

HERITAGE CORNER

Ice harvesting prepared community for summer

Winter ice collected for summertime cooling

Contributed by Moore Museum staff

A frosty winter day in the late 19th and early 20th century was the perfect time to think ahead and prepare for summer. Harvesting ice from the St. Clair River or from ponds in inland areas provided ice to preserve food longer in an ice box during warm weather months. This little luxury allowed people to enjoy summertime treats like homemade ice cream and freshly squeezed lemonade over ice. Larger supplies of ice were also used by the railroads, as well as hotels and other commercial establishments.

Ice harvesting would begin when the ice was at least a foot thick, and preferably, 18 inches. Horses were essential to this harvest. Horse-drawn scrapers were used to clear off the surface of the ice before a horse-drawn plough (see photo bottom right) was used to score the ice in the shape of large blocks. Then, the ice harvesting crew would use saws which resembled crosscut saws, but with only one handle, to cut the blocks along the score lines into approximately two foot squares. The blocks, which often weighed over 100 pounds depending on the thickness, were floated to the loading area using pike poles. Ice tongs were used to lift the blocks out of the water and onto horse-drawn sleighs for transport to ice houses.

Individual homes or farms sometimes had well-insulated ice houses, and certainly every good-sized commercial establishment would have one as well. Ice houses were insulated by placing a second wall two to three feet inside the outer wall, then tightly packing the space in between with bark or sawdust. Sawdust was also packed around the ice itself within the building. A well-designed and well-insulated ice house could keep ice available throughout the summer months, although more than half the original volume of ice would eventually melt away.

Much of the ice was used to keep perishable food

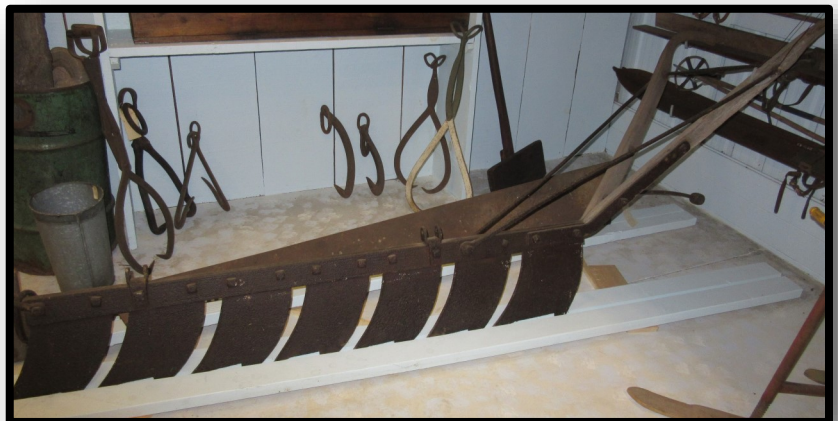
fresh in a household icebox from the 1830s onward. In rural areas, these would be supplied by the farm's own icehouse. In cities and towns, the iceman would regularly deliver blocks to each home. Iceboxes (like the one shown bottom left) were generally made of wood, and the ice compartment was often lined with zinc panels.

The sale of natural ice remained strong in cities and towns until the 1930s, when the widespread use of electric refrigerators removed much of the need for ice supplies, and artificially manufactured ice could be made. In rural areas, the use of iceboxes continued well into the mid-



Above: Vintage post card shows a work crew of men with a heavy work sleigh ice harvesting blocks of ice near Stag Island. Below: Ice plough and ice tongs used to harvest and handle ice. The ice plough is five feet in length (not counting the width of the handles) and each blade is eight inches high.

~Photos from the Moore Museum



Above: The ice box was once a familiar sight in all kitchens beginning in the 1830s.

twentieth century until electricity arrived at each farm.

[Note: There are many interesting videos on-line, both historical films and modern re-enactments, showing the process of ice harvesting.]

Sources:

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Powell, James. "Remember This? The iceman no longer cometh". *City News, Ottawa*. May 18, 2020. Accessed from <https://ottawa.citynews.ca/remember-this/remember-this-the-iceman-no-longer-cometh-2359180> Dec. 8, 2021.

Scott, Amy. "Ice Harvesting in 19th & Early 20th Century Ontario". *Culinary Historians of Ontario newsletter*. Winter 2003. Number 35.

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MORE HERITAGE CORNER

From page 11

Historic Sombra Hotel goes up in flames waiting for fire crew



~From Sombra Museum archives

Compliments of
RAYMOND GENERAL STORE
 GROCERIES - MEAT - HARDWARE
PHONE 627-2911
 BECHER - ONTARIO

1972 JANUARY 1972

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Promotional calendar from Becher store.

January 1, 1962 was a bad day for the Sombra Hotel and owner Jerry Cousineau. He and his family awoke to find their residence full of thick smoke. They escaped unharmed, but the hotel didn't fare as well.

Neighbours called the Sombra Township Area 1 (Port Lambton) volunteer fire department for help, but the firefighters lacked breathing equipment and were unable to enter the smoke-filled hotel.

Other fire departments in the area were called to help handle the blaze and the Sombra ferry's *Daldean* was sent across the St. Clair River to pick up the Marine City Fire Department's heavy pumper. Soon after it arrived it was drawing water from the river and the fire was brought under control.

The hotel housed 19 guest rooms, a dining room, a recreation room, a coffee shop, a beauty shop, and a barber shop.

Fortunately for the Cousineau's, who had been living in the hotel, were in the process of renovating a house they had purchased, so they were not left homeless.

Above: The Sombra Hotel, originally known as the St. Clair Hotel when it was built around 1897, is surrounded by patrons and village residents during the summer tourist season.

Above Left: In this photo, cut from the pages of the Sarnia Observer, a pumper truck with hose extended tries to limit damage to the hotel. The damage was estimated at between \$50,000 and 60,000.

Sombra was a popular place for summer holiday makers to visit in the mid-1800s. The Sombra Hotel was one of several hotels located in the village. They included: the Morning Star (at Baby Point); the British Hotel; the Sombra House; The Crown and Anchor; and the Grand Union.

Port Lambton was also a popular resort. A May, 1884 advertisement in the Sarnia Observer notes the Lambton Exchange in Port Lambton offers first class accommodation, good stabling, good fishing, and an attentive hosteler, all for \$1 per day. The ad went on to say Detroit and Wallaceburg steamers "...stop opposite the hotel permitting passengers to remain in town five hours between the up and down trips."

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MORE HERITAGE CORNER

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Artifact searches continue at Moore Museum

Two separate artifact searches are on to create new collections and displays at the Moore Museum.

All current and retired St. Clair Township firefighters are invited to contribute past and current patches from each of the fire stations in St. Clair Township. They will be used to create a feature in the fire hall exhibit building on the museum site. Anyone with one or more patches to donate can call the Moore Museum at 519-867-2020.

When creating a display of fashions or lifestyles, small decora-

tive pieces can put the finishing touch on an exhibit. With this in mind, Moore Museum would like to create a small collection of ladies' compacts. These fashion accessories were popular from the Roaring 1920s to the 1970s, so they represent an era especially interesting to this generation of museum visitors. Anyone with a decorative compact they would be interested in donating can contact Moore Museum at 519-867-2020. While all offers are appreciated, only a limited number of compacts can accepted into the collection to provide a small representative sampling of styles.

Newly updated Heritage St. Clair page features map showing historic plaques and storyboards situated throughout the township

Heritage St. Clair has updated its page on the St. Clair Township website, and one of the features now on view St. Clair Township's Historic Points of Interest map. This interactive map points out the locations of these colourful and educational installations and includes photographs of them so you'll be sure not to miss them. Here's a link you can use to go directly to St. Clair Township's Historical Points of Interest page:

<http://stclairtownship.ca/st-clair-townships-historical-points-of-interest/>

Mooretown Jr. Flags put the *ho-ho-ho* in *hockey*!



U13 Tier 1 players and coaches from the Mooretown Jr. Flags raised over \$500 for United Way of Sarnia-Lambton just by wearing their colourful, and often whimsical, Christmas sweaters.

This continues the team's six-year Christmas tradition of raising donations for the United Way of Sarnia-Lambton, which was started by player Chase Tichnor's brother, Charlie Brander.

Again this year, Chase invited his teammates to wear their favourite Christmas sweaters to their Dec. 19 game against Strathroy, and to collect donations for the United Way for doing it. Great sweaters, a great fundraiser, and a great performance by the team. They won by a score of 2-0!

Submitted photo