JAMESTOWN'S STORE-BOATS

TREES

When the pioneers came, this county was a wilderness — a wilderness of trees. Nature had been lavish in the volume and diversity of woods she had planted here. Forests of hardwood covered the uplands; the early settlers cut and burned thousands of acres of them to clear their lands for farming.

Tall pines grew in the valleys of the Conewango, Chadakoin and their tributaries. There — lumbering commenced in 1805 and for more than fifty years was the most important industry in this region. The Spring and Fall 'freshets' were watched for with eager interest by the thousands of lumbermen — who had been busy during the intervening time, in felling trees and preparing the lumber for the Southern markets.

One of the most picturesque scenes of those times were the numerous rafts, 'run' by red-shirted men who made them their floating homes — cooking in the shanty and sleeping on a little straw on a board until they reached their destination, Pittsburg, Cincinnati, St. Louis, or perhaps New Orleans. When the lumber was disposed of they walked home — to repeat the voyage at the next rise of the River.

In the early days matchless pine lumber sold for three to five dollars per thousand board feet; later, at ten dollars. Immense quantities were 'run', and after drying, the lumber was deemed all the better for its long soaking in the muddy water of the River.
Here, hardwoods were burned to ashes; pines faced extermination, and yet -- Nature, in the form of still abundant timber -- had set the stage for a great furniture center, a city that would make itself known throughout the world, for the integrity of its citizenry and the excellence of its manufactured products, the city whose genesis was --- trees!

**KEELBOATS**

I speak now of keelboats ---- for settlement in the center of this county could not have survived without them!

Long before white men came to settle here, keelboats were accustomed to load at Pittsburg with goods suitable for trade with the Indians, and proceed up the Allegheny and Conewango, where beads, colored cloths, salt, knives, axes and whiskey, were readily exchanged for furs.

With the coming of the settlers, the keelboats furnished the pioneers at their settlements with practically all their necessities: flour, dried-fruits, pork, hardware, window glass, nails, groceries, drugs, and --- last but not least --- 'Old Monongahela' that retailed at a dollar and a-half per gallon and was deemed essential by the boatmen, lumbermen and pioneer of that day.

A keelboat -- was a narrow craft some thirty feet long and twelve feet wide, built of heavy pine plank. The name referred to the shallow keel, which along its bottom, acted as a runner to slide the boat over stones, etc. Of shallow draft, pointed at both ends; sometimes partly decked, and often with a covered storage room for goods --- it carried ten tons or more.
At each side was a runway even with the top of the hull and projecting in, across which was nailed cleats to keep the boatmen from slipping when poling. These boats were 'driven' by being 'poled' or 'cordelled' by a hardy, almost iron-clad set of men who had become inured to it and could stand any amount of hard work. Ten or twelve of these men, each with a pole, were ranged on the cleated walk on either side of the boat. The 'setting-poles' were of white ash and about ten feet long, with a turned knob at the small end to set against their shoulders. A helmsman did the steering. At the command 'set', the men on both sides planted their poles in the stream bottom, and throwing their weight upon them, forced the boat forward. Walking forward to make another 'set', these hardy men traversed the running-boards from morn- in to night. Every minute of progress was hard labor --- the constant push of the current fought the progress of the boat with a tenacity that never let up.

Progress by keelboat was slow. Driving from Pittsburg to Warren required ten days --- and to Mayville, nearly as many more. They brought the products of civilization, and returned with the produce of the wilderness ... and salt. Salt indeed! As early as 1803 sailing schooners brought Onondaga salt to Barcelonay in large wooden barrels; the hardy settlers used oxen and 'stone-boats' to transport it over the Portage Trail to Chautauqua Lake -- where keel and other boats took it 'down the River' --- until salt in abundance was discovered in the Ohio Valley.

State law directed that when a dam was thrown across a navigable waterway, a lock should be put in for the passage of
such boats as should appear. Forty mill-dams caused difficulty and quarreling — after 1825 keelboats came no more, they were on the rivers of the New West.

JAMESTOWN

James Prendergast spent the summer of 1805 at the home of his parents on the west side of the lake. On a June day, while searching for a span of horses that had gone astray, he came to the site of present Jamestown. When he saw the rapids in the Outlet and the forest of pines upon its banks — he envisioned a great lumber industry. A dam across the river, with a never-failing supply of Lake water would create power for sawing the timber. Here was an all-water route to float his lumber to the cities that were rising along the great waterways to the South. He decided that here he would locate.

His vision became a reality when seven years later (1813) his mills sawed three million feet of lumber — most of which was run down the river in 1814. In 1815 there were fourteen families living in rough-board 'shacks' in the stump-dotted clearing that boasted two names: 'Prendergast Mills' and the 'Rapids'. A postoffice was wanted; a name for it was needed; a meeting was held and the little settlement was named 'Jamestown', in honor of its founder.

At this time Buffalo was a very small place. A number of unfinished houses, a few stores and a couple of taverns; most of the year on muddy streets. Until after the completion of the Grand Erie Canal (1825) we had very little commercial intercourse
with Buffalo. Our supplies came from Pittsburg; we knew its merchants and our business relations increased enormously with the advent of lumber-rafting.

About 1820 the village of Jamestown began to fancy it was a place of importance. Various persons skilled in the crafts had emigrated from the Eastern states and settled here. Woodworking industries developed, slowly at first -- and then more and more rapidly until the late 1850's -- when the furniture industry superseded all other wood-working activities.

The 1840's and 50's were the romantic period in Jamestown's commercial history. These were the days before the railroad came; waterways were the only means of distribution. Everything manufactured beyond the wants of the people -- was carried 'down the River.'

**FLATBOATS**

Close upon the advent of the lumber-raft, came the flatboat, a plain scow of shallow draft, some sixteen feet wide and forty feet long. Built of rough lumber and sometimes having a low, board roof; devoid of any attempt at beauty, it is small wonder it was jokingly called an 'ark'. Run down the river on a 'fresh'; carrying any cargo available: furniture, shingles, lath, hay, wooden-ware, cherry lumber &c. The flatboat was built in such a way as to do small damage to the lumber of which it was made ... and after the disposal of its cargo, was 'knocked down' and sold as lumber, often selling for more than the original cost of the lumber and expense of construction.
On the Cassadaga and Conewango, about 1835, there began to be seen a craft similar to the rough, utilitarian flatboat, but better built, longer and stronger and with a brand-new innovation, a 'cabin' that covered all but the ends of it. Ingenuity, good financial returns and pride of ownership, eventually produced a super de luxe craft some seventy feet long and sixteen feet wide. Built of the finest dressed lumber -- this 'floating dwelling and store' -- with kitchen, office, bedrooms and store rooms, was fitted with the best of doors and window, &c., and the outside was painted in bright colors, with the name of the boat in three-foot letters on its sides.

During the coming forty-five years (1840-1885) hundreds of these great boats, loaded with the industries of Southern Chautauqua County, were to float down the narrow Cassadaga and Conewango and the broad reaches of the Allegheny, Ohio and Mississippi -- vending their goods at the villages on their way; and to be known as 'Trade-Boats' and 'Store-Boats', and their cargoes called 'Yankee Notions',

Flatboats were built at many places along the local rivers, perhaps the most at Levant. I believe all the store boats had their origin there.

Drive a mile east from Falconer on Route 17; cross the old iron bridge and you are in Levant. No person remembers how the quiet little hamlet got its name -- a snowy-haired woman remembers its postoffice, blacksmith shop, brick kilns and two busy taverns; and she saw them disappear, one by one.
Levant had its 'day in the sun', a period of hectic activity almost fifty years long. For there, on the bank of the Cassadaga, were built hundreds of flat and store boats --- and there they were launched and loaded with Jamestown's manufactures and Southern Chautauqua County products.

The names of the men who built the hundreds of boats, are lost forever; neither do we know the names of the owners of the boats, or of the men who drove them to market ... we might count ten! We do know the names of dozens of the manufacturers -- and about their products --- of which there was an amazing variety and volume.

Surely! No name in boating days was better known, or more respected, that that of 'Commodore' Nathan Brown, of Jamestown. For more than forty years (beginning in 1844) he built and loaded his boats at Levant -- and other places, Faring forth on the early Spring 'rise', sometimes with a fleet of four or six boats - to be absent six or seven months while he disposed of his cargo and boats. His ports of call were many and his customer list extensive. He came to know in a friendly way the people on his routes, and wrote interesting accounts of incidents and experiences in the World of Waterways.

Close to the bridge at Levant; on the bank of the Cassadaga stands an iron Historical Marker .... altogether too brief ---- we read:
NATHAN BROWN
IN 1850's BUILT FLAT BOATS.
LOADED WITH JAMESTOWN
'YANKEE NOTIONS' SET OUT
FOR SOUTH, FOR YEARS
BOATS TOOK LADING HERE.

The story of Jamestown's products and the men who made them is an entertaining one. I hope one day it may be told - before it is forgotten! I feel it my duty to make brief mention of one of those men. A man whose inventive genius resulted in lightening the back-breaking labor of thousands of farmers; the man who invented and made the 'Grape-Vine' (serpentine) scythe and cradle snaths -- that replaced the straight snaths in use since time immemorial.

'Deacon' Samuel Garfield came to Chautauqua County and settled between Jamestown and Busti in 1814. He first built a shop near his house and developed a large trade. The demand for his snaths became so great that he was forced to come to Jamestown and establish a larger plant, and, for many years turned out scythe snaths, hand hay rakes, grain cradles and grain measures of various sizes. (These measures were similar in appearance to the cheese-boxes of today -- without covers) The one, two, four and eight-quart measures 'nested' in the half-bushel measure. His trade was so large that he not only supplied the local demand, but sent quantities of his products by boats -- even to the 'deep South.'

In 1870 this became a 'dead' industry in Jamestown.
Of passing interest - is the fact that a 'bunch of shingles' was legal tender at any shop, store or place of business in Jamestown -- well into the 1860's.

Regarding store-boats; I now quote from news items in the newspapers named:

'PITTSBURG INTELLIGENCER', 1841. Ezra Wood & Joel Partridge are here with a boat 90 feet by 18. Laden with 3000 patent wooden buckets, 300 tubs, 600 keelers (shallow tubs), 200 dozen scythe snaths, and 300 dozen fox tails (pitchfork handles.)

Breed and Partridge: 30 bureaus, 100 tables, 150 light stands, 200 sets table legs, 600 feet curled maple boards, eye and blistered maple veneering, 200 sets chairs, flag and reed bottoms.

Benham & Bell: 1500 chairs, 20 settees, 100 bedsteads, and 'chairs with great benefit to the afflicted!' 

'JAMESTOWN JOURNAL', 1854. "Last week we visited a fleet of boats that lie moored in the Cassadaga at Levant. There are 12 boats, averaging about 75 feet in length, costing $250. each. Half of them are owned by Commodore Brown. His cargo consists of: 1200 dozen scythe snaths, 260 dozen grain cradles, 800 dozen hand rakes, 120 dozen garden rakes, 200 horse rakes, 100,000 lights window sash, 1000 panel doors, 100 pair blinds, 160 dozen grain measures, 30 dozen bench screws, 15 dozen axes, 25 wheelbarrows, 10,000 feet pump-logging, 150 dozen shovels, 15 dozen scoops, 25 dozen spades, 355 dozen hoes, 300 dozen grass scythes, 75 dozen grain scythes, 350 dozen forks, 25 gross scythe-stones, 25 dozen corn knives, 25 gross scythe rifles (handles), and about $1,000. worth of percussion matches.
"Mr. L. B. Warner has his boat nearly loaded with 600 common chairs, 400 Extra common chairs, 200 Fancy chairs, 100 rocking chairs, 100 sewing chairs, 150 black walnut Grecian chairs, 25 black walnut Grecian rocking chairs, 12 settees, 25 bureaus, 50 tables, 12 dressing tables, 100 bedsteads, 12 cottage bedsteads, with a quantity of scythe snaths, measures, rakes, &c., Mr. Warners' cargo is destined for the retail trade on the Allegheny River."

"George A. Flint has a cargo of 5000 chairs of various styles, which are already contracted at Pittsburg."

"Most of these boats are finished in good style, gaily painted, with the name appearing in extensive capitals. We hope the name of Mr. Everett's boat 'HERE I AM' will not proclaim a 'fixed fact', by being lodged on the head of an island."

"This large amount of exports proves that the business interests of the village have kept pace with the enlargement of her limits, and that the growth of Jamestown has been healthy and will be permanent. It is not fanciful to suppose we shall soon need the paternal care of a Mayor and Board of Aldermen."

"ROCHESTER, Pa., "ARGUS", May 17, 1883: "A FLOATING DWELLING AND STORE". Mr. Nathan Brown, with his trading-boat is here again. Mr. Brown has been here every year for forty years, and his health is such that he bids fair to visit us for many years more. He deals in sash, doors, shutters, building hardware, &c., and his home is Jamestown, N. Y., on beautiful Chautauqua Lake. His boat without presents a very neat appearance, while within it is more convenient than many houses."
"Mr. Brown is possessor of a swivel gun of Revolutionary origin. It is eighteen inches long, three inches in diameter at the breech, and two inches at the muzzle. It is one of two guns taken by John Paul Jones from the British ship "SERAPIS", in the famous battle between it and the "BON HOMME RICHARD" (1779). Anyone wishing to see the relic can do so by calling on Commodore Brown, who is courteous and obliging."

END OF QUOTES.

I believe you all know this relic is on display at our History Center, at Westfield!

Here ends my saga of "JAMESTOWN'S FLAT and STORE BOATS", it is a brave, long story -- and deserves a better telling!

And, of Jamestown, whose genesis was - trees!

"A good place to Live and Work and Play!

I Thank You!

[Signature]

April 6, 1937.