

# **Time Tracs**

## **by Jim Ingram**

In the past, we have talked about the electric railroad and the steam powered railroad as being important means of transportation that assisted in the development of Lake Orion.

Now it is time to consider the important roll boats played in developing Lake Orion as a major summer resort.

At the turn of the century a fleet of eight large boats plied the waters of Lake Orion hauling everything from freight to groceries to passengers and yes, even the US mail.

When Lake Orion was young, there were lots of places on the lake that could only be reached by boat. John Winter, who developed Lake Orion as a resort, found that it was less expensive and more practical in the days before automobiles to build docks rather than roads and to maintain a fleet of boats to take people about the lake.

The largest of these boats, originally called the "Chatauqua," was purchased by John Winter in 1901.

It was a double deck boat which could accommodate 300 passengers. The upper deck could be either partially or completely covered by a canvas canopy.

On the weekends it had an orchestra on board and people could dance as they cruised around the lake. For 10 cents you could just sit and listen to the music and ride around the lake for the entire day.

"Chatauqua" was captained by Captain Albert Victor Foisey who ran a tight ship.

This reminiscence of old time Lake Orion resident Harold Weimaster was told by Barbara Benetti in her column about Lake Orion history that was published in the 1966 Lake Orion Review.

One day when the "Chatauqua" was coming in for a landing at Bellevue Hotel dock there was a terrific wind from the northeast, an unusual thing.

Cap Foisey made five or six passes at the dock with a capacity load. This made the boat difficult to maneuver and on his last pass the "Chatauqua" heeled over and nearly capsized.

Although he had ordered all passengers off the top deck, there were some who refused to come down and a few of these fell off into the water. However, none were drowned.

It was a close call though; the next winter the "Chatauqua" was widened in the beam by eight feet and its name was changed to the "City of Orion." It was a much safer boat this way and continued on the lake for many years.

These recollections of the ferry boats and especially the "City of Orion" run like a bright thread through the memories of everyone whoever rode on them. As Weimaster said about the "City of Orion," "It was a beautiful ship and was loved by thousands of people and everyone was sad to see it go."

But go she did with the general demise of Lake Orion as a summer resort. In the early 1930s the "City of Orion" as well as some small ferry boats were used as an embankment for fill at the end of Central Drive off Oaklane.

However, two pieces of equipment for the "City of Orion" still exist. One is the horn which can be seen at the Northeast Oakland County Historical Museum in Oxford and the other is the bow light owned by Scott Campbell at Orion Marine Center.