



Athens women's Broomball, circa 1910

Men's Pendleton Cup, circa 1912

Athens plays Westport at the Carson City Rink.

THE HISTORY OF LOCAL ATHENS WINTER SPORTS

By Sally Smid

Very early in our area's history, residents realized the need for making the most of long Canadian winters which resulted in a variety of sports. Sledding took place on any suitable hill. Historian Edna Chant wrote about sledding one night on the steep icy Mill Street hill in Athens, later dubbed "Dead Man's Hill". Kids slid down the hill at such high speeds and were often unable to stop. Horse drawn sleighs drove hazardously close to the youngsters, many of whom were forbidden from sliding there. One night after school, Edna disobeyed and went off to sled with her friends. She ended up colliding with several other sleds in "a tangle of legs and arms at the bottom of the hill". She sprained her leg badly. A man going by with his horse and cutter took her home. This incident caused a delegation of parents to go to council, and a by-law was passed outlawing sledding on Mill St. Isaac St., the High School, and the Arda hill, west of the village, were still popular sites.

Skating took place on frozen ponds and lakes when weather permitted. In 1900 the first maintained public skating rink was built behind what is presently Main St. Pizza. It was lit by gas lanterns. A hired manager, nicknamed "Mayor Carson", dubbed it Carson City. Cleared snow was thrown over the rink's high board fence and spectators watched from atop the snow bank. Teams arrived on the B & W Railway and stayed at the Armstrong Hotel. Westport and Lyndhurst were Athens' biggest rivals and fights usually added "interest" to the games. A 1909 Athens Reporter quote reflects this intense rivalry. "Hockey is a great game but some of the players, especially those from Westport, should be seated permanently on the fence." There was also nightly skating and a fancy dress carnival was held twice each winter. The Athens Band played and prizes were given for the best costume. Maude Addison was noted for her amazing figure skating and usually won a prize.

Another outside rink and house was built in 1917 by the Women's Institute behind the Cenotaph. It had a building for getting dressed and warming up. The Athens team would be upstairs and the opponents downstairs by the wood stove. Police Chief Scotty McLean would huddle over an old barrel lit by a coal lamp as he sold game tickets. "No one could describe the feeling of happy youngsters putting on their skates, or hockey players preparing for a game," Edna wrote.

By 1949 skating became so popular, it was decided that an indoor rink was needed and the Memorial Centre was built for \$24,000, to honour Athens veterans. Artificial ice was installed in 1969 and Centre 76 was later constructed, which still houses the Athens Aeros, a variety of hockey leagues, and figure skating clubs.

Winter horseracing took place on the ice in "Moonfish Bay" in Charleston. There are many stories about ice fishing and skiing along the roads and ditches behind horses, the Charleston Hockey Team, and "opening your coat while skating to allow the wind to blow you along Charleston Lake."

Broom ball was also played. Scottie McLean came up with the idea that the ladies, dressed in long skirts, wear skates rather than boots. Team members used brooms to push a ball on the ice, using rules similar to those of hockey.

Other winter sports included snowmobiling, snowshoeing and cross country skiing, which all provided ways to stay active and enjoy the long Canadian winters. LH