

THE KEOKUK PACKET COMPANY

By *William J. Petersen*

Business was looking up at St. Louis in the early forties. That, at least, was the firm contention of the energetic John S. McCune as he began urging his fellow citizens to establish a regular line of packets between St. Louis and Keokuk. But most businessmen balked at McCune's rash plan, believing that the country was not populated densely enough to support such a venture. Even McCune's best friends "distrusted the feasibility of the scheme and feared the results."

John S. McCune was no idle dreamer. He was a man of vision, strong in body, keen of mind, and endowed with boundless enthusiasm and a tremendous capacity for work. Born in Bourbon County, Kentucky, on June 21, 1809, McCune had moved to Pike County, Missouri, with his parents in 1817. Near Bowling Green his father staked out a claim and began raising fine blooded stock on his farm. An energetic pioneer of the old school, the elder McCune had acquainted his son at a tender age with the "healthful and useful pursuit of agriculture."

At the age of thirty John McCune went to Galena to arrange for the distribution of government supplies to Upper Mississippi posts. Returning to Pike County, he erected a flour mill on the banks of the Mississippi at the town of Louisiana. He soon became dissatisfied with this venture, however, sold his establishment and hastened to St. Louis and associated himself with Samuel Gaty in a prosperous iron foundry. He demonstrated his enterprise by proposing the Keokuk Packet Company after residing scarcely a year in the flourishing river port.¹

Despite "gloomy predictions," McCune launched forth on an undertaking whose daring conception had "startled" some of the most venturesome spirits in St. Louis. Fortunately he had the hearty support of Sam Gaty, whose German ancestors had settled in Pennsylvania before the Revolution and founded the town of Gettysburg. Samuel Gaty was born in Kentucky in 1811. The original name was Getty, but Sam's Kentucky teacher — he had

¹ Richard Edwards and M. Hopewell, *Edwards's Great West . . .* (St. Louis, 1860), 551-2.

only seven months' schooling — wrote and pronounced it "Gaty," and it was not until years later that Sam learned of the mistake. When he was ten years old the youthful Samuel was apprenticed in a Louisville foundry, and in 1828 came to St. Louis. During the winter of 1830-1831 he built a foundry and on July 4, 1831, made his first castings for Captain John C. Swon's steamboat, the *Carrolton*.

When John McCune joined the firm, Gaty already had the reputation of making the first casting in St. Louis and the first engine west of the Mississippi. He also had aided in building the *Eagle*, the first steamboat built at St. Louis and used during the thirties in the Alton trade. The foundry proved a bonanza for both, being assessed at \$171,000 in 1851, and the partnership was not dissolved until 1862. Meanwhile, in 1843, Gaty lent strong financial aid to McCune's upriver project. In addition he built some of the finest steamboats that ever "walked the water" for the line. One of the best known craft to ply between St. Louis and Keokuk was named in honor of the colorful Sam Gaty.²

McCune and Gaty quickly placed a boat on the stocks at St. Louis, and in May, 1844, the steamboat *Die Vernon* was ready to inaugurate the first regular upriver trade to Keokuk. Built at a cost of \$16,000 and owned by John S. McCune, Sam Gaty, Charles Dean, Sam Shepperd, and Captain Neil Cameron, the *Die Vernon* was 161 feet long, 25½ feet in breadth, 5 feet 5 inches in depth, and measured 211 tons. She was a single-engined sidewheeler with a plain figure. The *Die Vernon* plied between St. Louis and Keokuk for six seasons, burning at the St. Louis levee during the winter of 1849-1850. Captain Cameron commanded her during her first season.³

From this small beginning grew the Keokuk Packet Company, the pioneer as well as the longest lived of all the great packet companies. In 1845 two boats were added: the *La Clede* and the *Boreas*. The *La Clede* was a 239 ton craft that was completed at St. Louis in the spring of 1845. She was 197 feet long, 25 feet beam, and 5 feet hold, and was owned by Captain Cameron, John S. McCune, and seven others. The *La Clede* burned at the

² J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Saint Louis City and County . . .* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1883), 1:666-8; *Edwards's Great West . . .*, 101-105.

³ *Edwards's Great West . . .*, 551-2; Scharf, *History of Saint Louis . . .*, 2:1115. Enrolment No. 56, May 23, 1844, Collector of Customs Office, St. Louis; George B. Merrick "Steamboats and Steamboatmen of the Upper Mississippi," *Burlington Post*, Aug. 15, 1914.

St. Louis levee on August 9, 1848.⁴ Clearly, the Keokuk Packet Company evolved out of much the same ownership which had marked the earliest steamboats on the Upper Mississippi.

Not content with two vessels, they purchased the *Boreas*⁵ from Captains Thomas M. Fifthian and George Barnard. The company also secured the contract for carrying the United States mail, and a daily service was successfully maintained.

The three boats fared so well that an opposition line was formed in 1845 composed of the *Swallow*, the *Anthony Wayne*, and the *Edward Bates*. Cutthroat competition was the order of the day and it was not until mid-summer, and only after a bitter fight, that the McCune boats were able to force their exhausted opponents to withdraw from the Keokuk trade. Soon afterwards the *Edward Bates* was added to the Keokuk line.

The history of the *Edward Bates* was as dramatic as it was short. On August 9, 1848, while bound upstream with a large number of cabin and deck passengers, she collapsed a flue near Hamburg, Illinois, causing the death of fifty-three persons and scalding more than two score others. The deck crew and firemen, together with the unfortunate deck passengers, suffered the greatest casualties. Thirteen dead bodies were picked up at Hamburg after the accident. The explosion of the *Edward Bates* was one of the worst marine disasters on the Upper Mississippi. But the end was not yet: the ill-fated craft was burned the following year in the great St. Louis fire of 1849 with a loss of \$22,500 to her owners.⁶ Twenty-two other boats were destroyed in this gigantic conflagration.

⁴ Scharf, *History of Saint Louis . . .*, 2:1115; Enrolment No. 19, March 11, 1845, Collector of Customs, St. Louis; Merrick, "Steamboats and Steamboatmen of the Upper Mississippi," *Burlington Post*, Jan. 27, 1917.

⁵ Scharf, *History of Saint Louis . . .*, 2:1114; Enrolment No. 27, 42, March 28, April 10, 1845, and No. 56, April 18, 1849, Collector of Customs, St. Louis; Merrick, "Steamboats and Steamboatmen of the Upper Mississippi," *Burlington Post*, Jan. 3, 1914. Merrick believes there was only one *Boreas* but actually there were three and all owned by the same men: George Barnard and Thomas M. Fifthian. The first was built at Pittsburgh in 1841 and measured 156 tons; *Boreas No. 2* was constructed at the same city in 1845 and displaced 222 tons; *Boreas No. 3* was launched at Elizabethtown in 1847, measured 249 tons, and was captained by James Barnard. Chittenden mentions the loss of the *Boreas* on the Missouri River in 1846, and the writer is inclined to believe that it was the *Boreas No. 2* that served the Keokuk line since she was new and Scharf states that she was built elsewhere for St. Louis owners.

⁶ *Burlington Post*, Nov. 28, 1914; *North Western Gazette and Galena Advertiser*, Aug. 15, 1848; James T. Lloyd, *Lloyd's Steamboat Directory . . .* (Cincinnati, 1856), 175, 263-4.

By 1846 McCune's wisdom in establishing a daily line of packets on this easy 183-mile run was apparent. There were no rapids to cross, and boats in the Keokuk trade could be uniformly of a greater tonnage than those plying farther upstream. Thus, the *Die Vernon*, the *La Clede*, and the *Boreas* had a far greater average tonnage than the boats engaged in the lead traffic. Since they carried a heavier passenger trade and were less concerned with freight, they were more luxurious and costly. A decade later, when passenger traffic had increased above the Des Moines Rapids, the boats in this trade also became more beautiful and expensive. By this time the model hull had reached a point in design whereby a boat of well-nigh twice the tonnage of those of the forties drew no more water.

Within two years after McCune founded the line, newspaper editors were referring to the Keokuk Packet Company in familiar and friendly terms. On January 1, 1846, the *St. Louis Daily New Era* declared:

The old and excellent line of packets between this and Keokuk are about to resume their trips. The *Boreas* started up last evening. The *Die Vernon* is lying at the wharf painting and receiving repairs; she will resume her place as soon as the work is done. The queen of the trio, the *La Clede*, has gone to New Orleans, but is by this time on her way up, and as soon as she arrives the daily line will commence; enterprise and determination of the company to afford every accommodation and convenience to the citizens of the Upper Mississippi should entitle them to an increase of business. Their respective days of departure, and other arrangements, may be seen by reference to an advertisement in another column.

The first appearance of this advertisement in the spring of 1846 serves as an index to the steamboats, their captains, their schedules, and the chief ports at which they docked. The *St. Louis Daily New Era* proudly referred to the company as the "U. S. Mail Daily Line of Packets" operating the *Die Vernon*, the *Boreas*, and the *La Clede* from St. Louis to Clarksville, Louisiana, Hannibal, Marion City, Quincy, LaGrange, Tully, Alexandria, Warsaw, and Keokuk, touching at all intermediate landings between these towns. The following schedule prevailed:

STEAMBOAT	CAPTAIN	TIME OF DEPARTURE FROM ST. LOUIS
<i>Die Vernon</i>	Charles Dean	Monday and Thursday at 5 p.m.
<i>Boreas</i>	James Whitney, jr.	Tuesday and Friday at 5 p.m.
<i>La Clede</i>	W. S. Randolph	Wednesday & Saturday at 5 p.m.

The return from Keokuk to St. Louis followed much the same pattern. The *Die Vernon* left Keokuk on Tuesday and Friday evenings at five o'clock; the *Boreas* departed on Wednesday and Saturday at the same hour; and the *La Clede* set out on Thursdays and Sundays at five. The public was instructed to apply for passage on board the boats.

Prior to the Civil War no other single factor was as important as the Keokuk Packet Company in building up the country between St. Louis and Keokuk. Iowa was admitted into the Union on December 28, 1846, and the number of immigrants bound for the Hawkeye State steadily mounted until by the mid-fifties it had reached torrential proportions. Meanwhile, eastern Missouri and western and northern Illinois were also forging ahead. Throughout this process the Keokuk Packets enjoyed a considerable patronage from Alton. Passengers bound for some point on the Illinois River could transfer at Grafton to an Illinois river boat. Two flourishing cities, Hannibal and Quincy, offered a rich patronage, Quincy alone enjoying such a phenomenal prosperity that it became necessary later to establish a special "Quincy" line which connected with a short-run boat plying between the "Gem City" and Keokuk. By 1860 Quincy could boast 13,718 inhabitants and in 1870 this number had leaped to 24,052. Meanwhile Springfield, Illinois, could count only 9,320 and 17,364 in each of these years.⁷

After a slow start, Keokuk, the northern terminus of the line, sprouted during the fifties and was one of the most important Iowa cities at the opening of the Civil War. "Perhaps some of you never heard of that place with the queer Indian name," declared a St. Louis lecturer to a large Philadelphia audience in 1856:

Ten years ago last May I first saw it. A row of wooden houses under the bluff was the "city" then. The steamboat men called it "Rat Row." Now, Keokuk is built back a mile on the bluff, has 10,000 people, is lighted with gas, has two or three daily papers, is improving the navigation of the Des Moines river, to Ft. Des Moines, away there in the heart of Iowa, and is also building a railroad to the same point. She has a daily line of magnificent steam packets to St. Louis, and has an immense trade with the interior, in the Des Moines Valley.⁸

⁷ William J. Petersen, "The Lead Traffic on the Upper Mississippi, 1823-1848," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 17:81-2 (June, 1930); E. W. Gould, *Fifty Years on the Mississippi* . . . (St. Louis, 1889), 513-14; Henry C. Hubbart, *The Older Middle West, 1840-1880* . . . (New York, 1936), 261.

⁸ Keokuk Daily Gate City, March 14, 1856.

After such a eulogy a local editor might be pardoned for querying: "Isn't Keokuk worth looking after?" For the self-styled "Porkopolis of Iowa" had indeed become the entrepot for the Des Moines Valley as hordes of settlers pushed up the Des Moines River. For a number of years light draft boats had enjoyed a profitable trade between Keokuk and the mushroom Des Moines River towns. On one occasion in 1852 the company sent the 485-ton *Jeannie Deans* up the Des Moines, but her captain, fearing she would be caught by a falling river, sought the widest spot near Croton and hurried back. In 1859 the steamboat *Charles Rodgers* actually made the run from Keokuk to Fort Dodge, and a grand celebration was held in the straggling frontier village in honor of the first steamboat to reach that point. The building of the railroad up the Des Moines Valley during the early sixties quickly snuffed out this trade, and the iron horse henceforth carried the freight deposited on the Keokuk levee by the McCune packets.⁹

Far more important to Keokuk and the Keokuk Packet Company was the traffic destined for such points as Fort Madison, Burlington, Muscatine, Davenport, Clinton, Galena, Dubuque, and smaller towns as far distant as St. Paul in the North Star State. Since the beginnings of steamboating a profitable transfer business was enjoyed between Keokuk and Montrose during low water. Special rapids pilots also took the big boats back and forth across the Des Moines Rapids. Fortunate it was for the Gate City of Iowa that John McCune and his partners chose Keokuk as the terminus for their line and actually named the packet company in its honor.

It is not strange, therefore, that in the years that followed the admission of Iowa into the Union the importance of the Keokuk Packet Company should steadily increase. Two boats were added to the line in 1847. The *Lucy Bertram*, a 268-ton sidewheeler, was launched at St. Louis early in the spring with Charles Dean as her master. In September the *Kate Kearney* splashed into the Mississippi, being the largest craft McCune had yet brought out. She was 199 feet long, 30 feet in breadth, 5 feet 4 inches in depth, and of 304 tons burden.¹⁰

⁹ C. F. Davis, "The Voyage of the First Steamboat from Keokuk to Fort Dodge," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 7:141-2 (July, 1905); Tacitus Hussey, "History of Steamboating on the Des Moines River, from 1837 to 1862," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 4:323-82 (April, 1900); *Burlington Post*, Aug. 12, 1916; W. J. Petersen, *Iowa: The Rivers of Her Valleys* (Iowa City, 1941), 177-205.

¹⁰ Enrolment No. 18, March 3, 1847; No. 192, Sept. 10, 1847, Collector of Customs, St. Louis; *Burlington Post*, Dec. 23, 1916. The *Lucy Bertram* was launched at

Although McCune's packet company was now in its fourth season it apparently was still considered a pooling agreement, for the ownership of the various boats was still vested in different individuals and firms. For example, McCune and the firm of Anderson & Conn had an interest in the *Lucy Bertram* and the *Kate Kearney*, but the other owners differed in the case of each boat.

Ill fortune haunted the *Kate Kearney*. As she lay at the Canton levee in 1850 several flues collapsed and a number of people were killed or scalded. The shell of the boiler remained, however, and a new bank of flues was inserted. Two years later the *Kate Kearney* was declared unfit for service and was laid up. When two boats in the Alton line sank in 1854 the *Kate Kearney* was brought out to take care of one of the runs. On February 14, 1854, the last bell had ceased ringing and the *Kate Kearney* was preparing to pull out from the St. Louis levee when a terrific explosion reduced the boat to a "confused heap of ruins." There were fifty or sixty passengers aboard and many names, as usual, were not yet registered. Several unknown passengers were blown overboard and lost. Fifteen badly scalded persons, groaning and screaming, were rushed to a hospital where a number died within a few hours.¹¹

Meanwhile, twice-a-week service between St. Louis and Galena began in 1847 when the steamboat *Kentucky*, Alexander Montgomery, master, advertised a combination with the *Lucy Bertram* and the *Anthony Wayne*. The *Kentucky* expected to leave the head of the rapids every Saturday and Wednesday morning at eleven, or immediately after the arrival of the Keokuk Packets. Captain Montgomery assured passengers they would be towed by horses over the rapids in a comfortable packet and that the *Kentucky* would convey them in "much shorter time than usual" to Galena. Punctual service and fair rates were guaranteed.¹²

A distinguishing feature of the Keokuk Packet Company was its uniformly quick and certain service. This was in sharp contrast to most other boats running on the Upper Mississippi. A veteran river man, Captain E. W. Gould, was particularly impressed by the clocklike schedule maintained by the McCune boats:

St. Louis in 1847. She was owned by McCune, James E. Yeatman, Anderson and Conn, and John H. Boween. She was 198 feet long, 28 feet broad, and 5 feet in depth.

¹¹ *Lloyd's Steamboat Directory* . . . , 244-5.

¹² *North Western Gazette and Galena Advertiser*, Sept. 17, 1847.

The regularity and promptness with which it started from port and made its trips, soon became known, and was so satisfactory to the public and its patrons, and was such an improvement over the usual custom, of delaying departure for hours after the advertised time, and sometimes for days, that it grew rapidly into favor, and its patronage was unprecedented, and probably did more to advance the commercial interest of St. Louis, and for the settlement of the country bordering on that portion through which it ran, than all other causes combined.¹³

Balmy days were generally followed by rough weather. Jealous of the lush returns of the Keokuk Packets, rival groups frequently stepped in to enjoy a part of the trade. Their appearance always started cutthroat competition and it was fortunate the line was composed of a group of officers and owners willing to stake their all to whip the opposition. The men who comprised the packet company are said to have ranked among the most capable on the entire Mississippi. They were fighters, too, who were not easily frightened by an adversary.

One of the most bitter wars occurred in the spring of 1850 when the *Monongahela*, the *New England*, and the *Mary Stephens* formed an opposition line to the Keokuk Packets and fiercely contended for the river trade. Every week day evening a boat from each line left St. Louis side by side, carrying freight and passengers at ruinous prices and sparing no expense for fuel or food. It was a nip and tuck race for each port with the winner usually gaining the lion's share of the trade. The opposition had excellent boats and apparently fat pocketbooks, for the fight was a severe one. Spurred on by the dynamic brain and energy of John McCune the officers and owners proved equal to the emergency. After the two companies had sustained a loss of some fifty thousand dollars, the opposition line finally withdrew and their boats were sold at auction. The *New England* was added to the Keokuk Packet Company. By some curious twist of fate the new boat met the same fate as the *Edward Bates* when purchased from a rival line. The *New England* burned at the St. Louis levee on January 18, 1853.¹⁴

¹³ Gould, *Fifty Years on the Mississippi* . . . , 514.

¹⁴Scharf, *History of Saint Louis* . . . , 2:1115; Burlington Post, April 28, Nov. 24, Dec. 22, 1917. *Monongahela* enrolled May 2, 1850, at Collector of Customs Office in St. Louis. She was built at Pittsburgh in 1845 and was owned and captained by Spencer J. Ball of Clarkesville, Missouri. The *Monongahela* was 200 feet long, 24½ foot beam, and 5 feet hold, and measured 238 tons.

The slim bands that had held McCune's boats in mutual association for almost a decade were firmly riveted together on January 22, 1853, when the Keokuk Packet Company was incorporated under the laws of Illinois. Apparently such a plan had been under way for some time, for on March 13, 1852, John S. McCune enrolled the *New England No. 2*, the *Glaucus*, and the second *Die Vernon* at the Collector of Customs at St. Louis and named the Keokuk Packet Company as their owners. The new *Die Vernon* was among the most celebrated boats on the Upper Mississippi. Built at St. Louis in 1850, this magnificent craft was 255 feet long, 31.2 feet wide, 5.9 feet hold, and was 445 tons burden. She cost \$49,000, a sum which at the time was considered "very large" for an upriver boat. She was commanded by M. Langhorne, but in 1853 Rufus Ford captained her in her great race against the *West Newton* to St. Paul. She was the pride of the Keokuk Packet Company and one of the fastest boats that ever turned a wheel on the Upper Mississippi.¹⁵

It was about this time that the Keokuk Packet Company entered its golden age of steamboating. A feature in its history at this time is the longevity of the new boats entering the line compared with the short life of those constructed during the forties. Measured from the point of design, size, appointments, and durability, the boats built for western waters reached their greatest perfection between about 1855 and 1875. And the Keokuk Packets, while averaging somewhat smaller than the boats on the lower Mississippi and the Ohio, were generally much larger than those plying the Illinois, the Missouri, and the Mississippi above Keokuk. The superiority of these boats is attested by the ease with which the second *Die Vernon* beat the sleek *West Newton* in 1853.¹⁶

The mighty flood of settlers pouring into Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa afforded a rich harvest to the stockholders. Despite incessant competition,

¹⁵ The *New England No. 2*, the *Die Vernon*, and the *Glaucus* were entered on the books of the Collector of Customs at St. Louis on March 13, 1852, under enrolment numbers 29, 30, 31. The *New England No. 2* was apparently the old *New England* built, for her enrolment indicates she was built at Shousetown, Pennsylvania, in 1847. She was 213 feet long, 27 feet 2 inches beam, 5 feet 5 inches hold, measured 6 tons, and was commanded by Rufus Ford at the time of her enrolment. The *Glaucus*, a sternwheeler, was built at West Elizabeth, Pennsylvania, in 1849. She was commanded by Nathan P. Hubbard and was 153 feet long, 25½ feet in breadth, and 2 feet 2 inches in depth, measuring 154 tons.

¹⁶ A study of the tonnage, speed, cost, and length of service of the boats built during this period would seem to warrant this general conclusion.

explosions, fire, snags, sandbars, and the advent of the railroad, the company was so well managed that its popularity continued to increase. According to Captain Gould its stock was considered "the best in the market" and for a number of years very little of it was for sale.¹⁷

Heretofore the Keokuk Packet Company had confined its activities to the region between St. Louis and Keokuk, making only such connections above the Des Moines Rapids as would redound to its own advantage. Up to 1850 it had successfully beaten off competitors who dared parallel its run although scores of boats were churning up and down between St. Louis and the lead region. After 1850 the company frequently carried on rate wars with the enemy. Sometimes these grew out of an effort to pick up a little excess profit, when the traffic was light in the regular run, sometimes in retaliation against a competing line that had dared to enter as a regular in forbidden territory.

Naturally their competitors and often the press resented these incursions. When the St. Louis and Keokuk Packet extended their line to Galena in 1852 it met a hostile and bitter reception by the local press. Commenting on the arrival of the *New England*, the *Galena Jeffersonian* feigned to be "much pained to know that her freight was exceedingly light. She left on Tuesday morning, with as large a load as she brought. Though the business done by this line thus far has not, in our opinion, been very extensive, we are convinced that if the proprietors will only persevere, they will succeed — in losing as much money as they can conveniently spare." A St. Paul editor, on the other hand, felt it was a "mistake" for the company not to come all the way through and promised a "fair share" of the business on hand.¹⁸

Thriving steamboat corporations were seldom greatly concerned over local editorial chastisement. Even though traffic had not been increasing it is probable that the installation of a line by the Northern Cross Railroad to connect Quincy with Keokuk would have brought some reply by the McCune boats. At any rate when the *G. W. Sparhawk* began plying between those two points late in 1855, the Keokuk Packet was ready to meet it the following spring. Early in March the "old and popular" Keokuk Packet Company advertised two daily lines of steamboats between Keokuk

¹⁷ Gould, *Fifty Years on the Mississippi* . . . , 514.

¹⁸ St. Paul *Minnesota Pioneer*, June 3, 1852, quoting and commenting upon the *Galena Jeffersonian*.

and St. Louis. The "staunch and speedy" steamboats *Westerner*, *Keokuk*, *Sam Gaty*, and *Quincy* (2) were to leave Keokuk daily at 6 A. M., *Quincy* at 9 A. M., and arrive at St. Louis at 5 o'clock the next morning. In addition, to prevent the *Sparhawk* from encroaching too much, the *Ben Campbell* was to leave Keokuk daily at 2 in the afternoon and connect at Quincy at 5 P. M. with the St. Louis packets *Jeannie Deans* and *Die Vernon*. The company believed the names of these boats were alone "sufficient guarantee of their speed and accommodation."¹⁹

The support of Keokuk citizens was quickly thrown behind such boats as the *Ben Campbell*, a handsome 267-ton sidewheeler which had been built at Shousetown, Pennsylvania, in 1852, and named for the senior member of the firm of B. H. Campbell & Co., wholesale grocers of Galena. Originally designed for the Minnesota trade, the *Ben Campbell* had too much depth for that trade. Accordingly, in the fall of 1852, she was sold to the Keokuk Packet Company. Four years later, in the spring of 1856, a Keokuk editor recorded a trip on the sleek *Ben Campbell*:

We went down to Quincy on Wednesday, on the *Ben Campbell*, returning yesterday. It was the intention of a number of our citizens to have made a May party to our sister city, but the weather was so unpropitious in the morning that but few set out. — However, with the Brass Band aboard, the trip was pleasant enough, and we conclude that some of them enjoyed themselves pretty well, else we don't know why they should have set up so late encouraging a band of fiddlers and kicking around the floor, while we were trying to coax a little sleep to visit our eyelids. Capt. Heaight did everything to render the trip agreeable, and that the day was not as shiny and soft as we would have had it, was not his fault. But we had a beautiful day to return in, and perhaps enjoyed that the more on account of the rough day preceding it.

The river is gradually spreading out over its banks, and large bodies of bottom land are overflowed for the first time since the great flood of 1851. And still the river is rising, and the prospects of damage are greater than many interested parties can contemplate with much gratification.

Quincy is improving her streets somewhat, but we saw very little building, at least compared with what we are accustomed to see at home. The improvements that have been made in this respect we conclude to be in the southern part of the city, where we did not go, though we scoured over the rest of the town pretty

¹⁹ Keokuk Daily Gate City, Dec. 4, 1855, March 8, 14, 1856.

thoroughly. Quincy is a fine town, and we are always pleased with it, but there is not the rapid improvement and heavy, driving business that we see at home, her railroads, age, and extended reputation notwithstanding. But whoever wants to take a pleasant trip to a pleasant town, we would recommend to go down to Quincy on the *Ben Campbell*, under the auspices of Capt. Heaight, and his obliging Clerk, friend Hoey.²⁰

The opening of navigation was always hailed with delight. On April 2, 1856, the *Keokuk Daily Gate City* declared:

Navigation being fully opened, business has taken a new start, and all hands are full of life and activity. The Levee is crowded with plunder, teams, drays and men. The wholesale grocers are receiving large supplies of everything in their line. The stocks of dry goods are still behind hand. We will give due notice of their arrival.

The following day, April 3, the *Gate City* recorded the arrival of the *Westerner*:

The *Westerner* came in at 1 o'clock Wednesday morning, with one of the largest loads ever brought to this city. In addition to the manifest as published in this paper, she had a large number of passengers, and 22 families of immigrants with large lots of plunder, about 20 head of horses, 10 head of cattle, 3 imported dogs, and a lot of superior pigs.

The manifest of the *Westerner* is well worth studying, for it reveals the widespread needs of bustling Keokuk.

St. Louis — per *Westerner* — R H Stephens 5 pkgs; Stafford and McCune, 10 bbls whisky; Hamill and Co, 10 bbls flour; Connable, Smith and Co, 267 pkgs; Burns and Rentgen, 20 pkgs coffee, sugar and sunds; McGavie, Chittenden and Co, 115 bars iron, 187 bbls do, 16 pkgs; P Hart, 3 bbls ale; S S Vail and Co, 10 pkgs machinery; H W Drake, 62 sks d apples; Newton and Spelman, 20 pkgs; Bruce and Daniels, 23 bags d salt; Patterson and Co, 49 empty casks; B F Moody, 91 cases boots and shoes; Kramer, Irvin and Co, 8 pkgs furniture; Beatty, Long and Co, 5 pkgs machinery; J Fry, 31 pkgs; T I McKenny, 7 pkgs drugs; Carter and Co, 32 cases boots and shoes; James Crane, 5 bbls vinegar; Krayner and Schrick, 9 pkgs; A P Thomas and Co, 1 bbl mdze; Connable, Smyth and Co, 50 bxs candy; Kilbourne and

²⁰ *Ibid.*, May 9, 1856.

Davis, 3 bxs fire brick; C Garber and Co, 2 bxs mdze; J. Mount,
48 pkgs mdze.

Between April 4 and 19 the *Gate City* recorded the arrival of steamboats
at the Port of Keokuk, noting whence they came and whither they were
bound.

PORT OF KEOKUK

Date	Steamboat	From	Bound For
April 4th.	Alice, Jeannie Deans,	Keosauqua, St. Louis,	Des Moines River St. Louis
April 5th.	Die Vernon, Sam Gaty, Laclede, Badger State, Ben Campbell,	St. Louis, St. Louis, Rock Island, St. Louis, Quincy,	St. Louis St. Louis St. Louis Davenport Quincy
April 6th.	Audubon, Westerner, Montauk, Metropolitan, York State,	Davenport, St. Louis, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Davenport,	St. Louis St. Louis Davenport St. Paul St. Louis
April 7th.	Keokuk, Jenny Lind, Dan Converse,	St. Louis, St. Louis, Davenport,	St. Louis Burlington St. Louis
April 8th.	Ben Campbell, Cambridge, John Bell,	Quincy, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati,	Quincy St. Louis St. Louis
April 12th.	Sam Gaty, Laclede, James Lyon, Addia, Forest Rose, Eunice, York State, Fanny Harris, A G Mason, Ben Campbell,	St. Louis, St. Louis, Wheeling, Zanesville, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, St. Louis, St. Louis, Quincy,	St. Louis Dubuque Dubuque Dubuque Quincy
April 13th.	Dubuque, Montauk, Audubon, Conewago, Grace Darling, Ben Campbell,	Davenport, Davenport, St. Louis, St. Louis, St. Louis, Quincy,	St. Louis St. Louis St. Paul St. Louis St. Paul Quincy

April 14th.	Henry Graff,	St. Louis,	Galena
	Minnesota Belle,	St. Louis,	Galena
	Metropolitan,	Galena,	St. Paul
	Golden State,	St. Louis,	Dubuque
	Brazil,	St. Louis,	Dubuque
	Yuba,	St. Louis,	St. Louis
	Mattie Wayne,	St. Louis,	St. Paul
April 15th.	Ben Campbell,	Quincy,	Quincy
	Envoy,	St. Louis,	St. Paul
	Alice,	Davenport,	D M River
April 16th.	Ben Campbell,	Quincy,	Quincy
	Laclede,	Davenport,	St. Louis
	Keokuk,	St. Louis,	St. Louis
	Michigan,	Eddyville,	
	Dan Converse,	St. Louis,	
	Louisville,	St. Louis,	
April 17th.	Adelia,	Davenport,	St. Louis
	Oakland	Davenport,	St. Louis
	Sam Gaty	St. Louis,	St. Louis
	Ben Campbell,	Quincy,	Quincy
	Wave,	St. Louis,	Davenport

An analysis of these arrivals shows that 15 of the 55 arrivals recorded were Keokuk Packet Company boats — the *Ben Campbell*, *Die Vernon*, *Jeannie Deans*, *Keokuk*, *Sam Gaty*, and *Westerner*. The *Quincy*, a new boat in the line for 1856, had not put in its appearance by April 17. Of the 55 arrivals recorded, 28 were from St. Louis, 11 from the Upper Mississippi, 7 from Quincy, 6 from the Ohio, and 2 from the Des Moines. The Keokuk Packet Company was playing a dynamic role in the commercial development of Keokuk.

The closing of navigation was always viewed with regret by river towns. This was just as true at Keokuk as at Dubuque, even though the Gate City of Iowa had the advantage of a longer season of navigation — both at the opening and closing of the Mississippi. On December 5, 1855, the *Daily Gate City* noted: "About 32 inches reported on the rapids. Boats still go up occasionally. River falling slowly, with six feet in the channel to St. Louis, making a good navigable stage. Weather delightful; indeed an enthusiast might say it was glorious — if not 'perfectly g-e-lorious.'" Freight rates were remarkably low for the season — being 12½ to 15 cents per 100 pounds.

But the pleasant fall weather had changed by December 7 to rains followed by a "hard freeze" on December 9. On December 11 the *Daily Gate City* reported that the St. Louis packet, which was due on Sunday night, had been detained by "high winds and stress of weather," and did not get into Keokuk until Monday afternoon. The weather was cold and clear, roads hard, and streets lively with teams and drays. The following day the editor reported the river was still free from ice with a good stage of water to St. Louis, but the Keokuk Packet Company did not miss such opportunities to carry freight. On December 14 the *Gate City* recorded: "The *Die Vernon* came in yesterday half a day or so behind time, having been detained by fog, and by the delivery of 500 tons of freight all along up the river." After another cold spell the weather moderated considerably, but ice was running "thick and fast" in the Mississippi. This did not prevent the *Die Vernon* from coming into port again on Tuesday, December 18, and the editor learned that the packets would continue to run as long as there was a chance to get through. Two days later the *G. W. Sparhawk* and another steamboat arrived in port. Immediately thereafter the cold weather clamped down on Keokuk in earnest, and no further arrivals were recorded in 1855.

In 1857 the freight and passenger line between St. Louis and Quincy was comprised of the *Keokuk*, the *Sam Gaty*, and the *Quincy*. The mail and passenger line to Keokuk was made up of the *Jeannie Deans*, J. W. Malin, master; the *Die Vernon*, Sheble, master; and the *Thos. Swann*, in command of J. H. Johnson. In addition to the boats already mentioned, the *New Lucy*, the *Prairie State*, the *Regulator*, the *Jennie Lind*, the *Conewago*, the *Winchester*, the *York State*, and a number of others plied in the McCune Line.²¹

On April 16, 1863, the Keokuk Packet Company was reincorporated according to the laws of the state of Illinois. The Civil War, like the railroad and competition, left its scars, but the company continued strong, plying between St. Louis and Keokuk and engaging in occasional forays elsewhere. For a half dozen years following the Civil War McCune found himself caught in the vortex of the struggle that had been brewing between the

²¹ *Muscatine Journal*, May 25, 1857. According to the *Journal*, one-half of the stock of the company was owned in St. Louis and the other half distributed at various points along the line. Some five hundred persons were employed by the company during ten months of the year, and the boats were run at an annual expense of \$592,000. Only one accident had occurred since the line was organized.

Northern Line of St. Louis and the White Collar Line of William F. Davidson. The Keokuk Packet Company managed to weather this storm until 1873 when suddenly a union of steamboat corporations was consummated which changed the history of the line as well as that of Upper Mississippi steamboating.²²

Early in the spring of 1873, while the directors of the Keokuk Packet Company were confronted with the problem of renewing their articles of incorporation, a meeting of the captains and officers of three great packet companies was called in St. Louis. Intense railroad competition combined with a desire to eliminate the devastating competition that must ultimately ruin all river men led to a new steamboat combination under the title Keokuk Northern Line Packet Company. This was a combination of the White Collar Line and the Northern Line of St. Louis with the Keokuk Packet Company.

The two old St. Louis Lines gave their names to the new organization. But the Keokuk Packet Company gave more. The newly organized company wisely chose as its president John S. McCune. In making this important choice they pointed out that McCune had filled the same position in the Keokuk Packet Company for thirty years. His "close attention and watchfulness" to the needs of the company had led it from "infancy to giant greatness." All were agreed that McCune had developed the "most successful steamboat company in the West." No finer tribute could have been paid the hard-working McCune.²³

But McCune was destined to serve the Keokuk Northern Line for only a short time. Death robbed the new corporation of his steadying hand at a time when the country was still suffering from the throes of the Panic of 1873 and a relentless railroad competition. In the brief year in which he took command of the helm, the Keokuk Northern gave promise of continued profits through generous dividends. The moment his hand was removed from the pilot wheel the ship was caught in the cross currents of adversity and gradually sank to rise no more.²⁴

²² Letter to writer from Edward J. Hughes, Secretary of State, Springfield, Illinois, dated Dec. 22, 1936, furnished information on reincorporation.

²³ Keokuk *Weekly Gate City*, March 12, 1873, Oct. 28, 1874.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Feb. 4, March 4, 18, Oct. 28, 1874; Ward *et al.*, Appellants and Respondents *v.* Davidson *et al.*, Respondents and Appellants in 89 *Missouri Reports*, 445-63.