

## **The Good Old Days?**

**by Katheryn F. Fuller, Deputy Historian**

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We all know the big strides in technology during the twentieth century - cars, telephones, radios, TV, space explorations, but life has changed in many small ways, too. In the decade of the twenties, life in Edwards was quite different from today. Things changed rapidly then, too, and many of the things true of the early twenties had changed by 1930.

Winter was the same then as now, but the response to it was different. The few people who had cars drove them into the haymow or an empty shed, jacked them up to take the weight off the tires, took the battery into the cellar so it wouldn't freeze, and covered the car with a canvas tarpaulin to keep dust and chaff from the paint. It is told that one spinster teacher not only blocked up her car for the winter, but took off the tires, wrapped them in newspapers, and put them down cellar for winter storage!

Roads weren't plowed; they were broken. Some hardy teamster went through with his team and bobsled to break a trail. Sometimes the road commissioner hitched a heavy iron kettle behind his team and "kettled" the road with that by dragging it through the drifts. Occasionally, a few men would be hired to shovel some especially deeply drifted areas.

The main traffic was farmers taking milk to the factory and bringing home grain for the stock and groceries for the family. But log teams took advantage of good sleighing and big loads of logs were on the road from before daylight until after dark.

What did the kids do in the winter? Nearly every family, even the poor ones, had at least one sled, and sliding down hill was by far the most popular sport. "Catching pollies" was fun. That meant hitching your sled to a farmer's big empty bobsled and getting a free ride. Some parents forbade the practice, and some farmers wouldn't allow it, but it was quite common.

Eastman Hill was a favorite spot for sledding; the road was open, but didn't have much traffic. Sometimes when several children and sleds gathered, the sleds were hooked together, forming a train, and the whole gang went down together.

Some lucky kids had skates and skated on the Oswegatchie when it was frozen. Some had skis, simple affairs made of pine with a strap across the toe, and a great build-up of hardened snow under the heel after a few trips downhill. There were several who became very proficient on both skis and skates. Homemade skip-jacks - a barrel stave with an upright post and a small board seat, provided a thrilling ride for the venturesome.

If you had been thirsty on a hot summer day in the 20's, you would have gone to the water pail and dipper on a handy shelf in the kitchen. If there had been only an inch or two of tepid water in the bottom of the pail, you would have had to go to the nearest pump for a refill of cold, refreshing water. There were twenty to thirty wells in the village, so no one had to walk a long way to get drinking water, but the water in the village system was untreated Oswegatchie River water, not considered potable. Gradually, one by one, the wells became contaminated so that by the time the village water was obtained from drilled wells there were few left. If you had found the pail empty on a cold, winter day, you would have had to bundle up, with mittens to protect your hands from the cold pump handle, and would have had precarious footing on the ice under the pump where water had ben spilled.

Housewives doing grocery shopping didn't find things neatly packaged in plastic. Cookies were taken from big boxes and put into a brown paper bag, by the dozen or by the pound. Lard was dished out of a tub and put into a thin wooden boat-shaped container and wrapped in brown paper with an oiled finish, butcher paper. Farm women made their own butter and sold any excess to customers in town or to stores. It was packed in stoneware crocks, usually holding five pounds. The crock was returned for refills. Yeast was available in bulk, or Fleischman's cakes, but many good cooks preferred to buy it from Carrie Pratt who made her own.

It was during the 20's that some government agency decided that maple vinegar, the favorite kind for many families, especially those who made maple syrup, was deficient in acetic acid and no longer legal. It was replaced by cider vinegar which didn't have the accustomed flavor.

A number of people in the village kept a cow and supplied milk for themselves and neighbors. Fred Freeman delivered bottled milk to Frandy Dulack's meat market and had a small milk route on the "Brooklyn Side" of the village. The customers had two matching pails, one or two quart size, and a bracket on a pole or a box on a post placed so it could be reached from the milk wagon. Each day, or perhaps every other day, they set out the clean pail and it was replaced by the one full of fresh milk. Milk tickets were available so the customers could pay in advance and not have to take the change out when they saw the milkman coming.

There were five different bells in Edwards, each with its distinctive tone. Each of the three churches had a bell rung for Sunday services, or special meetings. The school bell rang at 8:30 as a warning, the "first bell". Then at 9:00 it rang again, the "last bell", school was in session. The fire bell with a loud, unpleasant tone, was on the hill behind the Town Hall, and when that rang the firemen responded, along with a number of spectators.

Many changes have occurred in the village itself since the 1920's when Main Street was lined with stores, including two clothing stores, a furniture store, and John Milan's ice cream parlor. A Grange Hall and IOOF Hall were impressive social gathering places. There were two saw mills, two feed and coal businesses, a large milk station and a busy railroad depot with two trains each day. The zinc mines provided an inn for single men and company houses for management. Many miners lived in the village and walked to work.

Now the mines, the bank, the school, the Grange and IOOF, many stores, the sawmills, feed stores, the railroad, and milk station are gone, victims of improved transportation and marketing or economic changes. Very few employed people work in Edwards; they commute to mines, mills or businesses in other towns. Yet with all the changes, Edwards remains a pleasant place to live with local citizens interested in keeping it pleasant, especially at Christmas time when it is one of the best-decorated places in the North Country.

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