

Down Memory Lane

By Vin Bellew

THE OLYMPICS...

Back about 40 years ago the Olympic trials for Scull races came to Eastchester, down on the lakes at the end of Highland Avenue and California Road. On the lakes were held the regional trials for single scull to compete for the Olympics. These regional races were held all over the country and the winners to meet in the finals.

We were Superintendent of Recreation and was called to the office of Supervisor Frank O'Rourke. Frank handed us a letter from the Olympic Committee asking Eastchester would they sponsor the trials on the Eastchester lakes.

Frank wanted us to do it.

What Frank wanted always happened.

The Olympics Committee moved into our office. We learned a lot. The lake was surveyed as to distance and depth and a course was laid out.

In the races they came from New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Boston and all over New York State.

On the day of the races there must have been one hundred sculls on the lake. It took three days to complete the trial runs. The press, radio were all over the place.

Now get this! One of the winners was John O'Rourke from Yonkers.

We later suspected that Supervisor O'Rourke had more to do with being picked for the Olympics. When accused, he only smiled, but did admit it was a distant cousin.

On the day of the races the lake was covered with canoes and row boats.

When the races were over we saw the possibility of making this lake a recreation boat area with boats for the local people.

The County turned our request

down flat but they did give us permission to fish on the lake, but only from the shore. That is the way it is today.

Before we were fortunate to get Lake Isle for swimming for the local people we tried to get this body of water for the local residents to swim in. It never got to first base.

Now that we have Lake Isle we are most pleased to see this wooded area and lakes kept the way they are now. Our town is bounded by these beautiful lakes and dense woods. May that never change.

For a fleeting moment Eastchester was in the Olympic lime light.

We can still see cars pulling up on California Road with a scull latched on top of the car. The entry bronzed like an Indian and every bit as supple and in good physical condition.

The occupant of the scull never carried a single extra pound. They were in perfect shape.

We are blessed to have those lakes and woods wrapped around our town.

The history of those lakes you might like to know.

Once upon a time a strong Hutchinson River ran down through Eastchester and from it came lakes and guarded wooded areas, where once the Indians tread.

These lakes were purchased by the New Rochelle Water Company and it became part of the water system in Westchester County. The area was once called "The Reservoir".

It is now owned and managed by the Westchester County government and quite likely to stay that way for many years to come.

Anyway that vast piece of property is a blessing to the Town of Eastchester.