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## Falls Cities Ferries: A Note

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While the Ohio River was and remains a 981-mile east-west transportation artery of vast importance, it was also a serious obstacle to travel between the North and the South. Before the river was improved by building dams and locks (canalization), during extreme low-water stages the Ohio could be forded at a number of places, one of which was the Old Buffalo Trace at the foot of the Falls of the Ohio. Winter crossings could sometimes be made on ice, but for about ten months of each year boats were needed to cross the Ohio River.<sup>1</sup> In the days of settlement and exploitation of the West, much thought, technology, and money were invested to devise suitable means of crossing. Today, with bridges that average fewer than fifteen miles apart, travelers scarcely know the river is there.<sup>2</sup>

Settlers who were headed for Indiana and Illinois set out west on the Ohio below the series of rapids at Clarksville, Indiana, known as the Falls of the Ohio. Six communities, commonly known as the Falls Cities, surrounded the rapids: Jeffersonville, Clarksville, and New Albany, Indiana, and Louisville, Shippingport, and Portland, Kentucky. The principal primitive trails that reached the area in the late eighteenth century included paths from Lexington and the East, Nashville and the South, and westward to Vincennes. The road from Nashville divided near Shepherdsville, Kentucky. The western leg traversed Blue Lick Gap to Louisville. The eastern branch passed through Middletown, Kentucky, to Charlestown, Northwest Territory, via Harrods Creek, Kentucky (then known as Seminary Lands or Transylvania), and crossed the Ohio to Utica.<sup>3</sup>

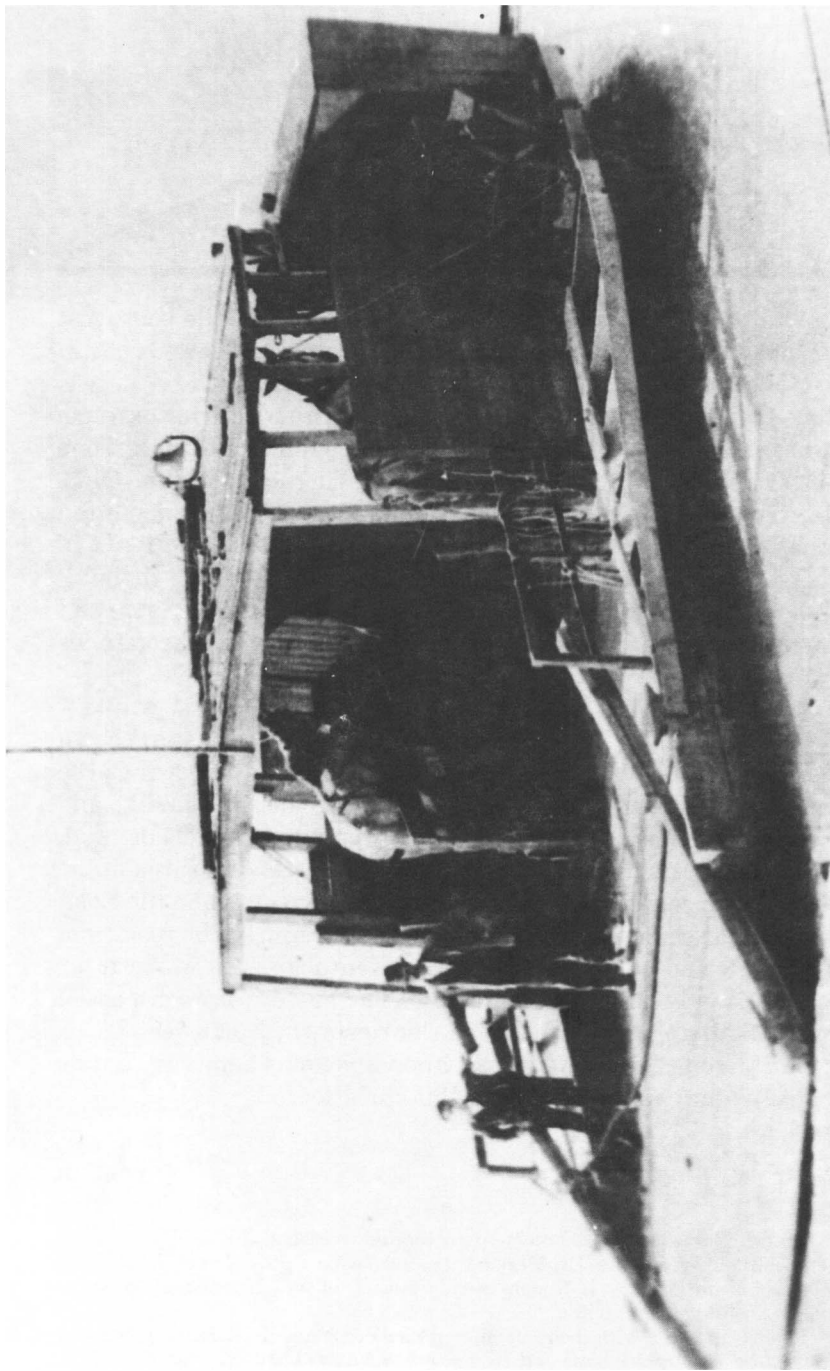
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<sup>1</sup>Louis C. Hunter, with the assistance of Beatrice Jones Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History* (1949; reprint, New York, 1969), 219-21.

<sup>2</sup>United States Army Engineers, *Ohio River Navigation Charts*, 1996; United States Corps of Engineers, *The Ohio River* (5th ed., Washington, 1935).

<sup>3</sup>Samuel W. Thomas, "Munsell's Map of Kentucky and the Northwest Territory, 1819," in *Views of Louisville since 1766*, ed. Samuel W. Thomas (Louisville, Ky., 1971), 42.



OHIO RIVER FERRY, LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY. THIS IS A SIDEWHEEL HORSE-POWERED FERRYBOAT.

M. C. Striegei Collection

Ferry service at the Falls Cities followed the common history of industry and technology: humble beginnings, improvement, expansion to large and profitable companies, and a decline caused by competition from a more efficient technology. The earliest ferries used almost anything that would float, including rafts, canoes, and skiffs. When the horse paths were widened to make wagon roads, the heavy wagons required larger boats, usually scows. Owned by individuals or families, they were propelled by manual labor using poles, oars, or even sails. Horsepowered ferryboats became practicable in the 1810–1820 period, and in the 1830s steam propulsion began to replace human and animal power, a transformation that took about thirteen years in the Falls area. Competition between owners was unrestrained, even feral, notwithstanding charters, licenses, and efforts at local governmental control. By 1820 attrition and consolidation had eliminated much competition, but ferries and landings were bought, sold, traded, inherited, and even acquired by marriage in a bewildering series of transactions until the middle of the nineteenth century.

The introduction of steam power in the 1830s made ferryboats too expensive for individual ownership. Ferry companies became large and profitable businesses, capitalized by partnerships and public stock subscriptions. Schedules were formalized, and rates were controlled. By 1850 only two ferry services remained at the Falls Cities, one between New Albany and Portland and another between the Jeffersonville and Louisville landings. Since the two services were five miles apart by river and more by land, competition between them was minimal.

Major technological competition arose when railroad bridges were opened in 1870, 1886, and 1895 between the Falls Cities. This competition was redoubled when interurban cars supplemented trains in the 1890s and early 1900s.

The New Albany ferry service ended in the early 1890s, and by 1920 the Louisville & Jeffersonville Ferry Company was in serious financial straits. A new company, the Falls Cities Ferry and Transit Company, owned by the advocates for a highway bridge, ironically, carried on until the end of 1929 as a public service. No longer needed when the bridge was opened, ferry service ended at the Falls Cities in 1929.

Ferry trades soon settled into nine distinct routes. (See map below, p. 283.) They were:

- 1) from the mouth of Falling Run, a mile and a half below downtown New Albany, to the foot of Duncan Street in West Louisville;
- 2) from the foot of Upper Fifth Street in New Albany to Ferry Street in Portland;
- 3) from the foot of Upper Sixth Street in New Albany to Ferry Street in Portland;
- 4) from the foot of Vincennes Street in New Albany to some point in Portland, probably Ferry Street;
- 5) from the mouth of Silver Creek at the western edge of Clarksville to the Point, in Shippingport, within easy reach of Tarascon's Mills;

- 6) from Spring Street in Jeffersonville to the Louisville public wharf at the mouth of Beargrass Creek (between Third and Fourth Streets);
- 7) from Spring Street in Jeffersonville to Geiger's Landing at the foot of Clay Street in Louisville;
- 8) from Fulton Street in Jeffersonville to Strader's Landing several hundred yards above Towhead Island; and
- 9) between Utica, Indiana, and Harrods Creek, Kentucky.

Other more or less maverick routes served the various communities from time to time.

John Campbell owned much land below the falls in what was then the county of Jefferson, Virginia. In 1785 the commonwealth of Virginia granted the earliest franchise in that vicinity to Campbell, between his land in Jefferson County across the Ohio River to the mouth of Silver Creek and Mill Run. There is no evidence that Campbell ever exercised his ferry rights.<sup>4</sup>

James Noble Wood kept the ferry between Utica, Indiana, and Harrods Creek, Kentucky, from 1794 until about 1825. That location was favored by many settlers because it bypassed the dangerous Falls and Louisville, then regarded as an extremely unhealthy place because of malaria and miasmatic diseases. Occasionally traffic reversed when settlers fled Indian attacks at Pigeon Roost and other points between the Falls and Vincennes. Service began with a five-passenger canoe, which was replaced by a scow large enough to carry wagons, teams, and cattle. The ferry carried an immense traffic in 1810, and often long lines of wagons waited their turns to cross the river.<sup>5</sup> Wood also provided hotel and stable accommodations for travelers.

In August 1799 William Croghan, brother-in-law of George Rogers Clark and owner of Locust Grove, a plantation in Kentucky, established a ferry to the Indiana shore by way of Six Mile Island. Run by a Mr. Ward, it was of little importance and mainly a personal convenience for Croghan.<sup>6</sup>

The Clarksville and Shippingport ferry service began at Gut Ford on Silver Creek, used by Indians and hunters when that stream was impassable. This early ferry was owned by John Carson, a squatter. Later Richard Aston, Carson's son-in-law, expanded the ferry route to cross the Ohio between the mouth of Silver Creek and the Point in Shippingport. In 1816 Aston sold the Silver Creek-to-Shippingport ferry to Moses McCann.<sup>7</sup> In 1817 the land between Silver Creek and Mill Run, about a half-mile upriver, was sold to William Wright,<sup>8</sup> who bought the ferry from Moses McCann in 1824.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Virginia, *Acts* (1785), 33:25, 586.

<sup>5</sup> *History of the Ohio Falls Cities and their Counties* (2 vols., Cleveland, Oh., 1882), II, 398 (hereafter cited as *Ohio Falls Cities*).

<sup>6</sup> Deed Book 10, p. 80, Jefferson County Clerk's Office, Louisville, Ky.; Minute Book 5, p. 175 ("Croghan"), *ibid.*; Louisville *Farmer's Library*, III (No. 112, March 3, 1803).

<sup>7</sup> Betty Lou Amster, *New Albany on the Ohio: Historical Review, 1813-1963* (New Albany, Ind., 1963), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Deed Book CK, p. 260, November 3, 1817, Floyd County, New Albany, Ind.

<sup>9</sup> *Ohio Falls Cities*, II, 168.



William Wright was an innovative owner who converted the ferry scow from manual propulsion to horsepower and provided shore facilities for his customers. Wright heavily advertised his ferry in the newspapers for more than a decade.

Clarksville and Shippingport ferries are now furnished with a first-rate new and Fast-running HORSE BOAT and careful hands and only half the price set by law. Man and horse—12 1/2¢ Foot passenger—6 1/4¢ The Vincennes road is in good order leading from this place. Our landings are bluff and dry, the banks easy and in good order. Good flats [landing floats] and gates on both sides of the river for the safe keeping of teams and stock for those who cross by my ferry. Also a house for the use of travelers *gratis*. . . . I have lately erected a *House of Entertainment* on the Kentucky side of the river near Tarascon's Mills which house may be found at the sign of #76.<sup>10</sup>

In 1805 Joseph Oatman, a hunter, settled on land at the mouth of Falling Run, just below the site of New Albany. The important Vincennes Pike abutted the northern edge of Oatman's property. Oatman and his sons, George, Jesse, and John, started a ferry, possibly in 1805, when the family immigrated to Indiana Territory from Pennsylvania.<sup>11</sup> It is said they 'set people over' the Ohio in a canoe free of charge until they were granted a license in 1807.<sup>12</sup> Oatman's Landing was directly across the river from land owned by William Lytle at the foot of Duncan Street in West Louisville. Aaron Fontaine bought Lytle's tract in 1814.<sup>13</sup> It is not clear whether both families operated boats or the Oatmans simply used Lytle's and Fontaine's landing. Joseph Oatman died in 1812, and in 1814 his widow, Christiana, married John Pittman, who gave bond that he would manage her farm and the ferry in her family's behalf. The farm was sold to Fontaine in 1822. It is possible that ferries owned by the Oatman, Snider, and Fontaine families shared the route for a decade or more.<sup>14</sup>

The Oatman family had a close alliance with the Snider family, members of whom also kept a ferry. In 1822 Margaret 'Peggy'

<sup>10</sup> *Daily Louisville Public Advertiser*, October 1, 1830.

<sup>11</sup> Land Entry Records for Vincennes, Indiana Territory, April 28, 1807, p. 1, Records of the Bureau of Land Management, Record Group 49 (National Archives, Washington, D. C.); Pennsylvania Revolutionary War Records, *Pennsylvania Archives*, 5th ser., vol. VII, 603.

<sup>12</sup> *Ohio Falls Cities*, II, 244-45. "License is hereby granted to Joseph Oatman of the County of Clark to keep a ferry across the Ohio River about four miles below Clarksville he, the said Joseph Oatman engaging to keep good and sufficient boats at all lawful hours for the passage of all travellers with their waggons, carts, carriages, horses, and cattle &c and for which he is to receive [fees] only as may be established by the Clark or Quarter Session of the said county. . . ." Photocopy of license, July 10, 1807 (Public Library of New Albany and Floyd County, New Albany, Ind.).

<sup>13</sup> The Fontaine Family of Kentucky to Filson Club, May 15, 1923, n.s. (Filson Club, Louisville, Ky.); Deed Book B, p. 189, August 26, 1822, Floyd County; J. Stoddard Johnston, ed., *Memorial History of Louisville* (2 vols., Chicago, 1896), II, 375-76. Aaron Fontaine was evidently a 'gentleman farmer' who owned the ferry but had the Oatmans and the Sniders operate it. He died April 22, 1823, and the ferry seems to have ceased operations with his death.

<sup>14</sup> Deed Book A, pp. 141-42, Floyd County.



FOOT OF OLD FERRY STREET IN NEW ALBANY, 1997. OATMAN'S LANDING WAS OFF TO THE RIGHT.

M. C. Striegel photograph

Oatman married Jacob Snider<sup>15</sup> and Julia 'July' Ann Oatman married Isaac Snider in 1825;<sup>16</sup> Jacob and Isaac Snider with their brothers John and Anthony had bought the ferry in about 1816. The ferry continued to be known as Oatman's. A November 18, 1820, advertisement in the New Albany *Chronicle* gave the owner's name as Jacob Oatman, apparently a mildly deceitful combination of Jacob Snider's first name with the Oatman surname to exploit the Oatman reputation; there was no Jacob Oatman.<sup>17</sup> The Sniders continued operations with Fontaine until about 1823, when the ferry was abandoned. George Oatman became a preacher in Georgetown, Indiana, while Jesse and John became tanners.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Aileen Snider Clegg, "Genealogy of Snider Family," n.d., Public Library of New Albany.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>17</sup> Victor M. Bogle, "New Albany as a Commercial and Shipping Point," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XLVIII (December 1952), 372.

<sup>18</sup> *Ohio Falls Cities*, II, 245.



OATMAN'S FERRY LANDING, 1997. THE ROAD, PRESENTLY OVERGROWN WITH WEEDS AND TREES, ANGLED UP THE BANK ON A GENTLE GRADE TO THE FOOT OF FERRY STREET AT FAR RIGHT.

M. C. Striegel photograph

The division of jurisdiction between Indiana and Kentucky made arrangements such as that between Oatman and Fontaine more or less common. It also tended to foster competition on routes in which a landowner on one side of the river might permit several ferries to land on his property while their keepers were obliged to use separate landings on the other. Public landings were available for all upon payment of rentals and wharfage fees to city or county governments.

Downtown New Albany became a hotbed of ferry competition when Nathaniel, Abner, and Joel Scribner bought a site from Colonel John Paul in 1813.<sup>19</sup> The first ferry in New Albany was established by Josiah and Martin Trueblood, more or less concurrently with the Oatmans', at Upper Sixth Street in New Albany. It ran to Ferry Street (now Thirty-sixth) in Portland. The Scribner family's purchase

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<sup>19</sup> Deed Book G, p. 244, October 31, 1813, Floyd County.

from Paul included Trueblood's ferry rights, which were sold to J. Sproatt, or Spratt, a week before the Scribner takeover.<sup>20</sup> A person known as 'Sproud, the Ferryman' ran the ferry for the Scribners until about 1816.<sup>21</sup>

The Scribners sold a large number of lots, one of which included the ferry landing, to Stephen Smith and Charles Paxson on December 5, 1816.<sup>22</sup> When Smith died, his four daughters inherited his half of the Smith & Paxson Ferry, which was continued until 1822. They sold their ferry rights to Mason Fitch,<sup>23</sup> who sold them to Peleg Underwood August 3, 1830.<sup>24</sup> Peleg Underwood sold the ferry to J. Underwood in 1834.

In 1816 John Conners came to New Albany and purchased several lots, one of which included ferry rights. It was at Upper Fifth Street, only one block, or 320 feet, from Smith & Paxson's landing, which placed Conners in direct competition with them.<sup>25</sup> By 1847 Conners and his son Thomas, who formed the New Albany & Portland Ferry Company, had full control and maintained exclusive rights to the landings in both New Albany and Portland. Various partners were taken into the company, including Captains Frank McHarry and Moses Irwin. In about 1858 Moses F. Irwin, James F. Irwin, John Hunter, and William A. Duckwall became partners in the New Albany & Portland Ferry Company.<sup>26</sup> In 1881 the firm was reincorporated as the Portland & New Albany Ferry Company.<sup>27</sup>

The end came when the ferry was bought by the New Albany Belt & Terminal Railroad in 1891. The ferry service was abandoned soon thereafter, but the boats continued to do excursion work for a number of years. The New Albany Belt & Terminal was later absorbed by the Kentucky & Indiana Bridge Company, which built a bridge to Portland, by that time a part of Louisville, Kentucky.

Another ferry near New Albany was kept by Caleb Newman, near Elizabeth, Indiana. Newman was a leading citizen of New

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 449.

<sup>21</sup> *Ohio Falls Cities*, II, 167.

<sup>22</sup> Deed Book K, pp. 277-83, Floyd County.

<sup>23</sup> Deed Book B, p. 172, May 2, 1822, *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Deed Book N, p. 553, January 7, 1841, ("Ferry"), p. 554, January 26, 1841, *ibid.*; Deed Book X, p. 515, June 23, 1851, *ibid.*; Deed Book Y, vol. I, 230, February 28, 1852, *ibid.*; Amster, *New Albany on the Ohio*, 35. This property, known as the Steam Mill Lot or Ferry Lot C, was subdivided into nine lots and sold, then bought and consolidated by the city of New Albany during 1854 to provide terminal space for the New Albany & Sandusky City Junction Railroad, which was never built.

<sup>25</sup> Deed Book O, no. 15, vol. I, p. 75, Floyd County.

<sup>26</sup> Captain Francis McHarry was a pilot and businessman deeply involved in commerce in New Albany, Shippingport, and Portland, including interests in the New Albany & Portland Ferry Company, the manufacture of cement at the old Tarascon Mill, and other enterprises. He died in 1857, and his tomb was cut into a cliff eleven miles below New Albany, where according to local myth he was interred standing erect behind a stone porthole overlooking the Ohio River through which he could curse passing steamboats. Steamboat pilots blew whistle salutes to foil the curse until the 1950s. His remains were removed to Cave Hill Cemetery in Louisville in 1905.

<sup>27</sup> Louisville, *General Ordinances* (1882), 80; Louisville Post, June 5, 1891.

Albany. His first ferry was near downtown New Albany, but he soon sold or abandoned it and set up the ferry at Elizabeth.

Epaphras Jones, a Connecticut Revolutionary War veteran, bought a tract of 100 acres on the eastern boundary of New Albany from William Clark.<sup>28</sup> He subdivided the property and named it Providence. Jones's ferry served between Vincennes Street and Portland, but not much else is presently known about it.<sup>29</sup> Ferries with rights granted by the commonwealth of Kentucky in Shippingport, successively owned by William Lytle, Henry Clay, the famous statesman and frequent presidential candidate, and Henry M. Shreve, may also have competed with the New Albany and Clarksville ferries.

Ferry services between Louisville and Jeffersonville followed the same hectic path of development as those of New Albany, with free-for-all competition from the beginning. Marston G. Clark received the first formal Jeffersonville ferry charter from Indiana Territory October 12, 1802. He sold out to James Lemon in 1816, the same year a new ferry was established at Fulton Street by Dr. Samuel Meriwether.<sup>30</sup>

By 1815 at least ten ferries served Clark County (which included much of Floyd County until 1819), owned by Richard Aston, Joseph Bowman, Marston G. Clark, William Clark, Peter McDonald, Robert Patterson, John Pettitt, William Plaskett, Nathaniel Scribner, and James Noble Wood. The routes and landings of several of these are unknown, and many of them may have competed between the same public landings. By 1820 attrition and consolidation eliminated most of them.

Marston Clark owned the ferry from October 12, 1802, until March 4, 1815, when it was sold to James Lemon. Lemon sold to Robert Fray October 9, 1822, and Fray sold to George White December 19, 1822.<sup>31</sup>

In 1820 George White received a grant from the state of Indiana to consolidate many of these ferries. By 1832 the owners included Athanasius Wathen and Ephraim Gilmore, who formed the Louisville & Jeffersonville Ferry Company, the longest-lived and most successful of all.

By July 22, 1838, Gilmore was bought out and the owners were John Shallcross (a delightful name for a ferryman), James J. Thompson, Charles M. Strader, and Athanasius Wathen.<sup>32</sup> Later owners' names read like a *Who's Who* of western rivers steamboat capitalists and included captains Zachary M. Sherley, William C. Hite, and

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<sup>28</sup> Deed Book CK, p. 410, July 21, 1818, Floyd County; for information about Epaphras Jones's Revolutionary War service in Rhode Island the authors thank George Yater of Louisville.

<sup>29</sup> *Ohio Falls Cities*, II, 168.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 452.

<sup>31</sup> Lewis C. Baird, *History of Clark County, Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1909), 370.

<sup>32</sup> *Ohio Falls Cities*, II, 398, 452; Baird, *History of Clark County*, 371.

Daniel G. Parr, all noteworthy Louisville citizens.<sup>33</sup> The Wathen family, still active in Jeffersonville's civic affairs, held stock throughout the firm's history.

In 1865 the new North & South Ferry Company was formed by William C. Hite, Pinckney Varble, Richard J. Woolfolk, and William J. May to run between a point in Jeffersonville to a point between Floyd and Clay Streets, formerly Geiger's Landing, in Louisville. Since it was owned by several partners in the older line, this may have been a gambit by the Louisville & Jeffersonville Ferry Company to control those landings. It vanished without a trace.<sup>34</sup>

Ferry companies at both New Albany and Jeffersonville flourished in the period from 1835 to 1870. The opening of the Louisville Bridge in 1870 began serious railroad competition with the ferries. Passengers could make uninterrupted and rapid trips between New Albany, Clarksville, and Louisville, but vehicular traffic still was obliged to use the boats.<sup>35</sup> The opening of the Kentucky & Indiana Bridge Company's span in 1886 was the deathblow for the Portland & New Albany, for the bridge had carriageways for vehicles in addition to the railway tracks.<sup>36</sup> Ferry traffic declined even more when the Big Four Railroad Bridge opened in 1895 and electric interurban cars began to cross the Louisville Falls Bridge September 13, 1905.<sup>37</sup>

To stimulate traffic, the Louisville & Jeffersonville Ferry Company developed Fern Grove, a resort and amusement park on the Indiana shore about thirteen miles above Jeffersonville; the company also shared ownership of Sugar Grove, another resort about the same distance below New Albany, with the Portland & New Albany Ferry Company. These resorts, beyond the reach of railways and good roads, became important sources of revenue for the ferry companies, which transported vast crowds to their attractions. Hotels, rental cabins, restaurants, dance halls, and amusement park rides were provided.

Despite additional traffic caused by the increased use of automobiles and trucks during the second decade of the twentieth century, the Louisville & Jeffersonville Ferry Company declined in both service and earnings. Their boats were old, the ice of 1917 did much damage to the fleet and landing flats, and competition from every direction plagued the company. By 1919 civic organizations and pri-

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<sup>33</sup> Frederick Way, Jr., "Capt. W. C. Hite," *S&D Reflector*, VI (March 1969), 29-31.

<sup>34</sup> Kentucky, *Acts* (1865), 40-41.

<sup>35</sup> Kincaid A. Herr, *The Louisville & Nashville Railroad 1850-1942* (Louisville, Ky., 1943), 24.

<sup>36</sup> George H. Yater, *Two Hundred Years at the Falls of the Ohio: A History of Louisville and Jefferson County* (Louisville, Ky., 1979), 141.

<sup>37</sup> Louisville *Courier-Journal*, September 12, 13, 1905; Baird, *History of Clark County*, 132.

vate citizens alike deplored the quality of service.<sup>38</sup> In December 1920 a group of promoters within the Jeffersonville Chamber of Commerce, all advocates of a new highway bridge, formed the Falls Cities Ferry & Transportation Company to keep the ferries running until the bridge could be built. David B. G. Rose, Froman M. Coots, John Geiger, William T. Ingram, and Charles Antz were officers. Harlan D. Sanders, secretary of the chamber and later renowned for fried chicken, was an investor.<sup>39</sup>

Two steel-hulled steamers and two steel landing flats were purchased from the Wiggins Ferry Company of St. Louis to replace the aged fleet.<sup>40</sup> One of the steamers was converted to a modern diesel-electric drive in 1925.<sup>41</sup> Both served until the end.

The Louisville Municipal Bridge, now the Clark Memorial Bridge, was opened between Jeffersonville and Louisville in October 1929. To fulfill charter conditions, the ferry ran until December 31, 1929. The owners sold the equipment, breathed a collective sigh of relief, and promptly disbanded the company, ending 145 years of ferry service in the Falls Cities.<sup>42</sup>

During the pioneer period ferryboats were propelled by manual labor using poles, paddles, or oars. Service was provided on demand. The perfection of the steamboat in 1807 and its adaptation to the western rivers in 1811 had no effect on ferry equipment in the Falls Cities area for two decades. The biggest early change occurred when paths and trails were improved to become wagon roads. Ferry owners replaced rafts and small boats with well-made scows ranging from forty to sixty feet in length by twenty to twenty-five feet in width.

Ferry franchises required their keepers to build and maintain approach roads between the high- and low-water marks at landings. Owners building such approaches often limited their efforts to clearing away the trees and underbrush, but at the busier landings owners installed corduroyed log or cobblestone roads to provide better footing for vehicles and animals. Asphalt and concrete were uncommon until the 1920s. Patrons used a bell, supported on pole or tree, to call the ferry from the opposite shore.<sup>43</sup>

First mentioned in 1824, by the 1880s all the Falls Cities ferries had landing floats, called flats, equipped with one or more stages to reach the wharf. A hinged section of rail on the ferry that formed

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<sup>38</sup> Jeffersonville *Evening News*, February 7, 1970.

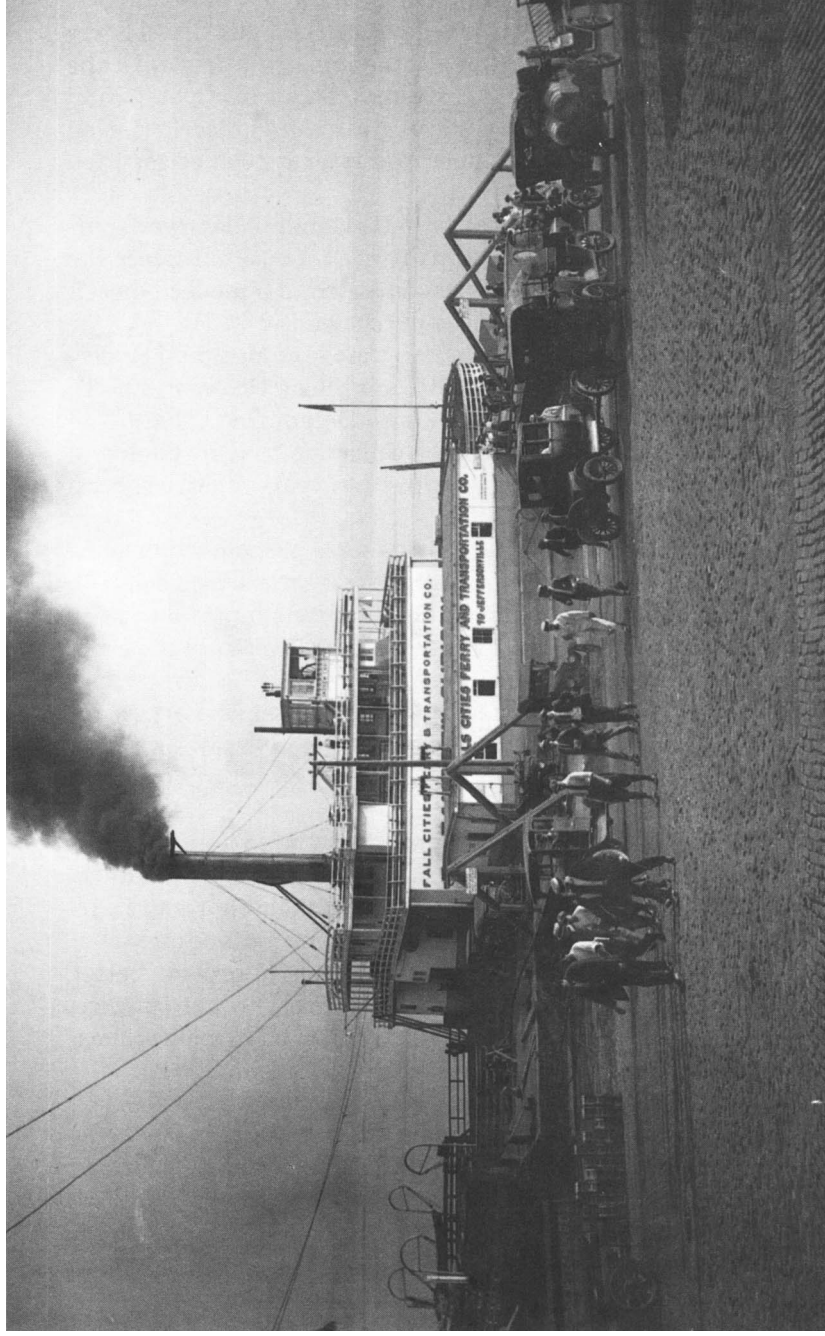
<sup>39</sup> Louisville *Courier-Journal*, December 25, 1920.

<sup>40</sup> Frederick Way, Jr., comp., *Way's Packet Directory, 1848-1983: Passenger Steamboats of the Mississippi River System since the Advent of Photography in Mid-Continent America* (Athens, Oh., 1983), 21, 174, 213, 477 (hereafter cited as *Way's Packet Directory*).

<sup>41</sup> Louisville *Times*, December 31, 1929, December 30, 1954.

<sup>42</sup> *Way's Packet Directory*, 174; Louisville *Times*, July 16, 1968.

<sup>43</sup> Kentucky, *Acts* (1812), 361.



THE *ANDREW CHRISTY* AT THE FALL CITIES FERRY AND TRANSPORTATION COMPANY LANDING IN LOUISVILLE,  
DISCHARGING AUTOMOBILES, TRUCKS, AND PASSENGERS AS VEHICLES IN THE FOREGROUND WAIT TO BOARD.

Caufield & Shook photo, courtesy Ekstrom Library,  
University of Louisville



a short bridge when dropped onto the deck of the flat spanned the gap between flat and ferry. Flats ranged from open-decked hulls to rather elaborate models with waiting rooms, ticket booths, and other conveniences.

When the Scribners took over Martin Trueblood's ferry in 1813, it used a scow propelled by oars.<sup>44</sup> The Oatmans, too, had a scow, but they carried passengers in skiffs for many years. In 1816 Scribner sold his ferry to Paxson and Smith, who replaced the scow with a horse-powered ferryboat consisting of two flatboats joined by deck timbers. The horses walked a 'tramp-wheel' through hatches in the deck.<sup>45</sup> The Oatmans met this competition with a horsepowered inclined treadmill system that drove side paddlewheels.<sup>46</sup> When William Wright took over the Clarksville and Shippingport ferry he quickly provided a horse ferryboat, or 'team-boat.'<sup>47</sup> A horse ferryboat ran between Jeffersonville and Geiger's Landing in the late 1820s.<sup>48</sup> Horsepowered boats persisted elsewhere for many decades, one of the last being built at the Howard shipyard in 1880.<sup>49</sup>

The first steampowered ferryboat at the Falls Cities appeared on October 8, 1831. The vessel was named simply *Steam Ferry Boat* and ran between Spring Street in Jeffersonville and the foot of Second Street, just above the mouth of Beargrass Creek, in Louisville. An advertisement in the *Daily Louisville Public Advertiser* of that date promoted the new service:

#### STEAM FERRY BOAT

A new and splendid *Steam Ferry Boat* is now running continually from Gray's Wharf, Louisville, to Jeffersonville. Persons wishing to cross will find her the most safe, convenient and comfortable way of crossing that has ever been offered between those two places, for either business or pleasure. She is very large and commodious, for wagons, carriages, gigs, horses and stock, and being built expressly for this ferry, it is hoped she may receive a share of public patronage.

#### THE PROPRIETOR

N.B. She has a roomy and comfortable cabin above for passengers.<sup>50</sup>

The adjective 'safe' proved to be ill chosen, for on November 9, 1831, the *Steam Ferry Boat* exploded at the foot of Spring Street, killing four men outright. Another died within a week.<sup>51</sup> The horse fer-

<sup>44</sup> *Ohio Falls Cities*, II, 167.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 167, 244.

<sup>46</sup> Bogle, "New Albany as a Commercial and Shipping Point," 371-72; Herman Rave, "Country Jottings," *New Albany Tribune*, January 26, 1928.

<sup>47</sup> Captain Alfred E. Pirtle, "A Sketch of Portland, Kentucky," manuscript, n.d. (Filson Club, Louisville, Ky.); *Daily Louisville Public Advertiser*, September 29, 1830.

<sup>48</sup> Nathaniel Field, "Recollections of Jeffersonville in 1830," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, January 1, 1879.

<sup>49</sup> Charles Preston Fishbaugh, *From Paddlewheels to Propellers: The Howard Ship Yards of Jeffersonville in the Story of Steam Navigation on the Western Rivers* (Indianapolis, 1970), 200.

<sup>50</sup> *Daily Louisville Public Advertiser*, October 8, 1831.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, November 9, 16, 1831.

ries ruled again until 1835, when a new steamer was placed in service.

The *Black Locust* was a catamaran steamboat with the paddlewheel between the hulls. James Howard built the ferry using black locust timbers, which proved to be very durable. The *Black Locust's* superstructure was rebuilt in 1847, and the hull lasted until the ferryboat was cut down by ice in the winter of 1866–1867.<sup>52</sup>

Later steam ferryboats were designed in one of three configurations, determined by hull shape and by paddlewheel location. By far the most common were sidewheelers, with independently controlled paddlewheels on each side. They were fast and extremely maneuverable because one wheel could come ahead while the other backed, turning the boat almost on its axis. Sternwheel ferryboats were not so handy, but they were cheaper to build and operate, since they needed but one engineer. Some small ferryboats were built 'bootjack' style with a 'U'-shaped recess at the stern in which the paddlewheel turned. The name was derived from the hull shape, which resembled the familiar household bootjack. No propeller-driven ferryboats served the Falls Cities.

Boilers were enclosed in a superstructure designed to occupy as little deck area as possible. The paddlewheels for bootjack and catamaran hulls were included in that space. Sidewheelers had the wheels enclosed outside the hull, supported by the flaring guard deck, with passages between the cabin and the wheel housings on each side for vehicles to reach the after deck. Passenger cabins on the smaller ferries were on the main deck in spaces not needed for anything else. On the larger boats the passenger cabin was on the second, or boiler deck, so-named because it was above the boilers. Passenger accommodations were stringently functional, furnished with wooden benches and little else. Water closets were unknown on the ferries; toilet facilities were open privies and the waste dropped directly to the river through the seat, which gave patrons a terrifying view of the water rushing below.<sup>53</sup>

The final improvement to ferries in the area was the conversion from steam to diesel-electric drive on the *Froman M. Coots*, rebuilt from the *W. S. McChesney, Jr.*, in 1925. The drive consisted of the diesel engine prime mover direct-connected to a direct current dynamo, which drove larger motors. Speed and reversing were controlled by double-ended rheostats in the pilothouse, which changed the current in the field coils. An impressive display of arcs and sparks

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<sup>52</sup> *Way's Packet Directory*, 55; Stephen G. Savage, "James Howard, Master Builder of Steamboats" (M.A. thesis, Indiana University, 1952), 22, 136; Fishbaugh, *From Paddlewheels to Propellers*, 14, 193; William M. Lytle, comp., and Forrest R. Holdcamper, ed., *Merchant Steam Vessels of the United States 1790–1868: "The Lytle-Holdcamper List"* (Staten Island, N.Y., 1975), 22.

<sup>53</sup> *Way's Packet Directory*, 174.

directly under the pilot's arm occurred with each change of speed or direction.<sup>54</sup> The paddlewheels remained.

A body of law governed ferries in the Virginia statutes long before the first Falls Cities ferries began to operate. Ferry owners were required to keep the ferry in continuous operation, either upon demand or by schedule, and build and maintain access roads. Enabling acts established rates, and laws specified penalties for overcharges or denial of immediate passage to travelers.<sup>55</sup> Indiana and Kentucky statutes were similar. This Virginia legislature enactment of 1779 may be regarded as typical:

WHEREAS it is represented to this general assembly, that public ferries at the places hereinafter mentioned, will be of great advantage to travellers and others: *Be it therefore enacted*, that public ferries be constantly kept at the following places, and the rates for passing same shall be as follows, that is to say: . . . the price for a man three shillings, and for a horse the same . . . for every coach, chariot, or waggon, and the driver thereof, the same as for six horses; for every cart or four wheel chaise, and the driver thereof, the same as for four horses; for every two wheel chaise or chair, the same as for two horses; for every hogshead of tobacco, as for one horse, for every head of neat cattle, as for one horse; for every sheep, goat, or lamb, one fifth part of the ferriage for one horse; and for every hog, one fourth part of the ferriage for one horse, and no more. And if any ferry-keeper shall presume to demand or receive, from any person or persons whatsoever, any greater rates than is hereby allowed . . . he shall for every such offense, forfeit and pay to the party grieved, the ferriages demanded or received, and ten shillings, to be recovered with costs before a justice of peace of the county where such offense shall be committed.<sup>56</sup>

After Indiana became a territory and then a state and Kentucky became a commonwealth, the laws and regulations were muddled by state boundaries. Kentucky's government had no jurisdiction over ferry rights and landings in Indiana, nor could Indiana enforce rules on the Kentucky side. This led to much unregulated competition and questions such as 'may a Kentucky chartered ferry land or be denied landing at any place in Indiana' were mooted from time to time with no real answer. In general, public landings were open to all who paid wharfage charges and taxes, but the owners of private landings could restrict the use of their land as they saw fit. Thus ferries could be restricted to one landing on one side of the river but could land anywhere on the opposite shore. The river, itself, was made open to all by the Supreme Court decision in *Gibbons v. Ogden* in 1824, which annulled state navigation monopoly laws.<sup>57</sup>

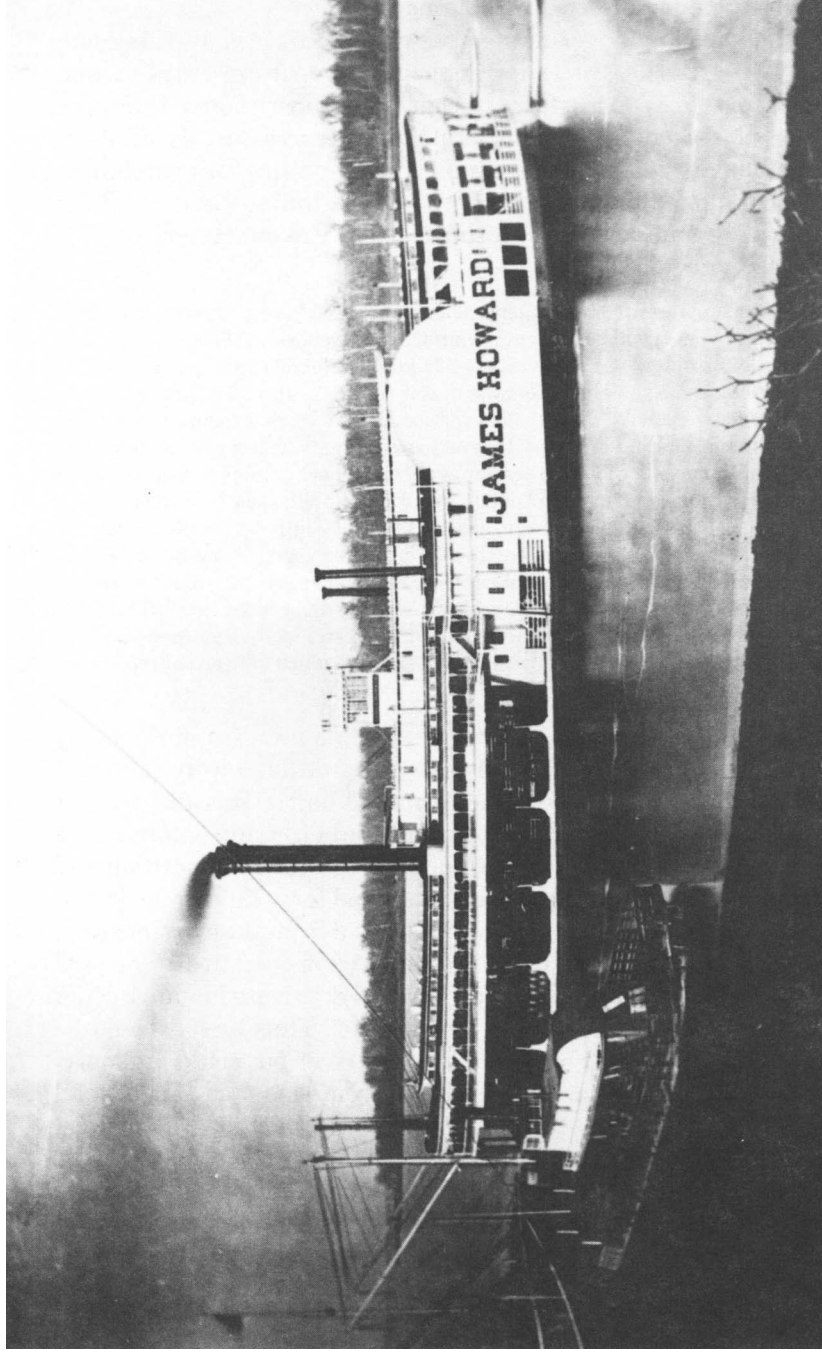
Governmental agencies taxed ferrymen as quickly as they could manage. The taxes were often absurdly low. The highest tax in Floyd County in 1821 was only fifteen dollars per year, but rural ferries

<sup>54</sup> Roy A. McBride, interview with Alan Bates, aboard *Mishawaka*, c. 1956.

<sup>55</sup> Virginia, *Acts* (1785), 587. Roads were required to be between fifteen and thirty feet wide and extend between high- and low-water marks. Kentucky, *Acts* (1812), 361.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 585.

<sup>57</sup> *Ohio Falls Cities*, II, 168.



THE SMALL FERRYBOAT IN THE FOREGROUND IS A RECESS-WHEEL FERRY, THE *JAMES WATHEN*,  
AT THE SPRING STREET LANDING IN JEFFERSONVILLE, INDIANA, C. 1870S.

paid as little as three dollars.<sup>58</sup> Wharfage fees were another matter. In 1867 the Portland & New Albany Ferry Company was charged one hundred dollars for the privilege of landing at the Portland Wharf, while the busier Louisville & Jeffersonville Ferry Company was charged thirteen hundred dollars.<sup>59</sup>

Boats, including ferryboats, carried such lifesaving equipment as their owners deemed appropriate. Many did not even have railings. Their estimates of need were more strongly influenced by costs than by concern for safety, since virtually no safety regulations existed before the passage of the weak 1838 Steamboat Inspection Act. That federal act was flawed by having few provisions for inspection and penalties. In 1852 a new Steamboat Inspection Act required testing and licensing officers, testing and inspection of machinery and boilers, and specified the kinds and quantities of safety appliances and equipment necessary. Stringent penalties were enacted, and the law was enforced. The inspection and crew licensing laws were made ever more comprehensive by later amendments to further protect the public.<sup>60</sup>

Ferry regulations often specified the minimum distance between ferry landings and routes, especially in rural areas,<sup>61</sup> but at the Falls Cities landings were much closer to one another. The landing at Falling Run was a mile and a half below downtown New Albany, but the landings at Upper Fifth and Sixth Streets in downtown New Albany were not much more than a boat-length apart owing to the sale of those properties to competing ferrymen in 1816. Owned by John Conners and Paxson and Smith, both ferries shared the Portland Wharf in unremitting rivalry.<sup>62</sup> Epaphras Jones's landing was a matter of yards above the eastern boundary of New Albany. The Silver Creek Landing was less than a mile and a half upstream from there. A mere seven blocks separated Spring Street and Fulton Street in Jeffersonville. This proximity abetted competition because it encouraged patrons to shop for the lowest rates.

The maximum fares specified in charter grants were often modified by local governmental agencies to prevent overcharges to users, but ferrymen could charge less. William Wright advertised that his rates were half those required by law, proving that ferrymen could compete by charging less. His success for two decades bears testi-

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<sup>58</sup> Virginia, *Acts* (1785), 587.

<sup>59</sup> Louisville, *Municipal Reports* (1868), 6.

<sup>60</sup> A study of Kentucky civil court records for the two-year period following the explosion of the *Steam Ferry Boat* revealed that not one damage suit was filed. There were many suits against steamboats for financial loss, unpaid wages, and cargo damage, but there was not one for personal injury. Clearly, passengers were expected to be prudent and protect themselves from injury before the Steamboat Inspection Act was passed. Hunter provides a full discussion of the Steamboat Acts of 1838 and 1852. Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, chapter 13.

<sup>61</sup> Kentucky, *Acts* (1806, Nov. Sess.), 363.

<sup>62</sup> *Ohio Falls Cities*, II, 168.

mony that the maximum fares at that time were generous enough to more than meet costs.<sup>63</sup>

Travel on the ferries was somewhat hazardous. Ferryboats between Jeffersonville and Louisville crossed the river immediately above the falls, where any stoppage of propulsion could result in being swept away. The five-passenger canoe at the Utica-to-Transylvania crossing was well above the perils of the falls, but passengers may have been obliged to part their hair in the middle to enhance stability. The Clarksville and Shippingport ferries crossed at the lower end of the falls. While there was no danger of being swept *up* the rapids, the outflow from them was frequently very swift and turbulent.

The falls represented a real hazard, for even when they were passable during high stages, the channel was crooked and was lined with rocks on both sides. Any loss of power or steering could be fatal in those strong currents.<sup>64</sup> Some of the rocks were so notoriously dangerous that they were dignified with names. Rubel's Rock, also known as Wave Rock, lay near the head of the Indiana chute and made a deceptive swell that looked like deep water. It was blasted away in 1889. Dick Smith's Wharf was a long rock ledge on the southeast side of Corn Island that was particularly dangerous to the early ferrymen leaving Gray's Wharf when a freshet ran out of Beargrass Creek.

Fog, too, was a peril, as Captain Alfred Pirtle described it:

The great and constant traffic between Louisville and Jeffersonville required a ferryboat every few minutes all day long and late into the night. This navigation was attended with difficulties and dangers, especially in foggy weather, and only the worst of fogs or storms laid up the boats. And now and then some accident, maybe of a log of driftwood lodging in the wheel, might compel a crew to toll their big bell for some boat to come to their assistance before the time of whistle signals. And fog sometimes rose so suddenly as to shut out both shores and force a stoppage.

One morning early the boat just rounded out from Jeffersonville with a large number of passengers and an omnibus on board, when a fog came up, compelling the pilot to stop his engines and float, peering in vain for a sight of land. Suddenly the boat just rubbed bottom and then grounded. The fog was so dense that nothing could be seen in any direction. The ringing of the bell attracted some boatmen on the Kentucky shore, who, guided by the sound, at least reached the boat and told the people they were on the rocks at the head of the falls. After [an] hour or two the ferry people managed to get a line to the boat and made strenuous efforts to pull it off with the assistance of the other ferryboats, but in vain . . . The companion boat took the passengers off, who were transferred in skiffs from the grounded boat to the other . . . Then the people having lightened the boat by leaving, she was safely hauled into deep water during the night.<sup>65</sup>

The Ohio River was and remains subject to closure by ice. Ice was an inexorable enemy to boats, especially those with wooden hulls.

<sup>63</sup> See William Wright's continuing advertisements in *Daily Louisville Public Advertiser*, 1824-1831.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas, *Views of Louisville since 1866*, 30-31, 44, 45.

<sup>65</sup> *Indianapolis News*, July 17, 1917.

It attacked in several ways. Boats trapped in moving floes broke their mooring lines and were carried away. When lines held firm, the ice often piled up and climbed over the hull to shear away the cabin. Ice from one to four inches thick grinding along a hull could trim that hull off neatly at the waterline. Only when ice was stabilized in heavy sheets could people and vehicles walk or drive from shore to shore. New dangers arrived with each thaw, for heaped ice formed gorges, backing up the river for miles. When such a gorge let go it swept everything before it to destruction. Riverboats sought ice harbors in the mouths of tributaries, in the chutes behind islands, or used the islands as shields. In any event, ice often stopped ferry service.<sup>66</sup>

During the severe winter of 1866–1867, the second *Black Locust* was crushed and sunk by ice.<sup>67</sup> In 1879 the *James Wathen* was caught in ice floes, drifted into a pier of the Ohio Falls Bridge, and sank. It was raised and ran until 1886.<sup>68</sup>

Other hazards to the ferryboats included winds and waves, floods, snags, collisions, and, after the introduction of steamers, machinery failures, explosions, and fires. The first steamer in the area exploded. On August 17, 1854, the *Adelaide* was snagged at Portland Bar and sank within seconds.<sup>69</sup> The vessel was raised and continued until lost in Civil War service at Cairo, Illinois, in 1861.<sup>70</sup> The New Albany ferry *Ben South* was also a war casualty when the steamer was captured and burned at Cumberland City, Tennessee, by Confederate General Hylan B. Lyons's troops on December 10, 1864.<sup>71</sup> The *John Shallcross*'s machinery broke down during a regular crossing in January 1865. The vessel drifted down the falls and went aground in the Indiana chute, and passengers were safely carried ashore in skiffs.<sup>72</sup>

James Howard, the famous boat builder, was drowned from the deck of the *John Shallcross* when his horse shied and backed his rig into the river because of an improperly fastened ramp on October 14, 1876.<sup>73</sup> The *Columbia* burned while laid up for winter on January 20, 1913.<sup>74</sup> On August 19, 1917, Captain Madison Dugan of the *George Rogers Clark* was murdered during a robbery attempt.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>66</sup> James E. Howard, interview with Alan Bates, Jeffersonville, Ind., c. 1954.

<sup>67</sup> *Way's Packet Directory*, 55, 242.

<sup>68</sup> *Louisville Courier-Journal*, January 15, 1879.

<sup>69</sup> *Louisville Daily Journal*, August 19, 1854.

<sup>70</sup> *Way's Packet Directory*, 6.

<sup>71</sup> Telegrams to Gen. W. D. Whipple, U. S., War Department, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (128 vols., Washington, D.C., 1880–1901), ser. I, vol. XLV, part 2, pp. 145–153; *Ben South Log*, 1864, Public Library of New Albany.

<sup>72</sup> *Way's Packet Directory*, 255.

<sup>73</sup> Fishbaugh, *From Paddlewheels to Propellers*, 73–74; Savage, "James Howard," 87–90.

<sup>74</sup> *Louisville Times*, January 21, 1913.

<sup>75</sup> Frederick Way, Jr., "Capt. William Perry Dugan," *S&D Reflector*, XXIV (March 1987), 35; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, August 20, 1917, August 19, 1967.

Despite this litany of disaster, the ferries had an enviable safety record.

Most manual- and animal-powered ferryboats were not named but were identified either by the names of their owners or their terminal points. Steamers, though, were a matter of much pride, and owners delighted in painting their own names in four-foot-tall black letters, fancifully shaded. At the Falls Cities these included A. Wathen, Isaac Bowman, James Thompson, John Shallcross, James Wathen, Z. M. Sherley, W. C. Hite, Froman M. Coots, John M. Martin, Ben South, Thomas Conner, and Frank McHarry. Other names were romantic: the expressive *Walk In The Water*; *Adelaide*, possibly named for a French queen; and the *Excelsior*, named for a famous thoroughbred horse, bespoke excellence and speed. Connotations of speed and convenience are implicit in *Rush* and *Transit*. *Music*, *Sunshine*, and *Corona* expressed pleasure. *George Rogers Clark* and *Henry Watterson* were named for notable persons. For a time the latter boat bore a portrait of the famous editor of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* in lieu of the usual block-lettered wheelhouse sign.

An advertisement on page one of the *Daily Louisville Public Advertiser* on August 3, 1831, gave notice:

Mr. and Mrs. Crew of the Jeffersonville Mineral Springs have the honor of announcing to the ladies and gentlemen of Louisville and vicinity that in addition to the comfort and convenience of their establishment they propose having a few dancing parties during the season under the management of Mr. A. Mathieu, who on such occasions will offer a variety of pleasing specimens of fireworks—the first will take place Thursday, the 4<sup>th</sup> August next . . . in addition a large balloon will ascend.

They also have the pleasure of stating that arrangements have been made with the proprietor of the horse ferry boat at Jeffersonville, to be near the Bear Grass Bridge [at the foot of Second Street in Louisville] at 10 o'clock precisely on that day.

For the convenience of those persons who may feel disposed to visit this establishment on that occasion, carriages will be prepared, and only regular ferriage will be charged.

It is intended to send up a live goose with the balloon, and which will take its flight from it, accompanied with fire rockets at about 300 yards from the ground.

Should any sportsmen feel inclined to try their skill, a more favorable opportunity is not likely to occur.<sup>76</sup>

The Chalybeate Springs was a lively place; similar advertisements appeared October 5-8, 1831, celebrating the new *Steam Ferry Boat's* first excursion with similar attractions, but no goose was mentioned. The Springs were destroyed during an improvement of the Big Four Railroad in 1904.<sup>77</sup>

Athletic teams, debating societies, and choruses used the boats to visit cross-river colleagues, frequently bringing their bands and cheering fans with them, carrying flags and draping the railings with

<sup>76</sup> *Daily Louisville Public Advertiser*, August 3, 1831.

<sup>77</sup> Lewis C. Baird, *History of Clark County, Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1909), 135.





SUNSHINE (1888-1907), AN EXAMPLE OF THE FINEST FERRYBOAT CLASS, AT THE MADISON, INDIANA, LANDING.

Howard Steamboat Museum Collection

bunting. Moonlight excursions with dancing and daytime excursions with picnic lunches were often offered. Ferryboats frequently took patrons to amusement parks and resorts at Fern Grove (later Rose Island), Sugar Grove, and White City, as they did to picnics on Six Mile Island and Twelve Mile Island.

Occasionally ferryboats ventured far from home. On June 24, 1901, the *Sunshine* delivered a crowd from New Albany to Brandenburg, Kentucky, forty-three miles from her Louisville home, to see a drama on the *Grand Floating Palace*.<sup>78</sup> Ferryboats met delegations and dignitaries who were transferred from a line packet boat to be wined and dined on the last leg of their journey to the Falls Cities, as was done on the *Columbia* when the Rivers and Harbors Commission met in Louisville on May 15, 1905.<sup>79</sup>

For many years harried mothers entertained their children on the ferryboats, taking advantage of the custom that allowed a passenger to ride back and forth all day for one five-cent fare. Children loved to watch and worry with delectable terror lest the soaring jackstaff should hit the Big Four Bridge.

Jeffersonville was Louisville's Gretna Green for several decades and had a number of marriage parlors for the convenience of Kentucky couples bent on quick marriage. Maidens could cross northward and return to the south as matrons in little more than an hour.

While the Falls Cities always competed with one another, like close-knit families, tribes, and nations they also often rose to one another's defense. Fire equipment and firemen on loan frequently crossed during major conflagrations. Captain Alfred Pirtle wrote:

Several times the Indiana State Prison, then adjoining Jeffersonville on the west, was set fire, and Louisville was called on to assist in putting out the fire. Four engines and hose carts were sent over on a load and 500 or 600 volunteers manned the apparatus. It was very exciting to see the rivalry displayed by the several companies as they rushed up the bank on the Jeffersonville wharf.<sup>80</sup>

Police departments also cooperated with their cross-river counterparts. Miscreants who tried to flee a jurisdiction on arrival across the river often found the police, alerted by telegraph or telephone, waiting to prevent their landing; they were arrested when the ferry returned.

The ferry steamers departed and arrived with as much panache as the floating palaces. When the last rig or auto was safely aboard, the roof bell was rung three taps. The ready whistle chirped three times. The mighty whistle sounded three blasts, ramps were raised by deckhands to form rails, and lines were lifted from timberheads. The ferryboat left the landing flat with a flourish. The gentle vibra-

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<sup>78</sup> Charles W. Stoll, ed., "Jesse P. Hughes Diaries, 1901," *S&D Reflector*, XXIV (June 1987), 26.

<sup>79</sup> Frederick Way, Jr., caption for photograph, *ibid.*, XI (March 1975), 31.

<sup>80</sup> *Indianapolis News*, July 17, 1917.

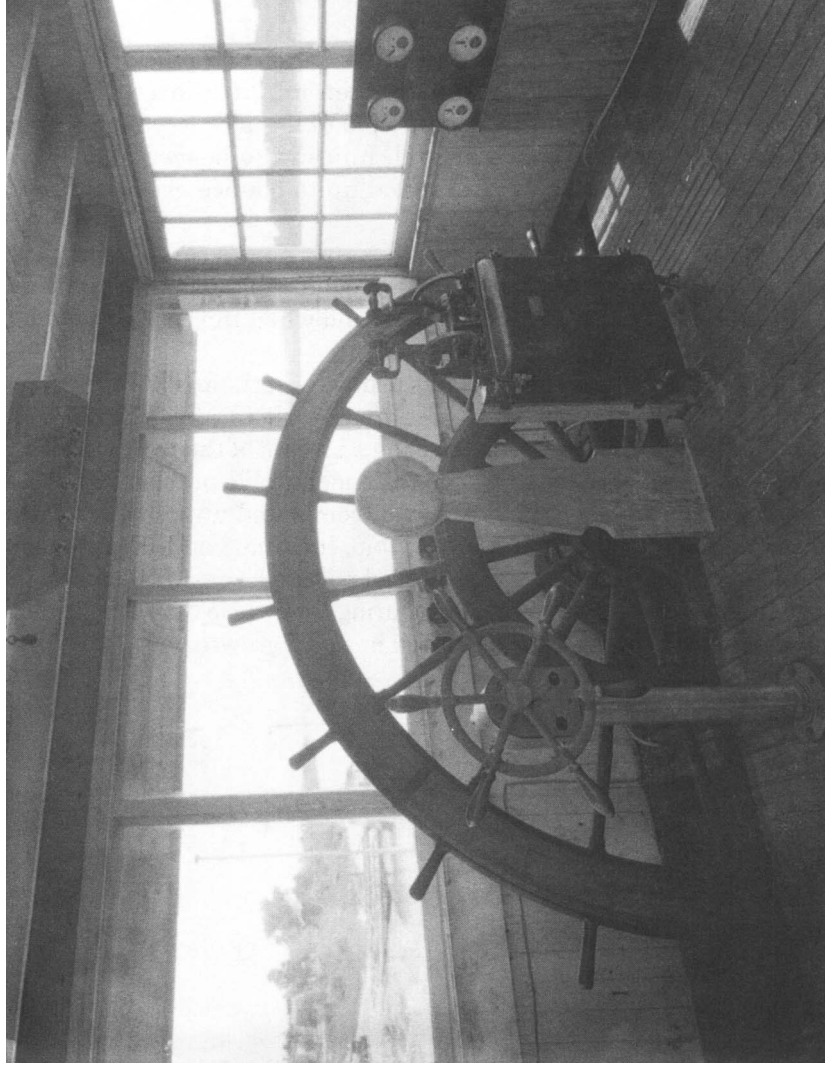
tions of the paddles striking the water were communicated to the farthest reaches of the boat. About ten minutes later, upon the approach to the yonder landing, the pilot blew a brassy landing signal, to announce the boat's arrival. Lines were heaved and ramps slammed down. Autos were cranked up to bounce over the flat to shore.

While passage time was short, waiting one's turn during rush hour in a long queue angling down the wharf to the landing flat was tedious. It was irritating to be left behind when the boat was loaded to capacity.

The importance of ferries in the days of settlement of the American West, when every stream was an obstacle to wheeled vehicular travel, cannot be overstated. Crossing a stream of the power and size of the Ohio without a boat was an insurmountable problem. The first major bridge over that river was not completed until 1870, almost seven decades after the opening of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois for settlement. Another seventy years passed before the basic rail and highway bridge system was completed. During that whole time the humble, unsung ferryboats were vital to our nation's growth.

PILOT HOUSE OF *FROMAN M. COOTS*  
(1925-1929). THE LARGE WHEEL IS FOR  
STEERING MANUALLY. THE SMALL WHEEL  
IS THE STEAM STEERING CONTROL. THE  
RHEOSTATS ON THE LARGE BLACK BOX  
CONTROL THE PADDLEWHEELS.

Caulfield & Shook photo, courtesy Ekstrom  
Library, University of Louisville.



**TABLE 1<sup>81</sup>**  
**CHRONOLOGY OF FERRY SERVICE BETWEEN**  
**JEFFERSONVILLE AND LOUISVILLE**

1794–1835?	James Noble Wood	Ran between Utica and Harrods Creek.
1799–1803?	William Croghan	Between Blankenbaker Landing, Six Mile Island, and Indiana.
1802–1815	Marston G. Clark	
1815–1822	James Lemon	
1816–1820	Dr. Samuel Meriwether	Ran between Fulton Street, Jeffersonville, and Shrader's Landing, Kentucky.
1822–1826	George White	Merged services between Jeffersonville and Louisville.
1831–1831	<i>Steam Ferry Boat</i>	Exploded boilers, five lives lost. Ran one month.
1835–1847	<i>Black Locust</i>	
1847–1867	<i>Black Locust</i>	New cabin on old hull.
1852–1866	<i>A. Wathen</i>	Erroneously listed as <i>Arthur Wathen</i> or <i>Athey Watchen</i> .
1860–1870	<i>Isaac Bowman</i>	
1862–1873	<i>James Thompson</i>	Renamed <i>Tinclad No. 13</i> , March 1863; renamed <i>Fort Hindman</i> , November 1863; renamed <i>James Thompson</i> , December 1865.
1863–1877	<i>John Shallcross</i>	
1865–1869?	<i>Union</i> <sup>82</sup>	
1871–1885	<i>James Wathen</i>	Renamed <i>Venice</i> .
1873–1891	<i>Z. M. Sherley</i>	
1878–1891	<i>New Shallcross</i>	

<sup>81</sup> The information about steam ferryboats (those with italicized names in the following tables) was derived from some or all of the following sources unless otherwise noted: Fishbaugh, *From Paddlewheels to Propellers*; Savage, "James Howard"; U.S., Bureau of Navigation, *Annual List of Merchant Vessels of the United States*, XX (Washington, D.C., 1887); *Way's Packet Directory*; and Lytle-Holdcamper, *Merchant Steam Vessels of the United States*. There are many discrepancies among these sources. The authors have selected data from these texts according to how close the source was in time and distance to the information reported; hence they were used in the following order: 1) Fishbaugh and Savage, who used Howard Shipyard records; 2) *Annual List of Merchant Vessels*, which was contemporary; 3) Way; and 4) Lytle-Holdcamper.

Alphabetization in all lists is in accordance with merchant marine practice. The first letter of the name is the index letter; e.g., the *Tom Greene* is listed under T, the *East St. Louis* under E.

<sup>82</sup> Louisville *Democrat*, April 12, 1865.

**TABLE 1 (continued)**

1882–1914	<i>W. C. Hite</i>	Rebuilt and renamed <i>Corona</i> .
1888–1907	<i>Sunshine</i>	
1891–1914	<i>City of Jeffersonville</i>	
1892–1913	<i>Columbia</i>	
1914–1916	<i>Corona</i>	Rebuilt from <i>W. C. Hite</i> .
1916–1924	<i>Pilgrim</i>	Renamed <i>Harry G. Drees</i> .
1916–192?	<i>George Rogers Clark</i>	Renamed from <i>Dr. Frederick Hill</i> .
1918–1920	<i>Transit</i>	Renamed from <i>Short Cut</i> .
1920–192?	<i>Perryville</i>	
1920–1924	<i>Andrew Christy</i>	Renamed <i>Henry Watterson</i> .
1920–1925	<i>W. S. McChesney, Jr.</i>	Renamed <i>Froman M. Coots</i> .
1924–1929	<i>Henry Watterson</i>	Renamed from <i>Andrew Christy</i> .
1925–1929	<i>Froman M. Coots</i>	Renamed from <i>W. S. McChesney, Jr.</i>

**TABLE 2**  
 CHRONOLOGY OF FERRY SERVICE BETWEEN  
 CLARKSVILLE (MOUTH OF SILVER CREEK)  
 AND SHIPPINGPORT

1779–?	<i>John Campbell</i>	Chartered between Clarksville (Silver Creek and Mill Run) to Shippingport. May have never run.
1779–?	<i>John Carson</i>	
? –1816	<i>Richard Aston</i>	
1816–1824	<i>Moses McCann</i>	
1824–183?	<i>William Wright</i>	

**TABLE 3**  
CHRONOLOGY OF FERRY SERVICE BETWEEN  
NEW ALBANY AND PORTLAND

1804?–1813	Martin Trueblood	<i>New Albany Landing</i> Upper Fifth Street.
1806?–1813	William Lytle and Henry Clay	Route unknown.
1813–1822?	Henry M. Shreve	Route unknown.
1813–1816	Scribner Brothers	Operated by J. Sproud from Upper Sixth Street.
1816–1822	Smith & Paxson	Upper Sixth Street.
1816–1847	John Conner & Son and New Albany & Portland Ferry Company	Upper Fifth Street.
1822–1830	Mason Fitch	Upper Sixth Street.
1830–1834	Peleg Underwood	Upper Sixth Street.
1834–184?	J. Underwood	Upper Sixth Street.
1847–1882	New Albany & Portland Ferry Company	Upper Fifth Street. Owned by Thomas Conner, Moses Irwin, James F. Irwin, William A. Duckwall, and John Hunter.
1882–1891	Portland & New Albany Ferry Company	Upper Fifth Street.

**TABLE 4**  
**CHRONOLOGY OF STEAMBOATS OWNED**  
**BY JOHN CONNER, THE NEW ALBANY & PORTLAND**  
**FERRY COMPANY, AND THE PORTLAND & NEW ALBANY**  
**FERRY COMPANY**

1849–1851	<i>New Albany</i>	First steam ferryboat at New Albany.
1849–1854	<i>Otto</i>	
1850–1855	<i>Walk In The Water</i>	
1853–1865	<i>Adelaide</i> <sup>83</sup>	Lost in Civil War service.
1853–1860	<i>John M. Martin</i>	
1860–1864	<i>Ben South</i> <sup>84</sup>	Charter to U.S. Government, captured and burned by Confederates, December 10, 1865.
1864–1869	<i>Excelsior</i>	
1865–1887	<i>Thomas Conner</i>	
1867–1890	<i>Frank McHarry</i>	
1873–1880	<i>Music</i>	
1880–1901	<i>Music</i>	Used only for excursion work after 1891.
1889–1896	<i>Rush</i>	Used only for excursion work after 1891.

**TABLE 5**  
**CHRONOLOGY OF FERRY SERVICE BETWEEN**  
**MOUTH OF FALLING RUN AND WEST LOUISVILLE**

1805–1811	Joseph Oatman
1811–1816	John Pittman and Joseph Oatman's sons sold to the Snider family about 1816. The Oatman and Snider families were related by marriage.
1816–1823	Aaron Fontaine probably owned the ferry after 1816, but the Oatmans and the Sniders operated it.

Note: This ferry landed on the Kentucky property successively owned by William Lytle, Fortunatus Cosby, and Aaron Fontaine in what became West Louisville.

<sup>83</sup> Louisville *Daily Journal*, August 19, 1854.

<sup>84</sup> *Official Records*, ser. I, vol. XLV, part 2, pp. 144-45.



25. Louisville & Portland Canal
26. Shippingport Island
27. Falls of the Ohio
28. Towhead or Willow Island
29. Six Mile Island
30. Goose Island
31. Falling Run
32. Silver Creek
33. Mill Run
34. Beargrass Creek (Originally)
35. Beargrass Creek Cut-Off
36. Lancassangue (Lankyshank) Creek
37. Goose Creek
38. Lentzler Creek
39. Harrods Creek
40. Vincennes Pike
41. Plank Road
42. Market Street
43. Gut Ford
44. Louisville & Lexington Turnpike
45. Utica-Charlestown Pike
46. Nashville Pike
47. Middletown Road

1. Oatman's Ferry Landing
2. Fontaine's Ferry Landing
3. New Albany & Portland Ferries
4. Epaphras Jones Ferry Landing
5. Clarksville & Shippingport Ferry
6. Louisville & Jeffersonville Ferry
7. Fulton Street Ferry
8. Croghan's Ferry
9. Noble's Ferry
10. WEST LOUISVILLE
11. PORTLAND
12. NEW ALBANY
13. PROVIDENCE
14. CLARKSVILLE
15. SHIPPINGPORT
16. LOUISVILLE
17. JEFFERSONVILLE
18. PORT FULTON
19. Geiger's Landing (Clay Street)
20. Spring Street
21. Chalybeate Springs
22. UTICA
23. TRANSYLVANIA (Harrods Creek)
24. Sand Island

