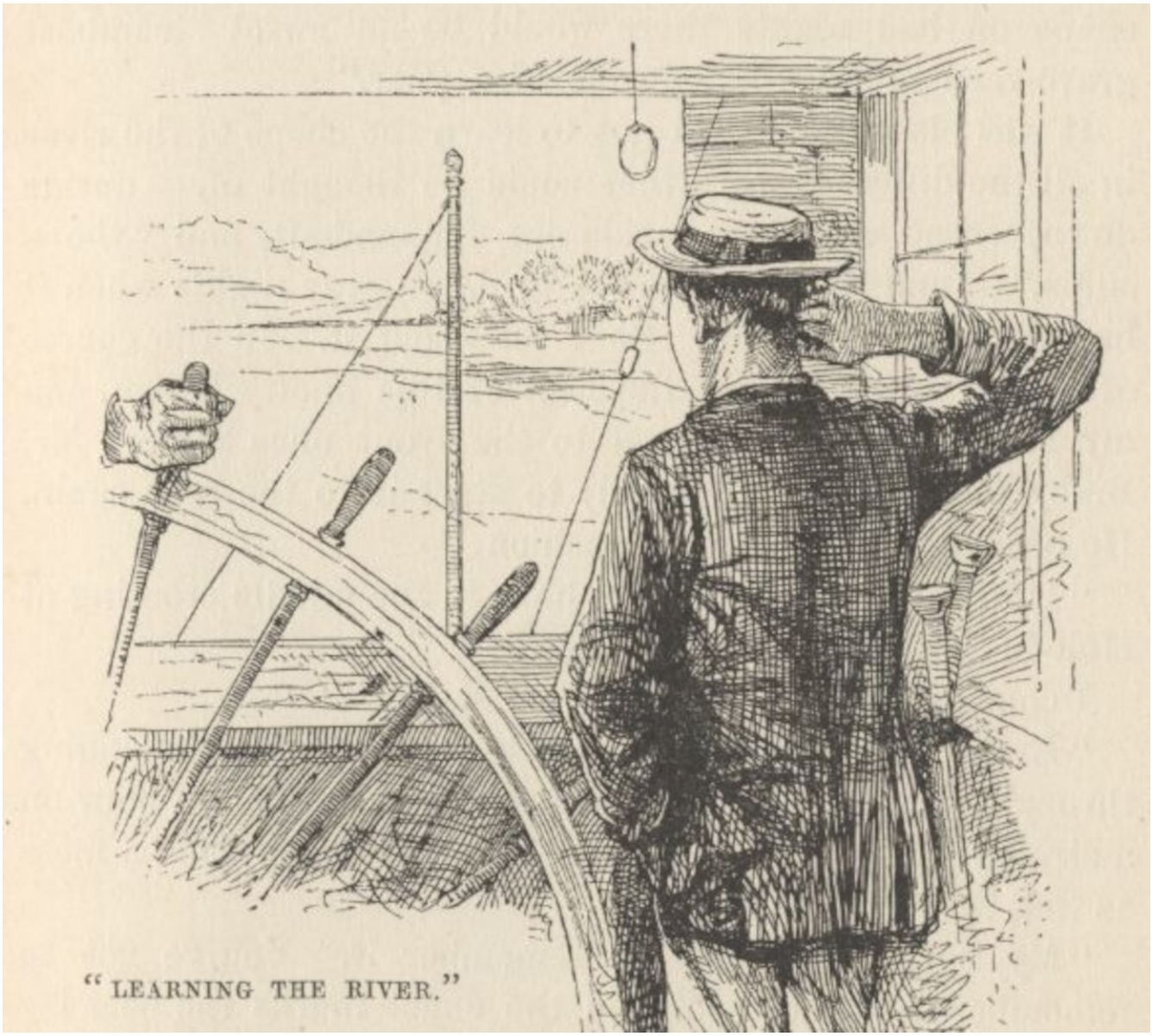
Sam Clemens: Cub Pilot on the Mississippi River



"LEARNING THE RIVER."

B. Scott Holmes

Sam Clemens abandoned his career as a printer, or at least as a print-setter, and boarded the *Paul Jones* in Cincinnati on February 16 of 1857. Where he first asked Horace Bixby, the pilot of the *Paul Jones*, to teach him the river is an open question. Somewhere between Cincinnati and New Orleans Sam began "doing a lot of steering". A reporter for the New Orleans *Times-Democrat* (Sunday, May 7, 1882, p.3) found Captain Bixby and asked about Mark Twain:


"BESIEGING THE PILOT."

"Well sir," he said, "the first time I met Mark Twain, or knew that such a person existed, was in 1857. At that time I was the chief pilot on the Paul Jones, a boat that made occasional trips from Pittsburg, to New Orleans. One day, while we were coming down the Mississippi, a long, angular, hoosier-like young fellow, whose limbs appeared to be fastened with leather hinges, entered the pilot-house and in a peculiar, drawling voice said: 'Good mawnin', sir. Don't you want to take er piert young fellow and teach 'im how to be er pilot?"

"No sir, there is more bother about it than it's worth."

"I wish you would, mister. I'm er printer by trade, but it don't 'pear to "gree with me, and I'm on my way to Central America fur my health. I believe I'll make er tolerable good pilot'cause I like the river."

"What makes you pull your words that way?"

"I don't know, mister; you'll have to ask my ma. She pulls hern too. Ain't there some way that we can fix it so that you'll teach me how to be er pilot?"

"The only way is for money."

"How much are you going to charge?"

"Well, I'll teach you the river for $500."

'Geewhilikins! he! he! I ain't got $500, but I've got five lots in Keokuk, Iowa, and 2,000 acres of land in Tennessee that is worth two bits an acre any time. You can have that if you want it."

I told him that I did not care for his land, and after talking awhile he agreed to pay $100 in cash, $150 in 12 months and the balance when he became a pilot. He was with me for a long time, but sometimes took occasional trips with other pilots.

Although Bixby indicated that he and Clemens came to terms either at their first meeting or quite soon after, Mark Twain three times explicitly designated New Orleans as the place where he approached Bixby about becoming his steersman and where they reached an agreement. It is reasonable, however, to assume that before agreeing to instruct him, Bixby would have used the trip to New Orleans to test his ability at handling the wheel.

The *Paul Jones,* with two barges in tow, was heavily loaded with ordnance for the Baton Rouge arsenal. As the boat neared Louisville it ran onto rocks near Dick Smith's wharf and stuck for more than 24 hours. February 19, the *Paul Jones* left Louisville; February 23, it reached Memphis; and, February 28, it reached New Orleans. Sam claimed in his autobiography that his intention was to travel to the Amazon, but could not find passage once in New Orleans. "I was in Cincinnati. . . I packed my valise, and took passage on an ancient tub called the *Paul Jones* for New Orleans. For the sum of sixteen dollars I had the scarred and tarnished splendors of 'her' main saloon principally to myself, for she was not a creature to attract the eye of wiser travelers". In actuality the ship had been built only two years earlier; it was piloted by one of the most respected officers on the river; and contemporary newspapers praised it as a "magnificent," 'first class," and a "very staunch and pretty packet" with "finely furnished cabins' and "superb" dining. It was later scuttled by Confederate forces, as Grant's army closed in on the Big Black river in 1863.

The Colonel Crossman,

Built: 1857, Tonnage: 415, Pilot: Horace Bixby, Captain: Patrick Yore, built expressly for Missouri River trade. Clemens' Service: 4 March - 15 March 1857

Sam and Horace Bixby departed New Orleans March 4, 1857 on board the *Colonel Crossman* with Clemens installed as the new cub and arrived in St. Louis on March 15. While in St. Louis Clemens took steps to secure the $100 that Bixby required as a down payment. Some forty years afterward, in notes for his autobiography, he reminded himself that he went to his cousin James Clemens, Jr., "to borrow the $100 to pay Bixby—before I got to the subject he was wailing about having to pay $25,000 taxes in N.Y. City—said it makes a man poor! So I didn't ask him". Clemens borrowed the money instead from his brother-in-law, William A. Moffett, and rejoined Bixby.

The Fate of the Colonel Crossman:

On February 4, 1858, the *Colonel Crossman,* without warning exploded, burned to the water's edge, and rapidly sank, leaving as a memorial a heavy loss of life. With Bixby as the off-duty pilot, the boat was ascending the Mississippi River in the New Madrid Bend. She was about to complete her first St. Louis-New Orleans round trip after making a seasonal shift from the Missouri River trade. Addressing the general panic sweeping through the passengers, Bixby first treated the injured. Then, when fire broke out, "with some assistance [he] got the life-boat . . . into the water where it lay bottom upwards until he sprang out upon it, and turned it up. His conduct is said to have been heroic in the extreme. He saved nineteen lives by the lifeboat. Sam Clemens, at this time, was likely aboard the *William Morrison,* while the *Pennsylvania* was being repaired.

> Harold Bush writes:[1] In 1857, after some strenuous years of travel throughout America that reinforced the religious heterodoxy of Sam Clemens, the newly apprenticed cub pilot came upon a copy of Thomas Paine's deistic manifesto of the 1790s, *The Age of Reason*. Having been primed for its contents, he devoured its arguments and they influenced his early writings. Paine's themes continued to influence Twain throughout his career: many of Twain's later writings echo the vitriolic attacks on orthodox Christianity characteristic of the latter half of *The Age of Reason,* particularly the assaults on scriptural literalism that dominate Part II of Paine's masterpiece.

1 Religion, Harold Bush, Chapter 17, Mark Twain in Context

I would expect that Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* would have been of greater influence on Sam's thinking than his possible conversations with the Cincinnati printer John J. McFarland.

After arrival in St. Louis Sam was faced with a seven week hiatus. The question here is why there is such a large interval between boats, from March 15 to April 29.[2]

On March 15 Captain Carroll, of the *Cora Anderson*, contracted with Bixby to serve as a pilot on the *Cora Anderson* "for a fair and reasonable compensation"; and further, that Carroll "contracted" with Bixby to remain in St. Louis until the return of the *Cora Anderson* from New Orleans, agreeing "to pay plaintiff a reasonable compensation therefor for such detention"—from March 15 to April 4. During that time, Bixby claimed, he "declined to engage on any other boat or in any other employment." His petition also requested compensation for expenses incurred between April 4 and April 29, the period of his unemployment between the date the *Cora Anderson had* returned to St. Louis and the date of Bixby's next piloting job, on the *Crescent City*. Bixby stated that he was "ready and willing and offered" to begin his employment upon the return of the *Cora Anderson* on April 4 but that Carroll refused to employ him as pilot on his boat.

The critical issue in this dispute turns out to have been Bixby's insistence on keeping his steersman. Bixby wanted to pilot the *Cora Anderson* on its April 9 trip, and Captain Carroll wanted to hire him. But the Captain balked at accepting a steersman-presumably any steersman—and his reason remains unclear and, to a degree, anomalous. Maybe he objected to the added expense—he was not overly liberal in the salaries he offered his pilots. Yet, in refusing to accept a steersman on his boat, Captain Carroll was acting counter to the growing practice of many steamboat commanders and owners, who encouraged the training of steersmen in order to increase the supply of pilots and thereby lower pilots' wages, a major expense for them. Conversely, his action was in line with the policy of a growing number of pilots-especially the union pilots in the Western Boatman's Benevolent Association-who wanted to strictly control the number of steersmen undergoing training at any one time. In that way they hoped to maintain full employment and high wages for licensed pilots currently at the wheel.

The Crescent City,

Built: 1854, Tonnage: 688, Pilot: Horace Bixby, Co-Pilot: Strother Wiley, Captain: R. C. Young, Clemens' Service: 29 April - 7 July, 1857

April 29, 1857: *Wednesday* – Sam left St. Louis, bound for New Orleans, arriving *May 4? Monday*.

May 8–9? Saturday – The *Crescent City* left New Orleans bound for St. Louis, arriving *May 16–19? Tuesday.*

May 27, 1857: *Wednesday* – Sam had returned to New Orleans on the *Crescent City.* Nearly all of Sam's piloting was between New Orleans and St. Louis, some 1,300 miles.


"A TANGLED KNOT."

2 *Bixby vs. Carroll: New Light on Sam Clemens's Early River Career,* Edgar M. Branch, Mark Twain Journal V30 N2 (Fall 1992)

Bixby taught Sam that he must memorize every mile of the trip, that each side of the river, coming and going was different, and that at night nothing looked the same. To make it more difficult, the river was constantly shifting its banks. Sam was boggled by what was required of him.

May 31, 1857: Sunday – Sam visited the French market in the morning. He wrote of it the next day to Annie.

To Ann E. Taylor
1 June 1857 • New Orleans, La.
Kansas City Star Magazine, 21 Mar 1926, UCCL 00013)

> P. S.—I have just returned from another cemetery—brought away an orange leaf as a memorial—I inclose it.

New Orleans, June 1st. 1857.

My Dear Friend Annie

> I am not certain what day of the month this is, (the weather being so warm,) but I expect I have made a pretty close guess.
>
> Well, you wouldn't answer the last letter I wrote from Cincinnati? I just thought I would write again, anyhow, taking for an excuse the fact that you might have written and the letter miscarried. I have been very unfortunate with my correspondence; for, during my stay of nearly four months in Cincinnati, I did not get more than three or four letters beside those coming from members of our own family. You did write once, though, Annie, and that rather "set me up," for I imagined that as you had got started once more, you would continue to write with your ancient punctuality. From some cause or other, however, I was disappointed—though it could hardly have been any fault of mine, for I sat down and answered your letter as soon as I received it, I think, although I was sick at the time. Orion wrote to me at St. Louis, saying that Mane told him she would correspond with me if I would ask her. I lost no time in writing to her—got no reply—and thus ended another brief correspondence. I wish you would tell Mane that the Lord won't love her if she does so.
>
> However, I reckon one page of this is sufficient.
>
> I visited the French market yesterday (Sunday) morning. I think it would have done my very boots good to have met half a dozen Keokuk girls there, as I used to meet them at market in the Gate City. But it could not be. However, I did find several acquaintances—two pretty girls, with their two beaux—sipping coffee at one of the stalls. I thought I had seen all kinds of markets before—but that was a great mistake—this being a place such as I had never dreamed of before. Everything was arranged in such beautiful order, and had such an air of cleanliness and neatness that it was a pleasure to wander among the stalls. The pretty pyramids of fresh fruit looked so delicious. Oranges, lemons, pineapples, bananas, figs, plantains, watermelons, blackberries, raspberries, plums, and various other fruits were to be seen on one table, while the next one bore a load of radishes, onions, squashes, peas, beans, sweet potatoes—well, everything imaginable in the vegetable line—and still further on were lobsters, oysters, clams—then milk, cheese, cakes, coffee, tea, nuts, apples, hot rolls, butter, etc.—then the various kinds of meats and poultry. Of course, the place was crowded (as most places in New Orleans are) with men, women and children

of every age, color and nation. Out on the pavement were groups of Italians, French, Dutch, Irish, Spaniards, Indians, Chinese, Americans, English, and the Lord knows how many more different kinds of people, selling all kinds of articles—even clothing of every description, from a handkerchief down to a pair of boots, umbrellas, pins, combs, matches —in fact, anything you could possibly want—and keeping up a terrible din with their various cries.

Today I visited one of the cemeteries—a veritable little city, for they bury everybody above ground here. All round the sides of the inclosure, which is in the heart of the city, there extends a large vault, about twelve feet high, containing three or four tiers of holes or tombs (they put the coffins into these holes endways, and then close up the opening with brick), one above another, and looking like a long 3- or 4-story house. The graveyard is laid off in regular, straight streets, strewed with white shells, and the fine, tall marble tombs (numbers of them containing but one corpse) fronting them and looking like so many miniature dwelling houses. You can find wreaths of flowers and crosses, cups of water, mottoes, small statuettes, etc., hanging in front of nearly every tomb. I noticed one beautiful white marble tomb, with a white lace curtain in front of it, under which, on a little shelf, were vases of fresh flowers, several little statuettes, and cups of water, while on the ground under the shelf were little orange and magnolia trees. It looked so pretty. The inscription was in French—said the occupant was a girl of 17, and finished by a wish from the mother that the stranger would drop a tear there, and thus aid her whose sorrow was more than one could bear. They say that the flowers upon many of these tombs are replaced every day by fresh ones. These were fresh, and the poor girl had been dead five years. There's depth of affection! On another was the inscription, "To My Dear Mother," with fresh flowers. The lady was 62 years old when she died, and she had been dead seven years. I spent half an hour watching the chameleons—strange animals, to change their clothes so often! I found a dingy looking one, drove him on a black rag, and he turned black as ink—drove him under a fresh leaf, and he turned the brightest green color you ever saw.

I wish you would write to me at St. Louis (I'll be there next week) for I don't believe you have forgotten how, yet. Tell Mane and Ete "howdy" for me.

Your old friend
Sam. L. Clemens.

June 9, 1857: Tuesday – Crescent City arrived in St. Louis.
June 17, 1857: Wednesday – Crescent City left for New Orleans.
June 23, 1857: Tuesday – Crescent City arrived New Orleans.
June 28, 1857: Sunday – Crescent City left for St. Louis.
July 7, 1857: Tuesday – Crescent City arrived St. Louis.

Steamboat: D. A. JANUARY

Built: 1857, Tonnage: 440, Pilot: Horace Bixby, Captain: Patrick Yore
Clemens' Service: 16 July - early Aug 1857

Research by Michael Marleau indicates that during this time frame Clemens most likely traveled up the Missouri River with pilot Horace Bixby aboard the *D. A. January*. Edgar Branch never placed Clemens on the Missouri River and had previously theorized that Clemens was on board the *Rufus J. Lackland* from 11 July to 3 August 1857. Marleau includes a new interpretation of Clemens' personal journals and indicates 1859 dates as the most likely dates of service on the *Rufus J. Lackland* as a licensed pilot."[3]

The *Day By Day* dates are based on the Edgar Branch source.

They made two trips together from St. Louis. The first, between July 16 and July 23, 1857; and, the second, between July 25 and August 1. Marleau writes: "Due to low water conditions on the Mississippi, and the number of steamboats laid up, many pilots were idle without positions... Bixby's intent now was to learn to pilot the Missouri River, Due to their articled arrangement, Clemens was bonded to Bixby; if the pilot was going to the Missouri, so was his steersman."

Marleau goes on to note that upon their return to St. Louis in August, Bixby recalled that Clemens had not wanted to learn the Missouri so they struck a new bargain, amending the articles and Bixby turned the teaching over to Sobieski Jolly, on the *John J. Roe*. Bixby and Clemens would not join up again until October of 1858 on the *New Falls City.*

Steamboat: John J. Roe

Built: 1856, Tonnage: 691, Pilot: Zebulon Leavenworth and/or Sobieski Jolly, Captain: Mark Leavenworth
Clemens' Service: 5 August - 24 September, 1857

August 5 Wednesday – Sam, cub pilot, was now under Zebulon "Zeb" Leavenworth and/or Sobieski "Beck" Jolly on the *John J. Roe*. The steamboat left St. Louis for New Orleans. It was a freighter and not allowed to carry passengers. Sam, about the Roe:

> I served a term as steersman in the pilot house. She was a freighter . . . It was a delightful old tug and she had a very spacious boiler-deck—just the place for moonlight dancing and daylight frolics. She was a charmingly leisurely boat and the slowest one on the planet. Up-stream she couldn't even beat an island; down-stream she was never able to overtake the current. But she was a love of a steamboat. August 14 Friday – John J. Roe arrived New Orleans. [4]

August 18 Tuesday – John J. Roe left for St. Louis.
August 29 Saturday – John J. Roe arrived St. Louis.
September 2 Wednesday – John J. Roe left for New Orleans.
September 10 Thursday – John J. Roe arrived New Orleans.
September 15 Tuesday – John J. Roe left for St. Louis.
September 24 Thursday – John J. Roe arrived St. Louis.

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3 "Tearing Up the Big Muddy, Sam Clemens on the Steamer D. A. January and the Missouri River", Michael H. Marleau, Mark Twain Journal V60 N1 (Spring 2022)

4 Day By Day August 5, 1857

Steamboat: Pennsylvania

Built: 1854, Tonnage: 486, Pilot: William Brown, Co-Pilot: George Ealer, 1st Mate: Abner Martin, Captain: John Klinefelter, Fate: 13 June 1858, lost by explosion
Clemens' Service: 27 September - 26 November 1857 and 17 February - 5 June 1858

November 2 Monday – Sam was now under the infamous William Brown. The ship left for New Orleans. In Chapters 18-19 of *Life on the Mississippi*, Sam recounted the conflict with Brown: "…a middle-aged, long, slim, bony, smooth-shaven, horse-faced, ignorant, stingy, malicious, snarling, fault-hunting, mote-magnifying tyrant." From their first meeting, nothing Sam did was right for Brown. Cub Sam would lie in his bunk at night thinking of creative ways to kill Brown. Imagination was all that was left to Sam, since it was a "penitentiary offense" to strike a steamboat pilot. The other cub on board was George Ritchie, who was blessed with serving watch only for the co-pilot George Ealer, as amiable as Brown was nasty. Whenever Sam took the wheel for Ealer's watch, Ritchie would mimic Brown, which got old fast with Sam. The conflict between Brown and Sam would peak the next June.

November 8 Sunday – Pennsylvania arrived in New Orleans.
November 10 Tuesday – Pennsylvania left for St. Louis. With Brown gone, George Ealer was most likely the pilot.
November 16 Monday – Pennsylvania arrived in St. Louis.
November 18 Wednesday – Pennsylvania left for New Orleans.
November 24 Tuesday – Pennsylvania arrived in New Orleans.
November 26 Thursday – Pennsylvania left for St. Louis. About thirty miles above New Orleans it was struck by the Vicksburg and lost its wheelhouse. The boat was laid up for repairs near New Orleans for eleven weeks. Some accounts say the two boats were racing, an illegal but common activity for steamboats. On Mar. 19, 1858, Sam would give testimony for a lawsuit in the matter. His remarks include observations of the boat:

> I was on the *Pennsylvania* as Steersman at the time of the collision in November last. I was not at the wheel at the time. At the moment of the collision I was standing on the Sky light deck, aft of the Pilot house…..I think that at the instant the *Vicksburg* struck us that one of her engines was still going—and my reason for thinking so is, that she did not recede from us after she struck, but kept pressing on—the crash of timbers continued—the deck swayed under me, and I thought I heard the noise of her engines. It was over a minute after the *Vicksburg* struck us, before she began to back away from us. After the boats came together, I heard the Captain of the *Vicksburg* call to Captain Klinefelter, and I understood him to say that he (Capt White) "Knew that the *Vicksburg* would run from the bar." I am learning the river—have been learning it, now, about ten months. At that time I had been on the *Pennsylvania* about three trips. The *Pennsylvania* steers very easily, I was in the Pilot house that night before supper, and I noticed that she steered well—that is her general character

> for steering. The *Pennsylvania* is a first class boat every way—she is large, and well finished for a passenger boat. The officers and crew which the *Pennsylvania* had at the time of the collision were all of them capable sober and patient. When I was on the extreme stern of the *Pennsylvania* as above stated, Capt Klinefelter was there—I do not know where he was after that. After the collision the *Vicksburg* towed the *Pennsylvania* to the right hand shore. The *Vicksburg* then backed off. I am not exactly certain whether I was in a position to see her when she left us. I do not think she landed after she left us—I think she just backed out, and went up the river. I am certain she did. [5]

Neider writes that from November 27 to December 12 Saturday – Sam worked as a night watchman on the freight docks from seven in the evening until seven in the morning, earning three dollars a night.

Marleau writes that after the collision with the Vicksburg "...A week later he was clerking and steering on the *William M. Morrison* under the watchful eye of the old pilot Isaiah Sellers. In February of 1858 the *Morrison* was laid up and Clemens returned to his duties on the repaired *Pennsylvania*."

Steamboat: William M. Morrison

Built: 1856, Tonnage: 662, Pilot: Isaiah Sellers, Co-Pilot: George Haggerty, Captain: John Bofinger
Fate: acquired by Confederacy
Clemens' Service: 2 December 1857 - 12 Feb 1858

Not included in Day By Day. Entries for this date range do not correspond with this entry. [6]

Steamboat: Pennsylvania

17 February - 5 June 1858

February 6 Saturday – The Pennsylvania, now repaired and refitted, left New Orleans with William Brown as pilot, George Ealer as co-pilot, John Simpson Klinefelter as Captain. Sam had procured a job for Henry as "mud clerk," so called because the job required leaping to shore in places where there was no pavement or dock. The job did not pay, but was a way to rise in the ranks. Henry Clemens was nineteen, and would make six trips with his brother.

February 14 Sunday – Pennsylvania arrived in St. Louis.
February 17 Wednesday – Pennsylvania left for New Orleans. The Mississippi was choked with ice, but Captain Klinefelter thought the boat could handle it. They went aground several times.
February 18 Thursday – Due to ice, the Pennsylvania had only managed to reach Rush Tower, some 40 miles south of St. Louis.
February 19 Friday – The Pennsylvania reached Cairo, Illinois in the afternoon. Other boats had either elected to stay in St. Louis or were aground.
February 25 Thursday – Pennsylvania arrived in New Orleans.
February 27 Saturday – Pennsylvania left for St. Louis
March 9 Tuesday – Pennsylvania arrived in St. Louis.

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5 John Klinefelter et. al. vs. Steamer Vicksburg, J. M. White, Master, National Archives [Marleau, "Eyewitness" 18-19].
6 "'Getting Along Tolerable Well': Captain Isaiah Sellers and Sam Clemens on the Steamer William M Morrison" Michael H. Marleau, Mark Twain Journal Vol 61, No 1, Spring 2023, pp 78-198.

To Orion and Mary E. (Mollie) Clemens
9 March 1858 • St. Louis, Mo.
(MS: NPV, UCCL 00014)
Saint Louis, March 9th, 1858.

Dear Brother and Sister:

> I must take advantage of the opportunity now presented to write you, but I shall necessarily be dull, as I feel uncommonly stupid. We have had a hard trip this time.

The trip described here began about 10:00 a.m. on 17 February in a falling, ice-choked river made particularly treacherous by a rapidly changing channel. The captains of most New Orleans boats at the St. Louis levee elected to await better conditions before sailing. Captain Klinefelter's decision to get under way was based on his belief that the Pennsylvania had "power enough to plow through the ice even if the river should be full of it"[7]

> Left Saint Louis three weeks ago on the Pennsylvania. The weather was very cold, and the ice running densely. We got 15 miles below town, landed the boat, and then one pilot, Second Mate and four deck hands took the sounding boat and shoved out in the ice to hunt the channel.

The pilot was George G. Ealer, a respected St. Louis–New Orleans riverman who served on the Crescent City, the Pennsylvania, and other major packets. Clemens wrote warmly of Ealer—a devotee of Shakespeare, Goldsmith, chess, and the flute—whose kindly disposition was in contrast to William Brown's maliciousness [8]*. Unfortunately for Clemens it was Brown who was his direct superior on the Pennsylvania.*

> They failed to find it, and the ice drifted them ashore. The pilot left the men with the boat and walked back to us, a mile and a half. Then the other pilot and myself, with a larger crew of men started out and met with the same fate. We drifted ashore just below the other boat. Then the fun commenced. We made fast a line 20 fathoms long, to the bow of the yawl, and put the men, (both crews) to it like horses, on the shore. Brown, the pilot, stood in the bow, with an oar, to keep her head out, and I took the tiller. We would start the men, and all would go well till the yawl would bring up on a heavy cake of ice, and then the men would drop like so many ten-pins, while Brown assumed the horizontal in the bottom of the boat. After an hour's hard work we got back, with ice half an inch thick on the oars. Sent back and warped up the other yawl, and then George (the first mentioned pilot,) and myself, took a double crew of fresh men and tried it again. This time we found the channel in less than an hour, and landed on island till the Pennsylvania came along and took us off. The next day was colder still.

By daybreak on 18 February, after twenty-one hours on the river, the Pennsylvania had managed to reach only Rush Tower, just forty miles below St. Louis[9]*.*

> I was out in the yawl twice, and then we got through, but the infernal steamboat came near running over us. We went ten miles further, landed, and George and I cleared out again—

7 "Pennsylvania for New Orleans," St. Louis Missouri Republican, 16 Feb 58, 3
8 see Life on the Mississippi, chapters 18, 19, 24, and "Is Shakespeare Dead?" SLC 1909, 4–19
9 "Steamer Rodolph's Memoranda," St. Louis Missouri Republican, 19 Feb 58, 3

> found the channel first trial, but got caught in the gorge and drifted helplessly down the river. The *Ocean Spray* came along and started into the ice after us, but although she didn't succeed in her kind intention of taking us aboard, her waves washed us out, and that was all we wanted. We landed on an island, built a big fire and waited for the boat. She started, and ran aground!

Captain Waldo P. Marsh's Ocean Spray, coming upriver from New Orleans with one wheel damaged by the ice, reported reaching "the foot of Ste. Genevieve Island [sixty miles below St. Louis], where we found Pennsylvania sounding. While we were trying to get over she grounded. We crossed below her on 5½ feet water, at 9 a. m.".[10]

> It commenced raining and sleeting, and a very interesting time we had on that barren sandbar for the next four hours, when the boat got off and took us aboard. The next day was terribly cold. We sounded Hat Island,

A dangerous crossing near Wittenburg, Missouri, about a hundred miles below St. Louis and eighty above Cairo, Illinois. In chapter 7 of Life on the Mississippi it is the site of some spectacular piloting by Horace Bixby.[11]

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10 Memoranda," St. Louis Missouri Republican, 21 Feb 58, 3

11 Next morning I felt pretty rusty and low-spirited. We went booming along, taking a good many chances, for we were anxious to 'get out of the river' (as getting out to Cairo was called) before night should overtake us. But Mr. Bixby's partner, the other pilot, presently grounded the boat, and we lost so much time in getting her off that it was plain that darkness would overtake us a good long way above the mouth. This was a great misfortune, especially to certain of our visiting pilots, whose boats would have to wait for their return, no matter how long that might be. It sobered the pilot-house talk a good deal. Coming up-stream, pilots did not mind low water or any kind of darkness; nothing stopped them but fog. But down-stream work was different; a boat was too nearly helpless, with a stiff current pushing behind her; so it was not customary to run down-stream at night in low water.

There seemed to be one small hope, however: if we could get through the intricate and dangerous Hat Island crossing before night, we could venture the rest, for we would have plainer sailing and better water. But it would be insanity to attempt Hat Island at night. So there was a deal of looking at watches all the rest of the day, and a constant ciphering upon the speed we were making; Hat Island was the eternal subject; sometimes hope was high and sometimes we were delayed in a bad crossing, and down it went again. For hours all hands lay under the burden of this suppressed excitement; it was even communicated to me, and I got to feeling so solicitous about Hat Island, and under such an awful pressure of responsibility, that I wished I might have five minutes on shore to draw a good, full, relieving breath, and start over again. We were standing no regular watches. Each of our pilots ran such portions of the river as he had run when coming up-stream, because of his greater familiarity with it; but both remained in the pilot house constantly.

An hour before sunset, Mr. Bixby took the wheel and Mr. W——stepped aside. For the next thirty minutes every man held his watch in his hand and was restless, silent, and uneasy. At last somebody said, with a doomful sigh—

'Well, yonder's Hat Island—and we can't make it.' All the watches closed with a snap, everybody sighed and muttered something about its being 'too bad, too bad—ah, if we could only have got here half an hour sooner!' and the place was thick with the atmosphere of disappointment. Some started to go out, but loitered, hearing no bell-tap to land. The sun dipped behind the horizon, the boat went on. Inquiring looks passed from one guest to another; and one who had his hand on the door-knob and had turned it, waited, then presently took away his hand and let the knob turn back again. We bore steadily down the bend. More looks were exchanged, and nods of surprised admiration—but no words. Insensibly the men drew together behind Mr. Bixby, as the sky darkened and one or two dim stars came out. The dead silence and sense of waiting became oppressive. Mr. Bixby pulled the cord, and two deep, mellow notes from the big bell floated off on the night. Then a pause, and one more note was struck. The watchman's voice followed, from the hurricane deck—

'Labboard lead, there! Stabboard lead!'

The cries of the leadsmen began to rise out of the distance, and were gruffly repeated by the word-passers on the hurricane deck.

'M-a-r-k three!... M-a-r-k three!... Quarter-less three!... Half twain!... Quarter twain!... M-a-r-k twain!... Quarter-less—'

Mr. Bixby pulled two bell-ropes, and was answered by faint jinglings far below in the engine room, and our speed slackened. The steam began to whistle through the gauge-cocks. The cries of the leadsmen went on—and it is a weird

warped up around a bar and sounded again—but in order to understand our situation you will have to read Dr. Kane.

Elisha Kent Kane, a U.S. Navy surgeon, participated in two unsuccessful Arctic expeditions in the 1850s in search of Sir John Franklin, the explorer who died in 1847 while trying to find a northwest passage to the Orient. Kane published two popular accounts of the expeditions: The U.S. Grinnell Expedition in Search of Sir John Franklin: A Personal Narrative (1853), and Arctic Explorations: The Second Grinnell Expedition in Search of Sir John Franklin 1853, '54, '55 (1856).

It would have been impossible to get back to the boat. But the *Maria Denning* was aground at the head of the island—they hailed us,—we ran alongside and they hoisted us in and thawed us out.

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sound, always, in the night. Every pilot in the lot was watching now, with fixed eyes, and talking under his breath. Nobody was calm and easy but Mr. Bixby. He would put his wheel down and stand on a spoke, and as the steamer swung into her (to me) utterly invisible marks—for we seemed to be in the midst of a wide and gloomy sea—he would meet and fasten her there. Out of the murmur of half-audible talk, one caught a coherent sentence now and then—such as—

'There; she's over the first reef all right!'

After a pause, another subdued voice—

'Her stern's coming down just exactly right, by George!'

'Now she's in the marks; over she goes!'

Somebody else muttered—

'Oh, it was done beautiful—beautiful!'

Now the engines were stopped altogether, and we drifted with the current. Not that I could see the boat drift, for I could not, the stars being all gone by this time. This drifting was the dismalest work; it held one's heart still. Presently I discovered a blacker gloom than that which surrounded us. It was the head of the island. We were closing right down upon it. We entered its deeper shadow, and so imminent seemed the peril that I was likely to suffocate; and I had the strongest impulse to do something, anything, to save the vessel. But still Mr. Bixby stood by his wheel, silent, intent as a cat, and all the pilots stood shoulder to shoulder at his back.

'She'll not make it!' somebody whispered.

The water grew shoaler and shoaler, by the leadsman's cries, till it was down to—

'Eight-and-a-half!.... E-i-g-h-t feet!.... E-i-g-h-t feet!.... Seven-and—'

Mr. Bixby said warningly through his speaking tube to the engineer—

'Stand by, now!'

'Aye-aye, sir!'

'Seven-and-a-half! Seven feet! Six-and—'

We touched bottom! Instantly Mr. Bixby set a lot of bells ringing, shouted through the tube, 'NOW, let her have it—every ounce you've got!' then to his partner, 'Put her hard down! snatch her! snatch her!' The boat rasped and ground her way through the sand, hung upon the apex of disaster a single tremendous instant, and then over she went! And such a shout as went up at Mr. Bixby's back never loosened the roof of a pilot-house before!

There was no more trouble after that. Mr. Bixby was a hero that night; and it was some little time, too, before his exploit ceased to be talked about by river men.

Fully to realize the marvelous precision required in laying the great steamer in her marks in that murky waste of water, one should know that not only must she pick her intricate way through snags and blind reefs, and then shave the head of the island so closely as to brush the overhanging foliage with her stern, but at one place she must pass almost within arm's reach of a sunken and invisible wreck that would snatch the hull timbers from under her if she should strike it, and destroy a quarter of a million dollars' worth of steam-boat and cargo in five minutes, and maybe a hundred and fifty human lives into the bargain.

The last remark I heard that night was a compliment to Mr. Bixby, uttered in soliloquy and with unction by one of our guests. He said—

'By the Shadow of Death, but he's a lightning pilot!'

Soon after Clemens and the sounding crew were thawed out on board Captain Hercules Carrel's Maria Denning, the Pennsylvania got under way and arrived at Cairo on Friday afternoon, 19 February. [12] *The Denning, bound for St. Louis, remained aground at Hat Island for at least five days.*

> We had then been out in the yawl from 4 o'clock in the morning till half past 9 without being near a fire. There was a thick coating of ice over men, yawl, ropes, and everything else, and we looked like rock-candy statuary. We got to Saint Louis this morning, after an absence of 3 weeks—that boat generally makes the trip in 2.

The Pennsylvania docked at St. Louis in the early morning of 9 March, having taken twenty days, six or seven more than usual, to complete the trip to New Orleans and back.

> Henry was doing little or nothing here, and I sent him to our clerk to work his way for a trip, by measuring woodpiles, counting coal boxes, and other clerkly duties, which he performed satisfactorily. He may go down with us again, for I expect he likes our bill of fare better than that of his boarding house.
>
> I got your letter at Memphis as I went down. That is the best place to write me at. The post office here is always out of my route, somehow or other. Remember the direction: "S.L.C., Steamer Pennsylvania, Care Duval & Algeo, Wharfboat, Memphis."

Duval, Algeo and Company of Memphis, Tennessee, were steamboat agents and receiving, forwarding, and commission merchants for the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad, specializing in cotton shipments to eastern terminals. They had purchased the unprofitable steamer St. Louis and in 1856 converted it to a wharf-boat anchored at the lower Memphis levee, where it remained until it sank on 9 December 1860.[13]

> I cannot correspond with a paper, because when one is learning the river, he is not allowed to do or think about anything else.
>
> I am glad to see you in such high spirits about the land, and I hope will remain so, if you never get richer. I seldom venture to think about our landed wealth, for "hope deferred maketh the heart sick."
>
> I *did* intend to *answer* your letter, but I am too lazy and too sleepy, now. We had had a rough time during the last 24 hours working through the ice between Cairo and Saint Louis, and I have had but little rest.
>
> I got here too late to see the funeral of the 10 victims by the burning of the Pacific hotel in 7th street. Ma says there were 10 hearses, with the fire companies (their engines in mourning—firemen in uniform,)—the various benevolent societies in uniform and mourning, and a multitude of citizens and strangers, forming, altogether, a procession of 30,000 persons! One steam fire-engine was drawn by four white horses, with crape festoons on their heads.

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12 Way 1983, 307; "Pennsylvania Arrived at Cairo—Special Dispatch," St. Louis Missouri Republican, 21 Feb 58, 3.

13 advertisement, Memphis Appeal, 13 Oct 58, 2; "River Intelligence," St. Louis Missouri Democrat, 14 Dec 60, 3; Way 1983, 412

On 20 February 1858, three days after the Pennsylvania left St. Louis, fire destroyed the new Pacific Hotel, killing twenty-one guests. [14]*St. Louis civic leaders organized an impressive funeral procession to Bellefontaine Cemetery for ten of the victims on 24 February. The Missouri Republican of the following day expressed confidence that the citizens in the procession and the twenty-five thousand spectators were inspired by sorrow and respect, rather than a "love of funeral pomp" or "mere curiosity".* [15]*Annie Moffett Webster later recalled attending the procession with her grandmother, Jane Clemens, who did love such occasions.*

Well, I am—just—about—asleep—

Your brother
Sam

March 11 Thursday – Pennsylvania left for New Orleans.
March 17 Wednesday – Pennsylvania arrived in New Orleans.
March 19 Friday – Sam gave a deposition in a lawsuit (Klineflelter, et al, vs. Vicksburg) over the collision between the *Pennsylvania* and the *Vicksburg* on Nov. 26, 1857.

March 20 Saturday – Pennsylvania left for St. Louis.
March 27 Saturday – Pennsylvania arrived in St. Louis.
March 31 Wednesday – Pennsylvania left for New Orleans.
April 6 Tuesday – Pennsylvania arrived in New Orleans.
April 10 Saturday – Pennsylvania left for St. Louis.
April 16 Friday – Pennsylvania arrived in St. Louis.
April 20 Tuesday – Pennsylvania left for New Orleans.
April 26 Monday – Pennsylvania arrived in New Orleans.
April 30 Friday – Pennsylvania left for St. Louis.
May 5 Wednesday – Pennsylvania arrived in St. Louis.
May 10 Monday – Pennsylvania left for New Orleans.
May 16 Sunday – Pennsylvania arrived in New Orleans.
May 20 Thursday – Pennsylvania left for St. Louis. When the boat was backing out, Sam had to leap for the rail from the John J. Roe, ending his visit with Laura Wright.

May 27 Thursday – Pennsylvania arrived in St. Louis.
May 29 Saturday – In St. Louis, Sam dreamed of Henry "lying in a metallic burial case in the sitting-room, supported on two chairs". He related the dream the next morning to his sister Pamela Moffett and family, who later recalled him taking it quite serious. Henry and Sam were staying with their sister for a three-day layover. Sam left St. Louis on May 30 so he must have had the dream on May 29.[16]

14 Scharf, 2:1446; St. Louis Missouri Republican: "The Late Catastrophe," 24 Feb 58, 2; "Two More Victims," 25 Feb 58, 2
15 "Burial of the Pacific Hotel Victims," 25 Feb 58, 2
16 Day By Day, March 29, 1857

May 30 Sunday – Pennsylvania left for New Orleans.

June 3 Thursday – Mid-morning: Pilot William Brown called Sam's brother Henry Clemens a liar, and started after him with a big chunk of coal. Sam stepped in between and "stretched him out" with a heavy stool. Sam then "stuck to him and pounded him with my fists a considerable time – I do not know how long, the pleasure of it probably made it seem longer than it really was…" For a few minutes no one was steering the ship. Called on the carpet in Captain John Klinefelter's cabin, Sam was questioned about the fight. The Captain said he was "deuced glad of it!" and advised Sam to further thrash Brown on shore. Brown refused to stay on the same boat with Sam, so was let off in New Orleans. This is the only violent act Sam was ever known to commit, though he threatened or wished more than a few other times.[17]

June 4 Friday – Pilot William Brown forbade Sam entrance to the pilothouse for the rest of the trip. Sam was " 'an emancipated slave' listening to George Ealer's flute and his readings from Oliver Goldsmith and Shakespeare. Sometimes he played chess with Ealer, and learned a trick which he would use himself in the long after-years—that of taking back the last move and running out the game differently when he saw defeat".[18]


"HENRY AND I SAT CHATTING."

June 5 Saturday – After the Pennsylvania arrived in New Orleans on this date, Brown left the boat. Captain Klinefelter offered Sam a co-pilot position back up the river, but Sam did not feel ready. He left the boat with the understanding he would rejoin it after Brown was replaced. Henry Clemens stayed on the Pennsylvania as a mud clerk.

June 8 Tuesday – Sam and Henry chatted until midnight on the levee. It was their last conversation.

June 9 Wednesday – The Pennsylvania left New Orleans at 5 PM without Sam and with Henry Clemens aboard. Klinefelter had been unable to hire another pilot, attributed by Powers to the pilot's union.[19]

Steamboat: Alfred T. Lacey

Built: 1857, Pilot: possibly Barton Bowen, Co-Pilot: possibly George Ealer, Captain: John P. Rodney
Fate: burned April 26, 1860 with loss of sixteen lives including Captain A. T. Lacy's daughter
Clemens' Service: 11 - 28 July 1858

17 Day By Day June 3, 1857
18 Day By Day June 4, 1857
19 Day By Day June 9, 1857

June 11 Friday – Two days behind Henry on the Pennsylvania, Sam left New Orleans bound for St. Louis on the *Alfred T. Lacey* with Captain John P. Rodney and Sam's Hannibal friend Barton S. Bowen, pilot.[20]

June 13 Sunday – 70 miles south of Memphis at about 6 A.M., the steamboat Pennsylvania's boilers exploded, severely injuring Henry Clemens. Henry was blown free of the ship, but swam back to help rescue passengers. Either Henry did not realize the extent of his own injuries, or was scalded in his attempts to help. About 150 people were killed, including pilot William Brown. Klinefelter helped with the rescue and received only minor injuries. Henry was taken aboard the *Kate Frisbee* to Memphis, some sixty miles up river from the disaster.[21]

June 14 Monday – Henry Clemens arrived at Memphis at 3 A.M. with 31 other victims, some twenty-one hours after the explosion and after several transfers, including the *Kate Frisbee*. Henry was taken to the Memphis Exchange, a makeshift hospital. 100-degree heat increased the suffering of the wounded.[22]

June 15 Tuesday – The Lacey docked in Memphis and news of the explosion reached Sam. He rushed to the Memphis Exchange. [23]

June 15 to 18 Friday – Sam stayed by brother Henry's side.

To Mary E. (Mollie) Clemens
18 June 1858 • Memphis, Tenn.
(MS: CU-MARK, UCCL 00016)
Memphis, Tenn., Friday, June 18th, 1858.

Dear Sister Mollie:

> Long before this reaches you, my poor Henry,—my darling, my pride, my glory, my all, will have finished his blameless career, and the light of my life will have gone out in utter darkness. O, God! this is hard to bear. Hardened, hopeless,—aye, lost—lost—lost and ruined sinner as I am—I, even I, have humbled myself to the ground and prayed as never man prayed before, that the great God might let this cup pass from me.—that he would strike me to the earth, but spare my brother—that he would pour out the fulness of his just wrath upon my wicked head, but have mercy, mercy, mercy upon that unoffending boy. The horrors of three days have swept over me—they have blasted my youth and left me an old man before my time. Mollie, there are grey hairs in my head to-night. For forty-eight hours I labored at the bedside of my poor burned and bruised, but uncomplaining brother, and then the star of my hope went out and left me in the gloom of despair. Then poor wretched me, that was once so proud, was humbled to the very dust.—lower than the dust—for the vilest beggar in the streets of Saint Louis could never conceive of a humiliation like mine. Men take me by the hand and congratulate me, and call me "lucky" because I was not on the Pennsylvania when she blew up! May God forgive them, for they know not what they say.

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20 MTL 1: 82n3
21 MTL 1: 80n1
22 MTL 1: 84n7
23 MTL 1: 82-3n3

One Memphis journalist later remembered that Clemens was "almost crazed with grief" at the sight of Henry, whose "fair young face . . . was almost the only one unmarred by steam and flame". [24]Another observer provided the following account of Clemens's arrival at the Memphis Exchange, temporarily converted into a hospital for the Pennsylvania victims:

We witnessed one of the most affecting scenes at the Exchange yesterday that has ever been seen. The brother of Mr. Henry Clemens, second clerk of the Pennsylvania, who now lies dangerously ill from the injuries received by the explosion of that boat, arrived in the city yesterday afternoon, on the steamer A. T. Lacy. He hurried to the Exchange to see his brother, and on approaching the bedside of the wounded man, his feelings so much overcame him, at the scalded and emaciated form before him, that he sunk to the floor overpowered. There was scarcely a dry eye in the house; the poor sufferers shed tears at the sight. This brother had been pilot on the Pennsylvania, but fortunately for him, had remained in New Orleans when the boat started up. [25]

> Mollie you do not understand why I was not on that boat—I will tell you. I left Saint Louis on her, but on the way down, Mr. Brown, the pilot that was killed by the explosion (poor fellow,) quarreled with Henry without cause, while I was steering—Henry started out of the pilothouse—Brown jumped up and collared him—turned him half way around and struck him in the face!— and him nearly six feet high—struck my little brother. I was wild from that moment. I left the boat to steer herself, and avenged the insult—and the Captain said I was right—that he would discharge Brown in N. Orleans if he could get another pilot, and would do it in St. Louis anyhow.
>
> Of course both of us could not return to St. Louis on the same boat—no pilot could be found, and the Captain sent me to the A. T. Lacey, with orders to her Captain to bring me to Saint Louis.

Like the Pennsylvania, the Alfred T. Lacey (sometimes Lacy), captained by John P. Rodney, belonged to the St. Louis, Cairo, and New Orleans Railroad Line of steamboats. Rodney's pilot was Clemens's Hannibal friend Barton S. Bowen. [26]The Lacey departed New Orleans for St. Louis on 11 June 1858, two days after the Pennsylvania. Word of the explosion reached it at stops before Memphis, where it docked on 15 June. In 1897 Clemens recalled that Bowen gave him twenty dollars, presumably to help defray his expenses in Memphis, but the money was stolen.[27]

> Had another pilot been found, poor Brown would have been the "lucky" man.

Brown, who had probably gone off duty at 4:00 a.m., about two hours before the explosion, was blown into the river. Reed Young, a coalboat pilot taking passage on the Pennsylvania, was also blown into the river. He seized a floating life preserver and grasped the injured Brown, who soon slipped away. Brown's last words, as reported by Young, were "my poor wife and children".[28]

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24 "'Mark Twain.' A Sad Incident of His Early Life Recalled," Memphis Avalanche, 5 Nov 76, 4, clipping in Scrapbook 8:13, CU-MARK, facsimile in Branch 1985, 37–39

25 "A Sad Meeting," St. Louis News and Intelligencer, 19 June 58, reprinting the Memphis Eagle and Enquirer, 16 June 58, clipping in Scrapbook 1:7, CU-MARK

26 see 7 May 66 to William Bowen, n. 4

27 "Villagers of 1840–3," Inds, 97

28 "The Explosion of the Pennsylvania!" Louisville Courier, 17 June 58, 3

> I was on the Pennsylvania five minutes before she left N. Orleans, and I must tell you the truth, Mollie—three hundred human beings perished by that fearful disaster.

Contemporary newspaper reports, some based on the opinions of surviving crew members, estimated that of the more than three hundred aboard the Pennsylvania, passengers and crew, between one and three hundred lost their lives. Captain Klinefelter at first asserted that only twenty-five to thirty had died, a figure that he and pilot George Ealer later revised to thirty-eight. St. Louis steamboat inspectors, having investigated the explosion, first put the number at between one hundred fifty and one hundred sixty, then scaled it down to sixty. William M. Lytle's "Losses of United States Merchant Steam Vessels, 1807–1867" reported only twenty fatalities (Lytle, 247). Weighing all available evidence, eighty to one hundred deaths seems a reasonable estimate, but the loss of the ship's register and papers and the inconclusiveness of missing persons data, especially for an unknown number of immigrants traveling deck passage, leave any estimate in doubt.[29]

> Henry was asleep—was blown up—then fell back on the hot boilers, and I suppose that rubbish fell on him, for he is injured internally. He got into the water and swam to shore, and got into the flatboat with the other survivors.

The explosion had occurred less than a mile below the foot of Bordeaux's (sometimes Burdeau's or Burdoo's) Chute and about sixty miles below Memphis, and approximately four miles above the head of Ship Island and twenty miles above Helena, Arkansas. According to eyewitness George C. Harrison, the boat was "not more than one or two hundred yards" off the Mississippi shore and "some three or four hundred yards" above the Harrisons' woodyard landing. Harrison, his father, and two friends manned a large flatboat and propelled it to meet the wrecked steamer, which was drifting downriver:

The passengers were very slow in embarking at first, many being more anxious to save their property than to assist others to get on board. Fortunately the fire did not break out for some thirty or forty minutes (perhaps longer) after the explosion. So soon as the fire did break out, they then began to tumble in pell-mell, by which some were hurt. Some already on board were slightly hurt by trunks being thrown upon them. When the fire broke out, it spread with the greatest rapidity. We remained along side of the burning mass until it was with the greatest difficulty that we extricated the wood-boat from her perilous situation. Had we remained one minute longer it would have been impossible to have escaped. The heat was most intense as we passed around the stern of the burning and floating mass, and made a landing on a towhead just below. . . . On board the wood-boat, as near as we could ascertain, were from 180 to 200.

The burned-out hulk of the Pennsylvania sank several miles below the point of explosion, near the Mississippi shore and above Austin, Mississippi, and Ship Island—a location that remained memorable to Clemens. His fullest account of the disaster is in chapters 18–20 of Life on the Mississippi, although

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29 "Burning of the Steamer Pennsylvania," St. Louis Missouri Democrat, 16 June 58, 2; "The Pennsylvania Disaster," St. Louis Missouri Republican, 18 June 58, 2; "Further Particulars of the Pennsylvania Disaster," New Orleans True Delta, 16 June 58, 2; "Terrible Steamboat Disaster," Memphis Morning Bulletin, 15 June 58, 2; "The Steamer Pennsylvania," St. Louis Missouri Republican, 18 July 58, 2, clipping in Scrapbook 1:7, CU-MARK; "Report Relative to the Explosion of the Boilers of Steamer Pennsylvania," St. Louis Missouri Republican, 8 Aug 58, 3; U.S. Congress, Senate, 6 [pt. 2]: 271–72; Way 1983, 367

his narrative of the destruction of the Amaranth in chapter 4 of The Gilded Age also draws heavily on the Pennsylvania disaster. For a detailed reconstruction of the event, see Branch 1985, 11–25.[30]

> He had nothing on but his wet shirt, and he lay there burning up with a southern sun and freezing in the wind till the Kate Frisbee came along. His wounds were not dressed till he got to Memphis, 15 hours after the explosion. He was senseless and motionless for 12 hours after that.

According to reports in Memphis newspapers, Henry arrived at Memphis on the Kate Frisbee (Captain Richard M. Mason) at 3:00 a.m. on 14 June, about twenty-one hours after the explosion. He and thirty-one other victims were then placed in the Memphis Exchange, where mattresses had been hastily assembled and arranged into five "wards," attended by the city's physicians, nurses, and many volunteers. Clemens provided further details of Henry's injuries and sufferings in a tribute he published, probably in late June or early July:[31]

> *Henry's stateroom was directly over the boilers, and he was asleep when the explosion occurred. He was never able to give an account of the matter himself, but from what others have said, and also from the nature of his injuries, it is supposed that he was thrown up, then fell back on the heated boilers, and some heavy substance falling upon him, injured him internally. His terrible burns did not seem as if they had been caused by steam or boiling water. After extricating himself, he escaped on a mattrass to a raft or open wood boat, where he lay exposed (with a hundred others,) to the wind and the scorching rays of a Southern sun, for eight hours, when he was taken on board the Kate Frisbee and conveyed to Memphis. He arrived there in a senseless, and almost lifeless condition. He lingered in fearful agony seven days and a half, during which time he had full possession of his senses, only at long intervals, and then but for a few moments at a time. His brain was injured by the concussion, and from that moment his great intellect was a ruin. We were not sorry his wounds proved fatal, for if he had lived he would have been but the wreck of his former self.*

Clemens later presented a different scenario in chapter 20 of Life on the Mississippi. There he claimed that after Henry was flung in the river by the force of the explosion he returned to the burning boat to help others before finally succumbing to his injuries

> But may God bless Memphis, the noblest city on the face of the earth. She has done her duty by these poor afflicted creatures—especially Henry, for he has had five—aye, ten, fifteen, twenty times the care and attention that any one else has had.

Clemens's gratitude toward Memphis was not diminished by time. This is evident from his 25 October 1876 letter in reply to a Memphis woman who had watched over Henry. After apologizing for failing to remember her in particular, Clemens wrote:

> *What I do remember, without the least trouble in the world, is, that when those sixty scalded and mutilated people were thrown upon her hands, Memphis came forward with a perfectly lavish outpouring of money and sympathy, and that this did not fail and die out, but lasted*

30 *Men Call Me Lucky: Mark Twain and the "Pennsylvania."* Oxford, Ohio: Friends of the Library Society, Miami University.

31 "My brother, Henry Clemens…," an incomplete, unidentified newspaper clipping, [July?], Scrapbook 1:15, CU-MARK.

through to the end. . . . Do you remember how the physicians worked?—and the students—the ladies—and everybody? I do. If the rest of my wretched memory was taken away, I should still remember that.[32]

Clemens's belief that Henry received special attention is borne out by the Avalanche, which observed: "Every one had been attracted by this young boy Henry, whose youth and slight physique were called upon to endure so much, and whose refined, graceful manner made it a gladness to do for him what could be done in the absence of a mother and sister for whom his heart grew sick."

Dr. Peyton, the best physician in Memphis (he is exactly like the portraits of Webster,) sat by him for 36 hours. There are 32 scalded men in that room, and you would know Dr. Peyton better than I can describe him, if you could follow him around and hear each man murmur as he passes—"May the God of Heaven bless you, Doctor!"

"What a magnificent man he was!" Clemens remarked of Thomas F. Peyton in his 25 October 1876 letter; "what healing it was just to look at him and hear his voice!" Almost thirty years later he recalled Peyton as "a fine and large-hearted old physician of great reputation in the community". [33]*Peyton, who attended patients in the third ward at the Memphis Exchange, provided this description of the treatment he gave to the Pennsylvania victims:*

The free use of white lead in linseed oil, such as is used in ordinary painting, and covering the part well with soft carded cotton, kept on until signs of sloughing, then remove, and re-apply to all parts not deeply injured, to the deep sloughs; apply fine olive oil and lime water, equal parts, on soft linen, and as the wound heals dress twice daily, with ointment of the sub-acetate of lead.[34]

The ladies have done well, too. Our second Mate, a handsome, noble-hearted young fellow, will die. Yesterday a beautiful girl of 15 stooped timidly down by his side and handed him a pretty bouquet. The poor suffering boy's eyes kindled, his lips quivered out a gentle "God bless you, Miss," and he burst into tears. He made them write her name on a card for him, that he might not forget it.

The Pennsylvania's badly scalded second mate, James M. Thompson, died at the Memphis Exchange on 27 June, six days after Henry Clemens.[35]

Pray for me, Mollie, and pray for my poor sinless brother.

Your unfortunate Brother,

Samℓ. L. Clemens.

P. S. I got here two days after Henry.

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32 "'Mark Twain.' A Sad Incident of His Early Life Recalled," Memphis Avalanche, 5 Nov 76, 4, clipping in Scrapbook 8:13, CU-MARK

33 AD, 13 Jan 1906, CU-MARK, in MTA , 1:311

34 "The Treatment Generally Pursued with the Sufferers by the Steamer Pennsylvania," St. Louis Missouri Republican, 18 July 58, 2, clipping in Scrapbook 1:7, CU-MARK

35 "The Pennsylvania Disaster. Additional Particulars," Memphis Avalanche, undated clipping in Scrapbook 1:11, CU-MARK; "The Sufferers," Memphis Appeal, 29 June 58, 2

June 25 Friday – Sam arrived in Hannibal with Henry's body aboard the steamer *Hannibal City*. Henry buried the same day next to his father, John Marshall Clemens in the Old Baptist Cemetery. In 1876 Sam would have both bodies moved to Mount Olivet Cemetery. Dempsey writes: "After emancipation, the Baptist church in Hannibal kicked its black members out of the church. Most white people quite burying in the old Baptist Cemetery, though blacks continued burying there….Mt. Olivet became the fashionable cemetery for white Hannibal Protestants".[36]

July 11 Sunday – Sam, cub pilot under Samuel A. Bowen, co-pilot George G. Ealer, Captain John P. Rodney left St. Louis for New Orleans on the *Alfred T. Lacey.* Sam loved Ealer, who read Shakespeare, played the flute and was fond of chess. Sam remembered steering for Bowen. This was the only round trip that the Lacey made that month.

July 16 Friday – Alfred T. Lacey arrived in New Orleans.
July 21 Wednesday – Alfred T. Lacey left for St. Louis.
July 28 Wednesday – Alfred T. Lacey arrived in St. Louis.

Steamboat: John H. Dickey

Built: 1857, Tonnage: 403, Pilot: possibly Samuel Bowen, Co-Pilot: possibly Strother Wiley, Captain: Daniel Able
Fate: Survived the Civil War; dismantled July 8, 1865
Clemens' Service: 4 August - 19 October 1858

August 4 Wednesday – The shorter run from St. Louis to Memphis and back allowed Sam to stay closer to his family after the death of Henry and make weekly visits. The John H. Dickey left St. Louis with Sam's old friend Sam A. Bowen, pilot and Daniel J. Able captain.

August 7 Saturday – The John H. Dickey left Memphis. In these runs there was either one-day layover or no layover. All departures were Wednesdays from St. Louis, Saturday from Memphis.

August 11 Wednesday – The John H. Dickey left St. Louis.
August 14 Saturday – The John H. Dickey left Memphis.
August 18 Wednesday – The John H. Dickey left St. Louis.
August 21 Saturday – The John H. Dickey left Memphis.
August 25 Wednesday – The John H. Dickey left St. Louis.
August 28 Saturday – The John H. Dickey left Memphis.
August 30 Monday – Sam dated the article he signed as "Rambler" this day. [37] This was the same pen name Sam had used for the Hannibal Journal from Apr. 29 through May 14, 1853.

September 1 Wednesday – Sam's article was printed in the St. Louis Missouri Democrat using the pen name "Rambler".[38] The John H. Dickey left St. Louis.

September 4 Saturday – The John H. Dickey left Memphis.
September 8 Wednesday – The John H. Dickey left St. Louis.

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36 Day By Day June 25, 1857
37 "Sam Clemens, Steersman on the John H. Dickey." American Literary Realism (Autumn 1982): Branch
38 ibid

September 11 Saturday – The John H. Dickey left Memphis.
September 12 Sunday – Heavy fog delayed the Dickey's arrival in St. Louis. [39]

September 15 Wednesday – The John H. Dickey left St. Louis.
September 16 Thursday – The John H. Dickey laid over at Cairo for six hours, where Senator Stephen A. Douglas was speaking in his campaign against Abraham Lincoln.[40]

September 18 Saturday – The John H. Dickey left Memphis.
September 22 Wednesday – The John H. Dickey left St. Louis.
September 25 Saturday – The John H. Dickey left Memphis.
September 29 Wednesday – The John H. Dickey left St. Louis.
October 2 Saturday – The John H. Dickey left Memphis.
October 5 Tuesday – The John H. Dickey arrived at St. Louis and unloaded 1006 bales of cotton, "the largest lot brought on any one boat this season".[41]

October 6 Wednesday – The John H. Dickey left St. Louis.
October 9 Saturday – The John H. Dickey left Memphis.
October 13 Wednesday – The John H. Dickey left St. Louis.
October 16 Saturday – The John H. Dickey left Memphis.

Steamboat: White Cloud

Built: 1857, Tonnage: 345, Pilot: probably Samuel Bowen, Captain: Daniel Able
Clemens' Service: 20 - 26 October 1858

October 20 Wednesday – The Dickey was laid up for repairs, so Sam and probably Sam Bowen and Captain Able, made the St. Louis to Memphis run on the White Cloud.

October 23 Saturday – The White Cloud left Memphis.

Steamboat: New Falls City

Built: 1858, Tonnage: 880, Pilot: probably Horace Bixby, Captain: James B. Woods
Clemens' Service: 30 October - 8 December 1858

October 30 Saturday – Sam left St. Louis on the New Falls City (built in January of that year, the largest ship Sam served on. Sam took passage on the boat in January as well)

November 8 Monday – New Falls City arrived in New Orleans.
November 10 Wednesday – New Falls City left for St. Louis.
November 17 Wednesday– New Falls City arrived in St. Louis.
November 19 Friday – New Falls City left for New Orleans.
November 26 Friday – New Falls City arrived in New Orleans.
November 29 Monday – New Falls City left for St. Louis.
December 8 Wednesday – New Falls City arrived in St. Louis.

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39 ibid
40 ibid
41 Ibid

Steamboat: Aleck Scott

BUILT: At Louisville, Kentucky, and completed in 1848 at St. Louis, Missouri

FINAL DISPOSITION: Sold to U. S. Quartermasters Department May 18, 1862 and renamed Fort Henry

OFFICERS & CREW: John C. Swon (Captain while running St. Louis-New Orleans); Henry Switzer (Captain while in the "Railroad Line"); Robert A. Reilly (Captain at the outbreak of the American Civil War); Isaiah Sellers (Captain); Oliver Fairchild (Captain); Patrick Yore (Captain); Thomas Fithian (Captain); James Barrard (Captain); Horace Bixby (Pilot)

RIVERS: Mississippi River; Tennessee River

OTHER INFORMATION: St. Louis, Missouri was her first home port. Ran St. Louis-New Orleans; later in the "Railroad Line"; traded at the port of St. Louis in 1858. She was one of the transports that ascended the Tennessee River and carried union troops to Fort Henry in February 1862; photographed at Cairo with troops aboard; the U. S. Quartermasters Department acquired her May 18, 1862 and renamed her Fort Henry. Later that year she was converted into a gunboat and renamed Lafayette

December 13 Monday – Sam and Horace Bixby left St. Louis on the Aleck Scott (709 tons) under Captain Robert A. Reilly. Sam remarked on the Aleck Scott:

> I will remark, in passing, that Mississippi steamboatmen were important in landsmen's eyes (and in their own, too, in a degree) according to the dignity of the boat they were on. For instance, it was a proud thing to be of the crew of such stately craft as the 'Aleck Scott' or the 'Grand Turk.' Negro firemen, deck hands, and barbers belonging to those boats were distinguished personages in their grade of life, and they were well aware of that fact, too. – Life on the Mississippi [MTL 1: 14].

The Aleck Scott was the last steamboat Sam served on as cub pilot. His next assignment was pilot on the Alfred T. Lacey.

December 21 Tuesday– The Aleck Scott arrived in New Orleans.
December 24 Friday – The Aleck Scott left New Orleans.
January 1 Saturday – The Aleck Scott arrived in St. Louis.
January 4 Tuesday – The Aleck Scott left for New Orleans.
January 11 Tuesday – The Aleck Scott arrived in New Orleans.
January 15 Saturday – The Aleck Scott left for St. Louis.
January 27 Thursday – The Aleck Scott arrived in St. Louis.
February 1 Tuesday – The Aleck Scott left for New Orleans.
February 11 Friday – The Aleck Scott arrived in New Orleans
February 16 Wednesday – The Aleck Scott left for St. Louis
February 27 Sunday – The Aleck Scott arrived in St. Louis
March 1 Tuesday – The Aleck Scott left for New Orleans.
March 8 Tuesday – The Aleck Scott arrived in New Orleans

To Pamela A. Moffett
9 and 11 March 1859 • New Orleans, La.
(MS: CU-MARK, UCCL 00019)

beginning of Lent, and all good Catholics eat and drink freely of what they please, and, in fact, do what they please, in order that they may be the better able to keep sober and quiet during the coming fast. It has been said that a Scotchman has not seen the world until he has seen Edinburgh; and I think that I may say that an American has not seen the United States until he has seen Mardi-Gras in New Orleans.

I posted off up town yesterday morning as soon as the boat landed, in blissful ignorance of the great day.

At the corner of Good-Children and Tchoupitoulas streets, I beheld an apparition!—and my first impulse was to dodge behind a lamp-post. It was a woman—a hay-stack of curtain calico, ten feet high—sweeping majestically down the middle of the street (for what pavement in the world could accommodate hoops of such vast proportions?) Next I saw a girls of eighteen, mounted on a fine horse, and dressed as a Spanish Cavalier, with long rapier, flowing curls, blue satin doublet and half-breeches, trimmed with broad white lace—(the balance of her dainty legs cased in flesh-colored silk stockings)—white kid gloves—and a nodding crimson feather in the coquettishest little cap in the world. She removed said cap and bowed low to me, and nothing loath, I bowed in return—but I could n't help murmuring, "By the beard of the Prophet, Miss, but you've mistaken your man this time—for I never saw your silk mask before, — nor the balance of your costume, either, for that matter." And then I saw a hundred men, women and children in fine, fancy, splendid, ugly, coarse, ridiculous, grotesque, laughable costumes, and the truth flashed upon me—"This is Mardi-Gras!" It was Mardi-gras—and that young lady had a perfect right to bow to, shake hands with, or speak to, me, or any body else she pleased. The streets were soon full of "Mardi-gras," representing giants, Indians, nigger minstrels, monks, priests, clowns,—birds, beasts,—everything, in fact, that one could imagine. The "free-and-easy" women turned out en masse—and their costumes and actions were very trying to modest eyes. The finest sight I saw during the day was a band of twenty stalwart men, splendidly arrayed as Comanche Indians, flying and yelling down the street on horses as finely decorated as themselves. It was worth going a long distance to see the performances of the day—but bless me! how insignificant they seemed in comparison with those of the night, when the grand torchlight procession of the "Mystic Krewe of Comus" was added. At half past seven in the evening I went up to St. Charles street, and found both its pavements, for many squares, packed and jammed with thousands of men and women, waiting to see the Mystic Krewe. I managed to get an eligible place near the middle of the street opposite the St. Charles Hotel, where I waited—yes, I waited—standing on both feet as long as I could—then on one—then on tother—and was just preparing to stand on my head awhile, when a shout of "Here they come!" kept me still in the proper position of a box of glassware. But it was a false alarm—and after a while we had another false alarm—and then another—each repetition stirring up the impatience and anxiety of the crowd & setting it to heaving and surging at a fearful rate. At last the distant tinkling of lively music was heard—and then the tag-end of a great huzza that had battered nearly all the life out of itself by butting against many squares of hard brick houses before it reached us—and again the tinkling music, and again the faint huzza—and five thousand people near me were tip-toeing & bobbing & peeping down the long street, & wondering why the devil it didn't come along faster—if it

ever expected to come in sight. Impatience was growing, now, — for ever so far away down the street we could see a flare of light spreading away from a line of dancing colored spots. They approached faster, then, & pretty soon, we took up the fainting huzza, & breathed new life into it. And here was the procession at last. The torches were of all colors, but their shapes represented the spots on a pack of cards—an endless line of hearts, and clubs, &c., The procession was led by a mounted Knight of the Crusader in blazing gilt armor from head to foot, and I think one might never tire of looking at the splendid picture. Then followed tall, grotesque maskers representing some ancient game—then an odd figure covered with checks, with a huge chess board & chessmen for a hat—then another quaint fellow gleaming in backgammon stripes, with two great dice for a hat—then the kings of each suit of cards dressed in royal regalia of ermine, satin & gold—then queer figures representing various other games,—then the Queen of the Fairies, with an winged troop of beauties, in airy costumes at her heels—then the King & Queen of the Genii, I suppose (eight or ten feet high,) with vast rolls of flaxen curls, bowing majestically to the crowd—followed by a couple of infinitesimal dwarfs,—and again by other genii, in costumes grotesque, hideous & beautiful in turn—then figures whose bodies were vast drums, trumpets, clarinets, fiddles, &c.,—followed by others whose bodies were pitchers, punch-bowls, goblets, &c., terminated by two tremendous & very unsteady black wine bottles—then gigantic chickens, turkeys, bears, & other beasts & birds—then a big Christmas tree, followed by Santa Claus, with fur cap, short pipe, &c., and surrounded by a great basket filled with toys—and then—well, I don't remember half. There were transparencies, marking the divisions, with a band of music to each. Under "May-day" was a beautifully decorated May-tree & a May-pole; —after "Twelfth-Night" followed a troupe of the most outrageously hideous figures, half-beast,-half-human, that one could imagine;—Santa Claus & his crew followed "Christmas"—the games, &c., followed "Comus at his old English tricks, & again," and if there were any other transparencies, I have forgotten them. The whole long procession blazed with bran-new silk and satin, and the whole thing seemed to have been gotten up without any regard to cost.

Certainly New Orleans seldom does things by halves.

New Orleans, Friday 11th.

I saw our little Princesses, Countesses, or whatever they are—the Piccolominis—in St. Charles street. yesterday. They came down from Memphis in the cars, I believe. Their first concert takes place to-night, and we shall leave this afternoon. So we shall not hear the young lady sing.

We had a souvenir of the warbler written on our sla old slate, but some sacrilegious scoundrel rubbed it out. It was "Je suis fachèr qu'il faut que nous allons de ce batteau à la Memphis." ("I am sorry that we must leave the boat at Memphis.") To which I replied en mauvais française, "Nous seront nous aussi très fachèr." (We shall be very sorry, also.) Ben was going to "head" it "The Lament of the Irish Emigrant," & sell the old slate to Barnum for five hundred dollars. Ben said he had a very interesting conversation with the "old dowager," Madame Pic. He remarked—"I imagine, Madame, that if it would only drizzle a little more, the weather would soon be in splendid condition for young ducks!" And she replied—"Ah, mio, mio,—une petè—I not can ondersthand not!" "Yes'm, it's a great pity you can't ondersthand not, for it has cost you the loss of a very sage remark." And she followed with a tremendous gush of the musical language. Then Benjamin—"Yes, madame,

> you're very right—very right indeed. I acknowlege the justice of your remarks, but the devil of it is, I'm a little in the dark as to what you've been saying all the time!"
>
> In eight days from this, I shall be in Saint Louis, but I am afraid if I am not careful I'll beat this letter there.

My love to all,

Your brother

Sam

March 19 Saturday – The Aleck Scott arrived in St. Louis
March 21 Monday – The Aleck Scott left for New Orleans.
March 27 Sunday – The Aleck Scott arrived in New Orleans
March 31 Thursday – The Aleck Scott left for St. Louis
April 8 Friday – The Aleck Scott arrived in St. Louis

April 9 Saturday – Sam was granted a license as a full steamboat pilot from the Department of Commerce in St. Louis. Until May 1861, Sam had the "best job in the world."

Note: Until copies of Sam's pilot license surfaced in the late 1930s, it was thought by Paine, DeVoto and others (from Sam's autobiographical estimates of eighteen months from his apprenticeship under Bixby,) that the date was Sept. 9, 1858. Sam may have recollected being allowed to pilot crafts without passengers prior to the issuance of his license, which would have been lawful at that time.[42]

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42 The Twainian, Nov. 1939