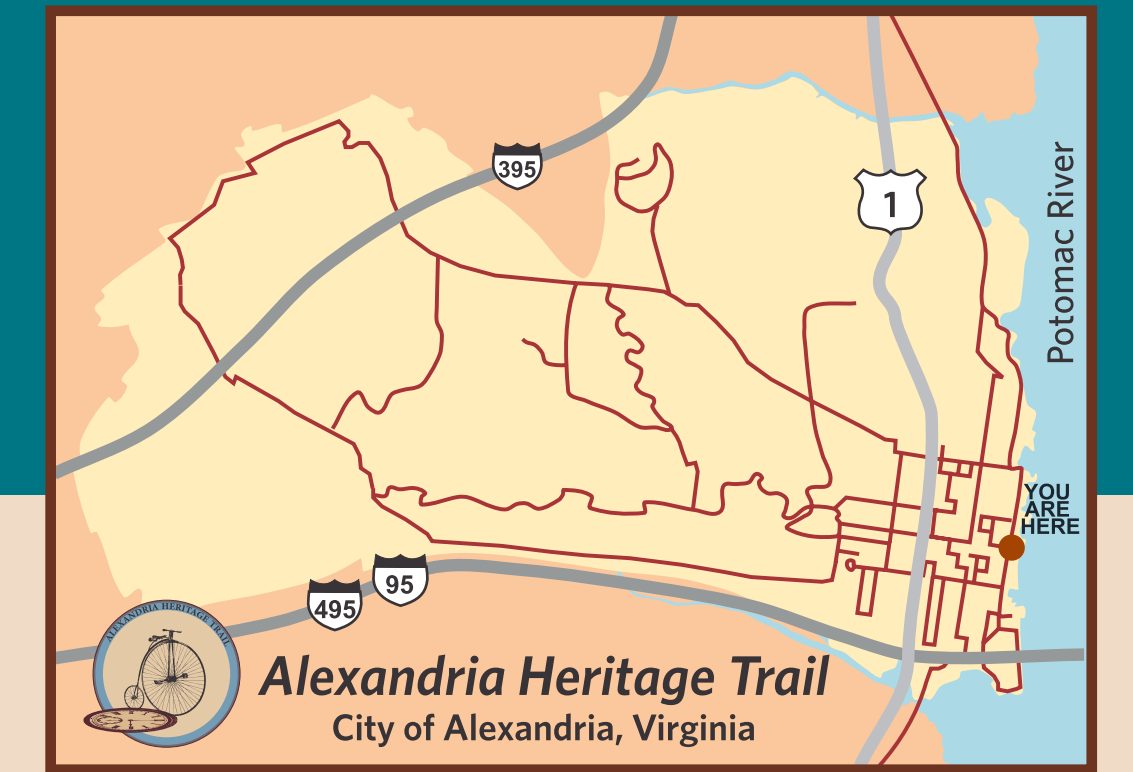


The River Queen



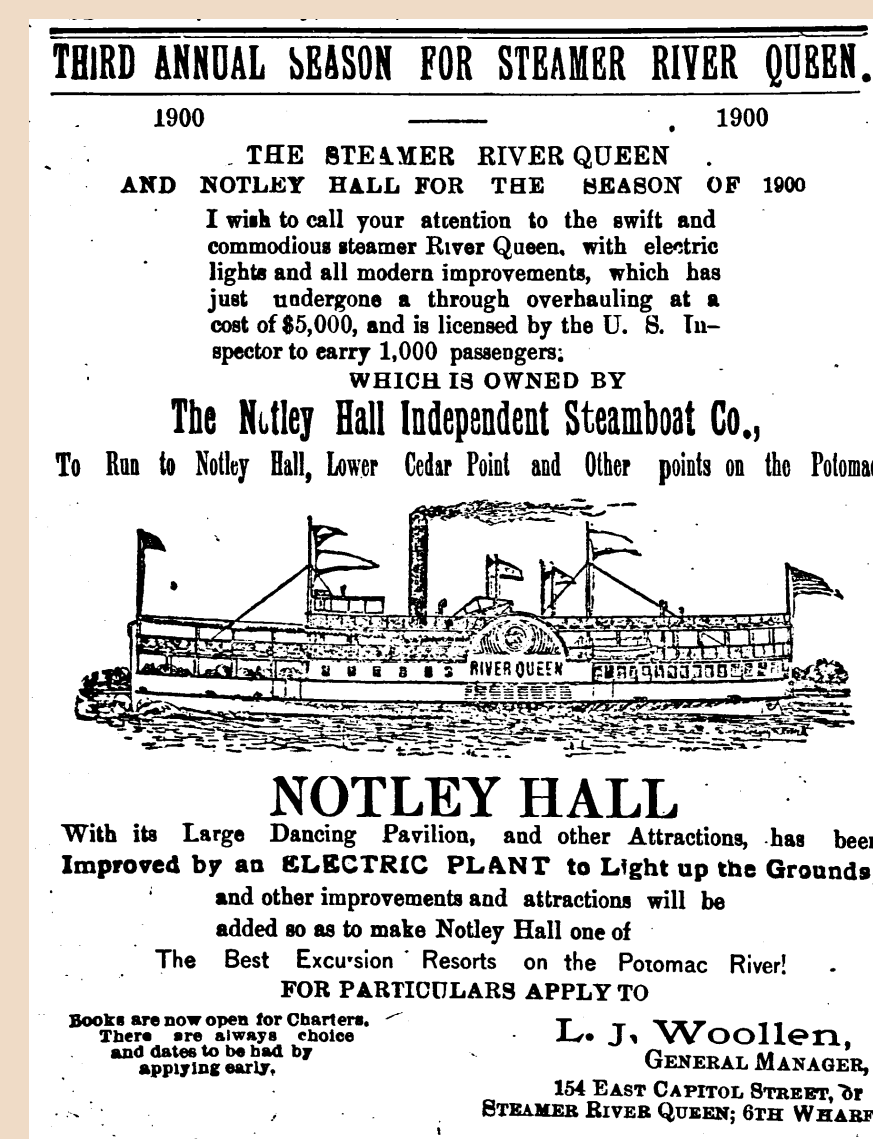
From 1898 to 1911, a 181-foot-long sidewheel steambot based out of Washington, D.C., called the *River Queen* would sometimes dock at the wharf at the foot of Prince Street in Alexandria. Built in 1864, it had first gained fame as the site of an unsuccessful peace conference in early 1865 between President Abraham Lincoln and representatives of the Confederacy and later as the site of a conference between Lincoln and his generals to discuss ending the war. By the end of the century, owners remodeled the steamer for day-long excursions that catered to African American pleasure seekers. In Alexandria and elsewhere along the Potomac, African Americans passengers boarded the ship to travel up and down the river and visit Black-only recreational resorts.

The *River Queen* and Black-only resorts were part of the evolution of the river from a place of work to a place of leisure. Despite the entrenchment of Jim Crow segregation, African American people wanted to be part of the Potomac's new recreational role in the region. In recognition of African American purchasing power, a white-owned company purchased the *River Queen* in 1898 for summer excursions. One of its most popular destinations was Notley Hall. A struggling white resort near present-day National Harbor on the Maryland shore, Notley Hall began to cater exclusively to African American excursion parties in 1894 and featured a dancing pavilion, shooting gallery, bowling alley, and other attractions. The *River Queen* sailed from Washington, D.C., to Notley Hall, occasionally docking here at the foot of Prince Street to take on board charter groups arranged by African American organizations, like the Fern Street Social Club on Princess Street.



President Lincoln met with military commanders onboard the *River Queen* in March 1865 to discuss the closing weeks of the American Civil War (left to right: William Tecumseh Sherman, Ulysses S. Grant, Abraham Lincoln, and Admiral David Dixon Porter), depicted in George Peter Alexander Healy's *The Peacemakers*, 1868.

The White House Historical Association



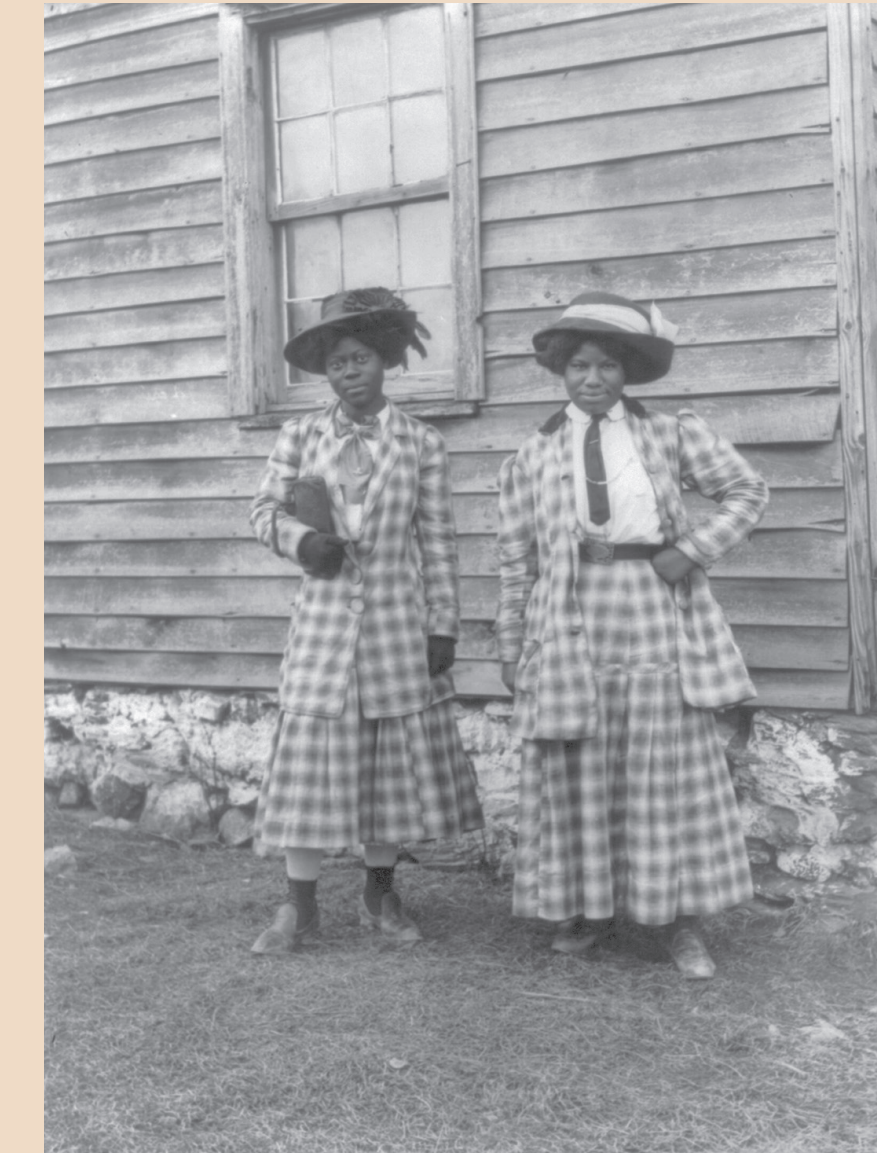
An Advertisement for the *River Queen* in Washington's *The Colored American*, April 21, 1900.

Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers



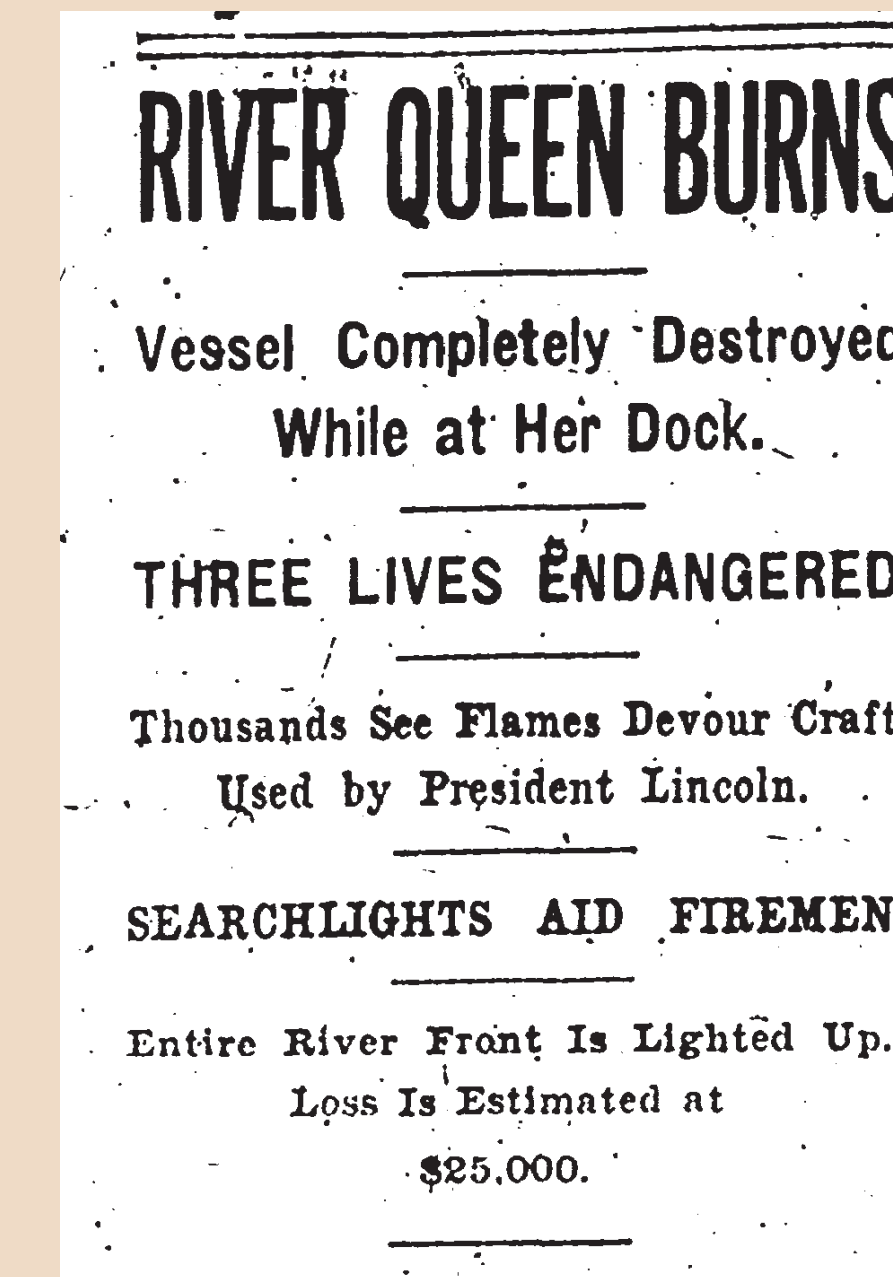
The *River Queen*.

William Smith Collection (P399), Alexandria Library Local History/Special Collections



Photograph of Two young African American women, probably somewhere in Virginia, ca. 1910.

Library of Congress



Headline, "River Queen Burns," from the *Washington Evening Star*, July 9, 1911.

Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers

The Colored American, a Black-owned newspaper, wrote in 1902 that the *River Queen* was patronized by "ladies looking as charming as June roses, in natty costumes, and the masculine contingent was on hand to see that they lacked nothing to round out the pleasure of the hour." Two years later, the newspaper was less flattering. "These excursions are operated by white men, for the purpose of making money off of the very colored people whom they refuse to rent houses to except in alleys, whom they refuse to employ except in the most menial way, and whom they Jim Crow in every possible way."

In May 1911, Washington-based Black entrepreneur, Lewis Jefferson, purchased the *River Queen* as part of his excursion empire. A millionaire by the age of thirty, Jefferson had a minority stake in Notley Hall by 1901 and managed the resort. With the purchase of the *River Queen*, Jefferson began running daily trips on the Potomac under its new captain, Alexandrian George Baggett, who was also African American.

Tragedy struck the *River Queen* soon after Jefferson purchased it. Late on the evening of July 8, 1911, the steamer caught fire while tied to its dock in Washington, D.C., and burned to a blackened hulk. Afterward, its machinery was removed and the remains were dismantled and carried to a junkyard.

