

# S&D

# REFLECTOR

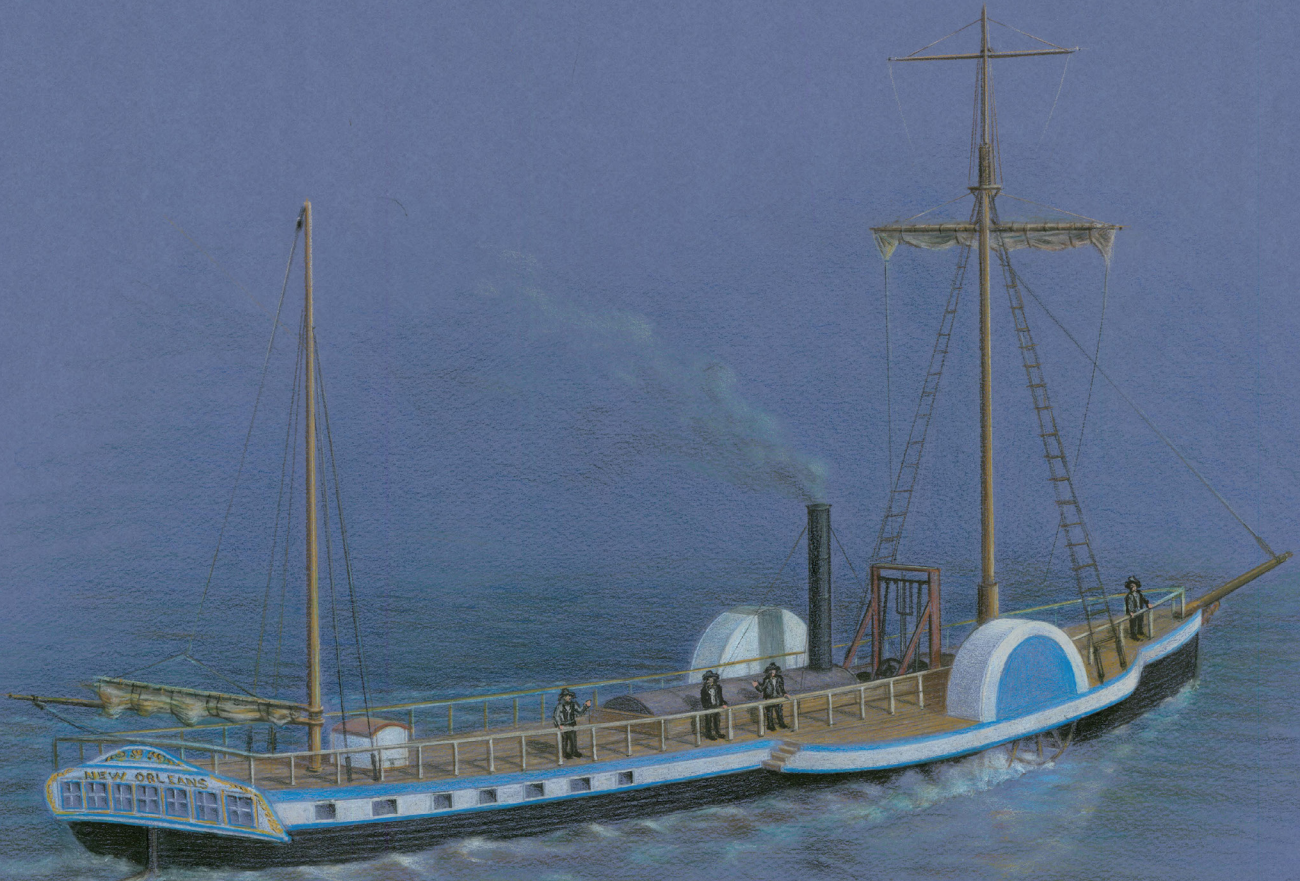
Published by Sons and Daughters  
of Pioneer Rivermen



Vol. 48, No. 3

Marietta, Ohio

September 2011



**The Real Steamboat NEW ORLEANS**  
**Upper Mississippi Giant: William Davidson**  
**FBL Steamer NATCHEZ & Greenville Bridge**



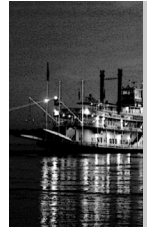
## Front Cover

This pencil drawing of the pioneer steamboat NEW ORLEANS graces our cover courtesy of maritime artist, model builder and S&D Board member John Fryant. Based on painstaking research by Jerry Sutphin and John White, this is perhaps the most authentic recreation yet drawn of Nicholas Roosevelt's steamer, built in the tradition of Robert Fulton's first steam vessels on this country's rivers. John White's fascinating look at two centuries of artist's recreations of this vessel begins on page 10.

💡 Our keen-eyed president is right on the money! The GEORGIA LEE (2320) it is. Printed below left is the photographic evidence kindly supplied by Jeff. The Combine sternwheeler pictured in foreground is IRONSIDES (T1208). That Jeff made reference to BELLE OF THE BENDS is strangely providential, as we had already decided to feature her colorized portrait on the back cover long before his letter arrived!

Marlene Morris forwarded the accompanying photo with a request: "Attached is a picture and I am hoping someone can shed some light on the history of this piece. It is an anchor with Greene Line Steamers logo. It measures about 4 inches tall and appears to have been made to look like bronze. Can you help?"

## Reflections from Our Readers



Jeff Spear writes: "The covers for the June issue were wonderful. Detroit Publishing had some of the best color of the period and that image is one of my favorites. However, the boat at the wharf in the background [on the back cover] isn't one of Capt. J. F. Ellison's. The post card I'm sending, also Detroit, was obviously taken the same day. Packet at left is COURIER, Combine towboat not sure, packet on right side with outboard stage is same image as appears in ISLAND QUEEN view and she is GEORGIA LEE. Key here is the dome on pilothouse and twin stages. Only twin stage boat Capt. Ellison designed that I know of is HUDSON. Capt. Way always said GEORGIA LEE looked big but wasn't, much like BELLE OF THE BENDS."



💡 Your editor drew a blank on this souvenir piece. Although it pictures the DQ, it does not ring a bell as having graced the shelves of her gift shop anytime after the late sixties. Nevertheless, we are confident that one of our readers can come to Marlene's aid. If you can help, please contact her at [fgmo@fuse.net](mailto:fgmo@fuse.net) While on the subject of Greene Line, we use this color spread to share a dandy shot of the GORDON C. GREENE opposite, with details of one of her adventures beginning on page 36. Any guesses about the location of this picturesque view?



Don Walsh, whose photographic work is showcased on the back cover of this issue, writes from "the shores of beautiful Georgian Bay" at Meaford, Ontario: "I visited your website and have it in my favourites file in Internet Explorer and am happy to support your organization. My wife told me when I

finished the photo that she really liked it but I could not step back from it to see it. I was so familiar with all of those workers and the cargo, mule, horses, and the packets, especially the packets. I have always been a fan of Samuel Clemens and when I saw that particular photograph on Shorpy's, I was captivated. As an amateur photographer, I am still in awe of the work of the photographer who took the original. His work is awesome even by today's standard, as far as I am concerned."

‡ Don's photographic work is no less impressive in bringing to full color life the classic image captured by the Detroit Publishing Co. glass plate somewhere around 1906-07. Check out our back cover and see if you agree.

A message from Bernadette Bell was forwarded to the REFLECTOR by Marlene Morris: "I thought you would want to know that Mr. Bill Torner will be receiving his twilight wish through a program we offer at our nursing facility at Cumberland Village Care and Rehabilitation Center in La Follette, TN. The staff at the center asked him what he would like to experience as his twilight wish, and he said to ride on a boat one last time." A newsletter from that organization reported, "Now this veteran's wish will come true on historic D-Day, June 6 at 10 a.m., thanks to the nursing center and the KNOXVILLE STAR. Capt. John Farmer will be at the helm of the riverboat. Despite Torner's somewhat frail health (he is 95), he is excited for the ride. When told that he would be receiving his long-awaited wish, he replied, 'This is the best day of my life.' He has invited his roommate to take the voyage with him."

‡ With great sorrow we report the news of Bill's passing on July 8th in "Final Crossings", p. 38.



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### Thinking about submitting to the REFLECTOR?

Please follow these guidelines:

#### Articles

- » 500 words or less
- » .rtf or .doc format (no PDFs)

#### Features

- » 750 words or more
- » .rtf or .doc format (no PDFs)

#### Images

- » at least 300 dpi
- » .jpg, .tif, .png, or .bmp format
- » minimal compression

Send to the Editor as an e-mail attachment



# "Lighting Up the Past, Present, and Future of the Mississippi River System"



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# S&D REFLECTOR

Published by Sons and Daughters  
of Pioneer Rivermen

Vol. 48, No. 3  
ISSN 1087-9803

Marietta, Ohio September 2011  
Post Office Permit #73, Marietta, OH

The name of this publication comes from the *Fleetwood Reflector* published in 1869 aboard the packet FLEETWOOD. This quarterly was originated by Capt. Frederick Way, Jr. in 1964.

Correspondence is invited and serious papers on river related history from our readers are always welcomed. Please check with the Editor before sending any material on a "loan" basis.

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## REFLECTOR BACK ISSUES AND INDICES

Copies of the current or of the immediate prior year are available at \$5 each, postpaid for members, \$8 for non-members. Issues for most years through 1972 are available at \$3 each or \$10 for a complete year (4 issues).

Indices for five year increments of the quarterly, 1964 through 2003, are available for \$5 per volume.

Orders should be sent to PO Box 352, Marietta, OH, 45750 for these items.

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There are two classes of membership - full and family. Full membership includes the quarterly S&D REFLECTOR, admission to the Ohio River Museum and towboat W. P. SNYDER, JR. at Marietta, and voting rights at the Annual Meeting. Family members enjoy all privileges except the REFLECTOR.

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## Getting Posted Up

### The People, Places and Stories of S&D

Your September REFLECTOR begins with a feature story about the steamboat whose Bicentennial voyage we celebrate this year. Viewed through the historian's careful and critical eye, John White's commentary is always insightful and sometimes humorous as he poses the question, "Will the Real NEW ORLEANS Please Steam Forward?" Coupled with John Fryant's skillful artwork on the front cover, you will be treated to a rare close-up of Nicholas Roosevelt's pioneer Western Rivers steamer.

Our next feature comes to us from an honest-to-goodness Son/Daughter of a Pioneer Riverman. Cynthia Davidson Bend paints a family portrait of her great-grandfather, "Upper Mississippi Steamboat Giant: Commodore William F. Davidson." Cynthia first spotted her family's name in earlier issues of the REFLECTOR about Alton Slough and the legendary packet PHIL SHERIDAN. In response to those articles, she graciously inquired whether our members might possibly enjoy reading her biography of this Upper Mississippi steamboat icon. After giving Cynthia our assurances that yes, we would like that very much indeed, we are now pleased to share her fascinating story, told with some very human and revealing glimpses of the man behind the legend.

Having covered several decades of steamboating from its pioneer days through its heyday, we move ahead in time to conclude this issue with a feature detailing one of the most tragic events in the modern-day era of inland river towboating. The Federal Barge Line steamer NATCHEZ was lost, along with half of her crew, on a cold and wild night in March 1948. This tragedy is recounted in "The NATCHEZ and the Greenville Bridge." Once again, you will be reading a narrative that was prompted by an e-mail from one of our readers, a story brought to mind as Capt. Elam Rusk passed along some final demolition photos of that notorious span from early this year.

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137 Juliana St • (304) 420-4800

*Weblinks available at [www.s-and-d.org](http://www.s-and-d.org)*

As this issue of the REFLECTOR goes to press, special celebrations of America's river heritage at Ohio River Museum's first Inland Waterways Festival on August 6-7, and Bicentennial programs at Howard Steamboat Museum on July 16 and in New Albany during the month of July will have taken place. Similar commemorations all over the Ohio and Mississippi valley have been observed or will be observed in these final months of 2011. As our readers report on these gatherings, we hope to share those details with you in December.

All of our feature stories and many of the articles in this issue spring from letters and e-mails addressed to the REFLECTOR. We continue to be amazed and gratified at the wide variety of interests, knowledge and generosity in sharing which reflect you, our readers and members. And so as we gather this September 16-17 in Marietta to remember the stories and traditions of our nation's inland rivers, we also gather to celebrate the rich variety, sense of community and enthusiasm of the many faces and voices that are the Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Rivermen. We look forward to seeing **you** there! 📍





## Meet Our Contributors

**John H. White, Jr.** (*Will the Real NEW ORLEANS Please Steam Forward*, p.8) is a native of Cincinnati, with lasting memories of the city's Greene Line packets and of scores of sternwheel towboats as they paraded by the city front. Like others of his generation, Jack has a special place in his heart for the Coney Island excursion steamer ISLAND QUEEN. In the introduction to his book *The Island Queen: Cincinnati's Excursion Steamer*, which he co-authored with his brother Robert, he wrote that "the story of the ISLAND QUEEN seemed to be a natural one for brothers who, in effect, had been raised in her wake." He recalled that in his youth, he looked forward to trips to the big amusement park. His reason, however, was because "I wanted to ride the boat; once at the Park, I was soon ready to return home. In fact, I would have been happier just to ride the boat back and forth all day."

Another of John's life-long passions was railroading and railroad history. After receiving his degree in history from Miami University, he was hired as Curator of Transportation for the Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution, a position he held until his retirement thirty-two years later. He modestly observed that "the Smithsonian felt it was a good fit."

A respected author, historian and researcher, John has written fourteen books and over 150 articles. When Dover Publications reissued Louis C. Hunter's classic *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, he was asked to write the introduction for the new edition. John continues to surface contemporary newspaper and magazine accounts of steamboating, which he generously shares with those interested in preserving our nation's inland river history.

Since his retirement as Curator for the Smithsonian, Jack has served as adjunct professor of history at his alma mater in Oxford, OH, where he makes his home. We are pleased to share with our readers not only his feature article in this issue,

but also a review of one of his most recent books, *Steamboats on the Inland Rivers*, on page 32.

**Cynthia Davidson Bend** (*Upper Mississippi Giant: Commodore William F. Davidson*, p. 12) remarks that although Commodore Davidson's descendents may have abandoned steamboating, they did not abandon the river. Cynthia's father, the third William F. Davidson to be named for his grandfather, traded paddlewheels for paddles. During his childhood the only vacation her father ever took was to canoe white-water rivers in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Initiated into white-water canoeing when she was ten, Cynthia loved the excitement — and also the two days out of school as they had to shoot the rapids in the high water of early spring. In rivers that looked like submerged mountain ranges, her Dad would shout "WATCH OUT FOR THAT ROCK!" Which rock? That was always the mystery, she confesses. When she guessed wrong or wasn't quick enough to spade the bow around a menacing crag, they'd have to take out the canvas patches and brass tacks and heat up the black tar to mend the rips in her "skin."

After WW II, aluminum replaced wood and canvas. With their "tin cans," Cynthia remembers the family taking on more demanding rivers like the Flambeau in Wisconsin, now sadly, dammed. When she wasn't on the water, she was in it. Through senior high and college Cynthia swam free style in races up to three-quarters of a mile.

Cynthia and her husband Charles celebrated their 64th wedding anniversary earlier this year. They built by hand the house in Afton, MN where they raised three children, a house in which they still live. After graduation from Carleton College, Cynthia was a teacher and author of four books, including *Billy's Goat*, a juvenile novel based on family pets. Used with schoolchildren in grades 4-6, it is still available on Amazon.

She continues to spend a lot of time on the water swimming or catching fish—enough to keep the family in bass and pan fish through the winter. Sometimes a grandchild or a great grandchild comes along as fishing companion, so the river connection remains unbroken into the next generations.




**You are Invited to Gather with Your Friends  
for the 72nd ANNUAL MEETING  
of the Sons & Daughters of Pioneer Rivermen  
at Marietta, OH  
on Friday and Saturday, September 16-17, 2011**

The program and festivities are set for S&D's 2011 annual meeting, and Jeff Spear sends details of a weekend which promises to be full of good times, good food, and wonderful memories. Our Friday night get-together kicks off at 7:30, a bit earlier than usual, in the Sternwheel Room at the Hotel Lafayette. The highlight of the evening gathering will be viewing the video "Saving the SNYDER." Word also has it that a special announcement regarding details of a spectacular acquisition received by S&D will be shared with the membership. Some tantalizing tidbits are revealed on page 37 of this issue. As usual, S&D faithful assemble afterwards in the comfy Hotel lobby and environs to swap tales, catch up on the latest news, and enjoy the company of longtime friends and greet the new faces among us.

Saturday morning's annual business meeting will convene at 9:30 in the Sternwheel Room. A nominating committee of Ruth Guenther, Fred Rutter and Barb Hameister, chair, will present names for the ballot in this year's election. Reports on the condition of S&D and its adjunct organizations, as well as updates from the Mercantile Library in St. Louis and Howard Steamboat Museum will be presented. Oftentimes other river museums and libraries share greetings and brief reports during this time as well.

Luncheon on Saturday will be at the Hotel, with a menu of chicken salad sandwich, chips, fruit, and cookie available for \$8.75. Capt. Bill Barr will be our luncheon speaker, sharing his expertise and inside look at "River Commerce Today." Your afternoon is free for visiting the W. P. SNYDER, JR. and the Ohio River Museum, with its special photo exhibit on the 1884 Flood, a display which contrasts contemporary views of the Flood with present-day images. Come discover the intriguing story behind the exhibit's title, "The Volcano and the Flood." This year is the 70th anniversary of Ohio River Museum's opening.

Our evening banquet at the Hotel will be served at 6:30. Choices of entree are: prime rib (\$27), salmon (\$26), and chicken (\$22), all served with roasted potatoes, vegetable, salad, dessert, coffee and tea. Following dinner, our featured speaker for the evening is Capt. Bob Reynolds, sharing his look at "Seasons on the River." Once the formal program concludes, the after-gathering continues long into the evening, as another memorable S&D meeting draws to a close.

The Hotel Lafayette asks that members planning to eat lunch Saturday and attend the banquet that evening, make reservations at least a week in advance by calling **800-331-9336**. A full schedule of meeting events with times and locations will be available at the front desk of the Lafayette. 



*Pictured here are a set of bell pulls made by Capt. Park Buttonfield while he was captain of the steamer MIDLAND, Crucible Steel Fuel Division. These would be wired up to the engineroom jingle bells down below. See the story on page 37 for more info about the collection from which these came.*

**WAY'S PACKET DIRECTORY 1848-1994**

ISBN No. 0821411063

List price at \$39.95 plus \$5 shipping/handling

**WAY'S STEAM TOWBOAT DIRECTORY**

ISBN No. 0921409697

List price at \$39.95 plus \$5 shipping/handling

*\*Note: any additional copies ordered ship for \$1 each*

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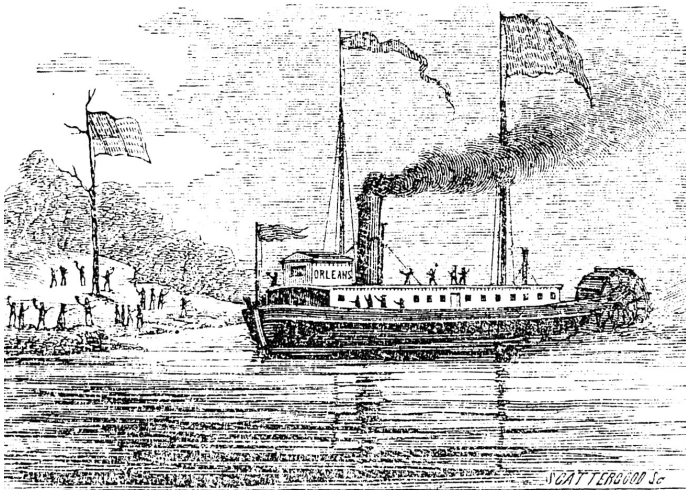
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# Will the Real *NEW ORLEANS* Please Steam Forward?

by John H. White, Jr.

There is, so far as I can find, no contemporary illustration of the historic river steamer *NEW ORLEANS* of 1811. The earliest datable image I can locate appeared in James T. Lloyd's *Steamboat Directory* of 1856 which was published forty-five years after the appearance of the first inland rivers steamboat.



**First artist's sketch of *NEW ORLEANS* in Lloyd's 1856  
Steamboat Directory.**

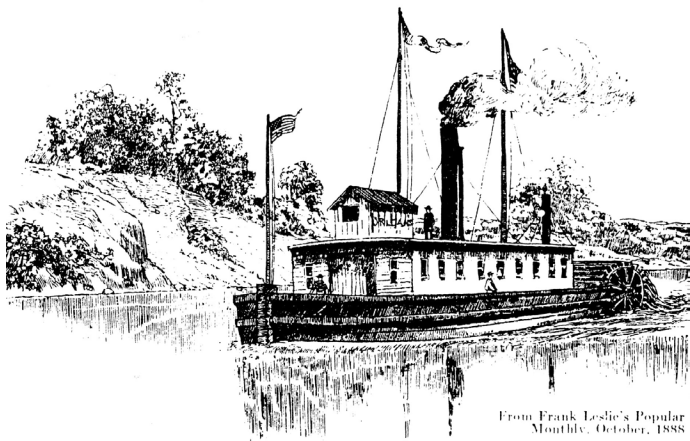
It should be understood that Lloyd was a publisher who compiled and printed books. He was not a professional historian as far as can be determined and he wrote for the popular market. He needed to sell books in large numbers to meet a payroll, pay the rent, and provide for his family. Profit was the chief motive here, not accuracy or scholarship. Of course he tried to be as accurate as possible but he could not afford to spend months or years in research and fact checking. The text and illustrations were produced as quickly as possible for the *Steamboat Directory* and then it was time to move on to the next job. When it came to illustrations, it was up to the artist to create something that looked right or at least reasonable, and send the art on to an engraver to make a plate. When it came to historic vessels such as the *NEW ORLEANS*, there was no convenient reference material available, and so the artist would "invent" an image. So long as it did not

look like a current-day vessel, 1856 in this case, it was acceptable. What we say about Lloyd is likely true for the several other printed works included in this article.

The drawing was prepared by an engraver named B. Scattergood. This ungainly sternwheeler is in my opinion a most inaccurate depiction of the original vessel since it in no way agrees with any other Fulton-designed vessel. Of the fifteen or more boats built and designed by Robert Fulton, all were more or less of a single pattern. The *NEW ORLEANS* was designed with two decks, a large barren top deck, side wheels, a single smokestack tall and slender, masts for sails, shallow flat-bottom hull, and a decorative stern much like an ocean-going sailing vessel of the time (1800). The wheels were covered with wheel covers or boxes and very near the engine. There was no pilot house and but a single rudder.

Howard Chapelle (1900-1975), a sailing ship expert, contended that Fulton and his hull builders copied the common Durham boat, a popular hull style for smaller sea-going coastal vessels. The clumsy and crude-appearing vessel created by Mr. Scattergood has a hull too deep, a top deck cabin and a pilot house that did not exist, plus a foolish and overly large sternwheel and smokestack totally out of character for anything designed or built by Robert Fulton.

In October 1888 *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* published a similar and equally bogus recreation of the *NEW ORLEANS* as a sternwheeler. This monstrosity has been reprinted over the years to represent Fulton's first inland steamer. The pilot house might best be described as an oversize hen house. Fulton himself would have been, in my opinion, much offended by the absence of grace and lack of style in these heavy-handed and coarse reconstructions.



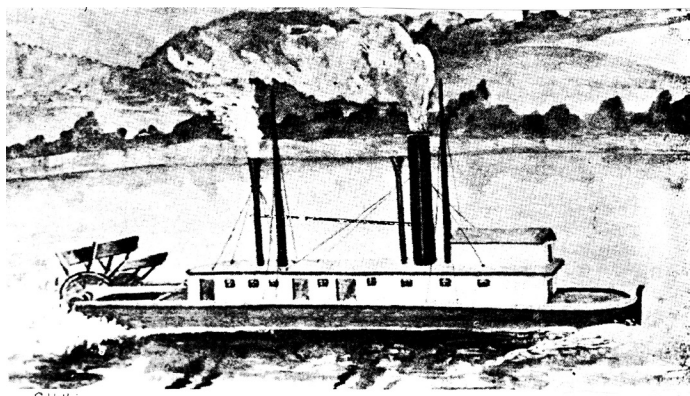
From Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly, October, 1888

**THE NEW ORLEANS**

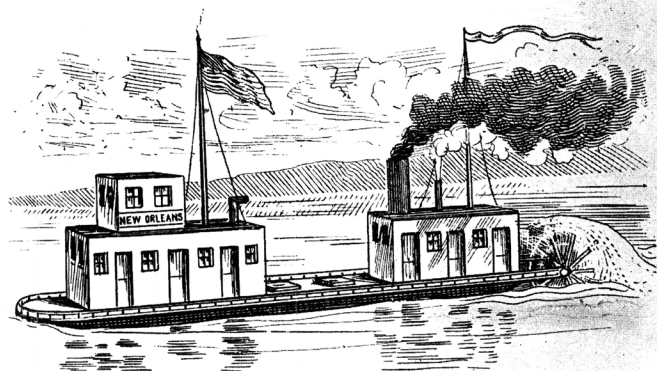
Artist's Sketch of the First Steamboat on the Ohio River, 1811.

**NEW ORLEANS as she appeared in 1888 Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly.**

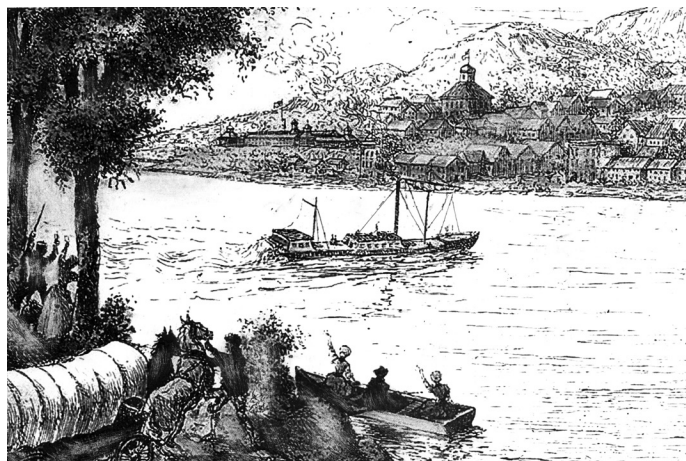
Sometime later an artist for the *Cincinnati Post* newspaper created another cumbersome sternwheel tugboat to represent the NEW ORLEANS. The date of this rendering is uncertain, but it was reprinted in the *Ohio River Handbook* in 1964 and is reproduced here.



Decades ago, Capt. Way discovered a curious line drawing at the Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh that he recorded on what is now negative 3172 at the Inland Rivers Library in Cincinnati. I suspect the source is an elementary school textbook of about 1900 or before. The artist was surely imaginative and determined to be original in his depiction of this historic vessel as can be seen in the drawing above right. It is certainly original. I would nominate it for top prize in the World's Ugliest Steamboat Contest. It is also perhaps the most inaccurate image pertaining to the NEW ORLEANS' general arrangement and its details. Can any reader send us an example of a more grotesque river steamer?



Late in 2010 I visited the Behringer-Crawford Museum in Devon Park, Covington, KY. They have a steamboat exhibit on the third floor that traces the history of riverboats from 1811 to the present time. An image of the NEW ORLEANS at Cincinnati during her maiden voyage shows the vessel heading toward Fort Washington and the Hamilton County Court House. It is an attractive engraving and I can see why it was selected for the display. Unfortunately it is also very inaccurate. The boat

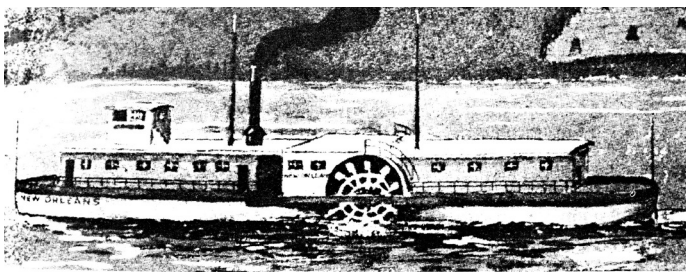


is hopelessly wrong. It is not only a sternwheeler, but it has two sizable deck cabins, while the original vessel had none. The main cabin has walls that slope in like a Civil War ironclad. It also appears much too long for a vessel that was only 116 feet long. Fort Washington is depicted in an oversize manner. It was only about 180 feet square. In addition, since it was demolished in 1808, it was not standing at the time of the NEW ORLEANS' visit late in 1811. The County Court House was much smaller than shown, measuring 56 x 62 feet in plan and standing just three stories high, not counting the hip roof or cupola. Work started on this structure in about 1814 and it was not completed until 1819. Our anonymous artist clearly did not do his homework very carefully. The image came from a slide in the

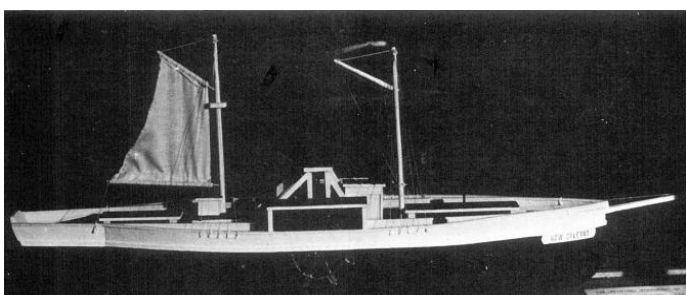


collection of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County. The source of the original print is not known.

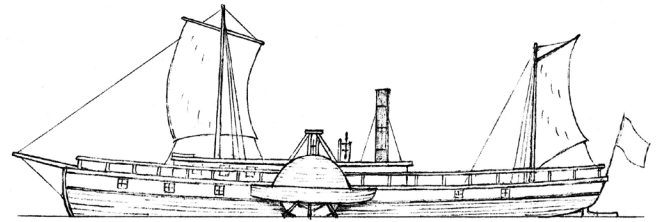
Some years later a sidewheel version of the NEW ORLEANS appeared in print. Unfortunately it included a very large top deck cabin and a substantial pilothouse. This image is also from the *Cincinnati Post* and the copy shown below comes from page 164 of Benjamin Klein's *Ohio River Handbook*, 1964. A full-size operating replica was created in November 1911 for the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania at a boat yard in Elizabeth, PA. The work was completed under the direction of Capt. James A. Henderson. Capt. Henderson may have been an excellent riverman, but as an historian his knowledge of early river steamers and design practices of Robert Fulton were deficient. While Fulton favored an open top deck, Henderson built a large boxy cabin. Fulton located the paddlewheels toward the bow of the vessel while Henderson placed them well to the stern. Fulton employed no pilothouse while the 1911 replica sported a sizable one. Fulton enclosed the paddlewheels inside boxes while Henderson for some reason left the sides of the boxes open. Fulton outfitted the NEW ORLEANS with two large masts and sails. The 1911 vessel had sail so small as to be useless. The 1811 boat was 116 feet long by 20 foot beam with a tonnage of about 371 tons. The replica was 138 feet long by 26 foot beam, with its tonnage not recorded so far as I can find. As an accurate representation of the original vessel, the 1911 replica was clearly a failure.



**Below: NEW ORLEANS model, Campus Martius Museum**

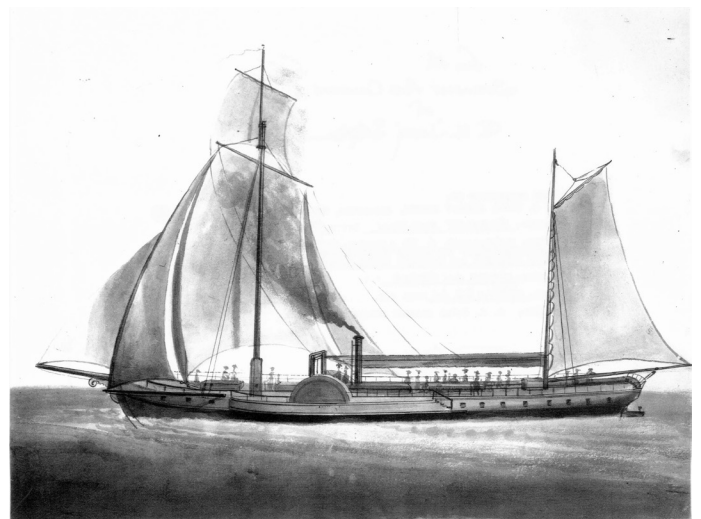


In 1967 a small book, *The Days of the Steam Boat*, was published. Author William H. Ewen included a drawing prepared by himself of the probable



appearance of the NEW ORLEANS as depicted above. It shows that this author/artist had done his homework to a degree, and he rendered a more accurate picture than his predecessors. The hull is perhaps too deep and too short, with the smokestack too far astern. The large deck cabin is of course wrong, but in general, it is a good effort.

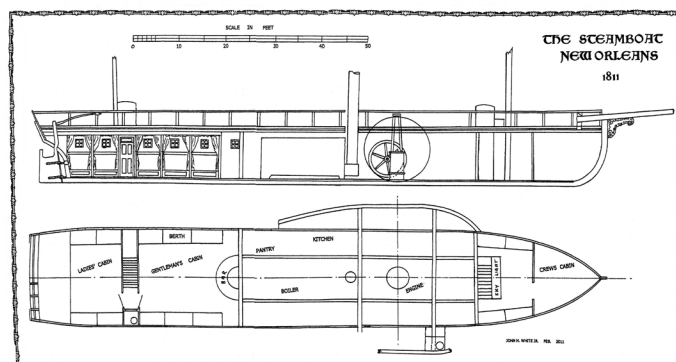
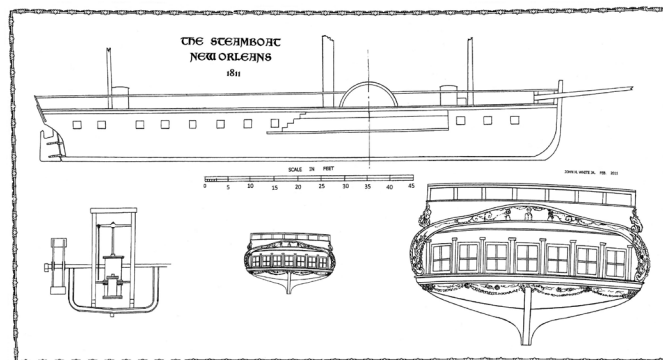
The S&D REFLECTOR on page 37 of the March issue reproduced a color image of the NEW ORLEANS as reconstructed by artist Gary R. Lucy. The skill of the artist is very apparent, but it is in my opinion too much like Fulton's first boat, the NORTH RIVER STEAMBOAT of 1807 as originally built, in depicting the outboard flywheel and lack of boxes for the paddlewheels. When that vessel was rebuilt during the winter of 1807-08, the hull was widened, engine rebuilt, and its overhanging flywheel brought inside the hull. A new boiler was installed, the cabins were much improved and wheel boxes were added. A better image prepared by Fulton himself is presented here in his own contemporary drawing.




In more recent time, former S&D president Gerald Sutphin discovered this image in the collection of the U. S. Naval Academy of a steamboat pen and wash drawing by Robert Fulton. The drawing is number six in a set dated November 20, 1810. It measures 17<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> by 22 inches. Jerry thinks it depicts the NEW ORLEANS as the date must be very close to the time that drawings for this vessel were underway. Yet, since Fulton remained loyal to the general design shown in this drawing, it might be for another boat or only a study design. I suspect it is one of Fulton's patent drawings – he was issued a general patent for steamboats on February 11, 1809 and he added a supplement to his patent on February 9, 1811.

Fortunately, several contemporary drawings for Fulton vessels are available. There is an original general arrangement drawing for the RARITON preserved by New York Historical Society and reproduced in *American Steamships on the Atlantic* by Cedric Ridgely-Nevitt in 1981. She was almost the same size as the NEW ORLEANS and was completed two years earlier. She had a flat-bottom hull perfectly suited to service on the Western Rivers. Original drawings in New Jersey Historical Society collections exist for the contemporary CAR OF NEPTUNE, a Hudson River steamer. The same is true for the Long Island Sound steamer FULTON of 1813. In addition to these documents are the very detailed drawings of Fulton ships in Jean Baptiste Marestier's report on American steamships published in Paris in 1824, using data gathered in the U. S. several years earlier.

It is clear from these drawings that Fulton followed a consistent plan for all of his boats. This included an open top deck as free and clear of obstructions as would be found on the typical ocean-going sailing ship. There were no cabins so that crew could move about easily to tend the sails. The cabins were on the second or main deck. The ladies' cabin was in the stern with the gentlemen's cabin just forward. Next came the boiler, then the engine space with a smaller secondary men's compartment and the crew's quarters in the bow. The last named compartment was the least desirable space on the vessel because it tended to be wet, rough riding and noisy. My own reconstruction of the NEW ORLEANS is reproduced in the two



figures above. My drawing is little more than a reworking of Fulton's own drawings, but drawn to the dimensions of the NEW ORLEANS. John Fryant's beautiful full-color perspective rendering of the vessel on the front cover follows my plan and shows the boat as it most likely appeared.

I wish to thank Diane Mallstrom of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County and Regina Siegent of the Behringer-Crawford Museum for their help in the preparation of this article. 

## In Upcoming Issues:

*Raising of Steamer MIDLAND at Davis Island*

*The Fast Boats: Inland River Greyhounds*

*Falls Heroes: Louisville's Life Savers (Part 4)*

*Vintage Steamboat Models Restored*

*The 1884 Ohio River Flood*

*Story of Dubuque Boat & Boiler Company*



# Upper Mississippi Giant: Commodore William Fuson Davidson

by Cynthia Davidson Bend  
Edited by Dutton Foster

Commodore William Fuson Davidson, according to Dorothy Warren in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, was “to Mississippi River steamboating what Jay Gould and Cornelius Vanderbilt were to the railroads.” The title bestowed on him by J. Fletcher Williams, a reporter for the *Daily Minnesotan*, stuck because Davidson “was at the head of the greatest of upper river packet lines,” according to George Byron Merrick. Whereas his grandson (my father) viewed rivers as whitewater challenges to his canoeing skill, the Commodore saw rivers as watery roads to profit.

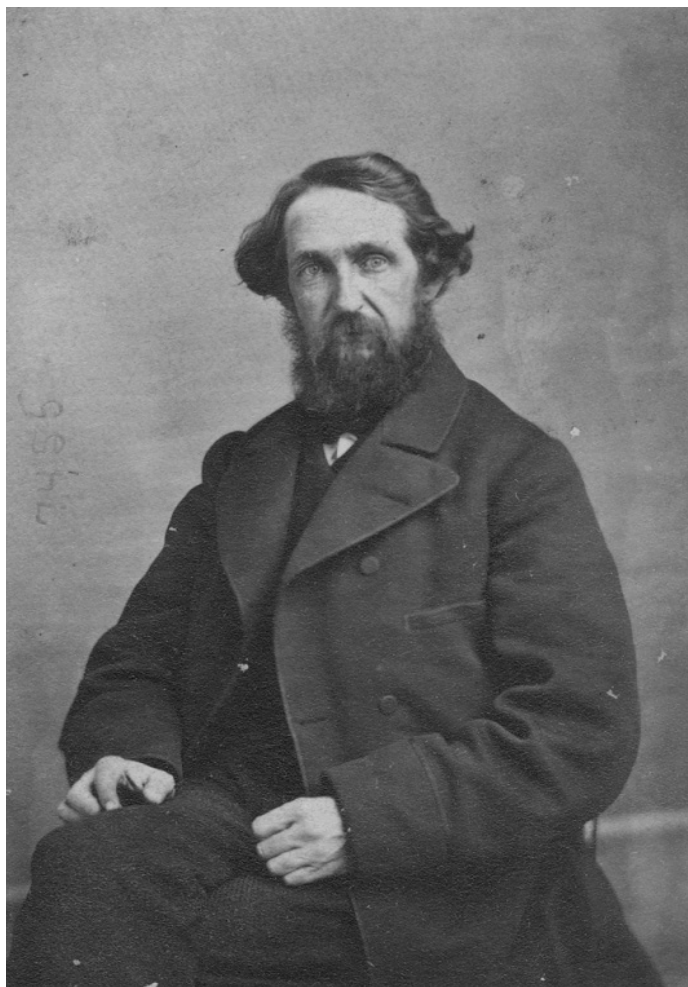
Born February 4, 1825, in Lawrence County, OH, William was the oldest of ten children. His father, also named William, made his living as a flatboatman on the Big Sandy River, as well as being a Baptist preacher. He was a hard man as his neighbor Judge Johnston made clear, recounting an occasion in early spring when the elder Davidson pushed aside blocks of ice with his cane to ease intrepid members of his flock to their shivering baptism in the Ohio River. On December 7, 1858, the future “Commodore,” then a captain at age thirty-three, married the Judge’s daughter Sarah.

Young Bill Davidson ended his formal education and began his river career at the age of ten. Growing up to see paddlewheels replace poles, the river boy joined the entrepreneurial rush, eager to cash in on America’s bounty by transporting everything from skins to lumber, grain to Idaho gold and circus performers. He believed riches were the just rewards of hard work. He came to revere a God in his own image, one who had bequeathed him a continent as well as personal and business difficulties to toughen him up for heaven.

## Friends and Enemies

It took years of hard work before anyone called Bill “Commodore.” In 1845 at age twenty, he acquired a boat named GONDOLA. With his next, the little sternwheeler FRANKLIN STEELE, he began carrying freight on the Minnesota River. He soon undercut his competitors, endearing him to local farmers. On his way upriver, Davidson unloaded their supplies on the bank; on the return trip, he loaded their grain and other produce. In 1858, just married, he bought another boat, and by 1859 he had five in operation.

As the years passed, he apparently never forgot the farmers who had been his first customers. In



*Portrait of Commodore William F. Davidson during his years as prominent steamboat owner and operator. Photo from author, courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

1886, a year before his death, the *St. Peter Advertiser* defended the Commodore against the *St. Paul Press*, which had accused Davidson of vicious monopolistic practices. It seems Davidson had bought 900,000 bushels of grain for which he had no buyers, so it rotted in storage, as mentioned in this grateful article:

“To the farmers we will say that, when all other wheat buyers have played out, this ‘pirate’ Davidson will buy your grain and give the highest going prices. If he chooses to let it rot here, or is obliged to in order that the public may be accommodated, that is his fault, or generosity of heart—as you please to have it.”

The *St. Paul Pioneer’s* attacks against Davidson Line’s growing monopoly of the upper Mississippi trade ended in 1865, when the Commodore bought the paper and placed his nephew in charge. In its pages thenceforth, the Davidson clan suddenly appeared as fine public servants, and the threatening specter of railroads on the horizon was swept away, as voiced in an article on November 30, 1865:

“The carrying trade must always be one in which railroads cannot compete with steamers—the latter being enabled to take freight at so much cheaper rates. In the vast produce exporting trade of this country in future years, the steamboat will undoubtedly have its full share of business. It is impossible to prophesy the course of trade, but it seems not too much to say that our city will in the future reap as much benefit from her position at the head of navigation on the Mississippi as she has in the past.”

Newspapers continued to give plenty of space to the energetic Scotsman with the circle of waving brown hair and full beard setting off his prominent nose, pictured in the protrait on page 12. He was hated or admired, depending on which side of the deal was speaking: “a monopolistic octopus of the upper Mississippi;” “a shrewd unscrupulous man;” “he could deceive most men and make them his tools;” “for ways that were dark and trickery, he would beat the heathen Chinee.” On the other hand, the following verse ran in the *La Crosse Chronicle* and various other papers in 1872, expressing lusty admiration of “fighting Bill.”

## FIGHTING BILL

Bill kem in the trade with the darndest old craft;  
She was broke down amidships and hogged all abaft,  
And her chimneys they leaned at right angles away,  
But he’d writ on his wheelhouse, “I’ve kem here to stay.”

The people all laughed at the plug of a boat  
And declared her Capt’n should have a new coat;  
For his elbows were out and his knees wasn’t in.  
But Bill he wuz honest, rags wan’t no sin.  
He wuz deck-hand and rouster—stood a watch at the wheel,

And would fire till he made the old safety valve squeal.

Wai, the berths that he held on that boat wan’t a few  
Fer the boys all declar’d he wuz chambermaid too!

He’d run any boat in the trade out ov sight  
And wuz never see’d knapping in daytime or night.  
But would land for a hail jist to take in a dime.  
And the shipper, they sed “Give us Bill every time.”  
The other boats vowed that the thing wuz quite plain  
That their business was played if this chap did remain;

So to put up a job they straight went about,  
The object of which wuz to rais William out.  
They cut down the rates and tuk passengers cheap,  
What before they charged one, now would pay for a heap.

But Bill he laid low with his deuces and treys,  
And what worried them most, he kept standing the raise.

The fight it went on, and the money it flew;  
When they landed for freight, Bill wuz always there too,

And raked in such a share of the trade which they sought,

That they swore by the powers, “Twas a tartar they’d caught.”

Yes, he staid, you may bet, and you’ll find him thar yit;

He’ll tell you about all the fights that he’s fit,  
Fur Bill he wuz game, and attended to biz.

And yer see all them “White Collard Boats,” well,  
thar his.

## Family Man

Whatever the public believed, the Commodore’s nine brothers and sisters venerated their older brother as a patriarchal Scottish clansman. His daughter, Sarah Matilda, remembered his table



surrounded by young male relatives looking for loans, jobs on the boats, or simply room and board 'on the house.' According to her, "The sacred name of 'family' was sufficient to win job, food, or a loan." At least a dozen Davidsons were well known in steamboat circles. Perhaps the most prominent was the second Davidson brother, Peyton Short Davidson. According to Merrick, "Pate" was "famous for pugnacity as well as pertinacity, a hard-fisted old steam-boatman of whom there is no record of repentance or conversion... a model mate in everything, including [profane] language."

Among many other relatives were Colonel J. Hamilton Davidson, cousin and oft-needed attorney for the Commodore; John X., brother of Hamilton and editor of the *Daily Pioneer* for the brief time the Commodore owned it; Jim and Frank Johnston, brothers in law; and Captain Thomas, whose sweetheart broke off their engagement after one trip on his boat. Thomas was known as one of the hardest drinking captains on the Minnesota River. Once after running over a stump and breaking 160 timbers in the hull, Tom accused his mate, Jim Johnston, of having ripped the bottom out of his boat. The ensuing scene with the captain, too boozy to ring the roof bell, and Jim heading up the hill at the next stop after saying he would take no more from Tom, was surely enough to discourage any sober-minded fiancée. Davidson took family loyalty seriously, and the family depended on his loyalty. Granddaughter Sarah Anne wrote, "After the Commodore's death his widow was deluged with letter after letter from begging relatives, most of whom claimed that the Commodore had always helped them in the past."

The Commodore's devotion to business frequently kept him away from his wife and home, a home darkened by tragedy. Sarah spent her time nursing sick babies and mourning the deaths of four of her six children. Their first, William, died in 1865 when three years old. Receiving a peashooter for Christmas, he eagerly put the tube to his lips—and inhaled a pea. His parents, unable to dislodge the pea, watched helplessly as little Willie died of asphyxiation. In that same year their third child, Mary, died when less than a year old. The second child, Edward, grew up and married, but for most of his adult life was in a sanatorium in the belief

that he was Napoleon, with his devoted wife, Julia, in a house two blocks away. Adelaide lived only three years. In his pocket diary, made up mainly of business notations, the Commodore does mention, "lunch with the wife," and then later, "Ramsey elected US senate 9:00 PM. Daughter born 2 AM. Steele in time." The date was 1869, the year of Annie's birth and death. Steele is presumably the doctor.

## Claiming His River

In 1856 Davidson was ready to reach out to the big river trade. This meant challenging the Northern Packet Company and the Galena, Dubuque, Dunleith and Minnesota Packet Company along the length of the Mississippi from New Orleans to the head of navigation at St. Paul. In June 1856 the JACOB TRADER began her laborious trip from St. Louis to St. Paul with the Commodore as captain and Peyton as mate. Landing at St. Paul's Jackson Street levee three months after departing St. Louis, she was welcomed by the *Pioneer Reporter* as a harbinger of people and commerce: "The more the merrier." Improbably, this extremely slow boat was the first of what was to become the "lightning line." Captain Davidson and his brother piloted her until she sank at Cincinnati in 1859, valued at \$12,000 and insured for \$6,500.

Even though the existing lines couldn't handle the increased river traffic; a newcomer was unwelcome. Although there were several smaller companies navigating between St. Louis and St. Paul, it was the Northern Line and the Galena, Dubuque, Dunleith and Minnesota Packet Company who monopolized most of the trade. In 1855 Galena declared dividends of \$100,000, with capitalization far greater than that of the Commodore's lines. Galena's most successful boat, the second WAR EAGLE, cost \$20,000 and cleared \$44,000 in her first year.

Davidson's packets, however, were welcomed enthusiastically by the business-boosting news sheets; no need for the Commodore to pay for advertising. In the "River News" of the *Pioneer*: "Capt. Davidson deserves the united thanks of the citizens of the Minnesota Valley, ... for placing upon our beautiful river so large and elegantly furnished

a steamer.” And “Davidson understands business ... does not tie up his boat for a week waiting on freight, but keeps her moving, thus making two trips to other’s one ... a good man to travel with and keeps attentive men.”

The rival lines fought hard for trade. Davidson’s FRANKLIN STEELE and Galena’s EQUATOR loudly summoned passengers with a cacophony of brass bands, while runners did their best to collect customers for their respective boats.

Like the steamboat lines, towns along the Mississippi system competed for the commerce that river traffic would generate. La Crosse businessmen wanted their own line, independent of transient or regular packets. But the Galena Packet Company gave them the brush-off. The La Crosse *National Democrat* fumed: “Are we to have a steamboat? Or did the Galena monopolists frighten our ‘solid men’ from the enterprise?” La Crosse ran their own boat for a time, but Galena’s rate-cutting made business tough for all. The Commodore joined the game in the late 1850’s, and the fight was on. After much expensive maneuvering, the Davidsons in 1860 prevailed to form the La Crosse & St. Paul Packet Line.

At about the same time, the Commodore bought a lumber mill in La Crosse with a long frontage on the Black River. The Davidsons constructed a shipyard and opened one of the few real boat-stores on the Mississippi. The Commodore’s brother Pate was in charge of the store; its basement was stocked with rope, chain, pike poles, oars, and all that a steamboat line required for operation, while the upper floor carried foodstuffs, usually of better quality than those of the normal grocery store. As the store had a telegraph service, packets could wire the store in advance of their arrival and order fresh meats and vegetables. In 1867 the boat store was the third largest merchandising establishment in La Crosse and, with its lumber and boatbuilding, one of its largest employers.

Frank E. Davidson, a young cousin of the Commodore’s, recalls selling 700 dozen eggs a day to the mill-hands of La Crosse during Lent, also many pollocks. The pollocks were sold as codfish, and Frank used to cut a V out of their tails to make

them look like the genuine article. In spite of Frank’s shady merchandising, La Crosse was thankful for the Davidsons’ business.

## Ongoing Struggle

The Commodore’s strategies with the rival Northern Line began with an effort to cut a deal, asking the latter to limit their business to trafficking between Dubuque and St. Louis, leaving the upper river to his White Collar Line, or to share the trade. The Northern Line refused and the war was on. The boats of the two lines would race for landings, while hundreds gathered to cheer at the levees. An 1872 Warsaw, IL, newspaper reported: “The Northern Line Company and Davidson’s White Collar Line have inaugurated a rate-cutting war: the passenger rate is but \$4.00 to St. Paul and only \$1.00 to St. Louis.” Eager voyagers lined up along the banks of the Mississippi for passage, finding it cheaper to travel than to stay at home. Meanwhile, Pate steamed into St. Louis on the ITASCA and was asked what he expected to do with “that old trap there.” His retort was that he’d have a white collar on all the boats running out of St. Louis before he was through.



**WAREAGLE No. 3 and ITASCA at St. Paul around 1866 or 67. Both boats carry Davidson’s “White Collar” trademark.**

*Photo courtesy of Murphy Library, UW - La Crosse.*

As the rate war escalated, both companies were losing money. An ill-timed catastrophe for the Davidsons was the burning of the S. S. MERRILL



at Warsaw. The *Warsaw Bulletin* reported on Sept. 21, 1872 that the Commodore was not disconcerted and telegraphed: "Steamer TOM H. JASPER takes MERRILL's place, will not lose a trip. Tell our friends to stand by us." But a letter to his father gives quite another picture:

"We are having opposition in our SteamBoating and have been losing some money but the other lines have put up the Rates some and we are now making a little money. Hope we will come out all Right yet this fall... They are somewhat encouraged by the loss of the Merrill which they think will cripple us but we have boats enough left, but none good as her. She is a great loss to us at this time but she is gone. She was partly insured, thirty seven thousand five hundred dollars only, which is better than the whole loss. We will come out all right never fear. Give yourself no trouble - we will come out right in the end."

An observer commented, "The grit of the Northern Line stockholders and the stubbornness of the Davidsons were probably more wonderful than wise," and after three years of battling, the Northern Line and the Davidson Line struck a deal bringing forth, not open trade, but another, larger monopoly. The quiet deal consolidating the oncerival lines fashioned the apparent competitors into a rate-splitting partnership.

"The Bald Eagle of the North" and his White Collar Line won control of Mississippi river traffic, and the WAR EAGLE, among many others, gained a white collar and carried passengers on round trips from St. Paul to St. Louis—a 729-mile distance—in about five days at a cost of \$25.00 or so.

At that time the Commodore's capitalization was a million and a half, and his line comprised fifty steamboats with almost a hundred barges transporting grain, coal, potatoes, material for trading posts, lumber, paint, iron, glass and chemicals for upriver jobbing sites, as well as Minnesota ice for southern towns. His passenger cargo was equally diverse. On April 30, 1857 the *Pioneer* reported the FRANKLIN STEELE waiting at Lake Pepin for the ice to break. It carried seventy five turnvereins (gymnasts) bound for New Ulm. In 1857 the STEELE transported one hundred fifty

soldiers from Traverse to Fort Snelling. Although the Commodore's business centered on his steamboat lines, he also made varied acquisitions along the river banks. His interests included the wheat business, grain elevators, farm land, timber, mining, cotton plantations, and late in life, an opera house he built in St. Paul (see article on page 20).

Yet, beneath the Commodore's edifice of business success, the tragedy of four children dying in infancy remained. Sarah Anne Davidson quotes from her grandfather's diary: "Sun. Jan. 8, '82: Freezing. Go to Cemetery. Walk both ways. Lot covered with snow. Children sleep beneath while their Spirits are with God."

## Fire and Low Water

Like those of all owners, Davidson's boats were prone to disaster. The 1858 WAR EAGLE burned in 1869, and her 1876 replacement struck the Keokuk Bridge and sank in 1881, although she was raised and ran until 1893. What happened to the poor pilot when he faced the Commodore's wrath was never recorded.

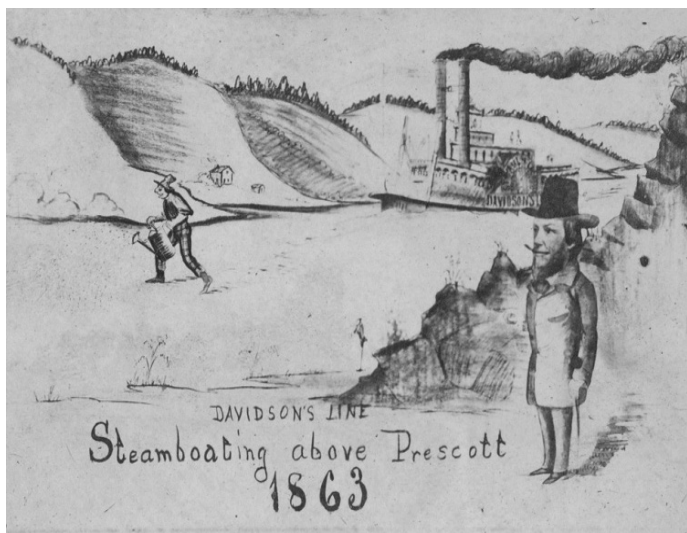
Meeting the challenge of weather and water was ongoing. The Davidsons' line was ready to take a chance despite "hell and low water." In 1863 and '64 when the water was so low that boats had to "blow their whistles to drive cattle out of the river," the White Collar Line was the only carrier to continue service above La Crosse. Their light-draft boats plied five drought-isolated areas of the river shuttling passengers who were herded over sandbar portages from one land-locked boat to the next. The crews sweated under loads of cargo and steamer trunks as gentlemen and ladies, wet skirts trailing, trudged through the sand with bags and hatboxes. Captain Volney A. Bigelow, an apprentice pilot on the Davidson boats in 1864, describes his experience:

"We used 5 boats to get from La Crosse to St. Paul: the WENONA [WINONA] La Crosse to Chimney Rock and transferred to the FLORA. Farther up stream the FLORA transferred to the ARIEL which went on to Prescott. Transferred there to the DUBUQUE which proceeded up stream to the bar. The JOHN RUMSEY was waiting above

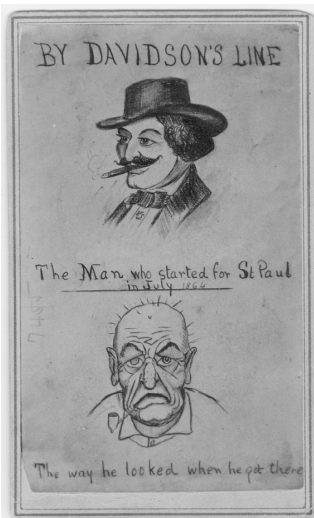
the bar. Passengers and freight were unloaded onto a barge and both crews pushed the barge by hand across the bar to the RUMSEY, which then went on to St. Paul.”

In August of that year Davidson men built wing dams at the most difficult sand bars, and river traffic was eased.

A cartoon of the time illustrated a beached steamboat and a man with a sprinkling can trudging across the sand in search of water in which to float his craft. A year later the cartoonists continued to make fun of the Davidson Line’s laborious progress toward St. Paul. The man pictured in the cartoon had started for St. Paul in July of 1864 as a debonair fellow with a waxed mustache and a lengthy cigar. By the time he reached his destination he had become a haggard, hairless old man, not too unlike the aging Commodore himself.



Images from author, courtesy Minnesota Historical Society



Perhaps the most difficult bout with sand bars that the Davidsons faced occurred on the Little Big Horn River when the Custer Rebellion Indians were starving, and the U.S. government acknowledged their obligation to feed them. The Davidsons contracted with the government to deliver supplies. The

Commodore sent eleven steamboats from St. Louis up to the Little Big Horn, carrying supplies which Northern Pacific trains had relayed as far as Bismarck. The supplies were delivered around August, but the river was down and disaster struck about half the boats. Some sank, some ran aground and were abandoned. The last that was seen of one boat was its piano floating down the river. Despite the disasters, profits enabled the Davidsons to buy four or five new steamers. Perhaps the most ignominious loss suffered by the Commodore occurred when his legendary PHIL SHERIDAN was destroyed after the marine ways collapsed as she was being hauled out for repairs at the La Crosse boatyard in 1876 (see March 2011 REFLECTOR).

In that winter of 1876 there was an ice gorge at St. Louis which claimed a dozen boats; all were a total loss—with the exception of the Northwestern Line’s CENTENNIAL, piloted by Peyton Davidson. She was a beautiful new boat costing \$65,000, far too big an investment to relegate to the Mississippi mud. She must be raised, and raised she was, with a cadre of divers, wreckers, crew members, and any other able bodied man Pate could conscript. Night and day Captain Davidson worked beside them, much of the time in waist-deep water. Although the steamer was greatly damaged, he did succeed in raising his boat at a cost of \$5,000. His ordeal with floating ice must have been reminiscent of his father’s baptisms in the Ohio River. But conversion was not for Pate. He found saving boats more to his taste than saving souls. As for the CENTENNIAL, she fell victim to ice once again in 1879, after which she ended her career as a barge for transporting sugar on the lower Mississippi.

## The Commodore’s Conversion

There is little doubt that the Commodore enjoyed his liquor early in his life. Of course the bars and the gaming on his steamers were a good source of revenue. About the time of his Baptist father’s death in 1883 — and only four years before his own — the Commodore found his religion while listening to Evangelist Payson Hammond in St. Louis. He went home and with the help of his Presbyterian wife Sarah, poured his liquor into the back alley. The next week he closed the bars on all



his boats, and soon he forbade gambling and dancing on his boats on Sundays. The stockholders raged.

Each night at the St. Louis Music Hall, a prominent guest would join Hammond before a crowd of several thousand. The night the Commodore spoke, crew members in the audience reported that he “rattled it off pretty quick.” No one seems to remember what he said, but the amusement never ceased when Bill Davidson got religion. One commented, “When religion had permeated his system, he went in for it with the same enthusiasm he had shown in butting other people’s steamboats off the track.”

One fateful Sunday, the ALEX MITCHELL, commanded by Captain Laughton, carried two hundred excursionists who were determined to dance their way from La Crosse to Lansing. Their entreaties proved too much for Captain Laughton who, unfortunately, succumbed to their frivolous impulses. After delivering the happy dancers and continuing downriver, as told by William Fisher to George Merrick, “We were struck by a cyclone. We lost both chimneys, the pilot house was unroofed, and part of the hurricane deck on the port side was blown off. Mr. Trudell, the mate, was blown off along with the roof and landed on shore a quarter of a mile away. Providence was apparently confused in meting out the punishment, as Captain Laughton slept quietly in his bunk while his mate was blown away and the Commodore’s boat was wrecked. Davidson, however, knew where to put the blame and promptly fired his insubordinate captain.

To abet the salvation of his crews, the Commodore began to hold prayer meetings aboard his boats. On one occasion, assembling the crew amid the stacked barrels of remunerative freight on the main deck, he intoned with mounting ardor, “Oh Lord, bless the poor. Give to every poor man a barrel of pork—a barrel of salt—a barrel of pep—O, hell no! That’s too damn much pepper!”

The Commodore began founding Bethels along the river, devoted to giving spiritual sustenance to steamboat crews, to organize and conduct Sabbath Schools, and to promote the temporal and spiritual welfare of river-men and their families. His secretary allegedly complained to Davidson when

money began flowing to support the Bethels, “You don’t need anyone to tell you how to earn money, but you certainly need someone to spend it for you.”

## Final Fights

In the early eighteen eighties the steamboat lines were fighting for their lives. Their former friends, the railroads, now had tracks which were unhampered by the winter freeze up, running in all directions. Chicago was replacing the Twin Cities as the major grain terminal. In addition, the Civil War, resulting in an impoverished South, had greatly reduced the Mississippi’s North-South traffic. Despite dwindling cargo for the packets, the Commodore clung to his belief in the river, and he was willing to maintain “his rights” by all possible means. Frank Davidson recalls a carefully shrouded incident of those days:

“When P. S. McCune died, his steamboat line was put on the market. The heirs tried to get the Commodore to buy the stock at par, but he refused. A month before the sale of this stock, W.F. Davidson was reported to have sold out a pile of his stock. Nobody, hearing this, felt inclined to buy the McCune stock; so it went very low, whereupon the Commodore bought it all. Afterwards it was discovered that Davidson had never sold any of his stock. The whole transaction had been merely a fictitious sale. A law suit followed. ‘Colonel Ham came downstairs into the boat store one day,’ Frank recalls, ‘and said in an off-hand manner, ‘There’s a stack of books upstairs which the St. Louis courts may be calling for. I don’t ever want to see them again. Just do what you like about them.’ Frank took the hint, and those papers were never seen again. The McCune heirs were defeated. No one could find the original records.”

In 1881, probably the grand climax of the Commodore’s career, the GEM CITY, a sumptuous new steamer of the St. Louis and St. Paul Packet Company, made her maiden trip to St. Paul with the Commodore as captain. He wore a uniform and cap, for the first time abandoning his habitual old slouch hat. The crew was also uniformed. On this trip his family occupied the best cabin on the boat. His little daughter Sarah Matilda’s most treasured memory

of that trip was of her guinea pig, which she carried on board in a bird cage. Davidson's affection for her shines through one of his few surviving letters:

"When you are home it seems all right but when you are away it seems that things are so different. The Dog is howling. Then I think of you at the table. Your place is vacant, my molasses often wanted and you not here to get it. My handkerchief has not been changed since you left until today. No little girls come to see you now ... the music teacher did not give any lesson and so many things are not as when you was home. I will be glad when your visit is out and you are home. Tell your Uncle Pate to get you a ticket and put you on the train when you are ready...

Your Father in Love, W.F.D."

Although the GEM CITY earned \$50,000, thus paying for herself on her first trip, she burned shortly afterwards. In her day, she was well known as the first Upper Mississippi steamer to carry an electric light. A second GEM CITY was built—the best ever. But the two decades of steamboat dominance were coming to a close. For the Commodore, 1883 was a dying year, first for his father, then his failing river business. Notes from captains foretold the end: "Steamers [CITY OF] ST. PAUL and MINNEAPOLIS have passed E. Dubuque without taking freight. This is not carrying out your orders. What is the prospect unless this freight is handled promptly? We had better go out of the business." Or this: "Have our doubts of finding anything this side of Sonora. Hope to get some hay there... Belleview is sending all their oats to Chicago while the Illinois Central RR has just contracted for all there is at Galena." Or this: "We arrived at Dubuque 8 this evening, found the PITTSBURG laying here waiting for us. She layed at Fulton until she heard us coming and then ran to Dubuque and layed there until we landed. She lays along just so as to keep ahead far enough to skim us of what little there is."

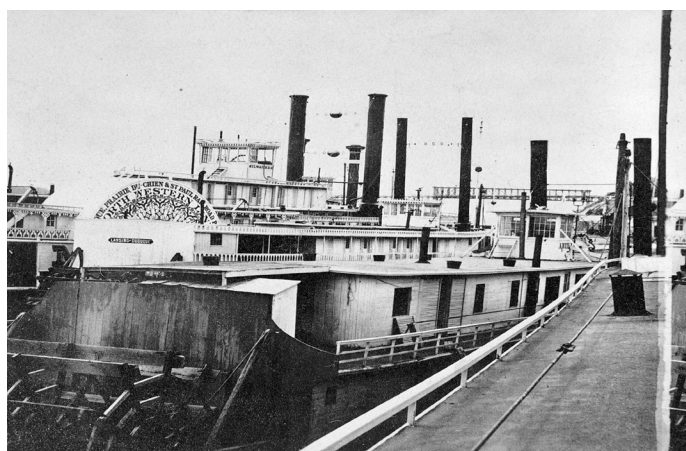
In the last years of his life, Davidson must have realized too late the mistake of his past alliances with various railroad lines. But according to associates, he had refused Jim Hill's invitations to join the latter's railroad empire. The Commodore claimed that he was too old to learn another trade and would rather stay on the River.



*Davidson family's portrait of WAR EAGLE No. 4*



*FLORA (2062), sternwheel packet built at California, PA in 1855 for Capt. Samuel Dean of Pittsburgh, before heading to Upper Mississippi for William Davidson. 152 x 19.3 x 3.9, 160 tons. Shown here passing Ft. Madison, IA. One of the low water boats mentioned in this article.*



*ARIEL (0339) in foreground at St. Paul with LANSING and NORTHWESTERN. ARIEL was built at St. Louis, 1860. 117 x 23 x 2.5, 120.44 tons. Carried Gen. Grant's 6th Minnesota Infantry from Ft. Snelling up the Minnesota River while enroute to New Ulm. FRANKLIN STEELE plied the same trade. She was another of Davidson's low water boats.*

*All photos appearing on pages 19, 21, and 22 are courtesy of Murphy Library, University of Wisconsin - La Crosse except as otherwise credited.*



Shortly before his death on May 26, 1887, Commodore Davidson was forced to face the demise of steamboating. He reluctantly concentrated on his land holdings, which by the time of his death included real-estate valued at \$3,000,000, other assets over \$1,000,000, and annual rental income of about \$75,000. His granddaughter Sarah Ann summed him up in her biography:

“There was certainly plenty of crooked dealing in Davidson’s negotiations... The McCune case is probably only one of many... His daughter recently met an old steamboat man in Texas who said he could remember her father when “he used to paint the stove doors red so you’d think there was a fire inside.” Whatever must be the final verdict on Commodore Davidson, ...to the end he maintained his conviction that independent competition was his inalienable right... His fanatical religious zeal was matched only by his almost patriotic defense of his own fortune. He died without ever having taken a vacation or a rest from work. He died an old man, though he was only 62, and on the streets ... the Commodore’s sudden death, his life, and his wealth were common topics of conversation.”

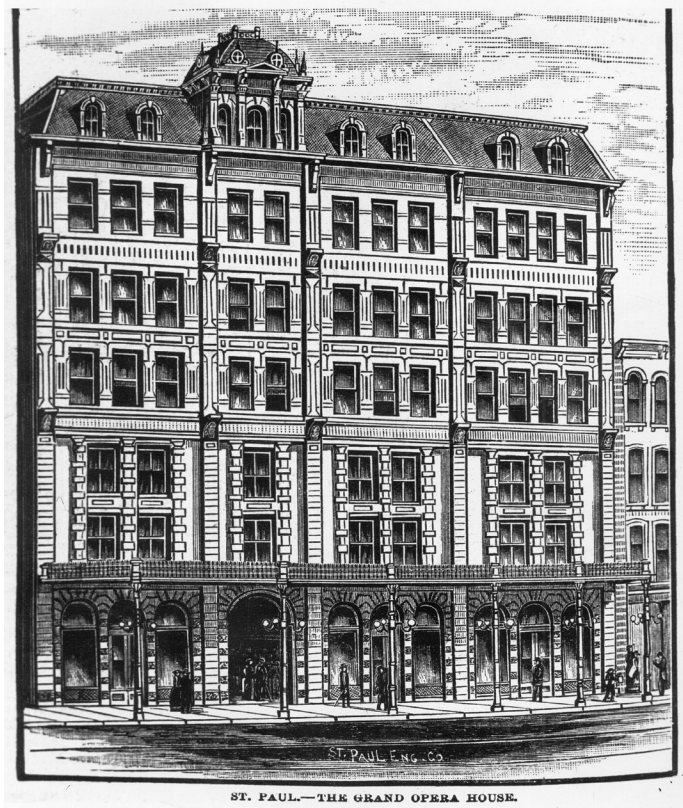
One of the Commodore’s last and largest boats, the 1876 WAR EAGLE, lives in all her glory in a large oil painting. Dulled by decades of coal dust, it first graced my grandparents’ mantel, then that of my parents. Now, after professional cleaning, it is displayed over the mantel of my sister’s home, and vividly recalls the glory days of steamboating and the primal energy of William Fuson Davidson. ☪

*Note: The original unabridged and annotated version of Ms. Bend’s article is available by email as a Word 97 document (compatible with all computers). Please send request to [duttonfosters@comcast.net](mailto:duttonfosters@comcast.net).*

## The Commodore’s Opera Houses

Eliza Rosenberg of the Ramsey County (St. Paul) Historical Society sends this information about Commodore Davidson’s venture into real estate and the fine arts. In March 1866 Capt. Davidson was president of a corporation which financed construction of an opera house on Wabasha Street between 3rd and 4th Streets in downtown St. Paul.

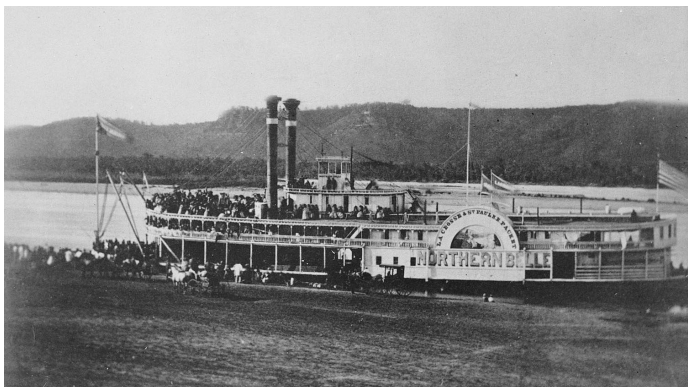
Apparently opera lovers were good patrons of the establishment, because in 1883 a new, larger building, the Grand Opera House, took shape behind the old one, again with Davidson in charge. A year later, the Commodore was once more directing construction in the vicinity: this time erecting a structure to serve as a “restaurant and business,” according to the building permit issued to him. Ms. Rosenberg speculates that “the building may have been the office for the business end of the Grand Opera House, and the restaurant may have been built to accommodate opera patrons and develop a theatre district in that part of downtown St. Paul.” The new opera house was to be short-lived, however, as it was destroyed by fire on January 21, 1889. By this time the Commodore had passed away, and his business partners attempted to salvage what remained of the office and restaurant. A permit was issued nine days later for repairs to this building – perhaps it suffered some damage when the Grand Opera House burned. The building stood until the 1960s, when it eventually fell victim to the wrecking ball of urban renewal. ☪



Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society

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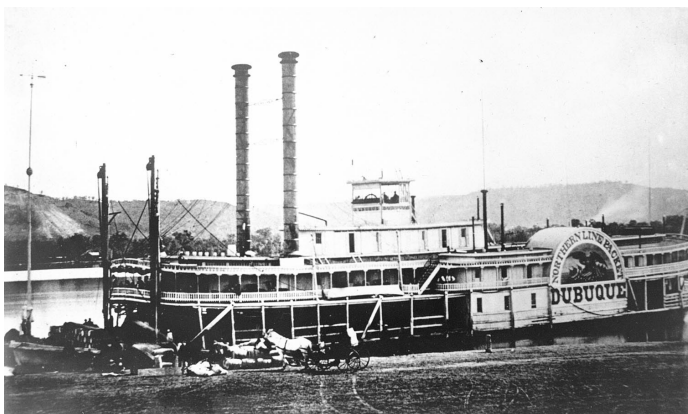




**NORTHERN BELLE (4236)** built at Cincinnati 1856 for Minnesota Packet Co., her original owner. 226 x 29 x 5, 329 tons. Transported troops in Civil War. Pictured here at Winona, MN. after acquisition by Davidson Line.



**MILWAUKEE No. 2 (3936)** and **KEY CITY No. 1 (3278)** pictured around 1862. **KEY CITY**, named for the city of Dubuque, was built at Cincinnati 1857, with hull 230 x 35 x 5.6 Engines were 20's with 7-ft. stroke. She sank the **BEN COURSIN** in collision near La Crosse in August 1857. **MILWAUKEE** was also built in Cincinnati that year, slightly larger by 43 tons. Ran Prairie du Chien - St. Paul. Both boats dismantled at Madison, IN in 1869.

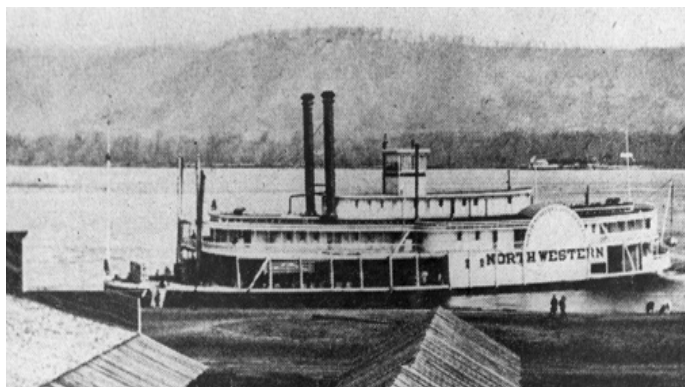


**DUBUQUE No. 2 (1615)** at Winona. Hull built at Wheeling in 1867, completed at Pittsburgh. 230 x 36 x 5.5. On her delivery trip she hit Rock Island RR Bridge, and suffered some damage.



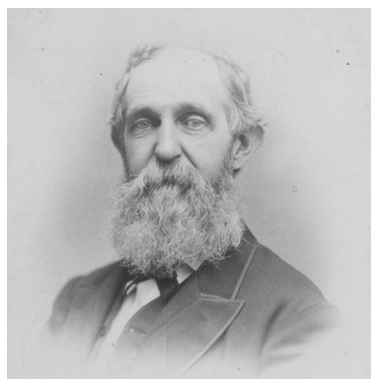
**MINNEAPOLIS (3944)**. Like **DUBUQUE**, her hull was built in Wheeling and then taken to Pittsburgh for completion in 1869. Engines 30's with 7-ft. stroke. She measured 233 x 36 x 5.8. In May 1882, Sam Clemens took passage from St. Louis to Hannibal on **GEM CITY**, then transferred to **MINNEAPOLIS** for remainder of trip to St. Paul. He was gathering material for his new book *Life on the Mississippi*.

Photo courtesy of Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County



**NORTHWESTERN (4235)** built at Cincinnati 1870. 802 tons, hull measured 245 x 38.5 x 5. Her engines came from **JAMES WHITE**, 26's with 8-ft. stroke. First vessel through Lake Pepin ice in spring 1873.

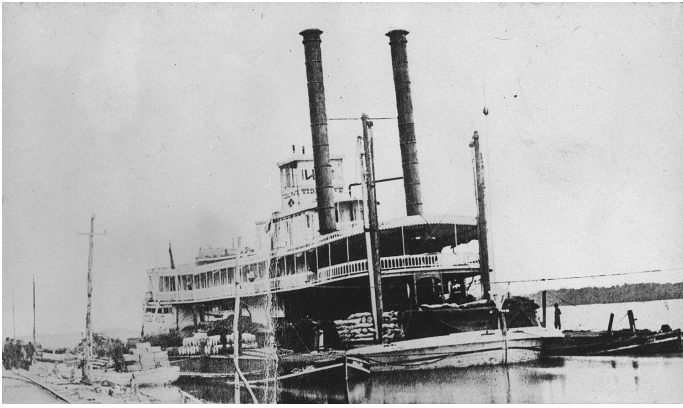
Photo courtesy of Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County



**William Fuson Davidson** during the twilight of his career as packet boat entrepreneur on the Upper Mississippi from 1845-87.

Photo from author, courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.





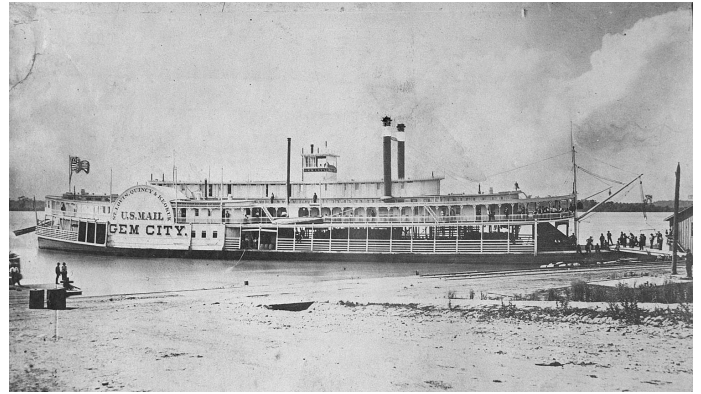
**TIDAL WAVE No. 1 (5387)** built at Brownsville, PA 1870 and shown here at Read's Landing, MN. 160 x 36 x 5. Engines 14's with 6-ft. stroke. Originally ran New Orleans - Red River. Brought to Upper Mississippi in 1872 by Diamond Jo Reynolds, and sold to Davidson Line in 1877.



**ALEX MITCHELL (0123)** Hull built in Paducah and completed at La Crosse 1870. 241 x 37.5 x 5.5 Engines 20's with 7-ft. stroke. Named for president of Milwaukee & St. Paul RR. Packet company made overland shipping arrangements with the railroad to forward package freight. Dismantled in 1881 with her cabin and machinery going to GEM CITY No.2 The boat was a victim of a cyclone and her captain a victim of the Commodore's wrath.



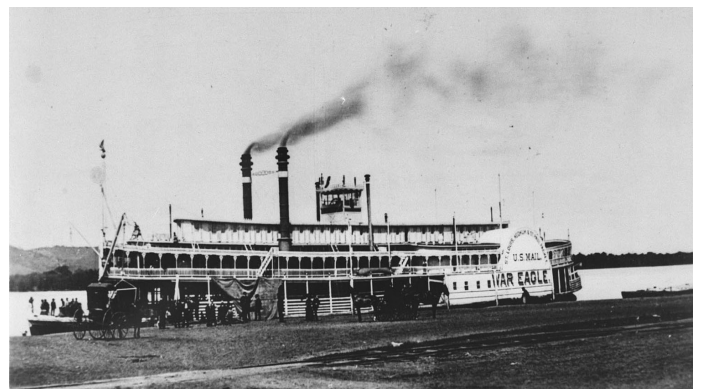
**CENTENNIAL (0913)** built in St. Louis 1876 from the TOM H. JASPER by adding thirty feet to her hull and resulting in an overly elongated appearance at 295.1 x 41.6 x 7.5. Ran as packet and excursion boat until she sank in ice opposite Ft. Madison in 1879. Raised and dismantled, her hull was used to carry sugar on the lower Mississippi until 1883.



**GEM CITY No. 1 (2221)** built at St. Louis 1881. 303 x 36 x 6 Engines 28 1/2's with 7-ft. stroke. Hull built for Keokuk Northern Line who turned her over to Davidson's St. Louis & St. Paul Packet Co. before completion. Her machinery was from ANDY JOHNSON. She was exceptionally fast, making the 1352-mile round trip between St. Louis and St. Paul in 5 1/2 days. GEM CITY was first boat on Upper Mississippi to have an electric searchlight. She burned at St. Louis Sept. 1883



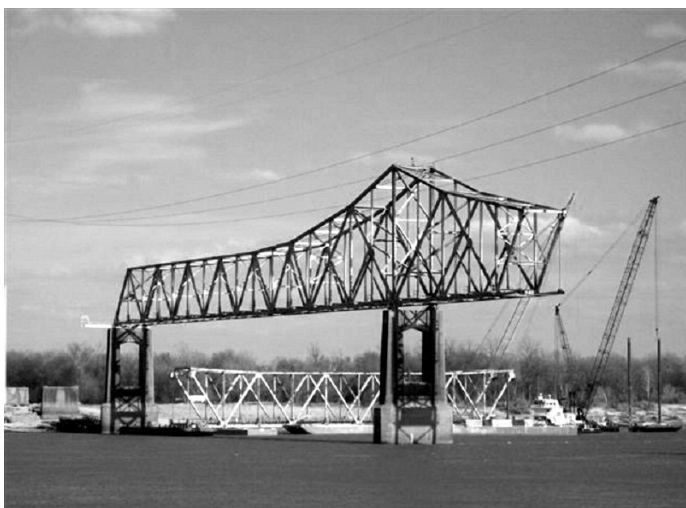
**GEM CITY No. 2 (2222)** was also built at St. Louis in 1884 with hull 263 x 29.8 x 5.6. Engines 20's with 7-ft. stroke. Her cabin and machinery came from ALEX MITCHELL. Ran St. Louis - Keokuk. She was bought in 1891 by Diamond Jo Line (as pictured above) and rebuilt into QUINCY at Dubuque's Eagle Point Boatyard in 1895. Acquired in 1911 with remainder of Diamond Jo fleet by Streckfus Steamers, and rebuilt into their flagship, J. S. DeLUXE in 1919. Dismantled 1938-39.



**WAR EAGLE No. 4 (5693)** built at St. Louis 1876. Hull 279.2 x 42 x 6.1, measured 941 tons. Hit Keokuk Bridge Nov. 1881 and sank. Raised and rebuilt. Sold 1891 to Mississippi River Excursion Co. and ran out of St. Louis. Dismantled 1894.

# FBL Steamer *NATCHEZ* and the Greenville Bridge

An e-mail arrived this spring from Capt. Elam Rusk with a video link showing demolition of the Mississippi shore spans of the Greenville Bridge on February 15, pictured below. He commented: "This may be of interest to your readers growing up in Greenville, MS in the 1930s and 40s. I rode across the river on the A. C. JAYNES and many went to work with my dad, Capt. A. S. Rusk. Also crossed this bridge many times." Capt. Rusk's remarks refer to his father who was pilot on the steam ferry at Greenville prior to construction of the bridge there in 1940.

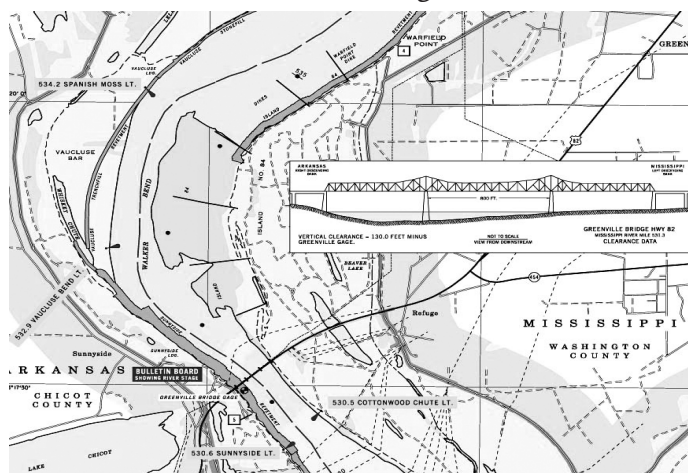


The old bridge was replaced by a new four-lane span, completed in 2006 and eventually opened to auto traffic on August 4 last year. It is the third longest cable stayed bridge in the United States, and is situated 2800 feet downstream from the old Greenville Bridge site. A long history of accidents at that former bridge provided the impetus in 1995 for planning the design of this replacement.

The difficulty of navigating bridges goes back to the first span across the Western Rivers, the Wheeling Suspension Bridge of 1849. Within eight years, the first railroad bridge to cross the Mississippi appeared at Rock Island. Both of these structures were the source of court cases brought by steamboat operators who protested the hazards of reduced clearances, location of the bridge and piers,

and restricted channel widths. The Greenville Bridge was another notorious span which left behind a tragic legacy.

The highway bridge carrying U. S. 82 across the Lower Mississippi at Mile 531.3 was completed in October 1940. Of the sixty-eight spans comprising the entire bridge's length of nearly 10,000 feet, only three crossed the channel. The main channel span had a vertical clearance of 130.1 feet above the zero on the Greenville gage, with an 800-foot horizontal clearance. Both the Greenville and Natchez bridges were built from essentially the same set of plans that year, with identical piers. The ones at Greenville were footed 180 feet below the surface of the river in water well over 100 feet deep. Designers were the firm of Ash, Howard, Needles and Tammen. When it was announced that the bridge was to be situated



at the foot of Vaucluse Bend (labeled Walker Bend on Corps of Engineer's chart shown here), the proposed location brought strong criticism from rivermen, including Capt. Arthur Rusk of Greenville. Despite those warnings, the bridge was built at that spot with subsequent events proving the grave danger of selecting that site. Before plans for the present replacement were finally drawn up, a detailed, six-year engineering and hydrographic study preceded its design and relocation.

Although the Greenville Bridge had the highest accident rate on the entire Mississippi River system,



not all of those incidents were river-related. In 1951 a fighter pilot from a nearby Air Force base was killed when his plane exploded after colliding with a pier as he attempted to fly beneath the span. But the two most notorious incidents claimed barges and a towboat. In 1963 a tow of lead went down by the same pier that had sunk the FBL towboat NATCHEZ fifteen years earlier. Neither the barges nor towboat were ever located following those sinkings. The loss of the NATCHEZ was the most tragic event to occur at the Greenville bridge and details of the night of March 4, 1948 were reported by *The Waterways Journal*.

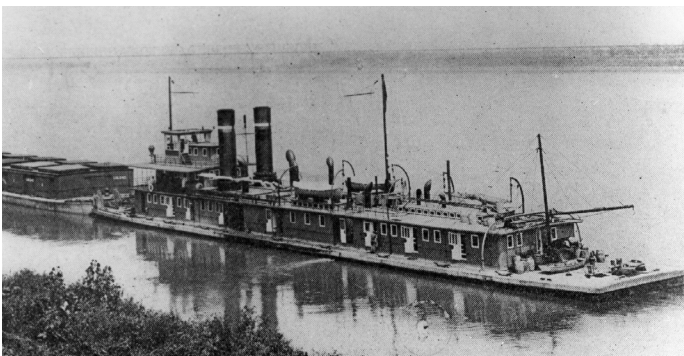
“ ‘I’ve got to come ahead on her,’ were the last words any one heard Capt. James F. Browinski say. A few seconds later Capt. Jimmy went down at the wheel of his steamer NATCHEZ.

“Capt. Browinski, 62, of St. Louis, and 12 others of his crew lost their lives when the Federal Barge Lines towboat was swept against the upstream side of a bridge pier below Greenville, MS.

“The captain last spoke to his partner, Capt. Walter I. Hass, also of St. Louis. Capt. Hass, off watch and in bed, was awakened by what is believed to have been a barge breaking loose. In only his underwear and one shoe, Capt. Hass ascended to the pilothouse. Reaching the door, he was greeted by Capt. Browinski with the words quoted above.

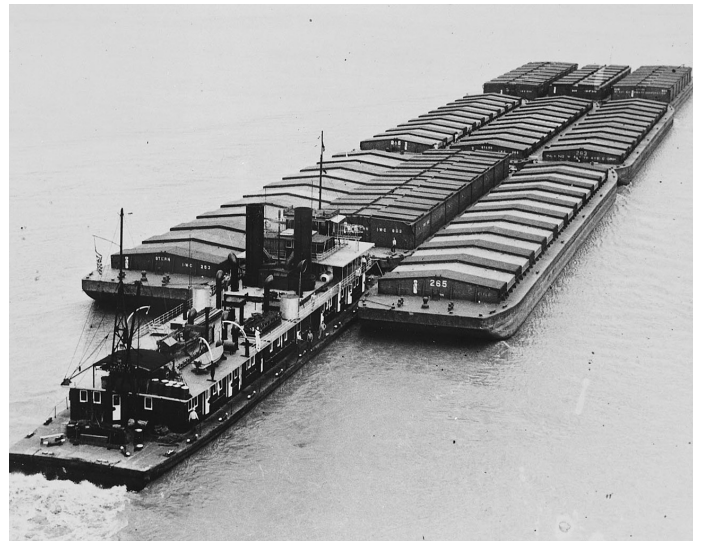
“His eyes still blinded from sleep, Capt. Hass went out on the port wing bridge to look around. Just then the port side of the steamer struck the bridge pier and rode up on it. The starboard side, almost across the swift current, was immediately submerged. A ring life preserver hung on the bridge railing. The steamer listed farther and farther to starboard. Capt. Hass seized the life ring and with it was catapulted into the frigid Mississippi as the steamer rolled over and sank.

“Twelve other members of the NATCHEZ’



crew were able to leave the steamer in time. Thirteen, however – some on watch and some in bed – went down with the towboat. Except for one striker engineer, the saved were deck crewmen.

“At the time of the tragedy, the NATCHEZ was ‘double-tripping’ with the first three of a six-barge oil tow, destined for the Sohio Petroleum Company at Mt. Vernon, IN. Behind her was the steamer SOHIO LATONIA in command of Capt.



William A. Howell, 28, of Cairo. Capt. Howell and others on the SOHIO LATONIA saw the accident and even worse, had known that the NATCHEZ was in danger.”

Capt. Howell’s description of what he witnessed that night appeared in the March 5th *Dubuque Telegraph Herald*.

“The current caught her and rolled her over. She went down in about a minute. The men below – firemen, engineers and so on – had no chance. Most of the fellows didn’t know what had happened. The pilot wasn’t on duty – I understand the captain was at the wheel. The pilot was asleep. They didn’t know the boat had hit the bridge. They thought it had bumped against one of its barges.

“We were about three-quarters of a mile under the NATCHEZ, and were about a hundred yards from shore, waiting for him to make the bridge. He had three of his barges and we had four. When he went through, the current caught him and shoved him crosswise. He went down on the pier. It rolled him under. The current just rolled him under.

“I saw he was in trouble before he got through.

I said to my mate, 'he's not going to make it. We've got to do something.' We were starting to work before the towboat even hit the piling. But we thought we'd just help him pick up the barges. We didn't know we'd be picking up men.

"The barges hit the concrete pier and broke away. Then the towboat hit. We got a line out, and tied our barges up, and knocked the boat out from the tow. We sent our launch and lifeboat out, then went out with our towboat to pick up the men. The CASABLANCA was coming up seven miles below us. We had the bad luck to be there and see it."

THE WEATHER  
EVENING EDITION  
DUBUGUE, IOWA, FRIDAY, MARCH 5, 1948  
NUMBER 47

# TOWBOAT SINKS IN MISSISSIPPI; 13 ARE REPORTED DEAD OR MISSING

**Mother, Baby Die in Jackson County Fire**  
RUINS OF FARM HOME SWEEPED BY FATAL FIRE

**2 Duaguers Among Crew Of Lost Ship**  
**AT LEAST 13 CREW MEMBERS WERE RESCUED**

**5 OTHERS BURNED; FARM HOUSE RAZED**  
Woman's Sob's Hint Kerene Was Put In Sive

**TOWBOAT PILOT SAVES HIS LIFE**

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**Visual Sweep Against Bridge Piling By Swift Current**

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**Visual Sweep Against Bridge Piling By Swift Current**

Front page of March 5, 1948 Dubuque Telegraph-Herald

The Waterways Journal described the rescue and investigation that followed.

"The SOHIO LATONIA's radio immediately broadcast a call for help, alerting the crews of several nearby towboats: the American Barge Line steamer CASABLANCA, the Chotin and Pharr mv. IRENE CHOTIN, the Butcher-Arthur Inc. tug ZENITH, and the Illinois Farm Supply Company mv. BLUE SEAL. The NATCHEZ' survivors were taken from the river, most of them suffering from shock and exposure, and the barges were caught.

"On Monday [March 8] Capt. John F. Oettl, District Marine Inspection Officer for the Eighth Coast Guard District, and Cmdr. Samuel O. Larche, officer in charge of the New Orleans inspection office, held a hearing in Greenville. Federal Barge Line officials expressed a conviction that no possible blame could be laid to Capt. Browinski, known as one of the most careful and capable pilots in the barge

line. Investigators at the scene on March 6 arrived at a new opinion as to how the accident happened. At first those who talked to survivors believed the NATCHEZ had struck her stern against one of the piers on the Mississippi side of the channel, losing control of its barges, and then was swept across the river westwardly, to crash against Pier 12 on the Arkansas side. The new version eliminated the first bump against a pier. It was as follows:

"Capt. Browinski split his tow south of the bridge. The tow which the NATCHEZ was pushing at the time of the tragedy was made up of three barges, one behind the other. A slack water route along the Mississippi bank was followed to an upstream point 300 or 400 feet above the bridge and opposite Sunnyside, AR. The route had taken the NATCHEZ and her tow between the first and second piers out from the Mississippi bank. An eddy at the uppermost northern point reached by the NATCHEZ threw the head of the tow out toward midstream. Thereupon Capt. Browinski backed downstream and passed through the same two piers as on the way up.

"When he got below the bridge, he started the NATCHEZ forward again over the same route. He again reached the point where the eddy had first caught him. This time his lead barge broke loose and passed downstream between the first and second bridge piers. Instead of backing downstream as he had the first time, the NATCHEZ' captain attempted to work his way to midstream, with the eddy pushing him all the time. An extreme angle was created for his tow and the current pushed him against the upper side of the first channel pier out from the Arkansas bank. Simultaneously a coupling broke. His boat was pinned against the pier by the current, with the port side of the NATCHEZ climbing the pier and the starboard side submerging. The vessel sank at the base of the pier, but was



m/v SOHIO LATONIA rescued crew from NATCHEZ



carried downstream by the current. Inasmuch as U. S. Engineers state that the NATCHEZ went down in 125 feet of water, it may be some time before bodies are recovered.

“Capt. William Howell, master of the SOHIO LATONIA, was warmly commended by officials of his company in Cleveland. The Federal Barge Lines this week forwarded letters of appreciation to masters and crews of the SOHIO LATONIA, CASABLANCA, IRENE CHOTIN, BLUE SEAL and ZENITH. Capt. A. C. Ingersoll, Jr., Federal Barge Lines president, left Memphis last week by train for Pittsburgh not long before the lines’ steamer NATCHEZ was lost. It was not until he was met in Pittsburgh that he was told of the disaster. Later that day Capt. Ingersoll flew to St. Louis enroute to spend the weekend at Greenville.”

In the same issue, the *WJ* also reported that on March 1 the J & L steamer H. E. LEWIS had part of her tow twisted around a pier at the Vicksburg Bridge, capsizing and sinking a barge loaded with steel. But it was a March 21 report of Capt. Roy Clay, supervising master of the MVBL, that confirmed the treacherous conditions still prevailing at the Greenville Bridge a full two weeks after the NATCHEZ sinking. After passing beneath the bridge aboard the company’s steamer INDIANA, northbound with six barges, he wrote:

“I have never seen a condition as serious as this anywhere on the river at any time. I am fully convinced that Capt. James Browinski was in no way responsible for the sinking of the NATCHEZ. In my opinion, the condition of the river at the Greenville Bridge at this time was one no pilot would expect and Capt. Browinski, arriving there at night, had no way of knowing that he would run into a condition which made his boat totally helpless as far as maneuverability was concerned. There is no question as to which pier the NATCHEZ hit or sank on. It is the first pier in the water from the Arkansas shore, approximately 200 feet from the bank, because the upper side of this pier is entirely covered with fuel oil.

“We arrived at this bridge on the steamer INDIANA at about one a.m., with intentions of traveling through the channel span. The current was so terrific we were unable to even get up to the bridge. I instructed the pilot on watch to tie off that

section of the tow and return downstream for the other section and be back at the bridge by daylight, so that we might see what the conditions were. In my opinion, as I look back, it was one of the most important decisions I ever made in navigating a boat. Had we continued the effort to pass through the channel span of this bridge when we first tried, we might have sunk the INDIANA also.

“Prior to this past high water, there was a continuous high bar extending from the Mississippi shore at a point immediately above the Greenville Bridge and extending over to a bend approximately three-quarters of a mile. At the present time, this bar has been cut in two and there is now a pointway or another channel, so to speak, coming down the Mississippi shore and back into the main river at a point approximately one-quarter mile above the Greenville Bridge. The formation of this pointway has created the present condition . . . where terrific eddies form. These eddies consume the larger portion of the channel of the river and move downstream, whirling at a terrific rate of speed, about a city block in size, and remain whirling at this terrific rate and size while passing through and consuming all of the channel span of the Greenville Bridge. At present it is necessary for a boat to navigate both upstream and downstream through this bridge by the narrow Arkansas span which was never intended to be navigated.

“When I went southbound on the CAIRO and through this bridge at about 11 o’clock at night with ten empty barges, we did not know the conditions and we ran the channel span and missed the right hand pier by only a few feet. This was the pier the NATCHEZ sank on. While coming upstream through the bridge I radioed the mv. ESSO LOUISIANA which had ten empties in tow, and



*Pictured here are FBL steamers (L to R) NATCHEZ, MEMPHIS, and BATON ROUGE*

had them wait approximately three miles above the bridge until after we had cleared. I told them of conditions as I saw them and suggested they run the Arkansas span, which they did. After getting through, the ESSO LOUISIANA immediately radioed us and thanked us for advising them how to run the bridge. They too were amazed at the conditions there and felt sure they would not have been able to get through the channel span.”

The NATCHEZ’ master, Capt. James Florian Browinski Jr. was born in Carrollton, KY on July 21, 1885, the son of a well-known river captain. His father, J. F. Browinski served as master of the steamer GEN. O. M. POE of the U. S. Engineers at Cincinnati in 1900. He was also one of the first captains on the Engineer snagboat KENTUCKY on the Kentucky River. By 1905, he was master of the towboat T. H. DAVIS doing railroad ferry work between Joppa, IL and Paducah. He eventually became terminal superintendent at Joppa for the C. & E. I. Railroad, directing the movements of the steamer W. J. JACKSON until his death in 1923. At that time his son, already a licensed master and pilot, took his place. The younger Browinski went on to pilot for the U. S. Engineers and Campbell Transportation Company before starting work for Federal Barge Lines. He was regular master of FBL’s big “state” boat MINNESOTA and was only helping out on the NATCHEZ because he was an Ohio River pilot. Capt. Browinski had license from Pittsburgh to New Orleans.

Also among those lost in the sinking was the boat’s Chief Engineer, Keith A. Montgomery, 37, of Dubuque. Montgomery was attracted to the engineroom as a young boy of 16 and worked as fireman, oiler, water tender and striker. After earning his license in 1933, he was appointed assistant engineer for FBL, working as assistant and later as chief on various towboats. On May 9, 1938, he was a member of the crew of the sternwheel S. S. THORPE who scrambled to safety when the boat and tow grounded and sank after getting caught in a cross current above the Washington Street Bridge in Minneapolis. Chief Montgomery brought out the new DPC steamer TENARU RIVER in 1943 and operated her successfully during the war years. Feeling the need for wider experience than the rivers could offer, he shipped out as assistant on a

Liberty ship in late 1945 and sailed as first assistant until he earned his chief’s license. But he returned to the river in November 1947 and was assigned to the NATCHEZ as chief engineer. While she was laid up for repairs during the winter at New Orleans, he worked on the WAKE ISLAND, rejoining the NATCHEZ in February.

In addition to Chief Engineer Montgomery, another Dubuque crewman was aboard that night, 17 year-old-deckhand John “Junnie” Mihalakis. The boy’s first job on the river was decking on the NATCHEZ on the Upper Mississippi the summer before, after which he returned home for the winter. Receiving a letter to rejoin the boat in February, he reported to St. Louis to catch the steamer for her round trip run between St. Louis and Sohio Petroleum dock at Mayersville, MS, seven miles above Lake Providence, LA. Accompanying him to St. Louis in the hopes of landing a deck job was a buddy, Edward Henge. His friend, however, was not hired because he had no previous river experience. “Junnie” was one of the thirteen lucky survivors. Today he lives just north of Dubuque at Mud Lake, and is probably the last remaining survivor of the sinking. Still fascinated by the Mississippi, he enjoys fishing and stays close to the river, after having spent a lifetime as a successful businessman. While visiting with him at his shop on his 81st birthday on March 18, he was asked what his most vivid memories of that night were after sixty-three years. On watch aboard the boat at the time of the accident, it was not the frigid water that made a lasting impression as he was thrown overboard. It was the terrifying speed with which he was dragged downstream by the current as he clung to a barrel he had grabbed hold of as the boat rolled over. “Junnie” continued to deck on FBL towboats into the early fifties, commenting on the good life he had with his new bride and his lavish \$400 a month salary, working day for day. He ticked off a list of towboat men with whom he worked, including one whom he helped to study for his license. Among those names was your editor’s uncle, Capt. Don Sawvel, who in his later years with FBL was master-pilot on the m/v MINNESOTA, and who in late 1947 was part of the NATCHEZ’ crew. It is an oft-told family story that had Uncle Don not got off the NATCHEZ prior to her last trip, there would have been a third Dubuquer aboard on that fateful night.



The steamer NATCHEZ (T1890) was built in 1920 by Charles Ward Engineering Works at Charleston, WV for the Inland Waterways Corporation of St. Louis, operator of Federal Barge Lines. Measuring 200 x 40 x 7.9, she was powered by triple expansion condensing engines 15 3/8 x 26 1/4 by 26-inch stroke, delivering 1800 hp. at 140 rpm to twin props 9' 4" in diameter. Her watertube boilers were oil fired. A sister boat VICKSBURG (T2524) was built by Ward in 1921. Two other identical



**Steamer NATCHEZ brand new in 1920 at Charles Ward Engineering Works, Charleston, WV**

towboats, MEMPHIS (T1792) and ST. LOUIS (T2231) were also built that year from the same plans by Marietta Manufacturing at Point Pleasant, WV. Ironically, the VICKSBURG knocked a hole in herself at Peoria, IL and had to be beached by her skipper less than a month before the NATCHEZ was lost. When new, the NATCHEZ' master was Capt. Cassius C. Woods, who became FBL superintendent at Memphis two years later. Other masters serving aboard were Charles E. Moore, Tom Ledger, Billy R. Smith and Bob Manning. Chief Engineer Wilson H. Bragg fell overboard and was drowned on August 15, 1945, eight miles above New Madrid, MO. At the time of her sinking, the boat was valued at \$200,000.

The final chapter in the tragic story of the NATCHEZ and the Greenville Bridge was reported in the September 18, 1948, *Waterways Journal*: "On August 20 the Inland Waterways Corporation (Federal Barge Lines) abandoned to the U. S. Engineers the steamer NATCHEZ, which was sunk March 4, 1948, after collision with the highway bridge at Greenville, MS. Before this action was taken both the Engineer Corps and the corporation had made repeated efforts to locate the sunken

vessel. During July, in addition to previous efforts, the corporation thoroughly dragged the bed of the river from the Greenville Bridge to a point about four miles below and also examined the surface of the river for an additional distance of about six miles for any breaks or indications of the wreck. The Engineer Corps also took repeated soundings of a large area of the river bed without being able to locate the vessel." To this day, no remains of the boat has been found.

Capt. Elam Rusk's brother Carl received his first issue of pilot's license in 1946, the start of a forty-year river career. Writing under the name Mark Thyree, he authored a collection of verse titled *River Rhymes*, including the poem "Greenville Bridge."

Down below the boat store  
 Passing Island Eighty-four  
 Around to the foot of Vacluse Bend  
 Where it should have never been  
 Stood that bridge awful at night  
 Deceptive in broad open daylight  
 With eddies and strong cross currents  
 Its piers many a barge they sent  
 To the muddy sandy deep bottom  
 And even that steamer Natchez  
 With all her crew the piers got 'um  
 Into that raging twirling water

Ole Man River offers no quarter  
 Was he angry after all these years  
 About having those concrete piers  
 Restricting his waters swift flow  
 Or did he just want to show  
 The true nature of a man-made thing  
 And the unnatural reaction such bring  
 When they connected Arkansas  
 To that Mississippi shore  
 Without an engineering structural flaw  
 Adding tale galore to big river lore

Our sincere thanks to Capt. Elam Rusk for allowing to us reprint these verses from his late brother's book, to Dan Owen of Boat Photo Museum for research assistance, and to editor John Schoulberg of *The Waterways Journal* for granting permission to share the story of the NATCHEZ' sinking as reported in the magazine's columns. 🕒

*Photo bottom left p. 24 courtesy of Boat Photo Museum.  
 All others courtesy of Murphy Library, UW - LaCrosse.*

# Str. PENNSYLVANIA at Wheeling

by John Panhorst, Jr.

John Panhorst, Jr. of Prosperity, SC shares a story and painting with us which seem especially appropriate for this issue, seeing as we have already related some notorious incidents about bridges in these pages. Shown here is an acrylic painting of Wheeling with the steamer PENNSYLVANIA in the foreground, commissioned by John in Sept. 1980. The artist was Marian Bradford of Harrisburg, AR. The PENNSYLVANIA's master was Capt. John Simpson Klinefelter, John's second great-grandfather. John's bridge story continues.

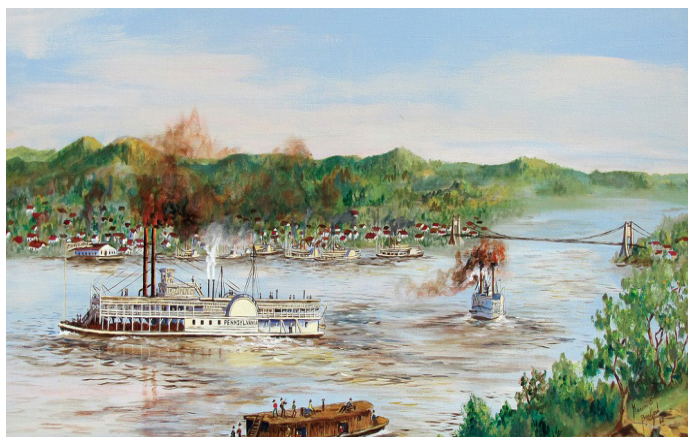


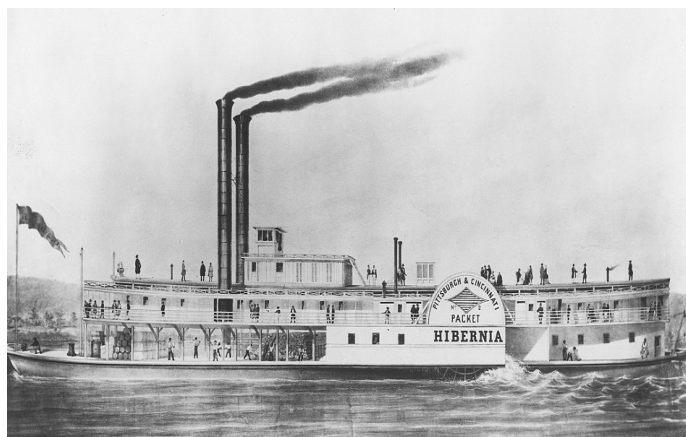
Photo courtesy of John Panhorst

In the background is the famous Wheeling suspension bridge built in 1849. It was reputed to be over one thousand feet long, and at the time, the longest in the world. Today the bridge still serves motor traffic. At its inception, Capt. Klinefelter and nearly all river interests viewed this bridge as restricting the natural flow of river commerce, particularly in high water.

When construction began, Capt. Klinefelter was master of HIBERNIA NO. 2 (2632), a packet mentioned in the "Wheeling Bridge Case" argued before the U. S. Supreme Court. Court documents state that her chimneys were damaged by striking that structure's cables, and "thereby was set off the legal fireworks and friction between Wheeling and river interests, especially those upriver in Pittsburgh," in the words of Capt. Fred Way. Attorney Edwin Stanton, later to become Lincoln's

Secretary of War, was aboard at the time of this incident, and many felt he ordered the collision to produce an actual grievance. In the spring of 1854, the bridge blew down, leaving only two cables stretched across the Ohio River.

That same year Capt. Klinefelter appeared on the Ohio as master and part owner of the brand new packet PENNSYLVANIA. To compensate for the arguably low bridge he had the boat's chimneys hinged to permit passage in high water. With great fanfare and ceremony, he always ordered the chimneys lowered, needed or not, when his packet approached the damaged bridge. From *The Wheeling Intelligencer* of May 22, 1854: "This was done in derision, and exaltation over the destruction of this noble structure, and though by a



**HIBERNIA NO. 2, built at Shousetown, PA in 1847, hull 217 x 27 x 5.4. Might the artist's depiction of her tall chimneys have been influenced by her fame in the Wheeling Bridge case?**  
Photo courtesy Public Library of Cincinnati & Hamilton Co.

silly and contemptible act, was highly insulting and provoking to our people, for it touched them on a subject which has awakened the deepest feeling in our mind."

John's commentary concludes: Did you see them? In the fall of 1988, John Panhorst and his son Scott put their 26-foot cabin cruiser TROUBADOR in at Pittsburgh and traveled down the Ohio. When they approached the Wheeling Bridge, Mr. Panhorst stopped the boat, lowered the "almost too high" eighteen-inch mast, blew the boat's horn, and proceeded on to Cairo. All done with the objection and great embarrassment of his then nineteen-year old son. Mr. Panhorst explained, "Son, this is required, as it is a family tradition." 🕒

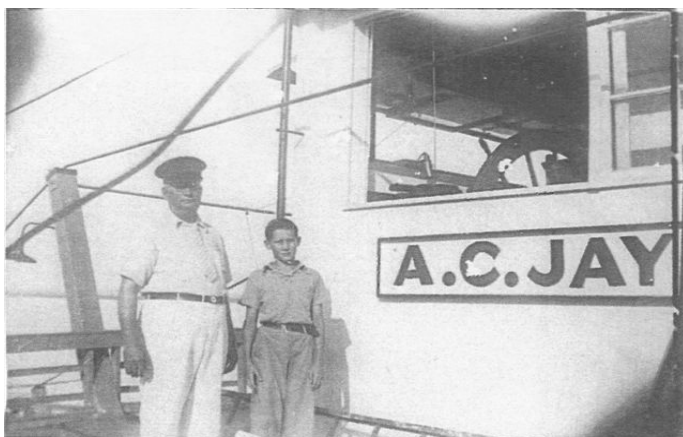


## Capt. Arthur Rusk and the Greenville Ferry

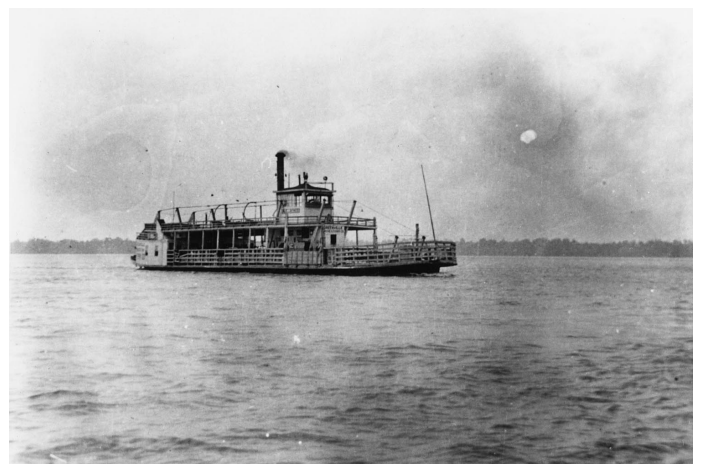
Occasionally an article in the REFLECTOR takes final shape only after a letter or e-mail arrives from a reader. And sometimes that note has a ripple effect as well in suggesting other back channels to be explored. Such was the case with this issue's Greenville Bridge/NATCHEZ story. Capt. Elam Rusk's words not only recalled memories of that accident, but also of the years when his father, Capt. Arthur S. Rusk, piloted the steam ferry which served Greenville residents before the bridge was built.



For a decade beginning in 1930, the A. C. JAYNES ferried residents across the Mississippi from Warfield Point, MS to Luna Landing on the Arkansas shore. Capt. Rusk remembered that Sundays, holidays and baseball game days were especially busy times for the JAYNES. Sometimes after games in distant El Dorado, AR, tired fans would leave their cars on the Arkansas side, ride across on the ferry and get friends to take them home. The boat would spend much of the next day bringing empty cars back to Greenville.



"I remember one dark night when the fog was so thick I had to put lanterns up the landing from the boat after I docked before people would drive off the ferry," Capt. Rusk said in a 1956 article in *The Delta Democrat-Times*. Navigating in fog required especially good hearing. He would steer toward the tip of an island in the channel at his usual speed until he felt he was past the head of the island. Then he would blow the ferry's whistle and listen. If he got one loud echo, he hadn't passed the point. But if he got two – one loud and one from the distant shore not so loud – he knew he was past the point and could head safely for the other landing. As he approached the shore he would again blow the whistle, the echo telling him how far from shore he was. A pocket watch and a compass were the tools Capt. Rusk used in good weather, timing his route on different compass headings, and putting that information to good use when fog shut him out.

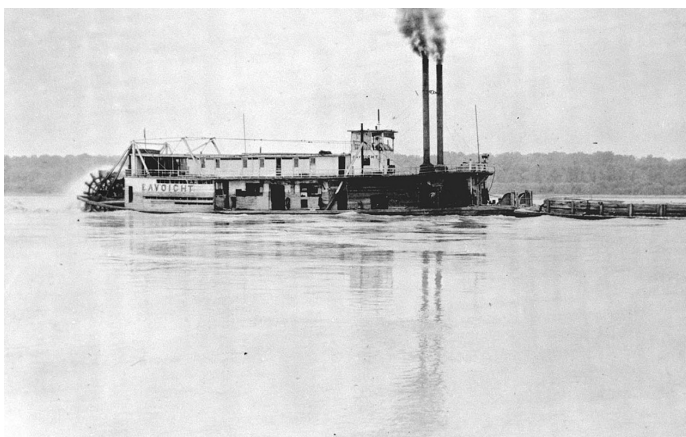


*Ferry A. C. JAYNES underway at Greenville, MS.*

But ferry boating was only one part of his half-century river career. It all began around 1902 when his uncle, Capt. Ed Rucker, interested the seventeen-year old boy in the river. At that time Capt. Rucker was master of the sternwheel packet HALLETTE (2515) in the New Orleans-Atchafayala-Des Glaizes trade. He later was pilot on the H. M. CARTER (2493) when she exploded her boilers near Bayou Goula on November 20, 1908. Pooling resources with an engineer and a Baptist preacher, Rusk purchased a little 200-horsepower sternwheel towboat named WADE. By 1905 he had pilot and master's license. He would take the boat up Black, Ouachita, and Red Rivers to pick up cribs of long leaf pine with his two-man crew and three timbermen to care for the logs. After floating them down the smaller streams

to the Mississippi, the cribs would be made into rafts and taken to saw mills just below Canal Street in New Orleans. Bananas – a great delicacy in those early days – would often fall overboard from nearby ships in great bunches and float out to the log rafts where Rusk and his crew would gather them up, sometimes getting enough fruit to last them a round trip. One of the engineers on the WADE was an amateur photographer, and he snapped a photo showing the boat pulling 1700 logs in double cribs 24 logs wide and more than half a mile long.

The WADE sank in the big September 1909 hurricane on the Lower Mississippi along with many other boats below Natchez, including all the great coal fleets and the towboat HARVESTER (T1063). Capt. Rusk raised the WADE between two barges from 35 feet of water, and rebuilt her superstructure. He ran her in the trade until 1912.



**Steamer E. A. VOIGHT, Capt. Rusk's first boat with Greenville Gravel Co. Built at Paducah in 1908. 125 x 24 x 3.5**

By that time he was towing timber on barges, an innovation he and the Bisso Towing Co. of New Orleans pioneered. Rusk delivered logs to ships at New Orleans for export to Germany. In 1913 he began eighteen years' employment with Greenville Gravel Co. "I wore out three boats for Greenville Gravel," he remarked, "and removed all of a gravel sand bar belonging to Mrs. Archer from just below Greenville." He started as master of E. A. VOIGHT (T0648). On one particularly busy day they shipped out 108 carloads of ballast for a railroad. In 1921, Rusk supervised the transfer of the VOIGHT's engines to a new boat, D. M. ARMSTRONG (T0545), and he served as her master for five years. The next boat he captained for Greenville Gravel was W. N. FRY (T2585), an iron-hulled propeller tug.



**Propeller tug W. N. FRY, originally built as J. B. O'BRIEN at Pittsburgh in 1878 with hull 70 x 16 x 7. Ran as S. S. PRENTISS from 1900-25 until sold to Greenville Gravel Co.**

By 1930 Capt. Rusk was operating the ferry A. C. JAYNES (0007) at Greenville with Ed Pullen, who kept up the landings with a crew that prepared the approaches on either side as the river rose and fell. The JAYNES was built in 1925 at Grafton, IL by Midwest Boat and Barge for operation as a ferry at Cape Girardeau. Her hull measured 125 x 30 x 4.3, and she had compound engines, 12's and 48's with a four-foot stroke. She had one coal-fired boiler, and was licensed to carry 24 automobiles. After ten years ferry service at Greenville, the bridge was completed in 1940 and the boat moved



to Helena, AR. She was purchased by Capt. A. C. Johnson and operated by Charles Holbert until she burned there in May 1960, shown in the view above.

After Capt. Rusk's days operating the ferry, he returned to work for Greenville Gravel Co., dredging material for runways at Greenville Air Force Base.



Following World War II, he dredged gravel to fill a hole on the Tennessee side of the Mississippi River at Memphis during construction of the Memphis-Arkansas Memorial Bridge (present-day I-55 bridge). The river continued to play a big part in the Rusk family's life, for the captain's sons Elam and Carl both became towboat pilots. Capt. Carl worked for Upper Mississippi Towing and Cargill and later was trip pilot on the MISSISSIPPI QUEEN in the 80s, while Capt. Elam served in the same capacity on the DELTA QUEEN in the 90s. 📷

*The two photos of Capt. Arthur Rusk in the JAYNES' pilothouse and with his son Elam are courtesy of Capt. Elam Rusk. All other photos are from Murphy Library, University of Wisconsin - LaCrosse.*

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## Book Review of John White, Jr.'s Steamboats on the Inland Rivers

In its 32 pages, this little volume packs an amazing amount of information and history about the 200-plus years of river transportation in our nation's heartland. John White, longtime curator at the Smithsonian's Transportation History section of the Museum of American History, is well-qualified to tell the fascinating tale of people, places, incidents, and boats that make up this colorful pageant.

Illustrated with dozens of photos, line drawings and sketches, the narrative sets forth a comprehensive yet concise overview with seventeen headings detailing Early River Travels and Pioneer Steamboats to the Packet Boat Age, Towboats, and the River Today. Also included are sections describing Artists and Naturalists, Captains and Crews, and Riverboat Builders. Rounding out the list of topics are Bridges Over the River, Floating Coffins, War Comes to the River, and Fun Along and On the River.

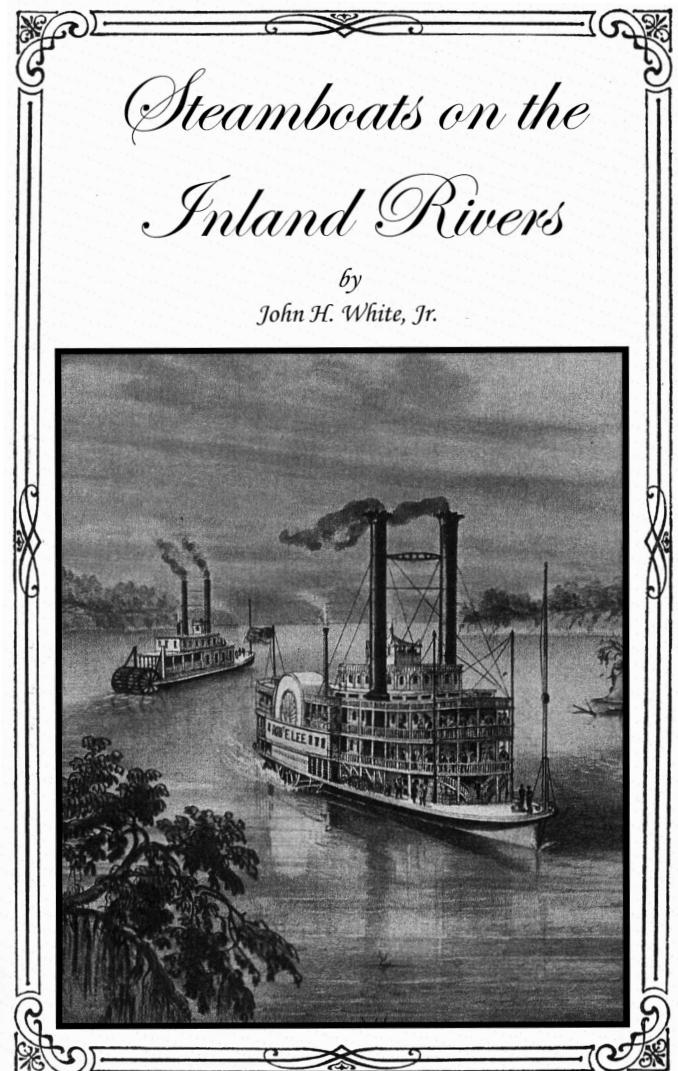
The special appeal of John's book is that seldom has this uniquely American story been told in such a thorough, quick-and-easy-to-read, compact volume. It could easily serve as a "handy pocket companion

and guide" for those traveling on America's inland rivers, where an easily accessible reference would come in handy.

Concluding the book is an extensive and well-chosen bibliography of nearly 100 river titles, which in itself makes this volume a valuable resource. Cost of the book is \$4.75 plus 80 cents shipping. They may be ordered from:

**J. H. White**  
101 Beechpoint Drive  
Oxford, OH 45056

Or e-mail John at [jwengine@hotmail.com](mailto:jwengine@hotmail.com) or call 513-687-6587.



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## The Newer Faces of S&D

### Mathew Stage

For the last five years, the CHAUTAUQUA BELLE, an authentic stern-wheel steamboat that was destined for the scrap yard, has been running successfully once again. Beginning at age 17, I had the good fortune to shape the boat's future, and with a little hard work, a lot of help, and a dedicated fan base, we have ensured this sternwheel steamboat time machine will remain on the waters of Lake Chautauqua for another generation.

Growing up on the shores of Chautauqua Lake, I developed a love for water, boats, and steam power early on in life. I can remember taking the family's thirty-five foot twin-engine Marinette down the lake to the public dock one time when I was about ten. My dad said I could dock it, so I chose to bring it in through the winding, narrow rows until I found an open inner slip right next to a twelve-foot speedboat. After receiving compliments from people who saw me come in that day (many remarked that they couldn't even pilot their little boats as well as I drove the giant two-deck Marinette) that's one of my first memories where I knew I wanted to captain my own boat some day.

A few years later, I learned to pilot something a little bigger than the family Marinette. The CHAUTAUQUA BELLE is one of only four stern-wheel steamboats left in America, and I successfully passed the stringent state pilot's license exam on my first attempt, just months after attaining the required minimum age. The BELLE is an authentic replica of the Mississippi-style riverboats that plied Chautauqua Lake in the late 1800s, bringing everything from supplies to passengers along the twenty-mile-long lake in western New York state.

Not stopping with the CHAUTAUQUA BELLE, I'm currently working the bridge aboard a 1,133ft Q-Max class LNG tanker as part of a second summer sea term, a requirement to earn my unlimited tonnage license. It took a lot of hard

work to be chosen for this position since they received applications from 400 students, had 40 interviews, and only selected two of us. I think a lot of it had to do with my experience aboard the CHAUTAUQUA BELLE.

In addition to working untold hours on my own, countless hours of help, support, hard work, and advice were given by many individuals. As a result, the CHAUTAUQUA BELLE isn't just a success story for me, but for the whole community. She wouldn't be running today if it weren't for all the dedicated support we have had these past five years. My debt is more than I will ever be able to repay to my grandparents. They have completely replaced all the woodwork aboard the vessel, from the cherry handrails to the pilot's wheel and the paddlewheel. I also owe a debt of gratitude to every passenger that steps aboard. As much as my family and I love the BELLE, we wouldn't be able to take her out if it weren't for those people who come back year after year to ride with us. I try to make sure each person

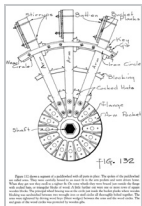


who buys a ticket is thanked at least four times before leaving our parking lot. From the ticket office to the gangway to the open waters, everything is made possible by their presence.

### Mat at CHAUTAUQUA BELLE's wheel

Currently I am on track to earn my third-mate unlimited license from SUNY Maritime in New York City. From there, I hope to eventually become captain of a passenger cruise ship. But no matter where I end up, I've made a promise that the CHAUTAUQUA BELLE will remain steaming on the waters of Chautauqua Lake. 🌊





# Small Stacks

## Immortalizing the CHAPERON - Part Two

by John Fryant

There were three Johns involved in this story: John Breynaert, John Shedd and myself, although my part was very minor.

John Shedd and his partner Sam Milone owned Model Shipways of Bogota, NJ. Their firm produced a line of wooden ship model kits, plans and fittings. From post-WW II years through the 70s, Model Shipways was one of the better known ship model suppliers in the U.S. I became acquainted with Shedd through our mutual memberships in ship model clubs and the Nautical Research Guild. John had a fascination for river steamboats and ambitions of producing a model kit of one. He commissioned John A. Breynaert to draw a set of plans for a typical Western Rivers sternwheel packet.

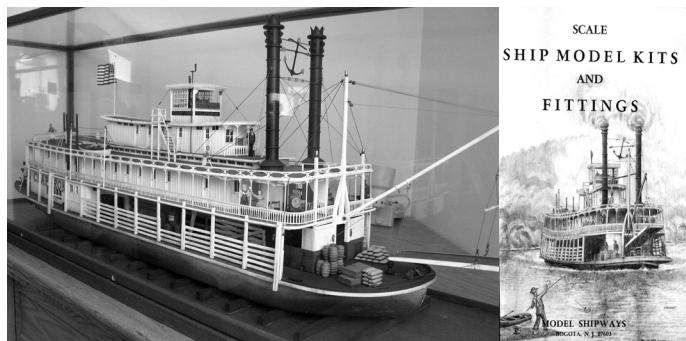
Breynaert was from the Boston area and an engineering graduate of MIT. I don't remember what branch of that profession he was in, but at one point in his career he was involved in designing nuclear power plants. In 1948 he researched and drew a very accurate set of plans for the MT. WASHINGTON, a sidewheel steamer from Lake Winnepesaukee, NH. John also built a first class model of the boat which was displayed in one of the buildings at MIT and may still be there.

I became acquainted with Breynaert in the early 1960s when we were both living in the Washington DC area. The Steamship Historical Society of America had a chapter to which we both belonged. He had ambitions of starting a steamboat plans service (which never happened) and had already helped others with reconstructing plans for two Hudson River sidewheelers, the ARMENIA and MARY POWELL. By the early 1950s he was looking for a typical Western Rivers sternwheel packet to research and draw for Model Shipways. I think he may have consulted with Fred Way, Jr. about finding a boat for which he could reconstruct plans. If he did, Fred probably recommended the CHAPERON, as she certainly had all the "typical"

qualifications: good proportions, wood hull, texas cabin, fancy topped stacks and enough fancy trim to make her look pretty. She was also small enough that a scale model of her wouldn't take up excess display space. Breynaert drew a three-sheet set of plans and did a fine job, although he admitted to me that he probably hadn't put enough sheer curve in the hull. At that time all of the photos of the boat that exist today hadn't been uncovered, so he likely did the best he could with the available information.

I bought a set of the plans and built a 1/48th radio controlled scale model of the boat, completing it in 1974. However, the model was so delicate to take out and operate that some part would usually break in the process. So it was soon "retired" to a display case. I still have it and upon my departure from this life it will go to my daughter.

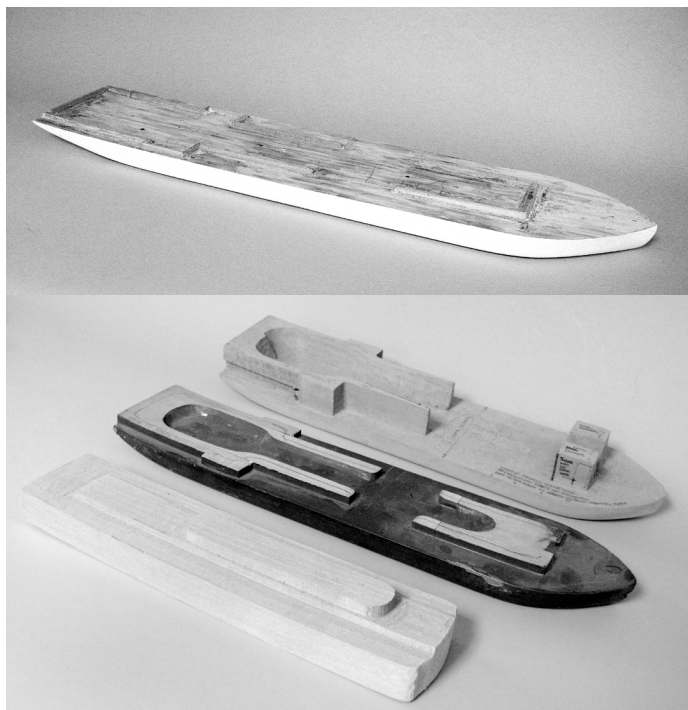
Meanwhile, John Shedd commissioned me to



design a cover featuring the CHAPERON for the 1972 issue of the Model Shipways catalog as a "come on" for the eventual introduction of a proposed kit. I used George Dabbs' famous photo for inspiration and added a young fisherman in the foreground waving as the boat passed. It was done as a pencil drawing, as the catalog was printed in black & white.

Shedd also experimented with techniques for producing the kit components. His entire line of model kits featured pre-shaped machine carved solid basswood hulls. He set up his wood carving machine to produce several hulls and cabin components in both 1/96th and 1/64th scales. These were circulated among several better-known ship modelers for opinions and ideas. I still have three of them, all with penciled notes. One hull had been painted green! Also circulated were sets of Breynaert's plans filled with copious notes in red ink as to how best to produce the various parts of the model.

Sadly, that kit project never went any further. John Shedd eventually retired and sold his Model Shipways Co. to another firm, Model Expo, then located in The Poconos area of New York State.



*Pre-carved components for the never-produced original kit. Large hull is 1/64th scale; smaller hulls and cabin piece are 1/96th scale. All photos courtesy of John Fryant.*

Now located in Hollywood FL, they continue to produce the Model Shipways line of kits and have introduced many additions and improvements. By the mid 1990s both Shedd and Breynaert had passed away and I had pretty much given up on ever seeing a model kit of the CHAPERON. Then about five years ago I got wind that Model Expo had hired a professional modeler to develop the kit in 1/48th scale. Having heard of this gent, I contacted him to offer the loan of negatives of the boiler deck railings and hurricane roof trim I had drawn for my model. I also loaned him photos of the boat and a copy of Alan Bates' *Steamboat Cyclopoedium* for reference, all in the interest of historical accuracy. The kit developer (who shall remain nameless) was most appreciative and we swapped correspondence on several aspects of the production. Then all was silent for about a year. Shortly thereafter I got word that the kit was about to be released. It was introduced in 2008 or 09 and when I saw the box cover, I was a bit dismayed. The kit developer's name was listed as Bob Crane, who was not the person I had worked with. Model Expo had switched kit developers in

mid stream and that accounted for the long period of silence. I don't know the reason for this, but the original kit developer did eventually return all the material loaned to him.



Unfortunately, there are some errors in the kit. The most obvious is that the pilothouse is glassed in all around and no interior details for it are provided. The CHAPERON had the typical open front pilothouse, as plainly shown on Breynaert's plans. In the photo of the model on the box cover, all of the cabin doors were painted red, which was not the case – they were white, of course. The paddlewheel was also lacking the outer ring of wood braces.

Even with the errors, it is still a nice kit and all the laser cut wood and photo etched brass parts fit together as advertised. For the modeler who is unfamiliar with the design and construction of Western River steamboats and just wants a nice looking model of a sternwheeler, it fills the bill. However, for the steamboat enthusiast who is familiar with the subject, it is woefully inadequate. Even so, it is certainly far, far better than the kit versions of fictitious sternwheelers currently offered by European manufacturers. Model Expo has produced what is the first reasonably accurate kit model of an American sternwheeler. I call it the most accurate inaccurate model of a Western Rivers sternwheel packet now available. The current price of the kit is listed at \$419.99. Model Expo's website is <http://www.modelexpo-online.com/> I might also add that this is definitely not a beginners kit.

As this is written, I am finishing up one of the kit models for a client in California. In my next column I will try to give a brief summary of the inaccuracies which I have observed. Hopefully, these constructive suggestions will improve the accuracy of future issues of the kit. 🕒



## Shall We Gather at the River?

This happy assembly gathered on the forward end of the GORDON C. GREENE's Sun Deck was photographed on Sunday, June 20, 1948, while the Greene Line tourist boat was landed at St. Paul's Lambert Landing during her first cruise to that city. The occasion was the baptism of six-month old Daniel Robert Drake, son of R. Taylor and Peggy Drake of Moline, IL, also accompanied by their daughters Sally and Martha. The infant was given the first name of his great-great grandfather, Capt. Daniel Smith Harris, well-known on the Upper Mississippi from the earliest days of steamboating at Galena. Capt. Mary B. Greene, pictured at center, was present as Daniel's godmother. If Daniel's father, the tall gentleman shown in these views, seems especially pleased, perhaps it was because this particular Sunday was also Father's Day.



These images came to the attention of your editor a year or so ago through the courtesy of Eleanor Huntoon Ray, the young girl at the extreme right in the photos. Eleanor is the daughter of Donald and Dorothy Huntoon of Dubuque, proprietors of Dubuque Travel Bureau, local booking agent for Greene Line Steamers. This cruise marked the GORDON's inaugural appearance on the Upper Mississippi, as her new sister from California began tourist service on the Ohio and Lower Mississippi that same summer. With Capt. Tom Greene as Master aboard the DELTA QUEEN, Capt. Mary commanded her husband's namesake on the Upper Miss, which had not seen a tourist boat since the GOLDEN EAGLE in the late thirties.

The GORDON made an early morning landing at Dubuque the previous Friday, June 18, to board six local passengers for the round trip to St. Paul, including Eleanor, her parents and her maternal grandmother, Mrs. C. B. "Pearlie" Trewin. The Huntoons' travel business at 551 Main continued to serve as local agent for Greene Line for many years. The family home was situated at the end of Fenelon Place, adjacent to the iconic Fourth Street Elevator overlooking Dubuque. From a large window facing downriver, the Huntoons kept watch for the boat's approach to the city, telephoning residents who had booked passage of the steamer's imminent arrival when she appeared around the bend south of town.



This first St. Paul cruise carried 69 passengers on an eleven-day trip, with fares ranging from \$120 and \$130 plus 15% tax per person on the Cabin and Sun Decks, to \$142 on the Texas Deck. The 1948 cruise schedule shown above right lists a three-week rotation of round trips to Hannibal, St. Paul, Muscle Shoals on the Tennessee, and Cairo, all originating and terminating in St. Louis. Intermediate passage could be booked on trips if space was available. Those seeking partial passage were usually directed to inquire at the Purser's Office on board when the boat made scheduled stops en route, although occasionally those tickets could be secured from a local travel agency like the one in Dubuque. The GORDON's 1948 season ended with a fall cruise to Chattanooga and a final trip from St. Louis to New Orleans with return to Cincinnati on November 2. Interestingly, Greene Line maintained a St. Louis office in these days at 1001 Olive Street. ①

**Baptism photos on this page courtesy of Eleanor Ray. GORDON C. GREENE 1948 Sailing Schedule (next page) courtesy of Dan Shrake.**

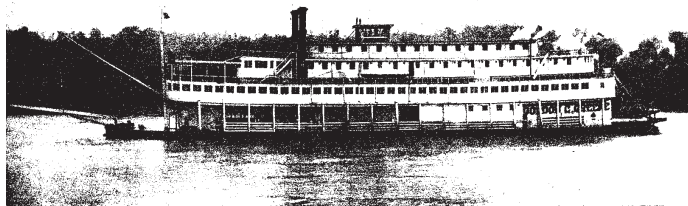
# SNYDER'S 128-Year-Old Stopping Bell Comes Home

The stopping bell that once rang out engineroom signals on the W. P. SNYDER, JR. is returning home after its removal from the veteran towboat in 1954 when retired by Crucible Fuel Co. That bell, cast in 1883, began service on the CHICKASAW, was transferred in 1902 to the CHARLIE JUTTE, and remained aboard after she was renamed CRUCIBLE in 1912. When the CRUCIBLE was laid up in 1950, it found its final home on the SNYDER.

In March of this year, S&D was contacted by Barbara and Beatrice Ritts, granddaughters of Capt. Charles E. Ritts, Sr., to be recipient of his fine collection of steamboat artifacts. Capt. Ritts worked for Crucible as deckhand, watchman, mate, pilot, master, and eventually Superintendent of Transportation from 1912 until his death in 1955. The engineroom bells are but a small part of his steamboat memorabilia. Full details and exhibit of this collection will take place during the Annual S&D meeting in September.

Pictured below are the engineroom bells when displayed in the basement of the Ritts' home in Braddock, PA. The bells were mislabeled in this photo, but have now been properly identified (left to right): ahead, back, jingle and gong.

Another amazing "find" in Capt. Ritts' collection is a series of photo post cards taken in May 1919 at Davis Island Dam as the steamer MIDLAND was being righted after sinking at that site. We look forward to sharing those in a future REFLECTOR. 🕒



## STR. GORDON C. GREENE \* SAILING SCHEDULE \* SEASON 1948

All Cruises Shown Below on STR. GORDON C. GREENE leave from St. Louis, Mo.

SEE YOUR LOCAL TRAVEL AGENT

Or Address GREENE LINE STEAMERS, INC., 1001 Olive St., St. Louis 1, Mo.

|  |                |  |                           |
|--|----------------|--|---------------------------|
| <b>WEEK END TRIP TO HANNIBAL, MO.—MISSISSIPPI RIVER—<br/>MARK TWAIN'S QUANT HOME TOWN</b>                  |                | <b>WEEK END TRIP TO HANNIBAL, MO.—MISSISSIPPI RIVER—<br/>MARK TWAIN'S QUANT HOME TOWN</b>                  |                           |
| Leaves St. Louis, Mo.  | June 11, 1948  | 5:00 P.M. Saturday   | Leaves St. Louis, Mo.     |
| Returns St. Louis, Mo.   | June 14, 1948  | 7:00 A.M. Monday   | Returns St. Louis, Mo.    |
| <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$21.75 and \$25.00 Cabin Deck; \$30.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>              |                | <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$21.75 and \$25.00 Cabin Deck; \$30.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>              |                           |
| <b>TO ST. PAUL, MINN.—UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER—11 DAYS</b>  |                | <b>TO ST. PAUL, MINN.—UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER—11 DAYS</b>  |                           |
| Leaves St. Louis, Mo.  | June 15, 1948  | 5:30 P.M. Tuesday  | Leaves St. Louis, Mo.     |
| Returns St. Louis, Mo.   | June 25, 1948  | 7:00 A.M. Friday   | Returns St. Louis, Mo.    |
| <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$120.00 and \$150.00 Cabin Deck; \$142.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>           |                | <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$120.00 and \$150.00 Cabin Deck; \$142.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>           |                           |
| <b>TO MUSCLE SHOALS, ALA.—MISSISSIPPI-OHIO-TENNESSEE RIVERS—<br/>8 DAYS</b>                                |                | <b>TO MUSCLE SHOALS, ALA.—MISSISSIPPI-OHIO-TENNESSEE RIVERS—<br/>8 DAYS</b>                                |                           |
| Leaves St. Louis, Mo.  | June 26, 1948  | 5:30 P.M. Saturday   | Leaves St. Louis, Mo.     |
| Returns St. Louis, Mo.   | July 3, 1948   | 7:00 A.M. Tuesday  | Returns St. Louis, Mo.    |
| <b>MAJORITY 1 KIP FARES: \$75.00 and \$80.00 Cabin Deck; \$90.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>          |                | <b>LABOR DAY WEEK END CRUISE TO CAIRO, ILL.—3 DAYS</b>   |                           |
| <b>FOURTH OF JULY WEEK END CRUISE TO CAIRO, ILL.—3 DAYS</b>  |                | <b>LABOR DAY WEEK END CRUISE TO CAIRO, ILL.—3 DAYS</b>   |                           |
| Leaves St. Louis, Mo.  | July 3, 1948   | 3:00 P.M. Saturday   | Leaves St. Louis, Mo.     |
| Returns St. Louis, Mo.   | July 6, 1948   | 7:00 A.M. Tuesday  | Returns St. Louis, Mo.    |
| <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$35.00 and \$40.00 Cabin Deck; \$50.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>              |                | <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$15.00 and \$40.00 Cabin Deck; \$50.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>              |                           |
| <b>TO ST. PAUL, MINN.—UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER—11 DAYS</b>  |                | <b>TO ST. PAUL, MINN.—UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER—11 DAYS</b>  |                           |
| Leaves St. Louis, Mo.  | July 6, 1948   | 5:30 P.M. Tuesday  | Leaves St. Louis, Mo.     |
| Returns St. Louis, Mo.   | July 16, 1948  | 7:00 A.M. Friday   | Returns St. Louis, Mo.    |
| <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$120.00 and \$150.00 Cabin Deck; \$142.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>           |                | <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$120.00 and \$150.00 Cabin Deck; \$142.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>           |                           |
| <b>TO MUSCLE SHOALS, ALA.—MISSISSIPPI-OHIO-TENNESSEE RIVERS—<br/>8 DAYS</b>                                |                | <b>TO MUSCLE SHOALS, ALA.—MISSISSIPPI-OHIO-TENNESSEE RIVERS—<br/>8 DAYS</b>                                |                           |
| Leaves St. Louis, Mo.  | July 17, 1948  | 5:30 P.M. Saturday   | Leaves St. Louis, Mo.     |
| Returns St. Louis, Mo.   | July 24, 1948  | 7:00 A.M. Saturday   | Returns St. Louis, Mo.    |
| <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$75.00 and \$80.00 Cabin Deck; \$90.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>              |                | <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$75.00 and \$80.00 Cabin Deck; \$90.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>              |                           |
| <b>WEEK END TRIP TO HANNIBAL, MO.—MISSISSIPPI RIVER—<br/>MARK TWAIN'S QUANT HOME TOWN</b>                  |                | <b>WEEK END TRIP TO HANNIBAL, MO.—MISSISSIPPI RIVER—<br/>MARK TWAIN'S QUANT HOME TOWN</b>                  |                           |
| Leaves St. Louis, Mo.  | July 24, 1948  | 3:00 P.M. Saturday   | Leaves St. Louis, Mo.     |
| Returns St. Louis, Mo.   | July 26, 1948  | 7:00 A.M. Monday   | Returns St. Louis, Mo.    |
| <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$21.75 and \$25.00 Cabin Deck; \$30.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>              |                | <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$21.75 and \$25.00 Cabin Deck; \$30.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>              |                           |
| <b>TO ST. PAUL, MINN.—UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER—11 DAYS</b>  |                | <b>TO ST. PAUL, MINN.—UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER—11 DAYS</b>  |                           |
| Leaves St. Louis, Mo.  | July 27, 1948  | 5:30 P.M. Tuesday  | Leaves St. Louis, Mo.     |
| Returns St. Louis, Mo.   | Aug. 6, 1948   | 7:00 A.M. Friday   | Returns St. Louis, Mo.    |
| <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$120.00 and \$150.00 Cabin Deck; \$142.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>           |                | <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$120.00 and \$150.00 Cabin Deck; \$142.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>           |                           |
| <b>TO MUSCLE SHOALS, ALA.—MISSISSIPPI-OHIO-TENNESSEE RIVERS—<br/>8 DAYS</b>                                |                | <b>TO MUSCLE SHOALS, ALA.—MISSISSIPPI-OHIO-TENNESSEE RIVERS—<br/>8 DAYS</b>                                |                           |
| Leaves St. Louis, Mo.  | Aug. 7, 1948   | 5:30 P.M. Saturday   | Leaves St. Louis, Mo.     |
| Returns St. Louis, Mo.   | Aug. 14, 1948  | 7:00 A.M. Saturday   | Returns St. Louis, Mo.    |
| <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$75.00 and \$80.00 Cabin Deck; \$90.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>              |                | <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$75.00 and \$80.00 Cabin Deck; \$90.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>              |                           |
| <b>TO CHATTANOOGA, TENN.—MISSISSIPPI AND TENNESSEE RIVERS—<br/>11 DAYS</b>                                 |                | <b>TO CHATTANOOGA, TENN.—MISSISSIPPI AND TENNESSEE RIVERS—<br/>11 DAYS</b>                                 |                           |
| Leaves St. Louis, Mo.  | Sept. 25, 1948 | 3:00 P.M. Saturday   | Leaves St. Louis, Mo.     |
| Returns St. Louis, Mo.   | Oct. 6, 1948   | 7:00 A.M. Friday   | Returns St. Louis, Mo.    |
| <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$120.00 and \$150.00 Cabin Deck; \$142.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>           |                | <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$120.00 and \$150.00 Cabin Deck; \$142.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>           |                           |
| <b>TO MUSCLE SHOALS, ALA.—MISSISSIPPI-OHIO-TENNESSEE RIVERS—<br/>8 DAYS</b>                                |                | <b>TO MUSCLE SHOALS, ALA.—MISSISSIPPI-OHIO-TENNESSEE RIVERS—<br/>8 DAYS</b>                                |                           |
| Leaves St. Louis, Mo.  | Oct. 9, 1948   | 5:30 P.M. Saturday   | Leaves St. Louis, Mo.     |
| Returns St. Louis, Mo.   | Oct. 16, 1948  | 7:00 A.M. Saturday   | Returns St. Louis, Mo.    |
| <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$75.00 and \$80.00 Cabin Deck; \$90.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>              |                | <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$75.00 and \$80.00 Cabin Deck; \$90.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>              |                           |
| <b>ST. LOUIS TO NEW ORLEANS, LA. AND RETURNING TO CINCINNATI,<br/>OHIO—MISSISSIPPI-OHIO RIVERS—18 DAYS</b> |                | <b>ST. LOUIS TO NEW ORLEANS, LA. AND RETURNING TO CINCINNATI,<br/>OHIO—MISSISSIPPI-OHIO RIVERS—18 DAYS</b> |                           |
| Leaves St. Louis, Mo.  | Oct. 16, 1948  | 9:00 P.M. Saturday   | Leaves St. Louis, Mo.     |
| Returns Cincinnati, Ohio.  | Nov. 2, 1948   | 7:00 A.M. Tuesday  | Returns Cincinnati, Ohio. |
| <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$200.00 and \$215.00 Cabin Deck; \$250.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>           |                | <b>ROUND TRIP FARES: \$200.00 and \$215.00 Cabin Deck; \$250.00 Texas Deck<br/>Plus 15% Tax.</b>           |                           |

See opposite side for Schedule of Str. DELTA QUEEN from Cincinnati

## GREENE LINE STEAMERS, INC.

Foot of Main St.,  
CINCINNATI 2, O.

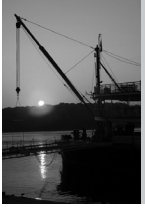
1001 Olive St.,  
ST. LOUIS 1, MO.



This July 1950 view from Pike's Peak State Park just south of McGregor, IA, was taken by local photographer Margery Goergen. The GORDON is just arriving for a scheduled shore stop, while the AVALON prepares to depart on an afternoon excursion. In 1950, these were the only two passenger steamers running between St. Louis and St. Paul.

Photo from Editor's collection.





## Final Crossings

### James Courtney Way

Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Rivermen lost one of its few remaining charter members with the passing of Jim Way, 83. He was the youngest son of the late Capt. Frederick Way, Jr. and died at Franklin Grove, IL on June 7, 2011.

Jim was born in Sewickley, PA and during his working years lived in Ashton, IL, near Rochelle, where he and wife Therese (Caron) raised their family. After retiring, Jim and "Terry" resided for many years in El Centro and nearby Holtville, CA.

Mr. Way's distinguished river career was aboard the DELTA QUEEN immediately following the boat's arrival in New Orleans in May 1947. Jim signed on with the engine room crew as striker-fireman under Chief Charlie Dietz. He participated in putting the boat back together following her ocean tow for eventual service on the Mississippi River system by Greene Line Steamers.

By July 16, 1947 the QUEEN was ready to run and Jim was a striker for 2nd engineer Floyd "Skyjack" Turner on the July-August voyage from New Orleans to Cincinnati and on to Pittsburgh for a major rebuilding. While the boat was undergoing remodeling at Dravo Shipyard to enter tourist service, Jim was listed as Watchman. Following the almost six months required for the overhaul, Jim was again engine room striker for the return trip to Cincinnati. DELTA QUEEN arrived in "Ragtown" March 1, 1948, concluding the career of Jim Way, Riverman.

Jim looked back on that short period of boating with great pleasure. Much later, as lecturer aboard the sternwheeler, Jim regaled DELTA QUEEN passengers about his enjoyable part in the beginning chapters of *The Saga of the DELTA QUEEN*.

*Our thanks to Woody Rutter for sharing these memories of Jim with us.*

### William V. Torner

William V. Torner, 95, died July 8, 2011 at La Follette, TN. Bill hailed from the Upper Ohio River and had muddy water flowing in his veins at an early age. In the early 1920s, the Torner family had a contract for mail ferry service across the Ohio between Newport, OH and the B&O Railroad mail stop at Vaucuse, WV. Bill rowed a sixteen-foot skiff, making five round trips a day, six days a week, in all weather and river conditions, day and night.

In June 1934, Bill got his first steamboat job when he signed on the Streckfus excursion steamer J. S. while she was landed at Dubuque. He also served aboard the steamer SENATOR (former SAINT PAUL) in her later years on the Ohio. Eventually, Bill worked on the steam towboat RELIANCE of Union Barge Line. He was very proud of his service as a Seabee in the U. S. Navy during World War II. In later years, Bill resided in St. Louis and Waterloo, IA, before moving to Tennessee.

In recent years, despite ill health, Bill's interest in the river never wavered. He maintained a fine library and well-organized collection of photos and slides. Most of all, he greatly enjoyed keeping in touch with river people. He was a longtime subscriber to *The Waterways Journal*, a member of S&D, and a charter member of Midwest Riverboat Buffs. Bill always closed his interesting letters with the phrase, "May we have steamboats forever."

Bill's niece, Sherrie Torner, wanted his river friends to know that she plans to take her uncle's ashes to Newport Cemetery above Marietta in September during the S&D Meeting. They will be interred there next to his wife Bernice, who passed on many years ago. Their graves lie in close proximity to those of the Greene and Hughes families, all well-known and greatly respected on the river. A long and two shorts of the whistle in tribute to a dedicated riverman, gentleman, and good friend.

*Thank you to Keith Norrington for allowing us to reprint his tribute to Bill from the steamboats.org website.*

**Visit us online at**  
***www.s-and-d.org***  
**for more current events and up-to-date news.**

## Steamboat Drawing and DVDs Make Debut


Those in the audience at Howard Steamboat Museum for Chuck Parrish's fine program on the first voyage of the NEW ORLEANS had the special opportunity of also being present for the premier showing of John Fryant's beautiful full-color pencil drawing of the historic steamboat. The artist brought his framed portrait, which is also shown on our front cover, to illustrate Chuck's talk, "Mr. Roosevelt's Riverboat Remembered," at the Museum on July 16. Pictured here inside the Howard mansion is the artist with his work. John assured us that he will bring it with him to the September S&D meeting for others to enjoy as well.



Also available to guests that day was the new DVD produced and written by Jerry Sutphin in association with the Rivers Institute of Hanover College. Titled "Two Hundred Years of Steamboating: 1811-2011," the 30-minute video was shown after Mr. Parrish's introduction and description of the voyage. It is available for \$10 from the Rivers Institute, **812-866-6846**. Ask to speak with Elsa.

Meanwhile, over in the Museum's Carriage House, visitors could view Indiana Historical Society's traveling display, "Steamboat 'a Comin'." Part of the Bicentennial exhibit, this 19-panel visual presentation will be on display through August 31st, and may be viewed at our [www.s-and-d.org](http://www.s-and-d.org) website. Admission to this exhibit is free.

While browsing at the Museum's gift shop and later at the souvenir stand aboard the steamer BELLE OF LOUISVILLE, we noticed a recent DVD history of the boat: "The Legendary Lady - Story of the BELLE OF LOUISVILLE." Twelve years ago Capt. Kevin Mullen and Anne Jewell collaborated in writing a marvelous book by the same name. Now we are able to enjoy that story in this new video version. Selling for \$15, it is available at both the Museum and aboard the steamer.

Finally, we are also pleased to announce the showing of the new DVD "Saving the SNYDER," documenting recent efforts to preserve the landmark towboat. This video will be featured at Friday night's gathering at the Hotel Lafayette on September 16th. Locations where the \$28 video may be purchased will be announced at that time. 

### Back Cover

Pictured at either Vicksburg or Memphis are BELLE OF THE BENDS (0531) and BELLE OF CALHOUN (0516), most likely in the same time period ca. 1906-07 as the cover photos featured on our June issue. The original is another example of Detroit Publishing Co.'s outstanding steamboat portraits. The B&W version was posted on shorpys.com website, where it captured the imagination of Canadian Don Walsh, who painstakingly colorized the image with the result you see here. (See Don's letter on page 2.) Capt. Way observed that the 1898 Howard-built BELLE OF THE BENDS, at 210 x 32.6 x 7.4 was "one of the more notably handsome of medium-sized sidewheelers." She ran in the Vicksburg-Greenville trade. BELLE OF CALHOUN, an 1895 product of Carondelet Marine Ways at St. Louis, originally ran St. Louis-Clarksville until she changed hands in 1899 when acquired by Memphis & Vicksburg Packet Co. who renamed her JULIA. She eventually returned to the St. Louis area in 1905 and got her old name back when owned by the New St. Louis & Calhoun Packet Corp. In her latter years, that outfit operated her with the IDLEWILD hauling apples out of Calhoun County.

*Original photo courtesy of shorpys.com. with colorized version from Don Walsh.*



