

The Legend

By Ellyn Okvist, B.Sc.

In 1922, our own Walter "Bunny" Gubner traveled to Poughkeepsie with the intention to purchase the famous Poughkeepsie racer, "THE ISIS" and to return to Lake Ronkonkoma with a dream of The Lake Ronkonkoma Ice Boat and Yacht Club.

This first race of the LRIBYC was held on February 3, 1923. The Ronkonkoma fleet had been tuning up during the week of January 25, 1923, and the presence of "THE ISIS," now owned by Commodore W. B. Gubner; "THE RADIO," owned by Vice-Commodore L. C. Heilman; "ZERO," owned by Joseph Kirk, treasurer; "BOOTLEGGERS," owned by Secretary Leo Cattanaich; Dr. W. Lucas' "FLAPPER;" and the fast scooter, "CHARLOTTE," owned by George Cummins, were all ready for the starter's flag.

All the ice boats except "THE ISIS" were built from plans drawn by George Buchout and assembled here after the shipment arrived by freight. The six ice boats were now representing the LRIBYC, which is still sailing today. The official banner of the club, combined red and white on a navy-blue banner, and has been displayed for 102 years. It was held up by Gubner and Heilman at this first race in 1923, the Long Island Championship.

Famous ice boat builder George Buchout, of Poughkeepsie, in his obituary was referred to as a "boat builder of note who had the distinction of constructing the fastest ice yacht in the world." Buchout built "THE ISIS," which Bunny Gubner purchased. Buchout also built "THE HAWK" for future President Franklin D. Roosevelt (D-NY) and "THE ICICLE" for John Roosevelt both for use on the Hudson River.

Almost 102 years later to the day, the Long Island Championship was held last weekend January 25 and 26 on our Lake. Lake Ronkonkoma is ideally located for ice racing as the fresh water of the lake freezes to a great depth and lasts much longer. After no ice conditions since the 2014 LI Championship was held here, this Saturday started out with professional ice sailors from the club. The sun was shining, the boats were prepared, and the community gave high attendance for the event.

History is held in high regard in our town, and after the no-ice conditions, many newcomers and children were not aware of the spectacle they were seeing. It is our intention to bring the sport to local eyes. Welcome back, ice boats, and the history of your races on our lake can be continued.

Note that many early first members lived on the lake shores. Gubner maintained a residence and his Evergreen Nursery on lakefront property at the west end of Ronkonkoma Lake, just south of the boat ramp. The area is still used today as the base camp for the LRIBYC.

The stern steerer, "ZERO," dates back to the original Club days and was owned by Joseph Kirk. The late George Neyssen, the next owner, sailed it for the last time in 2005 before his death in 2007. All of the original iceboats are gone except for the "ZERO," which has been in storage with his son, George Neyssen, who is planning to undertake a complete restoration. The later ice sailor, Neyssen, kept the family tradition when sailing this past weekend in the LI Championships.

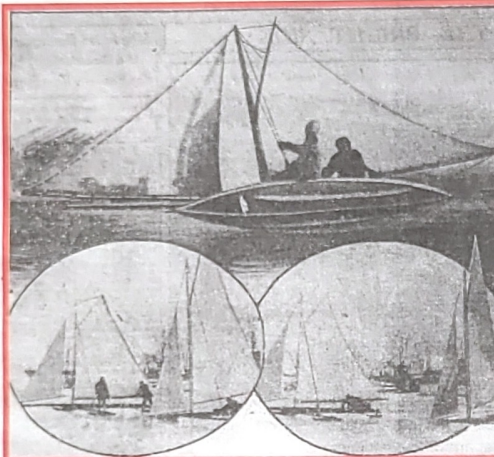
Frederick Greis, Rear Commodore of the Club, is the third generation of sailors following Dad Frederick and Grandfather Max Greis. An exciting part of the weekend was to see him and his "LEGEND OF RONKONKOMA" join the Championship. The name speaks for itself.

There are many members, iceboats, stories, and past history to discuss and they will come forward at another time. I personally stood in the middle of the Lake Saturday. What an experience.

We must wait patiently for the ice to form and be thick enough to support us and our recreational activities. Thursday, January 23, brought experts from the Club to test the ice for possible use by the iceboats. Scientific testing of course followed, and the experience of the sailors gave way for final approval to open the Lake for use.



An ice boat from the 1920s



Lake Ronkonkoma Ice Boat and Great South Bay Scooter, 1923



Preparation Line Up

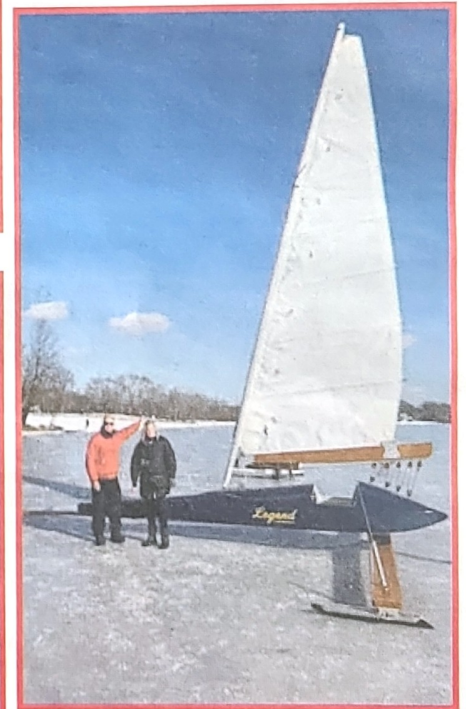
The process of lake freezing is far from simple, dictated by a complex interplay of meteorological, geographical, and physical factors. Understanding how quickly a lake freezes requires a deep dive into these influencing factors, revealing the intricate dance between heat loss, water density, and atmospheric conditions.

1. Temperature and Air Exposure
2. Water Depth and Volume
3. Water Movement and Mixing
4. Water Clarity and Color
5. Dissolved Substances
6. Geothermal Heat
7. Initial Cooling and Mixing
8. Formation of Anchor Ice
9. Skim Ice and Ice Growth
10. Final Freeze-Over

Eventually, given prolonged sub-freezing conditions, the entire lake surface will solidify with full ice coverage. However, even after the lake has fully frozen, the ice will continue to grow in thickness, although at a slower rate, as the heat from the lake has to pass through the insulating layer of ice above.

The comradery in the Lake Ronkonkoma Ice Boat and Yacht Club is priceless. Many are third generation sailors; the fourth and fifth generation of original Club members were there; and perspective new members are ready to join the 102-year saga that was built and maintained.

The iceboats are back! Please take time to stop and watch this majestic sport and enjoy what our town has had to offer since 1923.



THE LEGEND, Fred Greis and Ellyn Okvist

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