# A Brewer Childhood 60 Years Ago

By John D. Bennett

As a long time resident of this area, I would like to say that I like your nice little paper very much. Especially interesting to me are the old time articles. You see, I remember the days of 1925-1927. I was born in 1918 in North Brewer in an area that was called "Skunk Hollow," by some folks. The spot is near the Texaco station across from the North Brewer Shopping Center. The house is gone now, but there is still one there that stood next to my birthplace. I walked the Indian Trail many times and swam at Indian Point Ledge.

We drank water from the Oak Grove Spring there. We moved to Bangor and after a few years, we came back to Brewer to live. I went to the old Page school and lived on Glidden St. for a few years.

I rode in the little dump truck that was used to carry clay from the pit at the end of Glidden St. to the hopper of the Brooks Brick Yard place of business. I remember the sheds and rocks that were used to cure the bricks after they came out of the wire cutter. They were moved to the rocks and were carried there on two wheel carts. They also had a large flat area of ground where the still grey bricks were laid in rows to dry or cure. I remember the piles of soft wood slab wood that were used to fire the kilns. As I remember, the kilns were eight or nine feet high, shaped something like bee hives, and hollow inside. Large enough for a man to stand up straight in so that the bricks could be stacked all around the inside of the structure, leaving a great area in the middle for the fire to be built. Those fires were kept roaring hot with mounds of red hot coals and if you peered inside you could see the bricks themselves gradually turning to the so-called chimney brick red that we are all familiar with.

I don't know how long they were cooked, but you could see the red glow from the kilns reflected in the night skies. The little truck was loaded in the pit by a power shovel that we kids called a 'steam shovel." One of the shovel operators name was Ingalls, I believe. I remember the old Bon Ton ferry boats and rode across the Penobscot many times on Bon Ton III for three pennies. These sturdy little boats were powered by a small coal fired steam engine complete with the polished brass gauges like larger boats. They were called the smallest steam powered boats in the country. As one wore out another was put on. I believe one of them burned and sank at the dock. The Mayo family operated the last one, I think.

In the winter time the river froze often and finally a solid ice bridge was formed and people walked across all winter. As Spring came on, sawdust was put on the ice to slow the melting process.

Every spring there was a period when despite the sawdust, the ice was not safe to walk on and then people had to walk around on the old black iron bridge that was, of course, the only bridge at that time. The first real indication of spring was the arrival of the ice breaker that came up to smash the ice and clear the waterway for the coal barges and the "Boston boats" so called.

I remember one spring when the ice breaker was near done and a camera man from the newspaper was standing on the ice to get a picture of the powerful boat riding up onto and smashing the ice down into large cakes. He stood with his camera and tripod too long, some folks thought, but he seemed not to be alarmed and stayed for just one more shot.

Someone said, "He had better get out of there" and someone shouted, "Get out of there Danny". The ice breaker smashed toward him and rode up onto the ice and a long, wide crack appeared in the ice and split right up toward Danny Maher and to the relief of all observers, he grabbed up his equipment and scrambled away as fast as he could go, safe and sound. I believe the name of this ice breaker was "Kickapoo."

The method used was to back off and come forward at high speed and run the prow of the boat up onto the ice and break it down by sheer weight. The prow was heavily plated, and as I understand it, was filled with cement and had extra bracing. Before the arrival of spring, many people used to cut holes in the ice and fish for Tommy Cod.

I also worked in the ice houses on outer Kenduskeag and Valley Avenue in Bangor in the spring of the year to remove ice cakes from the storage place. That was in later years, about 1939.

The ice houses were actually large barns, that were filled in late winter with large cakes of ice and were filled wall to wall and nearly to the very top. The cakes were put in layer upon layer with sawdust packed between cakes and between layers. The removal of these ice supplies was interesting to me. There were small tracks laid in the top layer of ice. Actually they were miniature railroad tracks. Made of two heavy wooden planks placed side by side with strips of half round steel rods fastened to each plank. These planks were laid end to end, making a track clear to the far side of the house. Cakes were chiselled free and flipped end over end or side over side with the aid of a pick pole until they flipped onto the rails, and were then pushed e down the tracks to the door, into a small elevator. elevator was built upon the side of the building and took cakes two at a time, dow dock level and they were loaded onto trucks to delivered, house to house town.

The ice men who deliv pieces of ice to residential ar wore heavy black rubber shi on their backs to k reasonably dry. The bot edges of these aprons pockets packed full of spor to catch melting icewater. didn't want to drip water customers floors while filling ice boxes.

Once out of the houses, would squeeze the sponges ready for another deliv There was a trick to getting ice cakes to slide along the ra It seems that ice that is cut fr rivers or streams has one h ice side, and one snow ice or s ice side. If the ice cake flop onto the rails, soft side down, man was powerful enough make them slide. However, w hard side down they would along all easy. In fact sometir they had to be slowed down s not to damage the car of elevator. Pond ice is solid cl through. More so than river i River ice can be split to a surp ing degree of accuracy with common ice axe, or firema axe. Pond ice usually must cut for size by a handsaw.

Each household customer ed a card, put on display in th window to tell the driver wh size cake of ice they wanted. the card was shown standi tall, it meant a fifteen cent s and laying horizontally meant cent piece.

BUCKLE UP.