

## MEMORYS OF STEAM BOATS DAYS

by Wm J Kennedy

In 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 reson. All records. of which our firm kepet have been lost in the change of past years--Therefor this chaper 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 those floating palaces were built and fully equipped for future usefulness. and commanded by officers who felt moreppride in the boats than if they had been built es 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 make 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 "Laclede" named after one of the early day founders and Indian trader. who grew rich in time and left a large estate. this boat proved a speedy traveler and otherwise a success, and was lost by fire--following this steamer another one of much greater length 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 boat 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 delay's --This boat had hardly commenced its career. when another keel was laid for another bout to exceed 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 by 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 the current like a fiery demon setting fire to each boat that it touched--the heat was so intense from the conflagration of the burning boats that the stores fronting the landing was set on fire by high wind blowing in from the river. caused the destruction of Some fourteen squares of the buisness part of the city before it was stoped-Fire companies were renders useless and was helples 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 andthe name was in honor of a prominent

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 our Otil alive and in good health having reached my three score and ten and have gone through fires. Storms. Rail Road Smash ups and have been shot at, So that I feel so far as that event. has come and gone that no great harm was done--

As stated heretofor 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 the 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 Sams Military posts. and Indian trading Stocks as the North American Fur Company. and 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 or seven months and with many hardships and dangers including Indian Surprises who sought every opportunity to fire into the boats in hopes they could get the 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 but 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 existed from Indian Surprises and it was a task to be well guarded at all times, for the timber was much harder to secure owing to a scarcity of it-On the return trip. the steamers would be loaded with valuable furs, Robes, and pelts of all kinds for traders and the N-A-Fur C--There would be more or less wild 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 the passingers on the return trips-Father DeSmit the great Catholic Missionary amongst these wild Indians would make a trip back to the states to confir with the Bishop and return in the following year--At times. The President "John B Sarpy". of North American Fur Company whoes head quarters was in St. Louis where all supplies was 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 at St. Louis as he loved the wild life he was leading and feared he could not drink whiskey with the same freedom in his brothers presence. hence he kepeted away from his native city. preferring his habitation and life at Belvue Neb-while it lasted--I will call over the names of some of the steamers remember them to wit, Weston. Omega. Rowena. John Aull, Amorauth, and St. Peter-the last boat was a

"Shrieker" for it had a whistle that could be heard ten miles 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. That 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 venturousome boats would sink. becoming a total loss cargo going down with the hull if nothing would float off it rested in the sea in time becoming covered with sand and soil and as a general rule all was covered by insurance which cost high rates to secure- None of our upper rivers were so troubled with snags as the Missouri from its mouth until its sources as 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 feelin. So push on and trust -to good or bad fortune to get through-hardly ever did they get through with out 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 weeding out these pests and after several years work of sawing and tugging cleaned out a large number so the dangers were greatly reduced Sand bars 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 good condition, for there was a great amount of straining that would start every joint or Seam in the hulls-- Some times it would require the discharging of 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 and get through. and then discharge above more freight and go back and get the discharged freight from below--dreging 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 increase 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 and C Bluffs and in addition to the last named lines there was a regular line established from St Louis to Omaha and Sioux City. It was quite common to see three to five boats at the landing of many towns 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- Railroads had not as yet extended their lines to and along the Missouri river. It was not many years before they commenced and made rapid work. to absorb the river

trade. the effect of this competition to Steamboats began to effect. Seriously the river buisnes. So much So, that Some few far seeing Steamboat owners began in the Seventies to dispose of that kind of investments and get in to some other buisness. 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 competition and had to yield to the inevitable.-

I will name a few of the Steamers and officers that was from St Louis to Omaha and at times to Sioux City during the fifties Sixtees and up in the Seventies. as amongst the dailey packets Steamer "Admiral" commanded by Capt Robt Darst- "Alonzo Childs" by Joe Holland. "Emmilie. Capt Joe La Barge- "Spread Eagle" Capt Jno Barge "Hesperian" by same captain for the Spread Eagle was sunk proving a total loss- "E A Ogdon" Capt Ja Bissell. this boat was to slow and aged. So. that Bissell came out with the Steamer "Peerless" A. very hansome boat and very speedy which was all important to make money with "BenLewis" Capt Jno Lewis--"Omaha" Capt Joe Holland--"Stone Wall Jackson" "Itan" "Pride of the West" "War Eagle" "Gen'l 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 maing the first voyage for the Yellow Stone Country. it met its accident near the town of DeSoto by striking a hidden Snag. boat and cargo was raised and in bad condition was taken to St Louis. bat repaired and returned to another trip with better success The Steamer "Aubrey" was another short lived boats. being burnt up after a few voyages. this Stamer

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 from Kansas City to New Mexico during 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 80years- 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 I will add to my list of names of steamers. and their commanders that plied their trade between St. Joe and Omaha in connection with the Hanibal and St Joe Railroad. C. at St Joseph- one of these steamers was always at the Omaha landing each day. as a dailey line- and was very popular with the public for they spared no expense to keep up their popularity by entertaining their patrons who done buisness with them- The Steamer "Colorado Capt Hooper. "Denver" Capt Madden "Lacy" Capt Bell "Majors" 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 Daul were the popular agents of this line at Omaha. and did a large buisness of storage and forwarding of merchandise to the distant west- One member of this firm stil 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 Desoto Neb and Fort Calhoun some twenty five miles by river above Omaha; where some of these steamers was sunk, but a few yards distant from one to the other. with



valuable cargo's destined for the Yellow Stone Country consisting of supplies for trading posts and Uncle Sam's rude forts- Three of these boats were lost. and but little of their freights were Saved- the hulk with their macheinery and many barrels of whiskey casko and cases of wines, with much other merchandise lie today burried deep in sand and soil that has accumulated over them during some thirty years or more. Atempms 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 where these vessels sunk. 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 to expensive as the cost of salvage would be more than the goods would bring. Insurance men would pay the loss and charge some 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 kepeted agoing in the big stove day and night to keep passengers comfortable. The man whoes 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 making quick movements I could not resist to take a hand as I left for action I said to my wife and other ladies keep quiet but get your duds

and fixeus together. I will see what is up in front. and come back to your side. In fifteen minutes the trouble was over. Fire was out and boat headed for land. ere it got ashore. 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 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 ~~often~~ that event--In addition to what I have given. I wish to add further names of steamers and commanders of some for which I am much indebted to my fellow citizen of Nebraska City. R. 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 "Genod" was amongst the popular boats commanded by 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 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 endeavored 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 Jno. Shaw was another unfortunate in find-

ing a watery grave four miles above Neb City in the Sixties-  
"Keystone" Capt T. J. Goddin "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" com-  
manded by Capt Conley. Steamers "Burlington" "Yellow Stone"  
S A January John D. 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 flowed  
the turbulent and dangerous waters of the Missouri river.  
in the past years. and there is but few crafts now engaged  
in the buisness. that traverse any of our western rivers.  
for the competition from railroads is more than they can  
meet to complete for an existance. with all other risks.  
It is a great order that any man or group 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 boating. there was no hobler or more  
generous people than they. Is a rule (and it was law)  
the tables on these steamers had the best food cooked  
by experts in that profession that no hotel of today could  
excel and it was always abundant- cabins both for men and  
ladies were clean and tidy- and on some of the furnishings  
throughout were fine.- and amongst all a piano was gener-  
ally on board. that music was never lacking- colored boys  
who waited on tables always had a number of good performers  
on banjos and guitars and perhaps a vilolin dancing cards  
dominos, chess and checkers were always at hand to be in-  
dulged in and at times " a sly game of poker". to make

it more interesting would be indulged in if permitted by the officers seldom it was permitted--There was some fascination to this life and excitement from the lurking dangers. that was to be encountered on any of the voyages. Seldom was any of these officers by nature sour crabbed and ungentlemanly 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 eight hundred dollars for day no time was fooled away unless it was storms of high winds that was cause them tie up as near shelter as possible- a boat. of 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 freight and passenger list should realize to aboats trip from <sup>Y</sup>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 voyages in their days gone by and would not mind ~~take~~ taking a little trip again to enjoy. the congenial fellowship of those men. and their crafts.