

Naptha Launch

This post card shows a "Naptha Launch" named Comanche that plied the lake in the early 1900's. There is some interesting history and technology associated with this boat.....

In the late 1800's steam was the primary method of power used. A law was passed in the US that all boats that ran with steam engines must have a certified steam engineer on board at all times. For large boats this requirement was manageable but for small boats, usually owned by the wealthy this was burdensome. Around 1890 a variation on the steam engine called the Naptha engine was invented. Naptha was the then used term for gasoline, albeit not as refined as the product we know today. Instead of water being boiled to generate the working medium that powered the pistons, some of the actual fuel itself was used. While these successfully circumvented the regulatory requirement and were a little quicker to start up because Naptha was easier to boil than water, there was an increased hazard using vaporized Naptha as a working medium especially since seals in those days tended to leak. The link to the source of this information which is provided below describes a number of launches lost to fire. This post card was sent in 1910 and around that time as true internal combustion engines became available Naptha technology was thankfully abandoned.

