Ferry will make last trip over Lake Charles

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After nearly 28 years of continuous service the ferryboat Hazel will make its last trip over Lake Charles tomorrow evening.

When the whistle blows at the Westlake side at 6:45 o'clock it will be for the last time, so far as Lake Charles people are concerned.

The boat will then be put on the ways for repairing, and about the tenth of the month will leave for Baton Rouge, where it is to be placed in service on the Mississippi river.

The trip will be made down the Calcasieu river to the pass thence to the Southwest Pass of the Atchafalaya, and up that stream to the Mississippi.

Captain Fred Wehrt will pilot the steamer on its trip, and will be assisted by Captain Frank Ford and Captain G. Ed Wehrt.

The elder Wehrt, and Captain Ford are familiar with every foot of coast line between the Calcasieu and Atchafalaya rivers, both of them having spent years in navigating the waters of the gulf.

Barge Service

Monday morning the launch Olympia and a barge will be put in service on the lake. The boat will leave this side in the morning at 6 o'clock, and on the even hours after that up to 6 o'clock in the evening.

It will leave Westlake on the odd hours, and on the final trip at 6:30 o'clock in the evening.

This schedule will be maintained until the opening of the new bridge, after which the Olympia will run without the barge.

Captain Fred Wehrt, for more than twenty years pilot of the Hazel and a widely known schooner captain of the Louisiana gulf coast, was born at Cuxhaven, Germany, in 1842.

He came to this country just before the outbreak of the war, and engaged in the conflict on the southern side.

When Farragut battered his way into Mobile Bay, Captain Wehrt was operating a salt making plant on Dauphin Island, at the lower entrance of the bay, and this plant was wrecked by the Federals.

The salt was opened by boiling sea water in open kettles, and sold for $1 a pound, Confederate money. As it required several thousand dollars to purchase an article so common as an overcoat in those days, Captain Wehrt did not retire from the business with any considerable fortune.

After the war Captain Wehrt purchased a schooner and engaged in the coastwise trade up to Lake Charles. He followed the sea for about nine years, when he located at Westlake becoming a stockholder in the Lock-Moore Lumber company, then known as the Lock, Moore, Ryan and Wehrt Lumber company.

Early Families

When Captain Wehrt first came to Lake Charles there were only about a half dozen families residing around the shore of the lake.

Among the early settlers were Joe Charles, Charley Barbe, Michel Pithon, first president of the Calcasieu parish police jury away back in 1840, Miguel Rosteet, the pioneer merchant; Paul Gascon, who conducted a store on what is the Landry corner, at Broad and Ryan streets; and Captain Ben Jones.

Among the historic occurrences that Captain Wehrt remembers was the moving of the court house from Marion, up the river, to Lake Charles, an ox team being employed for the purpose.

In 1888 Captain Wehrt retired from the lumber business, and commenced operating the Hazel, which had been built by A. O. Hermanson.

The initial trip was made on June 10, 1888, and the boat has been operated continuously since that time.

The following data concerning the ferry service over the Lake has been furnished by Captain Ed Wehrt, the last owner of the boat:

First ferry operated from Sunday April 23, 1907

Lake Charles American Press
1878 to 1884, was the “Nettle,” owned by H. C. Drew and others, and run by Captain Ed Nichols. The Nettle burned to the water's edge, and was never rebuilt.

The Little Minnie, owned by the Kauagh brothers, operated for two years succeeding, and then came the Evangeline, owned and operated by Captain Carey, which ran until 1888 when the Hazel was put in operation.

225,000 Times

Since 1888 the Hazel has crossed the lake over 225,000 times and carried more than 2,500,000 passengers. It has covered 450,000 miles, or a distance equal to nearly twenty times around the world.

The boat has consumed fully 100,000 cords of pine wood, that cost the owners $100,000, and has paid out $300,000 more in wages.

The Hazel has figured in only two suits, and they were injunctions proceedings to protect the franchise.

It has figured in one collision in 28 years, having crashed into the Romeo once in a fog, neither boat was damaged by the accident. Not a single individual has been hurt through carelessness on the boat.

Although the present ferry franchise covers the west side of the river for a distance of two miles above and below the landing, and does not expire until 1917, the owners of the boat offered no opposition to the construction of the Calcasieu river bridge, and prior to that time to the operation of the free Hortman's ferry, although both are within the two-mile limit.

Lake Charles people will miss the Hazel. For many of them the sound of the Hazel's whistle has been a harbinger of early morning. The end of a chapter has come, and the Hazel will forever be a memory.