

Activity on the Old Northport Mill Pond

By Dick Hanson

For The Northport Area Heritage Association

The Northport Mill Pond was built in the 1870s by William Voice. He also built the first sawmill; the mills changed ownership a few times. Sawmills had a hard life - one was burnt to the ground. The sawmills used the water from the pond; it was a really bad event when the dam broke thru creating the mess shown.

Throughout the 1870s and 1890s, the different mill owners produced diverse products. Lumber was immediately needed in the early days of Northport. It's obvious that one of the main uses was to supply cordwood, which was the main fuel for the steamers.

After the age of sawmills and steamers, the Mill Pond took on a different use. . .

The Northport Mill Pond was a community gathering place in the wintertime. Kids and adults all used to gather to do ice-skating, which included figure skating, playing tag and general skating. Some of these events, such as figure skating, had background music (perhaps the Skater's Waltz usually brought by Guyles Dame - our local photographer and musician), which gave a sense of prepared performance.

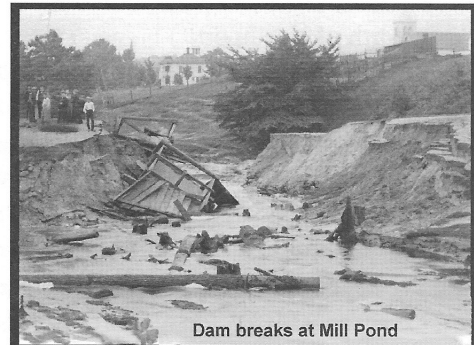
I was eyewitness to most of these events as well as being a part of it all. As one would expect during ice-skating, there were falls, cuts and other sources for black and blue bruises. There were occasions where some kids would go to the extreme north end of the pond where the Northport Creek fed the pond. There was more moving water and consequently, the ice was thin. This led to some falling through the ice. The pond was shallow at this end so that any of the people that fell through would find the water only up to their knees but very cold. It was obviously dangerous but people were encouraged to stay out of the north end of the pond; in fact, signs were posted "Dangerous!! Beware Of Thin Ice! - Enter At Your Own Risk!!" This all happened during my young days - in the 1930s and 40s. During those years, people just didn't seem to be thinking about liability. Today in 2016, you would never see such events on the pond because of liability insurance burdens. It was probably the middle of the 20th Century that these fun events came to an end

As I look back at these times, they were simple times compared to today. In our present time, fun events were thrown out the window because of the possibility of pending lawsuits.

Today, the one thing that does remain is the yearly trout fishing derby held mainly for the young kids. This is a great event and is truly fun for all the kids as they try their hand at catching "The Big One!"



Northport Mill Pond Construction



Dam breaks at Mill Pond



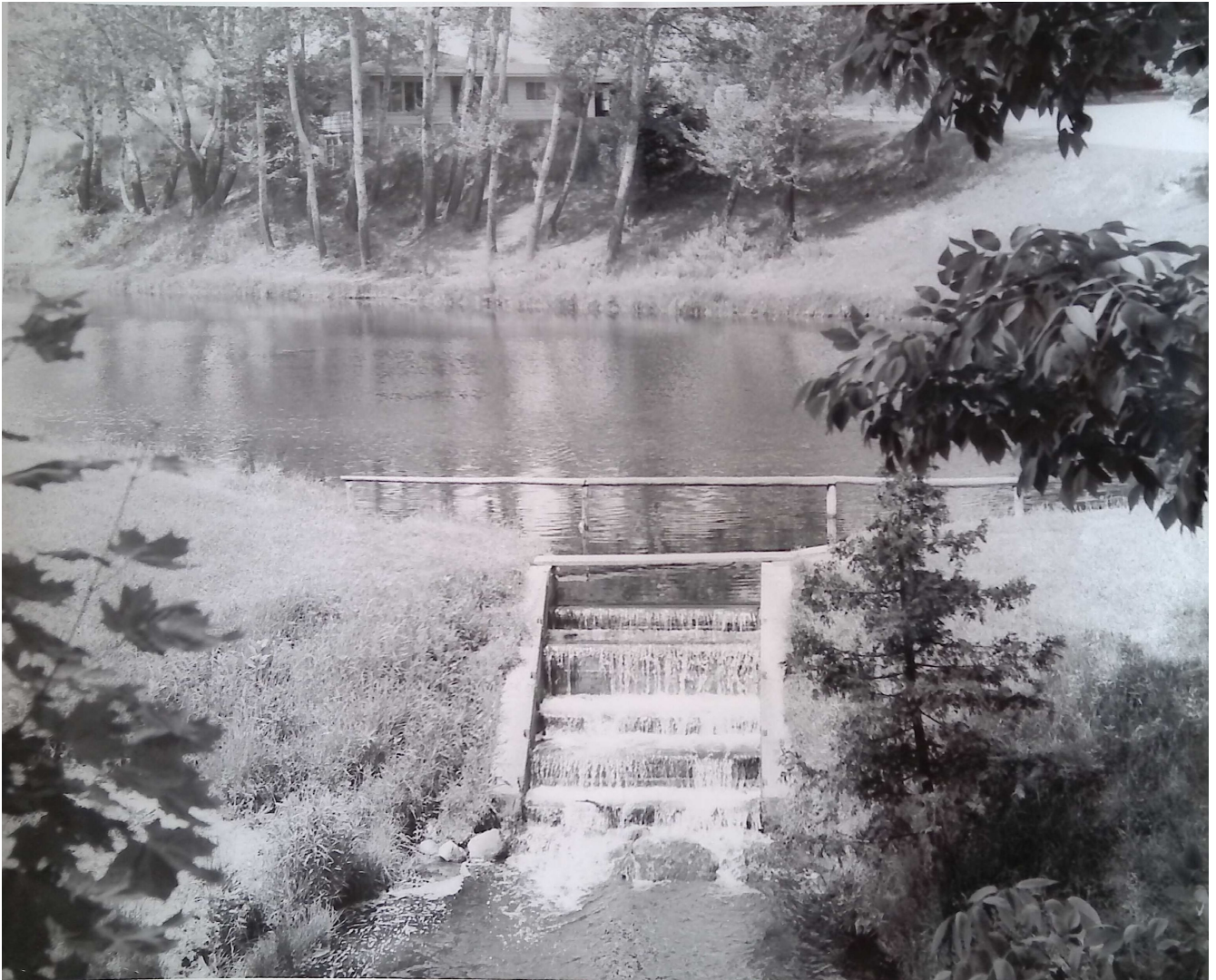
Wreckage flows to Northport Bay



Skating on the pond



The creation of the wall which would eventually become part of the bridge, c. late 1800s.



The Mill Pond as it looked in the 1950s.





Spectating the Ice Follies and ice skating on Mill Pond, 1959.



Perched on the back of the truck looking towards the camera is Cyril Hallet. In the background, Northport's 3rd Street.





Clearing the ice with a snow plow, 1959.



Setting up for a boys' ice skating race.





One spectator even brought a horse!



Boys' ice skating race



Flagpole at Mill Pond



Skating for the Ice Follies



Spectating; note the snow blower



Filming the Ice Follies. Cameraman's identity unrecorded.



Presenting the American flag.



If you know the two in the foreground, feel free to reach out and let us know!