

HAWARDEN...HOW IT ALL BEGAN

LIQUID GOLD FROM THE SIOUX RIVER

Chapter #8

By: Mary Truesdell Johnson

As we learned last week, Ice houses and Ice harvests provided the citizens of Hawarden and Calliope the luxury of having fine quality ice readily available for their use, as well as employment for many men and teenage boys. The ice business was one of Hawarden and Calliope's best industries and although the harvest season was extremely short, the Ice Company eventually expanded its distribution radius thus creating year round work for a considerable crew, delivering ice, and managing the Ice houses.

One of these young men who spent several of his Christmas' vacations harvesting ice in the early 1940's is Hawarden resident, Don Schlueter. Don's family was among the pioneer residents of Calliope. His great aunt Lettie Storts lived in the first wood frame house built in Calliope by her grandfather Alexander Johnson.

Don tells that the ice harvest started in the fall when men were hired to cut willow saplings that were tied in bundles. The ice company stretched a cable across the river above the dam and the men loaded the willow bundles in a barge and placed them in the water. Rocks, sand, and later concrete chunks were placed on the willows to hold them in place. This was repeated over and over until the dam was high enough to provide a sufficient ice field and slow down the current so the ice would freeze thick enough to harvest. The dam had to be rebuilt every fall because the high water in the spring washed it out.

When the ice was thick enough to harvest, it was scored with a gas powered circular saw that had a guide for the proper width of the ice cakes. Before the 1920's the ice was cut with work horses. The horses were harnessed to a tool resembling a plow. It had sharp blades on the bottom and horses pulled it over the ice as it cut. It took several passes to cut through a cake of ice. A man walked behind the horse to keep the blade upright and guide it. When the gas powered saw became popular it only took one cut to go through the ice cake. When the ice was ready to harvest the ice cakes were broken apart with spud bars and

pushed by men with pike poles to the open channel of the river and elevated up the chutes to the conveyor that carried them up to the ice house.



Jan. 12, 1913 - Making ice on the Big Sioux River. Note men working in short sleeves in Jan. Ice is being scored and open areas flooded.

Courtesy of Hawarden
Centennial Book

The Hawarden Independent of January 25, 1939 reported that “a crew of 50 men was employed and they will be cutting and storing about 5,000 tons of ice. Each cake of ice weighs about 225 pounds and when the machinery is working full capacity the ice is elevated into the ice house at a rate of 30 to 40 cakes per minute.” Don Schlueter tells that one man in the ice house would grab the cakes as they came down the chute and his partner would hook his tongs into the rear of the cake. The cake would be pushed to the rear of the house and put in place. This would continue until they reached the front. You then would start over on the second layer and continue until the ice house was filled to capacity. The scaffold in front of the houses had to be raised with chain hoists as the houses filled up.

“It was all hard hand work, but it provided a lot of jobs for men who were looking for work.” Don Schlueter

One hundred years ago this article appeared in the Hawarden Independent dated January 11, 1912: "Wallace and Knight started the ice harvest on Monday with a force of about 40 men. The ice is now about twenty inches thick and is the finest quality ever put up on the Sioux River. Right after the first freeze this enterprising firm put a force of men to work and shoved all the dirty slush ice over the dam. They are now putting snow scrapers on the ice and the result is that every cake is a perfect piece of congealed crystal."

The last ice house on the Sioux River in Calliope burned and was badly damaged in 1948. The owners at that time were Jess Vearrier and C.E.McCormick. Rather than rebuild the damaged ice house they purchased the Brick Block in Calliope (which consisted of five buildings) and built an artificial ice plant. The river was no longer their source for ice. They retained the name Hawarden Ice Company, and it continued to serve Hawarden and surrounding towns until 1951.

The only remains of this unusual and colorful part of our history are the cement foundations that can be found in the area of Carr's Landing on the east banks of the Sioux River north of Hawarden.