

OH 1/21 - Interview with Jessie Merle Hall

TAPE 1, SIDE B - Life on the paddle-steamer

You've told me the various rooms up on the top deck of the 'Merle'. What sort of accommodation was it? Do you remember it as cramped?

It was small, of course. I remember my parents' bedroom wasn't furnished with built-ins like a boat's cabin. They had ordinary furniture in it. It was quite a pleasant little sitting room. It had a built-in locker that was made into a couch with cushions and otherwise ordinary chairs. And it had one of those little stoves - little iron stoves - that you could boil a pot of water on the top. A kettle of water on the top, or heat some milk. And we used to love sitting round that little stove. Mother telling us stories. That's one of my vivid memories.

You mentioned that the galley was down on the lower deck.

Yes. The galley and the dining room and the laundry.

So did you take all your meals down there?

Yes.

Can you tell me what sort of facilities you had in the bathroom that you mentioned?

The bathroom was a small room entirely lined with white enamel - I suppose flat iron or zinc or something. It wasn't an ordinary bath. Lovely big bath. And you stepped over a small partition into this little dressing room off it.

So virtually the bath was the whole room.

Yes. And the hot water, of course, came from the boiler room, except in low river when it had to be heated. Then we were often bathed in a tub in front of the little stove.

When the River was high, were there restrictions on the amount of water you could use?

I don't think. No, there wouldn't have been. There'd have been plenty I think.

How many times would you bathe a week?

Oh goodness me, I can't remember. We were kept pretty clean I think.

What about toilet facilities? Where were they?

Down on the bottom deck. One each side. One for the men and one for us.

Were they emptied directly into the River?

Yes. Running water was supposed to purify itself.