NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

A TRIP FROM PITTSBURGH TO ST. LOUIS
AND RETURN IN 1850

James W. Hailman, a Pittsburgh iron and steel manufacturer and dealer of the period before the Civil War, for many years kept a diary, one volume of which, for the years 1850 to 1859, was presented to the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania last year, with other Hailman family records, by his grandson, Mr. George L. Hailman (see ante, 23:61—March, 1940).

The diarist, at the time of the journey he describes below, was a member of the firm of Coleman, Hailman & Co., whose plant or "warehouse" was located between Water Street and the present First Avenue (formerly known as Front Street). Contemporary advertisements in the Pittsburgh Daily Gazette refer to the plant as the "Duquesne Spring, Axle, Steel and Iron Works" (often called the Duquesne Iron Works for short), and the firm is described as "manufacturers of Coach and Eliptic Springs, Hammered Axles, Spring and Plough Steel, Iron, &c.," as well as "dealers in Coach Trimmings and Malleable Castings."

Mr. Hailman apparently had not infrequent occasion to make extended business trips, and it is his daily record of one such journey, to St. Louis and return early in the year 1850, that is here presented.

Jany 21

Arose at 5. the morning wet & disagreeable, was at Warehouse at 8. Was busy during the day in preparing a/c's & arrangeing for my departure to St. Louis to which place I contemplate starting on tomorrow to look after some business of our firm.

I always leave home with regret and always return to it with joy & pleasure, The endearments of home take hold upon the heart, and there is perhaps no pleasure so perfectly a pleasure, as that which we feel on arriving at home after a long absence. The journey I contemplate making is beset with much danger at this season of the year, the running ice in the upper Mississippi river Sometimes gorges & produces disastrous Effects upon the Boats navigating the river, but I will trust in the good Providence of God who ruleth all things well.

Had another letter from George W. to day he seems quite anxious to return home, but he cannot at present. Spent the Evening in reading & retired at 9 o'clock.
Jany 22

Started Early this morning, having bid farewell to my family, for I expect to leave for St. Louis, ah! it is painful to part from those we love, to leave home & all its Comforts & endearments & encounter the privations even of a short journey.

Left Pitts at 12 o’clk M, on board “New England #2 Capt Dean, Weather pleasant the Company on board appearing principally of that Class which may be denominated genteel & without that flipancy & flummery which is the bane of Society.—It seems to be a question which every one asks of himself when he embarks aboard a St Boat,—“How Shall I pass the time”? Blue & yellow backed books of trashy nonsense are purchased & hours spent in their perusal—Cards are played to “kill time”—some smoke continually—others saunter up & down & restless They now sit, now throw their feet forward & arms back & yawn loudly Then jump up, & with their back turned to the fire squirt their tobacco juice from between their lips over the floor to the great annoyance of the Steward & discomfort of their fellow passengers—Well! travelling on board a St boat is rather dull play & no wonder the inquiry “How will I spend the time”? 2 o’clk passed Beaver 5. o’clk Steubenville 7 P.M. at Wheeling had a fine view of the Wheeling bridge it is indeed a noble Structure & well may our “Village” friends at the “head of navigation” be proud of it. Left Wheeling at 9 the moon shines brightly, the weather pleasant,—Turned into my berth at 10.

Jany 23

Arose at 6 after rather an uncomfortable night having slept but little, which I attribute to the change from my quiet bed room to the noisy puffing shaking St Boat. Had Breakfast at 8.—Conversed with my friend English who is my travelling Companion, made our observations on the “Ships Company” & so passed the day. passed portsmouth in the Evening about 5. Nothing of interest occuring I turned in at 10 o’clk.

Jany 24

Was up at little after 5. this morning and found we had arrived at Cin-
cinnati at 2 o’clk in the morning. The weather has changed suddenly for the clouds are black & heavy & threaten rain. Having a good deal of business on hand to get through with in a short time, I had accordingly to stir myself. I left the Boat, for the Hotel as soon as it was light enough & by the way I must note the exceedingly carelessness of the Hotel Keepers in Cin. for at present there is scarily one Hotel in the place where you can comfortably lodge & where the “eating” is served up clean. After breakfast I started out, (notwithstanding it poured down rain in torrents,) & was busily engaged until 2 P.M. having walked from store to store & place to place until I had gone over a good portion of the City among our Customers. Dined at 2 P again started out leaving my friend English to arrange for our departure in the “Empire State” which goes at 6 P.M.—This has been an exceedingly disagreeable day, mud & rain & rain & mud, through which I have tramped nearly all day. Well there is now an end to it for I am abroad the “Empire” Snug & warm. A clever Captain, very agreeable Company & a good Boat. Left Cin at 8
P.M. the night Dark & wet. Spent the evening pleasently & retired to my berth at 1/2 past 10.

Jany 25

Arrived at Louisville at 10 o'clock A M had time to call upon one or two of our friends — the Boat stoping but an hour or two. Left Louisville at half past 11. Passed over the “falls” there being about 20 feet water. The river here presents at a low stage of water a novel aspect, tumbling over huge rocks, boiling & freting at the obstructions in its course, it loses its character of “La belle Riviere” & becomes a wild foaming current over which it is dangerous. Even to attempt to pass. A Canal is here made around the “falls” through which Boats pass during a low stage of water. Louisville is a place of considerable importance, there being a very considerable trade carried on with the interior of Ky & the neighboring part of Indiana.—Passed New Albany at 12 m. Our Boat running at about 11 miles per hour. The weather has cleared up rather cold. Nothing special occurred during the afternoon sailed along gaily untill dark, when it become somewhat foggy which made “our run” Short during the night.

Jany 26

The fog was thick this morning so that it was impossible to proceed under a head of Steam. We were therefore obliged to float along with the current and for 3 hours made but little progress indeed it was near 10 o'clock before the fog cleared away so as to permit us to “go ahead” which we did at the rate of 13 miles an hour—passed Evansville & Shawnetown during the day. The river in many places overtop'd its banks & spreading over the flat bottoms brought dismay & great damage to the inhabitants who were located in the “flats.” I observed some leaving their houses in canoes & carrying away with them what they could save from the flood and seeking the high ground find them a resting place for themselves & their cattle. Owing to these almost annual “overflows” this lower Country can not improve upon the borders of the river & the present inhabitants who have located themselves in the flat land will be constrained to leave and settle upon the higher ground some miles back, or eke out a miserable existence where they are with the disadvantages of an annually occurring retreat before the “overflow.”

The weather cloudy & cold & the night promises to be foggy so we shall have another “short run.” Retired to my berth at about 10.

Jany 27

This is the Sabbath, but I see nothing to indicate it save the clean & spruce appearances of our Company aboard. No Sabbath is known on board a St Boat. Ah! I forget it is so far respected as that card playing is laid aside & this is all, for the nauseous yellow back novel is still in request, the bar is open, and all the usual means adopted to “kill time” save only cards. Well I feel gratefull to My Creator that I have no inclination to indulge in the bar, to read the “trashy stuff” which comes in upon the travelling community like a flood, or to stake my reputation upon a Card Table.
This morning is quite as foggy as yesterday and we were obliged again to float with the current for 2 or 3 hours. at about 10 o'clik the fog cleared away & the sun shone beautifully making it quite pleasent out doors, so I took a turn upon deck.—I observe the Country presents still an unhappy appearance being completely submerged, houses & barns surrounded by water could not be approached but by means of a boat.

We arrived at Cairo at the mouth of the Ohio river. I found it also under water, at 12. we disembarked from the “Empire State” & took passage on the “Saluda” for St. Louis,— Cairo is happily situated for trade & commerce, but owing to the low flat ground upon which it Stands being annually inundated, it can never become a place of importance or number of inhabitants. A few miserable dwellings, two or three wharf boats and a floating boat Store or meat Shop comprise the whole City. The whole business is done at the wharf boats, many goods are here reshipped for St Louis & the ports on the Ohio. Left Cairo at 2 pm. The “Saluda” is a small boat plying as a packet between Cairo & St. Louis and designed principally for the Coasting trade of course we did not fare quite as well as in the “floating palaces” of the Ohio. Passed Cape Giradeau a little after dark. Spent the evening in Conversation & retired at 10.

Jany 28

Arose at day break this morning & found we had made but a “short run” during the night having had to stop at several places “along coast” to take in freight & here we are tied up, taking in Lumber & wheat without much prospect of leaving before Midday—How very impatient our passengers are becoming, this is always the case however, as we draw near our journeys end & any little detention happens. This impatience was greatly increased by the circumstance of the “Jno Hancock” passing as we laid by taking in this “Lumber,” I felt a little annoyed myself & heartily wished myself aboard of the “Hancock,” but we soon got under weigh, & kept the St Hancock in sight most of the day.—The day wore away as most days do when “on board ship” & nothing happened to mar our contentment untill at dark we lost sight of the “Hancock” & then “We are geting along slowly,” “How far are we now from St Louis”? & such like observations were heard to arise among our Company, however Cards & Cigars & “Yellow back,” put all to right again.

The weather sets in Cold & the night dark I learn we have several stopages to make during the night & will not reach St Louis untill morning & therefore content I turned into my berth at 10.

Jany 29

At before daylight stoped at St Genevieve, took in some more freight & made two or three additions to our Company on board in the shape of a bride & groom & their attendants. a few hours after overhauled the “Hancock” & passed her she having run fast on a bar. Here then we congratulated ourselves with being on board the Saluda & sailing away at the rate of 8 miles an hour. Arrived at St Louis at 11 oclik took lodging at “Planters Hotel.” Spent balance of day in “fixing up” & calling on our business friends.
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Jany 30

Arose rather late just dressed in time for breakfast, after which I started out on business. Spent most of the day at Mess Wood & Violet's Warehouse with whom as our agents my business was mostly to transact.—St. Louis is a city of a very large & growing trade and is destined at some day & that not far distant to be to the West what New Orleans is to the South a vast depot for the products & the whole North West.—Here may be seen at the business season upon the “Levee” piles “mountain high” of Flour, Pork, Lard Corn, Wheat & other products of the upper Agricultural district & immense quantities of Lead from the mines in Missouri & the upper Mississippi region. Large Warehouses are here stowed full of every variety of goods of both foreign & domestic fabric. Our own smoky city finds here an outlet for her iron, glass, cotton yarn & other goods. At this point Emigrants daily arrive who supply themselves with “outfits” for their journey further West & North.—There are several large Foundries and Engine shops here a considerable number of Steamboats are built annually which ply between this point & New Orleans. The energy & taste displayed in building up that part of this Noble City which was laid waste by fire on 17th May last is truly wonderfull blocks of large & convenient brick Warehouses have been put up & pay the proprietors a handsome percentage for they rent enormously high—varying from 1600$ to 4000$ per annum.

The population of St Louis is supposed to be over 60,000 & is rapidly increasing.

The “Planters House” at which I stop is a large & well constructed hotel for convenience, having a reading room where may be found most of the commercial daily papers of our principle cities but this House lacks one thing which would add “mightly” to the comfort of its guests, “that is to say” clean sleeping appartments & a clean table, there is a little too much dirtiness observable to please my fancy.—Attended a musical concert this evening after which returned with my friends to “mine hotel” conversed awhile & went to bed.

Jany 31

Spent the day in business which led me into several parts of the city distant from each other. I am quite surprised at the extent & magnitude of St Louis and as much surprised at the extent of their arrangements for business & the immense stock of goods which some of her merchants keep on hand to supply their growing trade.—I suppose Lyon Shorbedo have in their two Warehouses not less than 3 or 4000 tons of iron, nails &c. they do a large business exceeding perhaps half million dolls. per annum. I Consider this a very important point for the sale of much of our own manufactures & if our Agents will do their duty they will in a very few years build up a large business.

Went out with my friend Violet to tea, found a very agreeable family & spent a very pleasant evening. returned to the city at hlf past 7. visited the R. A. Chapter. returned to our hotel & retired at 10.
Having dispatched most of my business here I am now ready for a start home.—Took passage on the St Boat “Genl Washington” & left St Louis at 5 P.M., met several acquaintances on board & hope we shall pass the time pleasently although I fear our Company is much too large for Comfort.—we have not less than 100 passengers, the weather is a little Cold & promises to rain. The night is dark & misty yet we go on fearlessly Ah! Oh, “What is that”? have we run on a snag? is there any danger? then what can the matter be? were questions which almost simultaneously burst forth from all, as the boat struck hard & bumped along as if she were running over logs.—We were all quieted & laughed at our fears, when the Capt. assured us it was but the wheel striking a sandbar. As usual cards were displayed books of questionable character were produced & the usual scenes on board St Boats were beheld. I talked with my friends, mused upon the character of some of our Company & thus passed the Evening.

Feby 2

Up Early. the morning Cloudy & the rain falling in torrents. passed Cape Giradeau at near 9 ock and arrived at Cairo at 1 ock P.M. The Ohio is pouring out a perfect flood & Cairo is still under water. passed Paducah at mouth of Tennessee river at 1 ock P.M. Here some dwellings immediately on the bank of the river were under water to the 2 story where the inmates were contented to remain to await the subsiding of the waters. The same dull routine is gone through with on board untill all the well disposed drop away one by one to their berths, leaving the cabin clear for the inveterate card players who often keep it up all night and I am sorry to find such aboard of our Craft. Retired at 10.

Feby 3

This is the Sabbath. is known only on board by an abstinance from cards. Everything else is as usual. tis time a few brush up a little and appear in a “clean shirt or dickey” the boats barber too, appears to have had rather more employment in his “particular Calling” this morning than usual & shews “his ivory” as he chucks the dimes deep into his pockets. All our folks keep within doors as the Weather has changed suddenly Cold and it is rather Comfortless there being so many passengers to crowd around the fire that you can not have the heat but at the wish of losing it.

The day upon the whole passed away quietly & orderly which was more than I anticipated in the morning for among so many passengers there will be some unruly & rude. We had only one drunk man in our Cabin. A remarkable circumstance.

Feby 4

The weather continuing Cold extremely Cold. We seem to get along slowly. We made rather a “poor run” last night. Our Capt. says we will reach Louisville before dark.—There appears to be a restraint taken off our folks aboard.
they are more gay & noisy than yesterday.—Arrived at Louisville at 9 P.M. and took lodging at the Galt House.—a very comfortable hotel.

Feb. 5

Arose early, washed, shaved, and after a good breakfast started out to call on some business friends. Spent the forenoon in business and at 11 o'clock A.M. Reshiped on board the "Mail Boat" for Cincinnati. Weather still very cold.

Feb. 6

Arrived at Cin at 3 o'clock this Morning. at 6 I was up & went on board the Packet Monogahela hoping to see some Pittsbg friends who could tell me of the news at home, but finding none I retraced my steps, got my luggage to a hotel, and went about my business in which I was busily engaged during the whole day until dark. When wearied I sought "mine hotel" & retired to my room for the night.

Feb. 7

Embarked on Monongahela & left Cin at 12 M. a very large Company on board. Passed Maysvill at 8 oc'k P.M. and here got an accession to our number of passengers. this boat is well managed, belongs to the line of "Pitts & Cin Packets"—which line consisting of seven boats have carried tens of thousand of People without the slightest accident occurring.

Feb. 8

Our Boat is deeply laden & we make very slow progress indeed, Yet our company seem very well content. They are satisfied that if slow we are sure.—The time seems to pass rather more pleasantly away than on other boats during my trip, perhaps it is because I am nearing home.

Feb. 9

Another day of rain & cold bleak wind yet we steadily & calmly pursue our course

Feb. 10

Sunday Morning. Left Steubenville at about 5 A.M. at which hour I was not yet up. at 9 passed Wellsville & arrived at Pittsburg at 4 P.M. here I found my Horse & Buggy waiting & soon found myself safe in the bosom of my family again. Bless God for my safe & prosperous journey.