

Memories of Steam Boats Days

By Mrs. J. Kennedy

I'm presenting this sketch of the good old days of Steam boating on the lower and upper Missouri river; the writer has to rely on memory as to names owners and incidents & for the reason, all records of which our firm kept. have been lost in the change of past years - Therefore this paper will not contain as much interest or correctness as if made up from these lost records -

In opening the subject. I will go back to the year of 1842 - Starting at the city of St. Louis. as it was the port of entry and departure of those moving structures for all rivers in ^{the} growing West - It was also a city where quite a number of these floating palaces were built and fully equipped for future usefulness, and commanded by officers who felt more pride in the boats than if they had been built else where -

A few of these crafts I can call to mind for they were the pride of that city, for they proved in speed, and made up something better than the usual make of Steam boats, and were good money makers for the owners during their life time - The first to be constructed and safely launched was called "Vallée", named after one of the early day

founders and Indian trader. who grew rich in time
 and left a large estate. - This boat ~~was~~
 proved a speedy traveler and otherwise a
 success, and was lost by fire - Following
 this steamer another one of much greater
 length (~~300 feet~~) and width was in due time
 constructed and safely launched. but at
 the cost of one mans life who was caught
 and crushed to death as the hull was
 shooting into the waters: however it was
 no ill omen to this boats future career -
 This one was named "Iowa" and was a
 success to the owners. - The Commander of
 this boat was a very popular man: and of
 sharp experience and never meeting with
 any serious accidents or delays - This boat
 had hardly commenced its career. ere
 another keel was laid for ^{another boat} to excel in
 speed and make up all others. In time
 it was ready for its natural element
 which it reached in safety, coming
 back to the shore like a proud swan. and
 in a few months. was finished, tested and
 ready for its career. it was more speedy
 than any craft. that had ever been built
 there or else where - but unfortunately the
 life of this vessel was of short duration,
 for fire, one of the enemies of these structures

Accomplished its destruction with twenty
 eight other boats, that laid in port, at the
 time: having burnt its cable fastenings
 it went ^{down stream} with the force of current like a
 fiery demon setting ^{fire} to each boat that it
 touched: the heat was so intense from
 the ~~number of boats that was burning~~ ^{conflagration of the burning boats}
 that the stores fronting the landing was set
 on fire, with a high wind blowing in from
 the river, caused the destruction of some
 fourteen squares of the business part of
 the city, before it was stopped. Fire
 Companies were rendered useless and
 was helpless for the time: officers with
 troops were called in from Jefferson Barracks,
 who could ^{do} nothing more than blow up a
 few blocks to keep fire ^{from} spreading. Some
 lives were lost both by the fire and
 blowing up process - this occurrence
 took place "May 1849" - This unfortunate
 Steamer was named "Edward Bates" and
 the name was in honor of a prominent
 Attorney of St Louis, who became in "Lincoln's"
 Administration Attorney General. He was the
 father of Genl. Bates now Commander of
 the Military Department of the Platte -
 In this unfortunate boats career and sad ending
 some Church people said it was a just punishment
 for launching same on Sunday - - -

The writer of this Sketch. was a party on the occasion of the boat taking its Maiden Splash, and am still a live in good health, having reached my three score and ten and have gone through fires, Storms, Rail Road Smash ups, ^{explosions} been shot at; so that I feel so far as that event. has come and gone that no great harm was done —

As stated heretofore St Louis was a port of entry and departure of Steamers with large passenger lists. and valuable cargoes. of all kinds of Merchandise for distribution at all way points on the upper Missouri river. — In the forties the town of St Joseph was considered the head and end of Steam boat traffic. Some few of these early-day boats would take on cargoes. consisting. of Supplies for Uncle Sam's Military posts. and Indian trading stores as the North American Fur Company. had trading posts. from Belvue Neb. up into the Yellowstone Country which had to have Supplies once a year. to carry on their traffic with the Indians — A voyage by Steam boat in those days. took all of Six to Seven Months. and with many hardships and dangers. including Indian surprises. who caught every opportunity to

fire into the boats in hopes they could get
 them same to surrender. - But that never
 happened. For in time the officers prepared
 for such events, and made "Mr Brave"
 keep at a good distance and let those
 moving forts alone - a boat never had
 space enough to carry sufficient fuel
 for steam purpose. - from St Louis to
 St Joe. wood yards existed, that steamers
 could supply them selves until ^{they} could
 reach the next wood yard, ~~and~~ after leaving
 St Joe it was "tie" up when they
 needed further fuel and take all hands
 out and cut supplies from timber lands
 along the river which at best, was slow
 in making steam owing to wood being green
 & coal was not plentiful. - for the discovery
 of the article was yet in its infancy -
 much danger ^{was} from Indian surprises ^{& its}
^{impulsiveness} a task to be well guarded against at all
 times, for the timber was much harder to
 secure owing to a scarcity of it. - ~~with-~~
~~all the voyage was made under all~~
~~the trying circumstances.~~ - On the return
 trip, the steamers would be loaded
 with valuable furs, robes, and fells, of
 all kinds for traders and the V.A. Fur Co.
 There would ^{be} more ^{or} less ~~solid~~ dried meats
 and Buffalo tongues which was considered

a great treat to have for variety in diet -
 some traders and officers, from the Military
 posts in this Yellow Stone ^{country} would make up
~~some~~ of the passengers, on these return
 trips, - Father De Smit the great Catholic
 Missionary, amongst these wild Indians
 would make a trip back to the states
 to confer with his Bishop and return
 in the following year - At times, the
 President "John B. Sarpy", of North American
 Fur Company, whose head quarters was in
 St Louis where all supplies were carried,
 would make a voyage up to the
 posts, and hold conferences with ^{the} head
 men and traders. - His Brother
 Peter A. Sarpy seldom would visit
 St Louis as he loved the wild life he was
 leading and feared he could not
 drink whiskey with the same freedom
 in his brother's presence, hence he
 kept away from his native city,
 preferring his habitation and life at
 Belvue, Mission ^{post} while it lasted -
~~Some of these Steamers~~ I will call over
 the names, as I ~~can~~ ^{of some of the Steamers} remember ^{them} to wit
 Neston, Omega, Rowena, John Hull,
 Amaranth, and St Peter - the last boat
 was a "Shriker" for it had a whistle

that could be heard ten miles off any day that it was turned loose. also in the exhausting of steam at each ~~movement~~ of the engines it produced a powerful scream that could be heard long before the boat came in sight. — This steamer never had any trouble with the Indians as they never heard that kind of a "Yell" which could out do them. Some few of these venturesome boats would sink, becoming a total loss. Cargo going down with the hull. If nothing would float off, it rested in the ~~water~~ ^{water} becoming covered with sand and soil and as a general rule all was covered by insurance ~~...~~, which cost high rates to ~~secure~~ — Some of our upper rivers were so troubled with snags as the Missouri from its mouth until its source was ~~reached~~ reached. — In some places, the numbers of these dangerous things was enough to make the stoutest hearted Captain weaken and feel that he must turn back; and give up the further voyage. However they would not yield to that feeling. So push on, and trust to good or bad fortune to get through — hardly ever did they get through without some part of the boat

being torn into kindling wood, causing expense
 and delay to make repairs. - The worst of
 these places was between Kansas city and
 St Joseph. - It was well named: for it
 was called "Hell's half Acre" for it was
 thick with these dangerous torments. -
 Uncle Sam in time took up the job of
 welding out these pests, - and after
 several years work of sawing & tugging
 cleared out a large ~~amount~~ ^{number}, so the
 dangers were greatly reduced. - Sand
 bars ~~caused~~ ^{caused} another great trouble and
 much detention, as the water would fall
 each season. - The life of a boat was
 greatly shortened, by the many encounters
 they had during a trip up and down the
 river. - At times they ^{would} get on the bars so
 fast, that ^{it} required sparring and all their
 steam power to get them off, after many
 hours detention, and not always in ~~the~~
 good condition, for there was a great
 amount of straining that would start every
 joint or seam in the hulls. - Sometimes
 it would require the discharging of ~~the~~
 freight on shore a short distance from
 low water between bar points where
 there ^{would} be scant two feet of water and the
 boat would require three to four feet to

get through with its cargo, so that in cases
 of this kind it would require as stated
 a discharge of enough freight below
 & get through. And then discharge above
 more freight and go back and get the
 discharged freight from below - Arguing
 availed but little to lessen the trouble
 for in a few hours it was nearly as
 bad again - With all obstacles and
 dangers to the trade of boating - in the
 fifties, the demand for increased travel
 and freighting was such that lines or
 companies were formed to meet the demand
 numbers of new boats were built for the
 traffic - Packets as they were called, in
 those days were established for certain points
 from St Louis to Kansas City. From St Louis
 to St Joe. From St Joe to Omaha & C Bluffs
 and in addition to the last named lines
 there was a regular line established from
 St Louis to Omaha & Sioux city. ^{It was quite} ~~The sight~~
 of three to five boats was no uncommon
 thing at the landing of many towns. ~~at~~
 discharging and taking on freight and
 passengers. - There was many towns on both
 sides of the river from St Louis to Sioux city
 that required, the landing of freights and
 passengers. - Rail roads had not as yet -

Common to see

extended their lines, ^{to and along the Missouri River} It was not many
 years before they ~~did~~ commenced and made
 rapid work, to absorb the river trade.
 the effect of this competitor to steam boats
 began to effect seriously, the river
 business. so much so, that some few far
 seeing steam boat owners began in the
 seventies, to dispose of their kind of an
 investment, and get in to some other
 business. - Some met with success; others
 in new ventures failed - others that held on
 to steamboating soon had to leave the old
 muddy for other streams which in time
 met this new competitor and had to
 yield, to the inevitable. -

I will name a few
 of the steamers and officers that ran from
 St Louis to Omaha & at times to Sioux City
 during the fifties sixties, and up in the
 seventies, as amongst the daily packets
 steamer "Admiral" Commanded by
 Capt Robt Davet - "Alonzo Childs"
 by Joe Holland, "Emilie", Capt Joe
 LaBarge - "Spread Eagle" Capt Joe LaBarge
 "Hesperian" by same Captain for the
 Spread Eagle was sunk proving a total
 loss - "E A Ogden" Capt Jas Bissell, this
 boat was to slow and aged, so that Bissell
 came out with the steamer "Peerless"

A very handsome boat and very speedy which was all important to make money with - "Ben Lewis" Capt Geo Lewis - "Omaha" Capt Joe Holland - "Steve Wall Jackson" "Star" "Pride of the West" "Amorantho" "Corra" "Star of the West" "War Eagle" "Genl Grant" This last named steamer found a watery grave at the mouth of the Platte River, proving a total loss. Most of the freight was recovered - the steamer "Corra" was a new boat and was making the first voyage for the Yellow Stone Country. it met its accident near the town of W. Soto by striking a hidden snag. - boat and cargo was raised, and in bad condition - was taken to St Louis. boat repaired and returned for another trip with better success. The steamer "Aubrey" was another short lived boat, being burnt up after a few voyages. - this steamer was named after a noted plainsman, who fought Indians and traded with ^{them} to his advantage. He escorted many hundreds of people and trains across the lower plains ~~between~~ ^{from} Kansas City to New Mexico during ~~the~~ forty nine and fifties during the days of ^{the} gold fevers. - his death I noticed a few months ^{since} in print, giving his age at 84 years - he was prominent in his day as Col Cody is now, but not so attractive as Cody

In the closing of this statement of Steam
 boat days, ^{will} add to my list of names of
 Steamers, and their Commanders that plied
 their trade between St Joe and Ouaha
 in connection with the Nauvul & St Joe
 Rail Road, Co. at St Joseph - One of these
 Steamers ^{always} was at the Ouaha landing each
 day, as a daily line - and was very
 popular with the public for they spared
 no expense to keep up their popularity
 by entertaining their patrons who done
 business with them - The Steamer
 "Colorado" Capt Hooper. "Denver" Capt Waddell
 "Nancy" Capt Bell - "Major" Capt Weaver
 "West Wind" Capt Hooper "St Joseph"
 Capt Bailey - This comprised the Steamers
 for several years. Seldom meeting with any
 serious accidents. - John R Porter and
 Harry Ruel were the popular agents
 of this line at Ouaha, and did a large
 business of storage and forwarding of
 Merchandise to the distant west - One
 member of this firm still lives, and is
 the Register of Deeds for Douglas County Neb
 . I should have mentioned, that a grave yard
 existed, in the river, between the old town of
 Resoto Neb and Fort Calhoun some twenty five
 miles, by river above Ouaha; where some

of these Steamers ~~was~~ ^{were} sunk, but a few yards
 distant from one to the other, with valuable
 cargo destined for the Yellow Stone Country
 consisting of Supplies for trading posts and
 Uncle Sam's trade forts - None of these
 boats were lost, and but little of their ~~freight~~
 freights were saved - The keels with their
 Machinery, ~~and~~ ^{with} many barrels of Whiskey
 Casks and Cases of wines, with much other
 Merchandise lie today buried deep
 in sand and soil that has accumulated
~~for years~~ - over ~~them~~ ^{during} some thirty years or
 more - Attempts ~~have~~ ^{some time after} have
 been made to locate these unfortunate
 boats, and recover the goods and Machinery
 but all failed for the channel ^{has since changed} at the
~~place~~ ^{place} where these vessels sunk. Changes
 to else where - The question may be asked
 why were not efforts by parties interested
 made soon after the occurrence to save
 this Merchandise. - Reason for this, was
 the expense to get divers with their boats
 to such distance on the old Muddy was
 too expensive, as the cost of salvage would
 be ^{more} greater, than the goods ^{would} bring. - These
 for Insurance Men would pay the loss
 and charge same to loss account -

Fire at all times on these structures was to
 be dreaded. for its work of destruction was
 quick. and seldom could a boat be saved
 In the Spring of 1857. the writer of this
 Sketch was amongst the passengers on a
 downward trip to St Louis. The weather being
 quite cold. a strong fire was kepted a going
 in the big stove day and night to keep
 passengers comfortable. - The man whose duty
 it was. fired up stronger than usual that
 day. - about ten o'clock. I noticed from where
 I was in the ladies Cabin. a smoke out in
 the front. Called the Social Hall and saw
 Making quick movements - I could not resist
 to take a hand as I left for action. I said to
 my wife and ^{my} ladies "keep quiet. but get
 your deeds & fixers together. - I will see
~~how things~~ what is up in front. and
 Come back to your aide" - in fifteen
 minutes the trouble was over. Fire ^{was} out
 and boat headed for land. ere ~~she~~
 it got to shore. orders was given to head
 down stream again - The work was quickly
 down and well done. by cool heads -
 so that. with plenty of water and Dorrby Engine
 to throw it on in great force. the fire was
 quickly stoped. - Result was a big hole in
 the herican roof. large enough for a cart to
 go through - We had to borrow heat from Ladies
 Cabin after

that event — In addition to what I have given. I wish to add further names of Steamers and Commanders of same for which I am much indebted to my fellow citizen of Nebraska City.

W. H. Miller. who was Steam Boat agent for that locality from 1857 to 1861 and gives me the following names of Steamers and happenings to some of same. The Steamer "Genoa" was amongst the popular boats Commanded Capt. Throckmorton and assisted in the office by Joseph Gorman as head Clerk. They were extremely popular and never short for big cargoes and a fine list of passengers. This Steamer was sunk at Nebraska City Island two miles north of the city in Year 1855 —

The owners as above mentioned, as soon possible had another boat built and called the "Florence" named after a town seven miles north of Omaha, as it was a live town in its day by reason that thousands of Mormons resided there to start on their journey to Salt Lake, and Steamers had many of these people as passengers from St Louis to Florence and considerable in freights for that point. The "Florence" was a popular and successful boat.

Steamer "Arabia" commanded by Capt Geo Shaw
 was another unfortunate in finding a
 watery grave four miles above St city
 in ^{the} sixties - "Keystone" Capt G Goddard
 "Silver". Capt Robert Benton. This
 Steamer was named after a noted race
 horse, of St Louis, who made good records
 in his days - Steamer "New Lucy"
 commanded by Capt Conley. Steamers
 "Burlington" "Yellow Stone" & A January
 John W. Perry - these last named
 were named after two of St Louis
 Steam boat Merchants who were very
 popular with all the river men in
 their day - The names of these few boats
 was but a few of the hundred or more
 that plowed the turbulent and dangerous
 waters of the Missouri river, in the
 past years, and there is but few crafts
 now engaged in the business, that traverse
 any of our Western rivers. For the Competition
 from Rail roads is more than they can
 meet to compete for an existence, with
~~other~~ all other risks. It is a great wonder
 that any man or set of men ^{can} put
 money and time against these competitors
 and live at all - As a class of men engaged
 in the life of following the waters, for a living and

More if they ^{were} fortunate to make a success
 of beating. There was no nabler or
 more generous people than they. - As a
 rule (and it was true) the tables on these
 Steamers had the best ~~was~~ cooked by experts
 in that profession that no hotel of
 today could excel, and it was always
 abundant - labors. both for men and
 ladies were clean and tidy. - and on
 some of ~~some~~ the furnishings throughout
 were fine. - and amongst all a Piano was
 generally on board, that music was never
 lacking - Colored boys who waited on tables
 always had a number of good Performers
 on Banjos. & Guitars. & perhaps a Violin -
 Dancing. - Cards. Dominoes. Chess & Checkers were
 always at hand to be indulged in - and
 at times "a sly game of Poker". for some
 thing. to make it more interesting would
 be indulged in if permitted by the officers.
 Seldom was it permitted - There was
 some fascination to this life, and excitement
 from the lurking dangers. that was to
~~not~~ be encountered on any of the voyages.
 Seldom was any of these officers, by nature
 sour. crabbed, and ungenerous to their
 patrons. - free and lavish with money
 almost as if it had no value to them

Time and Speed was all important
 in this traffic - as each day's expense
 while on the voyage was large - say
 from three ^{hundred} to ^{four} eight hundred dollars per
 day - no time ^{was} ^{lost} ^{or} ^{fool}ed away, unless it was
 storms of high winds that was cause
 them tie up as near shelter as
 possible - a boat. If slow speed would
 take fifteen to twenty days to make the
 run from St Louis to Omaha, but
 could go back in eight to ten days
 Their freights and passenger lists
 should realize to a boat's trip from
 six thousand to ten thousand dollars -
 if much less, and detentions were their
 luck, they would be in a "hole" -
 I will close ^{with} no doubt there is many
 people yet alive ^{who} have enjoyed the pleasure
 and some of the annoyances, of steam
 boat voyages in their days gone by -
 and would not mind taking a little
 trip again to enjoy the congenial fellowship
 of those men, and their crafts