

The steamboats helped in the development of not only Detroit but also tourism in the area. However, we would not have these steamboats without the vision of John K. West, who opened and operated the waterway which speeded the development of Shoreham, Lake Melissa, Sallie, and Pelican into popular summer spots.

John K. West built a barge in 1886, a 14X32 feet, with a canopy which was propelled by a stern wheel operated by horse power. Used for the first time on Detroit Lake July 3, 1886, it apparently made a big hit with the summer visitors as a lake excursion boat for other barges were built and used through the season of 1889. However, West wanted more as he saw the potential of the lakes. In the summer of 1888, he organized the Pelican Valley Navigation Company. West was President and George D. Hamilton was treasurer.

The work of building the waterway commenced September 1, 1888. Building the waterway was no small task. In *Pioneer History of Becker County*, Alvin Wilcox explains

“A small dam was built at the outlet of Detroit Lake, which stopped the flow of the stream and permitted lowering of the channel to Muskrat Lake. There was a different of 4 feet 11 inches between Detroit and Muskrat Lakes, and one foot between Muskrat and Sallie, for a total fall from Detroit Lake to Salle of 5 feet 11 inches. The Pelican River was a shallow, crooked, brook-like stream through which it was very difficult to move a small rowboat. A dam was placed across this stream below and outlet the Muskrat Lake and a cut made through the bank into Lake Sallie, in which a lock was built. (First called Richmond and now known as Dunton Locks)

Work was continued until stopped by cold weather. In the following spring the dam at the outlet of Detroit Lake was removed and a channel between Lakes Sallie and Melissa deepened and made navigable. This was accompanied by means of temporary dams which held the water in the lakes and permitted the pumping out of the channels so that the dredging could be done with scrapers, shovel and wheelbarrows. Permission was obtained from the town of Lakeview to raise the bridges so as to permit the passing of boats.”

In 1891, more than 4,000 passengers made the round trip from Detroit to Shoreham, but West was not content. The waterway was extended south of Melissa to a point on the Pelican River where a dam had been built at Bucks Mills.

Business was booming for the Pelican Valley Navigation Company. Chautauqua grounds were established on the south shore of Lake Sallie, where the Shoreham Inn was located.

A second lock had to be navigated in the river near Little Pelican for there was a three-foot drop in the water level during the early 1900s. This was called Kingsbury Locks and then later renamed Johnson Locks.

Boat Roster:

Lady of the Lakes – 1889-1902

Robert Fulton – 1895-?

John K. West Waterway:

In 1886, West had a barge made – 14x32 – with a canopy over it and propelled by a stern wheel operated by horse power. Beginning on July 3, 1886, West used it to bring visitors around Detroit Lake until 1890.

In 1888, work on the canal between Detroit lake and Lake Sally started. World also started this year on the lock between Muskrat Lake and Lake Sally.

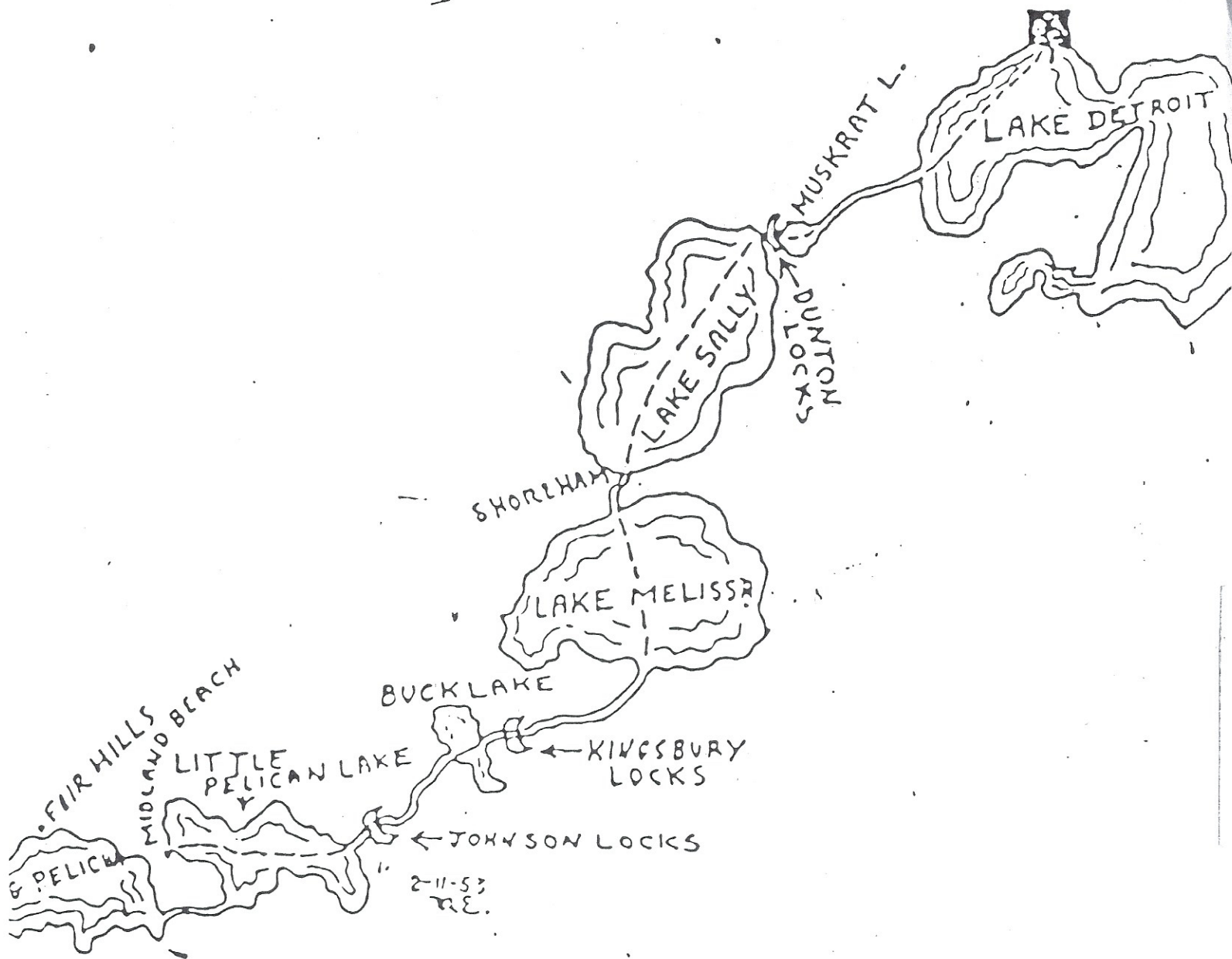
On July 25, 1889, *Lady of the Lakes*, a steamboat built by Chas. P. Willard of Chicago arrived in Detroit. When put to the test, it was found to draw too much water so Mr. Willard made the necessary changes and Mr. West widened and deepened the canal. From this time forward, Mr. West was always called Captain West by the Dakotans and the Northern Pacific Railroad people.

On September 24, *Lady of the Lakes* made her maiden trip down into Lake Sally, from whence she hauled barges loaded with ties and saw logs to the ice track on north shore of Big Detroit Lake. Thos. Richmond was the captain and Penn Martin the engineer. Dunton Lock was at the time called Lock Richmond. The boat and barges had to be locked through one at a time.

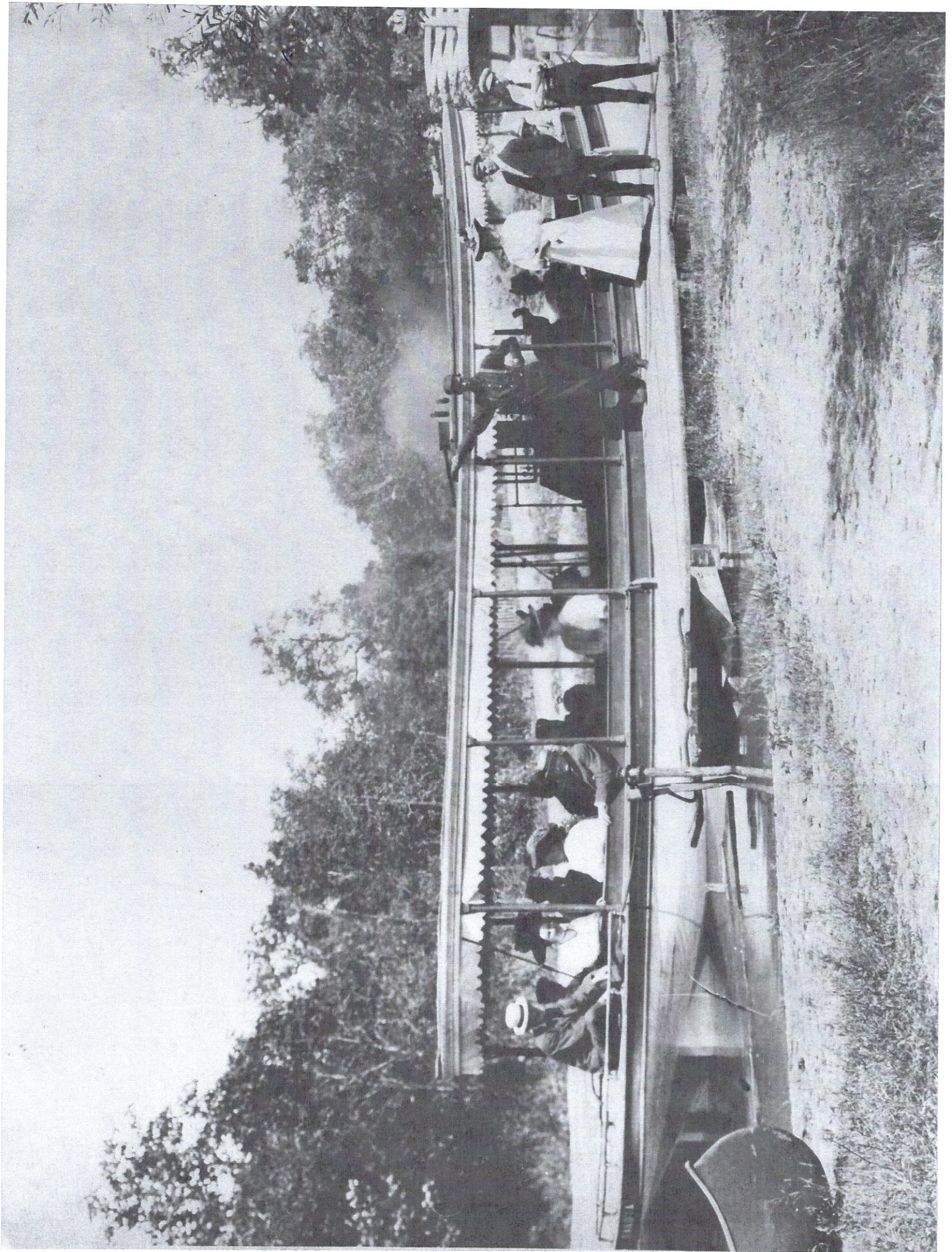
In 1890, *Lady of the Lakes* with Captain Richmond and engineer Albert Johnson began regular trips between Detroit dock and Lake Melissa – 3 trips each way daily, connecting with N.P. trains. The round trip fare was \$0.50. Horse-drawn busses made the connections between boat and train. This same year the Inter State Summer Assembly was in session and Richmond and Johnson not only had the boat filled, but also towed a barge filled with passengers. This Assembly was held on the south shore of Lake Sally. The grounds were enclosed in a high board fence with barbed wire along the top.

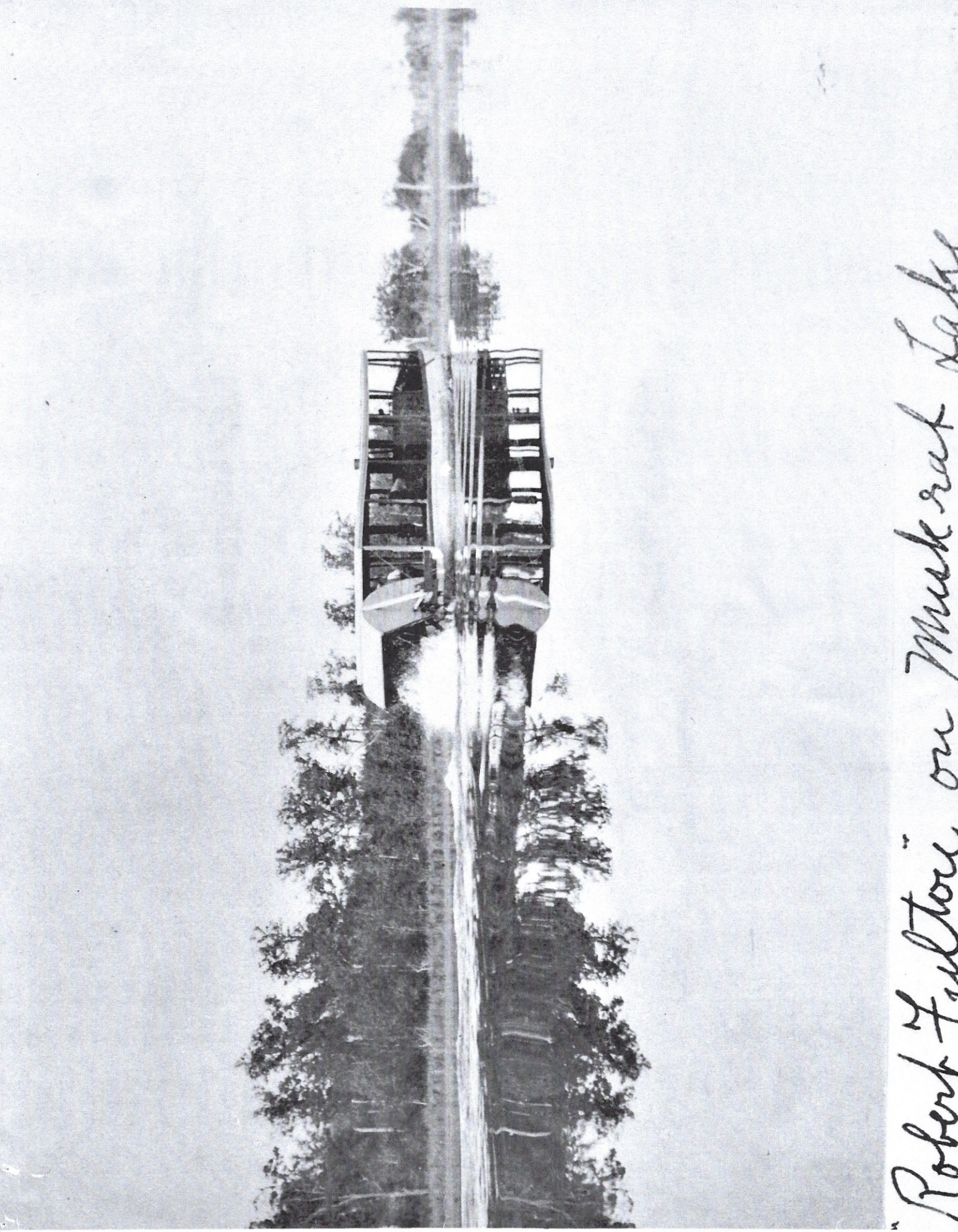
On September 1, 1891, *Lady of the Lakes* with Richmond and Johnson hauled 450 bushels of wheat from the Dunning Farm on the canal just above Muskrat Lake to Detroit Dock, where it was loaded into wagons and hauled to the Turnbull Mill.

In 1895, another boat called *Robert Fulton* was used to take passengers to the Chautauqua. This boat was run by Penn Martin Captain, and Chas. Bonnell, engineer. And instead of towing the barges loaded with passengers, it pushed them ahead.



ROUTE OF THE BOATS—The route of the boats operated at the turn of the century by the Pelican Valley Navigation company is shown in the accompanying map. Tourist who wanted to get to Fair Hills and King's Resort on Big Pelican lake had to transfer to a smaller craft at Midland Beach—on the west shore of Little Pelican. The channel followed the course of the Pelican river but it had to be widened and deepened along most of the route.





Robert Fulton on Muskrat Lake