

Early Grainger County Ferries and Mills

by Paula Gammell

Who thinks county court minutes are dry, boring, and not the slightest bit interesting?

Well, you couldn't be more wrong!

In county court minutes you can find such goodies as owners and locations of forts, fords, ferries, grist and saw mills, and 'houses of public entertainment'; you can also find bastardy bonds, apprenticeships, bound children, guardianships, and much other such useful information.

At "East Tennessee Roots" we've just finished transcribing the entire Grainger County Court Minutes from the beginning thru 1802 and we summarized all of the above. Let's here look at ferries and mills.

Consider rivers. Back when it was created Grainger County had plenty of them: the Holston formed Grainger's southern boundary, while both the Clinch and Powell ran through the interior of the county, almost the length of it.

What obstacles!

How to cross all those rivers? Ferries, of course.

At their first County Court Session, June 1796, both Marshall's and Turner's ferries on the Holston were referenced, as was Bean's on Clinch. It sounds like those ferries already existed.

Rapidly there were many more. Look at just some of the other ferries soon mentioned:

On Holston River:

Robertson's, 13 Sep 96
James Collison where Henry Cluck lives, 13 Jun 97
Pope's, 21 May 98
James Moore, 23 May 98
Isaiah Midkiff, where he now lives 20 Feb 99
James Ore, 20 Feb 00
Robert Long, 20 May 00

On Clinch River:

Ryall Jennings, 23 Aug 98
John Buller, at or just above the mouth of Strait Creek,
22 Nov 98
James Grant, at the junction of the Clinch and Powell
rivers, 21 May 00
Holt's, 20 Nov 00

And did you know that the county court set the rates that ferry owners charged?

To cross Powell River a man and horse cost 6 1/4 cents; a single man or horse the same; a wagon and 4 horses cost 50 cents. To cross Clinch and Holston rivers a man and horse cost 8 cents; a single man or horse the same; a wagon and 4 horses cost 75 cents.

Yes, rivers were obstacles. But they were also advantageous; their power could be harnessed to run machinery such as grist and saw mills. And even larger creeks could be used to power small grist mills.

On the very first day of Grainger County's existence, 13 Jun 1796, both Nicholas T. Perkins and William Thompson were granted permission to erect grist and saw mills, Perkins on Chamberlain's Creek and Thompson on Buffalo Creek. And William Stone was granted permission to erect a grist mill on Richland Creek.

A couple of sessions later, 10 Dec 1796, Michael Massingale (Massingill) was granted permission to erect a grist and saw mill on Buffalo Creek. His mill withstood the elements for over 200 years but fell victim to the arsonist's torch in 2002. Some other early grist mills mentioned were:

Thomas Buzby, on Young's Creek, 13 Mar 97
James Ore, on James Nicholas's Spring Branch,
11 Sep 97
Francis Maybury, on Clear Branch, 20 Aug 98
Joseph Powell, on Bigg Barren Creek, 18 Feb 99
John Evans, on Panther Creek, 20 Feb 99
Henry Howell, on Young's Creek, 21 Feb 99
Isaac Lane, on Spring Fork of Sycamore Creek,
20 May 99
Elisha Walding, on Gap Creek between Thomas Wal-
ding's and Hezekiah Jordon's houses, 18 Nov 99
William Jinings, on Ball Creek, 17 Nov 00

Remember: no matter how hard you try you just can't escape the changes caused by county formation. Above I mentioned that both Marshall's, Turner's, and Bean's ferries apparently existed when Grainger was created. Are you interested in those? Check Hawkins and Knox, since Grainger was created from those counties.

Today the Clinch River forms Grainger's northern boundary, so only its southern bank is within the county. The Powell River doesn't flow in Grainger County at all any more, and neither does Ball or Sycamore creeks. To follow up on ferries and mills on those waters, move on to the counties that were formed from Grainger.

And, notice James Grant's ferry at the junction of the Clinch and Powell rivers in 1800? That was the site of Grantsboro. Soon it was in Anderson County and by 1806 it was in Campbell County. Now it is under the waters of Norris Lake.

Now, isn't this absolutely fascinating? Yes, county court minutes certainly contain a wealth of information! So...who's ready for a little light reading?