

FROM THE EDITOR

Last August, a Californian named Stan Garvey invited me to tour a restored paddle wheeler moored at the levee, the *Delta Queen*. Never one to turn down a field trip, I drove downtown and found Garvey waiting for me on the boat's main deck.

Author of the 1995 book *King and Queen of the River* (Menlo Park, Ca: River Heritage Press, 1-800-852-4890), which chronicles the history of the *Delta Queen* and its twin, the *Delta King*, Garvey is uniquely qualified to explain the boat's structure, history, and significance. He spent the next hour walking me fore and aft, deck to deck, port to starboard.

The *Delta Queen* made its maiden voyage from San Francisco to Sacramento, California, on June 2, 1927. Less than two weeks earlier, Charles Lindbergh had completed his New York to Paris flight; the nation was quickly realizing that skies and highways were the way of the future in transportation—not rivers. Nevertheless, A. E. Anderson, President of the California Transportation Company, decided in the early 1920s to replace his two aging steamboats, the *Fort Sutter* and the *Capital City*, with new ones that would continue to carry two moneymaking cargoes: freight and travelers.

The *King* and *Queen* cost about a million dollars each to build, an elaborate expense for a transportation mode in its waning years. Anderson wasn't worried. He planned to make his money back mostly from shipping manufactured goods to Sacramento and agricultural products back to San Francisco along the Sacramento River. In the process, he promised a unique travel experience for anyone who could afford the \$3 round-trip ticket (those not wanting to sleep on the deck could pay \$1 to \$5 for a room).

So why was the *Delta Queen* at St. Louis, Missouri, in August 1997?

Like many artifacts of bygone days, the *Delta Queen* has become part of the nation's "smokeless industry," tourism. In 1947, Greene Line Steamers towed the boat through the Panama Canal to New Orleans. The *Queen* ran on its own steam—literally—from the Crescent City up the Mississippi and on to Pittsburgh via the Ohio River. There, workers overhauled the *Queen*, preparing it to carry tourists on the Ohio and Mississippi. The line ran for almost ten years before the boat's maintenance costs nearly pushed Greene Line into bankruptcy; Richard Simonton, "a major player in the fields of radio, television, and Muzak," according to Garvey, bailed the company out in 1958 and installed a calliope on the boat's sun deck. During the years since, the *Queen* has traveled other rivers, including the Arkansas, Tennessee, Illinois, and Cumberland.

As the boat's popularity grew, modifications necessary for its new, touristic function took their toll. Air conditioners, larger generators, and refrigeration units loaded the boat down, causing it to sit lower in the river. Late in 1990, workers added a double hull to the boat—a change that not only solved the "sinking ship" problem, but also allowed the *Queen* to better serve its passengers by increasing its hold of drinking water and fuel for the boilers and generators.

The gleaming boat I encountered on the fiftieth anniversary of its Life on the Mississippi showed little evidence of the cargo-and-passenger function it had served in the 1920s, the freight deck having been converted into a meeting place for travelers. The *Delta Queen* showed even less evidence of being a cousin to the cruder but still beautiful boats, like the *Arabia* (see page 4) and dozens like it, that met their ends plying the dangerous waters of the Missouri or Mississippi. And of course the boat's "human cargo," in both its 1927 and 1997 incarnations, was much more benign and legitimate than that carried by the *Enterprize* (see page 36).

In spite of the changes in the boat's structure and purpose, as I walked its decks with Garvey, he carefully pointed out the *Queen's* many "authentic" features—rooms, staircases, even the gift shop. According to Michael Bouman, Executive Director of the Missouri Humanities Council, writing in the winter 1998 issue of *Missouri Library World*, "'Authenticity' is one of the key concepts of cultural tourism." *Cultural tourism* is the tourist industry's term for travels to cultural institutions and sites such as museums, battle fields, and small towns. "When cultural organizations succeed," Bouman writes, "the local businesses share in that success."

While cultural tourism in Missouri focuses mainly on the state's cities, towns, and historic sites, enterprises like the *Delta Queen* play a role as well. Of course, the boat mainly makes money for the Delta Queen Steamboat Co., but while it sat at the riverfront, its passengers supported the businesses along the levee, shops downtown, maybe even (ironically) a riverboat casino.

Money is an important motivation for the tourist industry, but Garvey finds all the inspiration he needs on the river: "If it's quiet and you have time, find a spot on the riverbank," he writes in the closing lines of his book. "Relax. . . . Then listen—see if you can hear a steamboat whistle in the distance. And see if you can catch sight of the *Delta King* or the *Delta Queen* coming around the bend."

—Tim Fox