in the past few decades. What follows is a sampling of those items, selected for you to savor. The date that each entry appeared in the Bulletin precedes the item.

**Fall, 1960** - Perch fishing was unusually good all fall in the Big Bay area. A large school of perch moved into the bay early in October and remained there throughout the entire fall season. Many boats reported catches of more than one hundred each day.

-Roger Allen reports bagging several fine brant while hunting on Walnut Point on November 5. Rog says there was a large flight of brant on Oneida Lake during that weekend.

**Summer, 1961** - If you don't want to get caught out in a storm on Oneida Lake, take this tip from an Oneida Lake Association member:

He says that he gets an advance warning of storms by carrying along a radio every time he goes out on the lake. Any excessive static, he says, is a certain indication of a weather change and a warning

that a storm is brewing. He usually doesn't tune in to a station, but turns the radio on without a program, and just listens for static. The latter is what's important and, when it gets frequent, he gets off the lake fast.

-A period of warm, calm weather caused Oneida Lake to stratify during late July and early August.

During this period the warm surface water did not mix with cooler, and hence slightly heavier, water and settled near the bottom.

The supply of oxygen in water near the bottom was exhausted, forcing fish to move into shallow water. Low oxygen conditions were limited to areas over 30 feet deep.

**Winter, 1962** - Ice fishing on Oneida Lake has been good to excellent this year. One old timer at Jewell on the north shore said, "It has been the best year I can remember since 1897. That was some year."

**Summer, 1962** - Fred Zacholl, Muskrat Bay resident, did it. Fred was fishing bullheads in Big Bay Creek. He had a bite and hooked a fish. But wait! When he went to reel in he found that he had hooked two fish on the same hook! Yes, he landed both.

-Seen in Toad Harbor: two boats were fishing about forty feet apart. Suddenly, one fisherman had a bite, yanked hard, and then let out a yell. A large bass on his line had broken water and, then, jumped into the other boat! Whose fish was it?

-The big bald eagle is back again at Three Mile Bay. This bird has created quite some discussion for several years. Most residents say that it is a bald

eagle, while others claim that it is an osprey. The bird apparently spends considerable time along the Three Mile Bay shoreline.

**Winter, 1963** - "What can I do? I'm only a guy who likes to hunt and fish." You can do a lot. At every opportunity, tell your thoughts to the politicians. Join a sporting or an outdoor group or at least support those who are endeavoring to bring good ideas to our public officials. Write to our various representatives when you are requested to do so by the club or group that you join. The old saw that the "noisy wheel gets the most grease" is mighty true. Look at what the Oneida Lake Association has done. ■

## NOMINATING PETITIONS

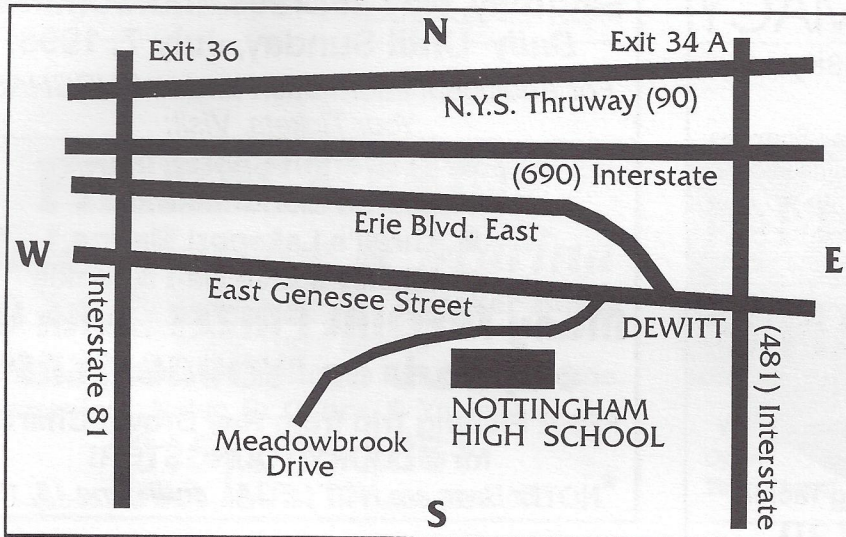
Under the OLA bylaws, members may nominate officers and directors. A petition, that is to be signed by at least fifty (50) OLA members in good standing, may state the name of a member or members the petitioners wish to nominate as officer or director. The petition must be served on any present OLA officer no later than three (3) days before the Annual Meeting. It will be mandatory that the names on any such petition be placed on the OLA Nominating Committee list with the persons nominated by the Committee, all in alphabetical order, for election at the Annual Meeting.

OLA's Secretary will make the membership list available for inspection by an OLA active member on request. ■

# OLA Annual Meeting at Nottingham High School on April 24, 1996

By: Tony Buffa

On Wednesday, April 24, the OLA will hold its 51st annual meeting at the Nottingham High School auditorium. Doors will open at 6 PM. Early attendance is encouraged so that you can enjoy our numerous exhibits. Children *under 18 years of age* will receive an **OLA fishing cap!**



While at the meeting, you will be able to register for the annual **Cicero Lions Club**

**Walleye Derby** which, for the fifth time, will include extra money prizes for those derby winners who are also 1996 members of the OLA. Membership renewals and signups will begin at 6:15 PM. You need not be a member to attend the meeting, but only current members will be eligible for the drawing of the **6 H.P. Mercury outboard motor.**



This year's meeting will begin promptly at 7 PM, and a short business meeting will ensue. Our theme is; **KIDS... TAKE THEM FISHING.**

Steve Brown, from the Sport-fishing Aquatics Resources Education Program (**SAREP**), will present an exhibit devoted to kids and fishing. Also, Steve will address the importance of getting children involved in fishing. You can expect dignitaries from the DEC and the research community to update the status of our fishery, the angler diary program,

zebra mussel infestation, and the fish cultural station at Constantia.

The Oneida Lake Association will award its coveted "Conservationist of the Year" plaque to an outstanding supporter of local conservation. The meeting will close with the grand prize drawing for the 6 H.P. Mercury outboard motor and the distribution of door prizes. This year's meeting will be special to all of us. We encourage you to join us for an evening of fun and information.

- Answers to page 11 -
- 1-Northern Pike and Pickerel
  - 2-Fort Brewerton
  - 3-Pancakes
  - 4-The Lakeside Press
  - 5-Russell's Hotel and Danceland
  - 6-Blind Island
  - 7-Charles Brown
  - 8-The Royal Blockhouse, occasionally referred to as Fort Royal
  - 9-Grape Island, Lotus Island, Harvey's Island, Hawley's Island
  - 10-DeWitt Clinton

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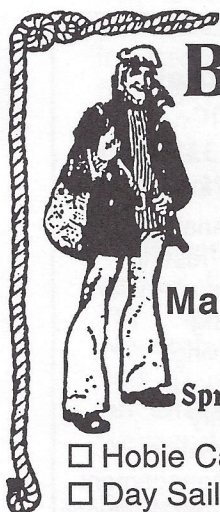
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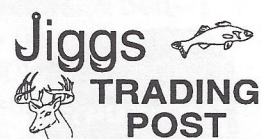
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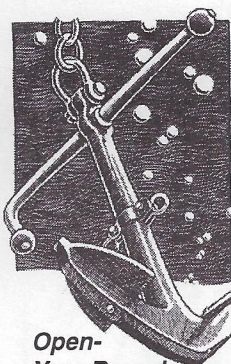
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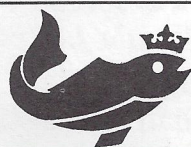
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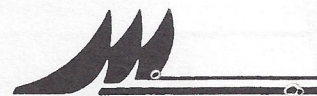
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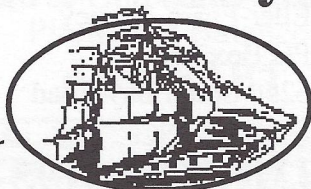
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