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By Charles R. Nichols

The title "Summit Lake" for the body of water off Summit Street is not to be found on older maps or descriptions. To quite a number of generations of Philmont residents, it was, and sometimes still is, "The Reservoir". To people without a working knowledge of mill towns, the term reservoir means a body of water to supply domestic drinking water. That was never the use of Philmont's Reservoir. It was originally for mill operation, and after the invention of motorized fire equipment with pumps, it served and can serve (if properly taken care of) as a ready supply for fire emergency use.



An original survey map shows a proposed 25 foot high dam, and also shows the depth of water over the area created. While the Ellis History of 1878 says a reservoir of 36 acres, the map indicates 48 25/100 acres.

The older photo here shows the Reservoir in 1908/1910. The two structures in the center were ice houses. In that wonderful time before refrigeration, ice was a very saleable commodity, and 'taking in the ice' was winter work for men and horses. The

ice was scored with a horse drawn plow in proper widths, and then cut across for proper lengths. Cakes were towed to the conveyor (the structure in front of the buildings) and stored in layers. Ice houses were traditionally built double walled, with insulation - usually sawdust - between. The Gifford-Wood Company in Hudson produced a large line of ice harvesting equipment, some of which still shows up at yard sales and in antique shops.

Since all this ice work was cold business, the men found ways of keeping warm - usually by something distilled. There were occasions when a dunking in the cold water happened - not of course connected with the warming activity! One year a horse fell in. There was some rumor that it was drunk, but that was generally not believed truthful.



There were several drownings in the reservoir - most accidental, some possibly suicide. Ice skating was a winter pastime, then and now. Swimming now is encouraged, but before the advent of a municipal sewage system, swimming there produced a considerable health risk.

The buildings in the distance, upper left of center, are on Summit Street. The dam is at the end of the reservoir in the center.

The new photo was taken from the same spot as the older one. The son of the owner of the boat in the old photo identified it as his dad's, and the steps going down the bank are still there.

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