

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

Captain Meldahl

By Jim Walton

from **99 Miles of River**, September, 1965

Concerned For His Family

Capt. Meldahl Rowed 116 Miles

In Dangerous Flood Waters

By Jim Wallen

Capt. Anthony (Tony) Meldahl had determination as strong as a solid oak plank.

He was an excellent pilot of some of the finest packet steamers on the Ohio River at the turn of the century.

So respected was his character and ability that the new high-level dam is being named for him. The Captain Anthony Meldahl Dam is now in an advanced stage of construction some 30 miles above Cincinnati. The pool is being raised. And the dam's dedication will take place next year.

The captain showed the world how his strong-will could conquer during the flood of 1913.

High water had forced the big packet he was piloting to tie up at Ashland, Ky. Captain Meldahl was concerned for the welfare of his wife and children down on his farm near the rivertown of Neville, Ohio. It was 116 miles away.

But how to get there? The water had submerged most every means of transportation.

So the experienced riverman decided there was only one way for him to travel. He borrowed the steamer's yawl and set forth alone.

He rowed down the wide and swift Ohio as it carried along houses, barns and chicken coops.

The long and dangerous trip was worth it. He found his fam-



Capt. Anthony Meldahl

... dam carries his name

ily safe and his fearless journey became the topic of conversation.

Among the cream of the steamer crop in those days was a mighty vessel named the Queen City.

Captain Meldahl stood watch in the pilothouse of that packet for every one of her trips during the first ten years of operation, from 1897 to 1907. Those were the days when a week's round trip between Cincinnati and Pittsburgh cost \$12, including meals and stateroom.

The Queen City, a 236-foot sternwheeler, was built at the Cincinnati Marine Railway. She continued as an active packet until late in 1933.

There were never any serious accidents with the Queen City under Captain Meldahl's command, but in the spring of 1899 he nearly lost his life while working as her pilot.

Early on the morning of March 6 the Queen was upbound below Kenova, W. Va., carrying her usual heavy freight and a considerable number of passen-

City.

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gers. A cold blustery wind was blowing. The river had been rising rapidly. The Queen neared the railroad bridge across the Ohio at Kenova.

The river's height was up to a stage of 48 feet, something that Capt. Robert R. Agnew of Covington, Ky., and Pilot Meldahl did not realize in the darkness.

The big steamer was a couple of hundred feet below the bridge when Capt. Agnew climbed to the top of the pilothouse to check the amount of clearance beneath the railroad bridge. There was no clearance. A splintering crash sent Captain Agnew tumbling from his perch.

Pilot Meldahl, who had been at the wheel, was caught between the big wheel and the front of the pilothouse. A wire line whipped across his neck. It held him fast. But as the pressure increased, the line snapped. His life was spared.

Captain Meldahl also was an able photographer in a day when the camera was rarely used by any but the few professional photographers. One of his best-known photographs is that of the handsome, packet Queen City passing up the Ohio River at the head of Newberry Island. This view, from the West Virginia shore, was made from his earlier home at Meldahl's Landing, at Washington Bottom, below Parkersburg, W. Va.



Last Steamboat

Meldahl Commanded

Towboat Cayuga was a member of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers fleet. Captain Meldahl was on this boat from 1916 to 1923. It was the Cayuga which bore the captain's body back to its final resting place near Ne-

ville. This scene in April of 1922 was when President Warren G. Harding went to Point Pleasant, Ohio, aboard the Cayuga to visit the birthplace of General U. S. Grant.

His later home was at the attractive Maple Lane Farm, just above Neville. It was at Maple Lane that he spent all of his later life, raised his family, welcomed his many friends, and now lies buried. Maple Lane farm is just across the highway from the new dam, another good reason for giving Captain Meldahl's name to the new structure.

Early in his steamboating career (1887) he was master of the 117-foot packet Harry D. Knox in the Parkersburg-Ravenswood, W. Va., trade. Later (1890) he was pilot and part owner of the stately packet steamer Fashion, running between Pittsburgh and Cincinnati. Others of the noted steamboats on which he stood watch were the Hudson and the Homer Smith.

In 1916 he went aboard the towboat Cayuga as captain and remained on that steamer until his final illness in 1923. The Cayuga towed for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the Cincinnati and Louisville districts, and occasionally in the Huntington district.

Captain Meldahl died on January 26, 1923, in a Cincinnati hospital. His body was returned to his beloved Maple Lane Farm, with its large shade trees and comfortable, white frame house.

Captain Tony's father, Emil Meldahl, had come to the Ohio Valley from Denmark. He was a member of a distinguished family engaged in shipbuilding and construction. At the settlement in Washington Bottom, then a part of Virginia, Emil Meldahl married a young lady who had come from Lubeck, Germany, and settled in Lubeck, W. Va., with her family, whose name was Munchmeyer. The Munchmeyers were part of a sizeable group that had emigrated to this spot, bringing the name of their home town with them.

Captain Meldahl's two daughters, who grew up at Maple Lane Farm, are Mrs. Clinton (Vera) Wile, Felicity, Ohio, and Mrs. John (Louise) Carley, Memphis, Tenn. They expect to be at the dedication ceremonies for the new dam in 1965.