

STEAMBOATING IN THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI FUR TRADE¹

The fur-trader on the upper Mississippi created a lucrative steamboat traffic. Supplies and equipment for traders and goods to be used in the Indian trade formed the principal upstream cargo and large quantities of furs and peltries were shipped downstream. In 1822, a year before the "Virginia" made the first steamboat trip to Fort Snelling, the United States factory system was abolished and a marked activity was noted in the fur trade. "Those formerly engaged in it," according to a St. Louis newspaper, "have increased their capital and extended their enterprize, many new firms have engaged in it, and others are preparing to do so. It is computed that a thousand men, chiefly from this place, are now employed in this trade on the waters of the Missouri, and half that number on the Upper Mississippi."²

Trading posts were planted along the upper Mississippi and its tributaries at strategic points. Those on the Mississippi were usually established at the confluence of a tributary stream such as the Des Moines, the Skunk, the Iowa, the Rock, the Fever, the Wisconsin, the Chippewa, and the St. Peter's, or Minnesota, rivers. Late in the fall of 1824 Thomas Forsyth, Indian agent at Rock Island, notified John C. Calhoun, secretary of war, and William Clark, then superintendent of Indian affairs, of the appointment of six licensed traders in his district. David G. Bates and Amos Farrar were granted permits to trade with the Sauk, Foxes, and Winnebago at the Fever River settlements; Russell Farnham received a license to trade with the Sauk

¹A paper read at the annual meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association at Lincoln, Nebraska, April 28, 1932. *Ed.*

²Giacomo C. Beltrami, *A Pilgrimage in Europe and America*, 2: 127 (London, 1828); *Niles' Weekly Register*, 23: 53 (September 28, 1822).

and Foxes at Flint Hills on the site of Burlington, Iowa; Maurice Blondeau procured the right to traffic with the same Indians at Dirt Lodge on the Des Moines River; George Davenport obtained the privilege of bartering with the Sauk, Foxes, and Winnebago at Rock Island; and Antoine Gautier, at the special request of the Winnebago, was located at a point fifty miles east of Davenport's post on the Rock River.³

Few places exhibited a greater activity than the region about the Falls of St. Anthony. In 1826 Lawrence Taliaferro, Indian agent at Fort Snelling, reported that "The number of Locations made by me under the act of Congress of the 26 May 1824 on the waters of the Mississippi alone, amount to seven in number, viz one at the mouth of Chippeway River, one at the Falls of St Croix, one on Crow Island, one at Sandy Lake, one at Leaf Lake, one at Leach Lake and one at Red Lake." At the same time ten other posts of the Columbia, the Cheyenne American, and the American Fur companies were located at strategic points within Taliaferro's jurisdiction. Fort Snelling served as the entrepôt for most of these posts and the seasonal catch was shipped downstream.⁴

Each decade witnessed the abandonment of posts along the Mississippi as the northerly tide of immigration gradually pushed back the fur-traders. The country which Giacomo C. Beltrami described as a wasteland in 1823 seemed to be becoming populous to Caleb Atwater in 1829; what was considered a wilderness by Captain Frederick Marryat in 1837, had become a thriving settled area when Fredrika Bremer visited it in 1851. By the turn of the half cen-

³ Thomas Forsyth to John C. Calhoun, October 11, 1824; to William Clark, December 13, 1824, in Reuben G. Thwaites, "The Fur-Trade in Wisconsin, 1812-1825," in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 20: 356-358, 363-365 (1911).

⁴ Taliaferro to Colonel Josiah Snelling, February 8, 1826, in Taliaferro Letter Book, A. These letter books are in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

tury the posts which formerly extended from Galena almost to St. Louis had disappeared and St. Paul and Prairie du Chien alone remained the chief fur centers on the upper Mississippi.⁵

A steadily receding fur frontier is indicated by the activity of the steamboats that plied regularly from St. Louis to Clarkesville, Louisiana, Hannibal, Quincy, and often, after 1823, as far as the Lower Rapids near the present site of Keokuk. The headlong rush to the lead mines in 1827 drove a sharp wedge through the frontier line to a point four hundred miles above St. Louis. Measured by the number of steamboat arrivals in a given year, St. Paul was about twenty-two years behind Galena. In 1828 there were 99 steamboat arrivals recorded at Galena; St. Paul had 85 in 1849 and 104 the following year. In 1838 the soldiers at Fort Snelling probably were astonished to see two steamboats, the "Burlington" and the "Brazil," lying beneath the fort; in 1857 a fleet of 22 craft lay moored at the St. Paul levee. A total of 965 trips were made by the 99 steamboats that docked at St. Paul in the latter year.⁶

Abundant and colorful information about upper Mississippi steamboats is hidden away in the correspondence between Hercules L. Dousman and Henry H. Sibley. The former was born at Mackinac in 1800 and educated in New Jersey; he entered a mercantile house in New York in 1818, but returned to Mackinac two years later to assist his father, a fur-trader. In 1826 he removed to Prairie du

⁵ Beltrami, *Pilgrimage*, 2: 127-137, 149-195; Caleb Atwater, *A Description of the Antiquities Discovered in the Western Country*, 210-240 (Columbus, 1833); Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World*, 2: 3-84 (New York, 1853); Frederick Marryat, *A Diary in America*, 110-126 (New York, 1839).

⁶ *Missouri Republican* (St. Louis), March 15, April 19, 1827; *Niles' Weekly Register*, 36: 130 (April 19, 1827); *Daily Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), April 17, 29, May 2, 1857; November 18, 1858; Captain Russell Blakeley, "History of the Discovery of the Mississippi and the Advent of Commerce in Minnesota," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 8: 377. A file of the *Missouri Republican* is in the library of the Missouri Historical Society at St. Louis.

Chien and became an agent of the American Fur Company and a partner of Joseph Rolette. When the latter died in 1844 Dousman put the final stroke to his reputation as a shrewd business man by marrying his partner's widow. Steamboats puffed up to the wharf at Dousman's home, "Chateau Brilliante," discharging cargoes of goods and luxuries for Wisconsin's wealthiest citizen before the Civil War. Dousman was the outstanding representative of the American Fur Company on the upper Mississippi.⁷

Sibley, another representative of the American Fur Company, was located after 1834 at Mendota, directly across the Minnesota River from Fort Snelling. He played an important rôle in the district about the Falls of St. Anthony. Franklin Steele, Joseph Laframboise, Martin McLeod, Alexis Bailly, and Norman W. Kittson also were important characters in the fur trade of this district. Dousman, Sibley, and Steele were especially interested in encouraging steamboating and each held shares in upper Mississippi craft.⁸

While no record is known which would indicate that the "Virginia" and the "Rambler" in 1823 or the "Mandan" and the "Indiana" in 1824 carried the employees or cargoes of the fur companies to the upper Mississippi, it is altogether possible that they did. On April 2, 1825, Captain David G. Bates took the "Rufus Putnam" to Fort Snelling. Four weeks later this craft carried goods to the Columbia Fur Company's post at Land's End, about a mile above the fort on the Minnesota River. The "Rufus Putnam" was the first steamboat known to have carried such supplies upstream to Fort Snelling as well as the first to ascend the Minnesota River. The boat, which was built in 1822 by Caleb Beston at Marietta, Ohio, for the firm of Green and Dodge, was a side-wheeler of 108 tons with

⁷ Thwaites, in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 20:304.

⁸ J. Fletcher Williams, "Henry Hastings Sibley: A Memoir," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 6:262-267.

high pressure engines. It ran on the Muskingum River for a year or two and was the first boat to ascend that stream to Zanesville, Ohio. Captain Bates bought it in the spring of 1825 and ran it in the upper Mississippi trade until 1826, when it was snagged near Port Chicot.⁹

St. Louis was the entrepôt for the fur trade on the upper Mississippi, as well as on the Missouri. "The American Fur Company," noted Atwater in 1829, "have here a large establishment, and the furs, skins and peltry cannot amount to less than one million dollars annually, which are brought down the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. . . . The Indian goods sold by this company, all come from England, and are of the best quality."¹⁰ Not all the furs from the upper Mississippi went to St. Louis, however. Before 1840 the trading posts below Prairie du Chien shipped their pelts downstream, but the seasonal catch of the American Fur Company on the Wisconsin and Minnesota rivers was concentrated in Dousman's warehouse, counted and sorted, loaded on keel or Durham boats, and forwarded to New York by way of the Wisconsin and Fox rivers and Green Bay. This was a difficult course to travel, for the boats were so badly battered by snags and sandbars on the Fox and Wisconsin rivers and from being dragged across the portage at Fort Winnebago that they were generally worthless at the close of the first season. Provisions were often wasted and spoiled. Moreover, the route lessened the receipts of upper Mississippi steamboats, since they usually carried the furs only from St. Peter's, at the mouth of the Minnesota River, to Prairie du Chien and they were

⁹ Edward D. Neill, "Occurrences in and around Fort Snelling, from 1819 to 1840," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 2: 110; George B. Merrick, "Steamboats and Steamboatmen of the Upper Mississippi," in *Burlington [Iowa] Post*, July 20, 1918; James Hall, *The West: Its Commerce and Navigation*, 160 (Cincinnati, 1848); Taliaferro Journal, March 31, 1826. These manuscript journals are in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. A file of the *Burlington Post* is in the possession of the State Historical Society of Iowa.

¹⁰Atwater, *Antiquities*, 219.

obliged to depend on lead and miscellaneous cargoes of freight for the remainder of the trip to St. Louis. Each year it became more apparent to traders on the upper Mississippi that St. Louis was the logical point from which to ship furs eastward.

In 1835 Dousman informed Ramsay Crooks, president of the American Fur Company, that it was almost impossible to ship pelts by way of Green Bay because of the damage to the furs and the great expense involved in transporting them over this route. In order to reduce the cost of transportation, Dousman proposed that Prairie du Chien be made the entrepôt for the inspection of furs, that he be granted the "privilege of the St. Louis markets, previous to sending them on to New York," and that Crooks should set a fair price on the furs shipped to him. No immediate action was taken on this proposal, but the subject was revived each year. In 1838, for example, Dousman urged Crooks to ship trade goods by way of St. Louis, Pittsburgh, and the Pennsylvania Canal and railroad; and he recommended that certain heavy articles be purchased in St. Louis. The New Orleans route Dousman considered too long, and he asserted that "from Green Bay here the conveyances are so uncertain that it will not do to trust to them." As the traffic on the upper Mississippi increased, shipments to St. Louis by steamboat became more certain and the wisdom of Dousman's suggestions was quickly recognized. Bundles of furs were a part of almost every steamboat cargo after 1840. The "Malta" left St. Peter's on June 8, 1840, in command of William P. Gorman with ten packs of skins for St. Louis. According to a bill of lading signed by E. F. Chouteau, the clerk of the "Malta," the downstream tariff was a dollar a pack.¹¹

¹¹ Dousman to Crooks, October 22, 1835; July 21, 1838, American Fur Company Papers; some bills of lading in the possession of the writer. The American Fur Company Papers are in the possession of the New York Historical Society; the Minnesota Historical Society has photostatic copies of all letters cited in this article.

Since the traffic above Galena occasioned by the presence of Indians, fur companies, and military posts was small, it rarely warranted the services of more than one or two boats. Moreover, a goodly portion of the supplies for the upper Mississippi Valley was taken from St. Louis and the Ohio River by transient craft, while regular boats plying between Galena and St. Louis also captured an occasional cargo. Such a consignment was carried by the "Bellview" to Sibley in 1836 for the Sioux Outfit. Besides the customary assortment of blankets, cloth, and strouding, the "Bellview" took to the upper Mississippi a number of other items of dress, including three blue cloth frock coats and six pairs of cloth pantaloons, presumably intended for some of the notable Sioux chiefs. Then there were also aboard two dozen common horn combs, a dozen dressing combs, sixteen hundred pairs of earbobs, four hundred large and two thousand small common broaches, a hundred and sixty pierced broaches, fourteen bunches of garnets, twenty-seven thousand white and twenty-five thousand black wampum, fourteen pairs of arm bands, and fifteen pairs of wrist bands. Hunting and war equipment included twenty North West guns four feet long, ten North West guns three and a half feet long, sixteen kegs of gunpowder, three thousand percussion caps, fifty-three pigs of lead, six dozen cartouche knives, and twenty-four dozen scalping knives, the latter possibly to be used on the crowns of luckless Chippewa braves. Fire water, in the form of a basket of champagne, four kegs of Spanish Brown, and five gallons of old port wine, probably disappeared all too soon. Four kegs and three boxes of tobacco may have enabled the Sioux to spend many hours in reverie over the delightfully civilizing sensations resulting from an intimate and perhaps too liberal use of the wines. Foodstuffs included eighteen barrels of pork, twenty-five barrels of flour, two kegs of lard, three barrels of New Orleans sugar, fifty bags of corn, a chest of tea, and twelve bags of peas. The miscellaneous

material aboard the "Bellview" included twelve boxes of soap, square irons, nail rods, flat irons, steel, a set of wagon harness, four kegs of white lead, a stove and pipe, a barrel of linseed oil, ten bars of iron, an ox plough, four kegs of nails, five brass kettles, a coil grass rope, and a trunk.¹²

The cost of transporting such consignments from St. Louis to Prairie du Chien and St. Peter's on upper Mississippi steamboats was slight compared with the expense incurred in taking goods to St. Louis. Although trade goods were less bulky than food supplies, the amount paid for importing goods from England to Prairie du Chien almost equalled the original price of the goods in England. In 1835, for example, the cost of a single shipment of goods in England was \$11,238.53. The itemized bill for conveying this merchandise from England to Prairie du Chien was as follows: packing, shipping, and other charges, \$935.29; exchange and insurance to New York, \$1,241.49; duties and other charges in New York, \$5,228.95; commission at five per cent, \$904.94; freight to New Orleans and charges there, \$204.85; freight to St. Louis and charges there, \$229.50; freight to Prairie du Chien, \$105.78; total, including five per cent interest, \$9,050.80. When the goods reached Prairie du Chien the cost was \$20,289.33, or almost double the original price.¹³ The tariff on the English goods shipped from St. Louis to Prairie du Chien was slightly more than a hundred dollars. But imported trade goods were insignificant compared with the commodities such as coffee, sugar, corn, dried fruit, meats, liquor, powder, and lead, all products of the Mississippi Valley, which made up the bulk of the shipments. Steamboats obtained a generous return on freight of this kind, since charges of

¹²An invoice of merchandise shipped by the American Fur Company on the steamboat "Bellview" to Sibley "for acct. and Risk of Sioux Outfit," is in the Sibley Papers for 1836. These papers are in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

¹³Charges on goods imported from England in 1835, Sibley Papers.

FINNEY, LEE & CO.,
WHOLESALE GROCERS AND COMMISSION MERCHANTS,
NO. 10, WATER STREET.



In good order, and well conditioned, by Finney, Lee & Co.
For account and risk of whom it may concern, on board the
good steamboat called the *St. Peter*, whereof
Capt. *W. E. Lee* is Master for the present voy-
age, now lying in the port of St. Louis, and bound for
St. Peter. Being marked and numbered *335*, and are to be de-
livered, without delay, in like good order at the port of *St. Peter*
(unavoidable dangers of the river and fire only excepted,) unto *St. Peter*
King or to *his* assigns; he or they paying freight at the rate of
One Dollar for Hundred Pounds & *Three Dollars*
for Charges.
Witness my hand, the owner, master or clerk of the said boat, has affirmed to *these*
Bills, all of this tenor and date, one of which being accomplished, the others to stand void.
Dated at St. Louis, this *twenty-second* day of *March*, 18*40*.

MARES.	PACKAGES.	WEIGHT.
<i>Rev. P. T. Karamanagh</i>		<i>335</i>
<i>St. Peters</i>		
<i>With the prime of shipping</i>		
<i>an a towing</i>		
<i>to don very well</i>		

A BILL OF LADING

[From the Sibley Papers, June 22, 1840.]

a dollar and more per hundred pounds was the general rule.¹⁴

After goods arrived at Prairie du Chien, Dousman took the portion belonging to his outfit and forwarded the remainder to Sibley at St. Peter's. Captain Joseph Throckmorton carried Sibley's supplies upstream on the "Warrior" in 1835. Foodstuffs aboard included thirty-three barrels of New Orleans sugar, twelve kegs of lard, eleven

¹⁴An analysis of some bills of lading in the possession of the writer and others owned by Captain Fred A. Bill of St. Paul warrant this conclusion.

barrels of molasses, a barrel of dried peaches and another of apples, two bags and twelve sacks of coffee, a barrel of crackers, a box of bacon hams, ten shoulders of bacon, thirty-three barrels of "One Hog Pork," two hundred sacks and four hundred bushels of corn, and four barrels of salt. Two dozen bales of blankets, strouding, and pieces of gaudy colored cloth were also stored aboard the "Warrior." The cargo included two "Chiefs Guns," ten North West guns, a hundred and twenty-nine kegs of gunpowder, a hundred and seventy pigs of lead, three hundred and ten rat traps, and thirty-six beaver traps. A box of Cavendish tobacco, two boxes and two kegs of common plug tobacco, four boxes of British soap, six boxes of glass, twelve barrels of porter, ten thousand pine shingles, a barrel of tallow, five demijohns of sperm oil, a crate and a cask of tinware, a bundle of square irons and another of round irons, and a bundle of German steel made up the miscellaneous articles that were shipped to Sibley on the "Warrior" in 1835.¹⁵

After the trip of the "Rufus Putnam" in 1825, the arrival at Fort Snelling of the first steamboat of the season was awaited with impatience. Under date of March 31, 1826, Taliaferro noted that the weather was moderate and the ice firm. Six days later the ice was still thick but weak. Flocks of wild geese flew honking over Fort Snelling on April 14, but the ice remained intact despite a twelve foot rise in the river. The following day the Minnesota River broke up, but the Mississippi remained firm. A bateau carrying peltries, the first boat of the season, arrived from Lac qui Parle on April 17. With the Mississippi twenty feet above its normal level, the ice finally started out from above Fort Snelling on April 21, sweeping away the crude huts that stood clustered along the bank.

¹⁵An invoice of goods shipped by the steamboat "Warrior" bound for St. Peter's and consigned to Sibley for account of the Sioux Outfit, Sibley Papers, 1835.

A second bateau arrived from the Minnesota River on April 26, but still no steamboat appeared. Finally, on May 2, the steamboat "Lawrence," Captain D. F. Reeder, arrived with a heavy cargo of freight and a considerable number of passengers.¹⁶

Steamboat captains—whether they were the first to arrive, the last to depart, or simply made flying mid-season trips—were always held in high regard by the pioneers. If a captain arrived twice during a season he was welcomed as a friend; if he made several trips he was looked upon as a brother; but if he appeared in the trade two successive seasons he was almost deified. Such men as Daniel Smith Harris, Joseph Throckmorton, John and George W. Atchison, David G. Bates, James Lafferty, Orren Smith, and Hiram Bersie made several trips during the course of a season or plied in the trade more than one year. By 1850 Harris and Throckmorton had each averaged about fifteen years on the upper Mississippi and the combined record of the Atchison brothers was equally good.¹⁷

Before the creation of Minnesota Territory in 1849, arrivals of steamboats at Fort Snelling were extremely irregular; and the arrivals at Prairie du Chien were likened by a settler to "angel's visits, 'few, and far between.'" The scarcity of cargoes often led captains to demand exorbitant rates, and in 1840 Dousman "blackguarded" Captain James Lafferty for charging Sibley excessive freight rates for goods shipped on the "Omega." Trips were made only when a sufficient cargo presented itself. In 1844 forty-one craft reached Fort Snelling and in the five years preceding 1849 an average of only forty-four boats docked

¹⁶ Taliaferro Journal, March 31, April 6, 14, 15, 17, 21, 26, May 2, 1826.

¹⁷ A list of captains and boats that are mentioned in the Galena, Dubuque, Muscatine, Keokuk, St. Louis, and St. Paul newspapers between 1835 and 1850 has been compiled by the writer; Blakeley gives a fairly complete list of boats and captains for the same period in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 8: 374-378.

there. The exact number of trips to St. Peter's between 1835 and 1844 is unknown but it is not likely that the average was more than twenty-five a year.¹⁸

When Stephen R. Riggs, a missionary to the Sioux, arrived in St. Louis in 1837 he was told that less than a half dozen craft reached Fort Snelling each season. Riggs was horrified to learn that the steamboat "Pavilion" left St. Louis every Sunday, but he hoped to avoid breaking the Sabbath by boarding a boat at Alton. When the "Olive Branch" arrived he took passage on it. Saturday night found the "Olive Branch" near Davenport, and Riggs, refusing to travel on the Lord's Day, got off and spent the night in a room where his slumber was broken by intermittent volleys of profanity from an adjoining "doggery." The missionary reached Galena without mishap, but there he was forced to await the arrival of a boat destined for Fort Snelling. The "Pavilion" arrived at Galena on a Saturday night, but fervent prayers, coupled with a dearth of freight, held the boat over until Monday and the remainder of the journey was made by the missionary without interruption.¹⁹

Some regularity of service might have been attained had one or two boats taken over the trade of the upper Mississippi and transient craft remained below. But captains of "tramp" vessels were not imbued with such an altruistic spirit, and rivalry naturally resulted. Since the American Fur Company was interested in encouraging a regular service, it was necessary to make a choice of captains. Both Throckmorton and Atchison were of a more tractable spirit than the fiery "Smith" Harris, and the lion's share of the fur trade traffic went to them. This was a bitter blow for

¹⁸ *Pioneer and Democrat*, November 18, 1858; Dousman to Sibley, June 29, 1840, Sibley Papers; John H. Fonda, "Early Reminiscences of Wisconsin," in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 5:240 (Madison, 1868).

¹⁹ Stephen R. Riggs, *Mary and I: Forty Years with the Sioux*, 32-37 (Boston, 1887).

Harris, but he continued in the trade throughout the forties with the "Otter," the "War Eagle," the "Senator," and the "Dr. Franklin No. 2." His skill and daring, his genial disposition, and his dogged and often ruthless determination in the face of competition, were a constant source of annoyance to his competitors. During the forties Throckmorton ran the "Malta," the "General Brooke," the "Nimrod," the "Cecilia," and the "Cora," while John Atchison commanded the "Lynx" and the "Highland Mary." Throckmorton withdrew from the upper Mississippi in 1848 and Atchison died of cholera in St. Louis two years later.²⁰

Dousman, Sibley, and other members of the American Fur Company had heavy financial interests in upper Mississippi steamboats. Perhaps the earliest boat in which the fur company had an interest was the "Burlington," which was built at Pittsburgh in 1837, was 150 feet long, had a 23½ foot beam, a 6 foot hold, and a double rudder stern, and measured 200 tons. It was owned by Throckmorton, Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and the firm of Hempstead and Beebe, all of St. Louis. These men, with Captain George McNeil and Isaac Newton Waggoner, who hailed from Illinois, had an interest in the "Ariel," also built at Pittsburgh in 1837. Two years later a 114 ton craft slid from the "ways" at Pittsburgh. The new boat, christened the "Malta," was 140 feet long, had a 22 foot beam, was 5 feet deep, and was owned by Throckmorton and Chouteau.²¹

²⁰ William J. Petersen, "Captain Joseph Throckmorton," in the *Palimpsest*, 10:129-144 (April, 1929); *Weekly Northwestern Gazette* (Galena), June 4, 1850. A file of the latter is in the office of the *Galena Gazette* at Galena, Illinois.

²¹ The official records of the boats mentioned are the "Ariel," number 24, enrolled March 13, 1837, the "Burlington," number 54, enrolled May 27, 1837, and the "Malta," number 73, enrolled April 30, 1839, in "Enrolment of Vessels," vol. 3, 1835-39, a manuscript volume in the customs office at Pittsburgh. Every new steamboat had to be officially enrolled before it was allowed to proceed on a trip. A change of own-

Dousman seems to have taken his first financial interest in an upper Mississippi steamboat in 1840, when he and Throckmorton bought the "Chippewa." This 107 ton boat was constructed at Pittsburgh in 1840 and was 122 feet long, had a 19 foot beam, and drew less than 5 feet of water when loaded. In 1844 Sibley, Franklin Steele, B. W. Brisbois, and Captain William H. Hooper each owned an eighth in the "Lynx," and Dousman possessed the remaining half. This 125 ton craft was built at Cincinnati, in 1844, was 136 feet long, 20½ feet broad, and had a 5 foot hold. The American Fur Company held an interest in the "Nimrod" and the "General Brooke," but Throckmorton was the sole owner of the "Cecilia" and the "Cora." In 1850 Brisbois, Dousman, and Henry M. Rice of St. Paul had a part interest in Captain Orren Smith's "Nominee."²² Dousman continued his interest in upper Mississippi steamboating until his death. In 1857 he owned a hundred and sixty shares of stock in the Prairie du Chien, Hudson, and St. Paul Packet Company, and was making payments on three hundred additional shares. The members of the Northern Outfit were instrumental in or-

ership or construction required a boat's reënrollment. The document on which the record was spread was designated "Enrolment, in conformity to An Act of the Congress of the United States of America, entitled 'An Act for enrolling and licensing Ships or Vessels, to be employed in the Coasting Trade and Fisheries, and for regulating the same.'" The captain usually enrolled his boat and was required to swear that he and the owners were citizens of the United States. A description of the boat and its measurements also were given.

²² The records of the boats noted are the "Chippewa," number 40, enrolled March 10, 1840, in "Enrolment of Vessels," vol. 5, 1839-41, the "Cecelia," number 32, enrolled October 26, 1841, and the "General Brooke," number 81, enrolled March 25, 1842, in vol. 6, 1841-45, in the customs office at Pittsburgh; the "Lynx," number 40, enrolled April 15, 1844, the "Nimrod," number 42, enrolled April 22, 1844, and the "Cecelia," number 95, enrolled August 8, 1845, in the customs office at St. Louis; the "Lynx," number 25, enrolled March 25, 1844, the "Cora," number 101, enrolled September 29, 1846, and the "Nominee," number 37, enrolled March 14, 1850, in the customs office at Cincinnati.

ganizing the Minnesota Packet Company, which thirty years later absorbed almost all the other lines on the river.²³

Throckmorton was a great favorite with the agents of the Northern Outfit. Efficient, prudential, and every inch a gentleman, he won the respect of both Dousman and Sibley and established a high standard in steamboat transportation. In 1839 Dousman notified Crooks that he had authorized Throckmorton to draw on him for a thousand dollars on account of the Northern Outfit.²⁴ Six years later he wrote Sibley that Throckmorton, then in command of the "General Brooke," wished to form a line between St. Louis and Fort Snelling with Captain John Atchison of the "Lynx." "I am in favor of it," concluded Dousman, "& shall encourage him to do so, as it will be of benefit to the Outfit & hurt the Harris's which I desire very much. I want you to give Throckmorton a part of your Freight so as to encourage him to run regular. He is just off and I have not time to say more at present."²⁵

Atchison was also a favorite with the fur company, although he was by no means so popular as Throckmorton. In 1845 Dousman wrote Sibley that Captain Harris had just gone up to St. Peter's with the "Otter" and urged him to restrain his people from buying anything from this boat, as Atchison had left St. Louis with the "Lynx" and would arrive shortly with "every thing you stand in need of."²⁶

It is not likely that either Dousman or Sibley, anxious for supplies from below and news from the outside world, would expect Atchison or Throckmorton to make a trip when no freight was offered. Nevertheless, the opening of spring navigation always found the two traders hope-

²³ "H. L. Dousman amt Stock subscribed in the Prairie du Chien, Hudson & St. Paul Packet Compy," December 24, 1857, Dousman Papers, in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

²⁴ Dousman to Crooks, December 14, 1839, American Fur Company Papers.

²⁵ Dousman to Sibley, May 9, 1845, Sibley Papers.

²⁶ Dousman to Sibley, March 30, 1845, Sibley Papers.

fully awaiting the arrival of their yearly shipment of supplies. In the spring of 1838 Dousman wrote Sibley that Throckmorton was at Prairie du Chien with the "Burlington" and had just left for below to procure a cargo of supplies for Sibley, but that none of the regular spring stock had come up. The following April he informed Sibley that the "Ariel" was expected shortly with all their goods and provisions. Eleven days later he wrote:

The Ariel came in last night and is [I] was much disappointed in not recev^g by her our Spring supplies of Provisions, Groceries, &c from St Louis. She brot. up only what remained in her all winter at the Rapids—but as I know you were badly off I prevailed on the Capt. [Lyon] to go up by giving him our Chippewa freight which the Pavilion brot up a few days since. I also send Brown, Robinson & Farribaults Goods. You will find with this Memor^a & Bill Lading of all I have been able to put on board for you, by the next Boat I shall probably be able to send the bal^a of your Provisions. The goods from N. York marked S, also those from St Louis S & S are on board as you will see by Bill Lading. The Boats which were stopped by the Ice last fall, have had a good deal of their freight pilfered &c Boxes opened & Goods taken out—also a good many Packages missing—so that you must be very particular in your examination of the two Lots mentioned above, as they have not been landed here and the Capt. tells me that he knows of several articles missing.²⁷

Not only were cargoes pilfered and delayed, but sometimes it was necessary to offer special inducements in order to persuade a captain to make a trip. For example, in 1838 Dousman wrote to Sibley:

I recd. yours pr. Burlington, together with the Packs, Feathers &c all in good order. The Ariel arrived this morning with the Goods for the Suttler Store and as the freight was not sufficient to justify her going up, they were all Landed & stored here. news has just arrived that 150 Recruits are on the way from the Bay for your place, & we have prevailed on the Qr. Master to promise to transpt^a to the Ariel & she now goes up merely to take up your things & be back in time for the Recruits. I have paid the frt. on the Goods from St Louis to this place at 87½ pr. c say \$95.38. Send down in the Ariel all your Packs as we are waiting for them to start the

²⁷ Dousman to Sibley, April 20, 1838, April 5, 16, 1839, Sibley Papers.

Boats for Fort Winnebago. The Clerk of the Burlington tells me that you told him after closing your Letter that the Flour by that Boat came out correct—there were on Board as I wrote to you 35 Bbl^s for Sioux O[utfit] & how much for S. & S. I know not as I did not see the Bill Lading, the shipment having been made to you direct. The 10 Bbl^s Pork which you mentioned as not being in the Bill Lading belong here & were taken up in the Boat with the understanding that they should be brot back as they were not handy when they went up. I regret they were left as we are in want of them, but I suppose you may as well keep them. they were ordered for Retail here & are what is called *clear mess* & cost \$5 more than the other kind.²⁸

Competitors of the American Fur Company often sent buyers north to attempt to break the company's monopoly. On such occasions steamboat captains often carried letters warning members of the Northern Outfit of their appearance. In 1844 S. W. McMaster gave Captain Harris a note for Franklin Steele informing him that competitors were going up on the "Otter" for the purpose of buying furs and advising him of a rising market, most furs having gone up fifty to a hundred per cent. "I give you a Statement," he concluded, "of the ranges of prices. Coon 37½ to 80¢ Red fox 1⁰⁰ to 1⁵⁰ Fisher 2\$ to 350 & 4 for large size Wolf 37½ to 62½ Otter is not so much sought after but is worth (Prime) 5\$." ²⁹

Dousman was at the foot of Lake Pepin when news arrived of the invasion of his domain. He wrote to Sibley:

You had better send and secure all the Furs you can in the hands of the Traders on the S^t Croix and about your place before the Steam Boats get up as there will be a number of buyers & speculators up & if they can be disappointed this year they will not be apt to return. even if we make nothing on the purchases I think it is a great object to prevent the Furs getting in other hands. I would have sent this by express to you but was afraid to creat[e] suspicion and as the mail leaves here in two days you will have time by moving promptly to do all that is to be done before a Steam Boat can get through the Lake. The [General] Brooke came to the Prairie on

²⁸ Dousman to Sibley, June 18, 1838, Sibley Papers.

²⁹ S. W. McMaster to Franklin Steele, March 22, 1844, Sibley Papers.

the 12th Inst. & there has no doubt been several other Boats there before this. The Lynx will be at Galena about 10 or 15 April.

A few weeks later Dousman wrote:

There is a Fur buyer on board the Otter (Mr. Frost) who buys for Smith Brothers & C^o St. Louis. look sharp after him. he appears to be a very Gentlemanly man & offers good prices.³⁰

It would be impossible to estimate the earnings of steam-boats directly engaged in the fur trade. Governed largely by the amount of freight on hand, the stage of the water, the season of the year, and the number of craft in the trade, rates varied greatly, but as a rule high ones prevailed. Before 1850 the cost of transportation between Galena and Fort Snelling was generally greater than it was a decade later between St. Louis and St. Paul. Charges from Galena were seldom less than fifty cents a hundred pounds and usually more was asked. In 1840 the "Malta" demanded a dollar a barrel for transporting five barrels of beer from Prairie du Chien to Fort Snelling. The "Demoine" charged seventy-five cents a hundred pounds for transporting the freight of the "Agnes" from Galena to St. Peter's. A trundle bed, a tin boiler, and a musket bar were carried for a dollar by the "Otter" in June of 1845. Captain Throckmorton conveyed six kegs of powder from Galena to Fort Snelling on the "Cecilia" in October, 1845, at the rate of a dollar per keg.

Captains sometimes collected the amount due on an article as well as the regular transportation fee. In 1845 the "Agnes" took 75 kegs of butter from Louisiana, Missouri, to St. Peter's at the rate of \$1.75 per hundred pounds. Clerk B. F. Wood was required to collect \$1,375 from Franklin Steele in payment for the butter. A sum of \$205.82 was paid Captain W. P. Gorman of the "Chippewa" for 4,989 pounds of miscellaneous freight, 16 pigs lead, 5 barrels of apples, and the passage of a man and

³⁰ Dousman to Sibley, March 23, April 12, 1844, Sibley Papers.

servant from St. Louis to St. Peter's. Pound freight was transported at the rate of \$2.50 per hundred.³¹

Despite such exorbitant prices upper Mississippi steamboats did not always reap rich profits. In 1844 the "Lynx" netted only \$161.04 for the season after deducting losses sustained by injury to the boat. The following year, however, the same boat earned \$11,194.73 and had a considerable amount still due her from tardy shippers. This was probably nearer the average yearly earnings. Since the fur company had a seven-eighths interest in the "Lynx," it naturally shared in the dividends. Captain John Atchison delayed in apportioning the earning of the "Lynx" and Dousman frequently suggested to Sibley that a final settlement be made. The misunderstanding was a subject of much written and verbal controversy over a period of several months.³²

More picturesque than the upper Mississippi fur traffic was the trade which arose from the planting of a settlement on the Red River of the North by the Earl of Selkirk. Although fully five hundred miles from the Falls of St. Anthony, it was so isolated that the upper Mississippi offered the best means of transportation to and from the outside world.³³ As early as 1819 a party of men left the Selkirk settlement for Prairie du Chien to purchase seed grain. Its members departed for their homes on April 20, 1820, in three Mackinaw boats loaded with two hundred bushels of wheat, a hundred bushels of oats, and thirty bushels of peas. They ascended the Minnesota River to its source, dragged their boats and supplies over the portage to Lake Traverse, descended the Bois des Sioux and

³¹ Some bills of lading scattered through the Sibley Papers; others in the possession of the writer and Captain Fred A. Bill of St. Paul.

³² Dousman to Sibley, November 19, 1845; January 14, April 30, May 24, 1846, Sibley Papers.

³³ Louis A. Wood, *The Red River Colony*, 15-34 (*Chronicles of Canada*, vol. 21 — Toronto, 1915).

Red rivers, and reached the Red River settlement sometime in June.³⁴

The advent of the steamboat on the upper Mississippi was hailed with delight by these isolated colonists. When the "Rambler" left St. Peter's in 1823 it took down two Swiss families from the Selkirk colony. They complained of living in constant dread of Indian attack, and of the severe winters and short summers. With uncanny foresight they prophesied that a lucrative traffic would spring up in provisions to be exchanged for furs and peltries. A herd of two hundred cattle had been driven to the Red River settlement in 1823 and sold for six thousand dollars, the drovers making the round trip in five months.³⁵

The people in the Red River area drew a large portion of their incomes from furs and peltries, especially from buffalo hides. Indeed the prowess of the Pembina group in the chase became proverbial and they were often referred to as the Red River hunters. Fort Snelling, and later St. Paul, was the entrepôt for their trade. Heavily loaded with the spoils of the chase, long caravans of ox carts jolted southward each spring to the head of navigation to await the arrival of their supplies on upper Mississippi steamboats. Several months were required to make the round trip overland, and the creaking of the lumbering ox carts could be heard for miles. Before 1850 first St. Louis and later Galena and Dubuque were termini for the trade of the Red River Valley. Galena furnished goods valued at fifteen thousand dollars to the settlements in 1848 and urged that buffalo packs should be taken further south if Sibley and Rice did not offer fair prices. In 1849 the "Senator"

³⁴ Fred A. Bill, "Steamboating on the Red River of the North," in *North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, 2: 100, 101 (January, 1928).

³⁵ *Missouri Republican*, September 3, 1823; *Mercury* (Pittsburgh), October 21, 1823. A file of the *Mercury* is in the Carnegie Library at Pittsburgh.

arrived at Galena with a hundred packs of buffalo robes from the Red River hunters.³⁶

It took thirty-two days for a caravan of 133 ox carts to make the journey from "Grant Cote" in Pembina County to Traverse des Sioux in 1853. Norman W. Kittson, Joseph Rolette, and Peter Hayden were among the traders who went to Mendota on the "Clarion," and Charles Cavieler, the United States collector at Pembina, also was a passenger. Kittson had over four thousand buffalo robes as his share of the spoils of the chase. The number of buffaloes on the plains, said to be unprecedented, seemed almost to verify the Indian theory that they sprang from out of the earth.³⁷

After 1850 St. Paul sought a complete monopoly of the Red River trade. The *Minnesota Democrat* of July 22, 1851, complained bitterly of a duty of twenty or thirty per cent on goods of the Red River settlers and urged that it be speedily removed or a valuable trade would be lost. Interest in the Red River country became national in character and during the winter of 1857-58 arrangements were made with the secretary of the treasury to enable the Hudson's Bay Company to ship its goods in bond through the United States to St. Paul. The St. Paul Chamber of Commerce paid Anson Northup two thousand dollars for putting a steamboat in operation on the Red River in 1859. At the same time the Hudson's Bay Company asked Burbank and Company of St. Paul for aid in transporting across the Minnesota country a hundred and twenty tons of goods from England and thirty tons of tobacco, sugar, and other commodities from New York. Two hundred

³⁶ *Pioneer and Democrat*, March 26, 1857; *Galena Daily Advertiser*, November 22, 1848; *Northwestern Gazette and Galena Advertiser*, July 18, 1848; *Weekly Northwestern Gazette*, September 18, 1849. Files of the three latter papers are in the office of the *Galena Gazette*.

³⁷ *Minnesotian* (St. Paul), July 23, 1853.

tons of freight were carried on the Mississippi by the steamboat "Enterprize" to St. Cloud, whence it was teamed to Georgetown and taken on the Red River to Fort Garry on the "Anson Northup." In 1862 the "Enterprize" contracted to carry seven hundred tons of freight for the Hudson's Bay Company from St. Paul to St. Cloud.³⁸

Steamboats continued to transport goods destined for the Red River country on the upper Mississippi after the Civil War. An item in a Dubuque newspaper in 1866 reads:

There is stored in the depot at Dunleith, 1,600 packages of goods for the Hudson Bay Company up the Red River, in the British American possessions. They are the neatest and best done up packages ever seen in that depot, and Americans could learn something by inspecting them. They consist of teas, sugars, dry goods, clothing, hardware, shot, and a general assortment of articles of use for the comfort of men. An agent accompanies them on their transit, pays the freight bill over each road, in British gold, sees that they are not molested, and keeps the articles together. They were shipped from London to Halifax, from thence through Canada, by the Great Western Rail Road to Chicago, from thence to Dunleith, and will be shipped this week to St. Paul on a packet. Each package has the duty stamped upon it, and is covered with sealing wax to detect fraud, and all packages encased with cloth are bound firmly with cords tied in a flat knot and the ends connected together with lead. Any of the goods could be bought in Dunleith or Dubuque for half what the freight has cost.

Three weeks later an additional shipment of a hundred tons of goods arrived at Dunleith destined for the Red River country.³⁹ Although the Red River freight transported by upper Mississippi steamboats was of little consequence compared with the traffic in lead or grain or with the passenger trade, it made, by virtue of its nature and destination, one of the most picturesque of steamboat cargoes.

³⁸ *Minnesota Democrat* (St. Paul), July 15, 22, 29, August 12, 1851; *Galena Daily Advertiser*, July 22, 25, 1851; Bill, in *North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, 2: 101-110.

³⁹ *Dubuque Herald*, April 22, May 11, 1866. A file of this paper is in the public library at Dubuque, Iowa.

The Mississippi traffic in furs dwindles into insignificance when compared, both in the value and bulk of shipments, with the lead trade. Neither was it as profitable as the returns from the government shipments to the Indian and military frontiers. Moreover, the shipment of a large portion of the furs by way of the Wisconsin and Fox rivers and Green Bay route deprived steamboats of a considerable cargo. The fur trade was important, however, because it offered a supplementary cargo to the stores shipped by the government to the Indians and troops of the upper Mississippi. The financial encouragement of the American Fur Company was also of importance, supplying a kind of aid that neither the Indian nor the military frontier offered to steamboat captains. Finally, it must be pointed out that the considerable stimulus given by the fur trade to steamboating on the upper Mississippi and its tributaries contributed to the spread of general information about the region. This in turn played its part in attracting the hordes of settlers and immigrants who were soon to transform the fur-traders' frontier into an agricultural and industrial domain.

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