

## POKEGAMA GOLDEN ERA

Pokegama and Cross Lakes and the Snake River were the most important natural resources to this area. The watery highway was first traveled by the Indians. Names of the two lakes are derived from the Ojibway or the Dakota language. Indian names are symbols for the real thing and are cherished links with the histories of the past.

Pokegama Lake in the Treaty was spelled Pe-ke-gam-now, meaning "The water with broken-crooked shores." Snake River was originally called Gin-a-big-o-zibi by Indians, meaning "Crooked and winding like a snake." There was a period when it was known as the Serpent River. Cross Lake appears to have been named by the Whiteman. "Lake which flows," meaning the river crosses over at one end, which appears as a Cross.

The explorers and traders traveled the same watery highway, followed by loggers in 1837, who made great changes in the vast wilderness over the next 50 years.

Before the treaty was ratified, there was exploitation of the Indians for the pines. Trouble and threats began, with the Indians refusing to allow the Whites to remove any of their "Chingwak," which meant Pines. "No money, no Chingwak," became the password. After ratification of the Treaty, loggers purchased land and began logging. Over the next ten years logging was at a slow pace because of poor logging camps and poor equipment. Trees were felled by an axe, as the cross-cut saw was not invented until 1880. One of the most important factors in the development of the logging industry was the transportation of the logs by water.

After 1847, dams were built on the Snake River and its tributaries. For example, Ann River had two dams with five foot heads at its mouth. Chesley Brook, now known as Little Snake River, had three dams, one with a seven foot head, a second with a 10 foot head, and a third with a five foot head. Knife River had two dams with seven foot heads. The purpose of the dams was to hold head water which, when released in the spring would float logs down the streams into Snake River, then to the St. Croix and to the sawmills at Stillwater. An Act of the Territorial Legislature approved on October 29, 1849, authorized Elam Greely to build and maintain a dam at the outlet of Cross Lake of a sufficient height to raise the water five feet, six inches for a term of twelve years. However, there were times that the water was raised above the low water mark to seven feet or eight feet. The resulting immense body of water created extensive additional lakes, areas which are marshes and bogs today. This dam was said to raise Pokegama Lake five feet. It was the main dam, and was named Chengwatana Dam. It flooded 9,874 acres, backing up water as far as the old lumberman's headquarters at Millet Rapids, located on the Snake River in the northwest corner of Grass Lake Township. This extensive waterway is what made navigation with steam boats possible later. The County Seat of Chengwatana was located near the Dam. Logging Companies purchased thousands of acres of land from the government at \$1.25 per acre, and extensive logging began. By 1880, there were 38 logging camps along the Snake River and its tributaries. The first log

rafts were steered by boats with oars and were powered by man power. These were later replaced by steam powered boats.

The first large steamboat on the Snake River was the Kate R named after Richard G. Robinson's wife. Robinson was an early explorer and land examiner for the St. Paul and Duluth Railroad. Kate R was a stern-wheel boat 75 feet long with a 16 foot beam. It plied the Snake River to Millet Point with supplies. It met wagons to pick up supplies for various logging camps. It was also used to tow rafts of logs. There were smaller boats named Dirty Bess, Woodtick and Custer navigating the smaller streams. The Snake River would be filled with logs from April to early August in the early years of logging.

By 1888, Mora had rail service, with inland rails to the logging camps and settlers and loggers began to get their supplies from Mora. At about the same time, the Kate R's service up the Snake River was coming to an end, and it became used for towing logs from booming grounds up the Pokegama Creek.

By 1893, logging was in a decline, and the Snake River would be free from logs by mid-June, while Cross Lake was filled with logs until later in July. Whatever logs were left up the Snake River were towed by the Dirty Bess, leaving the river and Pokegama Lake free for recreational purposes.

The Kate R was the first boat to be used for excursion trips to Lake Pokegama. It carried 80 passengers. Excursion boats came into their own in 1894, with the launching of the Stowe, which had been built in St. Paul. The Stowe was seventy feet long, fourteen feet wide, with a forty horsepower engine and thirty-eight inch propeller. The Stowe was owned and operated by A. E. Webber, who had a sawmill in Pine City, so the boat was used in the company's timber operation as well as for excursions. The Stowe came from St. Paul on three railroad cars. By day break the next day it was unloaded, steamed up and ready for business by the time the passenger train came in at 11.00 a.m. For passenger excursions, a 60 x 18 foot dancing barge was lashed to its side. Not everyone could be on the dance area at once, since the dancing barge made the boat lop-sided. Another steamer, known as the Cumberland, also had a dancing barge. After only three months use for excursion trips, it burned and sank. Names of some of the smaller excursion boats were Tuxedo Belle, Fritzen, Victoria, Nyroco and Florence B. These were all steamers. Another small boat, the Black Snake, was owned by Otto Kowalke.

Steamboats played an important part in the development of establishments surrounding Pokegama Lake, which soon included Fritzen and Pokegama Sanitoriums, The Eachus Hotel, Wilke House, Island Resort, and Johnson's Resort, which is better known today as Woischke's Supper Club. The Bergman, which was later remodeled and called Tuxedo Inn had a hotel on the west side of Pokegama, which featured a 100 foot observation tower built of square timbers. A huge cabin was built by Frank Laird, the timber baron, which was used for special guests on the east side of the lake, near the Ausmus farm. Later the cabin was sold to members of the Al Capone bootleg gang. They used it as a stop-over in their bootlegging operations across the Canadian Border. They would drive

across into Minnesota with their Pierce Arrows, loaded down with Canadian Whiskey, then cross anywhere on the prairie undetected. They would arrive around 3:30 or 4:00 in the morning and take their booze into St. Paul the next day. This piece of the Golden Era history came to an end when the gang learned that the Federal Authorities were hot on their trail. The cabin had been insured for only four days, when it mysteriously burned to the ground.

By 1895, Pokegama Lake was known as one of the most beautiful lakes in Minnesota in newspapers, pamphlets and railroad ads. St. Paul and Duluth passenger agent, G. S. Russell promoted Pine City as a resort town and promoted outings to Pokegama Lake as well. Excursion boats met the passengers at a dock located where the Cummings Car lot is now located. The excursion boats made trips up the Snake River to Pokegama Lake, filled with anglers, hunters and pleasure seekers. Saturday night was dance night. Ladies dressed in their best and gentlemen in their Tuxedos danced to the early hours of the morning.

Pokegama Lake was a booming recreational Center for anglers, with the immense body of water created by Chengwatana Dam, making it ideal for breeding fish. Fishing was so good that there would often be 40 - 45 tents camped on weekends at the Ausmus farm. The crowds were so large that they could not always be accommodated with available fishing boats, notwithstanding the fact that every establishment on the lake had a fleet of fishing boats, and Ed Kendell, Iver Stumne, and August Ausmus all offered boat services. Pine City and Pokegama Lake were in full stride as a resort area, and it was a "must" destination for vacations.

Passenger trains arrived at Pine City from the Twin Cities at 11:00 a. m. and 12:30 p.m., and by 1:00 or 1:30 p.m. the excursion boats would be loaded with festive crowds, and would make their way up the Snake River. Fiddler Ed Kendell provided the music during weekday trips. A band from Rush City or Pine City played on Saturday and Sunday. The Stowe made seven trips a day up the Snake River to Pokegama Lake and made the return trips to meet the 2:00 a.m. or 4:20 a.m. passenger trains. An extra passenger train car was added on Saturday from the Cities to Pine City. Crowds arrived from the north and from other states also. The cost of seventy-five cents per person covered the travel, dinner, and supper.

A big dance pavilion was built a mile north of the Ausmus farm. It was called the Rescue Island Pavilion. It had scarcely been used, when a cyclone attended a dance party, and the pavilion was scattered through the woods.

Occasionally gentlemen would escort ladies, who were not their wives, to Pokegama for a week's get-away. It seemed as though the Golden Era would never end.

April of 1898 was a very dry month. In May the rains came, and every logging company on the Snake River and its tributaries put their logs afloat. Cross Lake and the river were filled with logs. On June 6th of that year, a cloud burst happened, and it rained for seven

hours. The Chengwatana Dam held, but not its embankment, and not only 350 million feet of logs, but most of Pokegama Lake went down the river. The Dam was repaired, but the lake filled very slowly and fishing was very poor after that. Pleasure seekers and anglers found other resorts to go to and the Pine City and Pokegama resort business crumbled. The Kate R was put to rest on the shore at the Pine City fairgrounds. It was stripped of its machinery, which was taken to Stillwater. Ice skaters used her lumber for warming fires. Nyroco was shipped to Rush City. The Stowe was shipped to Walker, Minnesota, where it was later used on Leech Lake. Many other boats were dismantled.

In the meantime, farmers discovered the additional land created when the lake went down. Litigation began between the farmers and the dam owner. In 1912, a court rendered a decision, forcing the owner to remove the dam, altering the lakes and the rivers dramatically from what they had been before the logging days.

Later on, drought conditions revived interest in higher lake levels, and a petition signed by 56 persons was presented to the County Board to construct a dam at the outlet of the Pokegama Lake where it joins the Snake River. A petition with 18 signers in opposition was also presented. Another petition was presented to the Pokegama Town Board to build a canal on the Sanitorium property with a channel to divert Snake River into a straight canal, with a wing dam on the Snake River to help to divert the water. The Canal was built, but because of a lack of funds, the cut and wing dam was never built.

In 1914-15, a dam was erected on the site of the Old Chengwatana Dam. However, this dam was shortlived, since it was blown out on May 14, 1930. An effort was made to revitalize the resort business. In 1914 a full page ad was placed in the Minneapolis Journal about "beautiful Pokegama Lake" At the same time, an article appeared in the St. Paul Dispatch about three men who came to Pokegama Lake to fish. After tramping the woods for two hours looking for the lake, they came upon a farmer. When the farmer was asked where Lake Pokegama was, his laconic answer was, "Lake Pokegama ain't." The trio asked, "It ain't?" "Well," said the farmer, "they took the dam out of Snake River and Lake Pokegama dried up." Whereupon, the three anglers drove back to the City, according to a 1914 St. Paul Dispatch article, which recounts the conversation.

The Golden Era blessed those who lived through it with many beautiful memories. I dedicate this article in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Stumne, Fritz Johnson, Julia (Dosey) Peterson, Bertha Davis, Dr. and Mrs. Warner C. Pitzen, Leo Rosnow, and Frank Ziegler, all of whom were fortunate to have lived during the Golden Era. Ralph Ausmus recorded memories prior to his death, which was the source of some of the information regarding the Al Capone gang. While Mr. Ausmus did not live through the Golden Era, his father, who served as a bartender for the Al Capone gang when they were here, did. Other information for this article was gleaned from the Frank Ziegler manuscript, from the 1882-1885 Geological Survey, and from personal comments by Leo Rosnow.

The only remaining structural evidence of the Golden Era is Woischke's Supper Club and the main building at Pine Shores, although both structures have been remodeled significantly over the ensuing years.

.....Ann Vach