

KATY BEGINS

THE END. On the Red River above Fulton, navigation was possible but difficult, largely because the grandfather of all log jams — called “the Great Raft” — blocked and dammed the river.

On the Red in high water, navigators could reach as far upstream as the mouth of the Washita River. In 1832, a peak year, 32 landings were logged above Shreveport.

By 1873, the Engineers had succeeded in driving a channel through the Great Raft. In anticipation of opening the river for navigation, land speculation boomed at Paraclifta, an ante-bellum center in the southwest corner of Arkansas.

But irony prevailed. On Christmas Day, 1872, the Missouri, Kansas, & Texas Railroad ran its first train into Denison, Texas. The Katy had completed its line from the north across Indian Territory, bringing the beginning of the end to steamer travel.

River travel faced overwhelming competition from railroad building that surged in the region. This resulted in declines in river traffic and booms in economic development and population along the new railroad routes.

On that 1872 Christmas Day, Katy closed the door on significant river trade that was not to be opened again in the region for 100 years.

People could ride free, but horses and buggies were charged a nickel fare to ride the Arkansas River ferry at South Denver Avenue, Tulsa.

