

The Resurrection of Smith's Station,
a Butterfield Overland Mail Station, 1858-1861
by Joe R. Allen

Chimney Creek Ranch

The Chimney Creek Ranch located in southwestern Shackelford County, Texas and is about 12 miles west of Albany and 20 miles northwest of Abilene.

Near the center of the ranch is the original headquarters that began as a dugout during the Civil War era. Sometime in the 1880's the existing ranch house was built over the dugout, which was then converted to a cellar. The house was built on high ground on the east side of a small-unnamed tributary of the Clear Fork of the Brazos River.

George B. Horsfull and John F. Horsfull, the first owners of record, sold the ranch in 1873. There were three subsequent sales before G. R. Davis purchased the Chimney Creek Ranch from Ella Matthews Conrad in 1920.

Today G. R. Davis's great grandsons, Hank and Ted Paup, own and operate the ranch. Under their direction the ranch has prospered and become known for its successful range management, soil & water conservation efforts, hunting and development of historic sites within the ranch confines.

The old Overland mail station

In 1858, the Butterfield Overland Mail Company built Smith's Station on the north bank of a small creek at a place where an existing military road crossed it. The creek referenced here, a tributary of the Clear Fork of the Brazos River, had no name at that time and was later named Chimney Creek in the 1870's when the Chimney Creek Ranch received its name.

The Fort Phantom Hill mail station is 12 miles to the southwest of Smith's Station and the Clear Fork Station is 23 miles to the northeast.

Waterman Ormsby was a passenger on the first Overland mail delivery that left Tipton, Missouri on September 16, 1858. The destination, San Francisco, California, was a trip to be made in twenty-five days or less.

Ormsby, a correspondent for the *New York Herald* newspaper, was the only through passenger over the entire route and he reported back to his readers as he traveled, writing about each station

along the 2766 mile route.

Ormsby gave this description of Smith's Station, "Our next stopping place was at Smith's station, twenty-three miles from Clear Fork, on the banks of a small creek.

No house had been built yet, those at the station living in tents. They had nearly finished a fine corral for the stock, making it of brush (as no timber could be had) and filling the chinks with mud. Our supper consisted of cake cooked in the coals, clear coffee, and some dried beef cooked in Mrs. Smith's best style. We changed horses or mules and swallowed supper in double quick time and were soon on our way again." This is the only first hand account describing Smith's Station that has been found to date. All other accounts are secondary.

Smith's Station was a meal station for travelers and a change station which supplied fresh mules or horses that pulled the lighter built celerity wagon across this portion of the route.

Smith's Station operated continuously from September 22, 1858 until the War Between the States broke out in 1861 at which time all Butterfield routes ceased operations in Texas. Apparently the station operators, Mr. & Mrs. Smith, left Texas also. To date nothing about these two people has been learned as to who they were, where they came from or where they went. All leads come to dead ends.

The Road System

Captain Randolph B. Marcy commanded General William G. Belknap's escort on the tour that selected the sites for forts on the Texas frontier in 1851. Forts Belknap and Phantom Hill were completed in 1851 and Fort Chadbourne 1852. A military road connecting these frontier forts was laid at the same time, which was originally called the Fort Belknap to Fort Phantom Road. The Butterfield Overland Mail Co. used this portion of the old military road from 1858 until 1861.

Six and three quarters miles of the old Fort Belknap to Fort Phantom Road traces across the modern day Chimney Creek Ranch. The ranch benefits historically from this road because of who used and when it was in use. It was the first major road through modern day Shackelford County, Texas .It was the road on which Smith's Station was placed in 1858.

Smith's Station is the only documented Butterfield station in Shackelford County.

Many famous travelers also used this road. Col. James B. Leach wagon train of 1857, the Butterfield Overland Mail 1858-1861, and Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving on their first cattle drive in 1866 are examples. In 1871, William Tecumseh Sherman traveled this road when studying the Indian threat on the Texas frontier. With him was Randolph Baines Marcy who laid out the road in 1851.

Other users of this road included countless immigrants, buffalo hunters, Indians, and early

settlers in Shackelford County.

The resurrection begins

In 1981 G. R. Davis's granddaughter, Mary Frances "Chan" Johnson Driscoll, wrote an essay entitled *Chimney Creek Crossings*, which may have inspired a time of heritage renewal for this ranching family.

During this time of renewal Hank and Anne Paup, and Ted and Nancy Paup were deeply involved in giving the ranch a new facelift.

They began by documenting history, adding on to the ranch headquarters, erecting a chimney to commemorate a long past chimney after which both Chimney Creek and the Chimney Creek Ranch were named.

Two Texas state historical were approved and erected, one on the site of the 1900 Bud Matthews railroad switch, and the other on Chimney Creek to mark the site of the old Smith's Butterfield Overland mail Station built there in 1858.

The old mail station was of particular historical fascination to Hank and Ted and by the time they became involved it's remnants had dwindled to only a small mound of stones along side of a lonesome little creek.

This begged the question. "Why just a small stack of stones?"

Margaret and Roscoe Conkling, co- authors of *The Butterfield Overland Mail 1857-1869*, visited the Smith's Station site in 1935 and later wrote "the corral and station were constructed from stone, judging from the ruins that remain today", suggesting more than a small stack of stone.

So, where did all the rock go? This and other questions are answered as the story goes on.

As bits and pieces of information accumulated from writers like Waterman Ormsby, Margaret and Roscoe Conkling, A.C Greene, Dr. Lawrence Clayton, and from the lore of ranch managers, local historians, and from archaeological works, the Paup brothers formulated a clearer picture of Smith's Station and it's historical importance.

Armed with three decades of knowledge, Hank and Ted decided to recreate Smith's Station.

Questions & Solutions related to recreation

As with any new idea, questions arose about placement; structure style, size, who would construct it, where would the building stone come from and so on. A very large challenge!

The first major question to be answered was what should Smith's Station look like?

Ormsby's description of Smith's Station provided no information about the actual structure of the station. He stated: "No house had been built yet, those at the station living in tents. They had nearly completed a fine corral for the stock, making it of brush (as no timber could be had) and filling the chinks with mud".

The most reliable secondary account as to what Smith's Station looked like came from Roscoe & Margaret Conkling in the 1930's. The Conklings co-authored *The Butterfield Overland Mail 1857-1869*. They visited the Chimney Creek Ranch and Smith's Station and stated "the corral and station were constructed from stone, judging from the ruins that remain today".

According to local lore the original building stone for Smith's Station was removed from the site decades ago, supposedly by the Texas Highway Department, and the stone was ground up to make road base for use in the construction of State Hwy 351.

Mr. Robert Waller, long time grazing tenant of the Chimney Creek Ranch stated that any remaining rock was scattered by "chaining", which is a common practice used by ranchers of clearing brush by pulling very heavy chains between tractors or bulldozers.

To aide with visualization of how Smith's Station might or should look, sketches were drawn and a small model was built.

Another major consideration was how the rock would be applied to make the structure appear historically accurate. It would need to be a dry stacked limestone structure. So, a critical look was given to other Butterfield stations throughout west Texas.

Head of Concho station, located in Irion County, 133 miles to the southwest of Smith's, and 43 miles west of San Angelo was chosen to pattern after to achieve the historical dry stacked stone look. Interestingly, Ormsby's September 25, 1858 description of Head of Concho Station was very similar to the description he gave of Smith's Station. He stated "We reached the Head of Concha (Concho) River early in the morning and found there a most comfortable camp. The men had not yet had time to build a house and were living in tents. They had made a large corral of bushes---."

Both Smith's Station and Head of Concho Station were completed sometime after the route opened for service. Both were constructed of native limestone. However, long after the mail service ceased, Smith's Station did not survive the ages. Head of Concho ruins may be the best-unrestored station ruins in west Texas. It was for this reason that this sister station was chosen for Smith's Station esthetic style.

The next big question, how big should the station be?

Since none of the Butterfield stone stations followed a set size and no two were alike there was discretion as to the size of the Smith's Station structure and how it should look.

After considering examples of Butterfield mail stations in Texas, the Delaware Springs Station located in Culberson County, Texas was chosen to pattern after because of its concise size and because the Conklings had created a very historically accurate drawing of that station in 1932. Also, Larry Riemenschneider, archaeologist with the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, conducted a surface survey in his 1992 and suggested in his report that he believed it to be similar in style to the Delaware Station.

Kelvin Mullins, construction manager and architect, Imperial Construction, Inc., of Fort Worth, Texas was commissioned to make working architectural drawings of the structure to be replicated.

It was decided that the structure to be built would have 26' X 40' outer walls, with a 12'x12' interior /corner room. The walls would be 6' high and 20" thick. Care would be taken to guard historical accuracy. According to Mullins --- "The challenge was to re-create the structure so it looked authentic as to what the original structure might have looked like but with new construction. "

It was decided to install concrete foundations below grade with vertical rebar inside the stacked with concrete mortar within the center of the walls for added strength and support. Care would be taken so that no concrete or rebar would be visible from any exterior surface angle.

The exterior wall would be chinked, which is installing small pieces of stone in the cracks between the stones to further the old historical appearance.

The building material would field stone (limestone), like the stone that had been hauled away.

Replacement stone presented yet another challenge. Where could enough rock be procured to build a 26' X 40' structure with a 12'x12' interior /corner room with 20" thick walls, 6'high outer walls?

There was plenty of limestone that could be quarried, but it would have a fresh quarried look, rather than a weathered look.

A neighboring rancher, Scooter Morris from Abilene, had an old dry stacked stone wall that was once used as a corral. Mr. Morris donated the stone, with the understanding that the Paup's would be responsible for moving it. David White, a contractor from Lueders, palletized the stone and relocated it to the Smith Station site. There were 65 pallets of stone which turned out to be

the exact amount required for the re-creation project.

Placement of the station was a major question with a relatively easy solution because of archaeological work done between 1992 and 2005.

Larry Riemenschneider had done a surface survey of the site in 1992 attempting to determine locations of the house and corral. He probed the ground with steel rods to locate any remaining stones. Where the stones were found was plotted on a grid.

Because of the surface damage caused by chaining and the fact that most of the stone had hauled away, the exact location of the house and corral was problematical except for the probable location of a chimney. Further work was needed.

Glen Ely, Patrick, Dearen, and Joe Allen visited the ranch in 2001 as part of Ely's study of Butterfield stations sites in Texas. Following the visit Allen was hired to extract the metal artifacts from the site and plot where each was found on a grid.

Allen used the same datum point used by Riemenschneider and a similar grid.

The datum point referred to is the site of 1982 Texas State Historical marker, placed there under the direction of, Joseph E. Blanton of Albany.

Between 2002 and 2005 the artifacts were extracted and plotted on a grid, then with the aid of computer technology a semi-transparent grid was made and layered over the Riemenschneider grid, revealing a very plain print as to the exact location of the Smith's Station house.

In 2010 Kelvin Mullins staked off the re-creation site. It took time to find a local masonry contractor. During the wait time, Tony Jensen of Lueders, set out clearing about 450 yards of the old road coming in to the station site from the north east and to generally clear the station site of unwanted cactus and shrubs.

It took some time to find a local mason to install the stone walls.

In 2011, Larry Young Masonry of Clyde, Texas was hired to rebuild Smith's Station.

Young followed strict instructions on building a site that could endure the ages, yet maintain the historical look of an old stone station structure.

The construction work began by digging footings and trenches for the sub terrain foundation upon which the dry stacked walls would be placed. The Paup brothers oversaw the project's progress.

The masonry began and care was taken to maintain the historically correct look of dry stacked walls while rebar and mortar were used well inside the walls to provide strength for the structure to withstand the test of time.

The work neared completion by chinking the walls to give an authentic look and to provide added strength.

A final inspection of Larry Young's work was done and approved .

Smith's Station was completed in August 2011. The newly recreated Smith's Station site, like a good wine, will improve with age as the construction scars heal. Family and friends are currently enjoying it and it will be enjoyed for generations to come.

