

Phil Scheckel - the man and the river he loved



Pictured above is the Phil Scheckel as it appeared in 1897, when it made its last trip down the Chippewa River. After ending its career on the Chippewa, it was transported to Florida where it was used for a number of years.

Phil Scheckel immigrated to the Chippewa Valley from Germany in 1855 after a brief stay in Iowa. Scheckel spent the next 40 years navigating the Chippewa River on various riverboats from his base in Waubeek, which was a logging community on the Chippewa River about 3 miles upstream from Durand, on the west side of Nine Mile Island. In the early years of his career, riverboats had to transport everything into river communities like Durand and Waubeek which would not be grown there. Additionally, his riverboats transported passengers and for a number of years moved large rafts of logs both up the Chippewa to the sawmills at Waubeek, and Chippewa (which was on the Durand side of the Chippewa river where Bear Creek empties into the Chippewa) as well as downstream to Read's Landing, where the rafts were pushed to Mississippi River sawmills like those at LaCrosse. With the development of the railroad in the early 1880's the function of riverboats changed. One problem with riverboats was that they were at the mercy of the river and as it varied in depth, problems with sandbars could be a daily occurrence. Additionally, riverboats were very labor intensive as materials transported up and down stream had to be loaded, and unloaded a number of times before reaching its final destination.

Not only did Phil Scheckel know the navigation of the Chippewa River probably better than any man, but he also invented ways of using brush to create wing dams, causing the Chippewa to "deepen" itself making travel easier. Scheckel

also invented the "jenny pole" which allowed riverboats to pull themselves off sandbars if they ran aground.

The following stories about Phil Scheckel came from a number of sources, ranging from articles from newspapers of the time (the Pepin County Courier, the Entering Wedge, and the North Pepin Independents), to photos and stories which we were able to borrow from Georgeann and Pam Wolfe, who are descendents of Phil Scheckel. We hope that you enjoy the stories and that they give you insight into not only an interesting time in our history, but also into another way of life...life on the river.

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- haps the most famous Chippewa River boat, pushing a barge of logs on the Chippewa River. The Phil Scheckel was captained by Phil Scheckel, who worked the Chippewa River with paddlewheelers from 1855 until he made his last run in 1896 or '97.



(click on photos for a larger view)



An artist's view of Durand in 1881 from across the Chippewa River. A good share of the buildings in the foreground burned on Christmas day of 1881. Notice the riverboat on the right-hand side of the picture. Click the picture for a closer view...

[Steamboat Whistles Echo In Valley](#)



Eighty years aren't long when dealing with history, but those 80 years have brought a great change in the mode of transportation of this area. Most persons take four-lane highways and high speed cars for granted, but there are a few residents who can remember when it was much different. Among them is Katherine Rode Brisson, Chippewa Falls.

Pictured are Phil Scheckel and his wife, Margaret. The farm where they lived in Waubeek township is today owned by Richard and Judy Schlosser.

Father Was Captain

Only Way To Travel



"It was the only way to travel then" she said, except by horse. "There wasn't any railroad until much later". The coming of the railway replaced steamboats and by the



end of the century only the Phil Scheckel and one or two other steamers were still operating. Railroads could carry goods, lumber and passengers much faster and didn't have to worry about low-water or large log drives. "We lived on a big farm overlooking the river north of Durand on the west side" Mrs. Brisson said. "It was always a big thrill for us kids to run down to the shore when dad got off to see what he brought for us. He always had something". Scheckel first captained the "Pete Wilson" steamboat before he built his own, which was named for him.

Towed Log Rafts

Mrs. Brisson said her father's steamer carried mostly freight and log drive crewmen upstream and then towed rafts piled with lumber down the Chippewa to the Mississippi where they were towed elsewhere. There were some passengers on the boats, she recalled. According to Mrs. Brisson, Capt. Scheckel had made some trips as far as Eau Claire and Chippewa. However, the river was not always navigable to those points. Sand bars were the biggest obstacles and at various places wing dams were extended out into the water to create one deep channel for the steamers. Steamboats on the Chippewa were constructed a little differently from those that ran on the deeper Mississippi. The water here was shallower and more spread out in some areas. Thus, the ships were constructed with a flatter bottom and didn't draw as much water.

Was Innovative

Scheckel was credited with being the first user of what was called the "Jinny pole" to help steamers off the sand bars. The poles were driven into the sand bar and the steamer was able to pull itself off. (The poles are at the Durand Museum).

Scheckel was born in Luxembourg and came to the U.S. in 1855. He moved almost immediately to the Chippewa Valley, where in 1862 he built the "Golden Start" which he sold to E.E. Heerman, another well-known steamboat line operator. The "Phil Scheckel" was built in 1880.

In the "History of the Chippewa Valley", the author says, "With his long experience and careful attention to business, Scheckel was one of the best pilots on the river. No man on the Chippewa River understands its navigation better than he as the channel is obstructed by numerous sand bars which are constantly changing and creating the need for great care to successfully navigate the stream in low water. "The business he is engaged in being the towing of lumber, the captain has made several useful improvements in the methods employed. "Brush dams have been constructed for the purpose of keeping the channel clear. About 1861, with others, he began using the "jinny pole", which is very useful in manipulating rafts". By the mid-1870's local history journals reported 300,000

bushels of grain were being produced in the Chippewa Valley. Most of it was shipped down on steamers to Reeds Landing at Wabasha, Minn., then it went to the Twin Cities or downstream. The steamboats also had a role in the history of Eau Claire during the Civil War era as the steamer "Stella Whipple" left Eau Claire on September 21, 1861, with volunteers for the war. The coming of the railway replaced the steamers in a hurry. E.E. Heerman was one of the first to recognize this. He moved his interest to Missouri and points west in 1880's and a number of other steamships disappeared from the Chippewa River. It was a 13 hour ride upstream on the steamers while by rail it took only 3 hours.

Captain Scheckel's 43 years of service on the river were more than anyone else's according to records. Today, little physical evidence of the steamboat era remains. One item is the anchor from the "Phil Scheckel", which is located in Laura Ingalls Wilder Park at Pepin.

This 3 page article along with the photos used to illustrate it were graciously loaned to us by Georgeann Wolfe and her daughter, Pam Wolfe. Georgeann is a granddaughter of Phil Scheckel, and is justly proud of her heritage. We thank Pam and Georgeann for their generosity.



The Maiden Voyage of the Phil Scheckel
from the Pepin County Courier, April 27, 1878

Knapp, Stout & Co.'s new steamer, the Phil Scheckel, made her trial trip downriver on Monday last, returning next day. On landing at our levee, she was boarded by a large number of our citizens, who at once constituted themselves a "board of inspectors" and proceeded to look the property over. They examined her thoroughly and decided unanimously that she was the best Chippewa boat yet built. The Company has spared no pains nor expense to get a good, light-draught and serviceable boat - and they got it. She is a sternwheeler, 100 feet in length, 18 feet beam, built something after the style of the Ida Campbell, and draws less water than any boat on the river. She was built under the supervision of Mr. J.H. Stout, with Joe Gazley of this village as "boss" mechanic, and does full credit to both. Ed. Peck, engineer on one of K.S. & Co.'s Mississippi tow boats, put in the machinery, which is a sufficient guarantee that it is well done' the machinery is all new, except the boiler.

The boat will have the following officers for the season:

Captain: Phil Scheckel
Clerk: John Lyman
Pilots: M. Magill, M. Stevens
Engineers: John Wright, Ben Anderson

And in a related article from the same newspaper:

Ella Department

The new steamer Phil Scheckel landed here on Monday. She is a splendid looking boat. The company have again secured the services of M. Magill an old and reliable pilot. He has left his store in charge of Fred Porter, who you will find ready and waiting to wait on his customers.



The Crew of the Phil Scheckel (according to Eli Minder, Pilot)
taken verbatim from a segment of the April 25, 1918 Pepin County Courier article

Eli Minder was the pilot on the Phil Scheckel for many years. When he died in 1918, the editor of the Pepin County Courier found the following information which Minder had sent to him some time earlier, but the editor had been too busy to do anything with the information. At the time of Eli Minder's death it was included in an article accompanying his obituary.

Captain (from 1878 to 1901): Philip Scheckel

Pilots: Eli Minder, Marcellus Stevens, William Dustin and perhaps Henry Carlisle.

Engineers: Jas. McGuire, Ben Anderson, Pearl Roundy.

Clerks: John Hopwood, Chas. W. Greer, V. R. Lyman (now the noted surgeon in Eau Claire), Ben R. Stahman, W.J. Cochrane and W.W. Cassidy, Jr.



A Physical Description of the Phil Scheckel (by Eli Minder, Pilot)
taken verbatim from a segment of the 4/25/1918 Pepin County Courier article

She was 98.0 feet long, 20.0 feet beam, at deck, 18 feet on bottom, 3 feet hold. In November, 1896 her hull was enlarged to 112.0 feet by 24.0 feet by 3 1/2 feet) 108.0 tons; guards 2 feet, 8 inches wide. Sternwheeler. Engine 9 inches by 42 in. Wheel 12 feet in diameter, 14 foot buckets. One steel boiler cylindrical 16 feet long, 3 1/2 feet in diameter. Two smokestacks each 14 inches in diameter, 166 pound of steam permitted.

Her engine room was 18 feet by 20 feet. Dining room 17 feet by 20 feet. Two state rooms 10 feet by 7 1/2 feet with berths for 16 each. One state room 7 feet by 7 1/2 ft. with two berths. Kitchen 7 1/2 ft by 10. All this on the main deck. Pilot house 10 feet by 11 feet outside. Cost \$6,633.57.

When she came out she drew 11 inches; used 2 1/2 cords wood per day of 24 hours, and ran night and day six days every week during the season of navigation on the Chippewa. Sold in 1901-2 to Capt. S.R. Van Sant, who soon sold her to Mr. Flagler of Florida East Coast Railroad and she was taken to Key West, where an upper cabin was put on and she has ever since (this was written again in 1918) been used in construction of the oversea section of that railroad. She was still in existence in 1917 after withstanding many severe Gulf of Mexico storms far different from the raging Chippewa.

In still another letter, Mr. Knapp writes that he had talked with Mr. Flagler about the Phil Scheckel, who assured him that his railroad could not have been built

without the assistance of the flat bottomed shell from the Chippewa that had braved the dangers of the gulf of Mexico and to reach the scene of action and had for years braved the storms of the Atlantic and the Gulf with immunity from injury by storm and tempest. Mr. Knapp tells of seeing the Scheckel and her sister boat, the Columbia, tied to the bank, resting after their 10 years of work in and about Key West.

Advertising for Trade

Even during the earliest days of travel on the Chippewa, it was important to advertise for trade. People, even in those earliest days of commerce, had choices, and if you wanted people to choose your business over another, not only did you need to serve them well, but you also needed to let them know that you existed...therefore, the need to advertise.

At the bottom left, you'll see an advertisement from the June 5, 1874 edition of the Durand Weekly Times, promoting the Steamer Albany captained by Phil Scheckel. On the right you'll see an advertisement from the same edition of the Times promoting the Ida Campbell, a ship captained by H.W. Carlisle and owned by E.E. Heerman, who's ships were direct competitors with Phil Scheckel's boats.

You'll notice in Scheckel's advertisement that the Albany was apparently not the lightest of ships. Thus, if the water was down in the Chippewa, the Albany would have difficulty navigating it, and so the Pete Wilson was sent in its place.

You'll notice in the Ida Campbell's advertisement that they put together a whole package of transportation through one advertisement. Included in with the travel of the Ida Campbell was the option to extend your travels on the Ash's Line of stage coaches. In later years, steamboats would travel the Chippewa as far as Tyrone, and then people could opt to take a stage coach the rest of the way into Eau Claire.

The creation of the Phil Scheckel steamboat was still 4 years away at the time that these advertisements were posted.

CHEAP TRANSPORTATION

THE




STEAMER ALBANY

Is now making regular daily trips, making connections through from

DURAND TO READ'S LANDING,

And to Menomonie, via Dunnville. This boat is well adapted to the Chippewa River Trade, being

Swift, Light & Staunch.

She will make regular trips during the high water season of 1874. During low water her place will be filled by the well known Steamer


Pete Wilson.

For freight or passage apply on board.

PHIL. SHECKEL, Captain.
Wm. Robinson, Clerk.

The Light-draft Steamer

Ida Campbell



Has been expressly fitted for the

Chippewa River Trade,

For the season of 1874, during

High and Low Water.

She is staunch, reliable, and will be run in the interests of, and for the accommodation of the people of the entire Chippewa Valley. All kinds of

FREIGHT & EXPRESS

Matter handled with care, at

The Lowest River Rates

The attention of the traveling public is called to the fact that the Ida Campbell runs in connection with

Ash's Line of Stages

And makes reliable connections with the same for

Durand, Eau Claire,

And all points on the Chippewa River. For Freight or Passage apply on board, or to H. Ash, Williams House, Eau Claire.

JOHN LOBACK, Clerk. H. W. CARLISLE, Captain.

River People and Issues in the News

Following are three interesting stories from the Weekly Times, dated June 5, 1874, relating to issues of riverboat travel and the logging business and people who were common to our area at that time. Lumber jacks and lumber workers were a rather rough and tumble group of people, and thus the third of the three articles in this section.

Captain E.E. Herman (sic), of Read's Landing dropped in to see us last Tuesday morning. The Captain is interested in the Wabasha ferry, he being the Assignee of Albert Taylor, of Chippewa Falls, who obtained the charter of our legislature for running a ferry across the river at Wabasha. The Capt. informs us that the matter is in litigation, and will soon be brought to trial in the courts of Minnesota. The Capt. has three boats in operation this season, The Ida Campbell on the Chippewa, being a passenger boat, and his other two, the Iowa City and Minnietta, he has engaged in towing. His boats are all doing a smashing business.

The Mississippi log driving company held their annual meeting at Alma on the 27th at which time the old officers were re-elected. Mr. Weyerhauser, of Rock Island as president, and Thos. Irvine, of Muscatine, as Secretary. The best of feeling prevailed and it is confidently believed that within five years, 300,000,000 feet of logs will be turned out of Beef Slough annually. Three years ago, Jeff Matthews introduced the system of brailing* on the Mississippi, and the probability is that within two years the custom of boring and rafting logs will be done away with as they can be brailed at one third the cost of rafting, and the lumber is worth one dollar per 1000 more than logs that are bored.

A load of the Beef Slough boys came up to town on Sunday last for a little ride, and getting a little too much 'top-loading' got noisy and ugly. In going back they stopped at Lorenz brewery, and as they could not persuade Phil. to open and let them have more beer they retaliated by breaking several windows and sash. Deputy Sheriff Prindle went down Monday and arrested three of them - all he could find.

Going home they broke their wagon and injured one horse so that it is doubtful whether he gets over it or not. The team belonged to Johnson's livery, Wabasha. They will probably not take such an expensive ride again very soon.

* brailing of logs involves wrapping or banding the logs together so that they can be pushed by a paddleboat or tugboat.

The following article was taken verbatim from the January 7, 1856 edition of the North Pepin Independent. It discusses a developing new community called Waubeek and encourages enterprising people to consider the community, not only for its beauty, but more importantly for its economic advantages.

Waubeek at this time was just developing, and Phil Scheckel was new to this area at about the same time. Waubeek, even though it became the home of the largest sawmill in Wisconsin at the time, does not exist today because the lumbering ended and the community apparently was not able to diversify itself economically, therefore when the sawmills left, so did the community members.

Waubeek

A new town, bearing the above name, has recently been surveyed out in this county, near the Chippewa Boom, and about twenty-five miles from this village, on the North Pepin and Chippewa Falls stage road. Hon. C.C., Hon. E.B. and Captain S.B. Washburn are the proprietors.

The site of this town is the most beautiful of any that we have examined in this region of country, excepting that of North Pepin. Flourishing towns, however, are seldom built on sites where sole advantages are enumerated by the trisyllable "beautiful". The proprietors of Waubeek claim for that town decided commercial advantages, which we believe will override the ephemeral prosperity of a large number of its "beautiful" rivals. The leading advantages of Waubeek are:

1. It is surrounded by a region of country although not yet developed in its agricultural resources, bids fair to be as good as any in the Northwest. Good soil, good timber, and good water are among its principal characteristics.
2. The Chippewa Boom, which was built by a Company chartered by the Wisconsin Legislature of 1853, is located here; and the proprietors of the town own a large part of the boom stock. This is the only place that the Chippewa river can be boomed, or a boom constructed to which the logs of the river are accessible and can be commanded with safety, between Chippewa Falls and the mouth of the river. This boom is built on the Nine Mile Slough - a better channel

to float logs through than the main river, because, in "driving" logs down the river they naturally turn into the slough and then once there will float down into the boom, ready for assorting and rafting.

The Chippewa River is replete with bars which render the work of bringing down large rafts of logs very difficult. Heretofore, it has been customary to float down "cribs" or small rafts, and construct a number of them in one large raft at the mouth of the river, preparatory to running them down to the market below. It seems to us, that the construction of this boom was absolutely necessary to facilitate the business of driving, assorting and rafting logs. Piers of an immense size are sunk from a point opposite the village, to a point near the foot of Nine Mile Island. The boom timbers are hung from pier to pier, and the entire Nine Mile Slough is commanded, with no possibility of a single log escaping.

3. The proprietors of Waubeek are men of energy and resolution; and their names alone, in connection with the enterprise are enough to insure it a permanent and rapid growth.

A map of the town can be seen at the Real Estate office, where further information regarding the place can be had.

Land in Waubeek Township that was owned by Phil Scheckel

The map below is from the 1897 atlas of Buffalo and Pepin Counties. Note that in this area, the Chippewa River flows from north to south, or on the map from top to bottom. As you view the map you'll see the merging of the Chippewa river back into one river at the end of Nine Mile Island. The Chippewa splits nine miles north of this area with the major branch flowing east (or on the right hand side) of the island (called Nine Mile) and the minor branch flowing on the west side (or left side) of the island.

The area in the middle of this split is called Nine Mile Island. You'll see P. Scheckel's name on a couple of plots on Nine Mile Island as well as the plot of his farm just west of the river, again near the top of the scan (in section 4) The community of Waubeek was on the land shown to be owned by Knapp, Stout & Co. which is just east and a little north of Philip Scheckel's farm (in section 4) and just west of the Chippewa River. Phil Scheckel's farm was up on the prairie just

out of the Chippewa River's valley, while the main portion of the community of Waubeek was right down on the river's edge.

Another landmark that you might be interested in is the area where the city of Chippewa was located. Chippewa was located where Bear Creek and the Chippewa meet. You can find this area by looking just to the right of the section 16 mark on the map. The digits 16 are shown in the middle of the river, and just to the right (east) of that mark is where Bear Creek (notice the meandering creek) empties into the Chippewa. Downstream, of course, is located the city of Durand.

The following article was taken verbatim from the June 6, 1857 edition of the North Pepin Independent. It discusses steamboating on the Chippewa River at that time, and the challenges that crews faced in navigating the Chippewa, even back in those early days. It also emphasizes the positive things which the development of the Chippewa Valley was to experience as these obstacles were overcome. This article is about the steamboat, Chippewa, which was active on the river at about the time that Phil Scheckel began navigating the Chippewa. Interestingly enough, Phil Scheckel's first steamboat, the "Golden Star" was renamed the "Chippewa" after he sold it to Captain Heerman in 1862.

Navigation on the Chippewa

We learn by the Wabashaw (sic) Journal that the steamboat Chippewa, which was designed to run on the Chippewa River between the Lake and Falls (that is Lake Pepin and Chippewa Falls), has been withdrawn from that trade and gone to St. Louis for the purpose of plying, as a freight boat, between that city and St. Paul. Owing to the high water of the Chippewa, this boat has had extraordinary luck having made seven successful trips up the Chippewa, without meeting any obstruction. With her last trip the water in the Chippewa put a finish to all further steamboating there for the present.

It is now demonstrated that when a boat can get into the mouth of the Chippewa or as high up as Plum Island, or above the point known as the "Flowerpot" it can go clear to the Falls without any hindrance. In a short time there must be an enormous business done up that River. A number of new towns are springing up along its banks, and the population and business must largely increase the present summer. A small or even common sized steamboat, can run between Marksville (Maxville, I believe) and the Falls, the entire season. The great and irreparable obstacle to the navigation of the stream is between Marksville and the Lake. Marksville is only ten miles from this village. Our citizens can evince their enterprise in no better way, than to see to it that a plank road is built between this village and Marksville; and that a boat is put on the run between the latter place and Chippewa Falls.

No town of six hundred inhabitants in the great Northwest, embraces more enterprise than North Pepin; and we feel sure that it will not only secure the trade of the Chippewa as above, but assist in the early development of that valley by doing so.

Obstacles to River Boat Traffic

For those of us who live near the Chippewa, we may sometimes look out at the tranquil river at sunrise or sunset and imagine that it has always, and always will be, like that. However, back in the days when Phil Scheckel traversed the river there were many



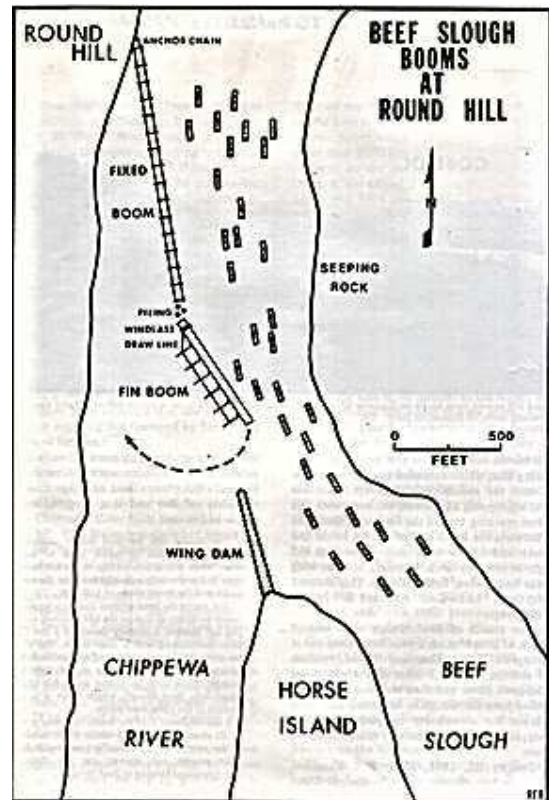
obstacles to travel, some man-made and some natural. In another area of this paper we look at the natural obstructions such as silting and discuss how these obstructions were overcome. In this section, however, we want to address some of the man-made obstructions.



For much of the time that Scheckel traveled the Chippewa there were a number of other industries using the river at the same time. The most significant industry using the Chippewa river extensively during this time was the logging industry. During the 1870's and 1880's much of Northwestern Wisconsin saw its virgin pine forest harvested. There was an

immense need for lumber as the entire mid-section of our country was developing. When you consider the fact that the city of St. Paul tracts its history back to 1848, it's easy to see that there was an explosion of building going on in the Midwest. Durand moved to its present site in 1855 and many of the other large and small cities in the Midwest have a similar timeline. In addition to the cities, thousands of farms were also established during the quarter century from 1860 to 1885. This same time period was when logging was "king" on the Chippewa.

Lumbering added special challenges to navigation of the Chippewa River. The steams of northern Wisconsin were used as a means of transporting logs to lumber mills. Logs were transported to market simply by pulling them to the nearest river and pushing them in. Each log had been "branded" when it was cut and so each company could receive credit for their cuttings. Logs were not transported down the Red Cedar and Chippewa in bundles or rafts, as both rivers tended to be quite narrow and shallow, and unless men were on these rafts with poles to push the rafts off the sandbars they would hang up on sandbars.



Certain parts of the area of the lower Chippewa that Scheckel navigated had special problems because the area just upstream from Waubeek, on the north end of Nine Mile Island, had logs pouring down the river and into the boom feeding the sawmill at Waubeek. The Waubeek boom broke in the 1860's, and additionally the saw mill at Waubeek burned down, and then other companies looked for a better place to allow more companies to trap and sort their logs. This new place was at Round Hill, which is located about 1 to 1.5 miles downstream from Durand. A floating boom (see diagram at the right) was placed



in the river allowing the river to “skim” the logs off and the natural water flow pushed them into Beef Slough, which was a quieter area of the Chippewa which ran parallel to the Chippewa all the way to the Nelson-Alma area where it emptied into the Mississippi.

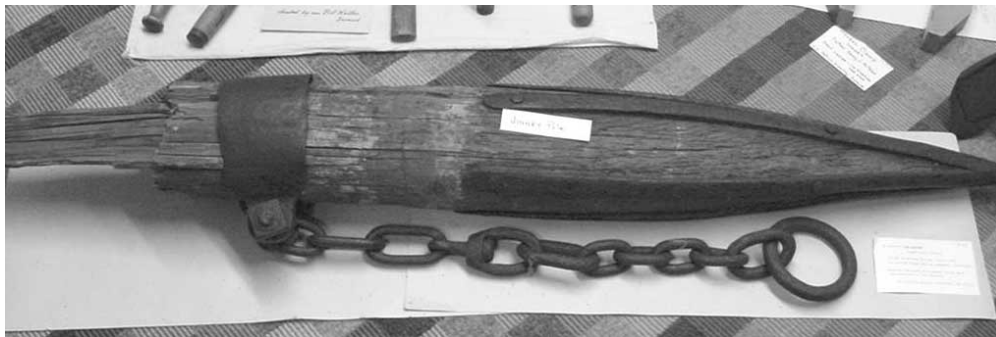
So as we look back at obstructions to navigation of the Chippewa logging was definitely a major one.



Tools of the River which are on display at the Old Courthouse Museum in Durand

Pictured above is one of the most picturesque and historic buildings in Western Wisconsin. The Old Courthouse in Durand is not only home to the Pepin County Historical Society's museum but also commands a majestic view of the Chippewa River where for nearly a half century Phil Scheckel and many other people made their living. Among the many historic items on display at the Old Courthouse Museum are the items below. Both of these items would have been very common to the men of the river. However, the items may cause those of us

visiting the museum today to scratch our heads in wonder, and to read the descriptions indicating how the tools were used.



This item is called a jinny pole. Jinny poles were very important to steamboat travel on the river. If a steamboat were to run ground, a jinny pole was used to allow the paddle wheeler to pull itself back onto the river.

The jinny pole, pictured above, was common to riverboats on the Chippewa. It is reputed to have been invented by Phil Scheckel, as a matter of fact. The jinny pole was taken from the steamboat which had run aground, be it near shore, or on to a sandbar, and apparently was driven into the ground along the shore. A very heavy rope then was attached to the ring in the jinny pole and the other end of the rope was strung to the paddlewheel. The paddle wheel was slowly started, winding the rope, pulling the steamboat back off the sandbar or shoreline. Once the paddle wheeler had pulled itself off the bar, it would drop anchor, recover the jinny pole, and proceed on its way.

Is this scenario entirely true, you might ask...my answer in honesty would have to be, I'm not really sure. The explanation is my own thought of how it might have functioned. The purpose of the jinny pole is authentic, but the way it was actually used probably died with those old rivermen.

Raft Pin

A second tool on display at the Old Courthouse Museum is a pin that was used along with chain to attach a binding around a group of logs to help form them into a raft which then was either floated or towed to a sawmill. During the 1880's there was a large business within Beef Slough where various companies sorted out the logs floating down the Chippewa, attached them together, and transported them to saw mills. At the time of cutting, each log was "branded" with a maul type instrument, marking it with the company sign, before it was pushed into the river. Because of these markings, sorting in an area like Beef Slough by the various companies was possible.

The Phil Scheckel, along with other steamboats, was involved in moving the rafts of logs from the gathering areas within Beef Slough to the saw mills.



The pin above is is about 3 feet long and was used to attach the strapping of the raft holding the logs together.

Obstacles to River Boat Traffic

Floods



Pictured above is a photo from Durand during the flood of 1880. (Click on photo)

The Chippewa River has always been a river which has a personality and temperament all its own. At least annually, and may years more often than that, the Chippewa decides to escape its bank and remind us all of the significance and power of nature. The Pepin County Courier, June 18, 1880 published a story of a big flood. We include it as another example of obstacles which had to be dealt with in living and working on a river.

The Flood of 1880

Taken verbatim from the Pepin County Courier, June 18, 1880

It is, of course, needless to inform any of our readers that we had a flood, and a pretty good sized one, too. From all accounts it must have extended over the whole Northwest to a greater or lesser extent, doing many millions of dollars damage and sacrificing a few lives.

The Mississippi river, Black, Wisconsin, Wolf, St. Croix, Chippewa and their tributaries were booming, and on several of the rivers the water was higher than

ever before "within the memory of the oldest inhabitant." Our space will not permit of any particular mention of damage done except on Chippewa, which more closely interests this locality.

The water had commenced to recede from the high point reached last week, until the heavy rains Friday and Saturday which extended all over the Northwest. The river at Eau Claire commenced rising again Friday morning but did not excite any alarm until Saturday afternoon when it got so high, and still rising, that the mill men began to take care of their loose logs and lumber and strengthen their piers and booms. About midnight the water in the Dells dam got so high that it lifted the booms over the top of the piers and the vast amount of logs in the dells commenced moving downstream in a solid body, sweeping everything before it. Everything above Eau Claire is reported carried away. The big mill at Chippewa Falls was still safe at last accounts though considerably damaged.

The railroad bridge at Eau Claire stood the racket, though some of the piers for the new bridge were carried away. The wagon bridge between East and West Eau Claire was carried away Sunday morning. Sherman's mill on the west side was carried off bodily. The Schulenberg mill was badly damaged; Shaw's mill escaped almost unhurt, but all the other mills on the west side were undermined, rafting sheds, slides, booms, piers, etc., swept off clean. It is said that the water at Eau Claire was 23 feet above low water mark. Many houses were washed away or rendered unsafe, and the inhabitants took refuge on high ground. So far as we can learn no lives were lost anywhere on the Chippewa, though some of the papers report five cases of drowning in Durand (?) (sic)

At Durand the flood did no heavy damage. The water reached the highest mark Monday afternoon when it was 14 feet above low water mark. The cellars along River Street were filled but none of the stores were inundated. Eight inches more would have brought the water into Tarrant & Dorwin's, Fraser & Eldridge's law offices and the Courier office, but it would have taken several feet more to have done much damage. About the only damage really done was to the roads along the bottoms, which are fearfully washed and gullied out. Crops on the bottom lands are, of course, badly damaged or totally destroyed.

The Monitor and Durand went to L.T. Crain's Monday forenoon and brought his stock; the family left the house Sunday afternoon. L.T. has lived there 20 years and has never had to "flee from the wrath to come" until this time. He says he

had five feet more water than ever before. A. Goodrich also was moved out by the Durand Monday. He has never to leave home on account of water before this time. Wm. Goodrich's family left their house Sunday morning.

Most of the logs that passed Durand went into Beef Slough, the sheer boom at Round Hill working to a charm, until Tuesday, when the water got so high that it, got over the piers, broke away and went down the river. The "boss" Ab. Gilmore, and several men went with it, however, and succeeded in tying it up on the small tow-head below Dead Lake. The Hartford and Artemas Lamb came up and brought it back to the Hill where it is again in position. The mill men who damned the boom in low water will have to bless it in high water, as without it they would have lost several millions of logs which would have gone into the Mississippi and been entirely lost. About three-quarters of the logs that left Eau Claire went over the bottoms and into the woods, and it will cost considerable to get them into the river again. The bottoms all along the river are filled with logs, lumber, booms, bridge timber, buildings, etc.

The loss to Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls is estimated all the way from one to two million of dollars, and we think that when they get that thing straightened around again that the latter figure will be found none too high. At Meridean considerable damage was done, though not near as much as was expected.

And another article from the same newspaper

The mill men are calling their tow boats up river to assisting in picking up booms, lumber and make themselves generally useful. The Iowa City went up for that purpose Tuesday afternoon and the Artemas Lamb, Julia and Silas Wright followed Wednesday. Many of the members of the Mississippi River Logging Company went up with her to view the ruins.

The Times, They are A-Changing....
New Means of Transportation



Phil Scheckel personally viewed a lot of changes in the Chippewa Valley during his lifetime. When he first came to the valley, roads were nearly non-existent. Those roads which did exist were trails that the Native Americans followed in their travels around this area of Wisconsin. During his lifetime, Scheckel saw the change from river traffic to rail traffic and saw the means of crossing rivers change from ferries to bridges.

(The photo at the left is of the ferry which crossed the Chippewa River at Meridean)

During the early days of Durand if you wanted to cross the Chippewa River with a vehicle (remembering that a vehicle would have been a horse and buggy) your choice was to take a

ferry. The Durand area saw a bridge built to cross the Chippewa quite early, with the first bridge being built in the year 1888. That first bridge that crossed the river at Durand had a mid-section which could rotate to allow riverboats to pass through. This bridge lasted until the year 1902 or so when it blew down, and the replacement bridge at that time was no longer able to rotate.



(Pictured at the right is the crew who had just finished building a new bridge at Durand)

Of course, shortly before that, riverboat travel also ended in this area as the last of the logging ended.



During the middle to later 1880's the railroad came to Durand, and with it a huge change in how people and products were able to travel. Travel time was diminished tremendously and also you could count on schedules as they were by and large unaffected by rain, drought, or winter's bite. From the standpoint of materials being shipped in

by train, those materials could be loaded on a rail car at the factory and then be transported all the way to its destination before there was a need to unload, and reload the materials.

(A horse and buggy in downtown Durand)

Additionally, roads in the area were developed and improved adding additional options for travelers. With better roads and bridges to cross rivers, the individual had more power to make decisions as far as where he/she wanted to travel...and also by what means to travel.

Yes, there were great changes during Phil Scheckel's lifetime. Though we've gone from riverboats and barges to the moon and back, we still see the day of the riverboats as a romantic time in our country and our area's history.



(The final picture is of the train at the Durand depot. I believe the time frame of the photo is early 1900's)

The obituary of Phil Scheckel taken from the September 29, 1910 edition of The Entering Wedge

Capt. Scheckel Called by Death

Picturesque Citizen Who Was a Pioneer in Navigation Died at Eau Claire Hospital

Last Thursday Capt. Phil Scheckel of Waubeek breathed his last at the Sacred Heart hospital in Eau Claire whither he was taken four days before in the hope that the best medical attention might prolong his life and bring a measure of his youthful vigor, but these proved unavailing in staying the hand of death and he passed away peacefully after a gradual break-down in health. His wife's death several years ago proved a serious blow and then the burning of his home early in January destroyed many of the old associations dear to his heart. Stout brothers very kindly donated lumber for a new home which was nearly completed when the venerable pioneer died.

Capt. Scheckel was born in Luxembourg, Germany, November 15, 1834 and therefore nearly 76 years of age. While still a youth his father was killed in a runaway and he stayed at home until 20 years of age. In 1855 he came to America landing in Dubuque, Ia., where he had a cousin and in October of that same year he came for the first time to Durand and the Chippewa Valley. Durand was nothing but a collection of frontier huts at the mouth of Bear Creek and its present site an undrained swamp.

In the year 1855 Mr. Scheckel looked over this section, went to Eau Claire and then to Menomonie, where he hired out to Knapp Stout & Co. He stayed but two days and then journeyed to Hudson and back to Beef Slough, spending the winter chopping wood in the bottoms near Alma. In the spring of 1856 he came up and hired out to Carson & Rand, working for them until 1857 and again entered the employ of Knapp & Stout. He spent that winter in the pineries and in the spring hired out to C.C. Washburn, afterwards senator, who had a sawmill in Waubeek and stayed with him seven years, during that time becoming a pilot on one of the boats. In the winter, with four yoke of oxen and teams, he built bridges over creeks so that there could be travel to the pineries. In 1861 the Waubeek boom broke and that same year the men in camp at Menomonie went on a strike because they had no molasses. They were finally induced to go back when promised fried cakes as a compromise.

In 1864 Mr. Scheckel again hired out to Knapp & Stout and remained in their employ for a period of 36 years. The last raft of the company was towed down the river by him in 1892 to Reeds Landing. In 1870 he made a successful entry into politics, being elected county treasurer by a majority of 237 in a strongly Republican election. In Stockholm they called him "Scheckelson" many believing he was Scandinavian.

In 1862 Capt. Scheckel built the boat "Golden Star" which he sold the following year to Capt. Heerman who renamed it the "Chippewa". Nobody knew the Chippewa any better than he. With its changing channel and shifting sand bars the greatest skill was required in piloting boats and rafts to the Mississippi.

December 25, 1865 Capt. Scheckel was united in marriage with Margaretta White who was his faithful helpmate until called by death in 1904. Seven children, all of whom are living blessed this union - Charles, Ida and Kate of Waubeek, Mrs. N.H. Manore of Durand, Mrs. Ed Taylor of Arkansas and Mesdames Louis Schroeder and Fred Mans. The family home was always on a big farm in Waubeek which Capt. Scheckel purchased in 1857.

Among the early boats Capt. Scheckel had to with were the Pete Wilson, Golden Star, Maqnoketa, Chippewa Falls Julia Hadley. The Phil Scheckel, which was run for many years, is still doing service. It is now owned by Standard Oil Co., and is used in transportation work off the coast of Florida. Last fall it passed through a terrible hurricane and storm but came out in good shape.

With nature assuming the garb of autumn and approaching a winter suggestive of death it is sad to see the stalwart pioneers pass from us one by one. The old guard is growing smaller year by year and soon all of those who passed through the hardships of pioneer life will no longer be here.

The funeral was held from the Catholic church in Eau Galle Saturday forenoon at 10 o'clock, Rev. Fr. Douven officiating. A large concourse were present to pay a fitting tribute to the old pioneer. Rev. Peter Trierweiler of Durand, a countryman of the deceased, preached the funeral sermon.

This obituary of Phil Scheckel taken from the September 30, 1910 edition of The Pepin County Courier.

Capt. Phil Scheckel Answers Last Call

Many were the hushed voices and saddened hearts when word came from Eau Claire that Captain Philip Scheckel was dead. He passed to the Eternal Home from Sacred Heart hospital Thursday, September 22nd - The cause of death, heart failure.

Captain Scheckel was born in Luxemburg, Germany November 15, 1837. His parents were Michael and Anna (Wagener) Scheckel. He came to American in 1854 and after stopping a short time in Iowa, came to Eau Galle and began rafting for Carson & Eaton. In 1862 he built the "Golden Star", later sold and named the "Chippewa". For several years he was in the employ of C.C. Washburn, a former governor of Wisconsin.

In 1864 he entered the employment of the Knapp, & Stout Lumber Company as captain of the "Pete Wilson". He ran this boat until 1880, when the "Phil Scheckel" was built. He worked for this company for forty years.

In 1866 he married Maggie White of Wabasha and three years later he purchased a farm near Waubeek where he has since resided.

Captain Scheckel was one of the oldest and best known of the Chippewa Captains. Probably no man on the river understood its navigation better than he. His ingenuity in constructing dams that made the river widen its own channel, was a surprise to his employers and even the government men found it necessary to make use of his dams. He also invented the "jinny-pole" during his service with Knapp & Stout and Co.

Mr. Scheckel served as both town and county treasurer for a time, being elected on the Democratic ticket.

The wife and mother was called Home six years ago. Seven Children are left of the family circle; Kathryn, Ida and Chas. of Waubeek; Jessie, Mrs. Ed Taylor, Arkansaw; Mary, Mrs. Net Manore, Durand; Maggie, Mrs. Louie Schrader, and Anna, Mrs. Fritz Mans, both of Waubeek.

Funeral services were held at Eau Galle Saturday, September 24th. The Rev. Fathers' Douvan and Trierweiler officiating. The last named Rev. and the deceased were from the same locality in the old country. Many were present at the services to pay their last respect to the memory of a friend they held dear as a man of great integrity and worth.

Captain Eli Minder (1838-1918)

taken verbatim from an article appearing in the Pepin County Courier, April 27, 1918.

Reminiscence of Early River Days

Interesting Data on Chippewa River Pilot and Steamboat

The following article, on the life of the late Capt. Eli Minder and the old Chippewa river steamboat, Phil Scheckel, from the serial, "Steamboats and Steamboatmen of the Upper Mississippi", by George B. Merrick, formerly of Prescott but now a

resident of Madison, will prove interesting reading to those of our readers who can vividly recall the days of navigation on the Chippewa River.

Captain Eli Minder, was born in Center county, Penn., October 5, 1838. When he was about five years old his parents came west and settled at Fort Madison, Ia., where in the intervals of his schooling the boy acquired the river habit, as all normal boys of the time and place did. In 1856 he moved to Pepin county, Wisconsin and worked on a farm for two years, but found it unsatisfactory. In 1858 he went to Wabasha, Mn. and formed a partnership with C.C. Jellison, was engaged in the rafting trade. In 1860, he entered the employ of Knapp, Stout & Co. where he remained for eighteen years, being one of their most efficient and trustworthy pilots and captains. Later he went to St. Paul where he was engaged in the towing business. His chosen scene of operations, however, was the Chippewa river where he spent most of his time while on the river commanding many of the well known Chippewa River boats, including many of the Heerman Line. He also engaged in steamboating on his own account, owning an interest in the steamer Luella for a time. He married in 1869 to Miss Mary H. Milliren. He died at his home in Ella, Wis., on the banks of the Chippewa, April 5, 1918.

REMINISCENSE OF EARLY RIVER DAYS

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Phil Scheckel, stern wheel boat built at Waubeek, Wis., in 1877, by and for Knapp Stout & Co., of Menomonie, Wis., and named for Capt. Phil Scheckel who for fifteen years or more had been in the employ of this great lumbering firm, most of the time in command of the Pete Wilson also owned by that company.

Mr. H. E. Knapp, son of the foun-

Railroad and she was taken to Key West, where an upper cabin was put on and she has ever since been used in connection with the construction of the oversea section of that railroad. She was still in existence in 1917 after withstanding many severe Gulf of Mexico storms far different from the raging Chippewa.

In still another letter Mr. Knapp writes that he had talked with Mr. Flagler about the Phil Scheckel, who assured him that his railroad could not have been built without the assistance of this little fiat bottomed shell from the Chippewa that had braved the dangers of the Gulf of Mexico to reach the scene of action and had for years braved the storms of the Atlantic and the Gulf with impunity from injury by storm and tempest. Mr. Knapp tells of seeing the Scheckel and her sister boat, the Columbia, tied to the bank, resting after their 10 years of work in and about Key West.

AMONG OUR NEIGHBORS

J. G. Auer, prominent resident and former business man, died at his home in Alma Wednesday morning.

Here's a new one heard on the Orpheum circuit; "Hiccoughs are messages from the departing spirits." —Ellsworth Herald.

Ellsworth high school will graduate a class of thirty-two on May 24th.

Elvera Graff, aged seven, of Wabasha, succumbed on Monday of last week to burns received while playing near a bonfire.

Buffalo County now has two centenarians. Mrs. John Stein of Cochran passed the century mark Wednesday, the 17th. Major Lewis of Mondovi was 100 years old last October.

Four prisoners in the county bastille at Barron broke jail last Thursday but officials recaptured them within several hours.

NOTICE OF FINAL SETTLEMENT

County Court, Pepin County, Wisconsin; in Probate.

Notice is given that a regular term of said court to be held at the court house in the city of Durand on the first Tuesday of May, 1918 the final account of administration of the estate of Peter Borman will

Mr. H. E. Knapp, son of the founder of the company, Mr. John H. Knapp, has kindly furnished detailed description of the Phil Scheckel, which came to me in July of this year, when I was literally under a cloud, and which was at the time laid aside by my wife and just now brought to my attention. Mr. Knapp writing from South Bend, Indiana, had his note books with him, and was able to give the following description of the Scheckel:

It was 98.0 feet long, 20.0 feet beam, at deck, 18 feet on bottom, 3 feet hold. (In November, 1896 her hull was enlarged to 112.0 feet by 24.0 feet by 3 1-2 feet.) 108.0 tons; guards 2 feet, 8 inches wide. Stern-wheeler. Engine 9 inches by 42 in. Wheel 12 feet in diameter, 14 foot buckets. One steel boiler cylindrical 16 feet long, 3 1-2 feet in diameter. Two smokestacks each 14 inches in diameter, 166 pounds of steam permitted.

Her engine room was 18 feet by 20 feet. Dining room 17 feet by 20 feet. Two state rooms 10 feet by 7 ½ feet with berths for 16 each. One state room 7 feet by 7 ½ feet with 6 berths and another the same size with 8 berths. Office 7 ft. by 7 ½ ft. with two berths. Kitchen 7 ½ ft. by 10. All this on the main deck. Pilot house 10 feet by 11 feet outside. Cost \$6,633.57.

Her officers were: Captain, from 1878 to 1901, Philip Scheckel. Pilots, Eli Minder, Marcellus Stevens, William Dustin, and perhaps Henry Carlyle. Engineers, Jas. McGuire, Ben Anderson, Pearl Roundy. Clerks, John Hopwood, Chas. W. Greer, Jno. V. R. Lyman [now the noted sur-



