Edited by Curtis C. Roseman and Elizabeth M. Roseman 252 pages 2004, University of Iowa Press The new book Grand Excursions on the Upper Mississippi River should not be considered a lightweight souvenir for people wanting to remember the upcoming Grand Excursion celebration. For one thing, it's only marginally about the Grand Excursion rail and steamship journey of 1854. For another, it tends toward the academic.

The book *is* a collection of 13 fascinating essays that use the Grand Excursion as a historical marker in the development of the Upper Mississippi River. And it's mostly a lively, well-written collection that contains something for just about anybody with an interest in history and development along the river.

Edited by Curtis C. Roseman and Elizabeth M. Roseman, *Grand Excursions on the Upper Mississippi River* begins with four pieces directly tied to the Grand Excursion of 1854. The Rosemans and the Quad Cities' Dick Stahl set the stage with an introductory piece, and that's followed by Roald D. Tweet's essay on the construction of the Rock Island Line, which Grand Excursion celebrated.

William J. Petersen's 1937 piece on the excursion offers an interesting perspective – looking back on the event but with much less distance than we have today. Petersen describes a "mock trial" concerning injuries sustained by one passenger on the Excursion, and his essay has a level of detail and a quaintness that's missing from the contemporary contributions.

Susan R. Brooker-Glass then looks at the Grand Excursion from the perspective of the Easterners who made the journey, primarily the journalists who documented this great accomplishment of connecting the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River by rail. One writer complained bitterly about the cost of transportation, tobacco, and liquor at one stop of the Grand Excursion: "St. Paul's Minnesota, stands alone, unrivalled, unapproached, as the greediest place on all this Western Continent."

From there, the book diverges from the Grand Excursion and begins looking at the Mississippi topically.

"Steaming Up the River," by Edwin L. Hill, is a valuable exercise in de-romanticizing life on the Mississippi. Hill recounts the often-horrific living conditions on the steamboats, from sleeping arrangements to food to drinking water: "For first-class passengers on the cabin deck, life was comparatively civilized … – that is, if one did not look into the galley, where food was prepared or at dishwashing or other aspects of sanitation and cleanliness. … One writer remarked that the passage of a chicken from life to dinner plate was so swift that he did not wonder if it was sufficiently cooked; he wondered if in fact it was really dead."

And for those not traveling first class? "Leftover food from the upper decks would be offered first to ordinary crew members and deck hands, then to the deck passengers. Many of the latter carried their own food and hoped it would survive the summer heat, vermin, and the grasp of other passengers. These people were crammed together in a small space with livestock, dogs, and whatever freight was being carried."

Patrick Nunnally's "The Picturesque Mississippi" is not an appreciation of the natural beauty of the river but an exploration of how principles of art are applied to – and finally used to change – the natural landscape. A scene along the Mississippi was and is appreciated only to the degree it's "pictorial, a visual composition that is pleasing in part because it resembles a painting," Nunnally writes.

Logging, fishing, urban renewal, natural resources, rail travel, and the re-shaping of the river for commercial purposes are among the other topics discussed in *Grand Excursions on the Upper Mississippi River*. I doubt many people will find *all* of the pieces in the book interesting, but any curious reader will find several fun, educational, and provocative things.

The volume's writing is generally strong, although references to the original Grand Excursion within the first two paragraphs of every essay ("At the time of the Grand Excursion in 1854 … ") quickly become tiresome.

And the book could have used a good editorial scrubbing, to make the prose sparkle for the general reader. John A. Jakle writes in the opening of his essay, "Such are the questions I ask. I organize my essay as follows."

That type of cringe-worthy prose is fortunately rare in this fine book. And beyond being a good read, *Grand Excursions* is a thoughtful introduction to myriad aspects and issues of the Upper Mississippi.

To order a copy of Grand Excursions on the Upper Mississippi River*, call (800)621-2736.*

The editors of the book will be appearing at Quad City Arts at 7 p.m. on Friday, June 25.