

WINTER ACTIVITIES OF AN EARLIER TIME IN THE AREA

Ice Harvesting (continued)

The harvesting of ice was a substantial business before the age of mechanical refrigeration. Transportation of fruit and other perishables called for lots of ice during warm months. Dozens of laborers were employed during the winter and many had work all year long at the ice houses filling railroad cars. Care had to be taken in moving the ice in order to keep the cakes undamaged. It often was a significant part of the local economy.

Sources which serviced local businesses and homes especially were the mill pond in town, Silver Lake in Green Oak Township and Lime Lake in Genoa Township. In these instances hand saws and later gas powered saws were used. Resorters living on Silver Lake were the main customers, rowing their boats to the Peach Ice House on Silver Side Drive. The Peaches preferred marsh hay to saw dust for insulation. Local farmers sold marsh hay to all ice companies (a spin-off industry?)

Lime Lake was considered to be an especially pure source of ice. Charlie Priestly was probably among the first to harvest ice commercially, beginning about 1915. However many others had cut ice there for years. In 1926, Don Leith, Sr., bought the ice business on Lime Lake from Ed Standlick and Floyd Chamberlin. Foreman Bill Holderness and mechanics Carl and Bill Wollenhaupt kept equipment and trucks in running order. Four huge ice houses on the east shore were filled to capacity, approximately 2000 tons, each year. These ice houses were built and owned by the people leasing the property. Pulled by teams of horses, properly shod, a large gasoline powered circular saw on runners cut the ice into blocks approximately 36" square by 12" deep. Each weighed 150-175#. The Leith children were introduced to the ice business when very young, usually by helping with the marsh hay insulating process. Don Leith, Sr., is reported to have said, "They cut their teeth on ice tongs." As each boy turned 14 he was given his own delivery route.

Until WW II, the population of the area multiplied many times each summer by the cottages and resorters, each of which had an ice box in need of ice. Deliveries were also made to taverns, markets and camp grounds. High school boys had a job all summer long. The winter of 1934 was very mild and little ice formed. To be sure of an adequate supply for his customers Leith contracted with the Detroit based City Ice and Fuel Co. A small ice house had been built in town about two years earlier, on S. West Street behind present day Singer Press. The ice was brought to Brighton, from Detroit, in semi trucks holding 133 chunks at 300# each. (Prepared by Marie-anna Bair. To be continued. To make a more complete record for Society files comments, corrections, additions gratefully accepted. 229-6402)

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