

# St. Joseph River is 'Sauk-Wauk-Silbuck' to Indians

To the Pottawatomie Indians, the St. Joseph River was "Sauk-Wauk-Silbuck".

When the Indians were the only inhabitants of what

came to be known of as the Niles area, the river provided food, a quick and easy means of transportation...and some of their legends.

One of the legends was reported by Ralph Ballard in his book, "Tales of Early Niles". He told of the legend in which two beautiful Indian girls were

one day seen by the river spirit.

The spirit was so enamored he claimed the girls for his own. The pair was found drowned. Since then, the Indians have claimed that the river spirit has taken two victims a year by drowning.

An early explorer in 1718 called the St. Joseph River valley "the best adapted of any to be seen, for the

purpose of living."

Explorer LaSalle called the river the Miami after Indians he found there then.

Down through the years the St. Joseph River has spawned a rich tradition of history along its 175 mile course that begins in Baw Beese Lake in Hillsdale County and ends at Lake Michigan at St. Joseph.

The first explorers here used the river as one of

their main travel routes because near the present South Bend the river is only four miles from the Kankakee River which leads to the great Mississippi River and the mid-continent of the nation.

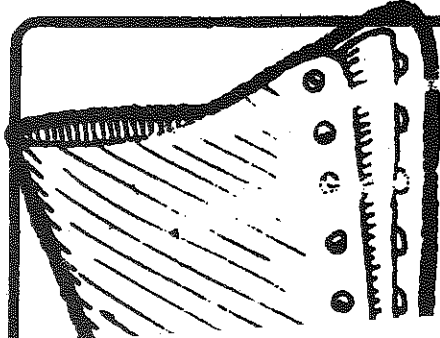
Flatboats used to ply the river from Lake Michigan all the way to the town of Three Rivers, carrying commerce up and down the river for pioneers.

Steamboats carried commerce on the river until the 1850's when the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad took their business away because they were so much faster.

Even so, excursion boats such as the famed May Graham carried tourists along the river between St. Joseph and Berrien Springs around the turn of the century.

Rum-runners also used steamboats on the old St. Joe. There is a legend that a boat loaded with kegs of whiskey sank near the Somerleyton bridge near Benton Harbor in 1830.

These days the St. Joseph River is no longer considered important as a river of commerce but it does provide a lot of pleasure for boaters, anglers and people who just like to look at it.



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