

# S & D

# REFLECTOR

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of Pioneer Rivermen



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**Cumberland Caper  
Capt. Pink Varble & Falls of the Ohio (Part 5)**

## Front Cover

This shot of the steamer DELTA QUEEN heading upstream under the suspension bridge between Marquette, IA and Prairie du Chien, WI was snapped on September 14, 1957 during her annual 20-day Cincinnati-St. Paul cruise. Swung open to the left is the floating pontoon span of the railroad bridge that has been floated downstream with the current to allow her passage. See Jim Karnath's comment about this unusual bridge in his letter on page 3. Jim's dad, Capt. Walter Karnath may have been Upper Miss pilot on this trip along with partner Roy Wethern. *Photo from Don Rehm collection.*

Newport & Cincinnati Bridge, the city's first railway bridge built 1868-72. The present-day bridge replaced this structure in 1897. Thanks to Fred for his follow-up and to Tom for kindly forwarding part of an illustrated article about the bridge from a 2015 issue of *C&O Magazine*.

Capt. Jim Blum writes: "In the early spring of 2016 I had the opportunity of viewing the 2014 two-part mini series made for the History Channel titled HOUDINI which starred Adrien Brody. Each showing was preceded by a short introduction from Gerald Abrams, the mini series producer. The river cities of St. Louis and Cincinnati as portrayed got my attention.

Only knowing the name Harry Houdini, I was surprised at the opening scene of the chained and shackled Houdini standing on the edge of the up-river side of the Eads Bridge, looking down to a hole chopped in solid bank-to-bank Mississippi River ICE. Yes, he jumped, yes he surfaced — in highly dramatic fashion against a marvelous Hollywood creation of the St. Louis skyline of the era and famous bridge. Scratching my head, I thought of current flow and coming up in the same hole in the ice ... okay, a dramatic opening for this 'movie.' As the story develops, Houdini meets a 'locksmith' in Cincinnati who has developed a curved key that fits into the body of the lock making it impossible to visually detect. Houdini is impressed and hires the locksmith to develop locks that he will use in his escape performances.

When an opportunity presented itself to ask Mr. Abrams about the Cincinnati connection, he responded something to the effect that 'I think it was just for the movie.' What actual city Houdini found this locksmith in is not known. His real name was Jim Collins as used in the movie, and he stayed with Houdini as his assistant until Houdini's death.

When the December REFLECTOR arrived I was blown away by the story and poster of Houdini and the Str. J S in NOLA, 1907. A little internet research has revealed that a great deal of the mini series played loose with facts and repeated falsehoods that have developed over time; however it was entertaining. Now to learn that the Mississippi River actually did play a part in Houdini's career is fascinating."



## Reflections from Our Readers

Fred Dahlinger writes: "The REFLECTOR arrived today and I was surprised to see the levee image utilized in the Pink Varble article. A friend who is a real authority on carriages and wagons informed me that the device is sometimes called a 'gallymander.' Don H. Berkebile's *Carriage Terminology: An Historical Dictionary* advises that such a wheeled chassis was used in New England granite quarries, to hoist and move large pieces of raw cut stone. Perhaps it was used on the levee for moving large stones that were part of bridge abutments?"

Other examples used for the hauling of heavy artillery around Civil War era battlefields were termed a "sling cart." The heavy load, suspended below the frame, lowered the center of gravity and made for a more stable movement of the load from one location to another. It also minimized the height to which the work piece had to be lifted for loading. Although this provides some context for the image, there is still no specific river use answer."

‡ And so the mystery continues. A short note from Tom McNamara, however, confirms that the location of the view shown on page 13 is indeed Cincinnati, picturing the original

Jim Karnath writes: “I seem to recall there was a sternwheeler named APOLLO in the Wisconsin Dells that had G&E engines. The original APOLLO that is. Some guys built a new APOLLO around 1970 in the Dells. We would regularly visit it on our trips between Chicago (where we lived) and Winona. The builders actually found the wreck of the original APOLLO and retrieved the engines from it. Obviously they were too far gone to work, so they took them to the Nekoosa Foundry and Machine Works to have new ones cast and machined. They were installed in the new wooden hull boat and did eventually run. Her owners tried getting into the excursion business in the Dells but did not make it because they could not gain a landing close to where the tourists were and also their advertising was restricted.

By the way, did you know there is a mural in the McGregor (IA) Public Library showing the ALEXANDER MACKENZIE going upriver through the old railroad pontoon bridge? Of course, Capt. Walter Karnath was captain on the MACKENZIE. Somewhere I have a photo of Dad standing in front of that mural during a visit to the Bickels in McGregor — when I find it I’ll send it to you. I know Butch and I made trips on the INVINCIBLE with Dad when this pontoon bridge was still operating. Neat!”

† Jim’s comments about APOLLO are in response to our September 2016 issue which added her name to the list of known steamboats carrying Gillette and Eaton engines. Also appearing on page 26 of that issue was a photo of GORDON C. GREENE passing through the open span of the railroad pontoon bridge at McGregor. That amazing bridge operated until sometime around 1961. The m/v INVINCIBLE was Capt. Karnath’s harborboat at Winona, while the big ALEXANDER MACKENZIE, twin to the JASON, ran the Upper Miss for Central Barge Line up until 1952. Thanks to Jim, a visit to McGregor Public Library has now been added to our itinerary next time we head up to see Corky Bickel.

The editor recently received a forwarded note from Michael Herschler who writes: “A while back a Board member commented in the REFLECTOR

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### Thinking about submitting to the REFLECTOR?

Please follow these guidelines:

#### Articles

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

#### Features

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

#### Images

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

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regarding declining subscriptions. I submit a big reason for this is pictures. Look in the old Fred Way REFLECTORS — big, beautiful half and full page pictures you could study for hours. What is there today? Tiny little black and whites that I can’t see with a magnifying glass. I find the REFLECTOR much less interesting today. While the editor does **Reflections from Our Readers continued on page 31.**

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

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America's Steam & Diesel  
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.

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## Getting Posted Up

### Wanted: Story Tellers

Your March issue features an entertaining and much-anticipated article by our longtime Board of Governors chair, Bill Judd. Capt. Bill, with gentle yet persistent encouragement from his good wife Darlene, finally put pen to paper and relates a classic tale of efforts to take the excursion boat STAR OF JAMESTOWN way up Cumberland River, only to be met with some twists and turns along the way. Although there are S&D members who have been lucky enough to hear the captain share some of his river adventures in person, we now can share that story-telling skill with all of our readers. And you are in for a real treat.

This issue's other feature story is the concluding chapter in Leland Johnson's biography of Capt. Pink Varble. Leland is another master story teller, and we have been the beneficiary of the Varble family request to print Leland's final work in this magazine,

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along with the blessing and kind permission of Leland's widow. Both of these pieces highlight one of the major missions of this journal — to tell the stories of the men and women of our inland rivers, past, present and future. That is an ambitious and wide-ranging goal, and one that requires a lot of help. In a note accompanying his recent renewal, Dale Zubik requested that he “would like to see more articles on the Upper Ohio, Allegheny and Mon River.” We agree with Dale, and hope to be able to respond to that request. In so doing, we encourage our readers who are able to share those stories with us to send them for publication.

Our “Final Crossings” column on page 31 reports the sad news of Dave Morecraft's passing. Dave's singular contribution to riverboat fans is that he helped fashion the “voice of the river.” In tribute, we offer this picture of Dave taken back in 1988. 



## CONTRIBUTIONS TO S&D AND J. MACK GAMBLE FUND

S&D subscribers are permitted by Federal law to make financial contributions to S&D or to the Gamble Fund as 501(3)(c) organizations.

Thank you for giving consideration to this opportunity. If you desire to make a contribution, please send your check to:

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c/o PNC Institutional Investments  
attn. Kevin McManamon  
1900 East Ninth St. 13th Floor  
Cleveland, OH 44114



## Meet Our Contributors

**Capt. Bill Judd** (*Cumberland Caper*, p. 8) readily confesses that he is a riverman and proud of it, and also admits that he is not a gifted writer but just a woeful story teller. Bill comments that no real riverman is a liar, just an expert at bending the truth. A fifth generation riverman and the third generation to hold license, his family ran the ferry between Moscow, OH and Ivor, KY for over 100 years, while his great-grandfather made 42 trips by flatboat to New Orleans. Bill says, "I guess the gene was just there." Capt. Bill's first real exposure to the river was listening as a youngster to his uncles talk about their work as commercial rivermen for the P&C, L&C and Greene Line, and he developed an unusual relationship with Capt. John Beatty as a teenager. He recalled, "As a kid I took photos of towboats and had an unusual Polaroid camera. One day I asked Capt. John if I could ride his boats to take photos. His answer was 'hell NO.' When he asked to see my camera, I looked at that giant of a man and said 'hell No', and to my surprise Capt. John burst out laughing and said, 'Kid, let's make a deal.' I rode his boats and by the time I finished high school I was working as a pilot. No license required in that day. I worked for several major companies, but after I married my wife Darlene, I left the river so that I could be at home. Big mistake!! (not in getting married but in staying on shore.) By 1968 I had had enough of shore work and bought an old sternwheel towboat that was on its way to the scrap yard, my second big mistake!! I did persevere and had a nice business career as a boat owner and operator. It was a rather steep learning curve though. By the 1990's I began to sell off my equipment with the last boat going in 2005. After 37 years I was a boatman without a boat."

Capt. Bill attended his first S&D meeting in 1959, was elected to the Board in 1991 and appointed Chairman of the Board in 1995, serving in that position until the end of 2011. As he thought about his time as chairman, he reflected that "it was 17 years and time for an old man to step aside. Hope I did a good job." In addition to his river interests and

business, Bill managed the river operations for five of the Tall Stacks, and was recognized for his life-long service by receiving awards such as Admiral of Kentucky Waterways, Duke of Paducah and the U.S. Coast Guard's Meritorious Service Award. In looking back over a long river career, Bill observed that "Now I just sit on my porch, receive whistle salutes and wave as the new generation passes by. After these 65+ years I am still proud to be a riverman!!"

Save  
the  
Date

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

Plans for the 2017 Annual Meeting of S&D are well underway, with President Jeff Spear advising that our guest speaker this year will be Dick Rutter of Alameda, CA sharing his knowledge of the story of California river steamboats. Members are encouraged to contact the Lafayette Hotel toll-free at **800-331-9396** or **740-373-5522** to make room reservations and banquet reservations. Entree choices are prime rib (\$30/person), salmon (\$29/person) and lemon chicken (\$25/person). More details will be available in the June REFLECTOR.

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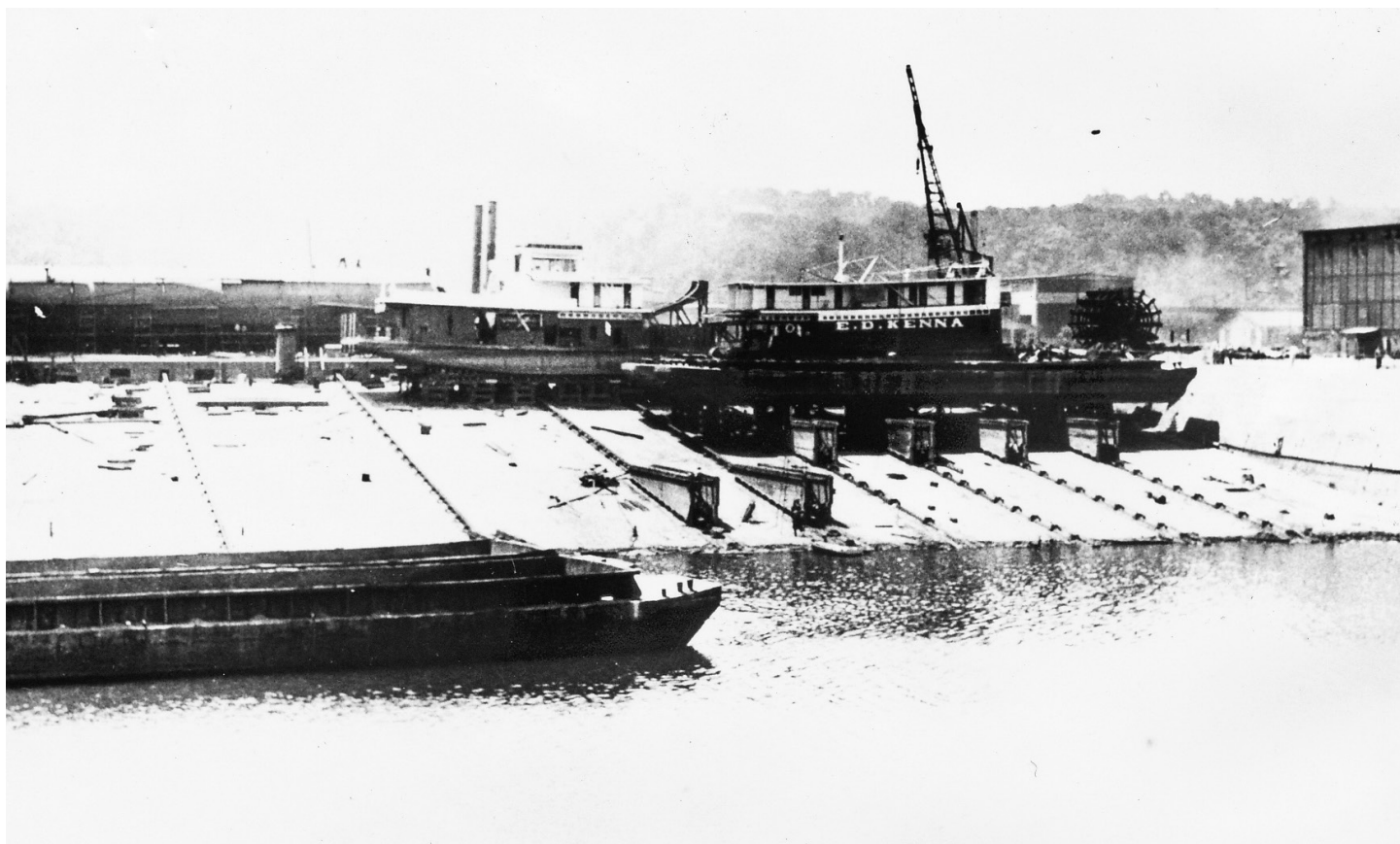
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Ohio River Company's E. D. KENNA (T6651) is shown above on the Dravo ways at Neville Island in 1936 for lengthening. Her hull was "spliced" at the dead flat and a 27-foot section inserted. Note that her wheel has been removed during this operation and sits up in the yard. Below, the original Ward-built towboat is icebound. According to Way's Steam Towboat Directory, her first trip away from Ohio River occurred in June 1935 when she delivered a barge of scrap from St. Louis to Ashland, KY. She went to the Illinois River coal towing trade in 1937-38 before returning to the Huntington-Cincinnati run. Photo from Ed Mueller collection.

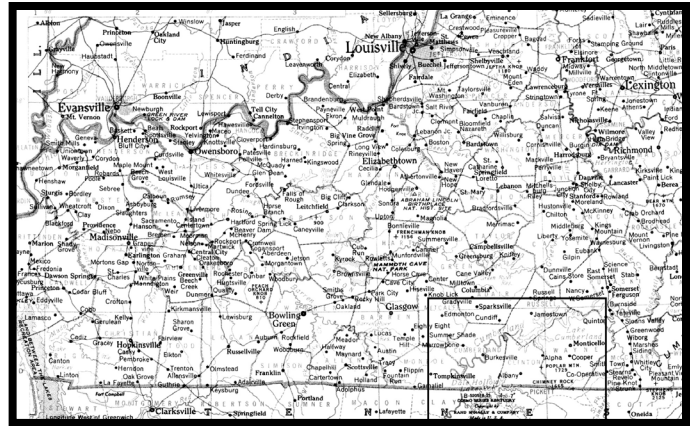


# Cumberland Caper

by Capt. William Judd

This story takes place way up the Cumberland River, far above the head of navigation as considered by both the Coast Guard and the Corps of Engineers. They both name Celina, TN at Mile 381.0 as the official head of navigation, but any riverman knows the real head of navigation was and is Burnside, KY, Mile 516.0. Even though Wolf Creek Dam at Mile 460.9 has no lock and its impoundment known as Lake Cumberland is considered landlocked, it is legally considered navigable water. Steamboats did run up to Burnside until 1933, but that's another story.

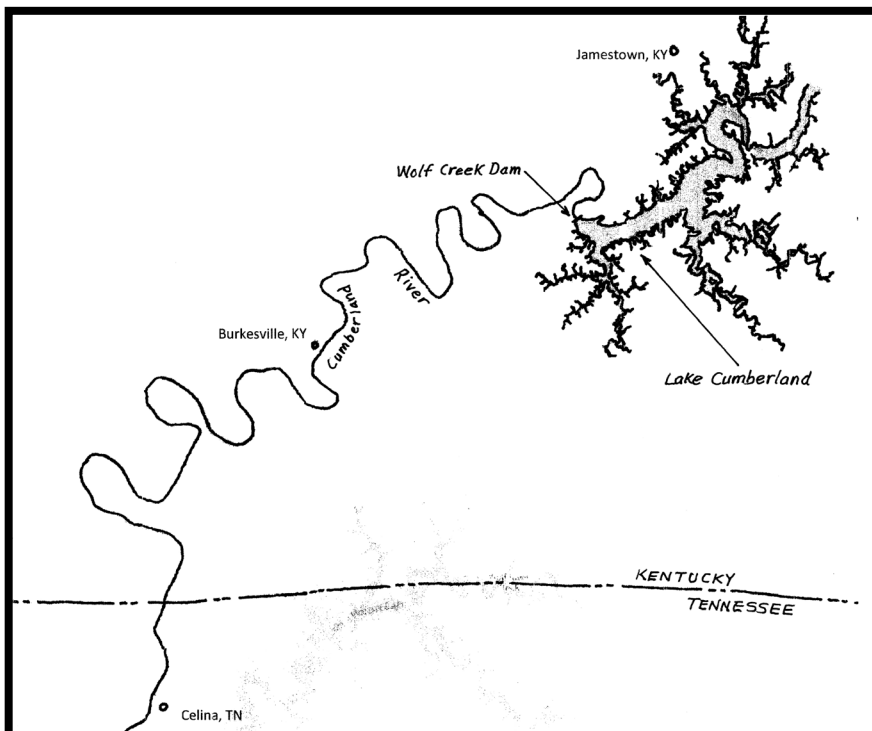
Now our main character is a good-looking sternwheel excursion boat known at the time of this caper as STAR OF JAMESTOWN. Built in 1971 at Dubuque Boat and Boiler Co. as MAGNOLIA BLOSSOM, the vessel was one of a handful of boats that were diesel-hydraulic driving actual pitmans to the sternwheel. The boat was originally based in Mobile, AL, and by 1980 became ISLAND QUEEN at Palm Beach, FL. The Webb Company of Lexington, KY bought the boat in 1989 for its Star Cruise Line operation, and sent it to Freeport



*Cumberland River pictured in detailed map is outlined above.*

Shipbuilding at Freeport, FL for major renovation that year. If the boat had seen a lot of water under her hull, the best and most unusual was still ahead. She was about to see some hard knocks and fast places.

The boat holds some numerous records, some a little dubious in nature. She is on record as the last commercial passenger boat to go up the Cumberland from Nashville to the Burnside area, actually making the trip up and back not once, but three times. Each



*Upper Cumberland River from Celina, TN to Jamestown, KY. Distance from Celina to Wolf Creek Dam by river is 80 miles.*

time, up and over the 260-foot high Wolf Creek Dam courtesy of a large movers' rig and trailers. The boat operated at Webb's Jamestown Resort and Marina as JAMESTOWN QUEEN. She made an outbound trip in 1992 to attend the Tall Stacks Celebration at Cincinnati. Here again, she set a record as the only known excursion vessel and maybe any vessel to have a collision with a hot air balloon. At one of the Tall Stacks side show events was a large gathering of hot air balloons, and on launching from the Kentucky shore they encountered a down draft as they crossed the river. My son, Capt. William M. Judd was master of the now-renamed STAR OF JAMESTOWN, while I was running Tall Stacks control and called the boat to warn him of the pending collision. Bill's answer was, "Dad, you've got to



be kidding.” If you think a Coast Guard inquiry and report is tough, try adding in an FAA investigation.

After Tall Stacks 92, the boat sat at Tucker Marine boatyard for a considerable time, and then moved to Marine Builders shipyard at Utica, IN where I supervised another rebuild of hull, engine and sternwheel, all at the Coast Guard’s requirement.

Now the caper begins. Starline closed its Kentucky River operation at Clays Ferry and decided the restaurant barge FISH MARKET and the STAR OF JAMESTOWN should be moved back up the Cumberland to Webb Jamestown Marina and Resort. A contract was arranged with Dee Bennett of Bennett Marine in Madison, IN using m/v ELSIE B to make the move. Little did the

captain of ELSIE B, known only to me as “Pappy,” have any idea what he was getting into. Capt. John Wanchic, a young but experienced Cumberland and Kentucky River man was placed in command of the STAR OF JAMESTOWN and the restaurant barge, representing Webb’s Starline interests.

The fleet set out the first week of June 1994. Things went real well down the Ohio and up the Cumberland, even the first twenty miles or so above Celina, but then things got kind of dicey. The water stages change daily as the big generation units are run up at Wolf Creek Dam, and the closer you get to the dam the higher the river fluctuations become. Normally the river will rise ten to twelve feet for several hours and then suddenly fall to about nothing. The ELSIE B and its tow had to know when the release was started and time their

movement to catch the rise, get in maybe six to eight hours of running time (remember, the current was very swift so progress was slow), then find a deep spot and tie off till the next release.

Now a new character joins the caper, Joe Foley. Joe was the main troubleshooter and “fix-it-upper” for Webb, the Starline and the Marina at Jamestown. I refer to Joe Foley as the “Admiral of the Upper Cumberland.” He was the one person posted on the Upper Cumberland, and even had a set of hand-drawn navigation maps of the river that he had done himself. Joe had a very intimate knowledge of the river from Celina to Wolf Creek, and knew Lake Cumberland just as well. He also knew, at least it seemed to me, everybody within a hundred mile radius of Jamestown. This attribute became paramount as the caper unfolded.

Early on the morning of June 13th, I arrived at Jamestown Marina to meet Joe and launch a pontoon boat just below Wolf Creek, and then proceeded down river to survey



*Above: STAR OF JAMESTOWN after 1992 Tall Stacks and her notorious collision with a hot air balloon. Below: m/v ELSIE B and tow making good time at Mile 408 on Upper Cumberland above Celina, TN en route to Jamestown, KY on June 14, 1994.*



the 35 miles to Burkesville, KY. Joe was at his best. They had shut down the generator units several hours before and the river was rapidly falling out. In that stretch there were four really bad bars or as the local officials said, riffles. Now these stretch across the river and literally form a dam, creating the upstream pools. I could see the bottom, boulders and fractured rocks, all set in sand. Nowhere did we get more than two or three feet of depth, requiring the raising up of the outboard to just float through. As we approached riffle number three, four men appeared in waders, spread out across the river fly fishing, with the water only up to their knees. By this time I was in a "panic state." I had never seen anything like this, and in my mind our project was in big trouble. Joe was calm as ever, saying "there will be six to eight foot over the riffles as the generator flow comes down."

Between Wolf Creek and Burkesville it was very desolate, a no man's land. Other than the fly fishermen, the only other persons seen were an occasional man with rifle in hand who was observing us, for reasons we later found out. I told Joe "if we hear banjo music, go faster." We never found the tow even though we went twenty miles below Burkesville before we had to return.

On June 14th, Joe and I took the pontoon and found ELSIE B and tow plodding along about Mile post 408 at a place called Holcombs Ferry. It was almost noon and I had hoped to get them up

to Burkesville, another twenty miles, before dark. Capt. "Pappy" was full of tall tales. One was that they had tied off in one of the pools in eight feet of water and around midnight the generator alarm went off and shut down due to heat. At daylight, ELSIE B was high and dry and "Pappy" walked around his boat and took photos.

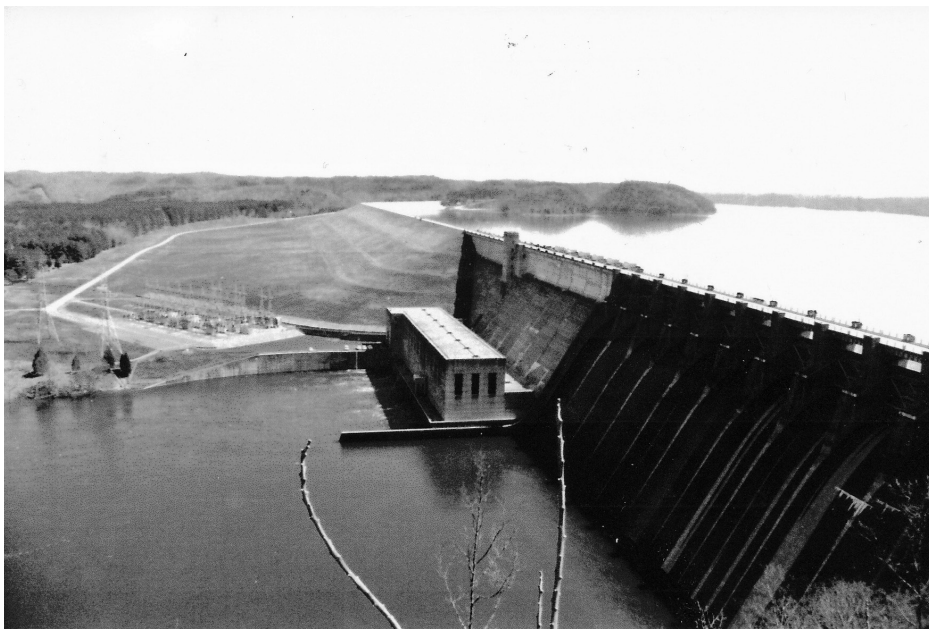
The engineers at Wolf Creek had decided to do another run and so with good water we got past Burkesville and made about another five or six miles. We wanted to get above riffle number four, but now the current was extremely strong, having taken two hours to make that last five miles. We tied the tow off in good water just below riffle four and held a high-level conference. Joe, "Pappy" and I agreed to let ELSIE B take just the restaurant barge and go on up to Wolf Creek. STAR OF JAMESTOWN would remain at Mile 431, tied to the left bank with a skeleton crew to care for the vessel. Joe and I repeatedly told the young man we left in charge to make sure that as the river rose and fell, to keep the vessel off the bank and in good water.

June 15th. I was staying with the Foleys in their garage loft apartment and it was supposed to be a kind of off-day. ELSIE B was still up at Wolf Creek where the loading of the restaurant barge was in progress, when Joe called and said, "the STAR OF JAMESTOWN is sunk." SUNK – did he say SUNK?? Now we knew where the boat was by river, but we had no idea how to find it by land. Joe called



***ELSIE B with STAR OF JAMESTOWN and restaurant barge in tow near Mile 420 below Burkesville, TN on June 14th.***

one of his friends to describe the area and received detailed instructions. So off we went in separate cars, Joe leading the way. After several false attempts at knocking on doors, we finally found the right farm and a very irate farmer. Again, "Admiral" Foley came to the rescue. The landowner calmed down, showed us a dirt road which led back to the river and sternly warned us and all our crew to stay on the road and the river bank: "Do not wander away from those perimeters if you want to stay out of trouble."



*Above: Wolf Creek Dam and Lake Cumberland. The dam is 260 feet high. The rectangular building at base of the dam houses the generator units. Capt. Bill blew a lock whistle when he arrived to no avail. Fred Way did the same at Kinzu on the Allegheny with identical results. Below: STAR OF JAMESTOWN at noon on June 15th with the river at low stage. At high stage only the pilot house and starboard roof were above water. All photos courtesy of Capt. Bill Judd.*



Well, back down the road we went and found a very sad sight. Only the pilothouse, bow and forward main deck were visible. All the rest was under water, the river being at high flow. Here we were, only thirty miles to Wolf Creek, but fifty miles from any chance of obtaining normal river salvage equipment. At this point I was rather down and out to say the least. First, I knew we had to notify the insurance underwriter and the Coast Guard.

June 16th. On site at 7:00 a.m., we were joined at 9:00 by Mr. Dudley Webb, head of Starline who, to say the least, was not a happy camper. Mr. Webb had a true mobile phone installed in his car and he called the insurance underwriters in Chicago to notify them of the situation. He wanted to abandon the vessel, haul it ashore with big dozers, and get his check. To which the head honcho underwriter said, "Let me call our surveyor, Bill Judd in Cincinnati, and get him down there." Mr. Webb replied, "He is standing here next to my auto," and handed me the phone. In short, I told the underwriters I felt I could get the vessel up, and they said to give it a try. In fact, my instructions were to use all means necessary to save the vessel. "Admiral" Foley looked at me and asked, "How?" to which I truthfully answered, "I have no idea." Joe Foley and I went back down the bank to the boat and held a big pow-wow. My answer was "innovate." Actually, I had no choice. The first step was to secure the vessel from slipping out into deeper water, so we hired three large, heavy-duty wreckers to come to the scene, wired their head cables to huge trees, ran their winch wires down to the vessel's starboard-side keels, and tightened up. Vessel secured.

The day did have several unusual events. About mid-afternoon a pick up truck with federal markings arrived with EPA personnel. They said a satellite had picked up an oil spill and they had come over 100 miles to check it out. All okay though, as we had an oil boom deployed. Later another section of our federal government arrived in the form of three Blackhawk choppers with crews, and soon several fires were in progress near us with crops of marijuana going up in flames. Remember those guys with rifles?

Now our plan of attack was that as I was getting the ideas, Joe was implementing them into reality. Whatever I came up with, Joe came up with the needed equipment and the right people. I frankly was relying on river history books I had read about the old time salvage jobs. Those old-timers simply closed up a vessel the best they could, put a lot of steam siphons to work, and basically pumped more water out than was coming in.

Well, that meant lots of plywood sheeting, steel rods, lumber and lots of pumps. Joe got to work contacting his many friends, supply store owners, equipment rental companies, etc., and what a job he did! We got a diving contractor out of Albany, KY to agree to be on site the next morning. The logistics were rather mind boggling to say the least. We left the site at dark, and I must confess I did not sleep well.



*Above: Wrecker units set with cables to secure vessel on June 16th.  
Below: Pumps and more pumps ready to get after the water on morning of 17th.*



June 17th. We were on site by 6:00 a.m. The dive team was there and had brought eight 2-inch Homelight and four 3-inch Honda water pumps. Foley had cleaned out the rental stores of pumps and hose. There were a total of eighteen pumps with hoses on hand.

By now Mr. Webb had reached an agreement with Wolf Creek not to release any water till after 6:00 p.m., and so we had a twelve hour window to get the boat up. We placed pumps on the guards, inside forward cabin and on the roof area aft with holes cut in the roof to get hoses down into the cabin and hull compartments. The divers set the hoses in aft areas where the water was deepest. All port side windows were boarded up and sealed. I had the dive team set airbags under the sternwheel for support as I sure did not want to lose the wheel as the boat rose. The only problem, though, was

that the boat did not rise. By noon lots of water had been pumped, but to no avail. By 4:30 p.m. we had compartments #1 through #3 dry with #4 and #5 still full. Water was still coming in but we were pumping it out at a faster rate. By 5:30 p.m. all compartments were basically free of water, yet the boat would not come up.

About mid-afternoon ELSIE B had arrived back on site. By 6:00 p.m. Capt. "Pappy" informed me that Wolf Creek had begun running water and we could see it already at our location. I guessed that the boat's hull had created a suction to the river bottom and in desperation I took a chance, let the wrecker cables go, and told Capt. "Pappy" to tie off ELSIE B with loose line to STAR OF JAMESTOWN and to gently jerk the boat. Two attempts were made with no success, so I said to "let out more slack line and then back like Hades." The STAR OF JAMESTOWN gave a heave and popped up like a submarine surfacing. The boat was finally afloat and we pumped her dry and had no leaks.

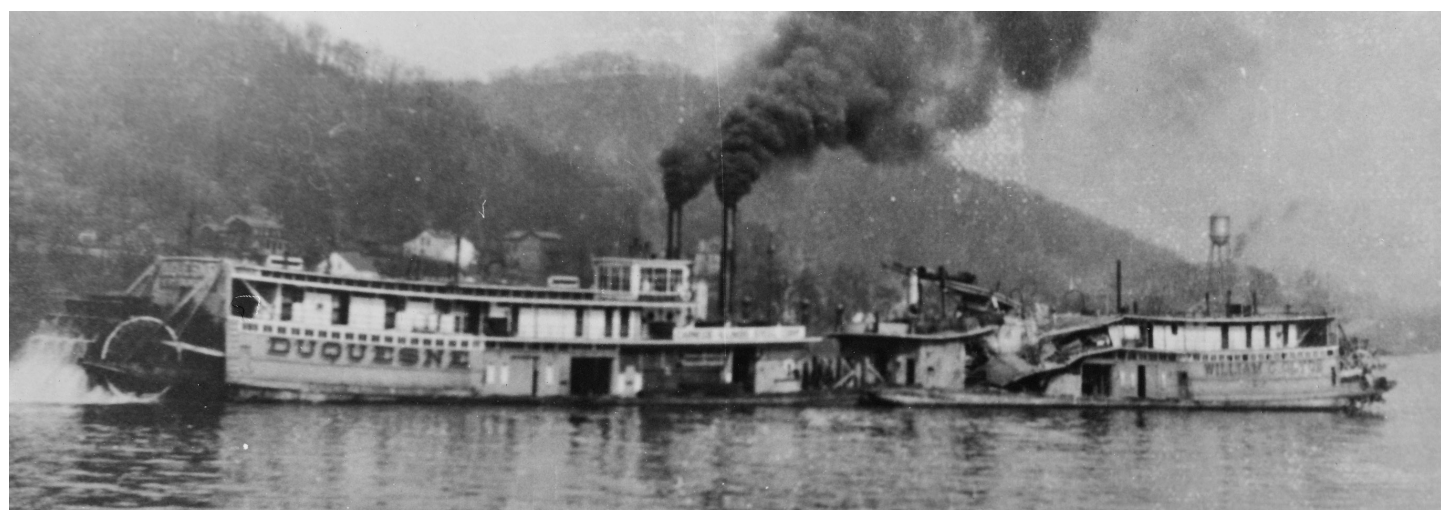
By now the river was rising rapidly and I was satisfied STAR OF

JAMESTOWN was sound, so I had ELSIE B hook up and leave six pumps on board with extra crew and had Capt. "Pappy" head up river. It took ELSIE B two days to reach the pull out site at Wolf Creek, but on June 19th the boat was out and high and dry on the house mover trailer. Although an inspection showed no hull damage, the inside and machinery were a total loss. For the next six months I made weekly trips to Jamestown, KY to oversee the rebuild. End of caper.

As Paul Harvey would say, "... and now the rest of the story." Mr. Webb ended up with a like-new vessel, her name was changed to JAMESTOWN QUEEN, and she operated there on Lake Cumberland till 1997 when it was once again sold to Mr. William Ferguson of Anchor High Marina at Old Hickory, TN. So off she went, up and over Wolf Creek Dam one more time and on down the Upper Cumberland River. She's still there in the Nashville area, I guess. 🕒



*JAMESTOWN QUEEN all like new in 1995 and ready to go. Photo taken at Jamestown Marina and Resort, Lake Cumberland.*



*US Steel Corp.'s DUQUESNE (T0645) tows the wreckage of WILLIAM G. CLYDE (T2662) back to Coal Valley, PA for rebuilding into JAMES E. LOSE. The CLYDE, towing seven loads while under charter to Mississippi Valley Barge Line, exploded a boiler on March 4, 1936 between Grand Tower and Wittenberg, MO downriver from St. Louis. Photo from Ed Mueller collection.*

# Capt. Pink Varble and the Falls of the Ohio (Part 5)

by Leland R. Johnson

## PINK'S PRIVATIONS

Headlines read “The Prize Flood of 1832 Will Please Hand over the Horns to 1883,” when the Ohio climbed in February 1883 to a level higher than recorded at the Falls in 1832. Raging water flooded Louisville’s Point and waterfront, submerging islands at the Falls including all of Shippingport where people took refuge in trees. Several drowned and more were trapped in their homes’ second stories with plenty of water but none to drink, with no food except what they snatched from wet pantries. The Falls City had gradually occupied the river’s floodplain and in 1883 the river took it back.

To rescue the suffering, Captain Pink took the steamboat MATTIE HAYS out in the floodwaters, and was joined by Louisville’s mayor, engineer, and physicians bringing along food and medicine. After Captain Billy Devan and his lifesavers carried their yawls up the stage onto the deck, Pink rang for full ahead and drove the HAYS against the river into the city’s east end, finding shelter from swift currents behind buildings. There, lifesavers dropped their yawls over the side, filled them with bread, bacon, and potatoes, and rowed through flooded streets. When they found souls marooned in upper stories, they left victuals for the healthy and carried the sick and helpless back to the HAYS for medical attention.

After lifesavers had explored a flooded section and rowed back to the HAYS, Pink moved the boat down the waterfront, anchoring every few blocks for lifesavers to rescue the sick and provision the hungry. At Shippingport they retrieved twenty families from their homes and trees, carrying them to the canal lockmaster’s house, which had been constructed on mounded earth above flood stages. Some refugees had nothing to eat for days and Captain Pink and his friends saved them from

starvation, if not drowning. Hailed as humanitarian for his aid to refugees in 1883, Captain Pink modestly instead extolled Captain Devan and the lifesavers. The following Christmas he thanked each lifesaver personally with the gift of a fat holiday turkey.

To Louisville’s surprise, the 1883 record was surpassed the following year, when in February 1884 the river incredibly climbed a foot or more higher than in 1883. Captain Pink and the lifesavers repeated their rescue efforts, using the RAINBOW instead of the MATTIE HAYS, which Clara Barton had chartered to distribute Red Cross supplies. Pink’s greatest service during the 1884 disaster, however, came when he saved the ferry W. C. HITE from destruction. The ferry, crowded with passengers, was caught by moving ice floes while attempting the crossing and drifted down sideways, lodging precariously atop the dam at the head of the Falls. Seeing this, Captain Pink ordered his brother Billy to take their towboat TRANSIT to the wreck, while he boarded one of the lifesavers’ yawls and raced to the ferry. Pink clambered aboard the ferry and held it steady while lifesavers evacuated passengers to safety. When Billy arrived with the TRANSIT, Pink lashed her to the ferry and the combined power of both boats pulled them from the dam’s crest and through the ice back to shore.

When not challenged by floods or ice, Pink’s piloting business thrived. During the 1880s he and fellow Falls pilots kept records of passing commerce and gave them to Army Engineers for project planning. In 1883, for example, pilots reported descending boats could pass the Falls 257 days, while ascending boats could get upstream over them during 57 days. That year, pilots took 1,475 boats carrying a half million tons of commodities—mostly coal, salt, and iron ore—across the Falls.

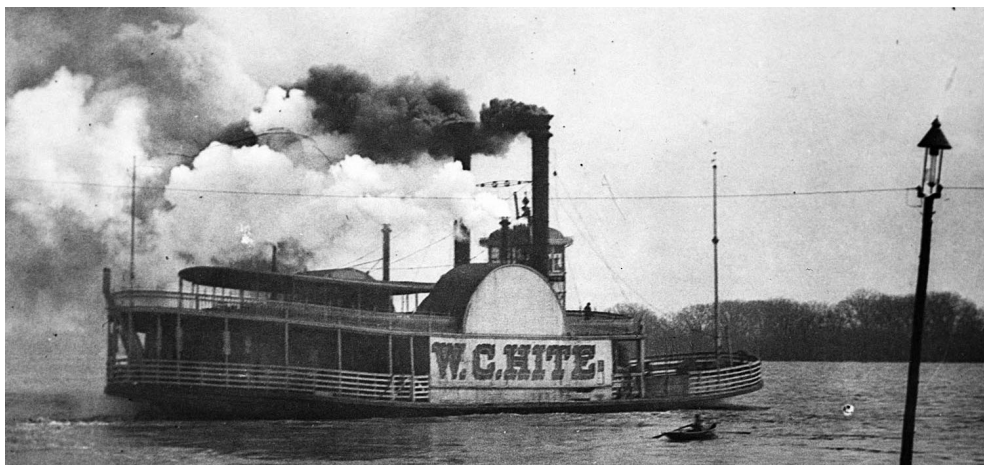
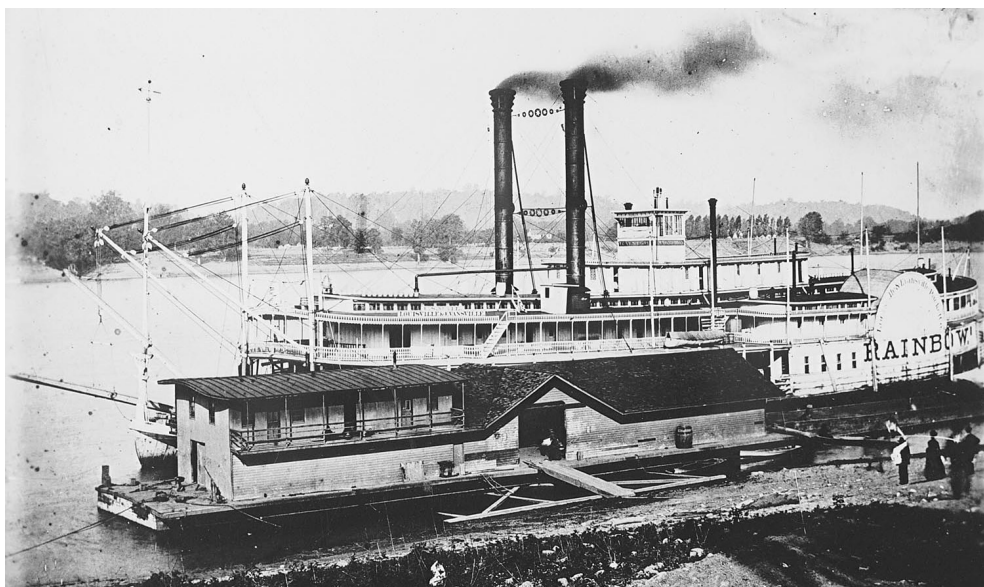
On February 22, 1886, Captain Pink set a personal record, making eleven trips over the



*This view of Portland from Sand Island shows a busy city front. The original sketch was drawn by B. Grove in 1853, and was redrawn as shown for the October 2, 1898 Courier-Journal. None of the packet names except RAINBOW appear in Way's directories, and there were two vessels by that name, the first built in 1854, the second in 1879. This may be the first RAINBOW.*

Falls with eleven towboats pushing 122 coal barges, his greatest peacetime service in one day. During the War he had once made thirteen trips over the Falls with gunboats and towboats in a single day. The following day was nearly as busy, and he limped home late at night, exhausted after seventy-two hours with little sleep. To better serve the steadily growing trade, Captain Pink moved his office onto the Louisville wharfboat, where boat captains were able to contact him for piloting without leaving their craft.

Captain Pink's contract with the Army Engineers for blasting Indian Chute each October came to an end in 1883 when the engineers took over the work. Where Pink merely walked the Falls at low water, marking rocks he thought hazardous for removal, the engineers surveyed the chute and planned a systematic



*Shown at top is RAINBOW (4673), piloted by Capt. Pink during the 1884 flood for relief efforts. Pink also saved local ferryboat W.C. HITE (5625) from going over the dam after she had been caught in ice floes. All three images from Murphy Library, UW-LaCrosse.*

approach. Pink's blasting had widened the chute to 160 feet at its upper end. The engineers continued blasting to achieve a 250-foot wide passage, using excavated rock to build guide dams along both sides of the chute. These stony guide walls confined water in the chute, making it deeper and helping keep boats in the channel. The guide walls were so sturdily built that parts were still in place and visible at low water 120 years after their construction. "The chute is still crooked and very difficult to run, on account of the cross-currents coming in from the sides at different places," admitted an engineer in charge, but by 1885 tows with three barges abreast could slip through the chute and, because of its greater depth, Captain Pink found it possible to take down heavily loaded coal barges when the river stage was much lower than before.

Although Captain Pink was deprived of the blasting contract, he took on other work instead of taking vacations as many colleagues did. Pilots of regular packets running to Evansville or to Cincinnati sometimes needed time off and gratefully accepted Pink's services as their replacement. In late summer and autumn of the 1880s, Pink temporarily commanded the JAMES GUTHRIE, JOHN FOWLER, WILLIAM PORTER, CITY OF OWENSBORO and J. J. O'DIL, most running to Evansville. He often carried aboard a brace of homing pigeons that he raised at his rooftop roost, and if his voyage met delay, he scribbled messages to Mary Frances, inserted them in tubes tied to the pigeons, and released the birds to fly home to his wife.

Demands on his Falls piloting mushroomed after Pink lost two trusted partners, brother Billy and brother-in-law John Littrell. Captain Littrell crossed the river to work with Jim Duffy as Indiana Falls pilot and to command the harborboat TRANSIT. Investing \$10,000, Littrell became partner in Cook and Hoffman coal wholesaling firm, which owned the TRANSIT, but he was injured in 1885 when her boiler exploded in the canal lock, blowing the crew overboard and scalding his hands.

After suffering painful injury, Captain Littrell retired from piloting to his Kirkwood horse farm on Brownsboro Road outside Louisville where he raised thoroughbred stock. In this risky business,

he sometimes partnered with Captain Robert McClelland, who owned a horse farm at Westport and had once worked aboard the TRANSIT. When Captain Littrell died in 1891, McClelland acquired ownership of his racehorse Lookout, winner of the 1893 Kentucky Derby.

Captain Littrell's retirement from the river opened opportunities for others. Young Dan Varble, Pink's nephew, moved to Jeffersonville and secured appointment from Indiana's governor as Falls pilot replacing Littrell. Captain Pink bought Littrell's one-third share in Cook and Hoffman Company for \$12,000 and went to Pittsburgh to contract with Peter Sprague for building a new towboat, also named TRANSIT, expressly for service at the Falls. With a hull 122 feet long, 24 feet wide, and 3 feet 9 inches deep, this harborboat had three boilers, two of the finest steam engines, and a very large paddlewheel. When it reached Louisville in 1889, reporters hailed it as the "perfect towboat," and it became Pink's pet. In addition to having a hand in its design, Captain Pink fitted up its cabin for personal use, installing carpet and curtains, a bunk, and purchasing a rocking chair for his comfort. He made his brother-in-law Fred Littrell her pilot.

Pink suffered another privation when brother Billy, during a steamboat trip to Missouri, bought an Osage River farm near Dixon, MO. Billy and his wife made their retirement home on this farm and moved west in 1887, leaving Falls piloting behind. The Varble brothers, including Pink, his older brother Rush of Madison, IN and his younger brother Dick from Westport, gathered in Louisville to give Billy a gala farewell.

Pink also lost an old opponent, Captain Dave Dryden. Captain Dave had remained at Jeffersonville, occasionally working on the river until 1884 when he became ill and a patient in the U. S. Marine Hospital at Portland. After partial recovery, he moved in 1889 to a farm in Ballard County, KY near the Mississippi River where he once distinguished himself as commodore in the Ellet ram fleet. Recognizing he had only a few years left, Dave gave his sword to his nephew, Captain Mason Chapman of the CITY OF FLORENCE, along with the sword and epaulets worn by Dave's father, a Revolutionary War sea captain. Dave





*TRANSIT (T2463) appearing on the right in this photo was built 1889 at the Axton Yard in Brownsville, PA for Cook and Hoffman Co., of which Capt. Pink owned 1/3 share. Pink traveled to Pittsburgh to arrange the contract with Capt. Peter Sprague to build the boat expressly for service in Louisville harbor. He fitted her cabin for his personal use, complete with carpet, curtains and rocking chair. She also appears on the front cover of our March 2016 issue exiting the Louisville-Portland Canal with her tow. Pictured on left is the packet JULIEN POYDRAS (3188), Howard-built in 1898 for Baton Rouge & Bayou Sara Packet Co. This photo was taken at Howard Shipyards in 1904 when her engines and boilers were removed and placed on the new WM. GARIG. Her hull was used in building the towboat EAGLE for Eagle Packet Co. Photo from Murphy Library, Univ. of Wisconsin - LaCrosse.*

whiled away his remaining days at his Ballard County farm far from the Falls, losing his money and time like every other dirt farmer.

Loss of old comrades proved politically troublesome to Captain Pink, because even Dryden might have joined Pink's 1888 campaign against construction of the Big Four Railroad Bridge a short distance upstream of Ohio Falls (Fourteenth Street) Bridge and the head of the Falls. When the Army Engineers conducted public hearings on the Big Four Bridge permit, Pink alone among Falls pilots attended to oppose it, speaking so vigorously the engineers requested his personal deposition. On August 25, Pink gave his testimony and a clerk summarized his answers to attorney's questions.

"Varble says his age is 59 and occupation is a Falls pilot. He has been a steamboatman since 1848 and regular Falls pilot since 12 Sept. 1853. In the last ten years he has done 4/5 of the work of piloting

boats over the Falls. The Falls are navigable for coal boats or barges from 9.5 feet on the Falls, or 11 feet in the canal. Coalboats are 160 to 170 feet long and 26 feet wide. Coal barges are 130 by 26 feet; model barges for freight and iron are 30 to 35 feet wide and 200 feet long. An ordinary tow going over the Falls is 620 to 630 feet long. We do take extra large tows at 750 feet long and 125 feet wide. Largest tow he took over the Falls was 16 coalboats and several barges. Have taken as many as 26 barges over in a single trip. He took the JOE WILLIAMS tow over in 2 trips; it had 31 coalboats and several barges with a total of 800,000 bushels coal. A coal rise at the Falls lasts 3 to 5 days, but there are cases when it has to be done in one day. Tows can go over the Falls in one day, while it takes them 3 days to get through the canal. Boats save \$500 to \$1,000 per trip by going over the Falls because the locking capacity of the canal is limited. The steamboat landing on the Indiana side is in front of and just below Spring

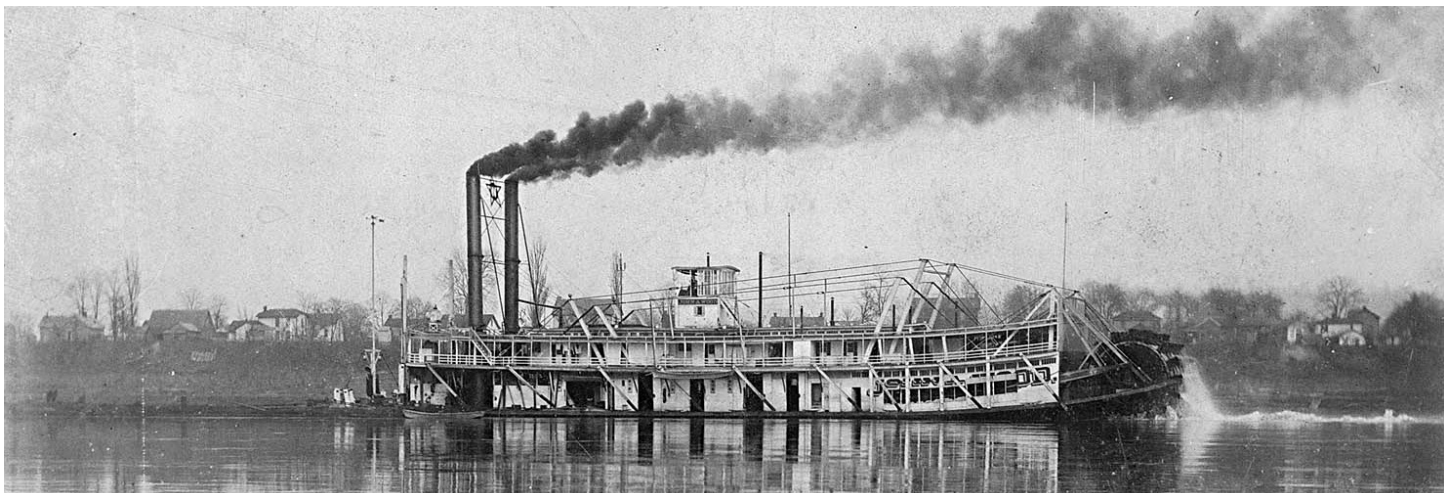
Street. The new railroad bridge would be dangerous at high water because boats must round to and round out at the landing, throwing them broadside of the current and they would be in danger of getting onto the piers while getting straight with the current. In navigating with a coal tow, we come down along the straight shore above Jeffersonville until we reach a point near the ferry landing near Spring Street. We immediately change the course of our boat or tow and head over toward Louisville at an angle of 25 to 30 degrees, and then we flank the point, throwing the boat on a quarter and backing up to the right point at the end of Mulberry Street, and continuing that way until we get down within one-half a mile of the head of the Falls, then straighten up our boat to run the dam and piers of the existing bridge. The river current here on a sudden or head rise reaches 6 miles per hour, ordinarily 5 miles an hour. There have been accidents on both the dam and the existing bridge. The Falls is the most hazardous place for navigation from Pittsburgh to the Gulf. Capt. David Dryden is an old pilot and has retired for some 20 years and he quit piloting before the towboat system commenced. Conditions at the Falls have changed since he retired. I have not one dollar's worth of interest in steamboat stock."

Pink's protest was followed by one from Captain J. W. McIntyre of the towboat JOHN A. WOODS, which often crossed the Falls with coal barge fleets from Pittsburgh. McIntyre explained his towboat and tow usually started its run over the Falls at Pumpkin Patch, descending along the Indiana bank and checking headway to keep the

boat's stern directed toward the Indiana shore. Although handling depended a good deal on wind strength and direction, the tow's head typically pointed at an angle toward the Kentucky bank until it reached a point near the head of the dam, when the pilot straightened and aligned the 650-foot long tow with the chute through the dam and the passage between the Ohio Falls bridge piers. Building the Big Four Bridge piers in this channel surely would hamper tow maneuvers and present severe navigation hazards.

Hearing these complaints, the Secretary of War appointed a board of engineers to consider issues, and when it met in Louisville Captain Pink, along with John Howard of the shipyard, Captain Frank Carter of L & C Packet Line, and Falls pilot Henry Barnaby of Jeffersonville, presented opposition. Redfield Proctor, Secretary of War, came to see the bridge site and Falls and he had the final decision on a permit for building the Big Four Bridge. Proctor inspected the Army Engineers' canal, then boarded their towboat MAJOR MACKENZIE to see the Falls. At the engineers' invitation, Captain Pink took the wheel and steered the Secretary and friends down the Falls safely to Portland, meanwhile pointing out hazards presented by existing bridges. Proctor, however, was not impressed by opposition to the bridge and, with modifications, allowed its construction to proceed.

When Captain Pink renewed his Masters license in December 1888, he began the busiest epoch of his life. The Ohio rose in early 1889 and



**JOHN A. WOOD's (T1391) Capt. J. W. McIntyre joined Pink in 1888 to protest the proposed location of piers for the new Big Four Bridge in Louisville harbor. Although Falls pilots and towboat pilots alike voiced their objections, the Bridge and piers were placed as designed with only minor modifications. Photo courtesy of Murphy Library - University of Wisconsin - LaCrosse.**

stayed relatively high for nearly three years. When questioned later about this remarkable stretch of high water enhancing river commerce, Pink declared: "In all my experience of more than thirty-five years as a Falls pilot I have never done better work and more of it than I have been able to do in the last six months. It has been the most remarkable year of good water I have ever known, and it bids fair to remain so for some time to come yet."

When coal fleets reached Louisville in late 1889, Pink told journalists he had done more work on the rise than since he had begun piloting. "He has taken 136 coalboats and fourteen barges of coal over the Falls up to last evening, handling more than a dozen different towboats and all on less than ten feet of water and never lost a lump of coal or scratched a boat or barge. This record is hard to beat." In 1889 three shipyards at Jeffersonville and Madison built more boats and barges than in any three previous years. The U. S. Mail Line packets between Louisville and Cincinnati carried as many passengers that year as ever in its history, although by that time it was competing with two railroads on both sides of the river between the Falls City and the Queen City. Conditions remained excellent in 1890.

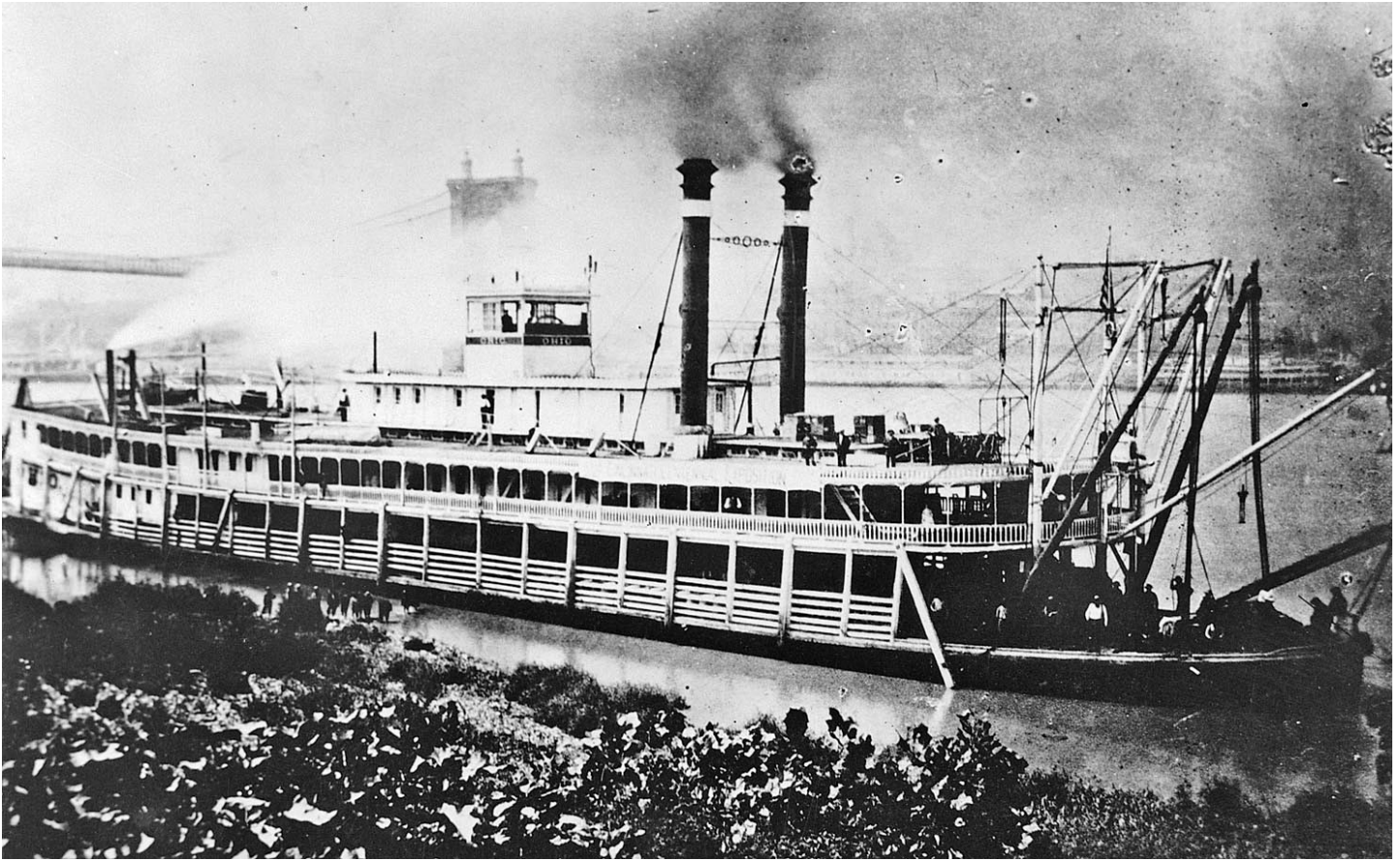
By the last decade of the nineteenth century, Captain Pink had become Old Man of the River. Whenever a riverman needed help at Louisville, he went to see Pink; whenever a cub reporter wanted Falls information, he interviewed Pink. One of the few reporters who knew a little math tried to estimate how many boats Pink had taken across in his thirty-eight years as Falls pilot. Figuring Pink had averaged 300 boats a year up or down, he concluded Pink had completed 11,400 trips over the Falls before 1890. By calculating average cargo tonnage for different rivercraft, he estimated Pink had piloted 9 million tons aboard steamboats, 3.6 million tons in barges, or a total 12.6 million tons of cargo.

The cub then sought to compute what percentage Pink had lost through wrecks. Testing Pink's memory, the reporter learned he had lost only two steamboats on the Falls since 1852. Other steamers had wrecked when under his care, but those were raised and returned to service. In taking

over coalboats and barges, Pink recalled losing only a single barge loaded with iron and seven barges of coal. He had never lost a single passenger's life because of any neglect of duty, although he came near to drowning several times himself. Roughly calculated, the cub came up with estimated losses of less than one percent—exactly .00055. This was, the cub concluded, "the best record ever made in this part of the country by a pilot. Capt. Varble," he went on, "although a veteran in the service, is an active, live, energetic man, and would walk a mile in the rain at midnight to help a fellow boatman in a time of need or distress."

Still, Pink was not perfect, and he suffered another loss in 1890 when the OHIO, sternwheeler of the Memphis and Cincinnati Packet Company, arrived at Portland, found the canal closed by high water, and requested Pink's help passing up the Falls. Seeing the boat was heavily laden and would have difficulty stemming the Falls' current, Pink blew the whistle for help and when his towboat TRANSIT arrived, he lashed it at the OHIO's side. The boats left Portland, ascended to Shippingport, and turned into Kentucky Chute. At Tarascon Mill a current caught the OHIO, however, driving her onto the rock foundation of an old sawmill lurking three feet beneath the river's surface. The jar was so light it did not awaken sleeping passengers nor concern Captain Pink, so he backed off the rocks and steamed further upstream. Near the head of the chute the mate ran upstairs, warning the boat's hull was sprung and taking on water. Pink sounded distress signals to bring the lifesavers and spun the pilotwheel with all his might, driving the boat straight into the Kentucky bank where she sank in shallow water. Pink rigged a stageplank to shore and helped frightened passengers off the sinking boat. His crew built a fire ashore to keep passengers warm and released cattle and hogs from pens on the lower deck; most swam ashore and roamed into the woods. Captain Billy Devan's lifesavers soon arrived and helped the passengers onto the TRANSIT to continue their trip to Louisville.

Captain Pink called the towboat FULTON to bring a barge and hired a hundred workers to save the OHIO's four hundred tons of cargo by carrying it onto the barge. Meanwhile, he hired a diver who found the hole in the hull and tacked a canvas



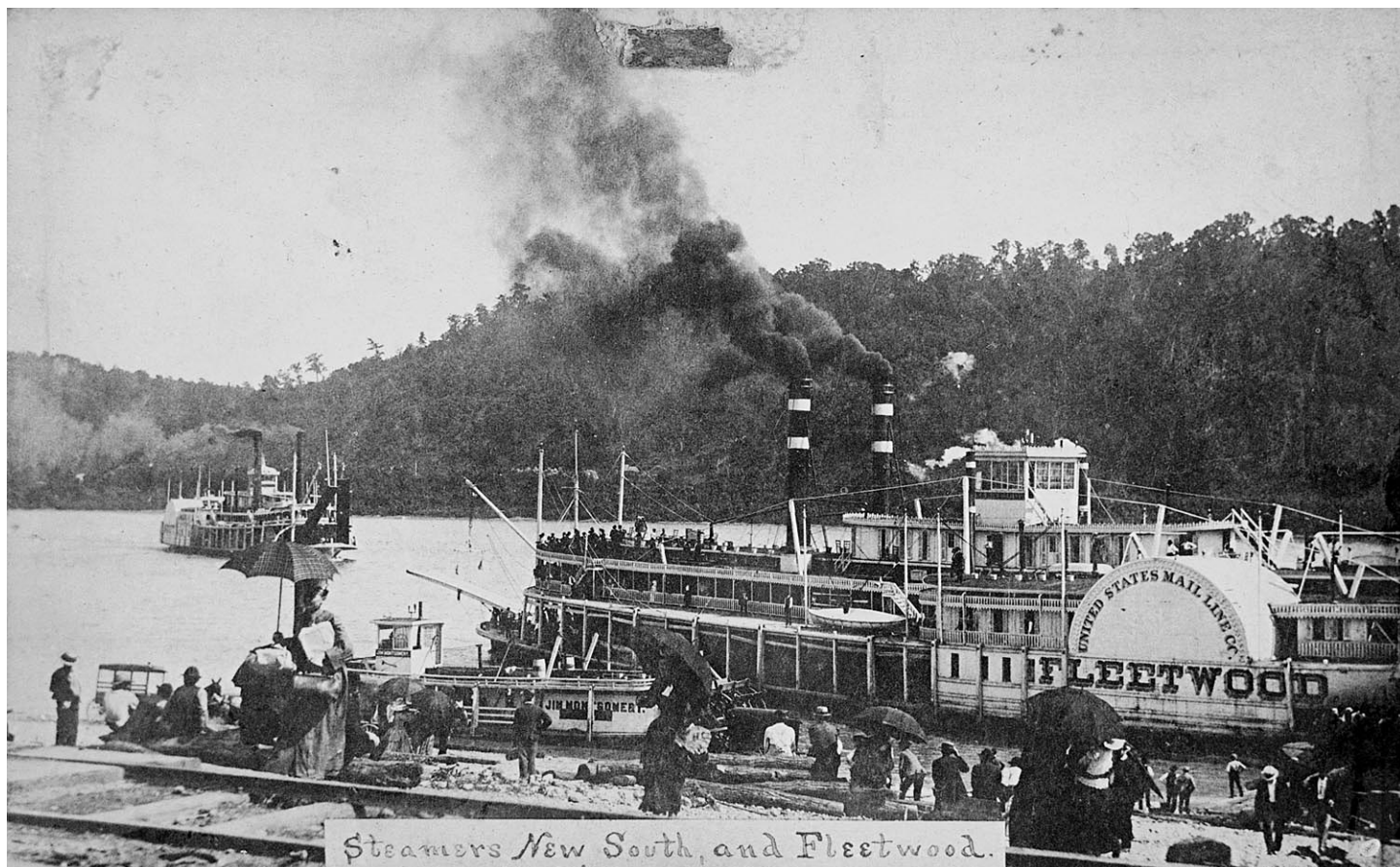
*In 1890 the Cincinnati-Memphis Packet Co.'s OHIO (4273) sank on an old sawmill foundation as Capt. Pink assisted her in passing up over the Falls. All passengers were safely evacuated to shore, and Pink arranged for off-loading the 400 tons of freight and then refloating the vessel, all within a reported span of four hours. Photo from Murphy Library, University of Wisconsin - LaCrosse.*

tarpaulin over it while Pink had other tarps nailed over open hatches. He then brought down the harborboats TRANSIT, FULTON, HOTSPUR, and MUSIC, all equipped with pumps, and at Pink's signal all began pumping water from the OHIO's hull. She soon popped to the surface as gracefully as a duck amidst cheers from her crew. Carpenters fabricated a wooden bulkhead inside the hull around the hole, while Pink's workers returned the cargo to the boat, and in four hours the OHIO resumed her voyage to Cincinnati.

Good conditions for navigation continued through 1890 and into 1891, making forty-five consecutive months without disruptions to commerce. In 1890 more new boats were built, more old ones rebuilt, more trades established, more business done, and more money made than any five previous years on the river. At Jeffersonville in 1890 the Howard yards built eight new steamboats, four transfer and ferry boats, and four grain barges, some with the new iron hulls, while the Sweeney yard installed boilers, engines, and machinery on

twelve new steamboats and fabricated two iron-hull steamers. Several steamboats were launched upriver at Madison Marineway, and one was built at New Albany. River commerce prospered even in the face of inroads made by railroad competition.

Navigation on the Ohio was so excellent in 1890 that the longest steamboat race of history fascinated the entire valley that summer. Like others, Captain Pink watched this ninety-day race with great interest. Two passenger steamers, the FLEETWOOD and the NEW SOUTH, competed that summer for control of daily packet trade between Louisville and Cincinnati. Carrying no freight, these passenger vessels departed Cincinnati every morning at eight o'clock, sped downriver side by side to Louisville, stopping only at Madison to board more passengers. Reaching the Falls City, they took aboard more passengers and steamed back to the Queen City. During the competition for more passengers, they dropped fares to as low as fifty cents a trip and therefore had capacity loads every day, making the parallel railroads sore. After



**NEW SOUTH (4189) and FLEETWOOD (2055) at Madison, IN in 1890. In foreground is JIM MONTGOMERY (3021) operating in Madison-Warsaw-Florence local trade. This view captures the fierce competition between NEW SOUTH and FLEETWOOD that summer to control the lion's share of business between Louisville and Cincinnati. Murphy Library photo.**

ninety days of pounding up and down river so close that one might step from one deck onto the other, the race ended in September when the owner of the FLEETWOOD bought out the NEW SOUTH and sent her home to Memphis.

Captain Pink likewise prospered, laboring endlessly at tasks, even in autumn. One day in September 1890 he took towboats and barges numbering one hundred eleven over the Falls on a swell without losing a single lump of coal. In the spring of 1891, however, he lost "Pink's Pet," his towboat TRANSIT. When the New Orleans steamboat GOLDEN RULE proved too heavily loaded to ascend from Portland, Pink brought the TRANSIT down to take part of its cargo. Swift current dashed his towboat against the big steamboat, caved her hull, and sent her to the bottom in fifteen feet of fast water. Currents were too swift for divers to go down to patch the hole, nor could harborboats be safely anchored to pump out the wreck, and Captain Pink concluded the wreck could not be raised until the river subsided.

The high water, so beneficial to commerce, hindered retrieval of the TRANSIT. She lay underwater nearly six months before Pink and his partners attempted to raise his pet. They hired divers who nailed boards across the holes in the hull, then covered the boards with canvas. Once the holes were closed, they started pumps aboard boats anchored next to the wreck, dewatered the hull, and raised it. Pink then had it rebuilt and refurbished, putting his pet back in service.

Captain Pink renewed his license in 1891, earning plaudits from examiners who declared him a "skillful master of steam vessels who could be entrusted to perform such duties upon the waters of rivers flowing into the Gulf of Mexico." It was his thirtieth issue of license as First-Class Pilot. That year Louisville's council reelected Kentucky Falls pilots, choosing Pink, his brother-in-law Fred Littrell, plus John Godfrey, Orvil Dougherty, and Chris Damon. Godfrey was a towboat captain with long experience; Orvil was nephew of Falls pilot Jim Dougherty who had died in 1891 just before the

election. Chris Damon's appointment was largely honorary; semi-retired at age seventy-three, he spent days at Pink's office whittling and telling stories of old times. This pantheon left the active service largely to Captain Pink.

Even Cincinnati's journalists, historically critical of Falls pilots, had a few favorable remarks to throw Pink's way. While Louisville after the Civil War owned none of the floating palaces running long-distance trades to New Orleans, Cincinnati did, and it generally considered Louisville's canal and Falls roadblocks to its commerce. Too large for the Portland Canal locks, the great steamboats had to cross the Falls going to and from the Queen City, and whenever one hit a rock, Cincinnati traditionally blamed Falls pilots, Pink among them. When Captain Pink visited the Queen City in June 1891 and toured its merchants' exchange, however, at least one journalist was impressed, writing: "Capt. Pink Varble, who for ages one might say has been famous as a Falls pilot over the treacherous rocky spot on the Ohio River at Louisville, was on 'Change yesterday as the guest of Capt. Bob Wise. 'Pink,' as everyone calls him, has carried every vessel, almost, over the Falls since the fifties, and in that time has been the guardian of the lives of several millions of people. His nerve and pluck have always been admired by travelers and he is one of the live curiosities, if such it may be termed, of the beautiful city of Louisville."

## PINK'S PASSAGE

Felled by a stroke and stretched on the JOHN A. WOOD's pilothouse floor, half conscious, Captain Pink saw Captain Wood holding the pilotwheel and heard him shout: "Pink, we're drilling straight into Wave Rock. What...?"

Pink focused on Captain John and lifted his arm. He jerked his hand up and down as if pulling a rope, then pointed to the left using hand signals learned so long ago when piloting flatboats over the Falls.

Understanding these signals, John pulled the bell cord for more power and rotated the pilotwheel to the left, and like a tail wagging a dog, the towboat twisted the barge tow to the right, grazing Wave Rock as it passed.

Ahead lay Willow Point, a crag projecting from the Indiana bank, against which the tow surely would smash. Captain John looked again toward Pink, who saw his question, raised his arm and began signaling the course. When Pink's consciousness faded, John called his name loudly, and Pink responded, opening his eyes and signaling with his hand again as John spoke the names of the obstructions ahead, names which Pink himself had given them: Enoch Rock, Welch Rock, Rubel's Rock, Big Eddy. Captain John later contended that Pink had not died of the stroke paralyzing one side of his body, but from a blood vessel in his head that burst as he strained to stay awake to bring the WOOD and its crew safely over the bar.

Finally the tow surged out of whitewater and into the swift chute between Sand Island and Shippingport. When Captain John backed and slowed, the tow crunched against the gravel of Portland wharf and stopped. John and his crew rigged a stretcher, rolled Pink onto it, and carried him to his harborboat TRANSIT and into his cabin. A crewman dashed up the wharf to phone ahead to a physician, telling the doctor to meet the TRANSIT at Louisville's wharf, while Fred Littrell cut the boat loose from the WOOD's tow, and steamed up Kentucky Chute with all possible speed. Captain Pink's last voyage over the Falls might also have been his fastest.

Dr. J. W. Irwin met the TRANSIT at the wharf near the foot of Third Street, found Pink rolling in and out of consciousness, and escorted the stricken pilot in the back of his buggy to Pink's home, where Mary Frances waited frantically. She helped get him into his bed, and the physician told her little could be done except to make him comfortable and let him sleep. She agreed he badly needed sleep. Pink had been so very busy the last week that he had little sleep for several nights. The following morning Pink slipped into unconsciousness from which he never reawakened.

Pink lay on his bed a week with Mary Frances and family tending him and friends dropping by to see him. They sat at bedside talking with Mary Frances, sometimes talking directly to Pink in hope of a response. Perhaps they told him the river news. The steamboat GOLDEN RULE had burned at

Cincinnati's wharf when a roustabout went into its hold with a flaming torch for light and touched a barrel of varnish, killing him and ten passengers. Congress had appropriated another \$35,000 so the Army Engineers could keep blasting away the Falls. The CARRIE HOPE had surprised everyone by successfully steaming ten miles up Rolling Fork of Salt River. When this news came, perhaps Mary Frances reminded Pink of their honeymoon on the ADELAIDE and how he took it up Salt River to Shepherdsville, the first steamboat to reach that metropolis. But if he heard her, Pink gave no sign.

The river news from St. Louis might have interested Pink. Editors there were launching a new magazine for rivermen to be named *The Waterways Journal*. Black roustabouts at St. Louis wharf had formed a union in the American Federation of Labor, and two thousand strong had marched out on strike, demanding a pay raise to twenty-five cents an hour when loading boats. Hiring scabs, the steamboat owners and shippers quickly broke the union. Certainly the river business was changing.

Captain Pink, sinking deeper, heard none of this news, good or bad. The Louisville newspapers offered their readers daily status reports on his condition. One advised: "Capt. Varble Dying. Not expected to live until morning. He was sinking rapidly. His family had been called to his side and his physician, Dr. J. W. Irwin, was with him. Every means of alleviating his last hours were taken and the veteran steamboatman, so well known to hundreds along the rivers from Pittsburgh to New Orleans, was resting easily. His illness dates back seven days when stricken with apoplexy while at the wheel of the towboat he was taking over the Falls."

His friend Will Hays found himself, for a change, on the receiving end of questions from reporters seeking human interest stories about the Captain, and Hays obliged them with some he thought amusing. Pointing out that Pink had a reputation among Louisville's wharf rats as a generous man, given to benevolence, Hays mentioned the case of a sick captain who called Pink to his bedside to say farewell and to ask him to look after his wife and family. "I'll promise you that I will look after your wife as long as she remains a

widow," Pink responded, "and that will not be very long." A few days later, surprised to see the fellow walking again on the wharf, Pink blurted out, "So you are not dead yet?" Looking sheepish, the man replied, "No, I concluded to live a while longer with her myself rather than let her have a chance to make another man miserable."

On April 2 Louisville learned that Captain Pink had died in his home at five that morning. The family scheduled his funeral at their home on April 4, with the eulogy by Reverend Millard Jeffries of East End Baptist Church. Pallbearers would include, in addition to Will Hays, Falls pilots led by Jim Duffy, wharfmaster Charles Kremer, Canal superintendent Will Ekin, Captain Billy Devan of the lifesavers, and young engineer Alfred Pirtle. Will Hays called rivermen to his office on the afternoon of Pink's passing to plan a tribute to the master of the Falls. Out of respect to the Captain, all flags on boats in Louisville harbor and at the Howard Shipyard were lowered to half mast. Soon, rivermen throughout the valley followed suit, lowering their flags at Pittsburgh, Evansville, New Orleans, and even Cincinnati.

A dismal rainy day did not deter the crowd overflowing Pink's home into the yard for the funeral on April 4. His four children and their families were there, along with his older brother Rush down from Madison, IN and his younger brother Dick from Varble's Landing. Too bereft to withstand the trip from Missouri, Captain Billy would not get to the funeral. A table in the parlor, piled a foot high with telegrams and sympathy cards from throughout the Mississippi Valley, testified to people's regrets at Pink's passage.

After prayer, Reverend Jeffries spoke of Pink's life. Pink was universally admired among rivermen from the headwaters to the Gulf of Mexico, the minister asserted. As a citizen he was one of the best known men in Louisville, and his death was more lamented by all classes of people than that of any other man who had passed away in the Falls City for years. He was a devoted husband, an affectionate father, and true friend. Kind and generous to a fault, temperate in his habits, energetic and brave, he was a man and a pilot who was regarded with honor and respect. The clergyman concluded with prayer, and

Clara McPherson, a family friend, led the coterie in singing “On Jordan’s Stormy Banks,” while Pink’s family said their tearful goodbyes.

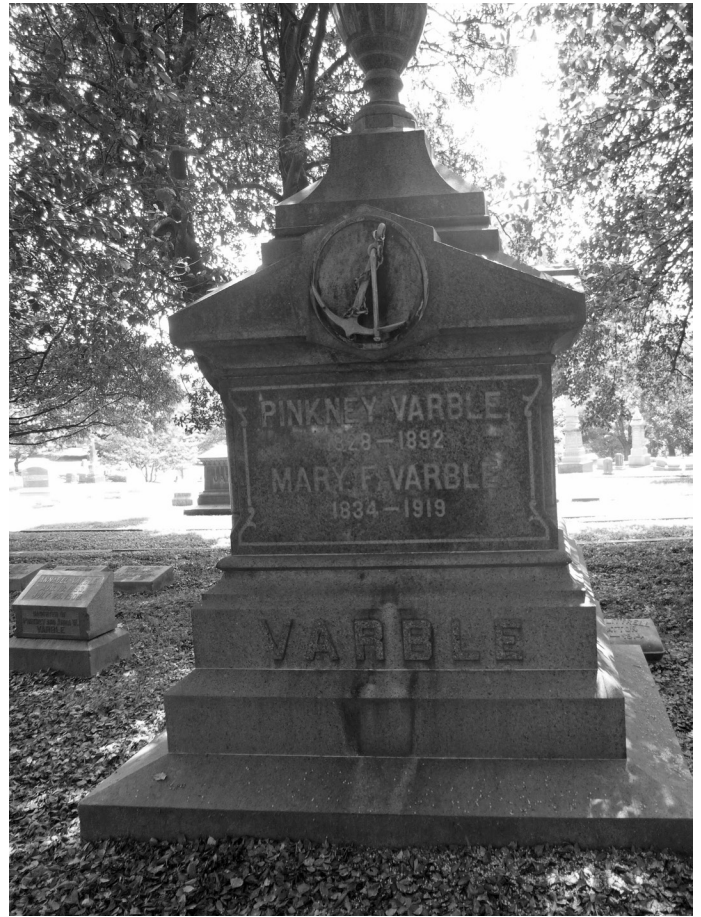
Outside, a procession formed to escort the casket to Cave Hill Cemetery, a short walk from Pink’s home. At the procession’s head were a crowd of rivermen who had arrived by boat from afar, bringing flowers. Pink’s family noticed a floral wreath in the shape of an immense pilotwheel with one broken spoke and two huge floral anchors, one sent by Louisville’s rivermen and another by Pittsburgh’s towboat captains. Behind the casket walked the family, and following them were fraternities marching in full regalia to honor Pink: the Kosair Temple of Nobles, the Knight Templars, the Demolay Commandery, the Odd Fellows, the Elks. At Cave Hill Cemetery, prayers were offered again, hymns sung, and Pink’s body was consigned to the grave.

By 1892 Will Hays had become the best-known songwriter in America, often compared with Stephen Collins Foster of the prewar era. He had written nearly three hundred songs since 1856, and his sheet music sold millions of copies throughout the land. To relieve his grief, Hays often penned lyrical poetry, and the loss of Captain Pink proved painfully persistent, assuaged by writing personal tributes to Pink’s memory. The most memorable of his paeans gracefully landed Pink at the gates:

“He has turned his last wheel,  
He has rung his last bell.  
He will pilot the steamer no more;  
He has made his last trip  
Down the river of Life,  
Landed, and gone out ashore.”

## POSTLUDE

The fatherless tailor’s apprentice who walked into Louisville from Westport, driving cattle before him with fifty cents in his pocket, left his family a small fortune in 1892. Among his estate were \$30,000 in life insurance and his third interest in Cook and Hoffman Coal Towing Company. Mary Frances thus had wherewithal to express her grief by employing Harvey Joiner, Louisville’s preeminent landscape and portrait artist, to paint a life-size oil portrait of Captain Pink. Mr. Joiner had



*Pinkney and Mary Varble monument in Cave Hill Cemetery, Louisville. Also located in the Varble family plot are headstones of Pinkney Varble, Jr. and Pinkney Varble III. Photo taken in May 2014 by Linda Varble Claire.*

been a friend of Captain Pink and, indeed, had his studio adjacent to Will Hays in the *Courier-Journal* building.

Joiner’s painting of Pink proved magnificent, and Mary Frances presented it with ornate frame for display by her partners at Cook and Hoffman Company. After Louisvillians had opportunities to view the painting, the company installed it aboard Pink’s pet, the harborboat TRANSIT. For years, Pink’s image graced Louisville’s harbor from the boat, visible over the shoulder of her pilot, Captain Dan Varble.

Cook and Hoffman Company reorganized when Joshua Cook became ill, and became the Hoffman Company with John Hoffman as president and Mary Frances Varble and Captain Robert McClelland as full partners. This company competed intensely with Jim Duffy for Louisville’s wholesale coal trade, buying a half-million tons of



Pittsburgh coal in barges annually and delivering it with the towboats TRANSIT and WASH GRAY. Jim Duffy's firm at Pumpkin Patch provided similar services, using towboats FULTON and HOTSPUR. When Pittsburgh's Monongahela River Coal Company, known as the Combine, bought out the Duffy and Hoffman concerns in 1899, however, the profit left Mary Frances fixed for life, and it proved a long one. She survived Captain Pink by twenty-seven years, passing on in 1919.

Captain Pink's passing left an enormous gap in the ranks of Falls pilots, and several sought to fill his place. Towboat pilot Ben Cox, trained by elder pilot Chris Damon, obtained Falls pilot appointment three weeks after Pink's demise, but Pink's nephew Dan Varble and brother-in-law Fred Littrell inherited most of Pink's business. According to Will Hays, Dan became the best pilot in Louisville harbor and a "worthy successor of his lamented uncle."

But Falls piloting underwent a swift transition during the 1890s, and just a year after Pink's death Will Hays observed: "There was a time, and not many years ago, when it took the late Capt. Pink Varble and several others to take steamboats down over the Falls and bring them up, every day when there was Falls water. Things have changed. Now, Capt. Dan Varble does it all, and he has time between jobs to think of what boats and business on the river used to be, and what they are now."

This decline, concealed for several years by excellent navigation combined with national prosperity, became evident when low water seasons returned in 1892, the nation suffered an economic downturn, and a metamorphosis in rivercraft culminated. Coalboats and flatboats disappeared from the Ohio, and the decline of the steamboat packet trade began. Coalboats were gone by 1892, replaced by towboat and barge fleets. Floating in pairs down the Ohio from Pittsburgh to southern markets, each pair of coalboats employed pilots to get over the Falls. Towboats originally pushed coalboat fleets to markets, but by 1892 barges designed for towboat handling replaced the boxy coalboats. Where the coalboats moving in pairs required many Falls pilots, the towboat-barge fleets supplanting them required just one.

The historic flatboat commerce also was ending by 1892, replaced by powered craft. Its decline began during the Civil War and never recovered in postwar years. Flatboats called produce boats still carried apples, potatoes, and Ohio Valley foodstuffs south each year until 1892, when they became rare. In 1893, when a flatboat loaded with Kentucky produce guided by broadhorn oars at its side and gougers at each end, floated down the Ohio, all steamboats and towboats it passed sounded their whistles in salute while deckhands rushed to the guardrails to see the last flatboatmen laboring at the oars.

Halcyon days for steamboat packets ended with hard times and navigation blockages of the 1890s. In 1892 Will Hays nostalgically recalled that years earlier he remembered seeing as many as twenty steamboats landed at Louisville's wharf, so crowded some had to await wharf space before landing. "Those days are gone," he lamented, "never to return." Although steamboat packets eked out a slim business on the Ohio River for another thirty years until the advent of improved highways and trucks destroyed it, their decline became evident to all perceptive observers after 1892.

This spectacle was not witnessed by oldtime Falls pilots, however, who marched into glory behind Captain Pink. Pink's toughest competitor in prewar days, Captain Dave Dryden, survived Pink by just two months, dying at his retirement home in Western Kentucky. Inactive for years, he had largely been forgotten at Louisville. Captain Enoch Lockhart, Pink's friend and fellow Falls pilot from Westport, who also served as superintendent of the Portland Canal, became ill late in life and lost his fortune through bad investments. Only by keeping a Walnut Street boarding house was his wife able to support Enoch during the painful months before his death in May 1893.

Dan Varble's principal competitor to obtain the piloting trade Captain Pink left behind, Captain Fred Littrell, lost his mental balance in 1893 and his family moved him to an asylum where he died. Indiana Falls pilot Henry Barnaby left the river in 1894 and Kentucky Falls pilot Chris Damon followed in 1895. Although holding the titular name of Falls pilot, Damon had not worked for years, nor had Henry Barnaby. Leaving Falls piloting and

becoming a lawyer, Barnaby had won election to the Indiana legislature and nearly earned election as Jeffersonville's mayor.

Bells tolling for Falls pilots reached into Pink's family in 1897, when Captain Billy Varble died at his retirement home near Dixon, MO. The last of the seven Varble brothers, Captain Dick, died at Varble's Landing near Westport in 1903. At the time Louisvillians remembered Billy had been a Falls pilot and a brother of Captain Pink, but they had forgotten that Dick also had been a Falls pilot.

None of Pink's three sons became Falls pilots, although they were captains because they had commanded their father's steamboats. Later, they left the river and joined their sister's husband John Stratton in his real estate development firm; and after John died in 1906, Captain Pinkney Varble, Jr. founded his own real estate company. Captain Pink's legacy as Falls pilot therefore fell largely to his nephew Captain Dan Varble, who quickly made himself foremost at his craft. In 1892 Dan opened his piloting office at Jim Duffy's building on Water Street near Third, and there he negotiated contracts with steamboat lines to take all packets bound to Memphis and New Orleans over the Falls. He worked as hard as his uncle, and in 1894 set a personal record when he made six trips over the Falls in a single day—steering over four coal tows and the packets DIXIE and LONGFELLOW.

Captain Dan became the last Falls pilot of history because the Army Engineers drove others out of business when they finally finished Captain Pink's pet project. Under contract with the Army, Captain Pink had begun blasting Indian Chute in 1879 to make it a wider, safer thoroughfare, and the Army Engineers continued demolition until 1899, aiming to open the chute to a generous four-hundred-foot width and eight-foot depth. In the last year of the nineteenth century, the engineers drilled 14,000 holes in the Falls rocks, packed them with 7,500 pounds of dynamite, and when the Ohio Valley Improvement Convention, seeking construction of locks and dams on the river, met at Louisville in October 1899, the engineers escorted delegates aboard the steamboat COLUMBIA out to witness the enormous blast that at last finished Pink's project.

With a full four-hundred foot channel available, Indian Chute no longer threatened ordinary steamboats with destruction, if they had experienced pilots; and most steamboat owners soon cut costs by using their own pilots, rather than hiring Falls pilots. Indeed, owners of some steamboats took advantage of persistent public fear of the Falls to market their "dangerous" excursions over the Falls. To see the monstrous cascades and be able to say that they had the bravery required to cross the Falls, ministerial and social clubs, even church schools, chartered steamboats on occasion and stood wide eyed at the rails, watching the waves, as their boat glided harmlessly down to New Albany or Portland.

"The days of the regular licensed Falls pilot are over," punctuated Will Hays in 1902, explaining: "Every good pilot is a Falls pilot since the Government improved the Indian Chute." Thereafter, the Louisville City Council ceased electing new Falls pilots, and their names were no longer listed in the city directory. Since Louisville pioneers James Patten and John Nelson had become the first in 1797, Falls pilots had practiced their craft more than a century, usually without accidents and generally with integrity. Their unique skills placed them among Louisville's most respected citizens; their performance, subject always to public view and comment, made them famous among rivermen; and, if they succeeded, they sometimes earned fortunes. Captain Pink Varble's name, therefore, reverberated from Pittsburgh to New Orleans and along the spiderwebbing tributaries of Old Muddy.

Handling multi-barge coal tows in Indian Chute, with sharp rocks capable of puncturing barges on both sides, became the principal business of Captain Dan Varble and his harborboat TRANSIT in the early twentieth century. In this, he was abetted by Monongahela River Coal Company, a monopoly on coal towboat shipments from Pittsburgh formed in 1899 and called the Combine, which bought the Duffy and Hoffman harbor coal companies at Louisville and made Captain Dan its official Falls pilot. He made excellent work of it, setting a new record in 1906 when he took the big towboat J. B. FINLEY over the Falls pushing an immense tow with thirty-two barges. Years later, the manager of Combine operations at Louisville recalled Captain Dan Varble did wonderful work taking large tows

over the Falls under all conditions day or night, and although he had never seen Captain Pink in action, he declared Dan the “greatest Falls pilot that ever lived.”


Captain Dan was still piloting the Falls in 1912, and in March he was returning to his TRANSIT at Louisville’s wharf for another passage, walking up the plank to the deck, when he suffered a sudden stroke and collapsed into the river. The boat’s engineer pulled him from the water, to no avail, and again Louisville mourned a Varble. Thus passed the last Falls pilot. That year, the Army Engineers began building Ohio River Lock and Dam No. 41 at the Falls, with a 600-foot lock in the canal and a long dam stretching across the Falls inundating some of its hazards. Because this dam had movable wickets collapsing to the river’s bottom at high water, boat passage through Indian Chute was still possible when the river swelled high and wickets were lowered, although the voyage was not especially hazardous.

Oddly, the boats Captain Pink and Captain Dan piloted survived them by many years. Captain Pink was aboard the great towboat JOHN A. WOOD crossing the Falls in 1892 when he was felled by his fatal stroke. Built in 1870 by its namesake, the WOOD caught fire at Pittsburgh in 1894, but Captain Wood seized an axe, descended into the hold, and smashed holes in the hull, deliberately sinking the boat to save it from the flames. He raised and rebuilt it, put it back into service, and in 1899 the WOOD became property of the Monongahela Combine. The Combine transported coal with it until 1919, when Standard Oil of Louisiana purchased the towboat to move oil on the Mississippi. It burned at Baton Rouge in 1925.

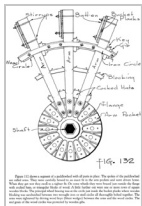
Captain Pink had his pet towboat TRANSIT lashed to the bow of the WOOD’s tow on his last trip down the Falls. Built by Pink in 1889, she was initially piloted by Pink and Fred Littrell. After Pink’s death, Dan Varble became her pilot, and she had an up and down career, sinking several times, only to be raised each time and put back in service. Captain Dan was boarding the boat in 1912 when he lost his life. The Combine bought her for Pittsburgh harbor duties, then sold her in 1920. New owners took the boat down the Ohio to Paducah, renaming

her A. W. ARMSTRONG and towing railroad crossties with her. The towboat’s long career finally concluded in 1930 when wrecked by a tornado which was crossing the Mississippi River.

The TRANSIT thus was mute witness to the passing of both Captain Pink and Captain Dan, and, indeed, all of Captain Pink’s children. When Pink Varble, Jr. died in 1921, he left three surviving children, one of them named Pink Varble III. Major Pink Varble III outranked his ancestors, not as a steamboat captain but as veteran of the United States Army in both the First and Second World Wars. Major Varble had the good fortune of marrying Rachel McBrayer, graduate of Science Hill Academy and a renowned Kentucky author, one of whose books was a biography of Jane Clemens, the mother of Mark Twain. Rachel set out to preserve Varble family history, saving a few artifacts inherited from Captain Pink and writing his biography, without which this book would be much the poorer. Although she and Pink III had a daughter and several grandchildren, they had no son to pass on the Pink Varble name, and thus the line culminated with Pink III. Yet, Pink Varble’s legend lived on among the memories of aged rivermen, among the imagination of children, among the pantheon of Falls heroes.

School children and their parents, along with tourists and residents who leisurely examined exhibits at Kentucky’s Portland Museum or at Indiana’s Falls of the Ohio Center, learned of the exploits of the Falls pilots, of Captain Pink and his Varble clan. Visitors to Louisville’s Filson Club inspected Captain Pink’s pilot’s license and other river-related documents preserved for history. But workers at the Louisville and Portland Canal had a more personal contact with the Captain’s legend. For they testified that during long, dark nights on the river they saw a misty wraith, a white figure striding like a cat along the crest of McAlpine Dam, surveying below the dam the whited sepulcher of the Falls of the Ohio. 

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# Small Stacks

## Steamboat Color Schemes and 19th Century Paint Colors

by John Fryant

Paints have been around for many years but prior to the 1860s pre-mixed colors were not available. Each painter had to mix his own colors. Therefore one painter's colors might be slightly different than another's. By 1870 there were color samples available from paint companies. These were primarily directed towards house painters, but a reasonable guess is that painters of inland rivers steamboats may have used such samples as well.

Nineteenth century vehicles like steamboats, locomotives, horse drawn carriages, industrial engines and other mechanical equipment were often given highly decorative paint schemes. Early railroad locomotives often had elaborately painted engineer's cabs, wheels and polished brass trim. The first Western Rivers steamboat, the NEW ORLEANS of 1811, was more elaborately painted than one might imagine, with trim colors of blue and white on a black hull (see S & D REFLECTOR, September 2011).

Reliable nineteenth century artists can be good sources of color information. Green was a popular color for trim and shutters on early nineteenth century homes. This color carried over to steamboats as well. An early painting of the steamer SUPERIOR (photo 1) shows her hull painted dark green with white trim. The 1838 steamer LOWELL had a white painted hull with green striped trim lines and deck edges. An 1843 painting of this boat shows this clearly (photo 2). The artist also shows all of the decks painted a red color (red lead maybe?) And an 1880 Thomas Anshutz painting shows that the sidewheeler EXPRESS had the curved tops of her sidewheel housings painted a tan color (photo 3).

A brief apology is in order at this point since the photos in this column are not shown in color, but that is out of the author's control as the March issue is going to press in black-and-white.

Newspaper river reporters also often gave detailed descriptions of color schemes on newly built boats. The little sidewheeler CLYDE which towed log rafts on the Upper Mississippi River was written up as having a dark red hull with white woodwork inside and out with the exception of the tops of the pilothouse and side wheel houses which were sky blue (photo 4).

The Bard brothers, James and John, living in the New York City area, produced many paintings of Hudson River boats and other East Coast steamers and sailing craft. The Bards were meticulous in their notes and measurements of the vessels they depicted in their paintings. There are two excellent books about them that would be valuable additions to any steamboat historian's library. It is too bad the Bards never made it to the Midwest. Those books are: *J. & J. Bard, Picture Painters*, by A. J. Peluso, Jr. 1977, ISBN #0-930930-02-9 and *The Bard Brothers, Painting America under Steam and Sail*, published by The Mariners Museum, 1997. ISBN# 0-8109-1240-6.

A very excellent color reference for early marine paints is an extensive article by Eric A. R. Ronnberg, Jr. published by the Nautical Research Guild and titled "Paint and Colors for American Merchant vessels, 1800-1920, Their Study and Interpretation for Modelmaking." The article includes many color samples of the types of paint discussed. This first appeared in the December 1991 quarterly *Nautical Research Journal*. It has since been reproduced in the *Guild's Ship Modeler's Shop Notes Vol. II*, which is currently available from the Guild's on-line store for \$35.00.

If the reader wants to delve deeply into the chemical composition and technology of nineteenth century paints, *The Transactions of the Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers for 1900* includes an eighty-six page article by associate member Prof. A. H. Sabin titled "The Composition and Classification of Paints and Varnishes." Not what the average modeler or artist would need, but enlightening to technically minded historians.

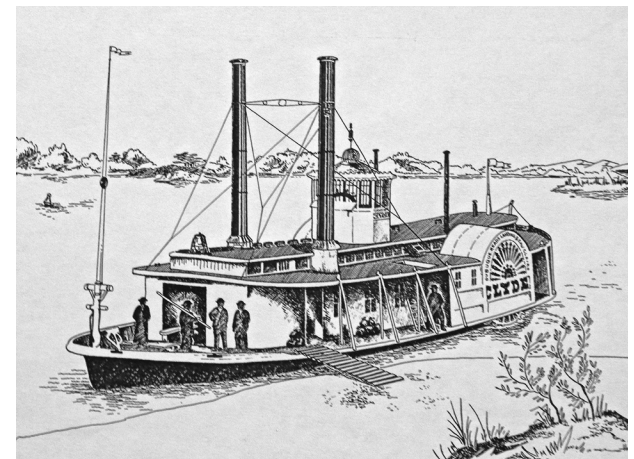
In contrast to all of this technical data, the late Alan Bates, in a letter to this author dated March 5, 1980, mentioned that Capt. Jim Howard of Howard Shipyard told him that unless a customer wanted a

specific color, they painted decks a dark Indian red (whatever that is). In the same letter, Alan gave a paint formula from *Moore's Universal Assistant, or 1,000,000 Industrial Facts*, published in 1885. That book prescribes "Dark red for common purposes: mix English Venetian Red, in boiled oil, with a little red lead and litharge, to give a drying quality. Lighter red: mix together equal parts of Venetian Red and red lead in boiled oil and turps."

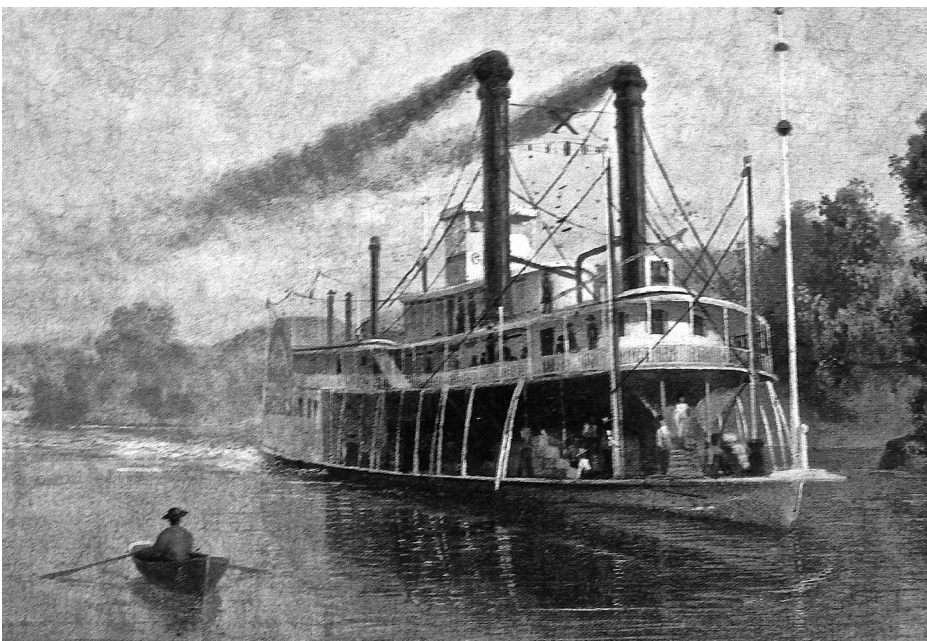
And finally after all the research is done, the artist/modeler must also consider that Western Rivers steamboats were frequently repainted. Thorough research may uncover several color schemes for a particular boat. Or as this model builder has been told, "What month of what year would you like to represent the colors of that boat?" More on steamboat colors and paint schemes in the next Small Stacks column.



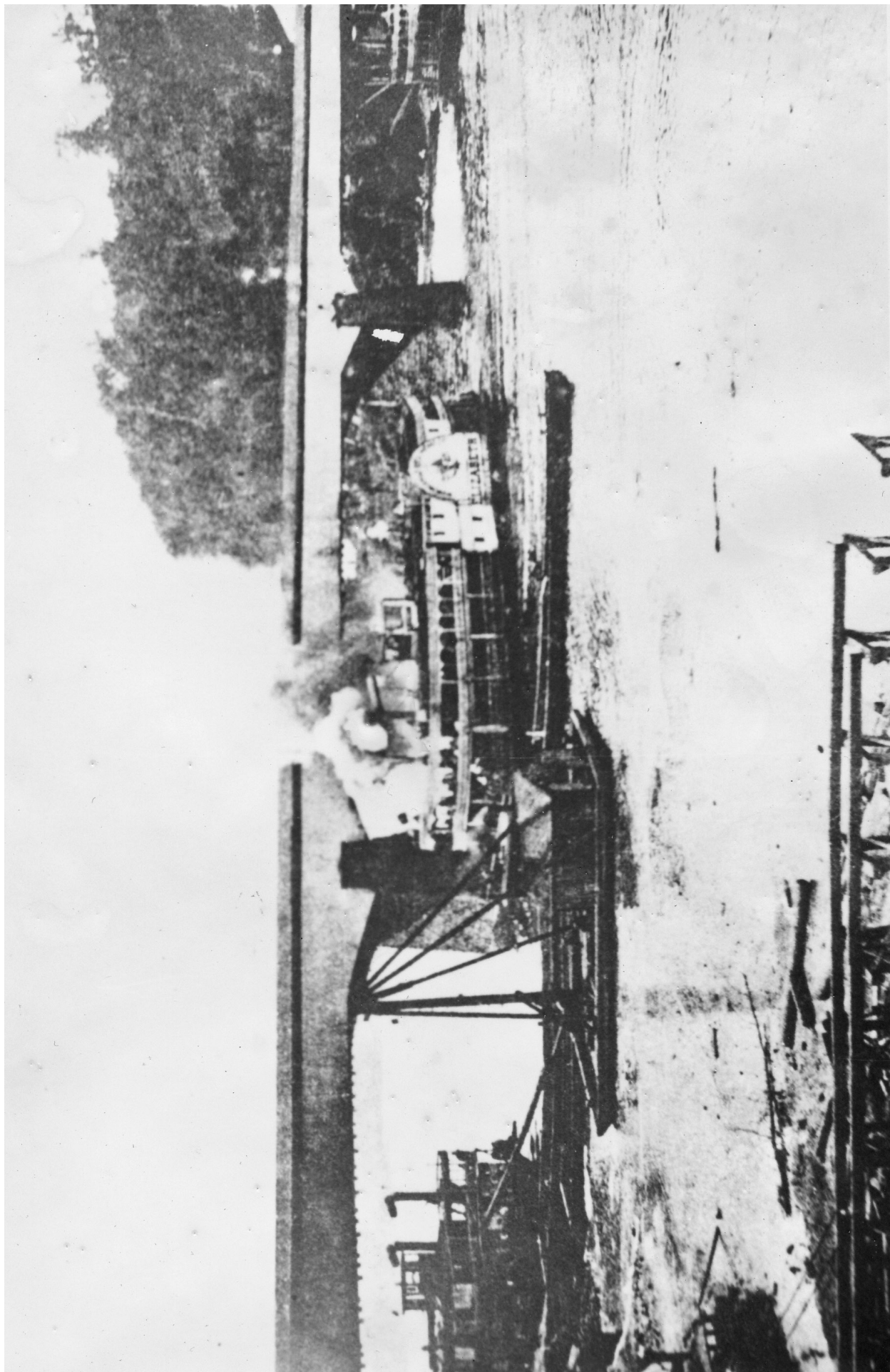
**Photo 1 (on left):** SUPERIOR was built 1821 at Steubenville, OH. The original painting by French artist Felix Achille St. Aulaire was completed when the boat was new during his visit to the Ohio valley in 1821. Lithographic copies of the painting were made by a Parisian print maker in 1832. Photos by John Fryant.



**Photo 2 (on left):** LOWELL was built in 1838 and completed in 1839 at Jeffersonville. She eventually sank below Ft. Gaines, FL in 1845. **Photo 4 (above):** In 1870 CLYDE was the first iron-hulled steamboat built on the Mississippi. She later became a sternwheel towboat.



**Photo 3 (on left):** EXPRESS NO. 2 was built at Wheeling in 1870 for the Wheeling-Parkersburg trade, Capt. Phil Anshutz master and Edward J. Anshutz clerk. She was dismantled in 1879 and her hull became Wheeling's wharfboat. Your editor was unable to determine whether the painter of this scene, Thomas Pollock Anshutz, was a relative of the master and clerk of the EXPRESS. Thomas was born in Newport, KY and in the summers of 1879 and 1880, he returned to his mother's hometown of Wheeling and painted several scenes, of which this may be one. His most well-known river painting is *Steamboat on the Ohio* (c. 1896-1907). It depicts a group of men and boys on shore watching a steamboat pass an orange-red factory in the distance.



*ELIZABETH (1766) was a wood-hulled packet whose hull was constructed in 1888 at Belle Vernon, PA and completed at West Brownsville, PA. She ran Pittsburgh-Elizabeth and then Pittsburgh-Morgantown. Sold in 1903 at a U.S. sale to Samuel Carpenter, a diver whose fleet was moored in Allegheny River above the 6th Street Bridge. While tied there in the fleet on January 24, 1904, Carpenter's OLIVETTE (4298) caught fire and soon set ELIZABETH, tied alongside, ablaze as well. Turned loose, she drifted down under the Union Bridge, a covered wooden structure, and set it on fire. The tug JOHN DIPPEL shoved her ashore where she continued to burn, a total loss. Photo from Ed Mueller collection.*



## Final Crossings

### David A. Morecraft

David Alan Morecraft was born on June 26, 1959 to B.D. and Marabell Morecraft. He passed away on December 1, 2016 at the age of 57. He was preceded in death by his parents, his loving wife Linda Fay Morecraft, and his brother Timothy J. Morecraft. Dave is survived by his son Zachary, his daughter Danielle Runda, and his sister Kathy Piper.

Many S&D members know him for what he loved more than anything else except his family: being the last authentic steam calliope builder in America. Dave developed a love of the steam calliope as a youngster in his hometown of Peru, IN, known in years past as the winter quarters of the Hagenback and Wallace Circus. As a town deeply rooted in the circus and all the trappings that are part of the old time traveling shows, the steam calliope is a big part of this heritage as well. Dave was self-taught as a calliope builder in the tradition of Thomas J. Nichol of Cincinnati, who built the finest steam calliopes in the heyday of the famous instrument. Dave worked for his father at Miami Metal where he learned the fine art of metal furniture construction. This career and his love for the old time infernal music machine were a perfect match. The historic music maker of the circus and steamboat came back to life with his touch, for he not only built them, but was a highly-regarded performer on them.

I was fortunate to know Dave as a great friend. We met through the late Capt. Alan Bates when Dave had come down to see the excursion steamboat BELLE OF LOUISVILLE in 1984. Capt. Bates showed him our calliope and gave him my name. That evening Dave called, we talked steam calliopes and within a couple of weeks I was playing his first instrument in Peru. His 100% accurate modern-built steam calliope impressed me so much that I asked him to build one for the BELLE. After 3 years and a lot of hard work, we convinced the powers that be and he built the finest set of whistles ever to play on the Ohio River! We worked on another project several years later for a calliope on the new overnight riverboat AMERICAN QUEEN. I remember him calling to ask if I could draw something quick and fax it to him for a bid he needed for the Delta Queen Steamboat Company. I had the drawings to him in 24-hours. It took another year for the contract to

work out right, but he saw it through, built the whistles, keyboard, designed the electronic systems, and installed it on the boat himself. He even negotiated a deal to sell over 200 wire racks from Miami Metal to them!

His instruments survive today on the Str. BELLE OF LOUISVILLE, Str. MINNE HA-HA of Lake George, NY., Amherst Madison's steam barge in Charleston, WV., Str. SUCCESS in Amsterdam, m/v FRONTIER at Lake Ashi, Japan and the AMERICAN QUEEN of Memphis, TN. While the calliope brings fun and happy memories when we hear one, sometimes it's the people in the background who really make those smiles happen. And so the next time you hear a steam calliope, think of Dave and all the smiles his creations brought to you. I am sure that would please him to know that smiles and happiness live on through his creations.

**Our thanks to Travis Vasconcelos for writing this tribute to Dave and for providing the photo on page 5.**

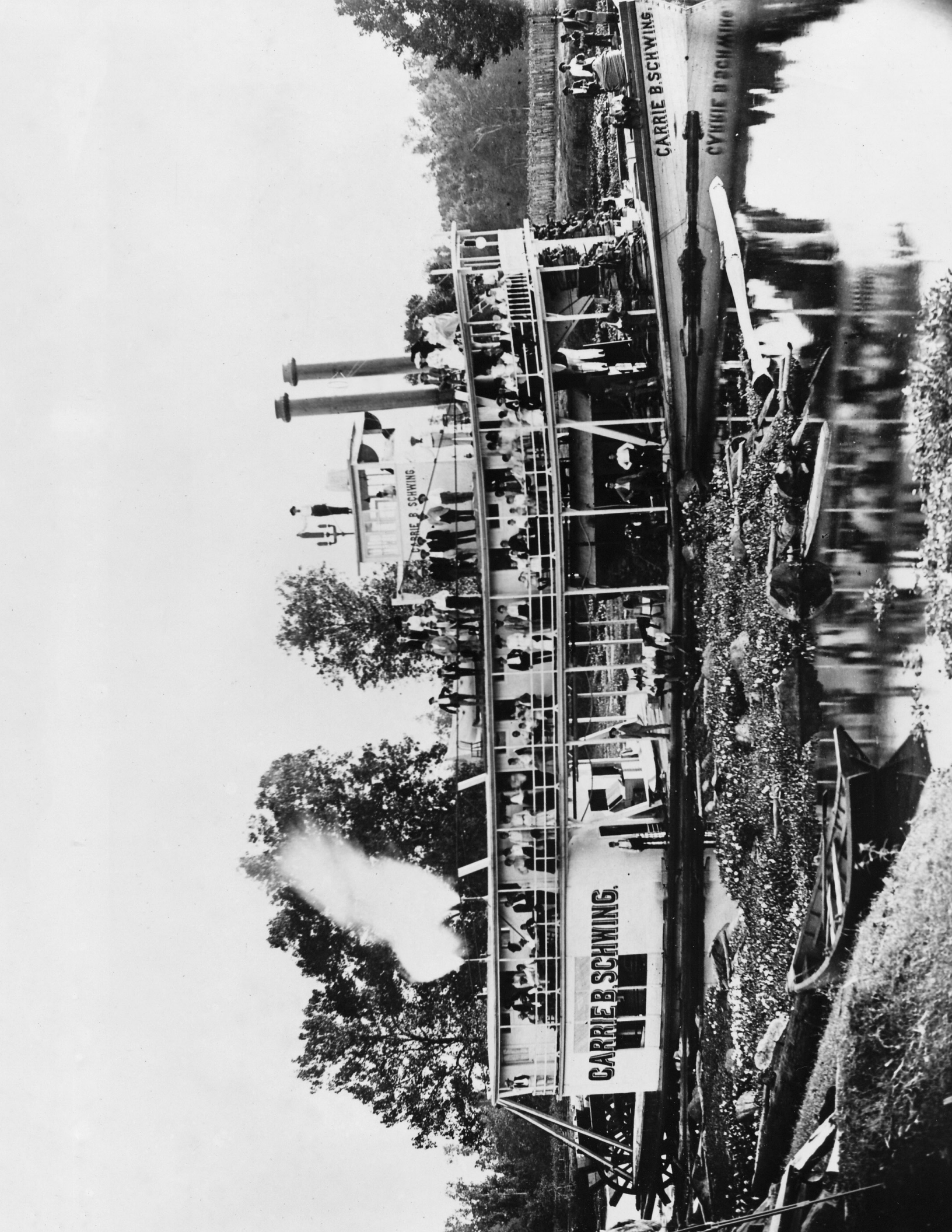
### *Reflections from Our Readers continued from page 3.*

an excellent job, let's have more picture space and less verbiage space in the pages. Bring back the big pix!"

🕯 Michael's concern and suggestion regarding the size of photos in the REFLECTOR are duly noted! When your editor first came on board over six years ago, Alan Bates advised him to include pictures, lots and lots of big pictures as part of each issue. Capt. Lexie Palmore, as we recall, also counseled the same in one of her early letters to the editor. Michael has once more reminded us of this wise advice, and he has our thanks for caring enough about the success of the magazine to bring it to our attention. Admittedly, today's REFLECTOR will never approach the magnificence of those created by Fred Way, as his magazines were a personal and unique reflection of the good captain and of his vast experience. But in fairness, we trust that most of our readers understand and accept that, and are willing to make some allowances. However, the matter of photos can and should be addressed by this editor. While this change will be made, it will be brought about in a manner that does not at the same time unduly limit the stories and history we also want to tell in these pages. But rest assured that we are committed to offering a magazine that you will value and enjoy.

### **Back Cover**

CARRIE B. SCHWING (0871 or 0872), one of the two towboat/excursion boats of Schwing Lumber Co., Plaquemine, LA. *From Ed Mueller collection.*



CARRIE B. SCHWING.

CARRIE B. SCHWING

CARRIE B. SCHWING.

CYRILLE B. SCHWING