The Influence of River Transportation on St. Joseph and Elkhart Counties, 1830-1860

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Faced with dense forests thick with underbrush and broken if at all only by crude Indian trails, emigrants to frontier areas welcomed every waterway as the easiest mode of travel because comparatively little work was necessary to make them serviceable. For this reason their use might well be considered the first step in the development of a transportation system. The St. Joseph of Lake Michigan and Elkhart rivers lie in the southern part of the Mississippi-St. Lawrence Divide, although nowhere in northern Indiana is the margin sharply marked. Indeed, unusually high waters of the St. Joseph would normally merge with the headwaters of the Kankakee River in the vicinity of South Bend.1 In both St. Joseph and Elkhart counties rolling topography and small lakes are characteristic.2

To credit the growth of the two counties mentioned solely to their river namesake would obviously convey an erroneous impression by disregarding other important factors like the Michigan Road. Because of its importance, however, the role of river transportation can be used as a frame to picture the development of St. Joseph and Elkhart counties between 1830 and 1860.

Typical appraisals of the St. Joseph River in numerous gazetteers of this period noted that it rose in southern Michigan and entered Indiana about the middle of northern Elkhart County. The stream received the Elkhart and other tributaries, then flowed west into St. Joseph County. After making its famous bend to the north, the river again flowed through Michigan to the lake. Most of the guidebooks agreed that the clear channel was navigable from its mouth to South Bend and frequently farther unless blocked by ice.3

One of the earliest commentaries on these rivers and the

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1 Clyde A. Malott, "The Physiography of Indiana," Handbook of Indiana Geology (Indianapolis, 1922), 71.
2 Ibid., 113-114, 116-124.
area through which they flowed was made by an unidentified traveler in 1829, who contrasted the top-quality soil and timber of their bottom lands with the thin soil and inferior oak and hickory nearer Fort Wayne. He considered Elkhart Prairie equally excellent, with a good town site at the junction of the Elkhart and St. Joseph rivers. The latter stream impressed him as a deep navigable waterway upon which keelboats and arks could make the trip of seventy-five to one hundred miles to the lake at all seasons.4

Actually, travel by ark was sometimes possible only in the spring and fall or after heavy rains, but it was considered more exciting, faster, and less expensive than overland hauling. Under sailing conditions then prevalent, bridges and dams were the greatest dangers encountered. The flatbottoms were little more than rafts with sides and a roof guided by an immense oar placed along the edge of the roof near the bow and another at the stern. Having reached their destination, the vessels were usually broken up for lumber. Some of the better constructed arks had a wood framework four feet deep, sixteen feet wide, and up to fifty feet long. Keelboats were long and sharp, drawing little water, with a covered deck about six feet high and a narrow passageway along one side. Eight to twelve oars placed at the bow were only used to descend the river, which enabled the boat to travel two or three miles an hour faster than the current. The ships were allowed to float at night, however, except where navigation was difficult. Poling was used for motivation upstream but made a very tedious journey.5

The same traveler of 1829 noted an establishment of the American Fur Company at the south bend of the St. Joseph River twenty miles below the mouth of the Elkhart where the high, dry plain afforded a handsome and extensive site for a village. By an act of January 29, 1830, St. Joseph County was organized, and all the area west to the Illinois line and south to the Kankakee was attached to it for administrative purposes. At that time, however, only 287 people in the entire region came under the new government.6

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4 “Northern Indiana in 1829,” Indiana Magazine of History (Bloomington, Indiana, 1905– ), III (1907), 84.
5 James Hall, Letters from the West (London, 1828), 323-324.
Martin M. Post, the Presbyterian missionary at Logansport, acknowledged this legislative act the next spring and was pleased with the clear springs and crystal lakes that abounded along the river. The fertile, healthy woods and prairie land along the lake were rapidly filling with emigrants. A correspondent of the Indianapolis Journal in an article on November 30, 1830, expressed the belief that within the next few years the incipient town would become one of the most important north of Indianapolis. Although his time limit was too short, the opinion was correct. In common with other frontier regions the prevalence of deer and other game was likewise happily observed.

By the spring of 1831 regular keelboat service for general freighting was initiated on the St. Joseph, and a bottle of whisky was smashed over the first boat's bow in the best nautical tradition. The number of keelboats and arks increased rapidly in the thirties as the possibilities for connections with the Great Lakes and eastern markets were realized. Along the ninety-six-mile trip from the mouth of the Elkhart River to St. Joseph, Michigan, towns like Elkhart, Mishawaka, South Bend, and Niles were given considerable impetus by the resultant traffic.

With the exception of the Wabash, the St. Joseph and Elkhart rivers bore the heaviest travel of all northern Indiana streams. Cargoes of surplus pork, flour, and corn in the form of whisky were shipped to Buffalo and other eastern mar-

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7 Martin M. Post to Absalom Peters, Logansport, May 24, 1830, in American Home Missionary Society Manuscripts photostats (hereafter referred to as A.H.M.S. MSS photostats) in Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana.


9 Of great importance in this connection was the Erie Canal connecting Albany on the Hudson River and Buffalo on Lake Erie. Construction of the 363 mile long channel was completed in 1825. Without the canal "the settlement of the Old Northwest, north of the line of the National Road, would... have been... so greatly retarded... that the War for Southern Independence might have terminated otherwise than it did." Edward Channing. A History of the United States (6 vols., New York, 1900-1924), V (1922), 11-16. On the New York canals, see Noble E. Whitford. History of the Canal System of... New York (2 vols., Albany, New York, 1906). The Canal's influence on the Old Northwest is carefully set forth in A. L. Kohlmeier. The Old Northwest as the Keystone of the Arch of American Federal Union (Bloomington, Indiana, 1938).

10 Anthony Deahl, A Twentieth Century History and Biographical Record of Elkhart County, Indiana (Chicago, 1905), 194-195.
kets by way of the former waterway and the Great Lakes. Besides farm produce, iron ore was shipped to Mishawaka from west of Bristol where a stove factory and foundry were in operation. At Elkhart on the St. Joseph a ferryman paid four dollars a year for his permit from the board of justices which stipulated that he had to supply safe boats forty feet long. He was allowed to charge the following rates: a wagon and six horses or three yoke of oxen, 75¢; a wagon and four horses or two yoke of oxen, 62½¢; a wagon and three horses or three oxen, 50¢; a wagon and two horses or one yoke of oxen, 37½¢; a wagon and one horse or one ox, 25¢; horse and rider, 12½¢; a footman or single horse, 6½¢; cattle 4¢ a head; and hogs and sheep 1¢ a head.\textsuperscript{11}

At least partly as a result of such nascent river activity the St. Joseph country by 1831 had begun to attract emigrants particularly from southern Indiana and central and southwestern Ohio, although the trip necessitated a journey of two hundred to two hundred and fifty miles under difficult conditions. Heavily timbered areas and swamp lands were intersected by narrow roads, which were nearly impassable in wet weather. Cold and snow during the winter of 1830-1831 accentuated the problem of obtaining provisions for men and livestock. There was not a house between beautiful Harris Prairie and South Bend in June, 1831. In fact, only five log houses, a tannery, an Indian store, and Alexis Coquillard's\textsuperscript{12} trading post and cabins on the river bank were seen in the town. Except for six other cabins outside the town plat, the southern half of the county was unbroken forest.\textsuperscript{13}


\textsuperscript{12} Coquillard came to South Bend as early as 1824, after employment as a fur trader by the Astor interests. He is credited with founding and naming South Bend and was influential in the town's early history. In 1854 he undertook the removal of Potawatomie Indians from northern Indiana and southern Michigan to Kansas. Jacob P. Dunn, \textit{Memorial and Genealogical Record of Representative Citizens of Indiana} (Indianapolis, 1914), 698.

\textsuperscript{13} Chapman, \textit{History of St. Joseph County}, 609-611.
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printed on a hand press and inked by two buckskin balls stuffed with wool. The fledgling editor’s companion, Jacob Hardman, the first physician in the county, came from Springfield, Ohio. He estimated that there were 163 people in the village proper when he arrived.\textsuperscript{14}

Settlement was slower to fan out south of land contiguous to the river, and not until 1833, was the first hewn-log house built in Clay Township. Of better than average quality, it boasted a hardwood floor of matched oak, a brick chimney, and pine shingle roof. A garret used as a storage space or extra bedroom and one large room below with a spacious fireplace and cellar completed its facilities.\textsuperscript{15}

In the fall of 1832 the first settlers came into future Greene Township after an advance party had plowed their land and planted crops in the spring. On September 2, the main group of twelve wagons, sixty people, and a large quantity of livestock left Xenia, Ohio. Passing over increasingly poor roads through Dayton, Fort Wayne, Goshen, and Elkhart to South Bend, the settlers considered the latter place only a little Indian trading post of a few log cabins among the oaks. The colony built on Sumption Prairie and brought in more supplies from Ohio in the spring of 1833.\textsuperscript{16}

At the same time other travelers barely noticed the small village at the south bend, and concentrated on the verdant scenery in the vicinity. Nevertheless, by 1833 a guidebook which was anxious to present South Bend in the best light stressed its location on a beautiful black oak barren about forty feet above high water. Twenty brick and frame houses and two hundred inhabitants, including two physicians, two lawyers, and a number of mechanics, were claimed for the town. It also contained three taverns, three mercantile stores, and a printing office which published a weekly paper.\textsuperscript{17}

By the early thirties the town was attracting notice as far south as Delphi where James Crawford, the Presbyterian missionary, echoed an earlier lament of his co-worker at Fort Wayne that no preacher of their sect was active in the vicinity.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 519-520, 512, 571.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 515; Timothy E. Howard, A History of St. Joseph County, Indiana (2 vols., Chicago, 1907), I, 146-147.
\textsuperscript{16} Howard, History of St. Joseph County, I, 141-144.
\textsuperscript{17} Scott, The Indiana Gazetteer, 162. The newspaper referred to was the St Joseph Beacon, a weekly which first appeared on May 23, 1832.
In fact, a South Bend merchant was the only member in December, 1832. Although the town could boast a good uncovered brick courthouse about forty feet square, there was no building expressly for public worship.18

Crawford’s cohort at Logansport expressed similar sentiment but stressed the health, beauty, and soil fertility in the area. Both were convinced that by prompt action and with sufficient encouragement the area could become an important section of the church in a short time. In every respect it was a “field white for the harvest.”19

Settlement was sporadic and irregular away from the river, and grasscovered expanses between Terre Coupée and Portage prairies contained few families in 1833. A settler passing through in October was more impressed by burr oak groves thirty to forty feet high than by the “few houses” in the town. Another traveler the same year, however, who viewed the courthouse and nearby log cabins and tavern, considered the place to be of considerable importance.20

By the end of 1833 settlers buzzed with excitement over reports that the following season a steamboat would ply between St. Joseph, Michigan, at the mouth of the river, and South Bend. The exciting prospects encouraged hopes that New York visitors would come to the latter town by rail and steamer in a few days. Moreover, Delmonico’s and other New York restaurants could then serve the fish and game delicacies of the Midwest.21 Within seven months these hopes were partially fulfilled when a small steamer plied once or twice a week from the mouth of the St. Joseph past South Bend. The river was found to be 280 feet wide at Bertrand, Michigan, by George Evans, a Quaker missionary, who crossed it in 1839. He called it a “considerable” stream “the water being deep” which afforded good steamboat navigation.22

18 James Chute to Absalom Peters, Fort Wayne, June 13, 1832; James Crawford to Absalom Peters, Delphi, December 12, 1832, A.H.M.S. MSS photostats.
19 James Carnahan to Absalom Peters, Delphi, February 12, 1833; Martin M. Post to Absalom Peters, Logansport, June 26, 1833, ibid.
20 Chapman, History of St. Joseph County, 510; History of Lake County, Lake County Historical Association Publication (Gary, Indiana, 1929), X, 77; Hugh McCulloch, Men and Manners of Half a Century (New York, 1888), 89.
22 Martin M. Post to Absalom Peters, Logansport, July 3, 1834, A.H.M.S. MSS photostats; George Evans to his Family and Particular
Two years later another observer credited Niles, Michigan, served by steamers from Buffalo and Chicago, with being the head of navigation on the St. Joseph. As indicated above, however, travel actually extended farther east. In fact, by 1847 four steamboats and innumerable keelboats and arks were navigating the stream for 175 miles from St. Joseph to Union City. Particularly in the spring and fall a deeply laden boat of some character was nearly always visible on the "beautiful stream."23

Meanwhile, settlement had been rapid in the spring of 1833, largely because anxiety over the effects of Black Hawk's War had ended. About the same time the iron works diverted John Merrill, a missionary on his way to La Porte, and he urged that South Bend be supplied with a minister at least by the following spring. A Presbyterian church was organized at South Bend in the second quarter of 1834, when there were an estimated five to six hundred people in the town without religious instruction. Post called it one of the most inviting spots in Indiana because of a rapidly increasing population, some very good buildings, and the beautiful healthy location.24

Finally, in the summer of 1835 residents of St. Joseph County welcomed John McConnell, a Presbyterian cleric, who recorded one hundred families at the south bend and predicted the town would soon take its place among the cities of the West. Some prospective settlers, however, were not so enthusiastic, and Jacob Schramm returned to Hancock County in November, 1835, because of sandy soil in the South Bend region. The next June an emigrant from Montgomery County called the town "very small" and observed only a few houses, two or three stores, a small brick courthouse, a log jail, and the American Hotel.25

Another settler later that summer wrote that the Methodists had built a church and secured a minister within the


last six months, and that the town's courthouse was modeled after one in Dayton, Ohio. The multiplicity of election candidates amused him. Estimates of the population varied from seven hundred in the spring of 1837 to fifteen hundred in 1838. By 1840 figures ranged from as low as 728 to 1,200. The latter number seems more probable, and the same source also listed ten lawyers, nine doctors, and nine merchants.26

The fact that some South Bend residents were not averse to making a dishonest dollar came to light about 1837 when a raid disclosed that a cake and beer shop was actually a counterfeiting center fully equipped with a press, dies, copper, and arsenic. Nevertheless, the town's continuing growth necessitated eight inns there in 1840. Enthusiasm was dampened, however, by the widespread effects of illness which incapacitated four-fifths of the population and prostrated entire families, according to one account. Convalescence was slow, some physicians died on the job, wheat and other crops went unharvested, and grass sprouted up in the main streets.27

By 1840 the population of the county had risen to 6,425, and just two years later the county seat was considered important enough for Bishop Stephen T. Badin of Vincennes to make a grant of land near South Bend to the order of Our Lady of Holy Cross on condition that it be used to support a college. On November 16, Father Edward Sorin, who became the school's first president, and seven others began the eleven-day trip from Vincennes of over one hundred miles through snow and piercing wind. A cordial reception and the frozen beauty of the site refreshed them all and inspired anticipation of success with the help of friends in France.28

26 Colton, Indiana Delineated, 36; C. W. Cady, The Indiana Annual Register and Pocket Manual for the Year 1845 (Indianapolis, 1844), 144; Chapman, History of St. Joseph County, 585.


28 Eleventh Census of the United States, Population, I, 18; Edward Sorin to Basil Moreau, rector of Le Mans, France, December 5, 1842, Circular Letters of the Very Rev. Edward Sorin (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1886), 260-261. On October 13, 1841, a small party from the Order of Our Lady of Holy Cross came to St. Peter's, twenty-five miles east of Vincennes, having landed in New York just a few months previously. Those who left for Notre Dame November 16 in addition to Sorin included Fathers Patois and Monsimer and Novices Patrick Connelly, Francis Disser, Pete Tully, Basil O'Neill, and William O'Sull. Typewritten transcript in Notre Dame Archives. Thirteen years later the boys' college at Notre Dame boasted fifty-nine American students, twelve French, six German, and three Belgians. In addition, a manual labor school for boys had thirty pupils. MS dated 1854 in Notre Dame Archives.
An unnamed correspondent writing to the editor of the New York Freeman's Journal, July 5, 1873, praised the courage of the founders of what became Notre Dame University at a time when “the Native American party” was attacking Catholic institutions and adherents. Stopping at the school on Christmas Eve, 1844, before proceeding to Detroit, he noted the small brick schoolhouse and the church whose altar was “a blaze of brilliancy” from which burning incense “filled the house with a blaze of glory and enveloped the altar lights [in] a soft and pleasing aureole.” Although finding a comfortable position in his bed that night was “like looking for the soft side of a deal board,” it was the best the place afforded.29

Meanwhile, on January 14, 1844, South Bend had been incorporated, and a year later an unsuccessful experiment in communal living was made two miles below the town. A joint stock company under the title of Philadelphia Industrial Association operated for nearly two years with about one hundred participants, but not over seventy lived in the colony at one time. Dissatisfaction over land entries was blamed for the society’s failure.30

By 1847 an estimated eighty run of millstones and increasing numbers of iron, wool, and leather manufactories lined the banks of the St. Joseph and its tributaries. Three years later the town’s manufacturing and commercial activity ceased temporarily when the population turned out en masse to see twelve wagons of a typical joint stock company depart on the search for California gold. Captain George Woodsworth, leader of the St. Joseph’s Company, made a series of agreements February 25 and 27, 1850, crediting Notre Dame University with outfitting the gold-hunting expedition. The school sent along Gregory J. Campeau and Michael Dowling as its representatives. Members of the expedition agreed loyally to bind themselves together for two years; to live under the regulations of Notre Dame as nearly as possible; to hold a monthly retreat; to be prompt and perfectly obedient to the captain and lieutenant; to order the secretary to keep an exact account of all receipts and expenditures; to hold mass and confession whenever possible; and to either divide all

29 Typewritten Transcript in Notre Dame Archives from the Catholic Archives of America.
profits after two years or continue work for two more. They also made other provisions relative to religious matters and management of the company’s funds, which included an initial capitalization of $1,450.21

In 1850, South Bend numbered 1,653 inhabitants and the county 10,954. Despite rapid growth, however, the decade closed with a reminder that isolated cabins throughout the county were still surrounded by forest, swamp, and marsh which necessitated extensive clearing and eventual drainage. Although fever and ague remained an annual deterrent to progress, cultivated fields, pastures, fencing, and improved homes were soon the rule. By 1860 the county’s population had risen to 18,455, and estimates for South Bend ranged from 3,832 to 4,013. The latter figure was probably more accurate, and the same source noted thirty stores, six churches, and two Catholic female seminaries in the town.32

Mishawaka, the county’s second most important city, had been laid out eight miles from South Bend by the summer of 1835, and contracts were let for the erection of one hundred homes that season. Late in the summer of 1836, Dr. E. W. H. Ellis, one of thirty emigrants who came through Mishawaka from Brockport, New York, noted that it had only recently dropped the name St. Joseph Iron Works and was becoming quite prosperous. He estimated that there were five hundred people in the town and observed many comfortable homes of “creditable” architecture. Mishawaka shared in the Methodist revivlist activity of 1850, and ten years later boasted 1,486 inhabitants.33

A similar pattern of river transportation influence can be seen on Elkhart County immediately east of St. Joseph. Descriptions of the Elkhart River were fewer than for the St. Joseph between 1830 and 1860. Nevertheless, it was described in 1829 as a fine “boatable stream,” over a horse’s knees in depth, which afforded ample water power in the driest season for all types of machinery. An early settler,

31 MS No. 58, Notre Dame Archives.
John Bowman, was especially pleased with its stock of fish and claimed that a net set at night would trap one hundred pounds of pike, redhorse, and other species by morning.34

The county itself was organized on January 29, 1830, the same time as St. Joseph, and vied with the latter in rapidity of development. Early descriptions were sketchy at best, but they conveyed a typical frontier picture of tough prairie sod that required as many as seven yoke of oxen to plow; meals of corn dodgers, boiled squirrel, and sassafras tea; and cattle roaming over the grasslands. Fever and ague were prevalent in the early thirties, but the county's fine oak timber and abundant game helped to compensate for it. With their tall grass and great variety of multi-hued flowers, prairies bordered by thick woods attracted considerable attention. Dotted with clear lakes heavily stocked with fish and filled with countless birds' nests, they were a hunter's paradise.35

That profuse grass, no matter how beautiful, could become instantly dangerous, however, was graphically proved whenever rising winds fanned a small blaze into a "torrent of flame" which swept the horizon in irresistible splendor. Columns of flame towered skyward surmounted by heavy smoke that nearly obscured the heavens. The deafening noise and magnificent spectacle held one observer fascinated despite his fear.36

Although the town of Elkhart settled rapidly after 1830, it had no Presbyterian minister until July, 1835. Temporal improvements came more quickly, however. Roads in the vicinity were of surprisingly good quality, except in the woods, over which an influx of milling, unorganized settlers poured in confusing array. Yankees, New Yorkers, Englishmen, Pennsylvania Yahoos, German Dunkards, Kentucky Buck-

34 "Northern Indiana in 1829," Indiana Magazine of History, III, 84; F. A. Batty (pub.), Counties of La Grange and Noble, Indiana (Chicago, 1882), part II, 257.
36 Charles C. Chapman (pub.), History of Elkhart County, Indiana (Chicago, 1880), 155-156. Prairie fires did not instill terror in all settlers. Such tales were "vastly amusing" to some. Unless a violent wind prevailed, such fires could easily be beaten out, or if fed by the wind, they could still be safely evaded. Only in the great marshes did typical descriptions of prairie fires have any validity. Herbert A. Kellar (ed.), Solon Robinson, Pioneer and Agriculturist (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1936), I, 118-119. These volumes are XXI-XXII of the Indiana Historical Collections (Indianapolis, 1916- ).
skins, Ohio Buckeyes, Michigan Chegoes, and Illinois Suckers were all represented, each with their peculiar characteristics. By October, 1835, anticipation of an “immense population” was based mainly on the great fertility of the land.

Southern and eastern parts of Elkhart were still un-cleared in the spring of 1838, but there were an estimated three hundred inhabitants, a small flourmill, and one hotel in the town. The schoolhouse was used for both teaching and religious services. Land lots ranged from fifty to three hundred dollars, but the market was dull. Merchants dispensed whisky by the quart, supposedly for medicinal purposes only. About the same time one tailor charged $1 for making pantaloons, $5 for a frock coat, $1.50 for a vest, and $3.50 to $4 for regular coats. On at least one occasion ten pounds of pork valued at 1.25 were credited against a tailoring bill.

Cramped quarters characterized the twelve by fifteen-foot log cabin in which the circuit court met at Goshen, Elkhart County’s other main settlement, in the fall of 1831. A saddler’s shop was housed in the same building, and it was no joke to those with court business that they had to go outside to turn around. The jury was sent to an adjacent grove for consideration of a verdict. Contrarily described as possessing no “considerable population” and as a “flourishing new town” in 1833, Elkhart’s pleasant situation on the border of Elkhart Prairie was agreed upon by all.

Settlers half a mile away in 1834 were struck by the strong Methodist foothold in the area, although the barnlike structure in which they worshiped had no underpinning, and animals often disturbed the services. Not for three more years was the first printing equipment for the Goshen Democrat shipped to Niles by water from Buffalo, then hauled to Goshen by wagon. Because of insufficient support, eighteen months were required to print the first volume of the paper.

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38 Deahl, History of Elkhart County, 158-159; H. S. K. Bartholomew, Stories and Sketches of Elkhart County (Nappanee, Indiana, 1936), 264.

39 Scott, The Indiana Gazetteer, 75-76; Colton, Indiana Delineated, 21; Chapman, History of Elkhart County, 372-373, 886; James Crawford to Martin M. Post, Delphi, December 12, 1832, A.H.M.S. MSS photostats.

40 Bartholomew, Pioneer History of Elkhart County, 217; Deahl, History of Elkhart County, 246.
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By 1840 when the county population had risen to 6,600, Whigs in Goshen put on a big rally during the presidential election campaign. A Johnny cake sixteen feet long was pulled by two yoke of oxen through stump-littered streets and across sidewalks which were only occasional slabs thrown down where the mud was too deep to wade through. Politics came to the foreground again in 1852 when the closing Whig rally filled the square with partisans. Two large flag poles on Main Street bore Scott and Graham and Pierce and King signs.41

Throughout the forties, the menace of wolves and occasional bears in outlying county areas created fear in isolated settlers' homes and necessitated organized hunts. The profusion of deer was a boon to hunters, who sold their hides and meat for a little over three dollars apiece.42

Such practical problems of subduing the wilderness somewhat obscured concentration on the Elkhart River, but in 1842 the opinion was expressed that the river could easily be made navigable for arks and keelboats from its mouth to three miles above Goshen. Numerous arks loaded with flour, high-wines,43 and pork had already sailed from Waterford and Goshen but experienced great difficulty when they encountered dams and bridges. On one day in 1842, a large number of arks laden with twenty-two hundred barrels of flour and nearly one thousand barrels of pork passed through the Mishawaka locks, which had been built several years previously. Goshen merchants with an important stake in such traffic tore up a new bridge in the river which they felt hindered navigation and threatened to remove all obstructions by force if necessary.44

Not until the spring of 1844 was the first steamboat on the river, probably the “Indiana,” welcomed by most of Elkhart’s citizens. Its whistle alarmed the cattle, and the center span of the Main Street bridge had to be removed because of the ship’s smokestack. The “Indiana” and successive boats usually had the engine in the stern and covered or exposed paddle wheels on either side. Although they drew only about eighteen inches when loaded, some of the larger boats could not reach Elkhart. Steamers were towed by three or four

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41 Eleventh Census of the United States, Population, I, 17; Bartholomew, Stories and Sketches of Elkhart County, 37, 68-69, 39-40.
42 Bartholomew, Stories and Sketches of Elkhart County, 10; Chapman, History of Elkhart County, 1130-1131.
43 Distilled spirits containing a high percentage of alcohol.
44 Deahl, History of Elkhart County, 196.
keelboats, but still required the additional help of windlasses on shore in running dangerous riffles or rapids. In April, 1848, for example, an eighty-foot ark carrying a colony to the New Buffalo settlement in Michigan grounded on a sandbar at Elkhart. Shippers generally planned on a three-day trip down the river and four or five upstream.45

In 1850 one guidebook stated that about forty thousand barrels of flour were annually exported from Elkhart County, in the shipment of which the St. Joseph and Elkhart rivers undoubtedly played a large role.46 Expanding river traffic was matched by a correspondingly greater population total that reached 20,986 by 1860, which placed Elkhart County second only to La Porte in north central Indiana.47

That St. Joseph and Elkhart counties entered the sixties with approximately equal populations and the fact that none of the surrounding counties except Kosciusko not served by an important transportation medium matched their totals indicate that available river facilities in the former were a decisive factor. In addition extensive railroad lines by the fifties and the Michigan Road created strong inducements which nearby counties could not match. Moreover, both St. Joseph and Elkhart counties offered a higher percentage of healthy land area than those bordering the Kankakee marshes and the four in the northeastern corner of Indiana. One of the main reasons for example why the Michigan Road was routed through South Bend rather than the length of La Porte County was fear of the Kankakee swamps.

River transportation was not an unmixed blessing, however, to Elkhart and St. Joseph counties. In the first place, extensive water travel was limited to the spring and fall and was impossible at least six months of the year. Secondly, farmers found it necessary to haul their produce and manufactured goods to and from the streams, which meant a struggle over primitive trails and roads. Finally, even during periods of navigability, riffles, sand bars, and sudden storms created hazards which often ended in disaster. These disadvantages gave strong impetus to the creation of better overland routes and ultimately a railroad network which guaranteed fulfillment of the most sanguine hopes for the region's growth.

45 Ibid., 196-197; Hall, Letters from the West, 322.