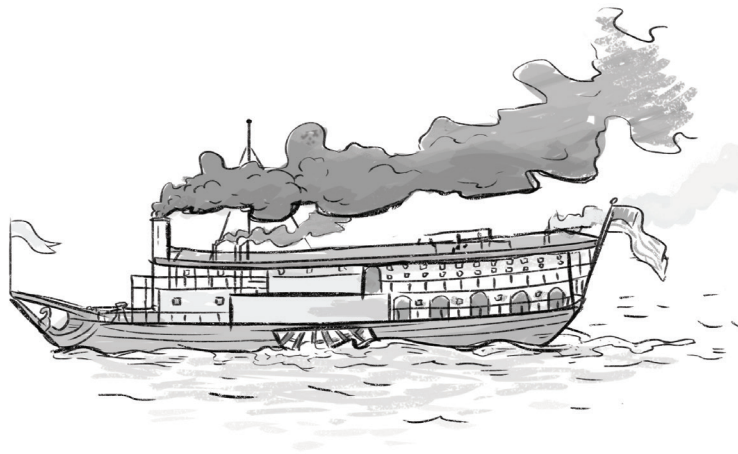


Adventures on the American Frontier

Pioneers on the Early Waterways

Part Ten

Race of the Lee and the Natchez



A Royal Fireworks Production

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Royal Fireworks Press
P.O. Box 399
41 First Avenue
Unionville, NY 10988-0399
(845) 726-4444
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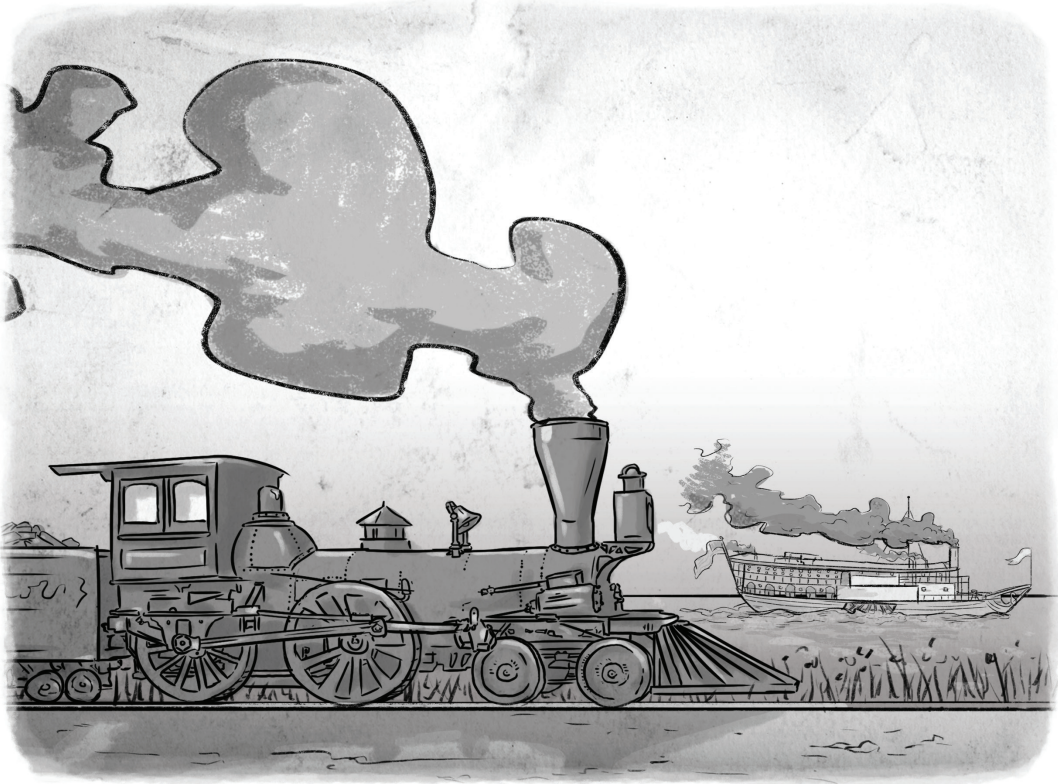
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After the Civil War ended, hundreds of men swung picks and mallets to build miles and miles of railroad. More and more, the hoots of the steamboat whistles were answered by the “Whoo-oo!” of the iron horse as it carried goods and men where the steamboats couldn’t go.



By 1870 the steamboat's days of glory were over. The rivers and lakes were no longer the main highways of America. Even so, that was the year of a steamboat race on the Mississippi River that has never been forgotten. The race of the Natchez and the Robert E. Lee brought the steamboat age to a glorious finish.

The excitement began as early as April.

"Have you heard about the big race? I'm betting on the Natchez."

"The Natchez? Fastest boat ever



built," many people said.

Others said, "That Natchez is a fine steamboat, but the *Robert E. Lee* is better. The *Lee* will win."

Both steamboats were in the Mississippi River trade. Both were fine passenger vessels, painted white with gold trim. Their staterooms held only the finest furniture. The carpets in their great dining halls were the thickest and the richest in color. From the ceiling hung great chandeliers, with glass beads that sparkled like jewels.

The race was to be from New Orleans to St. Louis, beginning at 5:00 on the afternoon of June 30, 1870. People began to gather at the New Orleans waterfront hours before that time. The two steamboats stood at the dock, ready to go.

“Look at the *Robert E. Lee!*” people said. “What has happened to her?”

The *Lee* did look strange. She had been stripped for action. Shutters, doors, deck furniture—everything not needed to make the boat go was gone. Where the deck was



usually stacked high with freight, there was a supply of fast, hot-burning fuel to add to the coal fires for her furnaces. The people could see many barrels of the kind that people shipped bacon in, and there were stacks of pine knots, sticky with resin. There were even boxes marked "Tallow Candles."

But the *Natchez* looked as she always did when it was time to begin a trip. There were several tons of freight on board and several passengers along the rails.