

STEAMBOAT TRANSPORTATION ON THE RED RIVER¹

"STEAMBOAT 'round the bend!" was a cry heard not only on the Mississippi in the heyday of the river steamers. At one time it echoed up and down the muddy stretches of the Red River from Moorhead to Lake Winnipeg. Before 1859 men of Minnesota or of the Red River settlement shook their heads dubiously at the mere idea of navigating the tortuous Red River,² but in the decade of the 1870's there were no less than seventeen steamers and hundreds of flat-boats floating on its muddy waters.

The steamboat era on the Red, though scarcely two decades in length, wrote an important and colorful chapter into the history of both Minnesota and the Red River settlement which became Manitoba in 1870.³ To Minnesotans it carried a vast trade which might otherwise have followed the Selkirk settlers' route via Hudson Bay or gone over the Dawson Road from the Lake of the Woods in the footsteps of Colonel Garnet J. Wolseley's troops. To the Red River settlers it was a bridge to the mainland, marking the end of a virtual isolation. The steamboat was the answer to the pioneer's prayer for rapid, regular, and relatively cheap communication with the outer world.

For six months of the year in the 1870's, the whistle of an approaching steamboat would bring crowds hurrying down to the dock at the foot of Post Office Street in Winni-

¹ The material for this article is drawn chiefly from files of Manitoba newspapers in the Manitoba Legislative Library, Winnipeg.

² John Macoun, *Manitoba and the Great North-west*, 579 (Guelph, Ontario, 1882).

³ The first steamboat on the Red River was launched in 1859. The completion of the railway connection from St. Boniface to the American roads in 1878 virtually ended the rule of the steamboats, though they did not disappear from the river immediately.

peg. So eager were the citizens to claim their goods, that special police had to be appointed to prevent them from surging on board before the passengers disembarked. Out of the holds of the arriving steamers came everything from printing presses to church organs. The flour for the settlers' daily bread and the oysters for their great feasts all floated down the river from Minnesota and the industrial East.⁴ Passengers with strange faces and speaking foreign tongues crowded the rail of many a steamboat or barge, eagerly straining for a first view of their new home. And on the returning steamboats went the chief exports of a pioneer economy — furs and buffalo robes, and in 1876 the first trickle of Manitoba wheat.⁵

The settlement at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers, incorporated as the city of Winnipeg in 1873, grew like a prairie weed in the 1870's. The population increased from 241 in 1871 to 7,985 in 1881. Stores, hotels, and large numbers of the inevitable saloons sprang up almost overnight. Winnipeg became the hub of a vast distributing system whose spokes reached out a thousand miles to the west, two hundred and fifty miles to the east, and four hundred miles to the north. Much of the credit for this development can be given to the steamboats from Minnesota. The people, goods, and materials that went into the building of the new province — everything from billiard tables to the "boss kitchen stove of the Province," weighing twelve hundred pounds — went down the river by steamer.⁶

⁴ *Manitoban* (Winnipeg), April 29, 1871; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), January 2, 1877; January 7, April 3, 1878. The daily edition of the *Free Press* is cited throughout, unless otherwise indicated. In 1877 Minnesota exported to Manitoba 31,373 barrels of flour valued at \$148,443.00. The next year flour was not among the leading Minnesota exports to Manitoba.

⁵ *Nor'-Wester* (Red River Settlement), June 15, 1861; *Free Press*, October 23, 1876; July 23, August 1, 1877.

⁶ Macoun, *Manitoba*, 680; George Bryce, *Manitoba: Its Infancy, Growth, and Present Condition*, 323 (London, 1882); *Free Press*, May 18, 1876; January 2, 1877.

The extent of the Manitoba-Minnesota trade in the decade of the 1870's can scarcely be realized without a glance at some figures. In 1876, according to a contemporary newspaper report, Minnesota sent goods to the value of \$802,400.00 into Manitoba, and forwarded over five million pounds of bonded goods via the Red River Transportation Company's steamboats. Manitoba sent to Minnesota goods, chiefly furs, valued at \$794,868.00. The Canadian province lacked \$7,532.00 to balance its trade with Minnesota, not to mention the vast amount spent by Manitobans on freight charges for goods carried by the Red River Transportation Company—a Minnesota enterprise. For the next year, the Minnesota exports to Manitoba dropped to \$768,415.00, but Manitoba lacked \$266,659.00 to balance its trade with Minnesota. In addition, Manitoba shipped \$197,361.00 worth of goods—chiefly buffalo robes, other furs, and wheat, the latter to the amount of ten thousand bushels—through Minnesota in bond.⁷

The steamboats, in the years between 1859 and 1878, played a part in the lives of all dwellers along the Red River. They grew used to the shrill screech of the steamers' whistles, and to their ungainly house-like appearance as they sailed past with stern wheels churning vigorously. Excursions by steamboat became the fashion during the summer months. Sunday schools went on picnics by steamer. The garrison from Pembina paid a good-will visit to Winnipeg in 1877, arriving on the "International." The Masons of Winnipeg went by steamboat to Emerson to found a new lodge there. The "Keewatin," a Manitoba boat, periodically held moonlight excursions with dancing on board. An unusually elaborate excursion was staged in 1877, when the "Manitoba" went to Lake Winnipeg. The steamer was decorated with poplar trees that lined the rail and wild roses that bloomed in the fire buckets. It flew American,

⁷ *Free Press*, January 2, 1877; January 7, 1878.

British, and French flags, and carried about a hundred and seventy excursionists on the trip.⁸

From very small beginnings in 1859, the steamboats, shuttling up and down the river, wove themselves into the pattern of Red River life. Credit for placing the first steamboat on the Red River must go to the vision of the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce and the energy of Captain Anson Northup, a Mississippi steamboatman. Backed by an offer of two thousand dollars from the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce, Captain Northup hauled overland in a very bitter winter the main parts of his boat, the "North Star," from the upper Mississippi. The boiler alone weighed eleven thousand pounds, and seventeen span of horses, thirteen yoke of oxen, and thirty men were needed to accomplish the Herculean task of transporting the outfit to Lafayette, a point on the Red River opposite the mouth of the Cheyenne. There in the spring of 1859 a hull was built, and probably sometime in May the first steamboat on the Red was launched. Bells pealed and cannon boomed when the "Anson Northup," as the boat had been named, flying an American flag at its bow and a Canadian one at its stern, sent the screech of its whistle echoing through the settlement at Fort Garry for the first time early in June, 1859.⁹

⁸ *Free Press*, July 28, 31, August 1, 12, 1876; June 18, 19, July 3, 4, 1877; August 23, September 9, 1878.

⁹ See a letter of Russell Blakeley, dated December 9, 1877, and published in the *Free Press*, December 17, 1877; Macoun, *Manitoba*, 579; *Nor'-Wester*, June 14, 1860. Blakeley was closely associated with the building of the "Anson Northup." Considerable disagreement exists as to the date of the boat's launching and first arrival at Fort Garry. May 17 and 19 and June 3 are given by different writers as the date of the launching, but most of them agree that the boat arrived at Fort Garry on June 5. Russell Blakeley, "Opening of the Red River of the North to Commerce and Civilization," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 8:48; George Bryce, *A History of Manitoba*, 198 (Toronto, 1906); Blakeley, in *Free Press*, December 17, 1877; Manton Marble, "To Red River and Beyond," in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 21:289 (August, 1860); William Douglas, "Yesterdays in Manitoba," in *Free Press*, March 16, 1935; F. H. Schofield, *The Story of Manitoba*, 1:196 (Winnipeg, 1913).

Photographs of the "Anson Northup" show a stern-wheeler, rather ungainly in appearance, and somewhat difficult to navigate, according to a *Nor'-Wester* correspondent, who commented humorously: "The boat has such an extraordinary affection for the shore that at times no amount of rudder and wheel can cure her headstrong and landward fancies." He also quoted Captain C. P. V. Lull, skipper of the "Anson Northup" in September, 1860, who characterized the boat as "nothing better than a lumbering old pine-basket, Sir, which you have to handle as gingerly as a hamper of eggs." The steamer had three decks. On top was the hurricane deck and pilothouse, which was the only cool place on the boat, according to J. J. Hargrave, a passenger at one time. The main deck contained four staterooms to accommodate ladies up to the number of twelve, and a cabin in which there were twenty-four berths separated only by curtains. The funnel ran right up from the lower deck and engine room through the main cabin, which was consequently always superheated.¹⁰

Northup, having established the "Anson Northup" on the Red River and collected his two thousand dollars for the job, declined the task of running it regularly and left it on the doorstep of the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce. After some delay it was taken over by J. C. Burbank and Company of St. Paul, and later by J. C. and H. C. Burbank and Company. These firms ran it intermittently until 1862. Promises of a regular ten-day or fortnightly service were never kept, as navigation conditions or lack of freight continually delayed the boat. In 1860 its owners entered into a contract with the Hudson's Bay Company for the transport of five hundred tons of freight annually from St. Paul to Fort Garry. Consequently, most of the cargo carried thereafter was earmarked for "The Honorable Company."

¹⁰ *Nor'-Wester*, September 28, May 14, 1860; Joseph J. Hargrave, *Red River*, 56, 61 (Montreal, 1871). Hargrave describes the "Pioneer," which was the "Anson Northup" with a few alterations.

The freight was taken from St. Paul to Georgetown by cart and shipped down the river from there.¹¹

At the beginning of the season of 1861, the "Anson Northup" became the "Pioneer" — "a name indicative of her position and mission." A freak accident in the following winter claimed the life of the first steamboat on the Red River. The "Pioneer" had been firmly tied up in Cook's Creek below Fort Garry for the winter of 1861–62. A sudden fall in the water caused the taut ropes to pull the steamer over and it sank in nine feet of water. Efforts to raise it proved futile.¹²

Fortunately for the future of steamboat navigation on the Red, the Burbanks had a successor to the "Pioneer," the "International," ready to be launched in the spring of 1862. This boat had a narrow escape from disaster when the ice moving downstream in the spring snapped its hawsers, and it was carried down past Georgetown until some obstacle luckily checked its course and it could be secured to the bank again. The "International" was specially designed for Red River navigation, but was rather too large to be handled comfortably on the upper reaches of the river. Its machinery and much of its materials came from the "Freighter," a Mississippi steamer that had been stuck in Big Stone Lake since an ill-fated attempt to sail it from the Mississippi via the Minnesota River to the Red in 1860. The "International" was a hundred and thirty-seven feet long and twenty-six feet wide, and it cost \$20,000.00 to build. The

¹¹ Blakeley, in *Free Press*, December 17, 1877; *Nor'-Wester*, January 28, 1860. The "Anson Northup" made eight trips in 1860, between June 1 and September 3, and a like number in 1861, between June 11 and October 26. See *Nor'-Wester*, June 14, 28, July 14, 28, September 14, 1860; June 15, July 1, 15, August 15, September 14, October 1, November 1, 1861. In 1860 the Burbanks promised a ten-day service and in 1862 a fortnightly service, according to notices in the *Nor'-Wester* for June 14, 1860, and May 28, 1862. The steamboat which arrived at Fort Garry on July 18, 1862, carried 857 packages for the Hudson's Bay Company and 205 for other consignees. This was a typical distribution of cargo. *Nor'-Wester*, July 23, 1862; September 13, 1869.

¹² *Nor'-Wester*, June 15, December 14, 1861; January 22, 1862.

Nor'-Wester waxed eloquent over the boat in describing its first triumphant arrival at Fort Garry on May 26, 1862: "It is really a grand affair. Its size and finish would make it respectable even amid the finest floating palaces of the Mississippi."¹³

Low water put the "International" out of commission for half the summer of 1862, and the same cause combined with Indian troubles in Minnesota kept it anchored under the guns of Fort Abercrombie for the next year. In this rather lame way the Burbank regime on the Red River ended. On February 5, 1864, the *Nor'-Wester* announced that the Hudson's Bay Company had bought the "International" for use in transporting the company's goods from Georgetown to Fort Garry. There were some rumors to the effect that the Hudson's Bay Company had an interest in the steamers long before 1864. Certainly it gave the Burbank line the bulk of its business, and the company had specially established a settlement at Georgetown as a convenient Minnesota terminus for the steamboats. One writer goes so far as to suggest that the Hudson's Bay Company bought the "International" because the steamboats encouraged immigration and the development of a civilization which would be detrimental to the fur trade.¹⁴

¹³ *Nor'-Wester*, May 14, 28, 1862; *Free Press*, April 3, 1877; Hargrave, *Red River*, 230; Blakeley, in *Free Press*, December 17, 1877; Bryce, *Manitoba*, 199; Bishop Alexandre A. Taché, *Sketch of the North-west of America*, 41 (Montreal, 1869); Alexander Begg, *History of the North-west*, 2: 321 (Toronto, 1894).

¹⁴ *Nor'-Wester*, May 28, September 11, 24, 1862; June 2, August 19, 1863; February 5, 1864; Douglas, in *Free Press*, March 16, 1935. Burbank's carts were plundered by the Chippewa near Grand Forks in 1862, so he refused to run the boat the next year unless adequate troops were provided to protect the route. There is no proof that the Hudson's Bay Company was financially interested in the boats before 1864, but many believed that the company backed the enterprise from the start. See a letter from Captain William Kennedy, in the *Nor'-Wester* of July 28, 1860, in which he commends the company "for placing a steamer on the Red River of the North" and for "sending its goods by this route"; an editorial in the *Nor'-Wester* of October 29, 1860, giving credit to Burbank and Sir George Simpson, the company's governor, for the fact

The Hudson's Bay Company was not the only group which did not entirely approve of the steamboats. Bishop Alexandre A. Taché, in his *Sketch of the North-west of America*, favors the development of land rather than water transportation because the steamers injured the fish and consumed the scanty supplies of wood along the shore, while all the profits from their trade went to Americans. Harris, Whitford, and Bentley, flatboat freighters, advertised their method of transportation as the answer to Bishop Taché's complaints. And an old voyageur wrote to the editor of the *Nor'-Wester* suggesting the employment of York boats on the Fort Garry-Georgetown run to keep the money in Canadian hands.¹⁵

Even without opposition of this sort, the steamboats were having a hard time maintaining their hold on the river. The trips of the "International" were few and far between in the years from 1864 to 1870, because of low water, general restlessness after the Indian troubles, and scarcity of freight. The future of Red River transportation seemed a gloomy one. After 1870, however, three things revived the enterprise, and by 1878 there were five boats a week running regu-

"that steam-navigation has been successfully introduced" on the Red River; and an editorial in the *Nor'-Wester* for November 29, 1862, in which reference is made to "the Company's strange zeal in opening up the St. Paul route to the exclusion of the Lake Superior one." The "Anson Northup" flew its flag at half-mast when Simpson died; and when the "Pioneer" sank, his successor, Governor William MacTavish, went to Cook's Creek to superintend efforts to raise it. The company built a receiving warehouse for the "Anson Northup" at Fort Garry and maintained a clerk there to take orders, deliver goods, and collect debts for the boat. See *Nor'-Wester*, September 28, October 15, 1860; January 22, 1862. Some writers say that the Hudson's Bay Company built the "International," and that it was ostensibly owned by Norman W. Kittson, the company's St. Paul agent; others claim that it was sold to Kittson in 1864. The week-by-week accounts in the *Nor'-Wester*, however, indicate that the Burbanks owned the boat until 1864, when they sold out to the Hudson's Bay Company. See Blakeley, in *Free Press*, December 17, 1877; George N. Lamphere, "History of Wheat Raising in the Red River Valley," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 10: 10; Begg, *History of the North-west*, 2: 321; Bryce, *Manitoba*, 198.

¹⁵ Taché, *Sketch of the North-west*, 41; *Nor'-Wester*, August 30, September 11, 1862.

larly to Fort Garry. The first of these revitalizers was the organization of the province of Manitoba in 1870. This step ended a period of uncertainty as to the fate of the area and signaled the start of an amazing era of development. The second was the extension in 1872 of the Northern Pacific Railroad to Moorhead, a point fairly easily reached by the steamers. And the third development was the entrance of competition when Hill, Griggs and Company of St. Paul placed the steamboat "Selkirk" on the Fort Garry run in the spring of 1871.¹⁶

The Hudson's Bay Company, probably realizing that if it could not check the development of the province it might as well share in the profits accruing from that development, at once offered the services of the "International" for the carriage of passengers and goods not belonging to the company. Hill, Griggs and Company, however, disposed of competition from the "International" and the brigades of Red River carts operating between Fort Garry and St. Paul by securing monopoly rights to bonding privileges, and it challenged the right of the Hudson's Bay Company to run a British bottom in American waters. At the same time it increased the freight rates on goods between St. Paul and Fort Garry. The charge formerly made for a hundred pounds had been from \$2.80 to \$3.75; the new company charged a straight four dollars, thus establishing a precedent of accompanying monopoly control with a rise in rates which later steamboat operators on the Red were to follow.¹⁷

By June 3, 1871, the Hudson's Bay Company had ironed out its international difficulties by putting the ownership of the "International" in the name of Norman W. Kittson, its

¹⁶ Taché, *Sketch of the North-west*, 41; *Free Press*, April 30, 1878; Macoun, *Manitoba*, 580; *Manitoban*, April 1, 29, 1871.

¹⁷ *Manitoban*, November 12, 1870; April 1, June 3, 1871; Alexander Begg and Walter R. Nursey, *Ten Years in Winnipeg*, 27 (Winnipeg, 1879); Bryce, *Manitoba*, 200. The old rates were from St. Cloud and the new from St. Paul to Fort Garry. On the Red River cart trade, see the *Nor'-Wester*, August 19, 1863.

St. Paul agent. Kittson also succeeded in making arrangements with the American authorities to end the bonding privilege monopoly. By boycotting the "Selkirk" in favor of the "International," the Fort Garry merchants showed their disapproval of Hill, Griggs and Company, which was suspected of having got the brief spring monopoly through influence. If they could not get a monopoly in one way, the indomitable owners of the "Selkirk" decided they would get it in another. At the opening of the 1872 season, there was a new company, the Red River Transportation Company, which was managed by Kittson and owned both the "Selkirk" and the "International." The public was given to believe that Hill, Griggs and Company, to escape the odium of the previous spring's events, had sold out to Kittson. In reality, that concern had joined forces with Kittson to found a monopoly company.¹⁸ Thus ended the first act in the drama of river rivalry.

The next three years were the "golden era" for the Red River Transportation Company, which enjoyed a complete monopoly on the Fort Garry-Moorhead run. Three more boats were added to the Kittson fleet in this period. The "Alpha" and the "Cheyenne" were devoted mainly to the freight business, while the "Dakota" joined the "Selkirk" and the "International" in the passenger and freight trade.¹⁹ Such was the vital importance of the services rendered by the steamboats, that a move by the dominion government in 1875 and 1876 to retaliate against American restrictions on British vessels by preventing American ves-

¹⁸ Bryce, *Manitoba*, 200; Begg, *History of the North-west*, 2:321; Begg and Nursey, *Ten Years in Winnipeg*, 33; *Manitoban*, June 3, 1871; March 25, 1872.

¹⁹ J. W. McLane, the original owner of the "Alpha," found that, as a British subject, he could not navigate his boat in American waters, so he sold it to Kittson's line. See *Free Press* (weekly), September 20, 1873. The "Cheyenne" was built in 1873 at Grand Forks and was a side-wheeler. The "Dakota" was built at Breckenridge in 1872 and was a stern-wheeler. See an article on "Steamboats on the Red River," quoted from the *St. Paul Advocate*, in the *Free Press* of April 7, 1877.

sels from carrying goods between two Canadian points was received with protests. If the American steamers were driven off the Red River, there were not sufficient Canadian boats to replace them.²⁰ Trade seemed more important than national dignity to the people of Manitoba at the time.

As early as 1873, however, there were rumblings of discontent at the high rates charged by the monopoly line. Editorials on the subject were fairly frequent in the *Manitoba Free Press* of Winnipeg. In 1874 the discontent was voiced by the Winnipeg Board of Trade, which censured the dominion government for its failure to provide adequate transportation facilities for Manitoba, and indirectly blamed the dominion for the province's \$750,000.00 bill for forty million pounds of freight. The board of trade claimed that the bill should have been at least \$300,000.00 less.²¹

The only solution seemed to be the formation of a rival company to force the rates down by competition. Accordingly, the Merchants International Steamboat Line came into being in 1874. At first it was planned as a Winnipeg enterprise, but the refusal of navigation rights in American waters had forced the organizers to include some St. Paul men. With the launching of the "Manitoba" and the "Minnesota" by the new company in the spring of 1875, the curtain rose on the second act of steamboat rivalry on the Red.²²

The ill-fated "Manitoba" ran into customs snags on its first trip and was detained at Pembina for some time. A

²⁰ *Free Press*, June 2, 1875. A petition from the Winnipeg merchants to their representatives in Parliament stated that there were not sufficient Canadian vessels to carry goods from Pembina, that the cost of transshipment would be high, and that Kittson's monopoly line could still charge just as much to take goods to Pembina as to Winnipeg, and probably would. *Free Press*, March 1, 1876.

²¹ *Free Press* (weekly), November 29, December 6, 1873; May 9, 1874. The editorials advocated the formation of a local company to offset the high rates.

²² *Free Press* (weekly), February 28, March 7, 1874; *Free Press*, April 1, 22, 1875.

letter to the editor of the *Free Press* held that Kittson's company had a finger in the trouble. The steamboat war was definitely on. Rates tumbled rapidly. One correspondent of the *Free Press* lodged a protest against racing between the rival boats on the river. The struggle was to have a more striking manifestation than that, however. On June 5, 1875, the most exciting event in the history of Red River transportation occurred. As the "Manitoba" was steaming toward Winnipeg after a fast trip of forty-seven hours from Moorhead, it was rammed amidships by the "International," and sank in shallow water. Fortunately, there was no loss of life. The *Free Press* at once took sides and held the "International" responsible for the accident. It was even rumored that the collision was deliberate. So great was the interest in the disaster that as late as June 29 the steamer "Maggie," a local boat, advertised special Dominion Day excursions to "Collision Villa" to view the half-submerged wreck. The Merchants line at once entered an action against Kittson's line for \$50,000.00 damages. Meanwhile, the "Manitoba" was raised, repaired, and in operation again by July 22 — six weeks after the collision.²³

All was not yet plain sailing for the Merchants line, however. It soon collided with financial difficulties. How much Kittson's company had to do with the troubles was a matter of much speculation. On September 11, 1875, the luckless "Manitoba" was seized at Winnipeg for a \$1,700.00 debt owed by the Merchants line. About the same time the "Minnesota" was taken into custody by the sheriff at Moorhead. Soon it was reported that neither of the boats would run again that season, due to financial complications. After this announcement, rumors that the Merchants line had sold out to Kittson began to fly, though the *Free Press* denied them. An indication of the way the wind

²³ *Free Press*, May 1, 5, 7, 8, June 5, 7, 22, 29, July 13, 16, 22, 1875; Begg and Nursey, *Ten Years in Winnipeg*, 116.

was blowing was the raising of first-class freight rates by the Red River Transportation Company from \$2.00 to \$2.50 for the St. Paul-Winnipeg run.²⁴

On October 23, 1875, the *Free Press* finally admitted that Kittson's line had bought out the Merchants line. The actual sale of the two boats, the "Manitoba" and the "Minnesota," did not take place until the next spring, when they were disposed of by sheriff's sale. The Red River Transportation Company was the purchaser, paying \$10,444.96 for the "Manitoba" and only \$4,000.00 for the "Minnesota." Earlier Kittson had arranged to have the "Minnesota" put through a court of admiralty so that he could acquire a clear title to the boat without responsibility for any debts which the steamer contracted prior to its passing through the court. What had really led to the sale, according to one account, was that the American shareholders in the Merchants line, worried by financial difficulties, made secret overtures to Kittson and ultimately received shares in the Red River Transportation Company when the transfer came about. Most of the Winnipeg shareholders lost their investments in the company. In the spring of 1876 Winnipeg claims running into the thousands against the defunct company were settled, seventy-three cents being paid on the dollar. The creditors, however, generously allowed seventeen and a third per cent to be deducted for payment in full of wages due. As late as November, 1877, reports of suits in Manitoba courts arising out of the collapse of the Merchants line appeared in the *Free Press*.²⁵ Thus ended the second attempt to establish competition in the Red River steamboat service.

After the collapse of the Merchants line, the Red River Transportation Company continued to tighten its hold on

²⁴ Begg and Nursey, *Ten Years in Winnipeg*, 124; *Standard* (Winnipeg), September 4, 11, 18, 1875; *Free Press*, September 2, 20, 1875.

²⁵ *Free Press*, October 23, December 21, 1875; March 25, April 6, 21, 1876; November 8, 1877; Begg and Nursey, *Ten Years in Winnipeg*, 125.

Red River trade. A rather bitter feeling toward this virtual monopoly whose profits all went to St. Paul sometimes found expression in the columns of the *Free Press* and elsewhere. A writer who used the pseudonym of "Manitoba" declared that the St. Paul businessmen had established a "monopoly breeding isolation under which the trade of this Province has pined." The *Monetary Times* of Toronto, as quoted in the *Free Press*, asserted that the greatest drawback to the trade of Manitoba was the high cost of transportation to and from it. The *Times* went on to say that the cause of this situation was a steamboat monopoly on the Red River which had been able to declare a dividend of eighty per cent on its stock in 1876. "Being a St. Paul organization, the company arranged its tariff to discriminate in favor of that city, which drove Winnipeg merchants to purchase heavy goods in St. Paul," the article concluded. The Americans along the Red River were likewise disapproving of the St. Paul dominance. An excerpt from the *Moorhead Star* in the *Free Press* of May 31, 1876, spoke of the outside communication denied to the country by "a force of circumstances over which we have no control—and will have no control until there is a line of steamers on the Red River owned by, or subservient to the people along its banks." The refusal of the Red River Transportation Company to pay its county taxes for 1875 to the Grand Forks district added to the unpopularity of the company, especially since its taxes had been earmarked to keep the local school open.²⁶

The Red River Transportation Company did not go unchallenged in the years between 1875 and 1878. Continual rumors that rival lines were being formed were heard. On January 29, 1876, the *Free Press* reported that failure to get bonding privileges from the American authorities had stifled one project. A year later the formation of the

²⁶ *Free Press*, March 10, May 31, August 25, September 25, October 31, 1876; April 27, 1877.

Moorhead Transportation Company was announced, but nothing more was heard of it. T. Davidson, a famous Red River flatboatman, began the construction of a large steamer in the winter of 1875-76, but by March 16, 1876, the Kittson line had bought it for \$11,000.00. As late as 1878 the never-completed hull of Davidson's steamboat was lying at Grand Forks—a forsaken victim of competition warfare.²⁷ The number of steamers on the river increased from ten in 1875 to seventeen in 1878, with an eighteenth under construction.²⁸ But few of the new boats were international in their business dealings, and consequently they did not challenge the Kittson line very much. Flatboats were a much greater threat to the Red River Transportation Company. In 1877 there was a rumor that the United States treasury department was going to put a tax on alien flatboats trading between American points. The *Free Press* suspected that the Red River Transportation Company was putting pressure on the treasury department to tax the flatboats off the river. The steamboats already paid a tax, but the flatboat was at a disadvantage because its life was limited to one trip downstream, after which it was broken up for lumber. Consequently, if the flatboats were taxed

²⁷ *Free Press*, November 19, 1875; January 29, March 16, May 31, 1876; January 3, 1877; October 11, 1878. The *Moorhead Star* is quoted as reporting three different projects on foot to put a new line of steamers on the Red River to supply the "missing link made by the abandonment of the River by the regular [Merchants] line" and "to give this part of the country the outside communication denied it." *Free Press*, January 19, May 31, December 8, 1876.

²⁸ The ten steamboats on the Red River in 1875 were: "International" (1862), "Selkirk" (1871), "Dakota" (1872), "Alpha" (1873), "Cheyenne" (1873), "Maggie" (1873), "Prince Rupert" (1873), "Manitoba" (1875), "Minnesota" (1875), and "Swallow" (1875). See Begg and Nurse, *Ten Years in Winnipeg*, 144. The seven steamboats added between 1875 and 1878 were: "Keewatin" (1876), "Lady Ellen" (1877), the "baby" steamboat (1877), "Victoria" (1878), "William Robinson" (1878), "J. L. Grandin" (1878), and "White Swan" (1878). The eighteenth boat was being built for P. MacArthur of Winnipeg. *Free Press*, July 26, August 14, October 23, 1878. All these boats operated in Canadian waters; there were doubtless others operating south of the border.

like the steamers, they would pay every trip what a steamboat paid once in a lifetime.²⁹

By 1878 the clang of the railroader's hammer on the spikes of the Pembina branch of the Canadian Pacific Railroad was echoing from the border to St. Boniface, and that road was approaching Selkirk below Winnipeg. The rule of the steamboats was soon to be challenged by the iron horse. The steamers, ironically enough, did a thriving business bringing in the materials for the rival that was to drive them off the river. Cargo after cargo of steel rails was brought in by steamer after 1875. The momentous trip down the river of the "Selkirk" bringing in the "Countess of Dufferin," as the first locomotive in Manitoba was proudly named, received much publicity in the newspapers. Its arrival at St. Boniface on October 8, 1877, was heralded by screaming whistles and ringing bells which combined with snorts and whistles from the engine itself. Still greater excitement prevailed on December 3, 1878, when the last spike was driven for the Pembina branch connecting St. Boniface with the South by rail.³⁰

The owners of the steamboats foresaw the threat to their business and were already making arrangements for diverting the steamers from the Red to the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan rivers. The Winnipeg and Western Transportation Company, a British concern, was formed in the spring

²⁹ The "J. L. Grandin" ran from Moorhead to Winnipeg for a short time in the spring of 1878, but later devoted itself to the grain trade on the upper Red. See *Free Press*, March 7, April 3, June 10, August 5, 1878. In 1876 half a mile of river bank at Fargo was lined with flatboats under construction, and it was estimated that ten thousand feet of lumber would be needed to build the flatboats necessary for the fall trade on the Red River. One firm planned to build two flatboats a day between August 23 and October 1, all to be loaded with flour for Winnipeg. *Free Press*, August 1, 19, 23, 1876; November 19, 1877.

³⁰ *Free Press*, September 13, October 4, 8, 9, 1877; October 9, 1878; *Free Press* (weekly), December 7, 1878. By October, 1878, the railroad had reached Pembina from the south and it was expected that steamboats would only run from that point. The Canadian Pacific Railroad was building the Pembina branch from St. Boniface to connect with the American lines.

of 1878. Its application for letters patent declared that the company contemplated carrying on a freighting and transportation business by steamboats and other vessels upon the Red, Assiniboine, and Saskatchewan rivers, and upon Lakes Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Winnipegosis, and the tributaries of these rivers and lakes. In 1878 the company purchased the "Cheyenne" and the "Alpha" from the Red River Transportation Company. It planned to run a daily boat between Winnipeg and Selkirk, a semiweekly boat between Winnipeg and Portage La Prairie, and a triweekly boat between Winnipeg and Emerson. The following spring the "Manitoba" was acquired, and it was rumored that the "Minnesota" would be the next purchase.³¹ The proud fleet of the Red River Transportation Company was disintegrating. It had answered the challenge of many a rival on the river, but it could not fight the puffing monster on steel rails. Once again the steamboats took up the trek westward with the march of settlement.

During the twenty years of the steamboat era, the steamers came to play an increasingly large part in the life and development of the communities they served. It was by steamboat that Lord Dufferin, making the first visit of a governor-general to western Canada, chose to arrive in 1878. The "Minnesota" was gaily decorated for the occasion. Proceeding down the river, it met the "Manitoba," which greeted the visitor with a cannon salute and with a large sign reading "Welcome Lord Dufferin." The two

³¹ *Free Press*, September 19, 26, 1877; April 16, 25, June 8, 13, 1878; April 26, 1879. The fate of several Red River boats is described by Captain Fred A. Bill in the *Grand Forks Herald* for September 23, 1923. He records that the "Alpha," "Cheyenne," "Manitoba," and "International" were operated on the Saskatchewan, Assiniboine, and lower Red rivers until the early eighties, when the railroad caught up with them and they were dismantled. The "Minnesota" sank while crossing Lake Winnipeg on its way to the Saskatchewan River; the "Dakota" burned in midstream near Pembina in 1881; and the "Selkirk" was swept from its moorings at Grand Forks in 1884, carried downstream, and wrecked on the pier of a railroad bridge.

boats were tied together while the organ on board the "Manitoba" was requisitioned to play the national anthem and other patriotic songs. On the return trip, bonfires along the river greeted the viceregal party as it proceeded upstream to Fisher's Landing, Minnesota.³²

Members of the first circus to visit Manitoba went down the Red River by steamer in June, 1878, crowding the decks of the "J. L. Grandin." The circus came to a rather inglorious end when its manager departed hurriedly with all the money and wages, leaving the troop stranded in Winnipeg. The prevalence of the steamboats inspired a Mr. De Canop of Moorhead to build a baby steamer, twenty-one feet long and six feet wide, which cost only five hundred dollars. It was driven by a propeller wheel twenty-two inches in diameter and could run twelve miles per hour. Another novelty boat on the Red River was a floating photograph gallery. Its owner went up and down the river taking pictures of "anyone who wants to hand his likeness down to succeeding generations." The boat was once sunk by the "Minnesota," but it was bailed out and back on the job a short time later, and making "heaps of money" according to a *Free Press* correspondent.³³

Nor were the trips themselves without their novelties and diversions. Racing was a favorite sport of the steamboat crews whenever they happened to meet another steamer. A *Free Press* correspondent gives a blow-by-blow account of one exciting encounter:

It wasn't a race exactly but they — the "Selkirk" and "International" — both wanted to get a leetle ahead of the other. They left here a week ago Monday evening, the "International" having three hours start, which she kept till arrival at Pembina, where a delay, caused by the breaking of one of her cam yokes allowed the "Selkirk" to catch up; both boats left that place, nose and nose together; the "Selkirk" took the lead, and kept it till she broke a wheel arm which occasioned a stoppage for repairs, during which the "International"

³² *Free Press*, July 31, August 6, October 3, 1878.

³³ *Free Press*, June 13, 1877; April 18, June 20, October 11, 1878.

passed her. At Grand Forks, the "International" stopped, but the rival boat hadn't time. Mitchell had just placed a "rooster" on the safety valve and was standing over him with a monkey wrench to see that he kept in his place. Both boats tore up the River, stole wood from each other — and kind of hustled things generally, the "International" reaching Fisher's Landing an hour and a half ahead, one says, and 15 minutes ahead, according to the "Selkirk's" version.³⁴

The "Lady Ellen" and the "Victoria," two Manitoba boats built by the same man and almost identical in size, staged a thrilling duel between Fort Alexander and Selkirk in 1878, with the latter winning by fifteen minutes. A night race between the "Manitoba" and the "Minnesota" is described in a letter by a passenger on the latter:

The great lights of the two steamers gave a weird appearance to the scene. The pilots leaned over their pilot houses and cracked jokes with each other; and the roosters on deck crowed over each other, and the great chimneys puffed and threw out great clouds of sparks in unison, but we didn't spill any coal oil into the furnace nor break up the cabin furniture to make steam, but we forged quietly ahead, and soon left the "Manitoba" far in our wake.³⁵

If they had no races to relieve the boredom, the crews sometimes did a little hunting on the side. While the "Manitoba" was taking on wood near Pembina on one trip in 1877, members of the crew went bear chasing and captured three cubs, but did not have the courage to try an encounter with the infuriated mother bear. On another occasion the boat was stopped when an eagle was sighted, and the crew caught it and christened it "Stonewall Jackson."³⁶

Accidents, amusing, tragic, and disastrous, also prevented the trips from becoming monotonous and kept members of crews on their toes. The luckless "Manitoba" seemed specially addicted to accidents. It was involved in no fewer than three collisions, it sank once, it had a minor fire in its hold, and it lost one passenger overboard, all in the three years between 1875 and 1878. The "Manitoba" was also

³⁴ *Free Press*, June 13, 1876.

³⁵ *Free Press*, September 26, October 11, 1878.

³⁶ *Free Press*, May 15, August 22, 1877.

blessed by a visit from the stork during one trip, and Captain Alexander Griggs insisted upon following a precedent he had set on the "Selkirk" by naming the new arrival for the boat. The "Keewatin," a local Manitoba boat, had all its accidents on one trip—a man fell overboard, another tumbled into the hold and dislocated his shoulder, and a third accidentally discharged a gun, nearly blowing the head off a man on deck. The "Swallow," another British bottom, was one of the few boats actually to sink in the shallow river. It careened in a sudden squall and a dramatic rescue of its crew and passengers by a York boat ensued. Father Albert Lacombe, a pioneer missionary of Manitoba, lost his "portable chapel" in the accident, but almost three months later it was pulled ashore in a net and returned to its owner. The "Swallow" was later raised and put into operation again.⁸⁷ Nine drownings off steamboats were reported between 1875 and 1878. Although "man overboard" was a fairly frequent cry, it did not always indicate a tragedy. For example, an incident that occurred on the "Manitoba" during a trip in 1877 was described as follows by a *Free Press* correspondent:

The fuss was all caused by a stranger who was trying a waltz across the deck with an umbrella under his arm for a partner, and who took a round too much, and without trying waltzed off most beautifully into the river. Assistance was rendered, and after a struggle the unfortunate votary of the mazy was lugged out by one of the roustabouts belonging to the craft. Damages sustained—ruined clothes, one plug hat, umbrella, and one shoe.⁸⁸

Early freeze-ups sometimes caught the boats before they reached winter quarters. In 1875 only the "Interna-

⁸⁷ *Free Press*, June 5, 1875; May 25, June 19, 1876; May 8, June 15, November 5, 1877; May 2, 4, June 10, July 27, 1878.

⁸⁸ *Free Press*, August 9, November 3, 1875; May 18, June 15, September 10, 19, 1877; April 23, May 9, 1878. One of the victims was the mate of the "International." His body was conveyed to St. Boniface by the "Manitoba," which was draped in mourning and flew its flags at half-mast. The "International" was similarly draped. *Free Press*, September 11, 12, 1877.

tional" reached port in time. Such happenings often had profound effects on the community at the forks of the Red and the Assiniboine, dependent as it was on steamboat transportation. In 1873 the *Free Press* was cut to half size temporarily because its stock was frozen in at Moorhead. The same year the Christmas goods ordered by H. S. Donaldson, stationer of Winnipeg, failed to arrive until after the festive season was over.³⁹

Navigation difficulties in the shallow and twisting Red River were another bane of the steamboatmen. The most tricky bit of navigating was over Goose Rapids in Minnesota, where many a steamboat remained stuck for days. Captain Edwin Bell, one of the first skippers of the "Anson Northup," had to build a temporary dam and remove numerous boulders before he got his craft off a sandbar at these rapids in 1859. His supplies on board were too scanty for a prolonged stay there, so it was a case of get off or starve. The captain and pilot of the "International" in 1862 devised an ingenious method of navigating through Goose Rapids which the *Nor'-Wester* described as follows: "Whenever they felt the boat getting aground, they would at once throw her broadside against the current, dam up the water, and would thus get water enough to float them a bit further." The many horseshoe bends in the river also added to navigation difficulties. The *Nor'-Wester's* special correspondent describes a device used on the "Pioneer," known as the "butter-knife." It was "an ugly, heavy, crooked beam, with a sliver attached to the end, and worked on an iron spindle at the prow of the vessel, as an oar, to assist the rudders in steering."⁴⁰ Navigating through ice

³⁹ *Free Press*, November 4, 1875; *Free Press* (weekly), November 1, December 27, 1873.

⁴⁰ *Free Press*, August 12, October 9, 1874; *Nor'-Wester*, October 15, 1860; August 15, 1861; July 9, 23, 1862; Edwin Bell, "Early Steamboating on the Minnesota and Red Rivers," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 10: 94-96. Sometimes the steamers had to divide their loads or completely unload to get over the rapids.

did not faze the redoubtable steamboat captains in the least, if they were caught by an early freeze-up. On November 18, 1878, the "Lady Ellen" arrived in Winnipeg from Selkirk after breaking its way through ice from Netley Creek, some ten miles from the mouth of the Red River. Captain Ham McMicken had rigged up a machine and adjusted it to the nose of the tug, which made it look like a battering ram. "It busted the ice like a charm," commented the *Free Press*. Earlier in the same autumn, the "Lady Ellen" had had to send out men to chop a path through the ice. Its fuel gave out in bucking the ice, and members of its crew had to carry a new supply more than a mile to the boat. In desperation, they burned even the furniture. To add to the difficulties, the ice knocked a hole in the boat, and it had to cant to one side to reach its destination safely. Frequent halts for wood and water were another necessity of Red River navigation. The "Anson Northup" used nearly a cord of wood an hour, at \$1.25 a cord. In one season it was estimated that it burned from eight hundred to a thousand cords.⁴¹

Perhaps the most daring and sensational navigation feat in Red River transportation history was that performed by Captain Griggs of the "International" in 1873.

The "International" was at the time on the way to Fort Garry with a large consignment of liquors for the Company and other Winnipeg merchants, and failing to arrive at the Provincial Custom's House by midnight on the 10th, importers of the liquors she carried would have had to pay several thousands of dollars in excess of the old duties. The new tariff came into force on the 12th inst., but the 11th being a Sunday, it was necessary that the entries should be made before midnight on the 10th. Capt. Griggs on taking command, resolved to make a bold stroke to reach the goal in season, and very coolly turned the boat out of the bed of the river and made a short cut over the prairie as far as Kelleys, thereby reducing the distance very materially and gaining our Custom House close to the line in

⁴¹ *Free Press*, November 5, 18, 1878; *Nor'-Wester*, September 28, 1860; June 25, 1862.

time for the agents, who had been sent there from Winnipeg, to make the necessary entries.⁴²

Spring floods inundating the prairie in that year had made it possible for the Red River steamboats to invade the domain of the prairie schooner.

In December, 1877, gray-headed steamboat veterans and others from Minnesota met in convention at Breckenridge to arouse interest in improving navigation on the Red River. Petitions to both the Canadian and American governments had already been sent in by men on both sides of the line pleading for an appropriation to improve the river. The Manitobans were particularly interested in having some work done on St. Andrew's Rapids between Winnipeg and Selkirk, while the Minnesotans wanted some dams and possibly a lock built at Goose Rapids. In 1878 the state Republican convention at Minneapolis declared Red River improvement a national concern. Congress responded to the agitation with grants of ten thousand dollars in 1877 and thirty thousand dollars in 1878. The Canadian government also promised to spend on the Red River a part of its appropriation for river improvement.⁴³

It was time that the importance of the Red River should be recognized by federal governments, for the volume of traffic on its waters was increasing annually. It was estimated that the freight for Manitoba passing through Moorhead in 1872 amounted to five million pounds. The *Moorhead Sun* compiled more exact figures for the next three years, and reported that in 1873 the volume of freight leaped to 23,613,136 pounds; in 1874, it was 37,626,200 pounds, and in 1875 it nearly doubled to reach 76,078,680 pounds. Of course part of this amazing amount came in by means of transportation other than steamboats, but the

⁴² *Manitoban*, May 17, 1873.

⁴³ *Free Press*, August 25, 1875; January 12, October 16, 1876; January 16, 25, 27, March 2, May 30, June 28, November 23, December 15, 17, 1877; February 26, April 8, July 27, 1878.

steamers carried a large share of the trade. In the early days sixty tons of freight for one trip of the "Pioneer" was considered a record, but in the 1870's the steamboats towed barges, and consequently carried much larger cargoes. The record for a single trip went to the "Selkirk," which took down 725 tons of railway iron as well as some other cargo in June, 1876. The steel rail business in 1875 and 1876 was a major occupation of the "Selkirk." Assisted by other boats at various times, it carried a total of 14,500 tons of railway iron during the seasons of 1875 and 1876—enough to lay 160 miles of track. In 1878 the steamers also carried locomotives and flatcars on their barges. Cargoes of nitroglycerin for use in construction work were hustled through the customs and gingerly passed by the other boats when met on the river. The record for the largest cargo carried in one bottom without the aid of barges went to the "J. L. Grandin," which carried over three hundred tons on one trip when engaged in the grain business on the upper Red.⁴⁴

In 1876, the "Minnesota" carried a history-making cargo—the first shipment of Manitoba wheat. It consisted of 856 bushels at eighty cents a bushel; the freight charge to Toronto was thirty-five cents a bushel. More than ten thousand bushels of wheat were shipped up the river in 1877, when one firm alone, J. H. Ashdown and Company, shipped out 5,266 bushels of wheat.⁴⁵

The number of immigrants who entered the province of Manitoba by Red River steamboat is large, though exact figures are difficult to arrive at. Individuals had been trick-

⁴⁴ *Moorhead Sun*, quoted in *Free Press*, February 5, 1876; *Manitoban*, June 15, 1872; January 24, 1874; *Nor'-Wester*, June 15, 1861; *Free Press*, May 14, 1875; June 5, September 13, 1876; April 23, May 2, 18, June 4, 15, 26, September 28, October 11, 1878. Typical cargoes were 114 passengers and 200 tons of freight for the "Selkirk" in 1872, and 283 passengers and 365 tons of freight for the "Manitoba" on its maiden voyage in 1875.

⁴⁵ *Free Press*, October 23, 1876; November 3, 1877; January 7, 1878.

ling in all along, but the first large group to sail down the Red to new homes in Manitoba was made up of Mennonites. In 1874 in two weeks 880 Mennonites arrived on the "International" and the "Cheyenne." In 1876, with the aid of barges, the "International" carried 423 Mennonites, 118 French Canadians, and 27 Scandinavians, all on one trip. In August of that year, 1,117 Icelanders arrived on two steamboats and their barges. In the next two years, practically every boat reported some immigrants among its passengers; some boats carried as many as four hundred newcomers.⁴⁶

With increasingly large cargoes for steamboats, transportation on the Red became a lucrative business. The "Selkirk" was said to have nearly paid for itself on its first trip, and on another trip in 1876 it realized over \$30,000.00. Such enormous profits were made possible by high rates, which fluctuated with the presence or absence of competition rather than with the growth of traffic. In 1860 it cost \$6.00 per one hundred pounds to ship freight from St. Paul to Fort Garry. The rate was \$5.00 in 1861, about the same in 1862, \$4.00 in 1871, \$3.00 in 1872, and anywhere from \$1.00 to \$2.00, depending on the class of the passage, in 1875, when competition was at its height. By September 18, 1875, however, when the Merchants line was said to be in difficulties, the sudden rise of the rate for first-class freight from \$2.00 to \$2.50 foreshadowed the news of the line's collapse. In 1876 the rate went down to \$2.25, but it never again dropped to the level of the competition year — 1875.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Free Press*, August 1, 14, 1874; May 30, August 9, 10, 16, 1876; March 5, 1877; April 22, 24, July 15, 1878. Immigration figures for Manitoba from 1872 to 1878 were: 1872, 1,400; 1873, 1,256; 1874, 2,956; 1875, 6,034; 1876, 4,912; 1877, 6,511; 1878, 4,000. *Winnipeg Daily Times*, May 24, 1879.

⁴⁷ Bryce, *Manitoba*, 200; Begg and Nursey, *Ten Years in Winnipeg*, 30; *Nor'-Wester*, June 14, November 15, 1860; May 28, 1862; *Manitoban*, April 1, 1871; April 1, 1872; *Free Press*, March 29, September

Passenger rates for the St. Paul–Fort Garry run also dropped, especially in the competition era. A passenger had to pay \$35.00 in 1860, \$30.00 in 1862, and \$29.60 in 1863. Hill, Griggs and Company in 1871 took first-class passengers on the “Selkirk” for \$28.50, and second-class for \$25.00. The Red River Transportation Company in 1872 cut the prices to \$22.00 for first-class, and \$17.00 for second-class passage. By 1875 the company was quoting rates only from Moorhead instead of from St. Paul to Winnipeg. Before 1875 first-class passage from Moorhead had cost \$11.00, and second-class was \$7.00. The advent of competition from the Merchants line pushed first- and second-class rates on this run down to \$5.00 and \$3.00 respectively—a slash of more than fifty per cent. By 1876, when the Merchants line had folded up, the passenger rates were back at the pre-1875 level—\$11.00 for first-class and \$7.00 for second-class fare. In 1877, when the Red River Transportation Company again began quoting St. Paul to Winnipeg passenger rates, they were higher than in 1872—\$25.00 for first-class, and \$19.00 for second-class passage. The fluctuations in rates seem to indicate that the protests against the monopoly of the Red River Transportation Company were well founded, justifying such comments as that of the *Guelph Herald*: “exorbitant freights charged on goods entering or leaving the Province [of Manitoba] constitute an evil which nothing short of the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway can remedy.”⁴⁸

And yet, despite continual grumbling at high rates and monopoly control, the people of Winnipeg watched eagerly each spring for the first steamboat from the south, and 20, 1875; April 26, May 13, 1876; April 20, 1877; Begg, *History of the North-west*, 2:387.

⁴⁸*Nor'-Wester*, June 14, 1860; May 28, 1862; June 2, 1863; *Manitoban*, April 1, 1871; April 1, 1872; *Free Press*, May 1, 1875; May 2, 1876; April 25, 1877. The *Guelph Herald* is quoted in the *Free Press* of January 9, 1877.

heaved a sigh of regret when the last one left in the fall. The year 1878, by way of a last triumph before the railroad diminished the importance of the steamboats, set the record for both the earliest and the latest arrival of a steamer. The "Manitoba" steamed down the river to Winnipeg on March 22 of that year, a month and a day in advance of the previous record, set in 1877. And at the close of the season, the "Cheyenne" arrived in Winnipeg on November 23, after breaking its way through ice gorges, one a mile long. The latest previous arrival was on November 1, recorded in 1875. One of the popular indoor sports at Winnipeg in March and April was the laying of wagers on the approximate date that the first boat would reach the settlement. Some rash bettors even predicted the exact hour and the name of the boat. In 1876 the *Free Press* commented humorously the day after the first boat had whistled its arrival at the city: "The agony is over. The boat's arriv. Bets are all settled. Some fellows will come out with shining plug hats, and a lot of others will have to wear their winter clothes all summer."⁴⁹

With the completion of the railroad to Manitoba in 1878, the importance of the steamboats declined, and interest in their activities likewise lessened. No more did the citizens race down to meet each boat, or bet their neighbors that the first steamer would arrive on May 1, at 10:00 A.M. An exciting and colorful chapter in the history of transportation in the West was closed.

MARION H. HERRIOT

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

⁴⁹ *Free Press*, November 4, 1875; March 18, April 6, 20, 26, 1876; April 20, 1877; March 6, 23, November 25, 1878.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).