

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

The Hattie Brown

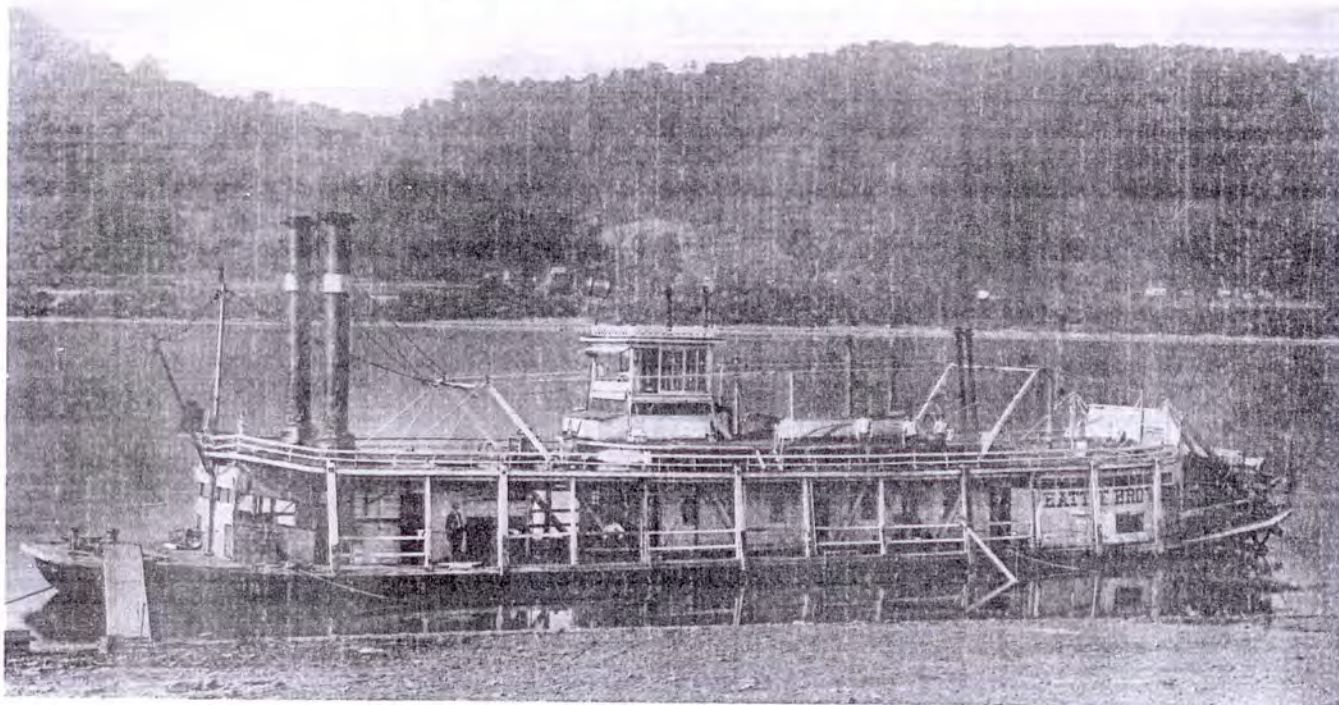
from

The Egregious Steamboat Journal

January/February 1993

www.nkyviews.com

The Hattie Brown



Ralph R. DuPae/Murphy Library

Here's the *Hattie Brown* at Madison, Indiana. Judging by the rigid stances of the individuals visible on board, this is a posed photograph. It's likely that she will soon head back upstream to Warsaw, Kentucky, at 2:00 PM. The river is extremely calm this day. The deck room with its skylight for the passengers is visible beneath the pilot house. Her 'escape pipes are literally juxtaposed, whereas most 'escape pipes were set much farther apart than these. Her engine room lettering is bereft of any shading. Normally steamboats were sparred out with a spar at the bow; but here the *Hattie's* spar is tied to a hanging fender ahead of her engine room.

When we hear the word "steamboat," we usually conjure up the image of a big fancy sidewheel packet.

Because our typical stereotyped notion of "steamboat" usually involves a sizeable entity of more than 300 feet in length (90.9 m.), we tend to overlook the smaller steamboats of yesterday.

Small steamboats receive little limelight. They were the epitome of practicality and their operations reflected frugality. Instead of offering fancy overnight service with staterooms, meals, and a huge service staff while running the main long distance trades from New Orleans to St. Louis, St. Louis to St. Paul, New Orleans to Cincinnati, or from Pittsburgh to Cincinnati, these steamboats either ran short distances between small towns during the daylight hours or up tiny rivers to carry

freight and passengers into less populated areas.

Before railroads connected towns along the rivers and the automobile became so omnipresent, small packets were often the only connection with the outside world.

These boats had little room for amenities. They carried a small amount of freight and functioned as the equivalent of a modern bus afloat.

There were many of these little boats and they filled the contemporary transportation gaps nicely. However, they were extremely functional steamboats and everything was centered about the main deck, with the exception of the pilot house on the boiler deck above.

They had no sleeping quarters and their meal offerings were minimal at best. The crew spent the night at their

homes and came on board in the early morning. The only person who spent the night while such a boat was laid up overnight was the watchman.

Small packets offered passengers seats in a deck room, reliable transportation, and protection from the elements, nothing more. They generally ran 12 hour days and their economical operation stemmed from the fact that they did not need the extra crew members that a boat would need to operate 24 hours per day.

Their seldom noted claim to fame is that they could easily reach towns and areas that larger steamboats could not reach during low water. Nowadays the Ohio has a series of locks and dams which provide constant slackwater navigation; but a century ago naviga-

tion was totally dependent on the three or four seasonal rises of the unfettered free-flowing rivers.

The rises usually came early in the year with the thawing of the ice experienced in late January. A spring rise was common. During the summers, rivers were wont to sustain long spells of low water and steamboat traffic would have to be suspended. If a town were not alternately served by rail, low water in the summer could bring all commerce to a halt. In the fall there was usually another rise and by the end of the year the cycle of rises would begin anew.

Although we take constant navigation for granted now, there was no such thing in the 19th century. On the contrary, it was easy for river towns and settlements to be isolated during low water.

Most steamboat companies ran their largest boats during the rises when there was enough water in the rivers; but when the rivers dropped, the same

companies would bring their low water boats into service, those that had wide hulls and drew little water. These would run as long as they could; but there was a point at which navigation was usually suspended--almost.

In certain sections of the rivers, there were many small boats of less than 130 feet (39.39 m.) in length that could run in extremely low water. While there was seldom enough water during the low water times to travel great distances, the small boats could often continue making connections between small towns.

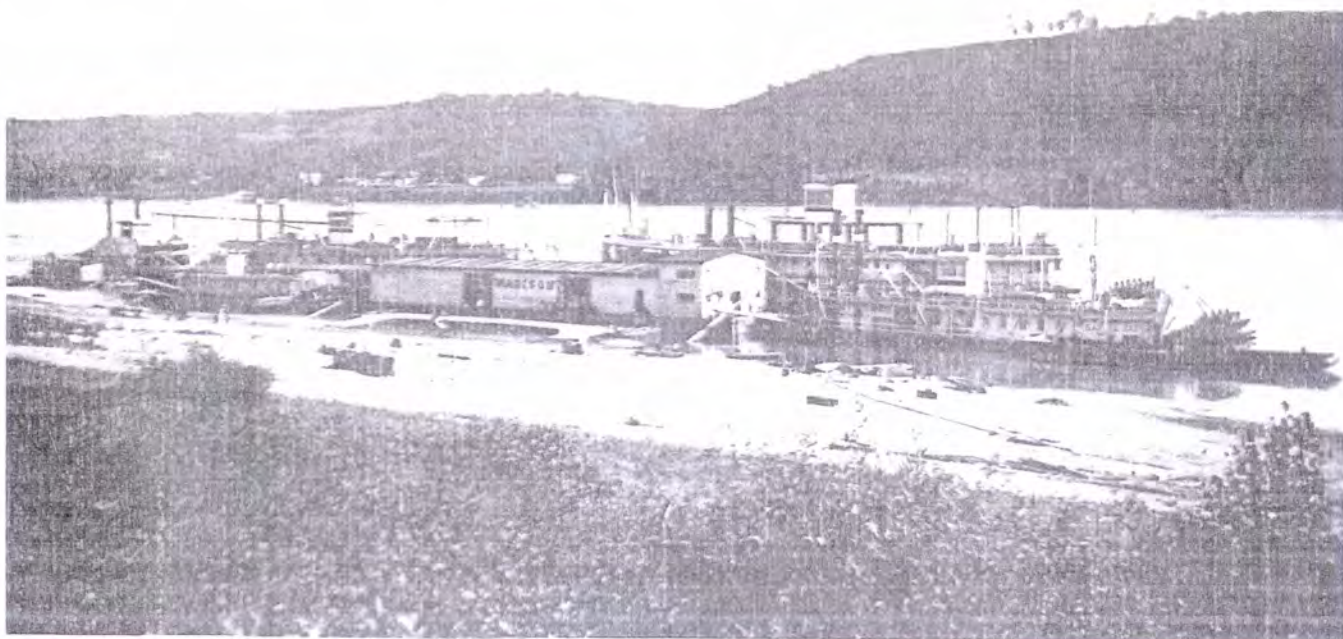
During low water sieges, these little boats frequently became the sole links with the outside world and suddenly their mundane transportation roles went from minor to major.

Unfortunately, there is not a great deal of attention lavished on the small steamboats. The model builder will sometimes wonder why no one has found these petite aesthetic gems notewor-

thy. The photo archivist may also dream of finding an engine room photo of the *Enos Taylor* in order to see the differences in engine room arrangements on minuscule steamboats compared to well-known photos of larger steamboats' spacious engine rooms.

One little steamboat that has received minimal attention over the years is the *Hattie Brown*. She was built at Belle Vernon, Pennsylvania, in 1884. Her hull was wooden and measured 120 by 20.3 by 3.1 feet (36.4 by 6.15 by .93 m.). She was wide enough to have good stability and yet drew so little water that she could continue operating during the worst low water sieges on the Ohio.

Her engines were 10's--4.5's, i.e., two cylinders with a ten inch bore (25.4 cm.) and a four and a half foot (1.36 m.) stroke. These were small for steamboat engines, though certainly not the smallest. Two coal-fired boilers, 38" (.97 m.) in diameter by 18 feet (5.45 m.)



Ralph R. DuPae/Murphy Library

The date is some time between 1907 and 1915 at Madison, Indiana. At the left is a sidewheel terry, the *Trimble*, which was built in 1895. Immediately behind her is a small gas sternwheeler; and the identity of the larger steamboat with white collars on her stacks is uncertain. The largest boat is the *Kentucky* of 1907. Alongside her below the wharfboat is the *Hattie Brown*. Note the long chain anchored in the bank in the right foreground running down to the wharfboat. There is another comparable chain running from a point further up the landing down to the other end of the wharfboat. These chains held the wharfboat in place and kept high water from carrying it away. If you look closely at the left there appears to be a dark line down the center of the river. This is a stone dike used to direct river water along a course prescribed by the Corps of Engineers. We know that this is a low water scene because the dike would not otherwise be visible.



Ralph R. DuPae/Murphy Library

Judging by the ripples in the water at the bow, the *Hattie Brown* is presumably rounding out after making a landing. She's 'escaping hard through the roof while her engineer has her tiny engine working at full-stroke to get the greatest amount of power from them. Although the *Hattie* was petite, pragmatic, and devoid of frills, she was a local favorite between Warsaw and Madison.

in length, provided steam.

The *Hattie Brown* was originally built and owned by the Brown family of Hartford, West Virginia. She began her life as a packet making the 17 mile run between Maysville and Augusta, Kentucky. She remained in that trade until the C&O Railroad connected the two towns and put her out of business. She then came further down the Ohio to Warsaw, Kentucky.

By 1897 the *Hattie Brown* was owned by the Louisville & Cincinnati Packet Company and ran with luminaries such as the *City of Louisville*, *Telegraph*, *City of Vevay*, *Lizzie Bay*, and the *Big Kanawha*. However, her daily life was calm and generally uneventful. For years she ran between Warsaw and Madison, Indiana, and was as regular as the rising and setting sun.

This trade was atypical for the general perception of steamboating. The *Hattie Brown* was a day-tripper. Many of her passengers were shoppers from Gallatin County, Kentucky, who would make a day of going 30 miles (50 km.) downstream to Madison.

Cincinnati and Louisville were some

distance away and a trip to either by steamboat would mean an overnight trip. Of course, what was an all day steamboat trip in the late 19th and early 20th centuries can now be done by automobile in less than an hour.

One of our first subscribers was the late Dr. Carl Bogardus of Warsaw, Kentucky. Dr. Bogardus rode the *Hattie Brown* from Warsaw to Madison and travelled a short distance further to Hanover, Indiana, where he attended Hanover College.

He was only person we have known who went to college by steamboat and we regret that we were not able to interview him about his recollections of the *Hattie*.

Captain Dick Brown ran the *Hattie Brown* for years. She would leave Warsaw at 6:00 AM and head downstream, arriving at Vevay, Indiana, and Ghent, Kentucky, at 7:00 AM. She would arrive at Madison at 10:00 AM.

At Madison the *Hattie's* passengers would have four hours during which they could shop and visit. That afternoon the *Hattie Brown* would depart from Madison at 2:00 PM and head

back upstream, retracing her path of the morning. Later that evening, between 6-7:00 PM, the *Hattie* would arrive back at Warsaw and then lay up for the night at Florence, Indiana, about a mile (1.6 km.) downstream. The following morning, the *Hattie Brown* would leave Florence for Warsaw and then depart for Madison again and return that evening. She followed this schedule for years and became a local institution cherished by everyone.

The *Hattie Brown* was such a constant part of daily life that people along that stretch of the river would begin to worry if this little packet were late. She was so predictable that you could almost set your watch by her arrival. Her melodious whistle was a delightful auditory experience familiar to everyone along the river between Warsaw and Madison.

One aspect of steamboating often missed by river writers is the personal role that small steamboats took in the daily life of those who lived along particular stretches of the rivers.

In the case of the *Hattie Brown*, the master and his small crew generally

knew everyone who lived between Madison and Warsaw. When the *Hattie* landed, she was a floating communication line with everyone else who lived along the river.

Her crew kept everyone apprised of the latest news and gossip. And since she came by twice each day, her crew was probably better informed than anyone else in the Ohio River valley on the day-to-day happenings between Warsaw and Madison.

In areas where the river provided the main transportation, nearly every farm had a road or a path down to the river. If you knew when the *Hattie* was due, you would go down to the river and wave a handkerchief to hail the little steamboat. Her sharp-eyed pilot would spot his hail and answer with a short whistle blast and then land to pick up the passenger.

Of course, children occasionally had great fun by surreptitiously hailing a steamboat and then running away--without any intent of going on board. If the mate or master personally knew whoever lived in the vicinity of the hail, he might be concerned at the person's abrupt departure. The boat would then

land and the mate might even walk up the path to the farm house to find out what had happened to the person who had hailed his steamboat and then disappeared.

Usually boys caught in such a ruse were given a trip to the woodshed wherein a lesson was taught that one only hailed a steamboat when one was serious about it.

Wharfboats did not exist at every community. At smaller communities there was not usually a wharfboat. Along certain stretches of the river there were only roads and paths down to the river.

On a small packet such as the *Hattie Brown*, it was common that the pilot would have been advised in advance that such and such a person would be planning to make a trip to Madison on such and such a day. Diligent pilots quickly committed such trivia to their astounding memories and they would accordingly remember to watch for a hail from this person at a particular landing.

However, even though memorizing the river from Warsaw to Madison was not particularly difficult, the real challenge was learning the details of how to

make landings at any stage of the river.

Towboat pilots were noted for being able to remember tremendous stretches of the river from Louisville to New Orleans; but their main trade was steering big tows of coal on rises, when the Ohio and Mississippi had plenty of water. The main worry for towboat pilots was getting big tows of empties back upstream when the rises had ended and the rivers were falling. Being stranded below Louisville in low water with empties was the worst fate for a coal trade pilot.

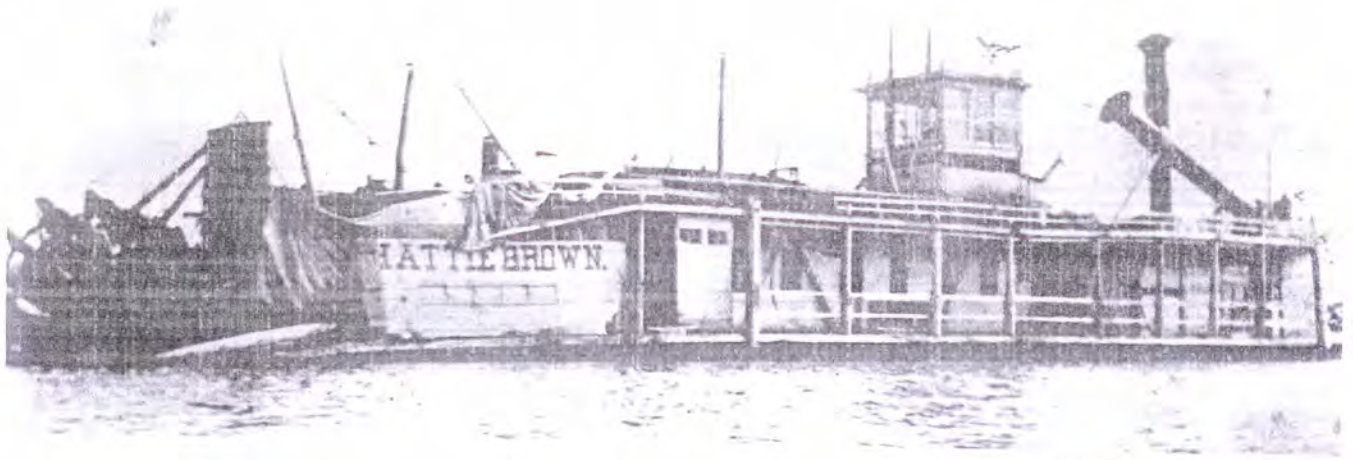
On the contrary, a packet pilot was not concerned with the long stretches of the river that the towboat pilot had to know. Whereas once the big coal tows had departed, they did not land unless there was an emergency or an accident. The packet pilot had a different challenge: he landed constantly and he had to know details about every landing by heart.

The pilots of small packets usually committed all these landings to their memories in great detail. Pilots kept themselves posted on the current status of every landing by constantly sharing gossip with every other pilot. Pilots



Ralph R. DuPae/Murphy Library

Here we see the *Hattie Brown* in her heyday during one of her daily runs on the Ohio. Freight is stacked on her guards against the bull rails and passengers are outside, presumably taking advantage of the warm weather. The *Hattie* evidently has a good load of freight aboard, for she is drawing slightly more water than usual. Evidently a landing is about to be made because of the group of people out down on the forecastle. Model builders should take note of the fact that packets tended to have their hogchains painted white, whereas the big coal trade towboats had theirs painted black.



Ralph R. DuPae/Murphy Library

In 1915 the *Hattie Brown* was badly damaged in a windstorm. A tarpaulin is draped over her engine room roof. The aft starboard hogchain posts have broken. Her starboard sampson post and the braces down to her sternwheel are gone and her hull is badly hogging at the stern. A smokestack has fallen back on a hogchain brace and has probably smashed its acorn finial. One interesting unusual detail visible here is her name painted on the after side of the pilot house. The steamboats with this characteristic can be counted on less than ten fingers. This was the end of the *Hattie Brown* as a steamboat; but she would be rebuilt and last two years longer.

were garrulous sorts and their day to day success depended on how much information about the river they could receive from one another. Trivial information about the stump that had drifted down to Ledbetter's landing just below the red barn opposite the light could save the day and keep a packet pilot out of trouble and a steamboat's hull from being punctured at the landing.

The best known steamboats are usually famous for disasters and accidents, while those that ran faithfully without mishap are considerably less well-known and, in some cases, almost anonymous.

For example, the *Sultana* is known primarily for her unfortunate loss of life in 1865. The *Joseph B. Williams* of 1876 was notorious for her many mishaps during her early years in the coal trade; but few are aware of her many years of stellar operations when she ran without any serious problem.

Steamboats are much like people: although you won't hear much about their good points, you'll certainly hear about their bad. This, however, was not the situation with the *Hattie Brown*, for, in all her years of faithful service, she ran well, served well, and, as a result, her history is essentially unremark-

able because of her lack of mishaps and her paucity of problems throughout the years.

People heard and enjoyed the *Hattie Brown's* mellow whistle for many years. She exuded a comfortable feeling of familiarity to everyone. The *Hattie* had been around for years and most felt that she always would be. She was an extremely dependable steamboat; and if she did not appear at a certain time of the day, everyone would know that something had gone wrong. She was so familiar and such a part of the daily life along the Ohio that she became a vicarious member of every family along that stretch of the river.

In 1915 at Craig's Bar, near Carrollton, Kentucky, in the days before the Ohio received her locks and dams, the *Hattie* encountered a bad storm. Her pilot kept her to the bank to avoid any problem; but then the wind drove her against a large tree on the bank.

Her stage fell overboard and one smokestack toppled while the other managed to stay erect. Her hogchains broke and her starboard inboard cylinder timber dropped and caused her sternwheel to fall out of the journal. The storm left her passengers badly scared; but the crew managed to calm

them down.

The wind and current carried the *Hattie Brown* downstream further and her crew finally managed to tie her up and there she spent the night with her small complement of passengers aboard.

The following day the crew attempted to hail the *Kentucky*; but she would not stop. The crew then walked to Ghent, Kentucky, and called Commodore Laidley, the head of the Louisville & Cincinnati Packet Company, at his opulent home in Covington. Laidley then arranged for the *Reba Reeves* to tow the *Hattie Brown* to the Kentucky River.

Unfortunately, the Louisville & Cincinnati Packet Company then began disposing of the beloved *Hattie Brown*. Her engines were removed and transferred to a new L&C steamboat, the *Vim*, which continued running between Madison and Warsaw.

The *Hattie* was taken to the Howard Yard at Jeffersonville, Indiana, for rebuilding. Her boilers and the remaining steam machinery were removed and she received an internal combustion motor and other alterations that changed her appearance.

The *Hattie Brown* was another steamboat casualty of the heavy ice of late

1917 and early 1918. She was laid up in the Licking River opposite Cincinnati for safety; but ice tore her away from her moorings. She was destroyed by the same ice that wrecked the magnificent *City of Louisville* and *City of Cincinnati*.

The ice carried the *Hattie* down past Markland. Her end came when she was smashed on the rocks on the bank at Sugar Creek. For many years her hull could be seen at low water near Clifty Creek. However, part of the *Hattie Brown* would live on for many years.

The *Vim* was not the *Hattie*, even though she had her engines and whistle and a similar appearance. However, people did not regard the *Vim* with the same affection they had routinely lavished on the *Hattie Brown*.

The *Vim* received a cabin on her boiler deck in 1919 and ran from Madison to the Kentucky River. The *Vim*

was renamed *Richard Roe* in August 1919 to honor the son of Captain William E. Roe, a manager of the Louisville & Cincinnati Packet company.

Captain Lewis Tanner bought the *Roe* in 1924 and used her as a towboat. Later she gravitated down the Ohio to the Green River and was owned by the High View Coal Company, located below Cromwell, Kentucky.

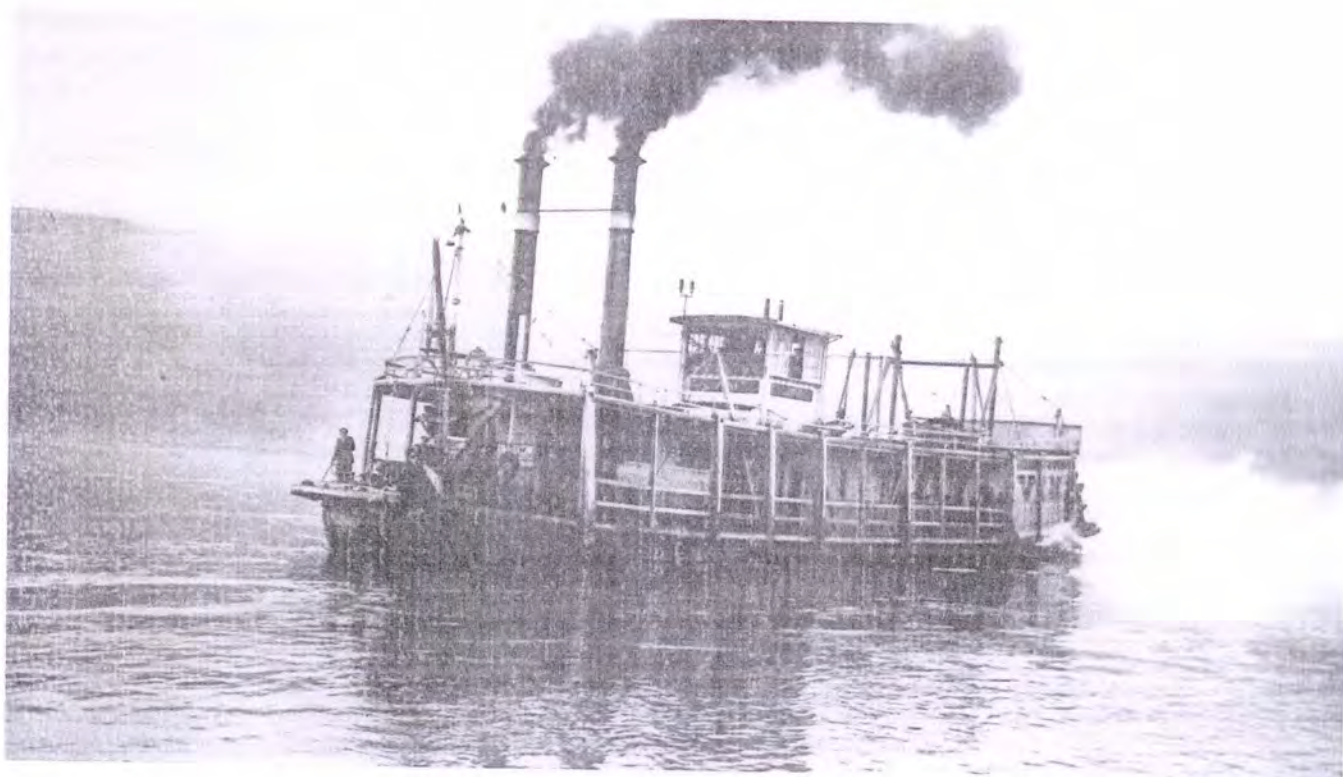
In 1928 the Billhorn Construction Company of St. Louis bought the *Roe* and used her on the Missouri River. In 1929 the *Richard Roe* became the *Barbara Hunt* and was evidently rebuilt at Osage City, Missouri. In 1935 the *Hunt's* engines, which had originally been on the *Hattie Brown* from 1884-1915, were removed and replaced with the engines from the *H. G. Hill*, a Cumberland River packet.

In the 1927 flood at Nashville the *H. G. Hill* was afloat over flooded Pen-

nington Bend (where Opryland is now located). As the flood receded, the *Hill* came to rest on the road leading to Wooddale Beach and blocked the road to summer camps in this section along the Cumberland. The *Hill* was dynamited to clear the road. In memory of the *H. G. Hill*, one of her smokestacks was left standing at the crossroads where she had come to rest after the flood. This stack stood for many years until it rusted away in the 1940's.

The *Hattie Brown's* little steam engines ran from 1884 through 1935--on the Ohio, the Mississippi, and the Missouri.

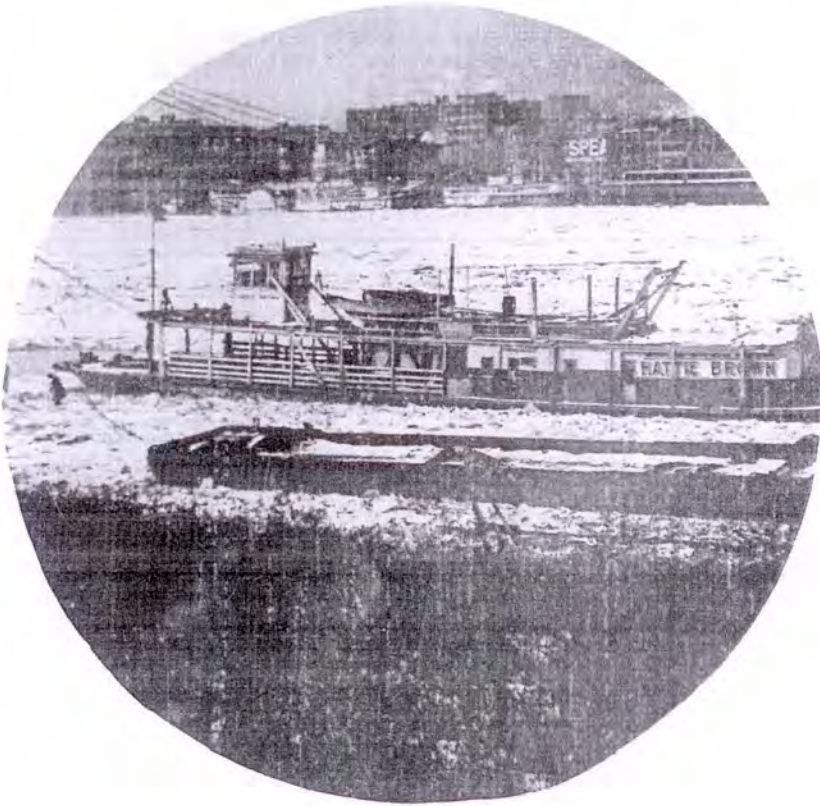
The people who knew the *Hattie* are now mostly gone. Even in the early 1960's it was possible to hear a senior citizen rave on about his or her firsthand memories of the little packet that had epitomized the area's spirit and meant so much to daily life there.



Ralph R. DuPae/Murphy Library

Even after the *Hattie Brown* was cut down by ice in 1918, it was hard to believe that she was gone. The boat that took her place was the *Vim*. The people along the Ohio liked the *Hattie Brown*; but they did not care for her successor. The *Vim* had the *Hattie's* fabled whistle and engines; and she looked like a duplicate to the untrained eye. The main difference was that the *Vim* did not have a skylight above the passengers' deck room. In addition, she does not have acorns on her forward hogchain posts and her 'escape pipes are set far apart from one another.

The Hattie Brown



They claim there ain't no music when the keyboard's hitched to steam;
They claim an old calliope would spoil a deaf man's dream--
But I find that there're exceptions to most things now and then.
And I'd like to hear the *Hattie Brown's* whistle once again.

An organ's built to play a hymn; a band's for martial strains;
A banjo's for spirituals; a uke for love's refrains...
The *Hattie's* song was like the birds'--the notes she used were few,
But every time she whistled, she played *Home, Sweet Home* clear through.

The hills all loved that whistle, for mornings when she blew
They turned her notes to echoes and bounced them in the dew.
When sunset paused for one last look through evening's half-closed door,
Her echoes lingered in her wake; her rollers on the shore.

I'd like to see her churnin' up, once more through Vevay Chute;
I'd like to hear her once again give that old landing toot.
I'd love to feel that atmosphere of home folks comin' back--
The *Hattie* somehow had a way that bus lines seem to lack.

I dreamed of the old Ohio in the Valley Memory,
Departed voices that I loved were coming back to me;
I heard the *Hattie's* whistle as she gaily rounded to--
Her notes still live in many hearts as human voices do.

The late Captain Claude Brown was born and raised at Vevay, Indiana. He knew the *Hattie Brown* well and this poem is attributed to him. There is a collateral version that features the *St. Lawrence* instead of the *Hattie Brown*.

Claude Brown's poem encapsulates the affection that everyone between Madison and Warsaw felt for the *Hattie Brown*. She was a tiny steamboat with a wonderfully memorable whistle that remained indelible in memories for so many years.

Although she ran in a short trade and had an uneventful safe career, she became a floating vicarious pet who visited countless households every day and grew to be part of them. She ran for years; and many grew up and grew older with her during those years in which she had become part of their lives.

Some steamboats were sleek, sensual, feminine creations. Many towboats were beefy creations, endentured slaves assigned to the repetitive mundane task of towing barges year after year. There were, however, many small steamboats; but the *Hattie Brown's* singular distinction was that she was such a local favorite that she became a regional institution as well.

The *Hattie's* day-tripping trade brought many shoppers to Madison long ago. While it is tempting to think that this practice is a thing of the past, it is not.

Gateway Cruises of St. Louis has certain day long cruises from St. Louis south to Kimmswick, Missouri. Kimmswick is a picturesque old river town filled with interesting shops. People come by boat to spend the day and shop. While it is not an identical situation, it certainly appears that Gateway took a lesson from the past and borrowed the idea for the Kimmswick trips from the *Hattie Brown*.