



Sept. 20, 2017

TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S MUSEUM . . . while dusting

As the nights get colder for winter to near, the prospect of that season looms in our forecast: just as it did over 100 years ago. A long forgotten industry of Sullivan County was akin to that season for it was that of making (or rather retrieving) ice. A recent reminder of that time comes from photos by researcher for Ricketts and Ganoga Lake area found on Facebook.

Before the advent of modern refrigeration, an industry existed in this country based on simply frozen water. In Peter Tomasak's book entitled "The White Gold of Mountain Springs" published in 2000, he clarifies that men worked in sub-zero temperatures through winter months just because it was a steady job for "clean money". Towards the end of its heyday, wages were 30 cents/hour (this was an increase from initial employment of 10 to 12 cents per hour in earlier years) and gasoline was 25 cents/gallon and Malcolm Kitchen recalled that "a soda pop was 5 cents a bottle". And although this industry was phased out in the 1940's due to middle class households being able to afford modern refrigeration; our ancestors did not have that luxury. A spring house was the best they could ask for prior to the development of "manufacturing" ice.

The job of extracting ice was a seasonal one, done only in the harshest of conditions. But for many, it was a better alternative to say working in the mines and for many who in better weather worked outside, this work of ice harvesting was a much more appealing choice. Storage of ice, once cut, could be extended with the use of sawdust, wood shavings, cork and even straw. It is said that if blocks of ice are kept insulated by one of these methods it can conceivably be kept until September. And then there is the vast amount of ice being purchased for shipment to cities. The need arose not only for ice houses but also for appropriate railroad box cars specifically designed for the shipment of ice. A bill of lading in our archives lists the W&NB railroad cost to ship per 2,000 pounds to destinations such as Satterfield, Strawbridge (each at 30 cents) and Hughesville, Lime Bluff, Chippawa and Halls (each at 40 cents). Reference for quantities in PA of ice shipments were 317,500 tons in 1849 and 5,250,000 tons in 1880.

For us locally, the long red building that sets parallel with the tracks up Railroad St. in Dushore, just before the train caboose was actually an ice storage building for that which was awaiting shipment. And the ice needed to cut for the toboggan slide at Eagles Mere and anywhere else is desired to be between 14 to 16 inches square – not just for the safety of the cutting of the ice but also it became a standard for cutting and shipping ice for sale.

For this and more, contact the museum for an appointment by either phoning 570-946-5020 or emailing museum@scpahistory.com. We will usually be here on Tuesdays and Thursdays from about 9 a.m. to perhaps 3 p.m., weather and personal schedules depending. This is an all volunteer organization so please be patient with us. Also you can visit our web site at www.scpahistory.com and like us on Facebook.