



A COMMON THREAD

Newport's Town Common has served as the centerpoint of activities and events, personal and public. Many think of the common as a tree-lined park ideal for a band concert or a picturesque Prom Photo. Such was not always the case. See the "Snippets of The Newport Common" graphic from *Chronology* by Evan Hill to look a bit further back in its history.

Snippets of The Newport Common"
Evan Hill's *Chronology*

In this article of The Mill Town Messenger, we look at one of the most treasured images we have shared in Newport for generations "Skating On The Common" and the spirit of this generation's "Rink-Leader".

Newport Skating Rink History

by Kjersti Goodrich

In the NH Argus & Spectator newspaper, on December 21 1883, an article appeared explaining, "Newport is to have a skating rink" on land by the depot, owned by Franklin Pierce Rowell. Mr. Rowell and G. W. Britton financed the 40' X 80' rink at a cost of \$1,000. It was built by Arthur W. Clark and Frank Latimer who were known for their high-quality buildings. The rink opened in February of that year and skaters were entertained that day by the Newport Cornet Band with a solo by H. O. Hutchinson. There was also an exhibition by John Merrill of Lowell, Massachusetts. Merrill was a well-known speed skater who had numerous local speed skating records and won multiple cup titles in the Boston, Massachusetts area. Thus began the long history of Newport ice rinks provided for the enjoyment of local skaters, that also featured skating exhibitions, with both professional and local amateurs.

The skating rink has been located in multiple locations around town throughout its history. Besides being in Depot Square, the rink has also been located at the syndicate (1895) (unknown location but possible near Syndicate Street), on Bela Cuttings/Billy Van field (now where Shaw's grocery store is located), on the playground opposite the LaValley Family Community Center, and on the Newport Town Common. It should be noted that Newport also had an indoor skating rink for roller skating that enjoyed a long history in Newport.



Prior to the making of a flooded skating rink, the townspeople used the "Horseshoe," a geographic feature where a river's meandering path breaks off and a lake-like body of water is formed in the shape of a horseshoe. But, as Ken Andler would mention later in his recollections of Newport, skating on a natural pond could lend itself to drownings if the ice was not thick enough.

Making a skating rink for public use involved multiple steps requiring much manpower. First the banks around the rink had to be built up, and iced. The center foundation was rolled with the town roller (used to roll the snow in the streets in winter). Water had to be sprayed

continuously for about 14 hours, in those early years. Temperatures below zero would be needed to keep the final floodings even for skating. The cost of upkeep could be very expensive.

By 1917 the skating rink had moved to the Newport Common. Now its primary use was during the Winter Carnival. From 1917-1918 the Newport Outing Club used the rink, lighted with incandescent lamps, for evening skating. Events included ½ mile races, ice hockey games, a 50 yd. dash, ice jumping and backward skating. Of course, the rink was open during the winter months for skating for locals as long as the ice held out.



Mariam Luck

Getting the ice just right was often a problem. In 1919 the Outing Club found there was not enough water available for the rink to be located in the center of town so it was located on the Bela Cutting/Billy Van field where water could be pumped in from the river nearby. Electric lights were strung up around the rink for evening events. This skating rink was flooded just about every night. A cement wall was built at the lower end of the rink to ensure good skating. Most likely the land was not as level as on the Common. In the 1920s the skating rink was moved to the playground on Meadow Road. Again, using water from the river made this a more viable option. In the summer of 1926, the Newport Water Commissioners extended the town water system to the playground so that only a short hose was needed to spray the rink. The rink remained here into the mid-1930s, when it was again moved back to the Town Common. At least one other time in the 1950s, the rink needed to be moved back to the playground to access river water. This time however, "a strainer (was) placed on the pipe from the river to avoid any ill effect from sewage."

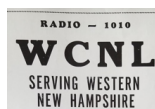
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NEW SUMMER HOURS



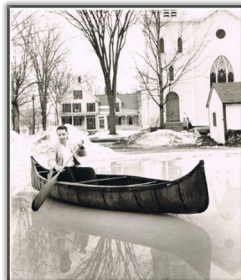
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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

In the 1950s, the warm spring weather turned the common into a combination swimming pool and fish pond. Someone tacked a sign onto the large elm tree on the corner of Park and Main Streets which read "Strictly No Fishing" and in small print underneath, "Until April 1."



The term "rink tenders" was used in the 1940s to refer to the men who cared for the Common skating rink. After those early years when the tenders were from the Outing Club, the town employees took over responsibility for making the ice. However, it appears that the job was not an easy position to fill as there were a multitude of advertisements looking for a Skating Rink Supervisor, most likely working long hours in the months December - February.

By the 1970s the Recreation Department had taken over management of the rink. If the job was hard, it was found that "many hands make the job lighter." In 1993 four teams of 3 men each were set up, which included a captain. A rotating schedule was set. And the men showed up, not just for their shifts, but also on other evenings. A total of 30 men were involved in keeping the rink available. "Tenders" became known as "Ice Kings" and received many good praises in newspaper articles. Jim Lantz made a point of mentioning in an ad for MJ Harringtons in the local newspaper, that he wanted to thank Ed Karr and Rick Thomas for their dedication to providing good ice for the skating rink. It should also be noted that one man in 1950, Frank Cram actually had a heart attack while performing his rink tending duties. He was rushed to the Carrie Wright hospital, but died shortly after.



Snippits of The Newport Common" Evan Hill's Chronology

1779 (?) -- The first town Common, reserved and used many years by the early settlers, was on the Unity road, and occupied the table-land between the Call hill and the A. Pease house. -- Wheeler 263.

1821 -- Town at [the] annual meeting (Mar. 13.) votes to buy what is now Common from William Cheney for \$200, "to be used and occupied (sic) as a public Common." -- Town Records, Vol. 4, p. 53. Land then was very swampy. -Wheeler 262.

1859 -- A park at the south end of the Common as fenced in and improved with walks, and decorated with shrubs and flowers, in 1859, by Dr. Thomas Sanborn and Messrs. Cross, then proprietors of the Newport House. -- Wheeler 263.

1866 -- Trees on the inside of the streets around the Common were set out mainly by Cyril Wheeler, Esq., and paid for by citizens living around the Common. -- Wheeler 263.

1876 -- The Centennial Tree at the south end of the Common was set out by the Grand Army of the Republic, July 4, 1876. Centennial trees were planted around the Baptist church the same year. -- Wheeler 263.

1888 -- The reservoir at the upper end of the Common has been covered over with new plank. - Argus 22 June 1888.

1891 -- Improvements on the Common have begun. We learn that the bandstand is to be moved further north, the land plowed, and a walk five feet wide laid around the circumference, and near the trees, crosswalks laid, rock mounds built, etc. -- Argus & Spec. - 22 May 1891.

1912 -- Soldiers' Civil War monument is dedicated on the Common. "The monument was completed this morning by the placing of a stand of arms in the space between the pillars." -- Argus and Spec. 7 June 1912

1930 -- The Information Booth is built on the Common at a cost of \$1,000 by the Newport Board of Trade, the forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce. -- Newport Town Times, p. 5, Vol. 11, Fall, 1997.

Especially during Winter Carnivals, the skating rink was not just used for leisurely skating. Performances were held featuring professionals like Martha Johannsen, Willie Frick, and Mary Simpson (skating partner of Sonje Henie – figure skater and movie star), to name a few. A penny scramble, and a Moccasin Dance were held in the 1930s, and in the 1940s Arthur Witkus held a skating contest for local skaters. Witkus first demonstrated "judging figures" to the crowd and the participants. Then the participants showed their skills at maneuvering the figures and performing their own open skate. Eventually a local group of skaters called the Silver Blades became regular performers at the Winter Carnivals.



Sometime in the 1930s a warming hut was added to the north end of the Common. Newspaper reporter Bill Patten remembered how prior to the hut being built, skaters had to sit in the snowbanks to take off their boots and put on their skates; reversing the process when it was time to leave. The original hut was warmed by a wood-burning stove. In the spring the hut was moved to the playground by the local Highway Department. In the 1970s a new hut was built by volunteers. All materials were donated by local businesses. In the 1990 the Friends of Recreation added skates of all sizes to the warming hut. This allowed those who didn't have skates to borrow them free of cost. The newest warming hut was built in 2016 by the Newport Recreation Department.

Despite the continued popularity of the skating rink, once described as "the safest thing done for the children of Newport," there was a time when it was proposed that the skating rink NEVER again be placed on the town Common. In 1980 Director of the Recreation Department Gary Bond, recommended the rink be permanently removed. His reason, the rink was killing the grass in the center of the common. He did change his recommendation to one year when he learned that the main reason for the dead grass was the use of heavy equipment and carnival rides during the summer months. The heavy equipment had damaged the sprinkler system. Carnivals were banned from the common, and it was also suggested that the ice be broken up in the spring so that "gasses" that were affecting the growth of the grass, could escape, allowing the turf to rejuvenate itself.

Crisis averted and the skating rink on the Newport Common continues to, not only provide exercise and entertainment for locals and visitors, but with the backdrop of the First Baptist Church on the north end, is now one of the most photographed scenes in this area. In 2016 and 2026 low levels of water at the Gilman Pond reservoir caused Newport to abandon the skating rink on the common. However, it will be back!!!

\$72,000 is what PJ Lovely, along with the residents of Newport, helped raise for the restoration of the annual Ice Rink. A last gift to the town PJ cares about deeply.

Born into a philanthropic family, Newport native PJ has lived by an unwritten rule of "Removing Road blocks, and always finding a way to say, 'Yes!'"

One might be surprised to learn that the man who has been a long-standing member of The Lions Club and Winter Carnival Committee is actually unable to multitask and admits to being impatient. His impatience didn't seem to show while he was collecting over 630 bags of trash at this year's Green-Up (well over the 250 goal, and more than double the typical number of previous years).



"My heart is in Newport; the town has given a lot to me and I try to support it back." With helping shape 36 Track and Field State Champions, as well as helping to set a world record for most people in a beard and mustache contest with 462 participants back in 2011, PJ has continued to live up to his goal consistently. Director of the Newport Recreation department since 1995, and working with colleague Beth Rexford for 32 years, PJ says, "We are a team at the rec."

Apprehensive about his choice to leave, he added, "I'll miss it, but it's time for PJ Rec Time." His plans include a hiking and exploring trip with his 4 adult children to Peru, fixing up his new home on Perkins Pond, and hopefully finally fulfilling his dream to bike across America, after a hip surgery put that plan on hold. PJ as ever is going to stay busy.

Happy memories of late nights spent flooding the Common with friends and being part of a tradition led this 57-year-old to hold the successful "PJ's Last Lap" walk-a-thon fundraiser this past May. So, if you don't bump into him hiking in the woods, or buy him a "Snake Bite" over at Salt Hill you will be able to ice skate this winter largely due to Newport's favorite son who wants "Less things and more experiences!"

A LOVELY GIFT

*"My heart is in Newport;
the town has given a lot to me and I try to support it back."*

By Pamela LaFountain



BECKY-BETH-PJ





At The Museum

MUSEUM HOURS
Sundays 11A - 2P through October or by appointment.

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The Corbins-Their Home & Family



Thanks to the many family Edgell and Cheronnet-Champollion family members who have donated items for this display.

MUSEUM EXHIBITS

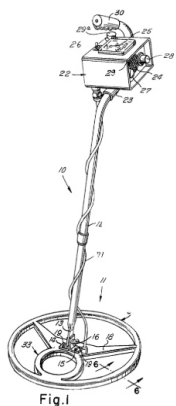
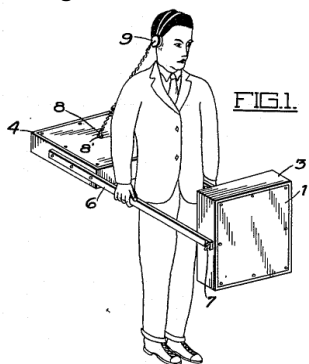
The display Items never before seen as well as recently discovered items found around the property using modern metal detecting technology.

Metal Detecting: A Modern Treasure Hunt with a Touch of History

By April Anderson

Metal detecting transforms a simple day outdoors into an adventure, merging discovery, excitement, and connections with history and nature. Each signal from the detector promises to uncover hidden treasures and unlock stories from centuries ago.

Metal detecting's history dates to the early 20th century, when the technology primarily emerged for industrial and military use. Its purpose was to find concealed mines and buried weapons, crucial tasks that underscored the need for reliable detection tools. As technology advanced, detectors became smaller, more affordable, and easier to use.



Modern metal detectors have advanced features that allow them to identify metal types and target depths. They use electromagnetic induction, in which wire coils produce a magnetic field that detects metal and produces a signal. Many detectors filter out unwanted items, such as bottle caps and nails, so that users can focus on valuable finds. Locally, common discoveries include oxen and horseshoes, square nails,

coins, buckles, tools, and pocketknives—tangible remnants of bygone labor and daily life.

For metal detecting, the right tools are key. A reliable beginner detector costs around \$500.

Headphones help catch faint signals; a sturdy digging tool and a pinpointer (a small, handheld metal detector) assist with retrieval. Bring a pouch for finds and trash, gloves for protection, and suitable clothing. Kneepads, a cleaning brush, and a GPS for tracking are useful extras.



After gathering your gear, know where you can dig. Responsible detecting means following laws, respecting private property, and reporting notable finds as required. Laws like the National Historic Preservation Act exist to protect historical artifacts. Playgrounds, parks, beaches, mountains, and old homesteads are popular places to search. If unsure about legality, consult the property owner or local authorities. Your own backyard is a great place to practice and hone your skills before exploring public sites.

In conclusion, metal detecting blends technology, history, and adventure. It sparks engagement with the environment and reveals hidden human stories beneath our feet. Whether for profit, passion, or curiosity, it draws people of all ages, turning landscapes into maps of hidden treasures and memories.

Happy Hunting!

A. BLOCH.
ISOLATING LISTENING APPARATUS.
APPLICATION FILED JUNE 24, 1918. RENEWED NOV. 25, 1920.
1,364,691. Fig. 1. Patented Jan. 4, 1921.



Historical Society EVENT DATES

NHS Trustees:

Dean Stetson, Laura Kessler, Pam LaFountain,
Mike Loftus, Tom Nulty, Lionel Hebert, Lee Branch,
April Anderson, Donna Menard, Paula Johnson

- September 17-30 – 250th Opera House Exhibit
- August 8-Magical History Tours-(Class of 1971)
- **August 22 – Apple Pie Crafts Fair**
- October 17-Magical History Tours-(Sign Up on Website)
- November 1- BB Van event at the Opera House
- November 7- Magical History Tours-(Sign Up on Website)

For More Info:



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