

WINTER ACTIVITIES OF AN EARLIER TIME IN THE AREA

Ice harvesting (concluded)

After WW II no more record is found of ice being cut from local waters. Mechanical refrigeration replaced the labor of hundreds. In 1946, Tom Leith purchased the ice business from his father and sold ice from the ice house on S. West Street. During the summers he had three and four ice trucks on the road. In 1952 Tom bought a milk delivery business from Marion Bradley. For 11 years Tom was the local milkman also. In 1953 Tom sold back the ice business to Don Sr., and Don, Jr. By that time ice was sold by use of a vending machine located at the ice house. Every grocery store and service station now has ice available in handy plastic bags.

Lyle Herbst began harvesting ice on Lime Lake in 1937. Until WW II called him into service in 1941, Lyle cut ice each winter, employing 25 men working on the lake, the chute and in the ice house. Lyle recalls cutting 1000 cakes of ice, 22"x22"x12", an hour. The rest of the year Lyle was kept busy on the local delivery route. Customers had a square card with 25, 50, 75 and 100 around the outer edge. This was displayed in a front window. Depending on how much one needed, that part of the card was at the top. "When you saw the card you stopped". Lyle's customers were on a route that stretched from Island Lake to Schaffer Road. The Michigan State Sanitarium near Howell usually received a ton at each delivery. He also cut for Burrough's Farms (Oak Pointe, 5341 Brighton Road) for their use during that same time. This ice was stored in the old King barn on Chilson Road.

Accidents and injuries, occurring during the ice harvest were not uncommon nor unexpected. Occasional drownings occurred. Because many on the winter crews of major ice companies were immigrants or itinerants, they were not always missed; only to be discovered by a fisherman the next summer. January 6, 1898, the ice house of the Toledo ice company on Whitmore Lake collapsed. Of the 150 workers inside two were killed and many injured. However by February 19, ice was again being filled at the rate of 40 cakes an hour. The advent of electricity made night shifts possible. But the grim reaper was also awaiting those who worked during the summer loading ice into railroad cars from the ice house. The obituary in the September 27, 1916, Brighton Argus begins "Life sure is uncertain" and continues with the tragic death of Leon Westphal from Genoa Township. A fellow employee reached for a cake of ice, missed and instead the tongs penetrated Leon's hand. Altho' the wound was treated by a physician, blood poisoning resulted. In two weeks Mrs. Pearl Griffin Westphal became a widow.

The war years tolled the bell for the local ice cutting businesses. Commercial artificial ice and home refrigeration dispensed with the ice man's job. The elimination of jobs by automation is nothing new. (Prepared by Marieanna Bair with thanks to Lyle Herbst, Tom Leith, Edna Peach and Edith Sporer. Other sources, 1880 History of Livingston County, Bill Pless' "Michigan memorabilia", "Yesteryears of Green Oak 1830-1930" and Mrs. Myron West's scrapbook. To compile a more complete record for Society files comments, corrections, additions gratefully accepted. 229-6402)

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