

FLATBOATING ON THE WABASH—A DIARY OF 1847

ONE of the first and most difficult problems confronting the early settlers of Indiana was that of transportation. The chief markets they wished to reach were New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore. Two general plans were proposed. One was to build highways directly over the mountains to the East. In accordance with this plan the National Road and the Wabash and Erie Canal were constructed. The other plan was to open up the streams to navigation and transport the produce of the country down to New Orleans, and thence to the East by the sea. The position of the State lent itself to this plan nicely. The southern boundary was a navigable river with tributaries reaching far into the interior, while on the west was the Wabash, a broad stream crossing the State diagonally and throwing off branches to all parts of the State.

The General Assembly at the Fourth session, held at Corydon in 1820, declared navigable nearly all the streams of the State which were capable of floating a flatboat. The supervisors of the public roads were instructed to call out the road "hands" and clear these streams of obstructions. Little work of this kind was done, but many attempts were made to run steamboats on the upper Wabash and the branches of White river. The smaller streams, however, were extensively used by flatboatmen. Flatboats were built in the larger pools of the streams and when the water rose sufficiently, usually in March, were floated out into the Wabash and Ohio, thence to New Orleans.

It was no little task to propel the flatboats up stream. This was resorted to only when the roads were impassable. In most cases it was impossible to get along shore with a tow line, so that nearly all upstream navigation was accomplished by "poling." For "poling" they used a flat-bottomed boat, thirty to forty feet long, with outer guards along which six or eight men walked and pushed with spike poles set against the bottom. It was possible to drive a boat carrying three or four tons burden eight or ten miles per day. This kind of transportation was used mostly on the upper Wabash—above Lafayette.

It is impossible with the data at hand to give any adequate idea of the amount of goods or the number of flatboats taken from In-

diana to New Orleans each spring. The Gards, of Lawrenceburg, loaded as many as sixteen boats at one time at their farm in the Miami bottoms. Scores of boats loaded with hay and manufactured articles were run from Vevay each year. All the towns on the Ohio riverboard contributed their fleets. From the interior each little stream—Flat Rock, Muscatituck, Big Blue, Whitewater, Anderson, Oil, Raccoon, Big, Loughry, Patoka, Big Pigeon, Big Sand, Eel, Wildcat, Beanblossom, Sugar, Salt, and a hundred others,—sent forth its crafts in season, all bound for New Orleans.

The canal commissioners of 1829 estimated the annual trade of Terre Haute at 7,000 barrels of salt, 3,000 barrels of whiskey. From Terre Haute alone went 3,000 barrels of pork. They placed the amount of pork of the whole Wabash valley at 10,000 barrels. This was the merest guess, based on the reports of passing boats at Terre Haute. From April 14 to April 27, 1834, forty-one steamboats landed at the Terre Haute wharf.

Almost every neighborhood in Indiana had its "port" where flatboats were loaded for the "down-river" trade. Stories and traditions of this business linger in all parts of the State, but authentic data is scarce. The following memorandum of a trip from Pittsburgh (see preceding article) was copied by Alva O. Reser, of Lafayette, Indiana, from the original manuscript, which is now in his possession:

DIARY OF THEODORE ARMITAGE, SHOWING TRIP ON FLAT BOAT FROM PITTSBURG, CARROLL COUNTY, INDIANA, TO NEW ORLEANS, ON THE FLAT BOAT "WHIG."

Leave Pittsburg, Carroll County, Indiana, March 13th, 1847. Ran to Dugan's Landing; loaded 216 barrels of pork, March 14th; cut loose Sunday, and ran to Lafayette. Very cold and windy and snowing.

March 15th and 16th, Cold.

March 17th, Warm.

March 18th. Cut loose and run all islands and towheads to the right; landed at Attica, on the left at 4 o'clock.

March 19th. At 9 o'clock cut loose, and passed Williamsport $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles below on the right; landed 4 miles below on the left. Warm at 4 o'clock. Lay till the 22d and cut loose at 3 o'clock; landed at Covington at 11 o'clock at night.

March 23d, Tuesday. Loaded 100 bbls. flour, 104 sacks oats, 100 bu. corn.

March 24th, cut loose and run down to warehouse 3 miles on the right.

March 25th. Cut loose, passed Perryville on the right; landed at the mouth of Vermillion Creek.

March 26th. Cut loose early in the morning, passed Coal Creek Bend and Sugar Creek; landed at Montezuma at noon. Windy. Cut loose after 4 o'clock; landed 3 miles above Clinton, late.

March 27th. Very early in the morning and landed at Clinton at sunrise.

March 28th. Warm.

March 29th. Cloudy.

March 30th. Loaded 260 barrels pork, 389 kegs lard, 20 bbls. lard; cut loose at 10 o'clock, passed Otter Creek Bend, a short right hand point, and landed at Terre Haute at 5 o'clock in the evening.

March 31. Cut loose in the evening. Run all night and passed Darwin, Illinois. Daylight at Wild-Goose Pond on the left. Passed York at 8 o'clock.

April 1. Passed Hackberry Bend some 4 or 5 miles below; cut off on the right. A very strong current into it; some rain in the afternoon; cold; landed 4 miles above Merom on the right.

April 2d. Cut loose at 4 o'clock in the morning; passed Coupee Points, 14 in number, at noon; landed at Vincennes at 8 o'clock at night.

April 3d. Cut loose at 1 o'clock in the morning. Passed Ambro¹ Island at daylight, 9 miles below, close under the right hand point. Passed Little Rock at noon, also Racey-Dam and Grand-Rapids. C. B. Nayler stuck fast over one-third of the bend opposite the head of the island; run down to the right hand point; landed above the bar at 2 o'clock. Lay 2 hours; cut loose, and run quartering across, two-thirds back again and landed at Steamboat landing at 5 o'clock. Squally about these times.

April 4th. Sunday. Cut loose at 9 o'clock. Raining. Run down to the left of Coffee Island. Landed under the point at 2 o'clock. Rather slow boating about these times.

April 5th. River raising and strong wind and heavy showers of rain. Nayler floated off at 2 o'clock in the morning and landed below me on the morning of the 6th at 8 o'clock. I am very cross this morning for some reasons best known to myself.

April 7th. Cut loose at 4 o'clock in the morning; passed Big Drift Bend, and cut off in the middle and kept close to the right shore; passed Bompo Island to the left of it at Graysville and four miles to the right past it Bald Eagle Point some 7 or 8 miles below on the left, very windy. Landed on the left hand point above Harmony at 5 o'clock.

April 8th. Thursday. Cut loose at 3 o'clock. Daylight at Fox River Island. Raining like the devil. Landed under the island, cut loose again, run in bend and broke steering oar. Lay some 4 hours, cut loose again; passed Grand Chain and landed in the bend below Blacks. Cut off at dark.

April 9th. Cut loose at 2 o'clock in the morning and made the Ohio at 10 o'clock. Very warm. Dark at Cave-in-rock. Run all night to daylight. Cloudy. Passed Paduca at 10 o'clock. Run all day. Dark at Wilkinsonville below Masack. Made the Mississippi at 1 o'clock in the morning of the 11th, Sunday. Daylight at No. 4. Run all day. Dark at Middle Point below New Madrid. Run all night.

April 12th. Daylight at No. 21. Pilgrim Island. Run all day. Dark at No. 35, Benton Island, below Randolph. Run all night.

April 13th. Daylight at Beef Island, No. 40 above Memphis; landed at

¹ This is a contraction of "Embarrass," and shows very nicely how many of the French names have changed.

the above town at sunrise. Lay 2 hours; cut loose, and run all day; landed below the first left hand point, below Commerce.

April 14th. Cut loose early; passed Yazoo, cut off horse-shoe Bend; landed between 62 and 63. Hard times of it, missed landing, made it again.

April 15th. Thursday. Cut loose early. Rain and wind. Run down opposite 64—9 miles. Landed under the left hand point. Cleared up. Cut loose at 4 o'clock; dark at 66, run all night.

April 16th. Friday. Daylight at 74, above Arkansas River. Cold. Run all day; dark at the Spanish Moss Bend. Run all night.

April 17th. Daylight above Princeton, upper line of Louisiana. Run all day. Windy. Run on the head of 95. Drift wood, broke two skiffs; landed at the left hand point below 98.

April 18th. Sunday. Cut loose at daylight. Some wind; run all day; passed Vicksburg. Dark at Palmira Island, 106.

April 19th. Daylight, Bayou Pierre; run till 4 o'clock. High winds.

April 20th. Tuesday, cut loose; passed Natchez about 9 o'clock. Run down to Ellis Cliffs on the left. Run against a snag; knocked in the side; run a mile below and landed. Lay till morning.

April 21st. Cut loose late; levee broke on the right; 4 boats run out. Run all day; dark at the head of Yunica Bend.

April 22d. Daylight below Bayou Sarah Post; (Baton Rouge) at noon. Very warm. Dark at St. Gabriel Church 10 miles below Placimine.

April 23. Got lost and run all day and night.

April 24th. Got to New Orleans about middle of the day, 1093 miles.