



**“St. Louis from the River Below” by George Catlin (1832)**

The American Fur Company’s first steamboat, the *Yellow Stone*, owned by Pierre Chouteau, made its first run up the Missouri leaving St. Louis on April 16, 1831. She reached Cantonment Leavenworth on May 1 and the company’s Fort Tecumseh (later known as Fort Pierre) on June 19. No previous steamboat had gone beyond Council Bluffs. A journey that had previously taken a whole season had been reduced to a few weeks.

The *Yellow Stone* was also the first steamboat to reach the Upper Missouri, arriving at Fort Clark in 1832, delivering 1,500 gallons of liquor and other trade goods. She returned to St. Louis carrying 100 packs of beaver pelts and bison robes from the fort. This landmark voyage demonstrated the practicability of navigating the Missouri by steam as far as to the mouth of the Yellowstone River with a strong probability that boats could go on to the Blackfoot country. Among the passengers on this voyage was artist George Catlin, who rendered the painting illustrated above.



### **Steamboat Yellow Stone (April 19, 1833) by Karl Bodmer**

*Karl Bodmer was commissioned by Prince Maximilian to illustrate the American frontier on his 1832-34 expedition. Their passage of the Missouri began in April 1833, and ended a year later, after a winter of severe hardship at Fort Clark. Bodmer completed numerous landscapes and Indian studies that are remarkable for their accuracy. He later developed many of his sketches into immaculate watercolor prints. This scene of the Yellow Stone was produced in London in 1839.*

In the spring of 1833, two fur company boats went up the Missouri River, the *Yellow Stone* and the *Assiniboine*. On the *Yellow Stone* were Prince Maximilian of Wied and his Swiss artist companion, Karl Bodmer, whose work is an important visual record of the Missouri River and the people who lived along it.

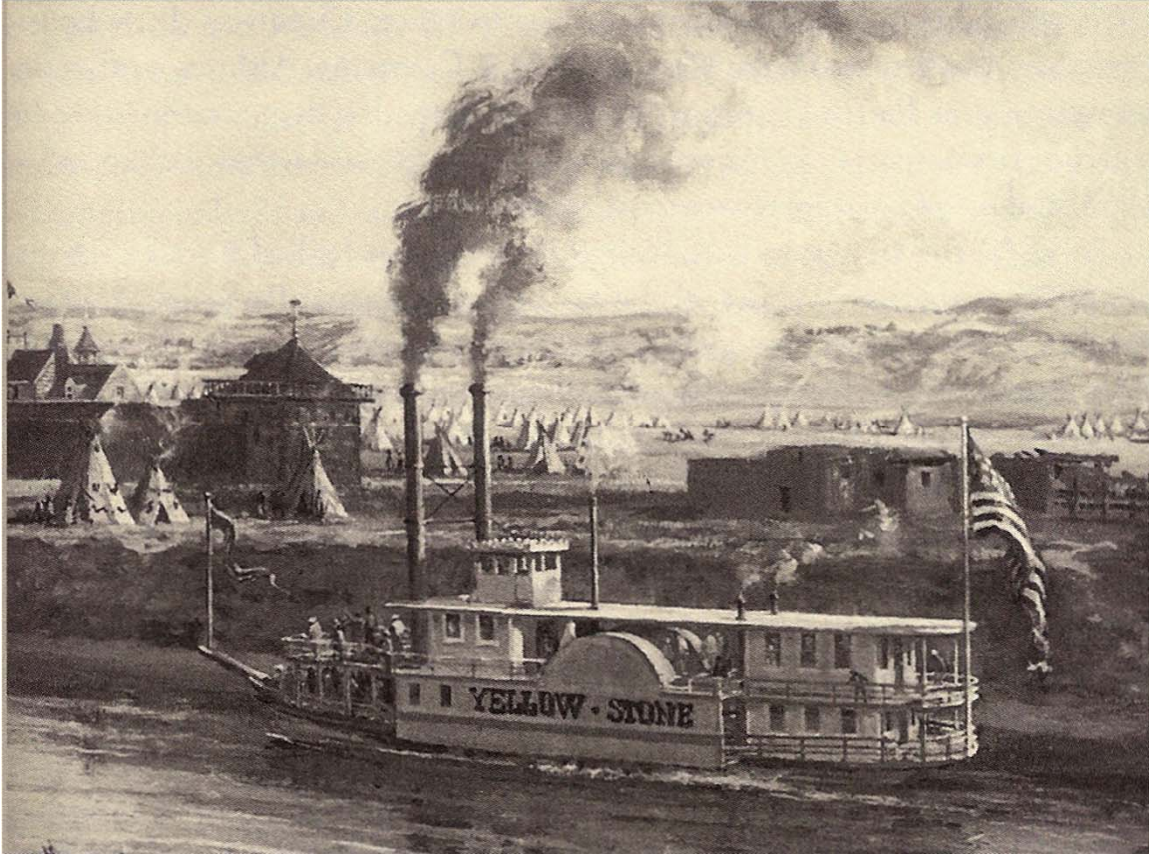
After five years of navigating among the snags of the Upper Missouri River, the *Yellow Stone's* career changed dramatically. The first steamboat in the fur trade, she was sold into the Texas cotton trade, steaming south on the Mississippi in the summer of 1835. Most steamboats her age would have been ready for decommissioning, if they had survived, but she had proven her reliability and was refitted in New Orleans at a cost of \$4,000.



**“The Yellow Stone in Peril” by Gary Lucy**

The *Yellow Stone* steamed directly into the struggle for Texas, as Santa Anna's army overwhelmed the Alamo and pushed General Sam Houston's force eastward. In April, 1836, Houston impressed the *Yellow Stone* into service in order to cross the flooded Brazos River. At 10 o'clock on the morning of April 12, Houston's men began boarding the *Yellow Stone*, and by 2 p.m. the next day, more than 700 soldiers, 200 horses and supplies had been ferried across the swollen Brazos in seven trips. This crossing gave Houston vital time.

On April 21, at San Jacinto, Houston's force surprised the Mexican Army during their daily siesta, attacking fiercely with cries of "Remember the Alamo". Caught off guard, the Mexican's surrendered just eighteen minutes later. Subsequently, Houston remarked, "Had it not been for the Steam Boat *Yellow Stone*, we would have lost Texas."



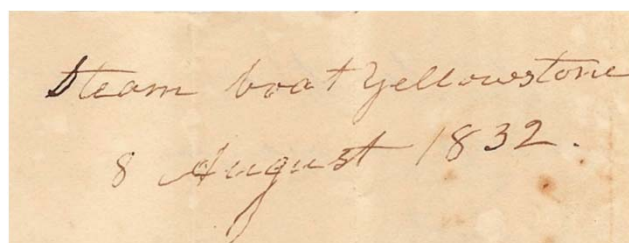
**Sketch of the Steamboat Yellow Stone at Fort Union (1832)**

The *Steamboat Yellow Stone* was built for the American Fur Company at Louisville, KY in 1831. She was a sidewheel wooden-hull packet, 130 ft long by 19 ft wide, with a 6 ft hold and was powered by a single steam engine. The *Yellow Stone* was the first steamboat to ascend the Missouri River above Council Bluffs to Ft. Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone River (1832). She was lost in 1837.

On March 26, 1832 she left St. Louis, arriving at Fort Union about June 17 and was back in St. Louis July 7. This voyage has been called a landmark in the history of the west as it proved that steamboats could navigate the Missouri River all the way up to the mouth of the Yellowstone.



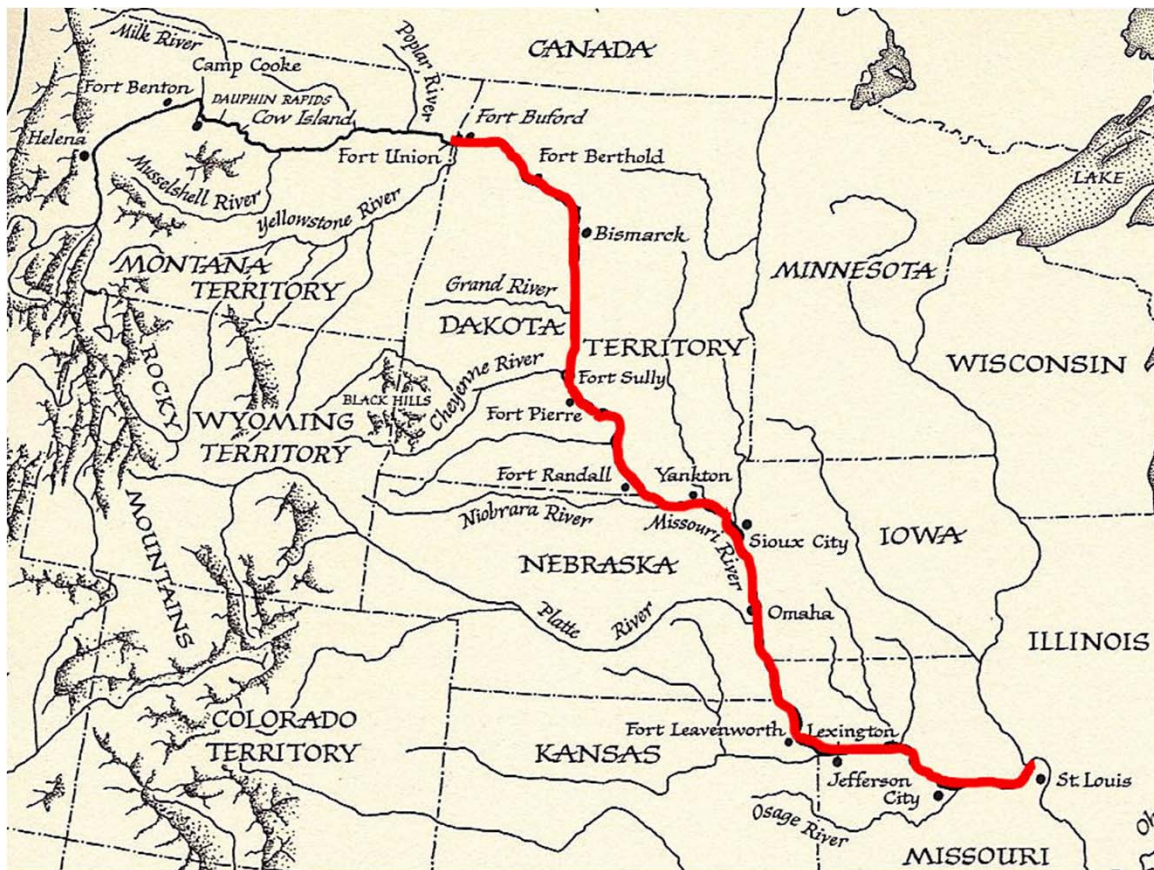
The letter shown was written on board by R. P. Beauchamp, a sub-agent under John Dougherty at the Upper Missouri Indian Agency at Bellevue (later Nebraska), who was on his way up river on Aug 8, 1832.



Beauchamp writes, "On the evening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> inst. The boat which I am now on reached Fort Leavenworth...I went on board that same night and slept on the boat...left on the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> inst and this is now the 8<sup>th</sup> day...we shall get to the end of our trip in two days more...11<sup>th</sup> August, we got up yesterday morning."

A rectangular piece of aged, yellowed paper with a handwritten signature in brown ink. The signature reads "R. P. Beauchamp" in a cursive script.

Beauchamp's destination was the Indian Agency at Bellevue, based on a letter in the Upper Missouri Agency records of the American Fur Company dated Aug 12, 1832 by Major Dougherty stating that he arrived with Doctors Davis and Martin to vaccinate the Indians. Donald Jackson's book "Voyages of the Steamboat Yellow Stone" (pp. 58-66) corroborates, noting that the *Yellow Stone* arrived to Fort Leavenworth Aug 2 where the doctors went on board. The *Yellow Stone* then turned back to St. Louis with this letter per the directive (**By S. Boat Yellowstone**). Beauchamp died from cholera at Bellevue August 15, 1833, about a year after he wrote this letter.



**Route of the *Steamboat Yellow Stone*, leaving St. Louis on March 26, 1832, arriving at Fort Union on June 17, 1832. The second trip in 1832, carrying this letter, went only as far as Bellevue, near Omaha.**

(3)

Steam boat Yellowstone  
8 August 1832.

Dear John

On the evening of the 2nd Inst.  
The boat which I am now on, reached  
Fort. Leavenworth; Maj. Dougherty, as I ex-  
pected came up on her - he handed  
me your kind letters - one enclosed  
in the other - we also got the box  
you sent up, all safe - I gave the  
letters to your Mother - she has, or will,  
write to you; as I requested her to do so.  
I went on board that same night &  
slept in the boat, as she was to leave  
next morning at light - We accordingly  
left in the morning of the 3rd Inst.  
and this is now the 8th day - we  
have got this far safe, and if no  
accident happen to us, we shall

get to the end of our trip in two  
day more. — I shall go down  
again in September and continue  
on to St. Louis, when I will see you,  
and make such arrangements with  
Mr. Kerr about you as will suit  
you and him — Maj. Dougherty tells  
me, that Mr. Kerr is very well pleased  
with you — He intends to take you  
back in the fall, as he told Maj.  
Dougherty, and as you state in your  
letter — so you may now look to  
Mr. Kerr as your friend, provided  
you behave well, which I trust  
in God you will — now my dear  
son, let me entreat you, to be atten-  
-tive to your duty — Be industrious  
and study well the interest of the  
man you live with — never disobey  
him, but be careful to please him  
in all things you do. —

11th August — we got safe up, yesterday morning —



when you are told to do any  
thing, you should move briskly and  
quickly - you will soon acquire  
habits of moving quickly - you  
must notice every thing you see  
done, and try to learn to do such  
things yourself - when you speak,  
always tell the truth; never mis-  
-represent <sup>thing</sup> any - always state  
things precisely as they are -  
never do any thing that you  
would be ashamed or afraid  
should be known - shun all  
low or mean company - go to church  
on sundays and never misbehave  
there - strive with all your might  
to improve your hand writing  
and also to improve in cyphering.

Suffer death before you would  
take even a pin from the store

without letting the owner know of  
 it - If you wish to buy any thing from  
 the store always speak to the owner.  
 It is my duty to advise you in this  
 way; but I know you will never do  
 any thing wrong; I am not afraid.

8-8-1832

base of Yellowstone  
 Mrs

St. Louis

To John A. Beauchamp

(By S. Boat Yellowstone)

Earliest Upper Missouri River  
 Cover known Steamboat

Stornweber - b. 1831 144 tons

b. Louisville Ky - St. Louis

American  
 Fur Co.

Lost 1837

(#2) of name

p. s. I am sorry that you wrote to Eliza  
 about what she foolishly said to you -  
 you ought <sup>not</sup> to notice such things - Thank  
 God, you are away from her - your father  
 P. P. Beauchamp

Steam boat Yellowstone  
8 August 1832

Dear John,

**On the evening of the 2nd inst. the boat which I am now on reached Fort Leavenworth.** Maj. Dougherty or I expected to come up on her – he handed me your kind letters – one enclosed in the other – we also got the box you sent up, all safe – I gave the letters to your mother – She has, or will write to you, as I requested her to do so. **I went on board that same night, as she was to leave next morning at light – We accordingly left in the morning of the 3rd Inst. – and this is now the 8th day – we have got this far safe, and if no accident happen[s] to us, we shall get to the end of our trip in two days more. –**

I shall go down again in September and continue on to St. Louis, when I will see you and make such arrangements with Mr. Kerr about you as will suit you and him – Maj. Dougherty tells me that Mr. Kerr is very well pleased with you – He intends to take you back in the fall, as he told Maj. Dougherty, and as you state in your letter – So you may now look to Mr. Kerr as your friend, provided you behave well, which I trust in God you will – now my dear son, let me entreat you to be attentive to your duty – Be industrious and study well the interest of the man you live with – never disobey him, but be careful to please him in all things you do. – when you are told to do anything, you should move briskly and quickly – you must notice every thing you see done, and try to learn to do such things yourself – when you speak, always tell the truth; never misrepresent anything – always state things precisely as they are – never do anything that you will be ashamed or afraid should be known – shun all loin [?] or mean company – go to church on Sundays and never misbehave there – strive with all your might to improve your hand writing and also to improve in ciphering.

Suffer death before you would take even a pin from the store without letting the owner know of it – If you wish to buy anything from the store always speak to the owner – It is my duty to advise you in this way, but I know you will never do anything wrong; I am not afraid –

P.S. I am sorry that you wrote to Eliza about what she foolishly said to you – you ought not to notice such things – Thank God, you are away from her – Your father,

R. P. Beauchamp

**(11th August – We got safe up yesterday morning -**


The steamboat *Yellow Stone*, A. G. Bennett, master, arrived here on Saturday last, after a voyage of three months, to the mouth of the river Yellow Stone, distant 2000 miles up the Missouri, carrying the goods to the traders employed by the American Fur Company, and bringing back a rich and full cargo of furs, peltries, and buffalo robes.

In this voyage the *Yellow Stone* ascended the Missouri 700 miles farther than in her voyage of last year; thus proving to the satisfaction of the Company the entire practicability of steam navigation in that upper region. We are informed by Captain Bennett, that he found as much water in the Missouri, at the mouth of the *Yellow Stone*, as was at the mouth of the Missouri when he passed up—and to all appearance, he could have gone much higher if necessary. Indeed, the navigation above the mouth of the *Yellow Stone* appeared to be less difficult; there being no snags. Sand-bars were plenty; but these abound from the mouth to the source of the Missouri.

This enterprise will no doubt greatly add to our trade and intercourse with the Indians, and subtract from that of the British trader. There is nothing, we are sure, that could have excited a greater degree of surprise among the wild inhabitants of the upper Missouri, than the appearance among them of a high pressure steamboat, moving majestically against the current, as if (so it would seem to them) impelled by some supernatural agency. Many of the Indians, who had been in the habit of trading with the Hudson's Bay Company, declared that that company could no more compete with the Americans, and concluded hereafter to bring all their skins to the latter; and said, that the British might turn out their dogs and burn their sledges, as they would be no longer useful while the *Fire Boat* walked on the waters. We are informed by Capt. B. that thousands of the natives visited the boat, were very friendly, and invited him to several feasts prepared in honor of the occasion.

PIERRE CHOUTEAU, Jr. Esq., Agent of the Company, attended the expedition, and returns, we are told, in high spirits.

A pair of articles from the *St. Louis Missouri Republican*, reporting on the *Steamboat Yellow Stone* (above, July 10, 1832; below, Sept 4, 1832)



FOR CAPTAIN LEAVY WORTH.  
The steam boat *YELLOWSTONE*,  
A. G. Bennett, Master, will depart for  
the above and intermediate ports, on *MONDAY*, the  
10th inst., at 10 o'clock, A. M. For freight or passage  
apply on board, or at the office of the American Fur Com-  
pany.  
Sept. 3d, 1832.