

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

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Oklahoma	
COUNTY: Bryan	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
JUN 29 1972	

1. NAME

COMMON:
Colbert's Ferry

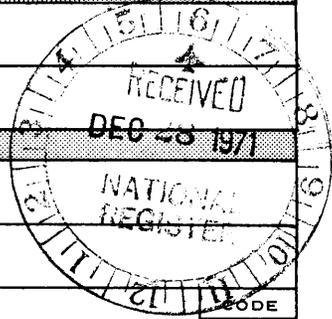
AND/OR HISTORIC:
Colbert's Ferry and Butterfield Stage Station

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
c. 3 m. SE of

CITY OR TOWN:
Colbert

STATE: **Oklahoma** CODE: **40** COUNTY: **Bryan** CODE: **013**



3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____ _____

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: **E. C. McMahan** (Owner of Ferry Site on North bank of Red River. Nearby historic sites owned by other individuals.)

STREET AND NUMBER: **P. O. Box 831**

CITY OR TOWN: **Colbert** STATE: **Oklahoma** CODE: **40**

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: **Office of the County Clerk**

STREET AND NUMBER: **Bryan County Courthouse**

CITY OR TOWN: **Durant** STATE: **Oklahoma** CODE: **40**

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: **Oklahoma Historic Sites Survey**

DATE OF SURVEY: **1958** Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: **Oklahoma Historical Society**

STREET AND NUMBER: **Historical Building**

CITY OR TOWN: **Oklahoma City** STATE: **Oklahoma** CODE: **40**

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DATE

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Waterman L. Ormsby, a New York Herald Tribune writer, was the only through passenger on the first run of the Overland Mail Stage from St. Louis to San Francisco in 1858. He has left a vivid and detailed picture of life at Colbert's Ferry.

We arrived here on Monday, the 20th [of September] at ten minutes to ten - being altogether thirty-four hours ahead of time to this point. But here was a difficulty. There was no team to carry on the mail. . . . We had a good dinner and I took advantage of the opportunity to write you - the first chance off the wagon since Thursday, the 16th.

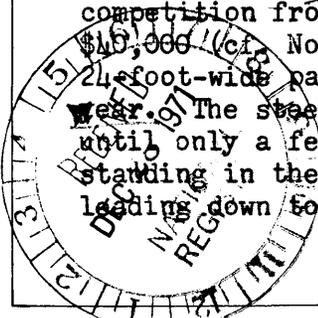
Mr. Colbert . . . has owned and run this ferry five years and has had excellent patronage. . . . Mr. Colbert evinces some enterprise in carrying the stage of the company across his ferry free of charge in consideration of the increased travel which it will bring his way. He also stipulates to keep the neighboring roads in excellent order and has already done much towards it. He had a large gang of slaves at work on the banks of the river cutting away the sand so as to make the ascent easy. His boat is simply a sort of raft pushed across the shallow stream by the aid of poles in the hands of sturdy slaves. The fare for a four-horse team is a dollar and a quarter and the net revenue of the ferry about \$1,000.00 per annum. . . . He has a fine farm and raises considerable corn . . . At his table I saw sugar, butter and pastry - the first two of which have been exceedingly rare articles since I left Fort Smith and the last of which I have not seen anywhere else since I left Fort Smith. . . .

We crossed the wide, shallow and muddy Red River on one of Mr. Colbert's boats and saw quite a large number of his slaves busily engaged in lowering the present steep grade up the bank.

John Malcolm went to work for Mr. Colbert in 1871. In his memoirs he writes: "The boat carried four two-horse wagons. The toll was \$1 for a two-horse wagon, \$1.25 for four-horse wagons and \$1.50 for six-horse wagons; 25 cents for man and horse, and 10 cents a head for loose cattle or horses. There was very heavy immigration all through '71 and '72 and we would put across from 25 to 200 wagons per day besides loose stock . . ."

The wagon bridge Colbert built in 1874-1875 -- to counter competition from the newly completed M-K-T Railroad -- cost some \$40,000 (cf. No. 8), was 577 feet long and sixteen feet wide, with a 24-foot-wide passing section in the center. It lasted less than a year. The steel-frame toll bridge that eventually succeeded it lasted until only a few years ago. But it is marked today only by two piers standing in the river. To the left (east) of the sunken dirt road leading down to the bridge site stands the unused toll house. Just

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No. 7. Description

Colbert's Ferry

beyond it an eroded dirt lane drops down the sand bank of the river to the water-level ferry site itself. With the old toll bridge gone and the (now) twin federal highway bridges (US 69-75) upstream to the right and out of sight, the site must strongly resemble that described by Correspondent Ormsby in 1858. Standing beside the long-abandoned toll house, the writer of this nomination talked with the present owner of the property, listened as he told of the three cottonwood trees on the south (Texas) side of the Red River to which the ferry cable was anchored - and the big single cottonwood on this side. All are gone now, but he pointed out their location, indicated the course of the road down to the ferry, and expressed the wish that perhaps someday a reconstructed ferry could once again carry the nostalgically-inclined traveler across the river as it had over a century ago.

The L-shaped old toll house - a two-door, white frame structure retired in 1931 -- is somewhat decayed, but not irreparably so. As for the Colbert home/stage station a quarter mile to the northeast, on the flat above the river, it can be located today only by foundation stones, a nearby cellar, and the Colbert family burying ground. But it has been described by Holmes Colbert, a son of B. F. Colbert, as consisting of two main rooms, approximately 16 x 18 feet with a 12-foot dogtrot between and two lean-to rooms behind - one a sleeping room, the other a dining room. The kitchen, with its large fireplace, was a separate log structure. All were constructed of the best materials obtainable and the workmanship represented the best of that day.



SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century | |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1853-1870s

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

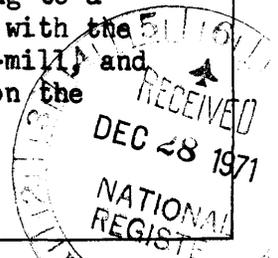
The site of Colbert's Ferry on Red River -- where the so-called Texas Road crossed the boundary separating Indian Territory and Texas between the present towns of Durant and Denison -- has been important historically for a century and a half - well before and long after the ferry itself offered transport across the unpredictable stream for man and beast, for freight wagon and mail-and-passenger-carrying stagecoach.

"Beginning as early as 1822," notes Historian Grant Foreman, "this great highway helped to populate Texas and served important pioneering traffic north and south through eastern Oklahoma. For half a century, until the coming of the railroad in 1872 and for many years after, thousands of restless homeseekers were seen in motion along this . . . TEXAS ROAD. It was so called in contemporary vernacular, in current newspaper accounts, in army correspondence, and on maps of the period."

The tremendous importance of the route (which followed originally an old Osage Trace from the northeastern corner of present Oklahoma to the Three Forks area where the Grand and Verdigris Rivers joined the Arkansas) is easy to document. The first railroad to be built in the Indian country -- the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas -- paralleled the old road and gradually absorbed its traffic. And today, ironically, U. S. 69, which also closely parallels the Texas Road from Kansas to the Red River, now absorbs much of the M-K-T's traffic. All of the crossings were and, in the case of the present highway and railroad bridges, are in this immediate area, just up-river from the ford/ferry site. (In the pre-ferry days of 1845, Foreman says, "it was reported that a thousand wagons had crossed the Red River into Texas in six weeks.")

Benjamin Franklin Colbert (of the well known, influential - and numerous - Chickasaw family) moved to this area from Mississippi in 1846. A man "of great sagacity and business tact," according to a contemporary, he soon owned a 500-acre plantation, operated with the help of some 25 slaves, as well as a steam sawmill, a grist-mill, and a cotton gin. In 1853 he established his first ferry here on the Texas Road.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Foreman, Grant, Down the Texas Road, University of Oklahoma Press, 1936, pp. 8-9.
 Malcolm, John, "Colbert Ferry on Red River," Recollections recorded by W. B. Morrison, The Chronicles of Oklahoma, Vol. XVI (1928), pp. 302-314.
 Ormsby, Waterman L., The Butterfield Overland Mail, edited by The Huntington Library, 1942.
 Ruth, Kent and Others, Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State, University of Oklahoma Press, 1957, pp. 406-407.
 --- Report on the Butterfield Overland Mail, A special Committee Report, The Chronicles of Oklahoma, Vol. XXXVI (1958), pp. 469-471.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

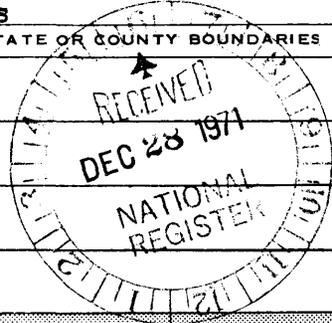
LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	(Colbert's Ferry: red check)			33° 49' 10"	96° 31' 19"	
NE				Colbert's Home/Stage Station (black)		
SE	° : "	° : "		33 49 14	96 31 05	
SW	° : "	° : "				

NO 51
H1

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **5 acres**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE



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11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: **Kent Ruth, Deputy**

ORGANIZATION: **Oklahoma Historical Society** DATE: **October 1971**

STREET AND NUMBER: **Historical Building**

CITY OR TOWN: **Oklahoma City** STATE: **Oklahoma** CODE: **40**

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name: [Signature]

[Signature]

Date: 10/29/71

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

[Signature]
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: 10/29/71

ATTEST: [Signature]
 Keeper of The National Register

Date: _____

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No. 8. Significance - 2

Colbert's Ferry

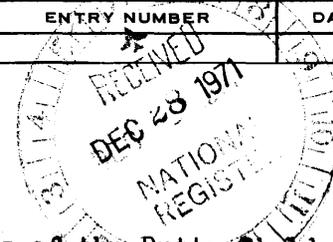
From 1858 to 1861 it carried the Concord stages of the Butterfield Overland Mail across the river. During the Civil War years Colbert's boats were frequently used by Confederate forces, including such figures as Stand Watie, William Penn Adair, and William C. Quantrill. Afterwards, both freight and passenger traffic was heavy until the M-K-T Railroad was completed. The first "Katy" passenger train crossed the river on Christmas Day 1872. The ferry business promptly slumped.

But Colbert, a man of considerable means by this time, had no intention of giving up the competition without a struggle. While continuing to run his ferry, he went to Washington and obtained a charter to build a bridge. Work on it began in 1874 and the following year it was open for traffic - at an estimated cost of \$40,000. The wooden structure was 577 feet long and sixteen feet wide, with a 24-foot-wide passing section for teams in the center.

The impressive span lasted a few days less than a year. Then an unusually high flood on the Red washed out, first the M-K-T bridge, then Colbert's wagon bridge. Within ten days Colbert's ferries were running again - transferring passengers and mail from the various trains cut off by the washout! Colbert later turned his charter to the Texas Toll Bridge Company, which operated a toll bridge at this crossing until 1931 when the so-called Red River Bridge War broke out.

The stage was set in 1929 when Texas and Oklahoma, with the consent of Congress, began construction of a free bridge. The toll bridge stockholders eventually secured an injunction from a federal district court to prevent opening of the free structure, whereupon the Texas governor threw up barricades at its southern end. But Oklahoma's governor at the time was William H. "Alfalfa Bill" Murray, one of the West's more colorful figures. Pointing to a previous Supreme Court decision that placed both banks of the Red under Oklahoma jurisdiction, he called out the National Guard, ordered it to seize the bridge, remove the barricades, and let traffic flow undisturbed. As a final gesture of defiance he ordered the highway approaching the north (Oklahoma) end of the toll bridge plowed up, the paving removed. The courts eventually settled the "War" and the toll bridge was used until the late 1950s, but by a steadily declining local traffic. Today it is marked only by two piers and the unused toll house.

Also of interest in the area (up on the flat north and east of the ferry/bridge site itself) are the fading evidences of B. F. Colbert's original home. Built in 1848, it was a single-story, double log house with open hall (dogtrot) between, smaller lean-to rooms beyond. In 1858 the home became the Butterfield station, one of twelve along the route's



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No. 8. Significance - 3

Colbert's Ferry

192-mile, northeast/southwest course from Fort Smith to Colbert's Ferry. A storm cellar remains today, along with an outline of the old foundations, and the family burial plot near by with its most impressive stone, fittingly enough, reading:

B. F. Colbert

Born Dec. 18, 1826

Died March 11, 1893

Amiable and Beloved Husband Farewell

Not on this Perishing Stone

But in the Book of Life

And in the Hearts of thy Afflicted Friends

Is Thy Worth Recorded.

