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Quick, Timely Reads On the Waterfront

Stanley the Sturgeon: Our Favorite Neighborhood Fish

By David Frew
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A favorite side trip when visiting Chestnut Pool was the fish hatchery just next door at the Water Department building. A full-service hatchery was established there in 1914, shortly after the water department began chlorinating city water. The original hatchery had been at West Second and Sassafras streets, but when the water department made the important decision to chlorinate its water supply in 1912, after several outbreaks of water-borne diseases, that facility was rendered inoperable. Fish cannot be raised in anything but fresh (not chlorinated) water. Recognizing the importance of commercial fishing to the local economy, a decision was quickly made to relocate a new hatchery near the bayfront so that fresh water could be piped directly into the tanks and jars needed to propagate whitefish, cisco, yellow pike (walleye), and blue pike. The new hatchery building

opened on the Chestnut Street Park property near Chestnut Pool. That hatchery continued until 1960.

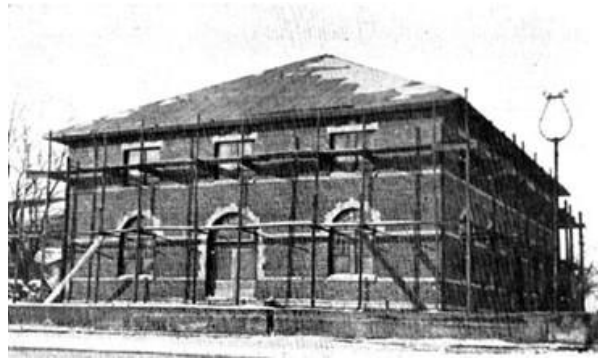


The original hatchery was built in the late 1800s.



A contemporary photograph of the old hatchery location seems to have the original fencing.

The new hatchery featured hatchery operations on the first floor and a large, public viewing area above and on the “mezzanine” level upstairs. By the time that we were visiting the mezzanine viewing area during the 1950s, the Fish Commission had assembled a wonderful array of aquariums that displayed native Lake Erie fish. The fish that were presented in the “mezzanine” included perch, crappie, yellow pike, blue pike, and whitefish. There was also a schematic that explained the hatchery process, including the acquisition of eggs and roe, the fertilization process as well as the system for raising fish from the egg to hatchling stages. It was a wonderful science museum, much more complete than any native Lake Erie fish display that exists today. The Cleveland Aquarium offers a close second, but Erie’s 1950s hatchery was better.



The Chestnut Park, Bayfront Hatchery, under construction



The original 1914 hatchery building has been integrated into the restored Chestnut Street Erie Water Works campus on the west bayfront. The restored building complex includes offices as well as public areas.



First-Floor hatchery operations



The mezzanine level aquariums

Hatchery-aquarium visits allowed us to see the fish that we had been catching; to watch them swimming and look carefully at their sizes, shapes, and colors. This was especially interesting for the variety of sunfish and crappies that we often caught at the Cascade Docks. Clear glass aquariums helped us to see details of their shapes and colors and to distinguish the various species. The aquariums or perhaps the food that the fish were being fed also seemed to enhance the colors, making it easy to distinguish between rock bass, sunfish, and blue gills.

Of all the fish housed in Erie's hatchery, however, the most exciting was the one sturgeon that was in residence. The sturgeon was enormous – more than five feet long. He was housed in a long, narrow floor level tank that was open at the top. The fish was so big and the tank so small that it seemed impossible for him to turn. We wondered if the tank was in fact too small to be humane. We had all heard legendary stories of Lake Erie sturgeon but none of us knew anyone who had ever caught one, nor had we ever seen one outside of the hatchery tank. The open tank made it possible to reach in and touch the great fish, which we often did. If the hatchery attendants caught us touching the sturgeon, we were chastised and warned not to do so. But that did not stop us. We loved the sturgeon. He was, by far, our favorite fish. We even devised a name for him: Stanley.

Eventually, Stanley the Sturgeon disappeared from the hatchery. We all tramped in one day in our dripping swimsuits after being at the pool next door only to find an empty tank. We were told that he had been taken to a "better" location and that the tank at Chestnut Street was too small for him. We were terribly disappointed but happy for our old friend. The hatchery closed in 1960 but the building still stands. When the Bayfront Parkway was being developed the modern Erie Water Works, under the leadership of Paul Vojtek, completed a beautification of their complex and the old hatchery was integrated into the beautiful new set of red-brick buildings that currently graces Erie's bayfront.

To complete the historic “loop,” Erie Water Works has welcomed a new hatchery to its campus. The local preservation organization, Save Our Native Species (S.O.N.S.) currently operates a hatchery in a small building on the west side of the Water Works campus. S.O.N.S. is an amazing group numbering more than 3,000 members who work tirelessly to support fish, the local environment, and fishing. Among their many gifts to the community they help introduce kids to fish and fishing. During spawning seasons each year, they raise perch and walleye in their small hatchery and open the facility to the public so that everyone who is interested can learn about fish.



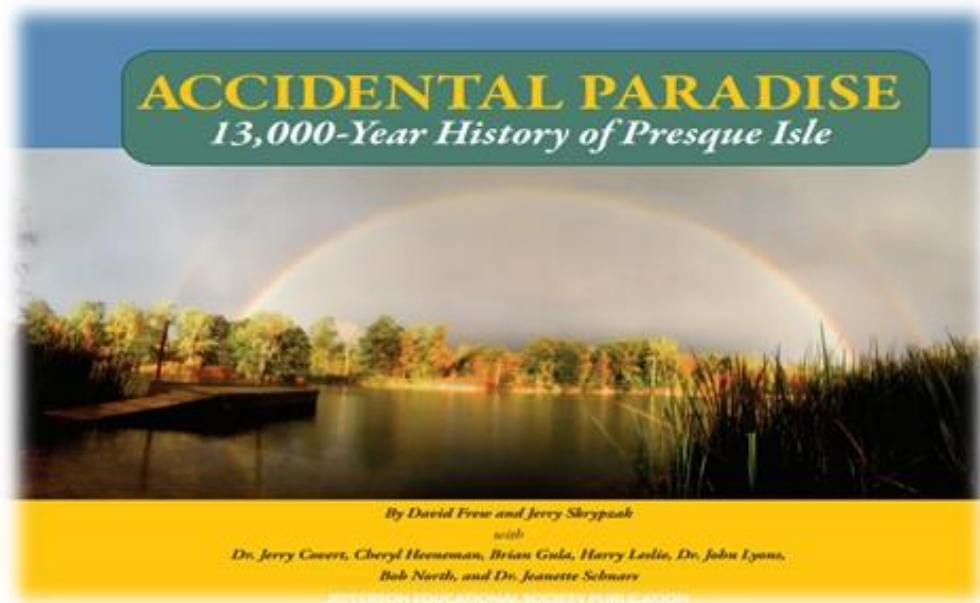
The S.O.N.S. fish hatchery

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Accidental Paradise
by Dr. David Frew and Jerry Skrypzak



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The book, priced at **\$35 plus tax and shipping**, can be ordered now through the website sponsored by the TREC Foundation, AccidentalParadise.com.

Presque Isle Gallery and Gifts on the main floor of TREC, located at **301 Peninsula Drive, Suite #2, Erie, PA 16505** will also handle sales *daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

For more information, send an email to aperino@TRECf.org.

To watch "Accidental Paradise: Stories Behind The Stories" click [here](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Historian and author David Frew, Ph.D., is a Scholar-in-Residence at the JES. An emeritus professor at Gannon University, he held a variety of administrative positions during a 33-year career. He is also emeritus director of the Erie County Historical Society/Hagen History Center and is president of his own management consulting business. Frew has written or co-written 35 books and more than 100 articles, cases, and papers.



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