

By: Staff 05/20/2021 1:00 pm

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The return of the Old Badger: 'The First of the Mohican'



First published in The Freeman's Journal on March 24, 1976:

"If at first you don't succeed," must have been mouthed by many Cooperstonians as they left the lakefront without having witnessed the scheduled launching of the Mohican. They did try again, and on the 4th of July, 1905, the good ship Mohican began its long career on Otsego Lake. The following reports from the Freeman's Journal of that year tell the story:

June 29th 1905:

"Miss Marie Anheuser Busch to Christen Boat Thursday."

"Thursday afternoon at 4 o'clock the new boat Mohican of the Otsego Lake Transit Co. will take her initial dip in the waters of Otsego Lake. As soon as the boat is free to move, Miss Marie Anheuser-Busch, daughter of August A. Busch and granddaughter of Adolphus Busch, will christen it with champagne and the words, "I christen thee Mohican." The public is cordially invited to witness the ceremony, which will take place at the Corporation dock."

July 6, 1905:

"Large Steamer in Otsego Lake has Carrying Capacity of Four Hundred – Made her Initial Trip July 4th."

"The Mohican is Launched – at about 1:40 on Saturday afternoon in response to the persuasion of a couple of jack screws placed against the bearings on either side, the big boat slid gracefully down the ways and kissed the waters of Otsego Lake. There was a high splash and the craft rode out jauntily about 50 feet, bringing taught the line, with which it was tied to its mooring at the Cooperstown Wharf. As it moved toward the water, Miss Osborne, daughter of the builder, broke a bottle of wine on the bow and spoke the words, "I christen thee Mohican."

"Welcomed by every patron of Otsego Lake, the big excursion steamer seemed reluctant to take her first dip. The launching had been advertised to occur at 4 o'clock on Thursday, and at that hour the Lakeside was thronged. It was the first real nice day in several and the village folks and summer boarders were out in glad array. In the bow of the boat, Marie Anheuser-Busch, a winsome lass of about 12 summers, the daughter of August A. Busch and granddaughter of Adolphus Busch, who recently purchased the beautiful estate adjoining Three Mile Point, held the bottle of wine in readiness to christen the Mohican.

Miss Busch, who is a remarkably pretty little lass of the brunette type, wore a cool white dress, with hat, shoes and stockings to match. Her hat was trimmed with daisies. In the boat also were about 75 other persons, including members of the Busch family, village trustees, editors, clergymen and whatnot with their wives and families. The band was there, assisting with all its might to make the occasion a successful and enjoyable one. Even the village popcorn stand was not absent.

“For two hours every known device was utilized to get the Steamboat to slide down the ways, but all to no purpose. She refused to budge! The band played “Slide, Kelly, Slide,” “Under the “Anheuser-Busch” and, finally, “We Won’t Go Home Until Morning.” At 6:00 o’clock the crowd began to thin out, and just after the town clock had struck the supper hour, the ladies and their escorts began descending the flimsy ladder by which they had gained the deck of the craft two hours before. “The Otsego Farmer,” containing the full account of the launching, was being recalled from the local post office.

“On Friday, the ways were given a more acute slant and grease anew, so the effort on Saturday succeeded. It did not take place, however, until several hours after the time set.

“The Mohican makes a fine appearance in the water. She is a double deck steamer, 80 feet long and 19 feet wide. She will be lighted by electricity and have all the modern sanitary conveniences. A searchlight will be operated from the upper deck. The Steamboat inspectors were here Friday and gave her a carrying capacity of 400. Her speed is about 12 miles an hour. Her cost was between \$7,000. and \$8,000.

“The Mohican made a trial trip on Monday and on the 14th made two excursion trips, carrying nearly 200 each time. Owner and passengers alike were greatly pleased with her. After some further painting she will make three trips around the Lake each week day unless transferred to special excursion service, when she will be replaced in the regular trip by another boat.

“The Mabel Coburn and Pathfinder, the other two steamers of the Otsego Lake Transit Co., are licensed to carry 95 and 90 passengers.”

“Otsego Lake has needed an adequate excursion boat ever since the old Natty Bumpo went out of service five or six years ago. The old Natty was 90-foot keel, ten feet longer than the Mohican. She was a side wheeler, slow and cumbersome, but for 30 years she was the only large excursion boat. Her carrying capacity was not as great as the Mohican, although the system of steamboat inspection was not then so rigid as now. The Natty Bumpo was launched July 4, 1871. One year later, July 11, 1872 she burned to the water’s edge. After being rebuilt, she was again launched in November 1872.

“The first steamboat on Otsego Lake was the Mary Boden, launched by Capt. D.B. Boden in 1869.”

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