

[Page 9 - Ice Cutting at Canso](#)ISSUE : [Issue 5](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1973/7/1

Ice Cutting at Canso Ice cutting for home use was at one time carried on all over Cape Breton. Often the ice would be put up in very simple buildings, using only loose rock for the floor to insure good drainage, and putting a 12-inch layer of sawdust (or 24 inches of hay or cut straw) over the rocks. There would be four walls of rough planks and often no roof at all • just a deep covering of sawdust or hay once the ice house was filled. The top covering was often double what was needed, to have enough handy to stuff down the sides when the sawdust between the ice and the plank walls had settled in the spring. Wood shavings were considered even better for insulation as they provided for more dead air spaces, but whatever the material the important thing was that it be kept dry, that it had no ice chips or snow in it. Between the ice and the walls there would be 8-10 inches of sawdust • and that would mean plenty of ice for ice cream or cold water or keeping fresh fish or meat right through the summer. But in some parts of Cape Breton the cutting and storing of ice was an essential part of major industries, such as lobster factories, fish plants and creameries. Here's how the operations were carried out in the Port Hawkesbury area: I. tX' "??"? Huey G. MacInnis Earle Embree: We had two fish plants here. And in the wintertime, for about three to four weeks, every stable that could be had for miles around here, had a horse or half a dozen horses in it, hauling ice from two ponds and storing it into ice houses, for their use all summer in these fish plants. Freshwater ice. Now one pond at the head of the harbour where the cement mixing plant is, has been filled up with bark since, waste bark from the pulp mill, and made into land. And the other one, out at the back of townj the dam has been allowed to deteriorate and let the water out, so now there's nothing but the little brook there. And I've seen ice coming in from out there when one horse could only haul four cakes, it was that heavy. Around 400, 450 pounds to a cake. And the double teams would haul 10, 12, 16 • all depending on the thickness of the ice. They packed it in these ice houses which had a double wall filled with sawdust. And they packed that ice in there one cake against the other, and then they broke up cakes and filled in all the crevices between the cakes • so that when they had a tier of ice over the whole of the ice house it just looked like one big flat floor. And another tier went on top of it, and another tier on top of it. They unloaded it from the main street and it went down into the icehouses in chutes. And as the ice house was filled up the chute was lifted up the end of the building. And in one place they went down near the ice houses to start filling thera, then they had to come up onto the main street where they had a big wooden platform built there right by the Black and White Inn to unload it and put it down the chute. And I've seen, yes, 50 teams lined up waiting to get clear of their load at the end of the day when they stopped. H. G. MacInnis: The last time I cut was 1941, but I guess it was up to 1960 they Jf"rf*?"" cutting and hauling ice for the creamery. We had beside the creamery two big fish plants here and they had a shed, it would probably cover half an acre. We usually started about January. I think winters and early fall were colder then. Right now you couldn't cut ice in January. Sometimes we'd get two cuttings off the same



pond. The ice was cut with an ice plow, drawn by a horse. The plow had a gauge on it. We always set it at 22 inches. You'd start off with simply a straight line for your first cut, then you'd set your gauge. You turned around and when the second Cape Breton's Magazine/9