



OTSEGO LAKE ASSOCIATION WINTER UPDATE 2023

What a difference a year makes!

In **2022**, Otsego Lake achieved ice-in on January 21, and our Winter Update featured articles on:

- Ice fishing and Ice harvesting
- Winter Carnivals which included snow or ice sculpting, and races on our frozen lake for skaters, dog sled teams, and even cars
- Ice records for Otsego Lake, including an EPA chart noting that ice cover is achieved later and for shorter duration in the 21st century than in years past



Ice fishing from Glimmerglass State Park on solid ice 2022

Now, in 2023, our winter has lacked a consistent snow pack or ice cover. It has been a challenging season to plan winter events or activities, with some disappointment in fewer opportunities to cross country ski, snow shoe, or ice skate.

In 2023, Evidence of warming weather patterns included:

2

- Little consistent snow accumulation in January, and open water on January 21, the date when the lake achieved ice cover in 2022.
- Ice-in, reached during the overnight hours of February 5-6, lasted mere days, which may prove to be the shortest period of ice cover in our recorded history.
- Limited outdoor activities: Badger and Glimmerglass rinks were able to offer some days of ice skating this year, but the Springfield's rink, built by the community in 2022, did not open at all in 2023. Featured on the Today Show in 2022, it remained closed this year, primarily because it was felt that the weather was too unpredictable to ensure that volunteer efforts needed to assemble the rink would pay off in many days of good skating.
- Cooperstown's Winter Carnival was held from February 4-6th, thanks to many dedicated volunteers and participation from many community organizations. The 2023 Carnival offered a variety of activities, but no ice or snow sculpting, or events on the lake, as in years past. Instead, the Carnival – the first in three years— wisely focused some attention on indoor as well as outdoor events, from rock climbing at the Clark Sports Center to a very successful (and sold-out) Grilled-Cheese-for-a-Cause lunch at the Farmers Market.
- At Glimmerglass State Park, the trails normally groomed for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing could sometimes only be enjoyed for a nice winter hike. And the popular tubing hill remained closed for the season, due to warm temperatures and insufficient snow.



January 21, 2023: Hills in Town of Springfield show a dusting of snow atop icy branches, but brown fields below reflect a lack of significant snowfall.



January 21, 2023: Photo from western shore of Otsego Lake shows open water all the way to Hyde Bay and Glimmerglass State Park.

Of course these observations are only an anecdotal comparison between two years, but as noted in our Winter Updates from 2021 and 2022, recorded data dating back to 1843 indicates a significant warming trend which affects both the duration and thickness of ice cover on our Otsego Lake. And as we've mentioned previously, scientists are very concerned about the negative impact of diminishing ice cover on the health of our lake water.

Glimmerglass State Park

As most of us are aware, Glimmerglass State Park made news last summer, not for the Triathlons or Marathons or fireworks or concerts we've enjoyed, but for waterfront closures: first for the discovery of E coli during routine water testing, and then for the appearance and identification of cyanobacteria, which we also know as a Harmful Algae Bloom (HAB.) Though HABs are, unfortunately, not uncommon in New York State lakes, this was the first HAB which caused the closure of swimming facilities on Otsego Lake.

But it was not the first time for Glimmerglass State Park to be in the spotlight; it has often been newsworthy since its beginnings over 60 years ago.

In 1963, when New York State purchased 600 acres of the George Hyde Clarke Estate at the head of the lake, there were some initial concerns about how the land would be developed and what amenities a public state park would provide. As noted in hydehall.org, one issue voiced by local residents and preservationists concerned the fate of Hyde Hall, and how the 40-room historic building might fit into the plans to develop the Park. Built by George Clarke in stages from 1819-1833, the building was in need of attention and restoration, which was an objective of the Friends of Hyde Hall, formed in 1964. In that same year, Governor Nelson Rockefeller announced plans for Hyde Hall: to “restore” and put it to “functional use,” using portions of the historic mansion for cultural and educational purposes. The ambitious goal was to have the building ready and open to the public by 1970!

As plans were developed for the design and construction of the park itself, local residents questioned the effect that the park might have on the environment, particularly the quality of the lake water. There was concern about the potential impact of locating campsites in proximity to Shadow Brook or the lake, and opposition from some quarters to allowing additional watercraft on the lake. Environmentally-minded residents were already concerned about the introduction of non-native species of flora and fauna into the lake waters, and many residents were opposed to having more boats on the lake, especially large, motorized watercraft. Nevertheless, the park was under construction by 1965.

Constructing Glimmerglass

According to Cobleskill Stone Products, a contractor for the project, many materials went into their share of building the park infrastructure: “5,470 linear feet of piping, 8,558 feet of concrete curbing, 3,282 feet of concrete sidewalk, and 5885 tons of black-top!” Of note was the construction of ten “Bioswales,” devised to mitigate storm water runoff, with grasses, plants and trees atop each Bioswale. They reported that “the collected and stored storm water is filtered through the sand blend over a period of days before it is drained to Otsego Lake.” (www.cobleskillstoneproducts.com)

Glimmerglass State Park opened in 1968, with picnicking and swimming from the waterfront beach --- but **no boat launch**. However, concerns over water quality and additional watercraft in the lake were not entirely laid to rest. Indeed, an advertisement for the 1968 edition of *The Goodyear Guide to the State Parks of New England and New York*, noted that one of New York's newest parks, Glimmerglass, was still "under development with a golf course, **marina**, and camp sites in the works"....

Environmental Issues

Though the marina hyped in 1968 never materialized, New York's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) announced plans to construct a boat launch at Glimmerglass in 1990. Their proposal resulted in much conversation—and consternation – among local residents. As reported by Mary Esch in the September 9, 1994 issue of *The Los Angeles Times*, many area residents favored the boat launch, so that they might have easier access to Otsego Lake waters. One local observed that "The Good Lord put the water here for the people to use," and accused opponents of the launch of being "selfish individuals who just want to keep the lake to themselves."

But contrary opinions were just as strong, especially among a group called Motorless Otsego, which was dedicated not only to preventing additional access to the lake, but also to restricting the use of **any** motorized watercraft, by **anyone**. One Motorless member referred to Otsego Lake as "The Walden Pond of New York," and the Times reported that the group had concerns beyond just the noise of motor boats, including the health of the lake water, for not only aquatic life, but also as a source of Cooperstown's drinking water. *The Times* cited additional issues with motorboats: "Propellers stir up weeds and sediment. Wakes erode shorelines. As much as one-third of the gasoline and oil put into the most popular motors – two stroke outboards—goes through unburned, spewed into water and air.

The Times 1994 article also reported that Bill Harman, Director of SUNY Oneonta's Biological Field Station (BFS) since 1968, had found issues with the

health of the lake waters in his over 20 years of experience with lake monitoring, citing “blooms of algae, declining deep-water oxygen levels, the introduction of milfoil weeds and alewife minnows that compete with native species, and decreasing numbers of mollusks, microorganisms and fish.” Harman also noted in 1994 that the “most obvious harm done by motorboats is the introduction of exotic (non-native) species like zebra mussels and the stirring up of sediments, which makes phosphorous available to feed the algae blooms.

The issues and concerns raised in the 1990’s were addressed primarily by a continuation of the status-quo: no boat launch was built at Glimmerglass State Park, and there was no ban on motorboats, which continued to proliferate on lake waters. Calls for additional boat access to Otsego Lake, however, have continued throughout the years. In a Daily Star column on October 15, 2010, weekly outdoors column writer Rick Brockway asked, “Why hasn’t the state built a boat launch that everyone can use? Is there any other New York state park that doesn’t have a public boat launch? Maybe it’s because the people of Cooperstown really don’t want anyone else on “their” lake.

As for Glimmerglass State Park, their Friends website notes that the park has continued to update and improve both facilities and programming over the years, including a 2013 rehabilitation of the parking lots near the waterfront. By using Bioswales, grass, and less pavement, Glimmerglass reports reductions in the amount of water runoff and improvement of runoff water quality as well. Today the park’s amenities are enjoyed by many local residents and visitors alike. New York State data (open data @ [its.ny.gov](https://data.ny.gov/)) shows a healthy usage of the park over the past decade: a total of over 1.5 million “official visits” have been recorded, with the highest annual attendance reported in 2018, when there were 185,367 visitors. Perhaps most importantly, we can be grateful for one important and enduring fact: New York’s purchase of land from the Clarke Estate and development of the state park helped to preserve an invaluable resource for Otsego Lake: open fields and forests. Among their environmental benefits, both fields and forests provide habitat for wildlife, and mitigate erosion and runoff, which reduces the amount of phosphorous-laden sediment entering our lake.



**Fall foliage in Glimmerglass State Park, reflected in Glimmerglass waters
Forests help improve watershed quality as well as the view shed**

The 1998 Plan for the Management of Otsego Lake, updated by the Otsego County Water Quality Coordinating Committee in 2007, noted that the greatest threat to our lake is from nutrient loading. Excessive amounts of phosphorous and nitrogen lead to eutrophication, resulting in excessive plant growth, fouling of waters, and harming aquatic habitats. Two of the contributors to excessive nutrient loading are runoff from farmlands, and clearing of land for both residential and commercial use. Among other measures, the watershed committees recommended attention to land use planning, focusing on “protection and preservation.” One component of that planning has been conserving our forested land, especially in the hills of the watershed. Although Glimmerglass and conservation easements have been successful in protecting some forested lands, other perhaps less-heralded local efforts have also been effective for many years. Since the rugged terrain of our forested land does not readily lend itself to traditional farming methods, encouraging small agro-forestry ventures has been important here for more than three centuries.

Sugar bush, our friend for many seasons and reasons

The Massachusetts Maple Products Association (massmaple.org) points out that Native Americans were the first to process and consume maple products.

The Haudenosaunee people, native to our area, were among that pioneering group. There are various stories which speculate about the first use of maple sap, including a chieftain throwing a tomahawk into a maple, or eating “sapsicles,” formed from sap on icy maple branches. But by the time Europeans arrived, native peoples were known to establish “sugar camps” near stands of maples in the spring to tap, collect, and process the sap. They dropped heated rocks into clay or wooden containers of sap to make “grain sugar,” or “cake sugar,” which was poured into molds to harden. And our native peoples also enjoyed maple syrup poured over snow, the simplest of maple “snow bowls.” From the experiences of Native peoples, early settlers also began to tap trees, and boil sap, primarily to produce maple sugar, the only sweetener readily available in 18th century America. Judge William Cooper, our Founding Father, was no exception.

Fortunately, Judge Cooper was an avid correspondent, so we are aware of many of his local ventures, some of which are chronicled in [A Guide in the Wilderness or the History of the First Settlements in the Western Counties of New York with Useful Instructions to Future Settlers](#). Consisting of a “series of letters addressed by Judge Cooper, of Cooperstown, to William Sampson, Barrister, of New York,” the Guide was first published in 1810 by Gilbert and Hodges, then copyrighted by James Fenimore Cooper in 1897, and is now available online through Google Books. In the Guide we learn that Judge Cooper purchased 40,000 acres of Otsego lands in 1785, which he sold in only sixteen days in May of 1786. The majority of the land was sold in 100-acre parcels, to potential farmers Cooper termed “the poorest order of men.” Not only could the purchasers not pay cash for their 100 acres, most had little experience with farming, nor did they possess any tools for clearing land or growing crops.

Judge Cooper had a vested interest in the success of the men who purchased his lands, partly because he would need to take payment for the farms in the form of crops they would produce. Cooper observed that clearing the wooded parcels for farming would be a lengthy and arduous task, and that most parcels had a substantial amount of hilly terrain that might never be suitable for farming. He therefore encouraged the preservation of maple trees and the establishment of maple sugaring, even furnishing the vats for the sap. As the sugaring business

became more established, Cooper also arranged to transport maple sugar from Otsego to Albany, and then down the Hudson River to the New York City area, where there was good demand for the product. He also proudly publicized his maple sugaring venture, sending a gift of “sugar and spirits produced from the maple tree” with his correspondence to President George Washington. He also offered advice to Thomas Jefferson on establishing sugar bush at Monticello, a venture which was ultimately unsuccessful. Although Cooper himself estimated that he had been at least partly responsible for clearing over two million trees in what is now Otsego County, he did promote the preservation of maple trees, which are natives and well-suited to our climate, and he cultivated a maple sugaring interest among local farmers. That interest has persevered for many years, with generations of farm families still preserving the maples and sugaring legacy.

Today, according to the New York Maple Producers Association, (nysmaple.com), rural New York has more “tappable maples” than can be found in any other state. Our industry includes over two thousand sugarmakers, who take pride in producing a natural and sustainable product, on farms which do not use fertilizers nor produce methane from their maple tree crops! Locally, there are two enterprises in close proximity to Cooperstown: Stannards Maple Farm in the Town of Roseboom—a 100 year-old family farm, (stannardsmaple@msn.com), and Cooperstown Maple Works, also a family-owned enterprise which is located in the hills overlooking Cooperstown (cooperstownmapleworks.com.) One of the largest local producers is Mill Hollow Maple, located in the Butternut Valley. Couple Amy McKinnon and Brian Ryther make it ALL happen, and emphasize that their commitment is year round, with no other employees or any true “off-season.” A visit to their sugar house in New Lisbon included a short hike with Amy in one of the stands of maples, and a very educational visit to the sugar house, which was constructed by Brian, with a little assistance from his father, Warren Ryther, who also helps with log- splitting---so that the evaporator can be “fired up” during sugaring season.

Mill Hollow Maple consists of five different sugar bushes, which contain 10,000 trees. As days warm and nights remain cool, sap drips from taps in about 6000 trees, and runs downhill under vacuum pressure through a large and impressive network of tubing to storage tanks at the bottom of the sugarbush. In the

afternoon and into the evening, Brian collects 1000-3000 gallons of sap from each site, and transports it all to the sugar house. He uses a converted fire truck which can transport 1500 gallons of syrup in stainless steel vats, or their back-up truck, which holds 1,000 gallons. At season's peak, Brian will truck 15,000 gallons of sap back to the sugar house in a single day. The sap, which is then 1-2% sugar, will next undergo processing to ensure that it meets the standards for Pure New York State Maple Syrup, which must have at least 66% sugar content. The first step inside the sugar house is reverse osmosis, which makes the sap about 15% sugar. That sap is then put through the evaporator, which is heated to 950 degrees Fahrenheit. The Mill Hollow evaporator is powered by wood, most of it logs from the property's felled trees. Amy's job during this stage is to feed 9 logs into the evaporator's fire box every 4-5 minutes. When the syrup has reduced to 66% sugar, it is then filtered, ready to be stored in 40 gallon stainless steel tanks. And in 2023, just as Judge Cooper arranged for maple sugar to be transported to New York City, Brian and Amy have a contract with Whole Foods to supply their "downstate" stores with jugs of Mill Hollow Maple Syrup. Fruits of their labors, including maple sugar, cream, and candy, can be found locally at the Cooperstown Farmer's Market as well as in some shops and grocery stores.

If you'd like to learn more about maple sugaring, New York's Maple Weekends provide a perfect opportunity; this year visitors are welcomed at select venues during the weekends of March 18-19 and 25-26. Some sugar houses host pancake breakfasts and have programs that demonstrate how maple products are made. One nearby venue is Millers Mills, located in Richfield Springs, which offers "maple demonstrations, including sap gathering, syrup production, finishing and packaging. More info at nysmaple.com or mohawkvalley.today

And, lastly, Sugaring Off Sundays are returning to The Farmers' Museum this year! On Sundays March 19 and 26, and April 2, the Museum offers a full pancake breakfast of scrambled eggs, home fries, sausage and, of course, pancakes with Otsego County pure maple syrup. Breakfast is served from 8:30 AM to 1 PM; the Museum and maple sugaring activities are open from 9:00 AM to 2 PM. Admission is \$10 for kids 6-12, \$15 for adults. For details: farmersmuseum.org. Hope you can get out to enjoy some maple syrup! And now:

It's time to plan for good times, in, on, and around

OUR WONDERFUL OTSEGO LAKE!!