

UPTON LAKE'S AMUSEMENT PARK

by Jon Wechsler

When I moved from Poughkeepsie to the end of Grove Way, by what was originally known as Upton's Lake, I often talked about the history of the lake with my neighbor Jim Schulhoff. He related stories of Franklin D. Roosevelt coming to "the grove" and talking to people in what used to be a natural bowl at the southern end of the lake. Jim told about the turn-of-the-century amusement park, located on the southwest shore, and showed me where the railroad from Poughkeepsie used to stop to let off passengers, right across the stream next to my house. He had a picture of the old bridge that went from the passenger drop-off across the cove toward his house.

The 44-acre lake was named for Paul Upton (originally from Massachusetts) who was one of this area's early pioneers. The lake is only a few feet from the Town of Clinton line in the southwest corner of the Town of Stanford.

The Poughkeepsie & Eastern Railroad was constructed in the late 19th century and ran from Poughkeepsie to Pine Plains, with nearby stops in Salt Point, Clinton Corners, Upton Lake and Stanfordville. By the turn of the 20th century, at the height of the summer season, six trains a day ran between Pough-



keepsie and Upton Lake. The fare was 24 cents. Admission to "Upton Lake Park", the new amusement park built by the railroad, was 10 cents. It was a BIG attraction. Included was an open-air amphitheater next to the present-day Schulhoff house. As Edith Allen Webster noted in the 1959 *Town of Clinton Historical Review*, "...there were benches placed in a semi-circle and a stage at the bottom of the depression where vaudeville acts and acrobatic stunts were performed, a merry-go-round, swings and a Wild West Show." Grove Way was hopping in those days!

As automobiles became popular, the attraction of taking the train to the amusement park lessened, and buildings began to decay. In 1903, it became "Camp Victory", a summer YMCA camp. The natural amphitheater was later the site for such visiting speakers as the newly married FDR, who often motored over from Hyde Park.

The P&E Railroad was also used in the late winter to haul Upton Lake ice blocks into Poughkeepsie. A short spur of track was added to the line, in front of the present Burkowske east shore homestead. Thousands of ice blocks were 'harvested' every winter and stored for hot summer days in two huge ice houses built at the cove. Jean Burkowske remembers, as a child, the long conveyer belt run by a gas engine that took

(Continued on page 2)



the ice blocks into the icehouses. Horses had previously pulled the heavy blocks, but there was always the danger that they might fall through the ice.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, all the land around Upton Lake was open to grazing and farming. Now, the only open land is on the south end where there are two horse farms. However, if you go out on the lake, you still can see remnants of the amusement park and the ice business. One way to do this is to purchase a boat rental from the Historical Society's *Promise Tree* at Community Day!

Jon Wechsler is a CHS Member and 32 year Millbrook High School history teacher.