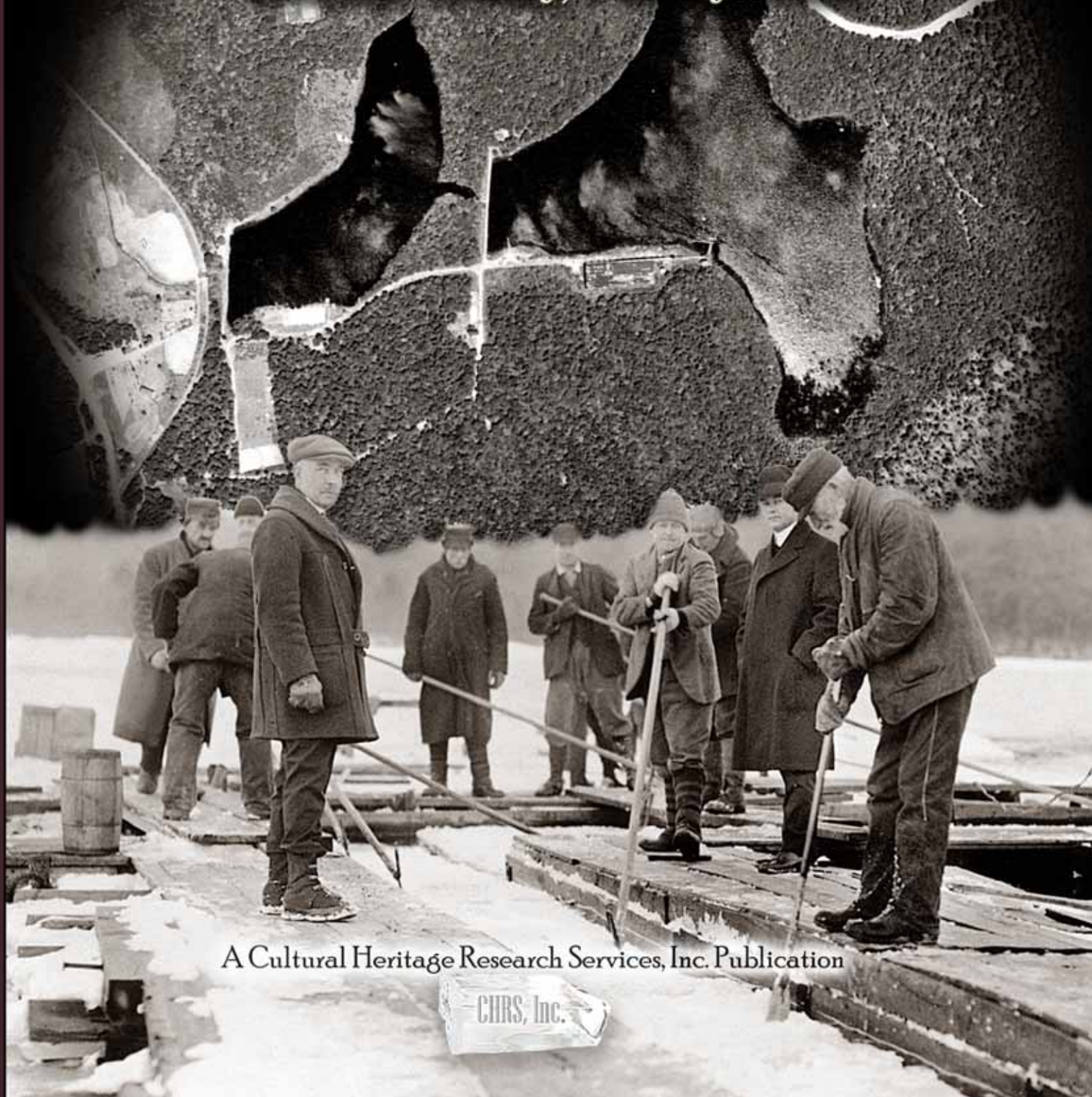


A Look Back at the
Ice Lakes of Rice Township
Luzerne County, Pennsylvania



A Cultural Heritage Research Services, Inc. Publication

CHRS, Inc.

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2005



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Aerial view of the Ice Lakes vicinity, United States Department of Agriculture, June 21, 1939; Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission and the Pennsylvania State Archives

Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Ice Company employees and overseers steering ice blocks toward the Upper Lake icehouse, winter 1919-20; F. Charles Petrillo Collection

On the back cover, clockwise from top left:

Members of the Fenner and Beers families astride the dock beside the Upper Lake icehouse, 1938; Sarah Fenner Jones Collection

Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Ice Company icehouse beside the Upper Lake, winter 1919-20; F. Charles Petrillo Collection

Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Ice Company employees Harry Lawson, Pete Modrovsky, and Frank Jeckell crouch on a wooden gangway on the Lower Lake icehouse, circa 1920, Milly Jeckell Collection

Canoeists on the Upper Lake, 1940s; Sarah Fenner Jones Collection

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Introduction

On the morning of September 3, 2003, three archaeologists unpacked their gear in a clearing beside a pair of adjoining lakes near the center of an unoccupied 506-acre woodland tract in Luzerne County's Rice Township. They were there at the landowners' request to launch a Phase IA Archaeological Survey, the aim of which was to assess the property's potential for containing "cultural resources"—that is, buried artifacts and man-made features, as well as above-ground structures at least fifty years of age.

The owners of the property, and the firm they had hired to conduct the survey, were following a protocol often called "the Section 106 process" in reference to the 106th section of the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act. That watershed legislation, later broadened and reinforced by other preservation-oriented laws enacted at both the federal and state levels, stipulates that when a project involving federal funding or licensing is proposed, the potential effects of the project on archaeological resources and historic structures must be evaluated before earth moving may begin (read more about "the Section 106 Process" on Page 3).

The owners of the Rice Township tract looked forward to creating residential lots on 440 of their 506 rural acres. The master plan called for construction of a vehicular bridge across a branch of the Little Wapwallopen Creek, within a wetland that would otherwise be left in its naturally soggy state. Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act gives the United States Army

Corps of Engineers responsibility for regulating all activities involving "waters of the United States, including adjacent and isolated wetlands." The landowners' bridge-building proposal would thus require federal approval. Before *that* could be granted (according to Preservation law), the Section 106 process had to be seen through to completion.

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), in its capacity as State Historic Preservation Officer, reviews and comments on all projects within the Commonwealth subjected to the Section 106 process. The PHMC had recommended that the owners of the Rice Township tract have both the stream-bisected wetland and other areas potentially impacted by the development project evaluated for cultural resource potential. If the stream had flowed through this shallow valley for centuries, it might have been a locus of Native American activities such as camping, fishing, hunting, and tool-making. The PHMC had, in fact, received reports of prehistoric artifacts such as stone "points" and ceramic shards being recovered by amateur archaeologists in that immediate vicinity ("prehistoric" or "precontact" meaning "of the period before the arrival of Europeans in America").

A Phase IA Archaeological Survey would also address the significance and condition of deposited materials and structural elements surviving from more recent human activities. The southern shores of the two lakes, jointly identified on twentieth-century United States Geological Survey maps as "The Ice Ponds," were said to

be studded with stone, concrete, and metal remnants of “icehouses”—storehouses in which ice harvested from the neighboring lakes had been stored before shipment to market. Local informants also spoke of former dwellings, outbuildings, a railroad spur, and other structures located some distance from the lakes, but still within the 506-acre parcel. The archaeologists would need to identify any vestigial above-ground structures, while also searching for evidence of former building locations (detectable through unnatural surface contours, obviously disturbed soils, etc.). This field work would help them answer several key questions: Are there areas with at least moderate prehistoric or historic archaeological potential that might be impacted by the development project? If so, what types of information would careful excavation and analysis of those areas be likely to yield? And finally, would that information make a significant contribution to the public archaeological record?

The archaeologists looking for answers to these questions—employees of Cultural Heritage Research Services, Inc. (CHRS) of North Wales, Pennsylvania—spent several days in September 2003 tramping through the Rice Township property, probing with their tools, taking pictures, making sketches. During one of these days, they were able to interview members of the family that had owned the property for a quarter-century after World War II. Meanwhile, back in their North Wales headquarters, CHRS’s Director of Research and his staff of historians collected documentary evidence of historic activities in the vicinity of the “Ice Ponds” (which, they learned, many veteran Rice Township residents have always referred to as “the Ice Lakes”). The researchers gathered and examined historic maps, aerial photographs from the mid-twentieth century, deed and census records, regional history publications, newspaper accounts, genealogical data, and business directories. Within a few weeks, the broader outlines of the Ice Lakes’ story had swum into focus.

When the data compiled by the historians and the field technicians were combined into a

single report—*Phase IA Archaeological Survey, The Ice Ponds Residential Development Project, Rice Township, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania* (CHRS, Inc., October 2003)—they led the authors to conclude that “the planned zoning and development of the Ice Ponds Residential Development project will have no effect on precontact or National Register of Historic Places-eligible surface or subterranean cultural resources.” The PHMC reviewed the archaeological report and concurred with CHRS’s conclusion.

The process was not yet completed, however. The PHMC went on to recommend that three mitigative steps be taken in light of the fact that the project would forever alter a piece of Rice Township that had figured prominently in the lives of area residents for nearly a century. The first two steps entailed producing a detailed map of the icehouse foundations, and preparing a report placing the Ice Lakes in the historical context of Luzerne County’s ice industry while also addressing issues relating to archaeological potential at ice harvesting sites. The most ambitious of the mitigative steps would be the preparation of an illustrated history of the Ice Lakes—a document which would restore to public memory both the context and the details of the Ice Lakes’ rise and fall in the first half of the twentieth century. When the job of preparing this illustrated history was presented to me (CHRS’s Director of Research), I recognized that another round of research was in order. We had been unable to answer certain questions in the limited time allotted for the initial phase of research. Moreover, in reading some of the recent publications touching on the Ice Lakes’ history, then speaking with area residents, we had found conflicting accounts of the Ice Lakes’ early years.

You will discover on the following pages that additional research enabled me to answer some of the key questions posed by the Ice Lakes and the scattered artifacts embedded in their shores. You will also learn that a few facts and motivations remain elusive. Perhaps the publication of this brief history will draw more enlightening details out of the woodwork. That would

certainly be in keeping with the spirit of the Section 106 process.

I am grateful to the following people who entertained my questions, offered stories and advice, and in some cases allowed me to copy and reproduce their historic photographs: Kenneth E. Hawk; Charles Ciesla; Joe Kubik; Joe

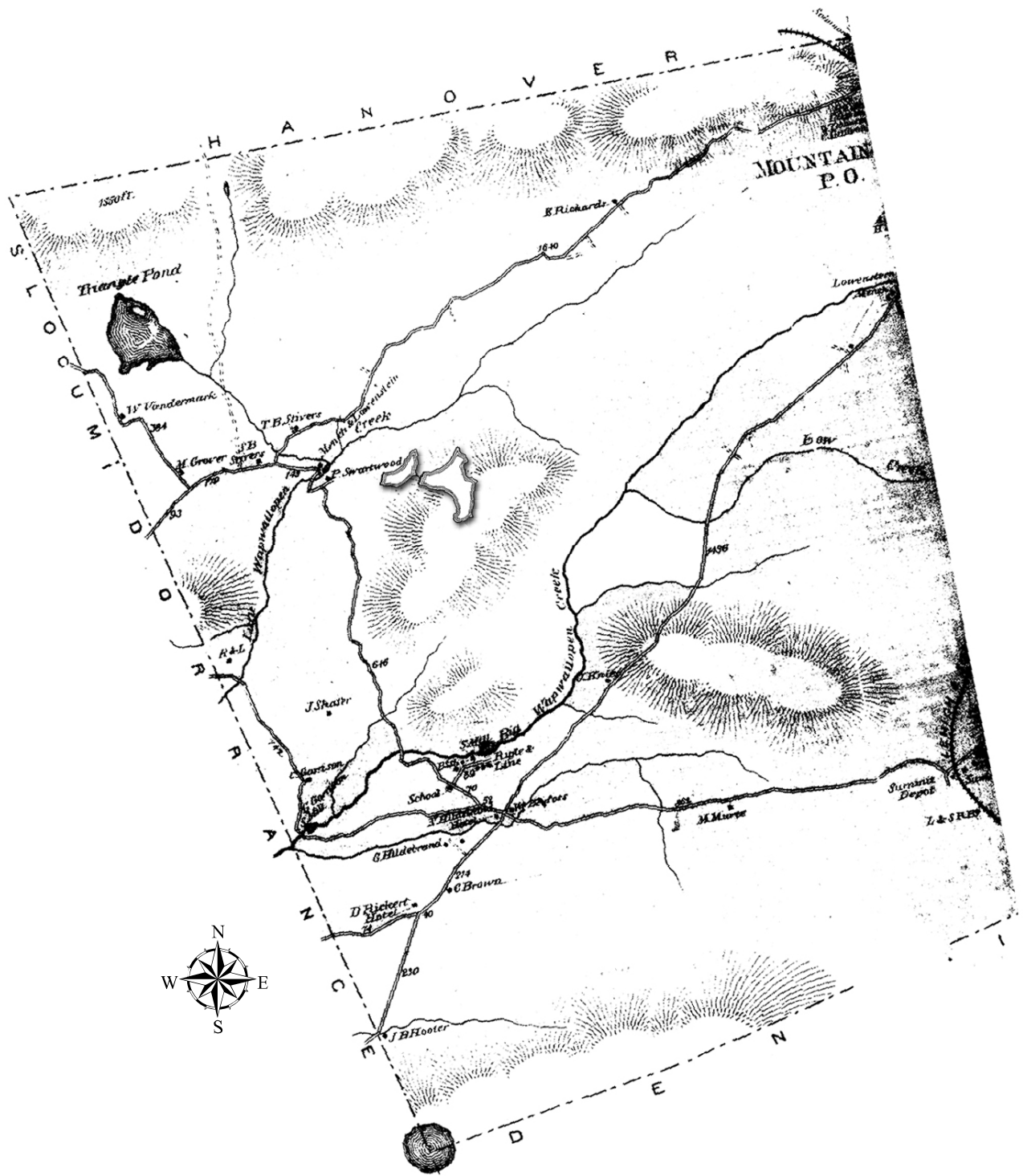
Tweedle Sr.; Mildred Jeckell; Linda Thoma; F. Charles Petrillo; Frank “Bud” Jeckell Jr.; Frances Jeckell Sirochman; Joe Sirochman; Tom Gasper; Jeanne Jeckell; Marcia Thomas; Sara Bagby; Sara Louise Jones; Barbara Jones-Smith; and Leslie Young. I could not have done my job without their gracious cooperation.

The Section 106 Process

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 is the cornerstone of the nation’s cultural resource preservation policy. Amended and strengthened several times since 1966, this law established the National Register of Historic Places, the office and duties of state historic preservation officers (SHPOs), a program of grants-in-aid to enable SHPOs to conduct their work, the Certified Local Government program to identify communities that meet certain preservation standards, federal agency responsibilities concerning historic preservation activities, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. This legislation was followed in 1969 by passage of the National Environmental Policy Act, which requires federal agencies to prepare impact statements for undertakings that might have an effect on environmental quality (cultural resources being a principal contributor to environmental quality). Yet another law with far-reaching implications—the Archaeological and Historical Preservation Act—was passed in 1974. This legislation extended the protections established by the Reservoir Salvage Act of 1960 to all federally funded, licensed, or aided undertakings where scientific, historical, or archaeological data might be impacted.

The unofficial but commonly employed term “Section 106 process” derives from the section of the National Historic Preservation Act requiring federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings or licensing activities on historic properties, while giving the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation an opportunity to review and comment on the potential effects of these activities. The Advisory Council has defined the procedure for satisfying Section 106 requirements in a set of regulations titled “Protection of Historic Properties.”

Given Pennsylvania’s rich cultural heritage, it should come as no surprise that the State Legislature has enacted laws aimed at further protecting the Commonwealth’s cultural resources, whether or not they are imperiled by federally funded, licensed, or aided undertakings. The lynchpin of this regulatory effort is Act No. 1978-273, amended as Act No. 1988-72, which requires that State-funded undertakings be subjected to the same Section 106 process as federally-funded projects. The State’s SHPO—the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Bureau of Historic Preservation—has also published guidelines designed to promote consistency and efficiency in the treatment of cultural resources across the Commonwealth. These directives include 1991’s “Cultural Resource Management in Pennsylvania: Guidelines for Archaeological Survey and Mitigation.”



The future footprints of the Ice Lakes have been superimposed by the author on a map of Wright Township published in 1873, four decades before the first of the Ice Lakes was created through the damming of a tributary of Little Wapwallopen Creek. The tributary was apparently too small to be noted by the 1873 cartographer.



Before the Lakes Were Formed

From deed records on file at the Luzerne County Courthouse we learn that the Ice Lakes did not exist prior to the twentieth century. The land they would one day cover—part of Wright Township until the incorporation of Rice Township in 1928—was mostly wooded at the close of the nineteenth century, with perhaps a farmfield here and there. Maps of the area published in 1873 and 1892 confirm the absence of lakes and buildings in this vicinity during the late 1800s. The only cultural feature denoted on these maps near the future site of the Ice Lakes was a road winding northward from an unnamed hamlet along the Big Wapwallopen Creek (where the village of Albert is today located) to an even smaller settlement along the Little Wapwallopen Creek (now the location of Nuangola Station). This rustic cartway, passing to the west of the Ice Lakes site, was the precursor of present-day Church Road.

In the waning years of the nineteenth century, the future site of the western Ice Lake—the smaller of the two bodies of water, called by area residents “the Lower Lake”—was part of a 106-acre parcel along the east side of Church Road owned by Joseph Grobowski and his wife Maggie. These residents of Glen Lyon (seven miles northwest of the Ice Lakes area) had reportedly “purchased the farm in 1896, cleared a portion of it and made some improvements, but in 1899 it was sold by the county commissioners for taxes and purchased by L. G. Stackhouse” (as reported in an article published in the February 4, 1913 edition of the *Wilkes-Barre Record*). Census records compiled in June 1900 reveal that 32-year-old mine fireboss Lee G. Stackhouse was

then living with his wife and four children at “Alden Station” in Newport Township, several miles north of the Wright Township property. Shortly before or after the census-taker visited the Stackhouses in June 1900, the Grobowskis “brought an action in ejectment against Stackhouse,” as reported in the *Wilkes-Barre Record* article. “While that suit was pending [on February 25, 1902, the Grobowskis] transferred their title in the land to [Nanticoke residents Michael and Marcella Wolongewicz]. After two trials [the Wolongewiczes] won and had Stackhouse ejected from the property.”

Meanwhile, the future site of the larger, eastern lake—known locally as “the Upper Lake”—remained unoccupied and “unimproved” (to use the traditional term for land left in its natural state). Cleaved by the Little Wapwallopen Creek tributary (referred to in some older deeds as “the stream leading from the Warrior Swamp to the Black Creek”), this rolling expanse of grass and forest was part of a large tract owned at the turn of the twentieth century by the widow and children of Ashley Borough businessmen and civic activist John C. Wells. Born and raised in Susquehanna County, John Wells had moved as a twenty-eight-year-old to the village of Ashley in 1864 to work as shipping clerk and Cashier for the Lehigh & Susquehanna Coal Company. He was soon promoted to Superintendent and General Manager, positions of prominence which he parlayed into a long career as a dealer in brick products, lumber, flour, feed, and ultimately groceries. Along the way he was instrumental in launching some of Ashley’s most active civic, religious, and financial organi-

zations, even taking the lead in securing a Borough charter in 1870. His entrepreneurial efforts in 1881 included acquiring a broad tract of “mountain land” in western Wright Township and dividing it into a dozen rectangular “farm tracts” that he hoped to sell once local land values had sufficiently inflated. He only managed to market one of these parcels—the 106 acres purchased by Joseph and Maggie Grobowski—before his death in 1897. Wells’ passing left the unsold collection of “farm tracts” east of the Grobowski property in the hands of his second wife, Fidelia, and his three grown children. These owners would not be able to find a buyer for their inherited real estate until the first decade of the twentieth century, and when the long-awaited day finally arrived, the sale would be driven not by the land’s agricultural potential but by its industrial promise.

“The Third Rail”

What qualities of John Wells’ would-be “farm tracts” and the largely unimproved Grobowski-Wolongewicz property to the west attracted the attention of industry-minded men in the middle years of America’s Progressive Era? For one thing, the Little Wapwallopen Creek tributary poured through the area a steady supply of “mountain fresh” water. For another, the broad swale through which the tributary flowed was so shaped that it might be dammed with relative ease, turning the upstream acres into a shallow and broad reservoir. Why would someone want to create a reservoir in this hinterland, miles from any civic center? The answer lay in a relatively new attribute of the site: it was no more than a stone’s throw from a railway line.

Rail service had only recently been introduced to western Wright Township. The conception and birth of the Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Railway (WB&HR) has been recounted in numerous publications, most extensively in E. J. Quinby’s *Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Railway* (1972), and James A. Wert’s three-part series

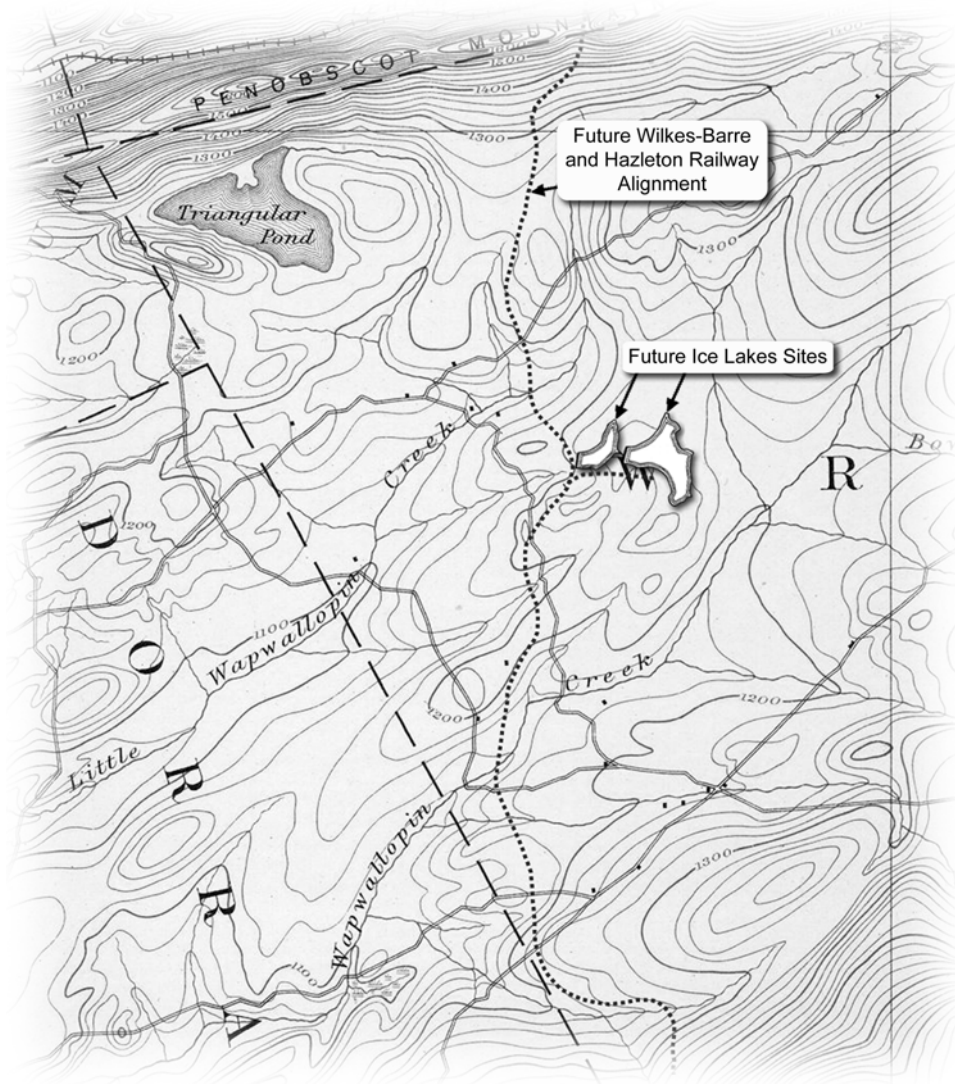
“Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Railway: A Dream Come True” (published in the November-December 1999 through March-April 2000 issues of *Trolley Talk*). Readers hungry for details of the Railway’s ingenious design and epic construction will find plenty of fodder in those accounts. We must be satisfied here with a few essential facts. The need addressed by the WB&HR was for a shorter rail connection between Luzerne County’s two cities: Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton. Prior to 1903, rail service between these metropolises was offered by both the Lehigh Valley and the Pennsylvania Railroad Companies, but the standard steam-powered lines these corporations had laid separately through the mountains in the mid-nineteenth century hewed to river valleys and other low-lying geographic contours, following paths of little resistance. This added considerably to the length of both routes. While Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton lay only twenty-one miles apart as the crow flies, the Lehigh Valley and the Pennsylvania Railroad trains traveling between the urban centers had to ply more than fifty miles of track.

That didn’t sit well with Alvan Markle, the Hazleton coal operator, banker, and businessman who had founded the Lehigh Traction Company in Hazleton in 1892 and created an “electric streetcar” system to connect many of the region’s coal mining towns with Luzerne County’s second city. Markle’s many business interests compelled him to travel frequently between Hazleton and the Luzerne County Seat at Wilkes-Barre, and he grew increasingly impatient with his protracted train trips. He finally resolved to build a more direct rail connection—an electric interurban line—using the know-how and influence he had acquired as founder and President of the Lehigh Traction Company. He persuaded a handful of business partners to join him in this effort, and together these directors formed the Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Railway Company in 1899.

After two years of planning and surveying, construction of the line through the woodsman’s paradise of central Luzerne County commenced

in 1901. The route adopted by the engineers brought it through Wright Township along the west side of the future Ice Lakes site, running more-or-less parallel with Church Road (see annotated map **below**). Curious locals pausing in their labors to watch the construction gangs at work may have been surprised to see a set of *three* rails laid down, as opposed to the usual

two. If so, they were probably even more perplexed when the workmen covered the easternmost rail with a strip of wood. This shrouded “third rail,” they would learn, was there to carry electricity to the streetcar motors. Historian James Wert has described the attributes and significance of this innovative technology as follows:



The future alignment of the Wilkes-Barre and Hazeltown Railway in western Wright Township—skirting the west side of the future Ice Lakes sites—has been superimposed by the author on a United States Geological Survey topographical quadrangle published in 1892, a decade before the Railway’s construction.

[The Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton] railway was the very first in the nation to utilize a protective covering over the [third] rail. This was a 2x6-inch wooden plank that was set high enough above the top of the powered rail so that there was enough space for the pick-up shoe from the interurban's truck to glide smoothly along the rail. The protective plank and the rail were held in place by a gray porcelain insulator placed every eight feet along the tracks. This was a great advance in safety. Other third rail lines had exposed power rails, which often caused some tragic fatalities. No human being was ever electrocuted along the WB&H line.

In addition to the safety feature, the wooden cover over the third rail helped keep it free from ice and snow, preventing interruptions in schedules. If a particularly vicious storm struck, a car was shuttled back and forth over the entire line during the night after the final revenue run to ensure that the tracks and third rail were kept clear.

Secondly, the third rail was placed on the east side of the roadbed with the center line of the third rail being 28 inches from the gauge side of the running rail. This was farther away than the usual practice to allow sufficient clearance for steam locomotives on the line where interchanges occurred with steam lines.

The WB&H adopted still another innovation. This was the special type of collector shoe that was developed in cooperation with General Electric especially for use with the protected third rail. This contact shoe was held firmly on the rail by pressure from a 15 pound spring rather than relying on gravity. The shoe had a thin neck that

connected to the hinge on the car's truck. If a shoe were to strike some obstruction, breakage would occur at the neck, preventing damage to the third rail structure. In that case, the shoe on the second truck would be utilized until the car could be taken to the repair shop. Shoes were folded up vertically and turned off when the trolley pole was raised to gather power from the overhead wire.

As we shall see, the capacity of the WB&HR's two unpowered rails to accommodate steam-driven locomotives and standard boxcars would prove critical in the subsequent development of the Ice Lakes site. The Railway Company's decision to locate a passenger station and an electrical substation just north of this site (the latter to step up power sent along the line from the powerhouse near St. Johns) would also have significant regional ramifications, as suggested by the name adopted for the surrounding village: Nuangola Station. Of slightly less consequence was the Company's placement of a station a quarter-mile southwest of the point where their railway passed beneath Church Road. This stop they styled "Pine View" (**facing page**), adding another evocative name to the local lexicon.

Among the first parties to benefit from the building of the WB&HR were landowners with property along the proposed route of the electric railway. Real estate that had previously held value only as woodland or agricultural field was suddenly worth considerably more as potential railroad right-of-way. This fact apparently did not escape Michael and Marcella Wolongewicz, barroom operators and residents of the bustling Wilkes-Barre suburb of Nanticoke. The Wolongewiczes were the folks to whom Joseph and Maggie Grobowski had "transferred their title in the land" encompassing the future site of the Lower Lake in February 1902, as construction of the WB&HR was underway. It was noted in the accompanying deed that the Wolongewiczes paid

the Grobowskis \$1,000 for the 106-acre farm along the east side of Church Road. The Grobowskis, the deed went on to carefully stipulate, simultaneously conveyed to the Wolongewicz "all their right to recover for any timber cut upon said tract by any person, and all right to recover for any trespass upon said land heretofore committed by anyone, and all right to sue for and receive and recover for any use and occupation of said land, either in any suit now pending or in any new suit, and all right to receive, sue for, or recover for any damages for any railroad or Railway right of way now or hereafter to be located." This was hardly boilerplate legalese.

Whoever drafted the deed went to great lengths to ensure that the Grobowskis would have no claim whatsoever to the property from that moment forward. We will soon see why that was of particular concern.

Within months of this conveyance, the WB&HR Company acquired as right-of-way a curving corridor of land in the western half of the Wolongewicz property. Records detailing this acquisition have not been located, but from the February 4, 1913 *Wilkes-Barre Record* article cited earlier we learn that legal ownership of the property was not, in fact, confirmed by the wordy deed of February 25, 1902. Even though



A humble sign, earthen platform, and makeshift bench mark the location of the Pine View stop on the Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Railway in this undated photograph from the early twentieth century. Passengers boarding interurban cars here—bound either for Wilkes-Barre and points north or Hazleton and points south—stepped over the shrouded “third rail,” which carried power to the cars’ electric engines. Joseph Tweedle Sr. Collection



Joseph Grobowski had signed off on the deal (scratching an X beside his typed name to serve as "his mark"), the Grobowskis later claimed that they were never paid \$1,000 for the Wright Township farm, and in any case the arrangement between the Grobowskis and the Wolongewicz had merely been a "necessary thing to enable [the Grobowskis] to recover their land" from putative owner L.G. Stackhouse (according to the *Record* article). The Grobowskis had believed "the conveyance was necessary to enable the [Wolongewicz] to intercede or intervene on behalf of the [Grobowskis]." The hopes of the latter were dimmed, however, when "Marcella Wolongewicz had herself substituted in the

ejectment suit against Stackhouse, which suit was prosecuted to judgment in favor of Marcella Wolongewicz, who, on May 9, 1906, obtained possession of the land."

This didn't wrap up the matter, however. The Grobowskis promptly filed an equity suit against the Wolongewicz, kicking off a second round of litigation that would drag on for the better part of a decade. Perhaps for this reason Marcella and Michael Wolongewicz did not immediately move their family from Nanticoke to the Wright Township farm following the May 1906 ruling. The Wolongewicz were still living in Nanticoke in October 1908 when they entered into an intriguing agreement with a

Wilkes-Barre businessman and a Wright Township entrepreneur (we will take a close look at this agreement shortly). Eighteen months later, there were still no Wolongewicz living in Wright Township, according to census data compiled in April 1910. Though they may have put off relocating to the country for legal or other reasons, Marcella and Michael Wolongewicz did not wait to begin making plans for the Church Road farm, and their strategizing would have major consequences for the Lower Lake site. So who were these folks?

The Wolongewicz Family

In a formal photographic portrait of the Wolongewicz family taken around 1910 (and lovingly preserved by a descendant), we find mother Marcella and father Michael surrounded by five children (*facing page*). There is nothing in the family's composition, or in the dress and demeanor of its members, to distinguish it from a million other American families of the early twentieth century. Though the Wolongewicz appear not to have been enumerated in either the Wright Township census or the Nanticoke Borough census of 1910, data recorded in other census years tell us that both Marcella and Michael had been born in Lithuania to Lithuanian parents. Michael had emigrated to the United States in 1875, shortly after turning 21. Marcella, who was born into the Gillis family around the time her future husband crossed the Atlantic, was brought to America in 1884, when she was not yet a teenager. The specifics of how and when she met Michael, who was nearly twice her age, are unknown to their descendants. Marcella would tell a census-taker in 1930 that she married Michael when she was 18, and the couple's first child, Joseph, was born before she turned twenty (Joe was a strapping teenager by the time the Wolongewicz family visited the photographer's studio around 1910). Marcella would present Michael with five more children—all female—in the decade following Joe's birth. In the

order of their arrival, the girls were Matilda ("Mattie"), Mary, Josephine, Helen, and Bertha. Mary may have died in infancy, as she was not included in either the family portrait or later census enumerations. While Marcella had what amounted to a full-time job bearing and caring for children between 1895 and 1900, Michael operated one or more "gin mills" or barrooms in Nanticoke, according to family tradition. He may have pursued other business interests, as well. His grandchildren would recall that, even after the family moved to the Wright Township farm, Michael "wore a business suit and carried a briefcase every day. He took the train to Wilkes-Barre, and no one ever knew what he did or where he went."

An intriguing Agreement

Ongoing litigation involving the Church Road farm may have compelled Michael Wolongewicz to appear in the County Seat from time to time. Other trips to the City might have been occasioned by his relationship with long-time Wilkes-Barre resident Albert M. Dimmick, a middle-aged machinist plying his craft in an axle factory. Dimmick's name appears with Michael's and Marcella's on an intriguing Agreement drawn up and recorded by the County's Recorder of Deeds on October 22, 1908. This document appears to be the earliest surviving record of a business plan that would one day leave a portion of the Wolongewicz's Wright Township property lying beneath a lake.

The parties to the 1908 Agreement were Michael and Marcella, as the landowners, and the partnership of Albert Dimmick and prominent Wright Township innkeeper and entrepreneur George W. Cooksey. After establishing that the Wolongewicz owned the farm along the east side of Church Road—reduced to 89½ acres through the recent exclusion of railroad right-of-way—the Agreement asserted that "it is the intention of [Dimmick and Cooksey] to build a dam at a point about 70 feet from the right of

way of the Wilkes-Barre & Hazleton Railroad on the land of the [Wolongewicz] to flood over and cause to be inundated with water certain portions of [the Wolongewicz property],” as well as several “farm tracts” to the east which Dimmick and Cooksey were in the process of acquiring from Fidelia Wells and her fellow heirs. The Agreement set forth the following terms:

Now, the said parties of the first part [the Wolongewicz] in consideration of the advantage accruing to them by having the said dam built by the said parties of the second part [Dimmick and Cooksey], and having property fronting on water and for the further consideration of the sum of One Dollar . . . have granted unto [Dimmick and Cooksey] all that part of their [property] embraced within a tract of land by a line drawn around the water covering and flooded back over said land by reason of said dam at a point fifty (50) feet from the high water mark and also a strip of land 100 ft. in width, running from the dam to the right of way of the Wilkes-Barre & Hazleton Railroad, to be used for driveways, switches or sidings from said Railroad and ice houses and for other purposes that the parties of the second part desire to put the land to.

It is understood and agreed that the said dam may be built to any height and length as agreed by the parties of the second part, and further that the parties of the first part have the right to use the road way around the water on the property of the parties of the second part. . . . It is further understood and agreed that if said dam should not be built or if the water should recede . . . so that it would no longer be used for the purposes of an artificial lake, then the land hereby conveyed

shall return to the ownership of the [Wolongewicz].

Artificial lake? Driveways, switches or sidings? Ice houses? What was all this about? Time would reveal that the Wolongewicz, Albert Dimmick, and George Cooksey had hatched a mutually-beneficial plan involving the creation of a reservoir, the harvesting of ice from the surface of the reservoir during the winter months, the storage of this ice in neighboring ice houses, and the shipment of the ice to market via the Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Railway (which locals had taken to calling “the Cannonball”). A short railroad spur would have to be laid to connect the ice houses with the Railway.

Luzerne County’s ice industry

Why did the parties to the 1908 Agreement think commercial ice harvesting might be a profitable enterprise? They could certainly look back over the previous half-century and find at least a handful of successful precedents within twenty miles of the Wolongewicz farm. Regional historian and “natural ice industry” authority F. Charles Petrillo placed the mid-nineteenth-century emergence of Luzerne County’s ice trade in a national context when he wrote:

Urbanization, improved ice-box technology, and consumer demand, including the popularity of mineral waters, fruit juices, and ice cream, stimulated the creation of an American ice industry. Farmers increased their use of ice for meat and dairy products. Food cooled with ice could be shipped by railroad to more distant places. During the last half of the nineteenth century, ice became a necessity for home and business, and by the 1870s there were substantial ice dealers in medium-sized communities like Wilkes-Barre and Scranton.

The first commercial ice dealer in Wilkes-Barre was Capt. Gilman Converse, once the captain of the *Wyoming*, a 128-foot steamboat which hauled freight and passengers on the Susquehanna River from 1849 to 1852 between Tunkhannock and Pittston, with occasional trips to Wilkes-Barre. Gilman sold ice from 1855 to 1865, cutting it from the Susquehanna River and local ponds. After Gilman's business was destroyed in a massive flood of the Susquehanna River in March 1865, he was succeeded by the Wilkes-Barre Ice Company, which was followed by the Wyoming Valley Ice Company in 1869.

By 1880, an estimated five million tons of ice were consumed by the American public. Pennsylvania was the nation's third largest producer of ice, following Maine and New York. Pennsylvania consumed about one million tons annually, cut on the state's lakes and rivers or bought from Maine and New York ice firms. The industry, by this time, also supported major conglomerate ice firms; the most well-known was the Knickerbocker Ice Company of New York, which also reached into Pennsylvania. With the growth of the ice industry during the 1880s, substantial regional companies were formed at White Haven, Tobyhanna, Pocono Lake, and elsewhere in the Pocono Mountains.

During the 1880s the White Haven Ice Company cut ice from the Lehigh River at White Haven. It had a nine hundred ton ice storage house at the Central Railroad yard in central Wilkes-Barre. The Knickerbocker Ice Company, based in New York and Philadelphia, also had ice depots in White Haven.

The two major ice companies in Luzerne County from the 1890s to the World War II era were at Mountain Springs near Ricketts Glen, and at Bear Creek near Wilkes-Barre. Both were originally formed by Albert Lewis.

This overview is included in Petrillo's chronicle of *Albert Lewis: The Bear Creek Lumber and Ice King* (1998), in which the author recounts in colorful detail Lewis's establishment in 1881 of a commercial ice harvesting plant in the village of Bear Creek, a lumbering mecca served by the Lehigh Valley Railroad nine miles northeast of the Ice Lakes site. The subsequent start-up of additional plants by Lewis and various business partners—most prominent among them Arthur L. Stull—in and around the Mountain Springs area of northwestern Luzerne County (approximately ten miles northwest of Wilkes-Barre) is related with similar comprehensiveness by Petrillo in *Harvey's Lake and Ghost Towns of North Mountain: Ricketts, Mountain Springs, and Stull* (both published by the Wyoming Historic and Geological Society in 1991).

The author points out in these accounts that Albert Lewis and his associates diversified into the "natural ice industry" for a variety of reasons, but chief among them was their recognition that local timber reserves were dwindling. Ice harvesting was a natural replacement for lumbering. It kept gangs of able-bodied men employed outdoors for at least several months a year, especially during the season when snow and plunging temperatures made lumbering particularly difficult and hazardous. Railroad connections already established for the transport of lumber could be used for the year-round shipment of ice. Moreover, water was a constantly renewed resource. If winters cooperated—which they generally did—icemen could count on harvesting as much frozen water as they could immediately ship to market, plus whatever their warehouses could hold. The clincher for aspiring ice entrepreneurs was the fact that harvesting and marketing ice

could produce profits greatly exceeding those generated with comparable effort in the timber industry. A reporter for the *Stroudsburg Times* observed in a February 1913 article that “they used to say that the Pocono Mountain section was growing rich when covered with timber, but now the results are far better as there is said to be three times as much value involved in ice house storage on the mountain than timber is worth.”



SCRAPING OR PLOWING



MARKING OR LINING



PLANING

The ice harvesting process

The tools and techniques employed in commercial ice harvesting at the turn of the twentieth century varied little across the American East, although terminology differed from region to region. The process of gathering and storing ice had been perfected decades earlier, and was commonplace in locales where rivers or reservoirs adjoined populated areas or were linked to them by rails. Here is how ice harvesting was described by reporter F.H. Forbes in an article titled “Ice,” published in the August 1875 edition of *Scribner’s Monthly Magazine*. Several of the illustrations accompanying Forbes’ account are reproduced here. Other drawings included on these pages are borrowed from an article published several years earlier in *Appletons’ Journal* under the exhaustive heading: “Ice: its formation, peculiarities, and uses—the commercial value and importance—the ice-harvest, how gathered and marketed.”

As soon as the pond is completely closed, the ice, with the atmosphere at a temperature of ten degrees above zero, forms very rapidly. If, after it has attained the thickness of say three or four inches, capable of bearing a man, a fall of two or three inches of snow follows, then the workmen begin to “sink the pond,” as it is termed. This is done by cutting holes an inch or two in diameter, and at three or four feet apart, thus admitting the water to the surface and submerging the snow, which forms the snow ice. With a steady temperature of ten degrees above zero for a week or ten days, the ice will have formed to the desirable thickness, say an average thickness of fifteen inches. We say average, because on many ponds the

freezing differs. The thickness is ascertained by boring holes with a two-inch auger. If, after the ice has formed sufficiently to bear horses, snow falls, then the scraping process begins, and continues with each fall of snow till the ice is thick enough to cut.

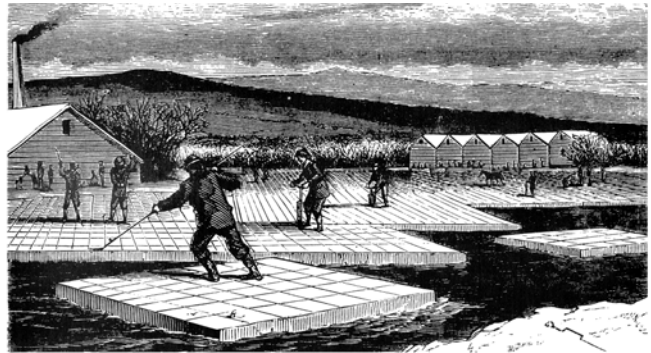
A space on the pond, say six hundred feet in width, is marked out and the snow is scraped from either side toward the center, forming what is called "the dump." Some seasons these dumps will rise to a great height, and then, through their immense weight, sink to a level. The process of scraping the snow into "dumps" is not only expensive, but wastes a great deal of ice, as only that cleared off can be cut. When the ice is twelve inches thick it will yield about a thousand tons to the acre, but so much is wasted by scraping snow, high winds, and various other causes, that it is only in exceptionally "good years" that more than half the average of a pond can be cut and stored.

After the snow is scraped off, the lining of the pond, so called, begins. This is done by taking two sights as in common railroad engineering. The targets are set, representing the line between two supposed points, say A and B. A straight edge is then run by means of a common plank between the points A and B, then striking from the angle B, it runs at right angles with the line A. Only two lines are necessary, one from A to B, and the other from B to an indefinite point.

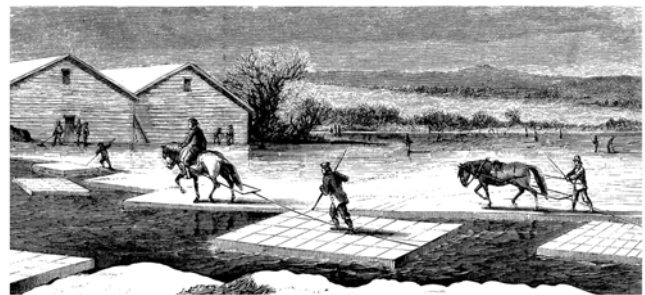
The liner proceeds with a double instrument, or what is called a "guide and marker"; the guide is a smooth-edged blade that runs in the groove made by the square edge; the marker is a part of the same instrument and runs



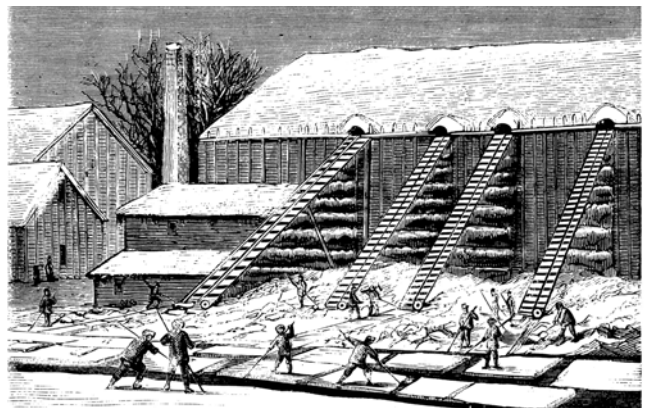
CUTTING OR SAWING



FLOATING



FLOATING



LOADING



FILLING ICEHOUSE

over the grooved lines laid out with the cutter. As soon as the machine reaches the objective point, it is turned over by an ingenious arrangement, so that returning, the guide runs in the freshly cut groove, and the marker cuts another groove forty-four inches distant. In this way the machine goes over the whole field, running one way, the last groove it cuts forming the boundary of the second side; then, commencing on this boundary line, it runs at right angles with the first, and goes over the entire field, cutting the ice into blocks of the required dimensions. The marker cuts a groove two inches in depth.

Following the marker come the cutters or plows with sharp teeth measuring from two inches in length to ten or twelve, and used according to the thickness of the ice. Then comes the snow-ice plane, which shaves off the porous or snow ice, it first being determined by auger-boring how many inches of snow ice there are. The ice is now ready for gathering.

It is broken off into broad rafts, then sawed into lesser ones, then barred off in sections and floated into the canal. The calking operation consists in filling the groove lines or interstices with ice chips to prevent the water from entering and freezing; this is

only necessary in very cold weather. The rafts or sheets of cakes are generally thirty cakes long by twelve wide, frequently longer. The ends have to be sawed, but every twelfth groove running lengthwise of the raft or sheet is cut deeper than the other, so that one or two men can, with one motion of the bar, separate it into strips ready for the elevator canal.

As the ice enters upon the van it is cut into single cakes of forty-four inches square. The process of elevating the ice has been reduced to almost scientific perfection. It is done by means of an endless chain fitted with buckets, and the hoisting power is a steam-engine. The ice-houses contain from three to five vaults or bins, corresponding to the several stories in a warehouse. A single range of buildings will contain five or more. The elevator is arranged so that one flat or story containing these five bins or vaults can be filled simultaneously; that is, as the ice leaves the elevator and is passed off on the wooden tramway of the platform, a man stands at the entrance of each vault to turn the cakes of ice in, the first cake from the elevator going to the farthest opening, and then in regular rotation till the first or lower flat in the range is filled. When the blocks are taken from the houses and loaded on board cars for shipment, they are reduced to twenty-two inches by a similar process of grooving and burring. None but the most experienced workmen are employed in storing the ice, as this requires a quick eye, a steady hand, and good judgment.

As each flat or story is completed, the openings at either end are securely and tightly closed, and when the whole building is filled up to the bed-plate,

the space between that and the hip of the roof is filled with hay, thus providing a sure protection against waste by shrinkage, which seldom exceeds one foot during the season.

Using such time-tested techniques, the employees of Albert Lewis's Bear Creek Ice Company were reaping ever-larger harvests of commercial ice in the early years of the twentieth century. Reports of their exploits, and the failings of the few other ice companies in the region, appeared regularly in local newspapers such as the *Wilkes-Barre Record*. Did any of these dispatches come to the attention of Albert Dimmick, George Cooksey, and/or the Wolongewicz? Perhaps the seeds of their 1908 Agreement were sown through the reading of accounts such as the following, published in February 1904, less than a year after the opening of the Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Railway through the Wolongewicz farm:

The Bear Creek Ice Co. have cut about 80,000 tons of ice at Bear Creek, and in addition to this amount the Lewis Lumber Co. have cut at Bean Run, near the headwaters of Bowman's Creek [in Mountain Springs], about 30,000 tons. All of the ice harvested at Bear Creek is shipped to the large cities, New York, Philadelphia, etc., via the Lehigh Valley R.R., and about one-fourth of the amount harvested has already been shipped to those points. This leaves about 60,000 tons in the ice houses at Bear Creek. The crop which they have stored at Bean Run will nearly all be used in Wilkes-Barre and vicinity.

If any readers were toying with the notion of launching their own ice-harvesting operations and claiming a piece of this pie, they might have been sobered by the details that followed. Ice

was indeed manufactured at no charge by Mother Nature, but as Albert Lewis and his colleagues could vouch, getting the commodity to paying customers entailed considerable effort and expense:

To harvest the crop at Bear Creek it was necessary to employ about 150 men for a month and 100 for an additional two weeks. They commenced to cut the ice about December 21 and finished on February 12. They have had the coldest winter at Bear Creek that they ever had, and this in conjunction with the heavy snowfall has made the harvesting of the crop a very difficult operation and has considerably increased the expense. Some of the ice was so heavy, too, that it was necessary to cut it down so as to make it marketable. At last reports the ice was twenty-six inches thick and to be marketable it should not be over eighteen inches in thickness.

When this account was published, only three “Ice Dealers” were operating in Wilkes-Barre, according to the City’s Directory for 1903-04. They were identified as the Artificial Ice Company, the Ganoga Ice Company, and the Wyoming Valley Ice Company. The latter was top dog in several respects. As historian Petrillo reported in *Albert Lewis*, “four of the area’s largest ice companies—the Wyoming Valley Ice Company, Summit Lake Ice Company, Pocono Company, and the Bear Creek Ice Company—consolidated their marketing arrangements on March 15, 1901 under the name Wyoming Valley Ice Company. The President of the new company would manage sales in the Wyoming Valley for the various companies. Actually, it was a scheme to divide the Valley into separate territories with the companies having a monopoly in assigned areas without the previous competition in the Valley towns among the companies. The arrangement lasted for many years.”

The number of ice dealers in Wilkes-Barre would double by 1910, then jump to fifteen by 1912. There would be no corresponding proliferation in ice-producing companies, however. The few producers in the region (sometimes referred to as “shippers”) simply expanded their operations, and divided their product among the more numerous distributors.

The Cooksey connection

It was onto this stage that Albert Dimmick, George Cooksey, and the Wolongewiczcs took their first collaborative step in October 1908. Cooksey appears to have taken the lead in this venture by virtue of his superior experience as a real estate speculator and entrepreneur. For proof of the former, one need only peruse the index of real estate conveyances in Wright Township on file with Luzerne County’s Recorder of Deeds. Between 1907 and 1924, George W. Cooksey bought and sold more than three-dozen properties within that municipality. Some of the parcels were located in and around the village of Albert, where Cooksey ran a hotel. The unofficial moniker “Cookseytown” would eventually be applied by area residents to this pocket of Wright Township (and Rice Township, after 1928).

What more do we know of this influential figure? Decennial census records tell us that George Cooksey was born in England in November 1860, and that as soon as he could travel alone as an adult (in 1881) he emigrated to the United States. Five years into his new American life, he married an English immigrant named Isabella, who was about four years his senior. By 1889 (according to the Wilkes-Barre Directory for that year) the Cookseys were living near the northern limits of Luzerne’s capitol, and George was trying to make ends meet as a general laborer. He managed to establish himself as a carpenter by the early 1890s, but this specialization proved only temporary. The Cookseys’ first and only child, Roger, was born in July 1896, and

around this time the family moved nine miles southward into Wright Township. Here George took up farming initially, then switched to inn-keeping and real estate dealing in the first decade of the twentieth century. This was his situation when he and Albert Dimmick (an old friend from his Wilkes-Barre days, perhaps?) decided to take the plunge into lake creation and ice harvesting.

It is unclear if Cooksey and Dimmick intended to create two adjacent reservoirs—as would turn out to be the case—or one impoundment large enough to have encompassed both of today’s Ice Lakes. When they signed their Agreement with the Wolongewicz in October 1908, the partners had already reached a verbal agreement with the heirs of John Wells to acquire three contiguous lots together containing more than two hundred acres immediately east of the Wolongewicz property. Significantly, these three lots—like the Wolongewicz farm—were drained by the Little Wapwollopen tributary. Cooksey and Dimmick paid \$1,632 for this land two days after they signed the agreement with the Wolongewicz.

Alas, before the partners were able to move ahead with their plans, Albert Dimmick fell ill. We thus find that when Cooksey acquired from Wilkes-Barre attorney George L. Fenner and his wife Jessie more land adjoining the unimproved “farm lots” in March 1909, he did so in partnership with Dimmick’s wife Mary. Albert Dimmick’s health would never improve. When he died at the age of fifty-nine in July 27, 1912, his obituary in the *Wilkes-Barre Record* explained that he had endured “a long illness of stomach trouble.”

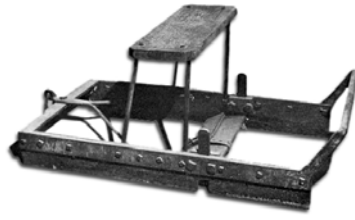
George Cooksey did not abandon his scheme upon his partner’s incapacitation. In August 1909 the venturesome innkeeper acquired from Robert B. Frankenfield and his wife Mary Jane a thirty-acre parcel abutting the northwest side of the Wolongewicz property. It was noted in the accompanying deed that Cooksey intended to build a dam or dams on the stream “present on

the land of Marcella Wolengevitz and Robert and Mary Jane Frankenfield,” and that this construction would “flood over the southwest corner of the tract” Cooksey was acquiring. All systems for reservoir creation appeared to be “Go.”

But then a year went by, and then another, with Cooksey making no progress on his project. Finally, in August 1911, he signed an Agreement with the Frankenfields that looked as if it would again shake the venture out of dormancy. The Agreement stated that Cooksey “shall build at his own expense a dam across the stream leading from the Warrior Swamp to the Black Creek, . . . which dam will flood the land of [the Frankenfields].” The Frankenfields “shall allow [Cooksey] to build the dam on their land and will allow him to build it to any height and flood as much of their land as possible.” Both parties were to “have the privilege . . . of the use of the said dam or lake for the purpose or boating, fishing and other reasonable uses to which a dam or lake at a picnic ground or summer resort may be put to. It being understood that in case a dam is not built by June 1st, 1912 or that it is not possible to build a lake or dam, then all rights under this agreement shall cease or be ended. The said Cooksey is also to be permitted to make a picnic ground on the South side of the said dam or lake at his own expense. It being understood and agreed that no intoxicating liquors shall be sold by anyone on or near said lake or dam or the picnic Ground above mentioned.”

We find here no reference to ice-harvesting intentions. Had Cooksey scaled back his plans for a reservoir to include only its recreational uses? We may never know, for it was shortly after the signing of this Agreement that Cooksey withdrew his proposal for inundating portions of the Frankenfield and Wolongewicz properties. He would build no dam and flood no land within those parcels. *That* transformation would be the work of a couple of ambitious Wilkes-Barre “icemen” who only now enter the picture.





The Ice Lakes Cometh

By the time Clinton S. Callahan and George Z. Slotrey signed a lease with Michael and Marcella Wolongevicz on February 4, 1913, the business partners had apparently already built a dam approximately seventy feet east of the WB&HR right-of-way, and thereby created what is now known as “the Lower Lake.” The Lake’s creation would be attributed to Callahan and his business associates in an April 1915 *Wilkes-Barre Record* article (into which we shall soon delve deeper). The February 4, 1913 lease, meanwhile, merely noted that the Wolongevicz property now included “an artificial pond which may be used for the cutting of Ice,” and that Callahan and Slotrey were “in the ice business and are desirous of renting and using the said pond for the cutting and storing of ice for commercial purposes.” The Wolongeviczes therefore granted to Callahan and Slotrey “the exclusive right to use all of the said pond for the purpose of cutting and taking ice therefrom, and [Callahan and Slotrey] may also use sufficient of the shores of said pond to build icehouses for storage and to build and erect such appliances as shall be necessary for cutting, storing, and shipping the said ice and also as much of the land adjoining as shall be necessary to connect the said pond and the icehouses with the Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Railway.”

Callahan and Slotrey’s lease was to expire after ten years, unless the Wolongeviczes exercised their right to terminate it after only five. In the latter case, the Wolongeviczes were to pay Callahan and Slotrey two-thirds of the cost of the “icehouse or icehouses and permanent appliances placed on said land for the cutting and storing of

ice.” If the lease was terminated after ten years, the Wolongeviczes would buy back the improvements at only a third of their construction cost. For the present, Callahan and Slotrey agreed to pay the Wolongeviczes ten cents for every ton of ice harvested from the lake prior to April 1, 1913. After that, the Wolongeviczes would receive seven cents per ton, payable quarterly. The minimum annual payment would be \$250, “unless it should be impossible owing to the warmness of any winter to obtain ice to the amount of \$250 from said pond.”

Who were Clinton S. Callahan and George Z. Slotrey, and why did they create the easternmost Ice Lake even before their business arrangement with the Wolongeviczes was finalized? Callahan was the younger of the two men, but he had a higher public profile. From census records and Wilkes-Barre Directories we gather that Callahan had been born in 1877 to an Irish father and German-American mother on a farm in Monroe County’s Coolbaugh Township. By the age of twenty-one he had made his way to Wilkes-Barre and found work there as an office clerk. He must have demonstrated unusual aptitude and ambition in this position, because the Pocono Ice Company appointed him to the position of Manager while he was still in his mid-twenties. He served in this capacity for nearly a decade before joining forces with George Slotrey to launch an ice-harvesting enterprise in Wright Township.

George Zachary Slotrey was a quarter-century older than his partner. This former Bradford County farmboy had tried his hand at sev-

eral occupations after moving to Wilkes-Barre—selling groceries, driving a hack, serving as a factory foreman. Around 1909 he took up ice retailing, and this seems to have suited him best of all. In City Directories published from 1910 through 1913, Slotrey was identified variously as an “Ice Dealer,” the “Manager” of an ice business, and as the “proprietor [of the] Mountain Lake Ice Company.” The headquarters of the last-named firm were said to be located at the “foot of Parrish” Street, which would place them near the intersection of Parrish and South Main Streets, along the railroad tracks lining Wilkes-Barre’s busy Pennsylvania Avenue.

We may assume that Slotrey and Callahan got to know each other through the ice trade. If they ever were competitors, they were no longer at odds in the winter of 1912-13, when Callahan’s “Pocono Ice Company built a pond of its own between Nuangola and Alberts Stations along the Wilkes-Barre Railway” (as reported in the *Wilkes-Barre Record* a couple of years later). Amid the welter of competing and conspiring ice dealers and “shippers” plying their trades in Luzerne County in the years immediately preceding the Great War, it is not entirely clear what relationship the Callahan-Slotrey partnership had with the Pocono Ice Company. At least in the mind of the *Record* reporter in April 1915, the two parties acted as one in 1912-13, with Callahan as the principal instigator.

It is significant that Callahan and Slotrey signed their lease with the Wolongeviczes on February 4, 1913. Only the previous day, Luzerne County Judge S.J. Strauss had issued “a lengthy opinion” in favor of the Wolongeviczes in the equity suit brought against them by Joseph and Maggie Grobowski more than a decade earlier. In an article recalling the facts and charges of the case, published in the February 4, 1913 edition of the *Wilkes-Barre Record*, the author noted that the Grobowskis had most recently “prayed for a decree [from the County Court] commanding the [Wolongeviczes] to surrender the deed [for the Wright Township farm] and to



reconvey the land to the [Grobowskis] and also for an injunction restraining the [Wolongeviczes] from conveying or incumbering the land and for other general relief.” It would appear that the threat of such an injunction and/or other concerns raised by the Grobowskis’ protracted equity suit had either discouraged Michael and Marcella Wolongevicz from giving George Cooksey the go-ahead to build his dam after signing the 1908 Agreement, or Cooksey himself had gotten cold feet. Callahan and Slotrey were no doubt aware of the ongoing litigation when they began negotiating with the Wolongeviczes in 1912, but the business partners were apparently confident enough that a ruling in the Wolongeviczes’ favor would eventually be issued that they went ahead and built the dam anyway. They waited, however, until the ruling was actually issued before they signed onto the terms laid out in the February 4, 1913 lease.

Weather may also have been a factor in the timing of this lease-signing. The prior month (January 1913) had been unusually mild in Luzerne County, with temperatures averaging almost twenty degrees higher than the previous January. This was more bad news for Pocono icemen, who had suffered through relatively

warm winters and less-than-capacity ice crops for several years running. On the first day of February 1913, however, “real winter weather blew into northeastern Pennsylvania,” wrote historian Charles A. McCarthy in a 1979 column published in Wilkes-Barre’s *Sunday Independent*. He continued:

Worried frowns which furrowed the brows of ice dealers in Luzerne County and adjacent areas for six weeks, and of consumers to whom scarcity of ice was expected to result in higher prices that year, were [finally] dissipated. . . . Word was circulated in Wyoming Valley Wednesday, February 5, that nearby ice fields were covered with a crop of ice which measured from seven to nine inches in thickness, and that preparations were being made to harvest it immediately. Cutting commenced in the Bear Creek region the following day. The ice there, since early in January, had been soft and therefore impossible to cut, but hardened by the very recent cold snap, the frozen ice measured about eight inches in thickness. Fields here were covered with six inches of snow and extensive areas had been uncovered in preparation for the cutting work. A larger force of men than usual was hired and arrangements were made for a quick harvest. It was felt that if the cold spell continued, several inches would be added to the ice depth before the current season closed.

On the morning of Wednesday, February 5, the thermometer at Bear Creek Ice Company registered eight degrees above zero. Practically the same news, of a sudden dip in the temperature, came from other regional ice cutting sections. At Splash Dam [Arthur L. Stull’s plant, northeast of

Ganoga Lake], Bean Run, Rickett’s Glen, and Lake Ganoga, the ice was reported as being ten inches in thickness. Cutting was scheduled to commence at those points Thursday, February 6. In preparation for the anticipated “quick” ice harvest, the Lehigh Valley Railroad arranged for trains of boxcars to be stationed at the cutting centers. Pocono Mountain reports indicated the ice in those several districts was between eight and nine inches thick. The snow at Pocono stations, as in all other places, delayed harvesting for several days. However, all of the producers were confident that if the cold spell continued, a normal sized crop would be secured. In any event, ice dealers were no longer worried that they might not receive any ice that season.”

The Crystal Lake Ice Company

It is doubtful that Callahan and Slotrey were able to build an icehouse alongside the newly-created reservoir on the Wolongevicz farm, fill it with harvested ice, and lay in a railroad spur from the WB&HR in time to take advantage of the February 1913 cold snap. Only a few weeks remained in the ice harvesting season, hardly enough time to put such pieces in place. There are other indications that the business partners did not begin harvesting ice here until a later season—most likely the winter of 1914-15. For one thing, the February 4, 1913 lease agreement went unrecorded for at least twenty months, and then it was “abrogated” by a new Agreement drawn up between Callahan and Slotrey and the Wolongeviczes in October 1914. Moreover, no mention was made of either Callahan or Slotrey’s independent ice-harvesting activities in the following news article, published in the January 15, 1914 edition of the *Wilkes-Barre Record*:

ICE MEN HAPPY

**Indications Point to a
Record-Breaking Crop of
Standard Thickness**

**Yield of the Pocono Plants
Estimated at 800,000 Tons**

**Several Hundred Men Working
Night and Day Filling the Big Stor-
age Houses in This Locality**

It is doubtful whether a dissenting voice will be raised to the observation that—"These are great days for the ice man, all right!"

You bet they are!

A letter came down from the Pocono Mountains yesterday to C.S. Callahan, manager of the Pocono Ice Co., of this city, containing the information that "these are great days for the ice people."

Mr. Callahan was informed in the letter, which was written by Charles Edwards, superintendent of the augmented ice harvesting gangs on the Poconos, that all indications are pointing to a record-breaking crop of fourteen inch ice to be harvested after next Monday.

To the retail distributor of the frigid product this announcement means considerable, and ultimately it will mean much to the consumer. Mr. Callahan figures it out this way: It has been four years since anything like a capacity crop has been harvested on the Poconos, and this has meant that prices have had to stay up when the supply of the commodity has been kept down.

Local retail men are supplied by the Mountain Ice Co., the largest harvesters of ice in the country, with the single ex-

ception of the big Metropolitan combine, the American Ice Co. of New York City, which annually reaps from the Hudson River in upper New York State, and from lakes in Maine, an amount of ice equal to that which comes from the Poconos. This year it is figured that the twelve lakes, or "plants," as they are called in the Poconos, will yield 800,000 tons. This, indeed, according to the local official, will be capacity storage and one seldom equaled in recent years. The harvesting of ice is an interesting process.

The Pocono plants, which it is expected to see going full blast next week, are located at Gouldsboro, Tobyhanna, Pocono Summit, Pocono Lake, Lake Hopatcong, and Greenwood Lake, the latter two in New Jersey. Several hundred men will be given employment to secure the yield and several weeks will be consumed in filling up the various houses.

Superintendent Edwards reported in his letter to Mr. Callahan that eleven and twelve inches of ice showed under the planers on Tuesday. While ordinarily this grade of ice would be seized by the officials, no effort will be made to begin cutting until Monday next when the thickness is expected to have reached fourteen inches.

Only 45 percent of the total yield of the Pocono plants was secured last year. Fourteen inch ice will be better both for the company and the consumer. It will mean that less space will be consumed in the storage and in warm weather the space taken up by ice means everything—not in the storage houses of the companies alone, but also in the refrigerator on the individual consumer.

Wilkes-Barre Record, January 15, 1914

Did the bumper crop of ice harvested during the 1913-14 season inspire Callahan and Slotrey to finally move the remaining components of their business plan off the drawing board? So it appears. On October 9, 1914, with the upcoming ice season just a few months off, the partners sat down with the Wolongewiczses and signed a new lease that “abrogated” the apparently unrealized and unrecorded earlier agreement. The new document would also go unrecorded for at least fifteen months, but it was enough to assure Callahan and Slotrey that the natural ice company they planned to establish would have at least one ice-harvesting plant at its disposal. Thus assured, the partners signed their names to a charter for the “Crystal Lake Ice Company” on November 10, 1914. This corporation was established in Wilkes-Barre “for the purpose of harvesting, buying, selling and supplying ice at wholesale and retail.” It had only three Directors—Callahan (holding 200 shares), Slotrey (also with 200 shares), and F.B. Reynolds (one share). Its place of business, according to the 1915 Wilkes-Barre Directory, was located at 50 North Pennsylvania Avenue, the address of the WB&HR’s three-story passenger terminal. The charter provided no clue as to why Callahan and Slotrey chose to name their ice company “Crystal Lake,” but it’s not hard to imagine that the men believed this title would evoke images of pure water and, by extension, attractive ice.

For the time being, the attentions of Callahan and Slotrey were focused on their new ice plant beside their new ice lake in Wright Township. Mother Nature conspired to get this enterprise off to a robust start. As noted in the 1915 *Wilkes-Barre Record Almanac*, an early cold snap allowed gangs of laborers to begin harvesting ice “on the mountain lakes and ponds” a few days after Christmas 1914. The men employed by the Crystal Lake Ice Company on what is now known as “the Lower Lake” were soon able to “fill two large store houses with ice which [the Company’s Directors] had analyzed by Prof.

Dean, chemist for the water company, and which is advertised as of high grade quality.” This news was reported in a *Wilkes-Barre Record* article published after the 1914-15 ice-harvesting season had wrapped. The article would not have been written—and we might not have received this important dispatch—if the introduction of the region’s newest “shipper” (Callahan and Slotrey’s Crystal Lake Ice Company) had not upset the balance of ice producers and distributors, and touched off “a bitterly contested ice war.”

(Pr)ice war!

A trove of statistical data pertaining to Luzerne County’s natural ice industry in the year of the Lower Lake’s inauguration was presented in a series of articles published in the *Wilkes-Barre Record* during the spring of 1915. Clinton Callahan’s name was invoked only once in these reports, but as the “Superintendent of the Pocono Ice Company,” he was a central figure in the “price war” that soon had all of Wilkes-Barre talking. From the *Record* articles we gather that Callahan and Slotrey had established the Crystal Lake Ice Company the previous year in order to become the chief supplier of ice to the Pocono Ice Company, which Callahan managed. It was a shrewd business move. The Pocono Ice Company was no longer in thrall to its “shipper”—Arthur L. Stull’s ice combine at Mountain Springs—and the Callahan-Slotrey partnership began earning profits that had formerly been poured into Mr. Stull’s coffers. As both the Superintendent of the Pocono Ice Company and a principal owner of the Crystal Lake Ice Company, Callahan was, in effect, buying ice from himself. Eliminating the middleman gave him a flexibility and independence that most of his competitors did not enjoy. As the following articles relate, he soon used this flexibility to underbid the competition, and this sent the price of retail ice in Wilkes-Barre spiraling downward:

Ice Dealers At War

Prices Are Tumbling

May Drop to Five Cents a Hundred is Predicted—Crop From New Field at Bottom of Trouble

A price war is on between local retail ice dealers, and rates are being slashed and tumbled fast. Already the price to heavy consumers is down to 15 cents a hundred pounds, and it is predicted that it may even go to 5 cents a hundred within a week. And if the fight keeps up, as both sides say it will, the low prices will prevail throughout the summer at least. Rumors of a “combination” to force out of business the first company that made the cut are current and the fight may be carried to the courts. In the meantime the public that has always been compelled to accept the prices dictated by the ice interests, is enjoying the situation of having warring companies bid for patronage and nearly all of them ready to cut prices to the minimum to get it. Independent companies have been forced by the law of self preservation to fall into line and it is said are meeting the prices made by the principals in the fight.

The Pocono Ice Company, it is understood, is primarily responsible for the situation here; and the main fight is between it and A.L. Stull and the five companies which Mr. Stull supplies with ice from Bean Run and his other North Mountain fields. The other companies were compelled to cut their charges, too, and some had difficulty in getting their shippers to stand back of them. As a result they are “sore” at the Pocono Company and are ready to line up with the interests which are fighting the reductions. It seems that up until last winter the Po-

cono Ice Company has been purchasing its ice from Mr. Stull at Bean Run or Mountain Spring. A year or more ago, however, the Pocono Company built a pond of its own between Nuangola and Alberts Stations along the Wilkes-Barre Railway, and during the winter just passed filled two large store houses with ice which they have had analyzed by Prof. Dean, chemist for the water company, and which is advertised as of high grade quality.

Eliminating the middleman, who has always been a factor in marketing ice locally, the Pocono Company shipped its ice direct from the Nuangola pond to Wilkes-Barre and placed it on the market at a price 5 cents cheaper than the other companies were asking. This, it is said by friends of the companies supplied by Stull, was contrary to the usual “silent” agreement made by all the companies, the Pocono included; and the price is one that the other companies, as middlemen, could not reach and make a reasonable profit. They found that the Pocono agents were procuring a great deal of good patronage that had been hitherto otherwise distributed. They rose up in arms and as a result sent the price down another five points. Where, last summer heavy consumers had to pay 25 cents for 100 pounds of ice, they now get it for fifteen. The price to other business places, using medium amounts, was 20 cents a hundred, and to private houses 30 cents a hundred, in each instance a drop of 10 cents from the summer price of last year, which, it may be pointed out, did not usually go into effect until some time in May.

Just where the end will be, the dealers cannot say. “We’ll be giving ice away before the summer is over,” said one of them disconsolately yesterday afternoon. It seems as though the fight will resolve itself into the question of the survival of the fittest. The situation presses unusually hard upon the dealers not supplied

by the Stull interests. There are five companies that get their ice from the North Mountain producers, including Heart Lake, Mountain Lake, Mountain Spring, Ganoga, and People's ice companies. All others, of which the Spring Lake Ice Company and the Wilkes-Barre Ice Company are the largest, get their product from other sources. Unless their shippers come to the support of these companies, as they probably will, it would be hard for them to get ice that they could sell at any profit, or with which to keep customers.

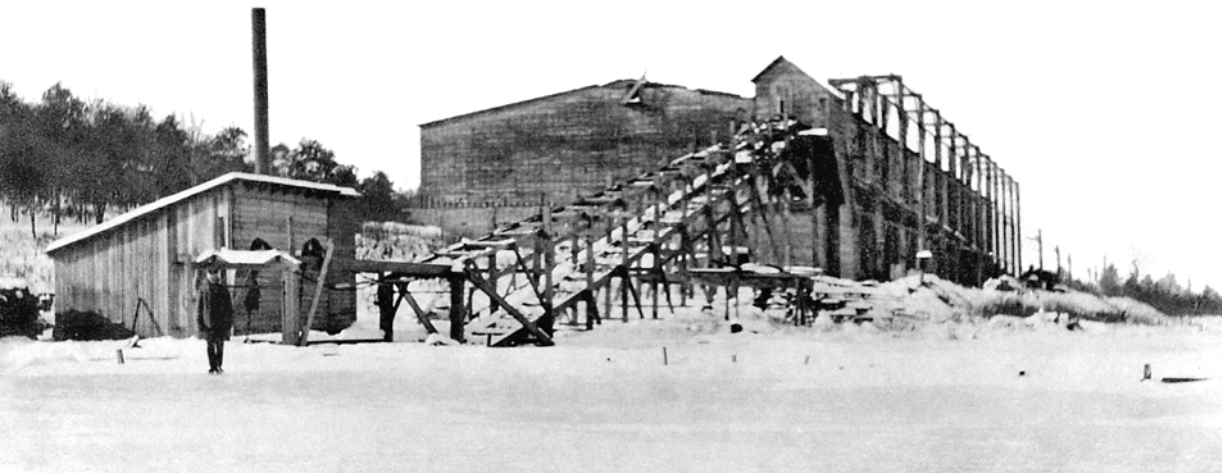
C.S. Callahan, superintendent of the Pocono Ice Company, would not discuss the situation last night, but indirectly it was learned that he and his partners are prepared to fight the thing through. They resent what they designate as the attempt of the other companies to dictate terms to them, declaring that it is their own business entirely if they choose to quote cheaper prices than the middleman can reach. They declare that their ice houses are full and that they can meet every demand of their customers for at least a year, and next winter, if given another good harvest, they will be ready to carry the war through next summer.

That legal steps may be taken in the matter is evidenced in the determination of the Po-

cono company to find out whether or not there is a "combination" of companies to force them either to raise their rates or go out of business. It was declared by an agent of the Pocono company yesterday that at least four companies are "working together"; that the wagons of one are permitted to haul ice from the bridges of the others; and that drivers employed by one company are seen driving wagons for the others. Their belief is that some of the companies have organized a holding company that dictates policy.

Had not the local ice price war been started, it is quite probable that there would have been an increase in shipper's prices of from twenty-five to fifty cents a ton over the rate charged last year, which would have raised the retail price five cents a hundred pounds. That increase, which will probably be put into effect in other cities, is due to the shortage of the crop in the Hudson River region. While the crops around here have been large, the demand for ice which comes from the big markets sends the price up here, and Wilkes-Barre would have caught the general increase, but for the extreme competition of the several companies.

Wilkes-Barre Record, April 21, 1915



Undated and unattributed view of the Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Ice Company's icehouse on the south shore of the Upper Lake. This southwestward view may have been recorded in the winter of 1919-20, when the photographs reproduced on Pages 32, 34, and 35 were taken. Joseph Tweedle Sr. Collection.

REACH LOW LEVEL

Ice Prices Slenderest They Have Been In a Decade

Question is Raised By Consumers Whether Producers and Dealers Have Not Been Making Inordinate Profits, in View of Their Ability to Market Ice at Present Attractive Rates

The ice war among the retail dealers, and the resulting slashing of prices until they are lower than they have been in a decade, was a general topic of conversation among consumers in Wilkes-Barre yesterday. There was considerable speculation as to the length of the war, as to which side will win, and what the ultimate benefit to the consumer will be. And through all the speculation recurred the persistent question as to whether all of the retail dealers or the producers do not make an inordinate profit during normal times if they can afford to sell it at fifteen cents a cwt. as they are during the present quarrel.

The war will last until both sides are ready to stand by a common price schedule, or until one or the other is ready to admit defeat and accept the situation of competing with a company that can afford to underbid. There is a strong possibility that some of the dealers may be forced to the wall in the fight; and unless the shippers stand back of their trade here the possibility will become a probability within a short time. They are all fighting with every agent they can muster to procure and hold the patronage of the city.

The Pocono Ice Co., whose low ice quotations several weeks ago seems to have started the war, would appear to have an advantage over the other companies here, because of the fact that it is in

itself a producer and retail dealer, while they must buy their ice from shippers. The Pocono company has a further advantage over the other companies here, because of the fact that the freight rate on ice from its ponds [*sic*] at Nuangola is only 30 cents a ton, while that from the Stull ponds at Bean Run or Mountain Spring, where the other fighting companies get their ice, is 50 cents a ton.

The usual cost of cutting ice and storing it at the ponds is about 10 cents a ton, depending on its condition, and another 10 cents would cover the cost of transferring it from the storage houses to the railroad cars. Should it be necessary to transfer the ice at the destination point from the car to another storage house, there would be a further expense of 10 cents a ton. At that rate, the Pocono company can get its ice into Wilkes-Barre ready for distribution at 60 cents a ton.

On the other hand, the other companies must pay the shipper his price, the minimum of which is on an average about 70 cents a ton, f.o.b. [free on board] shipping point. The freight charge on ice from Mountain Spring to Wilkes-Barre via the Lehigh Valley Railroad is 50 cents a ton, which would make the cost to retail dealers here \$1.20 a ton—just double that which the Pocono company must meet. If there was a further transfer at this end, the cost would run up to \$1.30 a ton, or 6½ cents a cwt. Unless their shipper stands back of them and gives them ice at a much cheaper rate than usual, it is evident that these companies must be at a decided disadvantage in fighting the Pocono company, whose expense of getting ice ready to deliver reaches only 3 cents a cwt.

It is equally evident, too, that unless the shipper gives them ice at a nominal figure it will be impossible for them to sell at 5 cents a hundred pounds, as was predicted. The dealers assert that the distributing ex-

Facing page: The western end of the Lower Lake icehouse is visible in this circa-1924 snapshot of descendents and cousins of Marcella and Michael Wolongewicz bathing in the Lower Lake. The structure does not appear to be in particularly good condition after standing less than a decade. Its western wall sports a hole so large at least thirty layers of ice blocks are visible inside. This hole is shaped like the gable end of a smaller building, suggesting that a second icehouse had once been attached to the western end of the larger structure. The bathers in this photo are (from left, rear) Matilda Wolon Symans, Petrie Truskowsky, Bertha Wolon; (front) Stanley Symans, Joseph Symans, and Frances Jeckell. Milly Jeckell Collection

pense is a big factor in the marketing cost; and with the initial cost in getting the ice in storage here 6½ cents, it is unlikely that any price under 10 cents would mean any profit. A rate of 5 cents a hundred would certainly entail a loss.

The question that occurs quite frequently in discussing the ice situation is whether dealers selling ice now at 15 cents are getting a reasonable profit, and, if so, whether the 25 cent minimum charge usually made does not represent excessive profits; or whether the price charged by the shippers does not represent a much larger return on their investment than is just to the public. Protests in the past regarding the high prices charged in Wilkes-Barre have resulted in the retail dealers blaming it on the shippers, and the producers on the retailers. The public wonders if both do not have a hand in it.

If the ice costs the dealers six and one-half cents their profit must represent the difference between that and their charge to the public, less the expense of distributing. The minimum price this summer, it is said, would have been twenty-five cents a hundred had it not been for the fight. The profit would have been, therefore, twenty-one cents on every hundred pounds, less the cost of handling the ice on the wagons and other expenses incidental to the conduct of the business.

To determine the proportion of profit gained by the producer it would, of

course, be necessary to know the amount invested in the ice fields and equipment. One plant in this vicinity, for which approximately \$300,000 was paid, it is said yields in a moderate winter about 150,000 tons. If the producer's profit on each ton is fifty cents, as has been claimed, the return would be about \$75,000 a year, less depreciation charges and such other expenses as are incurred in conducting the business. Various other features might enter into the question that would set at naught any casual speculation, and it would probably require an extreme investigation to establish the exact conditions.

The fight between the dealers remains unchanged. Several of them were driven to explanations yesterday. It is contended by one party that an agent of one company went to work for another company, and without letting his customers know of his change, transferred its trade to his new employers, procuring many of them. Then started a rush for patronage with cuts in prices as bait to get them.

The dealers fighting the Pocono Company declare that they cannot meet the prices quoted by that concern and make a reasonable profit. How long the fight will last will depend upon how long the companies are willing to do business with no returns.

Wilkes-Barre Record, April 22, 1915



ICE DEALERS' WAR IS ENDED

**Principal Parties Involved
Agree to Maintain a Uniform
Scale of Prices**

CHARGE HOUSEHOLDERS
35 CENTS PER HUNDRED

The war on ice prices, which has prevailed among local retail dealers since the middle of April, sending rates to the minimum that has not been reached in years, was ended yesterday when the principal parties involved in the fight got together, it is understood, and agreed to stop the wild cutting of prices, and to maintain a uniform scale that would ensure a profit to each. The prices agreed upon are five cents a hundred pounds cheaper than those which were in force here last summer, with one exception. In an effort to discourage the purchase of small amounts of ice, which involve a big loss, the dealers will charge fifty cents a hundred when

the consumer buys five-cent pieces. The other prices will be as follows:

To big consumers, 20 cents per hundred.

To ordinary business places, 25 cents per hundred.

To householders, 35 cents per hundred.

In each instance, the price last year was five cents more, and last year the amount of ice in storage, it is said, was greater than that held at the present time. Whether the price will be increased later in the season has not been decided upon.

The war, which was begun when one company introduced ice at a cheaper rate than the other companies, has lasted almost a month and during that time the public has profited by the dealers' misfortunes. Determined not to let any patronage get away from them, the various dealers met whatever cuts were made by their competitors, until they were selling ice for what they could get for it.

Wilkes-Barre Record, May 15, 1915

For reasons not readily apparent, Callahan and Slotrey transferred their lease rights at the Lower Lake to the Crystal Lake Ice Company the following January (1916). A few weeks later, they used their authority as principal owners of the Crystal Lake Ice Company to sign an Agreement with the Wyoming Valley Ice Company allowing the latter to harvest ice at the Lower Lake. This appears to have concluded the Crystal Lake Ice Company's involvement in Lower Lake affairs.

Advent of the Upper Lake

When we last heard from George Cooksey (August 1911), he had just signed an Agreement with Robert and Mary Jane Frankenfield allowing him to build a dam, flood part of their land, and "make a picnic ground on the South side of the said dam or lake at his own expense." But that was not to be, and Cooksey bowed out of the picture, providing an opening for Callahan and Slotrey to step in. Eleven weeks after the latter had signed their first lease with the Wolongewiczes, Cooksey re-introduced himself to the Ice Lakes story through his collaboration with a new partner: George Leslie Fenner, the Wilkes-Barre lawyer from whom Cooksey and Mary Dimmick had purchased several of John Wells' unimproved "farm lots" in March 1909. Had Cooksey been introduced to Fenner through that transaction, or had the men gotten to know each other previously? The record is silent on this point. We can assume, in any case, that Fenner was familiar with the Little Wapwallopen watershed and John Wells' speculative interests there. Fenner's father, Justice of the Peace James K.P. Fenner, had married Caroline Fellows, the sister of Wells' first wife, Jane Fellows. In the small world of Ashley, both John Wells and his brother-in-law James Fenner served on the Borough Council, and the latter even held the office of burgess for a couple of terms. The Fenner and Wells families were thus connected through civic activities as well as marriage. It takes little imagi-

nation to suppose that James Fenner's son George—twenty-three years old and newly-credentialed as an attorney at the turn of the twentieth century—might have provided legal council to the widow and children of John Wells. At the very least, Fenner's familiarity with Wells family affairs would have encompassed John Wells' foundering Wright Township development scheme.

On April 25, 1913, George Fenner joined forces with George Cooksey to acquire eight "farm tracts" abutting the three lots Cooksey and his recently deceased partner Albert Dimmick had owned since October 1908, immediately east and upstream from the Lower Lake site. This gave Cooksey at least half ownership in more than six-hundred contiguous acres flanking the Little Wapwallopen Creek tributary. It also set the stage for the resuscitation of his reservoir-building plan, though we find no evidence of this plan moving forward over the course of the next three-and-a-half years as the Lower Lake was formed and the Crystal Lake Ice Company made its splashing debut there. Then, on October 31, 1916, Cooksey and Fenner sat down with five other Luzerne County businessmen and signed an application to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for incorporation as the "Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Ice Company." Fenner would be the majority owner, with 450 shares. Cooksey would hold 150, Peter Bush of Dorranceton 50, Michael F. McDonald of Hanover Township 5, Charles F. McHugh of Wilkes-Barre 5, and the remaining two men—Thomas F. Farrell and William B. Paxon—would be share-less Directors. Capital stock totaled a hefty \$100,000, suggesting sizable ambitions. The Secretary of the Commonwealth approved this application in Harrisburg the same day it was submitted.

Two weeks later (after Woodrow Wilson had been re-elected President of the United States under the campaign slogan "He kept us out of the war"), George Cooksey and his wife Isabelle joined George Fenner and his wife Jessie in conveying the six-hundred-plus acres they

owned immediately east of the Lower Lake to the infant Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Ice Company (WB&HIC). The Fenners may have also conveyed an adjoining tract or two to the WB&HIC, as it was noted in a newspaper article the following year that the company “have control of 800 acres of land” in that location. It is this article, published in the December 8, 1917 edition of the *Wilkes-Barre Daily Record*, that provides us with our earliest evidence of the Upper Lake’s advent, and the construction by the WB&HIC of an icehouse along its shoreline. The bearer of these tidings was Charles Linskill, a roving reporter for the *Record* who issued occasional accounts of his travels under the heading “Here and There.” In his column of December 8—filed during an early cold spell that would freeze the surface of the Susquehanna River from shore to shore by December 11—Linskill recounted his recent swing through the Wright Township locales of Nuangola, Pine View, Albert, and Rita. Upon arriving in the village of Albert, Linskill wrote:

I remained that night at George Cooksey’s hotel, where I was pleasantly cared for. Mr. Cooksey was busy finishing up a large icehouse for his ice company near Blytheburn. They have control of 800 acres of land there and will store a good many thousand tons of ice. Mr. Cooksey is an energetic man and when he tackles a thing, something worthwhile is accomplished. His son Roger, a bright young fellow, is the attentive clerk. Mrs. Cooksey is also made of good material.

Isabelle Cooksey may have been “made of good material,” but she died in her early sixties not long after this article was published, leaving George a widower for what turned out to be the remaining quarter-century of his life.

Frigid temperatures settling into the Wyoming Valley in the second week of December

1917 might have added urgency to the WB&HIC’s push to complete the icehouse beside the Upper Lake. The competing Bear Creek Ice Company was already cutting ice by December 11, though full advantage of the situation could not be seized because laborers were in short supply. The United States had now been engaged in the Great War for eight months, and considerable manpower was being directed toward the war effort. At the same time, government officials were calling for natural ice harvesters to step up production in the coming season. This appeal was explained as follows in an article published in the *Wilkes-Barre Daily Record* on December 12, 1917:

The Bear Creek Ice Company expects to enter upon vigorous production for the duration of the early cold weather. As was expected, there was difficulty in securing sufficient men, due to the general labor shortage. The company is making strong efforts to enlist as many men as possible and is advertising daily for 100. This is in line with the request of the government that as much natural ice as possible be harvested this winter, in order to release the ammonia ordinarily used for making artificial ice for munitions use. Bear Creek men report nine inches of fine quality ice, and expect to reap a large harvest in the next few days.

December 1917 turned out to be Luzerne County’s coldest December in thirty years, and more weather records were broken the following February. By February 5, according to newspaper accounts, one round of ice cutting had been completed, and “ice three feet thick [was blanketing] the mountain lakes.” This wasn’t all good news for shippers, however. Their “harvesting of ice [was being] interfered with because of the extraordinary cold, the snow, and the thickness of the ice and shortage of labor.”

The situation had hardly improved by February 13 when “Charles N. Loveland, chairman of the food supply department, urge[d] firms and individuals to store natural ice whenever possible, owing to the prospect that the lack of ammonia will greatly curtail the production of artificial ice in the summer.”

War was over when the next ice season rolled around, but, as luck would have it, the winter of 1918-19 proved unusually mild. Only six inches of ice formed on the mountain lakes, and the haul for the WB&HIC on the Upper Lake was only 5,000 tons. This we learn from an informative and fortuitously illustrated article featuring the WB&HIC’s “Pine View” operation, published in the February 20, 1920 edition of the *Wilkes-Barre Record*. The four illustrations (coarse half-tone reproductions of photographs) ap-

peared under the heading “Views of a Modern Ice Plant,” while the report was titled “Local Ice Crop Is Largest Harvested In Many Years.” The photographs used to create the illustrations, taken by newspaper and society photographer John Jennings of Nuangola, are available to us in all their original clarity through the generosity and persistence of F. Charles Petrillo, who was able to track down the corresponding negatives. The images are reproduced on this and subsequent pages with their original captions. The accompanying article—published barely a month after the enactment of the Eighteenth Amendment to the U. S. Constitution, which banned the manufacture, sale and transportation of intoxicating beverages—is reproduced in facsimile on the facing page.



This photograph of the Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Ice Company’s icehouse on the Upper Lake in the winter of 1919-20 was taken by newspaper and society photographer John Jennings of Nuangola. The image was reproduced in the February 20,

1920 edition of the Wilkes-Barre Record, along with several other images of the WB&HIC’s ice harvesting operation (the other images are featured on Pages 34 and 35). The captions attending the images in the 1920 article are reproduced here verbatim:

This large ice-house, one of the most modern in the country, is divided into compartments. It is really several separate icehouses under one roof. In front of the icehouse is shown the conveyor line. [F. Charles Petrillo Collection]

LOCAL ICE CROP IS LARGEST HARVESTED IN MANY YEARS

But Dealers Say High Cost of Labor, Expense of Clearing Snow and Brisk Demand Will Likely Keep Prices Up

It is doubtful whether a dissenting voice will be raised to the observation that—"These are great days for the ice man, all right!"

You bet they are!

A letter came down from the Pocono Mountains The biggest ice harvest in years is being reaped this year, according to local ice men. Some of the companies have already completed their harvests and are shipping directly from the water; others expect to fill their storage houses within a few days. The recent snow falls have hindered the work of gathering in the crop and the harvesters have been put to considerable expense, they say, and time clearing the snow away. At certain places, particularly at Mountain Springs, where A.L. Stull operates, the snow has piled as high as six feet it is said.

Though the crop has been more abundant than in previous years, the prices may not be reduced much from last year. The operators maintain that the expense of harvesting has been much greater this year than heretofore and that this will be one of the stumbling blocks to reducing the prices. They point out that labor has cost much more and that bad weather and the steady fall of snow have put them to much expense. The loss of the hotel and saloon trade as a result of prohibition, they say, will have little effect on the demand this summer. The dealers be-

lieve that soda fountains and ice cream manufacturers will demand more ice than ever and that this increase will more than offset the loss occasioned by the Eighteenth Amendment. Then again, they are counting on warm weather next summer to help dispose of the large crop on hand.

Wilkes-Barre & Hazleton Ice Co., whose ponds are at Pine View on Wilkes-Barre & Hazleton Railway line, has completed its harvest gathering in a crop of 20,000 tons, an increase of more than 15,000 [over] that of the last year. This year's ice has been twice as heavy as that of last year, averaging twelve inches in thickness. The company reports that it has been fortunate in securing sufficient laborers, most of them coming from the farms in the Pine View section. The cutting has been done by means of electric saws and with the aid of the latest facilities, as shown in the [accompanying] photographs, which were taken at Pine View.

A.R. Stull, who operates two fields at Mountain Springs, reports that his force has gathered in so far a crop of 50,000 tons and with 15,000 more to cut his harvest will have to be completed. Mr. Stull has enlarged his storage house as a result of the large crop. He is at present shipping direct from the water. Mr. Stull also reports his ice being the heaviest in many years, reaching a depth of fourteen inches. His harvest last year amounted to by 46,000.

The storage houses owned by Albert Lewis at Bear Creek have not yet been filled owing to large snow fall which has delayed operations. Mr. Lewis said yesterday. The work of gathering in the crops started on December 22, and with continued warm weather will be finished within a short time. The ice this year has reached a depth of eighteen inches.

Wilkes-Barre Record, February 20, 1920



[Original captions, Wilkes-Barre Record, February 20, 1920:]

[Above] The harvested ice is hoisted to whatever height is desired alongside the icehouse up an inclined conveyor line. Large cakes move upward at the rate of sixty a minute. On the way they pass through a planer. The ice passes down an incline alongside the icehouse and at each doorway stands a boy with a hook to drag the cakes inside. The incline can be hoisted and lowered to meet the level of the partly filled icehouse.

[Facing page, bottom] Here are seen the men cutting the ice. It is broken into large squares, then cut into long strips and shot along the sluiceway to the conveyor line.

[Facing page, center] The modern plant no longer cuts ice by hand. Here is the electric saw which does the work on the dam near Pine View, where the Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Ice Company harvests its crop. With this saw two men will do as much as three horses and three men. It requires little physical exertion. All the men do is

guide it. And with it they can cut 1,000 tons in five hours.

Facing page, top: This photograph by John Jennings was not included in the Wilkes-Barre Record February 20, 1920 feature, possibly because the principal subject—a man scraping snow off what appears to be the Upper Lake with a horse-drawn scraper—was slightly out-of-focus. In perfect focus in the background are a couple of boxcars waiting for loads of ice on the railroad spur running along the south side of the Upper Lake.



F. Charles Petrillo Collection



Peak and Meltdown of the Natural Ice Industry



The author of the February 20, 1920 *Wilkes-Barre Record* article referred to the WB&HIC's "ponds at Pine View on the Wilkes-Barre & Hazleton Railway line." The pluralization of "pond" was either an error, or the WB&HIC had added the ice harvesting facilities at the Lower Lake to its Upper Lake operations. The likelihood of the latter is supported by an Agreement signed a couple of years later between the WB&HIC and the Wyoming Valley Ice Company, which had bought out the Crystal Lake Ice Company in December 1919. Through this March 20, 1922 instrument, the Wyoming Valley Ice Company agreed to transfer to the WB&HIC "all right, title and interest in an agreement dated January 26, 1916 that leases certain real estate owned by Marcella Wolongevicz." The WB&HIC now held formal ice harvesting rights on both Lakes. Six years later, the Company went even further and acquired the Lower Lake property with its ice harvesting improvements from Marcella Wolongevicz.

Marcella's descendants are under the impression that the Wolongevicz family "lost the Lower Lake" as a result of a business failure. This notion is supported by a handful of records collected by a great-granddaughter of Marcella and Michael which document Marcella's underwriting of a trucking business run by the brother of a son-in-law, as well as her periodic borrowings of

money from a relative of the WB&HIC's President, George Fenner. When the trucking business folded, Marcella apparently had to sign over the portion of her real estate she had put up as collateral. We thus find a deed dated August 29, 1928 by which "Marcella Wolongevicz or Wolon, a feme sole trader, of Wright Township" conveyed to the WB&HIC all of her remaining land on the east side of the Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Railway right-of way, including the Lower Lake, for \$1. From the identification of the grantor we gather that Marcella had adopted "Wolon" as a shortened version of her husband's surname, and she was now conducting business with her husband's permission, but without his aid (hence her characterization as a "feme sole trader"). The explanation of the latter may have been that Michael Wolongevicz—who was at least two decades older than his wife—developed dementia in his mid-to-late sixties. A grandson born in 1924 remembers that in his last years (the early 1930s) Michael "used to just wander around, not knowing where he was. It was probably Alzheimer's disease." He would die of a stroke on October 27, 1935.

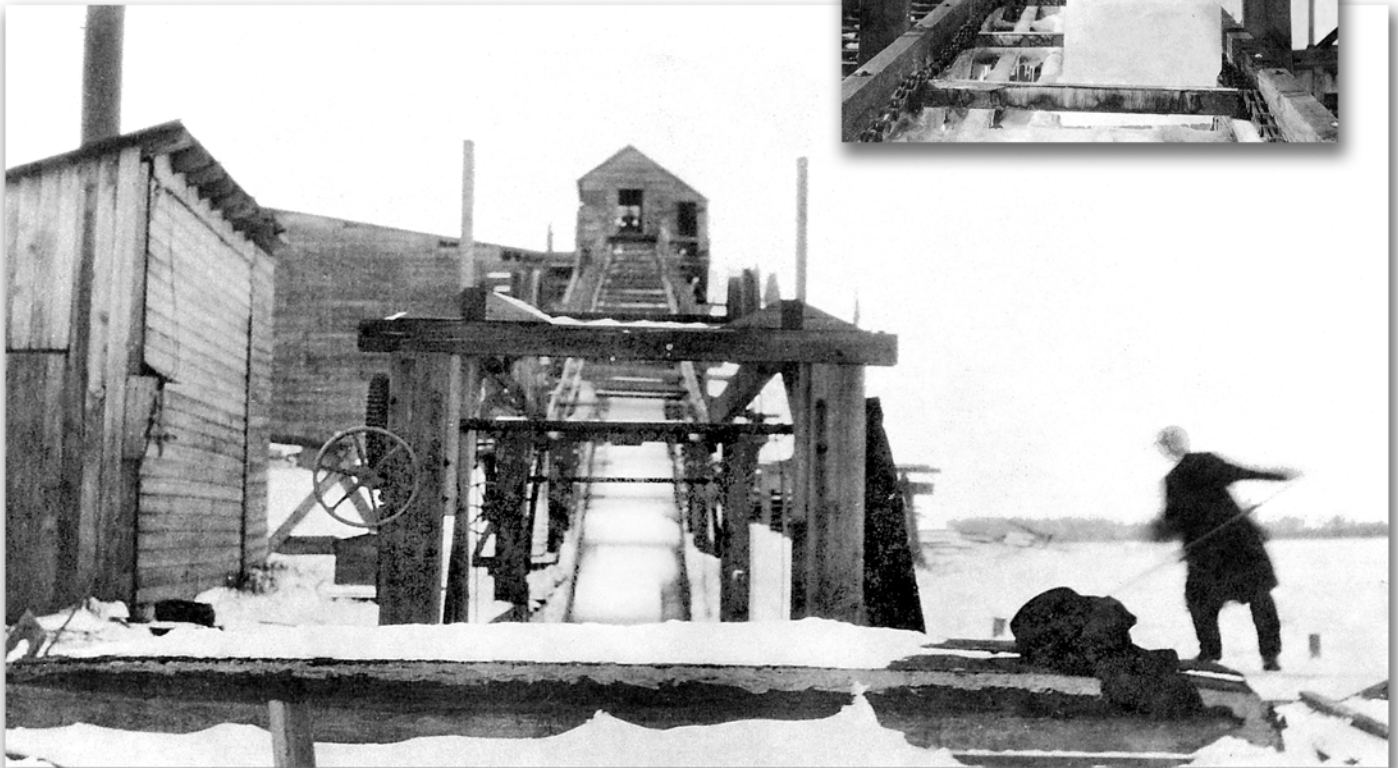
The Wolons' "loss" of the Lower Lakes property in August 1928 did not end their relationship with either that body of water or its larger neighbor. Marcella and Michael's surviving grandchildren report that the extended Wolon



Two 1920s snapshots from the Jeckell family archive show Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Ice Company employee Frank C. Jeckell Sr. and a handful of coworkers posing beside the Upper Lake icehouse (above) and crouching on a wooden gangway attached to the Lower Lake icehouse (top). These “icemen” have been identified by the Jeckell family as follows: (top photo, from left) foreman Harry Lawson, Pete Modrovsky, and Frank Jeckell; (lower photo, from left) Tony Konn, Curtis Hildebrand, Steve Modrovsky, foreman Harry Lawson, Henry Kling, Frank Jeckell, and Pete Modrovsky. Milly Jeckell Collection



Rice Township resident Joe Tweedle Sr. has collected these undated images of Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Ice Company facilities and equipment in Wilkes-Barre (top three photos) and beside the Upper Lake (bottom two photos).



family was permitted to continue using the Lower Lake and its surrounding grounds for recreational purposes. Indeed, when the Wolon house burned around 1930 (“Grandma [Wolon] was baking pies, and it caught the chimney on fire,” recalls grandson Frank “Bud” Jeckell Jr.), Marcella and Michael were allowed to move with their married daughter Bertha and her young family into a WB&HIC-owned house approximately three hundred feet south of the Lower Lake dam breast. That building—which otherwise accommodated the ice company foreman, his family, and a handful of employees (hence the designation “bunkhouse”)—sheltered the Wolons while a new home was being built for the family several dozen yards west of its fire-ravaged predecessor.

Through a son-in-law, Marcella and Michael also remained in touch with ice harvesting on the Lakes for the remainder of their lives. In October 1921, their youngest daughter, sixteen-year-old Bertha, married Frank Clement Jeckell, the twenty-one-year-old son of Ashley saloon proprietors and Lithuanian immigrants Joseph and Eva Jeckell. Bertha brought her new husband home to live with her on her parents’ small Church Road farm. In the coming decades, Frank would make his living primarily as a miner in local collieries, while supplementing these wages by farming, driving truck, and hiring himself out to the Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Ice Company. When a census-taker visited the Wolon-Jeckell home along “Alberts Road” on April 3, 1930 (two years after the incorporation of Rice Township), Frank Jeckell Sr. reported his current occupation as a “laborer” in the nearby “icehouse.” By that time, he and Bertha were the parents of four children (including six-year-old Bud), so the Wolon-Jeckell family numbered eight (including Marcella and Mike). A 58-year-old Polish boarder named Mike Kuplis rounded out the household.

The Wolon-Jeckells’ next-door-neighbors in April 1930 were Harry H. Lawson, his wife Helen (“Lena”), and the couple’s four children.

Harry was identified by the Rice Township census-taker as a 35-year-old “Foreman” in an “icehouse.” According to Bud Jeckell, the Lawsons lived in the WB&HIC-owned “bunkhouse” south of the Upper Lake dam breast, and Harry served the Ice Company as the equivalent of a mine fire boss (the “bunkhouse” would be destroyed by fire in February 1989, reportedly taking with it WB&HIC records that may have made the writing of this history much more comprehensive). Only one other Rice Township resident was identified in 1930 census records as an “icehouse” employee. This was 22-year-old newlywed Anthony F. Konn (written as “Conn”), the American-born son of Polish immigrants. “Tony” Konn would be photographed in the coming decade with his boss Harry Lawson and co-worker Frank Jeckell working at both the Lower Lake and the Upper Lake icehouses (**Page 37**).

Falling fortunes

By 1930, Luzerne County’s natural ice industry was in the early stages of what turned out to be a mortal meltdown. F. Charles Petrillo explained the situation and its causes in *Albert Lewis* as follows:

By 1925 the natural ice industry had lost substantial market share to ice manufacturing plants. The development of mechanical-chemical processes to make ice can be traced to experiments as early as 1834 in Britain. But the manufacturing processes were not fully developed until the Civil War period when they were pioneered in Texas. In 1860 there were only four ice manufacturing plants in the United States. By 1889 there were 222, and 1909 saw nearly a ten fold increase to 2,004. In this year Pennsylvania had 170 artificial ice plants, second highest in the United States to Texas’s 182. The Wyoming Valley had hopes of an

artificial ice plant as early as 1893 but this early venture seemingly failed and artificial ice plants did not emerge as a significant local industry until the 1930s. But elsewhere in the nation artificial ice plants flourished. By 1909 artificial ice tonnage was five times the natural ice harvests in New York and Pennsylvania. By 1920 the natural ice industry was declining quickly, and by 1925 the nation's major natural ice firms were closing. Too, the electric refrigerator was introduced in 1913-14 and would grow in popularity over the next two decades. Mechanical refrigeration techniques were developed for cooling railroad cars to haul and perishables and lessened demand for ice by railroad companies which contributed to the decline of the natural ice industry.

An additional factor in the sinking of the industry at the Ice Lakes was the dismantling in 1934 of the Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Railway. "The Cannonball's" electric streetcars were actually mothballed a couple of years earlier—on October 2, 1932—as James Wert explained in a closing passage of "Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Railway: A Dream Come True":

In 1930, the WB&H defaulted on its bonds and the officers were forced to sell the property. In such a difficult economy, the company was indeed fortunate to be able to sell the interurban to a businessman from Philadelphia. To keep the interurban alive, cutbacks were ordered by the new management. Effective December 1, 1930, the number of daily trains each way was reduced to eight, compared with the thirteen listed in the February 22, 1926, timetable. An ominous footnote appeared at the bottom of the schedule

as follows: "Additional service by motorbus operated by Hazleton Auto Bus Co. leaves Hazleton for Wilkes-Barre 12:00 noon daily except Sunday."

Adding to the hardship of survival was the construction by the Pennsylvania Department of Highways of state Route 309 during 1929 and 1930. The new roadway connecting Hazleton with Wilkes-Barre somewhat paralleled the rail line and was an incentive for people to drive their private automobiles and ship their goods by motor truck. The handwriting was on the wall.

The company's last desperate attempt to rescue passenger service occurred in 1932. Short on capital and unable to purchase modern high-speed electric interurban cars that could have attracted passengers back to the railway, the decision was made to acquire three 26-passenger motordriven Mack rail-buses. They arrived in August of that year and, after successful testing in September, were put into scheduled service on Monday, October 3, one day after electric interurban service ended without ceremony.

Neither the scrapping of the electric streetcars nor the substitution of rail-buses impacted Pine View's ice shippers directly. Their transportation system hinged on the rails alone, and these they only used at night when the WB&HR's passenger cars were idle. In the wee hours, steam-powered locomotives shuttled loaded and empty boxcars back and forth between the Ice Lakes and the WB&HIC's warehouses—either the main icehouse near the WB&HR terminal on Wilkes-Barre's Pennsylvania Avenue, or a warehouse in Hazleton (as reported by historian Wert). The WB&HR owned at least one electric freight locomotive, but electrically powered en-

From the Fenner family archive: (top, left) Wilkes-Barre attorney and Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Ice Company President George L. Fenner Sr. and his wife Jessie (nee Beers), circa 1938-39; (top right) Edith Beers, Sara Louise (“Sally”) Fenner, Emerson Beers, Elizabeth Fenner, Bill Beers, and Ralph Beers astride the dock beside the Upper Lake icehouse in 1938; (bottom) George L. Fenner Sr., Jessie Fenner, friend Helen Smith, and George L. Fenner Jr. cruise the Upper Lake in 1938; the icehouse stands in the background.



gines could not be used on the icehouse spur, which was not equipped with a third rail.

The rail-bus experiment extended “the Cannonball’s” life only eleven months. WB&HR President Alvan Markle and an auditor testified before the Public Service Commission in August 1933 that his Company was \$197,576 in debt, that passenger traffic had fallen nearly fifty per-

cent, and that the Company was unable to borrow money to meet its payroll. The PSC responded by authorizing the WB&HR to discontinue service at midnight on Sunday, September 17. From that day forward the traveling public would be served by the newly-formed Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Motor Transportation Company and its fleet of automotive buses. The rails



This aerial view of the Ice Lakes vicinity was recorded by a United States Department of Agriculture photographer on June 21, 1939, a few months after what local residents remember as the last commercial ice harvest conducted on either lake. The Lower Lake icehouse was no longer standing when this picture was taken. Its site had been transformed into a recreation area for the Bush family's Camp Poconesco. The Upper Lake icehouse was still casting a shadow in the summer of 1939, but the massive structure's slow dismantling—by humans as well as the elements—was already underway.

of the Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Railway were removed by steel salvagers over the course of the next few months.

For the WB&HIC, rail removal meant no more rail service at their Pine View operation. Ice would henceforth have to be transported to city warehouses in individual trucks—a more laborious and costly method that may have contributed significantly to the Company’s Depression Era decline. Another factor may have been the deterioration of the Pine View icehouses. With their industry slipping toward obsolescence, the WB&HIC may have resisted pouring money into the upkeep of buildings with very limited futures. Icehouses were notoriously hard to maintain, especially as they advanced in years. Moisture resulting from condensation and melting ice attacked wooden icehouse walls from inside and out, spreading rot and mold. It didn’t help that most icehouse builders employed the least expensive (and therefore most rot-and-mold-prone) lumber in their cavernous structures—primarily spruce, hemlock, and white pine. If they used any hardwood, it was for the main rafters. Some owners of large commercial icehouses in the Northeast went to the trouble of painting their buildings white, or whitewashing them, to help the walls reflect warming rays of sunlight. It would not be long under such extreme conditions before a new coating was required, however, so most icehouse owners chose to leave their wooden structures in a natural state.

In a rare view of the Lower Lake icehouse, captured in the background of a circa-1924 photograph of Wolon-Jeckell family members wading in the Lower Lake (**Page 29**), we see the western half of an unpainted wooden structure perhaps sixty feet tall and sixty feet wide. Though the length of the building cannot be judged from this incomplete image, we estimate from its surviving foundation that it was approximately 180 feet long. The structure does not appear in the photograph to be in particularly good condition after standing less than a decade. In-

deed, its western wall sports a hole so large at least thirty layers of ice blocks are visible inside. The hole is shaped like the gable end of a smaller building, suggesting that a second icehouse had once been attached to the western end of the larger structure. It is a reasonable suggestion, given the statement in the *Wilkes-Barre Record* article of April 21, 1915 that “during the winter just passed, [the Crystal Lake Ice Company] filled two large store houses with ice” at the Lower Lake. Additional evidence of a second, smaller structure is discernible on an aerial photograph of the Ice Lakes area taken by a United States Department of Agriculture photographer on June 21, 1939, after the wooden buildings along the south side of the Lower Lake had disintegrated (**facing page**). On the west side of the main icehouse location is visible the smaller footprint of what had been an adjoining structure. The cement or concrete footers built to support the ice conveyors along the lake side of the larger icehouse are apparent on the 1939 aerial extending along the length of the smaller building footprint, indicating that the second structure had indeed served as a storehouse for ice.

The Wolon-Jeckell family has preserved one other photograph documenting at least a portion of the main Lower Lake icehouse (**Page 37, top**). Taken around 1920, this photo shows the lakeside elevation of the house, with several employees (including Frank Jeckell Sr.) crouching on a wooden gangway. The walls of the icehouse appear in this view to have never been painted, and the effects of unchecked moisture are apparent in their discoloration. Photos of the neighboring WB&HIC icehouse taken around this time reveal that it was also unpainted, but it was in much better condition. That monument to George Cooksey’s and George Fenner’s ambition was, after all, only a few years old. It would reportedly survive the Crystal Lake Ice Company icehouse by a decade or more. The larger of the two storehouses was still standing—still casting a telltale shadow—when the June 1939 aerial photograph was taken.

In retrospect

If Bud Jeckell's memory serves, the Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Ice Company took its last ice from the Upper Lake during the winter of 1938-39 (a few months before the USDA aerial photographer flew over). Bud helped out with the ice harvest that season, the only time he did so. He was only about fifteen years of age. In a March 2005 interview, Bud recalled this and other experiences on and around the Ice Lakes:

I knew most of the guys who worked with Dad on the Upper Lake even before I worked with them that last winter. We kids used to carry Dad's lunch over to him, and we'd see who he was working with. Sometimes Dad wouldn't eat everything we brought him, so on the way home we'd fight over what was left—maybe a cupcake or something. He'd leave stuff on purpose, just so we would fight over it.

We had a lot of fun up at the Lakes in wintertime when we were kids. After it snowed, we'd watch all the neighboring farmers come down with their teams of horses and scrape the ice. Sometimes one of those teams would break through the ice, and the men would have to run over and pull them out. Or one of those big gas-powered saws would go through the ice. They had a heckuva time getting those things back on top. They were *big* units!

The Lower Lake icehouse was built first, and it caved in first. When they built the conveyor there, they had to put in concrete abutments to get the conveyor alongside the house, which was built right out to the edge of the lake. The water came right up to the wall. They had to put the concrete

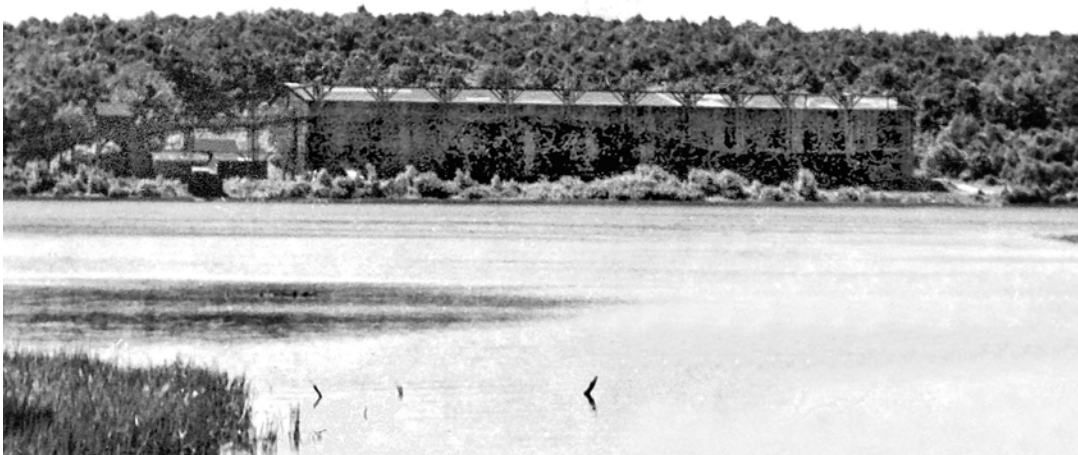
abutments there to hold the pillars that held up the gangway. The conveyor was what they ran the ice on. As they filled the rooms, they kept jacking up the conveyor. By the time they got all the rooms full, the conveyor would be all the way up to the top. The concrete abutments for the conveyor are still over there where the icehouse used to be.

The icehouse at the Upper Lake was bigger, with maybe three, four, or five more rooms than the lower house, which had rotted away by the time I worked on the Upper Lake. The Upper Lake icehouse was in pretty bad shape itself by 1939. It might have already been caving in.

It wasn't easy to get the ice harvesting operation going. You had to get the boilers in shape, and the conveyors in shape. Once they fired up the big steam engine at the eastern end of the icehouse, and got the big, heavy conveyor running, the whole system went, and they stayed with it until the icehouse was filled.

The last year they worked the upper icehouse, I worked on the conveyor. When it was my turn to pull a cake in, I had a hook, and I'd yank it into the room to the guys inside. The walls of the icehouse were filled with sawdust, but they weren't too particular about putting sawdust between the layers of ice. They used to stack the cakes of ice one on top of the other. Then, when they'd start taking it out, you'd come in there with a spud bar and use that to whack the ice cakes on the line where they had stuck together, and they would pop apart. There used to be a mountain of ice at the end of the conveyor where all the cakes that were cracked or that the guys weren't

This undated, southward view of the Upper Lake icehouse was captured by a photographer standing between Nuangola Road and the northernmost tip of the Lake.
Joe Tweedle Sr. Collection.



fast enough to get off the conveyor would pile up as high as the icehouse. That pile would be there all summer, slowly melting.

It took quite a few men to fill icehouse. You figure, if they're filling five rooms, then they need at least five guys on top of the conveyor. Then there were at least two guys inside each room, catching the ice when it came in, and lining the cakes up. That's fifteen guys right there. And that's only if you're loading five rooms. If you're loading all of the rooms, then you need a whole lot more guys. And then on the outside there were guys cutting the ice, guys chopping it apart, guys sending it down the channel, guys making sure it goes into the conveyor. There were guys all over the place when they were cutting ice. Most of them were day laborers, I imagine. Some were year-round employees. You had to have somebody there all year to load the boxcars when they came in.

I have no idea how my dad got involved in the ice business. It might

have been Harry Lawson, the boss, who lived in that house up there that burned down. He's probably the one who got my dad involved. He was in charge of the operation. Pete Modrovsky might have worked full-time for the ice company. I think his boys Steve, Tony, and Sucker (William) must have worked at the Upper Lake, too, during its last years. Then there was Henry Kling. He worked there quite a bit. So did Tony Konn.

Dad only worked for the ice company during the day shift, and worked in the mines on the night shift. He also ran his farm. I think all that working is what killed him [in June 1948, at the age of 48]. I was already driving a tractor when I was eight years old, to help Dad. We used to cut our own firewood. We made mountains of firewood. We never burned coal. Dad worked for the Glen Alden Coal Company, Buttonwood, Huber. I remember he was robbing pillars in Bliss. He worked in Twenty Tunnel. I think he

might have worked in Truesdale, too. He worked pretty much wherever he was needed. Then when I graduated high school, I was sixteen or maybe just turned seventeen, he took me laboring with him in the mines. I went right in. Dad didn't want me to go, but I said, "Hey, we got to eat. I'm not going to sit around here doing nothing while you [work so hard]." I went right down in the mines with him. That lasted one year. Then Uncle Sam put the glom on me, and that was that.

Like the Lower Lake icehouse, the upper house just sort of fell apart after a while. Then they busted it all up and started getting rid of it. Most of the wood was rotten. The conveyor stayed together longer. Kids used to go over there and climb on it, until one of them fell off. I used to shoot a lot of squirrels off of it with my .22. The squirrels had nests in the icehouse walls.

As the building deteriorated, people used to go in there and take the iron and sell it. There was a lot of iron in there—wheels, and things like that. The conveyor was all iron. When they ripped the railroad up, they did the same thing. They took the rails and left the fishplates and the spikes there. We used to go up there and pick spikes and fishplates and sell them for iron. You'd get a few cents for them.

I think they stopped the ice operation because there was no profit in it anymore. Once the railroad went, they had to haul the ice out by truck. That made it hard for the Fenners and the Bushes to make a profit. They made it as many years as they could.

When I was only a kid, I went out fishing on the Upper Lake with George Fenner Sr. a few times. I think he

wanted me there to paddle the canoe. We caught some nice big bass, him and I. But he never killed any. If we caught one, we'd put it back in again. It was a different story when I fished by myself or with my dad. We used to fish with bamboo poles that must have been twenty-five feet long. The line was as long as the pole. We used to go over there and catch live bait. We'd fish with small perch, bluegills, shiners, anything we could get. Right where we swam, Dad would fish with those poles, maybe five or six of them. He'd throw them out with the bait on them, and set the handle-end of the pole on a rock. The pole would be laying right in the water. When he got a bite, the pole was pulled off the rock. When his pole was floating away, that meant he had a bite. He used to pull out some fish that you wouldn't believe! If he had a big bass on there, man, watch out, 'cause he would give it a heave! That bass would come flying out! Or maybe it was a catfish, a calico, a perch, a bluegill, a sunfish, a pickerel, or an eel. We used to set trout lines out for eels. We'd get some whoppers. And turtles, too. In later years, I used to sit over there fishing, and the turtles would come over and pop their heads up. I'd have my .22 along, and shoot at the heads of the turtles. There used to be guys who would come out and set those big hoop traps for the turtles. There was a big hoop, then a smaller hoop, then a smaller hoop. They'd get one or two or three turtles, and haul them away.

I used to trap and fish and hunt all around those lakes when I was a boy. It was just fields and short brush then. We killed a lot of rabbits and deer in those fields. Now it's woods with huge

trees around where the Fenners' house used to be. You used to be able to see that when they built the dam wall at the Lower Lake, they dumped all kinds of stuff into the concrete to give it strength—like wagonwheels and axles. Some of those things were exposed, especially near the spillway. You can't see them anymore because they buried the old dam under a big bank so it wouldn't cave in. They were worried about it washing out. I think the State made them add the reinforcement.

Era's end

The Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Ice Company limped along for a few years after shutting down its Pine View operation. We find the Company identified in the 1939-40 Wilkes-Barre directory as one of seven "Ice Manufacturers and Wholesalers" in the City, and one of nine "Dealers." By 1941, the Company was only engaged in retailing. America's entrance into World War II in December 1941 hammered the last nail into the coffins of most of Luzerne County's few lingering commercial ice harvesting operations. Amid the excitement and exigen-

cies of wartime, able-bodied men were in short supply, and few could be spared for an all-but-obsolete industry. The WB&HIC retailed ice as late as 1943—the last year the Company was included in Wilkes-Barre's business directory—perhaps acquiring it wholesale from the region's last "shipper" at Mountain Springs, where small harvests would be conducted through the 1948-49 season.

The WB&HIC's abandonment of the Ice Lakes may have been hastened by a suit brought against the Company in May 1940 by one of its assignees, attorney George Fenner Jr. The specifics of the suit have not been extracted from the public record, but its settlement resulted in the Court-ordered public sale of the WB&HIC's numerous Pine View parcels by the Luzerne County Sheriff on June 11, 1943. Not surprisingly, the junior George Fenner submitted the winning bid on this occasion (\$1,783.18), and he and his sisters Elizabeth Meixell and Sara Louise ("Sally") Jones were presented with a deed to the multi-parcel property the following June 11. In that document we find one parting reference to the Ice Lakes' ice harvesting era. Among the itemized improvements on the largest parcel were a "lake containing about forty acres and also a large icehouse."

Former Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Ice Company President George L. Fenner Sr. (on left) lets his son-in-law Nelson A. Jones handle the rowing and trophy-displaying duties in this snapshot taken near the Upper Lake dam breast (in the background) in the late 1940s.



Pictorial Postscript

The Ice Lakes did not evaporate with the natural ice industry in the mid-twentieth century. The natural charms that had earned the fifteen-acre Lower Lake and forty-acre Upper Lake loyal followings between the World Wars remained potent long after the Lakes' original industrial mission obsolesced. Recreation-seekers—particularly members of the extended Fenner and Wolon-Jeckell families—continued haunting their shores, stirring their waters, and skating their frozen surfaces.

There was even a commercial aspect to some of these recreational activities. George Cooksey may not have followed through with his 1912 vision of planting a “picnic ground or summer resort” along the southwest shoreline of the Lower Lake, but his fellow Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton Ice Company Director Peter Bush (or members of his immediate family) built a lodge in that vicinity in the 1920s or 30s, creating a retreat called “Camp Poconesco.” The lodge was a popular destination for vacationers from as far away as New Jersey—until wartime gas rationing curbed non-essential travel. The Bush family erected a constellation of cabins around the south side of the lodge, renting them out to summer visitors for several decades after World War II.

George Fenner Jr. and his sisters Elizabeth (“Bets”) Meixell and Sara Louise (“Sally”) Jones held title to the Lakes and the surrounding tract of land from June 1943 through May 1967. As the snapshots reproduced on the following pages illustrate, members of the extended Fenner family passed many pleasant days on the south shore of the Upper Lake (leaving the Lower Lake

largely to the Bush family's administration). George Fenner and his wife Hilda converted the former WB&HIC “bunkhouse” and foreman's residence into a summer cottage. His sisters and their families initially “camped” in the abandoned scalehouse, fitting it out with bunkbeds, a table, and a kerosene stove. Shortly after World War II, Nuangola neighbor Paul Machina salvaged beams and other wooden components from the Upper Lake's deteriorating icehouse to build proper cottages for Bets and Sally. With few remaining supports, the icehouse collapsed into a pancake of splintered wood, shingles, and twisted metal.

The Fenners occasionally had company on the Upper Lake. A Henry family already occupied a cottage on the north side of the Lake when the Fenners set about transforming their foothold on the southern shore into a summer retreat. Later, a Neumiller family camped for many seasons farther west on the northern shore, and a Boy Scout camp operated for a number of years along the east side of the Lake.

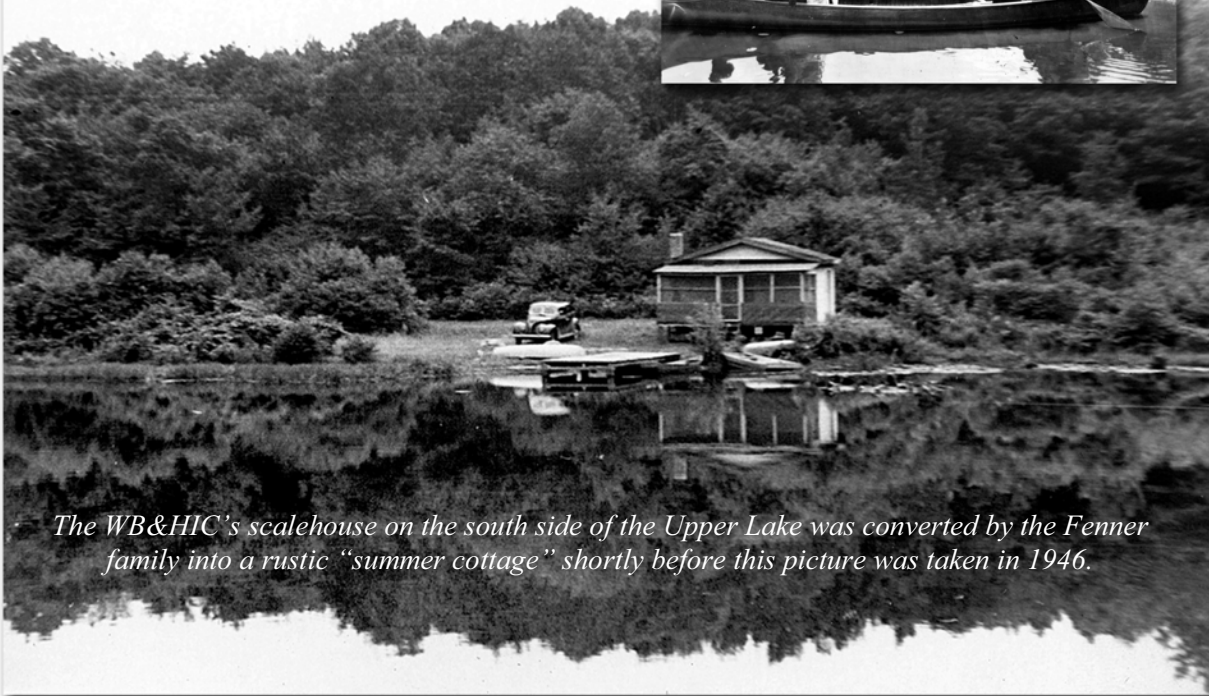
The Fenners conveyed the Ice Lakes tract to the Pennsylvania Power and Light Company in May 1967—reserving, however, a five-acre parcel encompassing the cottages on the south side of the lake as a “joint life estate” for George and Hilda Fenner. The cottages remained in use for many years thereafter, until the former “bunkhouse” and Bets' cottage were destroyed by fire in separate incidents. Ice had brought George Fenner Sr. to the Upper Lake early in the twentieth century; at century's close, his descendants were turned away by flames.



(Left) A photograph of the former WB&HIC “bunkhouse” (and formerly occupied by foreman Harry Lawson and family) taken in August 1959 records the addition of a screened-in porch by Wilkes-Barre attorney George Fenner Jr. and his wife Hilda, for whom the converted lakeside dwelling was serving as a summer cottage. An arsonist would reduce this building to ashes on the morning of February 15, 1989.



(Below) George Fenner Jr. paddles wife Hilda (nee Fletcher) and a canine companion along the edge of the Upper Lake in the late-1940s.



The WB&HIC’s scalehouse on the south side of the Upper Lake was converted by the Fenner family into a rustic “summer cottage” shortly before this picture was taken in 1946.

(Above, left) Sara Fenner Jones (known to friends as “Sally”; in foreground) relaxes with friends on the Upper Lake dock circa 1938. The WB&HIC “bunkhouse”—occupied for some years during the 1930s by Company foreman Harry Lawson and his family—is visible in the distance.

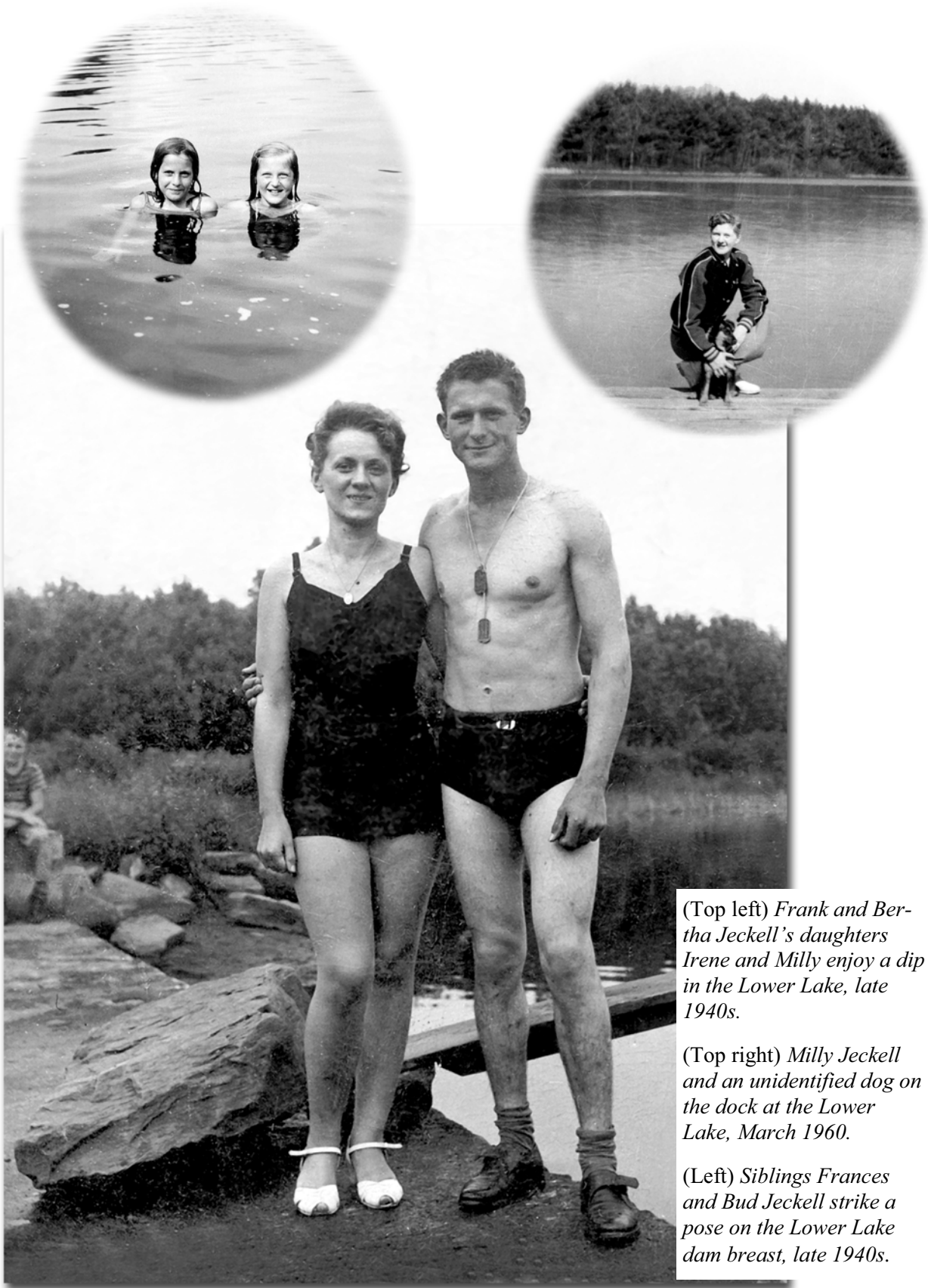
The collapse of the Upper Lake icehouse is documented in two photographs taken in the mid-1940s. Nuangola neighbor Paul Machina salvaged beams and other wooden components from this structure to build cottages for George Fenner Jr.'s sisters Elizabeth ("Bets") and Sara ("Sally"). Sally's cottage stood for a portrait (below, center) in July 1963.



(Above) Elizabeth ("Bets") Fenner Meixell untangles fishing line in front of her cottage during the late 1940s.



(Left and right) Sally Fenner Jones and her husband Nelson A. Jones take turns posing on the dock in front of the converted scalehouse in the late 1940s.



(Top left) Frank and Bertha Jeckell's daughters Irene and Milly enjoy a dip in the Lower Lake, late 1940s.

(Top right) Milly Jeckell and an unidentified dog on the dock at the Lower Lake, March 1960.

(Left) Siblings Frances and Bud Jeckell strike a pose on the Lower Lake dam breast, late 1940s.



(Left) Nelson A. Jones, his daughter Nancie, and two of Nelson's grandchildren soak up sun in July 1964, the Jones family's second summer by the Upper Lake after its move from Texas.

(Right) On his 92nd birthday—July 27, 1970—George Fenner Sr. (seated) is surrounded by his three children: (clockwise) Elizabeth ("Bets"), Sara ("Sally") and George Jr. The junior George and his sisters had owned the Ice Lakes tract from 1943 until 1967, when they conveyed it to Pennsylvania Power & Light Company. George Jr. and his wife Hilda reserved five acres on the south side of the Upper Lake as "a joint life estate," and George's sisters were granted use of this parcel until the property was sold to the Scott brothers of Pen Argyle, Pennsylvania in 1987.



(Left) George Fenner Jr. tends his lily pond along the southwestern fringe of the Upper Lake in August 1959.

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