



They were “the right men at the right time,” recalls *Tulsa Tribune* reporter Joe Howell, who has lived and reported on the story since 1934. They had “a good game plan, the flexibility to change it . . . , (and) an unlimited store of optimism and perseverance.”¹⁸

One launching point for their story was Muskogee, in 1905. Six members of the city’s Commerce Club, determined to prove that Arkansas River navigation was not only still possible but feasible, made a trip down the river to Fort Smith.¹⁹ They not only proved their point, but they were led by the man who was to become Oklahoma’s first governor. These six civic leaders in 1906 contributed \$500 each to finance a steamboat, christened the *Mary D*, which carried in the subsequent 16 months 35,000 tons of freight to and from Fort Smith.²⁰

At Muskogee, dealers in “white gold” — the politics of water — launched modern-day Arkansas River navigation with the short-lived Mary D in 1906.