

Sunny Bank, Our Ancestral Home
By Andrew Patterson (1995)

Chapter 9

Skating Rinks

Skating in the Gaspé area undoubtedly originated around the beginning of the twentieth century on patches of ice covering rivers and ponds. Gaspé's first rink was built in 1911 on the "Point", now known as Gaspé Harbor. During the next twenty-five years hockey became the dominant winter sport of the area, and eventually, by the 1930's, supported two leagues with eight local teams. This included a team from Sunny Bank called the Rangers.

Around 1930, a group of young men formed the Sunny Bank Rink Club and built its first skating rink. It was situated in a north-south direction on the lowlands near the York River, only a few hundred feet west of the present bridge. The ice surface was approximately the same size as today's regulation size but the boards were slightly lower. Around the outside, about ten feet from the rink, stood a high windbreak built with lumber from the covered bridge demolished in 1932.



1 Sunny Bank Rangers, about 1931. Left to right; Raymond Patterson, Ralph Patterson, Wilson Miller, Cecil Patterson, Elmer Patterson, Maynard Patterson (goalie), Stanley Patterson, Ulric Patterson, Lorne Miller.

To the east stood a one room rink house heated with an old wood stove. It represented a community effort to which many youngsters devoted their winters, and consequently, construction and operating costs were practically nil.

The group of youngsters who were responsible for the rink also formed the core of the Sunny Bank Rangers. This team emerged victorious from many of their encounters within the six team Gaspé Junior Hockey League. Most fine Sunday afternoons during winter, crowds would gather to watch the Rangers battle it out. A younger Sunny Bank team, the Maple Leafs, often captured the attention of an audience as well, competing against rivals from Wakeham, York Center of Gaspé.

Besides hockey, a great deal of skating was done by the children of Sunny Bank. As a finale for each season, a carnival was held. It included a banquet for the home team and a

well attended masquerade for all ages. The festivities usually wound up as an all night square dance in one of the local houses. Eventually most of the men involved married, and no longer had the time to devote to the rink. Despite the fact that it operated only five or six years, many good times are remembered by Sunny Bank's elderly citizens.

Sunny Bank's second rink was located near the house formerly owned by Calvin Miller, and presently by Austin English. It was opened in the fall of 1939 and only operated for one or two years. There was no rink house, and consequently Mr. Miller's house was frequently used for warming up freezing hands and feet.

After abandoning this rink, Sunny Bank went without for over a decade. In the early 1950's some small rinks were built near houses. One of this type was located near the home of Elmer Patterson. It was large enough to host an occasional hockey game, but not regulation size. Soon another group of youngsters, members of the Anglican Young People's Association, gathered their resources and formed another rink committee. With Bruce Patterson as the president and secretary combined, they went ahead and constructed Sunny Bank's third regulation size rink just behind Cameron Patterson's house, presently owned by Mrs. Weldon Sinnett. They cut logs and had them sawed at Cass' Lumber Mill in Wakeham. After hundreds of hours of volunteer labor by themselves and their fathers, the rink was ready for use in the fall of 1953.

A well was dug about eight or ten feet deep and with the aid of the Canadian International Paper Company's fire pumps, the ice surface was prepared each fall. Lighting was provided by several strings of bulbs hanging across the rink. A rink house was



built on the east side which soon proved insufficient to hold the crowds. Later another was built on the opposite side. Both rink houses were heated with wood stoves made from forty-five-gallon drums set in a box of sand. Neither rink house was locked so people could make use of the rink at will, and it was understood that the last person to leave would shut off the lights and close up.

So once again Sunny Bank had its own hockey team, which competed in a local league. During the first couple of seasons York Center also had a team, but later they combined their manpower to form one York team. A group of girls also formed a team and occasionally encountered a group of rivals from Wakeham. Aside from league hockey

games many hours were spent at scrimmage hockey. Unfortunately, in the late 1950's, many young Sunny Bankers were moving away in search of work. To compound this, a tremendous amount of snow fell during the last winter of operation. The hours of shoveling took its toll and after four or five years, the rink was closed. Everything was sold by auction and the assets were gradually given in aid of other rinks and community organizations.

After another lapse of about fifteen years, some of the same people who were deeply involved in Sunny Bank's last rink decided to try again, this time for their children. A general meeting was called and minutes began as follows: "The first meeting of the York Rink 'General Committee' was held in the York Hall on April 14th (1970) at 8:00 o'clock. Bruce Patterson was in the chair."

These minutes were taken by Harris Miller who later became the secretary, and sixteen people were in attendance. Sub-committees were formed to estimate the material costs of the various aspects of construction. The total of their estimates, as reported to a meeting on April 27, was \$4,992.62. This sum was turned down by the York Council but it promised two thousand five hundred dollars in support of the rink. After several months of volunteer labor and a total of 12 meetings, the 185' X 92' rink and three-room rink house were completed. The ice was prepared and opened to the public in mid-December 1970.

The new establishment, known as York Youth Center Ltd., is located at the site of the York Playground on property leased from Mrs. Ralph Clark. To the east of the regulation size hockey rink, stands the spacious three-room rink house. It has a main entrance in the center, containing a concession stand and washroom, with a dressing room on either end. Originally the center room was heated with an oil space heater, with wood stoves supplementing heat in the end rooms. In 1977 the Town of Gaspé installed electric heat as part of a renovation program.

Aside from the rink house there is a storage shed. Water was provided by means of a dam on Mac's Brook. Originally, the dam was constructed for the old Sunny Bank fish hatchery which was abandoned in 1938. A trench was dug from there to the site of the rink and plastic pipe was buried, providing a constant flow of gravity fed water. Six poles were erected around the rink with two 1,000-watt bulbs on each, providing light for night use.

After its 26th successful season of operation, it has proven itself the longest lasting of Sunny Bank's rinks. Each year volunteers gathered at the rink when the weather got cold enough to make ice. Volunteers often assisted in cleaning the ice after large storms.

Presently a lot of financial assistance is received from the town of Gaspé. In the last few seasons, government funded projects have largely replaced volunteer work. The older committee members have mostly resigned, and there are few young people with the desire to give their time. The rink, however, continues to be governed by a group of volunteers known as the York Youth Center Committee.

Since its opening, the York Rink has been a popular place during the cold winter months. It has provided our minor sports with practice time, children with skating, and teenagers and adults alike with hours of broomball and hockey. Aside from its regular operation, the annual Wakeham-York Carnival brings upwards of 500 people to participate in or watch some of its variety of events. For several winters this carnival raised enough money to pay the entire salary of the caretaker. All in all, rinks have provided Sunny Bankers with a healthy and popular form of exercise for over half a century.