

THE HISTORICAL TIMES

NEWSLETTER OF THE GRANVILLE, OHIO, HISTORICAL SOCIETY

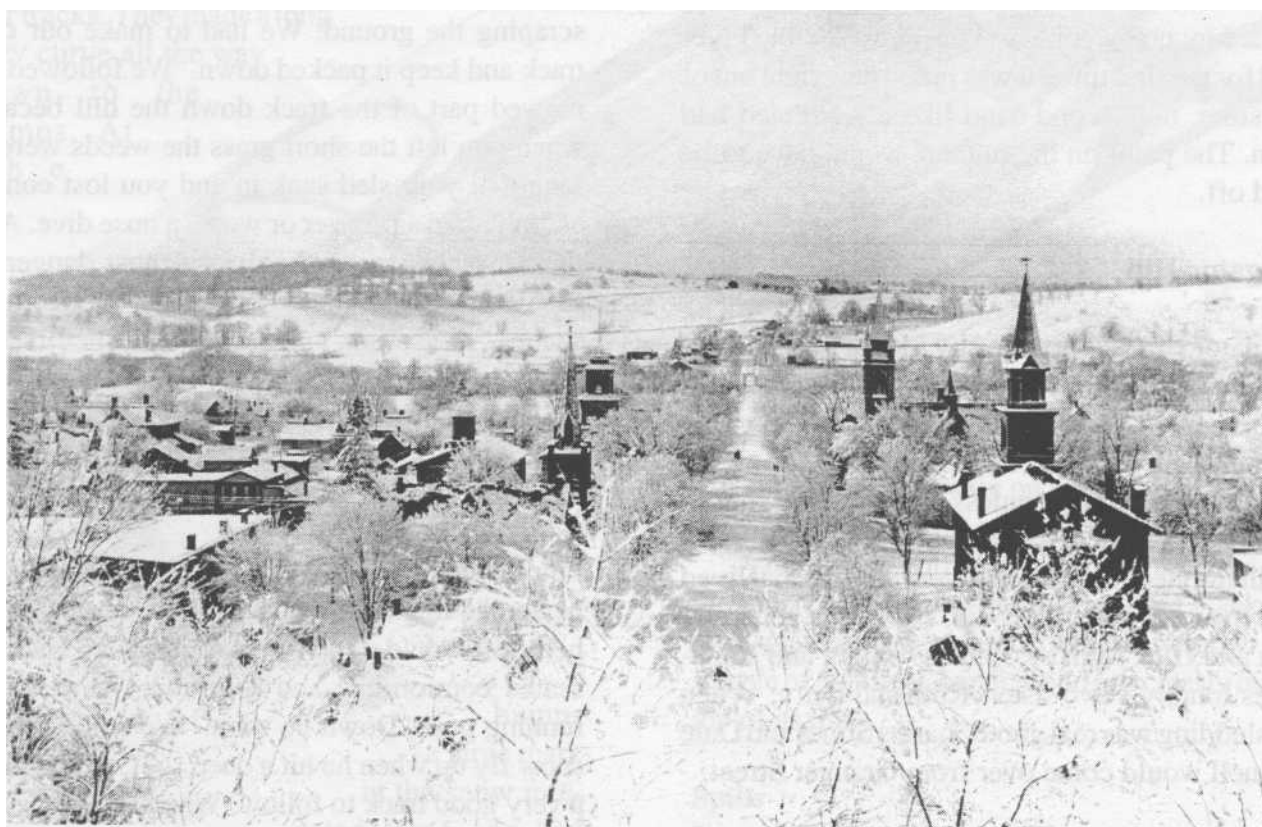
Volume XIII Number 1

Winter 1999

Bob Evans Remembers...

Winter Fun In Granville

*Snow and Ice Mean Warm Memories of Sledding on Alligator Hill
and Skating at the Gravel Pit*



A winter day in Granville early in the nineteenth century. Photo taken from College Hill looking south down Main Street. The steeples are those of (clockwise from near right): First Presbyterian, Centenary Methodist, St. Luke's, Opera House and First Baptist. The small figures visible in the center of South Main Street are a horse and sleigh; nearer are two pedestrians.

Snow Sledding on Alligator Hill

When I woke up I had a feeling something special had happened during the night while I was sleeping. I knew it was Saturday and there was no school, but that was not the reason for the special feeling. From my pillow I could look out the window and see the sky, it was clear blue, the sun was shining, it was very bright. I jumped out of bed to get a better look. To my great surprise and delight the outside world was white, clear, clean, pristine, untouched. A snow storm had passed through and dumped at least two feet of snow on the ground. No school today; Alligator Hill looked very inviting.

Great fun; now I could use my new Flexible Flyer sled for the first time. It was brand new right out of the store, not second hand like my old sled had been. The paint on the runners would have to be filed off.

Alligator Hill

Alligator Hill was not used by a lot of kids. First of all it was a long way to walk from town where most of them lived. Second the climb was so long that you only got a couple or three runs in during the morning or afternoon unless you could go without lunch or if you could stay until after dark. As a result my sledding buddies were the kids that lived "down on the pike" like I did. They were generally Ken and Dick Murray, Johnny Wright and sometimes Johnny's two sisters Ruth and Betty. When the sledding was real good Charles Stiner and Dale Gosnell would come over from Granger Street.

My house was usually the meeting place. From there we would go out on to the golf course, crossing 18 fairway to 17 green, up 17 fairway bearing to our left until we hit 11 rough, and then

started climbing until we hit the short grass path that went almost straight up the hill to 16 green. In the just fallen snow, soft and fluffy, the walking was labored and slow. Going up that hill carrying or pulling your sled was even slower and very hard work. But once you got up on top and turned around and looked out over that vast expanse of white and black, you were not tired or weary, you were exhilarated, you were happy, you were strong, you were big!! You were looking forward to that wonderful ride down. The hard work getting up there was completely forgotten.

The First Run!

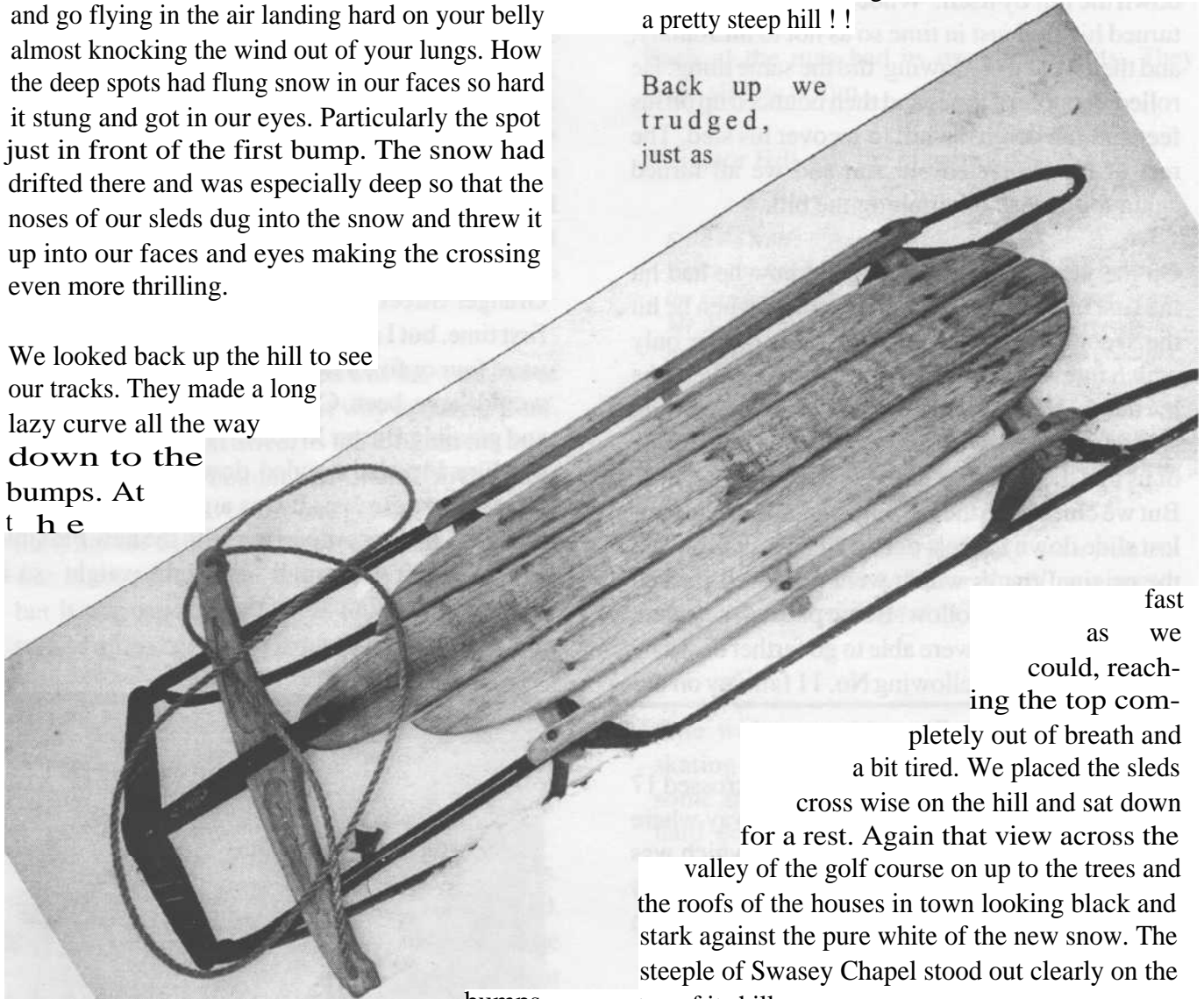
The first run down was very important. That track would determine all the following runs. The snow had to be deep to keep our sled runners from scraping the ground. We had to make our own track and keep it packed down. We followed the mowed part of the track down the hill because when you left the short grass the weeds were so long that your sled sank in and you lost control ending up in a tip over or worse a nose dive. Also that first run was probably the most dangerous since the rider did not know where the deep and shallow spots were, and he would be the first one to hit the bumps at the bottom without knowing exactly where they were. If any one of the bumps was not hit almost straight on, the sled could be thrown off on its side causing a rather bad spill.

Since Dick Murray was the biggest and the oldest, he agreed to go first. But he would not go on his belly, he would sit up on the first run. So Dick got seated comfortably and Ken and I gave him a running push. Down he went. We could see the snow fly up when he hit a deep spot, but he made a very good track to follow. When he had passed the bumps he waved and shouted and we followed immediately, all on our bellies, shouting and laughing all the way, ending up close to Dick down by the 12th green.

The Bumps

As we all coasted in and quickly jumped up off our sleds, we were all happy, laughing, and "Gee Whizzing" about how great that first run felt. What a surprising thrill it was to hit those bumps and go flying in the air landing hard on your belly almost knocking the wind out of your lungs. How the deep spots had flung snow in our faces so hard it stung and got in our eyes. Particularly the spot just in front of the first bump. The snow had drifted there and was especially deep so that the noses of our sleds dug into the snow and threw it up into our faces and eyes making the crossing even more thrilling.

We looked back up the hill to see our tracks. They made a long lazy curve all the way down to the bumps. At the



bumps a large mark in the snow indicated some one had dragged a foot while going over the bumps. No one would admit doing it because it indicated a bad run, but some one had hit the bumps a bit

off center and had to recover by dragging a foot. We often wondered how fast we were going when we hit the bumps, but we never could really find out. Was it 20, 25, 30, miles an hour?? We always talked about 30, but who knows?? It was a long run down a pretty steep hill !!

Back up we trudged, just as

fast as we could, reaching the top completely out of breath and a bit tired. We placed the sleds cross wise on the hill and sat down for a rest. Again that view across the valley of the golf course on up to the trees and the roofs of the houses in town looking black and stark against the pure white of the new snow. The steeple of Swasey Chapel stood out clearly on the top of its hill.

Spills

Johnny Wright, the youngest and the smallest of the group, could not wait. He jumped up, picked up his sled and took a running start for his belly flop on to his sled. Shouting and laughing he disap-

peared over the crest. The rest, of course followed immediately. Each taking his running start for his belly flop and going over the crest following our original tracks. But, Look Out, Johnny had hit the bumps wrong and had been thrown off his sled. He was rolling in the snow and his sled was going on down the hill by itself. Whoever followed Johnny turned his sled just in time so as not to hit Johnny, and the rest of us following did the same thing. He rolled a couple of times and then bounced up on his feet and ran down the hill to recover his sled. The rest of us completed our run and we all turned again to the task of climbing the hill.

On the way up Johnny explained how he had hit the first bump a little bit off center and when he hit the second one he hit it on the right runner only which threw him off the side of the sled. When he hit the third one he said he let go of the sled and started to roll. This was a good reminder to the rest of us that those bumps were not to be taken lightly. But we climbed to the top once again and made our last slide down the best one of all. We all followed the original tracks which were now well packed down, and easy to follow. Being packed they were also faster, and we were able to go farther down by turning to our left following No. 11 fairway on our way home.

Now walking and pulling our sleds, we crossed 17 fairway, passed the green, on to 18 fairway where Dick and Ken turned right to go home which was the golf course clubhouse. Johnny and his sisters and I continued on to my house, but they kept on going east on the pike to their house.

And that was the first morning of sledding on Alligator Hill. Was it cold? Not to us; we were too busy and too active to feel the cold even though the temperature had not gone above 40 degrees all day. Besides the air and the snow were dry and there was practically no wind. Just about a perfect cold day. Will we be going back? Yessirree! Tomorrow morning if Dad is not singing in church,

then. of course. we will have to go there in the morning. So for sure tomorrow afternoon for at least two runs if not more.

The Town Hills: Summit and Elm Streets.

As I mentioned earlier the kids from town did not get out our way very often to slide on the big hill. But there were a couple of pretty good hills in town that were used quite extensively. Two that I enjoyed were Summit Street and Elm Street in opposite ends of town.

Summit Street was really the first hill I was ever on. It was the natural place for us kids living on Granger Street to slide. I can not remember the first time. but I am sure it must have been when we were four or five years old. The "WE" in this case would have been Charles Stiner, Dale Gosnell, and possibly Buster Mitchell. I remember I had an old Fire Fly sled handed down to me from my Uncle Harry Brown. It was a good sled although old fashioned in comparison with the new Flexible Flyers. But it was small and light weight so it suited me just fine at the time.



The Summit Street hill started just above Prospect for the bigger kids, but for us little guys Prospect was "high" enough. We would run across Prospect and do a belly flop on the down slope for a good fast start. If the snow was packed real hard by the cars running on the street, when we reached the bottom we were going at a pretty good speed which was both good and bad. Because at this juncture we had to cross Pearl Street which was, even at that time, a main thoroughfare. Regardless we did it and to the best of my knowledge no one ever got into any trouble. During the late afternoon and evening at times the police blocked off Pearl street and then the families all enjoyed a safe, fast run down Summit Street going all the way to Granger sometimes.

The other hill we kids enjoyed was the west end of Elm Street where it went part way up Sugar Loaf. Here we used Plum Street as the top, and the busy cross street at the bottom was Cherry Street. Here again I never heard of any one getting in trouble or hurt, but for Elm Street there was one story that was different. I am not sure who it was that did it, but it was surely one of the older boys. Having started up higher on Sugar Loaf, he was going very

fast when he came to the intersection. A big freight wagon pulled by a team of horses was right in the middle in front of him; no time to turn right or left; he went straight through between the front and back wheels of that wagon without touching a thing. That was the big story of Elm Street. It should be a legend by now.

Each of the runs had its own personality. They were all lots of fun.

Alligator Hill was the big one.

Editor's Note:

Since the time of this sledding narrative, the holes on the Granville Golf Course have been realigned. What Mr. Evans refers to as the 17th fairway and green is the present 18th hole. This is known as the most beautiful golf hole in Licking County. The 18th fairway to which Mr. Evans refers is now the site of the expanded club house. The old 16th green is now part of a road in Bryn Du subdivision. The other fairways and greens mentioned are as he remembers them.

"Alligator Hill" is the incline going down from the present 18th tee. The "Alligator Mound" is a quarter mile east at the other end of the ridge.

Ice Skating on the Gravel Pit

There had been about three years of cold winters. My memory says they were 1928 through 1930. However just which year is not important. The important point is how cold it got this specific year and how good ice skating on the gravel pit was and how thick the ice became.

The weather, as I remember it, was different right from the beginning. We had a good snow for Thanksgiving. It turned cold, freezing and below at night, around 40 to 45 during the day right up to Christmas. The ground and the water froze all that

time without melting. By Christmas we were skating on the gravel pit. However there were still some areas in the middle of pit that had not frozen hard enough to hold our weight. These were generally marked by big stones placed around them. The frozen spots on Raccoon creek were generally the small deeper holes which did not run very fast so the water could freeze. Skaters had to be very careful not to go near the thin ice areas. Several kids fell in, but I don't remember any serious injuries.

The gravel pit was located south of town on the River Road. You went out Main Street, past the depot, across the tracks, across Raccoon Creek, and immediately turned left on River Road. About

a mile on the right was the "Pit". You could drive your car over the sand and gravel right up to the water's edge. I don't think anyone was working the pit at this time because I do not remember the dredge being there.

Editor's Note.

River Road has been relocated south of the gravel pit and intersects St. Rt. 16. Old River Road, which Mr. Evans remembers, now takes you to Lake Hudson, the site of the old gravel pit, improved with a sand beach and a popular summer swimming place. It has been many years since it froze thick enough to support ice skaters.

My Dad, Charles, better known as Ted Evans, was an expert skater. He preferred figure skating. He could write "Evans" on the ice with some difficulty. His capital "E"s were beautiful. He taught me how to do the "E". It was great fun to learn the turns on one foot and then the other. I got so I could do the "Ev" but usually fell or missed the "a". He also taught me how to do the figure 8. One circle on one foot and the other circle on the other foot with only one push off in the middle.

To do figure skating one used the "rocker" skate blade which was curved so that only a small part of the blade made contact with the ice at one time, and you could rock from toe to heel as necessary to make your figures. Dad had three pairs and gave one of them to me. They were called "rocker clamp ons." Between the sole plate and the heel plate there was a threaded small bar which when turned fitted the toe clamps and the heel claps to the shoe. Then there was a lever you pulled back which snugged the clamps up tight. The heel clamps never held so you put a strap under the heel and up over the top of your foot. They were not like the hockey and speed skates which generally were long straight blades with

the whole blade making contact with the ice. Shoe skates were few and far between in those days.

As I mentioned before, we had had some cold weather for some time, but then it really got cold. For three days and nights the temperature was below zero and never above freezing. The ice on the pit became very strong and thick. Near the edge it got to be about 3 feet, and out in the center it was measured at 26 inches as I remember. Anyway it was strong with a hard surface just right for skating. Everyone who skated was out on the ice Friday night, all day Saturday, Saturday night, and Sunday.

The area where the cars came in and parked became a real winter picnic area. Fires were built at the ice edge, logs were brought in for benches, it was a rather festive place. Everybody skated. Big, little, young, old, it made no difference. There were experts, beginners, and just plain skaters. Some preferred to cruise, others made figures and pictures on the ice, the kids usually played hockey, and a few couples danced, and then there was "Crack the Whip." The end of the whip was my favorite place; gliding faster and faster and then letting go and racing out into the open all by myself!

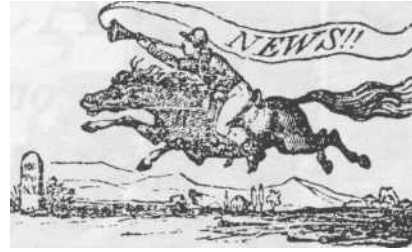
I remember this weekend very distinctly. The days were very clear with sunshine, but cold, generally around freezing. The nights were beautiful with a full moon. It was light, clear, almost like day time, visibility was very good. A big bonfire was built right at the edge on the ice. Another smaller one was built out almost at the middle, which amazingly enough never went through nor burnt out during the whole weekend. The vision of the whole area with the two fires, the clear blue sky, the full moon glowing almost as bright as the sun, people out on the ice, some skating, some just standing around the fires talking is still very clear and vivid in my mind. Another vivid picture I have is my Dad driving the

Model-T Ford out on the ice, and making it spin around a couple of times. That was a big show off, so it was done only once.

We had many other great days on the ice, but none so memorable as these. Ice skating on the gravel pit, a beautiful memory. " You Can't Take That Away From Me."

About the Author:

Robert C. Evans was born in Granville and lived on Granger Street, across from the elementary school until 1926, and then on Newark-Granville Road, in the second house west of St. Edward's Church, until moving to Newark in 1933. Two of his reminiscences about winter activities in Granville are published in this issue. Mr. Evans is now retired and lives in California.



Volunteers for the Historical Society were invited to share "tea" at the Old Academy Building on Sunday, Feb. 14. If you have volunteered during the past year and were unable to attend, please accept our "heartfelt" thanks.

Our next program will feature Al Davison, former president of the Society, speaking on the Granville Feeder Canal. Please join us at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 30 in the Old Academy Building.

Civil War Roundtable Programs Set

All meetings will be at 7:30 p.m. at the Old Academy Building. If you have any questions or want to be involved in any future presentations, please call Clarke Wilhelm at 587-2665 (work) or 587-1119 (home).

Tuesday, January 19 - "Confederate Prisoners on Lake Erie: Johnson Island Through the Eyes of Captain John Dooley"

Dr. Anthony Lisska, one of the founding members and former head of the Roundtable, spoke about the Union prison camp Johnson Island, with special emphasis on the diary kept by John Dooley. Dooley, a Richmond native who was part of Pickett's Charge and was captured at Gettysburg, was incarcerated at Johnson's Island until February, 1865. Throughout his prison time, Dooley kept a very "chatty" diary which Dr. Lisska believes offers valuable insights into the conditions at Johnson Island.

Tuesday, Feb. 16 - " The 8th Ohio Volunteer Infantry: The Gibraltar Regiment"

Member Tom Mellott, one of our regular present -

ers, will look at this Ohio unit which fought in most of the major campaigns of the Army of the Potomac, distinguishing itself especially at Antietam and Gettysburg.

Tuesday, March 16 - " Fighting Joe Hooker : Another Look"

Clarke Wilhelm, in his current mood of re-examining some of the "losers" among Civil War generals, will examine one of the few men Ambrose Burnside didn't like. The general who came a cropper at Chancellorsville and who generally ranks just a bit above Ambrose Burnside in historians' disdain.

Tuesday, April 20 - " The Experts Debate "

We will watch a video created by the Massachusetts School of Law Educational Forum, featuring four prominent Civil War scholars - James I. Robertson, Jr., Robert Krick, Herman Hattaway and Gordon Rhea - discussing and often disagreeing about key issues. Then we will see what we think about the same issues the experts tackled.



*From the Archives: Byron Evans in his blacksmith shop on Pearl Street, about 1915. His son Charles is seated at the right. Charles was the father and Byron the grandfather of Robert C Evans, whose reminiscences of Granville winters are in this issue of *The Historical Times*.*

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*This is the First Issue of Our
Thirteenth Year
for the
Historical Times*

*We hope that the members of the Society
have enjoyed reading about Granville's history.*

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or queries to:*

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