

## HAWARDEN...HOW IT ALL BEGAN ICE BOXES AND ICE HOUSES

Chapter #7  
By: Cathy Noble

When is the last time you heard someone refer to the refrigerator as an "ice box"? Unless you have been lucky enough to be around grandparents, great grandparents, or others of that age, you might not have - - - ever.

The refrigerator that we all know got its start using ice - a product that we now need a refrigeration unit of some kind to make. Back "in the day," however, there was no way to make ice, other than cold temperatures and water, but what happened during the sweltering months of a Midwest summer? That's where the ice houses came in. Ice houses stored the blocks of ice that had been cut from rivers such as the Big Sioux during the winter months.

Ice houses were big business in the river town of Calliope, and later in Hawarden as well. They not only provided ice for the growing communities, they provided jobs as well. A dam was first built in Calliope in 1877, to provide a large body of still, deep water that was necessary for the formation of good ice. After that, ice harvesting, storage and delivery began in earnest.

The Calliope Ice Company supplied ice to The Northwestern Railroad Company, the cities of Ireton, Alcester, and Beresford as well as the citizens of Calliope. Later, more ice houses were built supplying the area with more ice, and jobs.

This new industry also meant people no longer had to harvest their own natural ice or snow. Instead ice men delivered ice to people's homes. The ice man delivered large blocks of ice not only to people's homes, but to their ice boxes as well. People would post a sign on their house indicating how much ice they would like: .25, .50 or .75 cent blocks. The ice man would cut the required amount of ice, weigh it on a scale, pick it up with an ice tong tool, put the ice on his shoulder, and deliver it to the house.

Children would scamper behind the ice wagon, waiting for it to stop and make a delivery. Often the ice man would treat the children to the ice chips left from "cutting" the required size block of ice for the customer. Other children collected the chips to take home for their mom to make home-made ice cream.

The block of ice would then be brought into the house, and placed in the ice box, where it would last for two to three days.

The ice box made it possible for people to store their foods safely and for longer periods of time. One compartment in the ice box was used for food storage, while the other housed the large block of ice. Ice boxes were usually insulated with tin, zinc or sawdust to help preserve the cold. The ice eventually melted, needing to be replaced. At the bottom of the ice box was a drip pan that needed to be emptied on a daily basis.

Back then, having an ice box was a luxury - a concept that is difficult to imagine in a world where most of our refrigerators defrost themselves automatically and ice cubes can come right out of the door! However, through ingenuity, hard work and the resources surrounding them, settlers to this area were able to create industries that made their everyday life easier!

Once again, Calliope's (and later Hawarden's) location as a river and railroad town contributed to its well-being and development.



Calliope Ice Houses circa 1920's, Horses cutting the cakes of ice. Photo courtesy of Don Schlueter.