

## **The Ice Skating Pond / Swimming Pool on Center Street by Mel Montemerlo**

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During the Great Depression, there was a swimming pool at the “bottom” of Center Street, near Whiton Street. In his October 14, 1976 “Cabbages and Kings” article, Jack Redmond interviewed James J. Franklin. One of the stories that James recounted was about that swimming pool. He recalls being asked to raise money to build a swimming pool, which was difficult to do during the depression. With the help of the Knights of Columbus and the Masons, Jim put on a carnival for two years in a row. The money was raised and the pool was installed on Center Street. In the Fall of each year, the pool was drained and used for boxing matches.

The August 7, 1933 issue of the Springfield Republican reports on the accident that shut down that swimming pool forever. On August 6, 1933, a young girl discovered the body of a little boy at the bottom of the pool. He was Francis Silk, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Frank J. Silk of Oak Street. It was assumed that the boy went to the pool alone before it opened, and got in by going under a wire fence. He was unable to swim. David Cameron, who was in charge of the pool that day, recovered the body and found no signs of life. The Medical Examiner, J. A. Coogan, gave accidental drowning as the cause of the accident. After that, the pool never re-opened. It was dismantled.

There was a stream through the property where the swimming pool was. Later, the Explorers (Boy Scouts) dammed up the stream each fall so that a shallow pond was formed for ice skating.

As of this writing (2016), many folks from Windsor Locks remember ice skating there. Ice skating at that pond was almost a “right of passage” in the mid 1900s. There was a little wooden shack on the side of the pond that had an old wooded stove. It was a good place to put your ice skates on, to warm up, or to have a cup of hot cocoa.

During cold winter evenings and weekends, the rink was filled with kids and adults. A favorite ice skating game there was called “the whip”. A group of children formed a long chain (a line) by holding hands. The child on one end would move slowly. The children on the other end would skate fast, and the one on the end would let go, and attain a high speed. The effect is much like that of a whip. The skating rink can be seen the photo, which also shows the shed. You can see the chimney coming out of the side of the shed near the pond.



**Ice Skating rink on Center St. Warming shed is on the right.**

In the early 1950s, the town was without a swimming pool. When Frank Pesci was Windsor Locks' Parks Commissioner in the 1950s, he undertook the task of raising money to build a proper swimming pool. It took about three years, but he collected about \$37,000, and the swimming pool was built. The name of the park was changed to Pesci Park to honor Frank Pesci.

Around 1960, the land that the ice skating pond was on was developed, and houses were built on and near it. That marked the end of the use of the place as an ice skating rink in the winter.