

---

# Friends of the Peconica River Foundation

---

July 19, 2012

## History

### Early Steamboats On Peconica River

I have some knowledge on the subject of a steamboat on our river as far back as the late 1860's, and this I acquired from my father. He came to Freeport in May of 1867 to work as a baker and very soon after he became the owner of the little bakery. He married in January of 1870 and I am quite sure that it was between those dates that he owned a rowboat, which he used on the river. As a young man, in his native Isle of Mann, he had done both rowing and sailing on salt water. And prior to coming to Freeport he had done some boating in Chicago, on that part of Lake Michigan that was between Michigan Ave. and the tracks of the I.C.R.R., built on pilings from about 12<sup>th</sup> Street to Randolph St. where the depot was then located. All of that area and much more is now dry land.

He had often told me of a trip which he took up our river on a steamboat to Bobtown which was the name most generally applied to the little settlement of New Pennsylvania, now named McConnell. This steamboat was operated by J. W. (Walt) Linderman to transport cordwood from up river locations to Freeport, for at that time wood was almost the sole fuel for all heating purposes. The City Directory of 1868 lists this man as a dealer in firewood. On this trip my father had his boat in tow, attached either to the steamboat or the wood-hauling barge. They spent the night at Bobtown where Linderman loaded the barge, and they returned the next day.

In the earlier years when the German people used to get together on Sunday afternoons at Schiller's Garden on the Cedarville Road, they had steamboat rides around the Island, for at that time the river course ran around the island. It is so shown on the map of Lancaster Township in the County Atlas of 1871. The City Map in this book shows it too, but also with direct channel as it is now.

I remember that once, as a small boy, I was with my father when he was fishing for bullheads in the little slough which lay in the turn of the road to Cedarville, just north of town. I heard something coming down river and when I went to the riverbank I saw a steamboat pulling a barge load of fire-wood. That was perhaps in the years of 1883 or 1884. Mr. Linderman, here mentioned, was for many years a well know character here in Freeport, and for a long time he operated a one horse light dray, doing hauling jobs for ten cents. His usual stand was along side of the German Bank at the N.E. corner of Chicago and Stephenson streets.

As a young man I several times engaged steam launches for picnic parties or moonlight rides, using the boats of John Ellis or Charles Klein. These boat trips were at that time considered very pleasurable. But when the electric interurban railroad came we changed to its use and to down river groves for our outings.

The Peconica River was a scenic stream and as the upper drainage area was denuded of timber and the land cultivated, there was always an increasing amount of silt in its waters. Hence many mud flats were formed and sloughs filled up with silt deposits.

Leslie T. Fargher, Oct. 1968.