

The Iceman Cometh

BY JONAH SUSSKIND

I am not really a suspicious person by nature. That's not to say I'm not curious, but I tend to assume things are in their right place until proven otherwise. I guess that's why this has taken me so long. This week will mark two years of walking or riding past Acme Ice on Kirkland Street twice a day. At first, I didn't pay much attention to it. It was like swimming across a pond and passing through a mysterious cold spot. You notice, but it doesn't really bother you—at least not at first. It's when you swim through the same cold spot every day, always in the same place—you're going to begin to wonder about it—start asking questions. That's when you begin to imagine the muck below... and the darkness below that.

I guess it was the same with Acme Ice. Every day I would pass through this neighborhood with its historical homes, high-end family restaurants, and specialty shops, and then suddenly encounter this aberrant patch of crude industrial landscape... this cold spot with its

crooked sign that reads more like a warning than an advertisement, "WE SELL BOOZE LUGES."

Naturally I began to wonder. I began digging into the muck. And I'm not the only one. I've heard the rumors. You probably have too. Rumors about why their address is listed in Cambridge but their operation sits just over the

line in Somerville. Rumors about ties to Frederic Tudor, the man they nicknamed the Ice King who made his fortune carving up the frozen ponds of New England and selling blocks of ice by the boatload to remote tropical cities like Calcutta. You've probably heard the speculations. Historians say maybe it was no coincidence that Tudor



Image courtesy of the author.

finally crawled out of debt in 1837, the very same year that dry ice was discovered by chemists in France. We know that he spent much of his early profits on real-estate right here in this neighborhood where he built ice house prototypes in order to stay ahead of the competition. Could it be that there is some historical trade secret buried beneath the blacktop here? Some have whispered that the ice could be a front—a cover for something more sinister. After all they point out, what other ice vendor advertises 24/7 delivery? Others have even gone as far as to make detailed claims about dry-ice supply contracts with secret biotech labs working outside institutional oversight, performing ethically dubious experiments. A little far-fetched maybe, but come on, this *is* Cambridge. Am I supposed to believe that there are enough low budget special effects studios and basement raves in this town to warrant so much dry ice? Still others have simply remained quietly suspicious. Maybe they figure that Acme Ice is like the Cambridge version of a Chinese “nail house,” a real estate holdout that has refused to participate in the changing nature of a local development paradigm—some post-capitalist plight of a spirited business owner

choosing place of pride over pride of place.

Personally, I just think the community has the right to know the truth. Besides, if there’s one thing I’ve learned about living in this town, it’s that you don’t go pointing fingers at the local ice man without some evidence to back it up. So here I am. This is my third consecutive day in the car across the street from Acme with the window cracked, listening, watching, waiting for a clue, a sign, anything that might help put the pieces together. It is currently 11:50 a.m. and there isn’t much going on. The gray haired guy with the black boots has been inside his makeshift office since I got here an hour ago. It’s unusually quiet this morning. Something doesn’t feel right. A big plastic tub is sitting precariously on its side in the middle of the lot and a thin veil of fog is spilling out onto the hot pavement. Is this a signal? Am I the only one who notices?