

By David A. Wilson

By David A. Wilson from February 2016 interview with his father, Willard "Ray" Wilson



This image has it all: old-style phone to call up an order, delivery shoot, ice blocks, tongs for lifting, and string for tying—all rung up on an antique cash register.

The Allegri Ice House was located on River Road just south of Park Ave in Nutley. Today, a storage facility is now on the site. Route 21 did not exist back then, and boats plied the Passaic River. The Nutley family business started around 1910 and lasted through the 1950s. The Allegri family lived on Elm Place and included their children, Barbara and Tommy.

Local ice houses provided blocks of ice for a town's homes and businesses. Refrigerators were new and expensive to own in the early 1900s, so perishable items were kept cold with blocks of ice in well-insulated ice boxes. Families traveled to the closest ice house to purchase ice blocks sized to fit their needs and budget. Nearer was better, since the closer the ice house was to their home, the more ice would survive the return trip on hot summer days. Ice picks, ice tongs, ice saws, containment trays, and burlap were all part of living with blocks of ice in the home.

Once commercial refrigeration was economically viable, ice blocks were usually manufactured on site. Wells were a common source of water prior to municipal water lines being installed. The goal was to have ice that was clear, hard, and contaminate-free. Before refrigeration, ice blocks were cut from frozen ponds and kept cold in insulated buildings.



*Ray Wilson
back in the day.*

In 1943, fifteen-year-old Ray Wilson worked in customer service at Allegri's. Ray rode his bike there after school and took orders from customers for ice blocks ranging from 20 to 30 cents apiece. Each block was then sent from the freezer vault down a chute to the loading dock where the customer would put the ice in the car trunk's ice pan or tie it to the bumper on older 1930s cars.

People would buy a block or two at a time and had to quickly remove their order from the delivery point as another heavy block was surely on its way down. Looking to make a few extra coins, Ray struck a deal to buy a box of Milky Way bars at 3 cents each. He would then hide the box in the freezer until the boss left for the day. Then, up went a sign for "Frozen Milky Way Bars, 10 Cents Each." A profit of 7 cents a bar!

Allegri's was a small, older facility, and 300-pound ice blocks were their manufacturing limit. After freezing, the blocks were moved toward a large circular saw that cut grooves into the ice, creating score lines, weak points used to cleave the larger blocks into the smaller ones homes and businesses needed. These smaller blocks, which still weighed 30 pounds apiece, were sent down a chute into a storage vault, awaiting sale. Ray was involved in this dangerous process and recalls a day when the chute's stopping board was not in place and an ice block shot right out the front door. Fortunately no one was injured and the block survived its errant journey.

Think of this the next time you simply push your glass against your refrigerator door to fill it with perfectly sized ice cubes.

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Allegri Ice Company Addendum

By David Wilson

About one year ago we wrote about Allegri Ice Company. Inspired by Dad to search for more history and photos, I found John Brown and Bob DiBello were schoolmates with Barbara Allegri-Baldino. A few phone calls and e-mails with son, Geordie, provided us with additional history.

Anthony Allegri opened the Nutley ice plant in 1929. Anthony was a mechanic on the ill-fated Andria Doria where he developed his refrigeration skills needed to make ice. He also served in the Italian Merchant Marine, the U.S. Navy, and later at New York breweries and Morse Dry Dock.

Sons Gaetano (Tom), Charlie, Jimmy and Fred took over the business in 1947. Pictures were supplied showing the family and two trucks outside their building in 1932. A second photo, taken from a diesel power ad, shows Tom stacking ice blocks supplied by a mechanical lift.

Started as Allegri Ice and Coal, later changed to Allegri Ice and Fuel, the company became Allied Allegri during World War 2 making electronics and machine parts for the war effort. Later Allegri Tech was formed to help pioneer the printed circuit board industry. Tom trained neighbor, Martha Stewart, in the art of growing holly bushes. His wife Adele, schooled Martha on Italian cooking. Nutley Neighbors magazine connects the past and present as we explore Nutley

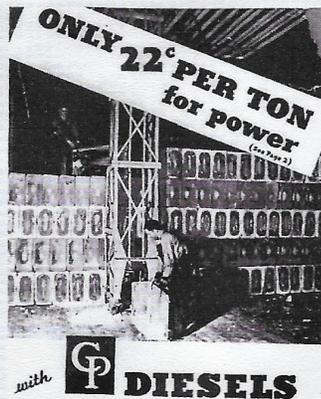
NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

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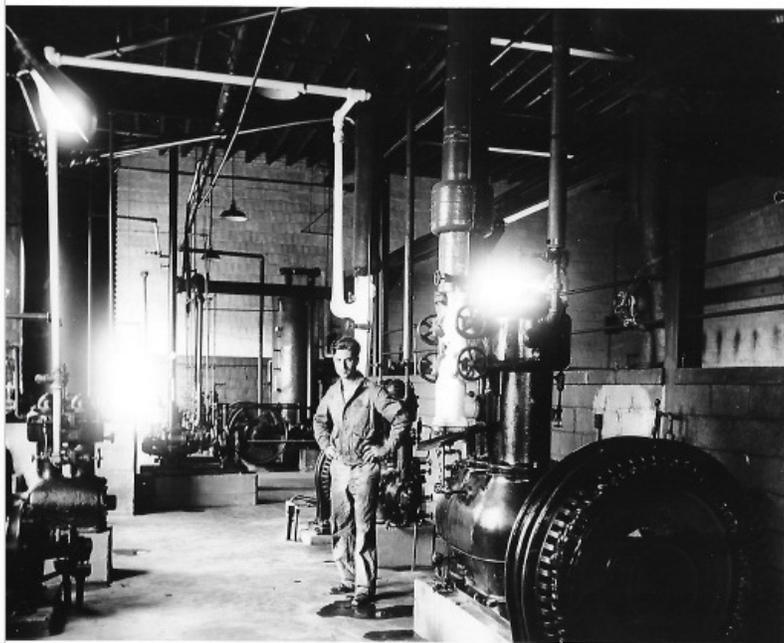


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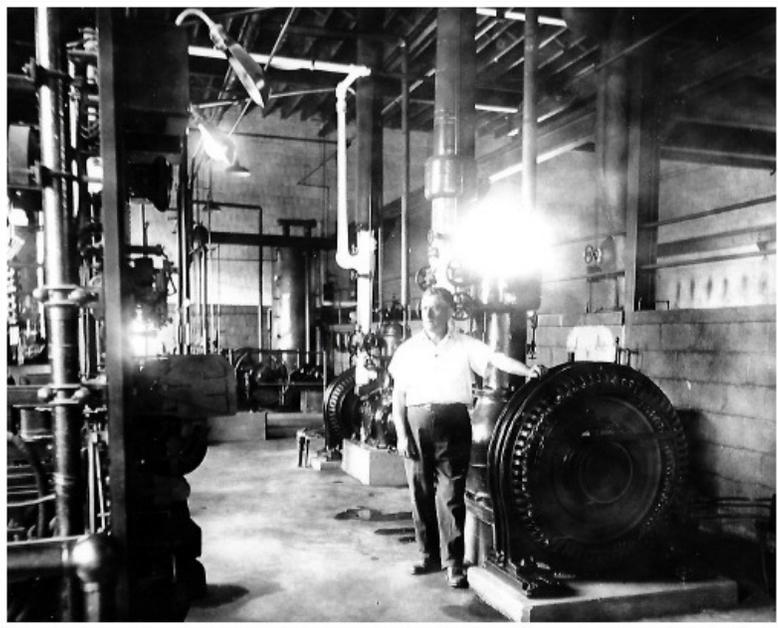
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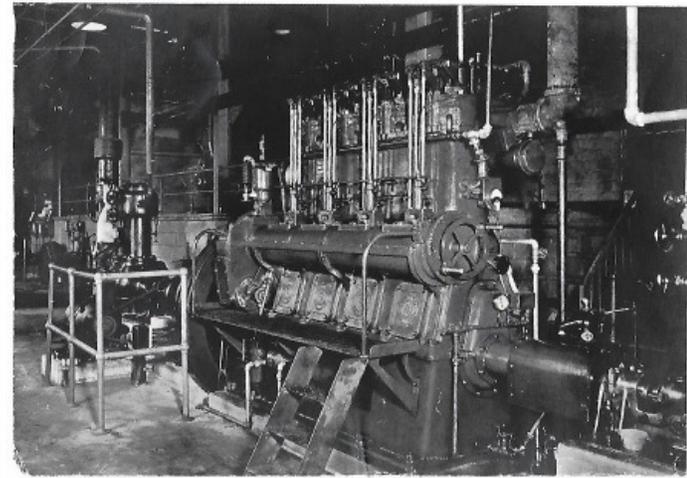
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Allegri Ice Company, Allegri family photo



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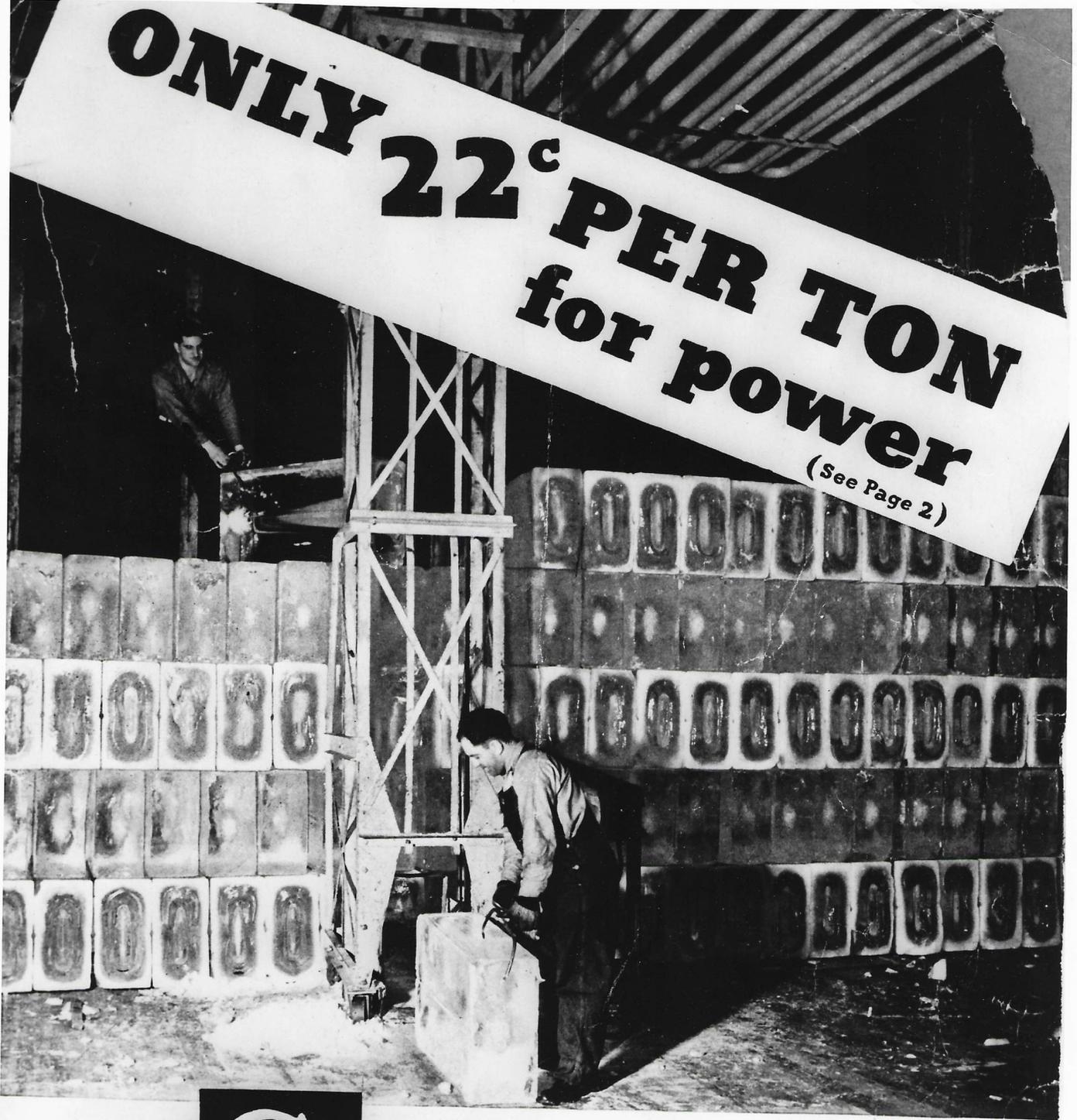


Allegri Ice Company, Allegri family photo



Allegrri Ice Company, Allegrri family photo

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(See Page 2)



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Allegri Ice Company, Allegri family photo

- [Allegri](#)