

The Illinois and Michigan Canal opened in 1848, and the boats that traveled the canal were modified as time passed, and the types of cargoes changed. In the latter part of the 19th century the

“In front of the main cabin stood a huge ice box and a large water tank. The tank was filled before leaving Pekin as the water in southern Illinois might be contaminated. There was a lot of malaria at that time.

“The main cabin or captain’s quarters had three rooms. The front half was dining room and kitchen. The back was divided in half with bunk beds on either side. Again sliding windows with shades, no curtains. Between the two bedrooms was a door, and the doors from the dining room-kitchen had curtains made of drapery material. Not much privacy, but this was mostly a family affair. There was a space for storage under the bunks for a trunk and cases of canned goods. There were a few hooks for hanging extra clothing.

“As you entered the cabin there was a step down. Near the door was a speaking tube for communication between the pilot house and the cabin. There was a brown cream colored linoleum in a square design on the floor. Between the window on the right-hand side as you faced the bow of the boat was a built-in table. Stools were used to sit at the table which was covered with oil cloth. The dishes were white ironstone.

“Across the front of the cabin was a cupboard for dishes, and a small sink. The cookstove was on the left side. There was an open shelf on the side. The iron fry pans and kettles hung on hooks behind the stove. There was a sewing machine in the corner and a rocking chair. On the back wall on the right-hand side was a mirror, and on the left side a large calendar.

“The menus were simple – meat, potatoes, a vegetable and a ‘sauce.’ Bacon and eggs and bread with coffee for breakfast, and sometimes ‘steamboat strawberries’ (prunes).

“In the pilot house there was another bunk bed with storage space below. The engineer slept here, as it was just above the boiler room. My father put a Yeast Foam box with one side removed across the corner of the window on the left side of the pilot house where I could stand and help him ‘steer’ the boat.

“At most of the elevators where grain was taken on the City of Pekin, it was carried on large conveyor belts into the hull of the boat. However, in southern Illinois the grain was transported in sacks into the boat. The hull of the boat was partitioned about the middle of the captain’s cabin, making two large bins. The hatches were fore and aft of the cabin. Two kinds of grain, corn or wheat, could be carried at one time, usually wheat from Hardin.”⁶

The City of Pekin evidently underwent some changes between the time Mrs. Poole remembers it, and when it next reappears. In the 1930’s the State of Illinois hauled the City of Pekin, or what remained of it, from the Illinois River to the Illinois and Michigan Canal at Channahon, where they planned to repair it for display purposes, or perhaps actual use hauling tourists up and down a stretch of the Illinois and Michigan Canal.⁷ Plans were drawn up for the restoration of the boat. Its condition is described by Frank Stephens, who compared it to the ocean and lake boats he had examined.

“The City of Pekin at the time it was surveyed, had its stern cut off at the center of the third hatch. Therefore, instead of the true stern

FOOTNOTES

1. City of Pekin Report, Works Progress Administration, Survey 14-19; Historic American Merchant Marine Survey, Chicago, Project 64-6; Watercraft Collection, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., June 11, 1937
2. Hall, Henry, "Ship Building Industry in the United States," in United States Census Office Tenth Census, 1880 Census Reports, Vol. 8, Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1884, p. 232. For a general view of Illinois and

