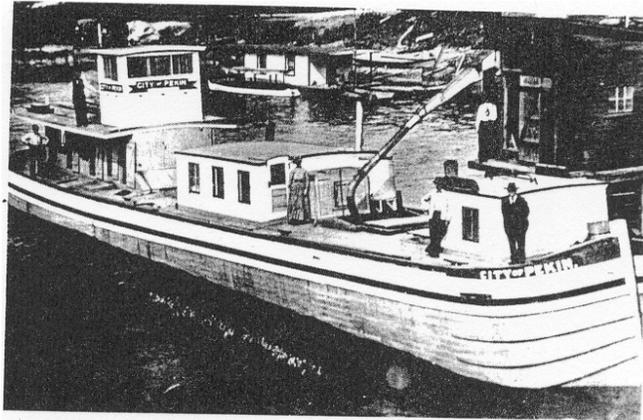
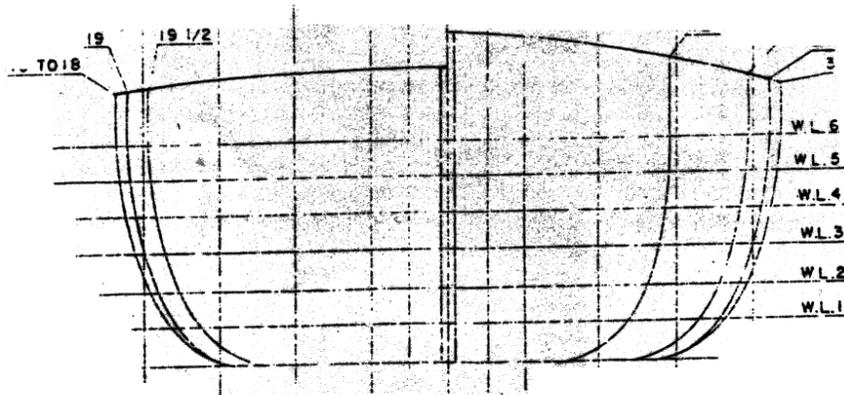


The 'City of Pekin' Story." Lockport, Ill.: Illinois Canal Society, 1986.

# THE "CITY OF PEKIN" STORY



by John Lamb



ILLINOIS CANAL SOCIETY

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The Illinois and Michigan Canal opened in 1848, and the boats that traveled the canal were modified as time passed, and the types of cargoes changed. In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the two principle cargoes carried were grain and stone. After 1870 a type of boat called a 'grain boat' came to be the common one on the canal. The dimensions and shape of the hull of this boat and all other boats plying the canal was uniform, being determined by the size of the locks, but the superstructure and cabins differed. A grain boat had a small shed at the bow, the main cabin was amidships, and there were two hatches between the bow shed and the main cabin. There were two hatches aft of the main cabin. Below deck the hold was divided into two compartments. They were separated by a bulkhead below the main cabin. An earlier type of canal boat common until the late 1860s was the lake boat. It had its main cabin in the stern. It also had an upswept stern with four windows. Crew members slept in the stern below deck. When steam propeller-driven boats became common on the canal after 1870, they had a modified grain boat superstructure. That is, small storage cabin in the bow and two hatches between there and the main cabin midships. In the aft end of the boat there was one hatch and then the pilot house about 8 feet high and 7 feet wide, and behind that was the machine room which was about 12 feet wide and 3 feet high. The boats were powered by twin screws driven by twin engines.<sup>1</sup> The stern was also different as there was more overhang than in the mule-hauled barges. By 1880 only steamboats were being built.<sup>2</sup>

The dimensions of the hull of the City of Pekin was typical of Illinois and Michigan Canal boats; it was 99 feet long and 17 feet wide, with straight lines from bow to stern. The City of Pekin was built in 1875 in Chicago. There are two conflicting versions of what it was called first. One version says it was The Clyde, a mule-hauled barge.<sup>3</sup> The other version is that it was the City of Henry, also a mule-hauled boat.<sup>4</sup> However, this can't be correct, as the City of Henry is registered as being built Nov. 16, 1875, and was a propeller boat.<sup>5</sup> So it seems that the City of Henry was always a steamboat. The boat was rebuilt in 1894; this was probably to make it more serviceable on the Illinois River. In that year W. H. Wallace moved his fleet of canal boats from Lockport to Henry on the Illinois River. The City of Henry was probably in the Wallace fleet. A further transformation took place in 1911 when it was again rebuilt with one engine instead of the traditional two. Also, the pilot house was raised and the engine room enlarged. The boat was renamed the City of Pekin at this time. The pilot house was now 15 feet high, making it impossible for the boat to navigate the Illinois and Michigan Canal or the Hennepin Canal because the pilot house could not clear the bridges on those canals.

The captain of the boat was Joseph W. Foster. Foster came from a canal family and was, himself, born on a canal boat between Morris and Seneca in the 1860s. The City of Pekin was owned by the Illinois River Packet Co., or the Turner Hudnut Company of Pekin. Foster supervised the rebuilding of the boat, which was done at Henry.

What was the boat like at that time? Foster's daughter, Mrs. Helen Poole, recalls it as follows:

"The fore cabin was the sleeping quarters of the deck hands. The walls were tongue and groove lumber painted creme colored. There was a board floor with a rag rug. As you stepped into the cabin there was a step down, a bunk bed on either side, windows were sliding ones with green shades. Under the window at the back was a shelf with a wash basin, a small mirror on the wall, a couple of hooks for hanging the 'go-to-town clothes.' A towel hung on the door. A lantern was used for lighting, and stored on the shelf. The sheets and pillow cases were dark blue with small white figures (calico) and dark blankets.

“In front of the main cabin stood a huge ice box and a large water tank. The tank was filled before leaving Pekin as the water in southern Illinois might be contaminated. There was a lot of malaria at that time.

“The main cabin or captain’s quarters had three rooms. The front half was dining room and kitchen. The back was divided in half with bunk beds on either side. Again sliding windows with shades, no curtains. Between the two bedrooms was a door, and the doors from the dining room-kitchen had curtains made of drapery material. Not much privacy, but this was mostly a family affair. There was a space for storage under the bunks for a trunk and cases of canned goods. There were a few hooks for hanging extra clothing.

“As you entered the cabin there was a step down. Near the door was a speaking tube for communication between the pilot house and the cabin. There was a brown cream colored linoleum in a square design on the floor. Between the window on the right-hand side as you faced the bow of the boat was a built-in table. Stools were used to sit at the table which was covered with oil cloth. The dishes were white ironstone.

“Across the front of the cabin was a cupboard for dishes, and a small sink. The cookstove was on the left side. There was an open shelf on the side. The iron fry pans and kettles hung on hooks behind the stove. There was a sewing machine in the corner and a rocking chair. On the back wall on the right-hand side was a mirror, and on the left side a large calendar.

“The menus were simple – meat, potatoes, a vegetable and a ‘sauce.’ Bacon and eggs and bread with coffee for breakfast, and sometimes ‘steamboat strawberries’ (prunes).

“In the pilot house there was another bunk bed with storage space below. The engineer slept here, as it was just above the boiler room. My father put a Yeast Foam box with one side removed across the corner of the window on the left side of the pilot house where I could stand and help him ‘steer’ the boat.

“At most of the elevators where grain was taken on the City of Pekin, it was carried on large conveyor belts into the hull of the boat. However, in southern Illinois the grain was transported in sacks into the boat. The hull of the boat was partitioned about the middle of the captain’s cabin, making two large bins. The hatches were fore and aft of the cabin. Two kinds of grain, corn or wheat, could be carried at one time, usually wheat from Hardin.”<sup>6</sup>

The City of Pekin evidently underwent some changes between the time Mrs. Poole remembers it, and when it next reappears. In the 1930’s the State of Illinois hauled the City of Pekin, or what remained of it, from the Illinois River to the Illinois and Michigan Canal at Channahon, where they planned to repair it for display purposes, or perhaps actual use hauling tourists up and down a stretch of the Illinois and Michigan Canal.<sup>7</sup> Plans were drawn up for the restoration of the boat. Its condition is described by Frank Stephens, who compared it to the ocean and lake boats he had examined.

“The City of Pekin at the time it was surveyed, had its stern cut off at the center of the third hatch. Therefore, instead of the true stern construction, there was a bulkhead with a pair of doors put into it. The workmanship on this ship was of the poorest quality we have seen. The City of Pekin did not have a keel. The planks were nailed to the frames and a 30 x 11 ½" white pine board was nailed to the frames as a keelson. The stanchions were toenailed into the keelson instead of the regular mortise and tenon. These stanchions were not regular in size, but were made of red oak. The bow construction was quite unusual inasmuch as there was a very blunt bow. The ceiling ran from the deck to the base of the frames. There were no shelf timbers, knees nor brackets, however, there were two sets of hogging irons running the full length of the hold. These irons were 10in diameter. The hatch coaming was placed on the planking instead of going below deck. The railing was only 60 above the deck with freeing ports spaced along it.”<sup>8</sup>

The state intended to use the restored City of Pekin as part of its Illinois and Michigan Canal Parkway, either as an exhibit or to be actually hauled on the canal by mules. They therefore wanted plans that would enable them to reconstruct the sadly amputated boat into a tow barge. The Works Progress Administration did the plans which are now on file in the Smithsonian Institution as part of the historic American Merchant Marine Survey. The trouble with the plans is the stern. Since the aft 40 feet of the boat had been cut away, and since the state wanted a tow barge and not a steam barge as the report notes, measurements from a “similar” barge were used for the missing section.<sup>9</sup> However, the drawings do not conform in either stern or rudder to a typical Illinois and Michigan Canal tow barge such as the Irene or to a propeller I. and M. Canal boat. John Shedd of the firm Model Shipways of Bogota, N.J., put together an excellent model kit with plans for the City of Pekin. First of all, he followed the Historic American Merchant Marine Survey plans, but subsequently he changed them. As he explains it: “Some years later I altered the stern to its present shape, which is structurally reasonable. The Watercraft Plans show a bulbous stern which would be compatible with fiberglass construction but hardly possible with planking.” He goes on to say, “However, the more I study the City of Pekin photo, the more it seems there is a sloping buttock, and not a simple wall-sided curve into the rudder post.”<sup>10</sup>

Also, it should be noted that there was no forward cabin in either Illinois and Michigan Canal mule tow boats or propeller canal boats. What these boats had was a small shed in the bow suitable for tools, but not intended for housing, as the typical crew on both the propeller-driven steam boats and the mule-hauled tow barge was three, and hence, only needed one cabin. So it is possible that the larger forward cabin was added to the City of Pekin for service on the Illinois River which entailed larger crews and longer trips. Despite all this, it must be said that the plans for the City of Pekin made for the Historic American Merchant Marine Survey are the best and most detailed plans for a 19<sup>th</sup> century canal boat in existence. So, in that respect, we owe a considerable debt to Frank Stephens, the delineator.

The final fate of the City of Pekin was a sad one. Hauled up to the Illinois and Michigan Canal in 1936 with its stern already gone, it was not to be restored to its former glory. Instead, it was left to rot on the canal at Channahon just below the U.S. 6 bridge until in 1941 it burned to the waterline. Thus died the best preserved of the old Illinois and Michigan Canal boats, but fortunately not before it had yielded an excellent set of plans that tells us much that would otherwise be lost about 19<sup>th</sup> century canal boats.

Published by the Illinois Canal Society, Lockport, Illinois, August 1980.

## FOOTNOTES

1. City of Pekin Report, Works Progress Administration, Survey 14-19; Historic American Merchant Marine Survey, Chicago, Project 64-6; Watercraft Collection, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., June 11, 1937
2. Hall, Henry, "Ship Building Industry in the United States," in United States Census Office Tenth Census, 1880 Census Reports, Vol. 8, Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1884, p. 232. For a general view of Illinois and Michigan Canal Boats, see the author's article, "Canal Boats on the Illinois and Michigan Canal," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, August 1978, pp. 211-224.
3. Ehringer, V. D., "Narrative Report to Accompany Master Plans for Illinois and Michigan Canal Parkway," prepared by V. D. Ehringer, General Superintendent, March 31, 1937, p. 9.
4. Op. Cit., City of Pekin Report. It may be that the City of Pekin was originally built as a mule tow boat named The Clyde, but it certainly was not built as a tow boat named "The City of Henry."
5. Illinois and Michigan Canal Boat Register 1868-1978. Illinois State Archives, Springfield, IL.
6. Poole, Helen Foster, Letter to the Author dated Dec. 5, 1978; Illinois Canal Society files.
7. Op. Cit., V. D. Ehringer, p. 9.
8. Op. Cit., City of Pekin Report. Notes on the City of Pekin.
9. Ibid., p. 1.
10. John Shedd letter to Author, August 14, 1978. Illinois Canal Society files.

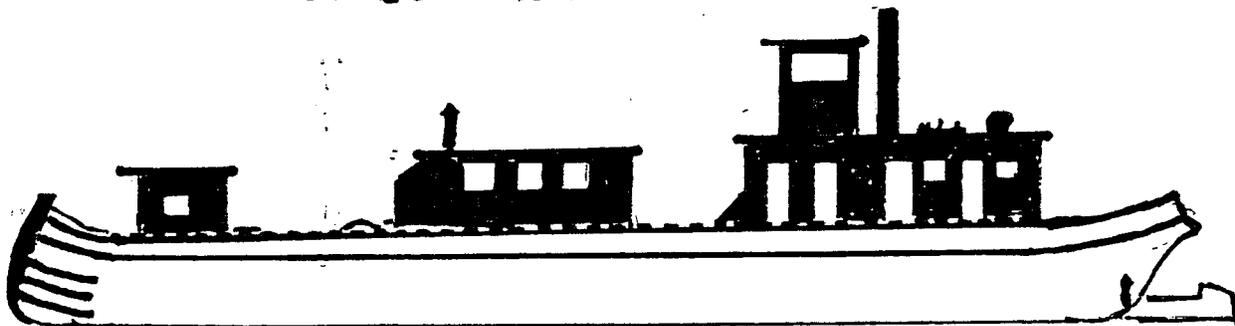
## APPENDIX

From Watercraft Collection, Historic American Merchant Marine Survey No. 14-19, page 2.

The following data was received from the Illinois and Michigan Canal Office at Lockport, Illinois:

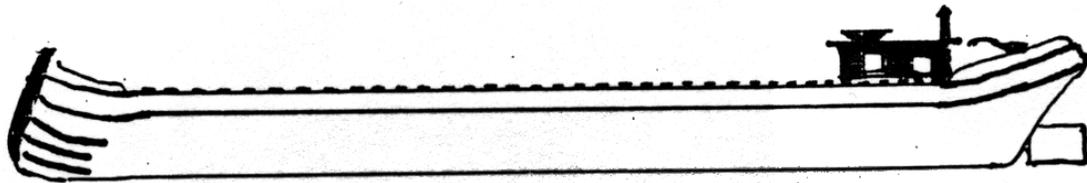
Register number – 125488  
Name – City of Henry  
Home Port – Peoria, Illinois  
Route – Between Mississippi River and Tributaries  
Class – Freight  
Owner – Illinois River Packet Co.  
Master – Joseph W. Foster  
Date of Inspection – March 31, 1911  
Date of Application for Inspection – March 30, 1911  
Gross Tonnage – 95 Vessel at Henry, Illinois, when inspected.  
Where built – Chicago Illinois  
When built – 1875  
When rebuilt – 1894, 1908 and 1911  
Engine – 1, double horizontal marine geared to two propeller shafts, formerly in Steamer Imperial  
Horse power – 100  
Diameter of cylinders – 10 inches each  
Stroke of piston – 1-1/6 feet  
Boiler – 1 Built 1911 at Clinton, Iowa, by Star Boiler Works  
Length – 10 feet, Diameter – 60 inches  
Kind – horizontal tubular, externally fired  
Material – Steel, steam pressure 150#

*City of Pekin after 1911 Rebuilt for use on  
the Illinois River*

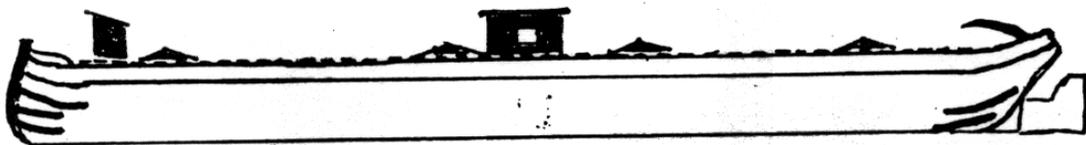


*Boats Built for the Illinois and Michigan  
Canal*

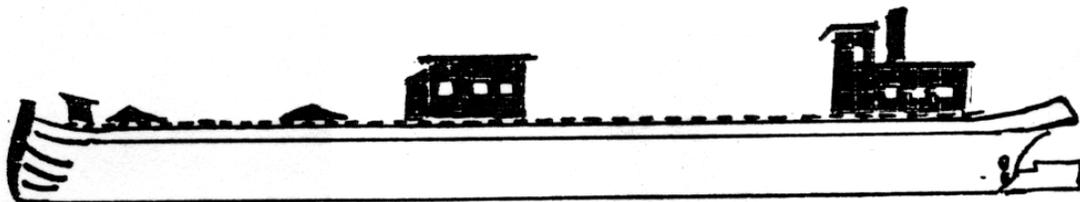
*1850s to 1890s*



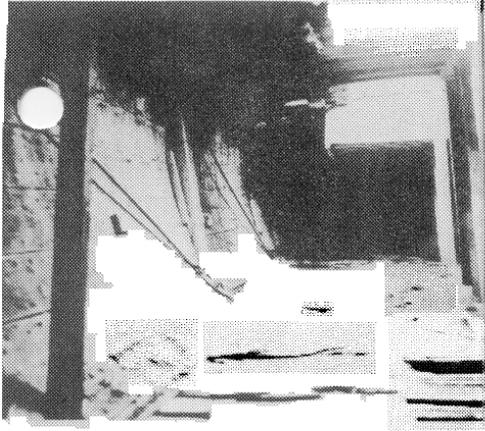
*Lake Boat built before 1869*



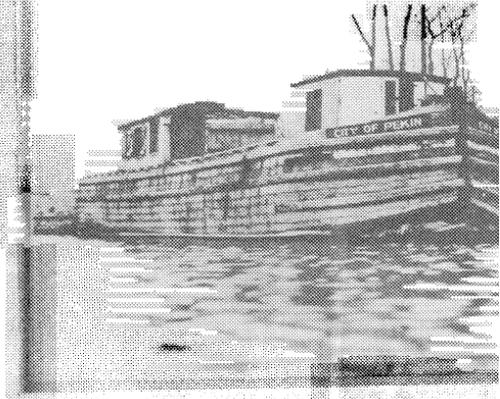
*Grain Boat built after 1870*



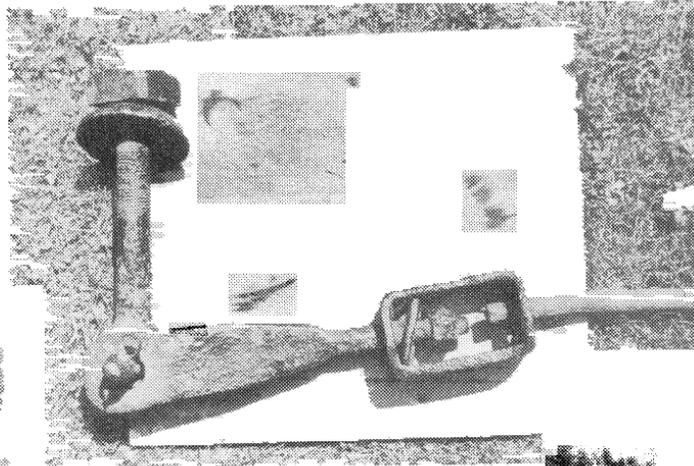
*Propeller Boat such as the City of Henry  
built around 1870 1890*



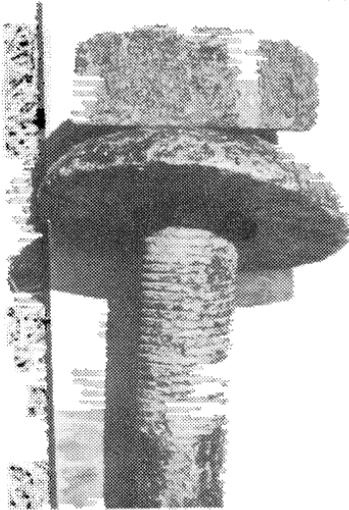
The "City of Pekin" at Channahon on the I. and M. Canal in 1936 (Smithsonian Inst. Photo No. 14-19-1)



(above) The interior hull of the "City of Pekin" in 1936. Note the hogging-iron on hull and nut that helps anchor it to boat's frame. (Smithsonian Photo no. 14-19-3)



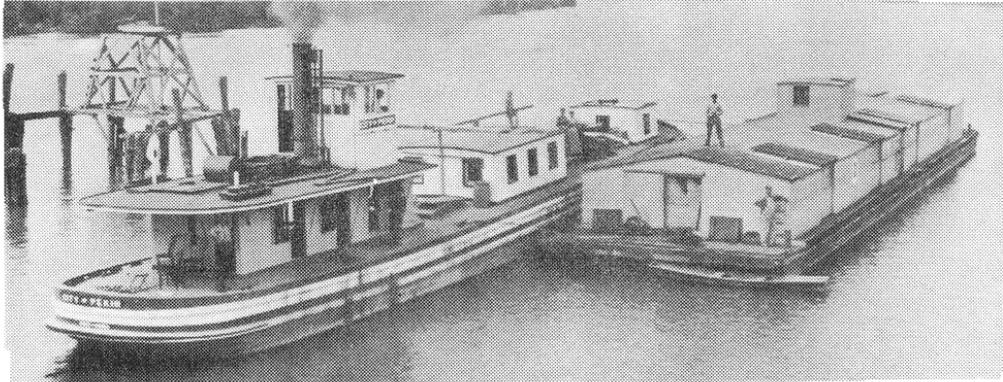
(above) the complete device used to anchor the hogging iron in the "City of Pekin" (I.C.S. Collection)



(above) The nut and part of the bolt drilled into the boat's frame to anchor the hogging iron (I.C.S. Collection)

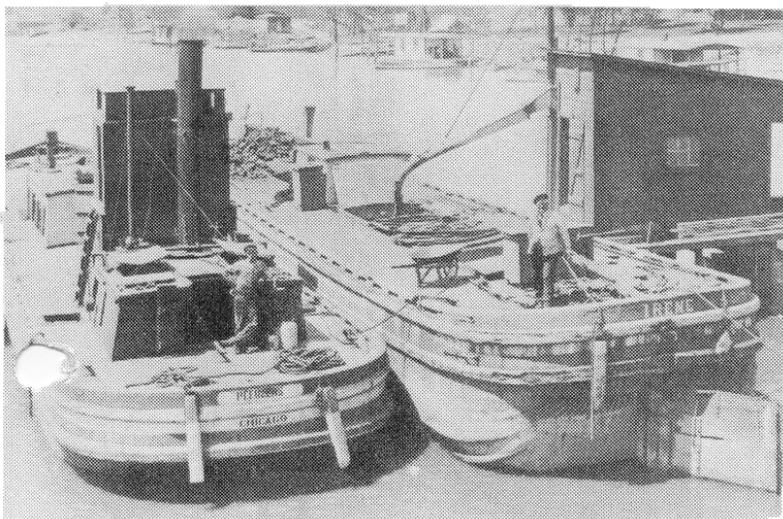
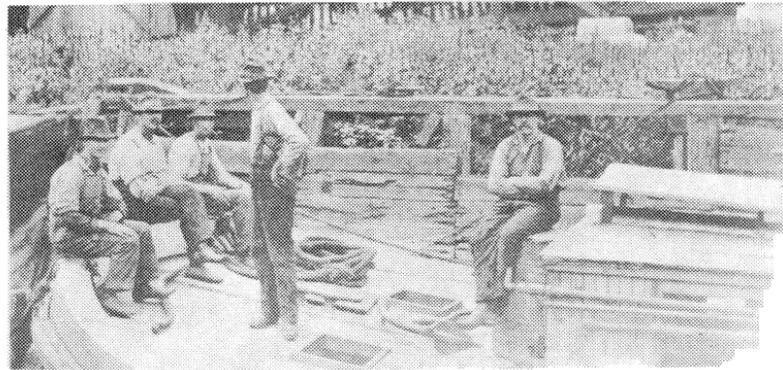
(right) One of the hogging irons from the "City of Pekin" now in the collection of the Illinois Canal Society.





"The City of Pekin" with tow on the Illinois River near Henry, Ill. about 1910.

The Foster family on a canal boat on the Illinois River.



The canal steamboat "Peerless" tied up at Henry, Ill. next to the tow boat "Irene". Note the difference in the shape of their respective sterns. This photo is about 1910.