

Belle of Louisville

KET – Virtual Field Trip

Steamboat Vocabulary

Boiler – A large enclosed metal drum in which water is heated to create steam. On a steamboat, steam under pressure becomes energy, and it's used to operate the engines, pumps, and electrical systems.

Boom – The crane-like device on the front of the boat that the landing stage hangs from. It allows the stage to be raised, lowered, or maneuvered into place.

Bow – The front end of a boat.

Brig – A cage-like small jail; at one time located at the back of the engine room on the Belle. If someone on the boat became a danger to themselves or others while the boat was out on the water, they were locked in up here. The Belle's brig was on the boat until the 1990s when it was given to the Howard Steamboat Museum in Jeffersonville, IN, where it can be seen today.

Buckets – On a steamboat, the large wooden planks attached to the paddlewheel shaft which push the water away from the boat to move it forward or pull it toward the boat to move it backward.

Calliope – On a steamboat, a steam-powered pipe organ. Used to attract the attention of people on the river bank; its sound can travel up to 4 or 5 miles.

Calliapist – The musician who plays the calliope.

Capstan – A large, rotating, steam-powered spool located on the bow of the Belle; is used to tighten the rope lines that secure the boat to the wharf.

Captain – See "Steamboat Careers" sheet

Collection Drum – Part of the heat exchanger system on the Belle; heats water from the live well using excess steam and exhaust. (see "Heat Exchanger")

Crosshead – A heavy metal piece that connects the engine piston rod to the pitman arm.

Deckhand – See "Steamboat Careers" sheet

Disembark – To leave a boat after an excursion cruise.

Embark – To leave, as in to leave the wharf for a cruise on a steamboat.

Engineer – See "Steamboat Careers" sheet

Escape Pipes – Usually shortened to "scape pipes," allow excess steam to escape from the engines; gives the engines more power. On the Belle these are located on the roof on either side of the calliope whistles.

Excursion Boat – A boat used for short-term recreational cruises.

Fantail – The exterior deck alongside either side of the paddlewheel

Ferry Boat – A vessel which moves people and vehicles from one bank of the river to the opposite bank. Were typically used to transport wagons, cars, and trucks, but could also move livestock and cargo.

Firebox – Also called the boiler room, the place where water is heated to make steam.

Fireman – See "Steamboat Careers" sheet

First Mate – See "Steamboat Careers" sheet

Flatboat – A river vessel without engines; has a very shallow hull. Used to move cargo down river. Often sold at the end of the trip so the boat's wood could be used to build homes or other buildings.

Generator – A piece of equipment used to produce (generate) electricity. There are both steam-powered and diesel-powered generators on the Belle.

Gingerbread Trim – The name given to decorative architectural features along roof lines and ceilings, especially on fancy steamboats.

H-Bitt – An h-shaped metal structure attached to the bow of the boat; is used to tie off lines when securing the boat to the wharf.

Handy Line – A lightweight rope that is tossed to a crew member on the wharfboat when the Belle is coming in to land. One end is tied to the heavier landing line, the other is attached to a knot called a "Monkey's Fist." (See "Monkey's Fist") The handy line is easy to throw because it doesn't weigh very much, the weight of the Monkey's Fist will carry the handy line from the bow of the boat to the wharfboat. The crew member uses the handy line to pull the much heavier landing lines onto the wharfboat for tying in.

Head Line – The primary heavy rope used to secure the bow of the boat to the wharf. For security, its backup is an identical rope called the check line.

Heat Exchanger – Is part of the "economizer" system; it uses excess steam and exhaust to preheat river water before it is sent to the boilers, so the boilers won't be damaged from cold water hitting the hot boiler plates.

Hull – The shell and framework of the lower part of the boat; is the section of the boat that sits below water and allows the boat to float. On the Belle, the hull is made of steel instead of wood like many other steamboats; is one reason the Belle has survived so long.

Jazz – A style of music common in America; New Orleans-style jazz was developed by musicians hired to play on board steamboats traveling long distances, like from New Orleans to Chicago.

Keelboat – A river vessel without engines; has a sharp-pointed prow (the very front of the hull), and is usually larger than a flatboat. Used to move cargo up and down river.

Landing Stage – Also called the boarding stage; is a movable bridge used in boarding or disembarking a boat at a wharf or landing. This "gangway" once served as the only way to transfer passengers or freight onto the boat. It is still used in areas where its length is needed to safely reach a wharf or shore.

Lazy Bench – A raised bench at the rear of the pilothouse where everyone but the pilot sits.

Line – A real catchall word. Anything that connects anything to anything else on a boat is called a line. A pipe is not a pipe. It is a water line or steam line, etc. A rope is a grass line or a rope line. A cable or wire rope is a wire line.

Live Well – Also called the hot well, is a drum located below the main deck of the boat. River water flows from openings in the sides of the boat (called sea chests) into this drum. There, trash solids in the water either settle to the bottom or float to the top. The cleanest water from the center of the well is then pumped into the rest of the steam system.

Monkey's Fist – A kind of mariner's knot made by tying thin line around a heavy weight; is attached to the handy line. On the Belle, a tennis ball filled with silicone is used for the weight; in the old days it was tied around things like a baseball or metal nut.

National Historic Landmark – A site designated by the National Park System as important to America's history; typically has unique features that make it unusual or unique.

Packet Boat – A river cargo vessel; was a very popular style of steamboat construction in the 19th century. The Belle is the last boat operating in the U.S. that was built as a packet boat.

Paddlewheel – Is the method of propulsion on a steamboat; some steamboats had a paddlewheel on each side of the boat, others had one paddlewheel at the stern (back end) of the boat. Pushes water to make the boat move forward or in reverse.

Paddlewheeler – The common name given to a boat which uses a paddlewheel for propulsion. The Belle is considered a “sternwheel steamboat,” because her paddlewheel is attached to her stern. (See “Stern”)

Pilot – See “Steamboat Careers” sheet

Pilot House – The small “room” on top of the boat where steering the boat takes place.

Pilot Wheel – The large, 7'-diameter wooden wheel in the pilot house that steers the boat; is assisted by the Belle's original steam-powered power steering system.

Pitman Arm – A long wood and metal arm that attaches an engine to each end of the paddlewheel shaft.

Port – The left side of any boat when you're facing forward.

Power Steering Levers – Located on each side of the pilot wheel; are attached to the steam power steering system of the boat. They assist in turning the pilot wheel so it is easy to move the rudders in the desired direction to turn the boat.

Propulsion – What moves a boat forward or backward in the water; the paddlewheel is the Belle's only form of propulsion.

Purser – See “Steamboat Careers” sheet

Roof Bell – A large brass bell located on the forward roof of the boat; is used to communicate instructions to the crew. The number and pattern of rings tells the crew what the captain wants them to do. It's one of the Belle's safety features and is used during emergencies.

Rudder – A fin-shaped piece of wood and/or metal underneath the stern of a boat; is used to steer the boat in a particular direction. The Belle uses a system of three connected rudders. The rudder is connected to the pilot wheel of the boat via cables.

'Scape Pipes – See “Escape Pipes.”

Sea Chest – A watertight box built inside the hull of the boat; allows river water in to feed the live well. The water is then used for ballast, steam production, and firefighting purposes.

Smokestacks – The tall stacks on a steamboat that let smoke (and burning cinders, on 19th century steamboats) safely escape from the boiler fires.

Starboard – The right side of any boat when you're facing forward.

Steam Whistle – Is a 3-chamber brass whistle powered by steam; used to communicate between boats, also identifies departures and landings to people on a wharf or landing.

Stern – The rear or back end of a boat; is where the paddlewheel is located on the Belle.

Telegraph – Is a communication system that allows the pilot to tell the engineers the direction and speed he wants to go. The engineer then communicates with the fireman using a similar system.

Throttle – A valve system that allows the engineer to speed the boat up or slow it down; controls how much steam is delivered to the engines.

Transport – To carry, to move people or cargo from place to place.

Western River Communications System – Also called the bells-and-gongs system, is the Belle's original communication system between the pilot house and the engine room. Replaced by the current telegraph system in 1954, but is still intact.

Wharf – A stopping place for boats; is built to accommodate the needs of the boats that tie in there.

Wharfboat – A floating, non-motorized vessel that serves as storage and workspace for a boat's crew; is also what a boat ties to while she's at the wharf.

Wing Bridge – A walkway which projects out from the front of the boat's roof. Allows the captain to clearly see the bow of the boat and the wharf or landing in order to give directions to the pilot and deck crew for landing and embarking. On the Belle, searchlights are attached to the port and starboard wing bridges.