

‘IT WASN’T THE MONEY BOAT’: THE MYTH AND REALITY OF TREASURE
HUNTING FOR WESTERN RIVER STEAMBOATS IN THE UNITED STATES

A Dissertation

by

KRISTEN MARIE VOGEL

Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Chair of Committee,	D. Bruce Dickson
Committee Members,	Luis Filipe Monteiro Vieira de Castro
	Kevin Crisman
	Joseph Dawson
Head of Department,	Cynthia Werner

August 2017

Major Subject: Anthropology

Copyright 2017 Kristen M. Vogel

ABSTRACT

This dissertation chronicles the historical record of the attempt to recover treasure from buried western river steamboats in the United States by examining the site formation of steamboat wreck sites, treasure myths, protective legislation regarding historic shipwrecks, and treasure hunting attempts from the late-nineteenth century to modern day. Primary accounts from the nineteenth century through current day, including newspapers, magazines, literature, narratives written by treasure hunters, legislative agendas, legal documents, and court case proceedings, were utilized. Seven case studies of steamboats targeted by treasure hunters were included: *Missouri Packet* (1820), *Ben Sherrod* (1837), *Arabia* (1856), *Twilight* (1865), *Bertrand* (1865), *Leodora* (1866), and *City of New Orleans* (unidentified). Each of these vessels sunk in the nineteenth century and later became the target of treasure seekers who hoped to recover valuables.

In the nineteenth century, the steamboat was a crucial mode of transportation of goods and people. Cargoes included foodstuffs, raw materials, ceramics, clothing, alcoholic spirits, and tools. Basically, if it was needed or wanted, it could be found in the cargo hold of a steamboat. Despite their utility, transporting goods by steamboat involved risk. Accidents—including boiler explosions or being impaled by snags—were common. In many cases, the boat sank after an accident. Some steamboats and their cargo were salvaged shortly after they sank. Others were abandoned, either inaccessible or forgotten.

An abandoned vessel potentially holds thousands of artifacts, some of it with potential market value. Thus, western river steamboats have become the subject of treasure hunting lore. These tales focused on rumored whiskey cargoes and precious metals buried on steamboats along the Ohio, Mississippi, and Missouri rivers and their tributaries. Treasure hunters of late nineteenth century attempted to get at the rumored treasure but often failed due to difficult conditions. Later attempts proved to be more thorough, and they could also prove to be more destructive to the archaeological record. Treasure hunters have recovered thousands of artifacts but no treasure troves. Some have worked to conserve and display artifacts. At the same time, treasure hunting methods are often at odds with archaeological principles and the conservation of cultural heritage.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation with love to my husband, David, and my son, Michael.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank the members of my committee: Bruce Dickson, Luis Filipe Monteiro Vieira de Castro, Kevin Crisman, and Joseph Dawson. Dr. Dickson shared his archaeological expertise through coursework, fieldwork, and many discussions about the dissertation. I appreciate his guidance and service as my advisor. Dr. Castro offered encouragement and aided me in finding an academic approach for the study of treasure hunting. Dr. Crisman's instruction in coursework and the field school in Oklahoma were vital foundations for this dissertation, and I am grateful for his keen eye for editing. Finally, Dr. Dawson offered helpful historical insight and suggested edits.

I appreciate the assistance given by the staff of the Anthropology Department at Texas A&M. I especially thank Rebekah Luza for acting as a technological intermediary when necessary. I am also thankful to the College of Liberal Arts, where I held a Graduate Assistantship, and in particular to my supervisors, Don Curtis and Terri Burger.

I received financial support for research from Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas. I am appreciative to have been a recipient of the William and Madeline Smith Research Travel Award and to have been able to access their archives. The Glasscock Center for Humanities at Texas A&M, the Department of Anthropology, and the Center for Maritime Archaeology and Conservation each provided research funding. Finally, the Ed and Judy Jelks Student Travel Award from

the Society of Historical Archaeology and a travel award from the Historic Natchez Foundation allowed me to present portions of my research at conferences. Thank you to each of these organizations for their financial support.

I would also like to thank individuals who met with me during the course of my research. In Missouri, David Hawley, Wayne Lammers, Gary Sisk, and Gary Rex Walters each took time to discuss their involvement with steamboat excavations in the state. Additionally, Mark Miles, the former director of the State Preservation Office in Missouri, answered questions and explained the state's efforts to protect historic sites. In Natchez, Mississippi, Mimi Miller of the Historic Natchez Foundation aided me in finding materials.

Thank you to my friends and family for their support. Ashley Barnett was a voice of encouragement. Laura Gongaware was my research and travel partner during early research on *Missouri Packet* and legislation protecting historic sites in Missouri. The late Gary Harvey offered helpful ideas and suggested sources. I am sorry he is not around to discuss the final project. Kali Johnson proofread a section of the dissertation. Becca Sager answered questions about her time working on the *Heroine* excavation in Oklahoma. Nikki Trott explored "reuse" with me in New Orleans.

I also extend my gratitude to those who offered their time with my son, so I could meet various demands of the degree: Aaron and Sarah Bryant, Tina Coleman, Heather and Tim Harrison, Jill Harvey, Ken and Linda Keith, Jordan Lynch, Marti Lynch, Leon and Mary Shelton, and Brad and Kristen Shumbera.

Thank you to my parents, Harlan and Nancy Vogel, for their unfailing support and assistance—including assisting with daycare, attending a field interview with me, and proofreading many drafts of the dissertation. Thank you to my husband, David, for his constant encouragement and editing skills. Finally, to my son, Michael, thank you for accepting both the adventure and tedium of having a mother in research and writing mode.

CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

Contributors

This work was supervised by a dissertation committee consisting of Dr. Bruce Dickson (advisor), Dr. Luis Filipe Monteiro Vieira de Castro, and Dr. Kevin Crisman of the Department of Anthropology and Dr. Joseph Dawson of the Department of History.

Some research collected about the steamboats *Arabia*, *Missouri Packet*, and *Twilight* and protective legislation in Missouri was done in collaboration with Laura Gongaware of the Department of Anthropology. All other work conducted for the dissertation was completed by the student independently.

Funding

Graduate study was supported by an assistantship with the College of Liberal Arts at Texas A&M and a scholarship from the Department of Anthropology at Texas A&M.

This dissertation was made possible in part by the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas through the William and Madeline Smith Research Travel Award. Additional research funding was provided by the Glasscock Center for Humanities at Texas A&M, the Department of Anthropology, and the Center for Maritime Archaeology and Conservation. I received travel awards from the Society of Historic Archaeology and Historic Natchez Foundation to present portions of my research at conferences.

Thank you to each of these organizations for their financial support. The contents of the dissertation are solely the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily represent the official views of the awarding institutions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES.....	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xiii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW	1
The Search for Buried Treasure on Sunken Steamboats.....	1
The Sought-After Treasure.....	6
Whiskey.....	7
Precious Metals	8
The Vessels	8
<i>Missouri Packet</i> (1819-1820).....	9
<i>Ben Sherrod</i> (1835-1837).....	10
<i>Arabia</i> (1853-1856).....	10
<i>Bertrand</i> (1864-1865)	11
<i>Leodora</i> (1864-1866)	12
<i>Twilight</i> (1865).....	12
<i>City of New Orleans</i> (unidentified).....	12
Literature	13
Treasure Hunting versus Archaeology	16
Overview of the Dissertation.....	21
CHAPTER II: FORMATION PROCESSES OF STEAMBOAT WRECK SITES	22
Time Capsules and Moments Frozen in Time	22
<i>Mamie S. Barrett</i>	23
Site Formation	27
Reuse	31
Cultural Disposition	38
Reclamation.....	39
Disturbance.....	41
Environmental Transforms.....	44

Disaster Response	49
Pre-Impact Stage	49
Impact Stage	51
Recoil and Rescue	59
Post-Disaster (Systemic Salvage).....	60
Conclusion.....	62
 CHAPTER III: TALES OF BURIED TREASURE ON SUNKEN STEAMBOATS	63
Buried Treasure Tales	63
Spreading the Myth	66
 CHAPTER IV: NINETEENTH-CENTURY HUNTS FOR BURIED TREASURE ON WESTERN RIVER STEAMBOATS	76
<i>Leodora</i>	76
<i>Missouri Packet</i>	77
<i>Twilight</i>	79
<i>Arabia</i>	90
<i>Bertrand</i>	98
 CHAPTER V: SEARCHING FOR BURIED TREASURE ON WESTERN RIVER STEAMBOATS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND BEYOND	103
<i>City of New Orleans</i>	106
<i>Leodora</i>	108
<i>Bertrand</i>	109
<i>Missouri Packet</i>	125
<i>Arabia</i>	129
<i>Twilight</i>	139
<i>Ben Sherrod</i>	147
Additional Recovery Attempts.....	153
<i>Jim Turner</i>	153
Pete King, Steamboat Hunter	154
<i>Sultana</i>	155
<i>Malta</i>	156
Conclusion.....	157
 CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION.....	161
Interpretation of Findings.....	166
Financial Considerations	166
Cultural Heritage	169
Legislation.....	171

Media.....	175
WORKS CITED.....	177

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Map of western rivers of the United States.....	2
Figure 2. Map of excavation sites of steamboat wrecks excavated by treasure hunters	7
Figure 3. Stern view of <i>Mamie S. Barrett</i>	25
Figure 4. Port side view of <i>Mamie S. Barrett</i>	25
Figure 5. View facing the bow of <i>Mamie S. Barrett</i>	26
Figure 6. Interior of <i>Mamie S. Barrett</i>	26
Figure 7. Flywheel fragment forms the upper arch of “Riverboat Bend” sign	34
Figure 8. One of three chandeliers from <i>Robert E. Lee</i> on display at the First Presbyterian Church in Port Gibson, Mississippi.....	36
Figure 9. The bell from the steamboat <i>America</i> at the gravesite of Captain LaVerrier in New Orleans, Louisiana	36
Figure 10. The bell from the steamboat <i>Betsy Ann</i> serves as a garden decoration in Natchez, Mississippi.....	37
Figure 11. Brick from <i>Paul Jones</i> on display at the Grand Gulf Military Park, Port Gibson, Mississippi	38
Figure 12. “A Missouri River Steamer Snagged” from Benjamin F. Gue, <i>History of Iowa from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century</i> , Vol. 1	53
Figure 13. “Explosion of the Steamboat Helen McGregor, at Memphis TN, 24 February 1830,” from James T. Lloyd, <i>Lloyd's Steamboat Directory and Disasters on the Western Rivers</i>	56
Figure 14. Artist rendition of workers removing cargo from the hold of the steamboat <i>Twilight</i>	86
Figure 15. Artist rendition of the buried <i>Arabia</i>	95

Figure 16. “Bertrand Stores” sign and other artifacts on display at the <i>Bertrand</i> exhibit.....	122
Figure 17. Exterior of the Steamboat <i>Arabia</i> Museum	137
Figure 18. Display at the Steamboat <i>Arabia</i> Museum	138
Figure 19. Artifacts on display at the Steamboat <i>Arabia</i> Museum, including queensware	138
Figure 20. Gary Sisk shows the author bottles of bitters from a cold storage unit	146
Figure 21. Gary Sisk shows the author artifacts from the <i>Twilight</i> excavation in storage	146
Figure 22. Large artifacts from the steamboat <i>Twilight</i> excavation are stored outside..	147

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In the winter months of 1987-88, a salvage company uncovered the buried remains of the nineteenth-century steamboat *Missouri Packet*. The vessel sank in 1820 in the Missouri River after hitting a snag, an obstruction in the river caused by a fallen tree, in the Missouri River. According to legend, the treasure aboard the ill-fated steamboat was lost. Twentieth-century salvors hoped to recover precious metals or well-aged whiskey. Instead, they found the remains of the vessel's hull, barrels of pickled pork, and little else. There was nothing of market value--nothing for the treasure hunters to sell to offset the cost of the excavation and make a profit. David Hawley, a member of the salvage company, explained, "It wasn't the money boat."¹ It could have been the lament of any number of salvors seeking treasure on buried steamboats.

The Search for Buried Treasure on Sunken Steamboats

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, the steamboat was a crucial mode of transportation of goods and people in the American West, including along the Mississippi, Ohio, and Missouri rivers, their tributaries, and lesser rivers (Figure 1). Cargos included foodstuffs, cotton, ceramics, clothing and accessories, alcoholic spirits,

¹ "Steamboat Excavated, but Treasure Wasn't There," *Lawrence (Kansas) Journal-World*, 28 February 1988, in Google News [database online], <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2199&dat=19880228&id=CiIyAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=FuYFAAAAIBAJ&pg=5718,5356242>>; "132-Year-Old Riverboat Wreck Being Dug Up by Adventurers," *The Nevada Daily Mail*, 11 December 1988, in Google News [database online], <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=M0IrAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=UNUEAAAAIIBAJ&pg=1811%2C6095754>>.

tools, and other items. If it was needed or wanted, it was likely carried in the cargo hold of a riverboat. In writing about the contributions of the vessel to the U.S. economy in the antebellum period, Charles Russell exclaims, “The steamboat, the steamboat— everything depended upon the steamboat!”²

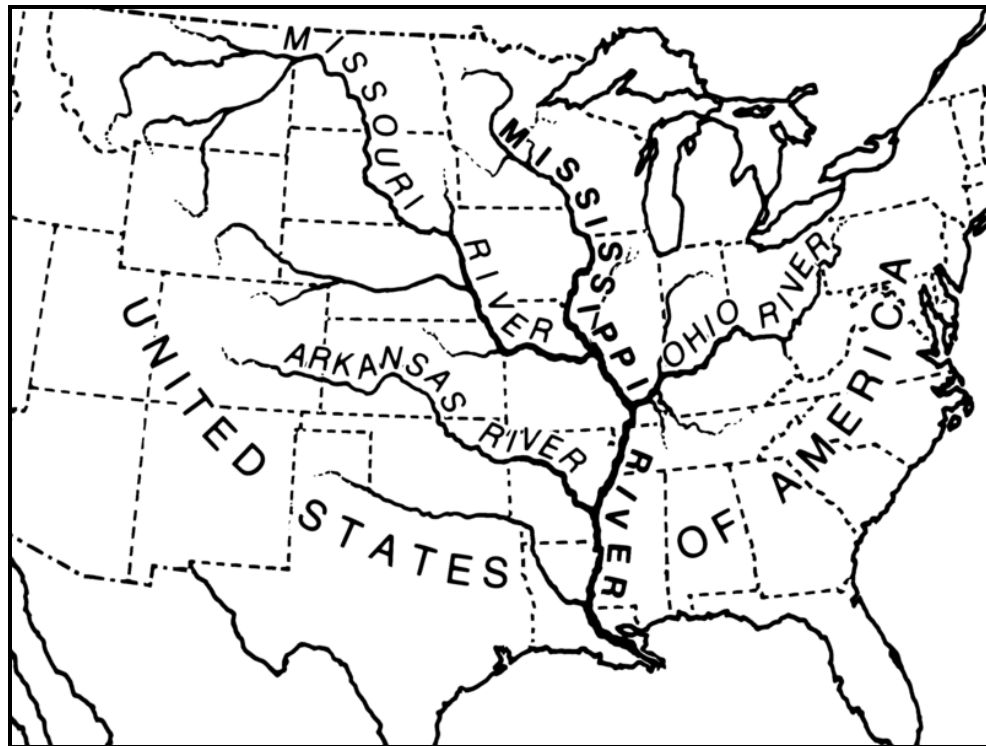


Figure 1. Map of western rivers of the United States. Reprinted from Pearson Scott Foresman, *PSF M-590002.png*, Wikimedia Commons, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3APSF_M-590002.png>.

Despite their utility, however, there was risk involved when transporting goods and people by steamboat. Common accidents included the boat being punctured by a snag, grounded by a shoal, or damaged by a boiler explosion. Louis Hunter writes, “Part

² Charles Edward Russel, *A-Rafting on the Mississippi* (New York: The Century Co., 1928), 21.

of the price to be paid for the great benefits of steam navigation, the West was soon to learn, was a succession of disasters in kind and scale unprecedented in the peacetime experience of this region.”³ In many cases, the boat sank, either fully or partially, after an accident. Evidence suggests that by 1851 there had been at least 1000 accidents on western rivers, and there were hundreds more in the decades that followed.⁴ Steamboat that were damaged beyond repair, that would require costly repair, or that was inaccessible due to rising waters or shifting channels, was often abandoned.⁵

While some steamboats were completely submerged, the hulks of many other wrecks were visible in the rivers’ waters. For travelers in the nineteenth century, steamboat wrecks and wreckage were a common site on western riverscapes. One writer remembered, “While going down the Mississippi some years ago I saw many wrecked steamboats. Impaled upon snags, out upon sandbars, old hulks burned to the water’s edge, and scattered pieces blown hither and tither by exploding boilers...”⁶ Another observer surmised, “Countless wrecks are charged up against [the Mississippi River’s] snags, and all along its thousands of miles of shores are innumerable proofs of its wanton and wild devastation. If an indictment against the Father of Waters were to be attempted its ‘counts’ would defy all efforts to number them.”⁷

³ Louis C. Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1949, 1977), 271.

⁴ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 272, 656.

⁵ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 271-272.

⁶ Grapho, “From a Chicago Standpoint,” *The (Chicago) Advance* 32, July 30, 1896, accessed February 26, 2015, *American Periodical Series*.

⁷ “A Useless Old ‘Stream,’” *The Daily Picayune (New Orleans)*, December 28, 1877, accessed February 8, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers* [database online].

Exposed wrecks were more likely to have cargo, machinery, and parts professionally salvaged or randomly scavenged, but even vessels under water could be salvaged. In the mid-nineteenth century, wreckers worked to recover valuable cargo and raise sunken steamboats. Wreckers were hired by steamboat owners or insurance companies after a sinking. In 1880, for example, the owner and the captain of the steamboat *Fawn* requested the services of the wrecking boat *Charlie Hill* on the Tennessee River to recover the sunken boat.⁸ Wreckers also could purchase the ownership of a wrecked steamboat, as advertised in New Orleans in 1876: “ATTENTION WRECKERS! -- The wreck of steamboat Garry Owen will positively be sold to-day at 12 o'clock M., at the office of O. Valenton, autioneer, Nos. 93 and 95 Magazine street.”⁹

While there were profits to be made by recovering sunken cargo, not every boat was recovered or salvaged. The public was more often than not unaware what was or was not recovered, which led to speculation that inaccessible valuables were left on sunken vessels. The steamboats that seemingly disappeared into the river were most intriguing to those seeking valuables. Over time, these steamboats could be buried underground on land due to a change in the river course.

Herein lies the great potential to find a vast array of nineteenth-century material culture. An abandoned vessel may hold thousands of artifacts, some of them with

⁸ “General Local Items,” *The Daily Cairo(Illinois) Bulletin*, February 17, 1880, accessed February 8, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87082573/1880-02-17/ed-1/seq-4/>>.

⁹ *The New Orleans Bulletin*, February 8, 1876, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86079018/1876-02-08/ed-1/seq-1/>>.

potential market value--or so conventional wisdom suggests.¹⁰ Thus, buried western river steamboats have become the subject of treasure hunting lore and activity. Treasure hunting, of course, is a cross-cultural phenomenon that has been practiced for millennia. In the context of this study, treasure hunting refers to historical and modern-day attempts to recover valuable artifacts from abandoned steamboat wreck sites for the purpose of selling them for a profit.

The multitude of steamboat sinkings in American rivers made rich fodder for tales of valuable lost cargo in the interior of the United States. Rumors of valuable lost cargoes persisted. These stories of buried treasure were usually passed from person to person and eventually some were published in books, magazine stories, and newspaper articles. The locations of the rumored hoards were widespread geographically along the rivers of the western United States.

Treasure hunters were inspired by these tales and used accounts of the wreck, maps, and personal narratives to locate vessels buried underground. From the 1870s to modern day, there has been interest in recovering steamboats with the hopes of finding treasure aboard. Specie and precious metals were sought, especially by twentieth-century treasure hunters. Nineteenth-century treasure hunters were more often after another type of treasure—whiskey aged several decades undisturbed in the hull of a steamboat. Individuals have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in pursuit of treasure, and to date, not a single recovery attempt has yielded the hoped-for valuables.

¹⁰ Adam I. Kane, *The Western River Steamboat* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

This dissertation explores late nineteenth-century to modern attempts to recover treasure from buried western river steamboats of the United States. Treasure hunters have targeted certain vessels along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, although the myths of buried treasure also include the Ohio River and smaller tributaries of the major river systems (Figure 2). Efforts to recover treasure troves from steamboats began in the 1870s and continue to the present day. To date, these efforts have been unsuccessful as treasure hunters have not found the treasure they have sought on riverboats, and in the majority of the cases, the investors have lost their contributions to the venture. On the other hand, some treasure hunters of the twentieth century have been at the forefront of recovering and preserving items of historical and cultural importance.

The Sought-After Treasure

The idea of lost gold and whiskey on sunken steamboats is deceptively enticing to would-be treasure hunters. Myths detailing valuable lost cargo began to circulate years after a vessel sank. A steamboat's cargo often included low-value perishables, such as food items, barrels of pork, and textiles, but the stories focused on items that had the potential to be salvaged and resold for substantial profits.

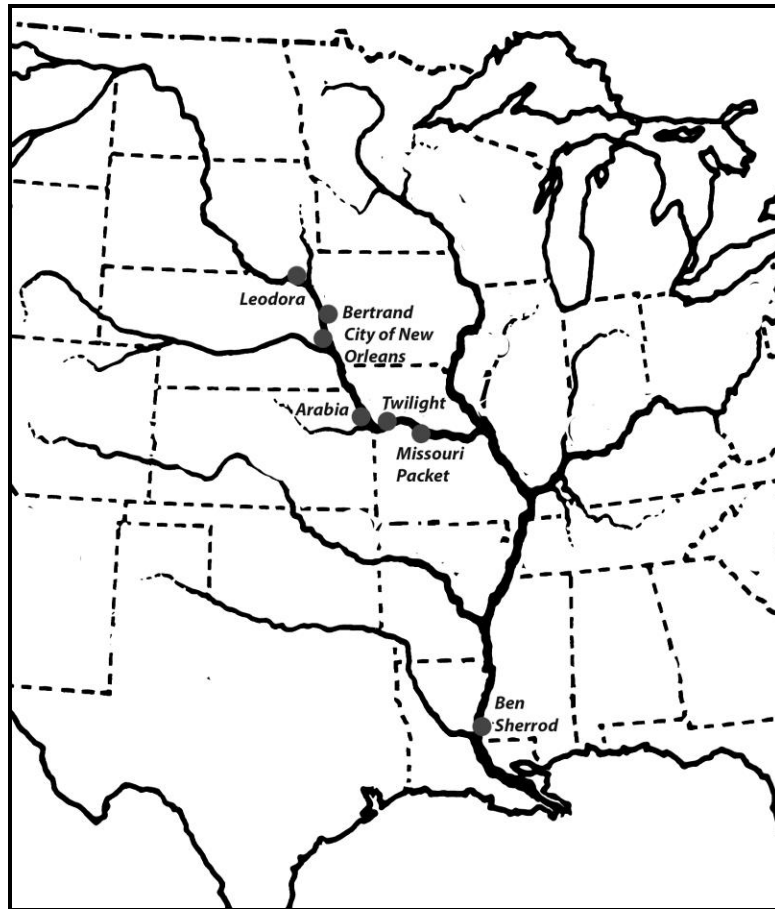


Figure 2. Map of excavation sites of steamboat wrecks excavated by treasure hunters. After Pearson Scott Foresman, *PSF M-590002.png*, *Wikimedia Commons*, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3APSF M-590002.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3APSF_M-590002.png)>.

Whiskey

As mentioned above, treasure hunters in the nineteenth century were especially interested in a vessel's reported cargo of whiskey. Whiskey was a popular spirit that was sent to western settlements via the river, often from distilleries in Kentucky. Whiskey is generally placed in charred oak barrels for aging. As it matures, whiskey gains flavor and color from the wood and the spirit undergoes changes due to evaporation and chemical processes. American-made whiskey is aged at least two years and more

typically from four to eight years. The longer aging process, the more flavorful the whiskey.¹¹ Many treasure hunters contended that the cargo hold of a buried steamboat would be an ideal location for the whiskey to age.¹²

Precious Metals

Would-be treasure salvors also hoped to recover precious metals from buried steamboats in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was believed that passengers carried personal wealth on steamboat travels, sometimes locked in a steamboat's safe or among the traveler's personal belongings. In fact, steamers did occasionally carry concentrated wealth. Companies and the government used steamboats to transport specie to pay troops stationed at western garrisons or to conduct business. Quicksilver was shipped to gold mining operations in the American northwest.

The Vessels

The primary database for this study is a corpus of seven western river steamboats that have been actively hunted by treasure seekers: *Missouri Packet*, *Twilight*, *Arabia*, *Bertrand*, *City of New Orleans*, *Leodora*, and *Ben Sherrod*. The source material includes primary accounts of early and more recent salvage attempts. Newspaper accounts describing salvage attempts from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are

¹¹ "Whiskey Trade in Lexington," Lexington History Museum, <<http://lexhistory.org/wikilex/whiskey-trade-lexington>>, accessed November 27, 2015; "Using Oak Barrels to Age Whiskey," *The Bourbon Review*, <<http://www.gobourbon.com/using-oak-barrels-to-age-whiskey/>>, accessed November 27, 2015.

¹² Generally, American-made whiskey is spelled with the 'e,' and that is the spelling adopted for this study. However, writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries sometimes used the variant spelling, whisky, and this was left when used in quotations.

descriptive but are also written in a contemporary style that is prone to exaggeration.

Additional resources include accounts of the salvagers themselves, state legislation, and legal proceedings.

Missouri Packet (1819-1820)

Missouri Packet, built in Louisville, Kentucky in 1819. The 120-foot (36.58 m), 60-ton (54.43 mt) steamboat was one of the earliest steamboats to travel on the Missouri River. In May 1820, the steamboat was traveling from St. Louis, Missouri to Council Bluffs, Iowa with provisions for troops. The boat snagged near Boonville, Missouri and was purposely run aground; this was reportedly the first steamboat accident on the Missouri River. News accounts of the time speculated that much of the cargo could be salvaged because the vessel was in low water. In subsequent decades, however, locals and treasure hunters concluded that specie onboard had not been recovered.¹³ Rumors of the vessel's lost whiskey and treasure were published beginning in 1875, and the vessel was salvaged by treasure hunters in the winter of 1987-88.

¹³ James Hall, *Notes on the Western States: Containing Descriptive Sketches Containing Descriptive Sketches of Their Soil, Climate, Resources, and Scenery* (Philadelphia: Ashmead & Co., 1838), *Google Books*,

<<https://books.google.com/books?id=BSQVAAAAYAAJ&pg=PR1&lpg=PR1&dq=Notes+on+the+Western+States:+Containing+Descriptive+Sketches+Containing+Descriptive+Sketches+of+Their+Soil,+Climate,+Resources,+and+Scenery&source=bl&ots=20F6ToeS9v&sig=ZRUZ53YWJ1bUW9KVtyPkNNLOKdc&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiOubjXgqDQAhUCOiYKHRGPDv0Q6AEIKjAD#v=onepage&q=Notes%20on%20the%20Western%20States%20Containing%20Descriptive%20Sketches%20Containing%20Descriptive%20Sketches%20of%20Their%20Soil%2C%20Climate%2C%20Resources%2C%20and%20Scenery&f=false>>, 258; "St. Louis, May 27," *The New-York Evening Post*, June 12, 1820, accessed February 8, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

Ben Sherrod (1835-1837)

The steamboat *Ben Sherrod* was built in New Albany, Indiana in 1835. The 393-ton (356.52 mt) vessel was traveling upstream on the Mississippi River in 1837 when it engaged in one of the great amusements of life on the antebellum river--a steamboat race. To the delight of passengers and crew, the steamboat attempted to beat the steamboat *Prairie* to Natchez, Mississippi. Unfortunately, the boat caught fire near Fort Adams, Mississippi. One hundred and thirty-seven individuals died in the accident. There were reports that the crew, including Captain Christopher G. Castleman, acted negligently.¹⁴ In later decades, salvors speculated that specie was also onboard when the vessel sank. A salvage company attempted to excavate the steamboat in the 1990s.

Arabia (1853-1856)

The side-wheeler *Arabia* was built in 1853 in Brownsville, Pennsylvania, had a length of 181 feet (55.17 m), a breadth of 31 feet (9.45 m), and was rated at 222 tons (201.4 mt). In August 1856, it was laden with goods for frontier communities along the Missouri River. The cargo reportedly included 135 barrels of whiskey. The upriver journey was cut short when the steamboat hit a snag near Parkville, Missouri; the vessel sank. While no passenger lives were lost, a mule drowned.¹⁵ The *Arabia* and its cargo

¹⁴ C.B. Marryat, *Second Series of a Diary in America with Remarks on Its Institutions* (Philadelphia: T.K. & P.G. Collins, 1840), *Google Books*, <<https://books.google.com/books?id=Vji6BmTIpAMC&lpg=PA15&ots=faqRDji0uw&dq=ben%20sherrod&pg=PP5#v=onepage&q=ben%20sherrod&f=false>>, 15-20; William Gilman Lyford, *The Western Address Directory* (Baltimore: Jos. Robinson, 1837), *Google Books*, <https://books.google.com/books?id=pi25W3A1QTsC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false>, 461.

¹⁵ Frederick Way, Jr., *Way's Packet Directory, 1848-1983* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1983), 26.

were quickly buried under the Missouri River, and there was little hope for salvage of undamaged goods immediately after the loss. Eventually, the river shifted course and left the boat and its cargo under a cornfield. The buried steamboat was not forgotten. *Arabia*'s legend grew--and as legend had it--the whiskey aged. Multiple unsuccessful attempts were made to find *Arabia*'s lost whiskey from the 1870s until a salvage company unearthed the vessel in 1988-89 and recovered much of the cargo and the vessel's machinery.

Bertrand (1864-1865)

The *Bertrand* was built in Wheeling, West Virginia in 1864. The sternwheeler had a length of 161 feet (49.07 m) and a breadth of 32 feet and 9 inches (9.98 m). It left St. Louis in March of 1865, headed towards Fort Benton in the Montana Territory, but the boat never made it. About two weeks after the departure, *Bertrand* and much of its cargo were lost on April 1, 1865 when *Bertrand* hit a snag just forward of the paddlewheel at the De Soto Bend of the Missouri River, about 25 miles (40.23 km) north of Omaha, Nebraska. No lives were lost. Attempts were made to salvage the machinery and cargo of the vessel, but these were unsuccessful. The wreckers turned their attention to *Cora*, another steamboat wrecked around the same time. *Bertrand* was not relocated. Whiskey and quicksilver were said to be among the ship's lost cargo, which enticed multiple parties to search for the vessel.¹⁶ The boat was finally excavated in the 1960s.

¹⁶ Way, *Way's Packet Directory*, 51; Ronald R. Switzer, *The Steamboat Bertrand and Missouri River Commerce*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 43.

Leodora (1864-1866)

The steamboat *Leodora* was built in Alton, Illinois in 1864. It had a length of 164 feet (49.99 m), breadth of 25 feet (7.62 m), and was rated at 158 tons (143.34 mt). While navigating the Missouri River, it ran aground and burned near Elk Point, South Dakota in 1866. In 1870-1871, the boilers were successfully recovered. Some believed the steamboat had a cargo of whiskey that was not salvaged, and an attempt to recover the liquor was made in 1911.¹⁷

Twilight (1865)

The steamboat *Twilight* was built in St. Louis, Missouri in 1865 and had a length of 215 feet (65.53 m), a breadth of 33 feet (10.06 m), and was rated at 335 tons (303.9 mt). The boat had a short career before being snagged on the Missouri River near Napoleon, Missouri in September 1865 while on route to Fort Benton, Montana. The steamboat *Twilight* was long rumored to have whiskey or other treasure aboard when it sank.¹⁸ Multiple attempts to recover buried wealth from *Twilight* occurred between 1868 and 2001.

City of New Orleans (unidentified)

In 1905, rising waters revealed a previously buried steamboat along the bank of the Missouri River two miles above Bellevue, Nebraska. The vessel was identified--not necessarily accurately--as *City of New Orleans*, which was said to have sunk in 1852

¹⁷ Way, *Way's Packet Directory*, 282.

¹⁸ Way, *Way's Packet Directory*, 460-461.

after hitting a snag. No record of a steamboat *City of New Orleans* sinking in Nebraska has been found. It is unknown why individuals labeled the vessel such, although there were steamboats with this name on western rivers. The wreck was thought to have whiskey aboard, and efforts were made to recover the liquor by constructing a cofferdam around the wreck.

Literature

Nineteenth-century narratives of travelers in the United States contain descriptions of western river steamboats, and authors acknowledge steamboat disasters on western rivers and the potential for loss of life and property. International travelers observe the steamboat workers, fellow passengers, the scenery of the river, dangers associated with river travel, and accommodations on steamboats, which were often decadent for first class passengers by midcentury.¹⁹ The writings of American author Mark Twain are often associated with river travel and steamboats. In *Life on the Mississippi*, Twain shares river lore and recounts his time as a steamboat pilot during the antebellum period.²⁰

While much of the literature about western river steamboats is of a “popular” nature, scholarly works on the history and archaeology of the steamboat are available.

¹⁹ For example, see Charles Joseph Latrobe, *The Rambler in North America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835); Jean Baptiste Marestier, trans. Sidney Withington, *Memoir on Steamboats of the United States of America* (Mystic, CT: The Marine Historical Association, Inc., 1957, reprint from Paris: The Royal Press, 1824); Frederick Marryat, *A Diary in America with Remarks on Its Institutions*, ed. Sydney Jackman (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1962); James Stuart, *Three Years in North America*, 2 vols. (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833); Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2015).

²⁰ Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984).

These works highlight the historical importance of steamboats and provide context for the discussion of nineteenth and twentieth century attempts to recover steamboats.

Commonly, the steamboat is linked with the westward expansion of the United States.

Louis Hunter's *Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History*, originally published in 1949, examines the steamboat's role in the technological and economic development of the trans-Appalachian West. Hunter provides readers with a thorough introduction to the structural and mechanical development of the steamboat, as well as information about passengers, labor, and river improvements.²¹ In *World Trade Since 1431: Geography, Technology, and Capitalism*, Peter Hugill emphasizes the importance of steamboats in connecting the interior of the United States to international trade. Before the expansion of railroads, settlements and large-scale agriculture--namely cotton--was limited by the ability to send the trade goods to market on navigable rivers.²²

Other works place steamboats within a specific geographic context and focus on regional development. Carl Brasseaux and Keith Fontenot's *Steamboats of Louisiana's Bayous: A History and Directory* discusses the impact and importance of steamboats in Louisiana, a major antebellum trade center. The text also includes a directory of steamboats that plied Louisiana's rivers.²³ *Steamboats and the Cotton Economy: River Trade in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta* by Harry P. Owens explores the use of steamboats

²¹ Louis C. Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1949, 1977).

²² Peter J. Hugill, *World Trade since 1431: Geography, Technology, and Capitalism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 166-171.

²³ Carl A. Brasseaux and Keith P. Fontenot, *Steamboats on Louisiana's Bayous: A History and Directory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

in relation to the agricultural development of cotton plantations, but the work is specific to the Yazoo River in Mississippi.²⁴

Others have focused on the socio-cultural aspects of the steamboat culture in the United States. In *Black Life on the Mississippi: Slaves, Free Blacks, and the Western Steamboat World*, Thomas C. Buchanan examines the experiences of African American steamboat workers, slaves transported via western waters, and runaway slaves. Walter Johnson's *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* writes of a grim reality that linked the development of the steamboat with the expansion of slavery.²⁵

There are publications about steamboat treasure hunts. Jerome Petsche's *The Steamboat Bertrand: History, Excavation, and Architecture*, published in 1974, is an initial examination the history of the steamboat *Bertrand* and a summary and early analysis of the artifacts recovered during the mid-nineteenth century excavation. Petsche describes the emergency procedures that National Park Service archaeologists and staff used to preserve the unexpected amount of artifacts recovered.²⁶ In *The Steamboat Bertrand and Missouri River Commerce*, archaeologist Ronald R. Switzer details the thousands of artifacts recovered from the wreck, their historical significance, and early salvage efforts.²⁷ Two publications, *Treasure in a Cornfield: the Discovery and*

²⁴ Harry P. Owens, *Steamboats and the Cotton Economy: River Trade in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990).

²⁵ Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).

²⁶ Jerome Petsche, *The Steamboat Bertrand: History, Excavation, and Architecture* (Washington: National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1974).

²⁷ Ronald R. Switzer, *The Steamboat Bertrand and Missouri River Commerce* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013).

Excavation of the Steamboat Arabia by Greg Hawley and *The Treasures of the Steamboat Arabia* by David Hawley give the account of the unearthing of vessel and give details of the recovered artifacts.²⁸ Yet, what these publications lack is the full account of treasure hunting on both ships and accounts of the potentially destructive methods used by excavators.

Treasure Hunting versus Archaeology

Archaeological evidence from excavation of western river steamboats is making substantial contributions to the information available on the subject. Adam Kane's *The Western River Steamboat* offers an excellent survey of the technical development of the steamboat. Kane uses archaeological evidence to supplement primary and secondary sources about the steamboat's structure, and the author details how shipwrights and boat builders developed and adapted the steamboat specifically for the conditions of western rivers. Kane utilizes evidence published on seventeen western river steamboats: "the Red River Wreck [since identified as the 1830s steamboat *Heroine*], *Eastport* (1852), *Cremona* (1852), *Arabia* (1853), *Scotland* (1855), *Kentucky* (1856), *John Walsh* (1858), *Homer* (1859), *A.S. Ruthven* (1860), *J.D. Hinde* (1863), *Bertrand* (1864), *Black Cloud* (1864), *Ed. F. Dix* (1864), Caney Creek Wreck (ca. 1845-60), Clatterwheel Wreck (ca. 1840-80), Natchez Watercraft 3 (ca. 1879), and 3Ct243 (ca. 1883)."²⁹ There are excavation or survey reports or other publications on each of these vessels. The majority

²⁸ Greg Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield: The Discovery and Excavation of the Steamboat Arabia* (Kansas City: Paddlewheel Publishing, 1998); David Hawley, *The Treasures of the Steamboat Arabia*, (Kansas City: Arabia Steamboat Museum, 1995).

²⁹ Kane, *The Western River Steamboat*, 34.

of these excavations were completed by state or other local agencies on exposed wrecks or wrecks that were underwater.

The steamboat *Heroine* is the earliest-known example of a riverboat wreck to be archaeologically investigated. The vessel had a length of 136 feet and 8 inches (41.65 m), a breadth of 20 feet and 4 inches (6.19 m), and a 160-ton (144 mt) rating. The vessel was snagged in the Red River near Fort Towson, Oklahoma in 1838. The extensive study included surveys and test excavations from 1999-2002 and excavation from 2003-2008. The excavation has revealed much about the early characteristics of the river craft, propulsion machinery, and even meatpacking practices of the day through the analysis of pork from barrels recovered during the excavation.³⁰

In *The Steamboat Montana and the Opening of the West*, Annalies Corbin and Bradley A. Rodgers present the findings of the archaeological excavation of a large 1880s western river steamboat with a length of 250 feet (76.2 m), width of 49 feet (14.94 m), and a tonnage of 959 (869.99 mt). The title is a bit of a misnomer. By the 1880s, steamboats had been in western rivers for more than fifty years, and the importance of

³⁰ Kevin Crisman, William B. Lees, and John Davis, "The Western River Steamboat *Heroine*, 1832-1838, Oklahoma, USA: Excavations, Summary of Finds, and History," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 42, no. 2 (2013): 365-381; Kevin J. Crisman, "The Western River Steamboat *Heroine*, 1832-1838, Oklahoma, USA: Construction," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 42, no. 1 (March 2014): 128-150; Kevin Crisman and Glenn Grieco, "The Western River Steamboat *Heroine*, 1832-1838, Oklahoma, USA: Propulsion Machinery," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 44, no. 1 (March 2015): 173-195, *Wiley Online Library*, <<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu/2048/doi/10.1111/1095-9270.12079/full>>; Juliet K. Brophy and Kevin Crisman, "A Taphonomic Evaluation of Three Intact Pork Barrels from the Steamboat 'Heroine' (1838)," *Historical Archaeology* 47, no.4 (2013): 71-85.

this mode of transportation was on the decline. Still, the book offers archaeological evidence of a vessel from the postbellum period.³¹

The best-known excavations of steamboats were not, strictly speaking, archaeological excavations. As noted above, both *Bertrand* and *Arabia* were targeted by treasure hunters and based on fanciful stories of the whiskey and valuables to be found in their holds. Their treasure-hunter-initiated excavations lacked scientific methodology, which greatly affected the quality of the information garnered during fieldwork. Neither vessel proved to contain the treasure trove the salvors hoped, but both did contain large collections of nineteenth-century material culture. Today, the cargos of both are housed in dedicated museums.

Steamboat treasure hunts continue to occupy the American imagination, in large part due to the two museums that are expressly dedicated to the recoveries of individual nineteenth-century riverboats: the privately-owned and operated *Arabia* Steamboat Museum in Kansas City, Missouri and the publicly-owned steamboat *Bertrand* collection at the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge, a federal property in Missouri Valley, Iowa.

The treasure hunting attempts and salvage operations described in this dissertation, including the excavations of *Bertrand* and *Arabia* are not examples of archaeological excavations, although they had archaeological elements. Like other scientific or scholarly fields, the field of archaeology has best practices. The Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA), the Society for American Archaeology (SAA), and the

³¹ Annalies Corbin and Bradley A. Rodgers, *The Steamboat Montana and the Opening of the West: History, Excavation, and Architecture*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008.

Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) each recognizes a code of archaeological ethics or professional standards, principles that differentiate archaeology from treasure hunting ventures. In particular, the buying and selling of artifacts is discouraged. The SAA recognizes:

The buying and selling of objects out of archaeological context is contributing to the destruction of the archaeological record on the American continents and around the world. The commercialization of archaeological objects--their use as commodities to be exploited for personal enjoyment or profit--results in the destruction of archaeological sites and of contextual information that is essential to understanding the archaeological record.³²

The SHA encourages member archaeologists to “avoid assigning commercial value to historic artifacts except in circumstances where valuation is required for the purposes of appraisal and insurance or when valuation is used to discourage site vandalism.”³³ The AIA cautions that member archaeologists should “refuse to participate in the trade in undocumented antiquities and refrain from activities that enhance the commercial value of such objects.”³⁴ This value is in obvious contrast to efforts to recover items from steamboat wreck sites to garner profits.

Additionally, the efforts to recover valuable goods from steamboat wreck sites can be potentially damaging to the protection of potentially significant historical sites, so professional organizations recognize the importance of preservation of artifacts. The SAA maintains, “It is the responsibility of all archaeologists to work for the long-term

³² “Principles of Archaeological Ethics,” Society for American Archaeology, accessed February 8 2017, <<http://www.saa.org/AbouttheSociety/PrinciplesofArchaeologicalEthics/tabid/203/Default.aspx>>.

³³ “SHA Ethics Principles,” Society for Historical Archaeology, 2015-2017, accessed December 1, 2015, <<http://sha.org/about-us/ethics-statement/>>.

³⁴ “Code of Ethics,” Archaeological Institute of America, December 29, 1997, accessed December 1, 2015, <<https://www.archaeological.org/news/advocacy/130>>.

conservation and protection of the archaeological record by practicing and promoting stewardship of the archaeological record. Stewards are both caretakers of and advocates for the archaeological record for the benefit of all people; as they investigate and interpret the record, they should use the specialized knowledge they gain to promote public understanding and support for its long-term preservation.”³⁵

Likewise, the SHA maintains archaeologists “have a duty to encourage and support the long-term preservation and effective management of archaeological sites and collections...for the benefit of humanity.”³⁶ In the cases presented in this dissertation, the long-term preservation of the archaeological record was not planned for specifically, even in cases where historical significance of the vessel was recognized. Additionally, the excavation methods involved little record keeping.

The *Arabia* and *Bertrand* excavations were deemed ‘successful’ insofar as they yielded vast collections of well-preserved nineteenth century artifacts which were ultimately preserved and displayed. This dissertation includes many examples where treasure hunters have failed to follow best practices for preserving cultural heritage with results that were detrimental to the archaeological record. Further, these attempts can be detrimental to cultural heritage because the glamorized efforts of nonprofessionals may embolden others to seek the mythical treasure of sunken steamboats.

³⁵ Society for American Archaeology, “Principles of Archaeological Ethics.”

³⁶ Society for Historical Archaeology, “SHA Ethics Principles.”

Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter Two of this dissertation surveys the site formation processes of western rivers steamboat wreck sites. I examine the disaster of the steamboat wreck, including the reasons wrecks happened on western waters and how a vessel could be buried over time. Chapter Three examines the development of the myth of buried treasure aboard sunken steamboats and details how the story is related to the general population. The next two chapters detail attempts to recover treasure from these vessels in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The final chapter, Chapter Six, concludes the study with discussion of the cultural, financial, and legal issues raised by the dissertation.

CHAPTER II

FORMATION PROCESSES OF STEAMBOAT WRECK SITES

Time Capsules and Moments Frozen in Time

A brochure for the *Arabia* Steamboat Museum in Kansas City, Missouri entices visitors by offering them the chance to view a “‘time capsule’ of remarkably preserved 1856 frontier supplies—the world’s largest collection.” Likewise, visitors to the Steamboat *Bertrand* shipwreck artifact collection in Missouri Valley, Iowa are greeted with a sign: “April 1, 1865: A Moment Frozen in Time.” The sign explains, “On April 1, 1865, the *Bertrand* left Omaha to continue its journey to Montana. That afternoon, less than two weeks out of St. Louis, the steamboat ran into snags at De Soto Bend and sank. Although no lives were lost, the *Bertrand*’s cargo disappeared under the mud and silt of the ‘Big Muddy.’” Indeed, both collections boast large quantities of nineteenth-century artifacts that stand as evidence of a bygone era of American history.

Archaeological sites, including shipwreck sites, are often likened to time capsules. The use of the metaphorical ‘time capsule’ title allows a tidy way to identify the importance of a vessel as a historical marker. Historian William E. Jarvis writes, “People can be said to have had a ‘time capsule experience’ when they indicate that they feel taken back in time.”³⁷ The discovery of a steamboat and its cargo can offer a connection to the history of the American West. Yet, the steamboat and its contents often need interpretation to produce the ‘time capsule experience.’ For example, mud-

³⁷ William E. Jarvis, *Time Capsules: A Cultural History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2003), 52.

covered artifacts need cleaning, preservation treatment, and placement in a museum exhibit before a viewer can appreciate the significance. The term ‘time capsule’ suggests the ship and its contents were encapsulated since the wrecking event. However, a steamboat recovered in the twentieth or twenty-first century will not be the same as it was at the time of sinking. This chapter examines the wrecking process and site formation processes that affect a sunken steamboat. There are natural and cultural factors that alter a wreck site over time. For those interested in treasure hunting, this means even if a western river steamboat did happen to be carrying valuable cargo when it wrecked, there are social and natural forces that will greatly reduce the chances of finding ‘buried treasure’ a century or more later on the vessel.

Mamie S. Barrett

The *Mamie S. Barrett* currently sits abandoned on dry land in Deer Park Bend, Louisiana, near the Mississippi River. This steel-hulled sternwheeler towboat was built in 1921 at the Howard Brothers Ship Yard in Jeffersonville, Indiana. The *Mamie S. Barrett* enjoyed a relatively long career on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers from 1921-1949, after which the vessel changed ownership several times. In 1983, the then-owners of the *Mamie S. Barrett* successfully applied to have the ship placed on the National Register of Historic Places. At the time, the ship was “permanently moored at the Eddy Creek Resort and Marina on Lake Barkley, Eddyville, Kentucky.”³⁸ However,

³⁸ “*Mamie S. Barrett*,” United States Department of the Interior National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form, 1983, <<http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/83002811.pdf>>.

permanency proved fleeting when the ship was sold again in 1987 to owners in Vicksburg, Mississippi. The steamboat exchanged ownership and was moved several more times in the following years. Currently, *Mamie S. Barrett* sits on dry land in Louisiana seemingly forgotten by all. While there has been interest in the preservation of the aging towboat, funds have been lacking.³⁹

While the *Mamie S. Barrett* waits for preservation that does not appear to be forthcoming, the elements are claiming it. The ship is weather beaten; the paint is stripped away, the windows are broken, and its metal parts are rusting. The boat's stacks have fallen over. There is overgrowth over the stern wheel and foliage creeping up the sides. The interior of the vessel is filled with debris, including what appears to be a mound of marine insulation (Figures 3-6). Presumably, if left to the elements, the *Mamie S. Barrett* will eventually 'disappear' into the archaeological record. This is site formation in action.

The reclamation of the *Mamie S. Barrett* serves as a present-day example of the processes that transformed steamboat hulls and their contents in the western United States. Hundreds of steamboats had accidents while traveling on the western rivers of the United States in the nineteenth century. Like the *Mamie S. Barrett*, many of those steamboats were abandoned.

³⁹ Carmen Winkler and Franz Neumeier, *The Steamboat Traveller*, 2nd Edition (Steamboats.org, 2007), 11.



Figure 3. Stern view of *Mamie S. Barrett*. Photograph by Kristen Vogel.



Figure 4. Port side view of *Mamie S. Barrett*. Photograph by Kristen Vogel.



Figure 5. View facing the bow of *Mamie S. Barrett*. Photograph by Kristen Vogel.



Figure 6. Interior of *Mamie S. Barrett*. Photograph by Kristen Vogel.

Site Formation

What framework is most useful to use in the examination of steamboat wreck sites? The work of maritime archaeologist Keith Muckelroy is a natural first step. Muckelroy's work attempts to find commonalities among any shipwreck across time and geographic location.⁴⁰ Muckelroy contends that shipwrecks usually occur after a traumatic wrecking event, and this in turn causes a transformation of the ship:

The shipwreck is the event by which a highly organised and dynamic assemblage of artefacts are transformed into a static and disorganised state with long-term stability. While the archaeologist must observe this final situation, his interest...is centred on the former, whose various aspects are only indicated indirectly and partially by the surviving material. If the various processes which have intervened between the two states can be identified and described, the researcher can begin to disentangle the evidence he has uncovered.⁴¹

Muckelroy identifies the natural and cultural processes as 'extracting filters' and 'scrambling devices.' Items are lost from the shipwreck through three 'extracting filters,' which he describes as "the process of wrecking, salvage operations, and the disintegration of perishables."⁴² Artifacts are scattered by 'scrambling devices,' whether that be during the wrecking process or due to the wreck's surrounding environment.⁴³ Elements of Muckelroy's theories are useful in the examination of steamboat wreck sites. One will certainly find 'extracting filters' (i.e. salvage of the boat's machinery, disintegration of perishable cargo) and 'scrambling devices' (i.e. the forces of currents or river migration) at work. Yet, Muckelroy's views were largely concerned with marine sites as opposed to riverine sites. Muckelroy writes, "Ultimately, it is only at sea that

⁴⁰ Keith Muckelroy, *Maritime Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 157.

⁴¹ Muckelroy, *Maritime Archaeology*, 157.

⁴² Muckelroy, *Maritime Archaeology*, 165.

⁴³ Muckelroy, *Maritime Archaeology*, 175-212.

seafaring disasters can occur, so that it is under the surface of the sea that the bulk of evidence must lie.”⁴⁴ Yet, in the case of western river steamboat wreck sites, the evidence is not just under the water but also in the former riverbeds and, in some cases, under fields. This has led to intermittent human interaction with sites based on cyclical environmental changes.

Others have expanded upon Muckelroy’s theory, and the result has been ever-expanding flow charts.⁴⁵ One useful expansion is Martin Gibbs’s examination of the cultural factors that have an impact on sites. Gibbs differentiates between an accidental sinking and incidents of scuttling and emphasizes human post-disaster responses. There is ‘Opportunistic Salvage’ (which is salvage done by non-professionals shortly after the wrecking event) and ‘Organized Salvage’ (which is professional salvage done after the wrecking event and is most likely done by the owners and/or those acting on their behalf). Additionally, he notes that salvage can be ongoing.⁴⁶ Salvage varies “depending upon historical, locational, environmental and legal factors.”⁴⁷ Gibbs’s analysis of disaster response links psychologist John Leach’s disaster and response stages to archaeological site formation. There are five stages to the disaster and response model: pre-impact stage, impact stage, recoil stage, rescue stage, and post-trauma stage.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Muckelroy, *Maritime Archaeology*, 9.

⁴⁵ For example, see I.A.K. Ward, P. Larcombe, and P. Veth, “A New Process-based Model for Wreck Site Formation,” *Journal of Archaeological Science* 26, Issue 5 (May 1999): 561–570 and Martin Gibbs, “Cultural Site Formation Processes in Maritime Archaeology: Disaster Response, Salvage and Muckelroy 30 Years On,” *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 35, no. 1 (2006): 4-19.

⁴⁶ Gibbs, “Cultural Site Formation Processes in Maritime Archaeology,” 7-18.

⁴⁷ Gibbs, “Cultural Site Formation Processes in Maritime Archaeology,” 15.

⁴⁸ Gibbs, “Cultural Site Formation Processes in Maritime Archaeology,” 7-8; John Leach, *Survival Psychology*, Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1994.

Riverine sites have many of the same considerations as maritime sites. There are crossover impacts between the two site types, such as waterlogging of wood and disintegration of perishables. Muckelroy's and other discussions of maritime site formation have been useful in analyzing of site formation of western river steamboat sites. However, these discussions are often focused on wrecks that are less accessible than riverine sites. Steamboat sites are often not in remote locations and can be accessible to cultural exposure over sustained periods. In some ways, they can resemble terrestrial sites.

Michael Schiffer gives a framework to examine the environmental and cultural forces at work on archeological sites. The focus of Schiffer's work is terrestrial sites, but archaeological and historical evidence suggests that steamboat sites undergo the cultural and environmental transformations discussed. Schiffer differentiates between artifacts in a systemic context and those in an archaeological context. When items are being used within a society, they are in a systemic context. Artifacts that no longer circulate within a society and are only in contact with a natural environment are in an archaeological context. Artifacts can move between contexts. It falls to the archaeologist to consider both the systemic and archaeological contexts of artifacts when analyzing a site.⁴⁹

According to Schiffer, there are cultural and environmental factors that affect site formation and the interpretation of the site. Schiffer identifies the cultural formation processes as: reuse, cultural disposition, reclamation, and disturbance. Environmental

⁴⁹ Michael B. Schiffer, *Formation Processes of the Archaeological Record* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987).

transformation processes are “all events and processes of the natural environment that impinge upon artifacts and archaeological deposits.”⁵⁰

Reuse of an artifact occurs when a new user obtains it or when it is used for new purposes. Reuse occurs in one of three ways: lateral cycling (the object changes ownership but not function), recycling (the object changes form as its components reenter the manufacturing process), and secondary use (the object changes function but not form).⁵¹

Cultural disposition takes place when an artifact is taken out of active circulation, whether intentionally or not. These items are disposed or abandoned. Some artifacts are intentionally discarded when they are no longer useful or needed, including when they break, become obsolete, or wear out. Other items are purposefully abandoned or buried. Still other items are unintentionally lost.⁵²

Reclamation of an artifact occurs when it is removed from an archaeological context and is put back into circulation within a society. This can take the form of scavenging, in which disposed items are used once again within the same community. Or, items can be removed from their original setting, such as through looting, archaeological excavation, or salvaging efforts.⁵³

The final cultural formation process discussed by Schiffer is disturbance. Disturbance includes cultural activities which change the archaeological context of an artifact. Common disturbance activities include construction, agricultural activity, and

⁵⁰ Schiffer, *Formation Processes of the Archaeological Record*, 3-7.

⁵¹ Schiffer, *Formation Processes of the Archaeological Record*, 28-31.

⁵² Schiffer, *Formation Processes of the Archaeological Record*, 47-49, 76-79.

⁵³ Schiffer, *Formation Processes of the Archaeological Record*, 99, 104, 114.

land maintenance. Schiffer discusses how trampling, or human movement in general, can disturb a site by displacing artifacts. Disturbance can be unintentional and indirect. Any activity that alters the environment of an archaeological site can be considered a disturbance activity.⁵⁴

Environmental factors include nonhuman forces—such as weather—that affect artifacts and their surrounding environment. Whether the artifacts are buried or exposed, environmental processes—such as deterioration—are at work. Human activity indirectly affects environmental processes.⁵⁵ Schiffer’s work is useful when considering what happened to a steamboat after an accident and once it entered an archaeological context.

Reuse

Historically, a steamboat could be reused in the three manners discussed by Schiffer. A steamboat was laterally cycled when ownership was sold or transferred to new owners. The steamboat still was used for transportation. The name of the vessel and the crew might have been changed, but essentially, the steamboat’s function remained the same. The contents of a steamboat could also be laterally cycled.

The steamboat itself received a secondary use when it no longer functioned as a mode of transportation for goods and people. The literary imagination of William Faulkner gives an example of a possible reuse of an entire steamboat. In the short story “Red Leaves,” Faulkner writes of a fictional Indian chief who had visited New Orleans in his youth. The chief was enamored with Southern culture, including frequent travel

⁵⁴ Schiffer, *Formation Processes of the Archaeological Record*, 121, 126-136.

⁵⁵ Schiffer, *Formation Processes of the Archaeological Record*, 143, 145-147.

onboard steamboats. The chief found a steamboat that had been run aground, so he had it “dismantled with his slaves and hauled on cypress rollers twelve miles home overland. It took them five months.”⁵⁶ Faulkner continues that the chief’s house had one brick wall, which he used to prop up the steamboat. As the steamboat aged, “the chipped and flaked gilding of the rococo cornices arched in faint splendor above the gilt lettering of the stateroom names above the jalousied doors.”⁵⁷ Faulkner’s detailed description of the steamboat-turned-house hints that the author may have seen such a marvel or imagined it when he saw an abandoned steamboat hulk.

Reused steamboat hulks were not entirely fiction. There are historical examples. The hulk of the eastern steamboat *Hendrick Hudson* was refurbished into a floating saloon and hotel in 1868 along the Hudson River. Although it is an example from a non-western river steamboat, it demonstrates the reuse factor. The boilers, engine, and paddle wheels were removed from the vessel. These parts were likely reused, recycled, or abandoned. In 1868, the floating hotel was moved by tugboat to another location, but it struck the bottom of the river and sank. The owners of the tugboat initiated a suit against the steamboat owners for payment of services rendered in a New York district court according to admiralty laws for maritime contracts. The court recognized the changed function of the hulk. While “its form and shape under water continued to be those of a vessel,” it was no longer “engaged in commerce or navigation.” The hulk may have still

⁵⁶ William Faulkner, “Red Leaves,” in *Collected Stories of William Faulkner* (New York: Random House, 1950), 317.

⁵⁷ Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, 317.

looked like a steamboat, but its purpose had changed. Therefore, the court dismissed the suit because it fell outside the admiralty and maritime jurisdiction of the court.⁵⁸

Reused steamboat hulks made ready structures for other purposes. An aged steamboat was transformed into a wharf boat with the removal of its machinery and being moored along the riverbank.⁵⁹ Joseph Alonzo Stuart writes that the Confederates kept an “old steamboat hulk” as a hospital until it was burned by Union troops near Blakely River in Alabama during the American Civil War.⁶⁰ The hulk of the steamboat *J.W. Vanzant* was used by the National Board of Health as an inspection station near Cairo, Illinois in the 1880s.⁶¹

Perhaps more common than reuse of an entire steamboat hull was the recycling of the steamboat’s components. Steamboat timbers, together with machinery and parts, were sometimes salvaged and recycled from wrecked steamboats. In 1838, the engine of the *Heroine* was reportedly removed and sent to New Orleans after the boat’s accident:

The steamboat *Heroine*, laden with stores for U.S. troops, struck a snag about two weeks since while ascending Red River, two miles above Jonesborough, and sunk. Her cargo was saved. The engine and crew arrived yesterday evening in the steamer *Mariner*.⁶²

Archaeologists did not recover the boilers from *Heroine*. Some supporting elements of the machinery were recovered, albeit “displaced from their original

⁵⁸ *The Hendrick Hudson*, Case No. 6,355, District Court, S.D. New York, (October 1869), accessed February 11, 2017, *LexisNexis Academic*.

⁵⁹ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 352.

⁶⁰ Joseph A. Stuart, *My Roving Live: A Diary of Travels and Adventures by Sea and Land, During Peace and War*, Vol. 2, (Auburn, CA, 1895), accessed February 8, 2017, *Google Books*.

⁶¹ *Annual Report of the National Board of Health. 1879-1885*, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1881, *Google Books*.

⁶² No Title, *The Times Picayune*, May 23, 1838, accessed February 9, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

locations.” Nautical archaeologist Kevin Crisman hypothesizes this may have occurred during contemporary salvage efforts.⁶³ The machinery could have been valuable when salvaged, so it was common to reuse the machinery from wrecked steamboats.⁶⁴

Other parts of steamboats were recycled for purposes other than their original function. An iron arch from a steamboat flywheel (likely of the steamboat *Black Cloud*) was used as part of a sign near the Trinity River Crossing in Liberty County, Texas. The sign was observed by archaeologist Steve Hoyt while doing an archaeological survey of the steamboat *Black Cloud* in the 1990s but has since been removed (Figure 7).⁶⁵



Figure 7. Flywheel fragment forms the upper arch of “Riverboat Bend” sign. Courtesy of Steve Hoyt.

⁶³ Kevin Crisman and Glenn Grieco, “The Western River Steamboat *Heroine*, 1832-1838, Oklahoma, USA: Propulsion Machinery,” *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 44, no. 1 (March 2015), accessed February 11, 2017, *Wiley Online Library*.

⁶⁴ Hunter, *Steamboats on Western Rivers*, 112-13.

⁶⁵ Steve Hoyt, e-mail message to author, February 17, 2010.

The removal of a steamer's furniture or other minor components did not necessarily change the form of the vessel, but steamboat parts and décor were reused. Their form was not changed, but their function sometimes did. Three examples of this type of reuse include:

- Three chandeliers from the famous racing *Robert E. Lee* (built 1866) are displayed in the First Presbyterian Church in Port Gibson, Mississippi. The church received them as gifts from private donors. While on the *Robert E. Lee*, the chandeliers burned kerosene. Now, they are wired for electricity (Figure 8).
- At the Metairie Cemetery in New Orleans, Louisiana, the bell from the steamer *America* (built 1898) adorns the gravesite of Captain LaVerrier Cooley. The bell now functions as a grave adornment (Figure 9).
- A bell from another steamboat, *Betsy Ann*, can be found as a garden decoration at the antebellum home Stanton Hall in Natchez, Mississippi (Figure 10).⁶⁶

The consideration of reuse can be of particular interest to those studying the archaeological remains of steamboats and the consideration of what is not found at a wreck site. Excavated or salvaged steamboats are likely to be missing elements, such as machinery and/or valuable cargo because of earlier reuse efforts.

⁶⁶ Winkler and Neumeier, *The Steamboat Traveller*.



Figure 8. One of three chandeliers from *Robert E. Lee* on display at the First Presbyterian Church in Port Gibson, Mississippi. Photograph by Kristen Vogel.



Figure 9. The bell from the steamboat *America* at the gravesite of Captain LaVerrier in New Orleans, Louisiana. Photograph by Kristen Vogel.



Figure 10. The bell from the steamboat *Betsy Ann* serves as a garden decoration in Natchez, Mississippi. Photograph by Kristen Vogel.

Artifacts from steamboat sites may also be reused when archaeologically excavated or uncovered by treasure hunters. A wide range of artifacts from steamboat excavations are on display in museums, both large and small, throughout the country. Examples of this include:

- The Steamboat *Arabia* Museum in Kansas City, Missouri houses the collection of nineteenth-century artifacts uncovered by treasure hunters.
- A collection of artifacts from the steamboat *Bertrand* are part of the Visitor Center at the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge in Missouri Valley, Iowa.
- Items salvaged from western river steamboats are on display at the Grand Gulf Military Park near Port Gibson, Mississippi (Figure 11).

- Artifacts from the excavation of the steamboat *Heroine*, which was studied in the Red River in Oklahoma, are on display in museums in Oklahoma City and Fort Towson.
- The *Tell City* pilothouse now serves as a museum exhibit at the Ohio River Museum in Marietta, Ohio.⁶⁷



Figure 11. Brick from *Paul Jones* on display at the Grand Gulf Military Park, Port Gibson, Mississippi. Photograph by Kristen Vogel

Cultural Disposition

Unlike the reused steamboat hulks described above, other steamboats were abandoned, whether due to their age or after an accident. Components of the steamboat, such as machinery or parts of its cargo may have been removed and reused, but the steamboat hulks--and in some cases accompanying cargo--went into an archaeological

⁶⁷ Winkler and Neumeier, *The Steamboat Traveller*.

context.⁶⁸ There are potentially hundreds of steamboats in the archaeological record. To date, approximately 21 nineteenth-century steamboats have been salvaged and/or archaeologically studied, and experts estimate that there are hundreds of vessels buried in the western rivers of the United States. These vessels are examples of cultural disposition, as is the *Mamie S. Barrett*.

Items were also disposed or lost on steamboats, and steamboat parts were disposed individually. While building the Eads Bridge in St. Louis, Missouri over part of an old steamboat wharf in 1870, builders discovered a myriad of “useless materials” discarded from steamboats: “The old sheet iron enveloping their furnaces, worn-out grate bars, old fire bricks, parts of smoke-stacks, stone-coal cinders and clinker, and every manner of things entering into the construction of a Mississippi steamer seemed to have found a resting place at this spot.”⁶⁹ The builders found items that were disposed, intentionally or not, in the water.

Reclamation

Throughout the nineteenth century, the historical record suggests that following the sinking of a steamboat, attempts were often made to recover the cargo. In 1831, the steamboat *Homer* caught fire while crossing the Ohio River near Beavertown, Ohio. The crew lost control of the ship, and it ran aground. There was seventy tons of cargo onboard, including barrels of fish, hemp, sugar, and tobacco. The fish and some of the

⁶⁸ Leslie Stewart-Abernathy and Allen R. Saltus, Jr., “Why These Wrecks, Here,” in *Ghost Boats on the Mississippi: Discovering Our Working Past*, ed. Leslie C. Stewart-Abernathy (Fayetteville: Arkansas Archeological Survey, 2002), 131-135.

⁶⁹ “The West Abutment of the St. Louis Bridge,” *Scientific American*, Vol. XXIII, December 17, 1870, accessed February 9, 2017, *American Periodical Series*.

hemp and tobacco were recovered.⁷⁰ Often, plans were made to recover cargo for insurance purposes after the vessel sank. In 1866, the steamboat *Revenue* sunk in Ohio River with a cargo of 200 tons (907.19 kg) of iron. *The New York Times* reported, “She was insured for \$25,000. Her cargo will probably be recovered.”⁷¹ In these cases, the cargo may have been reclaimed (or plans were underway to reclaim the property). Cargo went back into circulation within the economy when possible. In some cases, there are stories about recovered cargo and even recovered bodies. In 1823, it was reported that the steamboat *Tennessee*, which sank between New Orleans, Louisiana and Natchez, Mississippi, was “found and hauled to shore, and that the body of Mr. Pool, of Baltimore, was taken up with the boat, with his money and other articles about him. It is thought that much property on board may be saved; such as fish oil, and all kinds of spirits and liquids in tight casks.”⁷²

Steamboat owners and insurance companies were not alone in making reclamation efforts on western river steamboats. If a wrecked steamboat was exposed, there was potential for looters. Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, first published in the United States in 1885, provides a fictional account of searching for goods aboard a wrecked steamboat in the early nineteenth century. While rafting on the Mississippi River, Huckleberry Finn and the runaway slave Jim come across a steamboat that is stuck against a rock. The steamboat is leaning over, and the upper deck is still

⁷⁰ “Another Steamboat Accident,” *Christian Secretary*, June 11, 1831, accessed February 9, 2017, *American Periodicals*.

⁷¹ “Steamboat Sunk on the Ohio River,” *The New York Times*, September 5, 1866, accessed February 9, 2017, NYTimes.com, <<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9801E5D7133DE53BBC4D53DFBF66838D679FDE>>.

⁷² “Steam Boat Tennessee,” *Saturday Evening Post*, April 26, 1823, accessed February 9, 2017, *American Periodical Series*.

above water. Huck desires to explore the vessel for small tokens: “I felt just the way any other boy would ‘a’ felt when I seen that wreck laying there so mournful and lonesome in the middle of the river. I wanted to get aboard her and slink around a little, and see what there was there.” Huck hopes to “borrow” something from the boat, such as the captain’s cigars. Huck and Jim, however, are disappointed to discover that previous plunderers are already onboard the boat.⁷³ While the account is fictional, one can imagine local residents searching seemingly abandoned boats in search of small valuables.

There were treasure hunting schemes meant to get at cargo with a market value beginning in the late nineteenth century. Also, there have been a few archaeological investigations of vessels which began in the mid-twentieth century. If objects are recovered from wrecks and placed back into circulation--such as placed on display at a museum--then that is reclamation.

Disturbance

Human activity in and around western rivers has likely changed the archaeological context of many wrecked steamboats. In the archaeological context, artifacts are only in contact with nature. While salvage and archaeological excavation disturb steamboat sites, they remain examples of reclamation if artifacts reenter systemic context. Disturbed sites remain in the archaeological record, albeit with changed context. Schiffer notes, “Disturbed artifacts do not really reenter systemic context. Their

⁷³ Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1959), 72.

location—and sometimes form—are altered, but the artifacts themselves are not used. Disturbance usually results from an activity that has another purpose; artifacts and deposits just happen to be modified or moved along the way.”⁷⁴

Construction and agricultural activities around a steamboat wreck site can disturb the archaeological context of a vessel. The intent of the work is not necessarily to harm the vessel, and the workers may not have knowledge of the vessel’s existence. If the wreck is discovered, there currently may be legislation or procedures that should be followed. These requirements vary by state.

In the nineteenth century, such regulations did not exist. When a crew of workers was constructing a portion of a riverside park in Council Bluffs, Iowa near the Missouri River, they were digging and “a big bed of cinders was uncovered when the plows and scrapers had excavated to a point level with the surface of the river between the two bridges.” They also claimed to have found “chunks of half burned coal” that was of a variety used “on rare occasions of emergency by steamboats plying in the St. Louis trade.” The workers recognized that the items were not part of the natural environment. The finds were likely examples of cultural disposition, but no action was taken to study the site. The men continued working, and they were reportedly “anxiously anticipating contact with the smokestacks of a submerged steamer.”⁷⁵

In 1991, an antebellum steamboat was struck by a crane while workers were digging during the construction of a bridge in the Mississippi River near St. Charles

⁷⁴ Schiffer, *Formation Processes of the Archaeological Record*, 121.

⁷⁵ “Buried Steamboat May Be Excavated in River’s Old Bed,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, June 16, 1913, accessed February 9, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99021999/1913-07-16/ed-1/seq-7/>>.

County and Alton, Illinois. A 22-foot section of the vessel was removed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for recording and study.⁷⁶

Another recent example of this type of disturbance activity occurred in Nebraska. In 2013, a contractor near Omaha came across buried timber and a skeleton during construction. The contractor called the Fort Crook Resident Office of the Army the Corps of Engineers. The skeletal remains were found to be a deer. Archaeologists examined the timbers and concluded that the remains were most likely of a steamboat. No excavation was planned, and the contractor adjusted his building plans and went around the remains. District archaeologist Matt McCullor points out:

‘As an archaeologist, there is that desire to cordon off a location and perform an archaeological excavation to get to really see what you’ve found,’ said [Matt] McCullor, ‘but in this case, what is best for what was found is to leave it where it is. It will be better if left in its location for future archaeologists with more advanced recovery and testing techniques.’⁷⁷

There are cases in which the identification of a steamboat was the primary cause of the disturbance. Members of the Hawley family, who own the Steamboat *Arabia* Museum in Kansas City, Missouri, continue to search for other steamboats to recover after their salvage of *Arabia*. In 2006, they located a ship identified as *Mars*, a steamboat built in 1856 and used by the Confederacy during the Civil War. The Hawleys took core samples from the ship. Test drilling revealed oak timbers. This type of probing could be

⁷⁶ Christine Bertelson, “Buried Treasure: Section of Pre-Civil War Sidewheeler Found; Recovered Near Clark Bridge,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 22, 1992, accessed February 9, 2017, *Lexis Nexis Academic*.

⁷⁷ Eileen Williamson, *Discovering a Steamboat Relic of Missouri River Trade*, media release, US Army Corps of Engineers, April 4, 2013, <<http://www.nwo.usace.army.mil/Media/NewsStories/tabid/1834/Article/12444/discovering-a-steamboat-relic-of-missouri-river-trade.aspx>>.

considered ground disturbing activity.⁷⁸ The *Mars* has not been removed from its archaeological context, but the test drilling could potentially disturb artifacts and the environment of the vessel.

Environmental Transforms

There are a great number of environmental transforms at work on western river steamboat sites. It is difficult to generalize about the character of rivers because there are regional variations.⁷⁹ There are cyclical or intermittent flooding, drought, and other weather that varies widely throughout the western United States. For example, consider the Mississippi River. The river flows from Minnesota where temperatures dip into single digits in the winter. The river flows through ten states, the southernmost being Louisiana, which has a subtropical environment.⁸⁰ Just as it is difficult to generalize about western rivers, the site formation processes of western river steamboats can vary widely. The western rivers of the United States are dynamic. Historical archaeologist Annalies Corbin utilizes historic cartography to study the shifts in the Missouri River course. These changes can leave a steamboat exposed, buried, re-exposed, and re-buried. Corbin writes, “Through careful utilization and examination of historic maps, documents, survey reports, and aerial photographs, changes in the course of the river

⁷⁸ Laura Gongaware and Kristen Vogel, Untitled, Unpublished Draft, 2009.

⁷⁹ S.A. Schumm and B.R. Winkley, “The Character of Large Alluvial Rivers,” in *The Variability of Large Alluvial Rivers*, eds. Stanley A. Schumm and Brien R. Winkley, (New York: ASCE Press, American Society of Civil Engineers, 1994), 1-9.

⁸⁰ Schumm and Winkley, “The Character of Large Alluvial Rivers,” 5.

over the past 138 years are clearly visible. Understanding changes in river migration through historic cartography is essential for accurately predicting wreck sites today.”⁸¹

Inevitably, steamboat archaeological sites are subject to the cyclical nature of environmental transforms. Generally, artifacts from the steamboat and the steamboat itself will be waterlogged or have some amount of water damage. Some items will have perished in the river environment. Otherwise, there is a wide range of possibilities as to how the environment has impacted a steamboat and its associated artifacts.

In some cases, natural processes work to preserve the ship’s hull. For example, the courses of western rivers change over time, as historical accounts attest. In 1901, *The New York Times* reported that an incorporated portion of the city of Omaha, Nebraska was left in Iowa and a portion of Council Bluffs, Iowa was left in Nebraska after “the fickle Missouri” changed course. Often, the shifting waterways leave lakes. In the section of Omaha left in Iowa in 1901, the “Cut-Off” Lake formed. The lake was “so named from the fact that it originally was the bed of the river until a sudden whim of that stream [the Missouri River] sent the channel in another direction and left this body of water in the form of a crescent lake.”⁸²

Eventually, these lakes filled with sediment. If the remains of a steamboat were left in such an area, they would be well buried. As archaeologist Adam Kane writes:

⁸¹ Annalies Corbin, “Shifting Sands and Muddy Water: Historic Cartography and River Migration as Factors in Locating Steamboat Wrecks on the Far Upper Missouri River,” *Historical Archaeology* 32, No. 4 (1998), 87.

⁸² “Freaks of the Missouri: River in Changing its Course has Left Part of Omaha in Iowa and Part of Iowa in Nebraska,” *The New York Times*, November 15, 1901, accessed February 9, 2017, NYTimes.com, <<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=990CE7DB1430E132A25757C0A9609C94689ED7CF>>.

The lack of oxygen, water movement, and light has served to encapsulate these historical treasures. Excavations have revealed that the wrecks of western river steamboats are frequently preserved up to the level of the main deck, with an archaeological wealth of cargo on the lower decks and in the hold. Those vessels buried and submerged in the nation's interior may contain the most significant and complete collection of nineteenth-century material culture in the country.⁸³

Such was the case of *Bertrand* and *Arabia*, two well-known steamboats that, as noted, have been uncovered with a significant amount of cargo still onboard.

Their state of preservation and the amount of cargo onboard is likely due to the fact that they were buried. While there may be other steamboats in this type of condition, it should not be considered the 'norm.' Rather, it is one state of preservation in which a steamboat may be found.

In other cases, the cyclical changes in the environment can be detrimental to steamboat remains or change the archaeological context of the site. The migration of a western river may leave a vessel buried underground, or it could leave a vessel exposed to the elements. Once buried, a vessel will not necessarily stay buried. The remains can be buried and re-exposed through cyclical drought and flooding, freezing and thawing, and other environmental factors. Flooding can disarticulate an archaeological site, scattering artifacts. Exposure to the elements causes deterioration of wooden hull remains. In the northern United States, winter conditions can cause waterlogged wood to freeze and expand, affecting the ship's structure.⁸⁴

⁸³ Kane, *The Western River Steamboat*, 33-34.

⁸⁴ Uwe Lübken, "Rivers and Risk in the City: The Urban Floodplain as a Contested Space," in *Urban Rivers: Remaking Rivers, Cities, and Space in Europe and North America*, eds. Stéphane Castonguay and Matthew Evenden (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 130-131; Annalies Corbin and Bradley A. Rodgers, *The Steamboat Montana and the Opening of the West: History, Excavation, and Architecture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 43-51.

In their extensive analysis of the site formation of the 1880s steamboat *Montana*, which sank in 1884 in the Missouri River near St. Charles, Missouri, archaeologists Annalies Corbin and Bradley A. Rodgers consider the “scrambling devices” that the boat and its structure would have been impacted by, notably seasonal freezing and thawing. Parts of the vessel may have even been carried away by ice chunks. Corbin and Rodgers report that the starboard side of *Montana* was submerged almost continually, but the port side was sometimes exposed to the elements.⁸⁵ They write:

The condition of the wreck indicates that the *Montana* has only recently been exposed to swash zone conditions possibly caused by a slight change in the river course. From the time of wrecking until the mid-1960s, the port side of the boat was partially buried in the riverbank while the starboard side lay fully submerged and possibly buried under the river bottom. Complete and constant submersion, burial, or both afford a higher level of hull preservation than only cyclic submersion. The *Montana*'s current level of hull preservation suggests only recent exposure to cyclic environmental conditions.⁸⁶

They suggest that the *Montana* site could have been completely buried at times under dry conditions. The site would change during times of flooding:

Sections of the site previously blanketed by sediment were exposed, and covered sections previously exposed were buried. Annual flooding, in effect, led to prolonged exposure for some sections of the vessel, prolonged sediment preservation for other sections, and alternating cover and exposure for other portions. Depending on the length of time that sections were covered or uncovered, incongruous deterioration patterns developed.⁸⁷

During periods of sustained drought, steamboats and other river craft are exposed when river levels are low. During these times when steamboats are exposed, accounts of

⁸⁵ Corbin and Rodgers, *The Steamboat Montana and the Opening of the West*, 46.

⁸⁶ Corbin and Rodgers, *The Steamboat Montana and the Opening of the West*, 45.

⁸⁷ Corbin and Rodgers, *The Steamboat Montana and the Opening of the West*, 45-46

these remains appear in the popular press, and accounts often focus on the historical nature of the vessels, and the exposure of steamboats allows for scholarly research. However, when steamboats are exposed in drought conditions, it speeds the deterioration process.⁸⁸ Additionally, exposed steamboats are more likely to have cultural disturbance factors such as looting and treasure hunting.

In 1988, record low levels of water revealed the wreckage of a stern-wheel steamboat and other river craft in the Mississippi River in Arkansas.⁸⁹ Researchers studied the vessels, including the steamboat, and concluded:

Preservation was excellent. The vessels had been buried in silt, clay, and sand on the riverbed probably within one or two weeks of sinking. The wreckage was thus protected not only from the forces of decay and destruction normally seen on land, such as termites and the ravages of the seasons, but also from many sources of underwater disturbance. Wave action or temporary increases in water flow no doubt stirred the riverbed from time to time, exposing parts of the wreckage. But there are no marine organic agents of decay in the Mississippi, such as there are, for example, in the Caribbean.⁹⁰

Once exposed, people began to take away chunks of the boats, and the boats were also exposed to the elements.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Allen R. Saltus, Jr. and Charles E. Pearson, "Underwater Archaeology" in *Archaeology of Louisiana*, Mark A. Rees and Ian W. Brown, eds. (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2010), 315.

⁸⁹ "Old Al's Going to Get It (For a While)," in *Ghost Boats on the Mississippi: Discovering Our Working Past*, ed. Leslie C. Stewart-Abernathy (Fayetteville, AR: Arkansas Archeological Survey Popular Series 4, 2002), 4.

⁹⁰ "Archeology on the Parched Bottom of the Big Muddy," in *Ghost Boats on the Mississippi: Discovering Our Working Past*, ed. Leslie C. Stewart-Abernathy (Fayetteville, AR: Arkansas Archeological Survey Popular Series 4, 2002), 23.

⁹¹ Hester A. Davis, Mary Ann Goodman, and Leslie Stewart-Abernathy, "To the Rescue," in *Ghost Boats on the Mississippi: Discovering Our Working Past*, ed. Leslie C. Stewart-Abernathy (Fayetteville, AR: Arkansas Archeological Survey Popular Series 4, 2002), 2.

Disaster Response

Actions completed before, during, and after a disaster can impact the site formation of a wreck site. This can be seen when archaeologist Martin Gibbs' application of psychologist John Leach's disaster and response stages to shipwrecks. Leach proposes five phases of disaster response: pre-impact phase (with a threat stage and a warning stage), impact phase, recoil phase, rescue phase, and post-trauma phase. Gibbs applies the disaster-response model to shipwrecks in a maritime environment.⁹² These responses can also be applied to western river steamboat wreck sites. Western river steamboat accidents exhibit similar phases as sea-going vessels, but the riverine environment and responses within the phase will vary. The five major stages of disaster and response are:

1. Pre-impact stage--the period before the disaster event.
 - (a) Threat phase--when the possibility of disaster is identified.
 - (b) Warning phase--when the disaster is imminent.
2. Impact stage--during the disaster 'event' and immediately afterwards.
3. Recoil stage--commencing when the immediate threat to life has receded.
4. Rescue stage--when the person or group is removed from danger.
5. Post-trauma stage--medium- to long-term responses to the disaster.⁹³

Pre-Impact Stage

The pre-impact stage has two phases. The first is the threat phase. During this phase, the threat of disaster is recognized. Leach writes, "There are disasters and misfortunes which strike out of the blue leaving no possibility for personal preparation

⁹² John Leach, *Survival Psychology*, 8.

⁹³ Martin Gibbs, "Cultural Site Formation Processes in Maritime Archaeology: Disaster Response, Salvage and Muckelroy 30 Years On," 7-8.

and planning. Other events carry signs of danger before them alerting people to the fact that a calamitous event is highly likely. These signs may be subtle or blatant.”⁹⁴ It was well understood in the nineteenth century that travel by steamboat carried risk of disaster. Each time an accident occurred, it may have seemed as if there was not warning, but the risk involved with steamboat travel was known. Nineteenth-century readers of newspapers were often confronted with the stories of wrecked steamboats on western waters, so much so that one newspaper declared, “We are heartily tired of recording accidents to steamboats on the Western waters.”⁹⁵ Despite the risk of traveling and shipping via the inland waterways, individuals continued to use steamboats. Owners of the boat and of cargo aboard mitigated the risk of loss or damage to property by obtaining insurance. Insurance did not cover all losses, but it could lighten the financial burden for the holder of the policy. For example, an estimated two million dollars of property was lost in steamboat wrecks in the western rivers in 1848, and one million in insurance money was paid.⁹⁶ Insurance companies hired wreckers to salvage wrecks, so the decision to purchase insurance could increase the chance that a steamboat would be salvaged.

The warning phase of the pre-impact stage occurs when threats are recognized. There are many threats to travelers on western waters, from boiler explosions onboard to obstructions in the water. James Stuart, an English traveler, warned in 1833, “Accidents are so numerous upon the western rivers, that great care should be taken to select a

⁹⁴ John Leach, *Survival Psychology*, 10.

⁹⁵ “Wrecks of Vessels on the Western Waters, and Insurance Payments,” *The Pittsburgh Gazette*, May 31, 1849, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*.

⁹⁶ “Wrecks of Vessels on the Western Waters, and Insurance Payments,” *The Pittsburgh Gazette*, May 31, 1849.

vessel in which the captain and mate, and engineers and pilots, are well known to the public to be skilful and trustworthy persons.”⁹⁷ Stuart may have also been considering the hazards of snags or bars, but explosions were probably among the most terrifying and dramatic. An experienced crew, aware of the potential for danger, could reduce the likelihood of accidents.

Impact Stage

As mentioned above, there were many causes of steamboat accidents in the nineteenth century. Historical evidence suggests that snagging or hitting obstructions in the water was the most common cause of steamboat accidents.⁹⁸ A ‘snag’ was a general description for an obstruction caused by trees and branches in the water. There were considered to be several types of snags--sawyers, planters, snags, and sleepers--although definitions varied slightly. A sawyer was a tree or large branch that floated in the water, often with only a single end pointing upwards and the other end in the riverbed. Planters, as the name suggests, were uprooted trees that were seemingly implanted on the riverbed. To this, some added a third category, a snag, meaning a tree with branches of a live tree that extended into the waterway.⁹⁹ Others preferred to define a snag by the angle at which it protruded from the water. Planters were affixed to the riverbed at a

⁹⁷ James Stuart, *Three Years in North America*, Vol. II (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833), *Google Books*, 153.

⁹⁸ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History*; Kane, *The Western River Steamboat*, 27.

⁹⁹ *Dictionary of Americanisms: A Glossary of Words and Phrases, Usually Regarded as Peculiar to the United States* (Bartlett and Welford, 1848), 284, 315; “A Sketch of the Mississippi River,” *The Farmers' Cabinet* 30, Issue 5, (October 8, 1831), accessed February 9, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*; Kane, *The Western River Steamboat*, 27-28.

perpendicular angle, while sawyers were at a less than perpendicular angle. The sawyers were “yielding to the pressure of the current, in some degree like the motion of a saw-mill saw.”¹⁰⁰ Experienced navigators on the western rivers of the U.S. might also be concerned about sleepers, which were completely submerged snags. Abandoned steamboats could become navigation hazards to river traffic.

Snags of any sort could cause minor damage, such as getting stuck in a paddle wheel. Or, a snag could impale the hull, and the results could be catastrophic. Water could fill the hull slowly, allowing for time to try to ground the steamboat on a sandbar or along the shore, as was apparently the case after the *Missouri Packet*'s hull was pierced by a snag. However, if water filled the hull rapidly in deeper water, a steamboat could be quickly submerged in the river (Figure 12). While incidents involving snags were the most common type of hazard to steamboats and caused damage to ship and property, these types of accidents accounted for fewer fatalities than other types of accidents.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Stuart, *Three Years in North America*, 159.

¹⁰¹ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 272-275; Kane, *The Western River Steamboat*, 27-28; Paul Paskoff, *Troubled Waters: Steamboat Disasters, River Improvements, and American Public Policy, 1821-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007).

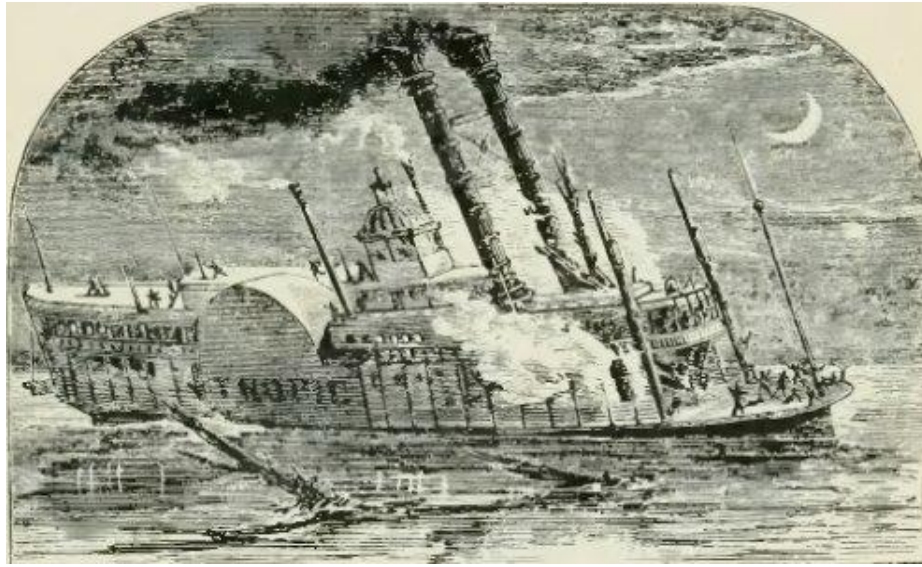


Figure 12. “A Missouri River Steamer Snagged,” from Benjamin F. Gue, *History of Iowa from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, Vol. 1 (New York: The Century History People, 1903). Reprinted from *Wikimedia Commons*, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_Missouri_River_Steamer_Snagged_-_History_of_Iowa.jpg>.

During the nineteenth century, explosions onboard steamboats were among the most terrifying and dramatic accidents. Fifty percent of lives lost due to steamboat accidents occurred because of onboard explosions. The human toll of explosions climbs when one considers injuries and not just fatalities.¹⁰² It was commonly accepted that explosions originated in the boilers, but the exact reasons for explosions were debated. Unlike other hazards of steamboat travels, like snagging, the exact causes of a steamboat explosions were not always understood by the general population and were debated by experts. As Louis C. Hunter explains:

The causes of collisions, snaggings, and fire could be understood without great difficulty, even though there was disagreement as to the most effective methods for their prevention. Boiler explosions, on the other hand, were novel and extraordinary phenomena, the character and causes

¹⁰² Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 282-283.

of which were for the man on the street shrouded in mystery and even by the scientist were only partly understood.¹⁰³

Although reasons for explosions were contested in the nineteenth century, there were many different theories focused on the steamboat's machinery.

Steam engines were powered by steam pressure, which were either low or high pressure. In the 1820s, some touted low-pressure steam engines as safer than the high-pressure steam engines, but this idea was questioned after a series of explosions on steamboats with low-pressure engines in the eastern United States. High-pressure engines gained popularity and were viewed as a necessity on western rivers, and by the 1830s, that type of engine was used almost exclusively on the rivers of the American west.¹⁰⁴

Instead of considering the type of engine used, attention was then drawn to one particular part of the engine--the boiler. Among the causes examined were defective materials used in the construction of boilers, the age of boilers, corrosion, accumulation of sediment, improper use of the boiler, improper maintenance, and the carelessness of the crew.¹⁰⁵ The author of a *New York Times* piece in 1860 wrote that the causes of steamboat explosions had been investigated and that the main causes were crew error and age of the boilers--whether it was on an eastern or western steamer. The author concluded:

People may undertake to sneer at the theories and deductions of scientific men, and to insist on the impenetrable mystery of boiler explosions. One thing, however, they must admit that the metal of boilers is exposed to

¹⁰³ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 289.

¹⁰⁴ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 122-142, 290-291.

¹⁰⁵ *The American Almanac and Repository of Useful Knowledge for the Year 1834* (Boston: Charles Bowen, 1834), 112, *Google Books*; Kane, *The Western River Steamboat*, 80-82.

unusual causes of deterioration, and that a thin and weak vessel will not resist a certain pressure so safely as that of known uniformity and strength. Simple as this is, it is enough. If the owners of boilers will only practice what they believe, these terrible slaughters will rarely occur. Till they do practice -- till they at least make some show of caution by subjecting their boilers to frequent and competent inspection, the public should; and we hope it will, brand them as wilfully accessory to the murder of any victims whom their boilers, exploding, may kill. And that there are hundreds of boilers certain to blow up, no intelligent person who is at all familiar with the subject, will dare to deny.¹⁰⁶

Despite such bold statements, steamboat explosions continued on western rivers of the United States throughout the nineteenth century, and the reasons for such accidents continued to be debated.

The results of an explosion onboard a steamboat were catastrophic. A sudden boiler explosion sent people flying into the air in every direction, scalding and mutilating them. Their corpses could land anywhere, in the river, on a street, in a tree, or even on a nearby roof.¹⁰⁷ An explosion also caused severe damage to the steamboat. The boilers could shoot upwards or through the hull. The explosion could tear a hole in the boat, and pieces could go flying. In many cases, a steamboat that suffered a boiler explosion was considered a loss. The boat was sometimes described as “blown practically to atoms” (Figure 13).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ “Steam Boiler Explosions,” *The New York Times* 8 November 1860, accessed February 9, 2017, NYTimes.com, <<http://www.nytimes.com/1860/11/08/news/steam-boiler-explosions.html>>.

¹⁰⁷ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 287; Frank Donovan, *River Boats of America* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1966), 90-91.

¹⁰⁸ “16 Lives Lost When the Boiler of a Steamboat Exploded,” *The (Painesville, OH) Evening Telegraph*, December 20, 1906, accessed February 9, 2017, *Google News*; <<https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=1NNZAAAIBAJ&sjid=aEoNAAAIBAJ&pg=3634%2C6009516>>. “Terrible Disaster! Dreadful Steamboat Explosion!--Great Loss of Life!--Destruction of the Marquette,” *The Daily (New Orleans) Picayune*, July 2, 1845, accessed February 9, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

Snagging and boiler explosions caused the majority accidents of steamboats, but there were also other hazards to navigating the nation's western rivers. Other hazards included running aground on a shoal, fires, ice blocks, and collisions with other steamboats or against bridges. Another danger was hitting the remains of previous wrecks that are submerged in the water. Such was the case of the *Eugene* in 1862 as it was plying the Mississippi River between Cairo, Illinois and Memphis, Tennessee. The *Eugene* sunk rapidly after hitting a submerged vessel, and several lives were lost.¹⁰⁹

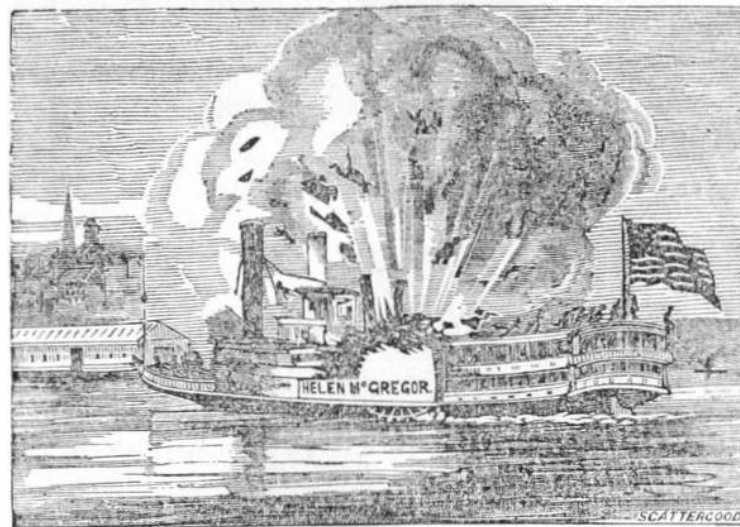


Figure 13. “Explosion of the Steamboat *Helen McGregor*, at Memphis TN, 24 February 1830,” from James T. Lloyd, *Lloyd's Steamboat Directory and Disasters on the Western Rivers* (Cincinnati, OH: James T. Lloyd & Co., 1856). Reprinted from *Wikimedia Commons*, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Helen_McGregor_1830.jpeg>.

The response to a steamboat accident varied based on the severity and location of the accident. Attempts were made to contain the danger. If necessary and possible, passengers were transferred to another vessel, and the ship's contents were removed.

¹⁰⁹ “Further Southern News,” *The Daily (New Orleans) Picayune*, November 26, 1862, accessed February 9, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

This measured response was taken after the steamboat *Weston* caught fire on the Missouri River in 1843:

A new boat, the *Weston*, running in the Missouri River, between *Weston* and St. Louis, took fire...about four miles above Saint Charles, on her downward trip. The hatches were fastened down, to keep the fire below, and the boat immediately ran ashore. The cabin furniture, books of the boat, baggage and lives of the passengers and crew were saved.¹¹⁰

In more severe accidents, like hitting a snag while in deep water or a boiler explosion, the vessel may have sank quickly. Water could rise to the upper decks of a vessel within minutes. The initial response was getting the passengers to safety and then trying to secure cargo if possible, but the response could be chaotic. Drowning presented a secondary issue for those who survived the initial wrecking event. Despite the frequency of steamboat accidents on western rivers, there is little historical evidence that suggests a procedural response to a steamboat accident. There was confusion following a traumatic incident, and there was rarely a safety plan aboard steamboats traversing the western rivers of the United States.

Animals on steamboats could have included dogs, horses, sheep, and other domestic animals. The animals onboard were often left to perish, especially if they were chained to a stanchion or other area of the steamboat. Such was the fate of a mule that was tied to a stanchion onboard *Arabia*. The animal died because it was unable to escape the sinking vessel. The diggers of the steamboat found the remains of the unfortunate animal, and they are displayed in the *Arabia* Museum. There were also the

¹¹⁰ "Steamboat *Weston* Burnt," *The Daily (New Orleans) Picayune*, June 9, 1843, accessed February 9, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

occasional wild animal, such as the account of a bear that died in the burning of the

Walk-in-the-Water:

The bear being chained about midway of the upper deck, excited strongly the sympathies of the spectators. As the flames rose they were drawn between the decks, and met over the bear--as they shot upwards, first upon one side and then upon the other, he would leap in the contrary direction to escape, and would as often be opposed by a wall of fire. He finally made one desperate effort and cleared the deck, but did not break his chain. He attempted to raise himself by grasping his chain above, like a human being but he was soon suffocated.¹¹¹

There was a professional duty among the crew to assist passengers. If another steamboat passed by the accident, the crew of the passing ship might offer assistance, such as transferring survivors. Steamboats were not legally required to carry life boats, but many did have yawls, a general purpose workboat which could be used after a disaster. Some steamboats carried life preservers as early as the 1840s, but their effectiveness at preserving lives seems to have been negligible. In some cases, passengers used whatever they could to remain afloat in the water. A survivor of a fire on the steamboat *Ben Sherrod* claimed to have thrown bales of cotton overboard in order to use them to float on.¹¹² The account of the burning of the steamboat *City of Pittsburg* on the Ohio River near Olmsted, Illinois in 1902 illustrates the chaos that could overtake a burning steamer:

Most of the passengers were still in bed when Second Clerk Oliver Phillips gave the alarm. The engineers at once started all the pumping engines, while the crew brought all the hose into play. Amid the streams of water on all sides, the flames from the lower deck and dense clouds of smoke, the passengers rushed from their staterooms and a frightful panic

¹¹¹ "Natches, Dec. 12 Burning of the Walk-in-the-Water," *Commercial Bulletin and Missouri Literary Register*, January 6, 1836, accessed February 9, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹¹² Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 280n18; Untitled, (*New Orleans Times-Picayune*, June 15, 1837, accessed February 9, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*).

ensued. The appeals of the officers and crew could not appease the terror-stricken crowds that interfered with the hose throwing water on the flames, as well as with those working with the lifeboats. Few could adjust life-preservers or do anything else for themselves. The smoke was stifling. Great clouds floated through the blazing steamer, choking the passengers and adding to the terror. Children cried pitifully, begging that they be saved...The burning steamer was quickly headed to the bank, but passengers had to jump off the stern, and trying to swim ashore through the swift current many were drowned. Many also perished in the flames.¹¹³

Fifty to sixty passengers and crew members died as a result of the fire or while trying to escape. This toll of victims was not unique among western river steamer fires.

Recoil and Rescue

Once the immediate danger to life and limb had subsided, the recoil phase began. The crew and other individuals may have tried to remove goods from a wrecked steamboat if it was accessible. After the steamboat *John Hancock* snagged on the Missouri River, it “sunk immediately.” It was speculated that the boat’s “cabin furniture may be saved, but the boat and cargo will be a total loss.”¹¹⁴ The steamboat *Diana* struck a snag on the Missouri River and was grounded “at the most convenient spot for landing the freight, all of which was got out in three or four hours, though much of it in a damaged condition, there having been two feet water in the hold. The damage would not have been so great had not the goods been exposed during the night to a heavy fall of

¹¹³ “Most Terrible Steamboat Disaster,” *The Paducah (KY) Sun*, April 21, 1902, accessed February 9, 2017, *Chronicling America*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85052116/1902-04-21/ed-1/seq-1/>>.

¹¹⁴ “Steamboat Accident,” *Commercial Bulletin and Missouri Literary Register*, November 29, 1836, accessed February 9, 2017, *America’s Historical Database*.

rain.”¹¹⁵ Even if the recovery of goods was not totally successful, items would be removed from the wreck site.

Survivors could be rescued immediately or could wait hours for rescue, but it was generally a shorter amount of time in comparison to an oceangoing disaster. If they were near a populated place, survivors might be helped by locals, such as an offer to board in a hotel. Or, survivors were picked up by another passing steamboat and taken to another port when possible. Medical care was given to injured individuals, as evidenced by the medical community’s recognition of the gravity surrounding steamboat accidents. In 1861, *The American Medical Times* argued for more medical personnel available for steamboat travelers:

In steamboat disasters, upon our rivers and lakes, there is universally great need of immediate and efficient medical aid. Many of the steamboat accidents consist of explosions, and the resulting injuries are of a nature that demand instant attention. Frequently these casualties occur many hours before the destination is reached, and the victims, if they survive, suffer untold miseries.¹¹⁶

Post-Disaster (Systemic Salvage)

Not all wrecked steamboats were abandoned, but many were. Likewise, not all abandoned steamboats were wrecked. Some vessels were abandoned because of wear or age. Of the steamboats that were wrecked, after the initial confusion and rescue attempts ceased, the steamboat and its situation was assessed. Often times, a decision had to be

¹¹⁵ “Steam-Boat Accidents,” *Commercial Bulletin and Missouri Literary Register*, March 21, 1836, accessed February 9, 2017, *America’s Historical Database*.

¹¹⁶ “Medical Provision on Railroads and Steamboats,” *American Medical Times*, January 25, 1862, Vol. IV, Stephen Smith, ed., January-July 1862, *Google Books*, 56.

made as to whether or not to salvage the vessel and its contents. That decision hinged on the condition of the vessel and its surroundings.

When possible, salvage operations were performed. When a boat was sunk in the river, efforts were made to raise it, to remove the machinery, furnishing, and cargo. In some cases, the entire hull was successfully raised. Such was the case with the steamboat *Monteray*, which sank to the main deck after striking a snag in the Mississippi. The boat was raised two days later.¹¹⁷

The steamboat could not always be raised, but valuable cargo and machinery could still be recovered. These were the initial reclamation efforts. If the cargo was insured, the insurance company might pay for wreckers to dive on the boat to recover valuable property. Professional wreckers, the most famous of whom was James B. Eads, specialized in the recovery of items under rivers with the use of a modified diving bell and later diving suits with helmets. Salvage techniques were especially developed in the 1840s and 1850s.¹¹⁸

Salvage attempts were not always successful or were sometimes only partially successful. River conditions could change from day-to-day. Wreckers trying to recover the cargo of *General Pratte* on the Mississippi River above Memphis found the vessel under 20 feet (.91 m) of water. Yet, when they returned to the same spot the next day, the vessel could not be found.

Search was made by dragging along the bed of the river for a considerable distance, but no trace would be found of the wreck, and

¹¹⁷ "Steamboat Accident," *Times-Picayune*, February 28, 1850, accessed February 9, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹¹⁸ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 119.

upon sounding, a depth of water was found in several places of from 100 to 125 feet [30.48 to 38.1 m], and for about one hundred feet [30.48 m] along the bed, no bottom could be found; the greatest depth previously known was from 20 to 30 feet [6.1 to 9.14 m]. A bar was also discovered in a part of the river which previously was deep water. It was the impression of the men in charge of the diving-bell, that the wreck had entirely disappeared under the bed of the river.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

The western river steamboat could be a volatile mode of transportation in the nineteenth century. There were hundreds—if not thousands—of steamboat accidents on western rivers. Many wrecked steamboats were abandoned. Over time, the site formation of the abandoned steamboat wreck site progressed. The site formation theories of Keith Muckelroy, Michael Schiffer, and Martin Gibbs were applied to steamboat wreck sites. Environmental and cultural factors influence the surroundings and preservation of these sites. The courses of rivers shift over time, and this can leave a vessel--once in the river--buried under land. In other cases, a vessel remains in the river and is exposed to the elements and human interference. In either case, opportunistic salvage can occur.

¹¹⁹ "A Hole in the Mississippi," *New-York Tribune*, February 13, 1843, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*.

CHAPTER III

TALES OF BURIED TREASURE ON SUNKEN STEAMBOATS

The previous chapter discussed the natural and cultural processes that make it unlikely that valuables would be found on buried steamboats. Still, myths of buried treasure on sunken riverboats persist. These tales inspire treasure hunters along the western rivers of the United States. One of them, Greg Hawley (co-founder of the steamboat *Arabia* Museum) recalls that his interest in buried treasure on steamboats was piqued by his brother. Hawley writes:

Dave [Hawley] began retelling a story he had heard about sunken steamboats on the Missouri River. During an air-conditioning service call, the home owner claimed that several steamers sank during the 1800s, and their oaken hulls and cargo remained hidden in the river valley. Our discussion intensified as we talked of steamboats and hidden treasure. The river's course had changed dramatically since the 1800s. If boats containing gold, silver, or valuable cargo did sink, then some likely remained buried under dry land in the old river channel.¹²⁰

This chapter explores the stories of treasure on buried steamboats like the ones that inspired the Hawleys.

Buried Treasure Tales

Tales of valuable lost cargo on buried steamboats follow similar patterns as other tales of buried treasure in America. Gerard T. Hurley analyzed 250 American tales of buried treasure, defining these as tales of “buried wealth.”¹²¹ Hurley found three main

¹²⁰ Greg Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield* (Kansas City, MO: Paddle Wheel Publishing, 1998), 19.

¹²¹ Gerard T. Hurley, “Buried Treasure Tales in America,” *Western Folklore* 10, No. 3 (July 1951), 197.

elements of the buried treasure tales. First, the tales are passed on as truth; they sound credible. Second, there are two components to the plot. Treasure is first lost and/or buried, and then individuals seek the treasure. Finally, the majority of the tales conclude with the treasure not being found.¹²² While tales of buried treasure on sunken steamboats were not a part of Hurley's study, these stories contain the elements discussed by him.

First, stories of buried treasure on steamboats sounded feasible because valuable goods, including whiskey and specie, were indeed transported by steamboat in the early nineteenth century. While insurance companies tried to salvage items shortly after an accident, wreckers were not always successful and the general population did not know exactly how much or what was recovered. It seemed reasonable to expect some cargo to have been lost along with the ships. Rumors spread by word of mouth and then by print. Newspapers added veracity to the tales by publishing stories about valuable cargoes aboard sunken steamboats. Western rivers were described as steamboat graveyards with hundreds of hulks:

If the waters in Sawyer's bend [in the Mississippi River] could be rolled backward, as the waters of the Red sea once were, and the sands cleared away and the skeletons of our former palatial steamers photographed, what a terrible object lesson would be conveyed from a spot that is now the most thickly settled marine graveyard in the world.¹²³

It seemed logical to assume there could still be treasure amongst the hundreds of vessels. The *Sioux City Journal* suggested in 1895: "Some of these boats which went

¹²² Hurley, "Buried Treasure Tales in America," 197.

¹²³ "A Marine Graveyard," *The (Anderson, SC) Intelligencer*, November 21, 1894, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*.

down carried with them cargoes which would be valuable if recovered now.”¹²⁴ In some cases, there were testimonies from individuals who were aboard the vessel before it sank or who were nearby when the accident occurred. These individuals claimed that they had first-hand knowledge of the sunken steamboat’s exact location and contents, and their stories seemed to add to the plausibility of the tales. In 1897, the *Sioux City Journal* offered readers a compiled list of nearly 300 sunken steamboats and suggested, “Their names will recall memories in the Minds of Old Timers.”¹²⁵

As with the stories analyzed by Hurley, tales of buried treasure on steamboats followed a two-part plot. First, the steamboat was lost. This was more than the initial wrecking event. Steamboats that remained accessible after a wreck or that were re-exposed later were stripped by wreckers and souvenir seekers of any valuable goods. The steamboat had to be inaccessible to steep in the American imagination. For example, rising waters could cause the steamboat to be submerged. Eventually, the river may have changed course, leaving the boat under land instead of in the riverbed. *The New York Times* acknowledged this possibility in 1899, explaining, “It is for this reason that there are few if any sunken steamboats in the Missouri River. They are all a mile or so out in the country or the farmer is plowing corn over their remains.”¹²⁶ After the boat was buried, stories began to circulate about the wealth lost on the rivers and encouraged

¹²⁴ “Twilight Opened a Whisky Mine: Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down,” *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895, accessed February 9, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

¹²⁵ “Missouri River History,” *Sioux City Journal*, December 30, 1897, accessed February 9, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

¹²⁶ “Freaks of the Missouri,” *New York Times*, June 4, 1899, accessed February 9, 2017, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times*.

treasure hunters to seek the lost hoards. Buried steamboats were a part of the lore of the river.

Finally, treasure hunters did not find the buried wealth they sought on sunken steamboats, at least not the wealth originally intended. Treasure hunters targeted steamboats that they believed had precious metals, specie, quicksilver, and/or whiskey. While small amounts of these valuable commodities have been found by treasure hunters, the large treasure troves hoped for by treasure hunters were not found. Despite the lack of success, stories of treasure hunts spurred more individuals to search for treasure. Treasure hunters even continued to search for previously disturbed vessels, even when treasure was elusive on the former attempts.

Spreading the Myth

Treasure hunters of both the nineteenth and twentieth century were spurred on by stories and myths despite the failure of every venture to recover treasure from buried steamboats. It was widely acknowledged that these treasure hunting missions were failures, yet the myth of buried treasure still circulated. The lore spread by word of mouth, and the details were muddled. How many barrels of whiskey? How much specie? Treasure tales spread in print, as well. Tales of buried treasure on steamboat wrecks were published in newspapers, books, and magazines. Later, with the emergence of the internet at the end of the twentieth century, treasure hunting forums and websites listed these stories.

The *Evening Times-Republican*, for example, reported a “thirst creating tale” of a “hundred jugs of that which inebriates” on the buried steamboat *The City of Providence*.¹²⁷ The boat sunk, supposedly, near Council Bluffs after a boiler explosion in the 1850s while racing another steamboat. Captain Edward F. Thorp, of Maplewood, Missouri, related the tale of the steamboat after the silver name plate of another steamboat was found, and the story had familiar details to earlier steamboat treasure tales. According to Thorp, there were “over 600 jugs of well seasoned whisky” to be found “just a short distance above the Omaha & Council Bluffs Street Railway Company’s bridge over the Missouri river.”¹²⁸ The whiskey was a “squirrel” whiskey that was intended for settlers in Sioux City and Omaha. There was an attempt to recover the cargo, but Thorp was not aware that any of the whiskey was recovered. It was reported that this whiskey would have “ripened into a quality that would well repay a big effort [sic] to recover it.”¹²⁹ Thorp went with a group of friends to the location where he thought the boat was buried and they were “deeply interested and efforts may be instituted to try and recover the whisky.”¹³⁰

After a 1911 attempt to recover 100 barrels of whiskey off the buried steamboat *Leodora* in South Dakota failed, newspaper accounts summarized the situation, “These failures...will not daunt other treasure seekers, for there are still believed to be rich treasures awaiting a finder in some of the 250 rotting hulks that lie embedded in the

¹²⁷ “Thirst Creating Tale,” (*Marshalltown, IA*) *Evening times-Republican*, September 19, 1913, accessed February 9, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85049554/1913-09-19/ed-1/seq-2/>>.

¹²⁸ “Thirst Creating Tale,” *Evening times-Republican*, September 19, 1913.

¹²⁹ “Thirst Creating Tale,” *Evening times-Republican*, September 19, 1913.

¹³⁰ “Thirst Creating Tale,” *Evening times-Republican*, September 19, 1913.

river's sand."¹³¹ The writer of the article seemed unable to resist speculating which other buried steamboats had "rich treasures awaiting a finder." The article named the *Bedford*, the *Bertrand*, and the *Boreas* as steamboats that went down in the Missouri River that could have valuable treasure.¹³² These three vessels were listed again in other accounts.

In 1902, it was reported that the *Bedford* sunk Missouri River in 1840 along with "a trunk, containing \$6000 in specie" which was "never recovered."¹³³ A 1911 *Kansas City Star* article again mentioned the *Bedford*, speculating that it carried what was "probably the richest treasure of any of these wrecks." The article claimed that in addition an estimated \$25,000-\$100,000 worth of gold and silver to be found.¹³⁴ The same article also listed the *Boreas*, which sunk near Hermann, Missouri after thieves set fire to the vessel to get to the silver bullion and Mexican dollars onboard. The fire spread rapidly, and the boat was lost--along with the fabled riches.¹³⁵ The *Bertrand* was the subject of many treasure tales and numerous recovery attempts.

Treasure tales based on sunken steamboat cargoes were the subject of other forms of literature. As previously mentioned, many of the most prominent treasure tales are focused on the Missouri River, in part because individuals used the river to transport items to and from gold camps in Montana, including quicksilver and gold dust. Missouri journalist Walter Barlow Stevens included a section on "lost treasure" of Missouri River

¹³¹ "Missouri River Boats that Never Came Back," *Kansas City Star*, November 5, 1911, accessed February 9, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹³² "Missouri River Boats that Never Came Back," *Kansas City Star*, November 5, 1911.

¹³³ "Missouri River Disasters," *The Lexington (MO) Intelligencer*, March 22, 1902, accessed February 9, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86063623/1902-03-22/ed-1/seq-1/>>.

¹³⁴ "Missouri River Boats that Never Came Back," *Kansas City Star*, November 5, 1911.

¹³⁵ "Missouri River Boats that Never Came Back," *Kansas City Star*, November 5, 1911.

steamboats in his tome on Missouri history, *Missouri the Center State: 1821-1915*. The text concedes, “Information as to the amounts of such treasure lost was not as a rule definite.”¹³⁶ Stevens identifies *Butte*, a steamboat that sank in 1883 with a reported cargo of gold dust worth \$110,000, and *Bertrand*, which sank on the Missouri River near Omaha, Nebraska with a rumored cargo of \$25,000 of quicksilver onboard. The author also notes *Boreas* sank in 1846 near Hermann, Missouri, with a cargo of Mexican dollars and silver bullion.¹³⁷

While there were many tales of sunken treasure on the Missouri River, writers also turned their attention to other western rivers. Syndicated newspaper columnist and radio personality Paul Harvey suggested in 1982 that there was “buried treasure” to be found in the wrecks of steamboats lost on the Mississippi River. Harvey suggested that looking where the river has changed course because “searching for sunken treasure in the active riverbed would be difficult because of the fast current and shifting silt. Searching for buried treasure in the now-dry riverbeds is comparatively simple.”¹³⁸ The shipwrecks noted by Harvey included: the *Sultana*, which sank in 1865 with a rumored cargo of gold and greenbacks valued at \$150,000; the *Pennsylvania*, which sunk above Helena, Arkansas, along with \$50,000 worth of gold; an unnamed Confederate vessel with \$75,000 in its strongbox; and the *Rhoda* steamboat which sank with a strongbox in 1876 while at the Helena Harbor, a port and industrial complex on the Mississippi River. Harvey did not make treasure hunting sound particularly daunting or expensive, nor did

¹³⁶ Walter Barlow Stevens, *Missouri the Center State: 1821-1915* (Chicago, St. Louis: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, *Google Books*, 107.

¹³⁷ Stevens, *Missouri the Center State: 1821-1915*, 107-109.

¹³⁸ Paul Harvey, “Mississippi Hides Sunken Treasure,” *Gadsden (AL) Times*, March 3, 1982, accessed February 9, 2017, *Google News*.

he distinguish between searching for treasure and the physical digging for vessels.

Harvey suggested that treasure seekers “may be able to find it [the treasure] with nothing more than the maps they used to give away at filling stations.” Harvey noted that heavy machinery was expensive, so it could be eschewed. Water tables and other details escaped Harvey’s descriptions as he writes, “A man with a shovel might make it pay if he knew precisely where to dig.”¹³⁹

In his 1970 travel narrative of traveling the Mississippi River, journalist Hodding Carter noted without much explanation or context:

There is romance of another kind--sunken treasure buried in the silt of the Mississippi, relics of maritime disasters and tragedy. A trove of half a million dollars in lead lies beneath the bridge below Greenville [Mississippi], and it has not been too long since a drastic change in an upriver channel revealed scores of hogsheads of century-old whiskey that is better now than it was when it was distilled.¹⁴⁰

There are books specifically dedicated to listing treasure tales, and buried treasure on sunken steamboats merit attention in this genre. These books are often localized to a single river or state, but the details of the tales are often murky. *Illinois' Unsolved Mysteries and Their Solutions* (1992), a children’s book, lists a safe aboard an unidentified steamboat in Coon Creek as one of the lost treasures to be found in the state. According to the story, the boat went down in 1861 with a safe filled with “an undetermined amount of gold and silver coins” after its boilers exploded. Readers are

¹³⁹ Paul Harvey, “Mississippi Hides Sunken Treasure,” *Gadsden Times*.

¹⁴⁰ Hodding Carter, *Man and the River: The Mississippi* (Chicago, New York, San Francisco: Rand McNally & Company, 1970), 74.

enticed with the possibility that “the weight of the safe would not have let it drift very far. Chances are good that the safe is still at the mouth of Coon Creek.”¹⁴¹

Likewise, *Lost & Buried Treasure of the Mississippi River*, by Netha Bell and Gary Scholl, includes four tales of sunken steamboats with valuable cargo that awaits to be found by a “lucky” person: the *Ben Sharrod* (a variant on the spelling of the *Ben Sherrod*) with one hundred thousand dollars in gold; the *Adams* with valuable silverware and gold, *Ruth* with two kegs of gold; and the *White Cloud* and other vessels with hundreds of thousands of dollars’ worth of cargo in the St. Louis Harbor fire of 1849.¹⁴²

Besides the creative nonfiction books above, hunts for buried treasure on wrecked steamboats has been an enduring topic of fiction. *Steamboat Gold* chronicles a fictional attempt to find the treasure on the *Morning Star*, steamboat that sank in Missouri. The attempt reads like earlier, actual treasure hunting attempts--save the added intrigue of supernatural forces, murderous plots, and the ultimate success of getting the treasure. It was first published in book and serial format in 1918. It later appeared as a serial story in 1931, published in *The Milwaukee Journal*. An edition of the story was published as a book in the same year. It was released again in *Argosy*, a pulp magazine, in six parts between January 1939 and March 1939. The book has been released in additional editions, including one as recently as 2005.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Carole Marshe, *Illinois’ Unsolved Mysteries and their Solutions* (Peachtree City, GA: Gallopade Publishing Group, 1998), 47.

¹⁴² Netha Bell and Gary Scholl, *Lost & Buried Treasure of the Mississippi River* (Sioux City, IA: Quixote Press, 1991), 51, 67, 82, 116-17.

¹⁴³ “Today--Start ‘Steamboat Gold,’” *The Milwaukee Journal*, March 22, 1931; George W. Ogden, *Steamboat Gold* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1931); “Treasure Trove,” *The Sydney Mail*, July 1, 1931, accessed February 12, 2017, *Google News*, <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=x4ZVAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=P5YDAAAIAIBAJ&pg=2583%2C1190>>

Print magazines also spread treasure tales, especially in magazines devoted to treasure hunting. *Lost Treasure* included an article on “Wrecked Steamboats” by treasure hunting enthusiast Jay Pastor in 2003 that highlighted “Fortunes Lost on the Ohio River.”¹⁴⁴ The article offers non-specific information about the treasure, such as the suggestion that “somewhere beneath the Ohio River lies a ship’s-bell that was cast from 22-pounds of melted-down silver dollars. It’s been under the water for 150 years, but no one knows exactly where.”¹⁴⁵ The author identifies “one of the problems treasure hunters face” is not knowing the exact location of treasure along the 1,000 miles of the Ohio River.¹⁴⁶ Even if the bell is not found, the author contends that “there is enough other treasure in the Ohio to keep us busy for years,” including “millions of dollars worth of riches.”¹⁴⁷ The author maintains, “Silver coins and jewelry are undamaged by fresh water, and gold ones stand up to anything. But even paper money has been retrieved successfully. And bottles, particularly the now-antique medicine bottles and whisky flasks, command a good market price among collectors.”¹⁴⁸ The author suggests that valuable finds could be found along the shorelines and nearby rivers because when steamboats were in danger of “floundering,” the captain headed to the shore. Pastor assures readers, “Even as recent as 2002, treasure hunters have found small articles from

500>; George W. Ogden, *Steamboat Gold* (Binghamton, NY: The Vail-Ballou Press, Inc., 1918, 1931); “FictionMag Index,” *Galatic Central*, accessed February 12, 2017, <<http://www.philsp.com/homeville/FMI/t/t679.htm#BOT>>.

¹⁴⁴ Jay Pastor, “Wrecked Steamboats,” *Lost Treasure*, June 2003, 29-31.

¹⁴⁵ Pastor, “Wrecked Steamboats,” 29.

¹⁴⁶ Pastor, “Wrecked Steamboats,” 29.

¹⁴⁷ Pastor, “Wrecked Steamboats,” 29.

¹⁴⁸ Pastor, “Wrecked Steamboats,” 30.

such wrecks, along the shores.”¹⁴⁹ Most fantastically, the author suggests scouring nearby the river for articles that were thrown from a steamboat because of a boiler explosion, as if the explosion rained down coins. To find the potential locations of sunken steamers, the author suggests scouring archives at museums and libraries for “old diaries, letters, journals, and maritime reports.”

On the Ohio, the author suggests these steamboats as worthy of investigation: *Magnolia* (sunk in 1868) and *Shepherdess* (sunk in 1844). The *Magnolia* might be worth searching for because “the ship’s furnishings, which included a steam calliope, were ornate and expensive.” When *Shepherdess* sank, “Much was lost. Most has never been recovered.”¹⁵⁰ The author also suggests other wrecks, including: *Brandywine*, *Caspian*, *Lioness*, *Ben Sherrod*, *Washington*, *Oronoko*, *Moselle*, *Ada*, and *Buckeye*. Pastor muddles details of these steamboats; several of the listed steamboats were lost on other western rivers, not the Ohio. If not by the Ohio River, the author notes that the Mississippi, Monongahela, Wabash, Kansas, Missouri, and Tennessee rivers have “much to explore and much of value to find.”¹⁵¹ The author does not offer one specific example of “treasure” found despite claiming that items had been recovered. Exactly who is finding these items is not mentioned, but the author is advocating a moderate approach to treasure hunting as a hobby for single artifacts, not large-scale ventures to uncover entire cargoes. The author admits that treasure hunters need to be cautious and experienced. He writes, “This sort of exploration is not for beginners. Treacherous

¹⁴⁹ Pastor, “Wrecked Steamboats,” 29.

¹⁵⁰ Pastor, “Wrecked Steamboats,” 31.

¹⁵¹ Pastor, “Wrecked Steamboats,” 31.

currents, rapids, whirlpools, hulks, and flotsam can be lethal to the inexperienced. There is also constant modern traffic.”¹⁵² The author notes correctly that treasure seekers need to obtain the appropriate government and/or landowner permission to start.

In the late twentieth century and during the twenty-first century, treasure hunting hopefuls also turn to the internet to find stories about lost treasure on steamboats. The website “Metal Detecting Ghost Towns of the East” reports that: “The steamboat John Adams sank near Island #82 on the Mississippi River. It was carrying \$500,000 in gold.” The same website encourages treasure seekers to search for *Ben Sherrod* near Natchez, which allegedly had \$75,000 in gold onboard. The website entices visitors that gold coins have already been found that may have come from the boat. The website declares, “Get searching! There could be more!”¹⁵³ The website *LostTreasureUSA* informs readers, “After high waters recede each spring, silver dollars dated in the late 1800s are found along the west bank of the Ohio River near Golconda. The coins have been washed ashore for many years and local stories say that they come from a wrecked steamboat that was carrying millions in silver.”¹⁵⁴ Internet sources such as these do not offer many specific details, but they do perpetuate the myth that there are caches--big and small--of treasure to be found. Internet forums allow users to circulate tales with little fact checking.

¹⁵² Pastor, “Wrecked Steamboats,” 29.

¹⁵³ Frank Pandozzi, “Buried Treasure in Louisiana,” *Metal Detecting Ghost Towns of the East*, accessed February 9, 2017, <<http://www.metal-detecting-ghost-towns-of-the-east.com/buried-treasure-in-louisiana.html>>.

¹⁵⁴ “State Treasures,” *Lost Treasure USA*, last modified March 14, 2011, accessed February 10, 2017, <<http://losttreasureusa.com/StateTreasures/StateTreasures.htm>>.

There were voices opposing the possibility of hoards of lost treasure in America's rivers. Dick Ferris, a seasoned wreck diver at the turn of the twentieth century, worked on recovery attempts of vessels lost in and around Iowa. Ferris acknowledged that there were hundreds of steamboat wrecks in the Mississippi River, but he did not have evidence of treasure troves. Ferris claimed, "Regarding the finding of treasures in wrecks and in the bottom of the river...I have never found any only in cases when I was sent after it, such as safes and such things that have gone down in the boat, but never found anything else."¹⁵⁵ Yet, cautions to temper expectations went unheeded. Buried treasure tales continued to spread regarding western river steamboats.

In the late nineteenth century, treasure hunters searched for buried steamboats based on tales of wealth to be found. There were multiple attempts to recover treasure, and these attempts have continued to modern day. The locations of treasure associated with wrecked steamboats are widespread and include the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio Rivers. The tales are spread by word of mouth, in print media, and, more recently, the internet. The tales often include incorrect information or lack details. Still, the tales have inspired treasure hunters for nearly 150 years to actually attempt to recover treasure from buried vessels.

¹⁵⁵ "Sees Many Wrecks," Rock Island (Ill.) Argus, September 13, 1901, accessed February 10, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn92053934/1901-09-13/ed-2/seq-6/>>.

CHAPTER IV
NINETEENTH-CENTURY HUNTS FOR BURIED TREASURE ON WESTERN
RIVER STEAMBOATS

Myths of valuables aboard buried steamboats led treasure hunters to search for the lost vessels. In the nineteenth century, protective legislation for cultural heritage sites was not yet in place in the United States. Treasure hunters typically targeted steamboats buried underground, as opposed to submerged steamboats. These buried vessels were considered abandoned property, and as such, the finds were treated as treasure troves. Treasure hunters could profit from what they found (as in finders are keepers). However, the finds would be subject to federal taxes.

Leodora

In 1871, wreckers reportedly found the steamboat *Leodora*, lost in 1866, buried under six feet (1.83 m) of sediment. Thomas Phillips, one of the wreckers, claimed that recovering valuables from the boat was “a sure thing.”¹⁵⁶ In February, a Memphis paper reported that the group had recovered “two boilers, an iron safe (full of gold, of course,) and several boxes of rubber boots.”¹⁵⁷ However, the treasure hunt ended without further fanfare.

¹⁵⁶ “Miscellaneous,” *Memphis Daily Appeal*, February 11, 1871, accessed February 10, 2017, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045160/1871-02-11/ed-1/seq-3/>>.

¹⁵⁷ “Rivers, Business, Miscellaneous,” *Public Ledger*, February 2, 1871, accessed February 10, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85033673/1871-02-02/ed-1/seq-3/>>.

Over the next twenty years, stories of whiskey from the buried steamboat *Leodora* circulated. “Elk Point” whiskey, which was “represented as a part of the lost cargo,” was reportedly served in saloons in St. Louis and other locations. Yet, no liquor was actually recovered. Still, E.E. Wenner and Fred Kroksch of Elk Point, South Dakota claimed there were 100 barrels of whiskey to find on *Leodora*. In 1896, the pair attempted to find the vessel. After months of digging, they recovered “a large box of hinges and 600 feet [182.88 m] of rope.” The items were well preserved. They found that “the rope, instead of being rotted, is strong and firm.” They were “encouraged” by the find.¹⁵⁸ However, they were unsuccessful at recovering any whiskey.

Missouri Packet

In 1875, a newspaper story circulated about a buried steamboat near Boonville, Missouri with a treasure worth \$200,000. The steamboat was unnamed in the article, but it was identified as the second steamboat to travel on the Missouri River that sank in July of 1819. The *History of Howard and Cooper Counties, Missouri* repeated the same story in 1883.¹⁵⁹ The details of the report are not fully consistent with any vessel that sank in the Missouri River, but it is likely referring to the *Missouri Packet*.

The misinformation about the vessel’s identity and sinking may have been due to the inaccuracy of the story’s source, W.L. Scott. Scott lived with his family near the

¹⁵⁸ “Signs of the Treasure,” *Sioux City Journal*, April 11, 1896, accessed February 10, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁵⁹ *History of Howard and Cooper Counties, Missouri* (Cooper County, MO: The Printery, 1883); “Buried Treasure,” *Times-Picayune*, October 14, 1875, accessed February 10, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*; “Untitled,” *The Andrew County (Savannah, MO) Republican*, October 22, 1875, accessed February 10, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85034076/1875-10-22/ed-1/seq-1/>>.

location of the wreck. Although he was a young boy at the time of the vessel's sinking, he claimed that he clearly remembered what the steamboat's officers and government officials said about the wreck; there was treasure onboard. Scott recalled that government agents visited the scene of the wreck shortly after the accident, but they were unable to access the vessel because it was submerged. The excitement surrounding the wreck made an impression on young Scott. More than fifty years later, he even claimed to be able to point out the exact spot of the wreck.¹⁶⁰ The ship's cargo was rumored to have included Monongahela whiskey--a rye whiskey out of Pennsylvania--and \$200,000 in silver coin to pay U.S. troops stationed in Council Bluffs.¹⁶¹ It was also maintained that the government still had rights to the silver coin. The *Times-Picayune* reported, "The government can yet reclaim the money if it will make the effort; or, if a release can be given by the Government, private parties will undoubtedly undertake it."¹⁶² Ultimately, it appears Scott's hope to garner interest in digging up the wreck failed, and the vessel remained undisturbed for another century when it once again piqued the interest of treasure hunters in the 1980s.

¹⁶⁰ "Buried Treasure," *Times-Picayune*, October 14, 1875; "Untitled," *The Andrew County Republican*, October 22, 1875.

¹⁶¹ *The (Jefferson City, MO) State Journal*, October 15, 1875, accessed February 10, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87052128/1875-10-15/ed-1/seq-5/>>; "Untitled," *The Andrew County Republican*, October 22, 1875; *Perrysburg (OH) Journal*, October 22, 1875, accessed February 10, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87076843/1875-10-22/ed-1/seq-1/>>.

¹⁶² "Buried Treasure," *Times-Picayune*, October 14, 1875.

Twilight

After its sinking in 1865, rising waters of the Missouri River rapidly covered the steamboat *Twilight*. Periodic falling water levels re-exposed the vessel from time-to-time. The exposed timbers of the vessel provided a tempting target for local treasure seekers, but *Twilight* seemingly disappeared as easily as it appeared. Rumors circulated that local farmers pulled out two barrels of whiskey from the steamboat. Yet, when they returned for more, the vessel could not be found. Another story claimed that a retired riverboat captain “spent the best days of his life hunting the banks of the river over in search of the *Twilight*” to no avail.¹⁶³

An early organized attempt to discover the cargo of the steamboat *Twilight* occurred in 1868. G.W. Mountjoy, a former sheriff of Lafayette County in Missouri joined with G.W. Tevis, a drug merchant from Lafayette, Missouri, to search for the cargo of the steamboat *Twilight*. Despite their lack of experience in riverine salvage, the pair formed a wrecking company. They spent 20 days during the winter months of 1868, using 20 hired men, and spending \$3,000, to search for the vessel. They eventually sunk a caisson over a vessel they believed to be the *Twilight*, but they found the boat was still partially buried in the river at that point. The recovery of the cargo proved exceedingly difficult for Mountjoy and Tevis.¹⁶⁴

Attempts to recover the cargo of the vessel continued in 1874. Several area farmers built a make-shift coffer dam around the wreck believed to be *Twilight*. They

¹⁶³ “Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down,” *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895, accessed February 10, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁶⁴ “Raising the *Twilight*’s Cargo an Interesting Work That is Going on near Kansas City,” *St. Louis Republic*, December 1, 1895, accessed February 10, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

then used a steam pump in an attempt to keep water away from around the wreck. The venture ultimately failed when the dam collapsed and injured two of the men, one fatally.¹⁶⁵

Treasure hunters again targeted *Twilight* in 1895. This expedition was the most extensive attempt on the boat in the nineteenth century. Captain Arthur Leopold, a licensed river captain and pilot, Captain George R. Collins, from the Third Regiment of the Missouri National Guard, and John King, a machinist, formed the Kansas City Wrecking Company to search for treasure onboard sunken steamboats.¹⁶⁶ They targeted *Twilight* because of the valuables and whiskey thought to be onboard. It was reported:

The cargo of the *Twilight* was very rich. It was composed of 300 barrels of whisky, hundreds of cases of wines, liquors and canned goods, and a great many barrels of oils of various sorts, including linseed, castor and petroleum. There were in her also ten or twelve tons of white lead, twenty tons of pig iron, 150 stoves and a huge stamp mill and engines for the mine, to say nothing of the sheet copper, eighty-five stands of government arms and uniforms, and all sorts of valuable things.¹⁶⁷

There was also a rumored purser's cabin filled with specie, although the stories vary as to why. One story claimed that a Kansas woman inherited several thousands of dollars in 1863, which she kept in a New England bank, believing that "those were 'parious' times in Missouri, especially for Kansans." With the end of the Civil War in 1865, the woman decided to withdraw her money and move it to Kansas. The woman traveled east to

¹⁶⁵ "Raising the *Twilight's* Cargo an Interesting Work That is Going on near Kansas City," *St. Louis Republic*, December 1, 1895; "The *Twilight's* Hold Now the Work Of Recovering the Cargo is Conducted," *The Kansas City Star*, November 24, 1895, accessed February 10, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁶⁶ "Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down," *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895.

¹⁶⁷ "Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down," *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895.

claim her inheritance and withdrew the funds as gold specie. She transported the specie in a tin trunk placed in a strong box for her journey back to Kansas. In St. Louis, the woman gained passage on board *Twilight* for its fateful last trip. She survived the steamboat's accident, but her fortune was lost along with the boat. She remained close to the site of the wreck for several years, "hoping that something would occur and the tin trunk and the gold wash ashore." She reported watching the early attempts to reclaim the treasure and was disheartened. She left the area and never returned, even when news of the recovery attempts surfaced.¹⁶⁸ Less elaborate reports held that the money was headed for an army post and merchants upriver.¹⁶⁹

Captain Leopold and company eagerly planned to dig for the supposed treasure trove. The group requested permission from the federal government to search for the vessel, believing "in such cases, after years have elapsed without the owners seeking to regain their property, 'finders are keepers.'"¹⁷⁰ To be keepers, though, they first needed to be finders.

They enlisted the assistance of a local farmer who claimed to know the exact spot of the wreck. The farmer used scenery to mark the location of the steamboat when it sunk, and he was able to use his points of scenery to pinpoint the location of the buried steamboat for the treasure seekers. He walked with the group in the field and reportedly

¹⁶⁸ "Raising the *Twilight's* Cargo an Interesting Work That is Going on near Kansas City," *St. Louis Republic*, December 1, 1895.

¹⁶⁹ "Romance of the Wreck and Recovery of the *Twilight's* Cargo," *The Wichita Daily Eagle*, April 3, 1896, accessed February 10, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014635/1896-04-03/ed-1/seq-8/>>.

¹⁷⁰ "Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down," *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895.

told them exactly when they stood over the boilers. After a successful probe of the area, the farmer was well paid for his information.¹⁷¹

The group continued to use the probing method to find the vessel, grumbling that it would have been easier to attempt to recover the treasure if the boat was still under water instead of land. Long, steel rods were forced down little by little until they reached a depth that the group estimated was level to where the steamboat should be. The work was tedious. Yet, it was reported: “After much patient probing one day the rod struck something hard, and telephoned up to sharp ears by means of vibration that it had struck metal.”¹⁷² The company continued to probe until they thought they found the ship’s “doctor,” the part of the ship’s machinery designed to keep the water in the boilers at safe levels. They then made an outline of the boat, carefully defining where they thought the hatches would be. To be sure, rods were sent down 16 feet (4.88 m) from the north and the south of the doctor. They found the wooden bulwark of the boat. The company estimated the boat to be 32 feet (9.75 m) wide, 185 feet (56.39 m) long, and six feet (1.83 m) deep.¹⁷³

The company obtained machinery from Kansas City, Missouri to sink a caisson over the vessel and remove sand, mud, and water. The caisson was built of heavy timber and was weighted at the bottom. It was eight square feet (.74 square meters) at the bottom and five-and-a-half (.52 m) at the top with two locks. There was a trap door

¹⁷¹ “Raising the Twilight’s Cargo an Interesting Work That is Going on near Kansas City,” *St. Louis Republic*, December 1, 1895.

¹⁷² “Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down,” *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895.

¹⁷³ Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*, 162; “Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down,” *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895.

eight feet (.74 m) from the bottom, and there was a second trap door at the top. Two pipes--the air compressor and the exhaust--were run to the bottom. Air was compressed into the caisson as it was sunk. Sand and mud were pumped out using the exhaust pipe. A rubber hose was attached to the exhaust valve. The exhaust valve was opened and the sand and mud were sucked in and blown to the top. The valve was then closed. The process was then repeated. The caisson was dropped "inch by inch and foot by foot" until it hit the boat's machinery.¹⁷⁴

The treasure hunters found the machinery of *Twilight* in good condition and not rusted. The company decided to remove the machinery, including an engine and six pumps, so the group could enter the hold. The men then decided the best course of action was to break up the machinery. The heavy pieces were hoisted to the surface.¹⁷⁵

They reached the deck and reported that the hull was slanted to the north at a 45 degree angle. The group cut the deck away, and they used the ship's bulkheads as support between the bottom of the caisson and the deck. The pine and oak deck timber were in good condition. Not surprisingly, blue clay and mud coated everything. The hatches were open, and "there lay the *Twilight* beneath them, buried under thirty-nine feet of sand, but as plainly visible to their minds' eyes as if she had been on top of the ground."¹⁷⁶ Reaching the hold was cause for celebration. One paper related the story:

The men were wild with delight down in the hold of the buried boat, with thirty-nine feet of wet sand above them. They filled their lungs with air

¹⁷⁴ "Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down," *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895.

¹⁷⁵ "Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down," *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895.

¹⁷⁶ "Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down," *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895.

pumped from above, and rolled and danced and shook hands with one another. For many months they had been digging and toiling for this very thing, and by the side of a wall of sand the treasure lay revealed.¹⁷⁷

Their first find was a case of liquor described as “white liquor” that had a “piney odor.” The labels on the bottles had been disintegrated in the river water, but the case itself was stamped “Old London Club Gin, 1860.” In their haste, they broke eight bottles with their picks trying to open the cases. The men took four bottles to show Captain Leopold, who was sleeping. Leopold was sufficiently impressed with the find, and he got dressed to celebrate. The group spent the rest of the night admiring their find.¹⁷⁸

The bottles were square-faced and quart-size. They were sealed with black wax, and it appeared that their seals had not been broken or compromised. They opened one of the bottles and strained the liquid of the cork pieces that had disintegrated into it. A few bottles were taken to Kansas City’s “leading club house,” so “good judges” could try the liquor. They described the liquor as old-fashioned with a hint of pine or turpentine. After a few sips, “a glow stole through the drinkers which spread from their toes to the tips of their ears, and they told voluminously of the good quality of this gin.” One connoisseur exclaimed, “It was the old London ‘square face’ that Dickens wrote about and smacked his lips over.” Some of the tasters claimed it was the best liquor they had ever consumed.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ “Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down,” *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895.

¹⁷⁸ “Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down,” *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895.

¹⁷⁹ “Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down,” *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895.

As workers cleared the hold, they could see more barrels and cases. Along with the alcohol, the crew found cases of canned goods. The tin was reportedly still shiny, but only some of the contents were still good. The labels of the canned goods were missing. There were sardines in iron-strapped cases, a case of spoiled oysters, and a case of clams. They picked out pieces of gunny and cotton sacks. The side of a tea chest was found. Meanwhile, the exhaust also pumped out corn kernels, peanuts, allspice, and coffee. The 150 bags of coffee were damaged. The allspice was still fragrant and apparently still had its flavor. In the 10 bags of peanuts, the shells were preserved, but the legumes inside had turned to dust. They also found 12 bales of jute bagging, some of which was still good.¹⁸⁰

In June of 1895, the endeavor was at risk of failing. Water and sand began to leak in through the hatches. The steam pump from Kansas City was not enough to keep the water out. They contemplated quitting, but they also realized that their target--whiskey and liquors--were not in their current location. The decision was made to sink a second caisson--this one of steel instead of wood--over the forward hatch. Here, the group found two cases of Old London Club Gin in good condition, one case of Manhattan cocktail, three cases of clocks, six barrels of mackerel in which the salt had dissolved the fish, a case of machine supplies, and a roll of rubber belting. They believed they could reclaim the rubber belting to use on their own air compressors. They also found “a perfect museum of sporting goods” that included “pocket knives, hundreds of brass dog collars,

¹⁸⁰ “Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down,” *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895; “Raising the Twilight's Cargo an Interesting Work That is Going on near Kansas City,” *St. Louis Republic*, December 1, 1895.

revolvers, rifles, shotguns, ramrods, rifle barrels, gunlocks, whisky flasks, with silver cups, gunsmiths' general supplies, gunsmiths' tools for repairing, and all sorts of miscellaneous sporting goods.” (Figure 14).¹⁸¹



Figure 14. Artist rendition of workers removing cargo from the hold of the steamboat *Twilight*. From "The *Twilight*'s Hold Now the Work Of Recovering the Cargo is Conducted," *Kansas City Star*, November 24, 1895, *America's Historical Newspapers*. Used with permission.

¹⁸¹ "Raising the *Twilight*'s Cargo an Interesting Work That is Going on near Kansas City," *St. Louis Republic*, December 1, 1895.

Despite a tangential interest in the the sporting goods and other cargo, the treasure hunters were still after more of the spirits that they believed to be amongst the cargo. In December of 1895, the crew was reportedly removing waterlogged cordwood when a wall of sand caved in. No one was hurt, but wood cases, kegs, and barrels were uncovered by the sudden avalanche. Here they found cases of gin.¹⁸²

More barrels of whiskey were also found. The workers did not find the 800 barrels they hoped for, but what they found was well-preserved. One of the barrels was tapped, and the general consensus was that the whiskey was even finer than the gin:

A glass of it, which was poured out before a company of men in the Kansas City club, filled the entire floor with its aroma. It was thick and oily, almost to the consistency of New Orleans molasses, and after the glass was emptied it clung to the sides as syrup would. Whisky connoisseurs who have sampled it say that it exceeds anything in the whisky line they had ever dreamed of.¹⁸³

The treasure hunters had high hopes for substantial profits from the whiskey, but first they hoped to prove that they would not owe taxes on their find. In mid-December of 1895, the group planned to leave the barrels in the boat until government officials could be present at their recovery. They expected that the barrels would bear the stamps that the taxes had been paid on the whiskey at the distillery.¹⁸⁴

Digging underground on an old steamboat was not without its frights. A young digger and “Mexican Bob,” who was described as a man without fear and an ex-cowboy, were working fifteen feet (4.57 m) into a tunnel dug into the hold. They came across a

¹⁸² “Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down,” *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895.

¹⁸³ “Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down,” *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895.

¹⁸⁴ “Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down,” *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895.

mass of freight, which they thought to be in such disarray their only option was to hack away at it. As the men wielded their tools, they came across a box. In alarm, they thought they found a coffin. Mexican Bob told the boy to dig it out. The men worked in the dark and “their only light was two tallow candles.” The younger man “whacked away” and “broke inside the box.” Frightened, “he began to back out of the tunnel.” The boy exclaimed, “There’s a dead woman in that box. I see her hair.”¹⁸⁵ The boy scrambled out of the tunnel and up the caisson to find Captain Leopold and tell him about the dead woman. Captain Leopold went into the caisson. Mexican Bob had persisted in digging the box out, and what they found was no cause for alarm: “The woman’s head proved to be a round brass oil can, her hair was the tan bark, darkened by the water and frayed out into long shreds. The boy did no more work that night, but sat by the boiler in the engine room and shivered.”¹⁸⁶

Despite moments like the one above, the mood surrounding the dig was generally enthusiastic. The excitement at the uncovering of the vessel’s cargo, including the whiskey, permeated into the surrounding community. Five hundred farmers reportedly showed up to watch the production, which prompted one wrecker to comment that no agriculture would be done until the excitement was over. The repeated attempts to discover *Twilight* caused the wrecked steamboat’s reputation to grow. Like Huckleberry Finn passing by the abandoned steamboat, local children were drawn to the tales and the lure of treasure: “She was a thing of fascination to country boys, who dreamed of all

¹⁸⁵ “Raising the Twilight’s Cargo an Interesting Work That is Going on near Kansas City,” *St. Louis Republic*, December 1, 1895.

¹⁸⁶ “Raising the Twilight’s Cargo an Interesting Work That is Going on near Kansas City,” *St. Louis Republic*, December 1, 1895.

sorts of exploits to get the treasure out of her. There was an air of mystery about her that thrilled the farm lads like the tales of Capt. Kidd or the stories of the adventures of wreckers.”¹⁸⁷

Interest in the treasure of *Twilight* was not for children alone. Imitation “Twilight” whiskey was served in local saloons. Experts who sampled actual *Twilight* whiskey thought the imitation spirit was like a “torchlight,” a term used to describe how cheap whiskey burned going down the throat. The group excitedly speculated that they could get at least \$400 per barrel for *Twilight*’s genuine whiskey.¹⁸⁸

Work to recover *Twilight*’s whiskey may have continued into 1896. No record is found to indicate that the group had the hoped-for monetary success, and no large quantities of spirits were removed from the vessel. The *Kansas City Daily Journal* reported in December of 1895:

In fact none of the whisky has been taken out of the hold of the vessel save a few bottles of gin found in the remains of a cask that had been consigned to a Leavenworth dealer. The wreckers were afraid to try to handle the barrels for fear they would prove unstable, and besides they did not know what action the revenue officers would take in the matter.¹⁸⁹

In 1897, a story reported of *Twilight*: “For years parties have been working to recover the contents of her hold, and have partially succeeded in doing so.”¹⁹⁰ One member of the operation, John King, later claimed that *Twilight* treasure hunt was a

¹⁸⁷ “Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down,” *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895.

¹⁸⁸ “Opened a Whisky Mine Three Hundred Barrels Struck Thirty Nine Feet Down,” *Sioux City Journal*, December 14, 1895.

¹⁸⁹ “‘Twilight’ Whisky,” *Kansas City Daily Journal*, December 9, 1895, accessed February 10, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86063624/1895-12-09/ed-1/seq-7/>>.

¹⁹⁰ “Missouri River History Record of 295 Wrecks since the Beginning of Navigation,” *The Sioux City Journal*, December 30, 1897, accessed February 10, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

failure. Nothing considered valuable enough to recoup the costs of operations was discovered. That didn't stop him, however, from working on the 1898 recovery attempt of the cargo from the steamboat *Arabia*.¹⁹¹ The attempt to recover buried wealth from *Twilight* inspired others to make similar attempts on other vessels, and stories of the buried treasure onboard *Twilight* continued to inspire salvagers in the twentieth century.

Arabia

When the steamboat *Arabia* sank in 1856 near Parkville, Missouri, there was little hope of salvage immediately after the accident. The ship and its cargo were underwater in the Missouri River, which eventually shifted course and left the goods buried under a cornfield. *Arabia*'s legend grew as the years passed, and (as legend had it) the whiskey aboard aged.

The first attempt to recover the cargo of *Arabia* appears to have been made in 1871. A newspaper account claimed that a buried steamboat had been found. Although the vessel was not named, the date and location of the wreck match that of *Arabia*. The cargo was said to include 800 barrels of whiskey and 500 barrels of high wine, a twice-distilled whiskey, under 15 feet (4.57 m) of sand. The unnamed parties seeking the steamboat obtained the title to the property. They hoped to obtain a profit by digging up the steamboat, but their efforts apparently failed.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ "Digging for Whisky," *The Kansas Semi-Weekly Capital*, March 8, 1898, accessed February 10, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*; "Missouri River Boats That Never Came Back," *The Kansas City Star*, November 5, 1911, accessed February 10, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁹² "Untitled," *Marshall County(Plymouth, IN) Republican*, February 9, 1871, accessed February 10, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84038034/1871-02-09/ed-1/seq-1/>>.

The next attempt to recover the cargo of *Arabia* came in 1877. Robert Treadway and Henry Tobener of Kansas City invested \$2,000 to build a wooden coffer dam to reach *Arabia*. Family lore supports stories of Tobener's involvement with the excavation attempt. Efforts continued into 1878, but the dig was ultimately abandoned with little success.¹⁹³

The *Kansas City Times* relayed an account of yet another failed attempt to recover the cargo of the steamboat *Arabia* in 1880. At this time, treasure hunters set up an engine near the location of the sunken vessel to pump out water around the vessel. The account does not reveal who the members of the group were or the techniques they used. The attempt failed, however, when a storm washed away the group's equipment. *The Kansas City Times* later reported, "The engine with its boat equipment engaged in pumping out the whisky in the sunken steamboat, *Arabia*, grounded in the river near Quindaro, was entirely carried under the water in the big storm earlier in the week. Too bad to have muddy Missouri River water mixed with any of that good 'red licker.'"¹⁹⁴

In the late 1890s, there was a well-publicized attempt to recover the cargo of the *Arabia*. The boat's legend resurfaced when so-called "river men" began searching for the ship under the direction of Gale Henson of Holt, Missouri. There was some rivalry among the different wrecking company factions. George R. Collins, who was part of the *Twilight* endeavor, claimed that he had looked into digging for *Arabia* in 1894. Collins

¹⁹³ Greg Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield: The Discovery and Excavation of the Steamboat Arabia* (Kansas City, MO: Paddle Wheel Publishing, 1998), 39, 84; *The Weekly (Cleveland, TN) Herald*, January 10, 1878, accessed February 10, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86053402/1878-01-10/ed-1/seq-1/>>.

¹⁹⁴ "In Kansas City Forty Years Ago," *The Kansas City Times*, April 16, 1920, accessed February 10, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

maintained that he learned beyond a doubt that all the valuable cargo from *Arabia* had been salvaged by wreckers out of St. Joseph shortly after the boat's sinking. He suggested that there was nothing left to dig for on *Arabia*, or he would have gone after it himself.¹⁹⁵

Collins' proclamations did not deter the work of Gale Henson and his group. Henson had once been known in some circles as the "boss gambler of the valley," and he later became a lumberman in Holt, Missouri. To members of his crew, he was simply "Dad." Henson was joined in the venture by G.W. Summers, a Parkville, Missouri merchant, and John P. Eby. Summers claimed to have seen the boat before it sunk.¹⁹⁶ The syndicate also included A.W. Farney, a civil engineer, contractor, and former steamboat master. They gambled that they could find the 165 barrels of whiskey thought to be onboard *Arabia* with a bonus of a large amount of queensware, a popular style of tableware.¹⁹⁷

Henson believed the wreck was now buried under ground. As with the search for the steamboat *Twilight*, Henson and his workers first probed to find *Arabia*. Henson forced down iron rods, sinking them into the sand and forcing them 42 feet (12.8 m) into the ground. The group started near the river and then probed over and over, hitting

¹⁹⁵ "They Won't Find the Arabia," *Kansas City Star*, January 20, 1896, accessed February 10, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁹⁶ "A Whisky Mine," *The (Sacramento) Record-Union*, July 21, 1899, accessed February 10, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015104/1899-07-21/ed-1/seq-7/>>; "Mining for Whisky," *The Copper Country (Calumet, MI) Evening News*, December 2, 1897, accessed February 10, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86086632/1897-12-02/ed-1/seq-7/>>; *The (Los Angeles) Herald*, December 12, 1897, accessed February 10, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042461/1897-12-12/ed-1/seq-14/>>.

¹⁹⁷ "Whisky Uncovered. Cargo of the Arabia Found by River Men," *Omaha World-Herald*, December 17, 1897, accessed February 10, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

nothing but dirt. They placed sticks in the ground to mark where they had already probed and kept searching. Finally, the group hit something they thought to be the sheet iron roof of the steamboat. They continued to sink rods to identify the outline of the steamboat, and once again they found metal. They determined that the vessel was buried 24 to 36 feet (7.32 to 10.97 m) underground. They cleared the undergrowth, so that there was a “cut out of the forest of willows the shape of a steamer.”¹⁹⁸ Once they located the steamboat and procured machinery similar to that used on the *Twilight* digs a few years before, the Henson group dropped three iron or steel caissons in different locations on *Arabia* in an attempt to reach the whiskey.¹⁹⁹

In mid-December 1897, newspaper accounts announced that whiskey barrels had been found in the *Arabia*'s hold. The barrels were reportedly well preserved. The treasure hunters hoped that they were about to make a sizable profit from the sale of whiskey, so they notified federal tax revenue authorities that they wanted to remove their find. It was speculated: “The diggers will realize a handsome sum for their work, and the government will receive about \$7,000 revenue tax on the liquor.” Revenue officers from Leavenworth, Kansas were to planning to “supervise the removal of the cargo.”²⁰⁰

Interest in the *Arabia* heightened as the work continued. One newspaper featured the reminiscences of a passenger who was aboard the steamboat when it sank. Abel Kirk had just been married near Peoria, Illinois and was traveling to Nebraska with his new wife. Kirk described the chaos after the boat hit a snag. There were no reported

¹⁹⁸ “Mining for Whisky,” *The Copper Country Evening News*, December 2, 1897.

¹⁹⁹ “Mining for Whisky,” *The Copper Country Evening News*, December 2, 1897.

²⁰⁰ “After Forty Years. A Cargo of Whiskey Recovered from a Steamer, which Sunk Forty Years Ago,” *Grand Forks (ND) Daily Herald*, December 17, 1897, accessed February 10, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

casualties, and the survivors were taken to a hotel in Parkville, Missouri. As reported, “Many of the trunks and valises were taken off the boat, and stacked up in the woods near the river. That night they were broken into by thieves and all the valuables were taken out.”²⁰¹ The treasure hunters were not deterred by the thought that the passengers’ valuables would not be onboard.

They were focused on recovering the whiskey, which they thought to be high quality, aged, and “priceless.”²⁰² Others were more cynical about the press surrounding the find: “The story of finding that whisky in a sunken steamboat on the Missouri bottoms may be set down as a sneaking scheme to have the new battleship christened ‘Missouri.’”²⁰³ That theory did not pan out, as there was not a battleship christened after the 24th state until the twentieth century.

For some, excited by the prospect of well-aged liquor, it was as if the Missouri was a genuine whiskey river. One newspaper account declared:

Confirmed toppers who, in their drunken dreams, delight to wander through an elysium where whisky flows as freely as water in the streets of Venice, should come to this spot to sleep. We have something that Jules Verne in his wildest flights of imagination fell short of—a whisky mine, concealed in the heart of a Missouri river steamboat buried deep, not in water, but in the earth on a Missouri farm.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ “A Reminiscence: A Man Who was on the Steamer Arabia, which Sank Forty-One Years Ago,” *Helena (MT) Independent*, January 1, 1898, accessed February 10, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

²⁰² “Struck a Whisky Mine: A Sunken Boat Bound for Sioux City Fifty Years Ago Found,” *Sioux City Journal*, December 5, 1897, accessed February 10, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

²⁰³ “Untitled,” *The Guthrie (OK) Daily Leader*, December 23, 1897, accessed February 10, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86063952/1897-12-23/ed-1/seq-2/>>.

²⁰⁴ “Struck a Whisky Mine: A Sunken Boat Bound for Sioux City Fifty Years Ago Found,” *Sioux City Journal*, December 5, 1897.

These accounts were perhaps premature. The group had not yet removed whiskey barrels from the *Arabia*. In early January of 1898, they reached the main deck of the steamboat 42 feet (12.8 m) below the surface. The timber was in good condition, but the group decided it would be too expensive to attempt to recover it. They also found barrels of ham. The ham—of course—was spoiled, but the barrels were in good condition. The group was encouraged and hoped the whiskey barrels would also be well preserved (Figure 15).

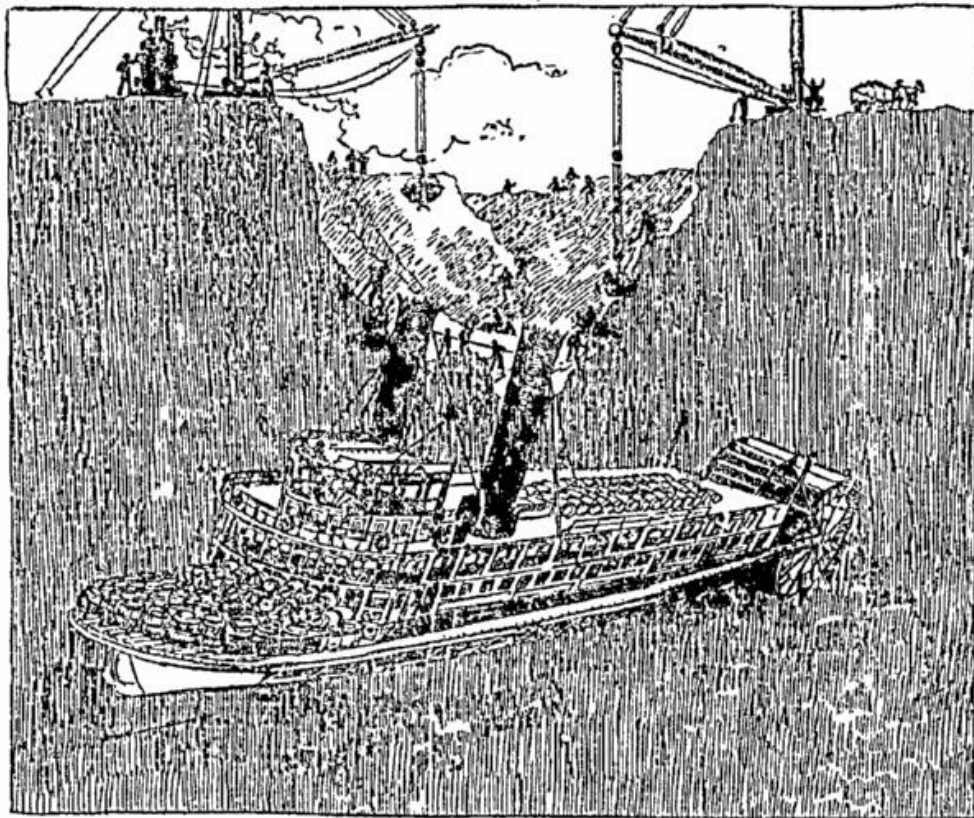


Figure 15. Artist rendition of the buried *Arabia*. From "Struck a Whisky Mine a Sunken Boat Bound for Sioux City Fifty Years Ago Found," *Sioux City Journal*, December 5, 1897, *America's Historical Database*. Used with permission.

Then, in mid-January 1898, work halted because of the rising waters of the Missouri River. There was too much water seeping into the work site. The engine they

were using was not working fast enough to pump the water out.²⁰⁵ Mud was seeping into the boat. Henson declared, “We’d work all summer if need be, to get that whisky...It’s galling on a man’s patience as well as his pocketbook to be so near and yet so far from the precious stuff.”²⁰⁶

Unable to give up the pursuit, the group made plans to raise the caisson and then sink it again directly over the barrels of whiskey. By that time, the group had spent around \$1,500 and the engine was consuming ten tons of coal daily.²⁰⁷ They had recovered a wagon, a case of hats, a case of boots, and a barrel of meat, which were all deemed “worthless.”²⁰⁸ Despite the setbacks, it was reported, “The company intends to get the whisky, regardless of the cost.”²⁰⁹ They believed the market for *Arabia*’s whiskey would pay back their efforts. A New York City club expressed interest in the whiskey, offering above-market prices. The going rate for top-quality, 30-year-old Kentucky was believed to be \$25 per gallon. The club men were reportedly willing to spend \$40 per gallon (3.79 L) for the hundred-year-old whiskey. If the group was able to recover 400 barrels, they believed they could generate \$500,000.²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ “‘Arabia’ Work Stopped,” *Kansas City Star*, January 8, 1898, accessed February 10, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

²⁰⁶ “So Near and Yet so Far: The Arabia’s Whisky is in Sight but the ‘Sand Dogs’ Can’t Raise It,” *Kansas City Star*, January 19, 1898, accessed February 10, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

²⁰⁷ “So Near and Yet so Far: The Arabia’s Whisky is in Sight but the ‘Sand Dogs’ Can’t Raise It,” *Kansas City Star*, January 19, 1898, accessed February 10, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspaper*; “The Whisky in Sight,” *Emporia (KS) Gazette*, January 19, 1898, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

²⁰⁸ “Digging for Whisky,” *Topeka Weekly Capital*, March 8, 1898, accessed February 10, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

²⁰⁹ “The Whisky in Sight,” *Emporia Gazette*, January 19, 1898.

²¹⁰ “Real Whisky Mine,” *Warren (MN) Sheaf*, July 27, 1899, accessed February 10, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90059228/1899-07-27/ed-1/seq-3/>>.

Despite the bold proclamations, work was on-and-off again. Recovery efforts again halted in March of 1898. The group planned to obtain a larger engine and to build a larger caisson to allow them to continue work the following autumn. Yet, the group's financial resources were exhausted.²¹¹ They seemed to persist for a time, perhaps searching for investors in the venture. In November of 1898, the *Kansas City Star* printed:

The editor of the Holt Rustler says he is wearing a pair of boots that are more than fifty years old, and that they are as nice looking and easy on his feet as a pair less ancient would be. They were taken from the sunken steamboat Arabia, which went down in the Missouri river about a half century ago, the cargo of which is being raised from a considerable depth of sand from an old bed in the river near Parkville.²¹²

Stories of the whiskey lingered. In 1899, the *Hopkinsville Kentuckian* printed, "When they begin to hoist those old oaken barrels out of the shaft it will be like hauling up chests of Spanish gold. The barrels will be worth \$1,250 each."²¹³ *The Record-Union* printed "Among the many curious things in Kansas is a whisky mine."²¹⁴

Ultimately, Henson and his crew abandoned their efforts. A 1910 interview with syndicate participant A.W. Farney revealed that, in his view, they had no choice but to

²¹¹ "The Arabia Work to Cease," *Kansas City Star*, March 27, 1898, accessed February 10, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*; "Abandoned Their Whisky Mine," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, April 7, 1898, accessed February 10, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

²¹² "Missouri Notes," *Kansas City Star*, November 17, 1898, accessed February 10, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

²¹³ "Real Whisky Mine," *Hopkinsville Kentuckian*, September 12, 1899, accessed February 11, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86069395/1899-09-12/ed-1/seq-6/>>.

²¹⁴ "A Whisky Mine," *The Record-Union*, July 21, 1899.

“strike camp and go away...not saying a word.” Farney maintained that there was no whiskey onboard the vessel.²¹⁵

It is unknown what became of the items that the group did find. The perishables were likely discarded. In 1911, the Kansas City Museum displayed a “felt hat from steamboat Arabia that lay forty-one years under water of Missouri River” as part of its historical collection, which they may have obtained from the members of the Holt Syndicate.²¹⁶ Decades later, another treasure hunting group, River Salvage, Inc., would rediscover *Arabia*.

Bertrand

Three years after the *Bertrand* was snagged in the Missouri River in 1865 and after unsuccessful salvaging attempts, the ship was still marked on a government survey. By 1879, government surveyors marked a Bertrand bend on their maps, but they did not mark the steamboat itself, even though the prow was reportedly visible near the time of the survey.²¹⁷

Interest in *Bertrand*'s cargo intensified after the wreck was completely buried. Multiple groups reportedly spent hundreds of dollars searching for the lost vessel with little luck in the decades following its sinking.²¹⁸ A local boy found a box of candles marked with the vessel's name. The find stirred treasure hunters, but they were unable to

²¹⁵ “The Legend of the Lost Arabia and its Treasure Exploded,” *Kansas City Star*, June 5, 1910, accessed February 11, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

²¹⁶ “In a Kansas City Museum,” *Kansas City Star*, July 16, 1911, accessed February 11, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

²¹⁷ “Have Located the Wreck of the *Bertrand*,” *Sunday (Omaha) World-Herald*, December 26, 1897, accessed February 11, 2017, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

²¹⁸ “Have Located the Wreck of the *Bertrand*,” *Sunday World-Herald*, December 26, 1897.

locate the boat. Even locals who were present when the boat sank were unable to pinpoint the location of *Bertrand* as the years passed.²¹⁹

According to a *Morning World-Herald* report in 1897, the first attempt to recover valuables from the buried *Bertrand* occurred twenty years earlier in March of 1877. At this time, the Missouri River reportedly shifted, leaving the boat close to the shore but still buried in “watery sand.” Several local men built a “rude crib” around the vessel and reached the deck, which was 10 feet (3.05 m) underwater. The group was rewarded with salted fish from the ship’s cargo for their efforts. However the venture was short-lived; the crib was lost when some ice broke upriver and washed it away. The exact location of the vessel was lost again when the river shifted again. The farmer at the head of the project reportedly “spent all his money in raising two or three barrels of fish from the hold, and then retired, broken in fortune, to die.”²²⁰

One man was biding his time waiting for an opportunity to search for *Bertrand*. As a boy, this unnamed individual had spent time with the original 1860s wrecking crew. He claimed to know the exact location of the steamboat even “though the shore line had changed and many of the old landmarks had been removed.” He was reportedly offered money to reveal the location over the years, but he declined in hopes of saving the treasure for himself. He joined a group that announced its intentions to search for *Bertrand* for the spring of 1897.²²¹

²¹⁹ “Seeking for a Buried Boat,” *Morning (Omaha) World-Herald*, February 9, 1897, accessed February 11, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

²²⁰ “Seeking for a Buried Boat,” *Morning World-Herald*, February 9, 1897.

²²¹ “Seeking for a Buried Boat,” *Morning World-Herald*, February 9, 1897.

This group of three men went to Alva G. Grover's office requesting the use of a dip needle, an instrument used to find magnetic materials underground. Grover was a local civil engineer and was familiar with the stories about the *Bertrand*, and he guessed that the men were going treasure hunting. After attempting to use the dip needle, the would-be wreckers conceded that they did not know how to properly use the equipment.

One account claimed:

Not understanding that it must be held straight north and south, they found indications of metal all over the Missouri bottom. At last, in the gray of the morning, one of them, who is quite a bright fellow, took the needle down to the river, and found that it dipped there as much as anywhere else. This convinced them that they did not know how to hunt for treasures.²²²

The group enlisted the aid of Grover. Grover visited De Soto, and he listened to the treasure hunters tales about the treasure they were seeking. He was persuaded that the efforts to find *Bertrand*'s lost treasure were "something more than a wild goose chase," and he joined the group.²²³ Despite their inexperience, the group was willing to spend "thousands" in search of the rumored 35,000 pounds (15,875.73 kg) of mercury stored in cast iron jars in *Bertrand*'s hold. They thought they would also find whiskey and peach brandy and were hopeful to find other items that they could sell.²²⁴

Grover obtained historic maps from the government that showed the river and its channels from the time of the steamboat's wreck. He found the wreck on the historic maps. He figured where the wreck should be located, based on the map, and put a stake in the ground that he thought should be within 100 feet (30.48 m) of the wreck. It was no

²²² "Have Located the Wreck of the *Bertrand*," *Sunday World-Herald*, December 26, 1897.

²²³ "Have Located the Wreck of the *Bertrand*," *Sunday World-Herald*, December 26, 1897.

²²⁴ "Seeking for a Buried Boat," *Morning World-Herald*, February 9, 1897.

longer in the river. He thought it to be 1.25 miles (2.01 km) from the river bank in a meadow.²²⁵ Grover was not the only one to think it the location of the lost steamboat. A county surveyor who had worked in the area 25 years previously supported Grover's location after visiting the spot.²²⁶

Once Grover marked that location, the group used the dip needle. They believed that its magnetic needle would be attracted to metal of the steamboat buried below the surface, even deep, but their efforts were unsuccessful. They were not at the mercy of the agricultural field season, so they could make another attempt in more pleasant spring weather.

The group appears to have abandoned their efforts to find *Bertrand* and went away with no quicksilver or brandy. Despite their failure, the story of *Bertrand* persisted into the twentieth century. In 1899, it was maintained that *Bertrand* "has on board a cargo which would make the man who dug it up wealthy."²²⁷

There were additional, smaller-scale attempts to recover treasure from western river steamboats, such as Samuel Hindman's 1895 search for *State of Missouri* and its rumored cargo of "\$82,000 in glittering old coin" buried southwest of Percy, Illinois. Hindman was ten years old when the vessel sank, and he was said to have been watching the spot "with longing eyes" waiting for a chance to dig for the treasure. He planned to

²²⁵ "Seeking for a Buried Boat," *Morning World-Herald*, February 9, 1897; "Have Located the Wreck of the *Bertrand*," *Sunday World-Herald*, December 26, 1897.

²²⁶ "Have Located the Wreck of the *Bertrand*," *Sunday World-Herald*, December 26, 1897.

²²⁷ "Freaks of the Missouri," *New York Times*, June 4, 1899.

sink drills at varying depths to search for the steamboat, but apparently nothing came of his plans.²²⁸

Treasure tales about buried steamboats circulated about other vessels. One 1895 newspaper story identified four steamboats buried between Napoleon, Missouri and the mouth of the Fishing River (a tributary of the Missouri River near Kansas City): *Lady Lee*, *Princess*, *Mars*, and *Twilight*.²²⁹ Naming specific vessels and targeting certain areas perpetuated the idea that there was treasure to be found. The names of the vessels in the most commonly circulated treasure tales would prove to be enticing to twentieth century treasure hunters as well.

²²⁸ “Buried Treasure,” *Morning (Omaha) World-Herald*, September 23, 1895, accessed February 11, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

²²⁹ “Raising the Twilight’s Cargo an Interesting Work That is Going on near Kansas City,” *St. Louis Republic*, December 1, 1895, accessed February 11, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

CHAPTER V
SEARCHING FOR BURIED TREASURE ON WESTERN RIVER STEAMBOATS IN
THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND BEYOND

Treasure hunters continued to search for buried treasure on steamboats in the twentieth century. During the first half of the twentieth century, they sought vessels under “finders-keepers” salvage regulations. However, the twentieth century was a period of transition regarding abandoned historic shipwrecks. The *Bertrand* excavation in the 1960s highlighted the potential for recovery of items of historical significance from buried steamboats. When treasure hunters searched for the *Bertrand* on federal land, they were required to comply with the American Antiquities Act of 1906 (16 U.S.C. 431-433), which requires that permits be obtained by qualified individuals for the examination of archaeological sites on land administered by the federal government.

Meanwhile, improved technology, namely scuba equipment and sonar equipment, allowed salvors to more readily locate and explore shipwrecks along the coast and in the Great Lakes. Treasure hunters utilized salvage laws to treasure hunt on abandoned vessels, and in the process, historic shipwrecks were often damaged. States were unable to halt the destruction of historic shipwrecks for commercial gain under prevailing salvage laws, but there was a desire to regulate salvage operations. The Abandoned Shipwreck Act (ASA) of 1987 (Public Law 100-298; 43 U.S.C. 2101-2106) was enacted to address these concerns.

According to the terms of the ASA, the United States government asserts title to abandoned shipwrecks meeting certain criteria, including abandoned shipwrecks which are embedded in submerged lands and included or eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. (Shipwrecks that were owned by the U.S. government or other sovereign nation are entitled to sovereign immunity, so the ASA does not apply.) The legislation includes vessels found inland and assures that laws of salvage and finds do not apply to vessels deemed historically significant. Title of the abandoned shipwreck is then transferred to the state in which the vessel is located. In essence, the ASA gives the states responsibility to manage abandoned shipwrecks embedded within the submerged lands within their borders.

Submerged lands (defined as the lands beneath navigable waterways) include tidal and offshore waters up to three miles from the coastline and the bottomlands of inland waterways like rivers and lakes. The ASA also applies to lands that were formerly navigable but have since been filled in, such as lands that were under a river has since changed course. If the land is currently privately owned, the landowner retains rights to shipwrecks embedded under common law. While the ASA may not protect vessels found under private property, individual states can extend protection to include these shipwrecks.²³⁰ For the most part, the protection of underwater cultural heritage not on federal land has been left to each state's discretion.

²³⁰ "Abandoned Shipwreck Act Guidelines," *Archaeology Program*, National Park Service, March 15, 2016, accessed February 12, 2017, <<https://www.nps.gov/archeology/submerged/definitions.htm>>; Gary Rex Walters, "Federal and State Laws Protect Historic Shipwrecks," *Preservation Issues* 2, No. 5 (September/October 1992), Missouri Department of Natural Resources, accessed February 16, 2017, <[https://dnr.mo.gov/shpo/nps-nr/PI2-5\(9-10-92\).pdf](https://dnr.mo.gov/shpo/nps-nr/PI2-5(9-10-92).pdf)>.

State-level management varies dramatically. In 2002, archaeologist Annalies Corbin inquired about state readiness to protect to historic shipwrecks along the Missouri River. The results revealed that the states were generally not ready: “Unlike coastal states, inland-river states do not have a long-established history of dealing with wreck sites. The reality is that Missouri River states are only now recognizing the need to preserve their river history.”²³¹ State legislation, historic preservation offices, and state historical societies are essential to preservation efforts, surveys, and excavations of wrecks within their borders.

However, state responses are stunted by lack of expertise, funding, and others resources. States may not be aware of treasure hunting activity and are thus unprepared to monitor activity of would-be salvors. In short, state responses have been reactive instead of proactive to treasure hunting activity in their border. In Missouri, for example, protective legislation for shipwrecks at the state level came only after the destruction of the steamboat *Missouri Packet* by a treasure hunting group. There has, however, been an increasing awareness of the need to protect the cultural heritage preserved in steamer wrecks. Treasure hunters face more restrictions and legal struggles in the latter half of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. Generally, while state legislation creates hurdles for treasure hunters, laws have not been altogether successful at stopping them.

The names of many buried steamboats have circulated as potential treasure troves during the twentieth century. Familiar vessels like *Missouri Packet*, *Twilight*, *Arabia*,

²³¹ Annalies Corbin, “Steamboat Archaeology on the Missouri River,” in *International Handbook of Underwater Archaeology*, eds. Carol V. Ruppé and Janet F. Barstad (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2002), 203.

Leodora, and *Bertrand* were the targets of treasure hunting consortiums. There were also recovery attempts on other vessels, including *City of New Orleans* and *Ben Sherrod*. New technology, especially in the second half of the century, allowed the recovery of artifacts from *Bertrand*, *Twilight*, and *Arabia*. However, the items recovered were not the “buried wealth” with a high market value as the treasure hunters hoped. Treasure hunters work in a climate of uncertainty due to legal disputes, financial issues, and concerns regarding the preservation of cultural heritage.

City of New Orleans

Nebraska resident John McCarthy and another individual reportedly found the remains of a steamboat while rowing on the Missouri River near Bellevue, Nebraska in August of 1905. The steamboat had once been buried in the Missouri River, but changing water levels partially uncovered the hull. Contemporary accounts speculated that it was *City of New Orleans* said to have sunk in 1852 near Bellevue, but their basis for this identification is unknown. The identity of the reports on the vessel may not be accurate as no reference to a *City of New Orleans* sinking near Bellevue in the nineteenth century has been found. McCarthy was likely more interested in the whiskey than historical accuracy. He reportedly found a whiskey barrel in the hold, and stories circulated that there were another 160 barrels yet to be recovered.²³²

²³² “State News,” *Bismarck (ND) Daily Tribune*, August 9, 1905, accessed February 11, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042242/1905-08-09/ed-1/seq-2/>>; “Valuable Whisky,” *Kansas City Journal*, reprinted in *The Wine and Spirit Bulletin* 19 (1905), *Google Books*; “Whisky Recovered,” *Williston (ND) Graphic*, August 10, 1905, accessed February 11, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress,

The finders of the so-called *City of New Orleans* intended to build a derrick around the site to haul up the whiskey, but McCarthy believed that divers were necessary to deal with the strong current on the surface. McCarthy and his partner had guards stationed to protect the whiskey cargo which they estimated was valued at \$75,000 at the time of the boat's sinking.²³³ The market value of the whiskey was thought to be much higher in 1905 because: "whisky that has been ripening undisturbed in the dark for fifty-two years is worth much more than nine cents a gallon to-day."²³⁴ Estimates of the whiskey's value soared to \$100,000.²³⁵

Skepticism about the value of the whiskey was mitigated by the fact that the vessel was seemingly within reach. The *Kansas City Journal* cautioned, "The same report has been sent abroad at irregular intervals for years, but this time it seems to have some foundation on fact."²³⁶ Some thought McCarthy would successfully retrieve the whiskey where others had failed. The *Omaha Daily Bee* reported, "Now this visible evidence is certainly much more encouraging than some of the former indications of buried treasure whisky that have sent prospectors into excitement, if not into bankruptcy."²³⁷ Several commentators put the find in context of Prohibition movements

<<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076270/1905-08-10/ed-1/seq-1/>>; "The Secret Revealed," *Omaha Daily Bee*, August 12, 1905, accessed February 11, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99021999/1905-08-12/ed-1/seq-6/>>; "Find Sunken Steamer and Whisky Cargo," *San Francisco Call*, August 6, 1905, accessed February 11, 2017, *California Digital Newspaper Collection*, <<http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=SFC19050806.2.13#>>.

²³³ "State News," *Bismarck Daily Tribune* August 9, 1905; "Valuable Whisky," *Kansas City Journal*; "Whisky Recovered," *Williston Graphic*, August 10, 1905; "The Secret Revealed," *Omaha Daily Bee*, August 12, 1905; "Find Sunken Steamer and Whisky Cargo," *San Francisco Call*, August 6, 1905.

²³⁴ "Valuable Whisky," *Kansas City Journal*.

²³⁵ "The Secret Revealed," *Omaha Daily Bee*, August 12, 1905.

²³⁶ "Valuable Whisky," *Kansas City Journal*.

²³⁷ "The Secret Revealed," *Omaha Daily Bee*, August 12, 1905.

springing up in the country. One claimed, “It is well that such a find was not discovered in prohibition North Dakota.”²³⁸ Another mused:

It has long been a mystery just why Missouri river water, in spite of its muddy ingredients and yellow appearance, should, in its filtered form, be about the most wholesome and palatable beverage that nature supplies. Is it not possible that this particular tang and bracing effects are due to the gradual assimilation of thousands of cargoes of good old ante-bellum whisky? If so, is it not a sin to destroy the spring that flavors the golden stream?²³⁹

However, information and excitement seemed to quickly disperse. McCarthy and his partner were apparently unsuccessful. No whiskey was recovered, and the location of the site is currently unknown.

Leodora

In June of 1911, E.E. Wenner again decided to try to recover the cargo of the steamboat *Leodora*, which went aground and burned on the Missouri River near Elk Point, South Dakota in 1866. This was not Wenner’s first attempt. His previous attempt in 1895 had been unsuccessful. It is unknown what his motivation was to resume efforts after sixteen years. Perhaps it was a lingering suspicion that the vessel held valuable cargo, or perhaps the river conditions were right for another attempt to get to the whiskey cargo valued at \$45,000. Or, perhaps it was his partners, the Cole Bros. of Alcester, who convinced him to give it another attempt.

Wenner and his partners worked on the vessel throughout the summer of 1911 from mid-June through September. The water levels had gone down since the 1895

²³⁸ “State News,” *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, August 9, 1905.

²³⁹ “The Secret Revealed,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, August 12, 1905.

attempt, and the vessel was partially on dry land. The group first dug to the water level with scrapers. Once they reached the water level, they installed a sand and gravel dredge pump and created a hole 20 feet (6.1 m) deep and 75 feet (22.86 m) in diameter.

Upon reaching the interior of the vessel, the diggers found evidence of the fire in the forms of scorched and damaged goods, including peanuts, coffee, almonds, and a medicinal bottle marked “O.K. Plantation 1840.” They remained hopeful that only the forwardmost 60 feet (18.29 m) of the steamboat was burned. According to an account by Dan Ballinger, who had been a passenger on *Leodora*’s final voyage, the remaining 100 feet (30.48 m) of the vessel did not burn.²⁴⁰ The 1911 attempt ultimately failed to uncover whiskey. They found rusted iron and “the rotting mass of the 148 tons [134,263 kg] of miscellaneous cargo.”²⁴¹

E.E. Wenner, though, did not cease to believe that there was whiskey to be found on *Leodora*. In 1936, Wenner reminisced about his earlier attempts on the vessel. Wenner may have been trying to renew efforts to get the whiskey, and he indicated it would take \$2,500-3,000 and favorable weather to get to the boat and its rumored liquid cargo.²⁴²

Bertrand

The *Bertrand* was not forgotten by the early 1900s; it was oft mentioned when discussions of lost treasure on sunken steamboats made the news. Despite its fame as a

²⁴⁰ “After Buried Treasure,” *Aberdeen Daily News*, September 12, 1911, accessed February 11, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

²⁴¹ “Missouri River Boats that Never Came Back,” *Kansas City Star*, November 5, 1911.

²⁴² Alton R. Kaste, “Untitled,” *Heraldo de Brownsville*, April 2, 1936, accessed February 11, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

treasure trove, the vessel appears to have been undisturbed until the 1960s. In 1920, an unnamed steamboat that was buried near Council Bluffs was mentioned in an article about buried whiskey; the article likely referred to *Bertrand*. The boat was rumored to have 10,000 gallons (37,854.12 L) of whiskey still in the cargo hold, which was enticing in Prohibition America. The article claims, “Whiskey now being more valuable than gold makes the old revived story more attractive than formerly.”²⁴³ The article acknowledges that the stories of buried whiskey have been around for decades. The author writes, “Any story about sunken treasure is believed when it has been extant long enough. It can be expected that men wearing diving suits will be risking their lives in the Missouri after the buried whiskey.”²⁴⁴ While there were no attempts to uncover *Bertrand* at this time, the legend of the steamboat lingered.

Forty years later, two Omaha-based salvors, Jesse Pursell and Sam Corbino, hoped to find the rumored treasure trove. The pair spent three years searching for the location of *Bertrand*. They studied historical maps of the DeSoto Bend area and used historical newspaper accounts of the wreck. They performed aerial surveys and magnetometer readings to narrow the location. Finally, test drillings were done. Corbino and Pursell felt confident that they had located the *Bertrand* when drillings brought up wood, perishables, glass, firebrick, and leather.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ “Hunting Buried Treasure,” *Anaconda Standard*, May 3, 1920, accessed February 11, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

²⁴⁴ “Hunting Buried Treasure,” *Anaconda Standard*, May 3, 1920.

²⁴⁵ “Steamboat Believed Located,” *Reading Eagle*, March 25, 1968, accessed February 11, 2017, *Google News*, <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=UKgkAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=xqAFAAAAIIBAJ&pg=3422%2C5680774>>; Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell, No. 394-72, United States Court of Claims, 208 Ct. Cl. 1002, January 9, 1976, *LexisNexis Academic*; K.D. Curtis, “Missouri Steamboat’s Treasure,” *Old West*, Winter

The location of their find was on the federal land of the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge in Missouri Valley, Iowa. Pursell and Corbino estimated that the treasure aboard *Bertrand* would be valued at \$1 million, including 35,000 pounds (15875.73 kg) of quicksilver, 5,000 gallons (18927.06 L) of whiskey in oaken casks, and \$4,000 in gold and silver coins. Pursell and Corbino also maintained that the vessel would have historical value, a claim that was likely to add credibility to the venture when they made their request to the government to excavate on federal land.²⁴⁶

Pursell and Corbino negotiated an agreement with the federal government to gain permission to dig on federal property. The salvors would retain sixty percent of the gross value of the finds of quicksilver, whiskey, and/or gold and silver; the U.S. government would get 40 percent. Furthermore, the contract stipulated that the government would not be liable for any of the expenses of the dig. The federal government would also retain artifacts recovered from the excavation, which was defined as “to include all man made objects or parts thereof.”²⁴⁷ Pursell and Corbino were required to act within the Act for the Preservation of American Antiquities because the digging was on federal

1972; J. Scott Harmon, “Recovering the Steamboat Bertrand: Marine Archeologists Study the Features and Cargo of a Unique Time Capsule Buried since 1865 under 25 Feet of River Silt,” *Early Man: Magazine of Modern Archeology*, Autumn 1979, 11.

²⁴⁶ “Steamboat Believed Located,” *Reading Eagle*, March 25, 1968, accessed February 11, 2017, *Google News*, <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=UKgkAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=xqAFAAAAIIBAJ&pg=3422%2C5680774>>; Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell, United States Court of Claims, January 9, 1976; Curtis, “Missouri Steamboat’s Treasure”; Ronald R. Switzer, *The Steamboat Bertrand and Missouri River Commerce* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 142.

²⁴⁷ “Steamboat Believed Located,” *Reading Eagle*, March 25, 1968; Jerome E. Petsche, *The Steamboat Bertrand: History, Excavation, and Architecture* (Washington: National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1974), 1-2; Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell v. *The United States*, No. 394-72, United States Court of Claims, December 19, 1973, accessed February 11, 2017, *LexisNexis Academic*.

land. This included having a National Park Service archaeologist on-site while excavating.²⁴⁸

The General Services Administration (GSA) oversaw the arrangement. The GSA holds the right to make contracts and provisions for wrecked, abandoned, or derelict property within the jurisdiction of the United States. Regarding abandoned property, the GSA regulations stipulated:

The Administrator of General Services is authorized to make such contracts and provisions as he may deem for the interest of the Government, for the preservation, sale, or collection of any property, or the proceeds thereof, which may have been wrecked, abandoned, or become derelict, being within the jurisdiction of the United States, and which ought to come to the United States, and in such contracts to allow such compensation to any person giving information thereof, or who shall actually preserve, collect, surrender, or pay over the same, as the Administrator of General Services may deem just and reasonable. No costs or claim shall, however, become chargeable to the United States in so obtaining, preserving, collecting, receiving, or making available property, debts, dues, or interests, which shall not be paid from such moneys as shall be realized and received from the property so collected, under each specific agreement.²⁴⁹

The excavation started in March of 1968. The steamboat was estimated to be buried 27 to 32 feet (8.23 to 9.75 m) below the surface. Heavy machinery was used to uncover the dirt, sand, and clay over the vessel. At 10 feet (3.05 m) below the surface, they hit the water table. Water began seeping into holes. Pursell and Corbino had to find a solution to the water flooding the site. They set up a dredging operation, and water and sediment were discharged into the Missouri River. They were able to dig down 20 feet (6.1 m) by the beginning of April of 1968, and they had enlarged the perimeter of the dig

²⁴⁸ Annalies Corbin, *The Material Culture of Steamboat Passengers: Archaeological Evidence from the Missouri River* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2000), 14; Petsche, *The Steamboat Bertrand*, 28-30, 39.

²⁴⁹ *Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell v. The United States*.

to 100 by 50 feet (30.48 by 15.24 m). Pursell and Corbino hired SCUBA divers to attempt to reach the boat, but the divers failed due to limited visibility and a layer of sediment covering *Bertrand*. Numerous well points were installed around the vessel to further lower the water table. Earthmoving equipment was used to reach it. Finally, in November of 1968, the first glimpse of the boat was revealed and the removal of artifacts began. A box labeled “Stores-Bertrand” confirmed the boat’s identity. Work was halted by winter weather late in the year. When the excavation continued in the spring of 1969, the salvors increased the number of well points around the site, using a series of 30 pumps to remove water to reach the hull of *Bertrand*.²⁵⁰

Early in the excavation, it became clear that one of the major issues regarding the excavation of *Bertrand* would be the preservation of the hull. The hull was found almost complete, but it was contorted. Researchers conducted a study to consider the wood drying rates and water content of the hull. Ultimately, the decision was made to keep the hull *in situ* after digging ceased. Federal researchers layered silt and black polyethylene on the hull and placed a layer of steel aircraft landing strip mats over the ship to protect it should heavy equipment be used to excavate the ship again later. At the end of the excavation, water was allowed to gradually fill the excavation site, creating a small pond over the ship. Today, visitors to the De Soto Wildlife Refuge can walk beside the pond to visit the location where *Bertrand* was reburied.²⁵¹ Most of the steamboat’s machinery appeared to have been removed shortly after the vessel’s accident. Some ship’s engine

²⁵⁰ Petsche, *The Steamboat Bertrand*, 30, 32-39.

²⁵¹ Petsche, *The Steamboat Bertrand*, 40-41, 75, 107.

parts and hardware were recovered, including firebrick, an ash trough, mud and steam drums, and a fragment of a paddlewheel.²⁵²

Thousands of artifacts were removed from the ship's deck and cargo holds. The majority of these artifacts were cargo, including a small amount of quicksilver. Most personal belongings were either removed or lost prior to the 1968-69 excavation. There was a diverse range of artifacts, and Jerome Petsche classified them into seven categories: (1) foodstuffs, liquor, and patent medicines; (2) textiles, wearing apparel, and sewing supplies; (3) household goods; (4) mining supplies; (5) agricultural supplies; (6) building supplies; and (7) miscellaneous cargo. The volume of artifacts overwhelmed excavators, and they experimented with different methods to record the finds as they were recovered. The desire to maintain the archaeological integrity of the site was somewhat at odds with the contract with the treasure hunters, and excavators were not prepared to handle or conserve the volume of artifacts recovered from the site. Ronald R. Switzer writes:

Faced with the rights of the salvors to remove the material expeditiously, yet under supervision of National Park Service archeologists exercising professional controls, optimum conditions of preservation were not possible until adequate laboratory facilities could be installed at the refuge. Also, in the absence of qualified conservators during the very first stages of cargo removal, the safety and integrity of certain material could not be insured.²⁵³

The national park archaeologists and crew did the best they could with the knowledge of the time, the field conditions, and having to work in conjunction with Pursell and

²⁵² Petsche, *The Steamboat Bertrand*, 37-39, 86; Switzer, *The Steamboat Bertrand and Missouri River Commerce*, 25.

²⁵³ Ronald R. Switzer, "Preservation of Bertrand Artifacts: General Procedures," in *The Steamboat Bertrand: History Excavation, and Architecture*, ed. Jerome E. Petsche (Washington: National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1974), 129.

Corbino. During the excavation, researchers grouped the artifacts into lots and recorded them quickly. Perishable items were stored in tanks and in cold storage to await further preservation efforts.²⁵⁴ Yet, the question lingered, who controlled the artifacts? And, what should be done with them? Pursell and Corbino spent \$65,000 in the venture, and they expected to get something for their efforts.²⁵⁵

No casks of whiskey were found, but two dozen bottles of “Bourbon/Whisky/Cocktail” were among the boat’s cargo. The majority of valuables aboard, including the most of the quicksilver, seemed to have been removed by insurance company wreckers.²⁵⁶ A large number of bottles of bitters were recovered. The federal government took possession of these, along with the other artifacts. However, Corbino and Pursell maintained they had a right to a portion of the value of the bottles of bitters, which they estimated would be worth \$2,000,000 on the antiques market. According to reports, Corbino and Pursell argued that the bottle of bitters “would be regarded as whisky by today’s standards” because the bitters “were a potent 32 per cent alcoholic solution.”²⁵⁷ The federal government did not agree with Corbino and Pursell’s estimate of the bitters’ market value, although it did offer to settle for the value of the bottles of whiskey but not for the value of the bitters.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ Petsche, *The Steamboat Bertrand*, 40, 43, 45; Ronald R. Switzer, “Preservation of Bertrand Artifacts: General Procedures,” 129; Otto Knauth, “Race Freeze to Reclaim Treasures,” *The Des Moines Register*, September 7, 1969, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*; “Cataloging of Bertrand Artifacts Nearly Finished,” *The Columbus (NE) Telegram*, September 10, 1973, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*.

²⁵⁵ “Steamboat Believed Located,” *Reading Eagle*, March 25, 1968; *Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell*, United States Court of Claims; Curtis, “Missouri Steamboat’s Treasure.”

²⁵⁶ Ronald R. Switzer, *The Steamboat Bertrand and Missouri River Commerce* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 148.

²⁵⁷ *Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell*, United States Court of Claims.

²⁵⁸ *Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell v. The United States*, United States Court of Claims.

The potential historical significance of the steamboat *Bertrand* and associated artifacts was realized by the archaeologists and other Federal Government employees on the project. The excavators yielded a large cache of well-preserved nineteenth-century material culture, and the government decided that the artifacts should be displayed for the public. As plans moved forward to build a museum, the government had to settle with the salvors. The matter was brought to the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives by Representative William Scherle of Iowa. Scherle introduced a private bill “for the relief of Jesse Pursell and Sam Corbino” on January 3, 1973, but it was never voted on.²⁵⁹

The dispute between the treasure hunters and the federal government ultimately ended up in the U.S. Court of Claims. Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell filed an action to receive a portion of what they estimated the value of “derelict goods” that were found. The government wanted the case dismissed, arguing that the case was outside the jurisdiction of the court. The Court did not accept the defendant’s motion to dismiss, holding the case fell within the Court’s jurisdiction: “The nature of a plaintiff’s claim determines the jurisdiction of the United States Court of Claims, not the character of the defendant’s defense.”²⁶⁰ The defense’s motion to dismiss was denied in the United States Court of Claims on December 19, 1973.

The federal government maintained that Corbino and Pursell could not be compensated for the artifacts according to the contract because the assets were not

²⁵⁹ *Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell v. The United States*, United States Court of Claims; U.S. Congress, House, “A Bill for the Relief of Jesse Purell and Sam Corbino,” 93rd Cong., 1st Sess., H.R. 1368, *Congressional Record*, January 3, 1973, accessed February 11, 2017, *ProQuest Congressional*.

²⁶⁰ *Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell v. The United States*, United States Court of Claims.

appropriated by the government. In other words, the government claimed there was no money to pay the treasure hunters. The Court held that the contract could be met once artifacts were sold. The Court maintained, “There were sufficient assets to be sold in contemplation of the contract to pay plaintiffs their contracted share.” The funds did not have to be appropriated; items uncovered from *Bertrand* could be sold to pay Corbino and Pursell.²⁶¹ The case was not dismissed, but that did not mean instant relief for Corbino and Pursell.

Three years later, the case was decided in the United States Court of Claims. The federal government had claimed nearly all the artifacts, except for a small amount of the quicksilver. Additionally, the government claimed “it has offered to deliver, but plaintiffs have refused, 60% of the contents of 76 bottles of whiskey, but not the containers in which the whiskey was found.” The federal government claimed ownership of the containers and the contents the other bottles found, including “mostly bitters, of several brands, but some brandy, schnapps and champagnes.” It was thought that the bottles might have “substantial value for the antique trade,” but it was also thought that their market value would oversaturate the market and “would probably break the market.”²⁶²

The Court questioned whether the government itself violated the American Antiquities Act when the contract was made with Corbino and Pursell. Neither plaintiff established himself as the qualified institution or expert required by law to entrust with

²⁶¹ *Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell v. The United States*, United States Court of Claims.

²⁶² *Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell*, United States Court of Claims.

the excavation.²⁶³ The Court also questioned the government’s intention to keep the entire collection of artifacts intact in one place. The Court held that the intention might be to build a museum, but that did not require that “every antique man-made article excavated must willy-nilly be swept into a museum.” The Court also believed, “Curators might well be reluctant to provide space to exhibit or even store every single artifact excavated.” The Court also held that the United States government could not “change the allocation of fruits called for by the contract unless it is prepared to show the contract allocation is illegal under the statute, and that it has not done.”²⁶⁴

The government tried to establish that the bitters were not spirits, so Corbino and Pursell would not have a contractual right to them. Yet, the Court recognized that while bitters could be medicinal, they could also be considered a spirit, “unless there was a terrible outbreak of hypochondria in the mining country to which they were consigned.”²⁶⁵ Therefore, the Court held, “The artifact exclusion does not exempt from the contract 60-40 split the alcoholic beverages found in the Bertrand and their containers.”²⁶⁶

The Court maintained that if Pursell and Corbino were entitled to the contents of the bottles of alcoholic beverages, they were entitled to the bottles that held those products, such as the bottles from the bitters collection. The government did not want to sell the bottles, as artifacts, or deliver the portion to Corbino and Pursell, which meant that the funds had to be appropriated. The Court found in favor of Corbino and Pursell in

²⁶³ *Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell*, United States Court of Claims.

²⁶⁴ *Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell*, United States Court of Claims.

²⁶⁵ *Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell*, United States Court of Claims.

²⁶⁶ *Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell*, United States Court of Claims.

the amount of \$38,984.40.²⁶⁷ While the Court found that the treasure hunting pair was entitled to that amount, it was only a fraction of Pursell and Corbino had spent on the endeavor.

Meanwhile, the government was moving forward with plans to build a museum to display the collection of *Bertrand* artifacts. The Secretary's Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, and Monuments recognized the historical significance of the vessel in 1969, and the government committed to the preservation and display of artifacts. There was urgency surrounding the project because the artifacts had been removed from the water and were in need of preservation and conservation. Funds were appropriated for temporary storage of the artifacts in October of 1969 from a U.S. Parks Service Project in New Orleans that was canceled and an additional \$120,000 promised from the Bureau of the Budget. Christensen Lumber Company of Fremont, Nebraska was awarded a contract for construction of a 120 by 40 foot (36.58 by 12.19 m) pre-fabricated building with a bid of \$9,312. Layne-Western Wells of Denver, Colorado was contracted for drilling and casing a well for the building at an estimated cost of \$976. The government also contracted for flooring, plumbing, heating, electricity, and additional equipment.²⁶⁸ Yet, the project lacked a long-term solution as to what to do with the artifacts.

By 1970, visitors were able to view artifacts from the excavation in a temporary museum at the De Soto Bend Wildlife Refuge. The cataloguing of artifacts took until

²⁶⁷ *Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell*, United States Court of Claims.

²⁶⁸ Otto Knauth, "Get Bertrand Shelter Funds," *The Des Moines Register*, November 1, 1969, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*.

September of 1973.²⁶⁹ There were multiple proposals for a museum, with estimated costs of up to \$5 million. In one museum proposal, the entire hull of the steamboat would have been displayed in an underwater tank exhibit. Concrete would have been poured around the site, the hull would be weighted so it would not float, and the water would surrounding it would be treated to prevent the growth of algae and fungi. Proponents of the plan believed “with proper underwater lighting and viewing ports for the public” the result would be “one of the most dramatic museums in the country.”²⁷⁰

A second proposal involved the possibility of raising the entire hull and preserving it for display in a traditional museum setting. This presented the problem of assuring that the hull was preserved once it was removed from water, so the timbers would not dry out, crack, shrink, and deteriorate. With either proposal, the cargo and other artifacts from the vessel would also be displayed in the museum, and any overflow of artifacts would be given or loaned to appropriate educational institutions, such as state historical museums in Lincoln, Nebraska and Des Moines, Iowa.²⁷¹

Eventually, the idea to display the hull was abandoned because of the cost. One of the principal advocates of the project, Representative William Scherle of Iowa, started to balk at the estimated costs of the project. Scherle admitted, “I am dragging my

²⁶⁹ “Museum to Show Bertrand Treasure,” *The (Butte) Montana Standard*, July 24, 1970, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*; “Cataloging of Bertrand Artifacts Nearly Finished,” *The Columbus Telegram*, September 10, 1973.

²⁷⁰ Otto Knauth, “Two Plans for Display of Bertrand,” *The Des Moines Register*, October 5, 1969, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*; “Study Plans for Museum,” *Carroll Daily Times Herald*, December 20, 1969, *Newspapers.com*.

²⁷¹ Knauth, “Two Plans for Display of Bertrand,” *The Des Moines Register*.

feet.”²⁷² The estimated cost of the project, including the proposed display of the steamboat hull, were not appropriated, and Scherle had doubts as to whether the price tag to raise and display the hull would be “worth the expense.”²⁷³ Some suggested of Scherle: “Guess he doesn’t want to be associated with a sinking (or sunken) ship in an election year.”²⁷⁴ Interior department officials also had difficulty procuring funding for building a permanent museum despite the importance of the artifacts and the potential to attract tourists to the De Soto Wildlife Refuge.²⁷⁵

In addition to the contentious dispute over ownership that developed with the treasure hunters, management of the artifacts was also under dispute. The National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service both vied for control of the artifacts. The Nebraska and Iowa State Historical Societies wanted the artifacts to be controlled locally in Nebraska and Iowa, but the National Parks Service instead entered into negotiations with the Smithsonian Institute to supervise the management of the artifacts. Silvio Bedini, deputy director of the Smithsonian National Museum of History and Technology, claimed, “We have absolutely no predatory interest in the Bertrand cargo...our role is to be helpful. All we’re interested in is that these items be adequately documented, catalogued and published.”²⁷⁶

²⁷² “Dragging Feet on Proposal to Raise Steamboat Bertrand,” *The Columbus (NE) Telegram*, October 25, 1972, *Newspapers.com*.

²⁷³ “Dragging Feet on Proposal to Raise Steamboat Bertrand,” *The Columbus Telegram*, October 25, 1972.

²⁷⁴ Pete Graham, “Along Main Street...,” *The Malvern (IA) Leader*, November 2, 1972, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*.

²⁷⁵ Otto Knauth, “Iowa Loss of Steamboat Relics Seen,” *The Des Moines Register*, July 29, 1974, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*.

²⁷⁶ Knauth, “Iowa Loss of Steamboat Relics Seen,” *The Des Moines Register*.

Marvin Kivett, the director of the Nebraska State Historical Society, retorted that the Smithsonian proposed that the national museum take control of the artifacts.

Officials from historical societies in Nebraska and Iowa wanted the artifacts to remain local. They had the support of local government officials, including Iowa governor Robert D. Ray and U.S. Senator John Culver of Iowa.²⁷⁷

Culver was instrumental in securing funding for the permanent preservation and display of the *Bertrand* artifacts. The Senate appropriated \$225,000 in 1976. Ultimately, the artifacts were kept locally at the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge, near Missouri Valley, Iowa. Plans to raise and preserve the hull of *Bertrand* for display were abandoned due to budgetary restraints. A visitor's center on site opened in 1981. The facility includes the museum, conservation lab, and library (Figure 16).²⁷⁸



Figure 16. “Bertrand Stores” sign and other artifacts on display at the *Bertrand* exhibit. Photograph by Kristen Vogel.

²⁷⁷ “Kivett is Fighting to Keep Bertrand Cargo from Feds,” *Lincoln (NE) Evening Journal*, July 16, 1975, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*; “Piracy on the High Plains,” *Lincoln (NE) Evening Journal*, July 18, 1975, *Newspapers.com*; Otto Knauth, “Ray Rakes Interior Dept. on Bertrand Cargo,” *The Des Moines Register*, September 12, 1975, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*.

²⁷⁸ “Steamboat Museum Money Wins Nod,” *The Lincoln (NE) Star*, June 28, 1976, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*; “Plan Museum for Sunken Sternwheeler,” *Estherville (IA) Daily News*, December 5, 1977, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*.

To some, the excavation of the steamboat *Bertrand* represents how commercial salvors can work with archaeologists for the interest of historical preservation and protection of cultural history. In a letter to the editor that appeared in the *Washington Post* in 1993, Lola Smith of Takoma Park, Maryland, argued, “The recovery of the steamboat *Bertrand*, which sank in the Missouri River in 1865, is an example of a spectacular success.”²⁷⁹ Smith wrote:

We now know that on April 1, 1865, western miners, farmers, merchants and other frontier folk had a taste for "Bourbon Whiskey Cock-tail," canned tomatoes, bottled cherries, bottled "chow chow," dried cod fish, canned gooseberries, concentrate of lemonade, "London Club Sauce," canned oysters, dried tamarinds and champagne. They used patent medicines such as "Dr. J. Hostetter's Stomach Bitters" and needed household goods such as washboards, kettles, waffle irons, churns and candle molds.

We now know what kind of door locks, shot flasks, thumbtacks and sleigh bells they used and exactly how nails were packed for shipment. The museum displays examples of men's and women's clothing, and amenities for the wealthy, such as fancy lighting fixtures, expensive dinnerware and even casters -- those stands that held bottles for the oil, vinegar and mustard with which to dress salads at Civil War-era tables.²⁸⁰

However, Smith’s account of the productive balance between archaeology and salvage operations was answered by Edward McManus, then the Chief Conservator National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. McManus writes:

The *Bertrand* was selected, not because of its historic significance but because of the potential wealth for salvagers. The Department of Interior archaeologists who were assigned to this project were there to supervise the salvage operations not as part of a larger and more serious archaeological investigation of frontier life.²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ Lola Smith, “Record of Frontier Life,” *The Washington Post*, May 12, 1993, accessed February 11, 2017, *LexisNexis Academic*.

²⁸⁰ Smith, “Record of Frontier Life.”

²⁸¹ Edward McManus, “A Happy Accident,” *The Washington Post*, May 22, 1993, *LexisNexis Academic*.

McManus rightly argued that despite the ultimate success of the excavation, archaeologists were wholly unprepared for the discovery of the thousands and thousands of artifacts and their conservation. Many objects deteriorated or were destroyed by improper handling and stabilization techniques. Simply put, the team was not prepared to handle the discovery. McManus argued, “For that reason it is best to leave objects undisturbed until proper conservation measures can be devised. Conservation is a thing salvagers seldom consider.”²⁸² McManus concluded:

In the instance of the *Bertrand*, the salvagers did not recover the wealth they had dreamed of, and the ultimate cost to the Department of Interior was millions of dollars, including the wonderful museum that now houses this important collection. Like Ms. Smith, I recognize that the *Bertrand* collection is a marvelous and fantastic historic resource. I disagree with Ms. Smith's contention that the *Bertrand* is an example of a spectacular success for salvage, and it should not therefore be used to condone the practice. Treasure hunting and serious archaeology are diametrical opposites. The *Bertrand* project was a happy accident. For the sake of preservation, scholarship and the greater public enjoyment, important historic objects and sites must be protected from salvagers.²⁸³

Artifacts from the steamboat *Bertrand* are still on display at the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge. The federal government has remained committed to the continued conservation and display of the artifacts, including a massive 2011 effort to relocate artifacts during flooding at the refuge. Admission to the exhibit and access to the steamboat *Bertrand* discovery site (now a lake) is included with entrance fee to the refuge (a modest \$3 per vehicle in 2015).²⁸⁴

²⁸² McManus, “A Happy Accident.”

²⁸³ McManus, “A Happy Accident.”

²⁸⁴ DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge, “Steamboat *Bertrand*,” U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, June 29, 2015, accessed February 11, 2017, <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Desoto/wildlife_and_habitat/steamboat_bertrand.html>.

Missouri Packet

River Salvage Inc., also known as Delta Research, was formed in Missouri to search for buried treasure on steamboats. Members of River Salvage, Inc. included Bob Hawley, his sons Greg and David, and Gene Smith, a surveyor from Independence, Missouri. Gary Sisk, another area contractor in the oil and gas drilling industry, and Jerry Mackey were also involved in salvage operations.²⁸⁵ The group searched for multiple vessels. In the summer of 1987, they searched for the steamboat *Hamlet*, which sank in 1819 near Franklin, Missouri after striking a snag. It was thought that the boat would have “rifles, whiskey and silver and gold coins” aboard for treasure hunters to find. Members of River Salvage Inc. estimated the cost of a salvage effort was \$250,000 but that it would yield an estimated \$300 million in goods. The group located the site they believed to be where *Hamlet* sank under a soybean field. Core drilling brought up wood fragments and two belt buckles.²⁸⁶ However, efforts to salvage the steamboat *Hamlet* were abandoned, and the group turned their attention to another buried vessel-- *Missouri Packet*.

River Salvage, Inc. sought investors to fund their treasure hunting business. While soliciting backers to fund the search and recovery, the members of the company reportedly “downplayed” the “treasure hunting facets” of the project and instead appealed to investors about the historical significance of finding a long-lost

²⁸⁵ “Steamboat Excavated, but Treasure Wasn’t There,” *Lawrence (KS) Journal-World*, February 28, 1988, accessed February 11, 2017, *Google News*, <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2199&dat=19880228&id=CiIyAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=FuYFAAAAIBAJ&pg=5718,5356242>>.

²⁸⁶ “Treasure Hunted Near Boonville,” *The Chillicothe (MO) Constitution-Tribune*, July 24, 1987, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*; “Salvage Team Targets 1819 Riverboat Wreck,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 2, 1987, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*.

steamboat.²⁸⁷ Still, Delta Research/River Salvage, Inc. had difficulty securing investors. Reportedly, “local historians questioned the theory concerning a wreck with money aboard.” The treasure hunters themselves apparently also were unsure of the monetary value of the cargo they found. They stopped trying to procure funding and instead decided to uncover the vessel without backers in the winter of 1987-88.²⁸⁸

The remains of the steamboat were buried under land due to a change in the river’s course. The salvage company obtained permission to dig on the private property. The vessel was unearthed by digging down through 35 feet (10.69 m) of sand. Once water started seeping into the site, a dozen high powered water pumps were used. The group found two boilers, the steam engine, and barrels of pork over a two day period, but members of the salvage company claimed that there was nothing of monetary “value” onboard the ship.²⁸⁹

According to one report, “the vessel’s remains were shredded by a backhoe.”²⁹⁰ Another report claimed the salvors “frantically tore into the hull with a backhoe.”²⁹¹ Wayne Lammers, a local videographer hired to record the salvage effort, was angered by the excavation methods and described the situation in violent terms, alleging, “It was like watching a rape.”²⁹²

²⁸⁷ “Steamboat Excavated, but Treasure Wasn’t There,” *Lawrence Journal-World*, February 28, 1988.

²⁸⁸ “Steamboat Excavated, but Treasure Wasn’t There,” *Lawrence Journal-World*, February 28, 1988.

²⁸⁹ “Steamboat Excavated, but Treasure Wasn’t There,” *Lawrence Journal-World*, February 28, 1988; “Historians Say Excavators Ruined Historic Steamboat,” *The Nevada Daily Mail*, August 9, 1988, accessed February 11, 2017, *Google News*, <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=EDYrAAAAIABAJ&sjid=eNUEAAAAIABAJ&pg=3644%2C2878272>>.

²⁹⁰ “Historians Say Excavators Ruined Historic Steamboat,” *The Nevada Daily Mail*, August 9, 1988.

²⁹¹ “Salt of the Earth Flavors Region,” *The Springfield (MO) News-Leader*, November 21, 1989, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*.

²⁹² “Salt of the Earth Flavors Region,” *The Springfield News-Leader*, November 21, 1989.

The method of uncovering *Missouri Packet* apparently caused division between the members of River Salvage, Inc. The treasure hunting group split into two factions. They both shared the blame for the destruction of the vessel, but they disagreed on what should have happened next.²⁹³ The Hawleys and Jerry Mackey considered the financial situation of the group. David Hawley defended the decision to quickly dig with a backhoe, reportedly saying, “We wanted to evaluate the damage and the probability of any cargo on the boat to justify the financial investment...It was a business decision. Unfortunately, there was nothing there. A dry well.”²⁹⁴ Hawley said the group’s expenses were at \$320,000 and the cost of excavation was not worth it. Hawley also indicated his belief that the vessel had been previously damaged by Corps of Engineer activity.²⁹⁵

Smith and Sisk disagreed. They reportedly argued that the site could have been more carefully excavated over a longer period “by hand rather than backhoe.” They thought any artifacts claimed would fund the cost of the excavation.²⁹⁶ Instead, Sisk reportedly claimed, “It was destroyed. Absolutely...Half to two-thirds of the boat was dug out. Planks and artifacts were in piles of sand 10 feet [3.05 m] tall and 30 feet [9.14 m] wide.”²⁹⁷ Hawley claimed that Sisk and Smith were trying to discredit River Salvage; the company had additional contracts for other boats on the Missouri River.²⁹⁸

²⁹³ “Historians Say Excavators Ruined Historic Steamboat,” *The Nevada Daily Mail*, August 9, 1988.

²⁹⁴ “Historians Say Excavators Ruined Historic Steamboat,” *The Nevada Daily Mail*, August 9, 1988.

²⁹⁵ “Steamboat Excavated, but Treasure Wasn’t There,” *Lawrence Journal-World*, February 28, 1988.

²⁹⁶ “Historians Say Excavators Ruined Historic Steamboat,” *The Nevada Daily Mail*, August 9, 1988.

²⁹⁷ “Historians Say Excavators Ruined Historic Steamboat,” *The Nevada Daily Mail*, August 9, 1988.

²⁹⁸ “Historians Say Excavators Ruined Historic Steamboat,” *The Nevada Daily Mail*, August 9, 1988.

For many years, the location of the recovered artifacts, including the ship's machinery, was unknown to the general public, but they were conserved and remained in the possession of the Hawley group. In November 2013, the engine of *Missouri Packet* was placed for display at the *Arabia Steamboat Museum* (owned and operated by the Hawleys and Mackey). Although few hull measurements were made public, witnesses of the salvage attempt estimated that *Missouri Packet* was 125 feet (38.1 m) long with a width 24 feet (7.32 m). The steamboat was a rare example of an early sternwheeler.²⁹⁹

The remains of *Missouri Packet* were reburied. For the most part, members of the River Salvage, Inc. remained quiet about the destruction of the ship. However others did not. Local historians and archaeologists noted the destruction. Missouri state archaeologist Michael Weichman said, "I know of no other boat like it...Now it's gone." This sentiment was echoed by University of Missouri-Columbia anthropologist Michael O'Brien, who claimed the excavation was a "disaster." Weichman pledged to lobby state legislators to enact legislation to protect historic vessels from future "botched excavations."³⁰⁰ Members of River Salvage, Inc. disassociated themselves from the *Missouri Packet* excavation.³⁰¹

The salvage of *Missouri Packet* occurred after the passage of the Abandoned Shipwreck Act, but Missouri had not yet passed state legislation for the protection of maritime sites within the state's borders. Lammers, the videographer of the project, submitted video footage of the destruction of the *Missouri Packet* to the Missouri State

²⁹⁹ "Steamboat Excavated, but Treasure Wasn't There," *Lawrence Journal-World*, February 28, 1988;

"Historians Say Excavators Ruined Historic Steamboat," *The Nevada Daily Mail*, August 9, 1988.

³⁰⁰ "Historians Say Excavators Ruined Historic Steamboat," *The Nevada Daily Mail*, August 9, 1988.

³⁰¹ Brian Burnes, "Arabia Steamboat Museum Receives a 194-Year-Old Steam Engine," *The Kansas City Star*, November 22, 2013, accessed February 11, 2017, <kansascity.com>.

Legislature. The footage was prime evidence used to support the passage of the first state legislation for the protection of historic shipwrecks in the state. Legislation passed in 1991, and Lammers was given one of the pens used to sign the bill by then-governor John Ashcroft.³⁰²

Arabia

Despite unsuccessful attempts to retrieve a whiskey cargo from *Arabia* in the nineteenth century, the steamboat's legend did not dim. Members of the 1897 excavation crew attempted to dissuade others from searching for the wreck. Captain A.W. Farney reportedly claimed in 1910 that the “the Arabia stands revealed, a fake, a vain pretender to legendary greatness, a veritable Doctor Cook of boats, with no one assuaging drop of ancient liquor to relieve the desert of unwelcome and intrusive truth.”³⁰³ In 1911, *Arabia* was described as a “Missouri River Boat that Never Came Back.” The authors of the article recalled the failure of nineteenth century treasure hunters to get the cargo.³⁰⁴

Yet, the story of *Arabia*'s lost whiskey cargo recirculated. In 1921, a newspaper article tantalized Prohibition-era readers with the prospect of finding the whiskey. *The Kansas City Times* reported in 1921, “Three hundred and fourteen barrels of whisky, which has been aging for sixty years and getting older every month! No, it's not a dream

³⁰² Kristen Vogel and Laura Gongaware, “Protecting Against Destruction: The Failed Salvage Attempt of a Nineteenth-Century Steamboat and the Missouri State Legislation that Followed,” paper presented at Society for American Archaeology 75th Anniversary Meeting, St. Louis, MO, April 2010; “Salt of the Earth Flavors Region,” *The Springfield News-Leader*, November 21, 1989.

³⁰³ “The Legend of the Lost Arabia and its Treasure Exploded,” *Kansas City Star*, June 5, 1910.

³⁰⁴ “Missouri River Boats That Never Came Back,” *Kansas City Star*, November 5, 1911.

nor a government seizure. It actually exists, every pint of it.”³⁰⁵ *The Kansas City Times* originally published the story about a steamboat *City of Higbee*, reportedly sunk in 1861, and 60 years of attempts to recover the cargo of the vessel. The details of the story suggest that the story actually referred to *Arabia*. The paper explained that the American Civil War prevented the recovery of the ship’s valuable cargo.

Would-be treasure hunter F.D. Walsworth spent his youth in Holt, Missouri hearing stories about steamboats with valuable buried cargo. He also followed the efforts of Henson to get to the cargo of *Arabia*. Walworth leased the parcel of land the steamboat was under. He said, “I can’t get my mind off that liquor, waiting for someone to get it. I am confident it is still there and could be recovered.”³⁰⁶ It would be no easy task to get the whiskey: “And all Dr. Walsworth must do is obtain some few hundred thousands of dollars and a company behind him, obtain modern drilling equipment, locate the whisky, bring it to the surface and cajole Mr. Volstead into allowing him to dispose of it.”³⁰⁷ Walsworth reportedly tried to entice someone to dig, believing the failure of the Henson dig was due to second-hand machinery. H.A. Henson, son of ‘Dad’ Henson, said he also thought there was cargo left onboard the vessel that could be brought up with the proper machinery. Walsworth appears to have had no luck garnering

³⁰⁵ “Buried Whisky Treasure Cargo Lost in Missouri River in 1861 is Worth a Million. Wichita,” *The Kansas City Times*, July 17, 1921, accessed February 11, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

³⁰⁶ “Buried Whisky Treasure Cargo Lost in Missouri River in 1861 is Worth a Million. Wichita,” *The Kansas City Times*, July 17, 1921.

³⁰⁷ “Buried Whisky Treasure Cargo Lost in Missouri River in 1861 is Worth a Million. Wichita,” *The Kansas City Times*, July 17, 1921.

interest to dig despite his estimate that the whiskey would be worth a million dollars at the time.³⁰⁸

Despite the lack of treasure recovered from their efforts on *Bertrand* and ensuing legal battle with the federal government, Jesse Pursell and Sam Corbino searched for Arabia in 1974. They found a boot, a nail, and some wood while drilling over the site of the boat. They sent an auger down and “struck the steamboat eight times.”³⁰⁹ Pursell and Corbino estimated that it would cost \$100,000 to uncover *Arabia*, and they expected to find 150 barrels of whiskey and other cargo with a value of \$16,000. In 1974, the location of the wreck was on the private land of Norman B. Sortor, who proposed allowing Corbino and Pursell to dig on the property provided that the land be restored to its original state and that Sortor received 15 percent of any recovered cargo. Sortor claimed he was interested in the opportunity for historical sake, not to make money.³¹⁰ For Corbino and Pursell, searching for sunken cargo was a hobby, and they were well-known as the excavators of the steamboat *Bertrand*. Corbino claimed, “We’ve been trying to get away from that idea [of being labeled treasure hunters] for some time...I don’t really know what to classify us. Some people think of us as archaeologists, but we’re probably just salvors. Most people though, turn up their noses at treasure

³⁰⁸ “Buried Whisky Treasure Cargo Lost in Missouri River in 1861 is Worth a Million. Wichita,” *The Kansas City Times*, July 17, 1921.

³⁰⁹ “Recover Items from Beneath River Channel,” *The Southeast (Cape Girardeau) Missourian*, April 24, 1974, accessed February 11, 2017, *Google News* [database online], <<https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=vc0fAAAIAIAJ&sjid=3NgEAAAIAIAJ&pg=1089%2C5993419>>.

³¹⁰ “Recover Items from Beneath River Channel,” *The Southeast Missourian*, April 24, 1974; Randall W. Myers, “Salvagers Scout Steamboat,” *The Kansas City Star* 21 March 1974, in *Newspapers.com* [database online].

hunters.”³¹¹ Pursell and Corbino had difficulty identifying the vessel positively as *Arabia*, and ultimately did not attempt a full excavation.³¹²

Pursell and Corbino were not the only avocational salvors searching for treasure buried on sunken steamboats in Missouri in the late twentieth century. After the *Missouri Packet* debacle, the Hawley family and their partners were also considering options for where to next dig. Greg Hawley writes that the family became interested in searching for treasure onboard steamboats when “Dave [Hawley] began retelling a story he had heard about sunken steamboats on the Missouri River. During an air-conditioning service call, the home owner claimed that several steamers sank during the 1800s, and their oaken hulls and cargo remained hidden in the river valley.”³¹³ Despite their inept effort with *Missouri Packet*, members of River Salvage, Inc., minus Gary Sisk and Gene Smith, continued to work together. The Hawleys, including father Bob and sons Greg and Dave, along with Jerry Mackey, and contractor David Lutrell formed the company. They considered several steamboats, including some whose name had been previously circulated for being likely to have treasure aboard: *Mollie Dozzier*, *E.A. Ogden*, *Twilight*, *Mars*, *William Baird*, *Arabia*, *Princess*, *George Washington*, and *Radnor*. Also, Greg Hawley indicates they were interested in “a nameless boat that sank near Boonville, Missouri.” There is no reason Greg Hawley would not have known the presumed name of the vessel was *Missouri Packet* because he helped to dig up several years before. Additionally, Hawley does not include the steamboat *Hamlet* even though he had

³¹¹ Myers, “Salvagers Scout Steamboat,” *The Kansas City Star*, March 21, 1974.

³¹² “Old Sunken River Boat May have Whiskey Cargo,” *Moberly Monitor-Index* 1 April 1974, in Newspapers.com [database online].

³¹³ Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 19.

participated in core drillings over the possible location of that vessel in 1987. The group eliminated the other vessels and chose to focus on *Arabia*.³¹⁴

River Salvage, Inc. estimated that the uncovering of *Arabia* would cost \$250,000, but expenses climbed to over \$700,000 during excavation. They told “friends and relatives” about their “adventures,” and in this way sold 15 shares of the company for \$10,000 each, securing \$150,000 in funding.³¹⁵ The treasure hunters and their immediate families pooled together \$500,000, and their funding was supplemented with bank loans.³¹⁶ The treasure hunters of River Salvage, Inc. were under financial pressure. Greg Hawley recalls, “If we had known the expense necessary to excavate the *Arabia*’s treasures, I doubt we would ever have started. The mental pressure of owing hundreds of thousands of dollars to the bank made things tense at home. My wife and I could lose everything if we failed: our home, cars, business, and our pride.”³¹⁷ Sortor, the landowner, was doubtful that the Hawleys would be successful. He had seen the 1974 attempt fail. Sortor told the Hawleys, “I’d rather you boys forget digging *Arabia*. A lot of folks have tried, but all have failed; and I’d hate to see you spend a lot of money for nothing.”³¹⁸

After the fall harvest in 1988, the treasure salvage group began work. They first outlined the boat by drilling and marking with flags. They did core sampling in multiple locations over the wreck searching for evidence of the ship’s cargo, and they decided to

³¹⁴ Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 23; “A Shared Dream: Treasures from a Sunken Boat,” *The New York Times*, January 3, 1992, accessed February 11, 2017, *LexisNexis Academic*.

³¹⁵ Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 68.

³¹⁶ Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 127.

³¹⁷ Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 154.

³¹⁸ Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 40-41, 42.

dig once they found evidence of English Queensware.³¹⁹ Before digging began, Greg Hawley writes, “As I stood above this ancient steamer, I knew that I was standing where others had stood, individuals with dreams and hopes, fears and uncertainties identical to ours. They, too, were men with determination, confident in their ability to reach and recover the cargo hidden aboard the *Arabia*.”³²⁰

The group--with the help of their families--began to dig towards *Arabia* in November 1988. They believed that water would be their biggest challenge to getting to the vessel, figuring flooding was the reason previous attempts had failed. Bob Hawley designed a “de-watering” system of electric submersible pumps that would remove water from around the wreck and dump it into the Missouri River.³²¹ They did struggle with the water, but they were able to control it by installing additional pumps at additional costs.³²²

The group started to dig at the stern, hoping to find a large portion of the cargo in that location. They used a track hoe to reach *Arabia*. Once they reached the ship, they used shovels to dig and water hoses to move the sand.³²³ The water hoses caused some problems: “As if we did not have enough water to worry about, our wash water would not soak back into the sand quickly enough. By midday, water had climbed up to our knees and hindered our progress.” Sand clogged the pipes.³²⁴

³¹⁹ Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 43.

³²⁰ Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 43-44.

³²¹ Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 45.

³²² Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 68.

³²³ Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 53, 54, 57.

³²⁴ Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 75.

The first artifact they uncovered was a Good Year Rubber Co. shoe, marked with the year 1849. Greg Hawley reminisces, “At that moment, I knew why I was here. The gold and silver I often dreamed about suddenly meant nothing. I was reliving the wonder of childhood with the discovery of this rubber shoe now resting in my hands, and the unknown still hidden beneath my feet.”³²⁵ There was minimal attempt to document the excavation. Greg Hawley claims, “The project was so significant we hired an archaeologist to document the *Arabia*’s wooden structure, machinery, and cargo. Proper documentation was a critical step for future historical and scientific research.”³²⁶ The group contracted an archaeological consultant, Gary Rex Walters, for the project. Yet, the excavation did not meet contemporary archaeological standards, and in actuality very few records are available.

Ultimately, the salvors recovered 200 tons (181,437 kg) of artifacts, ranging from rolling pins and jars of pickles to door knobs and locks. They also uncovered parts of the boat’s machinery and a portion of the hull from the stern.³²⁷ The variety and quantity of goods leads some to call the steamboat a “floating Wal-mart.”³²⁸ Yet, it became clear to the treasure hunters that there was no treasure. The excavation of the steamboat *Arabia* ended in February of 1989. The salvage company believed it, by law, had the right to sell the estimated 200 tons of cargo they found. Although the Abandoned Shipwreck Act was in effect, the state of Missouri had not defined the state’s role in the preservation of underwater cultural heritage within its borders. The group realized, however, that the

³²⁵ Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 54.

³²⁶ Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 48.

³²⁷ Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 60-64.

³²⁸ “Salvaged Artifacts Stun Archaeologists,” *The Salina Journal*, January 19, 1989, accessed February 12, 2017, *Newspapers.com*.

majority of the recovered cargo did not have a high market value. Greg Hawley muses, “We yearned for gold and silver, not the world’s largest collection of muddy boots and shoes.”³²⁹ Despite their disappointment in not finding gold, the group recognized the historical significance of the vessel and its contents. They decided to keep the *Arabia* collection intact and to open a museum.

Many of the items, like the boots, would need preservation and attention. Greg Hawley writes, “Unearthing the *Arabia* was fulfilling our wildest dreams. Yet, with the recovery of these fragile treasures, our families faced the difficult task of caring for and nurturing our discoveries.”³³⁰ They borrowed an additional \$750,000 to establish the museum. The museum includes a conservation lab, where the “treasure hunters” turned “preservationists” work to conserve the waterlogged items. The group received training from the Canadian Conservation Institute. Greg Hawley recalls, “They introduced us to freeze drying and the different archival lacquers, waxes and polymers that one needs, and we began to experiment on scraps of wood, leather, textiles. As we began to understand and have success with these small pieces of items, we began to move in to the main collection.”³³¹

The *Arabia* Steamboat Museum in opened in Kansas City, Missouri in 1991, and it currently houses the artifacts of the steamboat (Figures 17-19). Adult admission to the museum was \$14.50 in 2017. The group’s investment in the dig and the creation of the

³²⁹ Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 97.

³³⁰ Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 70.

³³¹ Bruce Cole, “Uncovering a Sunken Treasure: A Conversation with David and Greg Hawley,” *Humanities* 25, No. 6 (November/December 2004), accessed February 11, 2017, *National Endowment for the Humanities*, <<http://www.neh.gov/humanities/2004/novemberdecember/conversation/uncovering-sunken-treasure>>.

museum was paid off by 2004, but they continue to have costs for continued preservation efforts and museum maintenance. The museum is staffed by members of the original salvage team, along with members of their families and additional employees. Conservation is an ongoing process and is done in an onsite lab, and the efforts are part of the museum experience as visitors can view part of the preservation lab through a window.³³²



Figure 17. Exterior of the Steamboat Arabia Museum. Reprinted from Charvex, “Steamboat Arabia Museum, Kansas City, Missouri,” July 16, 2008, Wikimedia Commons.

³³² Richael Bangs, “In the Heart of the Heart of the Country,” *NBCNews.com*, September 23, 2004, accessed February 11, 2017, <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/6058198/ns/travel-great_escapes/t/heart-heart-country/#.VPqE_mTaH88>.



Figure 18. Display at the Steamboat *Arabia* Museum. Reprinted from Daderot, “*Arabia* Steamboat Museum,” October 31, 2011, *Wikimedia Commons*.



Figure 19. Artifacts on display at the Steamboat *Arabia* Museum, including queensware. Reprinted from Daderot, “*Arabia* Steamboat Museum,” October 31, 2011, *Wikimedia Commons*.

The *Arabia* Steamboat Museum encourages school visits and has curriculum that support Missouri State/Common Core Standards.³³³ The managers of the museum, the Hawleys, have been open to discussing the *Arabia* excavation and preservation with both the public and with scholars. Unfortunately, many scholars will have difficulty with the lack of archaeological provenience. Annalies Corbin, who used a part of the *Arabia* collection as data for her Master of Arts thesis and subsequent book, indicates, “...because no archaeological field notes were kept, few items could be positively associated throughout the collection.”³³⁴ Kathy Nichols summarized the view of many scholars in a review of the Museum: “Historians and archaeologists will object to the methods used during excavation of the boat and recovery of its cargo but must appreciate the willingness of former treasure hunters to forgo certain wealth by the commitment to keeping the cargo intact and sharing it with the public.”³³⁵

Twilight

The search for *Twilight*'s fabled whiskey cargo restarted in March of 1902. This time, the legend of the boat included tales of its splendor.

Twilight, for its time, was a marvel of completeness, and was not only one of the best boats of its day, but was quite the largest craft in the Missouri river trade. With a length of 230 feet, it measured thirty-five feet beam. It carried a large and capable crew and, when set afloat, late in the [18]50s, it was the topic of discussion for months, not only in Paducah, where it was built, but throughout Kentucky. Its furnishings were of the finest, and the artistic taste shown in the color and general arrangement of

³³³ *Arabia* Steamboat Museum, “Experience Learning Through Discovery: Grades 6-8 Interactive Tour Curriculum,” *1856.com*, accessed February 11, 2017, <<http://1856.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Arabia-Middle-School-Interactive.pdf>>.

³³⁴ Corbin, *The Material Culture of Steamboat Passengers*, 89.

³³⁵ Kathy Nichols, “The Steamboat Arabia Museum,” *The Public Historian* 27, No. 4 (Fall 2005), 88.

the women's cabin would not have set ill in my lady's drawing-room of the handsomest Louisville mansion. Particular attention was paid to the cuisine of the *Twilight*, and altogether a trip aboard this elegant boat was considered a treat and a privilege by all so fortunate as to embark.³³⁶

The author of the 1902 article also reinvented *Twilight's* history, claiming that the majority of the passengers died in the accident during a freak storm. The article also contended that the captain of *Twilight* donated a chandelier to the Baptist church at the corner of Sixth and Francis (which had closed by 1902). The chandelier, it was said, had hung in the ladies' cabin of *Twilight*, but it did not produce enough light.³³⁷

In May of 1903, newspapers reported that "another search" was being made for *Twilight City*, but it is probable that the authors were discussing *Twilight*. The reports claimed the boat sank in 1853 after being snagged somewhere between St. Joseph and Omaha. A change in the river course and fear of Indian attack left wreckers unable to recover the ship's cargo. George Hoskins of Omaha claimed, "When you talk of looking for buried treasure and hunting for the gold hidden by pirates, don't overlook the fact that out there in the winding bend of the Missouri river is a bonanza which puts all the tales of Capt. Kidd in the shade." An investor reportedly "got a trace of an old man who was a cabin boy on the packet at the time she sank. He claimed to be able to show the position of the boat."³³⁸ Ultimately, nothing came of these efforts.

³³⁶ "Mystery of the Missouri," *Omaha Daily Bee*, March 16, 1902, accessed February 11, 2017, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99021999/1902-03-16/ed-1/seq-17/>>.

³³⁷ "Mystery of the Missouri," *Omaha Daily Bee*, March 16, 1902.

³³⁸ "Long Buried Whisky," *The (Omaha) Bee*, May 21, 1903; "Buried Whisky," *Los Angeles Herald*, May 24, 1903, accessed February 11, 2017, *California Digital Newspaper Collection*, <[http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=LAH19030524.2.274#](http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=LAH19030524.2.274#>)>.

When excitement over the rumored treasure aboard the steamboat *Arabia* grew in 1921, newspapers recalled *Twilight* as another vessel with a whiskey cargo. At that time, there was no effort to obtain the cargo of liquor.³³⁹

As they were searching for a steamboat to excavate in 1988, Greg Hawley indicates that River Salvage, Inc., who later salvaged *Arabia*, did core drilling on what they believed to be *Twilight*. They originally thought that the vessel would have a significant amount of valuable goods, but core drilling over five locations revealed little evidence of cargo. They pulled up oak from the hull and a brass label from a sardine can. They decided not to excavate *Twilight*.³⁴⁰

Nearly a decade later, former River Salvage, Inc. partners Gene Smith and Gary Sisk decided to pursue the excavation of the steamboat *Twilight*. The partners faced stricter regulations than their predecessors searching for buried steamboats in Missouri. State legislation laws in Missouri set forth minimum standards of excavations, including that a state-approved archaeologist had to be part of the team and had to document artifacts. Additionally, the location of *Twilight* was on land overseen by the Army Corps of Engineers and was close to a protected wetland. Smith and Sisk spent 18 months getting the required state and federal permits. A botanist was hired to write a report assessing the impact of excavation on the wetland.

³³⁹ “Recalls Another Lost Boat. Steamer *Twilight* Went down in River near Wellington,” *Kansas City Star*, July 19, 1921, accessed February 11, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

³⁴⁰ Hawley, *Treasure in a Cornfield*, 31-32.

Finally, fifty percent of artifacts had to be offered at a fair market price to a museum. Sisk and Smith were hopeful that there would be interest in the St. Charles area for a museum featuring *Twilight*'s artifacts. The excavation began in 1997.³⁴¹

Smith and Sisk formed the Steamboat *Twilight* Management, Inc. with a third partner, Wayne Roberts. The company believed the cargo of *Twilight* would be as vast and well-preserved as *Bertrand* and *Arabia*. The company announced their hopes to find 300 cases of Old London Club gin. They also declared that there might be a thousand dollars in gold coins that were not previously recovered by wreckers.³⁴²

The group sought investors in their for-profit venture, but by the year 2000, they were still looking. They had found the steamboat, and Smith proclaimed, "All we're lacking now is the money."³⁴³ Roberts claimed the group needed \$1.4 million to dig *Twilight*, and shares were offered to investors. Roberts explained, "An investment of \$35,000 will receive a 1 percent share of the profits." Roberts declined to reveal how many individuals had invested or how much had been raised.³⁴⁴ Smith also reportedly approached the city of St. Charles, Missouri to sponsor the proposed excavation at a price of \$1.4 million, but the city declined to use public money on the project because it was unknown what would be recovered.³⁴⁵

³⁴¹ Kelly Garbus, "Steamboat Salvagers Begin Work," *Kansas City Star*, January 7, 1997.

³⁴² "Steamboat salvagers begin work," Kelly Garbus, A1:2, *KC Star*, January 07, 1997

³⁴³ "Group Seeks Investors to Reclaim Sunken Treasure," *The Southeast Missourian*, January 2, 2000, accessed February 12, 2017, *Google News*, <<https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=dB8vAAAIBAJ&sjid=9NwFAAAAIBAJ&pg=3406%2C149150>>.

³⁴⁴ "Group Seeks Investors to Reclaim Sunken Treasure," *The Southeast Missourian*, January 2, 2000.

³⁴⁵ Tommy Robertson, "Museum is Key to Steamboat's Final Home," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 3, 2001, accessed February 12, 2017, *LexisNexis Academic*.

Meanwhile, the company began using a “sampling dredge, a bucket drill,” and a “diver” to retrieve artifacts while they sought investors. The group also claimed that some artifacts had already been raised, “including the neck of a London Club gin bottle, the cork still in place. The bottle was broken when the excavator’s bucket drill struck it.”³⁴⁶ Smith announced that the majority of the 300 cases of gin would still be amongst the cargo on the vessel and that it would be in good state of preservation. Smith also claimed that Sotheby’s auction house estimated the worth of each remaining bottle to be \$2,000-\$10,000 each.³⁴⁷ In addition to the cargo from the hold, Smith thought that the deck cargo would also be on the vessel. A 4-inch (10.16 cm) dredge was used to obtain material from the top of the vessel earlier, and it had brought up peanuts, described as a “deck cargo.”³⁴⁸ The group hoped to raise *Twilight* in its entirety, cutting the vessel into 6-foot (1.83 m) sections. They also recovered a hog chain and “a brass label from a sardine can reading ‘sardines frita a la’huile.”³⁴⁹ It is unclear if that was a second label or the label originally brought up during the River Salvage, Inc. testing over *Twilight* in the 1980s.

Members of the group emphasized that they did not want to be thought of as merely treasure hunters. They expressed interest in the preservation of the steamboat *Twilight* as a historically significant vessel. They wanted the vessel and some of its artifacts placed into a museum, and they hoped to establish a museum dedicated to

³⁴⁶ “Group Seeks Investors to Reclaim Sunken Treasure,” *The Southeast Missourian*, January 2, 2000.

³⁴⁷ “Group Seeks Investors to Reclaim Sunken Treasure,” *The Southeast Missourian*, January 2, 2000.

³⁴⁸ “Group Seeks Investors to Reclaim Sunken Treasure,” *The Southeast Missourian*, January 2, 2000.

³⁴⁹ “Group Seeks Investors to Reclaim Sunken Treasure,” *The Southeast Missourian*, January 2, 2000.

Twilight. Smith said, “We want to do everything right. Everything will be logged as to where it was found, and we’ll be able to put it in the museum the way it was.”³⁵⁰

It is unknown if the Steamboat Management Twilight Co. obtained investors, and if so, how many. Plans for excavation nevertheless moved forward. To excavate *Twilight*, diesel engines were used to pump water off the site. Smith explained, “Workers labored inside a crater 50 feet [15.24 m] deep and as large as a football field.” The effort lasted three and a half months.³⁵¹ The group removed everything they could. The hull itself and a 15,000-pound (6803.89 kg) side paddlewheel were removed. Also, the group recovered “both ten-ton steam engines; both boilers; the water pump; the center hull’s bottom timber called a ‘bulkhead’ (it had no keel); anchor; rudder; Pitman arms; capstan; and even the fatal sycamore snags.” Other artifacts recovered included several cases of Old London Club Gin, bitters, tools, stoves, kitchen implements, foodstuffs, and personal items such as jewelry.³⁵² The final cost of the project was not disclosed to the public.³⁵³

Items were taken to St. Charles, Missouri for storage to a building on the site of ACF (American Car and Foundry Company) Industries. City officials in the city of St. Charles expressed an interest in procuring the artifacts for display. St. Charles mayor Patti York said, “We’re trying everything we can to bring it here...We don’t have the money or resources to go treasure-hunting, but we think this kind of thing would add an

³⁵⁰ “Group Seeks Investors to Reclaim Sunken Treasure,” *The Southeast Missourian*, January 2, 2000.

³⁵¹ Robert Rubright, *The Steamboat Twilight 1865* (Steamboat *Twilight* Museum, 2002).

³⁵² Rubright, *The Steamboat Twilight 1865*.

³⁵³ Darren Freeman, “Recovered Riverboat Reveals a Bit of History,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 30, 2001, accessed February 11, 2017, *LexisNexis Academic*.

interesting dimension to our city.”³⁵⁴ Proponents of opening a museum in St. Charles thought that the artifacts could be a centerpiece of a \$34 million restoration effort in the Frenchtown neighborhood of the city. The treasure hunters had funded the project, but the city had to decide whether or not to buy the artifacts and fund a museum.³⁵⁵ Rory Riddler, president of the St. Charles Council, said, “I was a big supporter of this project to save the ship in the past, and I'm excited that private dollars were found to dig it up...Now, what we can do in St. Charles is try to make this a permanent home for the ship.”³⁵⁶ Salvor Gene Smith asserted that there were negotiations with St. Charles officials, but there were also discussions with other parties.³⁵⁷

Plans to sell the artifacts and form a museum ultimately stalled. The lack of planning before the excavation adversely affected the outcome of the project. After some legal disputes between members of Steamboat Twilight Management, Inc., Gary Sisk obtained the artifacts, including the hull pieces. He moved them to his company property near Kansas City, Missouri. Sisk has indicated that he is committed to keeping the collection together, and he has formed a non-profit organization with that intent. *Twilight Steamship Museum, Inc.* is registered as a 501(c)(3). The artifacts remain on Sisk’s property. Some of the items, including bottles of bitters, are in cold storage (Figure 20). Other items are stored in boxes and shelves in a garage-like setting (Figure 21). The larger artifacts, including the hull and some of the ship’s machinery, are stored

³⁵⁴ Freeman, “Recovered Riverboat Reveals a Bit of History.”

³⁵⁵ Robertson, “Museum is Key to Steamboat’s Final Home,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*; Diane Plattner, “St. Charles City Officials Pursue Restoration of Steamboat Twilight as Centerpiece for Museum,” *St. Charles (MO) County Business Record*, May 30, 2001, accessed February 11, 2017, *LexisNexis Academic*.

³⁵⁶ Robertson, “Museum is Key to Steamboat’s Final Home,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

³⁵⁷ Robertson, “Museum is Key to Steamboat’s Final Home,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

outdoors, overgrown with grass and exposed to the elements of Missouri weather (Figure 22). Sisk hopes that the pieces will ultimately be housed in a museum.



Figure 20. Gary Sisk shows the author bottles of bitters from a cold storage unit. Photograph courtesy of Kristen Vogel.



Figure 21. Gary Sisk shows the author artifacts from the *Twilight* excavation in storage. Photograph courtesy of Kristen Vogel.



Figure 22. Large artifacts from the steamboat *Twilight* excavation are stored outside. Photograph by Kristen Vogel.

Ben Sherrod

When *Ben Sherrod* sunk after catching fire in 1837, rumors spread that specie, worth an estimated \$230,000--supposedly on its way to banks in Tennessee--went down with the boat. It was unknown if any of it was recovered.³⁵⁸ The possibility to find this trove drove a group with the Penelore Corporation, a company founded in 1994 in Woodville, Mississippi, to search for the vessel near Fort Adams, Mississippi. The

³⁵⁸ S.L. Kotar, J.E. Gessler, *The Steamboat Era: A History of Fulton's Folly on American Rivers, 1807-1860* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), 123; James T. Lloyd, *Lloyd's Steamboat Directory, and Disasters on the Western Waters* (J.T. Lloyd & Company, 1856), 99; "Dreadful Disaster--Loss of Lives--Steamboat Ben Sherrod Burnt," *Liberator*, May 26, 1837.

primary investor in the project was Donald Depriest, president of the Penelore Corporation. The group also included historian James O. Moore of Natchez, Mississippi and archaeologist Tommy Birchett of Vicksburg, Mississippi.³⁵⁹

The proposed research plan indicated that the vessel was believed to be *Ben Sherrod* based on its location. The vessel had been located underground in 1991 using a magnetometer survey and borings. A 12-inch (30.48 cm) core sample was taken to recover a plug of wood of white oak and a second brought up a wood sample of yellow pine. The wood was determined to be from native species of the Ohio River Valley, which added credibility to the belief that they had found the nineteenth-century steamboat.

The planned excavation of the boat included the removal of sediment overburden and dewatering at the site. The group planned to study the structure of the vessel and associated artifacts. They also planned to recover and preserve artifacts, and they wanted to excavate in such a way that data would be available to both scholars and the general public. They hoped to house the artifacts in a museum, but the plans for a museum were

³⁵⁹ “Sunken Steamboat Yielding Artifacts,” *The Commercial Appeal*, October 18, 2000; Ninon Parker, “Ben Sherrod Calamity Cost Lives, Fortunes,” *Times Daily*, October 15, 1992, accessed February 12, 2017, *Google News*, <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=3U4eAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=TMcEAAAAIIBAJ&pg=1301%2C2231695>>; “Mississippi Steamboat Tanks Creates Fever in Fort Adams,” *Waycross Journal-Herald*, September 26, 1994, accessed February 12, 2017, *Google News*, <<https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=eZJeAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=3kwNAAAAIIBAJ&pg=6578%2C6206769>>; “Penelore Corp.,” *Experian Powered Business Reports*, Experian Information Solutions, Inc., December 1, 1994, accessed February 12, 2017, *LexisNexis Academic*.

not solidified. The salvors thought that a museum would be a possible tourist attraction in Natchez, Mississippi.³⁶⁰

The Penelore Corporation obtained permission from the Glengola Farms, the landowner, to excavate, and they obtained a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers in the Vicksburg District to conduct an archaeological excavation adjacent to the Mississippi and Buffalo Rivers in Wilkinson County, Mississippi. Moore signed the permit in July of 1994, which was scheduled to expire on July 26, 1997.³⁶¹ A representative of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers claimed that she thought the excavators had “historical interests at heart, not treasure.”³⁶²

The group began to dig at the site in August 1994. Twelve wells were sunk to dewater the excavation area. The group reached a depth of 65 feet (19.81 m), which was not enough to have reached the vessel. They estimated the vessel was still five feet (1.52 m) below the excavated level achieved. They were able to see planks and timbers. They attempted to dig a sump hole to lower the water table, but in the process they possibly damaged the vessel when two planks of 5 to 6 feet (1.52 to 1.83 m) were removed. While drilling a well, the excavators also removed small sherds of china. The planks and

³⁶⁰ Panamerican Martime, LLC, “Work Plan for the Archaeological Investigation of an Unidentified Watercraft Located at the *Ben Sherrod* Project Site Wilkinson County, Mississippi,” Historic Natchez Collection, Natchez, MS.

³⁶¹ Permit CELMK-OD-FE 14-JCB-J28-118, Department of the Army Permit, July 26, 1994, Historic Natchez Collection.

³⁶² “Mississippi Steamboat Tanks Creates Fever in Fort Adams,” *Waycross Journal-Herald*.

sherds were recorded by Birchett.³⁶³ There was secrecy surrounding the project with the public “to keep the gawkers and the relic hunters out, prevent looting the site.”³⁶⁴

In mid-November of 1994, Birchett resigned as project archaeologist. He provided the Penelore Corp. with photographs that had been taken of the artifacts, but the company claims Birchett did not provide a written report to the company. The excavation continued for two more weeks, but work ceased in 1994 due to the rising waters of the Mississippi River.³⁶⁵ In July of 1995, Penelore Corp. returned to the site. They installed pumps and installed a coffer dam over the site. The excavation was halted once again due to rising water levels, and the company claimed that they did not reach the vessel, so they did not hire an archaeologist.³⁶⁶

The project permit was suspended in June of 1996, with the lack of a project archaeologist being one of the contributing factors.³⁶⁷ Penelore Corp. failed to notify the Army Corps of Engineers of the departure of Birchett. Additionally, the company did not hire an archaeologist in during the 1995 season. The Corps of Engineers expressed concern that the excavation was in violation of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), which requires that Federal agencies consider the impact of their projects on historical properties. The historic nature of the *Ben Sherrod* meant that it qualified to be eligible to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places and marked as a National Historic Landmark. The Corps of Engineers was

³⁶³ Penelore Corporation, “Summary of Excavation Work in 1994,” 1994, Historic Natchez Collection, Natchez, MS.

³⁶⁴ “Mississippi Steamboat Tanks Creates Fever in Fort Adams,” *Waycross Journal-Herald*.

³⁶⁵ Penelore Corporation, “Summary of Excavation Work in 1994.”

³⁶⁶ Penelore Corporation, “Summary of Excavation Work in 1995.”

³⁶⁷ James O. Moore, Letter to Joyce Butler, July 11, 1996, Historic Natchez Collection, Natchez, MS; Elizabeth Guynes, Letter to James Moore, July 30, 1996, Historic Natchez Collection, Natchez, MS.

concerned that damage had been done to the vessel without an archaeologist present. Also, the group had failed to comply with regulations regarding the mitigation of plants at the site and had not planted mitigation sites to replace flora removed during excavation. Gary Wright, a colonel in the Corps, wrote, “The work has had adverse effects on the cultural resource impacted by the project.”³⁶⁸

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation questioned in August of 1996 whether the Abandoned Shipwreck Act would apply to the project.³⁶⁹ Elbert Hilliard of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History expressed concern that the excavation had “turned into an undisciplined dig for artifacts.”³⁷⁰ By July 5, 1996, Hilliard had learned more about the individuals involved with the project. He said that DePriest “has been an outstanding proponent and supporter of historic preservation in Mississippi.” DePriest assured Hilliard that the project planned to hire an archaeologist in 1996, so Hilliard claimed, “I am confident that this excavation project can be renewed and completed in a manner that will bring credit to the State of Mississippi, the Section 106 regulations, and the Corps’ permitting process.” Hilliard believed that the project would meet Section 106 guidelines.³⁷¹

Counsel for the landowners, Glengola Farms, and the Penelore Corporation denied that the Abandoned Shipwreck Act applied to the project and that the suggestion that it did was “misleading.” The legal counsel argued:

³⁶⁸ Gary W. Wright, Letter to James O. Moore, June 13, 1996, Historic Natchez Collection, Natchez, MS.

³⁶⁹ Mississippi Counsel, Letter to Elizabeth Guynes, September 12, 1996, Historic Natchez Collection, Natchez, MS; Gary W. Wright, Letter to James O. Moore, June 13, 1996.

³⁷⁰ Elbert R. Hilliard, Memorandum to Arch Delrymple III, et. al., June 17, 1996, Historic Natchez Collection, Natchez, MS.

³⁷¹ Elbert R. Hilliard, Letter to Elizabeth Guynes, July 5, 1996, Historic Natchez Collection, Natchez, MS.

The *Ben Sherrod* is found on property owned by Glengola Farms. The state of Mississippi has no interest in this property. The state of Mississippi claims no interest in this property. The federal government neither has nor claims any interest in this property. To the best of our knowledge it is undisputed that Glengola Farms has clear title to the property so that the Abandoned Shipwreck Act is inapplicable. These facts demonstrate clearly that the *Ben Sherrod* does not lie in the ‘submerged lands’ of Mississippi as defined by ‘lands beneath navigable waters.’³⁷²

The counsel maintained that Penelore and Glengola Farms had previously obtained the necessary permits to begin the “expensive project,” and “that revocation has cost the parties substantial sums and will continue to delay the project unnecessarily and with great expense to Penelore.” The counsel requested the company’s permits be reinstated.³⁷³

Penelore Corp. successfully appealed the suspension of their permit to excavate. Permission was reinstated in July 1996. The reinstatement included the provision that the company officially hire an archaeological firm, signing a form regarding the handling of the project, and agreeing to “a revised mitigation plan for losses of wetland functions and values at the project site.”³⁷⁴ The Penelore Corp. planned to continue with the project in August of 1996. They recognized that they might be unable to reduce the water level and that the project could become “an underwater excavation” if they were unable to dewater at the site. Their plan in that situation would be “to control the water to a fairly shallow depth of about 10 feet [3.05 m].”³⁷⁵ Penelore was in discussion with

³⁷² Mississippi Counsel, Letter to Elizabeth Guynes, September 12, 1996.

³⁷³ Mississippi Counsel, Letter to Elizabeth Guynes, September 12, 1996.

³⁷⁴ Elizabeth Guynes, Letter to James Moore, September 5, 1996.

³⁷⁵ Penelore Corporation, “Excavation Plan for 1996,” Historic Natchez Collection, Natchez, MS.

Panamerican Maritime to provide archaeologists for the project.³⁷⁶ However, the excavation ended abruptly when Moore suffered a fatal heart attack on-site. Moore had been the driving force of the excavation, and after he died the project ended.

The financial obligations of Penelore Corp. did not end with Moore's death. Penelore was taken to court by creditors, Head & Engquist Equipment, L.L.C., who had provided the equipment rental for the excavation. Head & Engquist claimed that Penelore had not made a single payment on a \$23,000 rental. The contract between the equipment rental company and Penelore ended after a month because of the debt.³⁷⁷

Additional Recovery Attempts

Jim Turner

Additional attempts to recover buried steamboats include the discovery of a nineteenth-century steamboat in the Red River in Oklahoma in 1957-1958. A change in the river course partially revealed the vessel, which was identified as *Jim Turner*. The boat reportedly sank in 1854 with 300 40-gallon (151.42 L) barrels of whiskey. An eyewitness claimed the vessel had been previously exposed in 1911 when a group dug the vessel from the sand and managed to recover a barrel of whiskey. The men imbibed on the decades-old liquor and became so intoxicated the hole refilled with sand, and they lost their cargo.

³⁷⁶ James Moore, Letter to Joyce Butler, August 18, 1996, Historic Natchez Collection, Natchez, MS.

³⁷⁷ *Head and Engquist Equipment, L.L.C., Appellant v. Penelore Corporation, Appellee*, No. 2003-CA-00027-COA, Court of Appeals of Mississippi, Decided February 3, 2004, accessed February 12, 2017, *LexisNexis Academic*.

A local fisherman, Benny Badgett, found a vessel the vessel in 1957. He announced the discovery to the local press, along with his intention to recovery barrels of whiskey. He was opposed by B.F. Edwards, a lawyer representing the heirs of the owners of *Jim Turner*. Both parties believed there was whiskey and fine china in the hold of the boat. However, the Red River changed course once again in May of 1958, and the boat was completely submerged. Neither party was interested in pursuing the steamboat once it was buried in the sand and water of the Red River.³⁷⁸

The story of the lost whiskey still lingers along the Red River. Archaeologists excavating the steamboat *Heroine* in the Red River near Fort Townson were questioned if they had found the barrels of whiskey by residents of the area. Becca Sager, Field Conservator and Photographer on the Red River Project in 2006, recalls:

Most of the locals had ‘heard stories’ about a steamboat wreck carrying whiskey. Dates were all over the place from when this wreck was supposed to have happen, but I can’t remember what dates they said, other than most were after the Great Raft [a log jam] was cleared by Shreve in 1839 and before 1900...Most people talk about sunken gold, but their local lore was all about the sunken whiskey.³⁷⁹

Pete King, Steamboat Hunter

Modern day searches for buried steamboats by nonprofessionals have, at times, been about more than strictly finding treasure. There have been efforts to preserve the history and heritage associated with buried steamboats, as with the examples above of

³⁷⁸ Frank X. Tolbert, “Pow Wow Due on ‘Whiskey Boat,’” *Dallas Morning News*, February 16, 1958, accessed February 11, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*; Frank X. Tolbert, “The River Settles Whiskey Boat Case,” *Dallas Morning News*, May 7, 1958, accessed February 11, 2017, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

³⁷⁹ Becca Sager, Facebook message to Kristen Vogel, February 6, 2015.

Bertrand, Arabia, and Twilight. Pete King, a steamboat enthusiast from Iowa, has spent his entire adulthood searching along the Missouri River for a buried steamboat that he can excavate. He claims to have located 30 steamboats under lands near the river where boats are buried underground due to river course changes. He was inspired by the 1968-69 excavation of the steamboat *Bertrand* and began his search without any formal training in archaeology or the sciences.

King's hope is to find a steamboat that can be excavated. He claims the majority of the boats he found were not suitable for recovery because they were still partially submerged in the riverbed or under federally protected land, or he could not obtain permission from the landowner to dig. King's most recent discovery is what he believes to be the steamboat *Nugget*, which sank near Decatur, Nebraska in 1866. King reckons that *Nugget* was like 'a floating Walmart' carrying a wide variety and quantity of goods for a frontier population in Montana, and the boat would have historical significance. While King has not committed to digging up the vessel himself, he hopes to watch as other interested parties invest the time and money to excavate the vessel.³⁸⁰

Sultana

A 2014 episode of the Public Broadcast Service (PBS) show *History Detectives* featured a search for the steamboat *Sultana*. A boiler explosion on the packet, crammed with union soldiers eager to return home at the end of the American Civil War, lit the

³⁸⁰ Nick Hytrek, "'Steamboat Hunter' Ready to End Search," *The Des Moines Register*, *DesMoinesRegister.com*, July 28, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/2014/07/29/steamboat-hunter-ready-end-search/13306259/>>.

night sky near Memphis, Tennessee. The explosion killed more than 1,500 individuals and was one of the worst maritime disasters in American history. Despite the historical evidence of the frequency of explosions aboard steamboats, the episode framed the cause of the explosion as a mystery and possible Confederate sabotage or the work of a “corrupt union officer.”

The crew of *History Detectives*, with the assistance of archaeologist Steven James, realized that the remains of *Sultana* would likely be buried underground instead of still in the river. Magnetometer readings indicated a probable location of the boat. At the end of the episode, no effort was made to uncover the vessel, but they gathered a group of descendants of *Sultana* survivors to hold a memorial service over the location.³⁸¹

Malta

Dave Hawley and his partners—without his brother Greg Hawley, who died in a car accident in 2009—continue to search for additional steamboats to excavate. Hawley may have been involved in as many as 11 mostly undocumented excavations. Their goal is to find an artifact-rich steamboat to excavate to be able to display at the Steamboat *Arabia* Museum. Most recently, the team has focused on the steamboat *Malta*, which snagged and sank on the Missouri River 80 miles (128.75 km) east of Kansas City. Hawley believes the steamboat carries artifacts relating to the fur trade in the western

³⁸¹ *History Detectives*, “Civil War Sabotage?” Season 11, Episode 1, Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), 2014.

United States. Hawley has test drilled over the location where *Malta* is believed to be buried. Hawley plans to apply for permits and start an excavation of the site by 2017.³⁸²

Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, treasure hunters continue to search for buried steamboats. Examples like the ones above demonstrate a continued interest in the recovery of western river steamboats. Treasure hunters hoped to find precious metals or barrels of whiskey. Despite multiple attempts to recover valuables from steamboats, treasure hunters have yet to find “the money boat.” The costs of excavation escalate with little to nothing of perceived market value recovered, and treasure hunters and treasure hunting companies have gone thousands of dollars in debt to pay for the investment.

The extraction of artifacts from the steamboat *Bertrand* in the 1960s highlighted that buried steamboats potentially hold significant amounts of nineteenth-century material culture and that the vessels and associated cargo could be historically significant. Federal regulations protected *Bertrand* and associated artifacts to an extent. The treasure hunters entered into an agreement with the federal government to divide the value of any quicksilver, whiskey, and gold and silver. The federal government was to keep any other artifacts. The arrangement seemed to offer little risk for the government because it maintained that it would not be liable for excavation expenses, but neither the

³⁸² Arron Husted, “Museum Closes in on Historic Malta Bend Steamboat,” *The Marshall Democratic-News*, Marshallnews.com, March 2, 2016, accessed February 13, 2017, <<http://www.marshallnews.com/story/2282569.html>>; Arron Husted, “Students and Community Members Visit Site of Buried Malta Steamboat,” *The Marshall-Democratic-News*, Marshallnews.com, March 7, 2016, accessed February 13, 2017, <<http://www.marshallnews.com/story/2283922.html>>.

federal government nor the treasure hunters were prepared for the amount of material culture recovered. As a result, officials scrambled for resources to conserve and display artifacts, and some artifacts deteriorated as a result. Fortunately, museum space was built to house the artifacts on De Soto property, many artifacts were conserved and are on view, and the museum continues to be in operation.

There was also a prolonged legal battle over control of the bottles of bitters. The judicial system in the mid-1970s did not fully embrace archaeological principles, questioning why government officials would want to keep the entire collection intact. The United States Court of Claims awarded the finders of the steamboat the value of the antique bottles, but the federal government never appropriated the funds. To say that the treasure hunters did not profit from the endeavor is an understatement.

Likewise, the salvors of the steamboat *Arabia* did not profit directly from any treasure found on the ship. They found thousands of nineteenth-century artifacts but not the liquor or precious metals which had originally motivated them to search for a buried steamboat. The group decided to keep the *Arabia* collection together, however, and they used their personal funds to conserve the artifacts and open a museum. Media, government officials, and even some scholars regard the members of River Salvage, Inc. as reformed treasure hunters and historical preservationists who have dedicated their time and money to preserving the artifacts, maintaining the museum, and educating the public about nineteenth-century American history. However, the group should not be regarded as archaeologists or individuals who are doing archaeology. Instead, the group

could more correctly be considered antiquarians specializing in nineteenth-century steamboats and steamboat cargo.

Neither the *Arabia* excavation nor their previous excavation of the *Missouri Packet* met archaeological standards. Both vessels were dug with the intent to profit from the items found. Few records were kept on either excavation, which is a serious hindrance to scholars wanting to study the collection. Without records, it is also difficult to determine what was missed during the excavation. The managers of the *Arabia* Steamboat Museum continue to be promote the excavation as a great treasure hunting tale, not a story of archaeological success, and the museum focuses on the amount of ‘treasure’ recovered and the adventure of finding it.

The excavations of *Missouri Packet* (in Missouri) and *Arabia* (in Kansas) were done without the constraints of federal or state legislation in regards to historic preservation. The lack of oversight allowed treasure hunters to destroy parts of *Missouri Packet* and to excavate *Arabia* with little oversight. Evidence of the destruction of *Missouri Packet* led the Missouri Legislature to pass laws to protect historical ships within state borders by authority of the Abandoned Shipwreck Act. Other states have also developed protective legislation or applied state antiquities legislation to the excavation of historic ships. Treasure hunters are met with an increasing number of legal restrictions and challenges designed to protect historical sites such as buried steamboats. Legal restrictions are imperfect. States and local organizations lack the means to fully oversee and enforce protection of shipwreck sites or to monitor the care, sell, and

distribution of artifacts, as was seen in Missouri with the excavations of *Twilight* and *Ben Sherrod*.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the history of hunting for buried treasure on western river steamboats from the 1870s to present day. I presented the case studies of seven steamboats that have been actively sought by treasure hunters from the late nineteenth century through the twenty-first: *Missouri Packet*, *Twilight*, *Arabia*, *Bertrand*, *City of New Orleans*, *Leodora*, and *Ben Sherrod*. Each of these vessels sunk in the antebellum era and later became the subject of treasure hunting lore and target of treasure seekers.

To better understand the context in which treasure hunters worked, the site formation of steamboat wreck sites and myths surrounding buried steamboats were presented. The discussion began with an overview of the site formation processes of a steamboat wreck site. Michael Schiffer's *Formation Processes of the Archaeological Record* was applied to discuss the cultural and environmental factors that transform steamboat wreck sites over time. Also, the disaster-and- response stages theorized by John Leach, and applied to archaeological sites by Michael Gibbs, were applied to the steamboat wrecks. The cultural and environmental factors, along with the cultural response after a steamboat accident, explain why treasure hunters have been able to locate vessels buried underground and have recovered great quantities of nineteenth-century material goods but little-to-no precious metals, whiskey, or other valuables.

As the elements claimed the steamboats, and abandoned vessels were submerged or buried, treasure tales developed about lost wealth on western river steamboats. These

treasure tales follow similar patterns of other buried treasure tales, as identified by Gerard Hurley. The tales seem credible and are passed on as truth. They have two components to the plot. The steamboat is lost, supposedly with valuable cargo, and then individuals search for the treasure. Finally, these tales end with no ‘treasure’ being found. Dozens of stories have circulated about treasure on buried steamboats by word of mouth, newspaper articles, books, and most recently, the internet. These enticing stories inspire treasure hunters to search for treasure along western rivers and on buried steamboats.

The presentation of the case studies of the seven buried steamboats was divided into two chapters. First, I covered treasure hunting attempts of the late nineteenth century. During this time, treasure hunters needed to have permission to work on privately-owned land, and they could profit from items recovered from buried steamboats. They operated under the prevailing legal principal that ‘finders’ were ‘keepers,’ but they also expected to pay federal taxes on any recovered treasure. Attempts were mainly focused along the Missouri River and occurred from the Kansas City region to the border of Nebraska and South Dakota. The first recorded attempt occurred when a group tried to recover treasure from the steamboat *Twilight* in 1868. Treasure hunters were especially active in the 1870s and the 1890s. In the 1870s, there were attempts by different groups to recover treasure from *Leodora*, *Twilight*, *Arabia*, and *Bertrand*. There were also attempts on the same vessels in the 1890s, none of which were successful. Searchers found felt hats, foodstuffs, and other items, but no precious metals or whiskey.

Next, I examined treasure hunting attempts from the twentieth century to modern day. Early twentieth-century attempts on *City of New Orleans* (1905) and *Leodora* (1911) yielded similar results as in the decades before—no treasure. Salvage attempts in the second half of the twentieth century proved to be more thorough and more destructive to the archaeological record. Improvements in technology, including machinery advancements that allowed more dirt to be moved and more water to be pumped off site, allowed treasure hunters to more fully excavate, and in several cases, remove partially or fully steamboat hulls and other artifacts. The first example of this type of venture was the excavation of the steamboat *Bertrand* which began in 1968. The entire steamboat was exposed and thousands of artifacts were removed, although no great quantities of the liquor and quicksilver reported to be in the vessel's hold were found.

The excavation of *Bertrand* also marked a legal shift in treasure hunting from the century before because by the 1960s treasure hunters faced restrictions on their actions designed to protect vessels as potentially historic sites. The steamboat *Bertrand* was on federal property, which meant the excavators had to negotiate with the federal government to gain permission for the excavation. They were required to comply with the American Antiquities Act of 1906, and the treasure hunters had to contract with the federal government. The treasure hunters were allowed to excavate, and the federal government claimed that it would not be responsible for the excavation costs. Additionally, the excavation was required to have an archaeologist on site. Any profits from the sale of valuable goods were to be divided between the government and the

treasure hunters, and the government claimed ownership over any artifacts recovered that were not pre-identified as valuable. No treasure was found on *Bertrand*, but thousands of nineteenth-century artifacts were recovered from the site, to which the federal government claimed ownership. The treasure hunters went to court to try to recover the value of some of the artifacts, specifically alcohol-containing bitters in antique bottles. The U.S. Court of Claims found that the treasure hunters should be awarded around \$38,000, which reflected the possible market value of the antique bottles. The amount was only a small portion of the treasure hunters' investment and legal fees. The government, in association with local historical societies, opened a museum to display the artifacts. While the treasure hunters receive credit for initiating the search for the historic vessel, they lost their investment.

The federal protection of *Bertrand* was unique among the excavations in this study because it was on federal property. The other vessels were located on privately-owned land, so treasure hunters negotiated directly with landowners to excavate. Treasure hunters also had to comply with federal, state, and local regulations when those were in place. Federal legislation, namely the Abandoned Shipwreck Act of 1987, provides some level of protection for historic shipwrecks that meet certain criteria. Yet, federal protection and legislation has not been handled uniformly across the states over time. Within the framework of the Abandoned Shipwreck Act, the federal government transfers titles of eligible vessels to the states. Individual states are responsible for formulating the legislation and regulation in regards to shipwrecks within their borders.

States vary in their readiness to protect historically significant vessels such as steamboats.

Legislation did not protect vessels like *Missouri Packet* in Missouri or *Arabia* in Kansas from treasure hunters. Treasure hunters uncovered the steamboat *Missouri Packet* in 1987-88 utilizing destructive techniques that damaged the historically-significant vessel. The team that targeted *Missouri Packet* had a dispute among its members and divided into two separate treasure hunting groups. One team targeted *Arabia* in Kansas in 1988-89. Overall, the treasure hunters treated the steamboat *Arabia* better than *Missouri Packet*. They spent hundreds of thousands of dollars excavating the boat, did not find any treasure, but the group did recover thousands of artifacts. They recognized the historical significance of these artifacts and decided to open a museum. Currently the *Arabia* collection remains intact and on display in Kansas City, Missouri.

The destruction of *Missouri Packet* was a catalyst for Missouri state legislators to codify protective legislation for historic vessels in that state. Protective legislation has served to slow down treasure hunters but has not been altogether successful at stopping them or holding them accountable to state laws. The steamboat *Twilight* was excavated in Missouri by another faction of treasure hunters. While excavators complied with state regulations, ultimately the entire vessel was removed from its archaeological context. Since the end of the excavation, artifacts from the excavation have exchanged ownership and locations without monitoring by the state. Treasure hunters continue to search for buried steamboats in Missouri.

Elsewhere, officials in Mississippi and from the Corps of Engineers granted a permit to a group to uncover a steamboat thought to be the *Ben Sherrod*, which the group excavated in 1994 and 1995. The group claimed their interest in the vessel was for historical and educational purposes. Yet *Ben Sherrod* was not without a draw for treasure hunters for tales of specie aboard the buried boat had circulated. Additionally, the group's lawyers objected to the notion that *Ben Sherrod* might be eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. The group's permits were suspended several times due to questionable conduct, including not replacing the project archaeologist in a timely manner. The group also had technical difficulties at the site due to rising water levels. The excavation efforts ended abruptly when one of its leaders died after suffering a heart attack.

Interpretation of Findings

Financial Considerations

To date, the story of the recovery of western river steamboats has largely been narrated by treasure hunters who have focused on finding steamboats with artifacts of market value aboard. Traditionally, valuables meant precious metals or aged whiskey. When that approach to treasure hunting did not yield results, treasure hunters tried to commodify what steamboat wrecks did contain—historical artifacts. To date, only the owners of the *Arabia* Museum in Kansas City have been successful at that. The salvors of the steamboat *Arabia* failed to recover whiskey or precious metals, but instead they

invested in the conservation and display of thousands of nineteenth-century artifacts in a privately-owned museum which is, to date, a for-profit venture.

Treasure hunters spend large amounts of money with the hope that the valuables recovered will have enough market value to cover expenses and provide a profit. They have used their own funds, but they have sought investors. Costs of a treasure hunt quickly escalate—especially due to the cost of equipment and fuel. Additional expenses can also include legal fees, costs to perform environmental impact studies, and salaries of staff. Treasure hunters have also had ongoing expenditures once they decide to maintain a collection of artifacts from a steamboat wreck site. Once artifacts are recovered from a steamboat site, they must be properly stored and conserved or most will perish. The founders of *Arabia* use the anachronism “floating Walmart” to describe the steamboat because of the great quantity and variety of goods, and it was the great quantity of goods that inspired them to keep the collection together in a profit-generating museum. They have conserved thousands of waterlogged artifacts on display in Kansas City, Missouri at great expense. While they still have ongoing costs of maintaining the museum, facility rental, and preservation of artifacts, the debt of excavation was paid off through tourism not through sale of artifacts.

Private funds are not always used to fund the display of artifacts. Treasure hunters may seek public funds or additional investments to finish the projects, but these funds are not always found. Excavators of the steamboat *Twilight* did not secure funding for the maintenance of artifacts before the excavation from private or public sources, and they have been unable to find a permanent place for the display artifacts to date. There

may be continuing costs to pay for cold storage of the bitters and possible future costs for conserving and displaying the artifacts. In this case, the treasure hunters were granted a permit from the state of Missouri. Local communities, such as the city of Saint Charles, Missouri, were contacted about investing in the project, but local authorities made no commitment to the project. There may not have been a financial loss from the perspective of state and local governments, but Missouri allowed the excavation and subsequent transfer of artifacts with little oversight.

Federal, state, and local governments should proceed with caution when dealing with individuals seeking to excavate western river steamboats for profit. In the case of the *Bertrand* excavation, the federal government explicitly maintained that the government would not be responsible for the costs of excavation. However, the government also asserted ownership of all artifacts, defined as man-made objects. The government did not anticipate the thousands of artifacts that were recovered, so officials were unprepared for the costs associated with the storage, conservation, and eventual display of the items. Emergency funds were used for the initial storage and conservation, but there was also debate amongst legislators about how to fund the long-term upkeep of the artifacts. Eventually, funds were appropriated to conserve and display artifacts and build a museum. The funds did not include money to conserve and display the site's largest artifact—the hull of *Bertrand*. While the museum is to be appreciated, the outcome could have easily been something different. If the government had been unable to appropriate funds, the *Bertrand* artifacts could have deteriorated (as some did while waiting for conservation) and been lost. Even if states do not take financial responsibility

for an excavation and the conservation of artifacts, states that permit treasure hunts-- especially those without specific plans for funding conservation--are allowing the potential destruction of underwater cultural heritage.

Cultural Heritage

Treasure hunters disturb these vessels in their archaeological context, which is a form of destruction. Excavation of any sort can transform a stable environment into an unstable one. The destructive nature of excavation is why archaeologists insist on careful record keeping. While it prolongs the excavation, in the long run it is crucial for the interpretation of finds. For the most part, treasure hunters have failed to produce professional records of their excavations. Furthermore, archaeologists recognize that it is acceptable to leave stable artifacts *in situ* (in place) for future excavation, especially if funding for proper excavation and conservation, storage, and/or display of artifacts is not in place.

Treasure hunters in the western United States have had their niche on buried steamboats because archaeologists have recognized that excavating these boats to current archaeological standards would be cost prohibitive. Treasure hunters almost exclusively target steamboats buried underground. The steamboat examples discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 were buried or partially buried under dry land. Due to their location, these boats were not a hazard to river traffic and had a minimal amount of human disturbance. Treasure hunters have calculated that these vessels would be the ones most likely to contain unrecovered valuables, and this has contributed to the notion that buried

steamboats are “time capsules.” Treasure hunters have advanced this idea because it is romantic to imagine the buried steamboat untouched by human hands for decades with unclaimed riches aboard. Even when treasure is not found, the time capsule narrative is an enticing description for the vessel and the contents found. In modern times, treasure hunters have also utilized the time capsule narrative as a way to justify the recovery of historic artifacts from steamboat wreck sites. The reality does not fully support that these buried vessels have remained unchanged since sinking. Even if one considers a buried steamboat a time capsule, it is a capsule that has been intermittently opened over the decades. There are cultural and environmental factors that transform river wreck sites, including earlier salvage efforts and changing river conditions, even when the current condition of a buried vessel is stable.

Archaeologists have focused on steamboats that are either exposed or obstructing river traffic, and this focus will likely continue. Exposed vessels are more vulnerable to the elements and destruction by humans, so there is a more immediate need to study these vessels. That is not to say that archaeologists do not have an interest in western river steamboats. Scholars are interested in the artifacts recovered from both archaeological excavations and treasure hunting endeavors. Artifacts from both the *Bertrand* and *Arabia* collections have been utilized, but the collections’ usefulness is limited by the lack of archaeological methods of excavation. Evidence from treasure hunts suggests that buried steamboats may contain a wide assortment of nineteenth-century material goods in great quantities. Additional non-archaeological excavations of western river steamboats are not needed for the sake of collecting more nineteenth-

century material goods. The collections may awe the spectator with the sheer volume of artifacts and tales of treasure. However, archaeologists should promote a deeper understanding of culture and history. Given the importance of the steamboat in intracontinental migration, artifacts associated with buried western river steamboats could hold important details about life in nineteenth-century United States, such as details about the evolution of steamboat, evolution of steamboat construction, intracontinental migration, the domestic slave trade, and gender roles.

Archaeologists have already worked to record and excavate nineteenth-century steamboats, including the 1830s *Heroine* in Oklahoma, the 1880s steamboat *Montana* in Missouri, and numerous vessels in the Mississippi River. Archaeological excavation reveals important details of nineteenth century life. For example, barrels of pork found aboard *Heroine* reveals details about nineteenth-century butchery and the provisioning of army outposts. Pork barrels found on commercially-salvaged steamboat wrecks had been discarded by treasure hunters.

Legislation

Currently, the Abandoned Shipwreck Act of 1987 is the most explicit piece of federal legislation designed to protect historic shipwrecks, and this is unfortunate because it leaves so much open to legal interpretation. Even with the passage of legislation at a federal level, local legislation did not immediately follow. While some western states recognize the need for regulation, the level of protection varies from state to state. Protection of archaeological sites is not uniform throughout the United States.

Unfortunately, state legislation, where it exists, has failed to protect underwater cultural heritage that can be found on steamboats.

Before this legislation was in place, historic steamboats in the United States were vulnerable to treasure hunters. Unfortunately, the actions of treasure hunters demonstrate that steamboat wrecks remain vulnerable even under the Abandoned Shipwreck Act. The act depends upon protective legislation and policies at the state and local levels, and this has varied from state to state. Of the seven treasure hunting ventures discussed in this dissertation, four were excavated after the passage of the Abandoned Shipwreck Act. Two of these were in Missouri, and there was one example in each Kansas and Mississippi. The steamboat *Missouri Packet* was the first to be uncovered by treasure hunters in the winter following the passage of the Abandoned Shipwreck Act but before Missouri established state regulations. Treasure hunters damaged the historic vessel without federal or state oversight or consequences.

A year later, *Arabia* was excavated by treasure hunters in Kansas where, as in Missouri, local regulations did not match the intention of the federal legislation. In this case, the outcome of this excavation was different, mainly because the salvors recognized that while the steamboat had no riches, it did contain thousands of historic artifacts. The vessel was still not excavated to contemporary archaeological standards, but many of the artifacts were conserved and placed in a private museum. Neither state nor federal legislation protected these sites. The treasure hunters decided the standards of excavation. They decided how to excavate, what was historically important, and even which artifacts they wanted to conserve.

Missouri state legislators passed protective legislation specific to historic watercraft in 1991. The legislation requires minimum standards of excavation of historic shipwrecks in the state, including having a state-approved archaeologist at the site to document artifacts and requires permits for excavation. In theory, the permitting process regulates excavation and the distribution of artifacts. Treasure hunters (and others) have had to apply for permits to excavate historic shipwrecks. The excavators of the steamboat *Twilight* spent over a year preparing documents and impact studies before uncovering the steamboat in 2000. They followed state legislation, and they had the intention to display the artifacts. However, the artifacts (to date) have not been placed in a museum nor have they been studied. One of the members of the treasure hunting group has kept the collection, including parts of the hull and machinery now exposed to the elements, together on his private property. The legislation has not protected artifacts after the excavation ended.

Individuals continue to search for steamboats in Missouri. Dave Hawley, according to local reporting, has been involved in the recovery of almost a dozen steamboats. Most recently, he has focused on *Malta*. He has done test drilling on the steamboat and plans to apply for permits to excavate. Although it has yet to be seen if Missouri will allow the excavation, there is little to suggest the state would not permit the excavation. Ground-disturbing activity over the vessel has already been allowed, and as one of the owners of the *Arabia* museum, Hawley enjoys a reputation as a preservationist even though the excavations he has been involved with have not met archaeological standards.

Other states have not passed legislation specifically intended to limit the unscientific recovery of shipwrecks. Instead, state antiquities legislation or other federal legislation is used to frame the permits and excavation of shipwrecks. Shipwreck excavations are monitored by state-wide agencies or by local historic preservation offices. This was the case with the excavation of the steamboat *Ben Sherrod* in Mississippi. In addition to permission from the private landowners, excavators obtained a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers in Vicksburg City to perform the 1994 to 1997 archaeological excavation of the steamboat *Ben Sherrod* in Mississippi. The group claimed historic interest in the vessel. During excavation, the group's compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 was questioned when salvors continued work at the site without an archaeologist present, and their permit was suspended. When their permit was suspended, lawyers for the group dismissed the historic nature of the steamboat *Ben Sherrod* or a need for historic preservation of the vessel. Of all the wrecks discussed in this dissertation, the disaster aboard *Ben Sherrod* shaped American character and policy more than the others. The fire aboard the steamboat shocked the nation and moved public sentiment to support the first safety regulations regarding western river steamboats. Yet, the lawyers for the Penelore Corporation argued that protective legislation should not be applied in their excavation of the steamboat. It is unrealistic to expect salvage groups and treasure hunters to recognize a vessel as historically significant when it complicates excavation plans and drives up their expenses.

The outcome of future excavations of historic steamboats could vary greatly depending on where they are found. State responses have varied, and state legislation is not always in place. Some states have not considered a need for protective legislation. The legal protection of the Abandoned Shipwreck Act does not protect historic steamboats uniformly across the states. Buried steamboats in private property are particularly at risk.

Media

There were a limited variety of primary documents used in this research, especially regarding the nineteenth-century recovery efforts. Newspapers provided many accounts of treasure hunting expeditions from the late nineteenth century to the modern day. The media has played a large role in the transmission of the tales of treasure on buried steamboats and will likely continue to spread stories of buried treasure. From the nineteenth century to present day, newspapers published stories of rumored hordes and discovery attempts.

More recently, videos, internet, and television programming have also been used to spread treasure hunting tales. The twenty-first century has also introduced new media, including social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube). Steamboat treasure hunters have been successful at communicating their message to media in various forms. It is equally important that archaeologist work with the media and utilize it to promote proper archaeological standards among the general public because uninformed media

has the power to perpetuate myths of buried treasure and to declare treasure hunters to be the same as archaeologists and preservationists.

Recovery efforts of steamboats by treasure hunters are not archaeological excavations. An examination of the case studies in this dissertation reveals that treasure hunters have not utilized professional standards of archaeology. It starts with the motives of treasure hunters, which commercializes certain artifact categories (in these cases whiskey, quicksilver, and specie), and it continues with the lack of preparation for the long-term management of artifacts and methods of excavation. Unfortunately, treasure hunters' methods of recovery have reflected a desire for quantity of goods over quality of excavation. Treasure hunters have an agenda—to find treasure as cheaply and quickly as possible. This can mean that archaeological principles and historical interests are abandoned—presuming they were there to begin with. Damage to historic sites is caused when best practices of extraction of artifacts are not followed. The case studies in this dissertation demonstrate that the underwater cultural heritage of the western United States is vulnerable to the plans of treasure hunters, even where current protective legislation is in place.

WORKS CITED

Primary Sources

- Annual Report of the National Board of Health. 1879-1885.* Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1881. *Google Books*.
<<https://books.google.com/books?id=Z5xIAQAAIAAJ&dq=Annual%20Report%20of%20the%20National%20Board%20of%20Health.%201879-1885%20J.W.%20Vanzant&pg=PA285#v=onepage&q=Annual%20Report%20of%20the%20National%20Board%20of%20Health.%201879-1885%20J.W.%20Vanzant&f=false>>.
- Bartlett, John Russel. *Dictionary of Americanisms: A Glossary of Words and Phrases, Usually Regarded as Peculiar to the United States.* Bartlett and Welford, (1848). *Archive.org*.
- Bowen, Charles. *The American Almanac and Repository of Useful Knowledge for the Year 1834.* Boston: Charles Bowen, 1834. *Google Books*.
<https://books.google.com/books?id=k7gTAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbg_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false>.
- Carter, Hoddig. *Man and the River: The Mississippi.* Chicago, New York, San Francisco: Rand McNally & Company, 1970.
- Faulkner, William. "Red Leaves." In *Collected Stories of William Faulkner.* New York: Random House, 1950.
- Hall, James. *Notes on the Western States: Containing Descriptive Sketches Containing Descriptive Sketches of Their Soil, Climate, Resources, and Scenery.* Philadelphia: Ashmead & Co., 1838. In *Google Books*.
- Hawley, David. *The Treasures of the Steamboat Arabia.* Kansas City: Arabia Steamboat Museum, 1995.
- Hawley, Greg. *Treasure in a Cornfield: The Discovery and Excavation of the Steamboat Arabia.* Kansas City: Paddlewheel Publishing, 1998.
- Latrobe, Charles Joseph. *The Rambler in North America.* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835.
- Lloyd, James T. *Lloyd's Steamboat Directory, and Disasters on the Western Waters.* Cincinnati: J.T. Lloyd & Company, 1856.

- Lyford, William Gilman. *The Western Address Directory*. Baltimore: Jos. Robinson, 1837. In *Google Books*,
<https://books.google.com/books?id=pi25W3A1QTsC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbg_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false>.
- Marestier, Jean Baptiste. Trans. Sidney Withington. *Memoir on Steamboats of the United States of America*. Mystic, CT: The Marine Historical Association, Inc., 1957. Reprint from Paris: The Royal Press, 1824.
- Marryat, C.B. *Second Series of a Diary in America with Remarks on Its Institutions*. Philadelphia: T.K. & P.G. Collins, 1840. In *Google Books*,
<<https://books.google.com/books?id=Vji6BmTIpAMC&lpg=PA15&ots=faqRDji0uw&dq=ben%20sherrod&pg=PP5#v=onepage&q=ben%20sherrod&f=false>>.
- Marryat, Frederick. *A Diary in America with Remarks on Its Institutions*. Ed. Sydney Jackman. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1962.
- Ogden, George W. *Steamboat Gold*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1931.
- Ogden, George W. *Steamboat Gold*. Binghamton, NY: The Vail-Ballou Press, Inc., 1918, 1931.
- Russel, Charles Edward. *A-Rafting on the Mississippi'*. New York: The Century Co., 1928.
- Stuart, James. *Three Years in North America*, 2 vols. New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833.
- Smith, Stephen, ed. "Medical Provision on Railroads and Steamboats." *In American Medical Times*. Vol. IV. January 25, 1862. January-July 1862. *Google Books*.
- Stevens, Walter Barlow. *Missouri the Center State: 1821-1915*. Chicago, St. Louis: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1915. *Google Books*.
- Stuart, Joseph A. *My Roving Live: A Diary of Travels and Adventures by Sea and Land, During Peace and War*. Volume 2. Auburn, CA, 1895. In *Google Books*.
- Stuart, James. *Three Years in North America*. Vol. II. New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833. In *Google Books*.
- Trollope, Frances. *Domestic Manners of the Americans*. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2015.
- Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1959.

Twain, Mark. *Life on the Mississippi*. New York: Penguin Books, 1984.

Way, Frederick, Jr. *Way's Packet Directory, 1848-1983*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1983.

Williamson, Eileen. *Discovering a Steamboat Relic of Missouri River Trade*. Media release. US Army Corps of Engineers. April 4, 2013.
<<http://www.nwo.usace.army.mil/Media/NewsStories/tabid/1834/Article/12444/discovering-a-steamboat-relic-of-missouri-river-trade.aspx>>.

Secondary Sources

Bangs, Richard. "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country." *NBCNews.com*. September 23, 2004. <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/6058198/ns/travel-great_escapes/t/heart-heart-country/#.VPqE_mTaH88>.

Bell, Netha and Gary Scholl. *Lost & Buried Treasure of the Mississippi River*. Sioux City, IA: Quixote Press, 1991.

Brasseaux, Carl A. and Keith P. Fontenot. *Steamboats on Louisiana's Bayous: A History and Directory*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004.

Brophy, Juliet K. and Kevin Crisman. "A Taphonomic Evaluation of Three Intact Pork Barrels from the Steamboat 'Heroine' (1838)." *Historical Archaeology* 47.4 (2013): 71-85.

Cole, Bruce. "Uncovering a Sunken Treasure: A Conversation with David and Greg Hawley." *Humanities*. Vol. 25, No. 6. November/December 2004. National Endowment for the Humanities,
<<http://www.neh.gov/humanities/2004/novemberdecember/conversation/uncovering-sunken-treasure>>.

Corbin, Annalies. *The Material Culture of Steamboat Passengers: Archaeological Evidence from the Missouri River*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2000.

Corbin, Annalies. "Shifting Sands and Muddy Water: Historic Cartography and River Migration as Factors in Locating Steamboat Wrecks on the Far Upper Missouri River." *Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 1998. 86-94.

- Corbin, Annalies. "Steamboat Archaeology on the Missouri River." In *International Handbook of Underwater Archaeology*. Eds. Carol V. Ruppé and Janet F. Barstad. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2002: 193-206.
- Corbin, Annalies and Bradley A. Rodgers. *The Steamboat Montana and the Opening of the West: History, Excavation, and Architecture*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008.
- Crisman, Kevin J. "The Western River Steamboat Heroine, 1832-1838, Oklahoma, USA: Construction." *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*, 2014, 43.1: 128-150.
- Crisman, Kevin and Glenn Grieco. "The Western River Steamboat Heroine, 1832-1838, Oklahoma, USA: Propulsion Machinery." *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*, 2015, 44.1: 173-195. In Wiley Online Library, <<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/doi/10.1111/1095-9270.12079/full>>.
- Crisman, Kevin. Nina Chick, and John Davis. "Shipwrecked in Oklahoma: The Last Voyage of the Steamboat Heroine, 1838." *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* XCI, No. 3, Fall 2013: 260-295.
- Crisman, Kevin, William B. Lees, and John Davis. "The Western River Steamboat Heroine, 1832-1838, Oklahoma, USA, Excavations, Summary of Finds, and History." *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*, 2013, 42.2: 365-381.
- Curtis, K.D. "Missouri Steamboat's Treasure." *Old West*. Winter 1972.
- Donovan, Frank. *River Boats of America*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1966.
- Gibbs, Martin. "Cultural Site Formation Processes in Maritime Archaeology: Disaster Response, Salvage and Muckelroy 30 Years On." *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 35, no. 1 (2006): 4-19.
- Harmon, J. Scott. "Recovering the Steamboat Bertrand: Marine Archeologists Study the Features and Cargo of a Unique Time Capsule Buried since 1865 under 25 Feet of River Silt." *Early Man: Magazine of Modern Archeology*. Autumn 1979.
- Hugill, Peter J. *World Trade since 1431: Geography, Technology, and Capitalism*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
- Hunter, Louis C. *Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History* New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1949, 1977.

- Hurley, Gerard T. "Buried Treasure Tales in America." *Western Folklore*. Vol. 10. No. 3. July 1951: 197-216.
- Jarvis, William E. *Time Capsules: A Cultural History*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2003.
- Johnson, Walter. *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Kane, Adam I. *The Western River Steamboat*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004.
- Kotar, S.L. and J.E. Gessler. *The Steamboat Era: A History of Fulton's Folly on American Rivers, 1807-1860*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009.
- Leach, John. *Survival Psychology*. Washington Square, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1994.
- Lübken, Uwe. "Rivers and Risk in the City: The Urban Floodplain as a Contested Space." In *Urban Rivers: Remaking Rivers, Cities, and Space in Europe and North America*. Eds. Stéphane Castonguay and Matthew Evenden. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012: 130-144.
- Marshe, Carole. *Illinois' Unsolved Mysteries and their Solutions*. Peachtree City, GA: Gallopade Publishing Group, 1998.
- Muckelroy, Keith. *Maritime Archaeology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.
- Nichols, Kathy. "The Steamboat Arabia Museum." *The Public Historian*. Vol 27. No. 4. Fall 2005: 87-89.
- Owens, Harry P. *Steamboats and the Cotton Economy: River Trade in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990.
- Paskoff, Paul. *Troubled Waters: Steamboat Disasters, River Improvements, and American Public Policy, 1821-1860*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007.
- Pastor, Jay. "Wrecked Steamboats." *Lost Treasure*. June 2003.
- Rees, Mark A. and Ian W. Brown, eds. *Archaeology of Louisiana*. Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2010.

- Rubright, Robert. *The Steamboat Twilight 1865*. Steamboat Twilight Museum, 2002.
- Ruppé, Carol V. and Janet F. Barstad, eds. *International Handbook of Underwater Archaeology*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2002.
- Saltus, Jr., Allen R. and Charles E. Pearson. "Underwater Archaeology." In *Archaeology of Louisiana*. Eds. Mark A. Rees and Ian W. Brown. Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2010: 306-328.
- Schiffer, Michael B. *Formation Processes of the Archaeological Record*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987.
- Schumm, Stanley A. and Brien R. Winkley. "The Character of Large Alluvial Rivers." In *The Variability of Large Alluvial Rivers*. Eds. Stanley A. Schumm and Brien R. Winkley. New York: ASCE Press, American Society of Civil Engineers, 1994.
- Schumm, Stanley A. and Brien R. Winkley, Eds. *The Variability of Large Alluvial Rivers*. Eds. Stanley A. Schumm and Brien R. Winkley. New York: ASCE Press, American Society of Civil Engineers, 1994.
- Stewart-Abernathy, Leslie. *Ghost Boats on the Mississippi: Discovering Our Working Past*. Fayetteville: Arkansas Archeological Survey, 2002.
- Stewart-Abernathy, Leslie and Allen R. Saltus, Jr. "Why These Wrecks, Here." In *Ghost Boats on the Mississippi: Discovering Our Working Past*. Ed. Leslie C. Stewart-Abernathy. Fayetteville: Arkansas Archeological Survey, 2002.
- Switzer, Ronald R. "Preservation of Bertrand Artifacts: General Procedures." In *The Steamboat Bertrand: History Excavation, and Architecture*. Ed. Jerome E. Petsche. Washington: National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1974.
- Switzer, Ronald R. *The Steamboat Bertrand and Missouri River Commerce*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013.
- Walters, Gary Rex. "Federal and State Laws Protect Historic Shipwrecks." *Preservation Issues*. Vol. 2. No. 5. September/October 1992. *Missouri Department of Natural Resources*. <[https://dnr.mo.gov/shpo/nps-nr/PI2-5\(9-10-92\).pdf](https://dnr.mo.gov/shpo/nps-nr/PI2-5(9-10-92).pdf)>.
- Ward, I.A.K., P. Larcombe, and P. Veth. "A New Process-based Model for Wreck Site Formation." *Journal of Archaeological Science*, Volume 26, Issue 5, May 1999: 561-570.

Winkler, Carmen and Franz Neumeier. *The Steamboat Traveller*, 2nd Edition.
Steamboats.org, 2007.

Newspapers and Periodicals

Aberdeen Daily News

The Advance

Anaconda Standard

The Andrew County(Savannah, MO) Republican

Bismarck (ND) Daily Tribune

Carrol Daily Times Herald

The Chillicothe (MO) Constitution-Tribune

Christian Secretary

The Columbus (NE) Telegram

The Commercial Appeal

Commercial Bulletin and Missouri Literary Register

The Copper Country (Calumet, MI) Evening News

The Daily Cairo Bulletin

The Daily Picayune

Dallas Morning News

The Des Moines Register

Emporia (KS) Gazette

Estherville (IA) Daily News

The (Painesville, OH) Evening Telegraph

(Marshalltown, IA) Evening times-Republican

The Farmers' Cabinet

Gadsden (AL) Times

Grand Forks (ND) Daily Herald

The Guthrie (OK) Daily Leader

Helena (MT) Independent

The (Los Angeles) Herald

Heraldo de Brownsville

Hopkinsville Kentuckian

The (Anderson, SC) Intelligencer

Kansas City Daily Journal

Kansas City Star

The Kansas Semi-Weekly Capital

The Kansas City Times

Lawrence Journal-World

The Lexington (MO) Intelligencer

Liberator

Lincoln (NE) Evening Journal

The Lincoln (NE) Star

Los Angeles Herald

The Malvern (IA) Leader

Marshall County (Plymouth, IN) Republican

The Marshall Democratic-News

Memphis Daily Appeal

The Milwaukee Journal

Moberly Monitor-Index

The (Butte) Montana Standard

The Nevada Daily Mail

The New Orleans Bulletin

The New-York Evening Post

The New York Times

New-York Tribune

Omaha Daily Bee

Omaha World-Herald

The Paducah (KY) Sun

Perrysburg (OH) Journal

The Pittsburgh Gazette

Public Ledger

Reading Eagle

The (Sacramento) Record-Union

Rock Island (Ill.) Argus

The Salina Journal

San Francisco Call

Santa Fe New Mexican

Saturday Evening Post

Scientific American

Sioux City Journal

The Southeast (Cape Girardeau) Missourian

The Springfield News-Leader

St. Charles (MO) County Business Record

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

St. Louis Republic

The (Jefferson City, MO) State Journal

The Sydney Mail

(Florence, AL) Times Daily

The Times-Picayune

Topeka Weekly Capital

Warren (MN) Sheaf

The Washington Post

Waycross Journal-Herald

The Weekly (Cleveland, TN) Herald

The Wichita Daily Eagle

Williston (ND) Graphic

Court Cases and Legislation

Head and Engquist Equipment, L.L.C., Appellant v. Penelore Corporation. Appellee, No. 2003-CA-00027-COA. Court of Appeals of Mississippi. Decided February 3, 2004. *LexisNexis Academic.*

The Hendrick Hudson, Case No. 6,355, District Court, S.D. New York. October 1869. In *LexisNexis Academic*.

Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell, No. 394-72, United States Court of Claims, 208 Ct. Cl. 1002, January 9, 1976. In *LexisNexis Academic*.

U.S. Congress, House. "A Bill for the Relief of Jesse Purell and Sam Corbino." 93rd Cong., 1st Sess., H.R. 1368, Congressional Record, January 3, 1973. *ProQuest Congressional*.

Databases and Online Resources

American Periodical Series Online.

Arabia Steamboat Museum. <1856.com>.

Archaeological Institute of America. <<https://www.archaeological.org/>>.

The Bourbon Review. <www.gobourbon.com>.

California Digital Newspaper Collection, <<http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=SFC19050806.2.13#>>.

Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress.

The Des Moines Register. <DesMoinesRegister.com>.

DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge, "Steamboat Bertrand," U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, June 29, 2015, <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Desoto/wildlife_and_habitat/steamboat_bertrand.html>.

Lexington History Museum. <<http://lexhistory.org/wikilex/whiskey-trade-lexington>>.

Lost Treasure USA. <<http://www.losttreasureusa.com/>>.

The Marshall Democratic-News. <Marshallnews.com>.

Metal Detecting Ghost Towns of the East. <<http://www.metal-detecting-ghost-towns-of-the-east.com/>>.

Society for American Archaeology. <<http://www.saa.org/>>.

National Park Service. <<https://www.nps.gov/index.htm>>.

Newspapers.com. <<https://www.newspapers.com/>>.

The New York Times. NYTimes.com.

Society for Historical Archaeology. <<https://sha.org/>>.

Unpublished Primary Resources

Department of the Army. Permit CELMK-OD-FE 14-JCB-J28-118. July 26, 1994.
Historic Natchez Collection.

Guynes, Elizabeth. Letter to James Moore, July 30, 1996. Historic Natchez Collection.
Natchez, MS.

Hilliard, Elbert R. Letter to Elizabeth Guynes. July 5, 1996. Historic Natchez Collection.
Natchez, MS.

Hilliard, Elbert R. Memorandum to Arch Delrymple III, et. al. June 17, 1996. Historic
Natchez Collection, Natchez, MS.

History Detectives. "Civil War Sabotage?" Season 11. Episode 1. Public Broadcasting
Service (PBS). 2014.

Mississippi Counsel. Letter to Elizabeth Guynes. September 12, 1996. Historic Natchez
Collection, Natchez, MS.

Moore, James O. Letter to Joyce Butler. July 11, 1996. Historic Natchez Collection.
Natchez, MS.

Moore, James. Letter to Joyce Butler. August 18, 1996. Historic Natchez Collection.
Natchez, MS.

Panamerican Martime, LLC. "Work Plan for the Archaeological Investigation of an
Unidentified Watercraft Located at the *Ben Sherrod* Project Site Wilkinson
County, Mississippi." Historic Natchez Collection, Natchez, MS.

"Penelore Corp." *Experian Powered Business Reports*. Experian Information Solutions,
Inc., December 1, 1994. LexisNexis Academic.

Penelore Corporation, "Summary of Excavation Work in 1994." Historic Natchez Collection. Natchez, MS.

Penelore Corporation, "Summary of Excavation Work in 1995." Historic Natchez Collection. Natchez, MS.

Penelore Corporation. "Excavation Plan for 1996." Historic Natchez Collection. Natchez, MS.

Sager, Becca. Facebook message to Kristen Vogel. February 6, 2015.

Vogel, Kristen and Laura Gongaware. "Protecting Against Destruction: The Failed Salvage Attempt of a Nineteenth-Century Steamboat and the Missouri State Legislation that Followed." Paper presented at Society for American Archaeology 75th Anniversary Meeting, St. Louis, MO, April 2010.

Wright, Gary W. Letter to James O. Moore. June 13, 1996. Historic Natchez Collection. Natchez, MS.