
Friends of the Pecatonica River Foundation

August 15, 2013

History

Early Steamboats On Pecatonica River Part 14 of 15

Clarence L. Bolsar and Lenard Carter bought an aer thrust air-cooled engine with an airplane propeller. They tried it on a pair of pontoons and then a small boat, but it proved too slow and they sold it. Other ventures on the river included Ed Dougan's large boat imported from Madison in a bit aged condition. After some rehabilitation, he launched it south of the dam and chartered it for a Sunday school picnic. When loaded and under way it leaked so badly it returned to its dock and soon sunk to the dismay of the signer on Dougan's note at the German Bank. Another victim of an engine explosion was Ed Rubendahl who was badly burned by a fire on his boat and the boat ruined. The "Ada Wright" was seventeen foot launch placed in the river in 1912 by its owner John Wright.

The automobile and all weather roads by the 1920's spelled the doom of river boating. Then in April 1931 the old dam washed out ending what boating remained. The river continued to silt up and get more muddy ending navigation except for rowboats and small outboards.

Another phase of boating in 1870-1900 period was the many rowboats on the millponds thought out the county. Most of these ponds were used by fishermen, who had simple boats, to row around the ponds. Leslie Fargher tells of going with his father to the large pond at Hess's or Liberty Mill in Florence Township in the 18890's. They had a flat-bottomed boat in which they rowed around the pond. In the last few years the pond had silted through the years so that by late afternoon the water level dropped from mill use so they could hardly get back to the mill. Scioto mill had a large pond which was an attractive fishing, boating and picnic spot. The recent use of outboard motor boats on trailers has brought back some boating on the river. The rowboats at Krape Park were for many years the available boats in the county.

These are histories compiled by Arthur M. Saltzer, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He interviewed persons knowledgeable with the events or related to those parties. There must be a treasure trove of information out there, and that needs to be found and published. We have a rich history that was greatly affected by the Pecatonica River.

Continued.