

S. 12. 2. – “The Last Ice Age”: The trade in natural ice as an agent of modernisation and economic integration in the 19th and early 20th century

Chair: Professor Per G. Norseng

(Project Manager Norwegian Maritime Museum/ Emeritus professor University of South-Eastern Norway)

Discussant: David Atkinson

(University of Hull)

Panel Abstract

The panel will present results from an on-going international research project, funded by the Research Council of Norway and managed by the Norwegian Maritime Museum in partnership with the University of Hull, Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA, and the University of South-Eastern Norway.

Our point of departure is the shipping of natural ice from Norway in the 19th and early 20th century. In the peak years, this annually employed thousands of people in coastal communities and hundreds of ships. The significance of these local businesses in wider geographical, economic, technological and cultural contexts remains to be systematically researched. Literally speaking the project aims at following the ice from Norwegian lakes and ponds to its markets, in Norway and overseas, and investigate the Norwegian ice trade as part of an extensive international trade in ice and a logistic revolution with far-reaching implications for production, transport, marketing and consumption of fresh foods, cold drinks, etc. in Europe and North America, prior to the proliferation of modern cooling technology. The investigation is divided in four discrete, yet related strands:

Strand 1 focuses on production and the role of climate and environmental factors as well as on technological developments, manpower, and property relations involved in the production process.

Strand 2 investigates the ‘supply chain’ that linked centres of ice production with markets that tended to grow in scale and scope in line with improvements in sea and land transportation and growing urban populations.

Strand 3 analyses the contribution made by natural ice in the improvement of food supplies, health conditions and standards of living, with Britain as the primary case.

Strand 4 investigates the impact of natural ice on societal taste, fashion and aesthetics, and the role of this commodity in driving the cultural and technological developments that shaped modern urban life.

The paper gives all contributed to a Forum on “The Last Ice Age” in the *International Journal of Maritime History* vol 34:1 2022.

Keywords

Ice trade, shipping, food logistics, dietary changes, new technology

Nature's Factory': The system of Norwegian natural ice production 1850-1920

EYVIND BAGLE (Norwegian Maritime Museum)

Abstract

Eyvind Bagle centers on how trade in a particular commodity, in this case natural ice sold as refrigerant from Norway to the UK and Europe between 1850-1920, was contingent on particular qualities of coastal societies. It reports from a close-up study of the ice trade as it transpired from two separate localities on the south-eastern coast of Norway; Kragerø town on the Telemark coast, and Nærnes/Røyken parish in the inner Oslo fjord. The aim is to portray how the production and sales of Norwegian natural ice developed from a somewhat random and seasonally restricted activity to an all-year “industry”, with an intricate social network forming across the seas. A part of the research is to look at how the supply side marketed natural ice, as demand increased and new technologies promised to free markets from the “tyranny of nature”.

Biography

Eyvind Bagle, cand.hilol. (MA) in history, head of the Department of Research and Exhibitions, Norwegian Maritime Museum, presently PhD student, Faculty of Humanities, Sports and Educational Science

Two shipping conferences in the natural-ice trade

KNUT M. NYGAARD (University of South-Eastern Norway / Oslo Metropolitan University)

Abstract

A conference in shipping can be understood as a cartel-like association of competing shipping companies. The purpose is to ensure stable framework conditions in the form of “sensible” stable freight rates. Conferences were first used in the second half of the 19th century by liner shipping companies. In tramp shipping, conferences became relevant at the beginning of the 20th century. This article tells the story of two conferences in the tramp shipping segment transport of ice, both of which were active in the early twentieth century. Two groups of shipping companies, inspired by international developments, were established. One grouping was organized as most conferences were, while the other was organized more broadly. The former was a conference for shipping companies with wooden steamships, while the latter was for shipping companies with sailing ships. We follow the development of these two organizations in relation to the Norwegian export of natural ice. The article assesses the significance of ice freight for Norwegian shipping during the early twentieth century, the extent to which the two conferences were able to establish minimum rates for the transport of ice and why the two conferences developed differently.

Biography

Knut M. Nygaard PhD, has a broad national and international working experience, and has been director of museums and libraries. His main research interests are within maritime economic history. His Diploma theses in economics, his MA theses in history, and his PhD theses, are all within this field. Nygaard is currently doing research in the international research project “The Last Ice Age”: The trade in natural ice as an agent of modernisation and economic integration in the 19th and early 20th century.

Ice Wars: Imported Norwegian natural ice versus artificially manufactured French ice in Northern France 1890-1920

EFFIE DOROVITSA (Blaydes Maritime Centre, University of Hull)

Abstract

Norwegian natural ice blocks were regularly shipped to numerous French ports, mainly in Northern France, between 1870 and 1920, where they largely served to satisfy demand from both the fisheries and tourism sectors. The peak of this trade overlapped chronologically with the emergence of refrigeration technology in France in the last decade of the nineteenth century. This paper accounts for the antagonism between Norwegian natural ice and the French manufactured ice during that period. It showcases how the two products got embroiled in heated debates over their hygienic qualities and safety for consumption, driven by the new realities and reforms in the field of public health.

Employing a diverse set of primary sources and drawing from Fischler's (1988) notion of neophobia, the fear attached to a newly introduced food product, this paper argues that frozen food was deemed impure and taboo in nineteenth-century French culture, thus enabling Norwegian natural ice imports to retain their popularity in the French market long after the introduction of refrigeration technology. A propagandist campaign on behalf of the French artificial ice industrialists to eliminate Norwegian ice imports on protectionist grounds further failed to halt the influx of the 'crystal blocks of ice' from the Scandinavian country. As this paper demonstrates, this self-interested propaganda, ultimately collapsed under the weight of the growing needs of the local economies which heavily relied on Norwegian natural ice for the smooth operation of their fisheries and leisure industries.

Biography

Effie Dorovitsa is a second year PhD student of Maritime History at the University of Hull and is based at the Blaydes Maritime Centre. Her research interests lie in the intersection of Maritime History with Cultural studies and how they could inform one another. She has received her BA and MSc degrees in History from the University of Athens and the University of Edinburgh respectively. She has lectured in History and Ethnology in various Colleges and was also employed in secondary education as well as in the cultural/heritage sector.