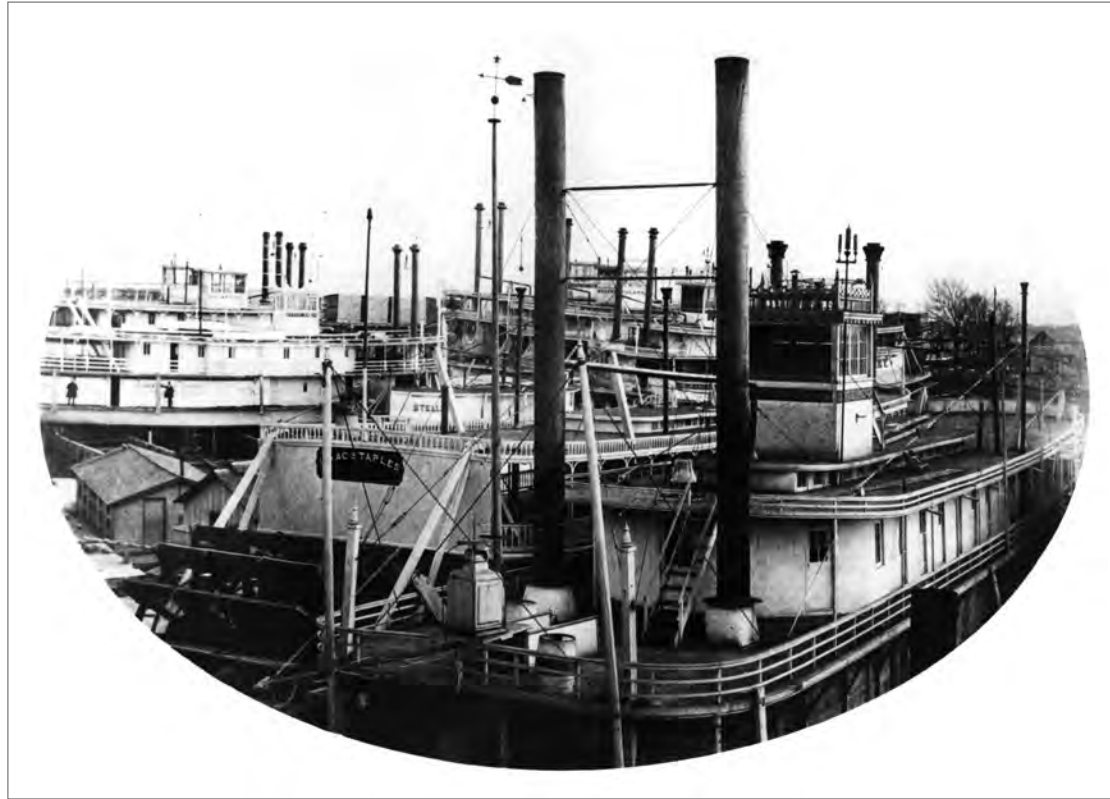


IMAGES: The Kahlke Brothers Marine Railway & Boat Yard

Rock Island, Illinois 1868 - 1971



J E R R Y C A N A V I T

The brothers John, William and Peter Kahlke were born in Germany in the small shipbuilding port of Bruns Bittle on the Elbe River; a suburb of Hamburg. They each came to the United States in the 1850's at different times and, after traveling around the country and gaining experience in carpentry and shipbuilding, they all met in New Orleans in the early 1860's and decided to pool their knowledge and experience and build a drydock and repair service there.

After obtaining a loan from a wealthy New Orleans businessman, they built their facility; one of the first in the post war era. When completed it cost \$40,000 and was an immediate success. With over 500 employees working both day and night, the venture flourished.

After a short while their business was brought to a standstill when workers went on strike for higher wages. The labor problems forced the brothers to sell their drydock, taking a heavy financial loss. They then went to Mexico to ply their skills, but returned to New Orleans briefly before heading north to seek other opportunities.

By this time the brothers were married and their travels took them to Port Byron,

Illinois, arriving there around 1866. Here they established a sawmill where they bought logs and sold lumber to farmers; a venture that soon failed. All three brothers tried farming for a brief period and when this didn't work out, they found employment at boatyards. John and Peter worked briefly at the John Theissen Yard, building several large steam-powered vessels. In their spare time the brothers built a large model barge and soon left Port Byron and took took their families and all of their possessions downriver to look for opportunity in Rock Island, Illinois.

Anna Schmidt Kahlke's parents (Peter's wife) lived in Rock Island and when they arrived there, they spent the first night at her parents' residence at 20th street and 8th avenue. During the night a fierce storm came up suddenly and the barge sank with all their possessions. They were able to raise the barge but most of their belongings were lost or destroyed.

With only the dream of starting their own boat-building business and a few possessions, the Kahlke brothers shared their dream with a local businessman and were able to secure a loan and obtain a 15 year

lease on a suitable riverfront property just below the Weyerhaeuser-Denkman saw mill, owned by Mr. Bailey Davenport. The annual rent was somewhere between \$200-\$300.

The brothers opened their boatyard for business in August of 1868. For the first few months there was no work and life was difficult. Food was a problem as no grocery store in Rock Island would extend them credit. Peter finally found a store on Gaines Street in Davenport that would, so his trips to the grocery store involved long walks over the bridge to Davenport and back.

Fortunately, heavy ice on the river that winter forced a number of boats into the shelter of the boatyard and the Kahlke's fortunes began to change. Soon they had many employees and were doing a good business. After a while, the Kahlke's reputation for doing good work spread and the boatyard began to attract a steady business. Holland's 1876 Directory reported that the yard had a steam sawmill, all kinds of saw, employed 50 people and had an annual income of \$50,000—\$75,000.

The boatyard remained on the Bailey Davenport property until 1884 when renting

became too expensive and the brothers had to purchase their own land. With a \$100 loan from Phil Mitchell for a down payment, they purchased land just downriver from the Weyerhaeuser–Denkmann mill properties.

With the boatyard successfully relocated, the last quarter of the nineteenth century saw numerous sternwheel towboats, raftboats and other utility vessels come from the Kahlke Brothers Yard. Most were not large vessels but were but all were sturdy and extremely well-built. Boats were built for such notable masters as Captain Cyprian Buisson, Captain D.F. Dorrance, Capt. George Winans and Captain John Streckfus. Even into the early twentieth century, the Kahlke Yard continued to bristle with activity.

The boatyard was a busy place at the turn of the century. There were usually about a dozen or so boats on the ways and just as many in the harbor area. The yard was used for everything from building and repairing boats to laying phone cables. The Kahlkes also did work around dams and bridges and the yard was always open to the owners of small cruisers for personal repair work.

In 1904, the sternwheel ferry

DAVENPORT (later to be known as the W.J. QUINLAN and probably the most notable vessel produced by the Kahlkes) slid down the Kahlke ways and into the hearts of Quad-Citians. She ran a regular schedule between Rock Island, Illinois and Davenport, Iowa from 1904 until 1924. With the deaths of Peter and John Kahlke in 1924, Peter's son Fred took over the business. He would rebuild the DAVENPORT into the popular ferry W.J. QUINLAN.

After a rocky start, Fred became a good businessman and, with the help of making good investments, he became a very wealthy man. His wealth was short-lived, however, as the stockmarket crash in 1929 left him with a lot less money. He still had the boatyard though and business was good, so he continued to be successful.

Although Fred Kahlke was considered a good businessman and somewhat of a miser, he was never known to be an organized man – in fact his disorganization was somewhat legendary. It was said that his filing system consisted of piling one paper on top of another until the office was filled, then a new room was added and the process continued. Until the time of his death, Fred had filed himself right out of two offices and was

completely surrounded by papers in a third. Unopened mail could be found everywhere. Fred referred to this as his “horizontal” method of filing.

Fred also loved animals. He once owned a mule named “Barney” that was a fixture around the boatyard for about 30 years. His favorite companion, however, was an old mongrel dog named “Soupbone.” He and Fred were inseparable. He slept under Fred's bed and even went to the First Baptist Church with Fred on Sundays. They were together for 14 years. When the dog died, he sent an announcement to the newspaper stating “My lifelong companion is gone.”

Fred served as a director of the Rock Island Bank and Trust Co. from 1953 until 1970. He didn't look much like a bank director as he wore a greatcoat almost year around and chewed an unlit cigar constantly. He had a reputation as a penny-pincher and was said to have violated this trait only in the presence of waitresses, of whom he tipped most generously. Despite the fact that he fancied himself a “ladies man,” he remained a bachelor all his life.

The Kahlkes, with their considerable carpentry skills, had always built their

vessels of wood. They chose to stay with wood because of their facility with the medium and because wood was less expensive and easier to repair. This philosophy served them well into the early twentieth century. When Peter died and Fred took over the business, he continued building and repairing wooden steam-powered vessels.

Although many of the great wooden boats had found their way to the Kahlke Yards, the day of riverboats made of wood was on the decline and Fred was late to realize that steel construction and diesel-power was the future. He did make inquiries about the new technologies but decided that changing over would be too expensive.

The boatyard continued to build and repair good, strong wooden boats well into the 1940's, but business continued to decline. In 1947, Fred seriously considered building a dry dock and putting in equipment for building steel boats, but it would have taken \$200,000 to do it and Fred didn't think there would be enough work to justify the cost. Records indicate he attempted to bid on six jobs in steel, but could never get a contract. He had waited too long.

Although Fred had numerous offers to purchase the boatyard, he steadfastly refused

to sell. And, as the need for building and repairing wooden boats declined, the Kahlke Boatyard slowly fell into disrepair. Finding workers skillful enough and willing to do the hard work necessary for the business became increasingly difficult and eventually there was no more work and Fred had no more employees. By the early 1960's all that was left of the once thriving boatyard were a few old wooden pigeon-infested structures embedded in an overgrowth of weeds and an old man with his pack of stray dogs, surveying what was left – and what was still hoped for.

There is nothing left now of what was once the largest and busiest boat yard on the Upper Mississippi River. The final death-knell came when the city of Rock Island, after the flood of 1965, bought the rights to construct an earthen flood dike to protect the city. The dike ran directly throughout the old boat yard and bulldozers and power-saws cut a swath through over one-hundred years of history.

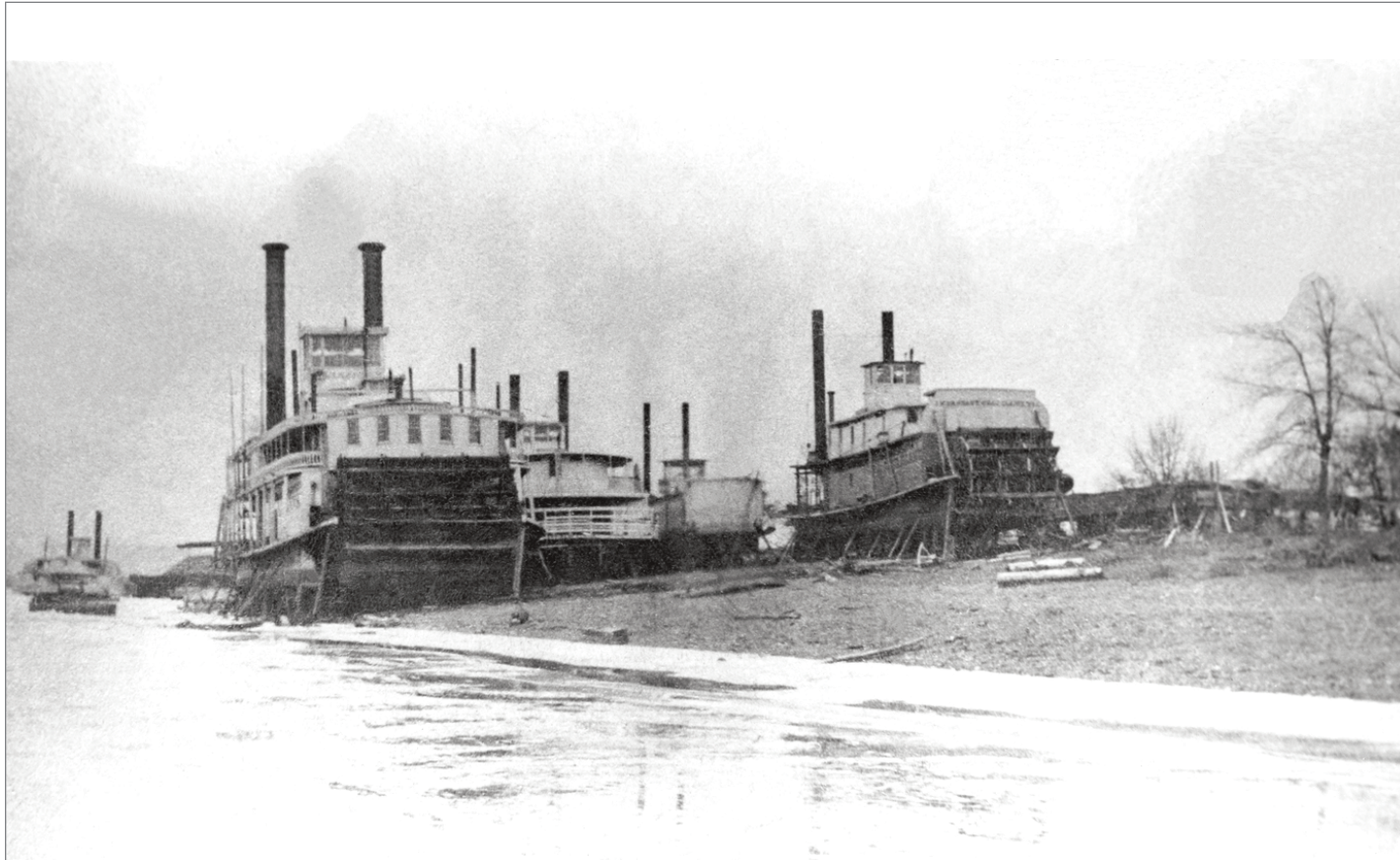
Fred Kahlke is gone and so is the family boatyard. In 1967 the remains of the W.J. QUINLAN fell victim to the torch of vandals or vagrants and was completely destroyed.

Every day many diesel-powered towboats pass where the old boatyard used to be,

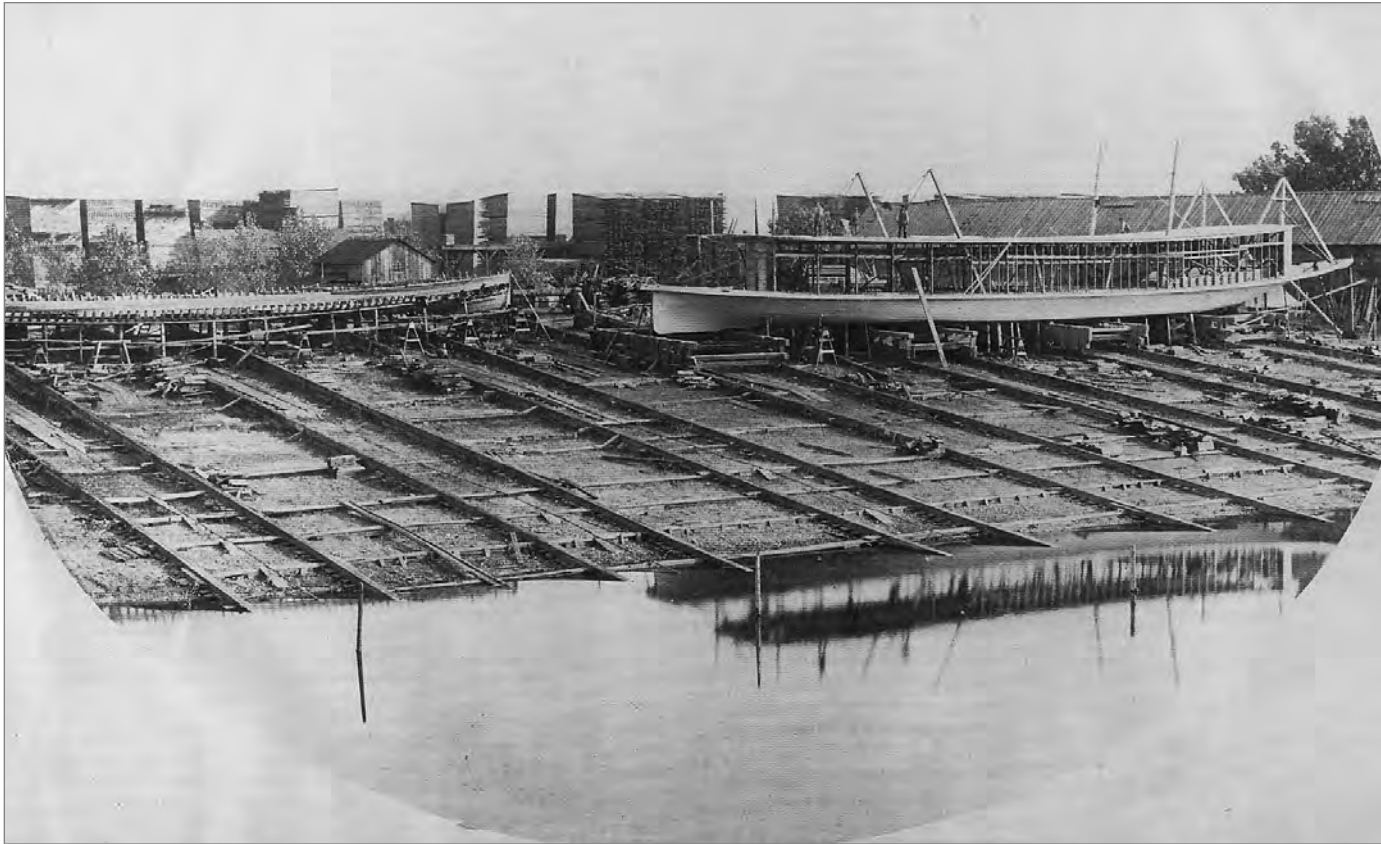
unaware of its' significance and contribution to the development of the Upper Mississippi River. Now the memory has grown dim and the salutes are no more.

So give a tug on the old whistle cord and give two longs and a short in remembrance of what used to be – to the Kahlke family of boatbuilders and to a bygone era when steam-powered riverboats made of wood were commonplace on the waters of the Upper Mississippi.





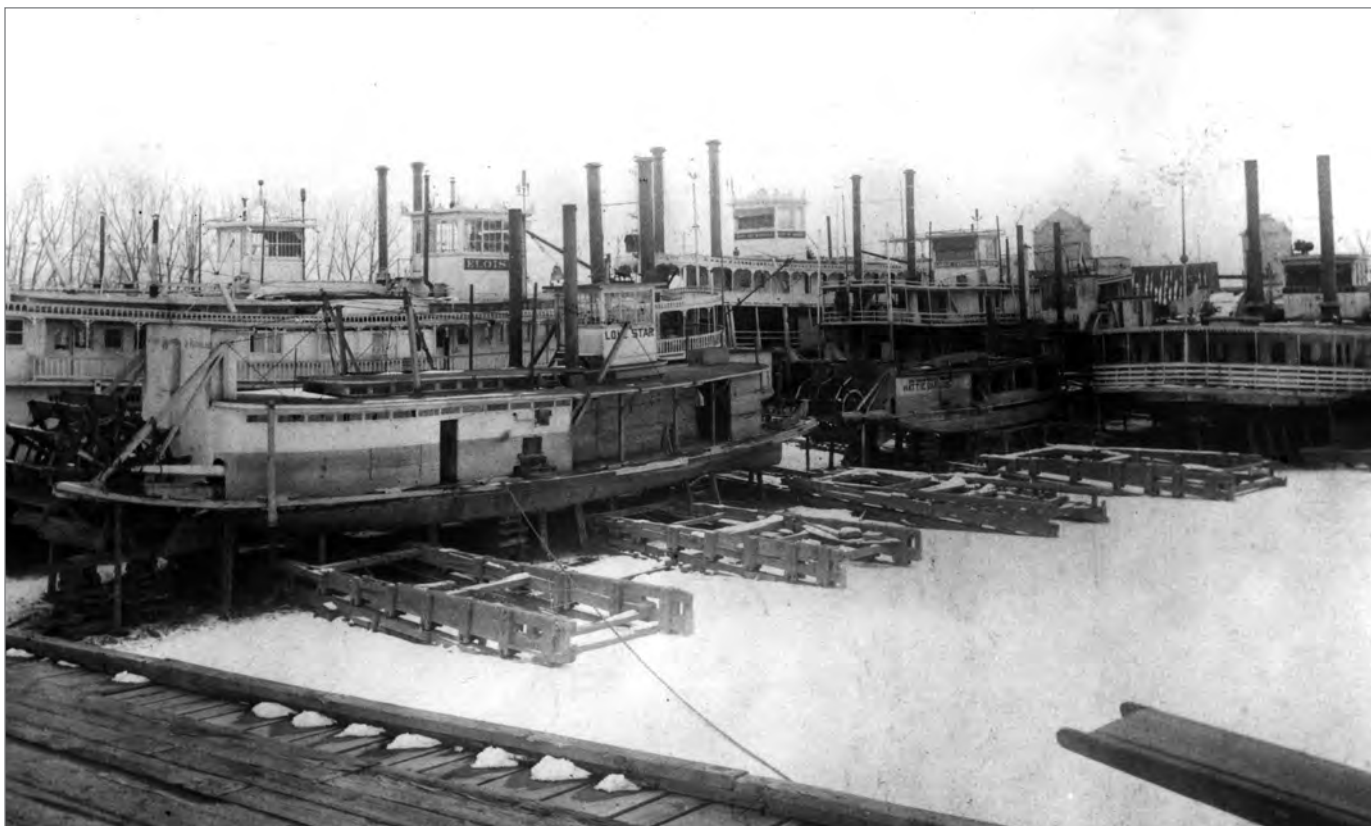
The Original Kahlke Boat Yard. Raftboat J.W. VAN SANT, ferryboat ROCK ISLAND and others, 1875.



The Kahlke Boat Yard & Marine Railway. Towboats under construction, 1891.



The Kahlke Boat Yard & Marine Railway. Towboat under construction, 1891.



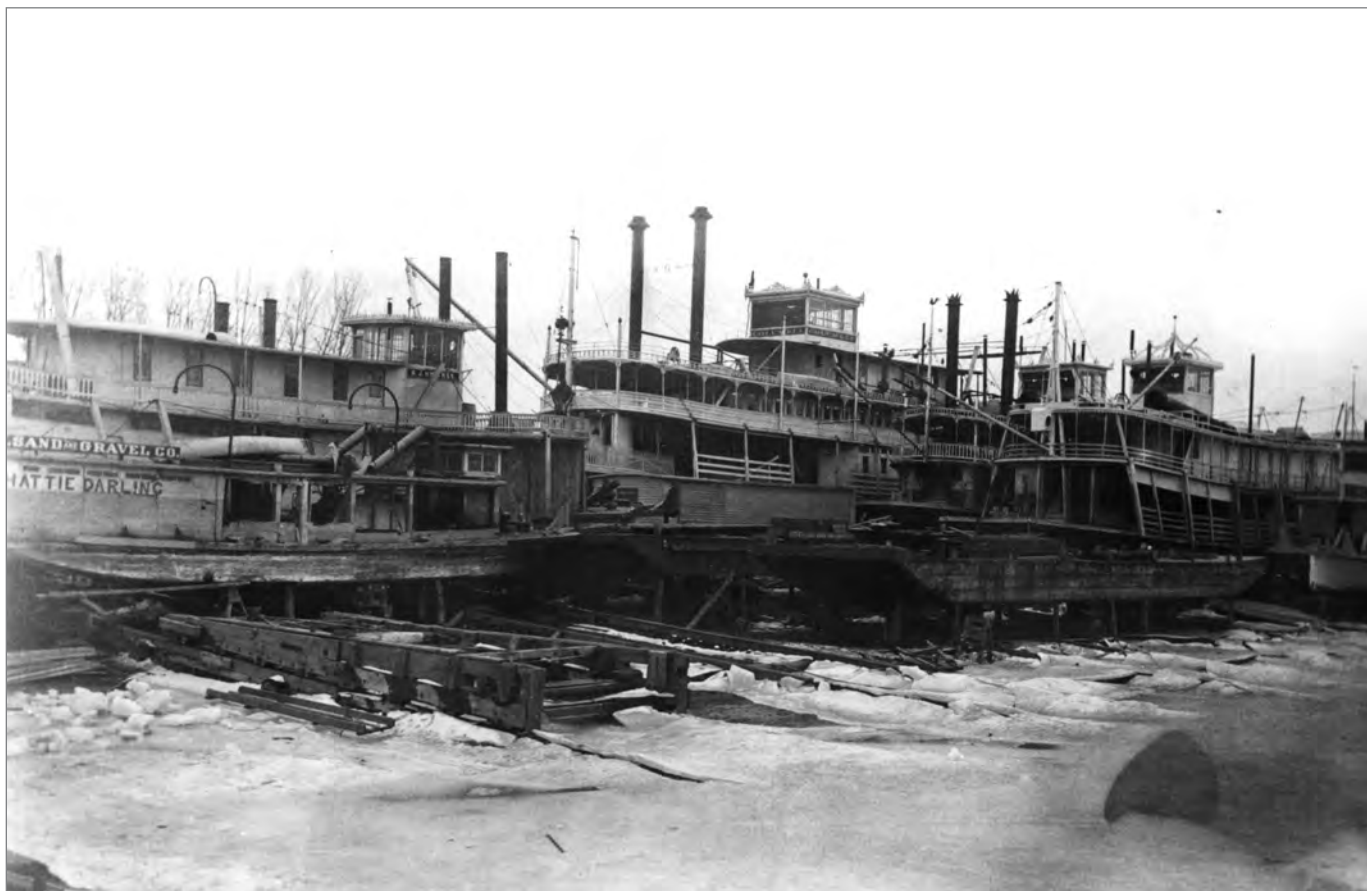
*The Kahlke Boat Yard & Marine Railway. Steamers LONE STAR, HATTIE DARLING,
ELOIS, AUGUSTA (ferry) and others, 1898.*



Steamers SATURN, MASCOT and others, 1898.



Peter Kahlke cribbing a boat (probably the ferry DAVENPORT), 1904.



Steamers HATTIE DARLING, COLUMBIA and others, 1905.



Sidewheel packet MORNING STAR being lengthened, 1910.



Sternwheel towboat J.P. and unidentified cabin cruiser, 1930.



Unidentified towboat and crew member at Kahlke Yard, 1934.



Sternwheel towboat E-L-K, 1931.



Ferry W.J. QUINLAN and towboat MARY K., 1931.



Steamers E-L-K, ELSIE and gasboat WAVE, 1931.



Sternwheel steamer FURY on ways having hull re-planked, 1931.



Sternwheel towboat J.P., 1931.



Steamers ELSIE, E-L-K and WANDERER, 1931.



Steamers E-L-K, WANDERER and cabin cruiser GEORGIA KAY, 1931.



*Steamers MARQUETTE, MARY K, and ferry landing, 1931.
Towboat in foreground probably FURY.*



Workers caulking a barge, 1933.



Sternwheel steamers WANDERER, FURY and houseboat CEE GEE, 1933.



Sternwheel towboat MARQUETTE in winter quarters, 1934.



Sternwheel towboats JAMES P. PEARSON, MARQUETTE and launch CATHERINE, 1934.



Sternwheel towboat PEARL, gasboat WAVE and unidentified sternwheel boat, 1934.



Steamers FURY, J.P., ELSIE and WANDERER, 1934.



Sternwheel towboat PEARL and other unidentified steamers, 1934.



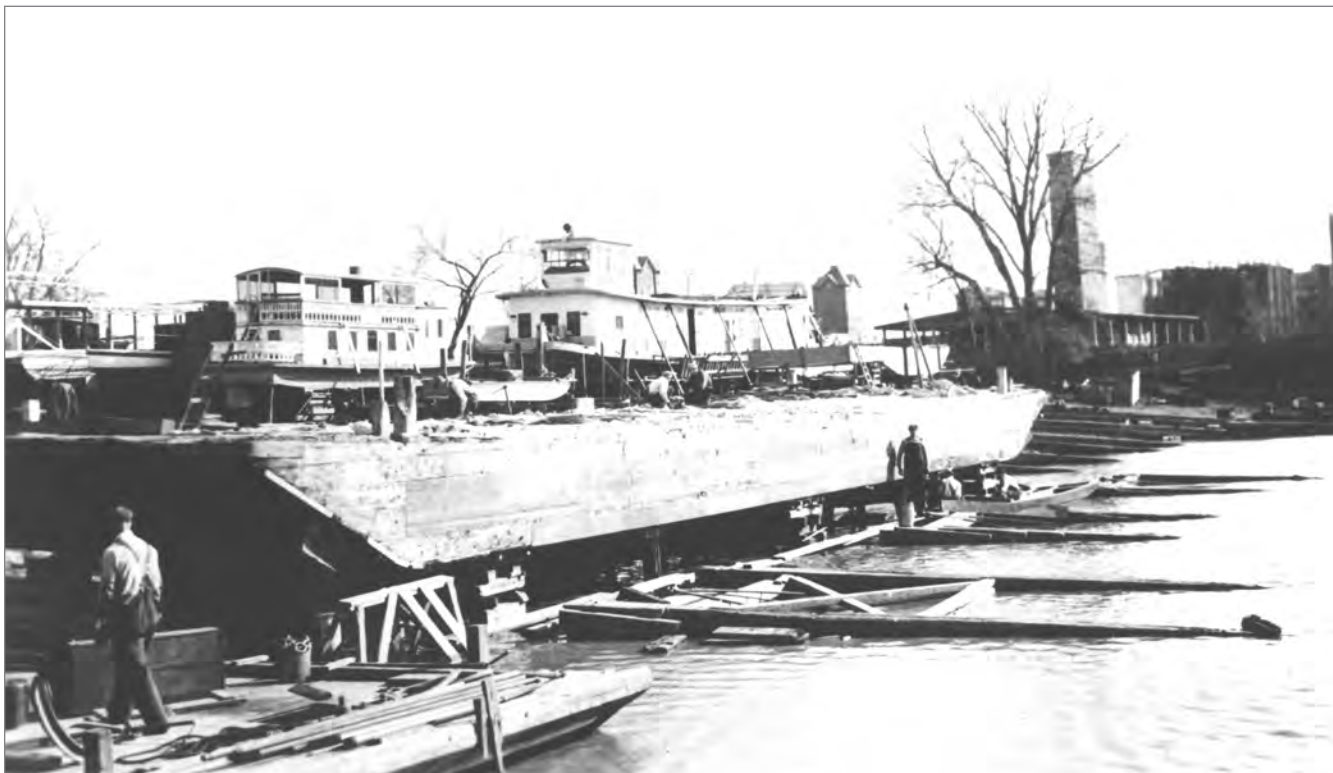
Sternwheel towboats PEARL, JAMES P. PEARSON and houseboat CEE GEE, 1935.



Sternwheel towboats JAMES P. PEARSON and MARQUETTE in winter quarters, 1935.



Sternwheel towboat FURY and sternwheel ferry W.J. QUINLAN, 1936.



Sternwheel towboat PEARL, houseboat CEE GEE and barge, 1936.



Steamers PEARL and FURY and houseboat CEE GEE, 1936.



Steamers PEARL and J.P with barges., 1936.



Steamers FURY, WANDERER and houseboat CEE GEE, 1936.



Steamers JAMES P. PEARSON, BEDER WOOD and houseboat CEE GEE, 1937.



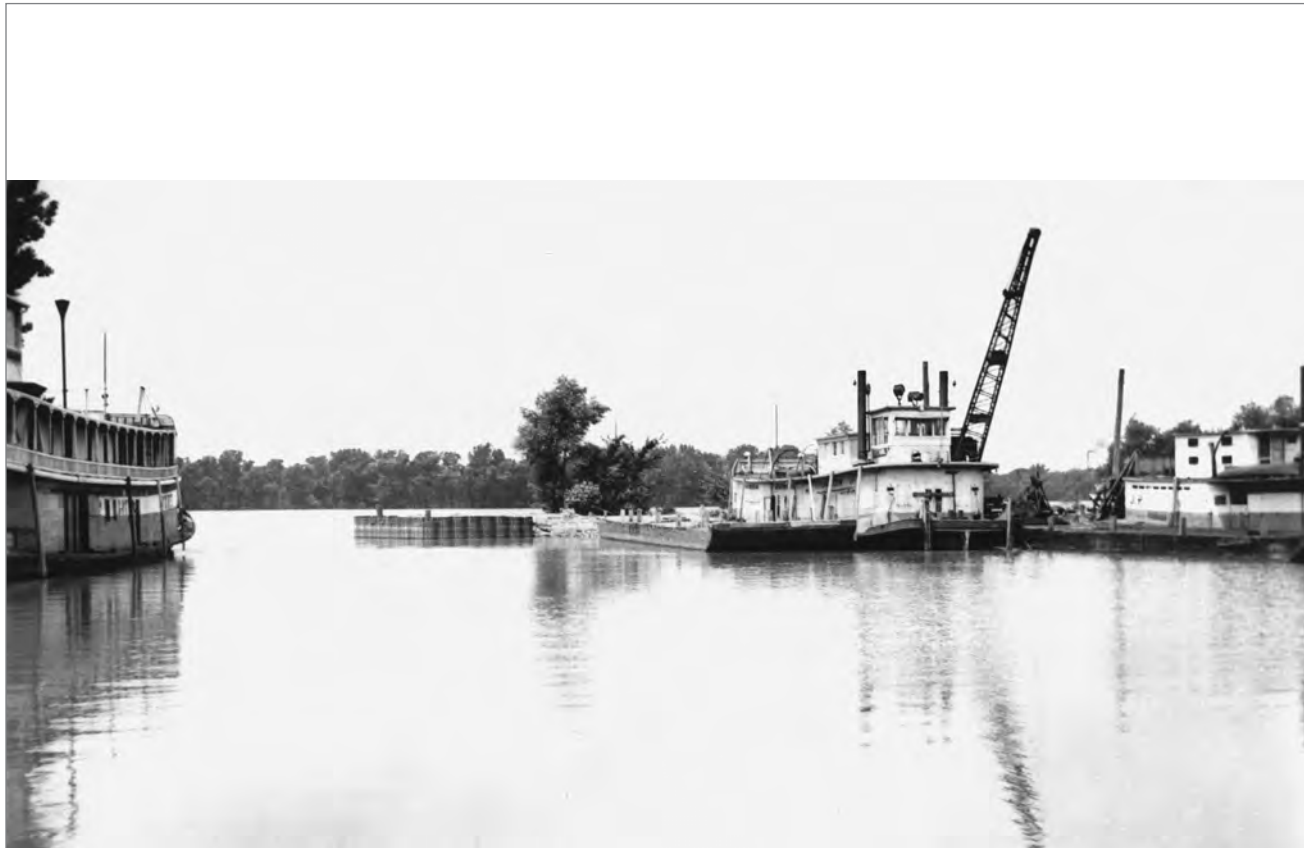
Steamers JAMES P. PEARSON, BEDER WOOD and houseboat CEE GEE, 1937.



Steamer JAMES P. PEARSON, gasboat WAVE and unidentified steamer, 1937.



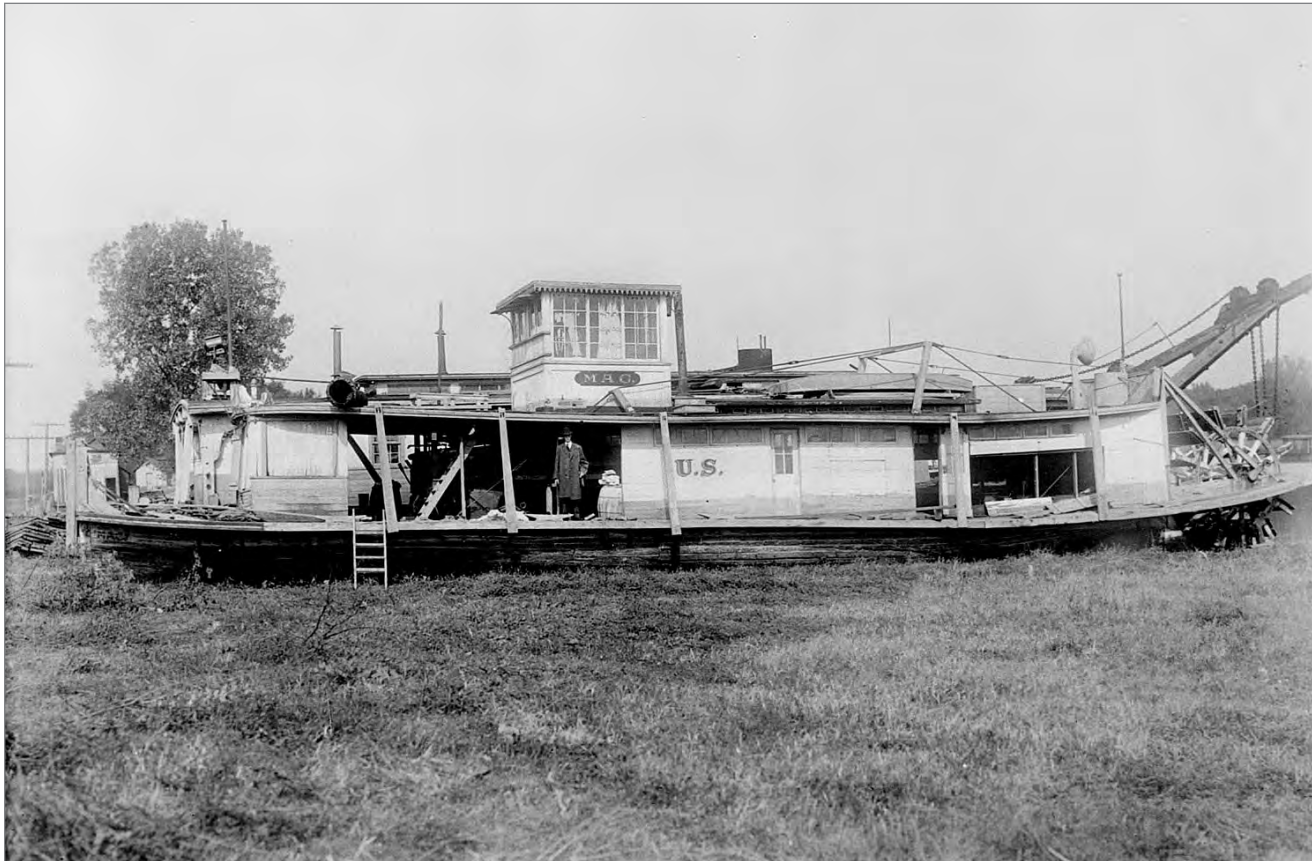
Steamer BEDERWOOD and barges, 1940.



Steamers FURY, PEARL and BEDER WOOD, 1940.



Sternwheel ferry W.J. QUINLAN, 1942.



Steamer MAC (formerly FREDDIE), ca. 1948.



Steamer MAC (formerly FREDDIE), ca. 1948.



Sternwheel ferry W.J. QUINLAN, 1948..



Sternwheel ferry W.J. QUINLAN, 1948..



Sternwheel ferry W.J. QUINLAN and m/v PIPE DREAM, 1950.



Sternwheel ferry W.J. QUINLAN , FREDDIE BOY and other vessels, 1950.



Sternwheel ferry W.J. QUINLAN, m/v PIPE DREAM and other cabin cruisers, 1950.



Sternwheel ferry W.J. QUINLAN and crane, 1950.



Steamer PEARL, 1951.



Steamer PEARL, 1951.



Towboat LONE STAR and ferry W.J. QUINLAN, 1956.



Towboat LONE STAR and ferry W.J. QUINLAN, 1956.



Ferry W.J. QUINLAN and worker with torch basket, 1961.



Ferry W.J. QUINLAN, 1961



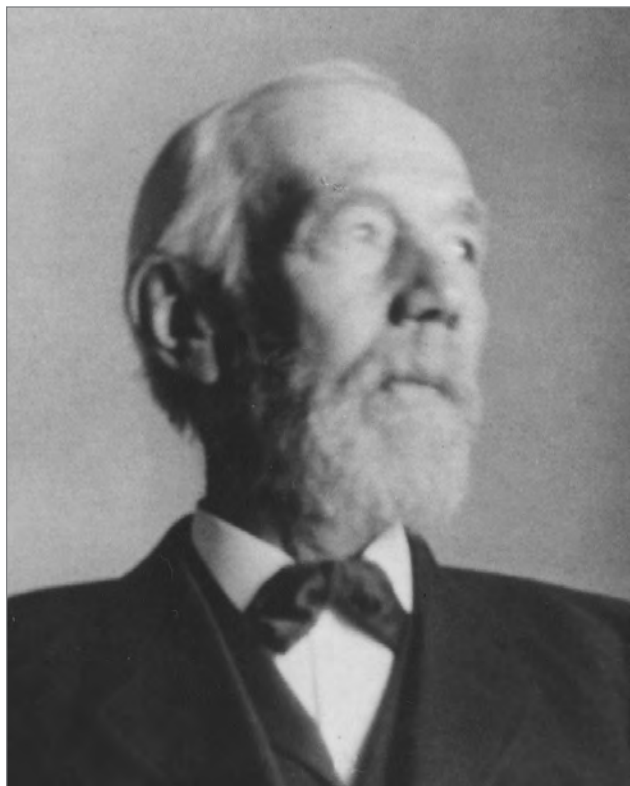
Ferry W.J. QUINLAN, 1961



Ferry W.J. QUINLAN, 1966



The Peter Kahlke residence, 303 – 4th Avenue, Rock Island, IL.



Peter N. Kahlke



Anna Kahlke



Fred, Peter and Anna Kahlke



The Peter Kahlke residence, 303 – 4th Avenue, Rock Island, IL.



Old River Chant:

*"Oh shovel up de furnace 'til de smoke puts out the stars;
we've just been built by Kahlke so we's bound to beat de cars."*