

“Let’s Talk ICE – Part 3”

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This is the last article of the 3-part series entitled “Let’s Talk ICE.” The first one was about ice skating on what is known as “Benny’s Pond”. The second was on the history of ice farming, and this third article will discuss the ice jams of 1910 that destroyed the Kirkwood/Conklin Bridge.

In doing research for these articles, it was fascinating to see weather patterns from 1910-1920 being similar to what we experience today. Some years the winters would be cold and snowy and be great for the activities of ice skating and ice farming (1917) and others would be too warm and classified as ice famines (1919). Then there would be years when there was so much snow and ice that the area would experience flooding and ice jams.

That is what took place in March of 1910. The winter months had been cold and the ice was thick on the local rivers. During the spring thaw, the snow and ice began to melt creating both flooding and tremendous ice jams. There were two bridges that were destroyed as a result: the Kirkwood/Conklin iron bridge and the one at Chenango Bridge.

The ice jam that was responsible for multiple problems for Kirkwood originated ½ mile south of the bridge in the Riverside area. Ice began to crumble in the middle of the night and released an enormous amount of water that had backed up on the river flats. Flooding reached its highest point in 8 years and farmers were forced to abandon the first floors of their homes and rescue cattle in stables. The Erie railroad tracks were covered at various points from Riverside to Langdon. It was 10:00 in the morning of March 2 when the final breakup of this ice smashed into two spans of the iron bridge and knocked them right off the foundational piers on the Kirkwood side. The iron was carried down the river, battered and twisted from the impact of the ice.

The Town Boards of Kirkwood and Conklin agreed to share the expense of rebuilding the bridge and reused the piers that were there to save on costs.

The Riverside area became known as the “bottleneck” because ice jams were common in that shallow spot where Snake Creek intersects the Susquehanna. Throughout the years, many methods were used to break the ice in hopes of preventing disasters like this from reoccurring.

