

SOURCE MATERIAL OF IOWA HISTORY

[The following letter was found in the Papers of Cyrus Clay Carpenter at the State Historical Society of Iowa. The writer of the letter, Henry Carse, was a friend and business associate of Carpenter's. One of his early ventures had been on the steamboat *Charles Rogers* (which is also spelled "Rodgers" in some sources). Before the days of railroads the businessmen of Fort Dodge were anxious to secure some type of transportation via the Des Moines River. Because of shoals, bends, and low water, steamboating on the Des Moines was always a hazard. However, in the spring of 1858 a group of men in Fort Dodge organized a stock company — The Fort Dodge Navigation Company — to raise funds for a boat to be built in Pittsburgh. Captain F. E. Beers, who, with Henry Carse, brought the boat back to Iowa waters from Pittsburgh, wrote an account of the early voyages which was published in Harry M. Pratt's two-volume *History of Fort Dodge and Webster County, Iowa* (Des Moines, 1913), 1:225-9. The following letter, briefer than Captain Beers's account, agrees in the main with the Captain's story which was obviously written much later. The two accounts illustrate the difficulties both of navigation and finance for a new boat. The fact that Beers did not bring the boat directly to Fort Dodge from Pittsburgh was annoying to many members of the Fort Dodge Navigation Company, who were anxious to realize some tangible results from their investment. That their complaints were resented by the crew of the *Charles Rogers* is indicated in Carse's letter, which was written before the boat made its first voyage to Fort Dodge in the spring of 1859, arriving there on April 6. The original of this letter, which is undated, was attached to another letter written to Carpenter by Carse and dated December 23, 1858, in which he stated: "I have about concluded that we are frozen up in the Desmoines River for this winter for good and with that expectation I have taken a school to teach till the River opens in the spring, was at Ottumwa the 21st and got my certificate. Will commence Monday 27th Dec. Will be new business to me but anything rather than [sic] to be an expense It was some inducement to be near the boat which is about 5 miles from me. I am stopping about 3 Miles from Agency City which is my place of getting my mail." Captain Beers wrote: "We laid the boat up for the winter about eighteen

miles below Ottumwa on the north bank of the river. . . . On the 23d of February [1859] the ice went out of the river and we started the boat again. Mr. Carse took a school near where the boat was tied up and he did not come on the boat for a week or two after we started, as his school had not closed." Also, according to Beers, they were caught in the ice near Bentonsport "late in November," a fact which Carse also mentions, although without giving a specific time. Therefore, it is evident that Carse wrote the following letter sometime in December, 1858. — EDITOR.]

THE STEAMBOAT CHARLES ROGERS

Friend Carpenter

Allow me to say a few things in regard to our little Steam Boat. The dimentions I suppose you have already learned — however I will give it 75 ft long 15 ft beam 3 or 3½ hold and will carry 60 to 65 Tons. Cylinders 10½ in. 18 ft by 36 in. Boiler and about 12 inch draft light — and is 80 horse power full *throttle*. The Hull is a very handsome model and well built and Engines and Boiler No. 1 the decking &c not very good finish. It will run like a *scared dog*.

We left Ft Desmoines three hours ahead of the Clara Hine and we gained on her one hour and a half in running from the Fort to Keokuk. They did not wait to take on any freight on the way down and they hurried and crowded on all the Steam they could all the way down. There were several bets made on the Clara, that they would overtake us, but the friends of the Clara lost all their wagers. The Clara Hine is a good Boat and fast — has good power and draws about 2 ft 6 inches light and I presume they can out run us up Stream. I do not [know] however, we never tried it.

Perhaps some think we are loaded down with power to[o] mutch; in answer I would say that it is all needed to stem the Rapids and make the bends in the Desmoines River. It is a hard Stream to navigate on account of Snags rocks rapids and bends in the River and it [requires] good power to give the boat motion so as to mind the rudders, particularly going down stream. Rattlesnake is a very bad bend to make and most boats have to run against the shore and swing around Stern foremost — but all we have to do is crack on the Steam and go down without touching, and it requires just such a boat to run on the River from Desmoines to Ft. Dodge and we should have run up on 1st or 2d trip if we could have got 5 or six Tons of Freight, but we could not get 500 pounds. Now we have recd Several letters from

Ft. Dodge of rather an insulting cast for not running to Ft. Dodge last fall. Other letters have been received in which we were not blamed.

I presume you understood the circumstances under which I left Ft. Dodge to go to Pittsburgh — It was a shortness of Funds — having received only about \$400 exclusive of what Blacshere [Aaron F. Blackshere of Ft. Dodge] Beers & Myself paid in. I paid my stock \$500 and advance of \$200 more and I give my individual property to secure the payment of the balance \$1175 in four & six months also a note for \$193 which Mr. Rogers loaned us to fit out with after the boat was finished. The latter we have about paid up. The name of the Boat, some of our correspondents seem to have serious objections to — they ask us why did we not call it The George H. Rogers as it would have sounded something like Ft. Dodge or Webster Co. Well all I have to say is that the name "Charles Rogers" is not a favorite name of mine, neither is it particularly objectionable not so much so as circumstances under which it received that name — but policy guides the operations of financiers as well as political men and many others; and thus it was in our case. Mr. Chas. Rogers was the man who built the boat and had it not been for the liberality of that gentleman the boat might have been in Pittsburgh or some place else for aught I know for we had but Thirteen dollars (\$13) left after paying Rogers what Beers agreed to pay him on delivery of the Boat to buy our outfit & pay our expenses to Keokuk &c.

Mr. Rogers bought our outfit or rather loaned us the money — we still had our \$13 to bring us around and part of that was uncurrent — knowing it was no use to write to Ft. Dodge for help for I had done my best before I left, so we held a consultation and decided to run the boat around to Keokuk on Muscle & Brass. So we hired a pilot to run the Boat to Cincinnati for \$40 an Engineer at \$40 per month and other hands from \$18 to 25 per month — not having sufficient reliance on Muscle & Brass — did not know but that we would be tied up at Cincinnati for debt — that is for hands wages but however Providence smiled upon us and we got passengers & freight — so that we were able to pay our pilot and get some provisions to continue our journey. But out of money again — and steam up ready to start not knowing where to get money to buy the next bushel of coal or cord of wood. It was then evening, and something had to be done — so observed three young chaps passing down the Levee towards another [boat] by ours with satchels so I out and hailed them and asked where they

were bound for. They said for Cairo so of course I made them believe ours was the fastest boat and would be sure to go through &c and they came aboard paid their fair [sic] which was \$20. So we made a raise again, blew our whistle and on we went to Cairo.

By the way we took on some frt at Cincinnati to amount to \$57, but could not of course realize any thing from it till we delivered it at Hannibal Mo. On our way to Cairo we received but little from passengers or frt and when we arrived there, had but \$6 [left] after laying in but a small stock of provisions and not more [than] 5 or 6 bushels coal & no wood and we saw very plainly that it was not going to help our case any by stoping there any length of time. So we shoved out about 11 oclock at night (it was after dark when [we] got in there) and shaped our course up the big Mississippi and tied up 5 miles above Cairo till morning and chopped wood and carried aboard till 12 oclock next day. Had but one ax & one Hand-saw to work with. Cut and carried aboard Two & half cords and we kept doing so till we got to St. Louis and we had about 15\$ ahead once more, and there we had to settle with the Pilot from Cincinnati to St. Louis which was \$35. Knowing that we had but \$15 to pay \$35, Beers & I resolved to carry him ashore in the skiff rather than give him an opportunity to tie us up — but he compromised by taking 10\$ down and the balance was to be sent to him from Hannibal when we collected our frt Bill.

So we shoved out from St. Louis to navigate a River entirely unknown to all of us without a pilot and but 5\$ a distance of about 500 miles. Fortunately we arrived safe at Keokuk without accident or hinderance of any kind whatever and without getting aground once which I thot was doing well for us, especially when we were passing other Steam Boats hard aground. We lay at Keokuk about Twenty four hours took about half a load. Shippers being disposed to patronize the Clara Hine and other boats that had been in the trade and they did not know what about shipping with us strangers. But we made a quick trip and made a little money — second trip we had a full load and made good time and cleared enough to pay off our hands and had enough to pay off our first note due for outfit which was about \$200 payable at Pittsburgh and this our last trip would have been the best had we not froze up; as it is we will not make any thing, our expenses will equal the receipts.

Now had we run up to Ft. Dodge the first trip we would have lost our second trip entirely; consequently would have been in debt to the hands

for their wages, and nothing paid on our debts. We done as we thought was best for the company and ourselves — had the stockholders paid up their stock we should not have had so mutch trouble and vexation and could have run up to Ft. Dodge and not have been cramped as we are for money. Yet we have not complained because they have not paid up. We know money was scarce and hard to get — yet we do not like to have persons find so mutch fault with us and our course [or] write so insulting a letter as was received from Thos. Sargent. We took the best course we new of and any sensible man would have taken the same course as we did, but I doubt whether Thos. Sargent would as he is rather an unreasonable man.

Others find fault because we did not write often. One reason why I did not write often was because I did not know what to write for the reason I did not know one day what we were going to do the next — and if we had written as often as we concluded to do any particular thing people would have thought we were crazy. When we left one Port we knew not whether we could leave the next and when we got to running the boat on the Des Moines River we had not time to think or write.

Yours Truly

HENRY CARSE