

## Steamboat Heroine

OKLAHOMA HISTORY CENTER EDUCATION DEPARTMENT



*Steamer Heroine on the Red River, 1838*, Peter Rindlisbacher (Steamboat Heroine Collection, OHS).

The role of transportation and trade drastically changed the landscape of America. The market and transportation revolutions changed American economics and increased migration to the West. Steamboat transportation allowed western farmers to participate in the selling of goods on the market. Steamboats helped to develop a system of trade that altered the **economy** of the West and increased settlement, even in states like Oklahoma.

The discovery of the sunken steamboat, *Heroine*, in Oklahoma's Red River in 1990 provided evidence as to the role of steamboats in Oklahoma and how they transformed the region. The **excavation** of *Heroine* by the Oklahoma Historical Society and Texas A&M University provided archaeologists and historians with information on *Heroine* and how it operated. When *Heroine* sank in 1838, it was carrying supplies to the soldiers at Fort Towson in Indian Territory, present-day Oklahoma. Steamboats traveling to Oklahoma mostly carried supplies for the military forts in the region, but they also spread the culture developing in the United States beyond its borders.

Steamboats helped transform the West and Oklahoma through trade and **cultural diffusion**. In the following pages, you will learn about the impact of steamboats on the West, the opportunities and challenges of steamboat operation, the experience of the crew and passengers aboard steamboats, and the story of the *Heroine*.

## Steamboats and the West

The market and transportation revolutions transformed the American economy in the 1820s and 1830s. The **market revolution** involved the shift from producing goods for survival to producing goods for sale on the market. The market revolution created **commercial agriculture** as we know it today. Farmers began to produce crops for their commercial value. The market revolution led to the transportation revolution, which involved the creation of bridges, canals, roads, steamboats, and railroads to transport the goods and services people created. These two revolutions created the systems in which people produce and purchase goods and services today.



Illustration of workers spinning cotton, 1840 (image courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery).

One important aspect of the market and transportation revolutions was the creation of the western river steamboat, built to transport goods from the West along the rivers. Western river steamboats helped solve a serious problem for the people living along western border of the United States. Farmers living in the West often had no way to transport their goods to other areas due to land barriers, like mountains, and a lack of **transportation** options. The emergence of the western river steamboat helped to solve this problem. Steamboats transported goods and people at a rapid pace, which revolutionized transportation in the West.

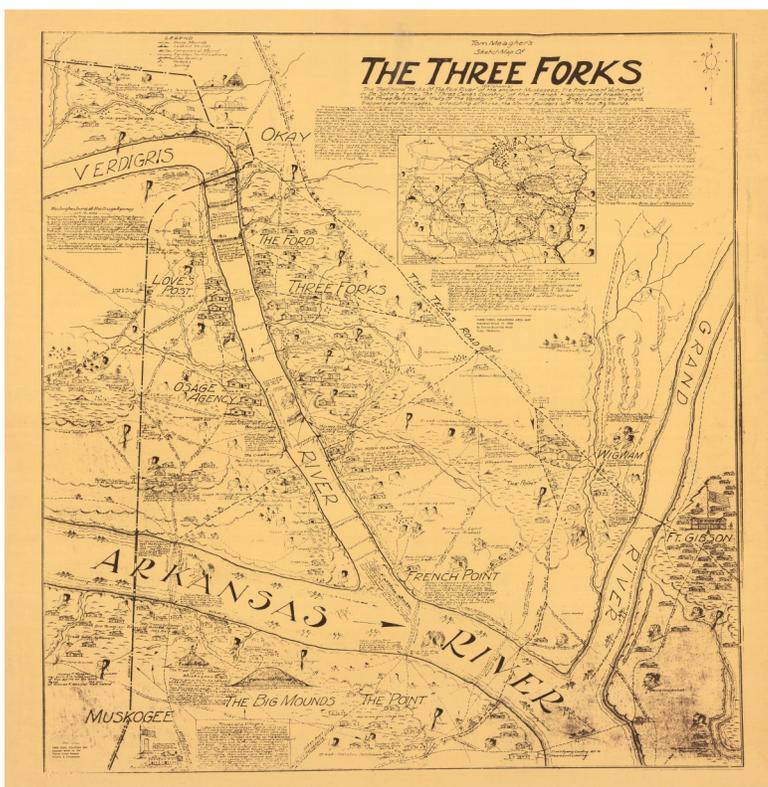
The steamboat industry not only provided the West with a strong transportation system, but it developed the economy of the region, too. Steamboat operations, as well as the construction and repair of steamboats, created more jobs and led to people moving to these jobs. The demands of steamboat repair and construction created **foundries** and machine shops which made steamboat engines and boilers. The steamboat industry also created a demand for lumber along the western rivers. Steamboats used massive amounts of wood for fuel, and people living along the rivers saw this as an opportunity to develop a business. They set up refueling stops in which steamboat operators could purchase wood for fuel while on the river.

Additionally, the development of western steamboats led to cultural diffusion. Cultural diffusion involves the spread and sharing of different cultures. Along western rivers, the diverse groups of people traveling together shared ideas and experiences. Passengers on the boats shared ideas and discussed the current topics of the day, adopting new ideas from each other. The steamboat's crew also contributed to this spread of culture, talking with people at the various ports where they stopped and with one another. Steamboats helped to spread ideas, values, and culture through travel. People shared experiences and ideas on board the boat and at the various ports. News and ideas traveled through the various steamboat ports and led to an increase in communication among the different regions of the United States. With the introduction of steamboats and other methods of transportation, ideas in the East were shared with the West and South.

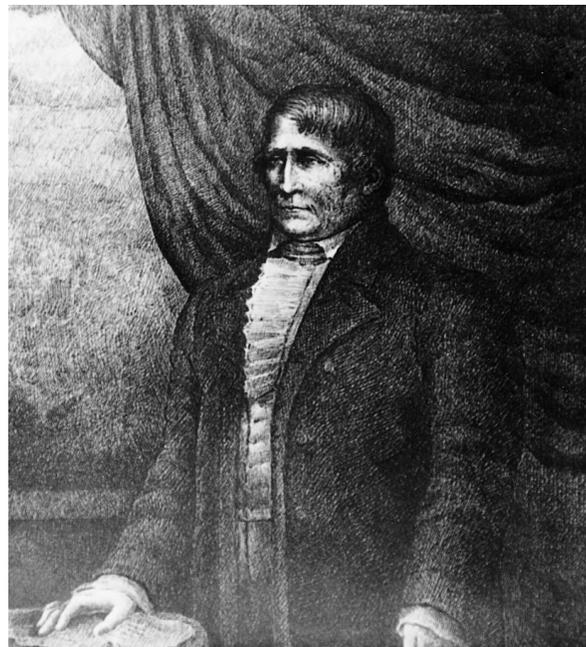


Waterfront, Vicksburg, Mississippi (image courtesy of Library of Congress).

Steamboats made interactions between American Indian tribes, traders, and the military possible. For instance, several American Indian tribes participated in the fur trade. In the fur trade, traders would purchase **pelts** from American Indian tribes and then ship them via steamboat. Steamboats also facilitated interactions with the military. During the era of Indian Removal, tribes would travel by steamboat to Indian Territory where their checkpoints military forts. These interactions led to more cultural diffusion with the American Indian tribes, traders, and soldiers sharing or imposing their cultures on one another.



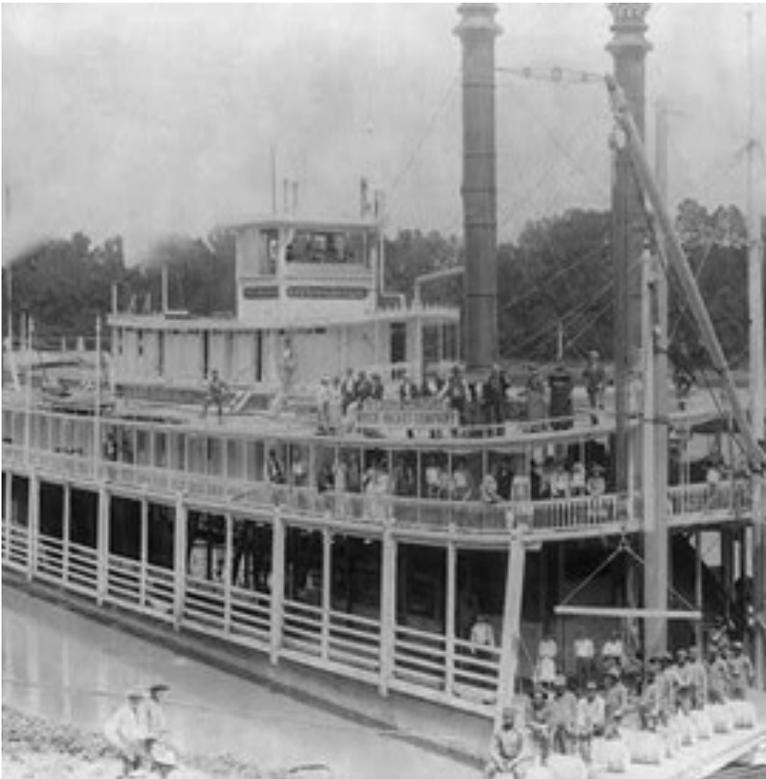
The Three Forks area was the primary fur-trading area in Oklahoma until about the time of the steamboat *Heroine*. This map was sketched by Tom Meagher (Watmap. Foreman0002, Grant Foreman Collection, OHS).



Jean Pierre Chouteau established a fur-trading business in the Three Forks region that lasted generations (3105, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS).

## Opportunities of Steamboat Operation

The steamboat industry provided economic opportunities for steamboat operators/owners and **roustabouts**. Steamboats created opportunities for operators through the high demand for transportation of goods and people. Although managing a steamboat was costly, owners still made a profit from steamboat **navigation**. Many owners belonged to the middle class, and steamboat operation allowed them to keep a steady income. Additionally, the steamboat industry provided opportunities for roustabouts, **semi-skilled** workers without regular jobs. Roustabouts worked whenever jobs became available. Roustabouts typically worked as deckhands on western steamboats, and, because steamboats traveled at different times, roustabouts often worked on multiple steamboats, jumping from boat to boat at the various ports.



*City of Paducah* (steamer), St. Louis & Tennessee River Packet Co., Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee. August 1892 (image courtesy of Library of Congress).

Furthermore, steamboats created opportunities for enslaved people, **Freedmen**, and immigrants. For enslaved people, hired out to work on steamboats from their enslavers, working on steamboats was an opportunity to assert their **autonomy**. Steamboats enabled mobility, something often restricted in other working environments. Steamboat work gave them the chance to communicate with family members or inquire about them at the various ports along the river. This mobility and exposure to different regions allowed some of the enslaved people to create networks that helped them to escape. Enslaved men often worked as deckhands. Enslavers did not often hire out enslaved women, but when they did, the women worked as chambermaids. Steamboats also provided opportunities for Freedmen. Similar to the roustabouts, Freedmen often worked as deckhands, but they also worked as servers and cooks.

### HEAVING THE LEAD LINE

Now we're stuck there—?—  
For the lead line drapped off right now.  
Well, old deck hand, when you git on top  
I'm gonna hear that line—?—  
Let the old boat draw.  
Lord, I'm throwin' lead line on the la'board  
side.  
Quarter less twain.  
Don't you change your mind.  
Heave it in the water just-a one more time.  
Eight feet and a half, Mr. Pilot, will you  
change your mind.  
Run him on a slow bell,  
Run him on a slow bell.  
Quarter less twain on the sta'board side.  
Mr. Pilot, will you change your mind.  
Drap it on over on the left-hand side.  
Tell me there's a buoy, a buoy right on the  
bar.  
The light is twisted, and you can see just  
how.  
Pull a little over to the la'board side.  
Lawd, Lawd.  
Quarter less twain,  
Quarter less twain,  
Quarter less twain,  
Quarter less twain,  
Lawd, Lawd, now send me quarter less  
twain.  
Throw the lead line a little higher out.  
I've gone low down, so mark twain,  
Mark twain.  
Come ahead, Mr. Pilot, a little bit strong.  
I've done got over, and I believe we're  
gonna  
Throw the lead line over——  
No bottom here.

“Heaving the Lead Line,” a song about working as a leadsman on a steamboat often sung by enslaved crew (image courtesy Library of Congress).

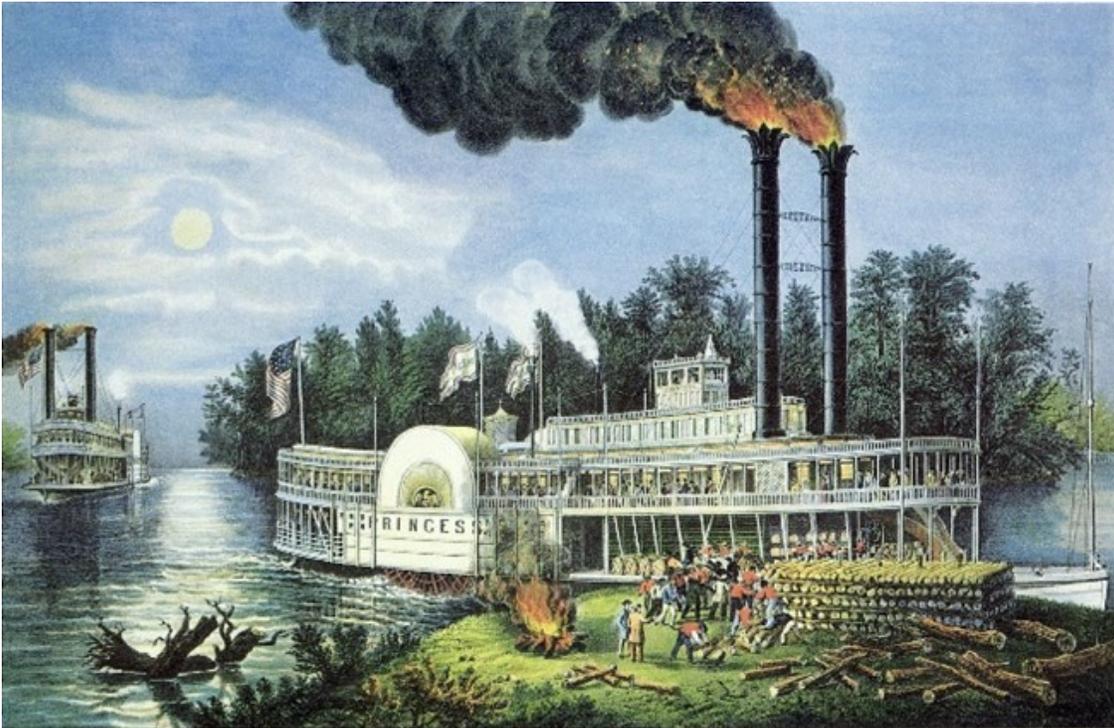
Moreover, steamboat operation provided economic opportunities to immigrants and **migrants**. Steamboats offered opportunities for migrants and immigrants to travel to the West to build a better life for themselves. Migrants traveled to the region from other U.S. regions, while immigrants came from other countries. The West had more land available and did not have the overcrowding of the eastern cities. Migrants could set up farms or engage in many other western industries. Immigrants could also engage in work as deckhands on western steamboats, become steamboat operators, and establish farms for themselves. Overall, the western steamboat industry provided diverse groups of people with new opportunities and most involved the chance to increase their economic status.



Loading a Mississippi River steamer at New Orleans, Louisiana (image courtesy of Library of Congress).

## Challenges of Steamboat Operation

Even though steamboat operation offered many economic opportunities, many challenges also existed. To start with, steamboat operation drastically altered the environment in the West. Steamboats required massive amounts of wood for fuel. A medium-sized steamboat, like *Heroine*, used anywhere from twenty-four to fifty cords of wood a day. A cord is a unit of measurement used when selling firewood. One cord measures four feet wide by four feet high by eight feet long. The removal of trees along the banks created erosion, **washouts** in the rivers, and changes in vegetation. The wildlife along western rivers changed as a result of the cutting of trees along the banks. While the environmental impact was huge, people continued to cut down trees to fuel steamboats because it provided them with a source of income. People along the rivers would cut down trees and stack them along the river banks and receive payment from steamboat operators for their product.



*Wooding Up on the Mississippi* (image courtesy of *National Geographic*).

Western steamboat operators also dealt with the challenge of weather and barriers to river navigation. Weather-related challenges included the freezing of the rivers in the winter and the flooding of rivers in the spring and summer. Most steamboats could only operate seasonally, with some only operating four months out of the year. Another challenge for operators involved natural barriers to boat navigation on the rivers. For example, the **Great Raft** was a tremendous log jam that prevented steamboats from navigating to the various ports on the Red River. In 1836, Henry Shreve began to remove the raft and in 1838 steamboats could navigate through it. The removal of the Red River Raft opened up trade along the Red River and provided new opportunities for steamboats to transport goods to new areas. The removal of the raft allowed *Heroine* to become a transporter for Fort Towson, supplying the fort with goods and, occasionally, recruits.



Scenes of the Great Red River Raft (image courtesy of Library of Congress).

Sandbars and rapids also impacted steamboat travel. Rapids often caused travel delays and forced boats to find another route. Weather and barriers contributed extensively to the struggles of steamboat operators, but the most significant challenge for them to overcome was accidents.

Accidents contributed to massive loss of life as well as economic losses for operators, passengers, and crew. Due to the lack of regulations for steamboats, fires, collisions, boiler explosions, and **snags** happened often. Collisions occurred more frequently in the early 1800s when the western steamboats first emerged. They often happened at night when it was difficult for the crew to see other approaching boats. Collisions caused death and severe financial loss and often caused boats to sink. When a collision happened, many passengers and crew died either from drowning or being crushed upon impact. Eventually, steamboatmen adopted the use of a steamboat bell. The bell was used to signal to other boats on the river to avoid collision.

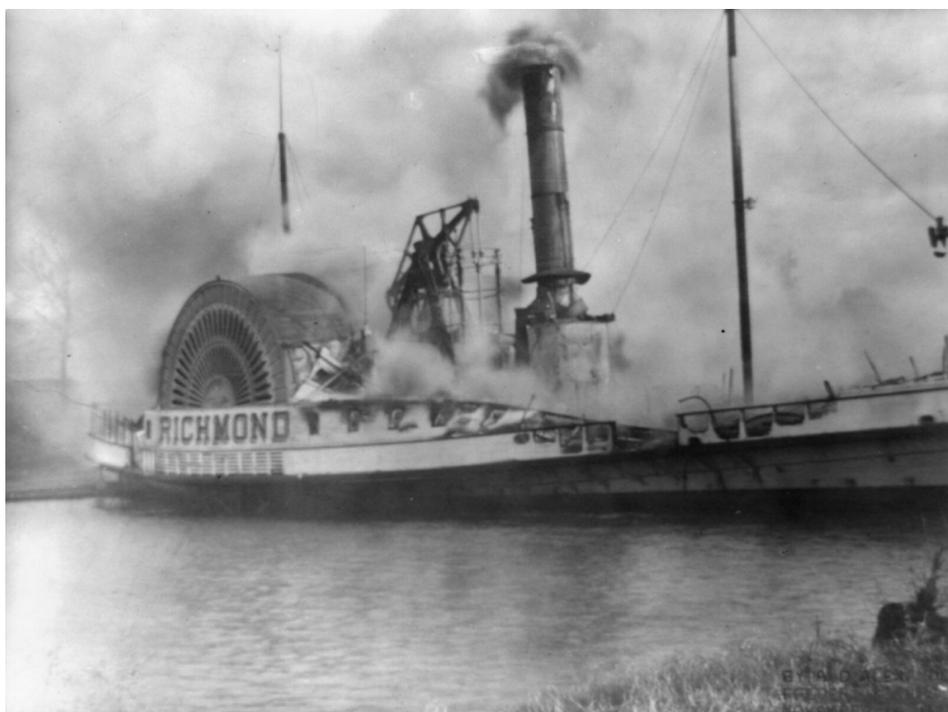


Steamboat collision (image courtesy Smithsonian National Postal Museum).

Fires and boiler explosions were another deadly form of accidents on western steamboats. Steamboat operators favored engineers, those responsible for fueling the boat, who placed the speed of the boat over safety. Therefore, fire and boiler explosions often occurred due to the common practice of steamboat engineers overloading the boiler and the **steam engine**. They used steam pressures far above the limit that the engines could stand. This caused boilers and engines to explode. Explosions and fires caused loss of life and injuries for steamboat passengers and crew. When an explosion occurred, the **scalding** hot steam caused injuries and even death. For example, in 1838 the steamboat *Moselle* exploded, killing 150 of the 280 people on board. The steamboat *Heroine* experienced boiler failure in 1835, which left several dead and many others severely wounded. Explosions like these got public attention and generated an outcry over the lack of regulation of the steamboat industry.

Snags on western rivers caused the most steamboat accidents. Snags were trees or large branches lodged in the bottom of the riverbed. Snags went largely undetectable because many were disguised under the water. They could only be detected if visible above the water, or if the pilot saw it below the surface. Snags punctured steamboats underneath the water, causing boats to sink. Snags contributed to almost three-fifths of all steamboat accidents. Snags did not contribute to a huge loss of life, as with explosions or fire, but they did often cause financial loss. Boats did not often survive, and freight was usually lost as well. For example, in the 1838 sinking of the *Heroine*, the crew salvaged some of the freight, but the boat was lost, causing severe financial loss for the operator.

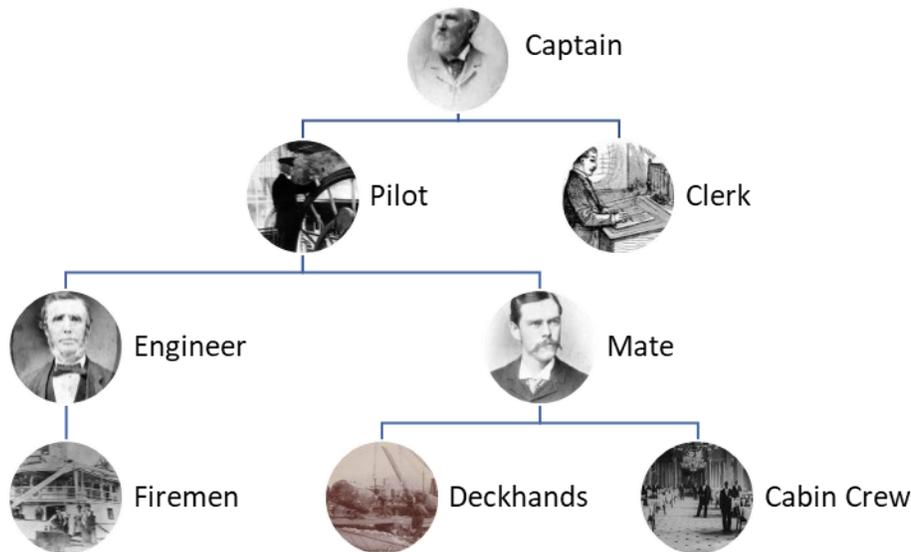
All of the challenges that steamboats experienced contributed to their short lifespans. Steamboats did not often run for more than four years due to the harsh river conditions and accidents. The frequency of accidents made steamboat travel a gamble, but one that people often took. If a steamboat could run for five years or more, it was considered old, its survival rare, and its crew and operators, lucky. The steamboat *Heroine* ran for five years before sinking in 1838, thus making it a veteran boat and a rare vessel.



Steamboat *Richmond* on fire (image courtesy of the Library of Congress).

## The Crew of a Western Steamboat

The experience on western steamboats differed for the passengers and crew of each boat. To start with, the crew was composed mostly of **unskilled laborers** who had to adapt quickly to the rapidly changing conditions of river travel. The number of crew members differed depending on the size of the boat. Mid-sized boats, like *Heroine*, generally had a crew of twenty to twenty-five. Western steamboats had a captain, pilot, mate, clerk, engineers, deckhands, firemen, cook, servers, cabin steward, steward's assistants, and **chambermaids**. A strict ranking system, or hierarchy, existed. Steamboat captains, at the top of the system, were often the owner or part-owner of the steamboat and focused on managing business interests. Steamboat clerks served under the captain and were responsible for setting the boat's passenger and **cargo** rates and making sure the right cargo was on board. In other words, the clerk and the captain managed the finances of the boat and made sure it profited as a business. The pilot answered to the captain, but usually possessed more authority as he typically had more experience with navigating steamboats. Pilots, often the most skilled members of the crew, had the responsibility steering and navigating the vessel on the river. The pilot of a boat learned his trade by observing and traveling on steamboats. Most pilots had worked as deckhands, so they understood all the boat's operations. Pilots usually possessed the

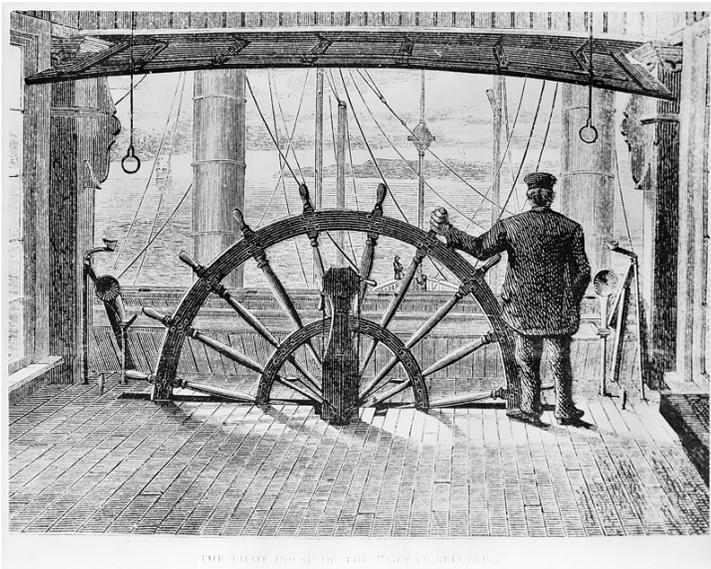


Chain of command on a steamboat.



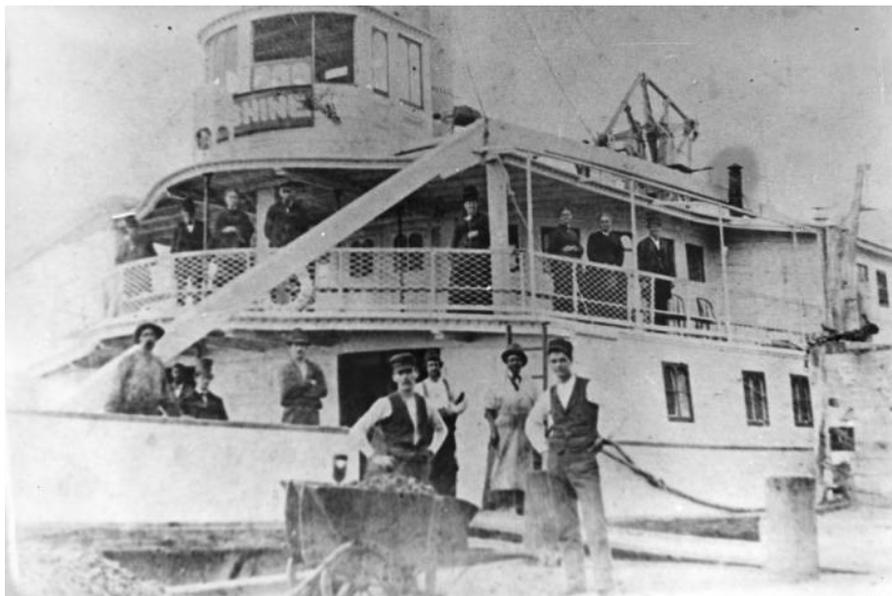
Patrick Yore, steamboat captain (image courtesy Missouri Historical Society).

most authority on the boat. Under the pilot was the mate, who had the responsibility of directing deckhands and the loading or unloading of the boat. The mate was also responsible for ensuring that the vessel obtained enough fuel. Next, the engineer was the person who kept the boat running. He, along with the firemen, ran the boiler and engine of the boat. Engineers and mates both answered to the captain and pilot, but engineers had a more difficult job. Pilots and captains often blamed engineers for mistakes or accidents, even when the engineer's orders came from them. Engineers had a significant amount of responsibility. They had to act and think fast to respond to signals for starting and stopping the boat. They also had the responsibility of making sure the boat ran properly and quickly without any accidents. Most engineers had no formal training, which led to many errors in judgment and contributed to many accidents. However, captains and pilots favored speed over safety and because of this, engineers pushed steamboat engines to their breaking points, causing explosions.



Pilot steering a steamboat (image courtesy Smithsonian National Museum of American History).

Firemen were deckhands who answered to the engineer and primarily stoked the boiler and engines. Stoking the boiler involved keeping the fire going, so the boiler and engines could run properly. Firemen had the most difficult and dangerous job on board steamboats. They worked all day every day with few breaks. If an accident occurred, they often perished first, especially if there was an explosion. Firemen could also work as regular deckhands who loaded and unloaded the steamboat. Deckhands made up most of the boat's crew, and experienced the most hardship because they



Deckhands on a steamboat (image courtesy Treasures of Connecticut Libraries).

were at the bottom of the chain of command. They were the boat's workforce, doing the worst work for the smallest pay. Deckhands and firemen worked nearly nonstop with no holidays, and they slept among the cargo. **Immigrants**, Freedmen, and hired out enslaved people made up most deck crews, and they often experienced physical and mental abuse from the mate of the boat. Finally, the cabin crew consisted of the cook, servers, steward, steward's assistants, and a chambermaid. Freedmen or enslaved people made up most of the cabin crew. The cabin crew received less pay than the deckhands, but they usually worked in less **hazardous** conditions. Their primary responsibility was to serve the passengers and officers of the steamboat. The cook and servers produced food for cabin passengers, officers, and the crew. The steward and steward's assistants waited on the needs of the cabin passengers, and the chambermaid cleaned cabins.

Each role of a crew member on board a steamboat was subject to the unpredictable nature of steamboat travel. Crews experienced accidents, including sinking, explosions, and fires with the deck crews often suffering the most loss of life and injury. The strict system of **hierarchy** and chain of command kept deck crews and cabin crews on the bottom of any steamboat's social order. These men and women worked long hours for little pay in extremely hazardous conditions. Some also experienced abuse at the hands of their mate, who acted as their supervisor. Ultimately, steamboat crews worked in extremely harsh conditions and understood the guaranteed uncertainty of steamboat operation.



Artist's rendering of the steamboat *Heroine* (Steamboat Heroine Collection, OHS).

## Steamboat Experience and Environment

Like the crews on western river steamboats, passengers also experienced a system of social hierarchy and difficulties while traveling. In the 1830s and beyond, society defined people based on their economic status and skin color. Society considered poorer people and people of color as less important, and they received harsher treatment. An example of this, called **social stratification**, is revealed by the experience of passengers on western river steamboats. Steamboat operators separated first-class passengers from the lower classes. In most cases, people of color and the poor were prevented from participating and interacting with wealthier whites.

First-class passengers, called cabin passengers, resided in the upper deck and typically paid more for their passage. Steamboat operators provided them with food, the service of the steward and servers, and relatively private rooms. On second-class boats, like *Heroine*, the accommodations included gender-segregated rooms with rows of bunk beds and curtains for privacy. On some boats, cabin passengers had access to saloons and card tables. In the case of an accident, cabin passengers had a better chance of survival since their rooms existed on a higher level. The upper deck was safer if the boiler failed or if the boat sank, which often occurred on western steamboats.

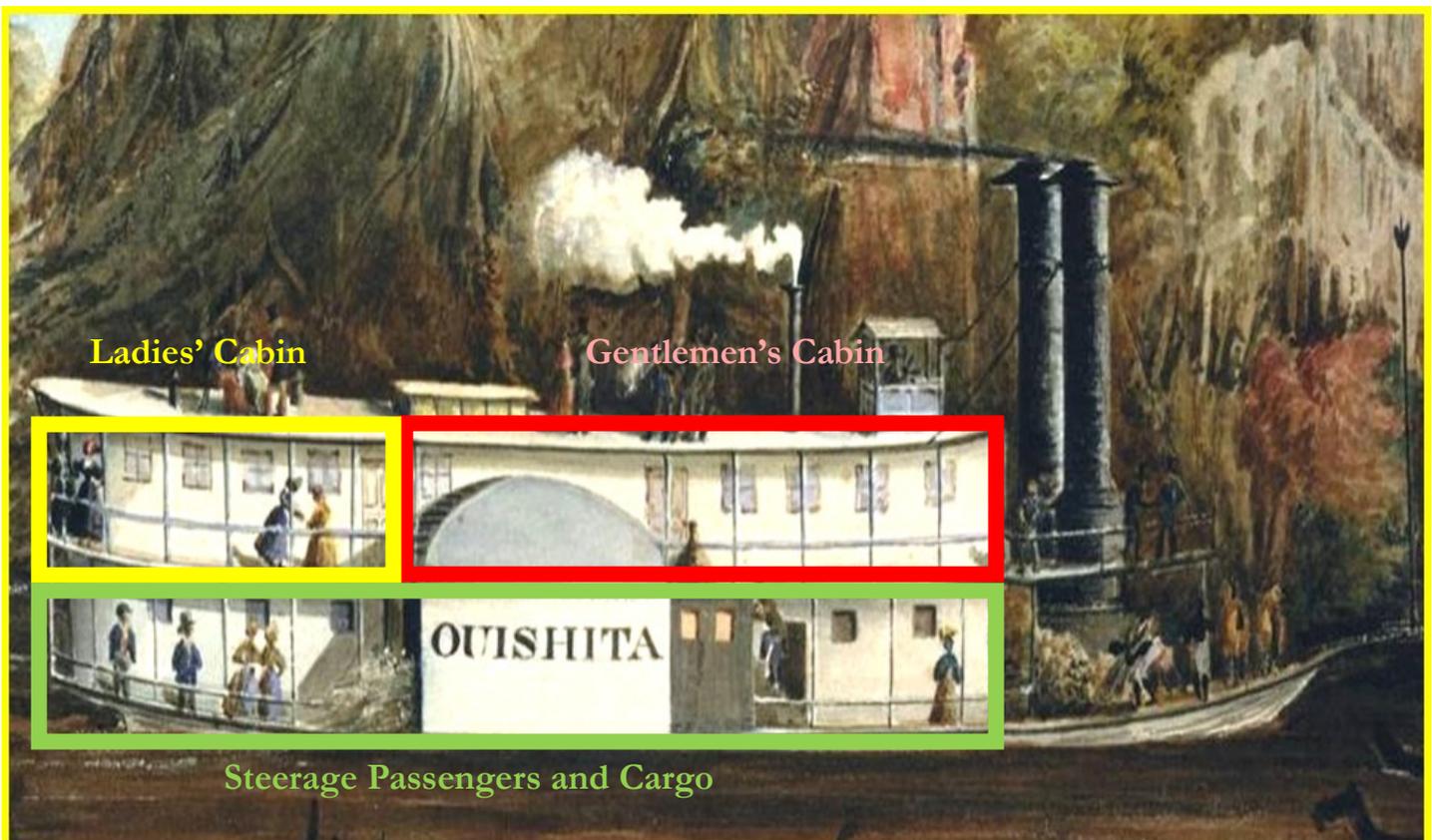
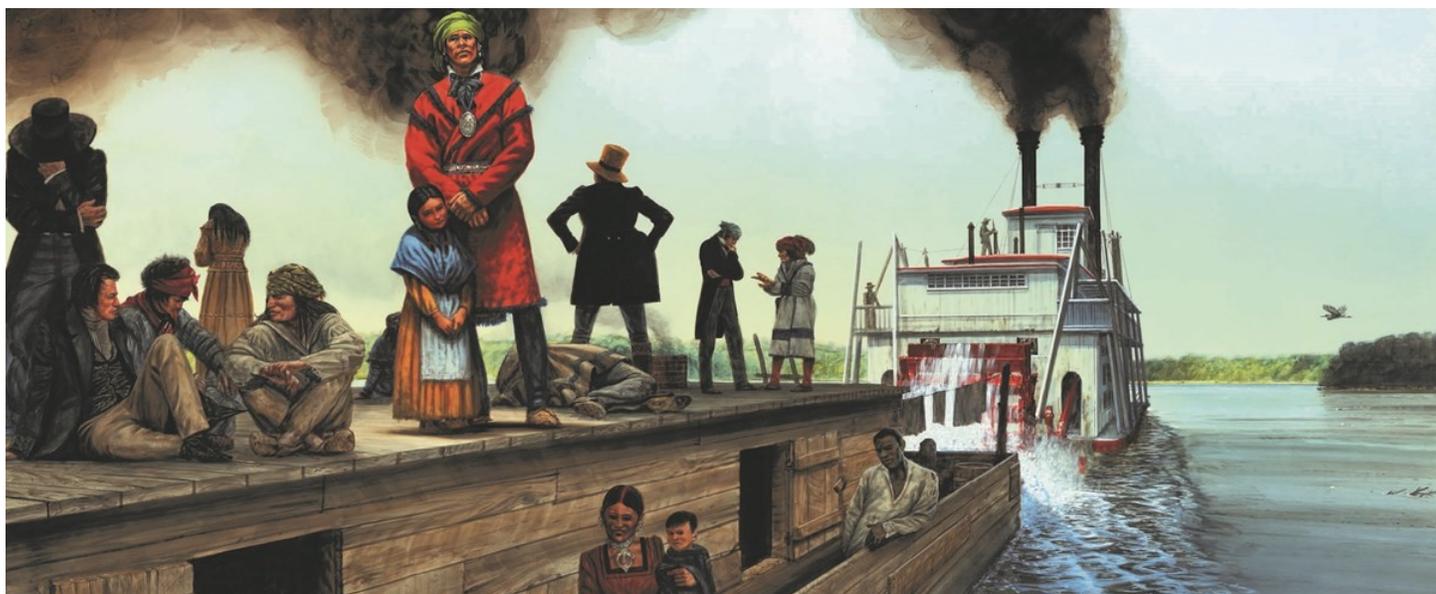


Diagram of the separation of steamboat passengers (Steamboat Heroine Collection, OHS).

In contrast to the experience of first-class passengers, second-class passengers, also called deck passengers, had a more difficult time. Deck passengers traveled on steamboats for a low price, and often hired themselves out to work for the steamboat to reduce the cost of their passage. Deck passengers did not have private accommodations and slept among freight on the main deck with the crew. The main deck was located underneath the upper deck, thus placing the deck passengers below the cabin passengers, which revealed and reinforced their rank in society. Moreover, deck passengers experienced overcrowding, and they often slept on top of freight boxes. Deck passengers also prepared their own food and often ran out of supplies. They did not have the access to the saloons or kitchens that the cabin passengers did.

Additionally, deck passengers had more exposure to diseases and suffered more during steamboat accidents. For instance, when **cholera** outbreaks occurred on steamboats, more deck passengers and deck crew were infected due to the lack of sanitation, healthcare, and social distancing. When accidents occurred, deck passengers, like the deck crew, experienced the most loss of life. The main deck was located only slightly above water level, and this made it the most difficult area to escape from when boats sank, or their boilers exploded. Even during collisions there were often more injuries and deaths among deck passengers. For example, in 1837, the *Monmouth* collision killed several members of the Muscogee (Creek) tribe, who were deck passengers, on their way to Indian Territory.



Cherokee Trail of Tears (image courtesy National Park Service).

## Overland Travel vs. Steamboat Travel

During the transportation revolution, when steamboat travel became popular, overland travel also expanded. Both steamboat and overland travel involved hazards and challenges. Overland travel in the early 1800s consisted of stagecoach and wagon travel.

The differences between steamboat travel and overland travel involve cost, time, and conditions. First, steamboat passengers usually paid less than overland passengers due to **supply and demand**. A great supply of steamboats existed, all offering the same accommodations to passengers, so competition kept the prices low. However, stagecoaches and wagon trains did not have the same demand. The cost of supplies for a family on a wagon train often exceeded 500 dollars. For stagecoach travel, the cost ranged from five to two-hundred dollars, depending on the distance covered, whereas the cheapest steamboat travel could be two dollars.



Photograph of a stagecoach that operated between Dodge City, Kansas and Fort Supply, Indian Territory (20738.N8.34.A, Edna M. Couch Collection, OHS).



Drawing of a covered wagon built by E. M. Terry, 1905—1939 (8533, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS).

The biggest difference between steamboat and overland travel was time. Overland travel took significantly longer than steamboat travel. Trips that would take weeks and months by wagon or stagecoach took one or two days by steamboat. Steamboats could travel fifty to one-hundred miles a day against the river's current, but stagecoaches and wagons traveled only seven to twelve miles. Stagecoaches often moved slower because they had to change horses, and road conditions and weather also caused delays. Wagon trains had to take ample amounts of time crossing rivers and navigating new terrain.



One advantage of stagecoaches: being able to travel without a water route (image courtesy Blue Earth Historical Society).

Additionally, the conditions of overland travel, like steamboat travel, were defined by danger and difficulty. Both wagon and stagecoach travel were extremely uncomfortable for passengers. Passengers on stagecoaches experienced overcrowding. Stagecoaches had three-passenger seats with only a limited amount of space available for each person. Passengers on stagecoaches sat extremely close to one another and experienced the jostling of the bumpy roads. In the summer, stage passengers experienced extreme heat and had to endure massive amounts of



A tavern in the mid-1800s (image courtesy Library of Congress).

dust from the hooves of the horses. Taverns along the road knew the passengers had no choice but to buy from them so they could serve poor-quality food and charge whatever they wanted. Similarly, wagon travel was extremely uncomfortable, with people often walking alongside the wagon instead of riding inside. Like deck passengers, people on wagon trains often experienced food shortages because they had to purchase and prepare their own food. Supplies on wagon trains often ran out due to the journey taking longer than expected.

Both overland and steamboat travel could be hazardous. For stagecoach travel, coaches were subject to breaking down along the road and getting stuck in the mud. Stagecoaches broke down because of wheels collapsing or braces breaking, often leaving passengers stranded until help arrived. Stages also got bogged down in the mud along the roads. In those cases, passengers had to help push the stagecoach or walk alongside to prevent getting stuck. The most dangerous aspect of stage travel involved the turning over of the stagecoach. Stagecoaches were prone to turning over due to uneven weight distribution and the speed of the horses. When a stagecoach turned over, passengers were often injured, but most did not die. People on wagon trains endured the hazards of unfamiliar terrain and climate, crossing rivers, and disease. Like stagecoaches, wagons often got stuck in the mud, causing delays in travel time. Additionally, because people on wagon trains lived out in the elements, they experienced disease. When people on wagon trains contracted a disease, they did not often recover due to the lack of medical resources. Like the deck passengers on steamboats, many people on wagon trains perished from disease.

Ultimately, steamboat travel involved more hazards, but the cheap tickets and speedy travel time outweighed the danger for most passengers.

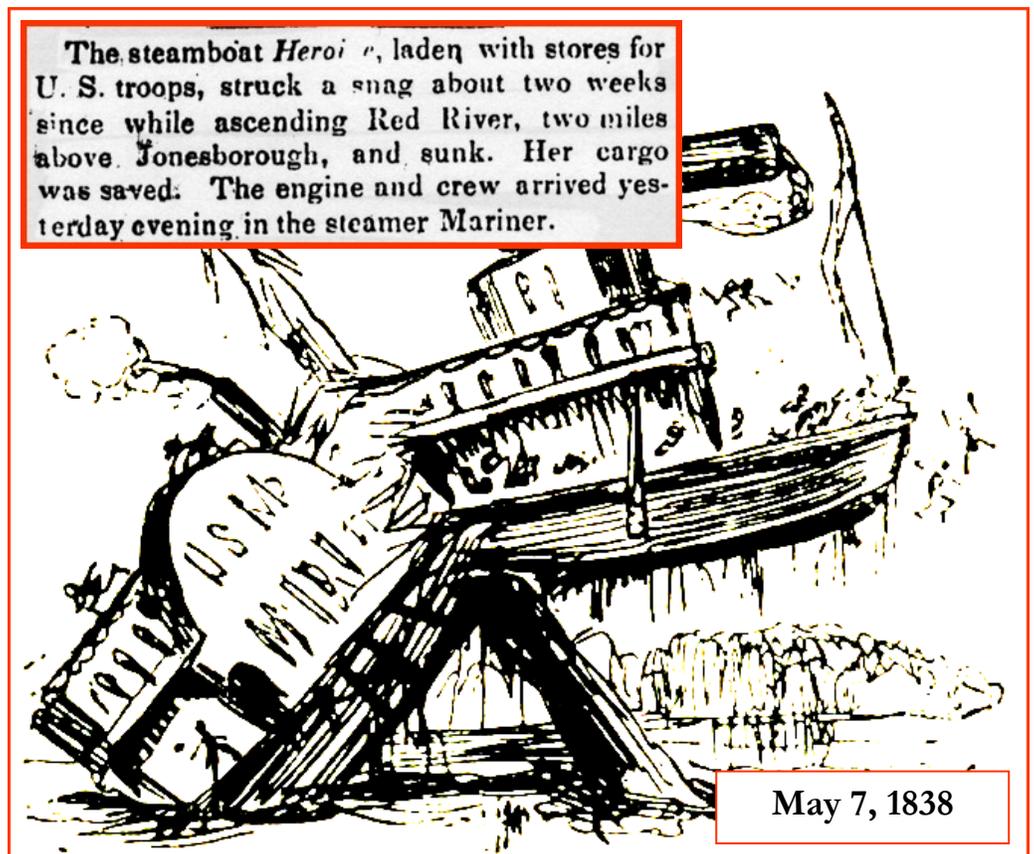


A wagon stuck in mud (image courtesy Library and Archives Canada).

## Steamboats and Military Forts

Military forts and steamboats had a complex relationship in Indian Territory. A military fort is a permanent army post that can easily be defended in the event of war. In the 1820s and 1830s, the primary role of Fort Gibson and Fort Towson was to provide services to the American Indian tribes in the region and enforce the federal government's removal efforts. Their main responsibility involved maintaining peace among the Five Tribes, who were forced to leave their eastern homelands, and the Plains tribes. In Indian Territory, western steamboats had a significant role in providing military forts with supplies and recruits as well as providing them with news from other areas.

Steamboats in Oklahoma also contributed to **forced removal** of American Indians from the East. For instance, some Muscogee (Creek) and Chickasaw traveled to Indian Territory from their eastern homes on steamboats. In 1832, the federal government sent supplies to Fort Towson for the removed Choctaw tribe.



Drawing of *Heroine* hitting a snag (Steamboat *Heroine* Collection, OHS).

Fort Towson was also a major port in Indian Territory. Materials for inland ports were shipped to Fort Towson and distributed via wagon on land. In 1838, *Heroine* was hired to carry supplies to Fort Towson. However, on its first journey carrying supplies to Fort Towson, *Heroine* hit a snag and sank in the Red River. The crew survived and salvaged some of the supplies and parts of the boat. The vessel remained hidden under the sand of the river until it was exposed by a flood in 1990. Excavations of the vessel began in 2001. Pork barrels, a soapbox, a cotton dolly, flour barrels, two hand trucks, and other **artifacts** found on *Heroine* revealed its purpose as carrying supplies to Fort Towson.



*Heroine* in the Red River (image Courtesy of *The Oklahoman*).



*Heroine's* snag (Steamboat *Heroine* Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society).

## Activities

### Evaluating Evidence: Travel Experience

This activity will help you to understand the differences between steamboat and overland travel using evidence from the diaries of people who lived in the nineteenth century. Read the excerpts from the diaries of Mrs. Luzena Wilson and William Fairfax Gray. Then, answer the questions below.

#### Excerpt from Mrs. Luzena Wilson, while on a wagon trail to California in 1849:

The traveler who flies across the continent in palace cars, skirting occasionally the old emigrant road, may think that he realizes the trials of such a journey. Nothing but actual experience will give one an idea of the plodding, unvarying monotony, the vexations, the exhaustive energy, the throbs of hope, the depths of despair, through which we lived. Day after day, week after week, we went through the same weary routine of breaking camp at daybreak, yoking the oxen, cooking our meagre rations over a fire of sage-brush and scrub-oak; packing up again, coffeepot and camp-kettle; washing our scanty wardrobe in the little streams we crossed; striking camp again at sunset, or later if wood and water were scarce. Tired, dusty, tried in temper, worn out in patience, we had to go over the weary experience tomorrow. No excitement, but a broken-down wagon, or the extra preparation made to cross a river, marked our way for many miles.

#### Excerpt from William Fairfax Gray on board the steamboat *Heroine* in 1836:

The boat and passengers both begin to improve. The officers of the boat are very attentive. The steward, an old Black man, is the best steward I have seen on the western waters. He had been a waiter in a tavern in Alexandria, D. C. There is on-board a Mr. Mills, a Virginian that I cannot find out. He is a man of good conversation and good address. He says he is a cosmopolite but calls Virginia his home. There is also a Mr. Stone, who is quite civil, a Mr. Rundell and a Mr. Reynolds, and their wives, Mississippians, going to spend their summer at the North; also Mr. Slaughter of Kentucky, nephew of Phil and Sam Slaughter of Virginia, a respectable, gentlemanly man, and a Mr. January, who has the model of a press for pressing cotton, tobacco, etc.

At 2 o'clock we arrived at Memphis, went ashore to see the town, and was introduced by Mr. Stone to Niel McCoul, the son of old John McCoul, of Spotsylvania. He says he is doing well. We had a storm this afternoon, and a hard rain. Owing to the darkness and storm we laid by at night until daylight in the morning. Mosquitoes have been very bad.

#### Thinking it Through:

How did Mrs. Wilson view her experience of wagon travel? Did she enjoy her experience?

Based on Mrs. Wilson's writing, what was wagon travel like?

What were some hardships for people traveling on wagon trains?

Based on Mrs. Wilson's tone, did wagon travel take a long time?

How did Mr. Gray write about his experience? What was his tone?

Was Mr. Gray comfortable on board the steamboat?

Based on Mr. Gray's writing, what was steamboat travel like? Did he have access to entertainment and more interactions with people?

How does the experience of Mr. Gray compare to that of Mrs. Wilson? Did they both experience the same level of hardship?

## Application: Labeling Parts of a Steamboat

Scan the code or copy and paste the link to use the coloring sheet below to label the various parts of a steamboat and their functions.



<https://ualrexhibits.org/steamboats/files/2015/09/Steamboat-identification-activity.pdf>

Steamboats had a lot of different parts that helped them travel down the river. You can create a steamboat, like *Heroine*, with all the necessary parts. Get ready to test your engineering and artistic design skills!

## Engineering and Design: Steamboat Building Activity

### Steamboat parts:

- Hull
- Paddlewheel
- Boiler
- Hurricane deck
- Smokestack
- Steam exhaust pipe
- Boiler deck, where passenger cabins existed.

### Supplies:

- Tissue box, or another rectangular box you have around the house (the hull and main deck of your ship)
- wrapping paper
- Clear tape
- Aluminum foil
- Straws
- Two pipe cleaners
- Cardboard toilet paper roll
- Cardboard (you can use the wrapping paper roll)
- Scissors
- Hot glue gun and glue sticks
- Cotton ball
- Markers, crayons (to decorate your boat)
- Glitter (optional)
- Paint (optional)

### Steps:

1. Find the hull and main deck of your ship; this will be the Kleenex box. Choose your wrapping paper, it can be any style you like!
2. Wrap your Kleenex box like a present.
3. Build your boiler deck, where your passenger cabins are. Cut shapes from the foil and glue them on the sides as windows.
4. Create the smokestack by cutting a small section and wrapping it in foil. Try to shape it into a rectangle if you can, then glue it on top.
5. Build your paddle wheel! Cut eight rectangles out of your cardboard and glue them together with the hot glue gun.
6. Attach your wheel to the boat. Glue two pipe cleaners along the length of the Kleenex box, then bend them down and over. Then, glue the pipe cleaners to the paddle wheel to hold it in place.
7. Add your steam exhaust pipe to power your boat! Cut and glue a piece of straw to the top of your boat. Then, glue some cotton to the straw.
8. Finally, add some of your own style to your boat! Decorate it with anything you like.

### Explore Further:

Try to think about all the different parts you have on your steamboat and point them out.

Visit <https://ualrexhibits.org/steamboats/files/2015/09/Steamboat-identification-activity.pdf> to learn more about the different parts of steamboats.

Add some cargo to your boat! What would you want to carry on the river? If you lived in the 1830s what would you need/want the most?

Make up a story about your steamboat! Where did it travel to? Did it carry passengers? How long did it last? Visit <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=HE023> to learn the story of the steamboat *Heroine*.

## Evaluating Evidence: Creative Writing

Imagine that you must travel to visit your relatives in 1838. Where are you going? What season is it? Remember that the seasons impact travel. Do you want to travel by stagecoach, wagon, or steamboat? What do you want to take with you? If you choose to travel by steamboat, will you purchase deck or cabin passage? Write a brief paragraph explaining how you would choose to travel and what you would take with you. Be sure to review the Overland Travel vs. Steamboat Travel section to help you choose which travel method is best.

---

## Counting and Addition: How Much Money Do I Need?

Imagine that you are a steamboat operator and need to fill your boat with supplies to prepare to travel down the river. As you read, steamboat operation could be very expensive. Below is a list of items that would be common on western steamboats. What do you think you need the most? Review the Challenges of Steamboat Operation section if you need help deciding what you need. Your task is to fill your boat with the supplies without spending over \$100.

### Supplies:

Cotton - \$20 per bale

Wood (for fuel) - \$5 per cord

Tools (for repairs) - \$10

Pork Barrel - \$25

Cotton Dolly - \$15

Hand truck - \$5

Shoes - \$12

Flour - \$2 per sack

### Thinking it Through:

What did you decide were the most important supplies to buy? Why?

Was it difficult to only spend \$100?

Do you think steamboat operators had to make tough decisions about what supplies to buy?

## Archaeology: Artifact Activity

Adapted from: Samford, Patricia and David L. Ribblett. *Archaeology for Young Explorers: Uncovering History at Colonial Williamsburg*. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. 2001.

Archaeologists study artifacts, objects made or used by people. Artifacts are all around and they are objects that are used in everyday life. For example, the toothbrush that you used this morning is an artifact. The trash that you throw away is also an artifact. The school that you are in right now is also an artifact, called a feature. This activity will help you to understand how archaeologists use artifacts to understand the people of the past.

### Steps:

1. Look at the picture of the trash
2. What does it tell you about the people that lived there?
3. Pretend that you have been looking at the trash of a family for a year and there has been an average of 12 soda cans in the trash each week. Suddenly, there are no soda cans in the trash,. What reasons can you think of to explain this change?
4. How many of the artifacts shown would survive if they were buried in the ground for 300 years? What would disappear?
5. If you only looked at the trash that remained after 300 years, would you change your conclusion about the family?



Trash Picture

## Artifact Analysis: What Is It?

### Introduction:

Steamboats during the 1830s were filled with all kinds of interesting objects. In this activity, students will use pictures of objects recovered from the steamboat *Heroine* to think critically about the people and things of the past.

### Supplies:

“What Is It?” activity sheet (One per group if doing this in a classroom)

Pictures of objects (can be printed or put up on computer screen or smart board)

Writing utensil

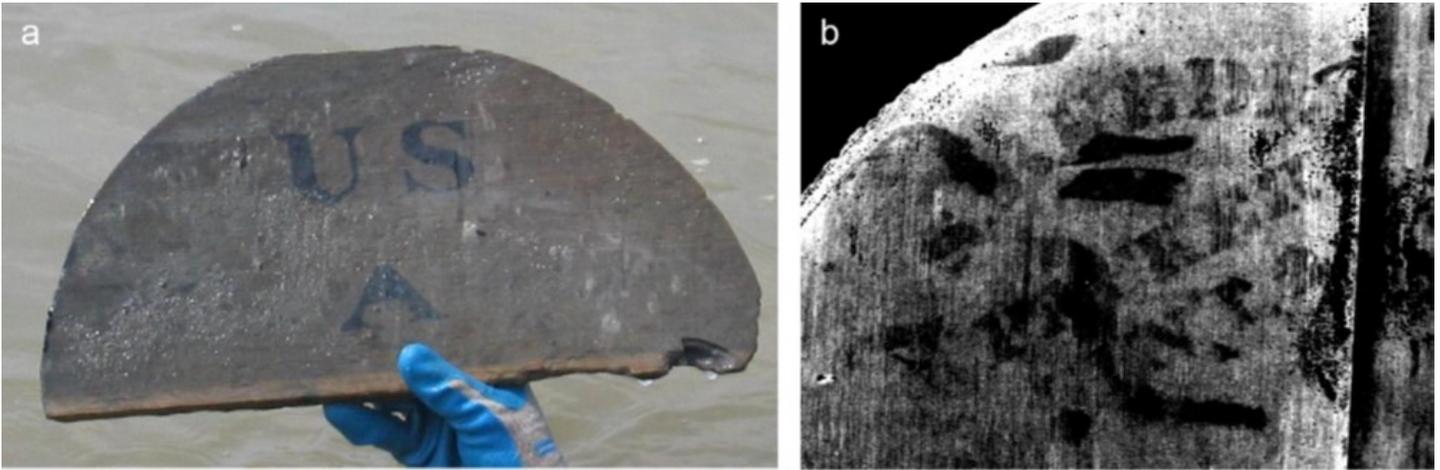
### Steps:

Break students into groups of three or four. Give each group time to work on completing the activity sheet. If you are doing this at home give the child time to complete the sheet on their own.

After groups have finished exploring their object, have one person from each group share the findings of the group. Allow for input from other groups/students.



Tin box from *Heroine* (image courtesy of *The Oklahoman*).



Part of pork barrel excavated from *Heroine* (image courtesy of Rebecca Sager, INA/TAMU).



Boot excavated from *Heroine* (Steamboat Heroine Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society).

## What Is It?

	Artifact 1	Artifact 2	Artifact 3
Describe this object. What does it look like? What is it made of? Does it look heavy or light? Does it look smooth or rough? Write down all you can about it.			
What do you think this object is? Why do you think that? What clues did you use to decide this?			
How do you think this object was used?			
Who owned or used this object? What can we learn about the person/people who owned this object just by looking at it?			
Do we still have objects like this today? Has it changed? Has it been replaced? How does this object relate to your life?			

## Glossary

- archaeology:** The study of past peoples by analyzing excavated artifacts, inscriptions, monuments, and other remains.
- artifact:** An object made or used by humans from the past.
- autonomy:** The right or condition of self-government.
- cargo:** The goods or freight on a ship, airplane, or other vehicle.
- chambermaid:** A maid who cleans bedrooms or bathrooms.
- cholera:** A diarrheal disease caused by eating or drinking food or water that has bacteria in it.
- commercial agriculture:** Large-scale production of crops for sale in markets.
- cultural diffusion:** The spread of the beliefs and practices of one culture to other cultures.
- economy:** The production and exchange of goods and services that create wealth in a country or region.
- excavation:** The process of digging, cutting, scooping, and removing material at an archaeological site.
- Five Tribes:** A term used to refer to the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Muscogee (Creek), and Seminole tribes.
- forced removal:** The removal of American Indians by the US government from their homelands in the Eastern US to Indian Territory.
- foundries:** A workshop or factory that makes metal.
- Freedmen:** An emancipated slave.
- Great Raft:** Also known as the Red River Raft; an extensive logjam formed in the Red River that impeded navigation on the upper part of the river.
- hazardous:** Involving or exposing one to risk or danger.
- hierarchy:** A system in which people or groups are ranked above the other according to status or authority.
- immigrant:** A person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country.
- market revolution:** Period in the 1820s and 1830s in which most people began to sell their goods and services.
- migrant:** A person who moves from one place to another, within a country, especially in order to find work or better living conditions.
- navigation:** The process of controlling the movement of a craft or vehicle from one place to another.
- pelts:** A skin of an animal.
- roustabout:** A semi-skilled laborer with no regular occupation who worked as deckhand on western steamboats.
- scalding:** Very hot to the point of burning.
- semi-skilled:** Work that does not require advanced training or special skills.

**snag:** A tree or branch on the bottom of a body of water that makes navigation dangerous.

**social stratification:** A system in which society ranks categories of people in a hierarchy with categories including wealth, income, and race.

**steam engine:** An engine that uses the expansion or rapid condensation of steam to generate power.

**supply and demand:** The amount of goods and services available for people to buy compared to the amount of goods and services people want to buy. (If less is available to buy, then more can be charged for the goods or service.)

**transportation revolution:** The construction of canals, roads, steamboats, bridges, and railroads to increase transportation of goods and people.

**unskilled laborers:** Workers with little or no training or experience.

**washouts:** Disappearance of a riverbed due to flooding.

## Bibliography

Agnew, Brad. "Fur Trappers and Traders," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=FU004>.

Atack, Jeremy. "1999 BHC Presidential Address Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence in the Weaving of Business and Economic History: Western River Steamboats and the Transportation Revolution Revisited." *Business and Economic History* 28, no. 1 (1999): 1-11. Accessed May 27, 2020. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.prod.nsuok.edu/docview/220058084?OpenUrlRefId=info:xri/sid:wcdiscovery&accountid=12831>.

Baird, W. David. "Westward Expansion," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=WE021>.

Buchanan, Thomas C. *Black Life on the Mississippi: Slaves, Free Blacks and the Western Steamboat World*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

Cox, Mike. "Become a TSHA Member and Join Our Mission to Promote the Unique and Rich History of Texas." Stage coaching in Texas | *Texas Almanac*. Texas State Historical Association, 2008. <https://texasalmanac.com/topics/history/stagecoaching-texas>.

Crisman, Kevin J. 2014. "The Western River Steamboat Heroine, 1832-1838, Oklahoma, USA: Construction." *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 43 (1): 128-50. doi:10.1111/1095-9270.12044.

Crisman, Kevin, William B. Lees, and John Davis. 2013. "The Western River Steamboat Heroine, 1832-1838, Oklahoma, USA: Excavations, Summary of Finds, and History." *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 42 (2): 365-81. doi:10.1111/1095-9270.12021.

Everett, Dianna. "Butterfield Overland Mail," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture* <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=BU019>.

Fairfax Gray, William. *Diary of William Fairfax Gray, Virginia to Texas, 1835-1837* (wg\_015.htm). Southern Methodist University, 1997. [https://sites.smu.edu/swcenter/FairfaxGray/wg\\_015.htm](https://sites.smu.edu/swcenter/FairfaxGray/wg_015.htm).

Faulk, Odie B.; Franks, Kenny Arthur, & Lambert, Paul F. *Early Military Forts and Posts in Oklahoma*. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1978.

Frank, Andrew K. "Indian Removal," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=IN015>.

Grant, Roger H. *Transportation and the American People*. Bloomington, Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press, 2019. Accessed July 10, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvktrwpm](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvktrwpm).

Hair, William I. "Stagecoaches and Public Accommodations in Antebellum Georgia." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (1984): 323-33. Accessed July 10, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/40581256](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40581256).

"Hardship Without Glory: Life on the Trail." PBS - *Frontier House: Frontier Life*. Accessed July 10, 2020. <https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/frontierhouse/frontierlife/essay3.html>.

History.com Editors. "Oregon Trail." History.com. A&E Television Networks, December 6, 2017. <https://www.history.com/topics/westward-expansion/oregon-trail>.

Hunter, Louis C, and Beatrice Jones Hunter. *Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949.

Kane, Adam I. *The Western River Steamboat*. College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 2004.

“Luzena Wilson’s View of the Overland Trek - American Memory Timeline- Classroom Presentation: Teacher Resources - Library of Congress.” Luzena Wilson’s View of the Overland Trek - American Memory Timeline- Classroom Presentation | Teacher Resources - Library of Congress. Accessed July 10, 2020.  
<https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/expref/oregtral/wilstwo.html>.

McLynn, F. J. *Wagons West: The Epic Story of America's Overland Trails*. London, UK: Pimlico, 2003.

McReynolds, Edwin C. *Oklahoma: A History of the Sooner State*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954.

Moody, Ralph. *Stagecoach West*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

Oklahoma Historical Society. “Steamboat Heroine: Commerce and Travel on the Western Rivers.” Program, OHS, April 2015.

“Pioneers Talk.” National Oregon/California Trail Center. Accessed July 10, 2020.  
<https://oregontrailcenter.org/pioneers-talk>.

Provo, Dan. “Steamboat Heroine E-Exhibit.” Interview by Dali Atchley. Oklahoma History Center, June 16, 2020.

Roberson, Glen. "Red River Raft," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*,  
<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=RE009>.

Taylor, George R. *The Transportation Revolution, 1815–60*. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2015.

Tolman, Keith. “Fort Towson (fort),” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*,  
<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=FO044>.

Tolman, Keith. “Steamboats and Landings,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*,  
<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=ST026>.

Twain, Mark. *Roughing It*. Hartford, Conn., American Pub. Co, 1891. Pdf. <https://www.loc.gov/item/07023335/>.

Warner, Larkin. “Oklahoma Economy,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*,  
<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=OK041>.

Withenbury, W. W., and Jacques D. Bagur. *Captain W.W. Withenbury's 1838–1842 Red River Reminiscences*. Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2014.