



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

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As I write this, the weather is finally turning cold and we are getting some snow. This brings to mind what was a big winter business in Wynantskill in the 1900's-namely ice harvesting. When you talk about ice harvesting in Wynantskill, people immediately think of the Milhizer family. I've heard excerpts from a 1980's interview with Bert Milhizer where he describes his business.

The Milhizer family started the harvesting business in Wynantskill in 1926-27. They had two ponds, created by diverting water from the Wynantskill Creek, with an ice house on each pond. Dirt dikes contained the water and dams controlled the water level. The ponds were drained for cleaning in the summer.

When the ice was 10-12 inches thick, it was ready for cutting. First you had to scrape away the snow with something Bert called a "corrugator" pulled by horses. (Anyone remember his horses named Gerry and Dan?) The next step was to mark and score the ice with needle bars, chisel bars and saws which would set the floats free. Then they were floated along a canal guided by pike poles. A worker with a needle bar separated them into cakes. Then they were guided into the ice house and up conveyor belts to different levels. Men inside would layer the cakes. Sawdust was put around the exterior for insulating and boards added to the sides of the structure, depending on the height of the stacked house. This could grow to four or five stories. Straw covered the top. The Milhizers employed 40-50 men for about three weeks every winter.

Various ice dealers would come to Milhizer to purchase ice blocks and peddle them to homes and businesses in the area. Burt said he harvested ice until 1947-48. The first ice house was torn down in the fall of 1953 and the other one was burned down June 20, 1959 for a mutual aide fire drill. This was the end of ice harvesting business in Wynantskill. Evidently there was other ice harvesting in the Town. Jake Kowsky cut ice on Snyders Lake. Do you know of others?

The ice harvesting business is now just a memory. The ponds have been filled in and there are houses on the property. However if you are driving along Main Avenue in Wynantskill, look for a sign marking Milhizer Avenue and remember the lively business which once was there.

Corrections: Since writing the story about Jim Gratton and Jim Herbert, I have learned that those two politicians actually faced each other in an election. In 1959 they both ran for Town Collector of Taxes and Jim Herbert won.

Also, in my story about the Koon house, I have been told that the original Koon homestead is located at 171 Pawling Avenue in Troy (and is on the National Register).

I would like to do a story on milk houses/milkmen in the area during the 1900's. If you have any information, please contact me at 283-6384.