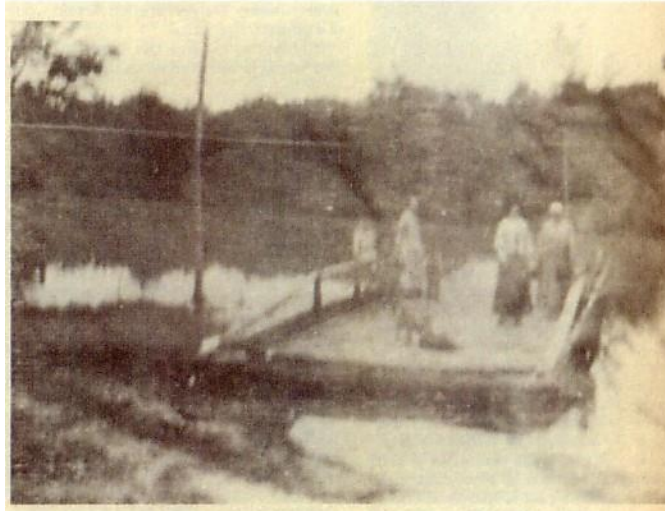


**Ferry Operations across the Tennessee River
in Franklin (later Colbert)
and Lauderdale Counties, Alabama
(Volume One)**



Ferry Operations across the Tennessee River in Franklin (Later Colbert) and Lauderdale Counties, Alabama (Volume One)



Picture 1. Early ferry crossing of Bear Creek in Northwest Alabama

For the past 140 years, many local ferry operators in northwest Alabama crossed the Tennessee River and Bear Creek. These included the Chickasaw Ferry (Eastport, Mississippi to Waterloo, Alabama operated by George and Levi Colbert before 1801), then later the Waterloo-Eastport ferry owned by Dr. Gabriel Bumpass; The Colbert Ferry operated by Chief George Colbert then later named the Georgetown Ferry with several operators. The Riverton-Waterloo Ferry operated as early as 1860 through 1937 (Operators included Spencer, White, and Pickens); The Cheatham & Smith Ferry (Malone Creek to Cave Springs-Smithsonia); Files Ferry (Caney Creek to Newport); Pride Ferry (Pride to Woodland); and the Stemni Ferry (at Margerum, Alabama across Bear Creek).

Authors Notes: The author realizes several ferries that crossed the Tennessee River in Lauderdale, Franklin, and Colbert Counties are not presented in this publication. The plan is to investigate these additional ferry operations in Volume Two.

Chickasaw Ferry

Chickasaw Ferry (historical location) N34.894444, W88.095833

Chief George Colbert was born in 1764 on the west side of Bear Creek as

It empties into the Tennessee River. His early manhood was spent on the banks of the Cypress and Blue Water Creeks hunting and fishing.

George Colbert began running a ferry in 1798 across the Tennessee River at

Bear Creek, as a means for travelers to cross the otherwise impassable river. In December 1801, George Colbert agreed to move his Ferry to the Chickasaw Trace (The name *Chickasaw Trace* was changed to the *Natchez Trace* in 1830 (Applegate, 1989, Authors Notes) crossing the Tennessee River as part of his agreement with General James Wilkinson (McDonald, 1997 p. 325; Atkinson, 2004; Walker, 2012; *The Oklahoma Historical Society*, 2004). Accounts reference the Ferry used by Colbert as a flat bottom boat 30 feet long By 7.6 feet wide (Atkinson 2004 p.188).



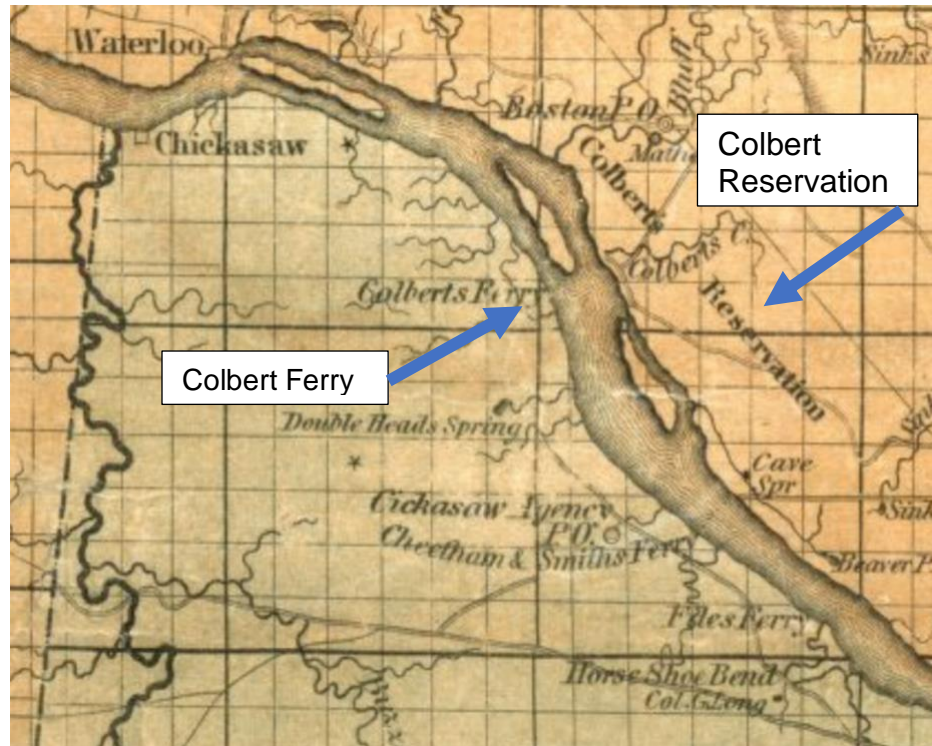
Picture 2. Flat Bottom Boat. (Artist unknown, from a wood carving)

(Historical Tidbit)

Treaty with the Chickasaw ARTICLE 4-1816. *The commissioners agree that the following tracts of land shall be reserved for the Chickasaw Nation. First. One tract of land for the use of Col. George Colbert and heirs, and which is thus described by said Colbert: "Beginning on the north bank of the Tennessee River, at a point that, running north four miles, will include a big spring, about halfway between his ferry and the mouth of Cypress, it being a spring that a large cow-path crosses its branch near where a cypress tree is cut down; thence westward to a point, four miles from the Tennessee river, and standing due north of a point on the north bank of the river, three (four) miles below his ferry on the Tennessee River and up the meanders of said river to the beginning point"* (https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/nt004.asp)

When the Chickasaw Nation ceded most of the Alabama Territory during the treaty of 1816, a reservation ("The Reserve") in West Lauderdale County was set aside for Chief George Colbert. The "Reserve" was initially made up of about 30,000 acres measuring some three to four miles in-depth in a distance

of about 12 miles up and down the north bank of the Tennessee River opposite Colbert Ferry (McDonald 1997, p.301). The "Reserve" was sold back The Government in 1818 (p. 210).



Map 1. 1837. Colbert's Ferry; Colbert's Reservation; Cheatham & Smith's Ferry; File's Ferries

The Reserve was later named Havanna also it was an ideal location on the lower end of long Island (seven-mile Island). Once the area was cleared, it was a good site for a ferry operation.

Kroger Island (Historical Tidbit)

*The **William Koger (Kouger) House** is a historic residence near Smithsonia, Alabama. The house was built around 1830 by William and Martha Koger, planters from Virginia. The Koger's brought their native architecture from the Tidewater-type cottage, with them to [North Alabama](#). The house was the center of a 630-acre (255-ha) plantation, which included an island in the [Tennessee River](#) purchased from Newton F. Neal in 1836. After William's death, Martha continued to manage the farm until she died in 1892.*

Koger's Island gets its name from William Koger and his wife, Martha Westmoreland Koger, both natives of Virginia. Their large plantation was in west Lauderdale County, north of the Island that bears their name. Their one-and-a-half-story Virginia-style home

was restored several years ago. Today, it is recognized as one of the rare examples of this architectural design in the Tennessee Valley. William Koger was descended from Jacob Koger, who arrived in America from Germany in 1728.

The island was originally owned by George Colbert, who sold it to the Government in 1818. It was purchased from the Federal Government in 1820 by Newton F. Neal, who later sold it to Koger. Early maps show that before the formation of Pickwick Lake, this small Island of fewer than 160 acres was separated from the north shore of the Tennessee River by only a small segmented stream of the river's flow.

During the latter part of the 19th century, Koger's Island was acquired by Columbus Smith, a prominent merchant, and planter. By 1900, Smith had established a large farming operation consisting of about 10,000 of the most fertile acres in west Lauderdale County. His commercial complex included a cotton gin, grist mill, and other related shops.

After Smith died in 1900, his son-in-law, Capt. John Thomas Reeder, took over the management of the estate. A former resident of Smithsonia remembers that Smith and Reeder utilized nearby Koger's Island as a storage area for Cotton awaiting shipment by steamboats (Times Daily 2013).



Map 2. Havanna appears on the map in Lauderdale County (date ?)

Tennessee River crossings in this area have been known by different names, such as Foster's Ferry, Prides Ferry, and Savage Ferry. Garners Ferry was located between Smithsonia and Woodland (in Lauderdale County) at the site owned by R. M. Foster. Garner owned the land around 1900 (McDonald 1997, p. 308).



Map 3. Locations of Cheatham's, Garner's, and Pride's Ferries

Cheatham/Smith Ferry

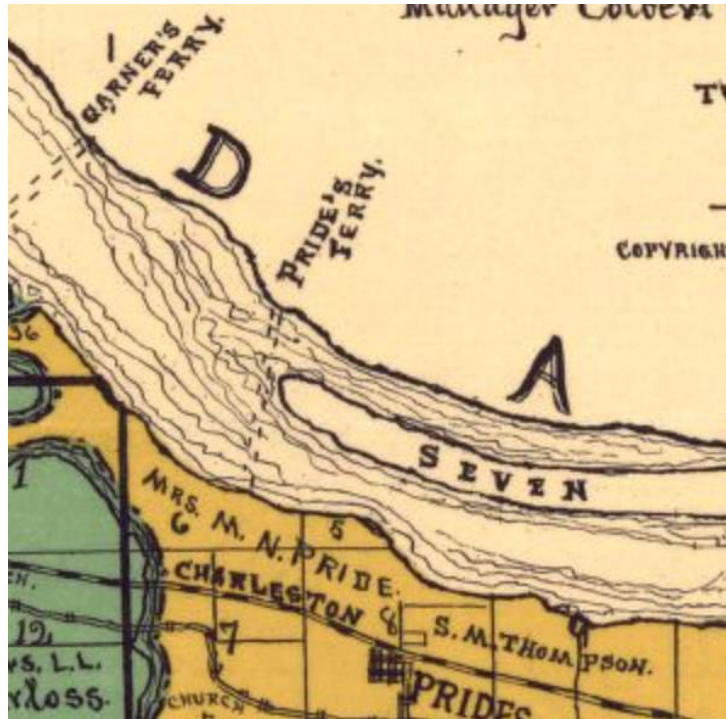
Christopher Cheatham at Cave Springs established the Cheatham's Ferry.

He was in the county as early as 1811, but at what time he began his Ferry is not known. The Ferry was located a few miles upstream from the earlier Colbert Ferry. Once the Colbert Ferry stopped operations ~1817. the Cheatham ferry provided supplies, travelers, and mail delivery to the Post The office operated at the Chickasaw Agency at Malone Creek. This Ferry is found on old maps of Alabama and listed as Cheatham & Smith Ferry. Columbus Smith had come to Lauderdale County as a boy and began to work as A young ferryman. This site was called Smith's Ferry as early as 1832. During the Civil War, Smith at his ferry site was an eyewitness to the marching and counter-marching of the Confederate and Federal troops, as both forces used His Ferry to cross the river. In 1896, Smith was granted permission by the local court to move his Ferry about a half-mile above his established Ferry. In his will, Smith referred to this operation as Point Smith (McDonald 1997, pp.306-307)

The 1910 census of Alabama (Colbert County) shows Jacob Reed (age 56) listed his Occupation as Ferryman at Cave Springs.

(Historical Tidbits)

Smithsonia was originally known as Cave Springs of the numerous caves in the surrounding area. It was then named Smithsonia, in honor of Columbus Smith, a landowner, and merchant following the Civil War. Smith operated a ferry, general store, grist mill, and cotton gin in Smithsonia. A post office was in operation under the name Smithsonia from 1886 to 1927.



Map 4. Prides' Ferry

Pride's Ferry

The Pride's Ferry is found on old maps of Colbert County. It is located at 34 44 10 N, 87 44 5 W. Pride's Station is named for Edward Mitchel Pride, who landed at Pride's Landing Sometime after July 1797, and eventually built the family home there. In the 1890 census of Alabama (Colbert County) shows Jessie Williams- Servant (age 22) listed his Occupation as Ferryman at Pride. In the 1900 census of Alabama (Colbert County) shows Jack Johnson listed his occupation as Ferryman at Pride (Wikipedia,https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pride,_Alabama)

Stemni Ferry

(Located at Margerum, Alabama)

An Indian by the name of Stemni operated a ferry over Bear Creek at Bolivar Road. The present Lee Highway (Highway 72) follows, in general, the course of this old road and crosses Bear Creek near Stemni Ferry (Natchez Trace Parkway Survey,1941). In 1900 the ferry across Bear Creek was discontinued

by the Colbert county (by order of Hon A.H. Alston, judge presiding).



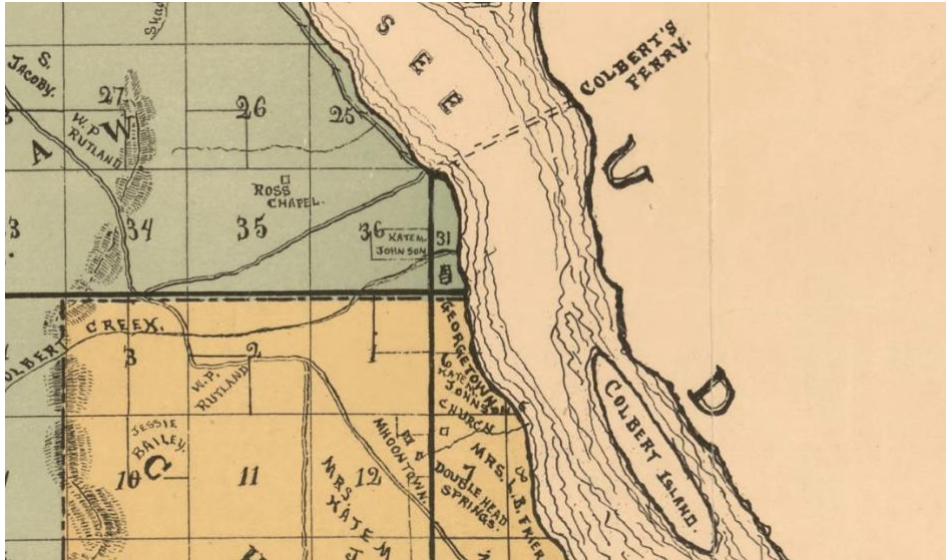
Map 5. Location of the old Stemni Ferry

Colbert's Ferry (Historical Tidbit)

A report from General James Wilkinson (Oct 1794) stated, "upon further observation that the route at Bear Creek is an improper one as the bottoms of both sides of the Tennessee River are inundated for a considerable distance during flooding and the ground over which is hilly and much broken" (Natchez Trace Parkway Survey 1941, p.36). Suggestions from Major George Colbert to General Wilkinson was a good crossing may be eastward, which would shorten the route (Daily, 2004 p. 20).

From historical maps and TVA archeological files, the Colbert Ferry was located at N34.84648 W88.794031.

The United States Government agreed to build cabins for travelers, a store, stables, a large two-storied dwelling house, a new ferry boat, and other facilities for George Colbert's family to operate a ferry as the Natchez Trace crosses the Tennessee River in present-day Colbert County.



Once George Colbert's wife Tuskiahooto died in 1817, and the United States mail route was officially changed to follow Jackson's Military Road through Florence, Alabama George Colbert closed the Ferry on the Natchez Trace, moved to Tupelo, Mississippi, and began his very successful farming operations on his plantation (Walker, 2013). Tuskiahooto was buried within 60 yards south of the Colbert House.



(Historical Tidbit)

Alabama Legislative Acts 1819 (page 73). *An act to amend several laws regulating public Ferries. Section 1. Be it enacted by the State and House of Representative of the State of Alabama in General Assembly concerned, that from and after the passage of this act, no person shall open or establish any Public Ferry in this State without first applying to the court of the county, within which such Ferry may be; and the court for good cause shown by the party applying, may grant a license to establish a ferry consistent with the provisions of this act and the laws regulating public ferries. Signed Dec 1819 James Dellet, Speaker of the House, Thomas Bibb, President of the Senate. Wm. W. Bibb, Governor.*

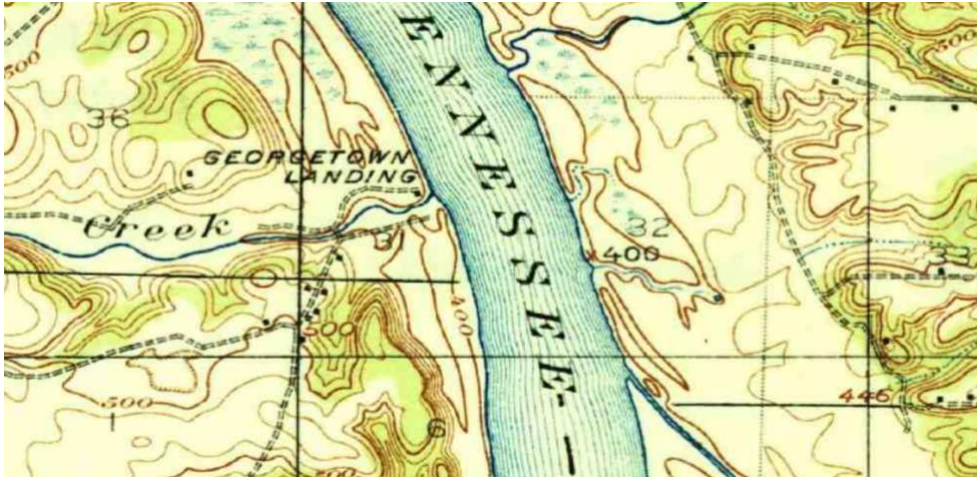
During the next 20 years (1817-1840), there was insufficient business to justify keeping the Colbert ferry operational. Sometimes after 1840, the old Colbert Ferry was reestablished and continued in use until 1861. During this period, New York and Philadelphia manufactures goods, to avoid high tariffs collected on goods shipping via the Mississippi River, used the Ohio and Tennessee Rivers and unloaded their goods at the Colbert Ferry.

These goods were then loaded on pack horses and traveled to Cotton Gin Port on the Tombigbee River, where they were loaded on boats and Barges, and shipped to St. Stephens and Washington County in the Territory of Mississippi (*extracted from a speech given by Frank A. King, President of Tennessee Valley Historical Society on Oct 29. 1927*)

Georgetown Ferry

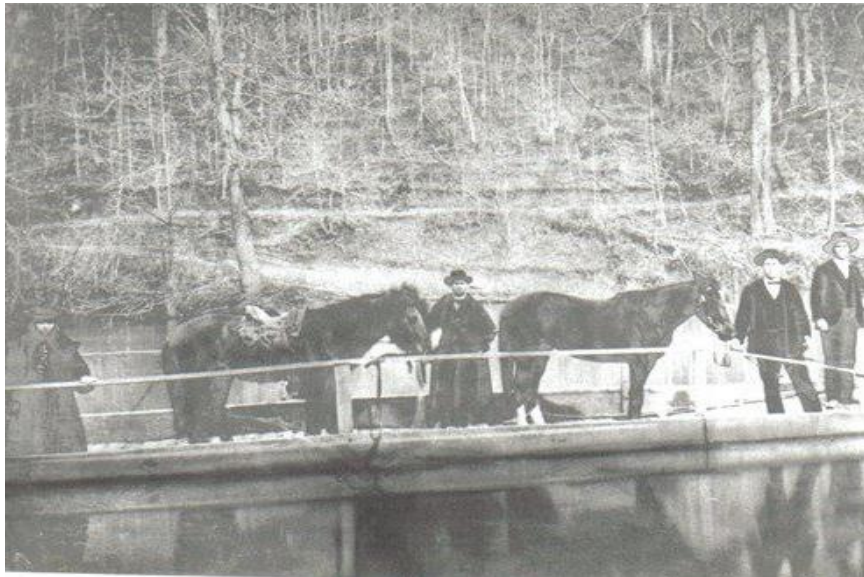
According to maps dated 1896, 1911, and 1924 the Georgetown Ferry operated at the following location N34.84314 W87.93476. This is not the exact location of the George Colbert Ferry (N.34.84648 W88.794031) nor later the Colbert Landing (N34.84092 W.87.93948).

After the Civil War, the name Colbert Ferry was replaced by Georgetown or George Town Ferry/George Town Landing, although records and local tradition are silent on reason for the name change.



Map 7. Location of Georgetown Landing

Considerable economic recovery during the post-Civil War era prompted Leander F. Hyatt to reestablish the Ferry at Georgetown in April 1877. After an unprofitable first two years Hyatt asked for and received permission to terminate his business (The Source Historical & Adventures, Vol 8:2. p.36)



Picture 3. 1879 photo of Georgetown Ferry operation (Property of Janet B. Smallwood).

(Historical Tibit)

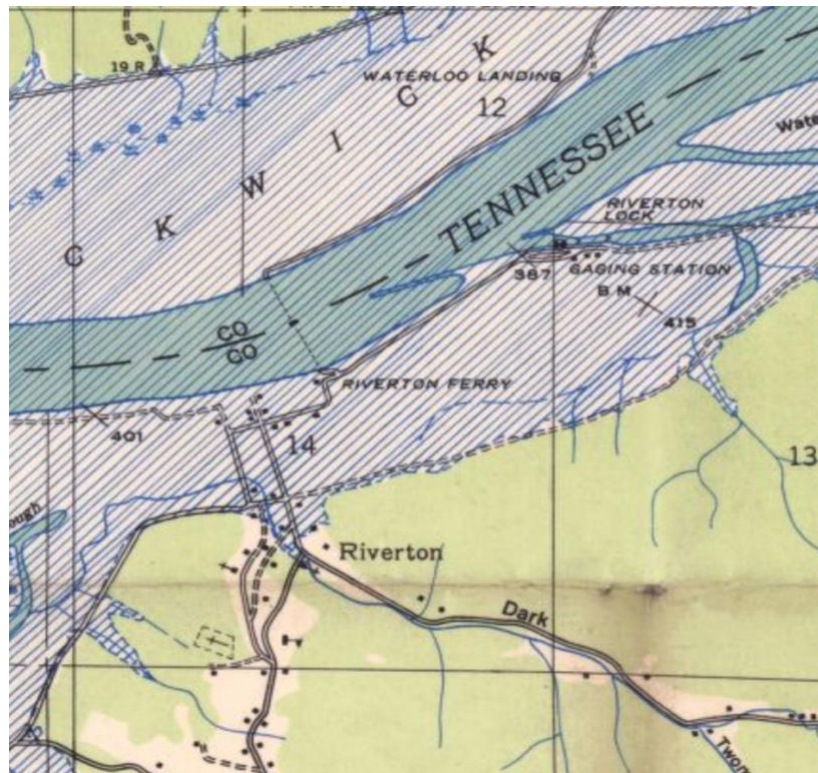
The average Alabama Ferry was about 40'x20' 25'and was solidly constructed of beams and planks nailed or pegged to gunnels. It was made watertight. An incline in front and rear made a possible entrance and exit of cargo (The Alabama Review, Jan 1951- River Ferries in Alabama before 1861)

Waterloo Ferry

Waterloo, Alabama has been a river crossing from early times. The first commercial Ferry was established here in 1832 when Dr. Gabriel Bumpass was granted ferry rights which he held for many years. In a newspaper advertisement in 1851 held the "Ferry at East Point Mississippi that crossed to Waterloo as the nearest and best way from Middle Tennessee to Northern Mississippi "(McDonald 1997, p.320).

Chickasaw/Riverton Ferry

Around 1860, Thomas Spencer, a 30-year residence of Chickasaw/Riverton was granted a charter/license from Colbert and Lauderdale counties to operate a Public Ferry across the Tennessee River from Chickasaw to Waterloo, Alabama.



Map 8. Riverton Ferry

General Assembly of Alabama H.665, February 13, 1897. James. W. White of Lauderdale county (Waterloo) is authorized to establish a public ferry across the

Tennessee River (from lines 11/12 Township 2 Range 15 W to the south
banks of the Tennessee River (sections 12/14)

No. 352.] *SS* AN ACT. [H. 665.
876-781-4
To authorize J. W. White to establish a ferry
across the Tennessee River.

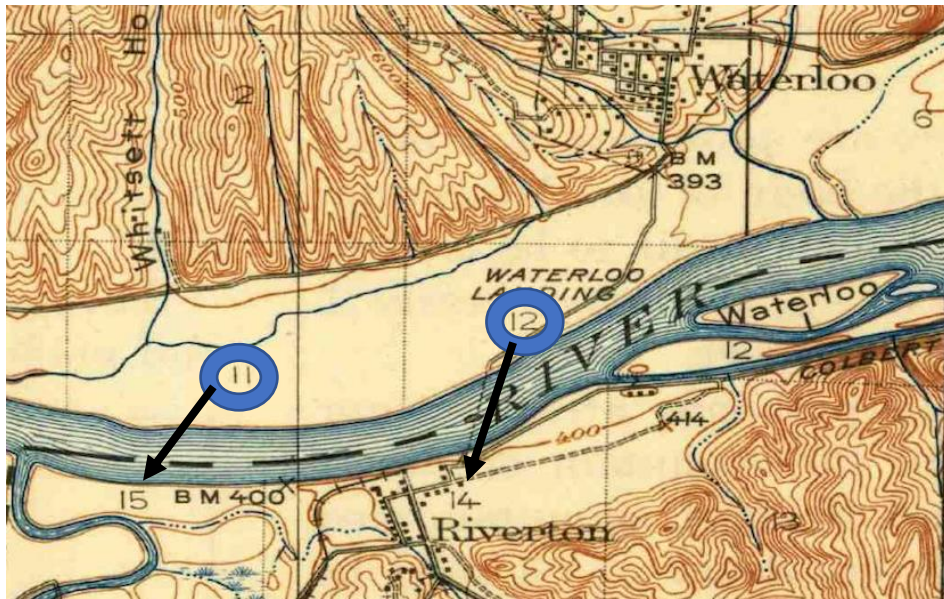
a. SECTION 1. *Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Alabama,* That J. W. White, of Lauderdale county, Alabama, is hereby authorized to establish a public ferry across the Tennessee River at a point within the lines of section eleven, twelve and fourteen, Township two, Range fifteen west; the northern bank of said river at such point being in section eleven or twelve in Lauderdale county, and the southern bank being in Section twelve of fourteen in Colbert county, Alabama, and he, his heirs and assigns are hereby authorized to charge such tolls for crossing at said ferry as may from time to time be prescribed by the court of county commissioners of Lauderdale county.

Eminent
domain.

SEC. 2. *Be it further enacted,* That said J. W. White is hereby authorized, if he cannot agree with the owners of the land on the banks of said river to have said lands condemned for the use of said ferry, by proceedings as provided in the Code of Alabama, and that if he cannot agree with the owners of the land in said sections eleven and fourteen, and in case he may desire to establish public roads leading to said ferry, he is hereby authorized to have said lands condemned by proceedings, as provided in the Code of Alabama.

Monopoly in
what radius.

SEC. 3. *Be it further enacted,* That no other ferry shall be established across said river, within two miles of the ferry herein authorized to be established.



Map 9: White's ferry routes from Waterloo Landing to Riverton

WILL FIGHT THE NEW FERRY.

Mr. Spencer Will not Submit to Being Outed.

A reporter of The Tribune was in Riverston Monday and had a talk with Mr. Thomas Spencer, the bus-ol man and ferryman, with regard to the proposed new ferry across the river at this point. Mr. Spencer is not disposed to submit tamely to the act of the Legislature that granted a ferry charter to Mr. J. W. White, of Watertown. He declared that the act was illegal and would not stand the test of trial. When pressed for his grounds for this assertion, he said: "Why, I own a prior charter, granted by Lauderdale and Col. Carters' court is precedence of legal custom more than fifty years old. The ferry has been continuously operated under this privilege, except for a while during the war."

"What if Mr. White or his lessee should begin operating a ferry?" the reporter asked.

"Then," said Mr. Spencer, "I will proceed against them according to law. I have a prior right, and my right cannot be superseded at its expiration, which is nearly a year hence. My charter is not from the State of Alabama, but is made from the two counties under the State law. If Mr. White undertakes to start a ferry I will fight it to the last ditch."

A Court Item.

Article from the Waterloo Tribune, March 12, 1887

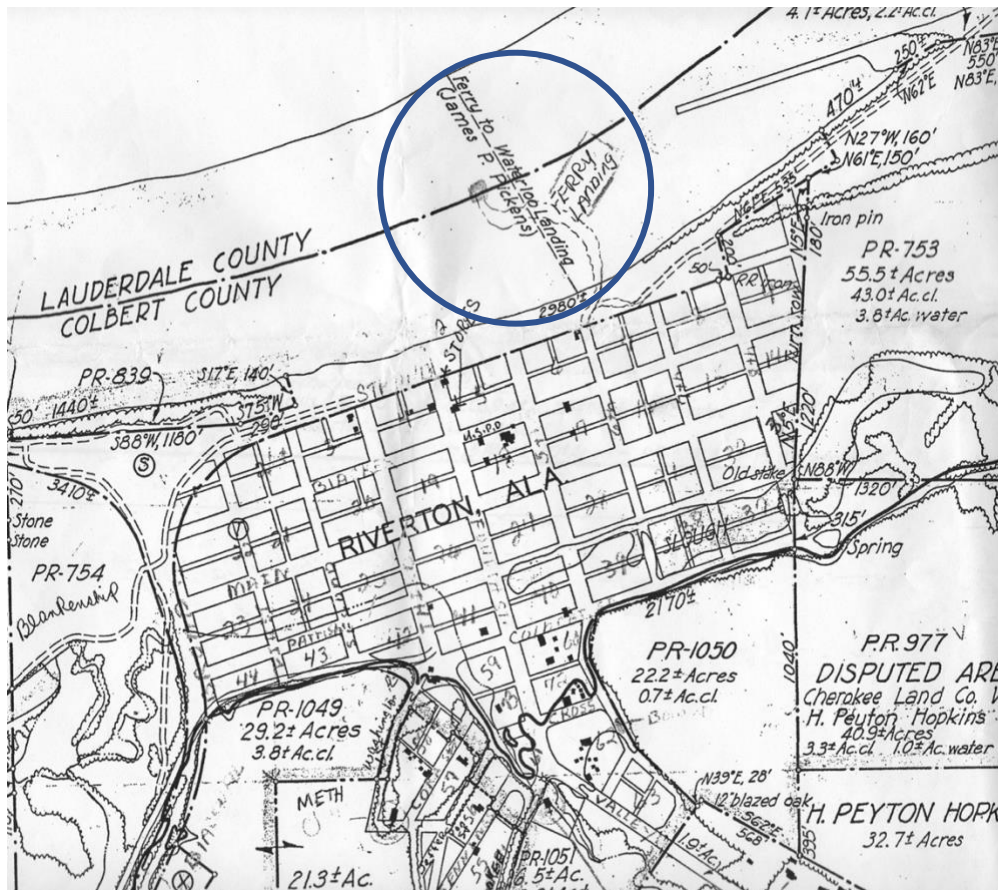
Sometime between 1885 and 1898 (date unknown) Thomas Spencer married Rut Davis. On May 23, 1898 Thomas Spencer wrote his last Will and Testament. On July 29, 1899 Thomas Spencer passed away and was put to rest in the Riverton Cemetery next to his first wife Mary Elizabeth Bledsoe Spencer. In his last will and testament Thomas left the ferry operation to his wife Ruth (Vengrouskie, 1999).

It is not known who operated the Public Ferry after Thomas Spencer's death. Ruth Spencer remained in Riverton through 1902. Afterwards, she remarried and relocated to Sheffield, Alabama.

The next historical account of the Public Ferry at Riverton is seen in the 1910 Alabama State Census (Colbert County) showing James Phillip Pickens (age 32) listed his occupation as an Engineer on a Public Ferry Boat. I have to presume this was the Riverton Public Ferry because the Pickens Family had a residence in Riverton, Alabama.

In the 1920 census of Alabama (Colbert County) shows Walter Smith (age 28) listed his occupation as Ferryman on the Public Ferry. Walter Smith was residing in Riverton, Alabama during this period.

A Tennessee Valley Authority Pickwick Land Reserve Land Map of Colbert County Alabama dated Jun 7, 1935 (see map below) shows the location of the Public Ferry between Riverton and Waterloo Landing with James P. Pickens name listed at the location this Ferry. Riverton landing did a thriving business for it was said that the navigation from Paducah to the landing was equaled in this country only to that of the lower Mississippi and the Hudson rivers.



Map 10. TVA Pickwick Land Reserve Land Map dated 6-7-1935

From TVA Family Removal and Population Readjustment Case Files (dated July 23, 1935) for James P. Pickens, he verified he had operated the Public Ferry at Riverton since 1921 (see documents below).

(383)

TVA 970, 7-10-35
Tennessee Valley Authority

Social and Economic Division

Schedule No. _____ INFORMATION _____
Map _____
Date 7/23/35 CONCERNING FAMILIES Beat _____

Fieldman Mosher
County Colbert

1. Name J. P. Pickens

2. P. O. address Riverton 3. Key map number _____

4. Years lived at present residence 13 In present community 27

5. Information concerning house:
 Rented or owned owned Material bricks Telephone no
 No. of rooms 3 Heating facilities heat Bath facilities bat
 No. sleeping rooms 2 Fuel used wood Condition, house good
 Age of house 45 Use of basement none " other bldg. 4
 Type of house 1 story Electricity no " yard fair

6. Source of water supply: Well ☒ Cistern _____ Spring _____
 Other _____ Distance from house 1 yards.

7. Toilet facilities: Inside _____ Outside ☒ None _____

8. Marital status: M. ☒ S. _____ D. _____ Sep. _____ W. _____ Race white

9. Information concerning husband and wife:

	Age Now	Age When First Married	No. Times Married	Birthplace		Highest School Grade Reached	Condition of Health or Physical Defects
				County	State		
Husband	57	24	1	Hart	Tenn	7	good but weak
Wife	53	20	1	"	"	5	chills

10. No. of children born: Boys 4 Girls 2 No. who have died: Boys 0 Girls 0

19. Check ownership of the following personal possessions:
 Radio _____ Organ _____ Sewing machine ☒ Piano _____
 Phonograph _____ Electrical appliances _____

20. The approximate value of furniture \$ 150 Grade poor

21. What is husband's calling or trade sumperry

22. Information on husband's employment during past 10 years (exclude farming):

Dates	Kind of Work Done	Earnings per Month	By Whom and Where Employed	Cause of Change in Employment
since 1921	operates ferry	65	—	—

23. Information concerning town property (1935):

Location (In or Out of Flowage)	Tenure (Owned or Rented)	Name of Owner or Renter	Size	Use	Assessed Valuation
inside town	own	same	1 1/2	house & yard	100.

24. Information concerning land outside town (1935): no personal property

Location (In or Out of Flowage)	Tenure (Owned or Rented)	Name of Owner or Renter*	Total Acres	Acres in			
				Wood- land	Pas- ture	Crops	Other
none							

TVA Family Removal and Population Readjustment Case File for James P. Pickens

Summary

While roads and trails played a role in the development of Alabama, a hardy group of men known as ferrymen provided unique solutions for crossing rivers and large creeks. From Indian Chief to white settlers and established business ferrymen found creative ways to solve the challenges of crossing the Tennessee River. In isolated areas ferries served as social and commercial sites, and communities developed around the Ferry crossing. Frequently the community often called a landing, derived its name from the ferry owner. By the late 1930s, the role of ferrymen was fading into history with the construction of a dam by TVA on the Tennessee River. Once an important part of history, much of historic ferry operations is hidden beneath the waters of Pickwick Lake. This publication tells the story of a few of the more prominent ferry operators in Franklin (later Colbert County) and Lauderdale counties Alabama.

Brief Introduction to Volume Two

- State Line Ferry
- Horston's Ferry
- Conner's Ferry
- Newport Ferry
- Cane Creek Ferry
- Boddle's Ferry
- Keller's Ferry
- Tuscumbia Ferry
- Florence Ferry
- Lamb's Ferry

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