

Cedar Hill Boat Ramp

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Most of us lake-lovers have spent numerous days in the south end of our wonderful body of water. The clear waters of the Obey and the Wolf join together with countless creeks and streams to meet that huge concrete wall we call Dale Hollow Dam. For sixty-five years, concrete and steel have held back a reservoir of clean water and rich history. Our journey today takes us to Cedar Hill Marina to uncover what lies beneath the waves.

It's commonly known that the Roberts family has owned and operated the dock since the earliest of days on the Dale. Their family has held ownership longer than any other dock operation on our lake. Now under new ownership, the marina stands as it always has, but with new captains at the helm.

New owners, Jack and Nancy Corns, and their sons, Chuck and Brian, have stepped into the shoes of the many Roberts family sons and daughters from the past with hopes of continuing this marina's rich heritage. We all wish them well, and with continued support from the Roberts family, success is almost a certainty.

But let's look a little deeper, ya'll. Let's stand on the boat ramp and look out into currents of the Obey River, now deep in the dark depths of Dale Hollow. Let's step back in time and see what the old Obey has in store for us.

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It's the mid-to-late 1800s. It's a cool morning on the river, the pale sunrise peeking over the mountaintops. Light mists are swirling above the lazy currents of the Obey. Nothing can be seen on the water, up or downstream. Only the quiet chirpings of the birds and frogs can be heard in the mist. A fiery young man is standing here beside us, his dusty trousers are damp with morning dew. The brim of his large leather hat shields his eyes from the sun. He's listening...

Ah...there it is...

From the shadowy depths of the misty hollows echoes the whine of a steam whistle. *Whoooooooooooo*. It's music to his ears. He closes his eyes as a wide smile tugs at his face.

Our fiery young lad is none other than James Davis, the son of a farmer and settler of the acres all along both sides of this river. His father, Matthew Davis, had taken the coveted Miss Elizabeth Dale to wed, thus ensuring his ties to the hundreds of valley farmland acres that bordered this river. Elizabeth's parents were the earliest of true

settlers in these parts, owning the entire hollow where our dam is located today. It was known as the Dale Hollow...and still is.

Today, like so many days, James is waiting patiently for his job to come to him. He is an apprentice to the captain of this steamboat pulling upstream, having impressed the old captain with his hard work ethics and sound river knowledge. The past five years had gained him the captain's trust, and he stands here today willing and ready to live up to that captain's good judgment.

Whoooooooo.

The old steamboat slowly chugs its way upstream around what is known as the Barksdale Bend, far to our right. Puffs of coal smoke billow from its darkened smokestacks, once painted a shiny black above bright white. And even though Father Time has tarnished the once pristine ornaments of this old vessel, it is still quite a sight to behold.

Whoooooooo.

By now, other workers are joining us along shore, already tired from their travels. Some have carted large wooden boxes down the steep slope behind us to be loaded onto this mighty rivership. A number of goats are being led down hill as well, and crates of chickens are sliding forward upon a large makeshift drag pulled behind a mule. Cackles and crows join the raspy voices of labor men filing in from the ridges nearby. Morning has begun on the Obey.

Soon, the old steamvessel pushes itself onto shore, its bottom growling and grinding into the shaley shore in front of us. This shallow point has the best access of any nearby due to the quiet backwater to the right of us. The almost currentless backwater makes it much easier for our captain to hold the boat in place. But even with the ease of dockage, young James frowns at the shallow water that still must be waded to load and unload all the tos-and-frogs being carted both on and off the ship. It's awkward and cumbersome, at best. James climbs on board, his soggy boots dripping with cold river water. The captain's Irish accent welcomes him aboard.

"Mornin' James, me boy...a right-nice day for a river trip, mightn't ya say?"

"Good morning to you, Sir," says James, tipping his hat and patting the captain on the shoulder. "There must be a better way to load and unload here, Sir. We all tire of cold, wet feet and soggy socks."

"Ah, you young lads always have grand ideas. If'n your head wasn't so full of that little Hestand lass from across the ridge, you'd be a buildin' your own pier here like your great uncles down stream at Butler's."

James scratches his head at the old man's words. His great uncles had created quite a trade pier down at Butler's Landing below nearby Celina. All the big steamboats dock at that famous pier along the Cumberland River, just downstream from the Obey's juncture. His uncles are well-known and well-respected men in their communities, and James has always admired their fame and good fortune. In his head, wheels start turning.

"I see your mind at work, me boy, but a pier is hard work. 'Tis a love affair with the river, boy...not that little Sadie Hestand. She's got you hooked good, boy. I see it in ya. A pier's no place for a lady, me boy."

"That sounds like a challenge, Captain!" chides James with a smile. "I've been lookin' for one of those."

The crusty old captain shakes his head and mumbles to himself, "... Greenhorn ... Throw some coal on the fire, Boy! We got a river to run."

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And that's how one of the great tales in Dale Hollow history began. Young James became Captain James K P Davis, of Davis Landing, right here where we stand on the Cedar Hill boat ramp. He and Sadie eventually obtained most of the Dale and Davis family farmland around us and filled these hollows with children, whose descendents still roam our ridges and valleys.

As we stare out over boats and docks now alongshore, I can almost picture large wooden beams stretched out into currents of the Obey. I think I can hear calls of crew men around us, and heavy footsteps on the old wooden planks. And ah ... there it is ... that lonely whine of steam piercing the misty coves of yesteryear.

I think Captain James and Sadie would be amazed at what has befallen their hills and hollows. I'll bet this marina would look quite intimidating to them, with its huge boats and lavish buildings. I bet it would look like quite a challenge.

But somehow, I bet the Corn family has been *looking for one of those.*~

