

Fishermen await Forge Pond ice crackup

by Gordon B. Seavey

WESTFORD — It may be a bit early to predetermine the exact time winter's hold on Forge Pond will lose its grip, but already local fishermen are predicting an early break-up of the ice sheet which has covered the 212-acre body of water prior to Christmas.

A mild February has started already to work on lesser bodies of water with open water showing in spots. At Forge, however, the ice sheet remains intact, although the two inlets, Beaver and Gilson brooks, are wide open indicating that it will be only a matter of days when clear water shows over the entire pond.

Records kept by Postmaster Robert Connell, an avid fisherman, over the past fifteen years show that the earliest break-up occurred on March 7 in 1974. The latest, according to his computation, were on April 13 in 1970 and 1971.

A few more days of stronger sun, plus high winds, could smash the now rotten ice into smaller particles. But it is too late this year for a new record.

In the larger, more northern lakes of Maine and New Hamp-

shire, the ice usually goes out by the end of April, but the average at Forge has been April first. An indication the winters may become more mild is the fact that a few years ago the average date was April 4.

Thickness of the ice this year was 19-1/2 inches at the broadest part of the pond, which straddles the Littleton-Westford line. At the Narrows, it was 23 inches. This would have been an ideal year to harvest ice had this business remained in operation. Not too much snow on top and not too thick so the cakes could be handled more easily. But like the passenger trains that used to skirt the edge of Forge, the ice harvesting business is now but a memory.

Open to all, those who wish to gamble on the day and time of day (before or after midday) when the ice sheet breaks up should leave his guess at the Westford post office with Mr. Connell or letter carrier Al Woirowicz, or at the Forge Village office with Superintendent Margaret M. Hudlin.

The prize for last year's closest guess, an aluminum rowboat, was not taken by the winner, although she won with a March 31 date. It was noticed that the boat had been dropped from a car roof and the seams had split in too many places to be patched.

This year's prize to the winner is somewhat different. It is a pair of mail sacks, condemned by the U. S. Postal Service, but good enough to carry home a sack full of fish, if caught. These are donations from Postmaster Connell, who heads the judging committee.

Although the new fishing season does not open until mid-April, this past season's ice fishermen have been gloating over their catches, with Bill Lyons reporting a 4-1/2 lb. large mouth bass and plenty of yellow perch and calico bass.

Largest pickerel apparently caught was 23 inches and John Kalshan pulled in two speckled trout at the Narrows. Trash fish, such as blue gills, were at a minimum this winter, which helped substantially the bait supply.