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The natural ice harvest
of Monroe County.

East Stroudsburg State College

THE NATURAL ICE HARVESTSS

OF MONROE COUNTY

PENNSYLVANIA

by

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Local History

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INTRODUCTION

For many years before electric refrigeration came to be an accepted method of keeping food cold, people relied on ice to do so. This ice came from ponds, lakes and rivers. It was cut in the winter and stored for summer use. As cities grew in size, they had to get their ice from farther and farther away.

In the 1890's the Pocono Mountains, with a never-failing supply of clean water, became an important source of ice for Philadelphia, New York and the cities of New Jersey. The railroads that were built to carry coal from Northeastern Pennsylvania provided transportation for the ice. Consequently, a large industry grew up in Monroe County to harvest the ice and distribute it to the cities. In 1901, a harvest of 500,000 tons was expected in the Poconos. In 1911, 1,500,000 tons were harvested in the Pocono Mountains and vicinity.¹

Besides this great industry, local men harvested ice on smaller ponds near Stroudsburg, East Stroudsburg and Cresco to be sold locally. Resort owners harvested ice for their own use. The railroad companies harvested ice for icing refrigerator cars. If local ice dealers ran low, they could obtain ice from the large companies.

Some of the lakes where ice was harvested were natural

¹Ice Trade Journal, XXV (December 1, 1901), 6; Cold Storage and Ice Trade Journal, X.I (March, 1911), 6.

lakes, such as Saylor's Lake. Some lakes had been created by the lumber companies, when they built splash dams to hold back logs of wood before sending them downstream. Such was the origin of Pocono Lake and the two Tobyhanna lakes. Other lakes, such as Lake Naomi, were built for the purpose of cutting ice and for recreation. In some cases the ice company owned the lake, while in others, such as at Pocono Lake, the companies acquired rights to cut ice in the winter.²

Much of the labor for cutting ice came from the county. The timing of the ice harvests permitted many farmers to earn this extra income. They could also use their teams of horses, otherwise idle in the winter. Young men who had dropped out of school found work with the ice companies. Those still pursuing an education could work on days when there was no school. Workers also came from outside the county to fill the needs of an industry that required five hundred workers in 1898.

²Thomas H. Knepp, The Poconos, (4th ed.; Stroudsburg, Pa. Thomas H. Knepp, 1966), p. 18; Carroll B. Tyson, The Poconos (Philadelphia: Innes & Sons, 1929), p. 76; Jeffersonian (Stroudsburg, Pa.), August 12, 1895; Harold C. Edwards, private interview at his home, Stroudsburg, Pa., July, 1972.

³Elmer Shaffer, private interview at Monroe County Historical Society, Stroudsburg, Pa., October, 1971; Ice Trade Journal, XXI (Supplementary Edition, February 15, 1898).

ICE FOR LOCAL USE

An item in the Jeffersonian of Stroudsburg in 1871 cited the need for an ice company in Stroudsburg that would be capable of supplying the people of the town during the summer months. One of the first icemen in Stroudsburg was Sydenham W. Palmer, the butcher, who was harvesting ice by 1874. He continued in the ice business until his death in 1895. As the demand for ice increased, he moved from gathering ice at the Tanite Company dam in Stroud Township in 1880 to cutting it on the McMichael's Creek at Colonel Norton's farm, now Glenbrook Country Club, in 1883. In 1888 he harvested 1100 tons of ice from a pond that he had built in his field beyond Pocono Bridge.¹

By the 1880's, the ice harvests were providing employment for many laborers in Monroe County. Howard Rhodes, the butcher, had an ice house. Simon Barry had an ice house that he filled from Kautz Pond. They may have been among the early ice dealers,²

Dealers cutting ice in the early 1920's included Reynolds and Fox, who had a pond in Stroudsburg. G. Martin Shupp of Gilbert and Calvin Correll of Kresgeville harvested ice at the Gilbert Ice Dam. Joseph Harps harvested ice at the former

¹Jeffersonian, August 24, 1871, p. 2; January 22, 1874, p. 2; October 10, 1895, p. 2; January 1, 1880, p. 3; December 21, 1882, p. 3; January 26, 1888, p. 3.

²Jeffersonian, January 24, 1884, p. 3; January 10, 1889, p. 3; December 11, 1889, p. 3,

Smith pond near Bast Stroudsburg,. This became **Gregory's** Pond in 1926, when Norman Gregory started taking 4,000 tons of ice from it annually. George **MacDonough's** pond, also near East Stroudsburg yielded about 4,550 tons, The Silver Lake Ice Company of Smithfield Township had a;capacity of 3,000 tons.³

Many of the summer resorts had ice houses that had to be filled in winter. The hotel proprietors at Delaware Water Gap were cutting ice from the Delaware River in the 1880's. By 1910, **J. A. Seguire**, an ice dealer, was furnishing ice for resorts in the vicinity of Cresco in addition to filling his own ice house. Ten years later, Charles Trach harvested ice for the **Tannersville** Hotel. Ice was gathered from Lake Mineola for the Brodheadsville Hotel. The **Marshall's** Falls House also had an ice house.⁴

Ice was available at the time of its harvesting for those residents who had private ice houses, In 1878, Pauponoming **Lake**, now **Saylor's Lake**, provided ice for this purpose. In January, 1920, ice was offered for sale at Churleigh Lake on **Foxtown Hill**. The East Stroudsburg depot maintained an ice house which furnished ice for the dining car of the Pennsylvania Railroad passenger train.⁵

³Morning Press (East Stroudsburg, Pa.), January 23, 1924; pp. 1,8; January 28, 1924, p. 1; January 3, 1920, p. 1; Norman Gregory, telephone conversation, July, 1972; Robert Brown Keller, History of Monroe County, Pennsylvania (Stroudsburg, Pa.; The Monroe Publishing **K T** 1927), p. 279.

⁴Jeffersonian, December 11, 1889, p. 3; Monroe Democrat (Stroudsburg, Pa.), January 12, 1910, p. 5; Morning Press, January 6, 1920, p. 1.

⁵Jeffersonian, January 10, 1878; Morning Press, January 2, 1920, p. 5; Margaret Doyle, "Railroad Depot Basks in Memories of Area's History," Pocono Record (Stroudsburg, Pa.), June 10, 1970, p. 15.

The Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad maintained, for its own use, two ice houses with a total capacity of 10,000 tons. These houses, one at Hawkey Pond in Coolbaugh Township and the other at Gouldsboro, held ice to be used in refrigerator cars.⁶

⁶Ice Trade Journal, XXI (April, 1898), 2.

THE BIG ICE COMPANIES

On a much larger scale than the ice harvests for local needs was the industry that developed to provide ice for the nearby metropolitan areas. The Poconos, with low population density, provided a reliable source of clean water for crystal-clear ice. The railroads that laced the Poconos, built largely to move coal out of Northeast Pennsylvania, provided transportation for the ice,

By 1891, ice was being cut at Saylor's Lake by the Popponoming Ice Company of Bethlehem. Twenty teams of horses and thirty men used modern equipment to harvest the pure spring water ice for shipment by railroad to Bethlehem. The lake was purchased in 1897 by C. B. Staples, Dr. J. H. Shull and W. S. Dutot of Stroudsburg, and Jeremiah Featherman of Hamilton Township for the purpose of developing the recreational possibilities there. The following winter, Stogdell S. Staples of Stroudsburg purchased tools and machinery for cutting ice on the lake. He planned to ship it as harvested, rather than store it. The Saylor's Lake Ice Company stored 4,000 tons of ice in 1900, had a 30,000 ton ice house in 1902. In 1927, the Lackawanna Ice Company stored 32,000 tons of ice at the lake.¹

Ice was also being cut in the early 1890's at Trout Lake

¹Jeffersonian, January 8, 1891; April 22, 1897, p. 3; January 13, 1898, p. 3; April 26, 1900, p. 5; Ice Trade Journal, XXV (April 1, 1902), 4, Monroe County, p. 279.

and Mountain Spring Lake, both near Reeders, after the New York, Susquehanna and Western, a subsidiary of the Erie Railroad, built the Wilkes-Barre and Eastern line that provided transportation for the ice. New plants brought the storage capacity for ice from each lake to 35,000 tons in 1902. In the 1907-1908 season, 130,000 tons of ice were harvested from the two lakes. They furnished large quantities of ice for New York City for the summer of 1911. By 1927 the Trout Lake Ice Company alone had a storage capacity of 62,000 tons.²

Another ice source appeared along the Wilkes-Barre and Eastern line in 1895, when the Pocono Spring Water Ice Company of Easton had the Tunkhannock Creek dammed to create Lake Naomi. Ice houses built on the shore held 60,000 tons of ice. The monolithic ice trust, the American Ice Company, leased the plant in 1900 and made plans to expand the facilities. In ordinary winters, Lake Naomi could be expected to yield between 400,000 and 500,000 tons of good ice. Plans were made to add a connection to the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western. The company placed contracts for two hundred refrigerator cars to carry ice to New Jersey and Pennsylvania cities. The Pocono Pines Ice Company of Easton succeeded the Pocono Spring Water Ice Company after purchasing their property at a sheriff's sale. The icehouses at Lake Naomi burned down in 1914, after being struck by lightning,

²Ice Record, I (February, 1901), 2; Ice Trade Journal, XXY (April 1, 1902), 4; Cold Storage and Ice Trade Journal, XLII (July, 1911), 59; Keller, Monroe County, p. 279; Monroe Record (Stroudsburg, Pa.), March 5, 1908. See also the Geographical Survey Maps of the United States Department of the Interior. The Pocono and Stoddartsville Quadrangles date from the 1920's, show the railroads.

and were not replaced.³

Above Lake Naomi on the Tunkhannock Creek, Isaac Stauffer, who had been lumbering the Poconos, joined forces with W. A. Shafer of Stroudsburg in 1898 to harvest ice from Stillwater Lake. A mile and a half switch was built to connect the lake to the Wilkes-Barre and Eastern Railroad. By 1900 the ice on Stillwater Lake was being harvested by the Tunkhannock Ice Company. They had facilities for storing 70,000 tons of ice in 1902, at which time the company merged with the Mountain Ice Company.⁴

Below Lake Naomi on the Tunkhannock Creek, ice was cut on Pocono Lake in 1900 by the Pocono Lake Ice Company of Easton, which included Isaac Stauffer among its stockholders. The company had two ice houses erected, each to hold 20,000 tons. The Wilkes-Barre and Eastern Railroad crossed the northern tip of the lake, providing the necessary transportation. The Pocono Lake Ice Company became part of the Mountain Ice Company in 1902.⁵

The Pocono Summit Ice Company probably cut ice on Pocono Pond, which was nearby and was adjacent to the tracks of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western. The harvest for 1898 came to 13,500 tons. The company had two houses with 45,00 tons capacity when it merged with the Mountain Ice Company

³ Jeffersonian, August 12, 1895, p. 3; Ice Trade Journal, XXIII (December, 1899), 4; XXVI (September, 1903), 14; Emma LeBarre Miller Waygood, Changing Times in the Poconos (Bethlehem, Pa., 1972), p. 28.

⁴ Ice Trade Journal, XXII (October, 1898), 7; XXV (April 1, 1902), 2, 4; Ice Record, I (July, 1900), 3.

⁵ Ice Trade Journal, XXIII (May 1, 1900), 8; XXIII (May 15, 1900), 7; XXIV (September 1, 1900), 11; XXV (April 1, 1902), 2, 4.

in 1902.⁶

The largest harvests at the turn of the century were those of the North Jersey and Pocono Mountain Ice Company with plants at Gouldsboro and at the two lakes at Tobyhanna. (Gouldsboro is not in Monroe County, but most of Gouldsboro Lake is.) The harvest in 1898 was 185,000 tons. In 1900 the company was bought by some men from Scranton for \$1,000,000. The American Ice Company offered nearly \$2,000,000 for the company towards the end of the year in its attempts to eliminate competition. In 1902, when the North Jersey and Pocono Mountain Ice Company became part of the Mountain Ice Company, it could store 200,000 tons of ice in its five ice houses. Also cutting ice at Gouldsboro was the Gouldsboro Ice Company with two houses holding 50,000 tons. Gouldsboro Lake and the Tobyhanna Lakes were on the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad. Special trains carried the ice to Manunka Chunk, New Jersey, and from there the Pennsylvania Railroad carried it to Philadelphia.⁷

In 1902 many of the ice plants in Northeastern Pennsylvania were consolidated as the Mountain Ice Company, with home offices in Hoboken, New Jersey. The Monroe County plants included the Pocono Summit Ice Company, Tunkhannock Ice Company and Pocono Lake Ice Company, as well as the Gouldsboro Ice Company and North Jersey and Pocono Mountain Ice Company, which were not

⁶Ice Trade Journal, XXI (April, 1898), 2; XXV (April 1, 1902), 2, 4.

⁷Ice Trade Journal, XXI (April, 1898), 2; XXV (April 1, 1902), 2, 4; Ice Record, I (December, 1900), 2; Jeffersonian, May 31, 1900, p. 2.

fully inside the county. The total storage capacity of these plants was about 540,000 tons. The company harvested 300,000 tons of ice in 1912. Storage capacity in Monroe County in 1927 was 185,500 tons. A harvest of 140,000 tons was expected in 1945, mostly for refrigerator cars. Ice cutting on Gouldsboro Lake continued into the 1950's. One advantage to be gained by consolidating was that the ice houses could be opened one at a time for ice, thus reducing loss from melting. The plants had switches to both the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western and the Wilkes-Barre and Eastern Railroads, enabling them to ship ice wherever it was most needed. The Mountain Ice Company shipped most of its ice to Paterson, Passaic, Newark and other Northern New Jersey cities. Ice was also available for large users, such as the railroad and a butter company. Local dealers could buy ice from the larger company if their supplies ran low.⁸

The officials of the Mountain Ice Company sought to improve the morale of employees and to develop an esprit de corps among the men by holding annual dinners. The 1910 convention was held at the Indian Queen in Stroudsburg. President Bahrenburg presided at sessions where such topics were discussed as the preparation of ice houses and loading ice into boxcars in summer. A slide exhibit of ice houses was presented. The men wore badges saying: "I Will Do My Best." The company motto was: "A block of ice never gets out of order."⁹

⁸Ice Trade Journal, XXV (April 1, 1902), 2, 3, 4; Cold Storage and Ice Trade Journal, XLIII (April, 1912), 97; Ice and Refrigeration, CXXVIII (February, 1945), 34; Mary Kelley, interview at Buck's College Shop, Stroudsburg, Pa., July, 1972; Harold C. Edwards.

⁹Cold Storage and Ice Trade Journal, XXXIX (January, 1910), p. 30; Harold C. Edwards.

There were other companies that cut ice in **Monroe** County in the twentieth century for shipment outside. The Anglewood Ice Company, operating in 1910, probably cut ice from Anglewood **Lake**, north of Pocono **Lake**. The Lynch Corporation cut ice at Lynchwood **Lake**, between Tobyhanna **and** Pocono Summit, and had a storage capacity of 35,000 tons in 1927. In addition, they cut ice at **Hawkey** Pond for the railroad. The Tobyhanna Creek Ice Company had a plant at Warnertown in Tobyhanna Township, where 65,000 tons of ice could be stored, Ice **was** also cut at **Brady's** Iake in Coolbaugh **Township**.¹⁰

¹⁰Monroe Democrat, January 26, 1910, p. 3; Morning Press, January 3, 1920; Keller, Monroe County, p. 279; J. LeRoy Crooks, "The Natural Ice Industry" (Unpublished notes on the ice harvests, Monroe County Historical Society, 1968), p. 2,

ICE HARVESTING BY THE LARGE COMPANIES

The harvesting and distribution of ice involved several different procedures. In the fall, the buildings and equipment had to be readied for the harvest. When the ice was ready to cut, men and horses had to be hired. The ice had to be cut and stored or shipped. In the summer, the ice that had been stored had to be shipped.

The large ice companies had, in addition to the ice houses, boarding houses for the workers, horse barns and buildings for machinery. One of these buildings would be kept hot during the harvest to facilitate drying out machinery that had fallen through the ice. The ice houses were divided into rooms about fifty feet wide, fifty feet high and one hundred feet long. A six room ice house, therefore, would be three hundred feet long. Sawdust between the inner and outer walls provided insulation. Preparations each winter included piling hay on the ground to a depth of one foot and covering it with boards. Grading the floor toward the center prevented the ice from pressing too hard against the walls. Slightly grading the floor toward the front facilitated the removal of ice.¹

¹Elmer Shaffer, interview at Monroe County Historical Society, October, 1971; Charles E. Edwards, "Preparatory Field Work and Storage of Ice" (Paper read before the Natural Ice Association of America, New York City, November 30, 1915), Refrigerating World, L (January, 1916), 49.

Ice cutting began each winter when the ice was thick enough to cut and when there were men available to do the work, Ice fourteen inches thick was **desirable**. Farmers came from miles around to cut ice, living in the boarding houses run by the ice companies. Men living at Pocono Pines could ride the school bus to the site of the cutting. The Mountain Ice Company had to go farther afield to find men, bringing them in from New York **City**. During World War II German prisoners of war from Tobyhanna cut ice, Horses had to come from New York, as there were not enough teams in the area to do the work,²

If the ice was covered with snow, horses pulling scrapers cleared the ice, The ice was then checked for weeds and dirt and for sink holes caused by springs, The field of ice was then marked off into a **grid**, with horses pulling markers that marked off blocks of ice twenty-two inches by thirty-two inches. The part of the field farthest from the ice house would be cut first, A canal cut out of the ice provided a passageway for the floats of ice to the basin, or water box, in front of the house, Horses pulled the saws that cut the ice in the field into floats of many blocks, Later a gasoline driven saw was used.³

When the float reached the **basin**, it was sawed into **blocks**. Men placed the **blocks** on a chain elevator, operated by steam in the early years and by electricity later, that carried the ice up to the ice house. On its trip, the ice block went through a gang

²Elmer Shaffer; William Quinn, telephone conversation, July, 1972.

³Charles E. Edwards, "Preparatory Field Work...", p. 50; Elmer Shaffer; Harold G. Edwards.

planer that **ohnvcd its surface** to make the blocko **all** uniform in size and shape.⁴

At each room of the ice house, a gang of men handled the ice. One man pushed ice from the conveyor onto the chute leading into his room. Two switchers at the bottom of the chute pushed the blocks toward the walls where a spacer lined them up exactly, **one** cake **over** the other, The chunk boy threw out broken ice. The room boss filled in where needed, checked the speed of ice on the chute, and kept an eye on the **scrapers**.⁵

In addition to filling the ice houses, the men loaded ice into railroad cars to be shipped outside the area, Some of this ice went to hotels, butchers and other year-round users of **ice**. Some ice went to ice houses where the harvest was insufficient,⁶

When the ice house was full of ice, a plank floor was placed on top of the ice, with sawdust piled on top of that, Then the rooms would be sealed tight, so that the ice that melted would melt evenly. The doors were closed off with two sets of door boards, with sawdust between them.⁷

The ice house of the Delaware, **Lackawanna** and Western was called the beef house, as ,trains loaded with meat from the west would stop there for ice before going on to **New York**. Crushed ice was loaded into wheelbarrows, and pushed **along a** platform in front of the ice house to be dumped down chutes into the bunkers

⁴Elmer Shaffer.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

at either end of the refrigerator cars.⁸

When the weather grew warm and the ice was needed, the ice house was opened and the ice shipped out in boxcars. A drop machine, about thirty feet tall, had a chute down which ice slid into the waiting boxcar. Five men were needed to do the loading: four men to handle the ice, while the fifth man guided it into position with a pick. When the car was loaded, paper was placed on top of the ice so that it would melt evenly, avoiding "turtleback" cakes. This use of paper, which became widespread, originated with Charles E. Edwards, superintendent of the Mountain Ice Company in Monroe County. A car held about thirty tons of ice. Sometimes as many as one hundred cars a day carried ice out of the Poconos.⁹

Harvesting ice was hard work and cold, and not without its hazards. Both men and horses were in danger of falling into the water. On a cold day, the clothing of a man who had fallen in would freeze solid in a few minutes. Horses had safety ropes around their bellies and necks, and planks or horse hooks were nearby to facilitate getting horses out of the water. One or two men had to stay out during the night to keep the canal open. If it froze over, it would have to be cut open before work could begin again.¹⁰

⁸J. LeRoy Crooks; p. 2; Harold C. Edwards.

⁹J. LeRoy Crooks, pp. 1,2; Harold C. Edwards; Oliver H. Sawyer, "Papering Ice in Cars and Houses," Cold Storage and Ice Trade Journal, XXXIX (April, 1910).

¹⁰J. LeRoy Crooks, p. 3; Charles E. Edwards, "Harvesting, Handling and Loading Ice," Cold Storage and Ice Trade Journal, XLII (December, 1911), 79.

IMPACT ON THE COUNTY OF THE ICE INDUSTRY

For a number of years, the natural ice industry was the **Largest industry in Monroe County. It replaced the lumber industry** in providing work for men in the county. As the use of electric refrigerators lessened the demand for ice, the lakes became focal points for the resort industry.

The ice houses have either burned down or have been torn down. They were frequently struck by lightning, and if a fire started they burned to the ground **quickly**. Those at Lake Naomi burned in 1914 and were not replaced. Those at Lynchwood Lake burned later, marking the end of the ice harvests there. The ice house at Gouldsboro stood until it, too, burned down in 1963. The ice houses at Tobyhanna were torn down. No evidence remains of this great industry except the ponds and lakes where the ice was harvested.¹

The ice lakes and ponds still stand. Lake Naomi, Pocono Lake and Stillwater Lake are the sites of vacation communities. Gouldsboro Lake and Tobyhanna Lake Number Two are parts of state parks. Lynchwood Lake is the site of Camp Tegawitha.

¹Waygood, p. 28; Harold C. Edwards; Knepp, p. 70.

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