

DAYS OF WOODEN SHIPS WOOD SHIPBUILDING IN VERMILION

Location: Marker is on Liberty Avenue (U.S. 6) west of Grand Street, on the right when traveling west. It is at Friendship Park which is on the grounds of the public library. 5680 Liberty Ave, Vermilion OH 44089.



Photographed By J. J. Prats,

Inscription.

Wooden shipbuilding thrived in sheds and shops that dotted the banks of the Vermilion River. Starting in early 1800s they turned out countless vessels that served a number of maritime industries; schooners used for fishing and carrying cargo; sloops sailed for recreation; scows used for hauling freight; and steamers and fish tugs that kept pace with commercial activity on the Great Lakes. A large number of skilled workers were needed along with supporting industries such as lumber mills, sail makers, engine manufacturers, and railroads.

Vermilion's earliest settlers, were the founders of local shipbuilding legacies. Parsons is credited with building the first schooner in Vermilion in 1814. He christened it *Vermillion* (36 tons). In 1816 Austin launched the *Friendship* (59 tons), the namesake for this park. Two additional vessels, the schooner *William* (32 tons) and sloop *Fairplay* (32 tons), were also built on the river.

1810s: Solomon Parsons and Captain William Austin, two of

1820s: Augustus Jones was another pioneer shipbuilder on the Great Lakes, building *Eclipse* (58 tons). Fairbanks Church from Huron came to Vermilion to build *Lady of the Lakes*, *Fox* (16 tons), and *Franklin* (21 tons).

Photographed By J. J. Prats,
February 14, 2020



This marker is on the left. Public library windows face the park.

1830s: Only two vessels were built during this period: the schooner *Louisa Judson* (16 tons) and the steamer *Vermilion* (385 tons).

1840s-1850s: *Vermilion* hit her stride in shipbuilding during this decade. No fewer than 26 vessels were launched, including 22 schooners, 3 sloops, and a scow. The size of the boats also increased from the 200-300 ton range to the largest being *Queen City* (368 tons).

1840s-1850s: *Vermilion* hit her stride in shipbuilding during this decade. No fewer than 26 vessels were launched, including 22

1860s: The pace of building slowed to about one or two boats a year. In all, 18 vessels including 12 schooners, two scows, a barge, the first tugs, and a canal boat were built. The largest was the *Negaunee*, an impressive 195 feet long, 12-foot depth and an amazing 640 tons.

1870s: The number of boats being built was in decline. Essentially, schooners were launched at a rate of one a year. However, they continued to increase in size.

1880s: Shipbuilding began to shift from schooners to bulk steamers and tugs or towboats designed to assist sailing vessels in restricted waters, and perform general work. All had wooden hulls and steam powered engines.

1890s: The *William Stone* (183 tons) was the last schooner to be launched in Vermilion. Built by Belford P. Crosier, it was one of the last commercial sailing vessels built on the Great Lakes. Smaller builders in Vermilion had already switched to steam powered fish tugs and towboats including the *Daisy* (18 tons) and *Edward K.* (44 tons).

1900s: Four wooden steam tugs were built as well as the first gas powered tug, the *Chas. A. Trinter* (88 tons).

1910s: Six steam and gas powered tugs were built reflecting the slowing pace of wooden shipbuilding.

1920s: Two tugs, the *Merle I.* and the *Ray F.* a sand dredger, and a passenger vessel were built. It became apparent that the new building material of choice would be steel over wood.

1930s: In 1935, Earl S. Miniger built the tug *Martha M.* (11 tons).

Today: In the 21st Century the legacy of wooden boatbuilding lives on in Vermilion. John K. Riddle of Riddle Boatworks continues the tradition of custom wood boatbuilding, restoring, and repairing wooden vessels since 1984. Moes Marine Service, founded on the Vermilion River in 1938 by Julius Moes, is a three generation family-owned and operated full-service marina, specializing in wooden boat repair, restoration, and refit.

Information taken from: <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=149306>