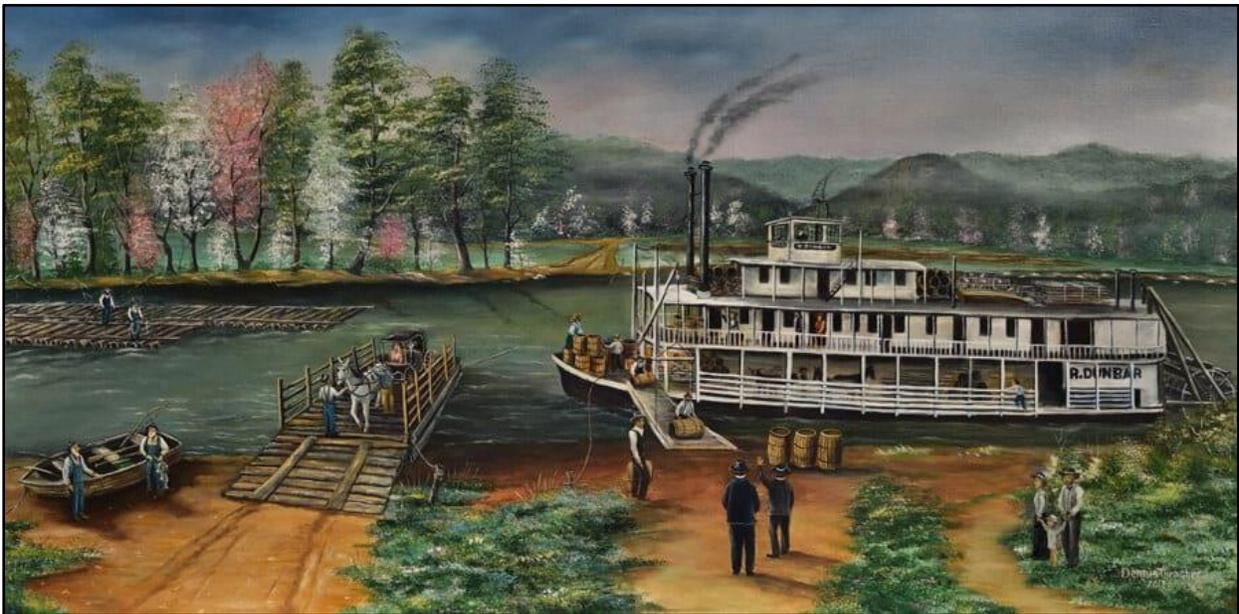


**Exploring Rural Kentucky Through Documentary Art:  
Unit 1 - *Creelsboro Landing, 1890s* - Documentary Art Interactive  
Directions to the Artist - *Creelsboro Landing, 1890s*  
- For the Student -**

**Introduction**

Video producers who are documenting a community's history want to use compelling visual images to help their viewers picture the past in their minds. Historic photographs help to tell the story. Occasionally there might even be a film clip that can be inserted. But there are rarely enough strong visuals from the time period to bring the past to life. Producers often purchase the right to use paintings that add visual interest to the story they are telling.



*Creelsboro Landing, 1890s* by Dennis Thrasher, 2018.

In the video *Creelsboro and the Cumberland: A Living History*, producer/director Tom Law used a well-balanced mix of historic photographs and artwork. However, he wanted two specific scenes that no one had ever painted, so he commissioned an artist to create them specifically for use in this video.

He provided the artist, Dennis Thrasher, with details about what he wanted included and what mood he wanted the paintings to convey (see below - the handout Tom Law provided Dennis Thrasher). Law also provided historic information and any existing visual imagery that would help Thrasher make the paintings reflect the time period as accurately as possible.

Thrasher was free to make his own artistic choices, however, about style, colors, focal points, contrasts, perspective, etc. The resulting paintings - *Creelsboro Landing, 1890s* and *Irvin Store, 1920s* - add a vibrancy to the video, the feeling that you could almost step into the past.

## *Creelsboro Landing, 1890s*

**Size:** 40 inches wide x 22½ inches high

**Medium:** Archival boards

The Creelsboro Valley relied on steamboats (and the ferry crossing) for transportation, commerce, and communications until roads were built in the 1940s. This area represents the last vestige of the steamboat era on the Cumberland River.

The artwork also depicts: a packet steamboat (based on the *Rowena*); the Campbell's ferry, which operated at this site from 1803 until the 1950s; a log/timber raft; and the community gathering for a big event – the arrival of a steamboat.

**Goal:** To illustrate the vital importance of the steamboat on this section of the Cumberland River.

**Setting:** Spring for high water levels and some color from bud break; a touch of green leaves and flowering trees. Excitement and bustle of landing.

**Point of View:** see aerial photograph, frame grab, Creelsboro Landing, north, taken in 2015 by Voyageur Media Group, Inc.



*Aerial photograph, frame grab, Creelsboro Landing, north. Credit: Kentucky Archaeological Survey, October 2015.*

An elevated perspective from the north side of the river, steamboat and landing in foreground (devoid of most trees), the Campbell's ferry (upriver), and a log/timber raft in background (up or downriver).

### **Elements**

**Steamboat:** see photograph CR Porter 1800s *Rowena* (date unknown).

A stern wheel steamboat is shown with its stack billowing and whistle blowing (pilot pulling cord and cabin boy with ears covered) upon landing with high spring "tide" (high water). The steamboat bow faces upriver (to the left frame of the scene). The crew has just finished tie up,



*An 1800s photograph of the steamboat Rowena. Credit: The Porter Family.*

horses; a clerk is helping passengers prepare to leave; and the engineer is checking the stern paddle wheel.

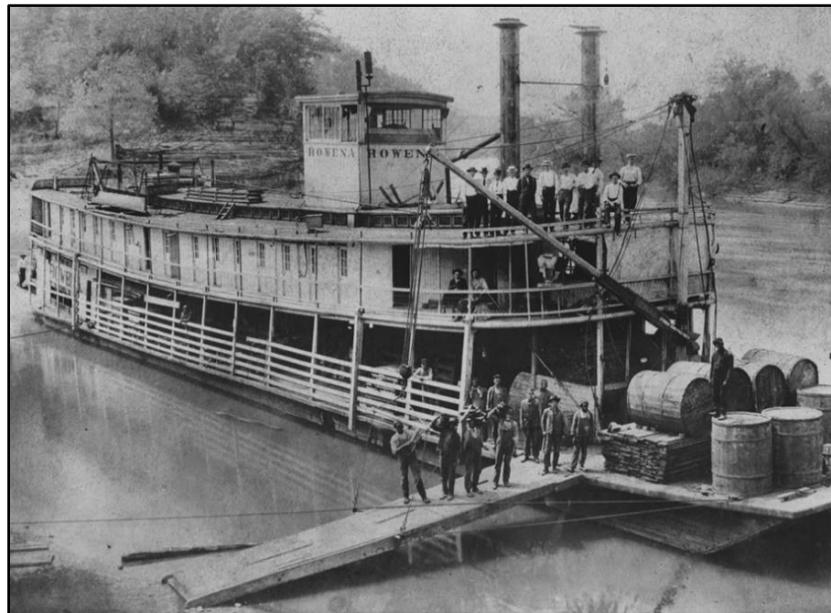
**Passengers:** A young family is arriving to visit their family; three or so business or salesmen; a few farmers; an itinerant preacher is arriving for services; and a young boy as a stowaway is climbing over the rail.

**Steamboats serving Creelsboro landing - 1800s to 1900s:** Based on research and oral histories with Francis Scott Andrew (*Sticky Burnside, Celina, old Martin Falls* [sic]); Delmas Marion Flatt (out of Burnside – *Celina, Rowena, City of Burnside*; out of Nashville - *Joe Hardin* [sic] *Falls*).

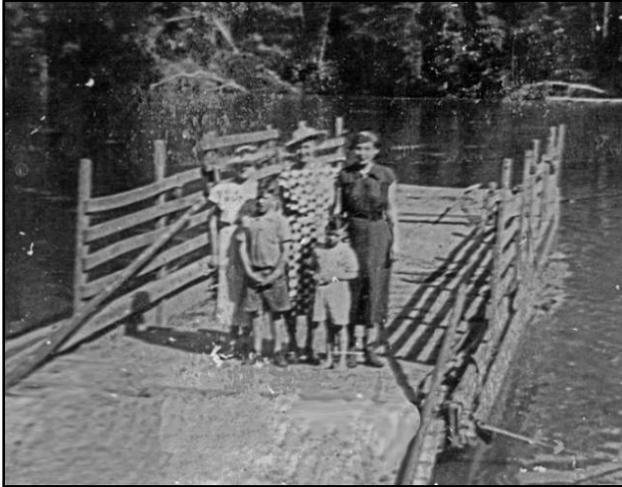
and is laying down “stage planks” (long rough boards) over the bank mud to unload passengers and cargo - dry goods, small barrels, burlap sacks, finished lumber and chickens held in crates on the top deck.

**Crew (10):** see photograph PLCHA Rowena001ab (date unknown).

The captain is shouting orders from the pilothouse, a pilot mate is blowing the steamboat whistle, the crew is finishing tie up, and are setting stage planks. One is untying barrels to roll down the “gangplank;” two are operating the front crane; one is calming the



*A photograph of the steamboat Rowena. Credit: Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.*



**Campbell's ferry:** see photographs (1920s-1930s) of actual Campbell's ferry (left), and a rope ferry at Burnside (below).

The ferry, a rough log raft with pull ropes, is loading a horse and wagon (not carriage) with corn on the south (or far side) of the river.

*Photograph of Campbell's Ferry. Credit: The Campbell*

*Rope ferry on Cumberland River, at Burnside, KY., Queen & Crescent Route ca. 1900. Credit: Vintage postcard.*



**Log/timber raft:** see photograph of a timber raft in Nashville, 1941 (below).



*Photograph of a timber raft in Nashville, 1941. Credit: Tennessee State Library and Archives.*

Timber was an important resource from the area. A crew of four with poles and a stern paddle are working hard to make sure the log raft (rough cut timber, tied together) doesn't strike the steamboat as they float downstream.

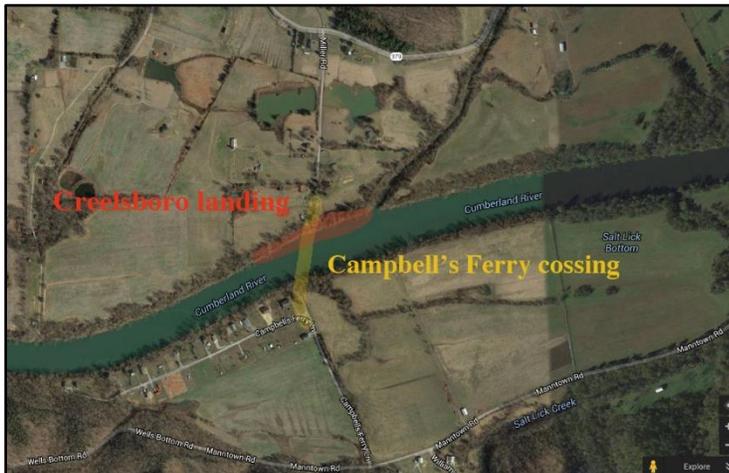
There would be a small shack (cook fire) where the men would live during the trip to lumber mills in Celina or Nashville. Based on initial research, I think a timber raft from the upper Cumberland would have looked like those seen in the photo (Nashville) with the old-growth logs set crosswise.

The oral history book, *Don't Go Up Kettle Creek*, suggests they were cruder and narrower on the Upper Cumberland River:

*All sixteen-foot logs were placed at the bow of the raft; next came the fourteen-foot logs, and the twelve-foot ones and ten-foot ones. This arrangement of the logs tapered the raft from front to back, causing it to handle more easily as it moved downstream.*

*Don't Go Up Kettle Creek: Verbal Legacy of the Upper Cumberland River* by William Lynwood Montell, page 97. University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1983 (2nd edition, 2000).

**Landing:** see several video frame grabs and photographs of the site taken in 2015 by Voyager Media Group, Inc.



*Aerial photograph, frame grab, showing location of Creelsboro Landing and the Campbell's ferry crossing. Credit: Kentucky Archaeological Survey, October 2015.*

The Creelsboro landing was on the north shore rising from the high water with an access road (now Miller Road) heading inland and slightly east (toward the Point of View).

Crude wooden stairs extend up to the slope where there is a small warehouse (foreground). Farmers are ready, with wagons full of cargo to load for downstream markets, including: hogsheads (tobacco barrels), burlap sacks of grain (corn), chickens in crates, and a few cattle (maybe one that is stuck in the

riverbank mud with two young men trying to pull it out).

**Local residents:** According to oral histories and written accounts, everyone came running when the steamboat whistle announced the boat's arrival. We show people walking, running, riding horses and wagons down Miller Road to the landing, which is bustling with excitement and activity: a family greeting arriving relatives, the local constable keeping things safe, the postmaster with a sack of letters, elders greeting the preacher, farmers with produce for the market, and a few boys fishing.

## Resources

**Photographs:** (see Creelsboro Digital Media Archives for steamboats, ferries, rafts and dress).

### Books:

*Steamboatin' on the Cumberland*, Douglas Byrd, Tennessee Book Company, 1961.

*Don't Go Up Kettle Creek: Verbal Legacy of the Upper Cumberland River*, William Lynwood Montell, University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1983 (2nd edition 2000).

**Academic Papers/Oral Histories:**

“Creelsboro: Steamboat Town,” Field Work, Eric Dicken, April 27, 1982. Folklore and Folklife Collection, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY.

**Websites:**

Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, Inland Rivers Library.

**<http://www.cincinnati.org/main/inlandrivers.html>**

University of Wisconsin, La Crosse Historic Steamboat Collection

**<http://digioll.library.wisc.edu/WebZ/html/historysearch.html?sessionid=01-59939-1235714802&entityactive=6&entitydoRefine=no>**