

Travelers on the Western Waters

BY JOHN FRANCIS McDERMOTT

BY 1811 all the world, it seemed, was afloat on the western waters. Flatboats and keelboats by the hundreds were on their way to Kentucky, to Natchez, to New Orleans. The long, slow, hazardous voyage was no hindrance to the travelers on the Ohio and on the Mississippi whose business or curiosity led them to "take water" at Redstone Old Fort (Brownsville) on the Monongahela, at Pittsburgh where the "beautiful" river lured to the West, at Wheeling where the National Road crossed the Ohio into the heart of the Northwest Territory. It was but the work of a few days and a matter of small expense to have built to specifications a Kentucky ark on which to load one's emigrating family with its livestock, wagons, farm paraphernalia, and household goods, or on which to embark a stock of merchandise for a speculation that might carry one on his adventure even to that alluring foreign city in distant Louisiana. Once the danger of ambush by Indians was over, once the traveler was sufficiently alerted to river pirates, he had difficulties of navigation to contend with—shallow water—riffles—sand bars—the falls at Louisville—occasional storms—the chance of a snag or a sawyer—ice—the hazards of the current—but the cumbersome Kentucky broadhorn was not too hard to handle. Three or four men could keep it in the channel. One reached his destination, sold his broadhorn for what it would bring as lumber, and returned home, if that was his intention, by sea or upriver by keelboat. Many a lone traveler to the west who did not wish to bother with a boat

of his own sought passage on a keelboat, sometimes voyaging in moderate comfort, sometimes in great discomfort, entirely at the will of a captain frequently indifferent to his passengers and unreliable in keeping his agreements, the boat crewed by a foul-mouthed, rough set of bullies and braggarts—riff-raff and oddments of society—who rapidly became tiresome and inescapable traveling companions. But whatever the tedium and trouble of such travel, everybody and his uncle and his aunt and his cousin was and had for three decades been crossing the Alleghenies to see the West.

All one needs to know about the boats and boatmen of the time, of river navigation, of ship building on the Ohio, or of immigrant travel to the western territories he can find in Leland Baldwin's *The Keelboat Age on the Western Waters*, a book which will always be valued for its lively and authoritative history of early river transportation. But, curiously enough, Baldwin had nothing to say about those for whom the boats were built and by whom these boatmen were hired. He turned to the travelers for detail but devoted no chapter to them. Yet it is these voyagers who created the river traffic—it is these travelers who opened, explored, exploited, developed the world beyond the Alleghenies.

Long before the first steamboat puffed its way down to New Orleans in 1811, travelers of every sort, class, and occupation were abroad on the western waters for a multitude of reasons. Military men like Major Erkuries Beatty shared in duty on the frontier. Government appointees like Andrew Ellicott, Winthrop Sargent, Thomas Rodney, and Meriwether Lewis took water on missions as treaty commissioners, territorial administrators, federal judges, explorers. Missionaries like David Jones and David Barrow sought Indians to convert or went on preaching tours around the new settlements in Ohio and Kentucky. Foreigners like Dr. Antoine François Saugrain from Paris and Thomas

Chapman from England inspected lands for possible settlement. A French general like Georges Collot made a secret military reconnaissance. A botanist like André Michaux combined spying for the French government with scientific explorations. Other botanists like John Bradbury and Thomas Nuttall roamed the Ohio, the Mississippi, and the Missouri on collecting tours for patrons in Liverpool and Philadelphia. Political exiles like C.-F. Volney and the Duc d'Orléans filled the lonely months with extensive tours or, like the Chevalier de Luzière, looked for asylum in Spanish Missouri. William Kelso and a companion took an ark-load of flour from Pennsylvania to New Orleans in the spring of 1782, John Halley peddled pork in Louisiana in 1789, John Straghan from the Redstone Creek settlements "trafficked" in crockery and flour all along the rivers on his way to Louisiana in 1804. Nicholas Cresswell left Pittsburgh in 1775 on a trading trip that carried him as far as Big Bone Lick. George Morgan was active in trade with the Illinois Country. Plain tourists like the young Englishman Francis Baily in 1796 and the Frenchman F. M. Perrin du Lac in 1802 came to satisfy their curiosity. Americans like Christian Schultz and Fortescue Cuming explored for themselves the western world opened up by the purchase of Louisiana and went home to write books about what they had seen. Dr. George Hunter of Philadelphia traveled to Kentucky and to Illinois and later to New Orleans to consider the possibilities of ginseng production, to examine saltpeter deposits, to collect overdue accounts for his wholesale drug business.

For business record, for report to higher authority, for family perusal, for personal satisfaction, these voyagers and many another kept diaries or wrote long letters home to wives and friends and associates. Their traveling memoranda, published and in manuscript, form today a voluminous documentation which rivals in bulk and surpasses in variety

that describing adventures and misadventures on the road to golden California in 1849 and the early 1850's. Little of this is important in national or world affairs. One may barter flour for cattle in Attacapas, trade crockery for hats along the Mississippi, sell \$45 worth of earthenware at this settlement and \$9 worth at another, freight a load of nails to Limestone, be ambushed by Indians at some hidden creek mouth along the Ohio, be overcharged for food at a stop for dinner, suffer from bedbugs at a primitive wilderness inn, scribble one's name on the walls of Cave-in-Rock, inspect Indian remains at Grave Creek, measure mammoth tusks and jawbones at Big Bone Lick, comment on the progress of Marietta and the decay of Gallipolis, make notes on the growth and prosperity of Pittsburgh, Wheeling, Cincinnati, Louisville. A knowledge of these actions and observations will not often bring about a reinterpretation of history. But they do contribute to our understanding of people and their ways; it is just such bits that enable us to recreate the daily life of a past time, to reconstruct a vanished world. From flatboat and keelboat the traveler on the western waters observed and recorded a vast detail about people, places, manners, and customs, and fellow travelers, making fascinating use of a leisurely opportunity that was his no longer when the steamboat made possible faster travel with fewer stops.

Pay your money and have your own choice of boat. Nicholas Cresswell in 1775 started for the Illinois with his trade goods in thirty foot pirogues, twenty-two inches wide, a kind of vessel long in use on the Ohio and the Mississippi. Alexander Wilson, traveling alone in 1810, preferred an open skiff in which he stowed his gun, truck, and greatcoat and the small amount of biscuit and cheese that formed his stock of provision for use when he could not get a meal ashore. He traveled light, for in addition he seems to have had only

a bottle of cordial given to him by a gentleman of Pittsburgh and a small tin with which he expected to bail his boat occasionally and "to take his beverage from the Ohio." At Louisville he sold the skiff for half of what it had cost him at Pittsburgh. The man who bought it, Wilson wrote to Alexander Lawson, wondered why he had given it such a droll Indian name as "The Ornithologist." "Some old chief or warrior, I suppose?" he asked.

Fortescue Cuming and his companion preferred something a bit more elaborate though they were not intending to live on their boat as many travelers did. They left Pittsburgh in 1807

in a batteau, or flat bottomed skiff, twenty feet long, very light, and the stern sheets roofed with very thin boards, high enough to sit under with ease, and long enough to shelter us when extended on the benches for repose, should we be benighted occasionally on the river, with a side curtain of tow cloth as a screen from either the sun or the night air. We had a pair of short oars, or rather long paddles, for one person to work both, and a broad paddle to steer with; and a mast, and a lug or square sail to sett when the wind should favour us; we had a good stock of cold provisions and liquors.

The party of which Samuel F. Forman was a member, traveling to Natchez in 1789, had "one long keel boat for the family, the Cabbin was necessarily low for safety from being entangled [with] the limbs of trees—the inside lined with blankets, beds &c. as a protection from the Indian bullets, the hold also secured for the same reason." In addition there was a

large flatt bottomed boat [which] was roofed all over, & look'd like a One story house, & also guarded against the enemy. On board of the keel boat [traveled] Uncle & family & the house servants & 2 hired men, one a Carpenter & the other a Black Smith—On board of the flat, the Captⁿ [hired as an overseer] & his colored charge, the Carriage horses (all the others sold) the Carriage &c. We bought a number of Rifles & divided them between the boats.

Judging from the price he paid for it, Aaron Burr's flat in 1805 must have been a well-made and well-furnished one:

"My boat," he wrote from Pittsburgh to his daughter Theodosia, "is, properly speaking, a floating home, sixty feet by fourteen, containing diningroom, kitchen with fireplace, and two bedrooms; roofed from stem to stern; steps to go up, and a walk on the top the whole length; glass windows, &c. This edifice costs one hundred and thirty-three dollars."

We find that sometimes a boat could be readied in a day but Judge Thomas Rodney's experience was probably not unusual. Arrived by the National Road at Wheeling with his two traveling companions he discovered on September 6, 1803, that

There is Two or three Boat yards here for building River Boats. . . . We agreed to day with two young men to build us a Batteau 30 feet long & 8 feet wide. To have 2 births on Each side Towards the Stern of the Boat which is at that end to be $6\frac{1}{2}$ wide at least—the births will take up 12 feet on Each Side from the Stern forward and are to be Covered with painted Canvas and the top with half inch board in the Manner of a Stage Waggon or Coach and so far as the births Extend the sides of the boat are to be raised 20 Inches above what they otherwise would be. She is to be finished complet and neat—with 2 oars—a mast and two spars for a Square Sail—The boat at $1\frac{1}{4}$ Dolrs a foot in length including the Oars Mast & spars & frame for covering them as prices fixed in the agreement—we to buy sail Cloth roaps &c & pay them for making sail also to pay for painting and for canvas & painting for Covering stern and for under Irons & also for any thing else we may propose not mentioned in agreement—

Two days later the three travelers all went to Caldwell's store "and Bot Stuff for matrasses & beding. I got 5 yds of fine Ticking at $7/6$ for mine & 6 yds of Linnen at $3/6$ for Sheets & Pillows and $2\frac{1}{2}$ yds Chintz for a Coverlid The Mattrass and Pillow to be stuffed with Wheat Straw and delivered them to a Mr [M^{rs} ?] Lawrence to make for me."

Nine days after the boat was begun it was not yet finished. On September 15 Rodney "Visited the Boat several Times and hurried workmen." He arranged also for a tin man to "make a Cook stove which is to be done Saturday afternoon." Saturday, the 17th, proved fine weather after much

rain. "All hands were busy in Expediting our bark and getting ready we got her on the water and she sat like a Sea Gull on it—got her Painted and Oars Mast Spars & Sail Made but Towards Evening I saw that we could not get our berths & Cover Completed & therefore gave up getting away Till Monday." Actually it was 2 o'clock in the afternoon on Tuesday before all was on board and all accounts settled. "Paid 65 Dollars for our Boat." They put off in heavy rain. "It continued to rain heavy and we got five miles before the Major and Brown caught up with us, by this Time we were all as wet as drowned Cats for our Painted Canvas Cover leaked like a riddle so that all our beds and baggage got much wet." Many a time were they to go to wet beds in wet clothes before they reached Natchez.

To assist in handling a Kentucky boat one took in whatever crew was available. Oftentimes there were men hanging around the port of departure hoping to hitch a ride westward. George Hunter and his friend Atkinson in 1796 started from Redstone with two men who had agreed to work their way, but at Pittsburgh one deserted. On a later voyage (1804) Hunter and his son had for crew "an old Spanish Fencing Master[,] a Swiss shoemaker, & a german who worked their passage." John F. Watson, in charge of a shipment of freight for General O'Hara of Pittsburgh in this latter year, hired several hands who appear to have been of the regular boatman class; he found them undisciplined and lazy. Often one avoided tying up at night at a town along the way, for it meant trouble if not desertion by some member of the crew. "Clark, the boatman," Watson soon had occasion to write,

had gone ashore, & did not return till morning, [which] obliged us to stay all night at Marietta. Had strong inclinations of leaving him. Spoke to him severely & threatened to stop his pay. Boatmen are indolent. Blair whom M^r Robbins had most confidence in seems in a constant state of apathy,—constantly sleeping, all day; regardless of the Boats. [They]

are very profane & abuse all whom they pass. [Not merely lazy, they would "gormandize the best first & what was put on board as an occasional repast, they devour without consideration of the future." The boatmen were ready for anything but work] all seem more prone to playing cards, to lounging on deck & to sleeping than to working. One of the boats wants caulking— They cannot be persuaded to begin it— one wishes the others to do it & neither does it. The frenchmans attention & his knowledge of steering is worth all the rest. When a point is to be passed or a danger threatens thereon, all put off rowing till so late as to make it impossible to get round without touching either rocks or trees.

A final trial for any boat owner was a fight between boatmen: "After our boat had ret^d in the night," reads one entry in Watson's diary, "Jn^o Marie & Clark quarrelled & the former after tearing him much with his teeth endeavoured to throw him overboard."

When the traveler took water, he faced first of all hazards arising from the inexperience of navigator as well as of boatmen. Young Samuel Forman recalled later that

To our keel boat we had a Cable & anchor; towards evening [below Pittsburgh] we thought best to make the experiment to come to anchor before it was quite dark;—anchor was cast—it so happened that the Cable was fastened only to the little post over the forecastle—when the boat felt the anchor, it whirled her head up stream, & as the Cable was interwoven with the little posts & slats, from one post to the other, she jurked every post & slats over board & created much confusion & anxiety, for by this time it became quite dark—we could not tell whether any persons were swept off or not, as men & children were standing upon the forecastle deck, & in this painful suspence we remained all night. The Flatt boat passed us in our difficulty—but we soon passed her, the Captⁿ hailed us, & said that he was entangled in the limbs of a large Sycamore tree—we dispatched 2 or 3 hands in the small Skiff to their assistance, altho' we had passed them but a few rods, that the Skiff was a long time stemming the mad current. We felt the want of good water-men. After loosing our Cable & Anchor (probably the anchor lays in that spot yet) Uncle took a chair & sot on the forecastle deck, as a polot, & I was stationed at the helm, & a man to help steer, Uncle & I only understood the sea phrases of *Laboard*, *Stabbard*, & *Port*. So we drifted all night, in the month of January— After the Captⁿ jumped off the *Sycamore*, the skiff returned to us. The Salt water fashion to steer, did not answer the fresh water Rivers—Continually Uncle called out to me all night long as he saw objects to be shunned, thus: Starboard (i.e., put the helm to the right) & Larboard, to the left, & Port to put it in the middle (that is parallel with the length of the Vessel); it was the

most awfiell night we ever experienced. Had our Cable been fastened to ring-bolt in the stem of the boat, it was highly probable that the stem of the boat would have been torn out, & the boat wrecked & all found a watry grave!

Storms provided some alarming moments to nervous travelers. David Barrow, Methodist minister on his way to Kentucky, at the Long Reach noted in his diary (26 May 1795) that at midnight "came on a severe thunder gust. The crew were all of a sudden called out of sleep. The scene was awful. All hands were at what they should do, in the midst of horror and darkness." The next afternoon they had

rain with a heavy hail some as large as a partridge's eggs. . . . This was shortly succeeded by repeated heavy showers of rain; so that we became exceedingly wet and the floor of our boat by the driving gusts, became so wet and dirty that we could by no means lie down to rest ourselves; not even when the management of the boat would suffer it. . . . The river was very high, currant strong and part of the night attended by a thick fog, which subjected us to frequent alarms for fear of being dashed on islands or against trees on one shore or the other.

In the early years after the close of the Revolution, ambush by Indians was a constant threat. Dr. Antoine Saugrain, traveling in March 1788 with three companions to find lands for settlement in Ohio, suffered attack opposite the Big Miami; two of his companions were killed, he himself was wounded. Forman noted in 1789 the nervousness of his party when it approached the mouth of the Scioto which was noted as "a very dangerous place to pass,—a Canoe with three men on board, was fired on the day before we passed, & one man was shot thro' one shoulder & another thro' the calf of one legg. . . . The cause why the Sciota was such a dreaded spot, the Indians had a secret cavern to hide [in], which was never discovered untill after the war."

Other hazards of high and low water, ice, and obstructions continued to make travel a rough venture for the amateurs handling these cumbersome vessels. To be grounded unexpectedly on a low shore or to be caught on a riffle were common experiences. Help might be obtained sometimes from

a passing boat; sometimes from those ashore. But, commented Meriwether Lewis in 1803, "the inhabitants who live near these riffles live much by the distressed situation of the traveller [they] are generally lazy charge extravagantly when they are called on for assistance and have no philanthropy or contience."

Life on the flatboat was not always what one could wish for. The Reverend Mr. Barrow cast off for Limestone, Kentucky, in 1795 in a small boat "having on board 7 grown males, 3 white women, 2 black, 3 white children and two black" as well as six horses, one cow, one dog, and a puppy. About the same time Lewis Condict left Wheeling in a boat carrying ten men and two women, "likewise seven horses." Generally every man shared in the chores and emergencies common to travel. Condict had been suffering from a "lax" (which he laid to change of water) before embarking on the river: "The water in many places we found so low that the boat stuck fast, & we were obliged to jump overboard & pry her off. On account of my ill state of health, the crew agreed to excuse me from performing the duties of rowing & jumping overboard." Dress was simply managed: "In descending the Ohio," wrote John Watson, "I never pull off any of my clothes to sleep except my boots." The time came eventually when one was forced to do his laundry. "To day I washed my cord du roi pantaloons because I thought I could do them better than they had been washed by women," Watson declared, "I realized my opinion I washed them, had them dry, & on again in less than 4 hours." One day Hunter washed his shirts and jacket but the latter blew away while drying. On another occasion as Hunter was going ashore in the little boat for spring water, he fell overboard but soon came up again, his watch so soaked that it stopped until the next day. Since travelers commonly took their horses with them, going ashore to cut hay was a regular necessity.

Typical enough, probably, of the fare on a flatboat was that described by John F. Watson:

The two boats go lashed together & descend night as well as day. each have a fire place for warming or for cooking. Our provisions consist of salt beef & pork, hams, dried mutton, potatoes, turnips, coffee, tea, cheese & butter. With our coffee & tea which we have every morning we get milk from the shore, obtained by a man whom we send off with a Canoe. We have flour cakes baked each morning in a dutch oven, & at dinner we have bread. We have but one general dish for soup & for meat. out of this all take their piece of meat in their hand or each takes his tin cup of salt meat soup, as the case may be. We get but two meals a day. Our drink is Rye whiskey & water. I enjoy all this coarse fare with *bon gout*. We have however longing after wild animals which we have daily opportunities of killing had we a gun. . . . My lodging is rude enough. I have only a single blanket appertaining to myself; but have access to Captⁿ Kenneys mattress & blanket; with these I make my bed on the top of the 3d tier of [word illegible] in the boat. & entirely exposed to the weather at the sides, inasmuch as the upper part of the sides are open about foot from the eves of the roof.

Many travelers took only emergency rations with them on the boat, intending to buy milk and eggs and poultry along the riverside and to get their dinners at farmhouses and inns. Their experiences were varied. The Englishman Thomas Chapman in 1795 obtained passage for himself and his horse on a boat belonging to Major Craig, Deputy Quarter Master in the United States Army, which was carrying supplies to the military hospital at Fort Washington (Cincinnati). At Wheeling Chapman went ashore and drank "a Glass of tolerable Port Wine, for wch the Inn keeper charged us after the rate of 4s 6d per bottle and 2s 3d per pound of chocolate." One day their diet on the boat was varied because the boat's crew had gone ashore and shot eight or ten turkeys: "the way we dressed them was by cutting them up in Pieces and boiling them with Potatoes, Bread, & Turnips, wch made excellent soup." Gallipolis, Chapman found "a small miserable looking village" but, like other travelers, he was delighted that it had a baker who made them "a Dozen Loaves of excellent Bread from Leaven."

Fortescue Cuming, planning a book about the western country in 1807, was particularly interested in the "entertainment" provided for travelers. He and his companion tied up at night and regularly sought their principal meal ashore. At the town of Beaver they "refreshed" themselves "with six cents worth of whiskey and water at general Lacock's tavern." Below that place, while they were still in their boat

it began to rain with heavy thunder and sharp lightning. We huddled into the stern under the awning, and I sculled with one oar to keep the boat in the channel, in hopes of getting to Georgetown; but the storm increasing, we judged it more prouident to stop at nine o'clock where we saw a light on the left bank. We were received very hospitably in their small log house by Mr. and Mrs. Potts. Our landlady gave us bread and milk, which after changing our wet clothes, we supped on sumptuously. We then made some milk punch, which our landlord partook of with us with great gout, entertaining us with some good songs, and long stories about his travels. Time thus passed away while the storm pelted without, and it was not until eleven o'clock that we stretched ourselves on the floor, with our feet to the fire, and enjoyed a good nap, resisting the kind importunities of the Potts's to take their own bed, their other one being filled with their five children.

A bit further down the river they stopped at

Wm. Croxton's tavern, the sign of the Black Horse, on the Virginia side, and got a bowl of excellent cider-oil [*sic.* cider royal, no doubt]. This is stronger than Madeira and is obtained from the cider by suffering it to freeze in the cask in the winter, and then drawing off and barrelling up the spirituous part which remains liquid, while the aqueous is quickly congealed by the frost.

One night they spent at Squire Brown's on an island about seven miles above Steubenville. He had "a noble farm and house very pleasantly situated on a high bank, with a steep slope to the river." The old man "entertained us until a late hour, by narrating to us his situation, and that of his family," but Cuming was not very pleased by the evening. "Though he does not keep a tavern, he knows how to charge as if he did, we having to pay him half a dollar for our plain supper [of apple pie, bread, butter and milk], plainer bed, and two quarts of milk we took with us next morning."

At Greenupsburgh, laid out the year before as seat of justice for Greenup County, Kentucky, Cuming found only a single dwelling house, occupied by one Lyons as a tavern.

We ordered supper, during the preparation of which Mrs. Lyons requested my advice for her husband, who had been seized that morning by the prevailing fever. I wrote a prescription for him *secundem artem*, which I thought fully equivalent to our supper, but as she gave me no credit for it in our bill, she probably supposed that a travelling doctor ought to prescribe gratis.

We had an excellent supper, of tea, nice broiled chickens, and fine biscuit, to which travelling and rowing gave us good appetite, notwithstanding we saw our landlady take the table cloth from under her sick husband's bed clothes. After this let not the delicate town bred man affect disgust at the calls of nature being satisfied in a manner he is unused to, as in a similar situation, I will venture to assert, he would do as we did.

If Thomas Rodney's report of his stay of several weeks at Wheeling had been published, it would not have drawn other travelers to the hostelry:

I cannot leave this Little Town without some observations on it— We were directed on the Road to a Tavern Kept by a M^r. Knox who is a Captⁿ of Militia and a justice of the Peace—and is a Pretty likely man in the Prime of life—but rather indolent in his turn of mind tho not want^g pretty good sense Yet his Tavern is a dirty hovel and his beds swarming with bugs— Yet I had a very good bed perhaps the best in the House and Elegant Chintz furniture & being newly painted Green the bugs did not much disturb me but there were three other beds in the room very ordinary and all Swarming with bugs so that no decent person could rest in them till M^r. Shields made a rant & made them wash two of them—all the rest of his beds and rooms I believe were worse for mine was the best room & the most decent company put there—nor was there any regularity in the Management of the House the servants all app^d Idle and Worthless and seldom was the Chambers in any decent order and their table was still worse regulated and in general ordinary tho sometimes we got things pretty good but it was rare & there was nobody seemed to care whether it was well or ill done— . . . there were two other Taverns in Town worse than this. . . .

If accommodations ashore were not all a traveler could desire, the behavior of the inhabitants along the river was not helpful or encouraging. On one occasion wrote Cuming: a young woman answered several questions we asked her very civilly; which I mention as a rare circumstance, as the inhabitants of the banks

of the Ohio, have too generally acquired a habit, of either not deigning an answer to the interrogatories of the numerous river travellers, or giving them a short and boorish one, or of turning their questions into ridicule; which proceeds from the impertinent manner in which they are generally hailed and addressed by the people in the boats.

When Cuming wanted to land at Beaver, some boys "mischievously misinformed" him so that the travelers rowed a mile lower down than the creek entrance. After landing "we had to climb a precipice to a log cabin, on the top and edge of the cliff, near two hundred feet above the surface of the river." Only after getting new directions did they reach the town.

Some of the settlers were suspicious of every traveler. After leaving Belleville, Cuming stopped at Peter Neisanger's farm (some seventy-five miles above Clarksburg, Virginia). "We were received with cautious taciturnity by Mrs. Neisanger, whose ungracious reception would have induced us to have proceeded further" had it not been so late in the day. Cuming saw a figure "scarcely meriting the name of human approaching. . . . it had the appearance of a man above middle age, strong and robust, fantastically covered with ragged cloathing, but so dirty it was impossible to distinguish whether he was naturally a white or an Indian." Cuming's companion accosted the person as lord of the place, but had no reply from him. "We again mounted the bank [in one further attempt to make contact] and found two [other] men with rifles in their hands sitting at the door." The elder of these two proved to be Neisanger. After a time, during which the host acknowledged the request for supper only with a doubtful nod of the head and a grunt, the rifles were laid aside and all the men made a hearty meal on brown bread and milk, while Mrs. Neisanger waited on them, not sitting down herself until they had all finished their dinner.

. . . During supper, Mr. Neisanger gradually relaxed from his blunt and cautious brevity of speech, and we gathered from him that he had been

a great hunter and woodsman, in which occupation, he said that one man may in one season kill two hundred deer and eighty bears.

He had changed his pursuit of the wild inhabitants of the forest about nine years ago, for an agricultural life. Since that time he had cleared a large tract of land, had planted three thousand fruit trees on his farm, and had carried on a distillery of whiskey and peach brandy, for the first of which he gets seventy-five cents per gallon, and for the last a dollar.

After supper we took leave of this Nimrod of the west without much regret. . . .

But not all settlements and settlers were as crude as these. Cuming was very much interested in the development of the western country and the signs of prosperity in the towns and the farms along the river. Brunot's Island immediately below the point at Pittsburgh he noted with pleasure

contains near three hundred acres of a most luxuriant soil, about half of which has been cleared by Dr. Brunot, a native of France, who adds hospitality and sociality to the abundance he derives from his well cultivated farm. He has judiciously left the timber standing on the end of the island nearest Pittsburgh, through which, and a beautiful locust grove of about twelve acres, an avenue from his upper landing is led with taste and judgement about half a mile to his house, which is a good two story cottage, with large barns, and other appropriate offices near it, and an excellent garden and nursery. He has fenced all the farm in such a way, as to leave a delightful promenade all round it, between the fences, and the margin of the river, which he has purposely left fringed with the native wood about sixty yards wide, except where occasional openings are made either for landings, or views, the latter of which are very fine, particularly of M'Kee's romantick rocks opposite, impending over the narrow rapid which separates them from the island.

On Long Island below Beaver, Major Isaac Craig of Pittsburgh had a "large but very plain wooden farmhouse of two stories, and about sixty feet long." Below Croxton's, where Cuming had enjoyed his "cider-oil," Mr. White of Middleton, Virginia, "is building a fine house of hewn stone." At Steubenville Mr. Bezaleel Wells "has a handsome house and finely improved garden and farm" a quarter-mile below town. There, too, Mr. Potter's "handsome square roofed house is worth comment." A lengthy pleasant catalogue of such developments could be made from Cuming's notes.

Of all residences, the grand showplace for a decade was that of Harman Blennerhassett established on an island opposite the mouth of the Little Kanaha in 1797 on which he spent by his own estimate "upwards of thirty thousand dollars." Many a traveler stopped there as Judge Rodney did in September 1803:

The next Island we came to was Blaney Hazzards 2 Miles below the Little Canaway— This Island as to buildings is Very Elegantly Improved, the dwellg^s House struck our View as soon as we turned the point of Belleprie. . . . Mr. Hazzard pressed us to stay & dine which as his Dinner was ready we assented to, we had a Small piece of ordinary bacon & two roasted Chickens & [word illegible] Preserves & Cheese and good brandy and wine & musk millions or Cantaloupe and [word illegible] Peaches which were full ripe & good and the first we had seen on this side of the Mountains.

The host "appears to be a Cleaver man and fond of Society & Expresses a fondness for music, Physic and Chemistry &c. but has something wild and Eccentric in his aspect."

Cuming saw the place the year after Blennerhassett had gone away on his adventure with Aaron Burr. Though the furnishings had been seized and sold at public auction to satisfy some of the Burr bills which Blennerhassett had endorsed, the house was still in good care and well worth the detailed description Cuming published of it:

On ascending the bank from the landing, we entered at a handsome double gate, with hewn stone square pilasters, a gravel walk, which led us about a hundred and fifty paces, to Mr. Blennerhassett's house, with a meadow on the left, and a shrubbery on the right, separated from the avenue by a low hedge of privy-sally, through which innumerable columbines, and various other hardy flowers were displaying themselves to the sun, at present almost their only observer.

We were received with politeness by Mrs. Cushing, whose husband, Col [Nathaniel] Cushing, has a lease of this extensive and well cultivated farm, where he and his family now reside in preference to his own farm at Belle-pré.

The house occupies a square of about fifty-four feet each side, is two stories high, and in just proportion. On the ground floor is a dining room of twenty-seven feet by twenty, with a door at each end communicating with two small parlours, in the rear of each of which is another room, one of which was appropriated by Mr. B. for holding a chymical apparatus, and as a dispensary for drugs and medicines.

The staircase is spacious and easy, and leads to a very handsome drawing room over the dining room, of the same dimensions. It is half arched round the cornices and the ceiling is finished in stucco. The hangings above the chair rail are green with gilt border, and below a reddish grey. The other four rooms on the same floor correspond exactly with those below, and are intended either for bed chambers, or to form a suit with the drawing room.

The body of the house is connected with two wings, by a semicircular portico or corridor running from each front corner. In one wing is the kitchen and scullery, and in the other was the library, now used as a lumber room.

It is to be regretted that so tasty and so handsome a house had not been constructed of more lasting materials than wood.

The shrubbery was well stocked with flowery shrubs and all variety of evergreens natural to this climate, as well as several exoticks, surrounds the garden, and has gravel walks, labyrinth fashion, winding through it.

The garden is not large, but seems to have had every delicacy of fruit, vegetable, and flower, which this fine climate and luxurious soil produces. In short, Blennerhassett's island is a most charming retreat for any man of fortune fond of retirement, and it is a situation perhaps not exceeded for beauty in the western world. It wants however the variety of mountain—precipice—cateract—distant prospect, &c. which constitute the grand and sublime.

The house was finished in a suitable style, but all the furniture and moveables were attached by creditors to whom Mr. B. had made himself liable by endorsing Col. Burr's bills, and they were lately sold at publick auction at Wood county court house, for perhaps less than one twentieth their cost.

Our keelboat travelers always had interesting comments to make on the new towns they visited—sometimes, we may think, their reactions may have been colored by the incidents of their travels. Lewis Condict found Pittsburgh

a handsome, flourishing & very lively little town. . . . It contains about 100 houses, some of which are handsome buildings. . . . An immense crowd of people from all parts are constantly passing through to Kentucky. . . . The inhabitants of Pittsburgh do not seem to be overburdened with religion. "Keep what I've got, & get what I can," whether by fair means or otherways, seems to be the motto of each individual. [John Straghan was impressed with this "gate city" to the West: there he] found Commershel traffick of allmost Every Discription and it may well be Stiled the key of the western parts of Collumbia for the Emigrants flock here from all Quarters of the Christian Diminions Eveen as wilde pigeons flock unto the Stubbles of the husbandman in time of harvest. . . . Elegant streets Crossing Each Other at Right Angles with a Jaol Court-

house and 2 Glass Manufactories of grate impoartance besides many Other Mecheneries Carried on by Individuals.

Steubenville in 1807, then eight years old, had one hundred and sixty houses, "including a new gaol of hewn stone, a court house of square logs . . . and a brick presbyterian church." At Charlestown, four miles downriver, standing in front of the gaol, Cuming noted, "is a pillory, on a plan differing from any I ever saw elsewhere: A large, round wooden cover, like an umbrella, serving as a shade for the criminal in the stocks, or for a shelter from sun or rain to the inhabitants who meet on business in front of the court house, the place generally used as a sort of exchange in the small towns in this country."

Of Cincinnati Condict had no better impression than of Pittsburgh: "The Inhabitants of Cincinnata cannot boast much of their morality, as they possess but little of it. It appears to be the most debauched place I ever saw." Straghan was impressed but doubtfully approving: "altho this is a very handsom florishin Town, yet I can say of a truth that I Left this Town with as much freedom as I would have Left a Roaring Lion in the fullness of his fury, they were Emigrants from almost every Quarter of the Zodiac Evin from the kingdom of Gaul."

In the long slow-moving days on the water, besides the occasional stresses of tricky navigation and stormy weather, besides good or bad meals and beds ashore, besides looking with interest at or reacting with annoyance to the new towns and the fine farms and the rough squatters, the traveler found much to arouse or hold his attention. River traffic was heavy and for the first-time traveler over the route—as most of these recorders were—the unusual caught his eye. Below the Falls at Louisville John Straghan "passed 3 handsome well Riggged Vessels Like unto the Ships of tarses for beauty, 1st the Ship Lusianaa of Pittsburgh 2nd Schooner, Named

Nauenea of Pittsburgh 3rd Brigg Lewisville the 1st 285 tun burthen nd 220 tun, rd 185 tun burthen these were all Loaded with the produce of Redstone and Kentuckey, and bound for the Isles of Spain and Britton." Watson saw one day "a 300 Blls boat of 20 oars" working its way upstream and later "an 80 oared boat." Aboard them he observed "almost every man rows naked & all have a sort of song or shout—They each receive 100 Drs & rest $\frac{1}{4}$ hour every 1 hour. The boats are all black, one mast beamed & very long. at the end is a canvas shelter which serves as a cabin." On another occasion he was interested to see a keel boat "sailing pretty fast against the current with but one square small sail."

Frequently the traveler would pass boats headed for Pittsburgh laden with furs or lead from the Illinois country. Soon after he had left Pittsburgh in 1796, Dr. George Hunter met on the river

a Long Keel Boat manned with Indians & one white man from the Illinois country laden with skins. They sett it up against the stream along the shore with great rapidity & kept time with their setting poles dextrously; I examined them with my spy glass & found them all quite naked except an handkerchief tied round their heads & a breachclout round their middles; as we approached their boat they perceived my Glass & immediately two of them lifted up their breechclout & stuck out their bare Posteriors—

Sometimes one wondered at the casualness with which the people of the West undertook travel. At Sycamore Creek above Manchester, Cuming "spoke a man of the name of May, who with his wife and child, and aged mother, had been seven weeks descending the Mississippi and ascending the Ohio in a skiff: bound from St. Louis in upper Louisiana, to Pittsburgh, a distance of thirteen hundred miles, on a visit to two of his brothers residing there. They had just landed to cook their dinner."

Some of the river craft attracted by their novelty. Near Gallipolis, Needham Parry in 1794 saw his first floating mill:

built on two round or keeled bottom boats, which lay out in the current with a windlass to allow it more or less rope, as it sometimes wo'd need to be confined farther out from shore. This was done by long skids which lay with one on the shore, & the other on the Mill house frame. The shaft of the mill extends over both boats and between the boats the water wheel runs; which is nothing but 4 strong arms, mortised through the shaft, & on those arms are boards pinned on about 2 feet wide, which served as buckets. This was called a double giered mill; having four wheels besides the water wheel. The way they stopped it, was severe on the works, it being by slipping a strong iron bar so as to catch the arms of the water wheel; which stopped it all at once.

Sure of interest, too, was such a floating store as Cuming saw when he came in at the landing at Little Grave Creek. On returning to our boat we found a floating store at the landing. It was a large square flat roofed and fitted with shelves and counter, and containing a various assortment of merchandize, among which were several copper stills, of which much use is now made throughout the whole western country for distilling peach and apple brandy, and rye whiskey.—The store had two owners, who acted both as boatmen and merchants, and who freely invited us to partake of a dram with them. They had loaded their flat at Wheeling, and were dropping down the river, stopping occasionally wherever they could find a market for their goods.

Alexander Wilson in his little skiff passed numerous arks on his way to Louisville.

Several of these floating caravans were loaded with store goods, for the supply of the settlements, through which they passed; having a counter erected, shawls, muslins, &cs. displayed, and every thing ready for transacting business. On approaching a settlement, they blow a horn, or tin trumpet, which announces to the inhabitants their arrival.

Unusual among river craft was the horse-powered keelboat which caught the eye of Fortescue Cuming below Sinking Creek.

A keel of forty tons came to the landing at the same time as we did. She was worked by a horizontal wheel, kept in motion by six horses going round in a circle on a gallery above the boat, by which are turned two cog wheels fixed each to an axle which projects over both gunwales of the boat, one before and the other behind the horizontal wheel. Eight paddles are fixed on the projecting end of each axle, which impel the boat about five or six miles an hour, so that she can be forced against the current about twenty miles a day.

One occasionally had the satisfaction of meeting somewhat notable persons. Major Erkuries Beatty, paymaster

in the western army, was introduced in 1786 at Limestone to "Col Boon the first discoverer of the Kentucke country who seems to be a very honest kind of Dutchman [!]." Rodney at a settlement near the mouth of the Kentucky River met a nephew of the famous Kentuckian who told him that "his Unkle Daniel, who is remarkable for having lived on Kenty River long before it was settled by the whites has removed on the west side of the Misisipi and lives 40 miles up the Missouri."

Rodney was particularly interested to meet at Wheeling, while he was waiting for his boat to be finished, Meriwether Lewis then on his way to Wood River, Illinois, preparatory to ascending the Missouri on his famous mission. He thought this captain

a stout young man but not so Robust as to look able to fully accomplish the object of his Mission nor does he seem to set out in the Manner that promises a fulfilment of it—He sets out in a Vessel 56 feet Long and Completely Equiped with Sails and 18 Oars with as many Soldiers & Rivermen as are Necessary to Man her and a M^r Clark son of Gen^l Clark as his Companion—and his Vessel fitted with very new and Comfortable Accommodations with great Stores of Baggage and Cargo so that she draws 2½ feet water and will be very Heavy to go up against the Stream of the Misisipi and other Rivers—this will be cause of Great delay in ascending the Rivers so far as this Vessel may carry him—but he has what he calls a portable boat the frame of which is made of Iron to proceed it—Yet it seems to me that he had better have adopted the long Experience of the Canadians, and used the bark Canoes that are used by them in their Northern Trade—he has already been delayed a long time in the Ohio waiting for his boat which cost 400 Dol^s and in getting this far and now is obliged to use three or four Ohio Canoes to light him over the Riffs or Ripples below this.

Travelers frequently stopped at Gallipolis not merely for the excellent bread they could procure there but to be entertained by the demonstrations of "a glassmaker at work." Needham Parry saw him "display many little curiosities, which he seemed to take a pleasure in." This was Antoine Saugrain, physician and chemist, who after his disastrous experience with Indians on the Ohio in 1788 had come back

in 1790 with the Parisian French who founded Gallipolis that year. About 1796 or 1797 he removed to Kentucky and not long after that to St. Louis, but in 1795 the Reverend James Smith, on a tour through Kentucky and Ohio, spent half an hour being entertained by Saugrain, who enjoyed himself by astonishing strangers:

While we were here a civil and well bred Frenchman obligingly entertained us with a number of curiosities. He first kindled a fire of a small clear flame, which, by means of a foot bellows, he increased or diminished at his pleasure. He then took a piece of glass about the shape and size of a pipe-stem (of which he had a great number of pieces); he held this glass in the flame till it began to melt, then applied it to his mouth and blew it up like a bladder; this he gave a fillip with his finger and it burst with an explosion like the report of a pistol. Another glass he blew up in the same manner and thro a tube as fine as a hair filled it with water, running upward in a strange manner and filling the globe at the top. Other pieces he wired as fine as a hair; indeed it appeared as if he taught this brittle substance so far to obey him, that it took any form he pleased. He showed us a number of thermometers, barometers, spirit proofs etc., all of his own make. The virtue of the spirit proof I tried on different kinds of spirits, and found it to answer the purpose for which it was intended by showing the real strength of the liquor. He terminated these shows by exhibiting a chemical composition which had the peculiar quality of setting wood on fire. The polite and agreeable manner in which he entertained us for half an hour was not the smallest gratification to me; for while it marked the general character of his nation, it placed his own in a very conspicuous point of view.

Natural curiosities also caused many travelers to stop by the way. Most noted of these was the famous Cave-in-Rock where everybody scribbled his name. "The names of persons on the rock were innumerable," Watson found on May 1, 1804. "I could find no place for mine & fell upon invention. For I got a candle (lighted) from the boats & stuck it on a cane—with this I could reach the roof & there I left my name marked with candle smoke."

Antiquities roused interest. Indian mounds were inspected and wondered at. Mammoth bones were searched out and carried away. Seven miles below Marietta, Rodney went ashore

and walked about a mile through the woods where the river turns to

the West. . . the Hickories, Walnuts, Elms, Beaches &c were commonly 5 to 6 ft Diameter—on many of the Beaches were the initials of Various names marked & dates from 1774 to 1802—on one Tree was an Indian king drawn with his Crown smoking a pipe—on another an Indian Queen with her Indian dress but her front was bare and naked and Even her privy parts was delineated in a Conspicuous Manner, the King appeared to have been drawn about twenty or thirty years ago, and that of the Queen Seemed to have been drawn 60 to 70 years ago—I left my own name and the year 1803 on a large Beach Tree and returned to the River.

On occasion a traveler like Cuming will report a glimpse of a “frolic.” Below Le Tart’s Falls he

met a large canoe, paddled against the stream by five well drest young men, while a respectable looking elderly man steered. They had five very smart looking girls with them, and, from their gaiety, were apparently returning from some *frolick*—the epithet used in this country for all neighbourly meetings for the purpose of assisting each other in finishing some domestick or farming business, which generally conclude with feasting and dancing, which sometimes lasts two or three days.

One day Cuming took on board as a passenger

a very stout young man, [who] was going to the falls [Le Tart’s Falls?] to attend a “gathering” (as they phrase it in this country) at a justice’s court. . . [held] on the last Saturday of every month: He supposed there would be sixty or seventy men there—some plaintiffs, and some defendants in causes of small debts, actions of defamation, assaults, &c. and some to wrestle, fight, shoot at a mark with the rifle for wagers, gamble at other games, or drink whiskey. He had his rifle with him and was prepared for any kind of frolick which might be going forward. He was principally induced to go there from having heard that another man who was to be there, had said that he could *whip* him (the provincial phrase for beat). After the frolick was ended he purposed returning home through the woods.

Occasionally we are treated to genre sketches in another tone. At Wheeling, Cuming stayed at Sprigg’s tavern. Sauntering about the town after supper, he thought it “appeared very lively, the inhabitants being about their doors, or in the street, enjoying the fresh air of a clear moonlight evening while two flutes were playing *en duo* the simple but musical Scots ballad of Roy’s wife of Aldwalloch, the prime parts very tastily executed.” Some days later when they landed one fine evening at John Wells’s, seven miles

below Biddle's, Cuming and his traveling companion found Eight or nine young men who had been reaping for Wells during the day, were stretched out at their ease on the ground, round the door of the cabin, listening to the vocal performance of one of their comrades, who well merited their attention, from the goodness of his voice, his taste, execution, variety and humor. We enjoyed a rural supper, while listening to the rustick chorister.

There were other moments unexpected but entertaining. Judge Rodney mentioned briefly in his journal that one evening "After the Major & Shields had gone to bed & while I was waiting 3 or 4 girls came down and bathed in the River near our Boats." This led to some "Pleasant Banter" afterwards.

The Major & Shields were Vexed that I did not wake them when the girls were bathing & swimming near our Boat at Augusta—and the Instant I Enquired if any of them had seen my gold ring [which Rodney recently lost] or knew where it was the major replied O Yes I know where it is— Where O by G-d that blackeyed girl, that wood-nymph you met with yesterday has got it— Shields joined him— I replied that this suggestion was to repay me for not waking them when the Naid's or River Nymphs were swimming around our boats—that I Expect they had come down agreeably to Assingation with but they were so fond of sleep that they had not patians to wait their arrival &c.

Nymphs of another character were the "Three Delaware Indian girls (Papooses)" who came on board Watson's boat in the evening at New Madrid. Their

object was evidently to barter their persons for biscuits, whiskey, &c.— They were better looking than I had ever imagined an Indian to be— Spoke but little English—they wore leggings & breach cloths & blankets as the men— There accents were peculiarly soft and delicate—In short they would have been desirable to one who had not a fear of contracting that disease which they would commonly be bearers of. I presume they are in the habit of frequenting all the boats that land. I told my men that they might entertain them as they pleased, provided they gave them no whiskey. I left them. . . .

Here, then, in the diaries of the travelers on the western waters, from the near illiterates to the most sophisticated gentlemen, from representatives of every occupation and profession, is to be found the whole vivid history of life along the waterways set down in the common daily detail. With

the advent and increasing use of steamboats, travelers would still record their observations and experiences, but the better the transportation, the less chance to see life as it was being lived. The leisure and—after a few days—the increasing boredom of extensive voyaging, as well as the newness of the country and the sense of exploration, had given the materials, the impulse, and the time to make extensive records. Today we can delight in the fullness of the record and the freshness of experience in the wealth of diaries in print and in manuscript that picture this old time on the western waters.

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