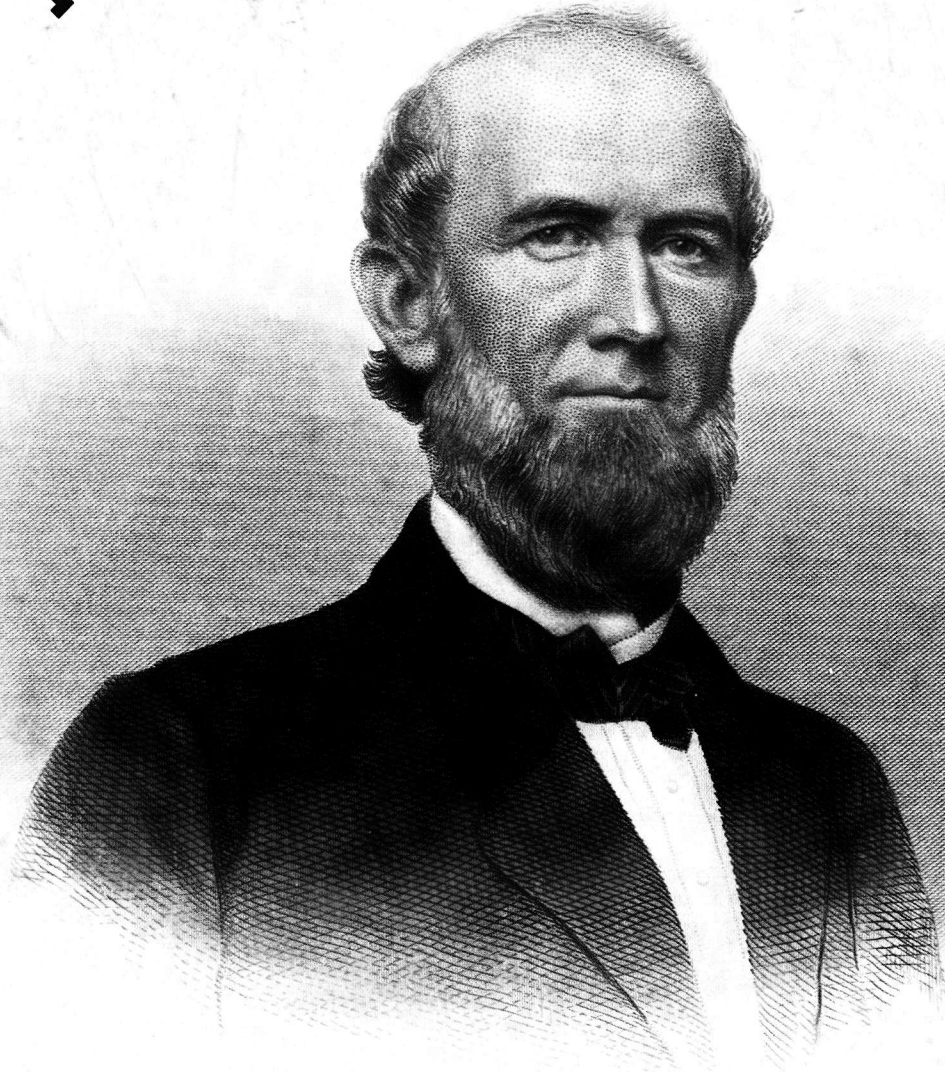


# The Boy, the Boat, and the Rat

by Julie Harrison



<sup>1</sup> A cold winter wind blew down the street. A thin, frail boy stood on the street corner and sold apples from a basket. Despite the weather he would not leave until every apple was sold.

<sup>2</sup> James Eads, his mother, and his two sisters had arrived in St. Louis a few

days earlier. They had nothing. A fire on the steamboat they had taken down the river burned all their possessions. James was doing his part to help his family by selling apples.

<sup>3</sup> James was not much of a salesman. Instead, he enjoyed inventing things,

especially anything to do with water. He loved making model boats and steam engines.

4 Only a few people were out on the street that cold winter day. James decided to go home and try again tomorrow. He took a shortcut down an alley behind an old, run-down hotel. Suddenly he stopped. He saw something out of the corner of his eye. A rat scampered across the alley. The rat's long, thin tail slithered underneath the wall of a stable.

5 The rat gave James an idea. He chuckled softly to himself and made his way home.

6 That night James began work on his newest invention. It took him a few days to finish it, but by the end he couldn't wait to try it out. He had made a small boat. All he needed now was the power to make the boat run.

7 One early morning James set out with a basket of apples and a box. The box had a spring door on one side. He wanted to capture a rat. James set the trap near the stable wall where he had seen the rat several days earlier. Then he left to try to sell more apples.

8 James returned to the stable that evening. Inside the trap was a rat! James hurried home and quickly ate his supper. The rat would be the power for his boat. Now he wanted to see how the rat and the boat would work together.

9 James kept the rat in the woodshed. Using a piece of bacon as bait, he lured the rat from the box and into the new boat he had built. The rat ate its reward hungrily.

10 The rat wanted to escape after it finished the bacon. However, the rat was penned in inside the boat. As the rat's feet moved across the bottom of the boat, the movement caused a treadmill to move. As the treadmill moved, the wheels

underneath the boat moved. The wheels, in turn, caused the boat to move forward.

11 James was thrilled. He ran from the woodshed to his house and showed his mother and sisters the boat. He placed the invention on the floor.

12 "How nice," his sisters murmured, "another boat."

13 His sisters had seen countless other boats. This one looked just like all the rest.

14 James told his sisters this invention was different and tapped his finger on the side of the boat. Suddenly the boat started to move quickly around the room. It zigzagged across the floor and bumped against the wall.

15 James's sisters thought the invention was wonderful. Some visitors who were there told James's mother that their son was a marvel. They asked what made the boat move.

16 James lifted up the boat and took it over to the visitors. He quickly lifted off the lid. "This is what makes it go," he said.

17 His mother gasped in horror. His sisters screamed as the visitors backed away in disgust. James's mother took a moment to compose herself. Then she told him to get the rat and the invention out of the house.

18 James took the boat outside and let the rat go free. Yet he was already planning his next invention. He would build a boat not powered by rats, but with steam.

19 James Eads would go on to create many more wonderful, and bigger, inventions. As an adult, he would build a great bridge that spanned the mighty Mississippi River. One pier of this bridge would be at the spot where James and his family escaped from the burning steamboat.

20 James Eads was someone who started out small but went on to bigger and better things.

## COMPREHENSION

**A** Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.

- 1 Another good title for this story is
  - a An Engineer's Beginnings.
  - b How the Steamboat Was Invented.
  - c How to Catch Rats.
- 2 James couldn't work full-time on his inventions because
  - a the weather was cold in St. Louis.
  - b he had to work to earn money for his family.
  - c he had to try to find his family's possessions.
- 3 When James showed what made the boat work,
  - a his mother thought it was amazing.
  - b his sisters thought it was wonderful.
  - c Neither a nor b

- 4 You can tell that James was a clever boy because
  - a ordinary things gave him unusual ideas.
  - b he worked to help his family.
  - c he let the rat eat the bacon.
- 5 When the writer says that James "started out small but went on to bigger and better things," she means
  - a inventors always start by building toys.
  - b a person's career can begin in childhood.
  - c toy boats are built before big bridges.

## LEARN ABOUT WORDS

**B** Often you can find out the meaning of a word by seeing how it is used in a story. The other words in the story give you clues.

Find the word in the story that best fits each meaning. (A paragraph number tells you where to look.) Write the word.

- 1 belongings; things owned (2)
- 2 laughed quietly (5)
- 3 seize; catch by force or craft (7)
- 4 drew; coaxed; attracted (9)
- 5 moved with sharp turns (14)

**C** **too** = also

**two** = the number after *one*

Words that sound alike but have different spellings and meanings are called homophones. *Too* and *two* are homophones.

Look at each word in **bold type**. Note the paragraph number. Look at the paragraph and find the homophone for the word in **bold type**. Which of the homophones fits in the blank in the sentence? Write the word.

**6 peace** (9)

James found a \_\_\_\_\_ of wood.

**7 feat** (10)

Building the Eads Bridge was a remarkable \_\_\_\_\_.

**8 wood** (18)

This boat is made out of \_\_\_\_\_.

**9 two** (19)

James sold \_\_\_\_\_ apples that morning.

**10 peer** (19)

Each end of the bridge is supported by a \_\_\_\_\_.

## THINK ABOUT IT

**D** Read each set of sentences. Which word in **bold type** is the best ending? Write the word.

- 1 James was afraid that he might not sell all the apples. He felt \_\_\_\_\_.  
**joyful   amazed   worried**
- 2 James chuckled at his idea. He felt \_\_\_\_\_.  
**displeased   amused   worried**
- 3 The rat-powered boat worked! James felt \_\_\_\_\_.  
**angry   thrilled   upset**
- 4 Mrs. Eads's visitors backed away from the boat. They felt \_\_\_\_\_.  
**overjoyed   scolding   alarmed**
- 5 James's sisters saw the rat and screamed. They felt \_\_\_\_\_.  
**horrified   cheerful   delighted**

**E** James hurried home *quickly*.  
James hurried home.

When writers or speakers are careless, they sometimes use an unnecessary word and say the same thing twice.

Read each sentence. Which word in **bold type** is not needed because the same idea is expressed elsewhere in the sentence? Write the word.

- 6 The **bushel** basket of apples was too heavy for the slender, **thin** boy.
- 7 James saw the **large** rat on a cold, **chilly** day.
- 8 James Eads had made **other** different model boats and **steam** engines.
- 9 James lifted **up** the **lid** of the boat.
- 10 The **next** boat James planned to build after this one was a **model** steamboat.

**F** The boat's horn wouldn't *toot*.  
The rat *squeaked*.

Some words imitate the sounds they refer to. *Toot* and *squeaked* are two such words.

Read each sentence. Which word imitates a sound? Write the word.

- 11 James heard leaves rustling in the cold wind.
- 12 James murmured, "How shall I catch the rat?"
- 13 The rat-powered boat zoomed across the floor and into the hallway.
- 14 The boat thumped into a chair, a table, and then the wall.
- 15 James's sisters shrieked when the rat looked up at them.