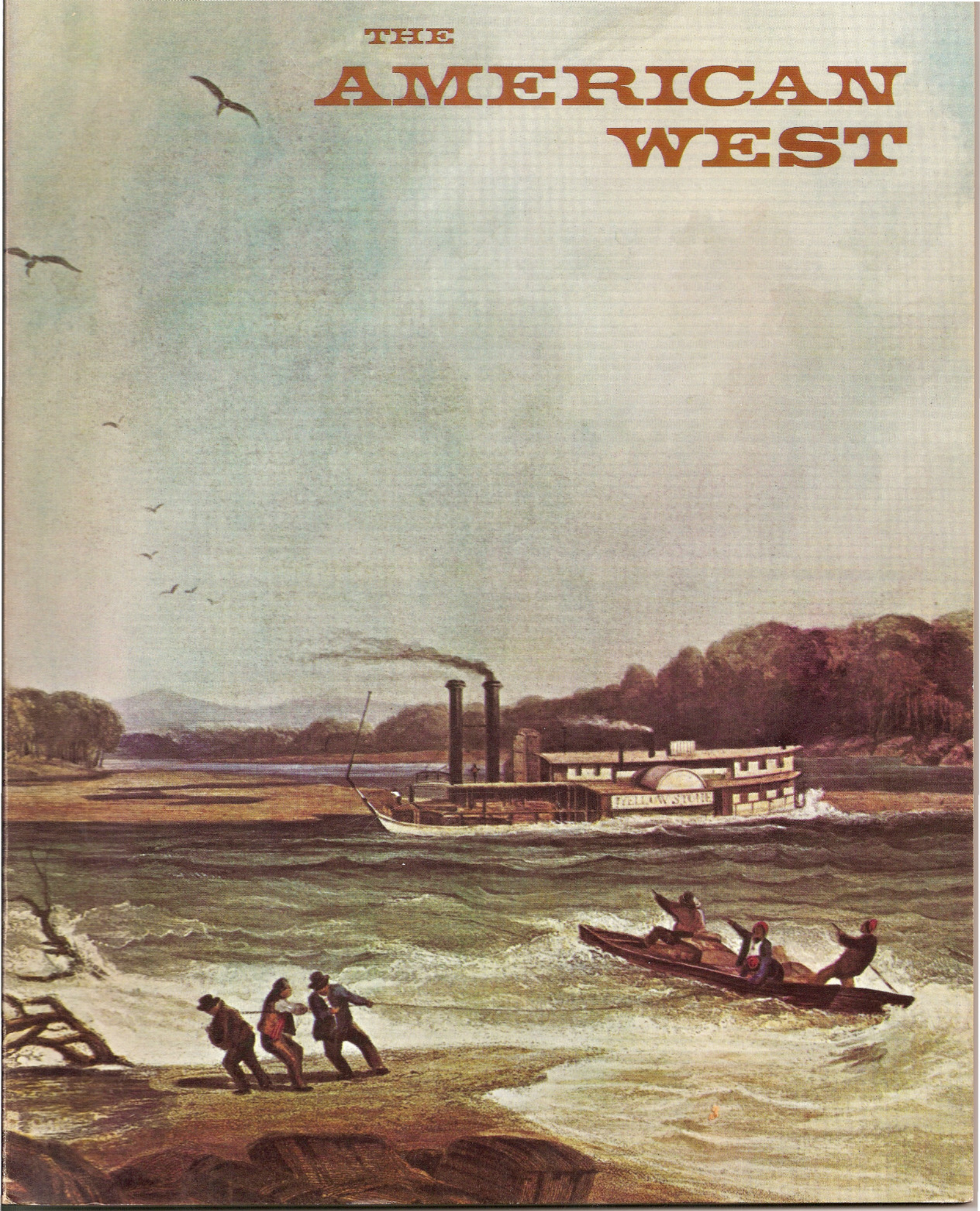
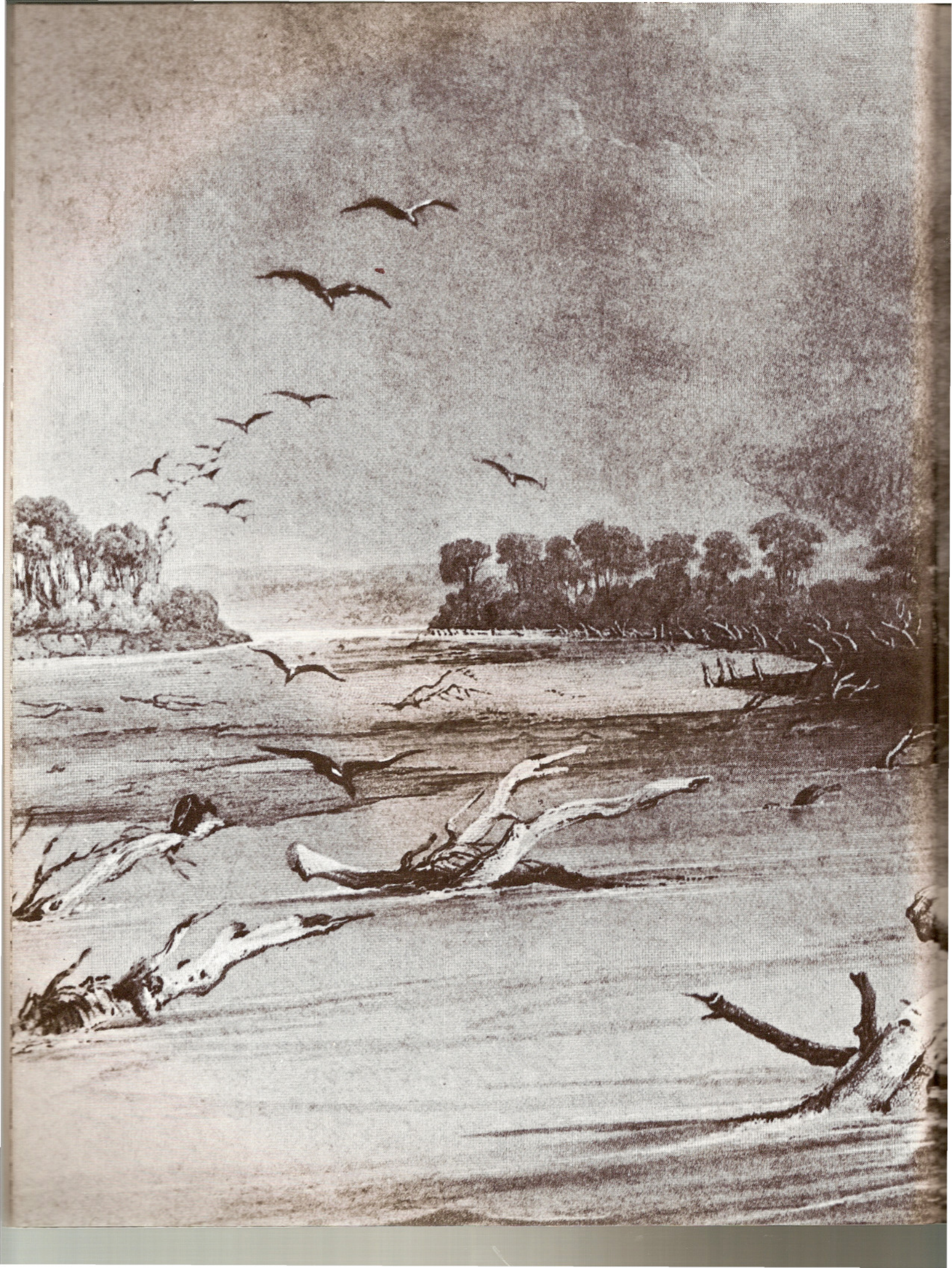
THE AMERICAN WEST



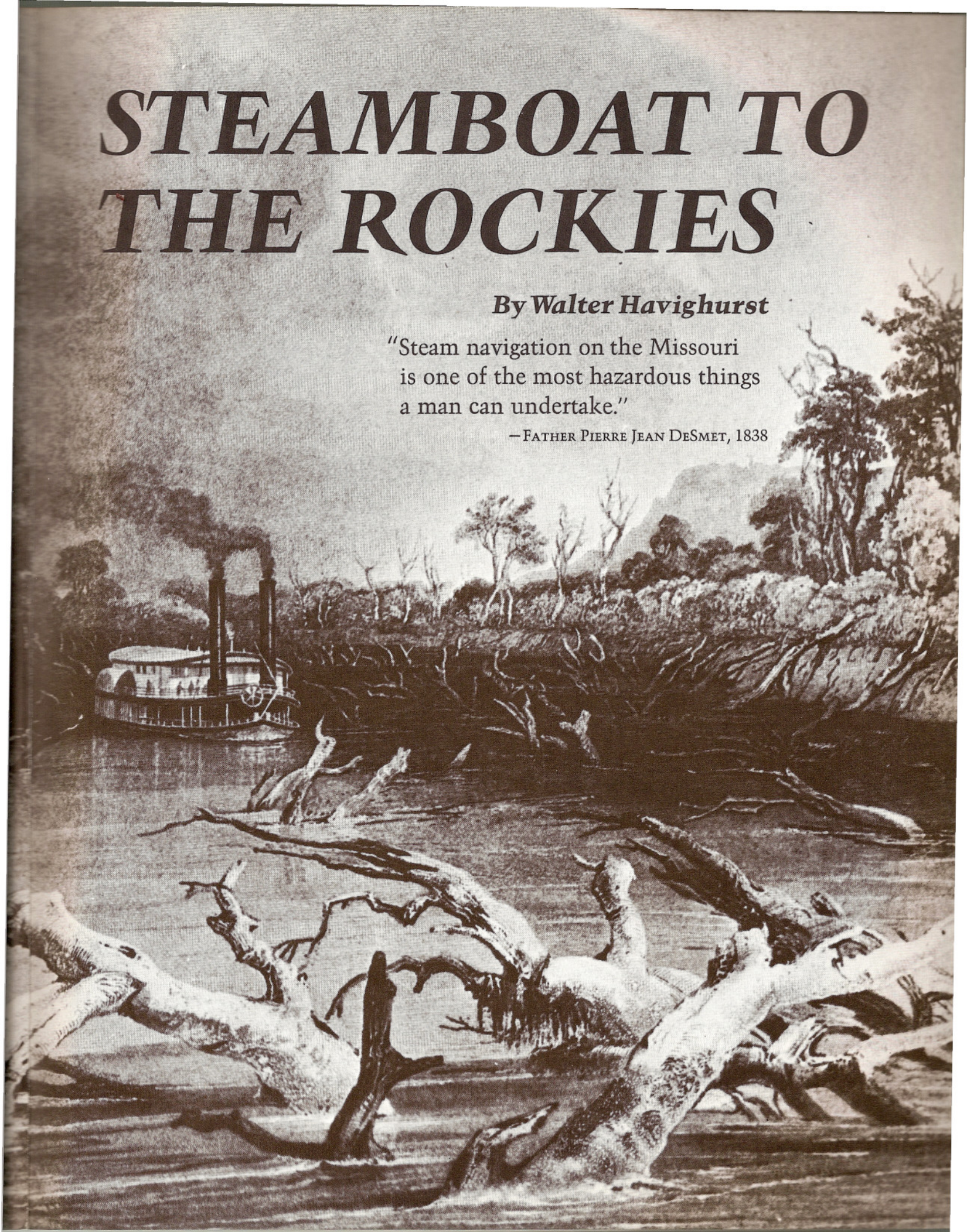


STEAMBOAT TO THE ROCKIES

By *Walter Havighurst*

"Steam navigation on the Missouri is one of the most hazardous things a man can undertake."

—Father Pierre Jean DeSmet, 1838



Writing in 1805 from his winter camp at Fort Mandan, sixteen hundred hard miles up the Missouri River, Meriwether Lewis reported that his expedition had found the river more dangerous than the savages. "The difficulties which oppose themselves to the navigation of this immense river," he observed, "arise from the rapidity of its current, its falling banks, sandbars, and timber which remains wholly or partially concealed in its bed. . . . To these we may add a fifth and not very much less inconsiderable difficulty, the turbid quality of the water, which renders it impossible to discover any obstruction even to the depth of a single inch." It would have astonished him to know that fifty-five years later the steamers *Chippewa* and *Key West* would unload cargo at Fort Benton twenty-five hundred miles above St. Louis, in the shadow of the Bear Paw Mountains and the Lewis Range. After half a century of trial and error, the vessels, the men, and the maneuvers had evolved to navigate the longest river on the continent.

The steamboat went west very quickly. In 1819, just ten years after Robert Fulton's *Clermont* splashed up the Hudson, the steamer *Independence,* in seven sailing days from St. Louis, churned two hundred and fifty miles up the muddy Missouri with a cargo of sugar, flour, whisky, nails, and iron castings. That same summer the Yellowstone Expedition, under Major Stephen H. Long, headed up the swirling river. Long had a flotilla of four steamers and nine keelboats. His instructions from the secretary of war were to "explore the country between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains, to conciliate the Indians, and to make scientific observations of the upper Missouri valley." He hoped to build a fort at the mouth of the Yellowstone River.

The Indians could not fail to be impressed by a seething, thumping steamboat, but for good measure Long's flagship was built in the outlandish form of a smoke-breathing dragon. Launched at Pittsburgh, the *Western Engineer* snorted down the Ohio in the spring of 1819. A St. Louis newspaper reported:

> The bow of the vessel exhibits the form of a huge serpent, black and scaly, rising out of the water from under the boat, his head as high as the deck, darted forward, his mouth open, vomiting smoke, and apparently carrying the boat on his back. From under the boat, at its stern issues a stream of foaming water. . . . To the eye of ignorance the illusion is complete, that a monster of the deep carries her on his back, smoking with fatigue, and lashing the waves with violent exertion.

A story ran through St. Louis that this dragon ship would voyage to the source of the Missouri, where it would be taken apart, carried five miles over the mountains, and reassembled for a run down the Columbia to the Pacific. The boat's banner showed a white man and an Indian shaking hands while one held a sword and the other a peace pipe.

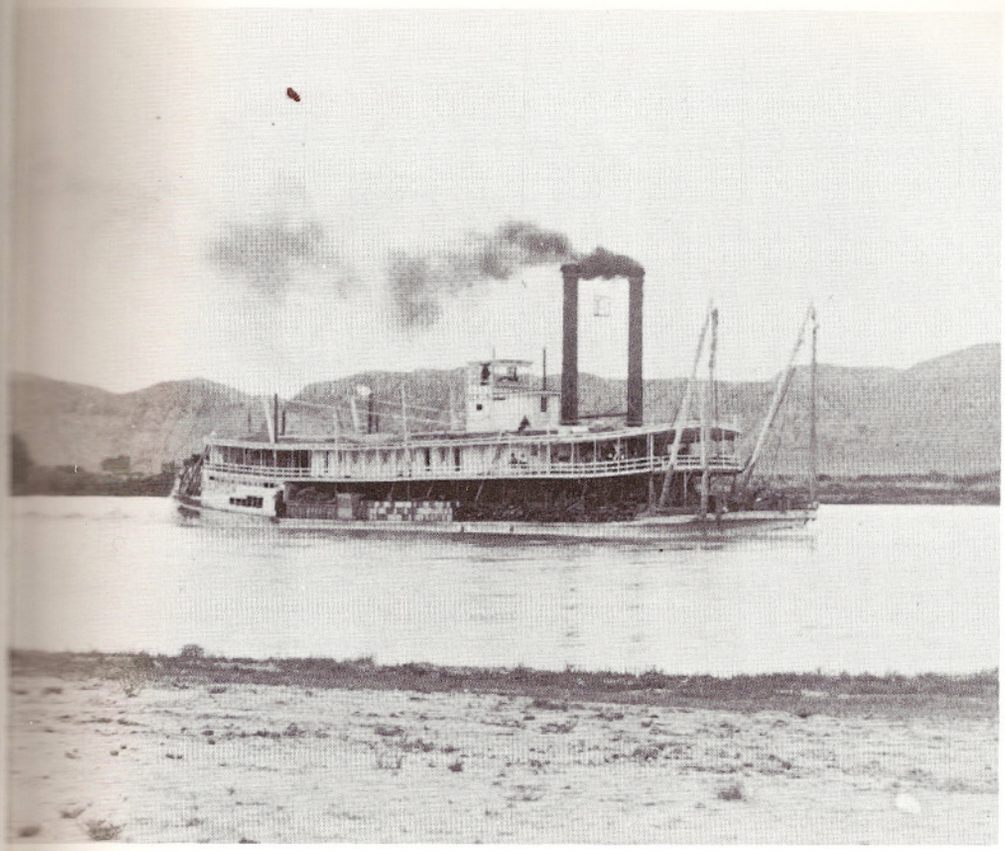
Troops for the expedition had embarked in keelboats, under Colonel Henry Atkinson. Officers and orderlies, along with equipment, supplies, and Indian presents, went in four steamboats, led by the bizarre *Western Engineer*. The other three, not built for the fickle Missouri, did not get far. The *Thomas Jefferson* was snagged in Osage Chute and became the first wrecked steamboat on the Missouri. The *Expedition,* which had delivered 163,000 silver dollars to the Bank of Missouri in St. Louis, and the *R. M. Johnson* struggled up to the site of Atchison, Kansas, where winter closed them in. The troop-laden keelboats had already arrived at Council Bluffs.

Advancing at three miles an hour, the *Western Engineer* stirred up the mud and startled the Indians. The dragon boat drew just nineteen inches, but it had trouble with the turbid water. Mud accumulated in the boilers, and the steam gauge dropped. The boilers had to be cleaned after every fifteen hours of use. Three months out of St. Louis the party reached Fort Lisa, near Council Bluffs. They wintered there, the artists sketching Indians and the frozen prairie, the scientists making collectors' forays over the wild land. Back at the fort they had good company. Magnetic Manuel Lisa was there—this was his last winter in the West—along with his bride and a friend of hers from St. Louis. Lisa spoke little English, and his wife knew neither French nor Spanish. They laughed together at their misunderstandings and turned to the expedition men as interpreters.

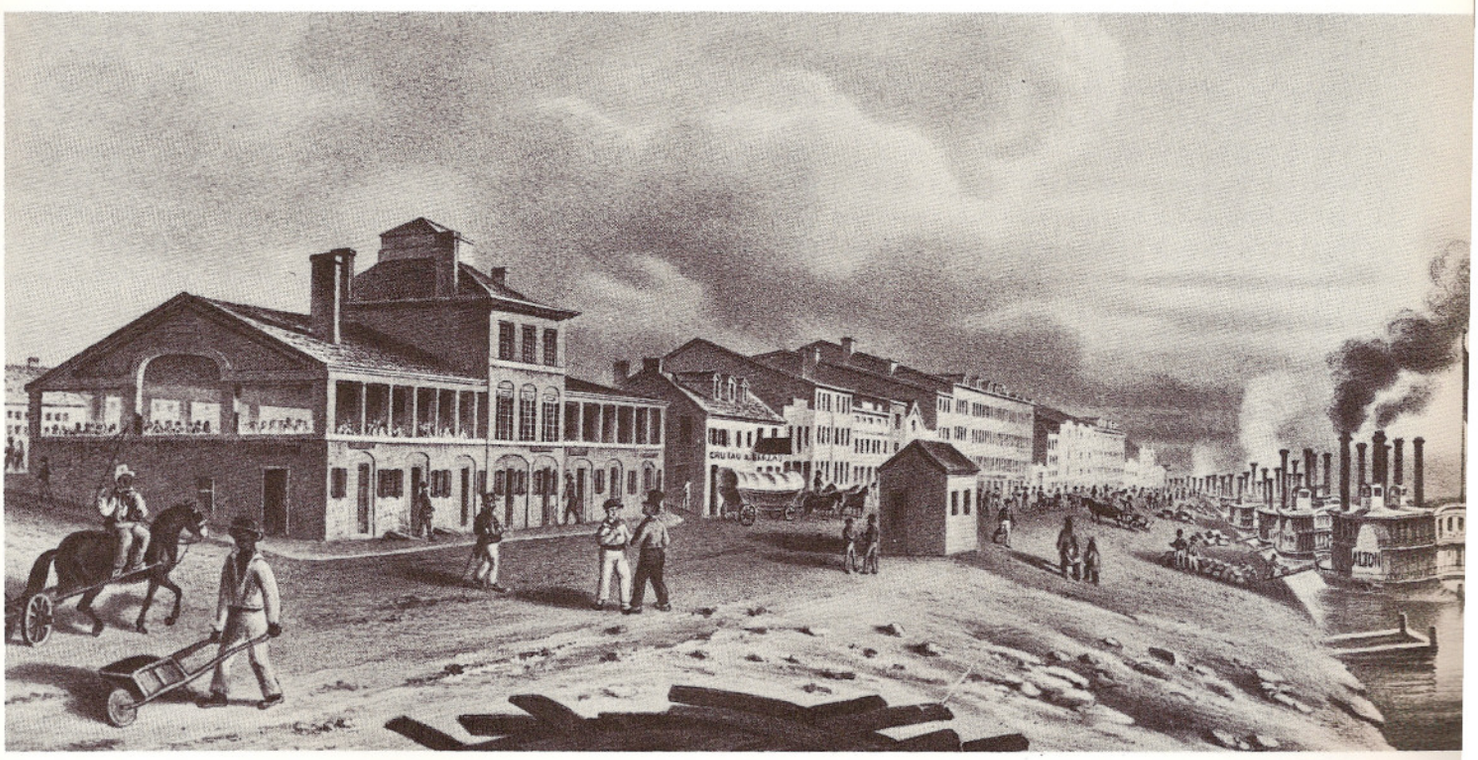
Meanwhile in Washington, D.C., a congressional committee cut off Long's appropriation. Disappointed with an expedition that was still eight hundred miles short of the Yellowstone, the secretary of war ordered Major Long to explore the source of the Platte River and return by way of the Arkansas. The Missouri had proved more difficult than anyone had expected. In the spring of 1820 the dragon boat went back down the river to St. Louis. That same season the steamer *Expedition* struggled up the Missouri with a cargo of presents for an assembly of tribesmen at Council Bluffs. While visiting the steamboat, one of the chiefs saw himself in a cabin mirror. He ran off and brought a crowd of others to roar in laughter at this wonder—unaware that the battered steamboat, coughing mud out of her boilers and running aground on bends and sandbars, would dispossess them of their country.

The Yellowstone expedition had failed, but the *Western Engineer* had proved that shallow-draft steamboats could navigate the Missouri, a lesson not lost on the proprietors of the fur trade. In 1830 the American Fur Company built the steamer *Yellowstone*, with a seventy-five-ton capacity, stout sidewheel paddles, and an upraised wheelhouse from which the pilot could scan the channel. In 1831 she steamed up to the mouth of the Niobrara and was stopped by low water. After lightening cargo, she continued to Fort Tecumseh (the present Pierre, South Dakota), where she delivered the rest of her cargo and returned to St. Louis. The next spring, by luck and labor, she churned up to the company's big new

Overleaf: "Snags on the Missouri," Karl Bodmer painting, first published in London, 1841.



The Benton, *last steamboat piloted by John La Barge, who died of heart failure while guiding her past Bismarck in 1885.*



Lithograph of busy Front Street, St. Louis, in 1840, with steamboats queued up at the wharf for the loading and unloading of their cargo.

Remains of the ill-fated* Benton *near Sioux City, Iowa. The 394-ton stern-wheeler met its demise on July 18, 1897, when it collided with a bridge on the Missouri. The men standing on the sandbar at left are salvaging whatever possible from this wreck, just one of many.

post, Fort Union, at the mouth of the Yellowstone River. Aboard was the artist George Catlin; whenever the steamer ran aground, he waded ashore with his sketching pad. In the clerk's office was Joseph La Barge, a youth of seventeen who would become the Missouri's most famous pilot. This steamboat trip made headlines in the East and was reported in newspapers all over Europe.

In the spring of 1833 there arrived at St. Louis one Alexander Philip Maximilian, Prince of Wied-Neuwied, an adventurer-naturalist who had already ranged afar from his castle on the Rhine. At the age of fifty, Prince Max was burning with curiosity about the American Northwest. Toothless, bearded, his stocky legs encased in greasy trousers, he was accompanied by a manservant named Dreidoppel, who proved to be a match for grizzly bears, and the young artist Karl Bodmer, fresh from his Paris studio. As guests of the American Fur Company, this party boarded the *Yellowstone* on April 10, 1833, for the steamer's third voyage. Through piles of trade goods, crates of live chickens, and a swarm of French-Canadian *engagés,* Prince Max was led to his cabin.

In radiant spring weather the *Yellowstone* churned past the green Missouri bottomlands and the grassy hills of Nebraska. At scattered trading posts—St. Joe, Council Bluffs, Sioux City, Vermillion—Indians watched the fire-canoe, her twin stacks puffing woodsmoke and her paddle wheels thumping. Down the swirling stream came uprooted trees, while the steamer scrambled out of the way. One morning Maximilian was aroused by a rending crash; a ragged branch had stove in the cabin door, nearly crushing him in his bunk. Often the *Yellowstone* ran aground; once she lost a chimney in a gale, and her crated poultry was blown overboard. Nevertheless, she averaged twenty miles a day up the surly river.

Fifty-one days out of St. Louis, the *Yellowstone* tied up at Fort Pierre. Prince Max and his two companions transferred to the *Assiniboine,* a new steamboat that could run on nineteen inches of water. While the *Yellowstone* splashed back to St. Louis with eight thousand buffalo hides, the *Assiniboine* toiled up the crest of snow water from the distant Rockies. She reached Fort Union, the new post near the mouth of the Yellowstone, at sunset on June 24. Two weeks at the fort gave Bodmer a chance to sketch Cree and Assiniboine tribesmen, while the Prince scouted cottonwood groves and the tawny bluffs.

In the 1830s this was the limit of steam navigation, but Prince Max went on in a keelboat, through the Montana buttes and badlands to makeshift Fort Mackenzie. After two months in the Blackfoot country, Max, Bodmer, and Dreidoppel shoved off in a Mackinaw boat with two live grizzly

bears in poplar cages. They wintered at Fort Clark, just across the river from old Fort Mandan, where in 1805 Lewis and Clark had been joined by the Shoshone girl Sacajawea (in the interim the river had flooded that site on the north bank). The party floated on down to St. Louis in the spring of 1834.

Back home on the Rhine, Prince Max laid out his notebooks and began writing his *Travels.* Meanwhile his specimen cases — pressed plants, birdskins, animal skins — were put aboard the *Assiniboine* at Fort Clark. Three days later sparks from the cabin stovepipe set the steamer afire and all Maximilian's collections were lost. But his great *Travels in the Interior of North America,* first published in Koblenz in 1839, appeared in German, French, and English editions, and over four hundred of Bodmer's watercolors are now on exhibit in the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha.

IN THE NEXT DECADE steamboats left St. Louis without fanfare for St. Paul, Pittsburgh, and New Orleans. But the departure of a "mountain boat" was different. In restless spring weather a boisterous company of halfbreeds, soldiers, trappers, and sportsmen trooped aboard with their blanket rolls and plunder. Yelling and whooping, they banged their rifles as the boat backed off. Ahead of them were a hazardous and always changing river, nations of roving Indians, a windswept land rising into unnamed mountains.

On April 25, 1843, John James Audubon boarded the steamer *Omega* with Joseph Sire as master and Joseph La Barge as pilot. He found 101 trappers, of nearly a dozen nationalities, all joining in the uproar of departure. While the boat labored up the flooded Missouri, the men saluted every village with yells and rifle fire. Beyond Fort Leavenworth they were in Indian country, stopping occasionally to discharge trade goods and take on fuel. Whenever they left, the Indians would run along the riverbank like children following a street parade.

Audubon made notes of army posts, trading stations, and Indian camps; of a black bear swimming the river and drowned buffalo floating past; of herds of buffalo, deer, elk, antelope, prairie wolves; of new species of birds, shrubs, and flowers. Below Fort Pierre they passed four barges piled with ten thousand buffalo hides. At loops of the river, hunters went ashore, coming aboard with fresh game a few miles farther on. Once the hunters shot four buffalo, though they brought back but one tongue and a few pieces of the hump meat. "Thus it is," Audubon noted, "that thousands multiplied by thousands of buffalo are murdered in senseless play, and their enormous carcasses are suffered to be the prey of the wolf, the raven, and the buzzard."

On June 6, with a cold wind whipping the river and a white frost on deck, the *Omega* ran aground. While the crew cut up driftwood for fuel, pilot La Barge pulled off in a yawl, searching for a channel through the bars and shoals. At Fort Clark, set amid the mud huts of a Mandan town, Captain Sire locked up everything before the Indians swarmed aboard. The previous year he had lost his own cap, belt, and powder horn at this same place; through the help of a chief he recovered the cap and horn, but a squaw had his leather belt and would not give it up.

After a record trip of forty-eight days, the *Omega* exchanged salutes with Fort Union, just above the mouth of the Yellowstone. The steamer unloaded cargo, took on some passengers and peltry, and hurried back to St. Louis before the river shrank. Audubon stayed until August, recording both the glamor and squalor of the frontier; then he came down with a party of trappers in a forty-foot Mackinaw boat. With him, like trophies from a safari, he brought a pair of foxes, a badger, and a Rocky Mountain doe.

In the 1850s the overland migration maintained a busy steamboat trade on the lower Missouri. A parade of vessels brought men, mules, oxen, and wagons to staging places for the long trek west. While wagon trains were ferrying the river at Independence and St. Joe, the fur trade was reaching deeper into the wild Northwest. The only transportation route to that country was the upper river—an imperial road strung with forts, posts, and stations where the Indian trails webbed in. Dented and scarred from snags and shoals, the fur boats were as beautiful as swans to the men at the upper posts, and their arrival was a noisy event at every landing.

In 1850 the Fort Mackenzie outpost in the rich Blackfoot country was enlarged and renamed for Thomas Hart Benton, who was said to have saved the American Fur Company from prosecution for liquor traffic with the tribes. To supply the post, steamboat cargoes were laboriously brought from Fort Union by keelboat. In 1851 Joseph La Barge took the steamer *St. Ange* to the mouth of the Poplar River, the farthest point yet reached by steamboat. Two years later the *El Paso* groped sixty miles farther to the bend above the mouth of the Milk River. With two hundred more miles' travel, a steamboat could tie up under the walls of Fort Benton.

In 1859 the fur company ordered its own *Spread Eagle* and the chartered *Chippewa* to Fort Benton. The two steamers set out on a booming current, but low water bared the bones of the river at Fort Union. There the *Chippewa's* master sold his boat to the fur company, giving them the problem of navigating the last three hundred miles. Freight from the *Spread Eagle* was transferred to the shallower *Chippewa.* Under command of Captain John La Barge, brother of the *St. Ange's* master, that vessel worked on upstream to Brulé Bottom, fifteen miles short of Fort Benton. It was then mid-July and snow water was running out. The *Chippewa* left her cargo on the bank and hurried down the shrinking river.

The next year, 1860, the *Chippewa* and the *Key West* made it all the way to Fort Benton. The *Chippewa* went up again in 1861 but did not reach her destination. On a Sunday evening at Disaster Bend, near the mouth of Poplar River, some deckhands lit a candle in the black hold to tap a cask of whisky. Soon the steamer was on fire. The crew got off, and

the boat drifted downstream while flames ate toward the kegged gunpowder below deck. When the explosion came, there was nothing left of the pathfinding *Chippewa*. For days afterward scavenging Crow tribesmen gathered tobacco, blankets, traps, shovels, and bags of beads and beans from the riverbank.

In the spring of 1862, Joseph La Barge brought his side-wheeler *Emilie* on a thirty-five day trip from St. Louis to Fort Benton. The record of that voyage (now in the archives of the Missouri Historical Society) makes vivid reading a hundred years later. At Sioux City the *Emilie* passed the last wood-pile landing. Beyond that post a steamer lived off the country, its men hunting antelope on the prairie and cutting wood from rack heaps on the riverbank. Ash and red mulberry made the best fuel. The furnaces ate up thirty cords a day, a supply that half filled the boiler deck, and some days more time was spent in wooding than in traveling; there was plenty of time for the hunters to look for game. At the Yankton Agency, Indians swarmed out of fifty Sioux lodges, and while the steamer loaded wood, the chiefs came aboard for a dole of whisky. At Fort Randall, the next outpost, three hundred Iowa volunteers crowded the riverbank, avid for news of the States and marveling like the Indians at the *Emilie's* mud-churning paddle wheels.

Some twenty-five miles above Fort Berthold, Captain La Barge found the river black with buffalo. A vast herd was crossing the stream and the banks were a solid mass of movement. For half a day the *Emilie* waited, and when she moved on, her locker was loaded with meat. A few miles farther the steamer came upon a wounded bull buffalo wading onto a willow island. The boat touched there, and some passengers jumped ashore twirling lariats. When the bull charged, the ropers scattered. A yelping staghound leaped from the boiler deck and seized the bull by the nose. From the rail a traveler felled the animal with a rifle shot.

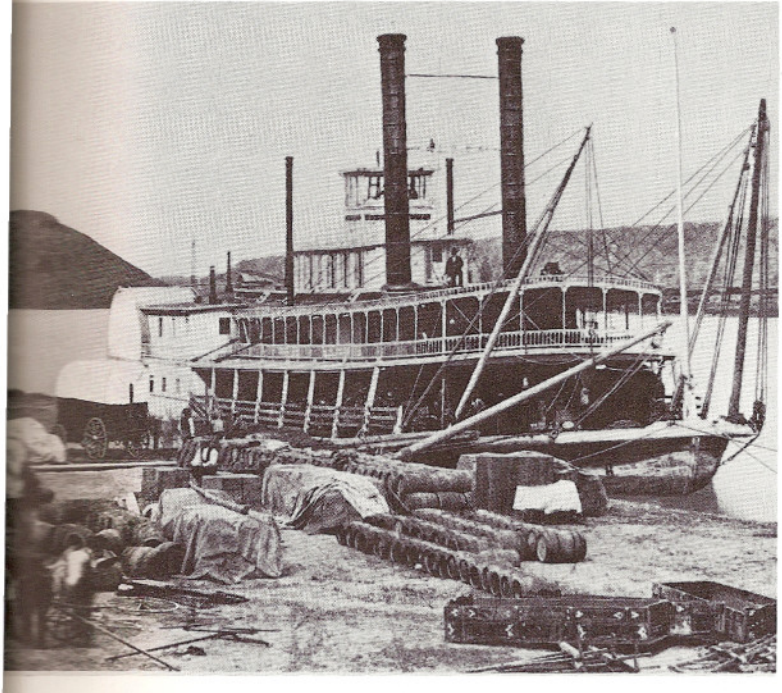
Halfway between Fort Union and Fort Benton, the river foamed over Drowned Man Rapids, where four boatmen from the *Spread Eagle* had been lost while stretching a line to warp a steamboat through. Seething and shaking, the *Emilie* went over on her own power, to the lusty cheers of her roustabouts. On June 17 the hills above Fort Benton echoed with her signal cannon.

In the noisy welcome a passenger named Taylor Linn made a friend of Little Dog, chief of the Piegan tribe of Blackfeet; Linn gave him an American flag, which the chief wore like a blanket. It was illegal to serve liquor to Indians in the steamer's bar room, but Linn bought a bottle to share with his friend ashore. While parading on the bank and carrying on a conversation that neither understood, they fell into the river. When they climbed out, dripping and still talking, the mate ordered them out of the way of the stevedores.

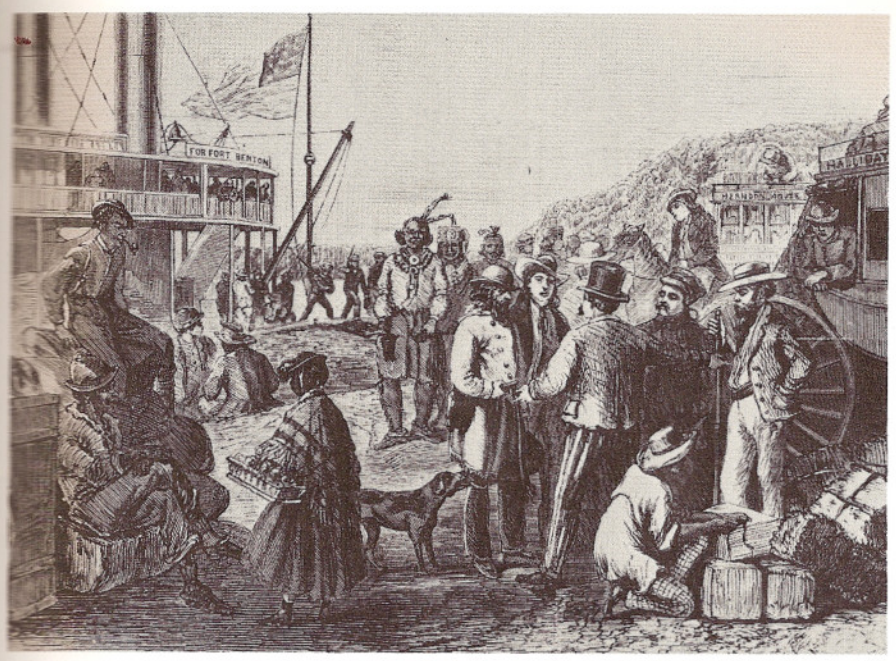
Returning downriver on the ebbing crest of snow water, the *Emilie* was halted by a great herd at a buffalo crossing. The boatmen lassoed eleven calves, hauled them aboard, and penned them up on the boiler deck. At Fort Berthold hunters caught a young grizzly bear, three coyotes, and a huge horned owl. Along with bales of hides and peltry, this live cargo was brought to St. Louis on a falling river early in July.

Meanwhile excitement was growing in Montana. That summer a party of prospectors in the Pioneer Mountains found placer gold along Grasshopper Creek, and the pick-and-shovel men swarmed in. The next spring brought the bonanza to Alder Gulch, and fifteen months later came the dramatic discovery at Last Chance Gulch, which overnight became the boomtown of Helena. At Fort Benton the fur trade dwindled and a new commerce began. Up to 1864 that post had seen just six steamboat arrivals. In 1865 a thousand men, hundreds of oxen, mules, and horses, six thousand tons of merchandise, and twenty quartz mills went ashore at the trampled landing. In 1866 thirty-one steamboats reached Fort Benton, where tents and tepees dotted the riverbank and wagon trains creaked off for the gold camps. In May of 1867 forty steamboats scraped and scrambled over the shoals of the upper river.

A typical mountain boat carried four hundred tons of freight and two or three hundred passengers. It was a stern-wheeler with a stout hull and a protruding spoon-shaped bow. The pilot house was sheathed in boiler plate against Indian bullets and arrows. With her shallow bow this boat could run on a sandbar and then back off. In a shoal passage, where the paddles threshed mud and air, the boat was "walked" ahead, a step at a time, to the clank of the steam



The steamboat* DeSmet *at the Fort Benton levee, 1873. From here the journey west continued overland by wagon and team to the gold beyond.



Arrival of the Fort Benton steamboat* Jennie Brown *at Omaha on September 26, 1868.

capstan. For this maneuver, cargo was shifted from bow to stern, spars were lowered into the sand, cables tightened on the capstan, and the boat was pried upward and forward—"grasshoppering" they called it.

"Steam navigation on the Missouri," said Father DeSmet, after many missionary trips to the Northwest, "is one of the most hazardous things a man can undertake." When the *Henry M. Shreve* went up to Fort Benton in 1869, she passed the burned steamer *Antelope*, the grounded *Huntsville*, the stranded *Big Horn*, the beached *Importer*, the *Peninah* hung up on a bar, the wreck of the *J. H. Trevor*, the *Mountaineer* aground with a broken wheel, the *Lacon* stuck and sawing up her guards for fuel. At Yankton Agency the *Shreve* broke her own rudder and spent two days making a new one of green timber. In a swirling current just five miles from Fort Benton, her crew attached a cable to a "dead man" timber on the bank. In shuddering toil, dragging 567 tons across a sandbar, the steam line broke. Then the crew used hand bars, walking the capstan around while the boat inched ahead. That summer twenty-four steamers reached Fort Benton, each one scarred and dented and panting from its labor.

Game was plentiful along the upper Missouri, but fuel wood was a problem. Joseph La Barge once carried a team of oxen to haul logs aboard, where a steam-powered saw cut them into furnace lengths. As traffic grew, some Indians took up the wood business. At a Sauk village in 1843, the steamer *Omega* took on eight cords of wood in exchange for five tin cups of sugar and three of coffee—25¢ worth at St. Louis, Audubon noted. But the Indians soon learned better, and later steamboat captains paid from $2.50 to $15.00 a cord

Continued on page 61

Chugging up the Missouri, the stern-wheeler* Rosebud *is loaded with cargo, fuel, and people.

STEAMBOAT TO THE ROCKIES

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to keep steam in their boilers. On her run to Fort Benton in 1869, the *Henry M. Shreve* spent $6,048.70 for fuel. A hundred dollars a day was a common wood bill.

Still, the chancy mountain trade made fortunes for its owners. Cabin fare cost $300, and the freight rate was 12½¢ a pound from St. Louis to the mountains. The *Peter Balen* cleared $65,000 on her first trip to Fort Benton in 1866. That same season the new *William J. Lewis* ran to the mountains and back at a profit of $60,000. In 1867, on a fast trip in his new *Octavia,* Joseph La Barge carried three hundred passengers and three hundred tons of cargo at a gain of $45,000. An upper Missouri boat could more than pay for herself on a single run to the mountains.

The pilots shared in the bonanza. Missouri boats paid $500 a month on the lower river and four times as much for the trip to Fort Benton. In seasons when he was not running a boat of his own, Joseph La Barge hired out at $2000 a month in the mountain trade. Gold in the hills meant gold on the river.

In 1855 the United States bought Fort Pierre from the American Fur Company, and so began the conquest of the upper Missouri by the U.S. Army. With the Montana gold rush the Northwest became a military frontier. In 1866 the fur trade was dying like an old campfire, and at the mouth of the Yellowstone Fort Union flickered out. Once the greatest of the Indian trading posts, its walls were crumbling and its last goods had been moved in the steamer *Louella* to Fort Benton. Returning to St. Louis, the *Louella* was crowded with prospectors who carried more than a million dollars in gold dust.

For a decade after 1866, the army was the biggest shipper on the Missouri. It chartered boats, hired pilots, and carried troops and military supplies to a string of forts on the upper river. A number of steamboats supplied the army during its war with the Sioux, but one vessel and one riverman saw more action than all the rest. When General Sheridan planned the campaign of 1876, he asked Captain Grant Marsh to command a supply boat, and Marsh chose the *Far West,* a light, strong steamer built for the upper Missouri trade and chartered by the army at $360 a day. In May of 1876, while the troops marched out of Fort Abraham Lincoln, heading into Sioux country, the *Far West* steamed up the Yellowstone River.

On the evening of June 21, the *Far West* was moored at the mouth of Rosebud Creek, where a great ring of campfires gleamed on the prairie. General Gibbon's infantry was spread along the river, and Custer's cavalry was bivouacked beyond. At dusk, George A. Custer came aboard—fringed buckskin jacket, windburned face, long mustache, and flowing hair; Gibbon and General Terry were already there. In lamplight they bent over field maps in the steamer's cabin. Gibbon's troops would move up the north bank of the Yellowstone to the mouth of the Big Horn, where the *Far West* would ferry them across. Meanwhile, Custer would ride up the Rosebud until he found the trail of Sitting Bull's Sioux. According to their plan, the two converging forces would crush the Indian force between them.

That night another lamp burned late aboard the *Far West.* At a poker table sat Captain Grant Marsh, young Tom Custer, and some other army men. They played intently while on the prairie the campfires winked out and the white stars circled over. When the game broke up, Captain Crowell of the Sixth Infantry was more than a thousand dollars richer. Next morning, the troops broke camp and the riverbank was empty. With guidons whipping, Custer's outfit disappeared over the grass hills.

Six days later the *Far West,* having labored fifty-three miles up the Big Horn River, was tied to an island at the mouth of the Little Big Horn. Through the shallows stumbled an exhausted messenger. It was Custer's Crow scout, Curly; in sign language he told a tale of ambush and disaster. White scouts arrived the next day, confirming Curly's grim report and telling of Reno's running battle with the Sioux; they brought orders to Captain Marsh to transport the wounded. All night litter-bearers straggled in, guided by fires along the riverbank. With fifty-two casualties on deck the *Far West* headed downstream, dodging shoals and islands.

That evening the steamer tied to the bank of the Yellowstone, near General Gibbon's supply camp; Captain Marsh had orders to ferry Gibbon's troops to the north side of the river. When the troops arrived two days later and were taken across, the *Far West* started for Fort Lincoln, 710 miles away. Day and night, swaying through rapids and grazing banks and bars, she raced down the Yellowstone and into the Missouri. Fifty-four hours after leaving the Big Horn, the steamer arrived at Bismarck and Fort Lincoln. That night telegraphers clicked out the news, and by morning the nation echoed with the names of Custer and Sitting Bull. Later that summer the *Far West* carried members of the Indian Peace Commission to treat with the tribes.

In 1884 Captain Grant Marsh, commanding the *Eclipse,* transferred Indian prisoners at Fort Keogh on the Yellow-

stone to the lower reservations. The next year he brought down the last of the Sioux. One of them was Sitting Bull, who after a few hungry seasons had come into Fort Buford, with his two wives and 185 ragged followers, and surrendered to the army. Grant Marsh took them aboard at Fort Randall and delivered them to the Standing Rock Agency. From there Sitting Bull went on tour with Buffalo Bill's Wild West show.

In 1885 Joseph La Barge, in government survey service on the steamer *Missouri,* made the last through trip to Fort Benton. He retired that fall, fifty-three years after his first voyage up the long river. La Barge dictated his memories to H. M. Chittenden in 1897 and compiled a record of steamboat wrecks—nearly three hundred of them—on the Missouri. The grimmest item in that somber list was the *Saluda,* piloted by his brother; Charles La Barge was killed along with a hundred others when the steamer exploded at Lexington, Missouri, in 1852. Another brother, John, died of heart failure at the wheel of the *Benton,* at Bismarck in 1885.

But the venerable Joseph La Barge outlived navigation on the upper Missouri. He died in 1899 and was buried in the Calvary Cemetery at St. Louis, above the sound of steamboats on the Mississippi. By then the mountain boats seemed as distant as the western wagon trains.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

This article draws upon Part I of Edwin James' *Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains* (vol. 14) and Prince Maximilian's *Travels in the Interior of North Ameria in the Years 1832–1834* (vols. 22-24), both included in *Early Western Travels* (32 vols., New York, 1904). Joseph La Barge's experience on the Missouri River is taken from H. M. Chittenden's *History of Early Steam Navigation on the Missouri River: Life and Adventures of Joseph La Barge* (2 vols., New York, 1903). Joseph Mills Hanson discusses the career of Grant Marsh and the development of army transport on the upper river in *The Conquest of the Missouri* (New York, 1946).

Detailed records of steamboat voyages appear in "Log of the *Henry M. Shreve* to Fort Benton in 1869," edited by William J. Petersen, in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (March, 1945) and in the manuscript narratives "Journal of the Trip of the Steamer *Clermont* from St. Louis to the Mouth of the Yellowstone River, 1846" and "Account of Trip of the *Emilie* from St. Louis to Fort Benton, Mont., May 14 to June 17, 1862" in the collection of the Missouri Historical Society. A detailed list of steamboat wrecks on the river is given in W. J. McDonald's "The Missouri River and Its Victims" in the *Missouri Historical Review* (January, April, July, 1927). Vivian K. McLarty recounted "The First Steamboats on the Missouri" in the *Missouri Historical Review* (July, 1957). The rise and fall of the fur trade on the river is traced in Charles Larpenteur's *Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri* (2 vols., New York, 1898) and Ray H. Mattson's "The Upper Missouri Fur Trade" in *Nebraska History* (March, 1961).

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IN PURSUIT OF DUTY

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this occasion he was unarmed . . . Neagle had no means of knowing that fact; on the contrary, to his mind every presumption was in favor of the belief that he carried both pistol and knife, in accordance with his usual habit. As a peace officer . . . he was justified in taking the means necessary to prevent Terry from continuing his assault." The question was the still unresolved one of the responsibility of a police officer making an arrest.

Mrs. Terry, unimpressed by editorial rhetoric, swore out warrants for both Neagle and Field. By prearranged plan a warrant was presented to Field by a much embarrassed deputy. He was released immediately on a writ of *habeas corpus.* Application was also made for a writ in Neagle's behalf. It was on this legal point that *in re Neagle* was initiated. Obviously, Field would not be held, but many people believed that he should be tried in California for the crime of murder. Failure to do so, they argued, would pose a serious threat to states' rights and the federal system.

While editors and attorneys argued the fine points of the law, David Terry was buried. It was a bad affair, marred by the presence of a crowd of curious onlookers. Moreover, the Terry family had its way and buried him next to his first wife, causing Sarah additional pain. Significantly, the California Supreme Court did not adjourn as was its custom at the death of former justices.

The *habeas corpus* hearing in the federal court was held in September. A number of witnesses appeared, suggesting strongly that nobody knew what happened at Lathrop. Field mingled freely with the witnesses, used the jury box as his own private grandstand, and even accompanied Judge Sawyer to his chambers at every recess and at the end of each session. The outcome of the hearing was never seriously in doubt. On September 16, 1889, Sawyer ruled that Neagle's action was done in the pursuance of his duty. Sawyer's decision did little to allay the fears of those who saw federal intervention as a threat to state sovereignty. The decision applied a loose construction to the word *law.* That within itself upset some, but Sawyer's views were clearly biased by his own involvement in the case. He declared Neagle innocent of any crime—a point not at issue—and supported this contention by reference to "the almost universal consensus of public opinion." This incredible resort to trial by newspaper editorial climaxed a decision marked by the absence of judicial prudence.

Field then presented Neagle with a gold watch and chain inscribed: "Stephen J. Field to David Neagle—as a token of his courage and fidelity to duty under circumstances of peril at Lathrop, California, on August 14, 1889."

The State of California promptly appealed the decision.