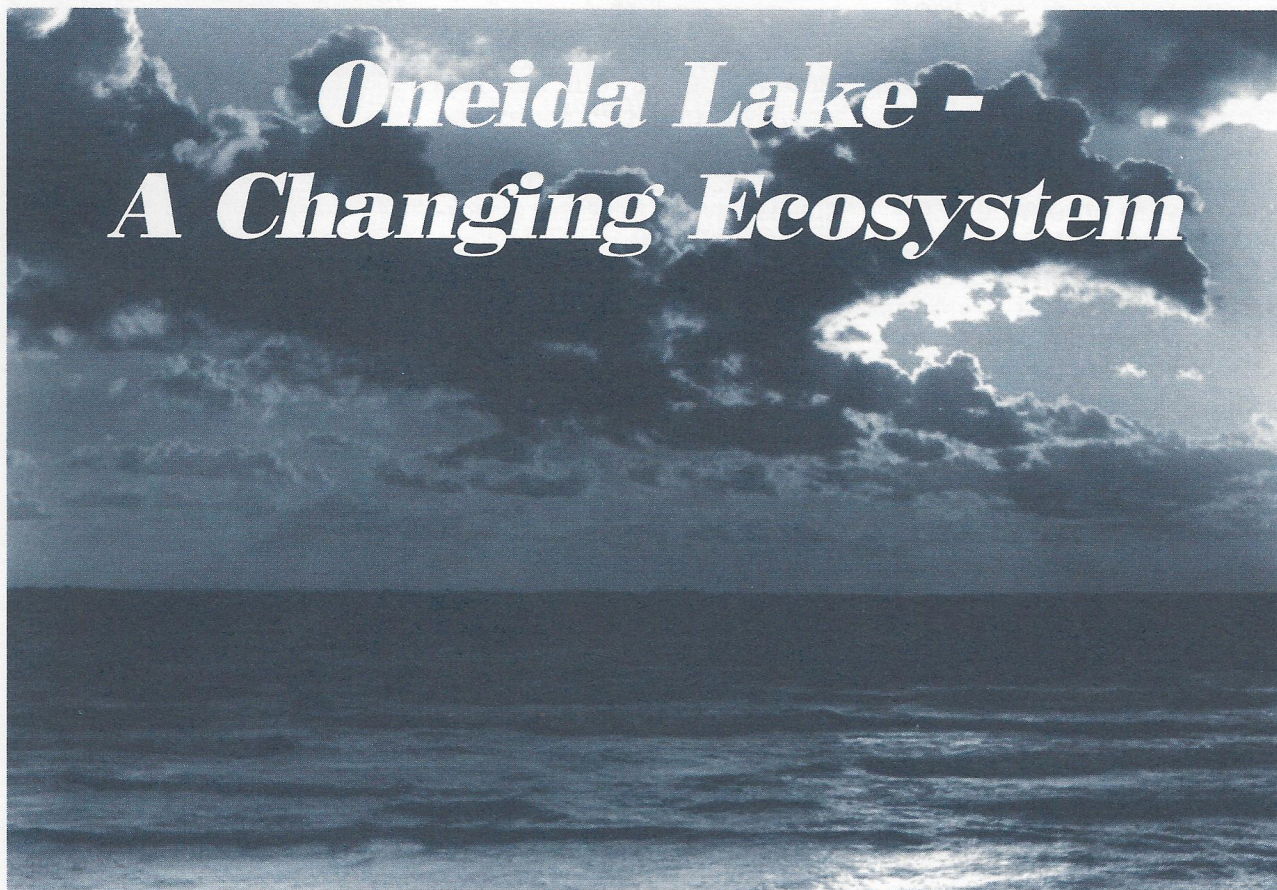


The Oneida Lake Bulletin

SPRING / SUMMER 1997



by Edward L. Mills, Connie Adams, Anthony VanDeValk, and Lars G. Rudstam

The phrase "in a state of flux" characterizes Oneida Lake today. Probably the greatest single cause of this alteration is the zebra mussel, which has changed the lake's ecosystem in many ways. Since these mussels infested the lake, water clarity has greatly increased. In 1996, clarity was slightly lower than in 1995, the year in which Oneida Lake was the clearest on record. This condition is expected to continue as long as zebra mussels remain abundant.

As zebras filter particles from the water, making the lake clearer, sunlight penetrates farther into the depths, thus stimulating plant activity. The beds of submerged vegetation that once grew along the shoreline in 3 to 5 feet of water now extend into deeper areas (6 to 13 feet). New weed growth provides a habitat for invertebrates and a refuge for fish like yellow perch, small-mouth bass, and sunfish. Deeper light penetration into Oneida Lake has likely affected fish distribution, especially for light-sensitive walleyes. Anglers have discovered that walleyes, which avoid strong sunlight, have abandoned exposed reefs and sought shelter in weed beds and in deeper water, where light intensity is lower. Although offshore angling continues to produce some good walleye catches, data from our Angler Diary Program indicates that fishermen who work inshore waters tend to be more successful. The proliferation of zebra mussels has also increased the population of bottom-dwelling invertebrates such as freshwater shrimp and midge larvae.

Since 1995, the lake's walleye population has remained relatively stable, at about 300,000 adult fish. Based on catches of young walleyes, we conclude that the number of adults should

(Continued on page 6)

President's Report

Oneida Lake Bulletin

Spring/Summer 1997

To the members of the Oneida Lake Association - the time has come to give my last president's report. My two year tenure has passed quickly. Your Board of Directors has my heart-felt thanks for the job that they do on our behalf.

We have dealt with various lake-oriented issues over the past few years and none has been as important as the continuing lake level controversy. Your Board of Directors feels that caution must be taken whenever significant changes regarding this point are considered. Some pressure groups want to eradicate any high water conditions that occur on our lake. To accomplish their goal, they suggest shorter boating seasons, quicker draw downs, and lower lake operating levels. Your Association sympathizes with their predicament, but differs in the extreme with their conclusions and reasoning.

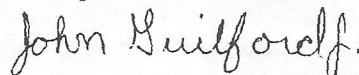
Any attempt to control flooding must address the potentially serious impacts on the total Oneida Lake environment that such an adjustment might engender. Your Board of Directors felt that a special mailing that promoted caution on this issue was necessary in 1995. The time has come to reinforce our message. All lakefront property owners, marina operators, and lake users who experienced negative conditions last fall due to premature low water levels should voice their concerns to every appropriate authority. How many of you had difficulty launching your boat or motoring out of your marina? This is a major issue and, if we pressure the powers that be, a positive change can be effected.

But the issue extends beyond boater inconvenience. We, as an Association, want to know all the impacts that will occur should lake level adjustments take place. What will happen to our protected wetlands? How will our rich and sensitive aquatic ecosystem be altered? What economic ramifications will increased draw downs have? These are important questions that must be answered prior to any lake level action.

Again - voice your opinions. Contact our elected officials. Only through constant political pressure can we insure that the Oneida Lake we know and love maintains its current vitality.

We have seen many improvements around our lake over the past several years. We want to insure that all lake users will be able to enjoy our environmentally healthy resource for as long a yearly duration as possible.

Your Oneida Lake Association will keep moving forward in its efforts to protect our lake. To you - our membership - goes our deepest gratitude for your help in this endeavor.



John Guilford, Jr.
OLA President

From The Editors -

The ice has finally departed and spring's warmth has arrived on Oneida Lake. Our annual spring Bulletin features a profile about "Oneida Lake, A Changing Ecosystem" in which Cornell University biologists discuss our lake's transformation. In other columns, Richard Colesante and Mark Babenzien highlight this season's active program at Constantia's Oneida Fish

Cultural Station, Bob Ripberger relates memories of the lake's infamous storms, Tony Buffa muses about the nature of Oneida Lake fishing and also describes our April 23rd Annual Meeting at Nottingham High School.

This is the season of renewal and, to all of you, we wish a happy, productive, and safe spring.

-Dom Maio
-Jack Henke

ONEIDA LAKE ASSOCIATION INC, FOUNDED IN 1945

The Bulletin is published by the Oneida Lake Association, Inc., that its members may be informed regarding the activities of the Association. The 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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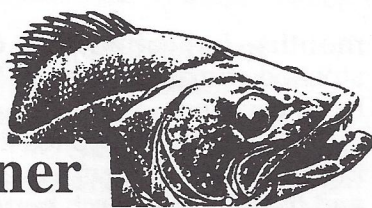
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The OLA Fishing Corner



Where Are the Fishermen?

by Capt. Tony Buffa

1996 was a different fishing season. Conditions in the summer and autumn were often ideal, but the number of fishing boats on Oneida Lake was the fewest I've seen in my 21 years as a charter captain.

What was wrong? Perhaps the walleyes weren't biting well or maybe the yellow perch catch didn't match the numbers from the 1980's? Historically, Oneida Lake has provided quality fishing for thousands of anglers. It's disappointing to think that a challenging angling year could turn off so many fishermen.

In sport fishing what counts are items such as the skill used to entice a strike or the intensity of a fish's battle. The experience of fishing, of just being a part of the environment, and of enjoying the Oneida Lake scene matters to the sport fisherman. In many regions, "catch and release" policies were instituted to preserve a valuable fishery. Even though fish aren't removed, participation in these angling sanctuaries remains high.

For the next few years, we may have to re-educate ourselves in terms of Oneida Lake expectations. With walleye recruitment at an all-time low, I don't expect a resurgence for at least 3 or 4 years and that's predicated on a good walleye year class for 1996. This statistic, of course, will not be determined until this spring.

How does the situation translate? It's called "sport fishing." There's still tremendous

pleasure in Oneida Lake angling. During the lake's recovery period, don't discount the smallmouth bass and yellow perch. Bass in the 17 to 19 inch category are common and this species often bites throughout the day. Keep fishing for walleyes. Your catches may be lower and you may have to use alternative techniques, but you will savor some good walleye trips even in an "off" year. The lake's perch population is rebounding. Once we judged perch catches by the number of five gallon pails we filled. In retrospect, I must say that this practice left us with a jaded sense of fishing achievement. Ten to twenty Oneida Lake "jack perch" should satisfy any angler's needs.

What about Oneida's other species? If it weren't for sheepshead, catfish, sunfish, and rock bass, I might never have developed a love for fishing. Catch and size statistics are but one small part of this great recreation. Perhaps we should consider the total picture, examine our consciences and ask, **"Are we sport fishermen or spoiled fishermen?"** ■

Oneida Lake Recollections

Stormy Memories

by Bob Ripberger

On a fine summer evening in June, 1945, two friends of mine and I rented a boat at Therre's on Lower South Bay. We loaded the wooden craft with our gear, mounted my 3.5 horsepower outboard on the transom, and headed for Frenchman's Island. The three of us enjoyed the spirit of

these rare fishing trips but, on this occasion, the fine catch of walleyes that we had dreamed about simply did not materialize. We were a stubborn trio, however, and we stayed on the water well past sundown.

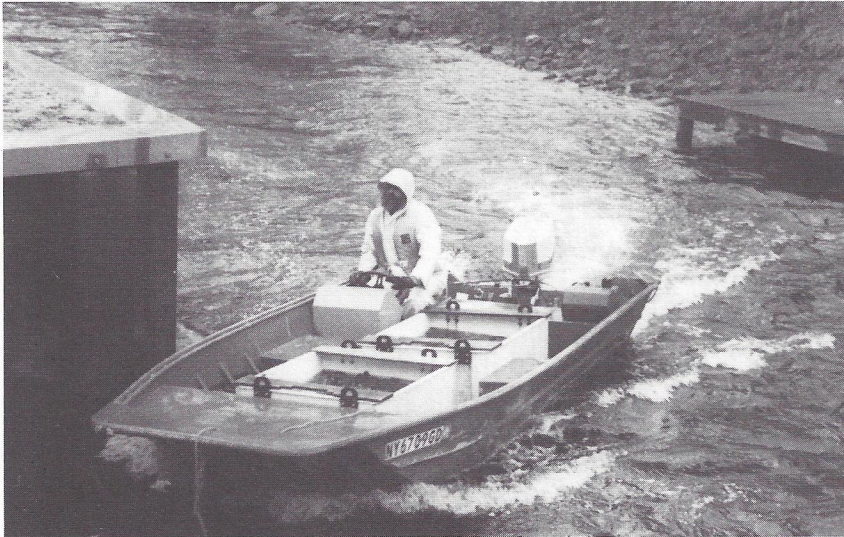
Suddenly, the wind came up and a summer storm rolled in, venting its fury upon us. I started the motor and headed for shore as the rain fell in torrents and the waves got bigger and bigger. Water lapped over the gunwales as I desperately tried to steer the boat through those pounding waves. My friends' reactions, though, made that ordeal easier to bear. My Italian-American comrade, seated in the middle, kept praying to the Almighty for our deliverance from Oneida's power while my Irish-American buddy was in the bow, singing an ancient Irish fighting song at the top of his lungs. I will never forget that night.

On another occasion we motored back to the marina just in time to avoid an early evening storm. As we stood on the dock, one of my friends surveyed the lake and observed, "That boat by the Island started back, but it seems to have stopped." Two men in the craft were waving and appeared to be yelling for help (we could not hear them because the wind howled so loudly). One of my friends jumped into our boat's bow and I commandeered our 3.5 Elto Handitwin motor. That little outboard never faltered and we performed a successful, although slow and very wet, rescue. With sadness, and reluctance, I gave up the Elto last year, but found a proper home for it - the Oneida Fish Cultural Station at Constantia. ■

Oneida Fish Cultural Station 1997 - 1998 Activities

by Richard Colesante & Mark Babenzien

With November's exception, this has been a great winter. Spring rapidly approaches and another walleye spawning run will soon be upon us. Walleye behavior provides a nice seasonal harbinger.



A fisheries' technician pilots a hatchery boat up Scriba Creek's spring torrent

This year's Oneida Hatchery program will involve walleye fry and fingerling production. One of our goals is to pursue water temperature and disease control more aggressively, two factors that have seriously impacted state wide walleye production during the last four seasons. We have some new ideas that may lead to improvements in these critical areas. We are planning for another year of rearing lake sturgeon fingerlings, assuming that breeder fish are available from the Saint Lawrence River. Ideally, this will yield a third year of successful Oneida Lake sturgeon stocking. Cornell University biologists, working out of their Shackelton Point research facility, caught five sturgeon last fall. These fish had grown about ten inches in only ten

months, indicating that our stocked sturgeons' health has been excellent.

This year's walleye ice fishing produced decent catches and the winter's perch harvest was above average. Hopefully, anglers left us some for April! If you haven't toured the new hatchery, plan a visit. If you've been here, a return trip might be in order. Every year pro-

Society, on Main Street in Oneida, has another set. To expedite your inquiries, the Bulletins' collections are accompanied by a topical index, which alphabetically lists subjects within the papers that are relative to Oneida Lake and cites the paper's editions in which articles on these topics appeared. ■

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.

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

Ice Fishing - 1997

by Jerry Randall

Last winter provided some interesting and productive ice fishing. As with open water angling, techniques and "hot spots" kept changing, but the overall picture was bright.

Early January perch fishing was better than average off Williams and Chapman Parks (north of Hubbard's Bar) and these areas continued to yield good catches well into February. In the latter month, perch migrated to

(Continued on Page 5)

Bulletin Archives in Area Libraries

Are you interested in examining past Oneida Lake Association Bulletins? Two sets of our newsletter, each including issues that date from 1951 to 1991, are now available for research. The Onondaga County Public Library, located in the Galleries Mall in downtown Syracuse, has the most complete collection and the Madison County Historical

(Continued from Page 4)

deeper waters near these parks and south of Cleveland and Jewell. The area east of Lewis Point, around Buoy 109, was also good then. Anglers landed many early winter perch on small buckeye minnows but, as the season progressed, small jigs tipped with mousie grubs inspired more strikes. Two jigs that worked particularly well were the "Rodent" and "Glo-In-The-Dark" tear drop models. Unlike past seasons, copper colored versions of these lures produced some fine catches. On good days, happy perch fishermen took home 15-25 nice fish and some limit results were noted.

Walleye fishing was slow at first, but gradually improved. Early season pike anglers landed some fine fish by using tip-ups baited with large buckeye minnows. In middle February, anglers who jigged gold Kastmasters in the 1/4 and 3/8 ounce weight classes began catching walleyes. These fishermen tipped their lures with perch eyes or minnow tails. Copper colored jigging lures also produced consistently. Generally speaking, walleye anglers had to work hard for their fish - quick limit catches were seldom taken. However, many larger walleyes in the 20 inch plus category were landed, as were many small pike that measured between 10 and 13 inches. As a bonus, walleye lovers often found that their offerings attracted large catfish, silver bass, and white perch. The areas around Buoy 113 and south of Cleveland were best for walleyes. ■

**Walleye Season
Opens May 3rd!**

In Memorium - Dr. Paul M. Cramer (1907 - 1996)

The Oneida Lake Association mourns the passing of Dr. Paul M. Cramer, a Syracuse physician who, for decades, lived a life that was dedicated to conservation's noblest principles. Paul Cramer was a past



President of the Association and a member of its Board of Directors and of its Advisory Board. He was President Emeritus of the American Wildlife Research Foundation, a past director of the Central New York Wildfowling, a life member of the National Rifle Association, a delegate to the New York State Conservation Council and a member of its Board of Directors, a moderator at the Adirondack Deer Forum, and a hunting safety instructor for over 40 years. He belonged to many other conservation organizations.

Dr. Paul Cramer possessed a passion for the Oneida Lake experience and spent countless hours there, fishing, hunting waterfowl, and mixing with the lake's people who were, in a very real sense, *his* people. His stories of the lake's history, interspersed with warm personal anecdotes, graced this publication's pages on many occasions. He could delight a visitor by relating his tales of lake adventures spent

in the company of his father, with former Syracuse newspaper photographer Art Cornelius, with his fellow OLA director and close friend Ed Heitzman and with his beloved Labrador Retriever "Black Jack." His work for the Oneida Lake Association was tireless and effective and his contributions to our organization were invaluable.

Dr. Edward James Heitzman (1925 - 1996)

We also note, with sadness, the death of Dr. Edward James Heitzman, a Syracuse physician who served on the Association's Board of Directors for fourteen years and, later, on the Advisory Board. Dr. Heitzman was a distinguished internist who was lauded for his treatment of "thousands of patients with a unique blend of compassion and humor." He engaged in private practice in Syracuse for twenty five years and later served as director of the emergency room and health services at St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center. At St. Joseph's he developed important changes in the quality of emergency room care. His medical career was highlighted by many accolades and he practiced his profession until his death.



Dr. Heitzman and his family were pioneer cottagers in the Bridgeport area and lived the "camp" days, when drinking water was taken from wells and simple electric pumps drew lake water for domestic uses. Dr. Heitzman was an old time bass fisherman, who used a veteran fly rod and reel combina-

(Continued on Page 7)

(Continued from Cover Story)

remain near that figure for the next few years. Our walleye stock density (numbers per square mile in the lake) is below the long term average, but is not expected to decline further any time soon. Yellow perch quantities have also been relatively low since 1994. However, catches of 1 and 2 year old fish in 1996 suggest that the population will catapult in 1997 and 1998 to around 2.5 million adults, the long-term average. Mark-recapture studies on walleyes and yellow perch, in which many of these fish are marked and the numbers caught in one year are compared to the marked total, will be conducted in 1997 to verify our predicted populations of these important species.

The freshwater drum (also known as sheepshead) is another historically rare fish that has gained prominence in Oneida Lake. A single successful hatch in 1987 propelled drum from a minor to a major component of the fish community. By 1995 and 1996 the drum population approached that of our walleyes. Because drum are long-lived (some to over 50 years) they are likely to remain abundant even in the absence of further reproductive success. Drum have become increasingly common both in our sampling nets and on the ends of anglers' lines. Fishermen should harvest more drum, as these fish compete with walleyes for available food.

Anglers' catches, as well as environmental factors, influence the state of Oneida Lake and its fishery. In 1997 Cornell University will be conducting a lake-wide creel survey. Two full time clerks will interview anglers, by boat and at launch sites, to assess their success,

effort, and the quantity of fish they harvest. To accomplish this, we need your cooperation. Any Oneida Lake angler is likely to be approached by a member of our staff, possibly more than once in a week or day. Please be patient and realize that their efforts are for the good of the lake. Interviews will be kept short. The last Oneida Lake creel survey was conducted in the late 1950's and fishermen, fishing techniques, and angling regulations have changed greatly.

Dramatic changes have occurred in the Oneida Lake colonial waterbird community. Historically, colonial waterbirds such as gulls, terns, and cormorants were only rare visitors to the lake. In the late 1920's these birds first nested on Wantry, Long, and Little Islands, off Constantia. In subsequent years, their populations have expanded and, as they all eat fish, these birds are an important addition to the lake's food web.

Common tern numbers have multiplied to about 400 pairs. Their population is greatly affected by predation on their chicks and eggs by gulls, owls, mammals, and shorebirds. The Department of Environmental Conservation classifies terns as being "threatened" and they are currently being considered for federal endangered species status. Terns are entertaining birds and their calls and acrobatic feeding dives are familiar to many lake users. Cornell Field Station personnel help maintain Oneida Lake's tern colony through habitat management, which uses artificial shelters to protect vulnerable chicks and exclude gulls from nesting areas.

Outings on the water would hardly seem complete

without the company of gulls. Development of Atlantic coastal islands in the 1950's moved nesting gulls inland and they located on Oneida Lake in the latter part of that decade. Three gull species now nest on Wantry and Long Island - Ring-billed, Herring, and Great Black-backed Gulls. These birds scavenge dead fish, but also prey on fish that swim near the water's surface, on some invertebrates, on young birds, and they often venture inland to parks, farms, and landfills to feast on food waste, worms, and rodents. Oneida Lake's gull colony includes approximately 2000 Ring-bills, 200 Herring Gulls, and 2 Great Black-backed Gulls. We plan to study these birds further.

Double-crested Cormorants are colonial waterbirds that draw the most public attention. Their inland move from coastal areas has occurred within the past 20 years. Oneida Lake acquired its first nesting cormorant pair in 1984 and there are now 247 pairs on Wantry and Long Islands. Cormorants are often viewed in a characteristic wing-spread posture, which they adopt after diving in order to dry their bodies' feathers and absorb the sun's heat. They sometimes fish near the surface, like terns and gulls, but they have the ability to dive to the lake's bottom, foraging there on burbot, bullhead, sculpin, and darters. Later this year, we will publish a detailed report that analyzes their diet. Preliminary findings indicate that cormorants consume yellow perch, sunfish, rock bass, emerald shiners, trout perch (a small fish living primarily in deeper water), gizzard shad, drum, white perch, white bass, and walleyes. ■

Oneida Lake History Quiz

by Jack Henke

Easy Inquiries

- 1- Oneida Lake's white bass and white perch are genetic relatives of what popular salt water game fish?
- 2- What was the name of the British general who brought his small army across Oneida Lake in 1777 en route to attacking Fort Stanwix?
- 3- Which Oneida Lake tributary contributes the greatest volume of water to the lake?

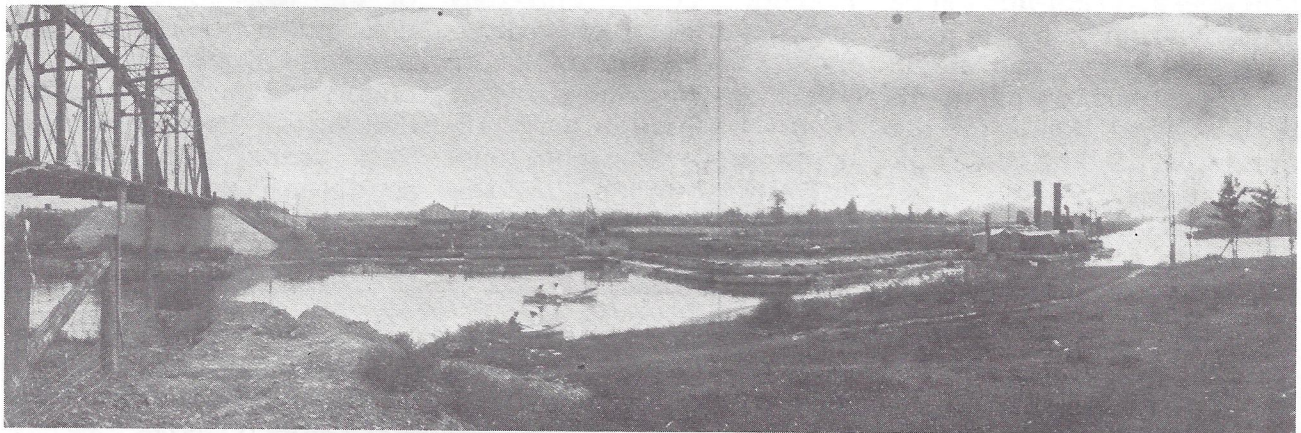
Moderately difficult questions

- 4- The small island by the Route 11 bridge in Brewerton was formerly called Indian Island and Baldwin's Isle. What is it called now?
- 5- Who built the original blockhouse that occupied the approximate site of the Brewerton Historical Society Museum?
- 6- After the American Revolution, the Rev. John Shepard received a land grant southeast of Brewerton and built a farm along the lake shore. This land was a part of a larger grant that was reserved for that

war's veterans. What was the larger grant called?
 7- What was the name of Lakeport's largest hotel around 1900?

The ultimate challenges

- 8- An aide to General George Washington is buried in a tiny cemetery just west of North Bay, along Route 49. Who was he?
- 9 - A point east of Bridgeport was named for a family who built sturdy lake boats. Who were they?
- 10 - What was the name of the largest steamboat that powered across Oneida in the early 20th century? *(Answers below)*



What a difference eighty years makes! This scene, taken from a post card created around 1917, shows the Barge Canal, east of Sylvan Beach. Fish Creek enters the canal in the photo's right and a dredger works to remove sand from the waterway's bed.

Answers
 1- the striped bass 2- General Barry St. Leger 3- Fish Creek 4- Denman's Island 5- Oliver Stevens 6- the Military Tract 7- the Larkin Hotel 8- George Marsden 9- the Dannon family 10- the Sagamore

(Continued from Page 5)

tion to practice his sport. A benevolent man, he delighted in taking friends bass fishing and made sure that everyone in the boat experienced the joys of catching the energetic smallmouth bass. Loyal to Association principles, he particularly savored passing on fishing traditions to his children and grandchildren. Every Heitzman child be-

came an Oneida Lake Association member.

E. James Heitzman, Dr. Heitzman's son, characterized his father and Paul Cramer with these words: "If there were ever two gentlemen who loved Oneida Lake, they were it."

We will miss them. ■

FREE MERCURY MOTOR!

Read the Bulletin for details! ▶



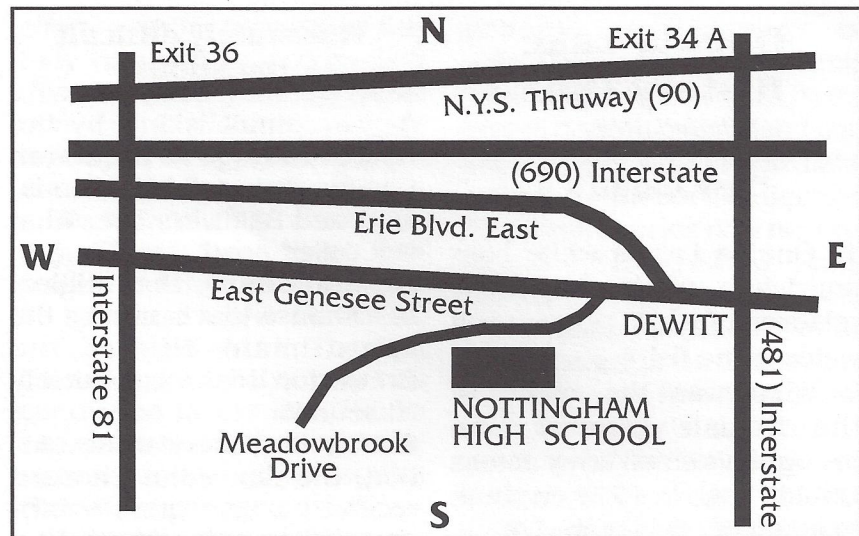
OLA Annual Meeting at Nottingham High School on April 23

by Tony Buffa

On Wednesday, April 23, the Oneida Lake Association will hold its 52nd annual meeting at the Nottingham High School auditorium. Doors will open at 6 P.M. Arrive early and enjoy our numerous exhibits!

While at the meeting you will be able to register for the annual Cicero Lions' Club Wall-eye Derby. OLA members who catch prize-winning fish in this contest will be awarded cash bonuses. OLA membership renewals and sign-ups will be available from 6:15. You don't have to be a member to attend our meeting, but only members will be eligible for the drawing of a 9.9 hp Force out-board motor.

A brief business meeting will begin promptly at 7:00.



Directions to Nottingham High School

This year's meeting's theme is, once again, "Kids - Take Them Fishing." Cornell University and Department of Environmental Conservation officials will update members on our fishery's status, the angler diary program, the zebra mussel situation, and on the Constantia Fish Cultural Station's agenda.

The Association will award its coveted "Conservationist of the Year" plaque to an outstanding local conservation advocate. Door prizes' distribution and the Force motor's drawing will close the meeting. This year's event will be special and we encourage you to join us for an evening of information and fun. ■

Oneida Lake - 1897

by Jack Henke

Our lake area's visitors, one century ago, would journey through a far different world than we know today. Getting to Oneida was a slow, often painstaking, process. Railroads provided the most expeditious method of travel. The Ontario and Western Railroad served the lake's eastern and northern shores. It connected with the New York Central at Oneida Castle and ran north from that depot to Fish Creek, Sylvan Beach, Jewell (West Vienna), Cleveland, Bernhard's Bay, and Constantia. This line carried more tourists than any other road. The Lehigh Valley Railroad joined the Central at Canastota and travelled north to Upper South Bay and Verona Beach. On the lake's western

extremity the Rome, Watertown, and Ogdensburg Railroad (which was controlled by the Central) served Brewerton's passenger traffic.

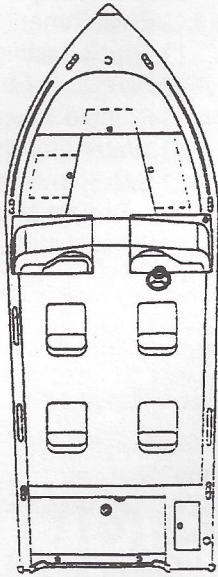
South shore communities like Bridgeport and Lakeport, both of which lacked a rail line, depended in part on the area's turnpikes and country roads for outside connections. These highways were seasonal affairs, dusty and grimy during summer's hot spells and muddied often beyond passage during spring and fall rains. Resilient residents, however, learned to adapt. Produce, logs, and passengers traveled from the south shore via steamboat to rail connections along the lake. Sleighing was an effective means of winter transportation and, when safe ice formed, the lake itself became a sleighers' course.

Steamboats were grand vessels that plied Oneida's waters throughout the navigation season. Larger boats like the *Manhattan* could carry in excess of 200 passengers. Some hotels operated their private steamboats. Sylvan Beach's Forest Home, for example, owned the *Fred B. Randall*. Smaller vessels also cruised Oneida and, while most carried cargo, passenger traffic provided additional income. In 1897, there were 35 licensed steamboats that frequented Oneida's ports. This was a major transportation industry for that era. ■

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the sailing
season is
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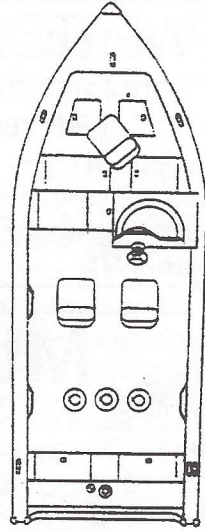
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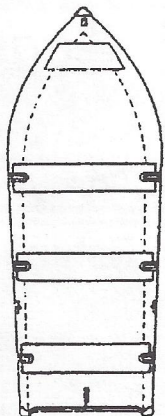
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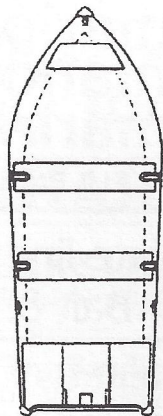


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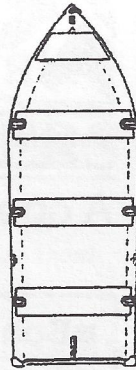
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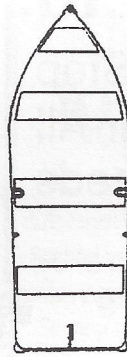
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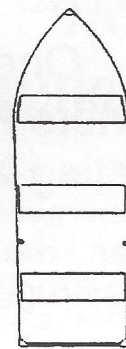
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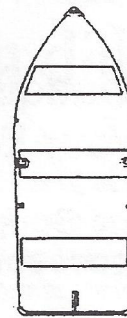
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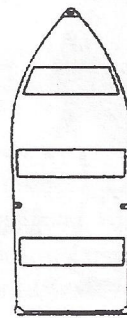
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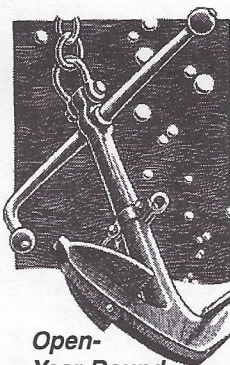
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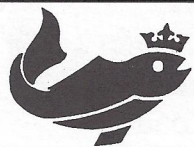
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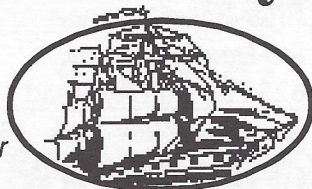
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