

STEAMBOAT LEGACY

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A STEAMBOAT FAMILY

by Dorothy Heckmann Shrader Used by permission (c) 1993 Dorothy Heckmann Shrader

The Royal (Steamboat) was built at Hermann by Capts. August and Gustave Wohlt to run in opposition to the Ferry Company, owned at that time by Heckmann and Talbot. Heckmann and Talbot bought the Fawn and the Vienna from the Wohlt and then bought the Dora from Heidbroeder and Boeger. This sternwheel had the distinction of being the only steamboat ever to go up the Gasconade River as far as Arlington (Jerome). Her dimensions were 86.6 x 24 x 3. She was listed at \$2,500.

Improvement work on the Gasconade River was progressing, but more pressure was needed to keep the appropriated funds flowing. Fritz Lang, the business manager and bookkeeper, kept excellent books so that a year's summary was easily available. Capt. Heckmann supplied the information requested and the newspaper kept it subscribers posted.

IMPROVEMENT OF THE GASCONADE

Captain Wm. L. Heckmann having been requested by Major A.W. Miller, U.S.A. in charge of the improvement of the Missouri and its tributaries, to furnish a statement of the Gasconade during the year ending June 1st, 1885, together with suggestions as he desired to offer as to the best means of improving said river, has forwarded the following report:

The Gasconade River business is only in its infancy and business is improving yearly. Six years ago there were only shipped about 25,000 bushels of wheat and this last season 226,750 bushels. This is due to former appropriations judiciously expended. The inhabitants along the river are a thrifty people and are only now beginning to realize the advantage of the river route, they are erecting ware-houses and are putting in twice the amount of wheat they did in former times and land is advancing steadily in valuation. What is needed now is a low water state of 30 inches, this can be secured by a system of low water dams, confining the water in a channel about 33 or 40 feet wide, (this is quite practicable as there is a gravel subsoil and cannot scour). Our worst places are where there are two or three chutes, these should be closed except one, by erecting dams at the fork of the chute, allowing the water to accumulate and then run off gradually through one channel. Other places wing dams could be put in to good advantage. I am convinced if commenced on this system from the first shoal to Indian Ford as far as surveyed, a distance of 76 miles, a channel of 30 inches could be secured. \$50,000 would do this work as material is conve-

nient, and would also be sufficient to remove obstructions in the river and cut what trees are liable to fall in the channel. This amount expended would double the business on the River in two years.

Boats engaged in the river are viz:

Str. Vienna	drawing 12 inches
Capacity 70 tons	
Str. Royal	drawing 12 inches
65 tons	
Str. Dora	drawing 6 inches
100 tons	
Str. Fawn	drawing 16 inches
70 tons	

Statement of Traffic from June 1st, 1884; to June 1st, 1885

Freight Down the River

Wheat	226,750 bushels
\$181,400	
Livestock, hogs, cattle	1,150 head
\$ 12,500	
Eggs	300 cases
\$ 1,125	
Lumber, Walnut	100,000 feet
\$ 4,000	
Lumber, Pine	300,000 feet
\$ 3,600	
Shaved Hoops	100,000 feet
\$ 600	
Railroad Ties	175,000 feet
\$ 56,000	
Miscellaneous Produce	
\$ 1,200	

Total Value \$260,425

Freight Up the River

Self Binders (38) and farm machinery	
\$ 9,000	
300 sacks of flour, bran and shipstuff	
\$ 1,160	
Lumber, 100,000 feet	
\$ 3,000	
Salt, 660 barrels	
\$ 900	
Mdse. (Miscellaneous)	
\$ 12,000	

Total Value \$ 26,060

Any other information you may desire, I will cheerfully give you.

Respectfully,

Wm. L. Heckmann, Master Str. Vienna

On March 28, 1886, Mary posted a diary entry describing the Miller family's arrival at the Hermann landing 19 years previously and her first meeting with the man of her life as he boarded the steamer

Post Boy. *Little did I think I would marry him and in this short time be the mother of 9 children. Mary must have been tired of counting children by this time. When she wrote this passage she actually had 10, with another on the way.*

The rivalry between the Wohlt and Heckmann interests ended in April of 1886. Talbot sold his interest in the Fawn, Vienna and Dora to the Wohlt brothers, who added their steamer Royal to the holdings. These four boats became the nucleus of the Hermann Ferry and Packet Company, and the golden shekels once again rolled into the company coffers. All the boats were spruced up. The Dora went to St. Louis to be remodeled, and the Vienna went to New Haven for repairs after a cabin fire.

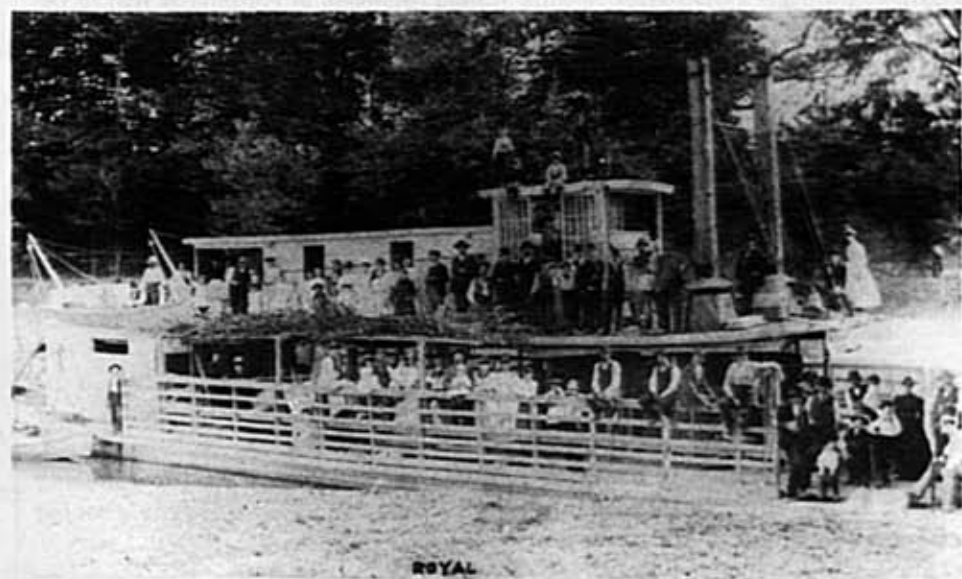
Just before Easter Sunday another Heckmann baby arrived with little fanfare. *Wednesday morning April 21st at 1:30 a.m. a little bit of a boy came here to make his home. This son, Mary's 11th child, was called George Talbot Heckmann. Later in the year a visit from Tina and her new baby, Elsie, was duly noted in the newspaper. Capt. Heckmann last Saturday chartered several saloons, because, as he says, it is not everybody that can be a grandfather at age 41.*

During the summer of 1886, a once-only event took place with both Will Heckmann Sr. and his cub pilot Will Jr. at the wheel of the steamer Royal. Years later, the Vienna newspaper carried a story about the trip, written by Steamboat Bill.

where the Frisco Railroad crosses the Gasconade River. It was my pleasure to be on this trip, the only one ever made by steamboat above Vienna, Mo. Steamboats had been running to Vienna for some ten years, but no boat had ventured above this port and when we did get up in the upper reaches of this river, it seemed we were entering a new world, and we were naturally very excited.

To the good people ashore it meant more, for most of them had never seen a steamboat. We had a heavy load of wagon timber, the river bank was full, and progress was slow up this swift stream. We could see the people crossing the side bottom fields and taking short cuts through the woods to head off and get a look at this boat, and whoever was on watch, the Dutch Captain or his Cub Pilot, their feet were on the big whistle treadle at intervals of every half hour.

In lots of places we would see one hundred people viewing the old boat. She was not much of a boat among the floating palaces on the lower Mississippi at that time, but up this little stream, to these people, our staunch Royal seemed colossal. Some of these good folks would follow the boat for miles along the bank, and at one place a boy and a big fat girl followed us for three miles, shoving vines aside, knocking down brush piles and skipping through the underbrush, overcoming all obstacles until they came to a large stream where they could not wade and it was too cold to swim.



ROYAL MAKES ONLY GASCONADE VOYAGE

In the latter (eighteen) eighties my father made a trip up the Gasconade River with the Steamer Royal to Arlington, Mo.,

To me this picture is still in my mind. I often wonder what became of that boy and the big fat girl. Hope they are still living and can see their beautiful little river rolling along

About 15 miles below Arlington we tied up for the night and found a very old gray bearded man sitting on the bank. Father went out to talk to him and naturally some of us went along.

It soon developed that this old gentleman did not welcome the coming of a steam boat. He tried every argument in his power to get us to turn back down the river. Among other things he said, "This river may fall 20 feet tonight and leave your boat stranded up here." After he found he could not scare us, he became more friendly and gave us some of his life's history.

His name was Willis Hensley, no doubt the same man that lived in a log hut below the mouth of Frene Creek, or in what we call Frenchtown, long before the first German settler came to Hermann more than a hundred years ago. Next we hear and know of him during the Civil War at Hensley Ford on the Gasconade River, the old Fritz Miller farm. He told us that he had moved up the Missouri and Gasconade River seven times to get away from civilization and the German farmers.

We quote his own words as the conversation wound up and we went to bed. Hensley said, "To be honest with you Captain Heckmann, I do not want your boats to come up here. I have moved up the Missouri and Gasconade rivers seven times to get away from the German farmers, as you call them. I call them Dutch, and if your d—boats keep coming up here I will have to move again and I am too old for that. One can still catch a few beaver, mink and coon here, so please take your old boat and stay away."

At that time my father was 41 years old. Mr. Hensley was over eighty. His story tallies and the writer believes he was one of the first men to live in and see the beautiful site of our beloved Hermann.

Father promised to never come back with his boat and he never did, which leaves to him the honor and historical fact that the steamer Royal, in charge of the Dutch Captain was the one and only steamboat that ever made a trip to this 50-mile stretch of river on the upper reaches of the picturesque Gasconade.



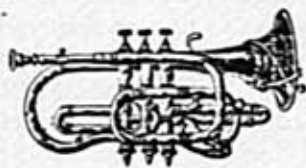
Mary tackled the work on the boats with gusto. She sometimes went along as cook and trained her daughters to do the same. Both Annie, not quite 14, and Lizzie, not quite 12, cooked on the Vienna. Business must have been a little slack in June because Capt. Will took two parties from St. Louis for a big hunt. But by July it was all hands on deck. *All boats have all they can do, wheat is coming in fast. there are today twelve boat loads waiting for them. River is low and ground hard and dry, everybody is praying for rain.*

The family was pleasantly surprised by a visit from George Husmann, the man

who had brought the Miller family to Missouri in 1867. The newspaper reported, *Mr. George Husmann, formerly a resident of Hermann and widely known as a horticulturist, pomologist and a wine grower, was here for several days last week. Mr. Husmann is a gifted talker and we should not at all be surprised if he had not induced some of our wine-growers to follow him to his home, in Napa, California.*

In October the Vienna sank right at the Hermann levee, but was raised the following day and was soon back in working order. According to Mary, *She had been idle for sometime and was dry, no one thought to look into the hull and there was no watchman on her so the outside at the engineer house was two feet under water.*

The F.F.F. Club still managed to make a little news. The revelers were caught in a bad storm, and their steamboat had to take refuge under the Gasconade railroad bridge. Another storm blew the Fawn high and dry on a sandbar at Bluffton. Nonetheless, the excursions remained popular.



GOING FISHING WITH A BRASS BAND!

The steamer Fawn will excurt up the Gasconade River next Sunday and anyone who has thirty-five cents to pay for his passage and a few worms to do a little plain fishing is invited. The Apostle Band will furnish the music.

Mary had overcome her aversion to steamboats, but she still disliked Hermann's excessive drinking and found the citizenry's German ways just too much to tolerate at times. The town was celebrating the 50th anniversary of its founding. Ever the organizer, Louis Rincheval planned a moonlight excursion to Portland as part of the celebration. Mary's comments about the whole affair were less than complimentary.

Tonight is intended to be a great day for Hermann, but the first, middle and end of it all is the drinking of as much beer and wine as all can hold...Yesterday, because it was Friday, could not do for the day proper, so they fired a 50-gun salute. That is they were to, but the old cannon busted on the 48th shot, and that put and end to one more of my enemies, peace be to its pieces...Tonight they had a torch light procession, got up only tolerably good, like everything done here...I done nothing for I always do all I can and could not put in any extra work.

Mary's "enemy" cannon was stationed on the courthouse bluff just above Wharf Street, so the shots were fired right over the Heckmann home. *On every occasion they were firing the old thing, making one nervous as long as the shooting lasted.*

The Leimer/Heckmann property had

been sold to Martin Olman for \$3,500, and the Heckmanns had moved to the Jordan house, better known as the Pete Miller house, at the east end on Wharf Street next to the White House Hotel. The move was done piecemeal and for a time the family had shivered in a damp house that had only one stove. The new house proved a most dangerous place to be. Mary wrote:

We heard a terrible thundering and clapping noise, as though there were a terrible explosion, not only once, but three times in succession. William was still reading, he jumped up and looked up and down, and started down. I ran out too and across to the butcher's, asked her what it was, she said a gasoline explosion, and just at that, she cried, "Oh, look at Gussie." The poor fellow was so badly burned, they carried him home and in much less time than I can write it the White House wash house was one blaze. It seemed to me ages until the fire company got the engine at work, then after starting it they had to take it to the river and pump water from there. With hard work, they succeeded in saving some of the White House, about one-third, the third story is burned out, the second badly damaged and the first in tolerable good shape. All things were taken out but so many things broken and damaged. The whole corner, Ettmullers office and drug store, Monnigs where it started and the White House were all gone, also the corners. They had leveled all the walls of the Monning property today, it was very shocking. There are some hopes of little Pfautsch getting well. When Annie, Kate and Alice came home they were dumb-founded at the looks of things.

The riverfront held many dangers, especially for children. The newspaper reported:

While some boys were playing on a rock heap that had lodged near the U.S. water gauge, Richard Storck happened to slip and fall into the river, and but for the timely aid rendered him by some of the boys, would have found a watery grave. We have often wondered how the urchins fooling around the river escape drowning—they are so extremely reckless.

It may have been Heckmann boys who came to the victim's rescue. Their father had taught them to swim by the very effective method of rowing them out into the river a considerable distance, pitching them overboard and saying, "Now swim you young pup!"

Settlement of the insurance claims from the big fire was protracted. But by the end of September, 1886, the White House Hotel was again under roof. In the meantime the newspaper was giving free publicity to the Concert Hall Garden, located just behind the Heckmann house.

There is probably not a more delightful spot in all the town to while away a few pleasant hours than the Concert Hall Garden. Summerhouses, beautiful flowers, shrubbery, gravel walks, in fact all that can

reasonably be expected, have been provided for the convenience of the guests, and the refreshments served are of the very best quality.

A grand party was staged in November for the reopening of the White House Hotel, with music by the Apostle Band. But if the Heckmanns attended, Mary made no mention of it. The newspaper reported, *The formal opening of the White House last Saturday eve was an event which will long be remembered by all present. The proceeds of the sale of tickets was \$200, which amount has been added to the fund for the purchase of a town clock.*

At about the same time, Capt. Henry Heckmann, who left the steamboat business after the Washington burned while he was at the wheel, opened a restaurant. The newspaper reported, *Heckmann's Lunch Room, on Schiller, next to Leisner's furniture store, is now in apple-pie order, and open to the public. The location as well as the management is admirable, and all those who want a good nice lunch on short notice will find this the right place.*

The year ended well for Mary. *We had a nice tree for Christmas, every one who sees it thinks its nice. In January the Harmonie Hall had a Masque Ball, declared by many to be one of the finest affairs ever "gotten up" in Hermann—better even than the White House Hotel party. Mary and Will stayed at the ball until after midnight, even though Will was leaving on the Farm at 6 the next morning. Mary reported that the affair was very good. This, for her, was praise of the highest order.*

This article was taken from the book, "Steamboat Legacy-The Life and Times of a Steamboat Family" by Dorothy Heckmann Shrader. Copies of the book are available by contacting THE WEIN PRESS, 514 Wein Street, Hermann, Missouri 65041. Phone 314-486-5522.

(Editor's note:) According to an article in the Vienna Gazette reprinted in the Rolla Weekly Herald, dated March 28th, 1889, "Capt. Heckmann, the veteran steamboat man, brought his steamer, the Royal, up Wednesday and extended his trip to Arlington. The Royal is a somewhat larger boat than the Pin Oak, and will take back a heavy load of wheat. The 'Royal' arrived at the Arlington bridge last Thursday and created as much excitement among the inhabitants of that burg as a young circus. This is the second steamboat that has visited Arlington. The first one made the trip about thirty years ago and was compelled to spend the summer there before it could get back. The 'Royal' we understand, only draws sixteen inches of water when loaded, and if that is the case, she can make the trip without fears of grounding in nearly any season of the year." Although there was another steamboat which did make it to Arlington, The "Royal" was the only one which could make the journey without fear of being stranded by the low water levels of the river.