

Reflections on Ice Harvesting on Falmouth Ponds

Clarence J. Anderson

Introduction to tape: It is March 21st, 1984. This will be an interview with Mr. Clarence J. Anderson of Falmouth. The subject will be ice harvesting on ponds in the Falmouth area. The tape will become the property of the Woods Hole Library's Oral History Collection. This is Lucena Barth making the recording.

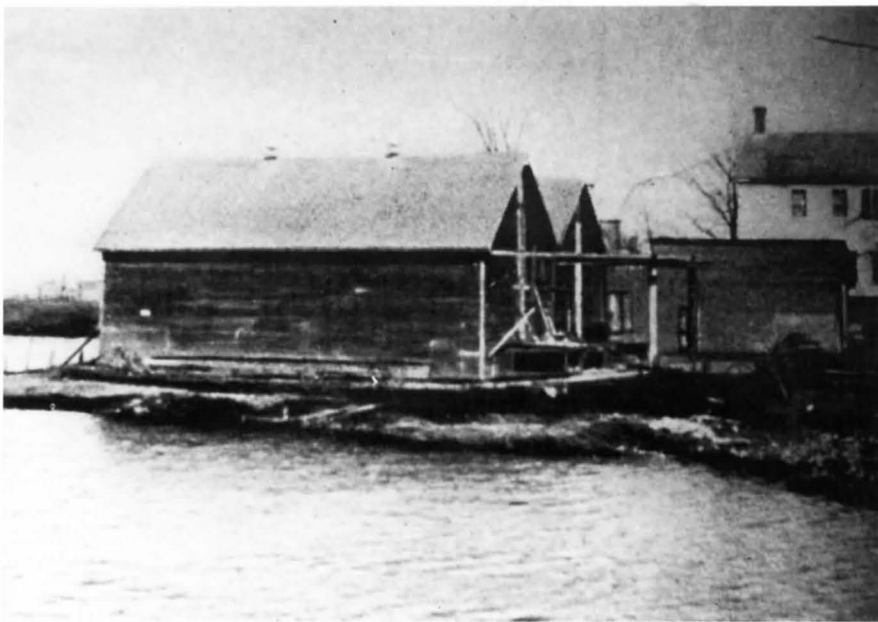
Barth: We might start with which ponds you will be talking about and what period in time,

1920s, thirties? I don't know when ice harvesting went out here as refrigeration came in.

Anderson: Ice harvesting in town here probably ended pretty much by 1933 or so. We were still using ice even after that period. I remember in my own house after my wife and I got married that first year in the old place (on Elm Road), we were still using ice that we would

buy from an ice dealer in town. But he was no longer harvesting ice here; he was having it at first shipped in from the state of Maine and then towards the end was buying manufactured ice.

I would daresay that by 1933, harvesting of pond ice in Falmouth had ceased completely. I do remember the ice houses on various summer estates. I don't know of, and I never heard of, anybody talking about icehouses in Falmouth prior to the coming of the wealthy summer residents and their building icehouses on their own properties for their own use. There were two big commer-



Falmouth Ice Company sheds behind the cove of Shivericks Pond, an area since filled to make a parking lot and Katharine Lee Bates Road. White building to right is the rear of Falmouth Academy, now the Chamber of Commerce building. "Not the least among the industries of Falmouth is the trade in ice. Starting with a storage of 159 tons and a patronage of a dozen families, it has grown to a storage of over 2,000 tons and a patronage of 300 families. People have discovered that the well and cellar are no fit substitutes for the refrigerator filled with ice. Capt. Lewis H. Lawrence and John F. Donaldson, the proprietors, may take pride in knowing that through the supplies of their company much time and labor are saved the busy housekeeper." Photo and quote from *Falmouth by the Sea*, 1896. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.

cial icehouses on Shivericks Pond in back of Eastman's Hardware Store where the parking lot is now, where they stored ice that was cut in Shivericks Pond. This was the Lawrence Brothers and they sold ice to the general public. Everybody in town at one time got their ice for their iceboxes – we didn't call them refrigerators –

Barth: Yes, I remember iceboxes. In fact, as you come into this house (26 Quissett Ave., Woods Hole), that little hatch up there on the right was for putting 75 or 50 or whatever it was pounds of ice in the icebox down below in the pantry. And of course I remember the one I grew up with, which was in the Midwest, we always had to keep emptying the water from the tray below as the ice melted.

Anderson: Sure, indeed! And if you forgot it, you had a flooded floor the next morning.

Barth: Right, and then the signs that you put up in the window? Did you have those?

Anderson: Yes, indeed! "ICE"! Then he would come in and see what we wanted.

I remember best the icehouse on a private estate, on the Emmons Estate. Now we're going back to Jonathan Hatch property, part of which became the Emmons Estate in later years. They had a large icehouse that as a kid I helped to fill with ice in the winter. We cut *that* ice in Oyster Pond. The various estates, I can't think of them all now, but I do remember Grasmere over on Jones Road; they had an icehouse. There was a very unusual icehouse right here on Quissett Avenue at the Houston Estate, the Marshall place in the early days. It was built underground of stone; it was built

into the side of the hill and there it was all stone. That's the only icehouse that I ever saw that was in the ground instead of wooden buildings on top of the ground.

Barth: Makes good sense, does it, for insulation?

Anderson: No, most people didn't think it was good at all because natural ground heat seemed to melt the ice, whereas the wooden buildings standing on top of the ground were so thoroughly insulated that they would hold ice much longer.

Barth: Yes, tell me about the construction of the icehouse, the insulation of the wooden ones on top of the ground.

Anderson: Well, the walls were hollow, about twelve inches, fourteen inches thick or wide, and these hollow spaces between the inner and outer surfaces of the walls were filled with sawdust, all the way from the ground to the roof level. This insulated the walls and then the ice was laid in the building. We started with an empty building in the winter and laid a layer of sawdust on the floor and then a layer of ice and then a layer of sawdust and then another layer of ice and another layer of sawdust until we filled the whole building to its full height.

Barth: From floor to peak?

Anderson: Not to the peak, only to what I call the roof-line where the roof starts to come off the straight walls. The reason for not going higher was to give the top a lot of ventilation to keep the heat out from the sun shining on the roof. So when we had gotten the building filled with ice completely to the roof-line, then we'd

put probably about a foot or more or maybe two feet of sawdust on top of the whole mass. Then that was all set until we opened it up in the Spring of the year whenever the ice was needed.

Barth: How about drainage? There's bound to be some melting?

Anderson: I never knew of any drainage. I imagine that when the buildings were built originally, they probably dug out an area underneath and filled it with gravel so that water settled down and went right down through.

Barth: How did you get the ice up so high (to the roof-line)?

Anderson: It was fairly easy. It was done two ways. Mainly we had an inclined chute from the ground level up to a certain height and would slide the ice up there with rope, block and tackle. We hooked the rope over the piece of ice and then we'd just progressively pull it up the slide into the building. When it got really high, I remember they used to just plain pick up the ice and hoist it right straight up in

the block and tackle and then it was on a swing device which would swing the ice into the doorway and then we'd slide them around into packing areas.

You see, an icehouse on the side where the ice was loaded into the house always had what we might call a slot from the ground level all the way to the roofline, a slot in the wall. We would start by merely sliding the ice right off the wagon right into ground level, until we progressively built up layers of ice and pretty soon we were starting to get a little higher than the wagonload and would start to incline a little bit. Pretty soon we would start to incline some more. Then we would pull the ice up with a block and tackle.

Barth: You just spoke of the wagon. Let's go back to how you got it from pond to the icehouse and then finally to how it was cut, and so forth.

Anderson: Yes. The first operation at the pond, wherever we might be, let's take Shivericks Pond where I remember it best. The people

involved would get out their ice plows and a horse. They would go down a strip of ice with the horse dragging the ice plow, which would cut a slot in the ice probably half the thickness of the ice, perhaps six inches deep. They would cut a slot in the ice, the ice plow would. Then at the end of the distance to travel, we would turn around and



Ice harvesting equipment. From bottom: ice pick, protective box next to serrated marking tool, ice saw and chisel. Photo by Paul Ferris Smith. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.

move over I think it was two feet. We would return with another slot cut in the ice.

Barth: So you'd go one way and then back...?

Anderson: That's right. Then we would turn around and repeat the operation back and forth over a given distance of perhaps two hundred feet. So we would end up with a section of pond that is completely filled with slots.

Then we would criss-cross those slots at four feet and go the opposite way, still using the ice plow and a horse dragging it. Then after this was all done, it was time for a man and a saw. The ice saw was identical to the pit saw that I've talked about that men used to saw lumber, except that in this case we only used *one* man because you couldn't have one man down below in the ice and water! One man stood on top of the ice and he worked the saw up and down. He finished cutting through those slots that had been cut with the horse and plow.

Barth: Was this a T-shaped saw?

Anderson: That's right! The saw blade would be straight up and down and would have a T-

handle on the top, horizontal to the vertical saw. So that the man that was standing there, if you can imagine this slot down the length of ice, he's standing here with a saw and he's going up and down and progressively backing up all the time.

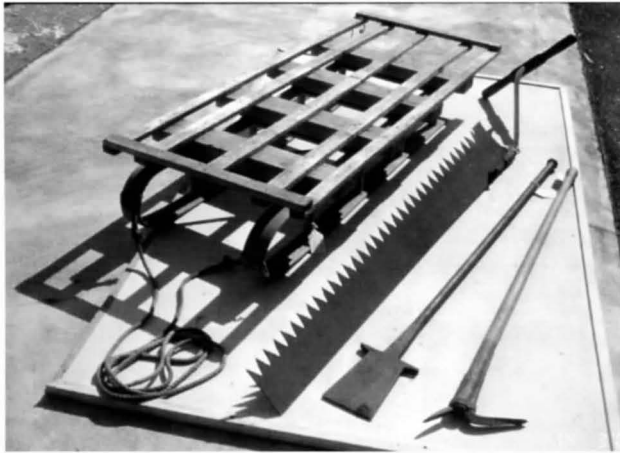
Barth: The slots would be six inches deep? Now the man is standing there with his saw and cutting all the way through the ice down to the water? (Anderson: Oh, yes.) What bothers me is how is he going to avoid falling in the icy water?

Anderson: Well, there was many a man when they were cutting ice that fell in the pond. There was at least one every winter that fell in the pond because he'd cut through somewhere and the ice would give way underneath him and down he went. It was just one of those things; you weren't greatly concerned about it. Nobody got drowned. You just got up and went

home and changed your clothes and came back to work.

Barth: Did they wear special shoes or boots that wouldn't slip?

Anderson: No, I can't say that they did. They did put calks, as they call them, on the horses'



Small wooden sled, ice saw, chisel, and ice pick used for transporting ice blocks from frozen ponds to the ice house. Photo by Paul Ferris Smith. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.

shoes so the horses didn't slip. A calk was merely a wedge-shaped piece of iron that fitted in holes in the horse's shoes, so he had these spurs or points that dug into the ice as he walked. But I can't say that I ever saw any of the men use calks.

Barth: And then...?

Anderson: The man might saw through any slot. Let's pick any slot at random. He might saw down that slot the whole length of it and then he might step over perhaps three or four or five slots and do the same operation again. He might take a distance of twenty feet for instance and cut across the end of these two cuts that he had made and down at the other end, the same thing. Here he has a big slab of ice floating free by itself.

Then what we did was we moved this slab over to where the ramp started in the water up into the icehouse. We'd move that slab of ice over here and then we had what was called ice-breakers. You could drive an ice-breaker into one of these slots in this slab of ice that's say 20 feet long and probably the entire slab would break in its cuts.

Barth: It's like scoring and breaking?

Anderson: Right! And you'd have a slab twenty feet long but only one ice slab wide. You'd lead that slab of ice up into the mouth of the trough and you would just chunk it off and you'd have one slab of ice two feet wide and four feet long that would be going up the trough.

Barth: About how much did those weigh on the average? Seventy-five or a hundred pounds?

Anderson: Oh, more than that! I don't really know but I would guess that a two by four foot slab would weigh two hundred and fifty pounds.

Barth: And still most of this was done by manpower until you got to where you used block and tackle, as you just described?

Anderson: Well, no, I'm talking now about the commercial icehouses on Shivericks Pond. They had an endless conveyer belt that was constantly running. All we did was to feed the chunks of ice into the trough and the spurs that were sticking up underneath the conveyer belt would dig into the ice and just start that block going up the trough. The next block would be fed in here and there were more spurs. There were spurs all the way along the conveyer belt.

Barth: The reverse of a calk?

Anderson: Yes, exactly! They would rip the ice and just keep it traveling up the trough. This was commercial ice cutting for the Lawrence Brothers Icehouses that stood on the pond. But the local individual homeowners, summer homeowners, that had the only icehouses that I remember worked on a smaller scale. They usually did push the ice up the troughs by hand. I don't think the blocks were any smaller. It seemed that there was a standard cut. In those days you did things by degrees; if one guy cut ice two-by-four, everybody else cut it two-by-four. The blocks were the same size.

Barth: And they all used the horse and the ice plow?

Anderson: I personally deposited a complete set of

ice-cutting tools at the Falmouth Historical Society. They're there to be seen by anybody who wants to go down there; they're in the barn. All the tools – the ice plow and the ice-cutting tools and equipment, it's all there.

Barth: I'm glad to know that. David Martin was telling me just yesterday that somewhere in Woods Hole a saw and a plow had turned up, in some building around Woods Hole. He said his father Buzz Martin probably knew where it was. There appears to be some storage problem because it takes up quite a bit of space.

May I ask another question? Since winters vary in severity I suppose some winters were better than others?

Anderson: In those days when I was a kid, definitely average winters were more severe than they are today. But even at that time (1920s) once in a while we would have what they called an open winter and there wouldn't be enough ice to cut. But it was rare that we had an open winter. Most of the winters were severe. They used to plan on getting twelve and ten inch ice.

Barth: What month was this mostly, January, Febru-

ary? Or did that depend on the type of winter, of course?

Anderson: The time it was done certainly depended on the weather. If we started in with an early cold spell and it was prolonged, we would cut early. But I guess that they would start any time after the first of the year. As soon as you got ice thick enough to cut, no matter when it was, you cut it. You didn't wait too long when you felt you had proper thickness because you might get a mild spell and the ice would be gone. So it was always a gamble whether or not you got ice even so. You had to watch the weather and the old people got to be pretty clever at it. One day somebody would say, "Well, time to cut ice; let's get going here." It was a mad rush to get going.

Barth: By the way, were tongs used at all?



Family ice harvesting with tools. From the postcard collection of Philip Stanton. Courtesy WHHC.

Anderson: Oh, yes, when we got the ice in the icehouse... (interview interrupted briefly while Mr. Anderson checks on his dog Sandy outside)

Barth: Oh, yes, another question. Supposed it had snowed. Did you have to get rid of the recent snow before you did the first steps of cutting? Then down below near the water, is that what they call black ice?

Anderson: I don't know what that term black ice means. I've heard it too and I can't tell you. As far as getting rid of snow was concerned, no, I don't remember that we ever had that problem. We just waited for the proper weather, and if you got snow and the snow melted, it formed more ice. I don't ever remember clearing snow off the ice. We used to clear plenty of snow for skating purposes, but I don't remember ever doing it for cutting ice.

Barth: And some of these ponds you've been talking about for getting ice were good skating ponds too?

Anderson: Oh, yes, Now Shivericks, of course, in the old days, *everybody* went to Shivericks

Pond skating, both young people and old people. Everybody! We'd have this great, huge section where the ice had been all cut out and open water, and you were skating right along the edge of the water. That was considered a common thing to do. You never fell in the holes where they'd cut ice. People were skating there all day long while ice was *being* cut.

I think of other ponds. We cut ice for the Emmons Estate in Oyster Pond. They must have cut ice in Miles Pond because before Sam Cahoon's ice *manufacturing* building was built, there was the remains of an old, torn-down, fallen-down icehouse there. I think I have heard that people did cut ice there years back. But I have never seen it.

Barth: I understand. And Cahoon's was artificially produced ice?

Anderson: His building was an ice-making plant.

Barth: And that was later than the times you're talking about?

Anderson: Yes, it was, it was later. I don't remember when he started that thing, maybe early



Ice skating on Nobska Pond in front of Fay ice house. Photo by Sarah Bryant Fay, ca. 1899. Courtesy WHHC.

thirties. It must have been gone by the early-mid forties.

Barth: I remember that the *building* was still there in the late fifties, but it was not operating as an ice plant.

Anderson: It may have *operated* until 1950 possibly.



Ice harvesting with horses and tools. From the postcard collection of Philip Stanton. Courtesy WHHC.

Barth: Now you actually participated in this ice-cutting yourself, didn't you?

Anderson: Oh, sure, indeed! I think the first job I ever had as a kid was cutting ice for the Emmons Estate on Oyster Pond, or *helping* to cut it.

Barth: It's heavy work, you must have been a teenager?

Anderson: Seven or eight years old! Yes, indeed! I volunteered to work with the men for the fun of it and I remember the first pay I ever got by check was for the work I did helping to cut ice on Oyster Pond. It was quite a thing; I didn't know what to do with it! I daresay the check was probably for two or three dollars, but it was quite an event.

At that time all our ice activities were with horse and wagon. We loaded the ice on a wagon and the horse carted it up to the

icehouses, wherever they were. Any ice-cutting activity that I remember was in the horse-and-wagon days.

Barth: Another question: the ponds from which the ice was taken had to be rather pure, without vegetation, rotting vegetation, and so on. Were they mostly stream-fed ponds, not stagnant water like this one below my house, for example.

Anderson: They were in a sense stream-fed waters, these ponds. They were all considered perfectly clean drinking water in those days. There was no pollution or contamination of any sort. The ice was considered pure. It was used for refrigeration purposes. It was for household use, it was that clear and clean.

Barth: Was there a lot of shipping out of ice? I understand that in the very early days, didn't the clipper ships take ice...?



Fay ice house at edge of Nobska Pond. Chimneys of H.H. Fay estate in left background; Fay water tower in right background, ca. 1890. Courtesy WHHC.

Anderson: That is correct. I used to hear an awful lot of talk about it but I certainly never saw it. There was an enormous market for ice in Cuba and the old whaling ships that were no longer being used were put into service for hauling ice to Cuba from the northern areas, such as Maine.

Barth: Around here, did you ever know of any of that taking place?

Anderson: I never myself ever heard of any cut and hauled out of here, no. It may have been before my time (born in 1912) but certainly not in my time, there was nothing hauled out of Falmouth to *any* place.

Barth: But thinking about earlier times, 1700s, say ...?

Anderson: It might have been but I'm inclined to doubt it. I think such ice that was hauled South was gotten further North, in the state of Maine perhaps. I do think that local whaling ship owners were involved in doing this. Now the Swifts of Falmouth were involved in *everything* concerning shipping. So that the Swifts, here, no doubt ... shipped ice.

Barth: You mean if they didn't take the ice from here, they sent ships up to Maine? And then out to other parts of the world?

Anderson: That's right. But I know the old people – my friend Ed Davis (Edward Payson Davis), father of "Mucker" (Maurice C. Davis), he often talked about how they used to ship ice to Cuba. But I don't think it was ever done from here. I don't remember of hearing about ice being used *around* here too much before the coming of the wealthy summer people who kept ice on their properties. The commercial icehouses on Shivericks Pond were not that old. They may have been 1890 to 1900 period they were built.

I don't know that people *used* ice around here before the influx of outsiders, because everybody here *salted* their foods, or sunk it in a dug well.

Barth: Yes. Did you, by the way, know a man named Hallett (I forget his first name) who worked on an estate near Nobska Pond? (Anderson: Oh, sure.) And he was interviewed in 1977. I transcribed his interview several years ago and he speaks of ice-harvesting, I believe it was on Nobska Pond.

Anderson: Yes, "the Dutchman's Pond."

Barth: Why did they call it "Dutchman's"?

Anderson: I don't know but that was always known as the Dutchman's Pond. I knew Mr. Hallett. Well, a man that would have been interviewed in 1977? I'm thinking that I would have known the father of this Mr. Hallett that you're referring to.

Barth: Well, he's talking about the old days, so this may be the father who was interviewed. He was retired at that time (1977).

Anderson: Well, that may have been him then. Certainly the man that I knew, and he had another brother that lived way down almost into Mashpee. It was Willis down there and I can't think of his (the Nobska Pond Hallett) first name.

Barth: I'll look it up before I see you again.

Anderson: Well, he may have been still alive in 1977. I question that but I may be wrong. He would have been very old. It was on the right side of Nobska Road (*not* Nimms estate) where he worked, or Church Street.

I certainly remember him. By golly, he has a daughter living in Falmouth! You could get a lot of information from her. Her name is Mrs. Bernard Rogers. She's Hallett's daughter. She would be a good person to talk to about early times.

Anderson volunteers some afterthoughts: It would be mighty darn cold and when we were loading wagons at Oyster Pond with ice, the man who was driving the team wouldn't ride on the team because it was so darn cold to sit still. He walked down the road leading the horses to keep warm. I can remember myself doing just that, walking down the road, leading a team of two horses. Well, it wasn't a *road* then; it's Elm Road today but it was just a trail through the woods to Oyster Pond and I was leading the horse. That was probably the big deal that I was getting paid a little bit for.

Barth: Thank you very, very much Mr. Anderson for all this interesting material.

Elmer Hallett

Tape originally transcribed by Lucena Barth

Introduction: It is October 12th, 1977 and Mary Lou Smith and I are interviewing Mr. Elmer R. Hallett, a Groundsman for the G.G. Whitney Estate on Church Street, Woods Hole. Elmer Hallett is a jolly man of 74 years, and his home is at Woods Hole Road. Elmer has been coaxed to reminisce about some of his earlier experiences at Woods Hole. I am Elsa Keil Sichel recording this Oral History for the Woods Hole Library's Historical Collection.

Sichel: Mr. Hallett, in telling us something about your memories of old Woods Hole, first would you tell me where and when you were born.

Hallett: I was born here at the Whitney Estate, on September 30th, 1903. And I've been here for fifty years. I've been working for the Whitneys in their house as a houseman, and I've done all the things around the place. And I've done everything, like taking care of the grounds, and that's about all of that.

Sichel: Did you do the plantings, too?

Hallett: No, I didn't do no planting. Of course, we had the garden across the street there where you people are. [Paul Ferris and Mary Lou Smith] Do you remember - do you know the blackberry bushes over there?

Smith: Yes.

Hallett: You know them round posts?

Smith: Yes, I do.

Hallett: Them round posts was the posts for the kerosene lamps on the street.

Smith: Oh, is that right! Oh, that's wonderful to know! ... So there were kerosene lamps up and down Church Street, Mr. Hallett?

Hallett: Oh, yes.

Sichel: And a lamp lighter, no doubt?

Hallett: Yes, I think John Connors was the lamp lighter, as far as I know.

Sichel: Now, did you have brothers and sisters? That were born here, too?

Hallett: Oh, yes. Martha Rogers and Mildred Hammond. Yeah. And we used to go down to Schuman's. And, of course, they had the Indian squaw and she did the housekeeping. And she used to take me out - you know when they did the fishing on the ice?

Sichel: Fishing through the ice?

Hallett: She took me on a sled; she used to go around to all these places that get the smelt or the pike or whatever it was. I remember her. Oh, she was a big woman.

Smith: She was one of the native Indians?

Hallett: Oh, yes; from Mashpee. She was a regular full-blooded Indian. And she used to catch skunk and eat them. Yeah.

Sichel: Would you tell me something about the experiences as you remember of cutting ice, or having ice cut from a pond and hauled?

Hallett: Well, this place here was the ice house.

And Sam Cahoon used to have cutting the ice down there. Of course, the Fays cut ice first. And after they got *their* ice house filled up, then we filled ours. Then I think, I think Sam Cahoon cut ice there, too, as far as I know.

Sichel: When you say the ice was cut, which pond are you referring to?

Hallett: Nobska Pond. Did you know that a man got drowned down there? The baggage master; he got drunk and he had a lantern and went down to Nobska Pond to go skating and he went right through, down there by Fay's, where Fays had cut their ice. But they never found his body.

Sichel: So his skeletal remains probably are still there.

Hallett: Yes, they're still there.

Sichel: Then where did the sawdust come from that was used to pack the ice?

Hallett: We got that down Carver, down at the saw mill; that's where that came from.

Sichel: When you say Carver, how far is that from here?

Hallett: Oh, I don't know; that's on the way to Boston.



Nobska Point with Fay ice house overlooking Nobska Pond. Fay water tower in left background, Fay farmhouse behind ice house; Nobska Lighthouse, fog horn and bell to the right. Photo perhaps taken from Glidden Tower, ca. 1899. Courtesy WHHC.

Sichel: And it was delivered here - what you needed and Cahoon's, what he needed?

Hallett: Yeah.

Sichel: Do you know where Sam Cahoon stored *his* ice?

Hallett: Yeah, up there on Sippewissett Road, the ice house.

Smith: That burned down.

Hallett: It burned down; and then they changed it over to an ice plant afterwards.

Sichel: Did they not cut ice at Sam Cahoon's Pond where the ice house was?

Hallett: Oh, yes; they cut the ice and stored it there, too.

Sichel: Because Cahoon didn't get the major ice from the Nobska Pond?

Hallett: No. After a while he changed over to an ice plant; he had a regular ice plant that made ice over there. You see, after a while, we couldn't get thick enough ice to put in the ice house. Of course, after a while, when the Frigidaire came in, why it went too.

Smith: Was it because the salt came into Nobska Pond that you didn't get such thick ice, or - what was the reason why?

Hallett: I don't know. There isn't enough opening there for the salt water to come in, only to drain off the excess water from Nobska Pond when it got too high. When it got too high, it came up toward the road.

Sichel: Perhaps there were milder winters.

Hallett: There have been milder winters, yeah. I don't think you could get ten or fifteen inches of ice now.

Smith: Is that what you used to cut?

Hallett: Oh, yes.

Sichel: In big slabs?

Hallett: Yeah.

Smith: Did you pull it out with horses?

Hallett: Oh, yeah.

Smith: You kept the horses right here in the barn?

Hallett: No, we had Fay's horse; Fay's horse did the work.

Smith: Then where was *their* big barn?

Hallett: Well, they didn't have a big barn; they had a small barn over at Fay's.

Hallett: And all the horses we had were all from the Animal Rescue League. See, Mrs. Whitney was a member of the Animal Rescue League; and all these horses that they had up at her home, she'd take one of them and bring him down here. Some would be fire horses and we had one that had been on the farm and he got away and he went to Mrs. Joe Fay's.

Smith: Was this farm called Little Harbor Farm?

Hallett: Little Harbor Farm, yeah.

Smith: It still is?



The Fay's farmhouse at Nobska Point where Martin Broderick lived. He is seated on the wagon with Mary Fay, H.H. Fay's daughter. (The horse pulling the wagon was also used in winter for harvesting ice on Nobska Pond.) Mary Broderick, holding tennis racquet, James McGrath in baby carriage, two children from the lighthouse and Billy Ring with the dog complete the picture, ca. 1900. Courtesy WHHC.

Hallett: Oh, yes, yeah.

Smith: And did Mrs. Whitney, she didn't live here year round?

Hallett: No, no; she went back to Milton.

Sichel: Now, these horses that she obtained from the Rescue League, were they ones that she felt that she wanted to give them a good home? In their old age or otherwise?

Hallett: Yeah.

Sichel: Where is the location of the Animal Rescue League from where these horses came? Where was it - on the Cape?

Hallett: No, it was in Boston. I don't know where in Boston.

Smith: You know, one of her horses is buried over - Bill -



"Where we cut ice" on Wanamaker Lake, East Northfield, Mass., 1906. From the postcard collection of Philip Stanton. Courtesy WHHC.

Hallett: Bill

Smith: and he has a tombstone at the end of our garden in the blackberry patch. Did you dig his grave?

Hallett: I was one that helped dig the grave. When they came to put him away, the man says, "Oh, you've got a hole there big enough for four horses!" (laughing) Yes, that was a hard digging! It was all clay; there's clay in there.

Smith: Was that before the blackberries were there?

Hallett: Oh, yeah.

Smith: Did you plant the blackberries?

Hallett: Yeah, we, my father and I, yeah. That's why the blackberries are so good! (laughing)

Hallett: There was one cold winter, the bell [in the Church of The Messiah] froze; and we had to take hot water down from here, down to the church, and thaw out the bell. You can imagine going up that ladder to thaw out that bell!

Sichel: Was it the clacker that froze?

Hallett: The clacker, yeah.

Sichel: Not the rotating of the bell?

Hallett: No, the clacker. I guess that's the only time it ever froze.

Sichel: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Hallett. This is really just the sort of thing we like to have for our records.

Oscar Hilton

Excerpts from an interview with Elsa Keil Sichel on September 18, 1974. Tape originally transcribed by Lucena Barth.

Hilton: ... they used to put up ice back in those days. Some winters it wouldn't freeze thick enough so that they could cut it. Other winters, it came cold, real cold winter, and the ice got six to eight inches thick in the pond and they'd start cutting.

We'd cut the ice, and we'd tell George Cahoon's icehouse down at Quissett, where Sam Cahoon had his icebox there for a good many years later on. Then we'd tell Jim Hallett up at Whitney's, up on Nobsque Road, Church Street. He had a icehouse there, and we filled his icehouse. We filled this place at the Laboratory. Horace Howell had a place that he stored quite a bit for a little ice. He had his in back of his meat market, right there near the post office or where the bank is now, right there where that little building is there, between the post office that's there now and what we consider the bank.

Then Martin Broderick was over to Henry Fay's over by Nobsque Light. The icehouse is still there now, standing there by the shore of the pond, over on the further end of the pond there, you'll see, that is, unless they've torn it down within the last two or three years. I haven't noticed.

Sichel: I must notice.

Hilton: They always filled that icehouse there for the Fays. Then Sidney Lawrence, he used to

have a horsecart and peddled ice, had a man drive an icewagon and peddle ice to put in an ice chest. They didn't have any electricity in those days; they had electricity in the towns.

Sichel: Where did they get all the sawdust to pack around the ice?

Hilton: They used to saw, haul it from, I don't know, way back up in the country here, where there was a sawmill. There were two or three places they could haul it from.

Sichel: Because there weren't sawmills here.

Hilton: There was no sawmill or nothing around town that I heard anything of, no. Yes, my wife sat down there one year in the Ford sedan that I had, with a lantern to keep her warm, checking the carts that brought the ice from the pond to the different icehouses. Each one would be hauling to their own icehouse. She'd keep track of the number of cakes. They paid for the cutting of the ice and loaded it into the carts by the cake.

Sichel: She was your bookkeeper.

Hilton: She kept track of each team that would come up by her, how many cakes they had on and who it belonged to, so that they could pay so much a cake for getting their ice out of Nobsque Pond.

Sichel: That's very interesting. Well, that was a great help.

Hilton: We had quite a bit of fun one time there. One morning it was still holding cold, and the place was where we had cut the ice out. We had quite a big hole cut out, quite a big area.

It had scummed over enough so that the little bit of snow that had come, perhaps an inch or so...

Sichel: Adhered to the top of the...

Hilton: Covered everything, the ice that was hard and heavy and the ice that was just a little scum from cutting ice. Albert Swain, he worked for Charles R. Crane, caretaker over there for quite a few years, he was a fellow that always came along and he had his head tipped way back. He wouldn't be looking down to see where he was going. He came along, and we were cutting ice out of the hole up at the end of where this was scummed over, you know. He said, "Whereabouts they've been cutting all this ice out here they've been hauling up?" He walked right off of that thin ice, and in he went, and we had to fish him out. (laughter)

Sichel: He certainly found the answer to his question quickly, didn't he?

Hilton: He found where we'd been cutting the ice two or three days before then.

Sichel: These are amusing memories of ice-cutting days, aren't they?

Hilton: Yes.

Sichel: Mr. Hilton, you said that some years the winter wasn't severe enough to have the fresh water ponds freeze over to cut ice. Then what happened that summer?

Hilton: Yes. For quite a number of years back in those days they had an iceplant in Nantucket,

and they had a fellow that had a two-masted schooner that used to bring the ice from Nantucket, where the schooner was. I built a small icehouse, enough to hold a schooner or a couple of schooner loads of ice, right on where the back end of the Penzance Garage is now, on the old part of the Oceanographic wharf, which was just out beyond my old shop that I had there at that time, before that was ever changed over and before they ever built the Penzance Garage. They used to bring the ice up from Nantucket and put it in that icehouse. Sidney Lawrence used to peddle it out from there with his cart, his man, around to different people. Every day or every other day he'd come and put in a hunk of ice in your ice chest. I still have one of the ice chests down here in my shed now.

Sichel: That's fond memories. Was the price of ice much higher that summer when it wasn't locally cut ice?

Hilton: Yes, it used to cost us a little more, but back in those days it was such a...

Sichel: Modest amount.

Hilton: Such a small amount, I mean, the prices of things were so small back in those days that it didn't make much difference on just a matter of a few cents.

Sichel: It didn't prevent people from using ice.

Hilton: We had ice to give out in our ice chests to keep the milk from souring and things of butter cool and things like that.