

## Mr. Mueller and the "Peoples Line"

It was the height of the Steamboat Era on Canandaigua Lake. The steamboats "Canandaigua" (1865 – 1889), piloted by Captain Standish, and "Ontario II" (1867 – 1887), piloted by Captain Cooper, had been doing battle for years, pretty much running the same schedules to the same piers, competing for both the excursion and produce businesses.

This finally ended in March of 1880, when the Canandaigua Lake Steam Navigation Company was formed by some prominent Canandaigua businessmen, including James McKechnie who owned the "Canandaigua", to establish a regulated steamboat schedule on the Lake. They in turn purchased the "Ontario II", eliminating competition. Naturally, fares immediately went up.

In December 1887 the Canandaigua Lake Steam Navigation Co. was reorganized and became the Canandaigua Lake Steamboat Company. The McKechnies were still in control. They made plans for the building of a new steamer to replace the Ontario II, which had burned at the Canandaigua Village Pier, and to supplement the aging Canandaigua.

Alonzo Springstead, prominent steamboat builder from Geneva, was asked to build the new steamer that was needed for the 1888 season. Considered the Canandaigua Lake's "Queen of the Steamboat Era", the "Onnalinda" could carry 600 passengers on Summer Sundays, with another 400 on a boat in tow. Launched on May 18, 1888, and christened by Miss Maud Sayer, a niece of Mr. James McKechnie, it was 142 feet on the keel with a 40 foot beam. It was powered by a 40 pound boiler, had 5 in its crew and had a snack bar.

Then, the Canandaigua Lake Steamboat Company started planning another new boat to further supplement their fleet. And in May of 1889, that construction was begun, again by Mr. Alonzo Springstead. (That boat would become the "Ogarita".)

In the meantime, a group funded with money from grape growers, headed by Captain John McCormack and including George Mueller, being unhappy with the McKechnie run monopoly on the lake, formed their own company, the "Peoples Line" in order to institute a second competing steamboat line. It would be managed by James Menteth. Their new boat built, believe it or not, by Mr. Alonzo Springstead, would become the "Genundewah". 112 feet on the keel (117 feet overall), she was 19 feet on the beam and 32 feet on the deck. With a 150 hp high pressure engine, it was claimed she would reach 16 mph. She carried the same name as the Indian name for Bare Hill. Her nickname was the "Gee-Whiz", reflecting her ornamentation and grace. Later on she was owned by George Mueller, whose son, John, would serve for awhile as pilot. She burned at the height of the competition with Onnalinda on December 8, 1894, the fire being of suspicious origin.

Much of the following was gleaned from an interview with John and Barbara Miller on May 27<sup>th</sup> past.

George Mueller, who would change his name to Miller, emigrated to the United States from a small village in Bavaria, Germany. After moving around a bit, he went to work for Senator Lapham on Long Point, and then for William Foster at Foster's Fruit Farm up on the hill above Shale Rock, where the present Miller's Nursery is located. He was married to Lena Miller, also from Germany, who died in 1887, leaving George with two children, John and George Miller, Jr.

In 1874, he purchased a farm on Bopple Hill and began planting peach trees. Within a few years, his interest shifted to grapes, and he became one of the pioneers in the grape industry. By the early 1880's he was deeply involved in the grape industry and began replacing his peach trees with vineyards.

Originally George was packing and shipping fresh grapes from his grape packing house (which became the family cottage) on Miller's Landing. And prices were good. But as more growers entered the market, prices began to drop such that the value of the grapes was less than the cost of shipping them by steamboat to the Village Pier.

In 1885, George built the stone wine cellar that still exists on Miller's Landing. The stone walls are 3 feet thick. In its heyday, a railroad track with a hand cart ran from the wine cellar to the end of the dock to facilitate loading of the wine barrels.

The shift from the fresh fruit to the wine business was to protect the value of his grapes. George continued to pack some fresh fruit through the early 1900's, but was in the wine business to stay until the Prohibition of 1918.

Although George's initial interest in the steamboats came from a desire to keep competitive freight prices for his fruit and wine business, he also enjoyed being host to many visitors to his wine cellar. George had built a covered dance pavillion and a picnic grounds near the cottage. Many companies in Rochester had summer picnics on Miller's Landing. George could easily arrange trips to the landing on the Genundewah, sell some wine and make a nice profit.

Even in the those early days of the wine business, George's sales were primarily mail-order. "He published a catalog about the size of a postcard, 12 pages in length. Prices were reasonable compared to today's costs, a short quart or fifth was 80¢, a case of short quarts would cost \$3.60 and he gave a 5% discount for cash. You could also have the wine put in your own containers at a still larger savings (75¢ per gallon). He did win some awards for the wines including a silver medal at the St. Louis Exposition in 1904, a bronze medal at the Columbia Exposition 1893, and the Pan American Exposition in 1901." (John Miller, May, 2014)

In 1936, George's grandson (J. E. "Ed" Miller) started J. E. Miller Nurseries, a highly successful business that sold in October of 2013 to Stark Bros. of Missouri. After 77 years Miller Nurseries was the last, free-standing family business of its kind remaining in the United States.