



The Frozen Water Trade (Text Only)

Gavin Weightman

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The story of the 19th-century ice trade, in which ice from the lakes of New England – valued for its incredible purity – revolutionised domestic life around the world.

In the days before artificial refrigeration, it was thought impossible to transport ice for long distances. But one man, Frederic Tudor, was convinced it could be done. This is the story of how, almost single-handedly, and in the face of near-universal mockery, he established a vast industry that would introduce the benefits of fresh ice to large parts of the globe.

Thanks to Tudor, the American fashion for drinks ‘on the rocks’ spread to tropical areas such as the West Indies and British India. By the 1830s fleets of schooners carried the frozen cargo, packed with sawdust and tarpaulins for insulation, to all corners of the world. The harvesting of the ice from New England’s lakes employed thousands of men.

The frozen water trade had a profound influence on the tastes of a large part of the world, but with the development of artificial cooling systems in the first quarter of the 20th century, the huge industry established by Frederic Tudor vanished as if it had never been.

Note that it has not been possible to include the same picture content that appeared in the original print version.

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