LOOKING BACK

by Hague Historical Society Board Members Shelly Gautreau and Nancy Young

ICE HARVESTING

Originally written by Nancy Young in February 2025

Beginning in the early 1800s, ice was harvested on lakes and ponds throughout the Adirondacks. Ice was a valuable commodity in those days before mechanical refrigeration made it possible to keep perishable food items cold throughout the year. The activity was referred to as a harvest because it involved the gathering of a cold weather "crop". Large operations such as the Lake George Ice Company would take as much as 20,000 tons out of Lake George in order to supply the Delaware and Hudson Railroad.



Closer to home, in the town of Hague, smaller crews toiled daily during the cold winter months to provide ice to local homes, hotels, and stores. Once the lake had frozen to a depth of at least ten to twelve inches, a work area was cleared. This was done in the early years with horses shod with cleated shoes called calks. The horses were attached to a scraper which cleared the area of accumulated snow and debris. By the 1920s, those horses were replaced with trucks.

Workmen used augers and saws to create a grid and then cut through the ice to create blocks. Each block was about twenty-two inches long and weighed between 250 and 300 pounds. After the block was cut, long-handled tools were used to maneuver the ice in the open water. Tongs allowed the men to pull the ice out of the water and onto a wagon or truck. Blocks were then scraped and smoothed in order to clean and make handling them easier. Once loaded onto a sleigh, the blocks of ice were transported to shore and then on to their final destination. Most homes, hotels and stores in the area maintained their own icehouses or large coolers. A well-maintained icehouse could keep ice frozen for up to a year. For some though, a 6- or 7-foot hole in the ground, covered by boards, had to suffice. Sawdust provided insulation and kept perishable goods from spoiling. All of this required teamwork and was not without much risk to both the workers and their horses.

It's a good thing we no longer depend on the lake in such a way! Our changing climate has made it impossible. Ice conditions vary from year to year and in some recent years the lake never froze at all.

For those of you who might be interested, the Lake George Association has been documenting dates regarding Lake George ice for over 100 years. You can read more HERE.

TI FESTIVAL GUILD OPENS "COLD BLOOMS SERIES"

The Ticonderoga Festival Guild will kick off its Cold Bloom Concert Series with a festive "Fasching German Night" on **Saturday, January 24, 2026**, at **5 pm**, at the Knights of Columbus Hall on Montcalm Street in Ticonderoga.

Fasching is a traditional pre-Lenten carnival celebrated in Germany with lively music, dancing, costumes, and plenty of food and beer.

The evening promises a rollicking, family-friendly dance and costume party featuring music by Fritz's Polka Band. A buffet dinner will be prepared by the Knights of Columbus and a cash bar will be available.

Tickets are $25 for adults and $10 for children and pre-registration is required. More information and ticket reservations are available HERE.



The Cold Bloom Concert Series will continue with several free community events throughout the winter and spring. Highlights include "Love Songs and Sweets" on **Friday, February 13th**, "Spring Sings" **on Friday, April 17th**, "Bluegrass Jam!" on **Wednesday, May 27th,** and "Opera Shots" on **Saturday, June 20th**. Full details about the series can be found HERE.

The all-volunteer Ticonderoga Festival Guild is best known for its popular free Tuesday evening concerts held throughout the summer.

The guild also brings unique children's programming into local schools during the academic year and hosts free Wednesday morning concerts during the summer at the Knights of Columbus Pavilion.