

Explorers on the Missouri

Living on the Missouri River, the people of St. Charles saw many great expeditions to the West. Most important were those of Lewis and Clark, Pike, and Long.

Two army captains, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, commanded an expedition that landed in St. Charles on May 16, 1804. Here Lewis and Clark hired the last of their crew of 44, Pierre Cruzatte and François Labiche, both experienced French-Canadian boatmen.

They spent five days in St. Charles. The crew attended two dances in their honor. Three privates were court-martialed for being absent without leave and received

lashes. Before departure on May 21, Clark shifted boat cargos forward. Navigating the Missouri River required weight in the bow to push through snags and driftwood. For the next 18 months the expedition journeyed up the Missouri and into the West, reaching the Pacific Ocean. They returned to St. Louis in September 1806.

In 1820, Major Stephen Long led a successful scientific expedition up the Missouri and Platte rivers to the Rocky Mountains. Part of the way they traveled by steamboat. From that year forward, steamboats began opening the West to trade and commerce.

WAS PIKE A SPY?

In 1806, Capt. Zebulon Pike led 22 men up the Missouri River from Fort Bellefontaine. Their mission: contact American Indian tribes, find the sources of the Arkansas and Red rivers, and observe Spanish border activities in the Southwest. In present-day Colorado they were captured by the Spanish, accused of being spies, and briefly imprisoned in Mexico. Pike was under orders from Gen. James Wilkinson, governor of Upper Louisiana, U.S. army commander—and a double agent for Spain.

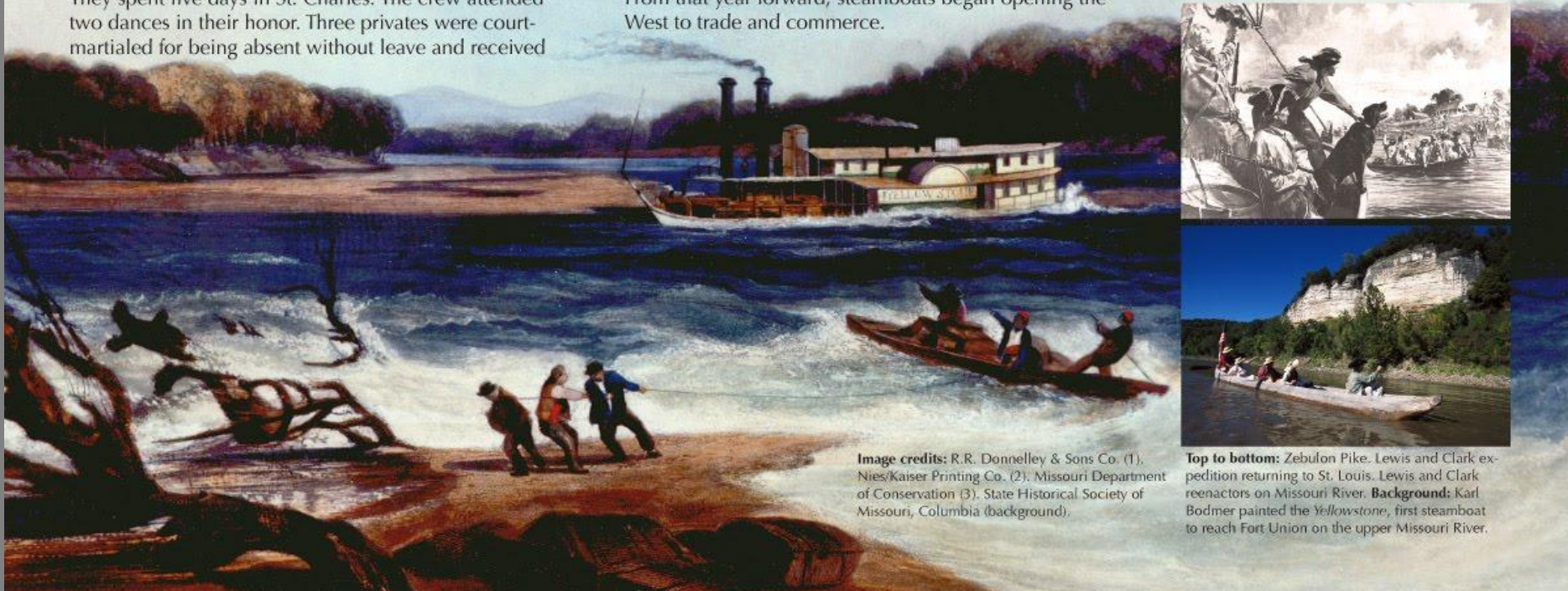


Image credits: R.R. Donnelley & Sons Co. (1), Nies/Kaiser Printing Co. (2), Missouri Department of Conservation (3), State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia (background).

Top to bottom: Zebulon Pike. Lewis and Clark expedition returning to St. Louis. Lewis and Clark reenactors on Missouri River. **Background:** Karl Bodmer painted the *Yellowstone*, first steamboat to reach Fort Union on the upper Missouri River.