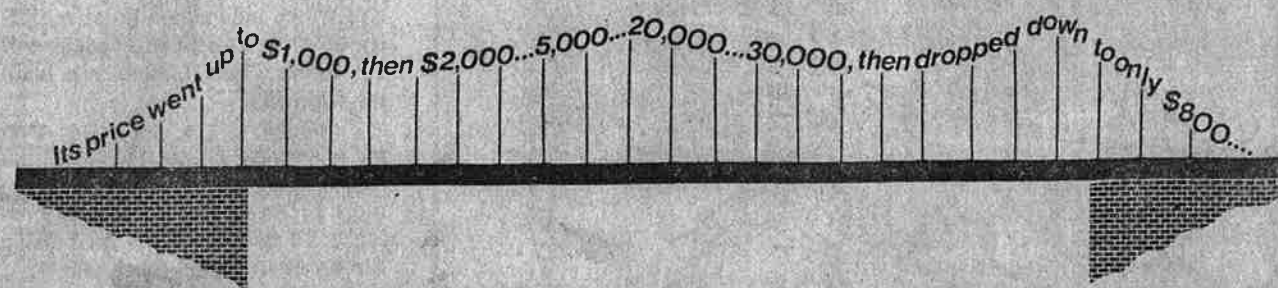


# Leisure

Entertainment / Hobbies / Art

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Section H

## State's First Bridge



By CARL MCINTIRE  
Sunday Feature Writer

Mississippi's first bridge -- and one early historian asked in 1906 if it could be the first in the nation -- fluctuated in value from \$1,000 to \$30,000 to \$800 in just a few years.

Located across the Noxubee River in the southern part of Oktibbeha County, just above the Noxubee County line, it was a privately built and operated span on which toll was collected from all who passed over -- human or animal, in all likelihood.

Just what the tolls were is not told for this bridge, but if it was like others, as it probably was, the prices might have been like this: 15 cents for an adult, 5c for children, 2c per cow or horse and 5c for pigs or sheep, by the dozen.

At any rate, it was the only bridge on the only thoroughfare from east to west and was on the U.S. government road known as Robinson Road, the first to be built in the state.

**THE ORIGINAL LANDOWNER** was a Daniel Nail, said to be a halfbreed Choctaw. He sold his interest in 1832 to Grabel Lincecum for \$500 and Lincecum built the bridge, probably in the same year.

A year later, when Oktibbeha County was organized, the county granted an annual appropriation of \$500 for the benefit of its citizens. Apparently, the county residents could use the bridge for free, all others paid.

Traffic must have been heavy in this era of the 1830s when the westward treks were underway by immigrants from the Carolinas, Georgia and Virginia. Many were heading for Texas, but it was in this period that many stopped and settled in Mississippi.

In covered wagons, drawn by oxen, and with their cattle and other livestock along, the families had to cross the river and the bridge was there, for a fee.

**IT MUST HAVE BEEN** a great business venture. In 1834 Lincecum sold out to McKinney Holderness

dians between their permanent home in the pine forest region to the south and their huntig grounds to the north.

**THEY HAD GIVEN** it its name -- Noxubee -- which means stinking water, presumably for the bad odors which emanated from the swampy bottoms following summer floods. (It was not, several writers of the era have noted, given the name for the stink which would have come from the decaying of bodies of their enemies who might have been tossed into the river.)

Only a mile and a half from the bridge, to the east on Robinson Road, was the Choctaw Agency. It had been established soon after the Treaty of Doak's Stand in 1820, when the Choctaws had sold part of their lands to the white man.

It was at the agency that the Choctaws received some of the annuities granted to them prior to the later Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830.

**FOR THE CHOCTAWS**, it was a prominent place and in 1827 they held their national council there, discussing at that time some of the details that were later written out in the Dancing Rabbit Creek treaty.

Also, Humming Bird, one of the chiefs of the Choctaws, was buried there in 1828 with Colonel Ward, the Choctaw agent, giving him full military honors.

After the second treaty, and until 1833, the spot was occupied by Col. Ward as the agent for the Choctaw families who had desired to remain in Mississippi and not join the others in the "Trail of Tears" to new homes and hunting grounds in the Oklahoima Territory.

When Ward left, the place on the river where the agency had become infamous. There were houses of entertainment, as they were called, and thefts and robberies became common. There were reports of people suddenly disappearing.

**IT WAS LATER PROVED** that the outlaw John A. Murrel and his gang had operated there and Love, in his account, says "in the recent discovery of human bones in a long abandoned well on the premises, these traditions are not lacking in verisimilitude."



Noxubee River, arrow points to bridge location.

## On Banks of Noxubee River --

-- Site of famous international ball game, followed by battle, in 1782.

-- Birthplace of Pushmataha.

In 1834 Lincecum sold out to McKinney Holderness for \$1,000. He sold it some time later to Richard Watkins for \$2,000. By then, Lincecum must have realized the bonanza he had created and almost given away in the first sale, so he and Dr. John Watkins bought it back from Richard Watkins, paying \$5,000. They, in turn, sold it to a Mr. Grooch for \$20,000 and a Mr. Dulaney came along and grabbed it up for the bargain price of \$30,000.

He probably thought he had a bargain, for traffic must have been at its peak when he made the purchase. The value dwindled fast, it would seem, for it was not a long time before he was selling it for a mere \$800 to James Stewart.

From there on there is no more story of the bridge, but more occurred during its lively period than just the sales.

**THE STORY IS TOLD** that a tavern owner, whose place was only about a mile from the bridge, tried to entice customers by informing them, in periods of low water, that the river could be forded a short distance below the span, thus circumventing the tolls.

Owners of the bridge, whoever it was at the time, naturally reacted to such information being glibly bandied about and there were disputes, lawsuits and generally poor relations between the neighboring businessmen.

As the price of the bridge would indicate, from sale to sale, it was a golden egg for a period. Then, at last, when Dulaney lost \$29,200 in unloading it to Stewart, either there were more ways to ford a creek or a lot fewer people heading west.

**HISTORIANS WHO** have recounted this bit of Mississippiana -- including William A. Love, who wrote for the Mississippi Historical Society in 1906 -- believed it was the dropping off of traffic that caused the decline in the bridge's value.

Beginning in the eastern part of Choctaw and the western portion of Oktibbeha Counties, the Noxubee River flows southeasterly to connect with the Tombigbee over in Alabama.

It was considered the dividing line of the Choctaw In-

are not lacking in verisimilitude."

Someplace close to the Noxubee River, and along Robinson Road, better times were to come, and nearby, there had been better times.

Rev. Cyrus Kingsbury, a missionary, established the Mayhew Mission along Robinson Road and in about 1825 erected a log home nearby. His work drew many persons of religious or official prominence over the years.

There were other crossing places on the Noxubee River, most of them fords, but a few ferries, not far from the bridge.

**IT WAS JUST BELOW** one of these ferries, known for Starnes, its operator, that Pushmataha had been born in about 1764. A large black oak tree was for years pointed out as the place of the famed Indian's birth.

Pushmataha, of course, became one of the most prominent figures in Choctaw history. He served in the U.S. Army in the Creek War of 1813, attaining the rank of lieutenant colonel. He was a major participant in the Treaty of Doak's Stand and, when he died in Washington, D.C., was given full military honors when buried in the Congressional Cemetery.

Not far below the bridge, near where Shuqualak Creek enters the Noxubee, was another historic site for the old river. It was here that the famous international ball game of the Creek and Choctaw Indians was played in 1782.

**FIFTY CHAMPION PLAYERS** from each side and several thousand spectators from each nation were on hand. It was a long, hard struggle and the Creeks won.

Immediately after the game a battle ensued and there were many losses in a day and night of fighting. The chiefs finally were able to quell the hostilities and the dead were buried, the survivors departing in peace.

While this writer has yet to see any such artifacts, Love, in his account, says "relics of the dead warriors have been exhumed from their resting places on the ball ground."

So goes the story of the river and the first bridge -- in the nation?

-- Where outlaws roamed, bones of victims later found in a well.

-- Location of Choctaw Agency, which handled Indian removal to Oklahoma.

-- Dividing line between Choctaw home grounds and hunting territory.

## McComb Church

### Members Build Third Building for Another Congregation

By BESS SIMMONS

Special to Clarion-Ledger

The congregation of J. J. White Memorial Presbyterian Church in McComb has just completed a unique home missions project. Volunteers have built a transient lodge for The Salvation Army.

When the old frame building housing The Salvation Army offices and lodge burned in late 1976, a recently constructed concrete block thrift store in the rear was almost undamaged. This shell has been converted into a transient facility that can comfortably sleep and provide food for the people who pass through the city and seek accommodations.

Workers from the church rebuilt the rear wall and roof, which were destroyed by the fire. They made one section of the large warehouse-type area into a comfortable room for living, dining and cooking. The remaining space provided a small bedroom for the lodge custodian and a dormitory for men. A compartmented tiled bath, small hall and utility room complete the structure.

According to Philip Enochs, who spearheaded the pro-

Workers would meet at the lodge after their regular jobs several afternoons a week and often on Saturdays. Sometimes three or four, other times as many as eight would show up with hammers, saws and other tools.

The Presbyterian Church donated a large part of material costs. Plumbing, ceramic tiling and electrical work were the only items contracted.

Lt. John Godley, resident commander of The Salvation Army, said reopening the transient lodge will relieve them of a tremendous financial burden they have had to bear these past 15 months. About 25-30 men, and sometimes women and families, ask for sleeping quarters each month. They have been sent to a local motel.

Being able to prepare and serve food to the transients will be another great saving, he said.

Rebuilding The Salvation Army lodge is the third project of this nature in which the church has participated. They built a church for a congregation in Belize, Central America, several years ago. In 1976 they cooperated with Fairview Presbyterian Church at Heidelberg and

