

Growers' Cold Storage and Ice Plant in Grimsby

By Jessica Linzel

In the early 1900s, Grimsby's Growers' Cold Storage and Ice Plant became one of the first locations in Canada where artificial refrigeration was used to cool produce. It was funded by the federal Department of Agriculture in 1914 as an experimental pre-cooling facility for fruit to be stored a few days before being shipped. At this time in Niagara's history, the region was becoming famous for its unrivaled production of tender fruits, with local products exported throughout the nation. The Canadian government saw the benefits of funding infrastructure, agricultural societies, and experimental farms in the area in achieving economic benefits as well as fame and accolades.

This storage facility was a technological phenomenon with potential for many different uses. In 1921 it was approved for use as an ice hockey arena during the winter months. The Grimsby Arena became home to the Peach Kings hockey team. The Montreal Canadiens even used this same arena for its preseason training camp from 1922 to 1924, since at that time it was only the fourth indoor arena to exist in the entire country.

Niagara Packers Ltd. owned the Grimsby Arena from 1932 to 1949, using it for fruit packing during the summer months and as an ice rink during the winter. (In the 1920s, local farmers formed co-operative groups like Niagara Packers to obtain fair market prices for their goods and enhance their profits.) The arena eventually burned down in 1949 and a new one was built in its place, lasting until 2005 when the current Peach King Centre was built a little farther down the street. The original location of the old Ice Plant is now home to the Livingston Activity Centre, located at 18 Livingston Avenue.

Grimsby and the surrounding areas under the shelter of the Niagara Escarpment continued to produce large numbers of peaches each summer and by 1922, a new railway switch and spur lines were added to the Grand Trunk Railway tracks



Photo courtesy of the
Grimsby Museum.

directed towards the new Cold Storage and Ice Plant as well as the cannery down the street. This made the transportation of goods even more efficient. Grimsby's many canneries, basket factories, and supporting industries aided in the town's successful manufacturing and sale of local peaches, grapes, cherries, pears, strawberries, and other fruits and vegetables. The cannery next to Growers' Cold Storage and Ice Plant was the second to have been built in Grimsby, and was operated by the Canadian Cannery Ltd., which was formed in 1903 as an amalgamation of 30 different Canadian canning companies.

In 1922, an addition was made to the Cold Storage and Ice Plant to accommodate the glut of peaches each year. They needed the space, as the platform was easily overloaded during harvest season as long lineups of farm trucks and horse-drawn carts waited to drop off their produce at the cold storage or the co-op next door. In fact, September 1922 was a record month with 486 carloads of fruit sent out from the train stations in Grimsby and Grimsby Beach.