
THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

Volume IX

JANUARY, 1991

Number 1

Published by
THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

EDITOR

Lee A. Dew

Ky. Wesleyan College
Owensboro, Ky.

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Richard A. Weiss

Mrs. Henry Etta Schauburger

THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL QUARTERLY is published in January, April, July and October, by the Daviess County Historical Society. The QUARTERLY is supplied free to all its members.

Annual membership dues are \$7.00

Inquiries regarding memberships and other matters of business may be addressed to the Society Secretary, Mrs. Shelia Brown Heflin, Owensboro-Daviess County Library, Owensboro, Ky. 42301.

Correspondence concerning contributions and other editorial matters relating to the QUARTERLY should be addressed to the Editor. The editors and the Society assume no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Addresses of the authors will be supplied upon request to the editor.

CONTENTS

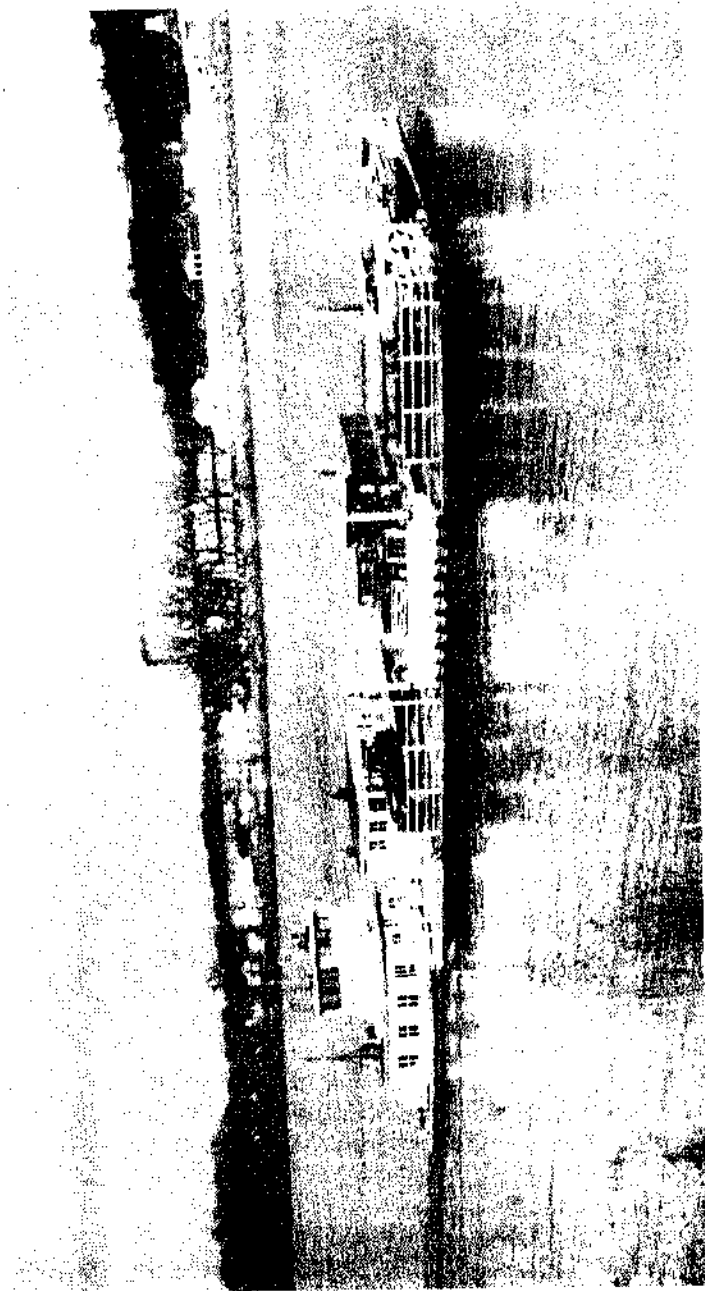
| | |
|--|---------|
| The Editor's Page | Page 1 |
| "Icebound in Daviess County" by Harlan Hubbard | Page 3 |
| "A Trip by Flatboat to Louisiana, 1842" | Page 14 |
| "Pearls of the Ohio" | Page 21 |

The Editor's Page

The coming of the "Always A River" Festival in August will make the year 1991 special in the history of Daviess County, and in recognition of that event we have an "all-river" issue of the Quarterly. The cover photograph is dated April 2nd, 1913, and the two people are identified as Mrs. Will Ford and Pearl.

The capriciousness of the river and the weather are marked not only by floods, as pictured on the cover, but by the severity of the winter. Harlan and Anna Hubbard encountered the latter in their shantyboat trip down the Ohio in the winter of 1947-48 where they had the good fortune to be rescued by the hospitable people of Daviess County.

Another winter trip on the River is described by the author of the journal of a flatboat trip to Louisiana in the winter of 1842-43. Not only is this a remarkable account of the kind of trade that was still going on at that time between Kentucky and the deep South, but it is also remarkable in that the ways of travel described in this account are almost identical to Hubbard's shantyboat more than a century later.



The ferry between Hawesville and Cannelton, showing the Indiana shore in the background. This ferry was the last in a long line serving these two towns, and went out of business with the building of the bridge. The H & C made its last trip on December 21, 1966. Photo courtesy of Hancock County Museum, Inc.

ICEBOUND IN DAVIESS COUNTY
by Harlan Hubbard

Editor's note: The following is an excerpt from Harlan Hubbard's book *Shantyboat: A River Way of Life*, (University Press of Kentucky, 1977), pp. 166-179. We thank the University Press of Kentucky for permission to reprint this passage. The Hubbards built their shantyboat in 1944 and lived on it for more than two years. They then decided to float down the Ohio River from their mooring at Brent, upstream from Cincinnati, and on January 19, 1948 they were opposite Cloverport, KY. They reached New Orleans in April, 1950 where they left the Mississippi River and entered the bayous, an adventure described in a subsequent volume.

One evening we anchored opposite Cloverport, Kentucky. It was a larger town, where the long-absent railroad reappeared. In the morning we rowed across, tied our johnboat in Clover Creek, and went up to the town to do some shopping. The stores were closed as if it were Sunday. We had not mistaken the day, but had arrived, by chance, on Robert E. Lee's birthday.

Towns were closer together now. There was a busy ferry between Hawesville and Cannelton. Then came Tell City, and Troy at the end of the long Troy Reach. One of our night anchorages was opposite Troy, whose lights were a cheerful sight. The Trojans must have wondered at our strange light at the water's edge. It was a cold night, and we drifted away with sheets of ice which lasted until melted by the warm midday sun.

This was a memorable day, fair and calm. Drifting slowly by clay banks and low sandy shores, Anna wrote letters and I made a new keel, working on the deck, warm in the sun. At one point I took the dogs for a walk along the drift-littered shore while the boat sailed on.

That evening we reached Blackford Creek in Kentucky. There was barely room for us to nose into the small stream, which was blocked ahead of the boat by solid ice. At nightfall clouds filled the sky, the north and northwest became very dark. A gale sprung up, blowing straight across the river. Luckily our back was turned to the cutting wind and snow.

The wind lay before morning, but the weather had an ominous look. Snow began to sift down from the heavy sky. Our days of easy drifting were over. We considered what to do. The momentum of steady traveling was strong. Our next stop was to be Evansville-fifty miles downriver, where mail would be waiting for us. Looking at the slowly

floating ice we realized that Evansville might be weeks away. Yet if ice conditions were to be serious the small creek we were in that morning did not seem to us a secure haven. We had heard tales of boats crushed between the solid creek ice and the broken ice in the river, and of sudden heavy rains and runouts. After some deliberation we decided to attempt another day's drifting. Perhaps we could reach Green River, a well-known harbor in times of ice, or at least the island opposite Owensboro, fourteen miles down the river.

We shoved out and drifted with the scattered sheets of ice. The open water became a thick slush in which the falling snow did not dissolve. An oar could hardly be lifted out of it, such a heavy ball of ice clung to its blade. Luckily there was a downstream quartering breeze which held us close to the sandy beach. By means of a pole, I was able to keep the boat from grounding. If there had been an offshore wind we could not have made a landing. And land we must, or be caught offshore by the freezing river. Picking out a spot where the beach was widest, the anchor was carried out on shore and additional heavy lines run to trees farther up the bank. There was no time for dinner that day. I placed the longer gangplank along the outside of the hull to protect it from the ice, hauled the ice-coated johnboat out on shore, cut a supply of firewood. By evening the ice in the river was heavy. The boat shuddered when the floes hit and ground along the side. Then, in the quiet, we went on reading until the next shock. Before long, however, there was unbroken stillness—we were frozen in.

The situation did not alarm us. There was solid ice for several rods out from shore, but beyond was open water and moving ice. The shore was a sandy, gently sloping beach, in a wide, straight reach of river. The winter weather was glorious. The river of ice sparkled under the bright sun and moon. There was a tall stack downriver on the opposite shore, and its smoky pennant lay always away from the northeast. More snow fell. Then came a day when the slow pace of the floating river became a new creation, a vast snowy plain, its smooth surface broken by low heaps and ridges of ice. The dogs scampered about in this new field, and we walked far out; we could have walked across the river to the other shore. It was a Siberian landscape.

Our first contact with the natives was a visit from an old man who was as hale as winter itself. He was very friendly, offered his services, but his opinion was that we were in a bad spot. He told us doleful stories of previous runouts of ice; how a gorge in a narrow bend downstream had caused the river to rise overnight to the top of this bank.

Then the ice ground along with such fury that no boat could withstand it. This man became known to us as Uncle Bill Mattingly. His farm was up the road, the second house, he told us, the one with the windmill.

I had already seen the road when I had climbed the steep bank which

rose perhaps thirty feet above the icy river. It was hardly more than a sandy lane parallel to the river, a hundred yards back. One could see a long way over the flat far land. There was no house on the road directly in line with the boat. An eighth of a mile north on the road was a large white farmhouse which appeared to be empty. An equal distance down the road was a well-kept place to which we went for drinking water. There we became acquainted with young Murray and Marian Estes.

Later, our good fortune in landing at this particular spot became apparent.

On the first Sunday, we were amazed to have seventeen visitors on board. Other people came and looked down at us from the top of the bank. It must be a populous country, we thought. However, these people had come from miles around. The news of a boat caught in the ice quickly spread. It was a dull season in the country, no one was busy. Something new to see and talk about was welcome, and worth a long trip.

One who came aboard was an old man whose conversation was most lively and entertaining. This was Lawson Green. At intervals his family of grown boys came down. They were all familiar with boats, and Carl Green, who lived a mile downstream, was an experienced riverman. The general opinion was that our situation was critical, that we had made a serious mistake in leaving Blackford Creek, that our best chance of safety now was to haul the boat out of the ice.

At first we did not take all this very seriously. We enjoyed those quiet days in the depth of winter. Our reading, writing and playing were all caught up with. Cutting firewood was a chore never finished. The boat must not be allowed to freeze in solidly. This meant breaking the ice around the boat as it formed-another steady chore. The chunks of ice between boat and shore were removed, and piles of ice as high as the boat rose at either end. We became hardened to the cold. Unbroken by a thaw, it became normal, and we were conscious only of the dry, keen air.

News came to us that the Ohio River was frozen solidly its entire length. The dams were lowered with great difficulty, and the water ebbed to low levels unknown in the days of artificial pools. We thought of beaching out on the sandy shore, but decided to keep afloat, not knowing what would be best for us.

At length the dire stories and predictions of the natives began to get under our skin. Perhaps it would be better to pull out of the ice. Many of the farmers had offered the use of their tractors, but we hesitated to entrust our boat to their jerking. I told one of the Green boys that I thought the steady pull of a winch from the top of the bank would be better. He said he would bring over a lumberman who had a powerful winch mounted on a truck.

To move the boat it would be necessary to lighten it as much as possible. Our new friends had already suggested that we strip the boat of all movables; that much would be saved, at least. They said we could live in the empty farmhouse, the one we had already observed a short distance up the road. This seemed a desperate move, and we hesitated. And would the owner of the farmhouse consent? We went to the Estes' to talk it over. About the range in the homelike kitchen were Marian, her aunt, and mother. I stated our case, our bewilderment and alarm. They were attentive and thoughtful. Then the mother spoke; we could move into the farmhouse, she said; the owner was her nephew; she would arrange it. Nearly all the community was of her family, and she promised that all would help us with the moving. We felt that the oracle had spoken in our favor.

On the appointed day a dozen men and boys straggled down to the boat. I had cleared a path up the bank, made steps and handrail in the steep part. Anna and Marian packed the loose articles in tubs--each jar of canned stuff wrapped in newspaper. The cookstove, bed and chests were carried up as they were. All of us, men and boys, climbed up the steep path time after time. At the top was Murray's tractor and open, flat trailer. Several trips to the farmhouse were necessary. It was amazing, even to us, how much stuff came out of that little boat. It was like opening a dry milkweed pod.

The jars of canned goods could not be moved into the frigid house; so a heating stove loaned by Uncle Bill was set up and fired beforehand.

By evening all our gear and plunder and our tired selves were tumbled into our new home. How desolate the boat was when we left it in the dark-dirty and littered, fires out, deserted on the icy shore.

The lumberman had been down to the boat that afternoon in the midst of our moving out. He thought it would be possible to haul the boat up the bank with his equipment, and set the following afternoon for the attempt. After this strenuous day, we would have been glad to rest a bit and settle down in our new home. However, it was too good a chance to pass up. Another day the weather might be unfavorable, our gang of helpers dispersed, the lumberman busy elsewhere.

We set about this new task early next morning. Carl Green was of great assistance. He said no timberhead could withstand the pull necessary to move the boat. Because of its position parallel to the bank, the boat would have to be pulled out sideways. Carl supplied some wire cables which were wrapped two or three times around each end of the boat, passing the stiff cable over the deck and under the bottom, clamping the ends. Boards were put between hull and cables to prevent their cutting in. Between the turns of cable at each end of the boat another cable was looped back and forth and clamped. This would serve as a bridle, distributing the force of the pull to either end.

Meanwhile another crew was clearing the bank above the boat, cutting brush, removing driftwood, and leveling off the worst bumps and holes. The truck arrived at midday, with the lumberman and two helpers. They brought several stout three-by-tens which we slipped under the near side of the boat for skids. A single, heavy cable was run down from the truck to our bridle cable. Lines from each end of the boat were made fast to trees up the bank. Slack on these lines was to be taken up as the boat was raised, so that it would not slide back if any cable parted.

Though it was a cold, raw day, with no ray of sunshine, a crowd of forty or fifty people was there to help or watch. For the most part they stood about a bonfire warming their hands. Nearly everyone had his own plan which he shouted out, never listening to the other fellow's. Only the lumberman was quiet. Anna, at the top of the snowy bank, and I, down on the ice by the boat, felt anxious, helpless, and could only hope for a successful outcome.

The first few tries nearly pulled the truck down over the bank. It was anchored at last by digging the rear wheels deep into the sand. Then another heave, and the boat came slowly out of the ice, like a huge turtle waddling out of the mud.

Above the sandy beach the way was steeper and uneven. Six-by-six timbers, also furnished by the lumberman, were laid to make a rude ways. It was a rough, jerky trip for the boat. We expected to hear the dread sound of timbers cracking or breaking, of spikes and bolts giving way, but the boat suffered no damage as it was hauled up as high as possible against the almost vertical sandbank at the top. The roof was even with the level field above. We estimated that the hull was fifteen or twenty feet above the ice. Then the cake of ice in which the johnboat was imbedded was hauled up, too, and the worst was over. The crowd departed and left us alone with the boat. It lay like a wreck, at a sharp angle on the snowy bank, but it was unharmed and out of the ice. Only in the most extreme conditions could it suffer damage now. We were relieved of strain, and thankful, and tired, tired.

Murray Estes and the others had offered their services so freely that I knew they would accept no money in payment. I asked Uncle Bill what to do. He said country people are accustomed to turning out and helping one another, so we must thank them heartily, and when the opportunity came, help them or another, a stranger perhaps, and expect no reward. His philosophy might have come from someone's Utopia, yet here it was, practiced in Daviess County, Kentucky, in the year 1948.

With the lumberman it was different. We expected to pay him for bringing out from town his equipment and men, for supplying planks and timbers. I was unable to make a definite arrangement beforehand, and after the job was done, he was even more evasive. At last he said we

owed him nothing, that he was glad to help us out. He walked away abruptly and we never saw him again.

Our attention was now turned to our new home on shore. In a day or two Anna had made it clean and well organized. We used only two rooms of the farmhouse, but they were sixteen feet square with high ceilings. After the compactness of the boat, our new quarters had an air of spaciousness. The high walls dwarfed our little cookstove, which was set up in one of the rooms. The cooking equipment and water buckets were ranged about. The big chest from the deck of the boat was converted into a cupboard with shelves for dishes by turning it sideways and nailing legs under it; the lid made a hanging door which could be propped up level to make a large, convenient workspace. Most of the floor in this room was covered with our canned fruits and vegetables, which seemed to have multiplied in moving.

The other room was dominated by Uncle Bill's tall heating stove. We improvised a lounge before it of a porch swing supported by four of the storage drawers from the boat. The dining table was the tall wash bench which could be carried from the kitchen fully set and placed between the seat and stove. Our bed, carried up from the boat intact, was in this room, placed on the floor as usual. When we began to play and paint, instruments and stands were left in readiness and the easel remained set up. Because it seemed peculiarly appropriate here, we hung a painting, recently completed, of Chan Watson's Trimble County farmhouse which overlooked Corn Creek near Payne Hollow. When this picture was sent to the Watsons, it was replaced by a painting of Uncle Bill's farmstead in winter starkness, the view from our window to the north.

On that side the doors opened onto a long porch, convenient in snowy weather. The windows on the other side looked over miles of flat, snowy fields with dark squares and distant lines of woodland.

More snow fell, renewing the whiteness of the landscape. Against the cold we bought a few bushels of coal since there was not enough wood around the house to burn, and the riverbank was too far away. The coal was hauled by one of the Green boys, who was a trucker, from a strip mine a few miles up the river. It was poor coal compared with that from West Virginia, a sack or two of which we had picked up on the spoil bank at Brent and carried in the hold thus far. We missed our open wood fire, but the coal stove had its points. It was delightful to take a bath by it, almost as tall as we were, and radiating heat all the way up and down.

Uncle Bill liked to come in and sit by his stove, ugly duckling though he considered it. It had once been his pride. All his children had been raised around it. Then, he explained, "I just got tired of looking at it, and got a new one." Yet he said the old one was better, for it warmed your

feet.

Uncle Bill often came in the "evening," and before leaving at feeding time told us yarns of private and local affairs. There was an edge to Uncle Bill's slow and gentle speech. He spoke of "littling the fire along." On these cold days he appeared with a bandana tied under his chin and over the top of his head to keep his ears and face warm. His battered hat was pulled down over the knot. Prosperous farmer though he was, Uncle Bill went to extremes of thrift. He reversed his cotton gloves when the palms wore out; right on left, they did not fit, and gave his hands a crippled look. Yet he had bought a new stove before the old one wore out merely because it had become tiresome to his sight.

While Anna was busy in our new quarters, I went down to the boat, and with a borrowed jack raised up the lower side until it rested level and without strain. The bottom was exposed for the first time since the boat floated four years ago. Planks and seams were in such good shape that nothing need be done to them. The sides of the hull, however, and the rakes, I prepared to paint. It was good to be working on the riverbank again, and to be working alone.

Uncle Bill's windmill was his weathervane. If the wind shifted from north through west, all was well. If it went into the northeast, the rope which hung down to the ground became wrapped around the framework of the windmill, and the weather turned bad. In these days the rope was always tangling up. One cold wave followed another, and at last came a real snowstorm. In all this weather there were flocks of robins about, a bird we seldom saw on the riverbank. In the woods and brush were bluebirds, flickers, towhees, and some winter birds not identified.

In the evening we usually walked down the snowy road to the Estes', sat and talked with them in the warmth and brightness of a room which had two stoves, heating stove and range. It had the charm of country kitchen and sitting room combined. We read the latest weather and river reports in their paper, which carried daily pictures of the icebound river and of craft frozen in. We learned that one boat was caught about sixteen miles down the river. We had seen it pass the day before the river froze over, a large diesel with a tow of empty oil barges, on which was a load of new automobiles. This valuable cargo was now frozen in mid-river. Later we read of its release by boats driving up through the ice from Evansville.

After a lively visit with Murray and Marian we gathered up our mail, which was mostly letters of alarmed inquiry about us, took our quart of milk, roused the dogs on the porch, and walked back to our dark, silent quarters. On some nights the stars of winter were spread about the level earth in a magnificence we had never seen before.

In this period there was actually a day or two when we did not go down to the boat. We had moved ashore completely, and the river seemed far

off. Yet there was work to do on the boat, and this took us often to the riverbank. The breakup of the ice was still a threat. If there should be heavy ice running when the river rose to the level of the boat, the inderpinnings on the lower side would be knocked out, the boat crushed against the bank. To save at least the wreckage, I strengthened kevels, made some new ones, bolted an iron ring for attaching cables on each side of the hull. The steel cables borrowed from Carl Green were kept in readiness.

We were optimistic, however, and while I caulked and painted outside, Anna was cleaning up within. Since the fireplace had not been dismantled, I could build a driftwood fire and keep the cabin warm and cheery. Walls and ceiling were washed down, some painting done, land all made ready for the return of our gear and stores.

After a while the cold passed away and the air softened. Rain fell on the bare earth and remnants of snow. We watched the river carefully. On the thirteenth morning after pulling out the boat, and the twenty-first after our landing on this shore, we awoke to see the ice broken up and moving. There was some open water. The next day was a violent one, hard rain and thunder. The earth was soaked and standing in water. The river, though it had risen several feet, filled again with ice; it became a turmoil of sheets and piles and cakes of ice; moving fast and grinding along the shore, piling up on the submerged sandbars until carried away by the rising water. We wondered if our boat could have survived this ordeal. It might have, but we were glad to be out of it, glad also to be out of Blackford Creek which was likely to be running out after the rain.

Four days after the breakup of the ice it became urgent that we move back on board. There was still much ice in the river, and the rising water had not yet floated our boat. The backwater, however, was flooding low ground between the ridge along the riverbank and the road. It would soon be impossible to reach the boat. We had to handle our return move alone since the threat of a flood was keeping the farmers busy. The task was much easier than the stripping of the boat, since, as if for our convenience, the boat had been lifted almost to the top of the bank up which we had toiled when unloading. Uncle Bill loaned us a team of mules and sled. A few well-organized trips were sufficient to haul our stuff to the riverbank. While we were loading it on board, the fast-rising river lifted the boat off the blocks, and we were again afloat.

It happened that Skipper was about to have her fifth litter of pups at this time. She did not like the present confusion and preferred to remain in the farmhouse even after we had moved from there. We had to carry her down to the boat more than once, and at last shut her in, until she understood we all lived there again. The pups came in the middle of the night. I woke Anna: "Skipper has a black puppy!" "Little Black Sambo," she answered sleepily. The black puppy was destined to share

our later adventures. His name is merely Sambo now, and he is so big that no one can believe Skipper is his mother.

It was well that we moved back on the boat when we did. The next morning we found ourselves anchored to a long slim island, all that remained above water of the ridge along the river. Backwater extended from our island to the road, which was nearly awash.

On the river side of the island, a swift current swirled past. The ice had thinned out, but the river was still half full. At this point the ice was running near the far shore. Towboats were navigating again, and they sought the open water on our side, running so close to us that they appeared of giant size. Luckily we were inside the protecting willows.

It was no place for us to lay, yet there was still too much ice for safe drifting. We decided to drop down the shore a mile to Carl Green's landing, where the mainland was accessible and where we would be in a protected harbor. The remainder of the loading was quickly done, the deck load being carried over a plank laid from the top of the bank almost level to the roof. The bees were placed once more on the main deck, having survived the winter weather under a tarpaulin on shore. Just before our casting off, Uncle Bill hailed us, saying the mail carrier, on his last trip before being cut off by water, had left us seven packages. To get the mail I waded through the icy backwater, swearing to get some hip boots. Some of the packages were Christmas mail catching up with us on February seventeenth.

It was a bright, mild day and we were all set for our short run. Some of the bees, however, had made an escape; so we turned the whole flock loose and canceled our sailing. Next morning we let go and skimmed along the willows. The cardinal practiced his spring whistle overhead and the meadowlark was heard in the fields. The woodwind notes of a dove came to us through the air of spring. How different had been our landing there, barely four weeks ago, in the ice and snow and Cape Horn weather!

We made a neat landing a mile below, snubbing on a tree and swinging into a narrow opening directly in front of Carl Green's house. Unfortunately the water was so shallow that the boat could not be brought within a plank's length of dry land: we had to paddle ashore in the johnboat.

At once we set about a grand washing of clothes. This had not been undertaken at the farmhouse because of the hard, discolored well water. Here good water could be had from Carl's pump, but it must be toted to the water's edge where it was heated over a fire, then transported on board in the johnboat. When washed, the clothes were ferried ashore and hung on a line stretched back and forth across the road which was unused because of the high water.

We walked back up the road to the Estes', fording some low spots where the water was deeper on the return trip. In each farm they were preparing for high water, patching up long-unused johnboats, contriving oars, moving stock and equipment to higher locations. This might be in their own barn where a false floor could be laid a few feet above ground. Except in unusually high floods this kept their feed and machinery dry, and even their cattle were installed on this higher level.

Carl Green was busy, too. He had a shop in which he rebuilt johnboats from wrecks picked up in the running drift. When the ice thinned a little he was out every day in his outboard yawl, "drifting," and towing in planks, timbers, and wrecks. Here was a man in his prime of life performing feats he would tell about in his old age. One of his prizes was a flat lost from some upriver boat harbor. Some of the wrecks he could not retrieve from the grip of the ice that had torn them from their moorings. It was dangerous work amid the shifting, swift-moving ice floes.

Carl's shop was in the basement of an abandoned country school which stood next to his house. The upper floor, formerly the school-room, was kept as a highwater refuge. In the yard was a onetime lifeboat, always held in readiness for rescue work. The community had learned in the 1937 flood that they could not depend too much on outside help.

We had much company these days, farmers come down to look at and speculate on the river which was rising but slowly now. Two of the boys made an overland trip to Maceo for mail in an outboard johnboat. They skimmed along flooded roads, jumped fences, navigated ditches, and pushed their way through treetops. Our portion of the mail they brought back was a large cloth sack of popcorn sent to us by Herbert Fall.

During these days the ice in the river had lessened until there remained but a narrow white ribbon of floating pieces which was shifted from one side of the river to the other by wind and current. We thought this could be avoided in our drifting, and made ready to cast off. True, the river was at flood, but it seemed to have reached its crest, and we were eager to be on our way.

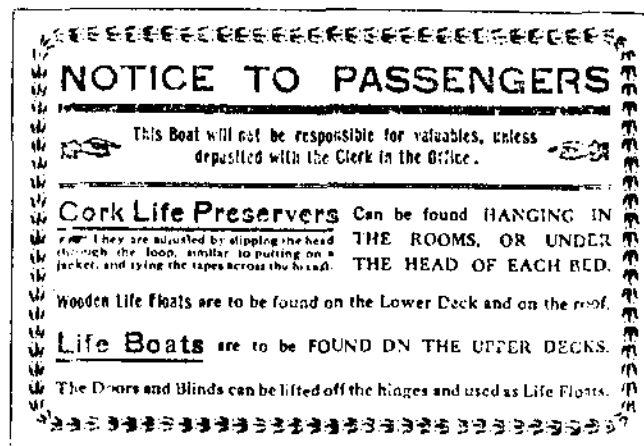
When we worked out through the trees, we found that the current of the bankfull river was swifter than any we had experienced in our previous drifting. It flowed through a flat country, where water and land were now on one level. Thus instead of looking up at banks and hills, we viewed a limitless expanse of inundated land where trees rose from the water. In this low country, where floods are to be expected, the buildings are placed on the highest ground, which now appeared as low islands. Some farmhouses were built on artificial walled islands; others erected on piling, seemed to be wearing patterns to keep their feet dry. Immense corn cribs, which at first we mistook for barns, were raised above the

fields by piers of concrete. They had a ramp at each end, and we pictured wagons of corn, in the sere autumn, driving in one end, and out the other, empty.

How good it was to be drifting again! At the head of Yellow Bank Island which was just about awash, we pulled into the chute on the Indiana side and had a fine passage down the narrow, tree-lined corridor. At the lower end we tied up to a line of trees standing on the flooded mainland. A graceful bridge arched its way across the river to the city of Owensboro, whose lights twinkled that night through the tall cottonwoods on the island.

In the morning we crossed over to Owensboro in the johnboat, rowing up through the slack water which covered the lower end of the island, so that the swift current of the river would not carry us below the city.

After dinner we cast off. It was a mild, sunny afternoon. Drifting past a wooded island called Little Hurricane, we pulled over to the right bank, and farther down, entered the long back channel of French Island. These narrow chutes were safe harbors for us. Toward the lower end of this one we caught on to a branch and manoeuvred the boat into an opening among some elms. Here the bank was above water, and the dogs had the satisfaction of going ashore whenever they desired.



This "Notice to Passengers" indicates that the most modern type of life-preservers were available to the passengers. No steamboat carried enough lifeboats for all the crew and passengers, so life-floats, either cork or wood, were an important feature of every passenger boat's equipment.

A TRIP BY FLATBOAT TO LOUISIANA, 1842

Editor's Note: The following is from a manuscript in the Hawes Family Papers, Margaret I. King Library, University of Kentucky. Parts of the manuscript are illegible, and where words cannot be determined, their omission is noted by the use of ellipsis marks (...). Punctuation has been added, since there are few punctuation marks in the original, and capitals added where appropriate. There is no indication of the author, although presumably it was a member of the Hawes family. The spelling is as in the original.

December 16 1842

Memorandum of Trip No. 4

- Dec. 16 Started from Hawesville the 16th, Saturday at 10½ o'clock and run
- 17 down to Iceland and landed at 6 o'clock A.M. on the 17th and there took 1000 lbs of bacon and 1 brl & 1 Keg of Lard for S. Hawes. Left that place at 12 o'clock and at sun set we had run to the head of French Islands. I run out to Owensborough and bought
- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------|
| ½ Dozen Tin Plates | 12½ |
| 2 milk crocks @ 25, 1 fosset (sic) | 12½, 37½ |
| 1 Brl whiskey 40 gal @ 20c. | \$8.00 |
- 19th Run through the night without striking and oar. About daylight the 19th was at the foot of Henderson Island. Saw no flat boat during this time. Run on through the day. Stopped at Mount Vernon with the skiff and bought
- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1 sifter @ 50, 1 file @ 12½, 1 keg @ 25 | 87½ |
|---|-----|
- 20 Run on and at sun set passed the head of Wabash Island. Wind up and 3 boats came in sight at 4 o'clock in the morning of the 20th. Were overtaken by Genl. Conner and at day light passed through the chute of Hurricane Island. Quite cloudy the latter part of the night and a drizzling rain in the morning. Hogs fight a great deal and one cut own their legs swollen. Continued raining. At ½ after 3 o'clock landed on Cumberland Island opposite Smithland. Stopped raining at 11 o'clock p.m. Cut cable with heavy wind up stream on the morning of
- 21st the 21st. The wind quite high through and made but slow headway and at 7 o'clock P.M. came in sight of Cash Island and were forced to land in the dead night on the point below

Cash Island on the left.

- 22 Started next morning the 22nd at 7 o'clock A.M. and reached the Mississippi at ½ past 8. Wind quite windy. Overtook (?) two boats, one loaded with cattle and the other with ... and apples. Still in company with Genl. Conner, but we having a down wind & sails will put up with some trouble. Found our draw board of service whereby we overtook the two boats above named. Hogs behaving better. Left the boats behind, the wind blowing down stream with so much force that the other boats could not keep out from shore. Passed six boats at Iron Banks, the wind increasing, and became so high that forced us into the Chalk Bank Eddy. Crawfished out without damage, and night overtook us at the foot of the right hand bend below Wolf Island where we landed with 2 boats owned by Mr. ... Moore and Mr. Sherman of Mathews ... loaded with Corn. The weather very cold and still windy. The wind having laid a little we cut cable at 11 o'clock that night. Moore's boat afraid to venture and so soon as we reached the bend found the wind high and the night very cold. Capt. Chambers quite unwell; but by pulling a great deal through this kept out (in the channel, ed.).
- 23 At on the 23 were at the head of (Island) No. 10. Run down the New Madrid Bend and overtook 9 boats, 2 loaded with potatoes, one with ..., 3 with hay, one with corn, 2 with barrells, and saw the 10th grounded on the head of the Bar of No. 14 loaded with Pork, flour & Whiskey. Landed at the point at head of 14 with 6, the others running over to the Bend. Intended to start at Moon up but wind too high for the difficult Bar below us. River falling very fast.
- 24th On this day remained fast and went hunting out to a lake. Killed nothing (but) a fox squirrel, the lake being froze so that the geese & swans had left. At 10 this day Genl Connor came in and landed. Started at 2 o'clock Xmas morning, leaving all behind but Genl Connor who had agreed to keep company. Passed before daylight 4 boats cabled in the bend above Little Prairie & at daylight was at the head of No's 16 & 17. Wind high but concluded to keep out and in the evening the wind laid and we landed on the right hand point at the head of (Island) 25. The weather very cloudy and unsettled, Mr. Chambers still unwell.
- 26 Started at 3 o'clock on the morning of the 26, at 11 o'clock A.M. reached plumb point where we saw 2 coal boats, 1 corn boat (and) a chicken boat aground. Run through safe and concluded to run ... short of 34. Had a apple toddy today in company with Genl Connor crew and passengers in the shade of 34. Great difficulty and only 3½ feet

- (of water). All hands badly on through the day, quite cloudy all day. At 3½ o'clock passed Randolph and landed at daylight in the foot of the bend opposite 35, and at the head of 36. This day overtook 3 boats and passed them. Great difficulty in landing, and if it had not promised a storm would have run all night. Started at 4 o'clock on 27th and run the chute of 37 at 7 o'clock and reached the devil's elbow at 10 o'clock, pulling headway to make Memphis if possible before night. River falling fast and the weather cool and cloudy with light wind. Could not make Memphis ... land at the head of the right hand bend above ... hogs and chickens. Rained through the night and heavy fog ... the morning. At 7 o'clock fog disappeared and wind rose Made Memphis at 9 o'clock. Went around to see the market. Corn retailing at 20 & 25 - pork at 3 & 3½ - potatoes at 6¼ per bushell - oats 12 & 14. Live hogs selling when butchered at 3 cts (per pound). Hired a horse and rode to Sister Anne's. Staid all night, and reached Memphis at 2 o'clock next day. Wind high, remained so all night of 29th.
- 27 Still too high to run ... lay by all day of the 30th. Took a walk through Memphis which seems to be a flourishing town and improving rapidly. Walked down to Fort Pickering, which seems to be declining. Bought here 1 funnel, 25; 1 ½ gal 37; horse hire 2.25; 3 glasses of liquor @ 12½, 37½, 3.25
- 28 Started this morning at 3½ o'clock and had wind up all day. At sunrise 4 boats in sight, supposed to be some that passed the day I returned from ... Sister. Run by them in running around Buck Island. They kept in sight until we reached Commerce when 3 landed. The other, loaded with cattle from Henderson Cty, landed at the head of Council Bend.
- 29 January 1st. Started at 2½ in the morning and run until sunrise without hitting an oar. When we were opposite the head of Bordeaux's shoots which were both dry. The 1st clear and calm night since we reached the Mississippi. Run on and in the evening passed 60 Prairie Island and landed at dark at Helena. The weather moderated and clouds at sunset. Helena had a Methodist meeting house where I heard on Sunday night a sermon. Overtook Britton of Rockport and 4 other boats at the land. Started on Monday at light and run down to the cut off where there were 2 boats aground and one that started (?) that morning from below Helena was stove by running on a log on the Bar above the cut off. Passed Old Town landing at 11½ and at 12 was at the head of 62 & 3½. The river low and snaggy. The weather quite pleasant. Run on and landed that night at the head of 66 in the left hand bend called Indian Charlie's
- 30
- 31
- 1st
- 2nd

- Bend. Started next morning, Tuesday, and overtook Weatherholt's and 4 other boats and landed that night at Victoria opposite Montgomerie's Point. Saw here Mr. Butler who said there was fine land back 4 miles from the river. Started wednesday at 6½ o'clock and run all day through the wind. Left all the boats. Run down to 76 and landed on the left above Lake Bolivar Landing. A very bad day's run as it was windy all day, and we were constantly at work. Went to a cane break and saw very large cane.
- 3d Started Thursday morning at sun rise and a boat just out from Bolivar, the wind blowing hard up and run down to the head of the bend opposite 80 and 81 where we landed at a very large cotton farm. Started at daylight Friday and run in the wind all the time blowing hard until we were forced to land at the foot of the shoot of 82 at Lewellen's Woodyard at 12 and tied up until next morning. The wind blowing hard and a heavy rain through the night. On Saturday morning we put out, the wind blowing from North and snowing and blew up such a gale that we were glad to find a landing and had great difficulty in clearing snags, but got landed at 11 a.m. Snowed very hard all the day and we laid in the bend below Columbus and above Point Chicot. At 3½ p.m. started and landed in Bachelor's Bend below 83. Next morning started at light.
- 4th Wind up but layed at 12 & closed up and run by 85 where 1 Learly lived at 2 o'clock and layed at dark at Worthington's Landing. Rained all night and next day until 12 and then the weather became cold. We run 4 miles and stopped at Paine's Plantation at the foot of 88 in the bend on Arkansas side.
- 5th Started from there on Tuesday and run through the day, the weather becoming more settled and the wind laying. Came in sight of four boats. Heard that live hogs were worth 2.50 ... We run on until 11 o'clock at night and landed at Tennessee
- 6th Landing at the head of the left hand bend above No. 98. Started from there at day light Wednesday and when we reached the bend above 100 I walked across 300 yards while the boat run 12 miles. Saw one black squirrel and no other game. Run Millikin's Bend and landed at the foot of No. 103. Good landing. Thursday we laid by for wind until 3 and run down to Breedlove's woodyard 3 miles above the Walnut Hills.
- 7th Friday started before day and run to Vicksburg and stopped until 12 and then started. The weather very cold and a prospect of running at night. The river rising slowly from Arkansas and dull prospects ahead. Pork worth 3½ & 4, live hogs 2 & 2½,
- 8th Run on that night and on Saturday morning were opposite Gr.

- Gulph (Grand Gulf). Continued running through the day and until 12 at night when we landed above Natches, 6 miles. On
- 15 Sunday morning run down and made landing. Walked up to the city and found the R. office shut and could not know whether
- 16 there was a letter. Monday before daylight walked up to visit the market. Found beef & pork selling at 5 & 6 cts but the butchers had plenty of hogs and 4 stock loads at the landing. Saw George Bright and walked with him through the city. In the evening sold 10 hogs @ 6 per head bucked out of 2 ... \$60.00.
- 17 Tuesday. Remained for the planters to come down. Saw Cousin A. Buckner who informed the weather was too warm to sell hogs as they could not kill them. Started that night at
- 18th 10 o'clock and the wind raised with the sun on Wednesday and with the sun on Wednesday and had to lay by all day & night at Boyden's (?) in the right hand bend below dead man's bend and above 118.
- 19th Started in the morning of Thursday, the wind still blowing hard, and kept out with difficulty until we landed 2 miles above Ford Adams and had to stay until next morning. Friday
- 20 had to stay until next morning. Friday quite unwell with a severe cold and diarrhea. The weather being cloudy and windy since we left Natches. Run down about 8 miles and landed again 4 miles above Red River landing. I took Mr. Bright in the skiff who had come as a passenger from Matches to White's Tavern where I dined and determined to stay until my boat could run, the prospect being gloomy, and and no chance of
- 21 sales. Saturday the boat hailed for me at 2 a.m. & I got out of a comfortable bed, the second time that I had slept in one since I left home. Corn begging at 37 cts pr bbl & pork at 3 cts. Run on through the day and landed on the upper part of Point
- 22 Coupee. Tried to sell but no sales. Sunday the weather as hot as June. Run all day and landed at sunset at Baton Rouge.
- 23 Monday went to the R. office, no letter, and made sale of 9 brls corn at $37\frac{1}{2}$ - \$3.37 $\frac{1}{2}$, and five hogs at one crippled, 26.50.
- 24 Tuesday. Started at 9 o'clock and run down to the farm of Dr. Williams, here were were blown ashore and made a sale of six hogs. 6 Hogs @ 6, \$36.00. Crossed the river and went three
- 25 miles below. Wednesday. Sold one hog in the morning five miles below Baton Rouge. 1 hog @ 6, \$6.00. Run that day and landed at Plaquemines where I heard through Mr. Connor of the New Orleans market, hogs selling at 2 $\frac{1}{2}$... Sold 1 hog, 4.50

| | | |
|-----------------|---|---------|
| 26th | Started and run that night and landed at Bayou Lafourche at 10. | |
| 27th | Went in the bayou at 2½ and made sale of 1 hog @ 3.25, 1 keg lard, \$3.25, \$6.50. ... until Friday morning. Run down one mile and sold two hogs, two @ 3.50 - \$7.00 | |
| 28 | Saturday, sold 8 hogs @ 6, | \$49.50 |
| 29 | Sunday, sold 1 hog in running 3 miles | \$5.00 |
| 30 | Monday, run 2 miles and sold 1 hog | \$6.00 |
| 31 | Tuesday, run to Napoleonville, 3 hogs | \$11.50 |
| 1 Feb | Laid at Dr. Williamson's, 2 miles below Napoleonville. Wind blew hard and staid until evening. Sold 2 hogs @ 3.50 - \$7.-- | |
| 2nd | Thursday, Run 1 mile, 5 hogs, 5.30, | \$27.00 |
| | ditto 2 brls beef @ 5 | 10.00 |
| | ditto 1 hog @ 6 | 6.00 |
| 3rd | Friday, run 2 miles. Sold 4 hogs @ 5.50 | 22.00 |
| | ditto 6 brls potatoes @ 75 1 @ 5, | |
| | 2 hogs, 6, 2, 11½ | 22.50 |
| 4th | Saturday, 1 hog 5.50; 2, 7.50; 1 @ 5.00 | 18.00 |
| 5th | Sunday. All day at the ... 6 hogs, | 29.00 |
| 6 | Monday. 1 hog @ 3.50, 1 @ 4.50, 2 at 11.00 | |
| | 2 at 11.50 -- 6 hog | 30.50 |
| 7 | Tuesday. 7 miles from ... and prospects dull | |
| | 7 Febr. 1842. 6 Hogs, 4 @ 4.75; 2 @ 1.50, | 22.00 |
| | 2 brls sugar | 22.00 |
| | 2 (hogs) @ 11. | 11.00 |
| 8 | 2 hogs @ 8; 2 hogs & 1 brl beef, 16 | 24.00 |
| | 1 hog 4½, 1 at 4, 1 \$6m 1, 3 - 4 gigs /3 | = 17.50 |
| 9 | 2 hogs @ 12; 1, 3½; 1, 6; 4, 11½, 2, 5. | = 38.00 |
| 10 | Friday. Rained all day and floated down to Thibideaux. | |
| 11 | Saturday. 2 hogs @ \$12. Met with mr. ... | 12.00 |
| 12 | Sunday. 4 hogs @ 6½ = | 22.00 |
| 13 | Monday. Remained at Thibedeaux. 3 hogs, 6 | 18.00 |
| 14. | Sold only 1 hog @ 5 and left Thibedeaux | 5.00 |
| 15 | Rained hard and turned cold. Find my beef and corn will not sell in the bayou | |
| 16th | Thursday. Sold 100 bshls corn @ 31¼ | \$31.25 |
| | do. 2 hogs @ 10.50; 1, 4 = e hogs | 14.50 |
| 17 | 3 hogs @ 5½ per head | |
| Saturday, 18th. | 3 hogs @ 12½, 2@ 11, 1, 6 | \$29.50 |
| | sold 6 hogs @ 3.50 | 21.00 |
| 20 Monday. | | |

Editor's postscript. The text of the document ends at this point. There is no indication whether or not the journey continued to New Orleans, how much of the cargo remained to be sold, or what the eventual outcome of the venture was. It appears, however, that it was a typical, and successful, trip, and illustrates vividly how farm products from the Daviess/Hancock area found ready markets in the lower South in the 1840's. The sales recorded in this incomplete document total \$741.12½, which was a substantial sum of money in 1842, and indicate that the down-river trade was a lucrative source of ready cash for the farmers of this area who were willing to risk the voyage downstream.



A typical shantyboat, dating from the period 1900-1920, to judge from the women's dresses. The Hubbards' boat probably very closely resembled this one. Boats such as this were the permanent homes of countless "river rats" during the period 1900-1950.

PEARLS OF THE OHIO

Editor's Note: The gathering of fresh-water mussels was an important industry along parts of the Ohio, the Green, the Wabash and other rivers of this area from the 1890's until the replacement of "mother-of-pearl" buttons by plastics and other man-made materials in the 1960's, although some hardy musselers still work occasionally "raking" these common bivalves. While the mussel was sought primarily for its shell and sold to the Japanese for the most part, a sought-after fringe benefit of mussel-shelling was the rare and exotic pearls which some of the animals contained. These pearls, ranging from pure white to almost black, sometimes got as large as a common pea, and were quite valuable. One of the most interesting displays of fresh-water pearls can be found at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, which has a matched set showing the various colors to be found in this unique jewel. The following article appeared in *The Messenger*, October 17, 1903.

One of an observant turn of mind may find much of interest in mussel fishing, and undertaking which is now assuming considerable magnitude along the Ohio, Mississippi, Wabash, and the other great waterways. Some weeks ago an Iowa firm commenced operating with ten men near Owensboro and the result is quite satisfactory to the dredgers. The spirit of the gold seeker of forty-nine pervades the men and boys who are engaged in mussel hunting. The daily wages has entirely lost sight of and the prospect of finding a hundred dollar pearl constantly dances before the eyes of the men who stand up to their waists in the river taking from its bed the fish which has so suddenly assumed commercial importance. Pearls of this value, however, have not been found here, but John Boyd recently got a number of pretty ones, valued at from \$5 to \$15.

But after all is said and done it is the shell which brings the reward. The hope of finding a pearl is the jack-o-lantern which lures the seeker on, inducing him to endure the icy water and withstand the hardships of the river.

Seven dollars and a half a ton is the price paid for the shells. The idea exists in a misty way in the mind of the mussel hunter that his shells are worth several times that price. And when the bed of the river has been denuded of its burden of shell fish, he may discover that for a mere trifle he has sold and delivered a fortune to the foreign buyers.

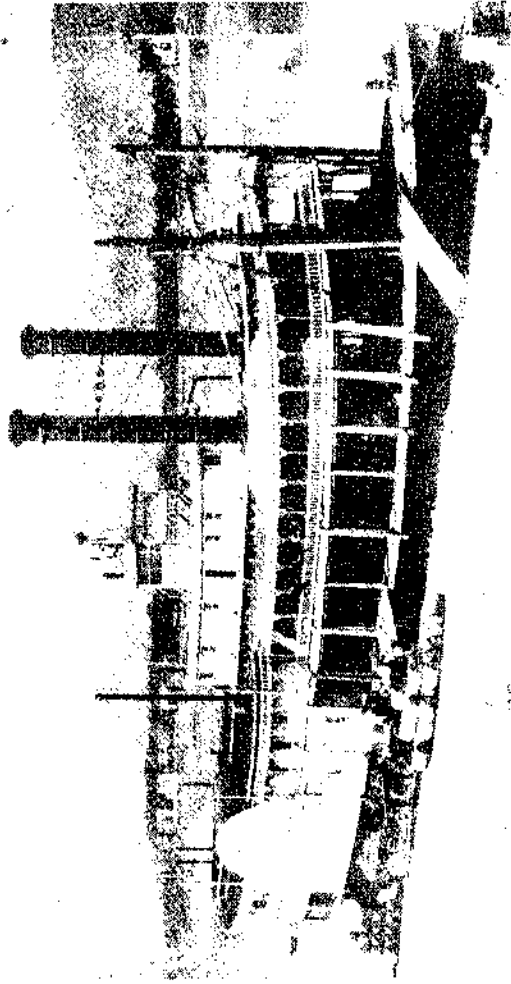
Owing to the rude manner of handling the mussels many valuable pearls are lost. When the fish are brought in from the river they are placed in a vat and boiled. They are then forked onto a table where the

meat is easily separated from the shells. During this process a keen watch is kept for pearls but in the haste few are found. The pearl is lodged beneath a layer of the mussel's flesh and is not easily taken. Later some enterprising fisherman will go over the dried-out mass of mussels that are now cast to one side and his reward will be rich. If the meat of the mussels were placed on drying boards and systematically treated the result would no doubt pay better than the shells.

As the mussel becomes more difficult to get, the price of them advances. The wage is now 17½ cents a box. At first it was 12 cents. The other day at Grand Chain, on the Wabash river, one fisherman got out forty-three boxes and his earnings for the day were \$6.45. He might have found one pearl that would have raised his wages for that day to \$106.45. (Editor's note - At this time common labor in the factories of Owensboro was compensated at the rate of \$1 per day.)

The nigger-head mussel is the chief one sought, although it does not rank high as a pearl bearer. This distinction belongs to the mussel known to the hunters as the "pig-foot," and none of this variety passes through their hands without close scrutiny. The perfect pearl is seldom found, yet the slug, or badly formed pearl, is common. These slugs sell for two or three dollars an ounce and are dressed by jewelers for various purposes.

The formation of the pearl is interesting and not generally understood by the men who find them. A grain of sand becomes lodged beneath the meat of the mussel and creates an irritation. This produces a liquid flow which in time encrusts the grain of sand with a pearly substance and in the end a pearl is formed. For one pearl some mussels pass many sleepless days and nights. The writer once knew a genius who stopped inventing flying machines long enough to conceive the idea that a small pearl button placed within an oyster shell would grow a pearl of fabulous worth. The oyster died but the inventor still lives, no doubt unreconciled to the failure of his scheme.



The U.S. Mail Packet *Courier* was typical of the Ohio River packets which dominated trade on the river for a century. This photograph, from the collection of the late William Low, is unidentified, but this scene could be almost anywhere along the Ohio.

THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

— OFFICERS —

President, Aloma Dew
1st Vice-President, Lee Dew
2nd Vice President, Bob Hughes
Secretary, Shelia Heflin
Treasurer, Marge Schauburger
Curator, Joe Ford
Editor, DCHQ, Lee Dew
Directors, Connie Hughes
Wendell Rone
Doris Campbell

The Daviess County Historical Society is open to all who have an interest in the history of Daviess County, the Green River Valley, or Kentucky. The Society meets on the Third Tuesday of each month from September through May. Most meetings are held at the Owensboro Area Museum on South Griffith Avenue.

Monthly programs of the Daviess County Historical Society are open to all, and non-members are encouraged to attend and participate.

Printed by Quality Printing Co., Owensboro, KY

THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

Volume IX

APRIL, 1991

Number 2

Published by
THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

EDITOR

Lee A. Dew

Ky. Wesleyan College
Owensboro, Ky.

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Richard A. Weiss

Mrs. Henry Etta Schaubeger

THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL QUARTERLY is published in January, April, July and October, by the Daviess County Historical Society. The QUARTERLY is supplied free to all its members.

Annual membership dues are \$7.00

Inquiries regarding memberships and other matters of business may be addressed to the Society Secretary, Mrs. Shelia Brown Heflin, Owensboro-Daviess County Library, Owensboro, Ky. 42301.

Correspondence concerning contributions and other editorial matters relating to the QUARTERLY should be addressed to the Editor. The editors and the Society assume no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Addresses of the authors will be supplied upon request to the editor.

CONTENTS

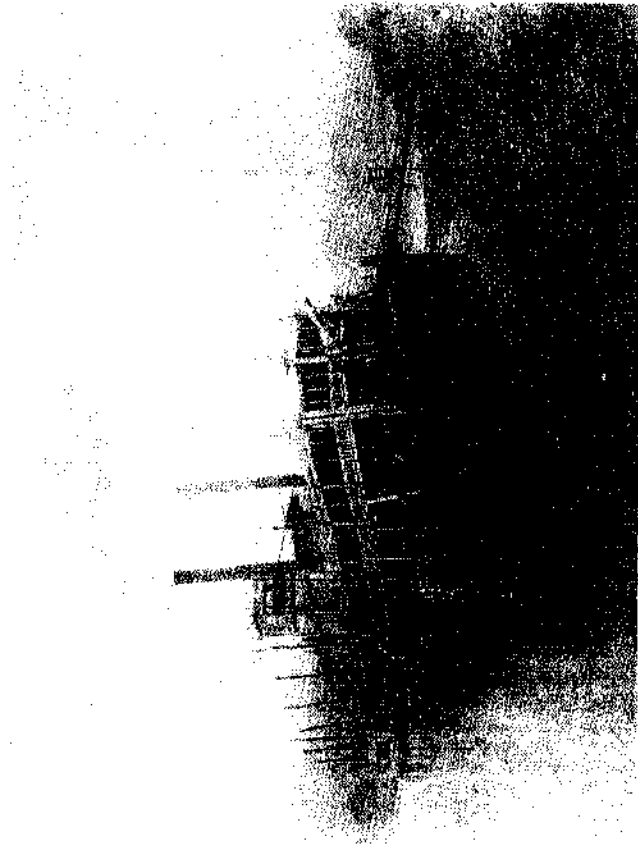
| | |
|--|---------|
| The Editor's Page..... | Page 25 |
| "Colonel John Hardin McHenry," by Nora J. Clark..... | Page 27 |
| "The Steamboat Era at Owensboro," by Lee A. Dew..... | Page 37 |
| "The Burning of the <i>Southland</i> ," | Page 47 |

The Editor's Page

This issue of the Quarterly features the excellent paper by Nora Clark on the career of Col. John McHenry, one of the most famous Civil War officers from this part of Kentucky. Nora is a senior at Kentucky Wesleyan College with majors in both history and political science. She is a native of Harlan County, and plans to go to law school. This paper was presented at a meeting of the Society in 1990 and was enthusiastically received.

Continuing with the river theme in honor of the Always A River festival we present two papers dealing with river navigation. The first, on the steamboat era, is a brief overview of river navigation at Owensboro from the time of the voyage of the *New Orleans* in 1811 to the end of the steam packets in 1932, with an afterward on the continuing importance of the river.

The final article is taken from *The Owensboro Messenger* and is an account of the fire which destroyed the last steam packet in service between Louisville and Evansville. The loss of the *Southland* truly meant the end of an era in river navigation. Although today the river is more important than ever in terms of freight tonnage, the destruction of the last of the old-fashioned packet boats meant that a certain element of the romance and tradition of the river was lost forever, except for a few survivors such as the *Delta Queen* and the *Belle of Louisville*.



Sinkings were common during the steamboat era on the Ohio. The passengers and crew of the *Steel City* were able to get ashore with dry feet thanks to an alert pilot who nosed her into the bank as she went down. Often, if the hull was considered a loss, the engines, bell and other useful parts would be salvaged and placed aboard new boats, or the hull might be raised. Some vessels survived one or two sinkings before finally being abandoned. Photo courtesy William Low Collection.

Colonel John Hardin McHenry
by Nona J. Clark

An examination of the Civil War career of Colonel John Hardin McHenry, Jr. offers some insight to the sentiments of Daviess County and perhaps all of Western Kentucky during the Civil War. Colonel McHenry offers two diverse yet interrelated looks at the Civil War as he acted out two distinct roles during the course of the war. First, Colonel McHenry was a Union man as he served as colonel of the Seventeenth Kentucky Regiment of Volunteers and fought valiantly to save Kentucky from the Confederacy. However, Colonel McHenry was also a pro-slavery man as well as a Union man.

John McHenry, Jr. was born on February 21, 1832, in Ohio County, Kentucky.¹ He attended Hanover College in Indiana and Centre College in Kentucky.² After three years as a West Point cadet, he studied law in his father's office and finally graduated from the University of Louisville's law department in 1857.³ He practiced law with his father, however his military career had not ended. In 1859, he was one of the ten captains selected by Governor Morehead to help subjugate the Mormons. He saw no action, however, for the trouble was settled by U.S. troops under Johnston and Lee.⁴

Glenn Hodges, in his pamphlet on the history of the Civil War in Hancock County, Kentucky, says that Colonel John McHenry of Owensboro recruited the Seventeenth Kentucky Regiment, a Union regiment, from the counties of Ohio, Daviess, Hancock, and McLean.⁵ The December 17, 1862, issue of *The Owensboro Monitor* added Grayson and Muhlenberg counties to that list. Colonel McHenry had been serving as a major in the State Guard; but when he heard that leaders of the secession party, particularly Buckner, were planning to force the State Guard into Confederate service, he quickly disbanded his companies and formed a volunteer regiment in 1861 in an attempt to keep these counties and, in effect, Western Kentucky, a part of the Union. The Official Records of the Civil War say that by December 31, 1861, Colonel McHenry had succeeded in recruiting approximately eight hundred volunteers for his regiment.⁶

However his regiment did not have success in its early development. The first time that Colonel McHenry is mentioned in the Official Records, he was fleeing from Owensboro. In Captain A.H. Foote's correspondence to Major-General Fremont on September 25, 1861, he wrote of the events of that day. Captain Foote, upon the orders of the Major-General, had proceeded up the Ohio River with a fleet of gunboats in an attempt to keep "the Ohio River open and to dislodge the rebels supposed to have been in possession of that place." When stopping in Owensboro, Captain Foote claimed that he found no

batteries, but that "a strong disunion sentiment is manifest in the place." Colonel McHenry and Colonel P.B. Hawkins boarded Captain Foote's ship, the steamer *Bee*, brought with them a "skeleton Kentucky regiment." Captain Foote tried to persuade them to stay in Owensboro but both refused on the grounds that they were not properly equipped nor had they been called into the service. Captain Foote then attempted to acquire five hundred men for Owensboro from either Governor Morton of Indiana or General Anderson of Louisville. Thus were born the Eleventh Kentucky Regiment under Colonel P.B. Hawkins and the Seventeenth Kentucky Regiment under Colonel McHenry.⁷

On October 1, 1861, the Seventeenth Kentucky Regiment participated in the first fighting seen on Kentucky soil.⁸ By October 8, 1861, things had become critical in Kentucky. The rebels were working quickly to gain some sort of foothold in this neutral state in an attempt to pull her over to the secession side. With disunion sentiment prevailing in much of Western Kentucky, including Owensboro, Paducah, and much of the Green River area, the Union forces would have to act quickly. Already, a few Union regiments had been organized: the Third Kentucky Cavalry under Colonel J.S. Jackson, the Twenty-Sixth Kentucky Infantry under Colonel S.G. Burbridge, the Eleventh Kentucky Infantry under Colonel P.B. Hawkins, a regiment under a Colonel Johnson, and, of course, the Seventeenth Kentucky Regiment under Colonel J.H. McHenry.⁹ However, with a strong rebel movement growing in the Green River area, these regiments though a good start were not strong enough nor organized enough to quell it. Thus, General William Tecumseh Sherman deemed it necessary to send General Thomas L. Crittenden to Owensboro to assume command of these regiments in October of 1861.¹⁰ Once Crittenden took command, Colonel McHenry's regiment and the others were able to effectively foil rebel recruiting operations in the Green River area.

While still under the command of General Crittenden, Colonel McHenry and the Seventeenth Kentucky Regiment fought rebel troops from Bowling Green, Kentucky, and Morgantown and Woodbury. These skirmishes are the first in which the official records say Colonel McHenry was involved.¹¹ On October 29, 1861, Colonel McHenry received intelligence that rebel forces consisting of one hundred forty cavalry had encamped at Woodbury in Ohio County. Colonel McHenry, Colonel Burbridge, and Captain Netter crossed the Green River at different points and met small parties of the enemy. Firing ensued with the result that McHenry lost one man and a couple were wounded, but they succeeded in driving the rebels away from their camp. After destroying their camp, Colonel McHenry and the others withdrew to Morgantown. On October 31, the enemy attacked the Home Guards there and were turned back with great loss by McHenry

aided by Colonels Burbridge and Jackson who had arrived from Owensboro. It is clear at this point that McHenry had helped to save this area for the Union; Major James Hagan of the Confederate Army who was involved in the skirmishes at Woodbury and Morgantown stated in his report of the incident that "the people generally in this section of the country are either sympathizers of the Lincoln Government, or so indifferent to ours that reliable information is difficult to obtain."¹² Whether this statement actually reflects the sentiments of the Green River citizens or whether Major Hagan was looking for any reason to be relieved of his duties remains unclear. One thing is certain-- Colonel McHenry had succeeded in pushing the rebel forces out of this area of Kentucky.

After the incidents at Woodbury and Morgantown, Colonel McHenry's regiment was ordered to proceed up the Cumberland River and join the forces of General Lewis Wallace at Fort Henry.¹³ Here, along with the forces of Colonel Osborne, Colonel Hugh Reed, and Colonel James Shackleford, Colonel McHenry was to fight under the command of Colonel Charles Cruft. Their aim was to aide General Wallace in capturing Fort Donelson, Tennessee from enemy forces. Colonel McHenry with a regiment of 510 men first engaged the enemy at Fort Donelson on February 15, 1862. They left their "blankets, knapsacks, and a few great coats" behind to follow the Twenty-fifth Kentucky and the Thirty-first Indiana where they soon received fire on their right. McHenry's regiment was forced to fight the enemy from behind "bushes and trees that entirely concealed them from our men." The rebel forces were able to drive the Seventeenth Kentucky back from the line, but they were able to regroup and force the enemy back from their position. This type of back and forth fighting continued for some time with heavy casualties on both sides. At one point Colonel McHenry reported that they engaged with the enemy where the Seventeenth Kentucky had encamped the previous night "resulting most disastrously to our knapsacks and blankets, which had been left hanging upon the trees."¹⁴ In Colonel McHenry's final role in this battle, he ordered his troops to charge up a hill on which the enemy was concealed behind trees and bushes. It is at this point that his regiment suffered the greatest losses though it proved a successful charge. The Seventeenth Kentucky remained on this hill throughout the night, and it was here that they received word that the enemy had surrendered. In all, Colonel McHenry's regiment had received four casualties, and thirty-one of his men were wounded. Although McHenry makes no mention of this in his official report to Colonel Cruft, *The Owensboro Monitor* reported that McHenry's horse was shot from under him when his regiment encountered rebel forces made up with recruits from his native portion of Kentucky.¹⁵

In the battle at Shiloh, the Seventeenth Kentucky became part of the Third Brigade under General Jacob G. Lauman that formed the Fourth Division under General Stephen A. Hurlbut.¹⁶ McHenry, with a force of two hundred fifty men, was unexpectedly attacked by Confederate forces while in line on April 6, 1862. The enemy fire was heavy, and it turned out that its purpose was to conceal the enemy as it moved across the field to flank the Seventeenth on its left. The Seventeenth Kentucky was able to return the fire and push the rebel forces back, but in return the enemy fired round after round resulting in heavy casualties for both sides. The fighting continued for five hours until General Lauman ordered McHenry to draw back. After this first day of fighting, McHenry's report stated that he had lost over half of his men and had used up most of his ammunition. Furthermore, because of injury to Major Wall and the withdrawal of Colonel Bristow, McHenry had to assume command of the Twenty-fifth Kentucky as well as his own depleted forces. At dawn, on April 7, 1862, his somewhat rejuvenated forces "participated in a desperate charge of one column upon the enemy, which resulted in driving them back, and gave the victory, glorious and dearly fought, once more to the beloved flag of our country."¹⁷ In this battle, Colonel McHenry claimed a loss of more than half his men. However, the Official Records state that he had lost a total of 88 killed, missing, and wounded,¹⁸ not quite half of the 250 he claimed went into battle on April 6. Even so, the Seventeenth Kentucky lost more men here than in any of the battles in which it participated. Once again Colonel McHenry's horse was shot from under him and he suffered a bullet wound in the arm, the only battle wound he reportedly suffered.¹⁹

The Seventeenth Kentucky was next placed in the Tenth Brigade under Colonel Jacob Ammen and made up the Fourth Division under the command of General William Nelson.²⁰ Colonel McHenry was ordered to move his troops from Pittsburgh Landing (Shiloh) on May 2. He was to march the Seventeenth Kentucky toward Corinth, Mississippi, "by slow, irregular, and inconvenient marches."²¹ They finally encamped about three miles from Corinth on May 16, 1862. There the Seventeenth Kentucky was in charge of guard and picket duty and the building of fortifications. Thus, remained the Seventeenth Kentucky's status throughout most of the siege of Corinth. Its only encounter with the enemy during this leg of the Civil War occurred when guarding a bridge. The enemy's pickets fired on the Seventeenth's pickets from the other side of the bridge, but Colonel McHenry's forces while giving up only one casualty were able to capture five infantry. Soon after, they were ordered to leave their picket duty and joined Colonel Ammen in his final march into Corinth.

Colonel McHenry's regiment now became part of General Lovell H.

Rousseau's Third Division. While under Rousseau's command, the Seventeenth Kentucky Regiment acted as guard to a supply train while the rest of the Twenty-eighth Brigade it made up fought at the Battle of Perryville on October 8, 1862. McHenry would be moved from here to Russellville, Kentucky under Major-General Rosecrans' command to stop guerilla forces in Southwestern Kentucky and to hold the supplies that that portion of Kentucky had to offer the Union forces. However, before he was moved to Russellville, Colonel McHenry committed a rather curious act that would result in his immediate return to civilian status before the end of the year.

It seems that while still under Rousseau's command, McHenry felt it necessary to issue a special order to his troops in regard to fugitive slaves. His special order was given on October 27, 1862, while the Seventeenth Kentucky Regiment was located near New Market, Kentucky. It reads as follows:

No fugitive slave will hereafter be allowed in this regiment, and all officers and soldiers are forbidden from employing any other than slaves or negroes known to be free.

All fugitive slaves are hereby ordered to leave this regiment in two weeks from this time.

All fugitive slaves within the limits of this regiment will be delivered to his owner or agent appointed, upon application, whether that owner be loyal or a rebel.²²

The Owensboro Monitor printed this order by Colonel McHenry's request on November 26, 1862, and gave a reason why he wanted it printed. A loyal man from Spencer County lost two slaves, found them in the presence of an Illinois regiment, and was nearly mobbed when he attempted to retrieve them. Colonel McHenry had to appeal to General Rousseau to resolve the crisis. The Illinois Regiment was surrounded by the Seventeenth and the Fifteenth Kentucky Regiments, Colonel McHenry identified the perpetrators, and they were punished, thus resolving the situation. So it seems that Colonel McHenry may have wished to prevent recurrences of such embarrassing incidents. However, he must have realized the repercussions his action would eventually have.

While in Russellville under Major-General Rosecrans' command Colonel McHenry was thrown into the second phase of his Civil War career. On December 4, 1862, President Lincoln issued General Order 199 that removed Colonel McHenry from office for violating the Additional Article of War approved by Congress on March 13, 1862. This article "prohibited all officers or persons in the military or naval service from returning fugitive slaves to persons claiming them unless

they were first required to take an oath that they were the lawful owners, and had not borne arms against the United States, nor given aid or comfort to the enemy.²³ Assuming that copies of the Additional Article of War had been sent to all Union headquarters as had Colonel McHenry's dismissal, Colonel McHenry must have known about this article. Furthermore, with his legal training he most likely realized that the special order to his troops, issued half a year after the war article, was illegal. Yet he issued it anyway.

Colonel McHenry's farewell to his troops on December 15, 1862 reveals some of the reasoning behind his special order. Colonel McHenry was still a Union man, but at the same time he had always remained a pro-slavery man. While most of the Union had taken on an anti-slavery sentiment, the Colonel remained true to the sentiments of his people, the civilians and soldiers of Western Kentucky. "Sustained by the Constitution of our country . . . sustained by the Constitution of his native state . . . sustained by his own conscience and by first principles . . . sustained by the people, and endorsed by you--with no intentions of violating the laws of the land, or rebelling against the orders of superior military authority--he is prepared and willing to meet this decree . . ."²⁴ It is clear from this statement that Colonel McHenry believed the President's decree to be unconstitutional. In Colonel McHenry's opinion, the Constitution of the United States did not give the President this power, and his article directly violated a statute of Kentucky law. Furthermore, his own personal feelings concurred with that of his soldiers. In fact, *The Owensboro Monitor* in printing Colonel McHenry's order to his troops stated, "Colonel McHenry's Order on the negro question, touching Mr. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, meets with universal approbation among the Union men in these parts . . ."²⁵ Clearly, Colonel McHenry felt his people were behind him on this issue.

Particularly touching is the support Colonel McHenry received from his business partner and father, John H. McHenry. Mr. McHenry wrote to his son a week after the President's decree. He assured his son that he should not feel disgraced by his dismissal. "By following a different course, you would have been amenable to the laws of your own State, and liable to confinement in this penitentiary."²⁶ He reminds Colonel McHenry of Section 5, article V, chapter 93 of the Revised Statutes of Kentucky: "If any free person shall be convicted of the offense of knowingly concealing a stolen slave, or a slave enticed from the service of his master or owner, or of harboring a runaway slave with the intention of preventing the owner from obtaining possession of such runaway, he shall be confined in the penitentiary for not less than two nor more than twenty years."²⁷ Mr. McHenry then goes on to plead with his son not to turn traitor. "Desert not your country in this her hour of

peril. The President is not the country. Those now in power do you great injustice, but, thank God, they are not your country. Their rule will be short, and the good and wise will yet do you justice."²⁸

Colonel McHenry, influenced greatly by his father's words, said farewell to his troops on December 15, 1862. "Stand by your commanding officer as you have stood by me. Desert not your country in this, her darkest hour of peril. Do not turn rebel or traitor . . . Interfere not with the 'peculiar institution' of the South . . . Stand by the principles that you first enlisted upon."²⁹ Even after receiving the most ultimate disgrace that a steadfast Union soldier could have bestowed upon him, Colonel McHenry remained just that--steadfast in his belief that the Union cause was just. No matter how wrongly the President viewed the peculiar institution, Colonel McHenry urged his troops to leave slavery be for now for the Union cause was the most important cause. *The Owensboro Monitor* echoed this sentiment when it printed this statement on November 26, 1862: "As we are not fighting this war upon the slavery question we will not meddle with it . . ."

After his farewell, Colonel McHenry returned to civilian life. However, his actions did not fade into the background. On February 18, 1863, *The Owensboro Monitor* reported that the Kentucky state legislature had introduced a joint resolution into the Senate: "Resolved, That we have witnessed with pride the gallant conduct of Colonel John McHenry, late commander of the Seventeenth Kentucky Regiment, and do heartily indorse (sic) and approve the order made by him in October last, expelling from his lines, and sending to their owners, all runaway slaves within his camp." His state (or at least his part of the state) remained behind him in his pro-slavery stance. Yet, their support for him ended where the Union cause began.

The Louisville Journal in March of 1863, reported that at the Union Party convention in Louisville in which Colonel McHenry was nominated as a candidate for the Second Congressional District's representative, McHenry made a statement concerning refusal of supplies to Union soldiers who would continue fighting while supporting President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation which had gone into effect that January. *The Owensboro Monitor* stated, "He could not be true and just to the gallant men whom he so often and so bravely led to battle, if at this hour he would turn his back upon them and refuse supplies, because they, while fighting to restore the Union were compelled to fight under a vain and fanatical policy."³⁰ Colonel McHenry claimed that *The Louisville Journal* greatly misrepresented him. Yet, any such statement as this would have put him at odds with the state that had so strongly supported him throughout his dismissal and had even called for his reinstatement and promotion. With this doubt surrounding Colonel McHenry's bid for state representative, he was destined to lose."³¹

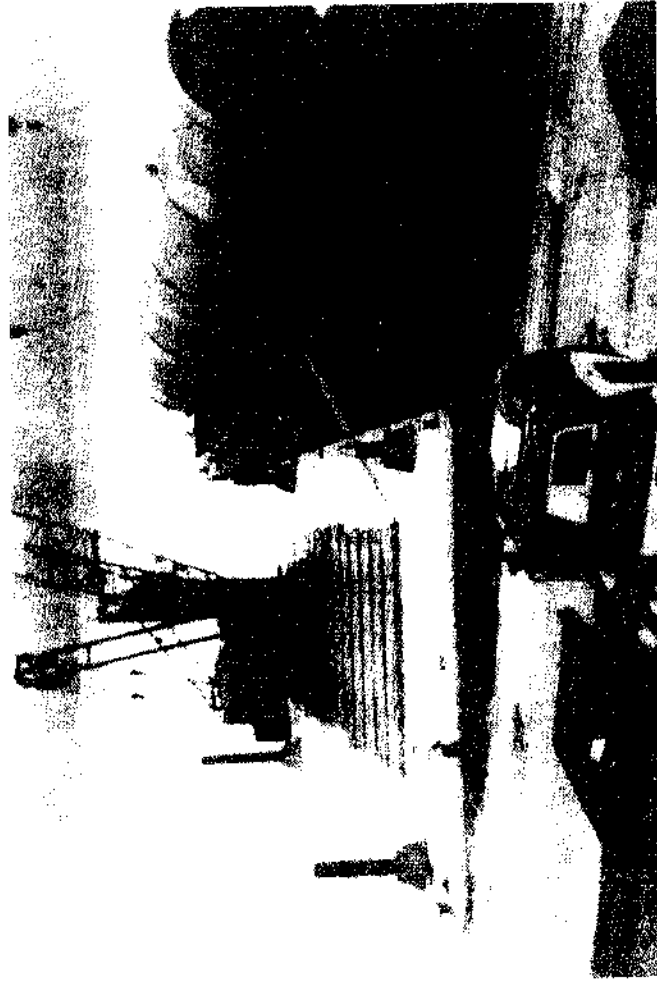
Colonel McHenry unsuccessfully contested his loss to George Yeaman and claimed that his friends were "bayoneted away from the polls."³²

Colonel McHenry remained politically active after his defeat for public office. In 1881 after becoming upset by the preference given to ex-Confederates for state government appointments, McHenry helped organize the Union Democratic Movement. Their gubernatorial candidate, ex-Lieutenant-Governor R.T. Jacob, received 75,000 votes.³³ In 1891, he was appointed postmaster of Owensboro, a position he maintained until his death on July 7, 1893.³⁴ At his death, he was viewed as "an eloquent speaker... a successful practitioner [of law]... a competent and obliging public servant, a brave soldier and an honorable citizen, who had the respect and esteem of the entire community in which he so long resided."³⁵

Colonel McHenry's story exemplifies the sentiments of Western Kentucky throughout the Civil War. They were pro-Union people who uplifted Colonel McHenry and made him their hero as he fought the rebels who would dare to jeopardize the union. They were pro-slavery people who agreed with Colonel McHenry that slavery should not be affected where it already existed. They were anti-Lincoln people who agreed with Colonel McHenry in thinking that Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation comprised a fanatical policy for which they had never agreed to fight. However, they placed the Union before slavery, and when McHenry even mentioned the possibility of placing slavery before Union, he lost their support. Colonel McHenry's story shows that no matter how fanatical or distasteful the Union leader may have been, the people of Owensboro remained Union, a cause for which they were willing to give up the peculiar institution.

1. **Lawyers and Lawmakers of Kentucky.** Chicago, IL: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1897. p. 339.
2. *Ibid.*
3. **Lawyers and Lawmakers of Kentucky.** pp. 339-40.
4. **The Biographical Encyclopedia of Kentucky.** Cincinnati, OH: J.M. Armstrong and Co., 1878.
5. Hodges, Glenn. **Fearful Times: A History of the Civil War Years in Hancock County, Kentucky.** Owensboro, Kentucky: Progress, 1986.
6. **The Official Records of the War of the Rebellion.** Series III, Volume 1, p. 801.
7. **The Official Records of the War of the Rebellion.** Series I, Volume 4, pp. 273-4.
8. **Lawyers and Lawmakers of Kentucky.** p. 340.
9. **The Official Records of the War of the Rebellion.** Series III, Volume 1, p. 801.

10. **The Official Records of the War of the Rebellion.** Series I, Volume 4, p. 297.
11. *Ibid.* p. 221.
12. *Ibid.* p. 222.
13. **The Owensboro Monitor.** December 17, 1862.
14. **The Official Records of the War of the Rebellion.** Series I, Volume 7, p. 250.
15. **The Owensboro Monitor.** December 17, 1862.
16. **The Official Records of the War of the Rebellion.** Series I, Volume 52, Part 1, p. 18.
17. **The Official Records of the War of the Rebellion.** Series I, Volume 10, p. 242.
18. *Ibid.* p. 234.
19. **The Owensboro Monitor.** December 17, 1862. Colonel McHenry did not claim such a wound in his report to General Lauman; therefore, I cannot help but think this a trumped-up claim in light of his dismissal from the Union Army by President Lincoln.
20. **The Official Records of the War of the Rebellion.** Series I, Volume 16, Part 2, p. 6.
21. **The Official Records of the War of the Rebellion.** Series I, Volume 10, p. 685.
22. **The Owensboro Monitor.** November 26, 1862. Issued on October 27, 1862.
23. Potter, Hugh O. **Hugh O. Potter's History of Owensboro and Daviess County, Kentucky.** Louisville, Kentucky: Herff Jones-Paragon Publishing, 1974. p. 74.
24. **The Owensboro Monitor.** December 24, 1862.
25. **The Owensboro Monitor.** November 26, 1862.
26. **The Owensboro Monitor.** June 14, 1863.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. **The Owensboro Monitor.** December 24, 1862.
30. **The Owensboro Monitor.** May 6, 1863.
31. **The Owensboro Monitor.** October 7, 1863. This election was controversial. Colonel McHenry claimed that he could have won the election, but his supporters were kept from the polls by federal troops.
32. **History of Daviess County.** Chicago, IL: Interstate Publishing Co., 1883. p. 135.
33. *Ibid.* 135-6.
34. **The Biographical Encyclopedia of Kentucky.**
35. **Lawyers and Lawmakers of Kentucky.** p. 340.



A crane, mounted on a spud barge, loads a fabricated steel assembly onto a barge at the Owensboro Riverport. The river still plays a major role in the area's economy, with thousands of tons of fertilizers, road salt, chemicals and other goods shipped into Owensboro annually, while other thousands of tons of coal, grain and, occasionally, shipments such as this, are shipped to markets around the world.

The Steamboat Era at Owensboro

by Lee A. Dew

The steamboat era at Owensboro is an era which is easy to begin, to fix a starting date for, but less easy to terminate. For the people of Owensboro the steamboat age began when they stood, the few folks who lived here then, on the crest of the high yellow banks overlooking the river and watched with awe, wonder, and probably not a little fear, the appearance of a strange new craft. It was 1811, and Nicholas Roosevelt was taking his pioneering steamboat *New Orleans* downstream from Pittsburgh, stopping along the way to promote the wonders of his new vessel, and taking time out at Louisville for his wife to give birth and for the river to rise so they would have a sufficient depth of water to run the falls.

The *New Orleans*, smoke belching from its stacks and steam hissing from its boiler relief valves, its long, slate-blue hull thrusting through the water with a silver bow-wave, paused at the Yellow Banks. Just a few hundred yards downstream from the Frederica Street landing, near the present site of the Owensboro riverport, the *New Orleans* nosed into the bank and the crew disembarked to cut firewood. Instead they found an outcropping vein of coal, which they dug for fuel for the boat - the first recorded instance of coal being mined in what was to become Daviess County, and the first economic impact of steamboating on the area.

With the disappearance of the *New Orleans* downstream the river returned to normal, but soon the watchers on the Yellow Banks saw other interesting sights - flatboats loaded with troops, guns, cannon balls, powder and other supplies floating southward to join General Jackson's Army at new Orleans.

Another steamboat also passed downstream, the *Enterprise*, commanded by Captain Henry M. Shreve. After seeing service as a troop transport for General Jackson, the *Enterprise* departed from New Orleans for Louisville. The successful voyage of the *Enterprise* was even more wonderful than that of the *New Orleans*, because it proved that steamboats could perform a task which no vessel could before, move upstream against the current with speed and reliability, and make a profit in the process.

While no witness to the downstream voyages in this area recorded his impressions of the experience, at least to my knowledge, there was one eyewitness to the upstream trip of the *Enterprise* who described the event. "Uncle Dan" Daly was a young slave boy in 1815, and in 1902, at the age of "at least ninety nine years old, and I expect 100," he was interviewed by a reporter for the *Owensboro Messenger*. "I remember seeing the first steamboat that came up the Ohio river. I can't remember its name, but it was a big sternwheeler, loaded with people. Well we

heard about its coming a long time before it arrived, and everybody was crazy to see it, and most all our masters let us go to the river to see the boat. Some came as far as twenty-five miles, and the banks were lined with people as far as you could see."

But Shreve was not content with the *Enterprise*. It was built along the lines of the eastern or Hudson River boats with a deep hull and with the machinery placed below the deck. Shreve built a flatbottomed steamboat with the machinery on the main deck, and added a second deck with cabins and a dining room for passengers. This was the *Washington*, the first "western waters" design, and in the fall of 1816 the *Washington* passed downstream, and in 1817 began a regular schedule between lower Falls of the Ohio and New Orleans. The age of the steamboat on the Ohio River had truly begun!

Soon the boats were revolutionizing life in Owensboro. From a crude frontier village it began to acquire sophistication. The boats brought people, mail and freight, but most importantly the boats brought goods - goods of all kinds to stock the stores and tempt the buyers - and the boats provided a market for the products of farm, forest and fireside, carrying away lumber, shingles, furs, leather, vegetables, cured meats, grain and whiskey which could be sold for money to buy the goods which now filled the stores around the square, where the new court-house stood as a symbol of local pride.

Other cash could be raised by Daviess Countians by selling firewood to the boats. This was "quick money," especially for slaveowners, who could put their people to work during the winter "off" season cutting firewood. The wood was cut in four-foot lengths and piled eight feet high in ranks eighty-four feet long, twenty cords to the rank. The ends were cross-piled and only one end was included in the measurement. The clerk of the boat was in charge of authenticating the measurement and carried an eight-foot long stick for this purpose. Boats would pay up to \$2.50 per cord for good wood, and "wooding-up" brought every deckhand to frantic activity when a boat would nose up to a riverbank woodpile.

Wood remained the fuel of choice for steamboatmen. Through much of the 19th century it was readily available, unlike coal, and did not burn at as high a heat. Coal tended to burn out firebox grates and created a noxious smoke. An Owensboro entrepreneur, Robert Triplett, developed coal mines around the seam that the *New Orleans* exploited, and built the first rail line in the west to haul coal from the mine to the riverbank, hoping to sell coal to steamboats. He also shipped several barge-loads of coal to New Orleans, the first recorded instance of freight being shipped by barge from Owensboro. But the coal did not attract a market, and eventually Triplett abandoned his projects.

Owensboro boomed in the 1830's and 40's, thanks in part to the

completion in 1830 of the Louisville & Portland Canal, which bypassed the falls of the Ohio at Louisville. It was now possible for steamboats and flatboats to sail directly downstream from Pittsburgh. In 1831 406 steamboats and 421 flatboats and keelboats passed through the canal. Two years later this figure skyrocketed to 875 steamboats and 710 other craft, carrying 169,885 tons of merchandise.

Some of that merchandise was bound for Owensboro. Luxury items such as Champagne, claret wine, raisins, oranges and lemons, Spanish cigars, Rio and Java coffee, slippers and shoes, dry goods, carriages, musical instruments, furniture and raw oysters were featured by Owensboro stores. Ohio flour, Western Reserve cheese, plantation molasses, and New Orleans loaf sugar replaced cornbread and sorghum on Owensboro tables, and for those who over-indulged there were full stocks of patent medicines, fresh off the boat, to cure neuralgia, dyspepsia, coughs, consumption, scrofula, piles and dropsy.

The first schoolteacher also arrived by steamboat, or, more precisely, by river. Mrs. Susan Tarleton was a passenger on a steamboat which sank near Cloverport. Mrs. Tarleton was thrown into the water, but managed to cling to a plank and floated with the current downstream to Owensboro. Having lost all of her possessions in the mishap, she agreed to stay on and teach as a means of earning a living.

The prosperity of the day did not even stop for the Mexican War. On August 31, 1846 a call was issued for troops for the war, and among the units enrolled was the Third Company, Fourth Regiment, from Daviess and Ohio Counties, commanded by Col. Decius McCreery. Ninety-one men served in this company, which departed from Owensboro on October 2, 1846 on the steamboat *Meteor* and served with Gen. Winfield Scott's army on the victorious campaign from the landing at Vera Cruz to the capture of Mexico City.

This era saw a new development on the river - the rise of the packet lines. As the scale and complexity of river commerce increased, so did the need for regular schedules and predictable departures. Thus was born the packet line. The word packet applied to vessels which made regular trips at stated intervals, unlike the transient or tramp vessels. The word line distinguished two or more vessels offering packet service in a given trade.

The first packet lines were the Pittsburg-Cincinnati, Cincinnati-Louisville, and Louisville-Memphis-New Orleans lines, but soon many local packet lines were also formed, such as the famous Louisville & Henderson Packet Line, Evansville-Paducah Line, Evansville-Bowling Green Line on the Green River and the Cannelton, Tell City & Evansville packets. While Owensboro was not a point of origin on any packet line, and thus did not always have a fixed departure time, none the less the city found itself served by several packet boats on regular weekly

schedules, as well as the transient boats coming up and down the river picking up cargo and passengers wherever they could. The rise of the great Howard Shipyard at Jeffersonville and other boat-building yards along the river led to an increase in transients. Whenever a boat was launched for service on the Mississippi, Missouri, Yazoo, Red or other rivers it would generally stop at the Owensboro wharf to pick up a little freight or a passenger or two to add to its trip revenue.

By the end of the 1850's the most famous vessels stopping at Owensboro, however, were the Grey Eagle boats of the Louisville & Henderson line. The *Grey Eagle*, *Big Grey Eagle*, *Little Grey Eagle*, and *Star Grey Eagle* connected Owensboro with the world, and brought news of the worsening political situation. Owensboroans and river men alike watched with trepidation as the votes were counted in the election of 1860, and worried what the South's response to Lincoln's election would be.

With the coming of the war, Owensboro, with many pro-Southern citizens, was considered "rebel" territory. The first gun-boat arrived at the foot of Frederica Street in September, 1861, and the U.S. Navy maintained a presence at the river-front for most of the war. Shipping was disrupted as civilian boats were pressed into military service, and further disrupted periodically by low water. In the summer of 1864, for example, the river was so low that the Owensboro *Monitor* complained that "steamers the size of chicken coops" arrived "semi-occasionally."

Confederate guerillas also disrupted river service, occasionally siezing boats, robbing passengers, and sometimes destroying the vessels. In July of 1863 the Memphis & Cincinnati Packet *Alice Dean*, which had been commandeered for service by the United States Sanitary Commission, was burned by guerrillas at Brandenburg. The *John T. McCombs* was boarded but not harmed, but later that year the *Ruth* was "fired by an incendiary," and the *Allen Collier* also captured and burned. The Owensboro wharf boat was burned in 1864 during a guerilla raid.

With the fall of Vicksburg in 1863 the Mississippi was re-opened for traffic, and loads of Owensboro produce headed south to the Memphis and New Orleans markets. Hay, bran, corn, beef and pork all brought high prices, and tobacco was always in demand. A welcome sight late in 1863 was a boat heading up-river from New Orleans loaded with sugar, a commodity that had been rare while military activities hampered commercial navigation on the Mississippi.

The period between 1865 and 1880 marked the peak of steamboating at Owensboro. By the end of the 1870's Owensboro boasted two wharf boats, the People's Wharf Boat Co. at the foot of Frederica Street and the Triplett & Bacon Wharf Boat Co. at the foot of St. Ann. These were

the twin funnels through which goods and passengers flowed into and out of the city. A list of the goods shipped by Triplett & Bacon between August and November 1870 gives an insight into Owensboro's export trade:

- 1,836 sacks wheat
- 464 head hogs
- 143 hogsheads tobacco
- 23 shipments wood products and lumber
- 266 empty beer kegs and barrels
- 163 dozen brooms
- 26 shipments household goods
- 166 sacks wool
- 632 bales green hides
- 449 dry hides
- 141 bales sheep hides
- 144 hog skins
- 45 barrels tallow
- 4 sacks ginseng
- 165 sacks feathers
- 186 bales rags
- 311 barrels potatoes
- 140 mattresses
- 568 barrels whiskey

This was the great era of the Packet lines on the Ohio River, and Owensboro saw many of these beautiful boats during the 1870's. The Louisville and Henderson line, founded in 1843, was still the best and most reliable. Its boats during this period included the *Morning Star*, *Tarascon*, *James Guthrie*, *Rainbow*, *City of New Albany* and *City of Owensboro*, all sidewheeler, and the sternwheelers *Fashion*, *Mattie Hayes*, *Rose Hite*, *Carrie Hope*, *E. G. Ragon*, *Gold Dust*, *Tell City* and the last *Tarascon*. A typical L & H schedule was that of 1875, which called for the *Tarascon* to be down every Tuesday and Friday at 10 a.m. and up on the same days at 10:30 p.m. The *Grey Eagle* ran down Wednesday and Saturday at 10 a.m. and up the same days at 11 p.m. The *Morning Star* stopped on Thursday and Sunday at 10 a.m. going down and came up on Thursday at 10 p.m. and Monday at 3 p.m. The newspaper advertisements boasted "Speed, Comfort and Safety" along with "No extra charge for Meals and Staterooms, Splendid accommodations for Stock."

Other lines serving Owensboro included the Southern Transportation Company, or "O" Line, running between Cincinnati and New Orleans. Their boats included the stern wheelers *Paris C. Brown*, *U.P. Sehneck* and *Golden Rule*, and the sidewheelers *Charles Bodman*, *A.C. Donally*, *Robert Mitchell*, *Charles Morgan*, *Thompson Dean* and

Thomas Sherlock. The Evansville, Cairo and Memphis Steam Packet Company advertised its boats for downstream service, including the *Idlewild*, *Arkansas Belle* and *Pat Cleburne*, while the Memphis and Ohio River Packet Company ran the *Cons Millar*, *Jas. D. Parker*, *Andy Baum*, *Jas. W. Gaff* and *Ben Franklin*. A typical week's business was reported in the newspaper as follows:

The "Old Reliable" wharfboat has shipped during the past week 4 top buggies, 66 barrels whisky, 28 sacks stretchers, 5 bales hoops and 10 dozen chairs per *Fashion*; 80 hogs per *C.W. Anderson*; 31 barrels whiskey, 5,214 feet walnut lumber, 6 boxes shoes, 10 boxes seed, 94 bundles spokes, 9 cases wood-work and 39 hogs per *James Guthrie*; 26 dozen chairs per *Andy Baum*; 13,600 feet walnut lumber, 96 bags potatoes, 121 hogs, 14 head cattle per *Dick Johnson*; 50 barrels whiskey, 75 hogs, 5,216 feet walnut lumber and 52 hogsheads tobacco per *Grey Eagle*; 15 barrels kraut, 18 bags peaches, 2 hogsheads tobacco, 15 barrels whiskey and 12 bales hoops per *Cans Millar*; 5 barrels whiskey per *Virgie Lee* and 4 bales hoops and 88 bags peaches per *J.W. Gaff*.

Local captains also sought to set up competing lines to divert business from the major packets. Captains Leif Elder and Phillip Brenham of Owensboro established an Owensboro-Evansville service in 1874 with the steamer *Sandy* while the Adams Brothers offered the same service with the steamer *Dick Johnson*. Captain R.S. Triplett sought local business with the *R.S. Triplett* and later the *J.M. Sweetser*, while Captain John Triplett ran the *Aggie* in the Owensboro-Evansville service. Of all these only the *Dick Johnson* in the Cannelton-Evansville service really was successful, the others eaking out a living working as ferries and push-boats for barges when business dropped off.

Steamboats were the major instrument for technological and economic development along the river, and river towns such as Owensboro owed their existance to the boats and the links they furnished with the regional and national economy. The steamboat trade was responsible for the burgeoning of the distilling industry in Daviess County in the 1870's, which at one time saw 18 distilleries operating here. Whiskey and other spirits were shipped by steamboat to markets as far away as New Orleans, Mobile, Cleveland, New York and Boston. The tobacco business also depended upon steamboat transportation, and the many warehouses and stemmeries in Owensboro billed tobacco to the major American markets and to Britain, Germany, the Mediterranean and Africa.

Steamboats also brought in the latest technology. Steam engines had been perfected not only for boats and locomotives, but for industry and agriculture as well, and by the 1870's steamboats were unloading the latest labor-saving wonder, the traction engine, a self-propelled

source of power which could be used in all sorts of industrial and agricultural applications, from running a portable sawmill to powering a threshing machine to running blower fans for coal mines.

An even more wonderful technology was electricity. The miracle of light without fire was an innovation of the first magnitude for those who sailed aboard steamboats, whose wooden hulls and elaborate gingerbread, covered with coat after coat of oil based paints and varnishes, made them floating fire hazards. The invention of the electric dynamo and light bulb was received with open arms by boatmen, and by the late 1870's thousands crowded the banks of the Ohio to see the miracle of the new lights as electrically-equipped boats passed during the hours of darkness.

This new technology founded an important Owensboro business. By the turn of the century the Owensboro Foundry Company was turning out thousands of generators and dynamos, many of which were sold to steamboat builders, while the Owensboro Electric Light Company manufactured light bulbs of all sort although for the all-important search lights the carbon rod lamp was used rather than a filament lamp, and continued in use well into the 1970's on many boats.

Steamboats also brought the first railroad to Owensboro, off-loading shipments of rails and ties, and the first locomotive, the *Jo Daviess* for the Owensboro & Russellville Railroad in 1872. By the end of the 1880's Owensboro was served by three railroads, but steamboat service continued, despite the predictions of many steamboat men that the railroads would kill off their industry. Freight charges were less by water than by rail, and many passengers preferred the comfort and relative luxury of steamboat travel to the noisy, bumpy, smoky and often crowded trains. Then too, the natural conservatism of many Kentuckians led them to stick to the old ways, even when railroad rates dropped. For farmers shipping cattle or hogs, grain, tobacco and such commodities, steamboats would let them travel for free as deck passengers, a service which railroads could not duplicate.

The river also brought entertainment of a variety of sorts to Owensboro and other towns up and down the Ohio. Showboats were a welcome diversion, not even stopping for the Civil War. Ward's Floating Theater opened its doors to Owensboroans on August 3, 1864. This boat carried seating for 500 guests and featured a cast of actors from Louisville and Cincinnati. The famous showboat *Water Queen*, built by Charlie Breidenbauch at Hawesville in 1890 traveled the Ohio for more than 40 years, featuring "Price's Great Moral Show." Pushed by another boat, since it had no engines or propulsion machinery, the *Water Queen* was an eagerly-anticipated arrival and waterfront town throughout the Ohio River system. She was destroyed by ice during the

winter of 1935-36 at the mouth of the Kanawha River.

Excursion boats also offered diversions, and vessels such as the *Island Queen* offered special trips and charters, complete with calliope music and entertainment, while entertainment of another sort was provided by the so-called "Joseph Boats," usually crewed entirely by women, which from time to time stopped at Owensboro. These boats were towed by steam towboats, since "the space generally used for boilers and engines" was "used for other purposes." These floating brothels, it was reported, were tolerated because they were "generally owned by or operated in the interest of persons of means and influence."

Towboats were becoming increasingly common on the Ohio, as freight shipments burgeoned with the great growth of industrialization in America in the post Civil-War decades. Steam towboats such as the *Defender* made their appearance - boats specially designed for pushing barges with none of the passenger accommodations or gingerbread of the packets. The bulk transportation of commodities such as grain and coal offered a new opportunity for rivermen and kept the paddle wheels turning, even with the coming of rail competition.

Other steamboats were specially designed to work as ferries, crossing the Ohio in countless places, including the Rockport-Maceo ferry, the Owensboro ferry and the Grissom's Landing ferry in Daviess County. These steam ferries continued, in some locations, well into the 1930's and beyond. The completion of an electric inter-urban line from Evansville eastward to Rockport, Indiana, opened up yet another opportunity for Owensboro boatmen. The *J. W. Sweetser*, under the command of Capt. R. S. Triplett, entered into the Owensboro-Rockport passenger business, departing from Owensboro at frequent intervals during the day to make connection at Rockport with the interurban cars to Evansville. This service was later taken over by the Rounds Brothers, who by 1910 had begun a change-over to gasoline powered boats named after the Owensboro newspapers, the *Messenger* and the *Inquirer*.

Gasoline engines were also making their appearance in automobiles - at first a terror to man and beast, but by 1910 becoming increasingly common on city streets and country roads alike. And with the coming of the automobile and the motor truck there came a demand for better roads. Good Road associations were formed, and county governments were lobbied to close down the old system of privately-owned toll roads and replace them with publicly-maintained graveled roads capable of all-weather use. The motor car and truck made greater inroads into steamboat revenues than did the railroads, and marked the beginning of the end of the "glory days" of steamboating. By the 1920's, too, the advent of inter-city bus lines offering service to towns now reached by railroads, or supplementing rail passenger service, will steal additional

passengers from the waterways.

No longer was the wharf at Owensboro stirred by the appearance of the "floating palaces." By the late 1920's only the steamer *Southland* operated between Evansville and Louisville. This vessel was burned in 1932 and replaced by the diesel-powered *Revonah*, which for a while bravely maintained the service and traditions of an earlier age for those who still wanted to travel with a style of dignity which most railway coaches could not offer.

The decline of the packet boats - symbolized to many by the burning in 1931 of the *Evansville*, the last of the Green River packets, did not mean the end of river navigation, however. The dream of rivermen from the days of Nicholas Roosevelt's first voyage in the *New Orleans* was at last to be made into reality. The "Deep Canal" project, an ambitious program designed to guarantee a permanent nine-foot-deep navigation channel the entire length of the Ohio River, was finally approved by Congress. The army Corps of Engineers began working on the scheme, which involved the building of forty-six dams along the length of the Ohio River between Pittsburgh and Cairo. This project would mean that no longer would rivermen be delayed by low water but rather would be able to operate year-round (except, of course for those occasional winters when the river froze, blocking navigation completely).

One of the dams, Number 46, was planned for Owensboro. Although there were a total of 46 dams in the project the original plan called for more, hence the dam furthest downstream was Number 53, although there were only a total of 46 dams. Construction began at Owensboro on April 1924, and the dam was complete four years later. The dam at Owensboro was typical of the dams constructed at this time, with a lock chamber 600 feet long and 110 feet wide. This was adequate to receive the average towboat on the river, a sternwheel steamer of up to 1,000 horsepower and with a capacity to push a tow of up to six or eight "standard" barges.

The completion of the project the following year meant that by the end of 1929 the Ohio River had been "canalized," and consisted of a series of long lakes or "pools" created by the dams, with a sufficient depth of water to maintain a permanent channel depth of nine feet. This involved some dredging, and a continuation of the work of the snag-boats, whose job it was to fish trees and other obstructions out of the river so they would not impede navigation. The construction of the Ohio River navigation system represented one of the biggest commitments up to that time by the federal government to the internal waterways system, and was to have repercussions which few were able to predict.

President Herbert Hoover spoke at the dedication of the system and warned that the new system, of which everyone was so proud, would be obsolete within forty years and have to be replaced. Now technologies

would transform the towing business, and with it the need for even larger dams with greater lock capacities.

The old river, before the coming of the dams, was frequently very shallow, and could be successfully navigated only by the flat-bottomed shallow-draft steamboats. The new nine-foot channel meant that now propeller-driven boats could safely navigate the river, providing they stayed within the nine-foot channel, and within a few years a new breed of towboat would begin making its appearance -- a steel-hulled vessel with powerful diesel engines, a deep-draft propeller capable of generating great thrust, and with large rudders for good control of the larger tows which these more powerful boats were capable of handling. In 1930, the first full year of operation of the new system, some fifty million tons of freight were moved along the Ohio River. By the 1970's this tonnage would increase by three-fold to an average of more than one hundred and sixty million tons per year.

The age of steamboating was over - a victim of the multitude of new technologies which were transforming freight and passenger transportation in the 1930's and '40's. It is ironic that the year that the *Southland* burned the first paved highway was fully operational linking Owensboro with Paducah to the west and Louisville to the east. Highway 60 was part of the great national highway system that enabled passenger cars, motor busses and trucks to become the new common carriers, eliminating not only the steamboat businesses but devastating branch-line railroads as well.

The motor car and the paved road led to the re-alignment of towns and cities. Towns which, like Owensboro, had for years grown along the river, hugging the bank, now spread outward to the interior, turning their backs on the river as new economic orientations and transportation routes brought new demographic factors to bear on city planning and development. For Owensboro, the completion of the Glover Cary bridge in 1940 marked yet another milestone as this new artery put an end to the ferries which had linked Owensboro to the Indiana shore.

Yet the commerce of the river remained, with throbbing Diesel towboats replacing the steam towboats of an earlier day, and the new 1,500 ton barges replacing the old standard barge, rendering old locks such as those on the upper Green obsolete and useless for commercial navigation, and destining them for inevitable closings under the economies of tight-budget administrations. Fortunately a few steam packets also remained, to remind a new generation of what the great days were like. Boats such as the *Natches* in New Orleans and the *Belle of Louisville*, and the queen of the fleet, the *Delta Queen*, still can stir the blood of young and old with their grace and beauty - still thrill us all with the sight of a steamboat under way - a symbol of the great era of steam on the river - working museums of our past!

The Burning of the *Southland*

Editor's note: Fire was the greatest single hazard for steamboats - their wooden hulls and upper works, covered by layers of oil-based paint made them tinderboxes. While more boats were lost by the hazards of navigation - snags, groundings, etc., the loss of a boat to fire was so spectacular, and grabbed the attention of newspapers and their readers to such an extent that it made great news copy. Thus, when the well-known packet boat *Southland* burned at the mouth of Green River in December, 1932, it made headlines in papers throughout the area. The following is from *The Owensboro Messenger*, December 17, 1932.

\$155,000 blaze sweeps
Ice Harbor on Green
River; Crews escape

Packet *Southland* burns at loss of \$50,000; four tow-boats and four barges are also destroyed; All of craft except two barges belong to Williams Brothers of Evansville

20 Members of crews leave boats safely

A packet boat, four towboats and four barges in the Green River ice harbor at Spottsville were destroyed by fire which started late yesterday. The entire loss was estimated by the owners at \$155,000.

Twenty crew members on the boats when the fire started escaped. All the property was owned by the Williams brothers of Evansville, a shipping firm composed of Capt. Edgar Williams, Capt. Jeff Williams and Capt. T.A. Williams.

Property destroyed and their value were:

The *Southland*, a packet operating between Evansville and Louisville, \$50,000.

The *Tom Williams*, a towboat, \$25,000.

The *Dick Williams*, a towboat, \$25,000.

The *Rival*, towboat, \$25,000.

The *Bernice*, towboat, \$10,000.

Four barges, valued at \$5,000 each.

The blaze started in the cabin of the *Southland*, its origin undetermined, and spread so quickly that members of the crew were unable to cast adrift other boats the *Southland* was towing up

the Green River for temporary storage.

Capt. Edgar Williams was on the *Southland* at the time. The packet had towed the *Tom Williams*, *Dick Williams* and *Rival* to dock until it could be determined whether the Ohio River, which was rising and on which ice was forming at several places, would be navigable.

The *Bernice* and the two barges had been in the harbor at the dock for a month. The Green River is used as a harbor during the winter months because it does not freeze over. The blaze which started in the *Southland* spread to the other craft.

Capt. Jeff Williams, at Evansville, gave his company's total loss estimate of \$145,000 and said it was partially covered by insurance.

Sparks from the original blaze set afire two barges some distance away owned by the Kosmortar Cement Company of Louisville. Their value was estimated at \$5,000 each. All the boats burned to the water's edge. No other loss was incurred.

The *Southland*, one of the boats destroyed by fire at Spottsville last night, had been a regular caller at the Owensboro levee for a number of years, making scheduled stops here each week to load and unload freight.

On its last trip down from Louisville, the boat stopped here about 9 o'clock Thursday morning. After discharging freight at Evansville, the packet went to Green River to remain until danger from floating ice was over in the Ohio River, when it was to have resumed its regular trips between Louisville and Evansville.

Ice, which is reported to be floating down from the upper part of the river, had not arrived here Friday.



The towboat *Tom Williams* at the wharf in Evansville in 1930. The stack and pilothouse of the *Dick Williams* can be seen behind the *Tom Williams*. This photo is from 1930, and comes through the courtesy of Mrs. Frances Harp of Henderson.

THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

— OFFICERS —

President, Aloma Dew
1st Vice-President, Lee Dew
2nd Vice-President, Bob Hughes
Secretary, Shelia Heflin
Treasurer, Marge Schauburger
Curator, Joe Ford
Editor, DCHQ, Lee Dew
Directors, Connie Hughes
Wendell Rone
Doris Campbell

The Daviess County Historical Society is open to all who have an interest in the history of Daviess County, the Green River Valley, or Kentucky. The Society meets on the Third Tuesday of each month from September through May. Most meetings are held at the Owensboro Area Museum on South Griffith Avenue.

Monthly programs of the Daviess County Historical Society are open to all, and non-members are encouraged to attend and participate.

**THE DAVIESS COUNTY
HISTORICAL QUARTERLY**

Volume IX

April, 1991

Number 3

**Published by
THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

EDITOR

Lee A. Dew

**Ky. Wesleyan College
Owensboro, Ky.**

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Richard A. Weiss

Mrs. Henry Etta Schauburger

THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL QUARTERLY is published in January, April, July and October, by the Daviess County Historical Society. The **QUARTERLY** is supplied free to all its members.

Annual membership dues are \$7.00

Inquiries regarding memberships and other matters of business may be addressed to the Society Secretary, Mrs. Shelia Brown Heflin, Owensboro-Daviess County Library, Owensboro, Ky. 42301.

Correspondence concerning contributions and other editorial matters relating to the **QUARTERLY** should be addressed to the Editor. The editors and the Society assume no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Addresses of the authors will be supplied upon request to the editor.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|---------|
| "The Ohio River," by Missy Lyons | Page 50 |
| "Barge Traffic at Southern States River Terminal," by Laura Greenwell..... | Page 52 |
| "The Travels of Jacques Martin, 1854," | Page 54 |
| "The Flight of NC-4," | Page 59 |
| "The Burning of The <i>Owensboro</i> ," | Page 61 |
| "Rails to Russellville, Part I," by Lee A. Dew. | Page 63 |
| Correspondence | Page 72 |

The Editor's Page

This issue of the *Quarterly* featured two essays by students at Apollo High School. The winners of the essay contest sponsored by the Society in conjunction with the Always A River Festival. Missy Lyons is the first-place winner, while Laura Greenwell received the second-place award. Their papers deal with two significant aspects of the story of the Ohio River.

The Swiss traveller Jacques Martin gives us an interesting look at Bon Harbor as it was in 1854 - a somewhat different account than other published descriptions of the activities at that place. We are indebted to Steve Sisley for this information.

Grady Ebelhar discovered a picture of a seaplane at the foot of Frederica, and by researching in the newspapers came up with the interesting account of the visit of NC-4 to Owensboro in 1919. Good job, Grady!

Our river coverage continues with a story of the burning of the gasoline boat *Owensboro* at the landing in 1917; a reminder that navigation on the Ohio is always fraught with hazards.

Finally there is the beginning of the story of the Owensboro & Russellville Railroad. Not only was the O&R the first competition with the river for Owensboro shippers and travellers, it owed its existence to the river, with everything from rails to the locomotive shipped in by steamboat. Thus the river continues to play a role, even in the creation of its competition for trade.

The Ohio River
by Missy Lyons

The Ohio River Valley is first and foremost the home of the greatest river in the West—the Ohio. From its beginning as a swamp in the ancient past, the Ohio River has evolved through the years into the mighty river it is today. The Ohio River is an extremely important part of the six states it flows through. It enriches the land, provides for trade, and is, in general, a way of life for many. During the last century the most pressing problem in the valley has been preserving the river. Acid waste and other forms of pollution have plagued the Ohio and threatened to destroy it. However, several steps have been taken to assure that the Ohio is “Always a River”.

The past of the Ohio Valley goes back much farther than one would expect. Long ago, the Ohio River Valley was a vast swamp where grotesque animals roamed. The eastern part of this area drained northward into the Erie basin and the western part drained toward the west through a valley crossing southern Illinois on its way to the ancient Mississippi River. As time passed, the swamp land dried and the steaming climate chilled as a vast glacier crept over the Ohio country. The ice slid across the valley into what is now Kentucky during the longest of the glacial ages. It began to form a colossal dam, a mile high and 50 miles long, which created a sea called “Lake Ohio” by geologists. It was four hundred miles long and as much as 200 miles across. An age of warming climate came. The ice sheets melted and brought incessant rains. Eventually the waters became an enormous flood that churned westward toward the Mississippi. Now instead of Lake Ohio there was the upper Ohio River. This ancient river dwarfed the Ohio River we know today.

The geologic past of the river gave the Ohio Valley the deep and fertile soil and the vast beds of coal and salines we now have. Today the Ohio Valley produces three-fourths of our nation’s coal supply. It also serves many other various and important economic purposes, such as commercial fishing and a means of transportation for thousands of tons of commerce. In addition, the saline reservoirs along the Ohio supply the basic materials needed for the ever-expanding chemical industry.

Unfortunately, as with the advancement of most things, the Ohio River Valley has suffered from its share of problems. The biggest problem that has ever faced the Ohio River is water pollution of many different forms. Due to the widespread use of the Ohio as a means of

sewage disposal, a need for filtration formed. Increased pollution called for massive use of purification chemicals and the first filtration plant was installed in Cincinnati in 1907. Waste water from industrial plants and acid drainage added to the growing contamination. A four-step program was required that called for the installation of sewage treatment works along the river and its tributaries, the sealing of mine shafts, control of industrial waste, and enlargement of the storage basins and water purification plants. There was, however, no legal agency to put it in action even though the technology was available. In the early 1920's a conference on stream pollution was held by sanitation engineers of the basin states without much success. Finally, in 1935, the Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce organized a Stream Pollution Committee to plan for regional involvement and cooperation in the biggest and boldest improvement program in the nation. On July 30, 1948, the governors of the states of Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia signed the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Compact (ORSANCO). The compact pledged lasting cooperation in the war against water pollution. Another pollution problem so far unmentioned was thermal pollution. Generating plants, such as the twin ones at Kyger Creek and Clifty Creek, used the Ohio to cool the condensers used at the plant. This caused increased temperatures that led to thermal pollution. Since the two plants began operation in 1955, the Federal Water Pollution Control Administration has established standards on river temperatures. Water cooling towers with natural draft cooling systems are now installed throughout the valley and in similar plants across the United States, increasing the efforts in the battle against water pollution.

From its vast and icy embarkment, the early stages of the Ohio River have emerged into the economically important river it is today. Without it, the Ohio Valley would lose thousands upon thousands of jobs and literally a way of life. The whole United States would suffer if anything ever happened to the Ohio River. It is the heart and soul of the Ohio Valley. Thanks to the grueling work of ORSANCO, the Federal Water Pollution Control Administration, and the inhabitants of the valley, the threat of pollution destroying our river has greatly decreased. The water pollution and contamination does still exist, but hopefully one day it will be controlled or wiped out completely. Some people see the Ohio as a muddy river of no importance that should be abandoned altogether. Those of us who live in and around the Ohio River Valley see the river's importance around here every day and know that simply is not true.

Barge Traffic at Southern States River Terminal
by Laura Greenwell

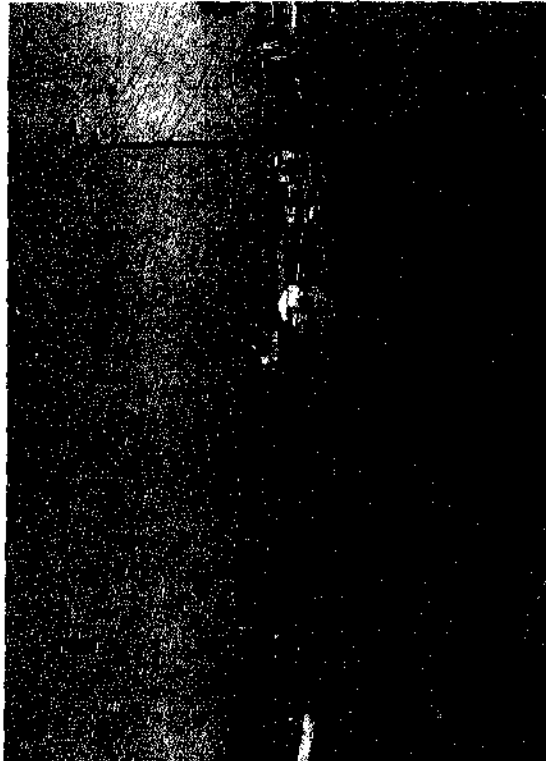
The great and mighty Ohio River is significant for its economic benefits, barge traffic, and an ever-growing job market. The Southern States River Terminal in Owensboro, Kentucky is a major site where many of these benefits take place. It is there that millions of gallons of petroleum products for many surrounding states are received and transported to its final destination. There are other sites along the river, besides Southern States, where other products are taken care of in the same manner. All this and more makes up the greatness of the mighty Ohio River.

The Ohio River is economically beneficial for the money that it saves in the area of transportation. Transports made by barge are almost sixty percent cheaper than those made by trucks. Frederic Greenwell, the manager of Southern States River Terminal, commented that although barge transportation is slower than other means of transportation, larger quantities can be shipped and money can be saved from the cost of shipping. Southern States not only receives petroleum products but also shipments of dry bulk and liquid fertilizer and great quantities of bailer twine through the Owensboro Riverport. For this reason the Ohio River is economically beneficial for the commerce of Kentucky.

Without the Ohio River there would be no barge traffic for Kentucky as well as other states. In this particular area all necessary commodities are shipped by barge. If not for the transportation provided by the river these commodities would have to be trucked in or shipped by rail car. Jim Courtney Jr., an employee of Southern States, stated that, "... gasoline, for instance, would have to be hauled longer distances causing higher prices." The barge traffic of the Ohio River directly or indirectly affects everyone's lives, due to the consumer services that it provides.

The Ohio River provides many jobs and a source of wealth from each. Alone Southern States provides jobs for roughly five-hundred people. Betty Wait is a secretary who earns her living from the river. She is also an employee of Southern States. Mrs. Wait said, "There are so many jobs that would relate to the Ohio River, even a secretary job, such as mine." Other jobs which relate to the business of Southern States include the crews for tow boats, which includes a cook, barge inspectors, people that gauge barges, and the crews for a dredging machines. Not to mention the truck drivers who transport the product to its final destination and the men who have a permanent job at the terminal. These people are grateful for the river because of the wide job market available.

The Ohio River's significance lies in its economic benefits, barge traffic, and a large job market. Together the preceding factors aid the commerce of Kentucky along with other states. Southern States River Terminal is one of the major river terminals in Owensboro, Kentucky. Several of the employees of Southern States commented on the greatness of the Ohio River. Frederic Greenwell once said that the Ohio River, "... carries more barge traffic (and other forms of commerce) than any individual could ever imagine." The Ohio River will always be the river for Kentucky.



A tow of coal moves downstream past the Frederica Street landing, part of the some 3,000 bargeloads of goods each year which move into or out of the Port of Owensboro. (Photo courtesy Hubert McFarland.)

Editor's note: The following is taken from a diary-journal of a Swiss traveller, Jacques Martin, of his travels in the Ohio River valley in the year 1854. Martin was a cotton spinner by trade, and came to the United States to purchase his own cotton mill. He had visited the cotton spinning factory at Cannelton, Ind., and this narrative begins with his departure from Cannelton. It is excerpted from "Le Rendezvous Americain," and was contributed by Steve Sisley of the Spencer County Historical Society in Rockport. After his wanderings Martin settled down in Spencer County and later fought in the Civil War. We greatly appreciate Steve's contribution, and his good work in Spencer County. He is a member of the Owensboro Area "Always A River" Committee.

#

Owensboro (Kentucky) February 4, this evening. I got up at four o'clock this morning to take the steamboat from Cannelton to Bonharbor, where I'd heard there was a new factory. Luckily the steamboat didn't arrive until six thirty, so that I made the whole trip in two days and was able not only to admire the banks of the Ohio, but also to see that there are coal mines in operation and to compare the location with that of Cannelton. At noon I arrived in Bonharbor, about three miles downstream from Owensboro, and when I got off the boat I had the best and even the oddest welcome I've ever had!

Since I was the only passenger for Bonharbor, the boat slowly grazed the shore, I jumped to the ground, and it continued on its way. Someone was standing on the river bank, as immobile as a heron; it was noon, I was hungry, I approached him to ask if there was an inn? Not one, he answered; you don't know anyone here? No. Well, then, do me the pleasure of coming and having dinner with me. I accompanied him, we sat down at the table with an old man and a child; there wasn't a woman in the house, except for an old Negress who served us. After we ate his bacon and polenta (corn meal mush, ed.) with a good appetite, he sat me down by the fire, to drink a grog and light up a cigar.

He was the most important man in the area, where he sells everything. He is the only one to have a brick house. All the others are just nasty abandoned wood shacks, where Negro workers used to live. I told him the purpose of my trip, and of my desire to see the factory. I was very much surprised to learn that it was shut down; my merchant gave me all the details he could, then he went to find the director of the mines, who has the keys, and who came with me.

The location is excellent from all points of view, without counting the fact that it enjoys the same advantage as Cannelton for the purchase of cotton and sale of products. According to what they told me, the owner who is very rich, would be willing to sell for almost nothing. It remains to find out why? For the location, sheltered from floods, is perfect, as are the machines, and he owns plenty of coal nearby, on his own land, and the river can be navigated all year round, in summer there's enough water, in winter it rarely freezes, six weeks in five years.

Here, it seems, are the reasons for his failure. Someone named Triplett plunged into this enterprise, but he had to borrow money for which he failed to pay the interest, and the lender, Mr. Barrett, set up his director of mines as overseer for the factory. That started misunderstandings between the bosses and the foreman. None of them knew what they were doing. The machines were oiled with what's called "local vegetable oil" here, never with olive oil, they weren't cleaned, and they were handled so poorly that they produced very little, and all the machines never worked all at once. Some pieces were worn out, some were new; the preparation was of a horrible quality and the thread all tangled, although spun with good cotton - all this explains a lot of things.

Besides, they worked with seventy-five or eighty Negroes, whom they had to teach the trade. Finally, the building, with its immense foundations, the machines, shipping them here, and setting them up with the usual cheating, necessitated an enormous capital, eighty or a hundred thousand dollars. To be brief, Mr. Barrett's sixty thousand dollars and Triplett's sixty thousand were used up. Such a capital and too weak production are enough to ruin an establishment. Three years ago Triplett died and Barrett took everything as payment. He shut down the factory and is trying to sell it; so far he hasn't succeeded.

Even today, if one wanted to build such a factory, with four thousand spindles and a hundred looms, it would cost not far from seventy thousand dollars; it can't even be thought of. I went to see Mr. Barrett and began talking about the factory. The good man told me he was asking forty thousand dollars, telling me it had cost three times that much. I laughed in his face but didn't make the slightest offer. Then he offered what I was waiting for, to open the packing crates and to show me the installations.

The man seems to me to be a slippery character; so I've got to see not what he is asking but what the establishment is really worth, and what price he has to sell it for if he doesn't want to keep it himself. The machines have been sitting idle for two years; up to now he hasn't found a buyer, and to get rid of them, he packed them up with the intention of sending them to Philadelphia and putting them up for sale. What would

he get out of them then? Very low prices or nothing at all, and four or five thousand dollars in freight costs. Then he's still have a beautiful building in the middle of the woods, completely worthless. The buildings to house the workers would fall to ruin, and the land around would no longer be worth anything.

By selling everything, on the contrary, he's avoid further expenses, the price of the land would go up, and since only women and children are employed in the factory, he'd have men for his coal mines. I pointed out these arguments, and as shrewd as he, I told him that I was expecting him to give me the factory for nothing as long as I'd make it work. If one is to believe my merchant, one could have the factory, the twenty acres of land and the residential building for fifteen or twenty thousand dollars. Suppose I needed four thousand five hundred dollars more to get it working, it would still be an unusual bargain. A factory can succeed only if the technical director knows how to do everything himself and if it's bought second hand, for about twenty-five percent of the original price. All those who have built them themselves have done poorly. Now I've got to wait for a firm offer from Mr. Barrett.

Owensboro, Sunday, February 5. While I write, I see big cavalcades pass by; people are going to church. Saddled horses are everywhere, in front of the houses, in the pastures. To go half a mile away everyone goes by horseback, men, women and children. One would say that the latter learn to ride before they know how to walk. Around the churches are big stables, often bigger than the church itself; you'd think you were in a horse fair.

I should have been in Henderson by midnight, but the captain was towing an enormous boat, on which was piled all the coal he could find for sale on the bans. Before we landed in Bonharbor, I heard him bargaining with a mine agent. He bought three hundred and fifty bushels at six and a quarter cents a bushel, which gives me some ideas of the real price. We didn't get to Henderson until three o'clock in the morning, and I spent the night in a boatman's room. They gave me a straw mattress and I wrapped myself in my coat and snored along with them.

I went to see Mr. Barrett again; he greeted me very kindly and gave me all the information he could, not a great deal as he knows nothing about factories. Yet he didn't strike me as being a gentleman; he may well be very rich, I don't doubt it, but everything points to his being sly in business.

No news from Europe. I'm impatient for some. . . . I have heard that food is expensive there this year; the misery must be great. Here the increase in exports has caused the price of grain to almost double. Yet although I've talked to all kinds of people, nobody seems to complain. I have read long articles about it in the newspapers, and it seems that everywhere the farmers are planning to sow large amounts of spring grain. They are clearing land as fast as they can, and sowing even between the trees. This is a great deal of work, and so the price of labor has increased. The farmers see the prices rise, and hope they will go higher still.

All along the Ohio, and along the roads, the graineries are full. These graineries are very coarse; split logs about nine feet long are stacked on top of each other right in the fields, the way coopers at home lay out their wood to dry. The cobs are thrown in there and a few boards are used for a cover. Some sort of fence is put up to prevent the cows and pigs from feasting on the corn. Because of the quantity of grain stored by the farmers, thousands of barrels of flour ready to be loaded are seen along the banks. The farmers' preparations for next summer lead one to hope that it won't be long before the price of bread drops.

I know the price of Mr. Barrett's factory at last, he wants forty thousand dollars for it. Since he's rich, he'd perhaps rather wait and lose interest rather than lower his price. In my opinion, fifteen or seventeen thousand is the maximum. After all, let him sell his machines in Philadelphia. Afterwards one could buy his land and the factory, which won't be worth anything anymore, and install second-hand machines. The best part of his offer is his promise to deliver first-quality coal for fifty years at six cents, soon it will be worth twenty. As for Mr. Barrett himself, those who know him treat him as *very, very smart* when they're talking to him, but behind his back they call him a downright scoundrel. I was advised never to talk to him without a witness.

I made a brief trip to the factory at Vincennes, on board the *Eclipse*, said to be the fastest and best boat on the river. I thought I was being very clever, but wasn't but an embecile, not having noticed that the boat was without cargo and thus would load up on the way. It didn't fail. It took three days to go three hundred leagues, enough to make a European fume and curse; yet I had no one to blame but myself. I won't be caught a second time. I was the only passenger for an intermediary port, along with a young German as green and innocent as me in such matters. The other passengers were bound for New Orleans and would make up for lost time thanks to the good clip of the boat, not counting the fact that they're admirably lodged for a long trip.

Already at Portland, we saw about sixty solid mules arrive from Kentucky driven by a man on horseback; they pushed each other, kicked and capered around him as if the mare he was riding were the mother of them all. Once these animals were loaded, along with lots of feed, we started off again. Further on we took on four hundred bales of hay, rolled up and pressed like cotton; they were a little smaller and weighed three hundred eighty pounds on the average. To send one bale all the way to New Orleans costs 30 to 40 cents, a mule four or five dollars. What an immense source of wealth for this country, these great rivers facilitating the exchange of goods. The farmers sell their hay and their mules a thousand five hundred miles away. What would happen in Europe if the peasants of Hungary and Poland came to sell their hay in Paris and London? After loading grain, tobacco, hay and flour at more than twenty different spots, we continued on our way and arrived at Evansville

Editor's postscript. This narrative gives some evidence of the fate of Robert Triplett's enterprise at Bon Harbor; evidence which has been scarce on this subject. The *History of Daviess County*, 1883, page 93, says only that "He built a small wooden factory for jeans and linseys, and afterward purchased cotton machinery to manufacture their warps." Hugh Potter's *A History of Owensboro and Daviess County Kentucky*, 1974, quotes a pamphlet published by Triplett in which described the factory as follows:

"The Bon Harbor cotton factory is designed to accomodate 7,000 spindles, and with an additional room to be built, looms to weave up all the yarns. The present room will suffice for the said number of spindles and one hundred looms. The building is constructed with such a thickness of wall, and of floors, that it is intended the jar of machinery shall not be felt. The roof is of slate, lower shutters and doors are of iron; heated by steam; not a fire-place or stove within the factory; the engine house so far fire-proof, that if all the fire in the furnace was scattered over the floor, which is of brick, it could hurt nothing.

We have as yet only 2,000 spindles in operation, intending to increase as operatives are learnt. More machinery is already ordered. We have not been in operation quite twelve months, weaving; but see enough to satisfy us that our best hopes will be realized, and that we have fully twenty percent advantage over eastern manufacturers in cost of the goods."

Potter says about the end of the operation: "Exactly when and why Bon Harbor became a ghost city and faded completely away is not now known but it has been suggested that failure to find ready funds in Europe and the approaching fatal illness of its promoter, who died four years after the pamphlet was published, were possible reasons." Potter, pages 35, 36.

The Flight of NC-4
by Grady Ebelhar

On November 13, 1919, the people of Owensboro got a peek at history at the riverfront of the Ohio. At that time the U.S. Navy's famous seaplane, the NC-4, was the first plane to successfully cross the Atlantic by the air route. It was on a tour of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, in the interest of the recruiting service.

The historical craft was under the command of Commander Albert C. Read. The plane landed in Owensboro exactly intact as when she dropped on the waters of Lisbon Harbor a few months earlier. The plane placed the United States first in the world of aeronautics.

An all-navy band from the *U.S.S. Pennsylvania* was accompanying the NC-4 Flotilla and arrived by train from Louisville at noon.

According to the *Messenger*, thousands of Owensboro and Daviess County people lined the river bank for three hours for its arrival. The trip took one hour and forty minutes from Louisville.

When the plane landed it suffered its first mishap of the tour when one of its wings struck a small steamboat moored at the Crescent Wharf. The wing was slightly damaged but was easily repaired according to the newspaper.

The crew of the NC-4, the same crew which flew the Atlantic, appeared numb although they were securely wrapped in leather suits. They declared that they had encountered frigid weather on the trip down the river.

The crew held a public meeting at the Armory with a band concert given by the Navy Band and Commander Albert Read told the story of the first trans-Atlantic flight made in May 1919.

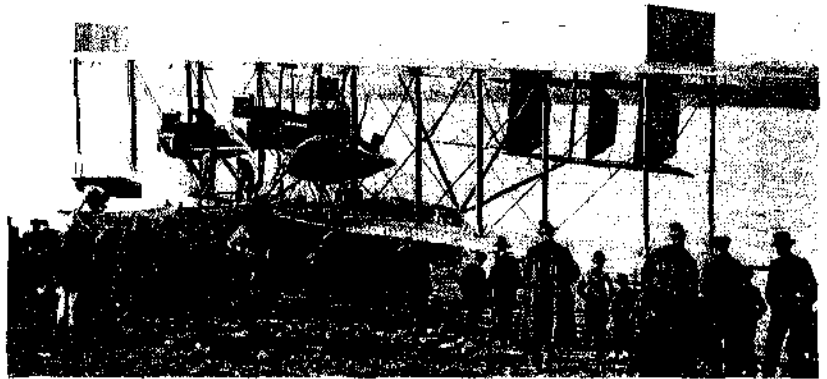
The plane arrived about two hours later than expected. For most people it was their first look at the airplane. The plane flew low until it reached the river near Glenmore Distillery where it touched down on water and continued to St. Ann Street. Up until dark a large crowd walked around the riverfront to view the plane and examine it.

The plane weighed 18,000 pounds empty and over 28,000 pounds with its fuel and crew and had a 1800 gallon tank capacity. The three propellers had a speed of 1500 revolutions per minute. The length of the boat where the crew lived during the ocean trip was 46 feet and the spread of the wings was 126 feet.

The trip across the Atlantic started at Rockaway Beach, Long Island, early in May and ended in Plymouth, England on May 31. The crew consisted of Commander and Navigator, Albert C. Read, Pilot; Lt. Walter K. Hinton, Asst. Pilot; Ensign P. Talbott, radio operator; Lt. H.C. Rudd, Chief Machinist; E.S. Rhodes and C.T. Kessie.

The plane carried to Owensboro the first mail ever brought in by air. Postmaster Floyd Laswell received the mail which included mail to Mayor Calhoun.

After a two-day stay the plane left for Evansville and was expected to make the trip in less than half an hour on its tour toward New Orleans.



The seaplane NC-4 drew quite a crowd on November 15, 1919 when it arrived at the landing at the foot of Frederice Street. Photo courtesy of Grady Ebelhar.

The explosion caused intense excitement along the levee. Within a few minutes after the *Owensboro* caught fire it communicated the flames to the wharfboat. The burning launch was cut loose from its moorings and drifted, a flaming torch, against the excursion steamer *W. W.*, recently purchased by Frank Pounds. Deckhands on the steamer cut the excursion steamer loose and it floated out of danger. The *Owensboro* remained against the wrecked barge *Jumbo*. Nothing but the hull of the boat was left.

Manager Millican stated last night that the loss sustained by the burning of the *Owensboro* will amount to \$5,000, fully covered by insurance. The boat was a total loss, only the steel hull and the damaged engines remaining. The damage done to the wharfboat, which was charred at the rear, will amount to \$200.

The cause of the explosion is unknown. Manager Millican stated that he was standing by the tank at the time. The boat tank had just been filled with fifty gallons of gasoline pumped into it by a ciphon (sic). Fladge Robbins, an employee, had filled the tank, and called young Gift to assist him in emptying the gasoline drum of about five gallons remaining. As the two men started to lift the drum it exploded. The flames communicated to the tank aboard the boat which exploded a few seconds later.

The launch *Owensboro* was built last year at St. Paul for the Crescent Navigation company at a cost of \$5,000.

###



**OWENSBORO'S
River Heritage Festival
English Park
August 11-13, 1991**

Rails to Russellville, Part I
The Owensboro and Russellville Railroad
by Lee A. Dew

Editor's Note: This article is the first of a two-part article, which originally appeared in *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, January, 1978, pp. 26-45. The second part of the article will appear in the October issue, and we are deeply indebted to the Filson Club for permission to reprint. The original article had full documentation, and anyone interested in footnotes can find them in the citation above.

It was the Spring of 1865; the Civil War was over, and in the months that followed the collapse of the southern dream, Owensboro businessmen conceived a dream of their own. Owensboro, they were determined, would enter the decade of the 1870's as one of the great commercial towns of the Ohio Valley.

The city had enjoyed a modest prosperity during the years of war. Despite occupation by armies and raids by guerilla bands, despite disruption of trade on the Ohio with the confiscation of steamboats into military service, despite the deep psychological scars remaining in a town bitterly divided over the issues of the conflict, the war years were good to Owensboro. Businesses prospered, the number of stores and shops increased, the population grew modestly, and agriculture, always the life's blood of the Owensboro economy, enjoyed high prices and firm demands.

Yet as the clouds of war receded, many businessmen of Owensboro were worried. They looked upriver to Louisville and saw that city's great growth as a mercantile center, linked by rail and water to both North and South. They saw the L & N Railroad giving to Louisville merchants direct access to the now-prostrate South, an area which, in years to come, would be an open market for manufactured goods of all sorts. Owensboroans looked downriver to Evansville and Henderson and saw another railroad, the Evansville, Henderson & Nashville, offering to Owensboro's sister city to the westward and Owensboro's rival across the river a direct route to the virgin markets of the former Confederacy.

They saw, in the thin, shining ribbons of iron pushing southward around them, the transportation force of the future which would determine which towns would grow and which would die, which businesses would succeed and which would fail. They looked with envy on these railroads, and they dreamed their dream. If Louisville could build a

railroad to Nashville and prosper - if Henderson could build a railroad to Nashville and enjoy an unprecedented economic growth; why not Owensboro?

This dream was not entirely new. In 1860, before all dreams were smashed in the great tragedy of war, Owensboro planned such a railroad. Businessmen from Daviess, Ohio, Muhlenburg, and Logan counties secured a charter from the legislature for the Russellville and Owensboro Railroad Company, together with authorization to sell a million dollars worth of stock. This dream vanished in the smoke of Sumter, but the seed remained, to sprout again at a more fertile time.

The return of peace to Owensboro brought the return of one of the most flamboyant characters in the city's history, Thomas S. Pettit, the outspoken editor of *The Owensboro Monitor*. Pettit was a crusader, and he embraced the idea of an Owensboro railroad with the fervor which, in an earlier day, had marked his attacks on Lincoln and his support for slavery.

Pettit wasted no time in calling for construction of a railroad. "We must get up more steam, and send the 'iron horse' over the plains and through the hills of this rich but underdeveloped country," he announced on January 10, 1866. He pointed to Evansville as a example: "Her growth and present prosperity are noticeable facts of what we have done for her," he contended. A railroad from Owensboro to Calhoun and Madisonville, he claimed, would siphon the Green River trade from Evansville to Owensboro.

Already a group of merchants were attempting to form a railroad company, and Pettit was loud in their support, contending that the project was favored by all "industrious and sober men who . . . have an interest in the prosperity and development of our city and county." He received support from an anonymous correspondent, signing himself "Natus Sali," who, in a letter published on March 28, 1866, called for support for the proposed railroad in order to insure that Owensboro would become "the first city in point of population and wealth, between Louisville and Memphis." "Don't let Evansville and Henderson entirely eclipse us," "Natus Soli" continued, "when every advantage of location and general adaptedness is in our favor."

Plans for the railroad did not entirely follow Pettit's suggestions. By the summer of 1866 it became apparent that sympathy for the proposed line lay in aiming it directly at Nashville by way of Russellville, a station on the L & N's line from Bowling Green to Memphis. As late as June, 1866, Pettit still called publicly for a road to "Calhoun", but by July 25, 1866, he was fully in support of the Russellville route. "A road from here to Russellville," he proclaimed, is of the utmost importance to this whole section of country through which it will pass, and when made we

are positive that its stock will equal, if not surpass, in value any other road in the State." He urged the citizens of Daviess county to "correspond with those of Russellville, and the intermediate country respecting this important work, that it may be undertaken and completed in the shortest time possible."

Not everyone in Owensboro supported the railroad idea, however, and Pettit aroused opposition. Owensboro had always been a river town, and many people saw the question of transportation in terms of absolutes - *either* steamboats *or* railroads, but not both. Steamboatmen saw the railroads as a threat to their passenger and mail business, and especially opposed the building of railroad bridges, which they felt were hazards to navigation.

There were many vested steamboat interests in Owensboro, including boat owners, pilots, crewmen, and others who depended directly upon the steamboat business for their livelihood. Businessmen and attorneys who had direct connections with the steamboat companies were powerful, and their spokesman, T.C. McCreery, was soon to represent Kentucky in the United States Senate.

Pettit satirized the anti-railroad men bitterly, in an editorial:

What railroad do you mean? The railroad from Owensboro to Calhoun (sic). - O, sir, I never heard of such a thing, nor do I want to hear anything of it. I hate all railroads except those at a distance. - It would call upon me to take stock - it would disturb my regular equanimity - it would wake me in the morning with the scream of its whistle - it would get up such a bustle and create such a fuss in general, as would disturb the regular soporific quiet of our town. This would never do, sir, for our place. It would produce an unpleasant enlargement of our city - it would bring in a large party of what are commonly called men of enterprise, establishing the clang and clatter of mechanics and manufacturing among us - the setting up of wholesale houses, and such a general jostle and rush of business as would inflict irremediable injury upon my nervous system.

Indeed, sir, I am of the opinion that to make any such road would be unkind and unneighborly to our sister city Evansville. She has been growing rich and powerful upon the wealth of the Green River trade, and to disturb her in this would offend my honor.

Pettit could safely indulge in this sort of satire, for public opinion, for a change, was on his side. It was increasingly obvious that a majority of the citizens favored construction of the railroad. On November 9, 1866, a mass meeting was held in support of the railroad idea, and a committee was elected to examine the old charter of the Russellville and Owensboro Railroad Co. for the purpose of reactivating that enterprise. Named to the group were Dr. W. D. Stirman, Dr. E. H. Luckett, W. H. Perkins, James Porter, T. S. Hutchisson and M. D. Loyd.

A short time later another meeting picked an Owensboro delegation of nearly 80 members to attend a pro-railroad rally at Greenville on December 21 st. There they found even more enthusiasm, including a willingness to vote a special tax, if necessary, for construction costs. They also reported support for the railroad in McLean county, with sympathy especially for a connection through Calhoun.

Confident that public opinion was behind them, the organizers of the railroad now turned to the legislature. On February 27, 1867, the General Assembly passed Chapter 1505 of the Laws of Kentucky, entitled "An Act to Charter the Owensboro and Russellville Railroad Company." The act provided for the sale of one million dollars worth of stock for the purpose of constructing a railroad between the two cities and granting to the railroad the usual powers of acquisition and possession of property. It also set rates to be charged, generally conforming to those of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad.

The charter provided that the County Courts of Daviess, Ohio, McLean, Muhlenburg and Logan counties had the power to subscribe to the capital stock of the company, subject to public approval in an election to be held on the third Monday in April, 1867. Further, the charter provided that construction should begin at Owensboro, providing that Daviess County subscribed to an amount of stock sufficient to pay the costs of construction to the county line.

The County Court of Daviess County immediately agreed to purchase 10,000 shares of stock, valued at \$250,000 subject to voter approval, and Pettit began editorializing in favor of the scheme. "Will we still lag behind, and hug the chains that fetter and cramp our energies," he demanded, "or will we throw the incubus off and stalk forth redeemed and disenthralled from the old foggy 'pennywise and pound foolish' policy that has so long depressed us as a State?" "Let

every friend of improvement go to work," he demanded, "and see that every vote is polled of those who favor this enterprise so fraught with blessed results to all."

"THE PEOPLE SPEAK," Pettit proudly headlined on April 17, "and the Shriek of the Iron Horse Responds!" The voters of Daviess County approved the purchase of railroad stock by some 437 votes, with Owensboro voters enthusiastically in favor of the scheme, and only a few rural precincts, in areas of the county not near the proposed line, voting against the purchase.

The vote in the other counties, however, was not favorable, due to objections to various provisions of the charter, and long delays were encountered as officials of the railroad met with county politicians in an effort to work out compromises. The problems involved the towns of Calhoun and Greenville, both of which wanted to be included in the railroad, but neither of which were willing to vote money in support of the scheme. By the end of the summer the people of McLean county had subscribed only 28 shares of stock in the line, compared to 1,585 shares held by Daviess County citizens. Finally, on September 18, 1867, the board of directors of the railway voted to run the line through Calhoun provided that McLean county would vote bonds to the amount of \$150,000.

Meanwhile the legislature voted to amend the charter to provide for subsequent elections in those counties which had failed to approve the stock subscriptions on the first try, thus enabling the directors of the railroad to continue their efforts to secure funding.

Early in 1868 the railroad employed N. M. Lloyd as chief engineer, and he began the work of surveying alternate routes for the railroad through McLean County, connecting either with Calhoun or with Livermore. In May an organizational meeting was held and James Weir of Owensboro was elected President of the line. Other officers included A. L. Ashby secretary and collector; W. B. Tyler, treasurer; and S. M. Wing, C. Riley, Benjamin Bransford, S. D. Kennady, F. L. Hall, W. A. Hickman and Clinton Griffith, directors. Weir, an attorney and President of the Deposit Bank, was a novelist of some distinction and one of the wealthiest men in the county.

In June, 1868, Lloyd reported on cost estimates for the two proposed routes; that via Calhoun was estimated at \$1,059,554, and via Livermore at \$969,872. Further the distance was shorter by the Livermore route - 41.81 miles compared to 47.36 miles. The cost to Daviess County was higher by the Livermore route, \$232,956 compared to \$188,196 for the Calhoun line, since more of the route was in Daviess County.

After giving the people of both towns time to manifest their interest in the railroad through the purchase of stock, the directors, in September, voted to run the line through Livermore. Not only was it the shorter and cheaper route but, the people of that town had subscribed more money for the line.

Stock sales continued at a slow pace until early spring, 1869, when Logan County voted to purchase \$500,000 worth of the securities, and other supporters pledged another \$100,000. By the end of April, 1869, more than \$1,000,000 had been pledged, much of it on the condition that construction began quickly.

Finally the great day came. May 3, 1869, grading began on the railroad. The first construction took place in Owensboro, beginning at Second Street and extending southward along the middle of Lewis Street, which ran some ten blocks to the city's southern limit. The City Council granted permission to run tracks down the center of the street, providing that a passageway, six to 13 feet wide, along the street on each side of the tracks was retained, and crossing constructed at intersecting streets. Residents along the street objected, and brought suit in Daviess Circuit Court, claiming that the city council did not have the right to permit the railroad use of the street. The court denied their allegation, and eventually the state Court of Appeals upheld the lower court's decision. Construction continued.

Immediately south of the city the railroad constructed a freight yard, machine shops, and other supporting installations on land donated to the company by Clinton Griffith, a director of the railroad, and W. N. Sweeney, a long-time railroad supporter. A depot was also built at the corner of Second and Lewis Streets, downtown. Other landowners in the county granted rights-of-way to the line on condition that a depot (or at least a stop) be erected on their property. This was a common practice in the 1870's, and was a means whereby railroad companies gained access to much valuable land. Such grants also caused numerous lawsuits later on, when railroads tired of the practice of stopping their trains at the behest of individual passengers and sought to end the practice.

Construction continued through the year 1869, and by April, 1870, the subgrade was complete to the McLean County line. President Weir departed for the East to purchase iron rails, locomotives, and rolling stock. The entire town turned out, on July 14, 1870, to welcome to railroad's first locomotive, the "Jo Daveiss," which was landed at the Owensboro wharf. This locomotive, built by the Baldwin works of Philadelphia, was purchased at a cost of \$11,325, and weight 49,000 pounds.

Soon the first rails were spiked into place, and the railroad began to move southward, the "Jo Daveiss" pushing flatcars loaded with rails and ties toward the valley of the Green River. Meanwhile surveyors were at work south of the river, locating the line from Livermore, through South Carrollton, to a junction with the Elizabethtown and Paducah railroad which was already built through Muhlenburg County.

With these first successes the directors were buoyed with optimism. They had already successfully petitioned the legislature to alter the charter to permit construction of the road south of Russellville to Adairville, on the Tennessee line, and to increase the authorized stock issue to two million dollars. Construction proceeded at a rate of one-half-mile per day, and materials arrived in a steady stream. On February 15, 1871, a passenger coach arrived from Jeffersonville, and on March 2 the first excursion train took passengers over the completed 14 miles of track to Utica, in southern Daviess County. On April 14 some 600 invited guests celebrated the opening of the line all the way to Livermore. The excursion, it was reported, was "a grand and joyful picnic, unmarred by accident."

By the summer of 1872 the tracks were completed to the little settlement of Strout City, or Owensboro Junction, (now Central City), on the line of the Elizabethtown and Paducah railroad. This meant an operating length of 33.4 miles of 5-foot gauge track, laid with 56 pounds-per-yard iron rail. In addition, 1.5 miles of sidings were in operation, boosting the railroad's total trackage to 34.9 miles of track. Two locomotives were listed on the roster, as well as a passenger coach, a combination baggage and mail car, two box cars and eight flatcars. The definitive Railroad Manual of the United States reported the company's intention to continue construction on to Nashville, and also plans for forming a connection, by boat, with a railroad being built from Rockport to Mitchell, Indiana.

Already rumors circulated about further plans for the railroad. An anonymous correspondent in the *Monitor* wrote in February, 1872, of plans to tie the O & R into a line from Chicago to the Gulf of Mexico. Yet despite these wild conjectures construction of the line halted at the E & P junction, although some grading along the line from the junction to Adairville, some 50 miles, had been done.

The railroad was running out of money. To supply additional cash for construction and operation, a series of bonds were issued in 1871 and 1872. Eventually most of these bonds fell into the hands of a group of investors who were able, in August, 1872, to take over control of the O & R. A new company, chartered in Indiana, was formed, called the

Evansville, Owensboro and Nashville Rail Road. This new company proposed to build a rail line from Evansville, through Newburgh, to a spot in Spencer County, Indiana, opposite the city of Owensboro, to link with the existing Owensboro & Russellville tracks, which would then be extended on to Nashville.

The E. O. & N. was a grand scheme, but it had little capital, only \$50,200 worth of stock being sold. The new corporation took over the assets and bonded debts of the O & R, and continued to operate the trains. But business was bad in 1873, and with the stock market crash of that year and the resulting depression, revenue on the railroad dropped dramatically. The time card still carried a daily mixed train, with both passengers and freight cars leaving Owensboro at 11:30 a.m., arriving Stroud City 2:40 p.m. making connections with the Paducah-Louisville train. The railroad bragged that a traveler could leave Owensboro at 11:30 a.m., and arrive in the Falls City by 11 p.m. that night, and for a fare of only \$5. The passenger train left Stroud City at 4:10 p.m. to return to Owensboro at 7:15 p.m. A freight train was also operated between Owensboro and the E. & P. junction.

By the summer of 1874 dissatisfaction with the railroad was spreading, and Editor Pettit was demanding that the new management complete the road or sell the line to "moneyed parties who will soon have our city in direct connection with Nashville." Throughout the remainder of 1874 the *Monitor* was full of correspondence condemning the management of the railroad and calling upon the directors to fulfill their promises by continuing construction. In a stockholders meeting in October, 1874, President Weir sought authorization to sell the railroad to its creditors to pay off outstanding obligations, but this move was blocked.

Finally, at a stockholders meeting in March, 1875, the sad conclusion was reached that "there was absolutely no hope for a completion of the road in its present status." The investors grimly considered and finally passed a motion admitting that the railroad must be sold, and that "judgment of court is necessary to give good and complete title" - in other words, the company was bankrupt. The directors, the stockholders agreed, should be empowered to "precipitate a sale . . . in as speedy a manner as possible."

It had been only five years since the "Jo Daveiss", and its sister engine, the "City of Owensboro," had first begun steaming so proudly down Lewis Street, and the rails had begun reaching southward. But the great dream of Owensboro was fading, dissipating in the realities of depreciation, cash flow, payrolls, debt obligations, and inadequate income. The rail line, unballasted and cheaply-built, was being torn to pieces by even the light traffic then upon it, and if it were to ever see an

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor:

Thank you for sending me the October 1990 and the January, 1991 Historical Quarterlies.

I had no idea there would be such a fascinating account beginning on p. 14, Memorandum of Trip No. 4, from Hawes Family Papers.

If you are ever in doubt of "who" a Hawes person was, it is quite possible that I could make the identification for you -- S. is Samuel Hawes, first son of Richard & Clary Walker Hawes -- sister Anne was living just below Memphis, in Mississippi, married to William H. Coleman, and Cousin A. Buckner (of Natchez, with whom Samuel visited on Jan. 17th) was William Aylett Buckner, son of Elizabeth Hawes Buckner. This man became one of Mississippi's leading citizens, and was called "Aylett", with the William dropped.

I have studied these families for so many years that they are most familiar now, and this article about Samuel's trip was such a nice surprise.

Sincerely,

Helen Hawes Hudgins
247 Jennings
Franklin, TN 37064

THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

— OFFICERS —

President, Aloma Dew
1st Vice President, Lee Dew
2nd Vice President, Bob Hughes
Secretary, Shelia Heflin
Treasurer, Marge Schauburger
Curator, Joe Ford
Editor, DCHQ, Lee Dew
Directors, Connie Hughes
Wendell Rone
Doris Campbell

The Daviess County Historical Society is open to all who have an interest in the history of Daviess County, the Green River Valley, or Kentucky. The Society meets on the Third Tuesday of each month from September through May. Most meetings are held at the Owensboro Area Museum on South Griffith Avenue.

Monthly programs of the Daviess County Historical Society are open to all, and non-members are encouraged to attend and participate.

THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

Volume IX

OCTOBER, 1991

Number 4

Published by
THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

EDITOR

Lee A. Dew

Ky. Wesleyan College
Owensboro, Ky.

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Richard A. Weiss

Mrs. Henry Etta Schauburger

THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL QUARTERLY is published in January, April, July and October, by the Daviess County Historical Society. The QUARTERLY is supplied free to all its members.

Annual membership dues are \$7.00

Inquiries regarding memberships and other matters of business may be addressed to the Society Secretary, Mrs. Shelia Brown Heflin, Owensboro-Daviess County Library, Owensboro, Ky. 42301.

Correspondence concerning contributions and other editorial matters relating to the QUARTERLY should be addressed to the Editor. The editors and the Society assume no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Addresses of the authors will be supplied upon request to the editor.

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|---------|
| "The Yellow Banks," by Lee A. & Aloma W. Dew | Page 75 |
| "The Ferry With a Past," by Louise Daily..... | Page 81 |
| "Rails to Russellville, Part 2," by Lee A. Dew | Page 86 |
| Correspondence | Page 95 |

The Editor's Page

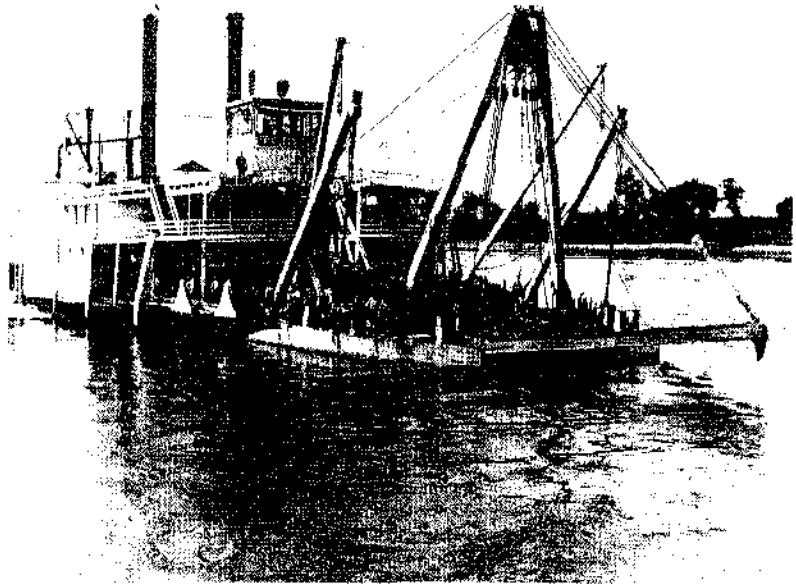
We conclude our year of featuring the Ohio River with an introduction to the Ohio River and Owensboro from the book *Owensboro: The City on the Yellow Banks*. The central theme of this book is the importance of the Ohio River to Owensboro's founding, development, current economy and lifestyle, and future. We hope that this year's emphasis upon the river has encouraged thought about the importance of the river to Owensboro's heritage.

Louise Daily's article, written in 1956, deals with the Green River, and while the ferry did not directly touch Daviess County it describes the river environment, and could just as well have been written about Delaware or Curdsville. It recalls a time, now gone, when life moved at a slower pace.

The continuing story of the Owensboro and Russellville Railroad takes up the tale with the problems of this line in the mid-1870's and details its history to the present, when the line has disappeared entirely from Daviess County, but survives in part in McLean and Muhlenburg. Like the river, the railroad played its important role in shaping Owensboro in our own time.

Finally, Jack Foster adds an interesting new dimension to the story of the visit of NC-4 to Owensboro in 1919. We appreciate his sharing of his fascinating reminiscence.

* * *



Snagboats such as the *E. A. Woodruff* were a common sight along the Ohio and its tributaries working to remove obstacles to navigation. Note the large logs on the foredeck. This photograph was taken on 28 September, 1909. (Courtesy US Army Corps of Engineers).

The Yellow Banks

* * * * *

Editor's note: The following is from *Owensboro: The City on the Yellow Banks* by Lee A. and Aloma W. Dew, and is reprinted by permission of the copyright holder, Rivendell Publications, Bowling Green, KY. It describes Owensboro's river as it existed in the years before the founding of the first permanent settlement on the Yellow Banks by Bill Smothers in 1797 or 1798.

* * * * *

No one knows for certain who the first Europeans were to view the high clay bluffs at the bottom of a sharp bend in the Ohio River - bluffs that were one day to be known as the Yellow Banks and give their name to a settlement along their crest. Perhaps it was a party of 23 Spaniards who in 1669 came up the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, searching for a lake which the Indians claimed was filled with silver. The Spaniards were all slain by Indians near Lake Onondaga, New York, and whatever records they made of their trip, if any, were destroyed.

Frenchmen next appeared, their sleek canoes barely parting the shiny waters they called La Belle Reviere -- "the beautiful river." The river became the highway linking the growing French settlements in the Upper Ohio country with the crown jewel of French colonies in the Mississippi valley, the city of New Orleans. In 1739 a detachment of French troops passed down the river to fight the Chickasaw Indians, the first of many military movements along the Ohio.

The first Englishman to observe the Yellow Banks was probably John Howard, who crossed the Appalachians from Virginia and descended the river to its mouth in an Indian canoe, much in the same fashion that countless others after him would imitate. Perhaps Howard spent the night on the long, narrow, crescent-shaped island later to be known as Yellow Banks Island. The famous historian Reuben Gold Thwaites, re-creating a typical pioneer voyage by rowboat in 1894, camped along the island's sandy beach. "We have had no more beautiful home on our long pilgrimage than this sandy islet, heavily grown to stately willows," he wrote.

It may be that some of these early voyagers may have paused at the Yellow Banks, possibly mooring their boats at the base of the deep ravine which sliced through the high clay banks and reached the level of the water at a spot where later the foot of Frederica Street would be platted. Had they paused there they would have probably noted the many buffalo signs and tracks, for this ravine was a favorite access point for the huge animals, enabling them to make their way down to the river bank for water.

Certainly if these early adventurers had climbed to the crest of the Yellow Banks they would have been struck, first of all, by the immense wealth of timber in the land that would one day be known as Daviess County. In addition to the honey locusts and black locusts along the bluffs of the Yellow Banks there were probably countless huge sycamores, sweet gums and cottonwoods, while on the higher ground to the south and in hills to the westward were to be found immense stands of hardwoods. The oaks predominated, especially the towering white oak, along with numerous blacks, scarlets, and shingle oaks -- all valuable for timber and firewood. Hickories were there in abundance, along with black walnuts, tulip poplars, hard or sugar maples, ashes, and wild cherries.

Beneath the canopy of these great trees grew the lesser trees, such as the post oak and black jack. Here, too, grew the persimmons and pawpaws, the red buds and dogwoods and the numerous sassafras trees. Wild blackberries choked the cleared areas, as well as wild gooseberries, sumac, currants, choke cherries, two varieties of plums, hazelnuts and other shrubs, while everywhere vines of all kinds made passage through the woods difficult. Wild grapes, poison ivy, morning glory and

bindweed would have blocked any but the most serious attempt to penetrate far beyond the river's bank, unless one followed one of the many trails worn by the countless hooves and pads of animals leading from the river back into the unexplored vastness of the interior.

The buffalo, the pre-eminent trail-blazers of the trans-Appalachian west, were to be found in considerable numbers in the seventeenth century. These great beasts had cleared trails between the Ohio, the Rough and the Green Rivers, and along these cleared areas abundant stands of grasses and clovers furnished forage for the buffalo herds and other ruminants. Elk were not uncommon, and deer were abundant in those days before the sound of the first rifle shot had echoed through the stillness; with abundant feed and water, their numbers were probably growing.

Bears, were common, thanks to the many fruit-bearing plants which naturally occurred in the area; and there were large numbers of wolves, panthers, jaguars, wild-cats (or bob-cats), foxes, raccoons, possums, skunks, otters, beavers, muskrats, minks, ground hogs, squirrels and rabbits.

Vast clouds of passenger pigeons filled the air and wild turkeys were to be found in the woods, while the open areas were filled with coveys of quail. Countless swarms of wild bees took advantage of natural holes in the many trees to build their hives -- eagerly sought out by bears for the delectable honey made from the pollen of the many species of wild flowers which bloomed, each in their season, from early spring to frost.

Other residents of this Eden were not so welcome. Ticks were to be found in abundance; and chiggers in profusion. Timber rattlers and copperheads were common venomous snakes, while numerous species of non-poisonous snakes were to be found. But one species of life, and by far the greatest perceived threat in the minds of pioneers, was neither snake nor insect, but man. And man, in the presence of the Mississippian Indians, was to be found in Daviess County and its environs in several locations.

If an intrepid explorer had climbed to the top of the Yellow Banks, he probably would not have seen any permanent Indian camps -- the closest signs of long-term habitation, according to Joe Ford, Director of the Owensboro Area Museum, were to be found upstream at what is now the site of the Elmer Smith power plant. He was located a ford across the river, and Indians camped on both sides of this ford almost continually. A short distance away from the river bank was another popular campsite where the Owensboro Brick and Tile Company is now located on Ewing Road at the foot of Bon Harbor Hills, while a rather large Indian village was located near what is now the town of Stanley.

But most Indians in the area of the Yellow Banks were to be found across the river in the bottom lands of Spencer County, Indiana. The

great bend of the river formed a peninsula of some 20 square miles in area, and here Indians lived in large numbers practicing agriculture, fishing, and enjoying a relatively high standard of living from the many varieties of foodstuffs available in this rich and fertile region.

The Indians of Daviess County in the late eighteenth century were far more advanced culturally than the first aboriginal inhabitants who were to be found in this area at about the time of the birth of Christ. These so-called Archiac Indians were hunters and gatherers who knew nothing of agriculture and did not even have bows and arrows, using instead crude spears for hunting game. They did have the throwing-stick, or atl-atl, which was used to give greater leverage for hurling their spears, but this seems to be about the extent of their technology. They lived primarily on deer and small game, nuts and berries, and shellfish -- the freshwater mussel -- available in unlimited numbers in the Ohio River. These are the people depicted in the diorama at the Owensboro Area Museum.

The Archiac peoples were succeeded by the Woodland culture, a far more sophisticated society, which used the bow-and-arrow, made pottery, and practiced rudimentary agriculture. The woodland people were mound builders, although not to as great an extent as the Mississippians. The Woodland Indians probably came into Kentucky from north of the Ohio River, and they were eventually superseded by the Mississippians moving into Kentucky from the West.

The Mississippians in what was to become Daviess County were probably, in Joe Ford's words, "outposts" of the more numerous settlements in Western Kentucky. In Henderson County, for example, Mississippian sites have been found which contained glass trade beads and Spanish and English coins, showing considerable contact between the Indians and white settlements. Trade copper is also found in these sites, as this was a popular item with the Indians, who lacked access to metallic ores.

Farming was the main activity of the Mississippians, and corn their primary crop, although their corn or maize was quite different from the familiar field crop of today. The Indian's maize was a smaller ear, with a husk covering not only the entire ear, but with husks encasing each individual grain so that each grain was doubly protected against the elements, insects, and predatory birds and animals. This made shelling the corn a more difficult task, as the grains not only had to be separated from the cob, but then the husks had to be removed from each grain. The women would take a handful of corn, rub it briskly between their palms, then blow the husks, or chaff, away leaving the grains.

Another crop raised by the Indians of Daviess, in common with many other tribes stretching as far as Central Mexico, was amaranth -- a tall, rangy, semi-wild plant which produced either white or black seeds,

depending upon the species. Amaranth was a truly miracle crop for the Indians. Not only would it grow and produce in almost any kind of soil and weather condition; it was also resistant to insect infestation. But most importantly the amaranth seeds were rich in lysine, the amino acid which is low in both corn and wheat. By combining amaranth with corn in their diet the Indians thereby assured themselves a complete nutritional protein. Further, the leaves of the amaranth were extremely high in vitamin A, an essential for the prevention of night-blindness. The leaves were boiled as greens, and the seeds could be boiled, mashed into a porridge, or ground into flour.

In addition the Indians cultivated a number of different gourds and squashes and, of course, tobacco. They encouraged the growth of the wild ground-nut and gathered berries of all kinds -- Jerusalem artichokes, nuts, fruits and other edible plants. For planting and cultivating they used a variety of stone implements with wooden handles and stored their produce in gourds, baskets and pots. The Mississippians practiced field agriculture and as a result probably had as healthy and well-balanced a diet as many European peoples of the day, and certainly a better diet than many urban workers of a century later.

But the days of the Indians on the Yellow Banks were numbered! By the mid 1770's red men standing on the high clay cliffs probably sensed that their world was being challenged and threatened by forces which they could not comprehend. The white men were appearing on the river in greater numbers. At first they came only occasionally, in the typical Indian dugout canoe, hacked with axes and adzes from huge poplar logs. Capable of carrying as many as a dozen men, these great canoes were the primary craft of the early explorers. Fast and easily maneuverable when going downstream, they were unstable and subject to being overturned in rapids or when hit by unexpected waves. Further, they were heavy and almost impossible to paddle upstream, except for short distances.

But soon a new craft began to appear, a variation of the canoe. This was the pirogue, first invented by the French. Basically the pirogue was a canoe sawed in two lengthways, with a broad flat board inserted in the middle to make it wider and more stable. Often these pirogues had a square stern making steering with a stern oar more efficient and were frequently used as ferries, being stable enough to carry horses or cattle. "We have frequently seen them in operation" wrote James Hall in *Notes on the Western States*, published in 1838, who added that, when used as ferries, the pirogues were "of a sufficient size, to effect their object in perfect safety."

Further, the pirogue could carry cargo, such as household goods, with much less risk of loss than could even the largest lean-bodied canoe, with the result that the pirogue became not only the first cargo-carrying vessel on the Ohio, but the first immigrant boat, capable of

carrying a family and its possessions to a new home downstream from Pittsburgh or Wheeling or some other port town "back East."

But the pirogue, like the canoe, was a defenseless craft, little able to repel a determined Indian attack, especially in shallow water or narrow channels. A larger boat was needed, both for security and for greater adaptability to the changing nature of the then-undammed Ohio. The answer lay in an entirely different design, which evolved into three distinct crafts -- the flatboat, the keelboat, and the barge.

The first of these new types of vessels to be seen by watchers on the Yellow Banks was the barge, not to be confused with the modern freight carrier. The word "barge" in this sense is used in the English meaning, to describe a round-bowed vessel, perhaps 30 to 40 feet in length and 12 feet wide, propelled by banks of oars on each side. The barge likely would have an enclosed cabin which afforded both shelter from the elements and protection from attack on the passengers, and might even mount to a small cannon on the bow as insurance against Indian attack.

In 1776 two men named Gibsnn and Linn descended in such a barge from Pittsburgh to New Orleans to bring back a cargo of 136 kegs of gunpowder for the revolutionary armies in Pennsylvania, thus demonstrating that through the expenditure of tremendous labor, loaded boats could be worked upstream along the Ohio. Barges were poled upstream against the current when the river was shallow enough; and in deeper water the strong-armed boatman relied on the cordelle, an exhausting process whereby the boat was hauled upstream by means of long ropes. The keelboat, somewhat longer and narrower than the barge and with slightly less depth, was better fitted to run in the narrow and shallow channels of the Ohio, and also had the virtue of being somewhat easier to work upstream.

Perhaps the watching Indians heard rumors through some aboriginal "grape vine" of the great war being waged to the eastward between the American colonists and the British. Perhaps word filtered down to the Indians in the lands that would become Daviess County of the first settlements of the "white-eyes" in Kentucky and of their war with the Shawnees in the lands north of the Ohio. They may have learned of the expeditions mounted to drive the English from their forts in the Illinois country and the Wabash valley, and of the success of these expeditions under the command of the redoubtable general George Rogers Clark.

These watchers would have no way of knowing that the very land on which they stood had already been "sold" out from under them by the Cherokees of Tennessee, who in 1775 concluded the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals with Judge Richard Henderson and other representatives of the Transylvania Company. This document surrendered to the Company all Cherokee claims to the territory enclosed in the triangle of the

Cumberland, Kentucky and Ohio Rivers - lands which the Cherokees did not control to begin with!

Eventually this treaty would be rendered invalid by actions of the Virginia legislature which on December 31, 1776 created Kentucky County and thus effectively laid Virginia's claim to all of the lands of Kentucky. Henderson was later (in 1778) given 200,000 acres of land between the Ohio and Green Rivers as compensation, and the rest of the land claimed by the Transylvania Company was opened to general settlement.

While the watchers on the Yellow Banks knew nothing of these events, and would not have had the slightest understanding of them in any case; they were able to comprehend that great changes were taking place up-river. A new kind of vessel which was to bring an end to the Indian way of life in Kentucky. The flatboat was a uniquely Western invention designed for the sole purpose of floating with the current downstream for only one voyage, and to be broken up and either sold for lumber or used for other purposes once that voyage reached its end.

The flatboat was a simple craft, with thick oak planks (2 to 2½ inches) over a frame of 6 or 8-inch square timbers. The bow was angled for more efficient passage through the water, while the sides and stern were perpendicular and covered throughout the whole length of the boat. A cabin was commonly built across the stern, and in the center of the four sides of the boat was mounted the crotch of a tree to be used as oarlocks for the long oars, or sweeps, by which some rudimentary steerage of the vessel was possible. In such a boat goods could be transported downriver to New Orleans; or an entire family, complete with livestock and possessions, could move downriver from Pittsburgh or Wheeling to new homes in the waiting lands of Kentucky. Thomas Clark records that from October 1786 to May 1786 a total of 177 flatboats with some 2,700 persons aboard passed Marietta, Ohio, heading downriver, while in 1788 it was estimated that 10,000 persons had floated down the Ohio to new homes. By 1790 the population of the District of Kentucky was estimated by the first United States Census as more than 70,000 persons.

The Ferry With a Past

by Louise Daily

* * * * *

Editor's Note: The following article was written in 1957 by Mrs. Louise Daily of Robards, KY, and was the winner of a state-wide contest for essays in early Kentucky history. It was submitted by Sr. Emma Cecilia Busam.

* * * * *

The population of Ranger's Landing today is forty-five people, twenty dogs and eight cats. Days pass very much the same as in other sections of the country, the man of the house leaves early in the morning for various jobs in Henderson and the woman remains behind to mind the children and keep house or be it summer work the garden. On Sunday farmers from the neighborhood gather on the bank of Green River to discuss crops, the latest prices or who will be the next president.

Earlier than recorded history Indians occupied the surrounding hills and fished in the clear green water on the Green River. On Sunday afternoon one can stroll for miles along the river bank, hunt for treasure in a nearby Indian graveyard or simply bask in the beauty of the scenery. Lying under the sun with thoughts wandering to by-gone days, it is easy to imagine the busy activity of the populace in pioneer days and if the curiosity is aroused, as the writer's was, search for records of the past.

The first white people of whose history anything is known, connected with the settlement of Henderson County, were a set of graceless outlaws. Their rendezvous was on the bank of the river where they made it their business to rob boats floating upon the water, frequently murdering the crews. Prior to 1798 there were few settlers south of Green River.

Among these outlaws were the Harpes, Masions, Wilsons, and Mays, who overrode in 1799, the entire Green River section, using Harpe's crossing; now known as Ranger's Landing as an escape point. The mode of transportation used in this escape was a raft, made of logs and boards propelled by an oar. They were terror of terrors and Captain _____ Young, with a band of men from Mercer County, armed themselves to drive the villains from the country. To apply the knife to the throat of one of these was to be a favor graciously embraced by any one of the command. Many were killed while fleeing south of the Green River. Captain Young was not satisfied with what had been accomplished and pursued the fast fleeing badmen into Henderson County and it is an asserted fact that twelve or thirteen outlaws were killed within the county.

This raid of Captain Young's was the first check given the outlaws, and soon after the killing of Big Harpe and the flight of Little Harpe to Mississippi broke them up entirely. The Harpes consisted of Big Harpe, his two wives, Sally Harpe and Betsy Roberts, Little Harpe and Susanna, his wife. Their trail through Kentucky was marked by human blood; men, women and children fell before their onslaught, until Big Harpe's head was severed, by Mose Stigall, from his body and placed upon the top of a young tree, at the intersection of the present Henderson-Morganfield-Madisonville roads.

The year 1800 was ushered in with a greatly increased population and still brighter hopes for the future. Records of this area are few and a major part of the information concerning this era has been passed down from father to son or mother to daughter. However, Green River being one of the leading navigable streams within the state it just naturally drew settlers in droves.

In 1895 a small station was established on the McLean County side of Green River, called McKinley, Kentucky. The settlement consisted of a post office, store and blacksmith shop operated by a man named Smith. During this period also the Jim Bottoms family settled at McKinley, and here the recollections of aged persons are very vague as to how this family acquired a franchise to become owners and operators of a ferry across Green River, from McKinley in McLean County to the Henderson County side. For many years this ferry was pulled from one side to the other by oars or a wire stretched from one bank to the other. As a matter of fact the first motor was installed on the ferry boat in 1932.

During the Civil War prices on all commodities were high, and the land located along the banks of Green River and the rolling hills extending back from its shores, produces the finest tobacco brought to market. Being located close to a transportation outlet, it is only natural this rich potential was sought by wealthy and influential men.

On the bank opposite McKinley, Kentucky a thriving town grew up under the promotion of Morris Ranger, for whom the ferry was named after the McKinley Post Office was moved to Comer, Kentucky. At one time Ranger's Landing was a place of considerable importance. Mr. Ranger, a native of New York State and a great cotton and tobacco king, took advantage of the high prices during the war and caused to be built at this point a large, substantial factory for handling tobacco. For several years he carried on an immense business and was really king of the territory. Mr. Ranger, is mentioned very briefly in the *History of Henderson County*, by Edmund L. Starling. However for more specific information concerning his activities several older residents of the county were consulted.

Not only was there a tobacco factory, but also a hotel; called simply the White House, for transit passengers from steamboats such as the *Crescent City* and *Park City* owned and operated by the Evansville, Bowling Green Packet Company. A part of this legendary building is now the present dwelling of Mr. Warren Porter, located on Highway 136, approximately two miles from the original site of the hotel.

After the Civil War, the price of tobacco decreased to such an extent it was no longer possible to maintain the factory profitably and Mr. Ranger simply abandoned the enterprise, selling it to the Fatman Company of Germany. Within a few years this company was bankrupt and simply walked out leaving everything behind. Between 1895 and 1900 the building and property was sold for taxes by the Henderson County Commissioner and purchased by Mr. J.W. Porter, grandfather of Mr. Warren Porter, who in turn tore down the factory and moved it to Cross Plains or what is today known as Niagara, Kentucky.

From 1900 the ferry has had many owners to mention a few for there were many; Van and Win Williams, Homer Sanderfur, Bill Brown and in 1932 Leo King, Claude Brown and E. J. Kirtley organized the Rangers Landing Company, which controlled the ferry until 1956, at which time it was purchased by James Ashby of Henderson, Kentucky.

While improvements in roads and ferries were taking place, settlers drifted in from all directions. The Hofferbearth Farm located in McLean County, bordering Green River, gave homes to some fifty families, in return for clearing the land and a portion of their crops. With the increase in population came a need for more conveniences and as a result Mr. Phil Bush established a general store in what had once been the McKinley Post Office.

During the same period the population of Rangers Landing had also increased to include two general stores, a blacksmith shop and some thirty families, plus many fine farms located within the vicinity.

As a rule the inhabitants of both communities were peaceful and the only difficulties were usually family affairs. Sunday was the big day. Neighbors gathered on the banks of Green River to gossip, watch the steamboats, load or unload and visit in general. A basket lunch was brought to spread at noon, or families came to visit houses bordering the river and this too required at least a portion of the meal to be supplied from home. Frankly a person would never under any circumstances visit another for a day without bringing either a ham, chicken, duck, beef or wild game. Each family grew what was necessary for subsistence and a little extra for entertaining and to sponge from the neighbor was unheard of. This tradition is continued even today, though not as often. At least once a year, usually in mid-summer, the residents of Ranger's Landing, to coin a phrase, "throw a Barbecue," and it is an unspoken rule everything brings a portion of the feast.

Farmers still gather in the summer and winter to discuss crops, politics and just visit in general. These visits at one time were not always limited to Sunday however, for the people of Rangers Landing could set the clock every afternoon, by Uncle Gillie Griffin, for regardless of rain, snow, sleet or hail, regularly, seven days a week, three hundred and sixty-five days a year, at three-thirty Uncle Gillie could be seen walking down the road from his farm, going to the river. At exactly four-thirty came departure, to do the chores. Always his pockets were filled with goodies for the children and always there was time for a game, be it football, baseball or a snowball fight.

For the ladies there was an occasional pie or ice cream supper, followed by a dance. Usually the dance was held in a clearing where the leaves were raked away and two or three inches of sawdust or straw sprinkled down. A favorite musician in both Henderson County and McLean County was Mr. Louis Fulkerson.

Mr. Fulkerson came to McKinley as an overseer of the wealthy Hofferbearth farm and became a leading citizen of the community. Greatly admired not only for his musical ability with the violin he was a man of honesty and fair play. Mr. Fulkerson was married to Elizabeth Coomes at Curdsville, Kentucky, a union which bore twelve children and lasted until his death in 1940. Mrs. Fulkerson died in 1942, and the only survivor of the twelve children, Mrs. Daisy McElroy, still resides at Ranger's Landing.

Lawlessness was held in check by public opinion more or less until 1904, the year of the formation of the Tobacco Planters' Protective Association; organized to protect the farmer from illegal business practices as well as prevent over-production; it was to affect the community around Rangers' Landing for many years.

After the dissolution of the association and before, law enforcement was very difficult, for Henderson was almost twenty miles away and as a result the sheriff was seen only at tax-collection time, unless chasing someone headed in that direction. The tobacco association had been very successful and well organized and did not reach the degree of unruliness peculiar to other sections of Kentucky and Tennessee. As a result leading men in the locality organized the Kentucky Night Riders.

The function of this organization was to mind local affairs, aid the needy and punish the unruly. If the father of a family failed to provide for his wife and children through laziness or drinking, he was warned twice by a bundle of switches placed upon the door step; if this was not successful the third time those switches were used. A family in trouble at harvest time because of illness or injury would find this group or strangers in the field harvesting the crop if there was no moonlight to accomplish the mission at night.

This system was set up by Mr. Louis Fulkerson of McLean County and Mr. Will Hammers of Henderson County, because secrecy was of very great importance. Instructions were relayed back and forth across Green River, always at night and any job to be done in McLean County was performed by the Henderson County organization and in return the McLean County riders accomplished the missions in Henderson County. Today one can take a tour of the surrounding area and have pointed out the sites where so and so was whipped or had his plant bed scraped, the gentleman himself performing this chore. Usually though whipping was a last resort, for the riders would rather move an entire family and pay all expenses than resort to whipping and many times this is exactly what happened.

Also it is possible to visit an Indian burial ground, long untouched by human hand, for legend has it an Indian brave stands guard over the sleeping and the residents of Ranger's have just enough respect for the dead not to test the authenticity of this tale. Situated on the Ben Rash farm, just below the burial ground is a natural spring, from which flows a constant stream of sweet clear water, cool as dew drops on the hottest summers day; surrounded by natural rock formations it is one of the loveliest spots in the county.

Ranger's Landing today is a quiet haven for the retired man and just recently many lots have been sold to people who hope to retire within a few years, or just want to get away from the city on week-ends. To these modern pioneers the welcome mat is spread out wide and though the golden past is gone they are welcomed with the warmth characteristic of these people, to the traditions and quiet life that has existed here for many years.

Rails to Russellville, Part 2
The Owensboro and Nashville Railroad
by Lee A. Dew

* * * * *

Editor's Note: This article is the second of a two-part article, which originally appeared in *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, January, 1978, pp. 26-45. The first part of the article appeared in the July issue. We are indebted to the Filson Club for permission to reprint. The original article had full documentation, and anyone interested in footnotes can find them in the citation above.

* * * * *

Despite deficit budgets and operational difficulties, the Owensboro and Nashville Railroad continued to maintain steam during the early months of 1875, even as the directors prepared for the traumas of bankruptcy. The daily passenger mail train departed for the junction at Stroud City (Later Central City), and freights ran whenever business warranted.

Sometimes operations were frustrated, as in early February, when a prolonged cold spell froze the water in the railroad's water tank, delaying the departure of the train until an alternate source of water could be located. At other times operations increased, as for a Mardi Gras excursion to Louisville, or the special Saturday excursions, which offered a round trip from Owensboro to the E. & P. junction at Stroud City for 50 cents. "From what we hear those Saturday excursions... are nice affairs," Editor Lee Lumpkin wrote in the *Owensboro Examiner*, "All the way to the Junction and back for 50 cents. This should induce everybody to take a ride into the country occasionally."

But these special operations did little to alter the bleak financial condition of Owensboro's railroad. A financial statement, printed in full in the *Examiner*, concluded with the following dismal summary: Debts - (stocks, bonds, etc.) - \$2,967,008. Assets, (right-of-way, rolling stock, depot, etc.) - \$1,444,503. The information contained in the *Railroad Manual of the United States* was less informative, but just as ominous in the eyes of potential investors. "The officers of this company refuse to give any information," the *Manual* noted tersely.

Still the citizens of Owensboro were optimistic that, with new management, "their" railroad would prosper. "A little energy 'all along the line' is all that is needed to put the road on a firm and paying footing," Editor Lumpkin assured the *Examiner's* readers. He applauded the news, announced in April, 1876, that the railroad would

be sold to the highest bidder at the courthouse door on May 25. "We hope that the road will fall into the hands of capitalists who will commence at once to push the enterprise forward to completion," he wrote.

There was no question that the road would be a bargain for some ambitious purchaser. Its assets included 36 miles of completed line, together with locomotives, cars, depots, machine-shops, and other buildings; an iron bridge over Green River, built at a cost of more than \$106,000; and a partially completed subgrade from the E. & P. junction to the Tennessee state line, some 50 miles, upon which no track had been laid.

The railroad might be bought for almost any price. In July, 1875, it had formally been declared bankrupt, and John G. Weir elected assignee. On December 12, 1875, Weir filed petition in the United States District Court to sell the property free of liens under the mortgages. A decree was entered on April 1, 1876, ordering the sale under the bankruptcy judgment.

The sale was postponed until June 12, due to "some irregularities," but on that date the formalities were held, and the hammer of the auctioneer fell upon the luckless line. James Nunan of South Carrollton became the new owner of the E. O. & N. and all its properties, except the locomotive "City of Owensboro," on a bid of \$120,000. James Weir bought the "City of Owensboro" for \$500.

Once again the flame of hope burned in the hearts of the citizens of Owensboro. They were convinced that the new owner, with a property bought for less than 10 cents per dollar of assessed value, would carry out the original plans for expansion. Lumpkin voiced the opinion of most Owensboroans when he proclaimed "the sale of the road . . . was the very best thing that could have happened to it." Looking into his crystal ball, Lumpkin predicted that "the man who supposed the EO&N Railroad to be defunct beyond resurrection could not be more mistaken if he were to bet his money on the election of a Republican president next fall."

But Lumpkin's crystal ball was cloudy. Nunan was in trouble. He did not have the \$120,000 so bravely bid for the railroad, and was trying frantically to raise the money. He proposed to sell the railroad to the city of Owensboro for the purchase price, but the city fathers were uninterested. By September he was seeking elsewhere, dispatching superintendent R. S. Triplett to Chicago in search of buyers, but such efforts failed.

Lumpkin was still as optimistic about the railroad's chances as he was for the candidates of the Democratic party, Tilden and Hendricks, whose names were emblazoned across his masthead. But as the early months of the year 1877 passed it became obvious that his hopes would

remain unfulfilled. His presidential candidate was counted out in the smoke-filled rooms of Washington in favor of the Republican, Hayes, and Nunan was forced to withdraw his bid for the railroad. On March 20, 1877, the court entered a decree annulling the sale and ordering a resale of the hapless line.

Even the weather seemed to conspire against the E.O.&N. Early in January a 10-inch snowfall, followed by a prolonged cold spell, blocked all train movements into Owensboro. Rumors began to spread that the mail and express train would be withdrawn, leaving only freight operations. Owensboro might be isolated once again. "The few days stoppage of the train by snow-blockades," Lumpkin opined, "demonstrated our insignificance as a city, with the river frozen up and no arrivals or departures of trains on the railroad."

The resale was scheduled for May 29, 1877. To celebrate the occasion the railroad offered free round-trip rides from Owensboro to the Junction for all "old and young, big and little, white and black." While the citizens enjoyed the free ride, Commissioner Weir appeared at the courthouse door and accepted the bid of the bondholders of the railroad. J.J. Brown, James Weir, and John C. Barret became the new owners of the line with a bid of \$63,000, in the name of a new corporation, the Owensboro and Nashville Railroad Company. The sale was confirmed by the Court on July 5, 1877.

The Articles of Incorporation of the Owensboro and Nashville Railroad, dated June 23, 1877, stated that "the business of said Company is and shall be to operate and complete said Railroad . . ." and provided for the issuance of stock to the value of \$1,500,000, to be divided into 60,000 shares of \$25 each. It was further provided that bondholders of the defunct E.O.&N be awarded stock to the value of one share for each \$25 of bonds held.

The always-optimistic Lumpkin was quick to applaud the new ownership. "Ever since the road passed into the hands of the present management the business of the line has been gradually on the increase," he noted in November. New signs of progress began to appear in Owensboro. The rails were extended to the river, to aid in the transfer of freight from steamboat to freight cars, and new freight depot was built at the corner of Lewis and Water Streets.

The railroad also turned to schemes for increasing passenger revenues. Round-trip arrangements were worked out with the Elizabethtown and Paducah Railroad so that inexpensive round-trip tickets to Louisville, Paducah and points in between could be sold to stimulate passenger traffic. Special trains were run whenever an occasion permitted, such as the trip scheduled in December, 1877, to South Carrollton for a Christmas party. Shoppers' Specials were also added that season by Superintendent D. F. Whitcomb, offering a round-trip ticket from any station on the line to Owensboro for the price of a one-

way fare. The train, which left the E. & P. junction at 7 a.m. arrived in Owensboro at 9:30, giving shoppers plenty of time to make their Christmas purchases before the 3 p.m. departure.

The new owners were determined to finish construction of the line to Russellville, but there were no funds in the railroad's treasury. They turned with hope once again to the city of Owensboro. In March, 1875, they announced the issuance of bonds to finance construction, and proposed that Owensboro purchase \$50,000 worth of the securities. Reluctantly the city council agreed to schedule an election on the issue, and set June 1 as the date.

Immediately two sides formed, and soon anonymous letters in the public press voiced the sentiments of the contending viewpoints. Opponents of the scheme contended that it would raise taxes unreasonably, that the citizens were already taxed to the hilt, and accused the railroad management of promising construction jobs to the poor white and black voters to win their support. Such contentions, a supporter of the bond issue replied, were "a tissue of misleading and false statements." Another pro-railroad scrivener sought to couple the railroad bonds with another highly emotional issue: "The opponents of the railroad subscription," he wrote, "also oppose the graveling of the streets."

The voters approved the purchase of the bonds by 93 votes more than the required majority of qualified voters, but the city council was of a different mind. Within two weeks of the election the council considered the bond purchase proposal and repudiated it on the grounds of legal technicalities. Repeated attempts to force reconsideration of the issue were futile. The railroad and its supporters continued frustrated.

The management continued their efforts to raise money. In October they announced yet another proposition, this time to sell \$350,000 of first mortgage bonds, payable when the railroad was "completed and equipped." They hoped to sell \$150,000 of these securities to communities along the line, or to the counties of Daviess and Logan. But, as the 1883 *History of Daviess County* noted, "corrupt management seemed to set in about this time, and the people lost confidence in the directory." The bonds went unsold.

But there was one customer of O&N securities. Quietly, without fanfare, agents for Edwin W. "King" Cole, President of the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railroad, were picking up blocks of O&N stock at bargain prices from disillusioned shareholders. Cole's plan was to extend his railroad empire to the Ohio river by means of the O&N, and perhaps on to St. Louis. Cole could buy the securities at a tremendous discount - things got so bad for the O&N that in the winter of 1878-79 the line ceased operations altogether. Finally, on May 13,

1879, Cole came out into the open, buying controlling interest in the stock of the railroad from T.S. Anderson, and taking over about half of the outstanding bonds.

Owensboro was alive with rumors about the future of the line under the leadership of the dynamic Cole. Some talked of a link with the St. Louis and Southeastern at Evansville, others speculated that Cole might construct a link through Southern Indiana to Vincennes, and then on to Chicago. Still others talked about the O&N as an integral part of a rail system linking the midwest with Savannah.

One thing was certain - things were beginning to happen along the line. Contracts were let for the completion of the line to Adairville. Soon tent camps were set up in Muhlenburg and Logan counties, and gangs of Negro laborers were at work on grading, bridging and tunneling. Loads of ties and rails were off-loaded from steamboats at Owensboro and stockpiled, waiting for the completion of the subgrade. The trains were running once again, and throughout the summer and fall of 1879 the O&N was the scene of busy activity and high hopes. When the winter rains stopped construction late in 1879 everyone was certain that the new year, 1880, would see the completion of the line and the emergence of Owensboro as a great railroad terminus.

Early in January the newly-merged *Messenger & Examiner* published a rumor that contracts had been let for grading an extension of the O&N line from Springfield Tennessee to Nashville, and predicted that the work would begin "at once." But while compositors were setting type for this item an even bigger news story was breaking. After a complex power struggle the L&N Railroad seized control of the NC&StL, and with it controlling interest in the O&N.

"This region has nothing to dread from the great Railroad stroke of President Standiford (of the L&N)," the *Messenger & Examiner* assured its shocked subscribers. "This new management will find abundant reward in finishing the road. . . This will give Owensboro the deserved outlet to the South and make her the Northern apex of an extensive system."

This euphoric view was only temporary. Within a few weeks it became obvious that the L&N had no intention of capitalizing on its new property or carrying out the dreams of their defeated rival. After an interview with the L&N President in February, the *Messenger & Examiner* sadly informed Owensboroans that "all idea of an Evansville connection has been abandoned." "The bright hopes in this regard that once made cheerful the entire people of the South are sure to be blasted," the newspaper concluded. A few days later they reinforced this view. It was now "very certain" that the L&N had no intention of extending the line beyond Russellville "if they can possibly avoid it." In March all construction was halted.

The first direct impact upon Owensboro of the new management of the O&N was a dramatic increase in freight rates. "Very little business is being done. . . on account of the extortionate freight rates," lamented the newspaper. Perhaps the L&N was conscious of their poor public image, for a few days later the rate on coal from Owensboro Junction to the city was reduced from \$14.40 per car to the old rate of \$9.00, and within a month most of the old rates were reestablished. The L&N also announced a campaign to upgrade the O&N line, including the replacing of several thousand crossties.

Still, the people remained discontented and suspicious. Many represented the huge debt incurred in the original construction, Daviess County, for example, having issued bonds totaling \$320,000 to raise the authorized \$250,000 in cash. Some, dispaired of ever seeing the L&N build the remainder of the line voluntarily, and agitated for legal action. Adairville citizens, for example, opened subscriptions late in 1880 to raise money to bring suit against the L&N to force completion of the line as far as that place.

For their part, the L&N management found themselves saddled with a liability. From April 1 to June 30, 1880, the first three months of L&N operation, the line had a total gross income of \$7,289.15, against expenses of \$8,136.99, for a deficit of \$847.84. This was bad enough in itself, but coupling the limited earning potential against a total debt of \$219,144.19, it appeared that the O&N would never be able to pay the interest on its massive debt, let alone any reduction of the principle. The question asked in the L&N boardroom was simply: Is the O&N worth any additional capital expenditures?

The money problems of the railroad were reflected in similar problems faced by the counties which had voted money for the line. A suit was filed by disgruntled citizens against Daviess County, claiming that the county's over-issuance of railroad bonds was illegal. A Franklin County circuit court upheld the claim, and ordered the county to pay \$70,000, the amount of the overissue, plus interest of \$21,000 and costs to the bondholders. The decision, the *Messenger* warned, "will make nearly \$100,000 additional taxes that the county will not be compelled to pay."

Finally, in the summer of 1881, the picture began to brighten. First the L&N stockholders voted to accept a management suggestion that the O&N be operated as a separate company, and be completed to Springfield, Tennessee, where it would intersect the parent company's Henderson-Nashville line. A few days later a group of Louisville investors announced the forming of a line, tentatively called the Louisville, Cloverport & Western RR, soon named, more ambitiously, the Louisville, St. Louis, and Texas RR, or simply "The Texas, line" and announced that their line would be built through Owensboro. Within days the L&N management ordered work resumed on the unfinished

subgrade of the O&N, and put in orders for four locomotives, three passenger cars, some 20 freight cars, and 250 tons of steel rail for their suddenly-reevaluated property. The L&N also agreed to furnish construction money to finish the line until a new bond issue could be sold.

Meanwhile, in Tennessee, other events were taking place which further complicated the issue. On August 20, 1881, a charter of incorporation was issued to the Tennessee and Kentucky Railroad Company, for the purpose of "constructing a railway from the point where the Owensboro & Nashville Railroad, may intersect the line between the States of Tennessee and Kentucky . . . to the city of Nashville. . ." A few months later, on October 1, 1881, Tennessee issued a charter to the Owensboro & Nashville *Railway* Company, which was formed by a merger of the Owensboro & Nashville *Railroad* Company and the Tennessee & Kentucky Railroad Company.

A few weeks later the purpose of these maneuvers became clear when the newly-formed O&N Railway issues a mortgage upon all its properties to the Central Trust Company of New York in the sum of \$2,000,000. This money would permit "improving its railway from Owensboro to Owensboro Junction .. and .. completing the construct thereof... to... Springfield," and would allow the O&N to "discharge its existing debts," purchase rolling stock and other needed materials, and "enlarge the operations of the Company ...".

The people along the line watched these moves with cynicism born of long experience with the promises of railroad managers. By now they were bored with promises, and were determined to bring political pressure to bear to force completion of the railroad. A bill was introduced in the General Assembly to force the completion of the O&N to Adairville within two years or the charter for the line would be invalidated. The *Muhlenburg Echo* summed up the feeling of many. "Every time the Legislature meets they (the Railroad) make a sport, and pretend they are going to finish it, when in fact it is only a feint to keep off legislation." This time the tactic did not work: the force bill was approved April 15, 1882.

Officials of the L&N fought the bill with every weapon at their command. Work was stopped on the extension south of the Junction, (recently named Central City), and L&N officials made it clear that if the bill passed it would make it impossible to sell the new issue of bonds, thereby dooming the line forever. Supporters of the bill disagreed. The L&N "has only to continue furnishing (the \$15,000 per month it claims to have been spending on the work and the road will be finished ... before the two years roll by," the *Messenger* argued.

By the end of 1882 the L&N was not only faced with the loss of the charter on the line from Owensboro to Adairville, but had to face growing competition on the line already in operation. A new line completed through Indiana, the Louisville, Evansville & St. Louis Air-Line Railroad, offered competing passenger service to Louisville. Passengers were taken from Owensboro to Rockport by the steamer *Sweetser* for the connection. Even worse, the Air-Line began cutting fares, from \$4 to \$3.75, and eventually to \$3.50. The L&N retaliated, cutting fares on the O&N, much to the delight of passengers. Further, the movement for the construction of the "Texas line," was gaining momentum. Owensboro supporters voted, early in 1883, to raise \$75,000 toward construction of this potential rival. The L&N was being pressured to act.

"Rumors of the early competition of the Owensboro & Nashville Railway to Adairville, Kentucky, have been flying thick and fast the past few days," the *Messenger* reported late in February, 1883. A week later a headline announced, "No Possible Doubt of It." The rails were already purchased and the contracts let for construction. For the people of the Green River valley, accustomed now to the repeated disappointments and frustration caused by broken promises, the news seemed too good to be believed. But soon word arrived in Owensboro that the L&N was serious, that loads of rail had been deposited at Russellville, ready for crews to work northward to meet other gangs working south.

Russellville citizens were ecstatic. For nearly 15 years they had been paying interest on railroad bonds, yet had not seen any trace of the railroad. Now it was about to become a reality. The Russellville *Herald-Enterprise* ventured a popular idea: "It is not too soon to investigate the possibility of the O&N Railway Shops in Russellville." The *Messenger* replied, haughtily, that the shops were already in Owensboro, and that Russellville need not bother trying to get them moved.

Workers were soon laying ties and spiking rails, and through the summer of 1883 work progressed, although many problems emerged. Smallpox broke out among workers at the Richdale tunnel, and for a while it became impossible to hire workers because of this dread disease. Labor unrest also caused delays. Tunnel workers walked off their jobs after repeated cave-ins took one life and injured several others.

Finally, after many frustrating delays, the problems of the 600-foot long tunnel were surmounted, and late in December, 1883, the first train from Owensboro pulled into the Russellville station. Early in January, 1884, regular service was opened from the Logan County seat to Adairville, where the tracks terminated.

The Owensboro & Nashville Railway was now finished. The rails would never reach Nashville, but rich coal timber, and agricultural areas of Daviess, McLean, Muhlenburg and Logan counties were now

made accessible to market, and for the people served by the line, the railroad meant a profound change in their lives, bringing them in direct contact with the modern world.

The shops were eventually moved to Russellville, and for years the line was known as the Owensboro and Nashville Division of the L&N. Eventually, in 1931, it was incorporated as a part of the Evansville Division. Passenger trains continued to run to Adairville until 1938, when that line was dismantled, but passenger service between Owensboro and Russellville endured until 1941. Freight service between Owensboro and Livermore ended in 1984, and the following year the rails were removed. Between Livermore and Drakesboro there is still (in 1991) some freight service.

CORRESPONDENCE

The following was received by the Editor from our old friend Jack Foster of the Hancock County Historical Society in response to Grady Ebelhar's article in the July issue of the Quarterly. We appreciate this informative supplement.

* * * * *

"The Flight of the NC-4" by Grady Ebelhar in the July 1991 *Daviess County Historical Quarterly* brings to mind some World War II memories of the commander of the NC-4, the then Lt. Cdr. Albert C. Read. This flight was indeed historic. It began on May 16, 1919 in New York and ended near the Azores Islands on May 27. Three of the four plane flotilla had to land on rough seas and were rescued. Only Lt. Cdr. Read's plane made it all the way to Lisbon, Portugal, and only then by landing and taking off four times! To put this flight into perspective: The "1989 Information Please World Almanac" gives the NC-4 flight seven lines. Even Charles A. Lindbergh's solo flight eight years later got only six lines. The flotilla's flight under Lt. Cdr. Read was called in the almanac "First transatlantic flight." Later in 1919 a flight by World War I British pilots, Capt. John Alcock and Lt. Arthur Brown made a flight the almanac called "first nonstop transatlantic flight," and it rated only six lines.

Back to the skipper of the NC-4. Albert C. Read graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1907. By 1909 he was among the first ten naval aviators ever! In the Great Depression with the cut in the military he was retired as a captain (a four striper). As World War II heated up, he was recalled to active duty in 1942 and promoted to Rear Admiral. He was ordered to be chief of the Naval Air Technical Training Command. His headquarters were on the thirty-sixth floor of the then tallest building in Chicago, the Board of Trade Building. This building was "full of" military personnel and was jocularly called "The USS Board of Trade." This "ship" had a statue of Ceres, the Goddess of Grain, on top and was equipped with an observation deck complete with an attendant (50¢ admission) and telescopes for 10¢ for one minute.

All who served under the admiral agreed he ran a "tight ship." He came aboard with a couple of nick-names but none knew how he came by them: "Acey Deucey" and "Putty". Then Ensign Jack Foster, now retired and living in Hancock County, recalls the admiral was tight lipped and had few words, but he got things done. The mission of this

staff of about 100 personnel was to establish schools and train all personnel in the navy flying arm except fliers. During the course of the war over 350,000 aviation ordnancemen, aviation radarmen, aviation radiomen, aviation metalsmiths and on and on were trained and sent out to wherever navy planes were in use. Many never returned. Foster recalls he had the high sounding title of "Material Officer" and it was his job to "obtain within or without the service" adequate material to "satisfy the curricula."

"Guarding" the admirals "deck" (office) was a young ensign called the "flag lieutenant." One day an officer was making a report to the admiral and fainted dead away. The flag lieutenant swears the admiral came to the door and said to him, "Please remove this lieutenant from my carpet."

A footnote to all this: The admiral could look out of his "porthole" (window) and see naval pilots "qualifying" for carrier landings on Lake Michigan on old excursion boats equipped with a Landing deck. (This training was moved from the coastal areas due to German U-boats lurking nearby.) He must have mused on the progress of naval aviation since his flight in the NC-4 over two decades before. And a further footnote; one of the men training out on Lake Michigan as a carrier landing officer was Owensboro's Caspar "Cap" Gardner, who served in the South Pacific, and later became mayor of Owensboro.

THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

— OFFICERS —

President, Aloma Dew
1st Vice-President, Lee Dew
2nd Vice President, Bob Hughes
Secretary, Shelia Heflin
Treasurer, Marge Schauburger
Curator, Joe Ford
Editor, DCHQ, Lee Dew
Directors, Connie Hughes
Wendell Rone
Doris Campbell

The Daviess County Historical Society is open to all who have an interest in the history of Daviess County, the Green River Valley, or Kentucky. The Society meets on the Third Tuesday of each month from September through May. Most meetings are held at the Owensboro Area Museum on South Griffith Avenue.

Monthly programs of the Daviess County Historical Society are open to all, and non-members are encouraged to attend and participate.

Printed by Quality Printing Co., Owensboro, KY