

# The MAXINKUCKEE Boat

By Harvey Firari

For forty years in the middle of the 20th Century, a sure sign that summer had once more returned to Culver was the sight of an excursion boat traveling along the shores of Lake Maxinkuckee. The 45-foot canopied craft, which could carry about 60 passengers, offered 12 miles of sightseeing on a 40-minute ride.

## What Were You Doing?

After the terrorists' attacks on September 11, 2001 and, if you were old enough, after Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941, it was not unusual to be asked: "Where were you?" or "What were you doing?"

Here's another one: **"Where were you in 1929, when the stock market crashed and anguished financiers jumped out of skyscraper windows?"**

If you weren't born about 71 years ago, you have a ready-made excuse. That was the year the Maxinkuckee boat was built, although other records indicate 1926. At any rate, it's safe to say that the boat was the product of the Great Depression.

Years later, about 1965, Eddie Amond, the captain's son, met the shipbuilder who had copied the design from a World War 1 subchaser and manufactured the main superstructure from an ancient wooden water tower, which had once served the city of Rochester, Indiana.

Mr. Fuller, the original owner, christened it "The Red Wing" and gave leisurely rides on Lake Manitou for 25 cents. After 12 years or so, Arthur Simpson bought the boat, moved it to Lake Maxinkuckee, and renamed it after the lake. For three years, with E.A. Thessin as the second Culver owner, the Maxinkuckee provided tours.

In 1941, two months before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and sank some of our ships, Frank Amond bought his own ship, the Maxinkuckee, and added her to his fleet of rental boats. For the next 38 summers, from Memorial Day to Labor Day, Captain Amond with the help of his wife Emma, who manned the ticket booth in the town park, hauled over a million visitors, among them such dignitaries as movie stars, the President of Mexico, a Cuban dictator, and the U.S. Postmaster General. During their younger years, Eddie and Joanne took part in the family operation.

When Captain Amond retired and sold the Maxinkuckee in 1976, he didn't know that he was sentencing his cruiser to a violent death by chain saws and torches at the hands of an Evil Landlady.



Indiana's most scenic boat ride on the state's second largest lake brings you close to the world famous Culver Military and Naval Academy and provides views of palatial estates. Sailing hourly seven days a week. For further information, see Capt. Frank Amond at the Culver City Park or write 802 Lake Shore Drive. Copyright, 1958.

## Frank Comes to Culver

Frank Amond spent his early years in Iliion, New York, where his father worked for the Remington Arms Company, and when old enough, he began a sales career with the Kresge Department Store in his hometown, later receiving promotions that moved him to Philadelphia, Washington, Perth Amboy, N.J., Cambridge, Ohio, and Connersville, Indiana. By that time, anchored to Emma and with two children, he began searching for a way to increase his income from an independent business venture.

While traveling back from Alton, Illinois, where a deal on a hotel had fallen through, he remembers that a friend, also employed at Kresge, had often talked about his exciting experiences as a student at the Culver Military Academy and the splendid location. Frank turned off the main road in Plymouth, followed signs to Culver, and when he saw the lake, he immediately made up his mind to move his family to Culver. With the financial backing of Will Osborn, he bought the local dime store and installed Emma as the manager. She ran a tight ship, so as to speak, keeping her teenage clerks honest by sewing shut their pockets.

After a few years, he sold the store to Bob Taylor so that he could spend more time building up his fleet of rental boats: five speedboats, a cabin cruiser, three sailboats, three "u-drive-it" boats, 36 rowboats, some of them purchased from Don Behmer's Culver Boat Service and from Rex Mawhorter. Racing around the lake like a bat out of hell, Emma had a reputation for being the best

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# The Maxinkuckee Boat

## Frank Comes to Culver

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driver in Culver. On October 1, 1941, the addition of a cruiser with an inboard diesel engine -- the Maxinkuckee boat-- would take Captain Amond and hundreds of visitors on nearly forty-years of enjoyable sightseeing.

Too old for service during World War II, he spent the winter months as traffic manager at an electronic factory in Plymouth. Ever at his side, Emma worked on the assembly line. During those years, he gradually reduced his fleet until he was down to the Maxinkuckee cruiser.

Often stories about Frank and his excursion boat appeared in newspapers and magazines. A good source of tidbits can be found in **The Culver Citizen's** "Nostalgia," a collection of past events served up for many years by Virginia Bair, who often gave the items her special puckish touch. One of them was entitled "**Captain Happy at 'his' Lake Maxinkuckee.**" In keeping with the image of the crusty seagoing captain, Frank was not exactly a candidate to model Smiley faces.

He must have possessed a chameleon personality, for there are those old-timers who remember a jolly, happy-go-lucky fellow, someone who hosted boat parties on the lake in the middle of the night. They say that the usual dyspeptic outlook gave way to some funny schmoozing in the moonlight. When pressed for details, they just smile slyly and speak no evil.

In his later years (after a medical procedure had foreclosed on the consumption of beer) he crossed the street from his apartment about eight in the evening, took his reserved stool at the bar of the Corner Tavern, ordered a cup of coffee, chain-smoked, and read the house newspaper. One of the owners was a bit on the grouchy side and sometimes muttered under his breath about running a coffee shop. By the time Frank reached the sports section, he needed another free refill. The Grumpy Hours at the Corner ended when Frank made a one-way voyage to the next world on July 31, 1983.

## Cruising with Captain Amond

Often with his Toto look-alike standing on the bow and yapping at passing watercraft, Captain Amond took great pride in showing off the wonders of the lake and delivering his spiel to the passengers sitting on hard wooden benches. As the boat circled out of Aubenaubee Bay, youngsters ran along the shoreline, shouted greetings and waved to the passengers, most of whom enjoyed waving back. With safety-first on his mind, the captain had to concentrate on piloting the boat. He was too busy avoiding concealed rocks to ring the bell to greet his loyal band of wavers, who tried to keep up on their chubby legs.

**"On a number of hot summer afternoons, the Maxinkuckee has safely carried up to 5,000 visitors,"** writes a Starke County reporter, who must have been the victim of fuzzy math or Virginia Bair's quirky sense of humor. Frank's safety record was impeccable, except for two incidents. One of them is described in the fall-2001 edition of "The Antiquarian & Historical Newsletter," mainly devoted to the Maxinkuckee Playhouse. A load of tipsy conventioners was transported by the Maxinkuckee boat from the Culver Inn to a new pier near the playhouse. When they all piled out of the boat, the pier col-

lapsed and dumped the loaded cargo into the water. All survived this unexpected bath, a sobering experience, indeed.

There are at least two versions of a second near tragedy. Although uncertain about the exact year, Mary Harris, the office secretary of the town library, remembers a sudden storm racing across the lake and driving the boat into the pier owned by Dr. K. K. Kraning, where the passengers found shelter in a boathouse. Eddie Amond believes that the close call took place after his father had sold the boat and since children were onboard, may have helped to encourage the new owners to put her up for sale.

## Shipwreck

Phil Scruggs and Mark Naylor bought the boat in 1976 and ran her for one summer. Other obligations forced them to abandon the boat on the shore near the Beach Lodge, where the rotting process began. They tried to sell her. They tried to donate her to the town, but the Park Board found the cost of renovations prohibitive. Then they tried to give her away. No luck, until April 28, 1979, when a group from Syracuse paid a dollar for her.

## From Lake Manitou to Lake Maxinkuckee and next to Lake Wawasee

But wait! Avast! It never reached the waters of Lake Wawasee. Twenty-two Syracuse boat-leggers with David Scheidt and Jan Appenzeller as the pirate leaders collected all of their spare change, took it to Culver, and paid one dollar(\$1.00) for the Maxinkuckee boat. They loaded it on a '78 Jimmy and drove it 30 mph along US 30. Since there was too much weight on the tongue, part of the trailer and boat dragged on the road, causing the rotting vessel to shed nails like dandruff off Chewbacca.

When they stopped along the way to examine the disintegrating boat, they had a sinking feeling that they had a lemon on their hands, that they hadn't got their money's worth. Instead of taking her to the lake, they dry-docked her at the corner of Appenzeller's lawn, 11739 N. SR. 13, on the south edge of Syracuse. As the amount of money that it would take to renovate the boat seeped in and as they gradually realized the decaying carcass could not be revived, enthusiasm waned and plans fell by the wayside.

The once proud Maxinkuckee stayed in the same location for the next fifteen years. But even as she was eaten away by maggots and other insects, she continued to serve tourists as a landmark, a source for area residents to provide directions. Culver residents may have felt some twinges of regret over the loss of their beloved boat, but at the same time, parents were relieved that their children would no longer injure themselves playing on the boat.

If Mr. Appenzeller had remained single, the boat might still be on his lawn. Scuttlebutt had it that his bride-to-be married him because, unlike other men who might have a rowboat or a dinky dory, he was a real he-man with a massive cruiser on display. That gossip was faulty. As the years passed, it dawned on him that his wife Pat didn't tie the knot so that she could watch the boat rotting away on their lawn. Pat calls herself the

“Evil Landlady” (her self-imposed epithet shows a keen sense of humor) and after some years of agitation, early fall of 1996, her husband caved in.

How did she get rid of the boat? “The evil lady took an ax and gave the cruiser forty whacks.” Actually, she threw a shipwreck party, invited about a dozen men and their spouses to come with chain saws, axes and torches, and while they smashed the boat in pieces, she served appetizers and liquid refreshments. When one woman expressed sadness at the demise of the boat, the Evil Landlady caused merriment by saying: “I don’t think it’s sad at all, but if you do take it away.”

Even in a state of deterioration, the boat did not go gentle into that good night. In the words of a reporter at the scene: **“Ghosts of the Maxinkuckee evidently instructed some bees and other insects to exercise their wrath on those doing the dismantling by stinging the exterminators. Bob McNary was stung twice as he attempted to rip boards from the starboard side.”**

Bob McNary, once a midshipman at the Culver Naval School, had memories of his mother coming to visit and the two of them taking trips on the Maxinkuckee. Perhaps the bee stinging was punishment by the Furies, the Greek mythological spirits of retributive justice that deal out terrible punishment usually reserved for someone like Orestes (a mother murderer) or Osama bin Laden (a mass murderer), but too vindictive for the partying boat hackers.

At last the remains of the Maxinkuckee were set afire behind the barn. The way was now clear for an antique shop. If you stop by, don’t expect to find any “evil” bargains like Egyptian mummies, flying broomsticks, or haunted shipwreck souvenirs. Just silver, lighting, and decorative stuff.



This may be hard to believe, but after all the destruction and the burning, two parts of the boat made their way back to the shores of Lake Maxinkuckee. Seth Becker rescued the board with the nameplate on it. To get the board on his truck, he had to cut it in two pieces so that it reads MAXIN/KUCKEE. Those two pieces were used to set the scene for the shipwreck theme at last summer’s July Yacht Club party, 2001.

Culverites who admired the boat would probably empathize with the Syracuse lady’s bewailing the savage smashing of the once-dignified cruiser. The two slabs of wood, sad remnants of glorious summer days, may remind residents of the time when they watched the boat circling the lake. As the circles grew tighter, soon the skipper and then the boat disappeared in time’s whirlpool, along with the spectators, leaving behind two slabs and warm memories of an excursion boat on the blue waters.



This painting of the Maxinkuckee boat by M. G. White hangs in the temporary library and will be moved to the History Room of the renovated library. (photo courtesy of Scott Pletka - head librarian)

### Invitation to Lake Wawasee Vandals

GREETINGS: You have been identified as a culprit who abandoned a derelict vessel on my property. You are hereby ordered to appear on August 24, 1996 with your most destructive tools and engage in a boat smashing party.

Signed: **The Evil Landlady, who is committed to destroying history, while serving beer and other delicacies.**



**DEATH OF A LANDMARK: Jan Appenzeller, the Evil Lady’s husband, is caught in the act of cutting the name from the bow of Culver’s favorite touring cruiser.**

Sources: *The Maxinkuckee Boat*

*Fulton County Folks Vol. 1 - Fulton County Historical Society; Robert Rust papers; South Bend Tribune 12/10/1978 - found at Marshall County Historical Museum; Dixie Becker (Mrs. Nelson); Culver Citizen; Nostalgia Column; Eddie Amond; Syracuse Mail Journal; Pat Appenzeller (Mrs. Jan); Post card from John Cleveland Collection; Picture of Maxinkuckee Launch - Culver Public Library.*

Antiquarian & Historical Society of Culver Winter 2002 Newsletter

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# 2001 Summer Programs Review

## Robert Hartman gave a slide presentation entitled "Building a Dream" at our June meeting.

The Culver brothers started the Wrought Iron Range Co. in 1881. Two years later Henry Harrison Culver left the company because of ill health. In 1883 he purchased land on Lake Maxinkuckee. He and his wife built the farmhouse – now called the "Founder's Cottage." In 1885 they built "The Homestead" which is now being reconstructed. After several years Mr. Culver returned to the family's manufacturing businesses.

The Culver brothers were also in the business of manufacturing Southern Calendar Clocks. Their goal was to sell a stove, sell a clock. The buyer of the stove might also receive a premium gift of an iron skillet or a hitching post. A cookbook was published to encourage the use of the stove.

They were dependent on the railroads to make their business a success. Bob had a map that showed a multitude of rail lines crisscrossing the county. The train would stop wherever a stove was to be delivered.

After several business ventures on his lake property were not profitable, Mr. Culver declared that a dream he'd always had was to start a school. This dream began in 1894 with the building of the campus and the faculty. The building of infrastructure continued until 1924, when finances from other than the Culver family, were required. New buildings would not be built again until 1948. But his dream was succeeding.

## Culver in 1915 – July meeting

Linda Rippy and Phyllis Schoonover came to us from the Marshall County Historical Society in Plymouth. Linda is the Executive Director of the museum. Phyllis volunteers, writing the newsletter and helping where needed.

At our July meeting they portrayed Emma and Irene. This morning Irene has come to Emma's home. They find scrapbooks filled with history of their community, Culver, Indiana. While sipping tea they share, with us, what they find.

### *Samples of the historical information they spoke of*

- Indians built willow branch homes with shingles of bark. In the winter fur was placed over the shingles.
- An early name of Culver was Union Town. This name was changed to Marmont in honor of a General in Napoleon's army.
- While acting as a conductor on the railroad, Mr. Knapp heard the need expressed by his passengers for a hotel that would be open from early spring to late fall. The clubs, around the lake, were open only from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Being interested in this business venture, Mr. Knapp built a fine hotel, the Arlington, on Long Point.
- In 1915 there were five excursion boats.
- There was a fine of ten dollars for hitching a horse to one of the town's shade trees.

- In 1906 the water works was started.
- 40,000 tons of ice was taken from the lake in 1907.
- The first school in the township was near Maxinkuckee Village. It was built in 1836-37.
- By 1842 there were 12 schools.
- The children should not have to walk more than two miles to go to their school.
- The school year was lengthened to 6 months.
- The John Osborn Hotel was built. A school, which had been on the lot, was incorporated into the hotel.
- Souza Sager was an outstanding athlete of the era. He scored 116 points in a basketball game. It is said he earned the name Souza when he marched up and down railway pretending to play a musical instrument.
- Then Irene realized she had to be on her way home for the iceman to make his delivery.

*This ended their reminiscing.*



*On the left is Phyllis Schoonover. Sitting next to her is Linda Rippy. They portray Emma and Irene who are reminiscing about the early years in Culver for the AHS.*

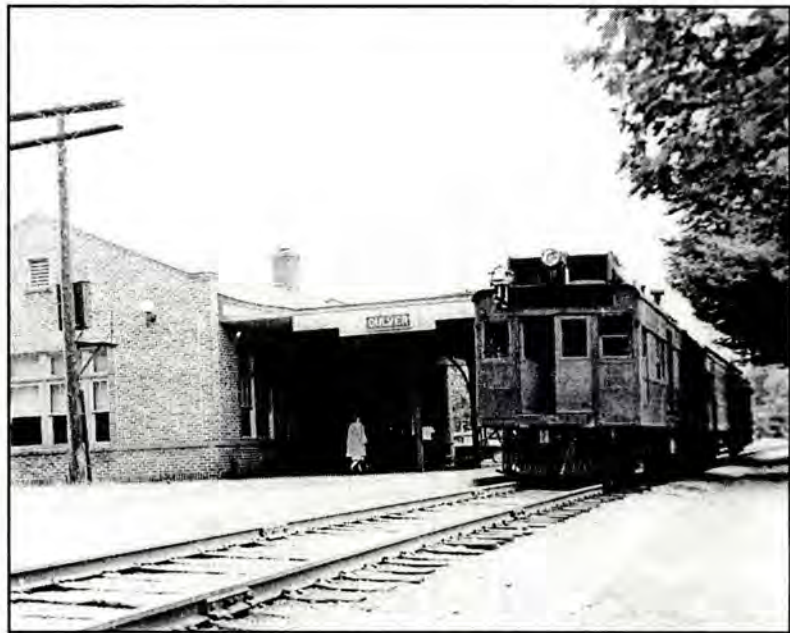
## **Vandalia Railroad – August meeting**

The ideal place for our August program was the Culver railroad station since our program was presented by Lynn Pentelow of Plymouth. Lynn is an avid collector of railroad memorabilia. He has a collection of pictures and many of them are related to the Vandalia Railroad Company and to its predecessor the Terre Haute and Indianapolis Railroad Company. In 1917 the Vandalia became part of the Pennsylvania RR.

Lynn collects objects relating to the railroad. He had on display buttons from the conductors coats, padlocks, metal baggage tags, a ticket, lantern from the Vandalia RR, passes for the clergy, and railroad maps of 1890 and 1914.

In 1882 a survey was made and it found the population of Marmont area growing and the activity around the lake increasing. As a result the railroad came. The first depots where shacks both at Culver and Plymouth.

The name Doodlebug was a nationwide term for a train used in the 1920s and 30s. It was either diesel electric or gas electric. It looked like a passenger car. If needed, it could pull a couple of cars. It was often seen in Culver.



*South Bound PRR "Doodle Bug" at Culver Station, Culver, Circa 1946*

## **Preservation of Historic Landmarks – September meeting**

Todd Zeiger spoke to us in September about his work with the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana. Its mission is to encourage the saving of historic properties. Todd is Director, Northern Regional Office of the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana in South Bend. Throughout the state there are forty-three staff members. It publishes a magazine called the Preservationist. They work with non-profit groups and organizations to do a project.

A small grant may be given for feasibility studies for the restoration of historic buildings and advice on alternate uses for the building. They are also able to give help in applying for grants to do the actual work.

There are 8,000 members supporting this non-profit, privately funded organization.

Todd mentioned several successful restorations including the saving of a round barn from the countryside near Rochester. It was brought into the city and is now on the Rochester golf course grounds. This was accomplished through the efforts of the Park Board.

The Ten Most Endangered Places in Indiana include historic buildings across the state. These become the goals for those interested in historic preservation. The best way to save historical building are through local organizations.

When asked how he became interested in this field Todd responded, "When traveling with his family as a child, I enjoyed seeing the older, well designed homes and other buildings along the way."

## **The President's Report**

With the arrival of the year 2002, the Antiquarian and Historical Society of Culver is entering its second decade of existence. The organization is alive and well, thanks in the most part to a terrific bunch of people, the Board of Trustees. Many of the members of the Board have been actively involved with the Society since its beginning. For the benefit of many new members this past year let me run down the list of these long term dedicated people: Lorrie Banfield, Agnes Bramfeld, John Cleveland, Jo Dugger, Richard Ford, Fred Karst, Bob Kreuzberger, Jim Moore, Stewart Roberts, E.P. Severns, and Jennifer Shea. In addition, we have a distinguished and very active group of emeritus and associate members that includes Marcia Adams, Jim Baker, Virginia and Dick Fisher, Harvey Firari, Anne Greenleaf, Bob Hartman, Rita Mason, Jim Moss, Lynn Overmyer, Dorothy Peterson, Jean and Bill Welch, to name the most obvious.

These volunteers make this large and very visible organization run and run well. Virginia and Dick Fisher maintain Heritage Park, the outstanding newsletter team consists of Jo Dugger, Agnes Bramfeld and, John Cleveland; Bob Kreuzberger and Jennifer Shea take care of finance, contracts

and investments; Richard Ford and Anne Greenleaf are in charge of membership and fundraising. Lorrie Banfield and Dorothy Peterson have been handling the popular monthly meeting and the library museum project is currently being shepherded by Marcia Adams and Fred Karst. All of these projects and many more are overseen and enforced by "The Whip," John Cleveland (as a matter of fact this column is being written while John stands over me, ready to take it to the printer).

In the New Year, the Society will begin its most ambitious project to date; the Community History Museum that will be housed in the new library building. Like the Heritage Park project before it, we are committed to making our Museum one of the finest local history museums in the country. It will be a place in which to display our pride in the wonderful heritage of this special community. With our committed membership, especially those mentioned above, I know we will succeed.

By the way, you may wonder what the president of an organization of such hard working people has to do. Well, most of my time is spent in having people congratulate me on the great things the Society is doing for the community. It's a tough job, but somebody has to do it. Happy New Year!

WINTER, 2002  
NEWSLETTER

Antiquarian and Historical Society  
P.O. Box 125  
Culver, Indiana 46511-0125

## Letters . . .

Dear Jo,

Just a note to thank you for sending me a copy of the fall newsletter. You and your staff have done a marvelous job. Special thanks of course go to Harvey Firari for pulling all the bits of information together into a readable and enjoyable article. The many local references added tremendously to the interest and purpose of your membership. On top of all that it was a tremendous tribute and remembrance which of course is very dear to my heart. The Maxinkuckee Playhouse is now firmly established as a part of Culver's history and excitement. (to quote) "For one brief shining moment that was known as Culver's Camelot."

*Paul Rutledge, Founder & Director*

## Dues and Donations

For an all-volunteer organization, we are constantly amazed at how much money is required to fund our day-to-day activities. First off, as you probably know by now, we own and maintain Heritage Park. This includes the taxes and all utilities and maintenance costs.

Other expenses include doing the research and paper work necessary to have our historic areas designated on the National Register, buying and installing the plaques involved, printing and mailing our much praised newsletter, notices for monthly meetings, etc.

When you send in your dues, I hope you will consider an extra contribution to help our Society develop worthwhile and lasting projects like the local history room in the library.

Please send \$20.00 Family 2002 dues to The Antiquarian and Historical Society, P.O. Box 125, Culver, IN 46511-0125

Dear Harvey,

Your Antiquarian Newsletter article on the Maxinkuckee Playhouse is great; I've just finished my third reading. And each reading brought new recollections of people and events that I supposed I'd long ago forgotten.

*Allan Holaday*

The Hord Cottage on East Shore Drive,  
was built 100 years ago.  
We congratulate the family on being a part of Lake  
Maxinkuckee for so many years.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Summer Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Winter Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to the Antiquarian and Historical Society,  
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