

## Echoes From the Past

### GRAND RIVER FERRIES

Early pioneers faced innumerable hazards as they traveled westward, not the least of which were river crossings. Most attempted to schedule their journeys in more moderate weather during the summer or fall, but even the best laid plans usually were foiled at some point. Today, travelers utilize modern bridges and, as we pass over the swirling waters of any river, particularly at flood stage, we should reflect in wonderment at the courage of our predecessors. The Grand River was no exception capturing enormous amounts of rainfall as it drained more than 10,000 square miles of water through eastern Kansas and western Missouri before it funneled through the valley of northeastern Oklahoma. When Jean Chouteau floated down the Grand River in search of a trading post site he took time to look for a shallow rocky crossing which, after two days he located at today's Salina. But pioneers anxious to reach a distant destination in the west were eager to cross the water barrier and move on. So ferry entrepreneurs along the Grand River Valley capitalized on their urgency as well as the rivers fickleness by providing a much needed service and an income for themselves.

Ferries were not elaborate structures, most were logs with planks laid over them and guard rails on the side. The most reliable were run by a cable strung across the river which was attached to a windlass to pull them back and forth. More primitive rafts were simply propelled by pike poles. Fees varied depending on what was transported. In early years, individuals were charged 5 cents each and horses 25 cents, but a team of oxen cost \$2.00 because of their stubborn nature in loading and unloading. Occasionally, the ferry owner would trade for produce, one owner charged either 50 cents round trip or two heads of cabbage or a watermelon one way.

The first ferry of record in the region was established northeast of Grove Springs by Thomas Carey in 1840 on the heavily traveled trail westward from northeastern Arkansas. Located at the end of today's Northwest 63<sup>rd</sup> Street on the east side of the river, now Carey Bay, the ferry service crossed the river to a trading post called "Tightwad" inundated by the lake near Echo Bay. The ferry headquarters included small bedrooms and Carey also offered goods for sale. Later, in 1873 a post office was added. Among his overnight guests was one Colonel Stand Watie who, during the Civil War on January 4, 1862, paid \$1.50 for two nights lodging. Carey's ferry operated until 1905 when it was replaced by a bridge, one of the first in the region over the Grand River.

As traffic demanded ferry service increased. In the 1840's, when the Military Trail which extended from Baxter Springs, Kansas to Fort Gibson was developed, a ferry was used at the Hudson Creek Trading Post five miles southeast of Miami. In 1870 a ferry at Pooler's Crossing over the Neosho River opened for business. Other ferries in what would later become Ottawa County included the Jim Clare, the Big Knife Ford, the Village Ford, and the Good Eagle Ferries, all operating as means of crossing the Neosho and Spring Rivers before bridges were constructed. Well known ferries operating south of Grove Springs included one at Klaus northwest of Zena and Anderson's Ferry near Buzzards Bend.

**Further downstream in today's Mayes County ferry service was provided by the Riley and Lewis families across the Grand River now inundated by Lake Hudson and further south by the Markham family, early pioneers in the 1840's. The area they farmed near the Grand River became known as Markham's prairie because in addition to the ranch, the Markhams had a general store and shortly thereafter added a ferry service located about two miles northwest of present day Locust Grove on a gentle slope along the Grand River.. Like Carey's Ferry near Grove, the Markham Ferry was located on an important trading route for farm families. However, unlike other ferries long forgotten, in 1962 over 120 years later, the Markham Ferry name would be preserved by the United States Corps of Engineers who approved construction of Kerr Dam but referred to the location as The Markham Ferry Project.**

**Just as many small businesses that serve a contemporary service, ferries were initiated then disappeared, some due to floods resulting in destruction of the raft and eventually all to the construction of bridges. But for the time they were in existence, ferries were a welcome site to weary travelers and a viable income for their proprietors.**



