

## The *Icelander* and the *Gladiator*

Readers of the only newspaper in the Territory of Minnesota were attracted by a strange advertisement in the *Minnesota Pioneer* of November 15, 1849. Passengers and shippers were advised by two enterprising steamboat captains that arrangements had been concluded whereby steam transportation would be continued throughout the winter by means of "Locomotive Ice Trains" connecting the mineral region with St. Paul. Residents of the Territory were well aware that steamboats could not ply the Mississippi during the winter. They also knew the railroad had not yet reached Chicago from the East. Indeed, five years were to pass before the iron horse reached the Mississippi at Rock Island, and eighteen years would roll by before St. Paul could claim rail connections with the East. Some readers had never seen a railroad train; few, if any, could visualize a train of cars skimming up the ice-locked Mississippi in the dead of winter.

Under ordinary circumstances most subscribers to the *Minnesota Pioneer* would have dismissed the whole matter as fantastic. But the names of the two steamboat captains involved in the project could scarcely be ignored. Daniel Smith Harris



had plied the upper Mississippi for a score of years and had always manifested rare courage and sincerity of purpose. Orrin Smith had been steamboating nearly as long, his career having begun aboard the *Heroine* in 1835. Both were respected and well-known Galenians of unimpeachable character, thoroughly reliable and trustworthy. It was unthinkable that either would stoop to chicanery or indulge in buffoonery.

Orrin Smith in particular was a God-fearing man. Refusing to run his steamboat on Sunday, Captain Smith would tie up to the bank wherever his boat might be at midnight on Saturday. On the following morning, if no minister was aboard, the pious skipper himself would conduct religious services. No steamboat that Orrin Smith captained was allowed to turn a wheel on the Sabbath. After midnight on Sunday the boat would raise steam and continue on her way.

With such commanders behind the proposed venture, the citizens of the frozen northland might look forward to uninterrupted intercourse with the settled area below. The "winter arrangements" which Harris and Smith contemplated were apparently far more elaborate than the steam sleigh which J. D. Carson and Jonathan Haines of Galena had experimented with in 1836. These ingenious Galenians combined an engine and coach in a single water-tight sleigh equipped with seats, windows, doors, and stoves. It was said to



be more comfortable and faster than other modes of transportation and perfectly safe, since it could be easily pulled out of the water if it broke through the ice or ran into an airhole.

Instead of a single sleigh, Captains Harris and Smith proposed to operate two "Locomotive Ice Trains" which they appropriately named the *Icelander* and the *Gladiator*. These, consisting of an engine, a tender, and ten cars, had been "prepared expressly for travel on the ice of the Mississippi." The "passenger cars" were to be attached to the train in the rear of the "baggage cars" in order that travelers should "incur as little risk as possible." Prospective passengers were assured that ample arrangements had been made for meals and sleeping and that the usual discomforts of winter travel would be absent.

The *Icelander* was to be commanded by Orrin Smith, while Daniel Smith Harris was to captain the *Gladiator*. Apparently neither entertained any doubt regarding the speed of the locomotive ice train: it was expected that a train could leave Galena at nine in the morning, make "all the usual steamboat landings" en route, and arrive at St. Paul and the Falls of St. Anthony twenty-four hours later. This would have meant faster time than Captain Harris was destined to make on his record-breaking run with the steamboat *Grey Eagle* in 1858. Furthermore, each train would make two round trips a week "until as near as



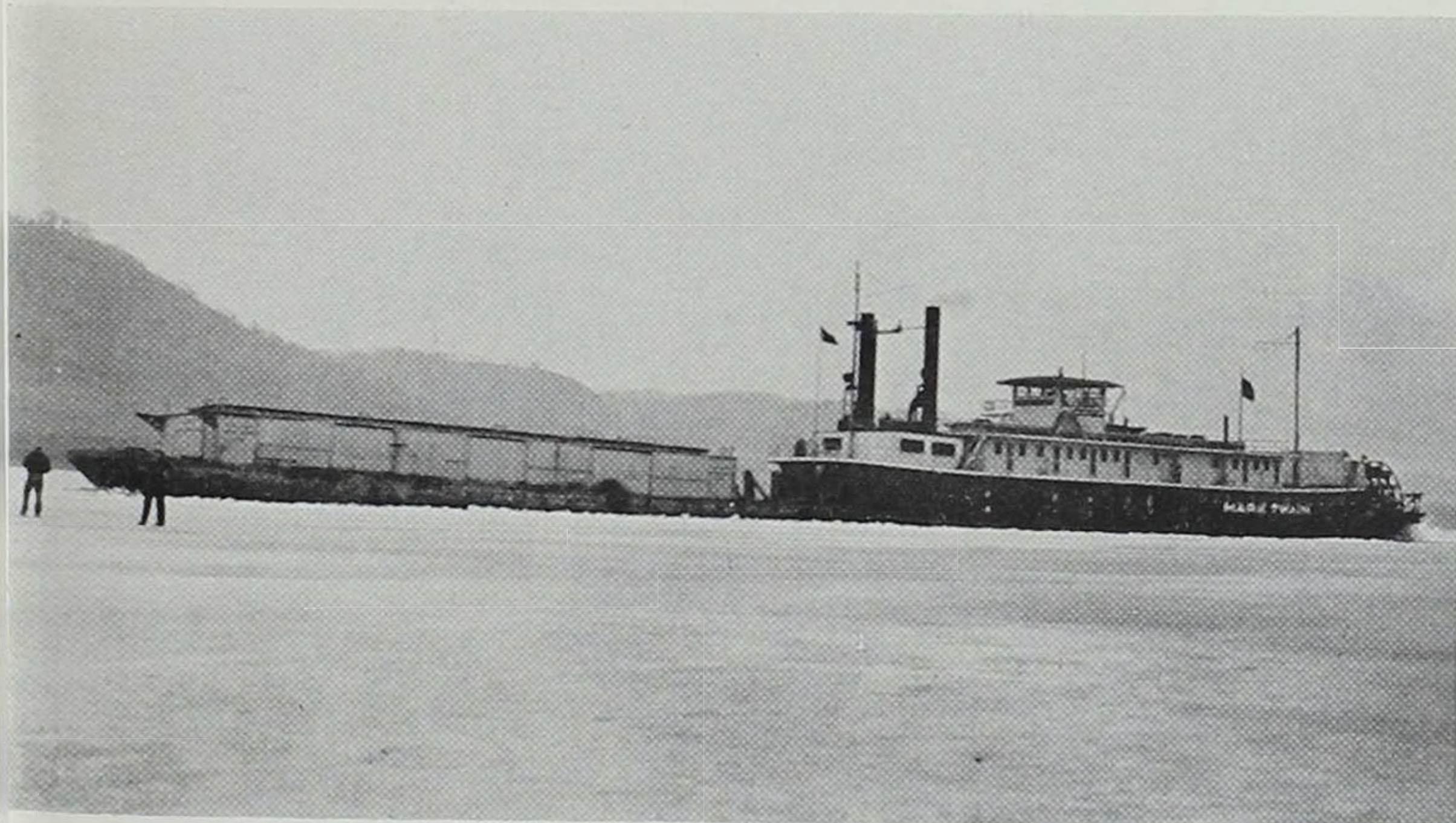
practicable to the opening of the river in April next." The *Icelander* was scheduled to leave Galena at nine on Mondays and Thursdays, and the *Gladiator* would set out from the same winter port on Tuesdays and Fridays. Bellevue, Dubuque, Guttenberg, and McGregor were Iowa towns most likely to benefit by this remarkable means of transportation.

The price for freight and passage was to be "the same usually paid on steamboats" during September. Since this "novel enterprise" has been "attended with great expense," the sponsors hoped the public would "extend to it their liberal patronage." In addition to freight and passenger service, it was pointed out, the isolated inhabitants along the way would be furnished with "tri-weekly mails" between Galena and the Falls. Buoyed up by such prospects people along the Mississippi waited for the river to freeze.

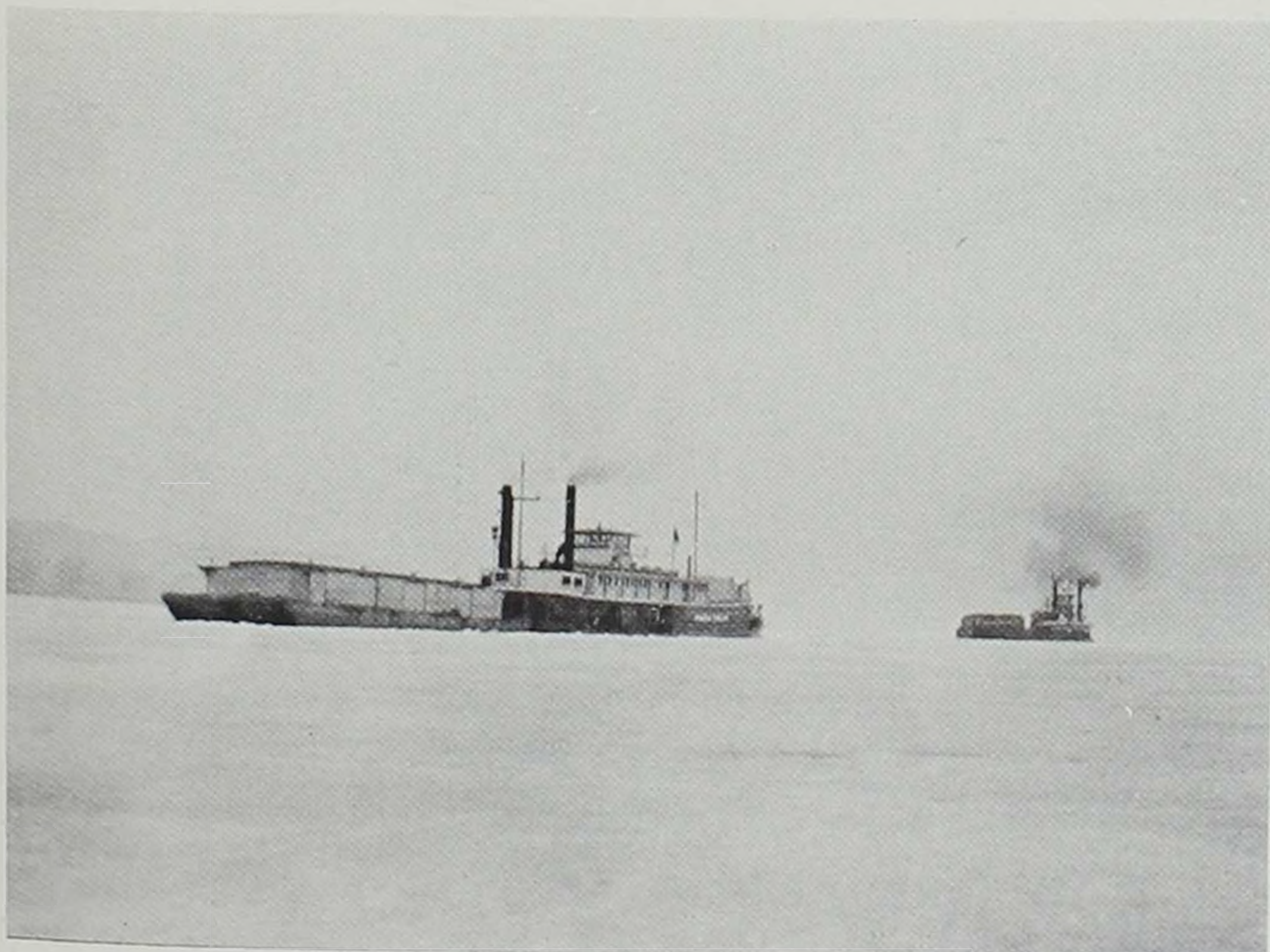
On December 7, 1849, solid ice finally formed on the river. It would only be a matter of hours now before St. Paul citizens could welcome their favorite steamboat captains in a new rôle. The enthusiastic editor of the *Minnesota Pioneer* pointed out that Hudson River steamboats were fitted with contrivances for breaking and cutting the ice and wondered if such a plan might not become feasible for the Mississippi, particularly since Lake Pepin always lengthened the season of isolation. But no mention was made of the ice



BATTLING ICE-LOCKED LAKE PEPIN — 1933



*Mark Twain* breaking through ice with small barge. View at Stockholm, Wisconsin, on Lake Pepin — April 1, 1933.

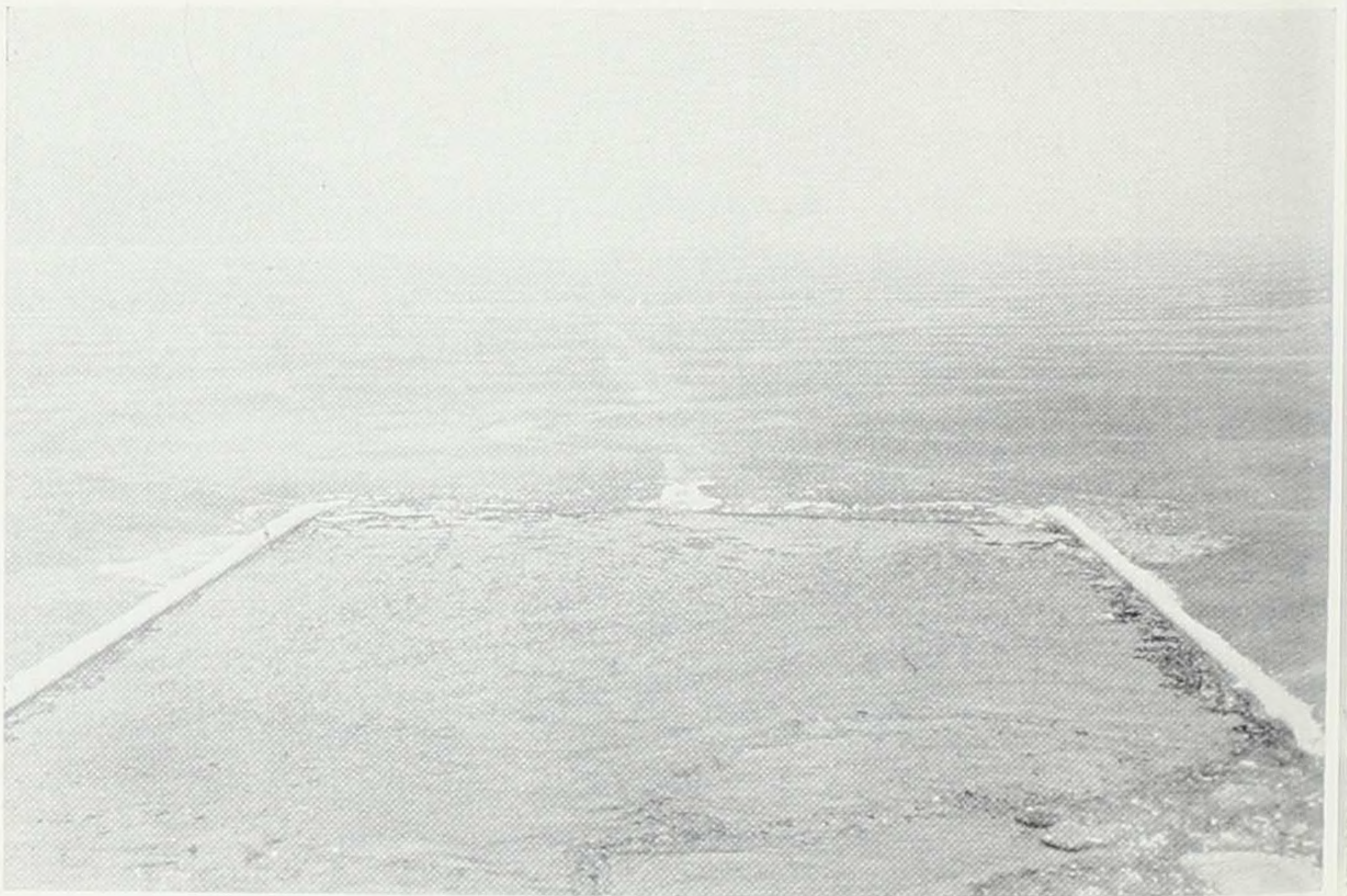


*Photos from William J. Petersen Collection*

Towboat *Mark Twain* being followed through ice on Lake Pepin by the *John W. Weeks* — April 1, 1933.



BATTLING ICE-LOCKED LAKE PEPIN — 1933



Cut in ice on Lake Pepin made by *Mark Twain* — April 1, 1933.

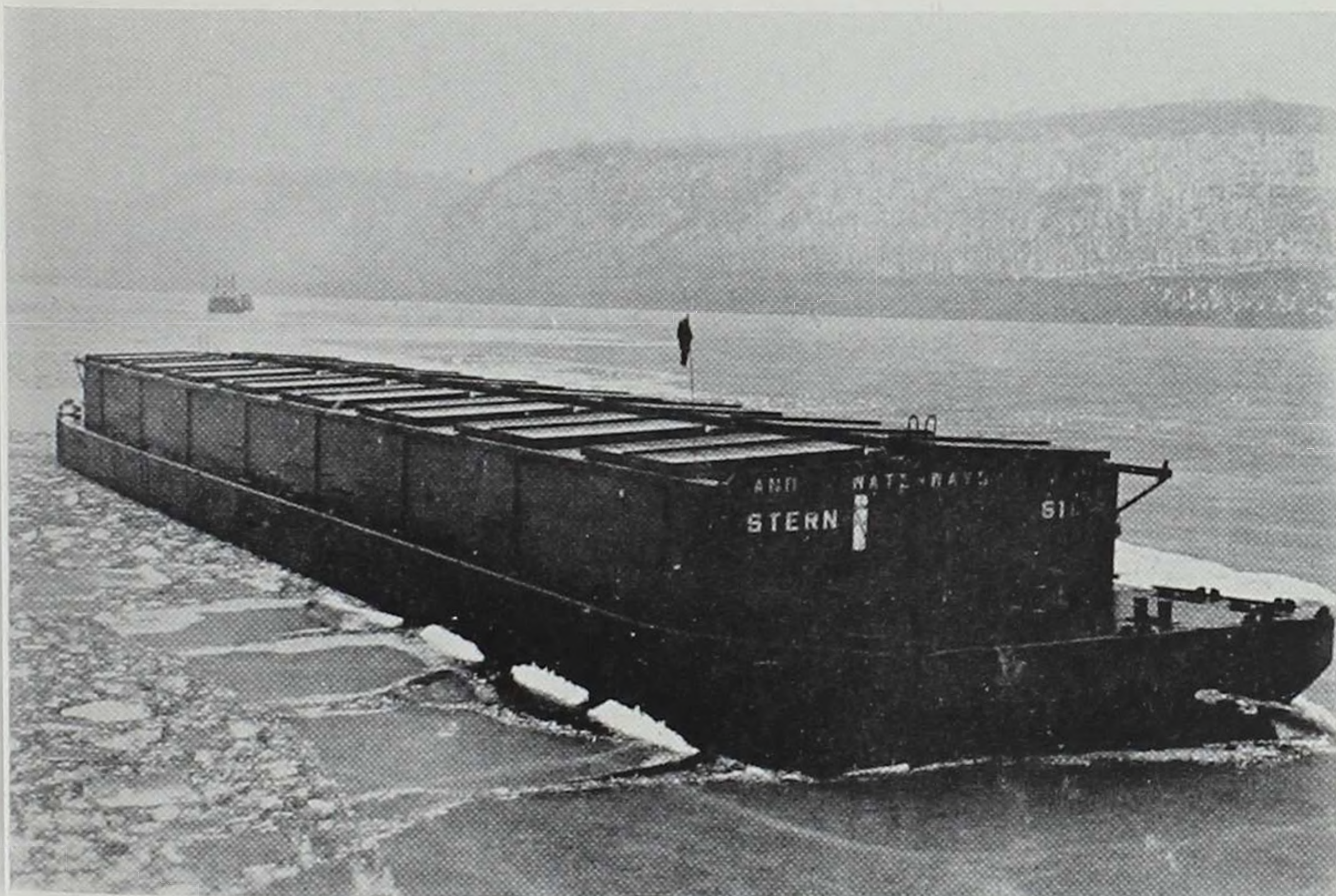


View from deck of *Mark Twain* showing ice broken up alongside of the boat. Pieces of wood on ice are parts broken from the wheel — April 1, 1933.

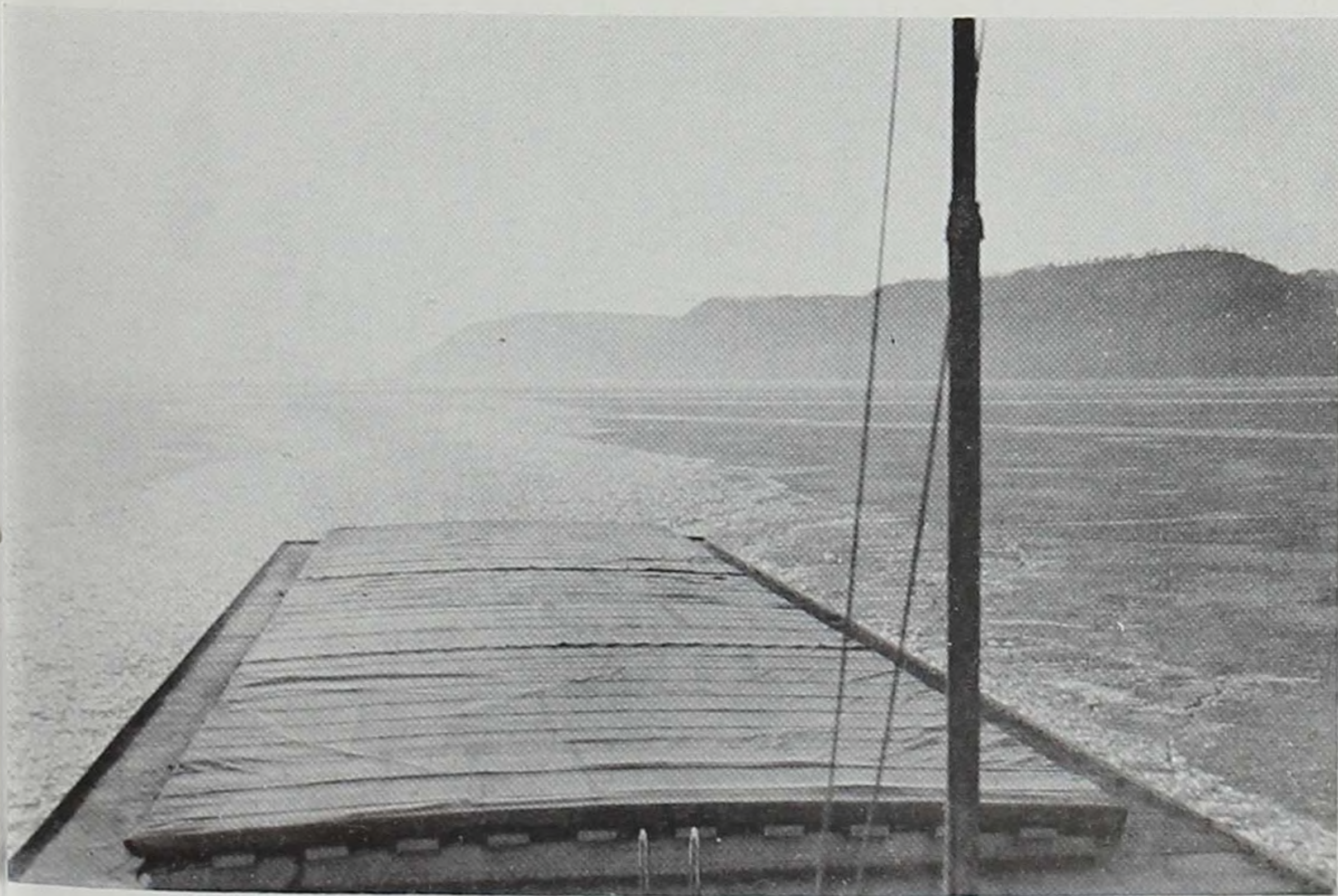
*Photos from William J. Petersen Collection*



## BATTLING ICE-LOCKED LAKE PEPIN — 1933



Barge 611 dropped in ice on Lake Pepin by *Mark Twain*. *John W. Weeks* in distance — April 1, 1933.

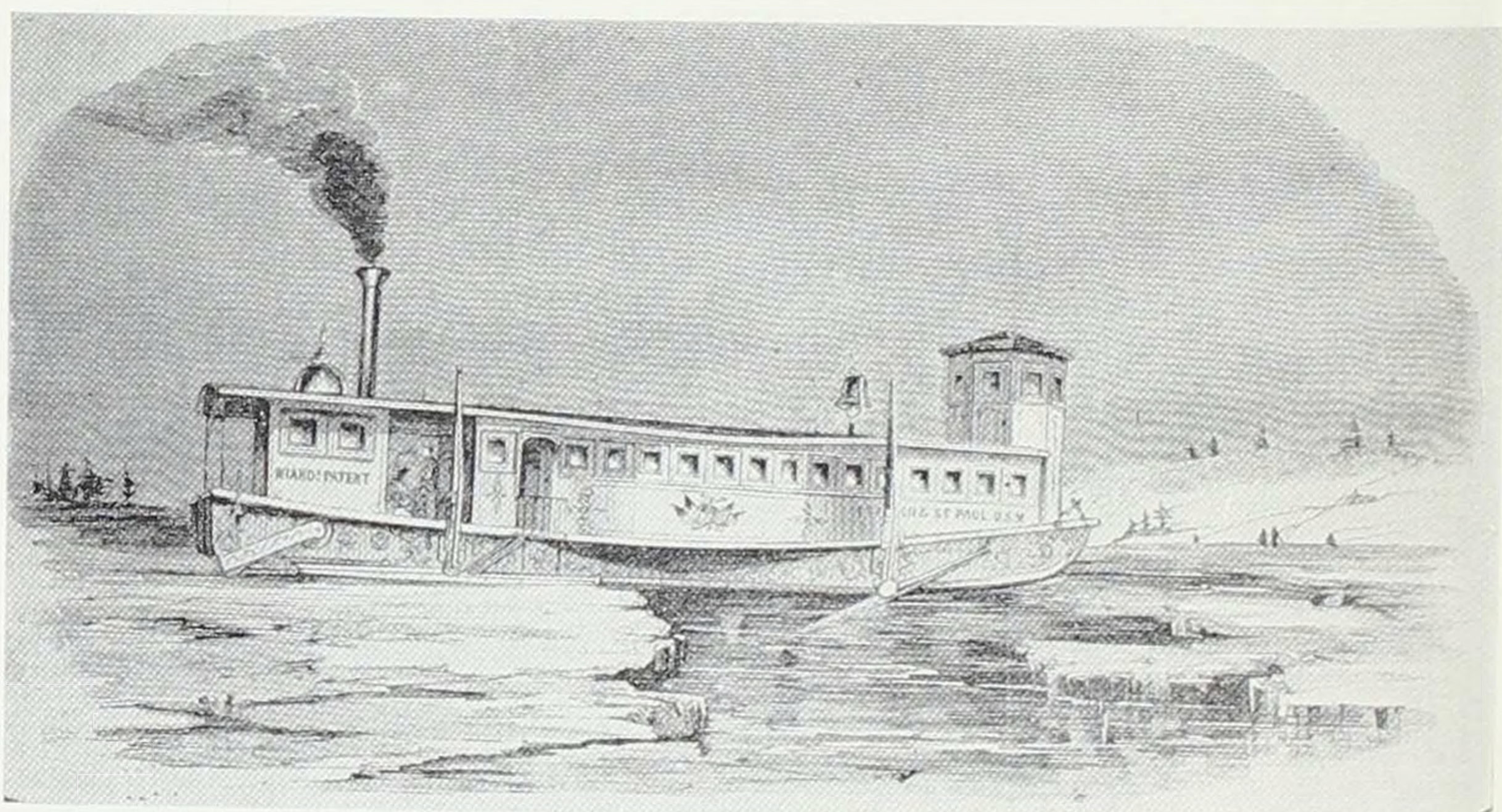


*Photos from William J. Petersen Collection*

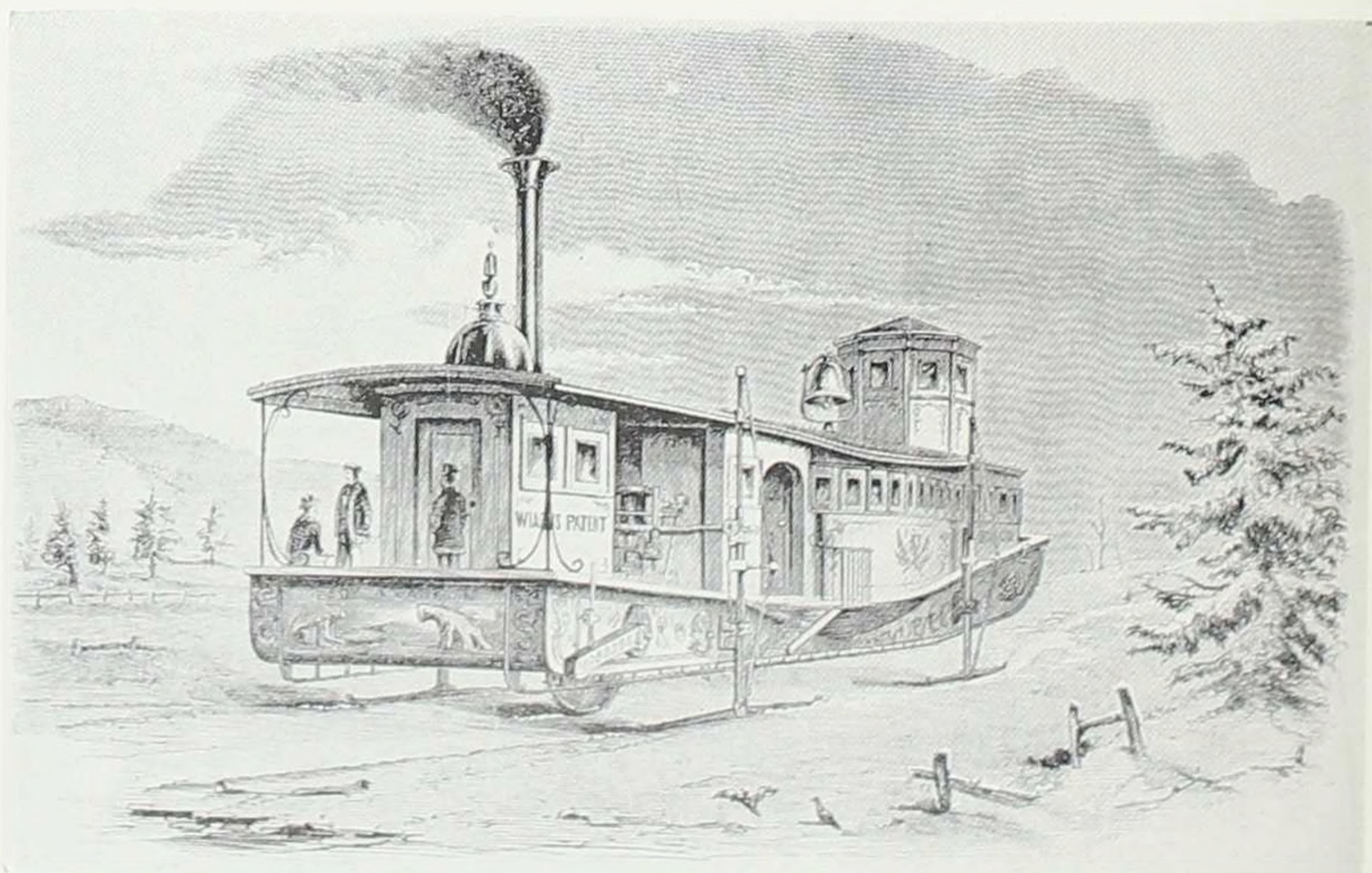
Churning up through Lake Pepin after cut is made in ice — April 1, 1933.



## NORMAN WIARD'S ICE BOAT



Wiard's Steam Ice Car Going into the Water.



*From Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper (12-3-1859)*

Wiard's Steam Ice Car Passing through a Snow Bank, Being Raised on the Runners by the Machinery for that Purpose.



trains. The following week the editor quoted a comment on the "Locomotive Ice Trains" in the *Independent American*. Would the *Icelander* and the *Gladiator* never come?

Some anxiety regarding the failure of the trains to appear must have been registered by the inhabitants of St. Paul, for the editor comforted them by pointing out that the "openness of the winter" had delayed the project. He promised, however, that "before Christmas" steam would be up and "half Galena" would be on the train. St. Paul, he declared, would welcome them.

But alas and alack, no locomotive ice train ever came. Nor were there any further announcements of the project or explanations for the failure of the *Icelander* and the *Gladiator* to put in an appearance. Diligent search of the existing files of the Galena and Dubuque papers has failed to reveal the reason for the non-appearance of the two trains. Were the engines too weak? Did the ice fail to become "sufficiently strong?" Were the two trains ever completed and patented? The newspapers of the period are strangely silent.

At any rate, the *Icelander* and *Gladiator* project represented an effort to provide a means of transportation during the ice-bound winter months for the frontier communities of Iowa and the upper Mississippi Valley. Supplies usually ran low before the opening of navigation in the spring. Overland traffic was also suspended during the



winter. But the ice train failed to fulfill the need just as the steam sleigh of two other Galenians had disappointed the isolated settlers thirteen years before.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

FIRST BOAT ARRIVAL AT ST. PAUL — 1844 - 1869

<i>Year</i>	<i>Boat</i>	<i>Captain</i>	<i>Date</i>
1844	Otter	Harris	April 6th
1845	Otter	Harris	April 6th
1846	Lynx	Atchinson	March 31st
1847	Cora	Throckmorton	April 7th
1848	Senator	Harris	April 7th
1849	Highland Mary	Atchinson	April 9th
1850	Highland Mary	Atchinson	April 10th
1851	Nominee	Smith	April 1st
1852	Nominee	Smith	April 10th
1853	West Newton	Harris	April 11th
1854	Nominee	Blakely	April 8th
1855	War Eagle	Harris	April 17th
1856	Lady Franklin	Lucas	April 18th
1857	Galena	Laughton	May 1st
1858	Grey Eagle	Harris	March 25th
1859	Key City	Worden	April 10th
1860	Milwaukee	Cochrane	March 28th
1861	Ocean Wave	Webb	April 8th
1862	Keokuk	Hatcher	April 18th
1863	Keokuk	Hatcher	April 5th
1864	Hawkeye State	Mason	April 14th
1865	Burlington	Rhodes	April 15th
1866	Sucker State	Hight	April 19th
1867	Itasca	Webb	April 21st
1868	Phil Sheridan	Hutchinson	April 4th
1869	Sucker State	Hight	April 19th