Welshman Boat Enterprise.
Mr. D. A. Thomas, Lusitania Survivor.
Puts His Millions into Line on the Mississippi.
First Craft Completed.

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Icon No.1, Begins Her Maiden Voyage from St. Louis to New Orleans Today.

By James E. Edmunds

New Orleans. April 12th (Can boats come back to the inland rivers?)

On April 15th, there sails from St. New Oltmans, scheduled to the latter city April 25th, the Item No. 1 of a fleet of 35 modern watercraft contracted for or planned, with which the Inland Navigation Company, capitalized at $9,000,000 proposes to put the issue to practical and gigantic experiment.

The Icon No. 1 looks like no other craft that ever moved on the Mississippi and is plan and operation she is as dissimilar from her predecessors as her looks imply.

John H. Bernhard, aged 31, Helander of Amsterdam the practical designer whose ideas are at the better of the new venture, D. A. Thomas now Lord Rhondda, of Wales and London, is the capitalist with a vision whose faith and whose check book enabled Helander to put his ideas to the test of actual trial.

The Island Navigation Company will be the first great corporation to essay long distance service on the Mississippi in a wonderful way since the Anchor line and the Mississippi Valley Transportation Company went out of business nearly a quarter of a century ago.

From one end of the valley to the other, businessmen, commercial organisations, transportation companies are watching the new venture keenly, for most part hopefully.

If it succeeds, and its promoters admit no chance of failure, the causes which have produced a transportation crisis this spring in the whole Mississippi drainage basis will be, in the great part removed.

The Water Way is the Valley Way.

For 12 years the Mississippi valley dreamed fond dreams of what would happen "when the Panama Canal is faded."

It was finished. Nothing happened that helped. Much came about that hurt.

The reason is evident: “The valley would not use the rivers to connect up with the gulf-and-canal route to the Pacific markets and the sources of supplies. The Atlantic seaboard did use the seaways.”

Ten years ago, James T. Hill declared that the next boom period to American business would swamp the railroads that millions would be needed to so rebuild the steel lines and to enlarge the rolling stock, that the two would be adequate to carry the commerce of a thriving America in 1920.
It is not 1920, but the railroads of America have been unable to meet the traffic demands of the last six months of 1915 and the first three of 1916.

From St. Paul and Minneapolis down to New Orleans, and crossways from Pittsburgh to Kansas City and from Chicago to Fort Benton, business organisations are saying: "Put boats back on the Mississippi and the tributaries: build terminals at the river ports; use the rivers and the rail roads: take the rivers out of the pork barrel.’”

The Chicago Association of Commerce, through its spokesmen before the Illinois legislature when the Mill was pending for a navigable canal between Lake Michigan and Chicago, declared:

"We want the Mississippi available for an outlet to the sea, not for our self-interest, but for our self-protection.”

Tet to this spring of 1916 the 13.000 miles of the "Mississippi river system" with its 3,200 miles of "main trunk line," that once served the whole heart of the continent run as empty to the sea as does the Amazon nearly as useless as, the, Congo.

The season of 1915-16, the valley is estimated to have produced $1,300,000, tons of freight and the railroad service has reached the utmost of its capacity of mileage, yardage, and rolling-stock: Another hundred million tons and it will be insufficient.

New Boats Upon the River.

Now, however, the first thorough going, amply financed, broadly proposed effort to "put the boats back, upon the rivers" is ready to be made.

Is 1914 John H. Bernhard Netherlands, a marine and electrical engineer, who had picked America for its oyster, undertook a laboratory experiment is modern commercial navigation of the Mississippi. His voyage is 1914 was with a low-powered, 1,000 ton, shallow-draft propeller craft originally constructed by ban for the Alabama and New Orleans Transportation Company to move coal out of the Warrier River, Alabama, to New Orleans.

On the very day, the Panama Canal was opened for traffic, the large tramped sadly back into the harbour of New Orleans after Journey to St. Paul. Barnhard was "cleaned out," for the boat had not been fast enough. His crew had been untrained. The war had brought stoppage of his promised returns cargoes. But he had learned what to do. His group of bankers financed a quest for each to New York and New England. It was agreed that it would require millions, a fleet a few boats, special terminals Instead of the bleak “levees" of the river towns, and an elaborate and export traffic department.

So, in the late autumn of 1914, Bernhard, "bested" but building with hope went east, for the south who was then in the throughs of 7-cent cotton.

In the early spring of 1915, he travelled back to New Orleans, and to a few Intimates he whispered the same of the one man whose Interest had been substantially awakened D. A. Thomas, the wealthy Welsh coal mine owner and financier, then in America on behalf of the British government. This man knew water transportation throughout the world. He had vision. He had confidence in America.

“The draft of the first agreement is signed," said Bernhard gleefully. "Mr. Thomas be on his, way, with it on board the Lusitania!"
The next day came word that the Lusitania had been sent to the bottom by a German submarine. But

D. A. Thomas was saved, and with him was saved the project for the Inland Navigation Company and for the revival of Mississippi water borne commercial.

New Fleet Built and Building.

Thirteen months from the tragedy, the Inland Navigation Company is organised with $3,000,000 of authorised capital, with the first of its new-style watercraft afloat, three more on the ways, three others are contracted for.

A fleet of 35, various lines and kinds to serve the various lines of traffic, are in view if the view if the first squadron meets the support and reaps the profits which John H. Bernhard declares are certain.

Lord Rhondda as D. A. Thomas is known is chairman of the board of directors of the corporation. John H. Barnhard is the executive head of its actual conduct. English capital has been supplemented by the pledges of men New York, St. Louis, and New Orleans.

Offices are open in New York and St. Louis and New Orleans. There are agencies in Memphis, Cairo, Greenville, Minneapolis, and Chicago.

Tariffs as complete and elaborate as any issued by any railroad set forth the rates and conditions of business.

Cooperative association has been arranged with all the companies operating old-fashioned packet steamboats out of the river towns to the way landings and smaller shipping points, as well as with the amply financed Kansas City and Missouri River Navigation Company operating boats and barges between Kansas City and St. Louis.

Freight is solicited for delivery on through bills of lading, to "any destination to which the use of the routes of the Inland Navigation company's craft furnishes a logical transportation link."

Steamship outlet and feeders at New Orleans have been arranged to Europe, South America, the Pacific coast of the United States, and thence to Asta, and to Alaska.

Many railroads have been enlightened enough to agree to traffic interchange. Suits against others for through bills of lading have been filed with the interstate commerce commission.

This is the vision in the view of the Inland Navigation Company: A movement of heavy, long-distance traffic, between the great concentration and distributing river and lake ports, with transshipment between ships and river craft or between river craft and the railroads rendered efficient and economical by the use of dock facilities as thoroughly modern as the carriers themselves.

What These New Craft are Like.

The new craft are like nothing that ever plied the inland rivers before. They look like a cross between canal boat and a motorboat.

The hull of Inco No. 1 is 240 feet long and 43 feet wide. It is all steel, bridge-structured, divided into bulk-headed, watertight, and air-tight- compartments. No cargo goes into the hull.

Upon the hull is superimposed a cargo box of removable steel sides and top hatches, 200 feet by 40 feet. Loaded with 1,600 tons of cargo, the barge will draw seven and a half feet of water.

Four 51-inch propellors are driven by for internal combustion engines. There is only a simple operating navigation box upon a steel bridge mounted amidships no other super-structure. In place of "stage planks," is a traveling gantry crane mounted astride the cargo box and clearing the navigation bridge. It can deposit car- go 68 feet from the ship's side. The Inco No. 1 cost $94,150 and carries more freight than the largest steamboats could ever bear, though some of them cost hundreds of thousands.

The crew of the Robert E. Lee consisted of 125 officers, engineers, mates, deck hands and "roustabouts." Twelve experts handle the Inco No. 1. She is keyed and wired, and telephoned and gauged, to save steps, avoid smoke, and eliminate friction, mechanical, or human.

On the Inco No. 1 a skilled navigator will sit in the navigation Dials and gauges before show the depth fore and aft and amidships, the trim by head or stern, the list to either side, the revolutions per minute of either propeller. By levers at his hand, he can control the speed of the boat, can stop her, or send her astern, can alter the "trim" or the list to ease her off shoals, can start or stop the pumps. By phone he can talk man or the sailor on watch.

The wireless operator will be almost at his elbow to talk to the main offices In New Orleans and St. Louis.

It is as, far, a cry from the Inco No. 1 to the Robert E. Lee, which is still type for other river craft as it is from a U-boat or a super-dreadnaught to the wooden frigates of Farragut and Porter.

And the Inco No. 1 is the smallest and the cheapest of the whole fleet of 35 which, if the first squadron succeeds, is to be completed in shipyards at St. Louis and New Orleans.

Sister boats already launched are of 2,000 and 3,000 tons, respectively. One great craft is planned to be over 300 feet long, 80 feet wide, and to bear 5,000 tons of cargo but still on a draft of only seven and a half feet-at a speed of 18 miles an hour.