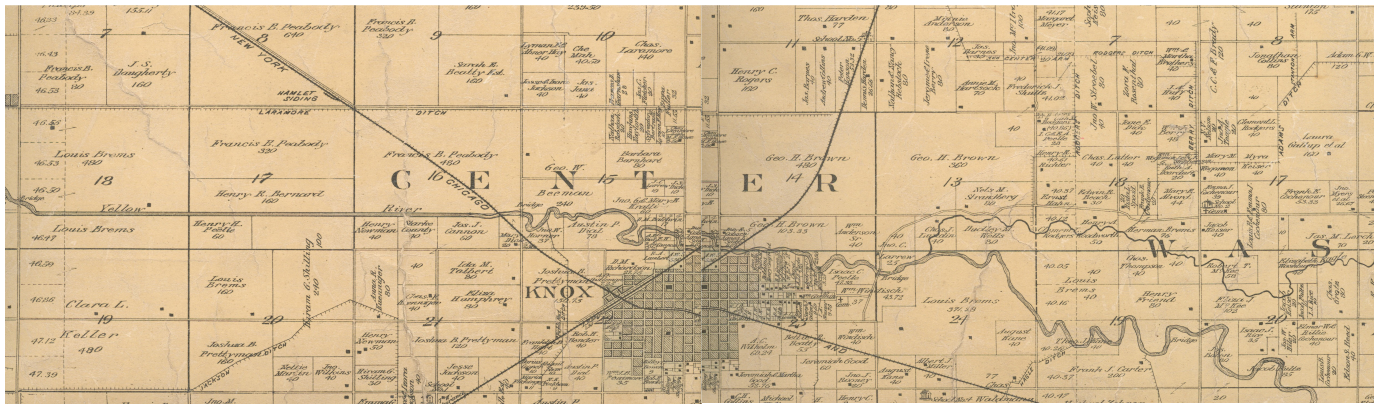


Yellow River in Starke County, Indiana ----- November 5, 2011 ----- Jim Shilling

The Yellow River flows through Starke County, beginning at the Starke/Marshall County Line eight miles east of Knox. One mile from the county line is a new concrete bridge at 1100 East. Several years ago the old bridge, a 1915 pony truss steel bridge, was moved to the end of Main Street in Knox to be used as a pedestrian entrance to Wythogan Park. This bridge (Bridge No. 39) is now on the National Register of Historic Places. At the 1000 East Road there used to be a bridge called the Whiteford Bridge. In the early 1900s, this bridge provided a way for students living to the north and east to cross the river on their way to school in Ober.



In the 1800s, the Yellow River was a meandering stream which flowed at will through the county. Around the turn of the century the excavation and straightening of the river began. The above 1898 map shows straightening of the river west of Knox for about three miles, but east of Knox the map shows the river still very crooked. The east portion to the Marshall County line was dredged later. The distance from the Marshall County line to Starke County's Range Line Road is 12 miles in length (two townships wide). However, the length of the Yellow River in this area before dredging was about 30 miles long because of the twists and turns in the river. After dredging, both east and west of Knox, this portion of the river is now about 13 to 14 miles in length.

The elevation of the land near the Marshall County line is about 40 feet above the elevation of the land at Range Line Road. Therefore, once the river was straightened, the water had less resistance and flowed more than twice as fast as it did before. During the last century, the river has cut and gouged the banks and carried tons of sand and silt west into an area west of Knox to the Kankakee River. In fact, the **bottom** of the Yellow River between Indiana 39 and Range Road is now approximately three feet higher in elevation than the land on either side of the river. This is partly because when the river was first dredged, the spoils were thrown in piles on both sides of the new excavation, creating high levees. The Yellow River has been trying to go back to the slow, meandering river that it once was. There is a dam near the U.S. 35 bridge in Knox that holds back the flow somewhat. Old timers have said that there were four or five rock dams that were installed, similar to the dam in Knox, to help retard the fast flow of the river. The only evidence of a rock dam that can be seen now is just west of Indiana 23, north of Ober.

Just east of Ober, consideration was given at one time to diverting the Yellow River south to the Tippecanoe River in order to help alleviate flooding in the Kankakee River area.

The original dam near U.S. 35 in Knox was a concrete dam, installed in the early 1930's by the WPA. It was a dam that was made from bank to bank at the same level. Water flowed evenly over it. A few years later, the dam washed out, probably due to the seepage of water through the sand underneath it. The rocks that are there now may have been installed at the same time as the concrete dam shown in the photograph to the right. The bridge over the river now is a concrete bridge. There is a walking trail from the Starke



County Visitors Center, under this bridge and into Wythogan Park with a concrete wall between the trail and the river. On the north side of this wall, just a few feet west of the U.S. 35 bridge, it is possible to see a small portion of the old dam. Across the river can be seen other concrete pieces that could have been part of the original dam.

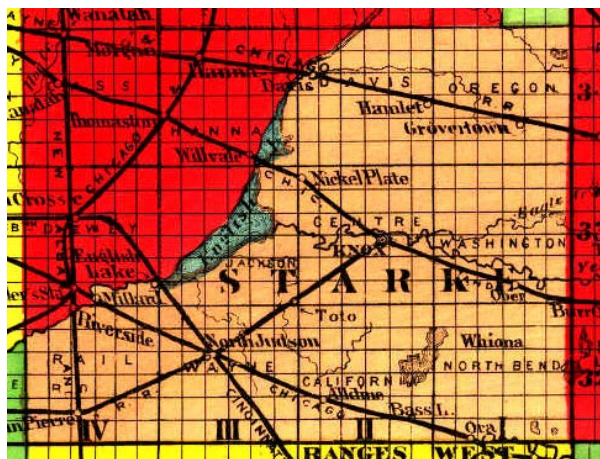
There were many places for swimming near this dam. Some were up stream by the railroad bridge, some were down stream below the dam. But local residents tell about diving off of the steel bridge into the pool of water west of the dam. Many have said that they would dive off of the **top** of the steel truss bridge. If this be true, the rocks must have been placed much closer to the bridge than they are presently. It is thought that with winter ice flows moving down the river, these rocks may keep moving to the west.

Several drownings have taken place in the area. According to rescue divers, the pool area just west of the dam is almost 30 feet deep and often is a “whirlpool” from which swimmers can’t escape. Adventurers may want to think twice before “shooting the rapids” over the dam.

According to one of the old maps, there was a mill on the north side of the river just east of the dam. There is no record of this mill, so we don’t know if it were a sawmill or a gristmill. If that mill existed, perhaps a dam was built at that location even before the dredging of the river.

There is a gauging station on the north side of the river on the east side of U.S. 35, which is monitored by the National Weather Service. The height and flow of the river is recorded every day. As of this writing the water height is 5.64 feet. Flood stage is 10 feet. The highest recorded historic flood stage from that station was in January 1991 at 15.30 feet.

A lot of changes have taken place since the village of Knox was “established on the south bank of Yellow River”. The Yellow River flows into the Kankakee River basin and at one time helped form English Lake. This lake at times was 15 – 20 miles in length and up to three miles wide. Since the dredging of the river, the lake is gone. But during the early years of Starke County, people living west of the lake couldn’t cross the lake (except by boat) to the east side in order to do business in the county seat. Because of this, the northwest portion of Starke County was given to LaPorte County.



An old survey map shows the Yellow River branched into Upper Yellow River and Lower Yellow River where it flowed into the Kankakee about 1 1/2 miles above the present junction. The area bounded by the fork of the Yellow River and the Kankakee was called Governor's Island. Looks like the "island" included 600 acres or so.

On the west side of Starke County, the Yellow River now flows

somewhat parallel to the Kankakee River and enters the Kankakee River at the town of English Lake. The “10-mile road” is an interesting trip. It starts on the east side of the Kankakee and Indiana 8, follows the bank of the Kankakee, then turns and follows the north bank of the Yellow River and exits at Indiana 39. This area is part of the Indiana Kankakee Fish & Wildlife Area.

