

**HISTORIC
NAMES
AND PLACES
ON THE LOWER
MISSISSIPPI
RIVER**

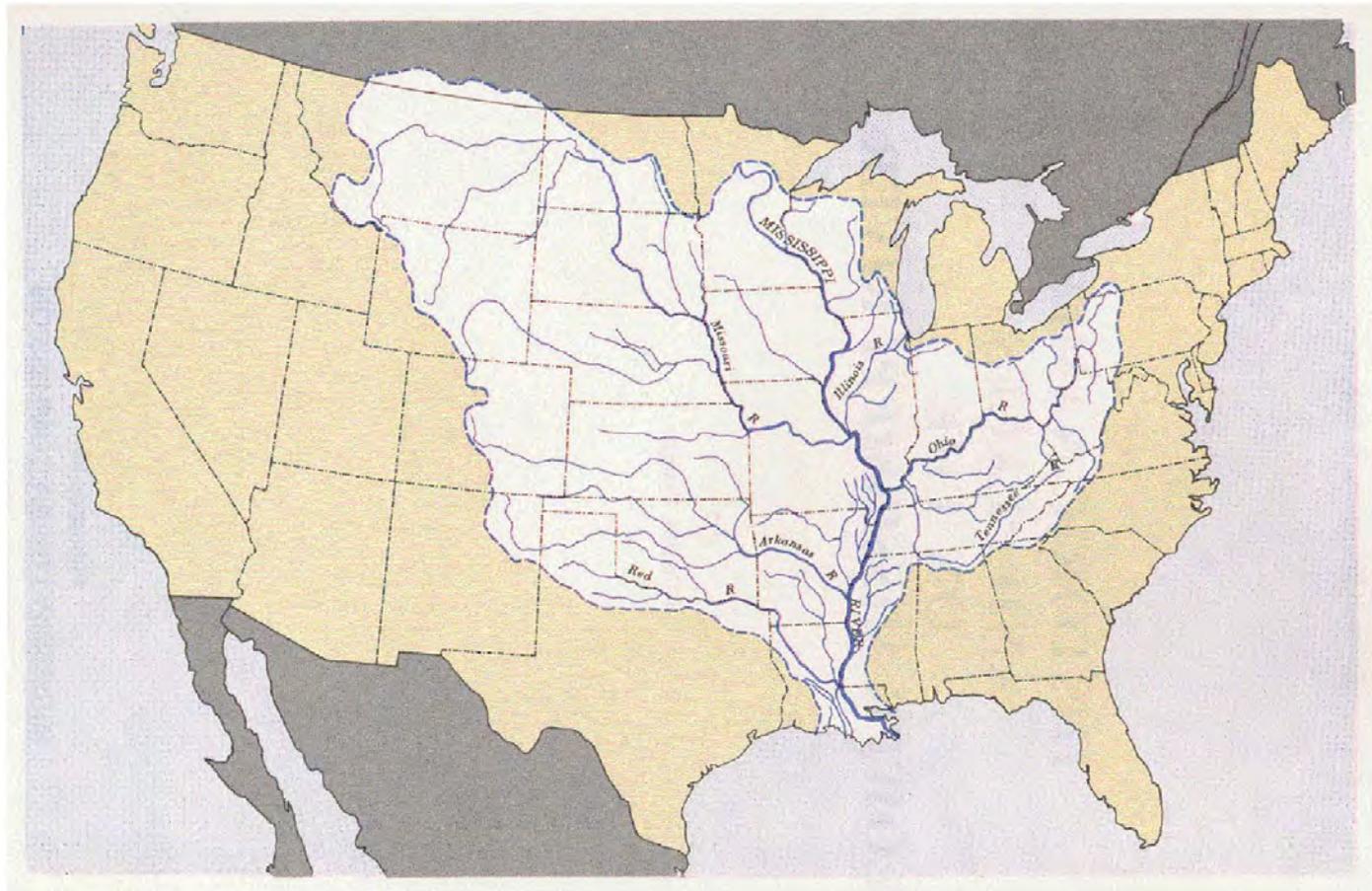


DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
Corps of Engineers, U. S. Army

**HISTORIC NAMES
AND PLACES
ON THE
LOWER MISSISSIPPI RIVER**

by
Marion Bragg

Published by
MISSISSIPPI RIVER COMMISSION
Vicksburg, Mississippi
1977



MISSISSIPPI RIVER DRAINAGE BASIN. *The Mississippi River drains an area of 1.25 million square miles in 31 states and two Canadian provinces. All of the water collected in this vast drainage basin, the fourth largest in the world, flows through the narrow outlet known as the Lower Mississippi, which begins at the confluence of the Ohio and Middle Mississippi and ends at the Gulf of Mexico.*

FOREWORD

The text of this publication is keyed to navigation maps published annually by the Mississippi River Commission, Corps of Engineers, U. S. Army. All of the physical features, historical incidents, and flood control and navigation works discussed herein are identified by "river mile" numbers, and the book is designed to serve as a historical supplement to the map book.

The navigation map book, entitled "FLOOD CONTROL AND NAVIGATION MAPS OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER, CAIRO, ILLINOIS, TO THE GULF OF MEXICO," is revised annually to include the latest information from surveys made by the Corps of Engineers and other Federal and State agencies. The maps show the location of navigation lights, channel lines, shorelines, islands, bars, towheads, revetments, dikes, docks, towns, and harbor installations. They are essential for safe navigation on the Lower Mississippi, and pleasure boaters will find them invaluable for planning a trip down the great river.

Copies of the navigation map book may be purchased from the Mississippi River Commission at Vicksburg, Mississippi, or from the District Offices of the Army Corps of Engineers in St. Louis, Memphis, Vicksburg, and New Orleans.

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Note: River mile figures are based on a 1962 survey of the Lower Mississippi. A more recent survey confirmed the accuracy of the 1962 measurements, and the figures used above are those that appear on current navigation maps published by the Corps of Engineers.

LOWER MISSISSIPPI BEGINS

Mile 953.8 AHP, Map 1

The Lower Mississippi River begins just below Cairo Point, Illinois. Here the Middle Mississippi and the Ohio River join each other, take a new name, and begin a long journey to the Gulf of Mexico. By air the distance from Cairo Point to the Gulf is only 600 miles, but the river's winding, twisting course is more than 950 miles long.

Distances on the Lower Mississippi are measured from the Head of Passes. The Passes consist of several short, narrow channels through which the river discharges its waters into the Gulf. The point where the river divides into Passes is located about 95 miles below New Orleans, Louisiana. It is designated on river maps as Mile 0.0, and is called the Head of Passes.

Since the confluence of the Middle Mississippi and Ohio occurs 953.8 river miles above Mile 0.0, or above the Head of Passes, the Lower Mississippi is said to begin at "Mile 953.8 Above Head of Passes," or at "Mile 953.8 AHP."

No one knows how long men have been pitting their wits and their frail vessels against the mighty Mississippi. There is archaeological evidence that human life and culture existed in the Lower Mississippi region at least 10,000 years before the birth of Christ. Prehistoric man and the Indians who later inhabited the Lower Mississippi Valley had no impact on the natural environment in which they lived. The European explorers, missionaries, and early colonists who were in the Valley at brief intervals over a period of almost three centuries also left the virgin wilderness and the great river virtually untouched.

When the vigorous young American nation acquired undisputed possession of the Lower Mississippi in 1803, American settlers were eager to develop the rich agricultural lands and vast forests that bordered the river. They soon discovered that the Mississippi was both a blessing and a curse. The river enriched their lands, provided transportation for their products, and gave them easy access to their own and other nations. On the other hand, it periodically destroyed their homes, washed away their crops, and on occasion gobbled up their villages and towns. For more than a century individual landowners and local governments fought a losing battle against the river's ravages.

In 1927 the greatest flood of record devastated the Lower Mississippi Valley. Hundreds of lives were lost, millions of dollars worth of property was destroyed, and there was widespread suffering and hardship. The spectacular superflood captured the shocked attention of the whole nation. Congress responded by acknowledging that the Mississippi River was a national problem, not a local one, and the Federal government joined the unequal contest between man and the river. For the first time a comprehensive flood-control plan was made for the protection of the whole Lower Mississippi Valley. Known as the Mississippi River and Tributaries Project, or the MR&T Project, the flood-control plan includes levees, floodways, tributary basin improvements, and channel improvements.

The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers was given the responsibility for constructing and maintaining the flood-control works. As funds became available, various phases of the

plan were pushed to completion. Still unfinished after half a century of work, the MR&T Project has nevertheless served to protect the six million inhabitants of the Lower Mississippi Valley from several major floods since its adoption.

The Corps of Engineers was also given the task of maintaining a navigation channel in the Lower Mississippi River. Before the Corps began this work, river traffic was often halted for months during low water periods. At low water, the Mississippi in its natural state consists of deep pools, shallow crossings, and divided channels. With corrective dredging, dikes and other works, the Corps has eliminated many of the low water navigation problems. The goal of a low water channel 300 feet wide and 9 feet deep is not always attained, but traffic is rarely halted for more than a few hours at a time.

Commercial traffic on the Lower Mississippi is heavier today than it has ever been in the past. Steamboats carried a limited amount of cargo, but the powerful modern diesel towboat can push 30 or more large barges with relative ease and efficiency. Petroleum products, coal, grain, iron, steel, sand and gravel, and paper are among the products that can be moved in bulk by barge. River towboats handled more than 300 million tons of cargo in 1974 and tonnage figures continue to increase. New concepts of containerization and intermodal transportation are being developed, and industrialization is increasing rapidly along the banks of the river.



HEAD OF THE LOWER MISSISSIPPI. In the above photograph, the Middle Mississippi River is on the left; the Ohio is on the right; and Cairo Point, the southernmost tip of Illinois, lies between the two rivers. Just below the Point, the Lower Mississippi begins its long journey to the Gulf of Mexico. The head of the Lower Mississippi lies 953.8 river miles above its foot, at the Head of Passes, where it divides into several short channels before emptying into the Gulf.

In recent years, there has also been a great increase in the number of pleasure craft to be found on the Mississippi. They vary from luxurious yachts and expensive houseboats to crude rafts and small canoes. Boats made of ferro-cement are not uncommon, and one party made the voyage in a genuine Chinese junk. Back in 1828 an observer commented that "no craft is so whimsical or outlandish in shape that it cannot be seen lying on shore or floating somewhere on the Lower Mississippi." The observation is still valid. People will tackle the mighty Mississippi in anything that will float.

Pleasure boaters who make the voyage from Cairo Point to New Orleans are often surprised to find it a unique experience that differs drastically from other pleasure cruises. Up-to-date navigation charts, navigation aids, and the observance of basic boating safety rules reduce the hazards, but few voyages on the Lower Mississippi are without some moments of real excitement or high drama.

One youngster who made the river voyage on a raft once summed up the experience briefly but eloquently. "Well, we made it," he said, "and I guess there's more to me than I thought there was."

The boy's remark highlighted one of the chief attractions of river voyages. The river is real, and its problems are real. The pleasure boater who makes the voyage safely can enjoy a sense of achievement rarely experienced in connection with other kinds of recreational activities.

BIRDS POINT, MISSOURI

*Mile 953.0, Map 1
Right bank, descending*

In 1798, Abram Bird of Virginia cleared a patch of forest on the west bank of the Lower Mississippi and built a warehouse where flatboatmen could obtain supplies needed for their long trip to the New Orleans markets.

The Bird family still owned the property when the Civil War broke out in 1861. Officially, Missouri was a Union state but many of its citizens were southern sympathizers. When General U. S. Grant was assembling his Union army at Cairo Point to begin a campaign to gain control of the Lower Mississippi River, the head of the Bird family was arrested on the suspicion of harboring "secessionist" views. The ferryboat he owned was confiscated, and his land became a camping ground for thousands of Union soldiers.

The strategic importance of the Lower Mississippi was obvious to Union authorities, if not to the Confederacy. While General Grant was patiently assembling his large army to begin the river campaign, the attention of the Confederate government authorities was turned to other areas. Fortunately for the untrained and inexperienced Federal soldiers, they had to contend only with hit-and-run raids by small groups of rebel cavalry as they waited for the campaign to begin in earnest.

Birds Point was the scene of a few of these early, hot little skirmishes. In one of the brief engagements, a Union army officer reported that he and his squad of 25 cavalymen had wandered too far from camp and had been attacked by "more than 100 rebels." After killing eight or ten of the enemy, he and his men retreated, the Union officer said. A Confederate officer, reporting the same engagement, said that he had attacked a large body of Union cavalry with only 34 men. He was happy to report that his little group had suffered only one minor casualty. One of his men, a poor rider, had fallen off a horse and broken his arm.

The reports of this engagement were typical of much of the reporting that was done during the war. Each side usually overestimated the enemy forces, underestimated his own casualties, or claimed a "glorious victory" from an inconclusive skirmish.

Birds Point-New Madrid Floodway:

Floodways are one of the essential elements of the comprehensive flood-control plan for the Lower Mississippi Valley. The Birds Point-New Madrid Floodway was completed in 1933, and is designed to provide safe passage for excessive flood flows in the Cairo area during major floods.



BIRDS POINT-NEW MADRID FLOODWAY. The Birds Point-New Madrid Floodway is located on the Missouri side of the Lower Mississippi, below Cairo Point, Illinois. Through the floodway, water can be diverted from the main channel of the river at a maximum rate of about 550,000 cubic feet per second. During a major flood in 1937 use of the floodway prevented levees and floodwalls in and around Cairo, Illinois, from being overtopped.

The head of the Floodway is at Birds Point, and it ends near New Madrid, Missouri. When put in operation, "fuse plug" sections of the levee at Birds Point are artificially breached, and the water flows down between the riverfront levee on the Missouri shore and a setback levee located about 5 miles to the west. The water returns to the Lower Mississippi just above New Madrid, where the volume of the flow does not pose a threat to the integrity of the mainline levee system.

The Birds Point-New Madrid Floodway was used during a major flood in 1937, but has not been put in operation since that time.

Mainline levee system:

The massive mainline levee system on the Lower Mississippi is the most visible

and perhaps the most impressive of all the flood-control works included in the MR&T Project.

On the west bank of the river, the levee line extends from a point some miles above Birds Point to the mouth of the St. Francis River. Another line begins at Helena, Arkansas, and protects the front of the White River Basin. From Pine Bluff, Arkansas, the west bank levee extends more than 650 miles downriver ending at the little town of Venice, Louisiana, less than 11 miles above the Head of Passes. This is probably the longest continuous levee line in the world.

On the east bank of the river, bluffs alternate with mainline levees to provide protection from major floods.

A total of about 3,772 miles of levees, floodwalls, and control structures are included in the MR&T Project. After they are constructed by the Federal government, they are turned over to local interests for ordinary maintenance. The Corps of Engineers offers assistance as needed during major flood fights.

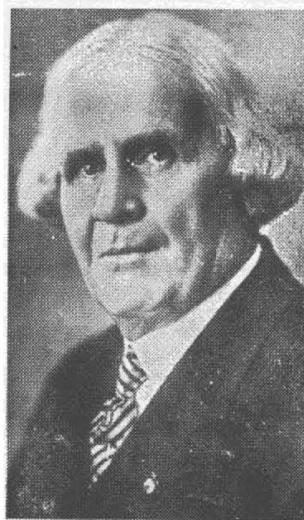
River voyagers will find that the mainline levees are often beyond their range of vision from the navigation channel. Levees are seldom built directly on the river bank, for it is the river's flood plain and not the stream itself which is leveed.

QUAKER OATS LIGHT

*Mile 952.6 AHP, Map 1
Left bank, descending*

On the Lower Mississippi, navigation lights are placed and maintained by the U. S. Coast Guard. Each light has a Mile Board on the frame that supports it, which enables boatmen to check their location by referring to the river mile locations shown on the navigation charts.

In 1882, Mark Twain returned to the river after a long absence, and remarked jokingly that the government had turned the Mississippi into "a sort of two thousand mile torchlight procession." The government, he said, had taken all the romance out of piloting. The navigation lights had also taken a lot of the danger out of piloting, Twain admitted, and had made the pilot's life a great deal easier and safer than when he had been a cub pilot on the Lower Mississippi in 1858.



CAPTAIN CALVIN L. BLAZIER. Quaker Oats Light was named for Calvin L. Blazier, a popular steamboat captain who wore his hair in the old Quaker style. His friends said he resembled the famous trade mark of the Quaker Oats Company. (Photo Courtesy of the WATERWAYS JOURNAL.)

Lights are usually named for geographical locations but sometimes for persons or for incidents in the river's history. Quaker Oats Light was named for one of the most popular pilots on the river. The steamboat captain's real name was Calvin L. Blazier, but he wore his hair in the old Quaker style and his colleagues called him "Cap'n Quaker Oats," because he so closely resembled the famous trademark of the Quaker Oats Company.

The location of all navigation lights appears on current navigation charts. Since the positions of the lights change from time to time, pleasure boaters should be sure they have up-to-date navigation charts when they plan their voyages down the Lower Mississippi.

WICKLIFFE, KENTUCKY

*Mile 951.7 AHP, Map 1
Left bank, descending*

The small town of Wickliffe is named for a Kentucky family that produced three State governors. Charles A. Wickliffe, one of Kentucky's own early governors, was a haughty, sharp-tongued gentleman whose undeniable administrative talent was greatly admired by his faithful constituents. His high-handed ways failed to impress Kentuckians, however, and they usually referred to him ironically as "the Duke."

There are some interesting prehistoric mounds in the Wickliffe area. They have been partially excavated and are open to the public, for a fee. In spite of the commercialized atmosphere, the excavation is fascinating and is well worth seeing. The owners call it the Ancient Buried City and it is located on the edge of the town of Wickliffe.

There is a launching ramp for small boats at Wickliffe, but no marina for pleasure boats. Fuel and supplies can be obtained on an emergency basis.

Wickliffe Revetment:

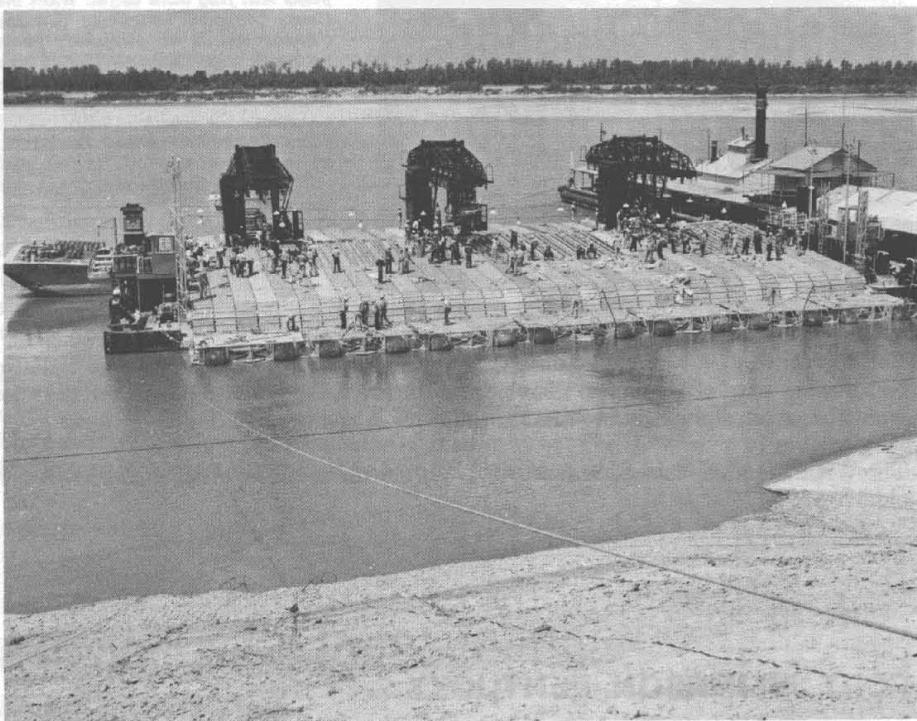
Revetments are protective works designed to retard or halt the attack of currents against the banks of the river. They help preserve waterfronts, levee systems, and other flood control and navigation works. The Wickliffe Revetment was constructed in 1951 and was extended in 1968.

There are more than 600 miles of revetment work along the Lower Mississippi River. They consist of articulated concrete mattresses, laid under the water, with stone or riprap paving above the waterline. A bank-grading unit prepares the river's banks for the protective work, and a mat-sinking unit assembles the mattress on the spot and lays it in the water.

On the Lower Mississippi, where almost everything is on a grand scale, erosion problems naturally assume gigantic proportions. It took more than half a century of experimentation for the Army Corps of Engineers to develop the methods and the

machinery used today to produce the articulated concrete mats that stabilize the river's caving banks.

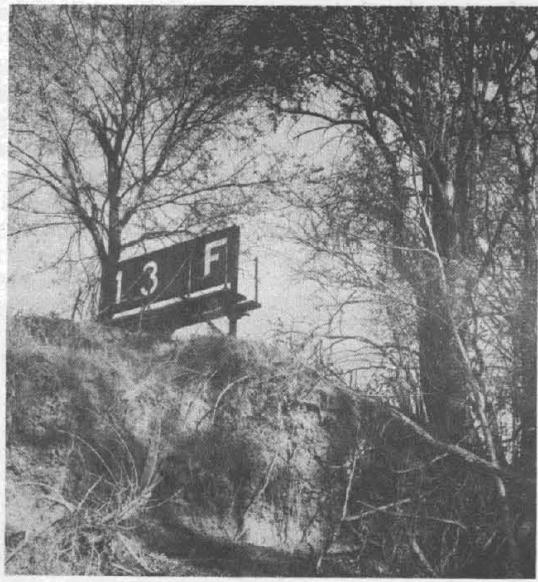
It has been estimated that when the river attacks an unprotected bank it can erode as much as 600 feet of good earth in a year's time. Even a moderate attack by river currents can eat up 30 to 70 feet of river bank annually. The soil that disappears as the banks cave away soon reappears as sand and silt temporarily suspended in the water. When the load becomes too heavy, the river drops it, and it forms sandbars, towheads, or islands. In the past, small towns have been totally destroyed by the river.



MAT-SINKING UNIT AT WORK. The mat-sinking unit shown in the above photo is in the process of laying an articulated concrete mattress designed to stabilize the river bank at the work site. The mattress, which consists of huge concrete blocks, is assembled at the site and lowered into place from a barge designed especially for this work. The fleet maintained and operated by the Army Corps of Engineers contains several of these mat-sinking barges.

Wickliffe Gage and Bulletin Board:

The establishment of permanent gages to measure the water stages on the Lower Mississippi was authorized by Congress in 1871. Today the Corps of Engineers maintains 32 gages on the river. From gage readings that have now been recorded for more than a century, useful data are obtained for flood control and navigation improvement work on the river.



RIVER BULLETIN BOARD. Bulletin boards along the river banks keep navigators informed about stages of the water. They are maintained by the Corps of Engineers, and may seem to be an anachronism in the electronic age, when most boats are equipped with fathometers, radar, and radio communications systems, but river pilots still find them useful. When the Corps proposed tentatively that the bulletin boards be abolished, pilots protested vigorously, so the Corps continues to maintain them for the convenience of the towboat operators. In the photograph, a bulletin board located above Lake Providence, Louisiana, shows a river stage of "13 feet, and falling" at the time the photograph was taken.

For the convenience of navigators, daily river stages are posted on large bulletin boards near some of the gages. Visible from the river, the bulletin boards tell the pilot what the water stage is, and whether the river is rising or falling.

The Wickliffe gage was established in 1932, but many of the other gages are much older.

FORT JEFFERSON, KENTUCKY

*Mile 950.0 AHP, Map 2
Left bank, descending*

Fort Jefferson was an American outpost during the Revolutionary War. It failed to accomplish the purpose for which it was established and was abandoned little more than a year after it was completed.

When the fort was built in 1780, the area in which it was located was Chickasaw territory. The Chickasaws had always favored the British over all the other contenders for control of the Lower Mississippi Valley. Thomas Jefferson, then the governor of Virginia, thought that the Chickasaws were aiding the British in their efforts to quell the American rebellion, and he suggested to General George Rogers Clark that a fortification just below the mouth of the Ohio would be useful as a base from which Indian allies could be recruited to help annihilate the troublesome Chickasaws.

General Clark, who had just won a victory over the British at Vincennes, was glad to cooperate in Jefferson's plan to drive the Chickasaws out of what is now western Kentucky. With the Revolution drawing to a close, Clark was planning a real estate speculation of his own that he hoped would make him a rich man. A fort on the river below the mouth of the Ohio might help attract settlers to a site where he expected to establish a city he would call Clarksville.

The little fort, named for Jefferson, was completed in April, 1780. Leaving a garrison of about 100 soldiers at the post, General Clark departed with the remainder of his army to pursue his operations against the British and the Indians.

As Clark had expected, settlers moved in around the fort almost immediately. Word of the American activities had already reached the Chickasaw villages, however, and in the summer of 1780 the Chickasaw warriors launched a vigorous attack against the post. All of the settlers were quickly driven inside the stockade, where they were trapped, along with the soldiers, as the Indians besieged Fort Jefferson for almost a year.

Supplies were giving out and total disaster threatened, but General Clark came to the rescue with reinforcements and the Chickasaws prudently withdrew. The post, having failed in its purpose, was abandoned and Fort Jefferson fell into ruins and disappeared. The settlers left with the soldiers, and moved to more thickly populated areas where life was not so hazardous.

The Chickasaw nation retained possession of the western part of what is now Kentucky until after the end of the Revolution. Eventually treaties and land purchases gave the United States undisputed possession of the territory. The Chickasaws finally yielded to the constant pressure and moved west of the Mississippi in 1837.

NORFOLK LANDING, MISSOURI

*Mile 949.0 AHP, Map 2
Right bank, descending*

General U. S. Grant established his headquarters at Cairo, Illinois, on September 4, 1861. Early in November, he received a report that Confederate troops were marching toward the old steamboat landing of Norfolk, Missouri, and planned to take possession of the place. The Federal general requested the U. S. Naval forces to send a gunboat down to Norfolk to investigate.

Two of the Navy's makeshift wooden war vessels, the *Conestoga* and the *Lexington*, departed from Cairo and eased cautiously down the river toward Norfolk. Both of the boats were old river steamers that had been hastily converted for service as gunboats on the Mississippi.

As the gunboats passed Norfolk Landing, the Navy commanders saw no signs of

activity, but just below Norfolk a rebel force was spotted on the river bank. The Union force counted 16 pieces of field artillery and one large gun. The two gunboats turned rapidly and steamed back up the river toward Cairo, pursued for a short distance by a rebel detachment on the Missouri shore. When the presence of the enemy below Norfolk was reported to General Grant, he ordered a regiment of soldiers to go down and take possession of the place and occupy it. By the time the Federal force reached Norfolk, the Confederates had quietly disappeared.

Later in the war, Norfolk was again brought to General Grant's attention. When about 400 tons of military supplies and almost three million dollars of army payroll money failed to appear at his headquarters in the recently captured city of Vicksburg, the General learned that the boat transporting the money and supplies had burned at Norfolk Landing, Missouri.

A court of inquiry was held, and the blame for the loss of the steamer *Ruth* was declared to rest with a rebel incendiary who had deliberately set fire to the boat, knowing that it was carrying government property. The firing of the *Ruth* was part of a general plan of the Confederates to destroy water transportation and cripple the movement of the Union armies, the court said.

ISLAND NO. 1

Mile 948.8 AHP, Map 2
Left bank, descending

The first book of navigation charts covering the Lower Mississippi was published in 1801, by a man with the improbable name of Zadok Cramer. Cramer's charts were crude, but his text was useful and he performed a unique service when he ignored the names of most of the islands in the river and gave them numbers. Until that time, some of the islands had had several names and it was always difficult for a flatboatman to obtain and remember useful information about reaches of the river that contained no distinguishing characteristics except an island or two. The island numbers made it easier to pinpoint and identify the difficult passages on the river.

Cramer told the navigators that Island No. 1 was about 1 mile long and lay close to the left shore. He warned them that the channel behind it was not navigable and told them to take the channel to the right, or west, of the island at all stages of the water.

Cramer's book, *The Navigator*, proved to be so useful and so popular that twelve editions of it were published, often with revisions that informed the boatmen about the new river towns that were springing up and about political events such as the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and the West Florida rebellion a few years later. Cramer was followed by many imitators who either copied him brazenly or leaned heavily on his book for information.

Many of the islands that Cramer numbered in 1801 have now joined a shoreline, and

some have completely disappeared. Island No. 1 has become a part of the Kentucky mainland.

Island No. 1 Dike Fields:

Stone dikes constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers extend from Mile 948.6 AHP to Mile 944.1 AHP, in the vicinity of Island No. 1. This is the first of more than 100 dike fields on the Lower Mississippi.

The dikes are designed to deflect the river's currents, to close up old chutes, and to keep the navigation channel in a desirable alignment. They have proved to be very effective. The dikes are made of pilings and/or riprap stone. When the water is high, the crown of a dike may not be visible, but may be lurking just below the surface of the water, where it could do a great deal of damage to the hull of a boat. Currents and eddies around the dikes can also be troublesome for very small craft.

Pleasure boaters particularly should check navigation charts carefully for the location of all the dike fields. No attempt to run over the top of a dike should be made, even when the water is high, for this could lead to damage to either the dike itself or the boat involved.

PUNTNEY LIGHT

*Mile 943.6 AHP, Map 2
Left bank, descending*

Puntney Light is named for an early settler who operated a woodyard on the left bank of the river.

Early steamboats, which were small vessels, needed as much space as possible for cargo and passengers. They seldom carried more fuel than could be consumed in 12 hours. Twice every 24 hours the boats would pull up to an island or river bank, and deckhands would be sent ashore to cut wood. Deck passengers often helped load the fuel on the boat, receiving a reduction in the price of their passage as a reward for the service.

When steamboats became more numerous on the Lower Mississippi, many large, permanent woodyards were established by landowners like Puntney, who found it a good source of ready cash. With the wood already cut and neatly stacked, loading was quicker and the boat could hustle on its way without undue delay. Sometimes a sort of "mid-stream service" was provided, in the form of a flatboat already loaded with wood. The steamboat would tie on to the flatboat and take it upstream, unloading without stopping its engines or going to the bank. When the cordwood was loaded, the flatboat could be cut loose to drift back down to the woodyard.

Wood was more readily available and cheaper than coal, and most of the steamboats on the Lower Mississippi used it for fuel.

ISLANDS NO. 2, NO. 3, AND NO. 4

*Mile 940.5 AHP, Map 2
Right bank, descending*

When *THE NAVIGATOR* was published in 1801, Zadok Cramer noted that these three islands were lying very close to the left bank of the river. Boatmen were advised to take the channel to the right of all three islands, even at high water stages.

As late as 1890, a navigation map published by the Mississippi River Commission showed the three islands still hugging the left shore, almost completely attached to the State of Kentucky. After the flood of 1927, the river abandoned its old channel, which early boatmen had called Lucas Bend, and cut the islands away from the Kentucky shore.

In spite of the new geographical location on the Missouri side of the river, Islands No. 2, No. 3, and No. 4 remained officially a part of Kentucky. Had the river eaten them away over a long period of time, depositing them far down the river bit by bit, Kentucky would have lost them, of course, but courts have ruled that when "a sudden avulsion" takes place, the land that the river cuts off remains the property of the state from which it was severed by the sudden change.

When land is built up in a new location over a long period of time, however, the process is called "accretion" and the new real estate becomes a gift from the river to the lucky landowner to whose property it attaches itself.

The bend around the islands that the river abandoned after 1927 has been named for J. B. C. Lucas, who had been a judge and acting-governor of the Missouri Territory before it became a state. Lucas died in St. Louis in 1842, leaving his heirs a large estate that included several plantations on the west bank of the Mississippi in the vicinity of the bend that bore his name.

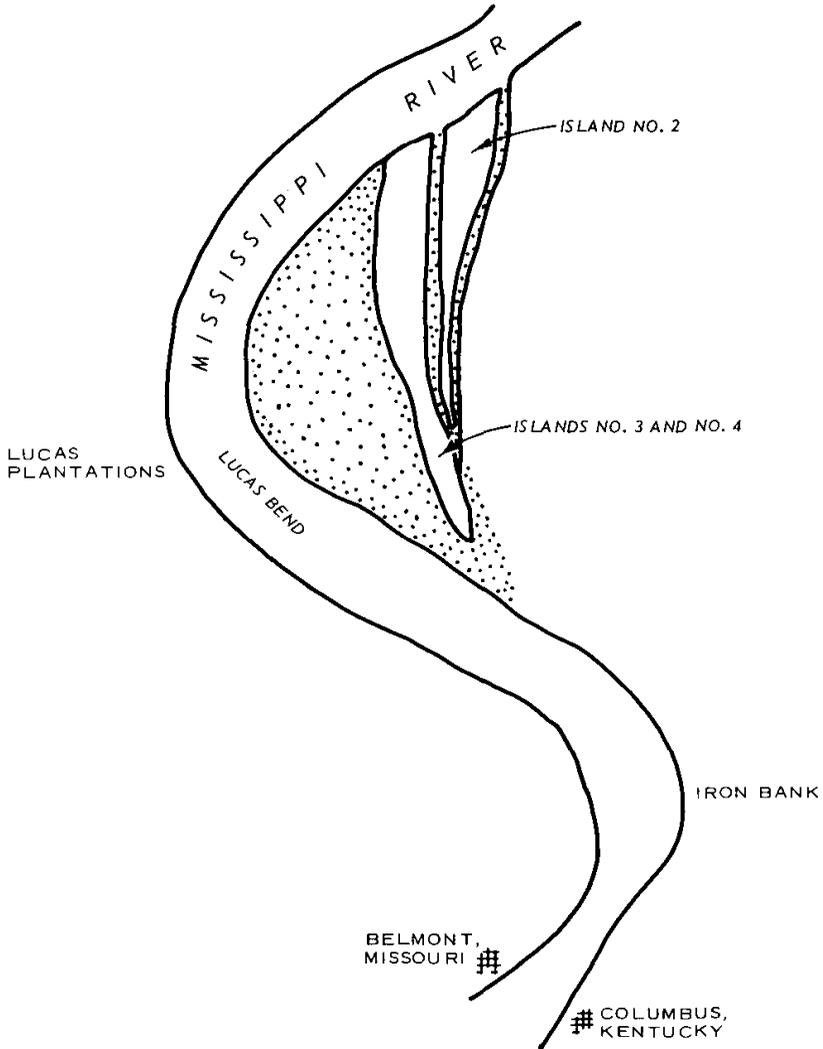
During the Civil War, Lucas Bend was still a part of the main channel of the Lower Mississippi, and on January 11, 1862, was the scene of an abortive little skirmish between the naval forces of the Union and the Confederacy. The two Union gunboats involved were not exactly looking for the enemy when they came upon three Confederate vessels in the bend and they distinguished themselves chiefly by the speed with which they turned and ran back up the river. A few wild shots were fired, but the Confederates were also busy turning and backing, so little damage was done to either side.

Captain William D. Porter, known to his colleagues as "Dirty Bill," was in command of the *U.S.S. Essex*, and as soon as he returned to Cairo he reported the incident to the fleet commander, Flag Officer Andrew Foote. Porter said solemnly that two of his officers had behaved with such gallantry that he wanted them promoted immediately.

Foote had already received a report of the engagement from a less interested party, and he replied rather sharply to Captain Porter. It was not the policy of the U. S. Navy to promote officers engaged in routine duty on a retreating vessel, Foote said. Since the *Essex* had fled before it was in range of the enemy's guns, how could there have been

any “gallantry” involved, he asked Porter. Dirty Bill grumbled and sulked, and did not reply.

Lucas Bend is now a lake with an area of about 287 acres. Like most of the old river bed lakes, it has an abundant population of fish and is a favorite recreation spot for local people.



(From 1890 MRC Map)

LUCAS BEND IN 1890. When the above map was made in 1890, Islands No. 2, No. 3, and No. 4 appeared to be attaching themselves to the Kentucky shore. After the flood of 1927 the river changed its course and left the islands on the Missouri side of the river. Lucas Bend soon silted up at both ends and became a lake.

COLUMBUS, KENTUCKY

*Mile 937.2 AHP, Map 3
Left bank, descending*

At the end of the Revolutionary War, a grateful but nearly insolvent new nation paid some of its heroes for their services with land warrants instead of hard cash. Soldiers who had served with General George Rogers Clark had seen the area now known as western Kentucky, and they were glad to accept grants of land on the east bank of the Mississippi River.

Development in western Kentucky was slower than the veterans had expected it to be. The land warrants were issued in 1784, but the Indian claims to the territory had not yet been extinguished and most would-be settlers still remembered the Chicksaw's attack on Fort Jefferson some years earlier.

In 1812, the British burned Washington, D. C., and the owners of the lands along the Kentucky bluffs seized what they must have thought was a heaven-sent opportunity to increase the value of their holdings. An engineer was hired, a survey was made, and a beautiful and elaborate plan was drawn up on paper for a new national capital. It was to be called Columbus, and its central location in the "western" territory and its proximity to the main transportation artery of the interior were extolled as virtues that Washington, D. C. had never possessed and would never be able to acquire.

A few settlers were attracted by the relentless publicity of the town's promoters, and a straggling village began to grow up at the foot of the bluff. The President and Congress obstinately continued to carry on the nation's business at the same old stand, however, and all the plans came to naught. By 1856 Columbus considered itself lucky to have a few warehouses and stores and a population of about 700.

When the Civil War began in 1861, Kentucky refused to join the Confederacy and declared itself to be neutral. This did not prevent many of the State's citizens from sympathizing with the southern cause, and about 35,000 of them joined the Confederate Army. About twice that number joined the Union forces.

While Kentuckians were making up their minds and joining one side or the other, high ranking officials of both governments were eyeing the town of Columbus as a strategic point for the control of the Lower Mississippi. Sentiment there seemed to be predominantly southern. On August 1, 1861, a Union steamer, the *Cheney*, was seized by a handful of Confederates when it docked at Columbus, and most of the townspeople turned out to cheer the event. About a month later, a Union gunboat cruised past the town, and the commander sent the following plaintive query to his fleet commander:

"At Columbus the rebels fly the secession flag from the top of a lofty pole in the center of the village, in defiance of our gunboats. What shall I do with Columbus?"

The Confederate general, Leonidas K. Polk, knew what to do with Columbus. Without so much as a gesture in the direction of the Kentucky legislature, which had declared

the State neutral, he marched in and took possession of it. Soon the bluff was bristling with guns, and the river in front of the town was obstructed with a huge chain that was attached to the bluff with a big sea anchor and to the opposite shore with a large capstan.

President Abraham Lincoln was well aware of the importance of the Lower Mississippi Valley and had urged more than once that the town of Columbus ought not to be allowed to fall into Confederate hands but should be occupied by Union forces as quickly as possible.

When the commander of the Union fleet sent a routine request for 3,000 shells to Washington, mentioning casually that he might take the Union boats down to Columbus, Kentucky, he was astounded to receive a prompt shipment of 11,400 mortar shells.

"There must have been some misunderstanding," Flag Officer Foote wired the Secretary of Navy in Washington. The reply came from the President's office, and Foote was informed that the additional shells had been sent to him by direct order of President Lincoln. If the Union Navy was going down to Columbus, an aide wrote, the President wanted to be absolutely certain that it had sufficient ammunition to take the place.

"The President hopes," the letter concluded dryly, *"that your gunboats will treat the rebels to a refreshing shower of sulphur and brimstone and rain them out."*

Foote ignored the President's none-too-subtle prodding, and it was General U. S. Grant who finally made a move in the right direction. By the time Grant's force arrived in front of the town, however, it was already strongly fortified, and he prudently turned his attention to the other side of the river.

Columbus eventually fell into Union hands by default. Grant's later capture of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson outflanked the position and rendered the Columbus fortifications useless. Polk took most of his guns and all of his men down to establish a new position at Island No. 10 near New Madrid, Missouri.

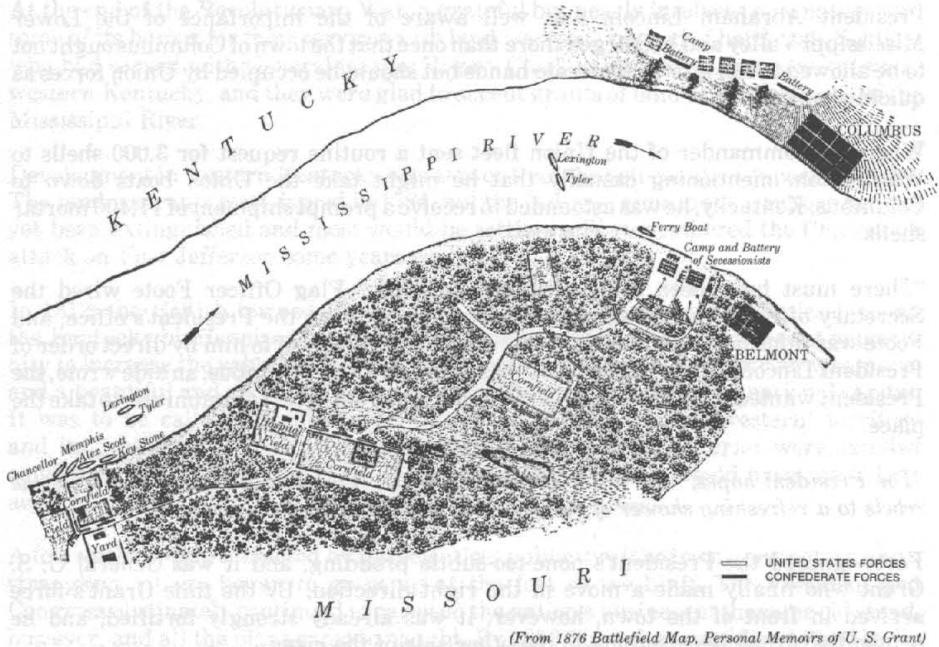
A detachment of U. S. soldiers marched into Columbus unopposed, and the town was garrisoned for the remainder of the war. It probably suffered as much damage from its friends as it did from its foes, for it was raided several times by Confederates.

In modern times, Columbus had been the victim of Old Man River more than once. On March 31, 1913, the Columbus levee collapsed and the entire city was flooded. During the flood of 1927 the levee was threatened again, and was cut after hope of saving it had to be abandoned. When the flood waters of 1927 began to recede, great chunks of the town's waterfront began to slide into the river. Houses and businesses had to be moved up higher on the bluff.

Today a floodwall protects the business district, which is back at the foot of the hill, but most of the schools, churches, and homes perch high on the bluff.

On the north side of Columbus, the State of Kentucky maintains a beautiful little State park which commemorates the battle of Belmont and preserves many of the relics of

the Columbus-Belmont battlefield. There is a small but interesting museum in a pre-Civil War house, and a piece of the huge chain that obstructed the river in front of the town is on display in the park. From the bluff there is a spectacularly beautiful view of the river and the Missouri shore opposite Columbus.



COLUMBUS-BELMONT BATTLEFIELD. The map above shows the site of a costly battle between Union and Confederate forces on November 7, 1861. General U. S. Grant, who commanded the Union troops, said that his inexperienced soldiers gained self-confidence at Belmont that stayed with them throughout the remainder of the war.

IRON BANK LIGHT

*Mile 937.0 AHP, Map 3
Left bank, descending*

The peculiar color and strange appearance of the high bluff at Columbus, Kentucky, attracted the attention of some of the earliest explorers, who commented on it more than a century before the founding of the town. French explorers, having failed to find the gold and silver mines they sought so diligently, reported that they had at least discovered an "iron mine."

Father Jacques Gravier, a Jesuit missionary who made a voyage down the Mississippi in 1700, stopped at the bluff to investigate the famous iron mine, about which he had

heard so many wondrous tales. He described it scornfully, as follows:

"The pretended plates of iron attached to the pebbles are anything but what was supposed, and what I was told. They are merely veins of hard and almost petrified earth, which have indeed the color of iron, but which are not heavy and break easily. I took a piece, to show that if there is an iron mine, it must not be judged by that earth."

Another priest, Father Pierre Charlevoix, came down the river 21 years later and stopped to examine the bluff. Although rumors of the supposed iron mine were still heard, he said he found only yellow earth and could only conclude that the mine was a figment of someone's imagination.

The iron mine which never existed gave the bluff its name, which is preserved today by the navigation light.

BELMONT, MISSOURI

*Mile 936.8 AHP, Map 3
Right bank, descending*

Belmont was a very small community on the Missouri shore opposite Columbus, Kentucky, and it became the scene of a major engagement during the Civil War almost by accident. General U. S. Grant had gathered up his green and inexperienced troops at Cairo and started down the river without any intention of engaging in battle. The most he hoped for at the time was that the presence of Federal forces on the river would prevent General Leonidas Polk from making a rumored movement across the Mississippi and into southeast Missouri.

When the Union transports and their gunboat escorts came in sight of Columbus, it was obvious that the position was too strongly fortified for them to think of a direct attack, but the Northern boys were spoiling for a fight, General Grant said, and he decided to let them test their strength against a small rebel encampment at Belmont. Landing his troops above the village, he led them into their first battle.

In his *Memoirs*, published in 1885, the old General remembered the battle with some embarrassment. His soldiers had behaved like veterans, he recalled, until the victory was won. The aftermath had shocked him. His men abandoned their arms when they reached the captured camp, and ran about madly, searching for trophies. Even his officers had behaved in an undignified and undisciplined manner, General Grant said. The noise and confusion prevented the quiet and stolid general from getting the attention of his men, and in desperation he finally ordered one of his staff officers to set fire to the camp. The blaze drew an immediate response from the guns across the river, and this sobered the soldiers considerably.

In the meantime, the rebels had returned, with reinforcements. When the Union boys

realized they were surrounded, they huddled around their officers and urged surrender. General Grant calmly reminded the men that they had cut their way into the camp, and told them they could just as easily cut their way out again.

The Union retreat was orderly, but so swift that the commanding general was almost left behind as the transports pulled away from the shore. At the last moment, a narrow plank was thrown out, General Grant urged his horse down a steep slope, and the horse trotted across the plank and on board the last departing steamer.

The press in the North called the battle of Belmont a disaster, a humiliating defeat, and a needless waste of human life. General Grant admitted that the casualties had been high, but pointed out that the Confederates had suffered heavy losses as well. His men gained experience and confidence, he said firmly, and the Confederates did not cross the river into southeast Missouri.

CHALK BLUFF, KENTUCKY

Mile 934.0 AHP, Map 3
Left bank, descending

When early explorers came down the river, the whitish color of the soil on a high bluff on the east bank caught their attention. They called it the Chalk Bluff, a name it still bears today. There is a scenic overlook on top of the bluff, with a fine view of the river and the surrounding countryside.

ISLAND NO. 5 (WOLF ISLAND)

Mile 933.0 AHP, Map 3
Right bank, descending

When Zadok Cramer gave Wolf Island its number in 1801, he described it as a very large island with about 15,000 acres of fine land and an open prairie in the middle where cattle were pastured. James Hunter, an early settler, was keeping a herd of several hundred cattle and a large number of hogs on the island when Cramer first visited it. At Hunter's warehouse, flatboatmen could purchase meat, butter, and eggs to supplement their rather monotonous diet.

John James Audubon, America's great naturalist and painter, was a passenger on a flatboat making the river voyage to New Orleans in 1820. He had just begun his monumental work which would later result in the fabulous volumes entitled "*Birds of America.*"

Audubon kept a journal on his voyage down the river, and in it he noted that he had stopped at Wolf Island on Sunday, November 19, 1820, to bathe and shave. He explained that he and his companions had agreed before leaving Cincinnati that they would stop every Sunday to take a bath. Wearing the same shirt all week and sleeping in odiferous buffalo robes at night made these weekly occasions memorable.

In his journal, Audubon also mentioned that after he reached Wolf Island he began to see large numbers of ivory-billed woodpeckers, a bird that is thought to be extinct today. Deer, bear, and wolves were also abundant along the river in Audubon's time, but the buffalo that had been so often mentioned by French explorers had already been pushed west of the Mississippi and into the high plains country.

In a case that once came before the Supreme Court of the United States, Wolf Island was the subject of an interesting boundary dispute between Kentucky and Missouri. Attorneys for Kentucky argued that Wolf Island had once been a part of the Kentucky mainland, and that it had been severed from the state in one of the river's sudden changes. They found 27 witnesses who were willing to swear that the navigation channel had *always* been on the right or west side of the island and that the island itself had *always* been considered a part of Kentucky.

Missouri attorneys showed the Supreme Court justices ancient maps and old navigation charts and traced the island's history all the way back to 1782, offering some very old maps as evidence that the island had always been located close to the Missouri shore and should be included within that State's boundaries. The court heard all the evidence, and decided that the sworn testimony of local residents was more persuasive than ancient maps and documents. Kentucky won the case, and Wolf Island, although it is today embedded firmly on the Missouri mainland, is still under Kentucky's jurisdiction.

BECKWITH BEND

Mile 925.0 AHP, Map 4

Beckwith Bend was named for a family that settled in Missouri before 1821. An important archaeological site called "Beckwith's Fort" is located on one of the old Beckwith plantations. It contains a large fortified site and some temple mounds that are said to have been built sometime between 1200 and 1680 A. D. The site is now included in a Missouri State Park.



DORENA CREVASSE

*Mile 924.0 AHP, Map 4
Right bank, descending*

The word “crevasse” comes from an Old French word, “crevace,” which meant a crevice, fissure, or crack. From the French settlers on the lower reaches of the Mississippi, American planters learned to apply the word to a breach in the levee system.

Before 1928, the cry of “*Crevasse! Crevasse!*” was heard all too frequently on the Lower Mississippi. Every inhabitant of the valley knew that it meant that the levee had broken, that the flood waters were pouring over the land, and that their lives and their property were in grave danger. Often people had to run for their lives, sometimes taking refuge on rooftops or in trees, and waiting for days to be rescued.

During the great flood of 1927, local residents around the rural community of Dorena, Missouri, were extremely concerned about their levees. On April 16, 1927, John Clifft went out just before dawn to take a look at a section of the levee that had appeared to be in poor condition the day before. He had just decided that it looked much better when



CREVASSE WATER. When the Dorena levee broke in 1927, water from the crevasse inundated the town of New Madrid, Missouri. In the above photograph, taken four days after the crevasse, the only completely dry land remaining in New Madrid is the levee in front of the town. It was reported a few days later that the water was higher in the town than it was in the Mississippi.

he noticed a small stream of water pouring in through the base of the embankment. Clifft ran for help, and the flood fighters gathered rapidly to try to stop the flow.

It was already too late; a short while later a whole section of the levee collapsed and John Clifft watched as the water poured through the breach, tearing down trees, sweeping over buildings, and snatching up chickens, pigs, and calves and whirling them away. Clifft heard later that the raging sea of flood water had demolished a schoolhouse 15 miles inland from the crevasse.

New Madrid, Missouri, was inundated by the crevasse water from Dorena, and on April 29 it was reported that the water inside the city levee was 1.5 feet higher than the river water outside the levee.

Dorena was one of many crevasses in 1927. Since the mainline levee system was built in 1928, no crevasses have been experienced at Dorena, but the community still suffers occasionally from backwater floods when major floods cause the water to back into the lower part of the Birds Point-New Madrid Floodway.

BAYOU DU CHIEN

*Mile 922.0 AHP, Map 4
Left bank, descending*

Bayou du Chien is a small tributary of the Mississippi. It joins the big river just above the town of Hickman, Kentucky. The stream drains about 70 square miles of western Kentucky and has an annual discharge of about 90.2 cubic feet per second.

The word "bayou" is said to have been a French adaptation of the Choctaw Indian word "bayuk," which meant "small, sluggish stream." Why this particular bayou should be called Bayou du Chien, or Bayou of the Dog, no one knows. The name appears on maps made more than 200 years ago, but the reason for it has long since been lost in the mists of time.

HICKMAN, KENTUCKY

*Mile 922.0 AHP, Map 4
Left bank, descending*

Hickman is a small Kentucky town that grew up on the east bank of the river after James Mills settled there in 1819. Originally called Mills Point, the location proved to be a convenient shipping point for goods and produce from the interior.

In 1834, a Tennessee settler purchased land in the Mills Point area and laid out a town which he named Hickman. By 1840 the population had grown to about 500.

A river guide published in 1856 described Hickman as a flourishing place with a dozen stores, several churches, a printing office, and a bank. At the busy steamboat landing, corn, cotton, cattle, poultry, and Kentucky tobacco were loaded out, while farm tools and supplies were brought in from other places. An overland stage route to the east began at Hickman and wound its way to Nashville, Tennessee. A ferry carried passengers across the river to Missouri.

Confederates moved into Hickman on September 3, 1861, and erected some river batteries, but the town escaped the dubious honor of becoming the site of a major Civil War battle. Union gunboats approached the town a few days after the batteries were erected, but withdrew without firing a shot. When Columbus fell, Hickman's batteries were not strong enough to serve as a new line of defense and the Confederate Army abandoned it to the tender mercies of the Union garrison that marched in unopposed.

For the remainder of the war, the town was occupied by a Union garrison. Occasionally rebel forces would appear to threaten the post, and the Union soldiers would flee. The rebels would move in for a day or two, and move out again when Union gunboats appeared with more soldiers to garrison the town.

Like most of the towns in border states, Hickman had both "secesh" and Union sympathizers among its inhabitants. They no doubt suffered equally during the war. Soldiers from both armies usually helped themselves to whatever they wanted, and it is unlikely that any of the citizens of Hickman had much left by the time the war had ended.



HICKMAN HARBOR. The Army Corps of Engineers completed a harbor project at Hickman, Kentucky, in 1963. The harbor now serves terminal facilities that handle grain, sand and gravel, and petroleum products. The industrial area includes about 130 acres. A floodwall and levee system to protect Hickman from flooding was also constructed by the Corps.

Hickman suffered some damage in the great flood of 1913, but today it is adequately protected from major floods and is busily engaged in developing industrial sites on its still-water harbor. There is no small boat marina at Hickman, but fuel and supplies may be obtained on an emergency basis.

ISLAND NO. 6

*Mile 921.0 AHP, Map 4
Right bank, descending*

In 1858, a disastrous flood raged through the Lower Mississippi Valley. Miles of levee were swept away, damage was severe, and many changes in the river's course resulted from the flood.

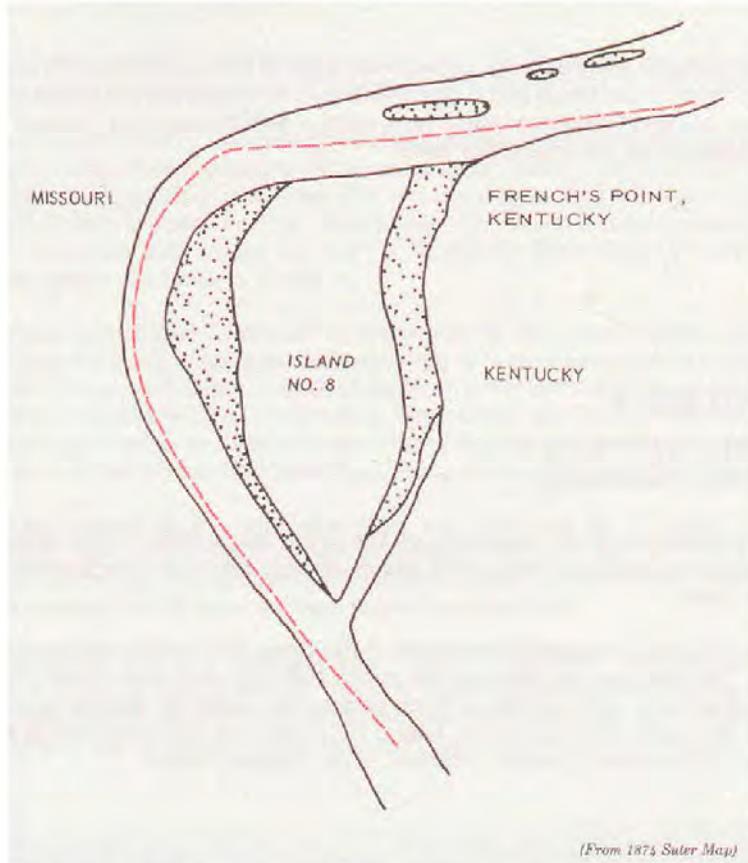
Island No. 6, which lay opposite the town of Hickman, Kentucky, was one of the areas affected. The flood caused the channel on the right, or west, side of the island to fill with sand and silt, and the island chute became the main navigation channel of the river. A few miles down the river, Island No. 7 suffered a similar fate in the great flood, and it eventually became attached to the Missouri shore.

ISLAND NO. 8

*Mile 914.0 AHP, Map 4
Right bank, descending*

Island No. 8 is one of the largest existing islands in the Lower Mississippi, and one of the few that is still actually distinguishable as an island. The channel on the right or west side of the island was formerly the low water navigation channel, but major floods in 1927 and 1937 caused the old bendway to fill with silt and sand, making it advisable for the island's old chute on the left to be maintained as the main navigation channel.

During the Civil War, there was one brief skirmish on Island No. 8. Confederate forces had been reported hiding on the island, and a detachment of Union soldiers was landed on July 21, 1864, to search for the rebels. It was later reported that the Federal force had killed two "bushwhackers" and captured 42 horses and mules.



ISLAND NO. 8. In 1874 a reconnaissance map of the Lower Mississippi showed Island No. 8 lying close to the Kentucky shore, with the navigation channel on the right or west side of the island. For more than a century, boatmen used the west channel at all stages of the water, but major floods in 1927 and 1937 caused the old channel to deteriorate, and the chute behind the island became the main navigation channel.

ISLAND NO. 9

*Mile 906.5 AHP, Map 5
Left bank, descending*

Island No. 9 lay very close to the left bank of the Mississippi, and by 1890 the chute behind it was closed at both ends. As the sand and silt accumulated at the head and foot of the island chute, the island became firmly attached to the Kentucky shore. The oxbow lake formed by the old chute took the island's number for a name and is known today as Lake No. 9.

DONALDSON POINT, MISSOURI

Mile 904.5 AHP, Map 5
Right bank, descending

The Donaldson family, for which the Missouri point is named, were plantation owners on the Tennessee side of the river before the Civil War.

When Union forces were making their way down the river early in 1862, General John Pope had his men dig a canal across Donaldson Point. It was his hope that the canal would enable the U. S. Navy gunboats to bypass Confederate fortifications around Island No. 10. The rebels promptly scuttled one of their own steamers, the *Winchester*, at the foot of the passage to obstruct it. It was an unnecessary precaution, for the canal proved to be too narrow and shallow for the Union vessels.

A few days after the *Winchester* was sunk, a Union reconnaissance party boarded the boat and set fire to it. The towhead that grew up around the sunken rebel boat in later years is still known as Winchester Towhead, and the remains of the rebel vessel are probably buried beneath it.

ISLAND NO. 10

Mile 901.0 AHP, Map 5
Right bank, descending

Island No. 10 was originally a very small island that lay close to the Tennessee shore. In the 1814 revised edition of *The Navigator*, Zadok Cramer noted that the island had been considerably damaged by the series of earthquakes that struck the Lower Mississippi Valley late in 1811. The shocks had continued over a long period of time, and Cramer said that Island No. 10 appeared to have cracked open in several places.

Half a century later, Island No. 10 became the site of another upheaval. Confederates had begun to fortify it early in the fall of 1861. The officer in charge of constructing the batteries pressed into service about 150 slaves from the surrounding plantations and farms, but the work proceeded very slowly. When the planters complained that their laborers were needed in the fields, the construction of earthworks ceased and the project came to a halt.

Early in March, 1862, the Confederates realized their mistake. General John Pope, with a large Union force, easily penetrated the feeble defenses at New Madrid, Missouri. Columbus, Kentucky, was outflanked by General U. S. Grant's movement against Fort Henry and Fort Donelson. The Confederates hastily threw up more earthworks at Island No. 10, and moved guns and men in to defend it.

General Pope waited impatiently at New Madrid for the U. S. Navy fleet under Flag

Officer Andrew Foote to join him. The Union officer needed transportation for his soldiers, so that he could cross the big river and pursue the Confederates and force them into battle.

Seven Union gunboats and 10 mortar boats arrived above Island No. 10 in mid-March, but Andrew Foote showed a strange reluctance to engage the enemy. After several timid sorties against the rebel guns, Foote told the Army general that he did not believe his boats could silence the rebel guns on the Tennessee shore. Pope waited, angry but helpless, for Foote to make a move.

Some of Foote's young gunboat commanders were also growing impatient. Henry Walke, commander of the *U.S.S. Carondelet* begged his fleet commander to let him run past the Confederate batteries and join General Pope at New Madrid. Given grudging permission to make the attempt, Walke sneaked the *Carondelet* past Island No. 10 on a dark and stormy night, and the *U.S.S. Pittsburg* followed him down two nights later.

With the Union gunboats below them, the Confederates knew that any further attempt to hold Island No. 10 would be pointless. Leaving a small number of men behind to buy a little time with a formal surrender of the island, the main body of the troops started a hasty retreat toward Tiptonville, Tennessee.

Flag Officer Foote received the surrender proposal and took possession of the island and its batteries on the Tennessee shore. His lengthy dispatches to Washington assumed full credit for the glorious victory at Island No. 10, and he was careful to add that it had been achieved "without the firing of a single ARMY gun."

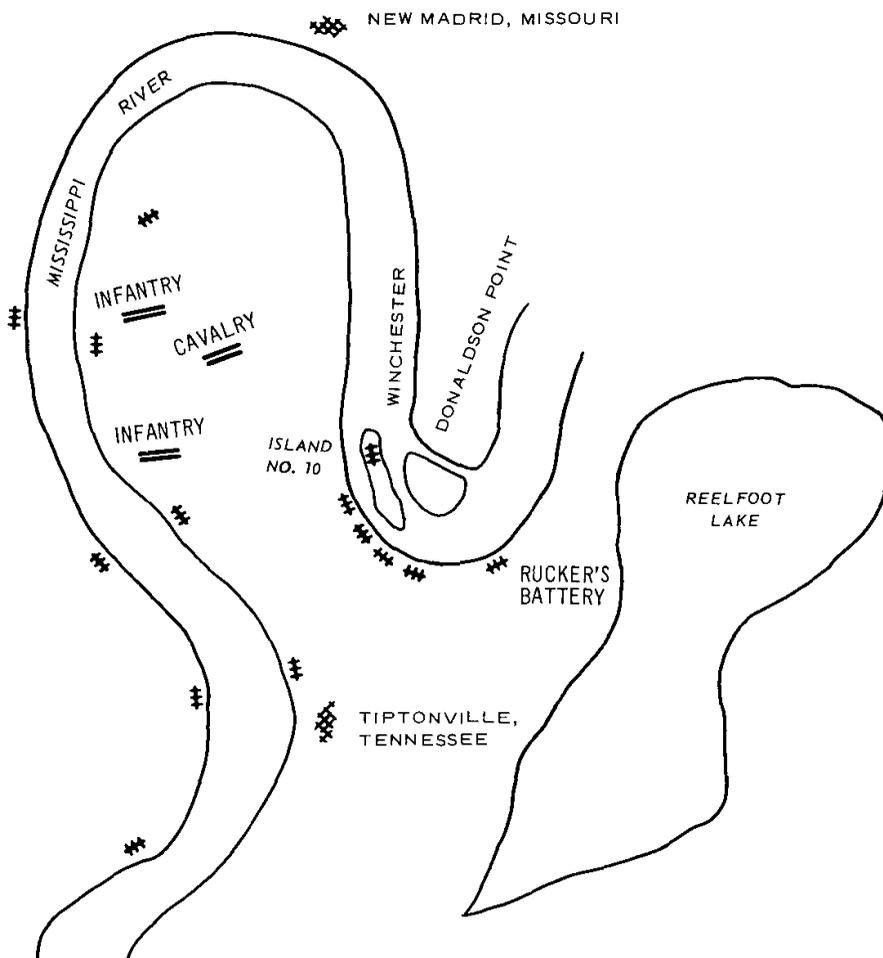
While the surrender negotiations were under way, General Pope single-mindedly carried out his original intention. Moving his men across the river by boat, he took a back road to Tiptonville and was waiting for the rebels when they arrived. Most of them came limping into the little town about 4:00 a.m., April 8, 1862, and when they marched straight into Pope's waiting arms they surrendered without a murmur of protest.

The fall of Island No. 10, New Madrid, and Tiptonville opened the way to the next Confederate fortification, at Fort Pillow, and eventually to Memphis, Tennessee.

Later in the war, Island No. 10 was chosen as a location for a colony of ex-slaves from occupied areas down the river. Union Army authorities sent 1,000 of the blacks to the island during the Vicksburg campaign, and detailed a gunboat and 86 Union soldiers to take care of them. The plan did not work out very well. A Navy commander complained officially that the Army officer in charge of the colony had become so chummy with the rebels that the whole southern army was receiving information and assistance through the Island No. 10 post.

Almost 10 years after the war had ended, Colonel Charles Suter of the Army Corps of Engineers made his reconnaissance map of the Lower Mississippi, and he showed several of the relics of the engagement at Island No. 10 still obstructing the navigation channel of the river. By this time, the island itself had moved to the Missouri side of the river, but in the channel were the remains of the *Yazoo*, the *Grampus*, and the *John Simonds*—all Confederate boats that the rebels had lost at Island No. 10. Colonel Suter

also showed the location of the *Fred Tron*, a steamer that had been snagged and sunk near the island just before the war began. Still another casualty was the *James White*, a Union transport that hit one of the rebel wrecks in 1864 and went down so rapidly that 16 deckhands sleeping in the hold were drowned.



(From Civil War Map (WOR))

CONFEDERATE DEFENSES AT ISLAND NO. 10. After Columbus, Kentucky, was outflanked by Union military operations in the interior, Confederate forces set up an elaborate system of defenses around Island No. 10. The rebels surrendered the Island to the U. S. Navy after Union gunboats ran past the batteries in April, 1862.

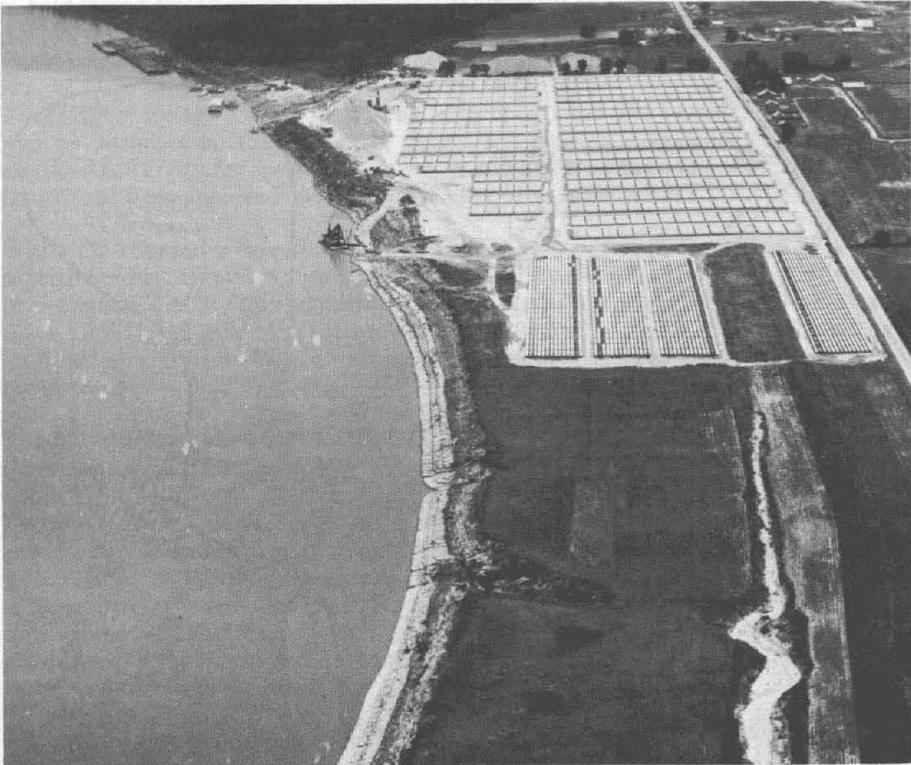
CATES CASTING FIELD

*Mile 900.5 AHP, Map 5
Left bank, descending*

Cates Landing, Tennessee, is the location of one of the casting fields where concrete blocks used in revetment work are produced and stored for each season's work.

The blocks made in the casting fields are 4 by 25 feet, and are formed into huge concrete mattresses that sometimes contain as many as 50,000 squares of concrete. They are placed in the riverbed by mat-sinking units maintained and operated by the Army Corps of Engineers.

In recent years, a great deal of sophisticated machinery and equipment has been developed to produce and handle the concrete revetment work.



CASTING FIELD. Concrete blocks for revetment work are produced under contract in government-owned casting fields at eight locations along the Lower Mississippi River. The field shown in the above photo is at Cates Landing, Tennessee. The eight fields together have a total storage capacity of about 1,300,000 squares, or about 3,000 acres of concrete.

SLOUGH LANDING NECK

Mile 898.2 AHP, Map 5
Left bank, descending

The Mississippi's meander loop in the vicinity of New Madrid, Missouri, is the longest on the Lower Mississippi today. The distance across Slough Landing Neck is less than 2 miles, but boats travel more than 20 miles around the loop.

In 1937 it was proposed that an artificial cutoff be made at Slough Landing Neck, and studies were made which indicated that the cutoff would not only shorten the navigation channel and bring it into a better alignment, but would also reduce flood heights above the cutoff. As always, before any project is adopted, public hearings were held. It quickly became apparent that local people were unalterably opposed to the project. The Mississippi River Commission, after listening to the opinions expressed by local interests, failed to recommend the project, and it was abandoned.

When the river later threatened a cutoff of its own, the Corps of Engineers constructed revetments and dikes in the area to stabilize the channel and to hold the river in its old bed.

NEW MADRID, MISSOURI

Mile 888.0 AHP, Map 5
Right bank, descending

Today's city planners ought to be able to sympathize with Colonel George Morgan. On paper, Morgan's plan for the city of New Madrid could hardly have been more splendid. It was to be a great and noble city, and would be the envy of the civilized world. To his surprise and dismay, what he actually produced was a squalid little village that in its earliest days was known chiefly for the poverty and misery of its inhabitants.

Colonel Morgan had been a U. S. Indian agent and a deputy commissary general in the Revolutionary Army. In 1779 he resigned his military commission and retired to New Jersey to become a gentleman farmer. He was comfortably fixed, and might have stayed on his farm for the remainder of his days in ease and comfort, but he could not forget the vast wilderness he had explored in his youth.

In 1788, Morgan met Don Diego de Gardoqui, Spanish minister to the United States. The two men talked about the fertile Mississippi Valley and the mighty river that drained it. Before the encounter ended, Morgan had succeeded in interesting the minister in a scheme he had conceived. Morgan wanted the Spanish government to give him a grant of land on the west bank of the Lower Mississippi, so that he could create a vast personal empire of his own. Gardoqui listened intently to the American's

plan, and voiced the opinion that Morgan might reasonably expect to obtain twelve million acres of land, subject, of course, to the King's approval.

Afire with ambition, Morgan set off down the Mississippi with a party of workmen and settlers, searching for an ideal location for the city of his dreams. It was to be the center of his vast domain. It would have broad streets, open green spaces, and whole city blocks dedicated to churches, schools, gardens, and public buildings. He would not allow anyone to cut a single tree without his permission, and his city would be so beautiful that it would attract the most cultured and educated people of his time.

Near the mouth of St. John's Bayou, at the top of a long meander loop of the Mississippi, Morgan found the spot he thought was perfect for his purposes. It had been the site of an early French trading post, and the land was high enough to be safe from overflow. The area was relatively flat, and not heavily forested.

Morgan had his workmen clear a field for cultivation, and began the construction of a warehouse. When the work was progressing smoothly, he departed for New Orleans, where he expected to attend to the paperwork involved in accepting the large grant of land he desired. Relying on the assurances of the Spanish minister, he assumed that his business with the governor of the Spanish colony would be a mere formality.

In New Orleans, Don Estaban Miro eyed the aggressive and arrogant American with cool distaste.

"Land?" the governor murmured. "Well... perhaps 1,000 acres."

Morgan shook his head impatiently. No, he had in mind something larger. What he really wanted, he said ingratiatingly, was enough land to create a buffer state between the Spanish in Louisiana and the new American nation. He would name his capital city "New Madrid," he added, to show that his first loyalty would be to Spain.

"One thousand acres," Governor Miro repeated firmly, "and perhaps additional small grants for each of your sons."

Colonel Morgan drew himself up proudly, bid the suave Spaniard a curt "Good day," and departed. From New Orleans, he went back to New Jersey, leaving the New Madrid settlement to fend for itself.

Morgan had worried the Spanish governor more than he knew. His was not the first such proposal that Spanish authorities had received, and Miro was suspicious of all of them. As soon as Morgan had departed, the governor ordered a detachment of 130 infantry and 20 gunners to hasten up the river and establish a fort at New Madrid. The military force would make it plain to the greedy Americans that Spain had no intention of giving up its possessions in the New World.

With the establishment of Fort Celeste at New Madrid, the area seemed to be firmly under Spanish domination, until about 1793, when new rumors arose about American encroachment on lands below the mouth of the Ohio. From New Orleans, Captain Pedro Rousseau, a trusted Spanish officer, was sent upriver in a Spanish war vessel called *La Flecha*. Rousseau's mission was to deliver reinforcements for Fort Celeste, and to investigate rumors and examine the banks on both sides of the river for evidence



PLAN OF THE FORT OF NEW MADRID. Victor Collot, a French general, visited the Spanish fort at New Madrid in 1796 and made a sketch map of the fort, town, and surrounding countryside. "Anse a la Graisse" was the old French name for the location. The phrase meant "greasy cove" and had been applied to the place by early French traders and colonists who obtained buffalo and bear grease in the area. General Collot notes on his sketch that the fort had been partly carried away by the river by 1796.

of American attempts to establish settlements.

La Flecha was armed with eight bronze swivel guns. It had a mast and sails, but Captain Rousseau found that its 16 oars were more reliable for making progress against the currents of the Mississippi. The voyage consumed several weeks, and Rousseau had ample time to examine the river banks and question the wandering Indians encountered along the way. He found no Americans.

In due time, *La Flecha* reached New Madrid. Rousseau reported that he found Fort Celeste in good condition. It was located about 250 feet from the river bank, he said, and was surrounded by a stockade fence and a water-filled moat. Inside the stockade was a house for the commandant, a hospital, a powder magazine, a dungeon, and barracks. There were three good cannons and one swivel gun to repel invaders. The few settlers around the fort seemed to Rousseau to be devoted to the Spanish cause, and he reported that they spent most of their time raising potatoes and corn to feed the garrison.

Captain Rousseau shot off his own little swivel guns to impress some visiting Indian chiefs, and went off to patrol the river from the mouth of the Ohio to New Madrid. Finding everything perfectly quiet, he took *La Flecha* back to New Orleans.

In spite of Rousseau's optimistic report, the Spanish governor was uneasy. He ordered Fort Celeste strengthened and warned sternly that it must be held against American aggression "to the last extremity."

Even as the colonial officials were strengthening their defenses to repulse the land-hungry Americans, the Spanish King was making a secret treaty that returned the Louisiana colony to France, its original owner. At the same time, American ministers in Paris were negotiating for the purchase of New Orleans. To their astonishment, Napoleon offered them the whole of Louisiana. The Spanish would soon be leaving New Madrid, and would never fire a single shot in its defense.

When the Louisiana Purchase was consummated in 1803, the Americans who took possession of New Madrid found it no great prize. The inhabitants, mostly French, were still poor, and the Spanish fort had already been virtually destroyed by the caving river banks. Houses in New Madrid had to be moved back regularly, to keep them out of the river's clutches.

In December, 1811, a series of severe earthquakes shook the Mississippi Valley. The center of the disturbance was in the New Madrid area, and the town was considerably damaged by the shocks. So widespread was the disturbance that two distinct shocks were felt in New Orleans, where on February 6 and February 7, 1812, a ball and a theater performance were interrupted by the shaking of the ground. At New Madrid, terrified settlers fled.

After the earthquakes had subsided, a few people moved back to New Madrid. Thomas Nuttall, an English scientist, who visited the town in 1819, said that it had only about 20 log houses and stores. He called it "an insignificant French hamlet," and complained that prices were exorbitant. Nuttall had had to pay 5¢ per pound for beef, 37¢ for butter, and 31¢ for sugar.

John James Audubon, who stopped at New Madrid briefly in the winter of 1820 was equally uncomplimentary. It was a dreary place, he confided to his Journal, almost deserted and hardly worthy of a name.

By the time the Civil War began in 1861, New Madrid was still a very small town. Feebly fortified by Confederates, it was abandoned when General John Pope and the U. S. Navy approached it.

After the war, the little town struggled on, having survived major earthquakes, floods, a Civil War, the river's attack on its waterfront, and a lot of bad publicity. Mark Twain in *Life on the Mississippi* commented dryly that New Madrid was "still there" in 1882, but "looked a little unwell."

Today New Madrid looks considerably better than it did when Twain saw it. Most of the old town has been eaten up by the river, but a few historic sites remain. A Federal project, completed in 1970, provides a harbor for New Madrid. The harbor serves a 200-acre industrial park, and three terminals handle petroleum products, grain, and sand and gravel.

There is no small boat marina at New Madrid, but supplies and fuel could be obtained in the harbor in an emergency.

WATSON POINT, KENTUCKY

Mile 888.0 AHP, Map 5
Left bank, descending

The large peninsula of land around which New Madrid Bend winds belongs to the State of Kentucky. It is bounded on the north, west, and east by the Mississippi River, and on the south by Tennessee. People who live on the point must go 7 or 8 miles up the river to get to any other part of their State of Kentucky, or must drive more than 10 miles through Tennessee before they reach the Kentucky border. It has been said that the residents of the point "shop in Tennessee, bank in Missouri, and send their children to school in Kentucky."

Many years ago, there was a boundary dispute between Kentucky and Tennessee involving the point, but a compromise was finally agreed upon. A small community, with a steamboat landing, called "Compromise," is shown on Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 reconnaissance map of the Mississippi. Later a sandbar grew up in front of the landing, the community was abandoned, and the name disappeared from river maps.

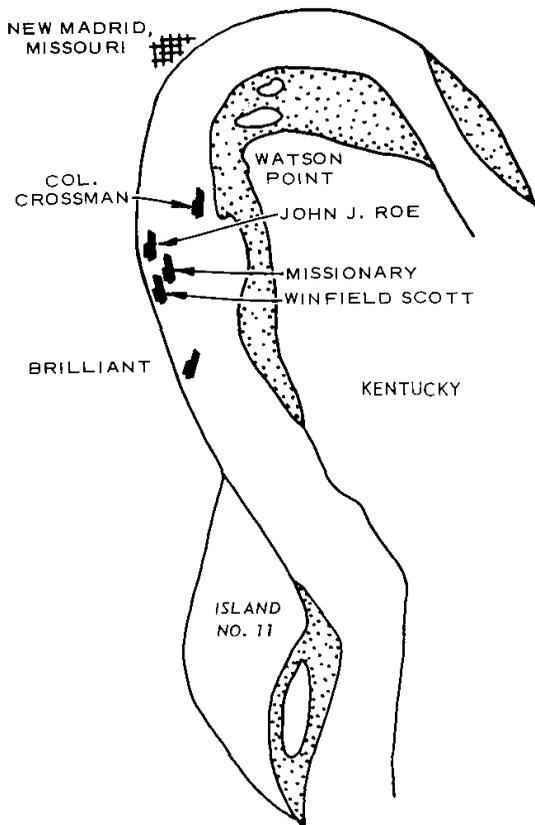
There was also a famous feud on the point long, long ago. The Watsons and the Darnells, two families that lived on the Kentucky point before the Civil War, were said to have been involved. Today the area is remote and isolated, but all is peaceful and serene on the fine farms that are located on the point.

ISLAND NO. 11

*Mile 882.0 AHP, Map 5
Right bank, descending*

The river channel above and below Island No. 11 was once a dangerous one, filled with snags and bars. Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 reconnaissance map of the area showed the wrecks of the steamboats *Col. Crossman*, *Missionary*, *Winfield Scott*, *Brilliant*, and *John J. Roe* in the channel between New Madrid and the head of the island.

The St. Louis-New Orleans steamer *Col. Crossman* exploded near Island No. 11 in February, 1858. The boat caught fire and burned to the water's edge. About 15 people were reported to have been killed in the accident.



(From 1874 Suter Map)

ISLAND NO. 11 IN 1874. A reconnaissance map made in 1874 showed the wrecks of five steamboats in the river channel between New Madrid, Missouri, and Island No. 11. The island had already attached itself to Missouri when this map was made.

The *John J. Roe* was a well-known and very slow steamboat that hit a snag in the bend above the island and went down in 1864. The boat was serving as a Union transport during the Civil War. A young man named Samuel Clemens was a cub pilot on the *John J. Roe* around 1858, and he later made the old boat a target for his sharp wit. As "Mark Twain," Clemens wrote that other boats raced each other but the *John J. Roe* was too slow to race anything faster than an island or a raft. It took her so long to get up the river, he said, that he often forgot what year they had left their last port. When she went down in 1864, he declared, it was five years before her owners even realized she was missing.

A steamer called the *Guiding Star* joined the older wrecks in the channel in January, 1893. She was said to have been a particularly beautiful boat. When she went aground on a bar and sank, her freight and furniture were salvaged before she broke in two and disappeared.

POINT PLEASANT, MISSOURI

*Mile 879.0 AHP, Map 5
Right bank, descending*

Point Pleasant was one of the small pioneer communities that suffered severe damage in the earthquakes of 1811-1812. Thomas Nuttall, who visited it on Christmas Day in 1819, said that it was a small French hamlet, where only a few Canadian settlers remained.

During the Civil War, Union forces erected gun batteries on the river bank in front of the village and occupied the position for a time. In 1874 the town was still located directly on the river, and it had a steamboat landing. Later a huge sandbar grew up in front of the landing, and the river moved in the opposite direction, leaving Point Pleasant more than a mile from the channel.

ISLAND NO. 12

*Mile 874.0 AHP, Map 6
Left bank, descending*

Island No. 12 lay close to the Tennessee shore when Zadok Cramer numbered it in 1801. By 1874 the chute behind the island was closed and it had become a part of the mainland of Tennessee.

BIXBY TOWHEAD

*Mile 873.9 AHP, Map 6
Left bank, descending*

There were two distinguished gentlemen named Bixby whose careers were connected with the Lower Mississippi.

Brigadier General William H. Bixby of the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers was one of the early presidents of the Mississippi River Commission, and later became the Chief of the Corps of Engineers.

Captain Horace Bixby was not a military man, but was one of the best-known steamboat pilots on the river. He was piloting an old boat called the *Paul Jones* when a boy named Samuel Clemens left his home in Hannibal, Missouri, and went down the Mississippi, determined to become a pilot. For the modest sum of \$500, Horace Bixby

agreed to let young Clemens serve as his “cub pilot,” so that he could “learn the river.”

Later in his life, Captain Bixby would be harrassed by newspaper reporters and others who wanted him to tell them what he knew about the youngster who had become the famous writer, Mark Twain. In exasperation, the old pilot once exclaimed: *“I wish that fellow Twain was dead!”*

When Mark Twain did in fact die in 1910, Captain Bixby wanted to set the record straight. For years, river men had belittled Twain’s knowledge of the river and his ability as a steamboat pilot. One well-worn witticism was: *“That fellow Twain knows a hell of a lot more about book-writing than he ever did about steamboats.”* Bixby had some surprising news for the reporters who questioned him after Twain’s death.

“Sam Clemens was a good pilot,” the old man declared firmly. *“He was also a smart fellow, and it was his brains that made other pilots jealous and led them to say he didn’t know the river—that he was just an inspired loafer, or something of the sort. What they said wasn’t true; Clemens was a good pilot—and he learned it from me.”*

RIDDLES OR RUDDLES POINT, MISSOURI

*Mile 873.0 AHP, Map 6
Right bank, descending*

Both the Riddle family and the Ruddle family owned property on the west bank of the Mississippi in the vicinity of this point, so it is hardly surprising that confusion arose as to the correct name for the area opposite Tiptonville, Tennessee.

On the river bank near the ferry landing opposite Tiptonville, there is an old family graveyard with a tombstone that carries the following inscription:

JOHN RUDDLE, Died Jan. 1829, Aged about 70 yrs.

Other members of the Ruddle family are buried in the cemetery, and it seems probable that Ruddle’s Point was the original name that boatmen applied to the point.

TIPTONVILLE, TENNESSEE

*Mile 873.0 AHP, Map 6
Left bank, descending*

Tiptonville, named for the Tennessee family that settled it before the Civil War, was a flourishing little town when the hostilities began. In 1862, Confederates hastily threw

up a battery of guns for the defense of the town, but they just as rapidly abandoned it after the fall of Island No. 10.

Later in the war, the commander of the *U.S.S. New Era* reported indignantly that the Union transport *Silver Moon* had been fired upon at Tiptonville. He was going to burn the town to the ground, he said. When citizens protested, the U. S. Navy officer pointed out that the culprits had hidden behind a woodpile on the river bank and had almost succeeded in capturing the Union vessel. Tiptonville was a dangerous place, he grumbled, full of people disloyal to the Union and infested with guerillas. When his temper had cooled, the gunboat commander relented and only burned two small houses and the offending woodpile.

After the Civil War, Tiptonville lost its waterfront when the Mississippi threw a sandbar in front of it. Today it lies more than a mile from the river bank and has no harbor. Most of Tiptonville's trade today comes from the rural areas, and in season there is a brisk business with sportsmen and tourists who visit nearby Reelfoot Lake.

REELFOOT LAKE

Mile 873.0 AHP, Map 6
Left bank, descending

Reelfoot Lake lies a couple of miles east of Tiptonville, Tennessee, and is believed to have been created by the New Madrid Earthquakes in 1811-1812. In its early days it was famous for the abundance of its wildlife and for the sunken standing forest of cypress and hardwood that could be seen beneath the surface of its waters.

By 1850 meat hunters had practically taken over the Reelfoot area. They shipped birds and game animals to northern markets in carload lots and resisted, often with violence, the intrusion of "outsiders." The State of Tennessee went to court after the turn of the century and in 1914 won a decision that led to a strict program of wildlife protection for the area. The poachers left, and the beautiful lake became a favorite resort for vacationers and sport fishermen.

Today the underwater forest has disappeared, and vacation cottages blight the lake shores, but Reelfoot still has abundant wildlife and is a beautiful body of water. The State has purchased some of the lake's shoreline and is establishing a State Recreational Park at Reelfoot.



MERRIWETHER BEND

Mile 870.5 AHP, Map 6

Although the spelling is slightly different, this bend in the Lower Mississippi was probably named for the Meriwether family of Tennessee, who owned plantations in the area.

One of the Meriwethers was in Memphis, Tennessee, when that city fell into Union hands. Elizabeth Meriwether's husband was a Confederate officer, and he had left her in Memphis with their children because he had been confident that it would be a safe place for her to wait for his return. Mrs. Meriwether was a lively, talkative young woman and she made no secret of her distaste for Yankee generals. General U. S. Grant made his headquarters at Memphis briefly, and he chose to ignore Elizabeth Meriwether, but when General William T. Sherman was placed in command of the occupied city, he proved to be less tolerant. After several encounters with the lady, General Sherman roared "*Get her out of town, NOW!*"

Elizabeth Meriwether was informed that she had been banished from the city, and she was forced to leave so hurriedly that she had to drive her own buggy. Writing about her refugee life many years later, Mrs. Meriwether recalled that she worried as much about her faithful mule, "Adrienne," as she did about her children. She could comfort her little sons, but she was afraid that poor Adrienne would become confused and unhappy by the sudden wild exodus from Memphis.

Adrienne's emotional stability was apparently equal to the occasions of refugee life. She survived and, weak and thin, was still pulling the buggy that brought Mrs. Meriwether back to Memphis after the war had ended.

Elizabeth Meriwether lived to be a very old lady, and when she reminisced about the war, it was obvious that she had never forgiven General Sherman for banishing her from her home.

ALASKA LIGHT

Mile 869.0 AHP, Map 6

Left bank, descending

Alaska Light is named for a steamboat that sank in this area more than 100 years ago. Colonel Suter's map of 1874 showed the steamer *Alaska* lying on the edge of a sandbar in the snag-filled channel above Island No. 13.

LITTLE CYPRESS BEND

Mile 864.8 AHP, Map 6

Few things impressed early voyagers on the Lower Mississippi more than the beautiful tree for which this bend was named. In Little Cypress Bend and other areas, the bald cypress grew to tremendous heights and sizes. The spreading branches, with light feathery foliage, and the massive trunks surrounded by the peculiar protuberances called "cypress knees" made it as picturesque as it was beautiful.

When loggers and lumbermen began their operations on the Lower Mississippi, cypress was so abundant that the straight-grained and easily worked wood was often used for fence posts and railroad ties. Today it has become relatively hard to obtain, and the expensive lumber is often used in house interiors.

On old plantations in the south, a few of the cabins that housed slaves or farm laborers are still in existence. Made of rough-sawed cypress that has weathered to a silvery gray, the marvelous texture of the weathered boards makes even the most tumble-down cabin attractive. Cypress lumber, which is extremely durable, was often called "the wood everlasting."

ISLAND NO. 13

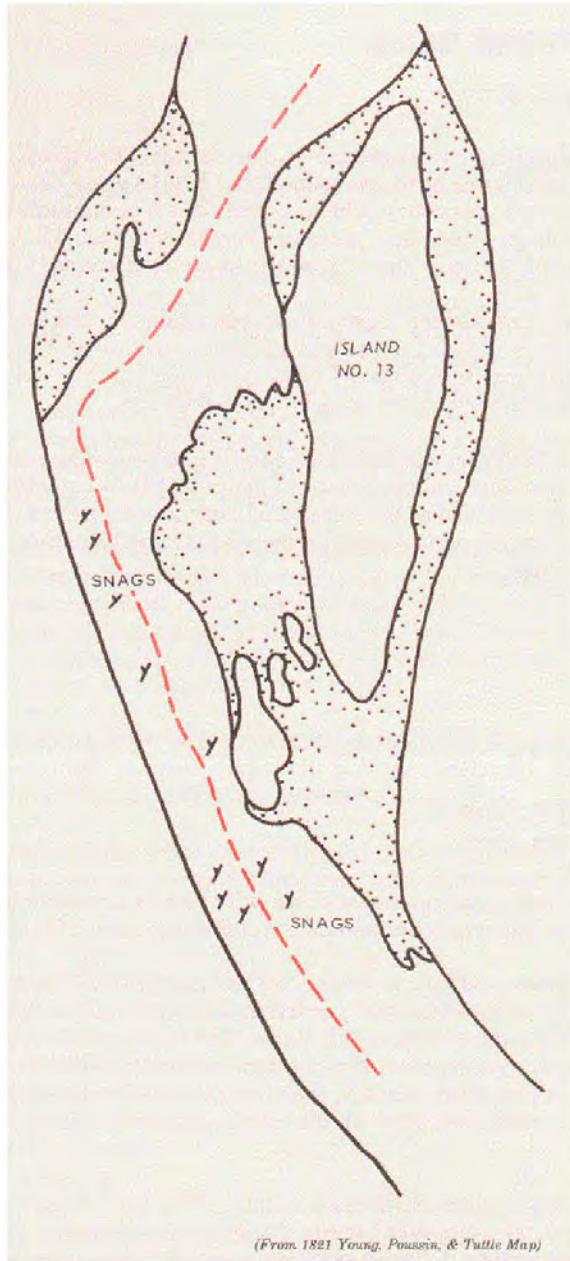
Mile 864.0 AHP, Map 6
Left bank, descending

Island No. 13 lay close to the Tennessee shore, with a navigation channel on the right or west side. The passage was a dangerous one, for it was always filled with ugly snags.

Snags were a serious problem to navigators during the early history of the Lower Mississippi. Steamboats, which had wooden hulls, were easily damaged by the snags that obstructed the channel in so many places. The huge trees that slid into the river whenever a bank caved away created new snags constantly. When a tree trunk became firmly fixed in the bed of the channel, the river pilots called it a "planter." If the tree leaned into the channel, bobbing up and down with the current, they called it a "sawyer."

When Congress first became interested in improving the navigation channel of the Lower Mississippi, the removal of snags was given first priority. Between 1824 and 1879, at least three million dollars were spent removing these dangerous obstructions from the Mississippi and its navigable tributaries.

Island No. 13 was located in one of the reaches of the river affected by the great flood of 1858. After the flood, the chute behind the island filled, and Island No. 13 became a part of the Tennessee shore.

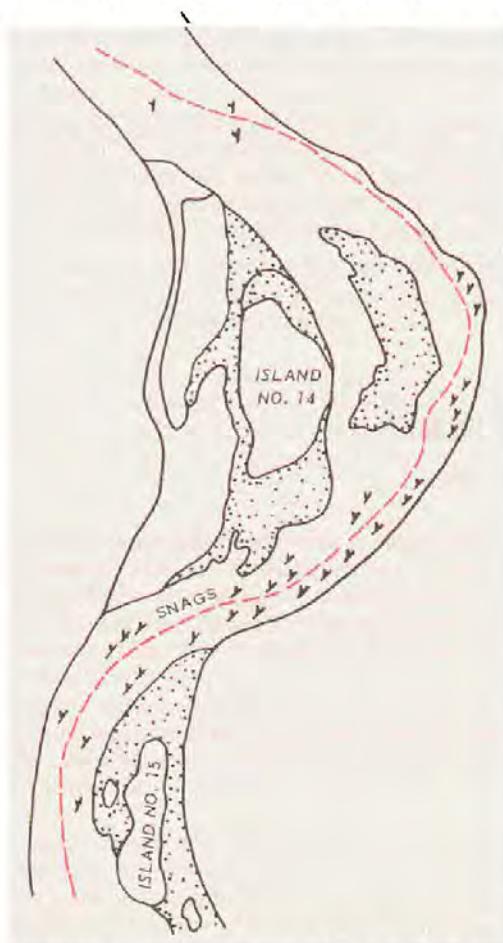


ISLAND NO. 13 IN 1821. Three U. S. Army Engineers made a reconnaissance map of the Lower Mississippi in 1821 and carefully located all of the most dangerous snags that obstructed the navigation channel. At the foot of Island No. 13, both sandbars and snags made the going tough for river pilots.

ISLAND NO. 14

*Mile 858.5 AHP, Map 7
Right bank, descending*

If Island No. 13 was a dangerous passage for pilots, the channel that ran past Islands No. 14 and No. 15 must have been even worse. The two islands lay on opposite sides of the navigation channel, each of them close to its respective shore, and the river between them was choked with snags. Zadok Cramer in 1814 commented in his book, *The Navigator*, that this reach of the river was "much convulsed during the Earthquake." The 1821 map made by Army Engineers showed a navigation channel filled with snags.



ISLANDS NO. 14 AND NO. 15. A map made in 1821 shows that river pilots had to thread their way through a forest of snags in the vicinity of these two islands. Sandbars were almost as hazardous as snags, and a pilot had to be wide awake to make his way safely through this tangle.

GAYOSO, MISSOURI

Mile 850.5 AHP, Map 7
Right bank, descending

Gayoso was a small Missouri town located on the west bank of the Mississippi when it became the county seat of Pemiscot County in 1851. By 1898, it had begun to seem inevitable that the currents of the river would gobble up the whole town, so the seat of the county government was moved to Caruthersville, Missouri. The erratic Mississippi then changed its tactics and began to move in the opposite direction, leaving the village of Gayoso more than a mile inland.

The town bears the name of a Spanish official who was very popular with the inhabitants of the Lower Mississippi Valley before the west bank of the river became American property. Don Manuel Gayoso de Lemos was appointed commandant of the Natchez District of Spanish West Florida in 1787. He was a mild and affable young man, very well-educated and very energetic. In 1797 he was made the governor-general of the Louisiana colony and proved to be a popular administrator. So pleasant was life on the west bank under the guidance of Gayoso that even the Americans who had settled there seemed to regret the change of government after the United States negotiated the Louisiana Purchase.

LITTLE PRAIRIE BEND

Mile 850.0 AHP, Map 7

When early voyagers went down the Lower Mississippi, they found it a monotonous trip. A wall of virgin forest lined the banks for most of the way, but in this bend of the river a small open meadow attracted the attention of all the travelers. The French called it "Le Petite Prairie," and a French-Canadian trader, Francois LeSieur, established a trading post on the river bank in front of the prairie in 1794.

Fortescue Cuming, an Englishman who was traveling down the river, stopped at Little Prairie in 1808, and reported that it had grown to a small village with about 24 houses and a tavern and store. Most of the inhabitants were French, Cumings noted, but there were a few Anglo-American farmers in the country around the village.

Little Prairie was virtually demolished in the earthquakes of 1811-1812. Zadok Cramer, in *The Navigator*, reported that he found it almost deserted when he visited it late in 1812. His graphic description of the adjoining forest was that "it looked as if it had been in some desperate engagement, in which it had got much worsted in the battle, so that the trees stand in all directions and in great confusion."

A few years later, another visitor said that he found only one house at Little Prairie. The remainder of the village, he thought, had been swept away by the river soon after the earthquakes.

In the winter of 1820-1821, John James Audubon was at Little Prairie, and shot a bald eagle. He took the bird back to his flatboat and began working on a drawing that would later become one of the famous plates in his *Birds of America*.

Eagles were common in the Lower Mississippi Valley in Audubon's time, when large numbers of them nested in the forests that lined the river banks. A recent survey revealed that the eagle population in the lower part of the United States has dwindled to about 800 breeding pairs, most of which are confined to the coastal areas. Pesticides, herbicides, and the loss of nesting sites have taken a heavy toll, and wildlife experts fear that the bald eagle may eventually become extinct.

CARUTHERSVILLE, MISSOURI

Mile 846.0 AHP, Map 7
Right bank, descending

Caruthersville is an interesting old river town that has a distinctly southern flavor. It was laid out in 1857 on land belonging to John Hardeman Walker, who had settled in the area before the great earthquakes of 1811-1812.

Walker, with the help of George W. Bushey, laid off lots on one end of his plantation and offered them to the public. The new town was called Caruthersville, in honor of Samuel Caruthers, a popular Missouri lawyer and judge. Caruthersville was incorporated in 1874, and became the county seat of Pemiscot County, Missouri, in 1898.

Caruthersville today is a pleasant little town with a grassy waterfront where people often loiter on warm summer evenings, watching the towboats pass and talking about the good old days. Located in the heart of an agricultural district, cotton, soybeans, and alfalfa are the chief crops. Private interests operate several terminals where grain, petroleum products, sand and gravel, etc., are handled. Caruthersville is protected from floods by a concrete floodwall.

There is no small boat marina at Caruthersville, but pleasure boaters can obtain fuel and supplies. There is a small but very interesting museum near the waterfront.

LINWOOD BEND

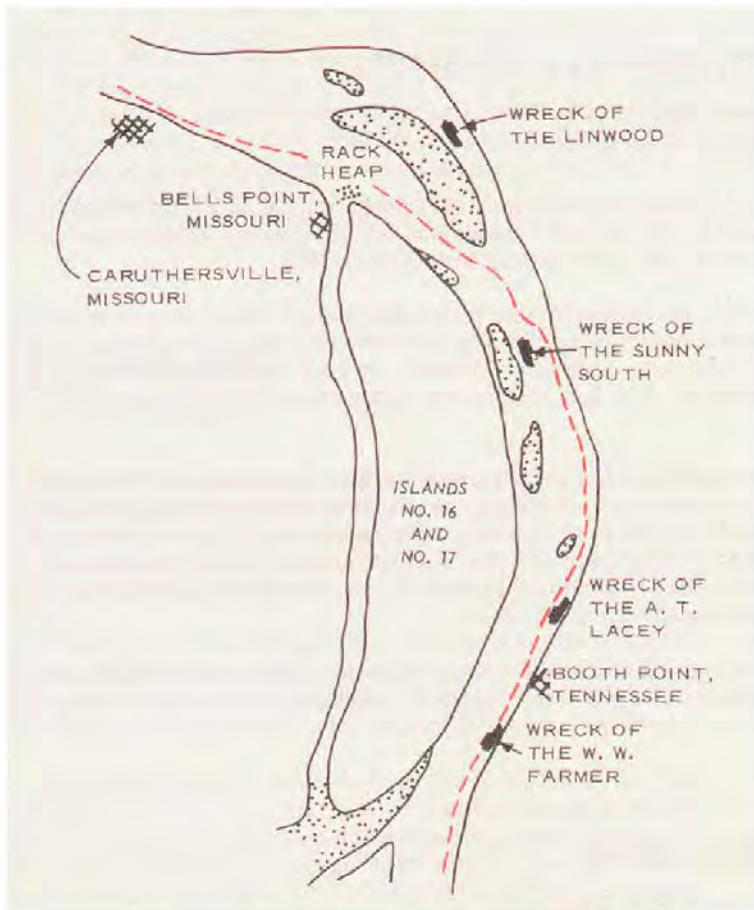
Mile 841.0 AHP, Map 7

The steamboat *Linwood* hit a snag and sank in the bend below Caruthersville, Missouri, in 1847. The boat was a total loss, and Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 map of

the Lower Mississippi showed the wreck of the old steamer still lying in the channel in the bend that had become known by the same name. In the lower part of the bend Suter showed also the wrecks of the *Sunny South*, *A. T. Lacey*, and *W. W. Farmer*.

Perhaps the best-known of all these boats that went down in Linwood Bend was the steamer *A. T. Lacey*, a boat that had been on the river about four years when she caught fire as she approached Booth Point on May 2, 1860.

If the fire had not created instant panic among the passengers, all of them might have been saved. The pilot ran the boat to the bank as soon as he realized she was on fire, but deck passengers were already leaping into the water as her bow nudged the shore. As was often the case, cabin passengers fared better than the deck passengers. Someone



LINWOOD BEND. Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 reconnaissance map of the Lower Mississippi shows the wrecks of four old steamboats lying in Linwood Bend. Sandbars, the wrecks, and the "rack heap," or pile of driftwood, at the head of the islands all made navigation difficult in the bend.

took charge, broke out life preservers, and put them on the women and children. All the cabin passengers were saved, with one tragic exception.

The exception was the little daughter of Captain A. T. Lacey himself, who owned the boat. Captain Lacey and his family had boarded the boat at Cape Girardeau, Missouri, and were on their way to New Orleans for a holiday. When the fire broke out, the boat's young clerk, determined to save the Lacey child, seized her and jumped overboard. Putting the little girl on his back, he struck out strongly for the shore. He had almost reached the bank when a large floating tree came past. The tree limbs caught in the child's clothing and swept her into the water. She sank immediately, and was never seen again.

The *A. T. Lacey*, valued at \$60,000, was a total loss. Cargo valued at \$120,000 was also lost. None of the passengers were able to save their luggage. In addition to the Lacey child, some of the deckhands, cabin servants, and deck passengers lost their lives.

ISLANDS NO. 16 AND NO. 17

Mile 840.5 AHP, Map 7
Right bank, descending

Around the head of Islands No. 16 and No. 17, enormous piles of driftwood accumulated, adding to all the other hazards of navigation in Linwood Bend. Steamboat pilots called the driftwood piles "rack heaps," because they resembled heaps of deer antlers, or racks.

The two islands had joined each other by 1874, and together they joined the Missouri mainland.

BOOTH POINT, TENNESSEE

Mile 838.0 AHP, Map 8
Left bank, descending

Named for an early Tennessee settler, Booth Point became the site of a small village during the steamboat days. When the river traffic declined, the village dwindled away, leaving only a few houses on the Point.

Interstate Highway 55 will cross the Mississippi at Booth Point, and the new bridge will probably bring about some changes in the rural area.

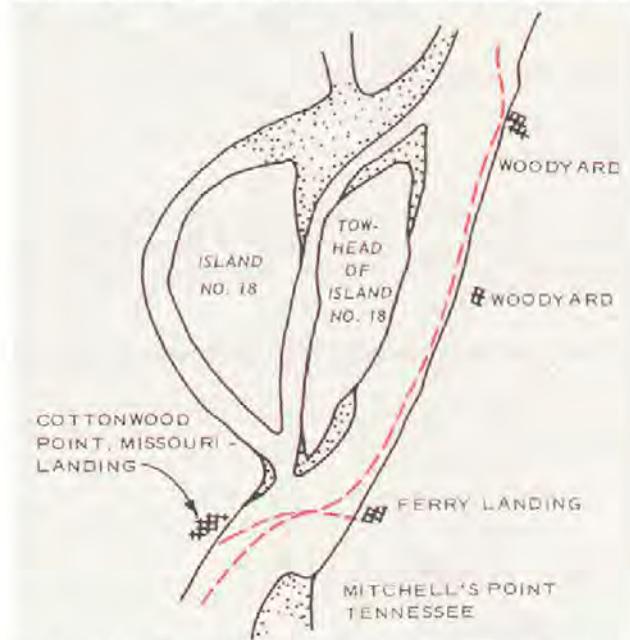
ISLAND NO. 18

*Mile 834.5 AHP, Map 8
Right bank, descending*

Island No. 18 was a notoriously difficult passage for early river pilots, for its bendway was always choked with snags. Colonel Charles Suter reported in 1874 that the channel was still in poor condition. The most a pilot could hope for in low water, Suter said, was that one of its three divided channels would have eight feet of water; often there would be less.

The island later joined the Missouri shore. A large towhead lying opposite it, along the Tennessee shore, had a chute behind it that is closed at the upper end. The closed channel is called Robert A. Everett Lake, and is a state-owned recreation area.

A small island once lay opposite Island No. 18, and Zadok Cramer called it Island No. 19. Samuel Cumings, in the 1829 edition of his book entitled *The Western Pilot*, noted that Island No. 19 had disappeared, probably in the earthquakes of 1811-1812.



ISLAND NO. 18 IN 1874. Before channel stabilization work began on the Lower Mississippi, divided channels at low water made the river impassable in some reaches. At Island No. 18, there were sometimes three channels, none deep enough to afford safe passage for the larger steamboats. Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 map shows the three channels and the report to the Chief of Engineers which accompanied the map said that contraction works would be needed to provide an adequate channel in this area at all stages of the water. Dike fields above the island in Linwood Bend have now eliminated most of the navigation problems around Island No. 18.

COTTONWOOD POINT, MISSOURI

Mile 832.9 AHP, Map 8
Right bank, descending

Cottonwood timber was so abundant in the Lower Mississippi Valley that steamboats often used it for fuel. Both the Missouri and the Tennessee shore in this area were covered with it, and there were several large woodyards that supplied cordwood for the passing boats.

Cottonwood is a very fast growing tree in alluvial soil, and is said to add as much as seven or eight feet in height and one or more inches in diameter every year under ideal soil and climate conditions. The tree liberates large quantities of silky-haired seeds which accumulate in masses that resemble cotton—hence the name. Indians had used the root wood for making fire by friction, and early settlers had found the easily split logs useful for stockades and cabins.

About 175 feet is the maximum height known to have been reached by a cottonwood tree. The tree is relatively short-lived, and is believed to have a maximum life span of around 200 years. Trees over 70 years of age often deteriorate very rapidly.

In recent years, many timber and paper companies have established cottonwood plantations in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Since the tree grows so rapidly, it has proved ideally suited to the production of pulpwood.

Before the Civil War there was a thriving little community tucked under the big trees at Cottonwood Point. It had a postoffice, church, sawmill, cotton gin, steamboat landing, and a number of nice homes.

One of the early gages to measure the stages of the river was established by the Mississippi River Commission at Cottonwood Point. The Corps of Engineers still maintains a gage there. There is also still a ferry that takes passengers back and forth between Heloise, Tennessee, and Cottonwood Point.

ISLAND NO. 20

Mile 829.0 AHP, Map 8
Right bank, descending

Island No. 20 has changed its location several times during the past century and a half. In 1801, it was close to the right shore. Later it moved to the left shore, and still later migrated back to the right shore again, where it rests today, permanently attached to the Tennessee mainland.

In the winter of 1820, John James Audubon spent a nervous night at Island No. 20. He and his companions had tied their flatboat to a willow tree and were just settling down for a good night's rest when they discovered that a party of Indians had set up camp on the opposite end of the island. The Americans loaded their muskets and kept an apprehensive night watch, getting very little rest, but the Indians did not molest them.

In 1865, a large steamboat called the *Ben Stickney* ran over a snag at Island No. 20 and sank in less than ten minutes. The outcome of the accident varied happily from the usual steamboat disaster story: There were 150 people on board; they abandoned the boat in a calm and orderly manner, and not a single life was lost.

ISLAND NO. 21

Mile 825.0 AHP, Map 8
Left bank, descending

Island No. 21 originally lay in the middle of the river, but Mark Twain noted in 1882 that it had joined itself to the left shore and "retired from business as an island."



When the big island showed signs of wanting to go back in business as an island in recent years, the Corps of Engineers constructed dikes to close off the old chute and keep the river in the desired location.

FOREST OF SNAGS. A reconnaissance map made by U. S. Army Engineers in 1821 shows the navigation channel on the right of Island No. 21 choked with snags. Pilots had to thread their way through this forest of snags without impaling their boats. They tried, but did not always succeed. Then wrecks were added to the other obstructions that made the channel a dangerous one.

NEEDHAM CUTOFF

Mile 821.1 AHP, Map 9

In 1820, flatboatmen were intimately acquainted with the bends, bars, shoals, and snags of the Lower Mississippi, but most of the members of the United States Congress had never seen the mighty river. Under pressure from constituents, Congressmen who had been asked to support plans for navigation improvements asked the Army Corps of Engineers for more information about the river.

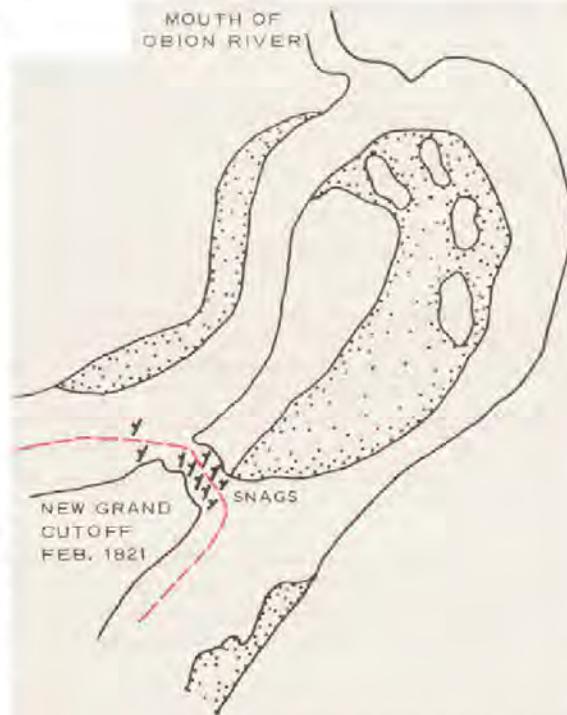
Captain H. Young, Captain W. T. Poussin, and Lieutenant S. Tuttle of the Corps were given the task of making a survey of the Mississippi. Congress appropriated \$5,000 for the project, and the three engineers made their reconnaissance trip down the river in the winter of 1821.

The reconnaissance map that resulted from the survey showed that the river had made a drastic change in the vicinity of the mouth of the Obion River. Young, Poussin, and Tuttle called the new cutoff "New Grand Cutoff," but the boatmen soon renamed it "Needham's Cutoff" because the unfortunate settler who lost most of his land was a farmer named Needham.

The bend that had been removed from the river soon silted up at both ends, and three small islands (No. 22, No. 23, and No. 24) were removed from the river, and soon disappeared from navigation charts.

In 1858 the steamboat *H. D. Newcomb* sank at the head of Needham's Cutoff and the wreck of the old boat was a navigation hazard for many years afterward.

NEEDHAM CUTOFF. *Early in the spring of 1821, the Lower Mississippi cut its way across a narrow neck of land and made itself a new bed through the middle of a farm belonging to a settler named Needham. Engineers making a reconnaissance map of the river later the same year showed the new cutoff, calling it "New Grand Cutoff," but the boatmen named it for the unlucky farmer who had lost his land.*



(From 1821 Young, Poussin, & Tuttle Map)

HALES POINT, TENNESSEE

Mile 819.3 AHP, Map 9
Left bank, descending

Hales Point, Tennessee, was a transfer point for goods and produce brought down the Obion River. Shipments which came down the little tributary on flatboats or in small steamers were reloaded at the Point to be sent on to New Orleans.

During the Civil War, a U. S. Navy officer encountered a merchant steamer called the *Rowena* at Hales Point. He found the boat heavily loaded with contraband goods. Noting that Hales Point was not garrisoned by Union troops and that it was "heavily infested with rebels," the officer seized the boat and its cargo.

When the U. S. Secretary of the Navy heard about the seizure, he was embarrassed. The seizure was an illegal one, he told the officer, and the boat would have to be returned at once to its rightful owners. The confiscation of private property was a tricky issue in the Civil War, and Navy officers often complained that they found themselves in trouble when they did what they thought was their duty. As in any Civil War, the legal technicalities were difficult to understand, and it was not always possible for an officer in the field to determine whether a particular operation was a legitimate part of warfare or whether it might be construed as an inhuman disregard for the rights of private citizens.

OBION RIVER

Mile 819.2 AHP, Map 9
Left bank, descending

When Needham Cutoff occurred in 1821, the Obion River had to find a new outlet to the Mississippi. The little tributary took the easy way out, following the old bend of the Mississippi down to the new channel and joining the big river at Mile 819.2 AHP.

The Obion River drains about 1,852 square miles in the State of Tennessee and contributes an average flow of 2,511 cubic feet per second to the Mississippi. The odd name of the river is said to have had its origin in an Indian word that meant "many-pronged."

One of the legends connected with the Obion is that Davy Crockett killed 105 bears near the mouth of the river. The story may be true, for most of the early explorers and early settlers who recorded their experiences mentioned that bears were very plentiful along the banks of the Mississippi before the wilderness was overrun with people.

There were several minor skirmishes along the Obion during the Civil War. In 1864, a group of Confederates were transporting about 30 wagonloads of guns, ammunition, and medicines down the Obion on a flatboat when they were surprised by a Union

cavalry force. The rebels fled, and the contraband goods were destroyed on the spot. The Union cavalry commander explained in his report that it would have been better to salvage the goods, but that piloting wagons through the muddy roads of Tennessee was a task beyond his capabilities.

As late as the 1870's, there was still a modest steamboat trade on the Obion River. Two little screw steamers ran between Hales Point and Dyersburg, Tennessee, and a larger boat was being built for the trade. The steamers brought down cotton, tobacco, corn, peanuts, hogs, cattle, potatoes, lumber, logs, and handmade shingles. The small farmers in the interior complained that the boats charged exorbitant prices for handling their produce, but the pilots retorted that the hazards were great on the Obion.

In 1874 the Army Corps of Engineers was asked to improve the river so that it would be open to navigation all year, in the hope that transportation costs might be reduced. By 1874, however, the railroads were killing off the steamboat trade in any case, and soon there were no boats at all on the Obion.

In recent years, the Corps has conducted flood plain studies and made surveys on the Obion to determine the feasibility of improving it for flood control, wildlife conservation, and recreational development.

RUCKERS OR NEBRASKA POINT, TENNESSEE

Mile 814.0 AHP, Map 9
Left bank, descending

Early maps refer to the point in Barfield Bend as Rucker's Point, and show Nebraska Woodyard located on the point. Today both names identify the area.

The Rucker family of Tennessee were early settlers in the area and "Rucker's Battery" was one of the Confederate artillery companies that helped defend Island No. 10 in 1862. The *U.S.S. Benton*, flagship of the Union fleet, engaged the battery for several hours on March 17, 1862. Much to the chagrin of the *Benton's* gunners, 281 rounds of ammunition failed to silence Rucker's guns.

BARFIELD BEND

Mile 810.0 AHP, Map 9

Barfield Bend was named for George C. Barfield, who kept a warehouse on the Arkansas shore, where goods and produce from the Forked Deer River in Tennessee

were unloaded from flatboats and keelboats to be stored for shipment downriver by steamers.

When residents of the Arkansas Territory petitioned the U. S. Government for postal service in the vicinity of the warehouse, they said that George Barfield would be more than qualified to serve as postmaster. The government, after due deliberation responded to the plea by establishing the postoffice two years later, appointing Barfield as the postmaster.

The community which is still called Barfield lies behind the protection of the mainline levee system today, with a few docks and terminals on the river bank in front of the village.

TOMATO, ARKANSAS

Mile 806.0 AHP, Map 9
Right bank, descending

Tomato, Arkansas, is one of the few communities on the Lower Mississippi that lies outside the protection of the mainline levee system. It was established as a shipping point for produce from truck farms in the area, and was said at one time to have "the smallest postoffice in the world." A man named Jones was postmaster at the time, and when his house burned down, he moved into Tomato's postoffice—whereupon the postoffice moved into a tiny smokehouse that Jones owned.

FORKED DEER RIVER

Mile 804.0 AHP, Map 9
Left bank, descending

Forked Deer River drains about 369 square miles of Tennessee and is a very minor tributary of the Lower Mississippi. It has an average discharge of only 511 cubic feet per second.

Keelboats once navigated the lower reaches of the Forked Deer River. In later years, it was said that local people had attempted to shorten the route to the Mississippi, tampering with the little river near its mouth and causing it to change its course.

The Corps of Engineers undertook a navigation improvement project on the river in 1883, but by 1896, the Forked Deer River was choked with snags, drift, and debris. It was also obstructed by three or four low bridges, and the project had to be abandoned.

ISLAND NO. 25

*Mile 801.5 AHP, Map 9
Right bank, descending*

Island No. 25 was severely shaken by the earthquakes in 1811-1812. Flatboats often traveled in large groups for safety's sake, and Captain John Davis was a pilot on a boat in one such group of boats. On December 15, 1811, the flatboatmen had tied their boats at Island No. 25 for the night. They were all rudely awakened at two o'clock the next morning, and found the earth in chaos around them. Captain Davis described the scene in part as follows:

"In a few seconds the boats, island and mainland became perfectly convulsed, the trees twisted and lashed together, the earth in all quarters was sinking, and the water issued from the center of the 25th island just on our left, and came rushing down its side in torrents; and on our right there fell at once about 30 or 40 acres of land, some say 300 acres."

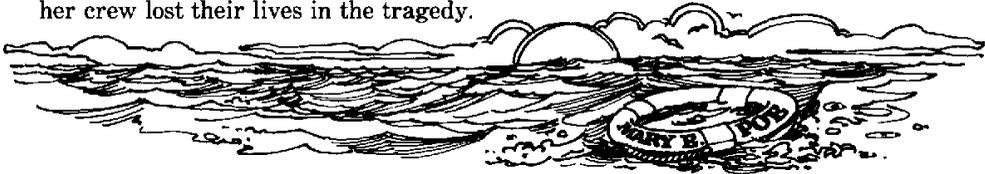
Captain Davis and his party completed their hazardous journey successfully, but not without some very anxious moments.

CANADIAN REACH

*Mile 800.5 AHP, Map 10
Right bank, descending*

The Canadian Reach, now an oxbow lake, was once the main channel of the river. The reach was filled with sandbars, snags, and tiny islands that made it a difficult passage to navigate. French and Spanish explorers called the numerous islands the Canadian Isles.

Zadok Cramer, in *The Navigator*, gave two of the islands numbers. Islands No. 26 and No. 27, as Cramer called them, soon grew together and became one island. The river, after 1900, abandoned its old bed in Canadian Reach and made a new channel in the chute behind the islands. Boatmen renamed the old islands "Forked Deer Island," and the Canadian Reach became an oxbow lake. Somewhere in the lake, under the sand and silt, lie the bleached bones of a steamer called the *Mary E. Poe*. She caught fire and went down in the reach in October, 1873, and several passengers and two members of her crew lost their lives in the tragedy.



ASHPORT, TENNESSEE

Mile 796.4 AHP, Map 10
Left bank, descending

Ashport, an old river town, had a population of about 200 in 1856. It was located in a big bend of the river, and had several warehouses, and a big steam-powered sawmill. The river's currents played havoc with the little village, eating away the bank in front of it until there was very little left of Ashport.

Today there is a relatively straight reach of river in front of Ashport, and the old bend has virtually disappeared. The area is still known as Ashport Bend, in spite of all the changes.

DANIELS POINT, ARKANSAS

Mile 796.3 AHP, Map 10
Right bank, descending

Daniels Point, on the upper end of the Plum Point Reach, was the site of some of the earliest experimental work carried out under the supervision of the Mississippi River Commission. Willow-mat revetments were placed on Daniels Point, but floods in 1891 and 1892 totally destroyed the protective works.

Changes in the river's course later changed the point of attack to the opposite side of the Mississippi, and today articulated concrete mattresses protect the Tennessee shoreline, while a dike field off Daniels Point helps to stabilize the navigation channel in the area.

GOLD DUST, TENNESSEE

Mile 791.5 AHP, Map 10
Left bank, descending

Gold Dust, a small Tennessee community, bears the name of an old steamboat. The *Gold Dust* was a sidewheel steamer, built in 1877 and still going strong when a famous passenger named Mark Twain noted that she was as neat and comfortable in 1882 as when she first entered the river trade. Twain was gathering information for a new

book to be called “*Life on the Mississippi*” when he rode the *Gold Dust* down the river. He enjoyed swapping stories with the boat’s officers about the good old days before the Civil War, and he found the boat’s pilot, Lem Gray, particularly pleasant and congenial.

About three months after Twain’s trip on the *Gold Dust*, the old steamer exploded her boilers near Hickman, Kentucky, killing 17 persons outright and injuring about 50 more. Mark Twain noted with regret that Lem Gray was one of those who lost his life, and added that Gray was “a good man who deserved a kindlier fate.”

The Gold Dust community today has a grain elevator and mooring facilities for barges. It is very small, consisting chiefly of people who farm in the immediate vicinity.

OSCEOLA, ARKANSAS

Mile 786.0 AHP, Map 10
Right bank, descending

Unlike many small towns along the Lower Mississippi, Osceola, Arkansas, has been growing in recent years. The 1960 census figures showed a population of little more than 6,000, but the 1970 census credited the town with a population of more than 7,000. It was originally located directly on the west bank of the river and had a thriving steamboat trade, but the river threw a large sandbar up in front of the town and gave it all kinds of problems. In recent years, local interests have established a small port, which is scheduled for expansion under a Federal project authorized by the Chief of Engineers in 1971. A harbor channel is being dredged, and a 97-acre industrial site is being developed.

During the Civil War, Osceola was too small to receive much attention from the Union forces, but in August, 1863, a Confederate force was reported in the area and a Union gunboat came up to investigate. The *U.S.S. Silver Cloud* landed a detachment of soldiers, who scoured the area but found no rebels. Just for good measure, the boat lobbed a few shells in the general direction of the town, to warn the people that an even worse fate might be theirs if they allowed Confederate forces to linger around Osceola.

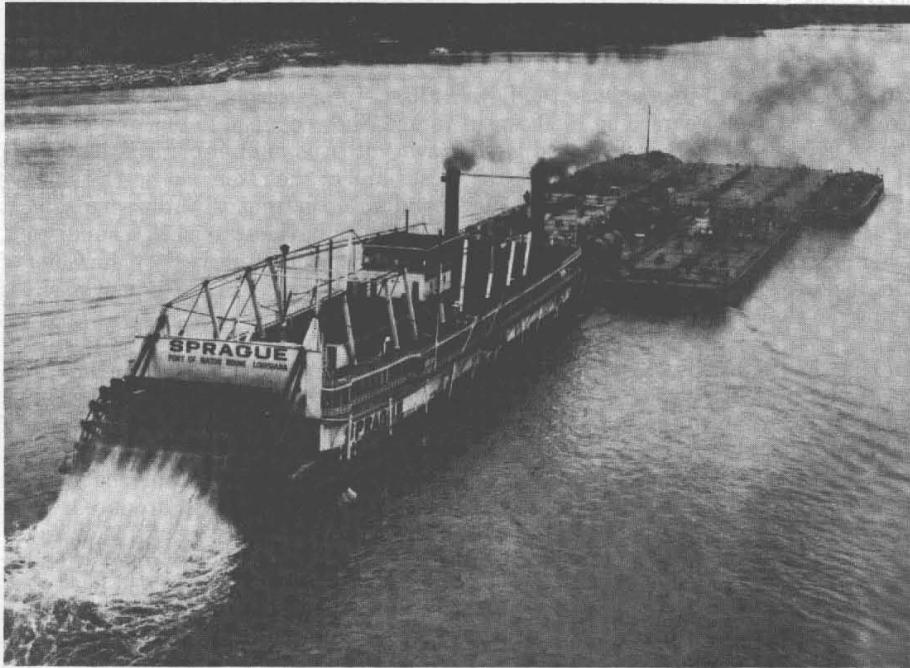
During the steamboat era, the people of Osceola must have seen more human suffering than most people witness in a lifetime. Plum Point’s notorious snags and bars were fatal to more than one steamer, and Colonel Charles Suter’s 1874 reconnaissance map showed three of the old wrecks still lying in the channel. The *Carolina* had succumbed to one of the snags in front of Osceola in 1841, and 34 people lost their lives. The *Tara Crown* and the *Telegraph* had gone down in the same area.

ISLAND NO. 30

*Mile 785.5 AHP, Map 10
Right bank, descending*

When Island No. 30 was given its identifying number in 1801, it lay close to the left shore. Later it crossed the river—or the river crossed it—and it now lies in front of Osceola, near the Arkansas side of the Mississippi. It appears to be attached to Arkansas, but is owned by Tennessee.

In 1913 the famous, record-breaking steam-powered towboat *Sprague* had a spectacular accident at Island No. 30. The big sternwheel boat, pushing a record tow of coal barges, was coming downstream when she was caught in side currents and whirled into the chute behind the island. Colliding with some stone dikes, the *Big Mama*, as she was affectionately called by river men, dropped her countless tons of coal into the chute, and lost all her barges.



STEAMBOAT SPRAGUE. Known to rivermen as the "Big Mama" of the Mississippi, the steam-powered towboat Sprague was a record-breaking workboat. She was on the river for more than 30 years and served as a tourist attraction at Vicksburg, Mississippi, afterward until she burned in the spring of 1974. With restoration estimates running into millions of dollars, she now lies on a muddy bank at the Port of Vicksburg, awaiting a decision as to her future—if any.

Some years later, the Mississippi tore out the old stone dikes at Island No. 30, removed the mountains of coal deposited there by the *Sprague*, and settled itself in a new bed where the chute had been.

The *Sprague* survived her mammoth accident and lived to break more records (and, of course, more tows), retiring in the 1940's after more than 30 years of service on the river. The towboat was acquired by the city of Vicksburg, and was for many years a tourist attraction on the city's waterfront. In the spring of 1974, a fire virtually destroyed the *Big Mama*. The hulk of the old boat, with her sternwheel intact, was laid up at the Port of Vicksburg to await a decision as to whether the boat should be abandoned or restored.

PLUM POINT, TENNESSEE

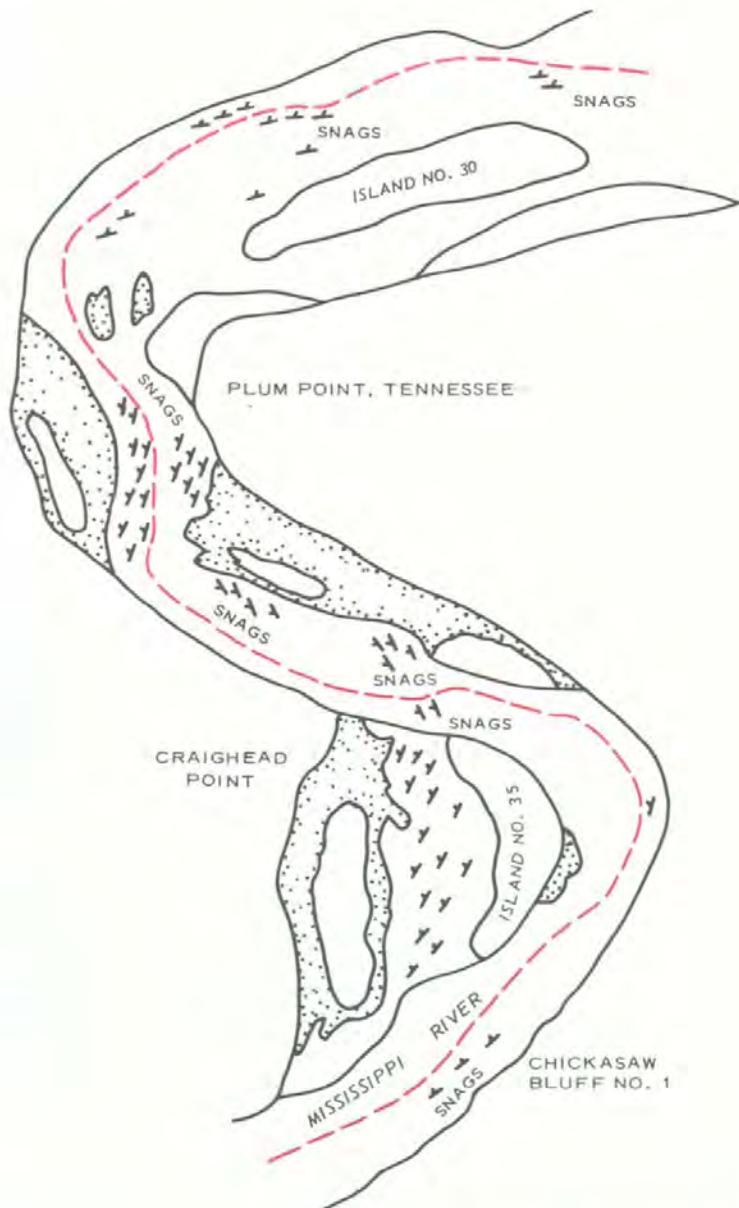
Mile 782.0 AHP, Map 10
Left bank, descending

"Worst place on the Lower Mississippi" was the kindest thing early boatmen ever said about Plum Point. A multitude of snags, half-concealed tree trunks, and sandbars gave even the most adventurous pilot cold chills, and the currents that foamed around the point with a loud roar were enough to frighten a timid flatboatman half to death. Flatboats, steamboats, barges, and even people met their doom at Plum Point with dismaying regularity until the Army Corps of Engineers began its work of improving navigation on the river.

Captain Henry Shreve, generally considered the real father of the Mississippi River steamboat, was thoroughly familiar with the hazards of Plum Point. In the winter of 1829, he took his new invention, a "snagboat," to Plum Point to demonstrate its effectiveness. In a few hours, the snagboat *Heliopolis* had snatched out and demolished a veritable forest of the ugly snags. The U. S. Government was impressed with Shreve's demonstration and put him to work as superintendant of the navigation improvements on the great river.

One of the few real naval engagements in the Civil War occurred in Plum Point Bend on May 10, 1862. It proved to be full of surprises for the U. S. Navy.

The Confederate's so-called "River Defense Fleet" consisted of seven old river steamboats that had been converted to rams. Their guns were not impressive, but they had formidable iron-clad noses that could easily penetrate an enemy ship's hull and send it to the bottom. The names of the rebel boats emphasized the fact that the fleet was an independent command that had nothing to do with the feeble Confederate Navy. They were called the *General Bragg*, *General Sterling Price*, *General Van Dorn*, *General Jeff. Thompson*, *General Beauregard*, *Colonel Lovell*, and the *Sumter*. A small steamer called the *Little Rebel* was the flagship of the fleet.



(From 1821 Young, Pousin, and Tuttle Map)

WORST PLACE ON THE RIVER. In 1821, when the above reconnaissance map was made, Plum Point was considered the worst place on the river. Plum Point was notoriously dangerous, and countless flatboats and steamers ran afoul of its snags and bars and went to the bottom.

The motley collection of vessels surprised the U. S. gunboats *Cincinnati* and *Mound City* in the Plum Point Reach and quickly butted them to death, sinking both of them near the river's banks. When the Union boats *Carondelet*, *Benton*, and *Pittsburg* hurried down to join the fray, the rebel commanders suddenly remembered their inferior armament and fled back down the river to Memphis, still Confederate territory at the time.

The glorious victory of the River Defense Fleet at Plum Point came as a surprise to southern supporters, as well as to the U. S. Navy, and in Memphis joy was unrestrained. Confederate citizens immediately jumped to the mistaken conclusion that Memphis would be a "safe" refuge for the duration of the war. The invincible River Defense Fleet would never allow Union gunboats to approach the city.

Today Plum Point is no longer the most dangerous passage on the Lower Mississippi, but it still requires the close attention of the Army Corps of Engineers. Miles of revetment work, several dike fields, and maintenance dredging keep the channel stable and maintain the required depth for navigation.

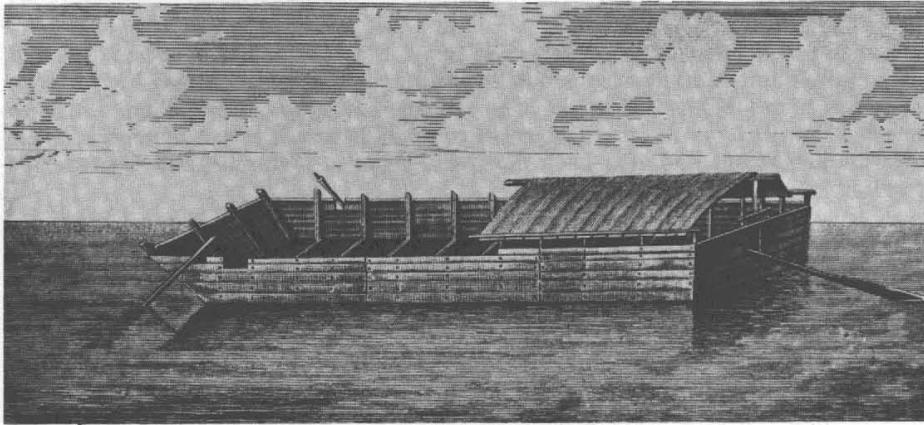
ISLAND NO. 33

Mile 781.5 AHP, Map 10
Left bank, descending

Island No. 33 is still shown on navigation maps, but Islands No. 31 and No. 32 were mislaid many years ago and no longer appear on the charts. Island No. 32 was said to have been totally destroyed by the New Madrid earthquakes in 1811-1812, and Island No. 31 may have suffered the same fate, or may have joined the State of Arkansas before it disappeared from the maps.

Island No. 33 was called Flour Island by early boatmen because so many flatboats that carried barrels of flour left their cargo smashed to smithereens on the island. Flatboats could carry from 200 to 400 barrels of flour, and even after the introduction of the steamboat most of the flour produced in the Ohio Valley was floated down by flatboat. New Orleans was the point-of-no-return for the awkward craft, if they were lucky enough to get that far in one piece. It was more practical to break them up there and sell the lumber than it was to attempt to get them back up the stream against the current, since manual labor was the only means of propelling them.

Thomas Nuttall, who took a loaded flatboat down the river in 1819, noted that Cramer's book, *The Navigator*, advised the use of the right-hand channel. After looking the situation over carefully, Nuttall said that the right-hand channel filled him with terror, and he took the channel on the left side of the island. He passed through something that resembled a submerged forest, he said, and was agreeably surprised when he landed safely on the river bank below Island No. 33.



FLATBOAT. Flatboats, also called Kentucky boats, came in many shapes and sizes. From the Ohio and Upper Mississippi Valleys, they carried furs, lead, coal, flour, and tobacco to New Orleans. Jacob Voder, a Kentuckian, had been a soldier in the American Revolution, but he took more pride in the fact that he had been one of the first American flatboatmen than he did in the fact that he had fought for American independence. When he died in 1832, Voder's tombstone informed the world that he had been a member of a crew that took the first flatboat from the Ohio Valley to New Orleans in 1782.

John James Audubon was detained at Island No. 33 by a storm in 1820. He spent the idle time working on his drawing of the Bald Eagle that he had killed at Little Prairie. With his spyglass, he could see live eagles roosting in the lower branches of the cypress trees in the vicinity of the island.

Island No. 33 was removed from the main channel of the Lower Mississippi in 1935 by Driver's Cutoff. It now lies more than a mile inland, on the east bank of the river.

FORT PILLOW, TENNESSEE

*Mile 779.5 AHP, Map 11
Left bank, descending*

Fort Pillow was a Civil War fortification, erected by Confederates in September, 1861. Named for General Gideon J. Pillow of the Confederate Army, the little fort had a small garrison and about 60 guns. The real strength of the position was never tested. The Union Army and Navy had planned a cooperative campaign against Fort Pillow, and set the date for June 5, 1862. When they arrived to launch the attack, they found that the rebels had abandoned the position the previous day.

Late in the Civil War, Fort Pillow unexpectedly zoomed into national prominence when the famous Confederate cavalry leader, General Nathan B. Forrest, recaptured it. A Union garrison, totally surprised and panic-stricken by the daring raid, offered

only feeble resistance. Forrest said later that he had attacked with a force of 1,000 men, but the frightened survivors of the engagement estimated the rebel force at 7,000 men.

The loss of Fort Pillow came as a stunning blow to Union officials, one of whom referred to it as "a massacre." The northern press took up the cry. After all, General Forrest had been a slave trader before the war, and it was natural to suppose the worst of him. The garrison of Union men had consisted of 200 white soldiers and officers and 300 blacks.

President Lincoln was deeply troubled by the outcry. He had been responsible for recruiting southern slaves into the Union army. He had supposed that it would be an effective war measure that would demoralize and terrify the people of the South. He had given the following assurance to Congressional leaders:

"The bare sight of 50,000 black soldiers upon the banks of the Mississippi would end the rebellion at once."

By the time the Confederates recaptured Fort Pillow, more than 100,000 black soldiers were garrisoning various captured posts in the Mississippi Valley, but the rebellion had not ended. Political enemies and the press demanded a public statement from the President about the Fort Pillow affair. Did the black soldiers panic and refuse to fight? Did the rebels trap them and deliberately murder them? Were they simply overwhelmed by numbers and did they fight bravely to the end? What was the true story of Fort Pillow?

The President said there would be an investigation, and refused to say more. The investigation was held, and resulted in voluminous and conflicting testimony. There were charges of southern atrocities, and charges of northern brutality. By the time the investigation was under way, the war was drawing to a close. The northern press lost all interest in the matter.

Today there is a small community on the Tennessee bluff that preserves the name of Fort Pillow. There is also a prison farm in the area that is a part of the State penal system.

CRAIGHEAD POINT, ARKANSAS

*Mile 779.0 AHP, Map 11
Right bank, descending*

When Columbus, Kentucky, New Madrid, and Island No. 10 had all fallen into Union hands, the way was opened for Federal forces to launch an effort to take Fort Pillow, Tennessee. The Union fleet of ironclad gunboats, under the command of Flag Officer Andrew Foote, and a Union army under the command of General John Pope arrived at Craighead Point, opposite Fort Pillow, on April 13, 1862.

After assessing the situation, it was agreed by the two commanders that a canal across Craighead Point would enable the gunboats and transports to bypass Fort Pillow and get below it.

Four days later, General Pope received orders to move his men to another point, and the Army departed, leaving Foote to deal with Fort Pillow as best he could. The Navy commander promptly decided that digging a six-mile canal was beyond his capabilities, and he kept the fleet dawdling about above Fort Pillow for several weeks. Occasionally one of the gunboats would throw a shell in the direction of the fortification, and the rebel guns would reply, but nothing was accomplished. On May 9, 1862, Foote turned his command over to another officer and departed, never to return. He was suffering from a wound that would not heal, and it would be the cause of his untimely death some months later.

Foote's hand-picked successor, Captain Charles Henry Davis, took command on May 9, 1862, and promptly found himself engaged in the humiliating affair at Plum Point. When the smoke had cleared, Davis urged the U. S. Secretary of the Navy to hurry the delivery to him of some ironclad rams.

While the Union fleet was waiting for the rams and trying to decide how to attack the fortification at Fort Pillow, the Confederates abandoned the position and disappeared.

Two years after the war had ended, a steamboat called the *St. Cloud* sank at Craighead Point. It was the second time down for the old steamer. She had served as a Union transport during the war, and in 1864 hit a snag on the Upper Mississippi and sank. She was raised, repaired, and put back in service, only to come to grief in the same manner at Craighead Point.

CHICKASAW BLUFF NO. 1

Mile 779.0 AHP, Map 11
Left bank, descending

There are four high bluffs along the Mississippi on the western edge of what is now the State of Tennessee. All of them were included in the territory claimed by the Chickasaw Indians, and the upper bluff was called Chickasaw Bluff No. 1.

The Chickasaws, never very numerous, were bold and aggressive in war and were much feared by the French, who had found them openly hostile.

The Chickasaws had almost destroyed DeSoto's expedition in the 16th Century. Later, they were friendly with English traders but always disliked the French. Eventually the Chickasaws would try to be friendly with the new American nation, and would in the process lose all of their lands, as well as their own national identity as a result.

FULTON, TENNESSEE

Mile 778.0 AHP, Map 11
Left bank, descending

Fulton, Tennessee, is a small community where the Corps of Engineers maintains a river gage and a bulletin board for the convenience of navigators. Before the Civil War, Fulton had an estimated population of around 400. Since it depended almost entirely on the steamboat trade for its commerce, it was doomed to decline when it failed to become a rail terminal and was bypassed in the 20th Century by major highways.

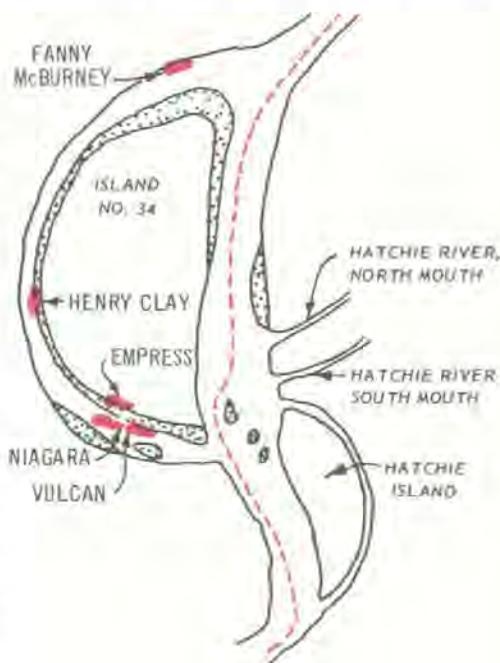
NODENA BEND

Mile 777.8 AHP, Map 11
Right bank, descending

Nodena Bend was a snaggy passage that ran to the right, or west, of Island No. 34. A good many steamboats went down in the bend before the river changed its course and appropriated a better channel in the chute east of the island.

Colonel Charles Suter's reconnaissance map of the Lower Mississippi showed just a few of the wrecks that had occurred in Nodena Bend. They were the *Fanny McBurney* (stranded on a sandbar in 1863); the *Henry Clay* (snagged in 1863); the *Empress* (snagged in 1864); and the *Vulcan* (a steam-powered towboat that sank in the bend in July, 1863).

NODENA BEND. The navigation channel west of Island No. 34, in Nodena Bend, was a treacherous one. Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 map showed five steamboats wrecked in the bend, and they were only a few of the boats that had been lost there. The river had already enlarged the Island No. 34 chute by 1874 and was in the process of abandoning its old bed in Nodena Bend.



ISLAND NO. 34

Mile 774.0 AHP, Map 11
Right bank, descending

Island No. 34 originally lay in the middle of the navigation channel of the Lower Mississippi, but migrated to the east bank, dragging a few smaller islands along with it. Later the river changed its course again, leaving Island No. 34 and a large towhead on the Arkansas side. The State of Tennessee still exercises jurisdiction over Island No. 34 and its towhead.

HATCHIE RIVER

Mile 774.0 AHP, Map 11
Left bank, descending

The Hatchie River is a small tributary of the Lower Mississippi. It drains about 2,609 square miles of Tennessee and Mississippi. Its watershed varies from flat, densely wooded river bottoms to fairly open, sparsely wooded hills. Abundant wildlife and waterfowl make the Hatchie Basin a favorite area for sportsmen.

In 1856 the Hatchie was said to be navigable for about 75 miles above its mouth. Six or seven small steamboats made regular trips up the river during the cotton season, and large shipments of sawlogs and white oak staves were brought downstream. Even in lower water, it was said that some of the smaller boats could navigate the Hatchie.

Just before the Civil War, the State of Tennessee appropriated some money for the improvement of the stream, but about a year after the war ended the state legislature declared the Hatchie to be an unnavigable stream and gave railroads permission to construct several low bridges across it.

By 1880 there were three railroad bridges obstructing the Hatchie River, and Tennessee farmers in the area were having some second thoughts. Transportation costs, they said, were exorbitant. Pressured by constituents, the state legislature reversed its earlier act and declared that the Hatchie was once again a navigable stream. Railroads were ordered to alter their bridges to provide draw spans for steamboats, but it was already too late to save the steamboat trade on the Hatchie.

In recent years, the Hatchie River has been on several rampages. The greatest flood of record on the little river occurred in 1948, but floods in 1935 and 1946 were almost as memorable. Flood-control studies are being made.

RANDOLPH, TENNESSEE

*Mile 771.0 AHP, Map 11
Left bank, descending*

Randolph, Tennessee, was established in 1828, and for a long time enjoyed more prosperity and a larger population than its neighbor, Memphis.

In its early days, Randolph had a great deal of trouble with a group of bandits who hung around the town, preying on the steamboats that came to the landing. In 1834, the people of Randolph lost patience with the criminal element and made a clean sweep of the robbers. Newspapers in other river towns reported, with obvious hearty approval, that eight of the wicked bandits had been jailed and that about a dozen more had been "meted out punishment decreed by Judge Lynch, from whose rulings there is no appeal." If the citizens of Randolph had really resorted to lawless violence to remove the bandits from their midst, it was the opinion of the people of other towns that the rascals had received exactly the treatment they so richly deserved.

Randolph might have been the site of a major Civil War battle, if Confederate officials had listened to some advice offered them in 1861. A rebel officer who was familiar with the area urged that Randolph should be heavily fortified. It would be much easier to defend than Columbus or Island No. 10, he said. About 18 guns were finally placed at Randolph, but when the Union fleet went down the river and approached the little fort on June 6, 1862, the rebels had already abandoned the post without a contest.

A short time later, General William T. Sherman ordered Randolph burned because some Confederates had fired on the Union steamer *Eugene* in front of the landing. Randolph had no real importance, General Sherman said scornfully, but he felt that its destruction would provide a salutary lesson for other southern river towns. It was a policy that was going to make the red-headed general better known later in the war than he was in 1862. Before the fighting ended, his concept of total war would make him the most hated of all the northern generals, as far as southerners were concerned.

In 1864 a handful of Confederate soldiers attacked another Union boat in front of the ruined town of Randolph, and almost succeeded in capturing it. The affair ended in a dramatic shoot-out on board the boat, and the *Belle St. Louis* fled the landing at Randolph with four casualties on deck. Two of the dead were Union men; the other two were Confederates.

After the Civil War, both the railroads and highways bypassed what was left of Randolph, and the town went into a permanent decline. In 1871, a Memphis newspaper reported that the bluff at Randolph was caving away, carrying with it the sites of the Civil War batteries.

Below Randolph, at the foot of Chickasaw Bluff No. 2, is Richardsons Landing. There is a casting field near the landing, where concrete blocks are produced for the Corps of Engineers to use in revetment work.

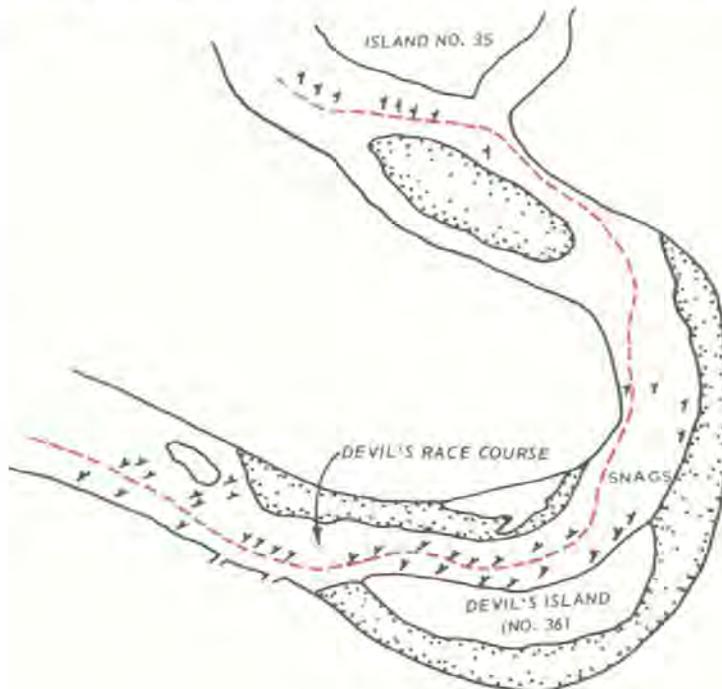
ISLAND NO. 35

*Mile 76 1/2 AHP, Map 12
Right bank, descending*

During the past century, many changes have taken place in the vicinity of Island No. 35, and Island No. 36 has completely disappeared from the river maps. The changes were all for the better. The area had been called *Chenal du Diable*, or the Devil's Channel by French explorers, and American flatboatmen had named it the Devil's Race Course. Island No. 36 was called the Devil's Island.

John Bradbury, a British botanist, was making a voyage down the Lower Mississippi in December, 1811, and had the misfortune to tie up at Island No. 35 the night the New Madrid earthquakes began to convulse the Mississippi Valley.

Bradbury had already been worried about the notorious Devil's Race Course. He knew that it was extremely shallow, with a huge bar obstructing the navigation channel. Countless large trees uprooted by the river's currents came to rest on the bar, and the



(From 1821 Young, Poston, and Tuttle Map)

DEVIL'S RACE COURSE. The navigation channel in the vicinity of Islands No. 35 and No. 36 was feared by flatboatmen, who called the passage the Devil's Race Course. Sandbars and snags made navigation difficult, and the water rushed over the bars and through the branches of driftwood trees with a roar that could be heard for some distance. Army Engineers making a reconnaissance map of the area in 1821 showed some of the snags and bars.

water rushed over the bar and through the branches of the driftwood with a roar that could be heard some distance away. When the boatmen were awakened by the shaking of the earth and the tossing of their boats, trees were crashing around them and all the waterfowl in the area were screaming in terror. They spent the rest of the night trying to keep their boats from being dashed to pieces, and next morning found the Devil's Race Course tame by comparison with the night they had spent tied to the island.

When John James Audubon came down the river in the winter of 1820-1821, he too had dreaded reaching Island No. 35 and the dangerous channel below it. To his Journal he confided gloomily that he expected it to be a terrifying experience and that he was hardly surprised to find the Devil working anywhere "on this cursed river." The next day, having run the Race Course safely, Audubon wrote cheerfully that many places on the Lower Mississippi were not half as bad as their names had led him to believe.

During the Civil War, a transport called the *Universe* was taking a group of rebel prisoners from Vicksburg to Cairo, to be sent to a prison camp in the North, when the boat hit a snag between Islands No. 35 and No. 36 and went down. The Confederates took advantage of the general confusion and panic on board the Union boat, and about a dozen succeeded in escaping. Six or seven of the others were drowned, along with some of the boat's crew.

Around 1874, the Island No. 35 and Island No. 36 area began to change rapidly. In the bend where Island No. 35 was located, the river showed signs that it was about to abandon the channel on the west side of the island. The Corps of Engineers tried to prevent the change by building sand dams across the island chute, but the river had its way. After the flood of 1927, the channel on the west filled with silt, and by 1928 boats were using the island chute as the main navigation channel. Island No. 35 joined the Arkansas shore.

Island No. 36 was eaten away by the river currents, and in 1876 the Devil's Race Course was removed from the main channel of the river by the Centennial Cutoff.

All of these drastic changes brought the river into a better alignment, and proved in the long run to be beneficial rather than harmful to navigation interests.

CHICKASAW BLUFF NO. 3

Mile 755.0 AHP, Map 12
Left bank, descending

Rene-Robert Cavalier de la Salle was born in France on November 22, 1643. At the age of 23, the young man sailed to the New World, and for the next few years he lived in Canada and learned a great deal about Indians, fur trappers, and the great North American wilderness.

La Salle was a dreamer, but he was also a tireless and energetic worker. He soon acquired an obsession about the Mississippi River. He believed that it flowed into the Gulf of Mexico, and he thought that a chain of forts and trading posts along its course would be profitable both for him and for the French government.

It took years of almost superhuman effort, filled with betrayals, mutinies, and other disaster, for the determined La Salle to get together enough men and money to begin to explore the Mississippi River. In 1682 he set out at last, accompanied by his second-in-command and trusted lieutenant, Henri de Tonti, and a party of 23 Frenchmen and 18 Indian braves, 10 Indian squaws, and three small children.

From the mouth of the Ohio to the Chickasaw bluffs, the voyage was uneventful. At the third Chickasaw bluff, the party stopped to rest and replenish their supply of meat. Hunters went into the woods. By nightfall, all had returned except Pierre Prudhomme, one of the Frenchmen in the party.

La Salle feared the worst. If Prudhomme had been ambushed and killed by hostile Indians, the expedition could expect to be attacked at any time. He was nonetheless determined to find out what had happened to Prudhomme before he continued the voyage downstream. The French explorer and his men began to construct a crude fort, hastily throwing up earthworks to protect them from possible Indian attack. When their fort was finished, they began a methodical search for the missing man. They searched the forest by day, and slept uneasily at night within their earthworks. On the ninth day, Pierre Prudhomme staggered into the camp, totally exhausted but otherwise unharmed. He had simply become lost in the woods, and it had taken him more than a week to find his way back to the river.

Since Prudhomme was in no condition to travel, La Salle detailed a few men to stay with him at "Fort Prudhomme," while he and the rest of the party continued the voyage of exploration.

After La Salle had proved to his own satisfaction that the Mississippi did indeed empty into the Gulf of Mexico, he set up a cross at the mouth of the river and claimed the vast valley for France. Then he returned to Fort Prudhomme. He arrived weakened by a fever, and spent 40 days in the little fort, near death. When he recovered, he went back to Canada and sailed to France to make arrangements to establish a colony on the lower reaches of the great river he had explored. His plans and ambitions were destined to fail, for when he later entered the Gulf of Mexico he was unable to locate the mouth of the Mississippi and landed on the barren Texas coast, where he was later murdered by one of his own men.

Old maps do not always agree on the location of Fort Prudhomme, but contemporary documents give evidence that the Chickasaw Bluff No. 3 was the true location of the French explorer's camp and fort.

The State of Tennessee owns 6,512 acres of land lying between the Mississippi River and Chickasaw Bluff No. 3. The area, called Shelby Forest, is a public recreation area.

CENTENNIAL CUTOFF

Mile 754.0 AHP, Map 12
Right bank, descending

The Lower Mississippi celebrated the nation's 100th birthday by making two major cutoffs in its course. One of them occurred below Island No. 36, and removed a large bend in the river that boatmen had called the Devil's Elbow. The change in the river's course in this area set off a kind of chain reaction that eventually shortened the navigation channel by about 30 miles. It was also the indirect cause of some undesirable shoaling in the harbor at Memphis, some miles down the river. Island No. 37 and Island No. 38 were both removed from the river by the Centennial Cutoff above Memphis.

BRANDYWINE ISLAND

Mile 752.0 AHP, Map 12
Right bank, descending

Brandywine Point, known today as Brandywine Island, took its name from one of the early steamboat disasters on the Lower Mississippi.

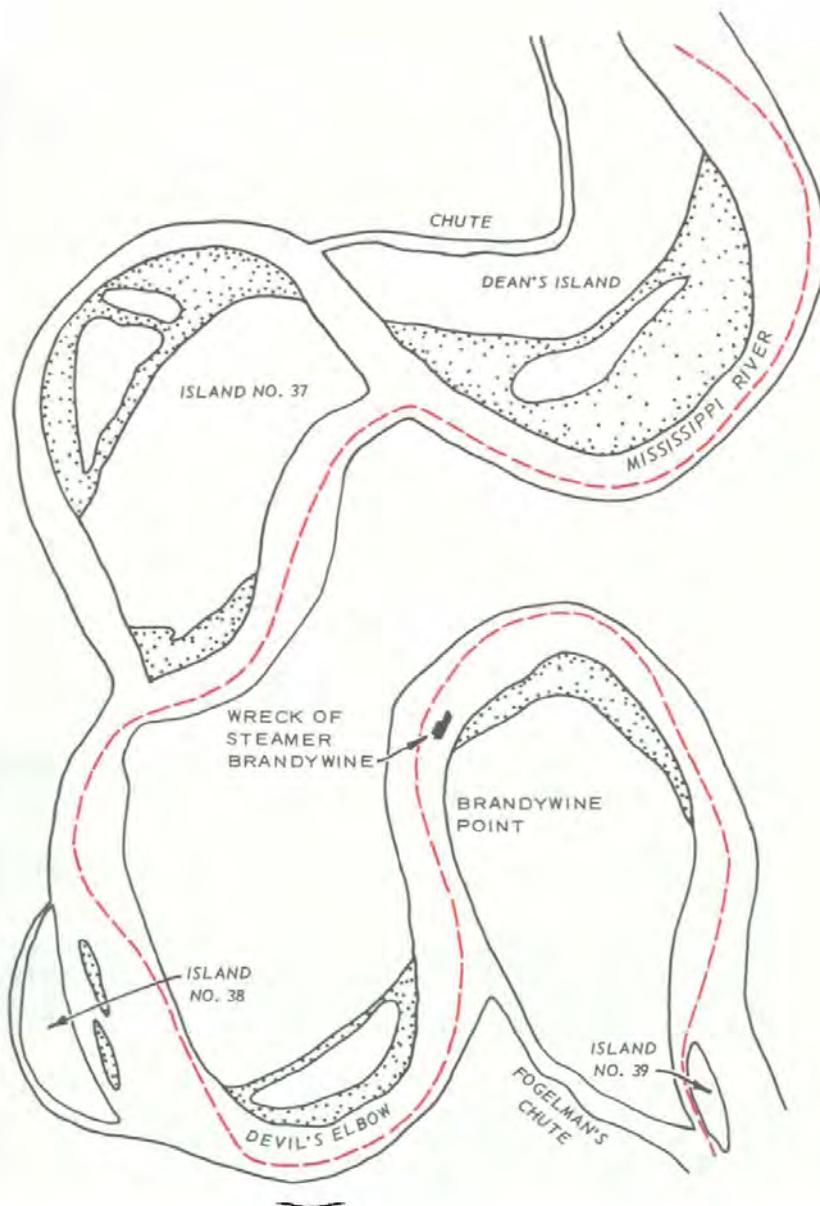
The steamboat *Brandywine* was hustling upstream on April 9, 1832, bound for Louisville and heavily loaded with passengers and cargo.

On board the boat was a shipment of wagonwheels, and the shipper had prudently wrapped them in straw to keep them from getting scratched and damaged from handling. Later it was said that sparks from the boat's stack must have caught the straw on fire. At any rate, a fire did break out in the vicinity of the wheels, and a high wind spread the flames rapidly over the deck of the boat. Frightened passengers began to leap into the water.

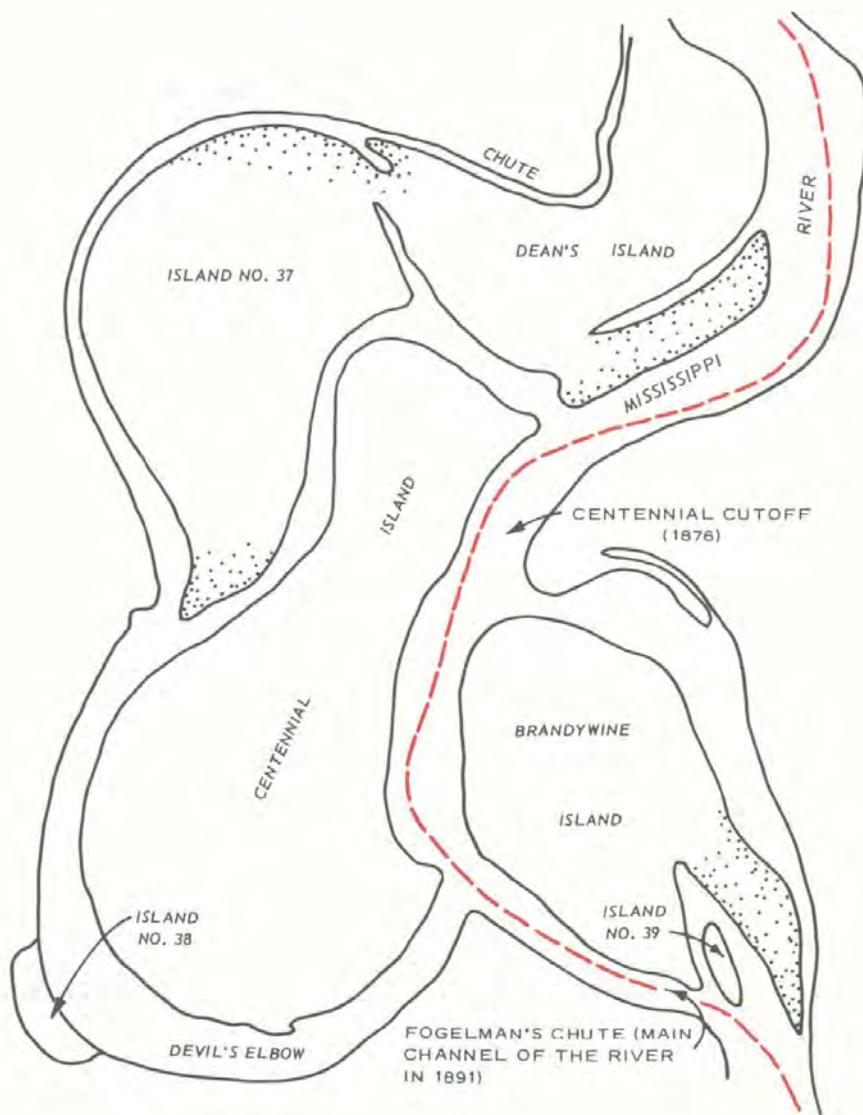
A contemporary account of the tragedy estimated that there had been at least 230 people on board the burning boat and that only 75 had been saved. Later estimates varied from 60 to 150 deaths. Since the boat's books and passenger list burned, it was never possible to ascertain the exact figures.

The place where the boat went down was afterwards known as Brandywine Point. In 1858 a woodcutter reported that the major flood of that year had uncovered a grim reminder of the old tragedy. He had found after the water receded that a part of the point had washed away and that the engine cylinders and part of the hull of the *Brandywine* were plainly visible, half-buried in the sand.

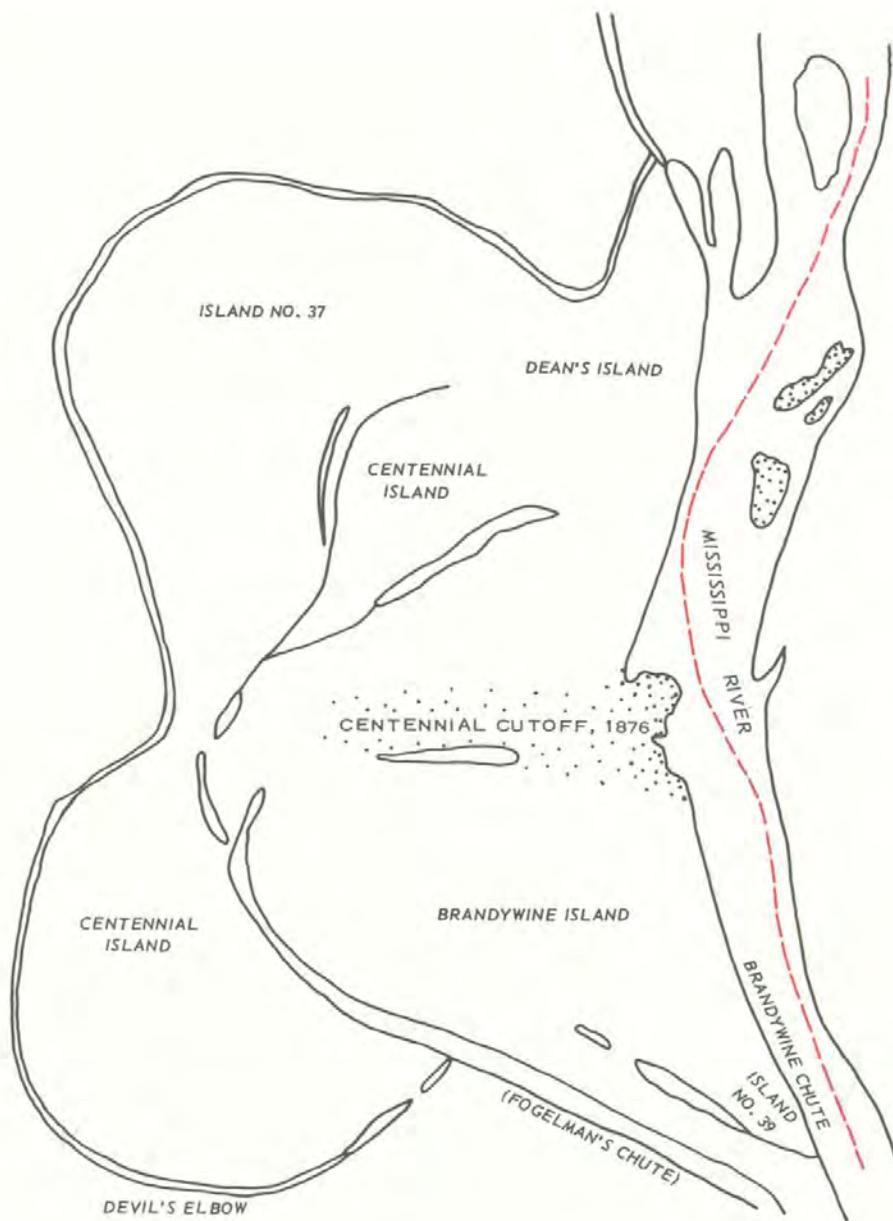
The State of Arkansas today maintains a public recreation area and wildlife refuge on Brandywine Island.



BEFORE CENTENNIAL CUTOFF. Colonel Charles Suter's map of the Lower Mississippi, made in 1874, showed a narrow neck of land separating the river channel above and below the long double loop that contained Island No. 37, Island No. 38, and the Devil's Elbow. Two years later, Centennial Cutoff occurred when the river jumped the neck of land and made itself a new channel.



AFTER CENTENNIAL CUTOFF. After the cutoff in 1876, the Lower Mississippi ran west, or on the right side, of Brandywine Island. A map published by the Mississippi River Commission in 1891 showed the river's new course and the old loop that was removed by the cutoff.



(From 1975 Navigation Chart (Map No. 12))

MORE CHANGES. Further changes in the Centennial Cutoff area made an island out of Brandywine Point. The river today runs through Brandywine Chute, and a total of about 30 miles have been removed from the navigation channel by changes in the river's course.

ISLANDS NO. 40 AND NO. 41

Mile 746.0 AHP, Map 13
Right bank, descending

Island No. 40 was a large island that lay in the middle of the river. The boatmen called it Beef Island, and when Island No. 41, a small island that lay at the foot of Island No. 40, became attached to the larger island, both became known as Beef Island.

Many steamboat accidents occurred in the Beef Island area, and one of the early ones would have been a major disaster had it not been for the prompt and unusual action taken by Captain T. J. Casey and his crew. The steamer *Gen. Pratte* had left New Orleans on November 19, 1842, bound for St. Louis. On board were more than 450 German immigrants who had taken the steamer at New Orleans after crossing the Atlantic on board the ocean-going vessels, *Columbus*, *Johannes*, and *Diana*. The immigrants were deck passengers, and the *Gen. Pratte* had eight or ten cabin passengers as well.

At about 2:00 a.m. on November 24, as the boat approached Beef Island, the crew discovered that a fire had broken out on the steamer. A determined effort was made to douse the flames with water buckets, but the fire spread rapidly. Captain Casey ordered the boat run ashore, a plank was put out to the bank, and the officers and deckhands began a nightmare effort to persuade more than 450 terrified people, most of whom spoke no English, to abandon the boat. Plunging into the smoke and flames, the boatmen forcibly removed some of those who were too frightened to run. Several elderly immigrants and many children were carried ashore.

Gathering the survivors on the island, Captain Casey built a huge bonfire to keep them warm. So loud were their lamentations that he assumed that many lives had been lost, but when morning came it was discovered that not a single person was missing. The heroic officers and crew of the *Gen. Pratte* had saved every passenger.

The German immigrants had lost their baggage and provisions, but fortunately they were all fully clothed. Captain Casey explained later that immigrants seldom undressed at night on board the boats. Most of them, he said, even had their shoes on when they fled the burning boat.

Many years later, the passengers on board the *W. R. Arthur* were less fortunate than those who had been saved by Captain Casey's cool courage. The *W. R. Arthur* had about 130 people on board when the boat's boilers exploded at the foot of Island No. 40 on January 29, 1871. The steamer caught fire immediately after the explosion, panic ensued, and only 50 or 60 of the passengers survived the holocaust.

The well-known *Belle St. Louis* was another steamer that met with an accident at Beef Island. She hit an obstruction there on November 14, 1879, and sank. The steamboat *Katie P. Kountz* had suffered the same fate in the same area a few weeks earlier.

REDMAN POINT, ARKANSAS

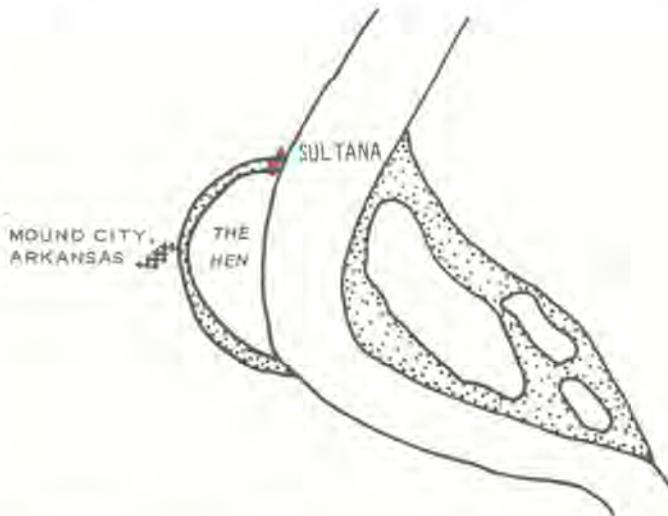
Mile 743.4 AHP, Map 13
Right bank, descending

Named for an early Arkansas settler, Redman Point had several steamboat landings and woodyards at the time of the Civil War. It was at Redman Point, between Harrison's and Bradley's landings, that the worst marine disaster in U. S. history occurred in 1865.

The Civil War had just ended. At Vicksburg, Mississippi, Union soldiers released from southern prisons were waiting for transportation North. For reasons which were never fully understood, the Union officers, who had a choice of several boats, put more than 2,000 of the unlucky men on board the steamboat *Sultana*.

The *Sultana* was a large boat, but hardly big enough to carry 2,000 men comfortably. The soldiers were so tightly packed on board that there was barely room for them to stand, much less to eat and sleep or rest. Few of them complained. The war was over, and they were anxious to return to their homes at long last.

It was an extremely cold December night when the *Sultana* exploded her boilers and caught fire at Redman Point. The Union soldiers, enfeebled by long imprisonment and exhausted by the crowded conditions on board the boat, never had a chance. In the swift, cold currents of the Mississippi, most of them struggled only briefly before they drowned.



WRECK OF THE SULTANA. Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 map of the Lower Mississippi showed the ill-fated Sultana lodged near the head of Hen Island, above Mound City, Arkansas. The explosion of the Sultana was the worst marine disaster the United States had ever seen. More than 1500 persons lost their lives.

For days after the accident, barges were sent out from Memphis on grim recovery missions. Hundreds of bodies were found, caught in piles of driftwood or lying on the edge of bars and islands. The final official estimate was that 1,547 men had died, but there were probably more. Not all of those who made it to the shore survived, and not all the bodies of those who had drowned were recovered.

The *Sultana*, burning furiously, had drifted down to Hen Island, in front of the little village of Mound City, Arkansas. There it sank, and the river piled sand around the hulk and mercifully obliterated all traces of the ill-fated boat.

In the North, the press paid little attention to the fearful loss of life in the *Sultana* disaster. President Abraham Lincoln had just been assassinated, the public was crying out for vengeance, and the press had more sensations than it could handle. Later several books would be written about the tragedy, but at the time the nation was preoccupied with other matters.

CHICKEN ISLAND

Mile 740.0 AHP, Map 14
Right bank, descending

Chicken Island is all that remains of what the French explorers called “the Thousand Islands.” Kentucky flatboatmen had renamed the islands “Paddy’s Hen and Chickens.”

In 1801 Zadok Cramer numbered four of the little islands, designating them as Islands No. 42, No. 43, No. 44, and No. 45. Island No. 46 was the number assigned to Presidents Island.

About three quarters of a century later, a mapmaker became confused by all the numbers on the islands and accidentally appropriated a number belonging to one of Paddy’s “Chickens” and gave it to Presidents Island. The error went unnoticed, and was perpetuated by subsequent maps and charts. As a result, Presidents Island and several islands below it do not bear the numbers today that Zadok Cramer gave them in 1801.

HOPEFIELD POINT, ARKANSAS

Mile 736.8 AHP, Map 14
Right bank, descending

In 1795, the Spanish were still clinging stubbornly to their possessions in the Lower Mississippi Valley. The little forts they had constructed to discourage encroachment

by Americans were feeble posts at best, but they were supported by a Spanish war fleet. On May 20, 1795, seven of the Spanish galleys were assembled at the point of land opposite the present site of Memphis, Tennessee.

Don Manuel Gayoso de Lemos was in command of the Spanish expedition, and he was preparing to negotiate with the Chickasaw Indians. He wanted a site for still another fort, to be located on Chickasaw Bluff No. 4. Setting up a camp on the west bank of the river, the Spanish governor commuted back and forth to meetings with the Indian chiefs. He called the campground "El Campo de Esperanza."

El Campo de Esperanza (later called Hopefield—a literal translation of the Spanish phrase) continued to serve as a base for the Spanish fleet while the Spanish workmen were constructing the fort on the bluff. When the United States took possession of the post on the east bank in 1797, the Spanish soldiers and seamen remained at Hopefield for a short time before they withdrew permanently from the river.

After the Spanish left the valley, Hopefield became a small American village. During the Civil War, the little town was burned. In front of the ruins of Hopefield lay the wrecks of several Civil War steamers.

One of the wrecks was an old riverboat that Confederates had converted to a ram. They called it the *Colonel Lovell*, and it was one of the boats that was sunk by the Federal fleet on June 6, 1862. The rebel ram, hit first by the Union ram *Queen of the West*, and then butted again by the *Monarch*, went down so fast that her crew had to swim for their lives. The boat was so badly damaged by the ramming that the Union forces did not bother to raise it to use against its former owners, as they did some of the other Confederate boats sunk at Memphis.

Another old hulk that was visible off Hopefield Point for many years after the war was the wreck of the little steam tug *Hercules*, a boat that enjoyed the dubious distinction of having been sunk by Confederate cavalry. Captain J. H. McGehee, a bold commander with a small detachment of Arkansas cavalymen, had captured the *Hercules*, the *Grampus No. 3*, and the *Jacob Musselman* and had burned them all under the very noses of the Union fleet and garrison at Memphis.

WOLF RIVER

Mile 735.9 AHP, Map 14
Left bank, descending

French explorers had called the little river at Chickasaw Bluff No. 4 the Margot River, and a French priest who descended the Mississippi in 1700 explained that it had been named for an Indian who accompanied the great explorer La Salle on his first voyage down the river in 1682.

Spanish officials had referred to the river as "Las Casas," and American settlers renamed it Wolf River.

This minor tributary of the Mississippi was never navigable very far above its mouth, but its lower reaches served as a harbor channel for Memphis, Tennessee, for many years. The Wolf River Harbor was the site of some of the earliest work of the Mississippi River Commission and Army Corps of Engineers. Currents had attacked the bank near its mouth in 1878, and willow mattresses were placed on it to protect the Memphis waterfront. In 1893, an outlying sandbar was developing at the mouth of Wolf River, and soon steamboats were having difficulty reaching the landing. Wharf boats had to be used to land or load passengers and cargo.

Some improvements were made under a project authorized by Congress in 1935, but the rapid development of barge lines and diesel towboats soon made the harbor obsolete. In 1946, major improvements were authorized for Memphis Harbor, and the Corps adopted a project that provided for a new industrial channel and harbor in what had formerly been called Tennessee Chute.

A closure dam was placed at the head of the chute, and an industrial fill provided building sites for industries on Presidents Island. Later, Wolf River was diverted into Loosahatchie Chute, above Memphis, and the three-mile reach at its old mouth became a slack-water harbor for the city, with terminals and facilities to supplement the big harbor project in Tennessee Chute.



MEMPHIS INDUSTRIAL HARBOR.

The Memphis Yacht Club now has its headquarters in Wolf River Harbor, and there is a small boat dock where pleasure boaters can obtain fuel and supplies. A marina offers showers, rest rooms, air-conditioning, and all the other comforts so often lacking at stops along the Lower Mississippi. The marina is only a block from the heart of the city of Memphis.

Recently, the Corps of Engineers and the city of Memphis have joined forces to provide a new recreational area on the waterfront. The inelegantly named Mud Island, which lies in front of Memphis, is to be renamed "Volunteer Bicentennial Park." The Corps is constructing a small boat harbor and public access site for the new park, and the city plans to build a river museum, a scale model of the Lower Mississippi, an amphitheater, and other public recreational facilities.

CHICKASAW BLUFF NO. 4

Mile 735.8 AHP, Map 14
Left bank, descending

The fourth, or lower, Chickasaw Bluff, where the city of Memphis is now located, was recognized by early voyagers as an ideal place for a settlement. The country around it was very beautiful, and the high bluff commanded the river and appeared to be a point that might well have military significance for any power desiring to hold the Lower Mississippi Valley.

French interest in the area had waned with LaSalle's death in 1687, but rumors of British interest in the valley of the Lower Mississippi awakened France's determination to keep a foothold in the interior of the North American Continent. For a time, it was all the French could do to maintain a feeble settlement on the river near the Gulf of Mexico, but when English traders incited the Chickasaw Indians to hostile acts against French traders and voyagers on the river, Jean Baptiste LeMoyne, sieur de Bienville, governor of the Louisiana colony, decided that the Chickasaws must be punished. He began preparing for an expedition against the Chickasaws.

By 1736, Bienville's campaign was under way. The plan was that M. Diron d'Artaguet, commandant of the French settlements on the Illinois, would bring all the Indian allies he could gather and land at the fourth Chickasaw Bluff. D'Artaguet's party would march eastward from the Bluff to meet Bienville, who was to bring his army up the Tombigbee River into the Chickasaw Territory. The two French armies would crush the hostile Chickasaws between them.

Bienville's elaborate plans did not work out, and the campaign was a disaster for the French. Bienville was repulsed by the Chickasaws before he reached the rendezvous, and the Chickasaws defeated the party from the Illinois and killed M. d'Artaguet. Bienville retired to New Orleans to brood about the humiliating failure.

In the spring of 1739, the French were ready to challenge the Chickasaws again. The rendezvous point this time was at the mouth of the St. Francis. From the St. Francis, Bienville proceeded to the Chickasaw Bluff No. 4 with an army of almost 4,000 whites, together with Indian allies from the Illinois, and a number of blacks he had brought up from New Orleans. The French commander landed his force at the Bluff and erected a crude fortification he called Fort Assumption.

The army spent the winter in the fort, and illness and hunger reduced the effective force to 200 men. Bienville, despairing of victory, sent a small contingent of men to negotiate a fragile peace with his old enemy, the Chickasaw nation, and retired again to New Orleans. Fort Assumption was dismantled.

The Chickasaws retained possession of the lower Bluff until the close of the Revolutionary War and the beginning of the westward expansion of the new American nation. Settlers moved into the Ohio Valley and hardy frontiersmen and land speculators began to eye the east bank of the Mississippi. Ownership of the territory that is now a part of western Kentucky and western Tennessee was still a disputed question, and claimants would have to negotiate with the Chickasaws before it could be occupied. The Spanish, who already had possession of the west bank of the river and New Orleans on the east bank, saw no reason to allow the Chickasaw Bluffs to fall into American hands by default. They had negotiated a treaty with the Choctaws and built Fort Nogales below the mouth of the Yazoo in 1791. In 1795 Don Manuel Gayoso de Lemos took a small fleet of Spanish war vessels up the Mississippi, and began negotiations with the Chickasaws at the fourth Chickasaw Bluff.

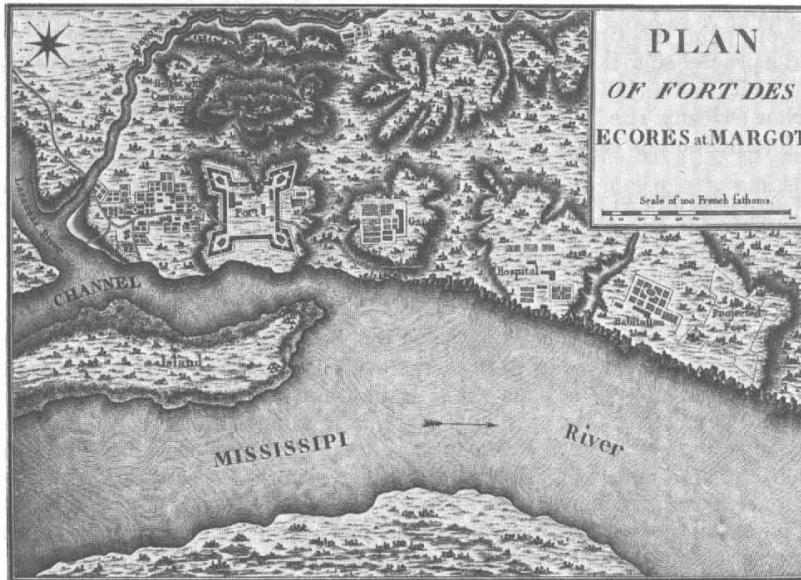
Rum, presents, and flattering words were followed by promises that the Spanish would protect the Chickasaws from the greedy Americans who were coveting the Indians' best hunting grounds. The Chickasaws agreed that the Spanish could build a fort at the mouth of Wolf River on Chickasaw Bluff No. 4.

Gayoso personally supervised the construction of the fortification, and on May 30, 1795, he took formal possession of the site, raising the Spanish flag with his own hands and conducting a noisy and colorful ceremony that was designed to impress the Chickasaws with the strength and power of the Spanish army and navy.

The new fort was christened Fort San Fernando de Barrancas, and Gayoso departed, leaving a small garrison of soldiers and three Spanish war vessels to defend the post. The Americans were as impressed as the Chickasaws, apparently, for no real effort was made to oust the Spanish and take possession of the Chickasaw Bluffs.

While Gayoso labored to make the Mississippi Valley secure for Spain, Spanish diplomats at home were busy undoing his work. In the Treaty of San Lorenzo, signed on April 26, 1796, Spain agreed to evacuate her posts on the east bank of the Mississippi north of Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Spanish colonial officials in the Louisiana colony delayed as long as they dared, but on October 22, 1797, Fort San Fernando de Barrancas was dismantled and evacuated, and a small party of American soldiers moved into the area to take possession of the territory. The Americans built a fort near the mouth of Wolf River and named it Fort Pike, but they soon abandoned it for a better site close to the ruins of the old Spanish



SPANISH FORT. When Victor Collot made the sketch of the Spanish fortification on Chickasaw Bluff No. 4, he labelled the drawing "Plan of Fort Des Ecores at Margot." The Spanish, who built the fort in 1795, called it Fort San Fernando de Barrancas. When they left the area in 1797, they dismantled the fort and took away all their guns and other equipment.

fort. Here they built a stronger fortification and called it Fort Adams. By 1808, the name had been changed to Fort Pickering, and a young officer named Zachary Taylor had been placed in command.

When the town of Memphis was laid out on the bluff in 1819, the United States government soon decided the area was secure enough to remove the garrison. Fort Pickering was abandoned, and allowed to fall into ruins.

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

*Mile 735.0 AHP, Map 14
Left bank, descending*

Between the U. S. Census of 1960 and the Census of 1970, some of the great urban centers of the nation lost population. Memphis, Tennessee, during the same period of time, reversed the trend and grew at an almost incredible rate.

The boom that Memphis still enjoys today is the result of industrial development. In search of adequate water and power supplies, well-motivated labor forces, and cheap transportation, industries have moved into the South in large numbers during the past decade. The influx of new industries has brought new jobs, new money, and new people into the Memphis area.

The city on the bluff is more than 150 years old. Although the high bluff had often been described as an ideal site for a great city, Memphis was slow to develop. The streets and lots were laid off in 1819, and the village was chartered in 1826, but there were few signs of progress until the development of steamboat lines and cotton plantations made it an important shipping point.

Early travelers seldom had a complimentary word for Memphis, but by 1856 it was showing a few signs of vigorous growth. It had a number of stores, some churches, printing offices and schools, and a population of around 14,000 people. A few observers even voiced cautious optimism about its future.

What the immediate future held for Memphis, of course, was a Civil War. The hostilities brought progress to a screeching halt there, as elsewhere in the South. Overconfident Confederate officials hardly bothered to fortify the position, and the city was dependent on the River Defense Fleet for its protection.

Memphis proved to be an easy target for the Federal forces. The Confederate rams, with their commanders suffering from delusions inspired by their easy victory at Plum Point, rushed out boldly to meet the Union Navy when it appeared in front of the city on June 6, 1862. To the astonishment and dismay of the River Defense Fleet and the spectators who had gathered on the bluff, the Union gunboats *Carondelet*, *Benton*, *St. Louis*, *Cairo*, and *Louisville* had brought along two new Union rams, the *Monarch* and the *Queen of the West*.

The noisy and unequal contest lasted about 90 minutes. Cheers turned to tears as the spectators on the bluff saw all of the rebel boats but one lost by sinking or capture. When the last remaining rebel boat, the *C.S.S. General Van Dorn*, turned tail and fled ingloriously down the river, the victors sent a detachment of Union soldiers ashore to take possession of the helpless city.

Memphis remained in Federal hands for the remainder of the war, except for a couple of hours one bright Sunday afternoon in August, 1864, when the bold and daring cavalry leader, General Nathan B. Forrest, swept into his old hometown, surprised the Union garrison, and almost scooped up a couple of high-ranking Federal generals. Forrest and his men occupied the city briefly, until the Yankee soldiers pulled themselves together and drove them out again.

When the war ended, Memphis had the same problems that plagued other southern cities. Reconstruction, yellow fever epidemics, and the decline of the river trade left the city prostrate and impoverished. A visitor from Europe in 1882 commented that Memphis seemed to be still suffering from the shocks of war. The old brick buildings were so green and mouldy, the visitor said, that they reminded him of Stilton cheese.

The development of the diesel towboat and the resulting rapid increase in commercial traffic on the river revived the city on the bluff. Today Memphis is a fast-growing

community with an unlimited potential for future development. The Port of Memphis handles more than ten million tons of cargo annually and is one of the nation's largest inland ports. Petroleum products, industrial and agricultural chemicals, wood products, and agricultural products are just a few of the items handled by the terminals, elevators, and piers in Memphis.

The Memphis District office of the Army Corps of Engineers is also located in the city, and the Corps has a repair and maintenance yard on the waterfront.

PRESIDENTS ISLAND NO. 45

*Mile 732.7 AHP, Map 14
Left bank, descending*

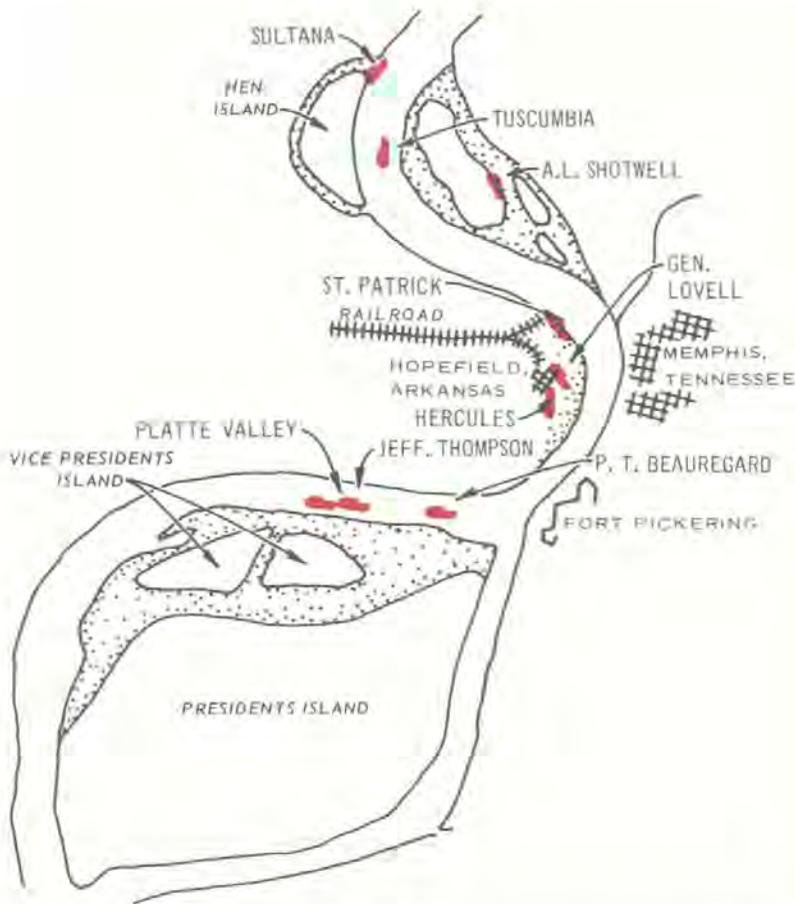
Zadok Cramer in 1801 identified Presidents Island and Vice Presidents Island as Islands No. 46 and No. 47. Today they are erroneously called Islands No. 45 and No. 46.

It has been said that Presidents Island was named for President Andrew Jackson, who had a small farm on the island at one time. Since the big island was already called Presidents Island in 1801, this seems improbable, since Jackson did not become President of the United States until 28 years later.

When the Civil War engagement between the Union and Confederate navies took place in front of Memphis in 1862, one of the casualties was a rebel boat called the *General Jeff. Thompson*. There were two versions of the sinking of the Confederate ram. Union officers said she was hit and sunk by their guns. The commander of the boat said, however, that he had found himself surrounded by Union vessels and had deliberately run her ashore and set fire to her to keep her from falling into Union hands.

After the battle, the wreck of the *Jeff. Thompson* had drifted down and lodged near the head of Presidents Island, where pilots found it a considerable hazard to navigation. Two years after the war had ended, the steamer *Platte Valley* stumbled over the old wreck and demolished herself. Three years later, the steamer *Mary Boyd* crashed into the wrecks of both the *Jeff. Thompson* and the *Platte Valley* and went to the bottom.

On the occasion of the *Mary Boyd's* misfortune, a newspaper columnist revealed some interesting details about the past history of the boat that had been known as the *General Jeff. Thompson*. The rebel ram had originally been a sailing vessel called the *Mary Kingsland*, the columnist recalled, and she had carried American soldiers to the Mexican War in 1846. She had later been converted to steam power, and had been engaged in the towing trade between New Orleans and the Gulf. When the Civil War erupted, the old boat was converted to a stream ram, rechristened the *General Jeff. Thompson*, and made a part of the River Defense Fleet. The Confederate officer for whom she was named was one of the spectators on the bluff at Memphis when the ram was sunk in 1862.



PRESIDENTS ISLAND. In 1874 Colonel Charles Suter's reconnaissance map showed the channel at the head of Presidents and Vice Presidents Islands obstructed by the wrecks of old steamboats. The Jeff. Thompson and P. T. Beauregard were both Confederate rams lost in the naval engagement in front of Memphis on June 6, 1862. The Platte Valley had been a Union transport during the Civil War.

If the General Jeff. Thompson had really been involved in both the Mexican War and the Civil War, she was in good company. During the Mexican War, Lt. U. S. Grant, Capt. Robert E. Lee, Capt. George B. McClellan, and Col. Jefferson Davis had all been officers in the U. S. Army and had fought together in Mexico.

During the latter part of the Civil War, Presidents Island was the site of a refugee camp for more than 1,500 blacks from southern plantations. The Federal agency called the Freedmen's Bureau established the colony but when the Bureau was abolished, the ex-slaves had to learn to take care of themselves. Some of them may have gone to work for Confederate General Nathan B. Forrest, who retired to Presidents

Island for a time after the war to manage a large plantation. General Forrest had been a slave trader in Memphis before the war, and so firmly did he discipline his labor force that many of them may have wondered whether the difference between slavery and freedom had been exaggerated.

Many years after the Civil War, a "pest house" was maintained on Presidents Island. Most southern cities had such crude hospitals, where people with highly contagious diseases could be isolated from the general public. With the pest house and a prison located on the island, respectable people gave it a wide berth until some years later, when it became a sort of gambler's paradise in the 1920's. In January, 1924, cock fights on Presidents Island attracted international attention. Birds from Mexico, Cuba, and other countries were matched against each other, and huge sums of money were wagered on the outcome of each gory battle.

Today Presidents Island is a part of the Memphis Harbor Project that has provided about 9 miles of off-river harbor channels to serve a 960-acre industrial fill on the island. There are 20 docks on the project channels, and the project handled more than 11 million tons in 1974.

JOSIE HARRY BAR LIGHT

Mile 719.5 AHP, Map 15
Left bank, descending

The elegant steamer called the *Josie Harry* was built in 1878. When she sank above Cow Islands, a sandbar grew up in the vicinity and was called Josie Harry Bar. A change in the river's course caused some of the old boat's timbers to be exposed to view in 1964. Two navigation lights in the area preserve the boat's name today.

COW ISLANDS NO. 47 AND NO. 48

Mile 715.0 AHP, Map 15
Left bank, descending

These two islands, now joined together and attached to the Tennessee shore, were originally called Islands No. 48 and No. 49. The boundary between Tennessee and Mississippi runs across Cow Islands, and each State has jurisdiction over a part of the islands.

In 1866 a fine new steamboat, the *R. J. Lockwood*, exploded and burned in Cow Island Bend. There were the usual rumors that a steamboat race had been under way shortly

before the accident, and the usual vigorous denials. Nine or ten people lost their lives, and a contemporary eyewitness account of the accident described in graphic and painful detail how the boat sank with the charred bodies of some of the victims still on board.

NORFOLK LANDING, MISSISSIPPI

*Mile 710.2 AHP, Map 15
Left bank, descending*

Norfolk was a steamboat landing on a plantation that belonged to a man named Nelms. Since it was the first landing below the Tennessee-Mississippi boundary line in 1861, Norfolk was designated as a customs point for the new Confederate States of America early in 1861.

A contemporary notice published in newspapers at the time, read as follows:

REGULATIONS OF THE SOUTHERN CONFEDERACY FOR VESSELS NAVIGATING THE MISSISSIPPI: All boats beyond the limits of the new Confederacy, going South, are required to land at the port of Norfolk, otherwise known as Nelm's Landing, in the State of Mississippi, a point just below the Tennessee line, when the Captain must furnish the Custom House officer with a list of his cargo. A permit is given to land freight at way points.

Men who had previously been neutral and disinterested in the issues which had aroused others in the North were suddenly enraged. Free navigation of the Mississippi was a natural birthright of every American, the westerners believed, and they would gladly fight to the death for it. The idea of a "foreign power" dictating the terms upon which they could navigate "their river" was unthinkable. Many of the frontiersmen and small farmers who would never have lifted a finger to liberate a slave, marched off with the Union Army cheerfully, hoping to liberate the Mississippi.

CAT ISLAND NO. 50

*Mile 710.0 AHP, Map 15
Right bank, descending*

Cat Island is the only island between Memphis and Council Bend that still bears its correct number. It lay close to the right shore in 1801, but has since joined itself completely to the Arkansas shore.

BUCK ISLAND NO. 53

Mile 702.0 AHP, Map 16
Left bank, descending

Buck Island's correct number is No. 51, but the confusion of numbers that began just below Memphis around 1874 reaches all the way down to this small Arkansas island. It originally lay in the middle of the river, was numbered No. 51, and is now firmly attached to the Mississippi shore.

John James Audubon wandered over Buck Island in December, 1820, marvelling over the large number of ducks, geese, and seagulls he saw in the area.

During the Civil War, Buck Island was the scene of a clever little smuggling operation. Although Union gunboats were constantly patrolling the area, the rebels somehow managed to quietly ferry across 12 wagonloads of arms and ammunition at Buck Island in 1864. By the time Union forces became aware of what was going on, rebels and supplies had all vanished.

In June, 1866 the steamer *City of Memphis* exploded and burned opposite Buck Island. On her last trip up the river, the big boat had run aground just above Vicksburg, but a high wind and heavy rains had dislodged her from the sandbar and she had hurried on upstream to her doom. Newspapers reported that about 60 people lost their lives in the explosion and fire.

The *City of Memphis* was an old boat at the time of her demise. She had been well-known and extremely popular in her day. In 1858, she had carried so many passengers that a daily newspaper published on board proved to be a successful and lucrative venture.

COUNCIL BEND

Mile 695.0 AHP, Map 16
Right bank, descending

Council Bend was a sharp right-hand turn in the Lower Mississippi. The navigation channel ran to the west of a large island that early French explorers had called Council Island. The island was said to have been the site of an important council between the Chickasaw and Choctaw Indian nations.

Both Council Bend and the island were removed from the main channel of the river in 1874 when the Mississippi leaped across a small neck of land and cut them off.

Council Island was originally called Island No. 53, but map makers later appropriated its number and applied it to Buck Island. Today the island is no longer on the river and on current navigation maps it bears no number.

COMMERCE CUTOFF

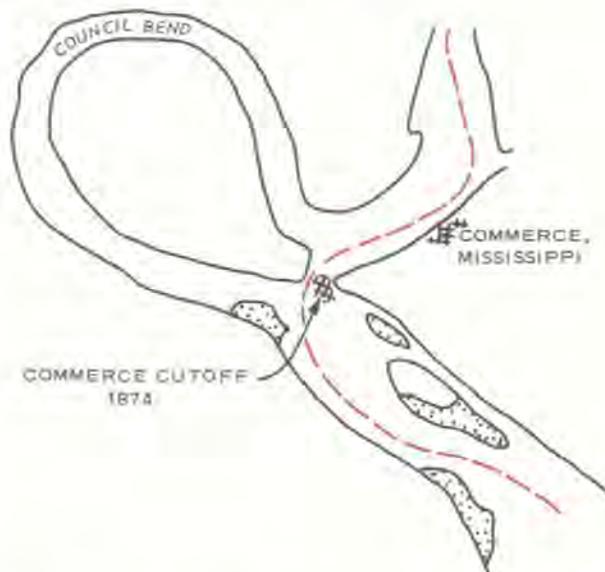
Mile 695.0 AHP, Map 16

Commerce, Mississippi, had a hopeful beginning and was a thriving little river town in the 1830's, but by 1841 it was engaged in a losing battle with the Lower Mississippi, and it soon lost most of its waterfront buildings and houses.

During the Civil War, the Union forces paid the town several visits. A Union gunboat captured a little steamer called the *Eureka* at Commerce in 1863. The boat was not armed and had no contraband goods on board, but the commander of the *U.S.S. Covington* explained with the usual wartime logic that the steamer must have been up to some kind of mischief or the rebels would already have burned it themselves, so he felt justified in confiscating it.

About a year later, another Union force stopped off at Commerce and burned a ferry boat. They reported that they had also shot a man "who looked like a guerilla."

In 1874 the Mississippi jumped across a neck of land just below Commerce and cut about ten miles off its channel. Local people reported that a steamer passed through the new cutoff just two days after the river changed its course, and that it was 800 yards wide by the third day.



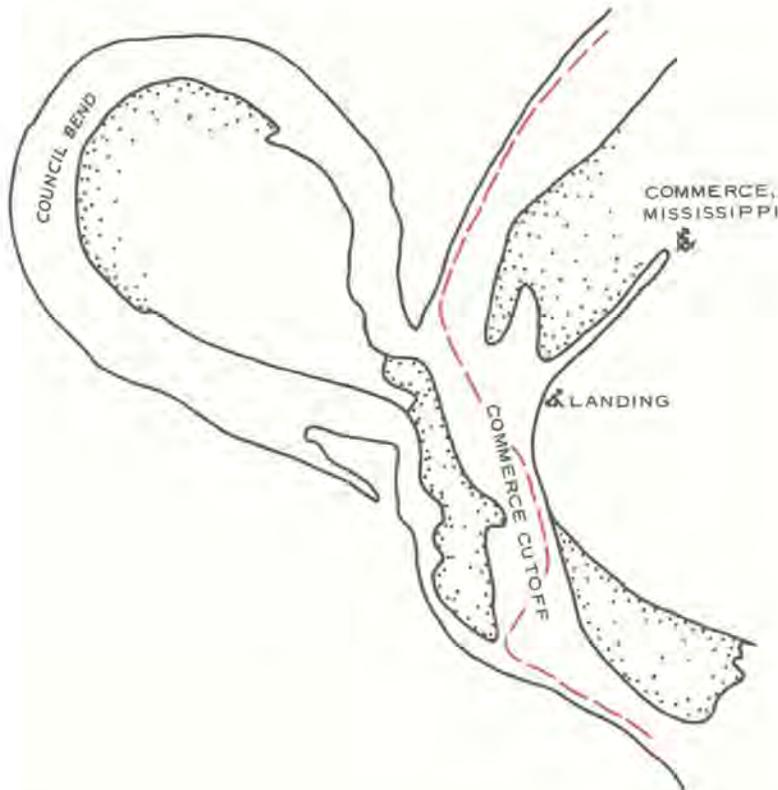
(From 1871 State Maps)

COMMERCE CUTOFF. In 1874, the Lower Mississippi blew out a narrow neck of land and cut off Council Bend. The cutoff occurred just below the little town of Commerce, Mississippi, where currents were already causing the banks to cave. As was usually the case, one change led to another, and the river was going to make it impossible for the community to survive.

The river continued making changes around Commerce, causing all kinds of trouble for the little town and doing a lot of damage to property in the area. It finally settled itself comfortably in a new bed known as Mhoon Bend, where it still remains today—restrained from further movement by a long revetment on the east bank of the bend.

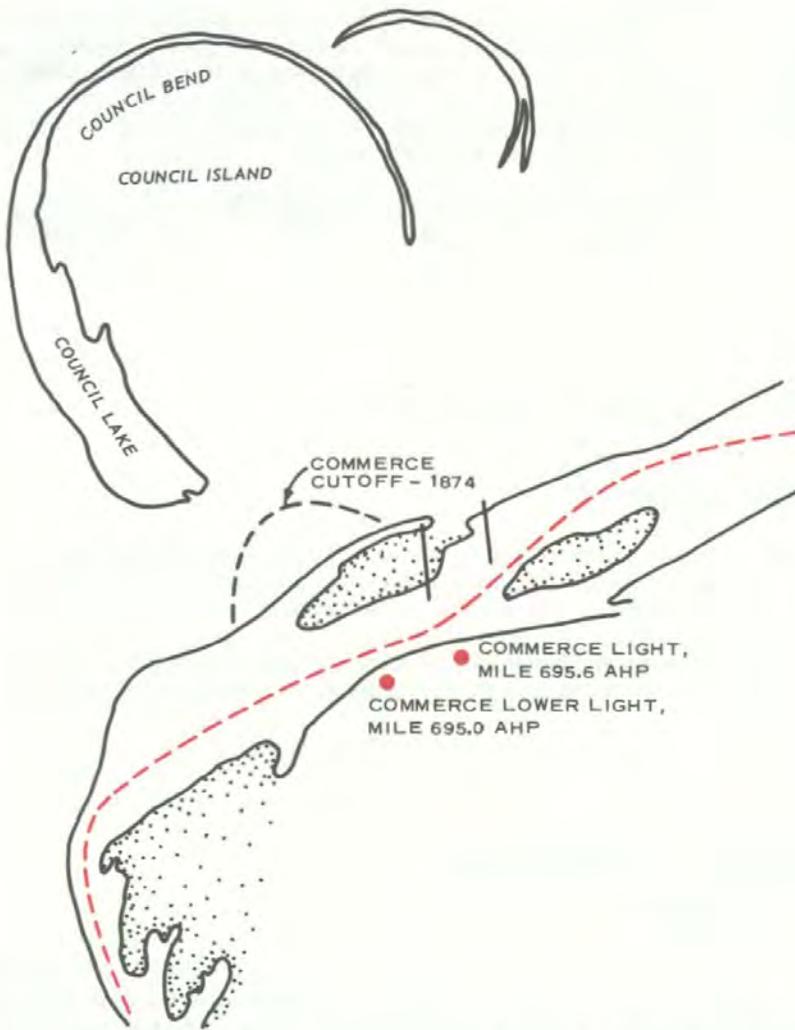
The steamboat landing at Commerce was still in occasional use as late as 1888, when a boat called the *Kate Adams* caught fire and burned at the landing. The big sidewheel boat was one of the first steamers on the Lower Mississippi to be completely equipped with a modern invention known as the electric light. The popular boat was also noted for the beauty of its cabin accommodations. The staterooms were panelled in solid walnut, cherry, and ash.

The town of Commerce was still hanging on in 1915, and still had a postoffice and steamboat landing, but the river had built up a big sandbar in front of it. As the steamboat trade on the river dwindled away, the community gradually disappeared.



(From 1891 MRC Map)

COMMERCE CUTOFF IN 1891. The Commerce Cutoff in 1874 initiated a series of changes in the river's course near Commerce, Mississippi, and had disastrous results for the little town. By 1891, the river had thrown a huge sandbar in front of Commerce, making it impossible for boats to land anywhere near its commercial center.



(From 1875 Navigation Chart (Map No. 16))

COMMERCE CUTOFF TODAY. Today the river lies far east of its old bed in Council Bend. The old Commerce Cutoff channel has also been abandoned by the river, and the town of Commerce has disappeared from the maps.

ASHLEY POINT, ARKANSAS

Mile 688.8 AHP, Map 17
Right bank, descending

During the past century, the Lower Mississippi has made some drastic changes in the Ashley Point area. Most of these changes came about directly or indirectly as a result of the Commerce Cutoff in 1874. The cutoff had caused Ashley Point to recede, and the same year the river abandoned Old Walnut Bend and started flowing through Bordeaux Chute. It then began a slow southeasterly slide that carried its main channel into the course it now follows at Mhoon Bend.

River pilots were probably happy to see the last of Old Walnut Bend. It had been a snaggy passage and was strewn with the wrecks of unfortunate steamers.

MHOON LANDING, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 687.6 AHP, Map 17
Left bank, descending

A river gage and a bulletin board for the convenience of navigators is maintained at Mhoon Landing. Both the landing and the bend are named for a Delta plantation owner whose land lay on the east bank in the bend.

The Mississippi shore in Mhoon Bend is protected by a very long concrete revetment that protects the bank and keeps the river from continuing to move eastward.

WHITEHALL CREVASSE

Mile 680.4 AHP, Map 17
Right bank, descending

Herbert Hoover, who was the U. S. Secretary of Commerce at the time, declared that the great flood of 1927 was "the worst peace-time disaster in the history of the nation." Hoover meant exactly what he said. He had been in the flooded areas personally directing the relief work, and he had first-hand knowledge of the human suffering and widespread destruction that the great flood had caused.

Levees in 1927 had been designed to contain a flood only slightly greater than the previous record flood of 1913. Even if the great flood in 1927 had not broken through the levee system, it would have overtopped the levees by four to five feet.



FLOOD OF 1927. The flood of 1927 was a superflood that caused a heavy loss of life and property. Hundreds of thousands of people had to leave their homes and live in refugee camps for the duration of the record-breaking high water. There were 13 major crevasses in the levee system. The above photograph shows tents erected on a levee near Arkansas City, Arkansas, to house refugees whose homes were inundated by the great flood.

The rampaging Mississippi broke through at Whitehall on April 15, and the gap enlarged rapidly until it was 2,400 feet wide. The St. Francis River flows within a mile of the Lower Mississippi in the vicinity of Whitehall, and the great crevasse very nearly allowed the two rivers to come together in a new confluence many miles above the normal mouth of the little tributary.

The Whitehall crevasse occurred so unexpectedly that many people living in the area affected had to take refuge in trees and on housetops. Some of them had to wait several days on their uncomfortable perches for rescue.

There were 13 major crevasses in 1927, and official reports estimated that 330,000 persons had to be rescued from trees and housetops. Before the flood had ended, 700,000 people had to leave their homes.

HARDIN CUTOFF

Mile 678.0 AHP, Map 18

Before the Army Corps of Engineers undertook its project to stabilize the channel of the alluvial Lower Mississippi, the river had a lamentable tendency to lengthen its meander loops and then to lop them off by cutting a new channel across the narrow necks of the bends. These natural cutoffs were mixed blessings. Sometimes they cut miles off the navigation channel, but just as often they created new problems and made the channel more difficult than before.

Around 1850, it was proposed that a program of wholesale cutoffs might improve the river channel. The proposal aroused a storm of controversy. Some people thought that the proposed cutoffs would reduce flood heights as well as improve the channel. Others were convinced that artificial cutoffs would raise flood heights and create more problems than they could possibly solve.

Before 1900 the arguments were almost purely academic, since neither the tools and technical skills, nor the funds, were available for such a project. After the turn of the century, the development of new equipment and the availability of Federal funds for river projects caused a serious study to be made of the cutoff question. In 1933, the Corps of Engineers embarked on the project that eventually resulted in 13 artificial cutoffs between Memphis and Baton Rouge. The cutoff at Hardin Point, constructed in 1942, was the last of the series.

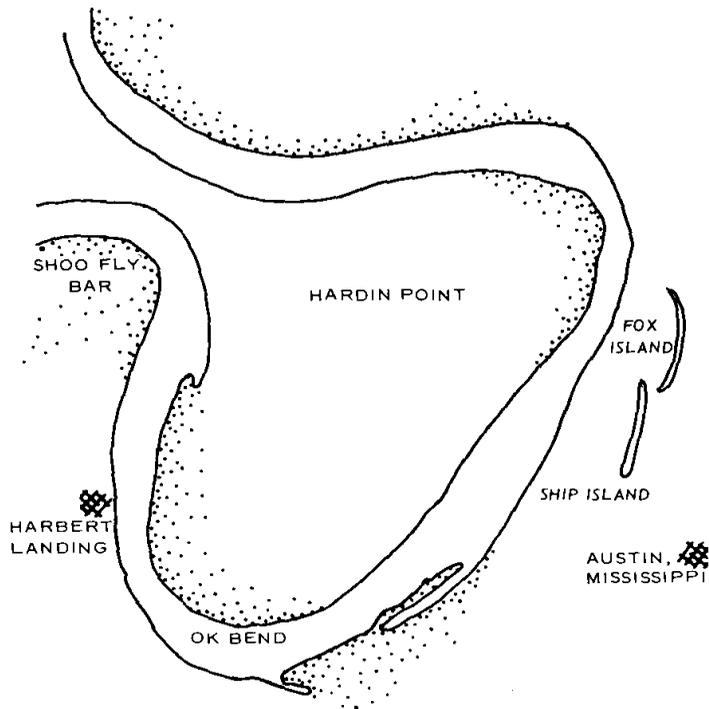
Hardin Cutoff shortened the navigation channel of the Lower Mississippi by several miles, and removed from the river a meander loop that had long been known as "OK Bend." The cutoff was constructed during the low water season of 1941-1942, and the last plug of earth was blown out on March 18, 1942. The new channel developed very rapidly. It was lighted for navigation on May 27 of the same year, and by June 30 towboats were navigating it in both directions without difficulty. In August the navigation lights were removed from OK Bend and Hardin Cutoff became the new permanent channel of the Lower Mississippi.

Several islands and the little town of Austin, Mississippi, were removed from the main channel of the river by the cutoff. One of the islands that was left lying miles inland was the one that lay near the town. It had been called Ship Island, and somewhere near its foot lay the remains of a well-known steamer called the *Pennsylvania*.

The *Pennsylvania* was lost near Austin during the great flood of 1858. The boat had been hurrying upstream in June of that year, and had passed Austin just before dawn. There was a woodyard above the town, and George C. Harrison happened to be out on the river bank stacking cordwood when the big steamer passed. Harrison stopped his work to watch the boat round the bend above him. Suddenly the *Pennsylvania* seemed to disintegrate before his astonished eyes. A fraction of a second later, a tremendous blast shook the earth, and Harrison knew what had happened. When the smoke cleared he could see that the *Pennsylvania* was already a total wreck.

Peering through the smoke and fog that still hung over the river, Harrison thought he could see people in the water, struggling to stay afloat and clutching at bits of debris. Young Harrison shouted to his father, and the two men quickly untied a woodflat and rushed to the disabled steamer as fast as they could row the awkward craft.

At the scene of the accident, there was wild confusion. Dozens of people were in the water, but many were still on board the disabled boat. To George Harrison's dismay, some of the passengers seemed to be more concerned about their property than their lives. Not until it became obvious that the *Pennsylvania* was being rapidly consumed by flames were the Harrisons able to persuade some of the people to abandon their luggage and jump to the safety of the woodflat. A few hesitated long enough to grab their heavy trunks, tossing them to the woodboat's deck and injuring several people in the process.



HARDIN POINT BEFORE CUTOFF. A navigation map published by the Corps of Engineers in 1941 shows the long meander loop that was removed when Hardin Cutoff was constructed the following year. Austin, Mississippi, had long since lost its waterfront and both Fox Island and Ship Island had attached themselves to the Mississippi shore in front of the town. Colonel Charles Suter's map of 1874 shows the old river landings that were on the point and the east bank in 1874.

The Harrisons kept their flatboat against the burning vessel until it too was about to be engulfed in the flames. Then they pulled away and drifted down to a safe place to attend to the injured and await assistance. The wreck of the burning *Pennsylvania* drifted past Austin and came to rest at the foot of Ship Island.

An investigation made after the accident revealed that the big boat had been carrying about 400 passengers when she exploded. About 160 of the passengers and crew were lost. Many of the dead were German immigrants.

One of the victims of the explosion died several hours after he had been taken to a hospital at Memphis. His name was Henry Clemens. Henry had been the boat's clerk, and his brother Sam was a cub pilot on the *Pennsylvania*. But for a last minute change of plans at New Orleans, Sam Clemens would have been sharing Henry's quarters at the time of the accident and might have shared his sad fate as well. If Sam Clemens

had not been left behind at New Orleans when the *Pennsylvania* made her last ill-fated upstream voyage, the world might have been deprived of one of its favorite authors. Young Sam Clemens would later abandon his career as a steamboat pilot to become America's most respected and beloved literary figure, Mark Twain.

The *Pennsylvania* was not the only steamer whose remains lay somewhere in OK Bend. Another interesting relic of the steamboat days lay off Hardin's Landing.

The Confederate gunboat *Tuscarora* was hurrying up to help defend Columbus, Kentucky, when she caught fire in front of the landing and went down. The crew of the rebel boat ran her to shore, and tried to remove the powder from her magazine, but the fire progressed too rapidly. When the flames reached the *Tuscarora's* store of ammunition, exploding shells zoomed into the nearby woods, catching trees on fire and burning down the plantation slave quarters on the shore. The boat, which carried three guns, went down about 30 yards from the river bank, and was said to have been still visible at low water in 1870.

On January 16, 1871, the steamboat *T. L. McGill* went aground at Shoo Fly Bar and caught fire. High winds fanned the flames and the boat's 115 passengers had to jump for their lives. About 75 people lost their lives in the accident.

ST. FRANCIS RIVER

Mile 672.3 AHP, Map 18
Right bank, descending

The St. Francis River rises in the rugged Ozark hills of southeastern Missouri, and flows in a southeasterly direction for 475 miles to join the Lower Mississippi a few miles above Helena, Arkansas. With its tributaries, the St. Francis drains an area of about 8,400 square miles.

Traders and settlers who were living near the mouth of the St. Francis around 1820 said that the little tributary of the Mississippi was a navigable stream and that keelboats often travelled 400 miles up from the river's mouth. This may have been a slight exaggeration. In 1836 a government engineer examined the St. Francis and reported that its channel was clogged by a huge raft of driftwood. Boats could travel above or below the raft, he said, but not through it. He thought that the whole St. Francis Basin had been severely shaken by the New Madrid earthquakes in 1811-1812, and that the raft had probably formed at that time, as a result of so many trees having fallen from the river's banks.

Some years later, the driftwood raft was broken up and removed. Boats could then navigate the St. Francis for a few months out of every year, but at low water periods the channel was often less than 16 inches deep in shoal areas.

Today the only commercial traffic on the St. Francis consists of logs that are towed from one point to another on the little river.

The St. Francis River Basin was always subject to frequent flooding from both headwater and backwater, but the Wappapello Dam and Lake, completed in 1941, now regulate the headwater flows. In the lower basin, 299.6 miles of an authorized 308 miles of levee have been completed. When the entire St. Francis River Basin Project is completed by the Corps of Engineers, hundreds of thousands of acres of fertile land will be protected from the backwater floods that have so often inundated the area in the past.

There is a National Forest in the lower St. Francis Basin, where fishing, hunting, and camping facilities are available for public use. The upper part of the river is essentially undeveloped and scenically attractive. The river has a rocky bed in its upper reaches, and the water is very clear and beautiful.

HORNER FIELD LIGHT

Mile 669.9 AHP, Map 18
Right bank, descending

The Horner Field Light is named for William B. R. Horner, who owned a plantation on the west bank of the river long before Arkansas became a State. Horner, who grew up in the territory, was a much respected attorney and territorial judge.

PRAIRIE POINT, ARKANSAS

Mile 669.0 AHP, Map 18
Right bank, descending

When Bienville, the governor of the French colony of Louisiana, declared war against the Chickasaw Indians and began his second campaign against them in 1738, the open prairie at the mouth of the St. Francis River was designated as a rendezvous point and depot for the French army's supplies.

A crude fortification called Fort St. Francis was erected, but the position proved to be a weak one. It was soon abandoned in favor of Fort Assumption, on the fourth Chickasaw Bluff.

When the French left the Lower Mississippi Valley, Spain claimed the west bank of the river but American settlers were attracted to the area around the mouth of the St. Francis. One of the settlers under Spanish dominion was Sylvanus Phillips of North Carolina, who built a two-story log cabin that soon became a river landmark and a favorite stopping place for voyagers on the Lower Mississippi. Phillips later established the city of Helena, Arkansas, naming it for his daughter Helen.

The little settlement that grew up around the mouth of the St. Francis before 1800 was called Big Prairie. It was devastated by the earthquakes of 1811-1812 and most of the inhabitants fled.

On November 24, 1865, there was a disastrous steamboat collision off Prairie Point. A northbound steamer, the *Niagara*, and a boat called the *Post Boy* were involved, and it was said that the pilots of the two boats had apparently had a misunderstanding about their passing signals. The *Niagara* was badly damaged in the collision and sank rapidly. About 150 black soldiers from the U. S. Army were on board and were said to have drowned when the boat went down. The disaster, like the explosion of the *Sultana* earlier in the same year, received only brief notice in contemporary newspapers. The press, the nation, and government authorities were still preoccupied at the time with the surrender of the South, the assassination of Lincoln, and post-war politics.

ISLAND NO. 60

Mile 668.0 AHP, Map 18
Left bank, descending

Island No. 60, also known as Helena Island, had a snag-filled navigation channel that steamboat pilots avoided whenever possible. When water stages were high enough, they ignored the bendway and took the chute on the left or east side of the island.

The steamboat *St. Nicholas* was in the island chute on April 24, 1859, when a sudden explosion tore away the boat's stern and precipitated many of her passengers and crew and much of her cargo into the water. The boat caught fire immediately, and casks of whiskey and barrels of turpentine that had formed part of the freight load fed the flames. It was estimated that about 70 people lost their lives.

One of the victims of the *St. Nicholas* tragedy was the son of General Gideon J. Pillow, a veteran of the Mexican War, who was soon to become a Confederate leader. It was said that the anguished father roamed the river banks for weeks, searching for the body of his beloved son, but the boy was never found.

After the flood of 1858, the chute channel behind Island No. 60 began to fill with silt. Soon the island attached itself to the Mississippi shore, and boats were forced to take the channel to its right at all stages of the water.

HELENA, ARKANSAS

*Mile 663.5 AHP, Map 19
Right bank, descending*

Helena, Arkansas, was established by Sylvanus Phillips, for whom Phillips County, Arkansas, was named. The little town became a county seat in 1820.

In 1852, Helena was almost wiped out by a disastrous fire that destroyed many of its homes and businesses. It was still in the process of recovery when the Civil War began.

Helena was not fortified by Confederate authorities, and Union forces entered it unopposed early in the war. They erected gun batteries and garrisoned the town. On July 4, 1863, while most of the Union army was preoccupied with Vicksburg, a rebel force launched a vigorous attack on Helena. The Union garrison suffered heavy losses, and if the U. S. gunboat *Tyler* had not come to the rescue, the town would have fallen into Confederate hands. Heavy fire from the gunboat forced the rebels to flee, and the U. S. Army continued to occupy Helena for the remainder of the war.

Residents of occupied towns did not have an easy time during the Civil War. In Helena, a Union officer filed an official complaint in 1864, stating that he had become completely disgusted with the lack of discipline at Helena. The soldiers were robbing and plundering the citizens of the town in a disgraceful way, he said, and their behavior reflected little credit on the U. S. Army or the cause for which the Union was supposed to be fighting.

Shortly after the war ended, Helena found itself engaged in another and quite different struggle. The Mississippi was flinging sand and silt at the town's waterfront, and making it difficult for steamboats to get into the Helena harbor. Some early dike and revetment work was placed at Helena, but the river had its way, and docks and other facilities had to be moved to the south end of the town so that its river trade could be retained.

In recent years there has been some industrial development in the Helena area, and the town has also acquired a new educational institution called the National River Academy of America. The unique school has been established on a campus about 10 miles south of the town, and it offers a two-year course of study to young men or women who are interested in river-related careers. The Academy cadets are given practical experience on towboats, as well as classroom instruction. The flourishing new school promises to help relieve the desperate shortage of skilled personnel needed by towboat and barge lines.

The River and Harbor Act of 1960 authorized a Federal project for port development at Helena, and construction is now complete. The harbor channel area, including about four miles of waterfront, serves as an industrial port site. The harbor terminals handle petroleum, grain, and agricultural and industrial chemicals.

There is also a pleasure boat marina at Helena, where boaters will find available fuel, supplies, showers, and other comforts.

YAZOO PASS

*Mile 658.0 AHP, Map 19
Left bank, descending*

For many years a narrow channel called the Yazoo Pass connected Moon Lake to the Mississippi River. Local interests constructed a levee across it to prevent the country below it from being flooded, but the flood of 1858 washed away the inadequate embankment.

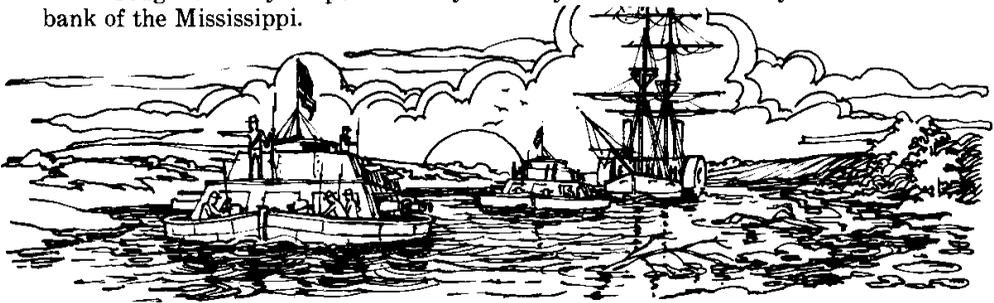
In 1859, local interests provided funds for a permanent closure of the Pass, and more than a million dollars were spent on this and other improvements that were designed to give protection to the Mississippi-Yazoo Delta on the east side of the Mississippi River.

In 1863, General U. S. Grant, probing every possible route that might allow him to get his army into a position to capture the city of Vicksburg, noted that steamboats had formerly passed from the Mississippi via the Yazoo Pass into Moon Lake. From Moon Lake, it was possible, he thought, for boats to pass into the Coldwater, Tallahatchie, Yallahusha, and Yazoo Rivers.

In January, 1863, Grant ordered the big levee at the Yazoo Pass cut so that his gunboats could explore the route. The Mississippi was above flood stages when the levee was blown up, and the flood waters rapidly enlarged the cut, filled the bayous, and flooded most of the low delta land between the Mississippi and Yazoo Rivers.

Transports carrying a Union brigade, convoyed by two Union gunboats, pushed their way through the narrow channel with difficulty, and after many vicissitudes succeeded in reaching Fort Pemberton, a Confederate fort at Greenwood, Mississippi. Because of the flood waters, no land approach could be made. The Union gunboats bombarded the rebel stronghold but failed to silence the Confederate guns. The Union withdrawal was slow, painful, and damaging, but the Federal force eventually made it back to the Mississippi. Later another expedition attempted to follow the same route, but the effort again failed. Levee crevasses made by the Union forces were still flowing, and no land approach could be made across the flooded fields.

The Yazoo Pass remained open for many years after the war had ended, causing widespread damage whenever the water stages were high enough to cause the river to flow through it. Today it is permanently closed by the mainline levee system on the east bank of the Mississippi.



GENERAL PILLOW LIGHT

Mile 657.7 AHP, Map 19
Right bank, descending

Gideon J. Pillow was born in Tennessee in 1806. As a young man, he practiced law in the town of Columbia, Tennessee, and had for his partner another Tennessean named James K. Polk. When the United States became involved in a war with Mexico, Pillow's former law partner was the President of the United States. The President appointed his old friend a brigadier general of volunteers, and later promoted him to major general.

When the Civil War began, General Pillow was not a secessionist but he was a southerner and a plantation owner. He cast his lot with the Confederacy, and was appointed a brigadier general in the Confederate Army. As a military leader, the old general demonstrated courage and loyalty beyond reproach, but his military judgment was often questioned. In 1862, he was suspended from command for some months, and during the remainder of the war he was without a command of any real importance.

General Pillow owned a plantation on the river below Helena, Arkansas, where two navigation lights still bear his name today. He died at Helena about ten years after the Civil War had ended.

MONTEZUMA CUTOFF

Mile 657.0 AHP, Map 19

The cutoff that became known as Montezuma Cutoff was a natural one, and is believed to have occurred some time between 1796 and 1817.

The cutoff removed 11 or 12 miles of the navigation channel in the reach. It became known as Montezuma Cutoff after a steamboat accident occurred in the cutoff some years later. The steamer *Montezuma* was a small, new boat when it tripped over a snag and went to the bottom on February 28, 1829. The wreck was visible in the area for many years afterward, and a sandbar grew up around it. Pilots called the sandbar the Montezuma bar, and the cutoff soon took the same name.

In later years, there were many other wrecks in the cutoff reach. The steamer *Luminary* ran headlong into a bar there in December, 1869. The 260-foot sidewheel steamer had served as a Union transport during the latter part of the Civil War.

DELTA, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 655.5 AHP, Map 20
Left bank, descending

Delta, Mississippi, was the county seat of Coahoma County until 1850, when it became obvious that the location was an unfortunate one. Since the river seemed to be determined to gobble up the little town, the county government was removed, and one by one the streets and buildings crumbled into the river as the currents continued their attack on its waterfront.

By 1890, most of the town of Delta had disappeared. Today a marker erected by the Mississippi Historical Society points out the original location, but nothing remains of the village itself.

FRIARS POINT, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 652.0 AHP, Map 20
Left bank, descending

On the Lower Mississippi, it often happened that one town's loss was another town's gain. When Delta, Mississippi, began to fall into the river and lost its status as a seat of county government, Friars Point was the lucky recipient of the new courthouse and other benefits that went with being a county seat.

Friars Point flourished until the time of the Civil War. In 1863, the village attracted the attention of Union forces when some Confederate sympathizers took pot shots at Union gunboats and transports from its waterfront. A few days later, the citizens of Friars Point awoke to find that their town had been surrounded by about 100 Union soldiers, who were toting with them a menacing-looking 12-pounder howitzer. Several civilians were taken prisoner, and some fine Delta cotton was liberated before the Federal visitors departed.

Friars Point, impoverished by the war and without rail connections, went into a rapid decline as river traffic decreased. In 1930 county government officials took a hard look at their second choice and moved again, choosing an inland delta town that would not have to depend upon the whims of the Mississippi for its existence.

Today Friars Point huddles behind the massive mainline levee system, looking a little frayed around the edges as many of its buildings fall into decay. Its one main street contains several empty stores, but there are also some very nice homes and an excellent small museum in the village.

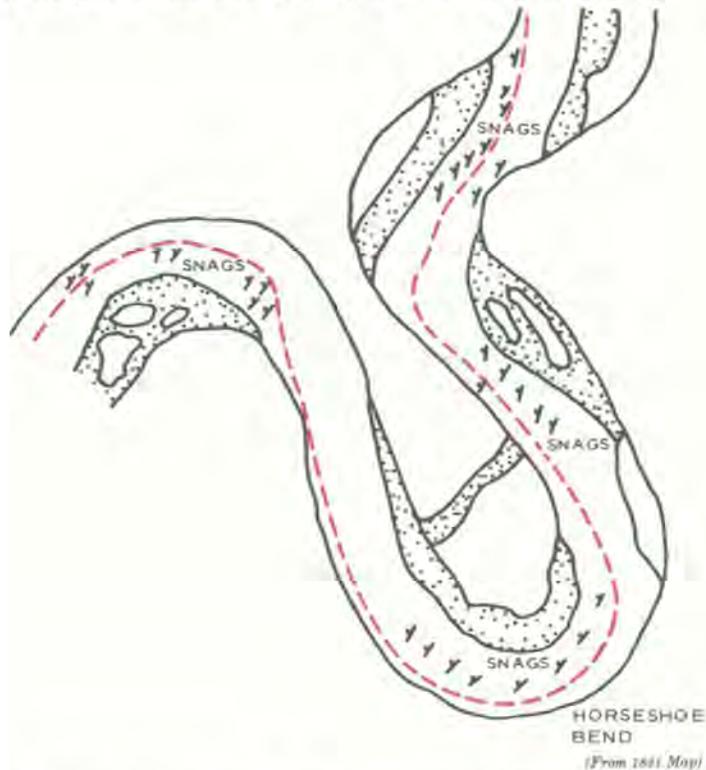
HORSESHOE CUTOFF

Mile 649.0 AHP, Map 20

When the Lower Mississippi cut across a narrow neck of land and abandoned its old channel at Horseshoe Bend in 1848, steamboat pilots were happy to find that they had about nine miles less to travel. The benefits were fleeting, as usual, for the river went to work immediately to lengthen other bends and soon compensated for the lost mileage.

Horseshoe Cutoff was one of three natural cutoffs that occurred in the Helena to Arkansas City reach of the river between 1765 and 1882. Theoretically these three cutoffs shortened the navigation channel by 30 miles, but by 1882 the channel was in fact 3.5 miles longer than it had been in 1765.

Horseshoe Cutoff left one permanent benefit for the area. The old riverbed became a beautiful oxbow lake that is known today as Horseshoe Lake. Like most of the oxbow lakes formed by the river's changes, it supports an abundant population of fish and waterfowl and provides an ideal recreational area for local residents.



HORSESHOE BEND. Horseshoe Bend in 1821 was filled with snags and already showing signs that the river intended to remove it from the main channel. Surprisingly enough, it took the Mississippi more than another quarter of a century to eat away the narrow neck of land and effect the cutoff.

ISLAND NO. 61

Mile 647.5 AHP, Map 20
Right bank, descending

When Horseshoe Bend was cut off by the river in 1848, Island No. 61 left the Mississippi shore and joined Arkansas. It is now almost indistinguishable from the mainland. Since it lies outside the mainline levee system, the island is subject to frequent flooding.

OLD TOWN BEND

Mile 645.0 AHP, Map 20

Both this big bend of the Lower Mississippi and the ancient lake that lies west of the river in Arkansas take their name from the villages of the Arkansas Indians, whose "old town" was located in the area.

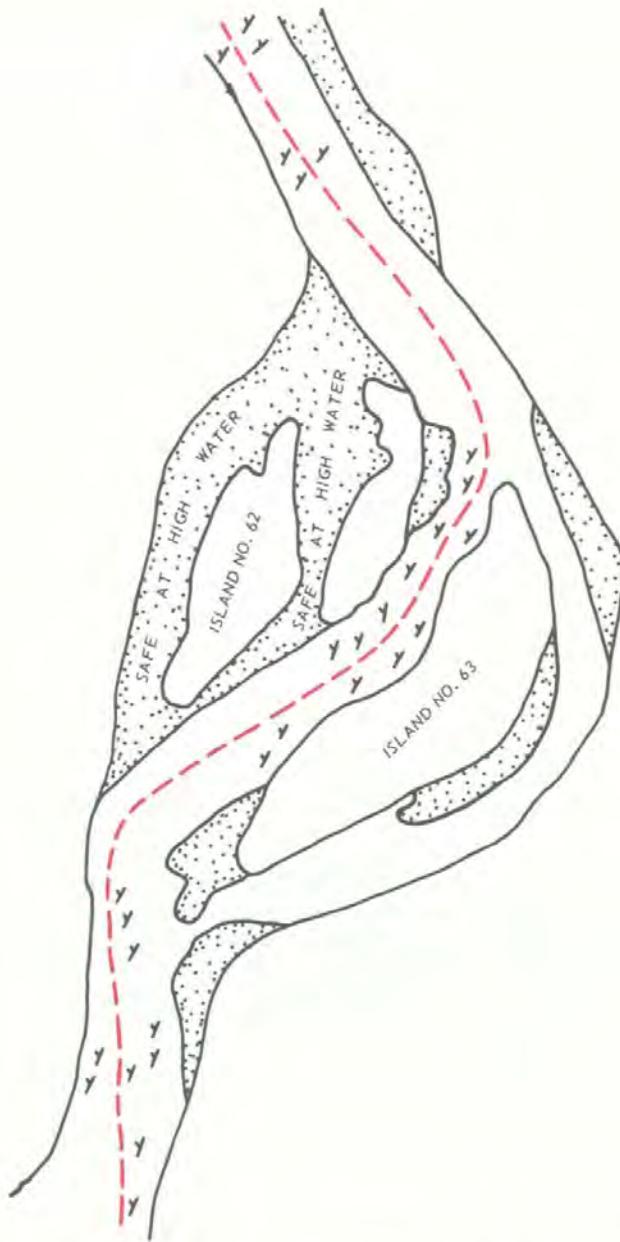
The vast wilderness of swamps and forests in the Old Town Lake area was crossed by Hernando DeSoto and his party in 1541. The French explorers, Louis Joliet and Father Jacques Marquette, also visited the Arkansas Indians in 1673, and may have reached this area before turning back after being shown some Spanish trinkets by the Indians. The two explorers knew that if the Spanish were still anywhere along the lower reaches of this great river, French visitors would not find a very warm welcome. They had already proved to their own satisfaction that the river flowed in a southerly direction, instead of westward as they had hoped. Historians disagree about the point to which Marquette and Joliet descended. Some say they turned back at the mouth of the St. Francis; others state that it was at the mouth of the Arkansas River.

Old Town Lake today is a favorite recreational area for people from Helena and the surrounding countryside.

ISLAND NO. 62

Mile 639.5 AHP, Map 20
Right bank, descending

In the flatboat and steamboat era, the navigation channel in the vicinity of Islands No. 62 and No. 63 was notoriously difficult. Even when the water was relatively high, the channel was filled with dangerous snags. At low water the river divided itself into several shallow channels, none of them deep enough for safe navigation.



ISLANDS NO. 62 AND NO. 63. A reconnaissance map made in 1821 shows the snags and bars that caused pilots to fear the channel that separated Islands No. 62 and No. 63 in 1821. Weaving safely through the snags required as much courage as skill, and when the water was low there was no channel deep enough for safe navigation.

In the winter of 1829-1830, Henry Shreve took the snagboat *Heliopolis* to the site and cleared away the worst of the snags, but the sandbars continued to be hazardous and new snags soon appeared. After the flood of 1858, the chute on the right of Island No. 62 began to fill with silt, and it attached itself to the Arkansas shore. In recent years, dikes have been constructed by the Corps of Engineers and the river channel has been contracted and stabilized between the two islands.

ISLAND NO. 63

Mile 638.5 AHP, Map 20
Left bank, descending

During the Civil War, Confederate forces found Island No. 63 a convenient location for the harassment of the Union gunboats that supported General U. S. Grant's military operations in the Lower Mississippi Valley.

On one occasion, the rebels fired on a Union transport, killing one soldier and wounding several others. Retaliation came swiftly. The *U.S.S. Tyler* and *U.S.S. Curlew* landed U. S. Infantry on both sides of the river in the vicinity of Island No. 63, and burned all the houses, barns, and crops they found in the area.

In the summer of 1864, with the Lower Mississippi under nominal control of the Union navy, a woodyard was established on Island No. 63 to serve the navy boats. Manned with slaves liberated from the cotton fields and ordered to cut wood instead, the island woodyard was soon filled with stacked cordwood for the use of the Union gunboats and transports.

A few weeks later, Admiral David Porter, commander of the Union fleet on the Mississippi, flew into a towering rage when he learned that the ungrateful freedmen had been conspiring with their ex-masters in a diabolical plot to put live torpedoes in some of the cordwood sticks, in the hope that a few Union boats would be blown to bits. The island was garrisoned with Union soldiers, who were ordered to deal out harsh punishment to all rebels, regardless of race, color, or creed.

ISLAND NO. 64

Mile 629.5 AHP, Map 21
Right bank, descending

Island No. 64 always lay close to the Arkansas shore. It began to join the mainland after the flood of 1858. Jackson Cutoff removed the island from the river entirely.

John James Audubon visited Island No. 64 in December, 1820, and recorded in his journal that he had amused himself by shooting at swans he found on the island. He failed to hit a single one, he added ruefully. About a year later, river engineers making a reconnaissance map of the Mississippi noticed the large number of swans in the vicinity of Island No. 64, and named it Swan Island on their map.

JACKSON CUTOFF

Mile 629.0 AHP, Map 21

Jackson Cutoff is an artificial cutoff, constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers in 1941. The new channel removed a troublesome bend and shortened the navigation channel by 8.4 miles.

When the Engineers were making the pilot cut across Jackson Point, the Mississippi was rising rapidly. The high water caused the plug of earth at the upper end of the cut to blow out prematurely, and the new cutoff developed very rapidly. A towboat passed down the cutoff three days after the plug blew out, and the channel was lighted for navigation a few weeks later.

There had once been a small island in the middle of the river off Jackson Point. Zadok Cramer called it Island No. 65, and it was the scene of a couple of rather strange incidents during the steamboat era.

In December, 1845, a steamboat carrying about 100 German immigrants upriver ran on a sandbar at Island No. 65 and was stuck fast. The boat carried a heavy load of freight, as well as a number of cabin passengers. The captain, in an effort to lighten the boat enough to dislodge it from the bar, asked the immigrant deck passengers to disembark. He instructed them to walk across the neck of land, and said that he would pick them up on the upper end of the bend when he had dislodged the boat from the bar.

When the obedient immigrants trudged out of sight across the neck of land, the crew dislodged the boat and it resumed its journey up the river. When it passed the Germans, who were patiently waiting at the upper end of the bend, the captain ordered the boat to keep right on going. It was many hours later before another steamboat found the bewildered immigrants on the river bank and rescued them from their cold misery.

Another strange affair at Island No. 65 concerned a steamboat called the *Martha Washington*. This boat caught fire and sank near the island on January 14, 1852. Nine or ten people died, but the boat's officers and crew and most of the passengers survived. The cargo and the boat's papers were lost.

Shortly after the disaster, the surviving passengers of the *Martha Washington* issued a

public statement crediting the cool courage and prompt action of the boat's officers with saving their lives. The captain of the steamer replied modestly that all still might have been lost but for the ready assistance offered by three brave flatboatmen who approached the burning vessel and risked their own lives helping with the rescue effort.

Shortly after these polite amenities had been published in the newspapers, a scandal erupted. Divers had attempted to salvage the cargo of the *Martha Washington* and had found that the heavily insured cargo consisted of carefully crated bricks, stones, and other heavy debris. Both the shippers of the cargo and the captain of the boat were arrested, and there were several trials on charges of fraud, arson, and even murder, for there had been several deaths resulting from the fire. The evidence brought into court was inadequate for conviction and all of the accused persons were freed. Later it was rumored that one of the men involved had confessed on his deathbed that the story was true and that he had been one of the conspirators in the fraud.

By a strange coincidence, on the same day that the *Martha Washington* burned, another steamboat called the *George Washington* exploded near Grand Gulf, Mississippi, and 20 to 30 persons lost their lives. Apparently there was no connection between the two tragedies.

Island No. 65 had entirely disappeared from the bend at Jackson Point by 1884, and it no longer appears on current navigation maps.

SUNFLOWER CUTOFF

Mile 625.0 AHP, Map 21

Sunflower Cutoff was an artificial cutoff, constructed in 1942 by the Corps of Engineers. The last plug of earth was blown out of the cutoff channel on February 16, 1942, but the channel was slow to develop. It was eight months before the lights could be removed from the old bendway and boats could begin using the new cutoff at all stages of water.

The cutoff removed a steamboat landing from the river that had been well known to river men since 1838. Sunflower Landing had the further distinction of having been acknowledged to be the "most likely" location of the historic discovery of the Mississippi River in 1541 by Hernando DeSoto.

The discovery of the great river was an important event in the history of the North American Continent, but to the ragged band of exhausted Spanish explorers under DeSoto's command, it must have seemed to be more a disaster than an achievement. The Spaniards were looking for gold and silver and had already crossed more rivers than they could count. When they encountered the largest river they had yet seen, they were too tired and harassed to be imaginative and dubbed it "El Rio Grande," or the

Big River. Having discovered it, they were interested only in getting across it as quickly as possible, for they had hostile Indians hot on their heels.

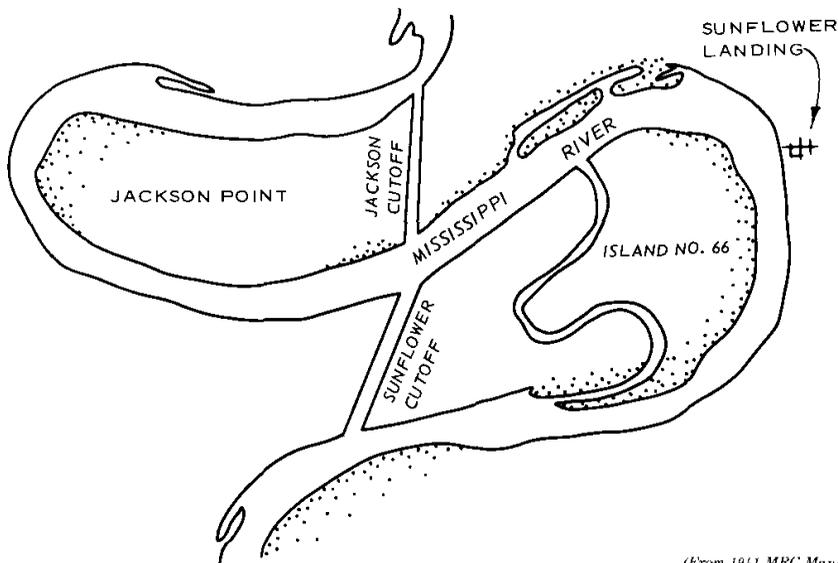
A member of the expedition dutifully recorded this description of the Mississippi:

"The river was almost half a league broad. If a man stood still on the other side, it could not be discerned whether he was a man or no. The river was of great depth, and of a strong current; the water was always muddy; there came down the river continually many trees and timber, which the force of the water and stream brought down."

For many years, historians debated the true location of DeSoto's discovery of the Mississippi. In 1935, the United States Congress asked the President to appoint a commission to study the DeSoto expedition and determine its true route through the Lower Mississippi Valley. The 400th anniversary of the event was approaching, and Congress wanted to know just where the anniversary observances ought to be held.

The United States DeSoto Expedition Commission met for the first time on March 5, 1936, and worked for the next two years on the difficult assignment. The final report was submitted to Congress on December 28, 1938. It was a careful, scholarly piece of work that proved to the satisfaction of most historians that DeSoto had discovered and crossed the Mississippi at a place that later became known as Sunflower Bend.

When the cutoff in 1942 made an oxbow lake of the old bend, the new lake was called DeSoto Lake, to honor the discoverer of the Mississippi.



(From 1941 MRC Map)

CUTOFFS IN 1941-1942. When the Navigation maps for 1941 were published, two cutoffs were under construction. Jackson Cutoff, completed later the same year, removed one large bend from the navigation channel, and Sunflower Cutoff, completed in 1942, removed old Sunflower Bend from the river.

ISLAND NO. 66

Mile 625.0 AHP, Map 21
Left bank, descending

When Sunflower Bend was a part of the main channel of the Lower Mississippi, steamboat pilots often had difficulty avoiding the numerous sandbars that made low water navigation hazardous. At the head of Island No. 66, an enormous heap of driftwood often accumulated.

On February 10, 1870, the steamer *Maggie Hays* stopped at the foot of Island No. 66 to make some minor repairs. When she resumed her journey and started past the island, a defective boiler exploded, sending scalding steam pouring over her decks. Most of the passengers had already retired for the night, and escaped injury, but the captain, engineer, and four deckhands were killed in the explosion. The disabled boat was run to shore by the pilot, where it burned to the water's edge and then sank. The cargo of pig iron and sugar was lost.

For many years afterward, the wreck of the *Maggie Hays* was an additional hazard for navigators in the bend.

ISLAND NO. 68

Mile 621.0 AHP, Map 21
Right bank, descending

Island No. 68 was the scene of several incidents during the Civil War. On May 29, 1863, the commander of the gunboat *Tyler* complained that the rebels were using the island as a base for harassment of Union boats. The rebels had two pieces of artillery, and would take pot shots at the boats as they passed Offutt's Landing. They would then rush back down across the narrow neck of Sunflower Bend to the vicinity of Island No. 68, where they would take a few more shots at the same boat after it had rounded the 20-mile bend.

A few weeks later, the same Confederate force prepared a clever ambush for a particular Union gunboat, but an informer spilled the beans and the intended victim became the attacker. When the gunboat shelled the Arkansas shore where the ambushers lay in wait, the surprised rebels fled, taking their artillery with them.

For a time all was quiet around Island No. 68, but in 1864, the commander of the *U.S.S. Tyler* found himself engaged in an embarrassing skirmish with a southern lady on a plantation opposite Island No. 68. The Union officer had been tipped off by an informer and had hoped to capture two rebel officers who were reported to be visiting the owner of the plantation. Taking a party of armed men, he crept ashore and surrounded the plantation house at two o'clock in the morning. With guns in hand, he

and his men aroused the household with shouts and volleys of gunfire. The two Confederate officers, who had taken the precaution of sleeping in the barn, were also aroused. Chuckling quietly, they slipped away to join their commands.

Mrs. Warfield, the mother of the two rebels, was in the house. When she came out, the noisy uproar ceased and the Navy commander demanded the surrender of the rebel officers. There were no Confederate officers in the house, Mrs. Warfield replied. Glancing toward the river, she said haughtily that she was glad to see that a Union gunboat was available, for she needed protection for a shipment of cotton that was waiting at her own landing nearby to be sent to New Orleans. The *U.S.S. Tyler* could convoy the steamer that was to take it down the river.

The Navy officer could hardly believe his ears. Turning red with rage, he answered roughly that his gunboat was not on the river for the purpose of helping rebels get their cotton to market. Mrs. Warfield calmly handed him a U. S. Treasury agent's permit, endorsed by a Union general, giving her permission to ship her cotton under Navy protection. She also handed him a personal permit for her to land at her plantation to attend to the cotton shipment. It was signed, endorsed, and approved by a U. S. Navy district commander.

With all these official documents in order, the commander of the *Tyler* had no choice. He provided the escort she demanded and saw her cotton safely on its way down the river. In reporting the matter to his superior officer, he said bitterly that it was difficult for him to understand why he should have to be out at 2:00 a.m. trying to capture Confederate officers, and then at 10:00 a.m. the same day be required to protect the cotton that obviously belonged to those same rebels, "thus affording them the means of supplying themselves with every comfort that money can procure ere they return to their brother rebels-in-arms."

His complaint went unanswered. High-ranking Union officers often took a puzzling interest in southern cotton, and their subordinates often found themselves engaged in giving assistance to "the enemy."

KNOWLTON CREVASSE

Mile 615.2 AHP, Map 22
Right bank, descending

During a major flood in 1912, the river bank in front of Knowlton's plantation began to crumble away, and on April 16 the mainline levee collapsed. As the flood waters of the Mississippi poured through the narrow gap, the swift currents gouged out a deep hole behind the broken levee. Knowlton Blue Hole, as it is called, is still there today. There is a piece of the old levee in front of it, and a mainline levee setback behind it.

On April 20, 1927, there was a rerun of the old disaster, when the Mississippi River

levee system again broke in three places near Knowlton. About 2,000 residents of the area were trapped on high spots or housetops. A government launch participating in the rescue operations sank near the Knowlton Landing, and it was reported that 18 people drowned.

Since the construction of the levee system of the Mississippi River and Tributaries Project by the Corps of Engineers, there have been no further crevasses in the Knowlton area.

ISLAND NO. 69

Mile 613.0 AHP, Map 22
Right bank, descending

In February, 1867, a sidewheel steamboat called the *Die Vernon* hit a snag and sank opposite Island No. 69. The old steamer had been built before the Civil War, and was one of the popular Vicksburg-Memphis packet boats.

The chute behind Island No. 69 was once navigable at high water stages, but it is now completely closed and the island has become a part of the Arkansas mainland.

LACONIA CREVASSE

Mile 609.5 AHP, Map 22
Right bank, descending

When a Confederate detachment of cavalry attacked the Union merchant vessel, *Allen Collier*, on November 7, 1863, near Laconia Landing, the rebels unexpectedly hit the jackpot. In addition to a large sum of money found in the safe, the Confederates captured several Union soldiers and a U. S. Navy officer. The *Allen Collier* was burned, and the rebels helped themselves to the money and sent the Union men off to a southern prison camp for the duration of the war.

One of the major crevasses in the flood of 1927 occurred at Laconia. About 2,000 people were driven from their homes, as the water poured through Laconia Crevasse and inundated about 12,000 acres of fine farmland.

CONCORDIA BEND

Mile 608.0 AHP, Map 22
Right bank, descending

Concordia Bend was a part of the main channel of the Lower Mississippi until the river made a natural cutoff and left it lying on the Mississippi mainland. Islands No. 70 and No. 71 were in the bend, and were attaching themselves to the right shore when the change occurred. The two islands are now a part of the east bank and are surrounded by the oxbow lake that once formed a part of the river's main channel.

SCRUBGRASS BEND

Mile 601.0 AHP, Map 22

Zadok Cramer, in *The Navigator*, included a note about the plant that gave this bend of the Lower Mississippi its name. Scrubgrass was a rush-like plant that stayed green all winter, Cramer explained. It had no leaves, and grew four to seven feet high along the edges of the river. The rough-surfaced and flexible stalks were gathered by early settlers and used to scrub wooden furniture and pewter plates and pitchers—hence the name.

Smith Point, which lay on the Mississippi side of the bend, was the site of several woodyards during the steamboat era. Most steamboats on the Lower Mississippi did not convert to coal until during or after the Civil War. Small steamers used 12 to 24 cords of wood every 24 hours, and larger ones could consume 50 to 70 cords in the same length of time.

WHITE RIVER

Mile 599.0 AHP, Map 23
Right bank, descending

The White River, a tributary of the Lower Mississippi, rises in northwest Arkansas, meanders through a small portion of southern Missouri, and then takes off in a southeasterly direction to join the Mississippi. It is about 686 miles long, and drains an area of more than 27,000 square miles. The basin terrain ranges from mountainous to flat, and agriculture and tourism provide a livelihood for most of its inhabitants.

The White River was an important artery of trade and transportation for early settlers in Arkansas. Canoes, dugouts, and small flatbottomed boats could navigate it for several hundred miles during most of the year. By 1831, a few small steamboats had ventured into the White River.

In 1831 the General Assembly of the Arkansas Territory petitioned the U. S. Congress for navigation improvements on the White River. Settlers complained that it was "obstructed with snags and lodgements of timber." Congress had a few larger rivers with even greater problems to be solved, and the White River continued unimproved.

During the Civil War, there was an abortive and inconclusive sortie into the White River by the Union gunboats late in 1862. In January, 1863, the Navy returned to the White River, and escorted Federal forces through the channel connecting the White and Arkansas Rivers and up to Fort Hindman. When the rebel fortification was captured, a post was established at the mouth of the White to prevent its use by Confederates.

After the Civil War ended, the residents of the White River Basin again asked the U. S. Government for navigation improvements. In 1871, the Corps of Engineers initiated a maintenance dredging and snagging project on White River that continued until the decline of river traffic caused it to be abandoned.

In 1961, residents of the area again became aware of the potential value of their waterway, and the Corps resumed the maintenance of a navigation channel in White River. Since 1961 soybeans, rice, sand and gravel, logs, limestone, and other products have been carried on the White River at a rate of more than half a million tons annually.

Ten miles of the White River, from its mouth to Wild Goose Bayou, now form an entrance into the McClellan-Kerr Navigation System of the Arkansas River.

The mainline levee and a backwater levee system protect a substantial portion of the White River Basin from major floods. Headwater dams and lakes provide power for the area and protection from headwater floods as well.

Local interests have constructed and now operate port facilities at several major towns on the White River. They included facilities at St. Charles, Clarendon, Des Arc, Augusta, Devalls Bluff, and Newport, all in Arkansas.

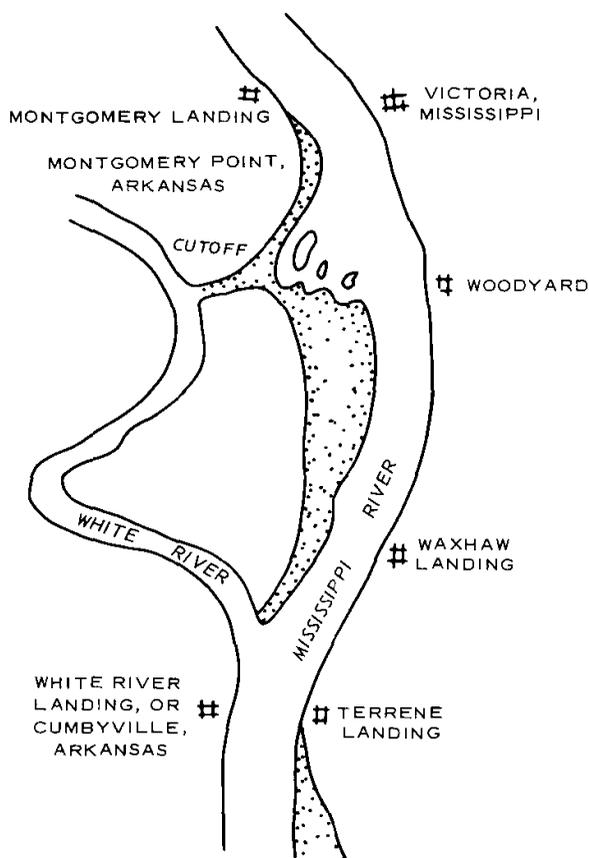
MONTGOMERY POINT, ARKANSAS

Mile 598.1 AHP, Map 23
Right bank, descending

John James Audubon, travelling by flatboat because he could not afford steamboat passage, arrived at Montgomery Point, Arkansas, on December 10, 1820. He was

exhausted, hungry, and decidedly cross. Without any real expectation of finding any conveniences or comforts available, he went to the only tavern in the area to obtain food and lodging. To Audubon's surprise, the innkeeper was a woman, and she knew how to make a weary traveler feel welcome. Mrs. Montgomery, he recalled later, was not only a handsome woman but she had manners that matched her good looks. Vastly impressed, Audubon confided to his journal that Mrs. Montgomery of Montgomery Point was a very fine lady who appeared to be "rather superior to those in her rank of life."

Montgomery Point served as a landing for the Arkansas as well as the White River. The old mouth of the White River was below the point, but at high stages boatmen took a chute behind Island No. 72 and went through a shortcut above the point. Island No. 72 no longer appears on current maps, and changes in the river's course have given the White River a new mouth above Montgomery Point.



MONTGOMERY POINT. Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 map of the Lower Mississippi shows the mouth of the White River below Montgomery Point. The shortcut at "Montgomery Cutoff" was used by pilots whenever possible. Today the White River joins the Lower Mississippi above Montgomery Point.

VICTORIA BEND

Mile 595.0 AHP, Map 23

The small community of Victoria, Mississippi, gave this bend of the Lower Mississippi its name, but changes in the river's course doomed the village to extinction.

One of the more spectacular steamboat tragedies of the pre-Civil War era occurred in Victoria Bend in 1857, when the steamer *Rainbow* caught fire. About 40 people lost their lives, and the accident led to a demand for legislation to force the steamboat lines to take precautions that would prevent such accidents in the future.

The flurry of concern aroused by the accident in Victoria Bend soon died down, and steamboat lines continued to pursue a policy dedicated to saving costs and time, rather than to the safety of their passengers. Between tragedies, the public seemed to view the explosions, fires, and snaggings on the river with the same kind of apathy with which people today view slaughter on the nation's highways. Passengers continued to patronize the fastest boats on the river, and the most admired pilots were the ones who would try to stay ahead of every other boat on the river, no matter what risks they must run.

ROSEDALE, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 585.0 AHP, Map 23

There were many early efforts to establish towns on the river opposite the mouths of the White and Arkansas Rivers, but none was entirely successful. Rosedale, originally called Floryville, was at the head of what is now known as Rosedale Bend. Riverton, a rival town that boasted that it had a mule railway to the interior, was located in the bend just below Rosedale. On the Arkansas side of the river, Cumbyville was a small community that fought a losing battle against caving banks almost from its beginning. While the Mississippi nibbled Cumbyville to death, it was also busy flinging sandbars down in front of Riverton and Rosedale. Riverton gave up the battle in the 1880's and quietly disappeared. Rosedale went into involuntary retirement as a river town because it was impossible to maintain its river landing.

While the three little towns were struggling to survive, Rosedale Bend was migrating southward. The tendency of bends on the Lower Mississippi to move downriver is a phenomenon that has often left a would-be port without a waterfront or navigable channel.

Today the names of Cumbyville and Riverton are preserved only by navigation lights. Rosedale, Mississippi, still exists but lies several miles from the river.

NAPOLEON CUTOFF

Mile 584.5 AHP, Map 24

Napoleon, Arkansas, was a flourishing town before the Civil War. It had long served as a landing for the Arkansas River trade, and was a busy, bustling place where flatboatmen, steamboatmen, professional gamblers, and ordinary citizens mingled noisily and happily for many years. By 1856, it had a population of more than 1,000 people.

Early in 1863, the Union Navy was having a great deal of trouble in the vicinity of Napoleon. The citizens of the town were always glad to harbor Confederates who desired to set up an ambush for Union boats. The rebels would fire at the enemy vessels from one side of the narrow neck of Beulah Bend, and then hustle their guns across the neck and fire at the same boat again when it had rounded the bend.

In the spring of 1863, Lt. Com. T. O. Selfridge of the U. S. Navy made a welcome proposal to Admiral David D. Porter, commander of the Union fleet. If a cutoff could be constructed across the neck of Beulah Bend, Selfridge said, the rebels would no longer be able to use the area for the harassment of the Union boats. Given permission to try the plan, Selfridge put his men to work and succeeded in opening up the new channel in April, 1863.

Admiral Porter was elated. In his official report, he said that the cutoff made by Selfridge was particularly interesting because "it shows how easily cutoffs can be made when conducted with ordinary intelligence." The cutoff that General U. S. Grant was simultaneously trying to effect at Vicksburg would come to nothing, Porter explained, because it was being made by Army men, who knew nothing of such matters.

The Union vessels had no further difficulties with the rebels at Napoleon after the cutoff. The navigation channel was shortened by about ten miles, and a small Union garrison was able to defend the mouths of both the Arkansas and the White Rivers.

What was good for the U. S. Navy was not necessarily best for the town of Napoleon, Arkansas, of course. The cutoff changed the course of the Lower Mississippi and subjected the town to an attack by currents that caused its waterfront to crumble into the river. One by one its streets and buildings disappeared into the muddy Mississippi. By 1882, the town was no longer shown on river maps.

In 1954, the Lower Mississippi fell to an extremely low stage, and for a short time the remains of the old town of Napoleon, Arkansas, could be seen scattered among the sandbars exposed by the river.

Selfridge's cutoff also affected the town of Prentiss, Mississippi, located on the east bank of the river opposite Napoleon. The river bank in front of Prentiss caved away rapidly, and about 8,000 feet of the Prentiss levee collapsed and was swept away by the river. When a new levee system was constructed by local interests after the Civil War had ended, the preservation of Prentiss was already a lost cause. The town was left outside the levee system, exposed to frequent flooding and erosion that soon destroyed



NAPOLEON CUTOFF. An artificial cutoff, made by Union Navy forces in 1863, removed Island No. 74 and a big bend from the main channel of the Lower Mississippi. The cutoff caused changes in the river that eventually resulted in the total destruction of the town of Napoleon, Arkansas. Captain Thomas O. Selfridge, who made the cutoff, reported to Admiral David D. Porter that he had removed a very bad "guerilla station" by cutting off the point above Napoleon.

it completely. Prentiss is said to have been briefly visible at extreme low water stages some years ago.

Island No. 74 was removed from the main channel of the river by the cutoff, and the old bed of the river became known as Lake Beulah. During the flood of 1912, a levee at the lower end of Lake Beulah developed more than 100 sandboils and became the scene of a dramatic but unsuccessful flood fight. On April 17, the sudden collapse of the weakened structure took the lives of several of the workers who were trying to prevent the crevasse. Flood waters poured through the break, covering almost one million acres of rich Mississippi-Yazoo Delta farmlands. About 20,000 residents of the area were forced to flee their homes.

Levee workers were in the process of closing the crevasse and strengthening the Beulah levee when a January rise of the river in 1913 breached it again, driving more than 10,000 people out of their homes. The Illinois Central Railroad undertook, under contract, the almost impossible task of trying to close the crevasse before the second rise of the record flood of 1913 arrived. The railroad laid a temporary track and dumped rock in carload lots. The heroic effort of the workers was successful this time. When the river rose again, the Beulah levee was repaired and withstood the strain of the great flood.

ARKANSAS RIVER

Mile 584.0 AHP, Map 24
Right bank, descending

The Arkansas River rises in the Rocky Mountains, flowing in a generally southeasterly direction for almost 1,500 miles before it joins the Lower Mississippi 584 miles above the Head of Passes. With its tributaries, the Arkansas drains a vast area of about 160,645 square miles.

Spanish explorers under the command of Hernando DeSoto crossed the Mississippi in the vicinity of Sunflower Landing, Mississippi, in 1541 and made their way to the Arkansas River. Following the tributary up to its junction with the Canadian River, the expedition set up a winter camp on the Arkansas and remained there until the spring of 1542.

It was more than a century before the Indians who lived in the Arkansas River Basin saw another white man. In March, 1682, the French explorer LaSalle led his small expedition into the Arkansas and visited an Indian village where he planted a wooden cross and informed the natives that their lands were now under the dominion of France.

Four years later, when LaSalle had failed to return to the Mississippi, Henri de Tonti established a small outpost on the Arkansas and raised the flag of France over it. Tonti left six men at the Arkansas Post as a symbol of French sovereignty and went off to search for LaSalle.

When Iberville and Bienville succeeded in establishing a feeble French colony on the lower reaches of the Mississippi, French colonial officials decided that the great river's tributaries ought to be more fully explored. Bernard de la Harpe was sent to investigate the Arkansas in April, 1721, and was ordered to establish a small military post near its mouth. Later the same year, John Law, French speculator and promoter, received a large grant of land at the mouth of the Arkansas. He sent a large number of workmen and colonists to the New World with orders to begin the construction of what he hoped would be his personal empire.

French explorers had reported that the Arkansas was a navigable stream, but a French priest who was in the area in 1721 said that its navigability had been greatly exaggerated. Traders and travelers had to drag their pirogues through many of the river's rapids and shallows, he explained.

Pirogues were wooden dugouts used by Indians and early explorers and settlers in the Lower Mississippi Valley. The birchbark canoe of Canada and the northern lakes was too frail for the tumultuous currents and heavy drift found in the Lower Mississippi, but the boat the French called the pirogue was tough and durable enough to stand the hard wear. Pirogues were usually made of hollowed-out cypress logs, but occasionally travelers mentioned seeing walnut pirogues.

Pirogues are still in use today, especially in the bayou country of southern Louisiana. A few are still made from a single log, but most are constructed from marine plywood. It

is a shallow-draft craft and can be extremely unstable in the water in inexperienced hands. Louisiana fishermen are apt to tell a novice that he should not attempt to paddle a pirogue unless he parts his hair in the middle and has an equal number of teeth on either side of his mouth.

When the French withdrew from the Lower Mississippi Valley, the Arkansas Post fell into Spanish hands. The Spanish called it Fort Carlos III of the Arkansas, and later changed the name to Fort San Estevan of the Arkansas. A village grew up around the crude fortification, with a mostly French population of 40 to 50 whites. According to contemporary accounts, the people were all "poor and miserable."

In 1803, the Spanish left the post and a French flag flew over it again for just 20 days, after which it was occupied by American troops. The town that had grown up around the military post became the seat of government of the new Arkansas Territory.

Arkansas was admitted to the Union as a State in 1836, and left it in 1861 to join the Confederacy. The old military post was rebuilt and became a Confederate fortification called Fort Hindman. Federal forces, smarting from one of their early defeats at Vicksburg, Mississippi, launched a cooperative Army-Navy attack on the rebel fort and captured it on January 11, 1863. It was occupied by a Union garrison until the end of the Civil War.

The Arkansas River, hazardous though it was, had served as an important trade artery and pathway for western exploration under American rule. The first steamboat to enter the river was the *Comet*, a small steamer that went up to the military post in 1820. By 1833 half a dozen small steamboats were regularly engaged in the Arkansas trade, and by 1848 the number had increased to about 30. Snagging operations and general maintenance dredging in the Arkansas was begun by the Federal Government in the mid-1830's. More than 100 years later, efforts to improve the Arkansas River ceased because of the decline in commercial traffic on the river.

Revival of waterborne transportation led to the construction of the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System by the Army Corps of Engineers, and more than four million tons of cargo moved on the new waterway during its first year of operation. Seventeen locks and dams and a number of lakes are included in the project. The waterway begins at the mouth of White River, and extends through a bayou into the Arkansas about ten miles from the mouth of the White.

The Arkansas Post National Memorial is a Federally owned site where a small museum is maintained to explain the history of the area. The Arkansas Post property is also a wildlife sanctuary. There are no launching areas, camping, or eating facilities maintained in connection with the site but it can be enjoyed by visitors who are interested in the history and ecology of the area.

ISLAND NO. 75

Mile 579.0 AHP, Map 24
Right bank, descending

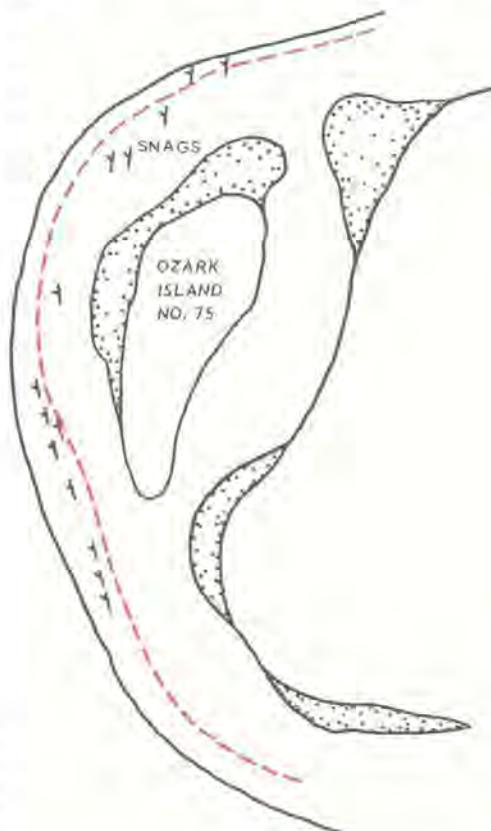
Island No. 75 was often called Ozark Island, and it originally lay in the middle of the Lower Mississippi. The navigation channel that ran past the island was filled with snags.

In the 1840's the steamboat *Belle Zane* had a bizarre accident at Island No. 75. The boat hit a snag, and for reasons that were never understood, promptly turned upside down. Of the 90 people on board, contemporary accounts estimated that about 50 made it to the safety of the island. It was a cold, bitter winter night, and when rescuers found the survivors the next morning it was said that only 16 people remained alive.

In 1848 the steamboat *Clarksville* caught fire at Ozark Island, and again there was a heavy loss of life. About 21 people were said to have perished in the flames, or were drowned in their effort to reach the island.

In 1857 the pilots of the steamboats *Humboldt* and *Belfast* had a slight misunderstanding about their passing signals and attempted to occupy the same side of the channel. The *Belfast* was not seriously damaged, but the *Humboldt* was mortally wounded and sank so fast that 15 of her passengers drowned.

Island No. 75 belonged to the State of Mississippi, but the river retired it to the Arkansas shore. River pilots who knew of its connection with so many old tragedies were glad to see the last of it.



OZARK ISLAND. An 1821 map showed the navigation channel at Island No. 75 filled with snags, and the passage would claim a good many victims before the steamboats disappeared from the river trade on the Lower Mississippi.

CAULK NECK CUTOFF

Mile 576.1 AHP, Map 24

Caving banks in Bolivar Bend had been eating up real estate at a rapid rate for quite a number of years before the Army Corps of Engineers decided that removing the bend would be easier and less costly than trying to protect it. They began the construction of Caulk Neck Cutoff in April, 1937. The cutoff was slow to develop and not until January, 1938, could commercial traffic be permanently routed through the river's new channel. In the fall of the same year the head of the old bendway began to close with silt deposited by the river.

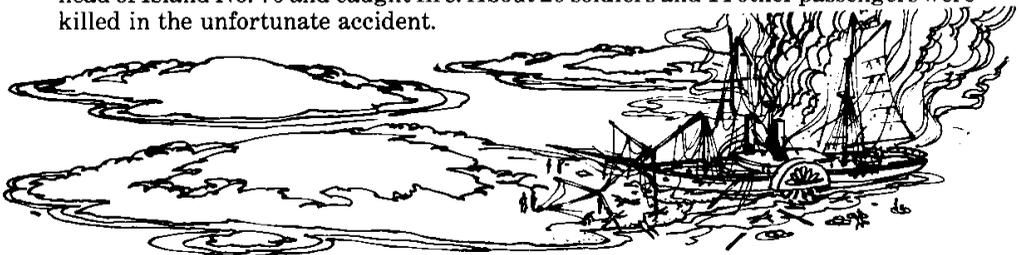
The old Bolivar Bend soon became a large and handsome oxbow lake. It was called Lake Whittington to distinguish it from an earlier bed of the river that had become a lake after a natural cutoff and had taken the name of Lake Bolivar.

Cut off from the main channel of the river along with Bolivar Bend were Monterey Bend, Island No. 76, and the small community of Bolivar, Mississippi. The village of Bolivar had a special problem after the Civil War. In 1863, the *U.S.S. Conestoga* had sent a party of seamen ashore to cut the levee that protected the little town and the country back of it. The commander of the Union gunboat had hoped that if he could not whip the rebels, he could at least drown them out. More than ten years later, the gap was still open. Local people had no funds to repair it, and whenever the river rose the water poured through the levee break and flooded the village and the farmland behind it. The Army Chief of Engineers asked Congress to allow the Corps to repair the Bolivar levee. Since it had been cut solely for military purposes, he said, he thought it was only fair that the Government should bear the expense of restoring it. His request was denied.

There was an interesting Civil War incident at Island No. 76. A gunboat commander seized a rebel boat at the island, and was embarrassed to find that the steamer's captain carried a permit signed by none other than Admiral David D. Porter himself. Mumbling apologies, the Union officer handed the boat back to its captain and watched it land and pick up some confiscated Delta cotton.

Later Island No. 76 was one of the islands that the Union navy used as a woodyard and a campground for an army of liberated blacks who cut and stacked the wood for their liberators.

On February 25, 1865, a Union transport called the *James Watson* ran aground at the head of Island No. 76 and caught fire. About 20 soldiers and 14 other passengers were killed in the unfortunate accident.



CYPRESS BEND

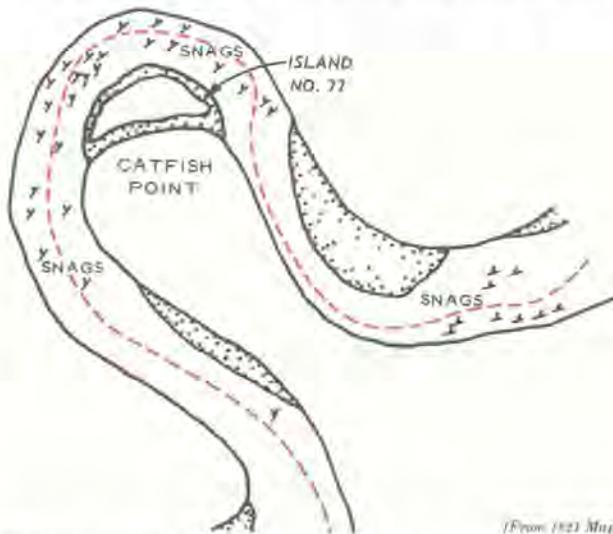
Mile 570.0 AHP, Map 24

One of the most useful species of trees that early French colonists found in abundance in the Lower Mississippi Valley was the bald cypress. The settlers used the bark as roofing for their crude houses, and sawed the huge trees into planks, which they exported from the colony.

Le Page Du Pratz, one of Louisiana's earliest historians, mentioned the cypress trees in a history of the colony that he published in 1758. The colonists were wasting the cypress, he said, and it had already become so scarce in lower Louisiana that the lumber had tripled in price.

When French dominion in the Lower Mississippi Valley ended in 1763, the cypress forests in the more settled areas of French Louisiana had indeed been depleted, but in the upper part of the Mississippi Valley cypress was still abundant. The American settlers who moved in after 1800 found it as useful and profitable as it had been for the French.

Zadok Cramer, author of *The Navigator*, found loggers working diligently at Cypress Bend in 1801. He noted disapprovingly that they were denuding the public lands of some of the finest stands of cypress. He questioned the moral and legal right of individuals to appropriate for their own benefit the timber which grew on land to which they had no title whatsoever. John James Audubon also found loggers at work



(From 1821 Map)

CYPRESS BEND. John James Audubon found this snag-filled, difficult passage at Cypress Bend in 1820. Confederate forces disabled a Union ram in the bend in the Civil War. The rebel cavalry eluded the enemy when pursued, but left behind a 12-pounder howitzer stamped "U.S. 1828," which made the Union officers wonder how troops so poorly equipped could give them so much trouble.

when he came down the Lower Mississippi in 1820-1821. At Natchez, Mississippi, he saw some of the huge log rafts that were being floated down to New Orleans. He talked to a rafter who boasted brazenly that he had made \$6,000 on a previous trip to New Orleans. Audubon described the timber bluntly as “logs stolen from the Government’s land.”

After the Civil War, when labor was cheap and improved equipment was available, the rape of the southern forests proceeded at a rapid pace. Timber could be purchased from destitute landowners for a minimum price, and large sawmills were constructed in the vicinity of tracts of virgin timber.

By 1916 the finest tracts of timber were logged out, and the little towns that had sprung up around the big sawmills were pockets of poverty, misery, and unemployment. When World War I and World War II brought increased demand for any and all kinds of lumber, small operators moved into the cut-over forests to harvest what was left.

In recent years, lumber and paper companies have found it profitable to purchase their own land and grow their own trees. Fast-growing species such as cottonwood and pine are preferred, of course, and slow-growing varieties such as bald cypress grow ever more scarce.

The loss of the forest habitat led to irreversible ecological changes in the Lower Mississippi Valley. The modern voyager on the river has only a slim chance of coming upon “about 100 Pelicans on a San Barr” as Audubon did in 1820, or of seeing the sky darkened with flights of waterfowl, as other travelers reported. The wild cry of the ivory-billed woodpecker has been forever silenced, and the bald eagle has virtually disappeared from his once favorite haunts along the river.

Cypress Bend, so named because of the tremendous size and immense beauty of the cypress forests in the area, is little more than a name on the map today.

HOLLY BRUSH CREVASSE

Mile 566.7 AHP, Map 25
Right bank, descending

On March 15, 1903, about 1,000 flood fighters were working frantically to save the west bank levee line from Point Pleasant, Missouri, to Cat Island. Day and night they labored, piling sandbags and dirt on all the known weak spots, but they could never quite stay ahead of Old Man River.

On March 16, the flood of 1903 overtopped the levee at Holly Brush plantation, and the embankment began to crumble. The gap soon widened to more than a mile, and water

poured over most of Lee, Crittenden, and St. Francis counties in Arkansas. The crevasse caused great hardship and suffering, and there was a heavy loss of livestock in the flooded area.

The Holly Brush Crevasse was one of seven major crevasses that occurred during the disastrous flood of 1903. The flood marked the beginning of a vigorous campaign for the development of a comprehensive flood-control program for the entire Lower Mississippi Valley, but it would take almost exactly a quarter of a century more to convince the rest of the nation that the flood problem was a national one.

CHICOT LANDING, ARKANSAS

Mile 565.0 AHP, Map 25
Right bank, descending

Early French voyagers thought that the river's snags resembled ugly, blackened, broken teeth, and they applied the name "Chicot" or "teeth" to several of the islands, points, and landings on the Lower Mississippi. This old steamboat landing still bears the French name of Chicot Landing.

MOUND CREVASSE

Mile 560.5 AHP, Map 25
Left bank, descending

The levee at Mound Landing, Mississippi, was an old one in 1927. It had been constructed by local interests in 1867, and had subsequently been enlarged. There was a ferry landing nearby, with a ramp to make it possible for vehicles to pass over the top of the levee.

As the record flood of 1927 raged through the Lower Mississippi Valley, flood fighters kept a close watch on the Mound Landing levee. On April 20, some seepage was noted, and emergency measures were taken to stop the flow of water.

About 6:30 a.m. on April 21, 1927, an observer noticed a large stream of water pouring through the earthen embankment. A violent "blowout" followed, and the levee collapsed. Within a few hours the gap reached a width of 1,000 feet, and was still enlarging.

The crevasse water spread over a vast extent of farmland. Planters and farm laborers fled their homes in advance of the crevasse water. In the town of Greenville, Mississippi, flood fighters watched developments anxiously, wondering whether the municipal levee would hold. When it became obvious that it would not, the town was ordered evacuated. Before the town's 15,000 inhabitants could be taken to safety, water was six to nine feet deep in the streets of Greenville. Rapid currents ran along the streets, tossing rescue boats around as though they were wood chips. Refugees were plucked from levees, housetops, mounds, and other high spots. They were placed on barges, and the steamer *Sprague*, largest towboat on the river, was one of the boats that took them to Vicksburg, Mississippi, where they were housed in tents for the duration of the flood.

The flood waters that poured through Mound crevasse carried tons of sand that it dropped on the fields just inside the levee gap. A 65-acre lake in the vicinity is another permanent legacy of the flood.

The mainline levee system of the MR&T Project replaced the broken levee at Mound Landing after the flood of 1927.

CHOCTAW BEND

Mile 559.0 AHP, Map 25

The Choctaws were the most numerous nation of Indians that inhabited the area known today as the State of Mississippi. The Choctaws began ceding their land to the United States in 1805, and by 1830 all but a small portion of them had been persuaded to move west of the Mississippi. A few who steadfastly refused to depart were settled on an Indian Reservation in the interior of Mississippi.

There is a very large sandbar in the river at Choctaw Bend, and an often-repeated story blames the steamer *Indiana* for it. It was said that when the steamboat went down in this bend in 1875, the sandbar began to grow around the wreck almost immediately.

YELLOW BEND

Mile 554.2 AHP, Map 25

During a survey made by the Corps of Engineers in 1861, it was reported that this big bend in the river was called Yellow Bend because of the peculiar color of the soil on the right bank of the bend. It was said to be composed of very dense, yellow clay.

When the clay bank caved away, the Corps of Engineers had to place several miles of concrete revetment in the bend to protect the mainline levee on the west bank.

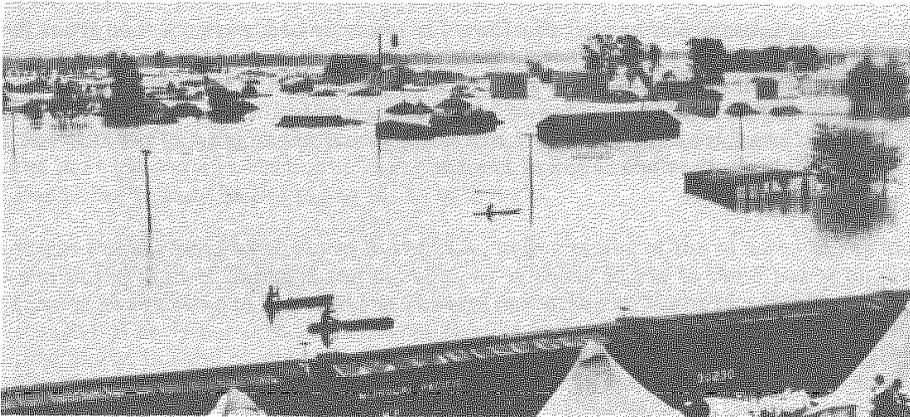
ARKANSAS CITY, ARKANSAS

*Mile 554.0 AHP, Map 25
Right bank, descending*

As river towns go, Arkansas City is a mere youngster. It was not established until the 1870's, when it was built to serve as a county seat for Desha County, Arkansas. The old seat of the county government, Napoleon, was being carried away by the river's changes after Napoleon Cutoff, and the county's only other river town, Eunice, had been destroyed by Federal troops during the Civil War.

The site chosen for the new town proved to be an unfortunate one. It was extremely vulnerable to flooding, and in 1903 a levee crevasse in the area damaged Arkansas City severely. In the great flood of 1927, the 2,000 residents of the town had to be rescued from the housetops when the streets were flooded to a depth of ten feet or more.

The mainline levee system constructed after the flood of 1927 protected Arkansas City from further flood damage, but the river had some new dirty tricks in store for it. Choctaw Island attached itself to the west bank of the river, and began to grow down in front of Arkansas City. The town lost its waterfront landing. Later it was bypassed by major highways.



ARKANSAS CITY IN 1927. The great flood of 1927 inundated most of the houses and buildings in the little town of Arkansas City, Arkansas. Refugees from the flooded village were housed in tents on the levee until the water subsided. The river gage at Arkansas City stood at 49.0 feet when the above photograph was taken on May 6, 1927.

Arkansas City survived all the disasters and now lies some distance from the river and more than two miles from a major highway. In spite of its shabby appearance, the town has a certain charm that stems from being just out of the hustle and bustle of modern highway traffic. Some of its early buildings still stand. There is a small library, a new postoffice building that harmonizes with older structures, and a small museum full of local treasures.

One interesting and unique feature of the little town is that all its streets are named for famous old steamboats. Robt. E. Lee Avenue intersects Natchez Street. Sprague Street ends at the levee and is intersected by Kate Adams Street.

EUNICE LANDING, ARKANSAS

Mile 553.5 AHP, Map 25
Right bank, descending

Eunice, Arkansas, was a small pre-Civil War community that served as a terminal for a railroad. Goods from the interior were brought to Eunice by rail to be transferred to steamboats for shipment up or down the Mississippi.

On June 14, 1863, the Union gunboat *Marmora* was cruising past the Eunice landing when it was fired upon by Confederate artillery. The Union vessel tossed a few shells in the general direction of the little town, and then anchored at the landing. The following morning the *U.S.S. Nebraska* came down the river and it, too, was fired upon as it came in sight of Eunice.

After the gunboats bombarded the town for some time, a party of men from the *Marmora* went ashore. The Union force set fire to the houses, stores, and a railroad depot. The commander of the *Marmora* reported afterward that his men had totally destroyed the town. "Not a single vestige of the town of Eunice remains," he said. No rebel force was found in the vicinity, and the Union detachment had not suffered a single casualty in the destruction of Eunice.

ISLANDS NO. 80 AND NO. 81

Mile 551.5 AHP, Map 25
Right bank, descending

Islands No. 80 and No. 81 lay side by side on the right of the navigation channel, and when the water was high enough steamboats took the chute between them. The

steamer *St. Joseph* was northbound in this area on the last day of January, 1850, when her boilers exploded and the boat caught fire. Contemporary accounts estimated the death loss at 12.

Rumors that the boat had been racing with the steamer *South America* were hotly and publicly denied by the captain of the *St. Joseph*. It was indeed true, he said, that he had passed the other boat just before the accident, but this was only because his own boat was so much faster than the *South America* that he was forced to pass her or stop his engines.

ASHBROOK CUTOFF

Mile 549.4 AHP, Map 25

Rowdy Bend, Miller Bend, Spanish Moss Bend, and Bachelor Bend were just above Greenville, Mississippi, and river pilots called them “the Greenville Bends.”

For many years, the Corps of Engineers did everything possible to prevent natural cutoffs at the Bends. One of the early revetment works was placed on the upper side of Ashbrook Neck to prevent a cutoff from occurring, but the work was badly damaged in the flood of 1892. During the 1917-1918 work season, the Engineers built a dike across Ashbrook Neck and constructed new revetment works. Rowdy Bend, however, kept elongating, until by 1930 the distance around the bend was more than 13 miles.

When the Army Corps of Engineers initiated its artificial cutoff program in the 1930's, the troublesome Greenville Bends were included in the project. At Ashbrook Neck, where the river had threatened to make its own cutoff for so long, the Corps began the construction of an artificial cutoff in August, 1935. The narrow plug that had been left in the middle of the cut was blasted out on November 19, 1935. Two days later the Mississippi River Commission, on its annual inspection trip, came through the new cutoff channel in the steamer *Mississippi*. The cutoff developed so well that by the next low water season all of the river's flow was in the new channel and Rowdy Bend was already beginning to fill at both ends.

When Rowdy Bend was removed from the main channel of the Mississippi, a small community called Gaines Landing was left without access to the Mississippi. The former river town had been used as a base of operations by Confederate troops during the Civil War. Union forces had burned the town after their gunboats were fired on in its vicinity, but the rebels continued harassing the fleet from the ruins of the village. The steamer *Delta*, a Union transport, was attacked in front of Gaines Landing by the 6th Texas Cavalry. The little steamer was so badly damaged that her crew ran her to the shore and abandoned her.

In 1864, a detachment from a Confederate brigade moved a battery of ten guns to Gaines Landing and launched a vigorous attack on the *U.S.S. Curlew* as it patrolled

the area. The gunboat was disabled and would have fallen into Confederate hands and been destroyed had the *U.S.S. Tyler* not rushed to her support.

From Gaines Landing, the rebel artillery detachment roamed the river's bank above and below the town, attacking a total of 21 Union boats. The Confederate officer in command later reported with some pride that he had disabled 5, damaged 5 more, sunk 2, burned 2, and captured 2.

Union soldiers drove the rebels out, and for a time all was quiet at Gaines Landing. Navy gunboats patrolled the Greenville Bends constantly, and commercial steamers made regular trips between New Orleans and Cairo.

On August 10, 1864, the steamer *Empress* was northbound at Gaines Landing when the Confederate battery made a surprise attack that almost resulted in the loss of the boat. The *Empress* was an unarmed commercial steamer and was virtually helpless against attack. She received 63 direct hits, and her captain was killed. Panic-stricken passengers demanded that the boat should be surrendered forthwith, but her crew and officers refused. The Union gunboat *Romeo* heard the commotion and came to the rescue of the disabled packet in the nick of time. She was towed to a safe place for repairs.

For the remainder of the war, a garrison of cavalry forces, artillery, and a U. S. Colored Infantry regiment kept the rebels away from the ruins of Gaines Landing.

A large part of Miller Bend was also removed from the main channel of the river by the cutoffs in the Greenville Bends. In the early steamboat days, the bend had been filled with snags and was notoriously difficult. It was in this bend that the big sidewheel steamer *John Adams* had struck a snag on January 28, 1851. The boat sank so rapidly that most of the 123 deck passengers on board disappeared with it and were never seen again. Fortunately for the cabin passengers, the cabin had separated from the hull as the boat went down, and all of them were rescued.

Contemporary accounts of the accident gave few details. The 100 or more people who had died were mostly Irish and German immigrants and even their names were not known. Most newspapers dismissed the tragedy in a brief paragraph, and some of them were not even certain just where the accident had occurred, or why.

During the Civil War, a Union steamer called the *Sallie Wood* was captured by Confederates, stripped of everything of value, and burned at the foot of Island No. 82 in Miller Bend. Admiral David D. Porter, commander of the Union squadron, reported to the U. S. Secretary of the Navy that he had eventually captured the scoundrels responsible for the foul deed and had sent them off to Cairo to be tried by a military court.

Another Union transport, the *Crescent City*, was fired on at Miller Bend and several Union soldiers were seriously wounded. In retaliation, a Federal force was dispatched to Greenville, Mississippi, with orders to burn the town.

TARPLEY CUTOFF

Mile 543.0 AHP, Map 26

Tarpley Cutoff was constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers after a natural cutoff had already occurred at Leland Neck in 1933. The Tarpley Cutoff removed Spanish Moss Bend from the main channel of the river and shortened the navigation channel by 8.6 miles.

Spanish Moss Bend was named for the strange and picturesque plant that cannot live without the support of other plants but that is not a parasite. Zadok Cramer, in *The Navigator*, said that this "singular vegetable" made its first appearance on the Mississippi in Spanish Moss Bend, hanging from the ancient cypress trees and giving the bend a weird and spooky appearance. He described how local residents harvested the plant, which they dried and used to stuff mattresses.

Spanish Moss is related, strangely enough, to the pineapple, and although it sometimes appears to completely cover its support it does not receive any nourishment from its host and does not damage the tree on which it grows. The plant is green, and is covered with tiny gray scales that trap the dust and water that nourish the moss. Its seldom noticed flower reveals its relationship to the pineapple.

During the Spanish dominion in the Lower Mississippi Valley, a Spanish military commander named DeVillemont received a large grant of land at Spanish Moss Bend. DeVillemont died shortly after he and his family had retired to the plantation, and his heirs soon became embroiled in a controversy with the new American Government, which refused to recognize their title to the land.

American settlers took advantage of the uncertainty and set up housekeeping on DeVillemont's plantation and adopted his name for the American community that was established there. In 1833, they changed the name of the town to Columbia.

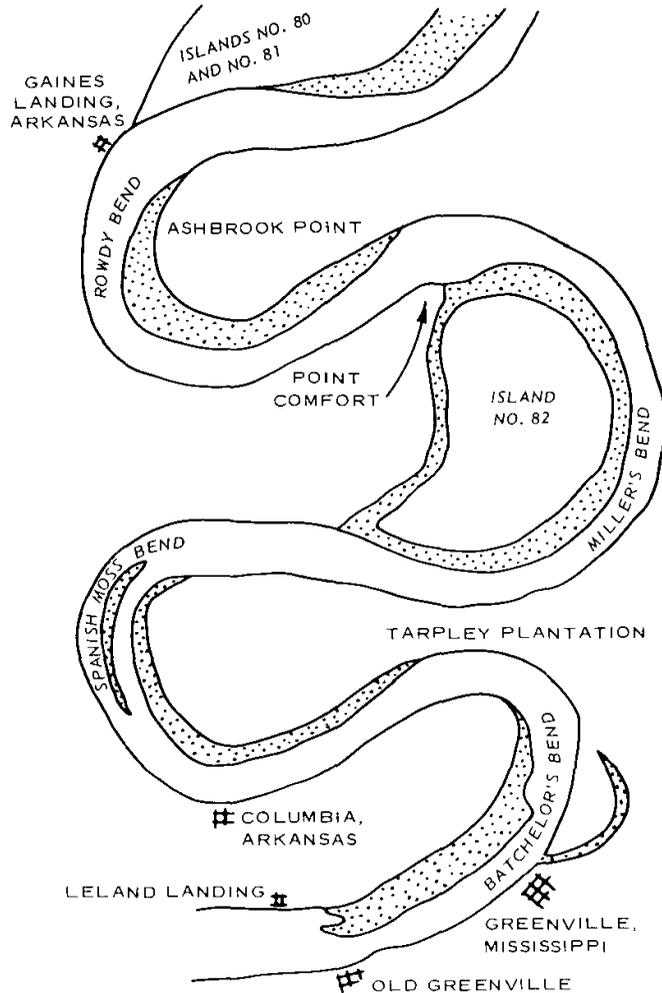
Columbia, Arkansas, was the county seat of Chicot County for a time, and served as a steamboat landing. Confederate artillery moved in to harass Union gunboats during the Civil War, and the town was burned in retaliation. Later the river removed the remains, and nothing is left of Columbia today.

LELAND CUTOFF

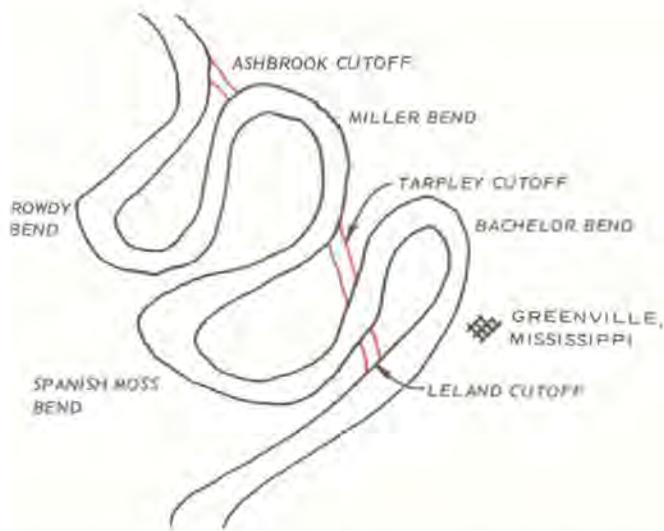
Mile 539.9 AHP, Map 26

On July 8, 1933, the Lower Mississippi cut its way across a narrow neck of land at Leland Plantation and abandoned its old bed in Bachelor Bend. Divorced from the river were Island No. 83 and the town of Greenville, Mississippi.

The Mississippi River Commission had long maintained a fixed policy of trying to prevent the river from making natural cutoffs in the Greenville Bends area, but the Mississippi overruled the Commission and accomplished its purpose in spite of all the engineers could do. Faced with the reality of the natural cutoff at Leland Neck, the Corps decided to construct the Tarpley and Ashbrook cutoffs to bring the river channel into better alignment and prevent further undesirable changes in the reach.



GREENVILLE BENDS. Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 reconnaissance map of the Lower Mississippi showed the Greenville Bends that were later removed from the main channel of the river. Today nothing remains of Gaines Landing, Columbia, and Old Greenville, and the new Greenville lies on an oxbow lake.



CUTOFFS ABOVE GREENVILLE, MISSISSIPPI. The above sketch shows the three cutoffs that removed the "Greenville Bends" from the main channel of the Mississippi River. Ashbrook and Tarpley were artificial cutoffs. Leland Cutoff was a natural cutoff. The removal of Rowdy Bend, Spanish Moss Bend, part of Miller Bend and all of Bachelor Bend shortened the navigation channel in the area by about 29.8 miles. The town of Greenville was left on an oxbow lake (old Bachelor Bend) which was renamed Lake Ferguson, in honor of General Harley B. Ferguson of the Army Corps of Engineers, who planned and carried out the two artificial cutoffs.

GREENVILLE, MISSISSIPPI

*Mile 537.2 AHP, Map 26
Left bank, descending*

The first attempt to establish a town on the east bank of the Mississippi in the vicinity of Bachelor Bend ended in frustration and failure. The river's currents attacked the waterfront at Old Greenville, forcing its citizens to pack up and move a few miles up the river to a location that was considered more secure.

Greenville, like other river towns, received a lot of unwelcome attention during the Civil War. It was threatened with destruction when the commander of the Union ram *Monarch* discovered that the people of the town were quartering rebel troops in their homes and churches. The Union officer said he would shell the buildings until he drove the rebels out, but a visit from Greenville ladies who came on board his vessel on February 14, 1863, persuaded him to change his mind.

The ladies must have been very persuasive indeed, for a short while later the commander of the *Monarch* reported that he had had to fire on Union troops at Greenville. The U. S. Army had sent a regiment of soldiers to the town to drive the rebels away, and the commander of the Union ram said he fired on them because they spent their time looting and pillaging the homes of innocent civilians. In his official report of the affair, the angry Union commander noted sarcastically that *"The following results were achieved—taking jewelry from the persons of women and toys from little children, and making a rebel soldier of every man and boy this side of the Yazoo River."*

About three months later, when Union boats were fired upon in Miller Bend, Union officials lost their patience with the little town of Greenville and ordered it burned.

Greenville proved more durable than might have been expected. It rose from its ashes, fought off the river's depredations, coped with periodic yellow fever epidemics, and even survived the cutoff that took it away from the river that had given it life.

The Army Corps of Engineers restored Greenville's status as a river town when it completed the Greenville Harbor Project in April, 1963. The oxbow lake, renamed Lake Ferguson, serves as a slack-water port where a public terminal handles petroleum, wood and paper products, construction materials, and industrial and agricultural chemicals. With the revival of its river trade, Greenville has also become the center of boat building and marine supply businesses, and the headquarters for many of the Lower Mississippi towing companies.

There is a convenient marina on the Greenville waterfront in Lake Ferguson, where pleasure boaters will find fuel and other supplies available to them.



CITY FRONT, GREENVILLE, MISSISSIPPI. Pleasure boaters in need of fuel or supplies will find the entrance to Greenville Harbor at River Mile 537.2 AHP. The marina is conveniently located on the city waterfront and the center of the town is less than two blocks away.

LAGRANGE CREVASSE

Mile 537.2 AHP, Map 26
Left bank, descending

LaGrange Crevasse, at the foot of old Bachelor Bend, was one of the major levee breaks that occurred during the disastrous flood of 1903.

A large force of men were working on the LaGrange levee on March 27, 1903, when it began to crumble. The flood fighters had to run for their lives, escaping with difficulty as the gap widened rapidly.

The flood waters poured through LaGrange Crevasse, drowning farm animals and causing many residents of the river to have narrow escapes from death. In the town of Greenville, whistles shrieked and bells clanged as every able-bodied man and boy in town was called out to help try to save the back levee that protected the town. The effort was in vain. The municipal levee crumbled away, and boats rushed in to evacuate the people of Greenville.

In the immediate vicinity of the crevasse, about 200 acres of fertile cotton fields were washed away, and the flood waters dropped a heavy layer of sand over some of the area. In some places, the sand was found to be as much as four feet deep.

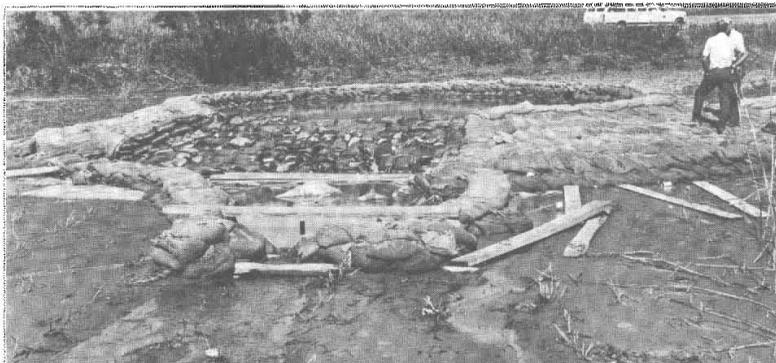
VAUCLUSE LANDING, ARKANSAS

Mile 534.0 AHP, Map 27
Right bank, descending

During major floods, Vauclose Landing is one of the places that engineers and flood fighters watch with some apprehension. Large sandboils have often erupted in the area in the past, and sandboils have to be controlled or they can cause a levee to collapse.

A sandboil is created when flood water seeps under the base of a levee through sand in the levee foundation. If the pressure of the seep water is high enough, the sand within the levee foundation can be eroded out, causing the overlying levee to collapse. Boils occur all along the levee system in major floods. They are usually brought under control by ringing them with sandbags, to a height that equalizes the pressure and reduces the flow of water through them.

There was a large sandboil at Vauclose in 1922, and in the flood of 1929 a sandboil in the same area built up a crater of sand that was about 15 feet wide across the top. It was brought under control, and the levee held. In the flood of 1973, there were boils in the Vauclose area again, but again they were brought under control.



SANDBOILS. In major floods, the pressure of the flood waters sometimes causes "sandboils" to erupt. The boils vary greatly in size and location and can cause levee failures if not brought promptly under control. In the above photo, flood fighters have brought a large boil under control by ringing it with sandbags.

WALKER BEND

Mile 533.5 AHP, Map 27

In Walker Bend, Island No. 84 now forms a part of the Mississippi mainland, but Arkansas claims jurisdiction over part of the island. Before the island joined the east bank, the navigation channel lay between Island No. 84 and the Mississippi shore.

In July, 1864, the steamer *B. M. Runyan* was northbound at the foot of Island No. 84 when she hit a snag and began to sink very rapidly. The boat was a Union transport, and the Union gunboat *Forest Rose* rushed to the rescue. All of the cabin passengers were taken aboard the gunboat, but the deck passengers were less fortunate. Most of them were soldiers whose enlistments had expired. They were going to Cairo to be mustered out so that they could return to their homes. Also on board the boat were some Union sympathizers who had found the South uncomfortable and who were going North to live.

In an official report of the accident, it was said that about 430 men belonging to a Missouri cavalry regiment had been on board the *B. M. Runyan*. The steamer was also carrying more than 100 mules and horses, 28 wagons, and all the camp and garrison equipment belonging to the regiment. About \$200,000 worth of government property was lost when the boat sank.

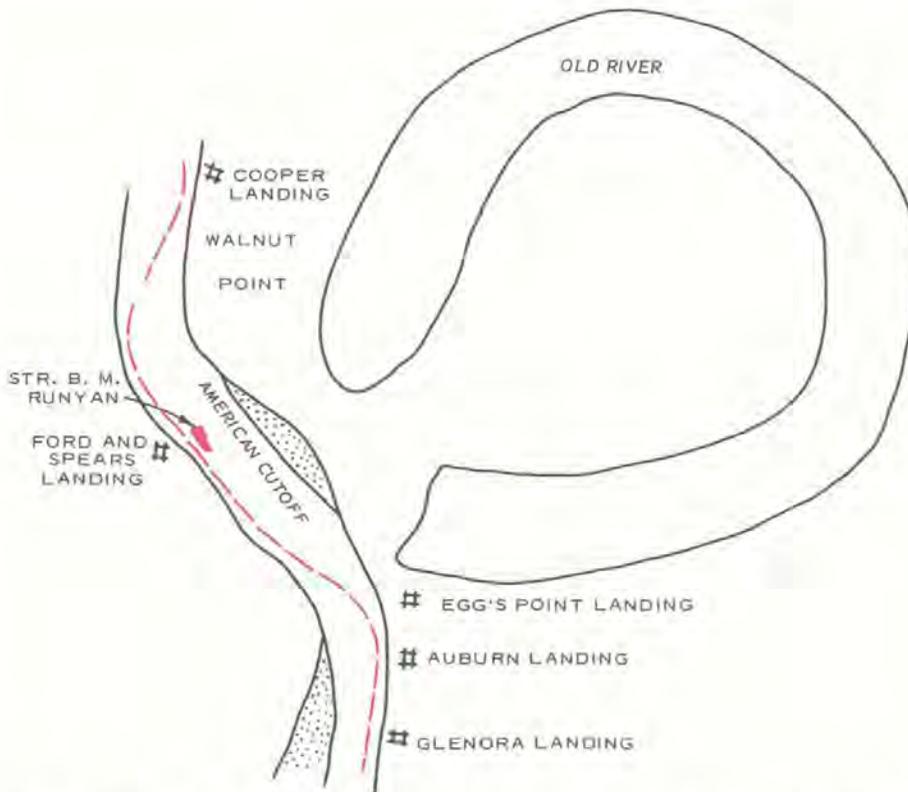
Estimates of the casualties varied from "more than 70" to "more than 150." The cabin of the sunken steamer separated from the hull and drifted downstream, where it lodged on a sandbar in American Cutoff. It was burned by Union forces so that nothing in it would be of use to rebels that might be lurking in the area.

AMERICAN CUTOFF

Mile 526.0 AHP, Map 27

In 1850, the United States Congress directed that a survey be made of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. Appointing Charles Ellet, a civil engineer, to make the survey, Congress asked for a report that might be used in preparing plans for flood control and navigation improvements. Ellet made his report to Congress in 1852, and it was the most complete report that had been made up to that time.

One of the locations to which Ellet gave his attention was a very narrow neck of land at American Bend. In a period of 25 years, the neck had dwindled from three miles to less than one mile in width. The point had been denuded of timber, and in high water the floods swept over it unimpeded. Ellet predicted that a natural cutoff would occur soon unless steps were taken to prevent the further erosion of the neck of land.



AMERICAN CUTOFF. Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 map of the Lower Mississippi in the vicinity of American Cutoff showed the wreck of the B. M. Runyan, a Civil War transport, lying close to the Arkansas shore. He marked the old bend and called it "Old River," but it is known today as Lake Lee.

Four years later, during the great flood of 1858, the Mississippi abandoned its bed in American Bend and cut across the narrow neck to make itself a new channel. The first steamboat that attempted to navigate the new cutoff had a cub pilot on board named Samuel Clemens.

Mark Twain, in *Life on the Mississippi*, recalled that his boat had not been able to make its way up the channel against the strong currents in the cutoff, but said that a day or two later steamers were navigating the channel without difficulty.

The old riverbed soon silted up at either end, creating a beautiful lake that was named Lake Lee. The 1,000-acre lake has a public access area with a launching ramp for small boats.

KENTUCKY BEND

Mile 518.0 AHP, Map 28

Explosions, fires, and snaggings were greater hazards to steamboats on the Lower Mississippi than collisions, which were relatively rare. When boats did run into each other, however, the results could be disastrous.

In February, 1846, a very popular steamer called the *Saladin* became involved in one of these unusual accidents. She was southbound in Kentucky Bend, and had stopped briefly to disembark a passenger. Suddenly the steamer *Congress*, northbound and in a great hurry, loomed up in the darkness. Both pilots backed their wheels furiously, but it was too late. The crash broke the northbound boat's boilers, sending scalding steam sweeping across her decks.

The badly damaged *Congress* went down in less than five minutes, leaving her passengers and crew struggling in the swift currents of Kentucky Bend. The uninjured *Saladin* crept cautiously through the dark, trying not to run over the survivors and picking up as many as could be located. It was estimated later that 20 people died either of injuries or by drowning, and that 30 were saved.

On May 2, 1851, there was a tragedy of equal proportions at the head of Kentucky Bend, when the Cincinnati steamer *Webster* suddenly burst into flames. The fire spread so rapidly that panic struck both passengers and crew, and the boat was not run to the shore.

J. A. Frazier of New York, a passenger on the ill-fated boat, gave a Vicksburg newspaper this graphic eyewitness account of the horrifying disaster.

"Not one minute, seemingly, elapsed between the alarm ere the flames, beaten up by the wind, clung to and enveloped the whole boat. Some of

those who escaped had to cling for hours to a snag—among them the writer of this account—with, unfortunately, no power to render assistance and doomed to be sad spectators to the terrible scene. Gracefully the burning boat, now completely on her own course, bore away with her the load of agitated victims, the flames bursting from her in every part, and through which, with a despairing scream, passenger after passenger plunged or was precipitated into the river.”

Estimates of the number of deaths varied from 40 to “more than 60.” The boat’s papers and cargo, as well as money and luggage belonging to the passengers, were all lost.

Islands No. 86 and No. 87 were originally in Kentucky Bend, but both have retreated several miles inland and are now a part of the State of Arkansas.

LAKE WASHINGTON

*Mile 515.5 AHP, Map 28
Left bank, descending*

The Mississippi has been engaged in the business of making oxbow lakes out of its old bends for several centuries. One of its oldest and most beautiful creations is Lake Washington. Geological evidence suggests that this lake may have been in existence for about 700 years.

The big lake covers several thousands of acres and was once widely known for its abundant fish and waterfowl population. Before the Civil War, several wealthy Delta planters built impressive mansions on the banks of the beautiful lake. Some of the houses still stand.

During the past half century, Lake Washington has been rapidly deteriorating. Some of its shoreline is spoiled by fishing camps, trailers, and cottages, and the lake waters have become heavily polluted with herbicides, pesticides, and commercial fertilizers used on the adjoining plantations. In 1973, the lake was closed to commercial fishing because of the dangerous level of contamination. Extensive land clearing in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta has led to increased exposure to runoff from the farm fields, and aerial spraying of crops in the area may also have contributed to the problems at Lake Washington.



WORTHINGTON CUTOFF

Mile 514.5 AHP, Map 28

The Worthington Cutoff is an artificial cutoff channel constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers. It was opened on December 25, 1933, but developed slowly. Annual dredging was required for several years before the river accepted the new channel as its permanent bed.

The cutoff was made because Matthews Bend had been eroding for many years, and it was feared that the mainline levee on the west bank would be lost. The west bank levee in Matthews Bend had been built in 1860 at a cost of \$80,000 in gold, according to an engineer's report made in 1874. It had been cut by Federal troops during the Civil War, and was still open in 1874. Later it had been repaired, and in 1928 the levee had been replaced by the mainline levee system of the Mississippi River & Tributaries Project. In the early 1930's, caving banks threatened to carry it away.

The cutoff removed the problem at Matthews Bend. Island No. 82 was also affected. The change moved it from the left to the right shore. It is now on the Arkansas side of the river, but belongs to Mississippi.

Early travelers on the Lower Mississippi commented that geese, swans, ducks, pelicans, and sandhill cranes could be seen "by the millions" around Island No. 88. This may have been an exaggeration, but Zadok Cramer complained in 1814 that he had spent a night on the island and had been unable to sleep because of the horrible clatter that the birds made all night long. A couple of Army engineers who mapped the area in 1821 were more impressed by the number of insects than by the birds. They called Island No. 88 "Mosquito Island."

When American farmers began to move into Louisiana, several small settlements were established on the west bank in the Matthews Bend area. Boatmen named the bend for a man named Matthews, who owned one of the plantations.

GRAND LAKE CUTOFF

Mile 511.0 AHP, Map 28

The exact date of the natural cutoff at Grand Lake has never been determined, but the river had already abandoned its meander loop in that area when Zadok Cramer first saw it in 1801. Cramer said that he could trace the old bendway by the size of the willows, which were still smaller in the old channel than they were on either side of it.

Some years after the cutoff occurred, a small community called Princeton grew up on the Mississippi side of the river opposite Grand Lake. There was a steamboat landing at Princeton, and the steamer *Oronoko* had stopped in front of it on April 21, 1838, at a

very early hour of the morning. A yawl was put in the water to go to the landing to pick up a few passengers. As the steamer waited for the yawl to return, a flue collapsed and scalding steam swept down the length of the *Oronoko*. Cargo, crew, and many of the deck passengers were blown into the water.

It was later estimated that 100 to 150 immigrants had been on the deck of the *Oronoko*. They had recently arrived in New Orleans from Europe, and had taken passage on the boat to seek employment in Louisville, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati. Only a few had signed the boat's register, so their names and the exact number were never ascertained.

The commotion and loud cries in front of the landing had aroused most of the citizens of Princeton. When they saw what had happened, they helped wrestle the *Oronoko* to the bank, and carried many of the injured to their homes. The disabled steamer was then towed down to Vicksburg, Mississippi, with about 30 of the most severely injured victims still on board.

At Vicksburg, the people of the town opened their homes to the victims and doctors did what they could to ease the terrible suffering, but 16 of the unlucky passengers died the next day. On Sunday, April 22, 1838, there was a mass funeral. The strangers, whose names still were not known, were followed to the cemetery by a procession many blocks long. The untimely deaths of so many immigrants who had started up the river with high hopes for the future had shaken the citizens of Vicksburg considerably, and they were even more shocked when they learned that another explosion on the Ohio River the same week had taken another 150 lives.

A wave of concern and indignation swept the country, and Congress passed the first legislation requiring steamboat owners and operators to take measures to protect the lives of their passengers. The Steamboat Act of 1838, however, proved to be weak, controversial, and more talked-about than enforced. Explosions, fires, snaggings, and collisions continued to mangle or kill hundreds of human beings.

Just above Princeton, at Maryland Landing, there was another spectacular steamboat accident in 1870. The steamer *Nick Wall*, which had been built the previous year, was caught in a high wind and blown on a snag. The boat sank rapidly, and about 40 people drowned. It was said that most of the dead had been deck passengers en route for Texas, where they had hoped to find new homes and more prosperity than they had enjoyed on the Upper Mississippi and Missouri Rivers.

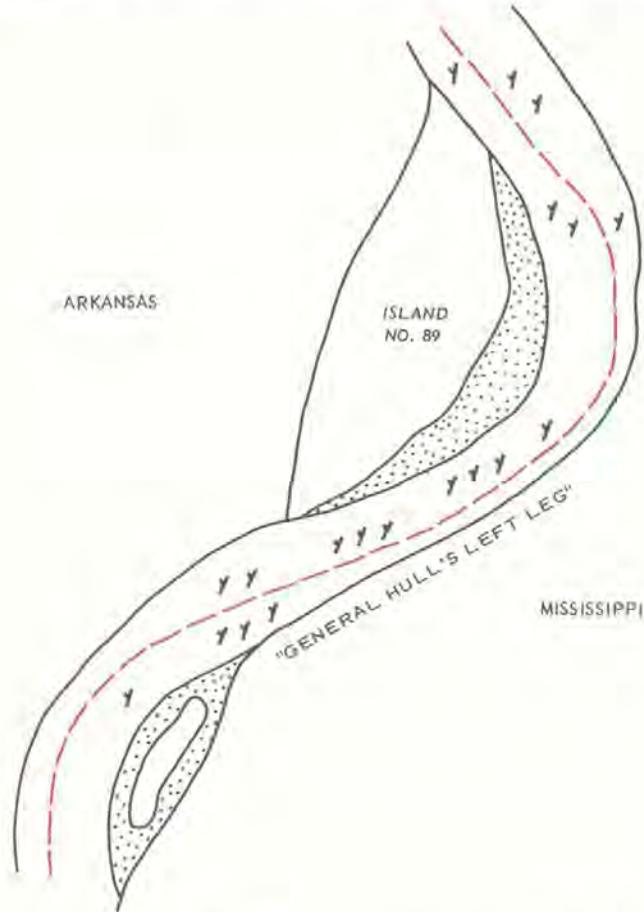
ISLAND NO. 89

Mile 506.5 AHP, Map 29
Right bank, descending

Island No. 89 was a small island that lay close to the Arkansas shore, with the navigation channel on its left at all stages of the water. Just below the island was a

snag-filled channel that boatmen, for reasons never explained, called "General Hull's Left Leg." General William Hull had been one of the heroes of the American Revolution. During the War of 1812 he suffered a humiliating defeat when he lost Detroit to the British. He was later court-martialed, and was saved from execution by the intervention of the President of the United States.

Island No. 89 has now become a part of the Arkansas mainland, and Island No. 90, which lay near the foot of Grand Lake Cutoff, has disappeared from the navigation maps completely.



(From 1821 Map)

GENERAL HULL'S LEFT LEG. Flatboat pilots sometimes put strange names on various parts of the Lower Mississippi. They called the snaggy channel below Island No. 89 "General Hull's Left Leg." General William Hull, for whom it was probably named, was a hero of the Revolution who later fell into ill repute because of inept campaigning in the War of 1812. The old general was court-martialed and would have been executed but for the intervention of the President.

SARAH CUTOFF

Mile 504.0 AHP, Map 29

Sarah Cutoff was an artificial channel constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers in 1935. The new cutoff was opened March 23, 1936, but developed very slowly. The low water flow was not permanently routed into the cutoff until August, 1937.

Sarah Cutoff removed Louisiana Bend from the main channel of the river, and was the second artificial cutoff made in this area. Bunch's Bend had been an old bed of the river and had been cut off in 1830 by Captain Henry Shreve. The neck of Bunch's Bend had been eroding for many years, and the cutoff would have occurred without assistance if Shreve had not dredged out the new channel. Shreve reported that the cutoff shortened the navigation channel by about 25 miles, and said that he believed it would reduce flood heights in areas below the cutoff. He reported that 20 or 30 steamboats had been able to navigate the new channel in the spring and summer of 1831.

Both Bunch's Bend and Louisiana Bend were involved in several incidents of the Civil War. Union forces established a small outpost on the west bank at Bunch's Bend in 1863, and on June 9 of the same year the Confederates attacked and captured it.

In Louisiana Bend, the Union transport *Clarabell* was northbound on Sunday morning, July 24, 1864, when a Confederate force opened fire from Ashton Landing, on the west bank. The boat was carrying 400 Union artillerymen of the 6th Michigan Regiment when it was attacked. About 13 of the soldiers were injured in the engagement with the rebel guns, and the steamer was hit 30 times. The *Clarabell* limped out of range and landed at Carolina Landing, on the Mississippi shore, and the crew began to repair the holes the solid shot had made in her hull. Rushing their artillery to the head of Louisiana Bend, the rebels began shelling the disabled boat again. An exploding shell set her afire, and all of the military equipment and personal belongings of the Michigan regiment were lost. The Union soldiers fled on foot and escaped capture.

Ashton Landing was one of the places where Union forces cut the levees in 1863. It was reported more than ten years later that three breaks in the area still remained open and that widespread damage was done whenever the river reached flood stages.

SKIPWITH CREVASSE

Mile 499.4 AHP, Map 29
Left bank, descending

The record flood of 1913 had two crests, and it was on the river's second rise that the levee at Skipwith plantation suddenly collapsed. The unexpected crevasse occurred at

noon on April 21, 1913. Couriers on horseback galloped wildly ahead of the slow-moving crevasse waters, shouting warnings to the people of the Mississippi-Yazoo Delta that their homes were about to be inundated. Several small towns were flooded, and flood-relief workers rushed to the scene with provisions, boats, and other assistance. Because of the heroic rescue efforts, no lives were lost, but it was estimated that 10,000 people had to flee their homes as a result of the crevasse. Buildings and houses were swept away in some areas, and a deep hole that covered 102 acres was created by the swift currents just inside the broken levee.

It was believed that stumps or logs left in the base of the original Skipwith levee had been responsible for the weakness that had allowed it to fail in 1913. The old levee had been built in 1882, and had been enlarged and strengthened several times.

Skipwith was a Union gunboat station and military base during the Civil War. After the fall of Vicksburg, Admiral Porter had had a carpenter shop established there for the repair of his vessels, and the U. S. Army had used some of the plantation buildings as a hospital and barracks for the freed slaves. Island No. 92 was opposite Skipwith Landing, and a Union transport called the *Sam Gaty* had gone down near the island on a sandbar in front of Opposum Point in 1863.

MAYERSVILLE, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 496.5 AHP, Map 29
Left bank, descending

Mayersville is a small town that serves as a county seat for a large and sparsely populated Mississippi county. There is an oil terminal and grain elevator on the river in front of the village, and a bulletin board where daily river stages are posted for the convenience of navigators.

ISLAND NO. 93

Mile 496.0 AHP, Map 29
Left bank, descending

Island No. 93 originally lay in mid-river near Mayersville. The lower end of the island was washed away in a flood in 1884, and what was left of it joined the east bank just below the town.

In 1852 the sidewheel steamer *Western World* collided with the *H.R.W. Hill* near Princeton Landing. Twelve lives were lost in the accident, and the wreck of the disabled *Western World* drifted all the way down to Island No. 93 before it finally sank.

ISLAND NO. 94

Mile 489.0 AHP, Map 30
Right bank, descending

Island No. 94, or Stack Island, became notorious early in the 1800's when it was used as a headquarters by a band of counterfeiters. The cunning gang turned out realistic but worthless U. S. notes. Traders and merchants in those days were accustomed to exchange their paper money for gold and silver. The flatboatmen who were the carefully selected victims of the counterfeiters soon discovered that the paper money was worthless. Their vengeance was as direct as it was prompt. The bandits were run to earth, and the few who were not hung on the spot were thrown into prison.

Stack Island is said to have disappeared during the New Madrid earthquakes in 1811-1812. Two or three years later, a sandbar appeared where the island had been. The sandbar became a towhead, and the towhead grew into a new island. By 1820, Island 94 was back on the voyagers' maps and John James Audubon spent a night there late in the winter of that year. He was entertained, he said, by some woodcutters who lived in the area. They had some tall tales to tell about the size and ferocity of the wildlife of the area. They claimed that alligators, wolves, and bears of enormous size were overabundant in the vicinity of Stack Island and swore that a huge brown tiger had recently frightened a 12-year-old boy literally to death.

One of the famous steamboats called the *Natchez* went down at Stack Island on the first day of January, 1889. The *Natchez No. 7* was, it was said, the finest of the long line of boats of that name made famous by Captain T. P. Leathers. The boat was 300.5 feet long and had eight large boilers. Her machinery had come from her well-known predecessor, the *Natchez No. 6*, which had participated in the famous race with the *Robt. E. Lee* more than a decade earlier.

When the *Natchez No. 7* ran aground and sank at Stack Island in 1889, she was under the command of Bowling Leathers, the son of Captain T. P. Leathers. On board with him was the young man's wife, Blanche, who also held a steamboat pilot's license. It was rumored later that when old Captain Leathers learned that his elegant boat had been lost, he was so angry that he refused thereafter to engage in any more business enterprises with his son and daughter-in-law.

After the accident, silt and sand began to cover the wreck of the *Natchez No. 7*. Later, a change in the river's course uncovered her again. In the low water season of 1962, the hull of the old boat was again located in mid-channel, with just nine feet of water over

the highest point of the wreck. The Corps dredge, *Jadwin*, was dredging the channel and brought up a few bits of the remains of the steamer. The channel was then dredged to the east to avoid the wreck.

Stack Island has joined the Louisiana shore, but Mississippi still has jurisdiction over the island.

LAKE PROVIDENCE, LOUISIANA

Mile 487.3 AHP, Map 30
Right bank, descending

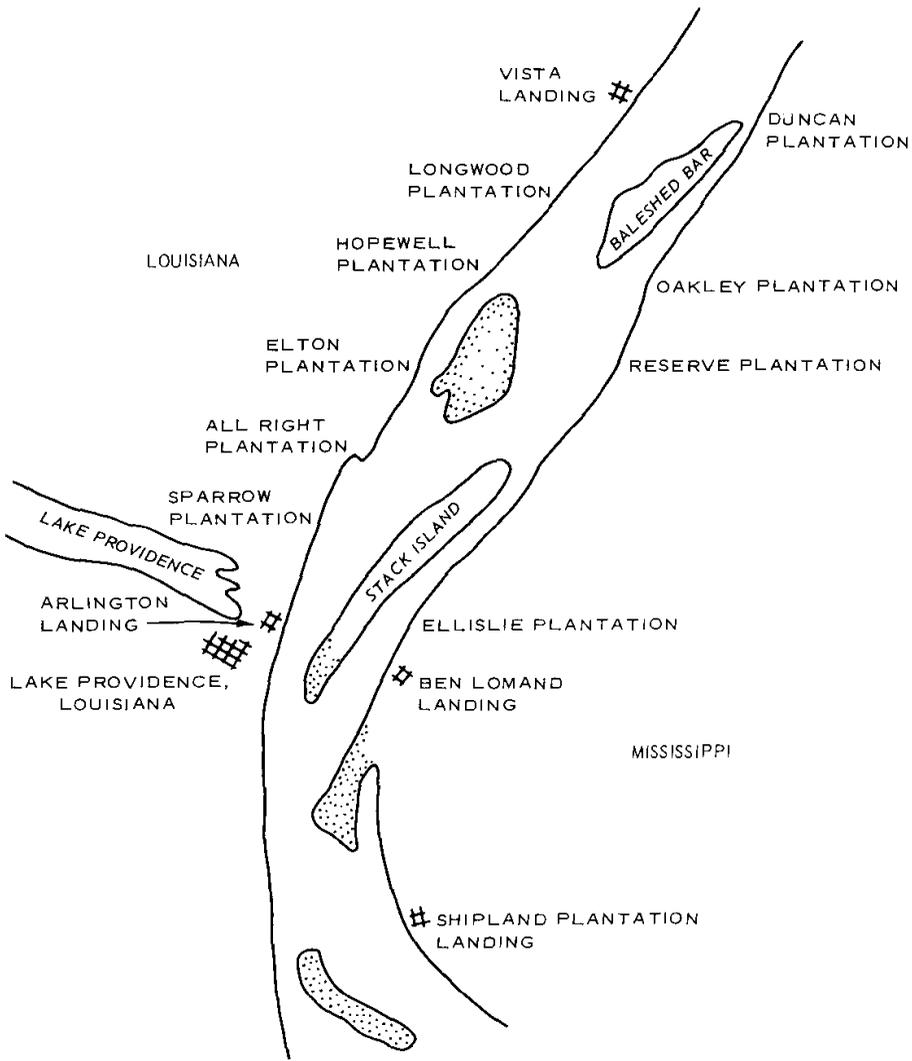
Lake Providence is an old river town and was the center of a brisk trade in cotton and plantation supplies before the Civil War. The large oxbow lake from which the town took its name is an ancient bed of the Lower Mississippi.

Lake Providence was the site of one of the numerous canals that Federal forces attempted to construct in 1863, when they were trying to find a way to bypass the rebel batteries at Vicksburg, Mississippi. Thousands of plantation slaves were confiscated and pressed into service by the Union officers who supervised the building of the canal, but the project was doomed to failure. General U. S. Grant visited the work site on February 4, 1863, and said later that he could see it was a futile effort. He let the work go on nevertheless, believing that employment was better than idleness for both his soldiers and the plantation slaves who were following the army from point to point. The project was abandoned in March, 1863.

The Union army occupied the town of Lake Providence during and after the Vicksburg campaign, and there were several minor skirmishes with Confederate forces in the vicinity of the town.

Lake Providence went into a decline after the Civil War. From time to time, bits and pieces of it slipped into the river and floods brought sand and silt through its broken levees. In 1894 engineers making a survey of the area were told by old residents that the original town had disappeared and that Lake Providence in 1894 was virtually a "new" town.

In 1953, the Army Corps of Engineers filled in the old military canal at the request of local interests. In 1960 a harbor project was authorized for Lake Providence. After the harbor channel was constructed by the Corps, local interests built a public terminal and a 248-acre industrial park. The Port of Lake Providence handled 375,257 tons of cargo in 1974. Products loaded and unloaded in the harbor in Hagaman's Chute included corn, soybeans, iron, steel, wood, paper, lime, and sand and gravel.



OLD PLANTATIONS IN THE VICINITY OF LAKE PROVIDENCE, LOUISIANA. An 1883 map published by the Mississippi River Commission showed a number of the old plantations that lined the banks of the Lower Mississippi in the vicinity of Lake Providence, Louisiana. Most of them were established before the Civil War, and several were very large and well-known cotton plantations. Stack Island was located near the Mississippi shore when the map was made, but has since crossed the river and joined Louisiana.

HOLLY BROOK CREVASSE

Mile 482.9 AHP, Map 30
Right bank, descending

Heavy precipitation over the Ohio Valley in the spring of 1903 culminated in disaster for a Lower Mississippi that was already at flood stage when the rains began in the Ohio River Basin. Seven major crevasses occurred in 1903, and the one at Holly Brook plantation was one of the most disastrous.

Everyone in the area was totally unprepared for the Holly Brook Crevasse. The levee had been built in 1877-1878, had been raised and enlarged in 1893-1894, and had been improved again in 1898-1899. It was believed to be perfectly secure. It collapsed at 6:30 a.m. on April 3, and the gap widened very rapidly.

The swift currents dug a blue hole 74 feet deep and more than half a mile long at the site of the crevasse. A temporary closure was hastily constructed but a late June rise in the same year washed away the repairs and the river flooded about 675 square miles of Louisiana for the second time. Losses were very heavy, and all the fine cotton plantations in the area below the break were devastated.

FITLER BEND

Mile 477.5 AHP, Map 30

The Fitler plantation lay in a big bend of the Lower Mississippi that had originally been called Tallula Bend. The village of Tallula lay on the east bank of the river, and Island No. 95 lay near the east or Mississippi shore.

Changes in the river's course left Island No. 95 on the Louisiana shore, and Tallula Bend moved slowly downstream until the town of Tallula lost its landing and became an inland village.

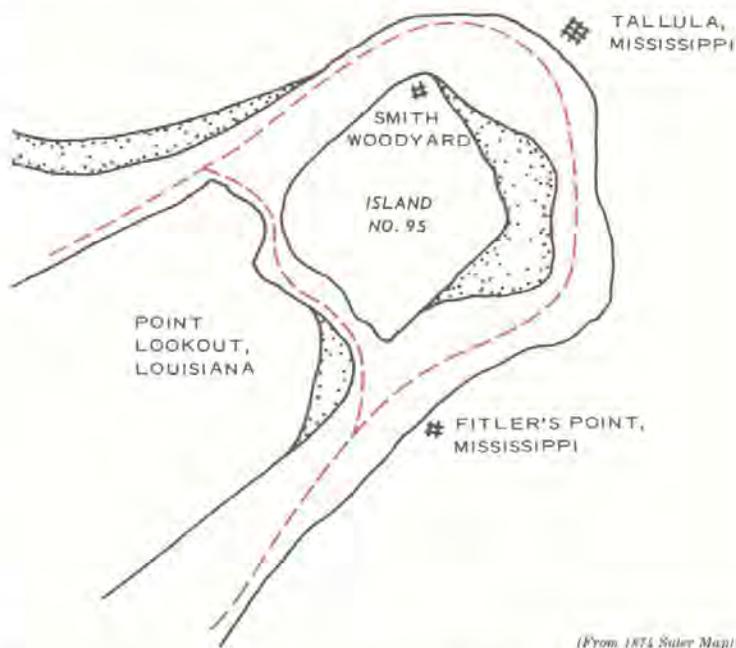
A new river community began to grow up around the Fitler plantation landing. By 1900 prospects for future development were so bright that streets were laid off, and "Fitlersville" boasted that it had electric lights, some stores, many warehouses, a big steam cotton gin, and a bakery.

Steamboats were already on the way out, of course, and Fitlersville soon reverted to its plantation status. The remains of the little town gradually disappeared.

There was some very early revetment work in Fitler Bend, and the flood of 1973 uncovered some old willow mats that had been buried on the bank for many, many years. Some of the earliest articulated concrete mattresses developed by the Corps of

Engineers were placed at Fidler Bend, and the old concrete blocks were also exposed by the 1973 flood.

In recent years, the east bank in Fidler Bend has been caving at a regular rate. There is at present no threat to the mainline levee, but engineers keep a close watch on the area.



FITLER BEND. When the above map was made in 1874, the big bend of the river just above Fidler Plantation was known as Tallula Bend. Later changes in the river's course left the village of Tallula far inland and as the bend slid southward it became known as Fidler Bend.

ALSATIA-SALEM BEND

Mile 468.0 AHP, Map 31

Two plantations on the west bank of the Mississippi gave this bend its present name, but it was originally known as Tompkins Bend.

Islands No. 96 and No. 97, which no longer appear on navigation maps, were in Tompkins Bend when Zadok Cramer numbered them in 1801. Near the two islands a

steamer called the *Bulletin No. 2* caught fire on March 24, 1855. The pilot of the burning boat courageously stayed at his post until he had run the steamer to the shore, but before a line could be taken to the bank the boat bounced off and floated on down the river, burning furiously. It was estimated that about 23 persons lost their lives. The boat's cargo and all of the luggage and other property of the passengers went down with the vessel.

GOODRICH LANDING, LOUISIANA

Mile 467.4 AHP, Map 31
Right bank, descending

Goodrich was a plantation landing at the foot of Tompkins Bend. In 1863, when Federal forces were engaged in the campaign against Vicksburg, the plantation was confiscated and made a headquarters for a government experiment that was designed to make the freedmen self-supporting. A large number of freed slaves from the surrounding plantations were taken to Goodrich and put to work growing cotton. A black garrison was stationed nearby for their protection.

On June 29, 1863, Confederate forces attacked the government plantation at Goodrich and carried off about 1,000 of the blacks after burning the cabins and encampment. Gunboats drove the rebel soldiers away, and Goodrich was reoccupied by Union forces. A year later, with Vicksburg in Union hands, Goodrich was turned over to the blacks again and a northern Freedmen's Aid Commission sent a young woman down from Chicago to teach the new citizens to read and write. She set up a school under the trees and began to initiate about 50 small children into the mysteries of the alphabet and the printed word. After a short time, she went back to Chicago, and the school was closed.

SALEM CREVASSE

Mile 466.0 AHP, Map 31
Right bank, descending

When the flood of 1912 descended on the Lower Mississippi Valley, the residents of East Carroll Parish in Louisiana worried about a lot of things, but not about the levee at Salem plantation. The Salem levee was said to be particularly strong and secure, and when a minor sandboil erupted behind it, the emergency was not considered a critical one. The water was still three to five feet from the top of the levee, and

sandbags and labor were available to take care of the little boil.

When the levee at Salem suddenly collapsed on April 13, the residents of the affected area were almost too stunned to run for their lives. Thousands of cattle, horses, and mules were swept away, and plantation cabins collapsed and disappeared in the swirling waters that poured through the crevasse. Mounted couriers galloped ahead of the advancing flood, shouting warnings to the startled and unbelieving farm laborers and residents of small communities in the path of the flood. People fled to the nearest high spot, and soon the levee on either side of the crevasse was crowded with hundreds who had taken refuge there. Many of them had to wait two days for rescue boats to arrive.

WILLOW CUTOFF

Mile 464.3 AHP, Map 31

Prior to 1913, the Lower Mississippi took a sharp turn into a 14-mile-long bend, through what is now called Lake Albemarle. The river's main channel at that time was about eight miles east of its present course. Caving banks in Albemarle Bend had caused some frantic activity in 1910, when revetment units from three districts of the Corps of Engineers worked to prevent the loss of the mainline levee on the east bank. The work had been difficult, costly, and, due to an entirely unforeseen change, unnecessary.

During the flood of 1913, the capricious Mississippi, with its usual disregard for the convenience of man, suddenly abandoned its old bed in Albemarle Bend. The Newman Cutoff, as the new channel was called, rendered the costly revetment work at Albemarle useless, and created many new problems in the vicinity of the new channel.

By 1934, it seemed apparent that the river was creating a new bend at Newman Cutoff, and that the new channel would be as troublesome as the old Albermarle Bend had been. The Corps of Engineers therefore began the construction of an artificial cutoff at Willow Point. It was opened on April 8, 1934, but the river refused to cooperate and it developed very slowly. For several years, intensive dredging was necessary to keep the cutoff open, but the Mississippi finally accepted Willow Cutoff as its new channel and permanent bed.

The two abandoned riverbeds, Albemarle Lake and Lake Chotard, have now become popular hunting and fishing resorts. Together the two lakes cover more than 1,000 acres. Since both are on the river side of the levee system, they have not suffered as heavily from agricultural chemical pollution as some of the landside oxbow lakes, and they are periodically restocked when the Mississippi rises high enough to flow into and through its old channels.

When Albermarle Bend was still a part of the navigation channel of the river, Island No. 98 lay close to the Mississippi shore in the bend. On February 3, 1866, the steamboat *W. R. Carter* was hustling past the island, southbound for New Orleans. As she slid past Island No. 98, there was a tremendous explosion as the boat's boilers burst. As usual, a raging fire followed the explosion.

The *W. R. Carter*, built in 1864, had accommodations on board for more than 100 passengers. Her large staterooms were luxuriously furnished, and opened into a main cabin that was 225 feet long. There was a nursery on the boat, where small children were cared for while their parents enjoyed the splendid meals that were served in the large dining room. The boat had just been overhauled when she exploded on February 3, 1866, and was believed to be in perfect condition. She was carrying a full load of passengers and freight.

The survivors of the accident—and they were pitifully few—were picked up by a passing steamer and rushed to Vicksburg for medical attention. Twenty-four hours after the accident, only three bodies had been recovered and debris and wreckage was still floating past Vicksburg's waterfront. It was estimated that 123 persons had died. For weeks afterward, Vicksburg newspapers were filled with heart-rending notices and advertisements from relatives of the missing victims, begging for information and assistance in locating bodies.

The *W. R. Carter* had been one of the fast packets of the Atlantic & Mississippi Steamship Company. The company and its hopeful stockholders had spent about \$3.5 million on 24 boats in 1866. By 1869, the investors were counting their losses. Fierce competition from independent owners and the loss of 11 of the company's boats by explosions and other accidents wrecked the enterprise and cost the stockholders about \$2 million.

TERRAPIN NECK CUTOFF

Mile 461.0 AHP, Map 32

In the 1829 edition of *The Western Pilot*, Captain Samuel Cumings reported that Eagle Bend was assuming the same shape that the old Horseshoe Bend had taken just before the river cut it off. The river's currents were working on the neck of Eagle Bend on both sides, and Cumings predicted an early cutoff.

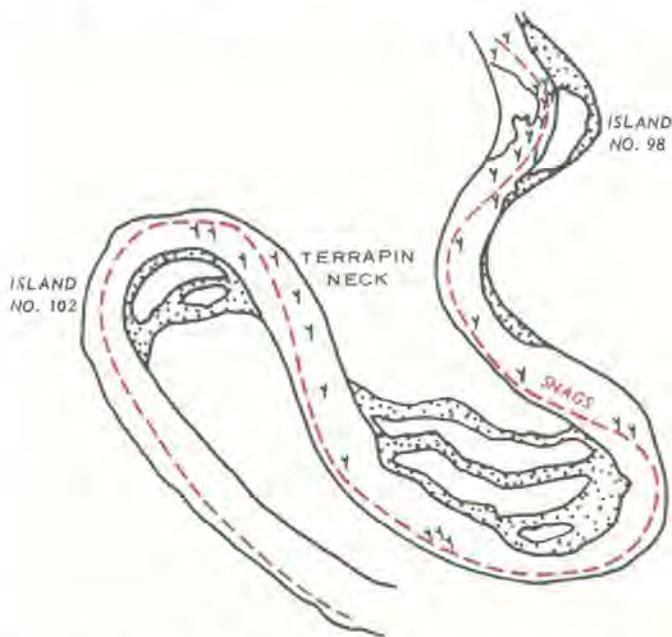
More than 20 years later, engineer Charles Ellet examined the bend and said the neck had grown extremely narrow, and that some "misguided and ignorant persons" had dug a ditch across it. Only diligent effort by planters in the area had prevented a cutoff from occurring, Ellet thought.

Local people in the Terrapin Neck area complained after the Civil War that in 1863 Admiral David D. Porter had sent a party of soldiers and seamen to Eagle Bend with

orders to try to effect a cutoff. The falling river had frustrated the efforts of the Union forces, but the ditch across the neck had been enlarged by the soldiers and was causing the river to flood their fields whenever the water rose to flood stages.

On March 7, 1866, the cutoff that had been predicted for more than half a century finally occurred. Terrapin Neck had narrowed until it was only about 30 feet wide, and the channel that the river cut across it enlarged very rapidly. On March 28 it was reported that the little steamer *Lida Norvell* had come down through the new cutoff instead of taking the bendway, and her captain said he believed the new channel was now safe for all boats.

Eagle Bend soon silted up at both ends and became the oxbow lake that is called Eagle Lake. For many years, Eagle Lake was widely known among sportsmen as one of the finest fishing lakes in the South, but pollution has created many problems in recent years. The swamps and forests that made the vicinity of Eagle Bend an ideal habitat for the Bald Eagle were cleared away, and the use of agricultural chemicals on the surrounding plantations contaminated the waters of the lake. A control structure designed to prevent pollution is now under construction by the Army Corps of Engineers. Sportsmen hope that when the structure is completed, the lake will recover most of its former productivity.



EAGLE BEND. When Army engineers made a reconnaissance map of the Eagle Bend area in 1821, Bald Eagles nested in the giant cypress trees that were abundant in the vicinity. In recent years, swamps have been drained, forests have been removed, and the lake that was created when the river cut the bend off in 1866 has become polluted. A control structure designed to prevent contamination by polluted waters is now being built by the Corps of Engineers.

ISLAND NO. 102

Mile 459.5 AHP, Map 32
Left bank, descending

During the Civil War, a refugee camp was established on Island No. 102. U. S. military authorities placed the camp under the supervision of government agents and teachers, and ordered them to teach the freedmen to be self-supporting.

The experimental project at Island No.102 was already floundering in red tape when Confederate forces were rumored to be in the vicinity. Many of the blacks fled the island, fearing that they would be taken back into slavery. The ones who remained were soon pressed into service on a confiscated plantation where a northern speculator was struggling with the mysteries of how to get rich growing cotton. Families were separated, there was much misery, and the government quietly washed its hands of the whole affair and abandoned the project.

OMEGA LANDING, LOUISIANA

Mile 457.1 AHP, Map 32
Right bank, descending

A steamboat accident near Omega Landing is the apparent basis of a number of imaginative stories that persist to this day. The boat involved originally was a steamer called the *Iron Mountain*. The accident was not a spectacular one. The steamer simply ran upon a snag, started to sink, and was safely abandoned by everyone on board.

Early the next morning, some of the boat's officers went out to investigate the condition of the sunken steamer by daylight. It was nowhere to be found. Assuming that it had been swept on down the river, they reported the loss to the owners and found themselves positions on other steamers. A couple of months later, it was reported that the *Iron Mountain* had been located. She had apparently been swept through a break in a levee shortly after the accident, and was reposing peacefully in the middle of a cotton field where the falling water had dropped her, near Omega Landing.

From this rather commonplace incident, many fabrications have arisen involving great steamboats that passed a river town loaded with happy travelers and then disappeared from the face of the earth without a trace. Fiction, when presented as "a true story," can be much more entertaining than fact!

Omega Landing today is the site of a new port that is being developed by the inland town of Tallulah, Louisiana, and the parish officials of Madison Parish. Port authorities have acquired and prepared an industrial site on the landside of the levee, and two industries are already established on the site. In 1974 the Corps of Engineers

constructed an industrial fill where local interests expect to expand an area to attract more port industries.

Omega was an early cotton plantation established before the Civil War.

MILLIKENS BEND

Mile 456.0 AHP, Map 32

Millikens Bend was named for an early settler in the area, and was the site of a prosperous little community before the Civil War. In 1858 it was said to contain several fine stores, a school, and some impressive homes. The steamboat landing was a busy one, for there were many rich and fertile cotton plantations in the area.

In January, 1863, Millikens Bend was swarming with Union transports that had brought a Union army under General William T. Sherman down the river to make an attack on the city of Vicksburg. The fleet had arrived in the bend on Christmas Day, 1862, and many of the steamers bore familiar names. The *John J. Roe*, *City of Memphis*, *R. Campbell Jr.*, *Sunny South*, *Universe*, *Empress*, *Sam Gaty*, *Die Vernon*, *Fannie Bullitt*, *Crescent City*, *Henry von Phul*, and *Nebraska* were all river steamers that had been converted from civilian to military use. When Sherman's campaign ended in disaster, the steamers disappeared from Millikens Bend for a time, only to reappear shortly thereafter with General Grant's army.

While General Grant was trying to find a safer way to approach the city of Vicksburg, some of the Union soldiers were encamped at Millikens Bend. Every day they were marched to Duckport Landing (*Mile 445.7 AHP*), where they were digging a canal that was supposed to provide access to the Tensas River, and thence to Red River. The Duckport canal was completed, and trees and drift were being cleared from a small bayou that would connect it with the Tensas when the Mississippi began a rapid fall. The falling water made the canal perfectly useless, but it also opened up a land route that Grant could use to march his army to a point below Vicksburg. Gathering all his troops together at Millikens Bend, the Union general started on his long road to Vicksburg by way of Grand Gulf and the interior.

When the troops moved out, Millikens Bend was made a depot for Union army supplies. A detachment of white soldiers and two black regiments were posted as guards. On June 7, 1863, rebel forces attacked the post. The Confederates had pushed the Union garrison out of its fortifications and to the water's edge when the Union gunboats *Choctaw* and *Lexington* appeared on the scene. The rebels fled.

Since the Union troops had suffered heavy losses in the engagement, and since black regiments had been involved, the northern press cried "Massacre!" Admiral David D. Porter, curious about the affair, went ashore, climbed the levee, and looked into the

fortified post. He reported that he saw about 80 black soldiers dead inside the post, and an equal number of dead rebels lying dead on the parapet outside. According to the evidence he could obtain, Porter thought the engagement had been “a fair fight.”

After the Civil War, the river’s currents attacked the site of the old town and it soon disappeared.

CABIN TEELE CREVASSE

Mile 452.7 AHP, Map 32
Right bank, descending

In the flood of 1927, the Lower Mississippi reached unprecedented high stages. At Cabin Teele plantation, the water overtopped the levee and washed it away, creating a crevasse more than 1,000 feet wide. Several thousand people who lived in the affected area were stranded on ridges, rooftops, and levees. Three days later, some were still awaiting rescue. Small boats were sent up from Vicksburg with food and provisions for the refugees, and larger ones followed to bring the people back to Vicksburg.

Vicksburg had more than 10,000 flood victims encamped in a tent city during the flood of 1927. People for miles around came to stare at the refugees. On Sundays, sightseers were so thick that committees were appointed to direct the traffic.

MARSHALL CUTOFF

Mile 450.0 AHP, Map 32

The bend of the Lower Mississippi River that was removed by Marshall Cutoff had long been subject to rapid erosion on the east bank. As it grew longer and longer, engineers feared that the Mississippi was going to cut its way into the bed that the Yazoo River had abandoned in 1799. The consequences of such a change would have been disastrous for the city of Vicksburg, Mississippi, where the waterfront had been restored in 1903 by diverting the Yazoo into the Mississippi’s old bed in front of the city.

To avoid commitment to a long and costly revetment program that might or might not have succeeded in holding the river out of the old mouth of the Yazoo, the Army Corps of Engineers constructed the artificial cutoff across Marshall Point in 1934. By August, 1937, the Mississippi had accepted the cutoff as its new channel and the danger of a change that would have given the Yazoo a new mouth was averted.

PAW PAW ISLAND

Mile 449.5 AHP, Map 32
Left bank, descending

The small tree called the Paw Paw is common in the Mississippi Valley. It has a maximum trunk diameter of about ten inches, and its wood is of no economic value. The fruit of the Paw Paw is three to six inches long, and is edible in October, or especially after a frost. It is cylindrical in shape, pulpy in texture, and is borne in cluster of two to four. A single fruit can weigh more than half a pound.

Paw Paw Island lay close to the right bank of the river and belonged to Louisiana. Marshall Cutoff moved it to the Mississippi side, and it is now attached to the east bank of the river. It is also designated as Island No. 103, and during the early history of the river had the odd name of "My Wife's Island."

Paw Paw was the scene of an accident involving the steamer *Ruth* in 1869. The big boat was one of the Atlantic & Mississippi Steamship Company's fast packets. She carried mail, passengers, and freight, and made connections with railroads at Memphis, Cairo, and St. Louis. The *Ruth* was sometimes called "the most magnificent steamboat ever built," "the Wonder of the West," and other complimentary names.

It was said that the big steamboat had accommodations for more than 1,000 passengers, but when she caught fire at Paw Paw Island on March 15, 1869, there were only 240 people on board. Fortunately for the passengers, the pilot had the courage and presence of mind to run the boat to shore. They lost their luggage, money, and other belongings, but not their lives. The *Ruth* burned to the water's edge after her passengers abandoned her, and was a total loss. All of the cargo, which included 200 head of livestock, was lost. The ruined hull drifted down and lodged on a sandbar near the left bank of the river just below Paw Paw Island.



*PAW PAW ISLAND. Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 map of Paw Paw Island showed it lying close to the Louisiana shore, and located the wreck of the beautiful steamer *Ruth* on the east bank opposite Duckport Landing. Many changes in the river's course have occurred since the 1874 map was made.*

YOUNGS POINT, LOUISIANA

*Mile 442.8 AHP, Map 33
Right bank, descending*

Youngs Point, on the Louisiana side of the river just above Vicksburg, is today one of the most tranquil places imaginable. Nothing disturbs the quiet of the rural countryside but the occasional throb of a diesel towboat gliding past the point, or the chug of a farmer's tractor in one of the nearby bean or cotton fields.

In 1863, Youngs Point was literally covered with thousands upon thousands of Federal soldiers, and a whole fleet of Union Navy vessels were tied up in the willows along the shore. General U. S. Grant was in command of the Union army, and Admiral David D. Porter commanded the Union fleet. Vicksburg, on the opposite bank of the river, was their objective. It was the third attempt against the rebel stronghold. A Union fleet under David Farragut had tried to take it in the summer of 1862, and the effort was a dismal failure. A Union army under General William T. Sherman had tried again at the end of 1862, and had suffered a humiliating defeat. Grant and Porter were going to try it again. They arrived at Youngs Point in January, 1863, and it would be six months later before they would see the inside of the Confederate fortifications at Vicksburg.

Between Youngs Point and Vicksburg, the Lower Mississippi made a long, long bend in 1863. Union vessels that attempted to pass the fortified city on the bluffs were exposed to the merciless bombardment of the rebel guns.

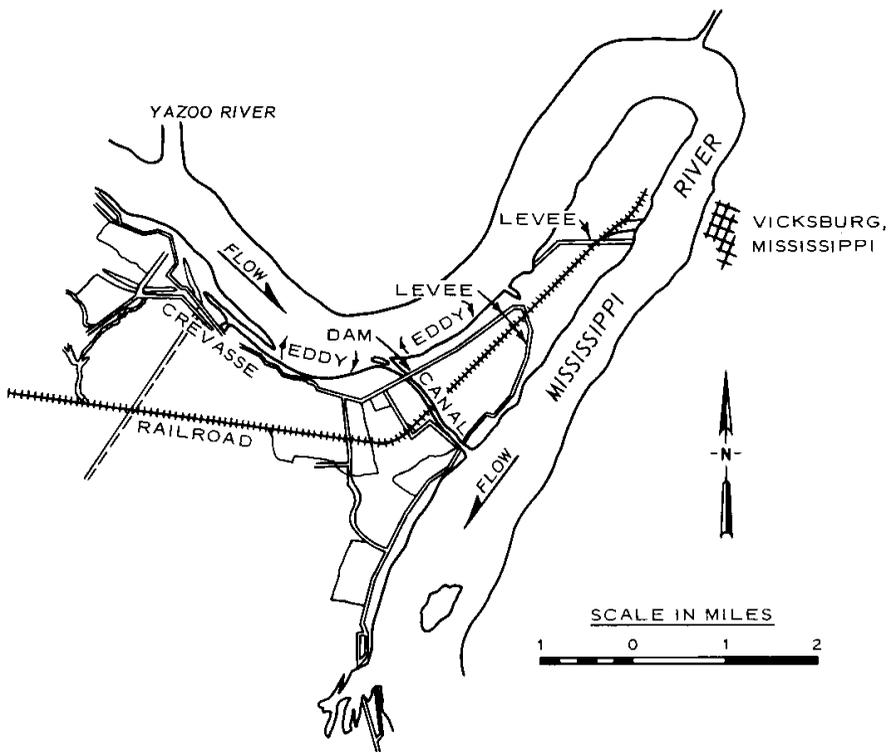
General Grant began his Vicksburg campaign with a half-hearted attempt to build a canal across Youngs Point. After the Civil War, the big ditch would be labelled "Grant's Canal," but it would have been more correct to call it "Lincoln's Canal." Someone had proposed the project to the President in 1862, and he had ordered General Thomas Williams to begin its construction while Farragut bombarded the hill city opposite the point. General Williams had lost most of his men from disease and had withdrawn in disgust when Farragut's fleet went down the river after failing to silence the guns at Vicksburg.

The U. S. Secretary of War had told General Grant that President Lincoln was taking a personal interest in the canal that was designed to cut Vicksburg off from the Mississippi. It was made perfectly clear to the stolid General Grant that his own personal opinion of the practicability of the idea was irrelevant. President Lincoln said "Dig!" and the general shrugged his shoulders and put his men to work. The project would at least keep his boys occupied while he explored other possible means of getting at the confounded city on the bluff.

General Grant reported on March 6, 1863, that the Secretary of War could inform the President that the Youngs Point canal was almost completed and would soon be opened. The next day, the rising Mississippi breached the dam at the upper end of the canal, and the work had to be halted. It was never resumed, but experiments were made at other sites. None succeeded, but General Grant was undismayed. His "providential failures," he said later, forced him to try the land routes that eventually led him to success and national fame when he captured Vicksburg.

During the campaign that followed the unsuccessful effort by bypass Vicksburg by digging the canal, a camp for convalescent Union soldiers was established at Youngs Point. When a small detachment of Confederates launched an attack on the position on June 6, 1863, a clever Union officer drew up the convalescents in battle lines that deceived the rebels and caused them to flee without a fight, believing themselves to be greatly outnumbered.

More than ten years after the Civil War ended, the Mississippi made its own cutoff at Vicksburg, and left the city of Vicksburg without a waterfront.



VICKSBURG IN 1863. An 1863 map prepared by a topographical engineer on General William T. Sherman's staff showed the deep bend in front of Vicksburg, Mississippi, that caused so much trouble for the Union forces. Vessels could not pass the fortified city without being exposed to the fire of the rebel batteries, and the military canal at Youngs Point failed to effect a cutoff that would bypass the city. President Abraham Lincoln was deeply disappointed; the canal had been one of his favorite projects and he had been firmly convinced that it would work.

CENTENNIAL CUTOFF

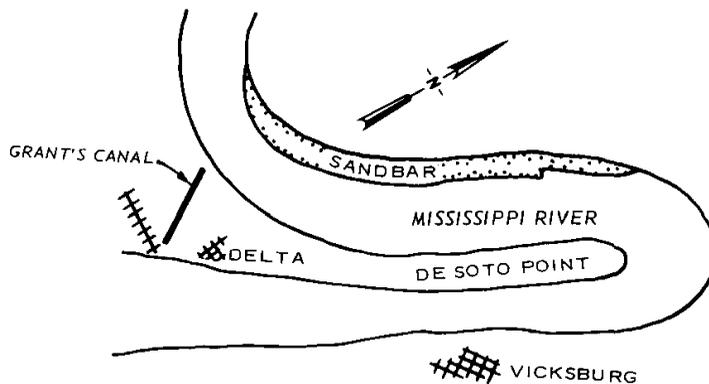
Mile 437.5 AHP, Map 33

At 2:10 p.m., April 26, 1876, the Lower Mississippi took one last bite out of a narrow neck of land in front of the city of Vicksburg, Mississippi, and went surging across DeSoto Point, Louisiana. The river had done what General U. S. Grant and more than 50,000 soldiers had failed to do in 1863. The old town of Vicksburg was removed from the Mississippi.

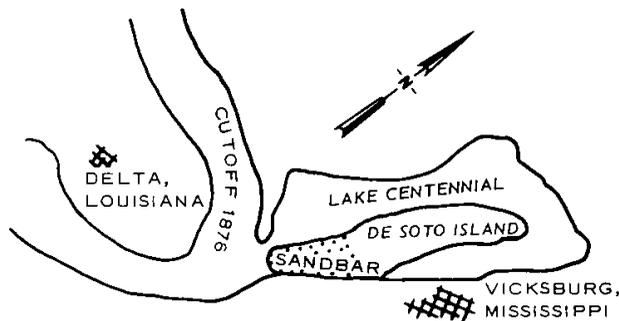
The cutoff that occurred while the nation was celebrating its 100th Anniversary came as no surprise to residents of the area. For many years, eminent civil and military engineers had been examining the narrow neck of land in front of the city and predicting that the river would soon cut through it.

Before the cutoff occurred, many people had argued that a cutoff would have little if any effect on Vicksburg. The old bend would remain navigable, they said, and the town would therefore retain its waterfront. The city's docks would continue to be as busy as ever. Others predicted gloomily that a cutoff would cause the old bend to fill with silt, that the point opposite would recede, and that Vicksburg would be left on a shallow oxbow lake, two miles from any potential steamboat landing.

The pessimists were correct. Vicksburg had lost its waterfront. At low water, a vast expanse of sand and mud prevented steamers from entering the river's old bed, and the docks in front of the city were silent and deserted for months at a time. Vicksburg would stagnate for a quarter of a century before the Army Corps of Engineers would build a canal that would restore the town to its former status as a river port.



BEFORE CENTENNIAL CUTOFF. Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 map of the deep bend at Vicksburg, Mississippi, showed an ever narrowing neck of land. Two years later, the Lower Mississippi cut across DeSoto Point and removed the bend from its main channel.



(From 1883 MRC Map)

AFTER CENTENNIAL CUTOFF. A map of the Centennial Cutoff area made in 1883 showed the disastrous results of the change in the river's course. Vicksburg, an important river port, was left without a waterfront and appeared to be headed for extinction.

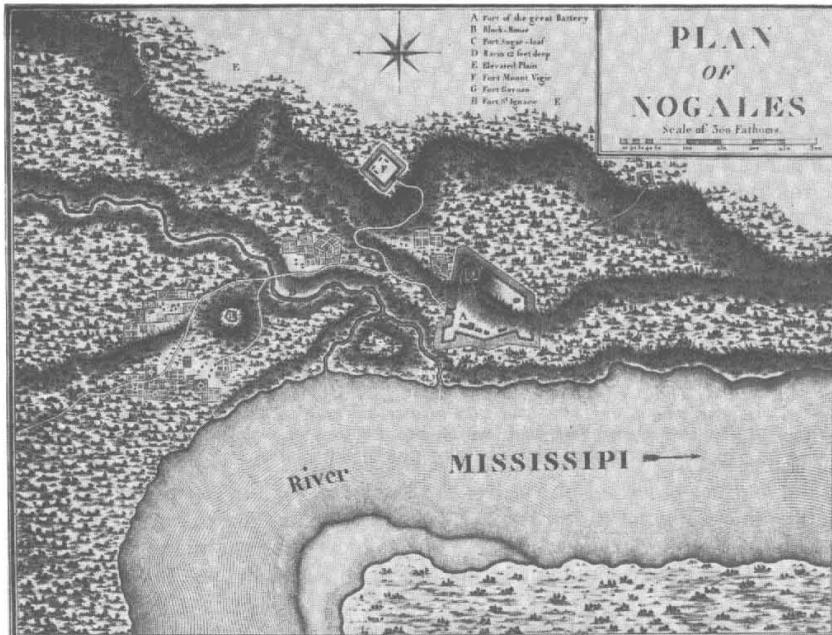
VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI

*Mile 437.1 AHP, Map 33
Left bank, descending*

The bluff where Vicksburg, Mississippi, is located today was the center of a power struggle between European nations for more than a century before the town itself was founded.

Jean Baptiste LeMoyne, Sieur de Bienville, had tried to establish a military post and plantations in the area in the early 1700's, but the French settlement was wiped out by hostile Indians. Just before the American Revolution began, British subjects who were loyal to the mother country and wanted no part of the coming struggle asked permission to plant a large settlement on the lands that lay between the Yazoo and Big Black Rivers. The Revolution disrupted the Tory plans, but enough British land grants were made to cause plenty of grief to the American settlers who would later move into the area.

Spain seized the Natchez District in 1781, and claimed that the mouth of the Yazoo River was the northern boundary of Spanish West Florida. The new American government disagreed, but preferred not to fight for the district that had become known as "the Walnut Hills." While diplomats argued the case politely, Don Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, Spanish commandant of the Natchez District, heard that an American land company was preparing to bring several thousand armed men down the river to establish an American colony on the bluff. Gayoso set out at once with a detachment of Spanish soldiers and workmen, and began the construction of a military post that he called Fort Nogales. Nogales was the Spanish word for "walnuts."



FORT NOGALES. The Spanish built a fort on the bluffs where Vicksburg is now located and during the Civil War the point was again fortified by Confederate military forces. The Spanish Fort Nogales is shown in the above sketch, made by General Victor Collot, who visited the fort in 1796.

Victor Collot, a French general who made a voyage down the Mississippi in 1796, sneered at the fortifications the Spanish had constructed on the bluff in 1791. The Spanish had blundered from hill to hill, adding on little outposts, he said, and the whole complex could be overwhelmed in a few minutes by any handful of determined men.

The small detachment of American regulars under Captain Isaac Guion who politely requested the withdrawal of the Spanish soldiers from Fort Nogales in November, 1797, may have had a similar opinion, but they were under orders not to provoke Spanish authorities. When the Spanish commander of the fort firmly refused to give it up, the Americans went on down the river to Natchez to wait patiently for the Federal government to work out its dispute with Spain. In March, 1798, the Spanish abandoned Fort Nogales.

An American garrison moved into the old Spanish fortification and renamed it Fort McHenry. American settlers in search of cheap land followed hot on their heels, and a small community of farmers was soon established in the area. Among them was Newit Vick, a Methodist minister from Virginia. Vick purchased a land claim from a restless pioneer and began raising cotton on the bluff. It soon occurred to him that the bluff he owned would make an ideal location for a town. He took a piece of paper and a pencil and sat down and drew a plan. His city was to be called "Vicksburgh."

Vick sold two lots before he and his wife succumbed the same day to the ravages of fever, and died, leaving thirteen children as their heirs. The executors of Vick's complicated Last Will and Testament thought that his plan to establish a town was a good one. They placed an advertisement in contemporary newspapers. It read as follows:

“VICKSBURGH: On the Second Monday in April next, will be offered at Public Sale, LOTS in the recently laid off Town of Vicksburgh. This Town is situated on the east bank of the Mississippi river, Warren county, Mississippi state, 90 miles above Natchez, 55 from Jackson, the Seat of Government, 14 below the mouth of the Yazoo river, 2 below the Walnut Hills, and is thought by many persons to possess advantages superior to any other site on the Mississippi river, above New Orleans. Its local situation is truly desirable, combining all the advantages of health, air and prospect—having an elevation of fifteen feet above high water mark, gradual ascent back for near a half mile, and possesses a commodious landing. The country, the traffic of which must center at this place, is extensive and fertile (embracing a greater part of the late Choctaw purchase) and will admit of good progress. Purchasers will have a credit of one, two, three and four years, by giving bond and sufficient security, with interest from the date. The sale to be on the premises. John Lane, Adm'r with the will annexed of the late N. Vick, deceased. February 16, 1822.

The public auction was a great success, and Vicksburg (it dropped the “h” in later years) was on its way into the future. The advent of the steamboat, the invention of the cotton gin, and the removal of the Indians had made it a sure thing. Shopkeepers moved in to take advantage of the growing trade in cotton and plantation supplies. Doctors moved in and offered their skills, and often their lives, in the yellow fever, smallpox, and cholera epidemics. Lawyers moved in to help untangle the conflicting claims of settlers under British land grants, Spanish land grants, squatter claims, and purchase from the U. S. Government. In one of the many disputes a question arose as to exactly when Vicksburg became a town. Was it founded by Vick when he drew his plan and sold the first lots in 1819, or did it come into existence as a town after the public sale? A high court decreed that when Newit Vick drew up his plan in 1819, he had founded the town. Various accounts of the town's history, however, have given dates ranging from 1820 to 1825 as the date of its establishment.

The town of Vicksburg was incorporated by the Mississippi legislature in 1825, and it became the county seat of Warren County. By the time the Civil War opened in 1861, it was a busy, flourishing river port with a population that was considerably larger at the time than the nearby capital city of Jackson. Many of Vicksburg's citizens were foreign-born, a large number came from states other than Mississippi, and few who were living in the town in 1861 were born there. Practically all of them, in spite of their diverse origins, were dedicated “southerners” but many of them were stubbornly opposed to disunion.

Before the war began officially, local militia in Vicksburg, with some help from the State, planted a battery of guns on the waterfront and created a national furor by stopping boats and searching them before allowing them to proceed down the river.

The Federal Government took no steps to chastise the local boys for their impudence, and enthusiastic Confederates took this as a sure sign that even Abraham Lincoln knew better than to tackle the stout little stronghold on the bluffs. When the guns began to boom at Fort Sumter, Vicksburg sent her young men off to fight on other battlefields, never dreaming that the war would touch the city itself.

When the Union fleet under Farragut began to bombard the city in the summer of 1862, Vicksburg was poorly defended and might have been taken, but Farragut declined the honor. It would be "insane" to attack it, he said, and withdrew. When General William T. Sherman, expecting to be joined by reinforcements that never arrived, launched his attack six months later, and was repulsed with heavy losses, the northern press cried: "General Sherman is insane."

It was President Abraham Lincoln's opinion that to let the South maintain its hold on the Lower Mississippi would be the greatest insanity of all, and he sent General U. S. Grant (who had already proved that unlike many of Lincoln's generals, he could fight and would occasionally win) down to take command of the campaign against Vicksburg.

Grant had no idea when he arrived how he would accomplish the great objective, but he knew he had no choice. As he explained later, the people of the North were terribly discouraged by the events that had occurred late in 1862. Voluntary enlistments in the Union army had almost ceased, and the government had had to resort to a draft. It was the wrong time to think about another retreat, and Grant was determined to go forward somehow to a decisive victory that would give the torn nation new hope.

With the cooperation of the Mississippi Squadron, under the command of Admiral David D. Porter, Grant eventually succeeded at Vicksburg. When the city surrendered on July 4, 1863, after a 47-day siege, President Lincoln breathed a sigh of relief. The city had been the key to the river, and the river was the key to the preservation of the Union, the President said. The war dragged on for two years after the fall of Vicksburg, but the loss of the river had doomed the Confederacy to failure.

The Reconstruction Period that followed the war left Vicksburg seething with unrest and staggering under a burden of debt that had reached astronomical proportions. When the river cutoff occurred in 1876, it must have seemed as though fate had decreed extinction for the devastated town. By the time the Corps of Engineers opened the Yazoo Diversion Canal in 1903, the steamboat era had already ended, but the restoration of the Vicksburg waterfront at least raised the spirits of its citizens.

When the Federal Government established the Vicksburg National Military Park and moved the headquarters of the Vicksburg District of the Corps of Engineers to the city, the struggling town received a much-needed boost. The location of the Mississippi River Commission and Lower Mississippi Valley Division headquarters in the city, and the opening of the U. S. Waterways Experiment Station at Vicksburg were bits of good fortune that gave the town new heart in its efforts to surmount and overcome all its problems. With the development of the modern diesel towboat and the revival of river trade, Vicksburg could stop grieving over its former glories and turn resolutely toward the future.

The Port of Vicksburg, with its fine slack-water harbor that was constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers and opened in 1960, has attracted small industries and river-related businesses to the town. The port terminals handle more than two million tons of cargo annually. Some of the products handled are grain, petroleum, lime, cement, steel, and paper products from International Paper Company's mill north of the city. The 245-acre industrial park constructed by local interests is already filled, and plans are under way for expansion. Vicksburg is growing steadily, and promises to become an important distribution center for the waterways industries and waterborne commerce. Like other river towns, it is benefitting from the development of improved boats and barges, navigation aids, and the maintenance of a safe and dependable navigation channel on the Lower Mississippi. The port handled 2,854,131 tons of cargo in 1974. Improved harbor and terminal facilities, and new concepts of shipping will lead to further development.

YAZOO RIVER

Mile 437.1 AHP, Map 33
Left bank, descending

The diversion canal constructed in 1903 by the Army Corps of Engineers diverted the Yazoo River into the Mississippi's old bed in front of Vicksburg and restored the town's waterfront. There is a marina for pleasure boats at the public landing in front of Vicksburg, where water, electricity, showers, and laundry facilities are available for pleasure boaters.

The Yazoo is a tributary of the Lower Mississippi and formerly entered the big river several miles above Vicksburg. With its tributaries, it drains approximately 13,355 square miles of delta and hill land in the northwest quarter of the State of Mississippi.

In 1699, the Tunica Indians were occupying villages along the banks of the Yazoo. Father Antoine Davion, a French missionary priest, established a mission among the Tunicas in 1699, but reported that he made little progress in converting them to Christianity. In spite of their disinterest in his religion, the Tunicas were fond of the priest, and when they fled the Yazoo to avoid a war with their enemies, they took him with them to a point farther down the river.

The lands the Tunicas deserted were soon taken by three small tribes—the Koroas, Ofagoulas, and Yazoos—who banded together and became known as the Yazoo Nation. French colonists established a military post and some plantations on the Yazoo around 1718, and coexisted with the Yazoos until 1729, when the Indians launched a surprise attack on the post and killed Father John Souel, a French Jesuit priest, and the handful of soldiers and settlers in the area. The French abandoned the Yazoo river and made no further effort to establish settlements in its vicinity.



OLD COURTHOUSE. One of the familiar landmarks at Vicksburg, Mississippi, is the old Warren County Court House. Built with slave labor and completed just before the opening of the Civil War, the court house was visible from the river and became one of the favorite targets of the Union Navy's gunners during the Vicksburg campaign. It suffered only minor damage. It now houses a fine local museum which contains many relics of Vicksburg's interesting past.

Choctaw Indians claimed the Walnut Hills area when the Spanish built Fort Nogales there, and the vast area of swamps and bottomlands that lay between the Yazoo and the Mississippi above the Spanish fort remained uninhabited by white settlers until after the Choctaws were removed in the 1830's.

During the Civil War, the Confederate forces hid a large part of their fleet in the Yazoo after the fall of Memphis and New Orleans. Most of the boats were sunk to prevent them from falling into Union hands. After the Civil War, local steamboat interests requested the Corps of Engineers to clear the stream of all the obstructions. Eleven or twelve of the old wrecks were removed, and one of them was the hulk of a merchant vessel called the *Star of the West*. This was the steamer that President Lincoln had sent to Fort Sumter in 1861 with reinforcements, and it had been on the receiving end of the first guns fired in Charleston Harbor. Later the boat had been captured by rebels, and they had brought it to the Yazoo when New Orleans fell into Union hands.

The Union gunboat *Cairo*, the victim of an ingenious rebel torpedo in 1863, was not removed from the Yazoo. The gunboat remained buried in the mud and silt until it was resurrected one hundred years after it had gone down. Hundreds of relics were recovered during the attempt to raise the *Cairo* in 1962, and many of them are now on

display in the visitor's center of the Vicksburg National Military Park. The gunboat itself was considerably damaged when raised and was sent to the Gulf Coast, where it still awaits funds for restoration.

The Yazoo River has always been considered a navigable stream, and plans for its improvement have been authorized. When funds become available to carry out the Federal project for its improvement, it is expected that the river will be navigable for 97% of each year. At present, a few towboats enter the Yazoo from time to time, and in 1974 almost a half a million tons of grain and agricultural chemicals were transported by barge on the Yazoo.

For more than a century, the lower part of the Yazoo Basin served as a storage reservoir for flood waters that backed into the tributary from the Mississippi at flood stages. In recent years, there has been a great deal of land clearing and swamp draining in the lower basin, and a flood-control project is now under construction by the Corps of Engineers. It is designed to provide protection for the backwater areas at high stages of the big river and would be overtopped only by a project flood.

KENTS ISLAND-RACETRACK TOWHEAD

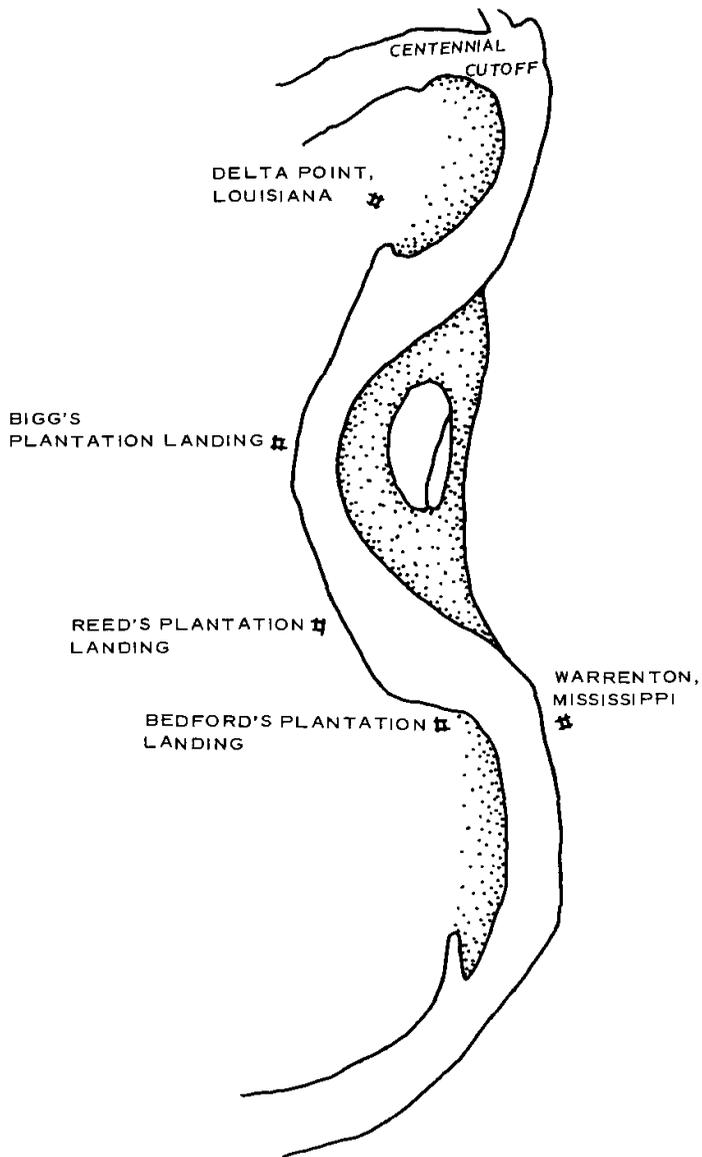
Mile 431.5 AHP, Map 33
Right bank, descending

When the Corps of Engineers dredged out a new channel on the east side of Kents Island, the old Reid-Bedford Bend was removed from the main channel of the river. The bend had been named for two Louisiana planters whose cotton plantations adjoined it.

Opposite Kents Island, there was once a small town called Warrenton. The legislature of the Mississippi Territory had created the town in 1809, ordering it established because the new county of Warren had to have a county seat. The location chosen was low, flat, and surrounded by swamps. After Vicksburg was established a few miles up the river, Warrenton was doomed. It could not compete with the city that had a better landing, a higher location, and a vigorous leadership that was determined to make the most of Vicksburg's advantageous location. The seat of county government was moved to Vicksburg, and Warrenton went into a long, slow decline.

During the Civil War, Confederate forces constructed a fortification at Warrenton, and its guns succeeded in putting one of the Union Navy's vessels out of action on April 22, 1863. The Union boat involved was called the *Tigress*, and she had safely passed all the Vicksburg batteries before one of the rebel guns at Warrenton scored a direct hit, causing her to go aground and break apart. The crew was saved, but the boat was a total loss.

Badly damaged by shelling during the war, Warrenton struggled on for a short time



WARRENTON. The old town of Warrenton, Mississippi, was located about eight miles below Vicksburg. Founded in 1809, the town suffered from floods, epidemics, and its swampy surroundings. It was almost destroyed during the Civil War, and by 1883 was declining rapidly. When the river moved westward, leaving it behind a vast sandbar, Warrenton was abandoned. Today no trace of the old town remains, but an ancient cemetery on the bluff behind the site tells the sad story of countless epidemics, when many Warrenton citizens died of yellow fever, smallpox, or cholera.

afterward until the river moved west, leaving the village landlocked. It was then abandoned, and all that remains today is an old cemetery on top of a nearby bluff.

Islands No. 104 and No. 105 were in the Reid-Bedford Bend, and disappeared from navigation maps when the bendway was cut off.

DIAMOND CUTOFF

Mile 425.5 AHP, Map 34

Diamond Cutoff was the first artificial cutoff constructed by the Corps of Engineers in the 1930's. There had already been several natural cutoffs in the area, and engineers believed that the river was about to create another at Diamond Island. To forestall the natural cutoff, the engineers began the construction of the artificial channel which was designed to keep the river channel in a more desirable alignment than the river itself might have chosen.

Work commenced in the fall of 1932, and the new channel was opened on January 8, 1933. It developed slowly but satisfactorily and eventually became the permanent bed of the Lower Mississippi.

DAVIS ISLAND, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 415.5 AHP, Map 34
Right bank, descending

The course of the Lower Mississippi in the Davis Island area has changed many times during the past two centuries.

In 1776, when American revolutionaries were putting the finishing touches on the document they called "A Declaration of Independence," loyal British subjects were asking the British King for grants of land on a great bend of the Lower Mississippi that was located a short distance above the mouth of Big Black River. In the bend were three small islands, and the British settlers called the area "The Three Islands."

One of the British subjects who succeeded in obtaining a small grant of land at The Three Islands was William Selkrig, a hard-working, peace-loving Tory who built himself a small cabin on the river bank, cleared away some of the ancient trees, and began to cultivate his soil in 1777.

In January, 1778, Selkrig saw a strange armed vessel approaching the landing near his cabin. The armed vessel was called the *Rattletrap*, and was under the command of an American captain, James Willing. Willing and his party were on their way to New Orleans, where he would obtain some assistance and supplies for the American revolutionaries from the Spanish governor, Bernardo de Galvez. Along the way, Willing was recruiting men who sympathized with the American cause, and burning the homes and crops of those who did not. Selkrig, a loyal Britisher, was taken prisoner, thrown aboard the *Rattletrap*, and carried away by the raiders.

Fortunately for Selkrig, British friends rescued him before the boat reached New Orleans. He returned to his little plantation at The Three Islands, only to find that Indians had plundered his cabin and fields in his enforced absence. Fearing for his own life, he abandoned his farm and moved down the river into a more settled area.

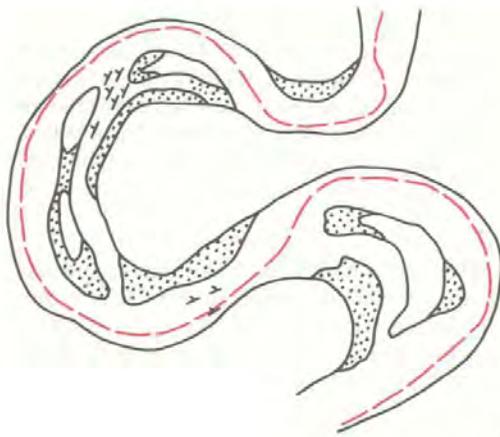
There were no further efforts to establish plantations in the vicinity of what is now called Davis Island until it became apparent that the United States was about to settle its boundary dispute with Spain, and that the Old Natchez District would become American property. American settlers rushed in to establish claims and a settlement called Palmyra sprang up on the east bank of the river in the bend.

When the United States opened a land office to settle land titles and dispose of government land, William Selkrig filed his claim to the land where he had built his little cabin in 1777. His title under the British land grant was held to be invalid, and the preemption claims of squatters in the area were recognized.

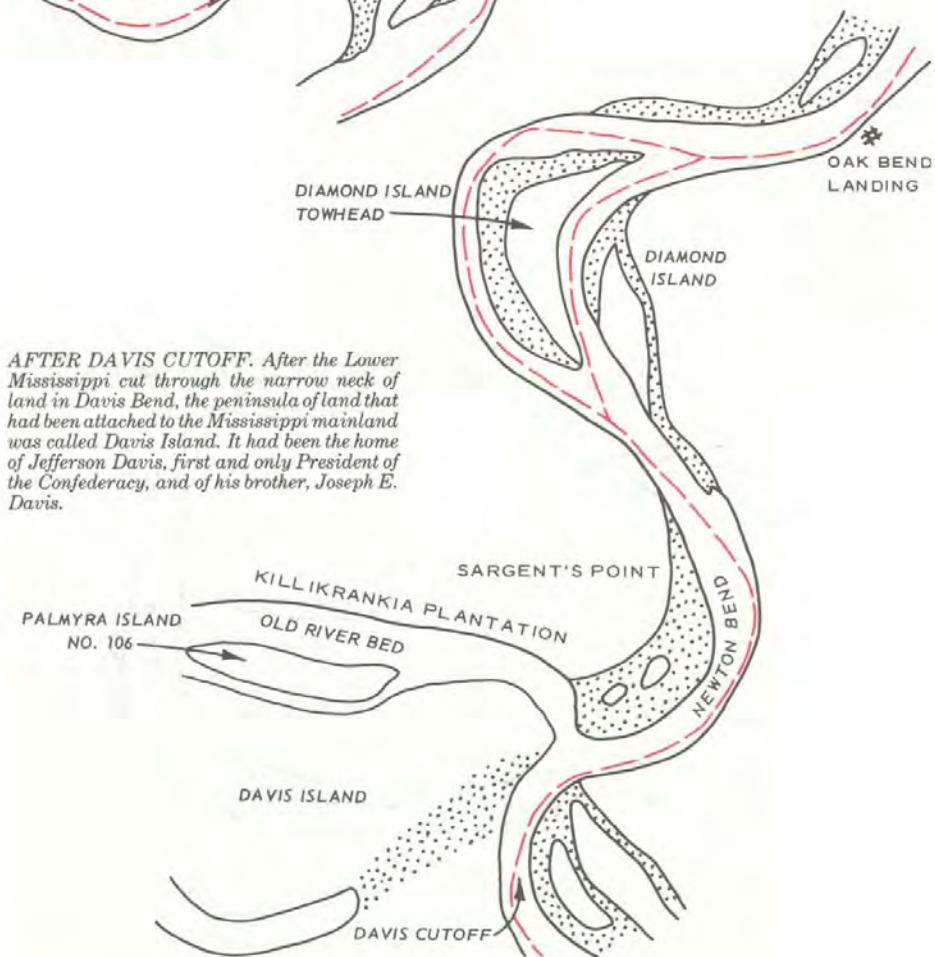
In 1808, Edward Turner, a Natchez lawyer, began to purchase the small tracts of land claimed by the Palmyra squatters, and by 1810 he had acquired the whole settlement on the north side of the peninsula of land in the big bend. Turner was joined in 1818 by another purchaser, Joseph E. Davis, who acquired most of the land on the west side of the peninsula. An adjoining property became the home of Joe Davis' younger brother, Jefferson Davis.

The two Davis plantations, Hurricane and Brierfield, became well-known and the bend of the river was renamed Davis Bend. When the Union campaign against Vicksburg was under way in 1863, both the Davis plantations were confiscated. Jefferson Davis, who had been a hero of the War with Mexico, a United States Senator, and U. S. Secretary of War, was now the President of the Confederate States of America, and Union authorities thought it was particularly fitting that the plantation that had belonged to the highest ranking rebel of all should be appropriated for use by the Freedmens' Bureau. A model colony was to be set up, to demonstrate that the ex-slaves from the southern plantations would quickly become self-supporting, given an opportunity. Cotton speculators thwarted the good intentions of both the black farmers and their government supervisors, and the colony was not a success.

After the war ended, Joseph Davis regained possession of the land in Davis Bend by signing an oath of loyalty to the Federal Government. He swore to Union military officers who administered the oath that he had taken no part in the rebellion and had given no aid or encouragement to the Confederacy of which his brother had been the first and only President. Jefferson Davis, on the other hand, steadfastly refused to take the oath, saying that he would never beg for favors from the Federal Government. He



BEFORE DAVIS CUTOFF. The big bend of the Lower Mississippi which had been known as "The Three Islands" during British dominion was later called Davis Bend. In the 1821 map shown above, the neck of the bend is extremely narrow, but it would be almost half a century before the river broke through to abandon the bend and create a new channel for itself.

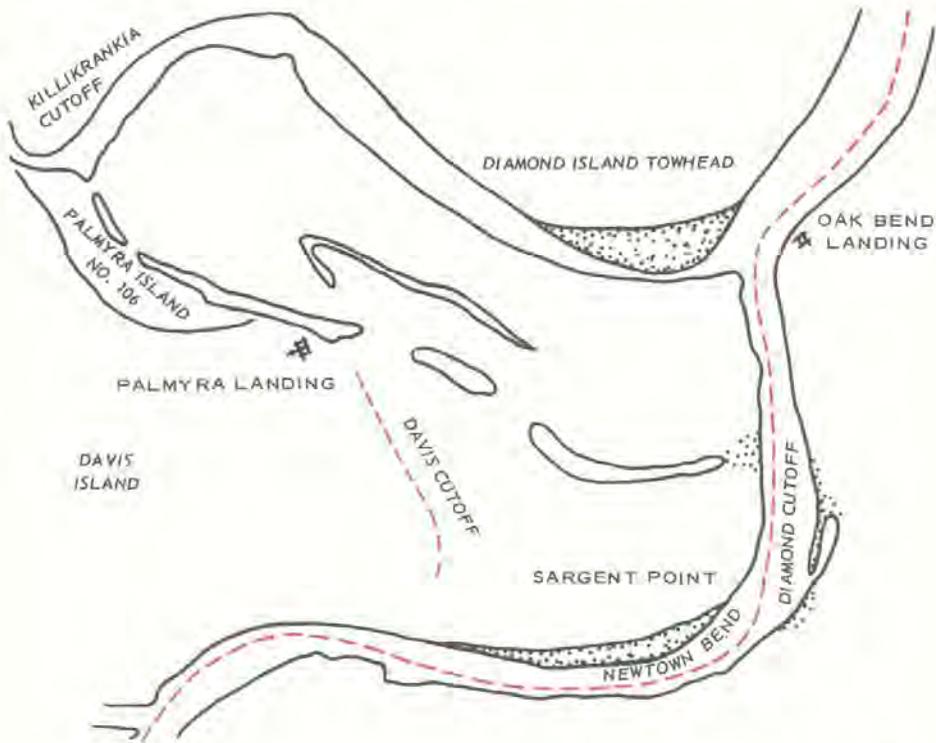


AFTER DAVIS CUTOFF. After the Lower Mississippi cut through the narrow neck of land in Davis Bend, the peninsula of land that had been attached to the Mississippi mainland was called Davis Island. It had been the home of Jefferson Davis, first and only President of the Confederacy, and of his brother, Joseph E. Davis.

had sincerely believed in the right of a state to secede, and he saw no need to “repent” of actions undertaken in good faith.

Two years after the war had ended, a natural cutoff occurred, and the peninsula in Davis Bend became an island. The Davis Cutoff removed about 25 miles of navigation channel from the river, but the reach was an unstable one that soon began to change again. In 1904, the Mississippi broke through a narrow neck of land at Killikrankia plantation and reclaimed its old bed in Davis Bend. When Diamond Cutoff was opened in 1933 the old bendway around Davis Island filled at both ends and the river permanently abandoned it.

The oxbow lake that was once Davis Bend is called Palmyra Lake today, and has become a popular fishing and hunting area for both Louisiana and Mississippi residents. The homes of the Davis family no longer stand, and the island is now a vast plantation where beans, cotton, and cattle are raised. It is separated from Mississippi by the river, and from Louisiana by Palmyra Lake and swampy areas, and few people ever see it.



(From 1941 MRC Map)

AFTER DIAMOND CUTOFF. After the construction of an artificial cutoff at Diamond Island, the Lower Mississippi abandoned its old beds in Davis Bend and Davis Cutoff and flowed into Newtown Bend, where it remains today. The above map was made in 1941, a few years after Diamond Cutoff.

BUCKRIDGE CREVASSE

*Mile 413.5 AHP, Map 34
Right bank, descending*

The crevasse at Buckridge plantation was the only major crevasse that occurred on the Lower Mississippi during the flood of 1916. The levee break reached a width of 1,800 feet, and 818 square miles were flooded in Louisiana.

About 2,000 farm laborers lived in the area affected by the crevasse. Most of them took refuge on rooftops and levees when the unexpected crevasse occurred, and many of them waited more than five days for rescue. One elderly black woman was found by rescue workers, clinging to a ceiling inside a flooded cabin. She had been there for 36 hours before they found her.

A congressional committee investigating flood control visited the flooded area during the crisis. They enjoyed a fine dinner in Vicksburg, toured the National Military Park, and took a brief look at the impressive crevasse from a government boat. They assured state and local officials that the Federal Government was going to do something to relieve them of some of the burdens of coping with periodic floods on the Lower Mississippi. The promises were honestly and sincerely made, and neither the committee members nor local officials knew that it would be another twelve years before an over-all plan for the protection of the Lower Mississippi Valley would be authorized by Congress.

BIG BLACK RIVER

*Mile 408.6 AHP, Map 35
Left bank, descending*

The Big Black River is about 270 miles long, and drains approximately 3,000 square miles of west-central Mississippi. French explorers called it the "River Tioux" but the British and American settlers who came into the area around the time of the American Revolution called it the Big Black River.

In 1773 a large group of New Englanders who were loyal to the British King petitioned King George the Third for a large grant of land on the Big Black River. They would establish a new colony for him there, they promised, and the capital city would be located on the little tributary of the Mississippi.

Several years passed before tentative approval was given to the proposal, and only a handful of the Tory settlers ever reached the Big Black River. Indian depredations soon forced them to seek the safety of older settlements.

When the United States took possession of the territory, lawyers labored for years to

disentangle the conflicting claims of British, Spanish, and American settlers in the vicinity of the Big Black River.

During the steamboat era, the Big Black was considered a navigable stream, but only a few small steamers dared to try to navigate the channel that was obstructed by snags, rocks, and overhanging trees. In 1881 the Corps of Engineers began a project to improve the river for navigation, but the work was halted in 1894 when local interests constructed fixed bridges beyond which boats could not travel.

Today parts of the Big Black are almost as wild as when the first settlers arrived. The river basin is almost entirely undeveloped, with no large towns located along the river's twisting course. The stream rises and falls with great rapidity, and frequently floods the farm fields, pastures, and swamps that lie along its banks.

YUCATAN CUTOFF

Mile 407.3 AHP, Map 35

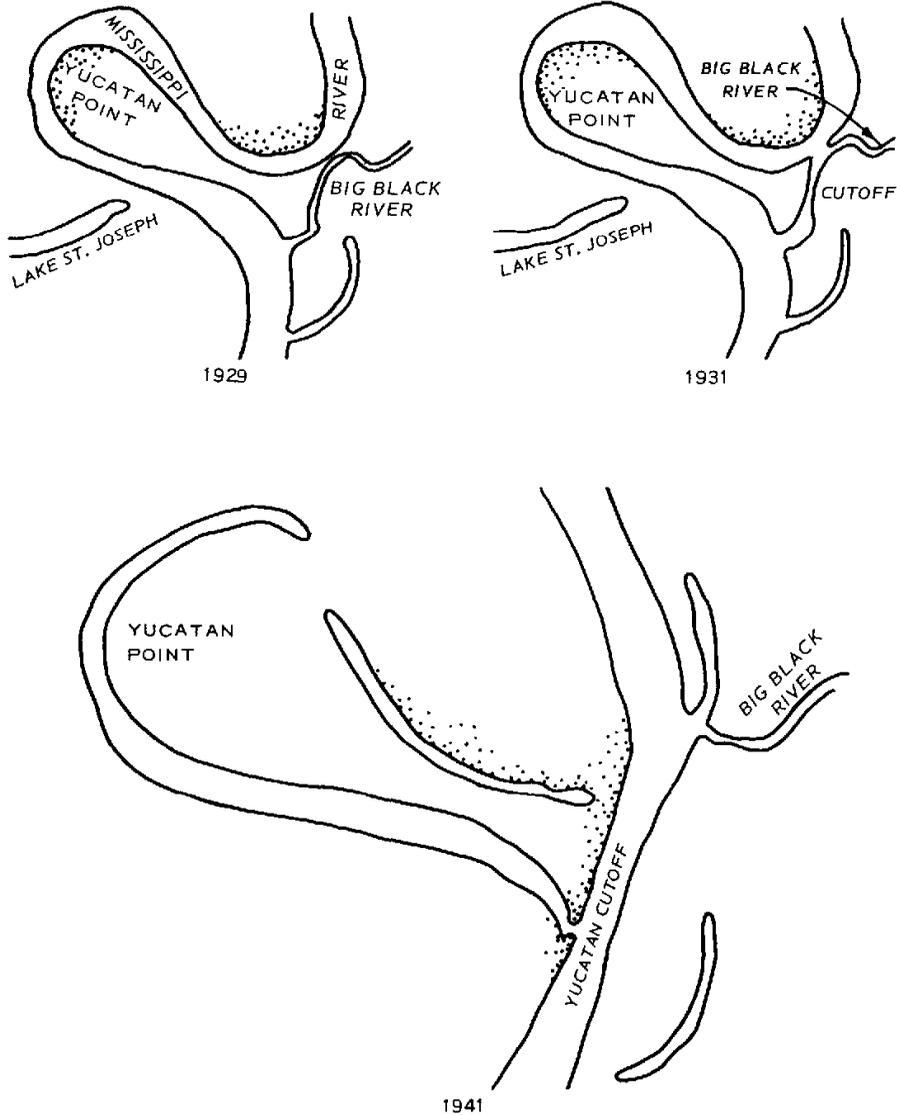
The Corps of Engineers did its best to avert a cutoff at Yucatan plantation in 1929, but the river engineers had two rivers working against them. Unlike most of the cutoffs on the Lower Mississippi, this one resulted from the coming together of two bends—one in the Mississippi and the other on its tributary, the Big Black. The cutoff occurred during a low water period, rather than at flood stage, and this too was unusual.

In the reach involved, the Lower Mississippi had meandered over a wide area for centuries. At one time, it had occupied the bed of what is known today as Lake St. Joseph, ten miles west of Yucatan Cutoff. Centuries later, it had moved eastward to the bluffs at Grand Gulf, Mississippi.

Before 1929, the mouth of the Big Black was located some distance below Yucatan and Hard Times Bend. When the east bank of Yucatan Bend began to erode, the Mississippi moved toward a big loop of the Big Black River. In the fall of 1929, the narrow ridge of land that separated the two rivers yielded to the pressures from both sides and collapsed. The Big Black poured into the Mississippi from its new mouth, above Yucatan Point. The big river then continued to change its course, appropriating the old bed of the Big Black below the new mouth, and Hard Times Bend became an oxbow lake, along with the old Yucatan Bend.

A boat with a famous name had met with a misfortune in Yucatan Bend in 1882. The steamer *Robt. E. Lee*, successor to the famous racing steamer of the same name, was rounding the point at Yucatan on October 30, 1882, when a fire broke out. Thirty of her passengers died in the holocaust that followed, and the 315-foot steamboat was a total loss. She had been built in 1876 and had carried some fantastic cargoes of cotton in her career, but by the time she went down at Yucatan the steamboat trade was virtually at an end.

Lake St. Joseph, which lies west of Yucatan and was an ancient bed of the Mississippi, was once the home of the Tensas Indians. The tribe had played host to some famous voyagers. LaSalle, Tonti, Iberville, Bienville, and countless French priests had called on the Tensas and visited their villages on Lake St. Joseph. The lake is a popular recreational and residential area today.



YUCATAN CUTOFF. The three maps above show the unusual cutoff at Yucatan Point, where the Mississippi and the Big Black River came together to make a new mouth for the tributary and a new channel for the big river. Yucatan Point, which had been a part of Mississippi, moved across the river and joined Louisiana.

GRAND GULF, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 407.0 AHP, Map 35
Left bank, descending

A high rocky bluff on the east bank of the Lower Mississippi, just below the mouth of the Big Black River, attracted the attention of all early voyagers on the river. LaSalle and Tonti, on their first voyage down the Mississippi, noted with apprehension the large and dangerous eddies at the foot of the bluff, and feared that their flimsy canoes and dugouts would be dashed to pieces.

Zadok Cramer, more than a century later, commented that the passage at Grand Gulf was a difficult one for flatboats. Hard rowing was required to keep the boat from being caught in the big eddy and dashed against the rocks at the foot of the bluff, he said, but competent boatmen need not worry about it.

There was a small settlement at the foot of the bluff during British and Spanish dominion, and it quickly grew into a flourishing village called Grand Gulf when the Americans took possession of the area.

Some years before the Civil War began, currents attacked the waterfront at Grand Gulf, and by the time the war opened many of its streets had already crumbled into the river.

When Admiral David Farragut brought the Union fleet up to Vicksburg in 1862, he found that the Confederates had also fortified Grand Gulf with a four-gun battery. He sent the *U.S.S. Brooklyn* to Grand Gulf to destroy the town. When the gunboat appeared in front of the little town, a group of citizens came out carrying a white flag.

"The rascals begged so hard," the gunboat commander told Farragut, *"that I agreed not to shell the place but levied upon them a contribution of cattle, pigs, poultry, and wood for my ship."*

The payment of the unofficial "war tax" did not help the citizens of Grand Gulf much. A couple of weeks later, someone fired on a passing Union steamer and a detachment of Army troops came ashore and burned the town.

When Farragut withdrew his fleet after failing to capture Vicksburg, the Confederates moved back to Grand Gulf and erected stronger fortifications. When General U. S. Grant began his movement down the river, his transports had to pass the rebel guns at Grand Gulf as well as the Vicksburg water batteries. Grant asked Admiral Porter to take his gunboats down and silence the Grand Gulf guns.

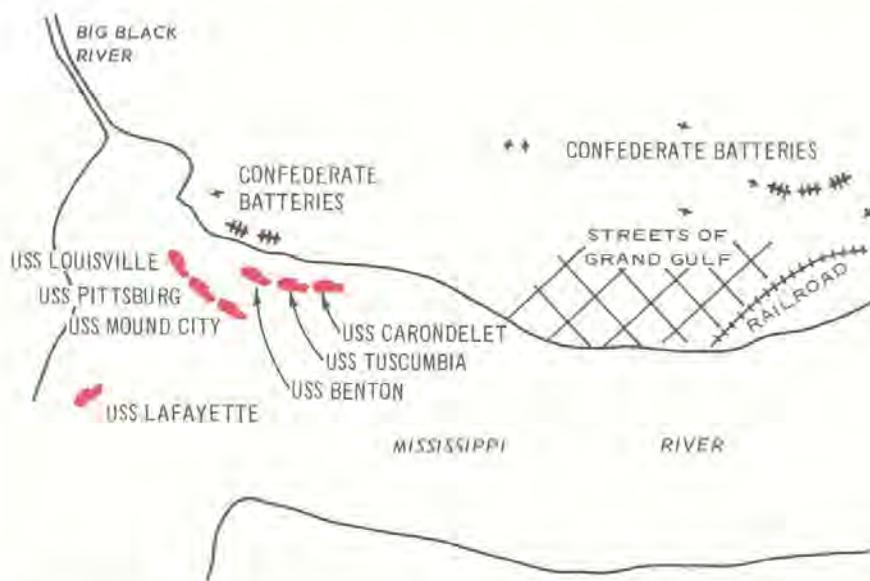
On April 29, 1863, the ironclads *Louisville*, *Pittsburg*, *Carondelet*, *Tuscumbia*, *Lafayette*, *Mound City*, and Porter's flagship, the *Benton* trained their heavy guns on Grand Gulf and poured thousands of rounds of ammunition upon the village and the fortifications. Several of the Union vessels were damaged in the engagement, and the rebel guns were not silenced. Eighteen of Porter's seamen were killed, and 56 wounded. In a second engagement, designed to occupy the rebels while Grant's army marched down the Louisiana side of the river past Grand Gulf, the gunboats again

failed to silence the batteries on the bluff.

When the Federal forces had crossed the river below Grand Gulf and approached it again from the interior, they found the batteries deserted and the town abandoned. The Union forces entered and took possession unopposed.

General Grant's intention originally had been to secure Grand Gulf as a base of operations against Port Hudson, Louisiana. When he rode into Grand Gulf with his army, the general had been on the march for almost a week. Joining Admiral Porter on the flagship *Benton*, General Grant borrowed some of the Navy officer's clean clothes, took a bath, and had the first hot meal he had enjoyed in days. Turning his attention to dispatches and paper work, Grant learned that General N. P. Banks would not be able to cooperate with him at Port Hudson. General Grant pondered the problem a short while, and changed his plans. He would leave his supply base behind and take his army through the interior. Perhaps he could approach Vicksburg from the rear, and trap the rebels there.

After the Civil War ended, the ruined town of Grand Gulf had further problems with the river. The Mississippi abandoned its attack on the Grand Gulf waterfront, and began to move westward. Soon the little village was landlocked behind a vast expanse of sand and mud, cut off permanently from the main channel of the Lower Mississippi.



ATTACK ON GRAND GULF. On April 29, 1863, seven Union gunboats under the command of Admiral David D. Porter bombarded the Confederate fortifications at Grand Gulf, but failed to silence the rebel guns. General U. S. Grant, who had planned to land his army there, had to find another landing place below the town. When he approached it a week later from the rear, he found it abandoned, and entered unopposed.

In 1962, the State of Mississippi acquired a tract of land at Grand Gulf and established a State Park there. Thousands of tourists have visited the little town every year, to browse in its fine museum and view the old cemetery and the fortifications that gave Grant and Porter so much trouble in 1863. The park has an excellent collection of old vehicles, including one very rare Civil War ambulance wagon. A "dog-trot" cabin, typical of the homes that early settlers built in the area, has been reconstructed on the park grounds. Made of hand-hewn timbers and roofed with cypress shingles, the house has two sections, separated by a roofed hall down the middle that is open at both ends. These pioneer dwellings were cool and comfortable, and the open hall in the middle was called a "dog-trot."

The Grand Gulf area was chosen as a site for a nuclear power plant being constructed by Mississippi Power & Light Company. After a century of dreamy isolation, the brooding bluffs are beginning to swarm with engineers, nuclear experts, and workmen engaged in the construction of the new plant.

WINTER QUARTERS CREVASSE

Mile 400.0 AHP, Map 35
Right bank, descending

On May 4, the flood of 1927 overtopped the levee at Winter Quarters plantation, on the west bank of the Lower Mississippi. The disastrous crevasse inundated the countryside and was still flowing copiously more than a month later. It was one of the 13 crevasses that occurred during the great flood of 1927.

BAYOU PIERRE

Mile 397.5 AHP, Map 36
Left bank, descending

The Bayou Pierre is a minor tributary of the Lower Mississippi. The sluggish little stream received its name from French explorers, who noted that it was filled with rocks and therefore called it "Pierre," which was the French word for rocks. British settlers called it Stony River for a time, but the old French name was never forgotten and is still in use today.

The first permanent settlement along the Bayou Pierre was made under British dominion, when British subjects were given land grants along its winding course. When Spain later seized the old Natchez District, Spanish officials encouraged

settlement in the Bayou Pierre area and the number of plantations increased. Among the first to take advantage of Spain's generous land policies were the Bruins of Virginia.

Bryan Bruin and his son, Peter Bryan Bruin, arrived at Natchez in June, 1788, with a party of 80 people from Virginia. The Spanish governor had promised each family 680 acres of land, with more to be made available if the settlement proved successful. The Bruins established their own plantation at the mouth of the Bayou Pierre, and Peter Bryan Bruin became one of the first territorial judges when the United States later set up a government for the Mississippi Territory.

The Bruin establishment became a favorite stopping place for distinguished voyagers on the river, and early in January, 1807, they received a visitor about whose head a storm of national controversy was then raging. Aaron Burr, a United States Senator from 1791 through 1797 had missed the Presidency of the United States by one vote in 1800. He had served as Vice President under Thomas Jefferson, had killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel in 1804, and had later resigned the office of Vice President and became involved in a mysterious scheme that many people believed would be a serious threat to the United States. It was widely believed that Burr and the motley crew of followers, less than 60 in number, who arrived with him at the Bayou Pierre in 1807 were engaged in a plot to seize New Orleans, foment disunion, and attack Mexico. Burr himself said mildly that he was only going to establish a settlement on some land he had purchased in the Ouachita River Basin of Louisiana.

When Burr conferred with Judge Bruin at Bruinsburg, he learned that the militia had been called out, and that eight armed U. S. gunboats were hurrying up from New Orleans. He promptly gave himself up to civil authorities, was later taken North and tried for treason, and was acquitted of the charges. General James Wilkinson, believed by many to have been a co-conspirator with Burr, was one of the chief witnesses against him. Burr went to England after the trial had ended in acquittal. He stayed there for some time, and later returned to New York, where he practiced law until his death in 1836.

During the Civil War, an army very different from Burr's landed at Bruinsburg. The landing was made April 30, 1863, and it consisted of about 40,000 soldiers under General U. S. Grant. General Grant had been told by an old slave that there was a good landing place at Bruinsburg, and that he could follow the wagon roads into the interior. Farragut's fleet had tried to enter the Bayou Pierre in 1862, but found it so obstructed with snags that the gunboats had to back out of the stream. Grant found the roads narrow and dusty, but quite adequate to carry his army into the interior of Mississippi. For the next thirty days the Union army skirmished its way through enemy territory from Bruinsburg, via Raymond, Jackson, Champions Hill, and the Big Black, to the rear of Vicksburg, where they settled down to starve the rebels into submission.

In 1864 two Union vessels collided with each other at the mouth of the Bayou Pierre. The *U.S.S. General Price* survived the accident, but the *Conestoga* went down with all her armament, machinery, and Navy stores still on board. The boat had carried two 30-pounder Dahlgren rifles, one 30-pounder Parrott rifle, and three 32-pounder and one 12-pounder Navy guns. The war vessel, with all these relics still on board was reported still visible near the mouth of the bayou at low water in September, 1864.

ST. JOSEPH, LOUISIANA

Mile 396.2 AHP, Map 36
Right bank, descending

The small town of St. Joseph, Louisiana, is the parish seat of Tensas Parish and was a river port until the Mississippi took away its waterfront and left it lying some distance inland. The St. Joseph Gage and Bulletin Board are now located at Gladstone Landing, several miles above the town. The town lies along a lake of the same name and has some interesting pre-Civil War buildings still standing.

RODNEY CUTOFF

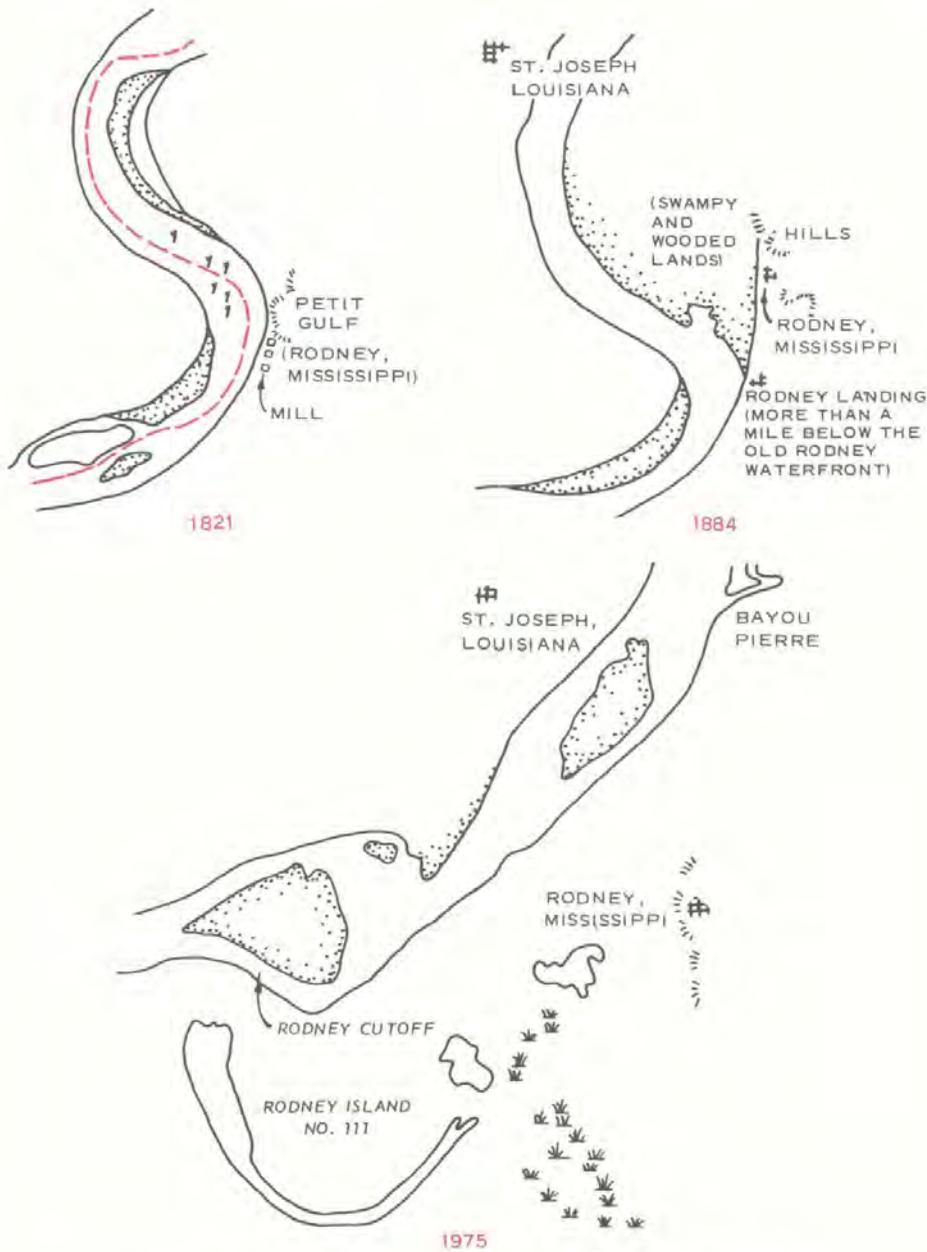
Mile 389.0 AHP, Map 36

The Army Corps of Engineers began the construction of Rodney Cutoff in 1935, and opened the new channel for navigation in 1936. Removed from the main channel of the Lower Mississippi were a troublesome old bendway and the small town of Rodney, Mississippi.

Rodney had been established at the foot of what had been called "the Petit Gulf Hills." The bluff's name referred to a small but dangerous eddy that early travelers found in the river in front of it. There had been some British land grants in the area, and a few Spanish ones later, but the town was established by American settlers. By 1834 it was a flourishing little village and had its own newspaper, postoffice, hotel, school, church, and steamboat landing. As the country around it grew more thickly populated, it grew in importance and was becoming a vigorous rival for the older towns of Natchez and Vicksburg when the Civil War brought progress to a halt.

During the war, the town was not fortified, but a Union gunboat was stationed in front of it after the fall of Vicksburg, to prevent the smuggling of men and supplies from Louisiana into Mississippi. Admiral David Porter had given all his officers strict orders not to go ashore in hostile towns where the Army had not stationed a garrison, but the men on board the *U.S.S. Rattler* were bored with the tedious duty and decided one bright Sunday morning to disobey the Admiral's orders and go ashore.

When the 25 officers and seamen from the Union gunboat entered the Presbyterian Church in Rodney, their presence created a mild sensation among the townspeople. For a time the service proceeded as usual, but the Navy men were in for a big surprise. A ragged band of Confederate cavalymen had been hiding out in the vicinity, and they were notified of the presence of the Union men at the church. The rebels surrounded the building, and a lively skirmish ensued. The congregation, composed mostly of women, children, and elderly men, joined the fray and helped subdue the startled sailors.



(From 1975 MRC Navigation Map)

RODNEY IN 1821, 1884, AND 1975. Rodney, Mississippi, once an important river port, suffered the same fate that overtook several river towns as the river moved inexorably away and left it landlocked. Its population of more than 4,000 dwindled to less than 50, and it became virtually a ghost town—southern style. A brick church still stands, bearing battle scars from an unusual skirmish between the U. S. Navy and the rebels. Contemporary newspapers called it "the battle of the hymnbooks."

When Admiral Porter heard about the humiliating capture of 25 of his best men, his rage was violent enough to blow the *Rattler* right out of the water, but she survived long enough to find a watery grave in a thunderstorm near Grand Gulf on December 30, 1864.

The little brick church where the Rodney civilians subdued the Navy men with umbrellas, hymnbooks, and walking sticks still stands and has been adopted as a restoration project by the United Daughters of the Confederacy in Mississippi.

After the Civil War ended, the town of Rodney had double trouble. In 1886 the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad took away its steamboat trade, and shortly thereafter the river began a westward slide that left the little town hemmed in by a vast wilderness of impenetrable swamps and hugh mudflats and sandbars.

By the time the Corps made the Rodney Cutoff in 1935, the town was already practically deserted. Its abandoned buildings crumbled one by one. Today it has less than 50 inhabitants, most of them black. There are some hand-hewn log cabins on the edge of town, and behind one of these relics from the past is a quite up-to-date and no doubt profitable automated oil well, pumping away 24 hours a day.

ISLAND NO. 111

Mile 388.0 AHP, Map 36
Left bank, descending

Island No. 111, often called Rodney Island, and Island No. 112 originally lay close together on the right shore. The Rodney Cutoff separated them, leaving Island No. 111 on the east bank and Island No. 112 on the west bank some distance below the cutoff.

KEMPE BEND

Mile 385.0 AHP, Map 36

Kempe Bend was named for James Kempe, a native of Ireland who came to the Mississippi Territory and became a cotton planter. During the War of 1812, Kempe raised a company of volunteers and fought with Andrew Jackson at New Orleans. When Mississippi became a State, he was appointed a colonel in the militia. He died in January, 1820.

ASHLAND LANDING, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 381.0 AHP, Map 36
Left bank, descending

General Zachary Taylor, one of the heroes of the Mexican War, was nominated for President of the United States by the Whig Party in 1848. He was elected, and in February, 1849, the Whigs planned a triumphal tour up the river for the President-elect. He owned a plantation in the vicinity of Ashland Landing, and it was there that the steamer *Tennessee* expected to pick him up and take him to Vicksburg for the first of the many public receptions that had been planned for him by Whig party leaders.

When a steamboat whistled at the landing just before dawn, the old General was ready. He went on board, and retired at once to a stateroom where he could finish his night's sleep. After the boat was well on its way to Vicksburg, one of the General's aides discovered that the party had boarded the wrong steamer. They were travelling on the *Saladin*, not the larger and more elegant *Tennessee*. The deception at the landing had been deliberately carried out by young Captain Tom Coleman, Jr., who was only 24 years old and was a friend of the Taylor family. Coleman had greatly desired to have the honor of taking General Taylor on the first leg of his journey to Washington, so he had simply "kidnapped" the President-elect of the United States.

"Old Rough and Ready," as his admirers called General Taylor, was awakened and informed of what had happened. The young steamboat captain waited anxiously for his reaction.

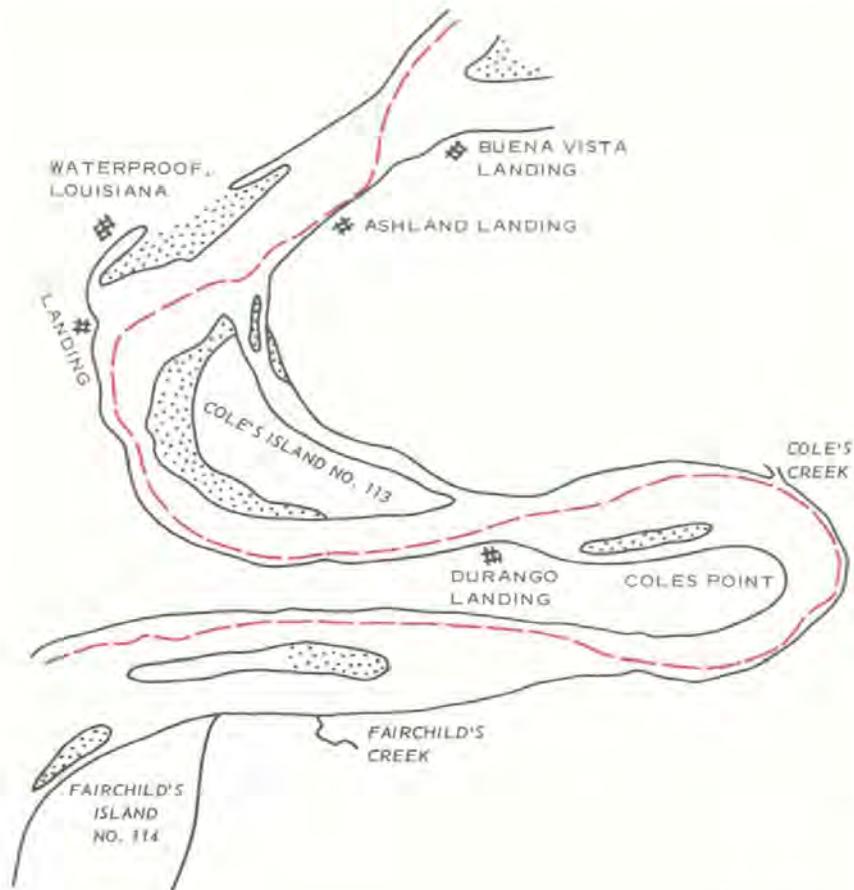
General Taylor simply laughed. There was nothing to do but have a drink and forget it, he chuckled. The *Tennessee* would no doubt catch up with them at Vicksburg, and he would transfer to it there.

WATERPROOF, LOUISIANA

Mile 381.0 AHP, Map 37
Right bank, descending

During one of the Mississippi's devastating floods, the people of one flooded rural community read a newspaper report that told them that everything in their whole region was under water "except one waterproof knoll." When the flood subsided, the community moved itself to the knoll, and the town acquired the name of Waterproof.

It was a name that gave the hapless reporter of another newspaper some embarrassing moments a few years later when he reported a local tragedy under the headline that read: "FOUR WATERPROOF PEOPLE DROWN."



From 1884 MRC Map

WATERPROOF, LOUISIANA. A map of the Waterproof, Louisiana, area made just before the cutoff of 1884 occurred showed the deep bend below the town and the narrow neck of Coles Point, which was cut off a short time later.

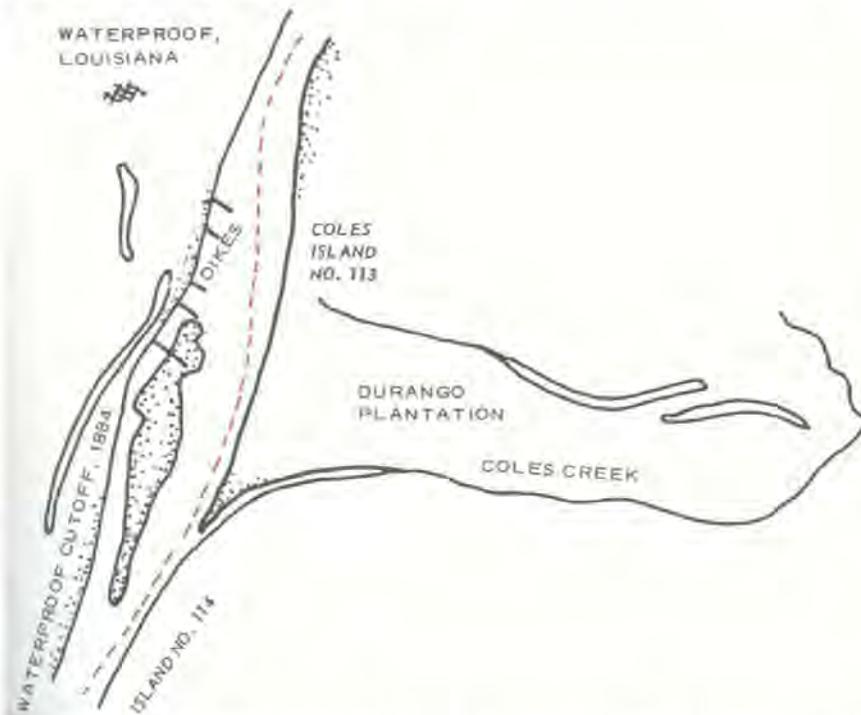
During the Civil War, a Union regiment of Ohio infantrymen set out on an expedition to Waterproof and captured mules, cattle, horses, cotton, money, and slaves from the plantations along the way. Arriving in the town, they skirmished briefly with Confederate cavalry. When a spy brought them word that more rebels were on the way, the Ohio soldiers boarded a Union transport and departed. The town was later garrisoned with black Union troops and there were several minor skirmishes in the area.

In 1870 a sidewheel steamer called the *Mississippi* hit a snag at Waterproof and sank in front of the landing. The boat's cabin, with all its fancy chandeliers burning brightly, separated from the hull and floated past Natchez, to the astonishment of the people who happened to see it floating majestically down the river. The boat had been

heavily loaded with livestock and produce for New Orleans. All the cargo was lost but the passengers and crew were saved. Four years later, the steamer *Henry Ames* fell over a snag in the same location and went down, with the loss of three lives and a cargo valued at \$130,000.

Waterproof had originally been located on a great bend of the river, opposite Island No. 113 and several miles above Coles Creek Point. The bend below the town elongated, and the neck began to erode. Some local resident who was eager for the cutoff to occur tried to help it along by digging a ditch across the narrow neck, but the river refused to be hurried. For almost 30 years more the water ran through the ditch at every high water period, but it was not until May, 1884, that the Mississippi abandoned its old bend and formed the new channel that was known as Waterproof Cutoff. Coles Point was left on the Mississippi side of the river and soon became almost indistinguishable from the land around it.

About a year after the cutoff occurred, the sidewheel packet *R. R. Springer* hit a sandbar and went down in the head of the cutoff channel. The boat had been built in 1878 and was said to have had the first electric light plant installed on a western river steamer. The generator that furnished the power for the electric arc lights was operated by steam power.



WATERPROOF CUTOFF. The cutoff that occurred near the town of Waterproof, Louisiana, in 1884 caused a number of changes in the area. Eventually the town became landlocked, Island No. 113 and Island No. 114 joined the east bank, and Coles Point became a part of the Mississippi mainland.

GILES CUTOFF

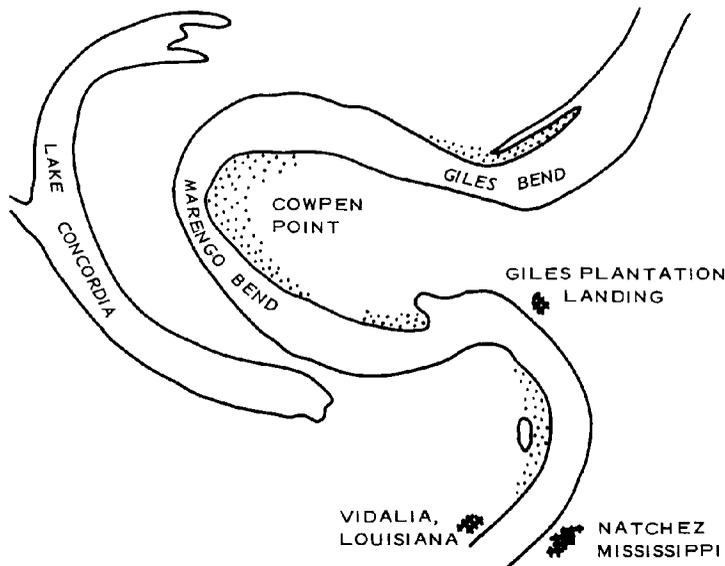
Mile 367.0 AHP, Map 38

Lake Concordia in Louisiana was an ancient bed of the Lower Mississippi. The newer bend in front of it was called Marengo Bend, and just above was Giles Bend.

In Marengo Bend, the river followed its usual pattern and the neck where Giles plantation was located became extremely narrow. Water flowed across Giles Neck in the floods of 1907, 1922, and 1927, and it became obvious that the river would soon abandon Marengo Bend. In 1933, the Army Corps of Engineers attempted to forestall the river's action by constructing an artificial cutoff that would bring the channel into better alignment than the river would achieve if left to its own devices.

Giles Cutoff was very slow to develop, and during the next low water period the engineers discovered why. Ancient cypress trees were embedded in the hard blue mud at the bottom of the artificial cut, and they were forming an effective obstruction to the low water flow. After several years of intermittent dredging, the natural dam was finally removed, and the river accepted the Giles Cutoff as its new bed.

Lake Concordia, a bed abandoned by the Mississippi centuries ago, may have been the last resting place of the Spanish explorer, Hernando DeSoto, who died of fever and exhaustion somewhere along the banks of the river in 1542.



LAKE CONCORDIA AND MARENGO BEND. In a map made long before the artificial cutoff at Giles Neck was constructed, Marengo Bend and an older bed of the Mississippi, Lake Concordia, are shown. Some historians believe that it was in this area of the Lower Mississippi that the Spanish explorer, Hernando DeSoto, died. The Spanish commander's followers, who wanted to keep his death a secret from the Indians, lowered DeSoto's body into the river that he had discovered.

DeSoto and his men had reached an Indian village that is believed to have been located near the present town of Ferriday, Louisiana, when DeSoto fell ill. He died a few days later, and his followers were afraid to let the Indians know that the man they had respected and feared was dead. They buried the Spanish explorer at night, near the gates of the Indian village. When the Indians saw the mound of fresh earth the next day, they were naturally suspicious, and they inquired about the expedition's leader, saying that they had not seen him for several days. That night, DeSoto's followers secretly disinterred the body, wrapped it in mantles weighted with sand, and dropped it into the river that would forever be associated with his name.

DeSoto died in the unhappy belief that his long ordeal on the North American Continent had been a failure. He had not found the treasures that he had sought. All he had found was a great river, and the river had claimed his tired body and ended his dreams of fame and fortune. He could not know, of course, that it was the discovery of the river that would make his name remembered centuries later.

NATCHEZ, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 363.8 AHP, Map 38
Left bank, descending

When the French brothers, Iberville and Bienville, explored the lower reaches of the Mississippi in 1700, they visited the Natchez Indians, whose villages were located on high bluffs on the east side of the river. The location appeared to them to be an ideal one for an outpost for the colony they were establishing nearer the Gulf Coast. In 1716 Bienville constructed the crude fortification that he called "Fort Rosalie" on the bluff, and a few French settlers built cabins nearby and began to cultivate the soil.

Most of the French colonists—priests included—looked on the Indians of the New World as "barbarous savages," and treated them accordingly. It was a policy hardly calculated to win the affection and esteem of the proud and intelligent Natchez tribe. For a brief time, the Natchez and the French coexisted uneasily on the bluff, but in 1729 the Indians lost their patience and rose up in revolt against their exploiters. The Natchez killed about 200 French soldiers and settlers before they fled across the river, to be pursued to their deaths shortly thereafter.

Fort Rosalie was strengthened, and the garrison was enlarged, but settlers were reluctant to return to the area, and it remained a weak outpost, unsupported by any substantial settlement.

A treaty by which the Natchez district became the property of Great Britain was ratified on March 10, 1763. Major Robert Farmer, a British officer, went up the river to inspect the Natchez post. He reported it to be in terrible condition, and British authorities ordered it repaired and sent a garrison of soldiers to occupy it.

British colonial officials did everything they could to encourage settlements around the Natchez post, but the district was still sparsely populated when the Spanish, taking advantage of Great Britain's preoccupation with the American Revolution, seized the Natchez post.

Spain's rule over the area was surprisingly benign. Liberal land grant policies encouraged settlers from other areas to take up plantations in the vicinity of Natchez, and a Spanish engineer laid out streets and planned handsome public buildings that were occupied by colonial government officials. The Spanish commandant of the district, Don Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, proved to be a fair, just, and affable gentleman and a popular administrator. The town and the district prospered under Spanish rule.

The citizens of the new American nation in the northeast were already looking westward, and they believed that free navigation of the river that drained the heart of the continent was their natural birthright. While American diplomats carried out delicate negotiations with Spain on the boundary dispute between the two countries, adventurers and Revolutionary War veterans plotted and conspired to either join the Spanish or drive them from the east bank of the Mississippi. Spain and the United States signed a treaty in 1795, and the east bank of the Mississippi as far south as the 31st parallel was declared to be American territory. Captain Isaac Guion, with a very small detachment of U. S. soldiers, arrived at Natchez in November, 1797. He set up a camp near the Spanish fort, and raised the American flag. It was March 29, 1798, before the Spanish garrison finally withdrew, leaving the Americans in the undisputed possession of the bluff.

A prompt influx of American settlers followed the withdrawal of the Spanish, and the town became the most important settlement in the new Mississippi Territory.

The steamboat era was officially initiated in Natchez by the arrival of the steamer *New Orleans*, on her maiden voyage down the Mississippi early in January, 1812. The first steamer ever to stop at the Natchez wharf picked up a small shipment of freight at Natchez and carried it down to New Orleans.

A few days later, an advertisement appeared in a New Orleans newspaper. It read as follows:

"For Natchez: THE STEAMBOAT New-Orleans. Will leave this on Thursday next, the 23d inst. For freight or passage apply on board, or to Talcott & Bowers. Jan. 21."

The notice inaugurating the steamboat trade on the Lower Mississippi was accompanied by a small cut of a sailing vessel. The idea of steamboats on the Mississippi was still too novel for the newspapers to have acquired any of the little steamboat cuts that would later decorate most of their river news columns and steamboat notices.

Most of the early voyagers on the Lower Mississippi stopped at Natchez, and gave accounts that seemed to vary according to their own moods or personalities. John Bradbury, an English scientist, saw it in 1812 and thought it remarkably wicked for its small size. John James Audubon in 1821 enjoyed his visit and called it a beautiful and romantic place.



NATCHEZ UNDER SPANISH RULE. The French general, Victor Collot, visited the Natchez post in 1796, and later published the above sketch of the town, government buildings, and fort that the Spanish had constructed. Collot described the post as "in the most wretched state" but thought the position had "a few feeble advantages" and could be strengthened. He described the district's inhabitants as divided in political opinion, except on one point: namely, that they would leave the district before they would submit to American rule.

Natchez was not fortified during the Civil War, and the town was surrendered to Farragut's fleet in 1862. Although it was occupied by Federal troops for the remainder of the war, little damage was done to its old buildings and beautiful homes.

Today thousands of tourists visit Natchez every spring to tour the mansions and get a glimpse of what the Old South must have been like before the Civil War impoverished the cotton planters who had made it the social and cultural center of the State of Mississippi.

The annual "Natchez Pilgrimage" gave the little river town an economic boost during the great depression, and continues each year to add to the economic health of the community. Some years ago, local interests constructed an industrial park and port terminal, and in 1968 the Corps of Engineers installed a floodgate, pumping plant, and levee designed to protect the port area from flooding. The port handled 1,162,865 tons of cargo in 1974. The products handled included grain, construction materials, wood and paper, and chemicals.

There is no marina for pleasure boats at Natchez, but fuel and other supplies are available on the waterfront at the foot of the bluff.

VIDALIA, LOUISIANA

Mile 363.3 AHP, Map 38
Right bank, descending

The Spanish established a small military post on the west bank of the Mississippi opposite Natchez around 1786, but abandoned it soon afterward. In 1801, Don Jose Vidal, formerly the acting governor general of the Natchez District, established a settlement there and called it Vidalia.

After Louisiana was purchased by the United States, Vidalia became the seat of government for Concordia Parish. When the currents of the Lower Mississippi attacked Vidalia's waterfront, the public buildings were demolished and some of its houses and commercial buildings were put on rollers and moved back from the river's edge. When a new levee was built, the old part of the town of Vidalia was left outside its protection and soon disappeared.

ISLAND NO. 115

Mile 357.5 AHP, Map 38
Right bank, descending

Island No. 115, also called Natchez Island, has joined the west bank of the river and is now attached to Louisiana. In 1942, the island was the site of one of the last steamboat accidents of the Lower Mississippi, when the old steamer *Tennessee Belle* caught fire and sank in the vicinity. The sternwheel packet had been built in 1904 and had carried freight and passengers on the river for 38 years before she was lost. The boat had been named the *Kentucky* originally, but a new owner renamed her in 1932.

ELLIS CLIFFS

Mile 348.0 AHP, Map 39
Left bank, descending

Richard Ellis brought his family into the Natchez District around 1785, when it was still under Spanish dominion, and established his plantation in the area that was then known as the "White Cliffs." When Ellis died in 1792, he had accumulated 6,000 acres of land, more than 150 slaves, and an impressive amount of other property. It took three years to settle the complicated estate and distribute the wealth among his heirs.

The high chalky bluff below Natchez was known as Ellis Cliffs by 1800, and was often mentioned by river voyagers.

ST. CATHERINES CREEK (OLD MOUTH)

Mile 347.3 AHP, Map 39
Left bank, descending

St. Catherines Creek, along which French plantations were established in the early 1700's, entered the Mississippi some distance below Natchez until local residents diverted its course around 1871, giving it a new mouth nearer the town.

One of the early steamboat disasters took place near the old mouth of the St. Catherine in 1825. The steamboat *Teche* had departed the Natchez wharf late in the afternoon, and tied up opposite the mouth of the creek when darkness fell, because there was a heavy fog. By 2:00 a.m., May 5, the fog had lifted and the steamboat had just pulled away from the bank to resume its voyage downriver when the boilers exploded and the boat caught fire. The passengers, awakened by the noise and smoke, became confused and panic-stricken. It was estimated that of the 70 or more people who had been on board, only half survived.

Steam power was still relatively new to the inhabitants of the Lower Mississippi Valley, and the loss of the *Teche* caused some uneasiness among the general public about steamboat travel. The sensational details of the sufferings of the victims, published by contemporary newspapers, were soon forgotten. Many hundreds of persons would die in explosions and fires before the public would demand measures to ensure the safety of the passengers.

GLASSCOCK CUTOFF

Mile 345.0 AHP, Map 39

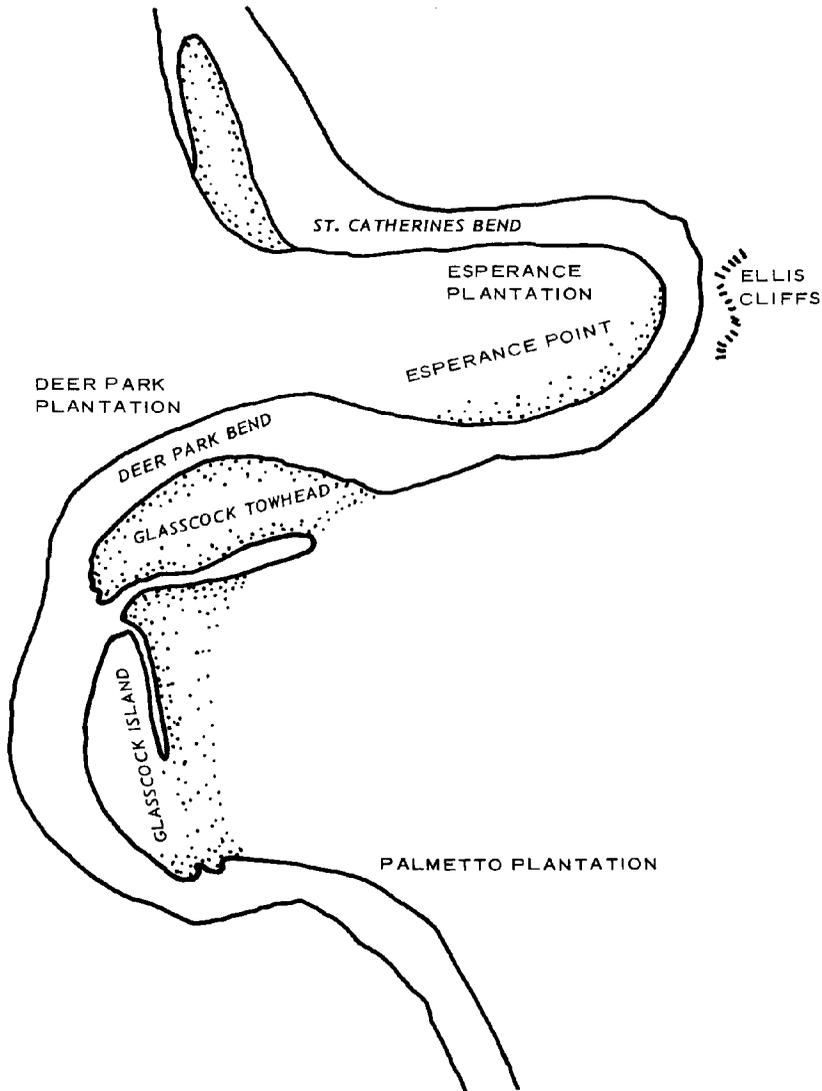
From St. Catherines Bend to Dead Mans Bend, the Lower Mississippi was in a constant state of change until the Army Corps of Engineers constructed the cutoff across Glasscock Point in 1933.

The river had threatened to make a natural cutoff as it eroded the neck of land that lay between St. Catherines and Deer Park Bend. A natural cutoff might have solved some of the problems in the area, but it would almost certainly have created new ones below. The Corps undertook to construct the cutoff by the longer and more difficult route across Glasscock Point. It was designed to bring the channel into better alignment, and to eliminate costly revetment work in Deer Park Bend.

The artificial cutoff at Glasscock was slow to develop. A part of the new channel ran through the bed of an ancient lake, where a plastic, greasy mud stoutly resisted erosion. At low water, the new passage would simply close, and the water would again flow around Deer Park Bend. After several years of corrective dredging, the

cutoff was finally accomplished and the new channel became the permanent bed of the river.

Islands No. 116 and No. 117 were in Deer Park Bend. They disappeared after the cutoff.



BEFORE GLASSCOCK CUTOFF. Before the construction of the artificial cutoff at Glasscock Point in 1933, the Lower Mississippi was threatening to make its own cutoff across Esperance Point, opposite Ellis Cliffs. An 1884 map showed Esperance Point occupying an area considerably north of the area it was occupying some years later when the Corps made Glasscock Cutoff. By 1933 Esperance Bend had moved southward, and the currents in Deer Park Bend were attacking the west bank and threatening the levee line.

JACKSON POINT

Mile 332.8 AHP, Map 40
Left bank, descending

In April, 1912, the Steamboat *Concordia* was engaged in flood relief work, evacuating farm laborers and livestock from the flooded Louisiana plantations. At Jackson Point, the boat hit a snag and began to leak. The pilot ran her to the shore, where she sank very rapidly in about seven feet of water. An official report of the U. S. Weather Bureau estimated that about 22 people, many of them women and children, were drowned when the tragic accident occurred.

PALMETTO BEND

Mile 326.0 AHP, Map 40

The palmetto plant, for which this bend is named, is abundant in this area, and grows well in most of the hardwood forests and swamplands of southern Louisiana. Early settlers on the plantations found it useful for making bonnets and fans. The leaves were dried and pressed and braided into long pieces and shaped into hats or bonnets lined with cotton cloth. Making the fans was a simple process. The plant is fan-shaped, and had only to be dried and trimmed to the proper size.

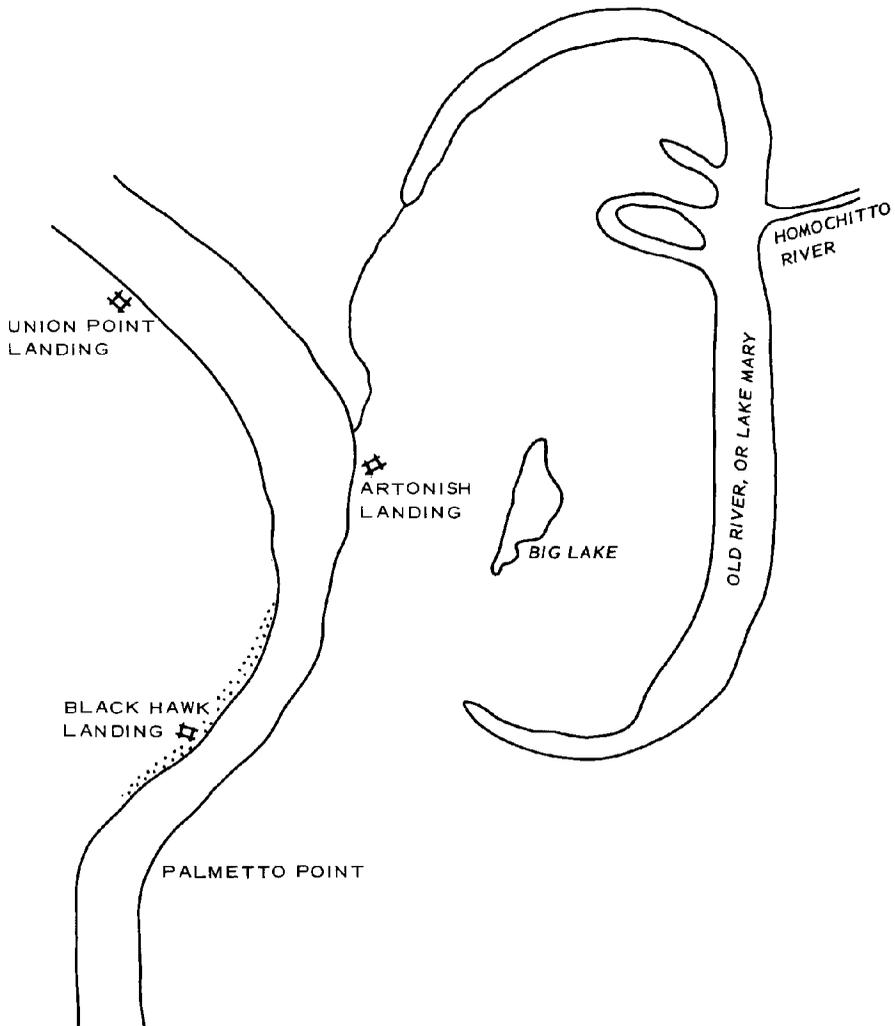
HOMOCHITTO CUTOFF

Mile 323.6 AHP, Map 40

Old River Lake, or Lake Mary, was a part of the main channel of the Lower Mississippi until the river made a natural cutoff in the area in 1776. The Homochitto River, one of the Mississippi's small tributaries on the east bank, had entered the river in the old bend. Today it finds its way into the Mississippi about 22 miles south of Natchez, by way of Washout Bayou.

The Homochitto was considered a navigable river and improvements to its navigation channel were authorized in 1899. About 20 miles of the lower channel of the river were improved, but no commercial traffic developed. The lower 35 miles of the river channel have also been improved for flood-control purposes.

Lake Mary is a very large oxbow lake that covers more than 5,000 acres. Its shoreline is still sparsely developed, and the big lake has an abundant population of fish and wildlife.



HOMOCHITTO CUTOFF. In 1776, the Mississippi cut across a neck of land and abandoned its old bend where the Homochitto River, a small tributary, had entered the big river. The cutoff also created a 5,000-acre lake that is known today as Lake Mary, or Old River Lake. Lake Mary, now 200 years old, has an abundant wildlife and fish population and its shores are still sparsely populated. It is one of the few large oxbow lakes that have not been blighted by the fishing camps and tacky cottages and trailers that make some of the other old lakes so unattractive.

BLACK HAWK POINT, LOUISIANA

Mile 320.1 AHP, Map 41
Right bank, descending

Black Hawk Point was the scene of two remarkable steamboat accidents, and the first gave the point its name. The steamer *Black Hawk* was southbound on December 27, 1837, when she passed this point with a large number of deck passengers, some Army officers, and a shipment of government payroll money on board. When the boat's boilers all blew up at once, the explosion swept some of the passengers and a number of the boxes of government money right into the river. The steamer then caught fire and drifted downstream, leaking furiously and burning very rapidly. It was later estimated that about 30 people lost their lives. All of the passengers lost their personal belongings, and only a part of the government money was recovered.

Almost 20 year later, in March 1854, the steamer *John L. Avery* hit a snag at Black Hawk Point and sank. The boat was carrying a heavy load of freight. She had stopped at Pointe Coupee on her way up the river, to pick up some hogsheads of sugar. The sugar was stacked along the outside edge of the deck, effectively hemming in all the deck passengers. When the boat went down so rapidly, they were unable to escape, and it was estimated that 80 to 90 had drowned. Most of them were Irish immigrants, whose names had not been recorded.

OLD RIVER CONTROL STRUCTURES

Mile 314.4 AHP, Map 41

In the 18th Century, the Red River and the Atchafalaya River joined the Lower Mississippi in the same big bend. The Red River was one of the Mississippi's tributaries, but the Atchafalaya was a high water outlet, a distributary that carried excess flows from the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico, through the Atchafalaya Basin.

In 1831, Captain Henry Shreve attempted to improve navigation on the Lower Mississippi by cutting off the big bend in the vicinity of the Red and Atchafalaya Rivers. The cutoff caused the Atchafalaya to fill with drift and debris, and it soon became unnavigable. In 1839, it was reported that the head of the Atchafalaya had grown so small that in low water people could walk across it on a plank 15 feet long. The State of Louisiana, in an effort to keep the Atchafalaya from closing completely, had the huge raft of drift and debris removed, and the Atchafalaya immediately began to enlarge and deepen its channel.

Shreve's Cutoff caused other changes in the area. The upper part of the old bend of the river began to fill, closing itself off from the Mississippi. The lower arm of the bend

became the Atchafalaya's connection with the Mississippi. In 1872, Red River changed its course, abandoned its old mouth, broke through into the old riverbed, and joined itself to the head of the Atchafalaya. With the channel that had become known as "Old River" as the only connection with the Mississippi, the flow was either westerly or easterly, depending upon the respective stages of the Red and the Mississippi.

The changed conditions caused the Atchafalaya to enlarge rapidly near its head. In 1880 it was reported that water was no longer flowing into the Mississippi from either the Red or the Atchafalaya. The current in Old River was flowing into the Atchafalaya at all stages of the water.

In the years that followed, many efforts were made to limit the flow from the Mississippi into the Atchafalaya, but they were all unsuccessful. It soon became obvious that the Atchafalaya, if left to its own devices, would capture the full flow of the Mississippi at Old River, creating a permanent diversion. The effect of the diversion on Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and the heavily populated and highly industrialized areas below Old River would be disastrous.

On September 3, 1954, Congress authorized the Army Corps of Engineers to construct permanent control structures at Old River to avert the threatened diversion of the Mississippi. The problems had been under intensive study for many years, and the construction of the project began almost immediately.



OLD RIVER CONTROL STRUCTURES. Control structures constructed by the Corps of Engineers regulate the flow from the Mississippi into the Atchafalaya. The distance from Old River to the Gulf of Mexico is about 320 miles via the Lower Mississippi, but only 140 miles through the Atchafalaya. A navigation lock provides passage for boat traffic.

The first structure to be completed was the low sill structure, and it was designed to maintain the flow that was considered normal at the time the structure was built. An overbank structure was then added to take care of excess water in major floods. So that boats would not be cut off from the Atchafalaya and Red Rivers, a navigation lock was constructed. It was opened to navigation on March 15, 1963. With all the control structures in place, Old River itself was completely closed by a huge earthen dam. The uncontrolled flow of water from the Mississippi into the Atchafalaya ceased completely on July 12, 1963.

For the next decade, the Old River control structures functioned satisfactorily. During the major flood of 1973, however, a wing wall collapsed in front of the low sill structure. When the flood waters subsided, surveys revealed severe damage to the structure. Emergency repairs were made, and the engineers began another long battle to keep the Atchafalaya from capturing the Mississippi. An extensive rehabilitation program is being developed by the Corps, while studies continue on permanent solutions to the complex problems at Old River.

Since most of the problems at Old River arose after Captain Henry Shreve constructed his cutoff in the area in 1831, it has often been argued that Shreve was responsible for the difficulties. It seems entirely possible, however, that the river would have effected a cutoff of its own without Shreve's assistance. Samuel Cumings, in *The Western Pilot*, commented in 1829 that the river was rapidly wearing away the neck of of land in the bend, which was then only 200 to 300 yards across. Islands No. 119, No. 120, and No. 121 (called the Three Sisters) had already been completely washed away, Cumings said, and he predicted an early cutoff.

FORT ADAMS, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 311.9 AHP, Map 41
Left bank, descending

The high bluff where the little village of Fort Adams, Mississippi, is located today has borne several names during its past history.

In the early 1700's French colonists called the bluff Davion's Rock. It was here that the Tunica Indians had settled for a brief time after they left the Yazoo River, and with them was the French priest, Father Antoine Davion.

In 1763, the British acquired the former French colony, and took possession of the settlements the French had made. In 1764, Major Loftus, a British officer in command of a small detachment of soldiers, was sent up the river to take possession of the Illinois settlements. He and his party were ambushed by Indians as they passed Davion's Rock, and retreated after suffering heavy losses. The British settlers began to call the bluff Loftus Heights.

When General James Wilkinson arrived at Natchez on August 26, 1798, to participate in the transfer of the Louisiana Territory to the United States, he concentrated all the American military forces in the area at Loftus Heights, where he constructed a fort that he called Fort Adams.

Fort Adams was garrisoned until after the annexation of West Florida, and a river traveler noted in 1810 that a handful of American soldiers were still there. By 1819, the blockhouse had been abandoned and the garrison withdrawn. A small rural community had grown up around the site of the old fort, and it still exists today, preserving the name of Fort Adams.

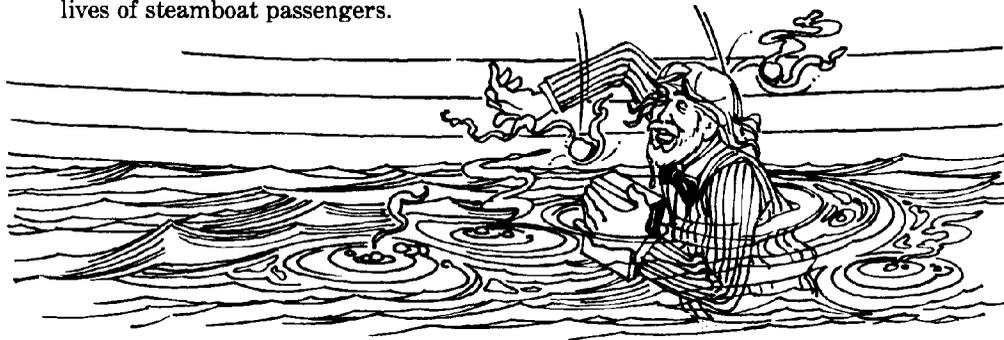
The river in front of the town of Fort Adams was the scene of a spectacular steamboat explosion on May 9, 1837. The steamer *Ben Sherrod* was the boat involved, and the explosion that sank her shook the country for miles around. It was a long, long blast. First the boiler blew up; then some kegs of whiskey and brandy; and then a cargo of gunpowder that the boat was carrying.

P. R. Bohlen was one of the passengers on board the *Ben Sherrod*. He had been down to Baton Rouge with a flatboat load of coal and ice. The sale of his cargo had brought him \$2,000 in gold coins, which he carried with him when he embarked on the steamboat for the trip back up the river. Awakened by the first explosion, he had hurried out on deck. Carrying the box that contained his gold coins, he leaped overboard and clung to the burning hull of the boat until hot coals began to fall on his head. Then he dropped his box, and swam for the shore. He was luckier than most of the passengers, for he made it to safety. Of the 300 people on board, it was later estimated that only 70 had escaped with their lives.

In addition to Bohlen's box of coins, a shipment of money destined for a Tennessee bank and \$18,000 belonging to another passenger, went to the bottom with the *Ben Sherrod*.

The usual horror stories were told about the accident. It was said that the boat had been engaged in a race, that the crew were all drunk, and that the engineer had deserted his post without stopping the engines. It was also reported that a southbound boat had passed and had run over some of the people who were struggling to stay afloat and had then gone on its way, refusing to stop and assist in rescue work.

The explosion of the *Ben Sherrod* was one of the major tragedies that led to the passage of the Steamboat Act of 1838, a well-intentioned but ineffectual effort to protect the lives of steamboat passengers.



OLD RIVER NAVIGATION LOCK

Mile 304.0 AHP, Map 42
Right bank, descending

Excavation for Old River Lock began in July, 1958, and the first towboat was locked through in March, 1963. The lock and navigation channel provide passage from the Mississippi into Old River, and thence into the Red-Ouachita and Atchafalaya River systems. The lock is 1,185 feet long, 75 feet wide, and has a controlling depth of 11 feet.

In 1974 about 4.5 million tons of cargo were towed through the lock. Most of the products are chemical or petroleum products.

ANGOLA, LOUISIANA

Mile 302.8 AHP, Map 42
Left bank, descending

The State penal institution at Angola was established in 1890, when the State of Louisiana purchased the plantation on the east bank of the Mississippi and moved the State prison from the city of Baton Rouge. The prison farm covers about 18,000 acres of land, much of it in sugar cane, and has in recent years been the center of a continuing controversy about prison conditions and housing facilities.

On the point where the prison farm is now located, Pierre LeMoyne, Sieur d'Iberville, visited the Houma Indians who occupied the heights behind the Lake of the Cross in 1699. The lake received its name when Iberville and his party erected a huge wooden cross on its banks. The following year, in 1700, Father Paul du Rhu, a French Jesuit priest, built a chapel for his mission among the Houmas and planted another large cross in the middle of the village square. The Houmas were driven from their homes a few years later, by the Tunica Indians, and settled farther down the river.

The bluff behind the lake, and the big bend of the river in front of it, took the name of the Tunica Indians. Tunica Bend was the scene of a great deal of naval activity during the Civil War. When David Farragut, commander of the Union fleet that captured New Orleans, made his first trip up the Mississippi in 1862, his flagship, the *U.S.S. Hartford* ran aground in Tunica Bend and stuck fast in the mud. To dislodge the ocean-going sloop from the mudbank, the Union seamen lined up on one rail and ran madly across the deck to the other rail. Running back and forth, back and forth, they tried to roll the ship off the mud as they had rolled it off the sands of coastal waters. The effort was a failure, and the sailors finally had to resort to the backbreaking job of unloading 100 tons of coal and most of the ship's 25 guns before they could lighten her enough to get her back into the deeper water. Admiral Farragut confided to a friend that the mental strain of navigating the treacherous Mississippi had made him physically ill and that if he did not get back to the ocean soon he would be a nervous wreck.

In November, 1864, a near disaster was averted at Tunica Bend when the Union sailors on board the Union vessels *Lafayette* and *Ozark* discovered that some bold Confederate swimmers had attached torpedoes to the bows of their ships. The chagrined sailors removed the deadly contraptions without mishap and afterwards kept a sharper watch on the vessels at night.

RACCOURCI CUTOFF

Mile 299.4 AHP, Map 42

When Shreve's Cutoff failed to alleviate navigation problems on the lower reaches of the Mississippi, the State of Louisiana in 1848 resorted to more of the same, constructing another cutoff below, that came to be known as Raccourci Cutoff. The new cutoff shortened the navigation channel by 19 miles, but failed to bring about much improvement in the reaches above.

Raccourci Island was the scene of what Federal authorities called "a horrible murder" during the Civil War. When the commander of the Union vessel, the *Nymph*, went ashore at the island, he was surprised and killed by a Confederate force in the area. Four Union gunboats were sent to Raccourci, and the Union men landed and destroyed corn, sugar, molasses, storehouses, and everything else that they could find in the vicinity that might be "rebel property."

HOG POINT, LOUISIANA

Mile 298.2 AHP, Map 42
Right bank, descending

Confederate forces erected a battery in the woods on Hog Point in November, 1863, and engaged several Union gunboats as they attempted to pass the point. A Union transport was hit and set afire by an exploding shell, and heavy retaliatory fire drove the rebels out of the area for a time. Later in the war, the steamer *Joseph Pierce* was fired upon by a rebel battery in the same area. When the Confederates learned that their target was a private vessel with ladies on board, they silenced their guns and moved away again.

The Hog Point crossing has long been one of the troublesome places on the lower river, and requires a great deal of maintenance dredging by the Corps of Engineers.

MORGANZA FLOODWAY

*Mile 285.7 AHP, Map 43
Right bank, descending*

Before the Morganza Floodway was built, the levee system at Morganza had been notoriously difficult to maintain. In 1874 a major crevasse swept it away, and the gap remained open for the next ten years.

In 1884, the State of Louisiana expended a large sum of money on the closing of the mile-wide gap at Morganza, and had just turned the new levee over to the Parish to maintain when the flood of 1884 threatened its destruction. Sixty or seventy workmen were rushed to Morganza to strengthen the new levee, but on March 14, it began to slough away. More men were hurried to the area, but at about 5:00 p.m. the same afternoon a fountain of water began to spout from the ground about 60 feet from the base of the embankment. The new earthwork was rapidly undermined, the levee collapsed, and a gap appeared. It was soon more than a mile wide.

Under the direction of the Mississippi River Commission, and with the help of about \$40,000 in Federal funds, the new crevasse was closed before the high water season of 1887, but three years later the flood of 1890 overtopped the Morganza levee and created two new crevasses.

When the Corps of Engineers adopted the Mississippi River & Tributaries flood-control project in 1928, Morganza was chosen as the site for a control structure to divert excess flows from the Mississippi into the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway when necessary.



MORGANZA CONTROL STRUCTURE. During the major flood of 1973, the Morganza control structure and floodway were put in use for the first time. In the above photograph, taken during the flood emergency, the Lower Mississippi is on the left, and the floodway is on the right.

The reinforced concrete structure and the Morganza floodway are designed to divert a maximum of 600,000 cubic feet per second from the Mississippi. The structure was completed in 1954, and was operated for the first time in 1973, when it helped relieve the pressure on the damaged Old River low sill control structure, and protected the Mississippi River levees downstream. The maximum discharge through the Morganza structure during the 1973 flood was 142,000 cubic feet per second, or only a fraction of its design capacity.

ST. MAURICE, LOUISIANA

Mile 271.5 AHP, Map 43
Right bank, descending

Rivermen could never mention the steamboat *J. M. White* without using superlatives. They called her “the finest river boat in the world,” and even the owners of competing boats had to admit that she was the most beautiful and elegant steamer that had ever been seen on the Lower Mississippi. She was the last of three boats that had been named for a prominent St. Louis merchant, and she was probably the fastest and finest of the three.

Built in 1878, the boat was 320 feet long and was lavishly furnished with every convenience for her passengers. She made her debut the same year that the yellow fever epidemic of 1878 struck the Mississippi Valley. Hard times followed the epidemic, for the South was still reeling under the economic disasters of the Reconstruction Period. The *J. M. White* never had a real opportunity to test either her speed or her full carrying capacity.

The big boat was still on the river when she caught fire December 13, 1886, at St. Maurice, and sank. Several lives were lost. The wreck of the fine old steamer could be seen for many years afterward, in low water periods, but the river finally buried the *J. M. White* in a high sandbar near the old landing.

ST. FRANCISVILLE, LOUISIANA

Mile 265.5 AHP, Map 44
Left bank, descending

The little town of St. Francisville was established around 1790 by British and American settlers who had received grants of land from the Spanish government. When the remainder of Louisiana became American territory by virtue of the

Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the St. Francisville and Baton Rouge districts were retained by the Spanish because they were considered to be a part of the Spanish colony of West Florida, and not a part of the Louisiana colony.

The pro-American element in St. Francisville and the surrounding region did not agree, and they staged a mini-rebellion, captured the Spanish fort at Baton Rouge on September 23, 1810, and set up the "Republic of West Florida."

West Florida's independence was short-lived, for the United States promptly annexed the area, claiming that it had belonged to the United States all along. Some of the leaders of the rebellion against Spanish rule grumbled about the high-handed American action, complaining that they should at least have been consulted, but the opposition was weak and the majority of the people in the area had wanted all along to become a part of the American nation.

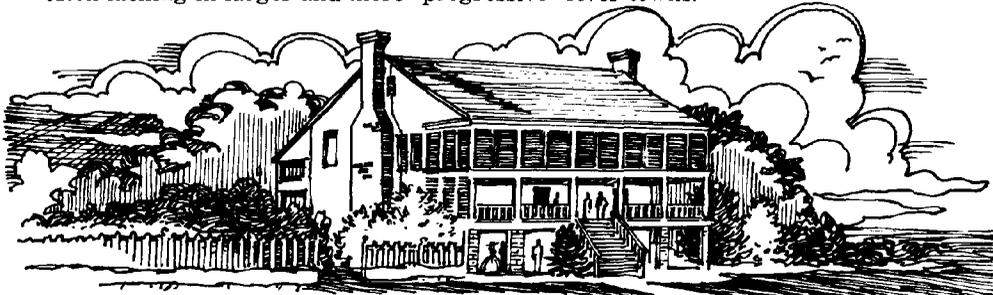
St. Francisville was strung out along a high ridge overlooking the river, and a rival town grew up at the foot of the ridge. Bayou Sara, located on the river bank, threatened to take all of St. Francisville's trade away, since it had control of the only river landing in front of the older town.

During the Civil War, St. Francisville was said by Union officers to be "a hotbed of secession," and when a civilian agent of the Federal Government was captured and detained in the town, a gunboat retaliated by bombarding it for several hours. The accurate gunfire did considerable damage to the houses and buildings of St. Francisville.

Bayou Sara was not molested by the Union forces, because they believed that most of its citizens were loyal to the Union, but after the war the rival town fell on hard times when the river's currents attacked it and carried away most of its buildings.

St. Francisville has survived to enjoy moderate prosperity in recent years. An annual Audubon Pilgrimage in the spring is a tourist attraction. John James Audubon lived in the vicinity in the 1820's and some of his famous bird paintings had their origin in West Feliciana Parish. Many of the fine plantation homes and interesting buildings of the town are opened for tours during the spring pilgrimage.

St. Francisville has so far escaped the doubtful benefits of modern urban development and has therefore preserved much of its early charm. Its neat small houses, gracious mansions, and interesting public buildings have given it a flavor and character that is often lacking in larger and more "progressive" river towns.



POINTE COUPEE

*Mile 265.5 AHP, Map 44
Right bank, descending*

Pointe Coupee (French: Cut Point) was the site of some of the earliest sugar plantations in Louisiana, and early travelers on the river often noted that the extended settlements that began at the Pointe resembled “a village 20 miles long.” The French had established a military post there, but by 1796 all trace of the old fort had disappeared and the Spanish garrison at Pointe Coupee consisted of one officer and one soldier.

The very first steamboat explosion on the Lower Mississippi occurred just off the west bank near Pointe Coupee in 1817. The steamboat *Constitution* had been built the previous year, and had originally been called the *Oliver Evans*, but her name had been changed some time before the accident occurred at Pointe Coupee.

The boat was rounding the point when a boiler exploded, wrecking the front part of the cabin and killing or wounding some 30 passengers. Damage to the boat itself was apparently not great, for the following notice appeared in a New Orleans newspaper on July 19, 1817:

“For ST. LOUIS, The Steam-Boat Constitution, R. P. Guyard master. Will be ready to receive cargo on the 25th inst. The Constitution, having been completely repaired and put in charge of a careful and enterprising commander, with an experienced engineer, leaves little doubt but that she will perform the voyage in a very short time, with perfect safety to passengers and cargo.”

The public was apparently reassured by the promise of “perfect safety” and the *Constitution* continued to be engaged in the river trade until 1822, when she was abandoned for the simple reason that six years of service on the Mississippi had worn her out completely.

FAUSSE RIVER CUTOFF

Mile 258.5 AHP, Map 44

Although current navigation maps give the date of the Fausse River Cutoff as 1722, there is considerable doubt among historians as to the actual date of this event.

When Iberville and Bienville explored the river in 1699, one of the accounts of the voyage, written by a member of the expedition, noted that the French explorers were told by Indians that they could save time by portaging their canoes through the cutoff in this area that was already developing in 1699.

When Father Pierre Charlevoix came down the Mississippi in 1721, he noted that the old river bed was dry except in time of flood, and that the cutoff channel had been “sounded with a line of 30 fathoms, without finding any bottom.”

The French called the bend that had been removed from the river channel “Fausse Riviere,” or False River, and it was soon lined with homes constructed by some of Louisiana’s wealthy sugar planters. One of the most influential and admired was Julien Poydras.

Poydras had been born in France, and had come to New Orleans in 1768. Carrying a pack on his back, the young Frenchman peddled his goods until he accumulated funds to buy a plantation of his own in Pointe Coupee Parish. Poydras was a well-educated and capable man who soon became extremely wealthy. He took an interest in local politics and was president of the State’s first Constitutional Convention and twice president of the State senate of Louisiana. At the time of his death, he was the owner of 1,000 slaves and six plantations. Much of his wealth was left to charitable institutions.

False River lake covers more than 4,000 acres and is today one of the favorite hunting, fishing, and boating resorts of residents of the area. Several of the old plantation homes in the vicinity of the lakefront have been preserved.

PORT HUDSON, LOUISIANA

*Mile 256.0 AHP, Map 44
Left bank, descending*

Port Hudson before the Civil War was a flourishing little town that had the good fortune to have both a river landing and a rail line to the interior. It was fortified by Confederates in 1862, and became one of the focal points of the Union effort to gain control of the Lower Mississippi River.

Admiral David Farragut had taken his small fleet past Port Hudson without hindrance early in 1862, but when he tried it again in March, 1863, only two of the Union boats succeeded in passing the fortifications the rebels had constructed. General Nathaniel P. Banks, with a Union force of about 13,000 troops, had moved against the rebel stronghold as the boats attempted to pass up the river, hoping to create a diversion that would allow the fleet to pass safely. The whole affair turned into a Union fiasco, with several of the Federal gunboats and transports disabled and the Union steamer *Mississippi* totally destroyed.

Late in May, 1863, General Banks besieged Port Hudson, and a Union fleet bombarded it for 43 days. Attacks on May 27, June 11, and June 14 were repulsed, but when the defenders of Port Hudson learned that Vicksburg had surrendered on July 4, 1863, they gave up Port Hudson as well.

Admiral David D. Porter, commander of the Union fleet, was jubilant. *"The Mississippi is open from end to end,"* he wired the Secretary of Navy. Porter then went down to see the place that had given General Banks and Admiral Farragut so much trouble. He wondered what all the fuss had been about, he said. Compared to Vicksburg, Port Hudson appeared to him to have been poorly fortified and hardly strong enough to stop a regiment, much less an army. Banks and Farragut replied indignantly that Port Hudson had been the strongest fortification on the entire river.

Today the Federal Government maintains a National Cemetery at Port Hudson, where 3,804 Union soldiers are buried. Only 582 of the little stones bear names; the remainder are numbered and marked "Unknown."



PORT HUDSON CEMETERY. The National Cemetery at Port Hudson contains the graves of 3,804 Union soldiers. Only 582 of the bodies were identified; the remainder are buried in graves marked "Unknown." Confederate soldiers were buried in family graveyards and churchyards in the area.

PROFIT ISLAND

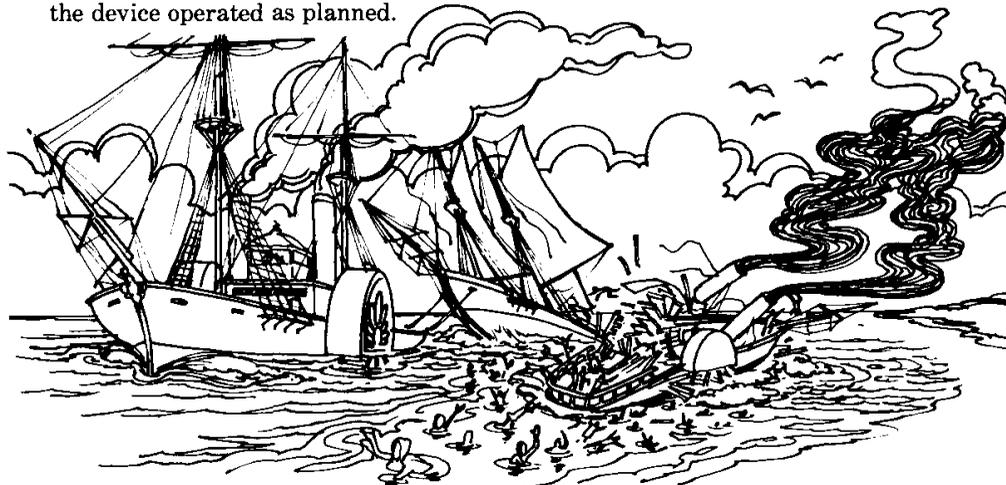
*Mile 249.5 AHP, Map 45
Left bank, descending*

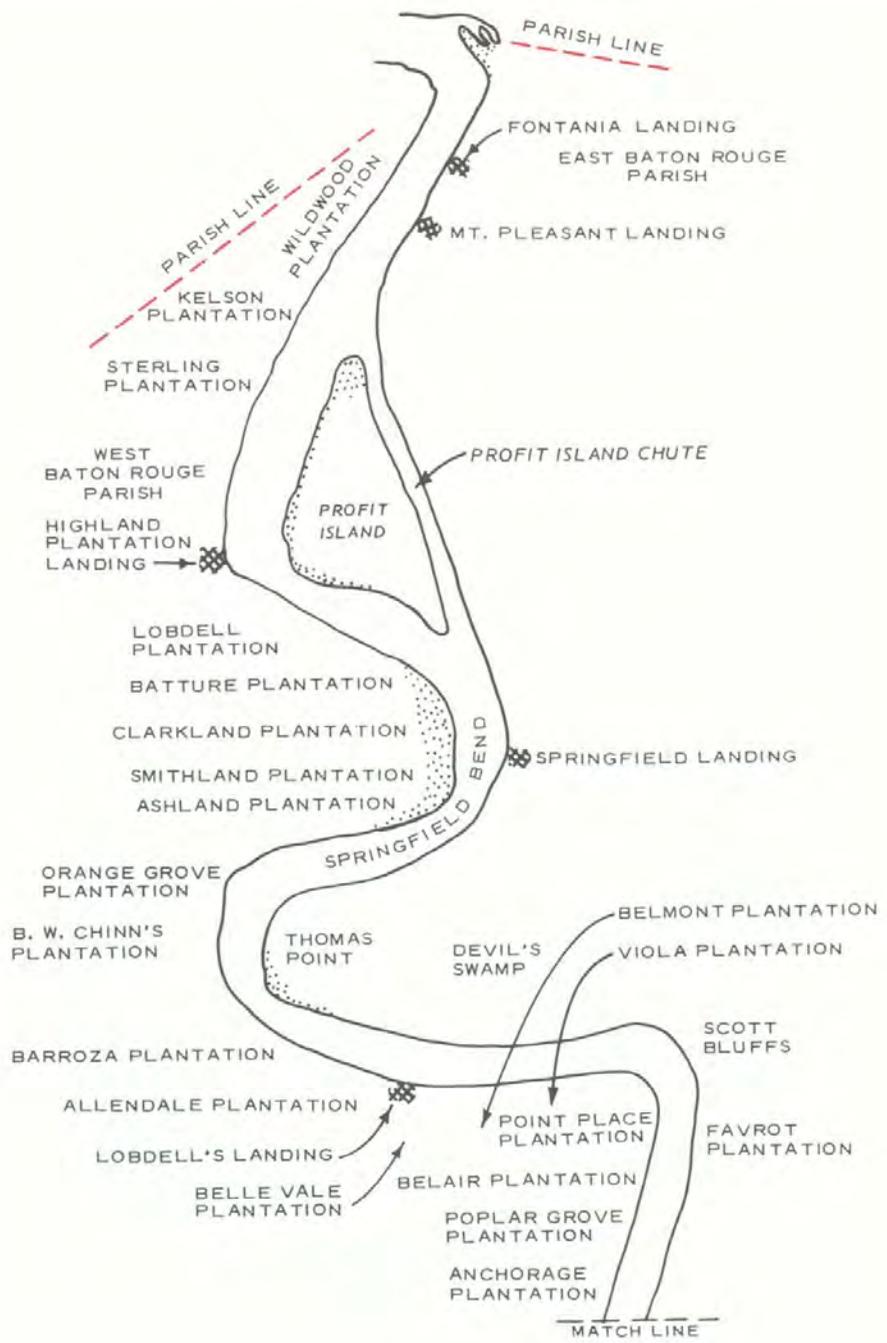
The large island that is known today as Profit Island was formed from two small ones, Islands No. 123 and No. 124. It is named for an early settler in the area and was originally spelled "Prophet Island."

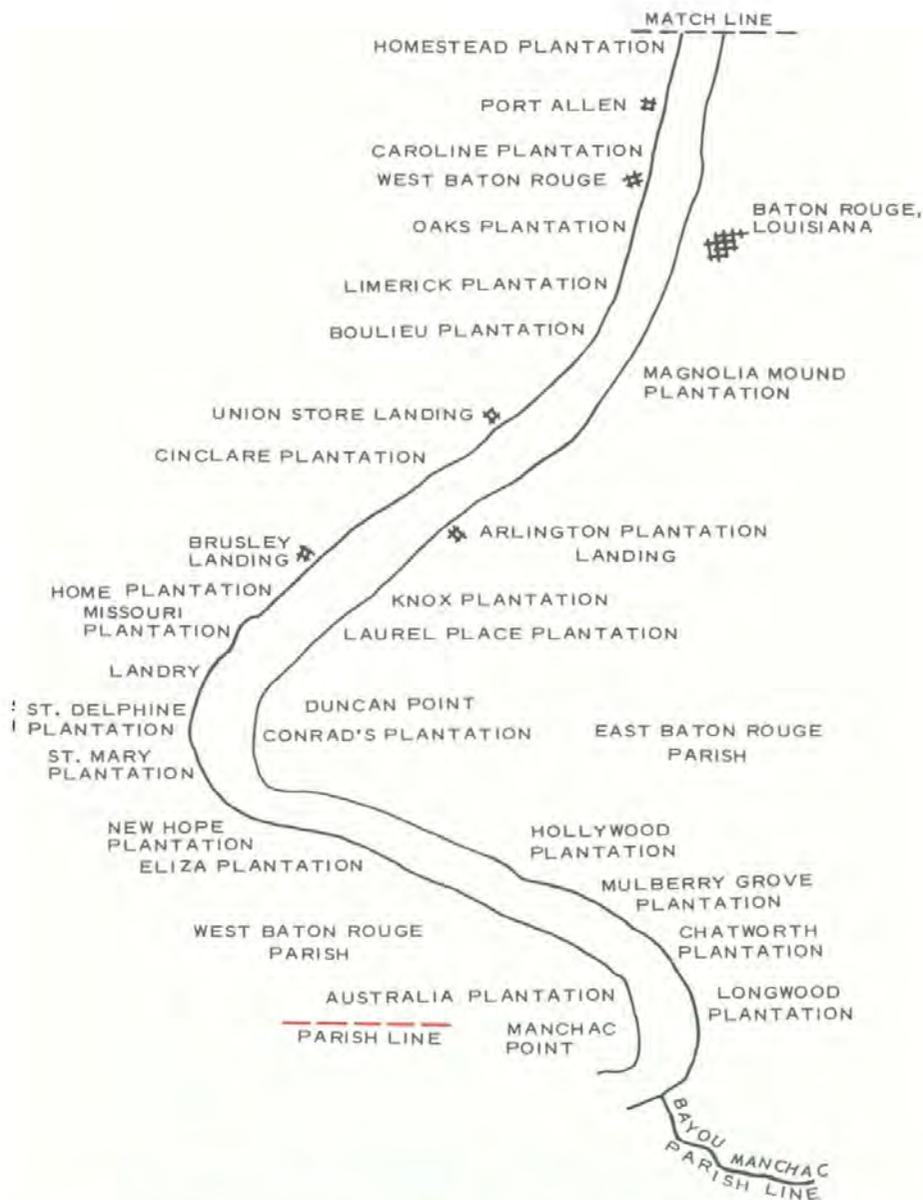
When the United States was transporting Indian tribes out of the boundaries of the new southern frontier in 1837, a gruesome tragedy occurred at Profit Island. The steamer *Monmouth*, a relatively small river boat, had been chartered to take about 700 Creek Indians up to the Arkansas River, where they would be sent to the Oklahoma territory for resettlement. Northbound at the island with a heavy load of passengers, the *Monmouth* collided with a sailing vessel called the *Trenton*, which was being towed downstream by the steamer *Warren*.

The collision caused the *Monmouth* to break apart, and hundreds of frightened Indians were precipitated into the water. Contemporary accounts of the accident were vague and very brief, but it was estimated that "300 to 400 of the Indians were drowned." The toll may have been higher; no one really seemed to know or care.

During the Civil War, the Union ironclad gunboat *Essex* had a narrow escape at Profit Island. Commander William Porter reported that his vessel had been headed upstream when it ran over some strange object in the water. Turning back downstream to investigate, the boat ran over the object a second time. Porter ordered the gunboat to the shore and sent two seamen in a small boat to take a look at the mysterious object. The sailors discovered that it was an explosive device, attached to a line strung between the east bank of the river and the island, straight across the navigation channel. If the "infernal machine" had worked properly, it would have destroyed the *Essex* and killed everyone on board, the shaken commander reported. He took the device up to the top of a nearby levee and detonated it, shuddering at the force of the explosion as he reflected that he would have been one of the casualties had the device operated as planned.







PLANTATIONS IN THE BATON ROUGE PARISHES. An 1884 map shows most of the Louisiana sugar plantations that were located on the banks of the Lower Mississippi in East Baton Rouge Parish and West Baton Rouge Parish. Many of them had been established by French colonial settlers long before the region had become a part of the United States.

SPRINGFIELD BEND

Mile 244.7 AHP, Map 45

Union forces under General Nathaniel P. Banks used the Springfield plantation landing as a main supply depot for their army during the campaign against Port Hudson, Louisiana.

A few days before Port Hudson fell, Confederates raided the depot in Springfield Bend and set fire to about a million dollars worth of government supplies. The rebels rampaged through the camp, throwing bottles of turpentine into the fires they had set and shouting their blood-chilling rebel yell. In panic and confusion, the Union troops that were supposed to be guarding the supplies fled into the night. During the raid, a Union boat, the *Iberville*, was disabled by the rebels and had to be rescued and hastily towed away by a gunboat.

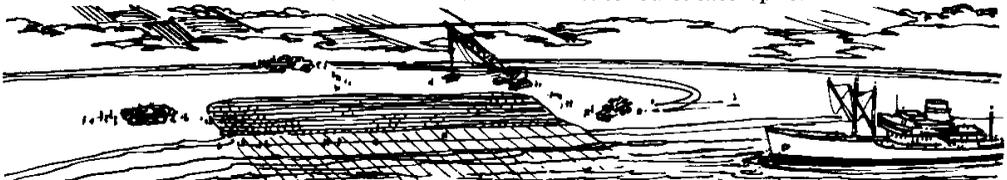
MULATTO BEND

Mile 236.6 AHP, Map 46

Slaves in the New Orleans area sometimes earned or were given their freedom. Often the freedmen were mulattos, the offspring of white and negro unions. One group of these freedmen established a community of their own on the west bank of the Mississippi just above Baton Rouge, and river pilots called the area Mulatto Bend.

River pilots were not as a group any more unkind or insensitive than other people, and at the time they named the point where the community was located, the term they used was acceptable to the whole population. They called it "Free Nigger Point," never dreaming that more than a century later the name would be found so obnoxious that it would be wiped from the navigation charts. The new name of the old point is Wilkinson Point.

In 1950, when the point still bore its old name, there was a near disaster in the vicinity when more than four million cubic yards of the river bank slid into the water, destroying the levee behind it and threatening to create havoc on the plantations and in the communities that the levee line protected. The New Orleans District of the Corps of Engineers rushed workmen and engineers to the area and in a matter of hours had constructed a setback levee that averted the threatened catastrophe.



PORT ALLEN LOCK AND CANAL (Intracoastal Waterway)

*Mile 228.4 AHP, Map 46
Right bank, descending*

The Port Allen Lock and Canal, constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers between 1955 and 1962, cuts the distance from the Mississippi to the western branch of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway by about 160 miles. From the Mississippi at Port Allen to the GIWW at Morgan City, the distance is now only 64 miles.

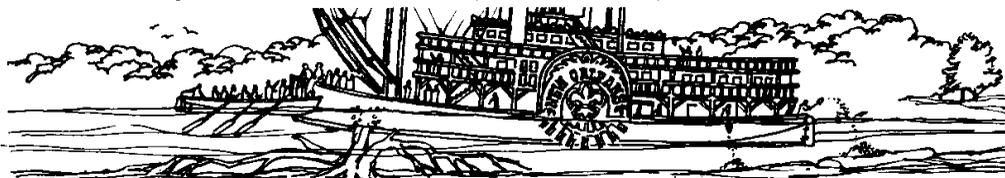
The Port Allen Lock, which replaced an obsolete lock at Plaquemine, Louisiana, was begun in 1955 and opened to navigation in July, 1961. In 1974, the traffic through the Lock amounted to 16.3 million tons. The canal has a channel 12 feet deep by 125 feet wide. The Gulf Intracoastal Waterway with which it is connected is 1,109 miles long and stretches from the Mexican border on the west to Apalachee Bay in Florida on the east.

The first steamboat on the Lower Mississippi sank just above Port Allen in 1814. The steamer *New Orleans* was northbound for Natchez, loaded with freight and passengers. She stopped at Baton Rouge on July 13, 1814, unloaded some of her cargo, and continued the trip up the river. A short while later, her captain decided to tie up to the west bank of the river for the night because the weather was bad. He landed alongside what he thought was a steep bank, and the passengers went to bed. Early in the morning, the crew prepared to resume the voyage. At daylight the engines were fired up and the lines were untied.

To the astonishment of her crew, the *New Orleans* seemed unwilling to leave her snug berth beside the river bank. She swung around in a circle, and refused to depart. On investigation, it appeared that the water had fallen some 16 to 18 inches during the night and that the boat had settled on a great stump that had been invisible under the surface the night before.

The boat's supply of fuel was heaved overboard, and the crew worked her off the snag. Immediately the *New Orleans* began to leak, and she sank so fast that it was with difficulty that the passengers escaped with their lives. They were taken back to Baton Rouge, where ten of them signed a public notice that later appeared in the newspapers, saying that neither the captain nor the crew of the boat had been to blame for the accident.

Two years later, another steamer called the *New Orleans* was running in the Natchez to New Orleans trade. The new boat had the engines salvaged from the old *New Orleans* and had the same hard luck that had struck her predecessor. She hit a snag near the city of New Orleans and sank, on December 1, 1818.



BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

*Mile 228.4 AHP, Map 46
Left bank, descending*

The huge, sprawling capitol city of the State of Louisiana received its name almost three centuries ago when the French explorer, Iberville, first visited the area and found a tall pole on the east bank of the Mississippi that had been painted red. "Le baton rouge," or the red stick, was said to mark the boundary between two Indian tribes.

The French established a small military post at Baton Rouge, and a colonial official received a large land grant in the area. Father Pierre Charlevoix, a Jesuit priest, visited "the Red Stick plantation" in 1722 and commented that it was in a sorry state and would probably never amount to much. The military post was a weak one, he said, manned by a handful of French soldiers.

When the Baton Rouge area was included in territory ceded to Great Britain by France at the end of the Seven Years War, the British placed a garrison of British regulars at Baton Rouge and erected a crude earthen fortification.

While the British were preoccupied with the American Revolution in the northeast, the Spanish attacked and easily overwhelmed the British fort at Baton Rouge. They held it until 1810, when the pro-American element in the area rebelled and took the fort. Baton Rouge became a part of the independent Republic of West Florida for a brief time. Three months later, the United States annexed West Florida, and Baton Rouge became an American city.

When the United States took possession of Baton Rouge, the old dirt fort was converted to a fine brick powder magazine, and handsome barracks were built for the soldiers stationed there under the command of an obscure Army colonel named Zachary Taylor. Taylor would later win fame as an American general in the Mexican War, and would become President of the United States in 1849.

The straggling village of Baton Rouge, which had been described in 1808 as "a dirty little town," and in 1809 as "a miserable place," began to prosper under American rule and was incorporated as a city in 1817. By 1829 its population had doubled and it was becoming an important river port. Around 1846 it was chosen as the seat of government for the State of Louisiana.

By the time the Civil War erupted, Louisiana's capitol had become a flourishing city. When Louisiana withdrew from the Union and declared itself to be an independent power in January, 1861, the barracks and arsenal at Baton Rouge were surrendered by the Union garrison. When the Louisiana legislature voted to join the Confederacy of southern states, the Confederate flag was raised over Baton Rouge.

Confederate authorities chose not to fortify the capitol city of Louisiana. When New Orleans fell, Federal forces came up the river and demanded the surrender of Baton Rouge on May 7, 1862. No resistance was offered. The seat of the State government had already been moved west of the Mississippi. The Union Army occupied Baton Rouge

on May 29, 1862, and many of its terrified citizens fled.

On August 5, 1862, the Confederates launched a vigorous attack on Baton Rouge. The four-hour battle resulted in heavy casualties on both sides and an uneasy victory for the Union forces. General Benjamin F. Butler, commanding in New Orleans, ordered the city evacuated and destroyed, fearing that another rebel attack would bring disaster. Union officers in command of the occupation army protested the order, reminding General Butler that the city still contained women, children, several orphanages, and an insane asylum. General Butler rescinded the order, but Union forces fled the city on August 20, in the midst of rumors of another rebel attack. A few months later, General Nathaniel P. Banks succeeded General Butler as commander of the district. He ordered Baton Rouge reoccupied, and the Federal forces moved back into the city on December 17, 1862. For the remainder of the war, a strong Union garrison was maintained in the city. The Old State Capitol Building was one of the casualties of the occupation. It was accidentally set on fire by soldiers, and the building was gutted. A replica of the old building was constructed in 1882. It served as the capitol building until a new one was erected in 1932 at a cost of \$5 million.

After the war, Baton Rouge shared all the problems that plagued other southern cities. The development of the modern diesel towboat, navigation improvements, and the revival of the river trade have made it the nation's seventh largest port today.

The Port of Baton Rouge is located at the head of the deepwater channel that leads to the Gulf of Mexico via New Orleans. It is also on the northern end of the highly industrialized area that stretches along the river's banks from the Baton Rouge port to a point below New Orleans. There are large chemical plants, grain elevators, and petroleum refineries in the Baton Rouge area, and the port handles more than 50 million tons of cargo annually.

There are fleeting and repair services for towboats and barges at Baton Rouge, but no marina for pleasure boats. The port area, which extends from River Mile 255.2 AHP to 168.3 AHP is often crowded with ocean-going vessels and towboats, and pleasure boaters should be extremely careful in the area.

DUNCAN OR CONRAD POINT, LOUISIANA

Mile 222.5 AHP, Map 47
Left bank, descending

The steamboat *Princess* was one of the best-known and most popular boats of her time. When she left Vicksburg for New Orleans one cold, wet day in February, 1859, she was, as usual, heavily loaded with both passengers and freight.

On the morning of February 28, the *Princess* passed Baton Rouge, traveling slightly behind schedule. It had been a difficult trip down because of heavy fog on the river,

and it was said later that the boat's officers were doing their best to make up for the lost time. One of the engineers was reported to have declared that he would get the boat to New Orleans by a certain hour "or blow her up."

Whether the engineer ever actually made the remark was never proved. As the boat approached Conrad Point, there was one tremendous explosion and the engineer on duty was one of the first to die. The *Princess* caught fire, and those who had not been killed or injured in the explosion were soon trying desperately to escape the flames.

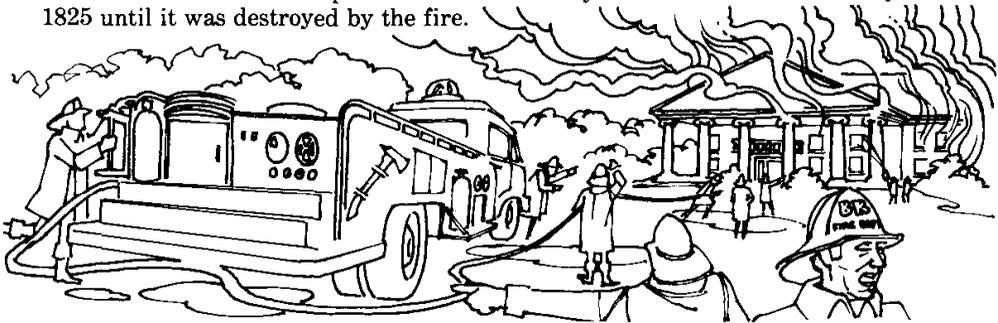
The boat was said to have been carrying more passengers when the accident occurred than she had ever carried before. Survivors were picked up by the steamers *Natchez*, *Sunny South*, *R. W. McRae*, *Vixen*, *Kate Dale*, and *Empress*—all of which happened to be in the vicinity at the time. So many of the injured were taken to so many different towns for medical assistance that it was difficult afterward for authorities to determine who had survived and who had not. Eventually it was estimated that about 100 persons had died in the tragedy, and that another 100 had suffered severe injuries.

So persistent were the rumors that blamed the accident on the boat's officers that a grand jury was asked to investigate the matter and determine who was responsible for the disaster. The jury was unable to fix the blame on any individual or individuals, for all of the people who might have had positive knowledge about the situation in the engine room at the time of the accident had been killed.

The explosion and fire that destroyed the *Princess* was not the first disaster associated with the name. She had been No. 5 in a line of boats that all bore the name. The *Princess No. 3* and the *Princess No. 4* had also burned. The elegant steamer *Charmer* replaced the *Princess No. 5* after the accident at Conrads Point, and she too burned two years later, at Donaldsonville, Louisiana, with the loss of five lives.

The point of land near which the disaster involving the *Princess* had occurred in 1859 was originally the property of Abner Lawson Duncan, who built a mansion on it that he called "The Cottage." When his daughter, Frances, married Frederick Daniel Conrad, Duncan gave the young couple the beautiful home. The Conrads were living there when the *Princess* exploded and opened their home to the suffering victims who had survived the accident but were horribly burned.

In 1960 The Cottage, which had been beautifully restored a few years earlier, caught fire and burned so rapidly that the fire engines that rushed down from Baton Rouge were unable to save it. The place had been owned by members of the same family from 1825 until it was destroyed by the fire.



MANCHAC BEND

Mile 215.5 AHP, Map 47

Manchac Bend takes its name from the Bayou Manchac, located on the east side of the Mississippi, and explored by Iberville in March, 1699. The French commander took two longboats, some bark canoes and 53 of his men into the narrow passage, hoping that it would be a practicable shortcut to the French post he had just established on the Gulf Coast. The bayou was so choked with debris and drift that the Frenchmen had to carry their boats on their shoulders a good part of the way. The men named the passage the "River Iberville," but French settlers later usually used its old Indian name of "Manchac," which was said to mean "rear entrance."

In a treaty ratified on March 10, 1763, Great Britain received from France all of the French colony of Louisiana that lay on the east (or left) bank of the Mississippi, "from its source to the Iberville River." Thus the Bayou Manchac became the dividing line between the British colony of West Florida and the "island of Orleans," which was occupied by the Spanish.

Early in January, 1764, a British officer visited the bayou, or the River Iberville, and surveyed the site to determine whether the little outlet could be cleared to provide passage for British ships. When it was decided that the plan was feasible, 50 blacks were put to work under the direction of a British captain. After laboring for six months, the workmen succeeded in clearing a passage for the ships and the governor of the British colony of West Florida ordered a fortification erected at the junction of the bayou and the Mississippi River. About 40 soldiers garrisoned the fort, which was named Fort Bute.

In the spring of 1765, it became apparent that the improvement of the bayou passage would be a continuing expense. Governor Johnstone reported unhappily to the King's ministers in England that he had spent 2,000 pounds clearing the bayou and would have to station men at its entrance to keep the floating trees and other debris from closing it again.

The feeble British garrison held Fort Bute until it was attacked by the Spanish on September 7, 1779. After a three-hour bombardment, the British surrendered, and the Spanish moved in to replace them.

When the Americans took possession of the area and became embroiled in the War of 1812, they obstructed the Bayou Manchac to keep the British forces from using it as a "rear entrance" into the Lower Mississippi Valley.

In 1828 American settlers built a large earthen dam across the head of the bayou to keep their plantations below it from being flooded at every high water. A proposal was made in the 1850's to reopen Bayou Manchac, so that it could serve as a floodway in major flood years. The Army Corps of Engineers investigated the plan, but did not approve of it. Today, the Bayou Manchac, or River Iberville, is effectively and permanently closed by the massive mainline levee system that crosses it.

PLAQUEMINE, LOUISIANA

Mile 208.6 AHP, Map 47
Right bank, descending

The word "Plaquemine" is said to have come from an Indian word that meant "persimmon." The persimmon tree of the South is ordinarily a small to medium sized tree that grows in moist bottomlands, in old fields, and along roadsides. It bears a small orange-colored fruit that is edible when fully ripe. Indians in the Mississippi Valley were very fond of the persimmon fruit, and often served it to visiting missionaries and explorers. The trees were said to be very abundant in the Plaquemine area, along the small bayou that was one of the Mississippi's distributaries.

Early settlers in Louisiana removed the timber and debris that obstructed the Bayou Plaquemine, so that the waterway could serve as a path to the interior, but they found that they had created some serious problems for themselves. With the head of the bayou open, it began to enlarge rapidly. By 1865, local residents found it necessary to close the head of the bayou again.

A small settlement sprang up at the head of the bayou around 1800 and adopted the name of the troublesome waterway. It was incorporated in 1838. Plaquemine was not fortified during the Civil War, and when a regiment of New York Infantry marched in on the last day 1862, the Union soldiers occupied the town without opposition. Most of the citizens of Plaquemine were of French descent. A few of them took the oath of loyalty to the United States after the soldiers moved in, but most did not.

Early in January, 1863, there were rumors that the Confederates were about to attack the post the Union forces had established at Plaquemine. The Union commander, a young major, sent out desperate appeals for reinforcements, but no help arrived. On January 2, 1863, he and his men repelled a determined rebel attack and suffered heavy casualties. The following day, the Union garrison learned that the local grapevine was humming with rumors of another attack. They fled, leaving behind their guns, ammunition, and rations.

Later Union officials questioned the townspeople. The citizens of Plaquemine professed to have been astonished by the sudden evacuation of the Union fort. They had heard no rumors of rebel attacks, they said blandly, and knew of no Confederate forces anywhere in the vicinity. A new regiment was sent down to reoccupy the town.

In June, 1863, the *Anglo-American*, a Union transport, ran aground in front of Plaquemine. The Union steamer *Sykes* went to the assistance of the grounded vessel. Confederates lurking in the area promptly sneaked down to the waterfront and burned both the boats. The *U.S.S. Monangahela* was sent to Plaquemine immediately to protect Union transports from further depredations. Admiral David Farragut himself came boiling up the river "to read a lecture to the mayor of Plaquemine." The admiral said that the mayor assured him that the citizens of the town had had no advance knowledge of the rebel raid on the fort and that he swore that the attackers were strangers to every citizen of the place.



LOUISIANA PLANTATIONS IN IBERVILLE PARISH. Iberville Parish, Louisiana, lies on both sides of the Lower Mississippi River. An 1884 map, published by the Mississippi River Commission, shows many of the Parish's fine sugar plantations that were located along the banks of the river. Some of the beautiful plantation homes still stand, most of them facing the river road and massive mainline levee system, rather than the river itself.

After the war had ended, Plaquemine suffered a major disaster when a large part of the town fell into the Mississippi River in 1880. The sudden caving of the bank had carried away about a dozen buildings, many fences, and most of the front part of the town.

In 1900 the Army Corps of Engineers was authorized to construct a navigation lock in the Bayou Plaquemine. Work was delayed by extreme heat and an outbreak of yellow fever in 1905, but in 1909 the new lock was finally opened for navigation. It had been designed by Colonel George W. Goethals of the Corps, who would later be the chief engineer on the Panama Canal project and who would serve as the Panama Canal Zone's first governor.

The old navigation lock, now obsolete, is no longer in use. The interesting little town has preserved many of its early buildings and its French flavor. It is the trade center of a rural area where some of the large sugar plantations of Louisiana are located. One of these is St. Louis plantation, just below Plaquemine. The house at St. Louis was built in 1857, and is still occupied by descendants of the original owner.

POINT PLEASANT, LOUISIANA

Mile 200.3 AHP, Map 47
Right bank, descending

Point Pleasant was once the parish seat of Iberville Parish, but the seat of the local government was moved to Plaquemine in 1842.

In 1973, there was a flood crisis at Point Pleasant when the river bank in front of the levee began to cave and crumble. Materials and men were rushed to the area, and the Army Corps of Engineers constructed a setback levee that averted the threatened disaster.

BAYOU GOULA LANDING, LOUISIANA

Mile 195.6 AHP, Map 48
Right bank, descending

The Bayou Goula Indians occupied this point on the Lower Mississippi when Iberville and his party went up the river in 1699. When the French colony was established on the lower reaches of the river, the land at Bayou Goula Point was granted to colonists who attempted to raise tobacco and indigo. The two crops were not entirely successful in

the area, but the introduction of sugar cane culture in 1795 gave the planters a new economic base for the development of plantations that would later bring them great wealth.

In 1851 a steamboat collision in Bayou Goula Bend attracted wide attention. Both of the boats involved were well-known steamers. The accident occurred when the steamer *Autocrat*, northbound in the bend, met the steamer *Magnolia*, southbound at Bayou Goula.

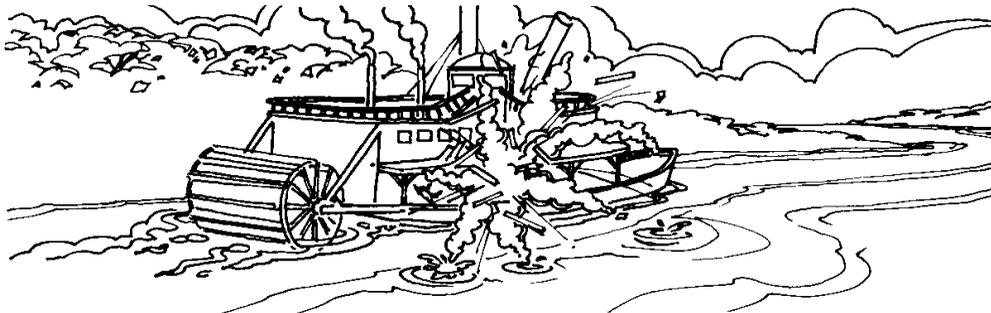
The rules for passing were perfectly clear, and when steamboat pilots followed them scrupulously, boats could pass even in a fog without danger. On this February morning in 1851, there was no fog. The pilots exchanged signals, and the two boats came together with a resounding crash.

On board the *Magnolia*, which had suffered no great damage from the collision, ladies screamed and ran about the decks in panic. On board the *Autocrat*, which was sinking rapidly, the passengers were too busy to cry out. Forty or fifty men jumped overboard. The ladies scrambled to the highest part of the sinking boat and waited nervously for rescue. The wind was high, and when the *Magnolia* came alongside the sinking vessel to offer assistance, the wind caught the two boats and banged them together again.

The crew of the *Magnolia* persisted, and all the people who had stayed on board the damaged *Autocrat* were saved. About 15 of the people who had jumped overboard were picked up, but it was estimated that 30 had drowned.

Several days after the accident, one of the passengers favored a newspaper with an eyewitness account of the disaster, and ended with the generous remark that the accident had been "entirely unavoidable." This aroused indignation on both sides. The master of the *Autocrat* said bitterly that it was obvious that his boat would not have sunk if the *Magnolia* had not crashed into her without warning. The master of the *Magnolia* retorted that no one could possibly hold him responsible for what had happened. His boat, he said, was simply proceeding upstream in a perfectly normal way when the *Autocrat* had rushed across her bow. The unlucky boat had gone to the bottom as a result of her own pilot's stupidity and inept handling, he declared.

Bayou Goula Bend claimed other victims in later years. In 1882, the steamboat *City of Greenville* collided with the *Laura Lee* in the bend and sent it down to join the *Autocrat* at the bottom of the river. In 1908, the *H. M. Carter*, a sternwheel packet boat, had an old-fashioned boiler explosion at Bayou Goula and sank with the loss of ten lives.



WHITE CASTLE, LOUISIANA

Mile 193.3 AHP, Map 48
Right bank, descending

White Castle was a large and imposing plantation home built by a sugar planter around 1800. The original site began to cave into the river, and the house was moved back several times, losing sections with each move. Eventually, what was left of White Castle was divided into two small cottages and moved to the village of White Castle, which now lies behind the protection of the mainline levee system.

BELLE GROVE PLANTATION, LOUISIANA

Mile 191.9 AHP, Map 48
Right bank, descending

When John Andrews of Virginia moved to Louisiana, he soon decided that he would build the finest home that the rich sugar planters of that State had ever seen. His dream house was completed in 1857, and he called it Belle Grove. Built with skilled slave labor, the magnificent structure was made of brick and cypress and had 75 enormous rooms. Door knobs and keyhole guards were made of silver, and all the wood was carved by a master craftsman. The furnishings were as lavish and costly as the house itself, and the garden that surrounded the dwelling was as ornate as it was huge. The plantation itself consisted of several thousand acres of land.

The fortune that Andrews had amassed apparently did not survive the exigencies of the Civil War and its aftermath. Belle Grove was sold by the family in 1867. It changed hands many times in the years that followed, and in the 1940's, stripped of its fine furnishings and falling into ruin, the great house was burned.

CARVILLE, LOUISIANA

Mile 189.3 AHP, Map 48
Left bank, descending

On the last day of November, 1894, a boat left the New Orleans dock pushing a barge with an unusual cargo. On the barge were seven very ill people, several doctors, and some newspaper reporters. The seven passengers were suffering from the dreaded disease that was then known as leprosy, and they were being moved from an abominable "pest house" in New Orleans to a plantation about 25 miles below Baton

Rouge, called Indian Camp plantation. The State of Louisiana hoped to give them better care and more humane treatment than they had ever known before.

From this uncertain beginning in 1894, there eventually developed a U. S. Public Health Service Hospital at Carville, Louisiana, where patients suffering from the ancient disease that has recently been renamed "Hansen's disease," are treated and often discharged to lead normal lives in their home communities.

When the U. S. Public Health Service acquired the State facility at Carville in 1921, the old hospital at Indian Camp plantation was gradually converted into a modern treatment and research center. New drugs and better methods of treatment in recent years have made it possible for most of Carville's patients to be discharged in a very short time.

For patients who must undergo long periods of hospitalization, the U. S. Public Health Service offers a rehabilitation program that is designed to help them to become contributing members of society when they return to their homes. Full-time teachers give elementary and high school courses at the hospital, arrangements are often made for vocational training or college work, and every effort is made to encourage the patient to upgrade the level of his educational achievements.

A swimming pool, tennis courts, golf course, and a lake where patients can enjoy fishing and boating are located on the hospital grounds at Carville. Many social and recreational activities are sponsored, and a bimonthly magazine, *The Star*, is staffed with patients.

A recent breakthrough in laboratory research at Carville offers some hope for progress toward the development for a cure for Hansen's disease. In the meantime, seminars and workshops keep doctors, nurses, therapists, social workers, and medical missionaries informed about the most effective drugs and the best methods for treating the disease and caring for the patients.

Admission to the hospital at Carville is voluntary, and patients are free to leave at any time they desire to do so. They are, of course, encouraged to stay until discharge can be recommended by the medical staff. At present the hospital has about 300 patients, with perhaps 100 out on passes and leading relatively normal lives elsewhere with the disease under control. Visitors over the age of 16 are welcomed at the hospital. Carville's cheerful atmosphere is a far cry from the old "pest house" of the past that was maintained for the purpose of confining involuntarily persons whose only crime was that they had become the victims of a serious disease for which no cure was known.



CLAIBORNE LANDING, LOUISIANA

Mile 188.3 AHP, Map 48
Right bank, descending

William Charles Cole Claiborne was born in Virginia, in the portentous year of 1775. At the age of 20, the young man went to Tennessee, where the following year he helped frame a constitution for the new State.

When Claiborne was 26 years old, President Thomas Jefferson appointed him to serve as governor of the Mississippi Territory. In 1803, Governor Claiborne and General James Wilkinson were appointed commissioners to receive possession of the vast territory known as the Louisiana Purchase. Jefferson then named Claiborne as the temporary governor of the Orleans Territory and later appointed him its permanent governor.

In September, 1811, Louisiana was getting ready to elect its first State governor, and William Claiborne wrote to his friend Julien Poydras that he had purchased a plantation and planned to become "a plain simple Planter." Claiborne was a candidate for governor of the new State, but he thought his chances of election very slim. He was mistaken; he won the office by a large majority.

In 1817 Governor Claiborne was elected to serve in the U.S. Senate, but he died within a year. He was 42 years old at the time of his death.

Claiborne's plantation was on the west bank of the Mississippi, and the old steamboat landing and the U.S. Coast Guard navigation light in the area still bear his name.

HOHEN SOLMS, LOUISIANA

Mile 185.6 AHP, Map 48
Right bank, descending

Hohen Solms was a small German community established by John Reuss, who purchased several plantations in the area and operated them under the name of Germania plantation. After the Civil War, Reuss purchased the old Ashland plantation on the left bank of the river opposite Hohen Solms, and renamed it Belle Helene, in honor of his daughter.

Ashland had been built in 1841 for Duncan Farrar Kenner. Kenner was interested in law and political affairs, and was a sugar planter as well. He was a delegate to the secession convention in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1861.

During the war, Kenner was appointed to go to London to negotiate a loan of \$30 million for the Confederacy. He arrived in London in 1865, too late to carry out his

mission. After the war, Kenner obtained a pardon for his participation in secessionist activities and returned to Louisiana. He found his sugar fields ruined and his thoroughbred horses stolen, but he recovered from his misfortunes and at the time of his death in 1887 was the possessor of a larger estate than he had had before the war.

When Kenner built Ashland, he named it for the Kentucky home of Henry Clay, whom he admired tremendously. The two-story house, with its thick walls of solid brick and its handsome brick columns, still stands in a beautiful setting of moss-hung liveoaks, some distance from the river and protected by the mainline levee system in front of it.



PLANTATIONS IN ASCENSION PARISH. Ashland, later known as Belle Helene, was one of the more impressive of the plantation homes in Ascension Parish, Louisiana. An 1896 map shows the location of Ashland and other river plantations in the Parish.

GEISMAR, LOUISIANA

*Mile 185.1 AHP, Map 48
Left bank, descending*

Between 1718 and 1722, a large number of German settlers were recruited by John Law for the Louisiana colony. Law was a flamboyant adventurer and financier who had won the confidence of the French people and their King, and he headed a company that promised to create a new paradise on earth in the New World.

The German farmers, like people elsewhere, believed Law's relentless propaganda and agreed to go to Law's own concession on the Arkansas, where they would help develop his own personal empire. Law dazzled the German farmers with promises, but when his "Mississippi Bubble" burst, he abandoned them without a backward glance. Most of them went back down the river, hoping to find passage back to Europe. Bienville, the harassed young governor of the colony, persuaded them to settle on the river above the city.

"The German Coast," as it was called, became widely known for its neat and prosperous little farms. The industry and energy of the Germans had accomplished what the French settlers had been unable to do, and the Germans helped bring a measure of stability to the hard-pressed colony which had proved so expensive and useless to the French government.

Swiss, Spanish, and American planters eventually joined the German communities, but it was the French influence that prevailed. Absorbed culturally and linguistically by the French, the German communities kept their German names.

EVAN HALL PLANTATION, LOUISIANA

*Mile 177.9 AHP, Map 48
Right bank, descending*

Evan Jones purchased a Spanish land grant on the west bank of the Mississippi in 1778, and built an impressive house that he called "Evan Hall." Jones was an American, but he could hold his own with the wealthy, cultured French planters around him. Talented and well-educated, he soon became one of the wealthiest and most influential planters in the New Orleans area.

Evan Hall has disappeared, but the well-built brick slave quarters have only in recent years fallen into ruin. There is a large sugar refinery near the site that is known as the Evan Hall Refinery.

BAYOU LAFOURCHE

Mile 175.5 AHP, Map 48
Right bank, descending

“The Fork,” or Bayou LaFourche, was a narrow outlet of the Mississippi that carried excess flows of the great river to the Gulf in flood times. In high water, the little waterway that meandered for 110 miles before it emptied into the Gulf of Mexico was navigable for steamboats but was a mixed blessing for early settlers in the area. While it was sometimes a useful transportation artery, it also allowed their plantations to be inundated all too frequently.

John James Audubon was in the Bayou LaFourche country early in January, 1821. He complained that it “rained and blowed hard,” but said he did not let the weather prevent him from taking a long walk to the swamp that lay behind the plantations. He was astonished by the number of birds he saw, and was fascinated by some fields of unpicked cotton. “The white bolls made it look like as if a Heavy Snow had fell and froze on every Pod,” Audubon wrote in his Journal.

In 1903, local interests built a dam across the mouth of the Bayou LaFourche, to keep it from pouring flood waters down on their fields. It was agreed that the dam would be a temporary one, which was to be removed on or before December 13, 1907. An Act of Congress in 1935 belatedly recognized the fact that the dam was still there, and authorized the permanent closure of Bayou LaFourche.

DARROW, LOUISIANA

Mile 175.4 AHP, Map 48
Left bank, descending

Opposite Donaldsonville, Louisiana, is the small town of Darrow, and just north of Darrow is another of Ascension Parish’s imposing old plantation houses. The massive house, called “The Hermitage,” was begun in 1812. The owner, Michel Doradou Bringier, had to delay the completion of his home while he helped Andrew Jackson overwhelm the British Army below New Orleans in 1815. Bringier was a great admirer of the old general, and when he completed his impressive house he named it for Jackson’s well-known retreat in Tennessee.

The Hermitage was remodelled around 1850. Its large Doric columns are considered to be among the most perfectly proportioned ever constructed in Louisiana, and they suit the dimensions of the great house with a harmony not always attained in southern architecture.

The house and its furnishings were damaged slightly during the Civil War. The Hermitage has not been occupied in recent years and is deteriorating rapidly. Oil wells have replaced sugar as a source of wealth in the vicinity of Darrow, but even oil well fortunes appear to be inadequate for the maintenance of a home the size of The Hermitage.

DONALDSONVILLE, LOUISIANA

Mile 175.2 AHP, Map 48
Right bank, descending

Donaldsonville was already an old community when the United States declared itself to be an independent nation. A trading post had been established there around 1750, and the parish church had been built in 1772.

In 1806, William Donaldson acquired a large tract of land in the area, and laid out a town on the river bank that was first called "La Ville de Donaldson." Donaldson was a native of Great Britain, but he spoke French fluently and was much admired by his French neighbors. An informant writing to President Thomas Jefferson in 1806 said of him: "The people here consider Donaldson a perfect, honest man."

The village at Bayou LaFourche soon became known as Donaldsonville. When it was decided in 1829 that the capitol of the State of Louisiana ought to be located somewhere other than in the city of New Orleans, Donaldsonville offered the legislature a fine brick building that had been built in 1825. The offer was accepted, and the legislature met at Donaldsonville in January, 1830, for a full three-month term. In 1831, the legislators returned to Donaldsonville, but stayed only four days before adjourning and moving back to New Orleans. The State House at Donaldsonville became a school building, and was later demolished.

During the Civil War, Admiral David Farragut became enraged when Union boats were fired upon from the river bank at Donaldsonville, and he ordered the town destroyed. The Union gunboats obediently bombarded the town, and a party of soldiers went ashore and burned some hotels, homes, and wharf buildings in the main section of the town.

On August 11, 1862, the citizens of the little town gathered to discuss the Union attack on the undefended village. They noted uneasily that Farragut had promised to destroy every house in Donaldsonville if his boats were molested again, and the people of the town said that they believed he would not hesitate to do just that. They made a public plea to Confederate sympathizers in the area to refrain from harassing the Union boats.

During the bombardment, the Navy guns had scored a direct hit on a Catholic convent in the town. A group of the nuns went right down to New Orleans and told Benjamin

Butler, the commanding general, exactly what they thought of this kind of warfare. The general was embarrassed, apologized profusely, and said that he would send some of his soldiers to repair the damage to the convent.

The commander of one of the gunboats discovered after the engagement that he had inadvertently fired on a French flag, thinking it was a rebel banner. He apologized to the people for his mistake and confessed his error to Admiral Farragut. The admiral told the gunboat captain not to worry. "There are only two flags on this river that we recognize," he declared. "They are the U. S. flag and the enemy flag. We will fire on the enemy flag wherever we find it, and if the rebels in Louisiana think they can protect themselves by hanging out a French flag, they are very much mistaken."

Since the people who were fired on in this incident were actually French citizens, who had hoisted their national flag with the permission of the French consul in New Orleans, Farragut's nondiplomatic attitude might have created an international incident. Fortunately, the Admiral's stated intention to fire on French flags went officially unnoticed in the general confusion of the war.

The same gunboat captain who reported firing on the French flag made another report about some soldiers he found pillaging and looting private homes in the Donaldsonville area. It was all right to fight the enemy in a "manly" way, he told Admiral Farragut stiffly, but he bitterly resented having to use his Navy vessel to protect Army men who were stealing wine, whiskey, silver, and female wearing apparel from a private residence.

Admiral Farragut shrugged and sent the report on to General Butler. General Butler replied angrily that he saw no necessity for paying any attention to "an improper, bombastic, and ridiculous rodomontade from a mere sub-lieutenant in the U. S. Navy." Farragut responded by sending out a request to all his gunboat commanders that in the future they should be more moderate and discreet if they felt compelled to report pillaging by Army personnel.

On the north edge of Donaldsonville, Union forces took possession of a steamboat landing called Port Barrow, and constructed an earth and log fortification. In 1863, Confederate troops, most of them from Texas, stormed the little fort and occupied it briefly after a dramatic battle. Gunboats were brought up during the engagement, and the rebels were cut off and captured. The town of Donaldsonville suffered some damage again during the bombardment.

Donaldsonville today is a small but busy trade center surrounded by sugar cane and soybean plantations. Many of its citizens are descendants of the Acadian exiles who settled in the area around 1770. It is also the parish seat of Ascension Parish. The population of the town is listed in the Census of 1970 as 7,500, but it is growing rapidly due to industrial development in the area.

There is no small boat marina at Donaldsonville, but fuel and supplies may be obtained on an emergency basis.



BRINGIER POINT, LOUISIANA

Mile 173.0 AHP, Map 48
Left bank, descending

The Bringier family, for whom Bringier Point is named, owned several impressive plantation homes along the banks of the Mississippi above New Orleans. Texcuco, located between Burnside and Grammercy, was built in 1855 by a Bringier. Bocage, built in 1801 and remodelled in the 1840's, was a wedding present for a Bringier daughter. The Hermitage, Union, and Ashland, as well as other plantations in the area, were all homes of various members of the Bringier family.

WADE HAMPTON LIGHT

Mile 172.0 AHP, Map 48
Right bank, descending

Wade Hampton of South Carolina had been a captain in the Army during the American Revolution. Later he was made a brigadier general, and was placed in command of U. S. military forces at New Orleans.

Hampton liked Louisiana so well that he moved a large force of his slaves to the State and acquired a plantation above the city at Point Houmas. Thomas Nuttall, an Englishman who had little patience with the institution of slavery, inspected General Hampton's plantation in 1819 and called its owner "a vast monopolizer of human liberty" who possessed 400 slaves and who had collected "an immense fortune of 150,000 dollars" from crops raised in a single year on his Louisiana plantation.

Nuttall said sourly that he did not envy the rich planters of Louisiana. "Between the fears of inundation, the efforts of the enslaved Africans to emancipate themselves, and the fatality of the climate, the opulent planters of Louisiana possess no enviable advantage over the happy peasant who dwells in the security which honest industry and salutary frugality afford him," the Englishman wrote.

General Hampton, of course, might have disagreed with Nuttall's opinion of the relative joys of being a planter or a happy peasant. When he died in 1835, it was reported that Hampton had been the wealthiest planter in the South.



POINT HOUMAS, LOUISIANA

Mile 171.2 AHP, Map 48
Right bank, descending

The Houma Indians had lived on the east bank of the Mississippi until the Tunicas hounded them out of their old home and forced them to seek a new one on the west bank of the river in the area now known as Houma Point.

Henri de Tonti, LaSalle's lieutenant, had called the Houmas the bravest savages on the river, and Father James Gravier who spent some time with them in 1700 added that they were as gentle and kind as they were courageous. He noted with surprise that the Houmas treated their war prisoners with the same gentle courtesy they showed to their own children. The Houma women often wept over the unfortunate captives and did their best to console them for having had the bad luck to be captured in battle.

Father Gravier, who often gave interesting sidelights on the characters of the Indians he visited, also reported that the Houmas were inordinately fond of chickens—not as food, but as pets. He said they had obtained a flock when a vessel was wrecked at the mouth of the Mississippi, and had kept the domestic fowl in their villages ever since, giving them the run of the cabins in the winter. The Houmas would never sell their chickens to voyagers who might eat them, Gravier said, but were glad to give them to anyone who professed to want them for pets.

In 1811, Governor William C. C. Claiborne received a visit from the chief of the Houma tribe in New Orleans. The governor, a kindhearted man, noted sadly that there were less than 80 surviving Houma Indians in Louisiana. He spent \$100 on a present for the old chief, and thanked the Houmas for their many kindnesses to French settlers in the colony's early days.

BURNSIDE, LOUISIANA

Mile 170.3 AHP, Map 48
Left bank, descending

John Burnside, for whom this community is named, was an Irish immigrant who came to Louisiana, became a sugar planter, and died a very wealthy man. He had purchased three or four old plantations on the west bank of the river in the 1850's and in 1857 became the owner of the fine old house that was called Houmas House.

The original house at Houmas plantation had been built late in the 18th Century under Spanish dominion. It had been occupied for a time by John Smith Preston, the son-in-law of General Wade Hampton. Preston and his wife had preserved the original dwelling and in 1840 had attached to it an entirely new house, which was joined to the

older one by an arched carriageway. The new house was two and one-half stories high, with columns on three sides.

By the time John Burnside purchased the Houmas House in 1857, he was one of the largest slave owners in Louisiana and people were calling him “the Sugar Prince.” He was said to have had 6,000 acres of cane in one unbroken tract in 1861. During the Civil War, Burnside, still a British subject, kept his great house intact and defied the Federal forces to molest him. After the war, he continued planting sugar cane with hired labor.

Long after Burnside’s death, Houmas House was purchased by Dr. George B. Crozat of New Orleans, who restored the dwelling to its former state of perfection.

UNION, LOUISIANA

Mile 166.7 AHP, Map 48
Left bank, descending

A daughter of the Bringier family of Louisiana made her home at Union plantation, and the village located on the site today preserves the plantation name.

Around Union, it was formerly the custom of local people to celebrate Christmas Eve by lighting huge bonfires on the levee. Wood was gathered for weeks in advance, and stacked around a tall center pole. When the fire was lit, tall reeds called “roseaux” were tossed into the blaze. They exploded with firecracker noises that gave added excitement to the occasion.





RIVER PLANTATIONS IN ST. JAMES PARISH, LOUISIANA. Union plantation was one of many large and well-known sugar plantations in St. James Parish. The house at Union plantation has long since disappeared, but plantation homes at St. Louis and Oak Alley, on the west bank, still stand.

WHITE HALL PLANTATION, LOUISIANA

Mile 165.5 AHP, Map 49
Left bank, descending

Confederates forces established a battery of seven guns in the White Hall vicinity during the Civil War. The White Hall battery inflicted severe damage on several Union gunboats in 1863. The *New London* was hit several times, and the *Monongahela* received a direct hit that penetrated her bulkhead, killed a sailor, and fatally wounded Captain Abner Read, commander of the Union vessel. In the emergency, the boat's young executive officer, George Dewey, took command. He was later to become famous when, as an Admiral in the U. S. Navy, he commanded a victorious American fleet in Manila Bay during the Spanish-American War.

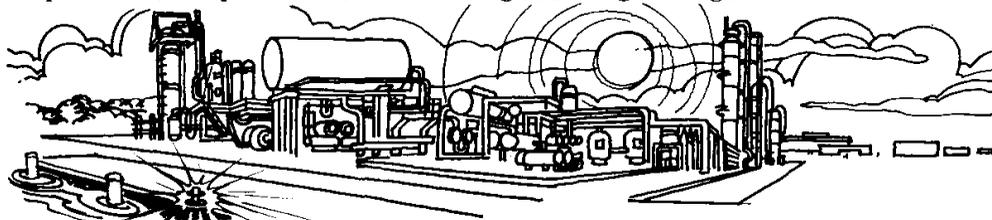
UNCLE SAM LANDING, LOUISIANA

Mile 160.4 AHP, Map 49
Left bank, descending

A plantation complex at Uncle Sam Landing was constructed in 1842 by Pierre Auguste Samuel Fagot and remained a river landmark for almost 100 years. The house was a very large, two-story structure with 28 tall columns, and it was surrounded by 46 other plantation buildings. Forty of the buildings were slave cabins, lined up along a double row of live-oak trees, with a sugar house at the end of the lane. Two smaller cottages and two garconnières were designed in the same style as the big house. The garconnières were living quarters for young bachelors on the southern plantations.

By the late 1930's the live-oak trees and cabins had begun to cave into the river, as the currents attacked the bank in front of Uncle Sam plantation. In 1940 it became necessary to construct a setback levee, and the deserted mansion and other plantation buildings were demolished to make way for the new embankment.

Where steamboats once landed to pick up shipments or passengers from Uncle Sam plantation, a chemical company now maintains a loading dock. Nothing remains of the plantation, except the name of the landing and navigation light.



CANTRELLE REACH

Mile 160.0 AHP, Map 49

In 1806, William C. C. Claiborne wrote President Thomas Jefferson that Michael Cantrell had been a favorite of the people of Louisiana for 40 years. When Cantrell had served as parish judge, Claiborne told the President, he had once had to pass sentence on his own son-in-law. The young man had been charged with assault and battery, had been tried in the parish court, and had been found guilty. Cantrell fixed him with a stony stare and decreed: "One month in prison and a fine of \$500." It was a good example of the old man's honesty and integrity, Claiborne thought.

Cantrell donated land and money to St. James Parish in 1770 for a church that was to be a river landmark for more than a century. When it was demolished in the late 1930's, some of the materials and furnishings went into the new St. James Church.

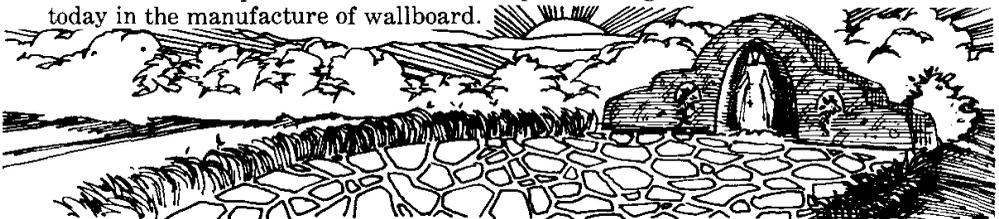
The area around the community of St. James Church is said to have been the site of the earliest settlement made by the Acadians who were exiled from Nova Scotia by the British in 1755. The first documented evidence of the arrival of Acadian refugees is that four families arrived in 1763 or 1764. By 1768 there were said to be about 500 of the French-speaking Acadians in Louisiana, and in 1785 1,600 more of the refugees were brought to Louisiana from France. It is estimated that today about a half-million people in Louisiana are descended from the Acadian (or 'Cajun) settlers.

CONVENT LANDING, LOUISIANA

Mile 158.7 AHP, Map 49

Left bank, descending

The village and the old river landing at Convent, Louisiana, are named for St. Michael's Convent, established by a group of French nuns in 1825. A long central building completed early in 1848 served as a school for the daughters of the wealthy planters in the area. The school building is no longer in existence, but St. Michael's Church is still in use. The church contains a unique grotto constructed of "bagasse" and shells. Bagasse is the fiber that remains after juice is crushed from sugar cane. Often used in the past as fuel for the steam-powered sugar mills, the material is used today in the manufacture of wallboard.



COLLEGE POINT, LOUISIANA

Mile 157.4 AHP, Map 49
Left bank, descending

College Point took its name from Jefferson College, a school established on the point in 1831. In 1842, it was partially destroyed by a fire, and in 1845 the State of Louisiana withdrew financial support from the institution. In 1855, bankruptcy temporarily closed its doors. Valcour Aime, a wealthy sugar planter, purchased the property at auction and presented it to the Marist Fathers of the Catholic Church, who reopened the school.

In 1927, the college ceased to function again. It was then purchased by the Jesuit order of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Jesuits made it into a retreat for laymen.

ST. JAMES LANDING, LOUISIANA

Mile 156.5 AHP, Map 49
Right bank, descending

So many legends have been told about the plantation of Valcour Aime that it is difficult at this late date to sort fact from fancy. Certainly there can be no doubt that the owner of "Le Petit Versailles" was an extremely wealthy man whose life-style was spectacular enough to attract wide attention even in an age when lavish living was no novelty to the sugar planters of Louisiana.

From a plantation record that he kept, the following staggering figures describe Aime's operations in 1852. In that year, he had 15,000 acres of land, which he cultivated with the help of 215 slaves. About 800 acres were planted to sugar cane, 300 to corn, 150 to crops belonging to the slaves, and the remainder was swampy forest. His 1852 sugar crop yielded a gross return of almost \$100,000. He had a sugar mill that was operated by an 80 horsepower steam engine. Aime's property in 1852 was valued as follows: \$360,000—value of land; \$100,000—value of buildings; \$60,000—value of machinery; \$170,000—value of slaves; \$11,000—value of livestock. Total value, \$701,000. In 1852, of course a dollar was worth considerably more than it is today and a man who had an income of more than \$100,000 per year could live like a king.

Valcour Aime's plantation home has disappeared, along with the fabulous gardens, with their artificial lakes, miniature river, and small but elaborate fort built for a child's playtoy. Aime's gardner, imported from Paris, was said to have had 30 slaves under his constant supervision. The mansion in which the family lived was built in 1799, and survived until the second decade of the 20th Century, when it was destroyed by fire.

OAK ALLEY, LOUISIANA

*Mile 153.5 AHP, Map 49
Right bank, descending*

Oak Alley was built in 1836 for J. T. Roman III, brother of a Louisiana governor. When Roman acquired the property, it already had a double line of impressive live oaks leading from the house site to the river. The trees had been planted by some earlier settler.

River pilots who could see only the double row of trees from the river gave the house its name. The 28 trees today are each from 15 to 30 feet in circumference, and their branches meet overhead, interlacing to form a shaded avenue about 300 yards long. At the end of the row of trees is the old plantation house, made of brick, covered with a soft, pink plaster.

The house at Oak Alley is 70 feet square, with a large central hall and four rooms on each of its two stories. Its hand-hewn cypress beams, hand-made bricks, and hand-wrought ironwork, together with fine imported mantels and other decorative details, make it one of the most interesting of the surviving plantation homes in Louisiana.



OAK ALLEY. An impressive double row of live-oak trees planted by an early settler gave a plantation home the name by which it is known today. The branches of the live oaks meet overhead and form a shaded avenue. No longer visible from the river, the avenue of oaks can be seen from the river road that lies behind the levee. The plantation house, built in 1836, is almost hidden by the large trees.

VACHERIE, LOUISIANA

Mile 150.0 AHP, Map 49
Right bank, descending

Colonial enterprises were often family affairs, and no one could have been surprised when two grandnephews of Jean Baptiste LeMoynes de Bienville received a large grant of land at “La Vacherie,” on the west bank of the river above New Orleans.

The small community which still bears the name of Vacherie was later established by German and Acadian settlers, who made it one of the area’s early cattle raising centers.

During the Civil War, Confederates planted a battery of six guns at Vacherie, and harassed the Union gunboats as they patrolled the Mississippi between Donaldsonville and New Orleans.

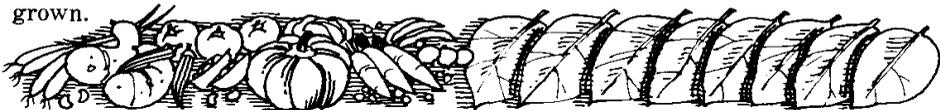
LUTCHER, LOUISIANA

Mile 147.6 AHP, Map 50
Left bank, descending

When the first French settlers in Louisiana were trying to find a money crop that would enable them to survive, many of them experimented with tobacco. The tobacco they raised proved adequate for home use, but had little commercial value, with the notable exception of one strain developed in the area now known as Lucher.

The unusual strain of tobacco, called “Perique tobacco” in honor of the lucky man who developed it, is still grown on a narrow ridge of land near Lucher, Louisiana—and nowhere else in the world. It is processed in a small plant located in the little town, and is used by tobacco companies for blending with milder varieties. Perique tobacco is black and strong, and requires three years for curing. It is one of the most expensive tobaccos on the market, and is grown today by many small farmers, some of them descendants of Pierre Chanet (known to his friends and relatives as “Perique”), who developed it so long ago.

The town of Lucher itself was an early sawmill community. When the sawmill had disposed of all the merchantable timber in the area, the town became a rural community surrounded by small farms where vegetables and Perique tobacco are grown.



GRAMMERCY, LOUISIANA

Mile 146.4 AHP, Map 50
Left bank, descending

Grammercy, Louisiana, now the home of the Colonial Sugar Refinery, now has sugar and chemical docks around its old steamboat landing. The area was plantation country until recent years, with several well-known plantation homes located in the vicinity.

Mount Airy was one of the plantations, and the house still stands. It is the familiar Louisiana "raised cottage" type, but has an elaborate cast-iron stairway on the outside, together with a cast-iron gallery and belvedere railings. There are eight wooden columns and several wide doors with decorative fanlights.

Near Garyville, between Grammercy and Reserve, Louisiana, is another famous old plantation house. San Francisco was built in 1850 for the son of a sugar planter. Its style, perhaps for lack of a better name, is often referred to as "steamboat gothic." The house has a profusion of decorative details that make it unique, and has been perfectly restored to its original grandeur.

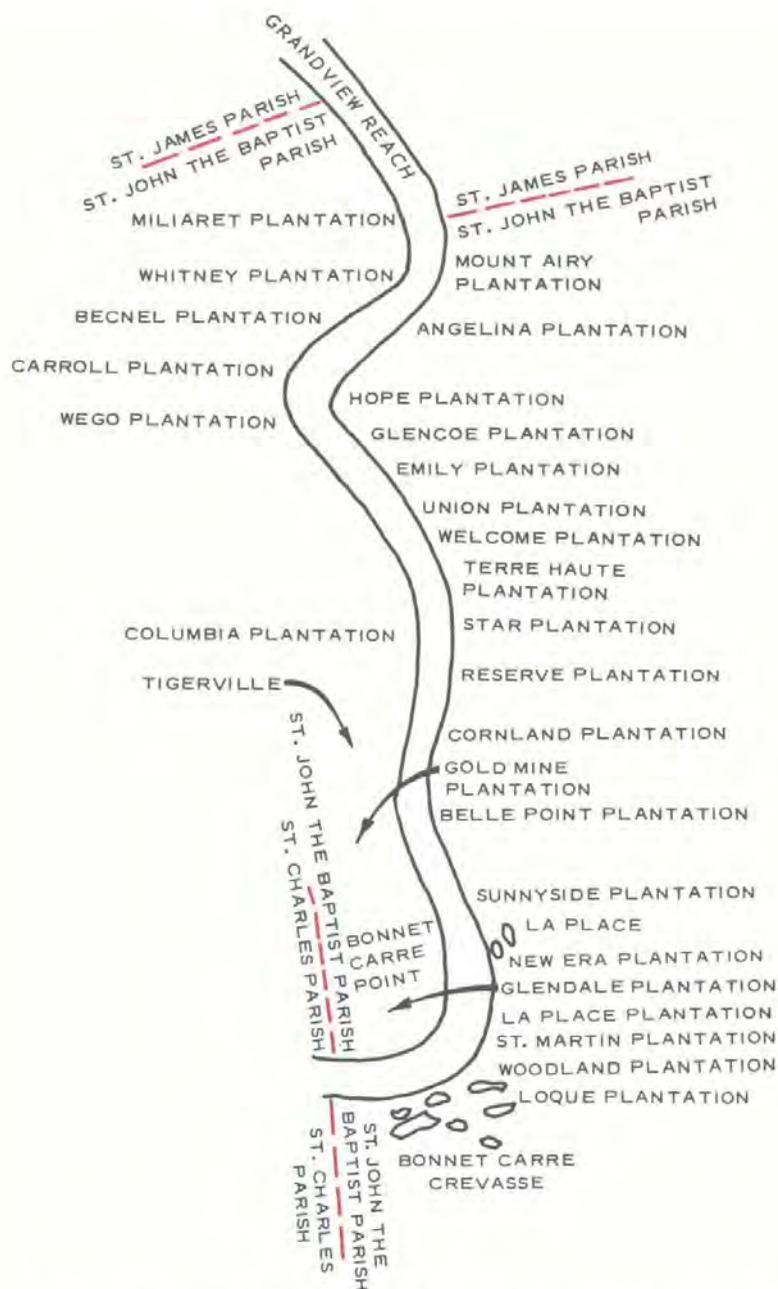
RESERVE, LOUISIANA

Mile 138.6 AHP, Map 50
Left bank, descending

Reserve, Louisiana, is a small town located in the heart of one of the most productive sugar cane producing areas of Louisiana. It is the home of Godchaux Refinery, one of the nation's largest sugar companies.

Sugar cane has been the basis of Louisiana's agricultural economy for almost two hundred years. Early French settlers in the Louisiana colony had tried to produce it in 1725, but the effort was a failure. They tried again in 1762, and failed again. They had turned to indigo and cotton as export crops, but in the closing years of the century, the indigo was all destroyed by insects and the cotton that had to be separated from its seed by hand was hardly profitable enough to make it worth raising.

In 1795, Etienne de Bore, made desperate by crop failures, decided to risk everything he had on one more effort to produce sugar. He bought a supply of seed cane, engaged a professional sugar maker, installed machinery for grinding and boiling the cane, and made \$12,000 on his first crop. His neighbors were quick to follow his example. An influx of refugees from Santo Domingo gave impetus to the industry. The newcomers were familiar with sugar culture and had brought their skilled slaves with them to Louisiana.



LOUISIANA PLANTATIONS IN ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST PARISH. Mount Airy and other well-known Louisiana sugar plantations are shown lining the banks of the Mississippi in the above map of a portion of St. John the Baptist Parish. The map was made in 1896, and some of the plantation homes have survived to the present day.

By 1827 there were 308 sugar estates in Louisiana, employing about 21,000 able-bodied slaves in the production and processing of the crop. By 1849 there were 1,536 sugar plantations, employing more than 100,000 slaves in the production of the profitable crop.

The sugar plantations today are highly mechanized, but the method of production remains much the same. Cane is planted by burying stalks end to end in a shallow furrow. The new cane comes from the "eyes" of the old stalk. The growing season is from April to October, and cutting usually begins late in October.

In the old days, the cutting had to be done by hand, but today machines are used. The stalks are loaded into high "wagons" and trundled to the sugar refinery behind a tractor. In the mill the cane is crushed, the syrup is processed, and the sugar is produced and refined.

St. Peter's Church at Reserve, built around 1886, has a fine rose window which is a memorial to one of the Godchaux family. Edward Godchaux was a sugar planter, business man, and philanthropist, and was much respected and admired by the people of the Parish.

BONNET CARRE CREVASSE

*Mile 133.0 AHP, Map 50
Left bank, descending*

The east bank of the Lower Mississippi, opposite Bonnet Carre Point, was an area where it seemed almost impossible to construct a levee that could withstand a major flood. Levees had crumbled in the area many times, and when the flood of 1850 came along, it opened up a crevasse that was more than a mile wide. Water flowed through it for more than six months. The crevasse was closed, and in 1859, another break occurred in the same area. It, too, was almost a mile wide.

By the time the flood of 1871 occurred, local interests had succeeded in closing the wide gap again, but the flood brought a new crevasse. In 1874 another major flood broke the levee again, and the local people and the State of Louisiana gave up in despair. Bonnet Carre Crevasse would have to remain open until some kind of outside assistance could be obtained for the difficult and costly repairs. It was closed in 1883 with funds provided by the Mississippi River Commission.

It had been proposed, some time before the Civil War, that the Bonnet Carre Crevasse area be permanently opened to serve as an outlet for the flood waters on the Lower Mississippi. Engineers were dubious about the wisdom of the plan, fearing that the outlet would enlarge (as natural outlets had done so often) and create new problems.

By the mid-1920's modern equipment and new skills made the plan feasible, but the crevasse itself was not chosen as the most suitable location. The mainline levee system permanently closed the crevasse, and the spillway was constructed about five miles south of the old levee break.

HYMELIA CREVASSE

*Mile 131.5 AHP, Map 50
Right bank, descending*

The crevasse at Hymelia plantation occurred on March 26, 1903, and was the most disastrous break in the levees in that major flood year. The levee at Hymelia had been considered perfectly safe, and it was with real astonishment that an observer reported discovering a hole ten feet in diameter at the base of the earthen embankment. The hole enlarged very rapidly, the top of the levee collapsed, and within three hours the break was over 200 feet wide.

For the next few days, desperate and costly efforts were made to close the Hymelia Crevasse. More than 1,000 laborers were put to work constructing pile and wood cribbing, and a sandbag fill. They were making good progress when a barge crashed into the cribbing on April 7 and wrecked it. The workers tried frantically to repair the damaged section, but their task was hopeless. Early in May the work was suspended, after the expenditure of a vast amount of money, materials, and labor to no purpose.

The water that poured through Hymelia Crevasse inundated plantations and villages below, but the long effort to save the levee had given the people time to evacuate their homes before the flood waters reached them. Some plantation owners were able to construct emergency levees to protect them from the water.

During the flood of 1912, there was a similar emergency at Hymelia. The levee collapsed on March 13, 1912, at eight o'clock in the morning, and the local levee board rushed laborers and materials to the area and began to try to close the crevasse. Local interests soon came to the end of their limited resources, and for a time it appeared that the flood waters would flow unimpeded over the plantations and towns below Hymelia. Fortunately, the Mississippi River Commission and the Army Corps of Engineers stepped in to assist the hard-pressed flood fighters, and undertook the responsibility for closing the crevasse. Damages had been estimated at \$25 million in 1903. In 1912 they were much less, for the crevasse was successfully closed.

BONNET CARRE SPILLWAY

*Mile 128.0 AHP, Map 51
Left bank, descending*

The Bonnet Carre Spillway is one of the important elements in the overall plan for the protection of the Lower Mississippi Valley from major floods. Designed to ensure the safety of New Orleans and the levee system above and below the city, the spillway structure and the floodway that carries the flood flow into Lake Ponchartrain have a design capacity of 250,000 cubic feet per second.

The Bonnet Carre area, where crevasses had been so frequent before 1900, was a natural choice for the location of the flood outlet. The spillway project was completed in 1935, at a cost of more than \$14 million, and consists of a concrete control structure with 350 individual bays which can be opened or closed by lifting or dropping the huge timbers that are called "needles." The Bonnet Carre Spillway was used in 1937, 1945, 1950, 1973, and, briefly, in 1975. In every case, the spillway relieved the pressure on the levee system below and served the purposes for which it was designed.

In 1965 the structure suffered considerable damage when Hurricane Betsy swept across it, blowing out all 7,000 of the timber needles. The winds of more than 100 miles per hour blew down trees in the area, damaged fences, and destroyed all the signs. Repairs were made after the storm, the timber needles were quickly replaced, and no permanent damage was done.



BONNET CARRE SPILLWAY. The above photo of the Bonnet Carre Spillway was taken during the flood of 1973, when the control structure was opened to relieve pressure on the mainline levee system. The Mississippi River is in the foreground, and at the foot of the floodway is Lake Ponchartrain.

The same hurricane in 1965 had wrecked or stranded 176 vessels between Baton Rouge and the Gulf. The storm came out of the Gulf of Mexico, hit the shore just west of Grand Isle, lashed New Orleans with 125 miles per hour winds, and passed west of Baton Rouge with winds still blowing harder than 100 miles per hour. In Louisiana, 81 people died in Hurricane Betsy, 17,600 were injured, and 250,000 had to be evacuated from their homes. Total damages were estimated at about two billion dollars.

During the flood of 1973, a serious emergency arose just above the Bonnet Carre Spillway when a caving river bank threatened the integrity of the mainline levee at Gypsy plantation. To prevent a levee failure that would have been disastrous, the Corps of Engineers had to construct a setback levee. The only feasible location for the setback, unfortunately, was right through the middle of the small community called Montz, Louisiana, which lay directly behind the levee. The 44 families who lived in the village were consulted, and after being informed of the very real danger of a crevasse, agreed to the relocation of their homes. Some of the houses were moved, other were demolished, and the residents of the community were relocated in other communities. The town of Montz, Louisiana, ceased to exist. The engineers constructed the setback in record time, and the levee was saved.

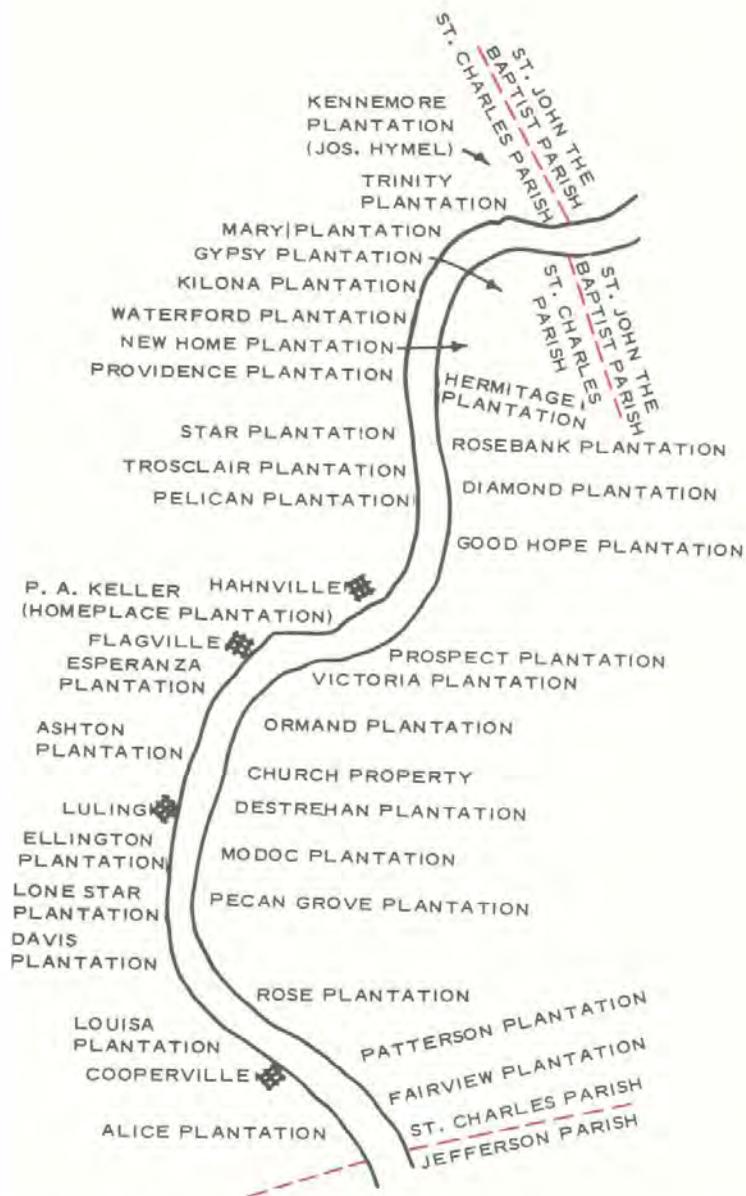
ORMAND LANDING, LOUISIANA

Mile 122.5 AHP, Map 51
Left bank, descending

The plantation house at Ormand is believed to be one of the oldest still standing in Louisiana. Its central portion is framed in cypress timbers, mortised and pegged, and the frame filled with a mud, moss and brick mixture, lathed and stuccoed over. This is the oldest type of construction found in Louisiana, and indicates that the house was built before 1790. Two brick wings appear to have been later additions to the house.

Just below Ormand plantation was an old building that had served as a river landmark from 1806 to 1930. German settlers in the area had built a log church on the river bank in 1740, and in 1806 had replaced it with a neat frame building. They painted the church red, and the steamboat pilots called it "Red Church."

When the Red Church was found to be riddled with termites in 1930, it was demolished and replaced by a new brick one. A statue of St. Charles, more than 100 years old, was taken from the old church and is still in use in the new one.



RIVER PLANTATIONS IN ST. CHARLES PARISH, LOUISIANA. An 1896 map, published by the Mississippi River Commission, shows most of the best known plantations that were located on the banks of the Mississippi in St. Charles Parish, Louisiana. At Ormand plantation, on the left bank descending, is one of the State's oldest surviving plantation homes. The Destrehan plantation house is now in the process of being restored, and on the opposite bank of the river is the Keller Homeplace, a beautifully restored house, with many of the plantation buildings around it still standing.

DESTREHAN, LOUISIANA

Mile 121.1 AHP, Map 51

Left bank, descending

In 1802, Jean d'Estrehan acquired an old plantation house that had been built between 1787 and 1790 for Antoine Robert de Logny. Jean d'Estrehan remodelled the old house in 1840. A recent restoration project revealed the tops of some small wooden posts that had originally supported the gallery. They had apparently been left in place to support the large brick columns that converted the simple West Indies style home to a Greek Revival mansion. The original beams and cypress planking of the gallery ceiling were also uncovered in the restoration work.

Pan American Oil Company acquired the old d'Estrehan property in 1914, and the "company town" that grew up on the property was called Destrehan.

Recently the River Road Historical Society has acquired the house and is restoring it.

DAVIS CREVASSE

Mile 119.0 AHP, Map 51

Right bank, descending

Rice was introduced in Louisiana very early in its colonial history, and by 1726 was being exported to Europe in small quantities. Today most of Louisiana's rice production is carried out on irrigated lands in the southwestern part of the State, but some of the early rice plantations were located along the banks of the Mississippi. Rice planters built flumes in the levee system to conduct the river water into the rice fields, and the flumes were a constant source of worry to levee boards that tried to maintain adequate protection from the frequent floods that struck the Lower Mississippi Valley.

Louisiana law dictated specifications for the construction of all rice flumes that pierced the levee system, but the law was not always obeyed. The State Board of Engineers advocated the use of siphons instead of flumes, but siphons were not very popular with the rice planters, who found the flumes easy to build and less costly to operate.

By 1884 the State laws were very strict, and rice planters were required to remove all below-standard or unlicensed flumes. Cutting the levee for new rice flumes was expressly prohibited.

At Davis plantation, an old rice flume had been filled, apparently not very expertly, and on March 8, 1884, at 1:00 o'clock in the morning, the loose earth began to ooze out of

the levee. Soon a 1,000-foot-wide crevasse opened up, and the flood waters poured into two Louisiana parishes. A railroad company whose rail line was affected by the crevasse expended a lot of money, time, and labor on an attempt to close the crevasse, but the effort failed. With the emergency repairs washed away, the railroad abandoned the crevasse on March 20, and it flowed unimpeded over the country below until the flood subsided.

KENNER, LOUISIANA

Mile 113.0 AHP, Map 51
Left bank, descending

The little community of Kenner, Louisiana, grew up on one of the Kenner family's many plantations, and became a railroad stop before the Civil War. When Farragut's fleet came up the river in 1862 after the capture of New Orleans, two regiments of Union soldiers were landed at Kenner with orders to destroy the railroad line. Afterward, there were charges of pillage, plunder, and general outrage at Kenner. A high-ranking Union officer investigated the matter and reported that the charges were based on fact. The behavior of the troops had been nothing less than brutal, he declared.

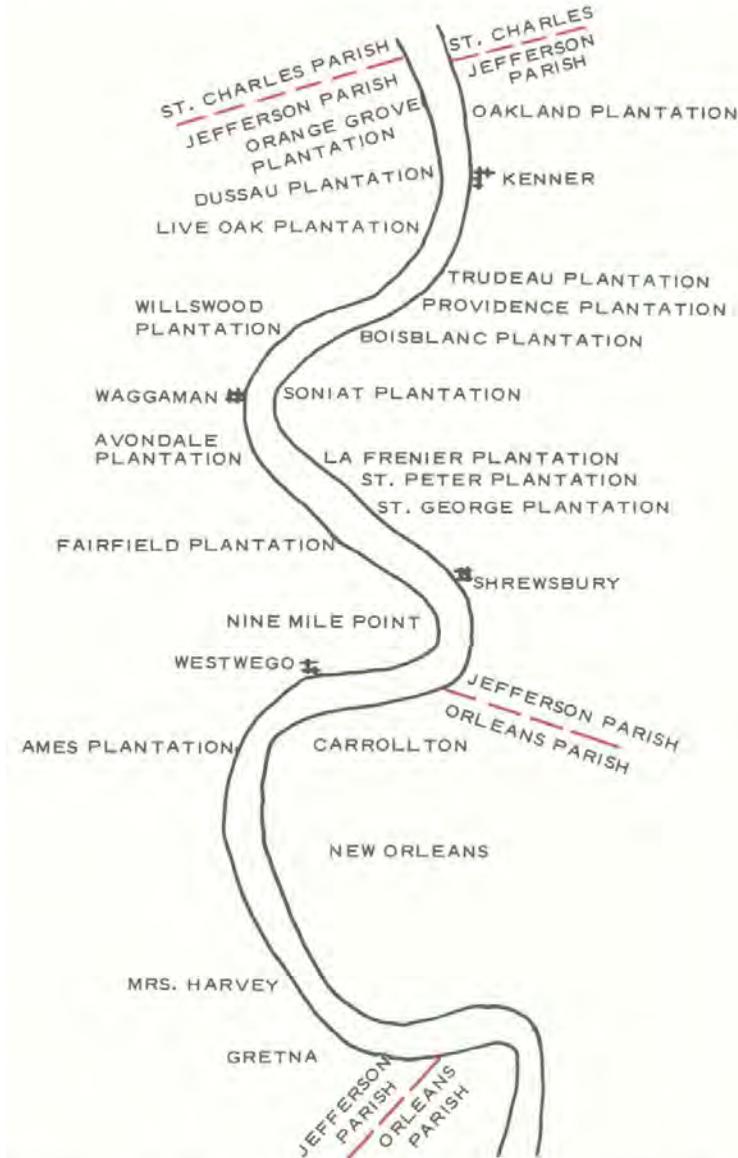
The officer said that he had talked to the men of the regiments involved in the incident, and found them "with few exceptions wholly destitute of a moral sense." They seemed to think, he said angrily, that "pillaging is not only a right in itself but a soldierly accomplishment." He believed that the men and their officers were all in league, and that it would be very difficult to secure evidence against any individual, but he intended to pursue the investigation and try to bring the culprits to justice.

The Kenner incident sent out shock waves that travelled all the way to Washington, D. C. General Benjamin F. Butler, in command at New Orleans, was questioned closely by the U. S. Secretary of War, and had to admit that there had probably been some gross outrages committed at Kenner. He would try to find the culprits and punish them, he promised.

General William T. Sherman could have told the people of Louisiana and the officials in Washington, as he would later tell the citizens of Warren County, Mississippi, that "War is barbarism at best." In 1862, however, civil war was still new to the people on both sides of the conflict, and there was much talk of "civilized warfare," and honor and decency between enemies.

Looting, of course, was not confined to the Union side. The rebels, too, soon learned to raid friends as well as foes to fill their needs. Planters on the Lower Mississippi learned to bury money, silver, china, and other items of value to keep them out of soldiers' hands. During the siege of Vicksburg in 1863, a grieving mother who lived on

a plantation outside the city reported sadly that the Union soldiers had dug up the body of her recently deceased infant on three different occasions, looking for her china and silver. The child had been buried in a flower garden near the house.



LOUISIANA PLANTATIONS IN JEFFERSON PARISH. River plantations in Jefferson Parish, just above New Orleans, are shown on a map published in 1896 by the Mississippi River Commission. Avondale plantation, on the west bank, is now a huge shipyard and the Harvey property above Gretna is the site of the Harvey Canal.

AVONDALE SHIPYARD

*Mile 108.3 AHP, Map 51
Right bank, descending*

Avondale began its shipyard operations in 1938, on the west bank of the river at Avondale plantation, where the rails and ramp of the old Southern Pacific Railway ferry could be utilized as a part of the shipyard equipment.

When the United States became involved in World War II, Avondale received government contracts for ships and equipment needed for the war effort. At the end of the war, the growing little shipyard was diversifying and expanding. Avondale was soon building dredges, fishing boats, offshore oil drilling rigs, and sugar mill equipment, as well as ocean-going and river vessels.

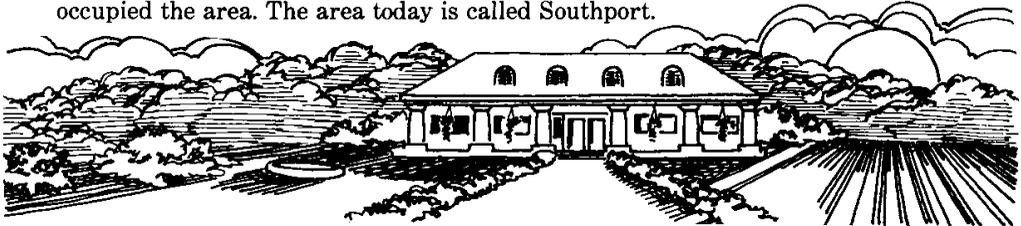
Later conflicts in Korea and South Vietnam led to more government contracts for the company that had already proved its ability to accelerate its operations to meet the urgent needs of the U. S. military forces and the merchant marine fleet. Today the Avondale operations have been further diversified until it is involved in almost every conceivable kind of marine-oriented business.

SOUTHPORT, LOUISIANA

*Mile 104.5 AHP, Map 52
Left bank, descending*

In 1721, Father Pierre Charlevoix stopped at a settlement, called Tchoupitoulas, located a short distance up the river from New Orleans. He observed with great satisfaction that the two Canadian brothers named Chauvin, who lived there, had developed a fine plantation at Tchoupitoulas. The Chauvins had brought nothing with them to Louisiana except their energy, industry, and intelligence, the French priest said, and they had quickly proved that settlements in the colony could be successful, if only the people were willing to work. The Chauvins were certainly showing up "those lazy fellows whose misery unjustly discredits the country," Father Charlevoix said.

The Tchoupitoulas plantation had been named for a tribe of Indians who formerly occupied the area. The area today is called Southport.



HARVEY CANAL AND LOCK (Intracoastal Waterway)

*Mile 98.5 AHP, Map 52
Right bank, descending*

The Harvey Canal, located on the west bank of the Mississippi opposite New Orleans, connects the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway with the Mississippi at New Orleans by way of a 6.5-mile canal that was built by the Army Corps of Engineers.

The Harvey Canal had its origin in a private canal that was in use long before the Corps facility was built. The canal had been opened up by a sugar planter in the area for drainage purposes. Some accounts say that Noel d'Estrehan had his slaves dig the canal, and other say that it was dug by German immigrants who were paid in land. In any case, the canal proved useful for many purposes, and at one time boats that wanted to use it were hauled over the levee on a contraption that the boatmen called "the Submarine Railroad."

In 1845 Joseph Hale Harvey of Virginia married one of d'Estrehan's daughters, and built an elaborate home near the canal. He widened and deepened the waterway, and the river pilots called his ornate, turreted house "Harvey's Castle" and his canal "Harvey Canal."

In 1942 the Harvey family sold the canal and its appurtenances to the United States Government. The house was demolished, and a new lock gate replaced the crude one that had been in use for many years. The new lock was opened for navigation in 1934.

The Harvey Lock is open to all water traffic, free of charge. It is in operation day and night, every day in the year. In 1974, 6 million tons of cargo passed through the lock. Pleasure boats as well as commercial vessels use it as a route to the GIWW west to Brownsville, Texas.

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

*Mile 95.0 AHP, Map 52
Left bank, descending*

On January 11, 1812, the SHIP NEWS column of a newspaper published in New Orleans, Louisiana, announced the arrival of ships from England, Jamaica, Cuba, and the east coast of the United States. At the bottom of the list was this laconic note:

"Arrived at the levee: Steam Boat NEW ORLEANS from Pittsburgh"

Two days later, the same newspaper gave a more detailed report of the arrival of the first steamboat at the New Orleans waterfront. It read as follows:

The Steam Boat NEWORLEANS, from Pittsburg, (sic) arrived here on Friday evening last. The captain reports that she has been under way not more than 259 hours from Pittsburg to this place, which gives about eight miles each hour.

The NEW ORLEANS steam Boat was built at Pittsburg by the Ohio Steam Boat company, under the patent granted to Messrs. Livingston and Fulton of New York. She is intended as a regular trader between this and Natchez and will, it is generally believed, meet the most sanguine expectations of the company.

New Orleans was already an old city when the first steamboat on western waters tied up at the old levee among the sailing ships and flatboats that had made it a busy, bustling little metropolis.

In September, 1717, John Law's Company of the West had decreed that a town be established on the Lower Mississippi, about three leagues from the river's mouth, and that it should be called New Orleans. The orders received by Bienville, who was struggling to keep the colony alive, suggested that the new capitol of Louisiana ought to be located between Lake Ponchartrain and the Mississippi, so that access could be had from either side by water.

Bienville reported in June, 1718, that he was working on the construction of New Orleans, but two years later a traveler noted that the so-called "city" consisted of a hut roofed with palmetto leaves. About a month later, another report said that there were three houses and a warehouse on the site.

Fever, floods, and fires made Bienville's task a difficult one, but by March, 1721, the section of the city that is today known as the "Vieux Carre," was laid out and a census of the inhabitants of the city claimed a population of almost 250. Later the same year, another census listed 470 people, 173 of whom were slaves and 21 of whom were Indians—also slaves.

Father Pierre Charlevoix, a visitor to New Orleans the next year, commented thoughtfully that its buildings and houses would be a disgrace to the smallest hamlet in France, but added that the situation had so many advantages that if the city and the colony survived at all, New Orleans would some day be a great and wealthy city.

Father Charlevoix was a shrewd observer, and he correctly assessed the full potential of the city. It survived the fires, floods, hurricanes, and political upheavals that made it a French, Spanish, and finally an American city that became the trade center of the Mississippi Valley. Sugar, cotton, rice, slavery, steamboats, and sailing ships all played their part in the development of the great port city. Wealthy planters made it the social center of the South, and immigrants from all over the world made it their home.

When the Civil War began, the queen city of the Mississippi became one of the first objectives of the Union forces. Plans were made; orders were issued. The

Confederates, on the other hand, seemed strangely oblivious of the importance of the city that was already theirs. General Mansfield Lovell, placed in command of the city's defenses, complained in vain to rebel authorities that the forts below New Orleans were entirely inadequate and that it would be impossible to defend the place with the feeble force under his command. Regiment after regiment left the city, hastening up to Kentucky, Virginia, and to other areas that the military minds of the Confederacy considered more important than the city of New Orleans.

Admiral David G. Farragut, commanding the Union fleet, approached the mouth of the Mississippi in 1862, and his orders were plain, clear, and uncompromising. He was to reduce the forts below the city, take New Orleans, and hold it until it could be occupied by Federal troops. "The Department and the country will require of you success," Secretary of Navy, Gideon Welles, told the Admiral.

Farragut was lucky, as well as capable. Chaos reigned supreme at New Orleans, and the Confederate forces could hardly have been more vulnerable. The Union fleet fought its way easily past the two feeble forts, made mincemeat out of the so-called Confederate defense fleet, and demanded the surrender of New Orleans.

"The city is undefended, and is yours by the power of brute force," the mayor of the city replied bitterly, and the Union forces took possession of it. They occupied it during the war, and left it filled with strife and political turmoil when they had finished "reconstructing" it after the war.

When a semblance of normality began to return to the South, its greatest city began another period of phenomenal growth and prosperity. Today it is the world's third largest port, and its 300 piers and docks are constantly crowded with ships flying the flags of many nations, as well as with diesel towboats and barges that bring the products of the nation to New Orleans for export.



PORT OF NEW ORLEANS

New Orleans likes to advertise itself as the “the city that care forgot,” and “the fun capitol of the world,” but it has not really entirely escaped the problems with which other great urban centers struggle today. It has, however, retained a great deal of its old-world charm and many relics of the past. Tourists find it fascinating, and swarm through the French Quarter at all seasons of the year. Mardi Gras in New Orleans is organized madness, but there are those who enjoy every moment of the balls, parades, and other seasonal festivities.

One of the newest attractions of the city is a new all steel, sternwheel steamboat called the *Natchez IX*, which offers excursions up and down the river in the New Orleans port area. The beautiful steamer can carry 1,600 passengers, and gives visitors to the city and opportunity to see the merchant ships, tankers, freighters, tugs, and towboats that make New Orleans one of the world’s important port cities.

Pleasure boat marinas at New Orleans are not located on the riverfront, but on Lake Ponchartrain. From the Mississippi, pleasure craft pass through the Inner Harbor (Industrial) Canal at Mile 92.6 AHP to Lake Ponchartrain, 5.5 miles east of the river.

Navigation locks on either side of the Mississippi at New Orleans provide passage into the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway for east or west bound voyagers. In 1974, the New Orleans port handled more than 144 million tons of cargo, and this indicates how heavy commercial traffic is in the area. Small craft owners should exercise great caution.

INNER HARBOR NAVIGATION LOCK AND CANAL (Intracoastal Waterway)

*Mile 92.6 AHP, Map 52
Left bank, descending*

The Inner Harbor Navigation Lock and Canal belong to the State of Louisiana and have been in use for more than half a century. The Corps of Engineers operates the lock and part of the canal, and the Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans operate the remainder.

The lock is 640 feet long, 75 feet wide, and has a depth of 31.5 feet. The canal provides access to both the Intracoastal Waterway east of New Orleans, and to Lake Ponchartrain.

A new ship lock and connected channel from the Mississippi River to the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet waterway have been authorized.

A vast amount of iron, steel, grain, shells, chemicals, and petroleum products go through the Inner Harbor Navigation Lock and Canal.



INNER HARBOR NAVIGATION LOCK AND CANAL. In use for more than half a century, the Inner Harbor Navigation Lock and Canal at New Orleans provides access to the Intracoastal Waterway and Lake Ponchartrain and is used by pleasure craft as well as large ocean-going vessels.

CHALMETTE, LOUISIANA

*Mile 89.3 AHP, Map 52
Left bank, descending*

The War of 1812 had officially ended on December 24, 1814, but the British expedition that was then approaching the mouth of the Lower Mississippi did not know it, nor was General Andrew Jackson, in command of the American force that awaited the redcoats, aware that the treaty of peace between Great Britain and the United States had already been signed.

General Jackson had expected the British attack to begin at Mobile, but Jean Laffite, leader of the “Baratarians,” said that New Orleans and the Lower Mississippi Valley was to be the British objective. The Baratarians were privateers who had established a base in the Bay of Barataria. They plundered foreign ships, and supplied New Orleans and the rest of the country with smuggled slaves and other goods. Jean Laffite was their leader, and the British had offered him a fabulous reward if only he and his men and vessels would join them in the attack against New Orleans.

General Andrew Jackson had called the Baratarians “hellish banditti” and William C. Claiborne, governor of the brand new State of Louisiana, called them “a public disgrace.” With the British knocking at the gates of New Orleans, the Americans needed all the help they could get. General Jackson gathered a force that included a handful of U. S. regulars, volunteer militiamen, a battalion of “free persons of color,” a group of Choctaw Indians, and the once-scorned Baratarians. Jackson declared martial law in the city of New Orleans, sent Captain Henry Shreve’s steamboat, the *Enterprise*, up the river to fetch some badly needed ammunition barges, and prepared to defend the city and the river.

The British advance came through Bayou Bienvenue and Bayou Manzano to the plantation below New Orleans owned by Jacques Villere, a militia general. The well-disciplined and experienced British soldiers were within eight miles of the city of New Orleans before the Americans were aware of their approach. When General Jackson was notified, he moved his troops into position silently and hastily. The U. S. Navy’s 14-gun schooner, the *Carolina*, was on hand to assist. The 16-gun converted merchant vessel, *Louisiana*, and two Navy gunboats, were also ready to cooperate.

When the *Carolina* appeared on the river in front of the camp the British had set up on the night of December 23, 1814, the redcoats were as surprised as the Americans had been to learn of their approach a few hours earlier. They fired on the ship, and General Jackson and his troops launched their land attack. It was a noisy, confusing, and inconclusive battle.

For the next few days, it was a standoff, as the British prepared an attack of their own and the Americans dug in to resist them. On December 27, the British succeeded in blowing up the *Carolina* with a well-placed volley of red hot shells. At daylight the next morning, they began their advance. With his motley crew of determined fighters, General Jackson pushed them back. On January 1, the British tried it again. Again they were forced back. On January 8, reinforcements had arrived and heavier guns, and the disciplined British troops were ordered forward. Sir Edward Pakenham, leading the British troops, was killed. When the battle ended, the British had suffered eight times as many casualties as the American Army.

The next day, a flotilla from the British Navy attacked Fort St. Phillip and began a bombardment that lasted eight days. The British shells did little damage and American casualties again were light. The attempt to take the fort was abandoned just before dawn on January 18, 1815, and the same evening the pitiful remnant of Pakenham’s army went back to the British ships that awaited them. General Jackson was surprised to discover the enemy had gone and made no effort to follow the retreating forces.

On January 21, 1815, New Orleans welcomed the victorious Americans and celebrated the end of the War of 1812, but it was not until March 6, 1815, that General Jackson received dispatches informing him officially that the treaty had been signed and ratified, and that his troops should be dismissed and sent home. On Jackson’s recommendation, Jean Laffite and his men received full pardons for their service with the American Army and Navy.

The final and decisive battle had taken place on Chalmette plantation, and the plantation house itself had been destroyed in preparation for the battle. It was later

replaced by another house, built for Judge Rene Beauregard, the son of a Confederate general. The Beauregard house, called Bueno Retiro, still stands in its beautiful setting of moss-hung live oaks and serves as a museum for the Chalmette National Monument, erected to commemorate the Battle of New Orleans. There is also a National Military Cemetery at Chalmette where Union casualties from the Civil War are buried. About half of the 14,000 graves are marked "Unknown."

ALGIERS LOCK AND CANAL (Intracoastal Waterway)

*Mile 88.0 AHP, Map 52
Right bank, descending*

The Algiers Lock and Canal connects the Mississippi River with the Intracoastal Waterway. The lock is 75 feet wide, 800 feet long, and has a controlling depth of 13 feet. The 9-mile channel that leads into the GIWW is 12 feet deep. The Lock was opened to navigation in April, 1956. It was constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers to relieve the overburdened Harvey Lock and Canal.

Algiers, a highly industrialized area, is strung out along the west bank of the river and is officially a part of the city of New Orleans. For more than a century, Algiers has been a boat-building and repair center. There is a U. S. Naval Base, as well as a U. S. Immigration Station, and a Quarantine Station at Algiers.

VIOLET, LOUISIANA

*Mile 84.0 AHP, Map 52
Left bank, descending*

A seven-mile channel called the Lake Borgne Canal begins at Violet, Louisiana, and was formerly much used by light-draft vessels because it cut about 60 miles off the trip from the Gulf to the Port of New Orleans. Since the opening of the Inner Harbor Navigation Lock and Canal at New Orleans, the old canal is used only by fishermen.

POYDRAS CREVASSE

*Mile 82.1 AHP, Map 53
Left bank, descending*

The Poydras community was on the western boundary of the area that early settlers called "Terre aux Boeufs," where about 1,500 Canary Islanders settled under Spanish rule in 1778 and 1779. The small farmers were given supplies and tools and implements by the Spanish government. They used oxen to pull their plows and wagons, and the French phrase "Terre aux Boeufs" meant "Land of Oxen." All of the Canary Islanders spoke Spanish, and were called "Islenos" by the French settlers of Louisiana.

The community of Poydras was virtually wiped out in 1922 by a crevasse in the levee that local interests had constructed. Less than half an hour before the levee collapsed, an inspector had examined the levee and said that it was in excellent condition. The break at Poydras relieved a critical situation at New Orleans, causing the river stage there to fall .2 of a foot in the next 24 hours. The crevasse water spread rapidly over the small farms and citrus groves on the east bank of the river below Poydras.

In New Orleans, the crevasse that had possibly saved the city from disaster, was the object of much curiosity and interest. Thousands of people travelled by automobile to Poydras to see the great crevasse. At Violet, Louisiana, cars were stopped and a donation of \$1 was collected from each of the sightseers, to be used for flood relief.

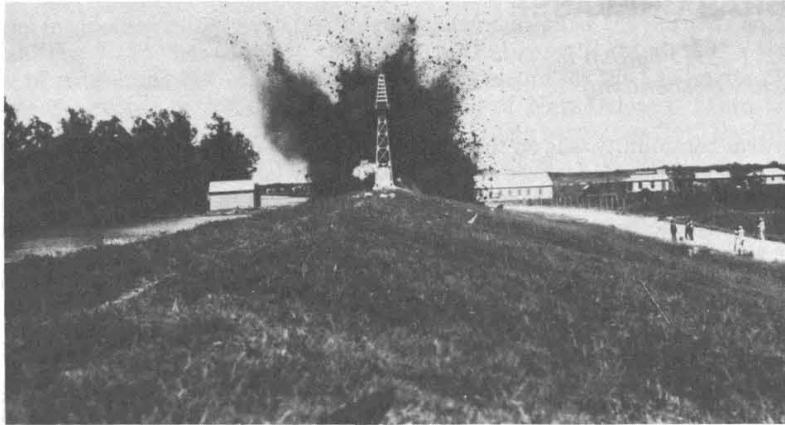
The steamboat *Capitol* was sent down from the city to assist in flood relief work. Refugees were taken from the levees and other high spots as far down as Pointe a la Hache.

CAERNARVON CREVASSE

*Mile 81.3 AHP, Map 53
Left bank, descending*

In 1927, the Lower Mississippi Valley was experiencing the worst flood ever recorded in the river's history. By mid-April, the river was so swollen at New Orleans that levees around the city were in real danger of being overtopped.

After long conferences between State and city authorities and the Army Corps of Engineers, it was agreed that the situation at New Orleans was desperate enough to call for drastic remedial measures. It was decided that an artificial crevasse would be made at Caernarvon plantation, in the hope that this would reduce the flood height at New Orleans and save the city.



CAERNARVON CREVASSE. When the record flood of 1927 threatened to overtop the levees that protected the city of New Orleans, flood fighters blasted an artificial crevasse in the mainline levee below the city at Caernarvon plantation. The result of the first blast, shown in the above photograph, was disappointing. Later, the gap was enlarged; the river at New Orleans began to fall; and the city was saved.

On April 25, 1927, a large crowd of engineers, government officials, reporters, and spectators gathered at Caernarvon to watch the blowing up of the levee. There was some embarrassment when the first charge of dynamite failed to do more than open up a small gap, through which the water trickled very, very slowly. Again and again, divers slid into the muddy water and carefully placed additional charges of dynamite, but the river refused to cooperate. After several days, successive charges opened a wide gap in the levee and the crevasse quickly enlarged until it was about 2,600 feet wide. At New Orleans, the river began to fall.

Many of the people who had lived behind the Caernarvon levee were small farmers, trappers, and fishermen. Not all of them were willing to sacrifice their own homes and fields for the sake of New Orleans. "Let nature take its course and choose her own victims," they grumbled. Residents of New Orleans promised to reimburse the small farmers for their losses.

For a while, it had been feared that the farmers and fishermen might oppose the levee crevasse with violence, and the Governor of Louisiana had ordered a small contingent of national guardsmen to Caernarvon, but they were not needed. The Islenos had bowed to the inevitable and were jamming the road to New Orleans with their ox carts and wagons, carrying all their worldly goods with them as they evacuated their homes.

Small farmers in the Caernarvon area still raise cattle and vegetables today. St. Bernard Parish, in which the community is located, has ground elevations ranging from 11 feet above mean sea level to below sea level. Many shallow lakes, bays, bayous, and canals make the parish attractive to both commercial and sport fishermen. There is some oil and gas production in the parish, as well as several refineries. The population of the area is increasing rapidly, as people spill over from the New Orleans area.

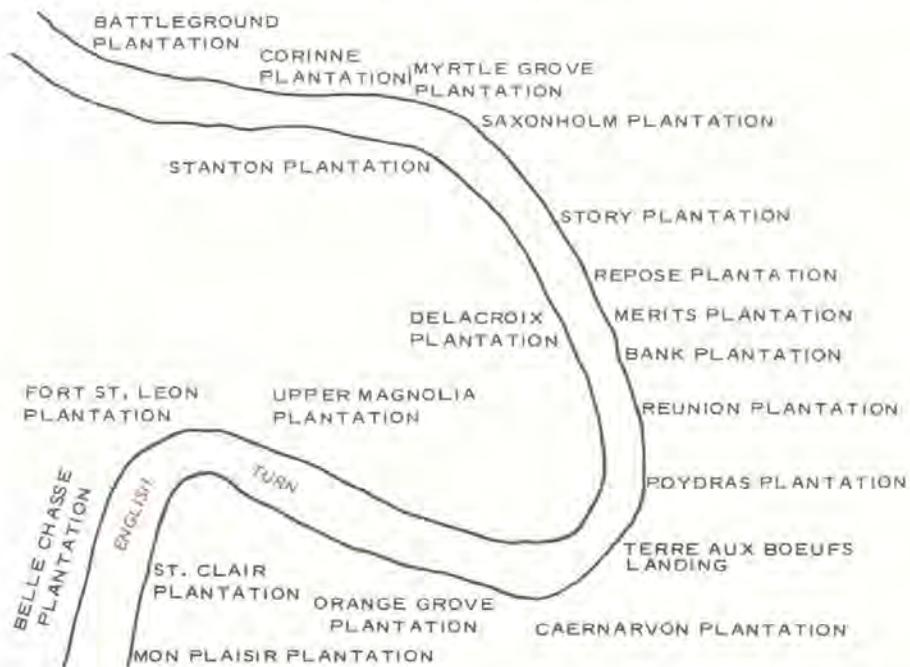
ENGLISH TURN BEND

Mile 78.0 AHP, Map 53

On September 16, 1699, Jean Baptiste LeMoynes, Sieur de Bienville, was descending the Lower Mississippi in a small boat with a handful of men when he met an English ship that had dropped its anchor in a great bend of the river below the bend in which the city of New Orleans is now located.

The ship was under the command of Captain Lewis Bond, who had been engaged to take a group of settlers to the Mississippi to establish a British colony on the lower reaches of the river. Bienville, a lad of 19 at the time, had an air of authority that belied his years. Haughtily informing the English captain that he was in the wrong river, Bienville declared that this one was claimed by the French. A large force of French ships and French soldiers was following close behind him, Bienville added casually, and should appear in the bend above very soon.

The young Frenchman's monumental bluff succeeded. Captain Bond raised his anchor, turned his vessel, and hurried back out into the Gulf of Mexico. From that time forward, the bend was known as "English Turn."



RIVER PLANTATIONS BELOW NEW ORLEANS: English Turn. An 1895 map shows some of the plantations that lined the banks of the Lower Mississippi just below New Orleans. The sharp bend where Fort St. Leon plantation is shown was known as English Turn. Fort St. Leon was a French post established around 1722 to prevent other European powers from sending their ships into the Lower Mississippi.

Later the French officials erected a small fort on the west bank at English Turn. The old fortification, called Fort St. Leon, was strengthened by the Americans during the War of 1812, when batteries were erected and a garrison was stationed there for the protection of New Orleans.

One of the last naval engagements of the Civil War also took place in English Turn. The Confederate ram, *William H. Webb*, had dashed out of the mouth of Red River late in April, 1865, and had run boldly and swiftly through the whole Union fleet that was stationed in the area. Just above New Orleans, the wily commander of the rebel ram raised a U. S. flag, carrying it at half-mast as though in mourning for the assassinated President Lincoln. The ruse fooled observers briefly, but inevitably someone recognized the *Webb* as she was about to pass the city unmolested. Defiantly running up the rebel banner, the steamer sped past the New Orleans waterfront and went downriver with the *U.S.S. Hollyhock* hot on her heels.

The *Webb* had reached English Turn when she met the *U.S.S. Richmond*, coming upstream toward New Orleans. Caught between the two hostile gunboats, the rebel crew had little choice. They ran their vessel to shore, set fire to her, and disappeared into the Louisiana swamps. The daring exploit had taken place almost two weeks after the surrender at Appomattox. The war was grinding to a close, and the *Webb's* bold dash for freedom had failed.

BELLE CHASSE, LOUISIANA

Mile 75.9 AHP, Map 53
Right bank, descending

Judah P. Benjamin, one of Louisiana's most able attorneys, purchased a plantation on the west bank of the Mississippi below New Orleans in 1844. About two years later, he remodelled the old plantation house, converting it to one of the finest mansions in the area.

Benjamin had served in the U. S. Senate from 1853 until 1861, when he resigned his Senate seat to offer his services to the Confederacy. During the Civil War, he was often called "the brains of the Confederate government," and he served the Confederacy as Attorney General, Secretary of War, and Secretary of State. When the war ended in defeat for the South, Benjamin fled to England to escape arrest and never returned to the United States.

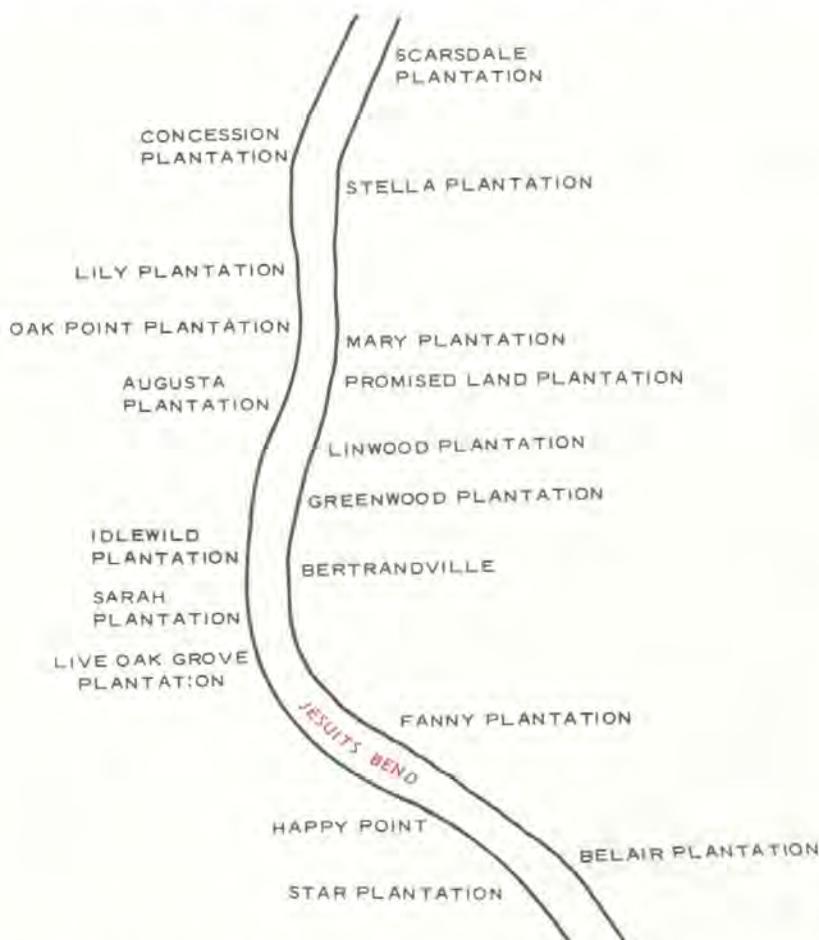
Long after the war, a vigorous effort was made to save the fine old plantation house at Belle Chasse, but restoration and maintenance costs made it impossible, and the mansion soon fell into ruins. It was demolished in March, 1960.

The large community at Belle Chasse today is a suburb of New Orleans, and many of its residents cross the Mississippi every day to work in the city on the east bank.

JESUITS BEND

Mile 68.5 AHP, Map 53

The Society of Jesus is a religious order of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Jesuits took an active part in the early settlement and development of the Lower Mississippi Valley. A Jesuit priest accompanied Iberville and Bienville, and other Jesuits established small missions on the Mississippi, enduring all kinds of incredible hardships and laboring incessantly to convert the Indian tribes to Christianity. Some were murdered for their efforts, but the Jesuits continued their work in Louisiana



RIVER PLANTATIONS BELOW NEW ORLEANS: Jesuits Bend. An 1895 map shows plantations on the east and west banks of the Lower Mississippi, in the area pilots called Jesuits Bend. The bend was named for an order of the Roman Catholic Church. Jesuit priests came to Louisiana with the first French colonists. They established missions and educational institutions and supported their work with produce raised on their plantations in this area.

until they were expelled in 1763 because of European opposition to the Order. They helped introduce indigo, oranges, figs, and sugar cane to the colony, and established missions and educational institutions.

In 1837 the Jesuits were allowed to come back to Louisiana, and they acquired land below New Orleans and operated plantations to support the educational institutions they established in New Orleans and elsewhere. River pilots called this great bend of the river Jesuits Bend, because some of the land belonging to the order was located in the area.

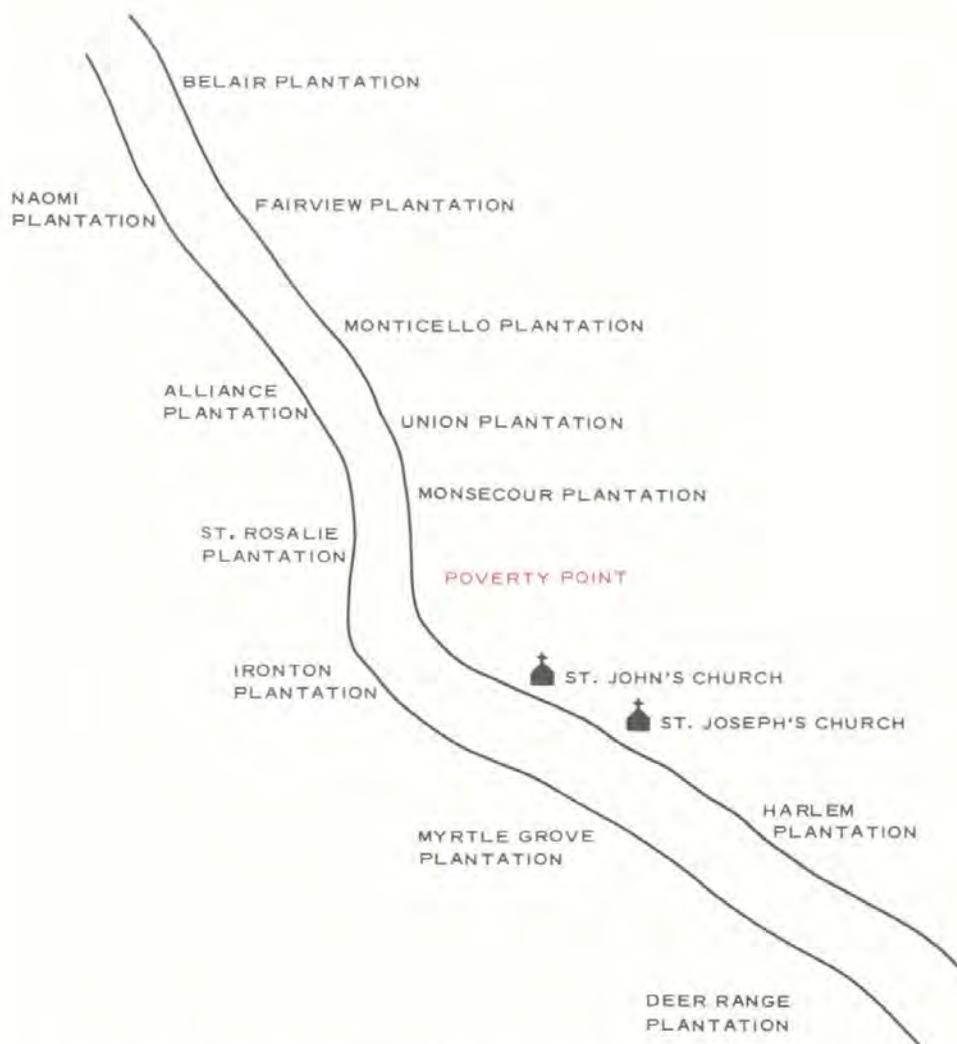
POVERTY POINT, LOUISIANA

Mile 60.0 AHP, Map 54
Left bank, descending

Poverty Point, on the east bank of the Lower Mississippi, was the site of the first French settlement on the river. Located about 38 miles below the present site of the city of New Orleans, the little fort the French built on Poverty Point was called Fort de la Boulaye, or the Fort of the Mississippi. It lay along a low ridge that Indians had assured Bienville would remain beyond the reach of the great floods. The site is believed to have been about one mile north of the present town of Phoenix, Louisiana.

Father Jacques Gravier visited the Fort of the Mississippi in 1700, and found it less than impressive. It was indeed an exaggeration to call it a fort at all, he said, for it consisted only of a battery of six small guns planted on the brow of the ridge that overlooked the river. The soldiers had built five or six crude cabins, he said, and M. de Bienville, the commander, had a decent house. During the last high water, everyone—Bienville included—had been wading knee-deep in water, Father Gravier reported. The fort was abandoned the year after the priest visited it.





RIVER PLANTATIONS BELOW NEW ORLEANS: Poverty Point. An 1895 map published by the Mississippi River Commission shows some of the plantations on the east and west banks of the Lower Mississippi in the Poverty Point area below New Orleans. Poverty Point was the site of the first settlement made on the river by French colonists. It was not a success, and was soon abandoned in favor of New Orleans.

JUNIOR CREVASSE

*Mile 55.0 AHP, Map 54
Right bank, descending*

The steamship *Inspector* was passing Junior Plantation on April 23, 1927, bound for the mouth of the Mississippi. As the ship fought the currents of the greatest flood ever experienced on the river, the pilot suddenly lost control of his ship. The prow of the *Inspector* swung to the right, the vessel lurched forward, and the boat buried her nose in the levee.

The pilot, dismayed by the mishap, tried desperately to keep the vessel jammed in the levee to reduce the flow of water through the gap she had made. Currents caught the stern of the vessel, swinging it around violently and gouging out an even bigger hole in the levee. The gap widened rapidly, and soon flood waters were pouring over the plantations below. The ship remained grounded in the levee for several weeks, preventing any attempt to close the crevasse until long after the flood had ended.

MAGNOLIA PLANTATION, LOUISIANA

*Mile 47.0 AHP, Map 55
Right bank, descending*

George Bradish and William M. Johnson were sea captains, and when they brought their ships up the river to New Orleans they observed with interest the fine plantations that lined the river's banks below New Orleans.

About 1780, Bradish and Johnson acquired a large tract of land on the west bank of the river, and established a plantation of their own. In 1795, the two sea captains pooled their resources and built a magnificent house that they called Magnolia. The Magnolia plantation house had ten large rooms, and thick walls that were made of plaster covered brick. Later Bradish bought out Johnson's interest in Magnolia, and Johnson acquired Woodland plantation, a few miles up the river.

During the flood of 1903, the batture and levee in front of Magnolia plantation suddenly caved into the river, and a wide crevasse appeared. Luckily for the planters and citrus growers in the area below, flood fighters had been expecting the worst. A trainload of materials waited in the railroad yard at Algiers. The train, picking up laborers along the way, rushed to Magnolia and the crevasse was closed in time to prevent severe damage.

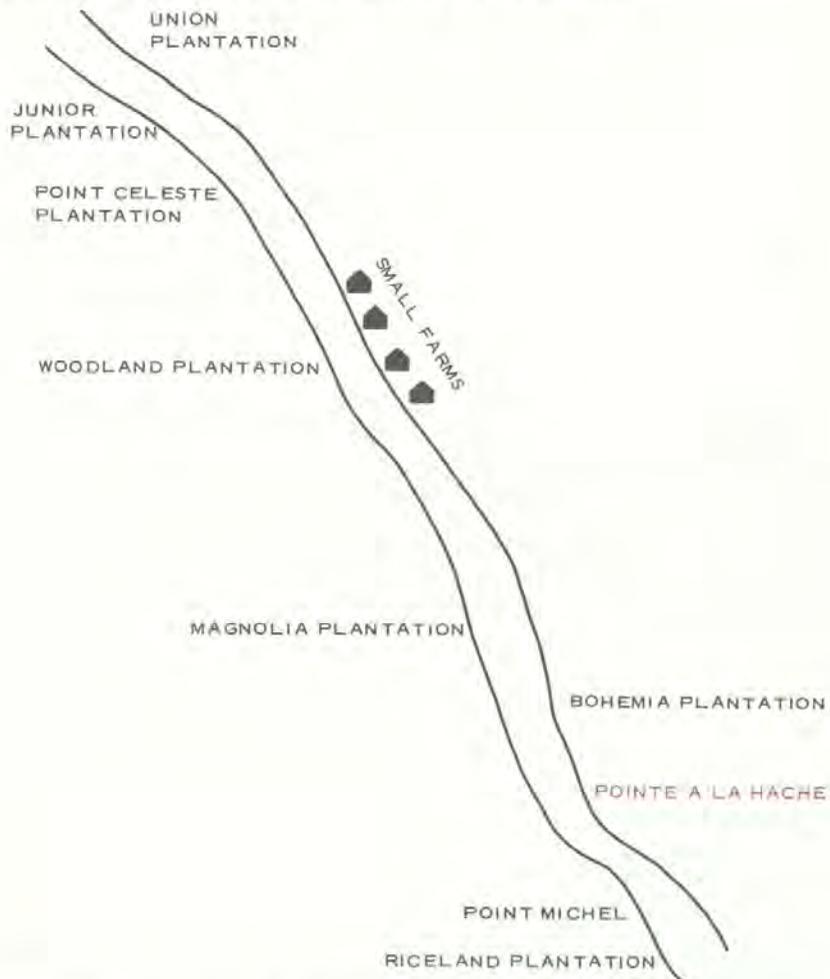
Magnolia is now abandoned and deteriorating rapidly. Recent hurricanes have damaged the front of the house. Woodland plantation, however, appears to be in good condition and the house is still in use. The land is planted with orange trees.

POINTE A LA HACHE, LOUISIANA

Mile 45.0 AHP, Map 55
Left bank, descending

French explorers named this point, using a French phrase that meant "Point of the Axe." A map made in 1765 called it "Hatchet Point."

The mainline levee system on the east bank of the Lower Mississippi terminates at Pointe a la Hache, about 50 miles above the Head of Passes.



RIVER PLANTATIONS ABOVE POINTE A LA HACHE. Most of the plantations just above Pointe a la Hache are owned by citrus growers. On the east bank, most of the farms are small ones. Oranges, lemons, grapefruit, and vegetables are grown on the citrus farms in the area.

NAIRN, LOUISIANA

Mile 34.0 AHP, Map 55
Right bank, descending

In 1973 a major flood crisis occurred at Nairn, Louisiana, on the west bank of the Mississippi about 60 miles below New Orleans. On April 26, 1973, late in the evening, a bank in front of the levee began to slough, and by dawn the next morning volunteers and Army engineers were working desperately to prevent failure of the levee itself. Old car bodies, stones, sandbags, shell, gravel, and everything else available went into the tremendous hole the river had scoured out in front of the levee. After an inspection of the site, the Corps of Engineers began the construction of a levee setback. It was completed by May 3.

EMPIRE LOCK

Mile 29.5 AHP, Map 56
Right bank, descending

The Empire Lock and Waterway connect the Lower Mississippi with the Gulf of Mexico via Adams Bay. The lock, built by the Corps of Engineers, was opened to navigation in 1948. It is 200 feet long, 40 feet wide, and has a depth of 10 feet. The waterway channel was completed in 1950, at a cost of more than one million dollars.

Commercial vessels logged almost 1.7 million ton miles through the lock and waterway in 1974. Vessels carrying seafood, shells, and off-shore oil drilling equipment and personnel use the waterway.

OSTRICA LOCK

Mile 25.2 AHP, Map 56
Left bank, descending

Ostrica Lock is owned by the State of Louisiana, and was opened to navigation in 1952. It provides passage from the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico, via Breton Sound.

The lock at Ostrica is used chiefly by crewboats, fishermen, and pleasure craft. It is 250 feet long, 40 feet wide, and has a controlling depth of 10 feet.

BURAS, LOUISIANA

Mile 25.0 AHP, Map 56
Right bank, descending

Buras, Louisiana, was named for a family of French brothers who moved into the area around 1850, and the name is still a common one in the community. Orange groves and farms extend in a narrow band along the river in the Buras area. Behind the orange groves are wooded swamps and marshes famous for the abundance of their wildlife population. Much of the community was destroyed by recent hurricanes. Many of the older orange groves were also lost.

Satsuma, Sweets, and Navel Oranges are grown in this area, as well as Ruby Red Grapefruit. Harvest begins in mid-October, when the small trees are heavily laden with the bright fruit, and continues until January when the weather permits.

FORT ST. PHILIP

Mile 20.0 AHP, Map 56
Left bank, descending

In 1792, the Spanish built a fort on the left bank of the Lower Mississippi, in a bend that was called Plaquemines Bend. Spain was at war with France at the time, and the fort at Plaquemine was meant to protect the mouth of the Mississippi and the city of New Orleans from invaders.

In 1796, a visitor to the fort reported that it had a battery of 24 guns and was garrisoned by about 100 Spanish soldiers. A small fleet of Spanish war galleys was stationed in front of the fort. The fort's thick brick walls were already being damaged because their foundations were unstable, General Victor Collot reported, and the soldiers had to employ 100 galley slaves on the river bank in front of the fortification to keep the river currents from washing it away.

General Andrew Jackson strengthened Fort St. Philip in 1815 and it withstood a nine-day bombardment by the British.

During the Civil War, Confederate authorities strengthened old Fort St. Philip again, and made it a part of the river defenses. Fort St. Philip had 45 guns, and the partially completed ironclad, *Louisiana*, was towed down and stationed just above the fort, to serve as a floating battery. The *Louisiana* was abandoned when the Union fleet succeeded in passing Fort St. Philip and Fort Jackson (on the opposite bank). She was set afire, exploded, and sank near Fort St. Philip.

Both of the forts were surrendered after the fall of New Orleans. In 1960 the U. S. Department of the Interior designated Fort St. Philip and Fort Jackson as national historical monuments. Fort Jackson is open to the public, but Fort St. Philip cannot be reached except by boat.

FORT JACKSON, LOUISIANA

Mile 18.6 AHP, Map 56
Right bank, descending

French colonial authorities had erected earthen and timber breastworks on the right bank in Plaquemines Bend in the mid-1750's and around 1792 a stronger redoubt called Fort Bourbon was constructed by the Spanish in the same area. Fort Bourbon was destroyed by a hurricane in 1795, but was ordered rebuilt immediately.

An attack by the British on the west bank in 1815 demonstrated the need for a major fort at Plaquemines Bend, and its construction was begun in 1822. Named for General Andrew Jackson, Fort Jackson was completed and occupied in 1832. It had cost the Federal Government more than half a million dollars. It was garrisoned by U. S. soldiers until the State of Louisiana seized the facility in 1861.

The Confederate government grudgingly provided funds and materials to strengthen Fort Jackson, but the preparations proved inadequate when Farragut's fleet of Union war vessels came steaming up the river in April, 1862.

The battle at Plaquemines Bend pitted the Union Navy against the two land forts, with the river defense fleet of the Confederacy playing only a minor and disastrous part in the engagement. The big Confederate ram *Manassas* ran aground early in the battle and was destroyed. The rebel boats *Warrior*, *Stonewall Jackson*, *General Lovell*, *General Breckinridge*, *Phoenix*, *Star*, and *Belle Algerine* were sunk. The *General Quitman* was lost. The rebels themselves destroyed the *Resolute*, *Governor Moore*, *Defiance*, *McRae*, and the costly but incomplete *Louisiana* to prevent their capture by the Union Navy.

The Union force had only two losses. The *Maria J. Carlton* was hit by Confederate artillery on April 19, 1862, and the *Varuna* was rammed by a rebel ship as she attempted to slip past the forts.

After the Union fleet passed the forts, Admiral David Farragut drew his fleet up in front of New Orleans and demanded the surrender of the city. The mayor laughed bitterly. "To surrender such a place were an idle and unmeaning ceremony," he said. The city was undefended.

Farragut suggested that the mayor raise a Union flag. The mayor retorted that the Union forces could raise their own flag. Farragut sent a small detachment on shore, and the men marched to a public building and hoisted the U. S. standard. William B. Mumford, a southern sympathizer, watched the little ceremony with hate in his eyes. When the Union men marched back to the waterfront, Mumford tore down the Union banner and dragged it through the streets, followed by a delighted mob that cheered him every inch of the way. Farragut blustered and blew, and threatened to bombard the city. The mayor replied that if the Union officers had no scruples about murdering thousands of innocent women and children who thronged the city, "because of a question of etiquette," then they could just go right ahead and bombard it. The Union admiral did not shell New Orleans, but when General Benjamin F. Butler moved in to take command he hunted William B. Mumford down and had him hanged in the street in front of the building from which he had taken the Union flag.

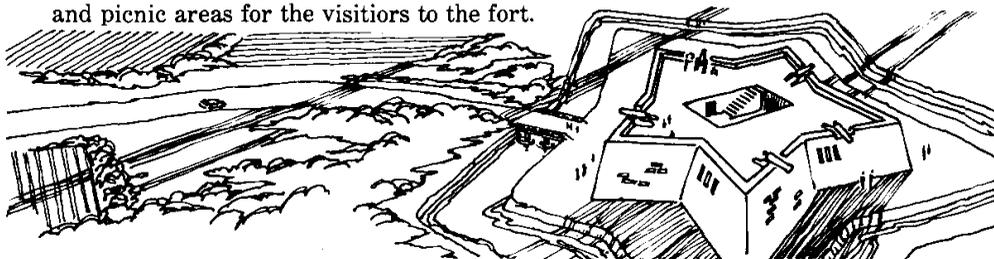
While Farragut was squabbling with the New Orleans authorities, Admiral David D. Porter's fleet of mortar boats continued to pound the two forts below the city. On April 27, 1862, the soldiers at Fort Jackson had had enough. They mutinied, spiking their own guns and threatening the lives of their own officers. The following day the two forts were surrendered to Porter.

Descriptions of the battle in Plaquemines Bend were confused and incoherent for the most part, but General Benjamin Butler left this vivid picture of the action:

"Twenty mortars, a hundred and forty-two guns in the fleet, a hundred and twenty in the Forts, the crash of splinters, the explosion of the boilers and magazines, the shouts and cries, the shrieks of scalded and drowning men; add to this, the belching flashes of the guns, blazing rafts of burning steamboats, the river full of fire, and you have a picture of the battle that was all confined to Plaquemines Bend."

With the fall of Forts St. Philip and Jackson, the fate of New Orleans was sealed, and the eventual control of the Mississippi by Union forces was made inevitable. Only Vicksburg and Port Hudson would manage to hold on for another year. The Union fleet that won the victory consisted of 46 vessels and 21 mortar boats.

The United States kept a garrison of soldiers at Fort Jackson until 1920. In 1960 the Harvey family of Louisiana, who had purchased the property, donated it to Plaquemines Parish. The parish has constructed access roads and repaired and restored the old fort, which was classified as a national historical monument in 1960. It is a large star shaped pentagon, surrounded by a moat. The old brickwork has withstood the ravages of time remarkably well. There is an excellent small museum, and picnic areas for the visitors to the fort.



VENICE, LOUISIANA

Mile 10.8 AHP, Map 57
Right bank, descending

Venice, Louisiana, is the last town on the west bank of the Lower Mississippi River that is accessible by highway. It lies at the end of the MR&T Project west bank levee system, and marks the termination of what is probably the longest continuous levee line in the world. The levee extends from Venice 650 miles northward to the Arkansas River.

Venice is in Plaquemines Parish, a long peninsula on the west side of the river that was formed by the Mississippi as it pushed its delta into the Gulf region. The entire parish is made up of accretion deposited by centuries of overflow before the Mississippi River levee system was built.

Hurricane Camille in 1969 virtually wiped out the lower part of Buras, Louisiana, and most of Venice. Houses were swept off their foundations or collapsed where they stood, as the 200 mile per hour winds and tidal surges swept over the area. From Fort Jackson to Venice, houses and trailers were smashed, livestock was drowned, and citrus groves were destroyed by the wind and water. Plaquemines Parish lies on both sides of the river, but most of its population lives on the west bank. Pointe a la Hache on the east bank is the seat of the parish government, however.

The parish is generously endowed with petroleum, gas, and sulphur deposits, and its fish and wildlife resources have significant value as well. Many former agricultural workers have abandoned the farms to go to work for the petroleum industry. Sulphur is processed at Port Sulphur, and fish and seafood are processed at Empire.

THE JUMP

Mile 10.5 AHP, Map 57
Right bank, descending

Around 1840, some fishermen dug a small canal on the west bank of the Mississippi just below Venice, Louisiana. A couple of years later, the river broke through into the canal and enlarged its channel very rapidly. Pilots called the area "The Jump" and it became a permanent outlet of the river. The channel, which became known as Grand Pass, is the first of the channels or passes that lead directly to the Gulf of Mexico.



CUBITS GAP

Mile 3.0 AHP, Map 58
Left bank, descending

In 1862, Richard Cubit, his wife, four daughters, and a 12-year-old son were living on the left bank of the Mississippi, about three miles above the Head of Passes. The commander of the first Union vessel that came into the river in March, 1862, caught Cubit in the act of notifying Confederate authorities by telegraph that the Union boats were in view of his house. The Union officer cut the telegraph cable, took Cubit's instrument away from him, and carried the man to the flagship *Hartford*.

On board the Union vessel, Cubit was questioned closely, lectured severely, and given a parole to sign under oath. He was allowed to return to his home and family.

Later in the Civil War, Federal forces cut through a bulkhead near Cubit's house, diverting a part of the Mississippi's flow into a fishermen's canal. The channel enlarged and soon became a permanent outlet of the river. River pilots called the new channel Cubits Gap.

HEAD OF PASSES

Mile 0.0, Map 58

About 953.8 river miles below the confluence of the Ohio and Middle Mississippi Rivers, the Lower Mississippi comes to an end, branching from this point—called the Head of Passes—into numerous small channels that lead into the Gulf of Mexico.

When the French colonists came to the Lower Mississippi Valley, they found navigation difficult in all the Passes. In 1723, one of the colony's master carpenters made a proposal to dredge the bar at the entrance to the Mississippi, declaring that he believed he could give it a depth of 38 feet. His plan was not approved, but in 1729 a colonial official reported that the channel had been deepened from little more than 12 feet to 17 feet and would soon be navigable for all kinds of French vessels.

The channel that the French navigators used was the Southeast Pass, a branch of Pass a Loutre. They built a fortification on the bank in the pass and called it "Balize," a name derived from the French word that meant "beacon." Bienville called it the most important post in the Louisiana colony.

By 1750 it was reported that Pass a Loutre had become choked with debris and sandbars and mudlumps.

The Passes were to be a constant source of worry and irritation for the growing port of New Orleans, Louisiana. At high water, ships could come and go with ease, but in

lower water periods it was often impossible to find a Pass that could be navigated at all by a fully loaded vessel.

In 1836, 1837, and 1852, unsuccessful efforts were made to improve South Pass and Southwest Pass for navigation. In 1858 torpedoes were exploded in another unsuccessful attempt to remove the mudlumps and bars from Pass a Loutre.

The Civil War brought all improvement efforts to a complete halt, but when the war had ended, the old controversy was taken up again. Countless proposals were made, and were embraced or denounced by various factions with equal passion.

In 1875, the United States Congress, with many misgivings, accepted a “no-cure, no-pay” proposition from Captain James B. Eads. Eads proposed to solve the problem with jetties and other works. If he failed, he would be a ruined man; if he succeeded, the United States Government would pay him eight million dollars.

The remarkable Captain Eads went about his gigantic task with supreme confidence. Eads had good reason to trust his own judgment and his own ability, for he had spent a good part of his life doing things that other people believed could not be done. He had invented a diving bell in 1842 and had made a fortune salvaging cargo and other property from sunken steamboats. He had put all his money into a glass factory that had failed, and had gone back to salvage work and accumulated another fortune. In 1861 he had proposed to President Lincoln that a fleet of armor-plated steam gunboats be built to help the Union gain control of the Lower Mississippi. He had received a contract to construct seven of the boats, and had delivered them within 65 days. Later he built seven more boats for the Union, as well as four heavy mortar boats, and converted two river steamers to ironclads. In 1874 he had completed another “impossible” project when he finished the Mississippi River bridge at St. Louis. The Eads bridge at St. Louis is still in use today.

Eads had agreed not only to deepen South Pass for the Federal Government, but to maintain a 30-foot channel in it for the next 20 years. He achieved what he had set out to do, and in 1901 the government took over the maintenance of the ship channel.

The Eads improvements in South Pass increased commerce in the Port of New Orleans to such an extent that a deeper channel was proposed for Southwest Pass. The work was authorized in 1902, and jetty construction was completed in 1908. A 40-foot channel was achieved.

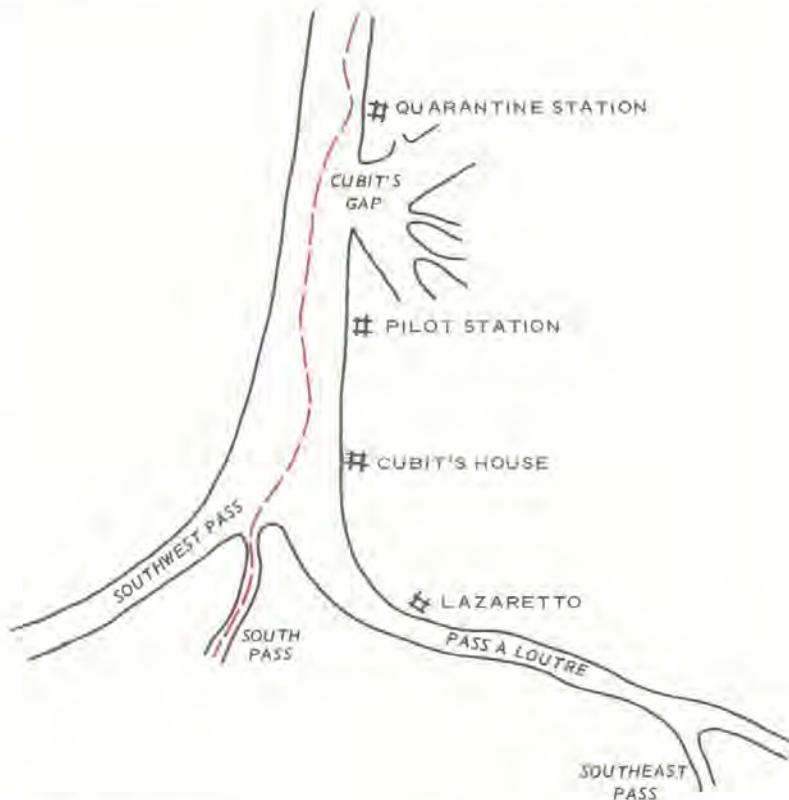
Today the Southwest Pass is most often used by oceangoing vessels that enter the Mississippi from the Gulf, bound for the ports of New Orleans or Baton Rouge. The Army Corps of Engineers maintains the channel by dredging when necessary.

During the Civil War, the first naval engagement on the Mississippi occurred at the Head of Passes. The U. S. Navy had established a blockade at the mouth of the Mississippi in the summer of 1861. On October 12, the Union vessels *Richmond*, *Water Witch*, *Preble*, *Frolic*, and *Vincennes* ventured up to the Head of Passes, where the Union force hoped to establish a battery of guns on the river bank.

From New Orleans, Captain George N. Hollins brought his improvised Confederate warships boiling down the river to meet the enemy. In the rebel squadron were the

McRae, Virginius, Ivy, Tuscarora, Calhoun, Jackson, the ram Manassas, and an unarmed towboat called the Watson.

The rebels met the Union fleet on October 13, 1861, and easily routed them from the Head of Passes. In their haste to be gone, several of the Union ships ran aground and lay all day on the bars in the Pass. Hollins failed to follow up on his decided advantage, and steamed back upstream to New Orleans to celebrate the glorious victory. The Union vessels were finally pried off the bars and resumed their blockade of the mouth of the river.



HEAD OF PASSES. An 1895 map published by the Mississippi River Commission showed a Quarantine Station on the east bank of the Lower Mississippi just above Cubit's Gap, and a Pilot Station below. Cubit's house was near the Head of Passes, and a hospital for lepers was located on Pass a Loutre. South Pass was the main navigation channel for ships bound for New Orleans out of the Gulf of Mexico.

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