

## Ho! for the Mountains

Prior to the advent of the iron horse on the banks of the Missouri the steamboat played a significant rôle in the settlement and development of western Iowa. Between 1820 and 1860 the transportation of troops and supplies, the traffic in furs, the movement of Indian tribes and Indian annuities, the mounting commerce that developed as settlements sprouted along the tawny Missouri from St. Charles to Sioux City all contributed to the growth of steamboating. The conquest of the Missouri to Fort Benton by the *Chippewa* and *Key West* in 1860 was followed by the discovery of gold in Montana two years later. The close of the Civil War opened the upper Missouri to a host of returning veterans eager to try their luck at the gold mines. Council Bluffs and Sioux City newspapers headlined scores of steamboat advertisements: "Ho! for the Mountains!" "Ho! for the Gold Mines!"

A typical mountain trip was recorded by Nelson Green Edwards, second clerk of the 567-ton *Henry M. Shreve*. This sturdy craft left St. Louis at one o'clock in the afternoon of April 6, 1869, with 210 tons of freight for Fort Benton



and miscellaneous way freight consisting of "Carriages & Buggys, Waggon, Horses & Lot Furniture". A score of deck passengers and sixty cabin passengers were registered at the start of the 2200-mile trip — a good showing for a boat engaged in the mountain trade.

After wooding up at the mouth of the Missouri the *Shreve* churned boldly up that mighty waterway. St. Charles was reached at ten o'clock but the boat did not stop. During the night the *Shreve* struck a "Bluff Bar" with such force that she sprang a leak, damaging six sacks of coffee in the hold. Washington was sighted at nine in the morning and Hermann at one in the afternoon. The *St. Luke*, a 648-ton sidewheeler of the Tri-Weekly Miami Packet Line, passed upstream while the *Shreve* lay at Straubs woodyard. At Jefferson City six deck passengers boarded the boat for Kansas City. A severe storm forced Captain Henry Shreve Carter to tie up a few miles above the State capital.

At daybreak on April 8th the *Henry M. Shreve* proceeded upstream. Shortly before noon Clerk Nelson recorded the *Henry S. Turner* and the *Post Boy* steaming downstream below Boonville. The *Turner* was a 763-ton steamboat running with the *Mary McDonald*, the *Stonewall*, the *Cornelia No. 2*, and the *Glasgow* in the St. Louis and



Omaha Tri-Weekly Packet Line. The *Post Boy* was a 674-ton craft that ran with five other passenger boats in the Missouri Star Line between St. Louis and Kansas City. Despite the presence of such short-line packets, the mountain boats reaped a fair share of the lower Missouri trade. Thus, the *Shreve* took on freight at Boonville that netted her \$532.50.

A short distance above Boonville, the *Shreve* met the *Mary McDonald* with a "Regiment of Troops & 1 Grisley Bear" on board. That night, while wooding up at Buck Horn Point, the crew worked hard shifting the buckets on the paddle wheels so that the boat could make better time. On the following day, April 10th, the *Shreve* passed Brunswick and Lexington and at five o'clock dropped her stage at the Kansas City levee. Kansas City was a flourishing town of thirty thousand, 390 miles above the mouth of the Missouri, just half way to Sioux City.

The *Shreve* lay at Kansas City eight hours, discharging freight and passengers and making temporary repairs to a boiler that had sprung a leak. The wife of Pilot Massie boarded the boat for Fort Benton at Kansas City while the daughter of second pilot Hans M. Chadwick also took passage for the same point. Several "Short Passengers" boarded the *Shreve* before she slipped her



lines and continued her journey upstream. From his vantage point in the clerk's office Nelson Green Edwards noted that freight and passengers were discharged at "11Worth" (Leavenworth) after which the *Shreve* steamed on past Weston to Atchison, where a large number of citizens had gathered on the levee "to look at the *Shreve's* mountain trip".

The *Shreve* docked at St. Joseph at one A. M. on April 12th, five and a half days out of St. Louis, having been delayed twenty-three hours en route. St. Joseph was the most populous town above Kansas City, counting a population of 19,565 in 1870. Twenty-eight hours were lost there and \$65 spent in repairing the boiler. Additional stores and \$142.20 worth of meat were taken aboard, and thirteen white roustabouts were discharged because the officers of the *Shreve* expected that little more freight would be handled on the voyage. Finally, at 5 A. M. on April 13th, the *Shreve* once more had steam up and was threading her way upstream.

Much time was lost during the next two days sparring the *Shreve* over sand bars. On April 15th, Clerk Edwards recorded that the boat landed at Hamburg, then a shipping point for southwest Iowa, and took on fifteen cords of wood. Later that day they put in at Nebraska City and



"Put off 11 Tons freight". After dark they tied up at a woodyard on Keg Island along the Iowa shore and remained there the rest of the night.

The *Shreve* arrived at Council Bluffs, 660 miles above the mouth of the Missouri, at 6:30 P. M. on April 16th. Once a thriving steamboat terminal and outfitting town, Council Bluffs, selected by Lincoln in 1862 as the eastern terminus of the Union Pacific Railroad, was the metropolis of western Iowa with a population of 10,020 in 1870. At the time the *Shreve* docked there, however, the town exhibited little interest in waterways transportation. The converging of several railroads there, coupled with the imminent driving of the Golden Spike at Promontory Point, had done much to make Council Bluffs railroad minded. Under such circumstances it is not surprising that the *Shreve* required only a half hour to discharge her freight there.

Crossing the Missouri to Omaha, the *Shreve* discharged more freight and passengers and then waited sixteen hours to pick up six cabin and seven deck passengers for Fort Benton. Continuing upstream, Edwards mentioned Seatons and Hendricksons woodyards, De Soto, Nebraska, and Little Sioux, Iowa. In his log for April 19th the observing clerk recorded that they passed the mouth of Little Sioux at seven in the morning



and by six-thirty were forty-five miles below Sioux City. "Capt. Carter Saw a White Wolf in Gun Shot & No Loaded Gun to Shoot." At one point the *Huntsville* was in sight ahead, but the *Shreve* did not overtake her, being delayed by high wind and innumerable sand bars.

The *Shreve* arrived at Sioux City at seven P. M. on April 20th, fourteen days and six hours out of St. Louis. Of this time, the boat had been delayed five days and seventeen hours for a number of reasons. Dark, moonless nights often made piloting impossible. Hurricane winds frequently caused the captain to order the boat tied to the bank. Shallow water at several points above St. Joseph forced the crew to resort to sparring. Laying in port for additional mountain passengers and freight accounted for further delays. Finally, the time required to repair the boiler at Kansas City and St. Joseph and the process of "wooding up" must be mentioned. Since the surveys of 1891 placed Sioux City 807.4 miles above the mouth of the Missouri, the average running time was four miles per hour upstream from St. Louis. Counting her delays en route the *Shreve* averaged less than two miles per hour.

In contrast to Council Bluffs, the passengers aboard the *Shreve* found Sioux City a decidedly river-minded town. Steamboats had given the



settlement its original impetus in 1856 when the *Omaha* arrived from St. Louis with a cargo of provisions, drygoods, hardware, and lumber, valued at \$70,000, for which the consignees paid a freight bill of \$24,000. The strategic location of Sioux City at the mouth of the Big Sioux had long been recognized. On November 11, 1862, the *Sioux City Register* declared: "There is not a more desirable region in the West than this Upper Missouri. Fertile in production — genial in climate — favored in locality — and settled by an industrious — high-toned population, it gives reliable promise of a prosperous and important future."

Sioux City became and remains to this day the metropolis of the upper Missouri. In the spring of 1864 the *Dubuque Herald* had urged prospective miners to travel to Montana and Idaho by way of Sioux City rather than by the circuitous Platte Valley. It was the last port at which to board a mountain boat for the gold mines of Idaho, Virginia City, Bannock City, and Gallatin. The year 1866 had ushered in the golden era of steamboating on the upper Missouri. Thirty-one steamboat arrivals were chronicled at Fort Benton, or half again as many as had been recorded in the previous seven years. Thirty-seven steamcraft docked at Fort Benton in 1867, thirty-five



reached that port in 1868, and the *Deer Lodge*, the *Antelope*, the *Cora*, the *North Alabama*, the *Only Chance*, the *Fanny Barker*, the *Big Horn*, and the *Huntsville* had already arrived at Sioux City when the *Henry M. Shreve* blew for a landing on April 20, 1869. In those bustling spring days, when mountain boats were putting in an almost daily appearance, Sioux City could boast a steamboat drydock, a railroad, a daily newspaper, and a population of over three thousand.

The influence of Sioux City as an outfitting town for the mountain trade can scarcely be over-emphasized. For more than a generation the pioneers of the northwest were destined to regard Sioux City as the commercial emporium of the upper Missouri. Between 1870 and 1890 the population of Council Bluffs grew from 10,020 to 21,474 whereas the population of Sioux City soared from 3401 to 37,806. In this development sturdy mountain boats played a vital rôle.

Clerk Edwards recorded that the *Shreve* lay at the Sioux City levee twenty-four hours awaiting the arrival of a train with prospective passengers. The delay probably paid because the boat "succeeded to get 3 Ladys & 3 children — 4½ Passages at \$110.00 Each to Benton." The captain must have regretted having discharged the roustabouts at St. Joseph because he, the clerk, the stew-



ard, the porter, and ten men worked until half past ten at night to get the passengers and their effects aboard. With a fair load of freight, twenty cabin passengers, and fourteen "deckers", the *Shreve* left Sioux City on the delightful spring morning of April 22nd for the "long & anticipated tedious Trip to Benton".

The hardest and the most dangerous part of the voyage lay ahead. The *Sioux City Daily Times* estimated that Fort Benton was 1955 miles upstream but the United States surveys of 1891 placed it only 1,474.2 miles above Sioux City. Yankton, the capital of Dakota Territory, lay 86.7 miles above Sioux City and could count only 737 inhabitants in 1870. Above Yankton the only inhabited places were Indian villages, Indian agencies, and such military posts as Randall, Sully, Rice, Stevenson, Buford, Peck, and Benton. These forts and Indian agencies afforded profitable employment to steamboat captains carrying government stores from points as far distant as St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh. The diminutive *Hiram Woods* ran as a weekly packet between Sioux City and Fort Randall, but sometimes went farther upstream.

The dangers of navigating the upper Missouri were ever present. As the *Shreve* was churning through Kate Sweeney Bend on April 23rd, Clerk



Edwards noted the *Urilda* lying wind-bound at the bank. A few hours later the *Urilda* was sunk, the loss being reported at \$10,000. The bend itself was named for the ill-fated *Kate Sweeney* which was snagged and sunk at that point on August 1, 1855. On the following day the *Shreve* wooded opposite the wreck of the *Antelope*, the second steamboat to reach Sioux City in 1869. The 400-ton *Antelope* had been destroyed by fire twenty miles above Yankton on April 12th. Two passengers were lost and Dr. Page of Boston was badly burned. The *Antelope* was valued at \$20,000, and her cargo at \$38,000. The *Peter Balen*, a boat that had netted \$70,690 on a round-trip to Fort Benton in 1866, was totally destroyed by fire on Dauphin Rapids on July 22, 1869. The upper Missouri was a veritable graveyard for the gallant craft engaged in the mountain trade.

Medical care was rarely available. George Miller, second engineer on the *Shreve*, died of typhoid fever on April 29th. He was buried at a woodyard on Pocahontas Island, two hundred miles above Sioux City. That same evening Indians were seen lurking in the high grass along the bank. Passengers and crew stood guard all night but fortunately no attack was made.

On the brighter side those aboard the boat enjoyed occasional overland hunting sorties while



the *Shreve* was toiling slowly around one of the many big bends that characterize the Missouri. Deer and antelope were plentiful on the prairie but these had to be shot close to the river if the hunters were to carry them back to the boat. On May 24th, Edwards reported that all enjoyed "a nice Saddle of Antelope for our Dinner to day given to us yesterday at Hard Scrabble Wood Yard." The following day they shot their first buffalo, a young bull weighing between five and six hundred pounds when dressed. "To day," Edwards recorded on May 28th, "we all faired most Sumptuously on Prairie Chicken Pot Pie, Roast Hump of Buffaloe, with other Smaller delicacys."

The greater part of the journey upstream, however, was devoted to hard, unremitting toil. Since the *Shreve* was the second largest boat to reach Fort Benton in 1869, she found it especially hard to navigate the numerous shoal places. Often the crew worked far into the night, sparring over sand bars and warping the boat through swift-running channels. When these methods failed it was necessary to unload as much as half the cargo and double trip over a shallow stretch of the river. It took ten days to traverse the last 230 miles along which fifteen rapids were strewn. Small wonder that exorbitant rates had to be



charged to reach Fort Benton. And yet, as General Alfred Sully pointed out, these rates were only half those charged when freight was shipped by railroad from Chicago to Utah and then trundled overland by cumbersome wagon trains.

On June 12, 1869, the *Shreve* squirmed her way to a well-earned rest at the Fort Benton levee. It had taken sixty-six days to make the trip — slow time when compared with the thirty-two days required by the *Emilie* in 1862. Although fewer steamboats were recorded at Fort Benton in 1869, there was more double-tripping and the amount of freight discharged is said to be the heaviest recorded. The *Shreve* left Fort Benton on June 15th and reached Sioux City in eleven days. Captain Carter could have obtained a good load at Sioux City for the forts above but his crew, tired by the long journey, refused to return.

Accordingly, the *Shreve* continued downstream. At Decatur she picked up nine hundred railroad ties for Omaha. The remainder of the voyage was made swiftly and without mishap but when the *Shreve* reached St. Louis on July 1st she had "had enough of the mountain trade" for that year. Chief Clerk H. M. Worsham gained seven pounds on the three-months trip while Captain Carter lost eleven pounds, reported the St. Louis



*Missouri Democrat* with the comment, "They both can stand the change."

Although Sioux City continued to serve as an entrepôt for the upper Missouri, there was a precipitate decline in steamboat arrivals at Fort Benton after 1869. The voyage of the *Henry M. Shreve* exemplified the exploits of almost a hundred boats that engaged in the picturesque mountain trade. These sturdy craft contributed a colorful chapter to the drama of western Iowa and the upper Missouri Valley.

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