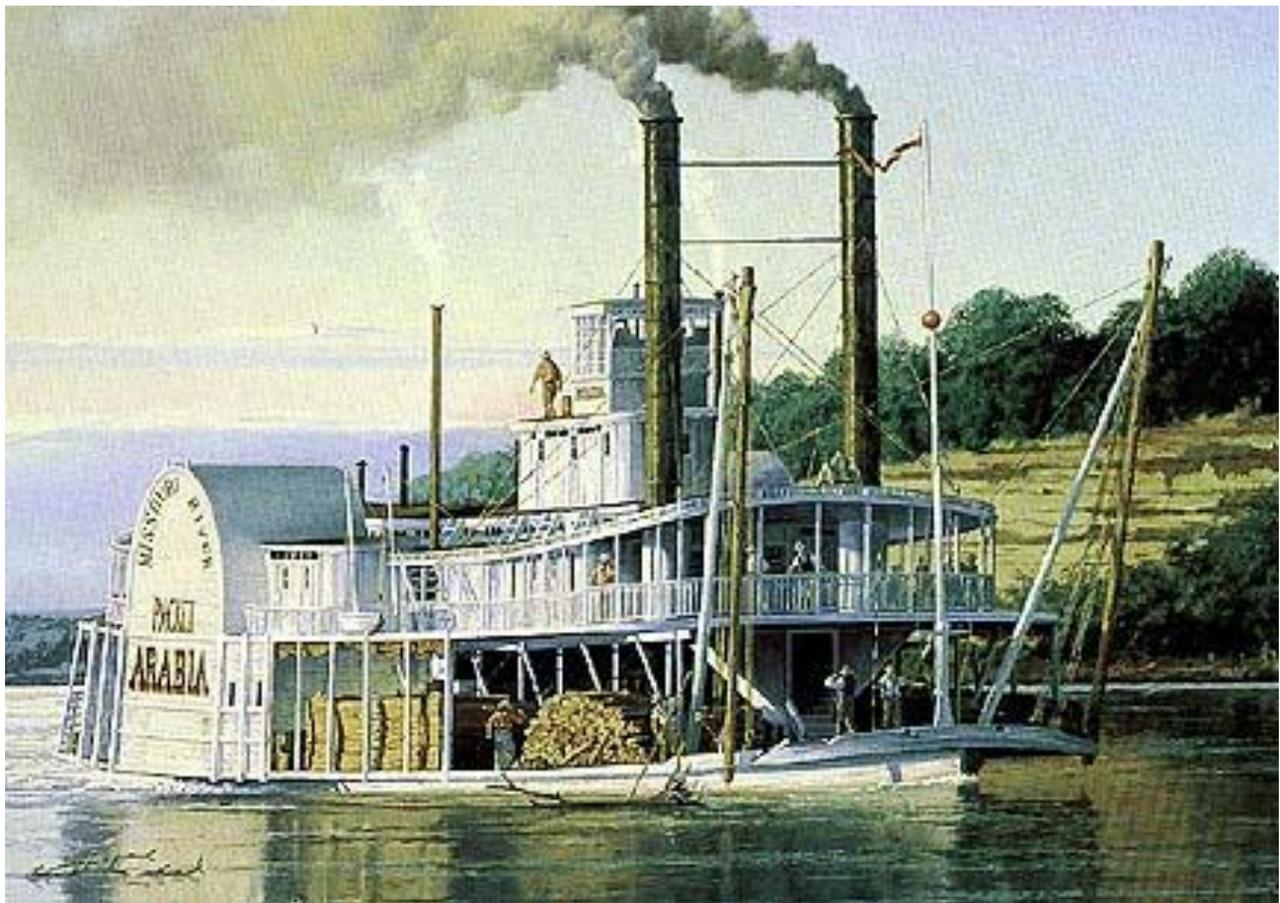


Henry Rampton and the Steamboat *Arabia*

By Charles Rampton

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As we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, it gives us the opportunity to reflect on our own births and blessings, and those who came before us that made what we have today possible. There is a Henry Rampton connection to the Christmas of 1854. It was on Christmas Day of 1854 that he married Francis Dinwoodey, a fellow immigrant from England, after his wife, Caroline had died four months earlier. Church members in St. Louis celebrated their nuptials with a tea in their honor. About a year later, their oldest son, Henry James Rampton was born in St. Louis.



Portrait of the Steamboat *Arabia*

Then, on 2nd June 1856 the Henry Rampton family, along with 200 other Latter-day Saints boarded the Steamboat *Arabia* in St. Louis to travel up the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers to Florence, Nebraska. There were two classes of passengers on the *Arabia*, cabin-class and deck-

class. Henry Rampton and most of the other Mormons were deck-class, meaning they slept on the deck for the twelve-day journey along with 30 wagons and other cargo. Many of the Saints from St. Louis had been able to save enough to purchase wagons and oxen. Henry Rampton was one of those fortunate enough to have a wagon. Others on board would travel to the Salt Lake Valley by handcart. Not all of them would make it, including members of the ill-fated Martin and Willey handcart companies who were also on board.

Just as the Saints who had traveled from England on sailing ships organized themselves, so did the Saints on the *Arabia* for their journey to Florence. John Banks was appointed company president while William Morrison was appointed to preside over the Saints on the lower part of the *Arabia*. His journal says they held "fellowship meetings" morning and evening. The Saints also formed a brass band which played every night from the hurricane deck.

On the 8th of June the *Arabia* landed in Kansas City for a brief stop. The Kansas City Enterprise sarcastically commented that the *Arabia* "carried heavy freight for Council Bluffs, consisting chiefly of Mormons destined for the land where sorrow and affliction never enters - nothing but adoration for Brigham Young."

Henry and the rest of the Saints on the *Arabia* arrived in Florence on the 14th of June 1856. Their oxen, which were being driven overland, did not arrive for another week.

After arriving in Florence, the *Arabia* would only make two or three more trips up the rivers. On 5th September 1856, near Parkville, Missouri (present-day Kansas City) the *Arabia* struck a submerged log which punctured the hull. By nightfall, all that was left above water was the upper decks and smokestacks. The boat continued to sink in the soft mud until the next day when it completely submerged. Fortunately, no one was hurt except one donkey which could not make it to shore. The 130 passengers were all able to get to shore. But the 220 tons of goods destined for stores up river were lost. The *Arabia* sank with enough supplies to stock an entire town - 5,000 pairs of leather boots, thousands of pieces of china, hats, dolls, clothing, nails, scales, axes, adzes, needles and thread, silk, beads, pots, pans, eyeglasses, buttons, shoes, medicine, guns, food, jewelry and 400 barrels of Kentucky Bourbon.

Although a tragedy in and of itself, the sinking of the *Arabia* was just one of dozens of boats lost on the rivers. But, the story of the *Arabia* does not end here.

Over the years, the course of the Missouri River shifted a half mile to the east from its position in 1856. For decades rumors persisted of a treasure buried in the mud in a farm near Kansas City. Finally, in 1987 a man by the name of Greg Hawley with his two sons, armed with old maps and a proton magnetometer, located the remains of the *Arabia* in a field about a mile from the river.

They obtained permission from the farm owner to begin excavation. The *Arabia* and all its contents were located about 45 feet from the surface, preserved in an underground lake that needed to be drained. Interestingly, mud and cold water are great preservers. The vast majority of the contents of the *Arabia* were salvaged intact, including the straw used to pack much of the goods in barrels that were headed for stores upriver. Today, those items, which give us a picture of what life was like in 1856 can be seen in the *Arabia* Museum in Kansas City. See

www.1856.com. It gives us a snapshot of what life would have been like for Henry Rampton and his fellow travelers.



Excavation of the *Arabia*
45 feet from surface in an underwater lake





Dishes that Henry Rampton and other Saints might have taken west with them.



Being a Blacksmith, Henry would have been familiar with and maybe even owned tools like these.