



AS MUCH AS THE WATER

HOW STEAMBOATS SHAPED ARKANSAS

From the earliest days of the 19th century, steamboats played a vital role in the history of Arkansas. Prior to the advent of steamboats, Arkansans were at the mercy of poor roads, high carriage costs, slow journeys, and isolation.

Water routes were the preferred means of travel due to faster travel times and fewer hardships. While water travel was preferable to overland travel, it did not come without dangers.

1790s

Robert Fulton (1765-1815) proposes plans for steam-powered vessels to the U.S. Government. The first commercial steamboat completes its inaugural journey in 1807 in New York state.

1810s

Henry Shreve (1785-1851) creates two new types of steamboats: the side-wheeler and the stern-wheeler. These boats are well suited for the shallow, fast-moving rivers in Arkansas.



March 31, 1820 The first steamboat to arrive in Arkansas, **Comet**, docks at the Arkansas Post.

1820s

Steamboats traveled the Arkansas, Black, Mississippi, Ouachita, and White Rivers, carrying passengers, raw materials, consumer goods, and mail to formerly difficult-to-reach communities.

1830s

Steamboats, or steamers, were used during Indian Removal in the 1830s for both the shipment of supplies and passage of emigrants along the Arkansas, White, and Ouachita waterways.



February 1, 1839 *Quatie*, wife of Cherokee Chief John Ross, dies aboard **Victoria** on its way to Indian Territory and is buried in Little Rock

1860s

During the Civil War, Arkansas's rivers offered the only reliable avenue upon which either Confederate or Union forces could move. Union forces early established control over the rivers in Arkansas. In addition to transporting supplies, some steamers were fitted with armor and fought during battles on the rivers.



April 27, 1865 *Sultana*, carrying 2,100 recently released Union prisoners of war, 100 civilian passengers, and a crew of 85, exploded on the Mississippi River, causing the death of about 1,800 people.

By 1875, steamboats could reach most parts of the state.

1870s

Entertainment boats increase in popularity in the later part of the 19th century. Shows that previously had to tour by wagon, now traveled across the state by steam. One such vessel was **New Sensation** which included theatre, dance, and music.

1880s



November 14, 1926 Famed river scene painter, **F. T. Anderson (1846-1926)** dies.

1950s

Navigation on the lower Arkansas River was difficult since boats were at the mercy of Mother Nature. The **McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System (MKARNS)** was constructed with seventeen locks and dams to make the river navigable.

The **first commercial barge** to travel the full length of the MKARNS, docked at the Tulsa Port of Catoosa.



January 21, 1971

2000s

In 2014, over eleven million tons of commodities were floated up and down the MKARNS.