

BRIDGES AND FERRIES IN AND AROUND VERNON

From the beginning, Holmes Creek proved to be one of Vernon's most valuable natural assets. Rising in Alabama, the creek flows southward through the town and empties into the Choctawhatchee River near Ebro.

The main routes for travel and commerce across Holmes Valley were Indian trails, rivers, and the Gulf of Mexico. Numerous streams, swampy lowlands, and frequent flooding made travel across the Choctawhatchee River and Holmes Creek difficult.

Wooden hand-operated ferries were constructed to transport goods across the creeks and rivers. By 1824, William Miller's ferry crossed the creek near present day New Hope. Jonathan Bunker operated a ferry across the Choctawhatchee near the Big Spring. By 1829, William Staples operated a small ferry at the site where Vernon was later established.

In 1830s, Stephen J. Roche established a trading post on the creek. Timber and other obstructions were cleared from the channel rendering Holmes Creek navigable by small watercraft as far north as Hard Labor Creek, probably near today's Cotton Landing. Later, in the 19th century, William Earl Yates ran a ferry at Vernon.

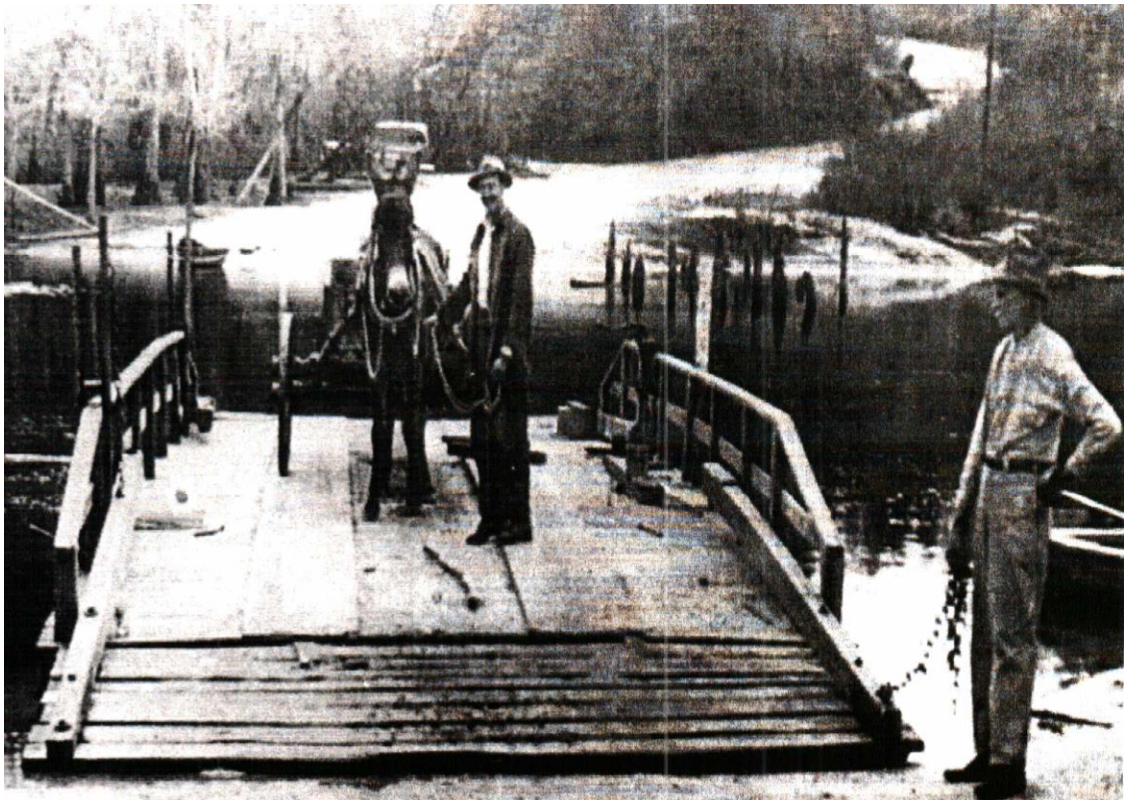
In 1888, Abijah Pippin was commissioned to build a bridge across Holmes Creek at Vernon. The single lane structure was built for a total cost of \$399. The structure was wide enough for one vehicle to cross at a time. A side ramp was constructed which permitted a wagon or automobile to pull off the main span and allow another to pass.

Dirt roads and wooden bridges became outdated and unsafe as travel between Vernon and nearby towns continued. A statewide program was launched by Federal and State agencies to build hard top roads and modern bridges throughout Florida. Highway 79 was paved and the wooden structure across Holmes Creek was replaced with a concrete and steel bridge in the 1930s.

Information obtained from the book: Vernon. The Heart of Old Washington County. Florida, May, Middleton and Robinson, Second, Edition, Revised 2006.

(This historical essay is displayed in the Vernon Historical Society Museum.)

Progress dictates change. A new Vernon bridge was completed in 2013 as part of the an overall project to four-lane Highway 79 north from I-10 to the beaches in Bay County by Florida Department of Transportation. Total construction took approximately three years to build two two-lane spans and remove the old span that was built in the 1930's.



Miller's Ferry
Mr. Tom Skipper – Ferry Tender



This is the final crossing at Miller's Ferry. Governor Warren is guiding the ferry from the front left rail.



Lumber bound for Pensacola was transported down Holmes Creek on rafts.



Wooden bridge across Holmes Creek at Vernon.
Man sitting on rail of bridge (right side) is John Elliot



Wooden bridge across Holmes Creek
Three locals – Willie Skipper, Roche Russ, and
R. "Crusty McKeithen



Perhaps a Sunday afternoon ride.
The James Yates Family 1918