

# HARVEYSLAKE.ORG

## The Harvey's Lake Steamboat Era

### THE EARLY YEARS 1860-1890

The first steam boats to ply the waters of Harvey's Lake were small usually transferred from service on local rivers. No detailed descriptions of these boats have been found, but all were thirty to forty feet long, had a rigid wood or canvas top with the steam machinery in the center. The later steamers drove a screw propeller unlike the paddle-wheel steamers of the shallow Susquehanna River. During inclement weather, the steamers may have had canvas awnings to protect the passengers.

The earliest steamboat at the Lake was the *Wingohocking*. It was originally built to serve the river and canal industry on the Susquehanna River in the Nanticoke area. It was taken to the Lake in 1860 to serve the Lake House (later Rhodes Hotel). In 1865 it was sold and taken to a New Jersey lake. In 1876 James W. Rhodes purchased another river steamboat, the *Emma*, for the Rhodes Hotel. It was a twenty-five foot side-wheeler. Within a couple of years, no record of the boat can be found.

Apparently, no additional steamboats were added to the Lake for several years. But in early June 1887 two steamboats were brought to Harvey's Lake to serve the two hotels and the increasing summer trade. James W. Rhoads and Charles Rhoads purchased a small steamer, the *Rose*, from Edward G. Butzbach, who operated a well-known landing on the Susquehanna River in Hanover Township. Originally called *Lena*, Butzbach launched the steamer on the Susquehanna River in April 1887 and renamed it. The *Rose* may have run only one season at the Lake as no record exists of it after 1887.

At the same time, Col. Jacob Rice, who owned the Lake Grove House, launched a steamer called *Lily of the Lake*. Little is known of the Rice steamer. It came from the Susquehanna River, and its original name may have been *Riverside*. During the same summer the Rice steamer was purchased by Albert Lewis, a wealthy land owner at the North Corner. Apparently, Lewis ran the steamer on a private basis and not for public fare.

In August 1887 regular passenger excursions began on a railroad which ran from the Wyoming Valley to Alderson. The small steamers of 1887 met the train at Alderson and took guests to the Rhoads and Lake Grove House hotels. The railroad and steamboat rides were a welcome change from the long stagecoach ride to the Lake.

In May 1888 an attractive steamer, the thirty foot *Mistletoe*, was launched on the Lake

## HARVEYSLAKE.ORG

by Charles Stanley and John Lloyd of Pittston. The *Mistletoe* was apparently built on the Hudson River, as it had previously run around Staten Island. The *Mistletoe* carried about thirty passengers and appeared to serve principally the Rhoads Hotel.

In May 1889 William Bond, of Warden Place, brought another small steamer, *City Charter*, from Ithaca, New York. The *City Charter* was forty-one feet long and eight and one-half feet wide with a three-bladed propeller. From 1889 to 1904 the *City Charter* made regular summer runs on the Lake.

### THE BIG BOATS 1891-1905

The age of the large steamers began in 1891. In January 1891 William Bond began to build a large steamboat at the North Corner—the first to be built at the Lake. It was never named, but was generally known as “the Big Boat.” Bond would subsequently use a boathouse near the Hunlock home at Warden Place to headquarter his steamer business. The *Big Boat* was seventy feet long and fifteen feet wide. Bond also had a boarding house and store at Warden Place near the later site of the Lakeside Inn. The *Big Boat*, painted white and red, was launched in June 1891. One news account reported that the boiler was inadequate for the boat's size and had to be replaced with a larger boiler. On the trial trip Bond was in a rowboat admiring the structure of his creation, and in the excitement capsized but was rescued by a friend.

By the fall of 1892 it was evident that Harvey's Lake would become a major summer resort. Bond's *Big Boat* was well patronized and was now said to carry an exaggerated two hundred passengers. The Lake Grove House planned a major expansion to accommodate 150 guests, and a new iron bridge at the Inlet was planned to replace an old long wooden bridge that was in disrepair.

The success of the Lake as a resort and the novel steamboat trade attracted the interest of local businessmen. On November 14, 1892, the Lake Transit Company was formed to operate steamboats at Harvey's Lake. On January 10, 1893, George R. Wright took the New York Central train to Peekskill, New York, along the Hudson River, to meet W. R. Osborn, a builder of steamboats.

During the 1893 winter, Wright helped erect a huge crib on the ice in front of the Rhoads Hotel to prepare a dock for a new steamboat to be built for the Lake Transit Co. The crib was finished on March 11. At seventy feet long and nine feet wide, the crib signaled that *Big Boat* would soon have a worthy rival. The next day Wright and Rhoads walked to Warden Place to view the *Big Boat*. They wanted to buy it to eliminate competition for the 1893 summer season. But Bond wanted \$5,000.00—an exorbitant price for a two-year-old steamboat.

The following week, on March 17, machinery and material to build the new steamboat arrived at the Picnic Grounds on the railroad from Osborn's Company at Peekskill. At a

## HARVEYSLAKE.ORG

March 23 Transit Company meeting the directors decided to call their new steamer *Rosalind* .

On May 9, 1893, at 3:40 P.M., the *Rosalind* was launched with champagne into the Lake from the Picnic Grounds. On May 13 a special railroad car carried the owners, their families and friends to the Lake for a ceremony. The builder, W. R. Osborn, held the wheel for the maiden trip.

The *Rosalind* was sixty feet long with an eleven foot beam. With one and one-half foot guards, the overall width was fourteen feet. Built with white oak, hard pine and white cedar, the *Rosalind* had a pilot house on the forward deck with an eleven foot open cabin forward of the engine room. There was a thirteen foot enclosed cabin behind the engine room. The steamer had a three and one-half foot draft and carried seventy-five to one hundred passengers.

On March 27, 1895, Bond finally agreed to sell his boat for \$3,500. By this time he had renamed it the *A. H. Lewis*, after the local lumber baron. Although Bond's price was still high, Wright persuaded the Transit Company directors that it was important to have a monopoly on steamer travel at the Lake. William Bond took his small steamer, *City Charter*, to Lake Carey, although for a time he continued to run a store and boarding house at Warden Place. By 1896 the *A. H. Lewis* was rechristened as the *Shawanese* and would remain the largest steam boat at Harvey's Lake for another four years.

On June 9, 1900, the Lake Transit Company launched the *Natoma* or "Queen of the Waters." Christened with champagne by Miss Julia Raife, daughter of the company's general manager, Philip R. Raife, the *Natoma* had a length on deck of seventy-seven feet and an overall length of eighty feet. The beam was fifteen feet with a four foot draft. The vertical tubular boiler was five feet six inches in diameter and eight feet six inches high, and could supply 150 pounds of steam and eighty horsepower.

The *Natoma* was the only fully double-decked steamboat to run on Harvey's Lake. When crowded, it carried 350 passengers. While the other Lake steamers had a single lifeboat, the *Natoma* carried two. All of the steamers carried canvas-covered cork life preservers. The *Natoma* pilot house was on the upper deck. There were cabins in front and behind the boiler room on the main deck. It cost \$3,000 to build.

On September 29, 1902, a new steamboat company was formed to compete with the Lake Transit Company. With \$20,000 of capital stock, the Harvey's Lake Steamboat Company had six directors. Calvin Dymond of Kingston was President. Other incorporators were T. L. Newell, E. T. Payne, Ephriam Troxell, John N. Pettebone and C. D. Honeywell.

The Harvey's Lake Steamboat Company engaged William Osborn to build two twin steamers. They were built alongside each other on the shore of Harvey's Lake above

## HARVEYSLAKE.ORG

the Rhoads Hotel in the spring of 1903. The *Wilkes-Barre* and *Kingston*, were ready for launching in May 1903. The *Wilkes-Barre* was initially launched without ceremony during the early days of May. As with other launchings at the Lake, William Osborn, the builder, was present.

The launching of the *Kingston* was scheduled for May 13, 1903. At 4:00 P.M., as the supports were knocked away, the launching party cheered the entry of the *Kingston* into the Lake. The boat was ceremoniously christened by Miss Faith Bullard with a bottle of wine broken against the bow followed by the cheer of the crowd. The Forty Fort Band played the Star Spangled Banner. The initial pilot for the steamer was Albert Marcy. Marcy and Daniel Ide, who resided near the Lake, helped to build the twin steamers.

The *Wilkes-Barre* and *Kingston* were truly twin steamers, and without the names of the boats painted on the bows, there was no practical method of distinguishing them. Each steamer was seventy feet long and twelve feet wide with a four foot draft.

Whether due to rivalry or passenger demands, the Lake Transit Company, on February 3, 1905, engaged the Osborn Company to build the last of the Harvey's Lake steamers. By this time the Osborn Company had moved its works a few miles south of Peekskill to Croton-on-Hudson. During the spring the new steamer *Acoma* was built at a site above the Oneonta landing toward the Outlet. *Acoma* is an Indian name for *Large Water*. The launching of the *Acoma* was scheduled for June 29, 1905.

In anticipation of the *Acoma*, the Lake Transit Company in May 1905 sold the *Rosalind* to a firm that operated steamboats at Lake Carey. The *Rosalind* was sent on three gondola cars on the Lehigh Valley Railroad to Lake Carey.

The *Acoma* was seventy-five feet long with an inside beam of thirteen feet but a beam over hull guards of sixteen feet. It had a hold of four and one-half feet. The keel was made of white oak. With an eighty horsepower boiler and working pressure of 160 pounds, it could travel fifteen miles per hour and was considered the fastest steamboat on the inland waters of Pennsylvania. The decks had a canopy for the passengers' comfort. The cost to build the *Acoma* was \$7,000.

### THE BOOM YEARS 1900-1920

The two decades from 1900 to 1920 were the high water mark for the steamers at Harvey's Lake. It began with the launching of the *Natoma* and ended with deceptively good seasons immediately after the Great War.

In the early 1900's the two steamboat companies enjoyed a rivalry that supported the six steamers - Shawanese, *Rosalind*, *Natoma*, *Wilkes-Barre*, *Kingston*, and *Acoma*. The competition was also good for the summer tourists and residents who were assured of transportation to the trolley or train to meet work schedules and of timely trips to the

## HARVEYSLAKE.ORG

summer dances and amusements.

During the early 1900's the crowds grew with each season. In addition to the usual community and church picnics, huge crowds were drawn to the Lake by ethnic festivals, especially at the Picnic Grounds. For many seasons thousands of people would arrive on the train or trolley, almost on a daily basis, for special picnic excursions. The steamers would provide day-long service from the Oneonta landing to the Picnic Grounds and to the hotels and picnic points around the Lake. The picture postcard was in vogue, and over three hundred views of the Lake were created to capture the Lake's Golden Era.

In June 1909 the Lake Transit Company purchased the assets of the Harvey's Lake Steamboat Company and enjoyed a monopoly on steamboat traffic at the Lake. After the Lake Transit Company acquired the *Wilkes-Barre* and *Kingston*, relatively new boats, the company retired the *Shawanese*, now nineteen years old, and offered it for sale.

By this time the Lake Transit Company had a full-time general manager, Clarence Shaver, who would continue in this capacity until the end of the steamboat days. Daily steamboat business began on May 15, 1910, and the Fourth of July in this year set a record for the highest daily passenger service on the steamers. The *Shawanese* did not attract a buyer; and it rested at the West Corner dock until it was dismantled.

During the earlier years, when there were large daily picnics, each of the steamboats enjoyed a busy day. A couple of steamers would begin an early run to meet the trolley stops and then quit in the late afternoon. The remaining steamers would start later in the morning and run until 10:00 P.M. or even midnight if a special late excursion was ordered. If a boat had an especially long day, it might have to re-supply with coal in the late afternoon .

The most popular ride for the trolley passengers was the "direct run" from the Oneonta landing to the Picnic Grounds. With a trolley arriving every half-hour, a couple of steamers could keep busy on the direct run for much of the day.

There were other popular landings on the Lake. From the Oneonta the steamer could run a circuit around the Lake stopping at Warden Place to leave guests for the Lakeside Inn . Then the steamer would cross the Lake to Boyd's above the firehouse, which was as close to Alderson as the steamers could approach.

Residents in an area near a steamer landing had a system to flag a steamer or launch. Red and white flags were at hand with red to signal an "up-lake" boat and white for a "down-lake" boat. At night a lantern or match circling in the dark would get a passing steamer.

## HARVEYSLAKE.ORG

For use in shallow areas the Lake Transit Company had a gasoline launch. The Lake Transit Company initially ran the *Wyoming*, a crude launch with glass side windows. After a few years the *Wyoming* was used infrequently and it remained stored in the Lake Transit Company boathouse. About 1915 the Lake Transit Company purchased a larger launch *Emily*, which was a popular three-cylinder, gasoline passenger boat.

The *Emily* was most often used for early morning and evening runs. Summer residents who worked in the Valley boarded the *Emily* to meet the early morning train at Alderson or the more popular trolley at Oneonta. At the Oneonta the *Emily* picked up laborers who came on the early trolley to work at the Lake for the day. The *Emily* also met the summer residents who returned from the valley on the early evening trolley runs. On Sunday morning the *Emily* carried Lake residents to the Alderson Church or to Mass at the Oneonta Hotel. The *Emily* was also available for excursions during the day or evening.

By 1920 all of the steamers could not be kept busy for the entire season, as tourists increasingly owned their own automobiles. By the early 1920's the *Kingston* was in reserve most of the time as the years wore harder on the *Kingston* than on her twin, the *Wilkes-Barre*. For the most part the *Acoma* and *Wilkes-Barre* were the workhorses for the fleet. Typically, the *Emily* handled the early morning trolley run; the *Acoma*, under "Cap" Anderson, ran a twelve-hour day from 10:00 A.M. until 10:00 P.M. The *Wilkes-Barre* ran until the early evening. On weekends and holidays the *Natoma* was also fired to handle the crowds.

"Cap" George M. Anderson was a colorful figure who was especially liked by the steamboat passengers. His ancestors were among the original Lake settlers in 1840. He was born at Harvey's Lake and in his youth he worked for the Farmer's Dairy in Wilkes-Barre; he then timbered near the Ice Lake Hotel above Luzerne. He and his brother, Charles, also cleared timber at the Outlet. The timber would be taken to the city, and the Andersons would return to the Lake with a load of coal that sold at the bin for three dollars a ton. In 1895 at age twenty-five, Anderson became a deckhand on the *Shawanese*. He learned the tricks of Lake travel under Capt. E. J. Carpenter. When Reuben Shaver took over the *Shawanese* from Carpenter, Anderson became the engineer. When Shaver left to run a steamer at Lake Carey, Anderson advanced to captain. Anderson had a special sense for the night run as he personally piloted the *Acoma* and often the *Emily* around the blackened Lake.

### DECLINE AND END

As business declined through the 1920s, the steamers ran less often. The Lake Transit Company used the *Emily* as a substitute more frequently for passenger trade, often with Anderson at the helm. The *Emily* carried thirty to thirty-five passengers. The wheel in the front was infrequently used. A second wheel was in the center-right where the pilot would control an engine and steer at the same time. The *Emily* was run by one man

## HARVEYSLAKE.ORG

except at night when an extra hand was generally aboard. With a wooden roof and fringe, the beloved *Emily* picked up her passengers to meet the morning train or trolley and faithfully met them on the return lines in the evening. In inclement weather, canvas awnings were dropped. A glass windshield, hinged on the front, could be dropped during a rain. It took really rough weather to rock the big steamers, and even the *Emily* managed well when the waves were rolling, although it was always wise to find a quick port in a sudden storm.

The *Emily* provided daily service through the late 1920's when only the holidays and weekends drew sufficient crowds to run a steamer. The Lake Transit Company could no longer survive the changing times.

The inland steamboat trade elsewhere in the state was also ending. On March 29, 1929, the state legislature repealed the inland steamboat licensing law of 1903. Apparently, the law was not actively enforced as some workmen on the Harvey's Lake steamers were not licensed. However, boilers on the steamers continued to be inspected under general inspection or insurance laws.

By 1930 the steamers were running sporadically at the Lake. The steamboat company tried to take advantage of Sandy Beach's popularity by building a concrete and steer pier at the beach in June 1930. The company advertised runs from the trolley station at Sunset to Sandy Beach. But public attraction could not be salvaged. The increasing use of the private automobile also tolled the end of the trolley line to the Lake. Regular trolley service to the Lake ended on July 6, 1931.

In the summer of 1932 the assets of the Lake Transit Company were sold for \$4,000 to John A. Griffiths of Forty Fort, although the sale was not reported until late July 1933.

The sale included the four steamers, the two launches and five parcels of land. Griffiths had no plan to resume the steamer business. Instead, he intended to develop the land holdings of the Transit Company, especially in the Outlet area.

Oscar Roth, an area jeweler, and Bob Roberts were interested in purchasing one of the steamers. The *Wilkes-Barre* and *Kingston* were in poor condition. Although the *Acoma* and its machinery were in better shape, the double-deck of the *Natoma* was still a special attraction. For a few hundred dollars the *Natoma* was sold to Roth and Roberts.

Several of the Lake's steamboat men assisted in preparing the *Natoma* for the remainder of the 1933 season. The *Natoma* drew a curious and friendly crowd as it circled in the Lake in a renewed life. For docking, the *Natoma* remained at the Lake Transit Company boathouse. For the 1934 season, however, the long dock at Sandy Beach became available. After 1934 the *Natoma* continued to run, usually on Sundays, for sightseeing trips around the Lake. In addition to Sandy Beach, the other stops were the Picnic Grounds and the Oneonta landing. A trip was twenty-five cents for an adult

## HARVEYSLAKE.ORG

and fifteen cents for a child. The new owners added an electric light system and painted the boat in white with black trim. Occasionally, the *Natoma* was rented for a party trip. Coal for the *Natoma* was trucked to the Oneonta landing and dumped on the shore where the Roth family would load it on the steamboat.

After the sale of the Lake Transit Company, the *Wilkes-Barre*, *Kingston* and *Acoma*, along with the *Wyoming* were dismantled at the Outlet boathouse. The boilers, engines and metal parts were sold for scrap to the Bethlehem Steel Company. Griffiths, however, kept the *Emily* and had it trucked to Lake Winola where he ran it for passenger excursions for two seasons. After the second season, the *Emily* was vandalized and lost to fire during the winter while it was resting on the shore.

By the end of the 1930's, operation and maintenance of the *Natoma* were a nuisance to its owners. In late August 1938 it was reported that time had finally caught the *Natoma*. It had served the season for Sunday tourist rides around the lake, and it was rented for evening parties. The Big Apple, a foot-stomping dance fad of the time, was drawing thirty to forty couples for dance parties on the steamer, which shuddered under the abuse. Carving initials on the woodwork of the *Natoma* was also a favorite pastime, and owners were unable to stay ahead of the damages to the boat, although the hull still seemed sound.

One unknown day the *Natoma* had its last ride, and by 1940 the *Natoma* was resold for two hundred dollars for the scrap value of its machinery and brass fittings. The *Natoma* was then taken to the shore above the Picnic Grounds toward Alderson in front of the Lakeview development owned by John A. Redington, a former owner of the amusement park. With the bow facing the shoreline, the *Natoma* was fastened in place to piles and was used for a dock. In the fall of 1947 the Redington lot fronting the *Natoma* was sold to Art Badman. By this time the *Natoma* was a wreck. Winter skaters had frequently pulled pieces from the steamer for firewood and the *Natoma* was sitting on the lake bottom with water flooding the vacant engine room. Badman had no alternative but to dismantle the *Natoma* hulk. He used some of the wood to build a summer cottage near the site. It was a sorrowful end for the most majestic treasure of the Lake's Golden Era.