

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

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## The 1905 “Congress Trip”

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Left:- Capt. Anthony Meldahl. Portrait made by a Marietta, O. photographer. Mrs. Harry Dameron, Huntington, Tony's niece, loaned the original of this picture to Jim Wallen, who passed it to us.

Bottom:- Tony Meldahl on watch in pilothouse of the QUEEN CITY, from an original negative by T. J. Farley, a passenger from New Jersey. It was taken about 1906-07 and came to us kindness of Cmdr. E. J. Quinby of Summit, N. J.

**T**ONY MELDAHL, pilot on the QUEEN CITY, was a blue-blooded Dane, a Viking whose parents were born and raised in Denmark. He was an inveterate tinkerer and experimenter (the invention of a bicycle to run on land or water didn't go so well) and thanks to his photography there exist priceless scenes taken from his pilothouse window and at landing places.

Capt. James A. Henderson, president of the Pittsburgh & Cincinnati Packet Line, relied implicitly on the collective judgments of Tony Meldahl and Phil Anshutz to keep the big QUEEN CITY out of trouble. This team brought the boat from the Cincinnati shipyard in 1897 and were together on her, without interruption, making every trip in the P&C trade, until they laid her up for low water at Pike's Hole, opposite Steubenville, on the Fourth of July, 1909.

Phil Anshutz was a good bit older than Tony, in his elder days a lanky, white-bearded, long-nose pilot identified with Buckhill Bottom, below Clarington, O. When Phil commanded the first steamer HUDSON for the List brothers he had Tony for pilot. They were pilot partners together on Capt. J. Frank Ellison's HUDSON before QUEEN CITY days. Both were farmers by nature and steamboatmen by choice. Both had owned in boats and had taken bitter consequences.

Tony's parents had many acres in West Virginia at the head of Newberry Island. Emil Meldahl, Tony's father, raised orange, lemon and fig trees in a greenhouse enlivened with exotic tropical plants. The Meldahls pressed grapes from an extensive vineyard and made wine. There was a silo on the farm, and a windmill, in days when these were scarce articles. The big frame home had a piano in it. A library was stocked with literature brought from Denmark. Neighbors came to snoop but not to borrow (who could read Danish?) and Mrs. Meldahl, Tony's mother, was the only accomplished pianist between Parkersburg and Pomeroy. On the broad acres roamed a herd of pedigreed Holsteins.

The reason CAPTAIN ANTHONY MELDAHL LOCKS AND DAM got that name is because when Tony married he bought acres near Chilo, O. and removed there. The new dam is practically at his doorstep. His daughter Louise Meldahl Carley (ardent S&D member) initiated the suggestion that the new locks bear her father's name. Tony Meldahl played an unique role in forwarding Ohio River improvement, and the honor done his name is justified.

Tony Meldahl loved the QUEEN CITY, and he loved people. He once persuaded Captain Henderson into putting a brass rail in the Q.C.'s pilothouse to circumvent the U.S. law forbidding access of common cattle into that domain. The rail was a fence to keep passengers back on the lazy bench and to prevent their meddling with the driver. ("Leave the driving to us.") The first U. S. Inspector who viewed this innovation was speechless with evidence of such cupidity. Next morning the brass rail was gone.

Tony knew full well if the QUEEN CITY was to survive as queen of the upper Ohio she was needing water under the hull, June-October, to carry summertime vacationists. The rug had been pulled from under her heavy iron-&-steel tonnage by the new U. S. Steel Corporation. Freight also could be lured back if slackwater was provided. The remedy for a sick P&C Line was locks and dams between Pittsburgh and Cincinnati.

**S**UCH DECISIONS were in the hands of a powerful Rivers and Harbors Committee in Washington. In the fall of 1904 Capt. J. Frank Ellison, P&C's Cincinnati officer, helped revitalize a down-at-the-heel outfit, Ohio Valley Improvement Association, for the purpose of raising funds to cruise the Washington congressmen from Pittsburgh to Cairo on board the QUEEN CITY.

Eleven of the seventeen members accepted, among them Theodore E. Burton, chairman. Tony Meldahl rubbed his hands in high glee. There was no U. S. law forbidding law-makers from the sanctity of Ohio River pilothouses, and Tony would have his innings.

The Congressmen came to Pittsburgh on the P.R.R. the morning of May 10, 1905. Instantly they were whisked to Lock 2, Allegheny River, put aboard the U.S. steamer LOMA, toured beneath the low bridges and treacherous piers in the harbor (at the instigation of William B. Rodgers, Sr. whose lifetime safari was raising bridges and improving the Allegheny) and dumped aboard the ex-



Tony at the wheel.



Committee Rivers and Harbors U. S. House of Representatives, on board QUEEN CITY in June, 1905, on the trip from Pittsburgh to Cairo. Seated, from the left: E. F. Acheson, Penna.; James H. Davidson, Wis.; Theodore E. Burton, Chairman, Ohio; B. B. Donever, West Va.; Roswell P. Bishop, Mich. Standing, from the left: William Lorimer, Ill.; Adam Bede, Minn.; J. McLachlan, Colorado; W. L. Jones, Wash.; J. E. Ransdell, Louisiana; S. M. Sparkman, Florida; De Alva S. Alexander, New York; and James H. Cassidy, clerk.

cursion boat ISLAND QUEEN for a trip up the Monongahela to McKeesport.

A special street car assigned to return the distinguished representatives back to Pittsburgh failed to show. Forty-five minutes later Hon. Theodore Burton and flock climbed into the first street car handy, hung to the straps (it bulged with millworkers) and returned to the Hotel Schenley for an evening of exhausting speeches dutifully reported in next morning's "Gazette," filling a page and a half.

The eleven well-pooped lawmakers were bedded that night on board the QUEEN CITY lying at the Monongahela wharf, foot of Wood Street, Pittsburgh. Hon. Theodore Burton got his initial lesson in river transportation when Tony Meldahl pointed out the mistake of street-car'ing back from McKeesport. The ISLAND QUEEN was back at her landing 30 minutes before the street car got there.

At five next morning the Q.C. departed for Cairo, all staterooms filled. Congressmen, business leaders, wives and families of congressmen, wives and families of business leaders and various political potentates. Most of them asleep. A few hardy ones came alive as the boat was passed through Davis Island Dam, 30 minutes later. This one and the Merrill Dam below Rochester, Pa. were the only operative locks and dams on the entire length of the Ohio River.

At East Liverpool inspection was made of the potteries of the Laughlin China Co. and of the Knowles, Taylor & Knowles potteries. Below that town what had started out as a grey day settled in for a steady downpour. Hon. Burton, plied by pilot Tony Meldahl, accepted haven on the lazy bench in the pilothouse. This blow hot--blow cold congressman, say what you will, was a student of maps, charts and statistics, and brought with him an extravagant supply.

Of course he didn't need them. Tony commenced unreeling his own fact-studded mental tape with fascinating vibrato. Astute Hon. Burton

knew at once he was in the presence of a virtuoso who held firm grip on the reins of a steed twice too big for the river she floated in (or so it looked to a novice) and who knew all the people along the shores as well. The combination was high irresistible.

As the QUEEN CITY passed under the old suspension bridge at Wheeling, preparing to land there, and with crowds lining the shore and a delegation termed "reception committee" awaiting in the door of the Crockard & Booth wharfboat, Tony took a chance. He muttered under his mustache to Hon. Mr. Burton: "It's a shame we don't go down and see the new McMechen Dam while there is daylight." Burton looked direct at Tony and saw the twinkle in the Danish eyes. Burton did not change expression. He waited a moment. Then he said: "Well, why not?"

Something had happened at that instant. The several hundred persons on board the QUEEN CITY were quick to sense it. Theodore Burton held in the palm of his hand the fate of Ohio River improvement. All of the elaborate machinery so carefully planned, the speeches, resolutions, banquets and persuasions were mere varnish to a most surprising, unanticipated human event. Burton had become Tony Meldahl's disciple. "Yes," said Tony, ringing the engineer for full head, "why not?"

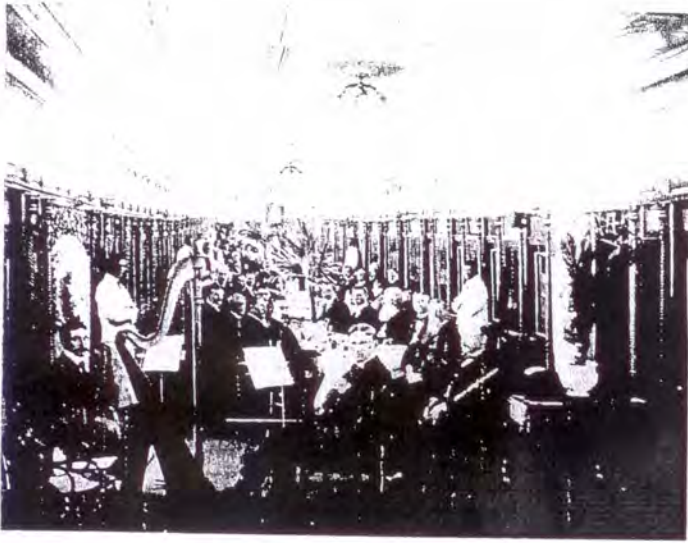
**R**AIN POURED CONSTANTLY and the river started to climb. Next day in the downpour a stop was made at Marietta where Capt. J. M. Hammett had elaborated some arrangements. The ladies, headed by Mrs. James A. Henderson, were entertained at the home of Mrs. B. G. Dawes while the men went on a 12-mile ride up the Muskingum aboard the steamer SONOMA. Later that day the QUEEN CITY dropped on down to Parkersburg for evening doings at the Hotel Chancellor.

"Where exactly is Blennerhassett Island?" asked Hon. Mr. Burton of his new-found pilot friend.

"Right below here--want to go see it?" Tony was romping in green pastures.



Crew of the QUEEN CITY in 1904. Standing from left to right: 1) not known; 2) Capt. Tony Meldahl, pilot; 3) Capt. Phil Anshutz, pilot; 4) Billy Sampson, steward; 5) not known. Seated: 1) not known, 2) Arthur Browne, purser; 3) Capt. J. Frank Ellison, manager of P&C Line at Cincinnati, and 4) Capt. John Sweeney, master.



Dinner is served on the QUEEN CITY during the Congressional Trip.

The Q.C. passed up Parkersburg, as she had passed up Wheeling, and for the same reason. She came back to the landing about an hour later with fait accompli. The river was rising and corn stalks and rubble dotted the oily brown surface.

Lock and Dam No. 1 had just been completed at Catlettsburg, Ky. on the Big Sandy. The following conversation is not so apocryphal as mere glance may suggest. It was related to me years later by pilot Dayton Randolph. Here is what Dayton said:

"Tony had no pilot license on Big Sandy, and neither did anybody else on the QUEEN CITY that 'Congress Trip.' Somehow Burton found out Tony couldn't legally take the boat to Lock One, so he figured to try Tony out.

"I would like very much to inspect that new lock," said Burton to Tony.

"Yes, sir, I think we can do that--you say the word and we will do it."

"Isn't there a matter of license?"

"Two 'scapes and a stopping bell and we're there."

"Against all Rules and Regulations we are there, you mean?"

"Begging your pardon, not ALL rules; just one rule."

"A very important rule...."

"Yes, of course it's important. It may mean a suspension for me."

"Let's do it."

"Tony nearly DID lose his license over that one," concluded Dayton. "There was a U.S. Inspector aboard the Q.C., an officious one whose name I won't mention for print; the kind who is always thinking how he'd look as a statue in a park, and he was about to unhook Tony's license off the wall and put it under his arm. If it hadn't been for Burton doing the hootchy-kootch back in Washington at the Supervising General's office Tony would have been a dead duck."

An enormous River Committee at Cincinnati boarded the P&C packet KEYSTONE STATE and steamed up to Fort Thomas. From the hilltop a 17-gun salute reverberated as the QUEEN CITY hove in view above Coney Island. Later, Edwin C. Gibbs took all delegates on a tour of Cincinnati via "palace" street cars, ending up at the Zoological Gardens.

Hon. Joseph E. Ransdell, Louisiana, in the past few days had fallen for the grace-and-curve of the QUEEN CITY and had become a confirmed river convert. In an address that day in Cincinnati he proposed the formation of a national organization to plump for locks and dams. This acorn grew into the oak of the National Rivers and Harbors Congress.

Tony Meldahl's license was for the Pittsburgh-Cincinnati run. Other pilots came aboard for the trip to Cairo. But by then the die was cast, and Burton was successfully "sold" not only for locks and dams, but for Tony. Five years later, in 1910, the famed River and Harbor Act authorized the improvement of the entire length of the Ohio River to a 9-foot minimum stage.

Tony and Phil Anshutz quit the QUEEN CITY one year prior to this. The owners paid wages only during actual operating season, less than five months a year, and wanted the pilots to take a wage reduction. Both said no. Phil retired and never again steamboated. Tony signed up as pilot on the smaller steamer OHIO which, being much lighter, ran longer. He died on January 26, 1923. The QUEEN CITY survived him, and was in the parade held in 1929 when slackwater was completed from Pittsburgh to Cairo. A salute was blown passing the Chilo farm. Today a monster dam and twin locks are monument to the pilot who risked his license and did his 'derndest' to give year-around navigation to future generations.