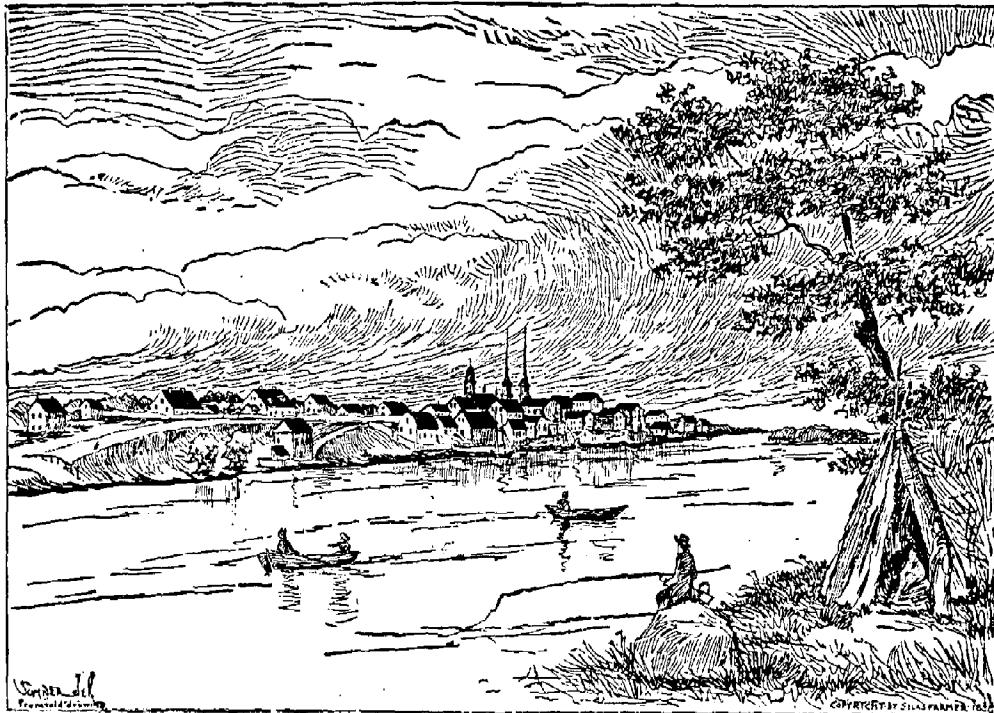


# DETROIT'S EAST RIVERFRONT

## People and Places of Yesterday



by **Kathryn Kozora**



Recreation Department  
Water Board Building  
735 Randolph Street  
Detroit, Michigan 48226  
(313) 224-1100

Coleman A. Young, Mayor  
City of Detroit

September 1982

To the Reader:

The City of Detroit Recreation Department is deeply involved in rebuilding the East Riverfront through the development of a series of parks and linkages connecting downtown to Belle Isle and through the improvements to its extensive set of parklands on the far east edge of the City. With the help of the Mayor's Office, other City Departments, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Coastal Management Program, we are trying to increase the awareness and use of our most important regional recreational resource: the Detroit Riverfront. This booklet is one element in that long-range goal. It is designed to briefly introduce you to the past of the East Riverfront in order to help understand the present and look to the changing future.

The study was researched and written by Kathryn Kozora, an Urban Planning Intern sponsored by the Wayne State University/City of Detroit Consortium Project, and placed in the Recreation Department in 1982. Ms. Kozora's research on the people and places of the East Riverfront seemed worth sharing with the increasing number of Detroit residents and visitors who are beginning to enjoy this area. Thus, the booklet has been designed to give some background on the fascinating history of an area that has been agricultural and industrial, residential, commercial, and recreational at different times in its history. The plum trees are gone from the early farms, as are most of the shipping related facilities, but many of the industrial buildings still stand and the street names and river activities remind us of its important past.

History can be traced through architectural changes, street names, the examination of archeological finds, books and old newspapers. Particularly helpful to this study has been the 1890 Silas Farmer History of Detroit and Michigan, an unmatched source of early information and pictures, and maps in the Detroit Public Library Burton Historical Collection. In order to make some information more accessible, the Recreation Department has prepared a series of brochures, booklets and reports on the riverfront. These include the East Riverfront Bicycle and Walking Tour, Detroit's Beautiful Belle Isle Park, Detroit's Riverfront Parks, and Detroit's Fishing Sites. Future publications include an Architectural History of the area as well as further recreational planning studies. Most are available on request by calling the Recreation Department during regular business hours.

We hope you enjoy this publication and find it useful.

Sincerely yours,

*Daniel H. Krichbaum*  
Daniel H. Krichbaum, Director

*Harriet Saperstein*  
Harriet Saperstein, Project Coordinator

DHK:HS:gl

Daniel H. Krichbaum, Director

F-4441 . MS K69 1982

The printing of this booklet is through the courtesy of  
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Cover Illustration - Detroit Riverfront 1826

## Beginnings

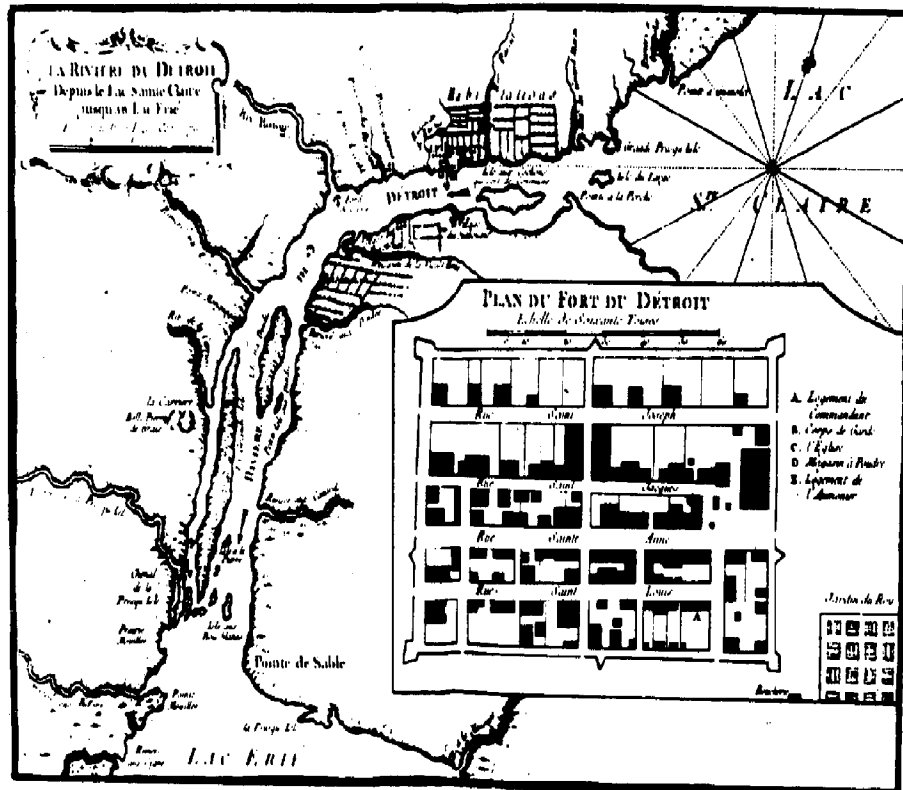
The land that was to become Detroit began emerging from under hundreds of feet of glacial ice 15,000 years ago. Retreating ice started a process that caused huge lakes to form and recede over vast periods of time. By 7500 B.C. the Great Lakes water system was much as it is now, with the channels known as the St. Clair and Detroit rivers discharging Lake Huron waters through Lake St. Clair into Lake Erie. Except for higher water levels which brought the water's edge to approximately Lafayette and then Jefferson, what we see today echos the ancient shoreline.

There is very little archeological evidence of Indian presence in the Detroit area before 1640, at which time a group called "Aictaeronon," with unknown tribal affiliations, formed a small village. Although several other tribes were known to have settled in the area, none was present when Detroit's founder, Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, arrived from New France with his own Indian followers. Early French travelers to the region had called all the waters between Lakes Erie and Huron "etroit," meaning strait, and when settling the land in 1701, "d'etroit" (of the strait) was commonly used. Initially, both sides of the river were known simply as north and south "d'etroit."

The Detroit River has always played an important role in the development of the city and it was not by chance that the French explorer Cadillac, well acquainted with the territory, chose his site for Fort Pontchartrain. Located on the first rise of ground from the river between what is now Griswold and Shelby Streets, the fort commanded control of the waterway and was a sound military as well as commercial choice. Detroit was to become the center of an already vast fur trading empire.

Early Years - Detroit and East Riverfront

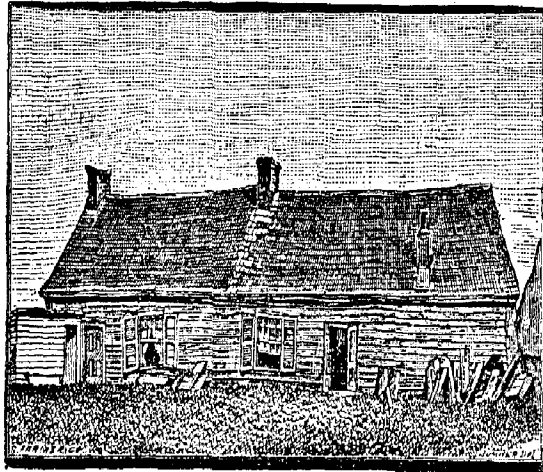
Construction of the fort was begun immediately upon arrival while outside the barricade, a small log church was built. Called St. Anne's, legend says it was named in honor of the saint's feast on the day of their arrival. Indians settled around the fort and with a handful of people, a small center of civilization was formed on the edge of the wilderness. Life centered around the fort and initially all growth was within its barricades but by 1708 a number of farms began to stretch east along the river. Cadillac granted long, narrow properties, the boundaries of which were ditches that separated the "ribbon" farms. This system provided each owner with access to the river while keeping the occupants close together for convenience and safety.



(Clements - U of M)

Fort Established by Cadillac

Log houses with stone chimneys and ovens were built near the river on a path that would first be called Old River Road, then Water Street and finally Atwater. Beside each home there was a garden, in back an orchard and, in the more distant fields, crops of wheat and corn. Some of the earliest inhabitants of the east riverfront were M. St. Aubin, Charles Chene, Jean Beaubien, Louis Campau and Charles Moran. The Moran house, built in 1734, was still standing in 1883 on Woodbridge Street between St. Antoine and Hastings (Chrysler freeway). A replica of this building is now in the Detroit Historical Museum.

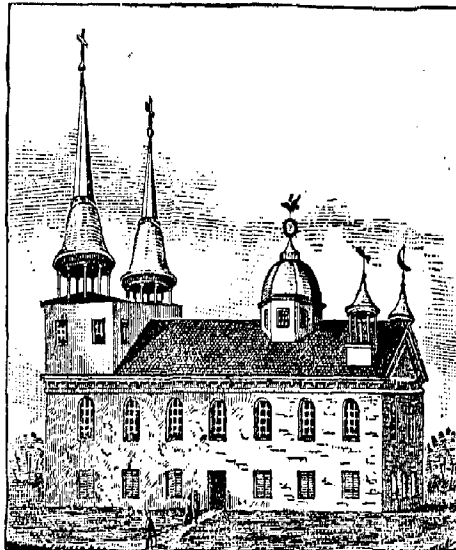


The Old Moran House

Since the land had been granted by Cadillac, a number of requirements had to be fulfilled. Owners had to begin improvement of the land within a certain period of time and pay annual dues, with an extra fee charged for the right to trade. They had to have their grain ground at the public mill and annually they would plant a maypole at the door of Cadillac, their signeur. If an owner wished to sell his property, he had first to offer it to Cadillac.

When Cadillac was appointed governor of Louisiana in 1710, the confusion over land grants prevented new settlement in the town. From 1728, land grants were handled from France with Louis XIV leasing land and directing settlement. In 1734, the Governor General and Intendent of New France began granting what are now known as the Private Claims.

Throughout this early period of growth, the center of activity was focused on the fort and commons -- life flowed around the seasons with the bells of St. Anne's sounding the angelus, calling all to prayer each day. The French Roman Catholic influence was very strong in Detroit's early history and religious practices were woven into the normal functions of the city. By 1754 there were settlers on both sides of the river and on either side of the fort. To make it more convenient for all to attend church services, Jacques Campau built a small church near his farm on the river near Dubois Street. It came to be known as the Red Chapel and until 1824 played an important role in the various religious ceremonies and many processions which took place in the city.



St. Anne's Church - 1818

Detroit became involved in the French and Indian War by 1758 and when the British took Montreal, Detroit was surrendered. By 1763, an increasing dissatisfaction with British rule led to an Indian uprising where Pontiac, chief of the Ottawas, tried to lure the French into a conspiracy to retake British settlements, including Detroit. This was the beginning of a battle that raged for five months and involved Detroit in a massacre now referred to as the Battle of Bloody Run. In an encounter filled with treachery, betrayal and intrigue Pontiac ambushed the British near a narrow wooden bridge over Parent's Creek (Jefferson and Adair). Legend says that an old white-wood tree near the creek was a silent witness to the slaughter and for many years was called the "Pontiac Tree." During the siege, the British retreated to the farm of James Campau (located between Dubois and Chene Streets)\* and it was his young son who brought the mutilated body of the British Captain back to the fort. A peace treaty with Pontiac was eventually signed, though Indian unrest continued.

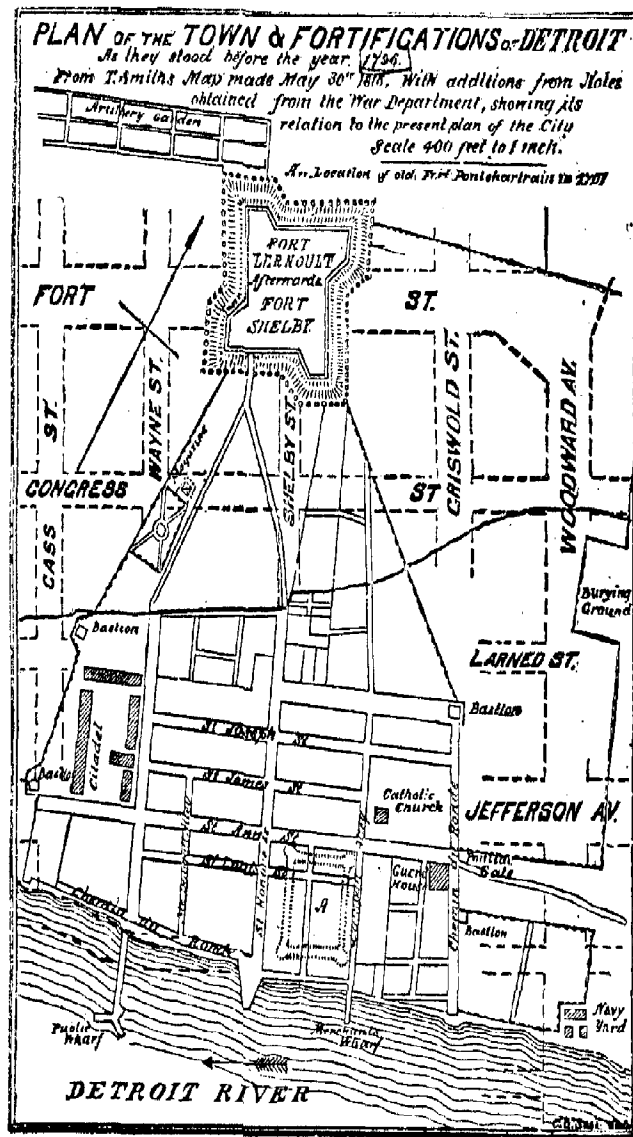


\*An archeological investigation was conducted at this location during the summer of 1982. Uncovered were household artifacts dating from the 1700s as well as evidence of prehistoric occupation.

The Pontiac Tree



Despite the change in power, there were few alterations in the established patterns at the isolated outpost. The onset of the Revolutionary War drew attention once again to the importance of the Great Lakes water system and the British built Fort Lernoult (renamed Fort Shelby at the close of the war) to protect their interests. While Great Britain acknowledged the independence of the United States in 1783, it was not until 1796 that they actually left the Detroit area. Political turmoil was so extreme that Detroit sent two representatives to the Canadian Legislature after being 'incorporated' into Upper Canada in 1791.



Map of the City in 1796

After Fort Shelby was established and integrated with the existing structures, a street pattern began to emerge within the barricades. Circling the town was a roadway called the Chemin de Ronde, while St. Louis, St. Anne (Jefferson), St. James and St. Joseph were the main streets running east and west. The inhabitants of the fort-city were served by two wharves -- Public or King's Wharf and Merchant's Wharf. King's Wharf was still in use in 1823. Three streams drained into the Detroit River from near the town: Campau's River (later called May Creek) on the west, Parent's Creek on the east and the Savoyard, which ran parallel to the river behind the fort. With currents strong enough to keep a grist mill turning most of the year, the Savoyard was a favorite for fishing and was busy with canoes heading towards the river.

Early Detroit was described as having vast prairies bordered by orchards of wild plum, mission pear, apple and cherry trees. An abundance of wild grapes flourished and wild flowers were everywhere. All manner of animal life was represented including otter, elk, deer and buffalo while wolves, bison and bear roamed the surrounding woods and forests. The Detroit River was said to be remarkable in its beauty with clear, calm waters and sandy beaches where canoes were pulled to a shoreline that contained dozens of inlets and finger bays. The river was a



St. Anne's Street - 1800

busy thoroughfare in the warm months and in the winter a frozen bed on which sleds and teams could cross. It has been noted that a small shanty built in the middle of the river dispensed warmth and good cheer to the weary traveler. To the city dweller within the fort, or "inside the pickets," the farms scattered along the river were considered to be country.

It was to the country that all fled during the fire of 1805. Everyone not fighting the fire rushed with belongings to the river's edge. Fire had always been a fearful but familiar presence to the early settlers, and continued to be so for many years. Besides those caused by accident, fire was also used as a major weapon during hostilities between Indians, French and British and Detroit's earliest history records conflagrations too numerous to mention. The city that burned to the ground was not rebuilt; a new city was planned.

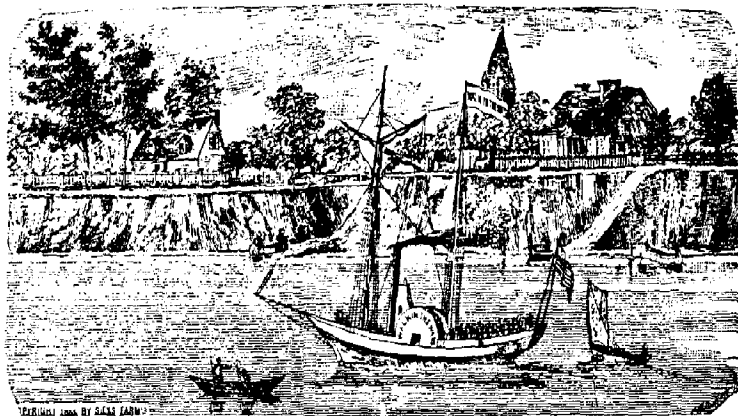
A short time before the tragedy, the Michigan Territory had been established with Detroit as the seat of a government which included an appointed Governor and three judges as the governing body. To aid in the rebuilding of the city, a federal land grant was awarded Detroit and it was at this time that Judge Augustus Woodward submitted a plan for the new city which included the division and granting of land. Much of what transpired over this disposition of property had a significant impact on the physical and political development of Detroit. This was particularly true of the riverfront where most of the privately owned property south of St. Anne Street was land excluded from the Woodward plan.

Recovery from the fire and turmoil created by continuing Indian hostilities which led to the War of 1812, left Detroit and its people at their lowest ebb. With population down to 1440, a painful if temporary period was experienced that was gradually altered as great advances in transportation, communication and technology brought about major changes affecting the way of life in the United States.

1800 - 1850

With the opening of the Erie Canal, the early 1800s brought steam navigation and the beginning of the settlement of the west. The Detroit River, now a water pathway connecting Detroit to the eastern seaboard and the Atlantic Ocean, put the city on the migratory route. The completion of a canal at Sault Ste. Marie connecting Lake Superior and Lake Huron joined Detroit to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan where accessibility to its lumber and mineral resources lured business and laborers to the north as well as industry to locations along the Detroit River. The changing land use patterns on the east riverfront reflected these new business interests as the heirs of the original French Farm owners sold their land to those implementing the new economy.

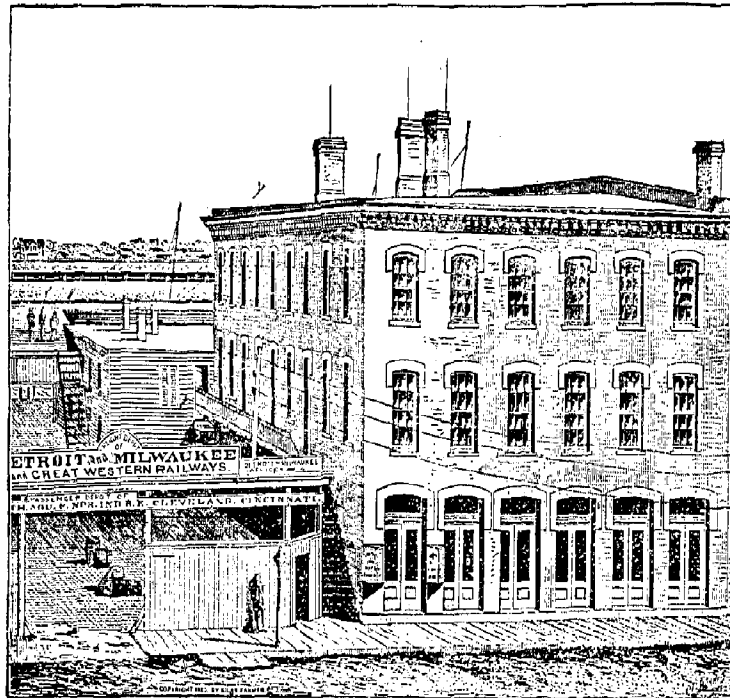
In addition to the abundance of raw materials for industry -- copper, iron ore and coal -- building materials were also plentiful. These included sand, plaster, and a large supply of brick clay and limestone. At this time, Michigan also produced more lumber than any other state. All of these resources can be traced to activities on the east riverfront. The Hart Map of Detroit in 1853 shows a dozen



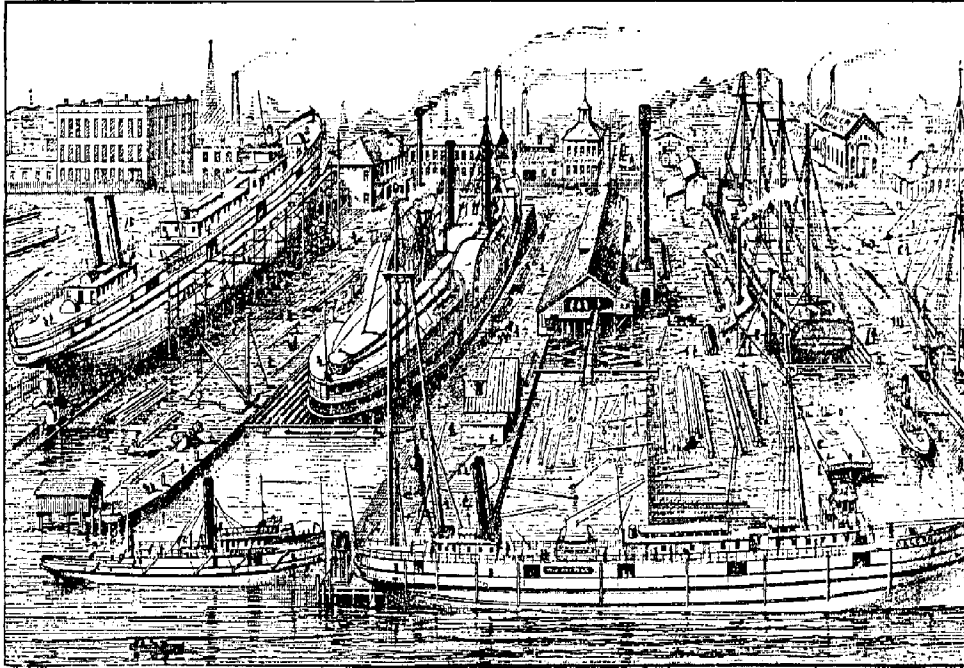
The First Steamer, Walk-in-the-Water  
Detroit Riverfront - 1818

saw mills with accompanying lumber yards, a shipyard and drydock on the river between Riopelle and Dequindre, a large lime kiln located at the foot of Dequindre and the city's Hydraulic works and reservoir at the foot of Orleans.

From the early 1880s, various railroad companies had huge land holdings on both the east and west riverfront which provided lines for the movement of raw materials, finished products and people. The first of these companies on the east riverfront was the Pontiac and Detroit Railroad which occupied the land from Randolph to Beaubien and later to Riopelle. The Detroit and Milwaukee, the Great Western and the Detroit, Grand Haven and Milwaukee were some of the numerous companies that were associated with this section of the riverfront, often two or three companies at a time. A vast railroad complex was formed that became the center of much freight and passenger activity.



The Detroit and Milwaukee Depot

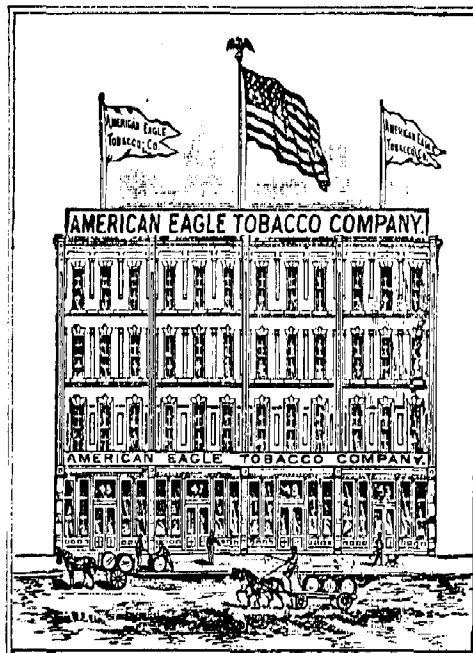


Detroit Docks and Repair Yard - Detroit Dry Dock Company, foot of Orleans

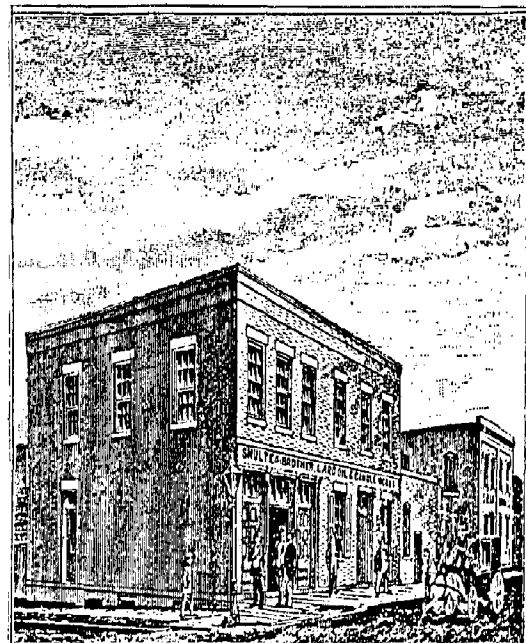
Shipbuilding became a successful early industry on the east riverfront which retained its importance until the early 1900s. At this time, new technology began to make wooden ships obsolete and the shortage of space on the riverfront property made it impossible to expand the facilities. In 1852, the first large vessel, a wooden propeller steamer designed to carry passengers and freight, was launched from what was to become the Detroit Dry Dock Company located at the foot of Orleans. As the center of wooden shipbuilding in Detroit, the Detroit Dry Dock Company supported numerous related industry. Among these were the Frontier Iron Works at 210 Chene which produced marine engines, the East End Boiler Works at 255 St. Aubin, the Taylor Water Tube Boiler Company at 1440 Franklin and the Murphy Iron Works at 3198 Guoin, manufacturers of marine and stationary engines. Under the leadership of Frank E. Kirby, one of the owners of the Detroit Dry Dock Company and a naval architect, many innovative vessels were developed including the "Lansdowne," a Detroit River railroad car ferry that was the largest ship on the lakes when

launched in 1881. It is still in existence and there are plans to restore it as a floating restaurant. The Detroit Dry Dock Company was to become known for its major advances in wooden shipbuilding and enjoyed a nationwide reputation.

Other early industry on the east riverfront included the Schulte Brothers Soap Factory at Franklin and Rivard, one of the oldest establishments in Detroit. "German," "German Laundry" and "Indian Chief" were some of the soap varieties produced. The American Eagle Tobacco Company at 45-53 Woodbridge was started in 1848 and was one of a growing number of firms that created a viable industry around tobacco in Detroit. The Berry Brothers Varnish Manufactory opened in 1858 on the corner of Leib and Wight. Scattered around the area were a number of foundries and tanneries. These smaller industrial firms usually employed just one or two people and had apprentices training.

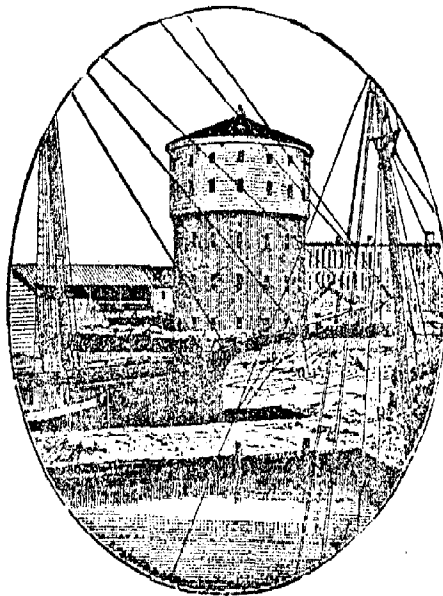


American Eagle Tobacco Company



Schulte Brothers

Next to the Detroit Dry Dock Company was the reservoir of the City of Detroit. With increasing numbers of people in the city, supplying water became a problem. In the days of the French farms, planks had been extended into the river and water was drawn with buckets. Later, several wells were dug near the river and in 1824 a wharf was erected at the foot of Randolph Street where the Peter Berthelet family was in charge of the operation that supplied free water. This method was unsatisfactory but was in use until 1835. In 1836 the City of Detroit purchased land from the Dequindre Farm -- three water lots with a frontage of 350 feet on the river at the foot of Orleans just east of the shipyard. Work began immediately on the wharf, reservoirs and the round house. The plan for the hydraulic works was copied from the Old Manhattan Works of New York City and had a 50-foot tower topped by a wooden tank that was 20 feet high. A narrow, winding stairway led to the top of the tower where "in olden times, a visit was one of the things to be enjoyed by all visitors." This system was in use until 1860 when another larger complex was built farther east on the river.

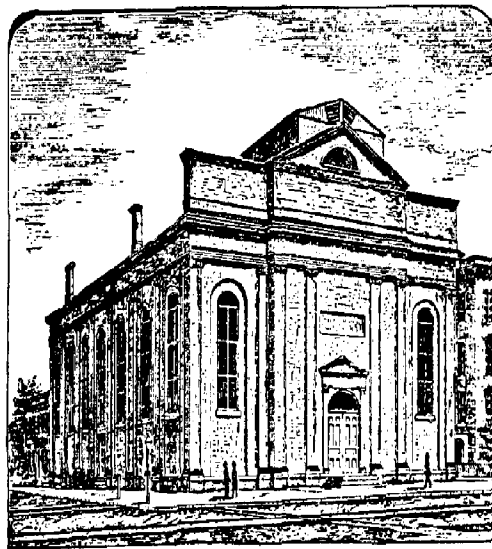


Old Round House - Foot of Orleans



## People

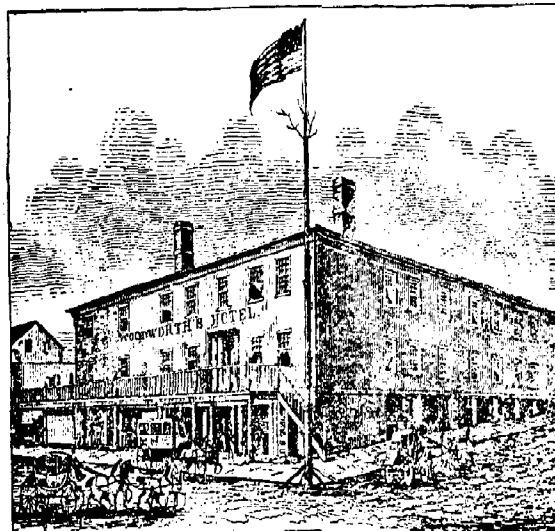
By 1850 the population of Detroit was 21,000. From 1825, steamship service from the east had brought a steady trickle of immigrants, primarily German and Irish along with Easterners moving west. Famine brought massive numbers of Irish to the United States between 1840 and 1855. While the majority remained on the eastern coast because of strong religious ties that held them to established parishes, Detroit's early Roman Catholic heritage proved to be a force in drawing the Irish to the Detroit area. They were to become the most important foreign born group until the heavy German migration starting in the mid-1800s. Within the German community there existed two large congregations, one Catholic and the other Protestant. It was the Roman Catholic contingent that settled with the Irish and French-Canadian Roman Catholics on the east side of Detroit. These three groups made up the east riverfront neighborhoods and created a pattern of residential population that was sustained well into the 1900s. There was a German Catholic Church located north of the area on St. Antoine and Sts. Peter and Paul Church on Jefferson and St. Antoine, built in 1884, also served the Catholic residents.



Church of Sts. Peter and Paul

Away from the main stream of commercial and financial activities which took place west of Woodward, the east riverfront took on an identity of its own. From a hodge-podge of mixed use starting with the mansions on Jefferson to the variety of industry found on the water's edge, neighborhoods emerged producing a kaliedescope of activity.

The resident population lived in small one and two story frame houses built along unpaved streets. Homes were clustered on Franklin, Woodbridge, Wight Streets or scattered throughout the area and interspersed with stores, shops and the buildings of craft and industry. A myriad of small business and other services emerged -- blacksmiths, barbers, bakers and butchers; shoemakers, saloon keepers along with a seamstress or two. Grocery, drygoods, notion and drug stores provided for resident needs. Meat markets, machine shops and warehouses were side by side. Boarding houses and a number of small hotels provided the housing for the transient population -- sailors, travelers and the countless hangers-on of an immense new industry based on the world-wide movement of people and goods.



Woodworth's Steamboat Hotel - 1819  
Corner of Woodbridge and Randolph Streets

Detroit's economic organization provided a large number of jobs for laborers that were primarily filled by the Irish and German immigrants. Employment was available on the east riverfront in the numerous sawmills and railroad related jobs. A higher than average wage of \$1.36 for a ten-hour day also attracted large numbers of people to the various shipbuilding and related firms. Many skilled Irish laborers worked in iron and steel industries while self-employed Irish included large numbers of draymen, those who pulled the 2-wheeled carts used for shuttling coal and freight between warehouses, railroad terminals, docks and stores. Some owned teams and wagons that were used for hauling freight on the docks and throughout the city. Watchmen and guards seemed to command a high salary and in a letter home an Irish watchman reported earning \$70 per month.

There were fifty taverns and saloons listed in the 1855 Detroit Directory and a large number of them were located on the east riverfront, evenly divided between German and Irish ownership. A large percentage of the German population were shopkeepers while traditional employment of the Irish included, besides draymen and those in the iron and steel industry, custom shoemakers, woodworkers and blacksmiths.

The emerging industrial cities were also providing jobs for women. The tobacco industry, where most of the work was done by hand, had over 200 female workers at 72-cents per day in 1880. Women also worked in the shoe factories and on the east riverfront the Mumford, Foster Last Company located at 401 Atwater, was a major employer. East riverfront also provided its share of the 1128 Irish and German domestics employed throughout the city. Clerking was another important source of employment for women where as much as \$9 per week could be earned in the retail stores opening on Woodward and Jefferson.

### East Riverfront Environment

An editorial written in the 1885 Detroit Directory deploras the condition of the three mile Detroit riverfront. The writer observes that the various owners are protecting, improving or neglecting their property at will "and in some instances have wholly barred the passage of the public from the water's edge." He states that the docks, with few exceptions, were in disrepair with "accidents and loss of life not uncommon." Also reported are a new line of docks being constructed from Orleans to the west side. Historically, there had been a continuous filling-in and expansion of the river's edge. As early as 1804, city officials approved the building of wooden cribs at the edge of the river that were to be filled with rubbish and other materials to create more land. In 1819, while giving permission for the building of a wharf at the foot of Randolph Street, it was noted that "as the city grew, an increasing amount of rubbish and refuse was deposited on the low grounds at the river's edge. This created an almost constant nuisance." In 1826, permanent improvement of the riverfront was begun by depositing earth from the embankment of Ft. Shelby along the edge of the riverfront. This work continued until 1834. By 1889 an international agreement was made ending all further expansion of the river's edge.

Streets had been introduced into the east riverfront area as they were needed. The earliest were Woodbridge, Hastings and Franklin in 1826, Rivard in 1833 and Guoin in 1835. Wight, Dubois, Riopelle and Chene followed in the 1850s. Walker, Mt. Elliott, Joseph Campau and Adair in the 1860s. Streets began and ended where use and need dictated. Where paving was used at all, wood, brick and stone were various paving materials represented at different periods of time. In 1842, wooden sidewalks were beginning to be popular within the city and in 1851 gas lamps were introduced for street lighting.

1850 - 1890

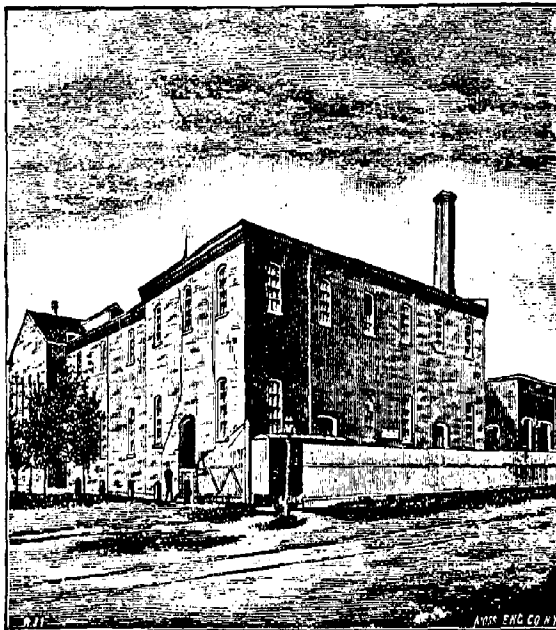
Population figures show a jump from 21,000 in 1850 to 116,000 in 1880. The total foreign population was 44,000. The late 1800s saw an expansion of iron and steel related industry as well as the introduction of new industries along the riverfront which provided employment for the increasing population. Total value of manufactured goods went from \$5 million in 1860 to \$33 million in 1890 with the east riverfront sharing in this growth. Some of the industries represented were:

1864 - Mumford, Foster and Company Last Factory - Located at 401 Atwater between Riopelle and Atwater, this company made up to 100,000 pairs of shoes per year.

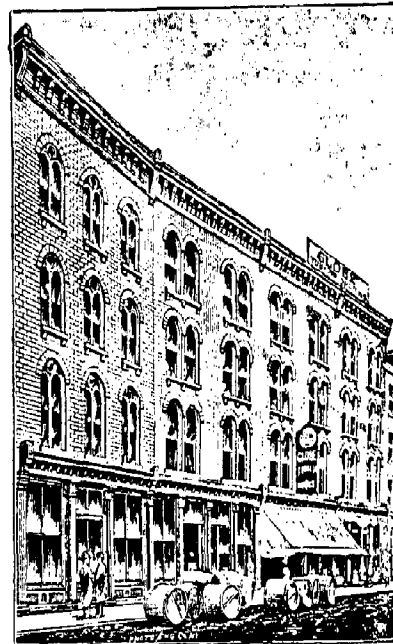
1867 - Detroit Flax Company - Located at 210 Chene Street, it became the Frontier Iron Works in 1872 and the Northern Engineering Works in 1885.

1870 - Globe Tobacco Factory - Located at 31-35 Atwater Street

1860 - Detroit Linseed Oil Company - Located at Leib and Wight Streets



Detroit Linseed Oil  
Company Works



Globe Tobacco  
Factory

1882 - Lauhoff Corporation - Located at 241 Chene, this is a family operated business manufacturing milling and food machinery that is still in existence.

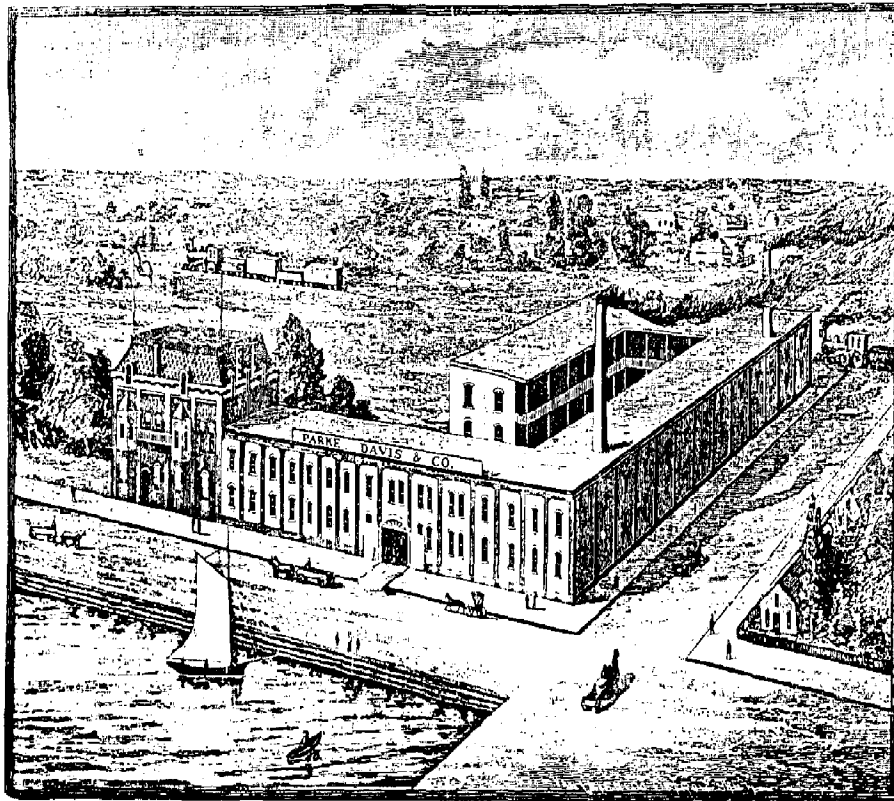
1884 - Parke Davis and Company, Manufacturing Chemists - Founded by Dr. Samuel P. Duffield and Harvey C. Parke in 1862. The company moved to their riverfront location at the foot of Joseph Campau where they were second only to New York in total value of pharmaceutical products manufactured.

1887 - Vail and Cranes Cracker Factory - Located at 48-56 Woodbridge Street

1890 - Globe Foundry Company - Located at 2685 Atwater Street

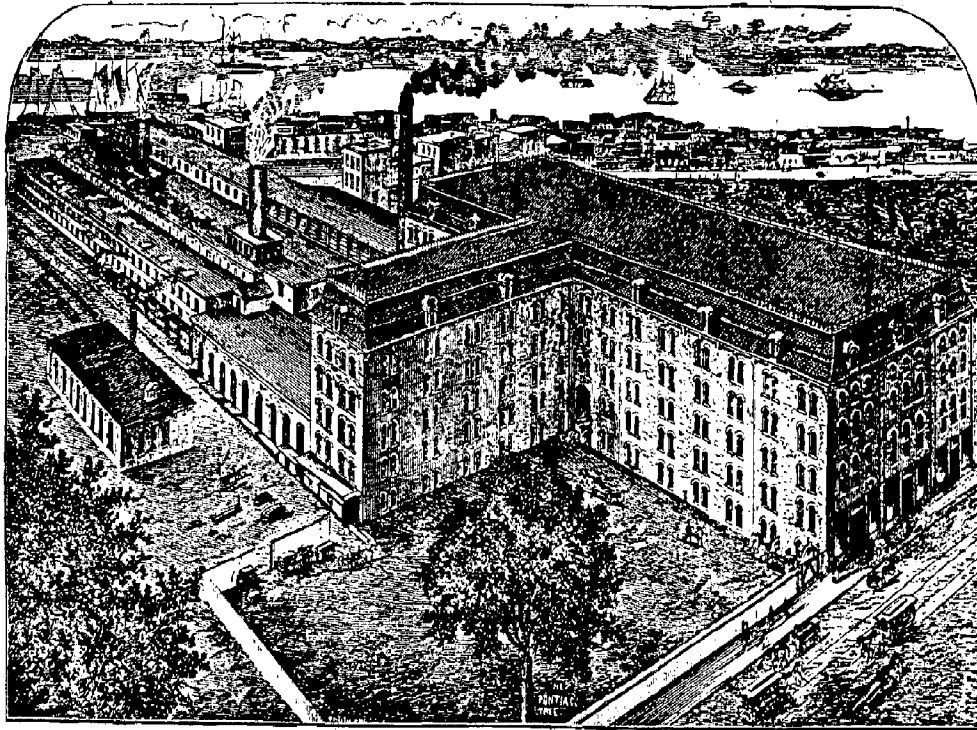
1892 - Ireland and Matthews Manufacturing Company - Located on Iron Street this company made stove trimmings and plumbing supplies. It was the employer of large numbers of Irish immigrant workers.

1899 - Eaton and Son Chemical and Dyewood Storehouse - Located at 1490 Franklin



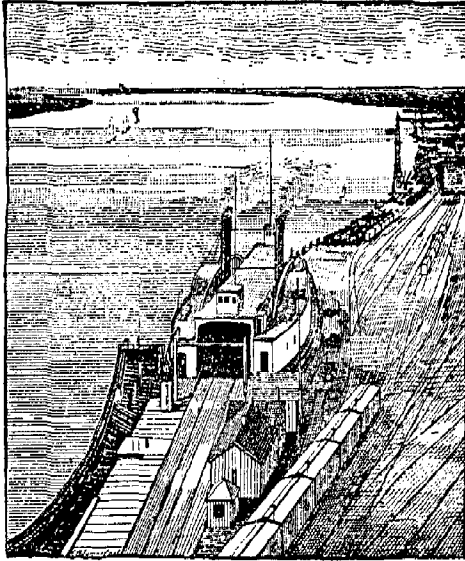
Laboratory of Parke, Davis & Company, foot of McDougall Avenue - 1884

Other industry represented on the east riverfront included the Peninsular Car Works producing railroad cars, the Detroit Stove Company established in 1870 and the Michigan Stove Company established in 1872. The latter two companies involved Detroit and the east riverfront in the world-wide distribution of stoves.



Michigan Stove Company's Works and Wareroom  
with Pontiac Tree

The railroad companies also grew and as time passed, more land was accumulated for railroad tracks, warehouses for freight, round houses and expanded depot facilities. Because the river was an impediment to the movement of railroad cars, self-propelled steamers were used to transport the cars from one side of the river to the other. The first boat was commissioned from London in 1867 and carried 14 freight cars from the docks at the foot of Beaubien to Windsor, Ontario. A complex system of lifts and tracks enabled the transport of materials without



Railroad Ferry Dock

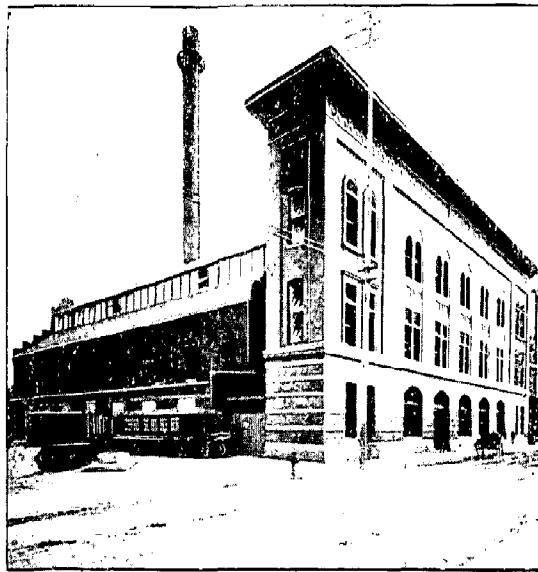
loading and unloading. Prior to the railroad ferry, all goods had to be transferred to ferries by hand and then reloaded again. The new boats handled 15,000 passenger cars and 400,000 freight cars annually in the late 1800s.

As early as 1871 there was talk of a tunnel to Canada for railroad cars and a site was chosen at the Detroit and Milwaukee Railroad station at St. Antoine. After digging for 135 feet, the work was abandoned. Michigan Central Railroad built a tunnel on the west riverfront but not until 1910. As industrial activity increased on the riverfront, other transportation methods were utilized. A private sidetrack for the factories and foundries provided daytime service by horse-drawn cars and a freight tramway on the docks of the Moffat Etherly Lumber Company was also in use in the late 1800s. Two ferry slips with dockage facilities at the foot of Beaubien and St. Antoine provided transportation service for passengers with carriages. After the advent of the automobile, car ferry service was established. As passenger and freight traffic increased, the depot at the foot of Brush was expanded to contain two restaurants, a baggage room and a larger waiting room. Eventually a custom house opened across from the depot and at the end of the 1800s, three trolley lines went by the busy Brush Street Depot.



Another utility located on the east riverfront was the Detroit City Gas Company formed in 1893 through the reorganization of the Mutual Gas Light Company which began operation in 1872. At that time, there were almost 60 miles of street pipe laid to serve the population east of Woodward. The new headquarters was located at 6559 Wight Street and this building was recently sold to Michigan Consolidated Gas Company, the successor firm.

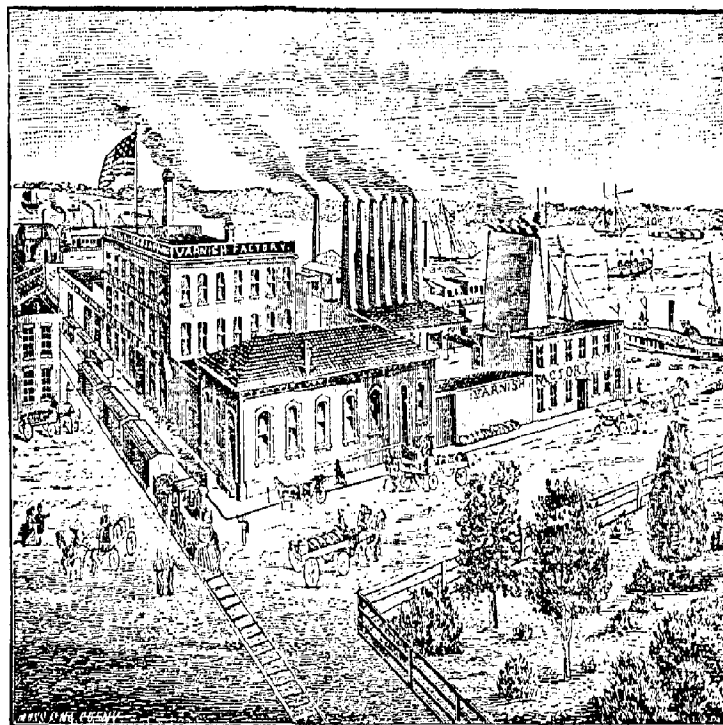
Electricity was introduced in Detroit in 1880. The main plant was located on the west side on Fort Street and in 1899 the City Electric Lighting Plant was built at 24 Atwater Street. In the early 1900s, Station F of the Edison Illuminating Company was constructed at 64 Woodbridge.



City Electric Lighting Plant

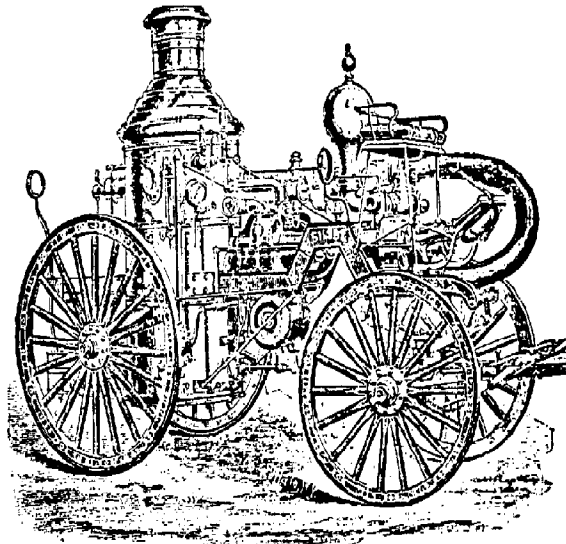
One of the most interesting ventures located on the river was housed in a frame building 20 x 50 feet that was constructed in 1875 at 475 Atwater Street near Dequindre. It was a hatchery built by the State Fish Commission and it produced 316,000 fish that were deposited in the Detroit River the first year and by 1887 nearly one hundred million fish had been raised. A new hatchery was built on Lafayette Street and Joseph Campau in the late 1800s.

What emerged on the riverfront was a tangle of piers, docks, wharves and rail-  
road tracks. Piles of wood, lumber and coal were conveniently left where needed.  
There were stables for wagons and horses and small wooden storing shacks littered  
the docks. With the river a source of ice, dozens of low sheds held ice packed  
in straw waiting to be delivered throughout the city. Swarms of draymen hauling  
loads fought their way to destinations, then back again in an endless round of  
deliveries. Horse drawn wagons carrying freight added to the fray. It is easy  
to imagine a million transactions with bartering and bargaining played out as a  
back-drop to business-as-usual. Filling the air around the activity was the  
penetrating baritone of the ships signalling to one another, the foreman bellow-  
ing orders to longshoreman, the shrill whistle of locomotives, the whine of the  
sawmills and the rumble of industry. Combined, it must have reverberated through-  
out the area, imbedding itself into the lives of all who lived, worked or visited  
there. How far removed from the tranquility of the French farms, but what an  
exciting spectacle of movement and sound it must have provided!



The spectre of fire remained and the east riverfront sustained millions of dollars worth of damages in the 1800s. Precautions were taken to lessen the possibility of fire with the formation of wards to create fire districts, the placing of fire alarm boxes throughout the area, the appointment of "Inspector of Chimneys" and "Inspector of Firewood" as well as the stationing of three fire boats in the river. At one time, a watchman was stationed in the steeple of the Presbyterian Church on State Street to signal early warnings but nothing could really curtail the damage because of the extent of the use of wood and the lack of technology in fire-fighting equipment.

In 1848, on the river between Bates and Randolph, a fire ravaged the area all the way to Jefferson moving east destroying property to Beaubien. 300 buildings were burned, 107 of them residences. After the fire, an ordinance was passed to further limit the size of wooden structures in certain areas of the city. In 1866, the offices, passenger and freight depots of three railroad companies located at the foot of Brush were burned to the ground along with 80 railroad cars, the steam ferry Windsor and large quantities of freight valued at over \$1 million. It was considered one of the worst fires in Detroit because of the loss of 18 lives.



Steam Fire Engine

## Transportation

Ferry service between Detroit and Windsor provided a popular form of entertainment during the warm months as well as supplying a much used form of transportation.

Dating from 1802, boats left primarily from the foot of Woodward and Randolph Streets. These first ferries were sailing vessels; later they were steam driven.

The Detroit and Windsor Ferry Company (later called the Detroit, Belle Isle and Windsor Ferry Company) provided the major service between Windsor and Detroit.

Initially, fare was 5-cents per person in the summer and 10-cents in the winter.

"During the warm summer days and evenings the boats are thronged with people who ride back and forth to enjoy the delightful breeze and everchanging scenery." The

D & W had a fleet of ferry boats to serve the population and one of the finest examples was the Fortune measuring 120-feet by 42-feet with a capacity of over 1000

people. In the late 1800s, the Walkerville and Detroit Ferry Company, owned by Walker and Sons, had regularly scheduled service from the foot of Joseph Campau

to Walkerville, Ontario. The ferry boats Ariel and Sapho left every 30 minutes

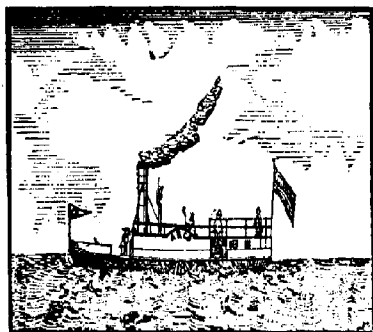
from 6:20 a.m. until 10 p.m. daily. The 1920 Detroit Directory estimated that

25,000 people crossed the river by ferry each day. There were also ferries trans-

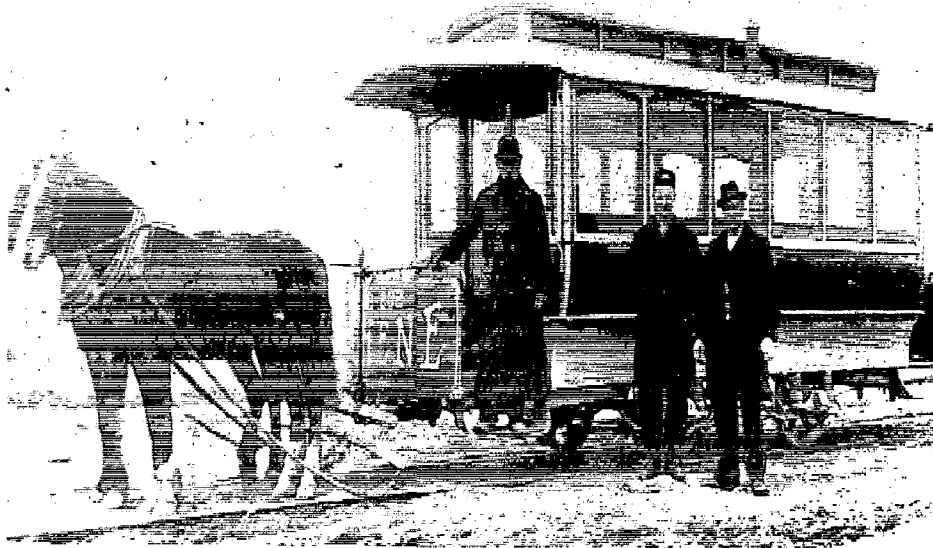
porting horses, wagons, cattle and other freight which left from docks at the

foot of Beaubien and St. Aubin Streets. Carriages with passengers also left from

these docks and later these facilities were used for ferrying automobiles.



Ferry Boat Argo  
from the Detroit and  
Windsor Ferry Company



The Chene Line - One of the last horsecar lines in the city  
(Schramm Collection)

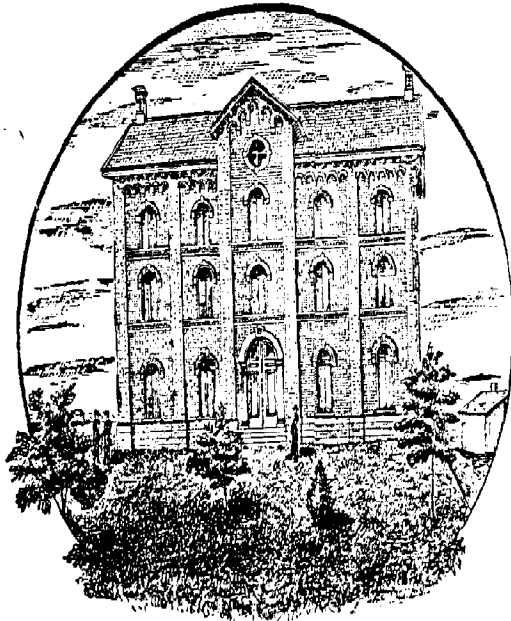
Trolleys were another form of transportation used. Compared to other cities, Detroit was late in establishing an adequate street system. A long and complicated history began in 1843 with the first regularly scheduled, horse-drawn omnibus on Jefferson. Service on the east riverfront included the Detroit City Railway Woodward line which was extended to the Brush Street Railroad Depot on Atwater in 1880 and the Congress and Baker line that was extended down Randolph bringing service to the depot. In 1889, the Chene Street line was initiated. It started at the city limits, East Grand Boulevard, and ran to the river. In 1899 the portion of this line south of Gratiot was called the South Chene line and ran to Atwater then east to Joseph Campau making connections with the Walkerville Ferry. In 1897 the Brush Street line, an electric, was also extended to serve the busy Brush Street Railroad Depot. While the Brush line was abandoned in 1924, the Chene line served until 1931.

The Detroit City Railway Company constructed its first large Car and Stable barn in 1879 on the east riverfront at 600 Woodbridge. The barn was a block long and three stories high with a connecting track to Jefferson Avenue.

## Detroit River

The Detroit River added another dimension to city, state and federal procedures. In 1863 the city appointed a Harbormaster whose duties were to prevent interference between vessels, keep the way clear for the ferries, determine places for anchorage and other marine related duties. He was also responsible for clearing the harbor of obstructions and looking after the safety on the public docks while assuming the task of the maintenance of the 26 life preservers owned by the city and placed along the docks on the riverfront. From 1872 it was the custom that the Harbormaster be a policeman and today the job is connected with the Detroit Police Department.

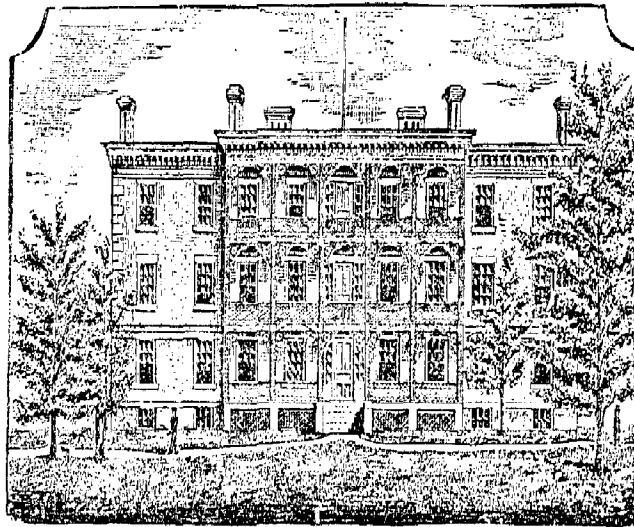
Federal involvement with marine activities was represented in various ways. The U. S. Army Corp of Engineers was put in charge of surveys and improvements of rivers and harbors as well as construction of canals and lighthouses. In 1880, fifteen lighthouse districts were formed in the U. S. with Detroit part of the 11th District. The U. S. Navy was responsible for placing warning bouys in the rivers and lakes and in 1870 the government purchased land from the Leib Farm and built the U. S. Lighthouse Supply and Storage Depot at 3766 Wight. The U. S. Coast Guard took over the duties of the Navy in 1939 and a large Coast Guard station is now located at the foot of Mt. Elliott.



U. S. Lighthouse and Storage  
Depot

Detroit was made a point of entry in 1799 and custom house regulations were provided for the district. Duties had to be paid by foreign ships and vessels leaving the United States would be issued clearances. All sailors had certificates of nationality and these, too, had to be checked at the port of entry. The U. S. Government had a revenue steamer and the Navy a ship to patrol the river and aid in the enforcement of the laws. In 1870 Congress authorized the organization of the Signal Corps as part of the U. S. Army. They were responsible for the collection of data relating to weather, tides, temperature of the river, atmospheric conditions, etc. The information was gathered and passed by telegraph all over the country. East river-front played a part in this service by providing the city base or 'benchmark.' This was designated on the water table of the old water works engine house at the foot of Orleans where it was computed at 575.28 feet above sea level.

In 1854 the Congress of the United States provided for the establishment of a Marine Hospital in Detroit. Located behind the Lighthouse Depot on eight acres of land on south Jefferson at Mt. Elliott, the hospital was constructed for seamen only and was supported by a monthly tax of 40-cents per month for each person employed on board

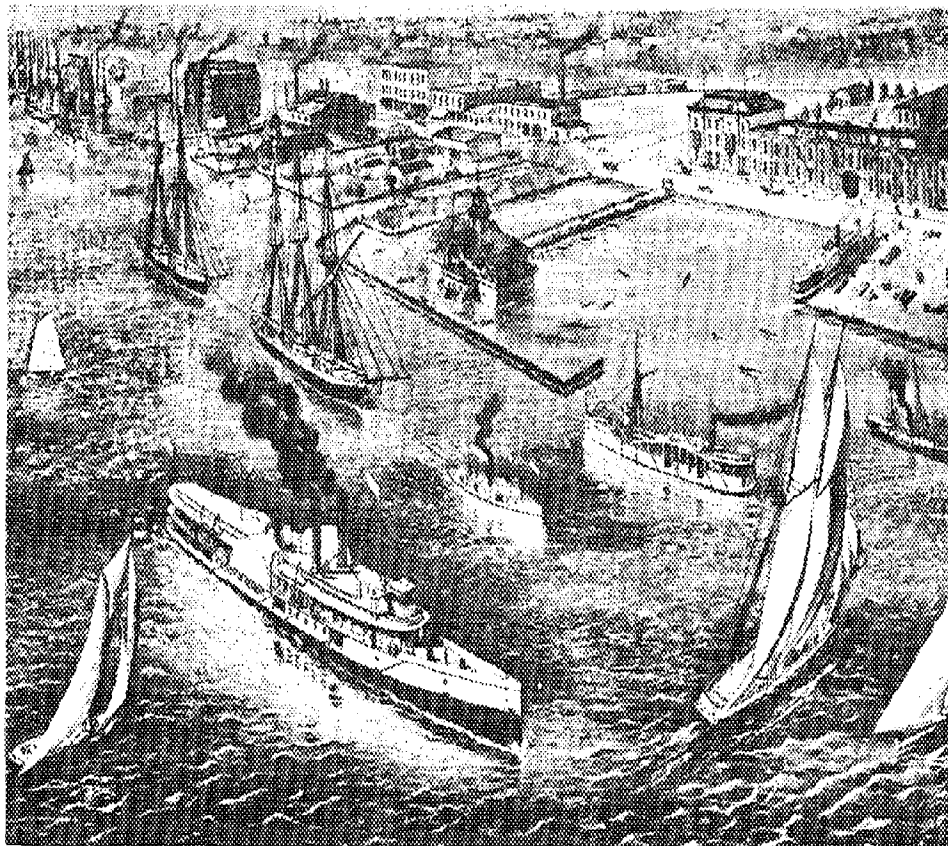


Marine Hospital

every registered ship. "The captain of each vessel is authorized to deduct the amount from the wages of all employed and this sum is then collected before the ship's license is renewed."

### Riverfront Recreation

Because of industry, there was very little private or public land used for recreation. What did emerge was a number of boat clubs up and down the riverfront. The earliest of these was the Detroit Boat Club founded in 1839, the first of its kind in the country. The club's first headquarters were in a shop shared with the Detroit, Grand Haven and Milwaukee Railroad Company on the east riverfront. From there it moved to the foot of Hastings Street and in 1873 the Club House was re-located on the river between Joseph Campau and McDougall in front of the Parke,

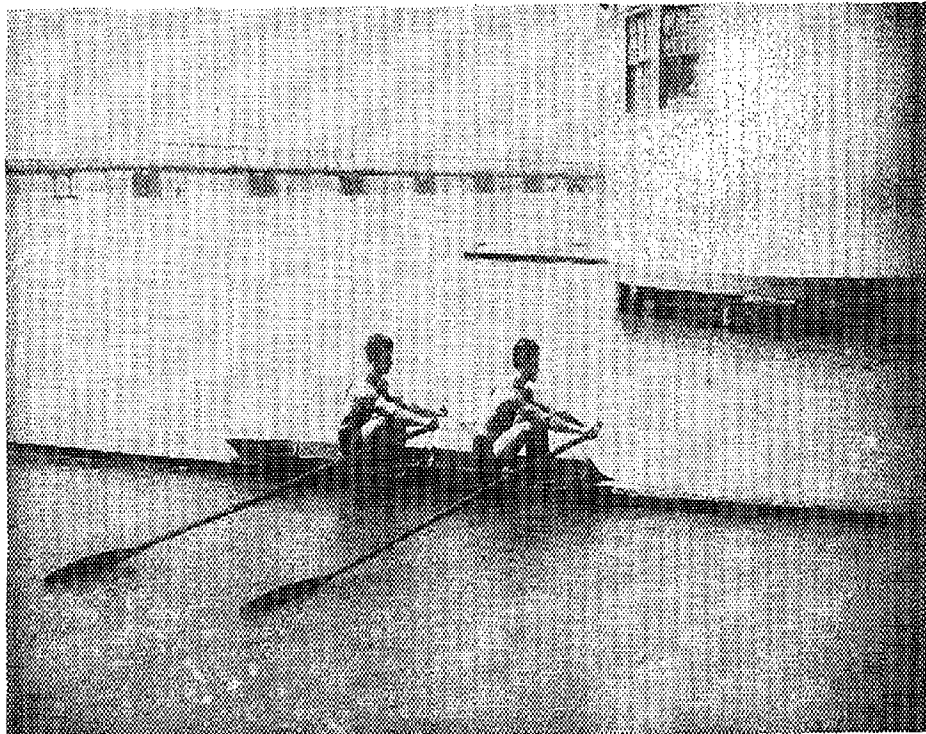


Detroit Boat Club between Joseph Campau and McDougall  
(Detroit Boat Club)



Davis Company. Oarsmen from the Detroit Boat Club enjoyed an international reputation and competed in numerous state and national rowing regattas. In 1891 the Detroit Boat Club moved to a new structure on Belle Isle.

While rowing was always a popular sport with the annual Detroit River Navy Regatta an important event, the late 1800s saw an increase in the sport as it became a chief pastime. Rowing clubs mushroomed and on the east riverfront the Excelsior Boat Club operated from the foot of Joseph Campau and the Centennial Boat Club was located on the river between Chene and Joseph Campau. Rowing clubs came from all over the state to compete in contests and people flocked to the river to watch. A large 2-day regatta is reported in 1877 when large grandstands were built on a dock east of Dubois Street to hold thousands of viewers. In 1882, the National Rowing Regatta was held in Detroit drawing huge crowds to the riverfront.

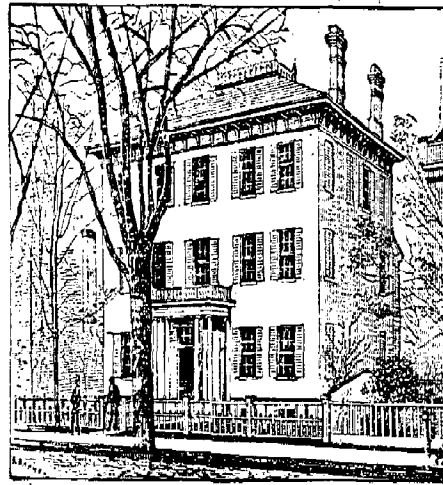
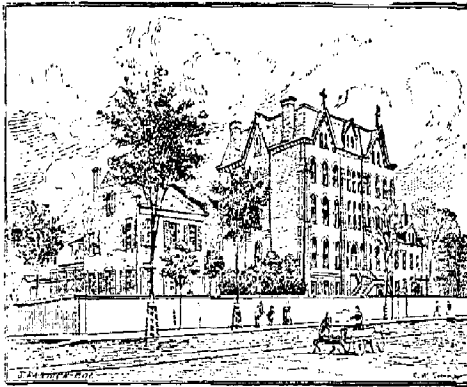


Pair-oared Shell on the Detroit River  
(Detroit Boat Club)

### Educational Facilities on the East Riverfront

East Riverfront had three educational institutions represented. Located on three acres of land on south Jefferson near St. Antoine was the first home of the Convent of the Sacred Heart. An all-girls Catholic boarding school, it was established in the early 1800s by wealthy French families and later also served Irish and German Roman Catholics. Adjacent to the boarding school was The Detroit College run by the Order of the Society of Jesus (Jesuit's). An all-male institution, it served the wealthy Roman Catholic families of Detroit with tuition at \$4000 per year. The University of Detroit Engineering College, established in 1878, was located east of St. Antoine on Jefferson Avenue.

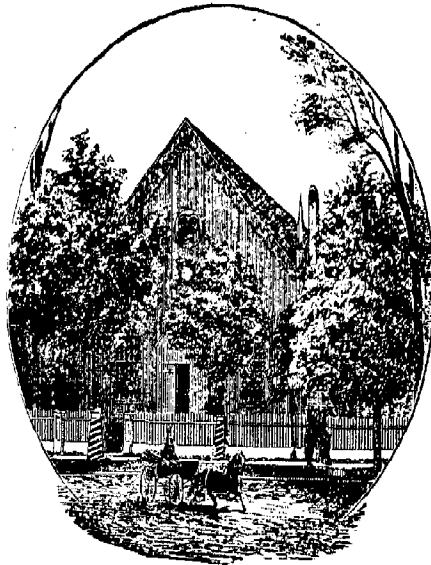
Academy of the Sacred Heart



Detroit College

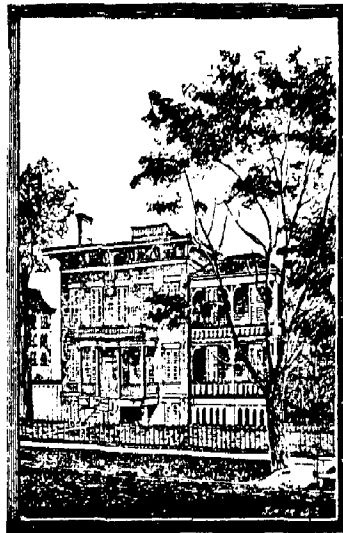
### Religious Institutions on the East Riverfront

Besides Sts. Peter and Paul Church, Jefferson Avenue was also the home of Christ Protestant Episcopal Church, originally constructed in 1845 between Hastings and Rivard Streets. The rectory was located behind the church on Woodbridge. In 1862 the old frame church was torn down and construction on the new building began.



Christ Protestant Episcopal Church  
Original Building

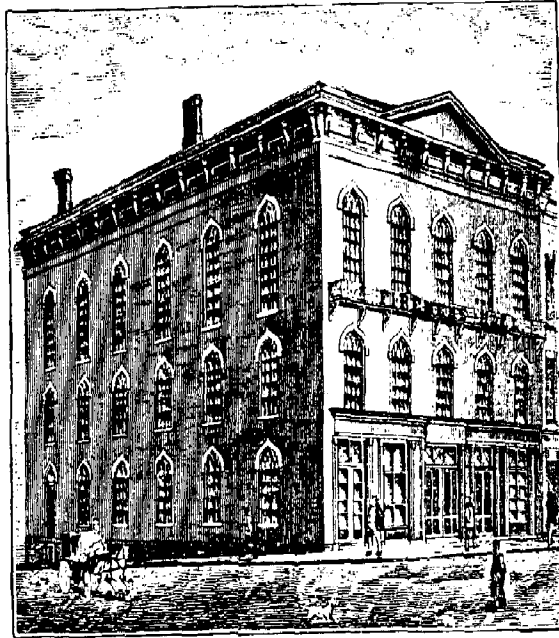
Another early religious institution located within the east riverfront area was the Jefferson Avenue M. E. Church. Originally, the society had established the Methodist Episcopal Sunday School in a machine shop on Atwater Street which was owned by a member of the church. Subsequently the church was erected between Riopelle and St. Aubin Streets where it remained until 1884.



Jefferson Avenue M.E. Church  
Original Building

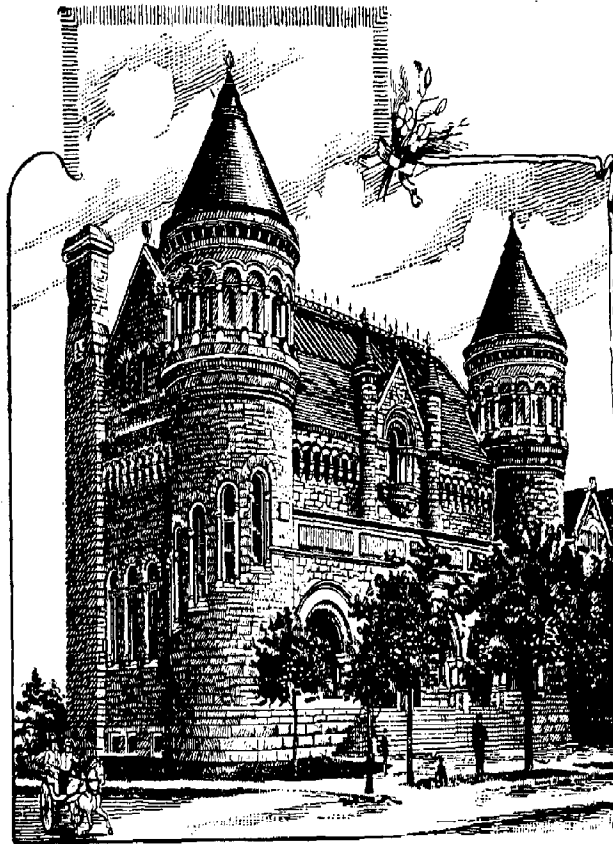
## Cultural Institutions on the East Riverfront

Public interest in the Detroit Fire Department led to the organization of the Fire Department Society. This organization became very popular and the yearly fees paid by members produced enough revenue for the construction of the Firemen's Exhibition Hall. Functioning as an important public hall for the city, concerts, lectures, and meetings were regularly scheduled and a library and reading room were provided for members.



Firemen's Hall - Corner of Jefferson and Randolph

A series of Art Exhibitions were held in Detroit, several taking place at Firemen's Hall. The interest stirred by these events and the efforts of the Art Loan Association eventually led to the construction of the Detroit Art Institute on Jefferson Avenue at Hastings Street in 1888. Three additions were made to the building to house the growing collection. In 1889 the Detroit Museum of Art School opened and was in operation for ten years. The new Institute of Arts on Woodward Avenue was part of a planned Cultural Center and was dedicated in 1927.



Art Museum - Jefferson Avenue and Hastings Street

There was also a private museum on Franklin Street east of St. Antoine run by a Dr. Louis Cavalli from 1846 until 1853. Considered the best of the private museums, it presented a collection of rare stones, minerals and insects as well as a gallery of paintings of great men. It was open daily to all visitors free of charge.

#### Early 1900s on the East Riverfront

The introduction of the automotive industry in Detroit initially involved the east riverfront area. The Studebaker Company operated a major plant there and the first factory of the Oldsmobile Company was located on the river east of Meldrum Street. This site was to become the headquarters for the U. S. Rubber Company and still later, the home of Uniroyal. However, as the automotive industry expanded, large factories were built by Ford, Packard and Dodge in the suburbs or at the edge of the city. The

Large tracts of land necessary for expansion were not available on the east riverfront and this lack of space was one of the primary reasons the area began a steady decline. A number of industrial firms in operation were able to transfer skills and materials to meet the new industry but the automotive surge moved outward leaving the east riverfront behind.

The 1922 Sanborn map reflects the transition from old to new business ventures. During this period, the General Ice Delivery Company and stables were still operating on the river between Dubois and Chene Streets while auto related industry and business began emerging throughout the area. The Packard Motor Car Company Used Car Sales Office and Service Station occupied a site on Woodbridge between Beaubien and St. Antoine. Property and buildings changed hands as new companies moved into the area including the Goebel Brewing Company which operated a plant on the river between St. Aubin and Dubois Street. At the same time a number of buildings were being converted to warehouse facilities; the Crowley, Milner Company operated a warehouse and garage on Franklin Street. Auto related business also invaded Jefferson Avenue where the mansions were being converted to apartments and boarding houses in order to accommodate the rapidly increasing population.

#### People - Early 1900s

Between 1900 and 1910 the population of Detroit jumped from 185,000 to 466,000. In the next ten years population had almost doubled to 994,000 which included a heavy influx of Eastern European immigrants. Gradually, a majority of the German, Irish and French residents moved out of the east riverfront area and the Detroit Directory of 1919 shows a representation of over 20 nationalities from every part of the world now residing in the area. These new groups included Hungarian, Russian, Slavic, Rumanian, Polish, and Lithuanian as well as Belgium, Arab, Turkish, Dutch and Greek.

While much of the industrial waterfront had often been regarded as disreputable, Detroit's proximity to Canada during the Prohibition era made the east riverfront notorious. Between 1920 and 1930 rum-running kept the Customs Border Patrol and the Detroit Police Department's fleet busy trying to curtail the smuggling activities taking place on the Detroit River. The foot of Riopelle Street was reputed to provide a safe haven for craft and cars could be seen rushing down to the pier where they would be loaded with the illegal goods. The "get-away" was then made down Atwater Street. This blatant disregard for the law was said to take place throughout the day and night.

Despite the changes and obvious decline during the early 1900s, the east riverfront still projected a unique image. There were a variety of residential areas and a wide array of shops and services available to take care of the needs of the people living there. While industry did not flourish, it existed and provided economic activity and employment. This was a brief respite before the inevitable technological and economic changes that would significantly alter the east riverfront.

#### Intervening Years

All the elements that had come together to create the vital mixture of riverfront activity were to be gradually changed or completely eliminated. As the importance of the railroad diminished, so too did to activity around the passenger and freight terminals along the riverfront. The raw materials that had flowed from the north in a steady stream lessened with the discovery of copper in the west and depletion of the forests that had supplied lumber. Wooden shipbuilding ceased and the automotive industry moved away. Crowds vanished with the eventual demise of ferry service brought about by the completion of the tunnel and bridge to Windsor. The orientation of the city was no longer to the river but outward towards undeveloped land.

The new Interstate freeways would contribute heavily to the decline of central city residential neighborhoods and aid the movement of industry no longer dependent on water transportation. The riverfront seemed temporarily abandoned, waiting, until a new set of circumstances would again draw attention to its potential.

#### Towards New Beginnings

Very little seemed to happen on the east riverfront until the 1970s when the combined force of Federal, state and local interest in urban waterfronts spurred activity. Following the public and private efforts that led to Hart Plaza and Renaissance Center, the east riverfront became the focus of the City initiated "Linked Riverfront Parks Project." These new plans call for a series of parks with pedestrian/bicycle pathways linking the area between Hart Plaza and Belle Isle. Housing and shopping areas will be interwoven with the remaining industrial sites and the new park system to create neighborhoods vibrant with activity. Movement towards this goal can be seen in the increasing numbers of Warehouse District restaurants, ongoing construction of Chene Park, the new Stroh headquarters located in the Parke, Davis buildings and the bright blue and white signage marking the bicycle and walking tours. As in its beginnings, Detroit's focus will be on the river where the people are invited to reclaim their past and participate in the future.



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The major portion of information for this booklet was researched from the Farmer's History of Detroit. All the quotations used in the text are also from this delightful volume. As the official historiographer of Detroit, Silas Farmer seemed to take immense pleasure in describing the people and events of the city.

## Pictures

Unless otherwise noted, all graphics for the booklet are taken from the Farmer's History of Detroit or from the City Guide and Souvenir. The lithographs in these publications lend themselves well to reproduction. Where necessary, permission was granted by the Burton Historical Collection for reprinting.

## Acknowledgments

Special thanks to William Worden, Staff Director of the Historic Designation Advisory Board for information on the industry of the east riverfront and material on the Dry Dock Shipping Company. A grateful thank you also to the people at the Burton Historical Collection for their aid.

The staff of the Copy Center of the Detroit Water Board has been especially helpful in layout and reproduction services of this study and many other riverfront publications.

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CREDITS

City of Detroit

Mayor Coleman A. Young

The City Council

Erma Henderson, President	Jack Kelley
Barbara-Rose Collins	Maryanne Mahaffey
David Eberhard	John Peoples
Nicholas Hood	Mel Ravitz

Recreation Department

Daniel H. Krichbaum, Director  
Theodore Jordan, Deputy Director

East Riverfront Recreation Project Team

Harriet Saperstein, Project Coordinator  
Edward H. Viall, Chief, Landscape Design  
Derek Stratelak, M.S.U. Landscape Architect Intern  
John Jones, Senior Social Planning Analyst  
William Worden, Director, Historic Designation Advisory Board  
Kathryn Kozora, Research Associate, Recreation Department and  
Wayne State University

This project was funded in part by:

U. S. Department of Commerce,  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration,  
Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 (P.L. 92-583)  
as administered by the  
Michigan Department of Natural Resources,  
Coastal Management Program,  
Chris Shafer, David J. Warner, Project Managers

and through an internship funded by:

City of Detroit-Wayne State University Consortium  
Jean Dietrick Rooney, Coordinator  
Center for Urban Studies, WSU

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