

GEHR Watershed Minute #17

Ice Farming: (214 words)

Before the advent of the modern day refrigerator, natural ice was cut from lakes, ponds and rivers in the winter and stored for summer use. Icehouses were used to store ice formed in the winter, to make ice available all year long, and early refrigerators were known as iceboxes, because they had a block of ice in them.

The ice was cut into blocks when about six inches or more thick, either by hand with chisels, scrapers and saws or with horse-drawn plows and cutters. The cut ice was then either floated or lifted out and placed in ice houses with insulated walls and packed in saw dust to keep it from melting as long as possible into the summer.

The Lake Lenape Dam had a special ice chute built into it that was used for moving harvested ice from the lake down to the river below the dam. Today, that ice chute with its control gate has been converted into a fish ladder to promote fish passage from the river up into the lake.

The ice farming industry flourished on the Great Egg Harbor River and its many ponds and tributaries until about 1918. Bargaintown Lake had a prosperous ice cutting industry, and the Collins brothers were famous ice men in the area.