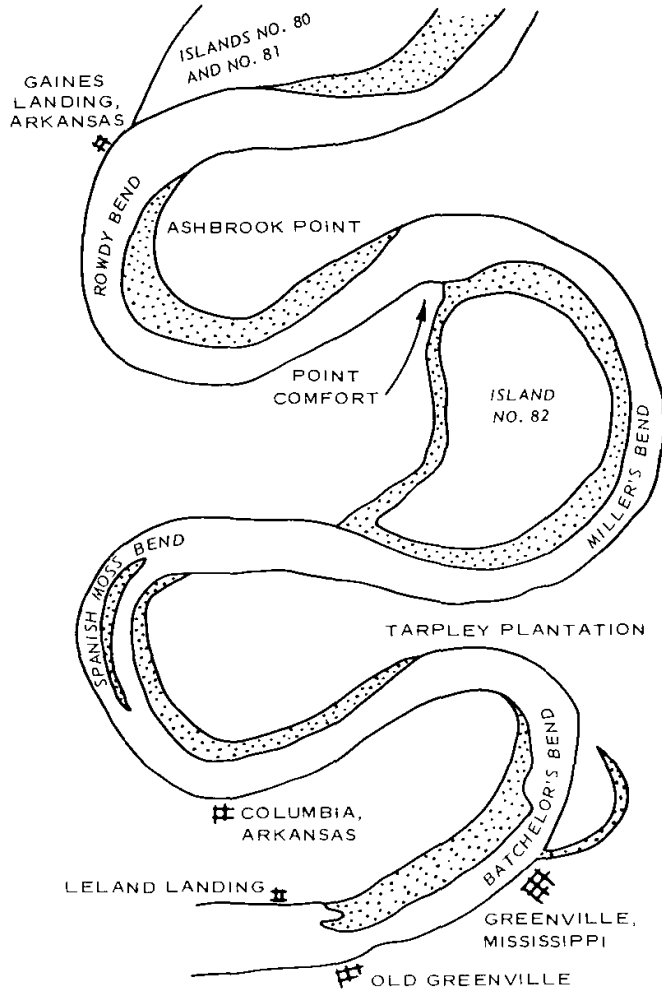
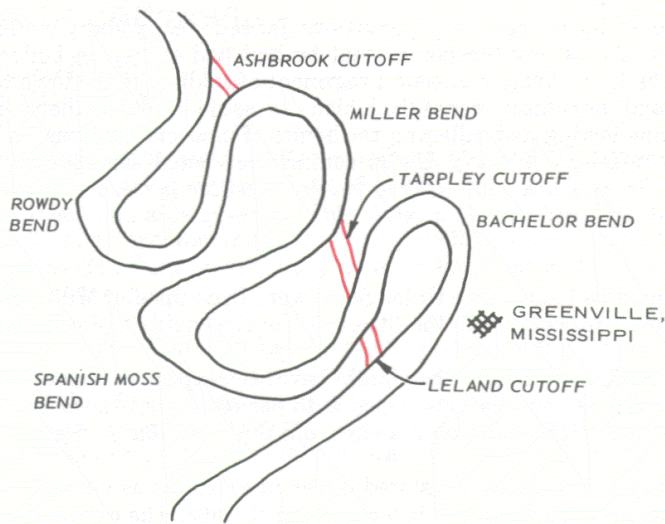


The Mississippi River Commission had long maintained a fixed policy of trying to prevent the river from making natural cutoffs in the Greenville Bends area, but the Mississippi overruled the Commission and accomplished its purpose in spite of all the engineers could do. Faced with the reality of the natural cutoff at Leland Neck, the Corps decided to construct the Tarpley and Ashbrook cutoffs to bring the river channel into better alignment and prevent further undesirable changes in the reach.



GREENVILLE BENDS. Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 reconnaissance map of the Lower Mississippi showed the Greenville Bends that were later removed from the main channel of the river. Today nothing remains of Gaines Landing, Columbia, and Old Greenville, and the new Greenville lies on an oxbow lake.



CUTOFFS ABOVE GREENVILLE, MISSISSIPPI. The above sketch shows the three cutoffs that removed the "Greenville Bends" from the main channel of the Mississippi River. Ashbrook and Tarpley were artificial cutoffs. Leland Cutoff was a natural cutoff. The removal of Rowdy Bend, Spanish Moss Bend, part of Miller Bend and all of Bachelor Bend shortened the navigation channel in the area by about 29.8 miles. The town of Greenville was left on an oxbow lake (old Bachelor Bend) which was renamed Lake Ferguson, in honor of General Harley B. Ferguson of the Army Corps of Engineers, who planned and carried out the two artificial cutoffs.

GREENVILLE, MISSISSIPPI

*Mile 537.2 AHP, Map 26
Left bank, descending*

The first attempt to establish a town on the east bank of the Mississippi in the vicinity of Bachelor Bend ended in frustration and failure. The river's currents attacked the waterfront at Old Greenville, forcing its citizens to pack up and move a few miles up the river to a location that was considered more secure.

Greenville, like other river towns, received a lot of unwelcome attention during the Civil War. It was threatened with destruction when the commander of the Union ram *Monarch* discovered that the people of the town were quartering rebel troops in their homes and churches. The Union officer said he would shell the buildings until he drove the rebels out, but a visit from Greenville ladies who came on board his vessel on February 14, 1863, persuaded him to change his mind.

The ladies must have been very persuasive indeed, for a short while later the commander of the *Monarch* reported that he had had to fire on Union troops at Greenville. The U. S. Army had sent a regiment of soldiers to the town to drive the rebels away, and the commander of the Union ram said he fired on them because they spent their time looting and pillaging the homes of innocent civilians. In his official report of the affair, the angry Union commander noted sarcastically that *"The following results were achieved—taking jewelry from the persons of women and toys from little children, and making a rebel soldier of every man and boy this side of the Yazoo River."*

About three months later, when Union boats were fired upon in Miller Bend, Union officials lost their patience with the little town of Greenville and ordered it burned.

Greenville proved more durable than might have been expected. It rose from its ashes, fought off the river's depredations, coped with periodic yellow fever epidemics, and even survived the cutoff that took it away from the river that had given it life.

The Army Corps of Engineers restored Greenville's status as a river town when it completed the Greenville Harbor Project in April, 1963. The oxbow lake, renamed Lake Ferguson, serves as a slack-water port where a public terminal handles petroleum, wood and paper products, construction materials, and industrial and agricultural chemicals. With the revival of its river trade, Greenville has also become the center of boat building and marine supply businesses, and the headquarters for many of the Lower Mississippi towing companies.

There is a convenient marina on the Greenville waterfront in Lake Ferguson, where pleasure boaters will find fuel and other supplies available to them.



CITY FRONT, GREENVILLE, MISSISSIPPI. Pleasure boaters in need of fuel or supplies will find the entrance to Greenville Harbor at River Mile 537.2 AHP. The marina is conveniently located on the city waterfront and the center of the town is less than two blocks away.

LAGRANGE CREVASSE

Mile 537.2 AHP, Map 26
Left bank, descending

LaGrange Crevasse, at the foot of old Bachelor Bend, was one of the major levee breaks that occurred during the disastrous flood of 1903.

A large force of men were working on the LaGrange levee on March 27, 1903, when it began to crumble. The flood fighters had to run for their lives, escaping with difficulty as the gap widened rapidly.

The flood waters poured through LaGrange Crevasse, drowning farm animals and causing many residents of the river to have narrow escapes from death. In the town of Greenville, whistles shrieked and bells clanged as every able-bodied man and boy in town was called out to help try to save the back levee that protected the town. The effort was in vain. The municipal levee crumbled away, and boats rushed in to evacuate the people of Greenville.

In the immediate vicinity of the crevasse, about 200 acres of fertile cotton fields were washed away, and the flood waters dropped a heavy layer of sand over some of the area. In some places, the sand was found to be as much as four feet deep.

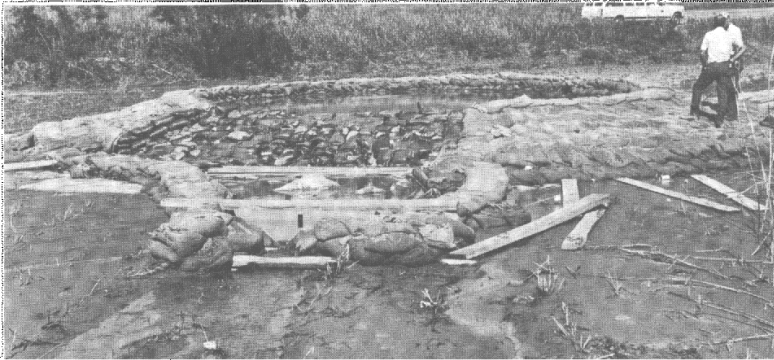
VAUCLUSE LANDING, ARKANSAS

Mile 534.0 AHP, Map 27
Right bank, descending

During major floods, Vaocluse Landing is one of the places that engineers and flood fighters watch with some apprehension. Large sandboils have often erupted in the area in the past, and sandboils have to be controlled or they can cause a levee to collapse.

A sandboil is created when flood water seeps under the base of a levee through sand in the levee foundation. If the pressure of the seep water is high enough, the sand within the levee foundation can be eroded out, causing the overlying levee to collapse. Boils occur all along the levee system in major floods. They are usually brought under control by ringing them with sandbags, to a height that equalizes the pressure and reduces the flow of water through them.

There was a large sandboil at Vaocluse in 1922, and in the flood of 1929 a sandboil in the same area built up a crater of sand that was about 15 feet wide across the top. It was brought under control, and the levee held. In the flood of 1973, there were boils in the Vaocluse area again, but again they were brought under control.



SANDBOILS. In major floods, the pressure of the flood waters sometimes causes "sandboils" to erupt. The boils vary greatly in size and location and can cause levee failures if not brought promptly under control. In the above photo, flood fighters have brought a large boil under control by ringing it with sandbags.

WALKER BEND

Mile 533.5 AHP, Map 27

In Walker Bend, Island No. 84 now forms a part of the Mississippi mainland, but Arkansas claims jurisdiction over part of the island. Before the island joined the east bank, the navigation channel lay between Island No. 84 and the Mississippi shore.

In July, 1864, the steamer *B. M. Runyan* was northbound at the foot of Island No. 84 when she hit a snag and began to sink very rapidly. The boat was a Union transport, and the Union gunboat *Forest Rose* rushed to the rescue. All of the cabin passengers were taken aboard the gunboat, but the deck passengers were less fortunate. Most of them were soldiers whose enlistments had expired. They were going to Cairo to be mustered out so that they could return to their homes. Also on board the boat were some Union sympathizers who had found the South uncomfortable and who were going North to live.

In an official report of the accident, it was said that about 430 men belonging to a Missouri cavalry regiment had been on board the *B. M. Runyan*. The steamer was also carrying more than 100 mules and horses, 28 wagons, and all the camp and garrison equipment belonging to the regiment. About \$200,000 worth of government property was lost when the boat sank.

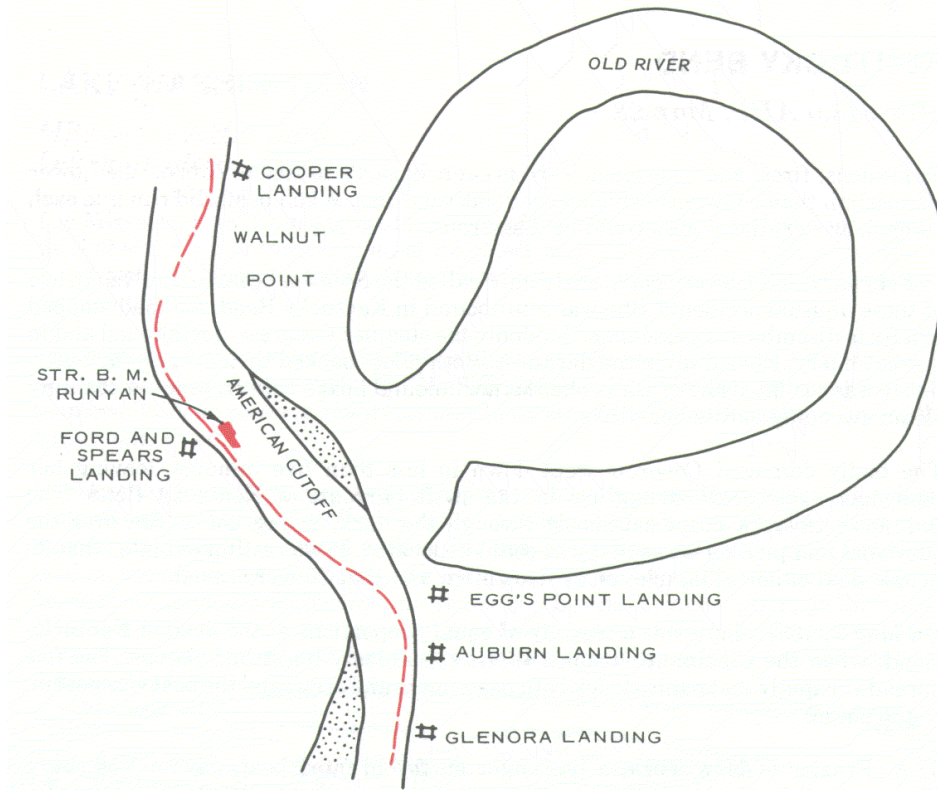
Estimates of the casualties varied from "more than 70" to "more than 150." The cabin of the sunken steamer separated from the hull and drifted downstream, where it lodged on a sandbar in American Cutoff. It was burned by Union forces so that nothing in it would be of use to rebels that might be lurking in the area.

AMERICAN CUTOFF

Mile 526.0 AHP, Map 27

In 1850, the United States Congress directed that a survey be made of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. Appointing Charles Ellet, a civil engineer, to make the survey, Congress asked for a report that might be used in preparing plans for flood control and navigation improvements. Ellet made his report to Congress in 1852, and it was the most complete report that had been made up to that time.

One of the locations to which Ellet gave his attention was a very narrow neck of land at American Bend. In a period of 25 years, the neck had dwindled from three miles to less than one mile in width. The point had been denuded of timber, and in high water the floods swept over it unimpeded. Ellet predicted that a natural cutoff would occur soon unless steps were taken to prevent the further erosion of the neck of land.



AMERICAN CUTOFF. Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 map of the Lower Mississippi in the vicinity of American Cutoff showed the wreck of the B. M. Runyan, a Civil War transport, lying close to the Arkansas shore. He marked the old bend and called it "Old River," but it is known today as Lake Lee.

Four years later, during the great flood of 1858, the Mississippi abandoned its bed in American Bend and cut across the narrow neck to make itself a new channel. The first steamboat that attempted to navigate the new cutoff had a cub pilot on board named Samuel Clemens.

Mark Twain, in *Life on the Mississippi*, recalled that his boat had not been able to make its way up the channel against the strong currents in the cutoff, but said that a day or two later steamers were navigating the channel without difficulty.

The old riverbed soon silted up at either end, creating a beautiful lake that was named Lake Lee. The 1,000-acre lake has a public access area with a launching ramp for small boats.

KENTUCKY BEND

Mile 518.0 AHP, Map 28

Explosions, fires, and snaggings were greater hazards to steamboats on the Lower Mississippi than collisions, which were relatively rare. When boats did run into each other, however, the results could be disastrous.

In February, 1846, a very popular steamer called the *Saladin* became involved in one of these unusual accidents. She was southbound in Kentucky Bend, and had stopped briefly to disembark a passenger. Suddenly the steamer *Congress*, northbound and in a great hurry, loomed up in the darkness. Both pilots backed their wheels furiously, but it was too late. The crash broke the northbound boat's boilers, sending scalding steam sweeping across her decks.

The badly damaged *Congress* went down in less than five minutes, leaving her passengers and crew struggling in the swift currents of Kentucky Bend. The uninjured *Saladin* crept cautiously through the dark, trying not to run over the survivors and picking up as many as could be located. It was estimated later that 20 people died either of injuries or by drowning, and that 30 were saved.

On May 2, 1851, there was a tragedy of equal proportions at the head of Kentucky Bend, when the Cincinnati steamer *Webster* suddenly burst into flames. The fire spread so rapidly that panic struck both passengers and crew, and the boat was not run to the shore.

J. A. Frazier of New York, a passenger on the ill-fated boat, gave a Vicksburg newspaper this graphic eyewitness account of the horrifying disaster.

"Not one minute, seemingly, elapsed between the alarm ere the flames, beaten up by the wind, clung to and enveloped the whole boat. Some of

those who escaped had to cling for hours to a snag—among them the writer of this account—with, unfortunately, no power to render assistance and doomed to be sad spectators to the terrible scene. Gracefully the burning boat, now completely on her own course, bore away with her the load of agitated victims, the flames bursting from her in every part, and through which, with a despairing scream, passenger after passenger plunged or was precipitated into the river.”

Estimates of the number of deaths varied from 40 to “more than 60.” The boat’s papers and cargo, as well as money and luggage belonging to the passengers, were all lost.

Islands No. 86 and No. 87 were originally in Kentucky Bend, but both have retreated several miles inland and are now a part of the State of Arkansas.

LAKE WASHINGTON

*Mile 515.5 AHP, Map 28
Left bank, descending*

The Mississippi has been engaged in the business of making oxbow lakes out of its old bends for several centuries. One of its oldest and most beautiful creations is Lake Washington. Geological evidence suggests that this lake may have been in existence for about 700 years.

The big lake covers several thousands of acres and was once widely known for its abundant fish and waterfowl population. Before the Civil War, several wealthy Delta planters built impressive mansions on the banks of the beautiful lake. Some of the houses still stand.

During the past half century, Lake Washington has been rapidly deteriorating. Some of its shoreline is spoiled by fishing camps, trailers, and cottages, and the lake waters have become heavily polluted with herbicides, pesticides, and commercial fertilizers used on the adjoining plantations. In 1973, the lake was closed to commercial fishing because of the dangerous level of contamination. Extensive land clearing in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta has led to increased exposure to runoff from the farm fields, and aerial spraying of crops in the area may also have contributed to the problems at Lake Washington.



WORTHINGTON CUTOFF

Mile 514.5 AHP, Map 28

The Worthington Cutoff is an artificial cutoff channel constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers. It was opened on December 25, 1933, but developed slowly. Annual dredging was required for several years before the river accepted the new channel as its permanent bed.

The cutoff was made because Matthews Bend had been eroding for many years, and it was feared that the mainline levee on the west bank would be lost. The west bank levee in Matthews Bend had been built in 1860 at a cost of \$80,000 in gold, according to an engineer's report made in 1874. It had been cut by Federal troops during the Civil War, and was still open in 1874. Later it had been repaired, and in 1928 the levee had been replaced by the mainline levee system of the Mississippi River & Tributaries Project. In the early 1930's, caving banks threatened to carry it away.

The cutoff removed the problem at Matthews Bend. Island No. 82 was also affected. The change moved it from the left to the right shore. It is now on the Arkansas side of the river, but belongs to Mississippi.

Early travelers on the Lower Mississippi commented that geese, swans, ducks, pelicans, and sandhill cranes could be seen "by the millions" around Island No. 88. This may have been an exaggeration, but Zadok Cramer complained in 1814 that he had spent a night on the island and had been unable to sleep because of the horrible clatter that the birds made all night long. A couple of Army engineers who mapped the area in 1821 were more impressed by the number of insects than by the birds. They called Island No. 88 "Mosquito Island."

When American farmers began to move into Louisiana, several small settlements were established on the west bank in the Matthews Bend area. Boatmen named the bend for a man named Matthews, who owned one of the plantations.

GRAND LAKE CUTOFF

Mile 511.0 AHP, Map 28

The exact date of the natural cutoff at Grand Lake has never been determined, but the river had already abandoned its meander loop in that area when Zadok Cramer first saw it in 1801. Cramer said that he could trace the old bendway by the size of the willows, which were still smaller in the old channel than they were on either side of it.

Some years after the cutoff occurred, a small community called Princeton grew up on the Mississippi side of the river opposite Grand Lake. There was a steamboat landing at Princeton, and the steamer *Oronoko* had stopped in front of it on April 21, 1838, at a

very early hour of the morning. A yawl was put in the water to go to the landing to pick up a few passengers. As the steamer waited for the yawl to return, a flue collapsed and scalding steam swept down the length of the *Oronoko*. Cargo, crew, and many of the deck passengers were blown into the water.

It was later estimated that 100 to 150 immigrants had been on the deck of the *Oronoko*. They had recently arrived in New Orleans from Europe, and had taken passage on the boat to seek employment in Louisville, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati. Only a few had signed the boat's register, so their names and the exact number were never ascertained.

The commotion and loud cries in front of the landing had aroused most of the citizens of Princeton. When they saw what had happened, they helped wrestle the *Oronoko* to the bank, and carried many of the injured to their homes. The disabled steamer was then towed down to Vicksburg, Mississippi, with about 30 of the most severely injured victims still on board.

At Vicksburg, the people of the town opened their homes to the victims and doctors did what they could to ease the terrible suffering, but 16 of the unlucky passengers died the next day. On Sunday, April 22, 1838, there was a mass funeral. The strangers, whose names still were not known, were followed to the cemetery by a procession many blocks long. The untimely deaths of so many immigrants who had started up the river with high hopes for the future had shaken the citizens of Vicksburg considerably, and they were even more shocked when they learned that another explosion on the Ohio River the same week had taken another 150 lives.

A wave of concern and indignation swept the country, and Congress passed the first legislation requiring steamboat owners and operators to take measures to protect the lives of their passengers. The Steamboat Act of 1838, however, proved to be weak, controversial, and more talked-about than enforced. Explosions, fires, snaggings, and collisions continued to mangle or kill hundreds of human beings.

Just above Princeton, at Maryland Landing, there was another spectacular steamboat accident in 1870. The steamer *Nick Wall*, which had been built the previous year, was caught in a high wind and blown on a snag. The boat sank rapidly, and about 40 people drowned. It was said that most of the dead had been deck passengers en route for Texas, where they had hoped to find new homes and more prosperity than they had enjoyed on the Upper Mississippi and Missouri Rivers.

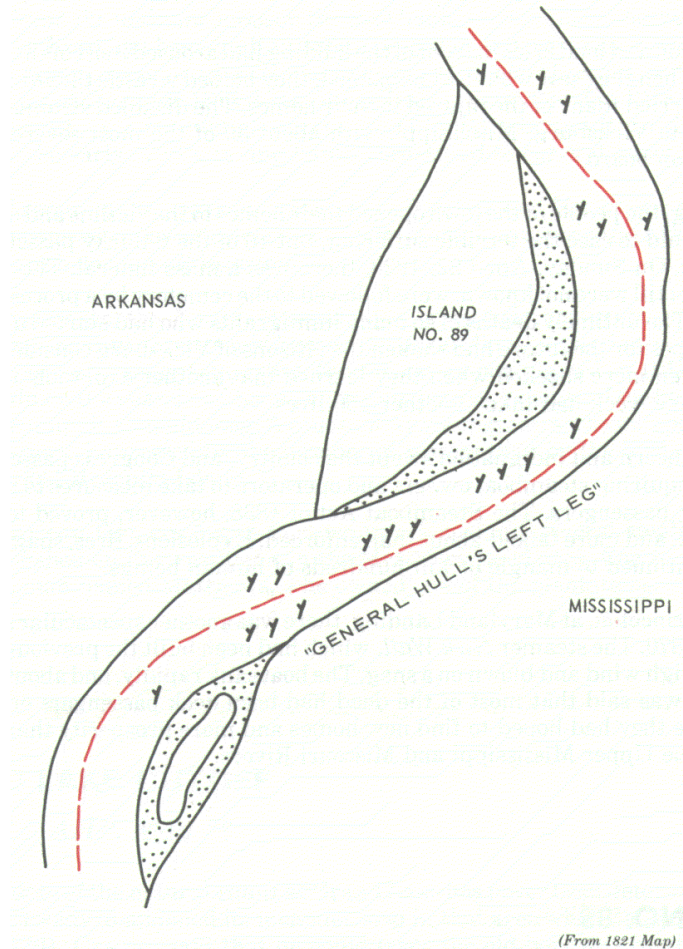
ISLAND NO. 89

Mile 506.5 AHP, Map 29
Right bank, descending

Island No. 89 was a small island that lay close to the Arkansas shore, with the navigation channel on its left at all stages of the water. Just below the island was a

snag-filled channel that boatmen, for reasons never explained, called "General Hull's Left Leg." General William Hull had been one of the heroes of the American Revolution. During the War of 1812 he suffered a humiliating defeat when he lost Detroit to the British. He was later court-martialed, and was saved from execution by the intervention of the President of the United States.

Island No. 89 has now become a part of the Arkansas mainland, and Island No. 90, which lay near the foot of Grand Lake Cutoff, has disappeared from the navigation maps completely.



GENERAL HULL'S LEFT LEG. Flatboat pilots sometimes put strange names on various parts of the Lower Mississippi. They called the snaggy channel below Island No. 89 "General Hull's Left Leg." General William Hull, for whom it was probably named, was a hero of the Revolution who later fell into ill repute because of inept campaigning in the War of 1812. The old general was court-martialed and would have been executed but for the intervention of the President.

SARAH CUTOFF

Mile 504.0 AHP, Map 29

Sarah Cutoff was an artificial channel constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers in 1935. The new cutoff was opened March 23, 1936, but developed very slowly. The low water flow was not permanently routed into the cutoff until August, 1937.

Sarah Cutoff removed Louisiana Bend from the main channel of the river, and was the second artificial cutoff made in this area. Bunch's Bend had been an old bed of the river and had been cut off in 1830 by Captain Henry Shreve. The neck of Bunch's Bend had been eroding for many years, and the cutoff would have occurred without assistance if Shreve had not dredged out the new channel. Shreve reported that the cutoff shortened the navigation channel by about 25 miles, and said that he believed it would reduce flood heights in areas below the cutoff. He reported that 20 or 30 steamboats had been able to navigate the new channel in the spring and summer of 1831.

Both Bunch's Bend and Louisiana Bend were involved in several incidents of the Civil War. Union forces established a small outpost on the west bank at Bunch's Bend in 1863, and on June 9 of the same year the Confederates attacked and captured it.

In Louisiana Bend, the Union transport *Clarabell* was northbound on Sunday morning, July 24, 1864, when a Confederate force opened fire from Ashton Landing, on the west bank. The boat was carrying 400 Union artillerymen of the 6th Michigan Regiment when it was attacked. About 13 of the soldiers were injured in the engagement with the rebel guns, and the steamer was hit 30 times. The *Clarabell* limped out of range and landed at Carolina Landing, on the Mississippi shore, and the crew began to repair the holes the solid shot had made in her hull. Rushing their artillery to the head of Louisiana Bend, the rebels began shelling the disabled boat again. An exploding shell set her afire, and all of the military equipment and personal belongings of the Michigan regiment were lost. The Union soldiers fled on foot and escaped capture.

Ashton Landing was one of the places where Union forces cut the levees in 1863. It was reported more than ten years later that three breaks in the area still remained open and that widespread damage was done whenever the river reached flood stages.

SKIPWITH CREVASSE

Mile 499.4 AHP, Map 29
Left bank, descending

The record flood of 1913 had two crests, and it was on the river's second rise that the levee at Skipwith plantation suddenly collapsed. The unexpected crevasse occurred at

noon on April 21, 1913. Couriers on horseback galloped wildly ahead of the slow-moving crevasse waters, shouting warnings to the people of the Mississippi-Yazoo Delta that their homes were about to be inundated. Several small towns were flooded, and flood-relief workers rushed to the scene with provisions, boats, and other assistance. Because of the heroic rescue efforts, no lives were lost, but it was estimated that 10,000 people had to flee their homes as a result of the crevasse. Buildings and houses were swept away in some areas, and a deep hole that covered 102 acres was created by the swift currents just inside the broken levee.

It was believed that stumps or logs left in the base of the original Skipwith levee had been responsible for the weakness that had allowed it to fail in 1913. The old levee had been built in 1882, and had been enlarged and strengthened several times.

Skipwith was a Union gunboat station and military base during the Civil War. After the fall of Vicksburg, Admiral Porter had had a carpenter shop established there for the repair of his vessels, and the U. S. Army had used some of the plantation buildings as a hospital and barracks for the freed slaves. Island No. 92 was opposite Skipwith Landing, and a Union transport called the *Sam Gaty* had gone down near the island on a sandbar in front of Opposum Point in 1863.

MAYERSVILLE, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 496.5 AHP, Map 29
Left bank, descending

Mayersville is a small town that serves as a county seat for a large and sparsely populated Mississippi county. There is an oil terminal and grain elevator on the river in front of the village, and a bulletin board where daily river stages are posted for the convenience of navigators.

ISLAND NO. 93

Mile 496.0 AHP, Map 29
Left bank, descending

Island No. 93 originally lay in mid-river near Mayersville. The lower end of the island was washed away in a flood in 1884, and what was left of it joined the east bank just below the town.

In 1852 the sidewheel steamer *Western World* collided with the *H.R.W. Hill* near Princeton Landing. Twelve lives were lost in the accident, and the wreck of the disabled *Western World* drifted all the way down to Island No. 93 before it finally sank.

ISLAND NO. 94

Mile 489.0 AHP, Map 30
Right bank, descending

Island No. 94, or Stack Island, became notorious early in the 1800's when it was used as a headquarters by a band of counterfeiters. The cunning gang turned out realistic but worthless U. S. notes. Traders and merchants in those days were accustomed to exchange their paper money for gold and silver. The flatboatmen who were the carefully selected victims of the counterfeiters soon discovered that the paper money was worthless. Their vengeance was as direct as it was prompt. The bandits were run to earth, and the few who were not hung on the spot were thrown into prison.

Stack Island is said to have disappeared during the New Madrid earthquakes in 1811-1812. Two or three years later, a sandbar appeared where the island had been. The sandbar became a towhead, and the towhead grew into a new island. By 1820, Island 94 was back on the voyagers' maps and John James Audubon spent a night there late in the winter of that year. He was entertained, he said, by some woodcutters who lived in the area. They had some tall tales to tell about the size and ferocity of the wildlife of the area. They claimed that alligators, wolves, and bears of enormous size were overabundant in the vicinity of Stack Island and swore that a huge brown tiger had recently frightened a 12-year-old boy literally to death.

One of the famous steamboats called the *Natchez* went down at Stack Island on the first day of January, 1889. The *Natchez No. 7* was, it was said, the finest of the long line of boats of that name made famous by Captain T. P. Leathers. The boat was 300.5 feet long and had eight large boilers. Her machinery had come from her well-known predecessor, the *Natchez No. 6*, which had participated in the famous race with the *Robt. E. Lee* more than a decade earlier.

When the *Natchez No. 7* ran aground and sank at Stack Island in 1889, she was under the command of Bowling Leathers, the son of Captain T. P. Leathers. On board with him was the young man's wife, Blanche, who also held a steamboat pilot's license. It was rumored later that when old Captain Leathers learned that his elegant boat had been lost, he was so angry that he refused thereafter to engage in any more business enterprises with his son and daughter-in-law.

After the accident, silt and sand began to cover the wreck of the *Natchez No. 7*. Later, a change in the river's course uncovered her again. In the low water season of 1962, the hull of the old boat was again located in mid-channel, with just nine feet of water over

the highest point of the wreck. The Corps dredge, *Jadwin*, was dredging the channel and brought up a few bits of the remains of the steamer. The channel was then dredged to the east to avoid the wreck.

Stack Island has joined the Louisiana shore, but Mississippi still has jurisdiction over the island.

LAKE PROVIDENCE, LOUISIANA

Mile 487.3 AHP, Map 30
Right bank, descending

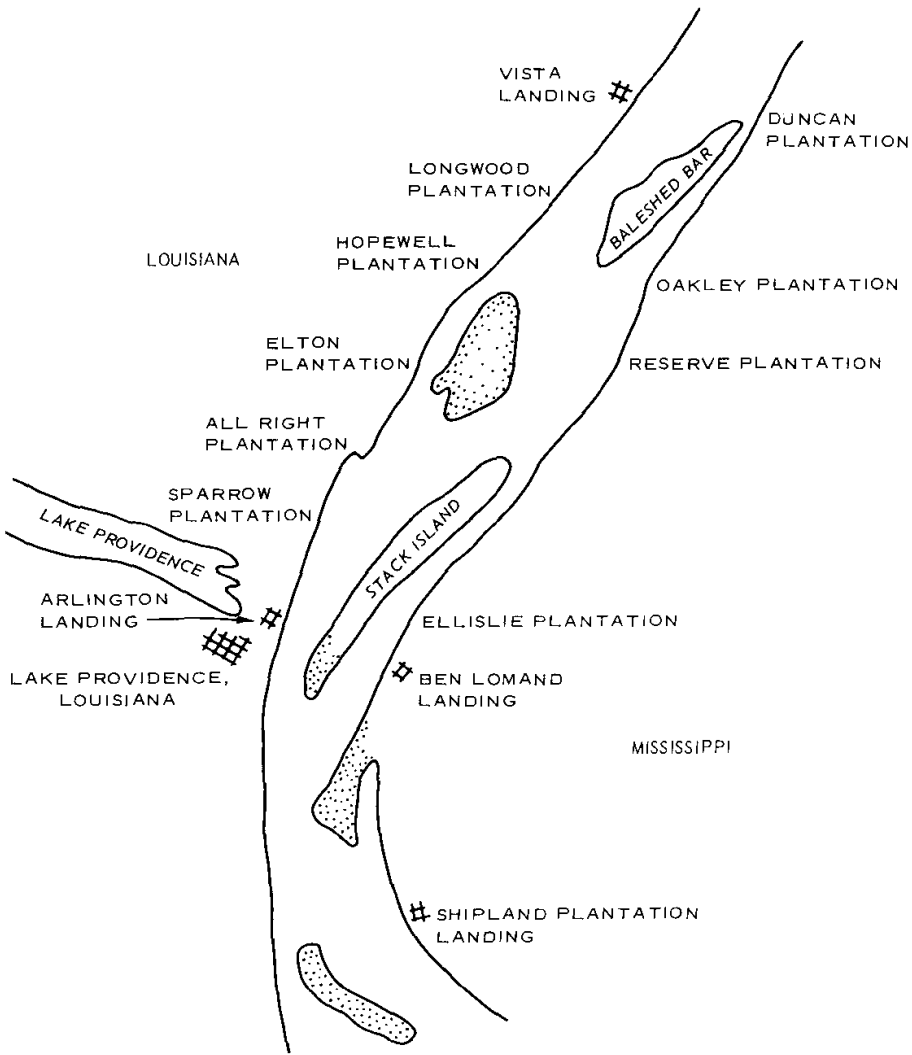
Lake Providence is an old river town and was the center of a brisk trade in cotton and plantation supplies before the Civil War. The large oxbow lake from which the town took its name is an ancient bed of the Lower Mississippi.

Lake Providence was the site of one of the numerous canals that Federal forces attempted to construct in 1863, when they were trying to find a way to bypass the rebel batteries at Vicksburg, Mississippi. Thousands of plantation slaves were confiscated and pressed into service by the Union officers who supervised the building of the canal, but the project was doomed to failure. General U. S. Grant visited the work site on February 4, 1863, and said later that he could see it was a futile effort. He let the work go on nevertheless, believing that employment was better than idleness for both his soldiers and the plantation slaves who were following the army from point to point. The project was abandoned in March, 1863.

The Union army occupied the town of Lake Providence during and after the Vicksburg campaign, and there were several minor skirmishes with Confederate forces in the vicinity of the town.

Lake Providence went into a decline after the Civil War. From time to time, bits and pieces of it slipped into the river and floods brought sand and silt through its broken levees. In 1894 engineers making a survey of the area were told by old residents that the original town had disappeared and that Lake Providence in 1894 was virtually a "new" town.

In 1953, the Army Corps of Engineers filled in the old military canal at the request of local interests. In 1960 a harbor project was authorized for Lake Providence. After the harbor channel was constructed by the Corps, local interests built a public terminal and a 248-acre industrial park. The Port of Lake Providence handled 375,257 tons of cargo in 1974. Products loaded and unloaded in the harbor in Hagaman's Chute included corn, soybeans, iron, steel, wood, paper, lime, and sand and gravel.



OLD PLANTATIONS IN THE VICINITY OF LAKE PROVIDENCE, LOUISIANA. An 1883 map published by the Mississippi River Commission showed a number of the old plantations that lined the banks of the Lower Mississippi in the vicinity of Lake Providence, Louisiana. Most of them were established before the Civil War, and several were very large and well-known cotton plantations. Stack Island was located near the Mississippi shore when the map was made, but has since crossed the river and joined Louisiana.

HOLLY BROOK CREVASSE

Mile 482.9 AHP, Map 30
Right bank, descending

Heavy precipitation over the Ohio Valley in the spring of 1903 culminated in disaster for a Lower Mississippi that was already at flood stage when the rains began in the Ohio River Basin. Seven major crevasses occurred in 1903, and the one at Holly Brook plantation was one of the most disastrous.

Everyone in the area was totally unprepared for the Holly Brook Crevasse. The levee had been built in 1877-1878, had been raised and enlarged in 1893-1894, and had been improved again in 1898-1899. It was believed to be perfectly secure. It collapsed at 6:30 a.m. on April 3, and the gap widened very rapidly.

The swift currents dug a blue hole 74 feet deep and more than half a mile long at the site of the crevasse. A temporary closure was hastily constructed but a late June rise in the same year washed away the repairs and the river flooded about 675 square miles of Louisiana for the second time. Losses were very heavy, and all the fine cotton plantations in the area below the break were devastated.

FITLER BEND

Mile 477.5 AHP, Map 30

The Fitler plantation lay in a big bend of the Lower Mississippi that had originally been called Tallula Bend. The village of Tallula lay on the east bank of the river, and Island No. 95 lay near the east or Mississippi shore.

Changes in the river's course left Island No. 95 on the Louisiana shore, and Tallula Bend moved slowly downstream until the town of Tallula lost its landing and became an inland village.

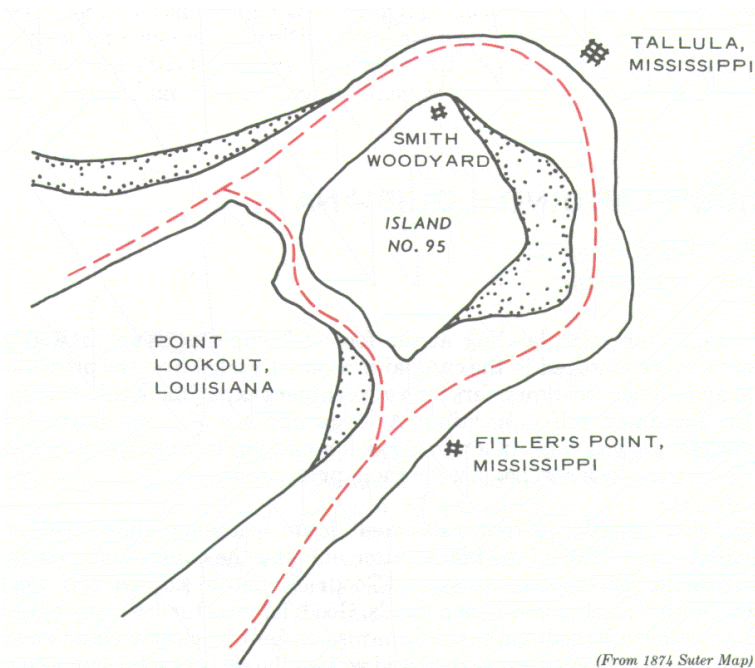
A new river community began to grow up around the Fitler plantation landing. By 1900 prospects for future development were so bright that streets were laid off, and "Fitlersville" boasted that it had electric lights, some stores, many warehouses, a big steam cotton gin, and a bakery.

Steamboats were already on the way out, of course, and Fitlersville soon reverted to its plantation status. The remains of the little town gradually disappeared.

There was some very early revetment work in Fitler Bend, and the flood of 1973 uncovered some old willow mats that had been buried on the bank for many, many years. Some of the earliest articulated concrete mattresses developed by the Corps of

Engineers were placed at Fidler Bend, and the old concrete blocks were also exposed by the 1973 flood.

In recent years, the east bank in Fidler Bend has been caving at a regular rate. There is at present no threat to the mainline levee, but engineers keep a close watch on the area.



FITLER BEND. When the above map was made in 1874, the big bend of the river just above Fidler Plantation was known as Tallula Bend. Later changes in the river's course left the village of Tallula far inland and as the bend slid southward it became known as Fidler Bend.

ALSATIA-SALEM BEND

Mile 468.0 AHP, Map 31

Two plantations on the west bank of the Mississippi gave this bend its present name, but it was originally known as Tompkins Bend.

Islands No. 96 and No. 97, which no longer appear on navigation maps, were in Tompkins Bend when Zadok Cramer numbered them in 1801. Near the two islands a

steamer called the *Bulletin No. 2* caught fire on March 24, 1855. The pilot of the burning boat courageously stayed at his post until he had run the steamer to the shore, but before a line could be taken to the bank the boat bounced off and floated on down the river, burning furiously. It was estimated that about 23 persons lost their lives. The boat's cargo and all of the luggage and other property of the passengers went down with the vessel.

GOODRICH LANDING, LOUISIANA

Mile 467.4 AHP, Map 31
Right bank, descending

Goodrich was a plantation landing at the foot of Tompkins Bend. In 1863, when Federal forces were engaged in the campaign against Vicksburg, the plantation was confiscated and made a headquarters for a government experiment that was designed to make the freedmen self-supporting. A large number of freed slaves from the surrounding plantations were taken to Goodrich and put to work growing cotton. A black garrison was stationed nearby for their protection.

On June 29, 1863, Confederate forces attacked the government plantation at Goodrich and carried off about 1,000 of the blacks after burning the cabins and encampment. Gunboats drove the rebel soldiers away, and Goodrich was reoccupied by Union forces. A year later, with Vicksburg in Union hands, Goodrich was turned over to the blacks again and a northern Freedmen's Aid Commission sent a young woman down from Chicago to teach the new citizens to read and write. She set up a school under the trees and began to initiate about 50 small children into the mysteries of the alphabet and the printed word. After a short time, she went back to Chicago, and the school was closed.

SALEM CREVASSE

Mile 466.0 AHP, Map 31
Right bank, descending

When the flood of 1912 descended on the Lower Mississippi Valley, the residents of East Carroll Parish in Louisiana worried about a lot of things, but not about the levee at Salem plantation. The Salem levee was said to be particularly strong and secure, and when a minor sandboil erupted behind it, the emergency was not considered a critical one. The water was still three to five feet from the top of the levee, and

sandbags and labor were available to take care of the little boil.

When the levee at Salem suddenly collapsed on April 13, the residents of the affected area were almost too stunned to run for their lives. Thousands of cattle, horses, and mules were swept away, and plantation cabins collapsed and disappeared in the swirling waters that poured through the crevasse. Mounted couriers galloped ahead of the advancing flood, shouting warnings to the startled and unbelieving farm laborers and residents of small communities in the path of the flood. People fled to the nearest high spot, and soon the levee on either side of the crevasse was crowded with hundreds who had taken refuge there. Many of them had to wait two days for rescue boats to arrive.

WILLOW CUTOFF

Mile 464.3 AHP, Map 31

Prior to 1913, the Lower Mississippi took a sharp turn into a 14-mile-long bend, through what is now called Lake Albemarle. The river's main channel at that time was about eight miles east of its present course. Caving banks in Albemarle Bend had caused some frantic activity in 1910, when revetment units from three districts of the Corps of Engineers worked to prevent the loss of the mainline levee on the east bank. The work had been difficult, costly, and, due to an entirely unforeseen change, unnecessary.

During the flood of 1913, the capricious Mississippi, with its usual disregard for the convenience of man, suddenly abandoned its old bed in Albemarle Bend. The Newman Cutoff, as the new channel was called, rendered the costly revetment work at Albemarle useless, and created many new problems in the vicinity of the new channel.

By 1934, it seemed apparent that the river was creating a new bend at Newman Cutoff, and that the new channel would be as troublesome as the old Albermarle Bend had been. The Corps of Engineers therefore began the construction of an artificial cutoff at Willow Point. It was opened on April 8, 1934, but the river refused to cooperate and it developed very slowly. For several years, intensive dredging was necessary to keep the cutoff open, but the Mississippi finally accepted Willow Cutoff as its new channel and permanent bed.

The two abandoned riverbeds, Albemarle Lake and Lake Chotard, have now become popular hunting and fishing resorts. Together the two lakes cover more than 1,000 acres. Since both are on the river side of the levee system, they have not suffered as heavily from agricultural chemical pollution as some of the landside oxbow lakes, and they are periodically restocked when the Mississippi rises high enough to flow into and through its old channels.

When Albermarle Bend was still a part of the navigation channel of the river, Island No. 98 lay close to the Mississippi shore in the bend. On February 3, 1866, the steamboat *W. R. Carter* was hustling past the island, southbound for New Orleans. As she slid past Island No. 98, there was a tremendous explosion as the boat's boilers burst. As usual, a raging fire followed the explosion.

The *W. R. Carter*, built in 1864, had accommodations on board for more than 100 passengers. Her large staterooms were luxuriously furnished, and opened into a main cabin that was 225 feet long. There was a nursery on the boat, where small children were cared for while their parents enjoyed the splendid meals that were served in the large dining room. The boat had just been overhauled when she exploded on February 3, 1866, and was believed to be in perfect condition. She was carrying a full load of passengers and freight.

The survivors of the accident—and they were pitifully few—were picked up by a passing steamer and rushed to Vicksburg for medical attention. Twenty-four hours after the accident, only three bodies had been recovered and debris and wreckage was still floating past Vicksburg's waterfront. It was estimated that 123 persons had died. For weeks afterward, Vicksburg newspapers were filled with heart-rending notices and advertisements from relatives of the missing victims, begging for information and assistance in locating bodies.

The *W. R. Carter* had been one of the fast packets of the Atlantic & Mississippi Steamship Company. The company and its hopeful stockholders had spent about \$3.5 million on 24 boats in 1866. By 1869, the investors were counting their losses. Fierce competition from independent owners and the loss of 11 of the company's boats by explosions and other accidents wrecked the enterprise and cost the stockholders about \$2 million.

TERRAPIN NECK CUTOFF

Mile 461.0 AHP, Map 32

In the 1829 edition of *The Western Pilot*, Captain Samuel Cumings reported that Eagle Bend was assuming the same shape that the old Horseshoe Bend had taken just before the river cut it off. The river's currents were working on the neck of Eagle Bend on both sides, and Cumings predicted an early cutoff.

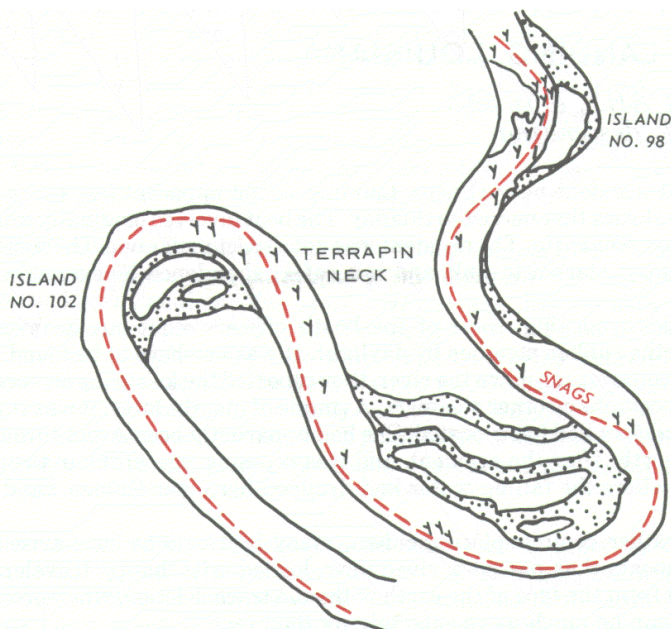
More than 20 years later, engineer Charles Ellet examined the bend and said the neck had grown extremely narrow, and that some "misguided and ignorant persons" had dug a ditch across it. Only diligent effort by planters in the area had prevented a cutoff from occurring, Ellet thought.

Local people in the Terrapin Neck area complained after the Civil War that in 1863 Admiral David D. Porter had sent a party of soldiers and seamen to Eagle Bend with

orders to try to effect a cutoff. The falling river had frustrated the efforts of the Union forces, but the ditch across the neck had been enlarged by the soldiers and was causing the river to flood their fields whenever the water rose to flood stages.

On March 7, 1866, the cutoff that had been predicted for more than half a century finally occurred. Terrapin Neck had narrowed until it was only about 30 feet wide, and the channel that the river cut across it enlarged very rapidly. On March 28 it was reported that the little steamer *Lida Norvell* had come down through the new cutoff instead of taking the bendway, and her captain said he believed the new channel was now safe for all boats.

Eagle Bend soon silted up at both ends and became the oxbow lake that is called Eagle Lake. For many years, Eagle Lake was widely known among sportsmen as one of the finest fishing lakes in the South, but pollution has created many problems in recent years. The swamps and forests that made the vicinity of Eagle Bend an ideal habitat for the Bald Eagle were cleared away, and the use of agricultural chemicals on the surrounding plantations contaminated the waters of the lake. A control structure designed to prevent pollution is now under construction by the Army Corps of Engineers. Sportsmen hope that when the structure is completed, the lake will recover most of its former productivity.



EAGLE BEND. When Army engineers made a reconnaissance map of the Eagle Bend area in 1821, Bald Eagles nested in the giant cypress trees that were abundant in the vicinity. In recent years, swamps have been drained, forests have been removed, and the lake that was created when the river cut the bend off in 1866 has become polluted. A control structure designed to prevent contamination by polluted waters is now being built by the Corps of Engineers.

ISLAND NO. 102

Mile 459.5 AHP, Map 32
Left bank, descending

During the Civil War, a refugee camp was established on Island No. 102. U. S. military authorities placed the camp under the supervision of government agents and teachers, and ordered them to teach the freedmen to be self-supporting.

The experimental project at Island No.102 was already floundering in red tape when Confederate forces were rumored to be in the vicinity. Many of the blacks fled the island, fearing that they would be taken back into slavery. The ones who remained were soon pressed into service on a confiscated plantation where a northern speculator was struggling with the mysteries of how to get rich growing cotton. Families were separated, there was much misery, and the government quietly washed its hands of the whole affair and abandoned the project.

OMEGA LANDING, LOUISIANA

Mile 457.1 AHP, Map 32
Right bank, descending

A steamboat accident near Omega Landing is the apparent basis of a number of imaginative stories that persist to this day. The boat involved originally was a steamer called the *Iron Mountain*. The accident was not a spectacular one. The steamer simply ran upon a snag, started to sink, and was safely abandoned by everyone on board.

Early the next morning, some of the boat's officers went out to investigate the condition of the sunken steamer by daylight. It was nowhere to be found. Assuming that it had been swept on down the river, they reported the loss to the owners and found themselves positions on other steamers. A couple of months later, it was reported that the *Iron Mountain* had been located. She had apparently been swept through a break in a levee shortly after the accident, and was reposing peacefully in the middle of a cotton field where the falling water had dropped her, near Omega Landing.

From this rather commonplace incident, many fabrications have arisen involving great steamboats that passed a river town loaded with happy travelers and then disappeared from the face of the earth without a trace. Fiction, when presented as "a true story," can be much more entertaining than fact!

Omega Landing today is the site of a new port that is being developed by the inland town of Tallulah, Louisiana, and the parish officials of Madison Parish. Port authorities have acquired and prepared an industrial site on the landside of the levee, and two industries are already established on the site. In 1974 the Corps of Engineers

constructed an industrial fill where local interests expect to expand an area to attract more port industries.

Omega was an early cotton plantation established before the Civil War.

MILLIKENS BEND

Mile 456.0 AHP, Map 32

Millikens Bend was named for an early settler in the area, and was the site of a prosperous little community before the Civil War. In 1858 it was said to contain several fine stores, a school, and some impressive homes. The steamboat landing was a busy one, for there were many rich and fertile cotton plantations in the area.

In January, 1863, Millikens Bend was swarming with Union transports that had brought a Union army under General William T. Sherman down the river to make an attack on the city of Vicksburg. The fleet had arrived in the bend on Christmas Day, 1862, and many of the steamers bore familiar names. The *John J. Roe*, *City of Memphis*, *R. Campbell Jr.*, *Sunny South*, *Universe*, *Empress*, *Sam Gaty*, *Die Vernon*, *Fannie Bullitt*, *Crescent City*, *Henry von Phul*, and *Nebraska* were all river steamers that had been converted from civilian to military use. When Sherman's campaign ended in disaster, the steamers disappeared from Millikens Bend for a time, only to reappear shortly thereafter with General Grant's army.

While General Grant was trying to find a safer way to approach the city of Vicksburg, some of the Union soldiers were encamped at Millikens Bend. Every day they were marched to Duckport Landing (*Mile 445.7 AHP*), where they were digging a canal that was supposed to provide access to the Tensas River, and thence to Red River. The Duckport canal was completed, and trees and drift were being cleared from a small bayou that would connect it with the Tensas when the Mississippi began a rapid fall. The falling water made the canal perfectly useless, but it also opened up a land route that Grant could use to march his army to a point below Vicksburg. Gathering all his troops together at Millikens Bend, the Union general started on his long road to Vicksburg by way of Grand Gulf and the interior.

When the troops moved out, Millikens Bend was made a depot for Union army supplies. A detachment of white soldiers and two black regiments were posted as guards. On June 7, 1863, rebel forces attacked the post. The Confederates had pushed the Union garrison out of its fortifications and to the water's edge when the Union gunboats *Choctaw* and *Lexington* appeared on the scene. The rebels fled.

Since the Union troops had suffered heavy losses in the engagement, and since black regiments had been involved, the northern press cried "Massacre!" Admiral David D. Porter, curious about the affair, went ashore, climbed the levee, and looked into the

fortified post. He reported that he saw about 80 black soldiers dead inside the post, and an equal number of dead rebels lying dead on the parapet outside. According to the evidence he could obtain, Porter thought the engagement had been “a fair fight.”

After the Civil War, the river’s currents attacked the site of the old town and it soon disappeared.

CABIN TEELE CREVASSE

Mile 452.7 AHP, Map 32
Right bank, descending

In the flood of 1927, the Lower Mississippi reached unprecedented high stages. At Cabin Teele plantation, the water overtopped the levee and washed it away, creating a crevasse more than 1,000 feet wide. Several thousand people who lived in the affected area were stranded on ridges, rooftops, and levees. Three days later, some were still awaiting rescue. Small boats were sent up from Vicksburg with food and provisions for the refugees, and larger ones followed to bring the people back to Vicksburg.

Vicksburg had more than 10,000 flood victims encamped in a tent city during the flood of 1927. People for miles around came to stare at the refugees. On Sundays, sightseers were so thick that committees were appointed to direct the traffic.

MARSHALL CUTOFF

Mile 450.0 AHP, Map 32

The bend of the Lower Mississippi River that was removed by Marshall Cutoff had long been subject to rapid erosion on the east bank. As it grew longer and longer, engineers feared that the Mississippi was going to cut its way into the bed that the Yazoo River had abandoned in 1799. The consequences of such a change would have been disastrous for the city of Vicksburg, Mississippi, where the waterfront had been restored in 1903 by diverting the Yazoo into the Mississippi’s old bed in front of the city.

To avoid commitment to a long and costly revetment program that might or might not have succeeded in holding the river out of the old mouth of the Yazoo, the Army Corps of Engineers constructed the artificial cutoff across Marshall Point in 1934. By August, 1937, the Mississippi had accepted the cutoff as its new channel and the danger of a change that would have given the Yazoo a new mouth was averted.

PAW PAW ISLAND

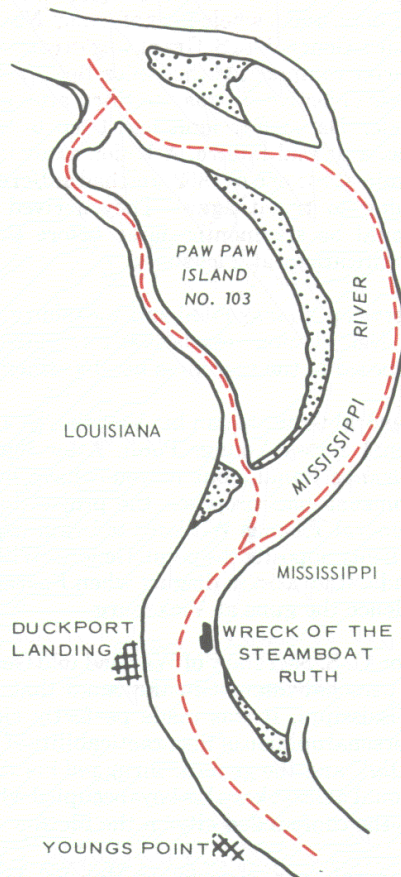
*Mile 449.5 AHP, Map 32
Left bank, descending*

The small tree called the Paw Paw is common in the Mississippi Valley. It has a maximum trunk diameter of about ten inches, and its wood is of no economic value. The fruit of the Paw Paw is three to six inches long, and is edible in October, or especially after a frost. It is cylindrical in shape, pulpy in texture, and is borne in cluster of two to four. A single fruit can weigh more than half a pound.

Paw Paw Island lay close to the right bank of the river and belonged to Louisiana. Marshall Cutoff moved it to the Mississippi side, and it is now attached to the east bank of the river. It is also designated as Island No. 103, and during the early history of the river had the odd name of "My Wife's Island."

Paw Paw was the scene of an accident involving the steamer *Ruth* in 1869. The big boat was one of the Atlantic & Mississippi Steamship Company's fast packets. She carried mail, passengers, and freight, and made connections with railroads at Memphis, Cairo, and St. Louis. The *Ruth* was sometimes called "the most magnificent steamboat ever built," "the Wonder of the West," and other complimentary names.

It was said that the big steamboat had accommodations for more than 1,000 passengers, but when she caught fire at Paw Paw Island on March 15, 1869, there were only 240 people on board. Fortunately for the passengers, the pilot had the courage and presence of mind to run the boat to shore. They lost their luggage, money, and other belongings, but not their lives. The *Ruth* burned to the water's edge after her passengers abandoned her, and was a total loss. All of the cargo, which included 200 head of livestock, was lost. The ruined hull drifted down and lodged on a sandbar near the left bank of the river just below Paw Paw Island.



*PAW PAW ISLAND. Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 map of Paw Paw Island showed it lying close to the Louisiana shore, and located the wreck of the beautiful steamer *Ruth* on the east bank opposite Duckport Landing. Many changes in the river's course have occurred since the 1874 map was made.*

YOUNGS POINT, LOUISIANA

Mile 442.8 AHP, Map 33
Right bank, descending

Youngs Point, on the Louisiana side of the river just above Vicksburg, is today one of the most tranquil places imaginable. Nothing disturbs the quiet of the rural countryside but the occasional throb of a diesel towboat gliding past the point, or the chug of a farmer's tractor in one of the nearby bean or cotton fields.

In 1863, Youngs Point was literally covered with thousands upon thousands of Federal soldiers, and a whole fleet of Union Navy vessels were tied up in the willows along the shore. General U. S. Grant was in command of the Union army, and Admiral David D. Porter commanded the Union fleet. Vicksburg, on the opposite bank of the river, was their objective. It was the third attempt against the rebel stronghold. A Union fleet under David Farragut had tried to take it in the summer of 1862, and the effort was a dismal failure. A Union army under General William T. Sherman had tried again at the end of 1862, and had suffered a humiliating defeat. Grant and Porter were going to try it again. They arrived at Youngs Point in January, 1863, and it would be six months later before they would see the inside of the Confederate fortifications at Vicksburg.

Between Youngs Point and Vicksburg, the Lower Mississippi made a long, long bend in 1863. Union vessels that attempted to pass the fortified city on the bluffs were exposed to the merciless bombardment of the rebel guns.

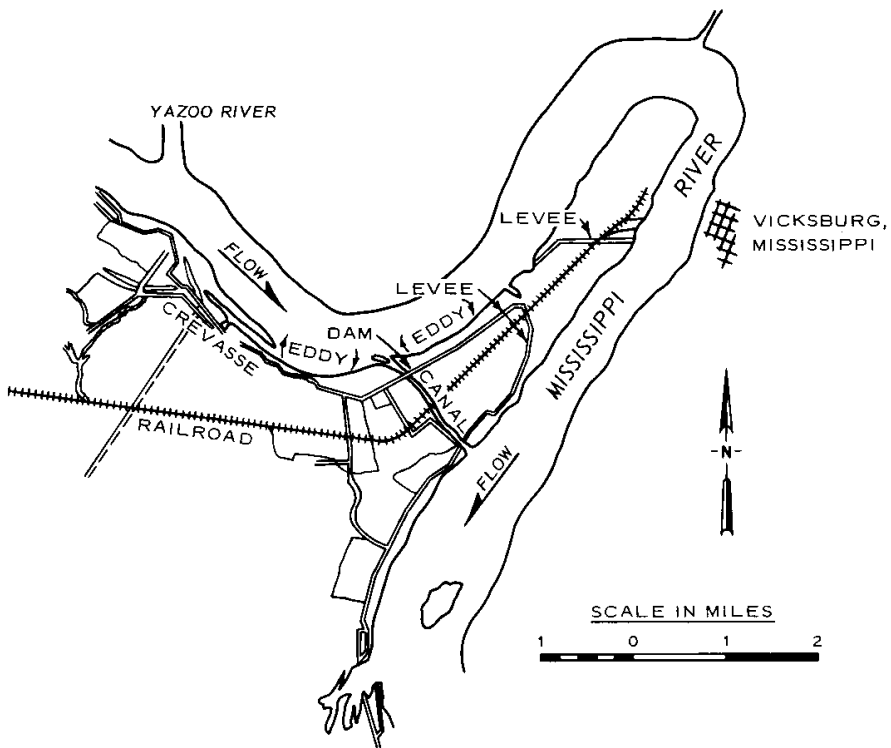
General Grant began his Vicksburg campaign with a half-hearted attempt to build a canal across Youngs Point. After the Civil War, the big ditch would be labelled "Grant's Canal," but it would have been more correct to call it "Lincoln's Canal." Someone had proposed the project to the President in 1862, and he had ordered General Thomas Williams to begin its construction while Farragut bombarded the hill city opposite the point. General Williams had lost most of his men from disease and had withdrawn in disgust when Farragut's fleet went down the river after failing to silence the guns at Vicksburg.

The U. S. Secretary of War had told General Grant that President Lincoln was taking a personal interest in the canal that was designed to cut Vicksburg off from the Mississippi. It was made perfectly clear to the stolid General Grant that his own personal opinion of the practicability of the idea was irrelevant. President Lincoln said "Dig!" and the general shrugged his shoulders and put his men to work. The project would at least keep his boys occupied while he explored other possible means of getting at the confounded city on the bluff.

General Grant reported on March 6, 1863, that the Secretary of War could inform the President that the Youngs Point canal was almost completed and would soon be opened. The next day, the rising Mississippi breached the dam at the upper end of the canal, and the work had to be halted. It was never resumed, but experiments were made at other sites. None succeeded, but General Grant was undismayed. His "providential failures," he said later, forced him to try the land routes that eventually led him to success and national fame when he captured Vicksburg.

During the campaign that followed the unsuccessful effort by bypass Vicksburg by digging the canal, a camp for convalescent Union soldiers was established at Youngs Point. When a small detachment of Confederates launched an attack on the position on June 6, 1863, a clever Union officer drew up the convalescents in battle lines that deceived the rebels and caused them to flee without a fight, believing themselves to be greatly outnumbered.

More than ten years after the Civil War ended, the Mississippi made its own cutoff at Vicksburg, and left the city of Vicksburg without a waterfront.



VICKSBURG IN 1863. An 1863 map prepared by a topographical engineer on General William T. Sherman's staff showed the deep bend in front of Vicksburg, Mississippi, that caused so much trouble for the Union forces. Vessels could not pass the fortified city without being exposed to the fire of the rebel batteries, and the military canal at Youngs Point failed to effect a cutoff that would bypass the city. President Abraham Lincoln was deeply disappointed; the canal had been one of his favorite projects and he had been firmly convinced that it would work.

CENTENNIAL CUTOFF

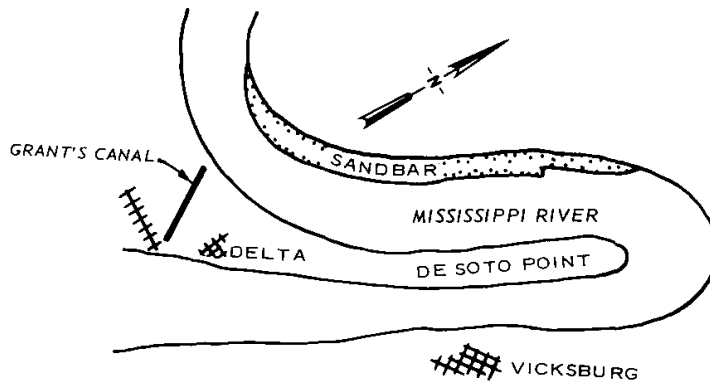
Mile 437.5 AHP, Map 33

At 2:10 p.m., April 26, 1876, the Lower Mississippi took one last bite out of a narrow neck of land in front of the city of Vicksburg, Mississippi, and went surging across DeSoto Point, Louisiana. The river had done what General U. S. Grant and more than 50,000 soldiers had failed to do in 1863. The old town of Vicksburg was removed from the Mississippi.

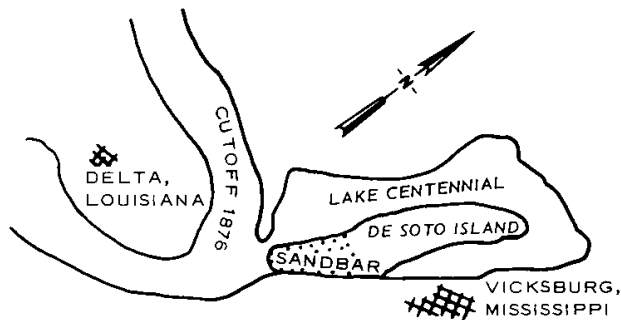
The cutoff that occurred while the nation was celebrating its 100th Anniversary came as no surprise to residents of the area. For many years, eminent civil and military engineers had been examining the narrow neck of land in front of the city and predicting that the river would soon cut through it.

Before the cutoff occurred, many people had argued that a cutoff would have little if any effect on Vicksburg. The old bend would remain navigable, they said, and the town would therefore retain its waterfront. The city's docks would continue to be as busy as ever. Others predicted gloomily that a cutoff would cause the old bend to fill with silt, that the point opposite would recede, and that Vicksburg would be left on a shallow oxbow lake, two miles from any potential steamboat landing.

The pessimists were correct. Vicksburg had lost its waterfront. At low water, a vast expanse of sand and mud prevented steamers from entering the river's old bed, and the docks in front of the city were silent and deserted for months at a time. Vicksburg would stagnate for a quarter of a century before the Army Corps of Engineers would build a canal that would restore the town to its former status as a river port.



BEFORE CENTENNIAL CUTOFF. Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 map of the deep bend at Vicksburg, Mississippi, showed an ever narrowing neck of land. Two years later, the Lower Mississippi cut across DeSoto Point and removed the bend from its main channel.



(From 1883 MRC Map)

AFTER CENTENNIAL CUTOFF. A map of the Centennial Cutoff area made in 1883 showed the disastrous results of the change in the river's course. Vicksburg, an important river port, was left without a waterfront and appeared to be headed for extinction.

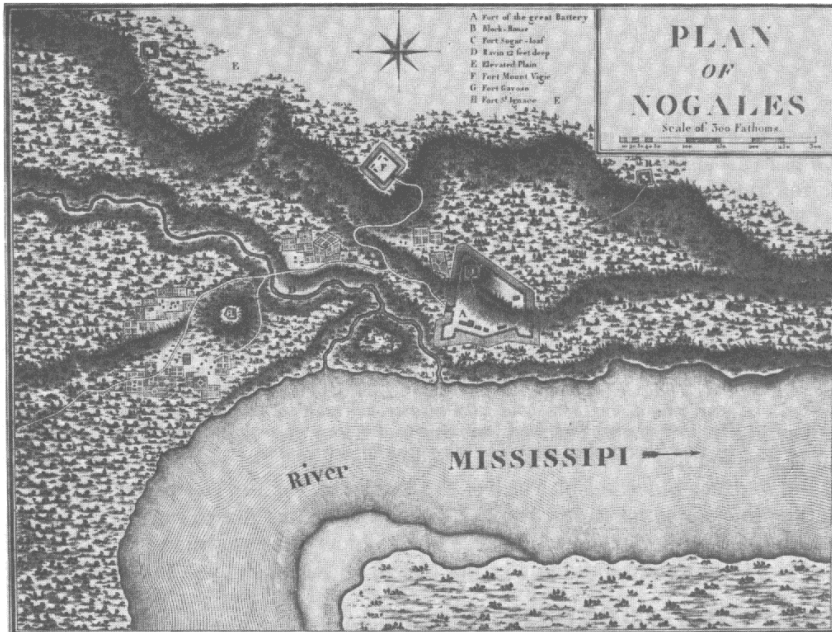
VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI

*Mile 437.1 AHP, Map 33
Left bank, descending*

The bluff where Vicksburg, Mississippi, is located today was the center of a power struggle between European nations for more than a century before the town itself was founded.

Jean Baptiste LeMoyne, Sieur de Bienville, had tried to establish a military post and plantations in the area in the early 1700's, but the French settlement was wiped out by hostile Indians. Just before the American Revolution began, British subjects who were loyal to the mother country and wanted no part of the coming struggle asked permission to plant a large settlement on the lands that lay between the Yazoo and Big Black Rivers. The Revolution disrupted the Tory plans, but enough British land grants were made to cause plenty of grief to the American settlers who would later move into the area.

Spain seized the Natchez District in 1781, and claimed that the mouth of the Yazoo River was the northern boundary of Spanish West Florida. The new American government disagreed, but preferred not to fight for the district that had become known as "the Walnut Hills." While diplomats argued the case politely, Don Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, Spanish commandant of the Natchez District, heard that an American land company was preparing to bring several thousand armed men down the river to establish an American colony on the bluff. Gayoso set out at once with a detachment of Spanish soldiers and workmen, and began the construction of a military post that he called Fort Nogales. Nogales was the Spanish word for "walnuts."



FORT NOGALES. The Spanish built a fort on the bluffs where Vicksburg is now located and during the Civil War the point was again fortified by Confederate military forces. The Spanish Fort Nogales is shown in the above sketch, made by General Victor Collot, who visited the fort in 1796.

Victor Collot, a French general who made a voyage down the Mississippi in 1796, sneered at the fortifications the Spanish had constructed on the bluff in 1791. The Spanish had blundered from hill to hill, adding on little outposts, he said, and the whole complex could be overwhelmed in a few minutes by any handful of determined men.

The small detachment of American regulars under Captain Isaac Guion who politely requested the withdrawal of the Spanish soldiers from Fort Nogales in November, 1797, may have had a similar opinion, but they were under orders not to provoke Spanish authorities. When the Spanish commander of the fort firmly refused to give it up, the Americans went on down the river to Natchez to wait patiently for the Federal government to work out its dispute with Spain. In March, 1798, the Spanish abandoned Fort Nogales.

An American garrison moved into the old Spanish fortification and renamed it Fort McHenry. American settlers in search of cheap land followed hot on their heels, and a small community of farmers was soon established in the area. Among them was Newit Vick, a Methodist minister from Virginia. Vick purchased a land claim from a restless pioneer and began raising cotton on the bluff. It soon occurred to him that the bluff he owned would make an ideal location for a town. He took a piece of paper and a pencil and sat down and drew a plan. His city was to be called "Vicksburgh."

Vick sold two lots before he and his wife succumbed the same day to the ravages of fever, and died, leaving thirteen children as their heirs. The executors of Vick's complicated Last Will and Testament thought that his plan to establish a town was a good one. They placed an advertisement in contemporary newspapers. It read as follows:

“VICKSBURGH: On the Second Monday in April next, will be offered at Public Sale, LOTS in the recently laid off Town of Vicksburgh. This Town is situated on the east bank of the Mississippi river, Warren county, Mississippi state, 90 miles above Natchez, 55 from Jackson, the Seat of Government, 14 below the mouth of the Yazoo river, 2 below the Walnut Hills, and is thought by many persons to possess advantages superior to any other site on the Mississippi river, above New Orleans. Its local situation is truly desirable, combining all the advantages of health, air and prospect—having an elevation of fifteen feet above high water mark, gradual ascent back for near a half mile, and possesses a commodious landing. The country, the traffic of which must center at this place, is extensive and fertile (embracing a greater part of the late Choctaw purchase) and will admit of good progress. Purchasers will have a credit of one, two, three and four years, by giving bond and sufficient security, with interest from the date. The sale to be on the premises. John Lane, Adm'r with the will annexed of the late N. Vick, deceased. February 16, 1822.

The public auction was a great success, and Vicksburg (it dropped the “h” in later years) was on its way into the future. The advent of the steamboat, the invention of the cotton gin, and the removal of the Indians had made it a sure thing. Shopkeepers moved in to take advantage of the growing trade in cotton and plantation supplies. Doctors moved in and offered their skills, and often their lives, in the yellow fever, smallpox, and cholera epidemics. Lawyers moved in to help untangle the conflicting claims of settlers under British land grants, Spanish land grants, squatter claims, and purchase from the U. S. Government. In one of the many disputes a question arose as to exactly when Vicksburg became a town. Was it founded by Vick when he drew his plan and sold the first lots in 1819, or did it come into existence as a town after the public sale? A high court decreed that when Newit Vick drew up his plan in 1819, he had founded the town. Various accounts of the town's history, however, have given dates ranging from 1820 to 1825 as the date of its establishment.

The town of Vicksburg was incorporated by the Mississippi legislature in 1825, and it became the county seat of Warren County. By the time the Civil War opened in 1861, it was a busy, flourishing river port with a population that was considerably larger at the time than the nearby capital city of Jackson. Many of Vicksburg's citizens were foreign-born, a large number came from states other than Mississippi, and few who were living in the town in 1861 were born there. Practically all of them, in spite of their diverse origins, were dedicated “southerners” but many of them were stubbornly opposed to disunion.

Before the war began officially, local militia in Vicksburg, with some help from the State, planted a battery of guns on the waterfront and created a national furor by stopping boats and searching them before allowing them to proceed down the river.

The Federal Government took no steps to chastise the local boys for their impudence, and enthusiastic Confederates took this as a sure sign that even Abraham Lincoln knew better than to tackle the stout little stronghold on the bluffs. When the guns began to boom at Fort Sumter, Vicksburg sent her young men off to fight on other battlefields, never dreaming that the war would touch the city itself.

When the Union fleet under Farragut began to bombard the city in the summer of 1862, Vicksburg was poorly defended and might have been taken, but Farragut declined the honor. It would be "insane" to attack it, he said, and withdrew. When General William T. Sherman, expecting to be joined by reinforcements that never arrived, launched his attack six months later, and was repulsed with heavy losses, the northern press cried: "General Sherman is insane."

It was President Abraham Lincoln's opinion that to let the South maintain its hold on the Lower Mississippi would be the greatest insanity of all, and he sent General U. S. Grant (who had already proved that unlike many of Lincoln's generals, he could fight and would occasionally win) down to take command of the campaign against Vicksburg.

Grant had no idea when he arrived how he would accomplish the great objective, but he knew he had no choice. As he explained later, the people of the North were terribly discouraged by the events that had occurred late in 1862. Voluntary enlistments in the Union army had almost ceased, and the government had had to resort to a draft. It was the wrong time to think about another retreat, and Grant was determined to go forward somehow to a decisive victory that would give the torn nation new hope.

With the cooperation of the Mississippi Squadron, under the command of Admiral David D. Porter, Grant eventually succeeded at Vicksburg. When the city surrendered on July 4, 1863, after a 47-day siege, President Lincoln breathed a sigh of relief. The city had been the key to the river, and the river was the key to the preservation of the Union, the President said. The war dragged on for two years after the fall of Vicksburg, but the loss of the river had doomed the Confederacy to failure.

The Reconstruction Period that followed the war left Vicksburg seething with unrest and staggering under a burden of debt that had reached astronomical proportions. When the river cutoff occurred in 1876, it must have seemed as though fate had decreed extinction for the devastated town. By the time the Corps of Engineers opened the Yazoo Diversion Canal in 1903, the steamboat era had already ended, but the restoration of the Vicksburg waterfront at least raised the spirits of its citizens.

When the Federal Government established the Vicksburg National Military Park and moved the headquarters of the Vicksburg District of the Corps of Engineers to the city, the struggling town received a much-needed boost. The location of the Mississippi River Commission and Lower Mississippi Valley Division headquarters in the city, and the opening of the U. S. Waterways Experiment Station at Vicksburg were bits of good fortune that gave the town new heart in its efforts to surmount and overcome all its problems. With the development of the modern diesel towboat and the revival of river trade, Vicksburg could stop grieving over its former glories and turn resolutely toward the future.

The Port of Vicksburg, with its fine slack-water harbor that was constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers and opened in 1960, has attracted small industries and river-related businesses to the town. The port terminals handle more than two million tons of cargo annually. Some of the products handled are grain, petroleum, lime, cement, steel, and paper products from International Paper Company's mill north of the city. The 245-acre industrial park constructed by local interests is already filled, and plans are under way for expansion. Vicksburg is growing steadily, and promises to become an important distribution center for the waterways industries and waterborne commerce. Like other river towns, it is benefitting from the development of improved boats and barges, navigation aids, and the maintenance of a safe and dependable navigation channel on the Lower Mississippi. The port handled 2,854,131 tons of cargo in 1974. Improved harbor and terminal facilities, and new concepts of shipping will lead to further development.

YAZOO RIVER

*Mile 437.1 AHP, Map 33
Left bank, descending*

The diversion canal constructed in 1903 by the Army Corps of Engineers diverted the Yazoo River into the Mississippi's old bed in front of Vicksburg and restored the town's waterfront. There is a marina for pleasure boats at the public landing in front of Vicksburg, where water, electricity, showers, and laundry facilities are available for pleasure boaters.

The Yazoo is a tributary of the Lower Mississippi and formerly entered the big river several miles above Vicksburg. With its tributaries, it drains approximately 13,355 square miles of delta and hill land in the northwest quarter of the State of Mississippi.

In 1699, the Tunica Indians were occupying villages along the banks of the Yazoo. Father Antoine Davion, a French missionary priest, established a mission among the Tunicas in 1699, but reported that he made little progress in converting them to Christianity. In spite of their disinterest in his religion, the Tunicas were fond of the priest, and when they fled the Yazoo to avoid a war with their enemies, they took him with them to a point farther down the river.

The lands the Tunicas deserted were soon taken by three small tribes—the Koroas, Ofagoulas, and Yazoos—who banded together and became known as the Yazoo Nation. French colonists established a military post and some plantations on the Yazoo around 1718, and coexisted with the Yazoos until 1729, when the Indians launched a surprise attack on the post and killed Father John Souel, a French Jesuit priest, and the handful of soldiers and settlers in the area. The French abandoned the Yazoo river and made no further effort to establish settlements in its vicinity.



OLD COURTHOUSE. One of the familiar landmarks at Vicksburg, Mississippi, is the old Warren County Court House. Built with slave labor and completed just before the opening of the Civil War, the court house was visible from the river and became one of the favorite targets of the Union Navy's gunners during the Vicksburg campaign. It suffered only minor damage. It now houses a fine local museum which contains many relics of Vicksburg's interesting past.

Choctaw Indians claimed the Walnut Hills area when the Spanish built Fort Nogales there, and the vast area of swamps and bottomlands that lay between the Yazoo and the Mississippi above the Spanish fort remained uninhabited by white settlers until after the Choctaws were removed in the 1830's.

During the Civil War, the Confederate forces hid a large part of their fleet in the Yazoo after the fall of Memphis and New Orleans. Most of the boats were sunk to prevent them from falling into Union hands. After the Civil War, local steamboat interests requested the Corps of Engineers to clear the stream of all the obstructions. Eleven or twelve of the old wrecks were removed, and one of them was the hulk of a merchant vessel called the *Star of the West*. This was the steamer that President Lincoln had sent to Fort Sumter in 1861 with reinforcements, and it had been on the receiving end of the first guns fired in Charleston Harbor. Later the boat had been captured by rebels, and they had brought it to the Yazoo when New Orleans fell into Union hands.

The Union gunboat *Cairo*, the victim of an ingenious rebel torpedo in 1863, was not removed from the Yazoo. The gunboat remained buried in the mud and silt until it was resurrected one hundred years after it had gone down. Hundreds of relics were recovered during the attempt to raise the *Cairo* in 1962, and many of them are now on

display in the visitor's center of the Vicksburg National Military Park. The gunboat itself was considerably damaged when raised and was sent to the Gulf Coast, where it still awaits funds for restoration.

The Yazoo River has always been considered a navigable stream, and plans for its improvement have been authorized. When funds become available to carry out the Federal project for its improvement, it is expected that the river will be navigable for 97% of each year. At present, a few towboats enter the Yazoo from time to time, and in 1974 almost a half a million tons of grain and agricultural chemicals were transported by barge on the Yazoo.

For more than a century, the lower part of the Yazoo Basin served as a storage reservoir for flood waters that backed into the tributary from the Mississippi at flood stages. In recent years, there has been a great deal of land clearing and swamp draining in the lower basin, and a flood-control project is now under construction by the Corps of Engineers. It is designed to provide protection for the backwater areas at high stages of the big river and would be overtopped only by a project flood.

KENTS ISLAND-RACETRACK TOWHEAD

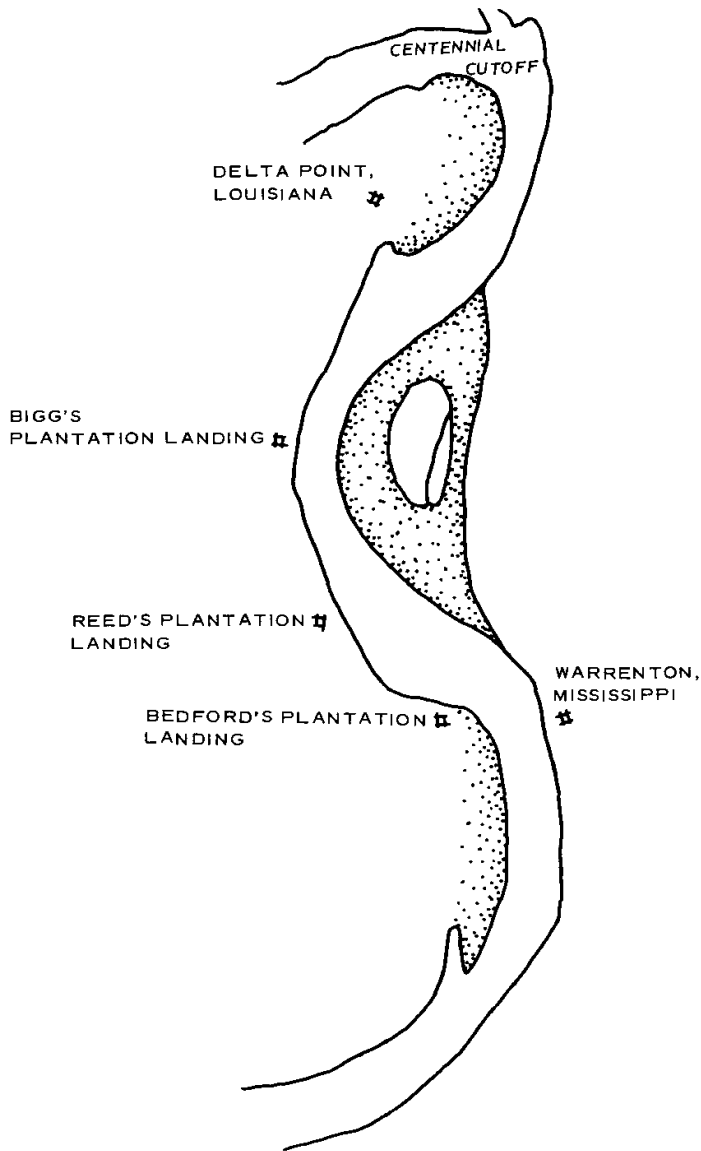
Mile 431.5 AHP, Map 33
Right bank, descending

When the Corps of Engineers dredged out a new channel on the east side of Kents Island, the old Reid-Bedford Bend was removed from the main channel of the river. The bend had been named for two Louisiana planters whose cotton plantations adjoined it.

Opposite Kents Island, there was once a small town called Warrenton. The legislature of the Mississippi Territory had created the town in 1809, ordering it established because the new county of Warren had to have a county seat. The location chosen was low, flat, and surrounded by swamps. After Vicksburg was established a few miles up the river, Warrenton was doomed. It could not compete with the city that had a better landing, a higher location, and a vigorous leadership that was determined to make the most of Vicksburg's advantageous location. The seat of county government was moved to Vicksburg, and Warrenton went into a long, slow decline.

During the Civil War, Confederate forces constructed a fortification at Warrenton, and its guns succeeded in putting one of the Union Navy's vessels out of action on April 22, 1863. The Union boat involved was called the *Tigress*, and she had safely passed all the Vicksburg batteries before one of the rebel guns at Warrenton scored a direct hit, causing her to go aground and break apart. The crew was saved, but the boat was a total loss.

Badly damaged by shelling during the war, Warrenton struggled on for a short time



WARRENTON. The old town of Warrenton, Mississippi, was located about eight miles below Vicksburg. Founded in 1809, the town suffered from floods, epidemics, and its swampy surroundings. It was almost destroyed during the Civil War, and by 1883 was declining rapidly. When the river moved westward, leaving it behind a vast sandbar, Warrenton was abandoned. Today no trace of the old town remains, but an ancient cemetery on the bluff behind the site tells the sad story of countless epidemics, when many Warrenton citizens died of yellow fever, smallpox, or cholera.

afterward until the river moved west, leaving the village landlocked. It was then abandoned, and all that remains today is an old cemetery on top of a nearby bluff.

Islands No. 104 and No. 105 were in the Reid-Bedford Bend, and disappeared from navigation maps when the bendway was cut off.

DIAMOND CUTOFF

Mile 425.5 AHP, Map 34

Diamond Cutoff was the first artificial cutoff constructed by the Corps of Engineers in the 1930's. There had already been several natural cutoffs in the area, and engineers believed that the river was about to create another at Diamond Island. To forestall the natural cutoff, the engineers began the construction of the artificial channel which was designed to keep the river channel in a more desirable alignment than the river itself might have chosen.

Work commenced in the fall of 1932, and the new channel was opened on January 8, 1933. It developed slowly but satisfactorily and eventually became the permanent bed of the Lower Mississippi.

DAVIS ISLAND, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 415.5 AHP, Map 34
Right bank, descending

The course of the Lower Mississippi in the Davis Island area has changed many times during the past two centuries.

In 1776, when American revolutionaries were putting the finishing touches on the document they called "A Declaration of Independence," loyal British subjects were asking the British King for grants of land on a great bend of the Lower Mississippi that was located a short distance above the mouth of Big Black River. In the bend were three small islands, and the British settlers called the area "The Three Islands."

One of the British subjects who succeeded in obtaining a small grant of land at The Three Islands was William Selkrig, a hard-working, peace-loving Tory who built himself a small cabin on the river bank, cleared away some of the ancient trees, and began to cultivate his soil in 1777.

In January, 1778, Selkrig saw a strange armed vessel approaching the landing near his cabin. The armed vessel was called the *Rattletrap*, and was under the command of an American captain, James Willing. Willing and his party were on their way to New Orleans, where he would obtain some assistance and supplies for the American revolutionaries from the Spanish governor, Bernardo de Galvez. Along the way, Willing was recruiting men who sympathized with the American cause, and burning the homes and crops of those who did not. Selkrig, a loyal Britisher, was taken prisoner, thrown aboard the *Rattletrap*, and carried away by the raiders.

Fortunately for Selkrig, British friends rescued him before the boat reached New Orleans. He returned to his little plantation at The Three Islands, only to find that Indians had plundered his cabin and fields in his enforced absence. Fearing for his own life, he abandoned his farm and moved down the river into a more settled area.

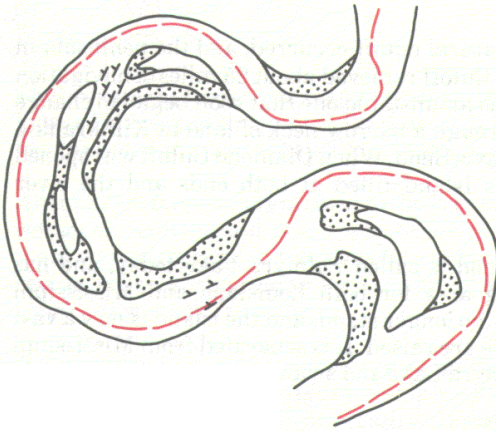
There were no further efforts to establish plantations in the vicinity of what is now called Davis Island until it became apparent that the United States was about to settle its boundary dispute with Spain, and that the Old Natchez District would become American property. American settlers rushed in to establish claims and a settlement called Palmyra sprang up on the east bank of the river in the bend.

When the United States opened a land office to settle land titles and dispose of government land, William Selkrig filed his claim to the land where he had built his little cabin in 1777. His title under the British land grant was held to be invalid, and the preemption claims of squatters in the area were recognized.

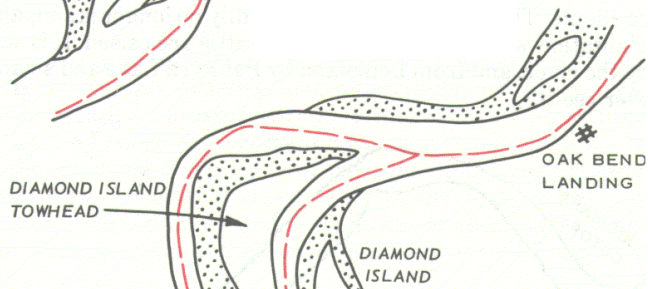
In 1808, Edward Turner, a Natchez lawyer, began to purchase the small tracts of land claimed by the Palmyra squatters, and by 1810 he had acquired the whole settlement on the north side of the peninsula of land in the big bend. Turner was joined in 1818 by another purchaser, Joseph E. Davis, who acquired most of the land on the west side of the peninsula. An adjoining property became the home of Joe Davis' younger brother, Jefferson Davis.

The two Davis plantations, Hurricane and Brierfield, became well-known and the bend of the river was renamed Davis Bend. When the Union campaign against Vicksburg was under way in 1863, both the Davis plantations were confiscated. Jefferson Davis, who had been a hero of the War with Mexico, a United States Senator, and U. S. Secretary of War, was now the President of the Confederate States of America, and Union authorities thought it was particularly fitting that the plantation that had belonged to the highest ranking rebel of all should be appropriated for use by the Freedmens' Bureau. A model colony was to be set up, to demonstrate that the ex-slaves from the southern plantations would quickly become self-supporting, given an opportunity. Cotton speculators thwarted the good intentions of both the black farmers and their government supervisors, and the colony was not a success.

After the war ended, Joseph Davis regained possession of the land in Davis Bend by signing an oath of loyalty to the Federal Government. He swore to Union military officers who administered the oath that he had taken no part in the rebellion and had given no aid or encouragement to the Confederacy of which his brother had been the first and only President. Jefferson Davis, on the other hand, steadfastly refused to take the oath, saying that he would never beg for favors from the Federal Government. He



BEFORE DAVIS CUTOFF. The big bend of the Lower Mississippi which had been known as "The Three Islands" during British dominion was later called Davis Bend. In the 1821 map shown above, the neck of the bend is extremely narrow, but it would be almost half a century before the river broke through to abandon the bend and create a new channel for itself.



AFTER DAVIS CUTOFF. After the Lower Mississippi cut through the narrow neck of land in Davis Bend, the peninsula of land that had been attached to the Mississippi mainland was called Davis Island. It had been the home of Jefferson Davis, first and only President of the Confederacy, and of his brother, Joseph E. Davis.

