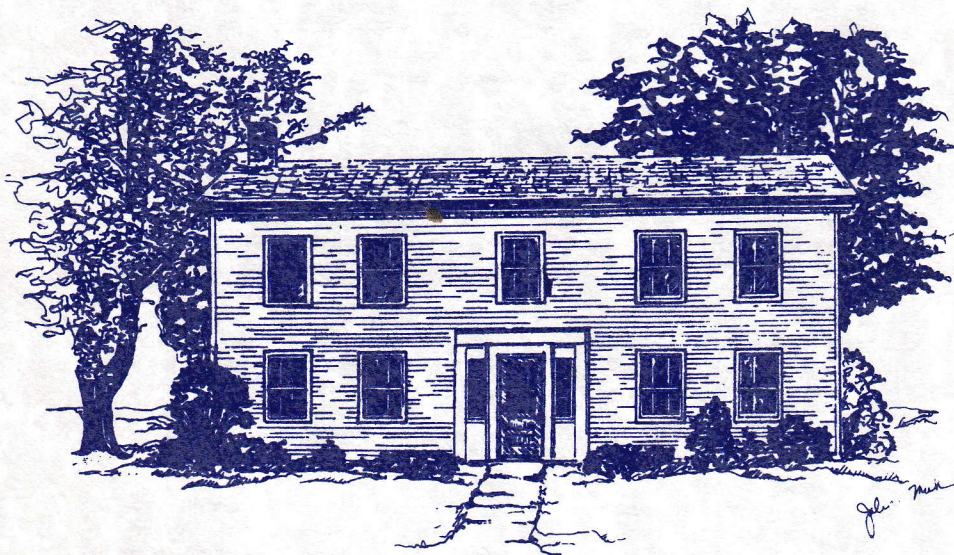


INDIANA WATERWAYS

Volume 5, Issue 1, August, 1986



The Reed Case House in Delphi, Indiana. This handsome Federal-style home was built in the 1840's by Reed Case, a Superintendant of Construction on the Wabash & Erie Canal. This view by Julia Meek shows the house as it will appear after restoration.

(Reprinted by permission of the Carroll County Wabash and Erie Canal Association. See page 8)

ICE ON THE WHITEWATER CANAL

by Paul Baudendistel

It was not until the cusp of January and February this winter that the mercury in my window weather station really settled down, marking the distinction between last season and this.

Through patches of storm window frost I surveyed the canal on January 28th and viewed the ice. From my living room observatory on the Whitewater Canal in Metamora, I can see West to the Mill Pond of Lock #25 where the 45 popcorn-fed ducks of last summer huddle around a small hole in the ice caused by a trickle of water coming over the "tumbles".

Looking East to the Boat Landing and the canalboat "Ben Franklin II" resting in its berth, I am reminded of those accounts of boats locked up in canal ice awaiting the spring thaw, and I consider the captains and crews of those boats reduced to huddling in an office around a small stove, not unlike the Curator's Office here at Whitewater Canal State Historic Site.

As our village plans, prepares and mostly awaits the spring thaw, this seems an appropriate time to share with you some research pertaining to our canal and the subject of ICE.

ICE PONDS

A mere fifty years ago the "ice box" was the standard for refrigeration in the southeastern Indiana home, and ice was big business. Canal basins such as the one at Brookville were an excellent source of commercial-grade ice.

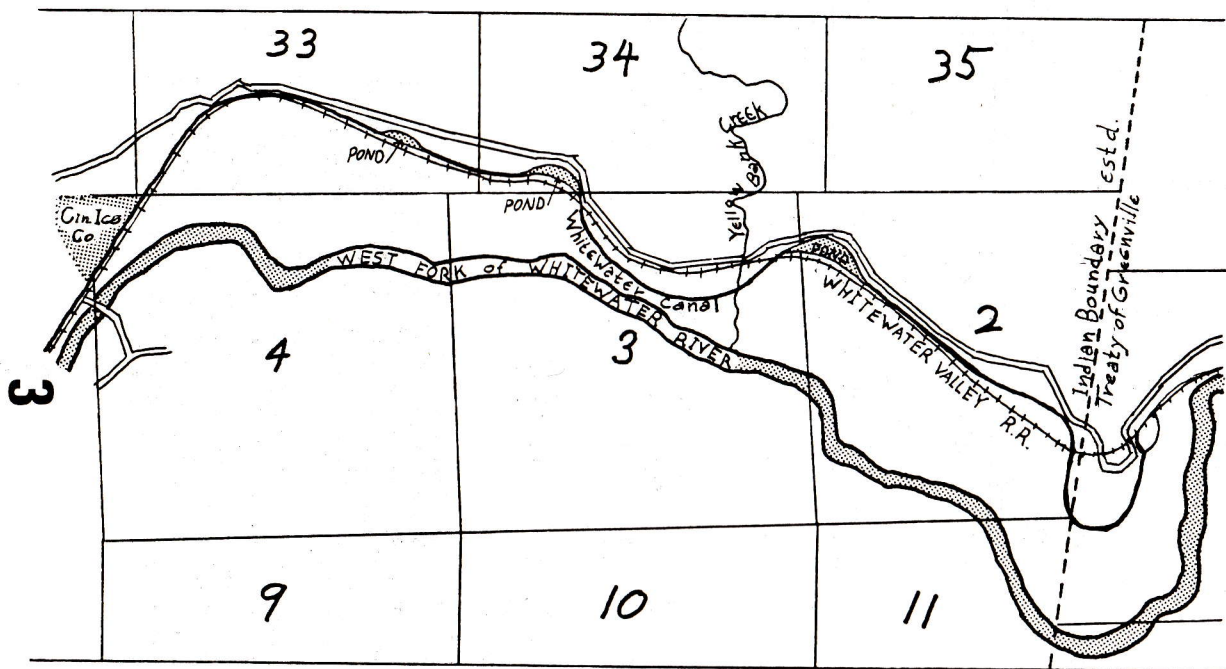
The old Whitewater Canal between the Laurel Feeder Dam and Brookville was maintained for hydraulic power purposes between 1863 and 1937. In addition to the canal basins which had been initially constructed, there were low areas adjoining the route of the canal which were easily flooded to create a series of ice ponds and ice houses to meet the needs of the valley. In the 1882 Atlas of Franklin County the majority of these ice ponds are labeled as being managed by the Cincinnati Coal and Ice Co., and it is presumed that the ice was exported by the railroad which then owned the canal.



PAUL BAUDENDISTEL COLLECTION

BEN F. WINANS PHOTO #438

Ice Cutters on Brookville Canal Basin, 1908



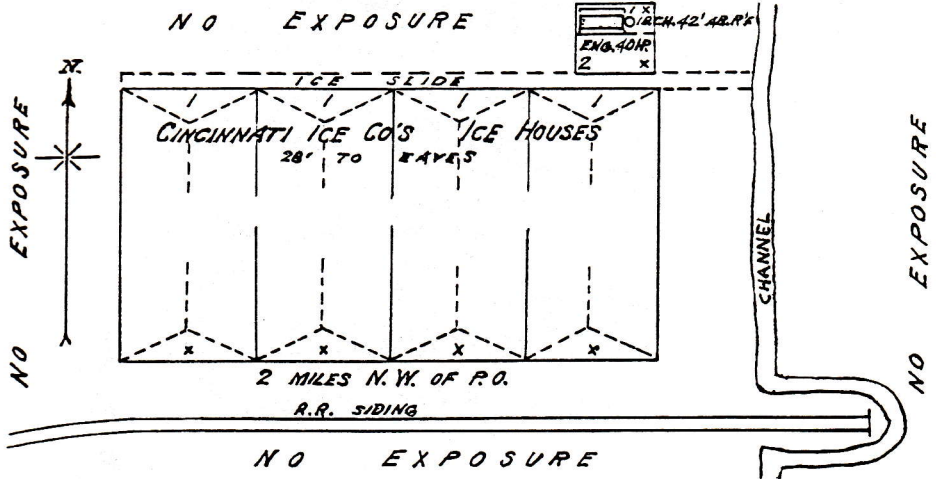
Ice ponds along the Whitewater Canal Between Metamora and Brookville ca.1900 Brookville Twp. Franklin Co.

In the picture at left, the ice on this canal basin has been scored off in two-foot intervals; from right to left it is being sawed into sixteen-inch blocks. These ice blocks were floated to the ice house in the background where they were stacked as necessary to achieve a cake of ice ten inches in thickness. The resulting block, 16"x24"x10" weighed 100 pounds.

The ice blocks were then slid up a ramp and into the ice house where they were packed in layers of sawdust. During the summer months this ice had a commercial value of three to five cents per pound.

ICE HOUSES

SITE PLAN OF OLD ICE HOUSE NEAR METAMORA



Ref: 1899 Sanborn Perris Map of Metamora, Indiana

This site plan is that of a large ice house which was located on the Whitewater Canal half-way between Metamora and Laurel, Ind. It was of frame construction and the double walled building was insulated with sawdust.

A few years ago, we inquired about this particular ice house while interviewing Metamora residents about local industries. Helen Gordon, then age 88, told us this story about the summer when Metamora got its share of free ice.

Ref: Metamora Oral History Project
Helen Wright Gordon Transcript
Tape 2, Page 8

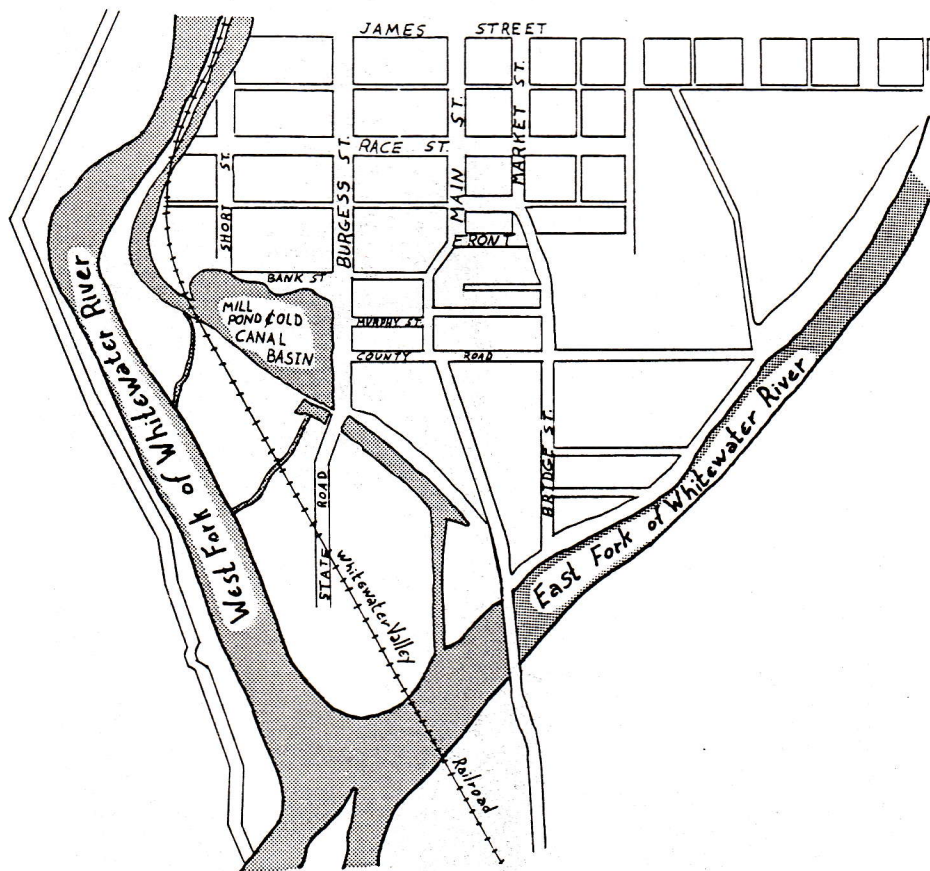
Helen:

The ice house that I remember was up on the head of the canal, right above the handle factory. And it had thirty two chambers to it. And they used to cut ice on the ice pond and put it in those chambers, and it would keep there for all summer.

People would go there and get ice to use. And, oh I don't know, (date) they had this so full of ice one time, all thirty two chambers were just full of ice. And it burnt that night. Somebody set it afire and it burnt. And after it burned down there was all that ice all stacked up. It stayed for a long time to melt. People used to come there and get ice.

ICE SKATING

The old canal basins were ideal for ice skating because there was no appreciable flow to the water. They froze faster and to a greater thickness than the water in the channel. The basins were also less monotonous to the skater than going up and down the canal. Distance skating is interesting though, and several of our folks here hold the distinction of having skated from Metamora to Laurel Feeder Dam and back.



The South End of Brookville showing the Canal Basin, location of the two photos: Ice Cutting and Ice Skating



PAUL BAUBENDISTEL COLLECTION

Ben F. Winans Photo #1350

Skating Party on Brookville Canal Basin, 1910

Ref: The Franklin Democrat
Brookville, Indiana Jan. 4, 1861

The canal being locked up with ice, presents a magnificent opportunity for the youngsters of our town to enjoy themselves skating and have a good time. It is however, very doubtful if skating be one of our best exercises. It is not quite free from danger to life and limb, while such rapid motion through a keen, cutting atmosphere, by those who live mostly in heated rooms, is questionable. Every year since skating was known, thousands of lungs have been seriously compromised by this violent change. Skating is excellent for hardy people, and for those much accustomed to exposure, but it is to be used with great caution by all who live in heated parlors.

It still takes a hearty and healthy soul to face the near-zero temperatures necessary for canal ice skating. On the day of this writing the only ones tough enough were four little kids. Active residents of Metamora have all skated on the canal at least once, and would tell you with authority: "Sure, we skate on the canal; but not today."

Why is it, for anything that requires movement, that we say: "When I was a kid..."? Yes, I helped build a fire on the ice for night skating parties, and then I often went inside to heat hot cocoa and stir the chili so it didn't stick to the bottom of the kettle. Well, someone had to do it!

REED CASE HOUSE MOVED AT LAST!

On July 24th and 25th, a long-awaited event took place in Delphi: the moving of the Reed Case House from its location on West Front Street to its new home along the canal bank at the Wabash & Erie Canal Park. This 1840's Federal-style home was built by Reed Case, who was Superintendent of Construction on the portion of the Wabash & Erie Canal which passes through Delphi.

The Reed Case House was donated to the Carroll County Wabash & Erie Canal Association in 1981. Readers may recall the December 1983 issue of INDIANA WATERWAYS, which was devoted to an explanation of the history of the Canal Park which the Carroll County group has been building for the past fifteen years. In 1983, we reported that the house was ready to be moved to its new site. Since then, numerous obstacles have appeared. It seemed that as each obstacle was surmounted, a new one would raise its ugly head, grinning evilly.

Perseverance is a valuable asset, and this is a quality possessed by the members of the Delphi group. Perhaps "bull headed stubbornness" would more accurately describe the qualities which have seen the group through the time of waiting for the move to be completed. In the history of the organization, that period will probably be remembered as the most difficult and discouraging ordeal of all. We certainly hope so.

Now that the house is moved, the job is not over. In fact, it can fairly be said to have just begun. Restoration of the large building will require many months of hard, difficult and expensive work, as well as thousands of dollars worth of materials. At best, it will be several years before the restoration is complete. The finances of the group have been severely taxed by the moving expenses, and the biggest part of the job lies ahead.

Since its inception in 1981, the Canal Society of Indiana has supported the Delphi group. What they need now is money, and lots of it. We aren't suggesting that you send them lots of money, though it would be welcome if you are so inclined. What you can do is to join their organization and help them to demonstrate a solid support for their project in the form of a healthy membership list.

The dues are only \$5.00 per year, and your five bucks will make a really important contribution to historic preservation. Donations are tax deductible. To join, or for more information, write:

CARROLL COUNTY
WABASH & ERIE CANAL ASSOCIATION
P.O.Box 255
Delphi, Indiana 46923

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