

SUGAR RIVER

The history of Albany is inextricably interwoven with the picturesque river that bisects the village. Sugar River as a power source was an impetus to progress for the pioneers; as a natural beauty area, an endless delight for recreation, and as an unpredictable sleeping giant, the cause of misery when heavy rains caused flooding and unsuspected depths resulting in drownings.

On the light side the Albany Vindicator wrote reprovingly in 1887: "Those boys still continue their disturbing custom of going bathing in nature's attire within the city limits in broad daylight. Whoever has the proper authority should see that it is stopped at once. It is a standing disgrace to our village."

Serious river problems in March, 1897, were described by the Vindicator editor:

"Owing to the heavy rains of last week the river rose to an almost unprecedented height and Albany seemed in danger of being submerged. The highest points were reached during Friday night and about noon Saturday. Warren's boathouse was demolished by the pressure of high ice and water. The dam at the west end and the linen mill race were damaged several hundred dollars worth. Water Street was submerged Saturday from the south and up to where Nichols Street intersects it and there was a good deal of water on Mechanic Street."

Two years later, however, the river yielded rich rewards to some of Albany's citizens. Under double headlines proclaiming the find was this story:

"Our little city has been thrown into the wildest excitement during the last few days over the discovery that

some valuable pearls had been found in clams taken from the bed of Sugar River. It has been known to several of our citizens for some time that three or four men had been devoting their whole time to pearl fishing, but the rumors that there was any money made in the business were very generally discredited. On Sunday the proprietors commenced drawing the waters from the mill pond and on Monday morning old and young, rich and poor, men and women, and children were out at least four hundred strong and the hunt is still on. Among those who have made the most lucky finds are: Mr. C. Sherman, one pearl sold for \$55; Jobs and Mackin, \$40; Mrs. Nancy Shafer, \$50; others ranged from \$10 to \$35. John Tilley 'takes the whole bakery' with a pearl for which he refused \$100. Scores of people are still hunting and thousands of luckless clams will daily give up the ghost to satisfy the greed for the almighty dollar."

The fun-loving nature of Albany's forefathers is evidenced in this account of a skating party on the river.

"Last Thursday was the day designated for a little fun on the ice. An invitation was issued to all to form a skating party for anyone who could place his hand on his heart and swear that he had not been skating for at least five years. Although the sun had affected the ice so that it was impossible to skate much, quite a number of boys (aged from 40 to 60 years) determined to skate or 'bust.' Many spectators had already assembled to enjoy the fun of seeing the boys skate on their ears, etc., and had already violated the first rule for spectators which was to contribute five cents for the privilege of sitting on the nearest fence. After arranging the preliminaries of buckling, tying and otherwise fastening about twelve or thirteen pairs of skates were fastened on to as many old settlers. They lit out on the ice and once in a while on all fours. But, considering the condition of the ice, they did exceedingly well for boys."



Nearly wheel-deep in water, this team and wagon are headed toward East Main Street hill just beyond Mechanic Street. In background is the Lewis house now occupied by Jessie Rendall.

The great flood, so momentous in Albany history that the Vindicator later published a velvet-finish, burgundy-colored booklet chronicling the event entitled "Souvenir of Albany Flood, September 13, 1915," is recalled graphically by people living today. One who remembers being a daring youngster remembers that her mother tied her to one of the uprights of the front porch to keep her from going near the rampaging waters.



Flood waters surround the old Tilley house on North Mechanic Street. Shown in boat are Ronald and John Tilley, busily paddling down the street during 1915 disaster.

Flood of September 13, 1915, brought the highest water in the history of the village. Large building in center of picture is old red livery barn which still stands on South Water Street.



The Vindicator's story carried several headlines and sub-headings, among them: "Loss of property will exceed \$75,000," "Over 30 families driven from their homes," and "Both dams on Sugar River at Monticello give way on account of cloudburst." The writer said that the water was eighteen inches higher than the previous flood in January, 1882. "Residents along Mechanic Street were notified and began to get their things out but the water came too fast and they were obliged to leave their rugs on the floor and were taken out of their houses in boats. The water ran over the levee and a stream two blocks wide with a strong current was

rushing down Mechanic Street carrying out-buildings, wood sheds, poultry houses, wagons, wood piles, and everything movable with it. On Water Street the water came over the banks and forced several families to move out. On the river every boat house was swept from its moorings and broken up as it went over the dam. Large trees along the river were torn out by the roots and carried downstream. Several head of stock were drowned up the river and their bodies floated down the river. The bridge across the river was closed to traffic for several hours as a precaution for no one knew how much strain it could stand.

"The drays and boat livery and bus were used free of charge all day in carrying the people about the village.

"As soon as it became known that the people were being driven from their homes, Mrs. Scott, proprietor of the hotel, sent word that the hotel was open to them free of charge and homes all over the village were thrown open to those who needed shelter and food.

"The water reached its highest mark about noon on January 29 and remained at that level for a few hours, receding two feet by midnight. By the next morning the water had gone down three feet and work was begun to make homes habitable, repairing the damage insofar as was possible."

Although the river has not flooded to such an extent since then, it has menaced the village with high water at later dates. In March, 1929, the water rose seven feet, breaking the race at the condensery and threatening to break off the end of the power plant building with the rush of the ice and water. Several business places were flooded. Massive chunks of ice floated down the river in February, 1938, again with the threat of flooding. People stopped on the bridge to watch the huge blocks crash over the dam.

In January, 1946, the high water mark was near the back doors of the H. C. Atherton and Charles Phillips homes, and a portion of the railroad track was washed out. The April, 1960, high water resulted in many flooded basements, the ball park under three and one-half feet of water, and the river lapping Mechanic Street.



Sunday outings on the pleasure steamer Mikado became a major attraction after the boat was launched in 1886. Shown at anchor in front of Reuben's Cave, the steamer regularly toured Lake Winnetka, the name given to the area above the dam.

The launching of the pleasure steamer, the Mikado, in late April, 1886, caused much excitement in Albany. Built by Professor Holiday, dentist, preacher, fiddler, the craft was 50 feet long and 15 feet wide. There were two decks, cabins fore and aft, and refreshment saloon which would supply fruits, candy and temperance beverages. A week after the launching a benefit entertainment for the steamer was given, with a basket social and music by the town's best talent, including the Cornet Band. Admission price of ten cents entitled one to vote on a name for the steamer. "The Bell of Albany" and "Mikado" were the choices.

The Mikado regularly carried its passengers up the river to Reuben's Cave and Lake Winnetka. Reuben's Cave area was leased to Dr. Holiday and wooden stairs were built near the cave to lead picknickers up to the bluff where tables were provided and a building, 24 by 50 feet, erected.

Added to the interest in the Mikado's excursions was the discovery of "health-giving" mineral springs near the cave. The interest in "Eureka Mineral Springs" greatly increased the number of passengers, who carried jugs and filled them for fifteen cents a gallon.



This log cabin was built on island located in the river just below Whitcomb Sanitarium. Cabin was eventually washed away in a flood.

That idyllic era ended in the early 1900's when the Mikado ran aground on rocks in the river. Gene Warren bought the engine to use for heating the house he built. Others tore the top deck off and removed the machinery.

All types of boats have been used, from that storied Mikado to the craft most popular today, the canoe. Old photographs show sizeable power boats as well as the row boats more commonly used. In 1916 a large two-story boat house was built on the east bank of the river. In addition to housing a large number of boats, it had a club room in the second story and a porch for those who wished to sit and view the river.

From time to time the fact that the river is there seems to have motivated the daredevil in a succession of adventurers to attempt the local equivalent of going over Niagara in a barrel. In 1932 the Albany Herald carried this story:

"About noon Sunday Chester Francis and Ivan Phelps took a canoe ride on the Sugar River above the dam. They decided to go over the dam. As they went over the dam the canoe capsized, throwing Mr. Phelps clear of the roughest water below the dam; but Francis was caught and carried under, brought to the surface and carried under again before he could struggle out of the



whirling turmoil into the current and drift downstream. Three friends waded out to bring him to shore. Francis was still in bed on Monday.”

Tragically, the river claimed a share of drownings through the years. In September of 1903 a young brother and sister, Fred Stiff, age 7 and Ina Stiff, age 11 months were drowned. In 1932 a cheeseman from Monroe dived into the river from the west bank where the water was twelve feet deep. He drowned because he could not swim. A near fatal accident ended happily, however, when Ed Killingstad saved the life of a youngster swimming near the dam, who got beyond his depth and panicked. Ed's heroism was recognized with a

Peaceful to spend an afternoon on Sugar River. Large building in background is the old ice house which served the community for many years.



Fancy wooden canoes like those above were a common sight on Sugar River in the early years. In the background is the log cabin that stood for many years on a small island just below the Whitcomb Sanitarium.

citation from the Janesville Gazette. The Carnegie Hero Award was bestowed on David Zanoni who plunged into Sugar River in June of 1947 to rescue his buddy, Garland Rankins, who fell while crossing the dam apron. Zanoni caught Rankins under water and towed him 45 feet to shallow water, battling a rapid current and rough water.

In July, 1950, the proceeds from the Fireman's Frolic were used to purchase a resuscitator, the impetus for this event being Burnell Schultz's drowning in the mill race at the dam. Other drowning victims include Elmer Anderson, Aaron Peckham, Kenneth Purdy, Dan Watts, and little Joel Spring.

In the late 50's and 60's, Stanton Steuri was the catalyst for a renewed interest in ice skating on the river. He strung up lights and with the help of would-be skaters cleared an area of ice on the river in back of his home at 300 Sugar River Parkway. Many delightful afternoons and evenings were spent there by youngsters and adults alike skating to music, also courtesy of Stanton.

In 1957 there was a community clean-up of the shore area of the river. Dead trees were snaked out and a boat ramp installed on the Legion Park area. The Legion and their Auxiliary sponsored a power boat show in 1962.

In 1968 a sand beach was created with sand donated by Herman Pluss and graded by Al Kranig, while Helen Killingstad furnished workers with food and drink during the day.



Boating was a popular pastime in Albany's early day. A visit to Reuben's cave was often a "must." In boat are Percy and Erva Atherton, with daughter Floy Atherton at far right. Others are not identified. Fancy clothes are a clue to boater's skills and boat stability in those days.

The sport that never seems to flag, though, is fishing. The fisherpersons are men and women, old and young, all with limitless reserves of patience. They're in boats on the river, sitting on the banks, fishing from the bridge, and even wading out into the middle. Their quarry are catfish, bullheads, walleyes and bass; and the Sugar River has yielded some remarkable specimens of each of those. From time to time the river's natural supply of fish has been augmented; for example, in 1890 100,000 pike from the state fish hatchery were received and placed in the river a mile north of town. The Isaac Walton League, the Herald noted in 1927, "has been doing good work. The Albany chapter with its small membership has done a fair share of its duty in this state, especially in inducing our legislature to pass the new laws. Further the Albany Chapter has sponsored the planting of a considerable number of fish in the rivers and creeks near Albany." In 1937 the Rod and Gun Club released 1,500 black bass in the river.



Fishing can be fun when you return with this many catfish. Proud fishermen, left to right are: Harry Thurman, Archie Francis, and Donald Partridge as they appeared in 1940.

TRANSPORTATION

In 1877 a stage line was opened to this area by Dr. John Warren and his brother E. F. Warren. Named Warren Brothers Western Stage Line, it was one of the longest lines in the Midwest and was well known all over the United States. It covered some 4,368 miles—765 of them in Wisconsin—with operations in other states as well; in fact, as far west as California. It was reported that the Warren Brothers Western Stage lines were continually stretching out in all directions, and the government always found the Warren Brothers to be gentlemen of unquestionable integrity.



Local livery bus owned by Barton and Maulcook, was used to haul travelers to and from the depot, as well as providing transportation to other destinations. Building in background was Barton and Maulcook livery stable. Dr. L. H. Allen, local veterinarian, had his office in this building at the time the photo was taken.

Between 1882 and 1885 other stage and mail lines were begun, one of them a line between Albany and Evansville that ran daily. Other lines which also carried the mail were operating between Evansville, Dayton and Monticello. In September of 1887 William Struck purchased the mail route between Albany and Belleville and commenced carrying the mail. Mr. Struck, an experienced stage driver, ran a "good hack and drove a good team" and could be depended upon, whatever the weather.