

**JULIA  
GARLAND  
NIVENS  
1847-1911**



**THREE  
RIVERS  
BOAT  
MASTER**

For 32 years, “Aunt Julia” ran the famous Nevins ferry across the Arkansas river at the mouth of the Grand (Neosho) River. Across her ferry rode soldiers, officers, statesmen and bandits. She knew them all – a friend to every one of them. The ferry has been referred to by the names of Nevins and Nivens.

Julia Garland was born in July 1847 at Doaksville, a small Choctaw village near Hugo. Her father was a member of Skullyville Constitutional Convention and her mother was a member of the Choctaw Nation. Records show Julia completed the fifth grade. When she married Mose Nevins, she became a member of the Cherokee Nation and received an allotment, which was located at the fork of three rivers near Hyde Park. When Muskogee began to grow, the amusement park took part of her allotment.

Hyde Park was developed in 1905 along the Arkansas River by the Muskogee Electric Traction Company, which ran the town’s streetcar company. The park featured beautifully manicured gardens, natatorium (indoor pool), small zoos with bears and gorillas in cages, roller skating rink, penny arcade, dance floor, billiard parlor, picnic areas, miniature railroad, amusement rides of all kinds, restaurant, theater and much more. The main attraction was the wooden roller coaster along the Arkansas River bank. The park was the primary recreation place through the 1920s when floods and finally a tornado ended its run.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the waterways of Indian Territory provided a barrier to travel, and even when they were relatively dry, their quicksand proved a danger. After the Five Tribes settled in Indian Territory in the mid-1800s, enterprising individuals set up business with flatboats, using poles, ropes, cables, and later steam engines to carry people and cargo across the hazardous waterways.

In 1824, the U. S. Army established Fort Gibson on the Neosho River to maintain peace between the region’s Indians. This was in the fertile Three Forks Area where the Arkansas, Verdigris, and Neosho converged. Tribal governments soon regulated the ferry industry. In 1849 the Cherokee National Council set an annual tax at \$25 per ferry on the Arkansas, Canadian, or Neosho Rivers and \$5 on the Illinois or Verdigris Rivers. The law required that a licensed ferry must transport every traveler during reasonable hours (except on Sunday) and that no other ferry could open within one-half mile of an established landing.

The Nevins Ferry crossed the Arkansas River. The east landing was on the east bank of the Arkansas River at the mouth of the Neosho River. The west landing was on the west bank of the Arkansas River near the present-day Muskogee pump station. In February 1879, Mose Nevins was assassinated by unknown men near the east landing of the ferry.

Although broken-hearted and left with three children, it didn’t break Julia’s courage. She took charge of the ferry the next day and operated it for the next 32 years. At the river by her ferry merged the Arkansas, Texas and Kansas trails. Cherokee Bill and the Cook and Jennings gangs frequently were ferried across the river by her and soon after she ferried the officers in pursuit of them.

She ran the ferry until 1903, when the Arkansas River Bridge was built. Any time day or night she was ready and willing to take a passenger across. High water, storms, heat or cold didn’t stop this plucky little Indian woman, who lived alone at the point where the three great trails met.

Every person who knew Julia had only a good word to say about her. She would often give clothes and food to strangers and sometimes money so they once more might make a start in life. Around 1906 she married Samuel Moody and moved to North Ash Street in Muskogee. With her husband and brother by her side, Julia died in October 1911 at age 64. She is buried in Greenhill Cemetery under her married name.