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CALIFORNIA'S INLAND FLEET

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It is unlikely that there is anyone who hasn't heard of the fabulous Mississippi River steamboats, and of the race between the Natchez and the Robert E. Lee. Stories and books and poems and movie scripts have been written about them - while California's own colorful fleet of river steamboats has all but been ignored.

They were wonderful packets, those old Mississippi steamers, with their thick carpets and crystal chandeliers and their wonderful food, and the Robert E. Lee was worth every bit of the fame that she got -- even though she was smaller by 200 tons than our own side-wheeler Capital, which ran between San Francisco and Sacramento for many years.

So tonight we are going to try in a small way, to fill in that gap in history, and to go back for fifty or a hundred years and even more, into a time when people had time to enjoy life, and the comfort and even luxury of travel on our inland waters was taken as a matter of course. True, it was not always luxurious -- especially on the rugged Colorado - but by and large people travelled well. And they lived high off the hog. As the white-haired old bartender on the Capital City Yosemite - "You et all the way from San-Fran-Cisco to Rye-o-Visty!"

California was a lovely place in those early days. There were no smog alerts, there were no bulldozers, there were no freeways. But they had their problems of transportation, and one solution was to

