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Municipal Ice Plants Successful

Agitation for municipal ice plants long been heralded as the home of the only municipal ice plant in America. This is not exactly true. It is the only manufacturing plant. Two cities in Connecticut have harvesting or "natural" ice plants, and one city in Connecticut and one in Florida have voted to establish a manufacturing plant.

Ice in Weatherford is a by-product of the municipally owned electric light and water plant. Late in 1912 an available bond issue of \$9000 was used as the basis for a contract with the Carbondale Machinery Company to build a ten-ton exhaust steam ice plant of the atmosphere type. The plant, as told by Municipal Engineering of May, 1914, operates in this manner: Ammonia gas is driven off of aqua ammonia and condensed by steam heat in the generator coils. The only moving part about the system is a small pump corresponding to a boiler-feed pump requiring hardly more than a tenth of a horsepower per ton ice capacity. Exhaust steam at three pounds pressure from the electric light engines and pumps is used in the generator coils.

The machinery and building represent an expenditure of \$11,000. This is about \$2000 more than the cost of

installing an electrically driven compression machine, but the low operating cost more than offsets the high first cost. When running full capacity, the total operating cost is 50 cents, of which 10 cents is for fuel and 40 cents for labor. Figuring current at two cents per kilowatt hour, the power cost per ton would have been at least \$1.25, as against the present 10 cent fuel cost. The saving in operating cost will very soon make up the difference in first cost.

The plant was started in April, 1913, and to January 1, 1914, the ice sales amounted to \$4,628.55. The total cost of manufacturing ice was \$2,137.19, of which \$1,103.70 was for delivery and \$1,033.49 for all other expenses. The profit, therefore, was \$2,491.36.

The prices of ice, delivered, are: Less than 1000 pounds, 50 cents per 100; 1000 pounds or more, in full blocks on one delivery, 30 cents per 100. On platform: Less than 300 pounds, 40 cents per 100; 300 to 1000 pounds, full blocks, 25 cents per 100; 1000 pounds or more, 20 cents per 100. Carload, f. o. b. municipal siding, 15 cents per 100, or \$3.00 a ton.

It is said that the indirect profit to the consumers, due to the reduction in the cost of ice and full weight measure, was at least \$1200.

Willamette, Conn., has a harvesting or "natural" ice plant, the bonds for which were voted on by the people in a mass meeting on August 26, 1913. (See the Party Builder, November 8, 1913.) The history of the plant goes back to 1907, when the State Legislature authorized the city to harvest, manufacture and sell ice. So the people of Willamette voted to establish an ice plant. In the Winter of 1912-13 the board of aldermen appropriated \$1000 for the purpose of cutting and harvesting ice. The demand for ice is 10,000 tons. The city harvested 1200 tons, and expected to buy the balance from the local ice dealers, but was prevented from doing so by the Corporation Counsel, who branded such a move "unconstitutional." At this point one of the local dealers shipped his supply, about 4000 tons, out of the city. The other dealer threatened to do likewise. The Common Council found itself powerless to stop him, but urged a local fruit and produce commission merchant to buy the stock, which he did, selling it at 60 cents per 1000 pounds.

Then, when the city attempted to deliver its ice, the Corporation Counsel declared that it was without its constitutional rights in so doing. This decision was disastrous in its effect, for the people were compelled to call at the city ice houses for their ice, which caused, in a measure, a loss of interest in the principle of municipal ownership. And because this method of sale was so unsatisfactory, the city was compelled to turn its small supply over to a private firm at \$2.00 a ton. This firm was put under a bond to retail it at not more than 40 cents per 100 pounds, and to not whole-sale it.

Won by Big Majority.

The public soon learned that the reason for this apparent failure was due to the fact that the city did not harvest enough ice. Consequently, the bond issue of \$8000 spoken of before, carried by more than a three to one vote. This covers an addition to the previous plant, costing \$6000; the necessary machinery cost \$1500, and additional tools \$300. Mr. S. E. Beardsley, state secretary of the Socialist party of Connecticut, is authority for the statement that "the city of Willamette harvested about 10,000 tons of ice (in 1913-14) and is now selling it to the people at a tremendous saving to them."

In 1907 the City Council of New Britain, Conn., made a provision for a bond issue of \$100,000 with which to establish a municipal ice plant. No action was taken, however, before August, 1913, when the Common Council appointed a committee to "investigate the conditions of erecting a plant." The commission inclined favorably to the idea of erecting an ice house on a nearby lake. This plant, it was thought, would cost not to exceed \$8000.

By the use of an electric device, and under supervision of the Board of Health, the ice could be freed from contamination. Acting upon the committee's report, the City Council erected an ice house, 75 feet long, 50 feet wide and 30 feet high, with gable roof. A chain conveyor is used to carry the ice from the pond to the house. This is operated by a two-cylinder gas engine. It handles 5000 tons of ice in ten working hours.

The capacity of the plant is 9000 tons. This will by no means satisfy the demands of the city, estimated to be about 29,000 tons. A letter from Mr. Theodore L. Wagner, chairman of the Ice Committee, dated January 21, 1914, indicates that it is the intention to let the delivery by contract for enough to cover the interest on the investment (\$10,000), the contractor to furnish a bond and to agree to charge not over 30 cents per 100 pounds retail.

By state legislation the City of South Norwalk, Conn. (which already owns its electric light plant and water works), is empowered to "engage in the business of manufacturing, producing, buying and selling ice," and may, "in pursuance of the power thus granted . . . purchase or lease land and buildings, erect buildings, purchase or lease and install machinery, apparatus, supplies, appliances and

tools," etc., with authority to take "all necessary electrical energy to operate said ice works from the electric works and to take all necessary water from the water works, paying the established minimum or a lower rate of not less than cost for same." The city is authorized to "issue ice works bonds to an amount not exceeding . . . \$60,000." This act took effect after "approved by a majority vote of a special city meeting or a special city election called by the Mayor and Council."

On June 14, 1913, the Governor of Connecticut approved a bill authorizing Hartford to "use any moneys within its control to manufacture, buy, house and sell ice," etc.

The voters of Bridgeport, Conn., in November, 1913, approved a referendum to erect a municipal ice plant.

In Fernandino, Fla., a municipal ice plant, to cost \$50,000, will be operated in connection with the city's light and power plant.

Probably the most spectacular attempt to establish a municipal ice plant was made by the Socialists in Schenectady, N. Y. Soon after taking office, in November, 1911, they secured and filled an ice house on the banks of the Mohawk River within the city limits, for the charity department. This was the first step in the "ice-a-cost" program. It was originally the intention of the administration to confine the ice to free distribution among the poor. But it soon decided that ice is water, that the city should have the right to supply ice, as it has to supply water, to the public, and so transferred the activity to the Water Bureau. Early in June, 1912, this bureau started to sell ice to the public at 25 cents per 100 pounds, in competition with the price of 40 cents charged by private concerns. By July 1 over 1000 customers were served daily.

Then the interests discovered that the city charter does not permit the city to take so radical a step, and a Supreme Court injunction was served upon the city officials on the afternoon of July 3, enjoining them severally and jointly, as city officials, "from transferring, selling, sending or displaying for sale any wages or bills in connection with the past delivery of ice." To circumvent this injunction, and to supply ice over the holiday, the city officials formed a co-operative company, purchased ice from Troy and sold it. Then they made arrangements to continue to sell ice at 25 cents for the remainder of the Summer.

When the engineers, firemen and drivers in the different ice companies in Cincinnati placed before their employers a demand for higher wages and fewer hours, the latter refused to consider it, and the men went on strike. The plants remained closed about ten days. Because of the ice famine that threatened the health of the city, the Mayor, on July 3, seized the plants, which were operated under the direction of the city by the men who had gone out on strike, at the old scale of wages, but on shorter shifts.

According to Guy M. Mallon, attorney for the city, in charge, the engineers and firemen showed great industry and resourcefulness in refreezing the ice that was left in cans and by "putting it on the platform" in 12 hours, when it was thought it would be three or four days before the ice would be ready to sell. The ice in storage was frozen into solid masses and was with difficulty put into shape. On the fourth day there was new ice at most of the plants, and on the fifth all were producing at full capacity. On the sixth day the plants were returned to the companies in as good condition as when taken by the city. The receipts taken in by the city were in excess of \$8,000. Wages paid were about \$1,700, and the bills for coal and supplies did not exceed \$300. The profit made was claimed by the companies, and it was thought the city would have to defend its right to the money by court action. So far as we know, however, no suit was brought.

Toledo, Ohio, harvested about 250 tons of ice in 1912, which was distributed free the succeeding summer. The ice was cut and stored by the workhouse prisoners. The Mayor's office is authority for the statement (made July 18, 1913) that the "establishment of a municipal ice plant is under consideration and will probably come to some result next year."

An experiment which was not carried to its conclusion, which therefore was costly, and which ever since has been used by opponents of municipal ownership as a sample of municipal inefficiency, was made at Boston, Mass. By the magazine, Concerning Municipal Ownership, it was claimed that 950 tons of ice cut from the city reservoir cost the city about \$60 a ton. This magazine, to quote the National Municipal Review, was "published for the sole purpose of showing the horrible examples of failure in municipal ownership, and it was not always as discriminating as it might have been in reporting extenuating or explanatory circumstances."

That "extenuating or explanatory circumstances" had something to do with the "failure" is shown by the following by George E. Roemer, Jr., of Boston: "It is true that in the winter of 1898-99 the Water Commissioner for the City of Boston harvested ice in two of the city reservoirs. The expense involved was quite heavy, for the reason that ice houses had to be constructed and special

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