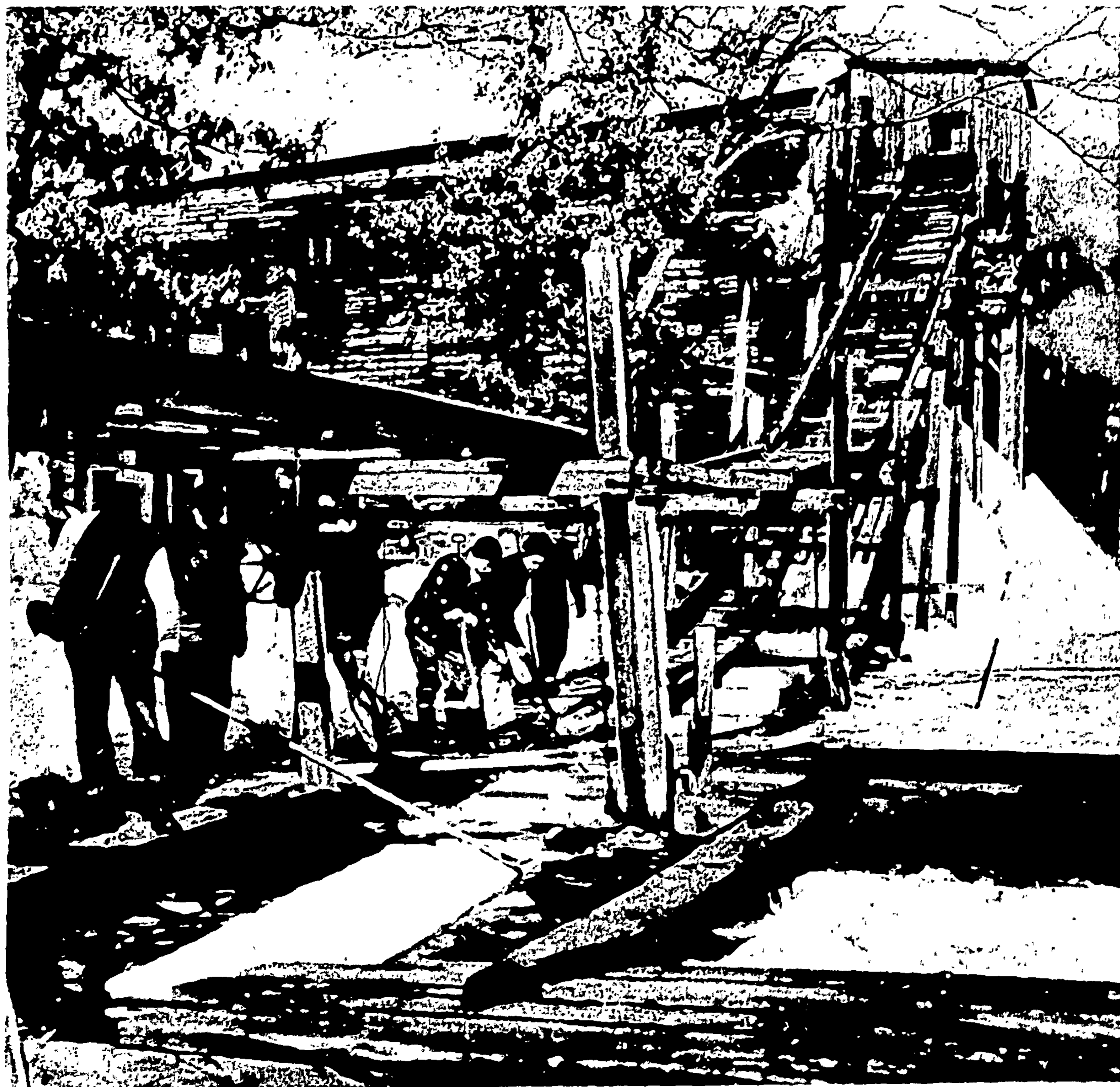




MUCH WORK with hand tools, above, went into harvesting Rhode Island ice crop each winter. "Key" floe is being cut to start field of ice for pike-poling to runways, pictured below, at Tracy's icehouses in Greenville 14 years ago.

# THE ICE HARVEST IS NO MORE

BY JOHN WARD



"MANY TIMES I worked all night, tapping a pond with a needle bar after a big storm to flood the deep snow cover and make more ice."

The speaker was Bertram Warren Gallup, 79, of Main Avenue, Greenwood, recalling how he used to harvest natural ice on a score of Rhode Island ponds and then peddle the product in downtown Providence, from 1902 to 1951.

"The first couple of years that I was with the old Providence Ice Co., we would go around to the icehouses out in the country, staying at their boarding houses and working on the ponds. In 1908, they built the Primrose plant up in North Smithfield. There were 60 French Canadian carpenters and 40 of us icemen on the job.

"We helped fill the walls with sawdust for insulation and then started harvesting ice. I used to work everywhere, on the pond, the runways and in the houses, stacking the cakes. I did everything but run the hoisting engine.

"The company had 35 different icehouses. I can remember cutting ice at Mashapaug, Tarkiln in Burrillville, Wallum Lake, Spring Green, Abbott Run, Ponaganset, Geneva and Omega in East Providence.

"In 1917, at Mashapaug, we were cutting ice 30 inches thick. They had horse races at the Reservoir Avenue end and they played hockey at the end near the railroad. There were icehouses at two or three places around the pond. One was called The Klondike because it was always so cold.

"Some Saturdays in the winter, I would work all day on the ice wagon, starting out at 4 a.m. Then, in the afternoon, they would hand me a train ticket for Georgiaville or for Wallum Lake to go to work on the ponds



BERTRAM WARREN GALLUP, a veteran of a half century as an ice cutter, recalls the old days.



right through until 6 o'clock Sunday night.

"If we needed ice real bad, we would take it at six inches, but we liked to get 12 to 14 inches and, generally, no more than two feet thick. The average cake was 22 by 38 inches, but, at Wallum Lake, we cut them 44 inches square, because they had farther to travel to the city and there was more shrinkage.

"Local farmers would be hired to help out and boys getting out of school would always grab a pike pole and pitch in. But, if you were digging a ditch, they would not come near you. We would first bore holes in the pond, to peg it out and mark what we called a field of ice.

"A sharp marker, with plow handles and pulled by a horse, laid out the lines and then another plow, with an eight-inch cutter, and a team of horses would come along the same marks. We would hand saw a header row of 300 cakes and start them to the cutting pens where they would be broken up and hoisted up the runways into the houses.

"Ice cutting was hard but fascinating work.

"In those years, we worked nights, by lantern light, on the ponds, along the chutes and in the big houses. We'd get working real fast and, suddenly, a pike pole would smash a lantern in the icehouse. The kerosene would go right to the bottom of the stacks of ice. The next summer, some customer would be complaining about the kerosene taste in the ice.

"Some nights, an entire trainload of ice would come into Providence from Wallum Lake.

"When there was an open winter here, and not much ice, they would load horses, harness, cutting tools, grain and us men into

a train at Union Station and take us into New Hampshire, to Lake Winnepesaukee, or even into Maine, to get a harvest. One winter, we shipped ice by boat from Maine to the Eastern Coal Co. docks, but there was a lot of breakage. The cakes were about 900 pounds each."

Mr. Gallup recalls the spectacular fires many of the icehouses made, lighting up the sky for miles, and the 1918 parade of horse-drawn ice wagons through downtown Providence. This was to show the industry's contempt for the rapidly encroaching electric and gas refrigeration in households.

He first went to work in 1902, for the Narragansett Brewing Co., driving a pair of horses and a wagon, bringing ice into the downtown area for the Crown, Narragansett, and Dreyfus Hotels. He says there were many homes downtown then. In 1906, the brewery gave up the retail ice business. Mr. Gallup went to work for the new owner, the Providence Ice Co., later to become the Rhode Island Ice Co.

"The ice company had 265 horses at various stables. I can remember, in 1917, a tough winter, driving a four-horse pung on my downtown route. Seventy-five of the horses were kept in barns at the foot of Dexter Street.

"Nearly all of the fellows I worked with on the routes and the ice ponds are gone now."

The firm still makes ice at its East Provident plant, but no one in Rhode Island cuts natural ice anymore.

There are few of the old icehouses still standing and only a few of the cutting gang veterans like Mr. Gallup left who recall the thrill of a night on the ice pond, bringing in the harvest.



OLD DOBBIN was a work horse on ice in winter and helped to peddle it summers. This is Bowen Pond, Riverside, in 1927.



EARLY 1900's, when Mr. Gallup, right, and William Pomeroy delivered cakes downtown. In background is the public library.