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F E R R Y

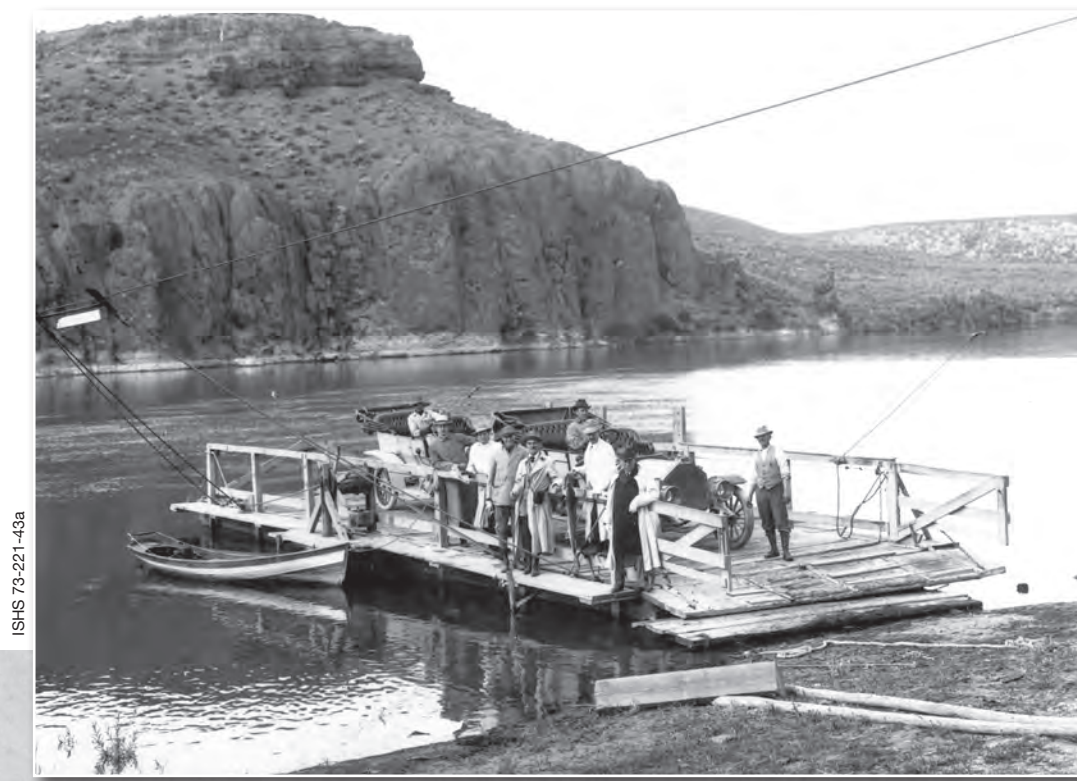
Wagon and livestock \$1

Man and Horse 50¢

Heavy Wagon \$2.25

Hog or Sheep 5¢ each

Automobile on a ferry crossing the Snake River circa 1920

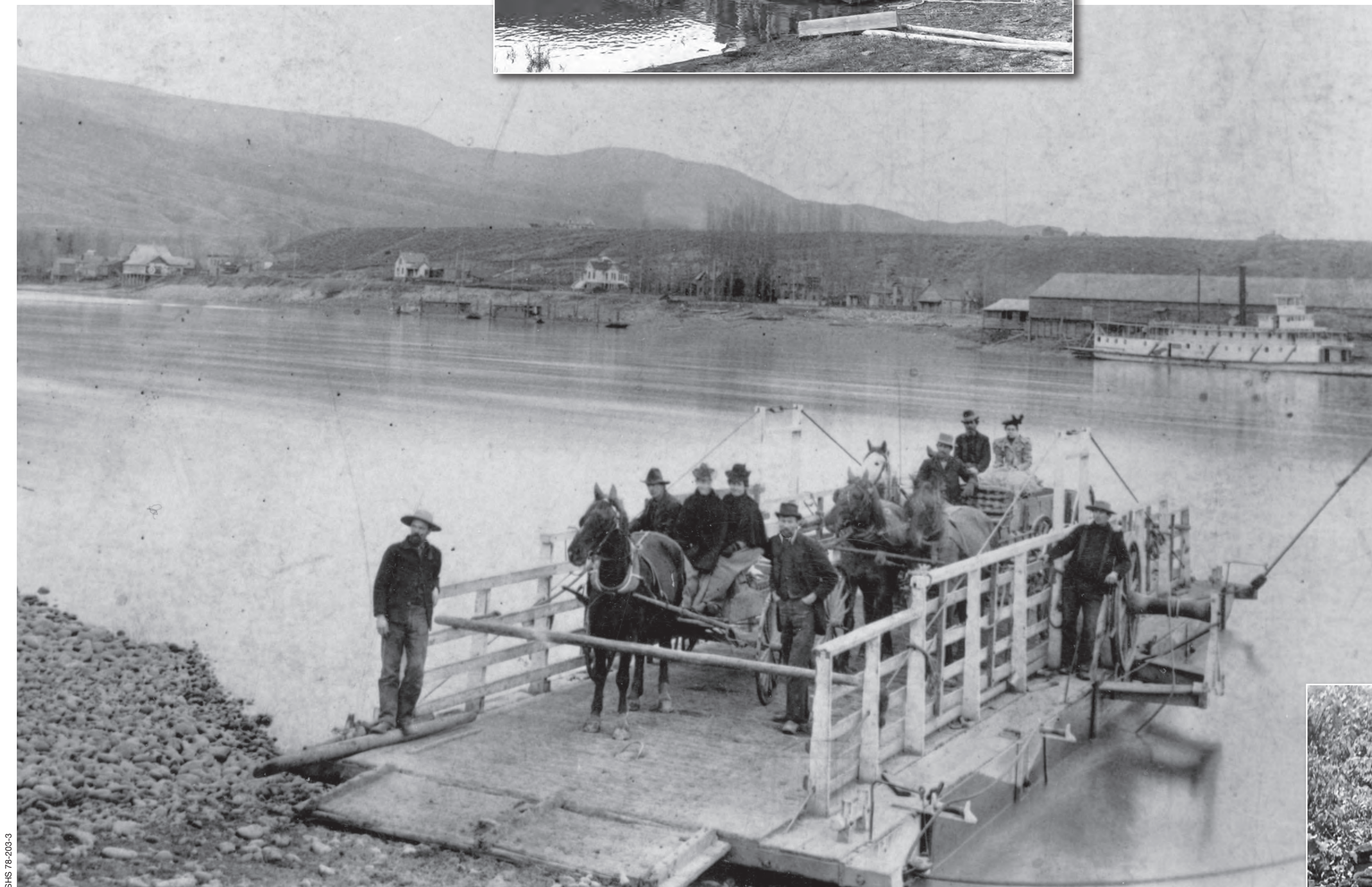


The First Ferries

While McClellan's is thought to be the first ferry chartered in Idaho Territory, ferries became commonplace in Southern Idaho. Some remained in service into the twentieth century on the Snake River, the most familiar of these being Walter's Ferry near Melba.

How They Worked

The ferries were flatboats, guided by a cable anchored to both banks. By changing the sweep (rudder), and consequently the angle of the boat in the water, the river current would push the boat along the cable. For docking, the ferries used horses or pulley and ropes to break free from the current.



Reclamation has altered the Boise River's channel. When Boise was founded, the river at this point was 600 feet wide at high water. The main road, connecting Boise with the Oregon Trail, crossed the river here, initially as a treacherous ford. In December 1864, John McClellan and Dr. William Thompson were given a state charter to build and operate a ferry at this crossing. The charter was issued in the name of Ada Ferry Company although it was simply known as "McClellan's Ferry". The ferry operated until the summer of 1868 when McClellan and Thompson replaced it with a toll bridge, The Boise City Bridge. In October of the same year, they sold the bridge to other parties who, eventually, sold it to the City. The present 9th Street bridge is the direct heir of McClellan's Ferry.



Ferry operator John McClellan shown here in front of his rustic cabin. McClellan's cabin, built in 1863, was located on the north side of the Boise River near River Street.



The Boise River Greenbelt Historical Education Project was produced in 1990 by the Ada County Centennial Committee

Photos by permission of the Idaho Historical Society