

## Steamboating on the Des Moines

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## STEAMBOATING ON THE DES MOINES.

DES MOINES, IOWA, March 18, 1904.

EDITOR OF THE ANNALS:—My father, the late C. F. Davis, of Keokuk, had among his papers a card of invitation to a dance given at Fort Dodge May 23rd, 1859, in honor of the landing of the first steamboat from Keokuk to Fort Dodge. As I am informed, this was practically the only boat which ever made that trip. The boat was loaded with groceries belonging to the firm of Chittenden, McGavic & Co., of Keokuk, of which firm my father was a member. The card [a facsimile] is in the following language, and bears the endorsement herein set forth:

### SOCIABLE SOIREE.

*We Dance at Masonic Hall,*

THURSDAY EVENING NEXT.

WILL YOU COME?

— MANAGERS: —

MAJ. WM. WILLIAMS,	HON W N MESERVEY,	J D STROW,
HON. J M STOCKDALE,	" THOS SARGENT,	GEO. W. REEVE,
" C. C CARPENTER,	A. M DAWLEY,	W. W. WHITE
" L. L. PEASE,	ISRAEL JENKINS.	

FLOOR MANAGERS:—JAS E. WILLIAMS, A. F WATRINS, H. D. MERRITT.

Fort Dodge, May 23d, 1859.

The following endorsement is on the back of the card:

Arrived at Fort Dodge on S. B., "Charles Rodgers", Monday, May 23d, 1859, and the dance was given in honor of the arrival of the 1st S. Boat from Keokuk to Fort Dodge.

C. F. DAVIS,  
Super-Cargo.

During the latter years of my father's life he gave some attention to collecting the history of early settlers of Iowa, and left an autobiography in which there is an account of the trip made by this steamboat. Believing that this may be of some interest in a historical way in Iowa, I am attaching hereto the original card, and the history of the trip as described in the autobiography left by my father.

Trusting that you will consider this of enough importance to give it a place in your collection, I am,

Yours sincerely,

JAMES C. DAVIS.

THE VOYAGE OF THE FIRST STEAMBOAT FROM KEOKUK TO FORT  
DODGE, BY C. F. DAVIS, DECEASED.

Occasionally during the summer months small steamboats navigated the Des Moines river (it having been improved to lock and dam as far up as Bentonsport) going as far as Des Moines, or "Raccoon Fork", as it was then called, charging for freight to that point from fifty to seventy-five cents per hundred pounds. At such times merchants in the interior took advantage of low freight and bought largely. In this connection I relate the following account of the first boat passing above Des Moines:

In May, 1859, our firm (McGavic, Chittenden & Co.) chartered the steamboat "Charles Rodgers", a small craft of about fifty tons, we agreeing to load her to her full capacity, destination Fort Dodge, on the Des Moines river, rate of freight through fifty cents per hundred pounds.

We loaded the boat with sugar, coffee, molasses, tobacco, salt, flour, etc., and I went on board as Super-Cargo. We left the landing at Keokuk, Wednesday, May 18th, 1859, at six o'clock in the evening, and entered the mouth of the Des Moines river before dark. The boat had no cabin, only the pilot house on the hurricane deck. We ate and slept on the lower deck, just back of the engine and boiler. The boat was laid up at the bank whenever night overtook us, only running in daylight, warping through the locks at Bonaparte and Bentonsport. One of the pilots was a violinist, and at several places where we tied up to shore for the night, with the assistance of the neighboring belles and beaux, we had old fashioned dances.

Our cargo being billed through to Fort Dodge we made no stops for way business, and arrived at Des Moines Friday evening, where we remained all night. Saturday morning we left Des Moines, and our boat being light draught and the river a good stage of water, we passed over the dam at Des Moines, and arrived that evening at the Boonsboro land-

ing, several miles from the town of that name. Here we remained for the night. Some parties coming over from the town, we had a dance in a building on shore. Between this point and Fort Dodge we ran out of fuel, and had to land several times, all hands went into the woods, and gathered dead timber to keep our fire going. The shrill whistle of the boat every now and then brought people to the river bank from miles back to see a boat.

That evening (Sunday) we made a landing at a farm owned by a man named L. Mericle, a short distance below Fort Dodge. The farmer being very anxious for supplies, I made my first sale of groceries to him, the bill amounting to \$10.00, which he paid in gold. The next morning (Monday) about noon, we steamed up to the landing at Fort Dodge. The town was up on high ground, some distance from the river, but all the population was at the landing to greet us. I went on shore with my invoice, and by noon of the next day the cargo was all sold and paid for in gold, that being the currency of the country at that time. The merchants of Fort Dodge whom I remember as purchasers were M. M. Havie, S. C. Hinton, Gregory & Messmore, J. J. Howe, Chas. Ranke, and F. A. Blackshire, one of the pilots of the boat, who lived at or near the town.

On the evening of the day our boat arrived, the citizens of Fort Dodge gave a dance at Masonic Hall in honor of the arrival of the first steamboat loaded with freight for that port.

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The idea of "coming west" is a good one. We have every advantage to offer to the over-crowded and over-worked inhabitants of the older states. We have boundless and fertile prairies, skirted by groves of timber, sufficient for the wants of all, awaiting the hands of farmers. We have every natural advantage to build up an Empire of wealth and usefulness. Then come out and see us with your own eyes, and see how lavish nature has been with her best gifts.—*Tri-Weekly Journal (Des Moines) Jan. 20, 1858.*

I NOW attest by these presents that I William B. Carter  
 of the County of Fairfax and Commonwealth of Virginia  
 for and in consideration of the Sum of two thousand and  
 fifty Dollars to me in hand paid by Isham Keith, at  
 or before the sealing and Delivry of these presents the  
 the receipt whereof is hereby Acknowledged, have Bought  
 and Sold and by these presents doth fully clearly and  
 Absolutely Bargain and Sell unto the said Isham  
 Keith Va Muttatto Boy named Jack, to have and to  
 hold the said Boy unto him the said Isham Keith  
 his Heirs Executors and administrators forever  
 And I the said William B Carter, for myself my  
 Heirs Executors Administrators and every of us, do  
 give and grant the said Boy Jack, unto him the  
 said Isham Keith his Heirs and assigns forever against  
 the Claim and Demand of all and every person or  
 persons whatsoever. In Testimony whereof I have here  
 unto set my hand and Seal this twenty fifth day  
 January One thousand Eight hundred and eleven  
 A.D. at Seal and  
 Acknowledged in presence of  
 Charles G. Ford

Wm B Carter

BILL OF SALE FOR A MULATTO BOY, NAMED "JACK".

From the private papers of the grantee, Isham White, one of the first Board of County  
 Commissioners of Van Buren County, Iowa. Presented by  
 Edgar R. Harlan, of Keosauqua, Iowa.

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