

Hudson Valley Ice Industry

The Hudson River itself provided the material for a booming industry in the 19th century. The ice that formed along the river during the winter months became a commodity and was harvested and sold to the surrounding area. Ice was harvested from north of the Poughkeepsie area all the way to Albany.¹ Though the upper classes of society had had access to ice for a while, in the 1800s the industry made it available to the general public.²

River ice was a valued product in the 1800s and there was significant demand for the Hudson Valley industry.³ In New York City alone, 285,000 tons of ice were consumed annually by 1855.⁴ The city's largest supplier of ice was the Knickerbocker Ice Company; established in 1855, this ice was harvested from the Nyack area in the upper Hudson.⁵ The ice industry near the town of Schodack was also a successful enterprise.⁶

The actual harvesting of the ice would begin in January.⁷ The horse-drawn plow, invented in 1827, cut deep into the ice and men pulled huge blocks of ice out.⁸ Once the ice was harvested it was placed in icehouses that "dotted the landscape" of the Hudson River Valley.⁹ Then in March the ice would be hauled onto barges and sent to the markets.¹⁰

The industry fell into decline in the 20th century with the expansion of artificial ice in the 1920s.¹¹ Refrigeration developed as well in the 1930s, and the demand for natural ice from the river diminished even more.¹² Icehouses in the Valley fell into disuse and disrepair.

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¹ "Schodack's Enduring Heritage," *Town of Schodack On-line*, accessed April 26, 2010, http://www.schodack.org/hist_feature_ice.htm.

² Edward T. O'Donnell, "The Dawn of New York's Ice Age," *The New York Times*, July 31, 2005.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ "Schodack's Enduring Heritage."

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Patricia O'Connell, ed., "The Birth and Death of the Ice Age," *Business Week*, February 18, 2003.

⁹ "Schodack's Enduring Heritage."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

Bibliography

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