

CRYSTAL LAKE

Newton's Great Pond



The aftermath of the 1915 Crystal Lake Ice House fire. Norwood Avenue is in the background.

MANY USES AND MANY NAMES

For centuries, Indigenous people relied on Crystal Lake for fresh water and wetland plants. Colonial settlement began here in the mid-1600s. Known as “Wiswall’s Pond” until the 1870s, the lake was also sometimes called “Baptist Pond” because Newton’s First Baptist Church held baptisms here. In the 1870s it was dubbed “Crystal Lake,” apparently by the ice company.

Right: Before electric refrigeration, ice companies cut blocks of ice from frozen ponds and stored them in ice houses, insulated in straw, to be delivered to customers in spring and summer.

FIRE AND ICE

On an April morning in 1915, alarm bells rang out. The ice houses at Crystal Lake were ablaze! Firefighters raced to pump lake water through hoses to douse the flames. They were too late to save the buildings, but the Crystal Lake Ice Company survived until the 1930s, when electric freezers became common.

CRYSTAL LAKE ICE.

GEORGE H. ELLIS.



THE BEST AND PUREST ICE CONSTANTLY ON HAND.
This ice is produced from the beautiful Crystal Lake (Wiswall's Pond), on the
E. & A. R. R., which is a guarantee for its purity.
Ice-Houses, Centre St., near Railroad, Newton Centre.



Crystal Lake in 1905.

“At night, the area in front of the bathhouse was lit, music was played, and people skated around and around in a circle.”

—JACK DREW RECALLING WINTER, 1930s



Playing on the beach in the 1970s.



Ice skating on the lake, c. 1900. 1980 was the first year Crystal Lake did not freeze over.

Left: In the 1950s, a Crystal Lake Bathhouse season permit cost 25 cents.

A LAKE FOR EVERYONE

From 1880 to 1900, Newton’s population doubled. Residents flocked to the lake for swimming, boating, and skating. Every Fourth of July, thousands crowded Cronin’s Cove for band concerts and fireworks.

But Crystal Lake Ice Company owner George Ellis wanted to fill much of the lake for real estate and reserve the rest for ice harvesting. Just before an 1895 winter festival, Ellis cut ice from the lake, spoiling the event. A 1905 court ruling settled the matter: at 33 acres, Crystal Lake is a “Great Pond” of the Commonwealth, for everyone to share.

LEARN MORE: www.newtonma.gov/historysigns

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