

Michigan Time Traveler

An educational supplement produced by Lansing Newspapers In Education, Inc. and the Michigan Historical Center.

KIDS' History

Ice

It can cool a drink or support a hockey game. It can make us wonder at its beauty or frighten us with its slippery surfaces. Today's Time Traveler visits some historic ice.

The Post Office Dogsleds

In the summer, it was fairly easy for the U.S. Postal Service to deliver mail by boat to St. James, the largest town on Beaver Island. However, when the lake froze each year, the government stopped mail service until the spring thaw.

Islanders were upset—they wanted to stay in touch with their families and friends as well as people with whom they did business. Both islanders and non-islanders began to deliver mail by dogsled to and from Cross Village—the closest mainland point. Islanders paid the free-lance mail carriers twenty to thirty dollars for each round-trip. They got their mail two or three times each winter.

However, crossing over the ice was dangerous. If the ice cracked, people could fall in the cold water and die. Sometimes, they suffered from frostbite. They could get lost in a snow storm for days. By the 1890s, the federal government responded to the islanders' pleas and hired J.B.H. Saltburn to deliver mail by dogsled three times a week for \$500 for the winter. On one of his trips, wolves attacked his dogs, but he made it through.

In 1926 the U.S. Postal Service began to deliver mail to Beaver Island by airplane—a twenty-minute trip. The days of the Post Office dogsleds were over.



Men and women snowshoe and dog sled over ice and snow. (c 1910 State Archives of Michigan)

Skating on Ice

Trader Charles Rodd sold ice skates such as these to a number of residents of Shin-gwah-koos-king near Midland in the 1850s. Hunters and trappers attached the iron blades to boots or shoes with leather straps to make skates to travel more easily on lakes and rivers. Other people used similar blades to skate and play games on the ice for fun. (State Archaeology Collections)



Things To Do

- Find and read articles in the newspaper about outdoor activities on ice.
- Comments or suggestions? Write to timetraveler@michigan.gov.
- Read more about Tawas and ice in: *Around the Bay* by Neil Thorton. Printer's Devil Press, Tawas City, Michigan, 1991.

At the Michigan Historical Museum

Visit the Lakes and Land Gallery.

The Michigan Historical Museum is located two blocks west of the Capitol in downtown Lansing. Museum admission is free. Hours: Monday-Friday: 9 a.m.- 4:30 a.m.; Saturday: 10 a.m.-4:00 p.m.; Sunday: 1-5 p.m. Telephone hotline: (517) 373-3559. Visit the Michigan Historical Museum's Web site: www.michiganhistory.org



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Harvesting Ice

In the nineteenth century, there were no refrigerators, but there were ice boxes. In winter, people sawed and harvested ice blocks from frozen lakes. They hauled them to shore, cut them into smaller slabs and stored them under sawdust and other insulating materials in

icehouses. During warm weather, they sold the ice to people who had ice boxes in their kitchens, to meat and grocery stores and to railroad companies shipping food that would spoil if it got too warm. (c 1890, State Archives of Michigan)



Children from Gateway North Elementary School in St. Johns look at the winter exhibit in the Lakes and Land gallery at the Michigan Historical Museum.

Adrift on the Ice

An article from *Iosco County Gazette*, Tawas City, January 8, 1874

Last week, Wednesday, while two young men were fishing on Saginaw Bay, near Bay City, the ice separated from the shore, and they were driven out into the bay by the wind. Not until Saturday did the news of the calamity reach Bay City, and immediately every effort was made to render relief.

Several parties set out in carriages for different points on the Bay shore, from which it was supposed boats could be launched, and dispatches were sent out to all adjacent shore-points, to look out for the drifting men and afford relief if possible.

Boats were sent out from several ports where the bay was clear of ice....

Tuesday morning, after having suffered innumerable hardships and privations, the ice on which they had been afloat six days, was driven by the wind nearly ashore at Pinconning Station and the men succeeded in getting to that station about noon that day. They report they experienced very uncomfortable weather and that Sunday was by far the most severe and perilous, as the warm and rainy weather had softened the ice so much so that the rough sea which followed broke it up and scattered the pieces until their situation was almost hopeless. Fortunately they had provided themselves with blankets enough to keep from freezing, but as they had eaten nothing since leaving home, they could not have held out much longer at the best.



Fishing Through Ice

In shanties like those in the distance in Perchville on Tawas Bay, anglers fish through holes they drill in the ice. (c 1960, State Archives of Michigan)



Tawas Point Lighthouse—now a Michigan Historical Museum site (c 1890, State Archives of Michigan)

Ice at Tawas Point —

Excerpts from a journal of Samuel C. Palmer, Lighthouse Keeper

September 6, 1900: Filled ice box and swept sidewalk.

December 8, 1900: Making ice all last 24 hours, very quiet.

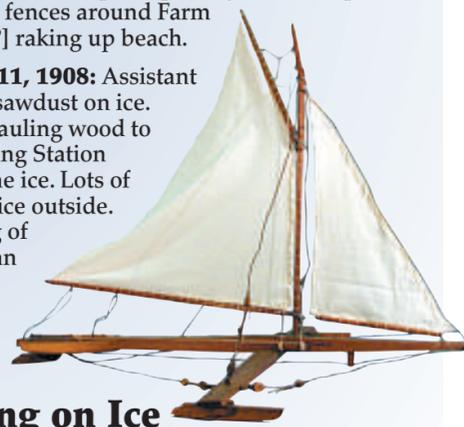
January 1, 1901: Very quiet and little going on. Quite a number of fish houses on the Ice but catching very little fish.

January, 12, 1901: Scrubbing and helping wife around the house. Bay nearly covered with ice.

January 13 1901: Lots of ice all around, very quiet here and little going on, very good sleighing.

June 3, 1907: Keeper repairing ice house platform building fences around Farm [garden?] raking up beach.

March: 11, 1908: Assistant putting sawdust on ice. Teams hauling wood to Life Saving Station across the ice. Lots of floating ice outside. Big gang of fisherman on ice.



Sailing on Ice

Iceboats were first introduced in the Netherlands in the 17th century to move cargo on frozen canals. Dutch immigrants introduced iceboats to America in 1790. In the 1860s, people began to race these boats. (An iceboat model—refurbished, c 1920, Collections, Michigan Historical Museum)