

# History of Newton Parks, Playgrounds & Recreation: Winter Sports



PHOTO: COURTESY JACKSON HOMESTEAD

*Ice crew, Bulloughs Pond*

The long serving Superintendent of Playgrounds, Ernst Hermann (1913-1939), brought his love for skating and winter sports with him from Germany. He routinely stretched eight to nine days of skating into 40-50 by retaining the natural "blue" or "black" ice and preventing snow, slush, and ice shavings from remaining on the ice surface.<sup>1</sup> He also perfected the maintenance of ice skating rinks<sup>1</sup> and designed an ice hockey rink, which allowed for easier ice cleaning and surface handling. People in Newton enjoyed far more days of skating because of his ice-cleaning methods and equipment than did the people in nearby communities.

In paying tribute to Herman's skill and knowledge in administering the skating program, Joseph Lee, Jr., the Father of the Playground Movement, said: "Dean Hermann could stay at home and by his temperature charts tell whether the ice was strong enough to take the tractor and the public." To demonstrate that mechanized equipment maintained ice cheaply and effectively, he devised several unique types.<sup>2</sup> Hermann wrote:

Nature, as a whole, gives us in this climate only about 8-10 days of skating in a good winter, but by proper care and maintenance this can be increased to an average of about 45 days per season. When we consider the enormous number of children, young people and adults who are thus enabled to spend 40-50 days out-doors during the winter months, we have added very materially to the physical and social health of our citizens. Owing to the fact that we have gradually developed a district type of ice maintenance, we have been called upon by many communities to help them with their skating problems. We gave, with permission from His Honor, Mayor Weeks, a demonstration of ice care in the lagoon on the Charles River north of Beacon Street in Boston.<sup>3</sup>

An ice hockey rink built with interlocking sections, but without a bolt either perpendicular to the ice or laterally in forming the wall, was an ingenious device Hermann developed. The rink was so constructed that it could be moved easily; the end boards were readily removed to facilitate cleaning the ice, and the bottom boards could be raised, thus reducing melting of the ice at the base of the rink.<sup>2</sup> In the 21st century, neighborhoods resurrected Hermann's idea of constructing small rinks for local use.<sup>4</sup>

Because of city-wide budget cuts following the passage of Proposition 2 ½ in 1980, Ware's (Pulsifer's) Cove on the Charles River in Auburndale Park became the only maintained area for skating.<sup>5</sup> This caused a strong reaction from skaters on the south side of Newton, who met with the Commission in an unusual New Year's Day meeting at which it was decided to charge daily fees for skating at Crystal Lake and Bullough's Pond, even though skating would remain free at Ware's Cove.<sup>6</sup> The following year a \$1.00 daily fee was charged at all areas.<sup>7</sup>



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*Toboggan Slide, Newton Centre*

The Newton Centre Toboggan Slide of two runs, each six feet wide and 350 feet long, was erected in 1928 and was a winter attraction for the next 50 years.<sup>8</sup> Later, an incident in which a woman broke her leg,<sup>9</sup> a change in the state's liability law, and condemnation as unsafe by the Building Inspector caused its demolition in 1978.<sup>10</sup> In its last year, there were 42 days of tobogganing,<sup>11</sup> yet no funds were available for its reconstruction.<sup>10</sup> ♦

**Note: For references, see next page.**

☞ Michael J. Clarke, Newton Conservator board member

## References

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2. Butler, G. D., Pioneers in Public Recreation Burgess Publishing Co: Minneapolis, MN, 1965. While highly regarded as a leader of the playground movement, Lee believed in the exclusion of immigrants by race and was the head of the Immigration Restriction League which fostered the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 that set quotas for Southern and Eastern European immigrants and banned Asian immigrants for decades.
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4. Morrison, J., Volunteers Build Free Ice Skating Rink in Newtonville. Newton Tab 2014.
5. Lesbirel, M. Minutes, Recreation Commission Meeting 12/15/80; Newton, MA, December 15, 1980, 1980.
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7. Lesbirel, M. Minutes of the Newton Recreation Commission 11/16/81; Newton, November 16, 1981, 1981.
8. Hermann, E. Minutes of the Playground Commission 6/12/28; Newton, June 12, 1928, 1928.
9. Lesbirel, M. Minutes of the Newton Recreation Commission 1/17/1977; Newton Recreation Commission: Newton, January 17, 1977, 1977.
10. Lesbirel, M. Minutes of the Newton Recreation Commission 11/20/1978; Newton, November 20, 1978, 1978.
11. Lesbirel, M. Minutes of the Newton Recreation Commission 2/28/1977; Newton Recreation Commission: Newton, February 28, 1977, 1977.