

Past Branford winters saw abundance of ice cutting

Ice cutting was a major activity in Branford during the winter months. There was an abundant supply of ice to be harvested at the Supply Pond and Ward's Pond at Mill Plain, the Bradley Pond in Cherry Hill and Altmansberger's Pond in Short Beach, as well as from the Branford River.

The ice had to be a minimum of 9 inches thick to harvest. It was cut and pulled out of the pond by horses up a ramp to the ice house. Here, it was stacked many layers deep and covered with hay or sawdust. A wall was constructed around the ice that would preserve it throughout the year. The industry was dependent upon the weather, and some years there was a poor harvest. In 1890, 1907 and 1908, there was no ice in Branford; it had to be purchased in Maine. 1917 was a particularly good year with 3,000 tons of 11 inch clear ice harvested that January at Wards, and all the other ice houses in town were filled to capacity.

There were several ice companies in town. The Branford Ice Company was founded in 1912 by A. Louis Rogers of

Branford, and it harvested ice at the Supply Pond and Branford River. The company's ice house could store 10,000 tons, and it sold largely to the New Haven market. The company was purchased by William W. Ham in 1915, and he continued operation until 1926.

Another large ice operation in Branford was that of the Bradley family of Cherry Hill. They had their own ice house, sometimes called an ice elevator, and delivered in Branford. The Bradleys retired from the business in 1936.

The most active and longest operating ice business was that of the Ward family. Thomas Ward and his son, Sidney, cut ice at their pond in Mill Plain

and delivered throughout Branford for nearly 100 years.

The availability of the electric refrigerator, which many families began to purchase during World War II, brought an end to the ice business in Branford.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Jane Peterson Bouley is the town historian of Branford.



PICTURES OF THE PAST

Jane Peterson Bouley



Photos by Harry O. Andrews, courtesy of the Branford Historical Society

The Branford Ice Company operated an ice house at the Supply Pond circa 1913.