

GEOGRAPHICAL VARIATIONS IN THE
OPERATION OF PADDLEWHEEL EXCURSION BOATS
ON A PORTION OF THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER

An Abstract of
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by
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ABSTRACT OF

"Geographical Variations in the
Operation of Paddlewheel Excursion Boats
on a Portion of the Upper Mississippi River"

During the summer of 1986 eight paddlewheel excursion boats plied a reach of the Upper Mississippi River between Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, and Burlington, Iowa. The eight boats, Lady D, Addie May, Spirit of Dubuque, Mississippi Belle II, Quad City Queen, Queen of Hearts, Princess, and Julie N Dubuque II, were located in the five hailing port cities of Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, and Guttenberg, Dubuque, Davenport, Bettendorf, and Burlington, Iowa. This study was conducted to identify and explain possible geographical variations in the operation of these boats, such as length of excursions, extent of service areas, and impact on their hailing ports.

Boatowners and their employees, during interviews, provided information on the boats, including capacities, dimensions, types of cruises offered, and excursion routes, and identified the specific media used to advertise their businesses. Maps to illustrate the excursion routes and the service areas for each boat or boat-owning company were prepared for the study. The service area maps were based on coverage area maps for each medium that carried advertising for the excursion boats. Interviews with directors of Chambers of Commerce and Convention and Visitors Bureaus were conducted to obtain subjective information on the impact of these boats on their hailing ports. Another perspective on the value of the excursion boat to a community was supplied by two representatives from Clinton and Muscatine, cities of considerable size in the study area that do not have boats.

In general, the larger boats were located in the larger, more urban hailing ports. Types of cruises and on-board services offered were not dependent upon boat size, however, as each seemed to provide the same amenities to its customers. Mapped patterns of the boats' service areas, based on the coverage areas of advertising media employed, generally corresponded with owners' estimates of their customers' residential locations. Paddlewheel excursion boats were seen as a definite strength in the tourism promotion efforts of the hailing ports towns. Cities without boats were making strenuous efforts to acquire one to boost their tourist activity.