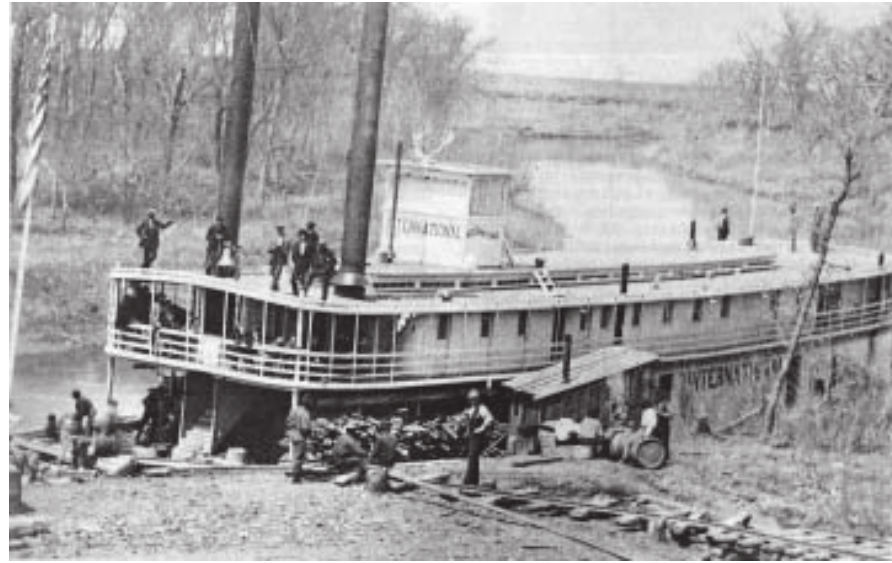


Steamboats



The steamboat International on the Red River.

Clay County Historical Society

One of the more colorful eras in the history of the Red River Valley was provided by the steam powered paddle wheelers chuffing and churning the muddy waters of the Red. The arcane jargon of the steamboat captains, low water difficulties, bells and whistles all provided excitement to this early transportation system. As much as local investors and residents wanted to believe differently, the boats were never to be more than a temporary link in a

changing transportation network.

In the 1850s, St. Paul and Fort Gary were the two largest settlements in the area. Minnesota merchants used horse or ox drawn Red River carts to ship goods for sale to their northern neighbors. The carts were cheap but slow as the 500 mile, one way, trip took a month. A steamboat on the Red could cut that time in half.

In 1859, Anson Northup dragged a steamboat's engine and boiler from the Mississippi River through a nasty Minnesota winter to the Red near Kragnes, Minnesota. He built a new steamboat and named it after himself. It wasn't much of a boat. One pilot called it a "lumbering old pine basket that had to be handled as gingerly as a hamper of

trains of hundreds of carts were squeaking their way from St. Paul to meet the Anson Northup and the International, a second steamboat built at Georgetown in 1862.

In 1871, the Northern Pacific Railroad reached the Red River at Moorhead and steamboating expanded. Trade with Winnipeg increased dramatically and thousands of eager settlers bound for Canada poured through Fargo-Moorhead.

The steamboat era started its decline in the southern valley when the railroad reached Fisher's Landing on the Red Lake River, east of Grand Forks in 1876. Flatboats became the preferred method of river transportation. Built locally, they were piled high with goods, and slowly floated to Winnipeg. The goods were sold and the flatboats dismantled and sold for the lumber. By 1878 Winnipeg had its own rail connection and steam boating was soon abandoned for the faster and cheaper rail system.

While steamboats could not compete with the railroad there were new farmers along the Red with wheat that needed to be transported to the railhead. Steamboaters turned to short-hauling grain, lumber and other wares. In 1878, the huge Grandin bonanza wheat farm near Halstad, Minnesota, built the J.L. Grandin. It hauled wheat to their elevator in Fargo. Within a few years the railroad built branch lines up and down the banks of the Red and steamboating once again could not compete. Steamboats operated near Grand Forks until about 1910 but the big boats in the southern valley quit running about 1886.

(Mark Peihl, Clay County Historical Society)



The J. L. Grandin taking on wheat in the southern valley.

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The J. L. Grandin tied up by the Grandin Lines elevator.

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The Unser Fritz, U.S. Government owned dredge.

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eggs". The Hudson's Bay Fur Trading Company at Fort Garry built a steamboat terminal at Georgetown, Minnesota, to transfer furs and trade goods between ox carts and the boat. Soon