

S & D

REFLECTOR

Published by Sons and Daughters
of Pioneer Rivermen



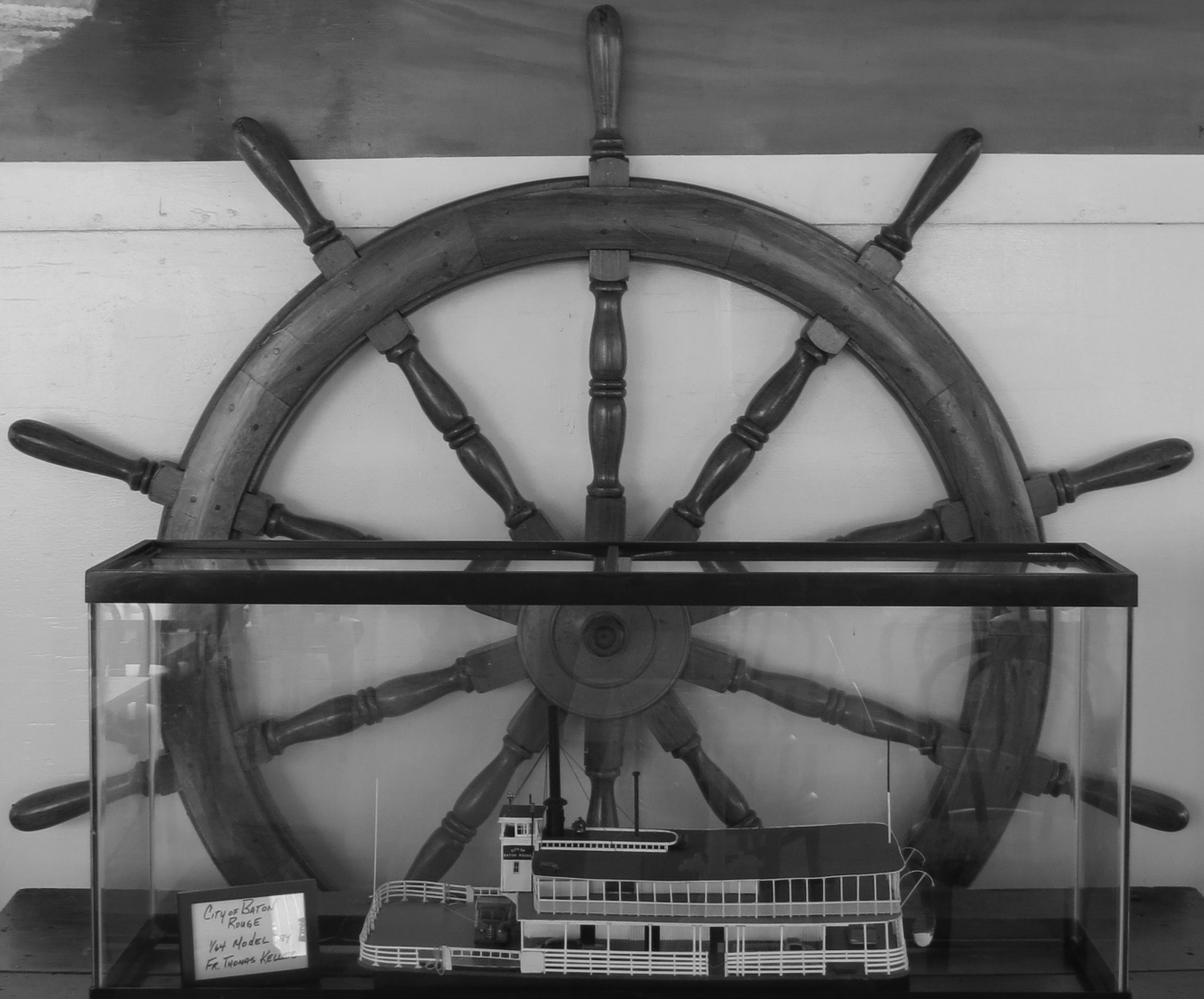
Vol. 53, No. 3

Marietta, Ohio

September 2016



1942 S&D Museum Report Capt. Pink Varble (Part 3) Last Packet to St. Paul



Front Cover

Mural picturing steamer JULIA BELLE SWAIN and riverboat TWILIGHT frames a pilotwheel and scale model of CITY OF BATON ROUGE on main deck of the former ferryboat. This view greeted visitors arriving on May 28th for the 100th anniversary celebration and rechristening ceremony on the Le Claire, IA riverfront. This CBR model is the handiwork of S&D member Fr. Thomas Keller of St. Louis, who builds steamboat models in his spare time. Other examples of his steamboat modeling skill will appear in our December issue. *Photo by Jonathan Tschiggfrie.*

June 2013 issue. At that time, her only possible competition in the Falls City excursion trade would have come from Capt. Jim Phillips' IDLEWILD, making her extended tramping visit for the summer season. Our thanks to Jim for filling in background details about the photo.

Chuck Parrish writes: "Enjoyed part 2 of Capt. Pink Varble & Falls of the Ohio in the June issue of the REFLECTOR. Leland was such a pleasure to work with, and I learned so much from him. His memory of detail was remarkable. Thanks for bringing Pink's life to print."

🔦 Part 3 of Leland's long-awaited chronicle about Capt. Pink appears in this issue. Several of our readers have likewise shared Chuck's appreciation and enthusiasm at the publication of this story of one of Louisville's most-respected rivermen.

Annie Blum writes: "Of course I read and re-read the article about Capt. Wisherd and the letter from Bob Reynolds. There is one thing I know for sure. In the finding aid for the Capt. William and Betty Streckfus Carroll Collection at Mercantile Library, which is available online, there is a list of blueprints in the collection that are from the PRESIDENT, the ISLAND QUEEN and the CINCINNATI.

For me, the fascination of the CINCINNATI is the two-deck cabin using, effectively, a balcony. It would seem that the credit for that detail goes to John W. Hubbard, owner of CINCINNATI, or to the person who drafted the original plans. That special detail was of course continued with PRESIDENT and ADMIRAL. According to the story in the REFLECTOR, the CINCINNATI was complete by the time Capt. Wisherd and Hubbard were discussing the purchase of the LOUISVILLE hull. I also have the impression that when a boat is purchased, many things go with it, so it is possible that the blueprints were obtained in that way.

I can further add that having known the Streckfus organization since 1962, having worked with both Capt. Roy and Capt. Bill, and having studied their papers, they certainly kept their own counsel. A letter, for example, written in 1940 by Capt. Joe Streckfus to a magazine stated emphatically that ADMIRAL



Reflections from Our Readers

Jim Reising writes: "Some time ago you asked if I could do some research about whether the ISLAND QUEEN made special trips from Cincinnati to Louisville for the Kentucky Derby. The quick answer is I could not find any evidence that the boat ever made special Derby trips. That being said, from the newspaper articles I could find, it appears that the ISLAND QUEEN each year in the 30s and 40s came to Louisville for a ten day to two week stay in early May. That means the boat was here in Louisville when the Derby was run. After the boat's Louisville stay she went back to Cincinnati for the start of the Coney Island season.

The Derby was a popular trip for other boats. In 1927 the *Courier Journal* reported the following boats were at the wharf for the Derby: CAPE GIRARDEAU from St. Louis, BETSY ANN from Pittsburgh, TOM GREENE from Huntington, and CINCINNATI and QUEEN CITY from Cincinnati. Unfortunately, the paper did not have a picture of all those boats at the landing."

🔦 Jim's comments are in response to inquiries about a photo of the IQ landed at Louisville on Derby Day, May 7, 1938 which appeared in our

was designed by a team, of which Mazie Krebs was only a member. Capt. Wisherd was probably part of the team that designed and developed the PRESIDENT from the CINCINNATI. One more thing I can add is that the Streckfus Company had always been interested in producing boats that were pleasing to their passengers and as such, were on the cutting edge of design and innovations. The design of PRESIDENT, for example, is sleeker than their wooden hull boats and sleeker than CINCINNATI. And that continued with the design of ADMIRAL. To me, it seems obvious that it took a group of people with different ideas and expertise to design the metal hull boats.”

‡ The REFLECTOR is most pleased with the insightful replies recently appearing in this column regarding the origin and evolution of PRESIDENT’s design and the role various individuals or groups have played in that process. Capt. Way observed that the original plan for CINCINNATI as envisioned by Tom Dunbar, her designer, was for a typical, single cabin boat, but that idea evolved into the somewhat rare two-cabin design with balcony (which appeared earlier on U.S. Mail Line’s AMERICA and UNITED STATES in the 1860s.) Both Tom Dunn and Annie Blum have generously shared their special knowledge and experience gained from many years service with the Streckfus Line, association with family members and familiarity with personal papers and records of the company through these reflections. We suspect that Bob Reynolds is equally delighted with the response his question has generated, while your editor welcomes and invites continued dialogue in this column on those topics of interest to our readers as well.

Tom Way writes: “It seems there has been a forty year gap in our communications, but the arrival of the new REFLECTOR prompted me to correspond. The ALTONA on page 19 looked odd to me and it took a minute to understand why it seemed so odd. The lack of a texas on a sidewheeler is what hit me. When checking the date of the photo I remembered the 1848 Fontayne daguerreotype of Cincinnati and went back to the March 1968 REFLECTOR for a review. The texas was a relatively new idea at that time and a few seemed tacked on directly behind

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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

the pilothouse. Later I realized this famous picture must be out there on the web, and of course, it is. On a computer one can zoom in on certain sections and do more than with a printed page, but the reason I write is to suggest that you might consider a second

Reflections from Our Readers continued on page 31

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

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America's Steam & Diesel
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S&D REFLECTOR

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of Pioneer Rivermen

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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.

David Tschiggfrie, Editor
2723 Shetland Court
Dubuque, IA 52001
reflector@comcast.net

REFLECTOR BACK ISSUES AND INDICES

Copies of the current or prior years are available at \$8 each, postpaid for subscribers, and \$10 for all others.

Indices for five year increments of the quarterly, 1964 through 2003, are available for \$5 per volume. The 2004-08 index is available in CD format only for \$11 postpaid.

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Getting Posted Up Old Friends and Old Times

One of the unexpected and pleasant benefits in attending special events on the river is the surprise meeting up with good friends during the festivities. Just such serendipitous meetings took place on May 28th in Le Claire. Along with a crowd of veteran river enthusiasts we had looked forward to greeting (see Kevin and Carrie Stier's note on page 31 for the notable group of river people they had gathered to participate in the ceremonies), we also had the pleasure of visiting – albeit much-too-briefly in many cases – with Pat Welsh of Davenport; Capt. Dan Shrake of Savanna; John Miller of Keokuk; Lee and Kathy Havlik of Chelsea, IA; Capt. Eric Dykman and family of La Crescent, MN; Sharon Reynolds of Paragould, AR; and Capt. Jim and Annie Blum of St. Louis. Of course, S&D members are no stranger

to this great experience as we gather for the annual meeting in Marietta. And so you are invited to “pop a surprise” and put in an appearance this Sept. 16-17 to add to the excitement and fun.

Vernon Barr tells the story of his Davenport-St. Paul roundtrip on GORDON C. GREENE in 1951, and in doing so triggered some happy memories

GREENE LINE STEAMERS INCORPORATED	
1826 Chestnut 0222x	604 N. COMMERCIAL ST. ST. LOUIS 2, MO.
Mr. Vernon F. Barr, 517 North F St., Monmouth, Illinois.	Date August 21, 1968
This acknowledges receipt of \$50.00 deposit on cruise Davenport, Iowa leaving <u>St. Louis</u> on <u>Sept. 7th</u> for <u>St. Paul</u> and return Reservations have been entered as follows:	
Cabin Deck Stateroom No. 9	
2 fares @ \$65.00	\$130.00
Plus 15% Fed. Tax	19.50
Less deposit	99.50
	\$49.00
Steamer GORDON C. GREENE leaves the Public Landing, Davenport at 3:00 P.M. Central Standard Time.	
<i>Pd in Full</i>	
Upon receipt of final payment, due two weeks before sailing, we will mail tickets to cover. Many thanks for these reservations which are appreciated.	
Very truly yours, <i>Roy L. Barkhau</i> ROY L. BARKHAU District Agent.	

NAME & ADDRESS	GREENE LINE STEAMERS, INC. STEAMER BELLA GREENE ONE HULL OR BOND TOP DECK	No 5214
<i>Mr. Vernon Barr</i> <i>52 East 17th Street</i> <i>Dubuque, Iowa 52001</i>	SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION <i>Roundtrip to St. Paul, Minn. via Dubuque, Iowa</i>	ISSUED BY GREENE LINE STEAMERS, INC. SEP 5 68 CINCINNATI
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Jim Bupp, President

Middle Ohio River Chapter
Frank X. Prudent, President

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ADJUNCT ORGANIZATIONS

Ohio River Museum, Marietta, OH
601 Front St • (740) 373-3750

Inland Rivers Library, Cincinnati, OH
800 Vine St • (513) 369-6957

Blennerhassett Museum, Parkersburg, WV
137 Juliana St • (304) 420-4800

Weblinks available at www.riverhistory.org

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Cleveland, OH 44114

of your editor's first Dubuque-St. Paul cruise on the DQ 17 years later. Both trips were six day – 700 mile journeys. But Vernon's fare was \$74.75/person in GCG's stateroom 9, while the DQ tariff in 1968 was \$142 to occupy inside stateroom 142 (no windows but a plentiful supply of steam heat) in skid row across the cabin deck stern (see attached tickets for details). Ah, them wuz the days! 🌀



Meet Our Contributors

Vernon F. Barr (*Last Packet to St. Paul*, p. 24) was born in 1909 in Chesterfield, IL, about thirty miles north of Alton, where it was customary for local residents to escape the summer heat by going down to the river and riding the excursion steamers with their "air-cooled river breezes." Vernon's family were regular patrons of those boats. During the 30s, he was employed as a civil engineer on highway construction in western Illinois and lived in Oquawka and then Peoria. Eventually he moved back to Oquawka with his wife Nancy, where they raised three daughters. Daughter Marilyn recalls that "we were heavily indoctrinated into steamboats, towboats, locks, boatyards and anything mechanical that moved on the water. Our house had a damaged linoleum tile in the kitchen, so Dad simply cut out the defective area and inlaid a silhouette of a towboat in a contrasting color. We thought it was perfectly normal to have a towboat on our floor and for a family to board steamboats by climbing over the railing as they passed through Lock 18." In the early 60s, Vernon returned to Peoria as a traffic bureau manager and relocated in Chillicothe on the Illinois River. It was there that he made new S&D river friends in Bob Burtnett, Bob Anton and the crew and fans of the JULIA BELLE SWAIN. After spending a lifetime as a self-proclaimed "River Rat," Vernon passed away in 1987.

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

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S&D's 77TH ANNUAL MEETING SEPTEMBER 16-17

You are cordially invited to attend the 77th Annual Meeting of Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Rivermen on Friday and Saturday, September 16-17. Room reservations may be made with the Lafayette Hotel, 101 Front Street, Marietta, OH 45750.

Friday evening's Meet and Greet Session convenes at 8:00 p.m. at Ohio River Museum, with a special photo exhibit commemorating ORM's 75th anniversary. Light refreshments will be served.

Saturday morning's Annual Business Meeting begins promptly at 9:30 in the hotel's Sternwheel Room. In addition to elections, updates on S&D chapters and affiliated groups, and financial and membership reports, news about a special promotion for subscribers and consideration of electronic publication of the REFLECTOR will be discussed.

A boxed noon luncheon will be served in conjunction with a trip to Blennerhassett Island. After driving to Parkersburg on your own, boat ride to the island and a house tour will be provided. Cost is \$25/person, and includes lunch, boat and tour fares. You may spend as much time on Blennerhassett as you wish; however the last boat leaves the island at 3:30 p.m.

Saturday evening's banquet and program begins at 6:30 in the Lafayette Ballroom. Entrees include prime rib (\$30/person), salmon (\$29/person), and lemon chicken (\$25/person). Make dinner reservations by calling the Hotel at 800-331-9336 or 740-373-5522. All prices include tax and gratuity. Our featured speaker is Capt. Alan Bernstein of BB Riverboats in Cincinnati.

Please note that reservations for the Blennerhassett Luncheon Tour must be confirmed and paid in advance by contacting treasurer Dale Flick in writing before September 1st and remitting the \$25 fee by check or money order. No reservations will be accepted on S&D weekend.

R. Dale Flick

1444 Burney Lane

Cincinnati, OH 45230

S&D Membership Report - 1942

A vintage copy of the 1942 S&D membership report was among several interesting items arriving by post recently from member Bob Anton in Peoria. Bob providentially supplied us with Capt. Way's contemporary account of the opening of the new River Museum in the spring of 1941 just in time

for this year's 75th anniversary commemoration. Shortly after, Bill Reynolds surprised us with a March 9, 1941 *Columbus Dispatch* article about the soon-to-be-open River Museum at Campus Martius. We share those items with you here in preparation for our gathering at the Museum on September 16.

THE RIVER MUSEUM

The Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Rivermen decided upon the creation of a River Museum soon after its organization and various plans were under discussion when the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society stepped forward and offered space for such an exhibit in their handsome Campus Martius Museum, Marietta, Ohio. With the aid of this Society, the rooms were selected and redecorated, suitable exhibit platforms and railings were built, modern lighting installed and the doors were opened on March 16, 1941. At this time the Sons and Daughters had assembled the beginnings of a collection, and within the past year many new features have been added, until at the present time there has been assembled a fairly comprehensive display of models, pictures, relics and educational features pertaining to the Mississippi River system.

The response to this effort has been gratifying. Visitors have been registered from all of the states, and from various foreign countries. In summer months a large tourist steamer brings many passengers to Marietta and the River Museum is one of the principal attractions.

An effort has been made to display material which will prove of interest to all ages and occupations and during the coming years special exhibits are planned to acquaint the public with the modern river methods and the character of the present traffic. Special emphasis has been placed on securing a wide range of historical material to graphically show the immense strides which have been made in the construction of river boats since the inception in 1811.

The River Museum is open to the public daily from 9 to 5, including Sundays, free of charge. The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society joins with the Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Rivermen in inviting all persons to avail themselves of an opportunity to see this unusual exhibit, most comprehensive of its kind assembled in the United States.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Rivermen was organized at a meeting in the Lafayette Hotel, Gallipolis, Ohio, on June 3, 1939. Miss Elizabeth Litton of Clarington, Ohio, daughter of a pioneer boat operator, was largely responsible for the gathering inasmuch as she visioned the valuable work such a group might accomplish. Capt. and Mrs. Phil C. Elsey were hosts to a dinner and the first officers were elected. Capt. Mary B. Greene, of Cincinnati, was elected honorary president; J. Mack Gamble, of Clarington, president; Capt. Phil C. Elsey, vice president; Miss Elizabeth Litton, secretary; Ben D. Richardson, of Malta, Ohio, treasurer; and B. L. Barton, Bert Noll and J. W. Zenn, members of the Executive Committee. The annual dues were set at one dollar a year and J. Mack Gamble was asked to prepare a constitution.

At a meeting held in the Hotel Lafayette, Marietta, Ohio, on September 10, 1939, the official insignia of the association was adopted, the familiar pilotwheel enclosing a headlight.

The growth of the organization from this point forward was rapid. In the fall of 1940 a meeting was held at New Martinsville, W. Va., and the constitution was adopted by the membership. At this time Ben D. Richardson was elected president. During his term the River Museum at Marietta was opened to the public, on March 16, 1941. On August 31, 1941, the present officers were elected at the annual meeting in Marietta, Ohio, and the membership had increased almost one hundred percent within the year. The association was formally incorporated on the 11th of November, 1941.

OFFICERS

1942

CAPT. MARY B. GREENE	- - - - -	Honorary President
CAPT. FREDERICK WAY, JR.	- - - - -	President
ROBERT THOMAS	- - - - -	Vice President, Upper Ohio
C. W. STOLL	- - - - -	Vice President, Lower Ohio
J. W. ZENN	- - - - -	Secretary
HARRY J. MADDY	- - - - -	Treasurer
J. MACK GAMBLE	- - - - -	Chairman of the Executive Committee
W. K. RICHARDSON	- - - - -	Chairman of the Museum Committee

MADISON CHAPTER

C. W. STOLL	- - - - -	Executive Committee Chairman
W. HURLEY ASHBY	- - - - -	Vice Chairman
ALENE STOTTLEBOWER	- - - - -	Secretary-Treasurer

CERTIFICATE OF INCORPORATION

This is to certify that we whose names are hereunto subscribed, citizens of the United States, have associated ourselves together under the General Corporation Act of the State of Ohio, under the corporate name of

SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF PIONEER RIVERMEN

by which corporate name or title the said incorporated society shall be known in law.

The purposes for which said corporation is formed are to perpetuate the memory of pioneer rivermen through the establishment of a River Museum or River Museums, where relics, models, pictures and other items relating to the rivers and their boats may be preserved; the preservation and publication of river history; closer association within and loyalty to the ideals of the river fraternity.

The following persons shall serve said corporation until the first meeting is called to elect trustees.

Witness our signatures this 11th day of November, 1941.

BEN D. RICHARDSON

J. MACK GAMBLE

FREDERICK WAY, JR.

From March 9, 1941 *Columbus Dispatch*

[Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Rivermen was] established with membership chiefly in three states: Ohio, West Virginia and Pennsylvania. It soon became evident that there was interest throughout the states drained by the Mississippi and its tributaries and, to some extent, from coast to coast. Members were quickly enrolled from Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri and many other states. It also became clear that a prime interest of most members was the early establishment of a museum where as much "steamboatiana" as possible could be collected before the items might be lost or destroyed.

There was keen competition among Ohio River cities wishing to be chosen as the site of the proposed museum and nearly every town along the stream was proposed at one time or another while various Mississippi River cities were also suggested. There was especially strong sentiment for locating the museum at Cincinnati but from the first, Marietta, located at the junction of the Ohio and Muskingum, received much favorable comment. However, the selection of Marietta as the site of the museum was assured when Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society through Erwin C. Zepp, Curator of State Memorials, and Mrs. Edith Reiter, Curator of Campus Martius State Memorial, offered space for the river exhibit in Campus Martius.

At the annual convention of S&D in New Martinsville, WV in September 1940, B. D. Richardson of Malta, OH was advanced from treasurer to president, while J. Mack Gamble, first president of the group, was made a member of an enlarged executive committee to which was added Capt. Frederick Way of Sewickley, PA, former owner of the packet BETSY ANN and more recently pilot of the huge sidewheel excursion steamer SENATOR. Capt. Way is nationally known through his authorship of *The Log of the Betsy Ann*, best-selling river book, and has written a new river book to appear this spring [*The Allegheny*]. Harry J. Maddy, former steamboat purser and now cashier of Ohio Valley Bank in Gallipolis, was made treasurer of the organization. An additional vice president was chosen in the person of Robert Thomas of Clarington, OH, who has probably done as much as any other one person to re-arouse interest in the river by building a collection of steamboat models which have been widely publicized. Mr. Thomas' father was for many years a ship carpenter at the Mozena Boatyard in Clarington, and Robert Thomas himself helped build the last river barges constructed there. Knowing the actual construction of steamboats he has been able to build models, the accuracy and life-like qualities of which have attracted much attention.

In the vestibule of the museum will be exhibited one of the largest steamboat models in existence, an eight-foot model of J.M. WHITE, believed by many rivermen to have been the fastest boat ever to ply the Mississippi. This model was built by Capt. Frederick Way and is a marvel to all through the exactitude with which it reproduces all the ornate decorative work which was such a notable feature of the floating palaces of the past. Capt. Way is also exhibiting a large model of the QUEEN CITY [see photo on page 29 - ed.], last and most notable of the large packets which plied the Pittsburgh-Cincinnati trade and whose days were ended by the wreckers last year after the big boat had put in a number of years as a lowly wharfboat at Pittsburgh.

In the main room of the river museum the largest model is that of the GUIDING STAR, one of the finest of the Ohio River boats, a huge sidewheeler that ran back in the 1870s from Cincinnati to New Orleans in what was known as the "O" Line, all boats of which carried a large "O" suspended between their tall chimneys. This model was built by Robert Thomas of Clarington, who also has on display the first model he ever built, one of the TELEGRAM, a daily boat which made trips nearly three-fourths of a century ago from Clarington to Wheeling at a time when the river afforded the only highway. Two other models built by Mr. Thomas and displayed in the main room are SUNSHINE, a 200-foot packet, built by Capt. J. Mack Gamble, Sr., a resident of Marietta, as the embodiment of all that was best in steamboat construction as he had learned it in more than a score of years of practical experience; and the GENERAL WOOD, a pretty and fast cotton boat which was brought to the Upper Ohio during the World War I period and continued to operate until about ten years ago under the management of Capt. William S. Pollock, who is now pilot of an Ohio River towboat.

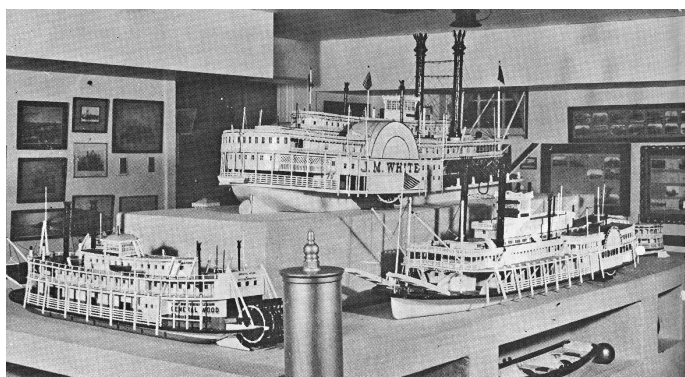
A model of special interest to Upper Ohio people is that of the packet LIBERTY, which boat was built in 1912 at Clarington and operated on both the Ohio and Muskingum Rivers for years and finally was the last packet boat in the year-round trade on the Upper Ohio until the days of the packet finally ended a few years ago. Recent news stories have told that LIBERTY's spirit still marches on, inasmuch as her engines are in use on the steamer VALLEY BELLE and the famous whistle is on the towboat MILDRED.

While the river association is largely devoted to preserving memories of the past, its officers are all especially interested in giving publicity to traffic on the Ohio River today which, through the use of powerful towboats moving fleets of huge barges, is greater than


ever in its history. Visitors to the Marietta museum are but a short distance from the Ohio River waterfront where they may see passing tows which may hail from Pittsburgh, New Orleans, Minneapolis, Chicago and even Texas ports. They will see huge 10,000-ton cargoes pushed by boats of the Campbell Line, headed by Charles T. Campbell, a native of New Matamoras, Washington County. River craft are especially busy now for they are an important cog in the defense program through their transportation service to the mills located in the "Workshop of the World."

Partial List of Donations and Loans for Exhibit in the River Museum, 1941

- Capt. Thomas R. Greene: Model of TOM GREENE, brass cannon from CITY OF LOUISVILLE, life preservers from GORDON C. GREENE.
- Capt. Jesse P. Hughes: Oil paintings of Greene Line packets and cabin signboard from COURIER.
- Capt. Donald T. Wright: Collection of Western Rivers books for nucleus of a river library.
- William McNally: Scale model of ROB'T. E. LEE.
- Robert Thomas: Scale models of SUNSHINE, TELEGRAM, GENERAL WOOD, GREENLAND, and GUIDING STAR.
- J. W. Rutter: Scale model of LIBERTY.
- Capt. Frederick Way, Jr.: Scale models of J.M. WHITE and QUEEN CITY, oil painting of ECLIPSE, photos and relics from Ohio and Mississippi steamboats.
- William F. Cox: Photo of KANAWHA BELLE
- Bud Muller: Bound volume of steamboat inspection certificates 1867-69 on Ohio River.
- G. E. Young: Photos of OTTO MARMET
- H. A. Simmons: Three scrapbooks of upper Ohio events 1880-1900 and old steamboat relics.
- Capt. C.W. Elder: Two plaster casts of George and Martha Washington from Str. WASHINGTON'S dance floor.
- Raymond W. Fisk: Photo of T.N. BARNSDALL.
- Henry A. Meyer: Photos of Civil War gunboats.



L-R: Models of GENERAL WOOD, J.M. WHITE and GUIDING STAR on display in original River Museum.

- L.F. Sutherland: Photos of Kanawha River towboats.
- William Kelley: Photos of old Pittsburgh towboats.
- James A. Wallen: Photos.
- Mrs. Mary Orr: 1860 engineer's license.
- Mrs. J. Frank Ellison: Photos and water color painting of HUDSON.
- Mrs. H.S. Washington: Photos of river boats.
- U.S. Repair Station, Marietta: IROQUOIS photo.
- Mrs. J. Newton Cooke: Lithograph of gunboat LAFAYETTE.
- Harry Pence: Photos of CINCINNATI and race between BETSY ANN and CHRIS GREENE.
- Capt. R.J. Hiernaux: Steamboat roof bell, whistle from KATE ADAMS, electric headlight, pilothouse signal indicator, nameboard from LOOKOUT, photos.
- Harry P. Fischer: Photo of VIRGINIA.
- W.H. Rea: Handmade pilotwheel clock.
- C.W. Stoll: Stateroom identification board from OUACHITA and steamboat pictures and relics.
- Stanley B. Huntington: Name board from cabin of W.N. CHANCELLOR.
- Mrs. Juliette S. Nichols: Clock from OHIO NO. 2 and relics from GOLDEN ERA.
- Dean Johnson: Photo of SENATOR CORDILL.
- Emma B. Wells: Mississippi River chart.
- E. Roy Wells: Tableware from packet TWILIGHT.
- Perl Sprague: Signal lanterns from H.K. BEDFORD.
- Henry Davis: Shipyard tools for wooden boats.
- J. Mack Gamble: Painting of ROB'T. E. LEE - NATCHEZ race, dinner bell from SUNSHINE, and pictures and other relics.
- Mrs. Dayton Randolph: Pictures of KEYSTONE STATE and cabin of IRON QUEEN.
- Mrs. Ola Hazelrigg: Photo of KITTY NYE.
- U.S. Department of Publications: Set of bound volumes of *List of Merchant Vessels*.
- Mrs. A. V. Danner: Way bills from Vevay, IN packets of 1860s and 70s.
- Sallie Knox: Spoon from LINNIE DROWN.
- J. W. Brown: Bill of sale for TWILIGHT.
- Austin D. Butler: Collection of old way bills.
- J. W. Zenn: Pilotwheel from J.C. RISHER and various photos.
- Frank Lloyd: Photos of river boats.
- Louis S. Hanshumaker: Steamboat shipping book.
- Nola Holz: Inkwell from DIURNAL.
- Clarence W. Wagner: Copy of *Lloyd's Steamboat Directory*.
- William Greenwood: Picture of GREENLAND.
- W. P. Miller: Steamboat photos.
- Norwood Chamberlain: Lithograph of race between ROB'T. E. LEE and NATCHEZ.
- Miss Carrie Dyer: Sketch of race between BALTIC and DIANA. 

Capt. Pink Varble and the Falls of the Ohio (Part 3)

by Leland R. Johnson

CHAPTER 5: PINK'S PONTOONS

Captains Pink Varble and David Dryden covered themselves with glory during the War Between the States. Captain Pink distinguished himself as pilot, setting records for moving Union warships and transports across the Falls, steering hospital boats to battlefields to retrieve wounded, and building emergency bridges across the Ohio for defending Louisville. Pink thus became a key link in the Union's transportation chain. Captain Dryden earned laurels as commander of Union warships that sank Confederate gunboats in battles on the Mississippi River and captured Memphis for the Union.

In September 1861 Pink accepted a covert mission from the Union Army, guiding thirteen steamboats towing 120 barges down the Falls and on to Paducah. This was the busiest day of Pink's forty-year career as Falls pilot: thirteen trips over the Falls and back in a single day, surpassing the twelve-trip record set in 1855 by Indiana pilot Henry Barnaby. This secret fleet carried with it all the mechanics from New Albany, and at Paducah they assembled the barges into the longest floating pontoon bridge ever constructed, nearly a mile long, permitting Union troops to cross the Ohio from Illinois dry-shod into Paducah, KY.

By the end of 1861 steamboat transports poured Federal troops from upriver into Louisville. The 41st Ohio Infantry arrived aboard the TELEGRAPH, the 24th Ohio came on the ECONOMY and FLORENCE, and the 15th U. S. Regiment from Cincinnati arrived on the CHAMPION. The SILVER WAVE brought the 17th Indiana, the MARENGO brought the 15th Indiana, and several steamboats brought the 7th Pennsylvania Cavalry with mounts from Pittsburgh. By early 1862 Louisville became a military camp, occupied by the Army's First Division including twelve infantry

regiments, one regiment of cavalry, four artillery batteries, and a corps of 300 Army Engineers. Bound for Nashville on Cumberland River, these troops paraded through Louisville to board fourteen steamboats at Portland's wharf. Some went on the steamboat DIANA with Captain Pink Varble at its wheel, and they followed Union gunboats up the Cumberland to Nashville, where Pink had a joyous reunion with brother Billy and recovered his towboat PINK VARBLE from Confederate hands.

Throughout the War, Army transport steamers employed Captain Pink to take them across the Falls because they were too large to use the Portland Canal locks, although Enoch Lockhart and James Guthrie pressed ahead with canal enlargement during the war. After returning from Washington, Guthrie became president both of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad and the Louisville and Portland Canal, thus managing most transportation through the Falls City. He and the canal directors hired



DIANA (1540) was piloted by Capt. Pink to carry troops of the Army's First Division from Louisville to Nashville early in the War. She was taken over by U.S. forces in April 1862 for use as a transport, but recaptured by the Confederates in March 1863 who set her afire on Bayou Teche two weeks later to keep her from falling back into Union hands. Photo courtesy of Murphy Library, University of Wisconsin - La Crosse.

Theodore Scowden, who had built Louisville's waterworks, to design locks twice the size of those built in 1830, and in 1860 they awarded a contract for building larger locks to Barton-Robinson of New York. This contractor brought dredges and machinery and hired 800 workers to excavate a new canal branch to Portland, then began building double-stepped masonry locks. These locks were 350 feet long and 80 feet wide, compared to the 190 by 50 foot locks built in 1830, but their construction was not far along when erupting war slowed their progress.

All larger steamers, gunboats, and ironclads necessarily employed Falls pilots instead of passing through the small canal locks, and Pink Varble became the busiest man in Louisville, guiding warships and supply transports down Indian Chute. In 1862 Pink took as many as ten boats daily over the Falls—about three-quarters of all boats then making the crossing—and he often took them over on extremely shallow river stages. Becoming exhausted by these labors, after ten years of accident-free piloting he suffered his first accident in July 1862. At the pilotwheel of the steamboat DUNLEITH, he steered safely past Backbone Ridge and shoals at the Indian Chute entrance. Then, he jerked the wheel to miss Rubel's Rock and the wheel jammed, giving the steamer an uncontrollable sheer. Pink sounded bells for the engineer to back, but the boat smashed into Wave Rock, cracking its hull like a nut, and it plunged to the bottom. Captain Billy Varble nearby aboard the CHARLES MILLER saw this and was off in a flash to the rescue. In minutes he had his towboat alongside the DUNLEITH to take off passengers and crew, but nothing could save the cargo of sacked oats and leather harnesses Army Quartermasters had shipped to Union cavalry in Tennessee. The Varbles with their towboat MILLER eventually shoved the wrecked boat off the rocks and into New Albany where it was repaired and returned to military service.

Recognizing his need for more help on the Falls, Captain Pink appointed his brother, young Dick Varble, to manage their towboat business, and arranged Billy Varble's appointment as Falls pilot. Pink first tried in early 1862 to have Billy made Falls pilot by the Louisville City Council, but could not persuade them to drop one of the older pilots: the

council had then reelected Pink, Jesse Vansickle, Andy McDowell, Fred Bratchey, and Jim Hamilton. But when Hamilton died in late 1862, Pink persuaded the council to name Billy to fill his unexpired term. The two Varbles thus became available to assist captains who visited Louisville's wharf calling for piloting services by Varble. Indeed, Captain Pink's reknown was such that people asked his help at every crisis at the Falls, and in September 1862 the Union Army directed him to help rescue the people of Louisville from Confederate siege.

After victory at Fort Donelson the Union Navy ascended the Cumberland to take Nashville, the first Confederate state capital occupied by Union troops. But in September 1862 General Braxton Bragg and his Confederate Army flanked Nashville and counter-attacked, advancing to capture Kentucky's capital at Frankfort and inaugurating a Confederate state governor. From the Bluegrass, the Confederates might strike west to Louisville or north to Cincinnati, and, guessing Bragg would head for Cincinnati, Union commanders reinforced and fortified the Queen City. James Guthrie feared, however, that Confederates aimed to seize his canal and railroad terminal at Louisville, and he protested to Union commanders: "I am convinced there is no real danger of an attack on Cincinnati. The real danger is cutting of the line of communication with General Buell's army from this place and after that the conquest of Louisville." Union command at Cincinnati responded by sending six gunboats to defend Louisville and by ordering General Jeremiah Boyle to fortify the Falls City, preparing for siege. In the meantime, General Don C. Buell raced his Union army from Nashville back toward Louisville, hoping to beat General Bragg and the Confederates to the prize.

The news by telegraph vividly described Louisville's crisis as the Confederates advanced: "Great excitement here. Every able-bodied man being impressed to take up arms for defense of city or work in entrenchments. Attack expected tonight or tomorrow. Buell close upon enemy's rear. Pontoon bridge being built to move over if necessary." Union Army authorities ordered Louisville's saloons closed and prepared to evacuate the city in case Confederates reached it before General Buell's forces. Captain Enoch Lockhart

called out his Shippingport home guards to defend the canal, and the contractor at the new locks sent their workers to the city's outskirts to build roads, rifle pits, and fortifications.

In this emergency, General Boyle at Louisville called Captain Pink for assistance, contracting with him and his friends to station steamboats at Louisville's wharf to transport civilians to Indiana, and to construct floating bridges across the Ohio. Captain Pink acquired all empty coalboats and barges he could find and anchored them in lines across the river from Portland to New Albany at the foot of the Falls and from Louisville to Jeffersonville above the Falls, while the canal contractor laid plank roads leading to the bridges and spiked double-track roadways atop the barges for crossing buggies and wagons. Pink completed the two floating bridges on September 26, and frightened Louisvillians began crossing in safety to Indiana. General Buell's Union troops won the race, however, blocking the Confederate approach toward Louisville, and on October 8 they fought General Bragg's forces to a standstill at Perryville, fifty miles from Louisville. After the Rebels returned to Tennessee in late October, Captain Pink disassembled and removed his floating bridges before winter's ice destroyed them.

Years later, when questioned about his floating bridges, Captain Pink replied: "It was that year when Gen. Bragg came into the State and moved towards this city with a view of capturing or destroying it. There was a great panic here among the people, and Gen. Boyle, who was in command here, ordered me to construct pontoon bridges across the river. I went to work, and in 48 hours I had the pontoon constructed of 120 barges, reaching from the Kentucky to the Indiana shore. Buell and his army came to the rescue of the city, turned the Confederates' course, and once more all was quiet on the Ohio. The pontoons remained in use for several weeks and then removed."

That October, John Wilkes Booth entertained Louisville with his portrayal of tyrant Richard III at the city's theater, but Pink probably missed the performance. He was too busy and must have been in the crowd which gathered at the wharf to admire the new steamboat RUTH built at Howard

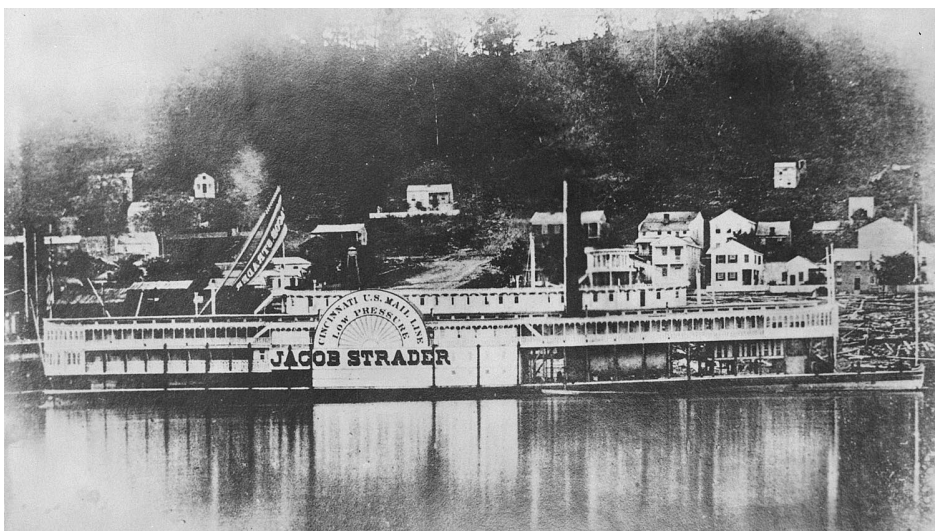
Boatyard in Jeffersonville. Her wheelhouse sported a painting of Ruth, daughter-in-law of Naomi, gleaning harvest fields after the reapers of Boaz. At 702 tons, the RUTH far exceeded Portland Canal's capacity and her pilot therefore attempted to descend Indian Chute and stranded the boat against Backbone Ridge. Captain Pink Varble steamed out to her with his harbor towboat to push her free from the rocks, saving it from destruction, but the Army then commandeered RUTH for military transport and a Confederate arsonist later torched the splendid packet, killing thirty passengers.

Because General Bragg and his Confederate Army destroyed Union Army supply trains at Stones River, TN on New Year's Day of 1863, the Army commandeered all steamboats on the Ohio and sent them in gunboat convoys to Nashville to resupply Union forces. This rush of military transports overwhelmed Portland's little canal, blocking passage by towboats pushing empty coal barges upriver for refills. Desperate to supply fuel for gunboat convoys, towboat captains elected to risk the passage through Indian Chute and brought Captain Pink aboard to steer them. During this crisis, Captain Pink set a new record bringing towboats and barges up through the chute, and a newspaper elaborated on his feat: "The boats brought up were the SHARK, WHALE, and LAKE ERIE. The WHALE made the run from the foot of the Falls to the towhead in forty-six minutes, the SHARK in forty-three minutes, and the LAKE ERIE in thirty-six minutes. They were all brought up through the chute, stemming the current most gallantly. Captain Varble handles a pilot wheel as the enchanter does his magical wand."

A crowd witnessed a dramatic Falls passage in 1863. Although Cincinnati was building a suspension bridge over the Ohio during the war, none crossed the river below Porkopolis, and all travelers and commerce therefore ferried the river at Louisville. A crew of seven manned a barge at Jeffersonville that set out to cross to Louisville, carrying aboard it a railroad locomotive. Weight of the heavily loaded barge proved too great for the crew to manage, and currents swept it into the Falls where cascades drove it onto the rocks, spilling crew and locomotive into the river. On the steamboat CELESTE, Captain Pink saw the mishap and, risking destruction,

steamed alongside the wreck where he found four crewmen clinging desperately to remains of the barge and pulled them aboard his steamboat to safety. But, alas, three crewmen had already gone to the bottom with the locomotive.

Captain Pink missed the panic in Louisville in summer 1863 when General John Hunt Morgan and his Confederate cavalry threatened attack, then circled the city to the west and north. Pink had gone south commanding the hospital boat JACOB STRADER, a 905-ton steamboat with 310 berths and a 306-foot-long cabin. The Union siege of Vicksburg was underway at the time, and Confederate guerrillas fired on the STRADER as she approached Walnut Hills on the Mississippi. Bullets zinged past the pilothouse, but Captain Pink stayed at the wheel, holding the boat on course. When a shell struck the boat's steam line, emptying its boilers of steam, the STRADER lost power and drifted helplessly on the broad brown tide. Captain Pink in the pilothouse sounded distress signals—five short blasts on the steam whistle—until nearby Union gunboats heard the call and steamed alongside. Lines from the gunboats lashed to the STRADER allowed them to tow the crippled steamer to shore for emergency repairs; and Pink then took it on to Vicksburg, where wounded soldiers were carried aboard for the return trip to Jeffersonville Army Hospital.



The big low-pressure packet JACOB STRADER (2915) was owned by U. S. Mail Line and served for a time as a hospital transport during the War. Piloted by Capt. Pink, she arrived near Vicksburg while the siege was underway and was fired on. After Union gunboats came to her assistance, Pink successfully landed her to load a complement of wounded soldiers at the city front for delivery to Jeffersonville's Army Hospital. Photo from Murphy Library, University of Wisconsin - La Crosse.

After returning, Captain Pink, his brother Richard, and their friend Captain William May, began investing in steamboats and purchased and rebuilt the SCIENCE after it had been wrecked. Soon after restoring the boat to service, Captain Billy went over the Falls at its wheel. She was loaded with Quartermaster stores the brothers Varble agreed to deliver to the Army at Nashville. Entering Indian Chute, Billy mashed into heavy ice jammed against Rubel's Rock, and his boat slid against ice floes onto the rocks of Goose Island. Alternately backing and coming ahead, Billy beat the boat off the rocks and through the ice, then across Big Eddy and down into safe harbor at Portland where he moored her overnight to inspect damages. That night, however, Portland was lit by bright light from the SCIENCE, which caught fire and burned to the waterline. All the Varbles ever recovered from her hulk were the scorched engines for use aboard another hull.

Captain Pink garnered more accolades as a pilot in 1864. When he brought the steamboat BRILLIANT, fully loaded, up the Falls at low water, a Louisville newspaper crowed: "Considering the low state of water and heavy current, we consider this a feat which can be accomplished only by Pilot P. Varble." And when he guided Army Quartermasters' towboat CRESCENT CITY bound for New Orleans with a tow of 2,500 tons of hay and 10,000 bushels of coal, it was described as the largest tow Pink had ever taken over the Falls and a noteworthy contribution to the Union war effort.

Yet, Captain Pink also suffered two memorable disasters in 1864. When he took the wheel of the little DIME, a Muskingum River packet that had chased General John Hunt Morgan and his Confederate cavalry in 1863, it had loaded 100 tons of groceries and liquor at Louisville and was bound for Nashville. Pink threaded it smartly into Indian Chute and nearly to Big Eddy before it burst a steam line and lost power. When the engineer below attempted emergency repair, the machinery crushed his hand,

and the boat drifted helplessly to smash against Wave Rock. The impact propelled two passengers over the side into the foaming cascades. Noting one passenger clutched to the rock, Pink jumped to the deck, found a hawser, and threw it until the passenger caught the line, then dragged him back aboard. Seeing another passenger bobbing along in the current, Pink launched the yawl and went after him, rowing fast enough to catch up and haul him in before he spun into Big Eddy's grasp. This was about as close as Pink ever came to losing a passenger on the Falls.

Two weeks later Captain Pink turned the steamboat JENNIE HUBBS down the Falls. This packet was flagship of the Dean Line, which ran her and other steamers in the Cincinnati to Memphis trade. Again, Pink steered this boat down Indian Chute to the turn just above Big Eddy, when a mechanical glitch caused disaster. As he prepared to twist the steamer around the rocks, Pink rang the bell for the engineer to back, but instead the boat continued forward and dashed into Wave Rock where the DIME had gone down earlier. The collision stove in the hull which lodged athwart the rocks. Captains Billy and Dick brought their towboat down the chute to take off the HUBBS' cargo, and when they removed this weight the whitewater loosened the wreck from the rocks and floated her off to Portland where it sank, a total loss.

If these incidents tarnished Captain Pink's standing as premier Falls pilot, he recovered luster in 1865 when the ferry JOHN SHALLCROSS with 180 passengers aboard left Jeffersonville at dusk in dense fog. Missing the channel in the fog and losing bearings, the ferry pilot and passengers met with a nasty surprise when they landed astride Backbone Ridge at the head of Indian Chute instead of at Louisville. Learning of this, Pink fired the boilers of his towboat GIPSEY, ran it into Indian Chute, and retrieved panicked passengers from the threatened ferry. He deftly transported them down the rapids, then returned them up through the canal to their destination at Louisville, all in a dark dense fog. The following day, he used his towboat to tug the ferry off the rocks and take it to a repair dock.

In the spring of 1865, Captain Pink set another new record for ascending the Falls. At Shippingport,

he boarded the WHALE, an immense towboat with engines powered by four boilers, and ordered the engineer to pour on the coal. With wicked handling, he brought it up from Shippingport through Indian Chute and landed it at the foot of Louisville's First Street in just twenty-nine minutes. This was quicker by eight minutes than ever before accomplished by any Falls pilot including Captain Dave Dryden.

Toward War's end the Falls cities became harbors for recovering wounded soldiers. On the Indiana side, the Army completed Jefferson General Hospital with twenty-seven buildings housing 5,200 patients, and it converted nineteen buildings in Louisville into military hospitals. Need for hospital space became so acute even steamboats were transformed into floating hospitals and served well. When the hospital steamer OHIO landed at New Albany with a thousand patients aboard, a news report declared: "It lacks a promenade for recreation but patients enjoy fresh air and bracing breezes from the river."

Ever since Captain Pink brought the JACOB STRADER back from Vicksburg, it had served as an Army hospital boat. Moored near the canal entrance, it housed wounded comfortably and was crowded with them in February 1865 when ice tore it loose and drove it onto the Falls. The STRADER washed down Kentucky Chute, headed for the drop at the end of the chute, where it could turn bottom up and drown the wounded. Runners took the news to Captain Pink, and dashing to his towboat GIPSEY, he steamed off in swift pursuit. Fortunately, the hospital boat lodged on rocks before going over the steepest cascades, and teetered there on the edge of catastrophe. Pink brought the GIPSEY alongside and tied to it. He and the crew helped the walking wounded clamber onto the towboat, then carried the remainder over on stretchers. With the GIPSEY's powerful engines, Pink beat upriver against currents and back to the wharf, where the wounded were carried ashore. He returned to the STRADER where the discharge of patients had lightened it enough to float off the rocks, and Pink pulled it back up Kentucky Chute to safe mooring.

Captain Pink received another secret assignment from the Army in 1865 when one of the largest troop deployments of the War passed up the Ohio. With

destruction of the Confederate Army at Nashville at the end of 1864, the Union command ordered General John Schofield and his Twenty-third Army Corps to move covertly east to join the assaults on General Robert E. Lee's army at Richmond, VA. Schofield's Corps boarded seventeen steamboats on the Tennessee River and, maintaining secrecy, traveled up the Ohio to Portland. While boats waited to pass the canal, troops broke mission secrecy by rioting, breaking into stores and saloons, robbing people on the streets, a debacle continuing until sober troops shot some rioters to restore order. Captain Pink then moved the transports above the Falls, and the corps resumed its long deployment, joining Union forces outside Richmond.

By spring 1865 Captain Pink Varble piloted highly unusual armored vessels down Indian Chute. The Navy arranged construction at Pittsburgh and Cincinnati of seven ironclad monitors resembling the warship MONITOR that fought Confederate MERRIMAC at Norfolk, VA. These heavily-armored boats, carrying fifteen-inch cannon in revolving turrets, needed at least thirteen feet of water to pass downriver. Indian Chute seldom had that depth, and Navy contractors therefore hired the best Falls pilot they could find: Captain Pink Varble. Using towboats to guide the formidable monitors, Pink safely steered these ironclads down the Falls on spring floods. After stops at Mound City Navy Shipyard near the Ohio's mouth, the monitors steamed down the Mississippi and some entered the Gulf of Mexico before the War's end.

Captain Pink witnessed turmoil and tragedy marking the close of War in Louisville's harbor. Soon after the Confederate surrender at Appomattox, a soldier in gray uniform jumped into the canal and drowned himself, leaving only a farewell letter to his family. Three Confederate prisoners-of-war set fire to the steamboat ELEANORA CARREL, and Captain Dave Dryden was at the wharf when flames engulfed this boat. Because hoses froze in the cold, the fire department had little success stopping the spreading blaze, and Captain Dave jumped into the fray. Fifty years later, a boy who saw it still had vivid memories of Captain Dave's foresight: "I remember when the ELEANORA CARREL burned right here at the wharf in the middle of the morning, and our fire department did good work

unavailingly. I saw old Capt. Dave Dryden scuttle her under the wheelhouse. That was interesting. It was seen that the cabin was bound to go, which would soon burn off and lighten up the boat (as it did), and then the hull and engines and freight in the hold might go also. So Capt. Dryden, not in any way connected with the boat, procured an axe and in a boat went in under the wheelhouse and cut great holes at the water's edge (or below) where he could, and the boat soon sank. The fire being extinguished, it was not a difficult job to raise the boat, with considerable value in the boat and cargo that was saved."

Slavery ended by the summer of 1865, and former slaves poured into Louisville. Homeless, they slept around Louisville's wharf. Because most were ultimately bound to Indiana and points north, a Louisville newspaper commented: "They doubtless think they can go further and do better. God speed them." That September, a 1600-man regiment of black soldiers from Camp Nelson arrived at Louisville headed to new Western posts. Again the Army turned to Captain Pink, who loaded them aboard the steamers FINANCIER and PINK VARBLE and took them over the Falls, delivering them downriver to Paducah.

Captain Pink's escapades thus bookended Louisville's War on the river. He made the last trips to Nashville and New Orleans before war blocked river commerce, made the first trips south when rivers were again opened, and moved the last Union troops east or west at War's end. Between these first and last crises, Pink became a key link of army logistics, piloting military transports, gunboats, and monitors steadily over the Falls, as many as thirteen in a single day.

When Louisville faced Confederate invasion, the Union Army made Pink a homeland security manager, relying on him to evacuate the city by boat or over pontoon bridges he constructed at the Falls. It could be argued that in this emergency he built the first bridges at the Falls, although he removed them after they served their purpose. By War's end he was assisting former slaves along paths toward freedom. Pink shifted from neutrality at the war's beginning to full support of the Union cause, but, as we see in the following chapter, he remained a

loyal Democrat, opposed to postwar Republican presidents U. S. Grant and Rutherford Hayes.

CHAPTER 6: PINK'S POSTWAR PASTIMES

Captain Pink and Mary Frances Varble filled their home with a growing family during the War. Their oldest children, Nelson and Mamie, were joined by brothers Pinkney and Melvin in 1863 and 1866, and these youngsters scrambled through the Varble home on Washington Street. Because Mary Frances devoted herself to their children, the Captain employed Irish servant Emily O'Nan to help with housework. As his children romped in house and yard, the Captain often sought refuge by climbing into the cupola adorning the house, tending his carrier pigeons or using his telescope to survey boats plying the beautiful river.

After breakfast Captain Pink donned his uniform and left home, striding swiftly to the wharf and his office with his telescope under one arm and his golden cane under the other. Louisville's ship carpenters presented him with this cane in 1865, engraving their tribute to his exploits on its golden knob. The Captain treasured this gift and carried it to use as a highly visible pointer aboard boats to direct crews to their duties.

As business prospered, Captain Pink moved to a better office in 1867 in a building at Fourth and Water Street. Described as palatial in comparison to the shack he had used earlier, his new office had a balcony where he and other pilots scanned the river

with a telescope. His office became a nerve center of Louisville's river commerce, where boat officers dropped in for greetings or to request Falls piloting services, and news reporters gathered on the hunt for stories in their daily columns.

Louisville in 1867 had two major newspapers, the *Courier* and the *Journal*, each with river reporters writing columns listing daily packet arrival and departure times; these alerted passengers and their friends when they should be at the wharf. To boost readership, the reporters also recounted news of Falls passages and boating ventures of interest to rivermen. River columnist for the *Journal* was young William Lightfoot Visscher, Owingsville native and Danville Academy graduate who had served the Union in the 25th Kentucky Infantry. George Prentice at the *Journal* hired Lightfoot in 1865, and he inked the paper's river column while also earning a University of Louisville degree. Lightfoot in his daily columns displayed abundantly the humor serving him well in his later career as newspaper editor and as historian of the Western frontier.

William Shakespeare Hays, river reporter for the *Courier*, was son of a Louisville businessman and became a steamboat officer during the War. He also enjoyed a sterling reputation as songwriter. In 1858 he wrote the lyrics for a melody he'd heard sung by river roustabouts, and his "Dixie's Land" became popular in the north when singer Dan Emmett made it the climax of his minstrel shows. Kentucky's state guard played the tune while marching in 1861 to join with the Confederacy, and Hays' song became the unofficial anthem of the Confederacy. When Hays took the steamboat GREY EAGLE to New Orleans

Notice to Steamboat Captains and Owners.

THE UNDERSIGNED RESPECTFULLY informs the public generally, that he is still following his old business, piloting Steamboats, Flatboats, Barges, &c., over the Falls. Any information wanted, in regard to the water on the Falls, can be had by telegraphing me. All dispatches promptly attended to, and paid by me. I will meet Steamboats at Jeffersonville at any time and hour they telegraph me they will be there.

P. S. Any Steamboat wishing to obtain orders for coal at Hawesville, can get them by calling on me for them, and pay for the coal on the return trip.

PINKNEY VARBLE,
Falls Pilot,

Office cor. Fourth and Water sts., Ben. Darrett's
Clothing Store, Louisville, Ky. no22-1m?

Important to Steamboat Captains and Owners.

D. M. DRYDEN'S BULLETIN.

I AM STILL ENGAGED IN MY PROFESSION of Piloting Steamers and other water craft over the Falls, and can always be found at the Jeffersonville Wharf Boat, and if desired, will come to Louisville. I have reduced my rates as follows:

Steamboats, from.....	\$20 to \$15
“ “	15 to 10
“ “	8 to 5

Coal Boats, per pair.....	25
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Flatboats, 100 feet and upwards.....	5
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“ under 100 feet.....	3
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Barges, in tow of Steamboats.....	3
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All Telegraphic orders will meet with prompt attention.
D. M. DRYDEN, Falls Pilot.
Jeffersonville, Ind., Dec. 9th, 1857. dec11-1m

—Captain Pink Varble, Joe Hamilton, Colonel May, Mr. Toomey, Oliver Hewitt, and Captain Shultz, besides a few others, have formed a whittling club, and will engage in making splinters till more water and better times come. They want a few old pine boxes to work on.

August 25, 1868 notice in Louisville newspaper takes a tongue-in-cheek poke at the slow season during summertime low water.

during the War he was briefly jailed by Union authorities for his pro-Southern music.

When not commanding steamboats, Hays worked as the *Courier's* river reporter. He stopped at Captain Pink's office each morning to learn the latest news, and there he usually met Lightfoot Visscher, the opposition's river reporter. In Pink's office, journalists learned what Pink and his friends knew of river conditions, and they peppered their columns with Pink's stories. They exchanged banter to amuse river loafers and their verbal sparring erupted in their daily columns as they contended for readers: "It was rumored a few days ago among wharf-rats, where Hays finds his most congenial associates, that he is fired with noble rage to demolish the river editor of this paper," mocked Lightfoot. "You mutton-headed, shallow-pated conglomeration of guts and gab, what are you barking at us for? Why are you like a thief of time?" Hays retorted. Lightfoot responded, "Will Hays has had something to say about our last song. The community has despaired of ever having his last."

And so this mock sparring went on for months, with Hays gradually emerging as top-dog. Newspapers did not print comics to amuse readers in those postwar days, and in his daily river column Hays offered jokes and humorous comments on Louisville's affairs. When the newspaper arrived at their doorstep each day, therefore, readers looking for amusement turned first to Hay's river column and generally were rewarded with chuckles. With rivermen, Hays' column thereby became the most popular feature in all of Louisville's newspapers, and so it remained through the nineteenth century.

A skilled steamboat officer as well as rambunctious river reporter, Hays enjoyed the full confidence of Captain Pink, who kept him well-informed on Falls passages and river conditions

generally. Hays, in turn, admired the splendid Falls pilot. Pink never had to purchase advertising for his services, because Hays regaled the public with fervid accounts of Pink's exploits and news of Pink's extended family business. Pink had brought his brothers Billy and Dick into his piloting and towboating trade, and as his business expanded he also recruited his wife's brothers, Captains John and Fred Littrell.

Captain John Littrell piloted Pink's towboat ROBERT FULTON to New Orleans in 1866. Towing four barges laden with 1600 tons of hay and 800 tons of general freight plus the hull of the old hospital boat NASHVILLE, newspapers hailed the FULTON's as the heaviest cargo ever transported from Louisville to New Orleans. On his return from New Orleans, Captain John rewarded Pink and the news reporters with gifts of precious fruit from Dixie.

Young Fred Littrell had a less auspicious baptism than his brother into Pink's business. Captain Pink invested in a floating drydock for repairing his growing steamboat fleet, contracting with boatbuilder Dan Richards for its construction; and when Richards completed the drydock in 1867, Pink wanted it sent to Portland and dispatched Fred to take it down the Falls. Fred boldly steered the floating dock, which had no engines, over the cascades and maneuvered safely pass Backbone, Rubel's Rock, Wave Rock, and Willow Point, only to get trapped in Big Eddy's whirlpool. For nearly an hour, Fred and Captain Dan Richards struggled to escape the eddy as it swirled their dock in circles. Lacking power aboard their craft, they whirled helplessly until Fred thought of a solution. Tying a rope to a long plank, Fred threw it off the dock into the current, and when the plank caught onto the swift current it tugged the dock from the eddy's clutches.

Captain Pink sorely needed his brothers-in-law aboard because his steamboat towing business grew quickly during postwar revival of trade with the South. Although completion in 1859 of the L&N Railroad to Nashville gained Louisville direct access to Cumberland Valley commerce, Louisville's merchants had little access to the Tennessee and Arkansas River trades they enjoyed before the war.

They asked Captain Pink's help to revive southern trade, and he formed the Merchants Packet Line to operate steamboats regularly up the Tennessee River to Muscle Shoals at Florence, AL and up the Arkansas and White rivers as far as possible. Captain Pink placed his steamboats BERMUDA, NORMAN, and PINK VARBLE in these long-distance hauls and put his family and friends to work moving Louisville's merchandise south. His friend Captain Milton Akins commanded the PINK VARBLE in Tennessee River trade, while Dick Varble and the Littrells had charge of his steamboats running to Arkansas. To serve old friends at Westport and Ghent, Pink proudly put his brother Billy in charge of packet service by the little towboat GIPSEY. It departed Louisville every other day upriver to Pink and Mary Frances' home towns with wayside stops at Carrollton, KY, along with Vevay and Madison, IN.

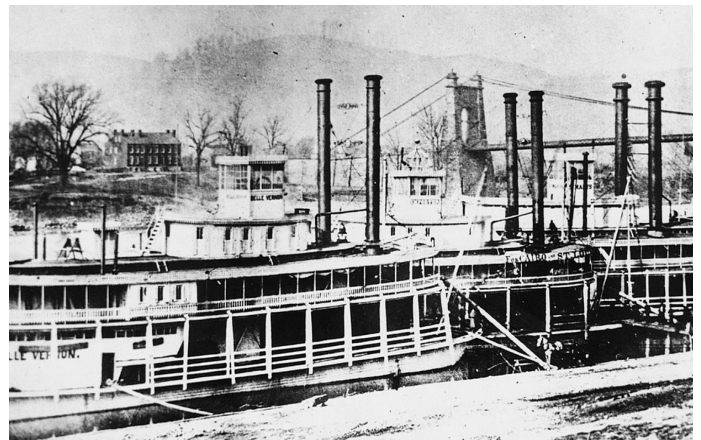
In addition to his piloting, towboating, and steamboat packet businesses, Captain Pink also engaged in salvage, usually recovering wrecked boats; but an unusual salvage of 1867 involved railroad equipment. In spring of 1863 Pink had saved from drowning a crew that foolishly attempted to row a locomotive aboard a barge across Louisville's harbor and, losing control, floated disastrously into the Falls, spilling the locomotive into the rapids. During 1867's low water, Pink searched the Falls and found the lost locomotive on the bottom. With barges, pumps, capstans, and blocks and tackle, Pink and his friends raised the huge iron engine from its watery tomb, dragged it onto barges, and towed it to Louisville's wharf, turning a tidy profit.

As chief of the Varble clan and its enterprises, Captain Pink became Louisville's wealthiest and most respected riverman. The Louisville Board of Trade called on him to reopen the Tennessee and Arkansas trades, and it joined an 1867 campaign for federal improvement of navigation at the Falls. It selected Captain Pink as its representative to river conventions at Cincinnati and St. Louis supporting congressional action. These efforts proved an early success when Congress ordered a new survey of Falls navigation by General Godfrey Weitzel of the Army Engineers. Weitzel then met with Captain Pink to discuss how best to improve Falls passage, and Pink urged the Engineers to blast a wider,

deeper channel through Indian Chute. The General, however, thought the enlarged locks, partly built by Theodore Scowden and the canal company during the War, should be quickly finished and opened before beginning work at Indian Chute. During their discussions, Pink also complained to Weitzel that the Falls bridge under construction in 1867 from Louisville to Jeffersonville might endanger passing boats.

James Guthrie, president of L&N Railroad and Louisville and Portland Canal, had sought building a bridge across the head of the Falls and as U. S. Senator during postwar years he obtained congressional approval for its construction. It was sorely needed, because in 1867 no bridge crossed the Ohio below Cincinnati and all north-south traffic downstream had to be ferried. Yet, rivermen objected that the new bridge piers would obstruct their passage over the Falls and Captain Pink found excellent reason for this complaint even before the bridge was completed.

At New Years 1868, the steamboat BELLE VERNON, loaded with New Orleans sugar and molasses, attempted ascending the Falls, but found currents too strong to stem and tied to the bank to await help from Captain Pink. Pink with his crew shoved off aboard his towboat T. D. HORNER to descend to the stranded steamer and push her up through the cascades. Pink had bought the powerful HORNER as war surplus—it had been an Ellet ram and took part in the battle of Memphis in 1862. Pink hired Dan, son of his late brother John Varble, to



In assisting BELLE VERNON (0541), shown above left, to ascend the Falls on New Years Day 1868, Capt. Pink hit the partly submerged piers of the new Falls bridge and lost his towboat T.D. HORNER. Murphy Library photo.

begin training as a steamboatman, starting at the bottom as cook aboard the HORNER.

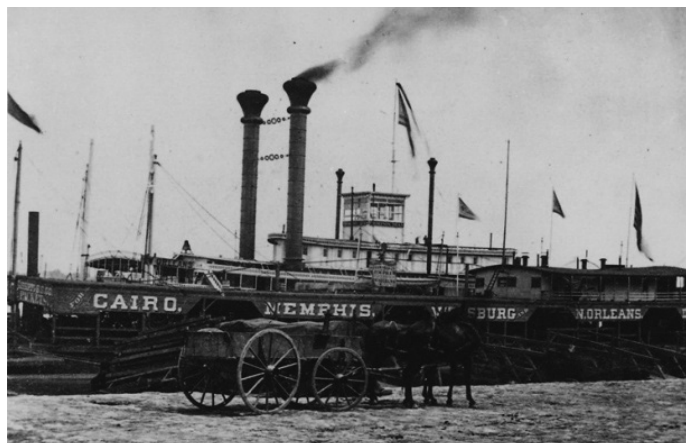
Because BELLE VERNON blocked Indian Chute, Pink steered his towboat toward Middle Chute. Soon after leaving the wharf, however, a smoky cloud covered the river and Pink lost sight of the partly submerged bridge piers, which sat low in the river because their construction had just begun. When just fifteen feet from a pier, Pink saw its stone rampart looming and put the pilotwheel hard over while signaling his engineer to reverse engines. Running with fast current, the boat had too much headway to stop and it crashed against the pier amidships. The collision knocked Captain Pink from his feet and the spokes of the spinning pilotwheel caught and smashed his hand. Everything on the boat upset, its boiler dropped into the hold, and the stove warming the pilothouse upended, setting the boat afire. Amidst flames in the splintering pilothouse, the Captain regained his feet and grasped the wheel with his free hand, bracing himself to back the wheel off his hand.

When Pink pulled his crushed hand from the pilotwheel's vise, he thrust it under his opposite armpit, squeezed to kill the pain, and dashed through the flames in search of his crew. The impact against the pier propelled two of them over the guards into the rapids, where they were lost. Pink found others aboard, including his nephew Dan, and hurried them over the side into the yawl as the wrecked towboat split in two and plunged toward the bottom. Pink, Dan, and crew manned the yawl's oars and fought their way through, shooting the chute to Portland wharf where they reached safety. Thus, the new bridge over the Falls accomplished what powerful Confederate warships on the Mississippi could not: sink the HORNER. Even before the bridge was completed, it had cost Captain Pink his \$15,000 towboat, the lives of two friends, and a badly crushed hand. He had ample reason for complaint to General Weitzel.

The General could not stop the bridge work, however, as Congress had authorized its construction. Nor would cessation have been wise. During the Civil War the United States paid dearly to ferry army supplies from Indiana to Louisville, and the Army had been forced to

build storage warehouses at Louisville's wharf and a railroad to transport materials from the wharf to the Louisville and Nashville Railroad terminal. Moreover, the Army had also paid Captain Pink for placing pontoon bridges across the river to evacuate Louisville in case of Confederate siege. The new bridge in sum seemed important to the nation, and its construction could not be stopped. The General therefore met with bridge engineers to urge modifications, and they agreed to change designs, lengthening spans over the chutes to afford wider clearances for passing boats beneath the bridge. Through General Weitzel, Captain Pink thereby effected changes in bridge design that kept Falls chutes open for commerce.

Notwithstanding new hazards at the Falls presented by bridge piers, Captain Pink's reputation as the best Falls pilot proved well earned. When he steered the new packet THOMPSON DEAN down Indian Chute on August 10, 1868, an amazed reporter for the *Louisville Journal* explained to readers its meaning: "One of the most wonderful feats, the like of which has never been accomplished, was performed yesterday by the well-known Falls pilot Capt. Pink Varble, assisted by his brother Capt. William Varble. The mammoth steamer THOMPSON DEAN arrived at this port Sunday for the purpose of taking advantage of the present rise in the river to get over the falls. On her arrival, there was barely the same depth of water in the channel that she was drawing, and as the river was rising slowly, the perilous passage was postponed



When Pink took the brand new THOMPSON DEAN (5379), 290 x 55 x 10 over the Falls for the first time on extremely low water, river editor William Lightfoot Visscher immortalized the feat in print. Photo courtesy of Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

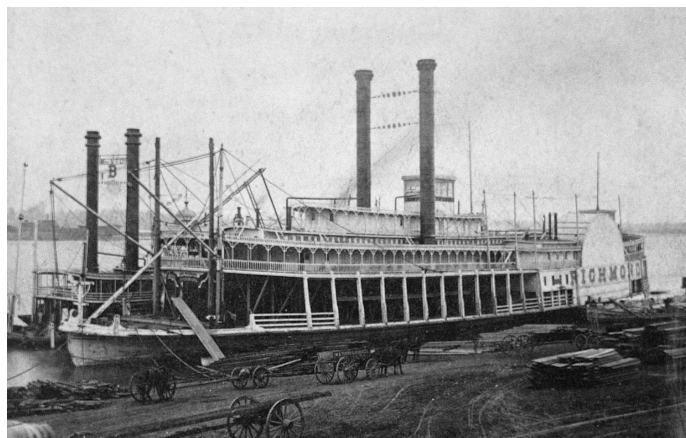
until yesterday [Monday]. The channel known as Middle Chute, the only navigable one, is very narrow: only 48 feet in width, and on either side are sharp, dangerous reefs on which a boat upon the slightest deviation from the channel would be dashed to pieces. The THOMPSON DEAN is 51 feet wide, and the seeming impossibility of navigating a boat of that width through a channel 48 feet wide was accomplished by listing or careening her until she drew [just enough] on the port side to enable the starboard knuckle to pass over the right hand reef. This was successfully accomplished, and she passed through the narrow channel, only rubbing slightly in one or two places and without injuring or straining her a particle. Mr. A. Hamilton, the builder, and the Board of Underwriters were on board, and were loud in their praise of Capt. Varble's skill." Likewise, Lightfoot also reported of the passage of the FRANK PARGOUD, another large steamer built in 1868 at Howard Shipyard: "In charge of Falls pilot Pinkney Varble it descended the Indiana Chute without a scratch. It was drawing over 5 feet at the stem and there were only 5 feet 8 inches in the chute and less than 5 feet over the rocks; if she had missed the chute it would have been damaged by the rocks."

Brother Billy Varble also earned accolades. Lightfoot proclaimed it remarkable when Billy brought the towboat GRAND LAKE up the Falls, because "the boat was drawing three and a half feet and there was only four foot four inches in the chute; it made the trip without stopping in fifty minutes. That is two inches less than any boat of that draft ever came up over the Falls. William Varble deserves great credit for his skillful handling of the boat."

In postwar years, towboats began rivaling packets as the principal cargo carriers on the Ohio, but packets maintained schedules year-round while towboats tended to be seasonal, moving as fleets on high water. In May 1867, for example, twenty-two towboats pushing 140 barges carrying nearly two million bushels of coal arrived at Louisville. Leaving barges containing a half million bushels for use in the Falls cities, the Varble clan guided the remaining barge tows over the Falls to Portland, where the barges were taken in tow of even larger towboats for voyage to markets along the Mississippi. The

largest towboat then descending to Louisville was the BENGAL TIGER pushing a 145,000-bushel tow, while the towboat BOAZ leaving Portland for New Orleans had a 275,000-bushel tow. When Captain Pink took the W. H. BROWN over the Falls in 1867, Lightfoot Visscher exclaimed it had brought down 20,635 barrels of salt and 10,000 bushels of coal from Pomeroy, OH and he pontificated: "Years ago if a flatboat loaded with a few hundred barrels of salt came floating down the river in a week or ten days it was considered a big thing, but now a powerful tug takes a score of thousand barrels of salt and a half a score of thousand bushels of coal and whisks them down the river in forty-eight hours. That is moving things in a lively manner."

Visscher was aboard the palatial packet RICHMOND when Captain Pink took her over the Falls on her maiden trip in 1867. In addition to her size and amenities, Lightfoot was impressed by the brass band playing martial tunes as Pink guided it over the cascades in style. Fifty feet wide and 340 feet long, with an immense chandelier-lit central cabin, an observation pilothouse for lady passengers, and an oil painting of the Confederacy's capital gracing its main cabin, the RICHMOND was known to roustabouts as "Rebel Home." Doubtless the boat's handling seemed familiar to Captain Pink, because her engines and boilers had been taken from the JACOB STRADER, which he had piloted under Rebel fire during the War to bring wounded soldiers back to Louisville. Will Lightfoot Visscher was so impressed with the RICHMOND that he went to work aboard her. In

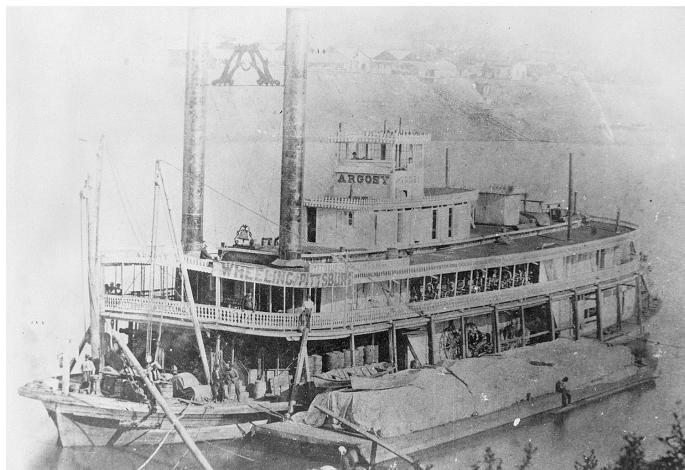


Another large packet which Pink piloted over the Falls on her 1867 maiden trip was RICHMOND (4753), later to play a prominent role in Frances Parkinson Keyes' novel Steamboat Gothic. Photo from Murphy Library, UW - La Crosse.

1868 the *Louisville Journal* and the *Louisville Courier* newspapers merged, forming the *Courier-Journal*. This meant only one river reporter was needed, and editor Henry Watterson gave the nod to Will S. Hays. Thus deprived of employment, Lightfoot became the RICHMOND's news editor, using a small press to publish the "Richmond High-Light" aboard the boat to amuse its hundreds of passengers and advertise its grandeur at wayside ports. When RICHMOND was sold in 1870, Lightfoot moved west up the Missouri River, establishing early newspapers at Kansas City and Omaha, then moving on to Denver, CO and Bellingham, WA where he also penned early Western frontier histories, notably a history of the Pony Express.

Formation of the *Courier-Journal* in 1868 left Louisville's river reporting largely to Will Hays, a position allowing him to influence engineering at the Falls and enjoy life with his friend Pink Varble and his family. Hays and friends sometimes spent evenings at the Varbles, where he entertained them with his ballads. When duties permitted, Hays sometimes went on pleasure excursions with Captain Pink, once along with Methodist ministers attending a general conference in Louisville. The circuit riders wanted to see the Falls, and the Captain and Hays granted their request, taking them over aboard the MARY HOUSTON and listening to their mumbled prayers amidst the roaring whitewater. When the German Turners of Louisville asked Pink for an excursion to Madison, IN, Hays went along aboard the NORMAN, hoping to visit Hanover College where he matriculated before the War. The Germans had their brass band on deck, and the 300 passengers danced quadrilles and round dances all the way to Madison, landing there about three in the morning. They put their brass band ashore and marched through town loudly serenading the natives, who were so surprised they chased Hays, Pink, and the Germans back to the boat for a hasty retreat to Falls City.

Perhaps their most exciting trip together involved taking the ARGOSY, a large steamer with a circus aboard, over the Falls. Smaller animals rode in cages on the deck, and larger animals crowded aboard an ark the ARGOSY towed for the purpose. Jostling back and forth in the twisting turns, up and down on six-foot waves, the animals became



Perhaps the "wildest" trip over the Falls occurred when Pink piloted ARGOSY (0331) carrying the menagerie from Dan Rice's Circus in 1873. From Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse.

agitated. As Hays later described the tumult for his readers: "The camel got his back up, the elephant grabbed his trunk, the ponies kicked up about it, the ox took two horns, the lion shook the others and growled, and the monkeys threw rocks at Pink as he went ashore, and one Mrs. Monk called him an old *steer*."

Favorites among rivermen and wharf rats, Captain Pink and Will Hays became charter members of the Louisville Steamboat Association. It usually selected Pink to represent it as a delegate to annual National Board of Steam Navigation conventions. When Pink went to the Buffalo, NY convention, he seized the opportunity to see the fabled rapids of the St. Lawrence River. The next year, he attended a convention at Metropolitan Hotel in New York City, and went to see the East River where Army Engineers were blasting away the Hellgate rocks. Pink proposed at this convention that Congress spend a like sum blasting dangerous rocks from Indian Chute at the Falls, and on his return to Louisville he admitted to Hays and his friends: "New York's a right-smart sized town."

Captain Pink suffered one his rare disasters on the Falls in winter 1869. He took the great RICHMOND down the Falls just after dark, reaching Portland safely. Captain Billy Varble was at helm of the LeCLAIRE following, but he turned back when fog descended and tied off the boat at Towhead Island to await his brother's return. When Pink returned from Portland, having gotten the larger RICHMOND through safely,

he concluded the LeCLAIRE also could pass. He steered it to Jeffersonville, took on passengers, and steamed down Indian Chute. Sudden fog settled on the river so thick the Indiana shore and bridge piers could not be seen, and Captain Pink navigated by a star brightly gleaming through the fog overhead. Hearing the river roaring against a bridge pier ahead, Pink spun the wheel, but fast current drove the stern against the pier's rocky abutment. Shock jerked the wheel from Pink's hands, and the boat commenced spinning down the Falls as water rushed into its hull. Terrified passengers dashed on the deck shouting and vomiting as the stricken vessel turned over on its side. Unable to stand, passengers clung to fixtures and some yelled they would jump into the river to avoid going down with the boat.

Captain Pink sent Billy to launch the lifeboat and row for help, then crawled among the passengers, telling them to hold on for their lives. At last the drifting boat settled to the bottom at the edge of Big Eddy in water to its boiler deck. Pink cajoled passengers to keep their places, telling them help was coming, and soon Billy arrived with the steamboat TARASCON to take them aboard and deliver them to Portland. According to the newspaper report, "The coolness and presence of mind of Pink Varble saved the lives of many. It is said he was the only unexcited person on board, and by his counsel prevented many passengers from leaping into the rapid water."

That same month, Captain Dave Dryden came near to losing another boat against the Falls Bridge. When rousters loaded the DEXTER at Louisville, they stacked too much freight on the steamer's bow, and when Dryden turned into the fast current down Indian Chute he discovered she was nearly uncontrollable. Her front end dragged low, while her paddlewheel rode high with little bite into the water. The boat rushed down the chute like a straw in the wind with bridge piers looming ahead. Passengers waited with terrible anxiety, their fate entirely out of their hands. Glancing off rocks at the side, the boat missed the bridge pier by mere feet, and a newspaper reported: "Dryden missed the piers of the railroad bridge only by the grace of God, not from his skill in handling the boat." Captain Dryden protested he was losing business to the Varble clan. "Captains complain there is no

Falls pilot at New Albany or Portland and when they want to ascend the Falls they must wait while they send for a pilot," Dave declared. "If they are not partial to one man and will take a good pilot on board when he shows himself, they would have no cause to complain. If they would telegraph to me they would not have to wait hours for a pilot. There is no need to wait as there are as good pilots and better boatmen than Varble on the Falls."

When William "Injun Bill" Smith resigned as Kentucky Falls pilot in 1868, Captain Pink arranged for the Louisville City Council to replace Smith with his brother, Richard C. Varble. By then, Dick Varble had trained as pilot for several years with Pink and Billy, becoming familiar with every rock and cranny on the Falls. In the Varble brothers' corporate arrangement, Dick also headed the Varble Company which owned and operated several towboats and packets.

Brother Billy, however, brought troubles to the Varble clan, starting in 1868 when he wrecked the J. P. WEBB on the Falls. Heavily loaded with freight for Evansville, it hit Wave Rock and went down in deep water at Big Eddy. Captain Billy injured his knee jumping from the pilothouse as the boat went down, but escaped with his life as did the crew. He blamed the accident on the boat's engineer, saying he did not reverse the engines in response to the bell signals. Owners of the steamer, nevertheless, sued Billy for damages and won an \$8,000 judgment against him. The Steamboat Inspection Board also suspended Billy's piloting license, although restoring it a month later.

The following spring, Captain Billy took the sidewheel SILVER MOON, crowded with passengers for the run from Cincinnati to Memphis, down the Falls and stranded it against Goose Island. The towboat NEVILLE took off its passengers and freight, but lightering the steamer did not float it off the rocks. Captain Pink helped Billy and crew run a cable from the steamer's capstan to an anchorage on a distant rock to pull it free. This tactic failed when the steamer CORA, descending the Falls bound for Missouri River, hit the cable and parted it. Sadly, the flying cable raked CORA's deck, slicing through two passengers as it passed. When high winds blew the following day, Captain Pink at last wrested the

SILVER MOON from the rocks and towed it to repair dock.

Captain Billy's troubles continued when he became embroiled in a quarrel with Captain George Dickenson, pilot on Varble's packet NORMAN. When the two confronted each other and began a brawl, Captain Pink stopped the fight by firing a pistol in the air. Captain Dickenson then embarrassed the Varbles by charging them with assault in Louisville's courts.


Billy's troubles climaxed in 1872 when the sternwheel CHARMER, running Cincinnati to Evansville with a full load of freight and passengers, went down in Indian Chute with Billy at its helm. Billy claimed the boat became unmanageable and took a sheer, ramming Backbone Ridge and sinking quickly. By sounding distress signals, Billy brought the towboat CHAMPION alongside to take off the passengers. Captain Pink built a bulkhead around holes in CHARMER's hull, then used pumps aboard his harbor boat FALLS PILOT to remove water and raise it for repairs. Billy, however, was in over his head.

The Steamboat Inspection Board investigated and heard testimony from the CHARMER's officers, who swore Captain Billy had been drinking before boarding their boat. One asserted he saw Billy was drunk when he entered the pilothouse. The Board reprimanded the CHARMER's captain for allowing Billy to act as Falls pilot in his condition, and suspended Billy's license for drunkenness. A few months later, Billy circulated a petition along the riverfront asking reinstatement, declaring if he became drunk again he would immediately surrender his license. When forty river captains, including Pink but significantly not brother Dick, inked their signatures on the petition, Steamboat Inspectors granted Billy's request, restoring his license conditionally.

This reformation proved enduring in Billy's case. By year's end he was steering a flatboat loaded with "Christmas fixings" over the Falls for delivery up Salt River to Pitts Point for Bullitt County's celebrations. Never again was Billy found drunk on the job, nor did newspapers report him starting more barroom brawls.

After losing the HORNER against the Falls Bridge, Captain Pink built the towboat FALLS PILOT, and he was at Portland with it awaiting another trip over the Falls when the GLASGOW, bound for New Orleans, hit a sandbar obstructing Portland's wharf after leaving the canal. It bow stuck in the sand and current swung its stern about into a stone wall that tore off its wheel and stove in its hull. Captain Pink saw men, women, and children dashing to and fro along its deck shouting "Save Us!" Pink immediately set FALLS PILOT into action, steaming alongside GLASGOW and taking off its passengers to Portland. He returned to the wreck, put a tarp over the hole in her hull, and used his towboat pumps to keep it afloat while pushing it across river to New Albany for repairs.

Captain Pink's piloting business changed by the early 1870s. In 1871 he towed thirteen coalboats over the Falls with his FALLS PILOT. These were the first coalboats descending the river from Pittsburgh in a long time, and they were nearly the last of their kind, replaced by coal barge fleets pushed by towboats. That year also, Louisville's City Council revised Falls pilots policies and fees. It decided to elect five Falls pilots for five-year terms, decreeing their fees would consist of \$3 per flatboat under ninety feet long, \$5 for longer flatboats and keelboats, \$8 for steamboats under 60 tons burthen, \$12 for steamers up to 120 tons, \$15 for boats under 200 tons, and \$20 for boats over 200 tons. Captain Pink's charges normally amounted to a nickel per cargo ton in each boat taken over. This compared favorably with the quarter per ton charged for passing through Portland Canal and kept Pink extremely busy when the river swelled to depths suitable for crossing the Falls.

The Captain also trained the next generation of Varbles. In addition to brothers and brothers-in-law, Pink began instructing their children in the intricacies of steamboat handling. His nephew Dan Varble, who started as towboat cook, became a pilot at age 19, steering the MAGNOLIA towing lumber rafts to Louisville; and, at a tender age, Pink's oldest son Nelson became Captain Nellie, commanding the towboat RESOLUTE. "The Varbles are born pilots," Will Hays observed, philosophizing, "and we guess Pink's ghost will take boats over the Falls for years after he's cremated." 

Last Packet to St. Paul: September 7-12, 1951

by Vernon F. Barr

When Marquette and Joliet entered the Mississippi Valley in 1673 they recorded the first encounter of white explorers with the scenic beauties of the Upper Mississippi River. Later explorers Stephen Long, Zebulon Pike, Harry Schoolcraft and others were to continue their explorations beyond the Falls of St. Anthony to establish Lake Itasca as the true source of the mighty stream. Their reports of the miles of clear water, wooded bluffs and abundant fish and wildlife spread the tales of this scenic beauty to the eastern states and on to Europe.

In the 1820s the success of the pioneering steamboat VIRGINIA in struggling through the lower rapids at Keokuk and the upper rapids at Rock Island and on to St. Paul opened the way for crude but reliable upstream travel. In 1854 when the westward-expanding Rock Island Railroad first reached the Mississippi, one of the fashionable tours of the world developed around this chance to ride the new prairie railroad and then cruise northward up the river on steamboats to the end of transportation in the beautiful land made famous by Longfellow in "The Song of Hiawatha."

I was on the waterfront in Oquawka, IL in the summer of 1951 when I luckily heard a deep-throated whistle blowing in the reach above the upper light. When the steamboat passed I could identify it as the GORDON C. GREENE, already a legend on the inland rivers and then running in the St. Louis-St. Paul summer tourist trade. I had last seen it in 1932 at Peoria, IL when it was the CAPE GIRARDEAU III and under charter to the renowned mayor "Big Bill" Thompson of Chicago. He had a colorful Republican political campaign organized for the fall elections and was touring cities along the Illinois River. The CAPE GIRARDEAU III had been built at Howard Shipyards at Jeffersonville, IN in 1924 as the last and finest steamboat for the Eagle Packet Company.

After some inquiries through river friends Dutch Willits of New Boston, IL and John Kuster at Burlington, IA, I located a source of tickets from Roy Barkhau in St. Louis. We secured reservations to board the GORDON at Davenport on September 7, 1951 and cruise to St. Paul and return in six days. It was the greatest short vacation of my life and led me to a long love affair with rivers, steamboats and the most leisurely life available in the Midwest – riding steamboats.

Equipped with a new book of river charts, we awaited the arrival of the GORDON on the levee in Antoine LeClaire Park in Davenport – waited and waited some more. Steamboats are usually late. An essential part of river travel is shifting into neutral and starting an attitude-adjustment period as soon as you walk up the landing stage. We were welcomed aboard by big, genial Bob McCann, the purser, a walking encyclopedia of inland river lore, and by the hostess, Mabel Bartenhagen, the "Steamboat Lady from Muscatine" showing us real Greene Line hospitality. The lively three-piece combo was entertaining us with riverboat music and then exchanged a short concert with another classic Mississippi riverboat, the dance excursion steamer AVALON when we met in Pool 15. The exchange of whistles, bells, colored lights and music made a dramatic sight on the darkened river with the lights of the Quad Cities along the shore. The AVALON had been built as the IDLEWILD and tramped all the inland rivers in a storybook career and is still running on the Ohio today as the BELLE OF LOUISVILLE.

On the first evening of our cruise our greatest pleasure was an introduction to pilothouse life and our two veteran pilots, Capt. Roy Wethern and Capt. Delmar Ruedigger. Capt. Roy had become the dean of all the Upper River pilots, a native of Diamond Bluff, WI and a survivor in his childhood of the sinking of his father's steamboat, the SEA



Above L to R: Capt. Delmar Ruedigger, Vernon Barr, Nancy Barr. Below: Deckhands on GORDON's main deck bow. All photos by Vernon Barr, courtesy of Bob Anton.



WING, on Lake Pepin in one of the Lake's worst disasters. Capt. Ruedigger, a real "German from Hermann" (MO) riverman, was, like Wethern, a veteran of the efforts by Federal Barge Line to restore commercial freight traffic to the Upper

Mississippi after the twenty-six locks and dams were completed in the 1930s.

On Saturday morning we were tied off in the harbor at Dubuque, IA having passed the scenic palisades near Savanna, IL in the night. Bob McCann pointed out the buildings and side-launching ways of Dubuque Boat and Boiler Yards along the north side of the harbor. It was hard to believe that the huge PELICAN and ALBATROSS, sidewheel railroad transfer ferries, had been launched there around the turn of the century. The ALBATROSS became the ADMIRAL, popular dance excursion boat at St. Louis and is still afloat today. The final great product of these old boatworks was to be the JULIA BELLE SWAIN for Capt. Dennis Trone, launched in 1970 and the Queen of the Illinois River ever since.

That afternoon we steamed past the towering bluffs at Wyalusing with a shore stop at McGregor, IA to pick up more passengers, two members of the Bickel family. Capt. Doc Carr had the mate, Peter Antrainer, using the sounding poles to confirm Capt. Wethern's opinion that the old landing was silted in and too shallow for a landing. The new passengers were given instructions by bullhorn to walk slowly up the railroad tracks as we sounded for deeper water near the shoreline. Capt. Wethern observed a roadside cottage with a good looking outhouse near the deeper water he had found and concluded that there would be a good path between such buildings and that the long landing stage of the GORDON GREENE could mash down the fringe of willows and complete a safe pathway for the passengers to reach the boat. The plan worked, helped by the cheers of the cruise party, the snapping of cameras and hearty calls for a round of mint juleps.

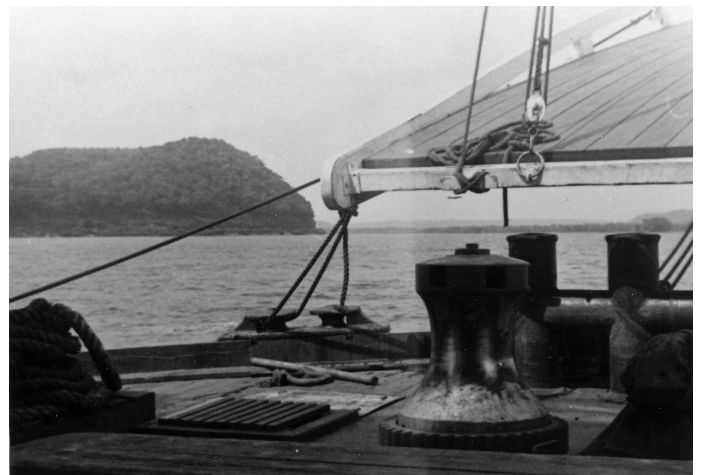
Our next interesting sight was the floating pontoon bridge at Marquette that swung open for the boats and adjusted vertically for the trains and the stages of the river. That evening we had the pleasure of being in the pilothouse with Capt. Wethern as we traversed winding Coon Slough near Mile 685. Sunday morning we passed the mouth of Chippewa River at historic old Reads Landing and entered Lake Pepin, the broad lake that stretches for twenty miles between the Wisconsin and Minnesota bluffs. Sunday also provided a pleasant shore stop at Red



Top: Main cabin of GORDON set up for dinner. Middle: Shore stop above McGregor to board two members of Bickel family. Bottom: Floating pontoon railroad bridge at Marquette. There was a similar one at Reads Landing in previous times.

Wing, MN with a chance to climb Barn Bluff and enjoy a panoramic view of the beautiful valley. We passed the mouth of St. Croix River that evening, then Pig's Eye Slough of log raft fame and tied off at Lambert's Landing, Mile 838, at about 9:00 p.m.

Capt. Wethern carefully eased the GORDON in past a luxurious river yacht named CARTASCA and dryly commented that you didn't scratch that



Top: GORDON at Lambert Landing in St. Paul with CARTASCA landed below. Middle: Mrs. Nancy Barr with Wisconsin bluffs near LaCrosse. Bottom: Mt. Trempealeau rises from the river off GORDON's port bow.

boat. It belonged to the Cargill family, well known in the grain trade. Our landing whistles seemed to be answered by steam railroad locomotives whistling at the nearby depot of the Great Northern Railroad, ready to wheel the Empire Builder on to the coast.

A short tour of the Twin Cities on Monday included a visit to the Falls of Minnehaha and the narrow river canyon between the cities and some



Entering Lock 6 at Trempealeau, WI upbound.

shopping time at Gokey's. After a delay to adjust the steam-powered steering gear to Capt. Wethern's satisfaction, we left at about 9:00 p.m. for the return trip downstream. The weather was cloudy with a soft intermittent fog that made the river a different world.

As barge traffic was light, we had no lockage delays and were approaching Lock 4 at Alma, WI at daybreak Tuesday morning. We were rudely awakened in our bunks by repeated short blasts on the GORDON's steam whistle. It was an emergency and we were barely alerted before the boat shuddered as the bow hit the lower lock gate with a solid bump. Apparently a loose bolt on the reversing lever prevented the engineer from following Capt. Ruedigger's signal. A quick inspection of the forward hull compartment indicated only minor damage and no danger of any leakage. The Coast Guard made arrangements for an inspection that night at a shore stop and we continued rolling on down the river. About mid-morning we passed picturesque Mt. Trempealeau, a French name translating an Indian

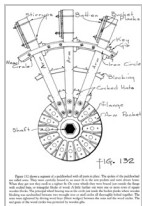
name meaning "the mountain that stands with its feet in the water."

The Coast Guard inspectors [who boarded during the stopover at Dubuque that night] agreed that the hull was sound and that the cruise could continue with repairs at a St. Louis shipyard. Next morning found us near Savanna leaving the palisades country and the large Clinton pool where we encountered strong south winds. As we entered the westward-flowing section of the river near the Quad Cities, the strong wind caused a rough landing against the upper wall at Lock 14 near LeClaire. Efforts were made by the deckhands and the lock men to use a pin on the bull nose, a long line and the steam capstan to work the boat off the wall as we came ahead out of the lock. The maneuver was too difficult to coordinate and Capt. Wethern chose to back to the upper lock gate, have the engineer fire up all three boilers and try to drive the boat out "full throttle" and "full stroke." It worked, but not without an anxious moment or two before the boat cleared the rocky headland west of the lock wall. The trip through Lock 15 was somewhat easier, but Capt. Roy dryly commented that the stop at Le Claire Park was on a rocky channel where no anchor would hold and the landing would be rough. And it was, but again with no damage.

We disembarked there and drove back to our home in Monmouth, IL to conclude the most pleasant, interesting and educational six-day vacation of my life. We had luckily caught the last of the old authentic steam-powered Mississippi River packet boats that ran in the St. Louis-St. Paul tourist trade. Her end was nearer than we knew.

When the GORDON C. GREENE was tied off a few days later at a St. Louis shipyard, the engineroom crew failed to clean the mud out of boilers and mud drum. On the next scheduled trip to Hannibal, the neglect caught up and she bagged a boiler. That ended her years in passenger service. The end of an era of Mississippi River steamboating had arrived, and I was lucky enough to have shared in the last days. 🍀

Gokey's Department Store was a downtown St. Paul fixture, selling casual and dress clothing, outfitting for sportsmen, shoes, luggage, china, etc. Orvis bought out Gokey's in 1990 and closed the St. Paul store in 1992. - Editor



Small Stacks

Folk Art and Steamboat Models

by John Fryant

Although the term “folk art” – frequently applied to paintings (Grandma Moses, for example), fancy quilts, needlework, or other such items – is not usually applied to models, a lot of them exist. They are or were built by home craftsmen who had been exposed to the full-size counterparts but had little or no knowledge of building scale models.

Mass produced models, usually from foreign sources, can be found in craft stores such as Michaels, Hobby Lobby and others. There are ships, aircraft, autos, trains and other transportation-related items. While all of these are easily recognized, they are not scale models of any particular vehicles. They may be suitable for décor in homes or places of business depending on the buyer’s taste.

There are steamboat models that fall into this category and some are displayed in museums. Small museums often accept donations of models built by individuals and then display them, often without properly researching them for accuracy.

Where should the line be drawn between “folk art” and true scale model? That’s a hard question to answer.

In this writer’s opinion, a “folk art” model is one that is not built to scale using measured dimensions. While it may include all of the proper components and details, they are not accurately sized. Stanchions or wooden railings, for example, might be the wrong thicknesses; windows, doors and cabin bulkheads could be under or over sized.

However, in defense of yesteryear’s model builders, they did not have access to the many excellent materials and specialized tools available today. These craftsmen often did the best they could with what they had to work with. Thus, their models are not up to modern-day standards of accuracy and construction details.

Two vintage models of this type that have been restored by your author are the famous Hudson River steamboat MARY POWELL (a story in itself) and the Western Rivers sternwheeler QUEEN CITY, well-known Ohio River packet. While the latter model is a true antique, it resembles the full-size packet about as much as this columnist resembles Marilyn Monroe.

The model, just recently cleaned and restored, is owned by Cincinnati Museum Center. Its age and builder are unknown. (How I wish it could have talked to me!) It is definitely not a scale model, yet the detailing reveals that the builder obviously had some knowledge of the full-size boat. The stack lowering mechanism with its “egg beater” cranks is well represented as well as the elaborate rope set-up for ringing the big roof bell from both the main deck and the pilothouse. All essential parts of a steamboat are present on the model although none are accurately depicted.

This QUEEN CITY model was filthy, covered with layers of dust and with faded paint and several broken or missing parts. It had once been equipped with an electric motor and gear mechanism to turn the paddlewheel. Six months were needed to do all the work required. When viewing the completed model, a quote by George Fitch, appearing in Fred Way Jr.’s *The Log of the Betsy Ann* came to mind: “Steamboats are built of wood, tin, shingles, canvas and twine and look like a bride of Babylon.” This model certainly fits that description.

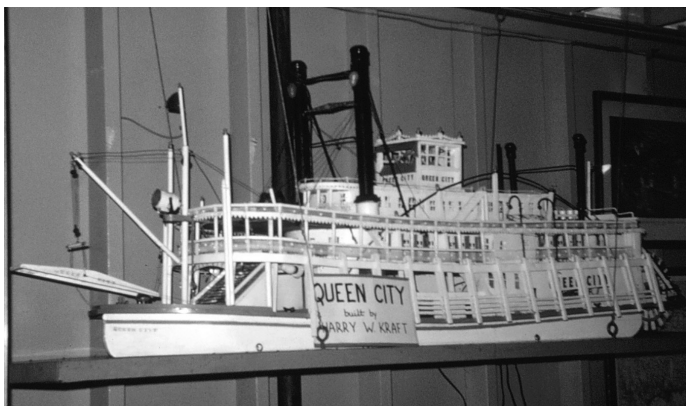
As we get further and further from the steamboat era, your writer strongly feels that folk art steamboat models displayed in museums or other public places should be appropriately labeled and exhibited along with photos of the actual vessel they purportedly represent. Otherwise, sometime far in the future, “when your grandchildren’s children have children” (in the words of John Hartford), viewers with very little knowledge of what the full-size vessels looked like may think that such models are true representations.

A word of advice to present day modelers is to research your subject matter as thoroughly as possible, then use the best materials available to build

your model. It may end up as a family heirloom or as a museum piece. Fully aware that expressing an opinion about such a topic is a risky business, this veteran of model building feels that the world does not need any more folk art steamboat models.



QUEEN CITY folk art model restored by author for Cincinnati Museum Center. Photo courtesy of John Fryant.



Another QUEEN CITY folk art model by Harry Kraft formerly on display at Julius C. Wilkie Museum in Winona.



Capt. Fred Way's accurate scale model of QUEEN CITY at Ohio River Museum. Photo courtesy of John Fryant.



QUEEN CITY as she really appeared. From Murphy Library

Gillett & Eaton Postscript

In our June issue, we tentatively identified fourteen steamboats which carried Gillett & Eaton engines. After further rummaging, we are able to add three more to that list as shown below. In the meantime, your editor welcomes any new additions to this compilation from our esteemed readers and steamboat sleuths. 🕒



CHICOT (To413) built 1925 by Howards for USE Vicksburg District. G&E engines 10's - 5 foot stroke. Sold 1941 to Commercial Barge Lines of Evansville. Murphy Library photo



DENISON, steam snagboat built 1915 by Dubuque Boat & Boiler Co. for USE at Mobile, AL on Warrior-Tombigbee Rivers. G&E engines 12's - 5 ft, 250 hp. Murphy Library photo.



Wisconsin Dells excursion steamer APOLLO was built at the Dells in 1898 with G&E engines 8 inches by 3'-8" stroke. A new APOLLO II was built in 1971. Murphy Library photo.

CITY OF BATON ROUGE Centennial Celebration

Saturday, May 28th found several hundred river fans gathered at Le Claire, IA to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the steam ferry CITY OF BATON ROUGE, and to celebrate her rechristening/rededication as she begins her second century of service. Our thanks to Capt. Jim Blum and Jonathan Tschiggfrie for providing this photo collage of the festivities. 🍷



Above: Travis Vasconcelos and Judy Patsch were on hand to greet visitors. Below left: All former officers and crew of JULIA BELLE SWAIN and TWILIGHT gathered for a group photo on the bow. Below right: Judy did the honors at the rechristening ceremony while . . . Above right: Fr. Thomas Keller offered the prayer as Carrie Stier and your editor look on. Middle right: Fr. Keller poses with his scale model of CBR.



Opposite page top: Special guest Libby Trone shared calliope keyboard with Travis Vasconcelos and Jonathan Tschiggfrie. Bottom (L-R): Judy Patsch, Tschiggfrie family, Capt. Kevin and Carrie Stier, and Annie and Capt. Jim Blum enjoy the day.

Reflections from Our Readers continued from page 3

appearance of these pictures in the REFLECTOR for this new generation that has never heard of them. I know my grandad was always on the lookout for material to fill up pages, so here is one choice.

Volume 5 Number 1 of the REFLECTOR had a list of wharfboats and a reference to the 'Jones Book,' also available on the web, which I found useful in my revived transfer boat research. I was looking into these some years back, but family, work and all those other distractions left little time for it during the last twenty years or so. I retired after 29 years with Johnson Controls at the end of last year. Now there is some time I can use for steamboats and the attached list is my current list of transfer boats, some of which were not in the *Packet Directory*. There are still some questions to resolve on these and I haven't located pictures of every one. Others have been dropped over time as pictures revealed them to be center wheel ferries rather than transfer boats."

🕯 Tom kindly shared the latest compilation of his Railroad Transfer Boat listings, and these efforts seem to offer the potential for a valuable and useful supplement to the directory of steam packets and towboats authored by his grandfather. Perhaps discussion of a possible addendum to these directories in some form might be in order down the line, in company with the listing of Western Rivers steamboats of 1811-1847 by John White as recently published in the REFLECTOR. As to the reprint of the complete Cincinnati daguerreotype of 1848 in these pages, a conversation with our colleagues at Cincinnati Public Library would be a good starting point.



A Thank You Note from the Stiers

Capt. Kevin and Carrie Stier would like to thank everyone who attended the Birthday Celebration for CITY OF BATON ROUGE at the end of May. We especially enjoyed opening the upstairs cabin for tours. We really loved seeing so many river folk who celebrated this special event and appreciated all of the support and good wishes we received.

We want to thank David Tschiggfrie for the hours spent researching CITY OF BATON ROUGE history and for writing her story for us. We also had the help of Keith Norrington of Howard Steamboat Museum, West Baton Rouge Museum, Harold "Coley" Hill, Jr., and the online archives of the Advocate newspaper.

We would also like to acknowledge our guest of honor and officiate Judy Patsch; Fr. Thomas Keller for designing, building and donating the amazing CBR model; Travis Vasconcelos, Barbara Hameister, Carol Roth, Jo Ann Schoen, Liz Patterson and Mike Washenko for being on hand to enhance the day with their vast experience and riverboat knowledge.

Finally, we were humbled to have so many family, friends and loyal customers celebrate with us. Most riverboats in operation today are small, family-owned companies and we rely on you to help us keep these historical vessels in operation.

(Commemorative t-shirts, pins, booklets and notecards are still available at 800-331-1467 or info@riverboattwilight.com)

Back Cover

GORDON C. GREENE paddles upriver under the suspension bridge connecting Marquette, IA and Prairie du Chien, WI on her way to St. Paul sometime in the early 50s. With Greene Line's new DELTA QUEEN cruising the Ohio and Lower Mississippi, the GORDON began regular service on the Upper Mississippi. Her final St. Paul cruise is featured on page 24. Margery Goergen photo from editor's collection.



W. GARDIN & CO GREEN ISLE