

From Albion's past

Building a boat in Albion, 1877

Submitted by the Albion Academy Historical Society

Burdick and Lanphere ran a steam mill in Albion to bend lumber for wagons and sleighs. They got to thinking about all the people who traveled to Lake Koshkonong to enjoy hunting, fishing and just being near or on the lake. Why not build a boat that could move a group of people around the lake to enjoy all the natural views of plants, animals and birds that used the water?

Did they look at the motorized boats on the Madison lakes? They were familiar with steam engines and lumber because of their business, so why not a boat? Their plans were grand: an 18 hp engine for steamers, two decks that would accommodate 250 - 300 people!! The boat would have a keel 65 feet long and a beam of 23 feet across. The first deck would be 20' by 90', the second deck 20' by 60' and the pilot house cabin 12' by 24'. And the boat would be ready for launch on the lake by June, 1877! (All this information was recorded in History of Madison, Dane County, 1877 - Dane County Towns - Albion, p. 289-90, 388)

How do we know IF this steamer ever got on to Lake Koshkonong? By looking at old newspapers from 1877. Unfortunately, Edgerton's newspapers from December 1876 to October 1877 are NOT in the bound newspaper collection at the public library. Next thought was to check the Jefferson Union newspapers from Fort Atkinson. Luckily for us the Hoard Museum finished digitizing ALL the newspapers in 2016, and they are available on the Dwight Foster Public Library computers!! Following are some Friday entries:

June 29, 1877 - THE NEW STEAMBOAT - We received a call on Tuesday from Capt. B. F. Burdick, one of the proprietors of the new steamboat Little Queen, building on Lake Koshkonong, to ply between this place and points on the lake. He informs us that the boat is nearly finished and WILL MAKE HER FIRST TRIP TO THIS PLACE NEXT MONDAY. We congratulate Messrs. Burdick & Lamphere on the successful accomplishment of this enterprise. Let us all turn out and give the LITTLE QUEEN a hearty reception.

June 29, 1877 - THE NEW STEAMER - Little Queen will visit town on her first trip on Monday, and we understand Capt. Burdick will give a short excursion to Black Hawk Island and return. At least that is the intention at this writing. A safe and convenient dock is being erected near the R. R. Bridge. It would have been more convenient to have had the dock near the

business portion of the town but the Steamer is too high to pass under the R R, Bridge. Hence the necessity of building it below the bridge. (Note: The Rock River Bridge is now part of a bicycle trail through Fort Atkinson.)

June 29, 1877 - The Pioneers and Farmers Association will have a Picnic at Morrison's Grove. The steamboat, "Little Queen," will give an excursion or two, down the river, and take it all around, we shall be as patriotic and jolly as can be. Hooray! (Note: celebrating Independence Day?)

July 6, 1877 - The Steamboat LITTLE QUEEN started on her first trip from Taylor House, Tuesday and had not proceeded more than a half mile when one of the large cog wheels broke and left her totally disabled, at the mercy of the wind and waves of Lake Koshkonong. Her appearance on Rock River will, as a consequence, be delayed for several days. The accident was a sore disappointment to a large number who anticipated a pleasant ride on the Fourth. Messrs. Lamphere & Burdick are working hard to get matters into shape, and all are wishing them the best of success.

July 27, 1877 - Steamboat tickets for the Little Queen can be procured during the season at R. S. White & Co's.

August 3, 1877 - The "Little Queen" made an excursion to the Island last Friday.

August 10, 1877 - Steamer "Little Queen" will leave every Sunday at 9 o'clock sharp for Kinney's Point across the lake, returning to Fort Atkinson at 8 o'clock sharp.

August 17, 1877 - The steamer "Little Queen" failed to get any passengers for the lawn party at the Koshkonong Hotel last Thursday evening, but a company, consisting mostly of gentlemen from here was formed and took a ride or two or three miles down the river and back. This is the second or third time the gentlemen of the village have enjoyed a ride on the steamer, but when are the ladies to have the pleasure of a trip down the river?

August 17, 1877 - The M.E.S.S. had a picnic at Lake Koshkonong on Tuesday. They went down on the steamer, which was well loaded. The band went to furnish music for them. (Note: Perhaps this was a church Sunday School trip?)

August 24, 1877 - On Sunday, Aug. 26, the "Little Queen" will leave her pier in Fort Atkinson, for Kinney's Point at 9 o'clock, stopping at Black Hawk and Lee's Point, returning to the Fort at 7 o'clock p.m.



The steamboat, "Ancient Edgerton," is pictured on Lake Koshkonong about 1885. (Photo courtesy of Albion Academy Historical Society)

All of these items were included in the Local Happenings section of this weekly paper. Then in the summer of 1878 we read the following:

May 31, 1878 - THE STEAMBOAT - S.J. Sawyer has purchased a new steamboat in Madison and will have the same sailing on Rock river in a few days. Good for you Doctor.

June 7, 1878 - The steamboat "Ninogwoshkote," purchased in Madison, by S.J. Sawyer, arrived Tuesday night and was successfully launched. She is a trim, well proportioned boat, and the UNION congratulates Mr. Sawyer on his enterprise and pluck in securing for the people of this city so desirable a means of much wished for pleasure.

June 14, 1878 - The new steamer made a trial trip, Monday, down the river. She is certainly a very superior little craft; capable of good speed, sound and well built. She will comfortably seat about seventy-five persons. Excursions to points on the river and Lake Koshkonong will be the order of the season.

June 28, 1878 - The Steamer "Corinne" will leave her dock Fourth of July morning, for Koshkonong Hotel, at 8 o'clock, instead of 8 1/2 o'clock as advertised on bills. And will not return until Friday morning.

No other mention of the Little Queen was found, but in 1878 the Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter (Edgerton) had this item:

June 21, 1878 - GRAND CELEBRATION JUBILEE AND FESTIVAL AT KOSHKONONG HOTEL, JULY 4TH, 1878 ...The beautiful steamer "Corinne" will run from Fort Atkinson in the morning, making excursions around the lake during the day from the hotel landing... (Note: This was one of the names for Lake House Inn over the years)

We wonder if the Little Queen was a paddlewheel steamer because that was typical for the 1860s. Did the "cog wheel" problem in July 1877 refer to the paddle wheel? By 1885, the steamboat, "Ancient Edgerton," appeared to have no paddle wheel. We have found NO photograph of the Little Queen at this date.

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