

# Riverboat stories provide picturesque portraits of the past

Steamboats ruled trade and travel from the 19th into the early 20th century, and with over 30 riverboat landings during this era, Owen County was bustling with prosperity.



BONNIE STRASSELL

By 1860 more than half of the American population was located west of the Appalachian Mountains and the Kentucky, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers provided a natural highway for western commerce.

Stories of steamboat travel range from the delightful to the disastrous and provide a picturesque portrait of America's rich and sometimes volatile history.

Many times, tragedies occurred when steamboat boilers exploded or a snag took out the bottom of a boat causing it to sink.

On June 2, 1913, the steamboat packet Sonoma hit a snag and sank near Worthville in Carroll County.

Owen Countian Minnie Hardin, along with her five-year-old daughter Leoti, were onboard.

The Hardins were a well-known local family who owned several steamboats; and after a trip to Louisville, Minnie and Leoti were waiting to disembark at Monterey.

Suddenly a snag was hit, creating a large gaping hole in the boat; and it quickly sank.

Although Leoti Hardin was only five at the time, for many years she would share a story of how a very special hat figured into the sinking of the Sonoma.

As the boat sank Minnie grabbed hold of her little girl and jumped into the river. Minnie couldn't swim but as she hit the water she seized anything that floated. Continuing to grab any passing freight that would hold the pair, Minnie was able to fight her way back to the hull, and by taking hold of the hull chain she kept Leoti and herself afloat until rescued.

Leoti recalled: "When we hit (the water) Mama said, 'hold onto my arm, baby, and I will buy you that hat

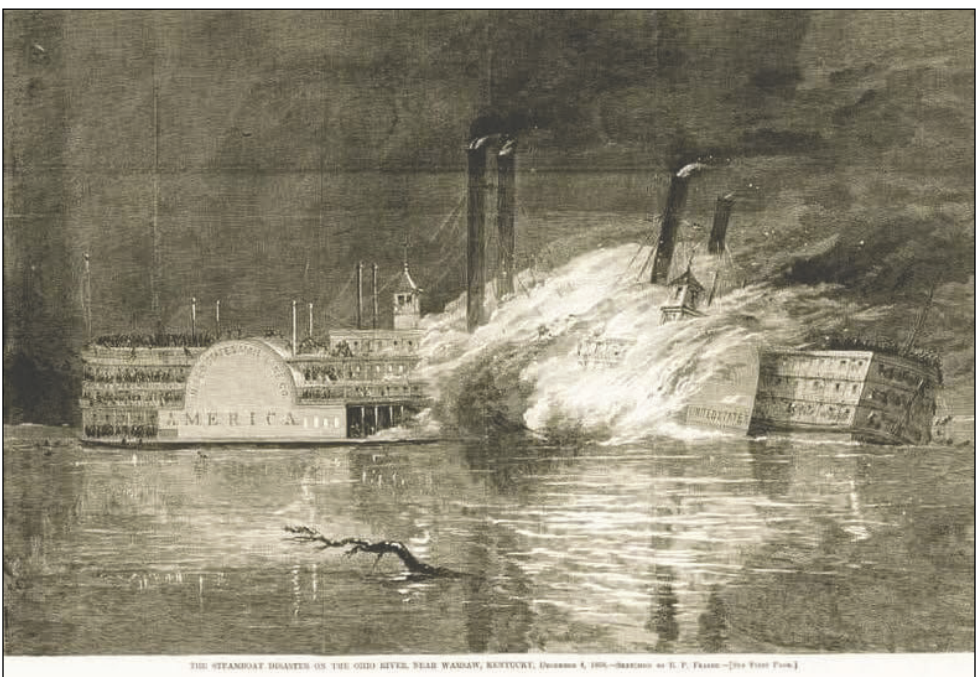


Photo furnished

**The collision of the United States and the America steamboats on the Ohio River, one mile above Warsaw. Owen Countian Alfred Cobb was onboard the United States and escaped.**

with the streamers. "The hat with the streamers had been in Miss Cleveland's Millinery Shop window in Monterey, Kentucky, and I wanted it very much, but Mama said that little girls did not have hats with streamers until they were six.

"Since I was five, I had to wear a hated straw bonnet tied under the chin, which I had on when the Sonoma sank."

After the pair were rescued, I have no doubt that Minnie Hardin kept her promise to her little girl and purchased the lovely little hat featured in Miss Cleveland's Millinery Shop window.

On December 4, 1868, a tragic collision occurred late at night one mile above Warsaw, Kentucky.

In his book "Liffy Leman or Thirty Years In the Wilderness," (available from the historical society for \$12), Owen Countian Alfred Cobb recalled this tragic collision between the steamboats the United States and the America.

Cobb had been on a journey to Cincinnati, Covington and Louisville to raise money to complete the Owenton Baptist Church; and on that cold December evening, he decided to take the night boat to Louisville.

"It was a very large, fine boat with a double row of cabins. The name of the boat was the United States. I think there were about three hundred passengers aboard, but having no acquaintances on board, I

thought I would retire early."

Cobb was awakened just before midnight and almost thrown from his bed. When he opened his door flames were coming up the stairway, cutting off escape.

Alfred slid down a pole to the bottom deck and saw hundreds of people jumping into the water. Many who had made it to a lifeboat drowned when they were sucked under the current by the sinking ships.

"There was a large quantity of coal oil on our boat and when it took fire, it spread upon the water and the river itself became a sea of fire."

Finally able to swim to the shore Cobb realized he needed to find help for the cold was overtaking him. Able to reach a nearby home Alfred described that he found it "full of frozen, burned and crippled people.

"The day of judgment, when the sea shall give up its dead, will only reveal the number that was lost. I believe there were more than one hundred dead bodies found, many floated down and came ashore at Madison."

Though tragic accidents happened on the river, many steamboat stories provided humorous and entertaining tales passed from one generation to the next.

Many of these stories

were told and recorded in the book Reflections of a Riverman, which is a collection of the writings of Riverman Charlie Johnson, and is available from the Historical Society for \$25.

Charlie, whose parents lived in Owen County, worked on riverboats on the Kentucky and Ohio Rivers for 40 years, both as a crew member and a captain.

Charlie related one exceptionally delightful store involving the popular Falls City, an Owen County favorite packet boat.

It seems that a young man decided to jump off the Southern RR Bridge at Tyrone just as the packet Falls City was going under the bridge.

"His parachute was a big old umbrella like they used to use over the driver of wagons. It turned inside out, the young man went through the roof of the boat and landed on the table right in the middle of the noon meal. The jumper got a broken leg, and the dinner was plumb ruined."

From tragic to exhilarating, from rousingly humorous to almost unbelievable, Kentucky riverboat stories have been shared again and again, and they serve as a window to the past. These vital narratives remain an integral part of the culture of Kentucky and have left an indelible imprint upon our history.

# Anti-Lynching art exhibit coming to History and Art Center

BY BOB DEMAREE  
PAXTON MEDIA GROUP

"Unmasked: Anti-Lynching Art and Public Community Remembrance in Indiana" arrived in Madison this week for an exhibit at the Jefferson County History and Art Center at 615 West First Street.

"Madison is an art and music city, an historical city. We love history, we love music, we love the arts, and this particular exhibit is the reimagining of two historic exhibitions held in 1935," said Sue Livers, who was instrumental in bringing the exhibit to Jefferson County.

An opening reception was held Tuesday that included pianist/singer Helen Mumphyre, of Carrollton, Kentucky, performing Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit." The exhibit will available 1-5 p.m. daily through Friday, Nov. 14 and include guided tours. "We have excellent volunteers that will help you navigate your way through" said Livers.

"Strange Fruit" is a song that originated as a protest poem against lynchings that was inspired by a photograph of the 1930 lynching of two 19-year-old Black men — Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith — in Marion, Indiana.

They were kidnapped from their jail cells, beaten and hanged from a tree in the county courthouse square Aug. 7, 1930 before a group of thousands. "Back in that

day, groups would gather when someone was lynched," said Livers. "It was a party."

The lynching in Marion is an example of the violence of murder that was being committed. The exhibition "addresses the legacy of racial violence in the United States. It's meant to foster community dialogue, remembering some of the things that happened that we have chosen to forget," said Livers, adding that through the visual art there is also dialogue of reconciliation and justice.

"Unmasked" is organized around a reimagination of two historic anti-lynching exhibitions held in New York City in 1935, just two miles apart, each with a distinct vision of the political role of art. This project unites these exhibitions in a single gallery space.

"Unmasked" opened at Indiana University on March 23, 2023, and since then has been to several locations in Indiana including Second Baptist Church, an historic church building in New Albany also know as the Town Clock Church.

Livers said although the exhibit's pictures aren't "real graphic" pictures" it is not recommended for students under the age of 15.

The exhibition received funding assistance from a \$1,950 Jefferson County Board of Tourism grant.

# Civil War marker supported in Henry

BY JOE DURBIN  
PAXTON MEDIA GROUP

Henry County Fiscal Court voted in support of a new historical marker in Eminence, which local resident Frank Charles said would be placed in the location of a Civil War camp of the 9th Regiment of the Kentucky Cavalry — who fought for the Union side of the war more than 150 years ago.

"For the past year, I have been conducting research of the official records within volumes one and two, The War of Rebellion —1861 to 1865 — maintained by The Library of Congress," Charles told the court.

Charles stated he has

consulted with leading Civil War historians and authors, and has researched records regarding the local regiment.

Charles claims to have verified the location of the Eminence Camp through historical records.

Further, Charles said that the installation of the historical marker will be paid for by the state, but that representatives of the Kentucky Historical Society Historical Marker program recommended that he seek the support of local leaders and include letters of support with the application for the marker.

The court unanimously agreed to support the application with a letter of support.

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**LEGAL NOTICE**

**NOTICE OF INTENDED PASSAGE**  
Notice is hereby given that the Carroll County Fiscal Court intends to conduct second reading and final adoption of an Ordinance approving a lease for the financing of a project; providing for the payment and security of a lease; creating a sinking fund; and authorizing the execution of various documents related to such lease on Tuesday, November 25, 2025 at 9 a.m., in the Carroll County Fiscal Courtroom, Carroll County Courthouse, 440 Main Street, Carrollton, Kentucky 41008.

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**LEGAL NOTICE**

NO.24-CI-00133  
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SERVICING  
VS.  
UNKNOWN SPOUSE, IF ANY, OF BOB JOE  
SCOTT, ET AL

TRIMBLE CIRCUIT COURT  
PLAINTIFF  
COMMISSIONER SALE  
VINCENT J. EIDEN, MASTER COMMISSIONER  
Per Judgment in Trimble Circuit Court, Master Commissioner will sell at 11:00 am on Friday, November 21, 2025, at public auction to the highest bidder at the Trimble County Courthouse, Bedford, Kentucky 40006, the property described as:  
PROPERTY ADDRESS: 534 Liberty Rd, Milton, KY 40045  
Includes Mobile Home Vehicle Identification CLN17692  
Parcel No.: 007-80-00-028.00, Deed Book 80, Page 345. Indivisible  
Terms are 10% by cash, certified check or money order & bond per KRS 426.705, balance due in 30 days; property is indivisible; sold free & clear of all liens encumbrances & interest of the parties except: A) All current real estate taxes and all taxes due thereafter, for which the purchaser shall not have a credit against the purchase price; B) Easements, restrictions, stipulations and agreements of record; C) Assessments for public improvements levied against the property; D) Any facts which an inspection and accurate survey of the property may disclose. However, neither the Plaintiff, its Counsel, the Court, nor the Commissioner, shall be deemed to have warranted title to any purchaser. At bidder's own expense, bidder is to carry fire and extended insurance coverage on said property from the date of sale until purchase price is fully paid. Amt to be raised-\$43,802.23. Michael R. Brinkman, Esq., Plaintiff's Atty. Vincent J. Eiden, Master Commissioner, Post Office Box 563, Crestwood, Kentucky 40014; (502) 243-1981.

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**LEGAL NOTICE**

**NOTICE OF HEARING**  
Lease Agreement between Carroll County and  
Kentucky Association of Counties Finance Corporation  
(County Facilities Renovation)  
Notice is hereby given that pursuant to a Notice of Intent to Lease from the Carroll County Fiscal Court requesting the State Local Debt Officer to approve the execution of certain Lease Agreement between the County and Kentucky Association of Counties Finance Corporation in a principal amount not to exceed \$10,000,000. The proceeds will be used for Energy improvements to the jail and courthouse repair. A hearing will be held in the Conference Room, Department for Local Government, 100 Airport Road, Frankfort, Kentucky, on Tuesday, November 25, 2025 at 2:00 PM, (Prevailing Eastern Time) to consider whether said lease and financial plan should be approved.  
Petitioner, Carroll County Fiscal Court is responsible for the publication of this notice and for the information contained herein. Specific questions about the type of project should be directed to the petitioners. The purpose of this notice is to comply with KRS 65.944 by notifying the public that the petitioner intends to issue bonds or other indebtedness in the total amount and at the terms set our herein.  
At the hearing, any taxpayer may appear and will be given an opportunity to be heard.

Matt Sawyers  
Commissioner and State Local Debt Officer  
Commonwealth of Kentucky

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