



Dyken Pond-erings

Newsletter of the Friends of the Dyken Pond Center

Issue 10

Promoting environmental awareness in people of all ages

Fall 2008

Dyken Pond Environmental

Education Center

475 Dyken Pond Rd.

Cropseyville, NY 12052

518 658-2055

www.dykenpond.org

Email: dykenpond@fairpoint.net

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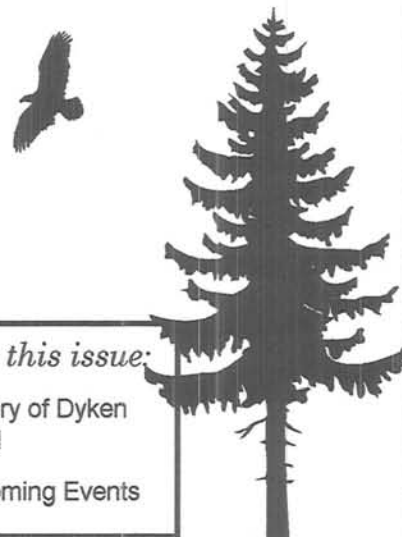
Otter Cove Land Appeal

Nick Conrad, Secretary

The Friends of the Dyken Pond Center is conducting a fundraising appeal to purchase the Otter Cove parcel. This critical 23-acre parcel of land adjoining the Center is threatened with development. The developer is willing to sell the parcel to the Friends for \$100,000, which we hope to raise by December 31. To date, we have raised more than \$14,000 in donations.

The forested Otter Cove parcel has 1100 feet of shoreline on Dyken Pond, and is bordered on three sides by the existing lands of Dyken Pond Center. The parcel is just steps away from the Center's canoe/kayak launch, and it provides a buffer between the Center and a proposed housing development. Acquisition of the Otter Cove parcel by the Friends of the Dyken Pond Center will keep the land in open space, and prevent it from ever being developed. The Friends will open the parcel to public access for passive recreation, such as hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and birding. The Center will extend the existing Otter Creek trail, creating a return trail along the lakeshore, offering wonderful hiking and recreational opportunities. This acquisition will also enhance the Center's environmental education and youth programs. If not acquired, this parcel faces development that will degrade the wilderness experience for the Center's many visitors.

The Friends have a contract to purchase this parcel for \$100,000 by December 31 of this year. The Friends have already committed \$5,000 to a down payment, and have applied for a grant to New York State that will pay half of the purchase price, if the Friends can raise the other half. While the Friends have the option of taking a mortgage or other loan to cover the purchase costs if we don't have the full amount by December 31, we would very much like not to incur that additional expense. If you have already contributed to this wonderful opportunity, we thank you greatly for your support. If you have not already become part of the campaign to preserve Otter Cove, we invite you to help us meet the challenge by sending a contribution today!



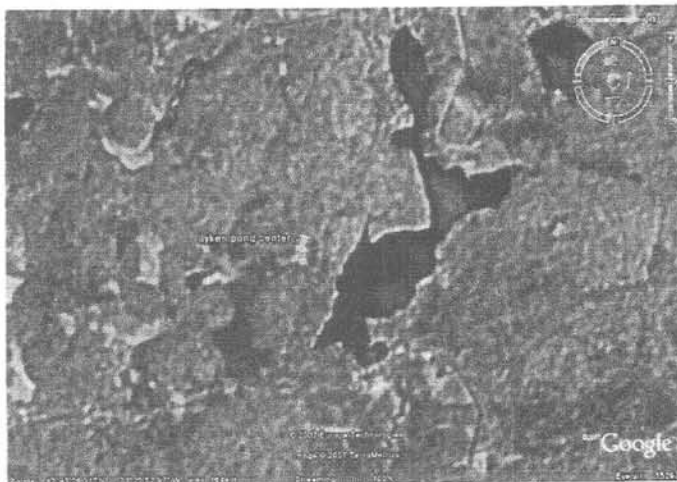
Also in this issue:

- ▲ History of Dyken Pond
- ▲ Upcoming Events

A Short History of Dyken Pond

by Gene Kane

It's hard to imagine as one looks over the approximately 180 acres that now comprise Dyken Pond that if you were to travel back in time before the early 1800's, you would be looking at two small ponds surrounded by ferns and wetlands. Pierce Hoyt, who at one time was the Director of the Dyken Pond Environmental Education Center (and has a geology background) feels that these ponds, along with most of the ponds in this area, originated as glacial kettle holes and were formed as the ice melted at the conclusion of the last ice age. An early 19th Century tax map shows the two unnamed ponds connected by a long stream. Another stream flowed from the southernmost pond and wound its way down the hills ending up in the Hudson River. This stream became known as the Poesten Kill, which means foaming or puffing stream in Dutch. Part of what is now known as the Rensselaer Plateau and where the towns of Berlin, Poestenkill, and Grafton converge, this largely isolated, forested area attracted first Mohican hunters and gatherers and then, during the 18th Century, those hunters and trappers from "beyond the great pond".



Google Earth Satellite Image Circa 2004

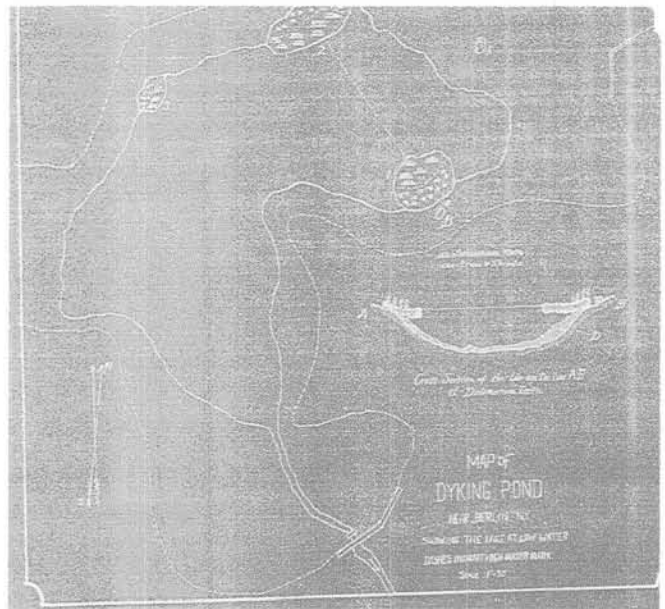
Meanwhile, the natural resources in the valley below were drawing people to Ashley's Ferry, where three major streams and the Hudson River, showing the potential for water power and transportation, lured those caught up in the Industrial Revolution. In 1789 Ashley's Ferry became Troy, and its growth was rapid. On the east side of Troy, the Poesten Kill ran through a large, hilltop gorge dumping water 100 feet below in what was to be known as the Mount Ida Falls. Its potential for water power attracted many industrialists, including an Englishman named Benjamin Marshall. In 1825 he acquired 5 acres of land at the gorge at the site of the Mount Ida Falls and the water rights to the Poesten Kill, including "from place of beginning," from Isaac Merritt for \$14,000. Then in 1826, Marshall built a mill to manufacture calico cloth; the building of other mills soon followed. The need for building materials to support this rapid construction spurred a new industry on the Plateau, that of lumbering and the saw mill.

The many ponds, flowing streams, and vast forests provided the energy and materials for these mills and soon settlements sprang up on the Poesten Kill, the Quacken Kill (with headwaters at Cranberry Pond), and near the large ponds around what is now known as Grafton. Ruth Bennett, in her book *Grafton Hill of Home*, states that at one time there were approximately 50 saw mills in the town of Grafton alone. One such mill, one of the few steam mills in the area, was located on the west side of "Dykeing Pond," a small pond at the headwaters of the Poesten Kill. Tomkins Hull built the mill sometime during the first half of the 1800's, using water from the stream connecting the two ponds to feed his boiler. He did a large business until the saw mill was destroyed by fire and not rebuilt. Dykeing Pond was so named because

of the banks thrown up around it to prevent water from escaping, thus creating water power for the mills being built on the stream below. These "dykes" were quite possibly built by Marshall sometime after 1825 when he acquired the rights to the headwaters of the stream (there is, however, no evidence available to support this thought).

These dykes were just the beginning, with help from the occasional contribution by an industrious beaver, of the transformation of those two "kettle holes" into a 180 acre, one and one half mile lake. Emerson and Powers, in their 1911 manuscript Peat Deposits of the Northern Berkshires discuss an old wooden dam built in 1846-47 at the southern end of Dyking Pond (the "e" being dropped by this time from the spelling of the pond). The dam, which burned in 1863, "raised the pond sufficiently to aid in the formation of a large marsh at the north end of the lake". Although the text does not mention who built the dam, but at about the same time Benjamin Marshall decided to harness even more power from Mount Ida Falls and built a series of tunnels in the north slope of the Poesten Kill in 1840. A new dam above the falls then diverted water into the tunnels and eventually onto a large water wheel 24' in diameter by 15' wide located in the basement of his cotton factory. Again, no evidence has been found connecting Marshall to dam activity at Dyking Pond, but the timing of both events does make for some interesting speculation.

Eventually the metal turbine replaced the water wheel adding more efficiency to the process. This increase in power soon attracted the construction of other mills, and in 1846 William Manning, Gardner Howland, and Alvin Williams opened a paper mill down the hill from Marshall's cotton mill using the water from those



Map From Emery & Powers, Peat Deposits of Northern Berkshires 1911 showing 5 marsh islands.

tunnels. The mill made manila paper from recycled hemp rope for use in flour sacks and envelopes. A machine works, a factory making curry combs, a barbed wire factory, and a flour mill soon followed, all purchasing their needed water power from Marshall. In 1855 the Manning, Howland, and Williams Mill became the Manning and Peckham Paper Company.

Emery and Powers, in preparing their work on peat bogs and marshes in the Berkshires and the Rensselaer Plateau, visited Dyking Pond sometime in the late 1800's or early 1900's. In addition to their reporting on the 1847 dam, they found that a stone dam 15' high had been built in 1894-5 for the purpose of creating a regular flow of water down the Poesten Kill to the mills in Troy. They found that the presence of this dam raised the water in a little pond about a mile north of Dyking Pond (South Long Pond) to the level of three feet, causing a part of the marsh which filled that pond to break loose and float to the south end of Dyking Pond. The authors go on to note that "this floating is-

three feet and a part of the marsh which-filled that pond broke loose, floating to the south end of Dyking Pond. They then got note that this "floating island was then blown to the north end of the latter pond where it is now". There are still some residents of Dyken Pond who either remember seeing these islands or of talking to an "old-timer" who watched people fish from atop the islands as they floated about.

One such "fisherman" was Clyde Bonesteel (born 1910) whose personal account of fishing from the floating bogs has been preserved on a home video made by his son Jim in 1998. "Back in those days you hooked up the team to the wagon and 2 or 3 people went up to Dyken Pond to go fishing and it'd be a day's journey up and back [from Wynantskill]. We didn't sport fish [in those days]. We took the boat and went out to a floating marsh. I don't know how big they were but they were thick enough that you could walk on them. They didn't have trees, just bushes and [herbaceous] growth. You would find a spot that was suitable and take a pole and make a hole big enough that you could get a line down through with half a dozen hooks on it. I don't even [remember] whether we baited them. You'd put them down in and pull them out and you'd have a line full of bull heads and you'd throw them in a tub. And, sometimes you'd have a whole tub of fish to take home. They weren't very big, only about 6 inches or so". The islands were still there in the 1920's and early 1930's, only to be removed as the population on the east side of the pond grew. Remnants of the dam can still be seen when the water level of the pond is low.

It seems, however, that this dam did not solve the ongoing problem of seasonal fluctuations in the quantity of water running the turbines. A dry spell

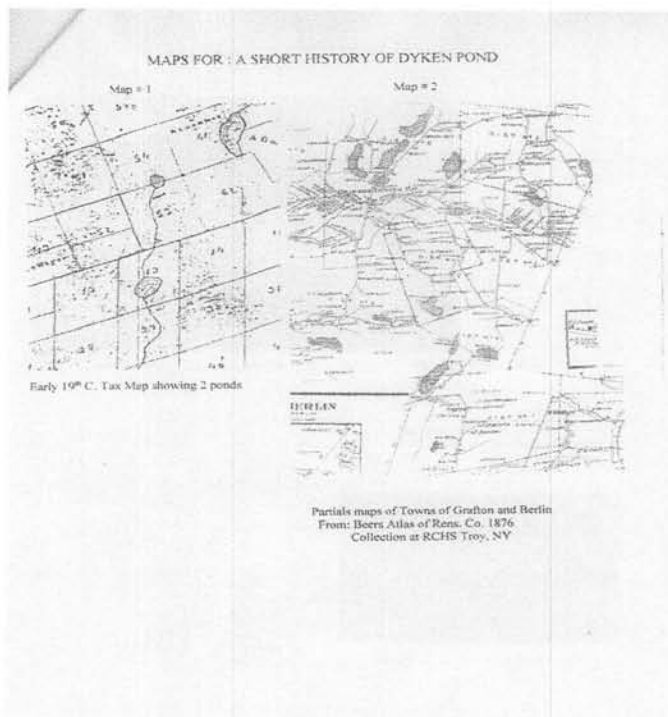
meant no water which meant no production. In 1901 an enterprising Andrew Ruff, who owned a flour mill on the pond, purchased properties from two farmers. David Fritz sold 83 acres surrounding Dyking Pond for \$5,300. Hammon Herrington, who had acquired properties from James Main in 1878 and Albert Wooster in 1883, deeded his 116 acres to Ruff for one dollar and considerations. The deeds conveyed parcels of land covered by waters of Dyking Pond and parts of South Long Pond (although only Dyking Pond is mentioned in the deed), and as much of the land bordering the pond and "upon said pond as will be covered by raising water of said pond 15 feet above their present high water level." This would be accomplished "by the construction of a dam at the present outlet of said pond". Both Fritz and Herrington retained the rights to all trees and timber and free access to the properties. Then in 1902 Manning, Peckham, and Ruff and Sons formed the Poesten Kill Hydraulic Power Company (PHPC) to regulate the flow of the Poesten Kill so that they could count on a steady stream of water for power. Ruff then sold those properties, along with all the language found in the deeds, to the PHPC (of which he was a member) and a new dam with gates to control the flow of water was constructed below the 1894 dam. In January of 1905 the reservoir was expanded to include some more land covered by and surrounding South Long Pond. A deed, giving the rights to "any and all times overflow with the waters of South Long Pond by means of erecting a dam or otherwise", was drawn up between the Saunders of Troy and the Poesten Kill Hydraulic Power Company. The Saunders received "the sum of ten dollars and "other valuable considerations". In 1906 John Osgood sold property involving more of South Long Pond to the Power Company and the

transformation from two "glacial kettle holes" to approximately 180 acres of flooded land was completed.

Local historian Eva Gemmill, in an article written for a Hudson Mohawk Gateway newsletter in 1980, notes that the water from the reservoir created by this dam usually took forty-eight hours to reach the mills in Troy. Therefore the gates of the dam were closed on Thursday to raise the level of the pond and opened on Saturday. This flooding of the stream provided power for the work week. Gemmill found that Nelson Fisher of Poestenkill, who had a camp and a store at Dyken Pond (sometime during this period the spelling of the pond was again changed) operated the dam for the Company. In addition, the local game warden was provided a key to the gates so he could keep a proper level in the stream for the fish.

In 1925 Manning Paper acquired a ten and three quarters acres parcel from R. Goodermote on the west side of Dyken Pond and built three "camps" on the property. Employees of the mill and their families used these camps or cabins during the summer months as determined by a lottery system. In 1962 Manning Paper ceased operations in Troy and moved to Green Island. In 1973 the Manning Paper Company donated the land and the water rights to Dyken Pond to Rensselaer County. Along with some adjacent properties this then became the site of the county's Environmental Management Council interpretive center. It is known today as the Dyken Pond Environmental Education Center and those three cabins are still in use by the Center. The pond is available to visitors during daylight hours and can be used for canoeing, kayaking, fishing, or just sitting on the shore and enjoying the scene cre-

ated by an Industrial Revolution's thirst for water power.



Reference Sources

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Harnett Survey map of Dyken & South Long Ponds, 1974

Hoyt, Pierce Director of Youth Services, Rensselaer County

Rensselaer Co. Historical Society, staff & library

1. *Beers Atlas of Rensselaer County 1876*
2. Bennett, Ruth *Grafton Hills of Home*, 1974
3. Sylvester, Nathaniel *History of Rensselaer County*, 1880
4. Thibadeau, Bart *History of the Development of Water Power 1975*

Rensselaer County Clerk's Office, Deed Storage Library

Rensselaer Land Trust.

Botanical Inventory of the Dyken Pond Environmental Education Center, 1999



Friends of the Dyken

Pond Center

475 Dyken Pond Rd.

Cropseyville, NY 12052

E-mail: dykenpond@taconic.net

We're on the web!

www.dykenpond.org

Up Coming Events

October

10th Last day to order bird seed: Annual fundraiser

12th Art and the Naturalist: Dan Yacobellis will combine art with nature. All skill levels welcome. 9 am—2 pm \$20 per adult and \$10 per child accompanied by an adult.

14th Full Harvest Moon Paddle: Paddle a canoe or kayak around Dyken Pond in the light of the moon. Pre-registration is required. Boat rentals available. 6—8 pm

18th Fire by Friction: Learn the Bow Drill method of friction fire along with other fire making techniques. 9 am—4 pm Fee \$15 member/\$20 non-member. Pre-register with Jim Bonesteel by calling 518-766-5354 or email to jim@jbonesteel.com

18th Birdseed Pick-up: at Capital Agway in Brunswick 9 am—12 pm

November

1st Capture my Flag: Day long game with teams tracking down the opponent's base and getting their flag before being detected! \$10 donation per person to Friends of Dyken Pond will go towards the land protection fund. 10 am—3 pm

15th Map & Compass: Beginners course on reading topographical maps and using a compass. Pre-registration is required. 10 am—3 pm Fee \$12 member/\$15 non-member

16th Volunteer Day: Help the Center prepare for winter by gathering, splitting and stacking firewood. All volunteers will be treated to dinner. 12 pm—4 pm

December

14th Yule Log Celebration: Celebrate the change in seasons with a hunt for the Yule Log, bonfire, outdoor festivities and kid's activities. Free 1pm—4 pm