



Parked in the Past

Maddox Ice Co. employed hundreds in early 1900s

Supplied Denver with ice from lakes near present-day Platte Canyon High School

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Today a football field and track occupy the land across U.S. 285 from the Bailey-based school complex made up of Platte Canyon High School, Fitzsimmons Middle School and the Platte Canyon School District administration building between Bailey and Shawnee. But in the years from 1903 to 1937 at that site, the months of January and February were busy with another activity.

From two lakes in the area of the present-day athletic fields, the Maddox Ice Co. shipped ice to Denver on the narrow gauge Colorado & Southern Railroad. In the 34-year span, the company seasonally employed 100 or more men to cut and move huge blocks of ice from the frozen lakes onto railroad cars at the Maddox Depot.

The ice was shipped to 684 Alcott St. in Denver, where the Maddox family lived in a small house and stored the Platte Canyon ice in several warehouses on site.

When the ice arrived in Denver, another 100 men were employed moving ice

blocks from boxcars into warehouses. And throughout the year, but more often in summer, drivers delivered ice for use in residential and business iceboxes throughout Denver and its suburbs.

Maddox land purchase

William Clay Maddox, called Clay when his first name was used at all in early issues of The Flume, came up the Platte Canyon from Denver in 1902 looking for acreage to build lakes for an ice business. He found what he was looking for on 320 acres of pastureland between Bailey and Shawnee.

Although the name of Shawnee had only been used since 1900, a settlement had been at that location since 1878, and it was first called Fairville and later Slaghts. The 320 acres Maddox bought excluded the eight acres that comprised the town of Shawnee.

Maddox and the seller, Alfred Crebbin, closed the deal on Jan. 1, 1903, for \$3,500 cash. In 2012 dollars, the amount would be close to \$80,000 – not a bad deal for 320 acres with water rights – but

quite a bit of cash to carry from Denver on the train.

Maddox named his business H. J. Maddox & Co.; the H. J. was in honor of his wife, Hilda Josephine. Later the name was changed to Maddox Ice Co.

Ice Harvest

The Maddox Ice Co. built two lakes on the property. They were drained long ago, but there is a lake in the vicinity today that covers a portion of the former Maddox property.

Arthur Hall, president of the Park County Historical Society, said the upper Maddox Lake “did cover most of the area where the current lake is.” When the weather got cold enough for two feet of ice to form on the lakes, the Maddox community was alive with the sounds of horses pulling scrapers across the frozen lakes to remove snow. Once that was done, workers would guide the horses in lines as straight as possible to score the ice, followed by men using gasoline-powered saws to cut blocks in uniform widths.

Each block was cut to the same exact size. The bottoms of the blocks, those that were on the underside of the lake, had to be trimmed and scraped because that side was never even. When that work was done, conveyor belts moved the ice blocks to train boxcars where they would be packed in insulating sawdust for shipment to Denver.

In an average winter, the company was able to harvest two cuttings of ice blocks, usually during the months of January and February.

Shipment to Denver

Brownie Anderson, Como-based railroad engineer with the Colorado & Southern, operated the ice trains when Maddox was

in business. He called the harvest the “January ice rush,” according to a Sept. 29, 2005, interview recorded with his son Andy Anderson, found on the Park County Local History Archives website, www.parkcoarchives.org.

“And of course they used every boxcar they could find,” said Andy Anderson. “And they had to work around the clock. They’d load 20 cars of ice, big blocks about the size of that sofa. They had big power saws out there sawing them up; they’d load them there in sawdust, and they’d make another move and load another boxcar (and) another boxcar and soon as that one was loaded, they headed towards Denver. Of course, in those days all of Denver was supplied by ice; they had iceboxes. They had the old ice truck and the guy with the tongs and the leather jacket on. He had to go up two flights of stairs with 30, 40 pounds of ice.”

In his book “Bits and Pieces of History along the 285 Corridor,” the late Park County historian Harold Warren said that in one shipment in January 1905, Maddox Ice Co. sent 30 trainloads of 20 cars each, or 600 loads of ice, to its warehouses in Denver. And they couldn’t ship all they had cut. Ice filled two warehouses near the lakes, ready for another shipment.

Earl Maddox, son of the founder, was quoted in a Feb. 27, 1977, Denver Post story as saying, “There would be days we’d pull 80 train carloads of ice out of those lakes. We’d bring the ice to Denver to store it, in sawdust, for the season’s use.”

Size of blocks

So how big is a block of ice?

Anderson, quoted above, said that each was as big as a sofa.

A caption of a photo on the Park County Local History Archives website showing a man maneuvering a block of ice up an incline on a conveyor belt, says “each ice block weighed about 1,800 (pounds).” In the photo, the block appears to be six or seven feet long and two feet thick.

For customers, the blocks were cut into smaller portions to fit each icebox; those portions cost the customer between 15 cents and 30 cents each.

Warren’s wife, the late Lenore Warren, lived in Denver as a child. She was quoted in the March 23, 1983, South Park Times in a story called “Bailey’s frozen past,” as saying, “It seems to me my mother would get 25 cents worth to fill our little icebox.”

She said Maddox was “the big ice company in Denver,” and every child admired the man who delivered ice. At each stop the iceman made, he would chip the block of ice to get it exactly the right size for the order. She said the children would hang around the ice truck to pick up the cold slivers of ice – it was a special treat on a hot summer day.

Setbacks

Life wasn’t always good for Maddox Ice. The Feb. 22, 1907, Flume reported: “Mr. Maddox and ice crew went to Denver Sunday,” meaning they left before the ice season was over.

The story continued, “It is feared the houses at Maddox will not be filled, as the ice is melting rapidly.”

February was warm that year, as evidenced by two sentences in the same Feb. 22 edition, saying, “Summer

weather still continues,” and, “How is this for a Florida climate?”

And then there were employee problems. The Feb. 14, 1908, Flume reported on the trial of “three rowdies, employed by the Maddox Ice company (sic), who created so much disturbance during the ice cutting at Maddox.”

They were accused of playing pranks on fellow employees that “were nothing less than brutality to the extent of bodily injury.”

The Flume doesn’t tell exactly what happened; it just says that a Maddox employee “suffered bruises as the result of penalties imposed upon him by their kangaroo court.” The rowdies were each fined \$3 and costs and were lectured by the court.

Recreational use

Maddox knew the frozen lakes would be a draw for people living in Bailey and Shawnee, and he freely allowed ice-skating, with one stipulation. The Flume of Jan. 29, 1904, said, “Mr. Maddox wishes it understood that fires on or about the lake are strictly prohibited.”

In the summer, it was a different story. To keep the ice pure, he put up signs saying, “Keep out, absolutely no fishing, hunting or loafing.” He did not want anyone near the lakes when they were not frozen.

Pure, clean water

Maddox’s rules kept the water and ice pure. The Denver-based Von Schulz and Low Chemical Laboratory tested the ice from the Maddox lakes. The report said, “The water, and therefore the ice from which it was derived, (is) remarkable for its extreme purity.” And, it said, “it is purer even than many rain waters. We believe it to be the purest natural water, including

artesian water, of which we have any record.”

Men were working on the Maddox lakes even before the water froze, to ensure the ice would be pure. A mention in the Nov. 25, 1904, Flume said that “a crew of 18 men are cleaning and floating the leaves and rubbish out of the Maddox ice in preparation for the coming cold weather.”

The local newspaper acknowledged the quality of the ice on the Maddox lakes and reported it to the public. A Dec. 8, 1905, Flume story said, “The best of ice is now freezing on the Maddox lake (sic). The lake has been floated several times to clear away all the dust, leaves and other rubbish.”

Given the heavy traffic on U.S. 285 and the increased population since 1937, it is unlikely a water test would show that amount of purity today.

The End

Two events occurred in the late 1930s that curtailed the lucrative ice business in Platte Canyon for Maddox and its competitors. The Colorado & Southern narrow gauge railroad shut down in 1937, taking away the means to economically move the ice to Denver. And in 1938 electric refrigerators were replacing iceboxes as the standard for storing food.

After the train route shut down, Maddox bought ice from other plants in Denver, and continued a gradually reduced home delivery service. It saw a small boom in deliveries during World War II when “people couldn’t buy new electrics during the war, or even get some of the old ones fixed,” said Earl Maddox in the Denver Post story. But by 1950, home delivery of ice had stopped.

Maddox Ice continued to operate as late as 1983, packaging ice for retail sales, but no evidence could be found that the company is in business today.

The land previously occupied by Maddox Ice Co. at 684 Alcott St. in Denver is now in use by Robinson Dairy.

Images on the following page.



Maddox Depot

The station at Maddox was between Bailey and Shawnee near the Maddox Lakes. The Colorado & Southern narrow gauge railroad brought the ice to Denver. (Photo courtesy of the Park County Local History Archives, Lassie Maddox Greenan Collection, Littleton Historical Museum)



SITE OF MADDOX LAKES

On Jan. 27, 2012, a water storage pond on the site of the early-1900s upper Maddox Lake overlooks the Platte Canyon School District buildings between Bailey and Shawnee. (Photo by Laura Van Dusen/The Flume)



Ice wagons 1915

Two Maddox ice wagons haul ice from the Maddox warehouses at 684 Alcott in Denver to a refrigeration ice station at 3131 S. Broadway in Englewood. Shortly before the U.S. involvement in World War I (April 1917), Maddox Ice Company started phasing out horse-drawn wagons to deliver ice and began using Model T and Model A Fords. (Photo courtesy of Englewood Public Library)



Maddox ice company

In this photo from the early 1900s, William Clay Maddox is behind the cutter and his son, Earl, almost hidden near the horse's head, is ready to lead the horse to scrape snow from the frozen lake. (Photo courtesy of Park County Local History Archives, Lassie Maddox Greenan Collection, Littleton Historical Museum)



A big block of ice

Blocks of ice about six or seven feet long and two feet thick were harvested from the Maddox Lakes between Bailey and Shawnee from 1903 to 1937. The blocks each weighed about 1,800 pounds. A system of conveyor belts moved the ice to the Maddox Depot. (Photo courtesy of Park County Local History Archives, Lassie Maddox Greenan Collection, Littleton Historical Museum)