PAPERS

CONCERNING

EARLY NAVIGATION

ON THE

GREAT LAKES.

I. Recollections of Capt. David Wilkeson.

II. The Pioneer Lake Erie Steamboats, *Walk-in-the-water* and *Superior.*

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BUFFALO:
Printing House of Bigelow Brothers,
Pearl and Seneca Sts.
1883.

INTRODUCTION.

At the desire of the venerable writer of the following reminiscences, I have undertaken to superintend their publication. In the main, the order and form of the memoranda here collected, are preserved, as in the author's manuscript. They are not presented as a product of literary art, nor are they given forth as deserving to be ranked with "works" of biography and history. They furnish merely a simple and unpretending contribution of material for these.

And it may be that what they afford by way of knowledge concerning the specific subjects treated,—the navigator and the steamboats,—does not constitute all their value. Much, making them more widely useful is, probably, to be found in the glimpses they give us of the days gone by; the forming times of that great commercial highway, in the midst of which Buffalo, as a chief depot of transfer, has so long stood preëminent.

These memorial jottings should, therefore, be read remembering that things in themselves trivial, taken alone, may, if viewed in their relations, and considered not in a critical but in a meditative and receptive manner, become interesting and instructive.

A. B.

RECOLLECTIONS OF

CAPTAIN DAVID WILKESON.

The greater part of what I have here written concerning Captain David Wilkeson, the subject of this paper, is from my own personal knowledge, and was, in fact, committed to paper many years before the Captain's death. To prepare the way for these "Recollections," I give here, first, a brief statement of the leading facts of his life, to be followed by the more particular relation of incidents which I intend to present.

He was born in the year 1800, but of the place of his birth I am not informed. Nor do I know anything concerning his childhood. But in 1815 he was a "hand" on board the schooner *Black Snake*, of about twenty-five tons burthen, under Captain James Wilkeson, an uncle. In 1817, when only seventeen years of age, he was promoted to the command of the *Black Snake*. The next year, 1818, he became captain of the schooner *Pilot*, making trips between Maumee river and Buffalo. From this time he was in command of various sailing vessels (among them the *Eagle* of ninety tons burthen, which will be often mentioned in these "Recollections"), until 1835. Meanwhile, he had (soon, indeed, after the war of 1812–15) made Perrysburg, Ohio, his home, and he maintained his residence there during the remainder of his life.

In 1835, he took command of the steamboat *Commodore Perry*, of which he was captain and part owner for ten years.

He then became commander of the steamboat *Superior*, which position he held till 1852, when he retired at fifty-two years of age from sailor-life. From that time till his death, twenty-one years later, September 8th, 1873, his life was spent in cultivating his farm, and in the care of the light-house in Maumee Bay, near Manhattan, Ohio.

My acquaintance with Captain David Wilkeson dates from about the close of the war of 1812–15, when as a very young man, he used to come to my father's tavern, and my grandfather's house near by, in Buffalo. From that time until he finally gave up sailing in 1852, and remained ashore at his home in Perrysburg, Ohio, he was a constant visitor at our house, seldom failing to come out to see us when he made our port.

I also at times took various trips with him, both on his sail and steam vessels, and consequently knew him well.

Captain Wilkeson was a practical sailor. In his time he was not excelled by any one on our lakes. He was energetic and persevering, and rarely failed to accomplish whatever he undertook in his line of business. Brought up in the hard school of poverty, and compelled at an early age to depend upon himself for advancement in life, and for his very livelihood, in fact, he was equal to the necessities of his condition and became a man noted in his chosen profession throughout the lakes.

He was self-reliant but not to obstinacy, venturesome but not to foolhardiness; possessing in fact all the qualities which together make up the true sailor and man.

As master of a vessel his invariable rule was to discharge his freight as soon as possible after his arrival in port, ship his return load at once, and be ready to start with the first fair wind. In the summer time he would get out into the lake as best he could, beat his way up in the day time, and at night hug the American or south shore, to catch the land breeze. He told me that by this method of being ready he made full

trips when in command of the *Eagle*, a vessel of ninety tons (one of a hundred tons being at that time considered a good-sized craft), while other vessels would be lying in the harbor.

He also told me that he had run with his vessel three times the length of Lake Erie in eight days, carrying a full load each way; and this when all loading and unloading was done entirely by hand.

Late in the month of November, 1833, westerly winds had prevailed at this end of the lake for about a week. Buffalo Creek had become quite filled with sail vessels,—so much so, in fact, that there was but a narrow passage-way left, only wide enough to allow one vessel to pass up and down the channel. Captain Wilkeson's schooner, the *Eagle*, was one of the thirty or more thus in waiting. The docks along the creek at this time were not very extensive,—nearly or quite all lying below the foot of Main street. One night there came a heavy fall of snow, fully a foot in depth, and during the latter part of that night the wind veered around to the east. I was to take passage on the *Eagle* for Perrysburg, and early that morning Captain Wilkeson kindly sent a sailor out to my father's house (about three miles), to notify me that the vessel was ready to start, and was only waiting for me. I immediately rode down to the dock in a sleigh and went aboard. The *Eagle* was then quickly gotten under way. Most of the vessels that had been in the harbor were already off in the lake, and some were out of sight. We were soon beyond the pier (the original one,—our outer pier had not yet been built). When fairly in the lake, with all sails set, for the wind was favorable though light, Captain Wilkeson directed the men to try the pumps, and to his great surprise found water in the hold. He therefore concluded to lay his course for Dunkirk, and kept the pumps going. He soon found that the vessel took in water when on one tack, but not when on the other. He then ordered the mate, Frank Bushaw, to lower the small boat and examine the vessel's sides. While he was doing so, I leaned over the port

railing, and discovered a hole near the water's edge which had evidently been made by the fluke of an anchor while we were in the jam of vessels in the harbor. The Captain then gave orders to "about ship" and return,—it taking some time to reach the Buffalo dock. A carpenter was sent for, who repaired the broken plank. We then again set forth and once more were in the lake. It was now two o'clock in the afternoon, and most of the vessels were out of sight. Night set in, the light breeze continuing all night and the next day, and until almost one o'clock the following morning, when it shifted to the west, and blew a gale. The mate who had charge of the deck called to the Captain who was below, and wanted to know what he should do, as he could make no headway. The Captain turned out in a moment, and stopping half way up the companion-way, asked what was the vessel's position. Being told about how far we were above Cleveland, he then asked, "Can you make the lee of the islands by laying your course across the lake?" The mate replied, "I dont know." The Captain told him to "try it." He did so; and in the morning, just at daylight, we got under the lee of Cunningham's Island, now called Kelley's Island. I had been lying still in my berth, wide awake, all this time, as the vessel had tossed very much; but about daylight beginning to feel sea-sick, I concluded to go on deck and take the air. I did so, but the effort was too much, I was compelled to go to the rail. I hung on with both hands, and after a few heaves and surges, both the vessel and myself felt easier, as we soon got into still water.

We continued our course without stopping, until we arrived at Swan Creek, now Toledo. After discharging part of our cargo at the warehouse there, we sailed up the Maumee river to Perrysburg.

In consequence of this terrible gale, the *Eagle*, though the last of all that fleet of vessels to leave port, and notwithstanding the delay on account of the leak, was the first to reach her intended destination, while many of those vessels were driven

on shore,—the *Guerriere*, which was also owned by Captain Wilkeson, being of this number; and several were totally wrecked.

Before canals and railroads came into general use, Perrysburg was expected to become the great business and shipping point at the head of Lake Erie. The place which was then known as Toledo was so marshy, and consequently so unhealthy, that people could not stay there and live. Swan Creek, a little above, was but little better. Port Lawrence, Vistula and Manhattan were hardly known then but in name, all lying below Swan Creek. Perrysburg and Maumee (nearly opposite) were ten miles up the Maumee river at the head of ship navigation, and therefore were thought to have great advantages not possessed by any of those places lower down. At this time commerce on our lakes was flourishing. The sail vessels, as a general rule, carried the furs, grain and produce from the west, and received a fair compensation, while the steamboats carried the passengers. Captain Wilkeson having settled in Perrysburg, took a deep interest in the prosperity of the place, and of its inhabitants. He was notably most generous and kind towards the poor families that settled in the town. He generally refused to dispose of his spare produce (for he did some farming,) to those who would pay him cash, but reserved it for the poor, trusting them until they were able to pay. He was truly the poor man's friend. He was ever ready to help the industrious and those who were trying to help themselves, and thus he contributed to the welfare and thrift of Perrysburg and vicinity by causing the settlement there of many industrious families.

Captain Wilkeson was always well liked by those who served under him. It is true that in the discharge of his duty he compelled and exacted implicit and prompt obedience to his commands; and, if everything was not done in exact accordance with his orders, did not hesitate to pour out upon the head of the offender the vials of his wrath in terms more em-

phatic than elegant. Still, he was always willing to help those in his employ in their troubles, and endeared himself to them by his many and constant acts of kindness.

During our first cholera season, in 1832, when this dread disease raged through our country, following the water courses, Captain Wilkeson was taken with a severe attack of it upon one of his down trips with the *Eagle*. His mate, Frank Bushaw, who looked upon his commander as of "the salt of the earth," was ordered to take the vessel into the nearest port to get medical assistance, which order he obeyed with the greatest possible speed. After procuring a physician for the Captain, yet even then believing he would surely die, he himself went ashore, and in his intense grief, sought, not spiritu*al* but spiritu*ous* assistance, to drown his sorrows, and got as drunk as a lord in the endeavor. This was a singular way of showing his love and respect for the Captain, but it was, perhaps, the most expressive way of which he was capable.

The deck load of sail vessels in the summer season, many years ago, consisted mostly of white oak staves and heading for flour barrels. The term commonly used to designate this kind of freight was "Ohio fur." On one of my passages with Captain Wilkeson, the deck being covered with this "fur," he told me that he did not like to see this material going away from the Maumee Valley in this shape. I asked in what shape he would choose to have it go. He quickly replied, "Make the barrels and send them filled with flour,—that is the way this deck load should be sent. We should try to encourage our own people, and encourage others to come among us and help to develope the resources of the Maumee Valley." That was his theme in conversation and what he was always trying to do. And he knew that encouraging those on shore would also help those who were doing business upon the water.

Before steamboats ran up the Maumee river, two of my sisters came down one summer from Perrysburg with the Captain, aboard the *Eagle*, spending much of the time on deck chatting

with him; he at the helm, they surrounded with the usual deck load of "fur." The Captain was good company. He was in the habit of procuring and reading the usual popular literature of his times. Cooper's novels he was familiar with, and on this trip would relate some of the exploits of Leatherstocking with his rifle, and many other incidents concerning the characters so well portrayed by the novelist. Such a commander as this made the trip upon his vessel a pleasant instead of a tedious journey.

Captain Wilkeson's vessel crews consisted usually of men residing at Perrysburg or vicinity, or of those he was acquainted with in other places; but sometimes he was obliged to fill the number required by engaging strangers who made application to him. On one of his trips with the *Eagle* he had with him a man of this latter class. Soon after his arrival in Buffalo he missed from a canvas bag which contained some sixty or eighty dollars in silver, twenty-five or thirty dollars. Suspicion pointed at once to this new hand, as he had the fullest confidence in the honesty of all the rest of the crew. The Captain took him aside and told him that there was some money missing from his bag of silver, and charged him with having taken it. He told him that there was no use of his denying the charge, and that he had better "own up" at once, for he knew there was no one of the rest of the crew that would do such a thing. The fellow being confronted so frankly and squarely, owned that he had taken the money. The Captain then asked what he had done with it. He said that he had hidden it under the dock. The Captain told him to go and get it, which he did at once, and passed it over to the owner. The Captain then said, "I now give you your choice, to be handed over to the authorities here, or take from me a flogging with a 'rope's end.'" He chose the latter. He was accordingly kept in durance till evening, and when all was quiet around the dock, the Captain took him in hand, gave him a powerful flogging, paid him his wages and told him to go and be an honest man in future.

Captain Wilkeson was fond of practical jokes with his associates. When sailing the *Eagle* and making her last trip for the season before returning home, it was his custom to lay in supplies at Buffalo for himself and men for the winter, such as clothing, boots and shoes, etc. On one of these occasions he and some of his men stepped into a store, and he said to the merchant, "There are a half-dozen of us that want to be fitted out with boots and shoes." A display of these articles was of course soon made. "Well, now," said the Captain, "what will you charge a pair; there is one man aboard to come up, beside the colored boy Joe, six pairs in all?" The merchant at once named a price which was satisfactory to the Captain, excepting that he claimed he ought not to charge more than half price for the black boy's pair. So the merchant said he would not mind as to that, and agreed to put the boy's boots at half price. The articles were selected, for those present, and the man and boy aboard were sent for; but when the boy came to be fitted, he required a larger boot than any of the crew. After this the Captain would joke the merchant about his sale of a black boy's boots at half price.

Captain Wilkeson was very fond of instrumental music; and in 1831 or 1832, as we had at my father's a piano (there being at that time but one or two others in the town), one of my sisters who had taken lessons while away at school used to entertain him by playing. The piano was a new thing to him, as it was to most of the people here at that time.

The Captain had been a hard worker from his boyhood, and had accumulated some property. He had full faith in the success of lake navigation, and in the fall of 1832 made arrangements to build himself a steamboat. Work was commenced on this vessel in December of that year, at Perrysburg, by the late F. N. Jones (the latter part of whose life was spent in Buffalo), who superintended the building. He was sent for this purpose by his father, who had taken the contract for constructing the boat. Some of Captain Wilke-

son's neighbors and friends taking stock in the enterprise, the steamboat was duly completed, and at the opening of navigation in the spring of 1834, commenced sailing. The name chosen for this steamer was the *Commodore Perry.*

An incident showing well the energetic and efficient character of the man may be given in this connection. Not knowing but there might be something in the way to endanger the boat at the launching, Captain Wilkeson stripped himself and went in personally and examined the bottom of the river or cove where the launching was to be accomplished.

Among those who had taken stock in the *Commodore Perry* was one Joe or Joseph Langford, a colored man who had been cook on the *Eagle*, and afterwards had the same position on the *Perry.* His wife, a colored woman, was one of the most lady-like and stylish women in Perrysburg. During one of the steamboat's trips, after nearly all the passengers had eaten their dinner and none were left at the table, Langford sat down and was eating, when he was interrupted by a passenger who chanced to be late for dinner. This person seeing Langford at the table, said, "I am not going to eat with a nigger." Langford felt quite indignant at the remark and curtly observed, "I should like to know who has a better right to eat his dinner aboard that boat than one of the owners."

In those early days of lake commerce, in the spring, or late in the winter, just before the opening of navigation, every one seemed busy along the docks in fitting out both steam and sail vessels. Sometimes, however, these would be delayed in commencing their trips until quite late in the season on account of the "ice blockade." I presume there are many now living who remember the delay caused at Buffalo by the ice, in the spring of 1837. All the vessels in the harbor had been for several weeks ready to leave, but found it impossible to get out. Boats would go out to the line of the ice and make an attempt to break through, but their efforts were in vain. They would have to work themselves back out of the jam and return

to their berths in the harbor. Vessels and steamboats from the west would be seen to come down to the edge of the floating ice, and after reconnoitering would return. In this state of affairs, when Captain Wilkeson with his steamboat *Commodore Perry* came down, it being his second trip from Perrysburg that spring, he determined not to be balked a second time, and resolved to work his way through if possible, even though it broke all the buckets on the paddle-wheels, and cut through the planking of the boat. To resolve with him was to act. He plunged into the ice, and all hands exerted themselves with a will to force the boat through. After many hours of hard labor, and a general destruction of the buckets and some of the arms of the wheels, the *Perry* emerged from the ice-pack into clear water, and in a crippled state steamed slowly up the harbor.

The docks and vessels were covered with a multitude of people, who had been watching with anxiety the daring and successful attempt to reach the harbor. As the gallant steamer passed grandly on, the shores and crafts of all kinds rang with the loud huzzas of the spectators, which continued to greet the noble vessel and her plucky commander until she reached her dock.

Captain Wilkeson was the hero of the day. Through the energy and confidence he had displayed in this emergency, as in others, he had succeeded, by breaking the blockade, in setting the many captives free,—for the channel made through the ice by the *Perry* remained open, and within an hour several sail-vessels had taken advantage of it, and before the sun went down were out beyond the ice. Others continued to follow, and there was no further obstruction. The *Commodore Perry* was thus the first boat which came in that spring, arriving the 16th day of May.

Upon one occasion I was talking with the "Commodore", as he was sometimes called, about his breaking through the "ice blockade," and said to him that the dock men ought to

have given him a silver cup or some other token of acknowledgment for the great service he had rendered them, especially as his successful efforts had been attended with considerable damage to his boat. He replied that he did not wish anything. "But," continued he, "they did invite me to take a public dinner at the Mansion House, but I declined, as I could not afford to spend the time."

This was not, however, his first exploit in opening navigation at Buffalo, in order to accomplish his own plans in the carrying business. Six years before, when sailing the *Eagle*, he came down with his load of freight and found Buffalo harbor blockaded with ice. No craft had gone out or come in. With his usual ready determination, he ran his vessel into the floating ice, and after many hours of hard work on the part of his faithful crew entered port. Through the opening he had made by his hazardous undertaking, others followed, and navigation was open for the season.

Another incident which I have heard related will illustrate his spirit as a seaman, viz.: that having been caught in a sudden storm of wind, hail and rain, which threw his vessel on its beams' ends, when unable to walk the deck, he crawled upon his hands and knees, holding on by whatever he could, the hail lacerating his face so that the blood ran down; and by his perseverance and management brought his vessel all right again.

Such stories of those that "go down to the sea in ships and do business upon the waters" bring to my mind often the old English song I used to hear sung more than sixty years ago:

> "Ye gentlemen of England, who stay at home at ease,
> Ye little know the dangers upon the raging seas,
> When up she mounts aloft, my boys, and down again so low,
> How she reels upon her keel while the stormy winds do blow."

When the steamboats on our lakes ran in opposition, or "every one for itself," the owners would have bands of musicians aboard, playing to attract travellers. Some boats would keep the band aboard to play while in port, and some to play while

entering and leaving the harbor. I have heard steamboat mates who sailed with Captain Wilkeson say that he frequently meddled with things and affairs that did not belong to him, but which it was the duty of the mate to see to. I know well that he always stood at the engine bell-rope to guide the course of the boat in entering or going out of port. I also noticed that the brass band would sometimes cease playing while entering or going out of port. He gave me the reason for this, saying that he did not dare trust himself, for fear lest in listening to the music his mind might be diverted too much from directing the course of the boat. I have no doubt that he thought it was necessary, sometimes, to be "boss and all hands," to make things go right aboard his boat, and have everything done up to time.

The Captain was prompt in his appointments and engagements. The *Commodore Perry's* time for leaving her dock at Perrysburg was a standing notice in the papers of the place. I asked him if he did not sometimes lose some passengers by being a little too exactly on time. He answered me in a slow, musing tone, casting his eyes up and scanning the bank and roads up and down the river (we were now lying at the dock at Perrysburg), saying, "If I see any persons hurrying to get aboard, I hold on a little to give them a chance; but if I see none of that class I order the boat to be let loose at the bow so as to swing off from the dock." While sailing the *Perry* his wife and sometimes some of the children would accompany him down and spend a few days at my father's house while the boat made a trip. The Captain's homestead was half a mile or so above the dock, and one time his wife informed him that she would accompany him down the next trip. The day came and the hour for starting. The time was up; Mrs. W. was seen coming, walking quite fast, because she knew his promptness, but was still some distance away when she saw the *Perry* swing into the stream, and she was left. The Captain related this to me on his arrival at Buffalo. He seemed to enjoy the transaction

and consider it as a joke on his wife, to let her know that she must be up to time in all business transactions.

In early steamboating on our lakes there was sometimes great competition in cutting fares, and most travelers were willing to take advantage of it. To illustrate the disposition of men I will state what Captain Wilkeson related to me. He said that a gentleman once approached him here at Buffalo, on the dock, and asked what he would charge him, as cabin passenger, to Detroit. The Captain named an amount which was considerably less than half the regular fare, and he was invited to step aboard and take a drink with the Captain, at the bar. A little while after this the Captain met him again, and was told the other boat would carry him for nothing. "Well, I will carry you for nothing and board you. You will go with me, of course, won't you?" "Well, I don't know," was the answer, "I think his wine is a little preferable to yours!"

At another time the steamboat managers had agreed that the boats should have up to a certain time to get their passengers, etc., and that then they would leave the dock. On one occasion the time was up, and the captain of a certain boat (it was not Captain Wilkeson, for he scorned any subterfuge of this kind) was directed to cast off and go. Just then the rain was pouring down in torrents. The answer to the order given him was, "You should not expect me to go out in such rain." The fact was there was a railroad train from the east past due. The answer, however, was given more as a joke or a put-off than anything serious. They, the captains, were always honorable in their engagements.

Some of his friends at home "ran him" pretty hard, at one time, about his paying so much attention and giving so much care to his steamboat, and neglecting his homestead. They said that he kept his boat in good repair, all painted up nice and fine, but neglected his premises at home; that his house looked dusty and brown,—wanted painting and brushing up. So they offered to contribute and furnish the materials if he

would have this renewing done. He answered them by saying he did not believe in this half-way charity giving,—and when he did a person a favor he did not stop half way, but carried it out fully. "Now," said he, "if you furnish the paints and materials and two good workmen to put it on, I will consent that you may have the job."

There are many yet living who remember the steamboat *Buffalo* running into the *Commodore Perry* just above Erie, and cutting the boat below the water-line. Captain Wilkeson lay in his berth in the cabin very ill from a cold, and had not been able to be on deck for two or three days. Hearing the tremendous crash caused by the breaking of the shaft and timbers, he arose from his sick bed, went on deck, and gave orders to his men what to do. All was bustle and commotion. The next moment another cracking and crashing of timbers followed. It was one of the wheels with part of the iron shaft leaving the boat and going down to the bottom of the lake.

The Captain, in relating the incident to me, said it seemed to him that when the wheel with part of the shaft was breaking away from the boat the whole boat was going to pieces and bound for the bottom. This breaking away and leaving the boat, however, saved the craft from going down immediately. It allowed her to careen over and bring a large part of her broken side above water. The passengers and most of the crew were taken on board of the *Buffalo*. Some few of Captain Wilkeson's faithful hands remained on the *Perry* with him. The *Buffalo* took her in tow and brought her into Erie harbor, to the side of the dock, where she soon after sank to the bottom. She was raised again, under Captain Wilkeson's management, and was repaired and did good service after this. It was Captain Wilkeson's persevering energy that saved his boat from going to the bottom of Lake Erie beyond recovery.

The Captain, in speaking of captains of vessels, as to their capability of taking care of them in a storm or at any difficult time, said, "If he," the captain, "gets frightened, or loses

confidence in himself, he is good for nothing, not worth a cent. He should never give up in despair. He should never say fail, or admit anything of the kind as possible."

To illustrate still further his energy in business, I will relate one more transaction.

At a time when there were but few side-wheel steamers (propellers had not made their appearance), in the latter part of one summer, when business on the lake was dull, and the prices of grain as well as freights were low, to make out a load for his ninety-ton vessel, Captain Wilkeson bought on his own account two thousand bushels of first quality of wheat. On arriving at Buffalo he could make no sale of it, nor could he get room to store it, elevators not having been brought out even as an experiment yet. He directed his men at once to work or tow his vessel out into the lake and hoist sail for Dunkirk. When he arrived there he despatched several of his crew on horses, into the country, to call on the farmers in that vicinity and let them know there was a chance to buy first quality of seed wheat at the dock in Dunkirk at fifty cents per bushel, which they were glad to do; and Captain W. soon received cash for his wheat and immediately returned to Buffalo, took a load of merchandise and was soon on his way back to the head of the lake.

Captain Wilkeson, in his religious belief, was a Universalist. With those whom he knew who professed to believe otherwise, he would often, at a convenient time, introduce the subject of religion, seemingly to draw them out and learn their views more fully. In the years when I used to journey with him on the *Eagle*, we had many friendly chats upon this subject. He was familiar with the Scriptures, and possessed a very intelligent mind, and was candid and sincere in all his arguments,—never treating the subject in a trifling manner. He was several years my senior, and I must admit many years older in practical business life, and far excelled me in argument. But, finally, I said to him, after repeated conversations on the sub-

ject, "Well, you truly believe in your professed way of thinking and that you are right?" To this he answered "Yes," at once. "Very well," I continued, "now I can say more than that." "How so?" "I can say I *know* I am right." "Well," he quickly and earnestly enquired, "but *how* do you, or *how can* you, *know?*" I said, "I hardly know how I can explain that to you, but I have the convincing evidence within me,—'God's spirit witnessing with my spirit.' I did not," I added, "obtain this confidence and trust in our Creator until I had become of mature age, and therefore I think the evidence more convincing, and derive from it more pointed assurance than if I had given my assent to it at a much earlier period of my life."

Continuing the conversation, I gave him, as well as I could, a simple statement of my own feeling of assurance concerning my faith and hope, as a matter of experience; resting my confidence in the doctrines of the Christian religion as held by those usually called Evangelical Christians, on my own internal conviction of their truth. Having heard my statement, and reflecting a moment he said: "That is something I do not fully understand; but," he continued, "to those that have that confidence and faith, I would be the last one to say anything that would shake or weaken it."

In conclusion, I may suitably adopt a few words from an obituary notice of Captain Wilkeson, published in the *Toledo Morning Commercial,* September 10, 1873, two days after his death, ten years ago.

"He was a man of great kindness of heart and geniality of disposition, whereby he won his way to the esteem of all acquaintances; while by his integrity and honorable dealing, he commanded the confidence of his fellow-men in an eminent degree. His independence of character ever prompted him to self-reliance and unremitting effort. After a residence in the valley of fifty-eight years, he passed away amid a state of things in extraordinary contrast with the scene which pre-

sented itself to his youthful eyes. Few, indeed, of his earliest cotemporaries now remain, and the last of them will soon follow him. Be it the care of those who have come or shall come after them not to forget the debt due to their early enterprise and sacrifices."

THE PIONEER STEAMBOATS ON LAKE ERIE.

INTRODUCTORY.

This paper was written many years ago, and originated from an impression felt at the time that the account of the events I should record might be of at least some little interest to the future historian.

I have thought that it would not, however, be unacceptable or out of place, in now presenting it, but before taking up the special subject in hand, to give a brief description of the general appearance and condition of our town as it was at the time when the first steamboat was built to run on Lake Erie.

What I thus offer is of my own knowledge and recollection, written without resorting to historical sources for information. Yet, although more than sixty years have passed since the two steamboats of which I have written were built, and the doings which I record occurred, those early scenes are still vivid in memory; and so my story is an account at first hand of matters of fact, as they appeared to me at the time of their occurrence, given in a plain and simple form. As one between the first settlers of this town and its present occupants, between a time which has long been past, and the present, indeed between the dead and the living (for my early associates have nearly all passed away), I present these recollections.

In your mind's eye, then, go back with me to the year 1818, and imagine the situation and the appearance of Buffalo and

its neighborhood at that time. Then the blue waters of Niagara, unobstructed by the works of man, rolled and whirled in their hurried, turbulent, and precipitant way; washing in their haste the black, rocky shore, below the village, from which that locality derived the name of "Black Rock."

Bird Island, lying low in the midst of Niagara River, was in its primitive, natural state, and alive with flocks of wild fowl, from which it took its name. These, never having been molested, cared but little for the presence of man as he moored his light water craft under the lee of the island, or traversed the rock and sand of which the reef was composed.

The beautiful sand and gravel shore, from the mouth of Buffalo Creek down to the black, rocky ledge, was then the main traveled road between the two villages of Buffalo and Black Rock, which were struggling for growth, and even for existence. While, down the river below the huge rocks, the beach then extended many miles towards the great falls.

I well remember how on this beach, thus in its primitive state, riding down the river just below the ferry, carrying a lantern, in the morning between four and five o'clock, in October, 1812, the gallant Cuyler lost his life by a cannon ball shot across from Canada by the enemy. This was in the first year of the war of 1812. But, when the events to which my paper relates took place, we had passed through that three years war against a powerful array of well-trained English troops and their savage allies. The relics of devastation and destruction, consequent upon this terrible conflict, carried on as it was, not only at, but within our very doors, were to be seen on every hand. The passer-by saw them in the ashes and stacks of chimneys of the burned buildings of our village and vicinity; and as he passed up and down the skirts of our town, on the bank of Niagara river, as far down as Conjockety creek, he saw them in the many hillocks over new-made graves that marked the resting place of those who fell in the frequent battles that were fought on this

border during that war. And he saw them in our forests, in the shattered and broken trees, which, pierced by cannon balls and bombshells that passed over our batteries, struck at twenty, thirty or forty feet from the ground; so that thus weakened, they would, under the subsequent effect of the wind, break and hang down, from the places where the shots had passed through them.

Squaw Island was in its native forest beauty, with Niagara's water flowing rapidly by on either side, rolling and whirling as if in haste to make the great leap over the grand precipice; and the great cataract's heavy booming sound, which, although residing nearly twenty miles distant, I have so often heard in the still quiet morning for more than three-score years, was then, as now it is, in the great orchestra of God's creation, the sublime, bass note, which never can be excelled by the puny work of man.

At Black Rock, I may here mention, as at Buffalo, only small beginnings had been made by way of occupation and settlement.

Porter, Barton & Co. had commenced the forwarding business (which included the portage around the falls) in 1805. Their principal place of business was at Black Rock.

Before the war of 1812, Nathaniel Sill & Co. (I think Nathaniel Sill's brother, Joseph Sill, was the "Co.") had a warehouse at the same place; and I believe soon after there were one or two others. They were all situated nearly opposite the head of Squaw Island; and near them, and below, was a ship-yard, where the "*Walk-in-the-water*," the first Lake Erie steamboat, was built.

Excepting these few buildings, and surrounding clearings near the river bank, all the land in the vicinity of Black Rock was covered with native forest. A large proportion of the timber was white oak, which, as is well known, is the principal timber used in ship-building. This timber-land extended over the greater part of what is now the city of Buffalo.

To show you still further the wild state in which the lands our city covers then were, I may mention some of my personal exploits during my early manhood. Having grown up from infancy in these native forests, and being naturally inclined in such a direction, I very easily drifted into the habits of the natives in hunting and killing game, by which I became quite a Nimrod during the first years of the settling of our town.

Besides trapping foxes, woodchucks, muskrats, and skunks, and snaring partridges, I have shot with my rifle some larger game. I remember killing a deer, for instance, where York street now is, at a point about thirty rods northeasterly from the Normal School building; another about a gun-shot, or say thirty rods, southeast of the State Insane Asylum building; another at about the spot, on Ferry street, where Fifteenth street crosses it; and another east of Main street between Utica and Best streets. I also killed several other deer within what are now our city limits.

And even since 1825 I have hunted often, and have killed raccoons, and chased foxes and deer in the native forest, where now we have these paved streets and great blocks of brick buildings.

At this time much of the travel, as I have before stated, between Buffalo and Black Rock, was by the way of the beach. Large sand-hills existed at "Sandytown;" that is, at about the foot of York street, now Porter avenue; these had been thrown up by the wind and waves, and piled against the edge of the forest. In the river abreast of Sandytown, was a good place for fishing with a hook. This could be accomplished, however, only by wading in up to the knees so as to reach the deeper water with the line. The Indians, making their camp-fires on the beach, were always here in the fishing season.

In their treaty with the whites they reserved the right to use the floodwood for their fires while fishing, or at other times when they might want it.

The outlet, or channel of Buffalo creek, gave only sufficient water for flat-boats. After a heavy blow down the lake there was not even that depth.

The warehouses on Buffalo creek at that time were I think only Wilkeson & Bigelow's, Townsend & Coit's, and Pratt & Co.'s. The first of these, the first Buffalo creek warehouse built, was located at the junction of the Big and Little Buffalo creeks, at the foot of what is now Commercial street.

The road leading west ran from the foot of Main street immediately on the bank of Big Buffalo creek to Pratt's ferry.

Dead creek entered Big Buffalo Creek a little below Pratt's ferry, and was crossed by a small wooden bridge. It is now the slip that connects the Ohio Basin with the harbor.

The land from Sandytown to Buffalo creek, west of "The Terrace," was, most of it, covered with an alder swamp and water, with the exception of some scattering large trees skirting the beach of the lake and river.

The peninsula, between Buffalo creek and the lake, with the exception of a few acres of cleared land opposite to Pratt's ferry on the Leach farm, was covered entirely with the native forest.

At this time the whole town of Buffalo contained less than two thousand inhabitants. The village contained about twelve hundred. Most of the villagers resided on Main, Washington and Pearl streets. There were some scattered dwellings on the Seneca road leading to the Indian village, and a few others outside the streets I have named.

With the exception of Main and Niagara no street extended north further than Chippewa; nor south beyond Crow street (now Exchange), until some years after 1818.

Genesee street, east of Washington, was not opened until eight or ten years after this.

Scattering forest trees, and stumps without number, were standing in most of the streets and highways.

Every family had a garden adjoining its residence.

The village and farm lots, from Chippewa street to Cold Spring, and all beyond, were mostly covered with native forests.

What I have stated as to the primitive condition and scenery of Black Rock and Buffalo, is more fully applicable to all the south shore, and ports of Lake Erie at that time. We were living almost literally in a wilderness; and so were we situated, when the people of this frontier were informed that a steamboat was to be built to run on our lakes.

THE STEAMBOATS.

The first steamboat which navigated the waters of Lake Erie was constructed at the village of Black Rock, near the foot of Auburn street, about opposite the head of Squaw Island, and was launched on the 28th day of May, 1818. She was named the *Walk-in-the-water*, and was of two hundred forty tons burden. The boat was completed, and started on her first trip to Detroit, August 25th, the same season. At this time there was no harbor at Buffalo. Vessels were compelled to lie off in the lake, or under Bird Island at anchor, while receiving and discharging their cargoes, or while waiting for a favorable wind to sail up the lake.

Her engines were not of sufficient power to propel her up the rapids into the lake. In order to accomplish this it was necessary to apply that long-used, and quite primitive propelling power called the "horn (or horned) breeze." I well remember how sometimes when I was fishing at Sandytown the boat would come paddling along with the assistance of some ten or fifteen yoke of oxen, under the command of our industrious and enterprising townsman, the late Captain Sheldon Thompson, with his long ox-whip in hand to urge and guide them.

That craft was quite a new thing, the invention having only lately been brought out, and put into practical and profitable use.

The first commander was Captain Job Fish. This Captain Fish had been an engineer for Fulton, Livingston & Co., on the

North river, the leading member of that firm being the celebrated Robert Fulton, who was the first man to make steam a success in propelling a boat.

The first pilot of the *Walk-in-the-water*, was John Davis, who subsequently sailed her as captain part of one season. It was not supposed, or presumed, that anyone residing in this far-off place called Buffalo, was capable of managing or sailing that most wonderful craft called a steamboat, and so Captains Fish, Davis, Jedediah Rogers, and Sherman, were all imported from the great city of New York, as their respective services were required, to sail the *Walk-in-the-water*, and subsequently the Superior, of which I shall presently give an account.

These captains were not professional sailors or seamen with the exception of Captain Davis, but were all very polite, gentlemanly men, unexceptionable in their deportment, and disposition to please and make comfortable and pleasant the passage of all travelers while guests aboard their boat. But there was also imported from the city of New York, for a steward, a young man by the name of Newland, a dandy coxcomb sort of a fellow, who thought to "astonish us natives" by using many of his New York cockney expressions in his inquiries among the farmers after vegetables and other supplies for the table of the boat. This Mr. Newland catered for the steamboat only one season, after which one of our own residents by the name of Truman Fowler, brother of the late Benjamin Fowler, assumed this responsible and important station.

To importing those four captains from the great city of New York, there was not so much objection, as they were, without exception, honorable and gentlemanly men. But we certainly had good and sufficient reason to wish the Steamboat Company had brought among us, unsophisticated as we were, a better specimen of a man, at least in morals, than the cockney of New York city, for a steward.

Why he continued in his stewardship only one season I never took pains to inquire. But I do know that he tried to ingratiate himself into the favor, if not the affection, of a fine blooming young lady, daughter of one of our neighboring farmers. Having seen her at her home, when he had been purchasing supplies for the boat, he took the liberty to call and spend an evening in her company. In the course of the evening her father had reason to enter the room quite suddenly, and the result was that he ordered this New York dandy steward to leave his house immediately, which he did not hesitate to do. His exit was considerably facilitated as he left the door-way, by the toe of the farmer's boot, propelled by the angry farmer behind it. This farmer lost a customer for his produce, but, I think, saved a daughter.

The *Walk-in-the-water* was quite a wonderful craft to the pioneers of this place, both as to her appearance and speed in navigating the lake. The trip to Detroit, a distance of three hundred miles, and back again, wind and weather permitting, would be made in from nine to ten days. This was considered very fast traveling in those days.

The fare of each cabin passenger, from Black Rock to Detroit, board included, was first put at twenty dollars, afterwards at eighteen, and finally reduced to fifteen; and it was reduced in June, 1820, to the following moderate rates: From Black Rock to Erie five dollars, Grand River seven, Cleveland ten, Sandusky thirteen, and Detroit fifteen.

One very important appendage to this steamboat was a small cannon. It was a four-pounder, mounted on wheels, and was carried on the forward deck. This cannon was fired once, before she left port, to let it be known that she would leave her dock at Black Rock in half an hour. Also, on her return trip when the boat arrived within one mile of the mouth of the river the cannon was discharged to let all the world know, at least all people that were in hearing of the report, that the steamboat was coming in.

This cannon,—whose sound was at this early time of so much interest to us, and to many residing on the shores of these lakes,—after journeying several seasons up and down, got loose during one of our heavy gales, fell overboard and was lost. The late Captain Blake told me it was lost as above stated, from his steamboat.

It must be borne in mind that all this time there were no harbors on the lake to run into in case of storms, or for landing passengers or freight. Should heavy winds or gales arise, the only chance for safety was, to run under Cunningham's Island, Point Abino, or down Niagara river.

In making its stoppages at the different ports, the boat would heave to, or come to anchor off shore, and cannon would be fired, when a row-boat (or "yawl") would bring out the passengers and freight for the steamboat, and take ashore persons and articles that were to be landed. If the weather was rough the boat would not stop at the way ports, but the passengers and freight would be carried by to be brought back and landed on the return trip.

It will be perceived that at this time, 1818, Buffalo was considered by many as a suburb to Black Rock, and but secondary in importance, in a business point of view, to that place. Black Rock was, in fact, the principal center-point, so far as speedy travel and most of the shipping business was concerned. Porter, Barton & Co., at Black Rock, had from the year 1805, been striving to make that the great city, which was to exist at the foot of Lake Erie, and the prospect now looked very fair that they would succeed. The day of the sailing of the boat, from Black Rock, was duly advertised in our two weekly papers, of which one was published at Black Rock by Smith H. Salisbury, the other in the village of Buffalo by his brother Hezekiah A. Salisbury. Of course they were opposed to each other in politics, and duly advocated the superior advantages of the villages in which their respective papers were published. Travelers from a distance, and especially

those from the eastern states, whose enterprise in trade was proverbial,—made their calculations to arrive at Black Rock in time to take passage on its day of sailing. They brought their goods in their own wagons, and left their teams here two or three months, while they took their goods "out west" and disposed of them. Some hired interpreters and went into the Indian country, and exchanged their merchandise for pelts and furs, doing a very profitable business; they and their goods having been carried through the lakes in sail vessels, before the advent of the steamboat. After the first trip to Detroit she was employed to carry the United States mail; confidence in her success being established. Her speed was from eight to nine miles an hour. She made seven trips to Detroit the first season, and was laid up for the winter in November, 1818, in Conjockety creek.

One or two anecdotes concerning the first appearance of the *Walk-in-the-water* at the upper end of the lake, will be here in place. It was told me that when the *Walk-in-the-water* first made her appearance, going up Detroit river, some one of the native French, residing there, pointing to the boat, said to his associate, "Jean, Jean, just see! what are these Yankees a-sending us now but a saw mill?" It is said also, that these people were told, by the knowing ones, that the boat was drawn by sturgeons, and that some very readily believed the statement.

It was related to me by one of the pilots, that when the boat first arrived at Detroit she was a wonder to all, and was visited by many who came to see this marvelous craft; and that among the visitors were quite a number of Indians. They manifested great curiosity and wonder, wanting to see and examine everything about the boat. While they were very intent and busy in examining the engine and machinery, the engineer, Mr. Calhoun, let off steam under its greatest power. The Indians started with a spring, leap, and bound, off and away from the boat, and ran up the hill, nor did they

lessen their speed until they were out of sight of the white man's "big canoe."

As an interesting relic of those times I give the following advertisement for the third trip of the boat, which was published in the *Niagara Patriot* of September 15, 1818:

LAKE ERIE STEAM BOAT

WALK-IN-THE-WATER,

JOB FISH, Master, will sail for the remainder of the season on the following days, to wit:

From Black Rock for Detroit on the 15th and 26th of September, the 7th, 17th and 27th of October, and the 6th and 16th of November, at 4 o'clock P. M. Returning she will leave Detroit on the 21st of September, the 2d, 12th and 22d of October, and the 1st and 11th of November at 4 o'clock P. M.

The Boat will come to, off Buffalo, to take on board or land passengers and baggage.

Passengers will also be landed or taken on board at Dunkirk, or any other place on the lake shore not designated above, when it may be practicable.

The boat is fitted up in handsome style; has excellent accommodations, and every exertion will be made for the comfort and convenience of passengers.

The following are the prices for passengers:

	CABIN.	STEERAGE.
From Black Rock or Buffalo to Dunkirk, ...	$3.00	$1.50
" " " " Erie, ...	6.00	2.50
" " " " Grand River, ...	10.00	4.00
" " " " Cleveland, ...	12.00	5.00
" " " " Sandusky Bay, ...	15.00	5.50
" " " " Detroit, ...	18.00	7.00

Waiters half price of cabin passengers.

A cabin is fitted up expressly for the accommodation of families, who, with their baggage, will be carried on very low terms.

Freight taken at the usual prices.

Buffalo, September 14, 1818.

On the day of the date of this advertisement, that is, the day before starting on this third trip, the *Walk-in-the-water* gave a pleasure-ride to the ladies and gentlemen of this vicinity, "to Point Abino and return." This was the first steamboat excursion on Lake Erie, and it will be suitable to record here a reminiscence of that then novel event.

A special advertisement in the two weekly papers—one in Black Rock and the other in Buffalo—had named the day and hour of starting from the dock at Black Rock; and espe-

cially announced that the boat would stop opposite Buffalo to take on passengers. And now the day has come, and the hour is near for the unique and notable event, and the scene presented to the mind's eye is lively and gay. There lies the neat, new steamboat at her dock, her colors flying, her deck covered with ladies and gentlemen; steam is up; smoke is pouring forth, and now the signal gun sounds out the notice, "We start in half an hour." But here are twelve yoke of oxen hitched to one end of a hawser, the other end of which is fastened to the boat, and between oxen and boat are two skiffs afloat under the hawser to hold it out of the water. And there is that practical business man, Capt. Sheldon Thompson, ox-whip in hand, ready to apply the "horned-breeze," or "horn-breeze," to do by "towing" what wind and steam, together, could not do in their own proper ways, viz., to take the boat up through the swift rapids into the quieter waters of the lake. And now, time is up, lines are cast off, the whip is cracked, and the oxen bow their necks under the yoke; the boat "hangs" a moment,—will she go? Steam and oxen are doing their best, however, and they succeed. The boat begins slowly to move, and the excursion is commenced. Yet, many times the ox-led "steamer" seems to "hang" in her course, when, by the crack of the whip, the "horned-breeze" is urged up to the rescue. The rocky, bluff shore, the place of the "Old Ferry," and of the strongest rapids, is reached, and now, with plenty of "haw, gee, buck," and ox-whip "The Excursion" gets into quieter waters. Bird Island is passed, and the river current soon left behind. The "horn-breeze" returns to the shipyard as "Old Boreas" is fabled to return to his cave. A little further on the boat "heaves to" and stops, as advertised, "opposite Buffalo," off the shallow mouth of the creek. Here are several yawl-boats filled with the Buffalo installment of excursionists, few, however, at most, for the whole town of Buffalo, even up to 1820, had scarcely more than two thousand inhabitants. While these board the boat,

let us imagine ourselves upon her deck, or better, mounted on her wheelhouse. Yonder, to the right, across the river, are the ruins of "old" Fort Erie, then only four or five years old, *as ruins.* How few remain who lived amid the conflicts of those days! There, spreading off in front as we look southwestward, is the beautiful lake. Now, toward the left a little, is a small point of sandy beach, and I am in doubt whether then or not till one or two years later, even the first little pioneer lighthouse, kept by Mr. Skates, marked that bit of sand, so important a spot to mariners in later days. And still farther to the left is the shallow, ever-shifting channel of Buffalo creek, sometimes in heavy gales filled up, so that some have declared that they had crossed it from shore to shore dry shod, and anon broken through by the current, may-be rods away from the old outlet. Then, sweeping the eye around eastward, there upon that bluff lies Buffalo ; but what a contrast is it to this our Queen City of the Lakes! There in the midst is a little cluster of buildings, from the "Mansion House," "Landon's tavern" in those days, to a little above Seneca street; while on either side, north and south, there are only scattering houses. On the creek are the two or three warehouses, the flat around the "Terrace" bluff is without residences, and along "the Main street," northward, only here and there a house appears. Down the river, coming round again "to the place of beginning," is Bird Island with its feathered inhabitants (white sea gulls, the most abundant occupants), and on the shore is Sandytown with its sand-hills, one of the cemeteries of our faithful troops, in the war of 1812. Then comes the river shore below, its beach the highway between Black Rock and Buffalo, and the great "black rock" which divides the beach into two (the upper and lower) portions. Next, we see "Squaw Island," once traditionally the habitation of a single, lonely "squaw," whence its name ; and Strawberry Island,—low, nearly treeless, and scarcely to be seen ; and Grand Island, looming up "grand" indeed with its heavy

forest of timber. The day being pleasant, from miles away, in a direct line, there are the clouds of mist plainly to be seen rising from that world-wide wonder, the Cataract of Niagara.

But, long ago, no—the eye and the mind work quickly,—by this time the Buffalonians must have gotten "*aboard*," and the Excursion, in all the charm of its novelty, must be in successful progress. Yes, the bell has rung, the engine has begun its tugging labors, and the boat is speeding on its way "to Point Abino and return." Who that was present that day, and old enough to write out its experiences has ever penned them for the coming time?—alas! it is to be feared, not one!

We must return to our talk of the steamboat's every day, work day, life.

The fuel used in running this first steamboat consisted wholly of bass, pine, and hemlock wood, all split fine and well seasoned. Hard wood would not answer; as that which would make a more lively and intense fire was needed. Bituminous coal had not made its appearance on this frontier at that time. And if it had been introduced it probably would not have been used for propelling purposes on the boat. This wood, delivered at the dock, cost from $1.25 to $1.75 per cord. It was quite an object for our farmers to secure the contracts for furnishing the wood for the steamboat. Many of them had plenty of fuel-timber for which to find sale, as they were clearing off their farms. The inducement, however, consisted chiefly in the price received for chopping and hauling; the timber itself was not considered of much value. Sill & Co., of Black Rock, and Townsend & Coit of Buffalo, were agents to purchase the wood for the "Steamboat Company."

The *Walk-in-the-water* continued to run through the seasons of 1819–20, and until November, 1821, when she was wrecked. But she never entered Buffalo harbor, for the very good reason that there was no such harbor while she was afloat; for she was wrecked before the improvements were

made which opened this port. The boat, it will be recollected, started on her first trip August 25, 1818, and the advertisement above given was for the 15th of September following, but it held good only for that season. When she started out the next spring, 1819, from Black Rock, she was hailed, when passing off the mouth of Buffalo creek, from a yawl boat, by passengers, who wanted to be taken on board. They were answered as she went steadily on, with, "*Gentlemen, you must distinctly understand the port from which we sail is Black Rock.*" So the passengers returned to the little village of Buffalo, and were obliged to get accommodations on some sailing vessel lying at anchor in the bay; or in the old stage-coach make their way through the mud; or else to wait until the next sailing day of the steamboat, ten days afterwards, *and then get aboard from "the dock at Black Rock."*

In the season of 1819, our townsman, Captain Charles L. Gager, was employed on board of the *Walk-in-the-water* as sailor before the mast. Captain Levi Allen, also, who has been a resident of this town seventy years and upwards, and who is yet living with us, was employed upon the boat for one or more seasons as wheelsman, and was aboard when she was wrecked.

She was driven ashore, in a gale, Nov. 1, 1821, just above the old light-house, and nearly opposite the foot of Main street. Having left her dock at Black Rock, about four o'clock P. M., with threatening weather, she had got a few miles above Bird Island, when a rising storm forced her towards the shore, and she came to anchor. About four o'clock in the morning a heavy squall tore her loose, and she was helplessly driven to the shore. However, no lives were lost, or property, other than the unwieldy boat. She had been seen to be in trouble, from the village, and watched till midnight, when she had drifted so far up the bay that her lights were hidden by the woods. The next known of her condition and fate by those on shore, was the news of the dis-

aster brought by Mr. Calhoun, the engineer. After the boat struck, he jumped overboard, waded to the shore, came to the village, told of the wreck, and, mounting a horse, rode to Black Rock to let his wife know that he was safe. The late Gen. Lucius Storrs, who was then, with his father-in-law Capt. Benjamin Caryl, keeping the Mansion House, went with others by boat across the creek, and over to the stranded steamer, and with Capt. Rogers, pilot Wm. T. Miller and the crew, landed the passengers by means of a boat guided by a rope ("painter," in sailor's phrase) stretched from the steamer to the shore. The saved company were taken to the Mansion House, where they found welcome shelter, and abundant sympathy and good cheer. The late Samuel A. Bigelow attended to the transportation of the cargo and furniture, and stored them in the warehouse of which he was part owner.*

The *Walk-in-the-water* was built by capitalists living in the city of New York. After she was wrecked it was proposed to build another steamboat; and a Mr. Brown of New York, agent of an eastern company, came on to contract for the work. Then arose a strife between the people of Buffalo and those of Black Rock, in regard to the question where she should be built. The people of Black Rock claimed that to be the right place in preference to Buffalo, as the latter place had no harbor, there not being five feet of water on the bar at the mouth of the creek; and they said that if she was built in Buffalo creek she would rot down before she would ever float on Lake Erie.

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*NOTE.—The mention here of this warehouse gives an opportunity for modifying paragraph second on page twenty-seven, about the warehouses on Buffalo Creek in 1818, since the printing of which some questions have arisen, requiring further investigation, and comparison of authorities. To avoid these, the paragraph referred to should be cancelled, and in its place the author's own original statement be read, as follows: "*There were, I think, at this time only two or three Warehouses on Buffalo Creek.*"

Particular mention of names in this connection is liable to awaken discussion, and is not necessary for the purpose of this paper.

At the time of the *wreck* of the *Walk-in-the-water*, at least two other warehouses had been added.

The particulars in the text concerning the final trip of the *Walk-in-the-water*, are are inserted, as received directly from the statements of the late Gen. L. Storrs and Samuel A. Bigelow, and our venerable townsman, Capt. Levi Allen. A. B.

The controversy was sharp, and competition was high between the contending villagers. As an inducement to the Steamboat Company both parties agreed to furnish all the timber that would be required to build the new boat, at an exceedingly low price. Notwithstanding all the adverse representations and discouraging endeavors of the citizens of Black Rock, Buffalo prevailed. So, on condition that the new boat should be built here, contracts were entered into by Buffalonians to furnish all the timber needed at the low price already promised; and they also gave their bonds for a large amount to the company, on the condition that the channel of Buffalo creek should be deepened by a certain time, so that the new boat, when built, could float out into the lake, or they should be paid one hundred and fifty dollars for each day it was detained.

The deepening of the channel was accomplished within the time required, to the great joy of the inhabitants of Buffalo. I have not space within my proposed limits to give an account of this great undertaking. How piles were driven by means of a "driver," extemporized from an old mortar, how the channel was dredged out by a scraper, made of a log sawed in half endwise, armed at the edge thus left with long saw-blades, floated into place on a scow and dropped, and dragged out by oxen, these and many like things may not now be described. But it is due to the spirit of the people of that day, and above all, to the memory of their leader in this as in so many of the "good works" that have created Buffalo city, Judge Samuel Wilkeson, to say that for an example of displays of energy, ingenuity, and persevering sacrifice in a good cause, this affair may be set down as among the foremost. And so the second steamboat, built to navigate these lakes, was constructed on the north bank of Buffalo creek at the foot of Washington street. She was called the *Superior*, and was of three hundred and fifty tons burthen. She was built in the winter of 1821–2, and launched on the 16th of April following.

An incident or two concerning the launching will be here in place: There was living in our village at the time a rather notable mulatto man, who was called "Whistling Tom"—what his true name was I never knew. He was tall, and of fine figure and features; the last partook more of white than of colored blood, and he was a character by himself. He was noted for his great power in and fondness for whistling. He was not only a great whistler, but could imitate the sound and notes of instruments of music, such as the bugle, clarinet, etc. The steamboat was launched side foremost. Quite a number of men were permitted to climb aboard before she slid off her ways. Many hundreds assembled to see her launched. When all things were ready, word was given, and then commenced the rattling of the sledges of the ship-carpenters who lay under the boat knocking out the blocks that held her from the greasy ways on which she was to slide into the water. Pretty soon she started. Not a word was spoken; each one seemed to hold his breath, when, just at the right moment, "Whistling Tom" gave a shrill peal like a bugle note in his most artistic style, which seemed to electrify all present. The moment he had finished the strain, there went up from the multitude a shout that made the welkin ring. Within the next minute there were several skiffs manned and with pikes and boat-hooks men went to work saving the floating timber that was carried into the water by the launched boat.

In the midst of the confusion of the multitude, there came a cry from the launched boat that needed immediate attention. It was that a man had got his leg broken. Doctor Congdon, who was quite a corpulent man, bustled round for some time, not having the agility to climb up on board from a small boat and make sure of the job of setting and splinting the broken limb. But finally he succeeded in getting aboard, and managing the case, which was a rare and tempting one; for a broken leg was not a very common occurrence in our village. The accident had been caused by the lurch of the

boat when her keel struck the water, which threw her over on her beams' ends.

There were some smeared trowsers that day among the boys and youngsters, caused by their climbing over the greasy ways of the boat. Among those present from the country towns were a certain girl, young lady we should say, and her beau. They were used to crossing logs and fences, and did not hesitate to shorten the distance to a favorable position by crossing those slippery ways. But the girl for once failed, and came down plump, and was sliding on towards the water, when she was gallantly saved from being fully launched into it by the timely assistance of her attendent beau.

It may well be believed that the launching of the *Walk-in-the-water* sixty-six years ago, and of the *Superior* fifty-nine years ago next April, were notable occurrences for young Buffalo Village, and even trivial incidents recalled concerning them, may have interest on this account.

After receiving her boiler, which had been brought across the peninsula from the wreck of the *Walk-in-the-water*, and being finished off ready for sailing, the *Superior* was floated out of Buffalo creek and taken to the dock at Black Rock, and there made ready for her first trip.

Some Buffalonians, yet living in our city, must remember the streak of woods cut out from the lake beach where the *Walk-in-the-water* was wrecked, through which, on rollers, the boiler of the wrecked boat was moved across the peninsula to the creek for the purpose of putting it into the new boat.

The *Superior* left Black Rock for Detroit on her first trip, April 23, 1822. She made two or three trips to Detroit, and back to Black Rock, without coming into Buffalo harbor. Her first entrance into our harbor was on or about the first day of June, 1822, the same season, and ever after she made Buffalo her stopping place.

From this time forward Buffalo began to assume a superiority over Black Rock in a commercial and business point of view. The deepening of the channel of the creek, so that vessels of all kinds could enter our harbor, and the locating here of the terminus of the Erie Canal at about this time (as published in the Canal Board Report in 1823), seemed to settle the controversy between the two rival villages, and Buffalo began to be regarded as a place of some considerable importance. Very soon, some of the merchants and other business men who had been doing business for years at Black Rock, expecting that to be the great city, left that place and came to Buffalo. And yet, at that time during gales of wind down the lake, or in very dark nights, vessels would frequently, as they do now, run down the river and come to anchor, not venturing to try to enter Buffalo harbor, the channel being so narrow. The steamboat would frequently run down also, and lie by the dock for safety, and Captain Thompson would then have to apply his "horned breeze" to help her up the rapids again.

In the fall of 1875, little more than fifty-three years after the *Superior* came out, on a visit to some of my friends in Mansfield, Ohio, I met with an aged lady, who related to me an incident of her journey from one of the New England states to that place. It was in the summer of 1822. She said she was then twenty-two years of age. She, with others, took passage at Buffalo on the steamboat *Superior* and were landed at Huron, Ohio. The boat hove to, off shore, and the yawl was lowered and manned, to take the passengers ashore. The wind was pretty strong, and a high sea was rolling. The Captain (Rogers) thought there was some danger in landing, and therefore accompanied them to the shore. There being no dock they were obliged to land through the surf, which was running very high. When the row-boat struck the beach one of the sailors got out into the water, this young lady mounted on his back, her arms around his neck, and he then carried her

"high and dry" through the surf to the shore. In the same way all the passengers were safely landed.

This good old lady, when she related this to me, was a widow, seventy-five years of age. In reviewing those early scenes of her girlhood she said she wished that she could know if that sailor were still living, adding that she would like to knit a nice, warm comforter and send him.

CONCLUSION.

But it is time to conclude these reminiscences. I planned to write only concerning the *two* pioneer steamboats which have been already described. I shall not go into a general history of our steamboats, or steamboating on our lakes. That should be written by some of our practical sailors, who have spent the most of their lives on our inland lakes and rivers. But I will say, there have been many improvements made to increase their speed, and also very many for the convenience and comfort of travelers. The earlier boats were all built with their cabins below deck. They did not have what is now called the upper-deck cabin. It was thought to be doubtful whether such cabins would stand the storms and gales of our lakes, and it was not until about twenty years after the first steamboat was built, that what is called the upper-deck cabin was ventured upon. Captain Walker tried the experiment, and put the first "upper cabin" upon the steamboat *Great Western* in 1838. The size of the steamboats continued to increase, as well as the luxurious furnishing of them, until they became literally "floating palaces." And later, those old-fashioned side-wheel steamboats have been almost entirely superseded by the craft usually termed the propeller. Indeed, such is the "march of improvement," that steamboats,—side-wheel and propeller, lower cabin and upper cabin,—with sail vessels of all kinds, yes, canal boats and all waterway craft, though very far from being "things of the past," have come to occupy only the place of helpers to the great system

of land-carriage, that the Railroad has introduced. So that all reminiscences concerning water transportation, whether of persons engaged in it, or methods of accomplishing it, may be already reckoned as relating to what has "had its day," except as something subordinate and supplementary.

To contribute, in some degree, towards furnishing material for a complete history of that once leading, and even yet great though minor, element in our progress, our Lake Commerce, this paper has been written, and is now presented to the reader.