

1970s



SAUGATUCK

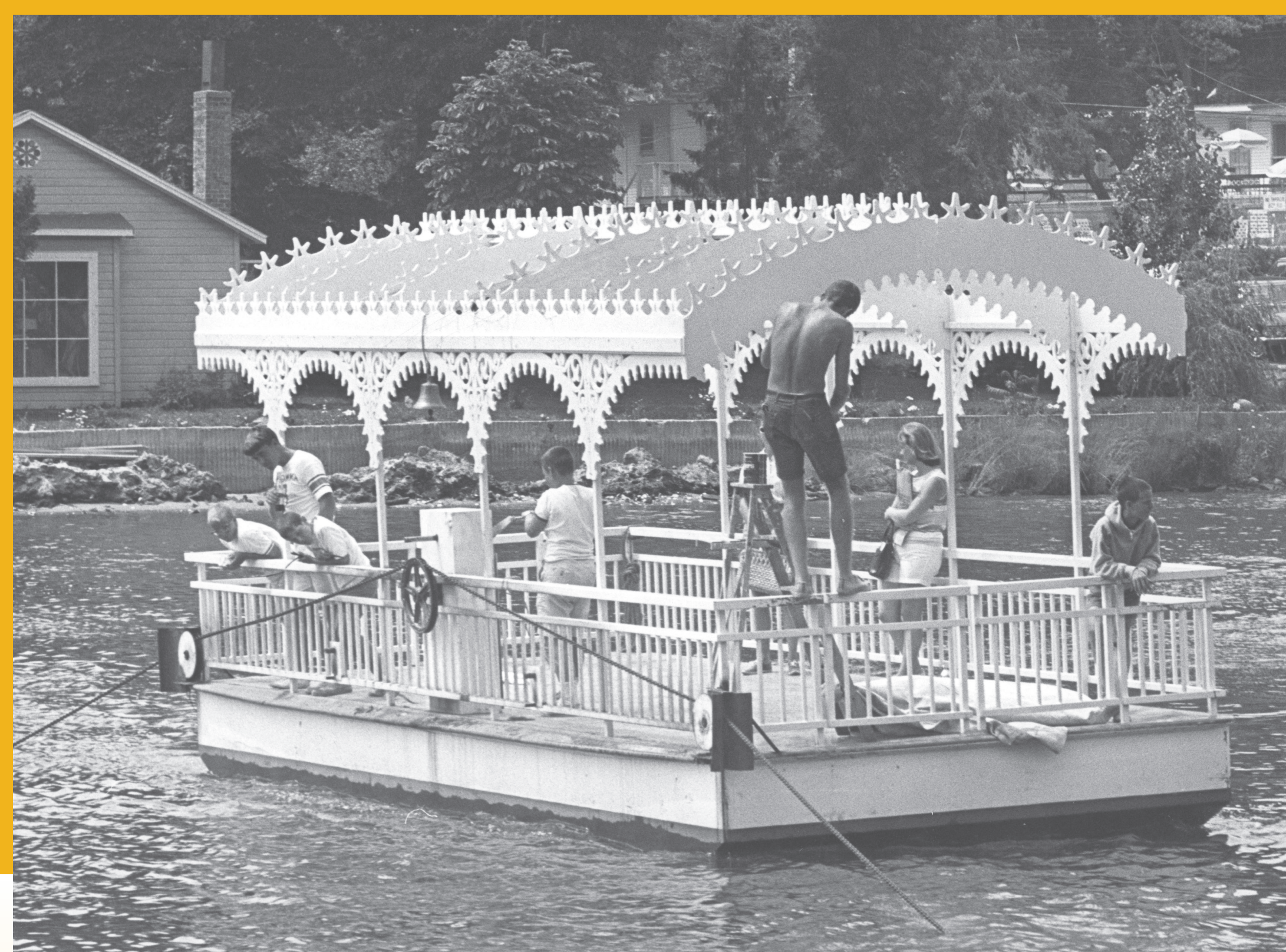
CHAIN

FERRY



People have crossed the Kalamazoo River here at the foot of Mary Street since the early days of Saugatuck. A bridge crossed the river near this spot in the early 1800s, until it was replaced by the first chain ferry in 1857. That same boat, with minor modifications was used until the 1940s.

The Chain Ferry is powered by a crewmember cranking a handle at the center of the vessel. A 400-foot chain, anchored to each river bank, is fed through a sprocket turned by the cranking which pulls the ferry through the water to the landing. After the chain guides the ferry, it drops back down to the river bottom, out of the way of passing marine traffic. Chain ferries were once



a common form of transportation. Many were later converted to run on gas or electric engines, making Saugatuck's ferry the last hand-cranked ferry in the United States.

In 1965 R.J. and R.E. Peterson updated the vessel to what we see today. The Petersons operated the River Queen Boat Works of Gary, Indiana, moving operations and the family to Saugatuck-Douglas in the 1960s. R.J. Peterson, an engineer, designed the new version of the Chain Ferry, made from steel and inspired by Victorian "gingerbread" architecture. He named the vessel after his wife, Diane and it was dedicated on August 21, 1965. This version of the Chain Ferry continues to cross the river today.

Although its appearance has changed, the use of the chain ferry has remained constant — transporting visitors to sites such as Oval Beach and Mount Baldhead.



SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS

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