

STEAMBOATS AT LOUISVILLE AND ON THE OHIO AND MISSISSIPPI RIVERS

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Since prehistoric man hollowed out logs with stone hatchets and fire, river transportation has played a major part in exploration, conquest, and development. Our earliest recorded history has been of the great rivers of Europe and Asia and Africa. The Nile, Euphrates, Danube, and the Rhine play their part; and in recent months the terrific struggle of opposing armies for the Volga and the Don gives us an idea of the part rivers play in conquest. In the United States, the Hudson, the Ohio, the Mississippi, and the Missouri each bore the war canoes of the Indians, the batteaux of the trapper, the broadhorns of the pioneers, the keelboats of commerce, to be followed by the steamboat. Louisville by its location at the Falls of the Ohio and its protected harbor, formed by the junction of Beargrass Creek with the Ohio River, was destined to have a great part in the eras of the settlement of the great valleys of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and of steamboating.

The invention of the steamboat—that is, a vessel propelled by steam power—is attributed to Oliver Evans, whose steam auto ran on land and water; by others to John Fitch, in 1778, who is buried at Bardstown where he spent the last years of his life. Edward West and James Rumsey are also credited. West, a watchmaker of Lexington, Kentucky, constructed a small steamboat and tried it out on Elkhorn Creek in 1798. Captain Gilbert Imlay attributed the invention of the steamboat to James Rumsey of Virginia.

John Filson in his *Kentucke*, published in 1784, says, on page 45, that Mr. Rumsey proposes to construct a “mechanical boat” that will be “propelled by the force of mechanical powers thereto applied.” Imlay, in his book, *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America*, first published in 1792, states, on pages 99-100, that:

"The invention of carrying a boat against the stream by the influence of steam, is a late improvement in philosophy by a Mr. Rumsey of Virginia, whose ingenuity has been rewarded by that State with the exclusive privilege of navigating boats in her rivers for ten years; and as this grant was given previous to the independence of Kentucky, the act of separation guarantees his right. Some circumstance or other has prevented his bringing them into use. However, there can be no doubt of the success of his scheme, for the Assembly of Virginia had the most unequivocal assurances before they gave the privilege, in a certificate signed by General Washington and Man Page, Esquire; setting forth, that they had seen a boat, they believed to be constructed by Mr. Rumsey, ascend a stream without the aid of manual labour, but without mentioning the operating cause, which has since appeared to be steam."

Robert Fulton's *Clermont*, in the year 1807, was the first as is now well known, to prove it feasible commercially to move a boat by steam power.

From that moonlight night of October 28, 1811, when Nicholas J. Roosevelt awakened and frightened the inhabitants of the village of Louisville with his steamboat, *New Orleans*, to the afternoon of September 21, 1935, when the last of the sidewheel packets, the steel-hulled *Cincinnati*, blew her well remembered deep chime whistle for the opening of the Fourteenth Street draw-span on her way to St. Louis to be converted into an excursion boat, only one hundred twenty-five years elapsed. Yet in that comparatively short time the valleys of the Ohio and Mississippi and their tributaries saw the greatest development of steam navigation, likewise the greatest development of civilization the world has ever known.

The *New Orleans* was a crude little affair, 116 feet long, 20-foot beam, with a single engine attached to paddle wheels on each side amidship; it was built along the lines of a sailing vessel, with a deep hull and two masts for sails, and two cabins. It required bold vision and great financial risk to embark on such an enterprise. She was built at Pittsburgh from plans drawn by Robert Fulton, and copied in many ways the *Clermont*. The *New Orleans* was financed by Nicholas J. Roosevelt and Chancellor Robert R. Livingston. She carried the following: a captain; an engineer named Baker; Andrew Jack, pilot; six hands; a man waiter; a cook; two female servants; Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas J. Roosevelt (the only passengers), and an immense New

foundland dog named Tiger. (*The First Steamboat Voyage on the Western Waters*, J. H. G. Latrobe, published by Maryland Historical Society, October, 1871.) She was the forerunner of the vast numbers of floating palaces which were to fill the rivers and transport a mighty argosy of freight and passengers.

On that night of October 28, 1811, when the *New Orleans* dropped anchor in the river off the foot of Fifth Street by the brilliant light of the Hunter's Moon, Louisville was a frontier town of 1,357 population, straggling along the river bank from the foot of Brook Street to Twelfth Street and inland southward to Jefferson Street, surrounded by woods and dotted with ponds. Corn Island was still in existence; Fort Nelson had a small garrison of troops; Evan Williams' distillery operated near the foot of Fifth Street; General Clark was still living; and Gwathmey's "Indian Queen," a tavern on the north side of Main between Sixth and Seventh, was the leading hotel. The first brick house built by Frederick Kaye in 1789 was standing on the south side of Market between Fifth and Sixth. Michael Lacassagne, the first postmaster, had his residence and "hanging gardens" on the river front between Bullitt and Fifth streets. Two policemen upheld the law's majesty. Whiskey sold for twenty-five cents a gallon.

When the *New Orleans* anchored at Louisville, the water on the Falls was too shallow to permit her passage down the river, and for a few weeks she operated between Louisville and Cincinnati, carrying freight and passengers, until there came a rise in the river; and in December, 1811, she continued to her destination at New Orleans. On her first trip down the Mississippi River she ran into the terrible New Madrid earthquake—the earthquake that formed Reelfoot Lake in Tennessee and caused the Mississippi to reverse its flow for a period of hours.

The *New Orleans* proved so successful that in a short time many other boats followed. The first steamboat built at Louisville, the *Governor Shelby*, was launched in 1815 at the mouth of Beargrass Creek, and was followed by the *United States* in 1818, the first to be launched at Jeffersonville, Indiana.

The Fulton-Roosevelt backers claimed a monopoly of steam navigation on all the rivers of the United States, and all boats built after the *New Orleans* paid tribute to this monopoly, until 1817 when a young man, later a resident of Louisville, Cap-

tain Henry Shreve, built the steamboat *Washington* at Wheeling, Virginia, to operate between Louisville and New Orleans. He refused to pay tribute, successfully challenged the monopoly, and the courts upset the monopoly claims of Fulton, Livingston, and Roosevelt. The *Washington* was a great advance over the *New Orleans* and in essential design was the steamboat as it was to be used during all the subsequent period of steamboating.

Shreve realized that the sailing model drew too much water to get over the sandbars and shallow places of the rivers in times of low water. He saw that a single engine, connected to both paddle wheels, interfered with the handling of the vessel. He was the first to build a wide, shallow draft hull with side wheels, each connected to its own engine, and with boilers placed on the deck of the hull rather than in the hull. On the deck immediately over the boilers he placed the passenger accommodations, and over that, amidship, on the extreme top deck, he built a pilothouse. From there the vessel was steered by a wheel connected by chains to the rudder, and signals were given to the engineer. This was the basic design of the inland river steamboats that followed the *Washington*.

After Shreve's *Washington*, the next great advance in steamboat design was the second *J. M. White*, built in 1843 by William King, at Elizabeth, Pennsylvania, for Captain J. M. Converse of St. Louis. By changing the lines of the hull it produced only two swells under way, and by placing the side wheels further aft than had been customary the paddles or buckets had a better dip in the water. This boat established a record round trip between St. Louis and New Orleans in April and May, 1844, of nine days, making all landings and the layover in New Orleans and with a full cargo of freight and passengers. The running time from St. Louis to New Orleans was three days and sixteen hours, and from New Orleans to St. Louis three days and twenty-three hours. So well was her hull constructed that after the boat was dismantled, in 1849, it was converted into a wharf boat, and in 1899 was destroyed by fire.

Steamboating was an unregulated business until 1839, when, appalled at the great loss of lives by sinking, explosions, and burning, Congress took a hand and required the boats, captains, pilots, and engineers to be licensed after a thorough examination.

Steamboating had a romance and glamour never attained in

any other kind of transportation. The large sidewheel passenger steamboat was beautiful. Her lines, with a graceful sheer, made her set on the water like a swan, the ornamental railings were filigree of woodwork, her smokestacks towered high above the water line and their tops were cut to represent plumes or fern leaves. From the hull to the hurricane deck the boat was painted a glistening white, with the tops of the wheelhouses a sky blue, as was the breeching around the smokestacks. The pilothouse with its ornamental crown added to the appearance of the entire structure. The dome of the pilothouse matched in color the wheelhouse. A red line near the top of the hull extended from the stem to the stern, and the skylights or ventilators over the main salon were of stained glass. The main cabin which extended nearly the full length of the boat was done in white and gold, the walnut or rosewood of the panels at the stateroom doors provided an agreeable contrast.

There was usually a small landscape over the stateroom doors. (It is not generally known that two of our best landscape artists, Carl Brenner and Harvey Joiner, of Louisville, got their start by doing such paintings.) Before electric lights were generally used, many boats had lard-oil lamps in crystal chandeliers. The bridal suites and the ladies' cabin were models of decoration, French plate mirrors in hand-carved and gilded frames adorned them, marble-topped tables, deeply velveteed upholstered chairs and settees were provided, and a piano of the best make completed the furnishings.

The name of the boat painted on the sides of the wheelhouses was a triumph of the sign painter's art; it was frequently done in gold leaf. Sometimes immediately above the name of the boat was painted a landscape or a figure. The boat's colors were beautiful. Flying from the forward flagpole, called the jackstaff, was a long flag outlined in red, white, and blue with the name of the boat in red on white ground. About halfway up on the jackstaff was an ornament, called the night-hawk. This enabled the pilot to steer the boat by various landmarks either day or night; so that an imaginary line, drawn from the forward landmark through the night-hawk, the pilothouse, and the verge-staff to landmarks on the shore astern, enabled him to keep the boat on its course day or night. Inboard on each wheelhouse was a flagstaff which flew burgees bearing the names of the

cities between which the boat operated. On the flagstaff at the rear of the texas the union jack was flown and on the rear flagstaff, called the verge-staff, flew the Stars and Stripes.

It was customary for the city or the person for whom the boat was named to present a complete set of colors to the vessel. This took place upon her first call to her home port, when a large number of citizens came aboard, bands played, speeches were made, and the public was invited to participate in the dinner aboard the boat.

The greatest steamboat ever built for Western rivers was the third *J. M. White*, built by Howard at Jeffersonville, Indiana, in 1878, and operated on the Mississippi in the Bends trade (from New Orleans to Greenville on the Mississippi). This great steamboat cost, with her furnishings, over \$250,000 and paid for herself in three years' time. She could carry a cargo of 8,000 bales of cotton, the freight on which averaged \$1.25 a bale. Her cabin passenger capacity was 225 people, all of whom were fed with the best food obtainable. Her staterooms were better than any hotel accommodations ashore; her smallest staterooms were ten by twelve feet, and others ranged in size to twelve by sixteen feet, all furnished with the most beautiful furniture obtainable and the best of linens. The carpets in her saloon were woven specially in Brussels. Her staterooms had no berths in them, but were furnished with walnut beds, inlaid with the monogram of the boat. At the rear of the texas, or cabin on the extreme upper or hurricane deck, beautiful quarters were provided for colored servants traveling with their employers, and this section was known as the "Freedman's Bureau." This great boat burned and sank in the Mississippi River, December 13, 1886, with a loss of several lives.

Steamboat traffic was extensive. In the two decades from the landing of the *New Orleans* at Louisville, traffic had increased so much that a canal was constructed between Louisville and Portland. Opened in 1830 by the passage of the steamboat *Uncas* it enabled the smaller boats to avoid the Falls. The canal's dimensions at that time were such that it could not be used by the big steamboats, and they therefore were obliged to take either the Falls route or transship their passengers and freight between Louisville and Portland. Portland, located below the Falls, was a separate town with many stores, several

hotels, and a paved wharf. In the course of time the canal was twice made wider and its locks lengthened.

During 1856 three thousand steamboats landed at the Louisville wharf; in 1859 there were 32 large packets regularly operating out of Louisville to St. Louis and New Orleans; in 1860 there were 904 packets in regular trades operating through Louisville to St. Louis and New Orleans.

During the twenty years from 1847 to 1867 a total of 204 steamboats, costing over \$7,500,000, were built at New Albany, Indiana. Among them were such floating palaces as the *Eclipse*, \$140,000, in 1852; the *A. L. Shotwell*, \$85,000, in 1853; the first *Robt. E. Lee*, \$160,000, in 1867. With such a natural obstacle to navigation created by the Falls and with the vast forests in the immediate vicinity, it was but natural that the Louisville-Jeffersonville-New Albany area should develop into one where the building of steamboats and their machinery created a great industry. In fact, the boat-building plant established in Jeffersonville by James Howard in 1824 had a continuous existence in the same family for over a hundred years. During the period from 1862 to 1882 there were 138 steamboats built at their yard. The skill of the designers and builders of that yard was such that a Howard-built boat was recognized as the best that could be made; at that yard were built the largest, most expensive, and best designed boats that ever navigated the Ohio and Mississippi rivers.

In 1878 the Howards built seven steamboats, among them two of the largest ever to ply Western rivers: the *Ed Richardson* and the *J. M. White*. In one year, 1881, this yard built three sidewheelers for the Anchor Line: the *City of Baton Rouge*, the *City of New Orleans*, and the *City of Vicksburg*.

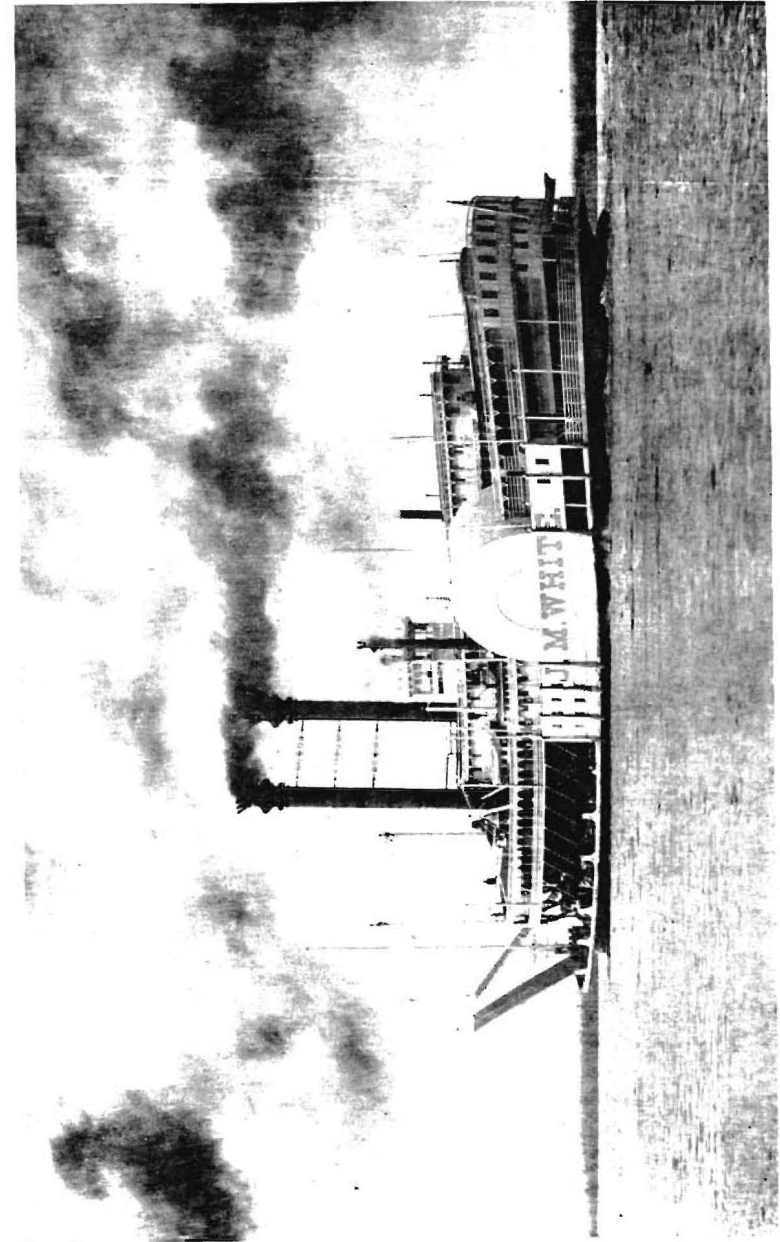
Two very celebrated passenger packets operated between Louisville and New Orleans were named for Louisville belles: the *Fannie Bullitt*, built at Louisville in 1854, rendered very heroic service as a hospital boat during the Civil War; and the *Mary Houston*, built, also at Louisville, after the Civil War. Both were popular and very fast passenger boats, and were owned by Louisville people.

The U. S. Mail Line operating between Louisville and Cincinnati was the oldest of them all. It was established in 1818, and antedated by many years the first steamship, the *Savannah*,

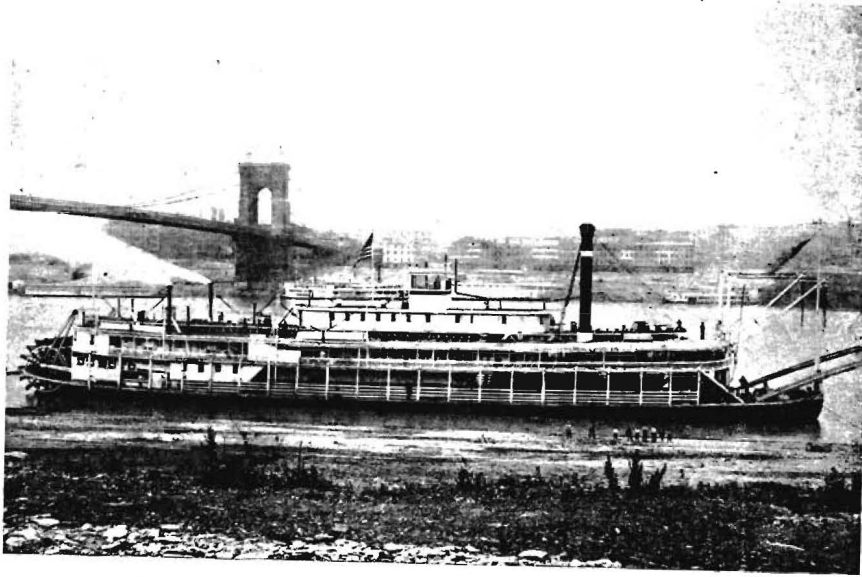
to cross the ocean. At one time it operated two large boats daily between those ports, at 10 a. m. and at 3 p. m., also one to St. Louis and one to Carrollton. Probably the greatest of its fleet was the *Jacob Strader*, which came out in 1853, operated in the Line until 1863, became a troop transport, and was dismantled in 1866. She had passenger accommodations for 400, and was the most ornate and luxurious of all the boats of her time. She was thus described by Dr. Thomas Low Nichols in his book, *Forty Years of American Life*, published in 1864:

“She was not, I judge, more than three hundred feet in length, but rose in a light and graceful style of architecture of which no example can be found in Europe, to a height of five stories, or decks. On the first deck are the boilers, engines, fuel and light freight, horses, carriages, and deck passengers. You mount a broad flight of stairs and come to the spacious drinking saloon, barber’s shop, and luggage room. From this landing another ascent brings you to the captain’s office, where passengers are booked and their staterooms assigned them. This is an ante-room to the great saloon, which is broad, high, well-lighted and furnished with marble tables, glass chandeliers, mirrors, sofas, etc., and reaches to the stern of the boat, perhaps two hundred feet. On each side are staterooms, or rather elegant bed-chambers, furnished with every convenience. The panels of the great saloon are painted in oil with landscapes of American scenery, and no cost has been spared in upholstery. The whole boat is lighted with gas and hot and cold baths can be had at a moment’s notice. The capacity of the kitchen and force of waiters are sufficient to provide a sumptuous dinner, with printed bills of fare, for six hundred passengers. Beneath the ladies’ saloon is a large saloon fitted up expressly for children and their nursery attendants.

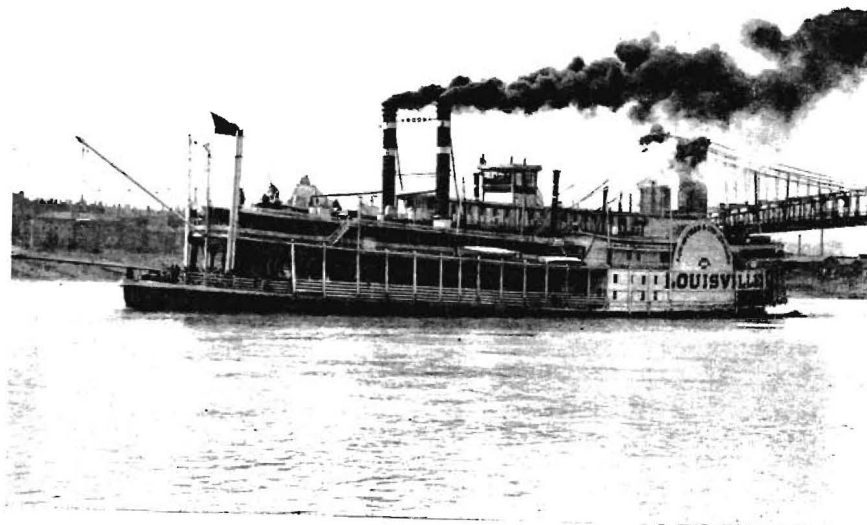
“Over the great saloon and its double range of staterooms, is the promenade deck, on which are the staterooms of the officers and pilots. The deck above this is called the hurricane-deck, and still above this rises the pilothouse; which, with its large windows on all sides, made comfortable by a stove in winter, commanding an unimpeded view, and communicating by signal-bells and speaking-tubes with the engineers, and by chains from the wheel to the rudder, gives the pilots, as the steersmen of these boats are called, complete command of the boat in its often difficult navigation. The pilot, his mate, and two assistants, are very important personages. They have the entire charge and responsibility of navigation. The captain tells them the points at which he wishes to land, and gives the signal for departure, but seldom interferes further with the course of the boat. The



The third *J. M. White*, 1878-1886, was the largest and most costly of the river packets



The *DeSoto*, 1877-1890, was a typical sternwheel packet



The *City of Louisville*, 1894-1918, was the fastest packet on the Ohio

pilots are paid two or three hundred dollars a month and found. Imagine yourself so highly favoured as to be invited by the pilot to take a seat in his glazed turret, forty feet above the water, and commanding the panorama of the valley through which you are gliding. Villages, farms, and forests seem to sweep past you. You meet steamers and pass flat boats, going lazily down with the current. It is the poetry of travelling. The rail is more rapid, but in comfort there is no comparison; for there is a bar where you can have your choice of every possible drink and also a table d'hote, with its bill of fare of fifty dishes. You may lounge on a sofa, promenade on the deck, play poker forward, chess amidships, or the pianoforte aft. It is your own fault if you do not, so being inclined, find plenty of interesting, perhaps charming, society.

"At night, dashing along the starlit river, all her windows blazing with lights, her furnace fires throwing their glare forward, the black smoke filled with sparks from her escape pipes, perhaps a band playing, and a gay party dancing on her lofty promenade deck, was altogether a strange and curious picture."

She made a record of nine hours and fifty-two minutes between Louisville and Cincinnati, arriving at Madison in three hours and twelve minutes from Louisville. This record stood until April 19, 1894, when the *City of Louisville* made the distance in nine hours and forty-two minutes. The *City of Louisville* made her last trip in May, 1917, and was destroyed by ice at Cincinnati in January, 1918. The boats of this Line included the numerous *Gen. Pikes* and *Telegraphs*, and the *Alvin Adams*, *Ben Franklin*, *United States*, *America*, *Northerner*, *Southerner*, *Moses McClellan*, *Superior*, *Gen. Buell*, *Major Anderson*, *Lady Pike*, *High Flyer*, *Gen. Lytle*, *City of Madison*, *Bonanza*, *City of Louisville*, *Big Sandy*, *City of Cincinnati*, and others. This Line continuously operated until April 22, 1931, when it was acquired by the Green Line and is now carrying freight exclusively.

The Louisville and Cincinnati trade was very profitable and rate-wars were not uncommon between the Mail Line boats and an independent packet. One of the notable wars was between the Mail Line packet, *Fleetwood*, and the *New South*. The *New South* was built at Jeffersonville in 1887 for the Paducah and St. Louis trade; she was a sidewheeler and was built along the lines of the Anchor Line boats. She proved too expensive to operate in that trade and was brought to Louisville and started running between Louisville and Cincinnati; the Mail Line met the threat with one of its best boats, the *Fleetwood*. The rate-

war started in April and continued until the first of July, 1890. Before the end came, passengers were being carried between Louisville and Cincinnati in both directions for one dollar round trip, including meals and berth. Each boat left with a capacity passenger list. Just before the end came, round-trip passage between the two cities could be made for twenty-five cents. The rate-war ended with the purchase of the *New South* by the Mail Line, and normal fares were restored: Three dollars one way, five dollars round trip, meals and berth included.

After this rate-war between the *New South* and the *Fleetwood*, others frequently occurred for the short trade between Louisville and Madison and Carrollton. At one time during the early summer of 1895, in addition to the service furnished by the Mail Line, there were six boats daily to Madison, including the *Big Kanawha*, *B. S. Rhea*, *Dick Brown*, *City of Clarksville*. All rate-wars ended with the one between the Mail Line and *City of Pittsburgh* in 1900 when the passage, one way, between Louisville and Cincinnati dropped to ten cents.

Louisville was one of the great steamboat centers in the entire Mississippi River system. It was the foot of navigation for the upper river and the head of the navigation for the lower river trade. Shippingport and Portland served as terminals and harbors for the head of navigation of the lower river. The Cincinnati and upper river boats had their wharf at Louisville above the mouth of Beargrass Creek, which, until 1854, emptied into the Ohio between Third and Fourth streets. That part of the Creek bank to the north was called Strader's Wharf; it was there where salt from the Kanawha River mines was warehoused. The Creek was crossed by several bridges, starting at the foot of Second Street. The Public Wharf was below the mouth of the Creek. Both wharves were protected from the prevailing northwest winds by Corn Island. The Louisville Gas Works got its coal by barges which were floated up the Creek as far as Preston Street.

During the Civil War the Louisville Public Wharf was one of the busiest and most congested places on the entire river. Troop transports and hospital boats loaded with wounded soldiers filled the wharf, and all that goes to supply a vast army passed over Louisville's wharves. At one time, in the fall of 1862, it was decided to evacuate the women and children and

wounded soldiers from the city, but, after a few boat loads had left, the withdrawal of the Confederates at Perryville caused the orders to be rescinded.

Regular lines operated out of Louisville to Cincinnati, Maysville, and Pittsburgh. Every other day there was a packet for Nashville. There was a boat three times weekly to St. Louis, in addition to the regular packets to New Orleans, and the daily service to Evansville and Henderson.

The Louisville and Henderson Packet Company had in its fleet such great sidewheelers as the *Tarascon*, *Morning Star*, *James Guthrie*, *Rainbow*, *City of New Albany*, and *City of Owensboro*; its sternwheel fleet included the *Fashion*, *Mattie Hays*, *Rose Hite*, *Carrie Hope*, *E. G. Ragon*, *Gold Dust*, *Tell City*, and the last *Tarascon*. Round trips between Louisville and Henderson could be made at a very reasonable cost. In periods of good weather and water it was one of the most popular trips out of Louisville.

A very popular short trip, during the later years of steamboating was to board the boat at the wharf at the foot of Fourth Street, go over the Falls to New Albany, and return to Louisville on the interurban steam car called Dinky or Daisy Line. This required the best part of an afternoon and furnished thrills at a total cost of 35 cents per person.

About 1877 the owners of the *Fannie Dugan*, a boat operating out of Cincinnati up-stream, painted a band of white around the smokestacks. Later this was done to the boats of the Line operating out of Cincinnati to up-river ports, and, accordingly, called itself the White Collar Line. The U. S. Mail Line, not to be outdone, painted two white collars on its smokestacks, from the middle of the 80's until 1918.

The White Collar Line operations extended down-river to Memphis and New Orleans. Some of its boats through Louisville (sternwheelers) were *Vint Shinkle*, *Granite State*, *De Soto*, *Carrollton*, *Congo*, *John K. Speed*, *Sherley*, *Sunshine*, *State of Kansas*, *Keystone State*. The sidewheelers: *Andy Baum*, *New South*, *Big Sandy* and others.

One of the lines fresh in the memories of some of the older Louisvillians was the celebrated "O" Line, or Southern Transportation Co., from Cincinnati to New Orleans, which operated from the 70's through the middle 90's. Its sternwheel fleet in-

cluded the *Paris C. Brown*, *Will Kyle*, *Louisville*, *U. P. Schenck*, *Golden Rule*, *Golden Crown*, and *Golden City*. Some of its sidewheel boats were the *Charles Bodman*, *A. C. Donnally*, *Robert Mitchell*, *Nicholas Longworth*, *Thompson Dean*, *Charles Morgan*, *Thomas Sherlock*, *R. R. Springer*, *New Mary Houston*, and *Guiding Star*. These boats provided first-class service from Louisville to New Orleans two and three times weekly. The *R. R. Springer* in May, 1881, made a record run from New Orleans to Cincinnati of five days and two hours which was never beaten. Built in 1879, the *Springer* was one of the first steamboats to have electric lights. The *Richmond*, built in 1867, and the *Golden Rule*, built in 1879, published a daily newspaper for their passengers. The *DeSoto* was a typical sternwheel packet.

Enormous cotton cargoes were carried on the Mississippi between Memphis and New Orleans. November 13, 1879, the iron hull sternwheel steamboat *Charles P. Chouteau* landed at New Orleans with a cargo of 8,844 bales of cotton and 200 tons of miscellaneous freight. This record stood until April 2, 1881, when the *Henry Frank* made port at New Orleans with 9,226 bales of cotton, 250 tons of freight, and a full passenger list. The *Frank's* record stands to this day. With freights averaging \$1.25 a bale of cotton and with a government contract to carry the U. S. Mail, steamboating was profitable. The *John Simonds*, one of the two three-deck steamboats to ply the Mississippi, on a fifteen day round trip between New Orleans and Memphis, in March and April, 1857, grossed \$11,354.

The larger boats not only served to transport passengers and freight, but in addition operated as bankers for their patrons; and also each boat had a certain personality of its own which made it sought after by the travelers. During the season of cotton and sugar shipments on the Mississippi River it was not unusual for boats like the third *J. M. White*, the *Katie*, and the *H. R. W. Hill*, to name a few of them, to carry many thousands of dollars in specie on a single trip. The cotton planter would ship his crop by his favorite steamboat, consigned to a factor in New Orleans and draw a bill upon the factor, who would sell the cotton and turn the proceeds over to the steamboat's clerk, who in turn, would deliver it to the planter on the boat's next up-stream trip. This was true of sugar also. The clerk of the steamboat was given commissions by the planter for plantation and house-

hold supplies which commissions would be filled at New Orleans and the supplies delivered on the up-stream trip.

Gambling was quite common on the Mississippi—more so than on the Ohio. The Ohio River trade was shorter and the gamblers did not have the opportunity to strike up acquaintances as on the longer runs. Many stories are told of the high stakes and of how the unsuspecting passengers were fleeced of large sums of money by these gentry. The captains of the boats did their best to keep the gamblers away, and not infrequently the captain or the boat's officers would break up the games, land the boat, and put ashore the professional gamblers, leaving them to their own devices to find their way to a city or town. Sometimes the stakes were slaves or the proceeds of sales of cotton and sugar crops.

There is one story about a governor of one of the Southern states who was returning from New York with a large sum of money from the sale of some of his state's bonds. He got into a game with professional gamblers where the sky was the limit, and, as was common, the professionals permitted him to win at first, gradually increasing the stakes until there was a very large sum in the pot. Suspecting that all was not as it should be, he pulled a large revolver from his hip pocket and called his opponents. At the same time pulling his weapon and backing the gamblers into a corner, he summoned the captain, who promptly put the gamblers ashore. A very entertaining book in that line is George Devol's *Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi*, published in 1926.

Steamboat races were a common occurrence—so much so that Currier and Ives had a stock lithograph of two steamboats racing, and every time a race attracted more than passing attention it was the custom for them to issue a new print with the names of the boats racing printed upon the lithograph.

In May, 1853, in a race against time the *A. L. Shotwell* ran from New Orleans to Louisville in four days, ten hours, and twenty minutes; to be followed the same month by Captain E. T. Sturgeon's *Eclipse* with a record of four days, nine hours, and thirty minutes, which was never broken.

The longest race that ever took place was the one between the *Diana* and the *Baltic*. Both the boats were large sidewheelers. In the race which started from New Orleans March 5, 1858, the *Baltic* was commanded by Captain Frank Carter and the

Diana by Captain Edward Sturgeon. The only landings made by either boat were at wood yards for fuel. They remained in sight of each other as far as Leavenworth, Indiana, when the *Baltic* forged ahead and landed at Portland wharf, two hours and forty minutes ahead of the *Diana*. The distance raced was slightly over 1,400 miles.

The race that attracted the most attention was that between the *Robt. E. Lee* and the sixth *Natchez*, which started at 5 p. m., June 30, 1870, from New Orleans and ended in victory for the *Lee* at St. Louis at 11:25 a. m., July 4, 1870, the *Lee's* time being three days, eighteen hours, and thirty minutes, the distance 1,157 miles.

The *Lee* was built at New Albany, Indiana, in 1866, and after it was discovered it was to be named for General Lee, public feeling became so high that threats were made to burn it. Captain John W. Cannon had the unfinished boat towed to the Portland wharf where it was completed. After ten years of active service the *Lee* was dismantled in the spring of 1876 at Jeffersonville. The *Natchez*, sixth of the name, was built at Cincinnati and was launched with steam up and ready to run in 1869. The *Natchez* lasted until the spring of 1879, when she was dismantled. She ran nine and one-half years, and made 410 trips without accident, and never flew an American flag.

Captain Cannon, the builder and owner of the *Lee*, and Captain Thomas P. Leathers, builder and owner of the *Natchez*, were Kentuckians. Both men were big men, and both men were very successful river men. Captain Cannon was born near Hawesville, Hancock County, Kentucky, June 17, 1820, and died near Midway, Woodford County, April 18, 1882. When only nineteen years of age he went to New Orleans and engaged in steamboating. He built, owned, and commanded fifteen large sidewheel steamboats. Captain Leathers was born near Covington, May 24, 1816, and died in New Orleans, June 14, 1896. He built, owned, and commanded fourteen large steamboats.

The officers of the great passenger packets were "rugged individualists" and high-class men. They were charged with a heavy responsibility in caring for the lives, comforts, and pleasures of their passengers, requiring unremitting vigilance in guarding against fire and other accident and policing of the boats to prevent crime, disorder, or neglect. It was a great hotel on

water, with tenfold the dangers and difficulties of management. The captain had to be a firm man who could deal with the worst characters and command the respect and prompt obedience of his subordinates; at the same time he had to understand all the courtesies of life. He cultivated a personal acquaintance with the passengers and knew who lived at every house along the river banks and greeted cordially those who came aboard at various landings. He had to answer the queries of his passengers; he had to be on his deck on the darkest and stormiest nights and keep in touch with his pilot.

Outstanding among such captains were Silas Miller, of the *R. F. Ward*; Peyton Key of the *Belle Key*; John Shallcross of the *Peytona*; T. C. Coleman of the *Saladin*; Frank Carter of the *Baltic*; David L. Penney of the *Rainbow* and the *City of Owensboro*; John Brennan of the *Fleetwood*; Harry Lindburn of the *City of Louisville*, and Captain Edward Sturgeon. Captain Sturgeon at the age of twenty-seven had built and owned and commanded one of the largest steamboats—the great *Eclipse*—ever operated in the Louisville and New Orleans trade.

Among river men deserving of particular mention is Colonel Will S. Hays, of Louisville, steamboat captain, also river editor and columnist, and widely known as a poet and composer. His songs fill a distinctive niche in American music. Two steamboats were named for him; the last *Will S. Hays* was equal in size, speed, and accommodations to any steamboat afloat in her time. Her engines, built in 1868 for the first *Thompson Dean*, were used on six boats and were destroyed by fire when the towboat *New Orleans* burned at Slidell, Louisiana, in July, 1928.

An interesting story is told about Captain John W. Tobin, who was principal owner and commander of the great *J. M. White*. He and Captain John W. Cannon were warm personal friends and were associated at different times in part-ownership of different steamboats. The third *J. M. White* was the largest and most powerful steamboat ever built, and Captain Tobin would not permit any attempt to better the record of the *Robt. E. Lee*. Late one night while ascending the Mississippi, after leaving Baton Rouge, Captain Tobin was awakened by an unusual amount of vibration. He sensed something very much out of the ordinary and, unknown to the engineers and pilots on watch, he went to the engine room, found the huge wheels were

turning over twenty-four times a minute and the boilers with a full head of steam. He went back to his cabin, ordered the boat landed, and put ashore both pilots and engineers for disobeying his orders. That was the first and only time the *J. M. White* was opened up.

The last race of the sidewheelers was between the *America*, an excursion boat, and the packet *Cincinnati* on the Ohio between Louisville and Fern Grove, on August 19, 1928, a distance of fifteen miles. It was won by the *Cincinnati* by twenty-eight feet, the time being one hour and five minutes. Since then the *America* has burned and the *Cincinnati* was remodeled into an excursion boat. The last race of the sternwheelers was between the *Tom Greene* and the *Betsy Ann*, on the Ohio, July 17, 1929, from Cincinnati up-stream to New Richmond, Ohio, a distance of twenty-two miles. It was won by the *Tom Greene*; the time was two hours and nineteen minutes.

Disasters were frequent. The quality of iron and steel in the boilers was not equal to the pressure; sometimes the feed-water pump, called "doctor," would get stopped up. This would bring about an increase in boiler pressure, and when the pump started functioning again the water out of the heater would turn into superheated steam and the boiler would explode. The worst disaster near Louisville occurred when the steamer *Lucy Walker* exploded October 23, 1844, down-bound for New Orleans. Her boilers let go just above the mouth of Salt River, with a loss of over seventy lives. The worst maritime disaster in which loss of lives was heaviest occurred in the spring of 1865 when the *Sultana*, a large sidewheel boat, operated in the Louisville and New Orleans trade, blew up about fifty miles above Memphis. She was bound up the river loaded with Union soldiers going North to be discharged. For no apparent reason her boilers exploded and over eighteen hundred lost their lives, nearly three hundred more than the loss in the sinking of the steamship *Titanic*.

Another terrible disaster in which many Louisville people lost their lives was the collision and subsequent burning and sinking of the Louisville & Cincinnati packets the *United States* and the *America* on December 4, 1868, at Rayl's Landing, two miles above Warsaw, Indiana. Within memory of many living today was the explosion in 1904 of the towboat *Fred Wilson*,

near the foot of Broadway. She was making up her tow of coal barges to go south, and about 4:30 a. m. her boilers let go and only six of her crew survived. The head of one of her boilers was found nearly one-half mile away in a vacant lot on Broadway; men's legs, arms, and bodies were blown into the cottonwood trees along the bank. Up to 1872 nearly 3,800 lives were lost by steamboat boiler explosions.

Probably the most distinguished individual to be wrecked on a steamboat was General Lafayette, May 8, 1825. He was coming up the Ohio River to Louisville, and the steamboat *Mechanic* on which he was a passenger struck a snag and sank at midnight in about twenty minutes, some 120 miles below Louisville. The General lost all of his clothing and papers and most of his money, and came very near losing his life; he was rescued by a member of the boat's crew.

The Falls and Big Eddy took a tragic toll of property and lives. So dangerous was the descent of twenty-eight feet in two miles from the foot of Ninth Street that very early in the history of Louisville the office of Falls Pilot was created, prior to the advent of the steamboat. In 1797 the Legislature took a hand and prescribed the qualifications and fees for these individuals. The first official Falls Pilot was Captain James Patton, whose house, at the northwest corner of Eighth and Main streets, commanded an unexcelled view of the river and the Falls. From his point of vantage he watched the approach of early pioneers' boats going down the river, and for a fee guided them safely over the Falls. Captain Patton and his family came to the Falls of the Ohio with General Clark in 1778; his remains are said to be buried in the old cemetery at Sixteenth and Jefferson streets. Wave Rock was the most dangerous place on the Falls until the summer of 1898 when it was blasted out. The greatest loss of lives there was the sinking of the *Milwaukee* in 1845, the *Jennie Hobbs* in 1851, and the *James D. Parker* in 1881. There is a well-defined tradition that the big sidewheeler *Mollie Ebert*, which sank in 1864, had a very large amount of gold and silver in her safe to pay Union soldiers on the Mississippi. She struck Wave Rock and sank swiftly; some lives were lost; she broke up, but no trace of her safe was ever found.

An interesting incident occurred in 1859 when the *Sallie Robinson*, a Yazoo River packet, and her cargo of 2,000 bales of

cotton were stolen by one man, Edward Schiller, who sold the boat and cargo for \$20,000.

Another unusual incident of steamboating took place on the Mississippi River. The only time a steamboat was ever held up by bandits, the *Andy Johnson*, a large sidewheeler, in November, 1871, left St. Louis on its run for up-river points. She carried a large sum in currency consigned to a bank for a lumber company payroll. The first day out of St. Louis a man appeared in the pilot-house, two men at the clerk's office, and one in the captain's cabin. The man in the pilothouse pressed a huge revolver in the pilot's back and ordered him to blow the whistle to land. The men in the clerk's office covered the clerk and scooped the money out of the boat's safe into a carpetbag. The boat landed and the bandits escaped with the loot. Waiting at the landing were the rest of the gang on horses; the bandits escaped in the woods and were never caught.

A very picturesque occurrence at Louisville was the arrival of the fleet of towboats coming down in the spring and fall from Pittsburgh. Usually in the latter part of November there was enough water in the river to float heavily loaded coal barges and coal boats; and this would occur again in April. A fleet of towboats would leave Pittsburgh on the rise, get to Port Fulton, Indiana, where was located the Pumpkin Patch or coal harbor. At this point the tow would be broken up and sections of six or eight coal barges, with the assistance of one of the local harbor boats, would be taken over the Falls, a section at a time, and then the tow would be reassembled at the foot of Broadway. Taking these sections over the Falls was risky; many coal boats and barges were sunk. If a coal shortage should develop here some day, dredging coal out of the river just below the Big Four Bridge piers should prove quite profitable. Some of the boats, after dropping their tows at the Pumpkin Patch, returned to Pittsburgh with a tow of empty barges.

When the crews were paid off for their voyage from Pittsburgh to Louisville, the police of Louisville had quite a problem on their hands. At this period Fourth Street, north of Main, and the river front were lined with saloons and dance halls. The old Buckingham Theater and the dance halls on Green Street were the scenes of wild revels, usually ending in jail for most of the participants.

The two largest tows to leave Louisville were those of the *Joseph B. Williams* and the *Sprague*. The first, the *Williams*, left here on March 15, 1898, with a fleet consisting of fifty-two coal boats, four barges, three flats, and one boat; the tow contained nearly one and one-half million bushels of coal, or enough to fill 1,937 railroad coal cars. The next and the largest tow ever to leave Louisville was in March, 1907; the *Sprague* left Louisville with a tow of seventy-one coal boats carrying one million eight hundred thousand bushels. The *Sprague* is still operating and has a record of towing four and one-fourth million gallons of gasoline in one tow from Baton Rouge to Memphis in six days and two hours.

Snags, fire, and ice were the great enemies of steamboats. The ice-run of 1918 inflicted a blow to steamboating from which it never recovered. In January of that year a period of extreme low water in the Ohio River was followed by a long freeze which was broken by warm rains, melting snow, and sudden rise in temperature. Over thirty-five steamboats were destroyed in the course of three days in the Ohio River alone. Among the steamboats cut down by the ice were the great steamboats, *City of Cincinnati* and the *City of Louisville* of the old Louisville & Cincinnati Packet Company. During the run-out of the ice, a protected harbor, the Ducks Nest, near Paducah, was attacked by the ice gorge on January 29, 1918. The titanic force of the ice caused the large passenger packet, the *Peoria* valued at \$100,000, to vanish forever. The pressure of the ice broke the lines holding her to the bank. Her crew was aboard and steam was up; all jumped and scrambled for the safety of dry land, while her wheel was slowly turning. The crewless boat proceeded on its downstream course in the floating ice and under its own power. It disappeared in the darkness and was never seen again. Even the general location of where it sank was and still is unknown.

No city in the Ohio Valley owes more to steamboating than Louisville. In 1811 Louisville saw the first steamboat, the *New Orleans*. Louisville saw the golden age of steamboating; she saw the decline and the approaching end of steamboating, until today when only one steamboat, the *Gordon C. Green*, in the Ohio River's one thousand mile course, is permitted to carry passengers over night. We are now seeing the rise of great fleets of barges and Diesel engine tow-boats. In that century and a

quarter Louisville saw the steamboat come and go, and also saw the advent of the ocean steamship, the railroad, the telegraph, gas, water-works, telephone, photography, typewriter, street cars, submarine, smokeless power, electric lights, automobiles, motion pictures, airplanes, and the radio. Will the next hundred and twenty-five years see a like development?

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