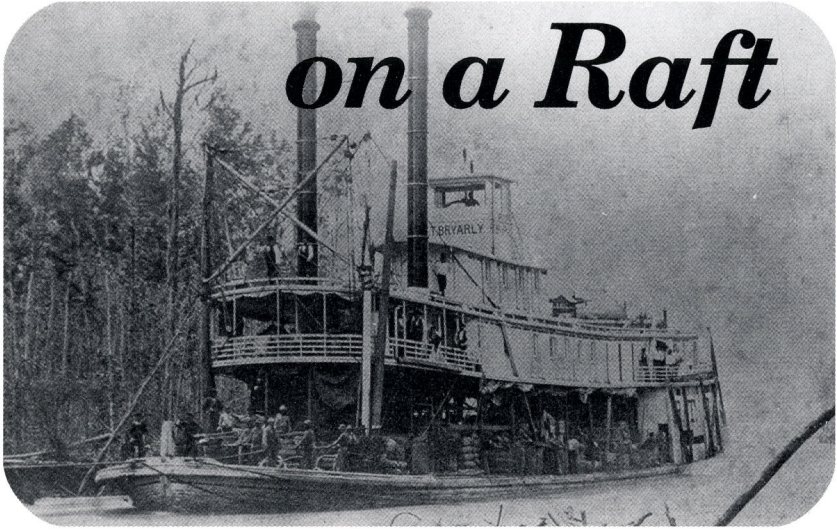


Tea Kettle

on a Raft



A History of Navigation on the Upper Red River

*By Keith Tolman**

The mention of steamboats churning up and down the Red River of Oklahoma is often met with incredulous stares followed by a flurry of questions. Removed from the living memory of most people, navigation of the Upper Red River has been all but forgotten by the general public. Indeed, steamboat navigation in the American West in general has been relegated to the realm of nostalgia, and even then confined in the public mind to major streams such as the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. In actuality,

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riverine navigation, especially by steamboat, was arguably one of the most important factors in the settlement of the American West.

To the Spanish it was known as the *Rio Roxo de Natchitoches* and to the Choctaws who entered its valley following their removal from the southeastern United States it was called the *Bokhoma*. During much of the nineteenth century, however, the Red River was often referred to simply as “Old Red” by the growing tide of Anglo-Americans entering the four-corners area of Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana. The term carried with it any number of connotations varying from affection for her primitive beauty to dread of one of her devastating rampages.

Whatever the Red River was called, throughout the 1800s it increasingly became the common thread that bound together a polyglot of cultures. Residents of the Red River valley often showed more brotherhood and common cause toward neighbors across the sediment-laden stream than to the governments of their respective mother countries. In general, the river was considered less a physical barrier to be conquered than a link between peoples living along its shores.

Boats, at first flatboats and keelboats, followed in the 1830s by the introduction of steam-powered vessels, became the single most important mechanism of cultural and commercial exchange on the Red River during that period. Steamboats especially brought in vast amounts of goods ranging from the common to the exotic and carried produce of the region to distant markets. Perhaps as importantly, steamboats became the bearer of culture by spreading news, ideas, and people at speeds unheard-of only decades earlier.

Probably nowhere was the marriage of river and steam more deeply felt than on the reaches of the Upper Red River, that section of the Red located above Shreveport, Louisiana. Often profoundly isolated due to poor roads, disputed borders, and the physics of the river itself, the earliest Anglo-Americans into the region lived as pioneers in the starkest sense of the term. The coming of the “fire canoe” changed that to the extent that to the much-repeated mantra “culture follows the plow” must be added the addendum “and the plow arrived by steamboat.”

By way of geographic introduction, the 1,300-mile-long Red River rises on the eastern slope of the Staked Plains in New Mexico and flows generally eastward, forming the boundary between Oklahoma and Texas, and, past the eastern boundary of Oklahoma, the border between Texas and Arkansas. Passing the line forming the eastern boundary of Texas, it continues on some twenty-five miles

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farther east into Arkansas before making an abrupt turn to the south, passing the city of Shreveport in the state of Louisiana. Changing course to the southeast below Shreveport, it wends its way past the Louisiana towns of Natchitoches, Alexandria, and a dozen smaller municipalities whose histories are inextricably tied to the river.¹

As the Red River nears eastern Louisiana where it empties into the Mississippi, it passes the Atchafalaya River, once the main course of the Red. Due to an ancient quirk of nature, the Red River broke through and entered an old meander of the Mississippi, leaving only a portion of the Red River to flow down the Atchafalaya. Roughly paralleling the Mississippi, the Atchafalaya wends its way to the low lands of the Louisiana Delta and the Gulf of Mexico. The possibility of the Red again being cutoff from the Mississippi is very real and has been a problem that has challenged engineers from Spanish Colonial times to the present.²

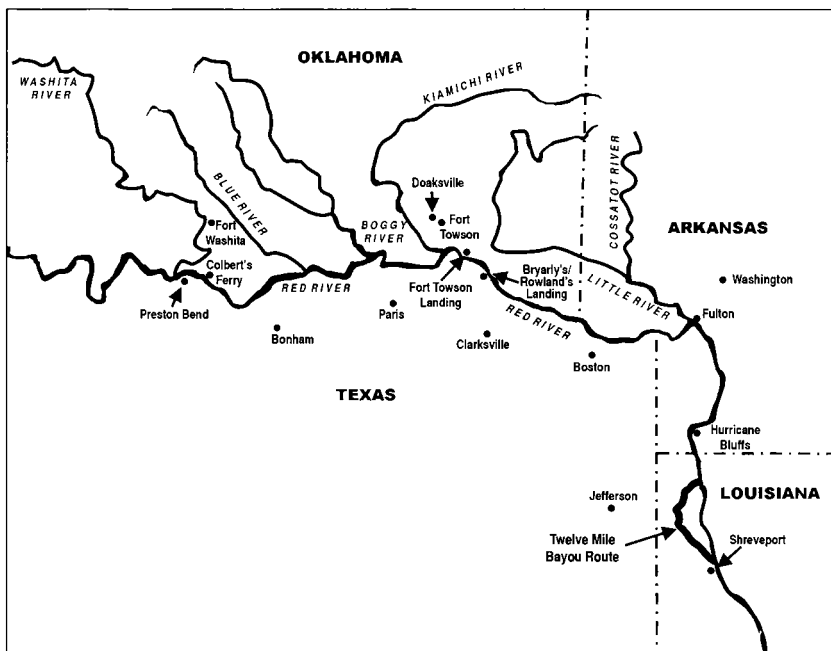
Generally speaking, the Red River is fed by relatively few tributaries of significant importance, at least as far as historic navigation is concerned. Two major exceptions are Twelve Mile Bayou and the Ouachita River. Twelve Mile Bayou at Shreveport leads to a chain of lakes and eventually Jefferson, Texas, once a major steamboat terminus and commercial center that supplied goods to much of northeastern Texas. A tributary of special interest to Oklahoma historians is the Ouachita River, which joins the Red not far upstream from where the Red enters the Mississippi. The southerly flowing Ouachita, with tributaries reaching nearly to the boundary between Oklahoma and Arkansas, was the stream on which some of the first steamboat-borne settlers traveled to the Upper Red River region during the early 1830s.³ They, as well as many Choctaws and Chickasaws being removed from the southeastern United States, made relatively short 200-mile overland treks to the Upper Red River valley after disembarking near the vicinity of Ecore Fabre, the present site of Camden, Arkansas.⁴

The pirogue of Native Americans and early French trappers and traders had long been used on the Upper Red River, but the first vessels of significant tonnage to ply her waters were flatboats. Functional if less than elegant, these flat-bottomed craft were built of rough lumber knocked together in the form of an oblong box with a square rake on the ends, often the only concession to hydrodynamic efficiency. Propelled by current, pole, and paddle, the produce loaded aboard was sold at markets downstream. More often than not, the craft was broken down at the market destination and sold

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for lumber, with the owners making their way back upstream as best they could, most often afoot.⁵

The keelboat, on the other hand, was a sturdy craft from fifty to seventy feet long and fifteen to twenty feet wide having a capacity of ten to twenty tons.⁶ It was propelled upstream by teams of men poling, warping, or cordelling the boat forward. Warping was accomplished by running a line forward from the bow and around an upstream object, such as a tree, stump, or snag. With the crew pulling the line at right angles to the river the keelboat was moved forward to the stationary object at which time another anchor point was located and the process repeated. Cordelling involved running a long towline from the top of the mast (infrequently used to support a sail) through a line attached to the bow and from that point to the shore. The crew, usually consisting of twenty to thirty men, pulled the keelboat along with the cordelle while walking along the riverbank. It hardly bears mentioning that the task of moving a keelboat upstream by those methods was backbreaking work with a journey of fifteen miles a day considered good progress.⁷



Map of Upper Red River (Courtesy Keith Tolman).

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The first known recorded instance of a keelboat entering the waters of the Upper Red River occurred in 1816. Claiborne Wright, the head of the family that would play a significant role in northeastern Texas history, left Tennessee in March, 1816, with his family. Intent on settling in the Red River valley at Pecan Point, south of present-day Idabel, Oklahoma, their six-month journey was one of adventure and hardship through an all but unexplored region.⁸

Wright's son, George W. Wright, left an account of the journey. Descending the Cumberland and Ohio Rivers to the Mississippi, they then rode the latter stream to the mouth of Red River. Ascending the Red, the elder Wright hired a guide of the Pascagoula Tribe at Natchitoches, Louisiana, and began a tortuous trip through the swamps, lakes, and bayous that then made up much of the Red River. The younger Wright described the region as "a dark and dismal and interminable swamp and overflow. All was dark and dreary, not a trace of civilization of any kind . . . nothing to be heard but the hum of mosquitoes and the bellowing of alligators."⁹

The Wrights entered Coushatta Chute, a small bayou located downstream from the modern city of Shreveport. Cutting their way



The Great Raft periodically halted traffic on Upper Red River above Shreveport for decades (Courtesy Noel Memorial Library Archives, Louisiana State University, Shreveport).

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through tangles of fallen trees, they entered a vast lake formed by an overflow of the Red River and its tributaries. George Wright described it as "one continuous sheet of water as far as the eye could reach, not a star to guide the mariner on his course. All seemed lost, forever lost, so long as human observation could see." They eventually made their way through the maze of waterways to reenter the Red River at Willow Chute near the present Louisiana-Arkansas border.¹⁰

Ascending the river, the Wright family, consisting of patriarch, an elderly couple, four small children, and an African-American slave girl, encountered a Coushatta Indian village. Friendly at first, the Indians held the mooring line fast when the group attempted to depart then looted the keelboat of whatever was of use to them. They later offered to pay for what they took, but possessed nothing of any use to their new and unhappy "trading associates." After passing one other settlement consisting of two whites, the Wrights arrived at Pecan Point.

The Pecan Point settlement was made up of an Indian trading post and two or three families. The Wrights' supply of meat was exhausted, and the two-year supply of flour on the keelboat had long ago spoiled, having taken on the stench of alligator from being stored in the damp hold. The new arrivals soon learned from those residing at the site that "The gun was [needed to procure] meat, bread, salt, coffee, house, fence." Deer hides were bartered for staples such as coffee and flour, and buffalo proved so plentiful one could be killed and delivered to camp in the same day. Freshly killed bear provided welcome fat in the otherwise lean meat diet of venison, turkey, and buffalo.¹¹

The torturous route taken by the Wright party up Coushatta Chute ending with emergence into the Red River proper at Willow Chute typified a problem that would vex residents and boatmen alike for many years. That problem was the "Great Raft of the Red River," an immense logjam which extended 165 miles upstream from below modern Shreveport. In existence since prehistory, the Great Raft in places formed a solid mass upon which grew grass, shrubs, and even trees. It was reported that in many places a man could cross the river on horseback and that a person traversing the raft from one shore to the other would often not realize there was water below.¹²

The phenomenon of the Great Raft was created by a combination of natural conditions. The loss of trees from the erosion of loose alluvial Red River soils, sharp bends, and violent floods called "freshets"

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combined to create the nearly impenetrable tangle of logs. The immediate and hardest-felt result of the raft was the difficulty in reaching the Upper Red River, which required circuitous routes through connecting bayous and lakes. Often a solid mass of logs from surface to river bottom, the Great Raft also acted as a dam, rendering useless millions of acres of otherwise rich and productive land.¹³

As the mid-1820s approached, several circumstances began to converge that focused attention on removal of the Great Raft. In an effort to quell lawless elements in the area and provide security on the border between the United States and Mexico (Texas at that time was a province of Mexico), Fort Towson was established in 1824 near the confluence of the Red and Kiamichi Rivers. Manning and supplying the new post required the expensive and time-consuming process of marching men or freighting goods via Fort Smith, Arkansas, or Fort Jesup, Louisiana. The former route involved traversing difficult mountain terrain, while the later involved making a long trip through southern Arkansas to avoid entering Mexico (Texas). The only alternate means of supply remained the keelboat and the arduous route through the bayous and swamps. The swift movement of supplies and troops by water to Fort Towson up a Red River clear of obstructions would have obvious strategic, tactical, and fiscal advantages for the military.¹⁴

Lending weight to the argument of the army for removal of the Great Raft were the voices of a growing influx of Anglo settlers into the Upper Red River valley. With them came the promise of a profitable cotton culture and the associated need for an inexpensive and efficient means to transport that commodity to market, specifically to the international port of New Orleans. Because they were forced to rely on overland transport or journey by flatboat or keelboat through twisted bayous, settlers clearly found little hope of economic growth in the valley. Adding to the call of cotton planters for opening the Red were land speculators and *empresarios* of the Moses Austin stripe whose gaze had not escaped the vast amount of rich land flooded by the Red River.¹⁵

The clearing of the Great Raft might have had relatively limited benefit had it not been for the introduction of the steamboat. Developed to the point of practical application by fertile minds such as John Fitch, Robert Fulton, and Oliver Evans, by 1810 the introduction of the steamboat to the western rivers of the United States promised to change the course of national history.

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In 1811 the Fulton steamboat *New Orleans* (371 tons) left Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, en route to New Orleans via the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Two and one-half months later, she arrived at her destination to become the first steam-powered vessel to connect the distant cities. The visionary Fulton realized the steamboat could be the catalyst for settlement of the American West and sought to gain a government-sanctioned monopoly over power navigation of its streams. Toward that end, in 1813 he wrote a letter to Thomas Jefferson outlining a combination river and land route from Quebec, Canada, to Mexico (Texas) in which steam navigation on the Red River was probably proposed for the first time.¹⁶



Capt. Henry M. Shreve, for whom the city of Shreveport is named (Courtesy Noel Memorial Library Archives, Louisiana State University, Shreveport).

Public opinion, especially in the west, looked with disfavor on exclusive rights such as those Fulton sought. Suspicious of what was perceived to be longstanding indifference of easterners concerning their affairs, westerners almost universally rejected Fulton's efforts. Adding to Fulton's difficulties, a group of inventors in Brownsville, Pennsylvania, on the Monongahela River, began building their own steamboats and entering into legal disputes with the Fulton interests. In the end, Fulton lost the legal battles and abandoned his dream, leaving navigation of the western rivers open to free competition.¹⁷

Foremost among the individuals comprising the "Brownsville Group" was Henry Miller Shreve, soon to become a major figure, if not a living legend, in the affairs of the Upper Red River. Born in 1785, Shreve grew up on the family farm near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers join to become the mighty Ohio. Following the death of his father in 1802, Shreve began his love affair with the western rivers when he hired on as a flatboat hand to help support the family. By 1807 Shreve had saved enough money to purchase a keelboat and was soon counted as a successful navigator-merchant.¹⁸

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Like Fulton, Shreve quickly realized the potential profits to be made by operating steamboats on the rivers of the American West. In 1814 he commissioned the building of the steamboat *Enterprise* (75 tons), which later delivered critical supplies to Gen. Andrew Jackson during the Battle of New Orleans. During that same year Shreve became the first to bring steam navigation to the Red River when he took the diminutive *Enterprise* as far up as the rapids at Alexandria, Louisiana.¹⁹

Shreve also is credited with establishing in the public mind the reality that steamboats could successfully and practically navigate western rivers on a regular basis. He did so in the spring of 1817 when he took his steamboat *Washington* (403 tons) upstream from New Orleans to Louisville, Kentucky, in a record twenty-five days. The feat, considered a watershed in the history of western steam navigation, fixed public opinion concerning the utility of the steamboat.²⁰

Adding to the excitement was the widely circulated report, bolstered by similar stories of other early steamboats, that in two round trips hauling freight from New Orleans to Louisville Shreve's *Washington* had managed to pay expenses, recoup the cost of the boat, and divide \$1,700 among investors. Steamboat transportation appeared attractive to investors as well as to those in need of shipping services. Prior to 1820, for example, the cost of shipping goods from New Orleans to Louisville by keelboat amounted to five dollars per 100 pounds. The cost of shipping the same weight of goods by steamboat along the same route dropped to as low as thirty-seven cents during the late 1820s. Such figures dramatically pointed out to all concerned the obvious economic advantages of steamboat transportation.²¹

Profitable and practical operation was of prime importance, but what truly captured the imagination of and inspired wonder in the public was the awesome speed and power of the steamboat. Considering that a keelboat trip from New Orleans to Louisville consumed from three- to four-months travel time, the twenty-five days taken by the *Washington* was nothing short of dazzling. With subsequent advancements in technology and refinement in steamboat operation, the time needed to complete the same 1,350-mile run had by 1853 plummeted to a record four days, nine hours, and thirty minutes.²²

The average fourteen-miles-per-hour, port-to-port speed made on the 1853 New Orleans-to-Louisville run is unspectacular by modern standards. Viewed in contemporary terms, however, it was an

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awe-inspiring accomplishment. A distance of fourteen miles during the nineteenth century was considered to be a good single day of travel by wagon, the most common form of conveyance at the time. It is little wonder the speed and unheard-of travel opportunities inspired youngsters of the period to become steamboat captains the way many modern youth dream of becoming astronauts.

The introduction of steamboats to the western rivers carried with it far more than economic implications. Technologically, it served as a harbinger of the Industrial Revolution in America and the first contact hundreds of thousands of people would have with a machine of mechanical horsepower and precision. In fact, the steamboat preceded by decades the widespread industrialization of eastern factories, which continued to rely for years on muscle, wind, and water for power. Surely, the movement and cacophony created by dozens of machined parts working in concert to produce power and motion must have been a breathtaking sight to early nineteenth century rustics and urbanites alike.

The introduction of the steamboat did not escape the notice of social commentators of the period. With its ability to spread news, ideas, and people swiftly, the steamboat was hailed as the vanguard of liberty, leveler of social classes, and great unifier of the nation. The French commentator Michel Chevalier wrote while traveling in the American West during 1835:

To improve the means of communication is to promote a real, positive, and practical liberty; . . . [I]t is to increase the rights and privileges of the greatest number, as truly and as amply as could be done by electoral laws; I go further, it is to establish equality and democracy. The effect of the most perfect system of transportation [the steamboat] is to reduce the distance not only between different places, but between different classes.²³

Individual steamboats themselves proved to be a social as well as physical conveyance where widely divergent people frequently rubbed elbows. Even discounting more extreme contacts between cabin-class passengers on the upper decks and the unwashed "deckers" below, each class was diverse within itself. Money being the great leveler; it was not uncommon for the crudest fur trapper to purchase cabin-class passage where he might find himself sharing a common dining table with a traveling European aristocrat, junketing congressman, or the wife of military officer en route to meet her husband at some distant frontier outpost. One can only imagine the unrecorded interactions that took place between people such as an aristocratic southern belle and a sweating stevedore just



Deckhands and lower-class passengers often shared space on the lower deck with livestock and baggage (William de la Montagne Cary, "Roustabouts Sleeping on Deck," from the Collection of Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma; used by permission).

off the boat from Ireland as both stood ankle-deep in the mud of a river town levee.

Such was the state of technological development and public attitude toward steamboat transportation during the 1820s. Excluded from the wonders and advantages of steamboat transportation by the Great Raft, residents of the Upper Red River longed for the day when they might share in the prosperity and excitement. Their frustration became all the more acute when by 1825 steamboats were ascending the Red on a regular basis to Natchitoches just below the raft. In the face of increased steamboat competition the three-dollar cost of shipping a barrel of dry goods from New Orleans to that port was cut in half and, more importantly, cotton was being shipped out of the Lower Red River region in ever-increasing quantities at cheaper rates.²⁴

In 1825 the Arkansas legislature sent a memorial to Congress calling for the removal of the Great Raft. In a thinly veiled effort to promote their own economic interests, the document cited the isolation of Fort Towson and the problems of supplying the frontier post as the primary motivation for submitting the appeal. In October of that year Gen. Winfield Scott from his headquarters in Louisville ordered twenty-five soldiers from Fort Jesup, Louisiana, to remove the offending obstruction.²⁵

The expectations of General Scott proved to be naive in the extreme. The party ascended the Red by keelboat until they encountered the raft where the officer in charge, a Captain Birch, quickly

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realized the task he had been given was impossible if not laughable, at least with the paltry twenty-five men assigned to him. Making the best of the situation, he instead made a survey of parts of the raft, passing ninety-six miles of it consisting of 168 sections, some of which were reported to be "100 yards to one mile in length, composed of logs of all sizes, and so closely connected as to preclude the possibility of removal." His examination also included the exploration of Twelve Mile Bayou near modern Shreveport northwest to Sodo Lake. That route, he reported, might serve as a future cutoff around parts of the raft. The observation proved to be somewhat prophetic as it indeed became one of the few routes steamboats would soon use to reach the Upper Red River prior to the removal of the Great Raft.²⁶

Residents of Upper Red River valley continued to memorialize Congress for the removal of the Great Raft, but the project was not seriously undertaken until the early 1830s, a date that coincided with the removal of the Choctaws from the southeastern United States to Oklahoma. With little doubt, additional impetus for clearing the river was provided when the government found itself not only faced with supplying the frontier garrison of Fort Towson but also with the daunting task of providing staples, goods, and treaty annuities to some 13,000 Choctaws and later 6,000 Chickasaws.²⁷

Attendant to the arrival of the tribes and the need to provide for them were other factors mitigating for removal of the Great Raft. With the arrival of the Choctaws, the one-time trading post of Doaksville near Fort Towson blossomed to become the capital of the Choctaw



This interior view of the Far West, an Upper Missouri River steamboat, is similar in size and upper-deck cabin accommodations to an Upper Red River steamboat (Courtesy State Historical Society of North Dakota A2821).

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Nation and for several decades one of the most important commercial centers in what would later become the state of Oklahoma. There, merchants provided for the needs of the Choctaw residents of the surrounding area and to a lesser degree the Anglo settlers living across the river in Texas. Adding to the need for efficient and reliable supply was the increased business brought to the Doaksville area by immigrants pouring down the Military Road from Fort Smith through Fort Towson to make new homes in Texas.²⁸

More significantly, the cotton culture became well established along the Upper Red River during the 1830s. Mixed-blood Choctaws and Chickasaws, who had been planters in the southeastern United States before removal, brought with them the knowledge and African-American slaves needed to cultivate the lucrative cash crop. That many progressive mixed-bloods chose to settle along the Upper Red River valley was no accident, but a calculated move to take advantage of fertile bottomland and the promise of the cheap steamboat transportation necessary to get the "Great Staple" to market. Within a decade of their arrival, prominent families of the Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes, such as the Colberts, Folsoms, Loves, LeFlores, Garlands, and many others, dotted the north side of the Upper Red River with extensive and prosperous plantations.²⁹



Choctaw planter Robert M. Jones (left), shown here with his wife Susan, was one of many cotton plantation owners along the Upper Red River. Rowland Bryarly owned a plantation on the Texas side of the river south of present Idabel, Oklahoma. His own boat, the R.T. Bryarly (p. 388), sank in 1876 at Pecan Point on the Lower Red River (not the Pecan Point near Idabel) (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society, left; courtesy Noel Memorial Library Archives, Louisiana State University, Shreveport, p. 388).

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Illustrative if not exactly typical of the emerging Choctaw-Chickasaw planter class was the mixed-blood Choctaw Robert M. Jones. Born in Mississippi in 1808, he received a formal education at Choctaw Academy in Kentucky and at the time of removal was contracted by the United States government to assist with the relocation of his tribe from Mississippi to their new home in present southeastern Oklahoma. Upon arrival, Jones entered the mercantile business, eventually owning interest in stores in Skullyville, Boggy Depot, Doaksville, and numerous other places on both sides of Red River. Prominent and respected, he took an active interest in Choctaw tribal affairs and, being an ardent secessionist, was later elected to represent the Choctaws and Chickasaws in the Confederate Congress during the Civil War.³⁰

During the 1830s Jones began to establish plantations along Red River in the Choctaw Nation. By the mid-1840s, he owned six with a total cultivated acreage estimated to exceed 10,000 worked by 500 African-American slaves. Jones's agricultural holdings included Root Hog, Shawneetown, Walnut Bayou, Boggy, and Lake West.³¹ Jones's showplace was Rose Hill Plantation located south of present-day Hugo, Oklahoma. The mansion at Rose Hill was a fifteen-room, two-story residence finished in maple, walnut, and mahogany woodwork with furniture imported from Europe. The house also boasted imported crystal chandeliers in nearly every room and housed an extensive library and portrait gallery.³²

On the Texas side of the river the story was much the same. Many of the Anglo settlers who had been forced by the United States government to move from the north side of the Red River, once believed by them to be a part Miller County, Arkansas, had re-established themselves on the opposite side of the river and had prospered.³³ Significant among the numerous plantations that sprang up during the period were the Wrights' extensive Kiomatia Plantation across from the mouth of the Kiamichi River; Pecan Point Plantation in Red River County; and the Glen Eden Plantation of Holland Coffee located far upstream at Preston Bend south of present-day Kingston, Oklahoma. Notable Texas planters on the Upper Red River included personages such as Collin McKinney, a signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence from Mexico, and Richard Ellis of Spanish Bluff, Bowie County, who in 1836 would serve as president of the Texas Constitutional Convention.³⁴

The influx of settlers into the Upper Red River valley and the establishment of "King Cotton" also gave rise to a number of prosperous northeastern Texas towns and communities. Founded during

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the 1830s and 1840s period were the towns of Clarksville, DeKalb, Paris, Hooks, Mound City (later Bryarly), Boston (now known as Old Boston), and Bonham. During the 1840s the Republic of Texas built the Central National Road southwest from the Red River at Wright's Landing near the Kiamichi to a small village on the Trinity River one day to be known as Dallas. The route effectively linked southern Texas to St. Louis via the military road leading from Fort Towson to Fort Smith.

Most historically significant of the Texas towns founded during the period was the now-long-vanished village of Jonesborough south of present-day Valliant, Oklahoma. The river town grew from a ferry operation established sometime before 1820 by Henry Jones, who later joined Austin's Colony in southern Texas. Situated near the Military Road connecting Fort Smith with Fort Towson and roads leading from Little Rock to Fort Towson via Washington, Arkansas, Jonesborough served as major gateway into Texas. Purportedly the "first Anglo settlement in Texas," Jonesborough witnessed the arrival of personages such as Stephen F. Austin, Sam Houston, and Davy Crockett, the latter during late 1835 while on his way to fight for Texas independence.³⁵

Prosperous plantations also were established farther down river in Arkansas, giving rise to a number of towns. Among the more prominent were Fulton, Lanesport, and Rocky Comfort. Washington, Arkansas, though situated some miles from the Red River, owed much of its growth and prosperity to the plantations and commerce of the Upper Red River valley.

In 1831, as a determined frontal attack on the Great Raft was being contemplated, the first steamboat made its way around the obstruction through the swamps and bayous into the Upper Red River. The extraordinary feat was orchestrated by Benjamin Rush Milam, noted Texas entrepreneur, soldier of fortune, and all-around adventurer. Milam, born in Kentucky in 1788, served in the War of 1812 before finding himself in diverse enterprises such as selling flour in South America and trading with the Comanches on the plains of Texas. In 1819 he served as a colonel in the filibustering effort of James Long to join Texas to the United States during the Mexican struggle to overthrow the Spanish Royalists. In the comic opera of negotiable loyalties that is Mexican politics, Milam found himself alternately occupying dungeon and dining table of the most current Mexican despots. The episode ended with him being awarded a land grant in southern Texas and the right to introduce colonists.³⁶

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Efforts to establish "Milam's Colony" failed, and in 1826 Milam cast his lot with the English adventurer Sir Arthur G. Wavell, one-time associate of Moses Austin and a general in both the Chilean and Mexican armies. Wavell received a grant to colonize a vast section of land on the Upper Red River, encompassing all or parts of present Bowie, Red River, Lamar, Fannin, and Hunt Counties. He appointed Ben Milam his agent and the latter hastened to the Red River to begin surveying while Wavell returned to England to promote the venture.³⁷

Empresarios such as Wavell and Milam had long recognized that Texas promised to be the greatest cotton-producing area in the world and viewed with wariness the professed Mexican aversion to the institution of slavery. In 1827 a law was passed outlawing slavery in Mexico and, fearing growing Anglo-American influence, the Mexican government in 1830 forbade further immigration of colonists from North America. It fell to Milam to demonstrate to potential European immigrants the viability of Wavell's Colony by introducing steamboat navigation to the Upper Red River.³⁸

In the spring of 1831 Milam purchased the steamboat *Alps* (45 tons) at Natchez, Mississippi, and renamed her *Enterprise*. With a Captain Hawley in operational command, the tiny vessel, towing two keelboats loaded with army quartermaster and ordnance stores destined for Fort Towson, left Natchitoches on May 28. Vowing to get the *Enterprise* through or sink her in the attempt, Milam laboriously picked his way through the bayous, cutting openings through the fallen timber wide enough to admit steamboat and accompanying keelboats. His efforts were further hampered by exceptionally low water for the season and by having to fire the boilers of the *Enterprise* with green wood.³⁹

When the *Enterprise* entered the Upper Red River at Long Prairie, Arkansas, on June 16, the reaction of area residents was electric. "It is difficult to imagine the powerful effect this circumstance had on the feelings of the citizens," wrote a resident in a letter to the *Arkansas Gazette*. "Men, women and children were elated almost to intoxication. . . . [A]s far as I have heard of her passage up, she has been saluted, toasted, and cheered at every settlement she has passed." The *Enterprise* made the Fort Towson Landing near the mouth of the Kiamichi and discharged her cargo. While there she was contracted by the army to tow a keelboat loaded with corn and salt upstream to Horse Prairie between the Kiamichi and Boggy Rivers where a group of Choctaws had settled and awaited pro-

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visions promised by treaty. The task completed, Milam and his *Enterprise* returned to the lower reaches of the Mississippi River.⁴⁰

The efforts of the resolute Milam were for naught. Wavell's Colony failed to attract the hoped-for European immigrants, and the entire plan faded away in 1835 when Milam led Texas volunteers against Mexican forces with his famous appeal: "Who will go with old Ben Milam into San Antonio?" The bloody battle for San Antonio de Bexar and the initial taking of the Alamo were successful, but came at the cost of Milam's life.⁴¹

In the years leading up to 1832 the United States government made several abortive efforts to circumvent the Great Raft. Assuming the position of superintendent of western river improvements in 1826, Henry Shreve began to develop a plan to confront the raft head-on. The instrument he needed to accomplish his goal was the snagboat, which the imaginative Shreve proceeded to invent (see cover). Basically consisting of two enormous pontoons joined by great wooden beams, it utilized a steam-powered crane and saw to raise snags, then cut them into smaller pieces that could be floated harmlessly downstream. The first snagboat, the *Heliopolis*, was launched in 1829 and entered its first season of operation on the Mississippi River. The site of enormous trees with gnarled roots being pulled from the river depths soon led to the snagboats being widely referred to as "Uncle Sam's Toothpullers."⁴²

Demolition of the Great Raft began in the spring of 1833 when Shreve attacked it with four snagboats and 150 men. They removed two miles of raft in the first day alone, and by the end of the first season in June seventy-one miles of raft had been cleared. Progress slowed during following seasons, primarily due to lack of adequate congressional appropriation, and the Red was not fully opened until 1838. The next forty years saw the Great Raft open and close at various times, and the Red was not said to be permanently open until 1880.⁴³

Aside from the increased potential for navigation that benefitted everyone on the Upper Red River, Arkansas and Louisiana benefitted additionally from the drainage of millions of acres of land. Shreve reported that the value of the public domain had been increased by an estimated \$15 million and that land once inundated by the Red above the raft was within a few years supporting a "continuous line of plantations." Towns also were established, not the least of which was Shreveport, named in honor of the man most responsible for bringing prosperity to the Upper Red River valley.⁴⁴

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During the years when the raft was being removed, a handful of other steamboats managed to make their way into the Upper Red River as the *Enterprise* had done in 1831. Most notable of them was the *Rover* (65 tons) captained by Benjamin V. Crooks, who became the most noted and respected steamboat master on the Upper Red. The *Rover*, towing two keelboats of supplies for Fort Towson and carrying 150 passengers "bound for the west," left Shreveport on the last day of December in 1835. In the spring of 1836 the passengers sent a testimonial to *Niles' Weekly Register* lauding Crooks's successful completion of the forty-one-day passage. The testimonial described Crooks's journey around the Great Raft via what came to be called the "Twelve Mile Bayou route." The *Rover* was one of the first steamboats to utilize that passage to the Upper Red River.⁴⁵

Though the Great Raft was cleared in 1838, it frequently closed, forcing steamboats to take the Twelve Mile Bayou route. The passage was pioneered by Travis Wright, who, aside from running his prosperous Kiomatia Plantation, was one of the best keelboat captains on the Red during the years preceding steam navigation. The route began at Twelve Mile Bayou four miles above Shreveport and led northwest to Sodo Lake. Continuing northwest to Clear Lake via Stumpy Bayou, the route changed directions back to the northeast toward Red River. Black Bayou flowing into Clear Lake led to Sewell's Canal, a three-quarter-mile-long artificial watercourse connecting Black Bayou with Red Bayou flowing into Upper Red River.⁴⁶

Though only seventy-five miles in length, the route was considered by many the most hazardous stretch for steamboat navigation on the entire Mississippi River system. Causing the most difficulty was Sewell's Canal, dug by the army to facilitate keelboat transit to Fort Towson. With a seven-foot difference in elevation between Black and Red Bayous, rapids were created from water descending through the canal from Black Bayou. Capt. Ben Crooks introduced the laborious expedient of repeatedly building log dams ahead of a vessel that allowed the water to rise enough to move forward a boat-length or two at a time.⁴⁷

The canal proper was a steamboat captain's nightmare. Passing through a particularly twisted section of it (indelicate known as "Alban's Gut" in "honor" of George Alban, a former steamboat captain who maintained the canal and collected a toll on goods shipped through it) often required "stripping the wheels." The process involved removing the lower arms and buckets (paddles) on a side-wheeler to allow clearance as the overhanging guards of the steam-

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boat passed over the canal banks. Even as the boat was being hauled forward by muscle-powered capstan, or sometimes by steam power via a line around the paddlewheel shaft, it was often necessary to cut down the banks by shovel in order for the guards to pass over. An attendant danger was an unexpected drop in water level that threatened to separate deck from hull as the guards overhanging the banks vainly attempted to support the weight of the descending boat.⁴⁸

The trip through the Twelve Mile Bayou route to the Upper Red River was slow, torturous, and frequently depressing. Black Bayou in particular was described as “a little streak of water twisted among dense thickets of underbrush, the branches of which were a mere tangled mass of crooked, thorny, wirey [*sic*] twigs.” Biting insects filled the air as “hard-featured alligators played hide and seek in the stream.” Living cypress trees with their lack of lower branches were a welcome sight, often serving as fenders to guide a steamboat. Colliding with a dead cypress, however, often resulted in dead limbs crashing onto or even through the upper decks as squirrels roused from their lofty homes scrambled for safety. To be sure, few who chronicled their passage through the bypasses around the Great Raft failed to note the sheer joy at their emergence into the Upper Red River. One writer called it one of the most memorable days of his steamboating life when he viewed the “hole in the woods and the wide Red River before us.”⁴⁹

In the spring of 1838 the Great Raft was cleared and the Red River was opened to traffic for the first time. Waiting to pass through was the steamboat *Concord* (no tonnage data available), captained by Erasmus Philley of Cincinnati, Ohio. The *Concord* pushed her way through the little opening created by a snagboat and was soon making uncommon speed up the broad, smooth river. Her triumph was short-lived, however. When the vessel reached Nunnelly's Landing, Arkansas, 280 river-miles above Shreveport, a boiler flue collapsed, resulting in an explosion. The cabin, situated aft of the boilers on the main deck, was wrecked as was much of the boiler (upper) deck. The captain found himself “closer to the chambermaid than anybody had ever seen me before” as he and the African-American servant emerged from the pile of debris that engulfed them when they were blown across the cabin. Fortunately, no one was killed, and injuries to the crew were slight. The wrecked boiler was “walled off” and the *Concord* limped back to Natchitoches on her remaining boiler.⁵⁰

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Other boats also were making their way through the raft into the Upper Red River. While most have escaped historical mention, two have been noted due to their tragic ends. Before pilots could learn the channel, the *Black Hawk* (160 tons) and the *Revenue* (130 tons) struck snags and sank near the head of the raft. To the *Black Hawk* probably goes the distinction of being the first of dozens of steamboats lost in the waters of the Upper Red River.⁵¹

Determination of the number of boats entering the Upper Red River in the years immediately following the clearing of the Great Raft is problematical due to the itinerant nature of steamboat operations and scarcity of quantitative data. It is illustrative to note, however, the scale of commerce being carried out on the Upper Red by that time. When the snagboat *Eradicator* arrived to remove a recently formed drift in April, 1839, the captain found two steamboats



Artist Karl Bodmer painted this scene of the Missouri River that many chroniclers frequently compare to the Upper Red River (Karl Bodmer, "Snags (Sunken Trees) on the Missouri," from the Collection of Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska; used by permission).

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loaded with cotton waiting to go downstream and five steamboats loaded with stores for Fort Towson and other destinations waiting to go upstream as soon as the drift was cleared. Three other boats had reportedly returned to Shreveport to store their cargoes and had gone back to New Orleans.⁵² This nautical traffic jam seems to indicate the Upper Red River was a busy watercourse, indeed.

Before the Great Raft was cleared, and more often during the frequent and sometimes extended periods when it again closed the river, it was necessary to freight goods around the raft. Few boats were able to pass through the Twelve Mile Bayou route loaded, and it became common practice for boats to enter the Upper Red and stay the entire boating season carrying goods between the headwaters of navigation and the raft. The ersatz town of Fogelville sprang up as a camp of teamsters of the "rougher sort," who utilized carts and oxen to freight around the raft to connecting steamboats. The mayor of the enterprising village was none other than George Alban of "Alban's Gut" fame, who seemed quite pleased to control the only two means of freighting when the main channel of Red River was closed.⁵³

There seems to be considerable amazement concerning the size and form of the early vessels that plied the Upper Red River. With hulls as deep as eight feet, the early steamboats venturing into the far reaches of the Red were not the classic steamboats of the 1850s. The structural evolution, or more correctly "devolution," of western steamboats from vessels built along oceangoing lines to the long, flat-bottomed engineering marvels they became was a protracted one.

The earliest steamboats into the Upper Red River were round-hulled, heavily timbered, and deep of draft. A contemporary of the first Upper Red River boats was the *Yellow Stone* (150 tons estimated), constructed in 1831 for the shallow Upper Missouri River. Extant specifications indicate she had a "6 feet hold" for cargo, exclusive of additional depth-of-hold taken up by keel, keelsons, ribs, ceiling, and overhead deck beams.⁵⁴ The *Hunter* (108 tons estimated), operated on the Upper Red River by Capt. Ben Crooks as early as 1840, drew seven and one-half feet of water fully loaded, for a total depth-of-hull of about eight feet. Even the *Relief* (70 tons estimated), another early 1840s Upper Red River steamboat described as "a very light boat," drew four and one-half feet loaded, about the same draft as 200-ton boats built twenty years later.⁵⁵

The majority of western river steamboats were built at Brownsville and adjacent towns along the Monongahela River in Pennsyl-

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vania. The location provided ready access to the sophisticated foundries, rolling mills, and machine shops of Pittsburgh that supplied steamboat engines and drive trains. With the establishment of steamboat building in the area over the Alleghenies came designers and shipwrights from eastern seaports. The influence of those people was largely responsible for fixing the early western steamboat along seagoing lines.⁵⁶

The steamboat historian Louis Hunter has noted of the early western boats, "If the superstructure is ignored, the lines and modeling of bow and stern and other visible portions of the hull show plainly the marine origin of the vessels." Paintings, drawings, and cuts from the 1830s and 1840s often show, if not at least suggest, compound hull curves, ship-like sterns, and seagoing bows, some complete with figureheads and bowsprits. That would account for contemporary comments that certain steamboats were said to be "built like a ship" or resembled "a dismasted frigate."⁵⁷

Maritime tradition aside, there was another important reason for prominence of the heavily timbered and deep-draft western steamboat. In order to build a steamboat of shallow draft and flat bottom, it was necessary to lengthen and lighten it, resulting in "hogging," the tendency of a boat lacking proper fore and aft hull stiffness to rise and sag as it traveled forward. Aside from the possibility of outright structural failure, hogging also could result in poor handling characteristics, damaged machinery, and a host of other nautical problems.⁵⁸

The problem was attacked first by distributing weight more efficiently, then by inserting longitudinal bulkheads in the hold. The major breakthrough came, however, with the introduction of hog chains, the earliest mention of their use being 1848. These were iron rods from 1 to 2.5 inches in diameter running diagonally up from bow and stern, then along and on either side of the boiler (upper) deck where they were supported by "Sampson posts" rising from the main deck or keelsons in the hold. Adjusted by turnbuckles, hog chains provided necessary hull stiffness without adding a great deal of weight. By way of example, one large steamboat used twenty-four tons of hog chain and cross chain (rigged laterally to support the guards) to replace an estimated 300 tons of wood that would have been needed to provide the same strength.⁵⁹ Improved techniques for lightening steamboats brought a dramatic decrease in depth-of-hull and associated draft. For a 200-ton steamboat (near the upper tonnage range for most Upper Red River boats) the

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average depth-of-hull decreased from 7.64 feet in 1827 to 4.9 feet by 1880.⁶⁰

Perhaps suggestive of the decrease over time in the draft of steamboats plying the Upper Red River were the landings referred to in contemporary accounts as being the “head of navigation.” Fort Towson Landing (frequently referred to as the “Public Landing”) was early on considered the head of navigation, though boats occasionally went far above it during times of high water. References after the mid-1850s, by which time the classic steamboat had evolved, often list Preston Bend (now under the waters of Lake Texoma) as the head of navigation.

When considering navigation of the Upper Red River by steamboat, it is important for modern observers to consider methods of steamboat operation and conditions on the Red River as they existed during the 1800s. Uncontrolled by modern dams, the Red River was subject to floods or “freshets” of astounding dimensions. The great flood of 1843, for example, found the Red River six miles wide above Bryarly’s Landing south of Idabel, Oklahoma. Coming not as a swell as usual, but as “a heavy column or body of water, like the outpouring of a swollen and broken sluice,” the flood killed a number of people and washed away crops and livestock. During the disaster, yawls from the steamboats *Miami* (114 tons) and *Napoleon* (no tonnage data available) were used to rescue people clinging to the tops of trees, while the deep-draft *Hunter* left the river channel itself to rescue hapless victims.⁶¹

Even during a normal boating season, from January to sometimes as late as June, waters were frequently such that boats of very deep draft could easily travel the Upper Red River, considered navigable when the stage was at about “half a bank.”⁶² Given an estimated average vertical Red River bank of twenty-feet, the river depth was, thus, ten feet above low water, whatever low-water depth might be at a given location. It should be pointed out, too, that use of the term “boating season” is somewhat misleading; the author has found instances of steamboats traveling the Upper Red in every month except July, August, and September. The lucrative freight rates charged for shipping on the Upper Red apparently made it profitable for steamboats to operate during low water; the practice seems to have been to tie up and remain idle while waiting for a brief rise and the opportunity for another short dash farther upstream.

The stage of the river and speculations as to its rise and fall were topics of great interest in the towns along the Red River. News-

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papers such as the *Choctaw Intelligencer* published at Doaksville spilled much ink concerning river conditions. A typical snippet said: "Rains have been very abundant the past week, and we understand Red river [*sic*] is rising rapidly; and the *redness* [emphasis in original] of the waters indicates that the rise is not entirely from the streams in this vicinity."⁶³ Merchants, too, found in river conditions and river navigation a convenient sales pitch for selling goods. In reporting on the advent of the coming boating season, a paper noted of one merchant: "He is also expecting by the first boats, a quantity of iron, Salt, Rope. And bragging - also a good article of tobacco, all of which he offers at reduced prices, for cash or cotton."⁶⁴

The predictions of local prognosticators concerning changes in river conditions captured as much if not more interest. One particularly adept prophet was "Squire" John Nunnelly whose Arkansas plantation was located near White Oak Shoals above Fulton. The captain of one steamboat, stranded for two months due to low water, made daily visits to the squire during which he spoke not a word about a change in the river. One day during such a visit, Nunnelly stared intently into the water for long minutes, then advised the captain to prepare his boat for departure. Neither the captain nor Nunnelly himself could provide a reason for the favorable prediction, but a rise did come and the vessel departed. Others reported that Nunnelly sometimes looked intently into the waters "as though he could read the hidden mysteries of 'Old Red' from White Oak Shoals to the Kiamish."⁶⁵

Adverse conditions on Red River were sometimes cause for great concern if not outright want. More than once a local newspaper bemoaned the fact that newsprint was in short supply due to low water and that the publisher had been reduced to printing his latest number on foolscap and half-pages.⁶⁶ There also appeared in Upper Red River newspapers recipes for the substitution of scarce staples such as coffee in which dice-sized pieces of sweet potato were toasted and ground to make a strong drink resembling cocoa.⁶⁷

While steamboats brought general prosperity, there existed a love-hate relationship between steamboat operators and the residents of the Red River valley. The hazards of navigating the Upper Red led to increased insurance premiums being imposed on operators that were, of course, passed on to residents of the Red River valley. However, some steamboat operators, who sometimes referred to the area as the "Red River Chicken Pie," charged as much as the traffic would bear. Suffice it to say, transport costs into and out of the Upper Red River valley were high compared to other steamboat

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trades, with three and one-half to five dollars being paid to the Red River "sharks" for each bale of cotton shipped downstream during the antebellum years.⁶⁸

Contrary to popular perception, the size of steamboats operating in the Upper Red River trade was not limited by conditions of the stream itself but rather by insurance companies. While the people of the Red River valley were aggravated and perplexed by the economic situation they found themselves in, steamboat operators chafed under underwriter restrictions they likened to the "Law of Moses." For example, the restrictions prohibited them from taking a sidewheel boat exceeding 210 feet in length above Shreveport, with harsher restrictions imposed on sternwheelers. Sharp-eyed and diligent inspectors working for the underwriters also prohibited taking any steamboat exceeding four years of age, no matter how well it had been maintained, into the Upper Red.⁶⁹

Steamboat owners and captains for years argued for the use of larger boats on the Upper Red River. They cited, by way of example, the fact that Missouri River boats with a length restriction of 250 feet were not allowed into the Upper Red, even though the Missouri was a shallower and more dangerous river. Following the lifting of length restrictions in 1870, larger boats entered the Upper Red River trade to the dire predictions of underwriters. They maintained that the "Cincinnati tubs" were "too long and otherwise unfit" and that the experiment would account for more boats lost on the Upper Red River during the first year than in the previous five. In actuality, during that first year of operation no boats were lost.⁷⁰

The steam engines powering the first boats to enter the Upper Red River were likely vertical, low-pressure, condensing engines along the lines of those developed by James Watt. Paradoxically, the engines did not derive their prime motive force from the steam itself but from the partial vacuum created when jets of cold water were injected into the cylinder to cool the steam. Suitable to the sluggish rivers of the east, they lacked the necessary power to navigate the swift waters of the American West. In their quest for more power, engineers on western steamboats soon began utilizing the direct action of steam to push the piston(s) and frequently disconnected the complicated pumps and nozzles used for water injection. Coincident to the use of direct steam came a necessary increase in steam pressure until, by the 1840s, 100 pounds per square inch was common rather than the 20 pounds utilized in the early condensing engines.⁷¹

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The modification of lower pressure engines and the “hard firing” of boilers demanded by conditions on the western rivers led to the development of the high-pressure, horizontal steam engine, a type that endured for the remainder of the steamboat era. Run at pressures of 125 to 150 pounds per square inch, and higher during times of emergency, they proved to be superbly adapted to navigation on streams such as the Red River.⁷²

Estimate of steamboat horsepower, or even speculation that a given boat was underpowered, is extremely problematical due to the very nature of period steamboat operation. The formula for computing horsepower (mean effective pressure x piston area x length of stroke x revolutions per minute x number of cylinders divided by 33,000 = horsepower) can be applied only if specific conditions effecting steam pressure and revolutions per minute on a specific boat at a specific time are known. A general lack of pressure gauges, modifications to the engine, type of fuel, hard firing of the boilers, and other unknown variables mitigate against such conclusions. In noting the potentially vast differences in obtainable power, a 1824 congressional committee report concerning steam engine operation noted that an engine rated at 20 horsepower under normal pressure could be made to do the work of an engine rated at 100 horsepower.⁷³

Until the mid-1840s most of the boats plying the Upper Red River were of the single-engine type—that is, a single, centrally mounted engine transmitted power via a “crank axle” and a central flywheel to the paddles of a sidewheel boat, the predominant configuration for vessels of the period. The central flywheel, varying from ten to fifteen feet in diameter and weighted at the rims with iron or lead, helped smooth out vibration and prevented the engine from stalling at “top dead center.” The paddlewheels were disengaged during maneuvering by independent clutches located at the ends of shafts. After the mid-1840s steamboats were almost exclusively built with independent engines powering each paddlewheel. That arrangement allowed for smoother operation and freed a great deal of deck space previously taken up by the flywheel and crank axles.⁷⁴

Early in the history of steamboat development, engineers experimented with various types of boilers, but the pattern soon adopted and retained throughout the steamboat era was the standard two-flue type. Fired from below, hot gases from the firebox were drawn to the back of the boiler, then up and forward through two flues that ran through the water reservoir to the chimneys (never referred to as stacks or funnels by steamboatmen). Boilers were usually oper-

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ated in multiples of two with most Upper Red River steamboats utilizing a single battery of two boilers.⁷⁵

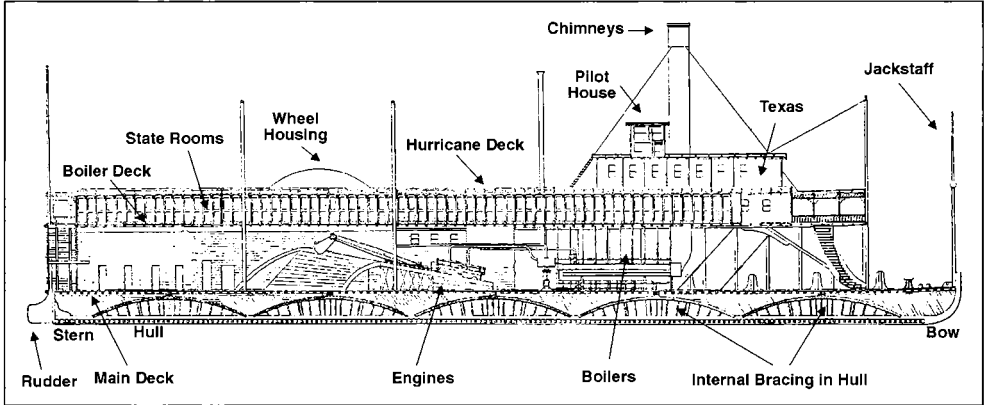
More efficient boilers were developed for stationary steam engines, but the western river steamboat retained the wasteful two-flue type primarily due to its lightness and a seemingly inexhaustible supply of cheap fuel. At least until the middle of the century when coal came into general use, steamboats on the Mississippi River system used wood for fuel with regional preferences as to species. On the Lower Mississippi resinous pine was preferred, while on the Upper Missouri River cottonwood was the choice.⁷⁶ On the Upper Red River cedar was a favorite fuel, though its use was lamented by those familiar with the beauty and value of the wood in places where it was not as plentiful. Emergency situations requiring extra steam called for hard firing the boilers with highly combustible fuels such as pine knots, lard, turpentine, or the occasional slab of bacon.⁷⁷

As on other rivers previously untouched by steamboats, crews of the first boats into the Upper Red River were left to gather wood as chance presented. On at least one occasion the crew of a boat dismantled and cut up a dilapidated cabin and hauled it aboard to be consumed.⁷⁸ The average Upper Red River steamboat burning an estimated twelve to twenty-four cords of wood per day led to the establishment of numerous wood yards. For many subsistence farmers living along the stream, the cutting and selling of wood for steamboat fuel provided their only source of cash income.⁷⁹

The vast majority of steamboats plying the Upper Red River during the antebellum period were sidewheel boats. Notions of modern nostalgia buffs aside, the sternwheel steamboat was considered by river men and the public alike something of an inelegant scow, while the sidewheel river packet was often viewed as "the most beautiful creation of man." In the years leading up to the Civil War and beyond, sternwheelers found increasing acceptance, especially during the waning days of the steamboat era when economy of operation and usefulness in the towboat trade made them more attractive.⁸⁰

As the hull and propulsion systems evolved so did the superstructure of the steamboat. From box-like cabins on the main deck and in the hold came an arrangement speaking to efficiency and comparative comfort, at least for the wealthier classes. The ladies' cabin was removed from the stern of the hold to the aft boiler (upper) deck (which never had a boiler on it despite the name), and by the mid-1830s the entire passenger saloon was located there, free-

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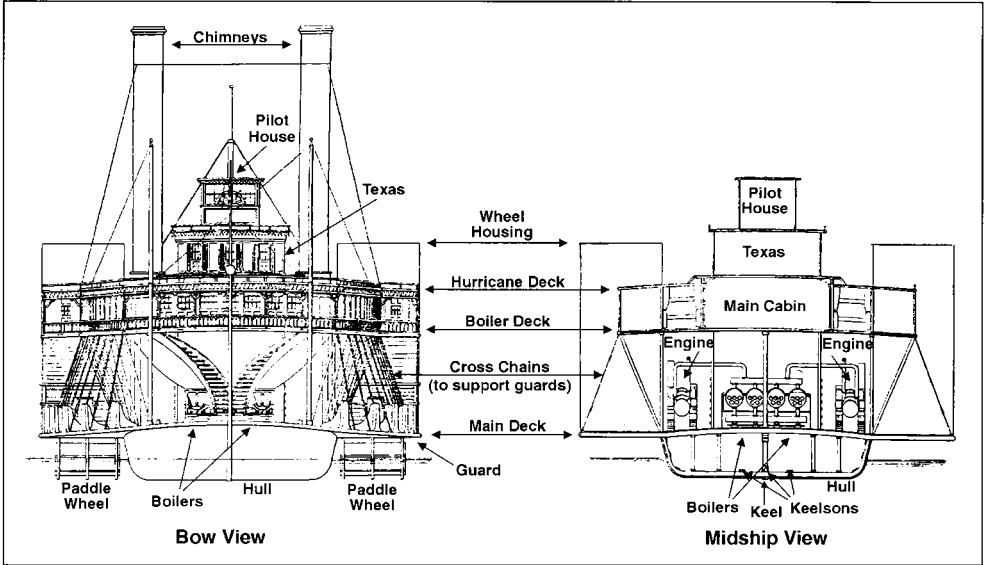
Side view of an 1850s sidewheel steamboat (Courtesy Keith Tolman; adapted from sketch in Transactions of the Institution of Naval Architects, London, 1861).

ing the main deck for freight and deck passengers. Deck passengers, or “deckers,” as they were called, were persons of ordinary means, frequently immigrants, who paid a few dollars for the privilege of traveling on the open main deck, eating and sleeping as freight and bullying deckhands allowed. The deckhands themselves had early on been displaced from their traditional quarters in the forecabin to the catch-as-catch-can accommodations of the main deck.⁸¹

The top of the boiler deck (roof of the cabin) formed the hurricane deck that served as a promenade for cabin-class passengers and the position of the pilothouse after it was moved from the forward boiler deck during the 1840s. In the 1850s a structure containing additional staterooms was added atop the hurricane that frequently served as quarters for officers and in the postbellum years a place for the segregation of African-American passengers, giving it the popular label of “freedmen’s bureau.” The introduction of the structure atop the hurricane deck coincided with the admittance of Texas into the Union via annexation and was therefore called the “texas” due to its afterthought-like appearance.⁸²

The top-heavy appearance of the classic steamboat is deceptive. The majority of the weight was, in fact, concentrated in the hull and lower deck with the superstructure being made of the lightest and thinnest materials possible. The “decorative orgy” of steamboat cabin appointment combined with lightness of structure led one wag to describe one of the larger floating palaces as “an engine on a raft with \$11,000 worth of jig-saw work.” The lightness of structure

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Side and midship views of an 1850s sidewheel steamboat (Courtesy Keith Tolman; adapted from sketch in Transactions of the Institution of Naval Architects, London, 1861).

served a utilitarian purpose, however. The reduction of weight translated into more cargo carried and the shallower draft needed to reach the farthest upstream landings.⁸³

Associated with the lightness of steamboat construction was the matter of operational life-span of the vessels. Driven hard, the boats encountered adverse conditions such as gross overloading, frequent groundings due to low water, floating logs, ravages of ice, and many other hazards. Coupled with such hard usage was damage or total destruction caused by fire, snagging, or explosion. In a word, steamboats on the western rivers were considered expendable with an average life-span of approximately four years. With the cost of steamboat construction during the 1850s at approximately eighty dollars per measured ton, a new 200-ton Upper Red River boat could be delivered at a cost of \$16,000. A princely investment for the period it would first appear, until one considers that such a boat could carry in excess of 1,000 bales of cotton to New Orleans at five dollars per bale. Not even counting passenger fares and revenue from upstream freight, a vessel could be paid for from cotton hauling alone in less than one boating season.⁸⁴

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Most if not all steamboats plying the Upper Red River performed dual roles as they did on other parts of the western river system. So frequent is the mention of passengers being carried on Upper Red River boats that it is reasonable to conclude that vessels dedicated solely to the hauling of freight were the exception rather than the rule. The most frequent passengers named on extant Upper Red River cabin passage lists included prominent planters, merchants, and officers or their wives en route to postings at frontier garrisons.

Given alternatives in overland travel, the life of a cabin passenger on a steamboat was one of comparative luxury. The cabin itself was lined on either side by staterooms with the aft portion of the saloon reserved as a sitting room for ladies. The forward end of the cabin formed a "T" on either side of which and facing forward were situated the office of the clerk and the obligatory bar from which alcoholic beverages were dispensed. Meals were served in the saloon by a staff of servants, usually African-American slaves, with the fare being plentiful if often ill-balanced and coarsely prepared. It was common practice on Upper Red River boats to supplement regular stores by purchasing local produce and by the crew fishing or hunting wild game during extended stops. Amid the din of cannonading engine, constant, unnerving vibration, stench of livestock from the deck below, and alternating heat and cold, passengers passed the ten-day journey from New Orleans to Fort Towson in conversation, watching the passing scenery, or reading newspapers and cheap novels hawked at major landings.⁸⁵

The antebellum period witnessed the rise to prominence of Upper Red River steamboat legends such as captains John Smoker, Owen Franks, Joe Ross, Green H. Cheatham, Thomas Moore, John Ankrim, James Crooks (nephew of Upper Red River steamboat pioneer Ben Crooks), and many others. Giants even among them were the Kouns family consisting of Ben, Issac, John, Lou, and Mart, who with brothers Noah, Matt, and William Scovell operated a score or more of boats over many decades. The majority of the Upper Red River captains hailed from towns along the Ohio River valley, though a significant number operated out of New Orleans, Shreveport, and Jefferson, Texas.⁸⁶

The number of steamboats that plied the Upper Red River during the era of steam navigation is a matter of conjecture but certainly number into the hundreds. Many made only one trip, and records of their passages remain elusive, but a number of boats were regular and familiar to the residents of the valley. Prominent among a long list of antebellum boats were the *Cotton Plant* (122

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tons), *Robert Lytel* (159 tons), *Echo* (161 tons), *Frontier* (109 tons), *Lone Star* (126 tons), *Fort Towson* (108 tons), *Glide* (52 tons), *Run-away* (115 tons), *Ham Howell* (144 tons), *Texas Ranger* (159 tons), *News Boy* (115 tons), *Mustang* (67 tons), *Jim Turner* (212 tons), *Southwestern* (202 tons), and *Choctaw* (133 tons).⁸⁷

During the antebellum period residents of Upper Red River valley ventured into the steamboat business themselves. Lured by potentially enormous profits and the prestige that accompanied steamboat ownership, many became full- or part-owners of steamboats. The *Texas* (148 tons), built in New Albany, Indiana, in 1849, was owned by a large group of shareholders from Bowie and Red River Counties who had invested \$500 each. The boat was later sold to interests in Lamar County, Texas.⁸⁸ The *Southwestern* was built in Cincinnati in 1839 and owned by Capt. Green H. Cheatham of Washington, Arkansas, later a planter near Clarksville, Texas. He and his brother Hal also financed the *Fort Towson* and *Frontier*, boats built specifically for the Upper Red River trade.⁸⁹

Possibly the most prominent Upper Red River steamboat owner was the Choctaw Robert M. Jones, who owned at least three boats. His first was the *R. M. Jones* (193 tons), built in 1851 at Newport, Kentucky, and owned by the trading company of Berthelet and Jones with Capt. John Ankrim also holding an interest. Jones sold her in 1854, and she was later wrecked on the Lower Red River. In 1852 Jones bought the diminutive *Frances Jones* (63 tons), named for his daughter, and ran her until she was dismantled in 1857. In that same year he purchased the *Victoria* (161 tons) and ran her on the Upper Red River until 1858. Aside from shipping for others, Jones surely must have realized significant savings by using his own boats to ship his cotton, supply his plantations, and maintain his far-flung mercantile empire. Curiously, steamboat directories indicate he had divested himself of all his boats by 1859 and never purchased another.⁹⁰

Interestingly, a few steamboats were actually built on the Upper Red River. The plucky little *Napoleon* (no tonnage data available), after delivering supplies to Fort Towson in 1840, stayed in the Upper Red and ventured to the Saline River, a tributary of the Little River fifty miles above Fulton, Arkansas. She came back "wearing the horns," the tradition of mounting deer antlers to the pilothouse of a steamboat that had ventured farther than any before or had set a new speed record between ports. She then navigated the Little River to the Cossatot near the Oklahoma-Arkansas border, but the trip proved to be "Napoleon's defeat" when she went down in the

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waters of that stream. Her machinery was salvaged, however, and used on a homegrown boat built at Fulton named the *Little River* that was later lost above Shreveport.⁹¹

At Berlin, Texas, located at the mouth of Mill Creek across from the Oklahoma-Arkansas line, John H. Dyer in 1842 conceived the idea of building a steamboat when the Republic of Texas promised to award a bounty for every steamboat desperately needed on the rivers of the young country. Using the engine off the *Mariner* (no tonnage data available), sunk at Pecan Point a year earlier, Dyer constructed the *Texas Planter*. Touted as “the first steamboat built in Texas,” little is known of her history or construction other than she was described as being “certainly peculiar, to say the least.”⁹²

The tonnage of steamboats plying the Upper Red River during the antebellum period presents an interesting picture. A random sampling of eighteen boats from the 1835–1850 period for which measured tonnages are known reveals an average boat of 127 tons. The period from 1850 to 1860 indicates a slightly larger average of 131 tons from a sample of twelve vessels. When compared to the 900-ton floating palaces of the Lower Mississippi, the size of Upper Red River boats appears modest until one considers that in 1843 steamboats of the 100–199-ton class accounted for approximately 50 percent of all steamboats operating on the western rivers during the steamboat era.⁹³ The size and tonnages of Upper Red River boats also is brought into perspective by comparing them to vessels such as the 100-ton *Susan Constant*, 40-ton *Godspeed*, and 20-ton *Discovery* that brought English settlers across the Atlantic to Jamestown in 1607. It also should be noted that more than a few steamboats on the Upper Red handily exceeded in capacity the 180-ton *Mayflower* of Plymouth fame.⁹⁴

With the Civil War came a scrambling of allegiances as northern steamboat operators on the Upper Red River returned to their home ports and southern boatmen to theirs. The northern operators enjoyed several years of prosperity hauling men and materiel under military contract during the first modern war of mobility. With miles of river being steadily wrenched from the hands of the enemy and protected by federal gunboats, northern boatmen carried on their business in relative safety while moving unprecedented amounts of troops and supplies. One Union supply officer calculated that a single 500-ton steamboat during one trip was capable of subsisting 40,000 men and 18,000 horses for almost two days. Additionally, the steamboats proved to be exceptionally versatile, having

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the ability to load or discharge troops and supplies by simply pulling up to a riverbank near where they were most needed.⁹⁵

The situation was strikingly different for southern steamboat operators. With Confederate seaports blockaded, the export of cotton declined and with it the business of transporting that commodity from the hinterlands to the coasts. Adding to the troubled situation was the steady federal blocking of the rivers the south had come to rely upon in lieu of railroads. By 1863 and the fall of Vicksburg the Confederacy had been denied movement on the majority of the western river system.⁹⁶

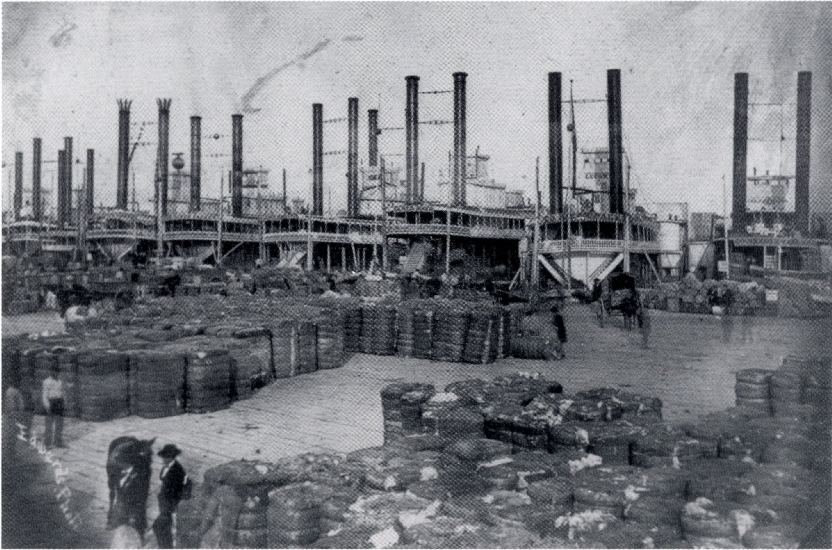
The spring of 1861 found the Upper Red River once again closed by the Great Raft. Possibly viewing the situation as fortuitous in the event of sectional war, the federal government had taken no action to remove it, so the Louisiana legislature attacked the problem on the state level. Louisiana lawmakers failed to win the cooperative support of the Texas legislature in removing the obstruction and allowed for the charter of a private company that would keep the river open and receive compensation in the form of tolls. An organizational meeting was called to meet in Shreveport in early 1861, but the war intervened and much of the Upper Red River remained closed throughout the conflict.⁹⁷

Though the Red River proper was closed, the omnipresent George Alban had made improvements to the Twelve Mile Bayou route, with the *Gipsy* (71 tons) out of New Orleans making the first passage through during the early spring of 1861. Formalized as the Upper Red River Low Water Navigation Company, Alban's concern charged twenty-five cents for every bale of cotton shipped downstream and twelve and one-half cents a barrel for all dry goods going upriver. As Confederate guns battered Fort Sumter in mid-April, eight steamboats loaded with cotton at Rowland's Landing north of Clarksville, Texas, waited for a rise in the river that would take them via the Twelve Mile Bayou route to New Orleans.⁹⁸

In July, 1861, president Abraham Lincoln called for a blockade of southern seaports, and in April, 1862, New Orleans fell to Union forces. Steamboat operations on the Upper Red River ground to a halt in the combined face of the blockade and loss of the favored port. Few if any steamboats plied the river above the raft during the remainder of the conflict.

Many of the boats that had become regular fixtures on the Upper Red went over to Confederate registry. Included on the list were the *Swan* (184 tons), *Texas Ranger* (159 tons), *Lafitte* (95 tons), and *Osceola* (157 tons). Other Upper Red River steamboats were in-

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Steamboats of the Red River Packet await lading at New Orleans landing. However, the Col. T. H. Judson (far right) was not a Red River boat and was preparing for a return trip to the Yazoo River Delta (Courtesy Special Collections, Tulane University Library, New Orleans).

volved in exciting exploits, such as the *New Era* (259 tons) that served as a United States transport before going into Confederate registry, only to be captured and pressed back into federal service. The *Hope* (193 tons) was burned and sunk on the Tallahatchie River in 1863 to prevent capture by Union forces, and the *Era No. 2* (157 tons) saw service as a federal tinclad. Running before the war between Shreveport and Hurricane Bluffs in Arkansas, the *Doubloon* (294 tons), one of the largest steamboats regularly to ply the Upper Red, was scuttled to avoid capture.⁹⁹

As the Union grip tightened on the Mississippi River system, Shreveport became a refuge for Confederate vessels attempting to evade capture. The *General Beauregard* (450 tons approximate), converted to a gunboat in 1861, sought safety in the waters of that port in 1864. The *Mary T.* (500 tons approximate), which served as a Confederate States mail packet before conversion into a gunboat (renamed the *J. A. Cotton*), also found shelter at Shreveport before her capture near Alexandria, Louisiana, in 1865. Of significant interest is the *William H. Webb* (655 tons), once a towboat and ice-

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breaker in New York Harbor. She was purchased by New Orleans interests in 1861 and sent to Havana, Cuba, where she was commissioned as a Confederate privateer. After capturing three Union vessels on the high seas, she was taken to Shreveport when New Orleans fell and later took part in the capture of the USS *Indianola*. In April, 1865, she made a heroic dash from Shreveport in a desperate attempt to break out of the blockaded Mississippi River, but was cornered by the USS *Richmond* below New Orleans where she was beached and fired by her captain to prevent capture.¹⁰⁰

Idled by events of the war, veteran Upper Red River steamboat captains John Smoker and Tom Moore busied themselves at Shreveport in the construction of the CSS *Missouri* (700 tons estimated). The finished gunboat, with single recessed paddle wheel and armor made of railroad rail, was described as "very formidable in appearance." The vessel was purchased by the Confederacy, with cotton rafted down the Sabine River and taken by Tom Moore from there to Matamoros, Mexico, and eventually Liverpool, England. He returned to Shreveport via Havana, Cuba, with a handsome profit for both him and his partner.¹⁰¹

While the farthest reaches of the Upper Red River were closed, there was activity from Shreveport upstream to the raft as the bayous flowing into the river proved to be ideal places to hide steamboats pending the end of hostilities. The *Twilight* (335 tons) was hidden there for the duration, as was the *General Quitman* (615 tons). The *B. L. Hodge* (289 tons) also was hidden in the Upper Red River after serving as a Confederate troop transport earlier in the war. In April, 1865, she was called upon to fulfill a historic mission when Confederate Gen. E. Kirby Smith, commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department, contracted for her to descend to the mouth of Red River and bring back to Shreveport the United States commissioners to whom he surrendered.¹⁰²

Above the Great Raft, prewar prosperity had evaporated. The newspapers themselves told the story with their half-sheet pages and absence of traditional front-page banners. Gone, too, were reports of river conditions, joyous notices of steamboat arrivals, and advertisement of goods being shipped in. At the end of the war the editor of the *Northern Standard* at Clarksville, Texas, wrote with some degree of hopefulness that "The dimensions of the old Standard are very modest now, but fortune favoring, may become larger ere long." He also noted, "Cotton is (not) King,' but cotton is the product which will soon . . . relieve the present destitution," and he implored readers, "whether they have negros [*sic*] or not," to plant

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at least a little cotton as well as food crops. Little did he know of the prosperity that awaited the people of the Upper Red River valley.¹⁰³

"This was my first offense at steamboating," jokingly wrote Capt. Matt Scovell of his first voyage to the Upper Red River in the fall of 1865. "[F]reight ran from what would now be considered percent to petty larceny." It was not until 1870 that a government appropriation was made to clear the Great Raft, which was accomplished in the spring of the following year. Even using the Twelve Mile Bayou route, however, steamboats began to ply the waters of the Upper Red River immediately after the Civil War and soon became as "thick as leaves on ambrosia."¹⁰⁴

What had happened was an explosive growth in the cultivation of cotton on the Upper Red River combined with shipping stockpiles of that commodity that had been stored during the war years. The Choctaw census of 1867, for example, placed the cotton production for the Choctaw Nation alone at 211,595 bales for that year.¹⁰⁵ It was reported that the banks of the Red River from the mouth of the Kiamichi 1,000 river-miles downstream were lined with cotton bales and the only question asked of a steamboat captain was "How many bales will you take?" The cost of shipping a bale of cotton from the Upper Red to New Orleans rose from a prewar high of five dollars to fifty dollars per bale.¹⁰⁶

Commensurate with the increase in freight rates came an increase in wages, which for steamboat pilots, who often received higher wages than captains, rose from a prewar figure of \$50 to \$100 per month on the Upper Red to as much as \$1,700 during the postwar boom. The wages of first mates and engineers went from around \$75 per month to \$500 with the \$20 to \$40 previously paid lowly deckhands rising proportionately.¹⁰⁷

The usual complement of a 200-ton steamboat was about twenty-six persons. In order of steamboat hierarchy, they consisted of one or two pilots, the captain (frequently a part-owner), mate, clerk, assistant clerk (also referred to as a "mud clerk" having the job of accounting for freight ashore), engineer, striker (assistant engineer), carpenter, several firemen, a cook, several stewards and chambermaids, and eight or ten deckhands. The officers of the vessels were predominantly native-born Americans with the majority of deckhands being immigrant Irish and Germans. The job of fireman (charged with fueling the boilers) was frequently held by African-Americans, and they almost always occupied the positions of cabin stewards and chambermaids. However, on the Upper Red River there is at least one known instance of an American Indian

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serving as a steward, and the marriages of Anglo steamboatmen to Choctaw or Chickasaw women were not unknown.¹⁰⁸

Following emancipation, freedmen often found employment on steamboats, a situational carry-over from the antebellum period when it was common practice to hire out slaves to work on steamboats, at least those working the southern trades. The contract between steamboat captain and slave owner was not taken lightly, because, once contracted for, the steamboat master was responsible for the death, injury, or "loss" of a slave due to negligence. Immigrant steamboat workers were of less concern, which gave rise to the oft-repeated story of a passenger running to the pilothouse to notify the captain that one of the deckhands had fallen overboard. At first scanning the river in deep concern, the captain soon focused his attention forward and continued steaming with the comment, "It's just a damned Irishman."¹⁰⁹

Throughout the nineteenth century steamboats carried goods into and out of the Upper Red River, but sometimes they also carried cargoes that were greeted with less than enthusiasm. Aside from the usual river news, newspapers carried reports of typhoid, smallpox, yellow fever, and other diseases striking towns up and down the river. The result was often panic, with steamboats coming from infected towns denied landing or sometimes worse.

The yellow fever epidemic of 1873 that struck Shreveport is illustrative of the situation. A steamboat bound for the Upper Red River landed at the all-but-deserted city where African-American crewmen, considered to be immune to the disease, left the vessel to take higher paying jobs caring for stricken townspeople. Other members of the crew were stricken themselves, leaving only the captain and an African-American cook to operate the boat. The captain and cook met the problem of securing deckhands by carting aboard by wheelbarrow drunken Irishmen they found on the levee. Allowing the Irishmen to sleep it off, the cook, acting as engineer, and captain got under way. The next morning the bewildered Irishmen wondered what they were doing on the boat, and it was explained to them that they had signed on as deckhands the night before. They seemed perfectly pleased with the arrangement after being fed breakfast and allowed to open accounts in the boat's bar.¹¹⁰

Epidemics along the river sometimes made for scenes ranging from the tense to the macabre. Upon hearing of an epidemic upriver, fifty to seventy-five armed men at Alexandria, Louisiana, met a steamboat headed downstream and refused to let it land. The crew eventually persuaded the people to give them medicine and food

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before quickly departing for more hospitable climes. Epidemics also gave rise to the shipping of items usually manufactured locally. Deprived of labor with which to build their own, Shreveport had shipped in hundreds of coffins to bury their dead. During a stop for wood, the captain went ashore to view the gruesome sight of his steamboat stacked from guards to boiler deck with coffins and a hearse swinging from the derricks on the forecastle.¹¹¹

By the early 1870s economic conditions stabilized. The price of shipping a bale of cotton from the Upper Red River to New Orleans dropped to five dollars per bale with one dollar per 100 pounds charged for freight shipped upriver. Declining shipping rates and increased competition among the steamboat operators led to the establishment of the New Orleans and Red River Transportation Company. As with the vast majority of steamboat companies that existed throughout the steamboat era, the boats were individually owned. A board of directors controlled the traffic, with profits going into a general fund and pro-rated according to the rating of each boat. The concern was succeeded some years later by the Red River Line, a true joint-stock venture operating until 1902.

Coincident with the drop in shipping rates and formation of steamboat companies was the beginning of a decline in the tonnages of steamboats operating on the Upper Red River. Adjusting for an 1865 change in tonnage calculation, the average Upper Red River boat dropped from 131 tons during the late antebellum years to 116 tons for the years 1865 to 1880. The drop was more dramatic for the period 1880 and later with the average steamboat on the Upper Red being 57 tons.¹¹²

Despite the decrease in average tonnage of Upper Red River steamboats, the postbellum period saw more boats and also some of the largest. Due in part to the lifting of length restrictions by underwriters and the surpassing of antebellum cotton production, some rather large boats plied the Upper Red. The largest of all known steamboats to enter the Upper Red, aside from those hiding from Union forces during the Civil War, was the *Lizzie Hopkins* (453 tons) built in 1867.¹¹³

The decline in the tonnage of average Upper Red River boats and the formation of steamboat companies was indicative of the changes taking place in steamboat operations on all the western rivers during the late nineteenth century. The change was brought about by railroads that had vastly expanded operations following the Civil War. Prior to the conflict, the Mississippi River was touched at only a few places by rail lines; by the 1880s the situation

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had changed dramatically as one railroad after another built roads paralleling that watercourse. Though steamboats initially held an advantage with lower freight rates, railroads steadily decreased shipping costs through better equipment, improved efficiency, and increased track mileage. The years of the railroad barons and unbridled capitalism also saw unfair competition in the form of rate cutting during boating seasons, followed by rate hikes during periods of low water when steamboats could not operate.¹¹⁴

The patronage of steamboats by passengers also began to wane as more and more communities farther from navigable rivers began to acquire railroad service. The danger, noise, filth, and constant jolting of early rail passenger service gradually gave way to increased speed, comfort, service, and safety. Rail passengers avoided the frustration of long periods of idleness while stranded at some remote location due to low water or exposure to the much-feared explosion of steamboat boilers, one of the most horrendous of man-made accidents of the entire nineteenth century.¹¹⁵

Portents to the end of steamboat transportation came early though almost unnoticed to the Upper Red River valley. Prior to the Civil War a railroad was built from Jefferson, Texas, a major steamboat terminal, to the vicinity of Shreveport. Ironically, the tracks were torn up during the conflict for use as armor on the Confederate gunboat *William H. Webb*, which had found temporary sanctuary at Shreveport.¹¹⁶ By 1881, however, a branch of the Texas and Pacific Railroad had extended track from New Orleans to Baton Rouge, then ascended the Red River valley to Shreveport. Within five years of the line's completion, cotton shipped by steamboats to New Orleans from the Red River region had dropped by two-thirds, while rail imports into the country soared.¹¹⁷

Earlier, in 1872, the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad crossed the Red River from the north into Denison, Texas, and in 1876 the Texas and Pacific Railroad paralleled the Red River from Sherman, Texas, to Texarkana. By the late 1880s the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad extended south across Red River into Paris, Texas, with a branch later built into Arkansas. The completion of those transportation links sounded the death knell of steamboating on the Upper Red River.¹¹⁸

While the railroads provided adequate transportation to and from many communities, others remained isolated, especially those located close to the Red River away from rail lines. As the larger steamboats disappeared from the western rivers, smaller ones of 100 tons or less took their place. By 1909 no through packet lines

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from places such as Shreveport to New Orleans were in existence, and steamboat transportation became limited to hauling produce and passengers from isolated river communities to local market towns. Often referred to as “cottonseed boats” due to the carrying of that low-valued commodity, they performed yeoman service in which the wave of a handkerchief brought about a landing and a trip to the nearest commercial center.

Even as the steamboat was passing, some residents of the Upper Red River held out hope for a revival of steamboat transportation. In 1908 the *Fort Towson Enterprise* reported on a “waterways congress” called by the Deep Gulf Waterways Association. Bitterly attacking the railroads and their high freight rates, the newspaper joined in support for the building of a canal paralleling the Mississippi River from the Great Lakes to New Orleans.¹¹⁹

Although doomed as a viable means of transportation, steamboating on the Upper Red River died a lingering death as a few boats held on well into the twentieth century. One boat, the *Kingfisher* (30 tons estimated), was operating as a commercial fishing boat on the Upper Red as late as 1905.¹²⁰ Another small steamboat was converted to a grocery store and plied the Kiamichi and Red Rivers of Oklahoma until about 1920, providing goods to isolated residents along those rivers.¹²¹ The last known steamboat to run the waters of the Upper Red River was the *Hustler* (52 tons). Built in Shreveport in 1926, she was optimistically advertised as a “packet” in a pretentious attempt to cling to the faded glory of the steamboat era. She was last reported assisting with snag removal in 1927.¹²²

Steamboating in a highly modified form survived the demise of the classic steamboat era and lives on to the present day in the towboat trade. Actually pushing rather than towing, diesel-powered boats move bulk cargoes by barge from ports far inland to shipping ports on the coasts. Gone, however, are the pioneering men and boats that ranged far inland to open new lands and keep them supplied with the necessities of civilization.

Commercial navigation on the Upper Red River lasted little more than a century. During that time, however, it served as an instrument of commerce and communication, bringing undreamed-of prosperity to the Upper Red River valley. It could be argued that this mode of transportation was instrumental in establishing an economic base that would have been delayed until the coming of the railroads many decades later, if at all. Indeed, flatboats, keelboats, and steamboats fought their way through the waters of the Upper

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Red to help establish an economy that might have made the building of railroads into the area economically unattractive.

Today, the Upper Red River is often viewed more as a physical obstacle and nuisance rather than the major highway of commerce and culture it once was. Many residents of the valley remain unaware of the important role early navigation of the Upper Red played in establishing the economic base of the region and in welding together divergent cultures in common cause. Though its origins are often only dimly recognized, there still exists a common bond among those living along the stream, one that often transcends political and cultural boundaries.

ENDNOTES

* Keith Tolman is curator of the Oklahoma Historical Society's Fort Towson Historic Site. He has been involved in the Red River Wreck Project conducting historical research and excavation of an 1830s steamboat discovered in the Oklahoma waters of the Red River. He holds an M.A. in the History of the American Southwest from the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond.

¹ N. Philip Norman, "The Red River of the South: Historical Aspects Pertaining to the Navigation of the River, with Tabulated List of Steamboats, Steamboat Masters, and Way Landings," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, 25 (April, 1942): 397.

² *Ibid.*

³ W. W. Wittenbury, "Red and Ouachita River Reminiscences," *Cincinnati (Ohio) Commercial*, October 25, 1870, photocopy, Archives, Louisiana State University, Shreveport (hereafter cited as LSU and Wittenbury Reminiscences). The articles were written by retired steamboat master W. W. Wittenbury of Cincinnati, who plied the Upper Red River between 1840 and the Civil War. He wrote the pieces as a rebuttal to complaints of steamboat interests in New Orleans that "outsiders" were taking away the business of "southern" boats on the Red River. Wittenbury, through his vivid, detailed and often amusing articles, makes a very convincing case that it was actually boats from towns along the Ohio River valley who pioneered steam navigation on the Upper Red River.

⁴ Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 61–65.

Ecure Fabre, literally French for "Factory Bluff," was the site of a factory (trading post) licensed by the government to trade with Indians, obviously on a bluff overlooking the Ouachita River. It was the future site of Camden, Arkansas.

⁵ Louis C. Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History* (1949; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1993), 68. This source is almost universally accepted by historians, mechanical engineers, and steamboat enthusiasts as the definitive work on western river steamboat navigation. The exhaustive work details virtually every technological, economic, and social aspect of steamboat operation in the American West.

⁶ Tonnage is a measurement of volume rather than weight. By way of example, a ton would have the same tonnage value whether it were composed of feathers or of lead. Tonnage values have remained relatively stable since the American Colonial period and are easily calculated by using an established formula.

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⁷ Joseph B. Thoburn and Muriel H. Wright, *Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People* (4 vols., New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc, 1929), 1: 78–79.

The bateaux of English and French Colonial North America was a long, deep, flat-bottomed, double-ended vessel, measuring from seventeen to twenty feet or more in length, and was known to have been in use in Louisiana during French Colonial period. It is probable that such vessels found their way to the Upper Red River, though direct evidence for their use in the area is lacking.

⁸ A. W. Neville, *The Red River Valley Then and Now: Stories of People and Events in the Red River Valley during the First Hundred Years of Its Settlement* (Paris: North Texas Publishing Company, 1948), 197.

Pecan Point was more a region than a specific geographical location, at least until the late 1820s when the name was applied only to the Texas side of Red River. It was an area south of present-day Idabel, Oklahoma, and encompassed a loose group of settlers and traders living on both sides of the Red.

⁹ *Ibid.* See also Rex W. Strickland, “Miller County, Arkansas Territory, The Frontier That Men Forgot,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 17 (March, 1940): 21–22.

George Washington Wright was born in Tennessee on December 11, 1809. In 1831 he purchased Kiomatia Plantation across from the mouth of the Kiamichi River. During the Texas Revolution in 1836 he served with Texas forces at Lavaca Bay and probably at San Jacinto. With the Mexican defeat, Wright served as a delegate to the first congress of the Republic of Texas. He also served in the third congress and in the last Texas congress before annexation. Selling his Kiomatia Plantation to his brother Travis Wright in 1839, he entered into business in Paris, Texas, where he also held public office. A hard-line Whig and a Unionist, in 1861 he voted against Texas secession at the Lamar County Secession Convention. When Texas seceded, however, he supported the Confederacy, providing for the arming of Texas units in his capacity as provost marshal for Lamar County. He died August 2, 1877 in Paris, Texas.

Travis George Wright, brother to George Wright, was born in Tennessee on October 9, 1806. He opened trading establishments first at Jonesborough, Texas, south of present-day Valliant, Oklahoma, and later at Clarksville and Paris. Active in expeditions against raiding Indians, in 1834 he set out to locate a nephew who had been abducted. Near present-day Kingston, Oklahoma, Wright encountered the ill-fated Dodge-Leavenworth expedition out of Fort Gibson. When General Leavenworth died, it was Wright who volunteered to take Leavenworth’s body to Natchitoches, Louisiana, for shipment to New York. In 1839 he acquired Kiomatia Plantation from his brother and a few years later contracted to freight supplies from Fort Towson to Fort Phantom Hill, Texas. He also financed the establishment of the Clarksville, Texas, *Northern Standard*, the first newspaper in northeastern Texas. An old-line Whig, at the outbreak of the Civil War he declined a commission as brigadier general of militia but later served as Confederate quartermaster and provost marshal in Red River County. He died on August 30, 1875, at his Kiomatia Plantation

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 274–276.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 276–278.

¹² Grant Foreman, “River Navigation in the Early Southwest,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 15 (June, 1928): 47–49.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁴ Patrick B. McGuigan, “Bulwark of the American Frontier: A History of Fort Towson,” *Early Military Forts and Posts in Oklahoma*, ed. Odie B. Faulk, Kenny A.

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Franks, and Paul F. Lambert (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1978), 10–11. See also Foreman, “River Navigation in the Early Southwest,” 47.

Fort Smith and Fort Towson were connected by the Military Road that ran southwest from Fort Smith over the Winding Stair and Kiamichi Mountains, then roughly parallel to the Kiamichi River to Fort Towson. The road from Fort Jesup, Louisiana, ran along the east side of Red River from Natchitoches to Fulton, Arkansas, then west to Fort Towson. Freight bound overland for Fort Towson was brought up river by keelboat or steamboat to either Grand Ecore or Campti, Louisiana, where it was transferred from boat to wagon.

¹⁵ Norman, “Red River of the South,” 400. See also Raymond E. White, “Cotton Ginning in Texas to 1861,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 61 (October, 1957): 257–259, 264–265.

Freighting cotton overland was an expensive and time-consuming endeavor, but frequently the only way planters in the Southwest could get their product to market before the advent of the steamboat. The journey often took several weeks and involved either significant investment in wagons and stock or multiple trips. A wagon load usually consisted of six bales of cotton drawn by a like number yoke of oxen. For each additional bale carried, an additional yoke of oxen was added. Cotton also was shipped to market by keelboat, flatboat, or log raft. Such vessels varied widely in cargo capacity from those capable of transporting 30 bales to larger ones carrying as many as 200 bales.

¹⁶ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 9–13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10–13.

¹⁸ “Captain Henry Miller Shreve: Inventor, Adventurer, and Visionary,” Shreve Family, article on-line, accessed February 12, 2002, available from <[http://shreve.mcls.kent.edu/ShreveFamily/FamousShreves/Henrymil. . . /HMShreveBiography.html](http://shreve.mcls.kent.edu/ShreveFamily/FamousShreves/Henrymil.../HMShreveBiography.html)>; INTERNET.

¹⁹ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 51–52.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17–18. Actually, Shreve made the same New Orleans-to-Louisville trip in the *Enterprise* two years earlier. The times between ports were nearly the same for each boat, but the *Washington* was a much larger and grander vessel, presaging the floating palaces that would come onto the scene in coming decades. Both trips received wide news coverage, but the 1817 voyage of the *Washington* has probably gotten more historical attention due to the size and elegance of the boat itself.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 20–21, 25–26.

²² *Ibid.*, 23.

²³ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁴ Foreman, “River Navigation in the Early Southwest,” 47.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 47–48.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934, 1961), 69–71; Foreman, *Indian Removal*, 225.

Many Choctaws and Chickasaws were transported at least part of the way to Oklahoma by steamboat. Most were brought up the Arkansas River to Little Rock and traveled overland from there. Others were taken farther upriver to Fort Smith, Fort Coffee, and the Choctaw settlement at Skullyville. Those who did not settle in that area trekked overland to the Red River valley. Others who came by steamboat were brought up the Ouachita River to Camden, Arkansas, making a 200-mile journey overland from that point to the vicinity of Fort Towson, one of the main dispersal

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points. No evidence has been found that indicates any Choctaws or Chickasaws were brought directly to the Upper Red River valley by water transport.

²⁸ Foreman, *Indian Removal*, 213 n.

The military road from Fort Smith to Fort Towson was a major route used by those headed for Texas both before and after the Texas Revolution. On October 30, 1844, the Clarksville, Texas, *Northern Standard* published a report that 225 wagons headed for Texas were encountered between Fayetteville, Arkansas, and Doaksville in the Choctaw Nation. The same newspaper on June 21, 1845, reported a train of wagons passing through Clarksville, Texas, every couple of days headed for the settlements on the Trinity River.

²⁹ Debo, *Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, 59–60.

³⁰ Freeland Nash, "Robert M. Jones," photocopy of unpublished manuscript, April, 24, 1995, 2–14, vertical files, Fort Towson Historic Site, Fort Towson, Oklahoma (hereafter cited as FTHS).

³¹ *Ibid.* The mansion at Rose Hill Plantation was destroyed by fire in 1911. The site, including the Jones family cemetery, was acquired in 1941 by the Oklahoma Historical Society, which has maintained it as a historical and archaeological resource since that time.

³² Diane Everman and Annetta Cheek, "Rose Hill Plantation," photocopy of National Register of Historic Places Nomination, February, 1979, 2, vertical files, FTHS.

³³ For a detailed account of the complicated political history of "Old" Miller County, Arkansas, see Rex W. Strickland, "Miller County, Arkansas Territory: The Frontier That Men Forgot," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 17 (March and June, 1940), and 19 (March, 1941).

³⁴ For information concerning mentioned individuals and plantations see separate entries in *The Handbook of Texas Online* available from <<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu>>; INTERNET.

Holland Coffee was a prominent figure in early Oklahoma and Texas Red River history. Born in Kentucky in 1807, he set up a trading firm in Fort Smith, Arkansas, in 1829 with Silas Colville and others which outfitted trading and trapping expeditions to the Red River valley of western Oklahoma. During the early 1830s he established trading posts on Cache Creek and Walnut Bayou in Oklahoma and at Preston Bend in Texas. He was instrumental in facilitating a number of treaties with American Indian tribes and was appointed an Indian agent for the Republic of Texas by Pres. Sam Houston. Coffee was stabbed to death in 1846 following an altercation with Charles Ashton Galloway, a trader from Fort Washita.

³⁵ A. W. Neville, *The History of Lamar County (Texas)* (Paris: North Texas Publishing Company, 1937), 10–11, 242–243. See also Pat B. Clark, *Clarksville and Old Red River County* (Dallas: Matis, Van Nort and Company, 1937), 10–12, 13–19.

Stephen F. Austin visited Jonesborough in an effort to locate a suitable route for settlers bound for Austin's Colony in southern Texas. Houston entered Texas for the first time in 1832 crossing at Jonesborough and, according to local tradition, spent his first night in Texas at the extant home of Travis Wright at Kiomatia Plantation. Crockett, after traveling from Washington, Arkansas, and visiting Fort Towson, crossed from the Choctaw Nation into Texas at Jonesborough. He hunted and explored the Red River valley on the Texas side as far west as Choctaw Bayou near present Denison and in a letter to his children in Tennessee announced his intention of settling in the area following his fateful journey to southern Texas.

³⁶ Lois Garver, "Benjamin Rush Milam," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 38 (October, 1934): 80–102.

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³⁷ *Ibid.*, 105–111. Wavell was the grandfather of World War II British Field Marshal Sir Archibald Wavell.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 107–116.

The much-lauded noble attitude of the Mexican government concerning the abolishment of slavery is something of a red herring. In the end, Mexican law merely prohibited the further introduction of slaves into Mexico, something the United States had done years before, and freed children born to those already in bondage. In the vein of nineteenth-century liberalism, freedom of the Mexican people was often freedom in name only. Landless and largely illiterate, the peasantry remained under the thumb of the landed ruling class.

³⁹ Muriel H. Wright, "Early Navigation and Commerce Along the Arkansas and Red Rivers in Oklahoma," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 8 (March, 1930): 77–78.

There seems to exist confusion on the part of some historians concerning the *Enterprise* built by Henry Shreve in 1814 and the boat purchased by Milam for the 1831 trip above the raft to Fort Towson. They were, in fact, different steamboats.

⁴⁰ Muriel Wright, "Early Navigation and Commerce," 78 n.

⁴¹ Lois Garver, "Benjamin Rush Milam," The Handbook of Texas Online, accessed February 20, 2002, available from <<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu>>; INTERNET.

⁴² Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 193–198.

⁴³ *Ibid.* See also Foreman, "River Navigation in the Early Southwest," 50.

⁴⁴ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 198. See also Wright, "Early Navigation and Commerce," 81.

⁴⁵ Foreman, "River Navigation in the Early Southwest," 51.

⁴⁶ Wittenbury Reminiscences, October 11, October 25, 1870.

The Twelve Mile Bayou route was one of a number of bypasses around the Great Raft that were used over the years. However, by the early 1830s it became the most used route to the exclusion of almost all others.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, October 28, 30, November 11, 1870.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Steamboat boilers were constructed with internal flues that carried hot gases from the firebox through the boiler section proper on the way to the chimneys. The use of flues allowed for the more efficient transfer of heat necessary for changing water into steam. A collapsed flue was a very serious accident sometimes resulting in the loss of the vessel. It was not, however, considered as serious as the catastrophic failure and consequent explosion of a boiler.

⁵¹ Foreman, "River Navigation in the Early Southwest," 53.

⁵² Thoburn and Wright, *Oklahoma: A History*, 82.

⁵³ Wittenbury Reminiscences, October 11, 1870.

⁵⁴ Donald Jackson, *Voyages of the Steamboat Yellow Stone* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), Appendix A, 160–162.

The *Yellow Stone* is one of the few early western rivers steamboats for which detailed specifications exist. The boat was built for the Upper Missouri fur trade by Pierre Chouteau, Jr., of the American Fur Company and was noted for transporting personages such as George Catlin, Karl Bodmer, and Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuweid. Some scholars believe the steamboat was the same *Yellow Stone* that during the Texas Revolution transported Houston's troops prior to the Battle of San Jacinto and carried the defeated Mexican dictator Santa Anna to Galveston, Texas, following his capture.

⁵⁵ Wittenbury Reminiscences, October 17, December 4, 1870.

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⁵⁶ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 68–69.

Other major centers of steamboat construction were Cincinnati, Ohio; Wheeling, West Virginia; Louisville and Knoxville, Kentucky; and St. Louis, Missouri. Steamboats also were constructed on the Upper Red River at Shreveport, Louisiana; Berlin, Texas; and Fulton, Arkansas. It should be noted, however, that steamboat construction outside of the major steamboat centers almost always consisted of the building of wooden hulls in which were placed engines, boilers, and machinery salvaged from other boats.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 69, 76.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 95–100.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁶¹ (Clarksville, Texas) *Northern Standard*, January 28, February 4, 1843.

⁶² Thoburn and Wright, *Oklahoma: A History*, Appendix VIII-2, 784.

⁶³ (Doaksville, Choctaw Nation) *Choctaw Intelligencer*, June 13, 1850.

⁶⁴ *Northern Standard*, January 14, 1843.

⁶⁵ Wittenbury Reminiscences, June 4, 1871.

⁶⁶ *Northern Standard*, April 27, 1843, February 6, 1845.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, March 2, 1843.

⁶⁸ Wright, "Early Navigation and Commerce," 86.

⁶⁹ Wittenbury Reminiscences, October 26, 1870.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 123–126.

The evolution of the steamboat engine is a detailed and technical subject far beyond the scope of this paper. The cited source provides a detailed account of the mechanical development of steamboat propulsion.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 131, 143.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁷⁴ Norman, "Red River of the South," 403–404

⁷⁵ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 154–158.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁷⁷ Wittenbury Reminiscences, December 26, 1870.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, November 11, 1870.

⁷⁹ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 265–266.

Forestry professionals have stated to the author that during the 1800s trees were much less plentiful and the Red River valley of southeastern Oklahoma was more open than at present. They attribute this to Indians burning off tracts of land in an effort to induce buffalo to move into the area from the plains farther west. The vast quantities of wood consumed by hundreds of steamboats coupled with the clearing of land for agricultural purposes seems to provide an alternative explanation for the reduction of trees during the nineteenth century.

⁸⁰ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 167–175.

While sidewheel steamboats predominated during the antebellum years, stern-wheelers gained increased acceptance from that time on; by the early 1900s they were almost the only type being used on the Upper Red River. Sternwheel boats were especially useful on tributaries such as the Upper Red River due to their economy of operation and shallow draft.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 89–91, 392–393, 419–420, 451.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 90–91.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 62, 91, 105.

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⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 100–103 110.

⁸⁵ Wittenbury Reminiscences, October 28, 1870, January 8, 1871. See also Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 400, 404.

Interestingly, the term “stateroom” is derived from the practice of naming the passenger compartments on Henry Shreve’s early steamboat *Washington* after the states of the Union.

⁸⁶ Norman, “Red River of the South,” 515–526.

⁸⁷ Frederick Way, Jr., comp., *Way’s Packet Directory, 1848–1994: Passenger Steamboats of the Mississippi River System Since the Advent of Photography in Mid-Continent America*, rev. ed. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1983). See also Norman, “Red River of the South.” See listing for individual steamboats in the cited sources.

Other chroniclers of Upper Red River navigation have given the number of boats on the Upper Red as “more than a hundred.” The problem with compiling a comprehensive list of Upper Red River boats is that the list must constantly be updated as previously unknown Red River boats appear in obscure sources. The author has documented some 200 steamboats on the Upper Red River, exclusive of those plying Twelve Mile Bayou from Shreveport to Jefferson, Texas. Perhaps indicative of the actual total number is the fact that he has documented in excess of 40 steamboats sunk between Shreveport, Louisiana, and modern Interstate 35.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 449.

⁸⁹ Wittenbury Reminiscences, October 30, November 3, 1870.

⁹⁰ Way, *Way’s Packet Directory*, 171, 385, 469.

⁹¹ Wittenbury Reminiscences, October 25, 1870.

⁹² *Ibid.*, December 28, 1870.

⁹³ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, Table 29, 664.

⁹⁴ J. Richard Steffy, “The Thirteen Colonies: English Settlers and Seafarers,” *Ships and Shipwrecks of the Americas: A History Based on Underwater Archaeology*, ed. George F. Bass (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 110–111.

The standard measure of 100 cubic feet used for computing tonnage has remained fairly standard from the American Colonial period to the present.

⁹⁵ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 553–561.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Northern Standard*, April 20, 1861.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, March 23, April 13, 1861.

⁹⁹ Way, *Way’s Packet Directory*. See also Norman, “Red River of the South.” See individual listings of vessels in cited sources.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Wittenbury Reminiscences, November 27, 1870. See also individual listing for the CSS *Missouri* in *Way’s Packet Directory* and Norman’s “Red River of the South.”

¹⁰² Way, *Way’s Packet Directory*. See also Norman, “Red River of the South.”

¹⁰³ *Northern Standard*, June 10, 1865.

¹⁰⁴ M. L. Scovell, “Reminiscences of Captain M. L. Scovell: Steamboat Captain On Red River: Palmy Days on the Red River,” photocopy of unpublished manuscript, ca. 1900, 1, Archives, LSU, Shreveport (hereafter cited as Scovell Reminiscences).

M. L. “Matt” Scovell was the youngest of three brothers involved in steamboat transportation on the Upper Red River. After being mustered out of the Union army in 1865 he joined in New Orleans his brothers William T. “Tilley” and Noah Scovell, who had seen service in the Confederate army. The two older brothers had extensive experience as steamboat captains on the Upper Red River before the war and brought Matt on as a clerk. In 1875 he became a licensed steamboat master and plied the

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waters of the Upper Red until about 1890. The three brothers had a close business association with the Kouns family and its Red River Packet Company.

¹⁰⁵ Debo, *Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, 114.

¹⁰⁶ Scovell Reminiscences, "Palmy Days On Red River," 1. See also Wittenbury Reminiscences, November 29, December 4, 1870.

¹⁰⁷ Scovell Reminiscences, "Palmy Days On Red River," 1. See also Wittenbury Reminiscences, November 29, December 4, 1870, and Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 445, 465.

¹⁰⁸ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 442, 446–451. See also Wittenbury Reminiscences, November 6, 1870, March 2, 1871.

¹⁰⁹ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 448–450, 457. The story has been repeated with minor variations in a number of sources.

¹¹⁰ Scovell Reminiscences, "The Yellow Fever Epidemic in Shreveport, 1873," 5.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹² Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, Appendix 643.

In 1865 Congress revised the method for computing vessel tonnage to include enclosed space above the main deck capable of being utilized for freight or accommodations. This resulted in a roughly 45 percent increase in tonnage for steamboats. This figure was used in adjusting for comparisons of antebellum Upper Red River steamboats with those of the postbellum years. The number of vessels used in the sample of Upper Red River steamboats was ten for the period 1865 to 1880 and eleven for the period from 1880 on.

¹¹³ Way, *Way's Packet Directory*, 291. See also Norman, "Red River of the South," 472.

¹¹⁴ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 589–593.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 491–492.

¹¹⁶ Scovell Reminiscences, "Palmy Days on the Red River," 1.

¹¹⁷ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 589.

¹¹⁸ Neville, *Red River Then and Now*, 198–199.

¹¹⁹ *Fort Towson (Oklahoma) Enterprise*, October 16, 1908.

¹²⁰ Way, *Way's Packet Directory*, 272.

¹²¹ Buck Sheets, interview by author, Sawyer, Oklahoma, February 22, 2002.

¹²² Norman, "Red River of the South," 459.