Ferries Once Linked
Alexandria to Pineville

The opening of the bridge between Alexandria and Pineville on April 12, 1902 was a major event in the history of the two cities.

Traffic between the two towns had been handled by ferryboats since the 1850's.

The G.W. Bolton made its last trip as a ferry just before the bridge opened and a few old-timers may recall with nostalgia how loud and long its whistle blew to mark the occasion.

The ferryboat made its first trip July 28, 1897. Its owners, Capt. Thomas D. Ringgold and J.W. Dammon, offered it for sale after the bridge opened.

Joseph Spottan, the pilot, was to be employed as one of the tollmen on the bridge. Dammon, the engineer, was to go into the brick manufacturing business in Pineville.

Judge M.R. Aria built the first steam ferry here in 1854 and operated it until 1864 when it was burned during the Civil War along with the town.

Judge Wasn't So Dumb

It was one of the first steam ferries in the south and many thought the judge was insane for building such a costly boat. However, the venture was a success and the judge was quickly acclaimed for his foresight.

Capt. John Graham worked for Judge Aria and later was awarded the ferry lease. He built a steam ferry which he named the M.R. Aria.

In 1876 Capt. Graham dismantled the boat and built the Rogers which he operated until 1880. It was sold and used on Cane River until it burned. In 1880 Capt. J. E. Garner was awarded the ferry lease and built and operated two boats.

After the death of Capt. Garner, Capt. C. R. Watkins held the lease and operated a boat bearing his name. He sold it in 1891 to Capt. Ringgold and Dammon, who ran it for six years.

Memorable Wedding Day

The ferryboats carried a wide range of cargo. It wasn't often that wedding parties were transported but on Feb. 27, 1874 Miss Annie Jeannette Skillman and Simon Cullen with their attendants and relatives crossed the river and were married in Mount Olivet Episcopal Church, Pineville.

No sooner had the carriages carrying the bridal party pulled aboard the ferry than the horses became frightened of the water.

Charles Flower of Evergreen Plantation, a member of the wedding party, jumped from his carriage and held the bridles for the crossing. Miss Sally Hynson, who married James A. Ringgold of St. Louis, Mo. in Kent Plantation House, was also a member of the wedding party.

Mrs. Hamilton M. Robertson, granddaughter of the Simon Cullens, said the St. James Episcopal Church, then located at Second and St. James streets in Alexandria had been damaged by a tornado on May 24, 1872, and had not yet been rebuilt.