

In Loving Memory of ISAAC MARSHALL CUNNINGHAM

STEAM CARPENTER

Born c. 1831 in Jackson County, West Virginia • Died May 16, 1877 in Cincinnati, Ohio

A faithful husband, loving father, and respected citizen

A LIFE REMEMBERED

With deep sorrow, we remember Isaac Marshall Cunningham, a skilled steam carpenter whose life was cut short in the prime of his years.

THE TRAGIC ACCIDENT

On Wednesday, May 16, 1877, about 11:30 o'clock in the morning, while engaged at work on the hull of the steamer *Golden City*, lying at the Cincinnati wharf, Isaac was by some misfortune thrown into the river. He was drawn under a passing barge; after it passed, he rose to the surface. Workmen threw a plank toward him, but it did not reach him. After struggling for some time, he disappeared. It is believed he struck something in his fall, for he was known to be an excellent swimmer. At the time this account was written, his body had not been recovered.

A DEVOTED MAN

Isaac was among the oldest residents of Pace, Kentucky. He was forty-six years of age and was born and raised in Jackson County, West Virginia. He leaves behind his beloved wife and four young children, all of tender age, to mourn their great loss. He was a sober, industrious, and well-liked man, respected by all who knew him—a kind husband and loving father. His untimely death cast a gloom of sadness over the whole community and a hitherto happy home.

"Truly in the midst of life we are in death."

— Psalm 90:10

FOREVER REMEMBERED

*His skill provided for his family.
His character earned the respect of his community.
His love will be remembered always.*

Prepared in remembrance of Isaac Marshall Cunningham
by his family and friends.



The steamer *Golden City* burning on the Mississippi River at Memphis, Tennessee, in 1882—five years after Isaac Marshall Cunningham lost his life while working on her hull at the Cincinnati wharf.

RIVER-ERA HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

Life and Labor on the Ohio & Mississippi Rivers
(Mid-19th Century)



During Isaac Marshall Cunningham's lifetime, the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers formed the backbone of American commerce. Steamboats carried people, timber, coal, agricultural goods, and manufactured products between river towns and major cities such as Cincinnati, Louisville, Memphis, and New Orleans.



Skilled tradesmen like steam carpenters were essential to this system. They built and repaired wooden hulls, decks, cabins, and structural members—often while vessels were tied to crowded wharves or anchored mid-river. Safety equipment was minimal, and accidents from falls, shifting barges, fire, or sudden currents were tragically common.



Steamboats were powerful but dangerous machines. Fires, boiler explosions, collisions, and drownings claimed hundreds of lives during the river era. Five years after Isaac's death, the steamer *Golden City* was destroyed by fire near Memphis—a reminder of the ever-present risks faced by those who worked and traveled on America's rivers.

Isaac's story reflects the lived reality of thousands of anonymous river workers whose skill and sacrifice sustained 19th-century trade—and whose lives were often shortened by the hazards of the water.



