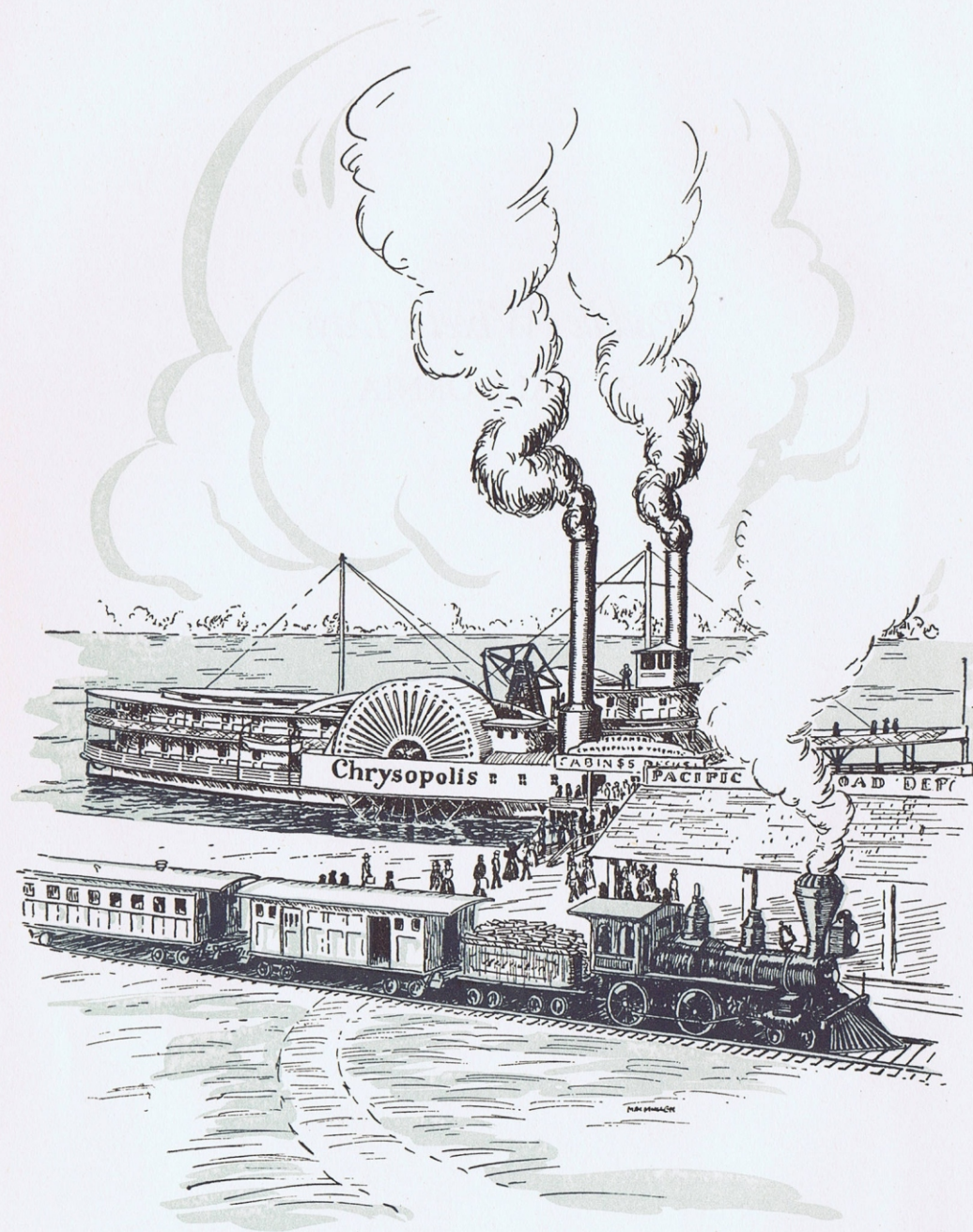


Note: The whole book is available in PDF format online at <http://deltaREvision.com>
and on <http://steamboatslough.com>



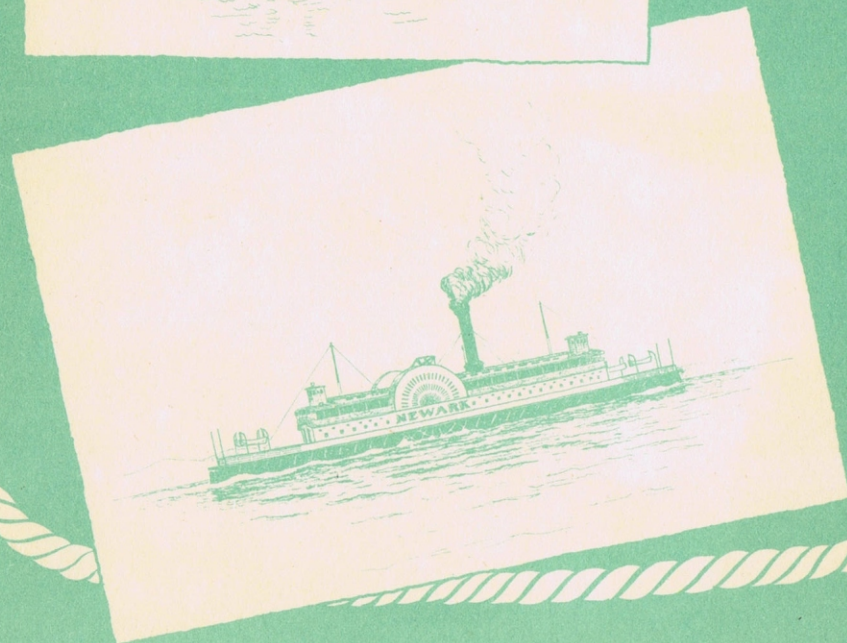
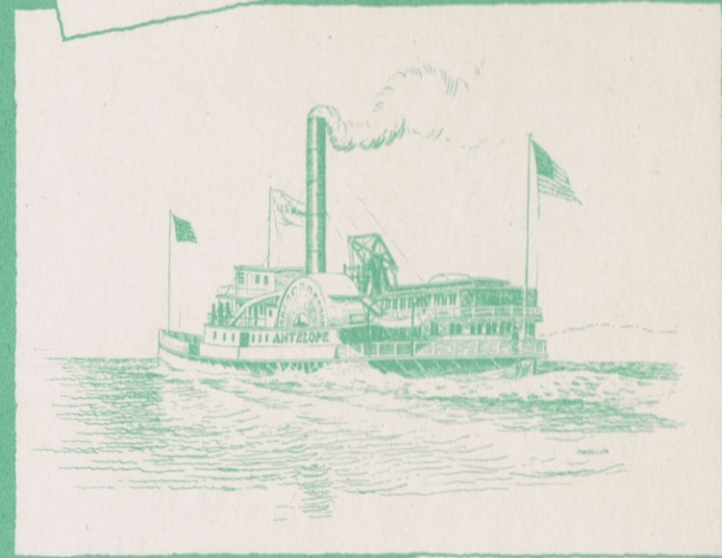
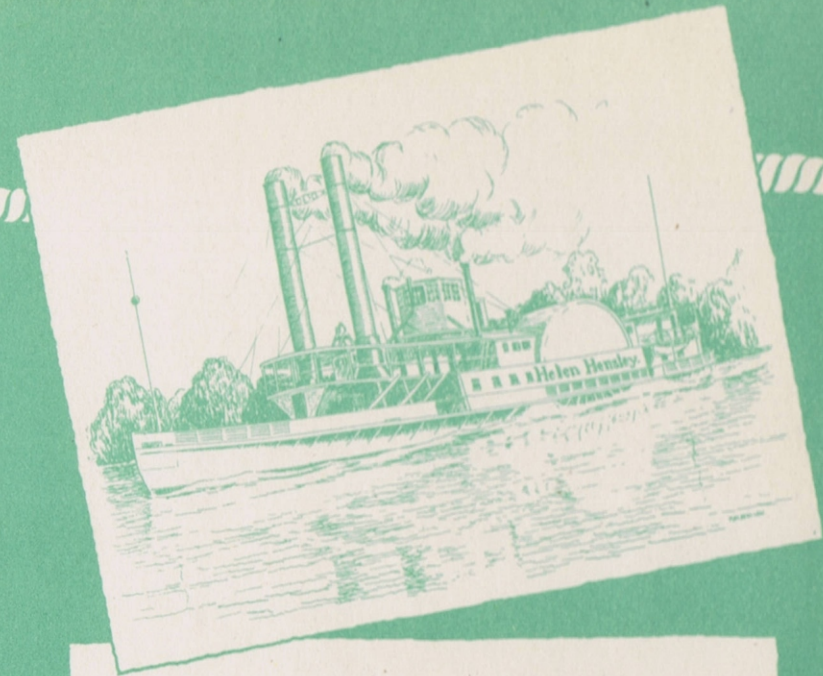
Paddle-Wheel Days

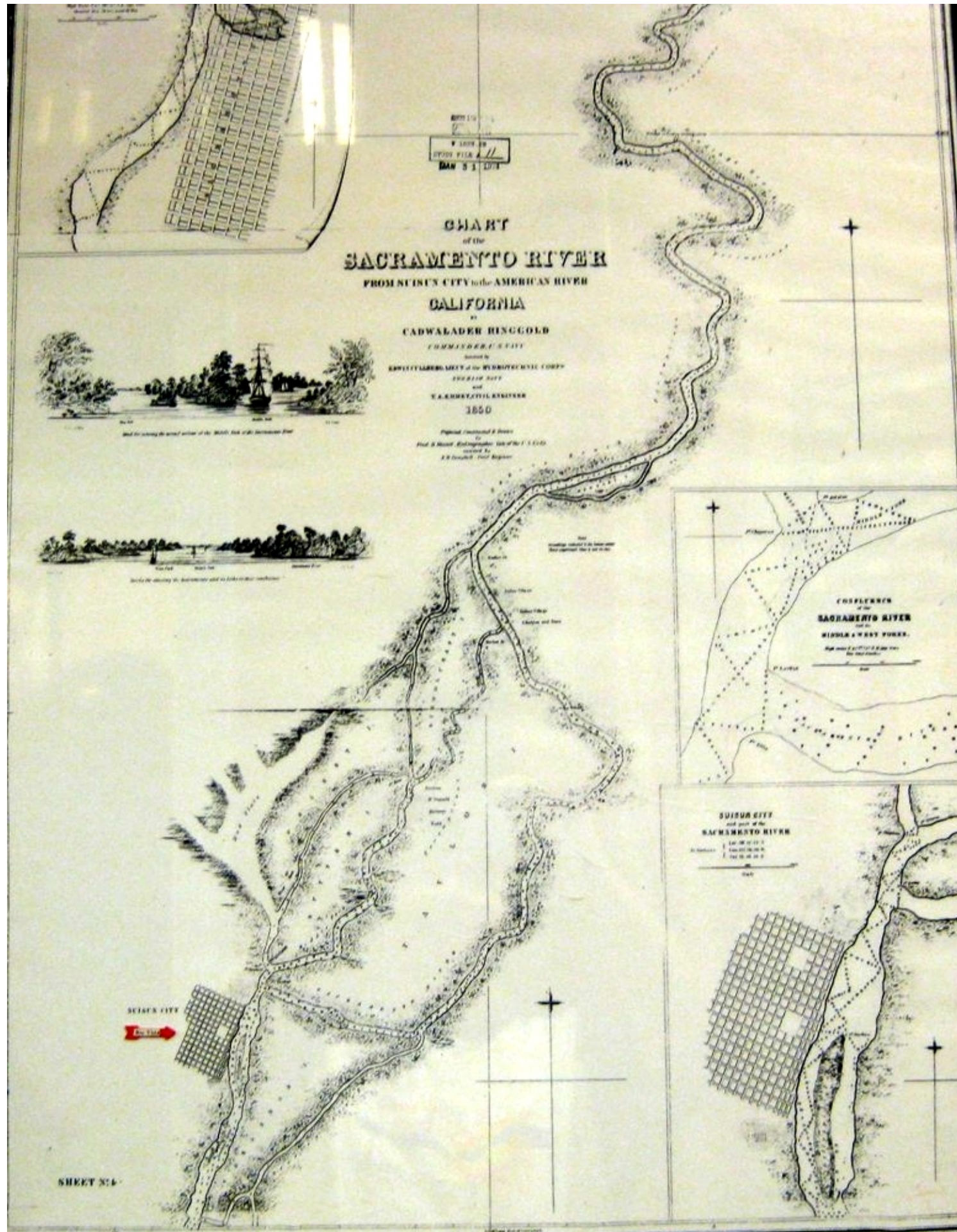
IN CALIFORNIA

By
JERRY MacMULLEN
Illustrated by the Author

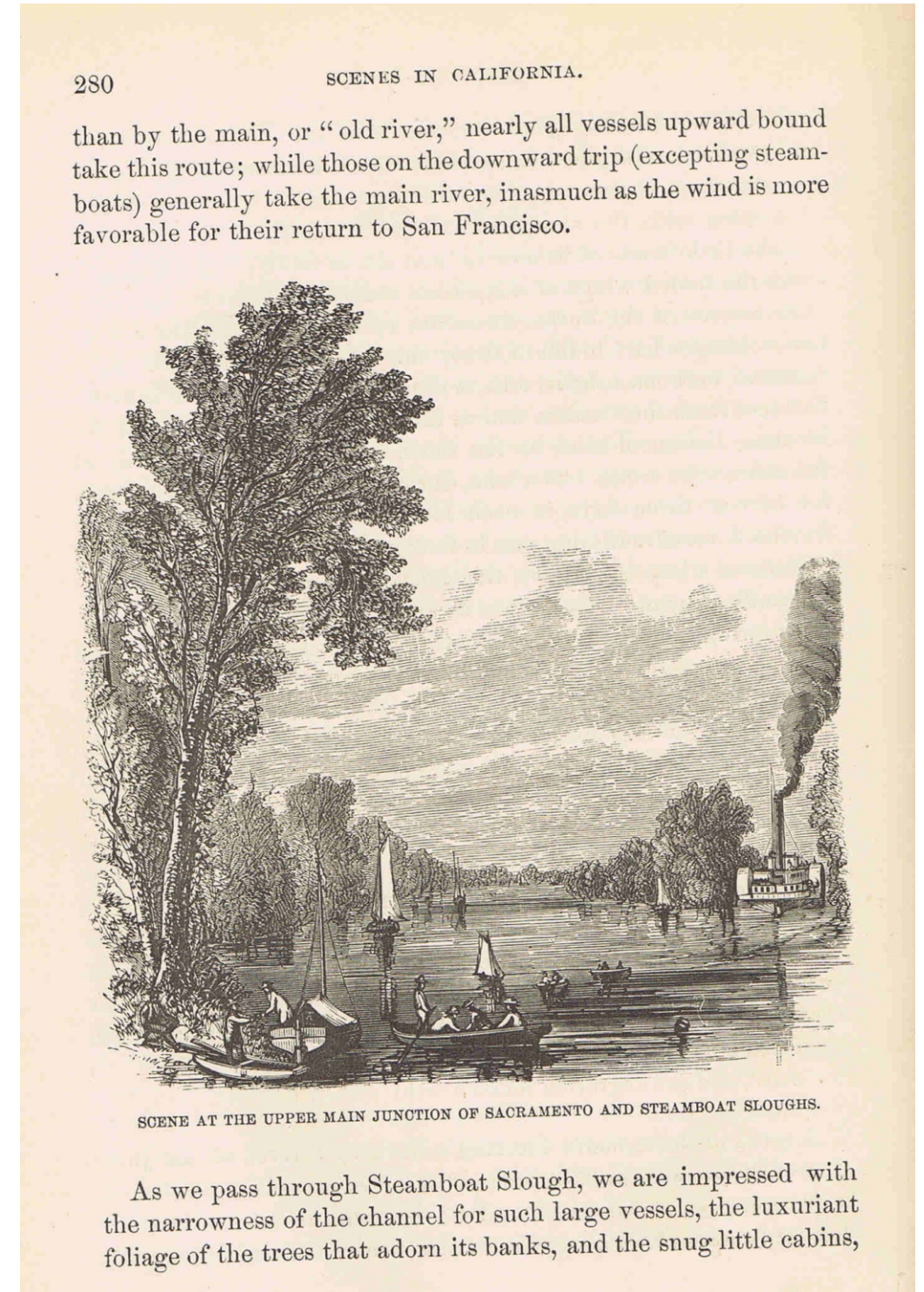


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Map and sketch are from different resources, provided here to give the viewer an understanding of the waterways used for travel 1848 and thereafter in the Delta. Waterway names changed over time, just as island names changed as they were reclaimed or sold to new owners.



than by the main, or "old river," nearly all vessels upward bound take this route; while those on the downward trip (excepting steamboats) generally take the main river, inasmuch as the wind is more favorable for their return to San Francisco.

As we pass through Steamboat Slough, we are impressed with the narrowness of the channel for such large vessels, the luxuriant foliage of the trees that adorn its banks, and the snug little cabins,

The above sketch is from a chapter of Hutchings' book on Yosemite, but he describes scenes along the way...the above was his trip up the Sacramento River and Steamboat Slough. Online link:

- [Http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/scenes_of_wonder_and_curiosity/alabaster_cave.html](http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/scenes_of_wonder_and_curiosity/alabaster_cave.html)
- Or at
- [Http://snugharbor.net/images-hutchings/Scenes_of_Wonder_and_Curiosity_in_Califo.pdf](http://snugharbor.net/images-hutchings/Scenes_of_Wonder_and_Curiosity_in_Califo.pdf)

The famous race of the *Confidence* and the *Queen City*, while not featured by gunfire, nearly ended in flames so far as the latter vessel was concerned. The *Confidence*, of California Steam, burned Philadelphia coal, imported at some expense; the *Queen City*, which belonged to the Marysville outfit, depended upon the cheaper and more plentiful local supply of wood. So stern a pace did the *Confidence* set, for all the screams of her engineer about the speed with which his coal was disappearing, that the *Queen City* had to force her own fires until flame and glowing cinders poured in sheets from her stacks, the firebrands falling over her decks in a blazing shower.³ Little fires broke out here and there, and it was necessary to organize her passengers into two work parties—one to pass wood to the furnace, the other to form a bucket-brigade and put out the resulting blazes on topside. But despite her efforts, the *Queen City* lost the race to her rival.

Funny, sad story!

Around 1860, Peter Donohue built the *Sacramento*, primarily as a rival of the speedy *Antelope*; but as a racer she was a bit disappointing. One day the *Antelope*, which had left Sacramento half an hour behind her, caught up with the *Sacramento* at the entrance to the narrow channel of Steamboat Slough. The *Antelope* tried to pass, but the *Sacramento* "caught her suction" and forced her, crab-fashion, on to a mudbank, where she hung up. Captain Fouratt, who had her on that voyage, managed to get her off in a few minutes and started in hot pursuit; his passengers were very unhappy over the affair and began overhauling their six-shooters; but the captain assured them that he had an even better idea. Shortly after the two steamers had made their stop at Rio Vista he succeeded in jamming the *Antelope*'s bow into the *Sacramento*'s starboard quarter. The other pilot rang up full astern, hoping to slide off and rake the *Antelope*'s side—and, if possible, carry away one of her wheels. But the *Antelope* was turning up for full ahead, and all that the *Sacramento* succeeded in doing was to swing her-

³ Later, when the towing of wheat-laden barges became more common, it was the practice to fit spark-arresters to the smokestacks. The boatmen didn't particularly care about the fires which they started in near-by wheatfields, but starting a fire on one's own barge full of sacked grain was something else again.

self squarely across her rival's bow. In that position the *Antelope* pushed her sideways down the river for several miles before they decided to call it quits. The next day, in San Francisco, Captain Fouratt was arrested on a charge of malicious mischief—a legal adventure which, he reported later, caused him "some slight delay and expense" but nothing really serious.

Pilots of the "Independent Opposition" steamer *Nevada* apparently delighted in "winging" the little *Antelope* and sending her home with badly tattered railings and joiner-work; but when they tried it out on the *New World*, they caught a tartar.⁴ In their most daring encounter the high-sided *Nevada*, after trying to force the *New World* ashore, found herself hung up on the other vessel's lower guardrails, the *Nevada*'s superior height proving for once a distinct liability. Gleefully the *New World* pushed her on to a mudbank, only the skill of the *Nevada*'s pilot keeping him from the ignominy of being hung up in the branches of a huge sycamore, especially picked out by the *New World* for the ceremony. In a later race, the *New World* having chased the *Nevada* into Steamboat Slough at full speed, the leading craft's pilot, apparently with too much on his mind at one time, failed to note the slight swirl which marked a snag. There was a roar of splintering timber and the *Nevada* began to fill. They got her on a bank near Cache Slough before she went down, and so no one was drowned; but the bank proved to be quicksand, and the big steamer became a total loss. Some people maintained that, as her pilot had formerly been employed by the wicked corporation which owned the *New World*, he had done the whole thing on purpose; but nothing ever came of it.

Residents of the bustling village of Benicia, it seems, took their river racing seriously, and their sympathies appear definitely to have been with the opposition steamers. One fine evening, as the *New World* rang off her engines and drifted up to the wharf, the local peasants refused to take her lines. Meanwhile the rival *Washoe* was making a beeline for the same wharf, across the bows

⁴ For taking similar liberties with the schooner *Mary A. Evans* in Carquinez Straits, the *New World* lost a \$5,600 lawsuit on December 4, 1861.

of the *New World*. The latter's pilot—again the redoubtable Fouratt—gave her one bell and a jingle, and she gathered way, the two rapidly converging on what the best maritime circles recognize as a thing to be avoided—namely, the “collision course.” The bow of the *New World* cut into the side of the *Washoe* as if she had been a pile of lug boxes, and it took no small amount of skill to get her ashore before she sank—which is fortunate, for the water off Benicia is not exactly shallow. Caught in flying wreckage, one of the *Washoe*'s passengers was killed, and the Benicians therefore had a virtuous angle to the rage which boiled over as a result of this treatment of the city's favorite steamboat; resentment was so high, in fact, that it was necessary to send soldiers down from Benicia Arsenal to protect the *New World* and her people from mob violence. The Solano County grand jury promptly indicted Captain Fouratt on a charge of assault with intent to commit murder, and he found it expedient to employ a mouthpiece—and a good one. The most important witness for the defense was to have been the *Washoe*'s pilot, and two well-known detectives of the period were detailed to see that nothing happened to him; however, one fine night he contrived to tumble out of his own pilot-house window and break his neck. In some manner not made crystal-clear⁵ the case was disposed of, with no harm to the pilot of the *New World*.

The next year a new grand jury was called, and to the surprise of Captain Fouratt it indicted him all over again. The defendant and his legal talent did a bit of sleuthing and developed the fact that Solano County's face-saving gesture was not, strictly speaking, kosher. To be blunt, the whole affair was more or less a cooked-up deal, and one of the grand jurors was naïve enough to admit, under proper persuasion, that even before being called he had publicly announced that “the *New World*'s pilot oughter be hung!” With

⁵ A quaint legend has been handed down to the captain's grandson, about this affair. It seems that the defendant assured the owners of his vessel that if he were advanced a modest sum in the neighborhood of \$600 he could work wonders with the grand jury. Among the wonders he worked, it is alleged, was the roaring state of intoxication which he was able to induce in (a) the individual members of the grand jury and (b) the magistrate before whom he was supposed to appear.

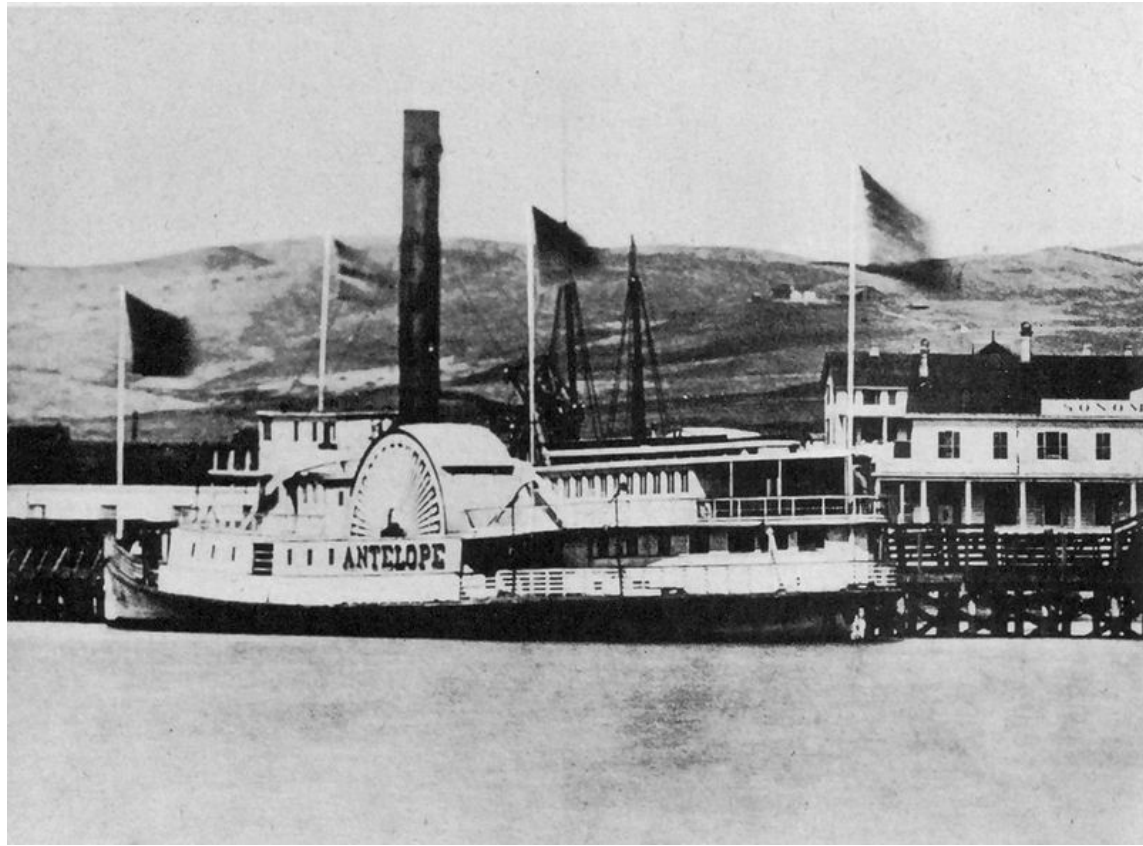
such obvious malice on the part of at least one of the good men and true, the case was tossed out, and the incident was considered closed. The *Washoe* was raised and rebuilt, later to become Page One news by blowing up.

It was not until along in the 'sixties that anything serious was done in the way of charting the rivers. J. A. Crocker, carpenter for the California Steam Navigation Company, sounded the Sacramento early in 1863; penciled maps and personal knowledge on the part of the pilots had been all that there was for conducting a vessel safely along the Sacramento or the San Joaquin. If you wanted to get a vessel up or down, you were careful to entrust her to a man who knew just when to line up his jackstaff with this barn or that cottonwood in order to keep in the channel. The first printed chart came from data obtained, at about the time of the Civil War, by the brig *Lawrence* of the United States Revenue Cutter Service. The first charts listed the various important trees and houses and barns—and even, if we are to believe river lore, those homely detached structures immortalized by the late Mr. Chick Sale, if they were so located as to be of value as leading marks.

An early government-sponsored improvement on the rivers was a dolphin installed at the north entrance to Steamboat Slough, especially for the benefit of the huge *Capital*. She was so long, and so deep, that she couldn't make the short bend, and so had to go several miles out of her way, around the main course of the river. When the dolphin was in place she would ease up to it and, with her bow once set firmly against the piles, put the rudder hard over and come ahead on the engines. The result, of course, was that she would neatly pivot around on her bow until she was fairly on the new course; then she would back down just enough to clear the dolphin, give the “ahead” bell, and go merrily on about her business.

The value of the echo of one's whistle, in navigating close waters, is known to all pilots. But the Sacramento and the San Joaquin run through flat country, and to produce the required effect echo-boards were set up along the banks of the rivers. By

“Dolphin” no longer there at north end of Steamboat Slough



Photos of some of the ships mentioned in the book, all of which used Steamboat Slough when traveling up to the Sacramento City landing

