

CURRICULUM GUIDE

Steamboat Time Line

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for the Traveling Exhibition

Steamboat A-Comin': The Legacy of the New Orleans

developed in partnership with the Rivers Institute at Hanover College



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Cover: Painting *The New Orleans Steaming Upstream by Moonlight, 1811* by Gary R. Lucy. Courtesy of the Gary R. Lucy Gallery, Washington, Missouri. <http://www.garylucy.com>

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Steamboat, Steam Technology, and Historical Context Time Line

Portions of the following time line have been adapted from “Historic Timeline: Prior to the *New Orleans*,” <http://rivers.hanover.edu/doc/HistoricTimeline.pdf>, and used with permission from the Rivers Institute at Hanover College.

1712—Thomas Newcomen invents an atmospheric steam engine used chiefly to pump water from mines. This steam engine has a single piston that is pushed upward by steam and sucked back down by the vacuum created when cold water condenses the steam, creating atmospheric pressure.

1763—The British government passes the Proclamation of 1763 that restricts colonization across the Appalachian Mountains. Settlers still move west and the proclamation is modified, but the act to limit the growth of the American colonies angers many.

1769—James Watt, an instructor at Glasgow University, develops the double-action steam engine, with steam pushing the piston up and then pushing it back down. The *New Orleans* had a double-action steam engine.

1774—The Quebec Act of 1774 extends Quebec’s boundaries to the Ohio River, thereby denying land claims of the thirteen colonies.

1775—April 19. The Battle of Lexington and Concord takes place.

1776 —Declaration of Independence is signed.

1783—The Treaty of Paris ends the American Revolutionary War and gives the United States all land east of the Mississippi River and south of the Great Lakes.

1787—John Fitch demonstrates the first workable steamboat. It has side paddles on each side, and is forty-five feet in length. He sails it down the Delaware River. Fitch does not have the financial backing he needs, and his steamboat is not a commercial success.

1787—The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 establishes the Northwest Territory—the region south

of the Great Lakes, north and west of the Ohio River, and east of the Mississippi River—and accelerates westward expansion.

1792—Kentucky becomes a state.

1796—December 7. John Adams is elected second president of the United States. Thomas Jefferson is elected vice president, having received the second largest number of electoral votes.

1798—John Fitch builds the first steamboat on the Ohio River. He is living in Bardstown, Kentucky, at the time. He again fails to find financial backers, so his project fails, and he eventually committed suicide the same year.

1799—December 14. George Washington dies at Mount Vernon.

1800—June. The United States capital moves from Philadelphia to Washington, DC.

1801—Thomas Jefferson is elected president, and Aaron Burr becomes vice president.

1802—William Symington, from Britain, builds a steam tug with a paddle wheel at the stern. He runs out of money.

1802 — Ohio outlaws slavery.

1803—January 18. Known as the Louisiana Purchase, the territory, approximately 800,000 square miles comprising the Mississippi River valley and most of the present-day Midwest, almost doubles the size of the United States. Jefferson asks Congress for funds for an expedition to explore the Mississippi River and beyond in search of a route to the Pacific.

1803—Ohio becomes a state.

1804—May. The expedition led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to explore the Louisiana Territory departs, moving up the Missouri River. Jefferson is also reelected in November.

1806–1811—Tensions mount between the United States and Great Britain. British warships board and search American ships and seize American as well as British seamen, claiming they are deserters

from the British armed forces (Britain was at war with France). Jefferson eventually closes American ports to British ships and begins preparing the United States for war.

1807—Robert Fulton invents the first commercially successful steamboat, sometimes called the *Clermont*, which runs a regular passenger service on the Hudson River from New York City to Albany. The steamboat is a side wheeler, built at New York, powered with an engine imported from England, and fitted with sails to help it along when the wind is beneficial. The *Clermont* is 150 feet long, 13 feet wide, and travels at 4 miles per hour.

1808—James Madison is elected president. He continues to build the country's defenses and prepare for war against Great Britain.

1809—June–December. Nicholas and Lydia Roosevelt take a flatboat from Pittsburgh to New Orleans on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. They use the trip to gather information for Roosevelt's associates, Robert Fulton and Robert Livingston, who hope to put a steamboat on western rivers.

1810—Spring. Nicholas and Lydia Roosevelt return to Pittsburgh, where he supervises construction of the *New Orleans*, a steamboat designed by Robert Fulton and Robert Livingston. When finished, the boat is 138 feet long with a 26.5 foot beam. Its capacity is between 300 and 400 tons. White pine is used to build the boat. The *New Orleans* costs approximately \$38,000.

1811—October 20. The *New Orleans* leaves Pittsburgh, commencing its voyage with Nicholas and Lydia and their daughter Rosetta as the only passengers. There is a captain, an engineer named Nicholas Baker, a pilot named Andrew Jack, six hands, two female servants, a man waiter, a cook, and a Newfoundland dog named Tiger.

1811—October 27. The *New Orleans* arrives in Cincinnati, but passes by without stopping. On October 30, Cincinnati's Liberty Hall notes in *Ship News* that "the steamboat, lately built in Pittsburgh, passed the town at 5 o'clock in the

afternoon going at a rate of about 10–12 miles an hour." The *Western Spy* comments, "The citizens of this place were much disappointed in not having an opportunity of viewing her, only as she passed. She made no stops here. From the rapidity with which she passed this place it is supposed she went at the rate of 12–14 miles an hour."

1811—October 28. The *New Orleans* arrives in Louisville, Kentucky. The arrival in Louisville is spectacular, dramatic, and wonderfully satisfying for Nicholas and Lydia. All onboard the *New Orleans* are awake on deck when the steamboat comes in. As they approach, the entire town gathers to celebrate the steamboat.

1811—October 30. While docked in Louisville, Lydia gives birth to a son, Henry Latrobe Roosevelt. The boy is named after Lydia's father, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, the famed architect and engineer noted for his designs of waterworks at Philadelphia and New Orleans and the U.S. Capitol in Washington, DC. Henry is the second child born to Nicholas and Lydia. His older sister, Rosetta Mark Roosevelt, was born on November 11, 1809. Henry will spend most of his adult life working as a hardware merchant and as a director of a bank in the town of Skaneateles, New York. He will die on January 10, 1884.

1811—November 7. The Battle of Tippecanoe is fought near Prophetstown in Indiana Territory. U.S. forces led by William Henry Harrison defeat Native American forces led by the Prophet (Tenskatawa) in a costly battle that heightens suspicion against the British.

1811—November 27. To the amazement of local residents, the *New Orleans* arrives in Cincinnati after steaming up the Ohio River.

1811—December 3. The *New Orleans* arrives in Louisville.

1811—December 8. The *New Orleans* passes through the Falls of the Ohio. For the *New Orleans* to travel through the two-mile, winding, narrow channel, the steamboat has to exceed 14 miles per hour. Andrew Jack, the steamboat's pilot, is not

allowed to make crucial decisions. Only court-appointed pilots are allowed to conduct vessels over the rapids since so many casualties have resulted from trips down the Falls. For each vessel that travels down the Falls, pilots are paid a fee of two dollars and are responsible for any damage due to neglect or mismanagement.

1811—December 16. The New Madrid earthquake occurs.

1811—December 27. The *New Orleans* arrives in Natchez, Mississippi.

1812—January 10. The *New Orleans* arrives in New Orleans, Louisiana.

1812—January 23. The *New Orleans* begins a trip from New Orleans to Natchez, Mississippi, a route it will run regularly for two years. The *New Orleans* conducts trade and is a financial success, making thirteen regular trips annually between New Orleans and Natchez. There also are many side expeditions. Downstream, the *New Orleans* carries from ten to twenty passengers at eighteen dollars each, and upstream it carries thirty to forty at twenty-five dollars each. The *New Orleans's* first year of business is said to have netted her owners twenty thousand dollars, a large sum for a day of small business ventures.

1812—The War of 1812 breaks out between the United States and Great Britain

1814—July 14. The *New Orleans* docks along the river bank on July 13. During the night the level of the river falls, and in the morning, the boat is resting on a snag. When the boat tries to pull away, the snag leaves a hole in the boat, and it sinks.

1814—The British burn the U.S. Capitol in Washington, DC.

1815—Napoleon is defeated at Waterloo.

1816—Indiana becomes a state.

1818—The *Walk on Water* becomes the first steamboat to navigate the Great Lakes.

1818—Illinois becomes a state.

1819—The first steamboat to cross the Atlantic

Ocean is the *Savannah*.

1825—The Erie Canal is completed.

1854—July 30. Nicholas Roosevelt dies.

1884—Lydia Latrobe Roosevelt dies.

Sources

“Historic Timeline: Prior to the *New Orleans*,” by the Rivers Institute at Hanover College, <http://rivers.hanover.edu/doc/HistoricTimeline.pdf> (accessed September 24, 2010).

“United States History: Timeline: 1800–1900” by Quintard Taylor Jr., University of Washington, http://faculty.washington.edu/qtaylor/a_us_history/1800_1900_timeline.htm (accessed September 24, 2010).