



Ohio River

Topic Guide for Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)

Introduction

The Ohio River, the Mississippi River's largest tributary, forms the southern borders of the states of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois and the northern borders of West Virginia and Kentucky. Its name is derived from the Seneca word for "good river" (ohi:yo'). In the 1700s and 1800s, as the English began to settle the area, cities like Cincinnati, Ohio, were established on the river. In the 1800s, it became a significant commercial route for products being sent from Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois, west toward the Mississippi River and on to New Orleans. From there, goods were sent out to sea, and would land in eastern seaboard ports like New York and Boston. Before and during the Civil War, the river was the dividing line between free and slaveholding states, and was crossed by many fugitive slaves as they traveled to freedom. Riverboat trade decreased starting in the 1870s after the arrival of railroads, better highways and, eventually, air travel, but the Ohio River remains a major channel for the transportation of bulk items like coal and grain.

Important Dates

- 1857: Construction on the Ohio River's first panhandle bridge is completed.
- July 19, 1863: Battle of Buffington Island (or St. Georges Creek Skirmish) occurs in the Ohio River between Ohio and West Virginia, leading to capture of Confederate Brigadier General John Morgan.
- January 1, 1867: A suspension bridge, designed by John A. Roebling, connecting Cincinnati, Ohio, to Covington, Kentucky, opens. At 1,057 ft., it was the longest suspension bridge in the world to date.
- 1867: James Parker purchases land along the Ohio River that would later become the popular resort and amusement park known as Parker's/Ohio Grove (1870-1886) or Coney Island (1887-present).
- 1884: The Ohio River floods at Marietta, Ohio, reaching 54.5 feet.
- March 23-27, 1913: The river overflows in Cincinnati and Portsmouth during the statewide flood.
- December 1917-January 1918: The Ohio River freezes, preventing transport of goods.

Suggested Search Strategies

- Try searching the following terms in combination (as an "all" word search), in proximity or as phrases: Ohio River, flood, Cincinnati, Marietta, Coney Island, boat, bridge, fish, panhandle, Buffington Island, coal, barge, drown, slave, grain, ship, canal.
- Limit your search by date to find information about specific events.

Sample Articles from Chronicling America

- "[Columbus & Piqua Railroad](#)" *Urbana Union* (Urbana, OH), November 5, 1862, Image 3, col. 3.
- "[Big Catfish](#)" *St. Paul Daily Globe* (St. Paul, MN), June 18, 1895, Image 4, col. 7.
- "[Fighting them Over](#)" *National Tribune* (Washington, DC), January 14, 1897, Image 3, col. 1-3.
- "[The Ship Canal](#)" *Akron Daily Democrat* (Akron, OH), March 2, 1901, Image 9, col. 1-2.
- "[Nearing the Crest](#)" *Marietta Daily Leader* (Marietta, OH), April 23, 1901, Image 1, col. 1-4.
- "[Boiler Bursts, Killing Twelve](#)" *Washington Times* (Washington, DC), May 26, 1904, Image 1, col. 1-2.
- "[Aristo Band Wins Prize](#)" *News-Herald* (Hillsboro, NY), August 25, 1910, Image 1, col. 6.
- "[Pictorial Story of the Great Disaster](#)" *Sun* (New York, NY), March 30, 1913, Image 25.
- "[Late News](#)" *Day Book* (Chicago, IL), August 12, 1913, Image 25, col. 2.