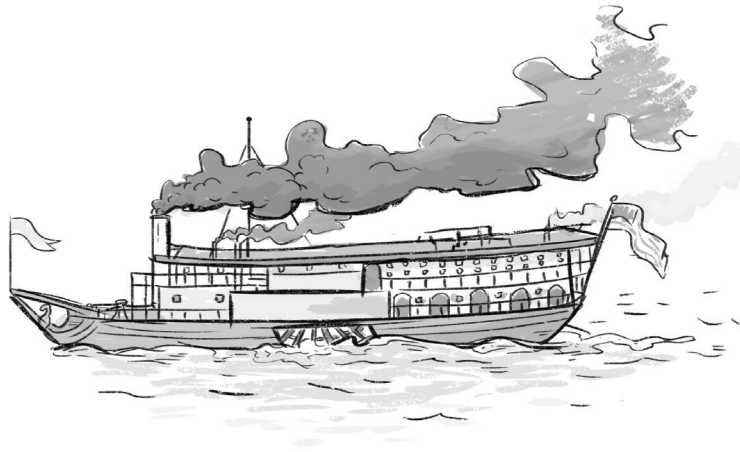


Adventures on the American Frontier

Pioneers on the Early Waterways

Part Seven

Ralph Keeler, Cabin Boy



A Royal Fireworks Production

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The lake steamer *Indiana* was easy to spot. It had a big, iron statue, attached to the smokestack, of a Native American on one knee aiming an arrow out over the water. In 1847, a nine-year-old boy named Ralph Keeler enjoyed his first boat trip on that steamer.



Two years later, Ralph had decided that he wanted to be a sailor. He stood on the dock in Buffalo, New York, trying to choose a lake boat on which to work. But Ralph was a landlubber, and he was very young and very small.

As Ralph stood there looking over the boats, he remembered his ride on the *Indiana*. His mother and father had died, and the boy was being sent from his home in Toledo, Ohio, to live with relatives in Buffalo. Ralph had loved that trip, for the



waters of Lake Erie had lapped gently at the *Indiana's* sides. Ralph had spent the days watching the sailors work and hearing the clanging, hissing engines. It was then that Ralph decided to be a sailor.

Now he was eleven and a half years old. He had not been happy with his relatives in Buffalo. "They don't like me at all," he told his friends.

"Why don't you run away?" one of the boys asked. "I'll help you."

That seemed like a good idea to Ralph.

The boy hid Ralph in his father's barn and brought food to him, but all he could take away without being noticed was bread and butter. To hide the bread, he put it into his pants pockets.

After a day or two, Ralph became tired of bread and butter, and even more so when he had to pick pocket lint off of it before he could eat it. "I think I'll get a job on a lake steamer," he told his friend.

By that time, the friend was finding it hard to explain to his parents why he was



eating so much bread and butter and why there were so many grease spots on his pants. He was glad to hear that he was going to lose his secret visitor. He dug into his pocket and brought out his entire fortune: five well-buttered pennies.

“That’s a good idea, Ralph,” he said.

“Here, take this money to help you until you can earn more. Pay me back when you’ve made your fortune.”

He went off to school, and Ralph headed for the dock.