

## The Frozen Ohio River

Many times during the early history of the Portsmouth area, the Ohio River has been closed in the harsh winters due to the frozen waters. It was first recorded in 1827, that the river froze, and a man rode his horse across the ice. This was the first time, but not the last, that the river at Portsmouth was closed due to ice.

In 1847, the river was closed for 10 days. During the time of river travel, the steamboats and ferries would be caught in the ice gorges. When a boat was caught, the ice had to be sawed away. Many times the vessels would be destroyed or handicapped because of the ice.

In 1855, the longest closing was recorded when the river was frozen for 47 days. People used sleighs and skated across.

In the Portsmouth Times, January 4, 1918, the Ohio River closed at 4:45 p.m. on Thursday afternoon, and by 4:30 a.m. that Friday morning, people began walking across the ice. The article notes that John Cooper, 62, had the honor of being the oldest man to cross, while Harry Davis, 14 was the youngest. Prior to this date, the last recorded closing was December 30, 1909.

According to the article, "the ferryboat Bonne, is resting on a huge ice flow the receding river left on the Kentucky side of the Ohio at New Boston. She is in a very dangerous position and may be cut in two." It was noted that many ice flows were 10 to 12 inches thick. Unfortunately, there have been those who did not gauge the ice well, and lost their lives by falling through and drowning.

In more recent history, the river was closed for 2 weeks in January of 1940. On January 19, the mercury dropped to a recorded 5

degrees below zero. Approximately one-third of the Ohio River's 981 mile length was blocked with ice until the thaw in February.

Other recorded closings of the Ohio River:

- 1851- closed from December 17 to January 28
- 1853-54- closed 12 days
- 1870-71- closed for 21 days
- 1874-75- closed for 42 days
- 1876-77- closed 20 days in December
- 1880-81- closed from December 28 to January 31
- 1882-83- closed 6 days
- 1883-84- closed 20 days
- 1884-85- closed 5 days
- 1885-86- closed 19 days
- 1886-87- closed 27 days
- 1887-88- closed 6 days
- 1891-02- closed 8 days
- 1892-93- closed 42 days
- 1894-95- closed 43 days
- 1896-97- closed from January 22 to February 5
- 1898-99- closed 22 days
- 1903- closed from December 18 to December 22
- 1905- closed February 4, 1905