

BACK IN the early 20s Great River was a small place. On the Vanderbilt side of the river there was only the Tea House of the former Idle Hour estate (later Saxon Arms) and Snapper Inn which was new. All the rest of the land along the Connetquot was bog and meadow.

During the winter local men cut holes in the ice and speared eels for a living. The eels were embedded in the mud for the winter. The holes in the ice made it dangerous for an iceboat as one of its runners could drop in and cause an accident. Therefore iceboats were out, whereas a scooter could go across any hole and never foul.

Still, the river wasn't too good for scootering either. The length was all right but it didn't have width enough, and sometimes the winds weren't right. An iceboat is a triangle structure with a runner at each point. The aft runner is movable and is the rudder, guided with a tiller like any sailboat. So it is under control at all times.

# Scootering On The River

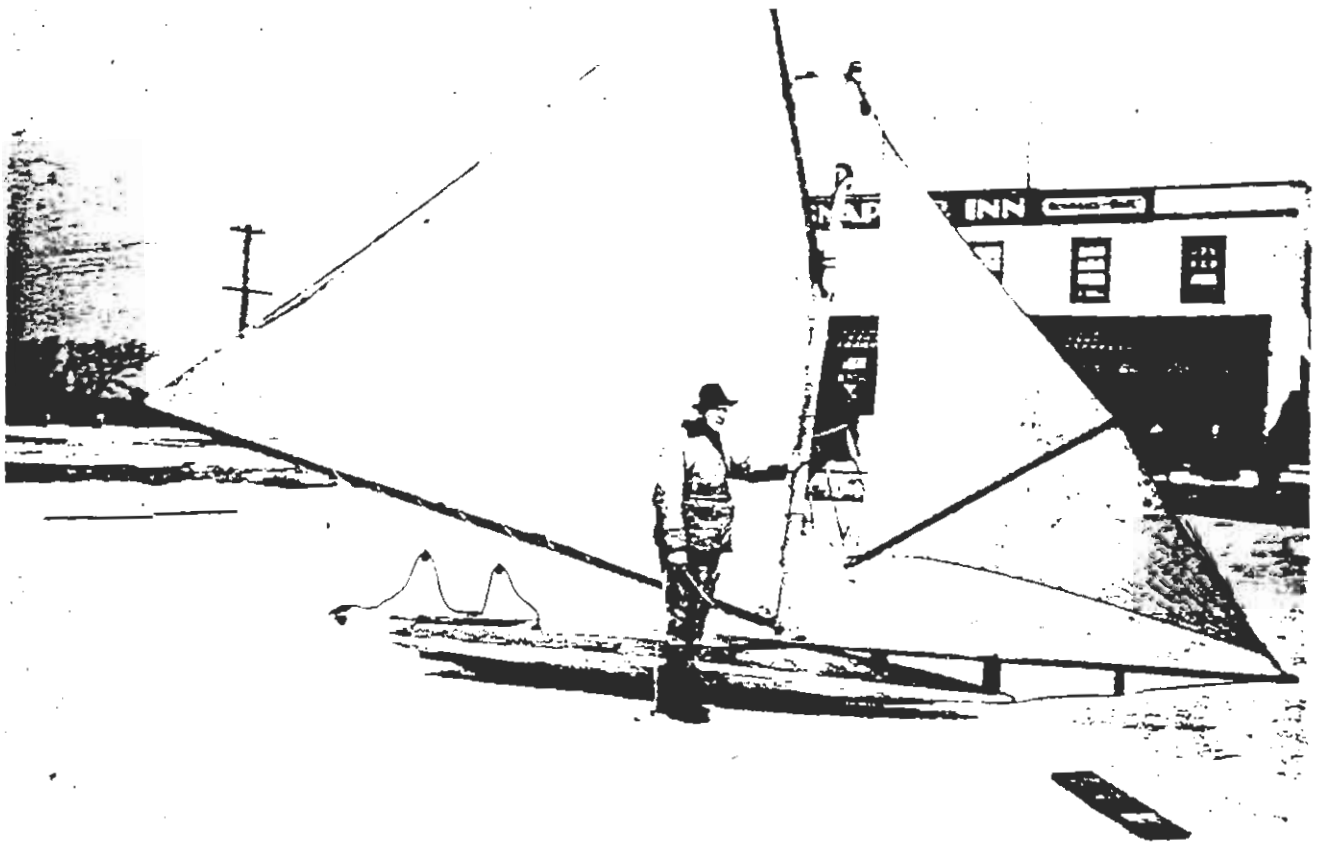
*Capt. Al Skinner*

On the iceboat frame is a small cockpit, whereas a scooter is a boat with two main runners along its bottom, shaped like the rockers on a chair. The part of the runners that really bore on the ice was about 12 inches. The bow and stern overhung the runners which were widely spaced. Outside the two main runners and about half their length were smaller runners. This was so that when the scooter listed the bottom and edges of the hull would be protected from the ice. Also, it

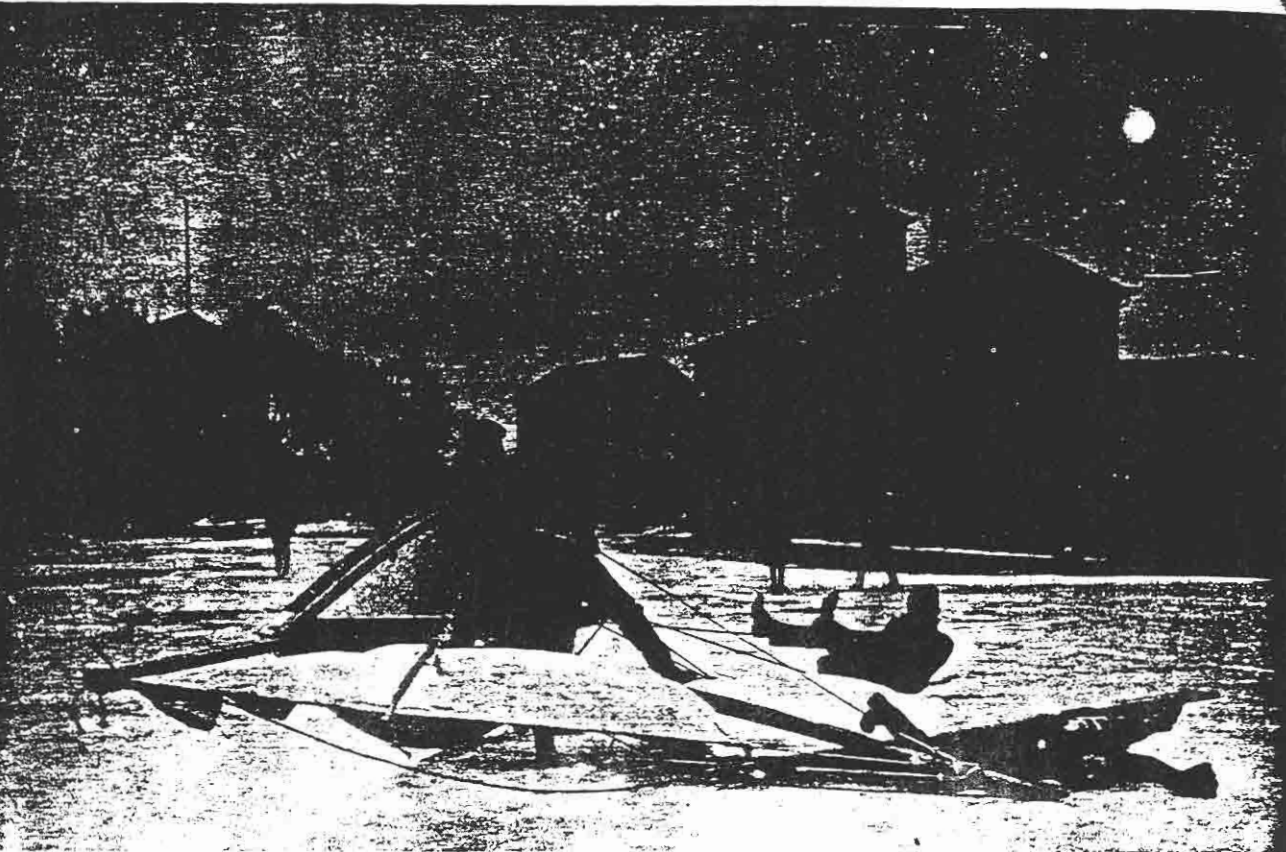
gave the scooter the bearing of another runner under it.

Scooters had to be sailed close-hauled and they were steered by the jib. By hauling it in the bow of the boat will pay off and go to "lewered" and by easing it up the bow will come up into the wind. In order to do this the jib has to be very large, and both sails have to be filled with wind at all times or there will be no control and it can't be steered.

I used to sail my scooter on the river and had fun with it. As a rule the wind was out of the west. I had never sailed up past the town dock as the farther up, the narrower the river got. Another thing, just after you got to the Cutting meadows there was a place in the meadows called the Horse Shoe. Off the north point of the Horse Shoe, no matter how much ice there was on the river, there was an air hole, from the bank out to about 100 feet, and about 30 feet wide. I guess it was caused by the tide.



Capt. Dick Conkling and Great South Bay scooter on the frozen Connetquot River in front of the Snapper Inn, February 1938.



Harry Otis and friends clowning with scooter on the Great South Bay, off the Mascot Dock in Patchogue, February 1905.

I didn't work on Saturday after-  
 noons, nor did my friend Joseph  
 erveny, nicknamed Rox. One  
 Saturday afternoon I called Rox up  
 and said, "Would you care to go  
 scootering?" All he said was,  
 "Come and get me," as he was  
 crazy about it. I did, and we got the  
 sails out of my garage and down to  
 the river's edge on Dick Conkling's  
 property. We pushed the scooter off  
 into the ice and headed it into the  
 wind. Then we put on the sails and  
 got ready to take off.

There was a good breeze out of  
 the northeast and that was just right  
 to run the length of the river. So we  
 went down the river and then came  
 about and headed back. At times we  
 could get some hard puffs, and  
 then not much at all. This time I  
 decided to go up past the town  
 dock. I stayed in under the Vander-  
 bilt side of the river as I knew about  
 the air hole on the Cutting side. We  
 kept going and sure enough the air  
 hole was there and we went by it.

When we got to the Cutting's  
 warehouse I decided it was far

enough so we came about and  
 headed back down. We picked up a  
 lot of speed and then no wind at all.  
 Suddenly I had no way to steer it.  
 Sure enough, it headed for the air  
 hole. I knew we were in for some  
 trouble so I yelled to Rox to bail  
 out. I went over the side and he  
 followed me.

We slid about 20 feet and the  
 scooter went on. It hit the water like  
 a big swan and it pushed a wave up  
 in front of it about two feet high. In  
 that way it went across the air hole  
 and up on the ice on the other side  
 of it, and continued on into the  
 Horse Shoe. Just before it ran into  
 the bank the wind caught it and  
 turned it, but not enough, so it ran  
 out on the bank and turned on its  
 side.

We walked ashore and down to  
 the boat, talking about how lucky  
 that the experience turned out the  
 way it did. No damage to the  
 scooter. So we took it by the  
 bowsprit and turned it toward the  
 ice. Then with a few nudges we  
 pushed it out on the ice and got in.

Away we went down the river like a  
 cow with her tail over her back  
 headed for the barn.

Out past the Snapper Inn,  
 Vanderbilt tea house and  
 Pepperidge Hall. I was afraid to go  
 through the Lead at Timber Point to  
 the bay as it is narrow, and I might  
 have got in trouble, so instead I  
 went out the mouth of the river past  
 the Bourne estate.

Once on the bay the wind was  
 steady and the scooter practically  
 flew. At times it would get up on  
 one runner for long distances, only  
 to come down with a thump. The  
 next thing we knew we were off  
 Cherry Grove. Everything looked  
 lifeless on Fire Island, and there was  
 no point in going any farther as the  
 ice on that side of the bay was  
 rougher and more had more salt in it  
 than the smoother brackish water  
 ice under the northern shore.

So we went about and headed  
 back. In about five or six minutes  
 we were back in the river and we put  
 the boat away. Up to my house we

went and had a couple of Coffee Royals. That always tasted good after taking a wild ride in a scooter.

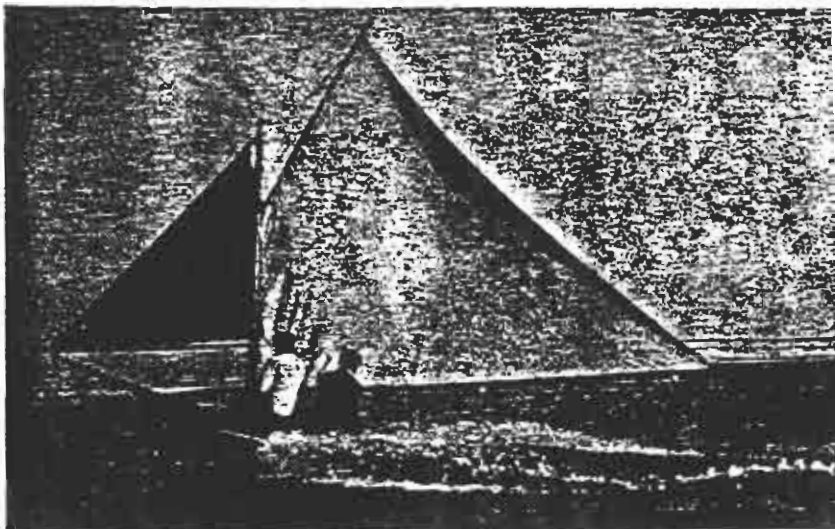
At the time when all this was going on I was working at Timber Point. The first nine holes were completed and playable. They kept seven men on year-round and I was one of them. We had a man by the name of Mr. Lavis who was the superintendent. He came from around Rochester, N. Y. so he knew what cold weather was. One day he came to me and said, "Al, you know all about iceboats." I said, "No, sir, I don't know a thing about them." "Why," he said, "I'm told you have a big one."

"No, I do have a big ice scooter, but there is as much difference between a scooter and an iceboat as day and night. For instance, an iceboat you steer with a tiller so you have it under control at all times. A scooter has to be sailed close-hauled and you steer with the jib. What's more, a scooter will teach you more tricks in five minutes than a barrel of monkeys."

"Have you done a lot of sailing?" I asked him. He said "No, just a little in small boats on a lake."

Then he asked if I knew of a Mr. Harry Hollins, and I said "Yes, I used to caddy for him on the Westbrook Golf Course. He had a sister who was a professional golfer."

"Well," he said, "Mr. Hollins has an iceboat or scooter and he told me I could use it if I went and got it. Do you know where he lives?" I said "I sure do." "All right," he said, "after lunch we will take a couple of men and the big International truck and go get it."



CHAPMAN BROOK

**A Great South Bay ice scooter jumping across a water gap. This was a lighter, faster version of the old Life Saving Service members' scooter.**

We did, and everything was in the Hollins barn where he said it was. We carried the scooter outdoors, found a broom, and swept it up. Then we loaded it up and drove back down to where the Timber Point boathouse is today. I asked, "Do you want to try this boat out today?" and he said, "I would love to."

So we carried it down to the bank and he said he would return the truck and two men and come back with his own car.

"Wait a minute!" I said. "Help me step the mast, then I'll go on and rig it." Which they did. The scooter was the same style as mine only much smaller. I had it rigged when he came back. The wind was brisk and out of the west, good to sail up and down the river. We pushed the boat out on the ice and then had to push it backwards so we could go out through the Lead onto the river.

Once we got squared away we in and off we went. The boat seemed like a toy to me but it worked very well. I rared up on a runner and he yelled to me, "Are you sure you know how to handle this thing, Eh?" I yelled back, "It's too late to find out now."

In no time we were up the river, we turned and came back down again. We made another trip up and back and rounded up where we started. He said, "Are you in a hurry to go home?" I said, "No, why?" "Well," he said, "I would like to run up and get my wife." I told him to tell her to dress warm, I don't care to stay out long with just a sheepskin coat on. When I was scootering I wear a windproof suit.

He said, "When we get her in the scooter I want you to give her a thrill. One that she will never forget."