

“THE ALLEGHENY RIVER, VERONA’S WESTERN SHORE”

By Frank W. Santucci

Rivers have served as symbols for the flow of life. Native Americans worshipped our American rivers establishing their encampments next to the shores of the streams. Of all the rivers in the United States, the Allegheny River has given birth to America’s legacy of freedom and industry. This river grew and, at times, declined with industry paralleling the history of the United States.

The Allegheny River is named for Native American Tribes, the Allegewi, Lenape and Iroquois who lived on the banks of this great body of water. Northern tribes, the Shawnee and Delaware, also used the river to travel to the Ohio River basin.

In 1749, a Frenchman named Celoran, an explorer for the French government, canoed down the Allegheny from French Creek in Venango County passing through Verona heading towards the Point at Pittsburgh. It is noted, in 1753 George Washington, as a British representative travelled up the Allegheny River past Verona heading toward French Creek with the intention of warning the French to remove their ambition of claiming the land the British had initially claimed.

This great giver has its beginning in Colesburg, Potter County, PA in a place called the “Triple Divide.” This Triple Divide forms the headwaters of three streams, the Potomac River, the Allegheny and one unnamed to Newfoundland.

The Allegheny River meanders north out of Pennsylvania into Olean and Salamanca in New York State then back into Pennsylvania at Webbs Ferry. From a little spring in Potter County to the Point in Pittsburgh, this powerful force travels approximately 325 miles.

In the past 200 years, just imagine what history and events this body of water has experienced running down to Pittsburgh toward the mighty Ohio River.

As the waters pass into Pennsylvania, small waves open up to enjoy the riverbanks of Cooks Forest. The different natural hues of green provide a spectacular background carpet, not aware of the journey that will take it to the artificial lights of Pittsburgh. It will pass and view 105 bridges from a position only it can enjoy. On its journey it is joined by many brother and sister tributaries; French Creek, Kiski River, and other smaller creeks, most notable to Verona is Plum Creek entering from the East. Verona lays claim to less than a mile of this Allegheny River.

At the bottom of Grant Street, a ferry, owned by the Ecker family, was built extending across to the opposite shore to Montrose in Blawnox. Near the entrance of Plum Creek, Mr. Brintell Robbins’ ship building business, thrived making flat boats used to transport goods to Pittsburgh in the 1800’s. During the War of 1812 the United States Government commissioned him to build flat boats needed to transport troops to Canada.

In 1908 a Verona inventor, John Kowalsky, built a motor boat that proved to be too powerful for other boaters causing it to be banned from the Allegheny River. He also invented an airplane that required water pontoons to provide a long enough runway needed for its takeoff.

Enticed by beautiful scenic banks, many organizations built boat and canoe club recreational buildings in the Verona area. Most notable - the Veronians SNPJ Club, the Pittsburgh Police Club, the Duquesne Club, the Sylvan Club, and the Algonquin Club. Today many organizations remain active, although in the 1980's the Veronians building was destroyed by a disastrous fire.

In 1899 after the Johnstown Flood, the banks of the Allegheny River in Verona produced a national story. As the Conemaugh River flooded into the Kiski River, the debris of the Johnstown flood reached the Allegheny heading towards Pittsburgh. The Verona townspeople would go to the banks of the river to retrieve whatever remnants they could. One such day produced a crib and to the amazement of the man who rescued the crib, therein a baby was discovered alive and well. Mr. Fletcher, the finder and a Verona store owner, immediately placed the baby on display in the front window of his establishment charging the towns people to view his discovery. Thousands of people around the area crowded Verona for weeks. This became a national story and when news of this find reached Johnstown, a woman from that area, came to claim this child as hers, identifying the baby by a birth mark. In a matter of hours, mother and daughter left our small town with much fanfare.

This river that arrives each morning and rushes past during the day, leaves us with some meaningful memories. It should be angry because of all the abuse and pollution river towns heap into her; the oil, winter salt, old furniture and at times automobiles find their way to the bottom. So abused, anger has made this pristine water of the north leaves us but returns each morning.

Verona found itself in the 1800's and early 1900's saluting to grand steam boats that would generate large waves slapping the banks. Young boys, and at times some adventurous girls, would swim out and ride the waves to shore. A dangerous pastime, but no known mishaps were ever recorded.

Each morning the river winks at Verona then becomes its fickle self, leaving us to entertain other small river towns; Aspinwall, Sharpsburg, Etna, and Millvale. After 300 plus miles to the Point, the Allegheny marries the Monongahela forming the Ohio River.

Today, Verona has a park on its short river bank and three marina docks that service large pleasure boats.

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