

Frederick Tanqueray Anderson's Steamboats
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"Early risers who were astir at daylight this morning were the first to catch the welcome sound of the long whistle of the Kate Adams as she came around Choctaw Bend, and in half an hour the whole town was agog with curiosity and excitement over the arrival of the new boat....When her whistle announced her approach to the elevator, a rush of people to the wharf and the boom of anvils immediately followed."

Arkansas City Journal, December 23, 1882 (After Joe Mosby, Arkansas News, September 7, 2013)

Steamboat and art and history exists between nature and culture; industriousness and exploitation; reality and romance. The arrival of the *Kate Adams* in Arkansas and the people's reaction to it illustrates the aura steamboats held and still hold in spite of their complex histories. These vessels had their own personalities and were often nicknamed as a friend or family member would bestow a pet name. An example of this is 'The Lovin Kate' described as a grand boat with three decks, a large main hall and two formidable smokestacks had a bell that reportedly could be heard 14 miles away. The lore of a boat was strong as 2,000 people greeted her when she first arrived in Memphis to become part of the Memphis and Arkansas River Packet Company (Lauderdale 2011). The importance of a boat's character and her relationship to her ports—were often told through romanticized and true stories that created a buzz, mystique, and romance around many of the vessels. Frederick Tanqueray Anderson's paintings visually tell these stories and provide a lens through which to consider Nineteenth century steamboats such as the *Kate Adams* (figure 1 – 4 aw *Steamboat at Sunset*).

A watercolorist categorized as a romantic American Landscape painter, Anderson became interested in the Arkansas and Mississippi rivers after traveling from his grandfather's plantation in Arkansas to New Orleans from 1850-1857 (Bennett and Worthen 1991: 89). His interests in landscape painting and nature also aligned with the mid-nineteenth century American preoccupation with the rugged West, Westward expansion, and the American landscape. Steamboats in part came to symbolize an entrepreneurial and cultural spirit—it is telling that the second steamboat on western rivers was called the 'Enterprise'. Mark Twain said that Americans thought that these boats were "floating palaces" and according to Robert Gudmestad, riverboats "transported passengers to a new and marvelous world; they created a sensual traveling experience" (Gudmestad 2011: 175). Artistic depictions of steamboats in general seem tied to romanticized perceptions of industriousness and glamour through waterway exploration.

In 1872 Anderson painted the watercolor *Rapidly Ascending the Mississippi* (figure 2) which was described in the "Memphis Daily Appeal" as "one of the most natural and beautiful pictures in the city" (after Bennett and Worthen 89). Anderson emphasized the stature of this steamboat by placing it in the foreground of the painting with a smaller boat placed in the distance. He also includes realistic details such as figures on the decks and sparks and dark smoke rising from the stacks. Although the title tells the viewer that this steamboat is lunging or leaping upward, Anderson further emphasizes the surge of the boat by using a dark palette with strong value contrasts between the rippling water and the structure of the boat. This relatively early work illustrates his interest in movement, light and shadow, and in conveying a mood.

Although there is not very much written about Anderson in terms of his stylistic influences, his watercolored seascape themes are stylistically similar to the romanticized landscape paintings of the Hudson River School and artists such as Thomas Cole and other mid-nineteenth century painters such as Winslow Homer. His painting *Steamboat at Sunset*, 1903 (figure 1) also seems to be heavily influenced by European travel in 1889 where he reportedly studied under the French Impressionist Camille Pissarro (Bennett and Worthen 89). Like many of his depictions of steamboats, he captures the full essence of this particular steamboat by showing it in profile. The boat is placed in the background with the silhouetted trees on the horizon line framing it. Anderson uses the medium of watercolor to blur and soften the edges of the trees, boat, and clouds, which focuses the viewer on light and the time of day. There are no details or people in this painting or others such as *Steamboat Around the Bend*, 1904 (figure 3)—instead the artist focuses on light and color to capture the romanticized essence of the steamboats and their water-filled landscapes.

Anderson chose not to depict the dark side of steamboats, such as its role in Native American Removal, slavery, and deforestation. Being a man of his time he focused on the pride many must have felt seeing these vessels of industry and economic hope pull into their ports. In spite of any harsh facts, steamboats dramatically changed our culture. Anderson's paintings bring to life and light an era in which these vessels changed the economy and culture of the south and the United States.

Bennett, Swannee and William B. Worthen. *Arkansas Made: A Survey of the Decorative, Mechanical, and Fine Arts Produced in Arkansas 1819-1870*. Volume II. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1990.

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