

WHERE THREE RIVERS MEET

YOUR GUIDE TO THE HISTORICAL PORT OF LA CROSSE

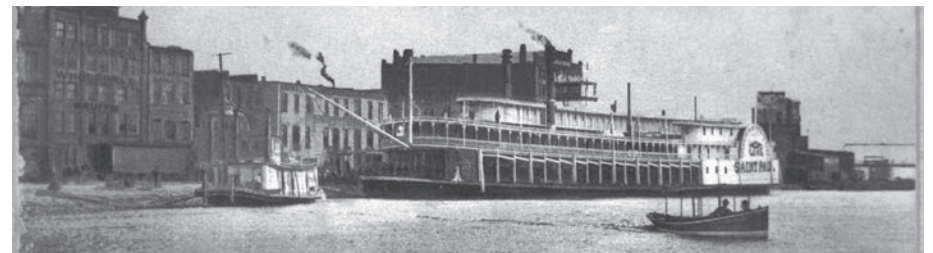


HISTORY OF LA CROSSE, WI

The La Crosse area is part of what's known as the driftless region, one of the few remnants of ancient landscapes left unscathed by many millennia of glacial migration. Situated between tall bluffs and the Mighty Mississippi River, the area was once home to countless generations of Native Americans including the Ho-Chunk, Ojibwe, and Sioux nations.

In 1805 Lt. Zebulon Pike named the area "Prairie La Crosse" while on an expedition up the Mississippi River. As the story goes, the explorers witnessed a game similar to the French game of lacrosse as they passed by. However, it wasn't until 1841 that a 19-year-old fur trapper named Nathan Myrick moved to Prairie La Crosse and established a trading post near the confluence of the Mississippi, Black, and La Crosse Rivers. A small settlement developed shortly after that.

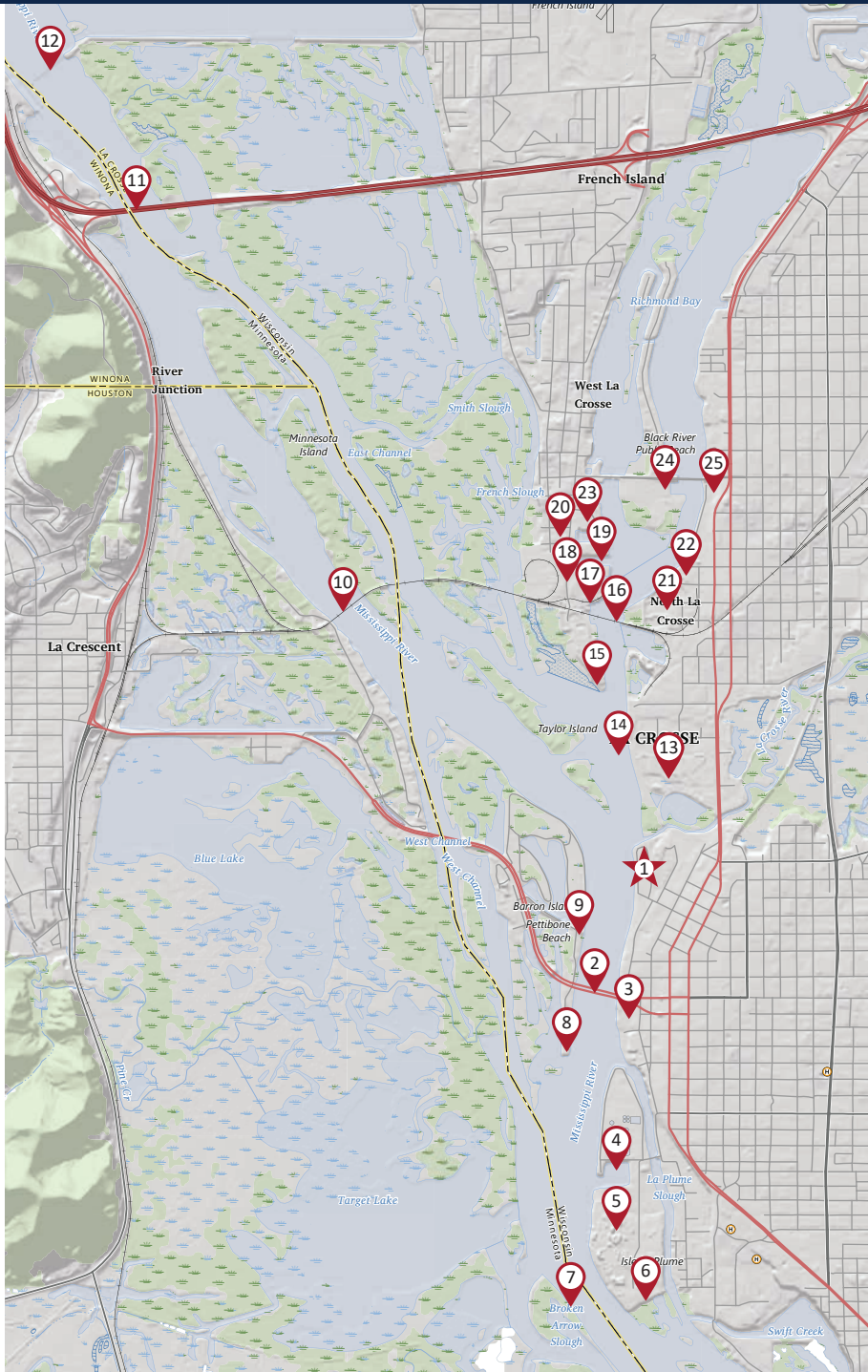
La Crosse quickly grew into a hub for the lumber and brewing industries, and by 1856 it incorporated as a city of 2,000 residents. As the town soon became the largest city on the west coast of Wisconsin, steamboats flocked to the shorelines, followed by the railroads in 1858. Today, La Crosse remains a critical economic and educational hub for the surrounding area. It is home to three universities and colleges, two world-class health organizations, and several growing businesses. Often labeled as one of America's best-kept secrets, the area has become a mecca for wildlife and outdoor enthusiasts.



Black and white photographs of the La Crosse waterfront taken in 1910 prior to building Riverside Park, courtesy of Murphy Library at the University of Wisconsin—La Crosse
Map from Library of Congress, Title: La Crosse, Wis., county seat of La Crosse County 1887, Created/ Published, Milwaukee, H. Wellge [1887]

PORT OF LA CROSSE

The Mississippi River is still central to life in La Crosse. Commercially, La Crosse is the largest port in Western Wisconsin, with over 1 million tons of grain, cement, pig iron, salt, and fertilizer handled here every year. It is also in the heart of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, a 261 mile-long corridor that boasts some of the finest fishing, hunting, and recreational boating in the country.



NOTABLE POINTS OF INTEREST:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Riverside Park | 14. War Eagle |
| 2. Cass/Cameron Bridge | 15. Xcel Energy French Island Generating Station |
| 3. LafargeHolcim Cement | 16. Black River Lift Bridge |
| 4. La Crosse Municipal Harbor | 17. F. J. Robers Company |
| 5. Hanke Terminal | 18. Cargill |
| 6. Isle La Plume | 19. J.F. Brennan Company |
| 7. Herold E. Craig Fleet | 20. Brennan Marine, Inc. |
| 8. Pettibone Boat Club and Marina | 21. Midwest Industrial Asphalt |
| 9. Pettibone Park & Beach | 22. Hydrite Chemical Co. |
| 10. The La Crosse Rail Bridge | 23. American Marine Marina |
| 11. Dresbach Bridge | 24. Veterans Point Marina |
| 12. Lock & Dam No. 7 | 25. Copeland Park |
| 13. River Point District | |

What is pig iron?

“The term ‘pig iron’ dates back to the time when hot metal was cast into ingots before being charged to the steel plant. The moulds were laid out in sand beds such that they could be fed from a common runner. The group of molds resembled a litter of sucking pigs, the ingots being called ‘pigs’ and the runner the ‘sow.’”
www.metallics.org/pig-iron



1. Riverside Park

This is where it all began. The park's north side is located at the confluence of the Mississippi, Black, and La Crosse Rivers and is the site where all those years ago, Zebulon Pike witnessed the game that eventually gave the city its name. The Charmant Hotel, located along Front Street behind Riverside Park, is where Nathan Myrick built his fur trading post. There is still a small patch of land in front of the Charmant called Spence Park. Before 1891, when the first Mississippi River bridge crossing was built in La Crosse, this area functioned as the ferry landing.

During the latter half of the 19th century, steamboats lined up along Front Street while cargo was transferred to and from warehouses and rail cars. As the city grew and steamboats slipped into the history books, the town hired famed landscape architect John Nolen to design a waterfront park that would become the crown jewel of La Crosse.



River Rats Ahoy!

The La Crosse Queen is a fixture for the north end of Riverside Park. It is a great way to see the river while enjoying refreshments and snacks. The gift shop was once the pride and joy of a local club called the "River Rats". Brennan founder, Jim Brennan, used to push this barge around with his houseboat, the JA-DO, during the 1960s and early 1970s. If only those hulls could talk!



The River Rat barge at Jim Brennan's dock in 1969.

2. Cass/Cameron Bridge

La Crosse's first bridge across the Mississippi River opened in 1891. This early swing span structure was built for horse carriages and early automobiles and could swing open to allow steamboats to navigate through a narrow pass. Unfortunately, after forty years, a tragic car accident led to the collapse of one of the spans and the decision to build a more modern replacement.

The steel truss bridge is known as the Cass Street bridge and opened in 1940, five years after the original swing span structure collapsed. Known locally as the "Blue Bridge" this monstrous structure carried east and west-bound traffic between Wisconsin and Minnesota for many decades without hindering river traffic of any size.

In 2005 a second bridge was added downstream. The Cameron Avenue Bridge's 87 foot-tall arch structure was designed to complement its older counterpart. Together these structures have come to symbolize the City of La Crosse.

LA CROSSE WISCONSIN

Look for the old approaches!

If you look closely at the western river bank. Just upstream of Pettibone Beach, you can see the west approach of the original horse and buggy bridge that collapsed that fateful August night of 1935.



3. LafargeHolcim Cement

The three large white silos are owned by LafargeHolcim and are a critical part of the local construction economy. Barges bring cement upriver, either from manufacturing facilities at Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, or imported through Lower Mississippi River ports from ocean freighters. This cement is distributed throughout the region, mixed with aggregate to make concrete, and turned into roads, houses, and more. The silos can hold nearly 12,000 tons of cement, enough to build over 3 miles of highway!



Welcome to the Marine Highway

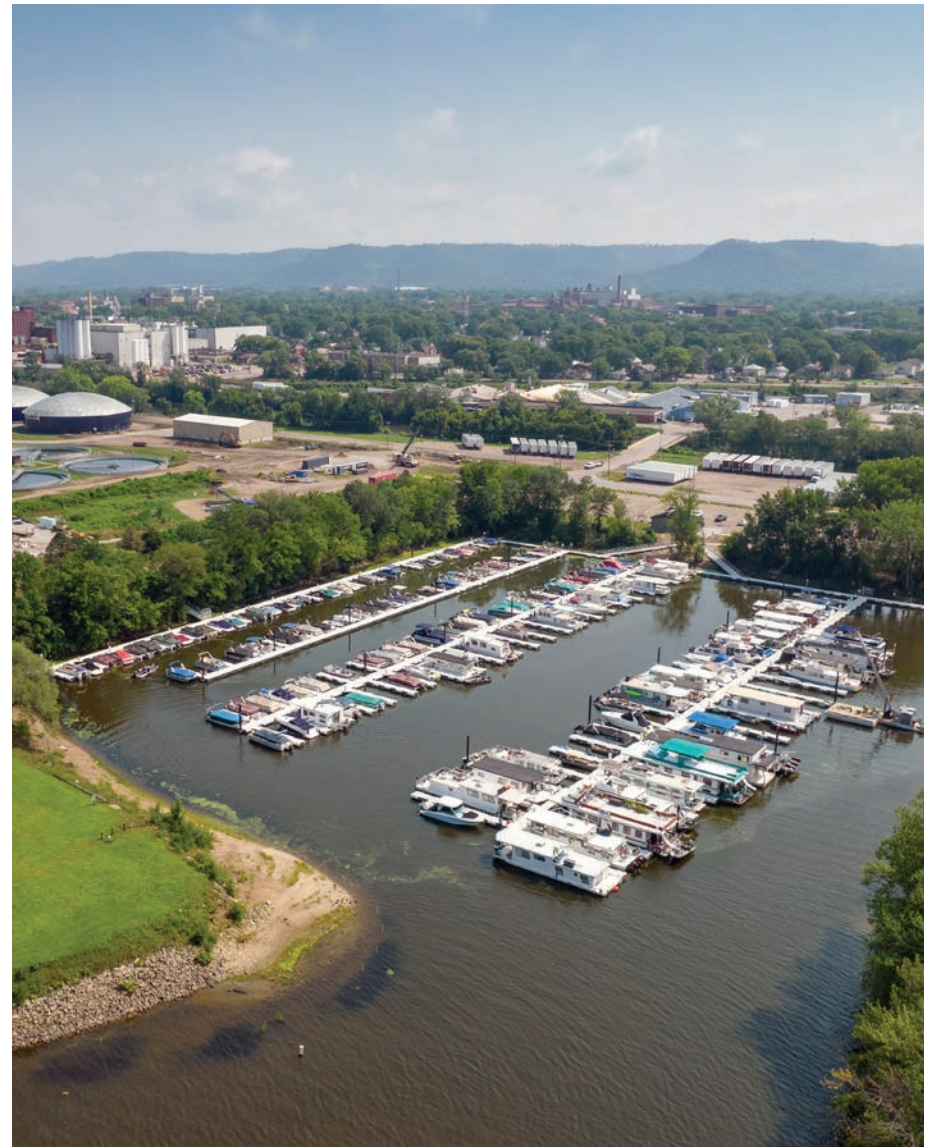
The United States is home to over 25,000 miles of navigable waterways, most of which are all connected together. It is one of the most efficient ways to move large volumes of bulk commodities over long distances. Nearly 630 million tons of cargo valued at over \$73 billion moves along the inland and coastal waters of the U.S. each year!



Figure 1: Fuel-Taxed Inland Waterways System

4. La Crosse Municipal Harbor

On city-owned land, this marina is operated by lease, doing business as La Crosse Harbor Services. There are 185 slips, mostly for seasonal renters, and a launch ramp for public use. Other amenities include pump-out, gas, rest rooms and showers, laundromat, houseboat rentals, ship's store, boat and engine repairs, and on-land boat storage.



5. Hanke Terminal

Hanke Trucking is a full-service transportation company that operates throughout the Midwest. They specialize in bulk commodities, aggregates, crushing, and transloading services. Their La Crosse terminal facility receives dry bulk such as coal, road salt, pig iron, and aggregates for distribution across the state. The site has a 20-acre open storage area with the capacity for approximately 100,000 tons of bulk materials.



6. Isle la Plume

As a natural island that once resembled the shape of a feather, Isle la Plume remained untouched for many years while the City of La Crosse grew. But, by the late 1800s, the two largest sawmills in town used the upper end as a lumber storage yard. Locals also began to use it as a dumping ground during this time, so in 1909 it was deeded to the City. The upper end became a park shortly thereafter, while the lower end continued serving as a landfill. As the population of La Crosse grew, so did the need for a municipal wastewater treatment plant. In 1936 a basic sewage treatment plant was built, and several additions and modernizations were made over the years. The plant serves the City of La Crosse and several surrounding communities, following strict effluent discharge regulations. It is oversized for a community the size of La Crosse because of the area's brewing history and the need to treat large amounts of wastewater from the brewing process.

Today the island is home to the La Crosse area sewage treatment plant, Houska Park, the Municipal Boat Marina, Hanke Barge Terminals, and the City Dock. Adjacent to the island are four fleeting berths leased to Brennan Marine to service the towing industry and local barge terminals. A maximum of 32 barges can be berthed at this site, making it a vital asset to the Port of La Crosse.



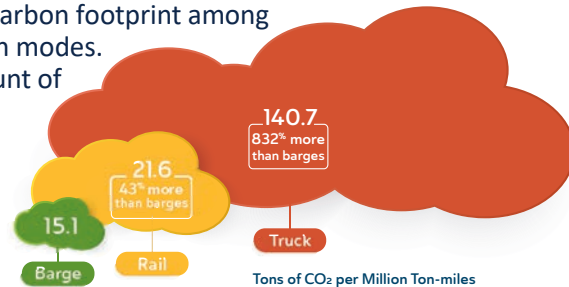
7. Herold E. Craig Fleet

Located across the main channel from the Isle la Plume fleet, this site is used primarily as a tow-building area. It has the capacity to hold 15 barges arranged in 5 tiers with space for 15 additional barges. As large line boats enter the Port of La Crosse they hold along this fleet while Brennan Marine removes and/ or adds barges. Line boats heading upriver are typically carrying commodities such as cement, coal, salt, pig iron, and fertilizer, while towboats heading downriver will generally pick up grain barges loaded with corn or soy beans. From here those barges will head down to New Orleans and get offloaded into ocean-going vessels.



Barging to a Cleaner Future

Barges have the smallest carbon footprint among competitive transportation modes. To move an identical amount of cargo by rail generates 43% more carbon dioxide than by barge, and trucks generate over 800% more emissions!



Source: National Waterways Foundation (2022)

8. Pettibone Boat Club and Marina

This local hotspot may have the best location on the entire Mississippi River! Home to over 250 recreational boaters, this historic supper club has sat perched on the southern end of Barron Island since the 1950s. The property itself is owned by the City of La Crosse, and in 2015 a brand new facility replaced the former aging building. No need for a membership, this “club” is open to all visitors, and provides all the modern conveniences of a full service marina.



9. Pettibone Park & Beach

Pettibone Park is a large park located on Barron Island. The park itself dates back to 1901, when 3-term mayor of La Crosse, Albert Pettibone, bought the land to create a community park. For 13 years, he worked to build the park, gazebo, public beach, and campground. When he finished his work in 1913, he tried to gift it to the City of La Crosse, but at that time it was part of Minnesota so he could not do so. After several years of negotiating, Wisconsin and Minnesota agreed to trade Latsch Island in Winona for Barron Island. President Woodrow Wilson and Congress approved the new state lines in 1919 and Pettibone Park officially became part of La Crosse. Today the park remains a popular destination for swimming, picnics, and frisbee golf.



10. The La Crosse Rail Bridge

The La Crosse Rail Bridge represents a rare historical window into the fight between railroads and steamboats. It is one of the few remaining swing span bridges with a hump-back truss design. At over 120 years old, this structure was originally designed for steam-driven locomotives to pass over, and then open to allow steamboats to pass through.

During the mid-1800s the Mississippi River was a hindrance to railroads going east to west. Bridges could not block navigation on the river, therefore ferries were used to transport rail cars across in the summer while tracks would be laid across the ice in the winter. In those days steamboats fought vigorously to prevent rail crossing, arguing that bridges hindered navigation. The first bridge ever built over the Mississippi was built in 1856 in Rock Island, IL. Shortly after a steamboat hit it and both the boat and bridge caught fire. A young lawyer named Abraham Lincoln defended the railroad successfully, setting a precedent that allowed more bridges and river crossings.

In 1876, the first bridge to cross the Mississippi River in La Crosse was built in this location by the Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad. It was later replaced by the current steel structure in 1902 and now is owned by the Canadian Pacific Railroad. River lore suggests that the configuration of the swing span was deliberately created to cause navigational challenges for steamboats. A tight turn and strong current coupled with the narrow 150 ft openings on either side of the swing span pivot point require river captains to expertly punch through the passage. Any mistake and a modern towboat might find itself headed down the non-navigable west channel located directly downstream of the bridge. Bridge hits remain common on this structure and towboat companies are liable for the damage. It is routinely ranked in the top 5 most hit bridge structures along the river.



11. Dresbach Bridge

The current parallel concrete box girder structures opened in 2016 as a replacement for the original plate girder bridges built in 1967. The structures carry Interstate 90 across the main channel of the Mississippi River. As part of the Federal Highway Act of 1956, signed into law by Dwight Eisenhower, Interstate 90 carries east and west-bound traffic from Boston to Seattle. After the 2007 collapse of the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis, the Minnesota Department of Transportation reassessed many bridges throughout the state. The original Dresbach structure was deemed obsolete and presented many safety concerns. The new bridge spans 2,593 feet across the Mississippi River. It cost a total of \$187.5 million and was designed to last 100 years.



See the Eagles!
The Upper Mississippi River is home to thousands of bald eagles. Visit a designated Eagle Watch to view them in action. The La Crosse Eagle Watch is located on the west side of US 53/STH 35, just south of Exit 3 on I-90.

12. Lock & Dam No. 7

Lock & Dam No. 7 is one of 29 structures along the Upper Mississippi River between Minneapolis and St. Louis. The system was built throughout the 1930s by the Department of War, now called the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to establish a 9-foot navigation channel. These dams create slackwater pools to maintain the necessary depths for towboats and barges. Lock structures are built into each dam, which allow vessels to navigate the elevation changes as they travel up and downriver. When Lock & Dam No. 7 opened in 1937 it drastically changed the landscape upstream. What was once sprawling farm fields gave way to Lake Onalaska, an 8,400 acre lake and wildlife preserve. Today, nearly 10 million tons of commodities travel through this lock each year.



Photo By: Robert J. Hurt

You are here!

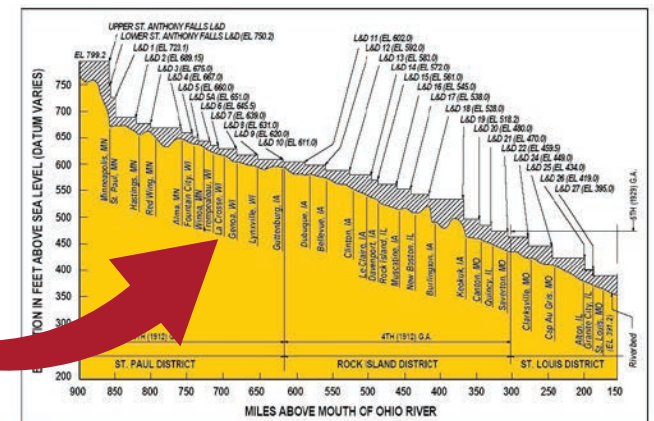


Figure 1 A longitudinal profile of the Upper Mississippi River lock and dam system (Courtesy of Dr. Tatsuaki Nakato, University of Iowa, Iowa Institute of Hydraulic Research, Muscatine, Iowa).

13. River Point District

The newly opened River Point district is a brownfield site undergoing redevelopment. It was one the site of a bustling oil terminal where barges would bring product in and large tanks would store it for distribution. Located at the mouth of the Black River this site was subject to flooding, particularly in 1965 and 1993 where significant damage and environmental impact resulted. After the facility closed, the City of La Crosse bought and remediated the land, as well as raised the elevation beyond the 100-year flood plain. It is now one of the few areas along the Mississippi River that is open for new development.

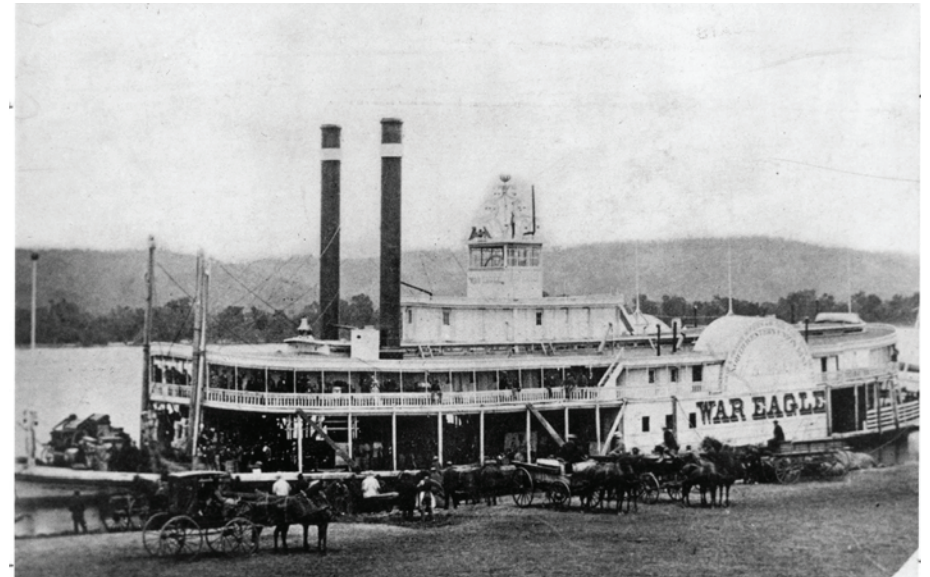


Wing dams Beneath the Surface

In 1866, Congress authorized a program to construct a four-foot channel along the Upper Mississippi River. To do this, wing dams were built in strategic areas to force the current into the main channel. This project was completed by 1878, but quickly became obsolete as vessels grew in size. In 1907, Congress authorized a 6-foot channel. Work on the 6-foot channel was never fully completed because it became clear that it would not be cost-effective to continue. Lock & Dam No. 1 in St. Paul and Lock & Dam No. 2 in Keokuk, IA (now known as Lock & Dam No. 19), are legacies from this earlier navigation improvement effort. The original wing dams are still hard at work. Located off of the main channel, these stone structures lie just below the surface. They tend to prey on recreational boaters who are unfamiliar with the area.

14. The War Eagle

Perhaps the most devastating catastrophe to hit the river banks of La Crosse is the tragedy of the 219-foot steamboat War Eagle. In the early hours of May 15th, 1870 the sidewheel packet boat was parked at an old railroad depot located at the site of the River Point District redevelopment. Passengers and barrels of kerosene were being loaded on board from a midnight train arriving from Milwaukee. Just before departing for St. Paul, one of the barrels started to leak and very quickly caught fire from a nearby lantern. The crew tried to roll the barrel off the steamboat and into the water, however a wooden barge next to it prevented this. The fire not only burned the War Eagle, it took out the wharf and several buildings along the bank. The boat burned so quickly that between five and seven passengers perished in the flames. To this day the hull and several lost items remain buried in the mud, 30 feet below the surface of the river.



15. Xcel Energy French Island Generating Station

This waste-fired electrical power station is located on lower end of French Island. Originally constructed in the 1940s as a two-unit, coal fired power plant, the electricity was used to power much of La Crosse. Coal was brought in by barge and offloaded on the western side of the island. In the early 1970s it transitioned to generate electricity using oil. When oil became too costly in the early 1980s, Unit 2 was converted to burn waste wood, followed by unit 1 in 1987. Today, the facility burns a 50/50 mix of refuse-derived fuel and wood waste generated from reclaimed railroad ties. It has the capacity to process more than 100,000 tons of municipal solid waste each year, which would otherwise end up in a landfill.



The Black River - A Vital Connection to Central Wisconsin

The Black River once converged into the Mississippi River near downtown La Crosse. When Lock & Dam No. 7 was built, the Mississippi River captured the Black River about 10 miles upstream in Lake Onalaska. From there, the Black River channel travels nearly 180 miles into north-central Wisconsin, where its headwaters begin in Rib Lake.

This feature made the Black River an essential artery into the great forests of central Wisconsin for early settlers. Sawmills lined the banks of the lower Black River while lumberjacks floated or barged logs down the narrow channel. Steamboats then could carry the fresh sawn lumber products to any point along the inland river system.

16. Black River Lift Bridge

The Black River Lift Bridge was originally built as a wooden truss bridge in 1876 as part of the first Mississippi River crossing in La Crosse. Like the La Crosse Rail Bridge over the main channel, the original timber structure was replaced in 1902 with a steel swing span.

In 2004 the 1902 swing span was replaced by the current bascule draw lift bridge. This is a heavily used bridge and is part of the main line for the Canadian Pacific Railroad. Opening nearly 2,000 times per year, it continues to be an important gateway to the upper section of the Port of La Crosse.

The construction of the new bridge was as impressive as the structure itself. As part of the Canadian Pacific's main line, the route had to remain open during its construction. New piers and abutments were built underneath the old structure while trains kept using it. The railroad allowed for a 36-hour window to take out the old swing span and install the current lift span. Once this was successfully accomplished, the old piers and abutments were removed, all while trains ran above the crews across the new span.



17. F. J. Robers Co., Inc.

Perhaps no company has had such an impact on the La Crosse harbor throughout its history than the F.J. Robers Company (Robers). Established in 1916 in Burlington, Wisconsin as the Ferd J. Robers Company, Robers quickly became a leading heavy civil contractor who help build power plants, locks and dams, interstate highways, levies, parks, and more. Records show that Robers pursued dredging opportunities in the La Crosse area as early as 1931. In 1936 it was instrumental in the construction of the levy system at Lock & Dam No. 7. This event began the re-establishment of the Black River harbor.

By end of the 1800s the lumber industry was all but gone on the lower Black River. The need for navigation through the Black River Lift Bridge and the Clinton Street bridge, located to the north, had disappeared. Both bridges had been locked in place and could only be opened manually. In 1936 both bridges were opened to allow a Robers dredge to travel up the Black River and begin building the levy that would tie Lock & Dam No. 7 into the Wisconsin side of the river. This in turn opened the area adjacent to the Black River Railroad Bridge back up for commercial river traffic. By 1950 Robers had acquired several acres at the lower end of French Island and began filling the area above the 100-year flood plane. This in turn created a 20-foot deep harbor, an ideal place for a new barge terminal. As a local dredging contractor Robers raised much of La Crosse out of the flood planes. Many highways, parks, and neighborhoods sit on dredge fill from one of their dredges. The F.J. Robers Company continued as one of the Midwest's largest dredging companies until 1989 when it sold its dredging business to J.F. Brennan Company.

Robers' terminal business continues as La Crosse's largest intermodal facility that specializes in the shipment of dry bulk products. Specific commodities include grain, steel products, cement, salt, coal, coke, aggregates, and fertilizers. This facility boasts over 1.5 million square feet of storage space, 26,000 of which is covered. It is also La Crosse's only facility with rail access. Located adjacent to the Canadian Pacific main line, there is direct access to a rail spur with three railroad tracks and 30 spots for loading rail cars. Most dry bulk product is delivered by truck, thousands of which will be processed through this facility during the fall harvest season.



18. Cargill, Incorporated

The two silos located on the corner of the F.J. Robers Company property are owned and operated by Cargill, Inc. Founded in 1865, Cargill is the largest privately held corporation in the United States. Now headquartered outside of Minneapolis, Cargill was once headquartered in La Crosse. From 1875 till 1909 the company had a substantial presence in La Crosse, where they began their ascent to the top.

Today the only remnants of Cargill's presence in La Crosse is an old fence from the long-gone family mansion and these two modern grain elevators built in the early 2000s. Each elevator can hold roughly a barge load of corn or soybeans. Grain is brought in from area farms by truck and transloaded to barge. Up to 250 barges (13 million bushels) per year get transloaded from this facility, making Bainbridge St. a very busy truck route!



Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge



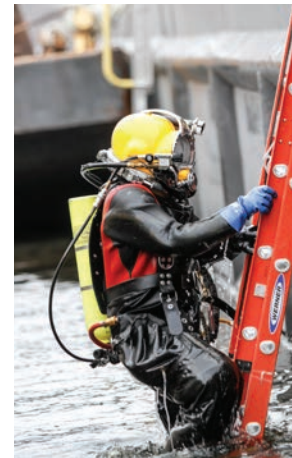
Photo By: Robert J. Hurt

The refuge is located in four states along the Mississippi River: Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois. It was established in 1924 as a refuge for fish, wildlife, and plants. The refuge encompasses one of the largest blocks of floodplain habitat in the lower 48 states, an essential lifeline for migratory birds. Bordered by steep wooded bluffs that rise 100–600 feet above the river valley, the Mississippi River corridor and refuge offer scenic beauty and productive fish and wildlife habitat unmatched in the heart of America. The refuge covers just over 240,000 acres and extends 261 river miles from the confluence of the Chippewa River in Wisconsin to Rock Island, Illinois. This national treasure is a scenic experience that rivals that of the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone National Park. The locals refer to it as America's best kept secret!

19. J.F. Brennan Company

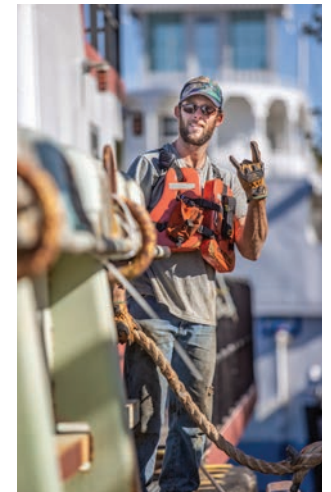
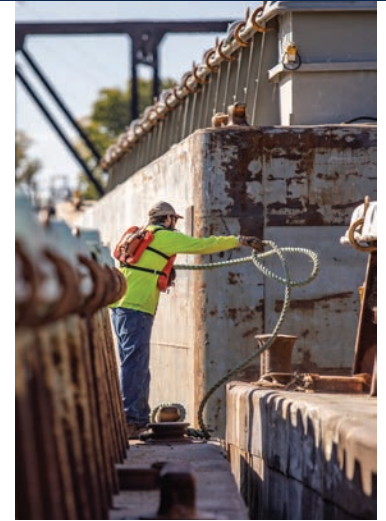
J.F. Brennan Company (Brennan) traces its roots back to 1919 when it was founded as Brennan Brothers in Lansing, Iowa. Jim and Gene Brennan grew their business from a small upstart partnership to a formidable midwestern bridge contractor. In 1945 Jim Brennan relocated part of the business to La Crosse to pursue new opportunities. It was here in the mid-1950s that they began working for the U.S. Coast Guard, maintaining channel markers along the Upper Mississippi River. They began to build a fleet of marine assets and eventually started a business called River Construction Company. This necessitated river access and a close partnership with Ferd and Charlie Robers enabled them to establish a riverfront operation at Brennan's current location. In 1959 the two brothers split, and Jim incorporated J.F. Brennan Company in La Crosse. Eventually, River Construction was renamed River Steel and transitioned to a steel fabrication company, while J.F. Brennan Company transitioned from a bridge-building firm to a marine construction company.

When Jim Brennan started J.F. Brennan Company, he did so in effort to build a foundation for the next generation. He was in the twilight of his career yet he was willing to bet his hard-earned reputation on his son, Ralph Brennan, and son-in-law, Roger Binsfeld. The tradition continues and the company is now led by the fourth generation. Today, Brennan specializes in environmental dredging, marine construction, commercial diving, and submarine cable services. They work throughout the inland rivers and along both the western and eastern coastlines.



20. Brennan Marine, Inc.

A sister company to J.F. Brennan Company, Brennan Marine is a harbor management firm that specializes in providing switching and fleetling, barge cleaning, and shipyard repair services to the inland river industry. Founded in 1984, Brennan Marine operates in the Port of La Crosse, as well as several others along the Mississippi and Cumberland Rivers. The local harbor vessel, named the *Megan McB*, is a 1,400 HP vessel built in 2013. It runs 24 hours per day, seven days a week during the navigation season. The 1,000-ton floating drydock is the largest of its kind north of St. Louis, and is a critical asset for the inland river industry's need for barge and vessel repairs.



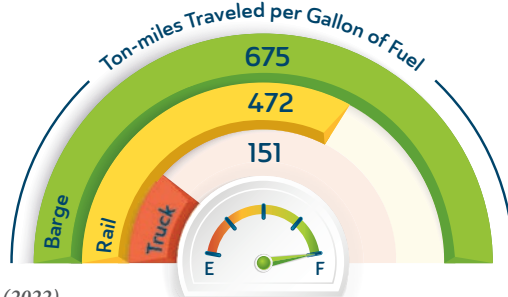
21. Midwest Industrial Asphalt

The upper dock receives nearly 100,000 tons of asphalt by barge and rail each year. Two pipelines extend from the wharf to seven asphalt storage tanks. This asphalt is used to build roads throughout the region. The lower dock handles petroleum products. It functions as a fueling station for towboats and a fuel offloading facility for storage. A metered pipeline line on the wharf is connected to a 10,000-barrel diesel fuel storage tank. Fuel is brought upriver by barge where it is distributed regionally by Midwest Industrial Fuels.



The Most Efficient Way to Transport

Barges move cargo 675 ton-miles per gallon of fuel. Ton miles per gallon are the measure of how far each ton of cargo is carried by a single gallon of fuel.



Source: National Waterways Foundation (2022)

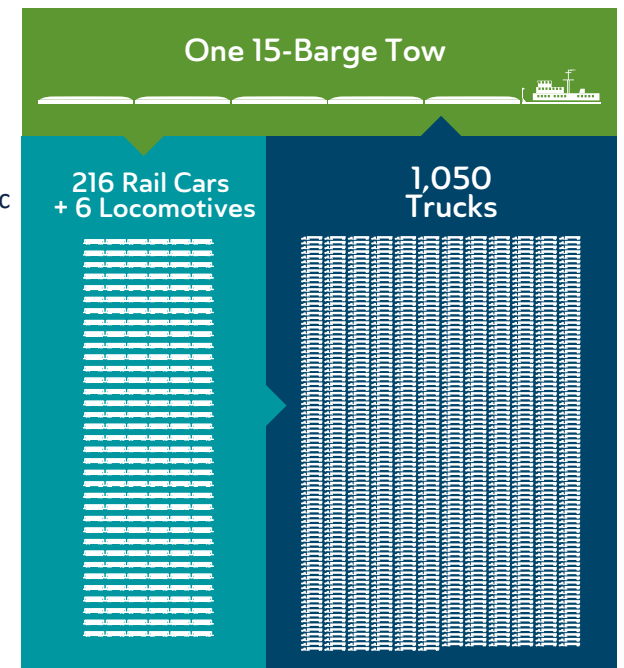
22. Hydrite Chemical Co.

Hydrite Chemical Co. manufactures industrial chemicals. This terminal receives liquid caustic soda. A pipeline extends from the wharf to two storage tanks with a 2,100,000 gallon storage capacity.



Carrying Capacity of Barges Far Outpaces Rail & Trucks

Waterways transport more than 60% of the nation's grain exports, about 22% of domestic petroleum and petroleum products, and 20% of the coal used in electricity generation.



Source: National Waterways Foundation (2022)

23. American Marine Marina

The marina located next to Brennan is called the American Marine Marina. Once the headquarters of SkipperLiner Industries, this facility used to manufacture world-class houseboats and touring yachts. SkipperLiner closed its doors in 2010 and the facility now functions as a full service marina with over 150 slips, fuel, pump out, boat repairs, and restaurant.



24. Veterans Point Marina

The City of La Crosse maintains and operates Veterans Point Marina on the south end of Veterans Freedom Park. Veterans Point Marina is a 50-slip, handicapped-accessible marina situated along the Black River.



25. Copeland Park

This area is a 20-acre waterfront park that dates back to 1876 as the site of an old La Crosse Lumber Company mill called “Big Mill”. In 1909 the land was gifted to the City of La Crosse by Col. F.A. Copeland to be developed into a waterfront park. That same year, famed landscape architect John Nolen designed a plan that “includes provision for many forms of active recreation and quieter relaxation.” Tennis courts, picnic areas, and a fishing pier were all incorporated into the design. During the winter months, the tennis courts were frozen over and turned into a skating rink.

Today the park continues to serve as a key fixture on La Crosse’s north side. The park’s north end is still home to an ice skating rink in the winter, while the south end is occupied by the home field of the La Crosse Loggers, a baseball team that competes in the Northwoods Collegiate Summer League. Several historical attractions can be found at the park, including a 1930s Burlington Steam Locomotive, a caboose, and the Grand Crossing Tower. Copeland Park also functions as the northside fest grounds of the infamous Oktoberfest USA.





Photo By: Robert J. Hurt



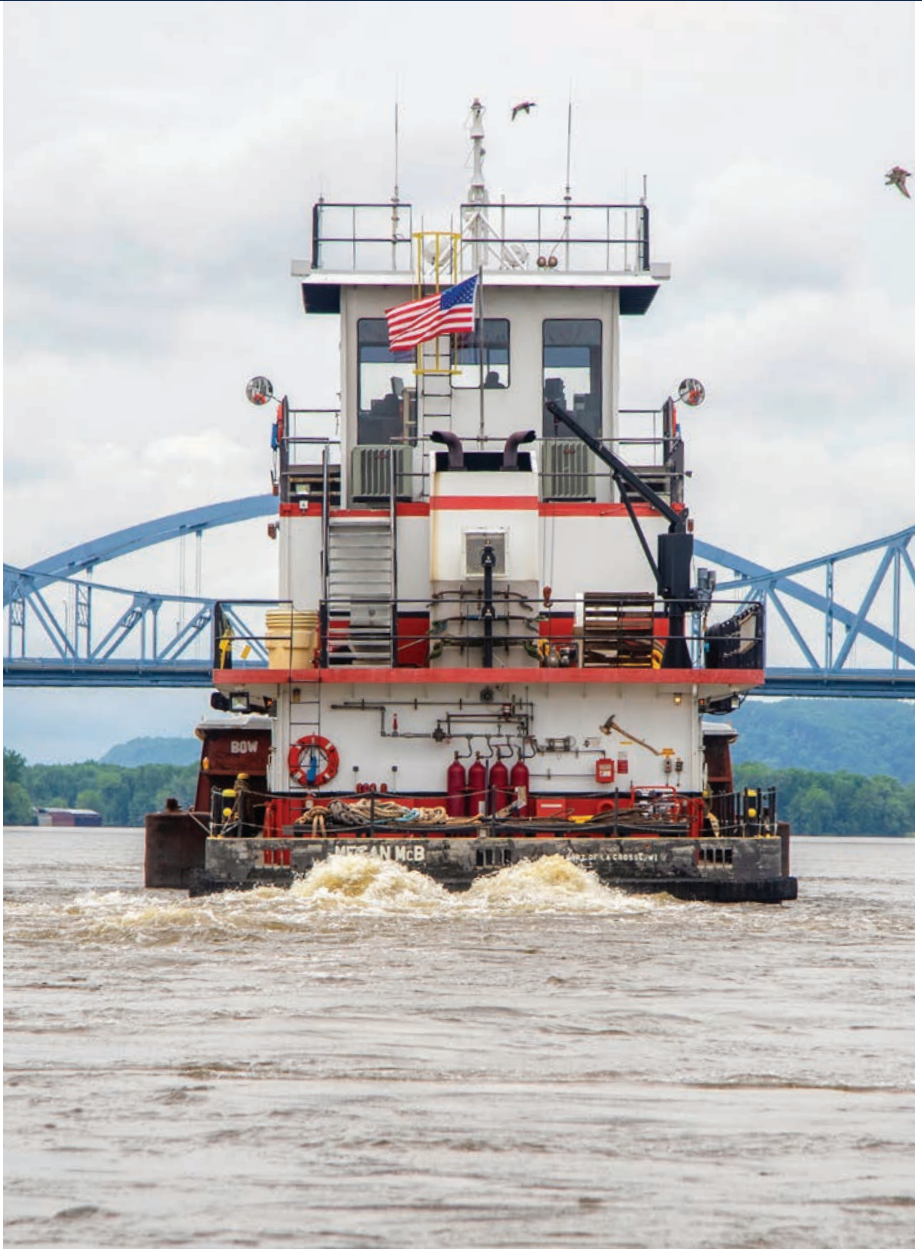
Cover: “Homecoming” painted by Michael Blaser

The cover depicts a scene in which a Brennan tow is returning home after a long construction season. As it passes through the La Crosse Rail Bridge, ice can be seen forming on the water. Brennan Marine’s Barbara B. helps the Anne Marie “punch through” the western pass of the bridge with her heavily loaded barges. The City of La Crosse is off in the distance as snowflakes begin to fly and a cold and weary crew arrives home.

Michael Blaser is a renowned artist who has spent his career recreating historical scenes along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. His artwork is a window into yesterday’s America, as his paintings transport viewers to a time long forgotten and an era long gone. From steamboats to towboats, Mr. Blaser’s talent leaps off the canvas and brings a sense of nostalgia for the mightiest of rivers.

Disclaimer

The information in this booklet was collected from a number of historical archives, La Crosse Tribune articles, river advocacy organizations, old crusty captains, ancient channel catfish, and river pirates. No information included in this publication represents the opinions or official histories of any of the listed companies, facilities, or municipalities other than J.F. Brennan Company. Copyright 2022 J.F. Brennan Company, Inc.



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