

## CHAPTER VII

### SKATING

In the winter it was lots of fun to go skating. It was possible to skate up the race about three miles to a large millpond for which the race was an outlet. About two-thirds of the way up to the millpond was the "head gates" where they controlled the amount of water to go into the lower part of the race. Near the "head gates" the water flowed so swiftly that it never froze, and we had to go up on the "bank" and walk around. However, we liked to skate as close to the head gates as we could, for we thought it troublesome to take off our skates, and if we kept them on while we walked around on the bank, the sand dulled the runners. But, alas, if we skated too close to the "head gates", the ice would suddenly break and we would get unexpectedly a very cold bath not unmixed with danger, as there was danger that the swift current would carry us off under the ice.

Grandfather well recalls how on one occasion he skated through the ice near the head gates. He got out all right, but the wind blew biting cold and he was all wet and two miles from home. Someone remembered however, that a boy we knew was teaching a country school near there, so we went over to visit him. He built up a big fire and Grandfather dried his clothes a bit before skating back home. I fear the little boys and girls watched us so curiously that they did not study their lessons well, but if they learned that it could be unpleasant as well as dangerous to skate too near to open waters, perhaps they did not waste the afternoon.

The land at Brodhead was very flat and there were no underground sewers. In the spring time water filled all the streets and vacant lots and all the yards which had not been "filled in" - that is, had extra soil brought in to build up the land above the level of the street. Sidewalks were elevated about a foot above the ground, so that in spring time they would be above the water. In summer time children frequently played "hide-and-seek" under these sidewalks. To drain the water off a series of ditches were dug, rather shallow at the north end of town and getting deeper as you went south. Sometimes after the spring "freshet" it would turn cold in the night and next morning you could put on your skates right at your own front gate and skate all over town and have a grand time playing ice games.

Alas, however, for the luckless ones who encountered mishaps - and mishaps were numerous - for, you see, in chasing another boy around a house where the whole yard was a sheet of ice, you might unexpectedly encounter a clothesline which, catching you under the chin, would give you a fine toss onto your back. Or, if you skated over a drainage ditch, you were likely to take a cold bath without waiting for Saturday night - for, you see, the water flowed down the drainage ditches and ice does not form so thick where water is in motion.

However, these mishaps of falling through the ice which seemed so unpleasant at the time proved to have given a valuable training. For, as mentioned before, when Grandfather was in college, he went out on Lake Mendota to ride in an ice boat. The ice was very thick - in fact, so thick that he could see at a distance they were "cutting" it. Probably we should

explain that we did not have electric refrigeration and make our own ice cubes - such a thing was never dreamed of when Grandfather and Grandmother were young. In the winter when the ice on lakes and rivers got very thick, men went out with big ice saws and sawed out huge blocks of ice and packed them in sawdust in a big shed they called an "ice house". In the summer they dug the cakes out one cake at a time and delivered small pieces to the homes for people to put in their "ice boxes".

Well, it seems that the preceding day they had been cutting ice just where we were going, but the lake had frozen over again, and as we ran along thinking the ice very solid, Grandfather suddenly went through. The other boy was too frightened to be of help. However, having fallen through the ice several times before, Grandfather was able to keep his wits about him. He broke the thin ice back to where the thick ice was and pulled himself out.