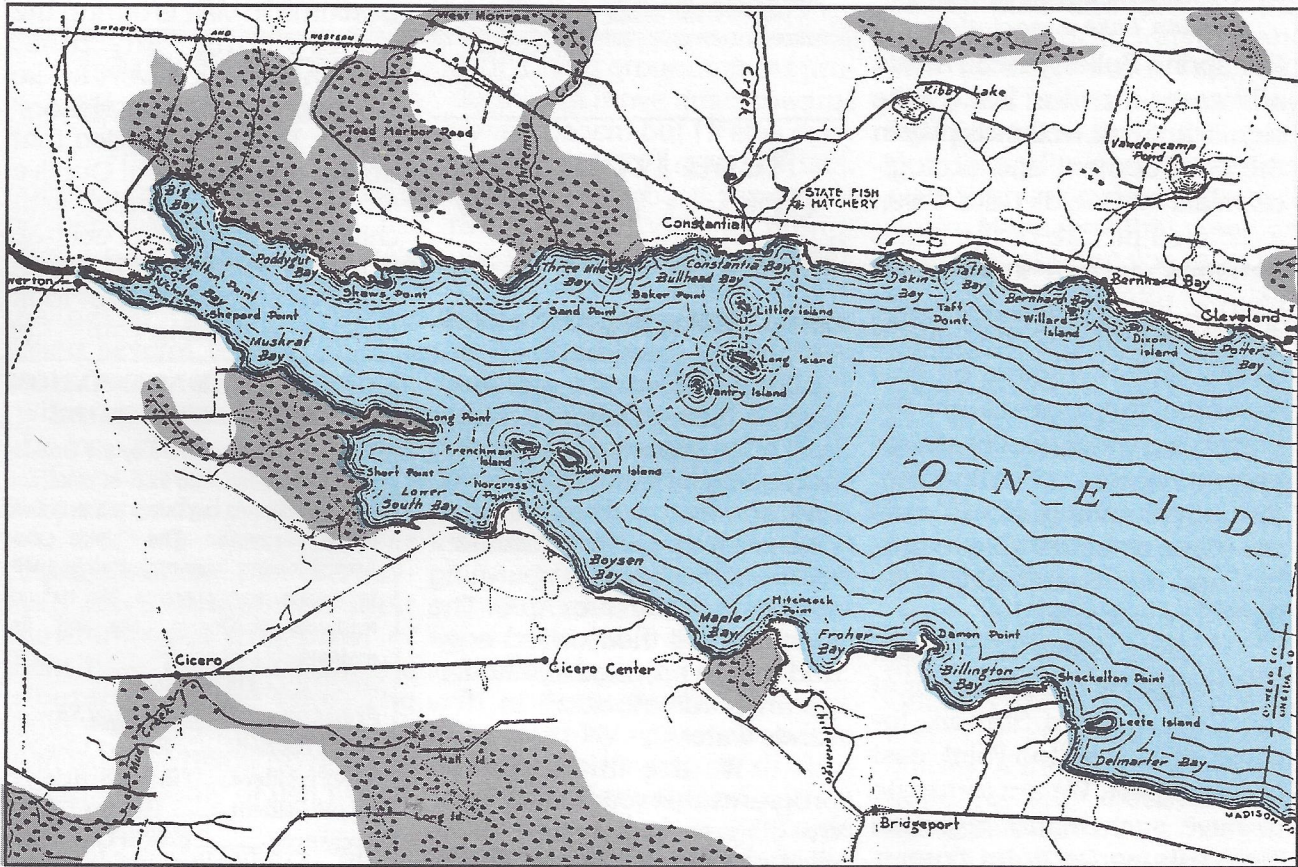


The Oneida Lake Bulletin

SPRING / SUMMER 1998



This map, dating from around 1930, was published in the Roosevelt Wildlife Annals series. Oneida Lake's extensive wetlands are indicated, east of Big Bay, and near Toad Harbor, Three Mile Bay, and Muskrat Bay. Note how the entire west side of Lower South Bay and the Long Point area, both highly prone to flooding today, were wetlands then.

Oneida Lake's Vital Wetlands

by Rebecca Schneider
Department of Natural Resources
Cornell University, Ithaca

and Edward L. Mills
Cornell Biological Field Station
Shackelton Point, Bridgeport

The diverse and abundant wetlands distributed around Oneida Lake are a critical component of the lake and its watershed. A mosaic of small patches of mixed hemlock and hardwood swamps characterizes wetlands in the watershed's northern half. The watershed's southern portion and the countryside adjacent to Oneida Lake are dominated by several extensive wetlands. Cicero Swamp is the largest of these and has deep, organic peat subsoils, deposited some 12,000 years ago as part of the postglacial Lake Iroquois. The Cicero Swamp includes a diversity of wetland types, from highbush blueberry bogs to red maple swamp forests, and a cattail-purple loosestrife marsh.

These wetlands are important wildlife habitats. Ducks and other waterfowl feed on aquatic insects in the shallow waters. The standing dead trees (what biologists call "snags") provide the required nesting locations for ospreys, wood ducks, and even an extensive heron colony in the Three Mile Bay State Game Management Area. Frogs, turtles, and snakes are a particularly rich animal component of the wetlands' biomes and the Cicero Swamp is unique for harboring one of

(Continued on page 5)

President's Report

Oneida Lake Bulletin

Spring/Summer 1998

To the members of the
Oneida Lake Association:

Our spring Bulletin's lead article addresses a critical issue - the significant role wetlands play in the development and ecological health of Oneida Lake. Given a detailed picture of the lake's wetlands' current impact and historic importance, we Association members can gain a better understanding of how essential these areas are for preserving water quality and for preventing destructive flooding. An understanding of wetlands will make us better able to protect and improve Oneida Lake for future generations.

Much of this information is provided by the biologists at the Cornell Field Station, located on Shackelton Point, east of Bridgeport. We are fortunate to have such highly regarded biologists as Dr. John Forney, Dr. Edward Mills, and Dr. Lars Rudstam to furnish us with a wealth of scientific data that facilitates our understanding of Oneida Lake's dynamics. Their views of the lake's ecology, enhanced by the insights of author-historian Jack Henke, clearly demonstrate that the Oneida Lake wetlands' environment must be preserved.

Our Bulletin also details this spring's events at Constantia's Oneida Lake Fish Cultural Station, discusses Cornell University's Creel Survey research program, offers some expert early season walleye angling tips, and highlights our annual meeting at Nottingham High School on April 29. I hope to see, and talk with, all of you at this event.

Until then - let's keep working for our lake's betterment. ■

Kurt Snyder
OLA President

News From the Oneida Hatchery

by Richard Colesante and
Mark Babenzien

This spring's ice-out will herald the beginning of our facility's sixth year of operation. Our El Nino-influenced winter has been unusual and spring may see a limited water run-off and somewhat drier weather. One point that we are confident about is that walleye spawning will occur in March or April. The hatchery will then collect eggs and milt to produce fry and fingerlings for stocking in New York's waters.

We are initiating two programs this year to help control diseases that affect the survival of walleyes in our fingerling program. We expect to run pilot tests, using water chillers, to keep temperatures for rearing walleyes within acceptable levels. This will also enable our recirculation systems to maintain disease-free water. We are continually trying to improve the efficiency and predictability of our walleye culture program. Last year, we collected about 290 million eggs and, from these, stocked 180 million fry and 160 thousand fingerling walleyes. Oneida Lake received 140 million fry last May.

We are currently holding one thousand sturgeon from last year. These fish are about six inches long and will be nurtured for most of the summer before being stocked in Oneida Lake. We expect to receive a fresh batch of sturgeon eggs in June.

Our hatchery is open to the public, seven days a week, from April 1 through September 30. Our hours last from 8 A.M. until 3:30 P.M. The best time to visit is during the walleye "run." Any time, though, can be a worthwhile stopover. We have a visitors' center, featuring a video that details our operation. Our live fish tanks are popular with children and adults. Feel free to call, at 315-623-7311, with your questions. We look forward to hosting you! ■

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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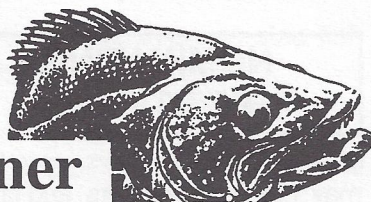
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The OLA Fishing Corner



Early Season Walleye Tips!

The annual "walleye opener" on Oneida Lake is a popular event, but not all anglers are familiar with the lake's fishing methodology or know the better "pike" spots. We asked several veteran Oneida Lake fishermen the question, "What techniques would you use for early season walleyes and where would you fish?" They responded as follows:

Ray Brown, Charter Captain: I hope that the walleyes have completed their spawning and that most of them have returned from the tributaries to the lake. The water's temperature will more than likely be below 50 degrees and the majority of fish will be in the shallows.

I will start in front of the Verona Beach State Park and Oneida Creek, probably in about 10 feet of water. I'll be keeping a sharp eye on my fish finder. I'll be jigging slowly - a very deliberate rod lift of 12 inches - the fish won't be aggressive in the cool water. I've had great luck with the "sand pike" jig pattern. Other patterns in black, brown, yellow and white also work well. I prefer to use jigs that have a trailer hook that takes care of short strikes.

I'll keep my boat drifting and drift out to about 20 feet of water. I'll work the area until I find walleyes and then concentrate at that depth. Drift speed is critical. Use drift bags to slow your speed. I also cast my jig in front of the drift. This gives you better control of the jig and helps maintain contact with the bottom. If the State

Park fishing grounds aren't producing, I'll move down towards Sylvan Beach, but I'll stay away from large groups of boats. Another spot that I may try is the pancake bottom "hump" due southeast of Buoy 109. The water's shallower here than in the surrounding area. If all else fails, I'll begin trolling using downriggers and small stick baits. In past years, I've had great success using Storm Jr. Thundersticks in blue/silver and black/silver. My trolling speed, this time of the year is about 1.2 to 1.5 miles per hour, much slower than normal. Good luck and have a safe and enjoyable opening day.

Tony Buffa, Charter Captain: My approach will be basic. I will use a drifted nightcrawler, rigged with a three-way swivel, a #4 Eagle Claw gold plated hook, and the appropriate weight to carry it just above the bottom. Anglers should locate the stream mouths where walleyes spawn and simply fish the water that's adjacent to those inlets. If you don't find fish in the shallow water, venture out into deeper areas, perhaps in the 25 to 35 foot zone.

If you like jigging, use combinations of black, brown, purple, white, green, and yellow to lure walleyes to your offering. Remember that the water will still be quite cold, so use a slow, deliberate stroke for your presentation. These fish will be exhausted from their spawning effort and, metabolically speaking, they will be sluggish. Stinger hooks do increase the catch ratio under these circumstances. I use stingers on all my jigs.

An alternative to the bucktail jig is the Heddon Sonar, model #431. This metal lure has three holes at its top. Connect a #12 swivel to the center hole and present the lure in a vertical jigging fashion. In deep water (over 20 feet), this lure is best used by letting it fall to the bottom and then lifting it a good 4 to 5 feet and then allowing it to fall again. Make sure that your line goes slack before you raise the lure off the bottom. This is a sign that the lure is on bottom and the lure is most effectively fished this way. You'll feel the fish when you raise the lure. Sonars can also be worked in the shallower waters using the same techniques as bucktail jigging. These lures are veritable "walleye killers."

Whatever you choose for an opening day strategy, remember one paramount Oneida Lake tip - safety comes first. The lake can get rough quickly. If the weather is questionable, stay close to your home port. Make sure that your boat is large enough to handle Oneida's waves and that you have all the required safety equipment on board. And "good luck - great fishing" to all of you!

Gerry Randall, Owner, Marion Manor Marina: Early season walleye fishing on Oneida Lake presents the fisherman with many options regarding method and area. One of my favorite approaches is drifting a "Dixie Spinner," baited with a worm or a leech. One area that produces well early in season stretches from Oneida Creek on the south to the Verona Beach State Park on the north. Ideally, I look for a brisk west wind, which produces a chop of one to three feet. If these conditions exist, I usually start drifting in about 24 feet of water and drift in to around 7

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Early Season Walleye Tips
feet. Generally, I find that the best action during this time of year occurs in water that's between 12 and 16 feet deep, but this can vary with weather conditions.

My favorite colors are chartreuse and orange. Cloud cover, water clarity, and time of day, however, may dictate the use of other colors. When there is a light breeze, "Colorado" style spinners seem to work best, while "Willow" blade spinners work very well during high wind conditions.

It's important to hook the worm or leech so that it presents a straight, natural drift, with no spinning action on the bait itself. Most commercial worm harnesses come with two hooks run in tandem. This allows the fisherman to hook the worm once at the head and a second time near the tail. I prefer to cut off these rigs' trail hook and just hook the worm at the head. This method will result in the loss of some fish due to short hits, but I believe that it also produces more strikes. The bait has a streamlined appearance and this attracts walleyes.

Getting the bait to the fish is another important factor to consider. Although there are several excellent ways to get your rig to the bottom, such as the use of bottom bouncers, drift rods, and drop sinkers off three way swivels, my favorite method involves an egg sinker rigged on the line above the swivel. This technique requires more adjustment for depth, but it also allows a better feel of the fish after the initial bite. If you haven't tried egg sinkers, give them a chance and I know that you'll be pleased with the results. ■

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, must 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 (3) three 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.

The 1998 Nominated Directors are: Dominick P. Maio, Parker J. Stone, Marshall O. Naumann, Steve Rogers and Joseph Mastriano.

Oneida Lake Creel Survey, 1997-1998

*by Tony VanDeValk
Cornell Biological Field Station*

The Oneida Lake Creel Survey lasted from May 3, 1997 until March 15, 1998. Since, at this writing, we are collecting data, we only have preliminary results from the "open water" portion of the survey. The 1997 open water season lasted until late December. Creel clerks conducted 1,939 interviews during 83 days on the lake, staggered from May through November. Surveys at boat launches yielded 563 interviews from May through December. We used the latter surveys on days when the lake was too rough for our boats.

The total effort for the 1997 open water season was estimated at 327,400 angler hours. Effort was low in May, peaked in June, and then decreased each month through December. May has traditionally been a popular month for walleye fishing, but poor weather conditions that endured for most of the month probably discouraged many fishermen.

The average catch rate for anglers that targeted walleyes in 1997 was 0.21 fish per hour. Catch rates were highest from May through July and then dropped steadily, remaining low through the fall. In previous years, the walleye catch rate increased in autumn. This year, Field Station surveys showed that prey (bait fish) availability peaked in August and remained high through September. Earlier studies by John Forney indicated that year to year angler success was not only determined by the size of the walleye population, but also by the number of prey fish present during that particular year. If prey fish are abundant, walleyes are less hungry and anglers must compete with the prey for the walleyes' attention. Last summer's dramatic drop in walleye catches confirms this point.

The interviews with walleye anglers showed a lag effect of about one month. Their effort was still high in August, but declined rapidly after a few weeks of poor walleye fishing. Around 68,000 walleyes were caught and 38,800 were harvested (15% of the lake's total population) during the open water season. Most successful trips occurred during June and July.

Anglers caught 26,500 smallmouth bass and har-

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vested 7,500. Those who targeted smallmouths averaged 0.33 fish per hour. Of these fish, 74% were 12 inches or longer. Angling success for these fish was fairly consistent throughout the summer. The catch rate increased, however, to 0.76 fish per hour by October.



Cornell biologists Tony De Valk and Tom Brooking clear a carp from one of their gill nets, used as a part of the fish census program.

Yellow perch fishing also peaked later in the year. Anglers caught 122,000 perch throughout the season and harvested 72,500. Most were landed from mid-August through December. Anglers targeting perch averaged 2.23 fish per hour for the year. Perch fishing was slow in May and June, but increased steadily to over 5 fish per hour by December.

With no substantial change in the population, we expect walleye fishing for 1998 to be about the same quality. Smallmouth bass fishing will continue to be excellent and perch angling will improve, in

terms of the average size fish caught.

Have a great year and enjoy your lake. It's a fine resource. ■

(Continued from Cover Story)

Oneida Lake's Vital Wetlands

the last remaining populations of the native pygmy rattlesnake. Oneida Lake's rich fish population is particularly dependent on the lake's inshore aquatic plant beds and its adjacent swamp forests for spawning and nursery areas. Juvenile fish can hide from predators in the dense thickets of plant stems and also find their essential aquatic insect food amidst this vegetation.

Oneida Lake's wetlands also exert a tremendous influence on the quantity and quality of water that flows from the watershed into the lake. Groundwater moves below the surface, from upland areas, carrying septic leachates, fertilizers, pesticides, and industrial wastes. Healthy lake-bordering wetlands intercept this groundwater before it reaches Oneida and its tributary streams. The dense complex of wetland plant roots, organic matter in the soil, and useful micro-organisms filters out many of the contaminants.

The extensive wetlands also provide a strong storage system for times when excessive rainfall floods streams and raises the lake's water level. Thick layers of soil litter (such as leaves) and organic matter absorb the rainwater like a sponge. Plant stems and foliage retard flowing water, reducing the flooding downstream. The dense network of roots,

which bind the soil along stream banks and the lake's shore, minimizes erosion.

Human activities have impacted wetlands and wildlife within Oneida Lake's watershed. The Erie-Barge Canal, built around 1916, engendered dramatic changes in the timing and magnitude of lake level changes. More recently, manipulations of water levels during spring have been used to reduce property damage along the shore. Prior to the canal's construction, lake levels sometimes fluctuated over seven feet each year, but this has been considerably lessened. Inadvertently, canal lake-level management also eliminated spring flooding in some wetlands that were important fish spawning areas. These changes have contributed to a severe reduction in Oneida's chain pickerel and northern pike populations. In addition, wetlands are now less able to filter and store water. Many have been drained for agriculture and a considerable amount of low-lying areas along the lake have been filled for residential development.

Oneida Lake's shoreline aquatic vegetation has also changed dramatically. Water level manipulation is a standard practice for removal of aquatic plants and it has been effective in Oneida Lake. The winter's freezing of lake and wetland bottom sediments, combined with spring's ice scouring, effectively destroys pools of seeds and roots that are essential to maintain wetland environments. Photographs and written records from the early 1900's document the existence of dense stands of emergent vegetation along much of Oneida's shore. More than forty shoreline and aquatic

(Continued on Page 6)



This view of Dunham's Island, taken from Frenchman's Island in 1928, shows the emergent vegetation that was once common around the lake's periphery.

(Continued from page 5)

Oneida Lake's Vital Wetlands

plant species were present around Sylvan Beach in 1916. Today, one would be hard-pressed to find half that number. In the lake's bays, bulrush and water willows flourished 300 to 900 feet from land. By 1967, the stands of these plants were sparse and only remnants of the vast beds exist today (primarily near Frenchman's and Dunham's Islands).

Currently, exotic plant species are invading and displacing native wetland vegetation, posing yet another threat to these vital areas. Purple loosestrife, the most visible invader, creates an attractive background in autumn, but its dense vegetation has a low value for wildlife. Although less obvious, giant reed grass and Japanese knotweed are also displacing the more valuable, native wetland plants. These exotic newcomers have highly competitive root systems and very successful seed dispersal mechanisms. These plants' impact on wetland communities' vitality is yet to be determined,

Page 6

but their presence is cause for alarm.

Protecting wetlands must be a long-term management goal for the Oneida Lake watershed. The lake is the vital, productive heart of this system. Its biological, economic, and aesthetic values cannot be understated and the wetlands that surround it are the key to its continued health. Wetland losses during this century have reduced Oneida's watershed's storage and filtering potential and its usefulness for fish and other wildlife. The remaining wetlands must be managed with extreme caution and care.

Some efforts are underway. Through the Federal Government's Wetlands Protection Program, in cooperation with the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Great Swamp Conservancy, 4000 to 6000 acres of wetlands south of Oneida Lake will be set aside and preserved. This local effort has the highest private owner participation rate in the entire United States' Wetlands Protection Program. Elsewhere, management must continue to address sev-

eral key issues. The benefits of new commercial and residential development have to be weighed against the environmental depredations brought on by further wetland losses. Lake-level management needs to be reevaluated and focused on the fact that current water levels must be maintained to preserve the Oneida Lake environment. The quantity and quality of groundwater must be carefully guarded. Finally, the spread of invasive species has to be evaluated and, where possible, limited.

Simply put, it is time to stop the filling, ban the draining, keep the lake's level at the status quo, preserve existing wetlands, and restore as many others as possible. With careful management, Oneida Lake and its wetlands will continue to be a rich and productive ecosystem. ■

Oneida Lake History Quiz

by Jack Henke

Easy Items

- 1 - How many trees grew on Wantray Island in 1900?
- 2 - What was Sylvan Beach's "Carnival Park" called in the latter 20th century?
- 3 - Which major Oneida Lake tributary was named for a prominent 19th century landowner?

Moderately Difficult Questions

- 4 - Who donated the land on which Sylvan Beach's Union Chapel is built?
- 5 - What building in Cleveland was designed by the famous architect Richard Upjohn?
- 6 - What was the former name given to the tip of Long Point?

(Continued on Page 7)

Oneida Lake Bulletin

(Continued from Page 6)

Oneida Lake History Quiz

Extremely Puzzling Inquiries

7 - The Native American title "Odeaba" referred to which Oneida Lake bay?

8 - Name the physician who once operated a sanitarium at Sylvan Beach.

9 - What famous New Yorker built a home, called "Kempwyk," just west of Cleveland in the 1790's?

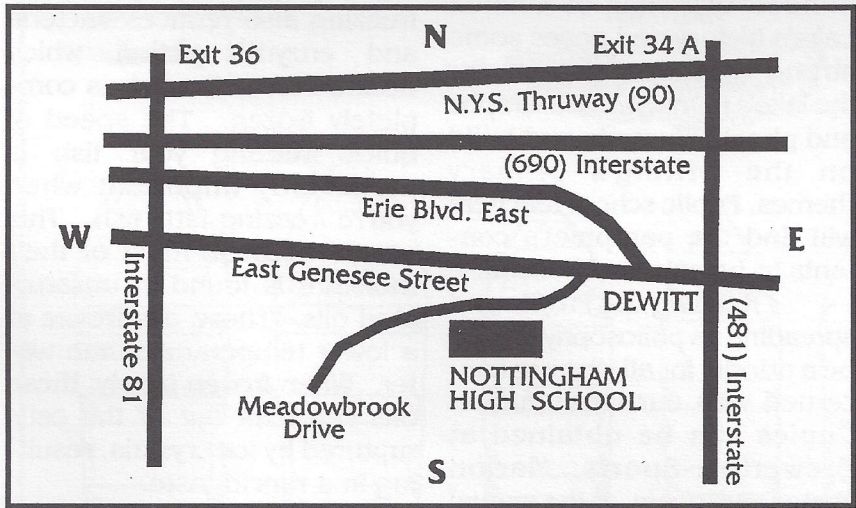
10 - What Constantia native served in the United States House of Representatives from 1874 until 1878?

Answers

- 1-one
- 2-the "Midway"
- 3-Scriba Creek
- 4-James D. Spencer
- 5-St. James Episcopal Church
- 6-Peck's Point
- 7-Toad Harbor
- 8-Dr. Martin Cavana
- 9-Francis Adrian Van Der Kemp
- 10-James H. Baker

**Anglers...
WALLEYE SEASON
Opens Saturday,
May 2nd**

OLA Annual Meeting at Nottingham High School on Wednesday, April 29



Directions to Nottingham High School

by Tony Buffa

On Wednesday, April 29, the OLA will hold its 53rd annual meeting at the Nottingham High School auditorium. Doors will open at 6 P.M. Arrive early and enjoy our numerous exhibits.

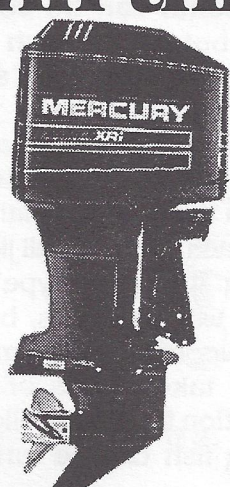
While at the meeting, you will be able to register for the annual Cicero Lions Club Walleye Derby that, for the seventh time, will include bonus

prizes for winners who are also OLA members. Association membership renewals will be available starting at 6:15. You don't have to be a member to attend our meeting, but only members will be eligible for the drawing of the 9.9hp Force outboard motor.

This year's meeting will begin at 7:00 with a brief business session. Representatives

from the DEC and Cornell University will update us on the status of our fishery, the angler diary program, zebra mussels, and the fish cultural station at Constantia.

Win this



MERCURY 9.9 HP MOTOR

The Association will award its prestigious "Conservationist of the Year" plaque to an outstanding environmental advocate. The meeting will close with the outboard motor drawing and distribution of door prizes.

We encourage you to join us for an evening of family fun and valuable information.

Power
Boaters
and Jet
Skiers -
Open
Water Is
Here!

Spring Panfishing At Its Peak

It's surprising how few people take advantage or even know about the superb panfishing that occurs in Oneida Lake during April. Sure, this month can be cold and rainy, but the panfish action now is nothing short of superb.

During April, yellow perch make their annual spawning migration inshore and up the Barge Canal at Sylvan Beach. Using small jigs, ice-fishing "teardrop type" lures baited with maggots, buckeye minnows, and dug worms, fishermen take scores of perch. The action for these delightfully tasting fish can be furious at times.

Every marina on Oneida Lake will receive a panfish influx during April. Black crappies, pumpkinseed sunfish, and bluegills find that the warmer, shallow marina waters attract minnows and are good feeding spots. Areas under marina docks are particularly productive. Remember, marinas are privately owned and you *must* get permission before fishing.

Bullheads and white perch become extremely active in April. Tributary streams such as Oneida, Canaseraga, and Chittenango Creeks and the inshore waters near them, produce fine catches. Night fishing in the lakes' many bays is also a good bet, especially after a strong wind pounds the bays' shores during the day. Channel catfish, suckers, and burbot are often caught while bullhead fishing. Night crawlers, gobs of dug worms, and even leeches work well for these fish. Dug worms are best for white perch. ■

Oneida Lake Profile Coming Soon!

The most recent update of the *Oneida Lake Profile* is now at the printers and will be available at our annual meeting in April. The publication was prepared by the staff at Cornell University's Shackelton Point Field Station and by the Oneida Lake Association.

In addition to explaining Oneida's biological workings, this edition of the *Profile*, details and analyzes the changes that have occurred in the lake's ecosystem during the 1990's. Walleyed pike population fluctuations, the zebra mussel invasion, the effects of increased water clarity, and a host of other topics are explored in the *Profile*. Written in laymen's terms, the pamphlet includes an expanded overview of Oneida Lake's history and poses some strong recommendations for the lake's management. Graphs and photos illustrate and build on the writing's primary themes. Public school teachers will find the pamphlet's contents to be extremely useful.

Reading the *Profile* and spreading its philosophy should be a priority for all who are concerned with our lake's future. Copies can be obtained at Brewerton Sports, Marion Manor and, again, at the annual meeting. ■

SAFETY... An Often Neglected Boating Topic

If there's one topic fishing and recreational boaters generally don't talk about, it's safety.

How many "war stories" have you shared with your friends about *the times* that you pushed the odds during outrageous thunderstorms or

five foot swells while fishing and boating on Oneida Lake?

About 50% of all water-related tragedies occur while using a boat. Make this year's boating excursions on the NYS waterways both enjoyable and exciting.

We have a new season just around the corner, so you have plenty of time to prepare and purchase the necessary equipment to make you and your passengers safe as well as compliant with U.S. Coast Guard rules. ■

Freezing Your Catch

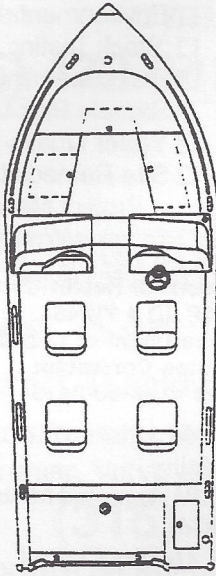
Quick freezing your catch minimizes the size of internal ice crystals that are formed when you freeze your fish. Big ice crystals tend to puncture the cell walls, allowing the juices to escape. Quick freezing also reduces bacteria and enzyme action which occurs before the fish is completely frozen. The speed of quick freezing your fish is particularly important when you're freezing fatty fish. This occurs because most of their moisture is found in unsaturated oils. These oils freeze at a lower temperature than water. When frozen slowly, these oils can leak out of the cells ruptured by ice crystals, resulting in a rancid taste.

You should never freeze more than two pounds of fish per cubic foot of freezer space at one time. Place the unfrozen fish packets on the freezer coils in the coldest part of the freezer. This speeds up the quick freezing process. Leave as much air around the packets as possible.

Once your fish is frozen, stack the packets tightly together. This helps decrease the operating cost of your freezer, as well as allowing you more space for additional food. ■

Your Environmental Voice for Over Five Decades

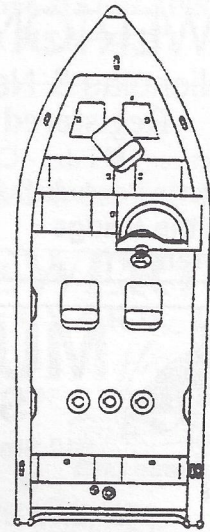
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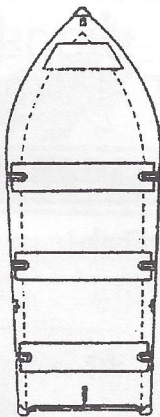
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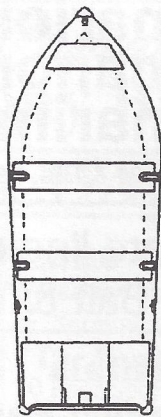


Tournament
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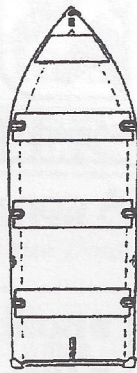
Oneida Lake Association
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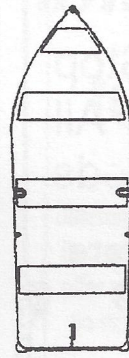
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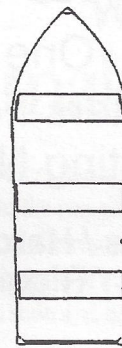
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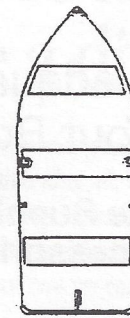
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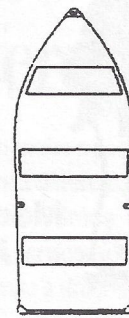
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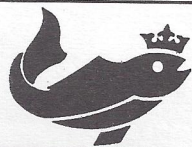
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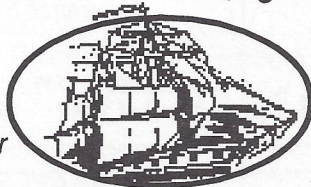
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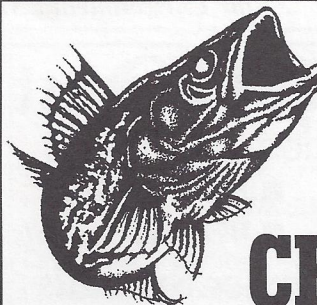
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