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BIG RIVER

May-June 2006

Summer Travel Issue!

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10 Places That Will Take You
Back to the 1800s***



***Mudpuppies —
Creatures of the River Bottom***

***Restaurant Review:
The Norton's***

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COVERING THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI SINCE 1993

BIG RIVERTM

May-June 2006

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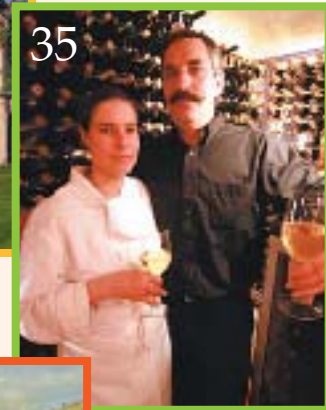
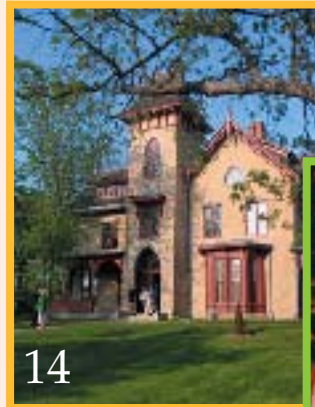
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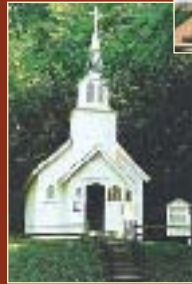
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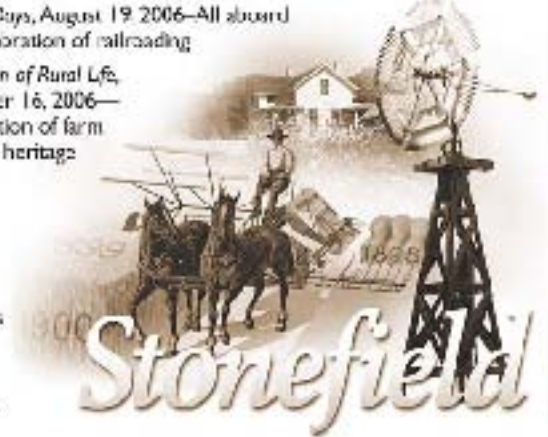
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From the Riverbank

Reggie McLeod
Editor/Publisher

Big River™

Big River Magazine (ISSN 1070-8340) is published six times a year by Open River Press with assistance from Riverwise, Inc., 70 1/2 E. Fourth St., PO Box 204, Winona, MN 55987; (507) 454-5949; fax: (507) 454-2133; email: editors@big-river.com; website: www.big-river.com

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Subscriptions are \$27 for one year, \$49 for two years or \$4.95 per single issue. Send subscriptions, single-copy orders and change-of-address requests to Big River, PO Box 204, Winona, MN 55987.

Second-class postage paid at Winona, MN.

POSTMASTER: send change-of-address requests to Big River, PO Box 204, Winona, MN 55987.

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CARPS, POOLS AND APRIL FOOLS

Over the winter I tend to work too much and not get outdoors very much. So, my first early spring excursions always set my head spinning with plans for the summer. On the last Sunday in March I was walking in a remote part of the Trempealeau Refuge with Pam at twilight as hundreds of Canada geese and tundra swans were settling into the backwaters for the evening. The biggest flock of swans that I have ever seen flew over us in a perfect V. I grabbed the binoculars and counted the birds in the shorter arm of the V. 105! There were at least 220 birds in

“Stories are always referring to this pool or that pool, but you never say what a pool is.”

that flock. Three more flocks of about that size flew over us as we hurried back to the car.

The May-June issue of *Big River* is always the most exciting one for us, because as we are enjoying the first days of spring, we’re working to launch our readers into some new summer adventures. We’re always trying to maintain that fine balance where we can, at the same time, entertain experienced river rats, casual river users and people who are just discovering the river. I remember once, years ago, speaking about the river to an elderhostel group. At the end of my presentation the first ques-

tion was from a guy who asked, “What’s the DNR?”

He was from a state that had something like the Department of Natural Resources, but they didn’t call it that. So, a lot of what I had been speaking about didn’t make much sense to him. That’s why we spell out Department of Natural Resources and other agency and organization names in its first use in stories.

This winter I was visiting with someone who has read *Big River* for a few years. He asked me to explain pools. “Stories are always referring to this pool or that pool, but you never say what a pool is.”

Oops.

So in “Poolology” I attempt to remedy that oversight. I’m sure it’s not the only thing we’ve overlooked, so don’t be shy about holding us accountable.

And speaking of holding us accountable, we always slip a story into the March-April issue that is fun but simply isn’t true. This year that was the short news item “Real River Fare,” about the river cuisine at a fictional restaurant, Scales, in a non-existent town, Ouacachita, Iowa. Though it is a phony story, it is an attempt to promote the idea of a river restaurant serving some fancy carp dishes. This could benefit the river and commercial fishermen, as well as diners who will get the opportunity to enjoy one of the world’s most popular fish. Eventually some clever, good-looking restaurateur will seize on the idea.

Carpe carp and enjoy the spring. 🐟

COMING IN THE NEAR FUTURE

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Contacts (800) 303-8201. For information about stories, columns and River News, contact Reggie McLeod, Pamela Eyden or Molly McGuire (editors@big-river.com). For calendar events, contact Kathy Delano or Molly McGuire (editors@big-river.com). For information about placing an ad in *Big River* or for information about selling *Big River* magazines contact Kathy Delano or Maureen J. Cooney (ads@big-river.com). We must receive calendar events by May 22 to get them into the July-August 2006 magazine. We must receive ads by May 10.

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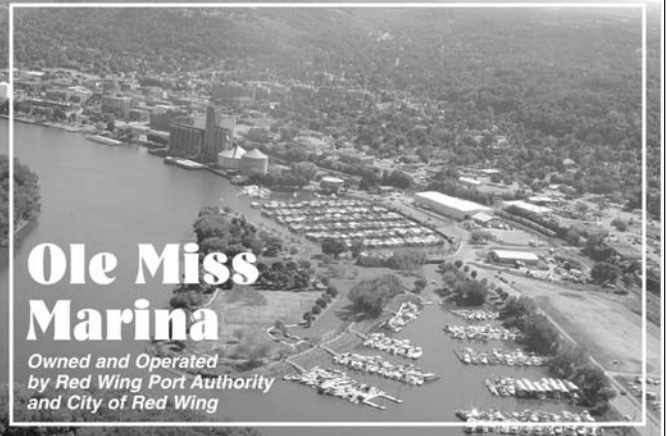
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River News

Bird Flu Watch

Washington, D.C. — Birds migrating down the Upper Mississippi River from Alaska and Canada this fall could bring the highly pathogenic H5N1 virus, dubbed bird flu, with them. Preparing for this possibility, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has teamed up with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to screen for wild and domestic birds infected with the virus.

Although human outbreaks of H5N1 around the world have been limited, so far, to people who work or live closely with infected birds or their droppings, many worry that the virus could mutate into one easily spread between humans.

The interagency plan calls for five activities to provide an early warning: investigate disease in wild birds; expand the monitoring of wild birds; monitor birds killed by hunters; keep an eye on backyard poultry flocks; and sample water and bird feces.

Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt said his agency is holding planning summits in all 50 states and providing checklists to local and state governments, businesses, schools and other organizations.

"Any community that fails to prepare — with the expectation that the federal government can offer a lifeline — will be tragically wrong," he warned.

Senators' Scorecards


Washington, D.C. — In its annual National Environmental Scorecard, the nonprofit League of Conservation Voters (LCV) ranks U.S. senators and representatives on their voting

Visit the Big River Home page (www.big-river.com) for links to information about stories marked with the mouse .

records on environmental issues. For the 2005 session the LCV gave two senators from Illinois and one from Iowa the highest score of all senators in states bordering the Upper Mississippi. Senators Barack Obama (D-Ill.), Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) and Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) scored 95 out of 100 points.

Mark Dayton (D-Minn.) and Russ Feingold (D-Wis.) both scored 90; Herb Kohl (D-Wis.) scored 75; Norm Coleman (R-Minn.) scored 35; and Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) scored just 10.

Senators from downriver states scored lower, except for Arkansas, 60 and 65 points. The other scores were: Missouri, 0 and 15; Kentucky, 0 and 0; Tennessee, 5 and 15; Mississippi, 0 and 0; and Louisiana, 10 and 50.

For scorecards of U.S. representatives, see the LCV website. 

Riverfront Developments

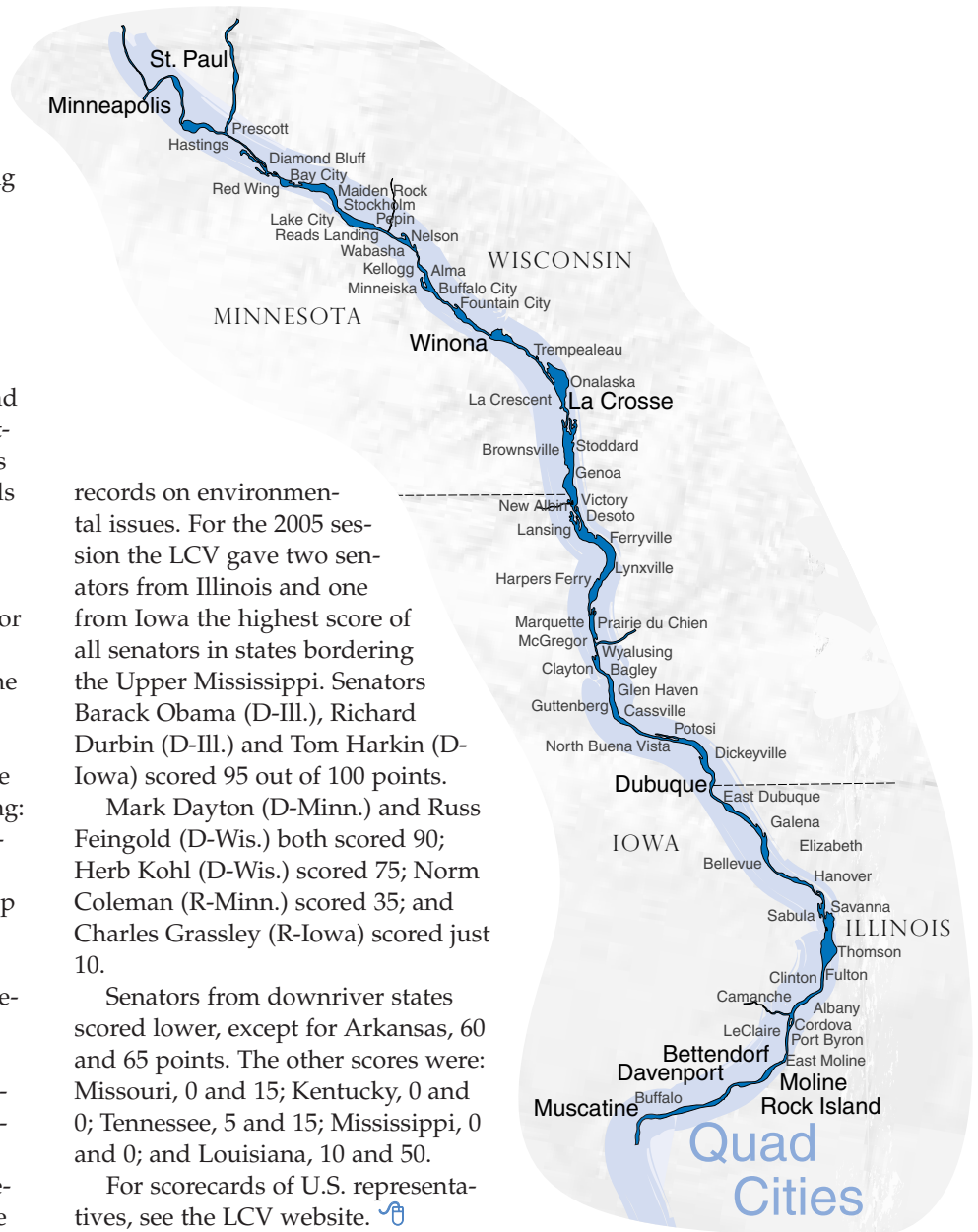
Minneapolis — Some very tall riverfront buildings are planned for both Minneapolis and St. Paul.

The Minneapolis City Council approved a proposal in February for an 11-building riverfront project that would include four towers ranging from 15 to 27 stories. The decision trumped the Minneapolis Heritage Commission, which rejected the tall buildings while approving seven other buildings. The commission said the tallest towers would dwarf the historic Pillsbury A Mill, a National His-

toric Landmark that once was the nation's largest flour processing facility. The project includes renovation of the mill.

Developer Schafer Richardson Inc., of Minneapolis, says construction could begin this year on the \$400-million condominium development. (*Star Tribune*, 2-24-06)

Meanwhile, a few miles downstream, another developer has proposed a 30-story Westin hotel for the Bridges of St. Paul, a big development under consideration for the West Side Flats across from downtown St. Paul.





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Bridges of St. Paul developer JLT Group Inc., of St. Paul, faces a gauntlet of regulatory approval for its proposal. West Side locals are already up in arms over proposed buildings in another development that would rise a mere six stories.

Farther downstream, 27 acres of the St. Paul Stockyards were sold in March to a developer who plans to build offices, warehouses and industrial buildings on the riverfront land.

The stockyards, which have been in South St. Paul since 1886, will relocate to Zumbrota and Albany, Minn., where taxes and municipal sewer and water costs are lower. (*St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 3-24-06)

Lock & Dam 3 Fixes

Red Wing, Minn. — Safety improvements to Lock and Dam 3, at Red Wing, may begin in 2007, according to the Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps is completing studies and asking Congress for \$62 million for the changes.

Proposed improvements include lengthening the upstream guide wall on the Minnesota side and dredging to modify the current that now sometimes sweeps downstream tows out

*That would threaten
shipping and shut
down the Prairie Island
nuclear power plant,
which relies on cooling
water from the river.*

into the gated part of the dam. The Corps would also repair the eroded embankment on the Wisconsin side.

One concern is that a tow might hit the dam and block one or more of its roller gates, forcing water to overflow the Wisconsin embankment, drawing down the upstream pool. That would threaten shipping and shut down the Prairie Island nuclear power plant, which relies on cooling water from the river. A coal-burner farther upstream might have to shut down as well.

What is the risk? "If we don't do anything, it's pretty high," said

Daniel Wilcox, project manager with the Corps' St. Paul District.

Barges have hit the dam 11 times since 1968.

"It's really just a matter of time before we get a fatality, and that's what we're trying to avoid," said James Ulrick, also a Corps project manager with the district.

Lock & Dam 11 Fixes

Dubuque, Iowa — Lock and Dam 11, at Dubuque, is undergoing a \$26.9 million rehabilitation, including resurfacing of the lock chamber, repairing concrete on the upper and lower guidewalls, replacing the lock machinery, installing new downstream bulkhead slots, and replacing the lock's electrical systems.

The lock was closed last October and most of the major work was done during the winter months. Lock service resumed this spring when the river opened for navigation. The rehab work is scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2007. Miter gates will be repaired or replaced under future contracts.

Meanwhile, you can watch the work in progress from Dubuque's Eagle Point Park.

First opened in September of 1937, the lock has "virtually remained untouched without improvements since its initial construction," according to the Army Corps of Engineers Rock Island District.

Farming for the River

St. Paul — University of Minnesota scientists are studying hazelnuts, alfalfa and other cash crops for the Minnesota River watershed — perennials that won't require fertilizer and pesticides. The corn and soybeans that now dominate fields flanking the river require both, sending pollutants into the Minnesota River. The Minnesota River is among the most polluted rivers in the U.S. and is the state's largest contributor to the nutrient load that kills off marine life in the Gulf of Mexico's Dead Zone.

Hazelnuts in Minnesota? "The natural range is into Canada," said Dean Current, director of the University of Minnesota's Center for Integrated



Dancers in St. Louis rehearse for the simultaneous, seven-city performance of "One River Mississippi" on June 24. Some of the dances will involve barges, speedboats and tall buildings. (Marylee Hardenbergh)

Natural Resources and Agricultural Management. His collaborator at the University of Minnesota is Ken Brooks.

In other words, you could eat your hazelnut gelato locally and think globally. New hazelnut bushes would produce their first crop in six years.

Researchers are also considering more prosaic plants — willows, alfalfa and natural prairie grasses — in search of crops that make money for farmers but don't require pesticides or fertilizers.

Current advocates government payments to farmers who would plant crops that keep pesticide and fertilizer out of the river. "If we are actually cleaning up the river, we think it might be reasonable to ask for payments for that service," he said. "Farmers now are putting chemicals on and getting paid subsidies. We're saying here's an option."

River Dancing

Itasca to Louisiana — On June 24, head out to the "One River Mississippi" site nearest you for a one-of-a-kind, never-been-done-before arts event. It's a simultaneous, seven-site interpretive dance along the banks of the Mississippi.

One River Mississippi aims to draw attention to the connection between people and ecosystems up and down the river, and to "bring joy and attention to the health of the Mississippi,"

said director Marylee Hardenbergh.

Dancers at Lake Itasca, Minneapolis, the Quad Cities, St. Louis, Memphis, New Orleans and Plaquemines Parish will dance to the same music at the same time on "found stages" that showcase the river. At various sites, dancers will dance on boats, barges, bridges and buildings on both

One River Mississippi aims to "bring joy and attention to the health of the Mississippi."

sides of the river. Local choreographers and dancers will plan and perform the dances. All seven communities will share a common sound system.

The performance will begin at 7:12 p.m., when participants in Itasca call out "One Mississippi!" Then Minneapolis participants will call out "Two Mississippi!" and so on down the river. All seven audiences will create a chord together, with Itasca singing one note, Minneapolis adding the next note, and so on until all seven notes sound together. That's when the dancing begins.

Hardenbergh has 25 years of experience creating large outdoor performances. She has produced the Solstice River dance celebration on the Stone Arch Bridge across the Mississippi in Minneapolis for nine years. 🐟

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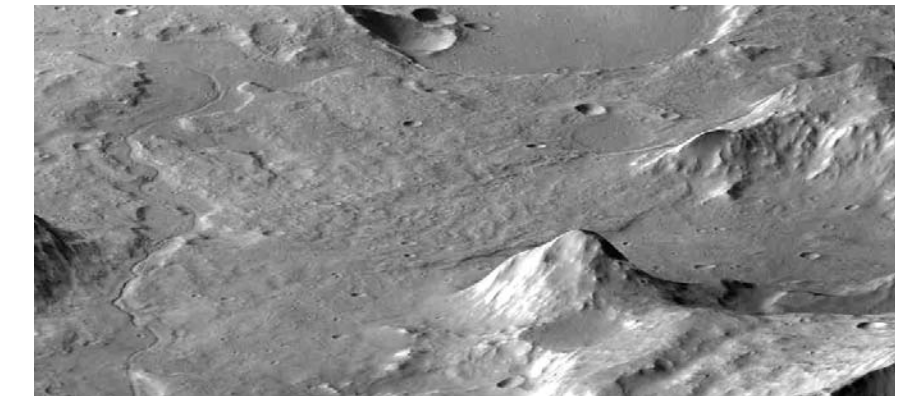
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RAGBRAI

Muscatine, Iowa — The 444-mile Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa, better known as RAGBRAI, will start on the banks of the Missouri River and end on the banks of the Mississippi this year. About 7,000 riders will cruise into Muscatine on the weekend of July 29. Muscatine has been the endpoint five times since the ride began in 1973. This year the RAGBRAI riders and several thousand more friends and supporters will arrive in town the same weekend of the community's annual three-day festival, Great River Days.

Martian Steamboats?

Paris — Photographs of the Libya Montes region of Mars, released in late March by the European Space Agency (ESA), show a 400 km (248 mile)-long valley that was carved into the surface about 3,500 million years ago, when the planet was warm and wet. The valley appears to be a broad river valley that contains a deeper interior valley. Scientists estimate that



High resolution cameras have captured images of a great river valley on Mars that once carried as much water as the Mississippi. That was before the planet dried up. In this photo, the river is seen on the far left side, running vertically in a meandering course. (European Space Agency)

the same amount of water probably flowed out of the region as currently flows out of the "middle reaches" of the Mississippi River, according to the ESA website.

The images were taken by the High Resolution Stereo Camera on board the ESA's Mars Express spaceship, launched in June 2003. Mars Express is scanning for signs of water. It is also mapping the entire surface of the planet at 10 meters per pixel and

some areas in even higher resolution — two meters per pixel. Some images are viewable on the ESA website. [↗](#)

More Refined

St. Paul — Flint Hills Resources, a refining and chemicals company owned by Koch Industries Inc., wants to expand its Pine Bend Refinery in Rosemount, Minn., to meet increased market demand. The refinery is already the largest in any state without oil

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wells. The current maximum capacity of 100,000 barrels of crude oil per day would be increased to 150,000 barrels per day.

An Environmental Assessment Worksheet was released at the end of March. A public comment period was scheduled to end in late April, after which the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency will decide whether a more thorough Environmental Impact Statement is needed.

The company is also proposing to build a second oil pipeline across Minnesota, to bring more crude oil from Alberta and Saskatchewan, Canada.

Flint Hills has a mixed environmental record at Pine Bend. In 2000 it was fined \$6 million for negligently discharging oil and wastewater from the refinery into a wetland next to the Mississippi River. State and federal agencies have fined it a total of \$19 million for pollution-related fines since 1998. In response to those fines, the company set up a partnership with the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA) to reduce its waste, air and water emissions by half in five years. So far, it has exceeded its goal. 🐢

River Prison

Thomson, Ill. — Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich wants to open the state prison in Thomson by the fall of 2006. In his annual budget the governor requested \$7.7 million for a

Folks in Carroll County are taking a wait-and-see attitude.

scaled-down opening of the prison, supporting 200 minimum-security inmates, and 75 guards and staff members — just a tenth of the number originally intended when the prison was built in 2001. Folks in Carroll County are taking a wait-and-see attitude. The proposal was still in the budget in mid-April, but senators were vowing to cut at least \$200 million from programs, paring back Blagojevich's increased spending. (See "Prison Holds Thomson's Economy Hostage" in March-April *Big River*.)

Turtle Express

Minneapolis — After an environmental review for a proposed commuter train from downtown Minneapolis north to Big Lake, Minn., found the route cuts right across Blanding's turtle habitat, planners at the Minnesota Department of Transportation went back to the drawing board. Blanding's turtles are classified as threatened in Minnesota and Wisconsin, and endangered in North Dakota, New York and Maine.

Anoka County, like many lands bordering the Mississippi, is a sandy plain that once provided homes and nesting areas for large populations of turtles. Now it provides habitat for large populations of people. Upgrading the existing Burlington Northern Santa Fe tracks to carry passenger trains could disturb the turtles and destroy some of their remaining habitat.

To protect them, Northstar project workers will control erosion, put up barriers to keep turtles out of construction zones, and pick them up and take them out of harm's way if they crawl in. The yellow-necked, dome-backed reptiles are a wandering breed. Not only do they move about from one wetland to another throughout the summer, but they also walk as far as a mile to lay their eggs at traditional sites.

The Northstar line is scheduled to run 18 trains a day, starting in 2009.

America's River Festival

Dubuque, Iowa — Inspired by the success of Grand Excursion 2004, organizers in Dubuque followed up the next year with an America's River Festival. That one was dampened by rain and bad weather, but they'll try again this year on the weekend of June 9 to 11.

The festival includes concerts, the ESPN Bass Masters bass fishing tournament, a lumberjack competition, hot air balloon rides, an art festival and a contest in which dogs will compete to see which can jump the farthest off a dock into the river.

Live music on two stages will be the central focus for many. Featured main stage performers include the



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Charlie Daniels Band on Friday, June 9, and Styx on Saturday, June 10. A variety of local and regional entertainers will also perform.

Admission to the festival is free, but entertainment on the main stage will cost \$15 each for Friday or Saturday, \$10 for Sunday. Or you can buy a \$25 bracelet, good for the entire weekend.

Turning Beer to Wine

Dubuque, Iowa — Two new projects have been announced for Dubuque's riverfront. The first, a public art program, "Art on the River," will put sculptures along the streets and sidewalks of the city's riverfront development.

The Dubuque City Council will commission works from local and regional artists, and display them at 10 locations on the riverfront from September 2006 to May 2007. The artwork will be sold at an auction in May 2007, and a portion of the proceeds will fund future commissions. Each year, a new series of proposals

will be considered for display.

Meanwhile, an old brewery on Dubuque's riverfront may soon be making wine. The City of Dubuque, which owns the landmark Star Brewery building just north of Ice Harbor, was finalizing agreements in late March to sell it to the Stone Cliff Winery, in nearby Durango, Iowa.

The National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium will open a new "Catfish Planet" exhibit featuring more than 100 species of catfishes

The first floor would become a wine production and tasting room, according to Nan Smith, owner of Stone Cliff Winery. Concerts will be staged in the open amphitheater outside.

The Star Brewery began in 1898, closed during Prohibition and was the only Iowa brewery to resume pro-

duction afterward. It was twice sold to other beer makers and then to the city in 1999. The massive red brick building has stood empty since then, while developers have transformed the riverfront around it.

The centerpiece of that river development is the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium, which will open a new "Catfish Planet" exhibit on Memorial Day featuring more than 100 species of catfishes from around the world, including electric, glass and walking catfish.

Bluegill Warning

St. Paul — Bluegill, sunfish and smallmouth bass from Pool 2 of the Mississippi — from Hastings, Minn., to the Ford Dam in St. Paul — have measurable levels of PFOS, a perfluorochemical (PFC), and should not be eaten more than once a week, according to a revised Fish Consumption Advisory issued by the Minnesota Department of Health.

The previous advisory listed the fish as safe to eat in unlimited quantities.

Laura Ingalls Wilder Historical Society



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Winner of the River Lovers' Photo Contest



Dan Meier of Minneapolis was canoeing and camping on the river in early July 2003, when he took this photo on the Wisconsin side of the river, just downstream of Winona.

Send entries for the next contest to *Big River* by the deadline below. If we select your photo to print in these pages, we'll send you three free copies of the magazine to share with friends. The contest is open to amateurs and professionals, adults and kids. Email a digital JPEG (.jpg) photo file — high-resolution photos only, please! — to photos@big-river.com. Write "PHOTO CONTEST" in the subject line.

Or send a print to Photo Editor, *Big River*, P.O. Box 204, Winona, MN 55987. (We cannot return photographs, though.)

Include your name, address, phone number and a short description of the photograph — who or what it is, when and where it was taken, etc.

The deadline for the July-August issue is May 21, 2006. The deadline for September-October is July 19.

Samples of fish were tested recently as part of an investigation of PFOS, which was manufactured by the 3M Company at its Cottage Grove, Minn., plant, on the banks of the Mississippi.

PFOS is part of a group of artificial chemicals used to repel heat, oil, stains, grease and water. 3M pulled Scotchgard from the market in 2000 after researchers found that the stable and persistent PFOS was showing up in the blood of people and animals all over the world. (3M still makes and

sells products under the Scotchgard brand name, but they no longer contain PFCs, according to the company website.)

In coming months, fish from other parts of the river will be tested to see if they have been affected.

Scientists are still studying the toxicity of PFOS, which adheres throughout the tissues of living creatures, not just in the fat.

(River News continues on page 50)

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This 1848 oil painting, *View of Mendota*, by Seth Eastman, shows the tiny village of Mendota from the Fort Snelling side of the river. The Sibley House is visible in the painting. (Minnesota Historical Society)



Right: The Sibley House today. (Minnesota Historical Society)

Go Time Traveling — Visit the 1800s This Summer

By Pamela Eyden

Grab your bonnet, shoulder your musket and hitch your mare to the carriage — this summer take a trip into the nineteenth century at some of the many historical sites along the river. Some offer full-fledged “living history” programs that give you a chance to take on roles, practice crafts and get to know some of the people who influenced the course of events along the river. Other sites leave you free to wander, read and imagine historical events on your own.

The sites here are listed from south

to north. All have websites, where you can find up-to-date information about times and fees.

Talk about a long journey — in one summer, you could traverse a century.

St. John Mine

Potosi, Wis., (608) 763-2121

Long before the California “Gold Rush,” there was a Wisconsin “Lead Rush.” Hopeful miners swarmed over the hills of southwestern Wisconsin, searching for claims

that would earn them more money than they could make by farming. The St. John Mine, a natural karst cave in the hills above the Mississippi, was mined by Native Americans for many generations and by the French, too, before Willis St. John staked his claim to the place. The mine produced a fortune for St. John between the years of 1828 and 1848, when the market for lead declined.

Visitors can tour the cave, squeeze into the spaces where miners worked and learn about minerals and geology, as well as history.

Villa Louis

Prairie du Chien, Wis., (608) 326-2721

Very few Victorians lived in high style along the river, but if you're curious about the ones who did, don't miss Villa Louis on St. Feriole Island, especially now that this grand 1872 mansion has undergone a 10-year, multimillion-dollar restoration.

Louis Dousman was born into a family that got very rich in one generation by trading furs. He and his wife Nina set the pace for the social and cultural elite of their time.

The exterior of this Italianate mansion shows restraint, but the interior bursts with color, extravagant patterns and intricate decoration. For Victorians, "too much was not enough," said curator Michael Douglas. Ninety percent of the furnishings from the remodeling that Nina Dousman did in 1893 have been reacquired. Many are from the Craftsman movement and were chosen by design consultant William Morris of Chicago.

On July 16 and 17, Wisconsin's only battle in the War of 1812 will be reenacted near the Villa on St. Feriole Island. The festive Carriage Classic competition is held just after Labor Day.

If you're curious about the fur traders from the early 1800s, check out the "Rendezvous" events scheduled for June 15-18 in Prairie du Chien. It's like a big campout with more than 600 lodges and teepees, and people dressed in period costumes demonstrating tools, guns, crafts and foods of an earlier time. Learn to tan fur, make baskets and assemble a teepee.

Stonefield Village

Cassville, Wis., (608) 725-5210

Stonefield Village, set in the lowlands near the river, is a "museum of agricultural history and village life." Tour 30 reconstructed buildings typical of a rural community in the late 1800s and early 1900s, including a fully appointed progressive farmhouse, period rooms and trade areas, as well as displays of antique reapers,

threshers, tractors and dairy equipment. Some of the farm equipment is quite rare.

The site of the home of the first governor of Wisconsin, Nelson Dewey, sits on the hill overlooking the village. The house that stands there now was built in 1893, 20 years after Dewey's house burned to the ground, but it is on the National Register, and is a handsome, restored house with a view of the bottomlands.

Colonel Davenport's House

Rock Island, Ill., (309) 786-7336

Colonel Davenport was among the first wave of U.S. Army soldiers to arrive in the Rock Island area in 1816. He left the Army, took up fur trading, built a fortune and then built a fine home on the banks of the river. This house, which was built using some novel construction techniques, is just a short walk from the river,



The only battle in the War of 1812 to take place in Wisconsin was fought on St. Feriole Island. It's re-enacted every summer when volunteer redcoats take up arms. (Prairie du Chien Chamber/Tourism Council)



Willard Bunnell was a fur-trader and friend of Dakota Chief Wapasha when he built this white pine house overlooking the river in 1859. (Winona County Historical Society)



The octagonal cupola atop the Ham House gave Mathias Ham a good view of his ships far below on the river. Besides strolling through 23 rooms of antebellum splendor, visitors can investigate Iowa's oldest standing building, a cabin that was built in 1833. (Dubuque County Historical Society)

where Indians once beached their fur-laden canoes and traders docked keelboats loaded with trade goods, just across the river from the Iowa city that now bears his name.

Davenport was famously murdered on the night of July 4, 1845, when thieves sneaked into his house and demanded gold. When Davenport didn't come up with any, they killed him. Three men were later captured, tried and hanged.

Visitors can tour the restored 1830s-era home and a fur-trading post of the era. Arsenal Island is dense with historical sites, as well as a working U.S. Army installation and a lock and dam.

Mathias Ham House

Dubuque, Iowa, (563) 557-9545

Mathias Ham, an early Dubuque entrepreneur, built his house on a hill with a commanding view of the river. Ham, his wife and five children

began their frontier life in a stone cottage in 1840. By 1856 he'd amassed a fortune from lead mining and shipping interests and built 23 rooms onto the cottage, including a tower so he could keep an eye on river traffic.

Both the 1856 mansion and an 1833 log cabin, Iowa's oldest building, which is also located at the site, have been restored and authentically furnished.

People who work at the house regularly report strange incidents, such as opening windows, phantom footsteps and odd electrical problems, as well as a sense that a strange presence lurks here. Some people attribute this to an event that happened well over 100 years ago: Late one night in the 1890s, Sarah Ham was awakened by an intruder. She grabbed her pistol and shot at her

bedroom door. Next day a trail of blood was found leading down to the river and eventually to the corpse of a river pirate. Some people say that an eerie light occasionally seen near the house is the ghost of this pirate.

Hixon House

La Crosse, Wis., (608) 782-1980

Hixon House was built by an eccentric lumber baron, Gideon Hixon, in 1859. An architecturally and historically important site, the house contains its original 19th-century furnishings, including a "Turkish Nook" and items collected during the Hixons' travels through Europe and Asia.

The restored house will be featured in La Crosse's Sesquicentennial Celebration August 3 - 6 this summer.



The Wilder family's small cabin has been reconstructed a few miles from the small rivertown of Pepin, Wis., and not too far from the village of Plum Creek, both of which figure in the writer's books.



In the cool of a tent, a Wilder Days volunteer demonstrates sewing on an antique sewing machine. (Jasper Bond)



Two participants cooled off in Lake Pepin after the Laura Ingalls Wilder Days parade on a very hot September day. (Donald Perry)

Laura Ingalls Wilder Cabin

Pepin, Wis.

Famed writer Laura Elizabeth Ingalls Wilder was born in 1867, in a log cabin near the town that became Pepin, Wis. Her first book, *Little House in the Big Woods*, is about her childhood years here and the stories her father told her.

Today, a replica cabin stands on the Ingalls' former property. The Pepin Historical Museum houses memorabilia of Laura and other family members, as well as period items.

Laura Ingalls Wilder Days, in September, draws people from all over the world to enjoy a day or two in the world Wilder so vividly described in her books.



The Hixon family lived in and cherished the Hixon House in La Crosse from the time it was built in 1859 until 1962, when the family gave it to the La Crosse Historical Society. In it you find fabrics and furnishings from the family's travels to Egypt and all over the world. (La Crosse Historical Society)

Bunnell House

Homer, Minn. (507) 452-7575 or (507) 454-2723

In 1849, Dakota Chief Wapasha granted permission to his friend, the fur trader Willard Bunnell, to build a cabin on Dakota land at what is now Homer, Minn. A decade later, Bunnell built a finer home nearby for his wife and family. It is an outstand-

ing example of Rural (or Steamboat) Gothic architecture. Visitors enter on the lower level and are guided up through three floors of the refurbished house.

The house has a grand view of the river. Visitors learn about pioneer life along the river back when canoes gave way to steamboats and trails became roads.

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The Villa Louis, which overlooks the Mississippi River in Prairie du Chien, Wis, was meticulously restored over seven years, with the help of old records and family photographs, such as the one above, which was taken in the grand front hall of the villa. (Wisconsin Historical Society)

LeDuc Historic Estate

Hastings, Minn., (651) 437-7055

William and Mary LeDuc moved to Minnesota in 1850. William was a lawyer, book seller, flour miller and farmer, who also served in the Union Army during the Civil War and attained the rank of general. Between 1862 and 1866 they borrowed the money to build this 15-room Gothic Revival house, using plans from architect Andrew Jackson Downing's book *Cottage Residences*. The house is near the Vermillion River in Hastings, Minn.

The family was involved in politics and many business ventures, including Minnesota's first railroad and a national embroidery business started by daughters Florence and Alice. William LeDuc was a good friend of Henry H. Sibley, who built the Sibley House (see below).

A persistent rumor about the four-and-a-half-acre estate claims there is a secret passage somewhere on the grounds. The house, on Highway 61 in town, just opened to visitors in 2005.

Sibley House

Mendota, Minn., (651) 452-1596

When young Henry Hastings Sibley, regional manager of the American Fur Company, began building his home in 1838, Mendota, one of the state's oldest settlements, was just a tiny outpost village on the frontier. Four sturdy limestone buildings remain from this era. Sibley's trading post eventually became part of a bustling territory. Sibley himself became the state's first governor.

Visitors can tour three of the restored structures, including an 1843 fur-company store and the 1840 residence of Jean-Baptiste Faribault, a trader and hotelier. Well informed guides tell stories of the fur-trade era and lead visitors through the fully furnished interiors and exhibits.

Fort Snelling

Minneapolis, Minn., (612) 726-1171

Hold your ears — the cannons fire twice a day at Fort Snelling in the summer.

In the early 1800s when Zebulon



The front hall after restoration was completed shows the love of vivid color that was part of Victorian sensibility. (Wisconsin Historical Society)



More than 130 competitors from all over United States arrive with horses, carriages, costumes and other gear to participate in the Carriage Classic at Villa Louis in September. It's an elegant display of period costumery and horsemanship. (Prairie du Chien Chamber/Tourism Council)

Pike saw the high bluffs at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers, he knew they'd be a good site for a fort, which was built in 1825 under the command of Colonel Josiah Snelling. The Army made roads, built

a gristmill and sawmill at St. Anthony Falls, planted hundreds of acres of vegetables, wheat and corn, cut hay for livestock, felled trees for their fires and made the first documented weather recordings in the area. Mean-



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William and Mary LeDuc were entrepreneurs with a progressive bent on many issues of the day. Their Gothic Revival home near downtown Hastings, Minn., was recently restored. It features a multimedia theater in the first-floor library to teach the history of times gone by. (Dakota County Historical Society)

while, they enforced the laws and policies of the United States. For 30 years it was a diplomatic, cultural and military center in what was then the unsettled Northwest. It continued operations until the end of World War II.

Today this restored stone fortress is the scene of a full living-history program, with costumed guides and a variety of tours. With their help, it's not hard to imagine the year is 1827, and you've just arrived on a packet-boat up the Mississippi River. Take the roles of soldiers and pioneers, and join in the fort's everyday life. March in drill formation, scrape a hide, get tossed in the brig, or make muffins and tea. The fort's activities are all set to background music of musket fire, cannons and the shrill call of the fife.

Oliver Kelley Farm

Elk River, Minn.

Oliver H. Kelley didn't know much about farming when he staked a claim in 1850. He became a "book farmer," learning the latest farming techniques from agricultural journals and by corresponding with other progressive farmers. In his later years Kelley founded the National Grange, a fraternal organization of farm families that did for farmers what the unions were doing for industrial workers.

Visitors to the Kelley Farm can walk the trails that wind along the Mississippi River and experience a working 1860s farm, make soap, visit farmhands and animals, and pick heirloom vegetables — the same kinds of plants the Kelley farm grew over 130 years ago. 🌿

Pamela Eyden is news and photo editor of Big River.

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Meet The Mudpuppy

Photos and text by Allen Blake Sheldon



A strange creature walks the floor of the the Mississippi River

Although some people say amphibians and reptiles are ugly or slimy, I have always defended them faithfully. However, when it comes to the mudpuppy, I have to admit this is one ugly and slimy critter — really slimy. Just try holding one. Mudpuppies are also called “water dogs,” although they bear little resemblance to either puppies or dogs. At one time it was falsely believed that these animals barked.

The common mudpuppy, *Necturus maculosus maculosus*, is an amphibian whose range extends from southeast Manitoba to southern Quebec, down to southern Missouri and northern Georgia. In the Mississippi River mudpuppies are found from Missouri upriver to St. Anthony Falls, which blocks its upstream progress. In the Arkansas River drainage system in the South, *Necturus maculosus*



Above: Mudpuppies can swim, but mostly they walk along the bottom.

Left: Mudpuppies develop large, bushy, red gills in oxygen-poor water. This one was photographed near Dresbach, Minn.

maculosus is replaced by the Red River mudpuppy, *Necturus maculosus louisianensis*.

What is a mudpuppy, anyway? It is a large salamander, averaging 13 to 16 inches long, including its vertically flattened, paddle-like tail. It is, of course, the color of mud — brown to gray to nearly black with darker spots or blotches, which provides excellent protective camouflage. It has bushy red gills when it lives in slow-moving, warm, oxygen-poor water, and small, compact gills when it lives in well oxygenated fast water, such as at the mouths of some Mississippi River tributaries. Its eyes are small,

*The common mudpuppy is the host for the larva of a freshwater mussel called the salamander mussel, **Simpsonaias ambigua**. This is unique, because all other known hosts for mussels are fish.*

lidless and don't bulge out. Each foot has four toes.

Unlike other salamanders, mudpuppies are neotenic, which means that mature adults are totally aquatic, retaining their larval characteristics, including gills. While larvae of most salamander species hatch in the water and have gills for only a few weeks until they develop into adults and move onto the land, mudpuppies live permanently in water and never metamorphose into a terrestrial form. Their lungs are used mostly for depth regulation instead of breathing.

Mudpuppies are mainly nocturnal, but their behavior changes with their habitat. Mudpuppies that live in slow, murky water with a muddy bottom or lots of vegetation are often active all day, since they aren't exposed to predators. Mudpuppies that live in clear streams hide underneath large flat rocks or logs by day and are active at night.

Mudpuppies use two forms of locomotion — they swim quite well,

holding their legs against their sides and swimming with an undulating tail motion, but they usually just walk along the bottom. They forage mostly at night, searching for almost any animal that will fit in its mouth — usually crayfish and other crustaceans, aquatic insects and worms. The menu might also include mollusks, fish, fish eggs and other amphibians, including juvenile mudpuppies.

Although they are sometimes accused of eating sportfish young, mudpuppies do not affect fish populations, and in fact, are a food source for fish. They are also consumed by northern water snakes and great blue herons.

Breeding season is fall and early winter. During courtship, the male swims or crawls around the female and eventually deposits spermatophores, jelly-like blobs, each capped with a sperm packet. The female picks them up with her vent or cloacal lips and stores them inside her cloaca, the chamber for holding wastes or reproductive materials. In late spring or early summer, the eggs pass through the cloaca and are fertilized as they are laid. She nests in a hollowed-out area underneath a large flat rock, occasionally in riprap or underneath a log, with the opening on the downstream side, so it won't fill with silt. She attaches 18 to 190 eggs singly, so they hang from the underside of the rock or log. Then she guards her eggs until they hatch, in one to two months, depending on water temperature.

Hatchling mudpuppies are about an inch long but will grow to eight inches over the next four to six years before reaching maturity. Mudpuppy juveniles or larvae look similar to the adults, but have a yellowish stripe along each side of their back. They are secretive, hiding in the vegetation of shallow water to avoid predators, including adult mudpuppies.

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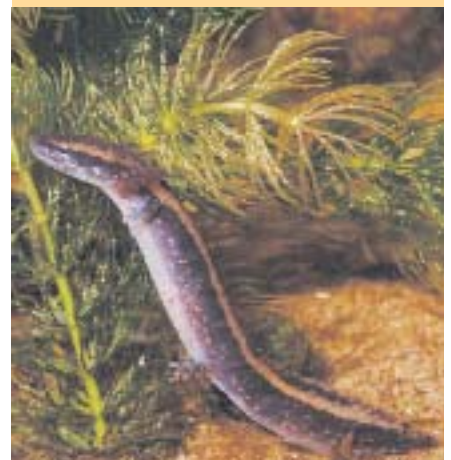
Along the Upper Mississippi River and eastward, the common mudpuppy is the host for the larva of a freshwater mussel called the salamander mussel, *Simpsonaias ambigua*. This is



Mudpuppy eggs hang from the underside of a rock.



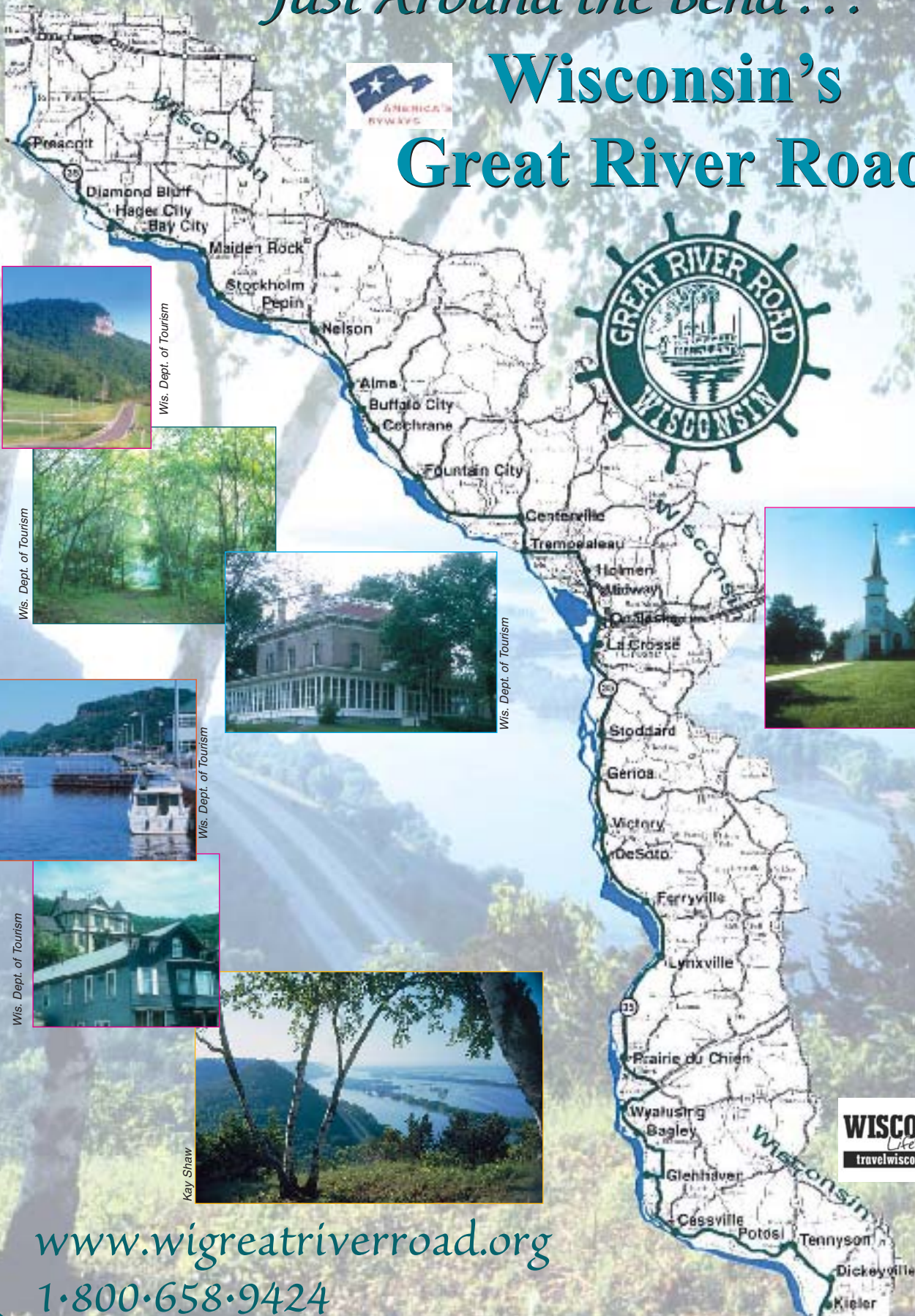
A mudpuppy embryo will take several years to reach adulthood. This one is from an egg that was accidentally torn during removal from a rock.



A juvenile mudpuppy has two yellow stripes along its back.

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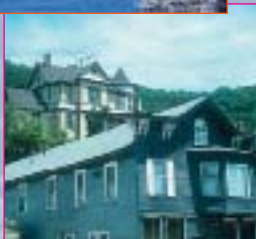
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You can see the small, compact gills on this mudpuppy living in a fast, clear stream.

unique, because all other known hosts for mussels are fish. Mussels begin life as larvae, called glochidia, that cannot swim and are just carried by the water or sink to the bottom. A glochidium has two valves, or halves, that are partly open and capable of

The common mudpuppy is a harmless creature that is part of the ecology of the Mississippi River.

clamping on to the gills of a host. The glochidium of the salamander mussel clamps onto the gills of the mudpuppy. There it forms a cyst and lives as a parasite for eight to 12 weeks, while it develops. When the cyst breaks, the little mussel sinks to the bottom and is on its own. The salamander mussel cannot survive as a species without the mudpuppy.

Your best bet to see a mudpuppy might be to catch one while fishing with live bait, and that includes ice

fishing, since mudpuppies are active all year. You might also try shining a flashlight into the shallows at night. Mudpuppies tend to move into shallower water at night to feed, and they are reportedly attracted to lights. Mudpuppies can also be found hiding underneath large, flat rocks that are in water one to three feet deep. They hide under rocks in deeper water too, but it's just not as handy to check them.

Like all amphibians, mudpuppies are very susceptible to water pollution and siltation, and have suffered the same kinds of limb deformities found in frogs in recent years. They are listed as threatened in Iowa.

The common mudpuppy is a harmless creature that is part of the ecology of the Mississippi River. Don't let it gross you out. Consider it a treat, if you see one. 🐸

Allen Blake Sheldon's photographs appear frequently in Big River. The last story he wrote was "Northern Water Snake, Cranky and Not-so-good Looking," September-October 2005.

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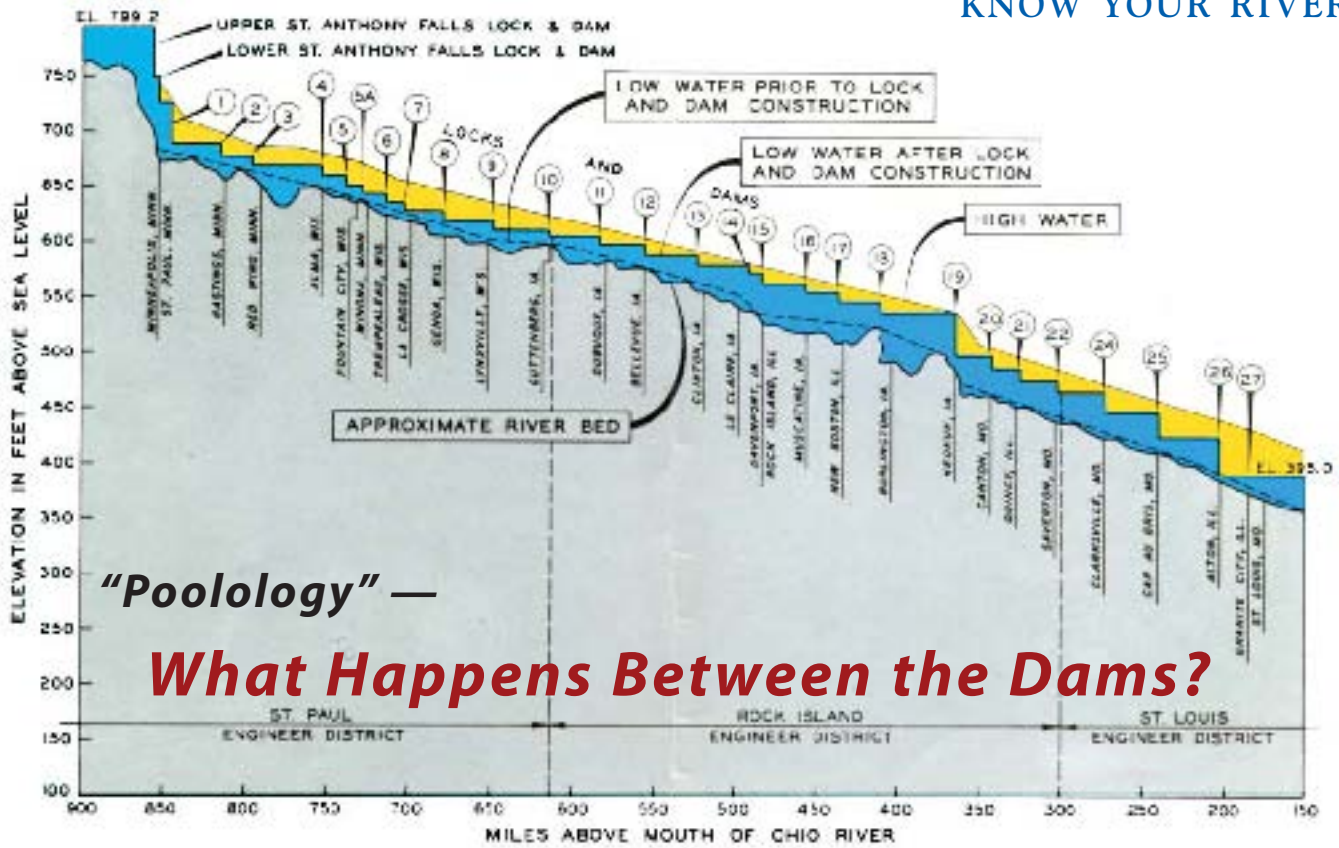
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**“Poolology” —
What Happens Between the Dams?**

The river's natural slope has been converted to a series of steps by the locks and dams. (Army Corps of Engineers)

By Reggie McLeod

The locks and dams have transformed the Upper Mississippi River into a series of pools, each named for the lock and dam that marks its downstream boundary — Pool 15 or Pool 5, for instance. For boaters who may have to wait an hour or two to lock through, the locks truly do define distinct stretches of the river.

Most of the pools share many characteristics, though each is unique. The longest pool in our stretch of the river is Pool 4, which covers 44 miles from Red Wing, Minn., to Alma, Wis., including Lake Pepin. The shortest is only a few blocks long, between the Upper St. Anthony Falls and Lower St. Anthony Falls locks and dams in Minneapolis. Nearly all the rest are between nine and 34 miles long.

Each of the dams was placed downstream from a shallow spot on the Main Channel in order to raise the low water level to more than nine feet deep over the shallow spot and the rest of the channel in that pool. The

dams were not built to control floods. During high water lockmasters are required to pull all of the dam gates completely out of the water.

The Stair-Step River

The character of each pool changes from the upstream to the downstream end. If you want to see what the river

During a normal summer, when the dam gates are down, you might think of the pools as stair steps, because the water on the downstream side of the dam is lower than the upstream side.

used to be like, launch a canoe or kayak into a backwater just below a lock and dam. The upper part of most pools has more islands, sloughs and backwater lakes, because the water level is close to the pre-lock and dam level. The next dam is too far down-

stream to have much affect on the water level in the upper part of the pool.

As you travel to the middle of the typical pool, you still see many islands and backwaters, especially at and below confluences with other rivers. Otherwise, you are likely to see more open water than at the top of the pool.

The lower ends of pools, especially right above locks and dams, are usually wide, open expanses of water with few islands and shallow, mucky bottoms. During a normal summer, when the dam gates are down, you might think of the pools as stair steps, because the water on the downstream side of the dam is lower than the upstream side, and the pool is almost flat with little current. After the dams were built, which raised the lower end of the pools, many islands disappeared under water. High water conditions destroyed many of the islands that remained. At the same

(Know Your River continues on page 40)



Riverman on the Mississippi
James Dallas Parks (1907-)
oil on canvas, 1940.

Navigating the Mississippi in Art

The Muscatine Art Center Stages a Different Kind of “Boat Show”



Davenport and Rock Island City
Henry Lewis (1819-1904)
oil on canvas, 1855.

By Pamela Eyden

Artists have long been fascinated by the river and the boats that float on it. Both are the subject of a show at the Muscatine Art Center, from May 21 through August 28 this summer. Called “Navigating the Mississippi: Early Modes of Transportation on the Mighty Mississippi,” the show features paintings, prints and drawings from the museum’s Great River Collection. In it you’ll find canoes and keelboats, steamboats, river rafts, towboats and more, portrayed by artists who are themselves part of the history of the

Upper Mississippi.

Henry Lewis, for example, was an English cabinetmaker who arrived in St. Louis in 1836. He taught himself to paint, and set about touring the Upper Mississippi. His images reflect the great pride people were taking in settling the country’s wilderness. Lewis later painted what he called his “Great Work,” a 1,000-foot panorama of the river, painted on a long roll of canvas. As it unfolded, the painting gave viewers a sense of floating down the river. Lewis toured the U.S. and Europe with his panorama until 1853,

when interest waned and he sold it to a wealthy plantation owner from Java. No one knows where it ended up.

The Muscatine Art Center is housed in two buildings — a 1908 mansion and a contemporary gallery. The two showcase collections ranging from historic maps, decorative arts and oriental carpets to paintings by Grant Wood, Georgia O’Keefe, Matisse and Chagall. Admission is free.

(All images courtesy of the Muscatine Art Center)



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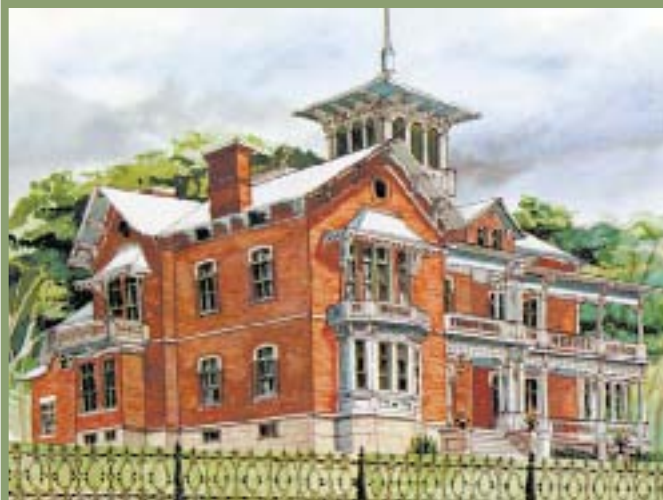
Bloomington, Iowa
John Caspar Wild (1804-1846)
hand-colored lithograph.



Upper Mississippi River
Henry Lewis (1819-1904)
oil on canvas, 1855.

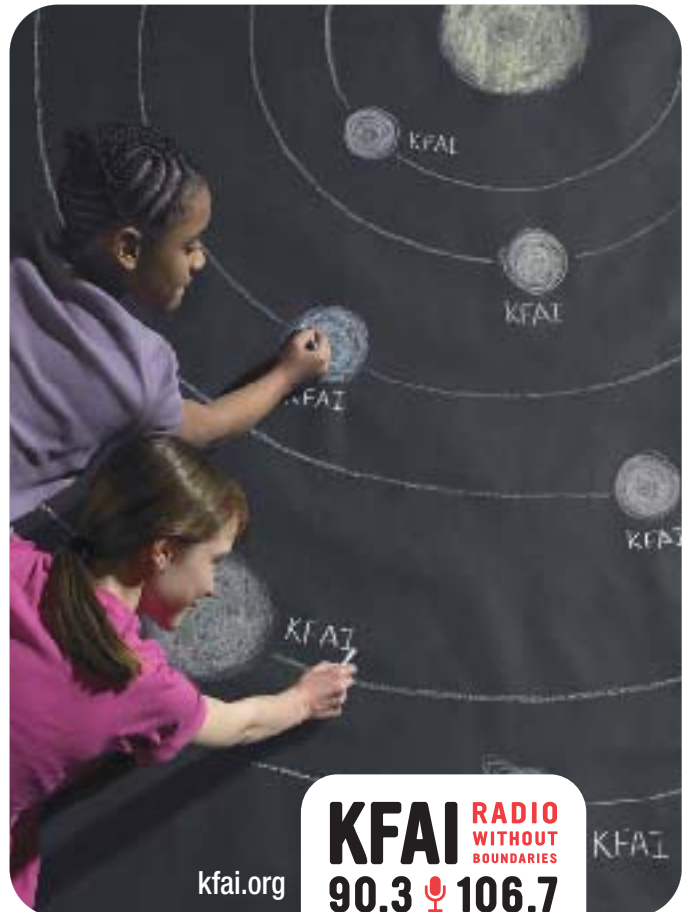


The Clinton. Nightloading on the River, Charles D. Robinson (1847-1933), oil painting, 1873.



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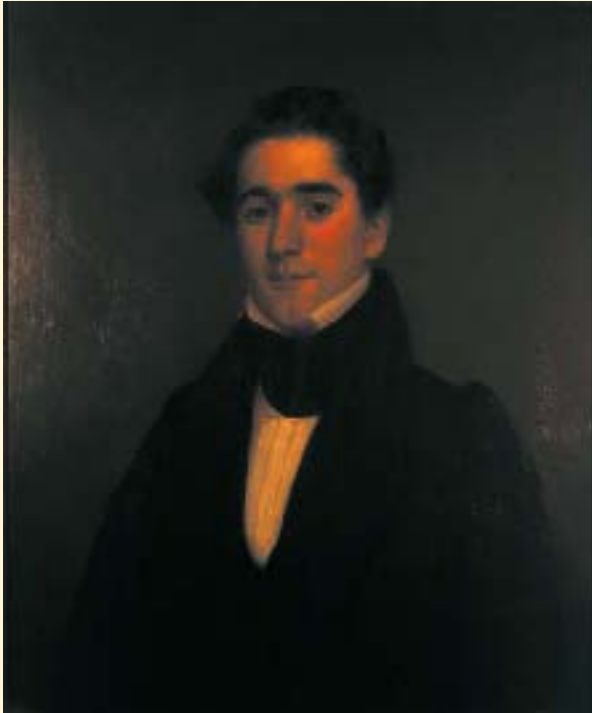
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The Norton's

Dining Off the Beaten Track



By Marc Hequet

Consider it a treasure hunt. Your clues: The place is near Hager City, Wis., a mile and a half off the main road, in a 1968-vintage machine shed across the river from Red Wing, Minn.

The Norton's is the name, and its strategy is city cuisine at prices that don't shock people accustomed to small-town blue-plate specials. Entrees range from \$17 to \$24.

The other piece of the strategy is a hip wine selection. You can spend \$140 for a bottle — the La Spinetta 2001, an Italian red — but you can buy by the glass for the usual \$6 or so.

The husband and wife owners met in a kitchen 10 years ago. Greg Norton, onetime bassist for the iconic circa-1980 post-punk Minneapolis band Husker Du, now is a 26-year veteran of the restaurant business. With Sarah Norton he managed the Staghead restaurant in Red Wing until 2003, when they bought the former machine shed to open a place of their own.

This particular machine shed had been a snowmobile club, then a bik-

er bar, then a restaurant called the Lavender Rose. Sarah remembers the pithy advice of a friend: "It's funky," warned the friend. "Buy it and unfunk it."

The Lavender Rose closed on a Sunday and The Norton's opened the following Friday. "We had four days to transform our restaurant in-

"We've got this crazy notion that if you keep the wine affordable, people will drink more wine."

to something that was our space," recalled Sarah. "It was a rush job."

They painted it in shades of blue to soften the machine-shed ambience. Local artists' work covers the walls.

The Norton's make the sausages and smoke the meats in-house. Their menu is distinctive, particularly for an out-on-the-highway place. Entrees range from salmon to rabbit to elk. Sarah recommends an Alsatian dish, the choucroute garnie



Sarah Norton is lead chef at The Norton's. To encourage local business, the restaurant offers a special discount to diners who live nearby.

(\$22) — smoked pork and sausage with sauerkraut — with an Alsatian wine. She's also proud of her duck confit (\$18) — duck legs and thighs braised in their own fat and then stored for weeks in the restaurant's cooler.

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"That intensifies the flavor and makes the duck really super tender," explained the self-taught chef. "It's a time-consuming dish, but the end product is really delicious."

Both Norton's take a hand in the kitchen, but Sarah is the lead chef. Her yen for Asian ingredients includes shiro miso, fermented soybean paste that is a fundamental in Japanese cuisine; kim chee, Korean fermented chili peppers and vegetables with cabbage; and of course fish sauce. Traditional European technique finds its place as well in her stocks, demi-glaces and creme fraiche.

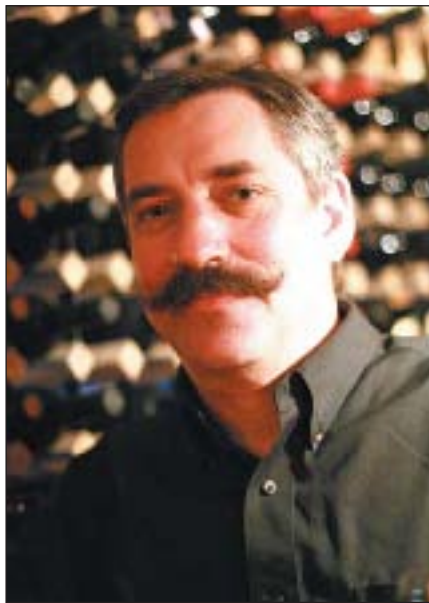
If you're looking for wine expertise, see Greg. His list includes about 250 labels from a dozen countries. Markups are minimal. "We've got this crazy notion that if you keep the wine affordable, people will drink more wine."

On a recent visit, my date thought the western Australian shiraz (Plantagenet '02, \$5.75 per glass) was a bit aggressive. A red that talks back a little, however, went well with the cheese plate (\$14) — English cotswold, goat, Vermont Amish blue, French Morbier and a nice German brie with mushrooms. It comes with honey, a nice touch. The dried white fig mostarda may be too sweet for some tastes — but try it with the cotswold on bread.

My date and I shared an entre, and it was good — pork tenderloin, with mashed potatoes, candied apple and broccoli. Of course it's hard to make broccoli sing, but it's good for you. So eat it.

Don't expect a view of the river at this river-bottom place—you can't see it from the restaurant. Nevertheless, a screened patio that seats 40 has a view of two wooded acres and vegetable and flower gardens. And if you can't boat in, you can fly in. The Red Wing airport is across the road.

Once a month, Twin Cities vocalist Christine Rosholt drops by to



Greg Norton takes pride in stocking the restaurant's considerable wine cellar with wines from 250 winemakers.

sing jazz standards from the 1930s and 1940s, backed by a pianist and bass player. And occasionally you can take a cooking class at The Norton's. In March it featured "Sauces for Pasta and Polenta" with matching wines at \$75 per person.

Dinner is served 5 to 9 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays, noon to 8 p.m. Sundays and 5 to 8 p.m. Mondays. Lunch is 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Nearby residents get 10 percent off on Mondays. The restaurant is closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

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If you find it, and if you like it, take a card on the way out. You may need the map on the back to find your way back. 🗺️ 📄

Marc Hequet is a contributing editor for Big River. His last feature story was, "Digging Ancient River History," July-August 2005.

Photos by Brooks Peterson.

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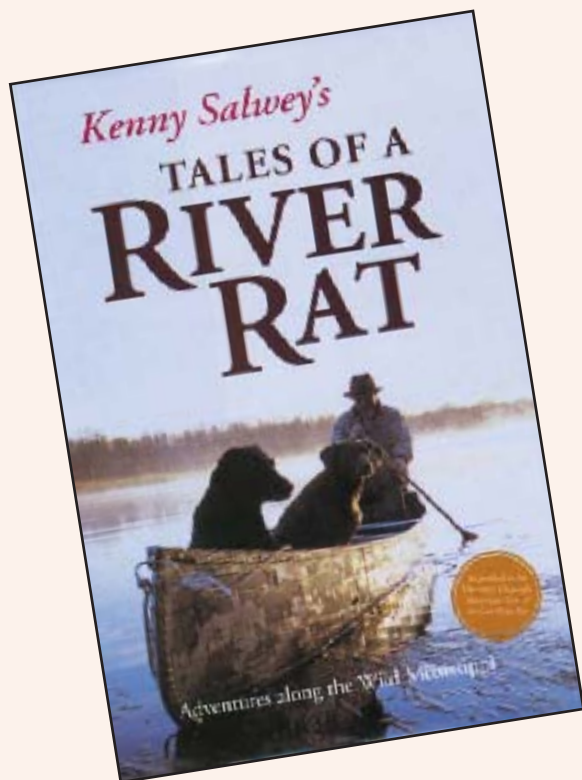
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Photo by Ann Reber



Back to the Backwaters

By Reggie McLeod

Tales of a River Rat

Kenny Salwey, *Voyageur Press, St. Paul, 2005, 256 pages.*

Whether Kenny Salwey is the last river rat, as he claimed in his first book, or a lonely swamp hermit who speaks to thousands of people a year, as this book's lengthy introduction claims, is open to discussion. He is clearly, however, a very talented storyteller, whether he's telling a story about a muskrat, a dog or a one-room schoolhouse in a state of skunk-cabbage-induced chaos. He hooks you early on and pulls you gently to the end of the story, like he might coax a big trout from under a log.

Salwey's first book, *The Last River Rat* (which was cowritten with J. Scott Bestul in 2001) focused on the changing seasons in the Whitman Backwaters where Kenny has trapped for decades. It described the skills he used to eke a livelihood from the swamps and the insights he gained from observing and pondering the "circle of life."

That book inspired a BBC docu-

mentary, which is now owned by the Discovery Channel (see "Big Time for the Backwaters," *Big River* January-February 2005). All this success has sent Salwey to film festivals and to tell his stories to bigger groups farther from his home in Buffalo County, Wis. Somewhere amidst all of this he found time to set down a few more stories, poems and a cookie recipe in *Tales of a River Rat*.

These tales range further than the first book, examining human nature as well as nature nature. Many of the stories illustrate the value of gentle patience, whether pursuing a trout, learning to appreciate other people or figuring out how to live with a too-clever dog.

Of course many of the stories unfold in Salwey's beloved Whitman Swamp, complete with the squirrels, woodpeckers and waterfowl that he so keenly observes and describes. His stories also give a good feel for that

After supper, Faye and the young ladies stayed in the shack, visiting like old friends, while Joey and I walked down to the dock to check the canoes. We stood on the end of the dock, listening and watching, as a seemingly endless string of blackbirds flew from the fields to their roost in the swamp. A fish rose just high enough to dimple the surface of the water. A hen mallard quacked loudly in the wild rice beds as the drakes softly chortled their feeding call. Finally, night drew its dark curtain over the swamp. I turned and walked up the bank to the shack.

"Let's go for a walk in the dark," Faye suggested, and off we went, following the dirt roads that crisscross the thirty acres of woods in back of the shack. Now night is dark no matter where you are, but you ain't seen dark 'til you've been in the swamp on a rainy night. We trudged along the dirt roads taking half steps instead of full strides on the uneven terrain, bumping and jostling one another liked a bunch of drunken sailors. No lights was the rule tonight. What fun is walking in the dark if you use a light? At one point we smelled a skunk.

"God, I hope Joey don't get ahold of that skunk," Faye said. "Oh yeah, we've had enough skunk-versus-dog episodes already to last me a lifetime."

We found our way to the ash-tree landing on Big Lake. After walking to the end of the dock, we stood still. The night was almost dead quiet. Just a whisper of a breeze drifted across Big Lake from the west. A great horned owl softly hooted from the top of a giant swamp white oak. We could almost feel the shiver of fear run through the little night critters, who knew only too well that the silent wings of death would claim one of them before morning. We turned and headed back toward the shack, laughing and talking like a group of schoolkids at recess.

From "Those Swamps You Call Home"

maze of water, mud and islands. This swamp is a rare remnant of what most of the Upper Mississippi River was like before the locks and dams were built. And Salwey is also a remnant of a way of life that was probably not that rare 60 or 70 years ago.

I should mention that Salwey is an old friend of *Big River's*. Back when *Big River* was a newsletter, he wrote an almanac column for five years. His stories still appear on these pages from time to time, including two that are in the new book. I enjoyed reading them again. 🌿

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August 2006

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(Know Your River continued from page 27)

time, silt trapped behind the dams filled in many of the backwater channels. Drawdowns, island building and backwater dredging are all being used to restore some of the natural habitat in the lower ends of the pools.

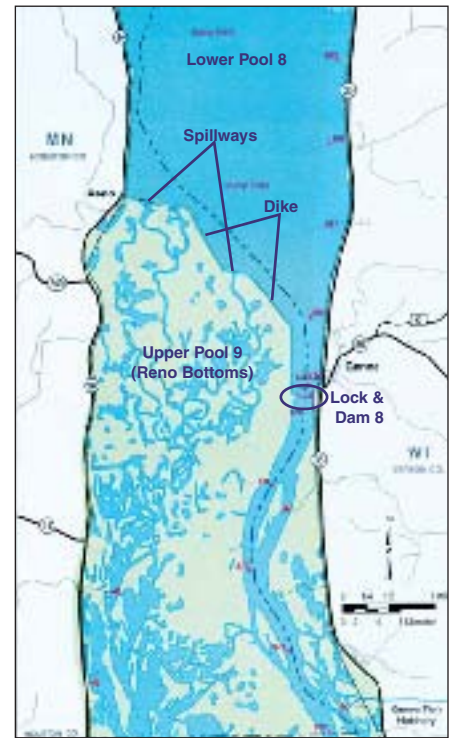
Visualize the flood-stage river with all the dam gates open and the water flowing freely. This creates a slope to the water surface that is more or less straight from one point of the river to another, regardless of the locks and dams. Now think of the summertime river with all the dam gates lowered into the river, creating a series of flat

Out there in the middle of the river you can look upstream at a wide-open expanse of river framed by towering bluffs and clouds. Turn around and you're looking into a verdant jungle of backwaters.

lakes with more normal water levels on the upper end of the pools and deeper than normal levels on the lower end — the stairstep river. During a drawdown, dam operators raise the gates just enough to lower the water level on the lower end of the pool by a foot or two, with little effect at the upper end of the pool. This exposes more shoreline and some of the sandbars and former islands long enough to get plants like grasses, cattails and arrowroots growing. Those plants provide food for waterfowl and cover for fish and other animals, thus restoring a bit of the natural productivity that was lost. Those plants also protect the shoreline and shallow areas from wave erosion. Without that occasional drying, many plants disappear from the lower pools.

Dikes and Spillways

Most dams are linked to higher ground by a long dike — sometimes more than a mile long. Each dike usually has one or more spillways, which allow more water to flow out of the pool during high water. During low water, when the dam gates are all in



The lower end of Pool 8 is a large, shallow expanse of open water. The upper part of Pool 9 is a complicated maze of backwaters. (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources)

the water, water flows through the spillways, too. Most spillways are a low, concrete covered section of the dike. A few dikes have no open spillway or have, instead, a large pipe or pipes to let water through the dike into the backwaters. Some have spillways and pipes.

These dikes provide another way to explore the backwaters. You'll usually find a small parking lot near the spot where the dike ties into higher

Whitman Bottoms and the Reno Bottoms are some of the best places to paddle and see a remnant of the river that used to be.

ground. You can judge the quality of the fishing by counting the cars in these lots, because most of the cars belong to anglers fishing below the spillways. These days you'll also find bike racks on some of the cars, because more people seem to be discovering the joys of dike biking or hiking. Out there in the middle of the

(Know Your River continues on page 59)

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(River News continued from page 13)

New Amenities

Savanna, Ill. — The city will soon build a new boat ramp and courtesy docks for visitors, using nearly \$83,000 in funds from an Illinois state grant. The state granted another \$23,000 to the city to write a planning grant to develop an action plan to improve its sanitary sewer system.

Celebrating Bridges

Rock Island, Ill. — A famous railroad bridge in Rock Island will be fêted in September, although it no longer exists. When it opened in 1856, the bridge stretched from Davenport to Rock Island and was the first to span the Mississippi River. It burned down when a steamboat crashed into it two weeks later, but it was rebuilt. The bridge is credited with easing shipping problems and giving a boost to rail transportation.

Plans for the celebration include creating a "ghost bridge" by shining light off sprays of water.

Meanwhile, the Centennial Bridge Commission Building, a prominent riverside landmark near another bridge just downriver, will become a new visitor center, thanks to a \$43,342 Preserve America grant. The building will feature interpretive displays about the city and river transportation. The Centennial Bridge opened as a toll bridge in 1940, the year of Rock Island's Centennial celebration.

River Busts

Muscoda, Wis. — Last Labor Day weekend, the Sauk County Sheriff's Department and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) worked together to arrest 14 people for use or possession of marijuana and LSD on the Lower Wisconsin River. Two drug-sniffing dogs were instrumental in the arrests. Since the dogs proved more effective on river sandbars and shorelines than local law enforcement officials are on the highway, the program will continue this summer.

At a February meeting of the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Board, there was some discussion of the con-

stitutionality of using dogs to sniff around tents and canoes without a warrant, but D.A. Calkins, assistant district attorney, pointed out that both the Wisconsin and U.S. Supreme Courts have upheld the method as constitutional.

The DNR and the sheriff agreed that alcohol is a much bigger prob-

People can be cited for underage drinking or for violating the ban on glass containers, but there is no law against drunk canoeing.

lem. People can be cited for underage drinking or for violating the ban on glass containers, but there is no law against drunk canoeing.

Law enforcement officers on the river beat will be able to talk to each other more clearly, now that Sauk County approved the building of a 250-foot communications tower within sight of the Lower Wisconsin River. The decision was made over the objections of the Lower Wisconsin Riverway Board, which had suggested other sites that would be less intrusive. The tower will be part of a system of nine radio towers in the county, where hilly terrain makes radio and pager communication difficult among sheriff's deputies, village police, firefighters and ambulance crews.

Birding Fests

Lake City, Minn., and Onalaska, Wis. — Two Mississippi River birding festivals are set to coincide with the spring bird migration in May.

The annual Great River Birding and Nature Festival will take place on the weekend of May 12, 13 and 14 in many towns on both sides of the river, from Bay City, Wis., to Winona, Minn. Participants will have all kinds of opportunities to get out into the bluffs, fields and backwaters to see birds. Some of the options: take a guided walking tour up Mossy Hollow; ride a motorboat down Indian Slough; trek out to author/naturalist Kenny Salwey's cabin; or ride a mini-

train through Tiffany Bottoms. A variety of speakers and performances are planned, along with "early bird" breakfasts and an auction. ☺

A week later and a few miles downriver, the 2006 Mississippi Flyway Birding Festival on May 19, 20 and 21 will be headquartered at the OmniCenter in Onalaska, Wis. Participants can get out to where the birds are by foot, canoe, kayak or motorboat with local guides. There's a steamboat cruise on the river, a mini-train ride through Tiffany Bottoms, a trip to Wyalusing State Park in Prairie du Chien and talks on topics ranging from owls and birdfeeders to the Jotoco Birdathon in Ecuador. The theme this year is Landscaping for Birds and Wildlife. ☺

Twilight Sold

LeClaire, Iowa — The riverboat *Twilight* will continue making three round trips a week from LeClaire to Dubuque, Iowa, this summer. Long-time owner Dennis Trone sold the boat this winter to employees Kevin and Carrie Stier. Carrie has been selling boat tickets since the 1980s. Kevin piloted the *Twilight* on its original upriver trip from Louisiana in 1987.

Guests on the 96-mile *Twilight* cruise to Dubuque enjoy entertainment, food and historic vignettes; and spend the night in the city before returning to LeClaire.

Floodplain Airfield

St. Paul — A proposal to spend \$42 million on a floodwall to protect an airport in the city's floodplain met with fierce and persistent opposition in early April, as the city planning commission approved it and sent it on to the city council, while opposing groups filed an appeal to stop the project and Saint Paul Mayor Chris Coleman said he would not approve the current plan.

The project would build a 1.7-mile system of levees, dikes and a permanent floodwall around the airport, which has been closed by floods three times in the last 15 years. It would also widen the river by excavating soil along the riverbank to allow the same volume of water to pass during flood

times. Corporations and the Minnesota National Guard are the main users of the airport. 3M has pledged \$1 million toward the project, the Federal Aviation Administration would come up with \$21 million, and the rest would come from the state and from bonds.

Opponents say the proposed sheet-metal wall, which would stand 19 to 22 feet higher than the average river water level, is ugly and would block access to and views of the river. They point out that dredging the riverbank would release long buried contaminants. Some also argue that putting more infrastructure into the floodplain and trying to keep the river is out-dated thinking.

Neighbors who oppose the plan also fear expansion of air traffic to the airport, increasing noise and air pollution.

Without the mayor's support, planners will have to resolve environmental and scenic concerns, and return to the city council.

River Classroom

Winona, Minn. — Winona State University (WSU) students can spend time on the river this summer and still earn a few credits through the new "University on the River" program. The four-week sessions cover environmental policy, statistics and biometrics; and English and Outdoor Education and Interpretive Services. Both sessions will take students out on the river on the university's newly acquired houseboat.

Project coordinator Drake Hokanson, WSU professor of mass communications, said students would spend three weeks in the classroom and one week on the houseboat. It won't be all work on the boat, though. Students will also learn to play volleyball on sandbars and paddle through the backwaters. ☺

Visit the **Big River Home** page (www.big-river.com) for links to information about stories marked with the mouse ☺.

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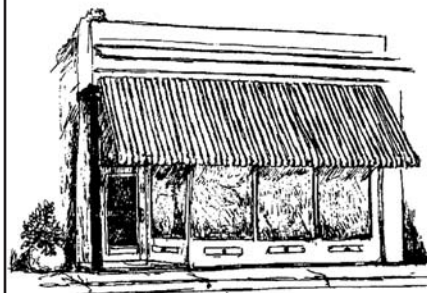
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BIG RIVER CALENDAR

Special Events

Weekends: *Mississippi River Explorer Cruises*, Galena, Ill., res. required, (800) 397-1320.

May

- Through 21 Exhibit, Seth Eastman, Artist on the Frontier, Minnesota History Center, 345 Kellogg Boulevard West, St. Paul.
- 5-7 100-Mile Garage Sale, loop from Winona to Red Wing, Minn., and Bay City to Alma, Wis., (507) 452-0735.
- 5-7 Free Camping, Pikes Peak State Park, (563) 873-2341.
- 6 Scenic Byway Celebration, between Dexter and La Crescent, Minn., (800) 428-2030.
- 6 Elizabeth (Ill.) Fort Days, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., (815) 858-2028.
- 6 Raptor Release, Raptor Center, U of Minn., St. Paul, (612) 624-4745.
- 6 Bird Walk, 7:30 a.m., La Riviere Park, Prairie du Chien, Wis., (608) 326-2718.
- 6-7 Living Green Expo, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., State Fairgrounds, St. Paul.
- 7 Bicycle tour of Arsenal Island, 1 p.m., Rock Island, Ill., res., (309) 794-5338.
- 7 Mississippi Gorge forest restoration, 8:30 a.m., Minneapolis, reg., (651) 665-9500.
- 11 Frog walk, 8 p.m., Buehler Preserve, Galena, Ill., (815) 858-9100.
- 11 Millard Fillmore Dinner, 5 p.m.; River Work Exhibit, 2 p.m., RiverCentre, St. Paul, (651) 293-6867.
- 12-14 Great River Birding and Nature Festival, Wisconsin and Minnesota from Red Wing to Winona.
- 13 Birding at Schaar's Bluff, Hastings, Minn., 9:30 a.m., (952) 891-7000.
- 13 Reggae Fest, Trempealeau Hotel, Trempealeau, Wis., (608) 534-6898.
- 13 Natural Area Guardians Bluebird Trail Walk, 9 a.m., Galena, Ill., (815) 777-3330.

- 13 Guided Bird Walk, 8 a.m., Effigy Mounds National Monument, Marquette, Iowa, (563) 873-3491.
- 13 & 20 Songbird field trips, 9 a.m., Galena, Ill., res., (815) 777-0621.
- 13 International Migratory Bird Day.
- 13-15 Iowa free camping, (515) 281-5918.
- 12-21 National River Cleanup Week, (865) 558-3595.
- 19-21 Mississippi Flyway Birding Festival, La Crosse and Onalaska, Wis., reg. by May 12, (866) 895-9233.
- 19-21 Dubuquefest, (563) 584-9565.
- 19-21 Fresh Art Studio & Gallery Tour, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., Pepin, Maiden Rock & Stockholm, Wis., (715) 285-5692.
- 20 Memorial celebration for Cody the Buffalo, 2 p.m. on, Money Creek Buffalo Ranch, Houston, Minn., (507) 896-2345.
- 20 Minnesota City Day, (507) 689-4103.
- 20-21 River Clean-Up, Galena, Ill., (815) 858-9100.
- 25-28 Sunfish Days, Onalaska, Wis., (608) 781-9566.
- 26 Jammin' Below the Dam, 6 p.m., Bellevue, Iowa.
- 27 Blues Bash, Trempealeau Hotel, Trempealeau, Wis., (608) 534-6898.
- 27-28 Living History Weekend, Apple River Fort State Historic Site, Elizabeth, Ill., (815) 858-2028.
- 27-29 Arts & crafts and flea market, McGregor and Marquette, Iowa, (563) 873-3521.

June

- 2-3 Swim with Dave the Wave, "Midwest Amphicars," Sabula, Iowa.
- 2-4 Minnesota Messabout, Lake Pepin at Hok-Si-La Park, Lake City, Minn.
- 2-4 & 9-11 Alexis Bailly Vineyard open house, wine tasting & tours, Hastings, Minn., (651) 437-1413.
- 3 National Trails Day.
- 3 Bluff planting, 8:30 a.m., overlook near Cherokee Ave. & Ohio St., St Paul, pre-reg, (651) 665-9500 ext. 11.
- 3-4 Civil War re-enactments, LeDuc Historic Estate, Hastings, Minn., (651) 437-7055.
- 3-4 Free fishing, Wisconsin & Iowa Waters.
- 3-4 Otakuye Hdihunipi, Dakota gathering, Lake Park, Winona, Minn., (507) 452-0735.
- 3 & 17 Birding field trip, 9 - 11:30 a.m., Galena, Ill., (815) 777-0621.
- 4 Celebrate Lake Pepin, events/cleanup, 11 a.m - 2 p.m., Hok-Si-La Park, Lake City, Minn.
- 4 Visitor appreciation day, Stonefield Historic Site & Nelson Dewey State Park, Cassville, Wis., (608) 725-5210.
- 4 Cruisin' Cassville Days, Riverside Park, Cassville, Wis., (608) 725-5855.
- 4 Minnesota and Wisconsin State Parks Open House.
- 9-11 America's River, Dubuque, Iowa, (800) 798-8844.
- 10 Bay City (Wis.) Fest.
- 10 Guided bird walk, 8 a.m., Effigy Mounds National Monument, Harpers Ferry, Iowa.

Calendar Events

Please send your July-August river events to us by May 22.

Send to Big River, PO Box 204, Winona, MN 55987

or email to editors@big-river.com

or fill out the form on our website at www.big-river.com/br.calendar.

(June events continued)

- 14 St. Anthony Heritage Trail and Mill Ruins Park, Friends of the Mississippi River tour, 6 - 8 p.m., (651) 222-2193.
- 14-19 Steamboat Days, Winona, Minn.
- 15-18 Prairie Villa Rendezvous, St. Feriole Island, Prairie du Chien, Wis., (608) 822-6916 or (800) 732-1673.
- 11 Hike the woodlands, 1 p.m., E. B. Lyons Nature Center, Mines of Spain, Dubuque, Iowa, (563) 556-0620.
- 11-17 Grand Illinois Trail and Parks bicycle tour, Rochelle, Ill., (309) 788-1845.
- 13-18 Steamboat Days, Burlington, Iowa.
- 15-17 Sturgis Mississippi River Motorcycle Rally, Davenport, Iowa, (309) 799-7469.
- 17 Jammin' Below the Dam, 6 p.m., Bellevue, Iowa.
- 17 Art in the Park, Clinton, Iowa.
- 17 Maiden Rock (Wis.) Summerfest.
- 17 Biking to Save the Turtles, 4 - 7:30 p.m., Mississippi River landing, off Hwy. 61, Weaver, Minn., (507) 932-3007.
- 18 Ride the River, 6 a.m. - 4 p.m., begins at LeClaire Park, Davenport, Iowa, (563) 322-2969.

- 19-20 Stone Arch Bridge Festival of the Arts, Minneapolis, (888) 676-6757.
- 22 Great Mississippi Riverboat Cleanup, aboard the *Harriet Bishop*, Twin Cities, (651) 259-5620.
- 22-25 Dubuque Catfish Festival, Dubuque, Iowa, (563) 583-8535.
- 23-25 WaterSki Days, Lake City, Minn.
- 23-25 Balloons in June, Clinton, Iowa, (563) 242-9174.
- 24 One River Mississippi, simultaneous dance at seven Mississippi communities from Lake Itasca to Louisiana.
- 24-25 World War II Weekend, Historic Fort Snelling, St. Paul, (612) 726-1171.
- 24-26 Mark Twain-like Mississippi River Steamboat Tour, departs from La Crosse, Wis., (608) 785-8572.
- 25 Summer Program, 1 p.m., Mines of Spain, Dubuque, Iowa, (563) 556-0620.
- 30-July 2 Mississippi Valley Blues Festival, LeClaire Park, Davenport, Iowa, (563) 322-5837.
- 30-July 4 Riverfest, Riverside Park, La Crosse, Wis., (608) 782-6000.
- 30-Aug. 6 Great River Shakespeare Festival, Winona, Minn., (507) 474-7900.

Meetings and Conferences

May

- 5-9 National River Rally, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m., Mount Washington Hotel & Resort, Bretton Woods, NH(503) 241-3506.
- 8 Hearing, Mississippi River Critical Area Plan draft, 4:30 p.m., City Hall, Minneapolis.
- 11 Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Board, 5 p.m., Boscobel City Hall, Boscobel, Wis., (608) 739-3188 or (800) 221-3792.1

June

- 8 Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Board, 5p.m., Rhinelander Cabin, Mazomanie, Wis., (608) 739-3188 or (800) 221-3792.
- 25-28 International Conference on Rivers and Civilization: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Major River Basins, UW-La Crosse, Wis.

August

- 22-23 Forum: Invasive Asian Carps in North America, Peoria, Ill. ☰



This 1865 oil painting, View of Upper Mississippi, by Joachim Ferdinand Richardt, is one of the paintings in the show, Navigating the Mississippi, which will be on display at the Muscatine Art Center in Muscatine, Iowa, from May 21 through August 28. (Muscatine Art Center)

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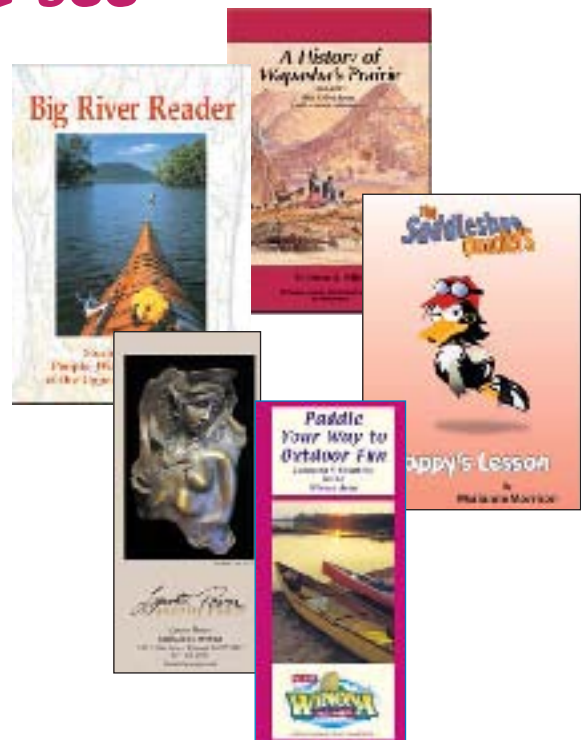
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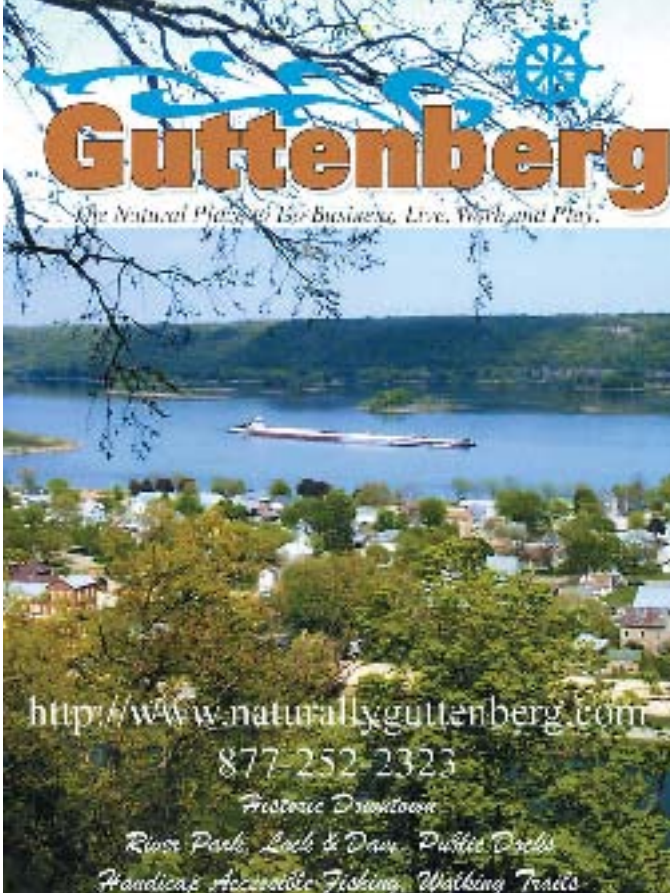
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(Know Your River continued from page 40)

river you can look upstream at a wide-open expanse of river framed by towering bluffs and clouds. Turn around and you're looking into a verdant jungle of backwaters.

A few pools — such as 5 and 8 — actually extend a bit upstream from the lock and dam at the top of the

Never swim near the dikes, especially near the spillways.

pool, because the dike runs upstream from the dam before heading to shore. These spots, such as the Whitman Bottoms and the Reno Bottoms, are some of the best places to paddle and see a remnant of the river that used to be, with swamp white oaks, winding backwater channels and backwater ponds thick with vegetation. They are also a good place to get lost in the maze of channels. During high water in the spring the river will at times run upriver into these backwaters, because much more water is coming through the dam than over the dike's spillway.

Be very careful near the spillways. At some of the locks and dams the

spillways run underneath the dike. If you're reckless enough to walk across a wet spillway, you'll have very slippery algae underfoot. Never swim near the dikes, especially near the spillways.

In some ways the locks and dams have been good for anglers and bad for fish. The fishing is usually better on the upper end of pools than the lower end of pools. If you've ever fished for trout, you're probably aware that fish prefer facing upstream. They also like to travel upstream, especially in the spring, during the spawning season. This is why you often see people fishing just below the dams and spillways, especially in the spring. Those poor fish are just stacked up below the spillways and dams, filled with eggs or whatever, trying to figure how to get over the dike or through the dam.

Most boaters stick to one or two pools. They get to know the beaches, backwater lakes, wing dams and fishing spots. And, like people, the better you get to know them, the more complex and individual you realize they are. ☰

Reggie McLeod is an amateur poolologist on Pool 6 and editor of Big River.

(Bob Myers continued from page 60)

they pushed it to Horseshoe Lake with their fishing boats.

At the seasoned age of 14 the boys took two fishing boats all the way to Minneapolis and Stillwater, Minn.

In the 1980s, Myers lived on a custom, three-decker boat he built at his wife's request.

The houseboat rental business has been a roller coaster ride over the years with its ups and downs mostly following the rise and fall of the water level. Myers still attends some winter boat shows, but he says the internet is becoming increasingly important. Still, much of his business comes from repeat customers, such as the Green County Dental Society, which has been renting boats for over 30 years. Groups often book for the

next year when they return their boat.

Myers works seven days a week from mid-May to mid-November. During the season he is lucky to get a day or two off. He spends winters building new boats, repairing his old boats or doing repairs for other boat owners.

He claims that his is the "second oldest houseboat rental agency" in the country, but he admits that he really doesn't know of any older.

"But if you just say you are the second oldest, no one gets mad." ☰

Gary Kramer is a boater and freelance writer who lives in Rock Island, Ill., His last article was "Ike Hastings, In the Wake of the Lilly Belle," January-February 2004.



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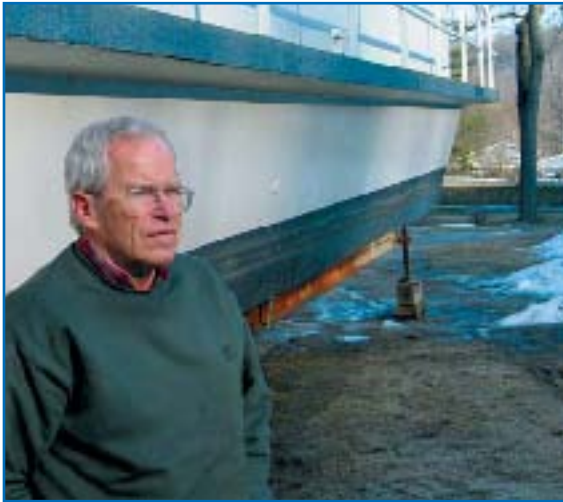
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Bob Myers at the Boatels boat yard outside McGregor, Iowa. (Gary Kramer)

Bob Myers Boat Builder

By Gary Kramer

Bob Myers grew up in the 1950s in McGregor, Iowa, playing with boats on the river. He still lives in McGregor, and his life still revolves around boats and the river, but he is not playing. Bob has designed and built more than 62 boats in his lifetime. His attention is focused on a fleet of nine rental houseboats and 70 slips at his Boatels Houseboat Rentals and Marina.

His father started the Boatels business in 1953.

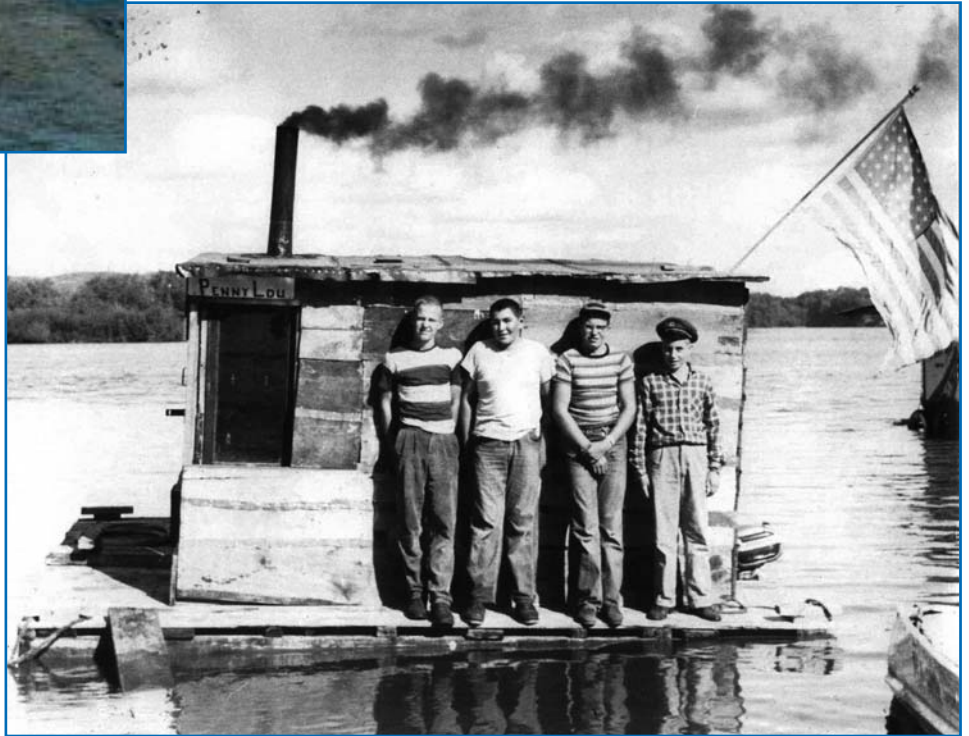
"My dad was always into some kind of business," Myers recalled.

When he was 11, his family visited the Chicago Boat Show and saw a plywood houseboat built by the Dreamboat Company. His dad built three 26-footers just like them. Bob's contribution, he laughs, was, "I was there."

Those became their first rentals, and three more boats of steel and aluminum quickly joined the fleet. They were very basic, with chemical toilets and no running water.

"If you wanted a shower, you went for a swim," Myers said.

Some of their early boats were built by Carricraft, but Bob began building his own and continues to do so. Their first boat was named *Number One*. Last winter Bob completed



Number 62, a 57-by-15-foot aluminum boat.

The boats were docked at the foot of Main Street at a marina owned by Alan Butterfield, who later owned Sunnyside Marina on the St. Croix

Bob has designed and built more than 62 boats in his lifetime.

River. When barely a teenager, Myers and his friends would take folks out for boat rides in a Chris Craft Continental that was part of Butterfield's Elk Boat Line. They would cruise up and down the river, giving the passengers a running commentary about interesting places.

He met John "Corky" Bickel as a

The crew of the Penny Lou in 1957 included, left to right, John (Corky) Bickel, Johnny Dykes, Robert Myers and Jake Trewin. They burned old tires in the wood stove so black smoke would pour out a smokestack and look like a real riverboat. (Photo courtesy of John Bickel)

kid and formed a friendship that still lasts. When McGregor tore down its old fire station to make way for a new one, Corky's father arranged for the boys to get some of the old wood. They turned that wood and some barrels into the *Penny Lou*, a houseboat-type vessel named for Corky's dog. Each year they would add new features to it, like a wood stove and a second story.

"The second story was more like a tent," Myers laughed.

It didn't have a motor at first, so

(Bob Myers continues on page 59)

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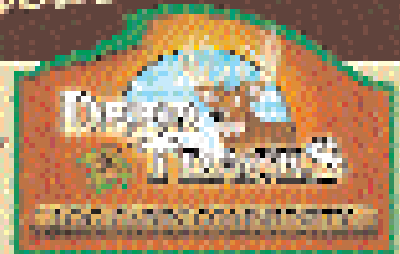


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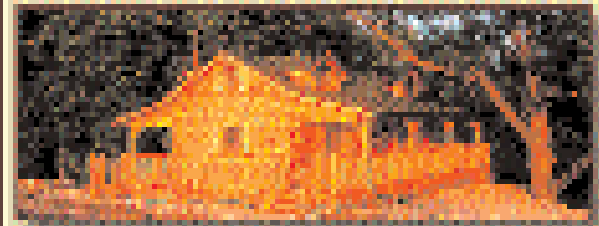
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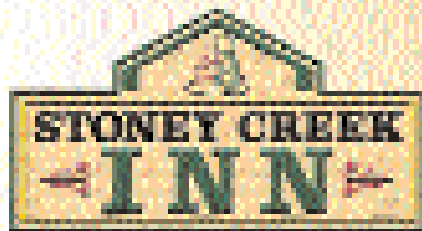


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