

" Finding Pearls in Plum Creek "  
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Pearls were found in fresh water clams in Plum Creek along the banks and in the water of the creek.

Plum Creek is located in the southern part of Russell. The creek is fed by springs which makes the water very cold at all times of the year. The bottom of the creek is lined with sand, so clams like to rest on the bottom of the creek and also along the banks.

In the early 1900s Mr Mack Rowe of Russell village had heard from several people that the fresh water clams in Plum Creek yielded pearls. He was a man that ventured into anything that could possibly make him some money and if there were clams in the Creek he was going to take a chance and find some of the clams and open them and perhaps he might find a pearl or two.

Mr Rowe hired several men and young boys to help him find these clams which were quite an undertaking to do.

It was hard to look into the water to find the clams as one would get wet doing so, but Mr Rowe had some wonderful ideas and he hit upon a idea of how to look into the water and not get wet.

He built a 12 X 14 inch wooden box with an open top and a glass bottom. This box was built so it would be water tight. The glass on the bottom was puttied in and in that way no water could get into the inside of the box.

This box was put into the water , and in this way one could look down into the box through the glass bottom and see the clams lying on the bottom of the creek and able to bring the clams up to the surface.

To get the clams, it was necessary to make something to bring them to the surface, as it was almost impossible to reach to the bottom of the creek to get the clams. One would get very wet and then again the extereme cold of the creek made it almost impossible for one to have their arms in the water for very long.

Now, to get the clams to the surface one needed something to with a long handle to reach into the water and bring up the clams.

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Mr Rowe made a long handled spud. This spud was made of bamboo or some other light weight wood. The handle was made about 6 or 8 feet long. On the end of the spud were 2 pieces of steel which was connected to a weak spring, the tension of the spring held the 2 pieces of steel together. In this way, they could clamp onto the clams in deep water and bring them to the surface by using this long handled spud, then they didn't worry about getting their arms or feet wet, in order to bring the clams to the surface.

The men and boys all wore hip rubber boots to keep their feet dry. This was a wet job and a cold one too, as the water was very cold in the creek as I mentioned before.

When they brought the clams up to the surface from the creek, they were thrown on the banks of the creek to be opened up when they collected a large amount of them, then they were opened on the banks of the creek, and the clams were left opened just to lie on the banks and rot as they were of no further use to anyone after they were opened, so they were just left on the banks of the creek.

Leaving the opened clams on the banks of the creek caused a considerable odor for the residents who lived close by. Several complaints were issued by the local residents, and the town officials made the searchers take the unopened clams to their own homes and open them there in search of pearls. The opened clams after this were buried in the ground so there were no more odors around the creek.

When it was decided the men had to take their clams home, the men took burlap bags and sewed straps on the bags, in this way they could take the burlap bags and sling them over their shoulders so they could carry a large quantity of clams and not have too much weight on them. They could carry a large load this way.

Mr. Rowe supervised the opening of the clams, each clam was carefully searched for a pearl, one had to be alert as sometimes they were very small and hard to see them. Sometimes this went on for weeks before a pearl was found, but they were never discouraged, they were hoping their luck would favor them and sometimes it did.

Fresh water clams are not considered good to eat, clams are safe to eat when they come out of the salt waters.

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Several beautiful pearls were found by Mr Rowe and several of them were worth several hundred dollars.

One beautiful pearl was sold to Mr Charles A. Kellogg, who was district attorney of St. Lawrence County at that time sometime in 1900s. The pearl was lovely and Mr Kellogg had it put into a ring for his wife as a gift.

Many of the people who lived along South Russell also tried their luck in searching for pearls in the fresh water clams, but not too many of them were too successful.

Forrest Whitmarsh a resident of South Russell also bought one of the beautiful pearls that were found in Plum Creek and he too had it made into a ring for his wife. This pearl was said to be large and well shaped.

Some people in Russell refer Plum Creek as Plum Brook, but no matter which way it is pronounced, it is an excellent stream for trout fishing in the spring and summer months.

Part of Plum Creek is now on State owned land and anyone who wishes to fish can go on this state land and fish. Then some parts of Plum Creek is on private land and there are NO Trespassing signs up and no one is allowed on this privately owned land without permission.

Not very many alive today can remember when men and boys worked hard to bring the fresh water clams to the surface to see if they would yield any pearls. It is just a memory now .

Respectively submitted

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