

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received JUN 13 1983

date entered JUL 27 1983

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Old Settler's Irrigation Ditch

and/or common Same

2. Location

Intersects "U.S. 283" N of Rosston

street & number Where ditch intersects U.S. Highway 283, 3½ miles south N/A of publication
of the state line, running west approx. 5½ miles and east approx. 8½ miles.

city, town Rosston, Ok. N/A vicinity of

state Oklahoma

code 40

county Harper & Beaver

code 059 & 007

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	N/A being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Settler's Ditch Reservoir and Irrigation Co. %Laurence Drake, President

street & number Route 1, Box 18

city, town Gate

N/A vicinity of

state Oklahoma 73844

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Clerk's Office

street & number Harper County Courthouse & Beaver County Courthouse

city, town Buffalo & Beaver (respectively)

state Oklahoma

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Oklahoma Preservation Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records Preservation Office, Oklahoma Historical Society

city, town Oklahoma City

state Oklahoma

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date N/A _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Old Settler's Irrigation Ditch sits in a shallow valley, now known as Ditch Valley, in the northwestern corner of Oklahoma abutting the Panhandle. This corner of the state averages twenty to twenty-two inches of rain per year, causing the High Plains to be barren, dry, treeless and enabling it to support only cattle grazing and wheat if watered from modern wells. In contrast to the natural topography of the region, the Ditch Valley, irrigated by the Old Settlers Irrigation Ditch for over eighty years, is a lush, green farmland with fields of alfalfa, oats, and wheat and rows of trees along the embankment.

The Old Settler's Irrigation Ditch was constructed between 1893 and 1905 when the area opened to settlers. It is approximately fourteen miles in length and twelve feet wide at the bottom (except for the last few miles, where it was only necessary to make it eight feet wide). At one place, the men digging the ditch had to cut through a hill twenty feet high for over five hundred feet. In most places the sloping ditch embankment forms a levy approximately ten feet high, but in some locations heights reach as much as twenty feet and the slopes of the banks spread the ditch between twenty and forty feet in width at the top. After completion in 1905 close to six thousand acres could be irrigated in a region known for its natural fertility.

An earthen diversion dam, reconstructed each year after the ice breaks up on the Cimarron River forms the headwaters for the ditch, but as the dam shifts yearly depending upon the exact location of the river's flow, the dam site was not included in the nomination.

In digging the ditch the men used horses with slips, (nonmerchanical but akin to a modern day backhoe) and manpower mostly provided by members of the company.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1893-1905 **Builder/Architect** Settler's Milling Canal and Reservoir Co.

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Old Settler's Ditch is significant because it represents a pioneer agricultural irrigation technology that enabled semi-arid land to be cultivated and support a sizable rural population in western Oklahoma. The Ditch is, today, a viable irrigation canal.

The Ditch is a visual reminder of the determination and ingenuity of the early settlers in western Oklahoma. Today, the ditch forms the life line for this valley. A small valley, known respectfully as Ditch Valley, a lush green, fertile area produces large acreages of alfalfa, oats, and wheat in contrast to the surroundings' semi-arid High Plains. Homesteaders began staking out claims in 1893 on the High Plains of north western Oklahoma, known as the Cherokee Outlet, a region plagued by a shortage of water.

Soon after settlement began in this northwestern corner of what became Harper County, Oklahoma in 1907, a group of farmers conceived the idea of irrigating the dry prairie land by digging an irrigation ditch to divert the water from the Cimarron River. Between 1893 and 1905, the farmers organized into the Settler's Milling Canal and Reservoir Company, purchased the easements and dug the ditch themselves with the aid of horses and mules. The ditch begins in the northeastern corner of the Oklahoma Panhandle at the Cimarron River and runs east into Harper County for fourteen miles. In most places the bottom of the ditch bed is twelve feet wide, but with the sloping embankments and levies, the top expanse nears sixty feet in many places. After completion prior to statehood, the farmers along the ditch could irrigate three to six thousand acres of naturally fertile farmland for crops of alfalfa, wheat, oats, and maize by diverting the water each spring from the Cimarron River.

In 1927, the company reorganized as the Settler's Ditch, Reservoir and Irrigation Company and during the Dust Bowl and drought of the 1930's, the ditch insured their survival. In 1942, the company decided to take advantage of the new government programs (Soil Conservation Service, Water Facilities Board and Farm Security Administration) to make repairs to the ditch and to construct a more permanent diversion control on the river, but floods have since destroyed the modern construction and the farmers have returned to the old technique of building up a sand diversion dam each spring at the head of the ditch.

Although several other projects were constructed at the same time, the Old Settler's Ditch was the only one to remain in use until the present day, serving the valley for over eighty years. Most of the other ditches were abandoned by the 1940's.

Today, this method of irrigation is quite unusual with the advent of drilling water wells and it is also unusual in its retention of rights to divert water directly from a river. Close to six thousand acres utilize the water from the Old Settler's Ditch, insuring at least two alfalfa cuttings per year, plus crops of oats, wheat, and feed for the hogs and dairy cattle in Ditch Valley. The only alterations to the ditch have been the construction of a few small concrete flumes to allow better access to the ditch's water.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 102 acres

Quadrangle name See continuation sheet

Quadrangle scale 7.5 min.

UTM References

A

Zone	Easting			Northing					

B

Zone	Easting			Northing					

C

Zone	Easting			Northing					

D

Zone	Easting			Northing					

E

Zone	Easting			Northing					

F

Zone	Easting			Northing					

G

Zone	Easting			Northing					

H

Zone	Easting			Northing					

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county Harper code 059

state code county Beaver code 007

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Karen Bode Curths Supervised by Mary Ann Anders

organization Oklahoma Preservation Survey date 1982, September

street & number 502 Math Sciences telephone 624-5678

city or town Stillwater, Oklahoma State University state Oklahoma

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *C. E. Metcalf* date 5/31/83

title _____ date _____

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

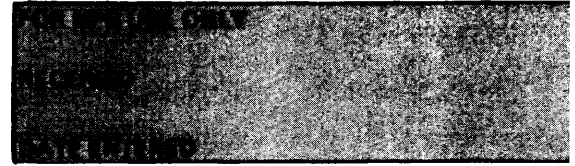
Beth Givens date 7/27/83
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**



CONTINUATION SHEET

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Bibliographical References:

Sage and Sod; Harper County, Oklahoma, 1885-1974. Volume II. Harper County Historical Society, 1975.

U. S. Department of Agriculture. Soil Conservation Service. Office Records on Old Settler's Irrigation Ditch. Harper County, Oklahoma. Unpublished.

U. S. Department of Agriculture. Soil Conservation Service. Soil Survey. Beaver County, Oklahoma. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1962.

_____. Soil Survey. Harper County Oklahoma. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960.

Interviews:

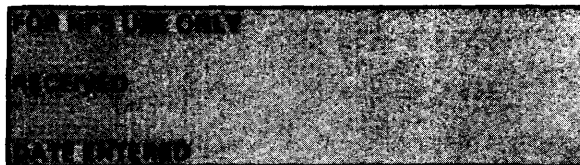
Laurence Drake, Ditch Valley, June 24, 1982.

Delbert George, U.S.D.A. Office, Buffalo, June 25, 1982.

Marcus Terry, Ditch Valley, June 24, 1982.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**



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UTM References:

- A: Gate NE Oklahoma 1970--14 407660 4088360
- B: Rosston NW, Oklahoma 1970--14 413640 4089460
- C: Rosston NW, Oklahoma 1970--14 420540 4089380
- D: Rosston NE, Oklahoma 1970--14 423005 4092000

Verbal Boundary Description:

At the section line road crossing U.S. Highway 283 three miles south of the Kansas state line, turn west and follow the road that becomes the trail paralleling the ditch to the point where the ditch and trail end at the Cimarron River. This is the point of beginning, 1200 feet north and 600 feet east of the southwest corner of Section 34, Township 6 North, Range 28 East, Cimarron Meridian. From this point, centered at the bottom of the ditch and for a total width of 60 feet, follow the ditch for approximately 14 miles to the terminus, the northwest corner of Section 25, Township 29 North, Range 25 West, Indian Meridian.