



## *Bethinking of Old Orleans*

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### Ice Harvesting

Today's photo, taken sometime back in the 1920s, shows a group of men from the Morton area engaged in harvesting ice.

They have been identified from left to right as: Mr. Petty (holding a dog), unidentified, Frank Rockow, a seated dog, Fred Jensen and Luther Staffin. The 1926 Orleans County Directory lists Luther Staffin as living on County Line Road in Kendall.

In the background, we see a bobsleigh to the left and cakes of ice stacked to the right.

I'm sure the dogs were simply on hand as supervisors of the day's work.

Such winter scenes as this commonly occurred on millponds, creeks, harbors and lakes in those ice cutting days of yesteryear.

Tools of the trade included plows, scoring plows, ice sticks, pike poles, ice saws and of course ice tongs that three of the men in our picture are holding —

and let's not forget high top boots, flannel drawers, frocks, gloves and wool caps.

I'm sure there were also plenty of cold feet, numb hands and drippy noses. Modern refrigeration does have its advantages.

Roughly between 1830 and 1930, the harvesting of natural ice in North America was a major industry.

For commercial use it was important to the railroads in our area for icing cars in shipping perishable fruits and vegetables.

Ice companies delivered cakes of ice to village residents for home use in the icebox. Often a square card was hung in the front window of your home to indicate you wanted the iceman to stop.

The use of ice has changed over the years. For example, natural ice was simply used as a coolant, not in food.

Horses were used in the harvesting process to pull the plows and bob

sleighs. Our photo was taken to exclude horses but they would have been hitched to the bobsleigh shown here. Formaldehyde was often used in cleansing the ice if a horse urinated on it.

Occasionally there were breaks in the ice and a man or even a horse had to be rescued. I'm told it was quite a trick to get a panic-stricken horse out of the water. Likewise it was almost impossible to ever get a recovered horse coaxed out onto the ice again.

Many farmers years ago had ice houses, which would be filled during cold weather using sawdust to insulate the cakes from melting. This supply was calculated to last until the next season.

Manufactured ice use commenced during the early 1930s and was delivered up into the 1940s. But with refrigerators becoming the norm in the 1930s, the ice industry melted into oblivion.