

The Oneida Lake Bulletin

SPRING EDITION 1995

Special OLA 50th Year Anniversary!

Oneida Lake - Its Biological
Past and a Vision into the Future

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OLA Annual Meeting

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President's Report

Oneida Lake Bulletin
Spring 1995

This report represents my last opportunity to address you directly as president of your Oneida Lake Association. I do so with both great satisfaction and appreciation.

I have found great satisfaction in the fact that being the OLA president has afforded me the opportunity to work directly with people who are committed as I am to protection of this gem of nature. The concerns and efforts demonstrated by members of the general public, the strong bipartisan support afforded to OLA goals and objectives by political leaders at the local, and state levels, the cooperation shown by state governmental agencies towards resolving issues raised by the OLA, and the sincere dedication of the OLA Directors towards protecting and improving lake resources have all been a source of great personal satisfaction.

Seeing so many people from diverse professional, political and personal backgrounds dedicated to the common cause of protecting and enhancing the *natural resources of our lake* inspires both confidence in the present as well as optimism and hope for the future.

I would like to take a moment and grant specific recognition to the individuals serving on the OLA Board of Directors. The OLA's accomplishments are directly related to their support and hard work. These twenty four individuals volunteer an extraordinary amount of personal time to develop and deal with issues *regarding the lake they "love"*. "Love" may seem like a strange word to use, but if you could see the glee in their eyes when they speak of days spent on or around the lake, or if you could see the fire in their eyes when they speak to issues or problems they feel will harm the lake, you would understand why I say they "love" the lake. We could fill an entire OLA Bulletin with accolades to people like *Earl Pearson, "Doc" Cramer, and others* who

were founding fathers of this organization and continue to dedicate substantial amounts of their time towards lake concerns. Since space is limited, we have chosen in this Bulletin to list all past OLA directors as a tribute to those who have served the OLA over the fifty years of its existence. I am proud of my association with the Directors, and feel honored that the membership granted me the opportunity to serve two terms as President.

Over the past two years, the OLA continued to address issues such as increases in the cormorant population, the invasion and establishment of invader species such as to the zebra mussel, excessive weed growth in shoreline areas, the need to develop additional sites for shoreline access, the need to improve boating access sites, and the need to ensure wildlife and vehicular laws are adequately enforced.

However, the greatest challenge over the past two years has been to bring a rational, balanced approach to the decision-making process with respect to the issue of flooding. As you all know, during Spring 1993 and Spring 1994, flooding was the issue of greatest concern for most lake residents. The OLA issued a position statement on water levels in the Fall 1994 OLA Bulletin and via meetings and correspondence with elected officials and various state agencies. The OLA has endorsed practices and policies which will eliminate flooding to the greatest degree possible without creating significant harm to the Oneida Lake ecosystem. The OLA has endorsed a process whereby, prior to implementation of proposed solutions, involved agencies and the general public must be fully informed of the possible consequences of any such actions. Only when all those involved in the decision-making process (i.e. elected officials, governmental agencies, and the general public) are informed of the *possible consequences* of proposed action can the process be considered balanced and fair. An honest evalua-

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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Vice President.....William Schriever
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Term: April 1994 - April 1997

George Angeloro Robert Ripberger
Anthony Buffa James Scherzi
Robert Cote William Sweredowski

Term: April 1995 - April 1998

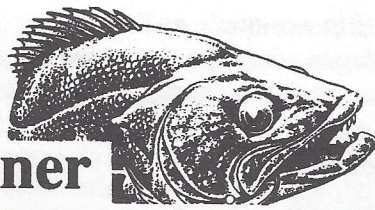
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tion of all concerns regarding manipulation of lake water levels is critical to ensuring that we are implementing long-term solutions which will not result in a worse problem for future generations. *This means examining the effects of proposed actions on the "natural health" of the lake as well as the impact on people using the lake (including shoreline and downstream residents)*. Some detractors have tried to portray your OLA as more concerned about fish than people, suggesting our thinking is somewhat skewed. (Continued on page 6)

The OLA Fishing Corner



WALLEYES : Go Deeper and Deeper

by Captain Tony Buffa

To say that Oneida's walleye fishery is rapidly becoming a deep water experience is no surprise to those anglers who have already adjusted their tactics and strategies to accommodate the changing environment brought about by zebra mussel infestation. No longer is it possible on a regular basis to fish the shoreline, whether trolling or jigging, and consistently pick "eyes" from the rock piles and the weed patches.

The scenario now is quite different. In-shore activity is very sparse. Most anglers are finding their piscatorial paradise toward the *lake's center with a preference for the 32 to 45 feet depths.*

A popular and very productive area is the strip of "pancake" located between buoy markers 121 and 117. Local anglers refer to the crusty manganese concretions as "pancakes". These "pancake" strips can stretch anywhere from a tenth to three quarters of a mile in a west to east direction and become veritable walleye condominiums. Small crevices in the nodule structure are inhabited by fresh water shrimp and other zooplanktors. Walleyes and yellow perch, in search of forage, use the "pancakes" as highways to their next meal. It is paramount to fish tight to the bottom when you are on the "pancake".

When jig fishing in this zone, I like to make contact with the bottom at each and every stroke of the rod. A

half to three quarter ounce jig dressed with a piece of nightcrawler during May and June seems to be the method of choice during the past three seasons. Early season trolling albeit successful, historically has definitely taken a back seat in recent seasons.

Good fish detection equipment is a must in this environment. I use the *Impulse 4040 and 4020* which are combination fish finder/loran units. Not only can you see the targets, you can repeat positions by proper tracking made possible by the plotter mode.

Water clarity, induced by zebra mussel filtering has declared the inshore waters "OFF LIMITS" during daytime fishing for walleyes. Gin clear water is pretty to look at but not conducive to walleye angling. Those of us who have fished the lake for years, recall the usual green algae character of the inshore lake and how it held foraging walleyes throughout the daylight hours. Not only is that pattern just a memory but the same inshore spots that held these walleyes, no longer remain accessible to the jig, drifted nightcrawler or crankbait. Where once walleyes prevailed, we now see **WEEDS, WEEDS, and more WEEDS!** Again, you can thank (I mean curse) the zebra mussels for this weed phenomenon. It's a simple equation: **WATER CLARITY + SUNLIGHT + NUTRIENTS = WEEDS.** Not only shallow weeds, but deep weeds. We now have weed patches extending from 20 feet depths. As a consequence of these

changes, we have all been forced to spend most of our walleye effort out and deep. Jigging, drifting and trolling are all effective approaches to the offshore depths *but knowing when to use these methods seems to be more important than the method itself.* ■

The Cornell Angler Diary Program

by Lars Rudstam and Tony VanDeValk,
Cornell Biological Field Station.

Oneida Lake has a truly remarkable data set on its fish populations. John Forney started this work in 1957 and has continued the data collection since then with funding through NYSDEC. Experiences gained on Oneida Lake are not only important for managing the fish populations on Oneida Lake, but also for fisheries management and aquatic ecology in general. Anglers are dynamic actors in the lake. For example, we believe that catch rate goes down when forage fish abundance is high and vice versa. Therefore, we need information from anglers to complement our surveys of the fish populations and limnology of the lake.

The Cornell Biological Field Station initiated an angler diary program at last years annual OLA meeting. The response from OLA members and other anglers has been very good. We had over 30 diary cooperators sending us information for the first open water season. We started analyzing the data this winter. **Walleye catch rates were about 0.5 fish/h which is considered excellent fishing in New York State.** Smallmouth bass catch rates were comparable (0.5 fish/h) *but perch catch rates were relatively low (0.75 fish/h)* compared to other areas of the state. We have also analyzed seasonal catch patterns and size distributions and a detailed report has been sent

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OLA 50th ANNUAL MEETING AT NOTTINGHAM H.S. April 19, 1995

by Tony Buffa

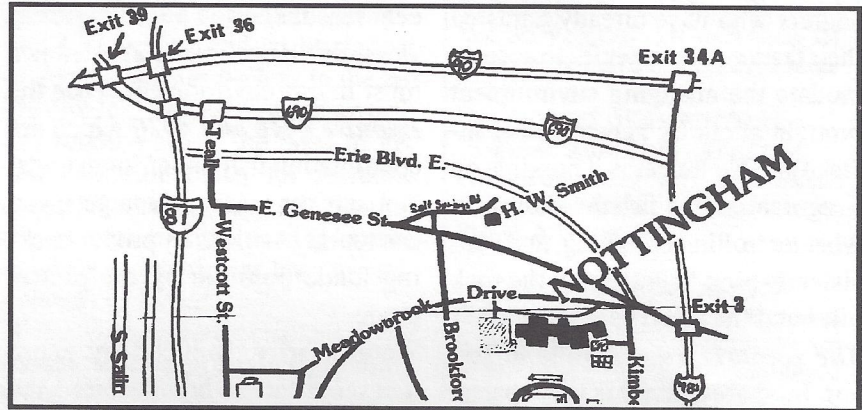
On *Wednesday, April 19*, the O.L.A. will hold its "50th" annual meeting at the Nottingham High School auditorium. **Doors will open at 6 p.m.** Early attendance is encouraged so that you can enjoy our numerous exhibits *honoring our 50 years of service to Oneida Lake and its users.*

While at the meeting, you will be able to register for the annual Cicero Lions Club Walleye Derby, which for the fourth time will include extra money prizes for those derby winners who are also members of the OLA. *Association member-*

ship renewals and sign-ups will begin at 6:15 p.m.. You need not be a member to attend, but only OLA members will be eligible for the drawing of five (5) \$100.00 checks.

This year's meeting will begin promptly at 7:00 P.M. and a short business meeting will ensue. Our theme is: **A GREAT PAST AND A BRIGHT FUTURE.** You can expect dignitaries from the DEC and the research community to update the status of our fishery and specu-

late on its future. The Association will award its coveted "Conservationist of the Year", plaque to an outstanding supporter of local conservation. The meeting will then close with the *drawing for cash and distribution of door prizes, including the "50th Year Anniversary" door prize, a 4HP Mercury motor.* This year's meeting will be special to us all. We encourage you to join us in an evening of fun, information and nostalgia. ■



"Angler Diary"

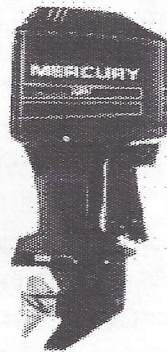
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out to all our cooperators. The information that we (= our cooperators) are collecting is the only information on catch rate and seasonal changes in fishing pressure on the lake at present.

We are excited about the angler diary data and our goal is to continue this program at least at this level for 5 years. Hopefully, our cooperators also find the exercise worth while.

We would like to have more cooperators as we are still short of our goal of 50 angler diaries. *If you are interested, please contact one of us at the Cornell Biological Field Station, 900 Shackelton Point Road, Bridgeport, NY 13030, Tel (315) 633-9243 (Fax (315) 633-2358 and email lgr1@cornell.edu).* We can also send you a copy of the **Angler Diary Report** as an example of the information you will get back from us. ■

FREE



1994 (4 HP) Mercury Outboard Motor

YOU may be the "lucky attendee" at our Annual Meeting at Nottingham High School to take home this outboard motor. This "50th Year Anniversary" door prize is donated by **Jiggs Trading Post at Marion Manor.** The *winner must be present* to claim this \$1200.00 value. ■

CORMORANTS - What are they good for?

by: Charles J. Engel, Jr.

This is an **ABSOLUTELY TRUE STORY:**

Last year *Conservation Officer Ronald X. Ditch*, who also happens to be a superb fisherman, was walking his beat along Three Mile Bay on the North Shore of Oneida Lake when he heard the blast of a shotgun. He ran toward the noise and saw a small gray-haired man with a shotgun in one hand and a dead cormorant in the other. CO Ditch said to him, "You have killed a federally protected migratory bird. You are under arrest!" The cringing hunter looked at CO Ditch with pleading eyes. "Please don't arrest me. I need this bird for food for my hungry family. I have been out of work for six

(Continued on next page)

months. We don't have enough to eat. I have never broken the law before and never will again. Please give me a break. I did it just for my children. I only did it once before when little Susie was dying of starvation." Officer Ditch was moved to compassion, and after all it was only a cormorant. "Okay. I believe you. It's only your second offense. Because of your family I will let you go." Officer Ditch continuing his patrol got to thinking. Cormorant! I wonder how those flying rats taste? He turned back and caught up with the shooter and his dinner, who thought the CO had changed his mind. "No. I only got to wondering how a cormorant tastes." The hunter shyly looked at CO Ditch with big blue eyes. **"Something between a Bald Eagle and a Whistling Swan, but it depends on the time of year and how you cook it."**

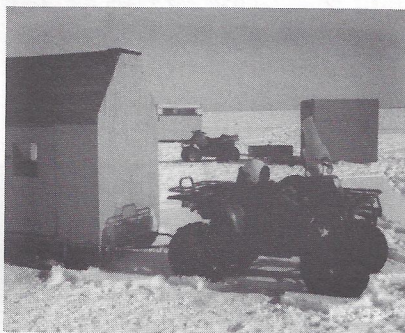
Ron, who says he *ALWAYS* catches fish, swears that this is an **ABSOLUTELY TRUE STORY.** ■

ONEIDA LAKE - ITS BIOLOGICAL PAST AND A VISION TOWARD THE 21st CENTURY

by: Edward L. Mills
Department of Natural Resources
Cornell Biological Field Station
900 Shackelton Point Road
Bridgeport, NY 13030

Since its recorded history, Oneida Lake has been characterized by its enriched conditions and records suggest that the lake has been productive for at least three centuries. While Oneida Lake is one of the most productive lakes in North America, the biological character has changed dramatically since the early 1800s. The most notable and well documented alterations to the lake's biological community have occurred in

the fishery. In fact, the present fish population bears little resemblance to the past. Imagine the first settlers seining salmon as they entered streams to spawn. By the mid-1800s, salmon disappeared, but lake whitefish (ciscos) were common and tons of eels were caught each year as they migrated out of the lake. Studies in the 1920s suggested that chain pickerel and northern pike rivaled the walleye in abundance. By the 1940s, walleye had largely replaced chain pickerel and northern pike and eels and cisco abundance declined dramatically.



Today's approach in ice fishing equipment

Cultural changes contributed to the increase in the walleye and to the decline of other native species. Salmon were doomed to extinction by lumbering and agricultural practices which degraded spawning streams. Construction of the Erie-Barge Canal, with its locks and dams, restricted movement of young eels upstream from Lake Ontario and the population plummeted. Loss of chain pickerel and northern pike was closely allied with the loss of spawning habitat associated with draining and filling in of the lake's marshes. The walleye was left as the dominant predaceous fish and it prospered.

If there is any aspect of the Oneida Lake fishery that has been consistent during the last 50 years, it is change itself. White perch invaded the lake in the 1940s from the Hudson River and reached record numbers in the mid 1980s before a massive die-off in the spring of 1987 collapsed the population to a more manageable level. Appearance of

large numbers of young gizzard shad concerned anglers in the 1950's but the outburst was brief and few were seen until 1984 when they returned with a vengeance. In recent years young gizzard shad has often replaced yellow perch as the primary prey for walleye. Anglers are attracted to Oneida Lake for its large yellow perch (also known as jack perch). The adult yellow perch population has been stable for the last 30 years but the population has shown signs of stress in recent years. Competition with gizzard shad and a greatly increased number of freshwater drum are possible but untested explanations why densities of yellow perch have failed to return to historical levels. Lake emerald shiners, native to Oneida Lake, virtually disappeared in the 1950s, and have shown some resurgence in the 1990s. *Other recent newcomers include the rudd and the blueback herring but their influence on the lakes fishery remains unknown.*

As we look toward the future and the 21st century, the Oneida Lake fishery will continue to be one of the premier fisheries of not only New York State, but the nation as well. Walleye is likely to remain the primary predator and the sportfish most sought by anglers. Yellow perch will continue to be an important sport fish but may have to share its position with other sport fish such as smallmouth bass. *Invading organisms will continue to play havoc with the Oneida Lake ecosystem, however.* The presence of the zebra mussel **has and will continue** to impact the Oneida Lake ecosystem. *Other exotics including the Eurasian ruffe and the gobie, both fish species introduced from Europe and now inhabiting the Great Lakes, will likely have a strong influence on shaping the future of the fish community once they are assimilated into the Oneida Lake food web. Consequently, the challenge for the 21st century will be enormous - to sustain Oneida Lake's high quality sport fishery in the face of an uncharted future.* ■

"President's Message"

(Continued from page 2)

Don't be misled by these simplistic approaches. The OLA has simply chosen to pursue a course of action that is both consistent with our mission statement and responsive to the concerns of our current members. **For 50 YEARS, this organization's Mission statement has been to restore and preserve the natural resources of Oneida Lake and its environs.** Over the past fifty years, manipulation of water levels has been an issue of concern for the organization.

In researching material for this 50th Anniversary Issue, the articles and documents show several periods when concern over water levels was a "hot" topic. Articles from the 1940's and 1950's, as well as a number of articles from the early 1990's, demonstrate clearly that the OLA recognized manipulation of water levels as an issue of concern prior to the '93 and '94 floods. Further, the OLA's long history in addressing this issue has been consistent. We are very concerned about those people directly affected by flooding. However, we also recognize the need to examine how proposed solutions will effect both the people and the ecosystem. Solutions won't be easy, nor will there be universal approval with respect to what should be done. However, if all the OLA members demand consideration be given to remedies which demonstrate respect and understanding for the mission statement of this organization, the result will be an enhanced decision-making process and a guarantee that we are protecting the lake ecosystem for future generations. Anything less than dedication to the lake's "natural health" and a firm commitment to protection of the lake for future generations is unacceptable.

In closing, please join me in celebrating our organizations 50th anniversary. All OLA members have a great deal to be proud of. Yet all OLA members must recognize that there is much to be done and that

the work of *protecting Oneida Lake never ends.* In the final analysis, any history of Oneida Lake should recognize the commitment and dedication of those who love this lake so much - *the membership of the OLA.*

Thanks again to my fellow directors for their assistance and to the members for their support. I am indeed grateful for the opportunity, as OLA president, to contribute to our common goal of protecting New York State's number one natural resource.

President,



JOSEPH J. MASTRIANO

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.

Changing Concepts of Law Enforcement on Oneida Lake for the Past 50 Years

by Capt. A Zukovsky

NYSDEC, Region 7 Law Enforcement

Strategically positioned at the crossroads of Central New York, Oneida Lake possesses a vast abundance of natural resources for recreational

use. The Lake has always been a sportfishing hot spot for several fresh water species, particularly the wall-eye pike.

Protecting these natural resources from poaching and other forms of over-exploitation has been the primary responsibility of the Division of Law Enforcement, Department of Environmental Conservation.

Fifty years ago, the Environmental Conservation Officers were known as "Game Protectors." Although their work was tedious, consisting mostly of foot-patrols, these pioneers in Environmental Law Enforcement were given the authority to appoint an unlimited number of unpaid "special game protectors" to assist in the enforcement of regulations on Oneida Lake.

A common law-enforcement assignment, prior to the game protectors having vehicles, was to travel by trolley from Syracuse to Bridgeport. At Bridgeport, they were picked up by boat and transported to the state boathouse at Constantia.

The boathouse was owned by the Conservation Department, and by today's standards provided crude living accommodations for several game protectors for extended periods. From this point, the protectors were taken by state boat for patrol around the lake. The boats were piloted by "boat operators" who had no enforcement authority, but did provide services to the Fisheries Bureau in setting and pulling nets, and stocking operations. The game protectors worked for several days on the boats, checking for violations and dragging the lake for illegal trap and gill nets which were fairly common place at the time. Other protectors were dropped along the shoreline by boat to be picked up several miles away. On foot, they would check the shoreline for violations and be met by the boat at a distant pre-established time and location.

Working alone, the protectors relied upon their own wits and skills in the performance of their duties. Winter ice fishing patrols were conducted entirely on foot and the work was

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not only dangerous due to the changing elements, but also quite strenuous. For example, a protector would have to pull a poacher's trap net, which was set through ice, and then drag it perhaps miles to shore.

Working conditions could also be a problem since the protectors on Oneida Lake worked every weekend and during the month of April, the spawning period for walleye pike, they were required to work the entire month with no days off in order to protect the vulnerable walleyes. State vehicles were provided to the Oneida Lake Game Protectors in 1958. The vehicles greatly enhanced enforcement capabilities around the lake by allowing the protectors to cover a much greater area. Although they now had vehicles, the protector was still on his own since there was no communication system. It was not until 1964 that the first two-way radios were installed in the vehicles, allowing the officers to make observations from strategic positions and direct other officers to make arrests of unsuspecting violators. It was not uncommon for violators to bring their boat into dock only to find officers waiting for them.

In the winter of 1968, the Oneida Lake officers were able to throw away their snowshoes which were used for ice fishing patrols. The Onondaga County Federation of Sportsmens Clubs purchased and donated two snowmobiles to the officers for exclusive use on Oneida Lake. Now equipped with portable radios, the officers have the ability to bring winter ice fishing enforcement to a much higher level of efficiency. From that point on, the Department recognized the benefits of the snowmobiles and provided for them thereafter. Boats are now also provided to the officers freeing them from the dependency of the now phased out "boat operators."

Technological advances have continued to enhance the Division of Law Enforcement tactical operations on the lake. Illegal nets are now detected by officers in Department-operated airplanes and helicopters.

An aerial sweep of the lake is completed in hours and has made illegal netting on Oneida Lake a rare occurrence. Night scopes enable officers to keep tabs on nocturnal Lake activities. Jet water sleds are now the preferred enforcement watercraft on the Lake. The water sled's versatility and speed continue to expand the officer's capabilities in apprehending unsuspecting violators.

The past fifty years have seen vast changes in Law Enforcement technology and tactics on Oneida Lake and the future will continue to provide greater challenges. The delicate balance between the lake's finite potential and the demands placed upon it today will require strong proactive DEC Law Enforcement. As we have seen many changes for improvement in the past, it must be kept in mind that many of them have not come easily. Oneida Lake law enforcement advances have occurred mostly through the demands and support of the public through effective voices such as County Federations and the strong support of the Oneida Lake Association. For fifty years, the Oneida Lake Association has been the front runner in maintaining effective law enforcement of Oneida Lake. The Association's concerns and influence with and through law enforcement have provided New York State with one of the Northeast's most pristine, public attractions enjoyed by millions - **ONEIDA LAKE!** ■

Oneida Lake Access Sites - Past, Present and Future

Providing access to Oneida Lake is an integral part of a sound fisheries management program and is consistent with the mission of DEC. Since 1955 when the former Conservation Department purchased and developed it's first public fishing and boat site on Oneida Lake, the Department has acquired and developed a network of 183 access facilities

across New York State. Many of these facilities are now being upgraded and expanded.

GODFREY POINT In 1955 the State of New York purchased a 26 acre lakeshore site in the Town of Vienna known as Godfrey Point. The purchase price was \$6,000. In 1956 a 30-car trailer boat launch facility was constructed. The cost to build was \$9,000. For 37 years the launch ramp shoreline, protected lagoon and public areas were used by thousands of boaters and fishermen each year. In 1994 the following improvements were completed: One double pitch concrete ramp 6 foot wide, ramp extensions, concrete transition slab, concrete abutments, sheet pile walls, floating docks and the re-routing of a stream bed to prevent future siltation. A program scheduled for the future include, construction of a breakwater, paving the parking lot, trenching a channel 100 feet wide, rest room facilities, concrete walks and shoreline protection.

SOUTH SHORE LAUNCH SITE

In 1956, the New York State Department of Parks and recreation, leased from Cornell University (*Shackleton Point*) a 13 acre site, 4 miles west of Lakeport, that included 900 feet of shoreline. In 1968 the Department of Parks and Recreation transferred the lease to the Conservation Department. In 1983 the facility was transferred back to the Department of Parks and Recreation. This site has since become one of the most popular fishing access sites in New York State, and it was felt to better serve the sportsmen of the area that the facility be transferred back to the Department of Environmental Conservation. This was done in 1989.

At this time the facility includes a direct lake launch ramp and a 35 car, trailer parking area. It is a rare weekend that the facility is not at capacity and often-times, way over capacity.

Proposed future improvements include:

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ONEIDA LAKE and its SPIRIT!

by Robert R. Ripberger

It was a warm summer in 10,500 B.C. when the Spirit of the Glacier decided to dam up an area that we now know as the **St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario**. The Spirit was in a playful mood and it loved playing with water. It was entranced by large wetlands and wet areas, so it made the dam high enough to flood most of central New York. It spread rocks, shale and limestone, it dug holes both shallow and deep, and in general it messed up the whole landscape. Today we thank the Lord for that Spirit and for what it did! **As a result we have our Finger Lakes, our treasured wetlands at Cicero and Canastota, and our very beneficial mucklands.** These have all been of great value to us. The greatest benefit, to those of us who enjoy fishing is the fact that the Spirit of the Glacier formed one of New York's greatest fishing areas, the one we all love and call by the Indian name of Oneida Lake!

As the centuries moved on and man became a part of life on this planet, history was made but little of it was recorded. Here in our beautiful backyard of Central New York we can find evidence of man's life and the Indian culture that existed many years ago. As time went on and history did become recorded, it showed that civilization in today's North America was different from that in Europe. Here in our country there were the Indians who lived in small groups known as tribes, and their lifestyles and cultures varied by location and by region. Here in our area we had the tribes known as the Onondagas and the Oneidas. Both of these tribes and their cultures are still here today, and Oneida Lake has the name of the tribe that lived at the East end of the Lake.

In the early days for which we have a history of the Lake, it was populated by large numbers of Atlantic Salmon, a specie that spawned both in the Lake and in nearby bodies of

water. Today it is difficult to believe that Atlantic Salmon ever spawned in Onondaga Lake and tributaries such as Nine Mile Creek. (*A small number of salmon placed in that creek a couple of years ago still live there today.*) The salmon was a favorite food of the Indian tribes, and because of the large numbers in the Lake, both the Onondaga's and the Oneida's erected villages near the east end of the Lake. Another specie that was then in the Lake in great numbers was the American Eel.

tral New York, but the numbers are small, and most of the damage they do affects the fishery in Lake Ontario. Gizzard Shad, Alewives, White Perch and Drum have invaded Oneida Lake over the past generations and have had some effect on gamefish populations. As these species became more plentiful the carp population was reduced to more acceptable levels. The Gizzard Shad is an exotic species that has its ups and downs in its reproductive cycles. Large numbers means a good food



Dedication for part of the pier for limited fishing on May 10, 1975

There also were carp and whitefish (Ciscoes), and later there were Northern Pike and Chain Pickerel. In those days there was little mention of walleyes, yellow perch and both large and smallmouth bass. These species were not mentioned until the 1900's. The Lake had large numbers of Lamprey Eels for many years, and the salmon was a favorite target and victim of the Lamprey. In recent times walleye and bass have also suffered from this predator, and it was not until the last quarter of this century that proper control measures were developed and introduced into Central New York fishing lakes. This, despite the objections of some who thought that the introduction of lamprey killing chemicals would pollute the waters, have been proven wrong Lamprey Eels are not completely gone in Cen-

supply for gamefish. Adult Gizzard Shad cannot always survive the stress of long, cold winters, when there are heavy coats of ice on the Lake. In this case, the other small species become the food supply. One of the worst "predators" of the walleye was the legal net fisherman. At times there were six or seven legal fishing crews on the Lake. That number was slowly reduced as canal dredging made it unprofitable. There is no record of how much the legal netters might have depleted the gamefish, but the illegal "fish pirates" who netted and sold the walleye during the whole year, even taking them from under the ice certainly damaged that population. Eventually the State Legislature passed a law making it illegal to sell Oneida Lake Walleyes. However, because of a limited enforcement by the

Game Wardens of the early days, it took years of effort by those few and the many O.L.A. fisherman members to rid the Lake of the "pirate infestation" and to get the "no sale" legislation passed. There have been no reports of illegal netting in some time.



Ice break-up on Oneida Lake

Oneida Lake was first known as Lake Iroquois. The Spirit of the Glacier formed it as a 51,000 acre (8-square mile) relatively shallow fishing lake. It is fed from a five-county watershed of which about two-thirds is located in the Tug Hill Plateau. At its maximum width the Lake is just under six miles with a mean average of just over three and one half miles. Its greatest depth is about sixty feet, and it has a shoreline that covers about fifty five miles. The Lake runs in an east-west direction, and as a result it is easily affected by winds and storms and can be a hazard to those who venture on it and are not knowledgeable of its idiosyncrasies.

Oneida Lake has always been one of the top fishing lakes in New York State. It has a well balanced plant and animal food web that includes algae's, small organisms, daphnia, various small minnows and other aquatic life such as crayfish, leeches, bass bugs, etc.

The major gamefish species since the early 1900's has been the walleye and the yellow perch, followed by the large and smallmouth bass. Bullheads are a springtime favorite. Other species taken by fishermen include silver and white perch, varieties of sunfish and rock bass. The D.E.C. fisheries biologists maintain a regular watch on the gamefish population, and are aided by the

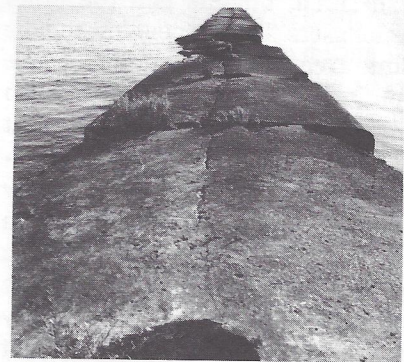
Cornell Biological Field Station, a training school located at Schackleton Point on the Lake. Here at the school is located a most complete and unique history of Oneida Lake fishery, developed by students and teachers over a period of almost forty years. There is no history of any fishery in any body of water elsewhere in the United States. This history and studies of zooplankton, daphnis, algae, hatches of small fish and the various gamefish species has been a great help to the D.E.C. biologists in determining and maintaining the size and numbers needed to keep the Lake population in some balance. The walleye hatchery that has been located at Constantia for over a century furnishes sufficient fry each year to stabilize the walleye population. Natural spawning does take place in the Lake. Because of normal predation, most of the naturally hatched eggs do not survive and some one-half to two-thirds of the fry needed to maintain the walleye fishery come from the hatchery each year.

Exotic invaders from Europe have found their way into Oneida Lake. Some have little effect. However, in recent years the infamous Zebra Mussel has entered the Lake and is having a very definite effect on some of the Lake's fish population. This thumb-nail sized invader can reproduce twice a year and each can lay up to a million eggs! It reproduces fast by ingesting zooplankton and small micro-organisms needed for daphnia, a food for small fish. By this action it reduced the life expectancy of small walleyes, perch and other species. In addition it does clear the water which admits more sun-light. This aids in weed growth and algae reproduction in amounts far beyond that needed for proper lake and fishery balance. The Zebra Mussel is slowly but surely eliminating the fresh water mussels that have always been a part of the Lake. There is much study being done to try to develop a method that will eliminate this invader, and some research is being done at the Cornell

Field Station at Shackleton Point. However, success seems to still be a long way off.

In the early 1940's the physical structure and the fishery of Oneida Lake started to undergo changes that concerned some of the older and more dedicated sportsmen who for years had enjoyed the great fishing on the Lake. Pollution seemed to be increasing, legal walleye-take numbers were being reduced, there were still illegal nets in the Lake, the carp population was still too high, and it was apparent to some of these sportsmen and women that there was need for some supportive action to protect the Lake environment. They have seen the effect of neglect on Onondaga Lake, and they wanted no part of that to effect Oneida Lake!

A number of these local conservationists met in late 1945 to discuss the Lake conditions and to decide what was needed and what could actually be started to help protect the Lake and possibly secure its future.



Pier is hazardous for fishing

At this first general meeting, held in November, 1945, it was decided that prompt action was needed. The next month, December 1945, representatives of local sportsmen's clubs, community leaders, businessmen, etc. met at the Syracuse Hotel and formed the Oneida Lake Association. Because of its historic and tremendous subsequent value of the efforts of this group of a half century ago, we list here the names of those who were the original officers. They included, Dr. Ben Sauer, Eric Will, Dick Brown, Bob

(Continued on page 10)

"Oneida Lake Spirit"

(Continued from pg. 9)

Voorhees, Carl Maar, Bob Soule, Ted "Pappy" Cramer, Harry Whitford, Fred Kreuzer, L.R. Cross, Stan Ernst, Clarence Frank, Tom Taylor, Max Frey and Ed Wray. They represented Syracuse, Cicero, Camillus, Chittenango, Sylvan Beach and Constantia. Those of us who appreciate the Lake owe much to the memory of these dedicated men!

Over the fifty years since the formation of the Association tremendous changes have occurred, many that have effected the lake. The problem of the illegal nets seems to have disappeared. Law enforcement, with its ups and downs, now seems to be improving, and D.E.C. has been doing everything possible to keep a positive force on the Lake. The surrounding Counties have committed manpower and flotilla equipment to patrol the Lake, helping to maintain the rules and regulations that make the Lake safe for fishermen, boaters and the other water users. The Association and the State Dept. of Transportation have continued to work together to keep water levels at heights that protect the fishery. The Cornell Field Station has continued to track, study and to advise of potential pollution problems that might have an effect on the Lake fishery. New sewage systems have almost completely encircled the Lake. During the past fifteen years the use of the Lake has increased dramatically, and the Association, through its Bulletin has continued to advise its membership of changes in boating laws, safety regulations and procedures, fishing regulations, methods of safe ice fishing, problems caused by Cormorants, reasons for variations in water levels, changes in fish populations, a full story of the invasion of the Zebra Mussel and *many other topics of interest to the O.L.A. membership.*

Back in 1985 the President of the O.L.A. met with the Commissioner of the D.E.C., and the Chief of the

Bureau of Fisheries. *He pointed out the need for a new hatchery at Constantia*, including the facts that the facility was decades old, as was all the equipment, that there was no research facility, and that with the greatly increased interest in fishing, especially for the walleye, a new hatchery was needed. It was pointed out that the State Conservation Fund Advisory Council study showed that fishing activities in the State returned a revenue of over sixty dollars for every dollar that was invested in that activity. This presentation of facts and figures finally made an impression on those who could take steps to bring into existence what we now have at Constantia, *the new Fish Culture Station, the finest walleye hatchery in the world!* With its modern equipment, its dedicated staff and a dedicated research laboratory, this hatchery will not only help to keep Oneida Lake as one of the great walleye lakes but will also be the means to propagate a walleye fishery in some forty to fifty other bodies of New York State waters. The Association has been a strong, vocal supporter of the need for the State to repair flood damaged pier areas at Brewerton, Sylvan Beach, and Verona Beach. Current membership in the Association is over 4,000. At the Annual Membership Meeting held each April it votes in Officers and Directors that number twenty-five dedicated sportsmen and women. They meet monthly to discuss, decide and act on matters that effect the Lake. The Board has direct contact with the top D.E.C. officials in both Syracuse and Watertown as well as in Albany. It keeps in very close contact with State Legislators and County officials representing the Counties around the Lake. There is a communication with the State D.O.T. and now the new Canal Authority, as well as any other groups that can have an effect on the Lake.

The new Fish Culture Station opened in the Spring of 1994, and the O.L.A. assembled some thirty-five of its members into a new ven-

ture called the Oneida Lake Hatchery Guide Program. These members spent several hours at the Hatchery, where they were given an outline of the facilities, a bit of the history of the Hatchery, information as to how this new Hatchery was to perform, etc., all under the supervision of the D.E.C. personnel who operate the Hatchery. The volunteer members then were classed as official Guides and were assigned the hours that they were to spend at the Hatchery during the egg-taking time. This is a period of from ten days to two weeks. The Guides spend their time on the Hatchery floor, answering questions, directing visitors and being of any service possible to the Hatchery staff. This enables the staff to better concentrate on their job of walleye propagation. The first year was a success, as declared by both the staff and the guides. Most of them have already signed up again to do guiding in the 1995 program. ■

Oneida Lake Fishing - The Way It Was

by: Charles J. Engel, Jr.

Chuck Rogers, the owner of the Brewerton Bait Shop, and his brother *Millard*, began fishing Oneida Lake in the mid-1920's. They started with their father *Jack Rogers*, who operated the Brewerton Red and White store on Route 11. Chuck Rogers' first fishing memories, beginning at age 5, were of trips in his father's 18-foot **inboard** boat equipped with a one cylinder Barber engine. The boat could zoom along at up to 10 miles per hour. *They fished mostly for walleyes.* At ice-out fishing was best near Brewerton and progressed to Walnut Point, Wanry Island, Pancake Shoals and as far as Dakin Shoals as the season moved on.

In those days trolling was his father's primary fishing method. Two sixteen foot cane poles, as limber as possible, with hand-wrapped guides and

(Continued on next page)

no reels were extended out from the sides of the stern of the boat. These were handled by Dad. Chuck rode and at the same time fished two handlines. The depth gauge was a surveyor's plumb on a line that was knotted every five feet. The fishing line was 20 feet of copper wire at the end and then cotton line whose length depended on the depth of the water. Pfleuger's Buffalo Spinner and homemade kidney spoons tipped with double hooks and draped with a nightcrawler were the favored baits.

A fish on a rod was hand-hauled in and swung back to the rower who grabbed and detached it.

If they wanted to fish for bass, they would either use bass bugs, which are little used today according to Chuck, or they would throw a seine net for minnows near the shore of Three Mile Bay. Jack Rogers would only fish for bass that he could see rising. *Then came the Revolution!* At age 10 Chuck invited his father to come to Brewerton's Smith's Pier dock to watch him cast for walleyes. Jack Rogers was skeptical. Armed with a steel Bronson rod and a Green Hornet reel, Chuck whizzed out onto the Lake a 6-inch Heddon Spook plug. A few cranks and "fish-on"! When the Spook came near, on it were *two* walleyes — one on each end. He landed both of them. Father became an instant believer.

Chuck assures me that this is an absolutely true story!

Plug casting became Chuck's only way of fishing. He could fish shallower water than he could trolling — and shallow water was (then) where the walleyes were.

Later, he and Millard bought a 2-horse Champion motor for \$90. It ran like a top for Chuck. Millard had to frequently row home.

Chuck's last story (*Absolutely True!*) was that as a teenager on every Thursday in the summer he would guide two brothers of Swedish origin, who were both local physicians. Their imported method of fishing was "twirling". They would lay a linen line in circles on a board

laid across the front of the boat and hand-throw large homemade spoons — made from spoons! — under docks near Brewerton, downstream from the Lake. They would catch plenty of 10 pound Northerns until their gallon jug of wine dampened their enthusiasm. For a day's fishing, *Chuck received \$5* — a small fortune to a young fellow in the 1930's.

Dr. Paul M. Cramer, affectionately known as "Doc", is a retired surgeon, a charter OLA member and a past director. Doc is 88 years of age. He began fishing Oneida Lake with his father *Theodore "Ted" Cramer* in 1912 at the age of 6. Doc and his father would take the South Bay Trolley from North Salina Street to the end of the line opposite Dunham's Island (fare \$.50). Doc's father kept a dory-style boat with a small inboard engine at the trolley dock behind the breakwater.

There were about a dozen similar boats, being the greater part of the fishing fleet at that end of the Lake. Doc and his father were bass fishermen and Shackleton's Shoals was their favorite fishing area — a one-hour trip at 6 miles per hour from the trolley dock. They used live bait — worms, crabs and grasshoppers. In 1912 bass bugs were unknown. However, their favorite was *CRICKETS!* — that young Doc would find under fieldstones near cornfields. According to Doc, the crickets were "deluxe" bass bait.

Two or three years later someone discovered bass bugs. Using homemade ash sieves on long handles, they would rake the swampy shore of Onondaga Lake near the Ley Creek inlet. Doc's father would not let him go into the water barefoot because of the sewage that did not receive, in those days, primary treatment. Neither the bass bugs nor the bass seemed to mind.

At about this time Doc's father moved up to a *16 foot custom-made Doehner boat with a Cady-Canastota 5 horse motor* that got them out to, and back from, Shackleton's Shoals a little quicker.

In the early 1920's Doc's father's fishing pal was *Otto Mutter* (an immigrant from Dublin) who had a camp near what is now Borio's Restaurant. Otto worked at Zett's Brewery, the maker of Par X Beer, located at the corner of Court and Lodi. The building still stands. At the end of a fishing day a cable was hooked onto Otto's boat and it winched into his camp's cellar.

In the early 1940's Doc took up baitcasting. A Little Wonder (fly, spinner, leader and 5/8 ounce sinker) tipped with a piece of worm "killed" the walleyes. Red and white River Runts and Phantom Minnows were also favorites.

After getting into medical practice at offices on Syracuse's Northside, Doc's fishing day was Thursday, doctor's day off. (He also fished Saturdays, Sundays and other days.) Doc has fished with some of Syracuse's best-known fishermen: *Art Cornelius* of the Syracuse Herald-Journal; *Roy Simmons*, Syracuse University Lacrosse Coach and *Charlie Boynton*, Syracuse Fire Chief, were just three of them.

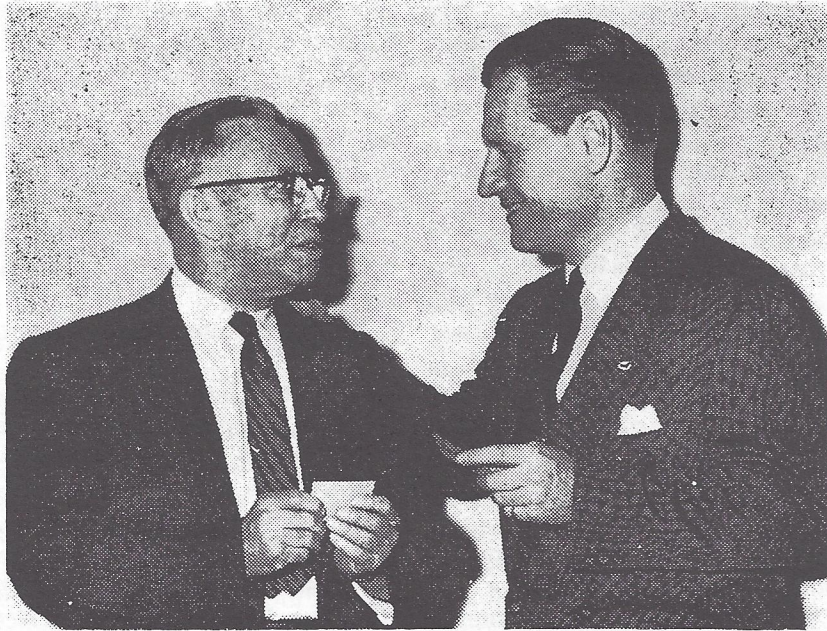
Besides fishing for bass during the day, in the 1940's Doc came to enjoy night fishing for walleyes. Thirty feet of water near buoy 127 or 129 was about right. A sharp eye out for fast-moving oil garages was required. While most night fishermen used Coleman lanterns, Doc used a "gooseneck" spotlight hooked up to a storage battery (good for one night). While night fishing in 1942 with Ken Wagner, a Spring Street neighbor, Doc recalled that the familiar lights along the shore and the distant lights of Syracuse suddenly ALL went out at about 11 P.M. There was nothing but darkness, and their lamp, to be seen. A barge came along, just missing them. It was not until they got ashore, using wave directions, that they were told that they had gone through a four-county wartime blackout.

When Doc was a boy, everyone gutted and scaled whole bass. Later, bass were skinned, but bones-in.

(Continued on page 13)

Reprinted from OLA Bulletin, March/April 1959

Governor Rockefeller Joins Oneida Lake Association



One of our newest and certainly most distinguished members is Nelson A. Rockefeller, governor of the State of New York. Gov. Rockefeller, an avid conservationist, is shown as he received his Oneida Lake Association membership card at his office in Albany from Dr. Benjamin A. Sauer, association director. That's right, you and the governor are now members of the same association.

Reprinted from OLA Bulletin -
Jan/Feb 1957

Were the Old Days As Good As They Say?

by Benjamin A. Sauer

A bit of checking into the "Good Old Days" makes you wonder if they were really as good as old timers claim. Pointing up the more pleasant aspects of years ago, for example, is the official report of the State Commissioners of Fisheries, Game and Forests for the year 1898. It lists the expenses of what then was known as the Oneida Hatchery. The report covers the months of October and November of 1897 and the months of March, April, May, June and July of 1898. The total cost, including labor and expenses paid to thirty-nine different men during the period, labor with a team of horses, disbursements and supplies

amounted to \$1,243.99. The expense for an exhibit at the New York State Fair of 1898 amounted to \$391.78. The amount paid for construction of a new hatchery at Constantia, between October 1897 and September 1898, including labor, expenses and all the materials came to \$5,749.47. In those "Good Old Days" the Chief Game Protector received a salary of \$2,000.00 a year. Two Assistant Chief Protectors got \$1,200.00 a year each. In comparison, the starting salary for a Game Protector today is \$3,320.00 a year and a Chief receives a maximum of \$8,370.00 a year. Four Commissioners received a salary of \$2,500.00 each and the President of the Commission received \$3,000.00 a year. In those days you were dealing with dollars that were worth one hundred cents. Here are a few items found in the expense accounts of the day. Din-

ner, \$.50; dinner for two, \$1.00; Three pen holders, \$.14; Bottle of Ink, \$.05; Post Office Box, 3 Months Rent, \$.25; Board, \$4.00 per week; Pan, \$.15; Dipper, \$.25; Breakfast, \$.50; Lunch, \$.25; Supper, Lodging and Breakfast, \$1.50, and One Gallon Machine Oil, \$.50.

But at the same time, when thinking of "The Good Old Days" it should be remembered that times have changed. Your dollars bought a lot more, for sure, but you had a lot less dollars to spend. And distance lends enchantment, too. One is prone to remember the advantages and forget the disadvantages. I wonder just how many of the old timers, after full consideration, would like to have "The Good Old Days" back again? To travel from Syracuse to Oneida Lake meant a trip by rail to Brewerton or a change of trains at Central Square for a trip along the North Shore, or a trip to Oneida and a change of trains to Sylvan Beach. The alternate was a trip by horse and wagon. A trip from Syracuse to Brewerton meant an all day drive. Few drove beyond King's Hotel at Cicero for dinner and return as an all day trip. What is now Route 11 North was then a toll road, made up of wood planks and known as "The Plank Road." At the junction of the present Route 11 and Town Line Road was located a Toll Gate. Next came the trolley line from Syracuse to South Bay and to Brewerton. When you reached the lake your equipment probably consisted of what you could carry in a basket - your lunch, bait and tackle. The basket also served to carry your fish back home. There were no outboard motors so you rowed a boat. There were a few guides on the lake. A few of them had Naphtha Launches. They always carried a pair of oars, just in case. In the "Good Old Days" they had no television, and no radio. They never heard of power steering, power brakes, power windows, automatic transmission or glass rods. I'll bet that 50 years from now the old timers will be talking about "The Good Old Days" of 1957. ■

Reprinted from OLA Bulletin - Jan/April 1963

Elmer Catches Over 100 Big Sunfish in Winter

Elmer Davis of Brewerton made one of the most unusual winter catches ever heard about while fishing in Big Bay Jan. 30. He started out with the idea of perch fishing, using grubs as bait. At the very first hole he dropped his line into, he caught a large bluegill or sunfish. Before he was through, he had landed over 100 sunfish. And they were all very large for that specie of fish, running about one-half pound each. Sunfish usually are considered a summer fish in Oneida Lake. But judging from Elmer's experience, it looks as if they could become a fine winter prize for ice fisherman with the right kind of bait. ■

Reprinted from OLA Bulletin - March/April 1958

Finds 22 Minnows in Pike's Stomach

Keith Garner, Muskrat Bay fisherman, thinks he knows the reason more walleyed pike were not caught during the early ice-fishing season fishing on Oneida Lake. While fishing near Frenchmen's Island, Keith caught a five and one-half pound pike. While dressing the fish, he inspected the stomach and found it had 22 minnows in it. A fish would be "crazy" to bite a hook with such abundant natural feed available. ■

Reprinted from OLA Bulletin - May/June 1958

THE SCORE BOARD

One of our members, Herb Flachsland, opened the pike season on May 1 in a big way. While fishing off Taft Point near Bernhard's Bay, he tied into and landed a bass that he states measured 23 inches. What's more, it was a tagged bass. Ed Kurlick was in the boat with Herb. It must have been tough to drop that one back in! ■

Oneida Lake Bulletin

"Past, Present and Future"

(Continued from page 8)

Enlarging the parking lot to accommodate 100 car-trailer combinations. Construction of a double ramp, lighting, rest-rooms, construction of a double breakwater, extensive dredging and a pier.

SYLVAN BEACH The original guidewall and pier at Sylvan Beach was built as part of the Barge Canal system. The original guidewall was built of underwater wood cribs filled with rock cobbles and capped with concrete. Over the years the cribbing broke down and eventually the entire structure, both north and south walls, and the pier, became unsafe to both fishing and navigation. In 1994 the Thruway Authority, the current custodian of this facility, rehabilitated the north guidewall. The project included removal of the existing structure, installation of sheet pile, backfilling and capping with precast concrete slabs. Seven hundred feet of the north guidewall was completely rehabilitated in 1994 and is now available to the public. In 1995 construction will begin on the south guidewall with completion scheduled for 1996. Rehabilitation of the pier has been considered but no definite plans have been proposed. A deepwater launch site has been considered for the Sylvan Beach area and basic plans have been submitted. The site under consideration would accommodate large trailer-transported boats and sailboats.

BREWERTON The Brewerton pier and guidewalls were part of the original canal system. Over the years the same thing happened to the Brewerton facility as happened to the Sylvan Beach pier and guidewalls. In 1993 rehabilitation of the north shore guidewall was completed, utilizing floating docks. The original facility was closed down for safety reasons for several years. Plans have been completed for the rehabilitation of the south shore guidewall using the same con-

struction technique that was used in the Sylvan Beach project. This project will probably begin in 1996. ■

"The Way it Was"

(Continued from page 11)

Then, in the 1940's, Roy Simmons came out to their camp and showed Doc the revolutionary bass preparation method he called "filleting". Doc's mother thought this to be a terrible waste of good bassmeat. However, Doc thought it was great and has filleted ever since.

Doc's last story was of the tornado that hit Syracuse in 1912. He and his father were on the Lake. Charlie Boynton was with them. Everything turned black. They headed for shore. It started to rain. The "rain" was twigs sucked up by the tornado. The nearest land was Shackleton Point. Now real rain started to pour down. Just before the boat filled they got to land and headed for Guy Moore's camp (later owned by Charlie Brown). They were put up for the night. The next day they notified their families who believed that they were among the many victims of the storm. ■

Best wishes to two great fishermen.

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Carl A. Young.....E.S. Cookingham
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Robert L. Voorhees.....Carl H. Maar
Robert G. Soule.....Robert A. King
T.C. Cramer.....Stanton G. Ernst

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(Continued from page 13)

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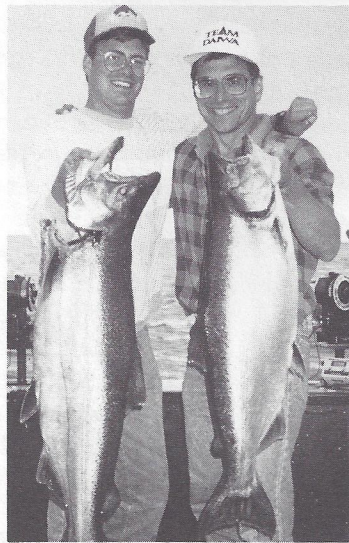
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- Robert H. Moses.....George A. Perry
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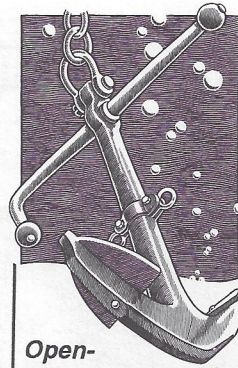
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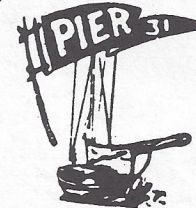
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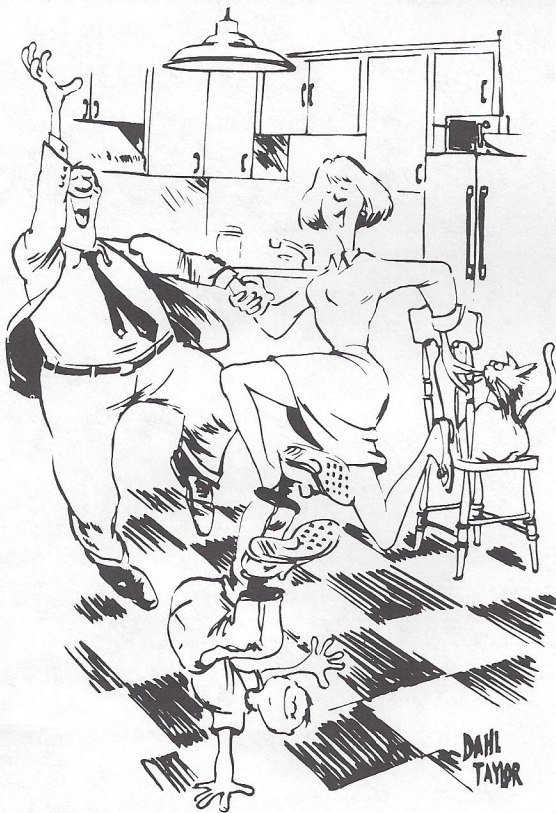
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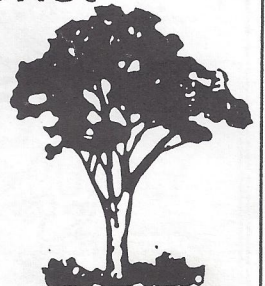
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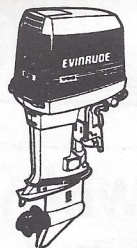
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