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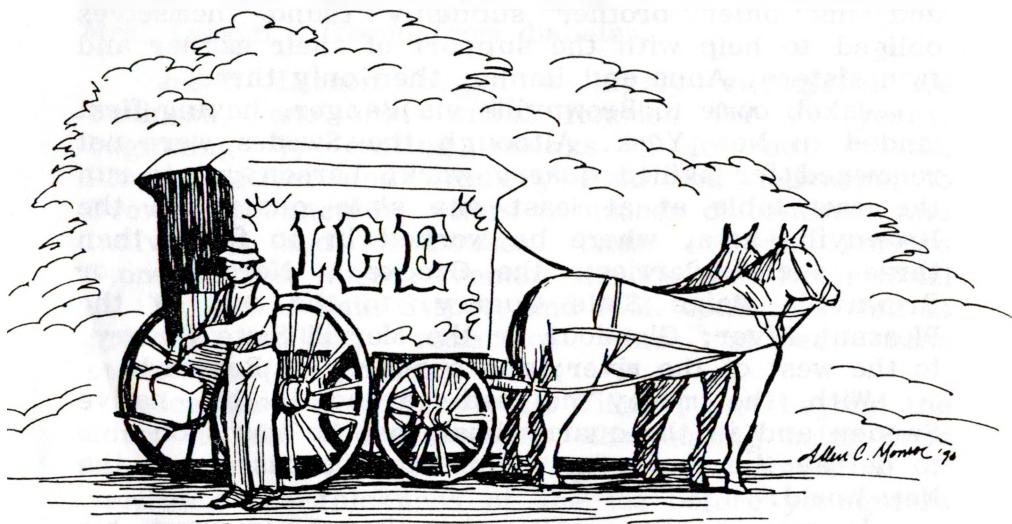


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BROWNVILLE'S ICE MAN

JAKOB LARSON



By William R. Sawtell

BROWNVILLE'S ICE MAN

Years ago, before the days of refrigerators, folks relied heavily on cellars and ice boxes to cool and preserve foods. And while each town had its ice man (or men), Brownville's was perhaps as legendary as any. Jakob "Jake" Larson and his descendants left an indelible imprint on the area.

Although it is known that Jake was born in Sundby, Sweden, on July 30, 1869, it is not exactly certain just when he reached our shores. When Jake was but a lad of eight, his father passed away. He and his older brother suddenly found themselves obliged to help with the support of their mother and twin sisters, Anna and Hanna, then only three.

Jakob came to Brownville via Bangor, having first landed in New York. Although the Swedes were not renowned for skilled quarry work, Larson got to run the saw table at at least one slate quarry in the Brownville area, where he worked in no fewer than three such quarries: the Crocker, Norcross, or Brownville Maine Slate Quarry, to the east of the Pleasant River; Glendour or the Merrill Slate Quarry, to the west of the river; and a quarry in Barnard.

With the money he had earned in his native Sweden and in the quarry business, he was soon able to defray the remainder of his family's passage to the New World.

It was in Brownville that he would meet his future wife, Amanda Sofia Erickson, who had been born in Ursult, Sweden, on February 13, 1867 (almost two years before Larson). The Larsons would make their first home on a farm above the Merrill Quarry site, on a lot purchased from Granville Roberts. Larson would later add a barn.

Only when those of Swedish descent, like the James Nelsons from Sebec or the John Ekhols from Brownville, came to visit was Swedish spoken in the Larson home; the native tongue was never used in front of the Larson children, which came to number seven: Ellen; Evan; Neal; a set of twins-Hilmor and

Hildor; Nella; and Vernald, the last living member of the family. (The James Nelsons eventually moved into Brownville, coming to settle in the Decker Place, not far from the Crocker Quarry. The John Ekhols lived just to the north of the Larson farm.)

It's interesting to note that the wife of yet another Swedish figure, Axel Carlson, a Canadian Pacific section man who was blown off the Onawa Trestle one December day in 1912, later came into the employ of Mrs. Larson at the home above the Merrill Quarry. This was Selma Amanda Fossman Carlson. Yet another such employee was Helen Stone (Pennington). Mrs. Larson suffered from diabetes.

Jakob Larson began a highly successful ice business, one that would flourish for 17 years, beginning by cutting chunks of ice out of the Pleasant River and Tannery Pond and delivering to Brownville Junction, where a number of concerns and individuals had ice houses. These included Perry's Store on Van Horne Avenue, the Pleasant River Hotel at the end of Main Street, and P.M. Jones, as well as private families, some of which shared these structures (ice houses).

Ice was cut in Brownville Village, just beyond the cove, not far above the dam, the hauling being done by horses. One of Jakob's services consisted of verifying the thickness of the ice before youngsters went skating on the river.

It was on the north side of Jenks Brook, not far from the tracks on the road leading out of the Village that Larson maintained his ice house, making deliveries to Brownville Junction on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. In the Village, deliveries were made on the other days of the week except Sundays.

Ice was sold and priced by the chunk according to size, selling for 25 to 30 cents a chunk. Larger businesses, like the stores in Brownville Junction, had monthly accounts with Mr. Larson.

Helping out in the ice house were local people, like Will Roberts, Jim Zwicker, and Harley Winship. Assisting with deliveries were Milton Smith and Edgar Chase.

It is to be noted that before the coming of Jake Larson's ice business, Ned Johnson had cut and sold ice in Brownville Village, customers coming to his ice house at the present site of the Louise Leeman place, less than 100 yards from the site where Larson would have his. At his hotel on Main Street in Brownville Village (near the site of the present Riversedge Restaurant), Cal Herrick also maintained an ice house.

With two to six horses, the Larsons also ran a woods business, as well as a milk business, hauling pulp for jobs obtained from Ernest Ladd. The Larsons hauled poplar, spruce, and fir across the ice by the Jack Thomas place, the wood going down over the dam on its way to Howland, Great Works, and other destinations. Jake's youngest son Vernald and Guy Page were active in this work.

Larson's horses were also used in local haying and plowing jobs on small farms.

Jake later acquired Ford and Chevrolet trucks, hauling white birch from areas where Bill Lancaster had cut for the American Thread Company to railroad cars in Patten, for transportation to Milo.

On Thanksgiving Day in 1926, the Larsons moved into the former Adams Huse Merrill house on Main Street in Brownville Village. The family had owned the house for a few years, but due to the poor health of Mrs. Larson, who died in August 1932, were in no position to move in sooner. Thus, Jakob rented an office in the house to Dr. McDonough, then to Dr. Killam.

Although his prestige in the community of Brownville was considerable, no doubt, Larson took no active part in local politics. However, he was instrumental in the organization of the Lutheran Church, the major church of Sweden today.

Having left a number of descendants, many of whom would make substantial contributions to mankind, Jakob "Jake" Larson passed away on April 3, 1945.