

## The Five+ Families of Cape Pond Ice

by Brittany Stuart, Kristin Czarnecki,  
and Scott Memhard

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## FOREWORD

Sometimes, the simplest ideas have a way of bringing people together. For the city of Gloucester, one man's dream of starting an ice company has done just that. Although it isn't given much thought, ice is behind every warm summer day's cookout, in the glass of water ordered at a restaurant, and in the cooler on a day spent fishing off the East Gloucester breakwater. Today, this one ingredient is there whenever needed without trouble, but in nineteenth-century Gloucester, it was a difficult commodity to come by.

Sailing out of Gloucester harbor today, it is nearly impossible to miss Cape Pond Ice's large white building with its colorful snowflake logo on the side. Established on Cape Ann in 1848, Cape Pond Ice and its operators have been a fundamental part of the Gloucester community and waterfront. Fondly referred to as "The Coolest Guys Around," the five+ families of Cape Pond Ice have left their mark on the city's history.

## ABOUT THE COVER PHOTO

The Memhards of Cape Pond Ice, 2023. On left, Larry Memhard – Vice President, Operations and Plant Manager, with his father Scott Memhard – part owner, President, and General Manager.

Photo credit by Terry Weber Mangos.

# The Five+ Families of Cape Pond Ice

BY BRITTANY STUART, KRISTIN CZARNECKI, AND SCOTT MEMHARD

## The Websters: 1848–c.1904

It all began in the mid-1800s; Gloucester was one of the busiest fishing ports in the country. The docks were buzzing with activity as locally caught fish were being landed by the ton and preserved by salting and small-scale ice making.<sup>1</sup> A local blacksmith, Nathaniel R. Webster, noticed the antiquated and inconvenient seafood preservation methods and devised a plan. Inspired in part by Bostonian Frederic Tudor, an ice industry pioneer who brought the Boston ice industry from an exclusively local business to one that spanned across the globe<sup>2</sup>, Webster decided to start an ice company. Rather than shipping ice globally, however, Webster was determined to bring a reliable large-volume source of ice to the Gloucester fishing industry.

In 1848, Webster built an icehouse and created Webster's Pond. To build the pond, Webster constructed an earthen dam on the brook running through his property. The pond, which does not exist today, was located at the site of Veterans Memorial Elementary School and the Route 128 extension. With the development of an icehouse and pond, the Gloucester Ice Company<sup>3</sup> was born. This original 100-foot dam quickly washed away, but Webster was not discouraged. By 1852, he had built two new icehouses on Upper and Lower Day's Ponds along present-day Eastern Avenue. Demand



PHOTO CREDIT: CAPE ANN MUSEUM ARCHIVES

Ice harvesting at Webster's Pond in Gloucester, circa 1852.

1 *Gloucester Daily Times*, 3/6/2013, "Cape Pond's Ice Boasts Rich History," Richard Gaines.

2 [www.smithsonianmag.com](http://www.smithsonianmag.com), 3/2/2011, "The Ice King Cometh: Frederic Tudor, Father of the Ice Industry," Lisa Braman.

3 *TimeShip for Kids Newsletter*, Cape Ann Museum, Winter 2009.



exceeded supply, and Webster expanded his operations to Cape Pond in Rockport. Covering almost 70 acres, Cape Pond provided the ice Webster needed to successfully accommodate the fishermen's needs.

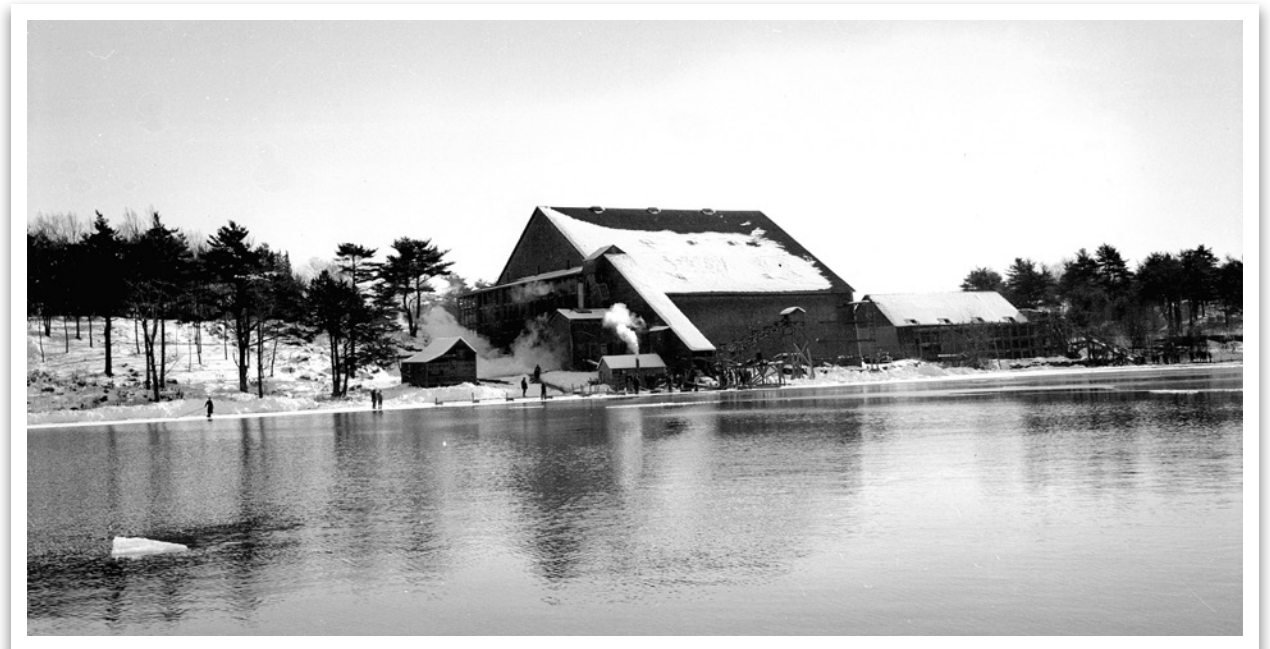


PHOTO CREDIT: CAPE ANN MUSEUM ARCHIVES

The Great House (icehouse) at Cape Pond, circa 1930s.

Nathaniel Webster passed away in 1858, ten years after starting the Gloucester Ice Company. In a short time, the Webster family was able to accomplish the unthinkable and provide the city's residents with a method of keeping fish fresh. The work of the Websters increased the quality and freshness over the salted fish of the past, and for this, many were grateful. As a tribute to the late Nathaniel Webster, Sr., a replica of his distinctive yellow and white Greek revival home still stands today overlooking Gloucester Harbor.

When Webster passed away, his son, Nathaniel Webster, Jr., took over operations, and the company became Cape Pond Ice Company. A successful businessman, young Webster successfully accommodated the fishermen's growing demand for reliable ice, and the company thrived under his leadership. Remembered as one of Gloucester's most remarkable citizens, young Webster was also, for many years, one of the heaviest taxpayers in the city.<sup>4</sup>

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4 *Gloucester Daily Times*, December 1900, Nathaniel Webster's Obituary.

## The Homans: 1876–1908

As with most great ideas, the creation of Cape Pond Ice Company and its ensuing success inspired numerous competitors to enter the local ice industry. In 1876, the Homan brothers, Francis and William, built 32-acre Fernwood Lake in West Gloucester for the sole purpose of harvesting ice. Their state-of-the-art icehouse measured 236 by 210 feet with an ice storage capacity of over 30,000 tons. At the time, this was thought to be the largest building in Massachusetts.

With multiple ice companies offering a compositionally identical product, the competition was fierce, and “ice wars” began to evolve. These suspicious events often made the local news, including stories of destroyed ice harvests to mysterious icehouse fires. One such article depicts an instance in which the Homans’ Fernwood Lake harvest was vandalized.<sup>5</sup> Suspected to be the work of someone within the industry, the lake’s surface had thirty perfectly square holes chiseled into it. These holes allowed water from below to resurface above the ice and were intended to ruin the crop. The article mentions additional crimes, such as the burning of multiple icehouses, including a couple belonging to the Websters. The Homans, in particular, were subjected to disdain from other icehouses as they undercut prices

<sup>5</sup> *Cape Ann Advertiser*, 12/15/1876, “Dastardly Attempt to Ruin the Ice Crop at Fernwood Lake, West Gloucester.”



A fire at the Webster's Pond destroys the icehouse and damages nearby property. July 3–4, 1898.



Note the Homan name on side of ice delivery wagon. Circa late 1800s.

to attract additional customers but were well-liked by Gloucester's fishing community. Even when Webster at Cape Pond Ice Company cut his ice prices to \$2 per ton, many customers maintained their loyalty to the Homans' ice.<sup>6</sup>

To demonstrate his love for Gloucester, Francis Homans' will directed his share of the annual business proceeds to be distributed amongst the city. He requested half the proceeds go to the Master Mariners Association, a quarter to Addison Gilbert Hospital, and the remaining profits to fishermen in need. He also requested that should the Master Mariners Association cease to exist, the proceeds go directly to Addison Gilbert Hospital to provide free care to poor fishermen. The Homans' Fishermen's Endowed Ice Company continued to operate in Gloucester until 1908, when Francis Homans sold the Fernwood Lake ice operations to Cape Pond Ice Company, now owned by the Abbotts of Rockport.<sup>7</sup>

## The Abbotts: 1908–1943

Freeman H. Abbott and his cousin, James Abbott, began their career in the ice industry as ice runners for the Websters. Later, they opted to branch out independently and established

the F.H. Abbott Ice Company in 1895. Soon after, they acquired the Cape Pond Ice Company. At that time, Cape Pond Ice provided 50,000 tons of ice to fishermen per year and even more ice to residents.<sup>8</sup> A truly local company, after the Abbotts purchased the Fernwood Lake Ice operations from Homans, they raised additional capital through a public offering. They insisted that all shares be held by local Gloucester people, with Francis Homans holding the largest number of shares.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID COLLINS

Father and son, both named Millard E. Collins, working for Cape Pond Ice! Circa 1915.

6 *Refrigerating World, Cold Storage and Ice Trade Journal*, March 1908, Volume 35, Page 73.

7 *Refrigerating World, Cold Storage and Ice Trade Journal*, March 1908, Volume 35, Page 50.

8 *Refrigeration World, Cold Storage and Ice Trade Journal*, April 1908, Volume 35, Page 75.

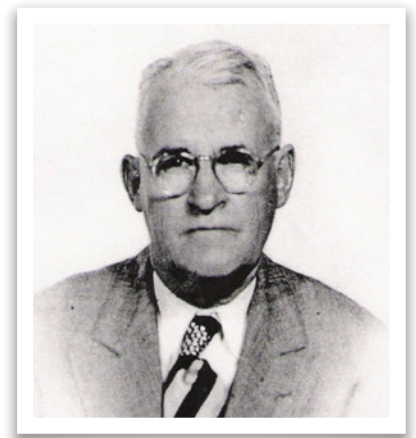
By 1916, Cape Pond Ice employed 60 men during the cutting season, with 20 teams and five automobile trucks. The customer base included the fisheries, Cape Ann residents, and summer hotels. The main office for the ice company was located at 105 ½ Main St in Gloucester, currently the location of Mark Adrien Shoes and the Cape Ann Savings Bank.

Freeman Abbott was an active member of the community. He was a part of the New England Ice Dealers Association and numerous local organizations. A family man, Freeman Abbott had five children. He passed away unexpectedly in August of 1921 during a trip to Alton Bay, NH—one of Cape Pond Ice Company's many supply sources. After his passing, his cousin James continued to run operations until his son E. Raymond "Ray" Abbott took over the company in approximately 1925.<sup>9</sup>

In a 2019 interview with Good Morning Gloucester, Ray recalled his commitment to the Gloucester community that went beyond supplying ice: "In 1943, I decided to sell the Cape Pond Ice Company. However, before doing so, I gave Upper Day's Pond to the city of Gloucester so that the children always had a place to skate in the winter, in the summertime, provide a pond for fishing, as well as a beautiful subject for our local artists to paint. It was during this same period that I was able to acquire most of the land around Cape Pond and later gave my interest to the town of Rockport to be used as a watershed."<sup>10</sup> Today, Cape Pond is one of the primary water supply sources for the town of Rockport.<sup>11</sup>

## The Ryans: 1943–1983

As time passed, technology and the way people sourced ice began to evolve. In 1943, entrepreneur John Ryan decided to purchase Cape Pond Ice Company. In 1944, Gloucester reportedly brought in 188 million pounds of fish. By 1946, this number had risen to 215 million pounds, and the fishing fleet struggled to find the essential



John Ryan, circa early 1940's.

<sup>9</sup> *Refrigerating World, Cold Storage and Ice Trade Journal*, September, 1921, Volume 56, Page 20.

<sup>10</sup> Direct quote from <https://goodmorninggloucester.com/2019/06/13/1979-time-capsule-e-raymond-abbott-former-cape-pond-ice-owner-and-gloucester-philanthropist-on-the-history-of-days-pond-its-waterlilies-and-a-rockport-watershed/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.rockportma.gov/water-filtration-division/pages/water-system-information>



quantities of ice locally. Ryan recognized the opportunity to revolutionize the company's production methods and began constructing a manufacturing plant at the end of Commercial Street, the same factory that stands today. Instead of mother nature's temperamental cooling, Ryan's plant was reliably refrigerated with liquified ammonia. The factory produced over 300 tons of ice per day, with each ice block weighing over 300 pounds. The prime location proved convenient, allowing Ryan to service local businesses and load ice directly onto the fishing boats as they headed to sea.

The Gloucester fishing fleet was incredibly grateful for Ryan's ingenuity. His factory allowed the fishermen to spend more time fishing, as they previously traveled to distant ports to locate the needed ice. His ice was also invaluable to the fish processing firms. They used it to chill the fresh fish they purchased on the docks, fish that would have otherwise spoiled in the stagnant heat of the summer without ice. Ryan's faith in the future of the Gloucester fishing industry and his revitalization of the ice company encouraged their ensuing growth and success.

The Gloucester fishing industry continued to flourish as regulators ruled in favor of the local fisheries. The Magnuson Act and the new 200-mile limit that excluded foreign fishing vessels further encouraged the Gloucester fisheries' success into the 1970s and 1980s. From 1943–1986, Cape Pond Ice Company's general manager, Philip "Phil" E. Harvey, dedicated his time to ensuring operations ran smoothly, and the fishermen got the ice they needed.

### **Philip E. Harvey, General Manager: 1943–1986**

Although Phil Harvey was not an owner like the other families mentioned in Cape Pond Ice's history, he was definitely part of the Cape Pond Ice family. One of the last true icemen, Phil was one of the most influential employees Cape Pond Ice had ever seen. Phil's ice career



Capt. Sammy Randazza loading ice onto the F/V Debbie Rose, 1978.

PHOTO CREDIT: CHARLES A. LOWE/GLOUCESTER DAILY TIMES

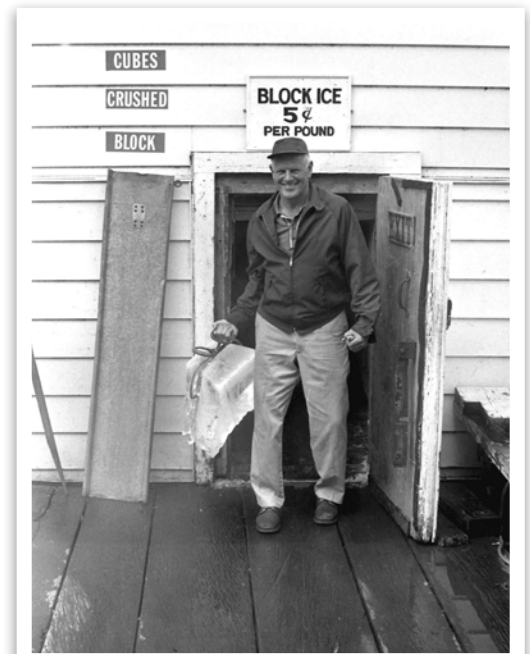


began with the natural ice harvests on Fernwood Lake and Cape Pond and persevered well into the days of modernized mechanical refrigeration. A Jack-of-all-trades, Phil's expertise was spread across many areas. To be an effective factory manager, he worked on refrigeration, plumbing, carpentry, and electrical. He maintained the factory, kept the books, serviced the customers, and managed the employees. He was always available when the customers or factory needed him—whether it was an unexpected midnight boat looking for a fill-up or a truck looking to be loaded with ice blocks well past closing time.

Phil's dedication to his work and sense of responsibility toward the company led many customers to assume he was the owner. His charismatic and dignified personality was always enjoyed, and he is remembered fondly by many. He set a fine standard: he was physically tall, strong, handsome, and always courteous and direct. You couldn't help admiring Phil, even at his most stubborn. Many Gloucester men passed memorable seasons working under Phil's leadership in the cold hard work of the icehouse. He set high expectations for those he worked with and taught many what

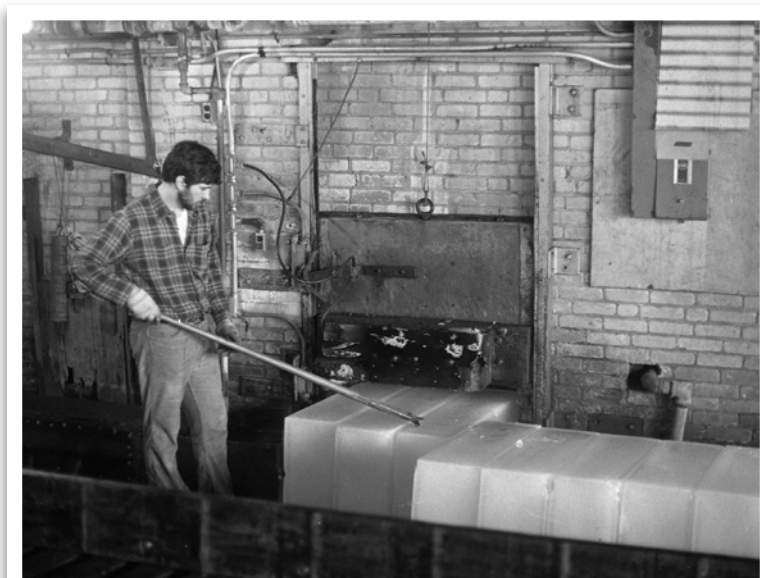
being a hardworking, respectable man meant. Phil's son, grandson, and even a great-grandson have all put their time into working at Cape Pond Ice.

When not managing Cape Pond Ice, Phil enjoyed his roses and gardening on Thurston's Point and traveling around the world during the January-February off-season. He dedicated much of his free time to exploring Cape Ann's local wild haunts, from Agassiz Rock to Dykes Meadow Reservoir. He was also an avid bowler, using his ambidextrous abilities



Phil Harvey carrying a block of ice, 1978.

PHOTO CREDIT: CHARLES A. LOWE/GLOUCESTER DAILY TIMES



Employee John Alves moving ice from production room into freezer, 1978.

PHOTO CREDIT: CHARLES A. LOWE/GLOUCESTER DAILY TIMES

to confound many opponents. Philip E. Harvey died suddenly at age 71, just three years into his retirement, on December 20, 1989, while chopping firewood. To this day, his photo still greets you as you walk into the front office at Cape Pond Ice Company.

## The Memhards: 1983–Present Day

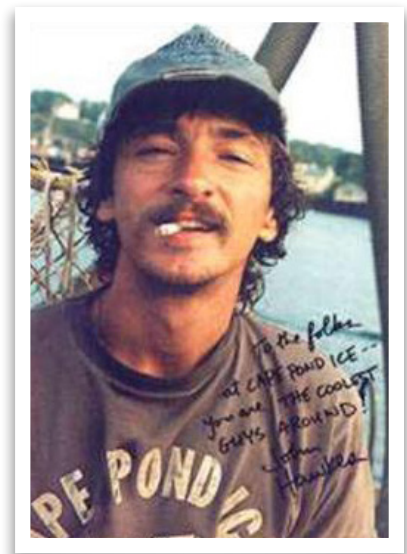
As with any industry, the ice business is continuously evolving. By 1983, the Ryan family decided to sell Cape Pond Ice Company to the ambitious Memhard family. Newcomers to the ice industry, Richard and Scott Memhard, worked alongside Phil Harvey to learn the ins and outs of the business.

As Gloucester's fishing industry declined, the Memhards' resilience was tested as they redesigned the business, attempting to compete with modern technology and times. New technology, such as the automatic ice-makers in home freezers and Refrigerated Salt Water (RSW) chilling systems on boats, decreased the demand for ice in both commercial and residential settings. Never ones to give up, the Memhard family persevered, adapting the business to the times.

## The Coolest Slogan Around

Gloucester has its iconic Fisherman's Statue, no question. But in Gloucester's business world, Cape Pond Ice's "Coolest Guys & Gals Around" slogan and logo are arguably amongst the most recognized in the region and beyond.

Scott Memhard conceptualized the slogan/logo in 1988. He and his team worked successfully to market and promote the business and the brand, bringing it to an iconic Gloucester status. He worked with local graphic designers including Helen Ann Lind, Deena Prestagard of SIRGE Marketing, and Gloucester's Bill Anderson, professor at Emerson College, along with his marketing students.



Signed photo of actor John Hawkes wearing the Cape Pond Ice tee shirt in *The Perfect Storm* movie, 2000.

Hand in hand with a marketing logo and slogan came the creation of tee shirts, sweat-shirts, caps, and more, helping Cape Pond Ice to diversify and thrive in a changing business. Memhard's marketing received more recognition when his tee shirt was featured in the movie based on Sebastian Junger's book *The Perfect Storm* in 2000. Even the Los Angeles Times took notice in an article published on August 2, 2000, titled *After the Storm, a Tempest of T-Shirts*.

In the early 1990s, the Memhards modernized the factory by investing in a new automatic ice maker capable of producing 40 tons per day without the manual labor required to produce block ice. They upgraded the icehouse's insulation and invested in an ice delivery system that allowed them to load ice onto trucks and boats at one ton per minute. Cape Pond Ice bagged ice soon became a staple at most convenience stores on Cape Ann, and the Memhards further expanded their operations by purchasing Lighthouse Ice. This was a smaller company started by Fran Tarr on Pond Road in Gloucester that offered a convenient bagged ice delivery to Cape Ann residents. The Memhards also acquired the Bresnahan Ice Company in Lawrence and the Peabody Icehouse to grow their bagged ice business territory. Seeking every opportunity, the company began supplying ice to vegetable and poultry farmers, concrete companies, and ice sculpture markets.

In the forty years his family has operated Cape Pond Ice Company, Scott has transformed the business, redesigning and redefining what it means to be in the ice industry. Bob Despres, a former general manager for Cape Pond Ice said, "He [Scott] was the kind of boss who was always willing to give any idea a try; we provided ice for the concrete during the rebuilding of the first World Trade Center tower in New York, and at one point we even shipped ice to London to be part of an Ice Hotel." Scott's appetite for history afforded him many hours spent



PHOTO CREDIT: JIM HOOPER

A photo grabbed during a lunch break, for Jim Hooper's 2014 "Portraits of a Working Waterfront" co-sponsored by Cape Ann Museum and the Northeast Seafood Coalition. Front Row: Sam Gale and Jason Erwin; Second row: Carlos Hernandez and Greg Ortiz; Third row: Scott Memhard, Steve Scatterday, and Jeff Scatterday



researching the fishing and ice industries and the people within the Cape Ann community. Scott takes pride in his business and, for many years, even offered narrated tours on the history of the company and an in-depth look into present-day operations. Today, Cape Pond Ice Company is not only a destination for a bag of ice but somewhere many visit to discover local history.

Like those before him, Scott Memhard's love for his company, community, and the City of Gloucester is unmistakable. When not at the office, Scott dedicates himself to his role as a city councilor, doing what he can to make a difference in the lives of Gloucester residents. He loves animals, gardening, and his family; much of his time is spent in the company of his young grandchildren. He continues to operate Cape Pond Ice with his son, Larry, and together, they work to keep Cape Pond Ice Company viable in an ever-changing environment.



On left, Phil Harvey, Scott Memhard and  
Scott's son Ian, circa late 1980s.

The families of Cape Pond Ice have left their mark on the city of Gloucester and its people. From Nathaniel Webster in the 1840s to the Memhard family 175 years later—the families have been here to support Gloucester residents and fisheries with remarkable dependency. What began as a dream of providing ice to fishermen ultimately led to a thriving multi-city ice operation for residents and businesses alike. Today, as the company faces the challenges of advancing technology and a declining fishing industry—one thing is certain; the stories of the families behind the company and their impact on the city will always stand the test of time.

## A PEEK AT SCOTT'S OWN PHOTOS



Scott, 2023.



Scott with his grandchildren, 2023.



With new grandson, born during the production of this story, 2023.



Scott's son Ian bagging ice, circa 2001.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### BRITTANY STUART

Brittany (Turner) Stuart grew up on Cape Ann. She began working at Cape Pond Ice in 2009 as an office assistant, eventually becoming the main tour guide for the historic icehouse tours. After graduating college in 2016, she departed Cape Pond in pursuit of her new career. She currently lives in Rowley, MA with her husband and two daughters.

### KRISTIN CZARNECKI

Kristin Czarnecki is the author of the memoir *The First Kristin: The Story of a Naming*. Her chapbook, *Sliced*, is out from dancing girl press, and her second book is forthcoming from Legacy Book Press. She is Gallery Coordinator at the Rockport Art Association & Museum.

### SCOTT MEMHARD

Scott Memhard is the humble, kind, and witty President, General Manager, and part owner of Cape Pond Ice, 2023.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

The amount of good stories about the people in Cape Pond Ice's history exceeds the space limitations of this project. Honestly, the tales could fill a full-length book! So, until that book is written, please visit <https://capepondice.com> for more information, photos, and great stories of Cape Pond Ice's employees - past and present.