

## CAPTAIN DANIEL SMITH HARRIS

On April 5, 1823, a band of forty-three men, women, and children, with three dogs, assembled on the Cincinnati levee. Led by Moses Meeker, an enterprising lead manufacturer and mining prospector, they were prepared to board the keelboat *Colonel Bomford* for the Fever River lead mines eleven hundred miles distant. During the preceding winter they had purchased their supplies, Meeker's outfit alone costing \$7000. Everyone now waited impatiently while the last of the trappings were safely stored in the hold of the keel. Finally all was in readiness, and the last passenger hastily scrambled on board. Flushed and stimulated by an unusually liberal draught of whisky, the habitual prelude to a day's work, each rugged boatman stood nonchalantly at his post on the runway with pole "set", awaiting the signal of the captain or steersman. As the poles (the average keelboat had from eight to fourteen) bit deep into the river bottom the *Colonel Bomford* slipped slowly from its moorings and glided downstream with its hardy passengers. Among them was James Harris and his son, Daniel Smith Harris, a pleasant-faced youth of fifteen.<sup>1</sup>

James Harris was a close friend as well as an employee of Moses Meeker. Born in Connecticut in 1777 of an old Massachusetts family whose lineage could be traced back to the handful of Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth Rock on the Mayflower, Harris had emigrated to New York State where he married Abigail Bathrick, a resident of Kort-

<sup>1</sup> *Galena Gazette*, March 17, 1893; Meeker's *Early History of Lead Region of Wisconsin* in the *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. VI, pp. 276-279; Wilkinson's *Recollections of the West and the First Building of Buffalo Harbor* in the *Buffalo Historical Collections*, Vol. V, pp. 176-181.

right, Delaware County. After residing in New York for several years the wanderlust again seized him and he moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, where he remained until the opening of the lead mines attracted him to Galena, Illinois.

The eldest son of James and Abigail Harris, Daniel Smith Harris, or "Smith" Harris as he was generally known, was born at Kortright, New York, on July 24, 1808. Financial difficulties had forced James Harris to withdraw his son from school to join the expedition to the lead mines. Three younger brothers—Robert Scribe, Martin Keeler, and James Meeker—were left behind with their mother until a suitable home could be provided for them. Jackson Harris, the fifth and youngest son, was born at Galena in 1828. Curiously, the four older brothers were all known and called by their middle names, a fact which possibly induced James Harris to give his youngest son only one Christian name.<sup>2</sup>

To the vigilant and inquiring lad of fifteen the departure of the *Colonel Bomford* must have seemed the merriest kind of a lark. Young Harris saw the boat carried swiftly down the Ohio River, propelled by the sinewy skill of the boatmen. Occasionally, perhaps, he was allowed to take a turn at the poles. Numerous villages dotted the banks of the Ohio River, and newly erected, rough-hewn farmhouses studded the shores. The country became more sparsely populated as the *Colonel Bomford* proceeded up the Mississippi. St. Louis, with its five thousand nondescript inhabitants, was the point of departure for all expeditions destined for the Missouri, the Illinois, or the Upper Mississippi. Quincy, Illinois, boasted one lone settler—John Wood, who subsequently became Governor of Illinois. At Hannibal a solitary backwoodsman promptly deserted his

<sup>2</sup> *Galena Gazette*, March 17, 1893; Merrick's *Steamboats and Steamboatmen of the Upper Mississippi* in the *Burlington Post*, February 9, 1918.

shack and boarded the *Colonel Bomford* for the lead mines. With the exception of a few government posts and fur trading establishments the country above St. Louis was uninhabited by white men.<sup>3</sup>

The sluggish and unsatisfactory method of keelboat transportation must have made a deep impression on young Smith Harris. From dawn till dusk the crew toiled up the broad expanse of the Mississippi, sometimes pushing the *Colonel Bomford* with their poles, and at other times pulling it along by means of the brush growing along the bank, called brush-whacking. When these methods were not successful they resorted to warping to stem the swift current. A rope was attached to a tree or anchor some distance ahead. Each boatman would then grasp the rope or warp, as it was called, and walk to the stern, pulling as he went. As each reached the stern he would "break off" and run to the bow for a new grip. The men continued in this fashion until the tree or anchor was reached. This was hard work and progress was so slow that dusk frequently found the boat barely out of sight of the previous night's stop. Occasionally a breeze enabled the *Colonel Bomford* to sail for a few miles but the wind did not shift with the bends of the river and such respites from labor were all too brief.

About seventy miles above the mouth of the Ohio River, the *Virginia*, the first steamboat to reach Fort Snelling, passed the *Colonel Bomford*. Meeker tried to get the *Virginia* to tow his keelboat but her captain, John Crawford, refused because the swift current often brought his boat to a standstill. Despite these difficulties the *Virginia* was able to complete her trip to Fort Snelling, return to St. Louis and reload, and steam northward again before the *Colonel Bomford* reached Fever River. It took thirty-one

<sup>3</sup> Beltrami's *A Pilgrimage in Europe and America*, Vol. II, pp. 60-197; *Galena Gazette*, March 17, 1893.

days for Moses Meeker and his companions to travel the four hundred and twenty-five miles from St. Louis to Galena, an average of but thirteen miles a day or less than one mile per hour.<sup>4</sup>

Inspired by the voyage of the *Virginia*, the youthful Harris conceived a strong desire to own and captain a steamboat. A large outlay of capital was required to own such a craft, however, so during the year 1823 he roamed the hills of the mining district with an Indian boy prospecting for lead, a task which he at first pursued with indifferent success. The year after James Harris and his eldest son arrived at Galena, the three younger boys came west to the lead mines to assist their father on his new farm in Jo Daviess County. The produce of the Harris farm found a ready market in a community devoted almost entirely to mining and the returns on their labor must have been as great as that reaped by many of the miners themselves. Even as late as 1836 the need for farmers and farm products caused considerable comment in the lead district.

In 1824 Smith Harris and his brother Scribe prospected together. One Sunday, Smith struck an old deserted shaft in West Galena. He worked it and discovered there one of the richest leads ever found in the region. West Diggings, as his mine was called, soon made him one of the most successful miners in the Fever River district. The two boys took 35,000 pounds of mineral from the first pocket and ultimately 4,000,000 pounds from the mine. They successfully fought off the claim-jumpers who attempted to deprive them of their find, continued in the mining business all their lives, and whenever misfortunes befell them in steamboating relied on their mines to recoup any losses.

<sup>4</sup> Meeker's *Early History of Lead Region of Wisconsin* in the *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. VI, pp. 277-279; Petersen's *The "Virginia", the "Clermont" of the Upper Mississippi* in *Minnesota History*, Vol. IX, pp. 347-362.

The year 1829 was noteworthy for Daniel Smith Harris. His aggressive character and success had attracted the attention of Captain David G. Bates, one of the best-known steamboat captains on the Upper Mississippi. Heavy lead shipments were being made to St. Louis and when a vacancy occurred in the pilot house of the steamboat *Galena* Captain Bates offered young Harris an appointment as cub pilot, a position which he accepted with alacrity. A little later, when an assistant engineer was needed, Scribe Harris was assigned to the berth. The training which the two boys received under Captain Bates laid the foundation for their future skill and daring in steamboating.<sup>5</sup>

The Black Hawk War brought a lull in river transportation. Only six steamboats dared to enter the lead district in 1832. Stillman's Run threw the entire Upper Mississippi Valley into panic, and *Galena*, gripped by fear, soon became an armed camp under martial law. Young Harris quickly enlisted as a lieutenant in Captain James W. Stephenson's regiment and was active throughout the war, participating in the decisive battle of Wisconsin Heights. He distinctly heard the Indians sue for peace following this struggle. "About daybreak the next morning", he relates, "the camp was alarmed by the clarion voice of the Prophet, from a hill nearly a mile away. At first, we thought it was an alarm, but soon found that the Prophet wanted peace. Although he was so far distant, I could distinctly hear every word, and I understood enough to know he did not want to fight. The interpreter reported that the Prophet said 'they had their squaws and children with them, and that they were starving, that they did not want to fight any more, and would do no more harm if they were

<sup>5</sup> *Miner's Journal* (Galena, Illinois), October 3, 1829; *Niles' Weekly Register*, Vol. LXIII (February 18, 1843), p. 388; Merrick's *Steamboats and Steamboatmen of the Upper Mississippi* in the *Burlington Post*, June 5, 1915, February 9, 1918; *Galena Gazette*, March 17, 1893.

allowed to cross the Mississippi in peace.''' The brutal massacre of women and children at Bad Axe a short time later is a dark page in the military annals of the United States. In 1893, two weeks before his death, Captain Harris received a pension for his services during the Black Hawk War.<sup>6</sup>

At the conclusion of the war, Harris decided to build a steamboat of his own. His experience under Captain Bates, his love for the river and the pulsing deck of a steamboat, a fairly substantial income from his mines, and the scarcity of boats in the trade probably induced him to return to steamboating. The sight of the hull of the keelboat *Colonel Bomford* near West Diggings, it is said, prompted him to construct a boat. Scribe was despatched to Cincinnati to purchase an engine and machinery, while Smith busied himself with putting the hull of the keel in shape and fitting it out with a cabin. Scribe discovered an old engine on a scrap-heap on the Cincinnati levee, drove a sharp bargain, and returned in triumph with his prize to Galena. During the winter the two brothers worked on their boat at a point called the Portage, three miles below Galena and about halfway to the mouth of the Fever River. In later years Harris built a canal across this narrow neck of land large enough for the biggest packets to go through. Harris Slough, as this canal is marked today on government charts, is a fitting memorial to the industry and activity of Daniel Smith Harris.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *The History of Lee County, Iowa* (Western Historical Company, Chicago, 1879), pp. 342-344; *Galena Gazette*, March 17, 1893.

<sup>7</sup> Merrick's *Steamboats and Steamboatmen of the Upper Mississippi* in the *Burlington Post*, September 9, 1916; *Map of the Mississippi River from the Falls of St. Anthony to the Junction of the Missouri River*. This map was prepared under the direction of Major G. M. Hoffman from maps of the Upper Mississippi River from St. Paul to Grafton based upon maps made under the direction of Major F. U. Farquhar and upon maps of the Mississippi River Commission (1915).

To be the builder and master of a steamboat at the age of twenty-five was no mean accomplishment, and young Harris could well be excused for viewing complacently the newly launched craft. All Galena rejoiced in the honor brought by her enterprising young citizen for it was the first steamboat built in the lead district and probably the first on the Upper Mississippi above Alton. The boat was named the *Jo Daviess* in honor of the county. According to her enrolment at the Port of St. Louis, the *Jo Daviess* was 90 feet 5 inches long, 15 $\frac{1}{4}$  inches beam, 2 feet hold, and measured 26 tons. She was a side-wheel boat with a transom stern, had a cabin above deck, and had no figure-head. Her flywheel was made of lead, the metal most accessible to Harris. Of the twenty-two steamboats docked at St. Louis in 1835 the *Jo Daviess* was the smallest, insignificant beside the *Great Mogul* which had a capacity of 700 tons.<sup>8</sup>

Almost as soon as Captain Harris had guided his craft out into the Mississippi he exhibited the audacious and venturesome nature which characterized him to the end. In July, 1834, the *Jo Daviess*, loaded to the guards with troops and military stores, ascended the Wisconsin River as far as the portage, and during the course of the summer she made two more trips to Fort Winnebago. Late that fall Captain Harris took a shipment of lead to St. Louis where he disposed of both cargo and craft and set out for Cincinnati to superintend the construction of a new boat.<sup>9</sup>

Even before the country along the banks of the Mississippi was partially occupied, restless pioneers were beginning to push their way up the tributary streams. Town

<sup>8</sup> *Enrolment of Vessels* (Collector of Customs Office, St. Louis), No. 21, July 7, 1835; *Galena Gazette*, March 17, 1893; *Missouri Republican*, May 23, 1835, quoted in *Niles' Weekly Register*, Vol. XLVIII (June 19, 1835), p. 250. Merrick declares the *Jo Daviess* was a side-wheeler.

<sup>9</sup> Merrick's *Steamboats and Steamboatmen of the Upper Mississippi* in the *Burlington Post*, September 9, 1916; *Galena Gazette*, March 17, 1893.

sites began to spring up, and settlers and speculators were anxiously waiting for steamboats. Shallow water, an unknown and deceptive channel, together with sparse settlement, all served to deter most captains from navigating unknown streams. But such obstacles were mere trifles to Captain Harris, and in 1836, two years after the voyage of the *Jo Daviess* up the Wisconsin, he piloted the *Frontier* up the Rock River as far as Dixon's Ferry.<sup>10</sup> This feat was hailed with delight throughout the Upper Mississippi Valley and Captain Harris was granted a lot at each town site along the Rock River by the grateful settlers and owners. In 1850 he piloted the *Dr. Franklin No. 2* up the Chippewa River to the mouth of the Menomonie, carrying goods for the Knapp and Wilson lumber camp on that stream. This was the first steamboat to go so far up the Chippewa and Captain Harris received one hundred dollars for making the trip.<sup>11</sup>

The first steamboat to enter the Minnesota River had been the *Rufus Putnam* in 1825, with Captain David G. Bates in command, but Harris's old master had ascended only one mile up that stream. In 1850, four excursions had been made up the Minnesota River, and Martin Keeler Harris, a younger brother of Captain Smith Harris, gained the distinction of reaching what is now Judson, in Blue Earth County. The people about St. Paul and in the Minnesota Valley hoped that a steamboat would penetrate still farther and the opportunity came in 1853 when Captain Harris's *West Newton* was selected to carry troops and government stores to the new post which later was named Fort Ridgely. "Of great strength and power, and in the hands of skillful men", observed an editor aboard the *West Newton*, "it was

<sup>10</sup> *Miner's Journal* (Galena, Illinois), July 3, 1830; *Northwestern Gazette and Galena Advertiser*, May 21, 1836.

<sup>11</sup> *Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul), April 25, 1850.



felt that if there were dangers and difficulties in the way of reaching the destined point, she would be better able to brave them than any other craft known in these waters". Two smaller boats, the *Tiger* and the *Clarion*, were sent ahead but were quickly overtaken and passed by the *West Newton*. "Soldiers and soldiers' baggage — soldiers' wives and soldiers' children — soldiers' stores and soldiers' equipment — soldiers' cattle and soldiers' dogs" were strewn about the *West Newton* from stem to stern. She also shoved a heavily loaded barge. The Minnesota River was at flood stage so the *West Newton* experienced little difficulty in ascending the snaky channel.

A week was required to make the round trip and Captain Harris was warmly praised for the success of the voyage. "His careful, quick, discerning eye, saw everything at a glance, and made all his calculations with a lightning velocity of thought; so that we struck no snags, collapsed no flue, and burst no boiler; though we did tear off the guards, throw down the pipes, and leave the cabin maid's washing of linen 'high and dry' on a tree, which bent down to receive the line." "This trip alone", wrote Harriet E. Bishop, an author who was aboard the *West Newton*, "would entitle Captain Harris to a wreath of fame".<sup>12</sup>

In 1858 Governor Henry Sibley of Minnesota presided at a banquet at St. Paul in honor of Captain Harris. The Governor eulogized the splendid work of Captain Harris in developing Minnesota and the Upper Mississippi Valley, hailing him as the senior commander then active on the upper river. But it was Captain Harris's work as the pioneer navigator of almost every tributary above the Des Moines Rapids that particularly impressed Sibley, and he empha-

<sup>12</sup> *The Minnesotian* (St. Paul), May 7, 1853; Petersen's *Early History of Steamboating on the Minnesota River* in *Minnesota History*, Vol. XI, pp. 123-144; Bishop's *Floral Homes; or, First Years of Minnesota*, pp. 298, 299.

sized the importance of the discovery of the head of navigation on such rivers as the Iowa and Maquoketa in Iowa, as well as the Minnesota River.<sup>13</sup>

After the sale of his first boat, the *Jo Daviess*, Harris acquired the *Hermione* and ran her throughout the season of 1835 when he disposed of her. For the next quarter century Captain Harris commanded almost a score of vessels and probably had a financial interest in as many more. This does not include the craft he became interested in as a member of the Minnesota Packet Company. In quick succession he captained, sometimes for a season, sometimes for only a trip or two, such boats as the *Frontier*, *Smelter*, *Pizarro*, *Pre-emption*, *Relief*, *Sutler*, *Otter*, *War Eagle* (first), *Time*, *Lightfoot*, *Senator*, *Doctor Franklin No. 2*, *New St. Paul*, *West Newton*, *War Eagle* (second), and the *Grey Eagle*. His restless energy was exhibited by his impatience with most of the steamboats he built or purchased. Only five seem to have been satisfactory enough for him to run them two or more seasons, although he ran the historic *Otter* for five years and sold the first and second *War Eagle* and the *Dr. Franklin No. 2* at the close of three seasons. The *West Newton* was snagged at the end of her second year. The *Grey Eagle*, the pride of the Upper Mississippi, served the gallant skipper from 1857 to 1861.<sup>14</sup>

To Captain Harris, the *sine qua non* in any steamboat was speed. The sight of a long, lean craft, as sleek and fast as a greyhound, delighted the picturesque skipper. In July, 1836, Harris ran the *Frontier* from St. Louis to Ga-

<sup>13</sup> *Daily Express and Herald* (Dubuque), April 2, 1858.

<sup>14</sup> Compilation of Mississippi boats prepared by the writer. Merrick's *Steamboats and Steamboatmen of the Upper Mississippi* in the *Burlington Post*, September 13, 1913, to December 6, 1919, is the most complete compilation accessible to the student, and the writer found it invaluable in compiling and checking against his own list which is based largely on contemporary newspapers and Collector of Customs records.

lena in three days and six hours, having stopped between twenty and thirty hours on the way up. The following year he astonished the mining district by making the trip between Dubuque and Cincinnati in the *Smelter* in five days. The return trip was made in exactly the same time.

It was not until 1845, however, that he brought out a boat which easily outraced all rivals. This was the first *War Eagle*, perhaps the swiftest boat to navigate the Upper Mississippi before 1850. She was built at Cincinnati in 1845 and was 152 feet long, 24 feet beam, 4½ feet hold, and measured 155 tons. Competition was exceedingly keen during 1845 and the *War Eagle* steamed back and forth between St. Louis and Galena at a terrific rate of speed, lowering her time each trip. The *St. Croix*, a trim and speedy craft, snapped at the *War Eagle's* heels for a time but gave up when the *War Eagle* ran from St. Louis to Galena in 43 hours and 52 minutes, a record which stood for many years. Some of the passengers on this trip expressed dissatisfaction with the treatment accorded them. Upon inquiry it was found that Captain Harris was too parsimonious with his meals, since only one dinner had been served on the trip. Further examination revealed that the *War Eagle* had left St. Louis after dinner on Tuesday and had reached Galena before noon on Thursday. The disgruntled passengers were informed that if they were traveling for dinners they would have to take a slower boat than the *War Eagle*.<sup>15</sup>

During 1852 the Minnesota Packet Company waged a bitter competitive battle with Captain Harris. Occasional voyages of the St. Louis and Keokuk Packet Company craft also proved annoying. Fearful of this new enemy,

<sup>15</sup> *Northwestern Gazette and Galena Advertiser*, July 9, 1836, March 28, April 25, May 30, 1845; *Iowa News* (Dubuque), June 10, July 15, 1837; *Enrolment of Vessels* (Collector of Customs Office, St. Louis), No. 14, March 5, 1845.

the Minnesota Packet Company took Harris into partnership at the close of the year. When the season of 1853 opened the St. Louis boats again made their appearance. The *Die Vernon* was groomed to run a special excursion to the Falls of St. Anthony as a challenge to the Minnesota Packet Company. Built at St. Louis in 1850 at a cost of \$50,000, the *Die Vernon* was 225 feet long, 31 feet 2 inches beam, 5 feet 9 inches hold, and measured 455 tons. She had over 100 berths and was more than a match for the *West Newton*. Captain Rufus Ford was in command.

The owners of the *Die Vernon* spared no expense to insure a victory. Twenty-five firemen were shipped aboard the *Die Vernon* to keep the boilers red hot and the ever watchful steward had a barrel of old butter — presumably for soap grease — but actually for extra fuel should the emergency arise. The *Die Vernon* left St. Louis on the afternoon of June 13th with her band blaring “Yankee Doodle”. Alton was reached in record time, and a sparkling wake was the answer to every boat which attempted to give her a brush. She reached Galena at dusk on the 15th. Determined to outrace the *Die Vernon* or blow up his boat in the attempt, Captain Harris purchased every bit of tar and rosin in Galena. Wood boats as far north as Winona were pledged to the popular skipper. When the *Die Vernon* backed out of Fever River the *West Newton* followed in her wake “blowing off steam and making more noise than a stalled freight train”. But half the “niggers” on the *Die Vernon* were hanging on the safety valves and she led the *West Newton* to Dubuque where she stopped for a few moments. The *West Newton* continued upstream and was soon out of sight. Captain Harris hoped to maintain the lead to Lake Pepin where a broad stretch of water twenty-two miles long would probably determine which boat was the faster and forecast the winner to St. Paul.

Captain Ford set out in hot pursuit, hoping to catch the *West Newton* before midnight. The *Die Vernon's* twenty-five firemen worked frantically throughout the night, being constantly plied with "whisky toddies to assist them in making steam". Potosi, Cassville, Prairie du Chien, Lansing, Brownsville, La Crosse — and still no *West Newton* in sight. Near Trempealeau, shortly after breakfast, Captain Ford finally sighted the *West Newton*. A bitter race ensued. Trembling under a terrific pressure of steam the *Die Vernon* slowly closed the gap between the boats although her safety valve was on the verge of blowing off. A few scant yards separated them when the *West Newton* landed to take on wood and surrendered the lead to the *Die Vernon*. Harris would still have had a chance to win had not Louis Robert, master of the *Greek Slave* and Harris's bitter enemy, succeeding in securing for the *Die Vernon* a wood boat that had been pledged to the *West Newton*. This was just a short distance above Winona and Captain Harris thus had his line of supply broken at the most crucial point in the race. The *West Newton* overtook the *Die Vernon* while she was towing the wood boat but passengers and crew quickly tossed the fuel aboard and cast the "flat" loose before the *West Newton* was able to forge ahead. The *Die Vernon* maintained her lead into St. Paul.

While he ran a gallant race against a faster boat, Harris took the defeat bitterly and departed from St. Paul without leaving the hurricane deck. The *Die Vernon* made a record run from St. Louis to St. Paul of 84 hours counting all stops. Her time from Dubuque was 28 hours for 265 miles or 9.4 miles per hour upstream. The *West Newton* averaged 9.1 miles per hour upstream from Galena to St. Paul, covering the 288 miles in 31 hours and 46 minutes. She returned to Galena in 21 hours and 7 minutes, aver-

aging 13.7 miles per hour downstream. It is perhaps as well that history does not record the fiery skipper's remarks when he learned how Louis Robert had tricked and probably beaten him.<sup>16</sup>

Discouraged at the outcome of his skirmish with the *Die Vernon*, Captain Harris went to Cincinnati at the close of the season and secured the second *War Eagle*. This beautiful and speedy craft led the fleet of boats which carried the famous Rock Island Railroad Excursion of 1854 from Rock Island to the Falls of St. Anthony. But a number of fast steamboats appeared on the Upper Mississippi that year and the *War Eagle* was sometimes forced to surrender the broom to them. This was too humiliating to Captain Harris and he determined to settle the question of speed for all time. His next boat, the *Grey Eagle*, was taken from a wooden model he himself had carved. Launched at Cincinnati in 1857, the *Grey Eagle* was 250 feet long, 35 feet beam, 5 feet hold, and measured 382 tons. She had four boilers, 42 inches by 16 feet. Her cylinders were 22 inches by 7 feet stroke. The wheels were 30 feet in diameter, with 10-foot buckets and 30-inch dip. A large grey eagle was painted on each wheelhouse. Possessed of beauty, speed, and grace, the *Grey Eagle* quickly outstripped her swiftest competitors, wrested the broom from the *Key City*, and became the acknowledged flagship of the Minnesota Packet Company.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Merrick's *Steamboats and Steamboatmen of the Upper Mississippi* in the *Burlington Post*, August 15, 22, 1914; *The Minnesotian* (St. Paul), June 18, 25, July 2, 1853; *The Minnesota Democrat* (St. Paul), June 10, July 22, 1853; *The Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul), June 3, 1852. The *Light List Upper Mississippi River and Tributaries*, Thirteenth District, Washington, 1930, gives the exact distances between the various ports as surveyed by the United States Engineers. Merrick says that the name of this boat was *Di Vernon*, but the official registration gives the name *Die Vernon*.

<sup>17</sup> *The Daily Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), May 5, 1857; *Merrick's Steamboats and Steamboatmen of the Upper Mississippi* in the *Burlington Post*, October 23, 30, November 6, 1915.

In 1858, Captain Harris performed the most brilliant exploit of his career in his race to St. Paul, carrying the message of Queen Victoria to President James Buchanan congratulating him on the successful laying of the Atlantic cable. At that time the telegraph lines extended to Dunleith and Prairie du Chien and the *Grey Eagle* was scheduled to leave Dunleith at the same time the *Itasca* was leaving Prairie du Chien. Captain Harris determined to celebrate the occasion by beating Captain David Whitten into St. Paul with the news. In order to do this it was necessary to run the *Grey Eagle* 265 miles while the *Itasca* was traveling 200 miles. This was no easy task, since the *Itasca* was a swift boat that had been hanging up records for fast time.<sup>18</sup>

When the *Grey Eagle* left Dunleith at 8:30 A. M. on August 17, 1858, she carried copies of the Dubuque and Galena papers containing the Queen's message:

Her Majesty desires to congratulate the President upon the successful completion of the Great International Work in which the Queen has taken the deepest interest.

The Queen is convinced that the President will join her in fervently hoping that the electric cable, which now connects Great Britain with the United States, will prove an additional link between the nations, whose friendship is founded upon their common interest and reciprocal esteem. The Queen has much pleasure in thus communicating with the President, and returning to him her best wishes for the prosperity of the United States.

Victoria.<sup>19</sup>

Every bit of combustible material—pitch, butter, and grease—that could be obtained was aboard the *Grey Eagle*. The boat responded nobly to the extra fuel, sped

<sup>18</sup> Wilson's *Telegraph Pioneering in The Palimpsest*, Vol. VI (November, 1925), pp. 373-393; *Daily Express and Herald* (Dubuque), August 17, 1858; *Light List Upper Mississippi and Tributaries*, Thirteenth District, Washington, 1930.

<sup>19</sup> *Daily Minnesotian* (St. Paul), August 20, 1858.

swiftly up Maquoketa Chute, past Cassville, Guttenberg, Prairie du Chien, La Crosse, and reached Winona, one hundred and fifty miles above Dunleith, at about 9:30 P. M. The *Itasca* had arrived just three and one-half hours before, so that her nine hour lead had been reduced by almost two-thirds despite the fact that the *Grey Eagle* had towed a wood flat for twenty miles. After a twenty minute delay at Winona the *Grey Eagle* continued upstream, so far ahead of schedule that Captain Harris ordered a deck hand to stand on the stage and heave the mail to the bank as the boat went by at half speed. Freight was discharged only where necessary and many of the passengers, induced by a generous offer of free meals and berth and moved by a desire to be a party to what already promised to be a record-breaking run, agreed to remain on board.

At 4 A. M. the next day, the *Grey Eagle* came snorting up to the Red Wing levee, sixty-five miles above Winona and only fifty miles from St. Paul. The *Itasca* had not stopped at Red Wing, thereby gaining several precious minutes on Captain Harris's boat. Fire brands streamed from the funnels of the *Grey Eagle* as she continued upstream, past Cannon River, Vermilion Slough, Sturgeon Lake, Diamond Bluff, and on to Prescott at the mouth of the St. Croix. The *Itasca* blew for Hastings, just two and one-half miles away, as the *Grey Eagle* came up to the Prescott levee. Mail and freight were dumped pell mell on the levee, and the boat whisked by Point Douglas and over to Hastings in time to see the smoke of the *Itasca* disappear around the bend of the river about two miles upstream.

When Captain Whitten discerned the smoke of a racing boat hard astern it did not take that shrewd Yankee long to guess the reason for this haste. He promptly ordered the engineer to crowd on every pound of steam possible.



Just below Pine Bend the astonished master of the *Itasca* saw the *Grey Eagle* poke her nose around a curve a mile away, running almost ten hours ahead of her regular schedule. At Merrimac Island the distance was reduced to three-quarters of a mile, at Newport a half mile intervened, Red Rock found the *Grey Eagle* a hundred yards closer. Kaposia, Pig's Eye, Dayton Bluff, and a boat's length separated the two boats. One mile further and they would be in St. Paul.

The frenzied passengers and crew of the *Grey Eagle* cheered madly as the gap slowly closed and the bow of their boat drew abreast of the *Itasca's* stern. But the latter had the inside track and in the next quarter of a mile it was clear that Captain Harris could not hope to reach the levee first. In the succeeding minute, the two boats drew almost neck to neck, with whistles blowing and cannon booming, but the *Itasca* nosed into the wharf first and her crew commenced putting out the stage. The *Grey Eagle* glided along side with a deck hand perched on the swinging stage, a number of papers fastened into the notch of an arrow of wood. The next instant they were cast into the arms of Harris's agent on the dock. Captain Harris made the run from Dunleith to St. Paul in 24 hours and 40 minutes, making 23 landings, and taking on 35 cords of wood en route. His average speed, counting all stops, was a fraction over eleven miles an hour upstream but the *Grey Eagle* probably ran thirteen miles an hour while under way. This was the fastest time ever made by a steamboat and eclipsed the *Die Vernon's* record of 1853 by over three hours.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Daily Express and Herald* (Dubuque), August 17, 20, 21, 1858; *The Dubuque Daily Times*, August 21, 1858; *National Democrat* (La Crosse, Wisconsin), August 24, 1858; *The Winona Republican*, August 25, 1858; *Red Wing Republican*, August 20, 1858; *Transcript* (Prescott, Wisconsin), August 21, 1858; *Daily Minnesotian* (St. Paul), August 19, 20, 1858; *St. Paul Daily Times*, August 19, 1858.

When the *Grey Eagle* was shifted to the St. Louis and St. Paul trade, Captain Harris was promptly challenged by Captain Scott Matson of the *Hannibal City*. The ensuing match, according to an observer, was the "fastest, closest, and most exciting race ever run on the upper Mississippi". Leaving St. Louis half an hour ahead of the *Grey Eagle*, the *Hannibal City* beat Captain Harris's boat into Keokuk by a few minutes. In exact running time, however, the *Grey Eagle* made the trip in 15 hours and 40 minutes, a record that stands to this day.<sup>21</sup>

Besides these colorful races, Captain Harris established other records for fast time. The first *War Eagle* sped from Galena to St. Louis in 33 hours while the *Grey Eagle*, in 1858, made the run from St. Paul to Galena in 21 hours and 15 minutes. Although the latter was 8 minutes slower than the *West Newton's* time in 1853, the *Grey Eagle* laid over 50 minutes at both Prairie du Chien and La Crosse and stopped an average length of time at all other landings. Her time would therefore appear to be considerably better. Both these marks were considerably better than that of the *Key City* which ran from St. Paul to Dubuque in an even 21 hours. The *Key City's* record of 25 hours and 38 minutes between Dubuque and St. Paul also pales before the *Grey Eagle's* time of 24 hours and 40 minutes. Moreover, at the same time that the *Key City* made this record, in May, 1858, the *Grey Eagle* slashed it by steaming from Dubuque to St. Paul in 24 hours and 11 minutes. This feat probably induced Captain Harris to make his race against time with Queen Victoria's message. Late in 1850 the *Dr. Franklin No. 2* made the run from Galena to St. Paul by way of Stillwater in 34 hours elapsed time. Since the round trip from Prescott to Stillwater was 47

<sup>21</sup> Merrick's *Steamboats and Steamboatmen of the Upper Mississippi* in the *Burlington Post*, November 6, 1915.

miles the *Dr. Franklin No. 2* made considerably better time than did the *West Newton* in her race against the *Die Vernon*.<sup>22</sup>

The opening of navigation was a big event in the life of every river town, large or small. Isolated throughout the long winter months from trade and regular communication with the country below, with only fragmentary news despatches trickling through from the outside world, each embryonic frontier community hailed with enthusiasm that captain who could bring his craft into port first and the event remained the topic of the day for weeks. Later, in the fifties and sixties, the larger towns granted free wharfage during the ensuing year to the first arrival, an item of no mean significance. The captain who gained this laurel was always certain of added popularity.

The *ultima thule* of spring navigation was St. Paul, situated at the head of navigation on the Upper Mississippi. From 1844 to 1861 inclusive, Captain Harris battered his way through ice-choked Lake Pepin seven times to win the much sought laurel. No other steamboat captain could approach this astonishing performance. When one recalls that a score of steamboats sometimes lay at the foot of the lake waiting for the ice to go out, this feat becomes all the more unique.

In 1844 Harris was the first captain to arrive at St. Paul, reaching the city with the *Otter* on April 6th. He repeated this performance in 1845 with the same boat, and, curiously enough, on the same date. In 1848, the *Senator* was first, arriving on April 7th. The following year the *Dr. Franklin No. 2*<sup>23</sup> arrived on April 9th, while in 1853 the *West*

<sup>22</sup> *Galena Daily Advertiser*, May 18, 1849; *Galena Advertiser*, June 21, 1859; *The Morning Sun* (Dubuque), June 22, 1859; *The Minnesotian* (St. Paul), June 25, 1853; *Daily Express and Herald* (Dubuque), May 6, August 21, 1858; *The Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul), August 15, 1850.

<sup>23</sup> Blakeley, basing his statement on data received from Philander Prescott,

*Newton* led the way to St. Paul with a considerable number of passengers and a large freight cargo. Two years later the *War Eagle* dashed into port with colors flying and cannons roaring while all St. Paul turned out to greet the gallant skipper. His last victory was hung up in 1858, when the *Grey Eagle* came screeching up past Pig's Eye on the 25th of March, the earliest arrival on record. His nearest rivals at this wild sport of playing checkers with frozen ice-cakes were Orrin Smith and John Atchison. Both managed to gain the laurel twice during this period, a record which pales before the seven victories hung up by Captain Harris. A list of the steamboats which arrived first at St. Paul for the years 1844 to 1861 follows:

<i>Captain</i>	<i>Boat</i>	<i>Date of Arrival</i>	<i>River Closed</i>
D. S. Harris	Otter	April 6, 1844	Nov. 23
D. S. Harris	Otter	April 6, 1845	Nov. 26
John Atchison	Lynx	March 31, 1846	Dec. 5
J. Throckmorton	Cora	April 7, 1847	Nov. 29
D. S. Harris	Senator	April 7, 1848	Dec. 4
D. S. Harris	Dr. Franklin No. 2	April 9, 1849	Dec. 7
John Atchison	Highland Mary	April 9, 1850	Dec. 4
Orrin Smith	Nominee	April 4, 1851	Nov. 28
Orrin Smith	Nominee	April 16, 1852	Nov. 18
D. S. Harris	West Newton	April 11, 1853	Nov. 30
Russell Blakeley	Nominee	April 8, 1854	Nov. 27
D. S. Harris	War Eagle	April 17, 1855	Nov. 20
M. E. Lucas	Lady Franklin	April 18, 1856	Nov. 10
W. H. Laughton	Galena	May 1, 1857	Nov. 14
D. S. Harris	Grey Eagle	March 25, 1858	Nov. 16
Jones Worden	Key City	April 20, 1859	Nov. 29
John Cochrane	Milwaukee	March 28, 1860	Nov. 23
N. F. Webb	Ocean Wave	April 8, 1861	Nov. 26

The opening of navigation in 1849 was peculiarly dra-

the Indian interpreter at Fort Snelling, says the *Highland Mary* arrived first in 1849, but the *Minnesota Pioneer* of April 28, 1849, credits the *Dr. Franklin No. 2* with the victory.

matic. Fettered for nearly five months by ice-locked Lake Pepin, the tiny settlement about St. Paul anxiously awaited the arrival of the first steamboat. During the winter, mail had been brought up occasionally by dog or horse train but the news was already old. Late in January word of the election of Zachary Taylor had arrived and it was hoped that the first steamboat would bring word of the creation of the Territory of Minnesota. Some concern was also felt over the appointment of the first Territorial Governor. The afternoon of April 9, 1849, was pleasant, the river was clear of ice, but still no steamboat had yet appeared at the St. Paul wharf.

But Captain Harris was nearing St. Paul with the *Dr. Franklin No. 2* loaded with immigrants who watched with awe a violent thunderstorm that had begun at dusk. As the steamboat rounded the bend a vivid flash of lightning revealed her presence to those ashore. "In an instant the welcome news flashed like electricity, throughout the town. All were on the *qui vive*, and regardless of the pelting rain, the raging wind, and the pealing thunder, almost the entire male population rushed to the landing—hundreds clustered on the shore unmindful of the storm as the fine steamboat *Dr. Franklin No. 2* dashed gallantly up to the landing."

The moment the boat's stage touched the shore the news-hungry "boarders" scrambled up, brushing aside the deck hands and immigrants who were about to come ashore. Captain Daniel Smith Harris and his officers were the men of the hour. According to an observer "the barkeeper had need of the arms of Briareus, the eye of Argus, and the tongues of Rumor, to satisfy the demands, made upon him. At length the news was known and one glad shout resounding through the boat, taken up on shore, and echoed from our beetling bluffs and rolling hills, proclaimed that the

Bill for the organization of Minnesota Territory had become a law."<sup>24</sup>

Spring navigation implies an open river to the rear. But steamboating at the close of the season was usually more hazardous because of the danger of being caught in the vise-like jaws of a freezing river. Should this take place the boat must be left behind, and the men return overland. Captain Harris exhibited his usual skill and daring at this novel gamble with winter. On November 15, 1836, he steamed out of Fever River with the *Science*, the last boat to depart that year. In 1840 the *Otter* left Galena on November 25th and the following year the same sturdy little craft buffeted her way out of frozen Fever River on November 22nd. This feat, together with her arrival first at the St. Paul levee in 1844 and 1845, gives the *Otter* and her daring master a singularly unique record.

In 1845 Captain Harris lost an exciting race with the ice and was forced to run the first *War Eagle* into winter quarters near Rock Island. Three years later Lake Pepin almost caught the *Senator* in its hoary paw. "Ten years ago, the eleventh of this month", relates the *Glencoe Register* of November 24, 1858, in commenting on this incident, "navigation closed on the Mississippi above the foot of Lake Pepin. Franklin Steele, Esq., who at that time supplied most of the then Territory of Minnesota with goods and provisions, had a whole cargo frozen up on the 9th at the head of Lake Pepin, in the old steamer Senator, Capt. Harris. It was with the utmost difficulty that the Senator worked her way through the Lake on the 10th".<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *The Daily Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), November 18, 1858; Blakeley's *History of the Discovery of the Mississippi and the Advent of Commerce in Minnesota* in the *Minnesota Historical Society Collections*, Vol. VIII, p. 413; *The Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul), April 28, 1849; *The Herald* (Dubuque), December 21, 1866.

<sup>25</sup> *Northwestern Gazette and Galena Advertiser*, December 3, 1836, November

The last trip of the season presented many dangers and hardships. It was difficult to secure a full crew to make the trip and fabulous wages were often paid because the extremely rigorous climate and the possibility of returning on foot through a desolate, Indian-infested, snow-covered country deterred all but the adventurous. But merchants and travelers were usually glad to pay double and triple the usual rates on the last trip of the season, and captains often made an extra profit. On one occasion the Minnesota Packet Company learned that a large amount of freight still remained on the upper river and sent Captain Harris to get it. Although he was ready to put the *War Eagle* into winter quarters and was incensed because some other captain had not been despatched, Harris steamed out of Fever River and proceeded up the Mississippi in the face of a biting wind. He refused to be governed by the prevailing tariff rates, however. "Now you keep your hands off", he declared to the Packet officials on departing, "and I'll make some money this trip".

The *War Eagle* reached Hastings, Minnesota, but an ice-locked river ahead and a rapidly freezing river below forced him to turn back. Freight and passengers were found in abundance at almost every port, the hoarse whistle of the *War Eagle* on the cold, frosty air sounding a cheerful note to belated passengers and shippers. Four days after her departure the *War Eagle* came shivering up the Fever River. Upon boarding the boat to extend their congratulations, the Packet officials found Captain Harris gloomy and disconsolate. Inquiry finally revealed that Harris had set out to make \$10,000 on the trip and had "cleaned up only \$9,700". It was his failure to reach his goal and establish a record and not the loss of a few hun-

24, 1841, February 17, 1846; *Tri-Weekly Galena Gazette and Advertiser*, January 9, 1844. Minnesota Territory was not legally created until March, 1849.

dred dollars which wounded the pride of the ambitious captain.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the fact that he had bitterly denounced Captain Harris and the Minnesota Packet Company, a hostile editor could not refrain from paying a tribute to the popular skipper. "The steamer War Eagle", notes the *Winona Republican* of November 24, 1858, "came up as far as La Crosse on last Friday morning, having on board a large quantity of goods, and a considerable number of passengers, for Winona, and towns in the interior, but her captain (A. T. Kingman) being somewhat afraid of the floating ice, would not proceed any further. Her cargo was accordingly discharged at La Crosse. If the War Eagle had been in command of the resolute Captain Harris, the ice of last Friday morning would not have prevented *him* from making this port".

Known and beloved for his skill and daring throughout the Upper Mississippi Valley, Captain Harris seldom let his enthusiasm interfere with the stern reality of steamboating. His boats were steady and dependable and pioneers placed the utmost faith and reliance in his work. "Last night we came upon a shoal but we didn't stick", wrote a belated traveler aboard the *Dr. Franklin No. 2* in November, 1849. "The boat walked right over on stilts. The chandeliers rattled as though we were stumbling over the hump of an earthquake. Woke at 6 and found the Franklin in bed with the Yankee under a lee bluff. The Franklin was discharging upon the Yankee a few bbls of pork. . . . The Franklin pays her wood bills in pork".<sup>27</sup>

In 1841 the *Otter* made fifteen trips from Galena to St. Louis, towing nine keelboats up the river during the sea-

<sup>26</sup> Merrick's *Steamboats and Steamboatmen of the Upper Mississippi* in the *Burlington Post*, November 1, 1919.

<sup>27</sup> *The Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul), November 8, 15, 1849.



son. At its close, the receipts were found to be \$15,000 from freight and \$7000 from passengers. Her small size and light draught enabled the *Otter* to ply the Mississippi at all seasons of the year, so that when navigation closed she had cleared an amount equal to over four times her value. During 1842, Captain Harris made eleven trips with the *Otter*, towed six keelboats, and cleared \$13,000 on freight and passengers. During 1843, a rate war developed and freight was carried for less than half the price of former years. Nineteen times during the season, the *Otter* forced her way out of Fever River with her keels and lower deck creaking under the heavy lead freight and with passengers crowding the upper decks. When the boat was laid up for the winter in the slough near Galena, her profits for the season were found to be only \$6000 on freight and \$4000 on passengers. Had the rates of 1841 been in force, Captain Harris would have cleared close to \$30,000, while a profit of almost \$45,000 would have resulted from the low water rate of 1839.<sup>28</sup>

When the lead traffic waned, Harris sought other sources of revenue. No other form of diversion brought more enjoyment and better returns than a trip to the Falls of St. Anthony, designated by George Catlin as the "Fashionable Tour". Early in May, 1837, Harris informed citizens of Galena, Dubuque, and Belmont, that he would make a trip to the Falls of St. Anthony in the *Smelter* if a sufficient number of passengers presented themselves. Realizing that tourists would patronize only those boats which offered the best facilities, Harris had built private state-rooms in the *Smelter*, a speedy side-wheeler launched at Cincinnati in the spring of 1837. The boat was described as the fastest, most luxurious, and largest craft on the Upper Mississippi, and the colorful skipper "greatly de-

<sup>28</sup> *Senate Documents*, 28th Congress, 1st Session, Document 242, p. 8.

lighted in her speed, decorated her gaily with evergreens, and (when) rounding to at landings, or meeting with other boats, fired a cannon from her prow to announce her imperial presence". Each new boat had some innovations. Thus, the *Pizarro*, built in 1839 at a cost of \$16,000, boasted a fire engine and hose attached to her main engine.<sup>29</sup>

Increasing competition in the excursion trade forced captains to offer more inducements to passengers each year. Captain Harris realized the necessity of allowing a sufficient length of time at historic spots and apprised the citizens of Dubuque of an excursion to the Falls of St. Anthony in an announcement which included the following:

The War Eagle is a new and Splendid Boat, and will be two weeks making the trip. Capt. Harris intends to make a pleasure excursion in *reality*, and will stop at all places of curiosity or amusement as long as the passengers may desire. A Band of Music will be on Board. Strangers and Travelers will have a fine opportunity of visiting one of the most beautiful and romantic countries in the world. *For Freight or Passage, apply on board.*<sup>30</sup>

His activity in the lead traffic and excursion trips, together with the profits derived from the Indians, the missionaries, the fur traders, and the soldiers, gave Harris a preëminent position among his fellow steamboatmen. By 1840 he and his brother Scribe were sole owners of the *Otter* and possessed a large interest in the *Pre-emption* which Scribe commanded. The firm of Glasgow, Shaw, & Larkins of St. Louis and Block and McCune of Louisiana, Missouri, shared with the Harris brothers in the earnings of the *Pre-emption*.<sup>31</sup> Supported by such well-known mer-

<sup>29</sup> *Northwestern Gazette and Galena Advertiser*, April 22, May 13, 1837, April 22, 1839; Folsom's *Fifty Years in the Northwest* (St. Paul, 1888), p. 689; *Enrolment of Vessels* (Collector of Customs Office, Cincinnati), No. 20, March 27, 1839.

<sup>30</sup> *Miners Express* (Dubuque), June 25, 1845.

<sup>31</sup> *Enrolment of Vessels* (Collector of Customs Office, Cincinnati), Nos. 14

cantile houses, Captain Harris had little to fear when competition threatened.

It was not long, however, before Captain Harris gained the enmity — and also the wholesome respect — of Hercules L. Dousman, the agent for the American Fur Company at Prairie du Chien. Fearful of Harris's aggressive character, Dousman often wrote Henry Sibley, his associate at Mendota, urging him to trade with such captains as Joseph Throckmorton or John Atchison. When the steamboat *Lynx* sank in 1844, Captain Harris expressed a desire to acquire a share in her when raised. "I believe it is the best thing we can do", wrote the cautious Dousman to Sibley, "provided he comes in on the *same terms* as we do & makes up our share of the loss — that is the amt we will be deficient on the Boat to be added to what she will sell for at auction & each party take half — say Harris half, Steele & you one sixth — Brisbois same & me the same". Such a plan evidently did not appeal to Captain Harris for he remained outside the circle and continued to ply in the St. Peter's trade in opposition to the American Fur Company boats. When Throckmorton proposed that a line be formed between St. Louis and Mendota, Dousman wrote Sibley: "I am in favor of it & shall encourage him to do so, as it will be a benefit to the Outfit & hurt the Harris's which I desire very much."<sup>32</sup>

The sinking of the *Argo* in the fall of 1847 had led to the formation of the Minnesota Packet Company. During the following winter Captain M. W. Lodwick went to Cincinnati, Ohio, with clerk Russell Blakeley and purchased the *Dr. Franklin*. Built at Wheeling, Virginia, in 1847, the

and 16, March 10, 17, 1844; *Enrolment of Vessels* (Collector of Customs Office, St. Louis), No. 25, March 17, 1844.

<sup>32</sup> Letters from Hercules L. Dousman to Henry Hastings Sibley, May 3, November 20, 1844, March 30, May 9, 1845, in *Sibley Papers*, in possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

new boat was 156 feet long, 24 feet beam, 4 feet 2 inches hold, and measured 149 tons. Her original owners were Orrin Smith and B. H. Campbell [of the firm of Campbell and Smith], Henry Corwith, M. W. Lodwick, and Russell Blakeley, while H. L. Dousman, Brisbois, and Rice, and H. H. Sibley acquired shares in her a little later. From this humble beginning there gradually evolved through a series of kaleidoscopic changes the Northwestern Union Packet Company, the greatest monopoly on the Upper Mississippi.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile Captain Harris had been running his boats on the Upper Mississippi and its tributaries. The heavy lead traffic between Galena and St. Louis engaged most of his time but when lead was scarce he often plied on the Mississippi and its tributaries as far north as St. Peter's and Stillwater. In the spring of 1848, however, when Harris withdrew from the lead trade the Packet Company insisted that he remain on the lower river. Highly incensed, Harris took up arms against the new group, running the *Senator* in opposition to the *Dr. Franklin*. After a spirited contest, in which business was "lively, if not profitable", Harris agreed to sell the *Senator* to the Packet Company and remain in the lead trade during 1849.

The creation of the Territory of Minnesota on March 3, 1849, and its attendant influx of immigrants lent a new aspect to the situation and Captain Harris determined to return to the St. Paul trade. The ink on the new bill had hardly dried when Captain Harris appeared at the Galena levee with the *Dr. Franklin No. 2*. She was built at Wheeling in 1848 by Captain John McClure, 173' x 26' 6" x 4' 4", and measured 189 tons. She was a finer, better, and speed-

<sup>33</sup> *Enrolment of Vessels* (Collector of Customs Office, St. Louis), No. 33, March 16, 1848; Blakeley's *History of the Discovery of the Mississippi and the Advent of Commerce in Minnesota* in the *Minnesota Historical Society Collections*, Vol. VIII, pp. 381-388; *Dubuque Herald*, May 3, 1866.

ier boat than either the old *Doctor Franklin* or the *Senator* and Captain Harris took a special delight in tormenting and annoying his opponents. Upon leaving a port he would run alongside his rival, allowing passengers and crew to fling taunts at those aboard the slower craft. As the next port hove in sight he would dash ahead and pick up the lion's share of the freight and passengers offered. Since the *Senator* was an exceptionally slow boat she lost much trade, the fickle public generally preferring the faster craft.<sup>34</sup>

The "*Old Doctor*", however, was almost a match for the *Dr. Franklin No. 2* and Captain Harris usually had to keep the *Dr. Franklin No. 2* in fine trim in order to hold his advantage. Once, in May of 1851, while these two boats were engaged in tearing up the river bed in a port to port race to St. Paul, Captain Harris found himself hard pressed to maintain his lead. Indeed, when no freight or passengers were offered, he was several times obliged to swing out the stage and discharge a willing and nimble passenger while his boat was moving under a slow bell.

Noting that his rival's boat lacked her usual speed, Captain M. W. Lodwick rang for a full head of steam and momentarily threatened to pass the *Dr. Franklin No. 2*. Captain Harris frustrated these attempts at first by swinging the stern of his craft across the path of the "*Old Doctor*", forcing her to reverse to avoid a collision. Once the two *Dr. Franklins* almost crashed, skillful piloting and full speed astern on the part of the "*Old Doctor*" alone preventing a catastrophe. Incensed by these persistent and well-nigh successful attempts to wrest the lead from him,

<sup>34</sup> *Enrolment of Vessels* (Collector of Customs Office, St. Louis), No. 44, April 4, 1849; Blakeley's *History of the Discovery of the Mississippi and the Advent of Commerce in Minnesota* in the *Minnesota Historical Society Collections*, Vol. VIII, pp. 381, 382; *The Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul), May 2, August 1, 15, 1850.

Captain Harris sprang from the pilot house to the hurricane deck brandishing a rifle, forced the pilot of the "*Old Doctor*" to back into the brush, and threatened to shoot if another attempt was made. His rash act and refusal to give way was bitterly denounced in the St. Paul press in a statement signed by those aboard the "*Old Doctor*".<sup>35</sup>

For three years this bitter, ruinous struggle between the Minnesota Packet Company and Captain Harris continued. Both sides had loyal friends and the fight was not confined to the participants, for merchants and settlers from Galena to St. Paul joined in the fray. Rates were reduced to a ridiculous figure, travelers often paying fifty cents for passage from Galena to St. Paul. "The boats continue to come loaded with passengers", declared the *Minnesota Pioneer* of July 22, 1852, "many of them seeking only recreation. Boats are crowded down and up. Some travel for the sake of economy and save the expense of tavern bills at home. Who that is idle would be caged up between walls of burning brick and mortar; in dog-days, down the river, if at less daily expense, he could be hurried through the valley of the Mississippi, its shores studded with towns and farms, flying by islands, prairies, woodlands, bluffs — an ever varied scene of beauty, away up into the lands of the wild Dakota, and of cascades and pine forests, and cooling breezes?"<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *The Minnesota Democrat* (St. Paul), May 27, 1851.

<sup>36</sup> *The Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul), July 1, 22, 29, 1852; Blakeley's *History of the Discovery of the Mississippi and the Advent of Commerce in Minnesota* in the *Minnesota Historical Society Collections*, Vol. VIII, pp. 388, 389. The following is typical: "The West Newton and the Nominee, both crowded with passengers arrived at St. Paul Tuesday night, at about the same minute, in a strife all the way up. The old Nominee tucked up her petticoats and the way she did leg it through, kept the West Newton at the top of her speed. We regret that this competition is reaching to such a pitch — or in fact that it should reach *any* pitch. Let the lines both live and work at fair prices, without any such strife. It will be better and safer for them and the public".

Both sides finally saw that there was plenty of business for both, that hundreds were enjoying transportation for 50 cents a trip, when \$8.00 would have offered a fair return, and that continuance of the competition would result in utter ruin. Fully aware of the value of Captain Harris's coöperation, the Minnesota Packet Company invited him to join them, and shortly afterwards the name of Daniel Smith Harris was listed as a director. Had the fighting skipper failed in this struggle he would have been forced out of the St. Paul trade and ultimately been driven from the Upper Mississippi. Luckily, a steady income from his lead mines tided him through several bad seasons.<sup>37</sup>

Despite his affiliation with the Minnesota Packet Company Captain Harris continued to manifest his extreme individuality. In 1856 a rate war arose between the Packet Company and the large number of "wild boats" which plied the Upper Mississippi. As usual a number of cities and individuals promptly joined in the struggle, Winona being particularly vigorous in its opposition to the monopoly. The *Tishomingo* was purchased to run between Dunleith and Winona. In the hope that his popularity would soothe any ill-feelings arising out of the competition, Cap-

<sup>37</sup> *Daily Express and Herald* (Dubuque), January 15, 1859. The following list of the freight and passenger tariffs on the river boats for 1858 and 1859 was given in *The Weekly Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), April 21, 1859:

From Galena, Dubuque, and Dunleith to	Passenger fare		Freight per hundred	
	1858	1859	1858	1859
McGregor and Prairie du Chien.....	\$3.00	\$2.50	\$.20	\$.10
Lansing .....	3.50	2.75	.22	.15
La Crosse .....	4.50	3.50	.25	.15
Dacotah and Trempealeau.....	4.50	3.75	.26	.15
Winona .....	5.00	4.00	.27	.15
Fountain City .....	5.50	4.50	.28	.15
Reed's Landing .....	6.00	5.00	.30	.15
Red Wing .....	7.00	5.50	.31	.20
Prescott and Hastings.....	7.50	5.75	.33	.20
St. Paul .....	8.00	6.00	.35	.20

tain Harris was chosen to run his *War Eagle* against the *Tishomingo*. A test soon came which the fiery captain provoked himself.

One day the *War Eagle* came over from Dubuque to Dunleith and in landing tore away a portion of the guard of the *Tishomingo* which lay taking on freight and passengers. Standing on the hurricane deck unmoved by the incident, Captain Harris calmly announced that passage to Winona aboard his boat would cost but fifty cents. These two acts drew a storm of protest, La Crosse and Dubuque joining with Winona against the Galena monopoly. "Don't travel on the Galena boats unless you make a positive bargain before hand, and to avoid being swindled don't travel with them at all", declared a paper, after three men had been charged \$4.00 each for passage between La Crosse and Winona. About the same time the *War Eagle* landed one hundred barrels of flour on the Winona levee and Captain Harris instructed his agents to "sell it if they could, and if they could not dispose of it, to start a Bakery!" "The offer to carry freight on board the foul bird of prey War Eagle for a trifle was promptly refused by our business men, stating to the runner that they would give all their trade to the *Tishomingo*", observed *The Winona Republican* of May 20, 1856. "The opposition", it continued, "is not alone against our boat, but is against the merchants — our best class of men, who have for years been building up a trade — and now that they are commencing to reap the fruits of their labors, Galena comes in Eagle-eyed for a large share of what is justly the due of our dealers." It was generally felt that the "noble *Tish*" could not be driven away by the *War Eagle*, even by offers to carry goods at 10 cents per hundred. Despite Winona's slogan that the *War Eagle* "shall and will not be patronized", despite the fact that 25 barrels of flour which the *War Eagle*



landed at the levee were destroyed and 50 others rolled in the river and damaged, Captain Harris retained his old time fame and popularity.<sup>38</sup>

It was not merely while in the pursuit of business that Captain Harris exhibited a pugnacious spirit. Hailed by the press for their gentlemanly deportment, one might readily assume that steamboat captains had acquired their cultural training at the Court of St. James before applying for their license. Such an assumption would be entirely erroneous. As chief architect and builder of an empire in the Middle Border, the steamboat captain was a component part of the frontier where men were men first, and sometimes, though perhaps not always, gentlemen afterwards. In the ordinary civilities of his profession Captain Harris was doubtless equal to any other man on the Upper Mississippi, but he had a fiery temper and he was especially vindictive to those who persisted in attacking him.

During 1857 the editor of the *St. Paul Daily Pioneer and Democrat* had made bitter recriminations against the Packet Company. One hot day in July, W. A. Croffut, the assistant editor of the *St. Paul Daily Times*, a paper friendly to Harris and the Packet Company, boarded the *Grey Eagle* to write a letter. Mistaking Croffut for the editor of the unfriendly paper, Captain Harris approached, called him a scoundrel, and "swearing great, round oaths, that he didn't want him to come aboard his boat" ordered him off. Astonished at such violent language, Croffut demanded an explanation and inquired if the *Grey Eagle* was not public to all who chose to come aboard. This was too much. Seizing Croffut by the collar Harris dragged him to the stairway and kicked him down to the lower deck. Following immediately he took another hold and "swear-

<sup>38</sup> *The Winona Republican*, May 20, 27, June 3, 10, 17, 1856; *Shakopee Independent*, June 18, 1856.

ing most profanely all the time, dragged him out upon the wharf, and there left him and returned to his boat". Unable to offer any resistance, the unfortunate Croffut was "bruised considerably, but had no bones broken". Harris was arrested, brought before a magistrate, and, acknowledging the assault, was fined "*ten dollars and costs*". The incident was a matter of deep regret to Captain Harris but no apology could placate the "bruised" pride of Mr. Croffut.<sup>39</sup>

Captain Harris, on the other hand, often demonstrated a touching generosity to his fellowmen and was ever willing to aid the poor and distressed. An old man, driven from his daughter's home at Fort Madison, sought and received passage to Louisville, Kentucky, aboard the *Smelter*. The thought of a lonely life in Kentucky broke the old man's heart and he died a short distance below Alton. Captain Harris had the old man decently interred and no charge was made on the cabin register. Again, in 1852, the *West Newton* picked up two ministers of the gospel at Rollingstone, Minnesota. Both were astonished at the terrific speed of the boat. "She fairly danced with us like a Nymph upon the waves", wrote one, "everything about the boat in general, and the table in particular, was in perfect '*apple-pie order*'. When we called at the Clerk's office to pay our fare, on learning our profession, he very gentlemanly remarked, 'Nothing to pay Sir!' to which, of course, we did not object; but for the favor were *truly thankful*. May other clergymen be equally favored."<sup>40</sup>

Captain Harris's sentimental attachment to his boat elicited the following comment from the *Daily Minnesotian*: "The Grey Eagle and her Commander, Capt. Harris, both

<sup>39</sup> *The Daily Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), July 15, 1857.

<sup>40</sup> *Northwestern Gazette and Galena Advertiser*, July 15, 1837; *The Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul), July 29, 1852.

sustained a sad and irreparable loss on Thursday evening, while between Hastings and this place. The boat took a slue on the Pilot, and ran into the bank, breaking off and losing her jack staff. Now, jack-staffs themselves are not so valuable, because, in this country where pine lumber is so plentiful, the boat's Carpenter could have repaired the loss in a few hours. But at its top there fluttered, conscious of the proud position it occupied, a gilt chicken cock, which, like the eagles of Napoleon, that soared over all his battle fields through many years, and long wars — had pointed the way with its glistening beak on every boat sailed by the old Commodore for many years, and seemed as if always leading him on to victory, inseparably associated with the success of whatever boat he has commanded. Of course the Captain is inconsolable for the loss of his chicken-cock, and says he would rather have lost \$500. He is endeavoring to find it, and probably it may yet soar at the head of his jack staff, years after the Grey Eagle is rotten and used up."<sup>41</sup> Strange to say the "chicken cock" was recovered and the prophecy fulfilled.

Late in the afternoon of May 9, 1861, the *Grey Eagle* crashed into the Rock Island bridge and sank almost immediately in twenty feet of water. Six or seven people were drowned including an insane man who had been chained to the lower deck. Captain Harris was found wandering about the upper deck in a dazed condition, picking up little odds and ends of no consequence compared with the \$60,000 craft he had just lost. Broken hearted over the loss of his *Grey Eagle*, he retired from active river life, retaining only a few shares of stock in the Packet Company.

Among the odds and ends which he recovered from the wreck was his much loved "chicken cock". The historic bird had been carved from a single block of solid oak at the

<sup>41</sup> *The Daily Minnesotian* (St. Paul), October 9, 1858.

boat yards at Cincinnati, had been hoisted for the first time on the *War Eagle* in 1845, and had been passed on to the *Senator*, the *Dr. Franklin No. 2*, the *West Newton*, the second *War Eagle*, and finally the *Grey Eagle*. Harris took it to Galena where it roosted quietly in his barn for thirty years when it was brushed up and placed on top of the arch surmounting the entrance to Grant Park in Galena. Replaced by a brilliant electric light, the "chicken cock" again went into temporary retirement at the home of Captain Harris's daughter — Mrs. Irene Gillette — where Captain Walter A. Blair found it and placed it in the cabin of the *Helen Blair*. After selling his boat Captain Blair presented it to the Academy of Science at Davenport where it remains.<sup>42</sup>

When Daniel Smith Harris died in 1893, it was said he was the oldest settler in Galena and of the State of Illinois. Coming to the lead mines in 1823, the same year the steamboat *Virginia* navigated the Mississippi to Fort Snelling, Captain Harris participated in the halcyon days of steamboating on the Upper Mississippi prior to the Civil War. He lived to see the corporation of which he was once a heavy stockholder pass into oblivion in the late eighties. At his death the Diamond Jo Line was the lone survivor of many years of bitter competition on the Upper Mississippi.<sup>43</sup>

Captain Harris was twice married. His first wife, whom he married in 1833, was Sarah M. Langworthy, a sister of James, Lucius, and Solon Langworthy, well-known figures in the history of northeastern Iowa. Mrs. Harris died in

<sup>42</sup> *Dubuque Herald*, May 14, 1861; *Rock Island Argus*, May 10, 1861; Merrick's *Steamboats and Steamboatmen of the Upper Mississippi* in the *Burlington Post*, October 30, 1915.

<sup>43</sup> *Galena Gazette*, March 17, 1893; Petersen's *Captains and Cargoes of Early Upper Mississippi Steamboats* in *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Vol. XIII, pp. 224-240.

1850 and in 1851 Captain Harris married Sarah Coates, who died in 1886. He was survived by ten children — eight daughters and two sons.

On several occasions Captain Harris was accompanied by his wife on boat trips, and John P. Owens describes the second Mrs. Harris as “a proficient in and enthusiastic admirer of the natural sciences, which promises to be of advantage to us in our researches among the soils, rocks and plants of the Upper Minnesota.” He added: “She has as her guest a well-known St. Paul lady, whose enthusiasm for pioneering, and being the first white woman to set foot upon this and that remote, out-of-the-way place is proverbial.” This guest was Harriet E. Bishop, author of *Floral Home; or, First Years of Minnesota*.<sup>44</sup>

The character of Captain Harris was a composite of the strongest and best traits of men. Deprived of a liberal education, he overcame this handicap by making excellent use of an exceptionally alert and vigorous mind. His remarkable memory stood him in good stead and in later years he was looked upon as an authority on matters relating to the early history of Galena. As a captain his personality always made a deep impression on his passengers. While traveling in western Pennsylvania in 1890, a citizen of Galena met an old lady who had traveled widely in her youth. Upon learning the residence of the traveler she spoke at some length of her trip on the Upper Mississippi in a boat commanded by a Captain Harris during the cholera years. Forty years had failed to efface from her memory the genial personality and indomitable character of this famous pioneer.

No other captain who engaged in steamboating on the

<sup>44</sup> *Galena Gazette*, March 17, 1893; *The Minnesotian* (St. Paul), May 7, 1853; Blakeley's *History of the Discovery of the Mississippi and the Advent of Commerce in Minnesota* in the *Minnesota Historical Society Collections*, Vol. VIII, p. 416.

Upper Mississippi prior to the Civil War could approach the record of Daniel Smith Harris. "In enterprise, activity, liberality, in constructive talent, in the ability to meet a great requirement in transportation in the early development of the Northwest, the fame of this courageous and efficient man is secure." To him, more than to any other single pioneer captain, was due the startling growth in the use of steamboats on the Upper Mississippi, the rapid expansion of their use to the tributary streams, and the constant development in speed, comfort, and efficiency, so necessary for the quick transportation of the vast waves of immigrants moving northward.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Galena Gazette*, March 17, 20, 1893; *Burlington Post*, May 31, 1919.