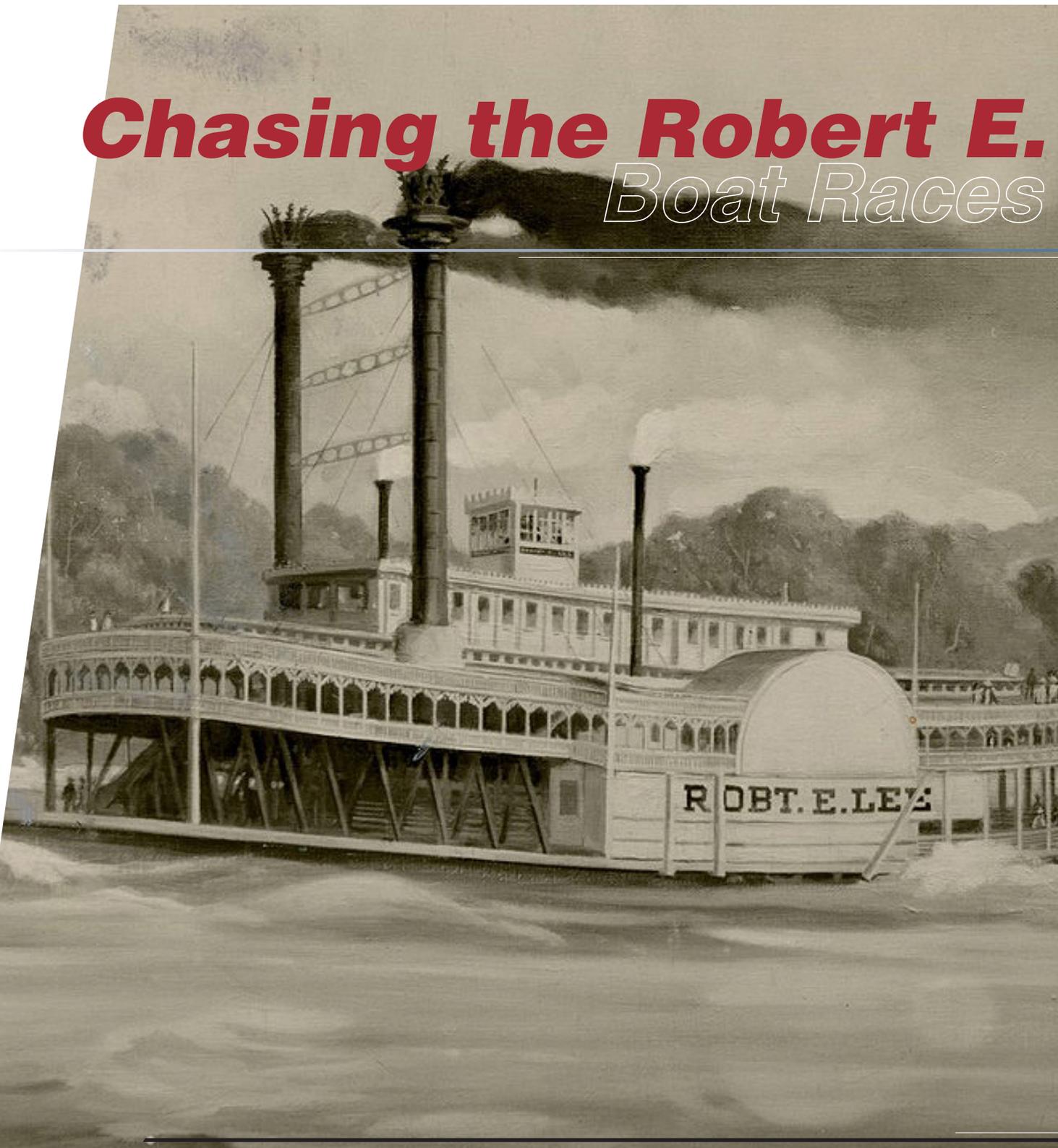


# Chasing the Robert E. Boat Races



The steamboat *Robert E. Lee*, built in 1866, outpaced the *Natchez* in a famous and fabled race from New Orleans to St. Louis in 1870. It was named for Confederate general Robert E. Lee the year after the Confederate defeat in the Civil War and could carry more than 5,000 bales of cotton. (Image: Missouri Historical Society)

# Lee: on the Mississippi River

by DEAN KLINKENBERG



**In 1870,** the Robert E. Lee beat the Natchez in a race on the Mississippi River from New Orleans to St. Louis, the most famous contest of the steamboat era. The race captured the imaginations of millions of people around the world at a time when steamboats and the Mississippi River were losing economic relevance in the United States. While the race didn't reverse the economic fortunes of the river economy, it set a standard for speed and tenacity that proved to be a remarkably enduring inspiration for boat enthusiasts of subsequent eras.

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## **Speed records set during the steamboat era had economic consequences; faster boats got more business.**

Speed records set during the steamboat era had economic consequences; faster boats got more business. The races also celebrated technological progress and the wit and creativity of steamboat captains and crews. Formal and informal records were kept of the fastest times to common destinations.

For the 300 mile run from New Orleans to Natchez, for example, the *Comet* completed the trip in five days and ten hours in 1814. By 1828, the *Tecumseh* had made the run in three days and an hour, but just six years later the *Tuscarora* trimmed it down to one day and twenty-one hours. In twenty years, the travel time had been reduced by eighty percent. When the *Robert E. Lee* cut the time down even more in 1870—to sixteen hours and change—contemporary steamboats were traveling the route nearly five days faster than the *Comet* had.

In the twentieth century, more powerful engines pushed sleeker boats faster and faster, delighting technology enthusiasts and the general public. Still, the challenges of covering a thousand miles on the Mississippi River as quickly as possible hadn't changed too dramatically since the *Lee* beat the *Natchez*. Since 1870, hundreds of attempts were made to best the *Lee's* record, but most failed to reach the finish line.

The dramatic story of more than a century's worth of races on the Mighty Mississippi offers insight into changing ideas about the river's role and technology's limits when put to the test against Mother Nature.

### **A Race for the Ages**

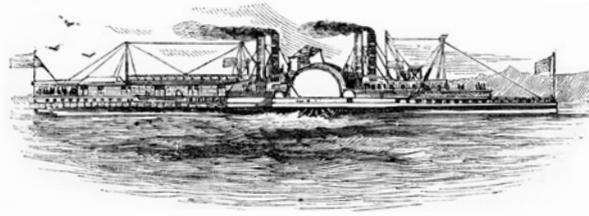
No steamboat race is more celebrated than the 1870 match between John Cannon's *Robert E. Lee* and Thomas Leathers' *Natchez*. Both boats were well-known at the time, as were their captains. The *Lee*, built in 1866 by Cannon, was the king of the inland waters, fast and luxurious, the most impressive steamboat in the country. Leathers built the *Natchez* (his sixth boat with that name) specifically to knock the *Lee* off its river pedestal.

The captains weren't exactly the best of friends. They had opposing sympathies during the Civil War, in spite of their common Kentucky roots. While much of the animosity between them played out between their associates, Cannon and Leathers once got into a fist fight in a New Orleans bar.

From the moment the *Natchez* hit the water, newspapers, passengers, and the general public wanted to see the two boats race. Leathers encouraged the talk,

but Cannon refused the bait, at least for a while. Proponents of river transportation hoped that a high-profile contest between two grand steamboats would help stem the loss of business to the railroads. (It didn't.) The race did, however, draw millions of dollars in wagers.

The captains prepared mostly by taking care of logistics, like stashing fuel at pre-arranged locations along the river. As the *Lee's* normal end port was Louisville, Cannon arranged to transfer passengers to another boat at Cairo, Illinois, so the *Lee* could continue to St. Louis. Stories of elaborate pre-race preparations are largely false. Noted steamboat historian Frederick Way related the account of Johnny Farrell, the *Natchez's* second engineer, who visited the *Lee* a few hours before the boats left New Orleans: "This old idea about the two boats preparing for days for the race, tearing down bulkheads, putting up wind sheaves, and a lot of other stuff, is not true. When I went aboard the *Lee*, all they had done was to move the coal bunkers a little forward. . . . On our boat there was absolutely no preparation whatever. There was no such thing as colors flying, bands playing, and the decks of both boats crowded with ladies and gentlemen."<sup>1</sup>



At 5 p.m. on June 30, the boats left New Orleans in front of ten thousand spectators crammed onto the levee. The *Lee* jumped out to a four-minute head-start that it gradually built into a comfortable lead. Telegraph operators transmitted the progress of the boats to people around the world. Cannon carried only seventy-five passengers (among them the governor of Louisiana) and no freight, but Leathers took on a regular load of cargo and a full complement of passengers. As they raced, the *Lee* slowed down just enough to refuel, while the *Natchez* stopped at its regular ports to unload passengers and refuel.

Both boats experienced setbacks. The *Lee*'s engineering crew had to improvise a fix to a leaky boiler. At Vicksburg, the *Natchez* had to pull over for thirty-four minutes to fix a valve on the pump that sucked river water into the boiler. Around Island 93, the *Natchez* ran into a sandbar but managed to shake itself free.

The race's biggest controversy took place around Greenville. In the middle of the night, the *Lee* pulled aside the *Frank Pargoud* and the two boats lashed together while a hundred cords of pine knots were transferred to the *Lee*. Cannon's move, while planned well in advance, incensed many fans (and bettors) who felt the *Lee* had benefited unfairly from the combined power of the two steamboats. While it's not clear that the *Lee* actually gained any time from tethering to the *Frank Pargoud*, it certainly benefited from having the added fuel.

The *Lee* pulled into Memphis at 11:04 p.m., greeted by huge crowds, fireworks, and music. It barely slowed down, tying up to coal barges again and getting back on its way six minutes later. The *Natchez* arrived over an hour later to pick up and discharge passengers, which cost it another seventeen minutes, then it got stuck on a shoal around Island 41 and lost more time.

When the *Lee* reached Cairo, Illinois—in record time—the boats were still just an hour and ten minutes apart. The *Lee* slowed to get alongside the steamer *Idlewild* and transferred its passengers bound for Louisville. The *Lee* also took on two new passengers, Enoch King and Jesse Jameson, pilots who knew the Mississippi well from Cairo to St. Louis. Cannon wanted the extra help to guide them through the difficult Thebes Gap and other tricky sections.

Leathers had trouble navigating the river north of Cairo, in spite of his experience. After hitting bottom a few times, he was forced to slow down. As the two boats neared Cape Girardeau, fog thickened in the river valley. Leathers pulled over at Devil's Island around midnight, then learned that the *Lee* had passed by just 25 minutes earlier. The *Natchez* had closed the gap by more than half.

The *Lee*, meanwhile, slowed down when it ran into the fog but didn't stop. Cannon executed an elaborate system for plodding ahead. He sent a few men ahead of the boat in a yawl to measure the river's depth; they relayed the information to the *Lee*'s regular

pilots, who were positioned at the bow of the texas deck. Through it all, Cannon stood on the hurricane deck to monitor the operation and quickly relay instructions to the pilothouse. Even with all these measures in place, Cannon nearly pulled ashore to wait out the fog. But he didn't, and the *Lee* crept slowly forward. By 2 a.m., the fog had thinned out and the *Lee* had a wide open river for the homestretch.

The *Natchez*, in contrast, waited for five-and-a-half hours until the fog cleared. When they reached Grand Tower, the crew learned that the *Lee* had passed by the town six hours earlier. Leathers almost certainly knew at that moment that he had been beaten.

At 11:33 a.m. on July 4, the *Lee* steamed into St. Louis in a record time of 90 hours and 13 minutes, more than six hours ahead of the *Natchez*, and three hours faster than the record that the *Natchez* had set just a month before. The record set by the *J.M. White* in 1844 had stood for over twenty-five years, but in 1870, two boats beat it within a month of each other.

St. Louis turned out two hundred thousand spectators for the finish. Excursion boats and a train blew their whistles in celebration, and the *Lee* answered back. Among those who welcomed the *Lee* at the St. Louis levee were Mary Lee, Robert E. Lee's daughter, and James B. Eads, whose revolutionary bridge was under construction just upriver from the landing where the race ended.

## **Koenig took the competition seriously—he personally paid for the silver trophy—and defined a set of rules for the competition.**

### **The Koenig Cup**

In the wake of the *Lee's* record, St. Louisan Edwin Koenig became passionate about shattering it and set the stage for races to come. Koenig was enthusiastic about the Mississippi and boating from a young age, perhaps because the family home at 3836 Kosciusko Street in South St. Louis overlooked the Mississippi River, or maybe because his father was an avid river man himself. Koenig joined the St. Louis Yacht Club when he was just fifteen years old and would later serve as its leader—or “commodore”—for forty years.

One way Koenig indulged his interests was by sponsoring an event that became known as the Koenig Cup, a competition to recognize the first boat to break the *Lee's* record and subsequent record breakers. Koenig took the competition seriously—he personally paid for the silver trophy—and defined a set of rules for the competition:

#### **RULES FOR COMPETITION**

- Competitors had to start in New Orleans and finish in St. Louis and give advance notice of their intent to challenge the record.
- The clock started when racers left New Orleans and didn't stop until they reached St. Louis; the Coast Guard in each city had to record starting and ending times.
- Racers had to run continuously; the only permissible stops were for fuel or repairs.
- Boats could carry spare parts but not spare engines.
- Engines and boats could be repaired but not replaced.
- Crew members could leave the boat but couldn't be replaced.<sup>2</sup>

It didn't take long to certify the first winner. In July 1929, a three-man crew of Memphians led by Dr. Louis Leroy piloted a twenty-six-foot runabout called the *Bogie* in a race against a fifty-five-foot yacht, the *Martha Jane*, captained by George M. Cox. It was Dr. Leroy's fourth attempt to beat the *Lee's* time. A previous attempt had been lauded for offering “an opportunity for accomplishment and observation in marine engineering.”<sup>3</sup>

The boats left from Canal Street in New Orleans on July 21, but engine trouble forced Cox to put the *Martha Jane* afloat at Natchez—and therefore forfeit the nickel wager to enter. Leroy and crew (Harvey Brown and Bob Hunter) forged ahead, forgoing sleep for four days while subsisting on a diet of buttermilk and orange juice.

En route, the *Bogie's* crew changed propellers three times and had to stop for twelve hours at Greenville, Mississippi, to replace the propeller shaft. After a frantic push in the last 50 miles, the crew completed the run in 87 hours and 31 minutes, nearly three hours faster than the *Robert E. Lee*. Even though their 150-horsepower Scripps motor was capable of pushing the boat along at 30 miles an hour, they averaged just 12 miles an hour for the entire trip.

After pulling into St. Louis early in the morning on July 25, the three men—“lean-faced and sunburned”—went straight to a hotel to clean up and sleep.<sup>4</sup> The *Bogie's* team finished at St. Louis at an exciting time. A new toll bridge had just opened over the

Mississippi River above the Chain of Rocks, and pilots Dale Jackson and Forest O'Brine were in the middle of setting a record for endurance flying (420 hours) with the *St. Louis Robin*. Commodore Koenig took Dr. Leroy and his wife to Lambert-St. Louis Flying Field, where they boarded a plane to get a close look at the *Robin*.

The *Bogie's* record didn't have the staying power of the *Lee's*. The following summer, five boats left New Orleans on August 8 in a race to St. Louis, but only Claude Mickler made it to St. Louis. He beat Dr. Leroy's time by nearly nine hours, racing solo in a boat he called *And How III*, a twelve-foot vessel that one paper wrote “might have been the captain's dinghy,” running with just one instrument, a tachometer, which he kept sandwiched between his legs.<sup>5</sup> He used it to make sure his motor was running between 3,500 and 3,800 revolutions per minute.

Mickler ran during the heat of the summer but found a creative way to find relief. “Sunday, when the sun was hottest, I was passing a Government boat of some kind and saw a fellow inside taking a shower. I pulled alongside, jumped aboard and told him to hurry up. I needed that one, too. That refreshed me a lot.”<sup>6</sup>

Mickler, though, was not awarded the Koenig Cup, because his motor had been replaced at Memphis, which violated the rules. While Mickler denied the motor change, he didn't seem too disappointed. “The trip was more to show an outboard boat could make the grade than to win a trophy,” he said.<sup>7</sup>

# New Orleans-to-St. Louis Boat Race Set for Aug. 27

Koenig Trophy, Symbolizing Speed Supremacy, to Be Goal of Drivers from Throughout Valley.

JUL 12 1931

By LEIGHTON RUTLEDGE.

Motor-boat enthusiasts of the Mississippi Valley will gather at New Orleans August 27 for the start of a race to St. Louis against time, the goal of which is the Koenig Trophy, emblematic of speed supremacy over a tricky and treacherous 1154-mile river route. This was made known yesterday when Commodore Ed C. Koenig of the St. Louis Yacht Club, donor of the prize now held by Dr. Louis Leroy of Memphis, announced plans forwarded to him by the New Orleans Yacht Club.

Probably a dozen boats will start the long grind, including outboard speedsters and elaborately rigged inboard cruising semispeed types. Already six or eight entries are assured, and more are likely to be forthcoming under the blanket challenge issued by the organization in the Crescent City. A provision of the award of the Koenig Cup is that notice be given the holder of the cup at least ninety days before the contemplated attempt is made. This proviso has been observed by the drivers, who originally contemplated individual assaults during the summer on Dr. Leroy's record of 87 hours and 31 minutes, but who have been rounded up to start in a competitive effort through the efforts of Dr. Leroy, the New Orleans Yacht Club and Commodore Koenig.

### St. Louis Competitor.

St. Louis has at least one entrant. He is Charles F. Schokmiller, 8329 Hall's Ferry road. On three previous occasions he has attempted to better the time for the distance, but each time was forced to give up the try by motor difficulties or adversities presented by the Father of Waters.

It is understood Dr. Leroy, who is a prominent Memphis surgeon, is rebuilding his inboard-motored craft, the Bogie, with a view to defending the trophy. Mayor F. Schelton of Greenville, Miss., also is a prospective entrant. L. O. Heard of the Police Department of Baton Rouge, La., is to be another competitor.

Women speedboat drivers, who have lately gained considerable prominence, notably through the sterling performances of Miss Loretta Turnbull of California, will have their representative in Miss

Donor of Trophy for River Classic



E. C. KOENIG

Irene Freutel of Memphis, whose boat is a 24-footer.

### Annual Race Foreseen.

It is the hope of New Orleans sportsmen, headed by the Yacht Club's commodore, P. B. Lusk, as well as the present holder of the trophy and its donor, to make a race such as this an annual affair. It would rival the Albany-New York City outboard jaunt in nation-wide interest, and would go a long way toward establishing national supremacy among speedboat pilots. The tortuous river course makes severe demands on men, boats and motors as to stamina and navigating skill.

The best time ever made from New Orleans to St. Louis by water is 74 hours 2 minutes. Frederick Smith, bus line official at Memphis, arrived at the foot of Olive street in his sedan-runabout at the end of that time on May 10. He did not, however, earn the Koenig trophy because of failure to file his challenge with Dr. Leroy ninety days previously.

Dr. Leroy's elapsed time was the first improvement upon the record of 90 hours and 14 minutes set up by the steamboat Robert E. Lee in her historic race with the Natchez in 1870.

In 1931, St. Louisans C.F. Schokmiller and George Blaich, Jr. piloted a boat from New Orleans to St. Louis in 78 hours, 46 minutes, breaking the old record by almost nine hours. Along the way, their carburetor broke twice, the second time just an hour from the finish line. Two other boats started at New Orleans on the same day, but neither finished. Schokmiller and Blaich were the second team to win the Koenig Cup.

(Image: St. Louis Globe-Democrat Collection, St. Louis Mercantile Library Association)



Edwin Koenig (center) congratulates Frank G. Burkarth (right) onboard the *Cifisco III*, a 37-foot cabin cruiser, after Burkarth won the Koenig Cup in October 1953. Burkarth, John Ritchie, and Herman Blattel completed the run in 61 hours, 22 minutes, 18 hours faster than the record set by Roy Smith and James Mawhee just three months earlier. (Image: Missouri Historical Society)

In 1931, St. Louisans G.F. Schokmiller and George Blaich, Jr., won the Koenig Cup when they crossed the finish line in the *Miss Evinrude II* eight hours faster than the *Bogie* had; they were the only boat of three that finished a race from New Orleans to St. Louis. It was the fifth try for Schokmiller, but he still didn't have an easy time of it. Somewhere around Natchez, Mississippi, they ran over a six-foot-long alligator gar. "When we hit him we thought it was all finished," Schokmiller told a reporter. "It spun us around and almost sent us over. And it didn't do him any real good either. He came to the top and floated belly up. Our propeller broke his back."<sup>8</sup>

Their carburetor broke twice, the second time just an hour from the finish line, and they nearly ran out of gas as they approached St. Louis, but Blaich "sat up on one side and tipped her [the boat] over a little bit and she started again and the last few drops of gas brought us in." By the time they finished, Blaich said their gas tank was "as dry right now as a Kansas Congressman's vote."<sup>9</sup>

The Great Depression and World War II limited the number of serious challenges until the early 1950s, so their record stood for twenty-two years. In 1952, Lee Sawyer, after two years of planning, tried to break the record with a solo run, but he had about as much bad luck as one person bit. At New

Orleans, he had trouble finding a place to put his boat in the water. Officials wouldn't let him use the Canal Street ramp, because they were apparently unnerved by the amount of gasoline he was carrying. Just three hours into his attempt, he ran onto a sandbar. For the next four days, he fought recurring motor troubles, fatigue, and a mild case of food poisoning. He lost the main channel a few times and missed a refueling stop before throwing in the towel after four days with little sleep and food. He beached his boat on a sandbar and collapsed, just thirty miles from St. Louis.

The following year, Roy F. Smith and his navigator, James E. Mawhee, set a new standard, finishing thirty-four minutes faster than Schokmiller and Blaich in a fourteen-foot boat called the *Mark Twain*. They had only slightly better luck than Sawyer. One of their motors broke down north of Memphis, so they sent it by truck to Cairo, Illinois, for repair. They lost eleven hours at New Madrid, Missouri, to another engine repair and limped into St. Louis with just one working motor.

Smith and Mawhee kept possession of the Cup for only three months. Frank G. Burkarth, John Ritchie, and Herman Blattel blew away the old record by nearly eighteen hours, pulling the *Cifisco III* into St. Louis on October 8; 150 boaters at the St. Louis Yacht Club cheered

them on, as boats followed them to the finish line around Cliff Cave County Park: "Seen from midstream, the convoy was a glowing circle of bobbing boats, laden with boat lovers bearing red flares. The *Cifisco* bore down through their midst, and the welcoming din began."<sup>10</sup>

The persistent Lee Sawyer came back with another solo run in 1954; he not only reached the finish line ("Sunburned, exhausted and happy") but also set a new record with his boat, the *Huckleberry Finn*, that shaved another four and a half hours off the record.<sup>11</sup> Still, his run didn't exactly go smoothly. Below Vicksburg, he ran into a logjam and found himself quickly surrounded by trees, twigs, and grapevines. When his engines died, he jumped into the river and used pliers to cut away a vine that had wound itself around his propellers. He was also slowed—twice—when he got entangled in commercial fishing lines.

Creativity was a hallmark of many of the record setters. In 1955, brothers Raymond and Charles Loetscher and navigator Max Zeiner completed a record-setting run in a homemade 26-foot boat called *Loetschers' Little Rock*. It was powered by three V-8 car engines that the river men configured to run together. They also built a guard around the propellers to protect them from debris.



They lost a few minutes at Arkansas City when the harbor police pulled them over for exceeding the twenty-miles-per-hour limit, but they convinced the officer that they were supposed to be going that fast because they were racing. Their effort almost failed near Sainte Genevieve when they hit a sandbar, but four hours of furious digging set them free. When a reporter asked Zeiner—who had never been on the Mississippi prior to that trip—where they were when they hit the sandbar, he replied, “we were right where we were supposed to be. It was the sand bar that was lost. Somebody must have put it there to sabotage our efforts.”<sup>12</sup> In spite of the delays, they broke the old record by nearly four hours.

The pace of change picked up in the mid-1950s. Three records were set in 1956 alone, then broken again in 1957 and 1958, the last one cutting the record time from fifty-three hours to twenty-nine-and-a-half hours, nearly a full day quicker. Racers approached the challenge with different strategies (and budgets). In 1956, for example, the Loetscher brothers were back for another attempt, competing against the *William Tedford*. The Loetschers ran in a 26-foot long steel boat powered by three Cadillac engines. Tedford, his 17-year-old son, Bill, Jr., and Nick Cioll raced in a 15-foot-long plywood boat powered by 33-horsepower engines. “Tedford said his boat weighed less than one of the Loetscher’s engines,” according to the *Post-Dispatch*.<sup>13</sup> The Tedfords crafted the three-engine configuration not for speed—it only increased their top speed by two miles per hour—but to create a backup engine for their catamaran, because “the boat could plane with two engines but

not with one.”<sup>14</sup> Tedford won and set a new record in the process, although it only held up for one month.

By the 1950s, racers chasing the Koenig Cup were getting better at managing river hazards, although they still occasionally ran into driftwood and sandbars. Roy Cullum and Richard Arant “struck so many logs in the last few miles that they thought they would sink before the finish.”<sup>15</sup> William Tedford’s successful run in July 1956 included ninety minutes lost when they ran over an obstruction and damaged all three propellers. Dangers were especially acute after dark, which is why many racers chose to run when the moon was full.

Fatigue was always problematic for racers, however. “We went through something of an endurance test ourselves,” Dr. Louis Leroy had said after finishing his run in 1929. When his crew arrived, “Their eyes were red slits, their cheeks sunken, their clothing greasy and wrinkled. They estimated they had lost from 15 to 20 pounds each. Dr. Leroy’s Van Dyke beard was ragged and all were unshaven. Their skin was a deep brown from the beating of the sun.”<sup>16</sup>

Most racers slept little or not at all. Sawyer, in his first solo run, woke up in the water at one point; he had fallen asleep at the wheel and run onto a sandbar. He also lost the main channel a couple of times when fatigue-induced confusion contributed to navigation errors. Roy Cullum reported that he “started to see boats and buildings and men walking on the river” near the end of his run.<sup>17</sup>

It didn’t help that most racers weren’t able to eat much while the

boat was running. “Eating makes you sleepy and we couldn’t afford to sleep,” Dr. Leroy said.<sup>18</sup> Apart from the need to pay attention when flying over water at high speeds, many of the boats vibrated too violently to make eating practical. Dr. Leroy’s team had gotten by on buttermilk and orange juice. The Tedfords sometimes got a burger from their ground crew at a refueling stop but otherwise relied on beverages from their cooler. Roy Cullum and Richard Arant just drank a lot of water and milk.

Many racing teams included a navigator in the crew, often an experienced Mississippi River pilot, to keep the boat in deep water. “We’d never have made it without his [Nick Cioll’s] ability to smell out the sandbars and all that floating real estate that keeps you from sleeping as it comes at you at 40 miles an hour,” William Tedford, Sr., said.<sup>19</sup>

Even with the help of the navigator, though, flying up a big river at high speeds was difficult work. “It’s not any fun,” Bill Tedford, Jr., recalled. Commercial barge traffic stirred up large wakes, or what Tedford called swells, “and those swells roll down the river for at least a mile below the boat, if he’s going upstream and you’re going upstream, the river gets rougher and rougher and rougher and it goes from shore to shore. You can’t get around it without jumping over these waves. . . . You’re leaping over these waves, which is why we liked to have the catamaran. . . . It kinda cushioned the impact when you came down the other side of the waves.”<sup>20</sup>

Besides the bumps and hazards of barge wakes, the crew was busy the whole time the boat was moving. Navigators kept track of

## **Interest in racing on the Mississippi River rekindled in the 1980s, thanks to flashy new speedboats and celebrity competitors**

deep water. Drivers couldn't take their eyes off the river. If there were other crew members, they were either watching for debris in the river or busy with other tasks. Bill Tedford, Jr., said whoever wasn't driving "had to constantly change these fuel tanks, because you run out of fuel about every 45 minutes."<sup>21</sup>

The technology continued to improve over time. Fiberglass hulls came into use and engines grew more and more powerful. In 1929, Dr. Leroy broke the *Lee*'s record with a boat that could top out around 30 miles per hour. In their July 1956 run, Tedford's team sometimes ran at 40 miles per hour at night. In 1968, Lou Cooley's boat could hit a top speed of 140 miles per hour.

After the flurry of activity in the 1950s, the records proved harder to beat. Bill Tedford took the Koenig Cup back in 1964. In 1968, the husband and wife duo of Lou and Dorothy Cooley topped Tedford's time by 17 minutes, thanks in part to a support team of a dozen members spread out among an accompanying airplane and refueling teams on land.

The last Koenig Cup was awarded in 1972 to Bill Tedford again, who ran with his usual team (son Bill, Jr., and Nick Cioll) in a boat they called the *Robert E Lee VI*. Their record time of 26 hours and 50 minutes bettered the Cooley's time by two hours.

It was Tedford's third win, and the rules for the competition stipulated that as soon as there

was a three-time winner, the trophy would be retired. Interest in the races was waning by then, as well. In 1929, the *Post-Dispatch* provided daily updates on the progress of the *Bogie*. Most of the successful runs after that received press coverage both before and after the race. By 1972, however, Tedford's new record merited barely a paragraph in a round-up column in the sports section.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Mississippi Marathon**

The Koenig Cup wasn't the only speed race on the Mississippi inspired by the *Lee* and *Natchez*. In 1956, the Mississippi River Marathon Racing Association sponsored its first annual New Orleans to St. Louis race. Six boats started at New Orleans, but only the boat piloted by Byron Pool and Lonnie Kirkpatrick finished. They completed the run on August 6, finishing about five hours slower than the record at the time.

The race was moved to Labor Day weekend in 1957 and 1958, and Pool and Kirkpatrick won both times, beating fifteen boats in 1957 and twenty-eight boats in 1958. Their third win brought a quick end to the competition, but their 1958 finish established a new record of 29 hours and 29 minutes.<sup>23</sup>

The marathon returned in 1959 with a new sponsor, the Mid-America Racing Association, and with two significant changes: the race ran downstream from St. Louis to New Orleans and boats only ran during daylight hours.

They ran the competition in 1959 and 1960, then in 1961 shortened the course to end at Greenville, Mississippi, instead of New Orleans.

The Mississippi River Marathon Racing Association returned in 1970 to sponsor an event commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of the race between the *Lee* and *Natchez*. The marathon started at New Orleans again and ran upriver to St. Louis, where boats finished on July 4 in front of big crowds celebrating Independence Day. Only stock boats with outboard motors were allowed to compete, and the race ran only during daylight hours; boats made a mandatory overnight stop at Greenville, Mississippi. While the pre-race publicity suggested that the organizers had high hopes to attract competitors, only three boats ultimately entered. Bill Petty and John Pierce finished first.

### **The Grace Cup**

Interest in racing on the Mississippi River rekindled in the 1980s, thanks to flashy new speedboats and celebrity competitors, culminating in a record that may never be beaten.

In 1982, Larry Smith, founder of Team Scarab racing boats, asked Michael Reagan, son of President Ronald Reagan, to pilot a boat to challenge Bill Tedford's 1972 record. Reagan, whose racing credentials included a win at the 1967 Outboard World Championships at Lake Havasu, Arizona, needed some convincing,



Robert Cox holding the Grace Cup trophy in January 2020. Cox won the trophy in October 1983 when he completed the race from New Orleans to St. Louis in 23 hours, nine minutes, beating Michael Reagan's record from the previous year by two hours. The Grace Cup was retired in 1986 with Cox as the last champion. (Image: Robert Cox)

also became a fundraiser for the U.S. Olympic Committee.

Reagan leveraged his name recognition and connections to convince the W.R. Grace Company, owners of the *Robert E. Lee* riverboat restaurant at St. Louis, to sponsor the event. They donated \$102,700 (\$100 per mile) to the U. S. Olympic Committee and established the Grace Cup Challenge as the successor to the Koenig Cup. Robert Coquillette, executive vice president of the Grace Company, proclaimed that the challenge “will stand as a permanent symbol of the incredible athletic and technical

achievement represented by the New Orleans to St. Louis speed run. It is one of the most grueling endurance tests in America.”<sup>24</sup> Like the Koenig Cup, the trophy would be awarded to any boat that established a new record time for a continuous run from New Orleans to St. Louis.

Smith and Reagan signed up additional major sponsors for the event they called Assault on the Mississippi, including Anheuser-Busch, which sponsored their three boats—*Bud Light I, II, and III*. Reagan started the race from New Orleans in *Bud Light I* along with crewmates

Johnny Mann on the throttles and Mike Low as navigator. Reagan, though, would pilot whichever boat was in the lead for the final leg into St. Louis. That turned out to be an easy decision, as *Bud Light I* was the only boat in position to challenge the record.

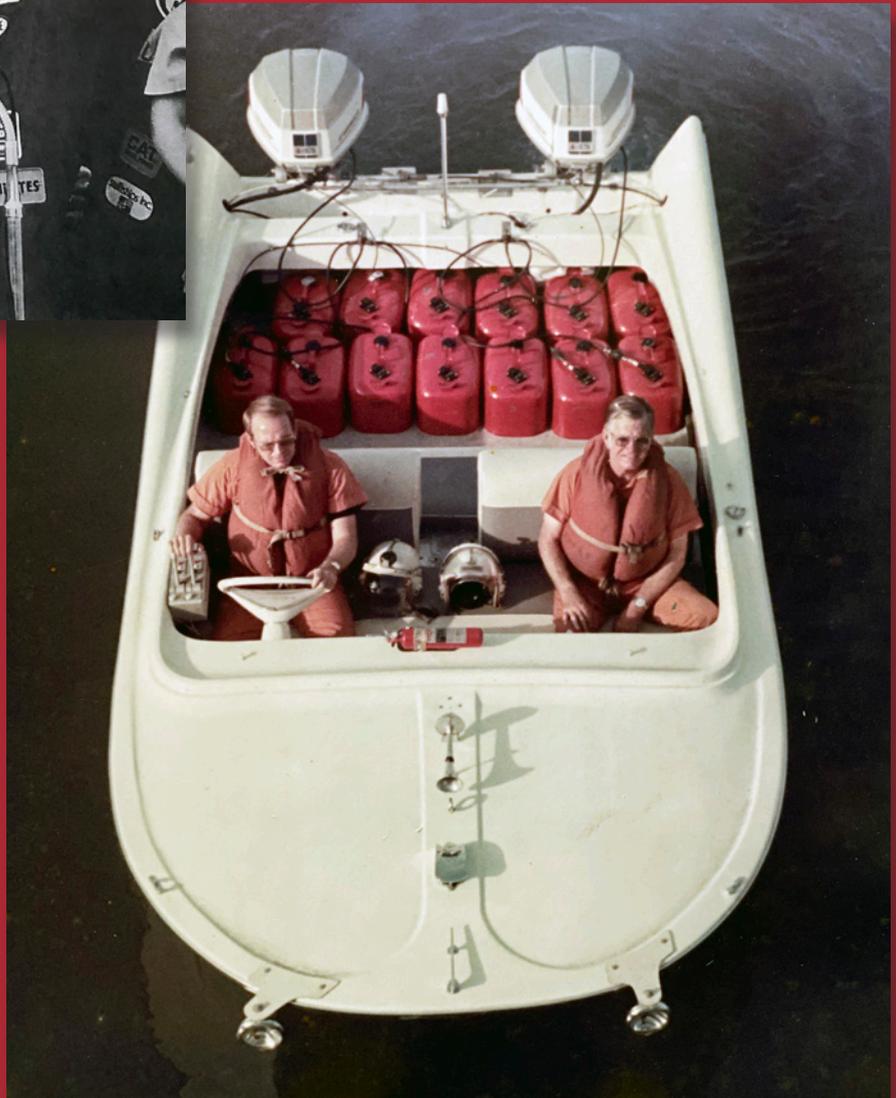
Even with the big budget, fancy boats, and extensive advance team, Reagan’s boat had a rough time. Below Vicksburg, *Bud Light I* hit a log in the river and lost an engine, and the crew had to change the lower units on their engines three times during the race. At Memphis, an error by their ground crew left them

Michael Reagan, son of then President Ronald Reagan, holding the Grace Cup on July 22, 1982, after setting a new record of 25 hours, 11 minutes for the run from New Orleans to St. Louis. Reagan's team spent more than \$500,000 on the attempt and raised another \$500,000 for the U.S. Olympic Committee. (St. Louis Mercantile Library Association, Globe-Democrat Collection)



William Tedford Sr. and Jr., holding the Koenig Cup in 1972. The Cup was first awarded to Dr. Louis Leroy in 1929, the first person to beat the Robert E. Lee's record time from New Orleans to St. Louis. In 43 years, the Cup changed hands 13 times. In 1972, William Tedford, Sr., won the Cup for the third time, which, under the rules of the race, gave him permanent possession of the silver trophy. (Image: William Tedford, Jr.)

William Tedford Sr., and Jr., in their boat, Robert E. Lee VI. In 1972, the father and son teamed with navigator Nick Cioll to set a new standard for the run from New Orleans to St. Louis, finishing in 26 hours, 50 minutes. To minimize refueling stops, they equipped the boat with multiple gas tanks, each one providing enough fuel for about 45 minutes. (Image: William Tedford, Jr.)



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**“Maybe it’s easier to put these programs together because of who I am, but, remember: The Mississippi River didn’t give a damn who was driving.” –Michael Reagan**

short on fuel, so they had to make an unplanned stop at New Madrid, Missouri, that cost them ninety minutes. The stop also prompted the helicopter that had been shadowing them (and carrying corporate sponsors August Busch, Bernie Little, and Bill Marriott) to land and find out what had gone wrong.

Down the stretch another engine failed, but *Bud Light I* ultimately succeeded, breaking Tedford’s record by 99 minutes. They circled in front of the *Robert E. Lee* a few times, waving to a small crowd on the floating restaurant as a band played “Meet Me in St. Louie, Louie.”

After the race was over, Reagan was asked how much his famous name helped him set the record; he observed, “Maybe it’s easier to put these programs together because of who I am, but, remember: The Mississippi River didn’t give a damn who was driving.”<sup>25</sup>

The Assault on the Mississippi crew spent at least \$500,000 on the race, while raising another \$500,000 for the U.S. Olympic Committee. President Reagan spoke at a celebratory banquet in St. Louis, where Bill Tedford, Sr. and Jr., were present; Michael Reagan had invited them as special guests. Tedford, by the way, spent about \$2,000 for his slightly less fast time; his support crew consisted of four buddies who bought gas in advance (with cash).

Team Reagan’s hold on the record didn’t last long. The next year, Bob Cox and Dean Pink left New Orleans at 12:31 a.m. in a

standard nineteen-foot Charger bass boat. As they sped upriver, a few tow captains pointed their spotlights on the river to help them navigate through the darkness. Like Tedford, Cox had a small support crew, just a couple of friends who helped with refueling by trucking cans of gasoline from stop to stop; he still managed to beat Reagan’s time by two hours. Cox guessed he spent about \$7,500 for his race.

Cox hadn’t been aware of the Grace Challenge Cup when he began the run, although he knew about Michael Reagan’s record run the previous year. His primary reason for racing had been to prove the endurance and capabilities of the bass boats he sold from his mid-Missouri dealership. He contacted officials about halfway to St. Louis, who later confirmed that he qualified for the record. Reagan called to congratulate him, and the two later met in Oregon when Cox was officially awarded the trophy.

Oil tycoon Patrick F. Taylor was the only significant challenger to Cox’s hold on the Grace Cup. In September 1983, he prepared a \$250,000, 38-foot Bertram offshore racer he called *Tygertayl* to break Cox’s record. Taylor had never raced a boat before, but he heard about Reagan’s attempt and figured he could do better.<sup>26</sup> He equipped his boat with radar and shortwave radio to avoid hazards in the river. “Hitting (a sandbar) is a real no-no,” he said before the attempt began.<sup>27</sup> He ran with a full moon and with the advantage of a falling river and big support team that included a helicopter. Like

Reagan, he used the attempt to raise money for the U.S. Olympic Committee. In spite of all the preparations, Taylor’s September 1988 attempt failed. It ended, in fact, when he ran the boat onto a sandbar. He ultimately made five attempts to break the record, all of which were unsuccessful.<sup>28</sup>

Cox, too, made a few more unsuccessful attempts to break his own record, including one in 1985 in which he ran onto a sandbar near Natchez. The impact broke his neck. A towboat pulled the boat free, after which he managed to pilot the boat for another two hundred miles until the engine quit. “My right arm from the middle of my right finger in the middle was numb from all the way there to my shoulder to my neck,” Cox said.<sup>29</sup> A week after the accident, he underwent surgery to remove two discs from his neck.

The Grace Company retired the Cup Challenge in 1986, but Cox came back with Jim Highfill in 1987 and beat his 1984 record by nearly three hours. In all his attempts, Cox never brought along a navigator or relied on maps. “We just run by the seat of our britches,” he said.<sup>30</sup>

***The Budweiser Challenge Cup/ Mississippi River Race***

In 1987 eleven teams lined up for a new take on the New Orleans to St. Louis run: the Budweiser Challenge Cup–Mississippi River Race. Unlike other races, boats competed head-to-head and only ran during daylight hours, eliminating the dangers of

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## **Arneson entered a thirty-two-foot Skater catamaran powered by a 1,325-horsepower G.E. T 58 turbine engine.**

speeding along the Mississippi at high speeds in the dark. Teams raced 641 miles to Memphis, where they spent the night, then ran the remaining four hundred miles to the Arch the next day.

The first team out of the gate on September 5 was also the first team out of the race. Just sixty miles after the start, Larry Robbins hit a barge wake at 65 miles per hour and went airborne. When the boat crashed back down, the impact broke his arm. Just five teams finished the first day's run. As they raced into St. Louis the next day, a crowd of some 25,000 lined the riverfront to cheer the winners. Most were probably there to catch a glimpse of the novice pilot of the 43-foot Wellcraft Scarab, a man named Don Johnson, who was better known for starring in the television show *Miami Vice*. "It's treacherous," he said. "In a minute's notice you can be upside-down or sideways or snagged in a tree. It's a grueling run."<sup>31</sup>

Johnson's team won the race (they were the only team to complete both legs) with a time under 20 hours, but since they only ran during daylight hours, they would not have qualified for the Koenig Cup or the Grace Challenge Cup.

Budweiser didn't return as the sponsor in 1988, but the event still attracted 21 teams, including Mike Mitchell of Fayetteville, Tenn., who wanted to race "for the challenge of beating the Mississippi."<sup>32</sup>

Mitchell didn't get the chance, though; he found a leak in the gas tank and had to withdraw.

Of the seventeen boats that began the race at New Orleans, just eight finished. Seven of those eight boats beat Don Johnson's time from the year before. Childhood friends Roy Fulton, Jr., and Jimmy Jackson won the 1988 race, finishing in just under fifteen hours for the two-day, daytime-only run. River racing was a Fulton family tradition. Fulton's father, Roy Fulton, Sr., won the Mississippi River Marathon three times (1959–1961). Fulton, Sr., also served on Fulton, Jr.'s, support team in 1988. The faster times proved problematic for race planners. The top four boats finished four hours earlier than expected, so no crowds on the riverfront cheered them on.

Organizers had high hopes for the Mississippi River Race. Cities along the Mississippi wanted it to be a centerpiece of Labor Day riverfront festivals, like Greenville, Mississippi's Delta Days. Organizer Elizabeth Gentry Sayad "hoped the race would develop into 'the Indianapolis 500 of motorboat racing.'"<sup>33</sup> Kenneth Bitting, Jr., the race's co-organizer, wrote: "We are structuring it to become the America's Cup of Power Boat Racing – the Mississippi 1039!"<sup>34</sup> In spite of their optimism, they failed to raise enough money to run the event in 1989 and had to cancel.

### **The Mississippi River Cup Challenge**

In 1990, Ted McIntyre founded the Gulf Coast Power Boat Association to revive the continuous run format. His company, Marine Turbine Technologies, spent \$75,000 to get the race going. It started and ended at the same points as the Koenig Cup, but unlike the older competition, boats were allowed to replace engines and to carry extra engines on board.

One of the four teams that signed up was headed by 69-year-old Howard Arneson, an inventor whose innovations included an automatic vacuuming system for swimming pools and a surface drive that significantly improved the speed and efficiency of motorboat engines. Arneson entered a 32-foot Skater catamaran powered by a 1,325-horsepower G.E. T 58 turbine engine. Two electric bass motors boosted its maneuverability. The boat was modified to carry 300 gallons of Jet A fuel, enough to ensure that it would only have to stop to refuel four times.

The race began around 7 a.m. on September 22 when Arneson ignited his turbine's afterburner, sending a plume of fire shooting straight up into the air. Arneson and team, sporting orange helmets fitted with face shields and orange life preservers, shot out from the New Orleans harbor and into a lead that they never surrendered. "I made up my mind to hammer it right from

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Publicity flyer for the 1988 Mississippi River Race. The race succeeded the Grace Cup Challenge, although the format was changed to a two-day, daylight only run. Actor Don Johnson won the inaugural Mississippi River Race in 1987. (Image: Missouri State Historical Society, Elizabeth Gentry Sayad Collection)

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## **In the end, Arneson shattered Cox's 1987 record by nearly eight hours, finishing the entire run in just 12 hours and 40 minutes.**

the beginning," Arneson said after the race.<sup>35</sup>

For 1,039 miles, Arneson stuck to the main channel of the Mississippi, resisting the temptation to follow chutes that might save a few miles. As they roared up the river at speeds up to 110 miles an hour, tow boat crews waved and yelled their support.

Traveling at high speed on the river was jarring. "Your eyeballs jiggle around in your head, and the wind buffeting—imagine trying to stand up in a 100-mph gale for 12 hours," Arneson said. "I was black and blue for a month." As Arneson roared into St. Louis, he "had a hard time seeing, my eyes were watering from big tears. You get rummy, emotional, so I had to think of other things." Navigator Tom George added: "It was a dream come true. A pure delight! That boat ran as planned and history was made!"<sup>36</sup>

In the end, Arneson shattered Cox's 1987 record by nearly eight hours, finishing the entire run in just 12 hours and forty minutes. He ran so fast that he beat his ground support team into St. Louis by two hours, even though he had traveled nearly 400 miles further than them. His time was a full three days faster than the *Robert E. Lee's*.

Ted McIntyre, the race organizer and one of the other competitors, observed, "What he did to that record is going to change the whole complexion of the event. It's a daytime race now. He devastated the record, made a

mockery of it. I'm half his age, and I was a whipped puppy."<sup>37</sup> McIntyre was forced to end his own attempt at New Madrid, Missouri.

### **Harry Truman vs. Robert E. Lee**

Virtually all of the boats competing for the fastest time from New Orleans to St. Louis were small motorboats. In 1949, a commercial boat took a shot at breaking the *Lee's* record. The *Harry Truman*, built for the Federal Barge Lines in 1948, was among the most powerful tows of its time. Powered by twin 1,600-horse-power diesel engines that turned two propellers, the tow was capable of a top speed of 18 knots (20.7 miles per hour). Captain Willis "Cannonball" Smith guided the boat from New Orleans on March 9, 1949, with the intent of breaking the *Lee's* record.

Outfitted with the best and most modern equipment, the *Harry Truman* still wasn't immune to the difficulties experienced by the power boaters. An electrical problem slowed them down near Profit's Island (about 150 miles upriver of New Orleans), and mechanical troubles near Cairo, Illinois, caused a delay of nearly three hours. The *Harry Truman* ultimately fell one hour and twenty-one minutes short of the *Lee's* record. Captain Smith was in good spirits in spite of falling short: "Smith, who derives his nickname from his complexion and the fact he 'cannonballs' through fog when other skippers

tie up for safety, was in no mood of depression, despite two nights without sleep."<sup>38</sup>

By the time twentieth-century boaters took on the *Robert E. Lee's* record, the Mississippi River had been significantly altered. The river had been shortened and mapped and buoys placed to mark the main channel. While that reduced some of the difficulties that the *Lee* and *Natchez* had faced, debris in the river was still problematic. In addition, the wakes kicked up by commercial barges created hazardous conditions for twentieth-century boats racing at high speeds.

Whether it was coal-fired steamboats pumping muddy water through their boilers or catamarans powered by jet fuel, the races continued to showcase advances in boat technology. But while the differences in technology from the *Robert E. Lee* to the *Bogie* to Arneson's *Skater* catamaran are stark, technology alone wasn't enough to set a new speed record. Some records were set by racers using standard boating equipment of the era, while many of the most advanced boats were derailed by mechanical or human failures.

For Tom George, who served as navigator for high-profile racers including Arneson and Don Johnson, Arneson's record had brought the competition back to its roots: "In the beginning it [the race from New Orleans to St. Louis] was a test for boats and the riverboat pilot's knowledge of the river. Then the race became more of a test for the boats. Now with the record at 12 hrs. 40 min. 51

Edwin Koenig (right) with his father, Henry, on the front porch of their home at 3836 Kosciusko Street in 1943. Edwin Koenig, long-time commodore of the St. Louis Yacht Club, founded a competition for speed boats that was inspired by the famous Lee vs. Natchez steamboat race of 1870. Edwin shared a love for the Mississippi with his father, who had once been a prominent member of the Western Rowing Club.

(St. Louis Mercantile Library Association, Globe-Democrat Collection)



sec it will be a test for equipment as well the navigator's and pilot's knowledge of the river."<sup>39</sup>

The competition, though, also tested the personal perseverance of competitors and their ability to adapt to difficult conditions. While all the races featured an often unstated drama pitting human technology against nature that fueled some of the public interest, ultimately, the most successful racers were the ones who adapted to the river's world rather than trying to conquer it. And it's not likely that these races would have had the cultural staying power if they had been held anywhere other than the Mississippi River. As George summed up: "The race has always be[en] a great test of man and equipment on one of the greatest rivers in our world and always will be!"<sup>40</sup>

### Edwin Koenig

Edwin C. Koenig, the son of Henry C. and Lizzette (Bruesselbach) Koenig, was a longtime Mississippi River enthusiast, promoter of motor boating, and avid racer. "It has always been my ambition to own the fastest power boat in the world," he told the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in 1927.<sup>41</sup> He set a few speed records with sailboats as a young man, and in 1904 he built his first racing boat, a steam-powered craft he called *Idlewild*. He also built a series of speed boats he called *Independence* and regularly challenged others to race him. On October 18, 1908, while attempting to set a speed record with the *Independence I* on the Mississippi at St. Louis, a rudder broke, and Koenig narrowly avoided crashing into one of the piers of the Eads Bridge.

In his role as commodore of the St. Louis Yacht Club (Ted Drewes was also a member), he organized motor boating events—regattas—on the Mississippi River, including one that attracted a reported 150,000 spectators. In 1926, he challenged Major William B. Robertson, a pioneer in aviation, to race a power boat on the Mississippi River as part of the second annual motorboat regatta. Twenty-five thousand spectators on the riverfront watched a full day of motorboat races. At the end, the cruiser *Miss St. Louis*, the fastest boat of the day, took to the river. As it passed the starting line, "An airplane piloted by Charles E.

Lindbergh, chief mail pilot of the Robertson Aircraft Organization . . . swooped down to an even start."<sup>42</sup> Lindbergh's plane, "a rickety old model," easily beat *Miss St. Louis* to the finish line.<sup>43</sup> Lindbergh then turned the plane around and finished with a flourish by flying under the Eads Bridge.

Koenig owned three excursion boats that operated on the Mississippi at St. Louis, beginning with the *Kabekona*—"a fabulously appointed excursion boat"—that he owned with Andrew D. Franz; they ran exclusive cruises on the Mississippi River for the city's well-to-do from 1915 to 1917.<sup>44</sup>

Koenig also operated the *Belle of the Bends* for three years after World War I, and in the 1930s he bought the *Erastus Wells*, renaming it the *City of St. Louis*. He spent over \$25,000 of his own money to convert the boat into the headquarters of the St. Louis Yacht Club. In 1938, he challenged the owners of the *Delta Queen* steamboat to race the *City of St. Louis* from New Orleans to St. Louis, even offering a wager of \$25,000; they declined.

Koenig died in 1960—he was 83 years old—and left most of his money to Washington University, Saint Louis University (SLU), Shriners Hospital, and Cardinal Glennon Hospital, which is why you will find a residence hall at Washington University and a plaza at SLU named after him.

## Speed Records from New Orleans to St. Louis

Date	Time	Captain/Crew	Boat	Engines	Event
1844, May 8	95:09	<b>Captain J.M. Convers</b>	<i>JM White</i> : steamboat		Steamboat era
1870, June 22	94:45	<b>Captain Thomas Paul Leathers</b>	<i>Natchez</i> : steamboat		Steamboat era
1870, July 4	90:14	<b>Captain John W. Cannon</b>	<i>Robert E. Lee</i> : steamboat		Steamboat era
1929, July 25	87:31	<b>Dr. Louis Leroy, Harvey Brown, Bob Hunter</b>	<i>Bogie</i> : 26-foot mahogany Chris Craft motorboat	One 150-horsepower Scripps motor	Koenig Cup
1930, Aug 11	78:40*	<b>Claude M. Mickler</b>	<i>And How III</i> : 12-foot outboard motorboat	Outboard motor	Did not qualify for Koenig Cup: changed motors en route
1931, May 10	74:02*	<b>Frederick Smith, Harvey Brown, E. Grady Lyle, Edmund Higgins</b>	<i>Greyhound</i> : 23-foot long runabout	One 130-hp motor	Did not qualify for Koenig Cup: did not provide advance notice of attempt
1931, Sept. 28	79:46	<b>Charles F. Schokmiller, George Blaich, Jr.</b>	<i>Miss Evinrude II</i> : mahogany outboard motorboat	Four cylinder motor	Koenig Cup
1953, July 5	79:12	<b>Roy F. Smith, James E. Mawhee</b>	<i>Mark Twain</i> : 14-foot motorboat	Outboard motors	Koenig Cup
1953, Oct. 8	61:22	<b>Frank G. Burkarth, John Ritchie, Herman Blattel</b>	<i>Cifisco III</i> : 37-foot cabin cruiser	Twin 145-hp engines	Koenig Cup
1954, Aug. 15	56:56	<b>Lee Sawyer</b>	<i>Huckleberry Finn</i> : 15-foot motorboat	Twin Mark 40 Mercury 25-hp motors	Koenig Cup
1955, Aug. 5	52:53	<b>Raymond Loetscher, Charles Loetscher, Max Zeiner</b>	<i>Loetscher's Little Rock</i> : Homemade 26-foot steel motorboat	Three V-8 car engines configured to run together	Koenig Cup
1956, June 24	47:20	<b>Roy Cullum, Dick Arant</b>	<i>The Rambler</i> : 15-foot aluminum motorboat	Two 40-hp outboard motors	Koenig Cup
1956, July 22	41:57	<b>Bill Tedford, Sr., Bill Tedford, Jr., Nick Cioll</b>	<i>Robert E. Lee III</i> : 15-foot marine plywood motorboat	Three 30-hp engines	Koenig Cup
1956, Aug. 25	39:41	<b>Lee Sawyer, John Springmeyer</b>	<i>Huckleberry Finn</i> : 15-foot plywood boat	Two 40-hp outboard motors	Koenig Cup
1957, July 12	31:11	<b>Roy Cullum, Lynn Graham</b>	<i>Rambler II</i> : 16-foot Crosby fiberglass boat	Two Mercury 60-hp motors	Koenig Cup
1958, Aug. 31	29:29*	<b>Byron Pool, Lonnie Kirkpatrick</b>	<i>Bing Ding III</i> : 17-foot Crosby fiberglass motorboat	Twin 70-hp, Mark 78 Mercury outboards	Mississippi River Marathon Race; did not qualify for Koenig Cup
1964, July 23	29:22	<b>Bill Tedford, Nick Cioll</b>	<i>Robert E. Lee V</i> : catamaran	Twin 90-hp motors	Koenig Cup
1968, July 7	29:05	<b>Lou Cooley, Dorothy Cooley, Larry Rentz</b>	22-foot catamaran	Four 105-hp Chrysler outboard motors	Koenig Cup
1972, July 23	26:50	<b>Bill Tedford, Sr., Bill Tedford, Jr., Nick Cioll</b>	<i>Robert E. Lee VI</i> : 17-foot fiberglass catamaran	Twin 120-hp Evinrudes	Koenig Cup
1982, July 22	25:11	<b>Michael Reagan, Mike Low, Johnny Mann</b>	<i>Bud Light I</i> : 38-foot Wellcraft Scarab	Three 425-hp V8 Evinrude motors	Grace Cup Challenge
1983, Oct. 5	23:09	<b>Bob Cox, Dean Pink</b>	19-foot Charger bass boat	One 235-HP Johnson outboard motor	Grace Cup Challenge
1984, Aug. 11	21:04	<b>Les Westmoreland, Jerry Jackson, Bruce Ellingson</b>	18-foot Baja sportster	One 200-hp Mercury motor	Not sanctioned
1985, Aug. 30	18:43	<b>Bruce Ellingson, Jerry Jackson</b>	<i>Miss Oklahoma</i> : 20-foot Concord ski boat	Johnson 3.6 GT V-8 motor	Not sanctioned
1987, Aug. 7	20:15	<b>Bob Cox, Jim Highfill</b>	20-foot Charger bass boat	300-hp Johnson V-8 outboard motor	APBA sanctioned
1987, Aug. 8	18:39*	<b>Sam Beelman, Tom Seals</b>			Not sanctioned by APBA
1990, Sept. 22	12:40	<b>Howard Arneson, Thomas George, Jay Niccum</b>	32-foot Skater catamaran	One 1,325-horsepower GE T 58 turbine engine	Mississippi River Challenge Cup

\*Unofficial times

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Way, Jr., *She Takes the Horns: Steamboat Racing on the Western Waters* (Cincinnati, 1953), 74.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Koenig Cup rules published in 1982, the official starting point of the race was the Coast Guard fireboat at the end of Esplanade Street; the finish line in St. Louis was the Coast Guard base at Iron Street. Departure and finishing times had to be recorded in the official log of each Coast Guard facility and approved by the Duty Officer. See Mark Spencer, "Assault on the Mississippi," *Powerboat* (September 1982), 19.

<sup>3</sup> "Speed boat in race against time from New Orleans to here," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 31, 1928.

<sup>4</sup> "Motorboat beats Robert E. Lee's time to St. Louis," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 25, 1929, 32.

<sup>5</sup> "Outboard motorboat beats record from New Orleans," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 12, 1930, 3A.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Another boat also beat the Bogie's record but was not awarded the Koenig Cup. In May 1931, four Memphians—Frederick Smith, Harvey Brown, E. Grady Lyle, and Edmund Higgins—finished in seventy-four hours, two minutes. Their effort was disqualified from the Koenig Cup because they failed to notify the committee ninety days in advance of their effort. Edwin Koenig nonetheless met the crew at the finish line and had a cup made for them to commemorate their achievement. Leighton Rutledge, "New Orleans to St. Louis river speed mark broken," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, May 11, 1931.

<sup>8</sup> "New Orleans-St. Louis motorboat racers win trophy and \$400," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 29, 1931, 10A.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> "Up-river speedboat record beaten by 17 hours, 50 minutes," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 9, 1953, 4C.

<sup>11</sup> "Sawyer sets speedboat record from New Orleans to St. Louis," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 16, 1954, 3A.

<sup>12</sup> "Record-breaking boat men tell of difficulties during river race," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 6, 1955, 3A.

<sup>13</sup> "Two attempts planned on river speed record," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 20, 1956, 4A.

<sup>14</sup> William Tedford, Jr., interview with the author, November 25, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> "New river record set for run from New Orleans," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 25, 1956, 3A.

<sup>16</sup> "Motorboat beats Robert E. Lee's time to St. Louis," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 25, 1929, 32.

<sup>17</sup> "2-man boat sets record, New Orleans to St. Louis," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, June 25, 1956.

<sup>18</sup> "Motorboat beats Robert E. Lee's time to St. Louis," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 25, 1929, 32.

<sup>19</sup> "Speedboaters set new record for New Orleans-St. Louis run," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 23, 1956, 7C.

<sup>20</sup> William Tedford, Jr., interview with the author, November 25, 2019.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> "Sport Shorts: Miscellaneous," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 24, 1972, 3C.

<sup>23</sup> Pool and Kirkpatrick's run, however, did not meet the criteria to qualify for the Koenig Cup. William Tedford, Jr., interview with the author, November 25, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Spencer, "Assault on the Mississippi," 16.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Herson, "A Taylor-made race for a very rich daredevil," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 20, 1983, 11A.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Three teams beat Cox's 1983 record, but none was sanctioned by the American Power Boat Association (APBA), which had become the de facto authority ensuring consistency between racing attempts. In August 1984, Les Westmoreland, Jerry Jackson, and Bruce Ellingson reached St. Louis in twenty-one hours, four minutes. The next year, Jackson and Ellingson finished the run in eighteen hours, forty-three minutes. In August 1987, Sam Beelman and Tom Seals beat Jackson and Ellingson's time by four minutes.

<sup>29</sup> Robert A. Cox, interview with the author, December 26, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Polly Whittell, "Don Johnson Tames the Mississippi," *Motor Boating & Sailing* (November 1987), 36.

<sup>32</sup> "Race kicked off Saturday," *Vicksburg Sunday Post*, September 4, 1988.

<sup>33</sup> "New sponsor, races on Mississippi," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 21, 1987, 4A.

<sup>34</sup> Kenneth H. Bitting, Jr., letter to Mr. Ben Langley, January 30, 1989, Missouri State Historical Society, Elizabeth Gentry Sayad Collection, folder 731.f121.

<sup>35</sup> Steve Temple, "Fire on the Mississippi," *Powerboat Magazine* (November/December 1990).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* Jim Wood, "Howard Arneson: Marin's Master of Motion," *Marin Magazine* (April 2008); Temple, "Fire on the Mississippi"; Thomas George fax to Elizabeth Sayad, Sept 26, 1990, Missouri State Historical Society, Elizabeth Gentry Sayad Collection, folder 731.f110.

<sup>37</sup> Temple, "Fire on the Mississippi."

<sup>38</sup> "Towboat Harry Truman has the spirit but loses to ghost of the Robert E. Lee," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 13, 1949, 10A.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas George fax to Elizabeth Sayad.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Tim Renken, "River run is a tough one," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 23, 1965, 6B.

<sup>42</sup> "Plenty of thrills for 25,000 viewing motorboat races," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 19, 1926, 3.

<sup>43</sup> "Boating enthusiast Edwin C. Koenig dies," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 5, 1960, 3C.

<sup>44</sup> "Edwin C. Koenig," *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society*, XVII, October 1960, 107-8.