

Ice Bowl or Iceberg?

Gorham Manufacturing Co. | *Ice Bowl* and *Spoon*



VISIT THE BMA
and see a whole
gallery of American
silver.

Gorham Manufacturing Co. Detail, *Ice Bowl* and *Spoon*. Designed 1870, this example 1872. Sterling silver. 7 x 10½ inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Purchased as the gift of the Friends of the American Wing in Honor of their 40th Anniversary. BMA 2010.16.1-2. Photo by Mitro Hood.

Once upon a time, before electric refrigerators were invented, people didn't expect their drinks to be cold. Even though they purchased ice from an ice man (who made daily deliveries from his horse-drawn wagon) most people wouldn't think of adding ice to a glass of water, only to watch it melt away. Instead, they used their precious blocks of ice to keep their food fresh in insulated wooden iceboxes.

Members of the affluent upper class, however, considered a glass of pure ice-cold water a delightful novelty and a sure way to impress dinner guests. A fashion-conscious hostess would buy enough chunks of ice from the ice man to fill an elegant silver bowl and set it on her table along with a long-handled silver spoon.

This silver *Ice Bowl*, shaped like a craggy iceberg, was sure to be a conversation piece. Two polar bears climb around the bowl's jagged rim while a third bear walks across a pair of harpoons that form the spoon's handle. As icy water chilled the metal bowl from the inside, a thin layer of frost formed on the bowl's exterior. When the frost started to melt, water ran down the icicles causing them to drip just as real icicles do.

This very unconventional ice bowl was manufactured seven years after the United States purchased the Alaskan Territory from Russia in 1867. As explorers and adventurers brought back tales of the frigid northwest, Americans became fascinated with the land of ice. Serving cold drinks from an arctic ice bowl was one way that people in warmer and tamer parts of the country could participate in the nation's new adventure.

CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Design a bowl, box, or other container in such a way that its exterior describes or resembles its contents.

Read the fascinating story of how ice was "harvested" from frozen ponds, stored in ice houses, packed in wood shavings, and shipped long distances (even across the ocean) before modern refrigeration was available. On the web at www.iceharvestingusa.com/crystalblocks1.html and in *The Frozen-Water Trade: A True Story* by Gavin Weightman, 2004.

Compare *Ice Bowl* to *Artist in Greenland*, Rockwell Kent's painting of an iceberg. ([Art-To-Go, January 2009](#))

PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.



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