

A BROWNSVILLE-BUILT TREASURE THE STEAMBOAT *ARABIA*

Conceived and born in Brownsville, Pennsylvania, her life on the frontier was an exciting one – but it was tragically short. She died a violent watery death at the height of her career and was unceremoniously buried hundreds of miles from Brownsville. Her grave lay undisturbed for more than 130 years.

Then one day, saviors from above came to her rescue. They found her right where they knew she would be. And they pulled off a miracle.

They resurrected her from the grave.

When they unearthed her from her not-so-final resting place, she willingly told them revealing tales, wonderful stories of real frontier people who had known her well in those turbulent years just before Abraham Lincoln became president and the terrible Civil War began.

She richly rewarded the devoted men who had searched so diligently for her. She repaid them by giving them all of the treasure that she had taken to her grave, a fantastic trove greater than her rescuers could ever have imagined. Only three years old when she met her untimely end in 1856, she is exactly 150 years old this year, and she is still revealing her amazing secrets to an astonished world.

She is the Steamboat *Arabia*, often called the *Great White Arabia*, after the tall, majestic appearance she presented as she gracefully glided on the waters of America's great midwestern rivers. She is the greatest archaeological discovery of her kind ever unearthed in America. The mother lode of nineteenth-century artifacts that she has yielded to her discoverers dwarfs even that of the *Titanic* in terms of the sheer volume of artifacts recovered from her.

The fascinating story of the *Arabia*, from her creation in Brownsville to her disastrous sinking and her amazing resurrection, is a tale in which Brownsville residents should have more than a passing interest – for it was in a boatyard on the banks of the Monongahela River at Brownsville that the steamboat *Arabia* was born.

The *Great White Arabia* was built by Brownsville's premier boat builder of the era, John S. Pringle. A Bedford County native, Pringle migrated to Bridgeport (later called South Brownsville) in 1826, and by 1828 he was producing steamboats at his Water Street boat yard. When a system of four locks and dams was completed from Pittsburgh south to Brownsville by 1844, Brownsville became the head of slack-water navigation on the Monongahela River.

Those locks and dams enabled steamboats to navigate the Monongahela year-round, even during summer droughts, and heightened the demand for newly-built steamboats. One year earlier, John S. Pringle had purchased property on the West Brownsville side of the river, just upstream from the covered bridge, where he opened another boat yard. Later he bought more West Brownsville property from Ephraim Blaine (father of James G. Blaine) and further expanded his enterprise.

"Mr. Pringle," wrote Pringle's contemporary, Fayette County historian Franklin Ellis, "has built at his yards on both sides of the river more than 500 steamboats."

Some of those vessels were enormous. The largest boat his yards ever built, the monstrous *Illinois*, was 380 feet long and 72 feet at the beam. Pringle's workmen built it, then floated it to Pittsburgh to be fitted with engines.

In comparison to the *Illinois*, the *Arabia* was modest in size, 171 feet long and 29 feet wide, with a cargo capacity of 222 tons. She was built in the Pringle boatyards in 1853, and upon being launched at Brownsville, she headed west to carry passengers and cargo on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.

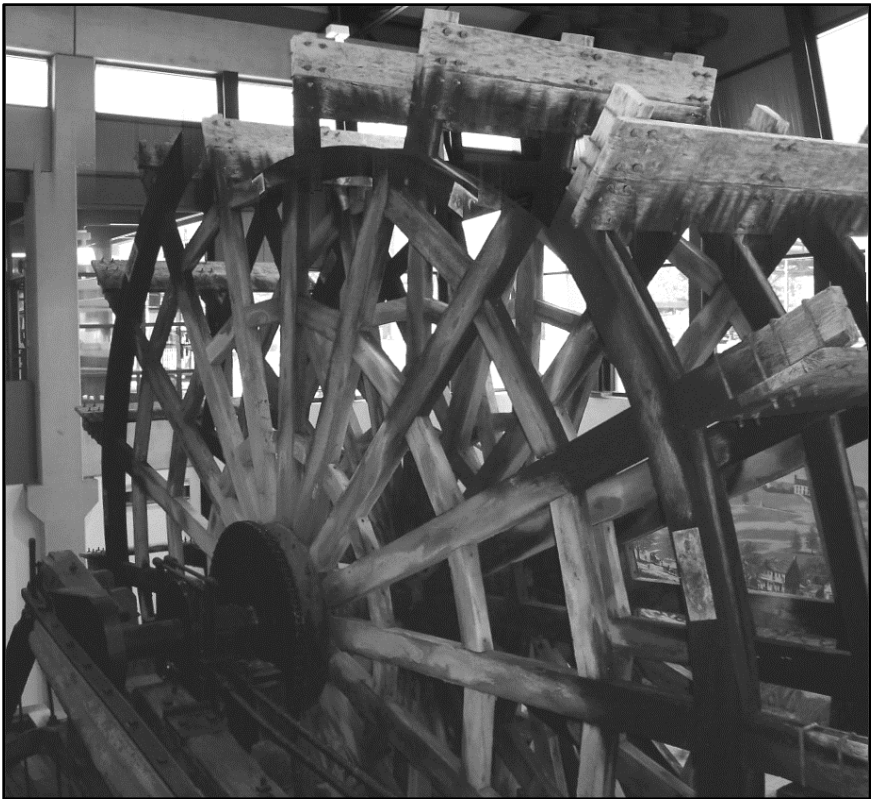
In the spring of 1855, she was sold to a Missouri river boat captain named John Shaw, and Shaw took her further west. He introduced her to the nasty Missouri River, a muddy and dangerous waterway whose forceful currents, bristling with hazardous debris, were the bane of the wooden boats that navigated it.

The Missouri River, in the words of those who knew it best, was "too thick to drink, and too thin to plow." It could be a career-buster for river boat captains, as it was famous for its hidden snags that could sink a boat, even a vessel the size of the *Arabia*, in mere minutes.

A "snag" was a dead tree that had fallen from the river bank into the water. Because steamboats like the *Arabia* used more than thirty cords of wood per day, firewood was often harvested from the trees along the river bank. The resulting erosion caused portions of the river bank to

slide into the water, often taking tree stumps and dead trees along. Once a dead tree was bobbing in the muddy water, the swift current would turn it until it was pointing downstream. Mostly submerged, it became a lethal stationary torpedo waiting to penetrate the bottom of an oncoming steamboat.

After a year of transporting goods between St. Louis and frontier communities up the Missouri River as far as present-day South Dakota, the *Arabia* was sold again, this time to Captain William Terrill and his partner, William Boyd. During the summer of 1856, Terrill took the boat up the Missouri more than a dozen times on biweekly trips from St. Louis to Sioux City, Iowa. On August 30, 1856, the *Arabia* departed from St. Louis with passengers and 220 tons of frontier-bound merchandise of every conceivable description, wholesale goods that were anxiously awaited by storekeepers all along the river.



This 28-foot-high paddlewheel, which is a working replica of one of the twin paddlewheels that propelled the *Arabia*, is an eye-catching introductory exhibit at the *Steamboat Arabia* museum in Kansas City, Missouri.

The *Arabia* was majestic in appearance. She was all white, a double-decked beauty. Her two 28-foot-high side paddle wheels, concealed in housings on which her name was emblazoned, could propel her upstream at seven miles per hour against the swift current of the Missouri. Her main deck was only a few feet above the surface of the water, and she glided gracefully along the river. Only the black smoke pouring from her towering twin smokestacks hinted at the power that was required to maintain speed and control in the challenging waters of the Missouri.

On the evening of September 5, 1856, the steamboat which had been so lovingly fashioned by John S. Pringle and his Brownsville craftsmen met her almost inevitable fate. She was sent to a muddy grave by a huge unseen walnut tree that had fallen into the river, floated into the channel, then rooted itself in the thick muck in the river bottom with its uppermost end near the surface and pointing downstream.

The collision between the bow of the *Arabia* and the tree was terrific. As passengers and cargo tumbled to the decks, the boat's prow rode upward into the evening air until the giant tree pierced its bottom; then just as quickly, the *Arabia* began to fill with water and descend into the filthy Missouri.

The shallow river was not deep enough for the boat to disappear completely. The vessel sank until its bottom rested on the mucky river bottom. Its upper promenade remained above water, allowing all of the passengers to be ferried ashore, a few at a time, using the *Arabia*'s single life boat. All of the passengers survived the sinking. Only a mule that had been tethered on the main deck was unable to escape. It was expected that salvaging of the precious cargo of merchandise would begin the next day.

But when dawn came and the crew assembled on shore to begin removing the cargo from the partially sunken boat, they could only stand dumbfounded on the riverbank, staring at the *Arabia*. She was nearly gone.

Only the top of the two smokestacks and the roof of the pilot house were visible. Overnight, the quicksand-like silt of the river bottom had claimed the pride of John S. Pringle's boat yard, its 220 tons of nineteenth-century merchandise, and 400 barrels of the finest Kentucky bourbon. The boat was judged to be unsalvageable and declared lost.

For over a century, the *Arabia* and its cargo rested at the spot where she sank. As years passed, nature rearranged the landscape above her. The annual floods of the muddy Missouri deposited layers of rich topsoil along the river's banks and on its bottom, gradually burying the sunken boat ever deeper. Some floods were so severe that the shallow river left

its banks and dug a new channel, moving in increments away from its former location until today, the channel of the river is nearly half a mile from the spot where the *Arabia* sank and was buried.

The rich topsoil where the river's former channel had been located attracted the interest of Kansas farmers, and as time passed, the fertile land directly above the *Arabia* hosted fields of corn. All the while, just forty-five feet beneath the endless rows of green stalks swaying in the Kansas breeze, the *Great White Arabia* and her treasure-trove of Americana lay hidden.

Next, the story of an against-all-odds search for the *Arabia*, a treasure hunt undertaken by an unlikely band of amateur adventurers.

FOUR FRIENDS MAKE THE DISCOVERY OF A LIFETIME

On the evening of September 5, 1856, the steamboat *Great White Arabia* struck a submerged log and sank in the muddy Missouri River, nine miles north of Kansas City. The Brownsville-built vessel settled into the mucky river bottom with 220 tons of new merchandise intended for delivery to storekeepers as far away as Omaha in the Nebraska Territory. Although no lives were lost in the disaster, the stricken boat's valuable cargo was deemed to be unsalvageable.

As years passed, the Missouri River changed its course repeatedly, eventually settling into its present channel nearly one-half mile from the site of the *Arabia*'s sinking. The former river channel where the *Arabia* lay hidden became fertile farmland, and fields of corn were planted directly above the boat's wreckage.

Among the local residents who occasionally heard stories of sunken steamboats in the area was Bob Hawley, owner of a refrigeration business. In the mid-1980s, one of Bob's customers told him that the unrecovered wrecks of many steamboats still lay hidden underground, somewhere in the vicinity of the Missouri River. Bob, an adventurer at heart, was fascinated and immediately began forming a bold scheme.

He mentioned his idea to his wife and adult sons, Dave and Greg, who worked for the family business. Bob also discussed a plan to find a lost steamboat and salvage its cargo with his good friend Jerry Mackey, owner of a local restaurant called the Hi Top. The lure of buried treasure excited all four men, and after talking about it, they decided to further explore the possibility of finding a sunken boat, recovering its cargo, and

splitting the riches they found.

In interviews featured in their own video presentation, *The Fall And Rise Of The Steamboat Arabia*, which they produced after their excavation of the boat, the four adventurers discussed the genesis of their crazy scheme.

“We knew,” said Greg Hawley, “that based on our earlier experiences with the river having been narrowed by the Corps of Engineers’ work and the meandering channel [having been] altered drastically from its original channel in the 1800s, it just made sense to us that many of those steamboats may no longer be in the Missouri River, but rather under agricultural farmland stretching from Montana to Missouri.”

The men agreed to try to find a sunken steamboat. Their next challenge was to identify a boat they might be able to find, one whose cargo could make a significant investment of time and money profitable.

“We did research for three years,” Greg explained, “and picked out ten steamboats that we thought held promise. Of those ten boats, the *Arabia* was the last one we searched for.”

“Everybody had a job that they did,” said Greg’s older brother, Dave. “I’d go to libraries, old museums, and old courthouses and hunt up old records. I learned a lot about steamboats.”

The oddity of this enterprise was that it was not being proposed by historians and archaeologists or by a university or government agency. This was the quixotic quest of an unlikely team of air conditioning technicians and a small-town restaurant owner.

“You have to understand,” said Greg. “We are principally blue collar workers. We’re average people; we’re not wealthy. We’re just common folks, just like you see walking on the street every day.”

The men used an old river map to help them identify the Kansas field where they suspected the *Arabia* might lay hidden. Then they went to see the owners of that farm, Norman and Beulah Sortor. Norman delighted his visitors by telling them that he had often heard the tale of the *Arabia* from his grandfather Elisha, who had bought the land just a few years after the boat sank.

Norman said that based on the family’s oral history of the farm, he had a pretty good idea where the wreckage of the boat might be. He agreed to let the men attempt to locate the *Arabia*.

But he also had a warning for the four eager treasure hunters.

“He said, ‘Dave, you can spend your money if you want to by digging this hole,’” recalled Dave Hawley, “‘but you’ll never even see the boat, let alone get down to it, because of the amount of water that’s in the ground.’”

It was a prediction that would come back to haunt the searchers. Ground water became their enemy, a maddening, never-remitting nemesis that threatened to drown their attempt to salvage the *Arabia*.

In the summer of 1987, Dave Hawley and Norman Sortor took a walk through Norman Sortor's cornfields. Dave carried a large magnetometer, an instrument he hoped could detect the *Arabia*'s boiler or engines somewhere in the ground beneath them. Within two hours, the instrument registered a positive reading. If it was indeed the *Arabia* that the machine had detected, the figures indicated that the boat lay under forty-five feet of Kansas soil, nearly thirty feet below the water table.

"I tied an orange ribbon to the tallest corn stalk," said Dave Hawley, "and after we had walked a while longer, I looked back and could see it. That was where the *Arabia* was waiting to be found."

The partners formed a corporation, River Salvage Inc., and each of them contributed enough money to finance a crane, a bulldozer, and plenty of pipe. Over the next eighteen months, while they planned the salvage attempt, news articles appeared describing their unusual quest. When local resident Dave Latrell read those stories, he contacted the partners and offered his expertise in the use of heavy earthmoving equipment. Latrell was welcomed into the enterprise as a fifth partner.

By mid-October 1988, Norman Sortor had harvested the corn in the field where they planned to dig. Just as importantly, the cold weather had lowered the water table somewhat, giving the pumps a fighting chance to stay ahead of the infiltrating ground water. It was time to start digging.

The heavy equipment began carving a hole that was soon the size of a football field. Recognizing the threat posed by the ground water, the crew had already drilled several wells and laid pipe to evacuate the ground water from the hole, but when the dig reached a depth of sixteen to twenty feet, the muddy water launched an aggressive counter-attack.

The men watched in growing consternation as icy-cold ground water gushed into the excavation site at a rate of 20,000 gallons per minute, overwhelming the wells and pumps. Worse yet, they knew they were still nowhere near the depth at which they hoped to find the *Arabia*. It was clear this forsaken channel of the muddy Missouri was not going to give up its prize without a fight.

"The water frustrated everybody," Bob Hawley recalled, "and it frustrated us. It was the one major problem of the excavation."

The men dug for four weeks, constantly battling the water while working in frigid temperatures, usually knee-deep in mud. On November 28, 1988, they finally found proof that they were in the right

spot.

“The very first thing that we noticed,” remembers Greg Hawley, “was the upper spokes of the starboard paddlewheel. We all gathered, elbow to elbow, digging through the sand, some with our hands, some with shovels. One spoke at a time, it began to emerge into view, and we realized we had found the upper spokes of this huge wheel, 28 feet in diameter.”

“The timbers of the paddlewheel,” said Bob Hawley, “coming out of the sand – that was a big day. We were just elated.”

Then someone spotted something on one of the mud-caked spokes.

“Caught on the spokes of the paddlewheel,” said Greg, “was a small shoe. We turned it over. The soles were all worn, and we could see, written on the bottom, ‘Goodyear.’ It was a Goodyear rubber shoe.”

It was a genuine artifact, the first recovered from the *Arabia*. After a freezing month of wallowing in cold mud and water, the men excitedly sensed they were on the verge of achieving their dream.

But right on cue, their nemesis – the water – came at them with renewed fury. They had found the boat, but they couldn’t stop the water. Each time they dug one foot deeper, trying to reach the main part of the boat and its cargo holds, ground water would rush in and inundate the site.

“The key to success on this excavation,” explained Greg Hawley, “was removing the ground water, and we had four generators going with twenty pumps.” On some nights in frigid sub-zero weather, the men had to keep the four generators running by hand-delivering fuel to them in five-gallon cans. It was a miserable, freezing ordeal, and still the water came. They began to wonder if they were trying to do the impossible.

To make matters worse, another thought had always lingered in the back of their minds, a thought no one dared to voice. In their research, they had come across information that had worried them from the moment they first read it.

“I never really thought they’d find anything,” said Bob Hawley’s wife, Flo, when describing what they had read, “because in the research, it said the *Arabia* had been salvaged in 1897.”

Could it be true? Might they be struggling to uncover an already-empty vessel, stripped of its cargo a century before? Not helping matters was the realization that even more of their own money would be needed to continue the battle against the unrelenting ground water.

“We finally got to a point,” said Dave Hawley, “where all five of us got together and said, ‘Look, to go any further, we’re going to have to spend at least another \$50,000 to bring more pumps and more wire, back off from the dig, and set these wells and pump water out at a higher

volume.’ Should we spend the money? Should we cut our loss now and forget it, or should we spend the extra money, go for it and hope for the best?”

An investment like that could mean mortgaging their homes and businesses, and plunging what was left of their savings into an ever-more-dubious enterprise. Their wives wondered aloud if their husbands’ adventure was now threatening to ruin the finances and family harmony of everyone involved. What if they borrowed the money and still couldn’t overcome the water? What if they discovered that the 1897 report of an already-salvaged wreck was, in fact, true? After examining their options, they swallowed hard and made the financial commitment.

Vindication came the day they spotted, immersed in a sea of brown muck and water, the tops of some barrel staves – the “magic” barrel, as they later dubbed it. With mud-covered gloves, they excitedly gathered around it and gingerly handled this first evidence of undisturbed cargo. From the muddy barrel they carefully removed over one hundred pieces of exquisite china, some of it Wedgewood.



Such a valuable prize would never have been overlooked by a previous salvage operation. The china, they triumphantly decided, was proof that the cargo was intact!

“Our wives were talking to us again!” laughed Jerry Mackey.

“It was the turning point of the excavation,” agreed Bob Hawley, “because prior to that, we were going to sell everything.”

From that point on, it was Christmas every day. Day after day for the next three months, the *Arabia* yielded its wonderful treasures – the greatest single collection of pre-Civil War artifacts in the world. Yet tempering their discoverers’ joy was a new dilemma they faced. What should they do with their spectacular find?

Next, we will see what treasures they found, and what they decided to do with their newfound riches. It was a decision that could make a veteran treasure hunter weep.

TREASURES OF THE STEAMBOAT ARABIA ARE NOW ON DISPLAY

The amazing recovery of the *Great White Arabia*, a Brownsville-built steamboat that sank in the Missouri River in 1856, is proof that even the most audacious goals can be accomplished by ordinary people when they are determined not to fail. Five men from the Independence, Missouri area – Bob, Dave and Greg Hawley, Jerry Mackey and Dave Latrell – pulled off the seemingly impossible task of resurrecting the *Arabia* from its forty-five-foot deep grave in a Kansas cornfield, combatting torrents of ground water, frigid temperatures, and mounting bills to achieve their dream.

During the winter of 1988-89, recovery of artifacts from the excavated *Arabia* proceeded for four months until the entire 220-ton cargo was salvaged. The condition of the boat itself did not permit it to be raised, although parts of the wreckage were recovered. Using a crane, the crew raised the boat’s 25,000-pound boiler, a paddle wheel, and part of the boat’s stern. Even the tree that sank the *Arabia* was discovered and raised from the mud.

After the entire cargo had been removed from the wreck, the pumps that had kept the ground water at bay were turned off. Within hours, the *Arabia*, for the second time in its ill-fated existence, disappeared beneath the muddy water.

What cargo was recovered? At the time of the sinking, the *Arabia* had been en route to Omaha, with many stops scheduled along the way. The salvaged cargo included items that one might have expected to find in an 1856 general store. Vials of perfume from France, china from England, guns from Belgium, silk from China, building supplies, farm



The loss of this anticipated shipment of coffee pots must have greatly disappointed coffee drinkers up and down the Missouri River.

implements and carpentry tools of every description, boots, beaver hats, clothing, buttons, beads, canned food, even champagne that still had its fizz – the list of salvaged items went on and on.

And pickles. They recovered jars of pickles, which Jerry Mackey put to the test.

“I tried some of them,” he smiled. “They were still fresh and sweet!”

One observer compared the 220 tons of recovered merchandise to “an 1856 Wal-Mart – the single greatest collection of pre-Civil War artifacts in the world.”

After enjoying the euphoria of unearthing this nineteenth-century

treasure, the five adventurers now faced a major decision. Having achieved the spectacular accomplishment of excavating the *Arabia's* entire cargo, what should they do with the artifacts they had recovered?

Some of the artifacts were highly valued as individual pieces. Their sale could help the partners pay the huge debt they had run up when digging up the *Arabia*. Should they sell some of the collection to finance the proper restoration and display of the rest of it? Was it realistic to think that all 220 tons of artifacts could be restored? And if so, what museum could possibly display it all?

While they contemplated what they should do, they stored the artifacts in coolers at Jerry Mackey's hamburger restaurant, the Hi-Top. One factor to be considered in making their decision was the enormous cost of the project, which had far exceeded their original estimates. The Hawleys' refrigeration business, Mackey's hamburger stand, and Latrell's small construction company did not generate big money, and big money is what they had spent on the excavation of the *Arabia*.

In the end, they decided they should display the *Arabia* artifacts in a special museum they would create just for that purpose. This summer, I visited the *Steamboat Arabia* Museum in Kansas City, Missouri, where I spoke with Dave Hawley. He shared some details of the tough decisions the men had to make along the way.

"Our initial investment of \$50,000 was spent real quick on a crane, bulldozer, cable, lights, pipe, etc.," Dave explained, "so we just paid for the project out of pocket for a while. As bills came up each week, we'd pay the fuel bill [for the heavy machinery], equipment bills, whatever. Well, that lasted for a while, but not for very long, because we could see the progress was moving slowly, and we still had a lot to do yet.

"So we went to our bank and borrowed \$50,000 and thought that would be enough. Well, it wasn't, so we borrowed a second \$50,000, and then a third and fourth \$50,000. And at that point, we were so far into it that we couldn't quit – we had too much money invested in it.

"So we just kept digging and borrowing, and by the time we got done, we had spent just under a million dollars, most of it borrowed. We had this giant bill, and we've been paying loans ever since, but . . ."

He paused for emphasis. "We've never sold any artifacts. We've never had any grants or corporate sponsors or government money. The museum and the ongoing restoration of the artifacts are totally supported by the people who come to see it."

And was ownership of the *Arabia* and its cargo a case of "finders, keepers?"

"No, it's not as simple as that," said Dave. "It belonged to the family of the guy who owned the land, Norman Sortor. We had

promised we'd give him fifteen per cent of whatever we found. Of course, we weren't going to clean his share," Dave laughed. "He'd have to do that himself. But he said that was fair.

"So we dug it up, and the Sortors came to look at it. Norman said, 'You know, it's neat stuff, but the work that it'll take to clean it is beyond our ability and our desire. It would be better kept with you, so keep it and share it with whoever comes.'

"All the Sortors asked for were 20 things – a dish, a wrench, a bottle, a school slate, and some buttons and beads. The rest became his gift to the world, to all of the people who have come to see the *Arabia* collection."



The *Steamboat Arabia* museum is in Kansas City, Missouri. It houses the greatest collection of pre-Civil War merchandise in the United States, all of it salvaged from a sunken steamboat built in 1853 at the John S. Pringle boat yard in Brownsville.

The treasures of the *Arabia* are now on display in the impressive *Steamboat Arabia* Museum in Kansas City, Missouri. It is a private enterprise, supported by revenue generated from its visitors, whose admission fees and purchases in the museum's gift shop help to finance the museum.

My family and I spent several hours at the museum this past summer, and we came away agreeing that it is a first class operation. The sheer number of artifacts on display is staggering. The collection is showcased in beautifully arranged exhibits, while the museum staff is continuing the slow process of restoring and preserving mud-encrusted artifacts. A nice feature is that museum visitors are permitted to watch as a technician works on restoration of an artifact.

“There is no fresh water preservation taught in any college or university in the United States,” explained a young lady in a lab coat, as she carefully chipped away at hardened mud and mineral deposits on an 1856 tool. “In fact, this is one of the few working fresh water labs in the United States.”

It is now fifteen years since the recovery of the *Arabia*'s cargo. She was asked how many artifacts remain to be cleaned and displayed.

“If they were all cleaned,” she replied, “we could probably double the size of the collection on display.”

That would probably take another building! Yet as work goes on to restore the *Arabia*'s treasures, Dave Hawley is already planning his next adventure.

“I've found the locations of ten [more sunken boats],” he revealed. “I look for them in the winter. I'd like to find a boat from the 1840s and add it to the collection here. Then you could compare an 1840s group of artifacts to the *Arabia*'s and compare the changes that occurred during that ten or fifteen years, such as what people needed and how things were made differently. That'll be our next project, but it will be done a little differently next time, because we plan to have school kids be our diggers!”

I told Dave Hawley that I was from Brownsville, Pennsylvania, birthplace of the *Arabia*.

“Margaret Johnson [of Pearl Street in Brownsville] was a friend of mine,” I said to him, “and she was very proud of the work she did in helping you research the construction of the *Arabia* at the Pringle boat yard in Brownsville.”

“Margaret was a wonderful lady,” Dave said. “She was so very proud of Brownsville, and she was always willing to help with research about the town and the *Arabia*. We were always calling her at the drug store with questions about the boat.”

In appreciation, the Hawleys gave Margaret a special videotape about the *Arabia* project, one which she enjoyed showing to local Brownsville organizations as she described the story of the *Arabia*'s construction in Brownsville, its remarkable recovery, and the *Steamboat Arabia* museum.

“Her passing was certainly a loss,” Dave Hawley said of Margaret Johnson, who passed away two years ago [2001]. Margaret never got to visit the museum in person, but her contribution to its success has not been forgotten by its founders.

If you are ever traveling through the Midwest, don’t miss visiting the *Steamboat Arabia* museum. If you are not anticipating a journey to Kansas City any time soon, there are other ways for you to see the wonderful treasures of the *Arabia*.

You can learn more about the *Arabia* by visiting the museum’s web site at www.1856.com, where you can purchase the videotape, *The Fall and Rise of the Steamboat Arabia*, or any of three books the Hawleys have written about the *Arabia* project. Purchases can also be made by calling the museum toll-free at 1-800-471-4030. Proceeds from these sales go toward the continuing restoration and display of the treasures of the steamboat *Arabia*.

Who would have thought that such an amazing archaeological and engineering feat could be pulled off by a group of amateur adventurers? Jerry Mackey, for one, never doubted it could be done.

“It kind of renewed my faith in the good old American way,” Jerry told an interviewer. “It can still be done in America. If you have the desire and the persistence, you can get it done.”

“And the beauty of this project,” Greg Hawley added, “is that we did it with our friends and family.”

“If we had found the *Arabia* and hadn’t been able to share it with anybody,” concluded Bob Hawley’s wife, Flo, “it wouldn’t be much fun.”

And share it they have.

It is a great tale, this story of five friends who found a treasure in a cornfield. On behalf of the people of Brownsville, the birthplace of the *Great White Arabia*, we thank these men for “doing it right” – and for sharing their spectacular find with the rest of the world.