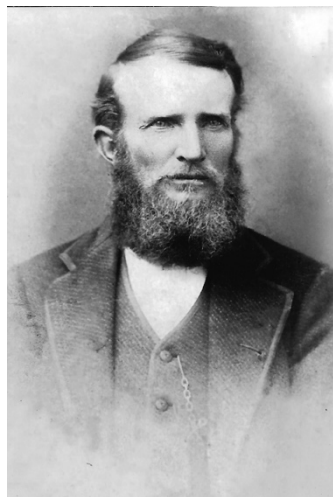


The Other Lee's Ferry: The Historic River Crossing at Pearce Ferry, 1876 to 1938
Gary Cascio and Bryan Brown

Pearce Ferry on the Colorado River was the forgotten baby brother to well-known Lee's Ferry,¹ with which it shared many similarities. Both ferries were established by order of Brigham Young, patriarch of the Mormon Church, to facilitate Mormon settlement of Arizona. Ferrymasters Harrison Pearce and John D. Lee had both actively participated in the Mountain Meadows Massacre of 1857 and Young reportedly sent them to the remote ferry locations to circumvent their criminal prosecution for the massacre. And while Lee's Ferry was the first realistic crossing site upriver of Grand Canyon, Pearce Ferry was the first feasible crossing downriver of Grand Canyon and the Grand Wash Cliffs. These similarities aside, Pearce Ferry never attained the prominence and level of use ultimately achieved by Lee's Ferry.

This paper presents a timeline of commercial ferryboat operations at Pearce Ferry, summarizes anecdotes and information available about river crossing activities, and identifies the boatmen and ferrymasters who made it all possible. Initially named the Central Ferry by Pearce, the crossing was known by many names and spellings: Colorado Crossing, Pearce and Pierce Ferry (with or without a possessive 's' at the end), Steen's Ferry, and Emery Ferry. U.S. Geological Survey maps officially designate the site as Pearce Ferry.²

HARRISON PEARCE



Pearce was a man of many talents. He was a farmer, soldier, teacher, musician, choir leader, and businessman; 1880 census records list his occupation as carpenter. His tombstone in St. George, Utah, identifies him as the first postmaster of Washington County and the second sheriff of St. George. He had three wives and 14 children. He joined the Mormon Church in 1845, a pivotal decision which ultimately led to a lonely ferry crossing at the base of the Grand Wash Cliffs in Arizona.

He was born in Georgia in 1818, son of James Pearce and Elizabeth Humphries.³ The family relocated to Alabama and then Mississippi where he joined the Mormon Church at the age of 27. His family then moved to Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1846. They quickly left Nauvoo for Ohio, and through various residences and travels eventually arrived in Salt Lake City in 1852.

Fig 1. Harrison Pearce. Courtesy Beau Birk, a descendant of Harrison Pearce.

¹ Although Lees Ferry is the official USGS spelling, since this is a historical paper, the authors prefer the historical spelling of Lee's Ferry [editor].

² A rich history of other activities and events exists from this locale. These involved miners, ranchers, explorers, outlaws, politicians, and Native Americans, all of whom played a colorful role in the history of the greater Grand Canyon region. However, only those events and individuals directly concerning the ferry operation are discussed here.

³ Florence C. Youngberg, *Conquerors of the West: Stalwart Mormon Pioneers* (Salt Lake City, Utah: National Society of the Sons of Utah Pioneers, 1999), 1962-1963.

Brigham Young, religious leader and second president of the Mormon Church, called upon Pearce in 1857 to lead his and other families to establish a settlement in southwest Utah near present-day St. George. There, he assumed the rank of captain in the 4th Mormon Militia, under the command of John D. Lee. A series of events then occurred due to friction between local Mormons, the federal government, the U.S. Army, and Native Americans. The result was that in September 1857 over a hundred unarmed men and women from a wagon train of Arkansas immigrants were shot and killed by the Mormon Militia.⁴ Federal arrest warrants were later issued for Lee and Pearce, although Lee was the only one tried, sentenced, and finally executed in 1877 for his role in what has become known as the Mountain Meadows Massacre.⁵

FERRY ESTABLISHMENT, 1876 TO 1882

Brigham Young intervened in Pearce's life yet again in 1876 when Pearce was 58 years old. He called upon Pearce to proceed to the Colorado River downstream of the Grand Wash Cliffs, where he was to construct a ferryboat and establish a crossing to facilitate Mormon settlement in Arizona. The Mormon explorer Jacob Hamblin was simultaneously commanded by Brigham Young to create a wagon road from St. George, Utah, to the ferry site and from there into northern Arizona.⁶

Hamblin left St. George in December 1876 and shortly arrived at the ferry site, found Pearce building a ferryboat, and stayed for two days to assist him. Although no photographs or drawings of the ferryboat exist, "apparently it could handle wagons and general supplies, but not livestock. At first, at least, it was propelled by oar power only"⁷—as was Lee's Ferry at this time.⁸

A group of 26 people, 35 horses, ten wagons, and 30 cattle arrived at the ferry crossing on March 18, 1877. The 90-mile journey from St. George had taken eight days due to the poor road. Pearce, assisted by his 38-year-old son James,⁹ began to ferry them across the following day. A settler named Smith reported the "experience was generally pleasant. That evening...the party was treated to a moonlight boat ride by Pearce...who became so enthralled [that] the party nearly drifted over a rapids." Another account of this crossing states that the ferryboat was

⁴ Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950). Various and conflicting narratives of the Mountain Meadows Massacre exist which tend to obscure the ultimate responsibility for the event. Yet it is unlikely to be a coincidence that Brigham Young ordered Pearce to the Grand Wash Cliffs to establish a ferry at the same time that Lee was being tried and convicted.

⁵ W.L. Rusho and C. Gregory Crampton, *Desert River Crossing: Historic Lee's Ferry on the Colorado River* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Peregrine Smith Inc., 1975), 27-29.

⁶ Melvin T. Smith, *The Colorado River: Its History in the Lower Canyons Area* (Provo, Utah: Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of History, Brigham Young University, 1972), 384-385. Jacob Hamblin and a party of explorers had discovered this site in the early 1860s and had crossed the river in a makeshift raft of dry timbers. The general locale then became known as Colorado Crossing and was only rarely used until 1876. There is no documentation that Hamblin sold the ferry to Pearce, although several online websites make that unsubstantiated claim.

⁷ Smith, 386. Hamblin returned to the ferry site in February 1877 from northern Arizona. To his surprise, no one was present. He crossed the river from south to north without assistance and without mentioning whether he used the ferryboat or simply forded the river. Pearce was apparently in St. George at that time, making arrangements for crossing the first group of Mormon settlers.

⁸ Rusho and Crampton, 46-49.

⁹ James Pearce, 1839-1922, "The 1857 Iron County Militia Project," http://1857ironcountymilitia.com/index.php?title=James_Pearce, accessed September 22, 2018.

“without a railing...plied with oars” and could transport “one wagon at a time.”¹⁰ This was probably the only time the ferry was used in 1877 and it may not have been used at all in 1878.¹¹ In contrast, hundreds of Mormon settlers and others were being transported across the river annually at Lee’s Ferry during these years.¹²

The year 1879 saw a small but unknown number of Mormon groups use the ferry. One such group crossed in the fall of 1879.¹³ David Kimball, one of the settlers, later described the road from St. George to the ferry as acceptable and recommended that future groups use it.¹⁴ Pearce then began placing newspaper advertisements in which he identified himself as proprietor of the “Central Ferry,”¹⁵ where he kept “teamsters’ supplies” on hand for sale.

At least two groups of Mormon settlers crossed in November 1880. However, Pearce was probably not present for these crossings.¹⁶ Mormon families led by N.R. Tuttle and John Tate left St. George with 600 board-feet of lumber with which to construct a ferryboat.¹⁷ The ferryboat used in 1877 and 1879 had apparently disappeared, because upon their arrival the group found only a small flat boat in poor condition and requiring repairs. Another group of settlers arrived shortly thereafter, one of whom was a carpenter with plans to construct a ferryboat suitable for transporting wagons.

Two pontoon boats, each measuring 10 feet long, three feet wide, and 14 inches deep, were built and then connected and covered with planks to create a large floating platform. Wagons were wheeled onto its deck, secured, and then pulled across the river with ropes that had been anchored to the southern bank. Trial runs of the ferry on November 14 were successful and a few wagons were subsequently crossed, but strong winds resulted in delays. Finally, the winds died down on the evening of November 17 and the remaining wagons were ferried across that night after the moon came up. A traveler from St. George arrived at this time after hearing that a ferry was in operation, and he was taken to the southern bank for \$2.00.

Crossing the horses was another matter, as the animals were expected to ford the river by swimming. Several horses were initially led to swim across the river behind the small flat boat by means of ropes around their necks. Attempts to force the remaining horses to swim across the river on their own were a failure after one “fine horse simply sank into the waters of the Colorado and disappeared.”¹⁸ The solution was to construct a fenced stall on the ferryboat, after which the horses were crossed without incident.

At least two groups of Mormon settlers were known to have used the ferry in 1881, although once again it is unclear if Pearce was present.¹⁹ One group, consisting of the Stevens, Neilson, and Nasstrom families, traveled from St. George in January and successfully crossed their wagons, baggage, and most of their livestock.

¹⁰ *Arizona Republic*, Phoenix, April 18, 1925.

¹¹ Smith, 387-392. The 1925 account of a crossing in August 1877 (*Arizona Republic*, Phoenix, April 18, 1925) may have been mistakenly referring to the crossing of the Kimball party in 1879.

¹² Rusho and Crampton, 45.

¹³ Smith, 392-393.

¹⁴ *Deseret News*, Salt Lake City, Utah, March 24, 1880.

¹⁵ The original name given by Pearce to his ferryboat operation was the Central Ferry; the name Pearce Ferry did not appear in print (as Pierce Ferry) until 1879 (*Weekly Arizona Miner*, Prescott, Arizona, August 8, 1879).

¹⁶ Catherine H. Ellis, “Arizona Has Been Good to Me: Routes and Recollections of Latter-day Saint Settlement in Arizona,” *Journal of Arizona History*, 54 (3)(2013):22.

¹⁷ Smith, 394-397.

¹⁸ Smith, 396.

¹⁹ Smith, 397-398.

Stevens later described the chaos of ferrying the last of the livestock across, which consisted of two sizeable oxen.²⁰ Hesitant to even board the ferryboat, the animals “sat back on their haunches” shortly after the crossing had begun and so unbalanced the craft that water flowed into the open pontoons supporting the deck. The ferryboat quickly began to sink. Stevens and Neilson realized they were not going to make it to shore in time and, with the help of two Paiutes who were also aboard, untied the oxen and let them swim to shore. Then the Paiutes jumped into the river, leaving Stevens and Neilson trying to row the ferryboat to shore before it was swept downstream into a small rapid. Meanwhile, Nasstrom arrived in the small flat boat but was only able to rescue Nielson. Stevens and the mostly-submerged ferryboat made it through the rapid intact and eddied out below. After noting that the ferryboat had been salvaged, the crossing completed, and the group was once again on its journey southward, Stevens commented, “Another day fixed matters all right and our little party left the Colorado River with a realizing conviction that ‘distance lends enchantment to the view.’”

Another crossing of sorts occurred in March 1881. Three men, Bill Johnson, Joe Henderson, and Miles Noyes, arrived at the crossing to find only “a row boat attached to a line that extended across the river from bank to bank.” The larger ferryboat constructed by Tuttle and Tate in 1880 and used by the Stevens group in January was apparently gone, and they made no mention of Pearce or others. They crossed with their baggage in the row boat, swam the horses behind it, and then camped nearby.²¹

Pearce built a larger ferryboat in the summer of 1881,²² suggesting that either his ferry operation was doing more business than the known historical records indicate or that the ferryboat used the previous November and January had been lost during spring high water. His merchant partners in St. George loaned him the money,²³ and “two loads of lumber from Mount Trumbull” were delivered by wagon for construction of the new ferryboat.²⁴ A stone building was also built nearby at approximately this time. Mary Ann, Pearce’s daughter, later recalled spending a lonely summer in the stone building with her father and family.²⁵

At least two groups of Mormon settlers attempted to cross at the Central Ferry in 1882. That summer the first group passed through St. George where Pearce recommended that they use his ferry, and he traveled there with them. But a surprise awaited them upon their arrival some days later. The Colorado was in full flood, a ferry crossing would have been extremely dangerous, and Pearce refused to take the group across at any price. The settlers then left and backtracked for some distance before turning west and traveling to the ferry operated by Daniel Bonelli at Rioville, a settlement at the Virgin River confluence, where they safely crossed to the

²⁰ *Deseret News*, Salt Lake City, Utah, March 23, 1881.

²¹ Herbert Brown, “The California Vulture in Arizona,” *Auk*, 16 (3)(1881):272. The purpose of their crossing is unknown. They awoke the next morning to discover two huge birds perched on a nearby cliff, one of which they shot—it was later identified as a California condor.

²² Smith, 401.

²³ H. Pearce letter to John Taylor, December 10, 1882, from the files of the L.D.S. Church Historian’s Office; cited by Smith, 401.

²⁴ James W. Nixon, *Autobiography of James W. Nixon* (St. George, Utah: private printing, Dixie State University Special Collections, 1937). Nixon was a young man of 15 years old when he assisted Mr. Leavitt in delivering the lumber.

²⁵ Undated typewritten interview of Mary Ann Pearce Atkin by Mrs. Joseph Sadovich of Henderson, Nevada. Cited by Smith, 400.

south side of the Colorado.²⁶ Insult was added to injury when, only a week later, Bonelli sent the newspaper a scathing letter in which he accused Pearce of poor judgment and worse.²⁷ The second 1882 crossing was reported by A. F. McDonald to have occurred in July.²⁸ He and his group were ferried across the river by Pearce “at the time of high water and found a good boat and an agreeable and accommodating ferryman...I consider the Central Ferry the safest and best crossing on the Colorado River.”

Pearce was weary of the ferry crossing by 1882. He was 64 years old and had little to show for the six years he had been running it, a nearly-bankrupt business venture worth an estimated \$3,000 dollars—and which was at least \$1,200 in debt.²⁹ And the future of his Central Ferry as an instrument of Mormon colonization in Arizona looked bleak because of competition from the more successful Lee’s Ferry and the nearby Bonelli Ferry. He wrote a letter to John Taylor, third president of the Mormon Church, in December and asked to be relieved of his duties at the ferry by March of 1883.³⁰

STEEN’S FERRY, 1883 TO 1885

Pearce sold the ferry operation to Thomas Steen of Kingman, Arizona, probably in 1883. The *Mohave County Miner* announced in its edition of April 8, 1883, that, “Thomas Steen, a brother of our worthy sheriff, is keeping the ferry known as Central Ferry, and formerly known as Pierce’s Ferry. For the information of travelers we will state that they can always depend on finding plenty of hay and grain at this ferry for teams and a good square meal for themselves at reasonable prices.” The *Miner* subsequently declared on May 6 that “Thomas Steen...[could] ferry anything...anybody...anytime.” Yet another mention of the ferry was made on November 18 when Frank McCabe of Jerome, Arizona, reported that he was in pursuit of horse thieves that “were making for Pierce’s Ferry.”³¹ Elsie Hunt returned to Utah from Arizona in 1883 via Pearce Ferry instead of Lee’s Ferry (which she had crossed previously) and recalled that the crossing was difficult and that “each [ferry] was worse than the other.”³²

Business was apparently good enough for Steen to place an advertisement in the *Deseret News* of April 9, 1884, proclaiming that “Pierce’s Ferry was the most direct route to southern and western Arizona,” owned by “Thomas Steen, proprietor.” By 1885, the crossing was being referred to as Steen’s Ferry³³ which was paying two percent of its gross proceeds as taxes to

²⁶ *Silver Reef Miner*, Silver Reef, Utah, July 15, 1882. The letter written by the settlers to this newspaper praised the Bonelli Ferry, also known as Stone’s Ferry, thereby implying that it was superior to that operated by Pearce. See also Smith, 399.

²⁷ *Silver Reef Miner*, Silver Reef, Utah, July 22, 1882. This date suggests that Pearce refused to cross the group in June or early July. The Bonelli Ferry was only 45 river miles downstream of the ferry operated by Pearce, resulting in no small competition between the two.

²⁸ *Weekly Republican*, Phoenix, Arizona, October 27, 1882. If this is accurate, it can only be assumed that the McDonald crossing took place in late July when the river was no longer in full flood.

²⁹ Smith, 401.

³⁰ Pearce to Taylor, December 10, 1882. Taylor granted the request; Brigham Young had died in 1877, shortly after directing Pearce to establish the ferry crossing. Pearce then moved to St. George and lived there and in southwest Utah until his death in 1889.

³¹ Steen inconsistently referred to his ferry operation as Steen’s Ferry, Pierce’s Ferry, and Central Ferry.

³² Ellis, 24; Ellis (23) also described another 1883 crossing at Steen’s Ferry by Hyrum Morris with five wagons, 25 horses, and 50 cattle.

³³ *Mohave County Miner*, Kingman, Arizona, March 22, 1885.

Mohave County.³⁴ In addition, unsubstantiated reports suggest that the U.S. Post Office may have used the ferry to transport mail across the river and on to Patterson Spring at about this time.³⁵ More reliable sources indicate this may be incorrect since the mail was known to have been transported across the river at the Bonelli Ferry in 1884.³⁶

THE LOST YEARS, 1886 TO 1915

The ferry seems to have disappeared after 1885.³⁷ The *Salt Lake Tribune* and the *Mohave County Miner*, usually the best source for local and regional transportation news, made no mention of it. The Stanton Expedition stopped at the ferry site on March 17, 1890, and reported that it was “abandoned” but that the stone house and the road to the crossing were still visible.³⁸ Another reference to the ferry noted that the Mohave County sheriff had difficulties in “crossing the Colorado at Pierce’s Ferry” when traveling from Kingman north into the Arizona Strip in 1897.³⁹ George Flavell floated past the ferry site in 1897, stating that it was abandoned.⁴⁰ Julius Stone, traveling with Nathaniel Galloway, passed the abandoned ferry site in 1909.⁴¹ The Kolb brothers also found it to be abandoned in 1912.⁴²

FINAL DAYS OF THE FERRY OPERATION, 1916 TO 1938

And then in 1916 the ferry came back to life. On the front page of its December 23, 1916, edition, the *Mohave County Miner* announced that “the old Pierce Ferry across the Colorado River at the mouth of the Grand Canyon is now in operation.” No ferrymaster was identified and no additional information was provided by the newspaper in that or any subsequent 1916 editions. However, an anecdote from 1917 revealed that it was a cable ferry with the ability to transport automobiles.

Walter Brown started to take the ferry across the river from south to north that year when his glove was accidentally caught in the pulley blocks connecting the ferryboat to the cable.⁴³ His glove was drawn into the moving pulley, two fingers of his right hand were crushed, and he was thrown headfirst into the river while trying to break loose from the grip of the pulley. He somehow regained control of the situation and began to drive his automobile the 80 miles on a

³⁴ *Mohave County Miner*, May 11, 1885.

³⁵ Friends of the Arizona Joshua Tree Forest, *History of the Joshua Tree Forest*, Meadview, Arizona. <http://joshuatreeforest.org/>, accessed October 14, 2018.

³⁶ Dan W. Messersmith, *The History of Mohave County to 1912* (Kingman, Ariz.: Mohave County Historical Society, 1991), 162.

³⁷ This is the time at which Lee’s Ferry was at its peak of activity, crossing “many hundreds” of Mormon settlers each year; Rusho and Crampton, 46.

³⁸ Dwight L. Smith and C. Gregory Crampton, *The Colorado River Survey: Robert B. Stanton and the Denver, Colorado Canyon, and Pacific Railroad* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Howe Brothers, 1987).

³⁹ *The Union*, St. George, Utah, March 13, 1897. Did his difficulty imply that no ferry was in operation and he had to ford or swim the river?

⁴⁰ George F. Flavell, *The Log of the Panthon: An Account of an 1896 River Voyage From Green River, Wyoming, to Yuma, Arizona, Through the Grand Canyon* (Plano, Tex.: Westwinds Press, 1987). There is some debate as to whether Flavell knew where he was when he reported Pearce Ferry was abandoned. Nevertheless, Flavell did not record any active ferry operations between the Grand Wash Cliffs and the mouth of the Virgin River.

⁴¹ Julius F. Stone, *Canyon Country* (New York, N.Y.: G.P. Putnam Sons, 1932), 103-104.

⁴² Ellsworth L. Kolb, *Through the Grand Canyon from Wyoming to Mexico* (New York, N.Y.: The Macmillan Company, 1914), 273.

⁴³ *Mohave County Miner*, Kingman, Arizona, April 28, 1917.

dirt road to Kingman to seek medical attention, only to have “the machine” break down due to mechanical problems.

Again, the ferry seems to have disappeared after 1917. A U.S. Geological Survey river expedition led by Claude Birdseye stopped at Pearce Ferry in 1923 and reported that it was abandoned.⁴⁴ The Eddy expedition of 1927 did not report any activity.⁴⁵



Fig. 2. E. C. La Rue took this photograph of Pearce Ferry on October 15, 1923. The old stone building was present but no ferryboat was to be seen; the wooden boat pictured on the shore is from the Birdseye Expedition. The photo was taken from the south side of the river (river left) looking northeast toward the Grand Wash Cliffs. E. C. La Rue 771, Courtesy U.S. Geological Survey Photograph Library.

The last phase of the commercial river crossing at Pearce Ferry began in 1933—by which time Lee’s Ferry was no longer in operation due to the construction of Navajo Bridge across the river near there in 1929.⁴⁶ On July 24, 1933, 30-year-old Murl Emery of Boulder City, Nevada, filed an application with the Mohave County Board of Supervisors to obtain a franchise for the “establishment and operation” of a river crossing at Pearce Ferry.⁴⁷ Murl had previously helped

⁴⁴ Diane E. Boyer and Robert H. Webb, *Damming Grand Canyon: The 1923 USGS Colorado River Expedition* (Logan, Utah: University of Utah Press, 2007), 232.

⁴⁵ Smith, 403.

⁴⁶ Rusho and Crampton, 108.

⁴⁷ Unpublished minutes of a meeting in the Office of the Board of Supervisors of Mohave County, Arizona, dated September 6, 1933; Records Department, Mohave County, Kingman, Arizona, 1-2. This document was provided by Robert Ballard, Records Manager for Mohave County, on December 3, 2018.

his father, Eliphalet Horace “Pop” Emery, operate the Arivada Ferry on the Colorado River at Searchlight, Nevada, in the 1920s.⁴⁸ The Board of Supervisors and the Arizona State Highway Commission approved the application and granted the franchise to Murl “for the benefit of travel over said Mt. Trumbull-Chloride highway” for a period of 10 years.⁴⁹

However, the Board attached a number of stipulations to the franchise. Murl had to put the ferry into operation within 90 days, and the ferryboat was required to have a carrying capacity of 20 tons.⁵⁰ A cable was to be installed across the river and a series of pulleys, or a trolley, was to connect the ferryboat to the cable for safety. Furthermore, only residents of Mohave County could be hired to construct and operate the ferry. The Board even established the rates that could be charged for a ferry crossing: automobiles were to be charged \$2.00 each for a one-way trip, \$3.00 for a round-trip; pedestrians were charged 25 cents each for a one-way trip, 50 cents for a round-trip; and freight and livestock were to be charged rates similar to automobiles based on weight and displacement.

⁴⁸ Robert S. Wood, *Desert Riverman: The Free-spirited Adventures of Murl Emery*. (Flagstaff, Ariz.: Fretwater Press, 2009). Murl was interviewed by Melvin Smith in 1968 and said that his father, Pop Emery, re-established the Pearce Ferry operation from 1932 to 1938 with a 26-foot boat driven by a Buick engine that could transport 16 people. The 1968 interview was conducted 35 years after Murl obtained the ferry franchise from the Mohave County Board of Supervisors; it is likely that his recollections were somewhat inaccurate, although Wood did report that Pop did occasionally help Murl at Pearce Ferry. Pop and Murl also operated a motorboat tour service from Pearce Ferry up into the Grand Canyon. In the 1920 census, they list their occupation as “ferryman.”

⁴⁹ The Board scheduled a final hearing on the application on August 15. Murl’s application quickly ran into trouble at the hearing. A franchise to establish a river crossing at Pearce Ferry had previously been granted to S. W. Alger of Kingman, Arizona, by the Mohave County Board of Supervisors on December 1, 1930. Alger appeared at the hearing, objected to Murl’s application, and argued that even though he had done nothing to “establish and operate” a river crossing at Pearce Ferry since 1930, the franchise was still legally his. The Board agreed but gave him 20 days to complete the ferryboat and put it in operation or forfeit the franchise. Alger failed to meet the deadline and Murl was awarded the franchise.

⁵⁰ It is unlikely that Murl met all the stipulations of the franchise. Surviving photographs of the ferryboat do not show a craft capable of transporting 20 tons.



Fig. 3. Pearce Ferry in the mid-1930s, showing the Murl Emery ferryboat in the foreground. The photo was taken from the south side of the river (river left), looking upstream and northeast to the Grand Wash Cliffs. Courtesy Elbert Edwards Photo Collection, Image ID 0214 0697, University of Nevada Library Special Collections, Las Vegas.

The Emery Ferry was in operation through the mid-1930s. Wagons, automobiles, freight, pedestrians, and livestock were typically crossed.⁵¹ Large numbers of sheep were grazed in summer high on the Shivwits Plateau country north of the river and were ferried across to the south side of the river to spend the winters grazing at lower elevations, then were ferried back north in the spring. Eddie McKee, chief naturalist at Grand Canyon National Park, visited the ferry crossing and photographed it in 1935.⁵² The rising level of Lake Mead inundated the Pearce Ferry area in 1938, which was probably the last year of ferry operations.⁵³

Pearce Ferry operated intermittently from 1876 to about 1938, primarily serving local interests. It failed to achieve prominence as a commercial river crossing due to its remote and nearly inaccessible location, combined with intense competition from other well-positioned river ferry operations. It seems likely that the Mormon Church lost interest in Pearce Ferry as a means to facilitate Mormon settlement in Arizona when it became clear that Lee's Ferry was better

⁵¹ Smith, 405.

⁵² NAU.PH.95.48.1047, Cline Library Digital Archives, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona. McKee's journal of the visit describes the geology in great detail but makes no mention of the ferry operation (McKee papers, NPS study collection and archives, Grand Canyon, Arizona).

⁵³ One of the reasons Murl Emery established the ferry crossing apparently was to be able to claim damages from the federal government and seek compensation after the waters of Lake Mead put his operation out of business. Smith (405) cited an interview he had in 1967 with Rutger B. Atkin for this information, as well as Smith's 1968 interview with Murl.

suited to the task. And by 1884 the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad route from Utah through Colorado and New Mexico to Arizona offered a faster and more comfortable journey.⁵⁴ Ultimately, Lake Mead inundated the locale and sealed the fate of this historic river crossing.

⁵⁴ *Deseret News*, Salt Lake City, April 2, 1884. A passenger who traveled to Arizona from Utah on the train wrote a letter to the editor and publicized the route.