

STEAMBOATS

Before Florida became a state, steamboats sailed down the St. Johns River carrying U.S. Army soldiers who set camp at Fort Mellon on the shores of Lake Monroe. The soldiers were sent to stop the migration of Seminole Indians into this area. This resulted in the Seminole Wars. At Fort Mellon and in the Battle of Camp Monroe, steamboats played a significant role by transporting the indians being removed, by exploring the St. John's River, and by replacing and distributing military forces. Around 1837, Lieutenant Pickell and Colonel Flanning ordered nine steamboats to ascend the St. John's River into Lake Monroe to tow barges inthe river and to stimulate trade. The nine steamboats included the Camden, the Charleston, the Cincinnati, the Forrester, the James Adams, the McLean, the Santee, the Essayons, and the John Stoney. As the Seminole Wars ended, the Steamboat Era still continued on the St. John's River and Lake Monroe. In 1853 - 1877, the Brock Line was developed, presenting the first commercial steamboat which influenced trade along the river and the development of towns. Between 1874 - 1875, the Brock Line consolidated with the Coxetter Line in order to cover more territory along the St. John's River. As more and more steamboats explored, wharves and docks were needed to unload their cargo into Sanford. These wharves were located at the foot of Melonville Avenue, Palmetto Avenue, Oak Street, and Sanford Avenue. With the decline of the Brock - Coxetter

Line, the Debary - Baya Merchant Line came into existence in 1883. This line transported people, tourists, and shippers along the river and Lake Monroe. Ships of this line included the Frannie Dugan, the Anita, the Frederic K Debary, the City of Sanford, the Welaka, the H. P. Palnt, the Volusia, and the Magnolia. The Magnolia was a large boat which carried 250 people and slept 22. As time went on, the desire for luxury influenced the steamboat industry. The steamboat, the City of Jacksonville, was the first to have electricity. Iron hulls replaced wooden ones to protect the ship from fire and total destruction. Around 1889, the Clyde Line purchased the Debary - Baya Line and took over the water ways of the St. John's River and Lake Monroe. In 1886, the Clyde Line began a steamboat run between Jacksonville and Sanford. The desire for speed came about and made vessels faster and more powerful. On October 12, 1885, a Clyde Line ship made a run to Jacksonville from Sanford in 12.5 hours. The Clyde Line lasted until 1933 when the railroad took over and totally shut down the steamboat industry.

## Full Steam Into Memory

By Blanche Mercer Fearington

There are not many men around who worked on the steamboats that plied the St. Johns River during the early years of the twentieth century.

But Robert L. Allen of DeLand is one. He came to Florida from his native Mississippi in 1911 and in 1914 settled with his father at Enterprise which had been the seat of Volusia County until 1888 when it was moved to DeLand.

Allen helped his father operate a ferryboat between Enterprise and Sanford until 1917. This was a time when a great economic and progressive change was developing in Florida and gasoline engines were rapidly replacing steam power.

The ferry, operated by the Allens, had been built by Emmet M. Robinson of Seville, who started it in 1902 and took two years to build the 61 x 16 foot cypress boat that could carry 25 tons or 75 people with power from its gas engine. It was called the Alma Lay, named for Robinson's little sister who died in 1882.

According to June Robinson Reynolds of Seville, her father sold the boat in late 1909 to a Captain Tuttle who operated it between Enterprise and Sanford until the Allens bought it in 1914.

In 1918, the cry "Riverboat's a-coming!" could still be heard by residents in central Florida who lived along the St. Johns River for there were two steamboats still running between Sanford and Jacksonville. In that year, at age 22, Allen took a job at \$50 a month, including room and board, as an oiler in the engine room of the Osceola.

An oldtimer told him that, in the 1880's, before the coming of the railroad, there had been a total of 50 steamers, plus a lot of paddle dayboats, running the St. Johns.

When the railroads arrived, many of the St. Johns' steamers were sold for use of other parts of America; others burned at the docks. The Osceola, a steel riverboat built in Jacksonville in 1913, was 180 feet long with two decks and an extra row of staterooms on the upper deck. It could sleep 100. The rudder and stern wheel was very hard to handle, says Allen. Its engines carried steam of 20 pounds, running the river at 12 miles an hour with a crew of 20.

It was the only other steamboat on the river at that time, says Allen, was the City of Jacksonville, a much larger iron boat, 160 feet long and five inches long that could sleep 60 to

80. It had two sidewheel engines, each independent of the other, and could almost run in its own length. It ran the St. Johns at 12 miles per hour and its crew numbered 20.

The City of Jacksonville was commissioned by Count Frederick DeBary, a German, who came from Germany to Florida for his health and settled at Enterprise. He built the DeBary Mansion, later the Florida Art Center.

The boat was built in Wilmington,

Delaware, in 1888 at a cost of \$120,000. It was decorated in white and gold and was the first boat on the St. Johns to have electric lights.

The two boats made three round trips weekly between Jacksonville and Sanford, working every day except Sunday. The Osceola left Jacksonville at 4 p.m. on alternate days and let off passengers or freight at landings all the way to Sanford, arriving at noon the next day.

After unloading and reloading, the boat left Sanford the same day and arrived in Jacksonville at six the following morning and started the return trip at 4 p.m. that day.

It cost \$10 to make the trip from Jacksonville to Sanford. In the very early days, the boat docked at Beresford and later at the old DeLand Landing.

Then, as well as early in this century, the whistle of the steamboats was an exciting event to central Floridians who lived in the sparsely settled communities along the river's route. The natives of that day did not have the amusements and distractions of today. To them, the coming of the steamboats meant new faces and new items to stock the shelves of back country stores.

Viola Pierson of Florida has nostalgic memories of days past when she as a little girl listened for the mournful sound of the Osceola's whistle as she rode with her father, W. R. Underhill, to Volusia, the county's first settlement, to pick up supplies brought from Jacksonville for his store at Barberville.

"Food on the boat was good," said Allen who, with some other members of the crew, ate with the passengers. Regular breakfast fare included bacon, grits and eggs; other meals were comparable.

He tells of one time when a stiff wind caught the Osceola up above Blue Springs. The wind turned the boat straight across the river with the bow stuck on one bank and the stern on the other so "nothing got by but catfish."

It took two hours to free it with a rope attached to a steam winch on the bow with the other end fastened to a tree on the bank. "Needless to say, it was more interesting to the passengers than the crew," Allen recalls.

"An old steamboat man noted for profanity said a good steamboat man could swear for seven minutes without using the same word twice." Allen attests to the fact that several of the crew went to five minutes while the Osceola was stuck.

One of the pilots of the Osceola was 80-year-old Capt. Billy Jones who had been a cub pilot on the St. Johns during the Civil War. He was on the Mary when the Federal Army trapped it and the crew ran it up into Haw Creek and burned it.

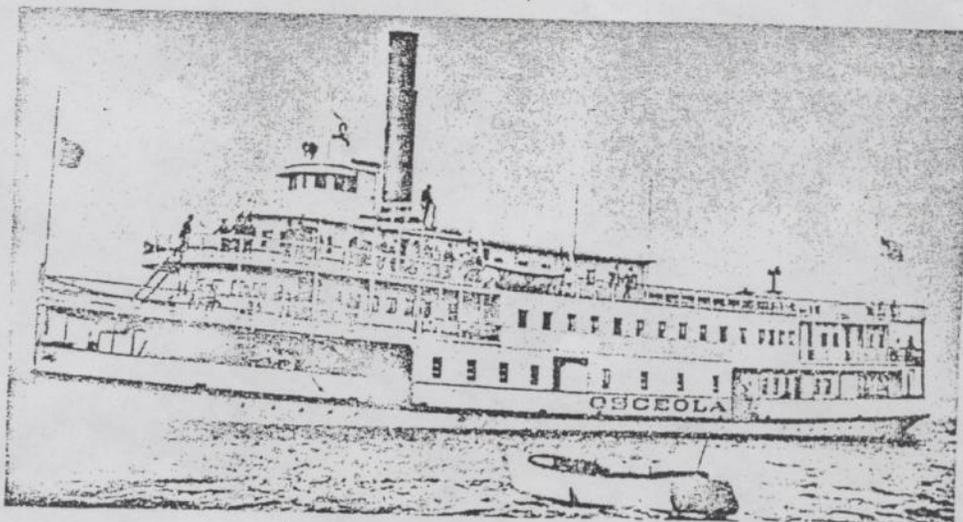
The Clyde Line owned both the City of Jacksonville and the Osceola. It stopped using the Osceola as a passenger boat in 1929; after that it was used by Chase Fertilizer Company as a freight boat until it was retired and junked around 1935.

But long before that, Allen had left the Osceola to go to sea in the engine room of a steamer where he was paid \$100 per month. In 1925 he settled in DeLand. He was employed at the DeLand Post Office for 31 years, 19 as city letter carrier and 12 as rural carrier. He retired in 1956.

Since that time he has been pursuing his favorite avocation—researching and recording history. In 1981 he is writing a book "Paddlewheels on the St. Johns."

It was thought that the days of the steamboats on the St. Johns ended with the Osceola's last run but Allen feels that may not hold true. He said "a steam boiler can burn any combustible fuel; gas, liquid or solid and the same wood that fueled the oldtimers still grows along the St. Johns' banks. Other fuels will be developed when oil runs out.

"But it may be cheaper to cut, shred and compress into pellets the wood along the river banks. Only time will tell."



The Osceola leaving the Enterprise Dock