

# COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.  
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

VOL. II. NO. 15

SAN DIEGO, ALTA CALIFORNIA, DECEMBER 19, 2008

PRICE: FREE

**"Ice always on hand."**

**William F. Menell**  
District Services Manager  
San Diego Coast District

At the Cosmopolitan Saloon you can get fine imported Havana cigars 20 and 25 cents each, or three for 50 cents; all other choice brands at regular bar rates, and the "Uncle Toby" five for 25 cents. Fresh lager beer, coolest in the city, by the glass, bottle or gallon, and all other beverages of the best quality. Ice always on hand.

Albert Seeley, in his advertisements for the Cosmopolitan states, "Ice always on hand." Today, this statement would seem obvious. But in the 1870s, decades before *General Electric* produced the first home refrigerator with a freezer compartment in 1939, ice in balmy San Diego was no easy feat. So the question is, where did he get it?

From about 1,000 BC--when it was recorded the Chinese cut and stored ice--to the mid 1800s, all ice was harvested. In the early 1800s there was a brisk ice trade, primarily from Boston's "Ice King" Fredrick Tudor. The *Tudor Ice Company* operated from 1805 to 1863 and owned icehouses

in Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, Galle, Singapore, Jamaica, Havana, New Orleans, and Charleston. The ice was shipped in sawdust, so it could survive the long sea journeys.

California also got ice from the East coast, a slow and expensive process, until the *Union Ice Company* contracted with Russian Alaska in 1851. Rival companies soon followed. The *California Ice Company* bought 250 tons of ice from the Russians in 1852, using straw for insulation. The next year, a third ice company, the *American Russian Commercial Company* was founded in San Francisco. The price, \$75 a ton, made the Eastern companies non-competitive.

On the horizon however, was a deal breaker, machines that made ice. Dr. Gorrie of Florida--whose main concern was not cold drinks but to treat yellow fever patients--built his first cooling machine in 1834, and was granted the first U.S. patent for mechanical refrigeration in 1851. The Northern press, especially in Boston, scoffed at the idea of machine-made ice, and his invention was never successful commercially.

The first real break-through for modern refrigeration was an 1860 U.S. patent granted to Ferdinand P.E. Carre of France. His system used

ammonia, which is still the most common method of commercial cooling today.

Much more successful at marketing, Carre's machines were quickly bought by breweries all over the country. Cold storage buildings for meat packers used refrigeration units, and railroad cars and ships began to provide refrigerated transport.

In Seeley's time, there were 3 breweries in San Diego; the *City Brewery*, the *San Francisco Brewery*, and the *Philadelphia Brewery*, and it is possible he bought ice from one of them. Lager beer--also advertised--requires cold storage, so a brewery that made lager may have also have had an ice machine.

But another option is also possible. When Jose Aguilar was the Mayor of Los Angeles, (1866-68) an ice factory was built there, which sold ice for 4 cents a pound. In a letter written by D.M. Berry, about San Diego, in early 1873, he states: "even the ice they use is made in a factory in Los Angles..."

So, the next time you need to come up with a toast, remember Dr. Gorrie, and Mr. Carre, the inventors that helped cool your beer or sparkling wine, or put the ice in your glass.

