IN THE SUMMER of 1916, a group of eight youthful Pittsburgh men took a "canoe cruise" down the Allegheny River. All were outdoorsmen and some were members of the Tippecanoe Club, which had its clubhouse and dock on the Allegheny River in O'Hara Township a few miles upstream from Pittsburgh.

The participants were from various walks of life, brought together by their love of the outdoors. On July 16, they traveled by train with their canoes and other gear to Olean, N.Y., where the journey would begin. The next afternoon's launch started a trip that would last for nine days, concluding in Oakmont near where they had started.
The man who saved this record of an Allegheny River canoe trip was Pittsburgher Al Geiger (at the stern) while on an outing, c. 1915, with a buddy from the Tippecanoe Club of Oakmont (note “TC” on Geiger’s tank top).
William Stengel’s humorous account gives a view of the adventurers’ personalities, the sights and towns along the river, and the group’s encounters with residents along the way. The reader will recognize this as a simpler, less sophisticated era than we know, perhaps typifying “the kinder, gentler” days for which some, at least, yearn.

This manuscript was made available by Dorothy Geiger Wycoff of Meadville, Pa., and her sister, Rosemarie Geiger Flavin of Pittsburgh, who discovered it among the possessions of their late father, Albert G. Geiger. Geiger, the 30-year-old co-pilot of the lead canoe (a craft dubbed Tecumseh by the men) was a haberdasher for the Hollander Company of Pittsburgh who lived on the city’s North Side. The year after the trip, he went to work in the men’s clothing department at Joseph Horne Co. in Pittsburgh, where he worked full-time for 38 years, and for another three years part-time, dying in 1972.

Born in Friedrichshafen, Germany, Geiger had been just a year old when his parents brought him to America. “All of his life, he absolutely loved the outdoors and rural life,” recalls his daughter Dorothy — “especially fishing.”

After his marriage in 1922, his wife Mildred and their daughters enjoyed outdoor adventures with him, traveling frequently to Canada’s lakes and rivers. Closer to home, the family partook of “farm vacations” with friends and family in Crawford and Mercer counties of northwestern Pennsylvania.

It remains unclear how and why the men came together as a group. They hailed from disparate parts of Pittsburgh, but all, or most, were of German ethnicity; it also seems likely that most in the group were members of one or more canoe clubs.

Geiger shared the Tecumseh, a 16-foot Old Towne, with J. Edward Foerster, who would produce a son, Thomas J., who would grow up to be an Allegheny county commissioner and one of the region’s most influential politicians in the late 20th century. The commissioner’s uncle (Edward’s brother), Charles Foerster, paddled one of the other boats.

Interestingly, like the others on the trip, Edward Foerster was about 30 years old and not yet married. “He used to tell me,” recalls his son, the ex-commissioner, “that he’d rather spend his life searching for something he couldn’t find than spend a day worrying about something he couldn’t change.”

Edward Foerster was born in 1886, one of seven kids in the family. From age 18 until his retirement at age 66, he worked at a bank on East Ohio Street known as the Workingman’s Savings and Trust Co. before its merger in the 1960s with Mellon Bank. “He started as a bank messenger and retired as the secretary,” says Tom Foerster. The family lived most of those years in the Troy Hill district of the city.

Edward Foerster passed away in 1968, the same year that son Tom won his county commissioner seat. Charles Foerster was a few years younger than Edward. He worked for the federal government in Pittsburgh — his nephew believes it was the Internal Revenue Service — and was transferred to Harrisburg in his later years. “He was a rugged individualist, both in demeanor and stature,” recalls Tom. “He looked a lot like Teddy Roosevelt.”

The Foerster family’s ties to northwestern Pennsylvania are deep. Successive generations have maintained summer cottages at Conneaut Lake near Pymatuning, and Tom still has a cottage at the lake, as do some of his brothers and sisters. “Growing up, we spent our summers there. The first thing my dad did every summer was rent a rowboat to stay fit. He used to love to row,” Conneaut summers had a lasting effect on the Foerster children. Tom learned to swim and to paddle a canoe there, “and I never even had a powerboat until just a few years ago.”

Foerster remembers meeting Jack Gedeon, another canoeist on the Olean trip, at Gedeon’s hardware store not far from Conneaut Lake. Gedeon was born in Pittsburgh in 1893, and at 23 was probably the youngest of the men on the trip. He grew up in the Carrick section of suburban Pittsburgh and worked at Leeds Co., a men’s clothing firm. Gedeon served in the Army during World War I — presumably after the trip — and later bought a hardware store in Sheakleyville, Pa., in Mercer County about 70 miles north of Pittsburgh. He became the Sheakleyville postmaster in 1940, retired in 1963, and died in 1975, according to his daughter, Irene Gedeon of Greenville, Pa.

Foerster also remembers meeting Bill Stengel. “He worked at the bank with my dad. I met him a few times, but I never made the connection to the Olean trip until now,” says Tom. “That goes way back. History is amazing isn’t it?”
Start of the Trip

Approximate Distance — Olean to Pittsburgh (via railroad
250 miles)
(via river 300 miles)
The party consisted of eight, divided into two groups,
each using an 8 by 10-foot tent:
Al Geiger — Everyone liked him, even the mosquitos, but
when it comes to telling stories we all take our hats off to him.
Ed Foerster & Bill Stengel — In a class by themselves;
champion wood-cutters but non-union. They sawed all night.
Vern Wilbert — Full of pep. His specialty was post offices;
could spot one 20 miles away in a strange country.
Jack Gedeon — Noted for his diplomacy in securing
information, names, and addresses. Ever-willing to get drinking
water so that he could chat with the farmers and had such a
good line of talk that the crabbiest of them got chummy in a
very short time.
Joe Leban — Expert frog-gigger, though Jack says he is a
better "crabber."
Charlier Foerster — Best tree-climber and snake catcher.
"Beck" Becker — Stood in good with the ladies when Jack
wasn’t around.

Sunday, July 16

On awakening, we were disappointed to find a fine drizzle
and a cloudy sky that foretold a downpour for the rest of the day,
but Ed, with his optimism, reminded us that this would only
facilitate matters by providing higher water.

Everyone met at Oakmont, with canoes and
luggage, and boarded the "Buffalo Express" at 9:41.
The only one who got a real send-off was Vern. It
was a noisy one, too, just like the pop of an air gun.
The ride to Olean was uneventful, interrupted
by changing trains and transferring canoes, etc., at
Red Bank, Falls Creek, and Driftwood. From Falls
Creek, the engineer pushed the old locomotive
to capacity in an effort to make up lost time, for
which we were very thankful. We later learned that
his zeal was not due to any solicitation
from us, as he was to meet his fiancée on the
other train at Driftwood to accompany her to
Buffalo. On the last lap of our journey, we
rode in the baggage car, everyone eager to
get the first glimpse of the Allegheny, which
is barely a creek here.

Upon arriving at Olean, about 8 o’clock, we immediately
went to the Olean House and secured accommodations — two
large rooms. But the thing of prime importance just then was
EATS, and believe me we did justice to the layout set before us.
After eating, we had a tour of inspection. Olean, situated in the
southeastern part of Cattaraugus County, N.Y., has a population
of 18,000 and is a residential town having many fine homes,
churches, and public buildings — in fact, more up-to-date than
we had expected. The natives were evidently not accustomed to

A hundred yards below our starting place, we were to navigate the first riffle, and for those of us who had never gone through any it was not comforting to see the water rushing past the jagged rocks dotting the stream and the spray at places denoting other rocks just below the surface. The Tecumseh led the way at 2:30, followed by Joe and Charlie, the Naomi, and Jack and Beck, with all passing through safely except the last boat, Beck steering. He then tried it at a different place and was pushed onto a sharp rock, puncturing the canvas and slightly damaging the bottom of the boat. He was able to proceed only after using candle grease to repair the damage.

Camped at 5 o’clock in the woods about 10 miles from Olean. The ground had very little slope and was not much higher than the river; so that it was damp, and in the back of us there was a swamp thickly grown with ferns. The location was by no means ideal for a camp, but the conditions certainly could not have been much better for mosquitos. They seemed to prefer heavy people, for Ed, Al, Jack, and Charlie got a royal welcome, sometimes not in very desirable places. Instead of using poles for the tent, we drew a heavy rope through the ridge and tied to trees at either end, holding the walls in place by driving stakes in the ground. Jack and Beck prepared the ground inside by digging places supposed to fit our hips and shoulders. We were willing to try anything once, but after that we slept on level ground.

Supper over, some of the boys tried their luck at fishing while we attempted to drive away the mosquitos by building a smudge. About twilight, two Indian boys came along looking for their cows and in this connection is a story about Vern: some time after dark, a few of the guys were gathered around the fire smoking, when Vern said he heard the cows; the sound he heard did resemble the lowing of cattle, though it really was the croaking of frogs, which are numerous and grow large here.

Tuesday, July 18th

All morning we traveled through a narrow gulch lined with high hills while a brisk wind blowing upstream kept us from making rapid progress. Yesterday we had passed through rolling country with occasional hills, but the hills are getting higher as we get closer to the edge of the Appalachian Mountains running through central and eastern Pennsylvania and New York which slope gradually toward Lake Erie. We saw very few houses until we came to Salamanka, the chief town in the Salamanka Indian Reservation, where we stopped to make purchases before proceeding a few miles downstream to stop for lunch.

About 4 o’clock we came across an Indian boy, James Cooper, poling a flatboat across the river at Tunesassa, a small Indian settlement with a few scattered houses; stopped to talk with him and found that he could read and write. We took his picture in Indian clothes and also the pictures of two smaller children (a boy and a squaw) and went on in quest of a campsite. We made camp just below a small island, from which a riffle extended to where we were and the water running over the stones sounded as if we were close to a falls.

During these first few days, we were surprised to note the extent of the railroads in this uninhabited country. Sometimes they were on one side and sometimes on both sides of the river.

Our water supply having run low, Jack volunteered to replenish it, and he and Joe trotted off to an Indian’s cabin, returning by nightfall. This evening we were entertained by vocal solos and quartets, which helped to pass the time pleasantly.

Wednesday, July 19th

Some of the boys accused Ed and I of disturbing their slumber last night by “sawing wood” and I merely mention this in passing but do not give it for authentic. Our version is that the rest either snored so loudly that they awakened themselves, or their sunburns would not permit them to rest.

Breakfast over and the boats packed, we made a quick getaway at 7:45, shooting the riffle in front of camp like old-timers, and at 9 o’clock we stopped at a farmhouse at Onaville for fresh water. The farmer, Louie Hanson, a white man, had a squaw wife; two girls from Bradford were spending their vacation there. Naturally this meant more pictures for our collection and Beck was right on the job again.

Passed the state line at Corydon about 11 o’clock and stopped at noon for lunch. We have gotten away from eating a big meal at mid-day and save our appetites for the evening, when we have time to enjoy the meal and the leisure necessary for proper digestion.

The heat was “intense” (as Geiger would say) and the sun got in some good work on our necks and arms. In the morning we used sleeveless jerseys, but after noon donned shirts to protect our arms so the burn would only come gradually.

For rugged scenery, no other day’s travel can compare to this
one. The river cuts its way through the mountains, which rise on either side to heights between 2,000 and 3,000 feet. The hills are covered with innumerable rocks in all kinds of fantastic formations, weighing several tons and measuring 30 feet across and as tall in places. They literally cling to the sides of the mountains, seemingly ready to roll down at any moment.

About 2 o'clock we came to Big Bend, where the river makes a turn in horseshoe fashion, and here we had the fastest water on the trip. The river bed is very wide but the channel is worn on the outer edge of the turn; in low water, the flow is through the channel that for a stretch of over 100 yards is not more than 30 feet wide. The bed is all rock, the current from 12 to 14 miles per hour and drop about 10 feet in 100.

Vern and I were watching the Naomi closely when suddenly it dropped from sight as if it had gone over a dam. We soon learned that this was due to the quick drop in the level of the stream; to minimize the danger of upsetting we got down on our knees, placing the weight in the bottom of the canoe instead of higher up on the seats. Everyone came through safely.

At the end of the rapids, we came to a big eddy filled with large boulders like the ones we had seen on the mountainsides. There were numerous cottages, too. We kept on until we came to Glade at 4 o'clock, just above the Conewango River, and stopped at the same cottage that Ed and his party had been driven to for shelter during a storm last summer.

Three young ladies — the two Hohman sisters and Margaret Zobrest — from Warren were spending their vacation here and to say that we got a royal welcome would be putting it mildly. When they knew we were from Pittsburgh, the whole place was ours and they insisted that we camp on their lawn for the night. Jack and Beck took the Hohman sisters for a canoe ride and took some pictures on the big rocks across the river, while Peggy gave the rest of us medical attention, which consisted of a tincture of ipecac for sunburnt arms and necks.

The meal was prepared on their cook stove and was eaten in the cottage, the first time we had our feet under a table since leaving Olean. After supper we planned to hike to Warren, about 5 miles distant, but there being no car service, Beck got busy again with the ladies. He wanted to take Peggy but received no encouragement for his pains and at last was satisfied with one of the other girls, second choice as it were. So we started down the road which lay along the hillside skirting the river. Before going far we were overtaken by a Ford truck. The girls were acquainted with the driver and the three girls, Ed, Beck, and I piled on. At the edge of town we boarded a streetcar and continued to the centre of town to the post office. The first person we met there was Vern with a pocketful of letters and a grin from ear to ear. I cannot remember whether Beck was similarly favored but do know that I was left out in the cold.

A horse race or fair was being advertised by a band playing on the balcony of the principal hotel and we listened to music for a while but started back about 10 o'clock, for we had a long jaunt before us. It was very dark, but before we had gone far the moon came up over the hill and lit the way. Ed, Beck, Charlie, and I took the three girls and Al and Vern came about a half-hour later, with Joe and Jack last. The latter two said they had met two nurses in town and had taken them to the hospital where they worked.

On reaching the cottage, we sat around on the porch for a while. Ed was the first to turn in. Jack took his girl out for a canoe ride, and on his return we bid the girls goodnight and went to our tents, about midnight.

Thursday, July 20

Slept until 9 a.m., the latest of any morning on the trip. We had a hearty breakfast and everyone was in a merry mood. Al, with his timely puns, and Jack, with his recitations, saw to it that there were no dull moments. After breakfast, Joe and Beck took some pictures and the fellows insisted that I must "marry" Peggy because she had given me the most attention. So, I was not given much choice in the matter. Jack was minister (robed in his poncho), the misses Hohman were bridesmaid and maid of honor, Beck was groomsman, Vern, altar boy. Al gave the bride away, and Joe was official photographer. The ceremony completed, we thanked the girls for their hospitality, backed out in mid-stream, and floated away singing "Farewell Ladies."

Arrived at Warren about 11 a.m., took on more provisions and stopped at the Garver House in hopes of meeting Vern's father. But Vern was disappointed that he did not arrive. Warren (population 11,000) was the most progressive town we visited. The chief industry is oil refining, of which the "Cornplanter" refinery is the largest.
Left at noon and camped that night at "Thompson's Eddy." Geiger thought he could get some fish but gave it up after a 2-mile paddle upstream. In the meantime, Jack and Joe planned to go gigging for frogs but we were near a lagoon filled with brackish water, and as soon as they started out in the flatboat owned by a nearby farmer, their lantern attracted the mosquitos and they finally gave up the attempt after furnishing considerable amusement for us on shore by their arguments about which was the best way to do the gigging.

Friday, July 21

Stopped at Tidioute (population 1,400), an oil and lumber town. We had gotten into the custom of setting a time limit when we went into a town, so we would all meet back at the river at one time and on our way back we could always make a "roundup" by looking in at the ice cream parlor and at the "groggies," as Ed calls them.

The part of the river we are on is in the timber region. This afternoon we passed two large barges being built, probably for taking lumber downstream in high water. About 3 o'clock we passed Tionesta (population 800) and stopped for water at a family camp a few miles below.

They took their fresh water right from a mountain stream, the prettiest we saw on the trip. The water, clear as crystal, came down the side of the mountain in cascades, forming a pool near the camp from which we filled our jugs. In the meantime, Jack and Beck had arranged to go back to spend the evening with two girls who were staying nearby, and after we had located an island about 2 miles below, they started back upstream on the pretext of getting more water, as the chaperon was strict and they had to have some excuse. We did not envy them their 2-mile pull over riffles with nothing but a pocket searchlight to guide them. For us, the evening passed all too quickly, for we gathered in our tents and made the air blue with smoke while we were entertained with stories and reminiscences, of which AI had an inexhaustible supply. Jack and Beck returned about 10:30.

Saturday, July 22

Between here and Oil City, the shores were lined with summer colonies, the largest being called "President," and there was an abundance of oil wells, some idle but most working. Stopped at the Oil City Boat Club to talk with some people who were swimming and met some young ladies from the East End of Pittsburgh.

Arrived at Oil City (population 15,000) at noon. Of all the towns we visited, this is the most unsightly and dirtiest, although we could see that it had once been a flourishing town. If Pittsburgh is the "Smoky City," then this must be "Old Nick's Burg." Everybody ate so much dinner that there was not much paddling done that afternoon.

About 10 miles further down-river we came to Franklin, at the mouth of French Creek, a very clean little residential town of about 10,000, most employed at the refineries between Franklin and Oil City. Spent an hour there and then kept on downstream until about 4:30, when a storm began to gather. We did not have much choice in the selection of our campsite because we wanted to get under cover before the rain came. The best we could find was on an oil field with its pumping equipment, and we just finished unloading the boats when the rain started to come down in torrents.

The oil wells around us had been worked for a long time, until they were almost drained and could only pump for a limited time each day. So, about 6 o'clock, we were surprised to see the cable on which we had hung our ponchos to dry start to move back and forth horizontally. We learned the cable connected a half-dozen wells operated by one engine. The engineer in charge explained the process to us and showed us the oil flowing from the well. It came out very cold and salty to the taste.

After dark, while we were gathered around our campfire, we were pleasantly surprised to hear "Rosary" and "Perfect Day" played by a coronetist a half-mile away. The hill across the river was very high and steep, serving as an excellent sounding board, and no brass instrument ever sounded better than this one out in the woods. It also seemed as if the musician was accompanied on harp or piano, but we later learned that this was due to an echo. After the music had ceased, we went over to where the sound came and made ourselves acquainted with the soloist, who with another young man from Franklin was building a summer cottage. We were made to feel at home around a big fire they had made and spent the evening talking, smoking, and listening to music.
The most interesting part of the trip, from the standpoint of rugged country, river current, and scenery, is now over. From now on we travel almost entirely through slack water and the towns get closer together, with an ever-increasing number of factories and mills.

Sunday, July 23

Our plans had been to make this a day of rest, but it developed that we covered the greatest distance (40 miles) and worked harder than on any other day. This was our first real taste of eddies, one right after the other, from the outset until we camped that evening, and there is not much to say about the day's travel except that it was very monotonous to paddle through these pools, expecting at each turn to get some fast water, only to be disappointed. We were all glad when Ed suggested we stop over at the Foxburg Inn for supper. While waiting for the meal to be served, Beck was having a fine time of it, flirting with the waitress, until Jack mischievously butted in. After that, Jack was the "man of the hour."

Tonight we camped on an island at the mouth of the Clarion River, a mile before Foxburg. The trees were covered with wild grapevines and it made a very pretty camp.

Monday, July 24

Reached Parkers Landing at 10 o'clock and attempted to buy provisions. There were no eggs in town and we could only locate one pound of butter. That afternoon about 4 o'clock a thunderstorm started to blow up the river, and we sought shelter in a deserted farmhouse opposite Phillipston. But the storm blew past and Jack, Joe, and Beck spent the evening shooting pool and bowling in Phillipston, coming back just in time to awake Vern and I, who had a hard time of it going to sleep on the hard porch floor. To save the trouble of pitching the tent, our group had decided to sleep in the house, but Beck later decided, for his own comfort, to pitch Charlie's dog tent. Anyway, Vern and I are "cured": no more boards for a bed.

Tuesday, July 25

Paddled through slack water all morning with a stiff breeze blowing upstream. Reached Kittanning at 1 o'clock and ate dinner. Passed Ford City about 3 p.m. and continued on down past Logansport. Here we saw the first steamboats and dredgers. Camped near Johnette, our last night on the road.

Wednesday, July 26

Got an early start and passed the Kiskiminetas River and Freeport about 10 a.m. Stopped for water at "Glencairn," the Carnegie Tech grounds. These grounds are for the use of the students, and certain times are assigned to the men and certain times to the girls. This happened to be the time for the girls, and the watchman politely informed us that he had orders to arrest trespassers. So, while we were, technically, trespassing, the watchman used discretion in not enforcing his orders and merely asked us to leave.

Continued on to Tarentum, where we stopped for lunch, then went on with the four canoes abreast, displaying pennants collected on the trip. After coming all the way from Olean without a single portage, we found we would have to carry our canoes and luggage over the locks at Springdale as they were putting the splash boards across the river to raise the water level. There were a good many visitors and swimmers at the camps, from the dam down to the Marquette Camp, and we got many greetings when they saw our pennants. Arrived at the Marquette about 4 p.m. Some stayed over, while others went to the Tippecanoe Club, and Jack and I came to Pittsburgh.

Thus ended the trip, everyone expressing the wish that we get together for a similar trip over a different route next year. Speaking for myself, I can say that I never enjoyed any vacation as well as this one, with its many different interests and the congenial companionship of the fellows.

Fellow Cruisers:
The foregoing was written from memory on December 15, 1916, five months after the trip, on the failure of Becker to produce the log he had promised. While I have mentioned everything to the best of my recollection, there might be an omission here and there inasmuch as I kept no dates, this being in the hands of Becker.
However, I have included everything of importance that I could remember, leaving the details for each individual, as the things touched on will undoubtedly help recall other incidents. — signed William Stengel

Annotations

1 Olean, founded in 1804, is generally considered the point at which the Allegheny becomes navigable. It lies within an hour’s drive (today) of the river’s headwaters in Potter County, Pa.
2 The unabridged Webster’s Dictionary, 2nd edition, defines a “white wing” as a street cleaner in a white uniform.
3 Tautly stretched, reinforced canvas was a common outer skin for canoes before the development of lightweight aluminum alloys later in the century.
4 The Native American boys were probably local Seneca.
5 The proper name of the reservation is the Allegheny Indian Reservation. The riparian areas the canoelists passed through after leaving Salamanca no longer exist. From just below Salamanca to just west of Warren, Pa., a distance of about 30 miles, the river is now the Allegheny Reservoir, created in the 1960s with the building of Kinzua Dam on the Allegheny. The government maintained the dam was essential for reducing the devastating floods that had plagued the lower reaches of the river, especially near Pittsburgh, ever since white men set about building merrily on the flood plains along the river. Nearly 10,000 acres of land deeded to the Seneca in state and federal treaties during the 1790s were forcibly purchased and flooded to create the reservoir. About 300 Native Americans in several villages were displaced, along with their schools and graveyards. The body of famous Seneca Chief Cornplanter was unearthed and moved to a new cemetery near the lake. Two paragraphs later in the text, Stengel mentions crossing the state line at Corydon; that town, also, no longer exists — it’s at the bottom of the reservoir.
6 Those photographs are among those used to illustrate this article.
7 The Conewango joins the Allegheny at Warren, Pa., though the town’s sprawl was considerably less in 1916 than it is today.
8 Apparently some of the men, before leaving Pittsburgh, had arranged to receive mail at post offices along the way.
9 Confirming whether the Cornplanter Oil Co. refinery near Warren was the largest in the region would be difficult, but there was a facility known by that name.
10 This is a reference to the small houses — known locally as “lease houses” — owned by oil companies and often built in groups around well sites where men who maintained the pumping equipment lived. Often, entire families occupied the small homes. Charlene Hennessy, a librarian at the Drake Well Museum in Pennsylvania’s historic “Oil Region,” said she had never heard the term “summer colonies” but that “President” was one of the largest and best-known of the oil worker hamlets. There is, in fact, a President Township between Oil City and Titusville, where the President Oil Co. owned considerable property. Some lease homes are still used by current generations maintaining the wellheads of a vastly smaller industry; many others were passed on to hunters and weekenders.
11 No information on “Glencairn” — apparently owned by the forerunner of Carnegie Mellon University — could be found in readily available sources.

Conclusion and a Note About Annotations
by Paul Roberts, Editor

As the reader learns at the end, the account of the 1916 canoe trip down the Allegheny River by William Stengel is not drawn from a journal kept during the journey, as the casual reader may have concluded, but rather it is a remembrance, a memoir.

Stengel wrote his account in December, five months after the mid summer “cruise.” Perhaps the winter cold caused him to long for the bare-chestedness of July; undoubtedly recalling the good times with good friends warmed him even more.

I think the remove of time may account for the breeziness of Stengel’s writing: unlike many diaries, his record is not loaded with minutia or weighed down by the intense personalness that can mark descriptions and emotions committed to paper as they happened, in situ. Interestingly, whatever may be gained is also partly lost, for neither is Stengel’s account full of profound insights or observations that he or others must surely have had during nine days of roughing it on the river. The passion of creation is missing here.

Then again, this was a watery adventure with frequent diversions on dry ground. In fact, a good part of the trip was devoted to pursuing and courting landlubber women. One gets the feeling from what Stengel didn’t write at certain key junctures that more went on in the realm of romance than he has recorded. While William Wyckoff says in his introduction that the 1910s were “kinder, gentler times,” I’d also say that in many ways things remain the same: since time immemorial, men have traveled by boat to distant places in search of adventure and the chance to know new love.

I added the annotations to Stengel’s original to clarify a few references. Especially interesting were his fleeting mentions of Native American homelands around Salamanca, N.Y., which, during his day, had not been obliterated by the Allegheny Reservoir (built in the 1960s). The tribal government maintains a small “protest” museum beside U.S. 17 west of Jamestown, N.Y., devoted to documenting the coming of the reservoir. Many in the region consider the episode simply another example of white thievry of Indian lands.

Relatively minor editing was needed to make Stengel’s account presentable. The only real puzzler was his description of the Indian boy whom the canoeists met July 18. Surprised that James Cooper could read and write, though the Salamanca nation began formal schooling in the early 19th century, Stengel in his original mentions a photograph being taken of Cooper “in Indian costume” (see photograph). Stengel’s meaning is obscure, since he writes that they met the boy simply crossing the river in a boat, so I changed the word to “clothes.”
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