

ICE SCOOTER RIDE OF '34

By Ruth Diuguid Dougherty

The winter of 1934 brought one where the snow, ice and below-zero temperature covered the ground and filled the air with bitter cold. At the same time of course, it also brought all the beauty and enjoyment such a winter can bring, especially for us teenagers as schools were closed because roads were covered with snow. In those years the town did not have many plows and some roads just never got plowed.

When the snow finally stopped and everything was blanketed with a deep covering of white, Charles Duryea Jr., from down the street, came to our door with his big black dog Sam. My cousin Ella May from Brooklyn, a perennial visitor all during our girlhoods, had come for a week. She ended up staying six, until her father could drive out for her. So the four of us, Charlie, Ella May, my brother who was also Charles Jr. but we called him "EDDIE", and I, we bundled up to go exploring in the snow, dazzling white with the sun shining upon it.

We lived in Sayville, a block from Great South Bay, so walked through the knee-deep snow to the foot of our Edwards Avenue. The Bay is a beautiful sight when frozen. There seems to be no end to it, just space, like being on some distant planet. Even back in those years before space exploration it

seemed like this.

We ventured out on the ice, swept clean of snow by the wind., to slide around and throw snow at each other, when along came an ice boat. It circled around to slow down and come in near us, the skipper being Bernard "Benny" Gaiser, the town constable. At that time he was probably the whole police force, if I remember correctly. He also had a farm up north of town where he raised horses, was over six feet tall, well-known, well-liked and one of the town's special citizens. Benny invited us to go for a sail with him. It was the first time I had even seen an ice scooter, and as it has turned out, the only time in my whole life so far, that I ever sailed in one. I am glad we accepted because it was a ride I shall always cherish and never forget. I still remember the thrill of the absolute speed over the ice and through the icy-cold freezing wind, like being on one huge ice skate. We arrived off Bellport in what must have been three minutes...or less! It was

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holding on either side. Suddenly he was gone! He bounced off, but went right on sliding in sitting position. We could not help but laugh at him. Luckily he did not hit a ridge in the ice. Again Benny turned around and rescued him, Charlie unhurt but with a cold, damp bottom.

Back at our starting point in Sayville, we disembarked when Benny stopped the craft. I do not remember ever being as cold in all my life, before or since. But the sail was worth it, the speed absolutely beautiful and breathtaking. I have often wondered if Benny knew how much we enjoyed it and that it is still remembered after all these years....over fifty now.

utterly marvelous.

Benny turned around for the sail westward, back to Sayville. When the Bay freezes over, there are breaks in the surface due to the movement of the water that does not freeze right away. This causes ridges or "bumps". I remember them as stretching across the Bay, north to south, every so often. The ice boat would simply speed over them, giving us passengers a bump. At a large one I got bumped up and down in such a way that it made my hat fly off. In a few seconds I thought my ears would freeze and drop off! Putting my mittened hands over them left me no way to hold on, so before I bounced out Benny deftly turned the vessel about and stopped it right by my hat. It was a green "tam" as such hats were called then.

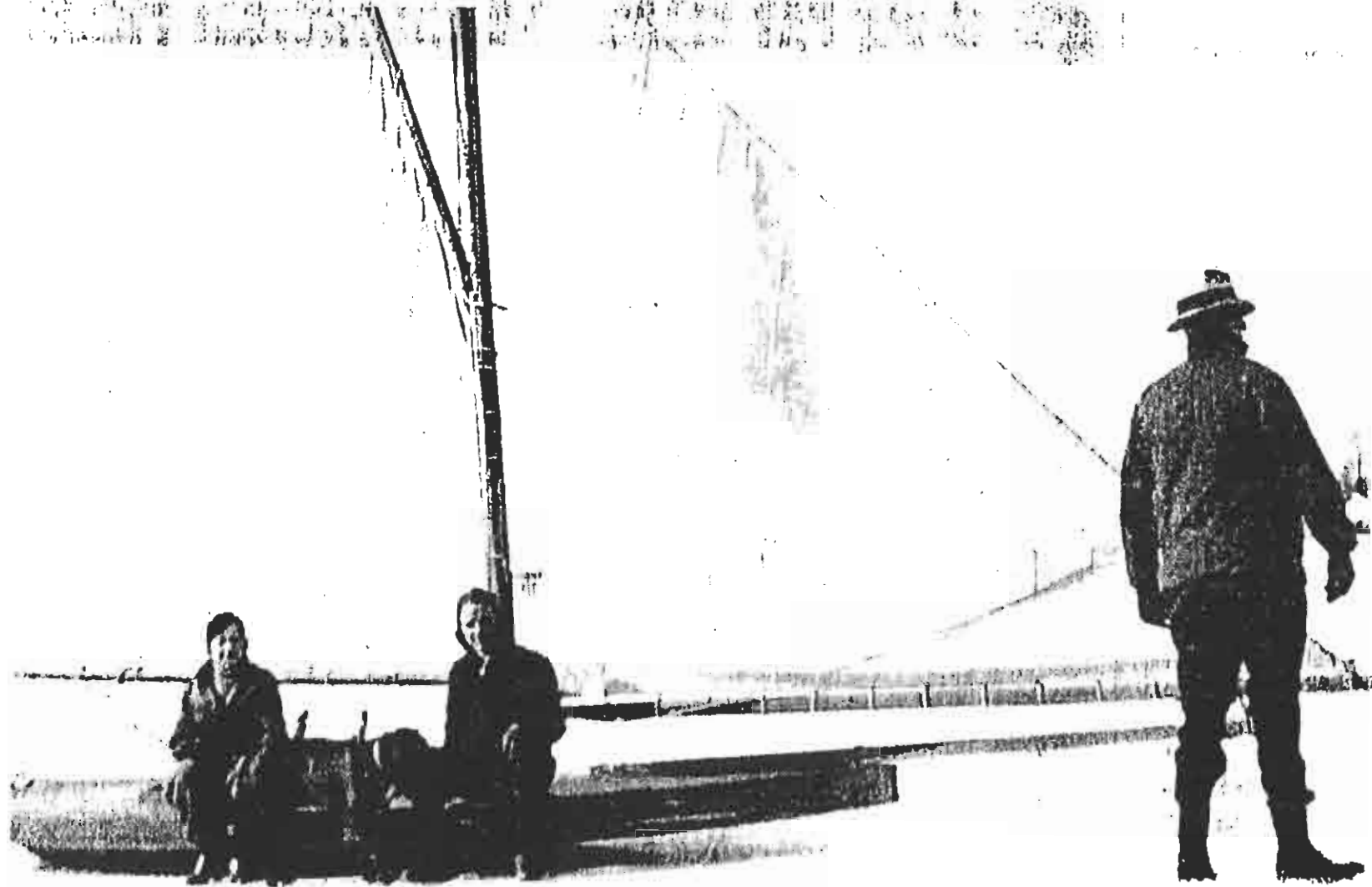
We continued our wonderful sail, bouncing along at terrific speed, the dog Sam crouched in the boat with us. Charlie was sitting on the very back,

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We tramped back up Edwards Avenue, the cold air searing our throats and lungs as we went through the snow. My thoughtful mother knew we would be cold and had a pot of hot cocoa on the stove waiting for us, bless her. How good it tasted!

Benny Gaiser of course has been gone many years. Charlie Duryea Jr. lives in Florida it is believed. My brother Eddie was lost in WW II serving in the U.S. Navy. Ella May Connolly presently lives in Babylon, mother of four children, grandmother of four also. She is still a perennial visitor at my home in Sayville, in the same house on the same street as that day we teenagers took that walk down to the Bay, never dreaming it would always remain a very special one to remember.

Ice boats-



Ruth Dougherty took this photo as a teenager. Seated on the ice scooter after the memorable sail are Ella May Connolly, Charles "Eddie" Dluguid, Jr. and Sam the dog. Of course that is Benny Galser off to the right.