

Omaha's Big Ice Crop---How It is Being Harvested in the Ice Fields



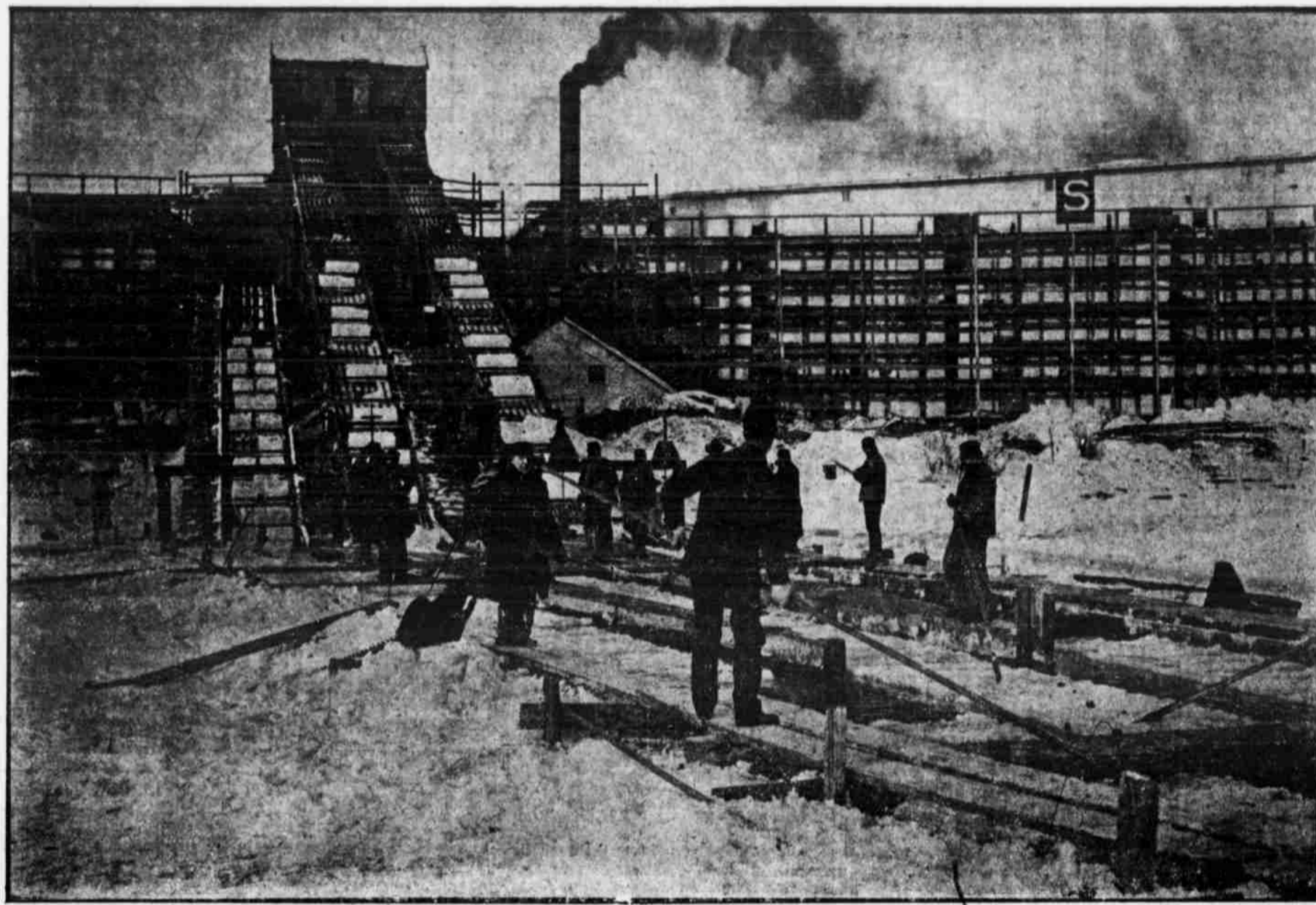
FLOWING THE ICE READY TO BE BROKEN INTO RAFTS—Photo by a Staff Artist.



MARKING THE ICE READY FOR PLOWING—Photo by a Staff Artist.



SAWING THE ICE INTO RAFTS—Photo by a Staff Artist.



CHUTES THROUGH WHICH THE ICE IS CARRIED FROM THE LAKE TO THE RUNWAYS ON WHICH IT IS TRANSPORTED TO THE PROPER SECTION OF THE HOUSE—Photo by a Staff Artist.



POLING THE BLOCKS INTO THE CHUTE—Photo by a Staff Artist.

It takes 200 tons of ice daily to keep Omaha cool in summer, exclusive of what the packers use. Sometimes it takes more. Occasionally it takes less. It depends on the weather, but the figures given are a fair estimate of the total daily amount of ice consumed in the city. The retail price for this congested thimble reducer is about \$1.00 per day. In other words it costs about \$7.00 per week to cool the feverish brains and burning throats on "the retributive morning after," besides supplying private families and the trade.

This amount includes the chunk on the front doorstep which has melted down to the size of a shirt stud on a hot summer's morning as well as the great cakes that are used at the soda fountain, behind the bar and in the refrigerators of the restaurants, meat markets and other provision stores. Ice was once a luxury, but the temptation to look it in the face over night so that the office boy won't waste it is not so strong as formerly as it is more plentiful and cheaper than formerly.

Ice harvesting has developed from a trade into a science. The crude methods in vogue years ago in gathering the crop have given way to means which involve the establishment of large and expensive plants. Ice used to be gathered by hand. Today it is gathered by machinery and the operation is an interesting one. Ice culture is the one agricultural field, if the term may be indulged, which does not require sunshine and warm weather to mature it. Unless artificially produced, it depends upon exactly those elements which destroy ordinary crops, yet, paradoxical as it may sound, it is a crop that is absolutely essential for the preservation of the products which it destroys.

in the world use so much ice as the Americans. Doubtless this is true. The American lives on ice. He was not always an ice-eating anthropological quadruped, but he has gradually. He has a glass of ice water when he sits down to the table in the morning. He has foods served on ice. He has his provisions kept on ice. And many of the dishes served him are frozen hard as ice. He begins with ice-water in the morning and figuratively ends with ice cream at night. In summer, particularly, he has iced tea, iced soda, iced beverages and, in fact, iced everything. When at last the time comes to be laid away in the bosom of mother earth he is packed in ice. It is ice, ice, ice from the time he leaves the cradle until he enters the grave. It is not to be wondered at, then, that the industry of ice gathering has grown to be such an important one and has developed from a small, insignificant industry into a business of considerable magnitude and importance.

Out of Jack Frost's Hands.

There was a time when the Honorable John Frost had a monopoly of the ice manufacturing business. In fact he controlled the market for years. There could be no ice crop unless he said so, and if he happened to cut off the supply in winter the ice dealer had things all his own way the following summer, and a chunk of ice as big as a hickory nut was treasured like the rest of the family jewels. Man, proud man, who has imitated about everything that nature produces, has also produced machinery that will make artificial ice, and in those countries where the weather cannot always be depended on ice is manufactured. The first ice plants made a chemical ice which could not be used internally. Today artificial ice is produced by freezing filtered and distilled waters. In Nebraska ice is still gathered from the usual sources and the business has grown to enormous proportions. Expensive plants have been built and the work of harvesting the crop is one of fascinating interest to every one except the man who has to gather it.

Consumption by Packers.

The largest ice consumers in Omaha are the packing plants. The Swift Packing company has an immense plant built on the north side of Cut-off lake, and the David Talbot ice company which controls the South Omaha Ice and Coal company, also has an enormous plant on the shore of the lake. The crop gathered by the latter company is sold largely for domestic consumption, while the Swifts sell it largely in wholesale lots. Both companies have been at work the past week and the ice company is preparing to gather its second crop.

Swift's had about 300 men and fifty teams at work the past week and several smaller dealers were also at work at retired points of the lake. The scene was inspiring to one who has never seen ice gathered upon a large scale. Long before the lake is reached one gets a glimpse of the harvesters. A score of teams are at work scraping off the snow.

Method in Everything.

Ice cutting has become methodical, even to the size of the cakes. Each cake is of the same size and the ice beds are marked out as regularly as a corn field. In fact, as one approaches the lake the impression is gained of a vast grain field that has been perturbed by some force of nature into everlasting white. Stretching away until they seem to run together in the distance are long, regular rows that remind one of the furrows of a well arranged vegetable garden in the spring. Each row is exactly the same distance from the other, and the lines are as straight as if they had been made with square, rule and pencil.

Marking out the ice field is the first work done. This is accomplished with the aid of a plow, which looks for all the world like a magnified rip-saw fitted into a pair of plow handles. The huge teeth of the marker are about three inches long and cut a furrow the depth of the teeth as they are drawn along the ice by a horse. On one side of the marker is a gauge. This consists of two flat blades extending down from an arm fastened rigidly to the marker. The gauge runs in the last groove cut by the marker and in this way each succeeding line is the same distance from the other and is cut the width of an ordinary cake of ice.

Actually "Cutting Ice."

An ice plow next goes over the ground and makes a cut into the groove for a distance of six or seven inches. The plow is like the marker. It is an abbreviated rip-saw with granite teeth and has handles like an ordinary plow. A team of horses draws the plow over the ice very easily. The ice is then cut into squares at right angles from the first lines and the cakes are ready to be dismembered.

Some distance out from the shore and stationed at regular intervals, a dozen men are using the only saw that is needed in gathering the crop. They are sawing the cakes into great rafts. They make a cut the width of eight cakes. These rafts are then divided from the main body with spud bars that look like the pictures of satan's roasting fork, only they have two tines instead of three. When divided from the main field the raft is the width of eight ordinary cakes of ice and thirty-four cakes long. In other words, there are 232 ordinary cakes of ice in a raft.

Men armed with spikes fixed to long poles then float the raft toward the shore, where it finally enters a canal of open water through the ice which is strengthened on the sides with boards. At regular intervals the canal is bridged with planks. One or two men stand on the bridge. They are muffled from head to foot and their feet are wrapped in gunnysack or burlaps. It is a cold job. They cannot wrap feet nor body too closely, for there they must stand hour after hour over the cold, blue rafts that are floating past under their feet. They hit the rafts a blow with their Titanic spears and the floating body is divided into three equal parts.

Stationed upon bridges across the ice canal farther along are other men. They divide the raft again and make it narrower and shorter. The canal is divided into two channels and one section is driven into one and the other half of the raft into the other channel. There are more bridges and more men further along. They are armed with ice spears and the raft has disappeared after it reaches them. Each cake of ice

has been detached into a separate square of ice sixteen inches across and with a depth equal to that of the ice, which at present happens to be from fourteen to sixteen inches. The great squares of crystal are moving forward to where the chutes begin that lead to the colossal storehouse of the Swifts.

Packing Away the Crop.

For a moment the huge, blue cakes, clear and white as a brilliant, toss and tumble sullenly on the forward bars of the chute. Then, impelled by some unseen force, they bound forward, caught in a shift of the endless chain which is moving them up the incline toward the icehouse. After going a certain height they drop through the chute and slide down towards one of the decks which extend around the icehouse. These decks are one above the other the length of the building and give it the appearance of a gigantic pleasure steamer.

Each platform has an endless chain, and as the ice slides into the platform it is again picked up and moved along where men stand at the doors leading into the icehouse. As the cakes arrive they are shoved into chutes leading into the interior. Here are more men with poles, who direct the cakes and swing them into the right direction. It is no easy job this. It requires agility and strength, for the cakes are going down the chute into the storehouse with railroad velocity and two cakes are coming at a time. Some cakes are allowed to go straight ahead. Some are swung to the right and some to the left, but to turn them and stop them with one of those long, spiked poles requires as much energy as to bring a lassoed steer to a standstill. The men here are perspiring, for they are mopping their brow. It is good exercise, but mighty lucky that it can be had now instead of during the heat of the summer. They don't need gunny sacks around their feet nor cumbersome thicknesses of clothes around the body. They are too busy to get cold. The exercise is much too lively to be hampered with a superabundance of clothing. Clothes are in the way now.

Examples of the Hurry.

"Look out!"

The man shouted just in time. He has

fallen to turn the entire crop. Three crops are harvested from the lake if the weather is propitious, and it dashes forward to where a helper is packing the minute if everything moves smoothly. Sometimes the movement of the cakes is not as smooth as it ought to be. Chutes would lay a foundation. The shout has come just in the nick of time. The one side as the cake cracks into the crystal wall and is crushed by its own force into fragments. Had it caught the helper there might have been a pair of fractured limbs to reduce.

"I should call that rather exciting work," was the sally of a reporter.

"Rather? Well, I should call it more than rather," was the laconic response. "I call it a good many and more. If that cake had caught me on the legs they would have been broken off like—"

"Say, what the hell are you fellows trying to do up there. Slow up till we get this pile out of the way. I'm no d-d machine if I do wear overalls."

The remark of the helper was called forth by the appearance of another cake that had shot down the incline before he was ready to receive it. It bounded forward and was smashed against the ever-growing wall of blue-white. Soon the ice, which is being piled floor upon floor, cake upon cake towards the roof will have become so high that it will have to be sent into the storehouse from the next higher deck. This is what the decks or platforms of the building are for. They begin to pile it from below the level of the lower platform and when the ice floor is even with the door, they send the ice up the chutes to the deck next higher and so on until the great storehouse is full to the top.

Pointed Paragraphs

Play is the work a man does that isn't compulsory.

If a man tests a coin with his teeth he bites the dust.

A souvenir by any other name would probably cost less.

What would a woman do with a secret if she couldn't tell it?

Dry bread of your own is better than a roast from your friends.

There are some widows who will not flirt—but they are generally deaf and blind.

The boy who blows his pennies will be in a position to blow in dollars later.

The handwork of some tailors seems in accord with the eternal mistiness of things.

It takes the average man half his allotted three-score and ten years to learn that he doesn't amount to very much.

When a man attempts to speak in public for the first time the audience makes him nervous—but later on he makes the audience nervous.—Chicago News.

Many Thousands of Tons.

The storehouse is divided into great compartments, ten men being assigned to each chamber. The storehouse will hold 80,000 tons of ice. The packing plant uses about 50,000 tons of ice and the rest is sold on contract.

The company also has contracts with the Milwaukee, Wabash and Rock Island railroads to supply each with 1,500 tons to be used for refrigerator purposes. This is now being loaded into cars which stand on each side of a platform built between the tracks that extend along the front of the ice house. With the present facilities the packing company is able to load about 100 cars per day. It is estimated that it will take five weeks to put in the

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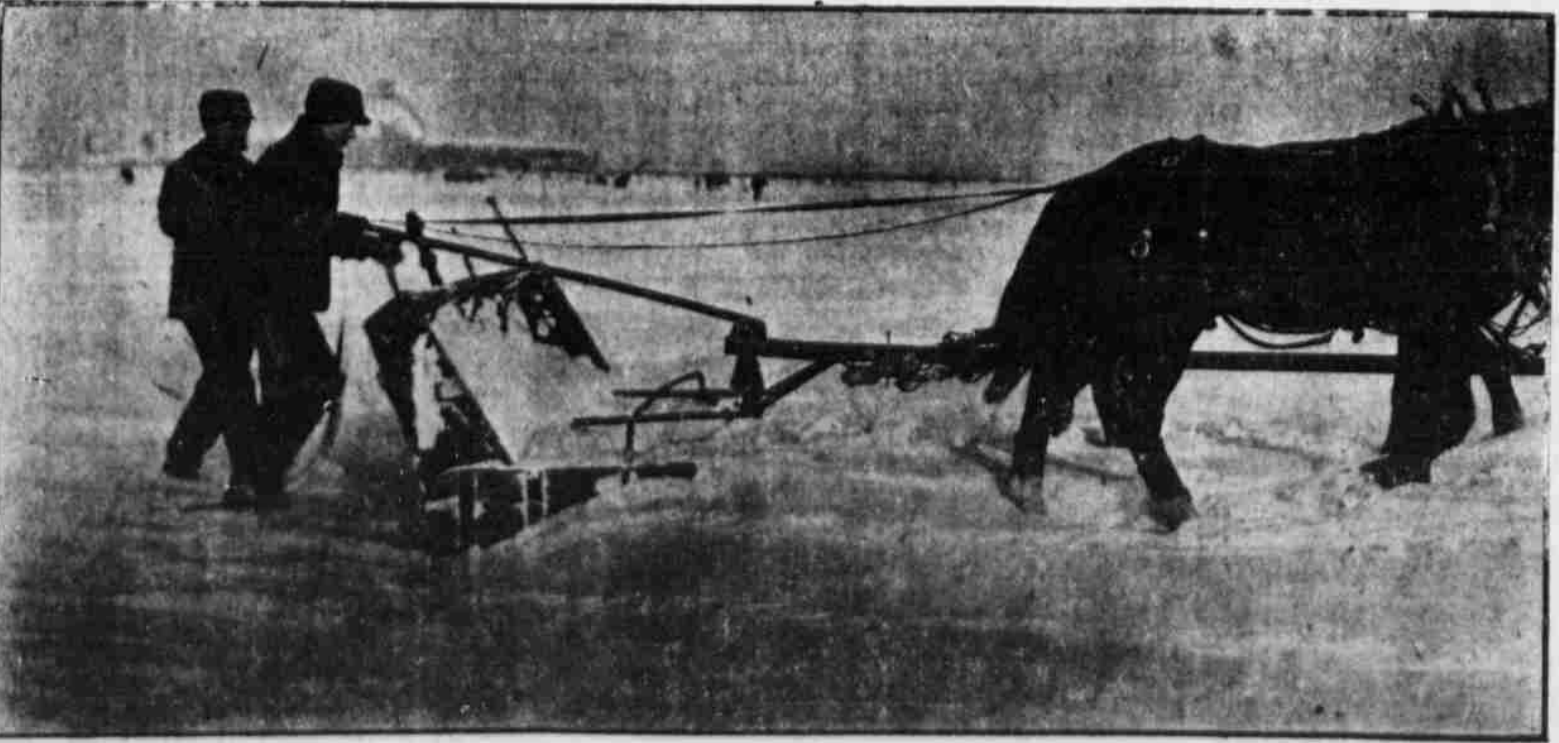
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SCRAPING THE ICE FIELD CLEAN OF SNOW—ONE OF THE EARLY OPERATIONS IN THE ICE HARVEST—Photo by a Staff Artist.



OLD-FASHIONED PLATFORM WHERE HORSE POWER LOADS THE ICE—Photo by a Staff Artist.