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INDEX CARDS

Ferries--South Canadian River
Norman

Field Worker: Don Whistler

BIOGRAPHY OF The Norman Ferry

INFORMATION: From Dick Borjes of Norman, Oklahoma

After the big flood on the South Canadian River in 1904, there wasn't any way to get across the river except to ford it. Fording it was rather dangerous, as there was considerable more water in it in those days than there is now, and the channel was very much narrower. That flood took out all the bridges along the river except the wagon bridge at Bridgeport and the Santa Fe bridge at Purcell. The toll bridge at Noble washed out at same time.

The Norman merchants wanted the trade from across the river and early in 1905, several of them came to me and wanted me to put in a ferry. They knew that I had experience along that line.

After looking up and down the river, I decided to put it straight west on the section line that is one mile north of West Main Street. At that time the river was flowing against the bluff on the west side. The channel was fairly straight at that point, and the absence of sand bar made it a good place for the ferry.

The Saint Louis World's Fair had just closed and I bought from the Salvage company that was cleaning up the ground, a one inch cable 1300 feet long. I anchored the

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west end up on the bluff by burying a big 12 foot log, dead man fashion, about 6 or 8 feet in the clay bank. The east end of the cable passed over a tower made of two 8 x 8 's and was fastened behind to a great big log about 30 feet long, buried about five feet in the sand. It took four teams of mules to pull that log around to the hole where we buried it. Stretching up that cable was some job, but I had plenty of assistance, as about 25 or 30 farmers living in that neighborhood came down and helped me put it in place. When we had finished stretching it, the lowest point was about 15 feet above the water.

The ferry boat was 14 feet wide and 36 feet long. There was a closed railing along each side, and a gate at each end that could be let down to form a kind of a gang plank for the wagons and horses to get on and off the boat.

This ferry was equipped with a kind of mechanical contrivance called "a squirrel" that made the river current furnish the power to move it back and forth across the river.

The principle involved was a simple one. The boat is fastened at each end to rollers or wheels that run on the overhead cable. By adjusting the length of these mooring

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ropes so that the front end of the boat is further up stream than the back, the current pushing against the side of the boat and rushing around the back end, pushed the boat across the river. The return trip is made by re-adjusting the length of the moorings lines.

I charged one dollar for a loaded wagon, 75 cents for an empty wagon or a buggy, and 25 cents for a man on horseback. If a man on foot went across when I had a wagon to go at the same time the charge was 10 cents, if I had to make a special trip with him the charge was 25 cents.

I gave receipts to the people who rode the ferry and if they bought enough merchandise in Norman, the merchant refunded the ferry charge. I remember that Del Larsh, Ambrister, R.C. Berry and Frank McGinly (Norman merchants) sure did object to me charging a dollar, but I told them, I had to live, and that I had a lot of money invested in that ferry. I ran the ferry the rest of that year. The river current got to changing and caused me a lot of trouble. I had to cut big cotton wood trees and anchor them along the banks in the river above the ferry to make the current run straight.

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About that time I entered a bid, for digging a well for the city at what is now Doll's Park. I was the successful bidder, so I turned the ferry over to some fellows, and they ran it until the spring floods came along, and washed the boat away. The land where the east end of the cable was anchored, washed away and the cable disappeared into the sand, except the west end where it was anchored in that clay bank. It stayed there for 8 or 9 years, I don't know whether it is still there or not. That was the end of the Norman Ferry.