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. 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.

River ice was a valued product in the 1800s and there was significant demand for the Hudson Valley industry. In New York City alone, 285,000 tons of ice were consumed annually by 1855. 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. The ice industry near the town of Schodack was also a successful enterprise.

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

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

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3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 “Schodack’s Enduring Heritage.”
7 Ibid.
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Bibliography

