

Now being renovated

Forge Pond beach first was called Excelsior Park

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD—A new bathhouse to replace one wrecked by vandals two years ago is being erected on the town beach at Forge Pond. Being built under the direction of the Westford Recreation Department, the modest all-cement building is to have a utility room for the life guards as well as shower and toilet facilities.

Known as Excelsior Park 130 years ago, this beach at the Village is attracting more visitors each season. With good weather abetting, large groups come to cool off or just sun bask on the sizeable beach. There is a small grove where families may picnic.

The 6½-acre plot, town owned, has an interesting history. It was no doubt the gathering spot of local Indians and Old Andrew had his "warre" (fish weir) on this spot. He sold the land to Grolon in 1660. Later, a boundary change placed the land in Westford.

THEN IN 1815 the Forge Village Boat Corporation was formed which placed the facilities in the summer entertainment business. Depending on the Stony Brook Railroad Co. (now the B & M) to bring visitors from Lowell and surrounding communities, the grove they built and named Excelsior Park was described as:

"A beautiful hickory grove with all the usual desirable appurtenances for picnic, Sabbath school and pleasure parties desiring to enjoy a social time in a delightful place." The brochure went on, "in 30 minutes from Lowell you will alight within 20 rods of Excelsior Grove on the margin of a large and beautiful pond, where such innocent amusements and exercises as water excursions, swinging, dancing, music, etc., may be fully enjoyed."

The water excursions were on a home-made vessel, called a side-wheeler or crank boat. It seated 20 or more passengers and two men turned handles to rotate the paddle wheels. Today, with an increasing number of sailboats on the pond, wind has taken the place of manpower.

AT THE END of the Civil War, the land was taken over for an ice business and old-timers remember the huge wooden ice houses which stored the winter's harvest from the pond. Mechanical refrigeration killed this business and the property was abandoned in 1930. Two years later a spectacular fire destroyed the buildings.

Abandoned for a long time, this choice piece of land was taken over by the Westford Jaycees a few years ago and with heroic effort, and much volunteer labor and materials,

they rejuvenated Excelsior Park at a cost of \$12,000.

Swings for children were erected, some 30 picnic tables and benches installed, and a rustic fence on the water side and a chain-link along the nearby railroad tracks, marked the triangular park. Townspeople were recognizing this haven as an indispensable part of their summer life.

Then the vandals started their senseless work.

MUCH OF THE rustic fencing was ripped apart and thrown into the pond or the canal outlet. The swings disappeared, one by one. The heavy, useful picnic tables began to melt away in the darkness . . . and now visitors have to bring their own. A sturdy little bathhouse was gradually battered down, the plumbing and fixtures twisted and smashed to bits.

The town has now taken over the operation from the disheartened Jaycees. With a new, solid concrete bathhouse, under strict supervision, it is hoped that once again bathers may be able to take a shower or get a drink of water, while participating in "innocent" summer recreation at old Excelsior Park.



Under construction

Masons working on new bathhouse at Forge Pond are Andrew G. Anderson (top), the contractor, and his assistant, Joseph P. O'Railly. The building should

be ready for use shortly. Two interested spectators are Johnnie Pyra of Flagg Road and his visiting cousin from New Jersey, Eileen Chanovize.