

High School Waterways

Troubled Waters Along the Towpath

January 2023



TROUBLED WATERS ALONG THE TOWPATH

The High School Pond 1910 - photo courtesy of Joe Smith

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Waterway Locations

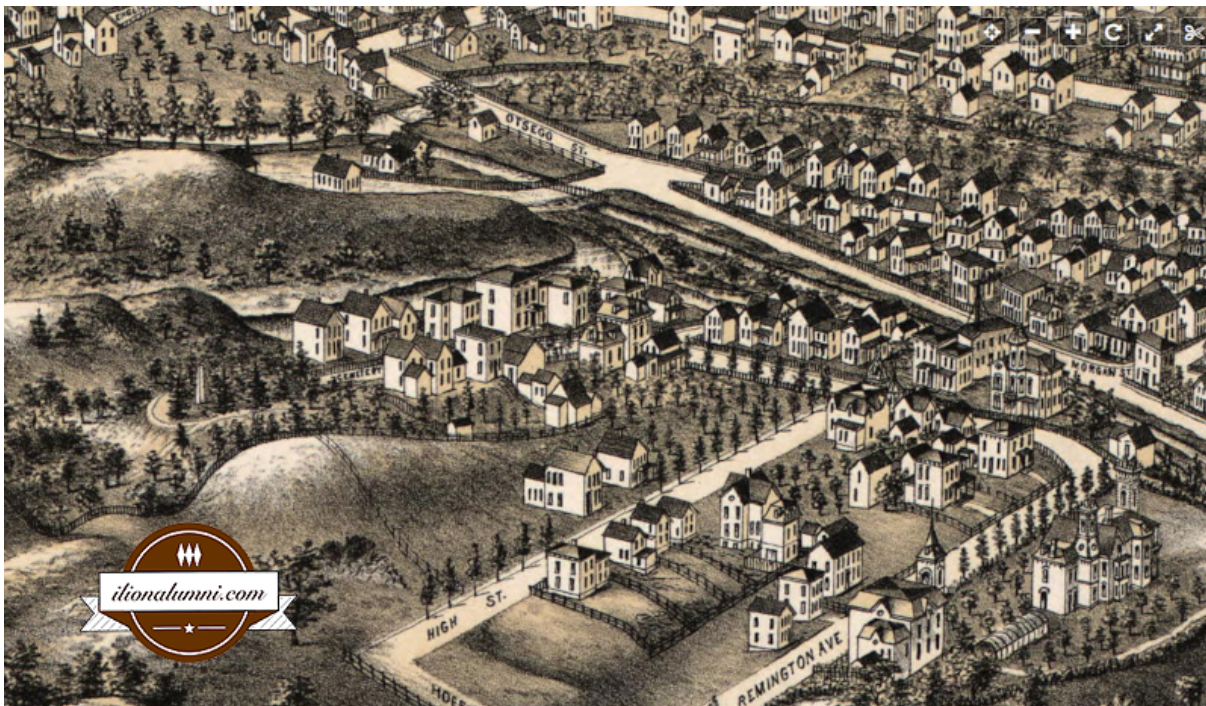
In order to fully understand how these waterways led to such tragedies and how the properties related to the Iliion School District, some background on the area is presented below.

As early as 1881, the waterway connecting Weber Pond to the Remington Arms was visible on a zoom-able map. The waterway originated at Weber Pond, by Frederick Street, and ran parallel to Otsego Street, under Benedict Avenue and then to the Remington Arms. The company owned the property along the canal and it was often referred to as the raceway. It was the site where [Harold 'Boots' Lever](#) first trained in Iliion.

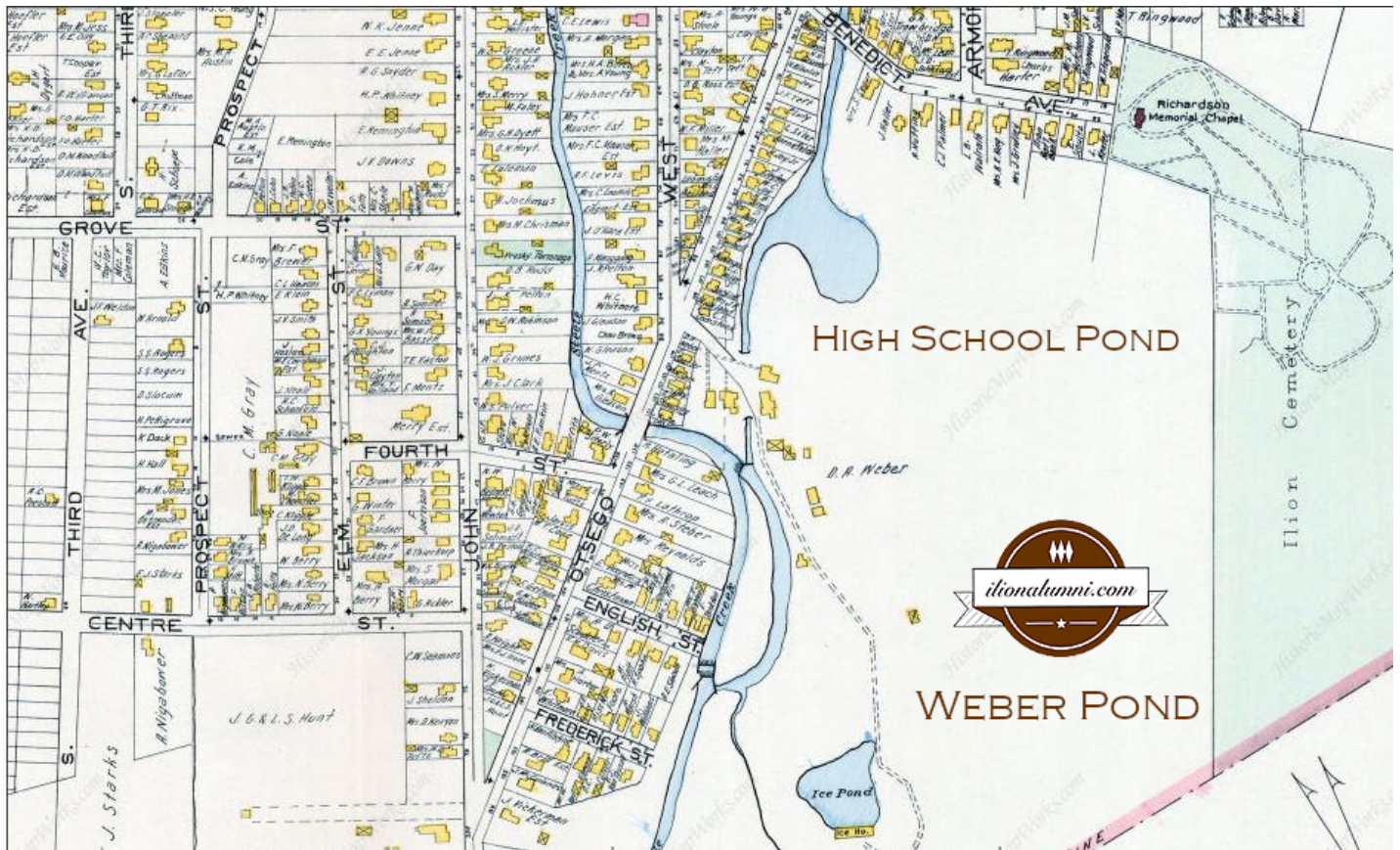


1881 Birds Eye View Zoomable Map of Iliion, NY
[Library of congress - Bird's eye view of Iliion, N.Y.](#)

The closeup image below, of that 1881 Birds Eye View map, shows the canal way as it appeared along Otsego Street. On the corner of Armory Street and Cemetery St (later named Benedict Avenue) was the home of Charles Harter. It was built by A. M. Osgood in 1870 and sold on foreclosure to Charles Harter in 1880. The Remington mansion is in the lower right.



The 1906 map below shows the relationship between the canal water way and the two ponds; the future "High School Pond" and the "Weber Pond", also known as "The Ice Pond."



1906 Map of Ilion, NY
 Published by Century Map Co. in 1906

The 1912 Sanborn Insurance image map, shown below, indicates the canal way was named the "Armory Forebay." The large body of water between Weber Avenue and Benedict Avenue would later be known as "The High School Pond". The high school would not be built until 1914. The pond was north of the high school and was later referred to as the "Girls' Lower Field".



1912 Sanborn Insurance Map of Iliion, NY
[Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Iliion, Herkimer County, New York, 1912](#)



Armory Hill Steps pre-1896 - A footbridge covers the waterway to the Remington Arms

First Drownings

The first newspaper article that was located, about drownings along this waterway, was published in June, 1906, and it was the first of five drownings that occurred in Weber's Pond.

June 7, 1906 - Drowned In Weber's Pond A Bright Little Boy Drowned While Bathing.

"A most distressing and fatal accident occurred Saturday [June 2, 1906], by which Edward Worrall, aged nine years, son of William Worrall of Baker's Lane, was drowned."

"Young Worrall and George Stitt, & boy of about the same age, went to the pond about nine o'clock and remained in the water for more than an hour. Stitt asked Worrall to leave the place when he did, but the latter refused. Worrall jumped back into the pond and that was the last seen of him alive. It is believed he was a victim of cramps."

"Another youngster, Fred Bishton, while passing the place about 11 o'clock saw a boy's clothing on the bank. Not seeing the boy Bishton notified Chief Stitt and he went to the place accompanied by Ray Whitmore. The latter dove in the water and found the body. Dr. Hunter was called but he could do nothing. Coroner Coffin took the case in charge." - Source Illion NY Citizen 1906-1908 - 0259.pdf

The second drowning related newspaper article was from May 26, 1922, and it was about a drowning in the canal-way.

May 26, 1922 Janette H. Hewitt

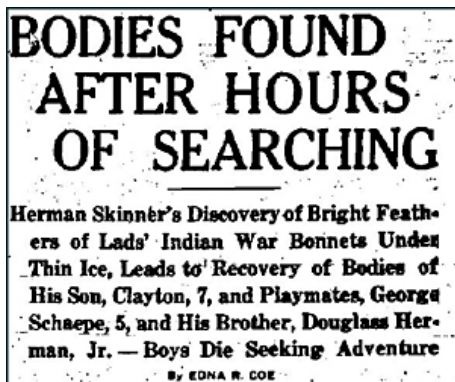
"Janette H. Hewitt, the five year old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Kerbs Hewitt of Ilion was drowned about 8 o'clock, Tuesday evening [May 23, 1922], in the creek which runs into Weber's Pond. The child had evidently slipped from the

Horrible Tragedy - Three Iliion Boys Drowned in Weber Pond - December 5, 1932



On December 3, 1932, [Hiram Skinner](#) suffered the tragic loss of his younger brother, Clayton Skinner, age 7. Two other victims of the tragic drowning in Weber's Pond, were the young brothers, George Schaepe and Herman Schaepe, Jr. who lived at 81 South Third Avenue. George Schaepe was just one week shy of his sixth birthday when he died. Douglass Schaepe, Jr. had turned seven years old in June. The Schaepe brothers had spent the Saturday afternoon playing with their friend, Clayton Skinner. The Schaepe boys went down the hill to meet up with Clayton at the Skinner family home; a big yellow house near the corner of Elm Street.

"When the three boys failed to report at their respective homes for the evening meal, an immediate alarm was mounted. They were good boys, and it was unlike them to be late. The search was begun by Herman Skinner, the father of Clayton; Mrs. Schaepe, the mother of George and Douglas; their uncle Louis Lacy; and their grandfather, Herman Schaepe, worked with officers Frank Ford and Bydsen Watson."



[Utica Daily Press, Monday December 5, 1932 - Part I - Utica NY Daily Press 1932 a \(1352\).pdf](#)

Herman Skinner's Discovery of Bright Feathers of Lads' Indian War Bonnets Under Thin Ice, Leads to Recovery of Bodies of His Son, Clayton, 7, and Playmates, George Schaepe, 5, and His Brother, Douglass Herman, Jr.

[Utica NY Daily Press 1932 a \(1366\).pdf - Utica Daily Press, Monday December 5, 1932 - Part II](#)

"The body of Clayton Skinner was brought to the surface about 10 Saturday night. Dr. James W. Graves, Herkimer coroner called and after a preliminary investigation, reported the boy had been dead several hours."

"Mrs. Schaepe was among the watchers on the bank, with Mr. Skinner, when Clayton's body was recovered. The certainty that her two sons had suffered the same fate was established and almost overcome, she returned to her home and to her

two younger children. Meanwhile her father stood watch as after long minutes, the body of the first grandchild and then the second, came to the surface."

"At the Skinner home, the father, mother, two brothers and five sisters went about the routine of the day, trying to ease the burden of sorrow for one another. In mid-afternoon, Mr. and Mrs. Skinner went to see about a plot in the cemetery. It was stated in both homes that funeral arrangements were not completed."

"Mrs. Skinner stated to neighbors who called yesterday that it is her own hope and consolation that the death of Clayton may teach caution to other boys, and that her sorrow may result in sparing other families similar tragedies. She and Mr. Skinner, the grandparents of Clayton, his brothers, Hiram, 8, and John, 11, the twins, Lola and Lula, 12; Ada 14, and Margaret, 16, were trying their best to act and speak in normal fashions....but the baby, little Barbara, who is just a year and a half old, seemed to sense the terrible event and cried almost constantly."

"This morning the school bells will have a sad message for the playmates of the three little first grade pupils."

By EDNA. R. COE - The Utica Daily Press

Services Are Held For Drowning Victim - December 7, 1932

Ilion, Dec. 8 - Final rites for Clayton Skinner, 7-year-old Ilion youngster who with two companions was drowned in Weber Pond Saturday night, were held this afternoon on the porch of the Skinner home.

As the infant daughter, Barbara, is ill with scarlet fever, the home is quarantined, thus preventing the family from attending the formal funeral service conducted a few minutes earlier in the First Methodist Episcopal Church by Rev. A. G. Judd.

Through an open door, the family, mother and father, and eight brothers and sisters, bade farewell to the unfortunate youngster.

Double funeral services for the two other victims, George William Schaepe, 8, and his brother, Douglass Herman Schaepe, Jr., 7, will be held tomorrow afternoon at 2 o'clock from their late home, 81 South Third Avenue. Rev. F. W. Ainslie will officiate and burial will be made in Armory Hill Cemetery.

Last Drowning - November 9, 1936

The Harter Family

The last drowning victim was the great-grandson of a highly respected former Ilion businessman, Charles E. Harter. Charles Harter bought the family mansion, at 4 Armory Street, in 1880, during a foreclosure. Mr. Harter was the president of the Ilion National Bank, for forty nine years, until his death at the age of 82 in 1926. A special dedication service was held, in April 1928, for the Charles Harter memorial window in the Ilion Methodist Episcopal Church. The subject of the window was "The Resurrection". It was installed on the west side of the church. View the window - ["The Resurrection"](#). Mr. and Mrs. Harter were the oldest members of the church at the time of his death in 1926. They were the parents of one adopted son, Frank Harter, who was a 1901 graduate of Ilion High School. Frank was connected with the Ilion National Bank & Trust Company with his father. He was also associated with his father in the oil business in Oklahoma for a number of years. Frank Harter died in 1934. He was survived his wife, who was the former Miss Lola Bellinger of Mohawk; three daughters, Miss Mary Harter, New York City, Miss Margaret Harter, and Mrs. G. X. Mathews, New York City; two sons, Charles and Frank, both of Ilion, and two grandchildren, Nancy and Charles. Charles Harter and his wife, Dorothy, were staying at his mother's house at 4 Armory St. on the day that their son, little two-year old Charles Harter, would wander down Benedict Ave. to the canal-way. He would be the last drowning victim of the waterway.



CHARLES E. HARTER



4 ARMORY STREET - HARTER HOME

The Harter mansion would be lost to foreclosure in 1937 and razed in 1939. The site would later become the home of pharmacist, Ben and Leila Russell and family when they built a ranch home on the site. Thanks goes to the late Jane Russell Nile, IHS 1950, for relaying the sad story of the Charles Harter drowning to me.

Iliion Drowning Scene Viewed as Dangerous - November 10, 1936 No Decision Reached ON Abandoning or Piping Canal Stretch

Iliion - No definite decision to abandon or pipe the hydraulic canal, where Charles Harter, two-year-old child, was drowned yesterday morning, has been reached per factory officials. It was stated today at Remington Arms.

The canal is an open stretch of water connecting Weber's Pond with Remington Arms and Remington Typewriter Plant. Plans to close it have been considered by the two plants for several months but have yet to be completed.

Weber's Pond was the scene of a triple drowning three years ago when three children broke through the ice. At that time, there was agitation to have the village undertake some form of supervision that would afford protection for children. The Village Board decided they had no power to act as the pond and canal were on private property.

Technical details are said to hamper the work of covering the canal which has been surveyed by engineers within the past five months.

Coroner James Graves, Herkimer, announced yesterday death of the Harter child was due to pulmonary oedema caused by accidental drowning. - Source - Utica NY Observer 1936 - 8374.pdf

Companies May Close Hydraulic Canal Where Ilion Boy Meets Death

Ilion - Decision either to pipe or abandon the hydraulic canal that yesterday claimed the life of a two-year-old Ilion youngster may be reached by the Remington Arms Company and Remington Rand Inc., it was learned last night.

Charles Harter, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Harter, 4 Armory Street, was taken from the waters of the canal yesterday morning and efforts to revive him failed. Shoes, stockings and hat of the youngster were found on the bank of the creek by neighbors and it was believed the baby had attempted to go "wading" in the icy waters of the creek, which is from three to four feet deep in that locality.

Attention was first drawn to the mishap when Nancy Harter, three-year-old sister of the victim, appeared in Armory Street shouting there was someone in the creek. Her cries were heard by Mrs. Arthur Sterling who told the little girl to go to her mother, because she (Mrs. Sterling) was unable to understand her.

Frederick Remmers, 18 Armory Street heard the cries of the girl and he ran to the creek and found the body of the youngster floating near the home of Frank Schmidt. Efforts of Remmers and George Dack, employees of the Utica Gas & Electric Company, to revive the boy were fruitless and he was carried to the Sterling home where a call was put in for the municipal inhalator. The call was taken by Chief Babcock, Officer Hall, Fireman Little and Drs. O'Neil, A. W. Hollandt, L. P. Jones and H. H. Halliwell.

Coroner James Graves, Herkimer, was called and said the boy died as a result of pulmonary oedema caused by accidental drowning while playing in the raceway. Two years ago two [three] boys were drowned several hundred yards above the area of yesterday's tragedy in the pond on the Daniel Weber property. Source - Utica NY Daily Press 1936 - 4552.pdf

Near Drowning - July 28, 1938

Boy Is Taken From Raceway

Sidney Youda, 5, Has Narrow Escape

Ilion - Sidney Youda, 5 young son of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Youda, 15 High, was hauled from the Remington Arms raceway late yesterday afternoon after he had fallen into the water.

The child, none the worse from his mishap, walked home to tell his parents he did not know who the man was who probably saved him from drowning. He explained he had slipped and fallen while standing on the edge of the water.

The mishap occurred a short distance from where another small child, Charles Harter Jr., was drowned in a similar accident three [two] years ago.

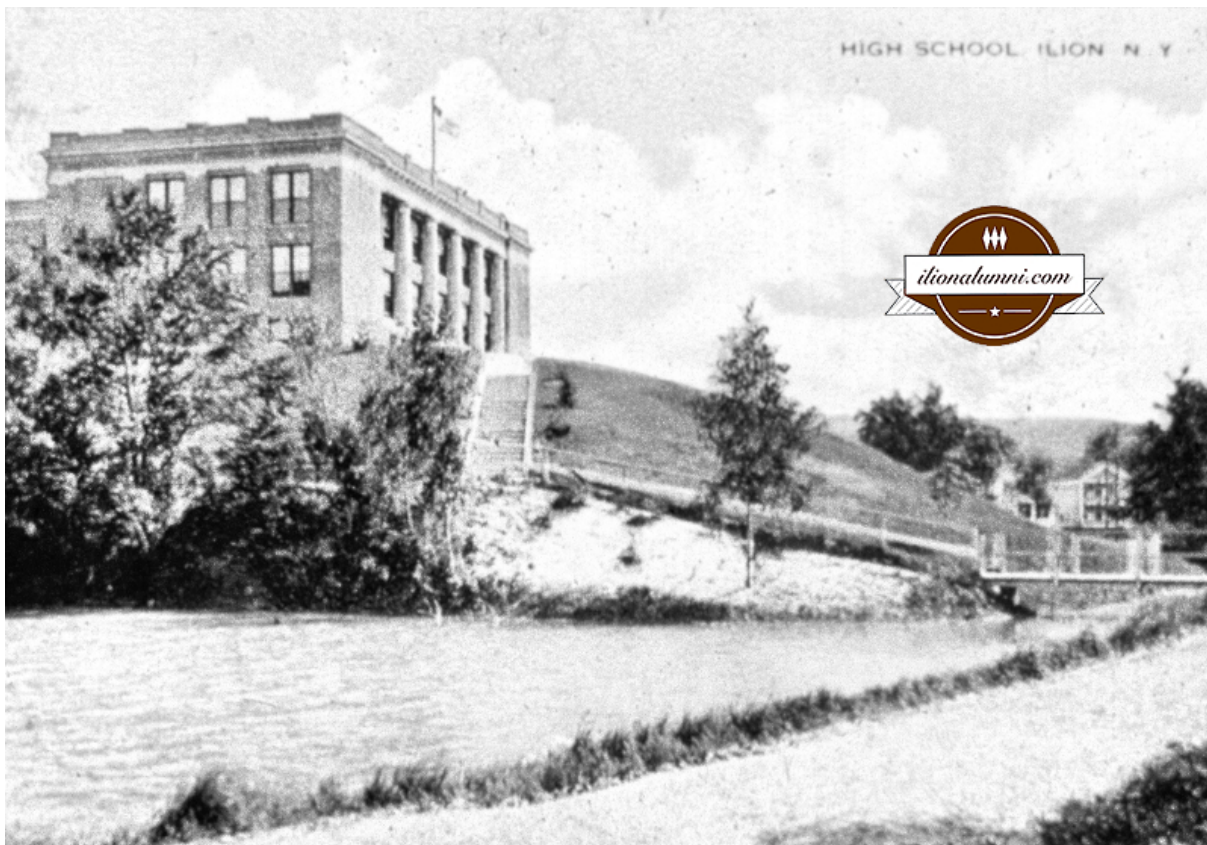
Youda appeared at police headquarters last night to learn if something could be done toward protecting children from the raceway which is an open unguarded stream. It is understood it runs through private property owned by Remington Arms and that the company is considering piping it. Source - Utica NY Observer 1938 - 5410.pdf

Canal Solution 1941



The canal along the towpath would remain in place until 1941

The filling in of the "High School Pond" was accomplished by using \$1,500 to have the pond filled with material from old buildings that were razed on the Remington Arms property. These improvements were begun in 1936 as part of a WPA project at the high school. The material from the old buildings was dumped in the pond as it became available. Completion of the work consisted of laying a top dressing of sufficient thickness to make the field level. The field was used as a community athletic/playground area. Plans were under consideration for submission of a project to the WPA to install a baseball and football "bowl" in the area formerly occupied by the high school pond. The School District acquired the Weber property in 1938. In 1940, plans for the property called for the construction of a new swimming pool in Weber pond. In 1947, there was a playground in the old high school pond area. The playground was closed in 1959 due to vandalism which "...practically ruined all the facilities there."



The pond on the north side of the high school.

Grading Project on Canal Bed Nears Completion - November 13, 1941

Another project while not directly connected with the defense program but of vital importance to the residents of the southeast section of the village is the filling in of Weber High School pond and the old Remington Arms raceway which parallels Otsego St.

Village and school board have completed their part of the three-way land transaction by filing deeds to disputed property to the Arms Company.

Weber Pond and the raceway was owned by the village, some adjacent property is owned by the village and the Board of Education. Under the three-way land transaction the Arms Company will transfer title to the raceway, Weber Pond and the disputed property near the High School to the village, which in turn will deed back to the school board property adjacent to the High School.

The Arms Company reserves the right to lay a pipe line under the land which they are deeding to the village at any time the occasion requires and they have also reserved the water rights which are owned by them in Steele's Creek.

Residents in that vicinity are glad to see the last of the old race-way, which to the past years has claimed the life of more than one child. Source - Illion NY Sentinel 1941-1943 - 0368.pdf

Weber Pond Solution - New Swimming Pool 1952

The new municipal pool, at the urging of the Iliion Varsity Club, was finally completed in 1952. The Weber Pond area across Steele's Creek, from English Street, was selected as the site for the proposed new swimming pool in the interests of economy and because it is near the center of population for Iliion. Per Village Engineer Glenn Forrest, "The present center of population of the Village is at the corner of Morgan and Second Streets. It has been assumed that this point will move in general in a southwesterly direction, probably at a point on West Hill as this is the logical direction for future growth of the village." The plan was to use Steele's Creek water which was to be disinfected. Piping was to be installed so that water from the village system could be used, if necessary, which was the recommendation of the State Department of Health.

Voters approved a \$65,000 bond issue in 1950 to build the pool. The vote was 367 for and 185 against. Only realty owners were allowed to vote. The new pool could accommodate 243 swimmers which was 100 more than could be accommodated at the South Iliion pool, in use at that time. An additional \$12,000 was needed to complete the project and that was furnished by the Light Commission from surplus funds. Total cost of the 105 by 70 foot pool was estimated to have been about \$80,000. In 1960, another heavy expenditure for a new filtering plant there, was estimated to cost \$5,000. The egg shaped pool, was to be 105 by 70 feet, nine feet deep on the deep end, and graduating into a children's depth at the shallow end.

Just in time for the Iliion Centennial, Iliion's new \$77,500 Swimming Pool, was ready for its dedication and opening. Frank (Bud) Capes was one of the prime movers for a good swimming pool in the village. Capes was chairman of the dedication ceremonies at the new swimming pool, during Iliion's Centennial Week in 1952. He served 11 years on the Iliion Recreation Commission. Mrs. Charles Harter was also a member of the Recreation Commission, along with Bud Capes, Frank Sheffield, Arne Paulsen and Harold Walrath.

It was fitting that a new swimming pool was constructed, on a site of so much tragedy. Hundreds of Iliion children learned how to swim at the 'big pool'. This training, helped avoid the terrible fate of drowning. It is a shame that there is no longer a municipal pool available for Iliion youth to learn how to swim.

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