

THE POND IN WINTER

ON a lovely fall day in late September I heard a group of boys talking about the wonders of frozen ponds, ice skating and hockey. The argument became quite heated when a boy came up with this proposition: Suppose you were born without arms. Could you play hockey with your feet only? You may stop, steal or hit a puck with your skates if you can manage it. Could you be a legally qualified player if you had no arms to hold a hockey stick?

Since each boy in the group had just finished playing either football or soccer on the school playing fields, why should they be engaged in the fantasy of hockey playing? Why should they not be discussing a lousy tackle, a good punt,



a block or a goal? To those who know its elm-bordered fields and large ponds, the answer is simple: they are St. Paul's School boys—St. Paul's School of Concord, N. H.

Artificial rinks for ice skating and hockey are becoming so commonplace that natural ice hockey rinks are as old fashioned as a non-electrical refrigerator. St. Paul's School has been called "the cradle of American hockey" by sports writers. The school is also a hundred years old, and for ninety-eight of these hundred years there was no such thing as an artificial hockey rink. If nature did not make ice, no hockey could be played. On November 19, 1954 the school's first artificial hockey rink was dedicated. I say "first" not because we may have a second or a third rink as a birthday present, but because the artificial rink brought to an end the dependence on temperature that every schoolboy and master in this cradle felt. For ninety-eight years the school skated, when it could,

on natural black ice, and at the end of its era let me tell of natural-ice hockey rinks.

Beginning the first of every November the morning's skein of ice on our ponds is inspected by each boy, tested for strength by sticks, fingers, feet, rocks or any handy object that might serve the purpose: pencils, pens, rulers, book bags, another boy if one can be found small enough to be pushed on the ice. Expectancy and conjecture are abroad. Will there be general skating before Thanksgiving? Boys and masters choose dates and, like harbingers of heaven or prophets of doom, predict ice by such and such a day, or the lack of it. If there is



no general skating before the Christmas holidays, morale, good cheer and work all suffer. Ice forms in the blood streams of the inhabitants instead of on the ponds.

If some brisk November morning the ice is an inch thick, out come all the skates, and after lunch onto the pond go 445 boys, the masters and wives with their children. If the faculty child is too small to stand, it is pushed in a stroller, sled or carriage by a parent on skates; if the child can stand up alone, it will have on a pair of skates. This first day of general skating is a festive one. The musical sound created by the steel of many skates striking ice has to be heard to be believed. It is as unique as the humming of telephone wires on a bitterly cold, snowy night or the crisp crunch of snow underfoot on a dry, zero day.

In New England where ponds to skate on are numerous, natural ice must be maintained as carefully as an artificial rink. A fall of snow covers and ruins the skating surface of a pond. If the snow falls as the surface of the pond is freezing, the result is snow ice—a porous surface that has shale-like properties. If a light snow falls on good ice and is not removed, the sun melts the snow, the night temperature freezes the surface, and the result is shell ice—a thin coat of top ice that cracks and breaks like egg shells. Ideal ice is that which freezes in calm weather (so the surface is not rough and wavy)—ice through which you can see the bottom of the pond. This is called black ice. On a pond that is not maintained for skating a ten-day period of skating before a snowfall means it is a good skating winter. In Massachusetts and New Hampshire the snowfall was so light in the winter of 1954-'55 that it was possible to skate on ponds for two months.

At St. Paul's School we have six hockey rinks on one pond. To maintain them requires a crew of men and special equipment. If snow falls before the ice is four inches thick, the mechanical equipment cannot be used. The schoolboys go out after lunch with snow scoops and shovels and push the snow to the banks of the pond. The snow cannot be left on the ice at the edge of the pond; its weight causes the ice to break away from the banks and a stretch of water separates the would-be skater from the ice.

If the ice has attained a thickness of four inches before snow falls, out go the crew of men and the mechanical equipment. Leading the procession is a street-cleaning machine with its rotary brush whisking the snow into windrows; it is followed by a snowplow pushing the windrows into piles; and behind it comes the snow blower. The great screw on the snow blower sucks in the snow, then blows it out on the banks of the pond, creating a veritable blizzard. As winter progresses, landmarks disappear. First, hedges and shrubs are gone, then one street light always ends up shining at the level of the snowbank, a light unto our feet. Frequently the end of May finds the pond with a white scallop of snow still on its shore.

With the snow disposed of, the ice is not yet ready for hockey players. Mounted on sled runners pulled by two white horses, a giant straight blade strips the surface of the ice. When I first saw this operation going on I said, "Oh, you are polishing the ice this morning."

"No, madam," came the reply, "we're shaving the ice." Only a female in a male community could be guilty of making such a mistake.



Following the shaver as it cuts a half-inch of ice from the surface is a tractor-snow-scoop pushing the shaved ice into mounds. Next the snow blower attacks the ice mounds as a humming bird does flowers, pushes in with its long tongue, backs out, pushes in, backs straight out, and the shaved ice is added to the mountain of encircling snow. The ice now looks and is as smooth as a mirror, except for the great cracks across it that develop with the freezing and expanding.

Supplementing the mechanical equipment are men and hand equipment.

One man has a barrel of warm water mounted on a sled. The barrel has a hose outlet that he handles as a female does a vacuum cleaner, pushing or pulling; only he fills the great cracks with warm water rather than sucking up trash.

Other men are removing the sideboards and goal-cages so the machinery can work, and replacing them when the swath has been properly shaved and manicured. One man drills holes in the ice for the long metal pins that hold the sideboards in place. Another man is down with one knee on a very low platform on rollers pushing himself along with his other foot, as a small boy pushes a wagon, marking out the rinks with blue lines; he uses a beautiful, bright dye that stains the ice. If the sun is shining, other men are folding back the sideboards so the sun will not be reflected and make soft ice and slush along the side of the rinks. From seven-thirty every weekday morning until two-thirty in the afternoon the pond is a beehive of machines and men that boys may skate.

Every afternoon the pond is an anthill of activity. In six hockey rinks six games are going on. Every forty-five minutes there is a shift; off come the two squads that have been playing, on go the next squads. At any rink you choose, you may see a game, whether it is the youngest boys or the school team—there are thirty-three squads ready to play. There are very few spectators at St. Paul's School and the majority of them have skates on their feet; if not playing hockey themselves, the potential spectators are out on the pond skating. By the time the afternoon is over, the ice is rough, cut up, pulverized in places, in spite of the fact that each squad when it finishes its period must clean the ice with hand scoops and shovels for the next players. Ice, like the males who use it, grows a daily fuzz and needs the shave and warm water.

Is it any wonder I claim we all develop a simian appearance in the winter term? Every boy bends forward at the hips and as he leans over on his hockey stick, the elongated arms of the chimpanzee are a similitude. Four hundred and forty-five skating chimpanzees are better than a circus.

REBECCA WARREN

CALENDAR OF SCHOOL EVENTS

(At the School unless otherwise noted)

1957

<i>Monday, April 8</i>	. . . . .	Beginning of Spring Term
<i>Saturday, April 13</i>	. . . . .	Dramatic Competition 8:15 P.M.
<i>Sunday, April 21</i>	. . . . .	Easter
		Third Form Tea, Sheldon Library 5:00 P.M.
<i>Monday, April 22</i>	. . . . .	Science Lecture: Dr. Frederick Singer 7:20 P.M.
<i>Thursday, April 25</i>	. . . . .	Cadmean-Concordian Joint Debate
<i>Saturday, April 27</i>	. . . . .	Track: Milton
		Tennis: Governor Dummer (away)
		Don Cossack Chorus and Dancers 8:00 P.M.
<i>Wednesday, May 1</i>	. . . . .	Tennis: Mount Hermon