



### In Their Own Words

Curated by Gina Neist, [eaglehistoricalsociety.org](http://eaglehistoricalsociety.org)

Winter in Wisconsin can be a time for outdoor fun on snowmobiles, skis, and sleds, but we have a history of workers making the most of the cold months to provide an income and a source of comfort and refreshment throughout the rest of the year. This article was taken from “Lulu Lakes Past and Present History” written by Norma L. Knoll.

### Lulu Lake Ice Harvest

When the Wisconsin Glacier created many clean, clear lakes, it helped to create an early industry—the harvesting of ice.



In 1898, the Knickerbocker Ice Company had a large operation at Lulu Lake that employed numerous people, several teams of horses, a branch railway, and a large three-story ice house that could store more than 100,000 tons of ice. By using straw as insulation, the ice would last until the end of summer.

Years ago, ice was needed to keep perishables from spoiling, as people used “ice boxes” in their kitchens before the invention of the electric refrigerator.

The harvesting of ice ceased in the 1920s when electric refrigerators replaced the out-of-date icebox. This was an ice age, but it was not due to the great glaciers. What we take for granted now was once a thriving industry, for how could a man enjoy a cold beer on a hot day if someone hadn’t thought to store ice when nature made it?

The ice harvest was the equivalent of making hay when the sun shines. In the late 1880s and 1890s, it was also a profitable industry that turned frozen lake into seasonal factories as busy as any town. At first, ice was ice. But as pollution concerns arose, harvesters sought pure sources. Wisconsin and Maine, Krudwig said, made the nation’s best ice.

The Lulu Lake ice house was made of two used sheds that were moved in and put up. The three-story ice house covered two acres and was 250 by 350 feet. There was a storage house for marsh hay, which was cut in summer for insulation for the ice. There was a boarding house for the workers, a gate house, horse barn and a caretaker’s house. As many as 150 people worked at the ice harvesting industry and 30 teams of horses. The horses had to be fitted with special shoes, called never slips, to walk on the ice in the winter, and with special horseshoes

called bog shoes so they would not sink in the muck in the marsh wetlands in the summer. Many men came to work cutting ice, but didn't stay long, mostly because they couldn't stand the cold and couldn't afford proper clothes and shoes. The men were only paid \$1 per day. If they owned a team of horses, they would get about 50 cents more per day.

The snow had to be cleared from the ice before the ice could be marked off into blocks to be cut. It was cut in long strips by horses pulling a circle saw that was run by a small gas motor. Then it was sawed into blocks two feet by four feet. The blocks were sawed off and floated to the conveyor to be pulled up into the ice house. Four to six blocks were taken up at a time. At first the conveyor was run by rope and horses, and later it was run by a steam engine. Hay was put between the cakes of ice. If blocks were broken, they were called slag ice and were just put in a big pile outside the ice house. Some of the workers would take some of this ice home for their own use.

The ice harvesting was a colorful and exciting enterprise. The workers dressed heavily and wore Scotch caps to protect their ears from wintry blasts. Occasionally a man would slip and fall into the water and would have to be pulled out and dried beside the fire that workers kept burning as a refuge of warmth. Sometimes a team would smash through the ice and drown in the depths. If one of the hoisting chains that raised the cakes of ice snapped, a long ribbon of ice blocks would crash back into the water, frightening the men with long poles who were guiding the blocks of ice onto the conveyor. There were always more watchers than workers. The ice harvesters always wanted the ice to be 24 inches thick. Some years they would have a poor year when the weather would warm too early in the year. Then the men would have to stop cutting ice. Just about every year 1,500 carloads of ice were shipped to Chicago during the summer and winter.



In Feb., 1920, the ice industry at Lulu Lake ceased when the ice broke up early and the conveyor fell into the lake. Also, the electric refrigerator was replacing the old icebox, and the new refrigerators could make their own ice.