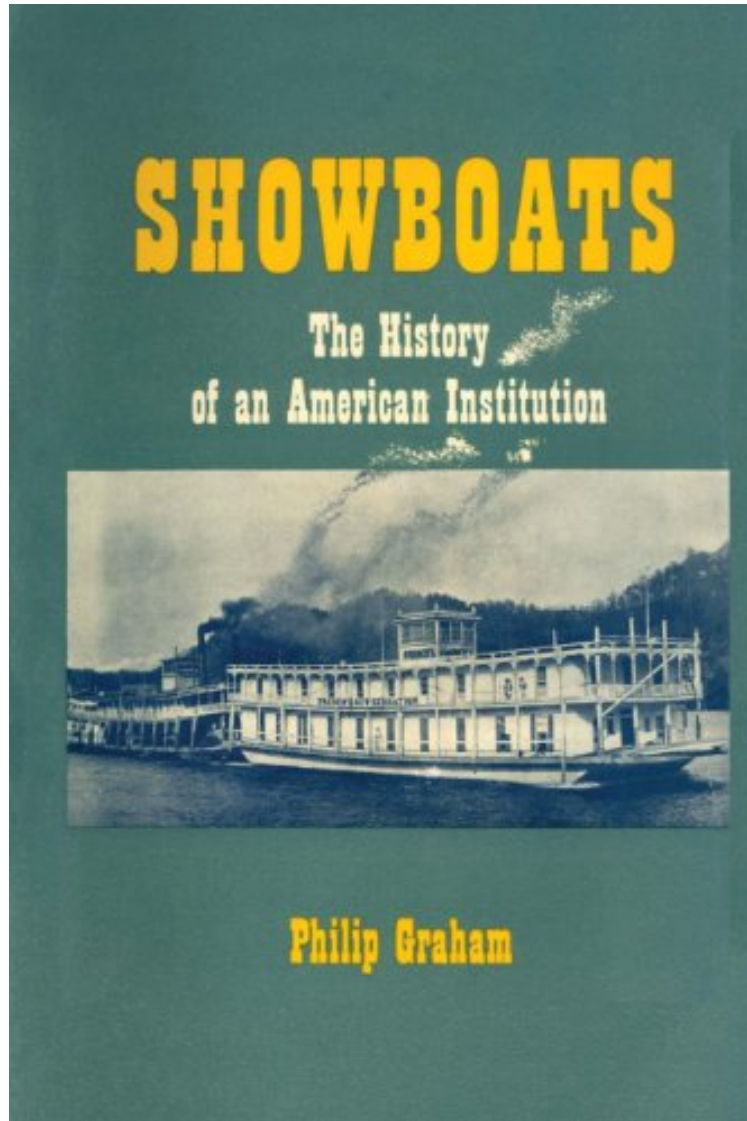


[Library ebook] Showboats: The History of an American Institution

## Showboats: The History of an American Institution

*Philip Graham*

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**Philip Graham : Showboats: The History of an American Institution** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Showboats: The History of an American Institution:

This book is a delightful and authoritative record of America's showboats from the first one, launched in 1831, to the last, ultimately tied up at a St. Louis dock. It is also a record of the men and women who built and loved these floating theaters, of those who performed on their stages, and of the thousands who sat in their auditoriums. And, lastly, it is a

record of a genuine folk institution, as American as catfish, which for more than a century did much to relieve the social and cultural starvation of our vast river frontier. For these showboats brought their rich cargoes of entertainment—genuine laughter, a glimpse of other worlds, a respite from the grinding hardship of the present, emotional relaxation—to valley farmers, isolated factory workers and miners, and backwoodsmen who otherwise would have lacked all such opportunities. To the more privileged, the showboats brought pleasant reminder of a half-forgotten culture. They penetrated regions where churches and school had not gone, and where land theaters were for generations to be impossible. Like circuit preachers, they carried their message to the outer fringes of American civilization. In spite of many faults, it was a good message. The frontier had created this institution to fill a genuine need, and it lasted only until other and better means of civilizing these regions could reach them—good roads, automobiles, motion pictures, schools, churches, newspapers, and theaters. But although the showboats have passed into history, they have left a rich legacy. As long as the Mississippi flows into the Gulf, their story will fire the imagination of Americans. Showboating has become so legendary that few Americans know what this unique institution was really like. In *Showboats*, at long last, the true story emerges. It differs in many important respects from the motion picture and fictional versions to which Americans are accustomed, but it is not a whit the less glamorous. Philip Graham has told his story with imagination, genuine insight, and complete devotion to facts. No one who is interested in America's past should fail to read it.