



Manchester Urban Ponds Restoration Program

City of Manchester Environmental Protection Division
300 Winston Street - Manchester NH 03103 (603) 665-6899
www.manchesternh.gov/urbanponds

The History of Dorrs Pond

Archibald & John Stark: Harvesting the Power of Ray Brook

In 1736, Archibald Stark moved to what is now Manchester (Derryfield at the time) from Londonderry and settled on the Thaxter grant near Amoskeag Falls. After his death in 1758, his property was divided among his four sons, one of whom was John Stark - the future Revolutionary War hero (Rowell, 1904). The parcel of land that John inherited encompassed the area of Ray Brook and what is now Dorrs Pond. It was on Ray Brook that John Stark ran a sawmill for many years, presumably constructed by his father.

Various historical accounts say that Stark was working at the Ray Brook mill when he heard of the fight at Lexington in April of 1775 (Willey, 1896). General Stark immediately left to fight the British and went on to become one of the leading figures of the Revolutionary War. The sawmill was apparently abandoned during the years of the War, and the remains of the dam at the sawmill site could be seen during low water until at least the late 1890's.



George Horace Dorr: Harvesting Ice at Dorrs Pond

Sometime in the mid-1800's, George Horace Dorr, a successful realtor and auctioneer, purchased the property. In 1862 Ray Brook was dammed, creating an artificial impoundment which was to become Dorrs Pond. Beginning in 1863, ice was harvested in the winter for sale to the people of Manchester. At the time there existed a 100-foot by 60-foot ice house on the property, and the business supported 22 workers (Seney, 1998). It is also reported that when circuses came to Manchester during this period, elephants were taken to Dorrs Pond to wash and cool down (Seney, 1998).



Amoskeag Manufacturing Company

Early in the 20th century, the property had come to belong to the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company. Amoskeag removed the dam and drained the pond, ironically due to its biological richness and what the company called "nuisance" sport fishing for the state-stocked German carp (Weigler, 1983). In 1923, Amoskeag deeded the property to the city for conversion into a summer swimming area. The dam was reconstructed to raise the water level, bath houses were built, and sand was hauled in to create a beach. After these developments, recreational use of the pond increased to such a point that the Beech Street trolley was extended to transport the hundreds of beach-goers. After 1936 however, use of Dorrs Pond as a swimming hole dropped off drastically. The Livingston Park pool was completed in that year, and it became the destination of choice for swimmers on hot summer days (Weigler, 1983).

Ice skating on Dorrs Pond.
Manchester Historic Association photograph.