The western steamboat was one of the great American contributions to modern technology, and its developmental roots were in Western Pennsylvania. Before the arrival of the railroads in the mid-nineteenth century, the steamboat dominated the carrying trade in the transmontane west. During this period, the Pittsburgh-Brownsville axis on the Monongahela River played a powerful role in this decades-long process. One of the leading mechanics and engineers in the development of river transportation on western waters was Henry Miller Shreve.

Because Shreve was "the father of the Mississippi steamboat" and because his life was "so interwoven with the opening of the inland rivers," the author's purpose is "to reveal in a combined narrative these two highly interesting phases of American history too long overlooked" (p.6). The result is an uneven, romanticized narrative written in a popular vein similar to the F.L. Dorsey biography of Shreve, Master of the Mississippi (1941). Any knowledgeable professional reader of the manuscript would have noted this immediately. The "heroizing" of Shreve is no substitute for wide gaps in our knowledge of the early years of steamboating history. Had McCall read Louis C. Hunter's "The Invention of the Western Steamboat," Journal of Economic History 3 (1943): 201-20, she might have written a more balanced account of her subject.

The Shreve family migrated from New Jersey to Fayette County near present-day Perryopolis when Henry was three years of age. They settled on land owned by George Washington. As Henry grew to maturity, and, after his father's death in 1799, "The rivers called him, and soon he was learning the ways of the riverboatman" (p.16). By 1807, at age twenty-two, he had sufficient resources to build a twenty-

Daniel B Reibel  Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Washington Crossing, Pennsylvania


five-ton keelboat at Brownsville. His first trip was down the Ohio and up the Mississippi to St. Louis, where he initiated a profitable fur trade to Philadelphia via Pittsburgh. In 1810, he built a new keelboat and ran his goods farther up the Mississippi to the lead mines on the Galena River from which he shipped a cargo of lead to New Orleans. "The American trade that he pioneered thrived for many years afterward and was reported in 1848 to amount to three million dollars annually" (p.50). "Considered the boy wonder of Brownsville," he soon built another, larger keelboat.

McCall outlines the adaptation of the steam engine to maritime use as well as the Clermont success on the Hudson River in 1807 by the Fulton-Roosevelt-Livingston group and their subsequent interest in the western rivers. They had obtained an agreement for exclusive use of the lower Mississippi from the Territory of Louisiana, and Nicholas Roosevelt was sent to Pittsburgh to begin constructing a steamboat, the New Orleans. Built in 1811, she made the first steamboat voyage downriver to New Orleans. She was unable, however, to return upriver farther than Natchez, and Shreve was "convinced that the Livingston-Fulton steamboats [with low-pressure engines] were not going to meet the pressing need for improved transportation on the . . . rivers. So he began to make plans" (p. 95).

He began working with a group of investors in Bridgeport (later South Brownsville), and they built the sternwheeler Enterprise with a high pressure engine patented by Daniel French. Shreve assumed command of the boat and, in December 1814, departed from Pittsburgh with much-needed supplies for General Andrew Jackson and the defense of New Orleans against the British. Shreve transported troops and munitions, ran supplies past the British to a fort south of the city, evacuated civilians, transported exchange prisoners to the Gulf, took soldiers up the Red River, and made a number of trips to Natchez. With the end of the war threat, he returned to Bridgeport by late June 1815, the first steamboat to accomplish that feat.

Shreve now "wanted to build a steamboat such as none . . . had ever seen" (p. 136). Not receiving the support he wanted in Brownsville, he went to Wheeling, Virginia, where he built the Washington, which had side paddle wheels, a high-pressure engine with a horizontal cylinder (his major contribution to engine technology) in the hold, and a draft of 12.55 feet. A disastrous explosion on her maiden voyage in July, just south of Wheeling, delayed his new project for months. Finally, he proceeded to Louisville and in 1817 made the round-trip from that city to New Orleans in forty-one days in spite
of the opposition of the Fulton-Livingston monopoly. "The era of the steamboat had arrived at last . . ." (p.153), despite the achievements of the Fulton boats Aetna, Vesuvius, and the second New Orleans. The anti-Fulton bias of the book is apparent, and there is little understanding of the economics of costs and profits of the lower river system.

Shreve's "persistence" in defying the Fulton-Livingston monopoly led to the opening of the lower Mississippi. Having moved to Louisville, Shreve was named superintendent of western improvements from 1827 until 1841. Three chapters deal with his development of an effective steam snagboat for clearing the major western rivers, particularly the removal of the Red River "raft." After retirement he lived on a plantation near St. Louis until his death in 1851.

While Shreve played a major, and vital, role in the development of steam transportation on the western waters, he was not, as McCall asserts, the "father of the Mississippi Steamboat" (p.250). That evolved over decades to its culmination in the floating palaces of the 1850s, and cannot be attributed to the work of any single individual.

The book includes a bibliography, index, and twelve pages of photographs and illustrations.

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A bonanza for any research historian is usually the discovery of a documentary source — a diary or a bunch of letters in an old trunk — which might inject new meaning into some past event. The diary of Bernard J. Reid, found only a few years ago, is such a find. Overland to California with the Pioneer Line: The Gold Rush Diary of Bernard J. Reid, the story of Reid's journey to California, provides a rich and personal account of one of America's unforgettable sagas — the gold rush of 1849.

Reid's diary, edited by Mary McDougall Gordon, is the story of the Pioneer Line, the first commercial wagon train to make the long trek