

ROSS, S. W.

EIGHTEENTH INTERVIEW. #12336

STEAMBOATS.

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Elizabeth Ross, Investigator
November 29, 1937

Interview with S. W. Ross
Park Hill, Oklahoma.

Boats had Names.

There were two boats on the Illinois River during the eighteen hundreds which had distinctive names. One of these boats, the larger of the two, was a ferry boat which once plied the river near the confluence of the Barren Fork with the larger stream. The ferry boat, composed of yellow pine lumber, was built by George Keys, Senior, and was the property of Riley Keys, Junior, who lived in the vicinity of the present hamlet of Welling in Cherokee County. This ferry boat was given the name of the "Ada Archer" by its owner.

At the time Miss Ada Archer, member of a prominent family of the Cherokee Nation, was a member of the faculty of the Cherokee National Female Seminary, then situated in the Park Hill locality. The ferry boat was operated for several years at intervals.

The smaller boat was named the "D. H. Ross," for the editor of the "Cherokee Advocate" at Tahlequah. It was a skiff in which Caleb W. Starr, a compositor in the office of the Cherokee National Newspaper, and Samuel Schable, a German

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shoemaker of Tahlequah, made a trip down the Illinois into the Arkansas, and down that stream to the city of Fort Smith, Arkansas.

The "D. H. Ross" was launched one morning at the old May party grounds on the bank of the Illinois, some two miles southeast of Tahlequah. The occupants of the skiff reached their destination in safety after spending a night in camp on the bank of the Illinois, some distance above the confluence of the Illinois with the Arkansas, near the present town of Gore. A full account of the trip was printed in the Cherokee Advocate. When they camped for the night the ~~travelers~~ by water roasted some fish which they had encased in tenacious mud and placed in the fire. After reaching the Arkansas they made easy progress to Fort Smith, landing at the foot of Garrison Avenue. There was as yet no railroad connection with the Arkansas City and consequently the stream was not bridged. Those who visited Fort Smith in vehicles or horseback were ferried across.

No one familiar with long past history of traveling down the Illinois ever recalled that any other boats on that stream bore distinctive names. There were some boats upon

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the sides of which the names of their owners were painted, but no one else seems to have considered giving the name of a woman or of a man to any of the small crafts. And no one else so far as known, ever named a ferry boat, though such boats were in operation on the Illinois from an early period. The first ferry boat was built and placed in the waters of the river soon after the establishment of the Cherokee Nation in the present Oklahoma, in probability. The Illinois was frequently at too high a stage to be forded and as there was much travel from Eastern points, as well as from Western sections, the necessity of a ferry boat at a convenient point along the stream was realized and the traveling public accommodated.

The spot where the "Ada Archer" was launched is less than a half mile downstream from the present Frisco Railway bridge, and just above the "old mouth of the Barren Fork." This latter stream changed its channel some years ago and now enters the Illinois several hundred yards below its original confluence.