

TN, Meigs County, Birchwood vicinity,

IDENTIFICATION	STATUS
<p>✓ Historic name: <u>Blythe Ferry (Meigs County MR A),</u> Common name: <u>same</u> <small>N of Birchwood on TN</small> Address: <u>Highway 60 at Tennessee River</u> Owner's name: <u>see continuation sheet</u> Owner's address: <u>Multiple(see continuation page)</u> Classification: <u>Site/Object - public</u> Tax map reference: <u>Dist. 2, Map 65-Meigs Co.;</u> <u>Dist. 2, Map 113-Rhea Co.</u> Acreage: <u>14.8 acres</u> UTM reference: Meigs Co.: <u>Z16/E68020/N3920070</u> Rhea Co.: <u>Z16/E680550/N3920590</u></p>	<p>Open to public: Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Visible from road: Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Occupied: Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Present use: <u>Transportation</u> Current condition: <u>Good</u> Alterations: <u>Ferry ramps now covered by asphalt; river level raised by inundation of Chickamauga Lake.</u> Site features: <u>N/A</u></p>
HISTORY	SOURCES
<p>Date of construction: <u>1809</u> Architect/builder: <u>N/A</u> Original or previous owners: <u>William Blythe, original; John Blythe; William Hutchinson; George Spivey</u> Original use: <u>Transportation</u> Theme/s: Primary <u>Transportation</u> Secondary <u>Military</u> Other <u>Exploration/Settlement</u></p>	<p>Bibliographical data: <u>Evans, Raymond, 1979 Cherokee Survey.</u> <u>Cherokee Census, 1835.</u> <u>Powell, Dr. John. Oct. 15 letter to John Ross, 1838.</u> <u>Lillard, Stewart. Meigs County, Tennessee. 1975</u> <u>TVA, Floodplain Management Branch, 1982.</u> Form prepared by: <u>S. Rogers and A. Toplovich</u> Title: <u>Cultural Resource Surveyors</u> Organization: <u>Tennessee Historical Commission</u> Date: <u>9/20/82</u></p>
DESCRIPTION	<p>The Blythe Ferry (the landings, boat and barge, and water passageway) is located in a wooded area bordered by farmland on State Route 60 at the confluence of the Tennessee and Hiwassee Rivers. The ferry crosses the tailwaters of Chickamauga Lake between Meigs and Rhea counties; the river is approximately .4 miles wide at this point. The approaches and landings of the ferry, originally dirt surfaces, are covered with asphalt and descend from SR60 to the river's edge. The ferry crosses the Tennessee and the mouth of the Hiwassee on a northwest/southeast axis. The original water level of the rivers has been raised approximately 7 feet by the inundation of the lake in the early 1940s—from 676' MSL to 683' MSL. The eastern ferry landing is located along a bluff and is unchanged by the lake. The western landing lays at a lower elevation and the original landing is exposed at times of low water. A raised causeway has been constructed over the original roadway leading up from the Tennessee. Although the present ferry landings</p>
SIGNIFICANCE	<p>Established in 1809 by William Blythe, the Blythe Ferry was vital to the development of transportation in southeast Tennessee. The ferry was one of the first of many ferries on the Tennessee and Hiwassee Rivers. The Blythe Ferry provided means to transport people and supplies between Rhea County's white settlements west of the Tennessee and the Cherokee territory east of the river. William Blythe, a Cherokee, was granted authorization to operate a ferry in 1809. After signing the Treaty of 1819 and renouncing his allegiance to the Cherokee Nation, Blythe and his son John received a 640 acre reservation including their original homestead and the ferry. The ferry served as an important communication link between the Hiwassee Garrison in Rhea County and the federal Indian Agency in Meigs County. Blythe Ferry continued its</p>

PHOTOGRAPHIC DATA

Photographer: Stephen T. Rogers

Date: 3/30/79

Negatives on file: Tennessee Historical
Commission

Photographer facing: See continuation below

Photograph number 43, 43A of 55
and 43B

CONTINUATION

PHOTOGRAPHIC DATA continued

#43 facing southwest

#43A facing east

#43B facing west

SITE PLAN - Include North Arrow

'See Continuation Sheet'

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**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Historic Resources of

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date entered

MEIGS COUNTY MULTIPLE RESOURCE NOMINATION - BLYTHE FERRY (#35)--Description

are essentially on the original locations, over the last 170 years high and low water have led to landings up-and down-river from present landings by approximately 50 yards. (These strips of land flanking the current landings are included within the nominated boundaries.) The ferryboat at Blythe Ferry is a ca. 1940 flat-bottom, steel hull barge powered by the tug Jean Marie. Capable of transferring up to six cars, the tug is attached to the barge amidship and pivots in either direction.

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MEIGS COUNTY MULTIPLE RESOURCE NOMINATION - BLYTHE FERRY (#35)--Significance

involvement between whites and Cherokee until the Cherokee Removal of 1838. At that time the ferry transported removal parties across the river on the "Trail of Tears." In an October 15, 1838 letter to John Ross, director of the removal, Dr. John Powell complained of the Blythes' slowness and uncooperative attitude in ferrying their fellow Cherokee and supply wagons across the Tennessee. Blythe Ferry also played a military role during the Civil War, when a company of the 5th Tennessee Infantry Regiment (USA) was stationed at the ferry for over a year to guard the mouth of the Hiwassee River. By 1900, George Spivey began operating the ferry; Spivey owned the ferry until the 1940s. At that time Chickamauga Lake was created, but this resulted in little change in the ferry's setting. Located on the tail-waters of the lake, where the level of the river has been raised 7 feet, only the western landing of the ferry has been affected. The Blythe Ferry survives as one of only four ferrys still operating on the Tennessee (one of only 5 ferrys known in the state), and continues as an important part of the main east-west route between Bradley, Meigs, and northern Hamilton Counties and Rhea County. The ca. 1940 ferryboat (boat and barge) is included in this nomination as an essential contributing element of an operating ferry. However, if either boat or barge is taken from service as a ferry, it is suggested that the vessel should be removed from listing, as it would no longer be considered a contributing element of a ferry.

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Continuation sheet Historic Resources of Meigs County, Tennessee Item number Boundaries Page 2

MEIGS COUNTY MULTIPLE RESOURCE NOMINATION - Blythe Ferry (#35)

Boundaries- Blythe Ferry

The boundaries begin at point on the east bank of the Tennessee River 150 feet northeast of the intersection of the centerline of Tennessee Highway 60 and the Tennessee River, thence southeast 50 feet, thence southwest 300 feet, thence in a northwesterly direction approximately .4 mile across said river to a point 150 feet southwest of the intersection of the centerline of Tennessee Highway 60 and the west bank of said river, thence northwest 50 feet, thence northeast 300 feet, thence in a southwesterly direction approximately .4 mile across said river to the beginning. Due to the lack of property lines or visual boundaries, arbitrary boundary lines were established to include the water passageway, and both the current and historic landing sites. The water passageway is rectangular in shape, approximately .4 mile long, and 300 feet wide. The boundaries include .1 acre of land on the Meigs County side and less than .1 acre of land on the Rhea County side. Total acreage of land and water is approximately 14.8 acres.

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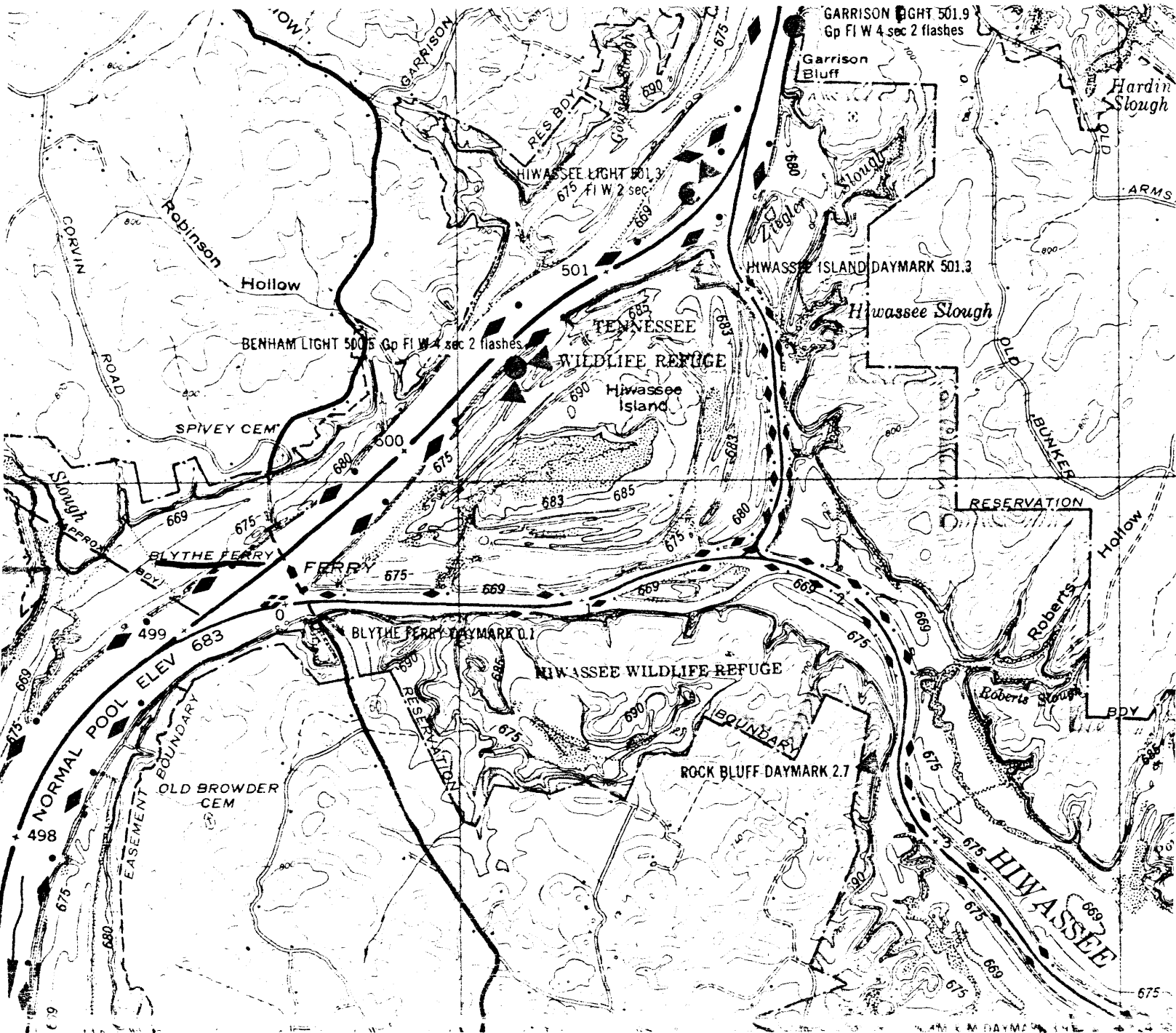
Historic Resources of Meigs

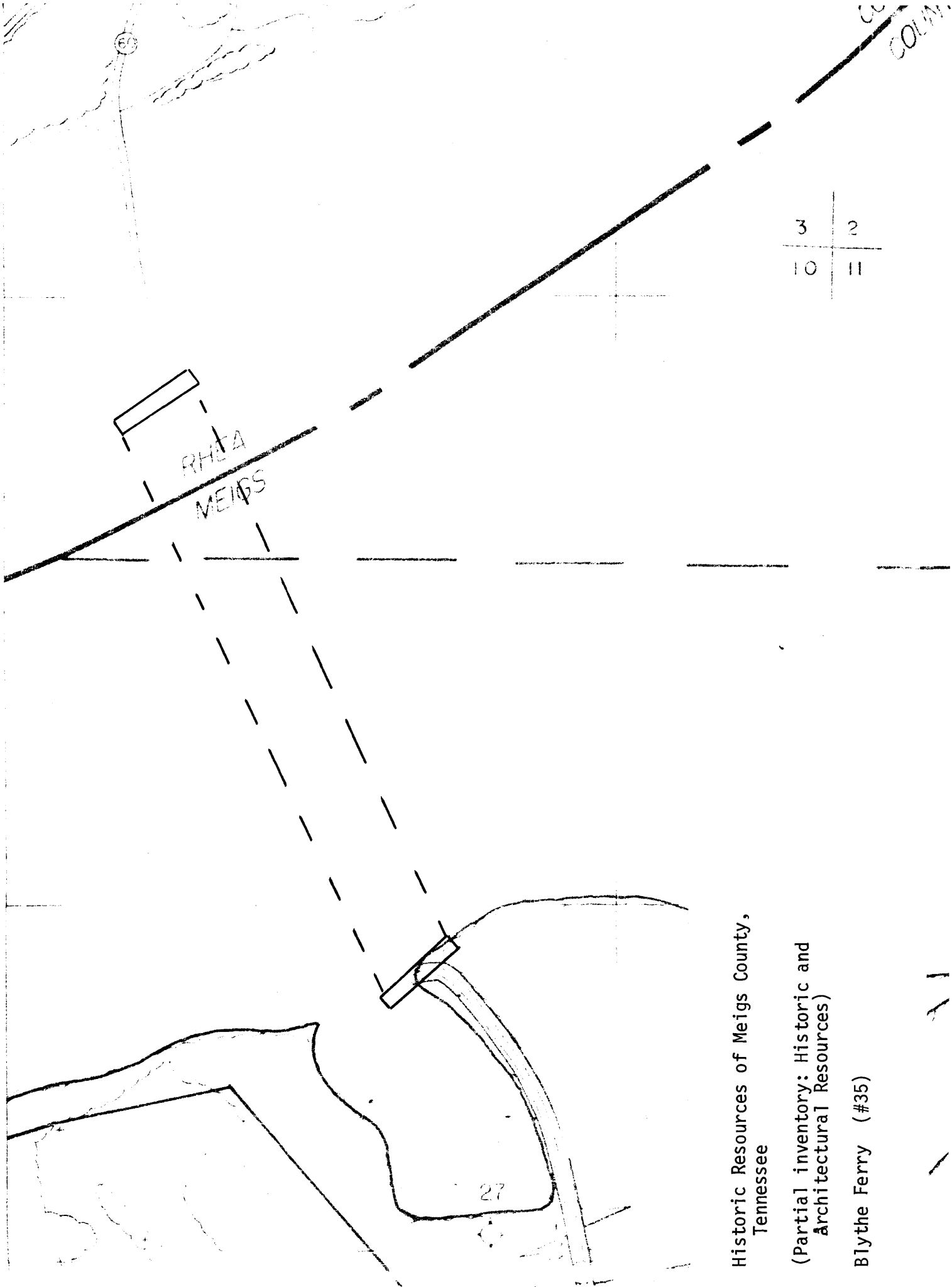
Continuation sheet County, Tennessee

Item number Site Plan

Page 2

MEIGS COUNTY MULTIPLE RESOURCE NOMINATION -
Blythe Ferry (#35)





Historic Resources of Meigs County,
Tennessee

(Partial inventory: Historic and
Architectural Resources)

Blythe Ferry (#35)

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Historic Resources of

Continuation sheet Meigs County, Tennessee Item number Photographic Data Page 2

MEIGS COUNTY MULTIPLE RESOURCE NOMINATION - Blythe Ferry (#35)

Additional photographs included with Blythe Ferry and Hastings-Locke Ferry (#30) inventory forms will increase the total number of photographs in the Meigs County Multiple Resource Nomination from 55 to 59.

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**National Register of Historic Places
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Historic Resources of

Continuation sheet Meigs County, Tennessee

Item number 7

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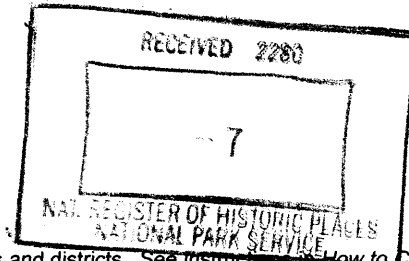
received

date entered

The Hastings-Locke Ferry (#30) and Blythe Ferry (#35) were not included with the Meigs County multiple resource nomination originally submitted (listed 7/6/82). The ferries were withheld while further research on ownership and property boundaries was conducted relative to the effect of changes in water level at the ferry landings.

Also deleted from the multiple resource nomination were the photographs of the Hastings-Locke Ferry (#30-photo 38 of 55) and the Blythe Ferry (#35-photo 43 of 55). These photographs are included with the ferry nominations at this time. (This continuation sheet should replace the original continuation sheet for item #7, page 4a.)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Blythe Ferry
other names/site number Blythe Ferry Site

2. Location

street & number Highway 60 at Tennessee River N/A not for publication
city or town Birchwood vicinity
state Tennessee code TN county Meigs/Rhea code 121/143 zip code 37308

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Herbert L. Hays 7/31/06
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

for
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register.

other, (explain):

Elson Beall 9.14.06

~~Additional Documentation Accepted~~

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
1	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Historic Resources of Meigs County, Tennessee;

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

1

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION: water-related

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION & CULTURE: outdoor recreation

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Asphalt

walls N/A

roof N/A

other N/A

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years. From original nomination

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ETHNIC HERITAGE/Native American
EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT
MILITARY
SOCIAL HISTORY
TRANSPORTATION
POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Period of Significance

1809-circa 1940

Significant Dates

circa 1809 – Blythe Ferry established
1838 – Cherokee Removal
1863 – Civil War Skirmish

Significant Person

(complete if Criterion B is marked)

Blythe, William

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

N/A

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

MTSU Center for Historic Preservation

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property 14.8 acres Graysville 111 NE

UTM References

(place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

From original nomination

1	<u>16</u>	<u>680203</u>	<u>3920070</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>16</u>	<u>680550</u>	<u>3920590</u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sarah J. Martin and Dr. Carroll Van West

organization Center for Historic Preservation date June 16, 2006

street & number Middle Tennessee State University, Box 80 telephone 615-898-2947

city or town Murfreesboro state TN zip code 37132

Additional Documentation

submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 Or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO) or FPO for any additional items

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Tennessee Valley Authority -- Headquarters

street & number 400 W. Summit Hill Dr. telephone (865) 632-2101

city or town Knoxville state TN zip code 37902-1499

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2

Blythe Ferry
Meigs/Rhea Counties, TN

Presently, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) maintains the Blythe Ferry site, which is located on land owned by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). The east landing is used primarily as a public access point to drop recreational boats into the water, but is also used for other recreational activities such as fishing. From the east bank (in Meigs County), one can see Hiwassee Island (Jolly's Island) to the north, which sits at the junction of the Tennessee and Hiwassee Rivers. Pre-Columbian Woodland cultures inhabited this island, which was later home to John Jolly, who left for Indian Territory before the removal and served as leader of the "Old Settlers" in Arkansas and Oklahoma.¹ Today, the TWRA maintains Hiwassee Island, which has become a key stopover point for migrating endangered whooping cranes. Immediately south of the ferry site is a shallow inlet, which was open space prior to the inundation of the Tennessee River.

Just 1,000 feet shy of the ferry site is the entrance to the future Cherokee Removal Memorial Park. According to the report titled "Cherokee Removal Memorial Park Design Charette" produced by the National Park Service, the Friends of the Cherokee Memorial, Inc., which organized in 1991, has worked with interested agencies and stakeholders toward the implementation of the park. In 1993, Cook and Spencer Associates, a survey and civil engineering consultant, created drawings for the initial design of the park. Meigs County and TWRA signed an agreement for a grant lease on the use of TVA land in 1996. Two years later TVA and Meigs County signed an agreement for a grant lease for the development of the Cherokee Removal Memorial Park at the Blythe Ferry site. Since then, the site has been cleared and graded, making the bluff automobile accessible. There are no interpretive markers at the site as of March 2003, nor is the site of the park within the present boundaries of the Blythe Ferry nomination.

When Blythe Ferry was first included in the National Register of Historic Places in 1982, it was one of only five ferries still operating in Tennessee. The circa 1940 ferryboat (boat and barge) was included in the nomination as an essential contributing element of an operating ferry. However, the whereabouts of the ferryboat is unknown, and it is no longer a contributing part of Blythe Ferry site and is omitted from this renomination.

¹ Long Distance Trails Group Office, National Park Service. "Cherokee Removal Memorial Park Conceptual Design Charette" (Santa Fe, NM: National Park Service, 2002), 2.

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3

Blythe Ferry
Meigs/Rhea Counties, TN

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Blythe Ferry was previously nominated to the National Register of Historic Places on January 5, 1983 for its local significance in exploration and settlement, transportation, and military history. The nomination met the registration requirements for Historic Resources of Meigs County, Tennessee, MRA. The purpose of this amendment to the original nomination is to expand upon the property's Cherokee heritage, to include its significance to the 1838 Cherokee removal, and to remove the barge and ferry boat from the nomination since they are no longer there. Native American ethnic heritage and social history have been added as areas of significance. Also, while William Blythe was noted as an important individual in the original nomination, the revised nomination clarifies that he is a significant individual and, therefore, criterion B is added. The Blythe Ferry Site is eligible for listing under National Register criteria A and B for its significance in Ethnic Heritage: Native American, Exploration/Settlement, Military, Social History, and Transportation.

Criterion A: Ethnic Heritage, Exploration/Settlement, Military, Social History, Transportation

William Blythe began operating this ferry along the Tennessee River circa 1809. The road leading to the ferry served the Cherokee Nation as a major thoroughfare between present-day Cleveland and the Tennessee River. Blythe Ferry is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its representation of the social history and ethnic heritage of the Cherokee Indians, its significance as one of the earliest ferries along the Tennessee River in East Tennessee, its role in facilitating the transportation of nine Cherokee detachments during the U.S. government's forced removal of the Cherokee Indians in 1838-39, and its use as a military campsite during the Civil War. The location of ferries, their connection with major road systems, and the potential of supply replenishment along the way all played major roles in planning the detachment routes taken by the Cherokee. Blythe Ferry was an essential component in getting the Cherokee and their possessions to their final destination.

Blythe Ferry was identified by Philip Thomason in "Historic and Historic Archaeological Resources of the Cherokee Trail of Tears, MPS" and Benjamin Nance in *The Trail of Tears in Tennessee: A Study of the Routes Used During the Cherokee Removal of 1838*, as an important resource along the Trail of Tears. It is significant as a campsite for departing Cherokee and a crossing point along the Tennessee River. Nearly ten thousand Cherokee crossed the Tennessee River at Blythe Ferry as they left their eastern homeland forever.

Criterion B: Blythe, William

Blythe Ferry is also eligible under Criterion B for its associations with William Blythe, a locally significant, mixed-ancestry Cherokee. Blythe's success as a ferry operator, businessman, and farmer in the Meigs County area from 1809 until 1839 is evidenced by the value of his property, which totaled \$14,000 in 1836. Prior to moving to Indian Territory with his family, Blythe assisted nine Cherokee detachments numbering an estimated nine to ten thousand persons across the Tennessee River in 1838. No other extant property associated with Blythe is known to exist.

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Blythe Ferry
Meigs/Rhea Counties, TN

Table 1: Cherokee Detachments Who Crossed the Tennessee River at Blythe Ferry

Conductor	Assistant	Departure Location	Disbandment Location	Date of Departure	Date of Arrival
Hair Conrad (replaced by Colston prior to departure)	Daniel Colston	Cherokee Agency Area	Woodhall Farm Vicinity Indian territory	23 Aug 1838	17 Jan 1839
Elijah Hicks	White Path (died en route- replaced by William Arnold)	Gunstocker Creek, Cherokee Agency Area	Woodhall Farm Vicinity Indian Territory	1 Sep 1838	4 Jan 1839
Jesse Bushyhead	Roman Nose	Chatata Creek, Cherokee Agency Area	Woodhall Farm Vicinity Indian Territory	3 Sep 1838	27 Feb 1839
Situwakee	Evan Jones	Savannah Branch, Cherokee Agency Area	Woodhall Farm Vicinity Indian Territory	7 Sep 1838	2 Feb 1839
Old Field	Stephen Foreman	Candies Creek, Cherokee Agency Area	Woodhall Farm Vicinity Indian Territory	24 Sep 1838	23 Feb 1839
Moses Daniel	George Still	Cherokee Agency Area	Woodhall Farm Vicinity Indian Territory	30 Sep 1838	2 Mar 1839
Choowalooka (replaced by Thomas N. Clark at Smith's Ferry)	J.D. Wofford	Cherokee Agency Area	Woodhall Farm Vicinity Indian Territory	14 Sep 1838	? Mar 1839
George Hicks	Collins McDonald	Mouse Creek, Cherokee Agency Area	Woodhall Farm Vicinity Indian Territory	7 Sep 1838	14 Mar 1839
Peter Hildebrand	James Hildebrand	Cherokee Agency Area	Woodhall Farm Vicinity Indian Territory	23 Oct 1838	18 Mar 1839

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Blythe Ferry
Meigs/Rhea Counties, TN

Table 2: Statistics for Cherokee Detachments Who Crossed at Blythe Ferry

Conductor	Depart	Arrive	Births	Deaths	Desertions	Accessions	Wagons & Teams	Riding Horses
Hair Conrad (replaced by Daniel Colston)	729	654	9	57	24	14	36	288
Elijah Hicks	858	744	5	54	---	---	43	344
Jesse Bushyhead	950	898	6	38	148	171	48	334
Situwakee	1250	1033	5	71	---	---	60	480
Old Field	983	921	19	57	10	6	49	392
Moses Daniel	1035	924	6	48	---	---	52	415
Choowalooka (replaced by Thomas N. Clark at Smith's Ferry)	1150	970	---	---	---	---	58	462
George Hicks	1118	1039	---	---	---	---	56	448
Peter Hildebrand	1766	1311	---	55	---	---	88	705
TOTAL	9839	8494					490	3868

*Table 1 information from Philip Thomason and Dr. Sara Parker, National Register of Historic Places, "Historic and Historic Archaeological Resources of the Cherokee Trail of Tears Multiple Property Nomination," October 2003. Table 2 information from William S. Jones, "Tennessee Places: The Legacy of the Trail of Tears in Van Buren County," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 63: 1 (Spring 2004), 52.

Historical Overview

Established in 1809 by William Blythe, the Blythe Ferry was vital to the development of transportation and commerce in southeast Tennessee. The ferry, located at the junction of Meigs, Rhea, and Hamilton counties, was one of the first of many ferries on the Tennessee and Hiwassee rivers; some 700 to 1,000 ferries in all operated in Tennessee during the nineteenth century.² Blythe Ferry provided means to transport people and supplies between Rhea County's white settlements west of the Tennessee River and the Cherokee territory east of the river. A majority of Cherokee forcibly removed from their eastern homelands in 1838, numbering some nine to ten thousand persons, crossed the Tennessee River at Blythe Ferry. Forced to give up his landholdings and business, Blythe also moved to Indian Territory. During the U.S. Civil War, the ferry site took on strategic significance and for a time was garrisoned by a company of federal

² Martha Carver, "Ferries" Carroll Van West, ed. *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill, 1998), 307.

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Blythe Ferry
Meigs/Rhea Counties, TN

troops. The ferry property passed through the hands of several property owners and continued in operation as one of Tennessee's last operating ferries until 1994

William Blythe (c. 1790-1856)

What is known about William Blythe comes from his landholdings, business interests, and involvement with the Cherokee Removal in 1838. A mixed-ancestry Native American with both European and Cherokee antecedents. Blythe married Nancy Fields, the daughter of Cherokee leader Richard Fields, in 1809. Together, they had six children (John, Martha, William, Elizabeth, Mary, and Elijah). Other wealthy, mixed-ancestry Cherokee men, such as John Ross, John Brown, and Joseph Vann, also owned considerable landholdings and operated ferries. Ferry ownership offered the Cherokee power and wealth, and, "in the Cherokee Nation, owning a ferry was not a right, but an economic privilege reserved for the powerful and influential."³ The adoption of Euro-American lifestyle traits and business practices was financially rewarding for these Cherokee men, but they and many other Cherokee also believed that acculturation served as the key to their collective survival.

In return for signing the Treaty of 1819, in which the Cherokee ceded the land on the east bank of the Tennessee River north of the Hiwassee River to the State of Tennessee, and renouncing his allegiance to the Cherokee Nation, Blythe received a 640-acre reservation at the mouth of the Hiwassee River and a few hundred yards north of the ferry landing. He was one of 160 to apply for a reservation, and "his application, made 'in right of his wife,' was approved, and the five-member family made their home on the Tennessee River near their ferry at Tennessee River mile 499.5."⁴ By 1836, Blythe's holdings were valued at \$14,000 and included the following: two ferries, 13 slaves, 15 cabins or 'negro homes,' a mill, a cotton gin, 2,000 peach and apple trees, a threshing machine, several barns, a blacksmith shop, a hen house, and other outbuildings. In addition, he also owned the southern bank of the Bunker Hill Landing at Hiwassee River mile 4.7 where he operated a ferry. While this area remains undeveloped, these structures are no longer extant.⁵

The Cherokee Nation granted Blythe permission to operate a ferry along the Tennessee River around 1809. The area was "in noticeable transition" at the turn of the 19th century, and "in the summer of 1807, the U.S. government relocated the Indian agency from Southwest Point NR 7/31/1972 at Kingston to about one to two miles north of Jolly's Island."⁶ The need to transport people and supplies during the War of 1812 further developed the local economy, making ferries along the Tennessee and Hiwassee Rivers even more important. Blythe Ferry Road served

³ Tony Holmes, "Early Cherokee Ferry Crossings of the Eastern Tennessee River Basin" *Journal of East Tennessee History* 62 (1990): 54-79.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 54-79.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 54-79.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 54-79.

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particular importance as the primary route to the Tennessee River leading out of Cleveland. In 1824, the Cherokee Council ordered that the road leading from Candies Creek (near present-day Cleveland) to Blythe Ferry be let out to the lowest bidder in order "to be opened and kept in good repair." They ordered the road to be cut and "clear of trees, and the cause of waying [sic] to be covered with dirt, together with the digging of mountains and hills, to be fourteen feet wide, clear of rocks, roots and grubs and the banks of all water courses to be put in complete order..."⁷

Blythe's political beliefs and allegiances are unknown. However, one can assume that he was not in favor of removal because of his financial success as a ferry operator, farmer, and businessman along the Tennessee River. Evidence of this assumption arises in the fact that Blythe and his family did not relocate to the West until most Cherokee had already gone. Moreover, his ambition to assist in the removal at his ferry site appears unenthusiastic. In an October 15, 1838 dispatch to John Ross, director of the removal, Dr. John Powell complained of Blythe's slowness and uncooperative attitude in ferrying the Cherokee and supply wagons across Tennessee. Blythe did, however, profit from the removal as indicated by detachment leader Jesse Bushyhead, who wrote on October 21, 1838 that, "we have been required to draw rations of sugar, coffee, salt, and soap, at Blythes [sic] Ferry to supply the detachment to Readyville or Nashville."⁸

Some detachments even camped at the ferry site. In a letter to General Winfield Scott dated November 12, 1838, Ross noted the "great body of Mr. [Peter] Hildebrand's detachment of Emigrating Cherokees quietly encamped on the South of the Tennessee River, and a portion with about 12 wagons, who had crossed, on the north bank." He continued by explaining previous day's events: "the emigrants were in readiness and commenced crossing the river – four boats were put in requisition and continued running until dusk, two of them were manned by Cherokees themselves. At the close of the day about sixty-one wagons of the detachment with the people were safely lodged across the river. The business of crossing was again resumed early this morning, and before 12 o'clock eighteen wagons, carriages, etc. with people were over."⁹ These bits of correspondence illustrate the ferry's role in transporting several thousand Cherokee across the Tennessee River in 1838, and its significance as a major commercial center in the early nineteenth century.

Sometime after the Cherokee detachments departed for the West, probably in 1839 or 1840, Blythe was forced to give up his business and landholdings and move his wife and family to Indian Territory. Alfred, William, and Charles Hutcheson, III, acquired the ferry from Blythe and by 1842,

⁷ Untitled article written by John Ross on October 25, 1824. Published in *Cherokee Phoenix* 1:9 (April 17, 1828).

⁸ Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Papers of John Ross: Volume 1, 1807-1839* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), 683.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 691.

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Burton Holman (and later W. Napoleon Holman) operated the ferry.¹⁰ Blythe and died in present-day Oklahoma in 1856.

Blythe Ferry and the Cherokee Removal of 1838

Prior to the removal of the Cherokee, Blythe Ferry marked the northwestern boundary of the Cherokee Nation and served as an important communication link between Euro-American settlements to the north and west and the federal Cherokee Agency at present-day Charleston. This area had been inhabited by generations of Native Americans.

The Cherokee prepared for their removal beginning in March 1838 when the U.S military, under the direction of General Winfield Scott, forced them into temporary forts at 27 military posts in Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. After several weeks in the temporary camps, the Cherokee were marched to emigration depots to be assigned to various detachments for the journey west. Emigration depots were created at the Cherokee Agency at present-day Charleston, Tennessee, near Ross's Landing (NR 6/27/74) at present-day Chattanooga, and south of Fort Payne, Alabama. According to the Trail of Tears National Register of Historic Places MPS, the majority of Cherokee were concentrated at the Cherokee Agency area. Several camps were located in this general vicinity, which covered a four-mile by twelve-mile area along the Hiwassee River extending from the Calhoun to Fort Cass, which was near present-day Charleston.¹¹ Nine of the eleven John Ross-affiliated detachments that camped at the Cherokee Agency began their journey by crossing the Tennessee River at Blythe Ferry.

Seventeen detachments left from the three depots between June 6th and December 5th of 1838. The first three detachments left under military escort from Ross's Landing in June of 1838 and were largely composed of "uncooperative" Georgia Cherokee who were strongly opposed to the removal. Just one other detachment received a military escort – John Bell's "pro-treaty" Cherokee unit.¹² The remaining detachments were transferred to the Indian Territory under the supervision of John Ross, who selected several prominent and trusted Cherokee leaders to direct the detachments. Detachments crossing the Tennessee River at Blythe Ferry were led by Hair Conrad, Elijah Hicks, Jesse Bushyhead, John Bengé, Situwakee, Old Field, Moses Daniel, Choowalooka, George Hicks, and Peter Hildebrand. Previous accounts written by Grant Foreman and James Mooney suggest these detachments crossed the Hiwassee River at Gunstocker Creek

¹⁰ Tony Holmes, "The Last Eight Ferry Boats in Tennessee – Frontier Mainstay Rapidly Disappearing, Part I" *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 47, 2 (1987): 69-73.

¹¹ Philip Thomason and Sara Parker, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Nomination Form, "Historic and Historical Archaeological Resources of the Cherokee Trail of Tears," October 2003, Section E, Page 16, 26-7, 38.

¹² *Ibid.*, Section E, Page 29.

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and the Tennessee River at Tucker's Ferry. However, letters from those who participated in the removal reveal that these detachments actually crossed at Blythe Ferry.¹³

Much of the historical context surrounding the use of ferries during the removal of the Cherokee has been compiled Phil Thomason in his National Register of Historic Places assessment of the Trail of Tears entitled "Historic and Historical Archaeological Resources of the Cherokee Trail of Tears." The following text comes from Thomason's Multiple Property Documentation Form:

Throughout their journey, the Cherokee detachments had to cross dozens of major waterways. While fording the smaller rivers and streams was possible, the major rivers had to be crossed by ferry. The Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi Rivers all lacked bridges in the 1830s and ferries were the only means of crossing. The ferries and landings at these locations played a major role in the journey of the Cherokee people.

Ferry landings of the early 19th century were typically built where the topography was conducive to building roads on either shore which allowed a gradual ascent or descent to the waterway. Ferry landings were often commercial centers where steamboats and flatboats would load or unload goods for transport elsewhere. Warehouses were often built at these locations such as the warehouse built by John and Lewis Ross at their landing in 1815 at present-day Chattanooga. The ferries themselves of this period were generally keelboats or flatboats which were polled across the river, pulled across by ropes from the other shore, or propelled by steam engine. Berry's Ferry on the Ohio River was described as a "John" or a flatboat with a steam engine in 1838.¹⁴ In December, while unloading passengers of the Moses Daniel detachment at Golconda, the steam engine on the ferry burst scalding to death two persons.

Ferries known to have been used by the Cherokee detachments include Blythe's Ferry, Kelly's Ferry, Brown's Ferry, Ross's Ferry, Robinson's Ferry, and Wylly's Ferry on the Tennessee River...¹⁵

¹³ Ibid., Section E, Page 44; Benjamin C. Nance, "The Trail of Tears in Tennessee: A Study of the Routes Used During the Cherokee Removal of 1838" (Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Division of Archaeology, 2001), 27.

¹⁴ Duane King, "Report on the Cherokee Trail of Tears: Correcting and Updating the 1992 Map Supplement" Unpublished manuscript, 1999, 30, as quoted in Thomason and Parker, Section F, Page 14.

¹⁵ Thomason and Parker, Section F, Page 14.

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It is not known what type of ferry was used during the removal. However, historical records indicate that the flatboat was commonly used to transport large groups, wagons, and horses.

Tennessee archaeologist Benjamin Nance produced a detailed assessment of the Trail of Tears routes in Tennessee. The following text comes from his 2001 report entitled, *The Trail of Tears in Tennessee: A Study of the Routes Used During the Cherokee Removal of 1838*:

Evidence from historic maps indicates that the road from the Cherokee Agency took a southward dip to Georgetown, intersecting with the direct road from Cleveland to Blythe's Ferry (now called the Georgetown Road). It is possible that a road along the Hiwassee River directly from the agency to the ferry existed in 1838, but no evidence was found during this survey for such a road. The 1838 map of the Fort Cass Emigrating Depot (Prince 1838) shows a road starting near Fort Cass and running westward along the Hiwassee River as far as South Mouse Creek. Today State Route 308 (Lower River Road) follows this same route and runs along the Hiwassee River into Meigs County and eventually to Blythe's Ferry, becoming what is now State Route 306. An 1862 map of the area (U.S. Topographical Engineers), on file at the Tennessee Division of Archaeology, shows the road coming out of Charleston and crossing Mouse Creek, then dipping southward toward Georgetown. It intersects with a road that runs between "Walker's" (probably John Walker's farmstead [Tennessee archaeological site number 40BY39] near what is now the Burlington Heights subdivision of Cleveland) and Blythe's Ferry. The present day Georgetown Road follows the same approximate course. The Civil War period map does not show a direct road from Charleston to Blythe's Ferry along the Hiwassee direct road from the agency area to Blythe's Ferry. The Cherokees camped in the vicinity of the ferry, but lack of specific locational data precludes the recording of an encampment site. The Blythe's Ferry landings are recorded as Tennessee archaeological site numbers 40MG48 and 40RH130.

From Blythe's Ferry the Northern Route went northwestward following what is today the Blythe Ferry Road (State Route 60). A newer road has cut off parts of this earlier road. The route went through Dayton and Morgantown. "Morganton Cross Roads" is shown on the 1832 Matthew Rhea map in this same area, and the 1839 postal route map shows "Smith's Cross Roads."¹⁶

Two detachments of approximately 1,700 Cherokee led by Richard Taylor and James Brown, left from camps upstream from Ross's Landing and generally followed the Northern Route, but did not

¹⁶ Nance, 28.

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cross the Tennessee River at Blythe Ferry. This variation of the Northern Route is known as Taylor's Route.¹⁷

The detachments crossing the Tennessee River at Blythe Ferry faced a series of grueling obstacles. The sheer number of Cherokee using the ferry, some 9,839 in all, with their 3,868 horses and 490 wagons surely caused long waits, much to the dismay of detachment leaders. Transporting thousands of people and horses across a major body of water also includes hazards such as drowning. Drought problems reportedly caused problems up and down the Tennessee River for much of 1838 and this may have affected the ferry operation.

After Cherokee Removal

The year 1838 is perhaps the busiest and most lucrative period in the history of Blythe Ferry, with some nine to ten thousand people crossing the Tennessee River at that point. At the junction of the Tennessee and Hiwassee Rivers, the ferry site continued as place of strategic importance to Euro-American settlers and the military. For instance, during the United States Civil War, a company of the 5th Tennessee Infantry Regiment was stationed for over a year at the ferry to guard the mouth of the Hiwassee River. The war's official records note a skirmish at Blythe Ferry on November 13, 1863.¹⁸

The ferry passed through several hands following Blythe's departure. Alfred, William, and Charles Hutcheson, III, acquired the ferry from Blythe and by 1842, Burton Holman (and later W. Napoleon Holman) operated the ferry.¹⁹ By 1900, George Spivey began operating the ferry; Spivey owned the ferry until the 1940s. At that time Chickamauga Lake was created, but this resulted in little change in the ferry's setting. Located on the tail-waters of the lake, where the level of the river has been raised seven feet, only the western landing of the ferry has been affected. Melvin Hall owned

¹⁷ Thomason and Parker, Section E, Page 43.

¹⁸ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1900), Series I, Volume 31, Chapter 43, part 1, 2.

¹⁹ Holmes, "The Last Eight Ferry Boats in Tennessee," 69-73.

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the ferry from 1960 to 1968, as did James Sinclair from 1968 to 1969, Stanley Brady from 1969 to 1973, and Wilford Caraway in 1973.²⁰

Now serving primarily as a public access point to the Tennessee River, the Blythe Ferry site is now developing as a recreational and tourist destination. In 1991, the Friends of the Cherokee Memorial, Inc. organized in an effort to oversee the design and implementation of the Cherokee Removal Memorial Park located approximately 1,000 yards inland from the Blythe Ferry site. Initial planning goals called for the preservation of the natural surroundings so as to provide visitors the opportunity to experience the landscape as it was in 1838.

Although Blythe Ferry is significant as an early nineteenth-century transportation and supply route, it remained vital to the area's economic development until the end of the twentieth century. Blythe Ferry was one of the last four operating ferries on the Tennessee River (one of only five remaining ferries in the state) before being replaced by a bridge in 1994. Until 1994, it served as an important part of the main east-west route between Bradley, Meigs, Rhea, and northern Hamilton counties. Despite no longer operating, the ferry remains an important element of early Tennessee history and is especially significant for its association to the Cherokee Removal from 1838-1839.

²⁰ Ibid.

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

See original nomination.

Boundary Justification

See original nomination.

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PHOTOGRAPH

Photographer: Dr. Carroll Van West
Middle Tennessee State University, Center for Historic Preservation
Murfreesboro, TN 37132

Date: March 2003

Negatives: Tennessee Historical Commission
2941 Lebanon Rd.
Nashville, TN 37243-0442

Ferry, facing west
1 of 2

Ferry, facing west
2 of 2