The author of the article (VMS 4/29/04) on the Valley ice industry had an interesting story of his own. James William Sweeney came to the Valley in 1919. Born in Texarkana on 10/2/98, he had, along with four siblings, been orphaned. The children were raised in the Incarnate Word Orphanage in San Antonio. Jim finished high school, went on to St, Mary's University, lettered in three sports including football where Dwight David Eisenhower was his coach, and was graduated in 1917. In WWI he was a ground crew member of the Lafayette Flying Esquadille.

He came to work for the American Refrigerator Transit Co. (A.R.T.) in San Benito. It specialized in providing insulated railroad cars for the transportation of produce. He soon was working for the Ice Company, precursor to CP&L. In 1923 he married Mary Yeasel Greiner who, in 1919, had come to San Benito from Chicago with her grandfather. They lived in company housing next to the loading dock adjacent to Fair Park and later moved to San Benito. Sweeney worked for a division of CP&L for 45 years, finally retiring at age 70. This three pack a day smoker died of lung cancer on 4/14/69. A daughter Mary Lou Sweeney Rumbo was to be a long time school teacher and organizer and first president of the Harlingen Historical Preservation Society.

Some chronological history dealing with ice manufacture and cooling follows:
1924-25 The Valley Electric and Ice Company approaches the mark of icing 13,000 railroad cars. It handles each one twice, first for a pre-cooling, then a final icing. At the peak of the season 100 men are employed. In Harlingen the manufacturing building exists today though the lengthy docks which stretched between parallel railroad tracks and carried the ice to the refrigerated cars are long gone. In time the Central Power and Light Company divested itself of the ice making operations and under the dynamic leadership of Lon C. Hill, Jr. evolved into a major South Texas utility. The sizeable old building once utilized by the Southern Texas Ice and Service Company is reached via Wichita and Memphis Streets. "Ice Plant No. 39 Harlingen" is engraved on one wing of the building. It likely indicates that this was one of many plants operated by the American Refrigerator Transit Company to provide ice for its specialized railroad freight cars. Southwestern is no more, but its successor is Reddy Ice with its warehouse in the Industrial Park. It furnishes packaged ice to retail stores.

9/17/30 On a three acre site, Central Power and Light Company (CPL) puts into operation its cold storage plant capable of handing 100 freight cars of products such as eggs, meats, fruits, dairy, and vegetables. J.W. Sweeney will be its manager. Previously he was superintendent of car icing and the ice department for CPL in the Valley, according to F.C. Ludden, Valley District Manager for CPL. Construction on the three-story reinforced concrete building with a 70' by 154' foundation started in late January 1930 after a $100,000 contract was awarded to W.A. Velten of Brownsville. In 1930 the building is just outside the city limit on the Combes Highway. That puts it on North Commerce now just north of the Fair Park Blvd. intersection.
1946  Cecil Carruth purchases CPL's cold storage warehouse. The name is changed to Harlingen Cold Storage. Cecil had come to Harlingen in 1929. His older brother Paul will follow about four years later. Carruth in 1930 was the bookkeeper for the Grant Lumber Co. in Harlingen and a year later had worked up to manager. By 1937 Carruth's business was general insurance and loans. By 1939 he was into the partnership of Carruth and Johnson Insurance, then with his brother Paul, and still later with Grant Klopenstein as Carruth-Klopenstein, real estate and insurance. Cecil, called Happy by his friends, was somewhat of a genius or, at minimum, his mile-a-minute mind is open to new ideas. He conceived the idea of commencing a frozen juice concentrate plant in Harlingen. He went to Florida and learned what would be required, including over $1 million of stainless steel piping. He and partners, including Paul, then converted the large plant at 804 North Commerce in the late 1940s. Misfortune befell them when a severe freeze decimated the Valley's 1949 citrus crop. His Texas Frozen Food Corp., for which he was president and J.E. Barr executive vice president, then sought alternatives in watermelon and pineapple concentrates and even looked into freeze-dried foods. When Paul went on with others to found Tropical Savings and Loan, Cecil sought to utilize the plant by leasing it to shrimp and other packers. Squirt brand soda pop with its grapefruit-citrus flavor was even bottled there for a time. The large building contained cold storage vaults, a shrimp processing plant, a citrus juice extraction plant, and a citrus peel dehydration plant along with Rio Freezer, Inc., cold storage. At one point with Texas Frozen Food Corp., Alberti Seafood Processing, and Russell Trading Co. operating in Harlingen, together they would comprise the city's largest industry. One slogan to evolve was "Serving the Nation's dinner table from Harlingen, Texas."

1954  CPL is finished with its ice-making business in its Harlingen plant. The operation is taken over by the Southern Texas Ice and Service Company, which maintains an office in the Clarke and Courts Building on East Harrison. In 1956 B.A. Majesky will be its manager at its Fair Park Extension plant, while that old ice hand, J.W. Sweeney, will manage the Clarke and Court office. By 1962 the Southeastern Public Service Company, with branches in many Valley cities and towns, will have taken over the manufacturing plant and moved its office to 423 W. Jackson.

1950-74  The Alberti Seafoods Processing Co. selling "King-O-Shrimp" and "Sea Breeze" Brands will pack products in Harlingen. Its owner Lawrence Alberti of Chicago is to die at age 67 on 10/16/60. When, in 1974, Alberti shutters its doors and a year later Western Shellfish at 708 N. Commerce does also, Cecil Carruth is left with his largely useless Harlingen Cold Storage Building.

1976  This is the last year here for the American Refrigerator Transit Co. at 825 N. Commerce. The shipment of cooled vegetables and fruit in railroad freight cars from Harlingen had declined to the point that operations here were no longer economical. Refrigerated trucks had taken most of the business from the railroads. To perpetuate the nostalgia, model train hobbyists can purchase A.R.T. models of refrigerated freight cars for their collections.
10/4/85  When Cecil Carruth dies on this date, the cold storage property is willed to the Rio Grande Children's Home in Mission according to his nephew, Tommy Carruth. The ghostly "white elephant" with its faded Harlingen Cold Storage sign still sits forlornly on Commerce as a monument to changing times.

1996  The Southeastern Public Service Company will continue its ice-manufacturing operations in Harlingen until this year. The Reddy Ice Company will then enter the picture. This Dallas-based company, formerly known as Packaged Ice before going private in 2003, is the largest U.S. maker of packaged ice. It operates in 31 states and D.C. In Harlingen its office and warehouse are in the Industrial Park at 1409 North 28th Street.

The April 2005 issue of Trains magazine provides additional information on train refrigeration. Quoted in full:

Ice bunker cars were the mainstay of the refrigerator-car fleet through the 1960s. Their advantage was simplicity. There was no diesel generator or compressor to break down or maintain, just bunkers on each end of the car to hold the ice that kept loads cold. Following an initial icing, cars would be re-iced using roof-level platforms while in transit. The disadvantage was that, although the cars were simple, they required a tremendous amount of ice—it took 9,000-11,000 pounds of ice to fill a car's bunkers, and each car on a transcontinental journey would require several stops to be re-iced. That, as well as the manual labor involved, the cost of making ice, and the numerous stops, contributed to the cars' downfall.

Mechanical refrigerator cars began to appear in large numbers in the 1950s, first carrying frozen foods, then—as refrigeration units' temperature controls improved—produce as well. The improved mechanical reefers spelled the end of the ice cars. Most icing platforms had disappeared by 1970, although through the '70s many old ice cars (often with bunkers removed) remained in top-ice (TIV) service in which crushed ice was applied on top of the commodity itself when loaded.

8/3/05  Another chapter involving the Harlingen Cold Storage Plant is writ in fire not ice. In the early 1980s Tony and Lupita Ramirez scraped together more than $100,000 to purchase the plant where she once had peeled and packaged shrimp. It took them fifteen years with the help of their five daughters to pay off the mortgage on the building. At one point they even had to mortgage their home in order to finance payments on the plant. The building would be used to house the Harlingen Information and Social Service Organization (HISSO). Launched in 1969 by the Ramirez family, the organization was dedicated to help the area's poor. In the 1970s it moved into training programs, such as typing and sewing classes, and feeding centers.

In 1998 Gov. George W. Bush presented the couple with the Governor's Award, the highest honor for volunteer community service in Texas. In 1999, HISSO was awarded a $10,000 grant by Philip Morris Companies as part of its Helping the Helpers Award in Hunger. In 2000 the Texas Department on Aging recognized Tony Ramirez's work by honoring him with the Greatest Generation of Texans Award, presented annually to ten Texans, 65 or older. Mr. Ramirez, who was born 12/29/30, was to die at age 73 on 8/9/04 leaving his 68 year old widow after 50 years of marriage.
In the sprawling building with its office having a big red heart painted near its front door, there was stored furniture, clothing, and appliances. On 8/3/05 a fire of unknown origin commenced between the walls of the rear of the uninsured structure. The contents of the storage area went up in flames. The cutting off of electricity caused the spoilage of food stored in three freezers in another part of the building. The fire was contained to the storage areas and although smoke impacted the whole edifice, the part of it adjacent to North Commerce Street will likely be useable.