

CLARK'S FERRY
Interview 137a
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Marie Davis, Speaker
Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: In this speech to the Angelina Historical Forum on May 9, 1995, Marie Davis presents the results of her research on Clark's Ferry, Clark's Cemetery, and Renova, all areas to the south of Diboll on the Neches River.

Clark's Ferry, Clark's Ferry Cemetery and Renova

Talk given to Angelina Historical Forum on May 9, 1995 by Marie Davis

Marie Davis (hereafter MD): The Angelina Historical Commission is putting forth an effort to get more historical markers in the county. As you all know Franklin has a great interest in the cemeteries in the county. So he said he would work up the information on Clark's Ferry Cemetery and I said I would try to do the research on Clark's Ferry so that we could get a marker.

So this will be what we have found out about Clark's Ferry, Clark's Ferry Cemetery and also about Renova, a sawmill and shipping point, which came later.

Angelina County was created out of Nacogdoches County in 1846. The county is about 48 miles long from northwest to southeast and 24 miles wide from northeast to southwest. The western-southwestern boundary is the Neches River. The county has 553,619 acres with 38,974 of this total being water. There are many creeks, lakes and branches within the county.

The population of the county in 1850 was 969 people. There were no railroads. The roads were mostly trails, traveled by foot, horses and wagons, and oxen. There were no bridges across the rivers. The creeks could be forded much of the time. (Neches could be forded during low water time—near the Crain Farm—rocks were put there by Indians.)

If the county were to become more populated, the new commissioners had to provide for a system of roads, ferries and bridges for transportation across the county.

The county commissioners court set up a system of roads by dividing the county into precincts and appointing an overseer of each road with the provision that the residents who lived along the road would help maintain the roads. If the residents were unable to do manual labor, they would be assessed a payment. Taxes were levied on property owners for the purpose of the cost of building and maintaining roads.

The court also established a ferry system for ferries to operate at major river crossings. The people who operated the ferries were licensed and bonded. The court established rates to be charged those using the ferry.

The Clark's Ferry was on the Angelina side of the Neches River, below the present town of Diboll – near where the railroad bridge is today.

Clark's Ferry was established by I. D. Clark on April 1, 1856 when he was issued a license by the Angelina County Commissioners Court to operate the ferry. Most of the ferries in Angelina County had steel cables fastened to a tree or post on each side of the river to pull the ferryboat across the river.

I. D. Clark was born in Kentucky and he lived at the ferry with his wife Ann, (born in Florida) and their three sons. Their son's names were Alford, Walter B. and I. D., Jr. The sons were all born in Texas, but evidently the family came after 1850, as they are not listed in that census as living in Angelina County that year.

By 1859 I. D. Clark had died. On November 23, 1860 Ann, his wife, petitioned the court to operate the ferry at the river. The license was granted and she paid the county treasurer a tax of 6 dollars and entered into bond and security. The rates were as follows:

Footman	five cents
Man and horse	ten cents
One horse and vehicle	thirty five cents
Two horses and vehicle	fifty cents
Wagon and two horses or steers	fifty cents
Wagon and 4 horses or steers	sixty cents
For each additional yoke	ten cents
Sheep, hogs, etc.	three cents

Ann Clark operated the ferry with the help of two slaves. This was before the Civil War. Her license was renewed in February, 1863. The rates had increased. An additional charge of one cent for swimming loose cattle, horses, hogs, or sheep if they were assisted by the ferryboat.

Ann Clark died in 1863, leaving her 3 minor children. The ferry was maintained by Robert Byrd with whom the Clark children lived. Robert Byrd is listed in the 1870 census and his occupation was ferryman.

The Clark estate was administered by A. L. Hudiburg of Homer who saw that the children attended school and that the property was rented. He also cleared a land title. In 1876-78, J. L. Cottrele was paid \$39 for tuition for the 3 boys for 1 and 3/10 sessions. In 1869 Captain Carter was paid \$11.00 tuition for I. D. and Walter Benjamin. (Alford not mentioned) A new ferryboat was built which cost \$150.00. This was charged to the estate.

In 1881 things began to change at the river. A public bridge had not been built. I did find that the first bridge on the Neches River was built in 1894 at Bonners Ferry – which would be west of Clarks Ferry. W. B. Clark was issued a license to run the ferry. The H. E. and W. T. [Houston East and West Texas] Railroad built the railroad bridge across the Neches. The story goes that the railroad ran out of money after building the bridge and this was the terminus for a while until more financial help could be arranged. Goods were shipped from Houston and Galveston on the railroad to the river and this became a distribution point for the county.

I. D. and W.B. Clark platted out a town, which they called Clark's Station and sold lots. They also gave a deed to the railroad on which to build a depot. The railroad called the town Miami and had a depot and post office there. The postmasters were Albert B. Seale, May 12, 1882 and Lula C. Ross, September 18, 1882 and mail was discontinued and sent to Lufkin on April 23, 1883.

The Clarks sold lots to Robert Shindler and W. B. Chambers who established a dry good store, a grocery store and a drinking establishment. They also sold lots to A. V. and W. G. Chancy who operated a hotel and saloon.

During the period of 1850 to 1880 Clark's Ferry had become an important river crossing. The commissioner's court records show there were several new roads built and others extended to and from Clark's Ferry.

On a county commissioners map dated 1921, the much-traveled dirt road, which ran from Lufkin through Burke and Diboll, was designated as the "Lufkin to Clark's Ferry Road." This road became state highway 35, which was contracted to be built in 1922. It took several years to build it. And it is now U. S. Highway 59.

A wooden bridge was built across the river after 1900. (Pearl said Avy Joe could remember crossing it when he was a boy.)

Pate Warner said he could remember that they would put boards across the railroad bridge for traffic to cross on. He also said that he could remember that the river bridge was built about 1928. In 1928 there were only 17 miles of paved road in Angelina County and 10 of them were built in 1928.

So with the coming of the railroads, better public roads and bridges, the ferry was phased out. But in its time, it served well to transport people, vehicles, animals and goods across the river and helped the county and state to grow.

Clark's Ferry Cemetery:

On a hill a few hundred yards north of Clark's Ferry, a cemetery was established. The name given to this was Clark's Ferry Cemetery. The first person known to be buried in the cemetery was Obediah Rhames, 1832-1860.

And of course it is possible that I. D. and Ann Clark are buried there although through the years the graves were lost. The cemetery was established on land owned by them. The oldest marker in the cemetery is dated 1864. There were farm families living in the area who were buried here. At the time the cemetery was established, there were no cemeteries for many miles.

There is one man buried there (Arthur J. Hill) who is a direct descendant of the first two Colonial Governors of South Carolina.

And on a sadder note, one man is buried there who was killed as a result of a feud between 2 families.

The only deed on record to the cemetery land was made in 1929. E. J. Conn had bought the surrounding property and he deeded an area 70 yards by 70 yards to the trustees J.D. Smith and Fred Wiley. A chain-link fence was constructed around the cemetery in 1986. In 1994 some members of the Angelina County Historical Commission and descendants of those buried there held some workdays to clean the cemetery. It is hoped this will be a continuing process and that the cemetery will be preserved.

Renova:

The HE&WT Railroad timetable of 1899 shows a stop at Renova, which was located in the general area. It was 3 miles south of Emporia. The location of Emporia is now in the city limits of Diboll.

The handbook of Texas states: "Renova, in southwestern Angelina County, was a lumber shipping station on the T.& N.O. Railroad from 1906 to 1913. In his new book: East Texas mill towns and ghost town, Vol. 1., W. T. Block says: "The Southern Industrial and Lumber Review observed in 1908 that a company was engaged in building and installing a small sawmill plant at Clark's Ferry on the line of the H.E.&W.T. Railway on the Neches River. The mill is of circular equipment."

Others can remember the shipping shed being there years later. Some people say Renova was on the Polk County side. On a 1928 map, Renova is on the Angelina side.

I was interested to know what happened to the 3 children orphaned by I. D. and Ann Clark.

The Clark heirs: The three minor sons left by I. D. and Ann Clark.

Alford: Could not find him mentioned after 1867-68

Walter Benjamin died in 1888 and had one son who died in 1889.

I. D. Clark, Jr. had a store in Lufkin, moved to Burke and was the Justice of Peace. He married many couples in the Burke area. He peddled vegetables in Diboll. He married Mary Treadwell and they had 5 children. He died in 1928. His house still stands in Burke.

END OF SPEECH