

30

Sunk Without a Sound

The Tragic
Colorado River
Honeymoon of
Glen
and
Bessie
Hyde

Brad Dimock

Fretwater Press
1000 Grand Canyon Avenue
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001
www.fretwater.com

© Brad Dimock 2001
All rights reserved
Printed in the
United States of America
01 02 03 04 7 6 5 4 3 2

ISBN
(cloth) 1-892327-28-7
(paper) 1-892327-98-8

Library of Congress Card Number: 00-111578

This book was set in Adobe Minion and Gill Sans,
designed and typeset in Adobe InDesign,
on a Macintosh G3
Printed by Thompson-Shore on permanent acid-free paper

Front cover photograph:
Dimock and Ledbetter in Travertine Rapid
by Dugald Bremner, ©1996
Back cover photograph:
Bessie and Glen Hyde, Hermit Camp
by Adolph G. Sutro,
courtesy Huntington Library



Jeanne and
Glen Hyde,
Cap Guleke

Atlantic navigation; generally plentiful as it respects food, and always so as it regards whiskey, should always have seductions that prove irresistible to the young people that live near the banks of the river."

The flatboatman steered his craft with a tremendous sixty-five-foot steering rudder, or "sweep," and occasionally propelled the boat with long "broadhorn" oars. Arriving in New Orleans, the flatboatman would liquidate his remaining cargo, sell his boat for lumber, squander his earnings in a dissolute spree, then tramp overland back to the upper reaches of the river to start again. "There is a charm about it that one can hardly account for," wrote another flatboatman, Thomas C. Collins, "unless it is because one is on the move nearly all the time. Almost every trip I took I would say, 'This is my last,' but, soon as I got home and rested a few days, I wanted to go again, and so it was with most of those who tried it."

On the Salmon, the first sweepboats, or scows as they were called, appeared in the 1870s. They were a scaled down, high-walled version of the flatboat. Like their predecessor, they were crudely built from rough-hewn planks, but only ranged from five to ten feet wide and sixteen to thirty-five feet long. The sidewalls rose three to four feet, and the bow and stern cantilevered up and out over the water. There were no broadhorn oars to propel the craft—instead the scowmen added a forward sweep to pry the bow of the barge into the proper thread of current.

The speed of the river provided the only propulsion, and the rear sweep aided in maintaining the proper heading.

The smaller sweep scows could be run by one man; the mammoth scows required two, one man for each sweep. The Salmon River was swift and shallow enough that the sweepboats excelled. Many were the miners that built scows and worked their way down the Salmon. The most prominent of the early Salmon scowmen was Johnny McKay, a Scottish hermit who worked the Salmon for more than twenty years beginning in 1872. After building a new boat in Salmon, Idaho, he would spend up to two years working from placer bar to placer bar, ending in Lewiston, Idaho, where he would sell his gold, scrap the scow, sell the lumber, and work his way overland back to Salmon.

By 1900 Harry Guleke had adopted sweepboating as his trade and, like the old flatboatmen, would work his way downstream buying, selling, trading, and delivering many tons of goods, always selling the boat for lumber at the end of the journey. Guleke took the trade a step farther by taking tourists through the gorge. One of them, a novelist named Caroline Lockhart, described him in 1911:

There was Guleke, big as a bear and as strong, and with a bear's surprising agility as I afterwards learned—low-voiced, deliberate, with a slow, pleasant smile and a droll fashion of shaking his head and saying: "Well, well, I declare!"

Many are the tales they tell of his strength—how, in an emergency, he broke a sweep in two, a tough green fir tree, to save a girl's life, and they chuckle over the story of how, upon an occasion, when attacked because he would not drink, he knocked the belligerent down three times and then said plaintively: "What's the matter with you? I don't want to fight," not being conscious that the fight had started.

Guleke was glad to help the Hydes build a scow, coaching and aiding them wherever he could. Guleke supplied the lumber from his small sawmill. Glen, an accomplished carpenter, had little trouble assembling the boat—the average time to build a scow was three days. On the afternoon of August 30, 1926, Glen and Jeanne Hyde launched on a paltry 650 cfs. (*Cubic feet per second*—the standard measurement of streamflow, as recorded by the United States Geological Survey, indi-

cating the number of cubic feet of water that pass a given point each second.) Years later, in a short story, Jeanne described their departure:

The boat was a flat-bottomed scow, measuring five by sixteen feet. A platform was built in the middle of the boat, where the boatman, and boat-woman, in this case, were to stand. Nearly meeting here were the ends of the two sweep oars, each extending out into the water about four feet. The captain of the crew, my brother..., took the fore sweep; the mate, myself, the rear. The captain shouted orders; I obeyed, to the best of my ability.

When we had stocked our boat with food calculated to last two weeks, thrown in our bedrolls, and other essentials, we started forth. Capt. Guleke went part way with us, just as sort of a send off. When he left I took over my position as rear oarsman. It was thrilling what a slight pull at the oar it took to turn the little scow.

Glen at the forward sweep

Glen at University of Idaho



Jeanne also kept a set of notes that Salmon River historian Cort Conley describes as "the most peculiar ever to come off the river; so sparse as to be almost poetic." Yet her spare phrases add flavor to the story of their trip. *People seeing us off—running along bank—horse looking at us, stupefied. First battle with oar—leaning on it—boat swerves—oar nearly knocks me out.* Below the town of Salmon, they passed the small community of North Fork. *First casualty—visor overboard. People watching us go by—"Goodbye, boys!"*

The Hydes had to learn quickly. Glen had learned to read the river's currents in his months on Canadian rivers. And they learned enough of the art of sweepboating in the first few miles with Guleke to survive the trip. They pried and wriggled their way between shallow rocks, hoping the river would deepen as tributaries joined the river. *"We're on a rock!"—wind holding us back! Taking wrong branch of river—stuck on low bottom—managing boat myself!*

Below North Fork a small dirt road paralleled the river as far as Shoup, where the Hydes arrived on their third day. They bought provisions and headed downstream to their first major rapid, Pine Creek. *Run onto rock—prying for an hour—bailing—waiting to swing—broken oar.* They eventually worked the boat free and replaced their broken sweep with a slender log. Later that day they broke their second sweep, and replaced it with another log. The weather added to their difficulties. *A fire on shore to dry out—raining—things wet—cigarettes—the candy melted to syrup.* In spite of the rain, Glen was enjoying himself. He shot a duck for dinner and assured Jeanne the weather was improving. *"It's clearing up!"—optimist.* It rained for another week.

Early morning beautiful—white mist rising from blue mountains. Feeling of being absolutely shut in—in the mountains. They had entered Black Canyon, a steep batholithic gorge, and home to Salmon Falls, a particularly steep, narrow drop. *Salmon Falls—highest—rocks—I on my back hanging to oar.*

"I was thoroughly scared just once," Glen later told a reporter from the *Lewiston Morning Tribune*:

That was when the boat became half upturned against a huge rock at Salmon Falls in the Box Canyon of the Salmon River. There the river drops twenty feet in fifty as it boils over jagged rocks. I broke