

The First Steamboat Voyage On The Western Waters

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When reading to the Maryland Historical Society, on a former occasion, "A Lost Chapter in the History of the Steamboat," I had occasion to refer to the first voyage of a vessel of that description on the Western waters, calling it a Romance in itself. The desire of the members present seemed to be to hear it told. I now propose to tell it. And, first, a word or two to explain how I come to be the narrator.

Mr. Nicholas J. Roosevelt, the hero of the Lost Chapter, married my eldest sister in the year 1809; and she made the voyage with her husband in 1811. Its events were the stories I listened to in my childhood. The impressions then made have never been effaced. They were deepened, when my father removed his family to Pittsburg, in 1813, having become interested with Livingston and Fulton in the steam navigation of the Ohio. Here he superintended the building of the Buffalo, the fourth of the steamboats launched at Pittsburg. The second and third were the Vesuvius and Aetna, already in course of construction when the Buffalo was commenced, and completed before it. My playmates were the boys who had seen the New Orleans leave for the lower Mississippi, only two years before. Our play ground, on Saturday afternoons, was often the shipyard where she had been built, at the foot of Boyd's Hill, on the banks of the Monongahela. Steam navigation was the one engrossing thought of Pittsburg in those days. Even children were interested in the discussion of it. My memory, therefore, supplies me with some of the matter of my story. I am in possession, besides, of my father's letter books of that date. His correspondence with Mr. Fulton was voluminous, and abounded in minute detail. No name is mentioned in it much more frequently than Roosevelt's, - no experience is oftener referred to. Mrs. Roosevelt, too, is still alive, in a green old age; and, in view of the present paper, I have refreshed my memory of the stories I listened to at her knee, by comparing it with her's. It is in this way I have come to venture on the present narrative. I, at one time, thought of hunting up the newspapers of the day; but a busy professional life has not permitted me to take the time necessary for the search. I am satisfied, however, that, should they be consulted, nothing will be found inconsistent with what I now set down.

Before coming to the voyage itself, it may not be uninteresting to state some matters germane to the subject, by way of preface.

Prior to the introduction of steamboats on the Western waters, the means of transportation thereon consisted of keel boats, barges and flat boats. Keel boats and barges ascended, as well as descended, the stream. The flat boat was an unwieldy box, and was broken up, for the lumber it contained, on its arrival at the place of destination. The keel boat was long and slender, sharp fore and aft, with a narrow gangway just within the gunwale, for the boatmen as they poled or warped up the stream, when not aided by the eddies that made their oars available. When the keel boat was covered with a low house, lengthwise, between the gangways, it was dignified with the name of "barge." The only claim of the flat boat, or "broad horn," to rank as a vessel

was due to the fact that it floated upon water and was used as a vehicle for transportation. Keel boats, barges, and flat boats had prodigious steering oars, and oars of the same dimensions were hung on fixed pivots on the sides of the last named, by which the shapeless and cumbrous contrivance was, in some sort, managed. Ignorant of anything better, the people of the West were satisfied with these appliances of trade in 1810.

Whether steam could be employed on the Western rivers was a question, that its success between New York and Albany was not regarded as having entirely solved: and after the idea had been suggested of building a boat at Pittsburgh, to ply between Natchez and New Orleans, it was considered necessary that investigations should be made, as to the currents of the rivers to be navigated, in regard to the new system. These investigations, Mr. Roosevelt undertook, with the understanding, that if his report were favorable, Chancellor Livingston, Mr. Fulton and himself, were to be equally interested in the undertaking. The Chancellor and Fulton were to supply the capital, and Roosevelt was to superintend the building of the boat and engine. For this duty, as has already been shown in the Lost Chapter, the latter was peculiarly qualified. He accordingly repaired to Pittsburg, in May, 1809, accompanied by his wife, to whom he had been but recently married. The only means of conveyance to New Orleans, where his investigations were to terminate, were the keel boats, barges, and flat boats already described. None of those then in use were suited to Mr. Roosevelt's purpose; and as the accuracy of his examination, rather than the speed of the voyage, was important, he determined to build a flat boat which should contain all necessary comforts for himself and wife, and float with the current of the Ohio and Mississippi from Pittsburg to New Orleans. This he accordingly did; and, with the exception of some three weeks passed on shore at Louisville, and some nine or ten days in a row boat between Natchez and New Orleans, the flat boat was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Roosevelt for the next six months.

The following reference to the voyage of exploration contained in a recent letter from Mrs. Roosevelt to the writer, may not be uninteresting:

"The journey in the flat boat commenced at Pittsburg, where Mr. Roosevelt had it built; a huge box containing a comfortable bed room, dining room, pantry, and a room in front for the crew, with a fireplace where the cooking was done. The top of the boat was flat, with seats and an awning. We had on board a pilot, three hands and a man cook. We always stopped at night lashing the boat to the shore. The row boat was a large one, in which Mr. Roosevelt went out constantly with two or three of the men to ascertain the rapidity of the ripples or current. It was in this row boat we went from Natchez to New Orleans with the same crew."

"We reached New Orleans about the 1st December, and took passage for New York in the first vessel we found ready to sail. We had a terrible voyage of a month, with a sick captain. The yellow fever was on board. A passenger, a nephew of General Wilkinson, died with it. Mr. Roosevelt and myself were taken off the ship by a pilot boat and landed at Old Point Comfort. From thence we went to New York by stage, reaching there the middle of January, 1810, after an absence of nine months.

"Once, while in the flat boat, on the Mississippi, Mr. Roosevelt was aroused in the night by seeing two Indians in our sleeping room, calling for whiskey, when Mr. Roosevelt had to get up and give it to them before he could induce them to leave the boat."

Cincinnati, Louisville and Natchez, were then the only places of even the smallest note between Pittsburg and New Orleans. Furnished with letters of introduction to their leading men, the travellers were kindly received and most hospitably entertained. Mr. Roosevelt's explanations were listened to respectfully, as he stated his purpose in visiting the West, and narrated what steam had accomplished on the Eastern rivers. But he was evidently regarded as a sanguine enthusiast, engaged in an impracticable undertaking. From no one individual did he receive a word of encouragement. Nor was this incredulity confined to the gentlemen he met in society; it extended to the pilots and boatmen, who, passing their lives on the Ohio and Mississippi, possessed the practical information that he wanted. They heard what he had to say of the experience of Fulton and Livingston, and then pointed to the turbid and whirling waters of the great river as a conclusive answer to all his reasoning. That steam would ever be able to resist them, they could not be made to understand. Nothing, however, shook the confidence of Mr. Roosevelt. He had made up his mind that steam was to do the work of the Western world, and his present visit was but for the purpose of ascertaining how best the work could be done upon its streams. The Ohio and Mississippi were problems that he had undertaken to study; nor did he leave them until he had mastered them in all their bearings. He gauged them: he measured their velocity at different seasons; he obtained all the statistical information within his reach, and formed a judgment with respect to the future development of the country West of the Alleghenies that has since been amply corroborated. Not only did he do this, but finding coal on the banks of the Ohio, he purchased and opened mines of the mineral; and so confident was he of the success of the project on hand, that he caused supplies of the fuel to be heaped upon the shore, in anticipation of the wants of a steamboat whose keel had yet to be laid, and whose very existence was to depend upon the impression that his report might make upon the Capitalists, without whose aid the plan would, for the present at least, have to be abandoned.

Arriving in New York in the middle of January, 1810, Mr. Roosevelt's report, bearing on its face evidence of the thoroughness of his examination, impressed Fulton and Livingston with his own convictions; and in the spring of that year he returned to Pittsburg to superintend the building of the first steamboat that was launched on the Western waters.

I am not aware that this preliminary exploration has ever been noticed in any of the published histories of steam navigation. It has seemed to me to be of sufficient importance to have a place in the present communication. It appears to us now, with our present knowledge of the Ohio and Mississippi, to have been a work of supererogation: but with the information then possessed geographically, it would have been most imprudent to have dispensed with it.

The exploring voyage proper ended with the arrival of the flat boat at Natchez, but Mrs. Roosevelt's account of the subsequent boat voyage to New Orleans is, perhaps, worth adding, if only for the sake of the comparison that it suggests:

"By placing," says Mrs. Roosevelt, "a large travelling trunk between the stern of the boat and the first seat, it made a level place on which we could spread a Buffalo robe to sleep on. Our pilot, who had lived all his life as a boatman on these waters, assured us that there would be no difficulty in finding lodgings for the few nights we should be out. But it appeared that the inhabitants on the river had been so often imposed upon by travellers whom they had received

into their houses, that they refused all applications. A pouring rain came up one evening and we tried to reach Baton Rouge, which we did at nine at night. It was a miserable place at that time, with one wretched public house; yet we felt thankful that we had found a shelter from the storm. But when I was shown into our sleeping room, I wished myself on hoard the boat. It was a forlorn little place opening out of the bar room, which was filled with tipsy men looking like cutthroats. The room had one window opening into a stable yard, but which had neither shutters nor fastenings. Its furniture was a single chair and a dirty bed. We threw our cloaks on the bed and laid down to rest, but not to sleep, for the fighting and the noise in the bar room prevented that. We rose at the dawn of day and reached the boat, feeling thankful we had not been murdered in the night.

It is many, many years ago: but I can still recall that night of fright. Our second night on shore was passed with an old French couple who allowed us to spread our Buffalo skins on the floor before a fine large fire, where we felt safe, though disturbed once or twice during the night by the old people coming into the room we occupied, and kneeling before a crucifix which stood upon a shelf. They were Roman Catholics.

"The time actually occupied by the voyage from Natchez to New Orleans in the row boat was nine days. Two of these nights were passed, as above described, under a roof; four in the boat, partly drawn out of the water, and hearing the alligators scratch on the sides, taking it for a log; when a knock with a cane would alarm them, and they would splash down into the water: the remaining three nights were passed on a buffalo robe on the sand beach, fancying, every moment, that something terrible might happen before morning."

Pittsburg, when Mr. Roosevelt took up his residence there in 1811, had but recently commenced the career which has now entitled it to the name of the Birmingham of America, The main body of the town was built on the right bank of the Monongahela, and extended from the point where the junction with the Allegany takes place, for perhaps three-quarters of a mile up the former stream, to within a short distance of the mouth of a small creek, with low grounds on either side, that here debouched into the river. On the Allegany side, which was liable to overflow, there were but few buildings in 1811. Close by the creek and immediately under a lofty bluff, called Boyd's hill, was an iron foundry, known as Beelen's foundry; and in immediate proximity to this was the keel of Mr. Roosevelt's vessel laid. The future antiquarian may, perhaps, find satisfaction in knowing that the Depot of the Pittsburg and Connellsville Railroad now occupies the ground I am speaking of.

The size and plan of the first steamboat had been determined on in New York, and had been furnished by Mr. Fulton. It was to be 116 feet in length, with twenty feet beam. The engine was to have a 34 inch cylinder, and the boiler and other parts of the machine were to be in proportion. The first thing to be done was to obtain the timber to build the boat; and for this purpose men were sent into the forest, there to find the necessary ribs, and knees, and beams — transport them to the Monongahela, and raft them to the shipyard. White pine was the only material for planking that could be obtained without a delay that was inadmissible. The sawing that was required, was done in the old fashioned and now long forgotten saw pits of 1811. Boat builders, accustomed to construct the barges of that day, could be obtained in Pittsburg: but a shipbuilder and the mechanics required in the machinery department, had to be brought from New York. Under these

circumstances, Mr. Roosevelt began the work. One of the first troubles that annoyed him was a rise in the Monongahela, when the waters backed into his shipyard and set all his materials, that were buoyant, afloat. This occurred again and again; and on one occasion it seemed not improbable that the steamboat would be lifted from its ways and launched before its time. With my own recollection of the remnants of the rude shops in which Mr. Roosevelt had the engine built, some four years after they had been abandoned, the wonder to this day is, how he could have accomplished what he did. At length, however, all difficulties were overcome by steady perseverance, and the boat was launched — and called, from the place of her ultimate destination, the *New Orleans*. It cost in the neighborhood of \$38,000.

As the *New Orleans* approached completion, and when it came to be known that Mrs. Roosevelt intended to accompany her husband on the voyage, the numerous friends she had made in Pittsburg united in endeavoring to dissuade her from what they regarded as utter folly, if not absolute madness. Her husband was appealed to. The criticisms that had been freely applied to the boat by the crowds of visitors to the shipyard, were now transferred to the conduct of the builder. He was told that he had no right to peril his wife's life, however reckless he might be of his own. Mrs. Roosevelt, too, expected before long to become a mother; and this was held to enhance the offence which the good people of Pittsburg fancied he was committing. But the wife believed in her husband; and, in the latter part of September, 1811, the *New Orleans*, after a short experimental trip up the Monongahela, commenced her voyage.

There were two cabins, one aft, for ladies, and a larger one forward for gentlemen. In the former there were four berths. It was comfortably furnished. Of this, Mrs. Roosevelt took possession. Mr. Roosevelt and herself were the only passengers. There was a captain, an engineer named Baker, Andrew Jack, the pilot, six hands, two female servants, a man waiter, a cook, and an immense Newfoundland dog, named Tiger. Thus equipped, the *New Orleans* began the voyage which changed the relations of the West, — which may almost be said to have changed its destiny.

The people of Pittsburg turned out in mass and lined the banks of the Monongahela to witness the departure of the Steamboat; and shout after shout rent the air, and handkerchiefs were waived, and hats thrown up by way of "God speed" to the voyagers, as the anchor was raised, and heading up stream for a short distance, a wide circuit brought the *New Orleans* on her proper course, and, steam and current aiding, she disappeared behind the first headlands on the right bank of the Ohio. [The *New Orleans* departed from Pittsburgh on Oct. 20, 1811.]

Too much excited to sleep, Mr. Roosevelt and his wife passed the greater part of the first night on deck, and watched the shore, covered then with an almost unbroken forest, as reach after reach, and bend after bend, were passed at a speed of from eight to ten miles an hour. The regular working of the engine, the ample supply of steam, the uniformity of the speed, inspired at last a confidence that quieted the nervous apprehension of the travellers. Mr. Jack, the pilot, delighted with the facility with which the vessel was steered, and at a speed to which he was so little accustomed, ceased to express misgivings and became as sanguine as Mr. Roosevelt himself in regard to the success of the voyage. The very crew of unimaginative men were excited with the novelty of the situation; and when the following morning assembled all hands on deck to return the cheers of a village whose inhabitants had seen the boat approaching down a long reach in the

river, and turned out to greet her as she sped by, — it probably shone upon as jolly a set as ever floated on the Ohio.

On the seventh day after leaving Pittsburg, the *New Orleans* rounded to opposite Cincinnati, and cast anchor in the stream. [Contemporary newspaper accounts record her arrival at Cincinnati on Oct. 27, 1811, but she did not stop there.] Levees and wharf boats were things unknown in 1811. Here, as at Pittsburg, the whole town seemed to have assembled on the bank, and many of the acquaintances of the former visit came off in small boats. "Well, you are as good as your word; you have visited us in a steamboat," they said; "but we see you for the last time. Your boat may go down the river; but, as to coming up it, the very idea is an absurd one." This was one of those occasions on which seeing was not believing. The keel boatmen, whose shoulders had hardened as they pressed their poles for many a weary mile against the current, shook their heads as they crowded around the strange visitor, and bandied river with with the crew that had been selected from their own calling for the first voyage. Some flatboatmen, whose ungainly arks the steamboat had passed a short distance above the town, and who now floated by with the current, seemed to have a better opinion of the new comer, and proposed a tow in case they were again overtaken. But as to the boat's returning, all agreed that that could never be.

The stay at Cincinnati was brief, only long enough to take in a supply of wood for the voyage to Louisville, which was reached on the night of the fourth day after leaving [Cincinnati]. It was midnight on the first of October, 1811, that the *New Orleans* dropped anchor opposite the town. [According to other reports the *New Orleans* arrived in Louisville on Oct. 28, 1811.] There was a brilliant moon. It was as light as day almost, and no one on board had retired. The roar of the escaping steam, then heard for the first time at the place where, now, its echoes are unceasing, roused the population, and, late as it was, crowds came rushing to the bank of the river to learn the cause of the unwonted uproar. A letter now before me, written by one of those on board, at the time, records the fact — that there were those who insisted that the comet of 1811 had fallen into the Ohio and had produced the hubbub!

The morning after the arrival of the vessel at Louisville, Mr. Roosevelt's acquaintances and others came on board, and here the same things were said that had been said at Cincinnati. Congratulations at having descended the river were, without exception, accompanied by regrets that it was the first and last time a steamboat would be seen above the falls of the Ohio. Still, so far, certainly, Mr. Roosevelt's promises had been fulfilled; and there was a public dinner given to him a few days after his arrival. Here any number of complimentary toasts were drunk, and the usual amount of good feeling on such occasions was manifested. *Sed revo care gradum*, ["but she can't go back upstream again."] however, was still the burden of the song.

Not to be outdone in hospitality, Mr. Roosevelt invited his hosts to dine on board the *New Orleans*, which still lay anchored opposite the town. The company met in the forward or gentlemen's cabin, and the feast was at its height, when suddenly there were heard unwonted rumblings, accompanied by a very perceptible motion in the vessel. The company had but one idea. The *New Orleans* had escaped from her anchor, and was drifting towards the Falls, to the certain destruction of all on board. There was an instant and simultaneous rush to the upper deck, when the company found, that, instead of drifting towards the Falls of the Ohio, the *New Orleans* was making good headway up the river and would soon leave Louisville in the distance

down stream. As the engine warmed to its work, and the steam blew off at the safety valve, the speed increased. Mr. Roosevelt, of course, had provided this mode of convincing his incredulous guests, and their surprise and delight may readily be imagined. After going up the river for a few miles, the *New Orleans* returned to her anchorage.

It had been intended, on leaving Pittsburg, to proceed as rapidly as possible to New Orleans, to place the boat on the route for which it was designed, between that city and Natchez. It was found, however, on reaching Louisville, that there was not a sufficient depth of water on the Falls of the Ohio to permit the vessel to pass over them in safety. Nothing was to be done, therefore, but to wait, as patiently as possible, for a rise in the river. That this delay might, as far as practicable, be utilized, to the extent, at least, of convincing the incredulous Cincinnatians, the *New Orleans* returned to that city, where she was greeted with an enthusiasm that exceeded, even, what was displayed on her descent from Pittsburgh**. No one doubted now. In 1832, I was detained for several days in Cincinnati, on my return from a visit to the South. There were numbers, then alive, who remembered the first advent of steam, and from some of these I learned what is here stated in regard to the public feeling at the time — the universal incredulity of the first visit — the unbounded confidence inspired by the second.

**She arrived at Cincinnati on November 27th, and returned to Louisville about a week later.

Returning to Louisville, the great interest of all on board the *New Orleans* centred in watching the rise in the Ohio. Rain in the upper country was what was wanted, and of this there seemed small promise. There was nothing in the aspect of the Heavens that indicated it. On the contrary, there was a dull misty sky with-out a cloud — a leaden atmosphere that weighed upon the spirits, and the meaning of which would have been better understood at Naples under the shadow of Vesuvius, than on the banks of the Ohio. The sun, when it rose, looked like a globe of red hot iron, whose color brightened at noon, to resume the same look when it sank below the horizon. All day long, one might have gazed on it with unflinching eyes. The air was still and heated; and a sense of weariness was the characteristic of the hours as they wore slowly by. At last, and when a nervous impatience affected every one on board, it was announced, one morning, that there had been a rise in the river during the night. There was another announcement of a very different character. Mrs. Roosevelt had, for the second time, become a mother*.

*This was Henry Latrobe Roosevelt, born in Louisville on October 30, 1811.

The events of the voyage were certainly multiplying. Fortunately, this addition to the passengers happened when the *New Orleans* was necessarily detained in port. Morning after morning, the rise in the river during the night was reported; and finally, in the last week in November, it was ascertained that the depth of water in the shallowest portion of the Falls, exceeded by five inches the draught of the boat. It was a narrow margin. But the rise had ceased: there was no telegraph in those days to tell hourly what was the weather in the country drained by the Ohio; and Mr. Roosevelt, assuring himself personally of the condition of the Falls, determined to take the responsibility and go over them if he could. It was an anxious time. All hands were on deck. Mrs. Roosevelt, whom her husband would willingly have left behind to join him below the Falls, refused to remain on shore, and stood near the stern. The two pilots, for an extra one had been engaged for the passage through the rapids, took their places in the bow. The anchor was

weighed. To get into the Indiana channel, which was the best, a wide circuit had to be made bringing her head down stream, completing which, the *New Orleans* began the descent. Steerage way depended upon her speed exceeding that of the current,. The faster she could be made to go, the easier it would be to guide her. All the steam the boiler would bear was put upon her. The safety valve shrieked: The wheels revolved faster than they had ever done before; and the vessel, speaking figuratively, fairly flew away from the crowds collected to witness her departure from Louisville. [*This was on December 8, 1811.] Instinctively, each one on board now grasped the nearest object, and with bated breath awaited the result. Black ledges of rock appeared only to disappear as the *New Orleans* flashed by them. The waters whirled and eddied, and threw their spray upon the deck, as a more rapid descent caused the vessel to pitch forward to what at times seemed inevitable destruction. Not a word was spoken. The pilots directed the men at the helm by motions of their hands. Even the great Newfoundland dog seemed affected by the apprehension of danger, and came and crouched at Mrs. Roosevelt's feet. The tension on the nervous system was too great to be long sustained. Fortunately, the passage was soon made; and, with feelings of profound gratitude to the Almighty, at the successful issue of the adventure, on the part of both Mr. Roosevelt and his wife, the *New Orleans* rounded to in safety below the Falls. There was still the same leaden sky — the same dim sun during the day — the same starless night; — but the great difficulty had been overcome, and it was believed that there would now, be nothing but plain sailing to the port of destination. It was yet to be seen how far the expectations of those on board, in this respect, would be realized.

Hitherto, the voyage had been one of pleasure. Nothing had marred the enjoyment of the travellers. The receptions at Louisville and Cincinnati had been great events. But, now, were to come, to use the words of the letter already referred to, "those days of horror." The comet of 1811, had disappeared, and was followed by the earthquake of that year, of which the atmospheric phenomena just mentioned were the prognostics; and the earthquake accompanied the *New Orleans* far on her way down the Mississippi.

In the language of a very intelligent traveller of those days: "Many things conspired to make the year 1811, the *annus mirabilis* of the West. During the earlier months, the waters of many of the great rivers overflowed their banks to a vast extent, and the whole country was in many parts covered from bluff to bluff. Unprecedented sickness followed. A spirit of change and recklessness seemed to pervade the very inhabitants of the forest. A countless multitude of squirrels, obeying some great and universal impulse, which none can know but the Spirit that gave them being, left their reckless and gambolling life, and their ancient places of re-treat in the North, and were seen pressing forward by tens of thousands in a deep and solid phalanx to the South. No obstacles seemed to check their extraordinary and concerted movement. The word had been given them to go forth and they obeyed it, though multitudes perished in the broad Ohio which lay in their path. The splendid comet of that year long continued to shed its twilight over the forests, and as the autumn drew to a close, the whole valley of the Mississippi, from the Missouri to the Gulf, was shaken to its centre by continued earthquakes." — C. J. Latrobe's *Rambler in North America*.

The first shock that was observed was felt on board the *New Orleans* while she lay at anchor after passing the Falls. The effect was as though the vessel had been in motion and had suddenly grounded. The cable shook and trembled, and many on board experienced for the moment a

nausea resembling sea sickness. It was a little while before they could realize the presence of the dread visitor. It was wholly unexpected. The shocks succeeded each other during the night. When morning came, the voyage was resumed; and, while under way, the jar of the machinery, the monotonous beating of the wheels and the steady progress of the vessel, prevented the disturbance from being noticed.

It has already been mentioned, that, in his voyage of exploration, Mr. Roosevelt had found coal on the Ohio, and that he had caused mines to be opened in anticipation. Their value was now realized; and, when he reached them on his way down the river, he took on board as much coal as he could find room for. [This was at the present site of Tell City, Perry County, Indiana.] Some miles above the mouth of the Ohio, the diminished speed of the current indicated a rise in the Mississippi. This was found to be the case. The bottom lands on either shore were under water, and there was every sign of an unwonted Hooch Canoes came and went among the boles of the trees. Sometimes, the Indians attempted to approach the steamboat; and, again, fled on its approach. The Chickasaws still occupied that part of the State of Tennessee lying below the mouth of the Ohio. On one occasion, uttered no word as the New Orleans went by. Before the travellers had been many days on the Mississippi, they fancied, as they looked at each other, that they had become haggard. Mrs. Roosevelt records "that she lived in a constant fright, unable to sleep or sew, or read."

Sometimes, Indians would join the wood choppers; and occasionally one would be able to converse in English with the men. From these it was learned that the steamboat was called the "Penelore," or "Fire Canoe," and was supposed to have some affinity with the Comet that had preceded the earthquake — the sparks from the chimney of the boat being likened to the train of the celestial visitant. Again, they would attribute the smoky atmosphere to the steamer, and the rumbling of the earth to the beating of the waters by the fast revolving paddles. To the native inhabitants of the boundless forest that lined the river banks, the coming of the first steamboat was an omen of evil; and as it was the precursor of their own expulsion from their ancient homes, no wonder they continued, for years, to regard all steamboats with awe. As late as 1834, when the emigration of the Chickasaws to their new homes, west of the river, took place, hundreds refused to trust themselves in such conveyances, but preferred making their long and weary pilgrimage on foot.

One of the most uncomfortable incidents of the voyage was the confusion of the pilot, who became alarmed, and declared that he was lost; so great had been the changes in the channel caused by the earthquake. Where he had expected to find deep water, roots and stumps projected above the surface. Tall trees that had been guides had disappeared. Islands had changed their shapes. Cut-offs had been made through what was forest land when he saw it last. Still, there was no choice but to keep on. There was no place to stop at. There was no possibility of turning back. In the first part of the voyage when the steamboat rounded to at night, she was made fast to the river bank: but when it was seen, that trees would, occasionally topple and fall over, as the ground beneath them was shaken or gave way, it was thought safer to stop at the foot of an island, which might serve as a break water, taking care the trees were far enough from the boat to obviate apprehension from them. Once, however, when such a fastening had been made and a plank carried ashore, and the wood chopping had been finished at an earlier hour than usual, a new experience was had. No shock had been felt during the day, and Mrs. Roosevelt anticipated

a quiet rest. In this, however, she was disappointed. All night long she was disturbed by the jar and noise produced by hard objects grating against the planking outside the boat. At times severe blows were struck that caused the vessel to tremble through its entire length. Then there would follow a continuous scratching mingled with the gurgling sound of water. Driftwood had caused sounds of the same sort before, and it was thought that driftwood was again busy in producing them. With morning, however, came the true explanation. The island had disappeared; and it was the disintegrated fragments sweeping down the river, that had struck the vessel from time to time and caused the noises that Mrs. Roosevelt had been disturbed by. At first, it was supposed, that the *New Orleans* had been borne along by the current: but the pilot pointed to land marks on the banks which proved that it was the island that had disappeared while the steamboat had kept its place. Where the island had been, there was now a broad reach of the river: and when the hawser was cut, for it was found impossible otherwise to free the vessel, the pilot was utterly at a loss which way to steer. Some flat boats were hailed, but they too were lost. Their main effort was, by dint of their long oars to keep where the current was the strongest. This was, evidently, the best plan for the *New Orleans*. It was not without its peculiar risks, however, In the bends, where the rushing waters struck the shore, to whirl around the curve, and glance off to form a bend in an opposite, direction, the deepest water was immediately under the bank; and here the trees, undermined by the current, would be seen at times, to sink into the stream, often erect until the waters covered their topmost twigs — sometimes, falling against each other, interlacing their great arms, as strong men might do, struggling for life when drowning — sometimes, they fell outward into the water; and, then, woe to the vessel that happened to be near them in the bend. This danger, however, steam enabled the *New Orleans* to avoid. Referring to it all, it is not wonderful that the survivor of the voyage still speaks of it as "one of anxiety and terror."

As the *New Orleans* descended the river it passed out of the region of the earthquake, and the principal inconvenience was the number of shoals and snags, and sawyers. These were all safely passed however, and the vessel came in sight of Natchez, and rounded to opposite the landing place. Expecting to remain here for a day or two, the engineer had allowed his fires to go down, so that when the boat turned its head up stream, it lost headway altogether, and was being carried down by the current far below the intended landing. Thousands were assembled on the bluff and at the foot of it; and for a moment it would have seemed that the *New Orleans* had achieved what she had done, so far, only that she might be overcome at last. Fresh fuel however was added, — the engine was stopped that steam might accumulate, presently the safety valve lifted — a few turns of the wheels steadied the boat, — a few more gave her headway; and, overcoming even the Mississippi, she gained the shore amid shouts of exultation and applause.

The romance of the voyage ended at Natchez, where the same hospitalities were extended to Mr. and Mrs. Roosevelt, that had been enjoyed at Louisville. From thence to New Orleans, there was no occurrence worthy of note. The *Vesuvius* and the *Aetna* followed the *New Orleans*, and they in their turn were followed by others, and again by others, until now, the traveller on the Mississippi is never, or, rarely, if ever, out of sight of the white and feathery plumes that accompany the boats of the Western waters as their high pressure engines urge them on their way.

Although forming no part of the story of the voyage proper, yet, as this has been called a Romance, and all romances end, or should end in a marriage, the incident was not wanting here:

for the Captain of the boat, falling in love with Mrs. Roosevelt's maid, prosecuted his suit so successfully as to find himself an accepted lover when the New Orleans reached Natchez; and a clergyman being sent for, a wedding marked the arrival of the boat at the chief city of the Mississippi.

And this is the story of the "First Voyage of the First Steam-boat on the Western waters" — another link in the chain that should have connected the name of Roosevelt with the names of Fulton and Livingston among the benefactors of mankind

*J. H. B. Latrobe wrote this paper sixty years after the events occurred — partly from memory, partly from hearsay in childhood, and partly from letters written long afterwards, which easily accounts for the inaccuracies encountered therein.

The biographical material below was taken from Scribner's *Dictionary of American Biography*, and Lamb's *Biographical History of the United States*.

NICHOLAS J. ROOSEVELT, inventor and engineer, was born in New York City, Dec. 27, 1767, son of Jacobus and Annetje Bogard Roosevelt. He was a descendant of Klaes Martensen Van Roosevelt, who came from the Netherlands to New Amsterdam (now New York City) in 1649.

His father was a shopkeeper in New York and served in the New York colonial troops as a private. Nicholas Roosevelt received a good education and developed a great love for things mechanical. As early as 1782 when he was living on the farm of Joseph Oosterhault, near Esopus, N. Y., he built a model boat, propelled by paddle wheels over the sides. The wheels were turned by hickory and whalebone springs which unwound a cord wrapped around the wheel axes.

After the evacuation of New York by the British Roosevelt returned there to pursue his mechanical interests. In 1793 he became a Director of the New Jersey Copper Mine Association, a company organized to rework the abandoned Schuylcr Copper Mine, an enterprise which was given up eighteen months later. Meanwhile he had become much interested in steam engines and their manufacture, and succeeded in inducing his associates to purchase some land on Second River, now Belleville, New Jersey, where he erected a metal foundry and shop. Following the completion of these works, called Soho after the establishment of Boulton and Watt in England, Roosevelt's associates retired and left him to carry on the enterprise along. Sanguine and ambitious, he at first had some success building engines for various purposes, including those for the Philadelphia Water Works. He also contracted to erect a rolling mill to supply the federal government with copper, drawn and rolled, for six 74-gun ships which were to be built, the motive power having been planned by Robert Fulton. After he had gone to great expense to complete this contract, a change in administration caused the abandonment of the ship's construction and a consequent great financial loss to Roosevelt.

About 1797 he entered into an agreement with Robert R. Livingston and John Stevens to build a steamboat as a joint venture, the engines for which were to be fabricated in his foundry. The work of building this experimental boat was slow and tedious and it was not until the middle of 1798 that steam was applied to the machinery. At first the boat was not successful, but on a trial trip, Oct. 21, 1798, after improvements had been made, the Palacca, as she had been named, attained a speed of three miles an hour in still water. During the construction of this vessel Roosevelt tried to induce Livingston to use paddle wheels over the sides, but Livingston would have nothing to do with such a plan. In 1801 Livingston was appointed U. S. Minister to France and the whole undertaking was dropped. By this time Roosevelt's business was in such chaotic condition that he was compelled to abandon his works entirely.

In 1809 he became associated with Robert Fulton in the proposed introduction of steamboats on Western rivers and in 1811 built at Pittsburgh the steamboat New Orleans. In this pioneer craft he descended the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers from Pittsburgh to New Orleans. In the belief he was entitled to a patent for use of vertical paddle wheels, he now applied for such a patent, which was granted to him on December 1, 1814. The following January he applied to the New Jersey

Legislature for protection as the inventor of such paddle wheels, but the Legislature decided, primarily because of the objections of Fulton and Livingston, that "it was inexpedient to make any special provisions in connection with the matter in controversy before the body," and there the disputed matter rested. Roosevelt soon retired from active work and resided for the remainder of his life with his family in Skaneateles, Onondaga County, New York. He married in Washington, D. C. on November 15, 1808, Lydia Latrobe, daughter of the elder Benjamin Henry Latrobe, (1764-1820) of Baltimore, Maryland, by whom he had nine children, six of whom died in their early youth. Nicholas J. Roosevelt died on July 30, 1854.

JOHN HAZLEHURST BONEVAL LATROBE, son of Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Sr. (1764-1820) and Mary Elizabeth Hazlehurst, was born in Philadelphia May 4, 1803. He was a writer, lawyer, engineer, inventor and public servant. He received his early education at Georgetown College, Washington, D.C., and at St. Mary's College, Baltimore. From 1818 to 1821 he was a cadet at West Point, in what was then the only school of engineering in the country, but resigned after the death of his father shortly before the end of his fourth year. He returned to Baltimore and entered the law office of Robert Goodloe Harper, and was admitted to the bar in 1824. In 1827 he helped to draft the charter of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, and in 1828 he was retained by the railroad to secure its right-of-way from Point of Rocks to Williamsport, Maryland. From that time until his death he was connected with the Baltimore & Ohio, and attained wide recognition as a railroad lawyer. He argued many important cases in the State and Federal Supreme Courts, and was in special demand as a patent lawyer, partly because of the engineering training he had received at West Point. His technical understanding enabled him to recognize at once the value of the Morse telegraph and to recommend it to the President of the Baltimore & Ohio, who granted Morse the privilege of stringing the first line between Baltimore and Washington along the railroad's right-of-way. He devised, among other things, the popular Latrobe Stove, which fitted into the fireplace and heated not only the room in which it was installed, but also the room above. In 1868 he published *The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, Personal Recollections*. He served as President of the Maryland Historical Society from 1871 until 1891. He married first on November 29, 1828, Margaret Stuart of Baltimore, who died two years later leaving one child. He married second on December 6, 1832, Charlotte Virginia Claiborne, of Mississippi, by whom he had seven children.