



# The Historian

*The Newsletter of The Summit Historical Society*

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## The "Deafy" Lee Skating Pond

*by Robert A. Hageman*

Although this winter has not been one for ice skating, years ago, when climates were conducive to skating throughout the season, Summit was known for a unique ice skating pond called "Deafy Lee's" which was located at the southeast corner of Morris Turnpike and Summit Avenue.

### How Named?

It was named after a hearing-impaired farmer who lived on the property. The name of the man was Charles W. Lee, otherwise known as "Deafy" Lee, a not-so-nice term used by the children and adults in the community.

Lee was born in 1858 in Livingston, New Jersey. His father, Samuel, and his mother, Lois, had six children. Lee was unmarried throughout his life and his occupation was listed as farmer. Before moving to Summit around 1910, he lived in Millburn with his sister Olive and his brother Edward.

The only building on the property was an 18th century farmhouse built in the 1730s by Bill Wood when Summit was Turkey Hill. The pond on the property was a marshland which froze over in the winter. Lee operated the pond from 1913 to 1919 charging \$2.00 for a season ticket and selling soft drinks to the skaters.

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*The Skating Pond circa 1929*

*("Skating Pond" continued from page 1)*

Lee had a St. Bernard dog, and he and the dog would guard the long hanging icicles that hung from the roof of his rented home which were vulnerable to pranksters during the cold winter months.

### **A Turn In 1919**

By 1919 Lee had moved back to Millburn to live with his sister Olive. He continued to be a farmer. The Highland Club (a men's literary club in Summit) took over operation of the property and built a new dam to permanently flood the marshland area. A simple stove was constructed along with a snack shack. The Club charged \$11 per family for the skating season or 15 cents and 25 cents per day for children and adults, respectively.

### **Summit Recreation Commission Takes Over**

In the late twenties and early thirties the Recreation Commission of Summit was in charge of the pond. It had free use of the property which was open to the public without charge. Maintenance of the pond, however, cut into the funds of the Commission.

On January 28, 1930 the Summit Herald wrote that two days earlier on a clear, crisp Sunday a record 3,400 skaters were at the skating pond. This was 400 more than the previous record. It was the heaviest skating day since the Summit Recreation Commission took over the operation of the skating property. The Herald reported that groups from as far away as Morristown, Newark, Jersey City, Elizabeth, Newton and Dover flocked to the pond.

Between skating, people would go into the shelter house for hot dogs and cocoa and gather around the warm stove.

Bright lights were set up for the evening skaters and skating lasted until 11:00 p.m.

### **Summit Skating Club Created**

By December, 1933 free use of the pond was no longer possible and the Crest Acre Corporation, then owners of the property, began using some of Summit's unemployed to clean the swamp to make perfect skating possible.

The old skating house was also completely renovated and forty-foot poles were erected making night skating possible.

With the additional outlay of funds needed that were well beyond the budget of the Recreation Commission, the organization and running of the pond went to the newly created Summit Skating Club which established a new pricing schedule. Season tickets for a Summit family were \$10; general public tickets on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays were 50 cents; other weekdays to the general public 25 cents; children under fifteen years of age were charged 15 cents on weekdays and 25 cents on Sundays and holidays. The charges also covered parking for skaters only and the checking of personal property while skating.

Even with all of these changes however, it was still known throughout the region as the "Deafy" Lee skating pond.

### **Farmhouse Razed September 18, 1930**

The house on the property had been vacant for some years and was noticeably decaying. It was described in the Summit Herald of January 19, 1930 as "having a porch bolstered up...with bus bodies... its exterior walls covered with roofing...; the house with its hanging ceilings and enormous fireplaces was ripe with age. No one would take it down for the lumber; it wasn't worth tearing down."

On September 18, 1930 the Summit Fire Department burned the house to allow for the widening of the Summit Avenue corner.

### **Vanished Landmark**

In many respects, the burning of the eighteenth century home may be regarded as the destruction of a landmark. It was standing when Washington and LaFayette frequented this region. The house had once looked out upon the "French Bakery", which was located on the present-day Municipal Golf Course and which was so instrumental to

Washington's plan to keep the British Commander General Clinton headquartered in New York (see Arthur Cotterell's article in this issue of the Historian entitled: *A Summit Role In The American Revolution*).

Just imagine what the occupants thought of the troop movements at that time and the information that may have been in the house. But now that is gone. Few today even remember the building.

On September 23, 1930, the Summit Herald had this to say regarding vanishing landmarks: "... the great need that there should be some organized and authoritative effort to survey, to mark and to preserve the landmarks of this historic region; or if not always to preserve them... at least to make a permanent record of them, of where they were and what they were and all that was known about them."

Such has been and is the mission of the Summit Historical Society. And while not always successful, the mission and the goal is in place.

### Lee In Serious Accident

In October, 1928 "Deafy" Lee was struck from behind by an automobile while driving his horse and a wagon load of hay on the Morris Turnpike.

His injuries necessitated that he be hospitalized at Overlook Hospital for nearly two months before returning to the home in Springfield which he shared with his sister Olive. Lee was seventy years of age at the time; his sister was seventy-two.

While in the hospital, he had taken to writing poetry. The following is a poem he had written as a farewell to the nurses at Overlook Hospital when he was released.

#### FAREWELL

To the nurses of Overlook:  
 Here my bed I have forsook.  
 Tonight to my own nest I'll go.  
 Down the way two miles or so.  
 No doubt twill seem a little strange  
 At first-to make the drastic change.  
 There there'll be no handy wire  
 To summon help should I require;  
 But I don't think that there'll be need--  
 At least I trust there won't, indeed.  
 No more a burden I'll be here  
 I hope, at least for many a year.  
 So here my quarters I've resigned  
 To him, I hope, who's more refined.  
 And now for all you've done for me  
 You have the thanks of

(Deafy) CHARLIE LEE



Charles W. Lee

### Lee Dies

Charles W. Lee passed away in 1930 at his home in Springfield, New Jersey at the age of seventy-two. The large pond which bore his name for so many years is much smaller today and is surrounded by attractive homes.

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