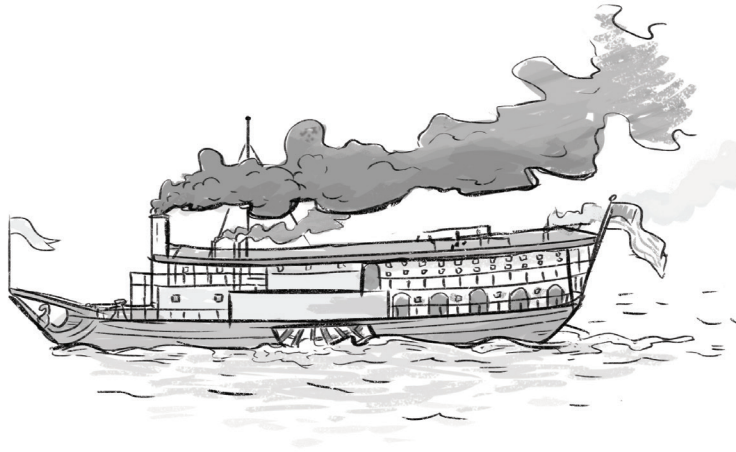


Adventures on the American Frontier

Pioneers on the Early Waterways

Part Six

Jim Garfield, Canalboatman



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As America grew, settlers poured into the Ohio Valley and the lands farther west. It wasn't long before the land away from the rivers began to fill up, too. Something had to be done to make it possible to carry goods to the farmers and to take their farm products to market.



In 1817, some government leaders had a meeting in New York about the problem. When they talked it over, they said, "Canals are the answer. Building roads is slow and expensive. The railroads will never amount to anything. But we have canals here to connect our eastern cities. Why not dig canals farther west?"

The work started, and the big Erie Canal was completed in 1825. It reached from the Hudson River in New York to Lake Erie. When it opened, boats could go from



the Great Lakes to New York City.

The next step was to connect the Great Lakes with the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.

Soon there was a network of canals, each about four feet deep and forty feet wide.

Canalboats carried tons of farm products to market, and they gave people a new way to travel, too. The cities grew even faster.

Not far from Cleveland, Ohio, where the canals from the Ohio River reached Lake Erie, a boy named James Garfield was growing up on a farm.

When he was fifteen, young James, who went by the name Jim, got work as a wood-chopper on the shore of Lake Erie. Sometimes he would stop his work to watch the sailing ships go by on the lake. Or he would see a lake steamer puffing its way from one lakeshore city to another.

“This wood chopping is not for me,” he told the men he was working with. “I’m going to be a sailor. A Lake Erie boat will do for a start, and then I’ll go on to the high seas.”



The next spring, in 1847, Jim walked the seventeen miles from his farm home to Cleveland. His mother had not wanted him to do it, but he was determined to become a sailor. He went right to the lakefront where a sailing ship was tied. He walked up the gangplank and went on board.

“Need a hand?” he asked the first sailor he saw.

“Ask the captain,” said the sailor. “Here he comes now. You can hear him yourself without half trying.”