History of Ice Carving

The history of ice carving begins with the harvesting ice. The earliest known record of an ice harvest is found in the *Shih cheng or "Book of Songs"* written at about 600 B.C. This collection of stories describes the everyday life of the Shensi warrior-farmers as they lived in the highlands of northwest China, and mentions their winter routine of flooding their fields with water. When the water had frozen, the ice was cut into blocks and stored in icehouses. The ice was used in the warmer months to keep their fish fresh.

In the 1600s, native hunters and fishermen of the Chinese province of Heilongjiang, on the border of Russia, designed ice lanterns for dark winter nights. They filled buckets with water to make ice, then slid it out, and put a candle in the hole to make a lantern. The trend spread, and people started hanging decorated lanterns from homes and parading them in carnivals. In 1897, the Transsiberian Railway was extended through the small Chinese fishing town of Harbin in Heilongjiang, once occupied by Russia. As a result of the traffic, Harbin grew into a cosmopolitan city. With below freezing winds from Siberia, and ice from the frozen Songhua river, Harbin became the home of the annual International Ice and Snow Sculpture Festival. Currently, this festival features the work of thousands of artists from all over the world.

The first well-documented ice palace was built as the setting for a monstrous joke. On the frozen River Neva, in the winter of 1740, a shivering bride and groom spent their wedding night in a building of ice. The palace was commissioned by the Empress Anna Ivanovna, who like Peter the Great, had a malicious sense of humor. In St.Petersburg, to distract the people from the bitter cold, Empress Anna had an ice palace built as the stage for a wedding. Anna forced Prince Mikhail Golitsyn to marry her exceptionally ugly servant. After the church ceremony, the bride and groom, covered in furs, seated in an iron cage fastened to the back of an elephant, headed an elaborate procession including horses, camels, wolves, & pigs. Guards posted outside made sure that they spent the whole night in the frozen mansion.

Harvesting natural ice increased throughout the world until the mid 1800's when Ice manufacturing began. In 1834, Jacob Perkins, obtained a British patent for the first ice making machine using ether. In 1859 Ferdinand Carre invented an ice machine that used ammonia, a much more volatile liquid. Cans of water were lowered into a 15 degree brine (Calcium Chloride) solution chilled by an ammonia system. Air was bubbled into the center of the can to make clear ice for carving. By 1920, 750,000 blocks of ice were made every day in the United States alone!

In 1892, Nellie Melba was performing in Wagner's opera *Lohengrin* at Covent Garden. The Duke of Orléans gave a dinner party to celebrate her triumph. For the occasion, Escoffier created a new dessert, and to display it, he used an ice sculpture of a swan (swans were featured in that opera). The swan carried peaches which rested on a bed of vanilla ice cream and which were topped with spun sugar.

The Sapporo Snow Festival which began in 1950 is one of Japan's largest winter events. Every winter, about two million people come to Sapporo to see the hundreds of beautiful snow and ice sculptures. For seven days in February, these statues and sculptures turn Sapporo into a winter dreamland of crystal-like ice and white snow. 1955, the Self-Defense Force joined in and built the very first massive snow sculpture, for which the Snow Festival has become famous for now.

In 1964 Virgil Clinebell invented a machine that produced 15 lb blocks of clear ice. This lead to the CB300 which makes crystal clear 300 lb blocks of ice. Modern carvers use crystal clear ice to make ice carvings. In recent times Ice carving has become more specialized. Because of this specialization more and more professional chefs are leaving ice art to the modern ice carving company.

Since 1989, Fairbanks Alaska has hosted the annual World Ice Art Championships. Over 100 sculptors come from around the world each year to sculpt large blocks of pristine natural ice. The competition is broken down into two main categories: Single Block and Multi-Block and each competition is further separated into Abstract and Realistic sculptures.

In the late 1980's there was a tool revolution lead by Mark Daukas. By winning numerous competitions he brought attention to the die grinder & angle grinder. Steve Brice has invented numerous tools including many ice carving bits & the nailboard. The art of ice sculpture is continually evolving; ice is spun on lathes & cut by routers controlled by computers. Affordable ice makers are now available that make 300lb. crystal clear blocks in your own freezer.

Works Cited

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