

The Rise and Fall of River and Rail transportation in Madison, Indiana.

The Age of Steam

Article: The Famous Madison Marine Way



The following is an article from The Madison Courier-February 4, 1882

Our Shipyard-The Famous Madison Marine Way

Origin, History and Present Prosperity of a Great Industry
 Record of Steamboats and Barges Built and Repaired
 Who Has Owned and Conducted It
 And the Existing Management's Big and Merited Boom
 Present and Prospective Prosperity.

The Madison Ship-yard during the past year enjoyed one of the most successful business seasons ever known in its eventful and chequered history. It is an institution of far more importance to the life of Madison than our people suppose. In fact, it is of more real benefit to Madison than any other manufacturing establishment in our midst.

Since the present firm started in July, 1878, they have built twenty-six new steamboats and barges and repaired eighty steamboats-the work amounting to a quarter of a million of dollars. During the year 1881 the amount paid for wages alone was \$51, 504, an average of about \$1,000 per week for the whole year. Add to this the amount expended by the crews of boats under repair here for supplies and outfit, and the amount of employment given to collateral branches of the business-tin work, sheet iron and copper work, boiler-makers, foundrymen and machinists-and the week's average of wages will swell up to \$1.500. Nearly all this money enters the tills of Madison merchants.

By careful and close attention to business, together with skillful management, hard work and a fixed determination to do nothing but good, honest work and charge honest prices, the present firm have more than regained for the Madison Ship-yard its former enviable reputation; and in St. Louis today, and wherever its work is known, it ranks A No. 1. They have now under contract a side-wheel boat, 265 feet long, for the Cincinnati and Louisville United States Mail Line Company; a towboat 100 feet long for Wisdom & Dubach, of Hannibal, Missouri, and the large steamer Centennial, on which they will put a new stern and add some 35 feet to the length, making her, when finished, 318 feet long. This speaks well for the future of the yard, as the opening of spring will no doubt bring to it sufficient work to keep 200 men steadily employed during the entire year.

INTERESTING FIGURES: Through the kindness of Mr. George W. Palmer, Assistant Secretary and Treasurer of the Company, we are enabled to give a complete statement of the names and lengths of all the steamboats and barges built at the yard since his connection with it, to-wit:

STEAMBOATS*

Name	Class	Length
Flavilla	Stern Wheel	130
Travis Wright	“	130
St. John	Side Wheel	175
12th Era	Stern Wheel	135
Northwestern	Side Wheel	245
Alice	“	220
Rock Island	“	200
City of Quincy	“	280
Lettle Fleta	Stern Wheel	130
Lewis V. Bogy	Side Wheel	167
Lookout	Stern Wheel	128
Henry Probosco	Side Wheel	235
Warsaw Ferry	Centre Wheel	120
Wildwood	Side Wheel	180
Fleetwing	Stern Wheel	115
John Scott	“	145
Kittie Higler	“	170
Clifford	“	110
Jo Kinney	Side Wheel	236
Geo. C. Wolfe	Stern Wheel	195
Vice President	Side Wheel	165
Spread Eagle	“	175
Josie	Stern Wheel	145
Abbott's Ferry	Side Wheel	90
James F. Joy	“	145
Kate Kinney	Stern Wheel	200
Fannie Tatum	“	175
B. L. Bastrop	“	155
Laura L. Davis	“	185
J. W. Talbot	Wharf-boat	100
Russell Hinkley	Ferry-boat	174
Ellen G. Smith	Side Wheel	160
Maumelle	Stern Wheel	165
John Taylor	Ferry-boat	115
Tom Parker	Stern Wheel	100
Belle	“	134
Dawn	“	160
U. P. Schenck	“	250
Bonanza	Side Wheel	265
Virgie Lee	Stern Wheel	180
L. A. Sherley	“	220
Gen. Pike	“	220
Fannie Moore	“	175
John H. Hanna	“	180
Calumet	“	240

Port Eads	“	200
Alexandria	“	160
Lotus	“	185
Bald Eagle	“	200
Eagle	Ferry-boat	85
Parole	Stern Wheel	130
Fred A. Blanks	Side Wheel	260
A. T. Jenks	Stern Wheel	110
Moline	“	125
Menomine	“	120
Wiggins' Ferry	Side Wheel	200
C. W. Coles	Stern Wheel	130
City of Frankfort	“	132
Judelle	“	100
Emma Etheridge	“	125

BARGES

Nos. 1 & 2 Transfer	Model	160
Nos. 3 & 4 U. P. Schenck	“	160
No. 5 Hare	“	165
Nos. 6 & 7, Gould	Scow	150
No. 8, Pat	Model	110
No. 9, Harry, Jr.	“	150
No. 10, Loyd, Jr.	“	150
No. 11, Ruth	“	150
No. 12, Charlie	“	150
No. 13, Pearse	“	180
No. 14, Noble	“	175
No. 15, Missouri No. 3	“	160
No. 16, Missouri No. 4	“	160
No. 17, Keokuk	“	175
No. 18, Jake	“	150
No. 19, Jerry	“	150
No. 20, Hill	“	100
No. 21, William	“	100
No. 22, Twenty-four	“	200
No. 23, Twenty-five	“	200
No. 24, Twenty-nine	“	200
No. 25, Forty-two	“	225
No. 26, Forty-three	“	225
No. 27, Forty-four	“	228
No. 28, Eighty-eight	“	225
No. 29, Wasp	“	100
No. 30, Surprise	“	125
4,420		

The following summary gives the length of all the boats and barges built at the yard during the time stated above:

BOATS 10,216 feet

BARGES 4,420 feet

TOTAL 14,636 feet

Making a total length of 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles and 116 feet, at a total cost of \$731,958. Add to this machinery, etc, and it will give a showing of at least \$1,000,000 brought to Madison through the instrumentality of the yard. Our people should be proud of an institution that does so much to enrich our people.

RETROSPECTIVE

As stated above the history of the yard has been an eventful and chequered one, from its incipiency in 1850 up to July 1878, when the present firm assumed control of it.

The original intention of the incorporators was to erect a rolling mill on the site, or near the present ship-yard. In 1850 a company was formed for that purpose, under the title of the "Madison Iron Manufacturing Company." After incorporation they changed their plans, for some reason unknown to the writer, and determined to go into boat-building. A Mr. Murray, who had just completed the Cincinnati Marine Ways, was employed to build the Madison Ways, and completed them in the year 1852.

When the company was ready for business the ways were leased to Alexander Temple and Don C. Robinson, who commenced by building the steamers Golden Gate, 180 feet long, and the J. M. White, 300 feet long. They continued to build large and fine boats, doing good, honest work, and soon established for the ship-yard an enviable reputation.

A GREAT DISASTER

On the 2d day of July 1856, Messrs. Temple & Robinson met with a great disaster by the burning of their saw mill, mold loft, etc.; also a large boat nearly completed on the ways. This disaster for a time stopped operations at the yard. The company, being unwilling to rebuild, closed out their interest to Messrs. Temple & Robinson, who rebuilt the destroyed buildings and repaired the damaged ways, and run the yard successfully for some years.

FIRMS CHANGED BY SAD DEATHS

In 1865, Vance & Armstrong purchased the yard and run it until the death of Mr. Vance on the ill-fated steamer United States. The surviving partner, Mr. Henry Armstrong, being unable to conduct the business, it reverted to its original owner. Mr. Temple having died in 1867, Mr. Robinson re-sold the yard to J. R. Stuart & Co., the firm consisting of J. R. Stuart, Wm. H. Fry and D. C. Robinson. In less than a year the latter sold his interest to Benjamin F. Temple, son of Alex. Temple, who in about a year sold his interest to Stuart & Fry.

From 1869 to 1873 Messrs. Stuart & Fry conducted the business with great energy and success; but the panic of 1876, which paralyzed all business in the country, did not spare Madison, and the ship-yard felt its paralyzing hand. Added to all this came the melancholy death of John R. Stuart by drowning off the steamer Pat Rogers, on the fatal morning of August 5th, 1873, at Laughery Creek.

Mr. W. H. Fry, the surviving partner, employed the veteran boat-builder, Capt. Dan. H. Morton, to superintend the yard, and though always under a financial cloud, did a booming business for some years, turning out some splendid boats.

BUILDING THE HENRY PROBASCO

One unfortunate venture of Stuart & Fry was the building of the side-wheel steamer Henry Probasco. She was 235 feet long, 36 feet beam and 6 2/3 feet depth of hold; engines 22 X 7 feet stroke, and cost about \$40,000. Not being able to find a purchaser, Mr. Fry hired a captain and crew and run her himself. As might have been expected, from his inexperience, the thing was a failure, and, at the close of a losing trip to New Orleans, she was sunk on the Grand Chain, some miles above Cairo, Ill.

In addition to his shipyard interest, Mr. Fry was interested in the iron store of Maxwell, Fry & Thurston, at Indianapolis. Owing to a decline in the price of iron, this firm went into bankruptcy in 1876, carrying with it Mr. Fry and the old ship-yard, all involved in one financial ruin. The Sheriff sold all the personal property, and left the yard as clean as if an army of locusts had passed over it.

FIVE YEARS OF IDLENESS

For five years this noble property lay idle, and everything and everybody in the west end of the city put on grave-yard appearance. The ship-yard's weekly pay rolls gave life to that part of the city and when they could no longer be looked too, business was paralyzed. Many of the merchants removed to Jeffersonville and Cincinnati to obtain employment.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PRESENT COMPANY

In July, 1878, under the management and untiring exertions of Charles A. Korbly, Esq., a joint stock company was formed, consisting of James Hargan, Charles Alling, F. W. Hablitzel, S. M. Strader, James H. Crozier and D. C. Robinson, under the style of "The Madison Marine Railway and Ship-yard Co." This Company bought in the interests of the three principal mortgage-holders, viz: Messrs. D. C. Robinson, G. W. Palmer and the Firemen & Mechanics' Insurance Co., issuing stock therefore. Five Directors were chosen and officers as follows: James Hargan, President; S. M. Strader, Vice President; Charles A. Korbly, Secretary and Treasurer; D. C. Robinson, Superintendent.

The new firm had everything to contend with. No stock on hand, no tools, and boasted reputation and prestige of the yard gone. With many to say "God speed you," but few to lend a helping hand. In spite of all these difficulties, the new Company has weathered the gale, more than regained the lost ground, and to-day the financial conditions and reputation of "The Madison Marine Railway and Ship-yard Co., for first-class work in every particular is second to no other establishment of the kind in the country. That it may continue to merit the success it has achieved is the wish of

Phelix Adair,
Madison, Ind,
Feb. 3, 1882

note: Steamboat enthusiasts may want to compare the above list of STEAMBOATS with the Ways' Packet Directory. There are some inconsistencies.

commenting closed for this article

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