

Fairmont's Excursion Boats of The Past

At one time, nearly 100 years ago, excursion boats were a common sight on Fairmont's lakes. This was in the early 1900s when Interlaken, owned by Frank Wade, was in its prime. Wade, founder of the Fairmont Boat Company, also owned parks, hotels, and cabins, many of which could not be easily accessed by car as roadways were either limited or nonexistent. As a result, Wade, being the consummate entrepreneur, acquired boats for that purpose.

For a few years these boats played an important role in transporting people to Interlaken, particularly those arriving in Fairmont by train as the train stations were only a few blocks from the Webster Street pier. The boats left every hour, on the hour, from the Webster Street pier to go to Interlaken Park. Apparently both Bird's Bridge and the channel at Lair Road could accommodate these vessels. The trip from Webster Street went across Lake Sisseton making stops at Oak Beach and Hazelmere Resort before docking at its destination, Interlaken.

There were a number of boats that navigated Fairmont's lakes during that period of time. The *Lady of the Lake* was small, about row boat size, and was used from 1915 to 1917. Another, the *Venus*, had a four cylinder inboard motor. The *Kildeer* was a forty passenger boat with a canopy. The *Waubun* was fully enclosed with windows and shades and was known as the fleet's luxury boat. The *Queen* operated from 1920-1921 measuring thirty feet in length with a capacity of twenty passengers.

The *City of Fairmont*, built by Captain Frederick Wherland, was first built for steam and later converted to a three cycle Fairmont engine. Originally named the *Galatea*, it carried up to seventy-five people and sailed on Pierce Lake, where Captain Wherland made his home. Upon taking it to Fairmont's lakes, it was determined to be too small for the many passengers it could potentially carry. Therefore, Captain Wherland cut through the middle and added about twenty feet. He then rechristened it the *City of Fairmont*. When it was abandoned after Captain Wherland's death, the city crew poured kerosene over its rotting remains on the beach of Ward's Park during the night and set it on fire. The fire was actually set out of respect as a Viking tribute in flames to its memory.

The most famous of the fleet was the *Concord*. It was the largest boat, a double decker, and it could accommodate several hundred people. The *Concord* was built in the winter of 1908 on the frozen ice of Lake Sisseton under the direction of Frank Wade. However, before its completion, Wade became ill. In spite of his ailing health, Wade continued to direct the construction of the *Concord* from his sickbed to his shipbuilder,

George Hengel. When the ice went out in the spring, the boat floated, and the inside and top levels were then completed.

The *Concord* measured 112 feet long, twelve feet wide, and it had a flat bottom. It was first equipped with a propeller, however, according to Mr. Hengel, because it drew too much water a stern wheel was installed. It was powered by a thirty-two horsepower Fairmont Gas Engine.

The *Concord* was available to individuals or groups and was used for summer excursions that included dances, card parties, and other social events. It was said that no trip to Fairmont was complete without a ride on the *Concord*.

Eventually, the Interlaken management found the *Concord* too expensive to operate. Another problem was that it had sunk to the mud in the boathouse several times. Ultimately, it was sold to John Lind, formerly a Welcome Hotel man who later lived in Truman. He used her planks and boards for the construction of a cottage at Hazelmere and, upon completion of the cottage, still had \$50.00 worth of lumber remaining.

As roads to Interlaken were improved and more people had access to automobiles, the demand for lake travel diminished. As a result, the Fairmont Boat Company faced extinction. In an attempt to continue its service, the city of Fairmont purchased the company in 1921 for \$1,500.00. However, as time passed, it became obvious that the city's pursuit of maintaining the boating business was proving to be unsuccessful. The boats were being used less frequently; they fell into disrepair, and they were eventually either scrapped or sold. By 1928, the boathouse was demolished as the automobile had taken over as the primary mode of transportation.

Consequently, another colorful chapter in the rich history of Fairmont and Martin County had evolved. The days of those excursion boats on Fairmont's lakes, though relatively short lived, marked a truly unique era in our local history.

For more information on this topic visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.

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Wednesday, August 30th, 1911

For further information call on or address

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