

Information about Colorado River Steamboat activity

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steamboats_of_the_Colorado_River

Polhamus, Mellon and Their Rivals, 1886 - 1904^[edit]

For the next six years Polhamus and Mellon struggled to save their steamboat business. The partners' reliable income now came from carrying supplies to Parker and Fort Mohave Indian agencies and coal for stamp mills at Eldorado Canyon and Hardyville. The decline in silver prices through the 1880s and early 1890s that culminated in the repeal of the [Sherman Silver Purchase Act](#) in 1893, closed many silver mines along the Colorado River including those at Eldorado Canyon in 1887, and in the Silver Mining District and the towns of Clip and Nortons Landing in 1888. The Hardyville mill became idle and the town was abandoned and became a ghost town. Occasionally the steamboats carried supplies or machinery for ranches and mines at other places along the river, or ran [excursion](#) boats from Yuma or Needles. They helped the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad rebuild their bridge across the Colorado below Needles at [Eastbridge](#) washed out or undermined by spring floods in 1884, 1886 and 1888 before they moved it, diverting their line down river to a crossing on a solid rock bottom at the station and later settlement of [Mellen](#) named, (though misspelled), for Captain Jack Mellon. There in 1889, they helped the railroad put in a cantilever bridge that was finished in 1890 and remained in use for decades. They also attempted to start regular steamboat tours by railroad passengers up to the mouth of the [Grand Canyon](#) and down to the Gulf of California but without success.^{[3]:82,84}

The salvation of the company came with the revival and discovery of gold mining districts along the Colorado in the 1890s. In January, 1891, gold was found on the north slope of the [New York Mountains](#), in California, about 40 miles north of [Goffs](#) station, on the Santa Fé Railway. A mining camp, [Vanderbilt](#) was established nearby Vanderbilt Spring. The discovery of additional gold-rich veins in the fall of 1892 set off a rush to the area. A few months later gold was found at what became the placer mining camp of [Murphyville](#), on the Arizona side of the river just twelve miles below Eldorado Canyon. Also in 1892, another gold boom occurred twenty miles east of Eldorado Canyon at [White Hills](#) in the [White Hills](#), in Arizona Territory. Gold mines were revived in the Picacho District and [Cargo Muchacho District](#) northwest of Yuma. Over the next ten years, more gold was found along the river, the largest strikes were at the [Searchlight District](#) mines, discovered in May 1897, fourteen miles west of the river, south of Eldorado Canyon, and the [Goldroad District](#) and [Vivian District](#) mines near what later became [Oatman](#), twelve miles east of Fort Mohave from 1903. All of these three later districts and at Picacho had railroad lines from the mines to their riverside stamp mills, that were built, fueled and supplied with the aid of the steamboats. Both the *Gila* and *Mohave II* were kept busy and a new barge, the *Enterprise*, had to be built to keep up with the trade.^{[3]:84,86}



View showing steamboat [Cochan](#) on the Colorado River near [Yuma, Arizona](#) in 1900.^[33] A photograph of the *Cochan*, last stern-wheel steamboat running on the Colorado River for the Colorado Steam Navigation Company between 1899 and 1909. This photo was taken in 1900. *Cochan* was sold to the U.S Reclamation Service in 1909. Not required by the Service, *Cochan* was dismantled in 1910.

However, the boom also attracted competition once again. The Stacy Brothers operated out of Yuma with new gasoline powered boats from 1891 to 1895 when Colorado Steam Navigation bought them out acquiring the *Aztec*. This gas boat they tried to use on the upper river in the low water season but it was no better than their steamboats and carried less cargo. Some other gas boats were put on the upper river by rivals but with no success. The first real rival was the steamboat *St. Valier* built by the [Santa Ana Mining Company](#) at Needles in 1899, but tied up in litigation it did not operate on the river until 1900. In the face of this competition, Polhamus and Mellon had the engine of the old *Gila* taken out and put in a new boat, the 135 foot long [Cochan](#). *Cochan* began work on the river carrying freight for the Searchlight mines in January 1900. At the same time the old *Mohave II* was run into [Jaeger's Slough](#) and left to decay.^{[3]:86, 88, 91}

St. Valier was purchased by the [Mexican-Colorado Navigation Company](#) in December 1901 from the Santa Ana Mining Company's creditors, adding cabins on her upper deck allowing them to compete for passenger business. Under the command of a former barge captain of the Colorado Steam Navigation Company, they made regular trips between Yuma and Needles competing with the rival steamboat *Cochan*. Another serious rival appeared in 1902 when the [Colorado River Transportation Company](#) built the 91 foot long [Searchlight](#) another stern-wheel steamboat, the last built on the lower Colorado. It was launched at Needles in December 1902, its engines were installed and it was on the river by March 1903. It soon cut into the trade of Colorado Steam Navigation Company to [Quartette Landing](#) and Searchlight.^{[3]:91, 95}

Additionally, between, 1901 and 1905 the [San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad](#) was built across southern Nevada, through Las Vegas, to [Daggett, California](#) where it connected to the AT&SF, and the complete Salt Lake–Los Angeles line was opened on May 1, 1905.^[34] In the face of these developments, in 1904, Issac Polhamus, sold out his share of the business to Mellon and two other partners.

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