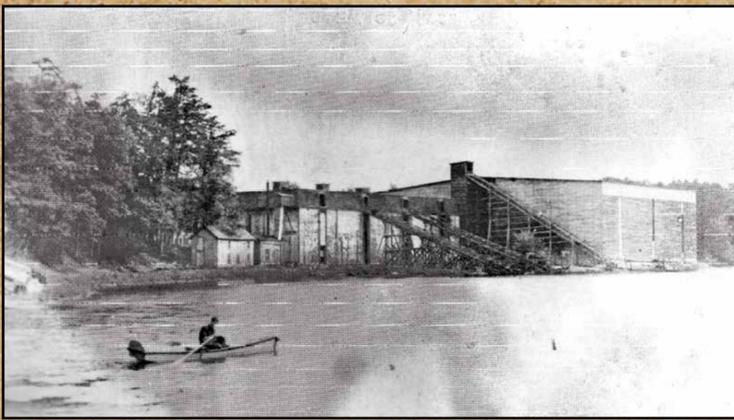


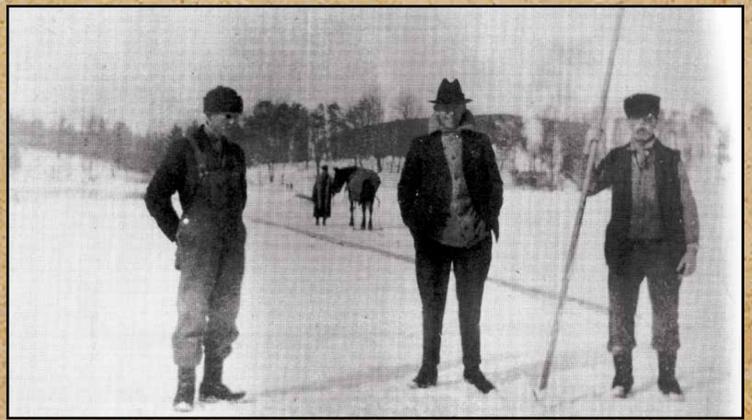
SOUTHWICK'S HARVESTED ICE EMPIRE

The commercial development of interior New England accelerated rapidly as railroads formed networks throughout the region. By 1855, the Northampton and New Haven Railroad passed through Southwick. It largely followed the route of the defunct Farmington Canal and provided inexpensive, rapid, year-round transportation of passengers, manufactured goods, and produce to the big cities to the south.

In 1874, the Knickerbocker Ice Company of New York City began harvesting ice from the middle pond and loading it directly onto rail cars. In 1879, Knickerbocker was taken over by the Berkshire Ice Company. By 1912, Berkshire had built five ice houses on a 228-acre tract of land along the west shore of the Congamond ponds; four on the Middle Pond and one on the South Pond. Ice from the spring-fed ponds was exceptionally pure and was in high demand.



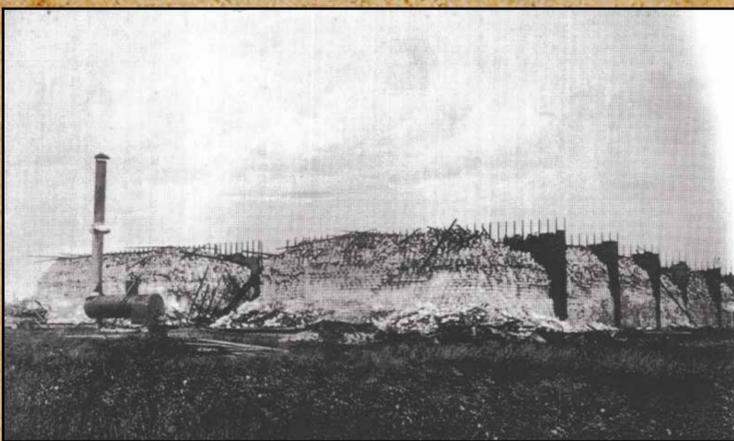
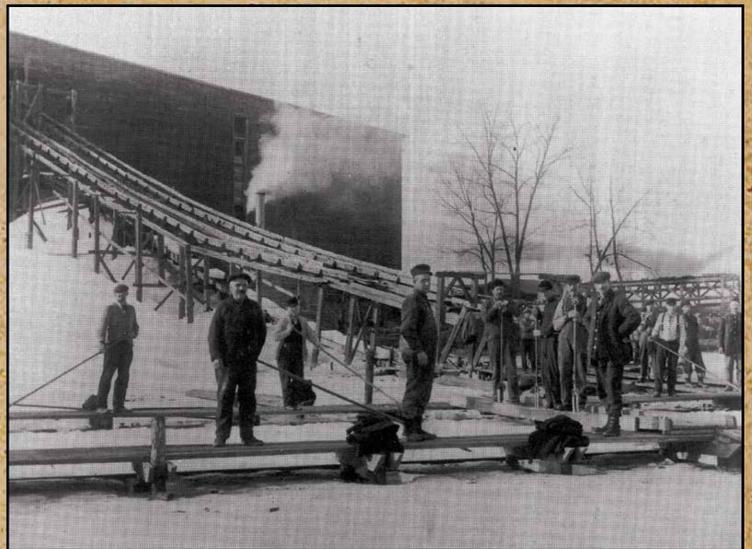
The ice houses were mammoth structures built of wood and insulated with sawdust. A typical ice house covered 2 acres of land and held from 45,000 to 65,000 tons of ice. The combined capacity of Southwick's ice houses was 225,000 tons. A newspaper article published in 1912 stated that Southwick had the largest ice houses in the U.S.



Ice was typically harvested from January to March, when the ice was sufficiently thick to support the weight of men and horses. The marking, cutting, sizing, and storage of ice were mostly performed by hand labor. It was dangerous and cold work; special shoe cleats were required by both men and horses and immersion or frostbite were ever-present hazards. Many of the specialized tools that were used can be seen at the Southwick Historic Museum.



Above and Right: Once cut, ice blocks were pushed along canals to the conveyor belts which carried the blocks up steep ramps into the house. Steam engines were used to power the conveyors.



Ice houses were vulnerable to fire due to their wood construction and combustible insulation. Sparks from locomotives, lightning strikes, or arson were the usual cause of these fires. Note the huge piles of ice that were left when, in March, 1933 the Congamond ice house was destroyed by fire.



The sole reminder of Southwick's ice empire is this building, erected in the late 1800's, which now houses Red Riding Hood's Basket. It was originally the home office of the Berkshire Ice Company. It has also served the community as a grocery store throughout most of its history. In this photo, taken in the early 1920's, note the Crystal ice house in the background, located just a few feet north of the intersection of Congamond Road and Berkshire Avenue. This ice house was destroyed by fire on July 14, 1923, following a lightning strike.

Ice could be stored from March until October.

During July and August, the peak ice consumption months, 60 to 90 rail cars of ice were shipped each day, six days a week, to Bridgeport, New Haven, and New York City. The industry employed up to 700 people during the cutting season. At its peak, the Berkshire Ice Company was generating \$1,000,000 in revenue per year.

In the early 1930's ice began to be manufactured using mechanical refrigeration. By mid-1930 the harvested ice industry that had revolutionized the American diet and lifestyle was all but dead. Refrigerators replaced ice-boxes in American homes. Southwick's mammoth ice houses burned one by one. None remain today.