

## **The Busy Bee and the Skipper**

Article written by Betty Auten, Seneca County Historian, and appeared in the Volume 3 Number 4 (circa late 1986) issue of her Seneca County History newsletter.

Today, the pleasure boats on Seneca and Cayuga Lakes and on the New York State Barge Canal continue the heritage started when the first pioneers settled and passed through the area. And before that time, it is certain that the Indians who lived here, also used the lakes to ply their canoes from one end of the lake to the other.

Beyond the southern end of Seneca Lake there were deep ravines to cross when one traveled by land. There was a swamp at the northern end of the lake but it was passable. Over 5,000 men crossed and re-crossed this swamp during the Sullivan-Clinton Campaign in 1779.

There were also ravines at the southern end of Cayuga Lake. The swamp at the northern end of the lake extended several miles beyond the lake. There were only narrow footpaths where one could go through until one went beyond the swamp. It must have been difficult for Peter Gansvoort and the soldiers who returned to Albany by that route. This was the route they took to return with the baggage that would not be needed while the rest of the army returned along the lakes, south to Newtown (Elmira).

When John Harris and James Bennett arrived in the area about 1788, they saw the need for a ferry and soon were providing a much-needed service. Later there were other ferries on Cayuga and Seneca Lakes, but the fame of the Harris-Bennett ferry has continued throughout all the related history of the county.

Their craft was about the size of a rowboat. The early boats were propelled by sail and with paddle wheel. Probably when all else failed, manpower with the aid of oars was also used.

In a five-year period, from 1801 to 1806, about 330 boats passed through portage at Seneca Falls, then called Mynderse Mills. Job Smith, Lawrence Van Cleef, and later others, were in the business of transporting the boats around the falls. No names have been preserved of those who did this at Waterloo, but that area also had a falls to bypass.

In Mynderse Mills, the boats had to be carried about a mile and the owners were charged six shillings a boat. As the crafts became larger, the price went up because the work had to be done with a team of horses. When the Cayuga and Seneca Canal was completed about 1818, this type of work was no longer necessary.

Boat yards were established along the canal and along the lakes. The "Miller," a boat which was used on the Erie Canal, was built at Seneca Falls in 1816.

The first sloop on Seneca Lake was the "Alexander," built at a cost of \$2,304 and launched in 1796. The first steamboat on Seneca Lake sailed in 1828, but there were boats on both of the lakes earlier than that date. The Goodwins applied for a ferry license as early as 1811.

For over one hundred years, crafts of varied sizes traveled up and down, over and across Seneca and Cayuga Lakes, transporting tourists to all the "ports of call" along the lakes. Some of these even picked up passengers in Waterloo and Seneca Falls for a pleasant journey to Watkins or Ithaca or Kings Ferry.

The skippers of these vessels made their occupation a lifetime calling and remained at their job for many years.

The most notable of these in Seneca County was Capt. James Voorhees Quick of Kidders. He was born Aug. 5, 1855 at Lodi, the son of Henry V. and Mary Traphagen Quick. Henry was also a ferryman. He was born in Seneca County, according to the 1860 census and was listed as a ferryman in the 1870 census. His son James was 13 at that time and probably was already gaining valuable experience by working with his father on the boats.

A ferry license was granted to Quick on April 21, 1886. Whether this was his first license is not known but this one gave him permission to travel from the end of the turnpike road at what is known as King Ferry to or near the dock of Myron R. Cole at Kidders. It was slightly more than two miles between the two locations. The fee was 25 cents per person; 75 cents for a man and a horse; \$1 for a team and wagon.

The "Busy Bee" was 67 feet overall and was built by James Bennett of Sheldrake, no relation to the Bennett of Harris-Bennett fame. The boat had four-foot gunwales and a 17 foot beam. It was equipped with either sail or steam. In the early years, a horse went along on the boat. It was trained to walk a treadmill as an extra source of power if and when the wind failed.

The rudder was a heavy detachable paddle equipped with chains to hold the boat on a straight course in case the skipper had to leave the wheel.

The Busy Bee made regular trips every day to meet the trains and to carry mail. In addition it was used in countless excursion and pleasure trips. The ferry could be signaled from either side through the use of a large board, nailed in a certain spot where Quick could see it in any weather. The board also saved Quick from making unnecessary trips across the lake. A white board meant the ferry was needed, a black board meant there were no passengers that trip.

In an interview, Quick was asked about any trips that stood out in his memory. He recalled the two largest loads. One, the largest was the participants for a Quaker funeral which would take place at Jacksonville in Tompkins County. Included were 10 carriages, 14 horses and 83 people.

Another time he recalled was when a German band was engaged to play at the Cayuga Lake House at Kidders. There were 75 people in that party and also included was their personal supply of a special German brew.

Quick remembered that around the turn of the century when the Westinghouse family lived at Kidders. George Westinghouse used to come in his private car by railroad to King Ferry. He would then ride across the lake on the Busy Bee to visit his brother at Kidders. He preferred the ferry to his private yacht.

It wasn't until the railroads that brought an end to the ferries. The development of the automobile brought about a great change to lake shore activities. Business dropped off to such an extent that the Busy Bee only crossed from May to November and it was probably the only ferry left on Cayuga Lake, at least in the northern end of the lake.

The boat needed frequent repairs which were costly. Without the needed revenue, Quick terminated the service and scuttled the boat. It was sunk near the dock at Kidders. It was partially visible under the water for several years until it finally broke apart and disappeared from sight.

James V. Quick piloted the Busy Bee and other crafts on Cayuga Lake for many years and the title of captain was honorary—until in the early 1940s he was presented a captain's bar from one of the officials at the newly-built Sampson Naval Base.

His wife Jennie died in 1930. He died in November 1945. He was survived by one daughter, Mrs. Anna Haviland of Interlaken, three grandchildren and three great grandchildren.