

## Caddo Lake Trash for Treasure



Exciting news for Caddo Lake enthusiasts—the Greater Caddo Lake Association of Texas, along with cosponsors, is hosting a Trash for Treasure day in Uncertain on **Saturday, June 11th**. We are asking people to get out on the water & help clean up trash and haul it back to **Johnson's Ranch Marina**, where dumpsters will be set up.

To encourage participation, there will be Treasure in the form of cash, merchandise, and/or gift cards for what you bring in. We all benefit from a cleaner lake and we may as well have some fun at the same time. Current plans are to tag some bigger and heavier items that have been seen in the lake for special awards.

Trash for Treasure will run from **8 AM to 3 PM** at **Johnson's Ranch Marina**. Food and drinks will be

available for purchase. There is no preregistration—just get up early and get on the water. When your boat gets full and maybe stinky, head to Johnson's Ranch & cash in your trash!!!

Remember..... Caddo lake, leave it better than you found it, by spreading the Caddo love, not your garbage!!

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# James Shenick

## The First Anglo Settler on Caddo Lake

By Donna McCann



New place name sign at Stormy Point and Shenix's Ferry site

Many people who spend time on or around Caddo Lake hear about some of the more famous early settlers, like Robert and Harriet Potter, who made their home on Potter's Point, or Peter and Amelia Swanson, who made theirs across the lake at Swanson's Landing. They were there around 1838, but they weren't the earliest Anglo settlers on the lake. That distinction belongs to James Shenick (aka Shemick, Schinnick, Shenix, etc.—spellings of names were inconsistent in the 1800s, being reinterpreted according to sound each time a literate person wrote it down. The owner of a particular name was often illiterate, as was Mr. Shenick.)

James made his home at Stormy Point in order to run a ferry across the lake. His ferry was in operation by 1824 at the latest, as he was mentioned in a letter that year from Indian Agent George Gray, writing from the Sulphur Fork Agency to Thomas McKenney in Washington, D.C.: "The number of whites within the immediate vicinity of this Agency are two families one settled on a large lake, for the

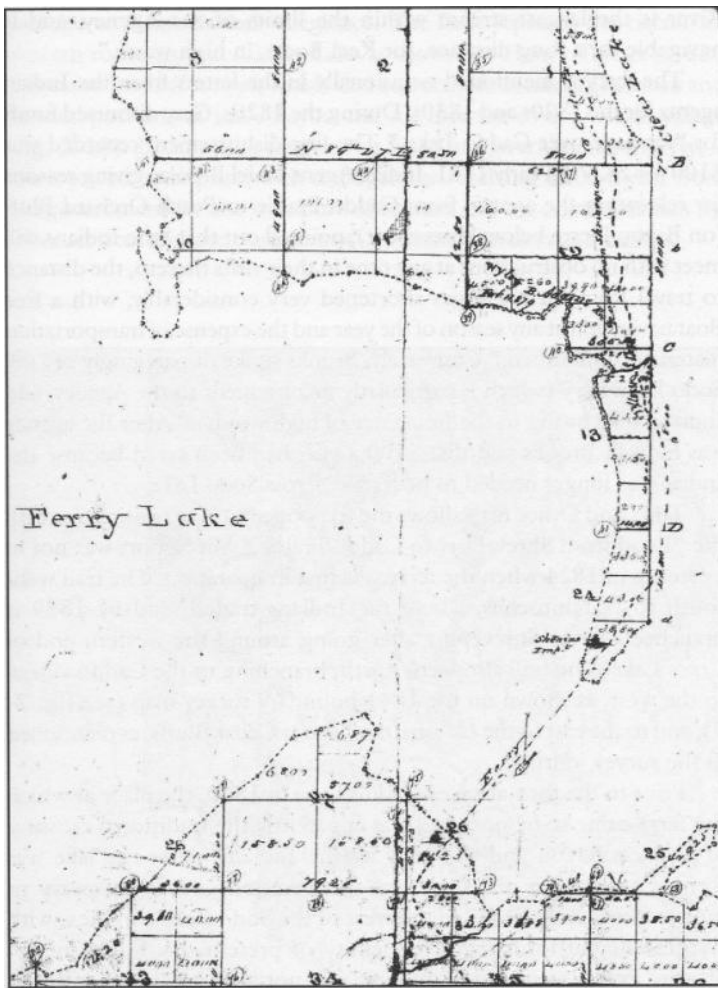
purpose of keeping ferry, for the accommodation of the Indians and travelers, and the other on a large creek or river, for the same purpose, Red River is the largest stream within the limits of the Agency, and is navigable for a long distance, for keel boats, in high water." During the 1820s, Gray disbursed funds from the U.S. Government for "ferryage over Caddo Lake." The first disbursement was for \$100 for the entire year 1827. In early 1831, the Indian Agent Jethiel Brooks wrote: "the Indians will meet with no obstructions at any time to their visits to [Bayou Pierre], the distance to travel from their villages shortened very considerably, with a free boat navigation at any season of the year."

Shreveport was not yet in existence when the ferry began operation. It was along an existing Indian trace from villages on the north side of the lakes to Natchitoches to the south, where the Indians traded. It is speculated that this trail was already in place before the lakes formed around 1800 as the Great Raft on the Red River caused the river to overflow and permanently cut through its banks, rerouting through distributaries to the west side. Until the ferry was established, a much longer route required Indian traders to go around the lakes to cross the Big Cypress Bayou at the first narrow spot much further west, around where Port Caddo formed and the State Park and the Highway 43 bridge are now. After Shreveport was formed, a branch of the trail went there as well. Stormy Point was aptly named, and a better ferry spot might have been further east where the Mooringsport drawbridge is now, but the trail was where it was. A map maker surveying the area in 1839 showed the ferry as Shenix's Ferry, and labeled the lake "Ferry Lake."

The ferry and James Shenick are mentioned in various documents from the period up through the 1830s. But why would a White man with a family choose to carve a home site into a total wilderness just to transport Indians across the lake? The answer is found in a deposition by Indian Agent Jethiel Brooks in a deposition concerning the treaty agreed to by the Caddo natives, where he mentioned that







Land Office map showing Stormy Point and ferry from 1839

James Shenick was the son in law of Larkin Edwards, married to Edwards's daughter Emily. Edwards was a friend of the Caddo natives and served as their interpreter to the Indian Agency. These relationships provided some security for James, his wife, and their children, as the Caddo natives considered them friends.

As civilization crept in and the Caddo natives mostly left the area, Shenick's Ferry was eventually not funded by the government anymore, and it was sold in about 1846 to a man named S. D. Pitts, who ran it as a strictly commercial venture for all comers until about 1857, when it was finally replaced by a ferry at Mooringsport. James Shenick retired to Myrtis, Louisiana (above Vivian) and died in 1863.

James Shenick left two legacies to the Caddo Lake area:

1. "Ferry Lake" was the official name for Caddo Lake until the early 1900s. It is obvious that the lake was named for the only ferry operating on it. The name was corrupted by others to "Fairy Lake," and some later maps chose to use that name instead.
2. "Jeems Bayou" on contemporary maps is a corruption of "Jim's Bayou," which is mentioned by name in the survey journal and designated Coughatta Jim's Bayou on maps of the period. Shenick was nicknamed Coughatta Jim because of his close association to the Indians. I wonder if some of the Spanish speaking Texans in the early 1800s pronounced "Jim" as "Jeem", resulting in the name found on modern maps.

## A Cause for Optimism

Old newspapers from the 1800s provide a wealth of interesting details about life in the Caddo Lake region during that time. What an exciting time it must have been for ordinary people seeking a new start in the great untapped wilderness that was Texas. Many of us living around here now can trace our ancestors back to these early settlers who were willing to take on a lot of unknown risk to escape the certainty of life as a poor tenant farmer with no chance of owning land in the states to the east.

As the new settlements in East Texas sprung up almost overnight, they were touted to potential settlers in the newspapers of the main jumping off points—places like Shreveport, or even New Orleans. Here is an example of one man's unbridled optimism concerning the opportunities right there for the taking. The town mentioned, Tuscumbia, was actually on the south bank of the Little Cypress Bayou, which turned out to be a bad idea, and it never really developed.

### EASTERN TEXAS.—Soda Lake, Port Caddo, Tuscumbia.

Though the Parish of Caddo and Eastern Texas are divided by the political relations, they are in all other respects one and the same. The nature of the country, the quality of soil, the staple products and means of communication are identical. The rapid settlement therefore if our neighbors is viewed by our citizens with great interest and gratification.— It is not generally known that Soda Lake is one of the most extensive and beautiful sheets of water in the south. Its fertile and picturesque shores are now clothed with many a log cabin, and ere many months, the primeval forest must give way to the cultivated fields. Port Caddo and its vicinity of which we have before spoken (and we are glad to perceive our notice generally copied in the city papers,) continues to increase and improve at a rate, which in any other country would be deemed wonderful. Tuscumbia is a new town just laid off at the head of navigation on the Cypress Bayou, and must become a point of some importance. The tide of Anglo Saxon population is setting steadily and with no ebb to the west. Wave will follow wave until the towers and palaces of Mexico shall be submerged, the Rocky Mountains swallowed up and the stream of life flow uninterruptedly from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Caddo Gazette March 28, 1839

# KEEP CADDO LAKE NATURAL!

## Join GCLA

Dues are only \$10.00 per person per year. This includes membership in The Greater Caddo Lake Association of Texas, plus you will receive our newsletters which are printed on a semi-regular basis; more often if needed. There is no better way to keep up with the issues that concern the lake.

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Please check the date printed above your name and address - it shows when your membership expires. If you are past due, this may be your last newsletter!

\*Your email address is voluntary. It will only be used to keep you informed of developments on the lake. It will not be given or sold to anyone.

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