

# Remembering When ...

## Our History

### ICE HARVESTING

Being born just after the good old days ended, I don't remember much about my grandmother's ice box. However, reviewing the history of the subject makes me cooler this hot July!

Ice was not made but "harvested" in the good old days. And there is no doubt that ice was big business and very important to everyday life – especially in the heat of the summer. Being close to water and cold air were important to the ice business and being close to good source of sawdust was even more important. Saugatuck and Douglas had an abundance of all three. Before "global warming" river ice was usually a foot thick in early January. It was then time to get the crew together and fill up the old ice house. The hollow walls of the house were loosely filled with sawdust to provide insulation – remember the ice blocks (at least those toward the bottom) had to last a year!

Any snow was cleared from the harvest area and gridlines were etched on the ice. Cutting of the blocks commenced with the use of a special long tooth hand saw (in later years a gasoline engine powered saw was used). The blocks were floated and pushed with pikes to a ramp that could be moved up or down depending upon the level of storage in the ice house. The 100 pound blocks were pulled up the ramp by an endless chain powered by animal or steam power-- to a point where gravity took over and the blocks slid to a spot inside the house. As each layer was laid down a coating of sawdust was spread to keep the blocks from sticking together.

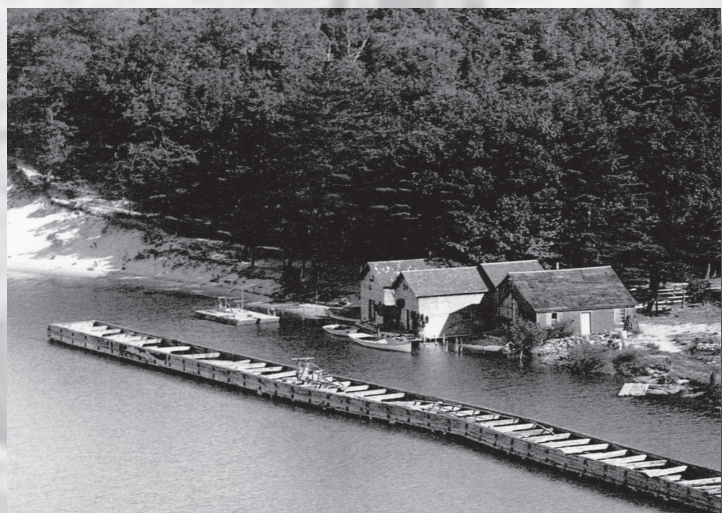
A number of ice houses existed along the river beginning with the first said to have been owned by William G. Butler. The Goshorns had one at Goshorn Lake and they hauled their sawdust from Singapore. The Shriver Brothers had two buildings in front of the Riverside Hotel at the Old Harbor--the little buildings have been erroneously called "fish shanties"--but they were in reality ice houses. In Saugatuck, houses were located between Mason and Hoffman and there was Eaton's Ice House (the building later became the Buerle Hotel and then the Blue Tempo) which stood where Coughlin Park is today. The Morgan ice house was located in Douglas at the east end of Center St.



Today I cringe when realizing that a good deal of river water found its way into the digestive system of ice consumers --but few seemed to worry about the health hazards of the product. The accepted opinion was that anything bad in the water had been frozen to death in the process ... Hmmm? By Jack Sheridan

Top - George Ricker January, 1929.

Above - Douglas Bryan and Irving Mead in front of Morgan plant showing off the power ice cutter.



Left - Shriver's Bend ice houses ca 1890.



Right - Moving blocks into the ice house - Morgan plant in Douglas ca 1929.

The Remembering When feature is the creation of Jack Sheridan and Jim Schmiechen of the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society. We remind our readers that this year's SDHS Pump House Museum exhibit titled "Lincoln's Ready-Made Soldiers: Saugatuck Area Men in the Civil War" is now open. The historic museum is located on the west side of the Kalamazoo River at the foot of Mt. Baldhead. It is open daily, noon to 4 p.m. until Labor Day, and then on fall weekends. There is no admission charge.

In addition, special presentations featuring various historical topics will be presented at the museum on

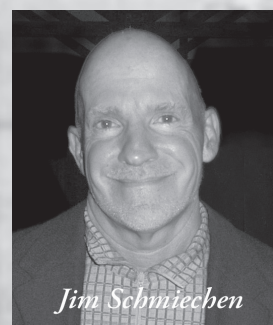
Tuesdays and Saturdays, 11 a.m. to noon, beginning June 21.

We welcome your comments on Remembering When. Call 269 857-7901, email us at [sdhistory@accn.org](mailto:sdhistory@accn.org) or write to Box 617 Douglas, MI 49406. SDHS historical images can be seen on the SDHS web site at [www.sdhistory.com](http://www.sdhistory.com) and all historical photos are available for purchase in print sizes up to 12x17.

Our historical image database is growing through your contributions. We scan your old photos—you keep the originals—and we then provide you with a CD of your digitized images.



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