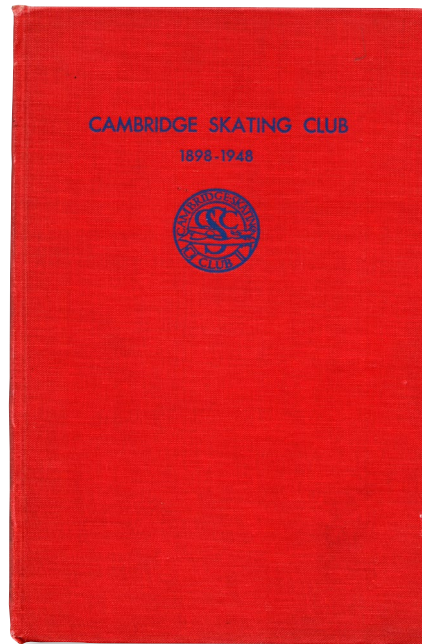


Who Was Frederick Swift?

It is said that, in the absence of a written record, the circumstances surrounding most events and the people who shaped them will be forgotten within two generations. The Cambridge Skating Club is therefore fortunate that a history was published to mark its 50th anniversary – our own “little red book.”

It is doubly fortunate that the author was Arthur Goodridge, then nearing the end of 20 years' service as club president. Moreover, Mr. Goodridge (1878–1958) was well qualified to tell the story of the club's founding. Born in Cambridge, he was a graduate of the Cambridge Latin School and Harvard College. His early skating experience was as a hockey player, but after he joined the club in 1911, he became a figure-skating enthusiast. Mr. Goodridge could write the club history from personal knowledge for he knew many of its early principals and champions.

Mr. Goodridge gathered all the reminiscences that he could to tell the story of the club's beginnings. He gave the honored title of founder to Frederick Swift, crediting him with



frontispiece to a photograph of an elderly man, captioned “Frederick Swift, Founder,” but gave no information as to when it was taken or how it was acquired.

Twenty-five years ago while working on the centennial book, I searched for more information about Mr. Swift and his wife, but could find nothing to add to Mr. Goodridge's brief account. The name Swift is not uncommon in New England, and it seemed reasonable to assume that Frederick Swift was a New Englander and perhaps a Harvard graduate. But Mr. Goodridge did not report a middle initial, and I was unable to identify a Frederick Swift in Cambridge or elsewhere who might have been our club's founder.

Now preparing for the club's 125th anniversary with on-line access to Cambridge street directories and the U.S. Census, I was able to unlock Mr. Swift's background and that of his wife (whose first name was *Ethel*, not Edith). In the digitized city directories, I found the Joseph Dorr family living on Hubbard Park Road – an easy walk to Willard Street. This listing was the key: Mrs. Dorr was Josephine *Swift* Dorr. A search of Census records then provided that she was born in 1861, and raised in Chicago, Illinois, as was her older brother, Frederick, born in 1859. Marriage to Joseph Dorr brought Josephine to Cambridge.

The fact that the Frederick Swift and his sister were raised in Chicago, with its cold winters, explains a lot. Chicago had begun creating public parks in the

the idea for a neighborhood “rink” that would provide safe skating for Swift's nieces, Katharine and Josephine Dorr, and their friends, including the daughters of Annie Longfellow Thorp, who had inherited the 1¼-acre field at Willard and Mt. Auburn streets. Mr. Goodridge described Mr. Swift as “an athlete and a fine skater.” Presumably, Mr. Swift's interest in a rink was increased by his courtship of a “successful figure skating competitor” – one Edith Dalton who had won prizes in New York and Philadelphia. Miss Dalton and Mr. Swift married in November 1899 – at the beginning of the club's third season. Mrs. Swift's name appears on the list of early medal winners. But after 1900, the Swifts disappeared from the club's records. Mr. Goodridge dedicated the club history's



FREDERICK SWIFT, Founder

❁ Cambridge Skating Club. ❁

Cambridge, December 2, 1897.

Skating clubs in other cities have been such a success that it is proposed to have a Skating Club on the property at the corner of Willard and Mt. Auburn Streets, adjoining Longfellow Park.

The property is to be fenced on the Willard and Mt. Auburn Street sides, and the Bowling Club, with an addition, is to be used for the accommodation of members.

The Park will be lighted at night, and a man will be in constant attendance.

The park will be put in condition and flooded as soon as the weather will permit.

Tickets for the season of 1897-1898, will be furnished on receipt of subscription, and members notified when the club will open for skating.

Please reply before December 11th to

FREDERICK SWIFT,
20 Berkeley Street, Cambridge.

Subscription: Family Season-Ticket, \$5.00
Single Season-Ticket, \$3.00

❁ COMMITTEE. ❁

MRS. B. R. GOODRICH.	MR. RICHARD H. DANA.
MRS. JOSEPH DORR.	MR. C. EUSTIS HUBBARD.
MRS. R. FRANCIS RICHARDS.	MR. WM. M. RICHARDSON.
MRS. ROBERT D. WESTON-SMITH.	MR. FREDERICK SWIFT.

1870s – two decades before Cambridge formed a park commission. During the late-19th century, ice skating was one of the Windy City's most popular winter pastimes. And there were lots of options – on rinks created by flooding fields as well as on the ponds and lagoons in the city's parks.

A number of innovations and improvements in our city have resulted from suggestions by newcomers. And members of the Cambridge Skating Club should be grateful that a Chicagoan saw the potential in Mrs. Thorp's field. Indeed, it was the success of the rink at Willard Street that showed skating rinks could be winter features in Cambridge parks.¹ Skating in the parks is a story for another essay, but readers will be interested to know that, before the building of the MDC (now DCR) rinks, there were outdoor rinks in as many as nine Cambridge parks.

Soon after 1900, the Swifts left Cambridge to live in New York City. Through Mr. Swift's sister, they likely heard stories of the new club's continued success. But whether Mr. Swift and his wife ever skated in Cambridge again, we do not know. Sadly, some time after 1910, Mrs. Swift fell victim to mental illness, and then lived for over 30 years as a patient at McLean Hospital in Belmont. The Swifts had no children, and so we cannot look for descendants to fête. But this 125th anniversary year, let's raise a toast to a Midwesterner, whose idea for a neighborhood rink has created winter fun for generations of skaters. As Arthur Goodridge urged at the club's 50th anniversary celebration, "Fun, ever more fun, for more people." And now let's add: With deep appreciation to Frederick Swift!

¹ When the Water Board succeeded in banning skating at Fresh Pond in 1899, it was expected that alternative venues for skating would be provided in the parks. However, the City was slow to make those provisions. A spur to action finally came when members of the high school's hockey team raised their voices in protest at the City's lack of action, pointing to the successful operation of the Cambridge Skating Club's rink. In 1908, the Park Department set up two rinks – one at the northwestern end of Cambridge Common, and the other on the Captain's Island ball ground (now part of Magazine Beach Park). The rink on the Common was boarded and the latter banked up with loam, and the department promised nightly flooding to maintain the ice. By 1924, there were skating and hockey rinks throughout the city, and three fields (Russell E. Hoyt, Rindge, and Cambridge) had been illuminated for night skating. Could the tradition of outdoor skating in the parks be renewed? Once again, the City might look to the Cambridge Skating Club.