

# S & D REFLECTOR

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of Pioneer Rivermen



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Marietta, Ohio

December 2016



**Capt. Pink Varble & Falls of the Ohio (Part 4)**  
**S&D's 77th Annual Meeting**  
**Father's Steamboat Fleet**

## Front Cover

Vice President Vic Canfield directs an eager boatload of S&D members ashore on Blennerhassett Island around noon on Saturday, September 17. Following a 20-minute ride downstream from Parkersburg on the m/v ISLAND BELLE, a picnic lunch was served at a nearby pavilion in the state park, and then visitors were treated to a VIP tour of the grounds and houses on the big island. More photos and descriptions of the 77th annual meeting appear beginning on page 22. *Photo by Brock Rogers.*



## Reflections from Our Readers

Don Hattery writes: "S&D did it again. I sat down to open my mail and got up an hour later after reading the REFLECTOR cover to cover! Great series on Pink Varble. Thanks."

🦉 Your editor is humbled and gratified at such reports from our loyal readers. However, we also confess that we are always somewhat fearful that such enthusiastic responses may get us in trouble with spouses who impatiently await the lawn to be mowed, walk to be shoveled, or errands to be run while the latest freight is being unloaded from the REFLECTOR!

Capt. Doc Hawley writes: "Too bad the enclosed information was not known at the time that Tom Dunn and Annie Blum's books were published. This incident had to have been the first J.S. as the date was November 1907. I wanted to come to the annual S&D meeting and commend Alan Bernstein, but was filming a documentary about Tennessee Williams riding the NATCHEZ in 1979. As a result of that experience, he was impressed enough to read and to finish Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*."

🦉 The information to which Doc refers was recorded in a magazine article, along with a copy of the handbill which advertised the stunt. The text of that story and its illustration follow.

## DEATH-DEFYING TRICK

During his slate of appearances at New Orleans' Orpheum Theatre in November 1907, the renowned illusionist and escape artist Harry Houdini (1874-1926) received a challenge from the *New Orleans Item*. Houdini often received such challenges to perform public stunts while on tour, and in this one he was first to allow himself to be manacled by a member of the New Orleans Police Department and then to dive into the Mississippi River at the foot of Canal Street from the steamer J.S. The date announced was Sunday, November 17, at noon. A recently acquired handbill bearing a bust portrait image of Houdini advertises the challenge, assuring attendees that "the Leap can be plainly seen from the Levee."

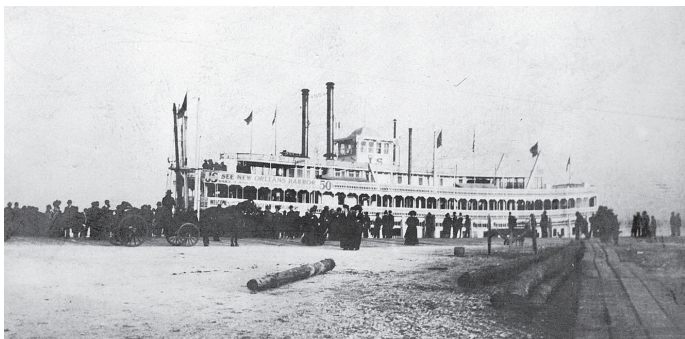
On the day of the event, Houdini left the Orpheum at 11:15 a.m. with a small entourage and made his way onto the steamer's gangplank. Rain had begun to fall but did not deter the gathering crowd of 7,000 to 10,000 onlookers near the Canal Street ferry landing. Soundings were taken from the boat's bow, and Houdini prepared for the dive. Instead of a NOPD officer, Judge John Fogarty of the First Recorder's Court shackled him with a set of irons loaned from Orleans Parish Prison; long, thick chains were wrapped around his wrists, arms, torso and neck and secured with padlocks. His legs were left free, although Houdini reportedly asked that they be bound as well. As reported in the *Daily Picayune*, at exactly noon, Houdini acknowledged the crowd, and with a "Good-by, boys!" propelled himself headfirst into the Mississippi.

Viewers strained to get any indication of his whereabouts in the river, and as seconds ticked by, the crowd became restless – but after half a minute, his arm broke through the water, clutching a mass of chains and opened locks. Then his head appeared and in triumph, he threw the hardware into a waiting rowboat and swam for a floating platform, where he was helped into a warm robe. While drying off in a private dressing room on the steamer, Houdini remarked to the press, "That's an awful river ... the worst I have ever been in ... I felt the strong current ... and while they tell me I was down only thirty seconds, it seemed to me that I was in that cold and darkness for an hour."

**NEW ORLEANS ITEM**  
**CHALLENGES**  
**HOUDINI**  
 "Sporting Chat"  
**of THE NEW ORLEANS ITEM**  
**Dares Houdini**

of the Orpheum Theatre to allow himself to be manacled by a member of the Police Department, selected by the Item, and then  
**to DIVE INTO the MISSISSIPPI RIVER**  
 releasing himself under the water, which is a test Houdini claims to be able to do under all conditions.  
 Having accepted this defie, the test will take place at the  
**FOOT OF CANAL STREET,**  
 Houdini allowing himself to be heavily manacled, and will leap into the Mississippi River from the gang plank of the  
**Steamer "J. S."**  
 moored at the foot of Canal Street, Sunday, at 12 o'clock, noon.  
**The Leap can be plainly seen from the Levee**  
**SUNDAY, NOV. 17th, 12 NOON SHARP!**  
**REMEMBER THE DAY AND DATE!**

Story and handbill above courtesy of Pamela D. Arceneaux



*Streckfus excursion steamer J.S. with crowd at New Orleans early in her career, ca. 1903. The banner on the forward end of her hurricane roof railing reads "See New Orleans Harbor - 50¢" Photo courtesy of Murphy Library, U W - LaCrosse.*

Fred Dahlinger writes: "I found this on eBay and thought you might like it! Check it out now as Ohio Stereoview Photographers Wagon Ohio River R R Bridge. More info to follow."

🔍 Fred's online discovery is of a photo which also coincidentally appears on page 13 in the

*Reflections from Our Readers continued on page 35*

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*Merry Christmas  
 and Best Wishes  
 for 2017  
 from the Reflector*

## S&D RENEWAL NOTICE

### FOR 2017

As 2016 comes to an end, it is time to renew your subscription. Cost of renewal is \$35. You will receive a postcard notice around Christmastime. Please complete your renewal and remit by **no later than February 15, 2017** by mailing your payment to our secretary at this address:

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

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America's Steam & Diesel  
Riverboat Magazine

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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.

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

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## Getting Posted Up

Telling Our Stories  
with Care

Traveling to the annual meeting has become an exploratory trek for your editor in recent years, as travel with Capt. Jim and Annie Blum often encompasses a side trip or two and a rendezvous with river friends en route. This year's excursion was no exception. A highlight of this September's journey was a stop at Capt. Bill and Darlene Judd's home on U.S. 52 above New Richmond, OH.

This much anticipated first call left both of the Judd's visitors in awe of the fine collection of John Stobart river prints, along with Bill's steamboat photo collections and artifacts that grace their riverfront home. The visit had been arranged so that further discussion and plans could be made for developing a memorial to Capt. Ernie Wagner at the Lock 34 Museum near Chilo, OH. Before leaving to resume the trip to Marietta, Bill also alerted us to be on watch for a "steamboat house" on the Ohio shore about ¼ mile above the Augusta, KY ferry landing as we headed toward Ripley. We may publish a photo of that edifice in a future issue.

But the greatest surprise and delight of the day occurred when Capt. Bill handed us a 9x12 manila envelope containing photos and a story which he put together especially for an upcoming issue of the REFLECTOR. Needless to say, we look forward to sharing that article with all of you next year!

Your S&D editor gladly welcomes contributions from our readers, as together we pursue a common goal of telling the stories of our nation's inland rivers. And whenever the editor takes pen in hand, a special responsibility is incumbent upon him to write as carefully, accurately and graciously as possible, always mindful of the trust and respect which has been accorded the S&D REFLECTOR over the years. Errors and misrepresentations need to be guarded against, and when they occur, should be corrected and if necessary, retracted and an apology offered. Such is the case brought to this editor's attention about an incident recorded in the September 2014 BELLE centennial issue. Failure to do careful and

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accurate research resulted in a misstatement of opinion as fact by this author and editor regarding Capt. Edgar Mabrey. Sadly, printed words cannot be erased, nor can damage they may have caused be undone. And so, this editor offers his apology to the captain's family and relatives, and renews his efforts to uphold the integrity of this journal. 



## Meet Our Contributors

**Fr. Thomas Keller** (*Father's Steamboat Fleet*, p. 28) is a priest of the Archdiocese of St. Louis and currently serves as Pastor of Assumption-Mattese Parish. He was ordained in 1997 and since that time has served as an Associate Pastor, Master of Liturgical Ceremonies at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis, instructor of Sacramental Theology at Kenrick Seminary, and now Pastor. Fr. Keller loves history and is a life-long steamboat buff and a member of S&D. As a young man he developed a friendship with Capt. Bill Carroll of Streckfus Steamers, deepening his appreciation of history. As a hobby, Fr. Keller builds R/C models of steamboats, his most recent project being the catamaran ferry CITY OF BATON ROUGE displayed at the boat's centennial celebration this May.

**Leland R. Johnson** (*Capt. Pink Varble and the Falls of the Ohio*, p. 8) is the author of this fascinating profile of one of the most celebrated rivermen at the Falls of the Ohio region in Louisville. The closing chapters of this biography will appear in our March 2017 issue, bringing to a conclusion the final manuscript Leland had composed before his passing in 2014.

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

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## A Letter from Lee Woodruff

Dear S & D Members,

As we conclude S&D's 77th year, I hope all of you had a successful 2016. As in past years, the Board of Governors held two meetings: the first during MOR Chapter's weekend event in April at Clifty Falls Inn in Madison, IN; and the second in September during the S&D annual meeting.

The board continues to follow the activities of the Ohio River Museum, including the on-going renovation of W.P. SNYDER, JR. At the September board meeting a representative of Ohio History Connection gave a detailed presentation concerning plans for upgrading the interior of the boat. The goal of the interior upgrade is to restore the SNYDER as close as possible to the way it looked when moved to Marietta in 1955. When this is completed the total investment, including new hull and exterior work, will total nearly \$3,000,000.

Another activity that is being closely followed is the potential expansion of the Ohio River Museum. Ohio Historical Connection and Friends of the Museum are actively pursuing funding for this project. Finally, the J. Mack Gamble Fund committee reported that they approved \$23,950 from the fund to support various river-related projects.

While our financial situation is still okay, our membership continues to be a concern. None of our recent efforts to attract members seem to have been successful. Again, I ask each of you to continue to promote S&D. If each of you could recruit *just one new member*, it would provide us adequate funding to continue to provide a first class publication.

We had a great weekend in Marietta. In addition to our annual meeting, we had an enjoyable visit to Blennerhassett Island. And our guest speaker for the evening banquet, Alan Bernstein of BB Riverboats, entertained us with many stories about running a riverboat company and his other experiences on the river. To all, please plan to join us at our annual meeting next September. As we close out 2016, I want to wish all of you a Happy Holiday Season!

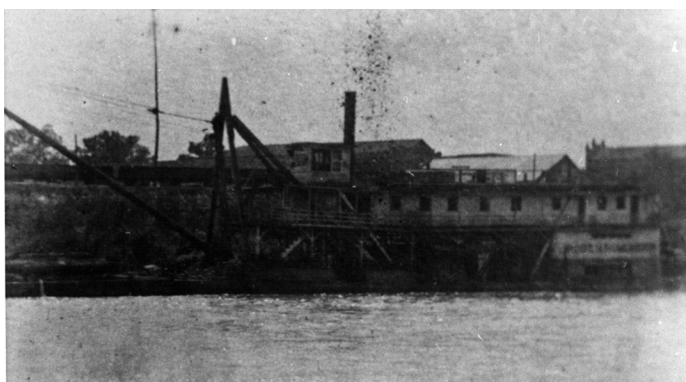
Lee Woodruff, Chairman

## More Gillette & Eaton Engines

In our last two issues, we have been documenting steamers which carried engines from the Gillette & Eaton firm of Lake City, MN, most of whose engines featured the company's patented Independent Inside Valve Drive. And as of our September REFLECTOR, the total had reached seventeen boats.

This summer your editor was in the Riverboat Twilight offices at Scales Mound, IL, perusing steamboat photos, blueprints, and other artifacts from Capt. Dennis Trone's collection courtesy of Capt. Kevin and Carrie Stier. A weathered old blueprint in Denny's JULIA BELLE SWAIN file showed a 1915 layout for setting up a pair of Gillette, Eaton & Squire high pressure engines for the Choctaw Transportation Company of Des Arc, AR. It didn't require much postulating to determine that Denny and the yard crew at Dubuque Boat & Boiler had used this G&E drawing to help lay out the JBS's engines, a near identical set also built in 1915 by these same enginebuilders. A quick check confirmed the name of an 18th steamboat for this list, ROBERT H. ROMUNDER (T2177).

That steel hull towboat was built in Clarendon, AR on White River, and named for the president of the company to handle logs on the White, Black and Little Red Rivers. She was sold in 1934 to interests in Ferriday, LA and was dismantled in 1954. Intriguingly, a sister boat ROBERT SANFORD (T2185) was built there two years later

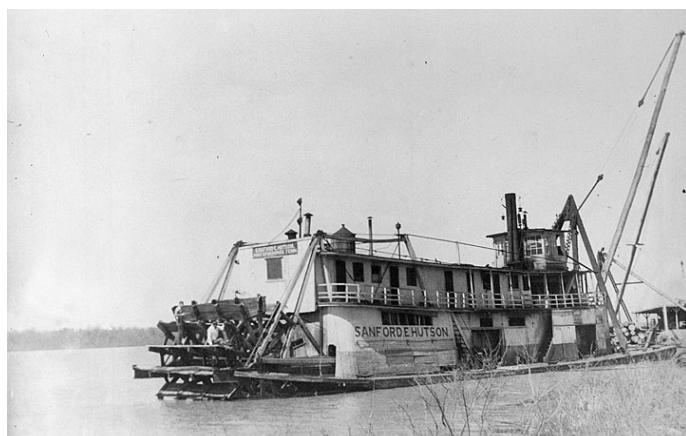


**ROBERT H. ROMUNDER** had 300 hp G&E engines on a hull 99.2 x 26.3 x 3, steam supplied by a single oil-fired boiler, and equipped with a derrick for the logging trade. She appeared in neither Murphy Library nor PLCHC's steamboat photo collections, but the above image was kindly supplied by University of Arkansas at Little Rock's Center for Arkansas History and Culture.

with a set of 175 hp engines for the logging trade, equipped just like the ROMUNDER. It is not idle speculation that she too would have been outfitted with G&E engines. By 1920, a third sternwheeler joined the fleet, when SANFORD E. HUTSON (T2266) was completed with 200 hp engines, 12's with a 5-foot stroke, perhaps bringing our present listing to twenty vessels. We have taken the liberty of picturing the ROMUNDER's two sisters below. Yet perhaps the most fascinating unidentified detail in the June issue's historical sketch of Gillette & Eaton are the names of two boats which served in Washington State and Saskatchewan, Canada. ⓘ



**Above, ROBERT SANFORD** and below, **SANFORD E. HUTSON** of Choctaw Transportation Co. in Des Arc, AR, perhaps numbers 19 and 20 in the Gillette & Eaton list. Both photos courtesy of Murphy Library, U W - LaCrosse.



Save  
the  
Date

S & D's  
78th Annual Meeting  
Friday - Saturday  
September 15 - 16  
2017

# Capt. Pink Varble and the Falls of the Ohio (Part 4)

by Leland R. Johnson

## PINK'S POLITICS

Always aware how politics affected his craft and his Falls, Captain Pink undertook political engineering during the 1870s. A Democrat in the Gilded Age, when Republicans dominated federal administrations, Pink navigated upstream in national politics. Yet, Kentucky and Louisville governments became strongly Democratic during these years, offering him opportunities to influence local elections and, as a result, the engineering of the Falls. He and his fellow Falls pilots campaigned to persuade the Army Engineers to enlarge Indian Chute, while also opposing placing more obstructions in Falls passages, and this required considerable political initiative.

Cincinnati's rivermen trading with the South perforce passed the Falls and took intense interest in navigation there, blaming their commercial competitor, Louisville, for delays at the passage. In 1870 they complained of boats they had lost against the bridge piers when attempting to run the rapids and, between hazards posed by the new bridge and delayed opening of the enlarged Portland Canal, they protested Louisville deliberately blocked Cincinnati's outlet to southern commerce. Both bridge and canal were then managed by companies headquartered in the Falls City.

The canal company exhausted its resources trying to complete the enlarged Scowden locks during the War. Named for their designer, Theodore Scowden, the new locks would double the size built in 1830, but they lay unfinished, worse than useless, after the War. With Congress's approval, General Godfrey Weitzel and the Army Engineers contracted for completing Scowden locks and for excavating the canal an additional fourteen feet to an eighty-foot width. After three years' work, however, the widened canal remained uncompleted

in 1871, and Cincinnati's rivermen traveled in person to Louisville to vent protests.

Hosted by Captain Pink, Cincinnati's boatmen inspected the construction and saw laborers and teams swarming the line, blasting and moving rock to widen the canal while masons built massive stone lockwalls that would serve a century. They saw construction steadily progressing, except for a contractor whose canal-widening job had fallen far behind schedule. Captain Pink and Cincinnati's delegation then met General Weitzel, who promised he would finish the job in 1872, even if it meant forfeiting contracts and hiring labor to get the canal open. "He will not allow the commerce of this great valley to be blockaded by the tardiness, inattention, and indifference of any contractor," declared one approving riverman.

Captain Pink recommended a design change to General Weitzel to prevent delays during high water when steamboats with tall stacks could not pass beneath the new railroad bridge. The canal had a pivoting span where the railroad crossed it, which



*Swing span of Ohio Falls Bridge at entrance to Canal under construction in 1870. Courtesy of [historiclouisville.weebly.com](http://historiclouisville.weebly.com)*



could swing open to let boats enter the canal. Pink proposed that Weitzel order a contractor to reduce the height of a hundred feet of canal wall beneath this pivot bridge. At high water, when steamboats on the river could not pass beneath the bridge, the pivot bridge could swing open to let boats enter the canal, and then they could pass across the lower opening in the canal wall to descend through Kentucky Chute, bypassing the locks altogether. Weitzel accepted Pink's ingenious solution and ordered it done, because this passage would allow boats to get past the railroad bridge even during extreme flooding. This new chute saw regular service and grateful rivermen dubbed it "Varble Pass."

General Weitzel also honored the promise he made to Cincinnati rivermen, forfeiting the negligent contractor's job when he did not complete it on schedule in 1872. Hiring extra labor, Weitzel finished the enlarged canal and a steamboat parade opened it in November 1872. When Congress later bought out the canal company and assigned canal operations to Weitzel, he immediately slashed canal tolls to a dime per ton, making passage through the canal nearly as cheap for steamboats as hiring a Falls pilot.

Captain Pink celebrated the larger canal's completion even though it presented challenging competition. It could pass boats and coal tows up to eighty feet wide, while the Indian Chute passage was only forty-eight feet wide. Pink and the Falls pilots therefore began drumming political support for an Army Engineer project to widen Indian Chute enough to keep Falls pilots in the game.

Louisville's civic leaders in October 1873 feted the U. S. Senate's Windom Committee visiting to inspect the canal and Falls. Chaired by Senator William Windom, this committee studied ways to augment America's foreign trade; and its considerations found improved river navigation might contribute by carrying more inland commerce to seaports for overseas export. The committee thus took interest in the Falls, the chief obstruction to river commerce from the Upper Ohio Valley to the sea. With Army Engineers and Captain Pink as guides, Senators of the committee inspected canal and Falls, then met in the Galt House ballroom to

hear rivermen explain what they thought Congress should do to stimulate the national economy.

After several steamboat captains and Captain Milton Adams of the Army Engineers presented opinions about what was needed to improve Falls passages, Captain Pink took a chair at a table with the Senators, who fired questions at him. Senator Windom of Minnesota began the inquiry: "What do you know about obstructions to navigation? When must steamboats use the canal and Falls?"

"Steamboats can navigate from three feet of water and barges from seven or eight feet," Captain Pink replied. "We hardly ever take steamboats over with less than three feet of water. Coalboats and barges can go over with seven and eight feet. The coal barge drawing six feet works on seven or eight feet of water. When the water on the Falls is three feet deep, it is nine feet deep at Cincinnati, because the river is wider here, by about three to one." Senator Windom nodded that he understood and continued: "What period of each year can you pass over the Falls?" Pink said: "We are governed by the stage of water on the upper river. It starts about this time of year and continues until July or August. We seldom have less than three feet until August of each year. September, October, and November are the low water months."

Senator Henry Davis of West Virginia chimed in: "Three feet of water is not enough for coalboats?"

"No sir," said Pink, "we don't take anything over but light-draft steamboats at that stage."

"How long can you take coal barges over?"

"An average of about seven months a year."

"When a coal convoy arrives," Davis asked, "do you have to break it up to pass over the Falls?"

"Since the bridge was built we have to break them up. Before the bridge was built we took a coal fleet of ten boats over. Now we cannot take more than half a tow. They can take larger tows below than they can bring down from Pittsburgh."

"Are many boats wrecked going over the Falls?" Davis inquired.

"I cannot tell you the percentage; we have very few losses on the Falls."

Senator John Sherman of Ohio interjected: "Do you know the insurance charges for crossing the

Falls?” Pink responded: “I don’t think any extra charge is made for the Falls.” Senator Davis returned to his question: “Do all boats coming down have to take pilots at the Falls?” “Almost all,” Pink allowed, “unless the water is very high. Sometimes when a man has run a long time on the river as pilot, and when the water is high he goes over.”

“What is the charge for piloting over the Falls?”

“It is owing to the size of the boat,” Pink explained: “Steamboats run from ten to thirty dollars—that is from 100 to 200 ton boats. Towboats run from twenty to forty dollars, depending on what they have in tow. I have taken over as many as fifteen barges in a tow, but that is not considered safe. That was before the bridge was built.”

“Do boats usually ascend when they can descend?” asked Davis.

“No, sir, there is no water for ascending boats unless there is eight and a half feet on the Falls, downstream. Then they begin to have water on the Kentucky Chute, about four feet. It is not a usual thing for boats to come through up the other side, because the main current of the Falls is down the Indiana side in the Indian Chute.”

“What is the time required for passing the Falls?”

“We can leave this wharf and land at Portland in about three quarters of an hour with a single steamboat. The way we run it is about four miles, as we have to run upstream some distance before we start down.”

Senator Sherman quizzed: “How many months a year can you ascend the Falls with steamboats?”

Pink scratched his head in thought, then replied: “About four months.”

Sherman continued: “How many months can you go up with barges?”

“Whenever there is water upstream at all, we can take barges.”

“Do boats going down over the Falls,” asked Sherman, “often have to ascend through the canal?”

“Yes, sir,” Pink replied brightly. “Our channel over there in Indian Chute is 48 feet wide. Up to 1856 it was only 28 feet wide. They commenced building boats longer and wider, and the pilots went to work themselves and opened the channel at the head of the Falls. They opened it to 48 feet, and Congress later gave them their money back for the job. The channel can be opened to 100 feet at little cost, and

this would allow many boats and barges to pass through that now must use the canal. The channel on the Falls could be widened by blowing out a reef of rocks which is a twelve-foot wide obstruction between two channels. If that was blown out, it would greatly aid navigation,” Pink concluded.

Senator Sherman added, “Is that the obstruction Captain Milton Adams of the Corps of Engineers mentioned?”

“I suppose so,” Pink agreed. “I took Captain Adams over and pointed out the obstruction to him.”

The Windom committee adjourned at Louisville to continue inspecting inland rivers to New Orleans. A year later it proposed an array of federal projects to open deeper, more reliable river channels as outlets for American exports. Although it did not recommend the immediate widening of Indian Chute as Captain Pink had proposed, the committee urged that locks and dams should be constructed to establish deeper slackwater navigation the entire length of the Ohio. When Congress approved this Ohio River canalization project in 1875, the Army Engineers began work near Pittsburgh with the Davis Island Lock and Dam, later named Ohio River Lock and Dam 1 in the numbered series. Many years elapsed, however, before the Engineers began constructing Lock and Dam 41 at Louisville in 1911, and the entire canalization of the Ohio to its mouth was not completed until 1929.

Two months after the Windom committee left Louisville, Captain Pink found himself sitting at another long table answering questions. United States Steamboat Inspectors sought to learn more about another encounter Pink had with the deadly Ohio Falls Bridge. Near dark on a December evening in 1873, Captain Pink took the wheel of the steamboat MARY HOUSTON, a 255-foot-long and 40-foot-wide packet running from Louisville to New Orleans. While he held its wheel, she crashed catastrophically into the bridge. Walter Haldeman, owner of the *Courier-Journal*, demanded steamboat inspectors investigate Pink’s mishandling of the boat because: “It came within an ace of being an awful disaster. It left Jeffersonville in the dark and in a heavy mist. The fog was so thick the pilot could not see the lights on the bridge piers until 50 feet away from the pier. Had the swirling current put it

one foot farther to the right, the boat and passengers would have hit the rocks and the loss of life would have been frightful." It seemed important to Haldeman that inspectors thoroughly review this accident.

Harking to the *Courier-Journal's* complaints about Captain Pink's neglect of duty, Steamboat Inspectors scheduled formal hearings. Calling witnesses to the accident, it put them under oath. Pink, of course, became the primary witness, and after the usual formalities took his seat at the inquiry, glaring at inspectors through feeble winter light infusing the room. Looking down the table at each of his judges, he saw all had been steamboat captains before entering government service, but none had been Falls pilots. At last he began to speak, as softly as possible with his gruff voice:

"I am a Falls pilot at Louisville. I have been taking the MARY HOUSTON over the Falls for five years. They never took any one else [another Falls pilot] if they could get me. I went on board of her on the evening of December 10, about five o'clock, to take her over the Falls from foot of Fourth Street. She did not leave until about six. When I went on board I found my wife and daughter and Mrs. H. G. Phillips, who were going with me over the Falls. I saw that the night was going to be bad, and advised my wife to take her company and go ashore, as the boat was going to Jeffersonville to take on freight, and we might have to remain there all night, and that unless it cleared up I would not go over. They went ashore and the boat went to Jeffersonville to take on one hundred tierces of hams, I think. We ate supper at the landing. Capt. Miller said to me, "What do you think of it?" I said I would let him know in a few minutes. I, in company with two pilots, went upon the upper deck of the boat. I remarked to the pilots, "There is no use of this boat's lying here, as I can see to the head of the canal, and count every light from First Street." I said to the captain, "I am all ready." I think this was about half-past seven or eight o'clock. When she backed out I said to the pilot, Mr. Pell, who was on watch, "There is the ferryboat, watch her a little, she may round out before I get past her." She was then at the wharf at Jeffersonville. As we passed the lower end of the Jeffersonville wharf there was a train going north across the bridge. The captain remarked: "Pink, they

have the bridge lit up for you." I said: "No, that is a train going north." We continued to see the bridge and the shape of it until we got down near the point of the dam. Pilot Pell remarked: "Pink, it is going to get pretty black on you." I said: "Yes, I will stop her. You catch a stern light for me. She is shaped all right now, and there is the point of the dam behind us." He said immediately: "The light has quit on me and I can't see it." At this time we were 100 yards below the dam. He turned his face forward and I saw a small light and remarked on it to the pilots. At this time the boat was still floating. Pell asked me which side of the light I wanted to take. I said: "The left hand side, as it must be the right-hand light." Capt. Miller said: "Pink, do you see the bridge?" I said: "I see the light on the bridge." The captain and mate on the roof then sang out to "back her at once," that it was on the wrong side. I saw the pier the instant he spoke, and I saw from the shape of the boat that it was bound to hit it "head on," and to prevent that I backed her two revolutions on the larboard wheel first. I then backed on both wheels. By backing on the larboard first, it had the tendency to swing the bow to the larboard, and swing her stern in the channel span. By doing this, the guard took the pier instead of the bow of the boat. After she struck, I attempted to land, but when I heard she was taking no water I kept on to Portland. I have taken a great many boats over the Falls under just such circumstances. I suppose at least a hundred times in my life I started in good weather and found it to be bad weather before I got through. Abreast of the dam the current runs at least ten miles an hour at that stage—9 feet, 8 inches. When the fog shuts down, no man in the world, in my judgment could have worked around and made a landing, especially at night, nor do I think it could have been done in day time. My judgment was to keep the boat straight and go on in hopes it would light up before I got there. Fogs come up on the Falls very quickly. Sometimes, when it is clear at Portland and Louisville, it is foggy on the Falls, but it seldom lasts long."

When Pink ended his brief statement, Captain A. H. Dugan, steamboatman and coal dealer, was called to testify. He said he had known Captain Pink for sixteen years, and he knew Pink's reputation was so excellent that nine-tenths of all steamboat captains sought his services. In his opinion, Pink

was the most successful of Falls pilots. Pink had lost a few boats on the Falls, but these were an insignificant percentage of the number he had taken over safely. "I do not think," Dugan concluded, "he would attempt to take a boat over the Falls if he thought there was any danger." Captain Pink threw a question at Captain Dugan: "Have you ever known me to keep boats waiting for good weather, even when the captains of boats wanted me to go?" "Yes, sir," Dugan admitted, "I have, often."

When Dugan left the hot seat, Charles Kremer, Louisville's city wharfmaster, took his place. His testimony explained why Walter Haldeman of the *Courier-Journal* took personal interest in the wreck of the HOUSTON.

"I am wharfmaster of the City of Louisville. I was at the landing when the MARY HOUSTON left for Jeffersonville. I think it was about 5 p.m. The weather was dull and smoky. The weather from 5 to 9 that night so far as I can remember was smoky on the Falls. I walked down to the corner of Fourth and the river about 7:00 and saw Mr. Haldeman of the *Courier-Journal*. Mr. Haldeman wanted his son to go down on the HOUSTON. At that time I could see what I supposed to be the HOUSTON's lights at the pork-house at Jeffersonville. I remarked to Mr. Haldeman that from the appearance of the weather at Jeffersonville it was clearing up, and that if Mr. Haldeman would go to New Albany he could catch the boat, as she would probably leave in a short time. Mr. Haldeman and his son then left me. I went home at the time. I went down again between 9 and 10 o'clock and found that the weather had shut down thick again. When there is water over the rocks, boats frequently go over the Falls after dark. I do not know the nature of the lights on the bridge; I did not know there were any there. I've known Falls pilots to send men down to the bridge with a lantern to mark the channel after dark. When I was down at the wharf at 7:00, or thereabouts, I was satisfied the weather was lighting up towards Jeffersonville, and that the boat would leave very soon."

After reviewing the accident and hearing the testimony, steamboat inspectors absolved Captain Pink of blame in the MARY HOUSTON's wreck, principally because the captain and owners

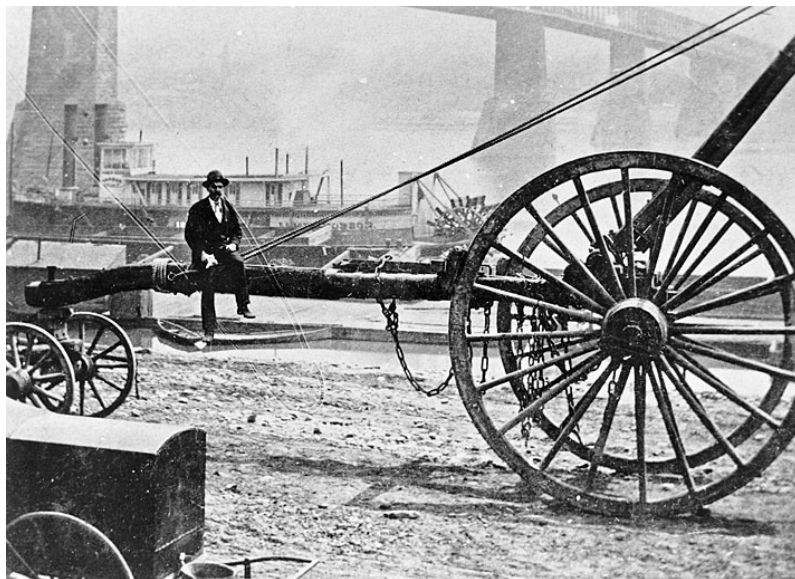
of this packet did not think Pink at fault. After repairing damages to their steamboat, they put the HOUSTON back on its scheduled run from Louisville to New Orleans, and when crossing the Falls they always employed Captain Pink as their pilot.

Pink's brush with Walter Haldeman the publisher had no apparent effects on the newspaper's traditional support for the Falls pilot, and river columnist Will Hays continued trumpeting Captain Pink's virtues. "On Sept. 12, 1853, Pink Varble was first selected as Falls pilot by the Louisville Board of Council, and he has been a pilot ever since," proclaimed one of Hays' editorials. "We have no doubt that since his election he had taken more boats backwards and forwards over the Falls than all the other Falls pilots together. Pink is an energetic, industrious, clever gentleman and a man of nerve. He is much thought of and respected by all steamboatmen. Long may he live."

At the next Falls pilots' election, Hays lent his influential support to Pink when a dozen candidates presented credentials to the City Council and entered the campaign to become a Kentucky Falls pilot. This became the most hotly contested Falls pilots' election of history. From a splendid field of candidates, the council could elect only five, and it changed several lives when it selected Captains Pink Varble, Enoch Lockhart, Fred Littrell, Chris Damon, and Jim Dougherty. Of this quintet, only Pink, Enoch Lockhart, and Chris Damon had served previously as Falls pilots.

Fred Littrell was the only member of Pink's clan left standing as Falls pilot after the 1876 election massacre. Fred's older brother John Littrell crossed the river after the election and became partner of Indiana Falls pilot Jim Duffy, wholesaling coal barges from the Pumpkin Patch to the Louisville market. Captain John eventually received appointment from the Hoosier state governor as Indiana Falls pilot.

The election left Pink's brothers Billy and Dick dead in the water. Dick soon sold out in Louisville and returned home to Westport, where he opened a general store at Varble's Landing and bought the steamboat JAMES HOBSON to haul merchandise



Appearing in the background of this photo (assistance is needed from our eagle-eyed readers to nail down a location) is JAMES HOBSON (T1327). Built in 1873 at Cincinnati, Capt. Pink bought her 5 years later

for \$4800 and used her in moving the unfinished J.M. WHITE from the Howards yard down to Portland for completion. Brother Dick also ran her as a local packet between Louisville and Varble's landing and in construction jobs on Muscle Shoals Canal in Alabama and Plum Point Reach on the Lower Mississippi. The real mystery, however, is not the photo's location but the contraption in the foreground. Several months ago S&D member Fred Dahlinger alerted us to a copy of this photo with a note: "Located on the levee, I'm sure there's a river connection for this very unusual and large wheel vehicle. I surmise it's for lifting (perhaps with an adjustable 'reach' over the hull) and probably conveying unusual and long loads of some type that are secured in the area below the frame, between the rear wheels. It reminds me of some large log hauling vehicles. Boilers? Freight? Someone will know." Fred did some sleuthing, and his results appear on page 3 in the Reflections from Our Readers column. Our thanks to Fred and to Murphy Library, U. of Wisc.-LaCrosse for this copy of the photo.

back and forth to Louisville. Finding this less than prosperous and desperate for cash, he accepted work with the Army Engineers, piloting his steamboat south to construction jobs on the Muscle Shoals Canal in Alabama and at Plum Point Reach on the Mississippi. He often visited Pink and Billy when passing through Louisville, but Dick never returned to Falls piloting.

Captain Billy Varble remained in Louisville, working on Pink's harbor towboats and enjoying fishing, until Falls pilot Jim Dougherty struck it rich. Dougherty was one of those lucky gamblers who won a lottery, receiving \$20,000, a princely sum in 1882. With this windfall, he purchased a Louisville mansion and promptly retired from Falls piloting, leaving this for Billy Varble to handle when Billy earned reelection as Falls pilot from the City Council.

The Varbles had long led the Louisville Pilots Association, uniting steamboat pilots in campaigns to get hazardous bridges and channel obstructions marked and lighted for safer navigation. At its own expense, the association had installed oil lamps at Grand Chain of Rocks guiding pilots through those hazards in the lower Ohio River. Its grandest success came in 1874 when Congress directed the Lighthouse Board to maintain the lights at Grand Chain and to install more navigation aids along

inland rivers. With this achieved, the association cut expenses by closing its office in June 1876.

Having admired the association's quarters, Captain Pink moved his office into space vacated by the association at 122 Water Street. With Dick Varble returning to Westport and Billy Varble temporarily out of service, Captain Pink reduced his enterprises and focused on Falls piloting. When he sold his steamboats, his friend Will Hays commented, "This sale deprives Capt. Pink Varble of all interests in any steamboat stock, and he quietly sits under his own vine and fig tree at No. 122 Water Street above Fourth. He may before long build a powerful towboat that has long been needed in our harbor."

Through the support of Louisville Congressman Albert Willis, chair of the House Rivers and Harbors Committee, Captain Pink achieved a project dear to his heart: widening Indian Chute enough to pass towboats and barges without breaking the tows into sections. When the Army Engineers in 1872 widened the canal to eighty feet, it offered capacity for larger boats and tows than the forty-eight-foot wide Indian Chute. Because coal tows clogged the canal for days awaiting turns at the locks, Captain Pink urged that Indian Chute be widened to pass the coal tows and thereby reduce delays at the canal—also bringing the Falls pilots increased business. His

friend Will Hays in his daily river news column colorfully harped on the need for Pink's project: "Uncle Sam should employ Pink Varble to blow out the 'mill-race' on the Indiana bank for \$30,000 and make a channel that boats can use without calling for help. As it is now, this is the worst dam spot on the Ohio, and Uncle Sam ought to improve it."

Captain Pink politicked for Indian Chute widening at conventions of the Steamboatmen Association and Pittsburgh Coal Exchange, won their endorsement, and in 1877 he got his chance. Captain Alexander Mackenzie, who succeeded General Weitzel in charge of the Portland Canal, saw political winds blowing in Captain Pink's direction, and he hired Pink and Enoch Lockhart to help plan widening Indian Chute. During autumnal low water in 1877, the two Falls pilots went onto the Falls with Army surveyors and pointed out the locations of Backbone Ridge, Rubel's Rock, Wave Rock, Willow Point, and boulders that could rip open hulls of passing boats. Surveyors marked these hazards on their plans and when funds became available in 1879, the engineers contracted with Captain Pink to manage this project.

When the river fell in 1879, Captain Pink started carving away the Falls. Captain Mackenzie sent his canal crew armed with sledgehammers, iron drills, and explosives to labor on the Falls under Pink's command. Beginning with Backbone Ridge at the left side of Indian Chute, the crew waded onto the rocks, drove iron drills by hand to make holes in the stone, and packed the holes with explosives. Daily blasts disturbed Louisville's peace throughout November as Pink worked down through the ridge. He hoped to get as far down the chute as the dreaded Rubel's Rock, but a rise in early December covered the reef, stopping the blasting. Still, Pink estimated he increased the chute's opening from forty-eight to eighty feet, also deepening the channel by eighteen inches. Hereafter, Will Hays predicted, Indian Chute would be known as "Varble Chute—most worthily named to honor a live, enterprising man, Pink Varble."

## PINK'S PAINS

At his fifty-first birthday, Pink had all the Falls piloting he and his clan could handle, and in autumn, when the river fell too low for Falls passage, he had a contract with the Army Engineers to keep him busy. Thanks to his friend, Representative Albert Willis, Congress in 1880 appropriated \$60,000 more for widening Indian Chute, and Army Engineers gave Pink charge of this. Louisville rocked each October. "Capt. Pink Varble shook the city and woke up the natives yesterday morning by his loud reports in blowing out the chute on the Falls," cheered Will Hays. "The explosions were terrific, and, aside from making the rocks fly and the water scatter, and the windows rattle, the clouds above the city lost their grip, caused by the concussion, and we had copious rains. Chute her agin, Pink."

Captain Pink blasted the Falls and they him. Perhaps it was the blasting racket, or perhaps piloting stresses or a physical malady which caused his blinding headaches. These sometimes prostrated him, confining him to bed until they passed; and he sought relief from the affliction through vacations at French Lick mineral spa in Indiana north of Louisville. Still, neither French Lick holidays, nor annual upriver trips to family reunions at Westport and Ghent, alleviated Pink's pains, made more excruciating by disasters suffered in his family and on the Falls during the 1880s.

First, Pink came within an ace of losing his brother Billy to the Falls. Billy dearly loved fishing the Falls, and when not piloting a steamer he could be found boating and fishing among the rocks. He and three friends in a skiff set out fishing one May morning when a strong current caught their boat and shoved it over the Army Engineers' dam near the canal's entrance. It capsized, spilling the four into turbulent water. Three floated onto rocks and held on, but Billy became immersed in the terrible suction beneath the dam. It pulled him down; he swam back to surface, then down again. "Boys, I believe I'm gone," he yelled as he started down the third time. Just then, a wooden seat from the splintered boat drifted by and he snagged it, clinging on and swimming out of the deadly pull of the

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current to save himself from death's maw. Billy lost his clothes and fishing rods, but considered himself lucky to escape at all.

That year, Pink also came near to losing two sons. Because Louisville then had no public parks, boys often walked to Cave Hill Cemetery in the east end where open fields and trees offered inviting space for romps and games. Quarrels erupted among the boys, however, and in 1881 a gang attacked Pink's son Melvin and his friends. When the fight went awry, one boy pulled a pistol, began shooting, and a bullet struck Melvin in the head. Although Melvin survived, he was never able to join his father as Falls pilot, and instead became surveyor for a Louisville real estate company.

Young Pink Varble, Jr. suffered a painful accident the same month his brother was shot. Taking a job with Adams Express Company, he was unloading packages from a railcar when an iron safe fell on him. Its weight paralyzed him and he was carried home to his father in agony. With tender care, young Pink eventually recovered use of his limbs, however, and his father put him in command of a harborboat, thus raising him to the rank of Captain Pink the second.

Captain Pink and Mary Frances were still caring for injured sons when her older brother arrived, seriously ill, from Natchez. Captain Frank Littrell

had become a renowned Mississippi River pilot, steering the steamboat NATCHEZ, famous for racing the ROB'T. E. LEE. Captain Pink and Mary Frances did what they could to alleviate his pain, even carrying him to French Lick to take healing mineral baths, but nothing availed. Frank died and Mary Frances sadly escorted her brother's body back to Natchez for burial.

In 1880, Pink's friend Albert Willis won reelection as Louisville's congressman, and when Pink bought another harbor towboat, he named it ALBERT S. WILLIS in his friend's honor, making Billy Varble and Fred Littrell its pilots. Congressman Willis campaigned in 1880 to persuade the U. S. Life Saving Service that it needed a station at the Falls of the Ohio. This agency had stations along the coasts and Great lakes, but none on inland rivers, and Willis contended one was badly needed at Louisville to save people about to be dashed to death on the Falls. Three sturdy Irish river rats, Billy Devan, John Tully, and Jack Gillooly, who had waterfront jobs, had saved many lives at the Falls during the 1870s. When they saw boats in danger, they jumped into a skiff and rowed to the rescue, doing this without pay in the name of humanity. Dubbed "Falls Heroes" by Will Hays, the three received gold medals from Congress and the Commonwealth of Kentucky in recognition of their selfless heroism. Congressman Willis wanted these three appointed the crew of a Louisville lifesaving station, and in 1881 he persuaded Captain Sumner Kimball, Chief of the Life Saving Service, to inspect hazards at the Falls.

Captain Pink and Congressman Willis hosted Captain Kimball during his inspection and organized a public rally at Galt House where Louisville's civic leaders expressed support for the lifesaving station. Then the three joined the Irish lads in their skiffs and dashed down the Falls, seeing death-dealing rocks and crashing waves up close. Taken aback by the close brush with these hazards, Captain Kimball admitted he thought an inland station folly until he saw the Falls personally. This tour convinced him of a need for the station, and before leaving Louisville he awarded a contract to build a boathouse to serve as the floating station and employed the Irish river rats as its crew. He made Billy Devan the station's captain.



**Capt. Pink Varble Jr.'s first issue of Pilot license and second issue of Master's license dated February 25, 1886. Courtesy of Howard Steamboat Museum.**

Captain Pink soon had urgent need of the lifesavers' services when the VIRGIE LEE wrecked on the Falls. Pink steered the steamer into Indian Chute when a tornadic wind struck the boat and blew her sideways, lodging it athwart the chute with bow stuck on the left-hand reef and stern on the right-hand rock ledge. Waves pounding against the upstream side threatened to capsize the steamer, and her passengers panicked, running the decks wildly and wailing aloud. Tully, Devan, and Gillooly were in their skiffs in an instant, rowed across the river at double stroke, and took off seventy-five passengers, women and children first, to land one skiffload at a time on the Indiana shore. Captain Pink's harborboats removed the cargo, and after the VIRGIE LEE was raised and returned to service, he remained her pilot whenever she crossed the Falls.

Ice in early 1881 sliced a sixty-foot gap through the Falls dam near the canal entrance, releasing terrific currents down Kentucky Chute and forcing boats entering the canal to hire towboats for help passing the gap. When the 600-ton steamer JAMES W. GAFF came up the canal, bound for Cincinnati with a heavy cargo and passenger load, its captain hired the HOP LOUDON with Captain Pink and Nellie Varble at the wheel to help the GAFF get past the break in the dam. Pink lashed his harborboat to the GAFF's bow and both boats pushed out of the canal. Yet, the vicious current caught the stern of the GAFF, swinging her into the gap, and the suction proved so strong it pulled both boats backwards through the gap and down Kentucky Chute. The LOUDON hit rocks first

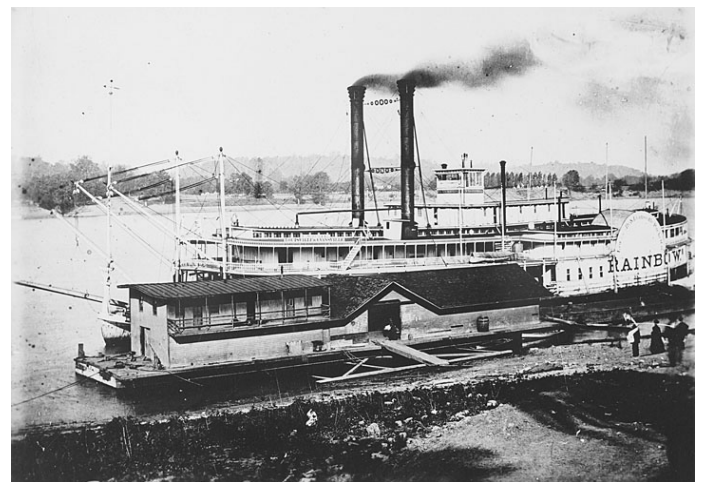


*JAMES W. GAFF (2951) was owned by Memphis and Ohio River Packet Co., built at Cincinnati in 1876 on a hull 230.4 x 25.6 x 5.6. Suction from a break in the dam due to ice in early 1881, pulled the boat back down through the chute until Pink recruited the help of several towboats to shepherd her up over the Falls. He lost his own harborboat HOP LOUDON in the process. Photo from Murphy Library, U.W. - LaCrosse.*

and went down immediately, while the GAFF bounced off and lodged against other rocks. Devan, Tully, and Gillooly saw the disaster, manned their skiffs, and shot through the gap after the steamers, saving all passengers. Captain Pink then brought other towboats to the GAFF, pulled her off the rocks, and took it up over the Falls on its way to Cincinnati. His harborboat LOUDON, however, was thoroughly wrecked.

A month after losing his towboat, Captain Pink was taking the packet RAINBOW up the Falls nearly to the head of Indian Chute when a steam line let go with a blast, filling its deck with scalding vapor. Roustabouts and passengers alike scrambled like frightened sheep, but none were burned or injured. Yet the blast left the steamer's engines powerless and currents spun it backwards down the Falls. Pink stayed at the wheel, manipulating the rudder to nudge the boat one direction or another around sharp rocks, and when she neared shore, Pink sent out a skiff with crewmen to play out a line to a tree, bringing the steamer safely to rest, although leaving its passengers dizzy from fear.

Some passengers attributed their narrow escape to the hand of Providence, and this brought a sharp retort from Will Hays. Although he was a devout Christian, a pillar of the Presbyterian Church, Will editorialized:



*A month after losing his own boat, Capt. Pink was once again called upon to assist a packet by bringing the RAINBOW (4673) safely to shore when a burst steam line left the boat powerless and careening backwards down the Falls. Will S. Hays' comments in the paper help put the rescue "in the proper perspective." The big packet was built by Howards in 1879 for Louisville & Henderson Mail Line. Murphy Library photo.*

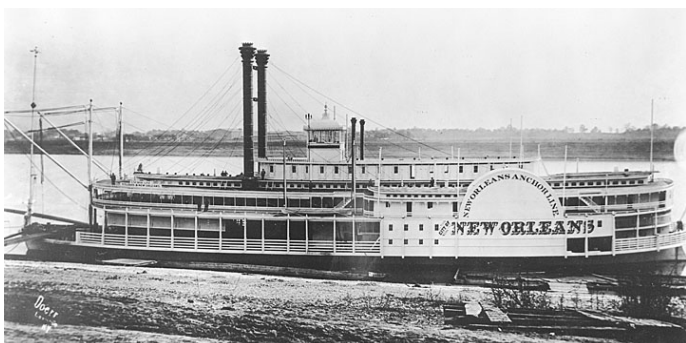


“It was due to Pink’s good handling, coolness, and judgment that it went down over the Falls between the bridge piers, backwards and without steam, and landed safely at the foot of the Falls. Providence may be a bully thing to have on board a steamboat in times of danger and distress, but if there is anything better than Providence it is a good pilot and a brave man, who knows how and when to act, and who understands his business. Providence may be all right and mean well, but if we are ever caught on a boat, and that boat is in danger of being lost on the Falls, we’ll wait until Pink tells us to grab a life-preserver and take no chances on being ducked or drowned by trusting to Providence. Pink saved the RAINBOW from being wrecked by being on board of her when the steam pipe burst and he claims no credit nor boasted honors for simply doing what he always does—his duty.”

After an uneventful autumn blasting the Falls, Captain Pink returned to piloting on the November rise of 1881, accepting the task from Howard Shipyards of taking down two magnificent new sidewheel packets, the CITY OF NEW ORLEANS and CITY OF BATON ROUGE, both too large to pass through the canal. When the river began to



**CITY OF BATON ROUGE (1050) above and CITY OF NEW ORLEANS (1112) below were both Howard-built in 1881. BATON ROUGE was slightly larger at 294 x 49 x 9’5”. Both were owned by Anchor Line for St. Louis-New Orleans trade. Their delivery below the Falls was entrusted to Capt. Pink. Both photos courtesy Murphy Library, UW-LaCrosse.**



fall, Captain John C. Howard urged Pink to get the new packets across the Falls quickly, so they could reach St. Louis before the spring rise. Pink agreed and took the wheel of the CITY OF BATON ROUGE with her captain and John Howard in the pilothouse. It was a grim winter day on the Falls, smoky and drizzly, with a stiff breeze blowing onto the Indiana shore.

The majestic boat steamed upriver from Howard Shipyards at Jeffersonville to get lined up for Indian Chute. She turned near Towhead Island and aimed her bow toward the head of the chute. As her engines slowly turned the mighty wheels forward, the boat cautiously edged into the downstream current. Straightening up, white clouds of steam shot from her ‘scape pipes as the sidewheels drove the boat ahead. She swept like an arrow past Backbone Ridge and started down the chute, aiming between the railroad bridge piers. Clearly, Captain Pink held the wheel of one of the finest steamboats the Howards ever built.

Then, spectators to the boat’s maiden voyage gasped when the boat staggered. She staggered and lifted herself, staggered again, and stopped. Her sidewheels started churning again, then stopped and backed, and finally ceased efforts to extricate the packet from the rocks. The lifesavers at Louisville shot across the river in a flash and pulled alongside the stranded steamer to help. One spectator was a *Courier-Journal* reporter who scrambled into a skiff and went to the steamer with the lifesavers. When he reached the CITY OF BATON ROUGE, he saw the boat was lodged on an obstruction under her stern. Clambering over the guard and onto the deck, the reporter found the boat’s builder, John Howard, sprawled on a bench with head in hands, fuming as he contemplated the disaster.

“What happened here, Mr. Howard?” the reporter asked. He replied, “I was in the pilothouse when she first hit the rocks, and I ran downstairs and into the hull to see the damage. From the racket when we hit, I expected to find a huge hole in the hull, but, although it was dark in the hold, I knew no hole was in its bottom or I would have heard water rushing inside. When I came back up out of the hold, the first chap I met was one of the lifesavers. It was wonderful how quickly they got to the boat

after the accident.” To the reporter’s next inquiry, “Was the boat in the channel when it hit the rocks?” came the answer, “No, I guess we must be eighty feet out of the channel. The current is running very fast, and we must have been going eighteen miles an hour when we hit. The rocks raised the boat about ten inches and damaged the larboard wheel.”

“Could the accident have been avoided?” queried the newspaperman. John Howard responded, “Yes. I am a friend of Captain Pink and consider him an excellent pilot, but this accident is unfortunate for him. I regret very much that it happened, because he missed it badly. The truth is, any ordinary steamboat could have passed the channel safely. This will hurt his reputation.” Pressing the issue, the reporter commented, “Why should it, if the boat was not drawing more water than was in the chute?” John Howard shrugged: “That’s how these things work sometime.” To the reporter’s final question, “If the boat had been straight in the channel, it would have gone safely through?” Howard replied, “Yes, clear as a whistle.”

The reporter returned to his office and published a highly critical editorial on Captain Pink’s mishandling of a beautiful and magnificent steamboat worth \$125,000, blaming the wreck on rocks Pink had blasted from Indian Chute in the autumn and left lying in the channel. “It was Capt. Varble’s place to know where the channel was, how much water was in the channel, how much water the boat was drawing, how stiff the breeze was, how swift the current was running, how light the boat was and where the blasted rocks had lodged,” protested the writer. “Had Capt. Varble known these important yet simple points the CITY OF BATON ROUGE would not have been stuck on the rocks.”

When this critique appeared, Captain Pink quickly went to his friend Will Hays to present his view on the wreck’s causes. During the autumn, while blasting Indian Chute wider, the Army Engineers had closed the gap in the dam where ice had broken through and had also extended the dam another two hundred feet toward Indian Chute. These changes held more water in Louisville’s harbor above the dam and reduced water levels below the dam, causing the water roaring through

Indian Chute to move much faster. It created a cross-current in the chute Pink had never seen before. Pink said he took the BATON ROUGE straight into the chute between the dam and the rocks, then a vicious cross-current drove her to the side onto the rocky reef where she crashed and lodged.

This explanation mollified Captain Pink’s critics, including John Howard, who retained Pink to take down the CITY OF NEW ORLEANS and to raise the BATON ROUGE. Fearing her hull might be stove in, Pink did not pull the boat off the rocks, instead running lines with anchors to secure her in place until the river rose. A week later he sailed the NEW ORLEANS grandly over the Falls with no trouble whatsoever, and the following week Will Hays reported the release of her sister boat. “At 6:45 yesterday morning the new CITY OF BATON ROUGE was afloat. Pink Varble was at the wheel. Steam was up and the engineers at their posts. Billy Devan and his lifesavers were there, too. The word was given, lines cut, the wheels revolved, and in five minutes the steamer was released from its prison and went driving headlong over the Falls and then landed in safety at Portland. It leaves for St. Louis tomorrow.”

As if these debacles were not enough, four months later Captain Pink suffered perhaps the most serious setback of his life on the Sunday afternoon of March 5, 1882, when the JAMES D. PARKER went down on the Falls, caught fire and



*Although the sinking of JAMES D. PARKER (2920) at the head of the chute on March 5, 1882 was the most serious accident Capt. Pink encountered in his long career at the Falls, no injuries resulted. The 185 x 36 x 5.5-foot PARKER was built in 1872 at Cincinnati for the Memphis & Ohio River Packet Company. Photo courtesy of Murphy Library, University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse.*

split apart, threatening doom for its 105 passengers. The passengers were in Sunday finery, dressed for dinner, when they felt the shock of collision. An ominous shiver ran through the steamer from stem to stern. Passengers jumped up and ran about, searching for family members and children, looking for life-preservers and help; their panic beggared description. Over sobbing of the frightened could be heard the hurried tramp of the crew working on deck and the hoarse voice of Captain Pink ordering them to emergency stations. Then passengers heard the final crash below and rushing water pouring into the hull. With a sharp careen to the side, the boat went down, splitting the hull from bow to midship. Upstairs to the hurricane deck the passengers scurried, and as they ran they saw blue smoke curling up and flames shooting through the cabin. The first mate and crew leaped in with fire buckets, doused the flames, and helped passengers escape to the upper deck. Then they used axes to cut through the deck into staterooms in search of trapped passengers.

Mrs. J. R. Maxwell of Cincinnati, a striking gray-haired lady with violet eyes, was sitting for dinner in the ladies' cabin when the stewardess told her the boat was about to cross the Falls. She strolled to the cabin door to look out at the cascades when she felt the boat thump into the rocks. The cook, rushing from cookhouse into the cabin, shouted, "That meant business!" When the second crash came, the stewardess warned ladies to head up on deck, but then the boat careened sideways and they had to climb up the floor on their knees. Mrs. Maxwell slipped and rolled back, then the roof crushed in and barrels thundered down, rolling into the cabin. Two hit her and a door sash fell across her shoulders, but she remained conscious. She shoved three chairs into place along the steep floor and climbed up on them to the door, where Captain Billy Devan of the lifesavers, already arrived from Louisville, pulled her onto deck and placed her in a skiff to deliver her safely ashore. She later told a reporter: "I wish you would thank the gallant lifesavers for their heroism. We owe our lives to them. Words are too poor things to express my gratitude."

A. W. Perry, traveling salesman, was knocked off the boat when the cabin turned over. He grabbed a passing tobacco hogshead and floated over the

Falls clinging to the barrel and was nearly to Portland before men in a skiff saw him and pulled him into their boat. "I was getting chilled through very fast, and my fingers were so benumbed that I could scarcely hold on to my hogshead, but I felt that it was a life and death matter, and I was bound to stick to it as long as possible," Perry later recalled. "I thought my time was up, and I prayed a brief prayer that the Lord would make it easy for me. All the shortcomings of my life went through my mind and I couldn't tell you just how it felt. The waves seemed as high as a house, and twice I was washed off the hogshead and went down out of sight, but I came up again and embraced my tobacco cask as if it was my best friend. I never had such a frightful experience, and if it isn't enough to make a man a Christian then he is a hopeless case. I'll never go over those Falls again, and further I won't travel on Sunday anymore. I do not think the officers of the boat should have gone into such a dangerous place with a boatload of passengers when there was a safe way provided [by canal] by which they could have made the trip. I believe the law should prevent taking such risks, and I believe the officers should be punished."

When the PARKER wrecked at noon, the Louisville lifesavers had just returned from early church services and were still in their Sunday togs when John Tully in the station's watchtower gave the alarm. Immediately they scrambled into lifeboats and splashed off, rowing powerfully across the river and down Indian Chute. Tully with Captain Billy Devan and Ed Farrell took the lead in their lifeboat RECKLESS, while Jack Gillooly, Joe Martin, and Jim Duffy followed in the READY. An Indiana Falls pilot and owner of Duffy's Landing at Pumpkin Patch, Jim Duffy happened to be visiting the lifesavers when the alarm sounded and he jumped in to help. Crossing the river in a hurry, when the skiffs touched the wreck's side, male passengers and roustabouts crowded to them, attempting to board the lifeboats. "Women and children first!" Captain Devan ordered, but panicked passengers ignored him until Tully stepped on deck with his oar in hand, using it to double over a roustabout and flailing at others until they retreated. One skiffload at a time, they transferred all passengers safely to the Indiana shore, nothing lost except the lifesavers' Sunday suits and some passengers' dignity.

Rampant rumors that more than a hundred passengers had gone down with the PARKER set Louisville afire, and *Courier-Journal* reporters clambered into skiffs and braved currents across the river. One found Captain Pink consoling distraught passengers on the Indiana shore and asked him to account for his role in the disaster. Pink responded:

“I was called upon to take the JAMES D. PARKER over the Falls. She was drawing six and one-half feet of water, and there was eight feet of water in the chute by the marks I have established myself. I told the captain that I thought it was a safe trip. We started about 12 o’clock and went clean up the river to the Towhead. I told him that I wanted to get well up the stream and get started in straight. Just as soon as we got her head turned downstream I shut her down to the slow bell, her pilots having told me that the boat steered best when under the slow bell. We went on, passing the dam all right, steering very nicely until we entered shoal water at the head of the chute, at which point the bow inclined a little to the port or left side.

“I immediately gave her the wheel so as to give her a sheer to the starboard, but she would not answer the helm, but kept sheering over to the port side. I then saw that she was bound to strike on the left side of the chute, and I stopped the engines and waited probably about one minute, until I saw she was not answering to her helm. I had the engines reversed, and did succeed in backing her, but it did no good, and she kept running out until she struck on the left-hand reef several times—I think knocked her stern post out. I finally got her head straightened down the stream, and went ahead on her again to go through the bridge, but, not having any headway on her when she straightened up, the force of the current caused her to sheer to the port or left side again and by the time she got to the bridge she was broadside onto the current right directly across the channel.

“About this time the mate, Mont Hoskins, came and informed me that the boat was filling and sinking rapidly. I immediately tried to back her over to the Indiana shore so we would be in as shoal water as possible, but the water gained so rapidly that she sunk before I could accomplish my object. She went right down in the middle of the channel below the bridge, and now lies at the lower end of

Rubel’s Rock, with her bow pointed upstream, a total wreck. I heard the Captain and Clerk tell the passengers to stay on top of the hurricane roof, that everything would be all right. A great many of the passengers had life-belts on when the life-saving crews arrived. I am satisfied that it was not more than ten or eleven minutes from the time we first struck until the life-saving crews were alongside. I told the Captain to lower the yawl and I would watch for the life-saving crews, and about the time I said this I looked toward the station and saw them coming right over the Falls. I stayed in the pilothouse until they came alongside, and I left the boat after the women and children had been taken off.”

Captain Pink never learned what caused the steamer to sheer to port while he was spinning the pilotwheel to starboard. It could have been as simple as a broken tiller line, or perhaps a submerged rock had sheared off the rudder, or perhaps again it was the vicious cross-current that had wrecked the BATON ROUGE. He did learn why the boat sank so fast and split apart: her cargo included more than 600 barrels of iron nails. These nails kept the wreck glued to the Falls until it went to pieces, while river pirates flocked to it in skiffs and stole what they could of its cargo and everything else not nailed down. Although many passengers had lost their pocketbooks in the disaster, they pooled their funds and purchased a silver ice pitcher and goblets to present the lifesavers as tokens of their appreciation. The passengers assembled aboard the life station two days later to thank Captain Devan and his brave boys.

Recounting this catalog of Captain Pink’s pains of the early 1880s does not render him justice. Good news never is as interesting as bad, and Pink’s daily successes went unrecorded in newspapers. Making up to thirteen trips daily over the Falls, Captain Pink took hundreds of boats of every kind over safely for every boat that was lost when he held its wheel. Indeed, by actual count he had taken 582 steamboats over the Falls by 1882, and few had suffered losses or even damages. Six weeks after the loss of the PARKER, for example, he took down the big towboat JOSEPH B. WILLIAMS, commonly known as “Big Joe.” He set a record with it by pushing fourteen coal barges and four fuel flats through the

## Early IDLEWILD Views Surface



In April 1882, Pink took the big towboat JOSEPH B. WILLIAMS (T1452) with fourteen coal barges and four fuel flats over the rapids, the largest tow to descend the Falls at that time. "Big Joe" had Hartupee condensing engines, 19's, 44's with a 9-foot stroke, and was the "daddy of 'em all" until the SPRAGUE came on the scene. Murphy Library photo.

cascades, the largest tow ever to descend the Falls to that time. Still, something was amiss. Perhaps it was his headaches that interfered, perhaps his family crises that distracted him, perhaps constant demands for his services, day and night, wind and rain, cold and snow, that wore him down.

These incidents did not diminish public faith in Capt. Pink's talents, and he continued to enjoy all the business he could serve. Indeed, during spring coal tides Pink had so many calls for his services he scarcely had time to sleep or eat. Overtasking his indomitable energies, he suffered as a consequence, but he could never resist the call when a boat wanted to come or go over the Falls.

In the summer of 1883, as a railroad line was built along Louisville's waterfront and buildings along old Water Street were demolished, among them was Captain Pink's office. Pink moved temporarily into Will Hays' place on Third Street, where Hays sold pianos and steamboat tickets when not writing river columns for the *Courier-Journal*. "He is yet in full vigor of life and manhood. He is cool and brave as a lion, generous to a fault, and as tenderhearted as a spring chicken," extolled Hays in his river column. "The Falls of the Ohio without Capt. Pink Varble would be like the play of Hamlet without the ghost in it. Long live Capt. Pink!"

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### Mississippi River Excursion Steamer Idlewild

One of the few stern wheel steamers built in recent years exclusively for excursion and packet service on the Mississippi River is the steel hull steamer *Idlewild*, constructed by James Rees & Sons Company, Pittsburgh, for the West Memphis Packet Company, which operates excursion and ferrying steamers out of Memphis. The *Idlewild* is engaged five and one-half months each year in the excursion business and six and one-half months as a

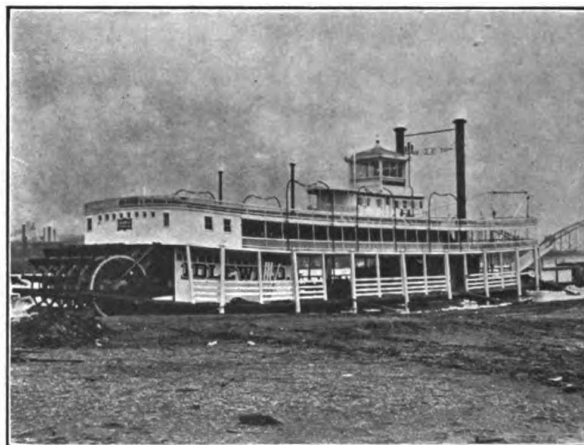


Fig. 1.—Stern View of the *Idlewild*

day packet between Memphis and Beacon Point, Ark., 35 miles out of Memphis. On this route the vessel leaves Memphis at 8.30 every morning, returning at 6.30 in the evening, carrying both freight and passengers.

The dimensions of the *Idlewild* are: Length, 160 feet; beam, molded, 40 feet; floor, 35 feet; depth of hold, 5 feet. Steam is supplied by three boilers, 44 inches diameter and 24 feet long, with seven flues each. The main engines have cylinders 16 inches in diameter by 6 feet 6 inches stroke. The vessel has a fine large cabin arranged for dancing and a "texas" cabin for the crew.

Sometimes, the rarest treasures lie right under our nose. This was the case with these two early views of IDLEWILD. Both appeared in November 1915 *International Marine Engineering*, an online reprint used by your editor extensively over the past two years to research Gillette & Eaton. Incredibly, both views escaped his notice until two months ago! The upper view is at the Rees yard in Pittsburgh in late 1914 and the lower one at Memphis in 1915.

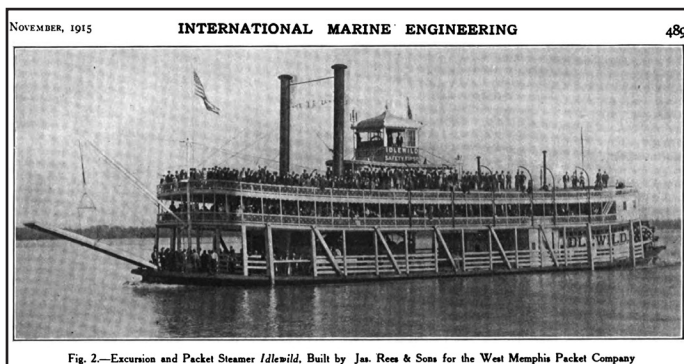


Fig. 2.—Excursion and Packet Steamer *Idlewild*, Built by Jas. Rees & Sons for the West Memphis Packet Company

# S&D's 77th Annual Meeting

On March 16, 1941, Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Rivermen welcomed its first visitors to the newly opened Ohio River Museum on the lower floor of Campus Martius Museum in Marietta, OH. The Museum played a major role in S&D's vision for "Lighting Up the Past, Present, and Future of the Mississippi River System," and represented one of the first major permanent exhibits of steamboat and river memorabilia in the United States. The river group, which had been launched on June 3, 1939 and incorporated in Ohio two years later, provided hundreds of items for the initial displays: steamboat models, photos, paintings, name boards, whistles, roof bells, china and tableware, bills of lading, inspection certificates and licenses, to name but a few. Then, in 1955, Crucible Steel's retired sternwheel pool towboat W. P. SNYDER, JR. was added as a floating artifact adjacent the Museum on the banks of the Muskingum. A mere three decades after opening its doors, the Museum's collections had grown to the point where a new building, separate from Campus Martius, was constructed to house the expanding displays. And happily, that growth continues to the present day.

It was no surprise, then, that S&D chose to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Ohio River Museum on the opening evening of our annual meeting this September 16th. A special photo exhibition was prepared to honor the event at the Museum, and attendees marveled at the tremendous growth of the organization's collections over the decades.

Saturday morning, September 17 brought a gathering of S&D members to the Sternwheel Room of the Lafayette Hotel in Marietta for its annual business meeting. A special welcome was extended to first-time attendee and new member Grady Smith. Among the meeting's highlights was a report on the commencement of Phase 3 in the ongoing restoration of the SNYDER, an effort supported by state funding to the tune of nearly \$3 million since 2004. Efforts in the coming year will focus on restoring the boat to its appearance as a working towboat, with painstaking attention to

maintaining accuracy in the vessel's historic details. Phase 3 is expected to be completed by spring 2017. Just one month after the annual meeting, news was announced that favorable bids for the project had been received and work was set to commence (see bulletin on page 31 for details).

A report from the J. Mack Gamble Fund trustees' chairman Capt. Bill Barr announced the awarding of \$23,950 in grants to river-related non-profits this year, which included Friends of the Museum, the Point Pleasant River Museum, the Str. BELLE OF LOUISVILLE, and renovation of the TELL CITY pilothouse on Museum grounds. With great regret, Capt. Barr reported the retirement of Bill Pollock as a Gamble Fund Trustee due to health issues, and offered Dr. Pollock the thanks of S&D for his faithful stewardship of the Fund all these years. Bill also announced Capt. Kevin Mullen as the new replacement on the Board.

Treasurer Dale Flick's financial report as of September 16 showed a yearly income of \$16,933.81 and expenses of \$14,482.90, for a current balance of \$13,362.74 as compared to a \$10,911.84 balance at this time last year. Secretary Sharon Reynolds also submitted a report which was read in her absence showing 407 members at the present time, which included our institutional memberships. A discussion followed about our declining subscription/membership numbers and weakened financial state, in spite of recent efforts to bolster these numbers through our presence and recruitment on Facebook and on our website. The Board shared its discussions relative to addressing these problems by offering such future options as reducing the number of annual issues of the REFLECTOR, adding an electronic version of the magazine online in conjunction with a reduced press run, or discontinuing publication altogether. Member David Vornholt suggested we consider the possibility of hiring professional management to help us increase our shrinking membership base. The suggestion was referred to president Jeff Spear for further action. One possibility considered by the Board was to make a request from the J. Mack Gamble Fund to assist in publication of the

REFLECTOR at some future point should that become necessary. To follow up that suggestion, the Board has engaged the services of an attorney to provide a legal opinion whether the Gamble Fund charter would permit its funds to be used for that purpose.

Lee Ann Hendershot of Ohio River Museum announced an increase of 800 visitors over last year's attendance, and highlighted school groups and adult groups visiting this year. Several special events were scheduled including Welcome Back Carp Day, Summer Camp, Museum Day, and the annual Inland Waterways Festival. The new passenger m/v LOUISIANE has scheduled six stops in Marietta next year, with ORM tours being offered. Museum chair Bill Reynolds also reported two new Bill Reed oil paintings on display (Str. GEN. QUITMAN and one of Str. DAKOTAH, the gift of William Koltelc.) A framed photo of Str. CHARLES T. CAMPBELL was also received from Maryann Ossoff. In addition, Capt. Holes uniform jacket is now on display as part of an enhanced Civil War on the River exhibit. Clarington's Upper Ohio River Museum has partnered with USCE's Pittsburgh District to revitalize the visitor center at Hannibal Locks and Dam, which will include a Corps-produced video highlighting the history of the facility. The museum is assisting in the production of the exhibits.

Patricia Van Skaik of Inland Rivers Library at Cincinnati shared a report of their current exhibit "Bills of Lading: Viewing Cincinnati through Its River Trade" on display through November 15. In addition the Thomas Cottrell collection of 16 volumes of bills of lading has been indexed, with Patricia requesting information about Mr. Cottrell that may be known to S&D members. Capt. Jesse P. Hughes' diaries have also been added to the digital library, and work is progressing on W. E. Reed's 60 volumes of steamboat scrapbooks. Capt. Jim Blum offered a report from Mercantile Library at St. Louis that cataloguing of all its most recent collections continues, and offers great accessibility to everything currently in the Library. He also announced that Sean Visintainer no longer serves as curator, and a search for a replacement is underway.

Frank Prudent outlined the meeting schedule of Middle Ohio River chapter of S&D. Their spring

gathering this year at Clifty Falls in Madison, IN featured Phil Johnson's update on the DELTA QUEEN, followed by their August meeting in Cumberland Falls, KY and next year's spring offering slated for Bardstown, KY. Ohio-Kanawha Chapter president Jim Bupp reported on their efforts to provide applications for S&D membership to those training as river pilots at the Training Center in Point Pleasant. And all present were pleased to learn of the chapter's financial stability in these perilous times with \$30 in the chapter cigarbox.

Jo Ann Schoen next provided a DELTA QUEEN update with an email from Cornell Martin. Backers are pushing hard to get legislation passed before the current session of Congress adjourns at year's end. The House is expected to pass it quickly, while Senate passage will be more difficult. REFLECTOR editor Tschiggfrie made his annual plea for letters, emails and stories for upcoming issues, while our digital wizard and webmaster Brock Rogers was introduced to the crowd. The nominations committee of Ruth Guenther and Barbara Hameister presented the slate of nominees for office. Nominees for the coming year were Jeff Spear, president; Vic Canfield, vice president; Sharon Reynolds, secretary; and Dale Flick, treasurer. Also nominated for a 3-year term on the Board of Governors were Lee Woodruff, chair; Capt. Bill Barr; and John Fryant. There being no nominations from the floor, all were re-elected by unanimous acclamation. And with the upcoming excursion/tour/luncheon as next event of the day, a record one-hour business meeting was adjourned.

The noon excursion from Parkersburg to Blennerhassett Island aboard the m/v ISLAND BELLE sternwheeler afforded an opportunity to enjoy a box lunch on the island's picnic grounds, followed by a tour of the impressive reconstruction of the original Harman Blennerhassett mansion occupied by the family until 1806, as well as the original Putnam-Houser home from that same era. S&D visitors were given VIP treatment by retired Blennerhassett State Park historian Dr. Ray Swick, who led the tour. After returning to Marietta, members had a chance to "spiff up" in advance of the evening banquet and program.

*Text of Annual Meeting report continues on page 34.*



*Lafayette Hotel welcomes 77th Annual Meeting of S&D with banner announcing the gathering displayed from balcony at corner of Front and Greene Streets. Brock Rogers photo.*



*Loyal DQ supporters Pat Carr, Barbara Hameister, Ruth Guenther and Carol Roth pause briefly from their efforts to recruit letter writers at ORM meet and greet session.*



*Capt. Bill Barr explains a fine point during discussion with your editor and Michael Jones on Friday evening at Ohio River Museum. Photo courtesy of Barbara Hameister.*



*Jim Bupp shared the story of his contribution of this capstan on display outside ORM as he poses with one of many artifacts donated by S&D members over the years.*



*M'Lissa, Carolyn and Rick Kesterman take a moment during their visit with Woody Rutter to smile for our camera while viewing the exhibit honoring the 75th anniversary of Ohio River Museum.*



*Opening of the annual business meeting in the Lafayette ballroom Saturday morning was chaired by Lee Woodruff, with members from thirteen states in attendance. Photo by Brock Rogers.*





*Waitin' on the levee, waitin' for the ROB'T. E. LEE ... Capt. Jim Blum, Jim Reising, and Capt. Bill Barr enjoy a sunny fall morning at Parkersburg before boarding ISLAND BELLE.*



*Some of the S&D crowd on upper deck of ISLAND BELLE before departure from Parkersburg's Point Park on Saturday. Another S&D contingent was encamped on main deck.*



*As noon departure neared, S&D officials assisted boat crew in boarding our group. On one occasion we recall Jeff Spear and Vic Canfield mention the words "worse than herding cats."*



*Pilot for the twenty minute cruise down to Blennerhassett was Capt. Gary Kitchen. Gary provided lively narration, and kept the crowd entertained with more than just "historical" facts.*



*Dale Flick greets Connie and Gary Frommelt, with smiling Jim Reising in foreground. For many who attended this year, the visit to Blennerhassett was a first. Unanimous consensus was that it was an extremely enjoyable excursion.*



*Occasionally a photo is snapped which captures a moment that needs little or no explanation in a caption. Such was the case with our distinguished president as he presided over the luncheon. Signs notwithstanding, all S&D wildlife were fed.*



*Harman Blennerhassett Mansion as reconstructed in the State Park 1984-91. Originally built in 1800, the Palladian-style home was burned to the ground in 1811, after the family fled the island in December 1806. Brock Rogers photo.*



*Capt. Alan Bernstein and Dave Vornholt of New Richmond, OH frame the portrait of Capt. Ernie Wagner displayed at Susanna House, Dave's Bed and Breakfast. Alan's first river job was aboard DQ with Capt. Wagner. Brock Rogers photo.*



*First group of S&D visitors meet outside mansion with Dr. Ray Swick (far left) for general orientation to the grounds prior to touring buildings on the island. Brock Rogers photo.*



*Two longtime friends share some time before the evening banquet. Although not privy to Bill and Alan's discussion, we suspect there were more than a few good stories swapped.*



*Blennerhassett historian Dr. Ray Swick and mansion docent offer an introduction in the entrance hall to the history of the family, their home and its reconstruction. Brock Rogers photo.*



*Banquet guests on left are Jim Blum, Charles Jordan, Frank Prudent, Alexandra Oglesby, Taylor Abbott. Vic Canfield, John Fryant and others in background. Brock Rogers photo.*



*Three well-known rivermen in the passenger boat business compare notes. From left, Alan Bernstein, Gary Frommelt and Tom Dunn. All three of these gentlemen have been featured speakers at our S&D banquets. Brock Rogers photo.*



*Capt. Bill Judd gives a warm welcome to Lil and Forrest Smith at the end of the evening's program festivities, while M'lissa Kesterman looks on approvingly. As usual, visiting continued long into the evening hours.*



*From his early days on the DELTA QUEEN, through the years operating MIKE FINK restaurant and the popular BB Riverboats, Alan fascinated the crowd. Capt. Jim Blum photo.*



*Hamilton, OH father-and-son members Bob and Robby Grubbs pose for our camera after the program. Mom Sheila also joined the family group for the weekend.*



*Barbara Hameister captured this snapshot of Cincinnati tablemates Dale Flick, Jane Greene and Betty Elsey at the beginning of the evening banquet.*



*The customary formal portrait at meeting's end of our not so formal officers and board. Front row L to R: Dale Flick, Bill Judd, Alan Bernstein, Fred Rutter, Tom Dunn, and Vic Canfield. Back row L to R: Taylor Abbott, Bill Barr, John Fryant, Michael Jones, Lee Woodruff, Jeffrey Spear, your editor, and Frank Prudent. Brock Rogers photo.*

# Father's Steamboat Fleet

by Fr. Thomas Keller

As a small child, I fondly remember listening to my Grandfather who was born in 1898 tell stories of steamboats on the Mississippi River. Later, I was thrilled to ride the TALISMAN and the S.S. ADMIRAL. When in 8th grade, I had my formal introduction to steamboats. It is a story of stowaways and river intrigue and begins with the DELTA QUEEN and the MISSISSIPPI QUEEN's annual reenactment of the race between the ROB'T. E. LEE and NATCHEZ beginning in New Orleans and culminating in St. Louis on July 4, 1870.

The Delta Queen Steamboat Co. used a business about 20 miles south of downtown St. Louis to take on V.I.P. guests for the final three-hour leg of the cruise. My parents were aware of this little known information so we took bold action. We got up early and blended in with invited guests watching two big silhouettes against the morning sun slowly creep up the river. Then it was time for a leap of faith. We walked onto the deck of the small towboat HELEN B., together with the invited guests and were shuttled into the channel where we pulled along the big MQ. It was scary and exciting while we all leaped one at a time over the rushing water between the hulls onto the MQ. After the jump, we were committed to the crime, so we did what all stowaways do: we acted like we were supposed to be there. The race began with blasts from the DQ and MQ whistles. The two big boats lumbered upriver between barge fleets tied to both banks. More blasts from the whistles as we passed the occasional towboat working the Fourth of July holiday. Slowly the hazy summer St. Louis downtown skyline came into view. However, I became suspicious when the DQ, who led the race most of the way, slowed down, allowing the MQ to take the antlers! The calliope played gleefully as we passed the Gateway Arch and then under the Eads Bridge. Although I felt the glory of victory aboard the MQ, I've never fully trusted steamboat races since then.

Regardless of the race's outcome, nothing slowed down my newfound fascination for such large magnificent boats that are pushed by those big

paddlewheels. Little by little, I found books about the Mississippi and most of all I loved to study photographs of the old steamboats. I also love to make things, so making models of steamboats came instinctively. My first, made while I was still in grade school, is just popsicle sticks and toothpicks arranged to resemble what was my memory of the MQ. I have been making models of steamboats ever since.

My first job was with Gateway Riverboat Cruises, successor to Streckfus Steamers in St. Louis. This was while Capt. Jim Blum piloted the "little boats" m/v TOM SAWYER and m/v HUCK FINN; Capt. Bill Carroll, former Master of the S.S. ADMIRAL, still patrolled the wharf boat, and Tom Dunn managed the office as he still does today. At the time, the St. Louis riverfront was experiencing a renaissance because the PRESIDENT had returned to St. Louis and the levee was still filled with restaurant and entertainment boats. It was a great summer job and I loved every minute.

Today, I scratch-build model steamboats in the 1/64th "S-Scale." My work isn't on the same level as experts like John Fryant. He reproduces boats with scientific accuracy. My models might have a folk art element to them, but that's only because there are some technical aspects of modeling I've never mastered, so I improvise. Also, I am probably in a hurry to put them in the water. My biggest violation is I cheat on the hull. I simply cover a cut piece of styrofoam with basswood and congratulate myself on another "unsinkable" ship. Then I probably spend hours studying photographs of the steamboat I want to build. *Way's Packet Directory* provides length and width. I imagine it in three dimensions and start measuring and gluing wood together. I do work hard to recreate the superstructure as accurately as possible. The shear of the decks is an important detail many modelers miss. It is difficult to make a piece of basswood bend the right way to achieve a proper shear, but if it is done properly it is incredibly satisfying. Another challenge is building without all the measurements, but needing

all the pieces to fit together. The height of the main deck or the cabin is usually unrecorded. The dimensions of the pilothouse are lost to history. You can reproduce the number of stanchions but unless you know the distance between them it may have catastrophic results to the overall proportions. Capt. Way meticulously records the hull's length and width, but I'd love to know the height from waterline to the pilothouse roof too!

During the building process I equip the models with Dumas Products running hardware and add the R/C components and LED lighting. But these always require little compromises to the historical accuracy to make a model functional. Weight distribution, locations of the R/C components, motor or batteries, and access for maintenance all require modifications for which I hope a true steamboat buff or modeler with a keen eye will pass a merciful judgment.

Then there are colors! Modern excursion boats favor white with fire truck red trim, occasionally substituting the red with bright yellow or blue. But can they be trusted? Black and white photos are rich in detail but lack the colors. Deck and roof colors, stanchions on the main deck, pilothouse domes, name boards and even paddlewheels all must have been painted for either practicality or to draw attention. But how can we know exactly? Perhaps one might assume orthodoxy of colors among steamboats over the years, but fickle captains had very different colors available during the era of Victorian packets from those of the pre-WWII excursion boats. The study of colors available to steamboat captains is an article itself. Luckily, some evidence exists on the few preserved historic boats, or the old folk models found in museums, and in early color photographs, but I wish there were more evidence. [Providentially, Fr. Keller's frustration is addressed in John Fryant's column on page 32 - Ed.]

Gems of information on color or another detail show up on [www.steamboats.org](http://www.steamboats.org). Facebook is great for sharing photos, but nothing is better than the debate of the characters and historians who still occasionally chime in on [www.steamboats.org](http://www.steamboats.org).

Several other resources including the S & D REFLECTOR has improved the quality of my work.

The Old Boat Column in *The Waterways Journal* provides great information about steamboats and has had venerable authors over the years. Alan Bates' *The Western Rivers Steamboat Cyclopedium* is indispensable to understanding accurate models. UW La Crosse Historic Steamboat online library is an excellent resource for steamboat photos and they have helped me find details I would never have known about. Finally, the members of the St. Louis Admiral's R/C Model Boat Club are tremendously supportive and offer endless inspiration and help with model building and equipping models for radio control. There are several other builders in the club who focus on steamboats and towboats.

In the fall of 2015, while enjoying pilothouse hospitality on the Riverboat TWILIGHT, I showed Capt. Kevin Stier some photos of my models. I was extremely honored when he asked me to make a model of the venerable old catamaran ferry CITY OF BATON ROUGE for its Centennial in May of 2016. That model was featured in the September 2016 edition of the S & D REFLECTOR.

The model of the CITY OF BATON ROUGE was the first I've ever built for someone else and the first that was not equipped for R/C use. It was a liberating experience to simply build without the need to compromise for powered sailing, but it was also a challenge because I knew river buffs would be scrutinizing that model like a steamboat inspector of old.

My childhood friend and fellow steamboat buff, Darin Schuld helps pilot the models with me when we put them in water. Darin is a very well-connected river buff and he keeps me informed of what happens on the river. I may only get to put the models in the water once or twice a year, but those occasions always attract spectators and everyone seems to have just enough experience with the Mississippi River to feel compelled to tell a personal story.

My favorite time to run the models is right at dusk. Usually the wind dies down and the pond is perfectly calm. The model's lighting and silhouette along with the fading natural light gives them an appearance that, with a little imagination, can bring them to life. One can almost hear the noises on

deck or detect the smell of the engine room and the unmistakable odor of live steam. And one can feel the grandness that must have been the Steamboat Era.

Over the years, I have built dozens of models including KATE ADAMS, S.S. ADMIRAL, QUEEN CITY, CAPITOL, CITY OF VICKSBURG, SUSIE HAZARD and others. And

I have a list of dozens more in my head that I hope to build someday.

Although Americans seem to have difficulty holding onto the relics of our past, I hope that the remaining steamboats and the many models of long-lost steamboats serve as a lasting reminder and memorial of the amazing machines that helped expand and build our nation. 🇺🇸

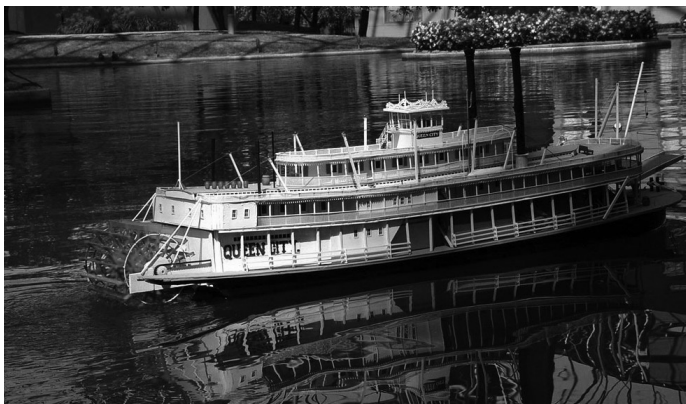


*Above: Steamer S.S. ADMIRAL, flagship of Streckfus excursion fleet at St. Louis beginning in 1940. Below: Anchor Line packet CITY OF VICKSBURG.*



*Above: Streckfus steamer CAPITOL by day and night. She served at New Orleans and tramped the Upper Mississippi. Below: Lower Mississippi packet KATE ADAMS.*





*Above: Famed Ohio River packet QUEEN CITY. Below: QUEEN CITY in foreground with CAPITOL in distance.*



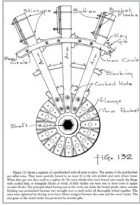
*Above: Streckfus Steamer Service's steam harbor tug SUZIE HAZARD. All photos courtesy of Fr. Thomas Keller.*



## **SNYDER Update from Fred Smith**

On October 17th, a bulletin arrived from Fred Smith of Ohio History Connection: "We are happy to report that the third phase of restoration of W. P. SNYDER, JR. is about to commence this fall. We trust that readers of the S&D REFLECTOR will be interested in our plans. On October 6th we received favorable bids that allow the full extent of the work to occur. Generally the project consists of, but is not limited to: restoration including floor and ceiling painting, asbestos insulation

repair, installing authentic period paint colors, repairing door hardware, installing missing door thresholds, coordinating installation of historic accessories. Final cleaning includes removal of all construction debris, sweeping, mopping, and glass cleaning. Exterior restoration includes repairing rot damage, fixing roof leaks, and painting sections of the exterior as described in the bids. Final cleaning includes removal of all construction debris and cleaning as above. We anticipate completing work by the end of next summer at the latest. She will be in fine form for her 100th birthday." 🕒



# Small Stacks

## Steamboat Colors – Part 1

by John Fryant

One of the most challenging aspects of modeling or producing paintings of old steamboats is determining their color schemes. During this series we will investigate paint colors, photographic film types, lighting conditions and perhaps other issues that haven't as yet crossed your author's mind.

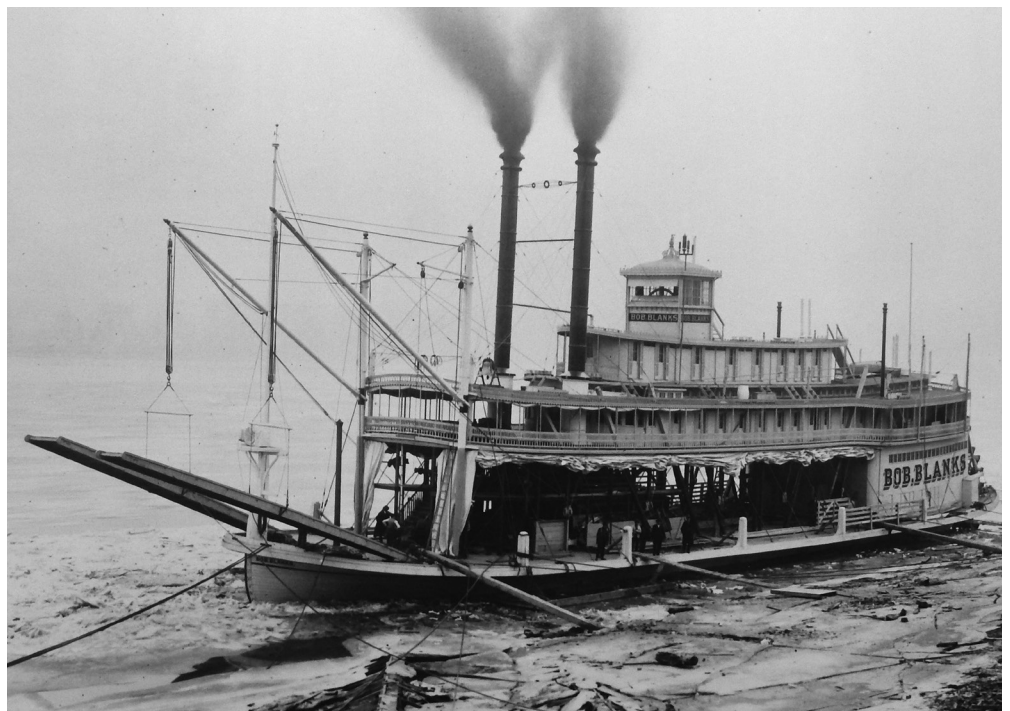
First let's talk about old photos and film. Of course, color photos of nineteenth and early twentieth century steamboats do not exist, as color film hadn't yet been invented. The glass plate negatives and early black and white film translated the colors of a subject into shades of gray in varying degrees of brightness. To render the subject accurately, the brightness levels must correspond as closely as possible to the brightness of the actual colors themselves.

Up until 1926 the general black-and-white film in common use was orthochromatic film. This film was sensitive to blue and green and as a result, reds and yellows appeared dark, sometimes black, in photos taken with it. Panchromatic, or continuous tone film was introduced in that year and that film rendered colors in black-and-white photos much closer to their relative brightness. Panchromatic film quickly replaced orthochromatic, but the latter continued in limited use as it was easier to process.

With orthochromatic film used in photos of boats, aircraft and other vehicles taken in the 1920s and 30s, it is difficult to differentiate between the reds and blacks. Yellows and blues appear dark; often the yellow will appear darker than the

blue. If panchromatic film was used, reds appear much lighter than blacks. Other factors, such as filters, natural lighting conditions and printing techniques could alter the relative brightness of the various colors. Not knowing what colors glass plate negatives (Daguerreotypes) were more or less sensitive to, an invitation is extended to our readers who might have such information to step in and shed some light.

One of my favorite "mystery" steamboat photos for color determination is of the cotton boat BOB BLANKS, brand new at the Howard yard. It's a cold winter day in 1903 and she has steam up, ready to head south. Now study the photo carefully. A good enlargement helps. Note that the main deck nosing, engine room bulkheads, canvas drop curtains, jack staff, heat shields at the bottoms of the stacks and the water barrel on the hurricane roof are all a lighter shade than the main cabin, texas and pilothouse. Note also that there is a definite color separation line on the derrick posts right at the boiler deck level. A reasonable guess is that those upper cabins were painted a buff color. Why? Well, I've read that a buff or khaki color was used in the tropics to repel insects. That's why the Navy's warships used in tropical regions of that period had buff colored superstructures. Since this boat was intended to work in southern waters, perhaps that was why those parts of the boat where the passengers spent most of their time would be so painted.





Different lighting situations or printing techniques could also alter the appearance of colored portions of the vessels. Two photos of the 1897 towboat DOLPHIN NO. 3, new at the Howard yard illustrate this. These two views were taken on the same day, perhaps within an hour of each other. Note that the skiff tied alongside is in the same place in both photos. However, the light in each photo is different. The stern view plainly shows the darker color (gray?) applied to the main deck bulkheads, while the bow view shows them looking entirely white. But wait – look very closely at the engine room bulkhead in the bow view. A color separation line appears very faintly just below the letters “No. 3”. Direct sunlight was hitting the side of the boat probably “whiting out” the darker paint color. Someone having only the bow photo would think that the boat was painted entirely white.

Wise advice to modelers and artists is to collect as many photos as you can of the boat that interests you. This will either help to enlighten you or further confuse you. And until someone invents computer software that accurately converts black and white photos to color, the determination of colors will still largely be a matter of guesswork. To add to the confusion, steamboats were frequently re-painted. According to the late Alan Bates, the colors selected were often the cheapest available at the paint store or else whatever happened to be available in the paint locker on board.

This treatise will continue in the next issue. Meanwhile, readers having opinions or factual information about steamboat colors are encouraged to contact me ([jnoboat@aol.com](mailto:jnoboat@aol.com)) or our REFLECTOR editor ([reflector@comcast.net](mailto:reflector@comcast.net)).

**BOB BLANKS** (0657) shown on left was owned by J. P. Parker, then the Carter brothers. Her 175 x 35 x 5 wood hull carried engines 16's - 7 ft. stroke. She ran out of New Orleans to Red River. Photo from John Fryant



**DOLPHIN NO. 3** (To619) as shown on right was completed for DolphIN Transportation Co. of St. Louis for Capt. John Lueben. Her 155 x 32 x 5 hull carried Ainslee-Cochran engines 20's - 7½ ft. stroke, originally built for sidewheel service on packet CALHOUN. Both photos from Murphy Library.



*Text of Annual Meeting report continued from page 23.*

After the evening banquet, Mike Washenko spoke briefly about the DELTA QUEEN. He and his wife are minority partners in the new company which owns the boat. He presented a specially-designed gift pin to each person present who supported efforts to pass S1717 to keep the veteran sternwheeler on the rivers. He also asked for help in writing local U.S. Senators to urge their support for that legislation. Mike offered special recognition for the loyal support of Barbara Hameister, JoAnn Schoen, and Carol Roth in their tireless efforts to encourage others to help save the boat. To cap off the presentation, two DQ jackets were auctioned off, and were awarded to the highest bidder, who just happened to be Mary Bernstein, wife of our guest speaker this year, Capt. Alan Bernstein of BB Riverboats in Newport, KY. After an introduction by Alan's longtime friend and colleague Capt. Bill Judd, Alan shared some of his early years on the river, which began with his work in 1970 in the DELTA QUEEN's galley, and continued through the years that he operated the MIKE FINK riverboat restaurant in Cincinnati and Covington, through his active involvement in the Passenger Vessel Association, and culminating in the successful operation of today's well-known excursion boat fleet and its flagship BELLE OF CINCINNATI. Along the way, S&D members were also treated to some snippets of Alan's work in helping to organize and carry out the Tall Stacks celebrations in Cincinnati. All in all, the audience was captivated by Capt. Bernstein's amazing sense of dedication, hard work, and infectious sense of humor in his long career in the river excursion passenger business.

As always, there are many unscheduled events and conversations with friends that take place in between (and sometimes coincident with) the various "sessions" of a typical S&D weekend. Two such occasions for your editor occurred when Michael Jones captured this writer's attention with an email article about the recent discovery of the steamer MALTA's remains at Malta Bend on the Missouri River. Enroute between St. Louis and Council Bluffs, IA, the boat sank in 1841 and was discovered 37 feet below ground in a cornfield 1000 feet from the current river channel. This is reminiscent of the earlier discovery of BERTRAND and also of

ARABIA near Kansas City back in 1987. In fact, both ARABIA and MALTA's remains were found by David Hawley. His most recent find lies within a 20 x 140-foot outline, and not until the excavation commences can it be determined whether the boat was headed upriver with fabric, food and household goods, or downstream loaded with furs for the American Fur Company in St. Louis. Whatever transpires, Michael is hopeful that S&D may be among the first to see photos of the unearthing. The second bonus enjoyed by your editor occurred on Saturday evening following the program when Jim Reising shared a viewing of his recently completed DVD for Howard Steamboat Museum on Capt. Jim Howard, a masterfully-done video.

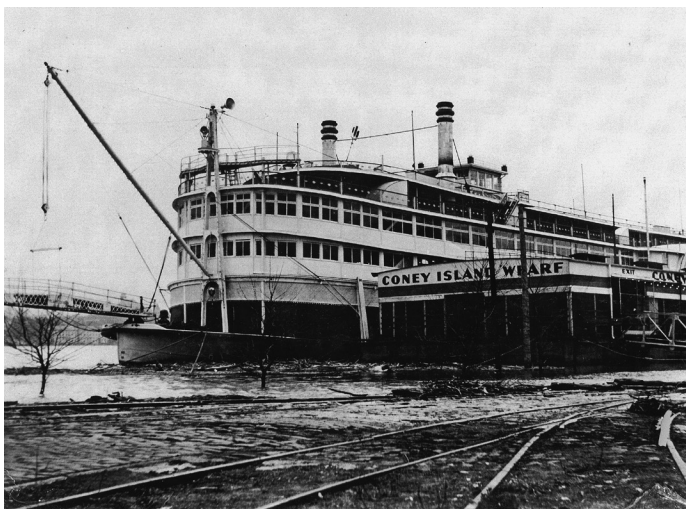
With next year's meeting scheduled for September 15-16, the Officers, Board members and those who attended this year's gathering extend a cordial invitation to all who read these words. Come join us in 2017 as we celebrate the stories of our nation's rivers, its boats and its people. It is a weekend sure to be filled with great memories and good times. And for those who would like more info about S&D and its journal, S&D REFLECTOR, please check us out at [www.riverhistory.com](http://www.riverhistory.com) or on our Facebook page. We'd love to welcome you aboard!

Although not a complete listing of attendees, these are folks who signed our guestbook: Kit Arelin; Taylor Abbott; Debbie and Bill Barr; Steve and Cheryl Barrickman; Alan and Mary Bernstein; Lois Follstaedt Bickel; Jim Blum; Susan Burks; Victor Canfield; Pat Carr; Tom Dunn; R. Dale Flick; Gary and Connie Frommelt; John and Sharon Fryant; Ben Gilbert; Daniel and Dorothy Goen; Bob, Sheila and Robby Grubbs; Ruth Guenther; Barbara Hameister; Gayle and Bill Hindman; Helena and Bob Isfort; Mike and Rita Jones; Charles Jordan; Bill and Darlene Judd; M'Lissa, Rick and Carolyn Kesterman; Mary Ann Knoutz; Kay and Tom Metzler; Charles Montague III; John and Gwenn Noftsger; Alexandra Oglesby; Liz Patterson; Frank Prudent; Jim Reising; Judy Reynolds; William Reynolds; Carol Roth; Bee and Woody Rutter; Fred Rutter; Jo Ann Schoen; Robin Simpson; Lil and Forrest Smith; Jeffrey Spear; Geraldine Swarts; David Tschiggfrie; David Vornholt; Mike Washenko; Joanne and Jim Williams; Lee Woodruff; Kathleen Wyatt; Jane Young. 🍷

### *Reflections from Our Readers continued from page 3.*

Pink Varble story, along with some of his observations. Fred did some follow-up on his suspicion that the large-wheeled device in the foreground reminded him of logging wagons used in the North Woods and he came up with the following results from Wikipedia: "Michigan logging wheels, also known as big wheels, logger wheels, katydids or nibs, are a type of skidder. They extended the season in which the logging industry could extract timber from the North Woods of Michigan by removing the need for icy ground to travel over. The logging wheels were a specially-designed large set of wooden wagon wheels that could carry logs up to 100 feet in length by suspending them from the wheel axle. They were first built by Silas Overpack in 1875 at the request of a farmer who had found they were useful for logging over softer terrain. At the time, Michigan was the nation's leading producer of timber." A big thank you to Fred for clearing up that part of the story.

Of course, that still begs the question, what is a set of logging wheels doing on a riverfront somewhere on the Ohio, Lower Mississippi or Tennessee? As always, our readers' comments are invited and most welcome.



*A visit with Tom and Barbara McNamara in Cincinnati this September brought an unexpected surprise as evidenced by the photo above. ISLAND QUEEN and her Coney Island wharfboat are obviously riding out the high water inching upwards over the tracks on the Public Landing. We leave it to our Cincinnati-area Sherlocks Bill Judd, Dale Flick, and Tom Schiffer to supply a date. Photo from Larry Ulrich collection.*



## Final Crossings

### Walter S. Carpenter

Walter S. Carpenter, 99, of St. Marys WV, passed away July 30, 2016 in Charleston, WV. He was born May 23, 1917 in St. Marys, son of the late Hiram A. Sr. and Mary Ambler Carpenter.

Walter was a graduate of St. Marys High School and received his BA and MS degrees in Zoology and Chemistry from West Virginia University. He served in the U. S. Army from 1942-46, and was engaged in chemical warfare research attached to the San Jose Project in Panama. During his early years, he helped his father with timber, farming, river and construction interests. He retired from St. Marys High School in 1982, where he taught physics, chemistry and biology for 32 years.

A longtime member of S&D, Walter served for many years as historian and president of Pleasants County Historical Society and the Genealogy Room at Pleasants County Public Library was named in his honor. He also was honored with the 2006 West Virginia History Hero Award and in 2014 the Distinguished West Virginian Award.

Walter is survived by sons Deleno Quentin (Lee Ann), Walter Webb (Karen), Bryan H. (Darla), John E. (Mary Ann); three grandchildren and four step-grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren and five step great-grandchildren. Services were held August 4 at St. Marys United Methodist Church, with interment in St. Marys IOOF Cemetery.

*Our thanks to Woody Rutter for providing the REFLECTOR with Mr. Carpenter's obituary notice.*

### Back Cover

Father Thomas Keller's model of excursion steamer CAPITOL (story on page 28) is aglow with LED lights. Every excursion steamboat since Streckfus' first J.S. carried some sort of deck outline lights. *Photo courtesy of Fr. Keller.*

