
Friends of the Pecatonica River Foundation

May 16, 2013

History

Early Steamboats On Pecatonica River Part 11 of 15

The river was Freeport's beach. Powerboats below the Goddard Dam could travel down river as far as Brown's Mill. Coming up stream near what is called Three Rivers on the north bank was Anchor's Cottage, used by C.P. Guenther, Emil Molter, Ward Yount, F. Hermsmeier, Ernie Hermsmeier, Ben Hermsmeier and Charles Thomas. Forest Park was on the same side, more accessible by interurban. There were a number of cottages for rent by the week with natural spring waters free to tenants. Next was the N.S. Cottage (meaning none such) just a few feet west of Forest Park built by a group from the Y.M.C.A. on the former Young property. On the south side of the river were the pasture and timber known as "Smokey Hollow". The Zymo Club, Buffalo Ranch, and Maple Grove were more locations while on south bank was the former Riverside Camp meeting Grounds (V.F.W. Club site) at the end of Shawnee St.

At the C&NW Railroad Bridge on the southeast side of the Hancock Ave. Bridge was the Pathfinder Club, which owned a large launch. The Ivanhoe Launch and Clubhouse was just southwest on the other side of the same bridge. These boat clubs, along with the others, were social clubs whose members pooled their funds to buy a large launch. Most of their fishing trips, picnics and parties enjoyed quantities of Freeport made beer. Ascherville was nearby as was the I.C. Roundhouse. Upstream there were the Milwaukee Railroad, Stephenson Street and transfer bridges before coming to the mill dam. The Goddard family purchased the electric power business in 1901 and attempted to generate electricity for the next fifteen years with this waterpower. This preserved the high dam so that it held until it finally washed out in April 1931. It held a huge mass of water upstream providing a deep wide channel for several miles for boating.

Above the dam about 500 feet on the south bank was located Bunker's boat rental and swimming hole. This gentleman rented rowboats and the large raft had been used to ferry teams to Josel's Island across the river. Smiths and several other icehouses were on the north bank. In this area were the boathouses of the Illinois Club and the Monkey House, which had a commodious clubhouse seating 150 people and which annually put on Carlson's Minstrel Show. The red boathouse was across the river from the Keene Canning factory. Many of the boathouses were supported on piles or poles six feet above ground to keep them above flood level.

The Rambler Club and boathouse was on the south bank east of the old Cedarville Bridge near the end of N. Winnebago avenue. The club also had a camp at the cut off about nine miles upstream. The Ramblers owned a gasoline launch built about 1900. IT was 35 feet long, powered by a single cylinder gasoline engine built at the Illinois Central shops. This boat made several trips to Winslow during high water by removing the canopy so that it could pass under the bridges. Even during low water the boats could go to Damascus. The bridges were high above the water unless the river was at flood stage. Some of the Rambler members were Harry Burkhardt, Wm. Arndt, John Fletcher, Ed Mensenkamp, Joseph Goeke, and John Fosselman.
Continued.