

activity, but just below Norfolk a rebel force was spotted on the river bank. The Union force counted 16 pieces of field artillery and one large gun. The two gunboats turned rapidly and steamed back up the river toward Cairo, pursued for a short distance by a rebel detachment on the Missouri shore. When the presence of the enemy below Norfolk was reported to General Grant, he ordered a regiment of soldiers to go down and take possession of the place and occupy it. By the time the Federal force reached Norfolk, the Confederates had quietly disappeared.

Later in the war, Norfolk was again brought to General Grant's attention. When about 400 tons of military supplies and almost three million dollars of army payroll money failed to appear at his headquarters in the recently captured city of Vicksburg, the General learned that the boat transporting the money and supplies had burned at Norfolk Landing, Missouri.

A court of inquiry was held, and the blame for the loss of the steamer *Ruth* was declared to rest with a rebel incendiary who had deliberately set fire to the boat, knowing that it was carrying government property. The firing of the *Ruth* was part of a general plan of the Confederates to destroy water transportation and cripple the movement of the Union armies, the court said.

## **ISLAND NO. 1**

*Mile 948.8 AHP, Map 2*  
*Left bank, descending*

The first book of navigation charts covering the Lower Mississippi was published in 1801, by a man with the improbable name of Zadok Cramer. Cramer's charts were crude, but his text was useful and he performed a unique service when he ignored the names of most of the islands in the river and gave them numbers. Until that time, some of the islands had had several names and it was always difficult for a flatboatman to obtain and remember useful information about reaches of the river that contained no distinguishing characteristics except an island or two. The island numbers made it easier to pinpoint and identify the difficult passages on the river.

Cramer told the navigators that Island No. 1 was about 1 mile long and lay close to the left shore. He warned them that the channel behind it was not navigable and told them to take the channel to the right, or west, of the island at all stages of the water.

Cramer's book, *The Navigator*, proved to be so useful and so popular that twelve editions of it were published, often with revisions that informed the boatmen about the new river towns that were springing up and about political events such as the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and the West Florida rebellion a few years later. Cramer was followed by many imitators who either copied him brazenly or leaned heavily on his book for information.

Many of the islands that Cramer numbered in 1801 have now joined a shoreline, and

some have completely disappeared. Island No. 1 has become a part of the Kentucky mainland.

#### **Island No. 1 Dike Fields:**

Stone dikes constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers extend from Mile 948.6 AHP to Mile 944.1 AHP, in the vicinity of Island No. 1. This is the first of more than 100 dike fields on the Lower Mississippi.

The dikes are designed to deflect the river's currents, to close up old chutes, and to keep the navigation channel in a desirable alignment. They have proved to be very effective. The dikes are made of pilings and/or riprap stone. When the water is high, the crown of a dike may not be visible, but may be lurking just below the surface of the water, where it could do a great deal of damage to the hull of a boat. Currents and eddies around the dikes can also be troublesome for very small craft.

Pleasure boaters particularly should check navigation charts carefully for the location of all the dike fields. No attempt to run over the top of a dike should be made, even when the water is high, for this could lead to damage to either the dike itself or the boat involved.

## **PUNTNEY LIGHT**

*Mile 943.6 AHP, Map 2  
Left bank, descending*

Puntney Light is named for an early settler who operated a woodyard on the left bank of the river.

Early steamboats, which were small vessels, needed as much space as possible for cargo and passengers. They seldom carried more fuel than could be consumed in 12 hours. Twice every 24 hours the boats would pull up to an island or river bank, and deckhands would be sent ashore to cut wood. Deck passengers often helped load the fuel on the boat, receiving a reduction in the price of their passage as a reward for the service.

When steamboats became more numerous on the Lower Mississippi, many large, permanent woodyards were established by landowners like Puntney, who found it a good source of ready cash. With the wood already cut and neatly stacked, loading was quicker and the boat could hustle on its way without undue delay. Sometimes a sort of "mid-stream service" was provided, in the form of a flatboat already loaded with wood. The steamboat would tie on to the flatboat and take it upstream, unloading without stopping its engines or going to the bank. When the cordwood was loaded, the flatboat could be cut loose to drift back down to the woodyard.

Wood was more readily available and cheaper than coal, and most of the steamboats on the Lower Mississippi used it for fuel.

## ISLANDS NO. 2, NO. 3, AND NO. 4

*Mile 940.5 AHP, Map 2  
Right bank, descending*

When *THE NAVIGATOR* was published in 1801, Zadok Cramer noted that these three islands were lying very close to the left bank of the river. Boatmen were advised to take the channel to the right of all three islands, even at high water stages.

As late as 1890, a navigation map published by the Mississippi River Commission showed the three islands still hugging the left shore, almost completely attached to the State of Kentucky. After the flood of 1927, the river abandoned its old channel, which early boatmen had called Lucas Bend, and cut the islands away from the Kentucky shore.

In spite of the new geographical location on the Missouri side of the river, Islands No. 2, No. 3, and No. 4 remained officially a part of Kentucky. Had the river eaten them away over a long period of time, depositing them far down the river bit by bit, Kentucky would have lost them, of course, but courts have ruled that when "a sudden avulsion" takes place, the land that the river cuts off remains the property of the state from which it was severed by the sudden change.

When land is built up in a new location over a long period of time, however, the process is called "accretion" and the new real estate becomes a gift from the river to the lucky landowner to whose property it attaches itself.

The bend around the islands that the river abandoned after 1927 has been named for J. B. C. Lucas, who had been a judge and acting-governor of the Missouri Territory before it became a state. Lucas died in St. Louis in 1842, leaving his heirs a large estate that included several plantations on the west bank of the Mississippi in the vicinity of the bend that bore his name.

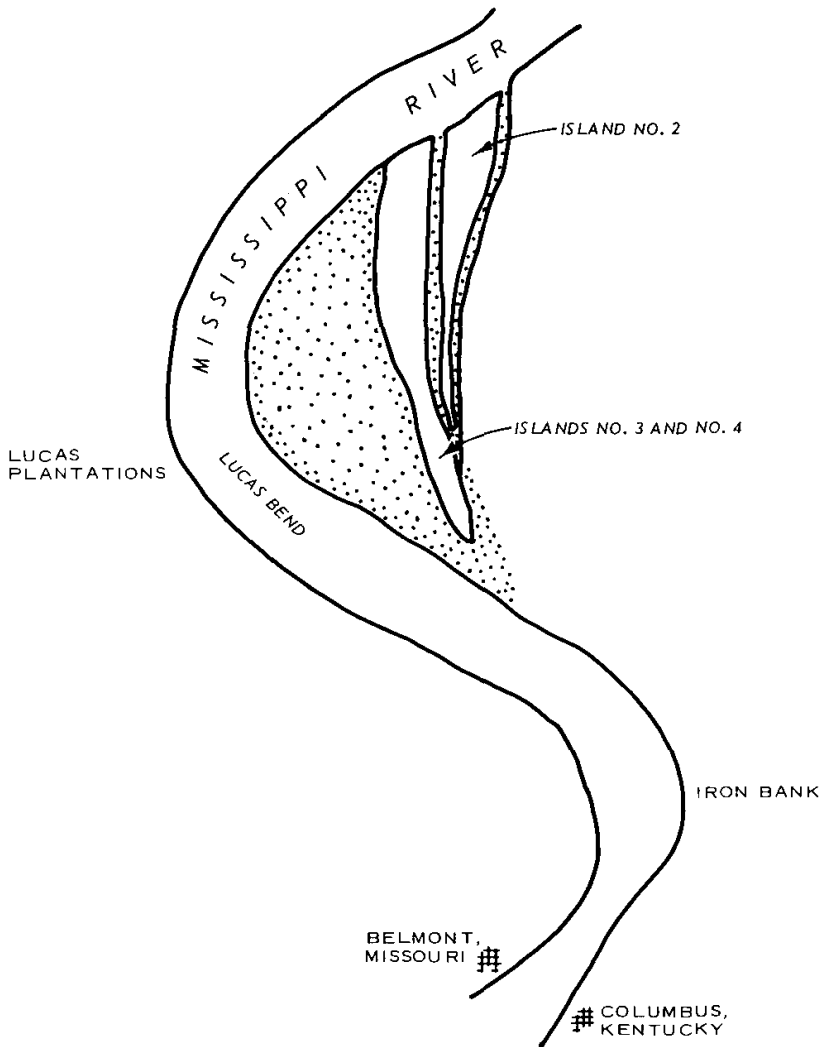
During the Civil War, Lucas Bend was still a part of the main channel of the Lower Mississippi, and on January 11, 1862, was the scene of an abortive little skirmish between the naval forces of the Union and the Confederacy. The two Union gunboats involved were not exactly looking for the enemy when they came upon three Confederate vessels in the bend and they distinguished themselves chiefly by the speed with which they turned and ran back up the river. A few wild shots were fired, but the Confederates were also busy turning and backing, so little damage was done to either side.

Captain William D. Porter, known to his colleagues as "Dirty Bill," was in command of the *U.S.S. Essex*, and as soon as he returned to Cairo he reported the incident to the fleet commander, Flag Officer Andrew Foote. Porter said solemnly that two of his officers had behaved with such gallantry that he wanted them promoted immediately.

Foote had already received a report of the engagement from a less interested party, and he replied rather sharply to Captain Porter. It was not the policy of the U. S. Navy to promote officers engaged in routine duty on a retreating vessel, Foote said. Since the *Essex* had fled before it was in range of the enemy's guns, how could there have been

any “gallantry” involved, he asked Porter. Dirty Bill grumbled and sulked, and did not reply.

Lucas Bend is now a lake with an area of about 287 acres. Like most of the old river bed lakes, it has an abundant population of fish and is a favorite recreation spot for local people.



(From 1890 MRC Map)

*LUCAS BEND IN 1890. When the above map was made in 1890, Islands No. 2, No. 3, and No. 4 appeared to be attaching themselves to the Kentucky shore. After the flood of 1927 the river changed its course and left the islands on the Missouri side of the river. Lucas Bend soon silted up at both ends and became a lake.*

## COLUMBUS, KENTUCKY

*Mile 937.2 AHP, Map 3  
Left bank, descending*

At the end of the Revolutionary War, a grateful but nearly insolvent new nation paid some of its heroes for their services with land warrants instead of hard cash. Soldiers who had served with General George Rogers Clark had seen the area now known as western Kentucky, and they were glad to accept grants of land on the east bank of the Mississippi River.

Development in western Kentucky was slower than the veterans had expected it to be. The land warrants were issued in 1784, but the Indian claims to the territory had not yet been extinguished and most would-be settlers still remembered the Chicksaw's attack on Fort Jefferson some years earlier.

In 1812, the British burned Washington, D. C., and the owners of the lands along the Kentucky bluffs seized what they must have thought was a heaven-sent opportunity to increase the value of their holdings. An engineer was hired, a survey was made, and a beautiful and elaborate plan was drawn up on paper for a new national capital. It was to be called Columbus, and its central location in the "western" territory and its proximity to the main transportation artery of the interior were extolled as virtues that Washington, D. C. had never possessed and would never be able to acquire.

A few settlers were attracted by the relentless publicity of the town's promoters, and a straggling village began to grow up at the foot of the bluff. The President and Congress obstinately continued to carry on the nation's business at the same old stand, however, and all the plans came to naught. By 1856 Columbus considered itself lucky to have a few warehouses and stores and a population of about 700.

When the Civil War began in 1861, Kentucky refused to join the Confederacy and declared itself to be neutral. This did not prevent many of the State's citizens from sympathizing with the southern cause, and about 35,000 of them joined the Confederate Army. About twice that number joined the Union forces.

While Kentuckians were making up their minds and joining one side or the other, high ranking officials of both governments were eyeing the town of Columbus as a strategic point for the control of the Lower Mississippi. Sentiment there seemed to be predominantly southern. On August 1, 1861, a Union steamer, the *Cheney*, was seized by a handful of Confederates when it docked at Columbus, and most of the townspeople turned out to cheer the event. About a month later, a Union gunboat cruised past the town, and the commander sent the following plaintive query to his fleet commander:

*"At Columbus the rebels fly the secession flag from the top of a lofty pole in the center of the village, in defiance of our gunboats. What shall I do with Columbus?"*

The Confederate general, Leonidas K. Polk, knew what to do with Columbus. Without so much as a gesture in the direction of the Kentucky legislature, which had declared

the State neutral, he marched in and took possession of it. Soon the bluff was bristling with guns, and the river in front of the town was obstructed with a huge chain that was attached to the bluff with a big sea anchor and to the opposite shore with a large capstan.

President Abraham Lincoln was well aware of the importance of the Lower Mississippi Valley and had urged more than once that the town of Columbus ought not to be allowed to fall into Confederate hands but should be occupied by Union forces as quickly as possible.

When the commander of the Union fleet sent a routine request for 3,000 shells to Washington, mentioning casually that he might take the Union boats down to Columbus, Kentucky, he was astounded to receive a prompt shipment of 11,400 mortar shells.

"There must have been some misunderstanding," Flag Officer Foote wired the Secretary of Navy in Washington. The reply came from the President's office, and Foote was informed that the additional shells had been sent to him by direct order of President Lincoln. If the Union Navy was going down to Columbus, an aide wrote, the President wanted to be absolutely certain that it had sufficient ammunition to take the place.

*"The President hopes,"* the letter concluded dryly, *"that your gunboats will treat the rebels to a refreshing shower of sulphur and brimstone and rain them out."*

Foote ignored the President's none-too-subtle prodding, and it was General U. S. Grant who finally made a move in the right direction. By the time Grant's force arrived in front of the town, however, it was already strongly fortified, and he prudently turned his attention to the other side of the river.

Columbus eventually fell into Union hands by default. Grant's later capture of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson outflanked the position and rendered the Columbus fortifications useless. Polk took most of his guns and all of his men down to establish a new position at Island No. 10 near New Madrid, Missouri.

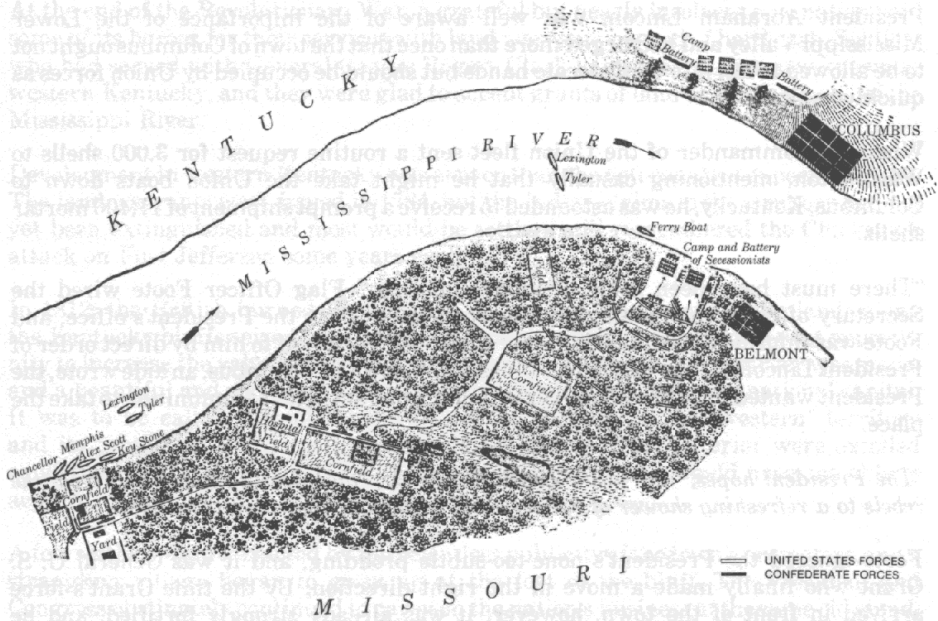
A detachment of U. S. soldiers marched into Columbus unopposed, and the town was garrisoned for the remainder of the war. It probably suffered as much damage from its friends as it did from its foes, for it was raided several times by Confederates.

In modern times, Columbus had been the victim of Old Man River more than once. On March 31, 1913, the Columbus levee collapsed and the entire city was flooded. During the flood of 1927 the levee was threatened again, and was cut after hope of saving it had to be abandoned. When the flood waters of 1927 began to recede, great chunks of the town's waterfront began to slide into the river. Houses and businesses had to be moved up higher on the bluff.

Today a floodwall protects the business district, which is back at the foot of the hill, but most of the schools, churches, and homes perch high on the bluff.

On the north side of Columbus, the State of Kentucky maintains a beautiful little State park which commemorates the battle of Belmont and preserves many of the relics of

the Columbus-Belmont battlefield. There is a small but interesting museum in a pre-Civil War house, and a piece of the huge chain that obstructed the river in front of the town is on display in the park. From the bluff there is a spectacularly beautiful view of the river and the Missouri shore opposite Columbus.



(From 1876 Battlefield Map, Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant)

**COLUMBUS-BELMONT BATTLEFIELD.** The map above shows the site of a costly battle between Union and Confederate forces on November 7, 1861. General U. S. Grant, who commanded the Union troops, said that his inexperienced soldiers gained self-confidence at Belmont that stayed with them throughout the remainder of the war.

## IRON BANK LIGHT

*Mile 937.0 AHP, Map 3  
Left bank, descending*

The peculiar color and strange appearance of the high bluff at Columbus, Kentucky, attracted the attention of some of the earliest explorers, who commented on it more than a century before the founding of the town. French explorers, having failed to find the gold and silver mines they sought so diligently, reported that they had at least discovered an "iron mine."

Father Jacques Gravier, a Jesuit missionary who made a voyage down the Mississippi in 1700, stopped at the bluff to investigate the famous iron mine, about which he had

heard so many wondrous tales. He described it scornfully, as follows:

*"The pretended plates of iron attached to the pebbles are anything but what was supposed, and what I was told. They are merely veins of hard and almost petrified earth, which have indeed the color of iron, but which are not heavy and break easily. I took a piece, to show that if there is an iron mine, it must not be judged by that earth."*

Another priest, Father Pierre Charlevoix, came down the river 21 years later and stopped to examine the bluff. Although rumors of the supposed iron mine were still heard, he said he found only yellow earth and could only conclude that the mine was a figment of someone's imagination.

The iron mine which never existed gave the bluff its name, which is preserved today by the navigation light.

## **BELMONT, MISSOURI**

*Mile 936.8 AHP, Map 3  
Right bank, descending*

Belmont was a very small community on the Missouri shore opposite Columbus, Kentucky, and it became the scene of a major engagement during the Civil War almost by accident. General U. S. Grant had gathered up his green and inexperienced troops at Cairo and started down the river without any intention of engaging in battle. The most he hoped for at the time was that the presence of Federal forces on the river would prevent General Leonidas Polk from making a rumored movement across the Mississippi and into southeast Missouri.

When the Union transports and their gunboat escorts came in sight of Columbus, it was obvious that the position was too strongly fortified for them to think of a direct attack, but the Northern boys were spoiling for a fight, General Grant said, and he decided to let them test their strength against a small rebel encampment at Belmont. Landing his troops above the village, he led them into their first battle.

In his *Memoirs*, published in 1885, the old General remembered the battle with some embarrassment. His soldiers had behaved like veterans, he recalled, until the victory was won. The aftermath had shocked him. His men abandoned their arms when they reached the captured camp, and ran about madly, searching for trophies. Even his officers had behaved in an undignified and undisciplined manner, General Grant said. The noise and confusion prevented the quiet and stolid general from getting the attention of his men, and in desperation he finally ordered one of his staff officers to set fire to the camp. The blaze drew an immediate response from the guns across the river, and this sobered the soldiers considerably.

In the meantime, the rebels had returned, with reinforcements. When the Union boys



realized they were surrounded, they huddled around their officers and urged surrender. General Grant calmly reminded the men that they had cut their way into the camp, and told them they could just as easily cut their way out again.

The Union retreat was orderly, but so swift that the commanding general was almost left behind as the transports pulled away from the shore. At the last moment, a narrow plank was thrown out, General Grant urged his horse down a steep slope, and the horse trotted across the plank and on board the last departing steamer.

The press in the North called the battle of Belmont a disaster, a humiliating defeat, and a needless waste of human life. General Grant admitted that the casualties had been high, but pointed out that the Confederates had suffered heavy losses as well. His men gained experience and confidence, he said firmly, and the Confederates did not cross the river into southeast Missouri.

## **CHALK BLUFF, KENTUCKY**

*Mile 934.0 AHP, Map 3*  
*Left bank, descending*

When early explorers came down the river, the whitish color of the soil on a high bluff on the east bank caught their attention. They called it the Chalk Bluff, a name it still bears today. There is a scenic overlook on top of the bluff, with a fine view of the river and the surrounding countryside.

## **ISLAND NO. 5 (WOLF ISLAND)**

*Mile 933.0 AHP, Map 3*  
*Right bank, descending*

When Zadok Cramer gave Wolf Island its number in 1801, he described it as a very large island with about 15,000 acres of fine land and an open prairie in the middle where cattle were pastured. James Hunter, an early settler, was keeping a herd of several hundred cattle and a large number of hogs on the island when Cramer first visited it. At Hunter's warehouse, flatboatmen could purchase meat, butter, and eggs to supplement their rather monotonous diet.

John James Audubon, America's great naturalist and painter, was a passenger on a flatboat making the river voyage to New Orleans in 1820. He had just begun his monumental work which would later result in the fabulous volumes entitled "*Birds of America.*"

Audubon kept a journal on his voyage down the river, and in it he noted that he had stopped at Wolf Island on Sunday, November 19, 1820, to bathe and shave. He explained that he and his companions had agreed before leaving Cincinnati that they would stop every Sunday to take a bath. Wearing the same shirt all week and sleeping in odiferous buffalo robes at night made these weekly occasions memorable.

In his journal, Audubon also mentioned that after he reached Wolf Island he began to see large numbers of ivory-billed woodpeckers, a bird that is thought to be extinct today. Deer, bear, and wolves were also abundant along the river in Audubon's time, but the buffalo that had been so often mentioned by French explorers had already been pushed west of the Mississippi and into the high plains country.

In a case that once came before the Supreme Court of the United States, Wolf Island was the subject of an interesting boundary dispute between Kentucky and Missouri. Attorneys for Kentucky argued that Wolf Island had once been a part of the Kentucky mainland, and that it had been severed from the state in one of the river's sudden changes. They found 27 witnesses who were willing to swear that the navigation channel had *always* been on the right or west side of the island and that the island itself had *always* been considered a part of Kentucky.

Missouri attorneys showed the Supreme Court justices ancient maps and old navigation charts and traced the island's history all the way back to 1782, offering some very old maps as evidence that the island had always been located close to the Missouri shore and should be included within that State's boundaries. The court heard all the evidence, and decided that the sworn testimony of local residents was more persuasive than ancient maps and documents. Kentucky won the case, and Wolf Island, although it is today embedded firmly on the Missouri mainland, is still under Kentucky's jurisdiction.

## **BECKWITH BEND**

*Mile 925.0 AHP, Map 4*

Beckwith Bend was named for a family that settled in Missouri before 1821. An important archaeological site called "Beckwith's Fort" is located on one of the old Beckwith plantations. It contains a large fortified site and some temple mounds that are said to have been built sometime between 1200 and 1680 A. D. The site is now included in a Missouri State Park.



## **DORENA CREVASSE**

*Mile 924.0 AHP, Map 4  
Right bank, descending*

The word “crevasse” comes from an Old French word, “crevace,” which meant a crevice, fissure, or crack. From the French settlers on the lower reaches of the Mississippi, American planters learned to apply the word to a breach in the levee system.

Before 1928, the cry of “*Crevasse! Crevasse!*” was heard all too frequently on the Lower Mississippi. Every inhabitant of the valley knew that it meant that the levee had broken, that the flood waters were pouring over the land, and that their lives and their property were in grave danger. Often people had to run for their lives, sometimes taking refuge on rooftops or in trees, and waiting for days to be rescued.

During the great flood of 1927, local residents around the rural community of Dorena, Missouri, were extremely concerned about their levees. On April 16, 1927, John Clifft went out just before dawn to take a look at a section of the levee that had appeared to be in poor condition the day before. He had just decided that it looked much better when



*CREVASSE WATER. When the Dorena levee broke in 1927, water from the crevasse inundated the town of New Madrid, Missouri. In the above photograph, taken four days after the crevasse, the only completely dry land remaining in New Madrid is the levee in front of the town. It was reported a few days later that the water was higher in the town than it was in the Mississippi.*

he noticed a small stream of water pouring in through the base of the embankment. Clifft ran for help, and the flood fighters gathered rapidly to try to stop the flow.

It was already too late; a short while later a whole section of the levee collapsed and John Clifft watched as the water poured through the breach, tearing down trees, sweeping over buildings, and snatching up chickens, pigs, and calves and whirling them away. Clifft heard later that the raging sea of flood water had demolished a schoolhouse 15 miles inland from the crevasse.

New Madrid, Missouri, was inundated by the crevasse water from Dorena, and on April 29 it was reported that the water inside the city levee was 1.5 feet higher than the river water outside the levee.

Dorena was one of many crevasses in 1927. Since the mainline levee system was built in 1928, no crevasses have been experienced at Dorena, but the community still suffers occasionally from backwater floods when major floods cause the water to back into the lower part of the Birds Point-New Madrid Floodway.

## **BAYOU DU CHIEN**

*Mile 922.0 AHP, Map 4  
Left bank, descending*

Bayou du Chien is a small tributary of the Mississippi. It joins the big river just above the town of Hickman, Kentucky. The stream drains about 70 square miles of western Kentucky and has an annual discharge of about 90.2 cubic feet per second.

The word "bayou" is said to have been a French adaptation of the Choctaw Indian word "bayuk," which meant "small, sluggish stream." Why this particular bayou should be called Bayou du Chien, or Bayou of the Dog, no one knows. The name appears on maps made more than 200 years ago, but the reason for it has long since been lost in the mists of time.

## **HICKMAN, KENTUCKY**

*Mile 922.0 AHP, Map 4  
Left bank, descending*

Hickman is a small Kentucky town that grew up on the east bank of the river after James Mills settled there in 1819. Originally called Mills Point, the location proved to be a convenient shipping point for goods and produce from the interior.

In 1834, a Tennessee settler purchased land in the Mills Point area and laid out a town which he named Hickman. By 1840 the population had grown to about 500.

A river guide published in 1856 described Hickman as a flourishing place with a dozen stores, several churches, a printing office, and a bank. At the busy steamboat landing, corn, cotton, cattle, poultry, and Kentucky tobacco were loaded out, while farm tools and supplies were brought in from other places. An overland stage route to the east began at Hickman and wound its way to Nashville, Tennessee. A ferry carried passengers across the river to Missouri.

Confederates moved into Hickman on September 3, 1861, and erected some river batteries, but the town escaped the dubious honor of becoming the site of a major Civil War battle. Union gunboats approached the town a few days after the batteries were erected, but withdrew without firing a shot. When Columbus fell, Hickman's batteries were not strong enough to serve as a new line of defense and the Confederate Army abandoned it to the tender mercies of the Union garrison that marched in unopposed.

For the remainder of the war, the town was occupied by a Union garrison. Occasionally rebel forces would appear to threaten the post, and the Union soldiers would flee. The rebels would move in for a day or two, and move out again when Union gunboats appeared with more soldiers to garrison the town.

Like most of the towns in border states, Hickman had both "secesh" and Union sympathizers among its inhabitants. They no doubt suffered equally during the war. Soldiers from both armies usually helped themselves to whatever they wanted, and it is unlikely that any of the citizens of Hickman had much left by the time the war had ended.



*HICKMAN HARBOR. The Army Corps of Engineers completed a harbor project at Hickman, Kentucky, in 1963. The harbor now serves terminal facilities that handle grain, sand and gravel, and petroleum products. The industrial area includes about 130 acres. A floodwall and levee system to protect Hickman from flooding was also constructed by the Corps.*

Hickman suffered some damage in the great flood of 1913, but today it is adequately protected from major floods and is busily engaged in developing industrial sites on its still-water harbor. There is no small boat marina at Hickman, but fuel and supplies may be obtained on an emergency basis.

## **ISLAND NO. 6**

*Mile 921.0 AHP, Map 4  
Right bank, descending*

In 1858, a disastrous flood raged through the Lower Mississippi Valley. Miles of levee were swept away, damage was severe, and many changes in the river's course resulted from the flood.

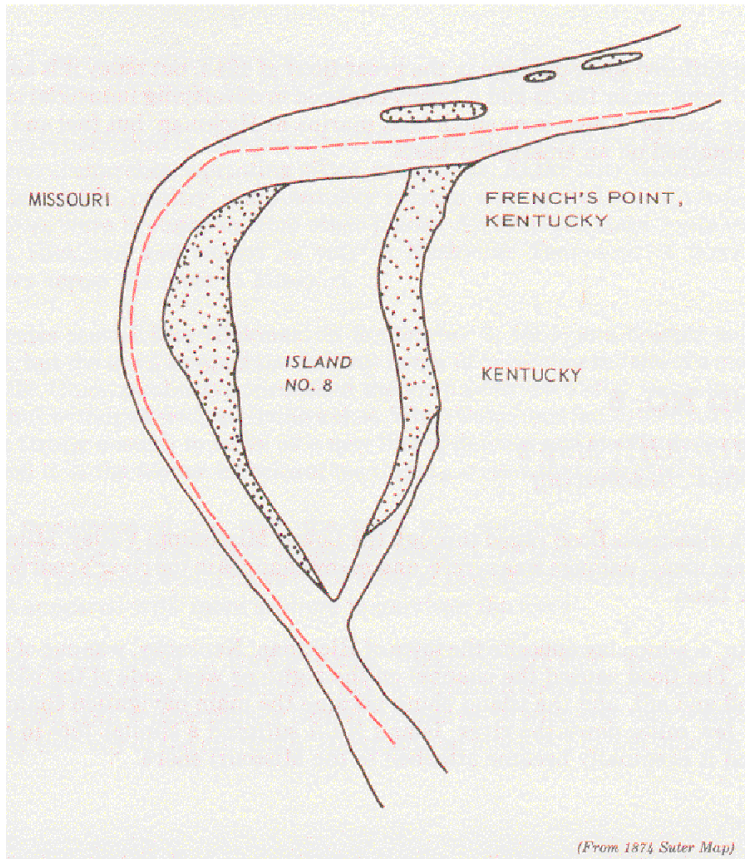
Island No. 6, which lay opposite the town of Hickman, Kentucky, was one of the areas affected. The flood caused the channel on the right, or west, side of the island to fill with sand and silt, and the island chute became the main navigation channel of the river. A few miles down the river, Island No. 7 suffered a similar fate in the great flood, and it eventually became attached to the Missouri shore.

## **ISLAND NO. 8**

*Mile 914.0 AHP, Map 4  
Right bank, descending*

Island No. 8 is one of the largest existing islands in the Lower Mississippi, and one of the few that is still actually distinguishable as an island. The channel on the right or west side of the island was formerly the low water navigation channel, but major floods in 1927 and 1937 caused the old bendway to fill with silt and sand, making it advisable for the island's old chute on the left to be maintained as the main navigation channel.

During the Civil War, there was one brief skirmish on Island No. 8. Confederate forces had been reported hiding on the island, and a detachment of Union soldiers was landed on July 21, 1864, to search for the rebels. It was later reported that the Federal force had killed two "bushwhackers" and captured 42 horses and mules.



*ISLAND NO. 8. In 1874 a reconnaissance map of the Lower Mississippi showed Island No. 8 lying close to the Kentucky shore, with the navigation channel on the right or west side of the island. For more than a century, boatmen used the west channel at all stages of the water, but major floods in 1927 and 1937 caused the old channel to deteriorate, and the chute behind the island became the main navigation channel.*

## **ISLAND NO. 9**

*Mile 906.5 AHP, Map 5  
Left bank, descending*

Island No. 9 lay very close to the left bank of the Mississippi, and by 1890 the chute behind it was closed at both ends. As the sand and silt accumulated at the head and foot of the island chute, the island became firmly attached to the Kentucky shore. The oxbow lake formed by the old chute took the island's number for a name and is known today as Lake No. 9.

## **DONALDSON POINT, MISSOURI**

*Mile 904.5 AHP, Map 5*  
*Right bank, descending*

The Donaldson family, for which the Missouri point is named, were plantation owners on the Tennessee side of the river before the Civil War.

When Union forces were making their way down the river early in 1862, General John Pope had his men dig a canal across Donaldson Point. It was his hope that the canal would enable the U. S. Navy gunboats to bypass Confederate fortifications around Island No. 10. The rebels promptly scuttled one of their own steamers, the *Winchester*, at the foot of the passage to obstruct it. It was an unnecessary precaution, for the canal proved to be too narrow and shallow for the Union vessels.

A few days after the *Winchester* was sunk, a Union reconnaissance party boarded the boat and set fire to it. The towhead that grew up around the sunken rebel boat in later years is still known as Winchester Towhead, and the remains of the rebel vessel are probably buried beneath it.

## **ISLAND NO. 10**

*Mile 901.0 AHP, Map 5*  
*Right bank, descending*

Island No. 10 was originally a very small island that lay close to the Tennessee shore. In the 1814 revised edition of *The Navigator*, Zadok Cramer noted that the island had been considerably damaged by the series of earthquakes that struck the Lower Mississippi Valley late in 1811. The shocks had continued over a long period of time, and Cramer said that Island No. 10 appeared to have cracked open in several places.

Half a century later, Island No. 10 became the site of another upheaval. Confederates had begun to fortify it early in the fall of 1861. The officer in charge of constructing the batteries pressed into service about 150 slaves from the surrounding plantations and farms, but the work proceeded very slowly. When the planters complained that their laborers were needed in the fields, the construction of earthworks ceased and the project came to a halt.

Early in March, 1862, the Confederates realized their mistake. General John Pope, with a large Union force, easily penetrated the feeble defenses at New Madrid, Missouri. Columbus, Kentucky, was outflanked by General U. S. Grant's movement against Fort Henry and Fort Donelson. The Confederates hastily threw up more earthworks at Island No. 10, and moved guns and men in to defend it.

General Pope waited impatiently at New Madrid for the U. S. Navy fleet under Flag



Officer Andrew Foote to join him. The Union officer needed transportation for his soldiers, so that he could cross the big river and pursue the Confederates and force them into battle.

Seven Union gunboats and 10 mortar boats arrived above Island No. 10 in mid-March, but Andrew Foote showed a strange reluctance to engage the enemy. After several timid sorties against the rebel guns, Foote told the Army general that he did not believe his boats could silence the rebel guns on the Tennessee shore. Pope waited, angry but helpless, for Foote to make a move.

Some of Foote's young gunboat commanders were also growing impatient. Henry Walke, commander of the *U.S.S. Carondelet* begged his fleet commander to let him run past the Confederate batteries and join General Pope at New Madrid. Given grudging permission to make the attempt, Walke sneaked the *Carondelet* past Island No. 10 on a dark and stormy night, and the *U.S.S. Pittsburg* followed him down two nights later.

With the Union gunboats below them, the Confederates knew that any further attempt to hold Island No. 10 would be pointless. Leaving a small number of men behind to buy a little time with a formal surrender of the island, the main body of the troops started a hasty retreat toward Tiptonville, Tennessee.

Flag Officer Foote received the surrender proposal and took possession of the island and its batteries on the Tennessee shore. His lengthy dispatches to Washington assumed full credit for the glorious victory at Island No. 10, and he was careful to add that it had been achieved "without the firing of a single ARMY gun."

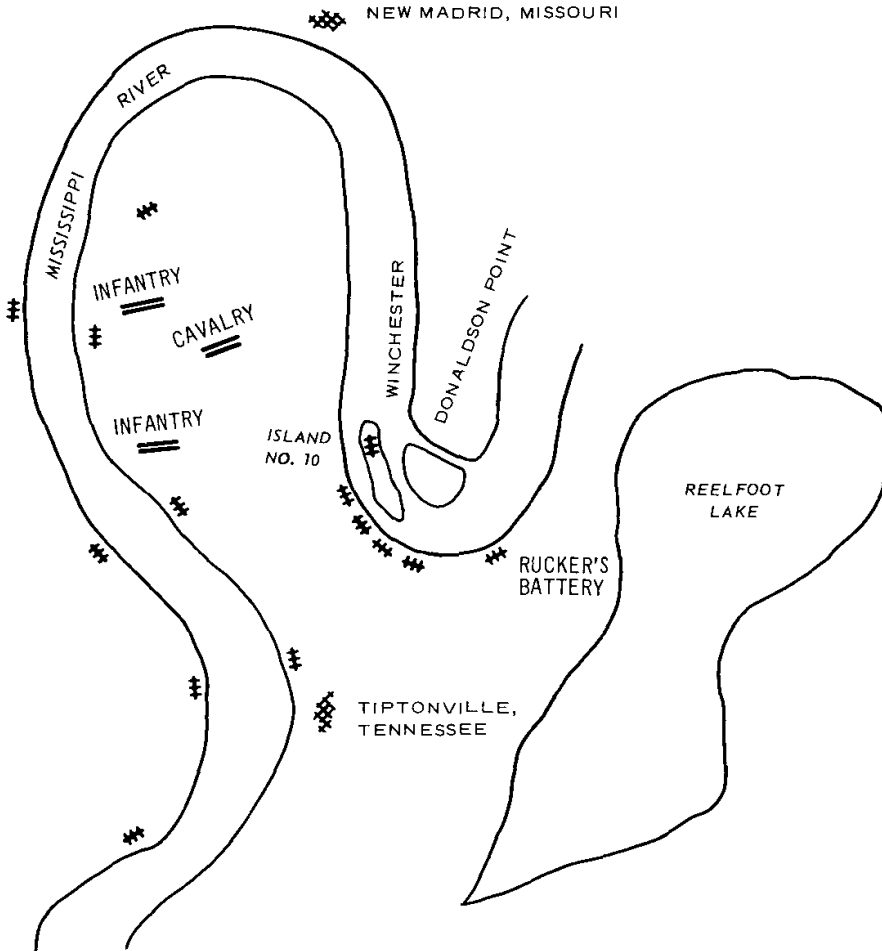
While the surrender negotiations were under way, General Pope single-mindedly carried out his original intention. Moving his men across the river by boat, he took a back road to Tiptonville and was waiting for the rebels when they arrived. Most of them came limping into the little town about 4:00 a.m., April 8, 1862, and when they marched straight into Pope's waiting arms they surrendered without a murmur of protest.

The fall of Island No. 10, New Madrid, and Tiptonville opened the way to the next Confederate fortification, at Fort Pillow, and eventually to Memphis, Tennessee.

Later in the war, Island No. 10 was chosen as a location for a colony of ex-slaves from occupied areas down the river. Union Army authorities sent 1,000 of the blacks to the island during the Vicksburg campaign, and detailed a gunboat and 86 Union soldiers to take care of them. The plan did not work out very well. A Navy commander complained officially that the Army officer in charge of the colony had become so chummy with the rebels that the whole southern army was receiving information and assistance through the Island No. 10 post.

Almost 10 years after the war had ended, Colonel Charles Suter of the Army Corps of Engineers made his reconnaissance map of the Lower Mississippi, and he showed several of the relics of the engagement at Island No. 10 still obstructing the navigation channel of the river. By this time, the island itself had moved to the Missouri side of the river, but in the channel were the remains of the *Yazoo*, the *Grampus*, and the *John Simonds*—all Confederate boats that the rebels had lost at Island No. 10. Colonel Suter

also showed the location of the *Fred Tron*, a steamer that had been snagged and sunk near the island just before the war began. Still another casualty was the *James White*, a Union transport that hit one of the rebel wrecks in 1864 and went down so rapidly that 16 deckhands sleeping in the hold were drowned.



(From Civil War Map (WOR))

**CONFEDERATE DEFENSES AT ISLAND NO. 10.** After Columbus, Kentucky, was outflanked by Union military operations in the interior, Confederate forces set up an elaborate system of defenses around Island No. 10. The rebels surrendered the Island to the U. S. Navy after Union gunboats ran past the batteries in April, 1862.

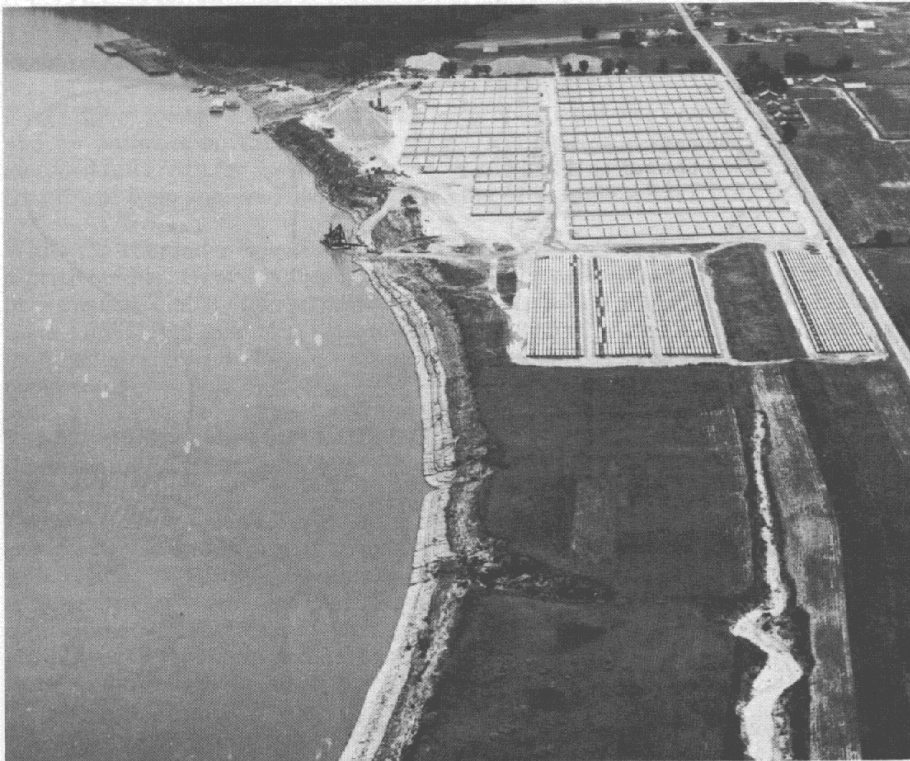
## **CATES CASTING FIELD**

*Mile 900.5 AHP, Map 5  
Left bank, descending*

Cates Landing, Tennessee, is the location of one of the casting fields where concrete blocks used in revetment work are produced and stored for each season's work.

The blocks made in the casting fields are 4 by 25 feet, and are formed into huge concrete mattresses that sometimes contain as many as 50,000 squares of concrete. They are placed in the riverbed by mat-sinking units maintained and operated by the Army Corps of Engineers.

In recent years, a great deal of sophisticated machinery and equipment has been developed to produce and handle the concrete revetment work.



*CASTING FIELD. Concrete blocks for revetment work are produced under contract in government-owned casting fields at eight locations along the Lower Mississippi River. The field shown in the above photo is at Cates Landing, Tennessee. The eight fields together have a total storage capacity of about 1,300,000 squares, or about 3,000 acres of concrete.*

## **SLOUGH LANDING NECK**

*Mile 898.2 AHP, Map 5*  
*Left bank, descending*

The Mississippi's meander loop in the vicinity of New Madrid, Missouri, is the longest on the Lower Mississippi today. The distance across Slough Landing Neck is less than 2 miles, but boats travel more than 20 miles around the loop.

In 1937 it was proposed that an artificial cutoff be made at Slough Landing Neck, and studies were made which indicated that the cutoff would not only shorten the navigation channel and bring it into a better alignment, but would also reduce flood heights above the cutoff. As always, before any project is adopted, public hearings were held. It quickly became apparent that local people were unalterably opposed to the project. The Mississippi River Commission, after listening to the opinions expressed by local interests, failed to recommend the project, and it was abandoned.

When the river later threatened a cutoff of its own, the Corps of Engineers constructed revetments and dikes in the area to stabilize the channel and to hold the river in its old bed.

## **NEW MADRID, MISSOURI**

*Mile 888.0 AHP, Map 5*  
*Right bank, descending*

Today's city planners ought to be able to sympathize with Colonel George Morgan. On paper, Morgan's plan for the city of New Madrid could hardly have been more splendid. It was to be a great and noble city, and would be the envy of the civilized world. To his surprise and dismay, what he actually produced was a squalid little village that in its earliest days was known chiefly for the poverty and misery of its inhabitants.

Colonel Morgan had been a U. S. Indian agent and a deputy commissary general in the Revolutionary Army. In 1779 he resigned his military commission and retired to New Jersey to become a gentleman farmer. He was comfortably fixed, and might have stayed on his farm for the remainder of his days in ease and comfort, but he could not forget the vast wilderness he had explored in his youth.

In 1788, Morgan met Don Diego de Gardoqui, Spanish minister to the United States. The two men talked about the fertile Mississippi Valley and the mighty river that drained it. Before the encounter ended, Morgan had succeeded in interesting the minister in a scheme he had conceived. Morgan wanted the Spanish government to give him a grant of land on the west bank of the Lower Mississippi, so that he could create a vast personal empire of his own. Gardoqui listened intently to the American's

plan, and voiced the opinion that Morgan might reasonably expect to obtain twelve million acres of land, subject, of course, to the King's approval.

A fire with ambition, Morgan set off down the Mississippi with a party of workmen and settlers, searching for an ideal location for the city of his dreams. It was to be the center of his vast domain. It would have broad streets, open green spaces, and whole city blocks dedicated to churches, schools, gardens, and public buildings. He would not allow anyone to cut a single tree without his permission, and his city would be so beautiful that it would attract the most cultured and educated people of his time.

Near the mouth of St. John's Bayou, at the top of a long meander loop of the Mississippi, Morgan found the spot he thought was perfect for his purposes. It had been the site of an early French trading post, and the land was high enough to be safe from overflow. The area was relatively flat, and not heavily forested.

Morgan had his workmen clear a field for cultivation, and began the construction of a warehouse. When the work was progressing smoothly, he departed for New Orleans, where he expected to attend to the paperwork involved in accepting the large grant of land he desired. Relying on the assurances of the Spanish minister, he assumed that his business with the governor of the Spanish colony would be a mere formality.

In New Orleans, Don Estaban Miro eyed the aggressive and arrogant American with cool distaste.

"Land?" the governor murmured. "Well... perhaps 1,000 acres."

Morgan shook his head impatiently. No, he had in mind something larger. What he really wanted, he said ingratiatingly, was enough land to create a buffer state between the Spanish in Louisiana and the new American nation. He would name his capital city "New Madrid," he added, to show that his first loyalty would be to Spain.

"One thousand acres," Governor Miro repeated firmly, "and perhaps additional small grants for each of your sons."

Colonel Morgan drew himself up proudly, bid the suave Spaniard a curt "Good day," and departed. From New Orleans, he went back to New Jersey, leaving the New Madrid settlement to fend for itself.

Morgan had worried the Spanish governor more than he knew. His was not the first such proposal that Spanish authorities had received, and Miro was suspicious of all of them. As soon as Morgan had departed, the governor ordered a detachment of 130 infantry and 20 gunners to hasten up the river and establish a fort at New Madrid. The military force would make it plain to the greedy Americans that Spain had no intention of giving up its possessions in the New World.

With the establishment of Fort Celeste at New Madrid, the area seemed to be firmly under Spanish domination, until about 1793, when new rumors arose about American encroachment on lands below the mouth of the Ohio. From New Orleans, Captain Pedro Rousseau, a trusted Spanish officer, was sent upriver in a Spanish war vessel called *La Flecha*. Rousseau's mission was to deliver reinforcements for Fort Celeste, and to investigate rumors and examine the banks on both sides of the river for evidence



*PLAN OF THE FORT OF NEW MADRID. Victor Collot, a French general, visited the Spanish fort at New Madrid in 1796 and made a sketch map of the fort, town, and surrounding countryside. "Anse a la Graisse" was the old French name for the location. The phrase meant "greasy cove" and had been applied to the place by early French traders and colonists who obtained buffalo and bear grease in the area. General Collot notes on his sketch that the fort had been partly carried away by the river by 1796.*

of American attempts to establish settlements.

*La Flecha* was armed with eight bronze swivel guns. It had a mast and sails, but Captain Rousseau found that its 16 oars were more reliable for making progress against the currents of the Mississippi. The voyage consumed several weeks, and Rousseau had ample time to examine the river banks and question the wandering Indians encountered along the way. He found no Americans.

In due time, *La Flecha* reached New Madrid. Rousseau reported that he found Fort Celeste in good condition. It was located about 250 feet from the river bank, he said, and was surrounded by a stockade fence and a water-filled moat. Inside the stockade was a house for the commandant, a hospital, a powder magazine, a dungeon, and barracks. There were three good cannons and one swivel gun to repel invaders. The few settlers around the fort seemed to Rousseau to be devoted to the Spanish cause, and he reported that they spent most of their time raising potatoes and corn to feed the garrison.

Captain Rousseau shot off his own little swivel guns to impress some visiting Indian chiefs, and went off to patrol the river from the mouth of the Ohio to New Madrid. Finding everything perfectly quiet, he took *La Flecha* back to New Orleans.

In spite of Rousseau's optimistic report, the Spanish governor was uneasy. He ordered Fort Celeste strengthened and warned sternly that it must be held against American aggression "to the last extremity."

Even as the colonial officials were strengthening their defenses to repulse the land-hungry Americans, the Spanish King was making a secret treaty that returned the Louisiana colony to France, its original owner. At the same time, American ministers in Paris were negotiating for the purchase of New Orleans. To their astonishment, Napoleon offered them the whole of Louisiana. The Spanish would soon be leaving New Madrid, and would never fire a single shot in its defense.

When the Louisiana Purchase was consummated in 1803, the Americans who took possession of New Madrid found it no great prize. The inhabitants, mostly French, were still poor, and the Spanish fort had already been virtually destroyed by the caving river banks. Houses in New Madrid had to be moved back regularly, to keep them out of the river's clutches.

In December, 1811, a series of severe earthquakes shook the Mississippi Valley. The center of the disturbance was in the New Madrid area, and the town was considerably damaged by the shocks. So widespread was the disturbance that two distinct shocks were felt in New Orleans, where on February 6 and February 7, 1812, a ball and a theater performance were interrupted by the shaking of the ground. At New Madrid, terrified settlers fled.

After the earthquakes had subsided, a few people moved back to New Madrid. Thomas Nuttall, an English scientist, who visited the town in 1819, said that it had only about 20 log houses and stores. He called it "an insignificant French hamlet," and complained that prices were exorbitant. Nuttall had had to pay 5¢ per pound for beef, 37¢ for butter, and 31¢ for sugar.

John James Audubon, who stopped at New Madrid briefly in the winter of 1820 was equally uncomplimentary. It was a dreary place, he confided to his Journal, almost deserted and hardly worthy of a name.

By the time the Civil War began in 1861, New Madrid was still a very small town. Feebly fortified by Confederates, it was abandoned when General John Pope and the U. S. Navy approached it.

After the war, the little town struggled on, having survived major earthquakes, floods, a Civil War, the river's attack on its waterfront, and a lot of bad publicity. Mark Twain in *Life on the Mississippi* commented dryly that New Madrid was "still there" in 1882, but "looked a little unwell."

Today New Madrid looks considerably better than it did when Twain saw it. Most of the old town has been eaten up by the river, but a few historic sites remain. A Federal project, completed in 1970, provides a harbor for New Madrid. The harbor serves a 200-acre industrial park, and three terminals handle petroleum products, grain, and sand and gravel.

There is no small boat marina at New Madrid, but supplies and fuel could be obtained in the harbor in an emergency.

## **WATSON POINT, KENTUCKY**

*Mile 888.0 AHP, Map 5*  
*Left bank, descending*

The large peninsula of land around which New Madrid Bend winds belongs to the State of Kentucky. It is bounded on the north, west, and east by the Mississippi River, and on the south by Tennessee. People who live on the point must go 7 or 8 miles up the river to get to any other part of their State of Kentucky, or must drive more than 10 miles through Tennessee before they reach the Kentucky border. It has been said that the residents of the point "shop in Tennessee, bank in Missouri, and send their children to school in Kentucky."

Many years ago, there was a boundary dispute between Kentucky and Tennessee involving the point, but a compromise was finally agreed upon. A small community, with a steamboat landing, called "Compromise," is shown on Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 reconnaissance map of the Mississippi. Later a sandbar grew up in front of the landing, the community was abandoned, and the name disappeared from river maps.

There was also a famous feud on the point long, long ago. The Watsons and the Darnells, two families that lived on the Kentucky point before the Civil War, were said to have been involved. Today the area is remote and isolated, but all is peaceful and serene on the fine farms that are located on the point.

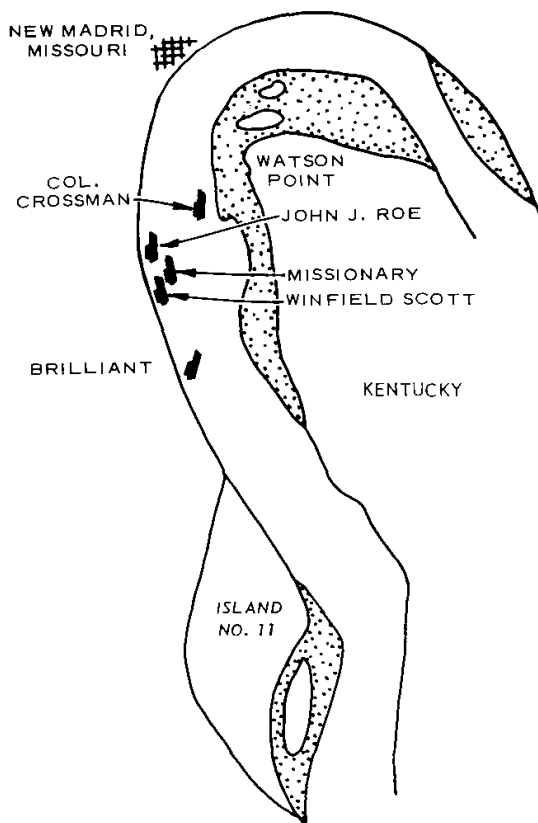


## ISLAND NO. 11

*Mile 882.0 AHP, Map 5  
Right bank, descending*

The river channel above and below Island No. 11 was once a dangerous one, filled with snags and bars. Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 reconnaissance map of the area showed the wrecks of the steamboats *Col. Crossman*, *Missionary*, *Winfield Scott*, *Brilliant*, and *John J. Roe* in the channel between New Madrid and the head of the island.

The St. Louis-New Orleans steamer *Col. Crossman* exploded near Island No. 11 in February, 1858. The boat caught fire and burned to the water's edge. About 15 people were reported to have been killed in the accident.



(From 1874 Suter Map)

*ISLAND NO. 11 IN 1874. A reconnaissance map made in 1874 showed the wrecks of five steamboats in the river channel between New Madrid, Missouri, and Island No. 11. The island had already attached itself to Missouri when this map was made.*

The *John J. Roe* was a well-known and very slow steamboat that hit a snag in the bend above the island and went down in 1864. The boat was serving as a Union transport during the Civil War. A young man named Samuel Clemens was a cub pilot on the *John J. Roe* around 1858, and he later made the old boat a target for his sharp wit. As "Mark Twain," Clemens wrote that other boats raced each other but the *John J. Roe* was too slow to race anything faster than an island or a raft. It took her so long to get up the river, he said, that he often forgot what year they had left their last port. When she went down in 1864, he declared, it was five years before her owners even realized she was missing.

A steamer called the *Guiding Star* joined the older wrecks in the channel in January, 1893. She was said to have been a particularly beautiful boat. When she went aground on a bar and sank, her freight and furniture were salvaged before she broke in two and disappeared.

## **POINT PLEASANT, MISSOURI**

*Mile 879.0 AHP, Map 5  
Right bank, descending*

Point Pleasant was one of the small pioneer communities that suffered severe damage in the earthquakes of 1811-1812. Thomas Nuttall, who visited it on Christmas Day in 1819, said that it was a small French hamlet, where only a few Canadian settlers remained.

During the Civil War, Union forces erected gun batteries on the river bank in front of the village and occupied the position for a time. In 1874 the town was still located directly on the river, and it had a steamboat landing. Later a huge sandbar grew up in front of the landing, and the river moved in the opposite direction, leaving Point Pleasant more than a mile from the channel.

## **ISLAND NO. 12**

*Mile 874.0 AHP, Map 6  
Left bank, descending*

Island No. 12 lay close to the Tennessee shore when Zadok Cramer numbered it in 1801. By 1874 the chute behind the island was closed and it had become a part of the mainland of Tennessee.

## **BIXBY TOWHEAD**

*Mile 873.9 AHP, Map 6  
Left bank, descending*

There were two distinguished gentlemen named Bixby whose careers were connected with the Lower Mississippi.

Brigadier General William H. Bixby of the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers was one of the early presidents of the Mississippi River Commission, and later became the Chief of the Corps of Engineers.

Captain Horace Bixby was not a military man, but was one of the best-known steamboat pilots on the river. He was piloting an old boat called the *Paul Jones* when a boy named Samuel Clemens left his home in Hannibal, Missouri, and went down the Mississippi, determined to become a pilot. For the modest sum of \$500, Horace Bixby

agreed to let young Clemens serve as his “cub pilot,” so that he could “learn the river.”

Later in his life, Captain Bixby would be harrassed by newspaper reporters and others who wanted him to tell them what he knew about the youngster who had become the famous writer, Mark Twain. In exasperation, the old pilot once exclaimed: *“I wish that fellow Twain was dead!”*

When Mark Twain did in fact die in 1910, Captain Bixby wanted to set the record straight. For years, river men had belittled Twain’s knowledge of the river and his ability as a steamboat pilot. One well-worn witticism was: *“That fellow Twain knows a hell of a lot more about book-writing than he ever did about steamboats.”* Bixby had some surprising news for the reporters who questioned him after Twain’s death.

*“Sam Clemens was a good pilot,”* the old man declared firmly. *“He was also a smart fellow, and it was his brains that made other pilots jealous and led them to say he didn’t know the river—that he was just an inspired loafer, or something of the sort. What they said wasn’t true; Clemens was a good pilot—and he learned it from me.”*

## **RIDDLES OR RUDDLES POINT, MISSOURI**

*Mile 873.0 AHP, Map 6  
Right bank, descending*

Both the Riddle family and the Ruddle family owned property on the west bank of the Mississippi in the vicinity of this point, so it is hardly surprising that confusion arose as to the correct name for the area opposite Tiptonville, Tennessee.

On the river bank near the ferry landing opposite Tiptonville, there is an old family graveyard with a tombstone that carries the following inscription:

*JOHN RUDDLE, Died Jan. 1829, Aged about 70 yrs.*

Other members of the Ruddle family are buried in the cemetery, and it seems probable that Ruddle’s Point was the original name that boatmen applied to the point.

## **TIPTONVILLE, TENNESSEE**

*Mile 873.0 AHP, Map 6  
Left bank, descending*

Tiptonville, named for the Tennessee family that settled it before the Civil War, was a flourishing little town when the hostilities began. In 1862, Confederates hastily threw

up a battery of guns for the defense of the town, but they just as rapidly abandoned it after the fall of Island No. 10.

Later in the war, the commander of the *U.S.S. New Era* reported indignantly that the Union transport *Silver Moon* had been fired upon at Tiptonville. He was going to burn the town to the ground, he said. When citizens protested, the U. S. Navy officer pointed out that the culprits had hidden behind a woodpile on the river bank and had almost succeeded in capturing the Union vessel. Tiptonville was a dangerous place, he grumbled, full of people disloyal to the Union and infested with guerillas. When his temper had cooled, the gunboat commander relented and only burned two small houses and the offending woodpile.

After the Civil War, Tiptonville lost its waterfront when the Mississippi threw a sandbar in front of it. Today it lies more than a mile from the river bank and has no harbor. Most of Tiptonville's trade today comes from the rural areas, and in season there is a brisk business with sportsmen and tourists who visit nearby Reelfoot Lake.

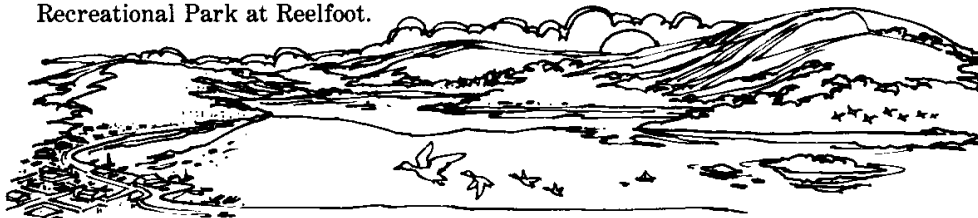
## REELFOOT LAKE

*Mile 873.0 AHP, Map 6*  
*Left bank, descending*

Reelfoot Lake lies a couple of miles east of Tiptonville, Tennessee, and is believed to have been created by the New Madrid Earthquakes in 1811-1812. In its early days it was famous for the abundance of its wildlife and for the sunken standing forest of cypress and hardwood that could be seen beneath the surface of its waters.

By 1850 meat hunters had practically taken over the Reelfoot area. They shipped birds and game animals to northern markets in carload lots and resisted, often with violence, the intrusion of "outsiders." The State of Tennessee went to court after the turn of the century and in 1914 won a decision that led to a strict program of wildlife protection for the area. The poachers left, and the beautiful lake became a favorite resort for vacationers and sport fishermen.

Today the underwater forest has disappeared, and vacation cottages blight the lake shores, but Reelfoot still has abundant wildlife and is a beautiful body of water. The State has purchased some of the lake's shoreline and is establishing a State Recreational Park at Reelfoot.



## **MERRIWETHER BEND**

*Mile 870.5 AHP, Map 6*

Although the spelling is slightly different, this bend in the Lower Mississippi was probably named for the Meriwether family of Tennessee, who owned plantations in the area.

One of the Meriwethers was in Memphis, Tennessee, when that city fell into Union hands. Elizabeth Meriwether's husband was a Confederate officer, and he had left her in Memphis with their children because he had been confident that it would be a safe place for her to wait for his return. Mrs. Meriwether was a lively, talkative young woman and she made no secret of her distaste for Yankee generals. General U. S. Grant made his headquarters at Memphis briefly, and he chose to ignore Elizabeth Meriwether, but when General William T. Sherman was placed in command of the occupied city, he proved to be less tolerant. After several encounters with the lady, General Sherman roared "*Get her out of town, NOW!*"

Elizabeth Meriwether was informed that she had been banished from the city, and she was forced to leave so hurriedly that she had to drive her own buggy. Writing about her refugee life many years later, Mrs. Meriwether recalled that she worried as much about her faithful mule, "Adrienne," as she did about her children. She could comfort her little sons, but she was afraid that poor Adrienne would become confused and unhappy by the sudden wild exodus from Memphis.

Adrienne's emotional stability was apparently equal to the occasions of refugee life. She survived and, weak and thin, was still pulling the buggy that brought Mrs. Meriwether back to Memphis after the war had ended.

Elizabeth Meriwether lived to be a very old lady, and when she reminisced about the war, it was obvious that she had never forgiven General Sherman for banishing her from her home.

## **ALASKA LIGHT**

*Mile 869.0 AHP, Map 6*

*Left bank, descending*

Alaska Light is named for a steamboat that sank in this area more than 100 years ago. Colonel Suter's map of 1874 showed the steamer *Alaska* lying on the edge of a sandbar in the snag-filled channel above Island No. 13.

## **LITTLE CYPRESS BEND**

*Mile 864.8 AHP, Map 6*

Few things impressed early voyagers on the Lower Mississippi more than the beautiful tree for which this bend was named. In Little Cypress Bend and other areas, the bald cypress grew to tremendous heights and sizes. The spreading branches, with light feathery foliage, and the massive trunks surrounded by the peculiar protuberances called "cypress knees" made it as picturesque as it was beautiful.

When loggers and lumbermen began their operations on the Lower Mississippi, cypress was so abundant that the straight-grained and easily worked wood was often used for fence posts and railroad ties. Today it has become relatively hard to obtain, and the expensive lumber is often used in house interiors.

On old plantations in the south, a few of the cabins that housed slaves or farm laborers are still in existence. Made of rough-sawed cypress that has weathered to a silvery gray, the marvelous texture of the weathered boards makes even the most tumble-down cabin attractive. Cypress lumber, which is extremely durable, was often called "the wood everlasting."

## **ISLAND NO. 13**

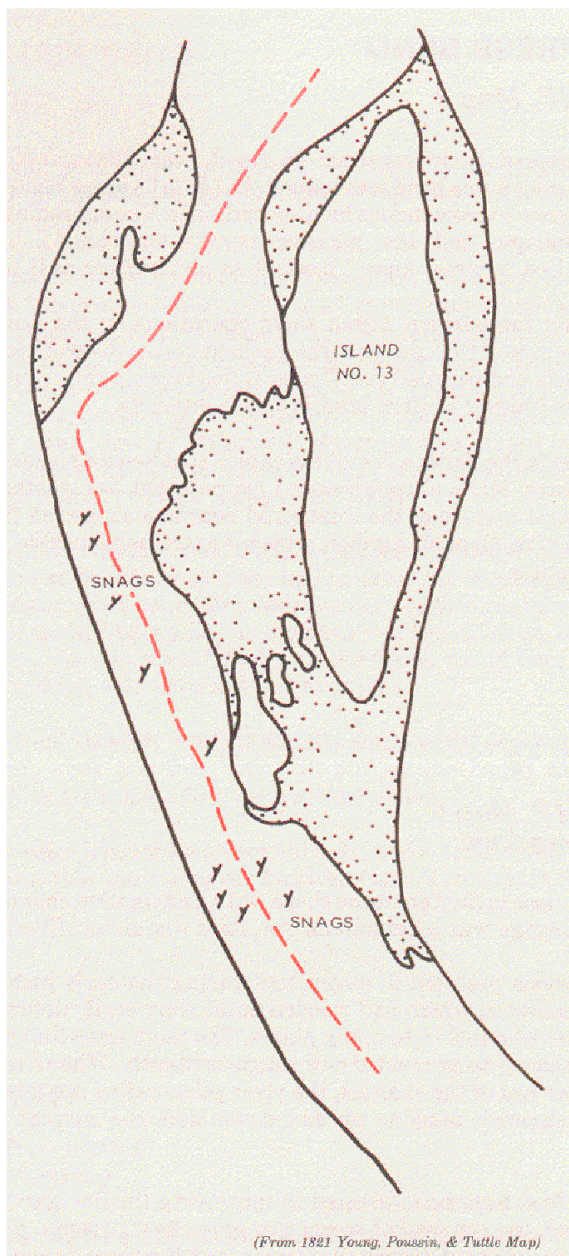
*Mile 864.0 AHP, Map 6*  
*Left bank, descending*

Island No. 13 lay close to the Tennessee shore, with a navigation channel on the right or west side. The passage was a dangerous one, for it was always filled with ugly snags.

Snags were a serious problem to navigators during the early history of the Lower Mississippi. Steamboats, which had wooden hulls, were easily damaged by the snags that obstructed the channel in so many places. The huge trees that slid into the river whenever a bank caved away created new snags constantly. When a tree trunk became firmly fixed in the bed of the channel, the river pilots called it a "planter." If the tree leaned into the channel, bobbing up and down with the current, they called it a "sawyer."

When Congress first became interested in improving the navigation channel of the Lower Mississippi, the removal of snags was given first priority. Between 1824 and 1879, at least three million dollars were spent removing these dangerous obstructions from the Mississippi and its navigable tributaries.

Island No. 13 was located in one of the reaches of the river affected by the great flood of 1858. After the flood, the chute behind the island filled, and Island No. 13 became a part of the Tennessee shore.

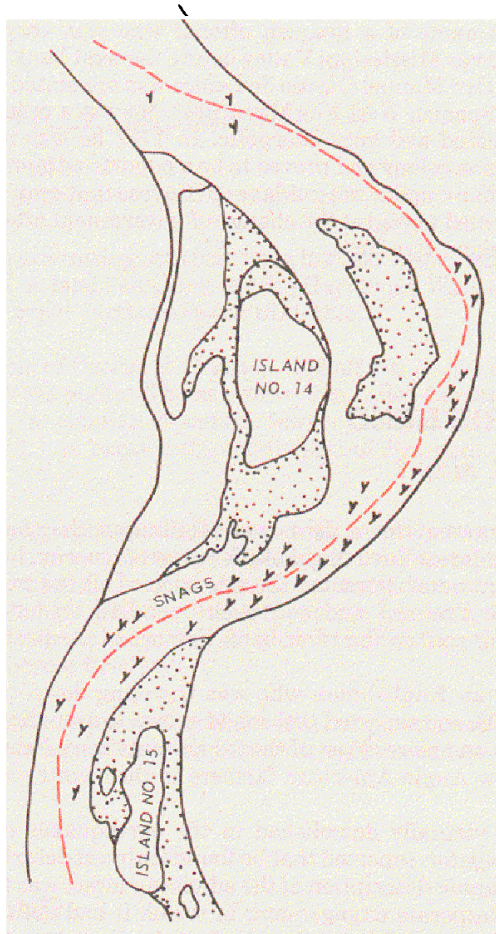


*ISLAND NO. 13 IN 1821. Three U. S. Army Engineers made a reconnaissance map of the Lower Mississippi in 1821 and carefully located all of the most dangerous snags that obstructed the navigation channel. At the foot of Island No. 13, both sandbars and snags made the going tough for river pilots.*

## ISLAND NO. 14

*Mile 858.5 AHP, Map 7  
Right bank, descending*

If Island No. 13 was a dangerous passage for pilots, the channel that ran past Islands No. 14 and No. 15 must have been even worse. The two islands lay on opposite sides of the navigation channel, each of them close to its respective shore, and the river between them was choked with snags. Zadok Cramer in 1814 commented in his book, *The Navigator*, that this reach of the river was "much convulsed during the Earthquake." The 1821 map made by Army Engineers showed a navigation channel filled with snags.



*ISLANDS NO. 14 AND NO. 15. A map made in 1821 shows that river pilots had to thread their way through a forest of snags in the vicinity of these two islands. Sandbars were almost as hazardous as snags, and a pilot had to be wide awake to make his way safely through this tangle.*



## **GAYOSO, MISSOURI**

*Mile 850.5 AHP, Map 7*  
*Right bank, descending*

Gayoso was a small Missouri town located on the west bank of the Mississippi when it became the county seat of Pemiscot County in 1851. By 1898, it had begun to seem inevitable that the currents of the river would gobble up the whole town, so the seat of the county government was moved to Caruthersville, Missouri. The erratic Mississippi then changed its tactics and began to move in the opposite direction, leaving the village of Gayoso more than a mile inland.

The town bears the name of a Spanish official who was very popular with the inhabitants of the Lower Mississippi Valley before the west bank of the river became American property. Don Manuel Gayoso de Lemos was appointed commandant of the Natchez District of Spanish West Florida in 1787. He was a mild and affable young man, very well-educated and very energetic. In 1797 he was made the governor-general of the Louisiana colony and proved to be a popular administrator. So pleasant was life on the west bank under the guidance of Gayoso that even the Americans who had settled there seemed to regret the change of government after the United States negotiated the Louisiana Purchase.

## **LITTLE PRAIRIE BEND**

*Mile 850.0 AHP, Map 7*

When early voyagers went down the Lower Mississippi, they found it a monotonous trip. A wall of virgin forest lined the banks for most of the way, but in this bend of the river a small open meadow attracted the attention of all the travelers. The French called it "Le Petite Prairie," and a French-Canadian trader, Francois LeSieur, established a trading post on the river bank in front of the prairie in 1794.

Fortescue Cuming, an Englishman who was traveling down the river, stopped at Little Prairie in 1808, and reported that it had grown to a small village with about 24 houses and a tavern and store. Most of the inhabitants were French, Cumings noted, but there were a few Anglo-American farmers in the country around the village.

Little Prairie was virtually demolished in the earthquakes of 1811-1812. Zadok Cramer, in *The Navigator*, reported that he found it almost deserted when he visited it late in 1812. His graphic description of the adjoining forest was that "it looked as if it had been in some desperate engagement, in which it had got much worsted in the battle, so that the trees stand in all directions and in great confusion."

A few years later, another visitor said that he found only one house at Little Prairie. The remainder of the village, he thought, had been swept away by the river soon after the earthquakes.

In the winter of 1820-1821, John James Audubon was at Little Prairie, and shot a bald eagle. He took the bird back to his flatboat and began working on a drawing that would later become one of the famous plates in his *Birds of America*.

Eagles were common in the Lower Mississippi Valley in Audubon's time, when large numbers of them nested in the forests that lined the river banks. A recent survey revealed that the eagle population in the lower part of the United States has dwindled to about 800 breeding pairs, most of which are confined to the coastal areas. Pesticides, herbicides, and the loss of nesting sites have taken a heavy toll, and wildlife experts fear that the bald eagle may eventually become extinct.

## **CARUTHERSVILLE, MISSOURI**

*Mile 846.0 AHP, Map 7*

*Right bank, descending*

Caruthersville is an interesting old river town that has a distinctly southern flavor. It was laid out in 1857 on land belonging to John Hardeman Walker, who had settled in the area before the great earthquakes of 1811-1812.

Walker, with the help of George W. Bushey, laid off lots on one end of his plantation and offered them to the public. The new town was called Caruthersville, in honor of Samuel Caruthers, a popular Missouri lawyer and judge. Caruthersville was incorporated in 1874, and became the county seat of Pemiscot County, Missouri, in 1898.

Caruthersville today is a pleasant little town with a grassy waterfront where people often loiter on warm summer evenings, watching the towboats pass and talking about the good old days. Located in the heart of an agricultural district, cotton, soybeans, and alfalfa are the chief crops. Private interests operate several terminals where grain, petroleum products, sand and gravel, etc., are handled. Caruthersville is protected from floods by a concrete floodwall.

There is no small boat marina at Caruthersville, but pleasure boaters can obtain fuel and supplies. There is a small but very interesting museum near the waterfront.

## **LINWOOD BEND**

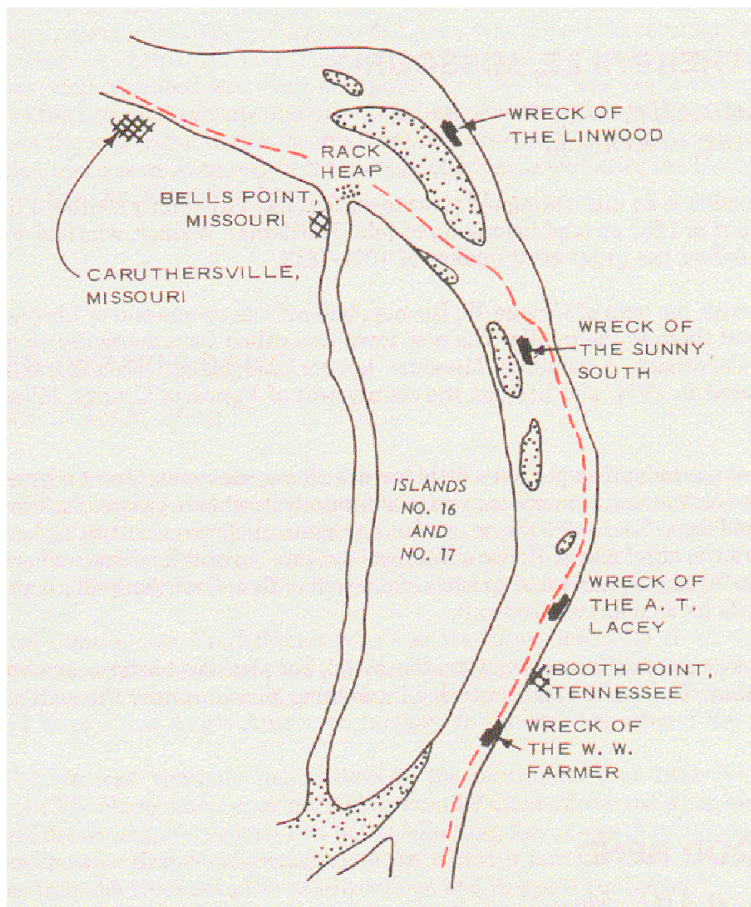
*Mile 841.0 AHP, Map 7*

The steamboat *Linwood* hit a snag and sank in the bend below Caruthersville, Missouri, in 1847. The boat was a total loss, and Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 map of

the Lower Mississippi showed the wreck of the old steamer still lying in the channel in the bend that had become known by the same name. In the lower part of the bend Suter showed also the wrecks of the *Sunny South*, *A. T. Lacey*, and *W. W. Farmer*.

Perhaps the best-known of all these boats that went down in Linwood Bend was the steamer *A. T. Lacey*, a boat that had been on the river about four years when she caught fire as she approached Booth Point on May 2, 1860.

If the fire had not created instant panic among the passengers, all of them might have been saved. The pilot ran the boat to the bank as soon as he realized she was on fire, but deck passengers were already leaping into the water as her bow nudged the shore. As was often the case, cabin passengers fared better than the deck passengers. Someone



*LINWOOD BEND.* Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 reconnaissance map of the Lower Mississippi shows the wrecks of four old steamboats lying in Linwood Bend. Sandbars, the wrecks, and the "rack heap," or pile of driftwood, at the head of the islands all made navigation difficult in the bend.

took charge, broke out life preservers, and put them on the women and children. All the cabin passengers were saved, with one tragic exception.

The exception was the little daughter of Captain A. T. Lacey himself, who owned the boat. Captain Lacey and his family had boarded the boat at Cape Girardeau, Missouri, and were on their way to New Orleans for a holiday. When the fire broke out, the boat's young clerk, determined to save the Lacey child, seized her and jumped overboard. Putting the little girl on his back, he struck out strongly for the shore. He had almost reached the bank when a large floating tree came past. The tree limbs caught in the child's clothing and swept her into the water. She sank immediately, and was never seen again.

The *A. T. Lacey*, valued at \$60,000, was a total loss. Cargo valued at \$120,000 was also lost. None of the passengers were able to save their luggage. In addition to the Lacey child, some of the deckhands, cabin servants, and deck passengers lost their lives.

## **ISLANDS NO. 16 AND NO. 17**

*Mile 840.5 AHP, Map 7*  
*Right bank, descending*

Around the head of Islands No. 16 and No. 17, enormous piles of driftwood accumulated, adding to all the other hazards of navigation in Linwood Bend. Steamboat pilots called the driftwood piles "rack heaps," because they resembled heaps of deer antlers, or racks.

The two islands had joined each other by 1874, and together they joined the Missouri mainland.

## **BOOTH POINT, TENNESSEE**

*Mile 838.0 AHP, Map 8*  
*Left bank, descending*

Named for an early Tennessee settler, Booth Point became the site of a small village during the steamboat days. When the river traffic declined, the village dwindled away, leaving only a few houses on the Point.

Interstate Highway 55 will cross the Mississippi at Booth Point, and the new bridge will probably bring about some changes in the rural area.

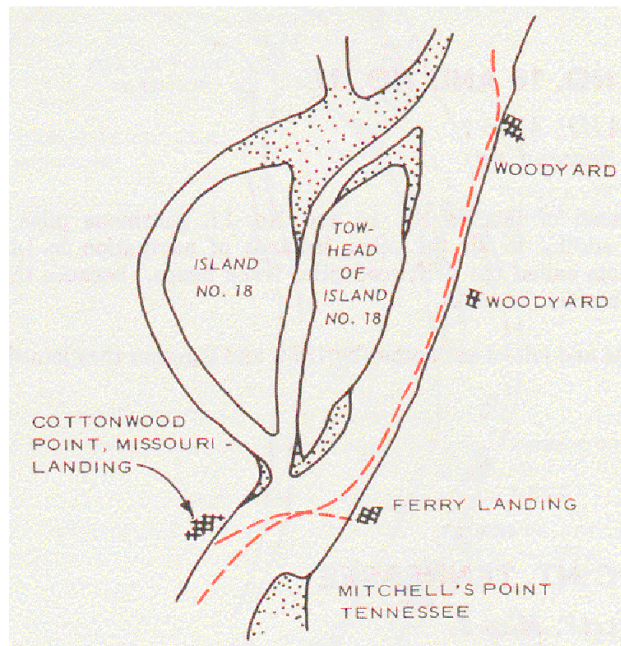
## ISLAND NO. 18

*Mile 834.5 AHP, Map 8  
Right bank, descending*

Island No. 18 was a notoriously difficult passage for early river pilots, for its bendway was always choked with snags. Colonel Charles Suter reported in 1874 that the channel was still in poor condition. The most a pilot could hope for in low water, Suter said, was that one of its three divided channels would have eight feet of water; often there would be less.

The island later joined the Missouri shore. A large towhead lying opposite it, along the Tennessee shore, had a chute behind it that is closed at the upper end. The closed channel is called Robert A. Everett Lake, and is a state-owned recreation area.

A small island once lay opposite Island No. 18, and Zadok Cramer called it Island No. 19. Samuel Cumings, in the 1829 edition of his book entitled *The Western Pilot*, noted that Island No. 19 had disappeared, probably in the earthquakes of 1811-1812.



*ISLAND NO. 18 IN 1874. Before channel stabilization work began on the Lower Mississippi, divided channels at low water made the river impassable in some reaches. At Island No. 18, there were sometimes three channels, none deep enough to afford safe passage for the larger steamboats. Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 map shows the three channels and the report to the Chief of Engineers which accompanied the map said that contraction works would be needed to provide an adequate channel in this area at all stages of the water. Dike fields above the island in Linwood Bend have now eliminated most of the navigation problems around Island No. 18.*

## **COTTONWOOD POINT, MISSOURI**

*Mile 832.9 AHP, Map 8*  
*Right bank, descending*

Cottonwood timber was so abundant in the Lower Mississippi Valley that steamboats often used it for fuel. Both the Missouri and the Tennessee shore in this area were covered with it, and there were several large woodyards that supplied cordwood for the passing boats.

Cottonwood is a very fast growing tree in alluvial soil, and is said to add as much as seven or eight feet in height and one or more inches in diameter every year under ideal soil and climate conditions. The tree liberates large quantities of silky-haired seeds which accumulate in masses that resemble cotton—hence the name. Indians had used the root wood for making fire by friction, and early settlers had found the easily split logs useful for stockades and cabins.

About 175 feet is the maximum height known to have been reached by a cottonwood tree. The tree is relatively short-lived, and is believed to have a maximum life span of around 200 years. Trees over 70 years of age often deteriorate very rapidly.

In recent years, many timber and paper companies have established cottonwood plantations in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Since the tree grows so rapidly, it has proved ideally suited to the production of pulpwood.

Before the Civil War there was a thriving little community tucked under the big trees at Cottonwood Point. It had a postoffice, church, sawmill, cotton gin, steamboat landing, and a number of nice homes.

One of the early gages to measure the stages of the river was established by the Mississippi River Commission at Cottonwood Point. The Corps of Engineers still maintains a gage there. There is also still a ferry that takes passengers back and forth between Heloise, Tennessee, and Cottonwood Point.

## **ISLAND NO. 20**

*Mile 829.0 AHP, Map 8*  
*Right bank, descending*

Island No. 20 has changed its location several times during the past century and a half. In 1801, it was close to the right shore. Later it moved to the left shore, and still later migrated back to the right shore again, where it rests today, permanently attached to the Tennessee mainland.



In the winter of 1820, John James Audubon spent a nervous night at Island No. 20. He and his companions had tied their flatboat to a willow tree and were just settling down for a good night's rest when they discovered that a party of Indians had set up camp on the opposite end of the island. The Americans loaded their muskets and kept an apprehensive night watch, getting very little rest, but the Indians did not molest them.

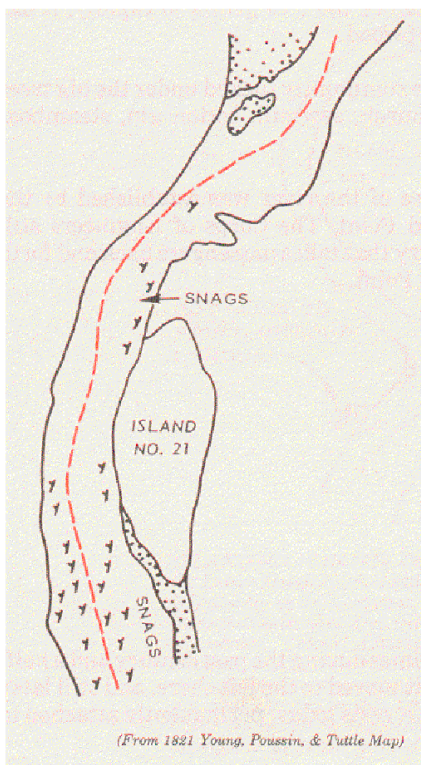
In 1865, a large steamboat called the *Ben Stickney* ran over a snag at Island No. 20 and sank in less than ten minutes. The outcome of the accident varied happily from the usual steamboat disaster story: There were 150 people on board; they abandoned the boat in a calm and orderly manner, and not a single life was lost.

## ISLAND NO. 21

*Mile 825.0 AHP, Map 8*

*Left bank, descending*

Island No. 21 originally lay in the middle of the river, but Mark Twain noted in 1882 that it had joined itself to the left shore and “retired from business as an island.”



When the big island showed signs of wanting to go back in business as an island in recent years, the Corps of Engineers constructed dikes to close off the old chute and keep the river in the desired location.

*FOREST OF SNAGS. A reconnaissance map made by U. S. Army Engineers in 1821 shows the navigation channel on the right of Island No. 21 choked with snags. Pilots had to thread their way through this forest of snags without impaling their boats. They tried, but did not always succeed. Then wrecks were added to the other obstructions that made the channel a dangerous one.*

## NEEDHAM CUTOFF

*Mile 821.1 AHP, Map 9*

In 1820, flatboatmen were intimately acquainted with the bends, bars, shoals, and snags of the Lower Mississippi, but most of the members of the United States Congress had never seen the mighty river. Under pressure from constituents, Congressmen who had been asked to support plans for navigation improvements asked the Army Corps of Engineers for more information about the river.

Captain H. Young, Captain W. T. Poussin, and Lieutenant S. Tuttle of the Corps were given the task of making a survey of the Mississippi. Congress appropriated \$5,000 for the project, and the three engineers made their reconnaissance trip down the river in the winter of 1821.

The reconnaissance map that resulted from the survey showed that the river had made a drastic change in the vicinity of the mouth of the Obion River. Young, Poussin, and Tuttle called the new cutoff "New Grand Cutoff," but the boatmen soon renamed it "Needham's Cutoff" because the unfortunate settler who lost most of his land was a farmer named Needham.

The bend that had been removed from the river soon silted up at both ends, and three small islands (No. 22, No. 23, and No. 24) were removed from the river, and soon disappeared from navigation charts.

In 1858 the steamboat *H. D. Newcomb* sank at the head of Needham's Cutoff and the wreck of the old boat was a navigation hazard for many years afterward.

**NEEDHAM CUTOFF.** *Early in the spring of 1821, the Lower Mississippi cut its way across a narrow neck of land and made itself a new bed through the middle of a farm belonging to a settler named Needham. Engineers making a reconnaissance map of the river later the same year showed the new cutoff, calling it "New Grand Cutoff," but the boatmen named it for the unlucky farmer who had lost his land.*

