HISTORICAL SOCIETY NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

THE MONONGAHELA RIVER STEAMBOAT INDUSTRY: California, 1852-1879

JOHN KENT FOLMAR

TRiver has yet to be told, although it flourished in Brownsville, Elizabeth, Monongahela, Belle Vernon, and California for over three decades in the nineteenth century.¹ Fortunately for posterity, Dr. Henry D. Wilkins, a lifelong student of river history, compiled a great deal of information relative to the boat building industry in the California-Brownsville area. One of his favorite projects was the accumulation of data about the boats built in California yards.²

The ownership of the boatyards is rather sketchy, however. When California was founded in 1849, the proprietors, as was the custom in a potentially developing community, established a sawmill. In July 1851, the sawmill was purchased by McFall and Company, and the first boatyard, with two launchways, began operation on the site of the former Pennsylvania Railroad station (now the California Public Library).³ The hulls were usually constructed and then taken to Brownsville or Pittsburgh for completion, that is, for the installation of boilers, machinery, and piping.4 In October

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1 The definitive study of this topic, Louis C. Hunter, Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History (1949. Reprint. New York, 1969), does not deal with the Monongahela steamboat industry except in a cursory manner. That generalization is also true of Richard T. Wiley, Monongahela: The River and Its Region (Butler, Pa., 1937). 2 Dr. Wilkins practiced dentistry in Brownsville, Clarksville, and Cali-

fornia for many years. His grandfather and uncle were river captains. He was a charter and active member of the Brownsville Historical Society. After his

death in 1975, his collection of historical river data and memorabilia was deposited in the California State College Archives. 3 The first owners were William McFall, Jr., James Imlay, and St. Clair Chrissinger. Ownership transfers and litigation information is in the offices of the Recorder of Deeds and the Prothonotary, Washington County Courthouse, Washington, Pa. 4 The fact that the hulls were usually, but not always completed else-

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1853, the vard was sold to Benjamin Coursin and Mark Sterling, and in 1858, a new firm, Eberman and Company, took over.5 S. W. Craft and John Lambert leased the yard in early 1865, and, in March 1866, Eberman purchased the vard again, Eberman, McFall and Company were the owners in 1879 when the yard ceased operations. By then the tracks of the Pittsburgh, Virginia and Charleston Railroad had been completed to Greenfield (present-day Coal Center) and it needed the right-of-way along the river.6

I have extracted selected data from the Wilkins compilation in the table.7 He identified 131 boat hulls; many more were probably built, particularly barges; however, the records are not extant. Note that seventy-four boats (56 percent of the total) were built during the 1850s (the Panic of 1857 prevented more from being constructed). Despite the ever increasing railroad competition, fortyfour (33.6 percent) were built during the 1860s. Only thirteen were built during the 1870s, although they were large craft and, again, "times were hard."

Most of the boats were, logically, first enrolled in Pittsburgh (only seven were not). On the other hand, the last known enrollments of eighty-seven boats (66 percent) were in cities on the major rivers of the west, particularly the Ohio, Mississippi, Missouri, and Arkansas. Almost three-fourths of the boats (ninety-seven) displaced 250 tons or less, twenty-seven were in the 251-450-ton category, and seven exceeded 451 tons. Only fourteen (11 percent) were not sternwheelers. A glance at the final dispositions of the boats reads like an insurer's nightmare, which in fact it was. From these data it is apparent that the California boatyards played an important role in the industrial history of the Monongahela River valley.

where complicates the problem of identifying those boats built in California. The boats were enrolled (registered) when built and also when there was a change of ownership or if major structural rebuilding occurred. Wiley, Monongahela, 132-33.

⁵ Coursin and Eberman were prominent boatbuilders from Elizabeth, and Sterling, from Pittsburgh, was a steamboat captain and boat owner.

Sterling, from Pittsburgh, was a steamboat captain and boat owner. 6 The owners sued the railroad for damages. Testimony during the trial indicated that the yard's business averaged \$40,000 per year (with a high of \$80,000) and profits averaged \$3,000-5,000 (with a high of \$10,000). They were awarded \$7,000 in damages and \$2,000 for the property. 7 The data are from Records of the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, Record Group 41, Industrial and Social Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; and three compilations, Frederick Way, Jr., Towboats --Old and New (Sewickley, Pa., 1946), William M. Lytle, Steam Vessels Built in the United States 1807 to 1856 (Washington, D.C., 1931), later updated to 1867, and Sarepta Cooper Kussart, Navigation on the Monongahela River, 7 vols. (Monongahela, Pa., 1929-1933).

Name	First Enrollment	Last Enrollment	Tonnage	Tonnage Dimensions	Description	Final Disposition
1. Persia	Pitt.,	11/28/59	255	171x28'2"x5'7"	side wheel; 1 dk;	Burnt, Memphis; 5/23/60
2. Prairie City	3/16/52	St. Louis,	198	151x25'8"x5'6"	stern wheel, cabin	Burnt, St. Louis; 12/7/55
3. Twin City	4/23/52	St. Louis, 10/25/55	197	154x28'2"x5'2"	st. w., no mast, c.d. ^b	
4. Badger State	5/19/52	St. Louis, 3/16/60	127	140x28x3'6"	8	Sank, 8 mi. above St. Louis, 12/14/62
5. Return	7/22/52	Louisville, 9/6/57	219	152x28x5'6"		Foundered, Duvall's Bluff, Ark 7/27/59c
6. Arkansas	8/20/52	New Orleans, 3/6/55	246	158x31'2"x5'4"	*	Snagged, Mobile River, Ala., 27 Mi Bluff 1/26/56
7. Forest Rose	10/14/52	, 1/24/57	205	154x28'6" x5'	st. w.	Boilers exploded, near Manalon A-1, 3/26/67
8. Helen Mar	10/20/52	St. Louis, 11/21/55	180	135x27x5'4"	£	Sank in ice, Maysville, Ky, 2/24/55; raised &
9. John Strader	11/29/52	New Orleans,	206	137x28'4"x5'9"	2	usinamica room Burned, Ark. R., 11/18/57c
10. Quaker City	2/26/53	Nashville, 6/0/57	214	152x28x5'3"	st.w., c.d.	Burned, Nashville wharf,
11. St. Nicholas	3/11/53	St. Louis, 10/7/58	667	264.7'x35.5'x7.3'	s.w., c.d.e	Boilers exploded, 9 mi. above Helens Ark 4/24/50
12. Henrietta 13. Chennit	4/25/53	", 11/22/59 10/31/59	179	1431/x251/x4'10" 136x28x5'	st. w.	Abandoned, 1861c
14. Fanny Fern	5/23/53	4/15/57	182	153x29x4'4"	S.W.	Exploded, 18 mi. below
15. Oakland	6/9/53	Louisville, 6/24/59	142	142x26'7"x4'	st. w., c.d.	Abandoned, 1859

DATA – BOATS CONSTRUCTED AT CALIFORNIA, PA., 1852-1879

TABLE

I. Burned, St. Louis wharf,	Dismantled, St. Louis, 1871 Abandoned, 1859 Burned near Thebes, 111,	5/12/50 Abandoned, 1858°	Seized by Confederates,		Snagged, Neb. City, Neb.	st. w., no mast Abandoned, 1861c	" Dismantled, 7/10/64 Abandoned, 1860°	Snagged, Island #37, above	st. w., no mast Burned, St. Louis, 12/7/55c	Abandoned, 1858 ^c	st. w., towboat Abandoned, 1865 ^c st. w. Burnt, Galena, Ill., Miss. R.,	10/02 Lost, 2/7/57 Lost near St. Louis, 1/13/66	Lost, collision, Grand Gulf,	.d. Burnt, Pittsburgh, 7/15/58 Burnt, Quincy, III, 9/16/58 Abandoned, 1869c
s.w., c.d.	st. w. s.w. st. w.	2	2	s.w., no mast	S.W.	st. w., 1	st. w.	:	st. w., 1	st. w.	st. w., 1 st. w.	2 2	:	"; c.d. st. w.
167x29.1'x5.1'	137x27'4"x3' 167x29x5' 151½x34x5½'	116x21x3'2"	203x32x7'4½"	120x30x6'	170x28x5'	135x23'1"x3'9"	136x28'8"x4'8" 150x27x4'	152x29'5" x3.67'	150x28'9"x3'10"	122x22x3'	150x27'6" x4'6" 153x29'6" x4'8½"	150x31'5"x5' 150x34.5x5.67'	150x39'6"x6'	151x34x4'4" 150x34'3"x5'11" 152x29'4"x3'10"
237	82888 82888	72	457	193	122	111	168 156	153	154	76	185 198	219 268	316	231 276 160
St. Louis,	", 2/24/71 ", 9/19/57 4/29/56	St. Louis,	Memphis,	New Orleane,	St. Louis,	Wheeling, Va.,	w 21/00 ", 5/5/64 Mobile, Ala.	6/1/55	St. Louis,	// 10/ 34 New Orleans, 7 / 28 / 54	3/13/65 3/13/65 Cincinnati,	3/10/56 12/10/56 St. Louis,	12/31/62	5/20/58 4/18/57 Wheeling, Va., 6/21/60
8/3/53	9/13/53 10/31/53 10/31/53	12/12/53	New Orleans,	3/1/54	3/27/54	5/6/54	6/6/54 6/14/54	7/6/54	7,11/54	10/25/54	10/12/54 10/19/54	10/21/54 11/30/54	11/30/54	1/17/55 3/7/55 6/26/55
16. Montauk	17. Adelia 18. Ben Bolt 19. James Park	20. Alice	21. Kate Frisbee	22. Two Brothers	23. Genoa	24. John Buck	25. Kate Cassel 26. Eclipse	27. Empire	28. Parthenia	29. City of Knoxville	30. Shingiss 31. Swallow	32. Chicago 33. Empire City	34. John C. Fremont	35. Great West 36. W. H. Denny 37. Flora
16.	10.12	ଷ	21.	ର୍ଷ	3	24.	S. S.	27.	7 8	%	30. 31.	33.	¥.	3.8°.

152x29'6"x4'4" " Stranded at Chester, Ill., 11,10,62	" Snagged near Van Buren,	" Ark. K. 0/10/39 Sunk in ice, Cincinnati,	Ŧ	"; c.d. S	" Burned, Mobile, Ala,	3" st. w. Stranded, Sugar Creek, Ky.,	st. w., 1 dk.,		'10" " Burnt, Cincinnati, 5/12/69e	st. w. packet Sank, near Cairo, Ill.,	$\begin{array}{ccc} & & & & & \\ & & & & & \\ & & & & & \\ & & & & & & \\ & & & & & & \\ & & & & & & \\ & & & & & \\ & & & & & & \\$	st. w. Burnt, Pittsburgh, 5/7/59.4 Abandoned, 1861c	s.w. st. w.	", "Greenville, Z/25/02-4	arm, Pittsburgh, 5/7/59c
151x29x3'9"			137x28'6"x4'6"	150x30'4"x5'8"	153x35x5 '3"	149x36'2" x5'3"	137x25'10"x4'7"	154x40'5" x6'	150x36'8"x5'10"	151x37'4"x6'	150x29x4'7"	153x31x4'6" 98x16x3'6"	l57x26x4'8" l41x26'6"x4'6"	131x30x4'	l53x33'6" x4'4" l47x28'8" x4'4"
	153 1	1324	162 1	239 1	255 1	255 1	152 1	328 1	288 1	304 1	186 1	198 52 9	18 3 159	143 1	203
St. Louis, 10/11/62	", 11/13/58	St. Louis,	Wheeling, Va.,	Cincinnati,	, 4/25/65	3/24/58	same, 6/15/67	4/5/59	Cincinnati,	", 7/25/65	Memphis,	3/13/04 3/18/59 Louisville,	5/16/66 Nashville,	1/4/59 New Orleans,	4/ 13/ 39 5/12/59 Mobile,
7/5/55	7/17/55	7/1/55	9/11/55	10/11/55	10/20/55	1/3/56	Wheeling,	3/22/56	3/22/56	4/29/56	7/21/56	7/23/56 11/1/56	11/14/5 6 3/18 / 57	4/7/57	5/9/57 5/30/57
			man		Vallace	64.	Nauto	od		DIAN		kela	50-	:	luffs l

Grapeshot
Gipsy
Emma Graham
E. F. Sass
Sir W.m. Wallace
Sir W.m. Wallace
Sir W.m. Wallace
Karley Bowen
Metropolis
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Metropolis
La Crosse
La Crosse
Belmont
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Minnetonka
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38. La Clede

Burnt, L. Providence, La., 2/15/67¢ Abandoned, 1862¢ Burnt, Cincinnati, 6/23/61¢	Lost, 1862°	Exploded, Matamoras, O., 1/21/62c Hit bridge, Clarksville, Tomm 2/10/64c	Snagged near Little Rock, Ark, 2/11/61c	Abandoned, 1867c Burned Dilcher Dt I a	12/31/64 Burned, Cumberland River,	Snagged, Sioux City, Ia.,	A, ouc Seized by Confederates, 1961r	Burned Little Rock, Ark.	Abandoned, 1866°	Sold to U.S. Govt., 1862 Burned, Eddysville, Ky., A 115 / Eddysville, Ky.,	Abandoned, 1861° Burned Gretna, La., 6/66°	Destroyed in ice, Helena,	Abandoned, 1864c
st. w. "	2 2	; steam towboat st. w.	2	2 2	st. w.	1	2		2	• •		2	-
154x31x4' 154x29'4"x4' 151x34x4'6"	144x22'3"x3'7"	124x22x3'10" 150x39'6" x4'	152×31'10"x5'5"	148x41x6' 152x28'4"x3'	147x22x3'3"	132x25'7" x2'8"	109x24x3'7"	141x21'2"x4'9"	127x25'x3'2"	170x29x5' 149x32x4 '9 "	109x26'8"x4' 134x26x3'7"	119 <u>x</u> 19'6"x3'7"	87x24x3'
177 163 211	110	96 211	245	321	101	84	86	181	93	228 208	104	78	55
New Orleans, 7/20/66 11/60 Cincinati,	11/22/00 Louisville, 11/11/59	2/0/01 Cincinnati, 0/21/60	Memphis, 11/5/61	Louisville, 3/31/65 Cincinnati	2/8/64 Cincinnati,	5/31/03 St. Louis, 4/21/50	-/21/39 New Orleans, 511/60	00/1/0	Wheeling,	12/2/61 6/4/64	New Orleans,	6/26/71	St. Louis,
7/15/57 7/28/57 9/8/57	9/16/57	10/8/57 10/24/57	10/28/57	12/5/57 1/29/58	3/17/58	4/9/59	6/27/59	9/3/59	11/9/59	11/15/59 11/26/59	12/16/59 3/13/60	5/8/60	5/11/60
58. Marmara 59. Mary Cook 60. Lehigh	61. Acaçia Cottage	02. Advance 63. Neptune	64. Quapaw	65. Fort Wayne 66. Venanao	67. Echo	68. Col. Gus Lynn	69. Red Chief #2	70. Julia Roane	71. LeClaire	72. Mingo 73. Clara Poe	74. Daniel B. Miller 75. Science	76. Webster	77. Maquoketa

Abandoned, 1865¢	Abandoned, 1869 Burned, Union Pt., Red R.,	11/7/035 Abandoned, 1866c	Abandoned, 1882°	Burned, Red R., La.,	2/2//00 Abandoned, 1870c	Abandoned, 6/30/81,	Fritsburgn Sold to U.S. Govt., 3/25/63 Burned, Portland, Ky.,	Rig changed to barge,	Snagged, Commerce, Mo.,	2/11/04° Out of service, 1869°	Abandoned, Cincinnati,	Lost, ice, St. Louis,	12/13/70ª Snagged, Mound City, Ill.	9/18/00 Abandoned, Omaha,	Sold to U.S. Govt., 11/14/63
р. •	" " (s.w.c)	st. w.	" (towboat ^d)	st. w.		st. w., 1 dk.,	" no mast "	:	st. w., 1 dk.,	"no mast	S.W.	st. w.		:	-
151x27'7"x4'	169x29'9"x4'10" 137x29x4'4"	128×22×2'9"	129x24x4'	157x32'6"x4'6"	154x32x4'7"	154x28x4'	156x32x4′6″ 150x32x4′6″	178x32x4'7"	154x33x4'9" •	136x27x3'10"	174x32x5'2"	203x34'3" x5'2"	156'6" x32'2" x4'5"	155x33x4'9"	145x26x4'
157	230 159	73	152° 116	212	208	200	208 199	249	222	131	270	341	206	224	142
New Orleans,	4/ <i>2</i> /00 2/26/69	Evansville, Ind.	9/19/04 Chicago,	4/ 12/01 Cincinnati,	9/26/05 New Orleans,	6/3/75	3/16/63 Louisville,	3/20/0/ St. Louis,	12/24/63	Wheeling,	0/22/00 Paducah, Ky.	4/22/70 St. Louis,	Cincinnati,	2/11/00 Omaha,	c//01/0
7/25/60	11/3/60 12/1/60	10/19/61	1861° 2/17/62	4/20/62	7/8/62	10/14/62	10/30/62 11/1/62	11/1/62	11/4/62	11/7/62	1/5/63	3/28/63	4/18/63	5/28/63	6/3/63
78. Cricket No. 2	79. Sampson 80. Robert Fulton	81. Cottage	82. Magnet 83. Petrel	84. Silver Lake #3	85. Golden Era	86. Tigress No. 2	87. Key West No. 3 88. Ella Faber	89. Nellie Rogers	90. Orient	91. Cottage No. 2	92. Armada	93. Davenport	ilm.	95. Silver Lake No. 4	96. Echo No. 2
78.	79. 80.	81.	8 2.8	8	85.	86.	87. 88.	89.	90.	.16	32.	93.	4.	95.	8.

Snagged, Golconda, Ill.,	U. 2010) Lost, ice, Cincinnati, 3.128.173	Dismantled, 4/26/78 Abandoned, 1871 , 1870	Snagged below Neb. City, 8/25/66	Lost, near Commerce, Mo., 12/17/65	Snagged, DeSoto, Neb., 5/28/67	Burned, Lake Depere, Ill.,	Sunk, Miss. R., Hackers Rend 8/10/80	Sunk, 65 mi. above Cairo, 111 12/0/77	Abandoned, 1875c	Abandoned, 1881 Abandoned, Pensacola, 12/27/86	Snagged, 150 mi. above I ittle Rock 1/15/72	Lost, ice, near Lock #4, Monon R 1/13/77	Abandoned, 11/8/76 Destroyed, fire, 14 mi.	Abandoned, 1882	Lost, 1877 Wrecked, enrollment date 3/31/76
2	" (towboatd)	st		2		64	ŧ		" (towboatd)	,, st. w. (packet ^d)	st. w.	s.w.	st. w. (towboat ^d) st. w.; 3 decks	:	" st. w.; 1 dk.
157x32x4'9"	132x24'2"x4'7"	138'8" x24'2" x4'6" 132'6" x24'4" x4'4" 155x30x3'5"	156'4" x32x5'9"	156x32'3"x5'9"	159x30'6"x4'9"	142'5" x25'6" x5 <i>1/</i> 3"	142x24 '6" x5'3"	166x29'10"x5'5"	162x27x4'10"	116.5x19.5x4' 151x30x4'4"	154x33x6.8'	164x26x5.7*	117x20x4.4' 153x32x5.1'	119x19.4x3.4	163.3x32x6.2' 118.4x26.4x3.3'
221	138	142 133 149	200	267	215	170	173	254	201	142 276	488	259	114 291	8	390 93
11/1/64	Cincinnati, 3/20/69	", 11/30/74 12/1/69 8/16/68	St. Louis, 4/9/66	12/16/64	10/25/66	St. Louis, 12/20/70	. , 4/9/83	", 3/5/68	Parkersburg, W.Va.	7/17/75 Pensacola, Fla., 3/21/82	0/21/02 New Orleans, 11/26/70	5/25/69	10/16/73 11/4/93	Galena, 5/12/00	0, 12/00 New Orleans, 7/24/75
10/23/63	11/10/63	11/25/63 12/17/63 1/30/64	4/21/64	4/28/64	8/15/64	11/8/64	12/3/64	12/10/64	11/12/654	3/14/65 10/12/65	2/20/66	5/12/66	7/3/66 3/11/67	5/5/68	4/21/69 Franklin, La., 10/28/69
97. Olive	98. Petrel No. 2	99. Hawkeye No. 2 100. N. J. Bigley 101. Echo No. 3	102. Ontario	103. Roanoke	104. Nora	105. Joseph Fleming	106. A. J. Baker	107. Bee	108. Wm. H. Brown	109. Lark 110. Peerless	111. Importer	112. Chieftain	113. Fairplay 114. Diamond	115. Park Painter	116. Australia 117. Minnie Avery

NOTES FOR TABLE

a The enrollments, unless noted, and if known, were in Pittsburgh. Some RG 41, National Archives, unless otherwise indicated. The data are from RG 41, National Archives, unless otherwise indicated. The tonnages are rounded off to the nearest whole number. The dimensional data are presented in feet and inches or in feet and tenths of a foot, reflecting the way the data were presented in the various sources.

b stern wheel, cabin on deck.

c Lytle, Steam Vessels. d Way, Towboats.

e sidewheel.

Way notes that she was built in California, Pa., in 1853, and shipped on a f barge to Louisiana destined for California. She was, instead, assembled in Gretna, Louisiana, in 1855.

g Kussart, Navigation, 5: 483. This vessel was used on the Magdalena River trade, Colombia, South America. Kussart's text notes that the *Cottage* No. 2 (boat number 91 in the table) was converted to a salt barge, her cabin and machinery going to build another boat, the Mountain Belle, at Brownsville; 5: 483.

h Way, built in California; RG 41, Pittsburgh.

i Way and Kussart, built in California; RG 41, Pittsburgh.

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