

THE "VIRGINIA," THE "CLERMONT" OF THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI¹

The year 1823 marks the first successful undertaking on the part of a steamboat to navigate the waters of the upper Mississippi from the foot of the Des Moines or Lower Rapids to Fort Snelling, eight miles below the Falls of St. Anthony.² The advent of the steamboat on these waters was the death-blow to the barge, the raft, the keel boat, the pirogue, and other boats that hitherto had been the navigators of the upper Mississippi.

In 1810, a year before the "New Orleans" made the first steamboat trip to the city of that name, the population of the United States was but 7,239,881. Although the greater portion of this population was still east of the Allegheny Mountains, the territory embracing the states bordering on the Ohio was experiencing a phenomenal growth. Two routes lay open to emigrants from the East — one was by land, the other by water down the Ohio River in such crafts as broadhorns, rafts, or barges. If a more substantial type of boat was desired, the keel boat was used. The country along the Ohio and lower Mississippi was settled by emigrants carried on these boats and its produce was sent down the river to New Orleans on similar craft.³

The total population of that territory which is now embraced by the states of Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota was small in 1810. Missouri had 19,783 people, while Illinois had but 12,282; in 1820 the territory included in

¹ A paper read on June 13, 1928, at the Fort Ripley session of the seventh state historical convention under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society. *Ed.*

² Giacomo C. Beltrami, *A Pilgrimage in Europe and America*, 2: 127 (London, 1828); *Niles' Weekly Register*, 24: 400 (August, 1823).

³ Morris Birkbeck, *Notes on a Journey in America*, 172 (Philadelphia, 1817).

these two states had but 121,797 inhabitants. No federal census returns were made for what are now the states of Iowa and Wisconsin until 1840. In that year the Iowa country showed a population of 43,112 and Wisconsin had 30,945 inhabitants. In 1850 the territorial population of Minnesota amounted to but 6,077. In 1820 the three latter states were not even geographic expressions.

To protect the scattered inhabitants of this northwest frontier four forts were established. Fort Edwards was located on the east side of the Mississippi at the mouth of the Des Moines River, the foot of the Lower Rapids. Fort Armstrong, erected in 1816, was situated on Rock Island at the foot of the Upper Rapids. Fort Crawford, also erected in 1816, stood on the outskirts of the little French village of Prairie du Chien, six miles above the junction of the Wisconsin and the Mississippi. Fort Snelling was built on a towering bluff on the west bank of the Mississippi at its junction with the St. Peter's or Minnesota River. It was established in 1819 on a site almost eight hundred miles from what was to be its chief source of supply and reënforcement, Jefferson Barracks, Missouri.⁴ At these remote establishments the Indian agent, the missionary, the fur-trader, and the soldier found the Indian of primary interest. Here treaties were signed, annuities distributed, and furs bartered. Here in time of imminent danger the early settler sought protection, and from these posts military expeditions sallied forth. Early each spring the unwieldy keel boat brought supplies up the Mississippi, and often troops were transferred from post to post by these vessels. To complete the entire journey upstream to Fort Snelling, the most remote post, the keel boat sometimes took only forty days, but often as many as sixty were required.

With the exception of Alton, Illinois, a straggling frontier town, the only settlement of any size above St. Louis was

⁴ Marcus L. Hansen, *Old Fort Snelling*, ch. 2 (Iowa City, Iowa, 1918); Bruce Mahan, *Old Fort Crawford and the Frontier*, 69-72 (Iowa City, Iowa, 1926); *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 2: 265.

Prairie du Chien, an old French community, which had long been a center for the fur trade of the Wisconsin and upper Mississippi valleys. At Clarksville and Louisiana, Missouri, there were a few huts, and Quincy, Illinois, was even less pretentious. In 1821 the curtain was just rising on Galena and the neighboring lead districts, but some half dozen years were to elapse before they were to attain prominence. St. Louis served as entrepôt for the upper Mississippi region. When it was incorporated as a city in 1822, its population was a scant five thousand, including a large number of Frenchmen engaged in the fur trade.⁵

In a survey of steamboating on western waters prior to 1823, the hazardous voyage late in the fall of 1811 of the "New Orleans" from Pittsburgh down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans is the outstanding event. All along the route the settlers gazed at this novel craft with astonishment. After demonstrating to a crowd of skeptics at Cincinnati that it was possible to go up as well as downstream, it continued on its way. It was forced to hold over for a couple of weeks at Louisville to await a favorable rise of water that would make it possible to pass the falls of the Ohio, but it finally succeeded in effecting a passage and reached New Orleans on January 8, 1812.⁶

During the next five years the evolution and growth of steamboating was slow. Less than a score of boats were built on the Ohio and the lower Mississippi and the mortality rate was very high. The great cost, the danger from snags and sand bars, the difficulty of passing the falls of the Ohio, and the War of 1812 all served to hinder construction and navigation on these streams. The danger of explosions during these experimental years also made navigators wary.⁷

⁵ Beltrami, *Pilgrimage*, 2: 127-130; Frederic L. Paxson, *History of the American Frontier*, 212 (Boston, 1924).

⁶ *Niles' Weekly Register*, 23: 275 (January 4, 1823).

⁷ *Niles' Weekly Register*, 25: 94; 38: 97 (October 11, 1823; March 27, 1830). A "List of the First Steamboats Built and Documented on

Strange as it may seem, no steamboat ventured up the Mississippi above the mouth of the Ohio during the years from 1812 to 1817. The small number of the boats and the increasing volume of trade seems to have kept them running on the Ohio and lower Mississippi. Finally on August 2, 1817, just as the people of St. Louis had given up hope of seeing a boat that year, the "General Pike" came snorting up the river, the first boat to ascend to that city. In October of the same year the "Constitution" arrived. During 1818 there were several arrivals at St. Louis and from that time on the number gradually increased.⁸

On May 21, 1819, a Missouri newspaper announced the departure from St. Louis of the steamboat "Independence" for Franklin and Chariton, Missouri, and a week later it chronicled the arrival of the vessel at these points with a cargo of flour, whisky, sugar, and iron castings. This was the first time that a steamboat navigated the waters of the Missouri.⁹ The following month an expedition under Stephen H. Long left St. Louis and stemmed the currents of the same river to Council Bluffs.

In the spring of 1819 plans were being made for the building of a fort at the mouth of the Minnesota. The war department ordered Major Thomas Forsyth to purchase two thousand dollars worth of goods to be shipped up the Mississippi by steamboat to the Sioux Indians living above Prairie du Chien in payment for the site, which had been ceded to Lieutenant Pike in the treaty of 1805. "The owners of the steamboats,"

Western Rivers," including fifty-one boats with the tonnage and the place and date of the building of each, was obtained in 1923 by Captain Fred A. Bill of St. Paul from the bureau of navigation of the department of commerce. It is published in the *Saturday Evening Post* of Burlington, Iowa, for May 12, 1923, and the *Wabasha County Herald* of Wabasha for June 26, 1924.

⁸ James H. Perkins and J. M. Peck, *Annals of the West*, 761 (St. Louis, 1850).

⁹ "Selections from the Missouri Intelligencer and Boon's Lick Advertiser," in *Missouri Historical Review*, 1: 309 (July, 1907).

according to Forsyth, "finding it was impracticable to navigate such craft on the upper parts of the Mississippi river, changed their plans, and commenced transporting the provisions in keel boats. Finding that no steamboat could get up the different rapids, and that the contractor had commenced to employ keels, I hired a boat and crew, bought provisions, and was ready by the third of June."¹⁰

In the years 1818 and 1819 over fifty steamboats were built for western commerce — more than had been constructed in the previous seven years. It was quite natural, therefore, that there should be a gradual increase and expansion in their use, but even with this added number it is not likely that more than a third of the total trade on western waters was carried by steamboats. Earlier, however, in 1817 nine-tenths of the trade had been carried by other types of boats. After a slight decline in building, the number again began to increase until in 1826 it reached the high mark of fifty-two. This number was not surpassed during the following five years.¹¹

The "Virginia," the "Clermont" of the upper Mississippi, was a small stern-wheeler of 109.32 tons, built at Wheeling, Virginia, in 1819 and owned by Redick McKee, James Pemberton, and seven others. It was 118 feet long; 18 feet, 10

¹⁰ Forsyth, "Fort Snelling: Col. Leavenworth's Expedition to Establish It, in 1819," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 3: 140. In December, 1819, a contract was made by the quarter master general with James Johnson to furnish steamboats for the "transportation of provisions and munitions of war, detachments and their baggage, or other Articles to the Military posts" at the "mouth of Saint Peters, near the falls of St. Anthony, the mouth of the Yellow stone on the Missouri, and Belle point on the Arkansas." Apparently Johnson put boats on the Missouri, but not on the upper Mississippi. A manuscript copy of the contract is in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. See also *Documents in Relation to the Claim of James Johnson for Transportation on the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers*, printed as 16 Congress, 2 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 110 (serial 56); and *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 2: 68, 324.

¹¹ *Niles' Weekly Register*, 25: 94; 33: 181; 38: 97 (October 11, 1823; November 17, 1827; March 27, 1830); Birkbeck, *Journey in America*, 174.

inches wide; and its depth was 5 feet, 2 inches. It had a small cabin on its deck but no pilot house, being run by a tiller at the back, and it lacked both mast and figurehead. According to its enrollment at the port of New Orleans, dated December 21, 1822, it was the fifty-first boat built and documented on western waters. During the course of its first journey on the upper Mississippi in 1823 it was commanded by two men. Pember-ton acted as master occasionally and John Crawford seems to have held the position of captain officially. The "Virginia" completed two successful trips to the mouth of the St. Peter's River and one to Prairie du Chien during the year 1823. On September 19, 1823, while on its way from Louisville to St. Louis, it struck a snag and sank in the Mississippi about seventy miles above the mouth of the Ohio. The passengers and crew were saved, but the cargo went down. No evidence has been found that the boat ever was raised.¹²

The "Virginia" was chartered primarily to carry government supplies to the posts on the upper Mississippi. These were destined to be used either by the troops at the northwest forts or for distribution among the Indians. Other freight and passengers also were carried. Major Lawrence Taliaferro, the Indian agent at Fort Snelling, was in Washington on business connected with his work early in 1823 and he was ordered on his return to superintend the movement of supplies to the upper Mississippi on the "Virginia." He no doubt imparted a great deal of information to Beltrami, the Italian exile and explorer, who was granted permission by the Indian agent to go to Fort Snelling on the "Virginia" and who "bunked" with him both on board the boat and after they reached Fort Snelling.¹³ Beltrami was the sole chronicler of the events of

¹² *Niles' Weekly Register*, 25:95 (October 11, 1823); Fred A. Bill, "History of Early Steamboat Navigation," in *Wabasha County Herald*, June 12, 26, 1924.

¹³ A. J. Hill, "Constantine Beltrami," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 2:191; Beltrami, *Pilgrimage*, 2:127.

the journey and it is chiefly through his record that the incidents of the voyage are known. He was a typical adventurer of the better class.

Another passenger was Great Eagle, a Sauk Indian chief, who had been prevailed upon to board the "Virginia" while his less fortunate fellow tribesmen made their way along the banks of the river to their home. These lesser lights must have been filled with the keenest jealousy as they plodded their weary way along the rough, muddy bank while their chief lolled at ease upon the deck of the "Virginia" smoking his pipe and no doubt recounting weird tales of his bravery and the cowardice of his enemies. A Kentucky family bound for the lead mines at Galena was on board, according to Beltrami, "with their arms and baggage, cats and dogs, hens and turkeys; the children too had their own stock. The facility, the indifference with which the Americans undertake distant and difficult emigrations, are perfectly amazing. Their spirit of speculation would carry them to the infernal regions, if another Sybil led the way with a golden bough." A woman missionary completes the list of known passengers. She was bound for the lead district and expected to work among the Indians.¹⁴

On April 21, 1823, probably amid cries of farewell and the good wishes of those gathered on the levee at St. Louis to see it off, the "Virginia" began its journey up the Mississippi.¹⁵ The passage to Fort Snelling was, in Beltrami's opinion, "an epoch in the history of navigation. It was an enterprise of the boldest, of the most extraordinary nature; and probably unparalleled." The trip remained a subject of discussion in St. Louis for many days after the departure of the "Virginia,"

¹⁴ Beltrami, *Pilgrimage*, 2: 128, 161.

¹⁵ Beltrami, in his *Pilgrimage*, 2: 127, erroneously gives May 2 as the date of departure from St. Louis. The *Missouri Republican* (St. Louis) of April 23, 1823, chronicles the departure of the "Virginia" two days earlier. A file of the *Republican* is in the library of the Missouri Historical Society at St. Louis.

and "there was a great speculation as to whether the steamboat would ever return again, and also as to the practicability of steamboats crossing the Rapids of the Mississippi."¹⁶

The current seemed to become swifter when the "Virginia" was but six miles from St. Louis. "We were approaching the mouth of the Missouri, which is only eighteen miles from that town," Beltrami remarks, "and notwithstanding the power of our steamboat, we did not come in sight of this river before eight o'clock the following morning." Twenty-one miles above the mouth of the Missouri the "Virginia" passed the mouth of the Illinois. "The eastern bank of the Mississippi, opposite the village called *Portage des Sioux*, leading from the Illinois to the Missouri," Beltrami notes, "rises in abrupt rocks, hewn by nature into perpendicular pillars."

Clarksville and Louisiana, "two pretty rising villages" on the Missouri shore, were passed, the latter being about a hundred miles from St. Louis. The "Virginia" halted at Louisiana a short time and Beltrami climbed a hill to get a view of the surrounding country. Immense and impenetrable woods were the only objects that met his eye and he noted that with the exception of the forts along the way, Louisiana was the last vestige of civilization before Prairie du Chien was reached.

A few days later while the "Virginia" was taking on wood Beltrami ventured alone into the forests. A flock of wild turkeys eluded his pursuit and he continued his walk, soliloquising on the beauty of the plant and animal life about him. Suddenly realizing that a considerable length of time had elapsed, he hurried back to the shore only to find his boat gone. Fortunately the latter struck a sand bar and Beltrami's absence was discovered. A canoe was sent to rescue him and he was

¹⁶ Beltrami, *Pilgrimage*, 127; Moses Meeker, "Early History of the Lead Region of Wisconsin," in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 6:277. The remainder of this paper, unless otherwise indicated, is based upon Beltrami's narrative, 2:127-137, 149-195.

brought back. Thus was saved to posterity a continuous record by the only chronicler the "Virginia" had on board.

When Beltrami returned to the "Virginia" he found that Great Eagle and the pilot had quarreled because the Indian had recommended taking a certain channel while the pilot insisted on taking another. When the boat struck the sand bar Great Eagle was so vexed that without further ado he plunged into the stream, swam ashore, and joined his fellow tribesmen who were making their way along the bank. This event probably occurred a little above where Quincy, Illinois, now stands.

The following day the "Virginia" arrived at Fort Edwards, where Great Eagle was found surrounded by members of his tribe. They had arrived before the "Virginia," had set up a temporary encampment, and "were exchanging furs with the traders of the South-west Company." Beltrami carefully observed the position of the fort, "built upon a promontory on the eastern bank of the Mississippi; its situation, which is pleasant, commands a great extent of the river and the surrounding country, as well as the mouth of the river Le Moine [*Des Moines*] which descends from the west and is navigable for three hundred miles into the interior. The banks of this river are inhabited by the Yawohas [*Iowa*], a savage people, who have been almost entirely destroyed by the Sioux." After being pleasantly entertained by the officers of the fort, the visitors continued their journey.

The "Virginia" had now reached the foot of the Des Moines or Lower Rapids, a hitherto impassable barrier for steamboats. In spite of an excellent stage of water the vessel proceeded cautiously, since the sharp, jutting rocks would crush the hull of the stoutest steamboat. For nine miles the perilous ascent continued, until the boat succeeded in twisting its way up to the middle of the rapids. Here it was forced to return to Fort Edwards, its heavy load and draught being too great to effect the passage, and it was only by sheer luck

that the boat escaped a rock and was saved from being dashed to pieces. Fortunately the damage was very slight. Two days later, with a considerably lightened cargo, the "Virginia" succeeded in reaching the head of the rapids, where a party of Sauk Indians was encamped on the east bank of the river, near the present site of Nauvoo, Illinois.

The ruins of old Fort Madison on the west bank next drew Beltrami's attention. A short distance above the fort the mouth of the Skunk River, which the Italian calls the "river of the *Bête Puante*," was passed and a little farther on the Iowa. From this point on the beauty of the Mississippi held Beltrami spellbound. According to his description, "Wooded islands, disposed in beautiful order by the hand of nature, continually varied the picture: the course of the river, which had become calm and smooth, reflected the dazzling rays of the sun like glass; smiling hills formed a delightful contrast with the immense prairies, which are like oceans, and the monotony of which is relieved by isolated clusters of thick and massy trees." Such were the musings of the Italian exile as he basked in the warm sun and dreamed no doubt of his sunny Italy, thousands of miles away.

As the "Virginia" rounded a bend in the river Beltrami aroused himself from his meditation just in time to gain a "distant and exquisitely blended view" of Rock Island. Fort Armstrong stood at the foot of this island on a plateau about fifty feet above the level of the river. At the mouth of the Rock River was an encampment of Fox Indians, and Beltrami relates that "On the western shore of the Mississippi, a semicircular hill, clothed with trees and underwood, encloses a fertile spot carefully cultivated by the garrison, and formed into fields and kitchen gardens. The fort saluted us on our arrival with four discharges of cannon, and the Indians paid us the same compliment with their muskets. The echo, which repeated them a thousand times, was most striking from its contrast with the deep repose of these deserts." Many of the

Indians who welcomed the "Virginia" no doubt participated in the battle of Bad Axe nine years later. Had they been permitted to draw aside the veil that hid the future and see their bodies torn and mutilated by the withering fire of the steamboat "Warrior," their greeting would have been less cordial.

While the "Virginia" was at Fort Armstrong preparing for the ascent of the Upper Rapids, the intrepid Italian visited the Fox village. Music, dances, and games formed a part of the entertainment. Beltrami was especially amused by the gullibility and superstitions of the Indians and he was not averse to taking advantage of them. He did not hesitate to impress upon them the fact that he had descended from the moon and was endowed with supernatural powers. By means of wily claims such as this, he often succeeded in gaining possession of a favorite peace pipe, tomahawk, or scalp.

The following day with the assistance of Colonel George Davenport and his "patroon debuts" or steersman, the "Virginia" began the ascent of the Rock Island or Upper Rapids, which Beltrami observed were longer and swifter than the Des Moines or Lower Rapids. The fact that the river had been rising for two days helped the boat to pass over this hazardous spot, although one rock that it struck was almost its undoing. The men were entirely exhausted by the labor involved in getting over the rapids and the captain held the "Virginia" over for a few hours near the present site of Le Claire, Iowa, in order to give them an opportunity to recover from their fatigue.¹⁷

Six miles above the rapids on the west bank of the river was another Fox village. "Higher up, after passing the rivers *la Pomme* and *la Garde* [*Wapsipinicon*], which run westward, we saw a place called the Death's-heads," Beltrami relates, "a field of battle where the Foxes defeated the Kikassias, whose heads they fixed upon poles as trophies of their victory." This

¹⁷ Franc B. Wilkie, *Davenport Past and Present*, 157 (Davenport, Iowa, 1858).

was at Tete de Mort Creek, a few miles below the present site of Dubuque.

The "Virginia" stopped at the mouth of the Fevre River, now known as the Galena, and Beltrami considered its name "in perfect conformity with the effect of the bad air which prevails there." Here the family from Kentucky and the woman missionary left. After the other passengers had spent a few hours visiting the lead mines, the journey was continued.

Twelve miles above the mouth of the Galena the lead mines of Dubuque came into view. The Italian visitor was obliged to resort to the use of whisky in order to obtain permission to visit the mines. The Indians were carrying on just enough mining to satisfy their needs in trade. They melted the lead into holes dug in the rock and reduced it to pigs in this manner. It was then carried across the river, for they would permit no white man to come to the mines to get lead. Julien Dubuque's body was enclosed in a leaden chest in a wooden mausoleum situated on the top of a hill overlooking the Mississippi.

Upon leaving Dubuque the "Virginia" wound its way through a country of ever increasing beauty and grandeur. A deserted Fox village was seen on the banks of the Turkey River. Farther on the steamboat passed the mouth of the Wisconsin River, and its importance as a highway for the fur-trader was noted by Beltrami. Six miles above this point the "Virginia" hove in sight of Prairie du Chien. The boat had now traveled a distance of five hundred miles and this little French settlement was the only village to present any of the true earmarks of civilization. South of the village stood a "wretched wooden fort, named fort Crawford."

About nine miles from Prairie du Chien, near Yellow River, stood a rock which was painted red and yellow every year and which the Indians looked upon with veneration. Here the river presented "scenes of peculiar novelty." According to Beltrami's description, "The hills disappear, the number of is-

lands increases, the waters divide into various branches, and the bed of the river in some places extends to a breadth of nearly three miles, which is greater by one half that at St. Louis; and what is very remarkable, its depth is not diminished."

As a rule the engines of the "Virginia" stopped at dusk, but one evening it was found possible to proceed, for suddenly the river was illuminated by the distant glow of a gigantic forest fire. As Beltrami records:

It was perfectly dark, and we were at the mouth of the river Yahowa [*Upper Iowa*] . . . when we saw at a great distance all the combined images of the infernal regions in full perfection. . . . The venerable trees of these eternal forests were on fire, which had communicated to the grass and brushwood, and these had been borne by a violent north-west wind to the adjacent plains and valleys. The flames towering above the tops of the hills and mountains, where the wind raged with most violence, gave them the appearance of volcanoes, at the moment of their most terrific eruptions; and the fire winding in its descent through places covered with grass, exhibited an exact resemblance of the undulating lava of Vesuvius or *Ætna*. . . . This fire accompanied us with some variations for fifteen miles. . . . Showers of large sparks, which fell upon us, excited terror in some, and laughter in others. I do not believe that I shall ever again witness such astonishing contrasts of light and darkness, of the pathetic and the comic, the formidable and the amusing, the wonderful and the grotesque.

The "Virginia" traveled almost all night by the aid of this superb torch. During the night she passed the Bad Axe and Raccoon rivers, but at dawn she struck a sand bar, perhaps as a protest against so great an amount of work.

Six miles above the Racine River Beltrami noted a place called "*Casse-Fusils*" from the fact that a party of Indians, jealous of their brothers, who had been given guns by the English, attacked them and broke their muskets into pieces.

The "Virginia" was now entering the beautiful and romantic country around the present site of Winona. The majestic bluffs, standing like giant sentinels, were likened by Beltrami

to those on the Rhine between Bingen and Koblenz. At the present site of Winona, called by Beltrami "*la Prairie aux Ailes*," the Sioux chief, Wabasha, came on board with his warriors. The pipe of peace was passed around and Taliaferro acted as interpreter for his fellow passengers. Wabasha was greatly impressed with the construction and performance of the "Virginia." The intricacy of the engine especially appealed to him. When members of the Long expedition passed by in keel boats a short time later he expressed deep interest in the "Virginia" and the travelers learned that he had been particularly curious about the construction of the engine and the principle on which it worked.¹⁸

Leaving Chief Wabasha behind the "Virginia" entered a section of the river that was "diversified by hills, plains, meadows, and forests." It passed the mouths of the Buffalo and Chippewa rivers, flowing into the Mississippi from the east. Just above the Chippewa is the foot of Lake Pepin. This enlargement of the Mississippi is of considerable depth and boats have no difficulty in passing through it even during seasons of low water. In stormy weather its waters are lashed into a fury and steamboats that can navigate the shallow upper river, being necessarily of light draught, seldom venture onto it. As the "Virginia" was plowing its way through, a terrific squall struck it and only by means of superb navigation was the boat able to wallow its way to safety. Staring Indians, gazing in astonishment from the banks, were the only witnesses to this thrilling and almost fatal incident.

At the "Mountain of the G[r]ange," now known as Barn Bluff at Red Wing, there was another Sioux village, and here again the chief and his leading warriors came on board. After the travelers solemnly smoked the peace pipe and gave ear to some long and tedious speeches, they resumed their journey. Above the mouth of the Cannon River the Mississippi became

¹⁸ William H. Keating, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Sources of the St. Peter's River*, 1: 283 (London, 1825).

narrower and the bluffs steeper and more imposing. All on board must have experienced a thrill as they passed the St. Croix River and realized that the long journey was almost at an end. The travelers soon passed Little Crow's village, and finally on May 10, 1823, the "Virginia" nosed her way into the Minnesota River and came to a well-earned rest under the frowning cliffs upon which Fort Snelling was built.¹⁹

The long trip of 729 miles had been made in twenty days, of which four had been spent in getting over the Lower Rapids and one in stemming the Upper Rapids. During the course of the journey the boat had struck five sand bars, four below Prairie du Chien and one above. No fuel had been prepared in advance and the "Virginia" had been forced to lay over while fresh supplies were cut by the crew. With the exception of the night of the forest fire, the engines had stopped each day at sundown, as it would have been foolhardy to attempt to travel at night on a river hitherto unnavigated by steamboats.

The voyage of the "Virginia" is an important one, for it established the practicability of navigating the upper Mississippi by steamboat. Late in the summer of 1823 a second boat, the "Rambler," made the ascent to Fort Snelling.²⁰ After the trip of the "Virginia" the government did not hesitate to use a quicker and more reliable way of moving troops and supplies than had previously been used. With the advent of steam navigation it became evident that the Mississippi provided the most expeditious and natural outlet for the huge quantities of lead that were just beginning to be produced and were soon to reach enormous volumes. The river also was to become the main artery along which the great waves of immigration moved

¹⁹ The date used for the arrival of the "Virginia" is that established by Captain Bill. See *Wabasha County Herald*, July 10, 1924.

²⁰ *Missouri Republican*, September 3, 1823. The "Rambler" on its return to St. Louis had among its passengers two Swiss families from the Selkirk settlement on the Red River and Lieutenant Russell of the Fifth United States Infantry.

steadily into the upper Mississippi Valley. As a consequence of this steady growth in population a tremendous trade, which became greater and greater with each passing year, was established on the broad waters of the great river. No other means of transportation was capable of serving this region so well during the period from 1823 to 1848.

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