

ICE HOUSE

by Ann Giard-Chase



Photo by Howard R. Debs (communicatorsandcommunications.com). Used by permission, Frederick County Division of Parks and Recreation. "Ice House" was written by Ann Giard-Chase for *Rattle's* Ekphrastic Challenge, August 2015, and selected by Debs as the Artist's Choice winner.

Mostly it's their feet
I remember – shaggy
hooves the size of pies
stomping through the snow,
their breath forming in white clouds
as they pulled the wooden
sled through the frozen
tracks of ice. It was January,
cold as a knife's edge.
Winter had come again
barreling down from the north,
dragging behind it the arctic winds,
throttling the lake in its icy
grip. I imagine it was 5 a.m.
when my grandfather rose
from his warm bed, stoked
the embers in the pot-bellied
stove, pulled on his boots
and trekked from house to barn,
his body heavy with layers
of fur and wool. It was ten below.

Time to loop the feedbags
over the workhorses' necks, strap
them to harness, give the reins
a flick, trudge to the bay to unload
saws and tongs and cut long scars
into the lake's icy bed. Whatever
you do in this life, however difficult
your quest, your bones aching
from the effort, your heart weary
of the task, remember the ice men,
the creak of their sleds as they went
slogging out into the immeasurable cold,
their voices rising under the moon's
thin light to pile the heavy blocks
of ice, shroud them in sawdust, wrap
them in stillness, and bury them
deep in their dark stone caves.

