

LIFE ON THE OHIO
Switzerland County Historical Society

Harold Patterson Model builder

The centerpiece of the "Life on the Ohio" museum are the model boats built by Harold Patterson. Patterson, a native of Florence Indiana, was a performer on Bryant's Showboat. Mr. Patterson's travels exposed him to many of the finest showboats and steamboats. He faithfully preserved the memory of these boats with his beautiful models. In 1991 Barbara Fluegeman wrote a very informative article about Harold Patterson for the Vevay newspaper. Much of the information for her column was obtained from interviews with Luana Gaebel, granddaughter of Harold Patterson.

The museum has twelve of the Patterson models. Seven of the models came to the museum in 1991 for the "Always a River" program. In 2003 the Switzerland County Library donated Harold Patterson's model of the HATTIE BROWN to the museum. Patterson had loaned four of his models to the Howard Steamboat museum in Jeffersonville, Indiana. Luana Gaebel felt that since her grandfather had built the models in Switzerland County the new "Life on the Ohio" museum should be the permanent home for the entire collection. Luana made arrangements with the Howard museum to return the four models "home" to Switzerland County.

Although the models are unbelievably detailed they are true American folk art, as they are constructed from common household materials. On each model you will see chairs, benches, stacked firewood, cargo and even pot belly stoves.

Models associated with the showboat business are the ARGAND, PRICE'S NEW WATER QUEEN, BRYANT'S NEW SHOWBOAT, and FLORENCE.

The ARGAND model is of the ARGAND, a sternwheel towboat (single large paddle on the stern or rear of the boat) built at Levanna, Ohio in 1896. She ran the Wheeling-Parkersburg trade until 1898 at which time she was sold to run on Big Sandy River. She was sold, April 1901, to Capt. Edwin A. Price, who used her to tow his showboat NEW WATER QUEEN. The ARGAND burned on the Muskingum River in 1927.

PRICE'S NEW WATER QUEEN was built as the ROBINSON PALACE. The boat was one hundred and fifty feet long and thirty feet wide. It had a double deck auditorium with twelve plush lined boxes and two balconies. The seating capacity was seven hundred and fifty-nine patrons. It was purchased at auction by Captain French and renamed FRENCH'S NEW SENSATION. Upon his retirement French sold the boat to Captain Price who renamed the boat PRICES NEW WATER QUEEN. This is the showboat where the famous Bryant family got their start.

The FLORENCE was a small gas powered sternwheel boat used by the Bryant showboat family to push their houseboat.

BRYANT'S NEW SHOWBOAT, built in 1917, was one hundred and thirty-five by thirty feet, with a capacity of almost nine hundred. A unique feature of this model is the interior is a faithful reproduction of Bryant's showboat. It is lighted and features seating and a stage complete with scenery.

Patterson also built models of the working boats he would pass in his travels. These are the ALICE BROWN, CHARLES B. PEARCE, LEVI J. WORKUM, and HATTIE BROWN

The ALICE BROWN was a sternwheel towboat built in 1871 in Pittsburgh, Pa. for Brown's Line coal miners and boat operators. She regularly plied between Pittsburgh and New Orleans until 1915.

The CHARLES B. PEARCE was a Sternwheel Packet Boat (carried both freight and passengers). She was built in Augusta, Ky. in 1900 and ran Cincinnati -Portsmouth briefly. Sold to Capt. John Carnes in June 1903 and ran Paducah-Golconda. She towed showboats for some years. She sank at Pt. Pleasant in 1918.

The LEVI J. WORKUM was a sternwheel packet boat built in Levanna, Ohio in 1890. She plied between the Workum distillery in Petersburg, Ky. and Cincinnati transporting their wares. She was familiarly known as "the whiskey boat." She was taken to Madison, Ind., in 1907 where the hull was enlarged. She was renamed KENTUCKY and ran a great while in the Cincinnati-Madison trade, frequently Cincinnati-Louisville. This model is complete with whiskey barrels.

The JOSEPH B. WILLIAMS was a sternwheel towboat built in Pittsburgh in 1876. She was owned by the Grand Lake Coal Co. In 1898 she towed a record tow of coal between Cairo and New Orleans. She pushed 52 coal boats, four barges, and four flats for a total of 1,453,000 bushels of coal. She caught fire at Cairo in 1914 and was lost.

The crown jewels of the model collection are the NATCHEZ, ROBERT E. LEE and the AMERICA. These three boats were sidewheel (large paddle wheel on each side of the boat) packet boats.

The NATCHEZ and ROBERT E. LEE are modeled after the famous NATCHEZ and ROBERT E. LEE that raced from New Orleans to St. Louis in 1870. The NATCHEZ was built in Cincinnati in 1869 for Captain T. P. Leathers for the New Orleans-Vicksburg trade. The ROBERT E. LEE was built in New Albany Indiana in 1866 for Captain John W. Cannon for the New Orleans-Vicksburg trade.

The AMERICA model is of the AMERICA built in Jeffersonville, Ind. by the Howard boatyard in 1917. The hull and machinery came from the INDIANA, which had burned off her upper works at Cincinnati on May 1, 1916. She ran the Louisville-Cincinnati trade for the Louisville & Cincinnati Packet Co. While laid up for the winter above Jeffersonville, Ind., she burned Sept. 8, 1930.

The HATTIE BROWN model is of a well-known boat in the Switzerland County area. She was built in Belle Vernon, Pa. in 1884. Capt. Dick Brown ran her in the daily Warsaw-Madison trade for many years. She was later owned by Louisville & Cincinnati Packet Co. She was lost in the big ice at Cincinnati, winter 1917-1918.

Danny Back
Greetings from Ohio River mile 519.4