

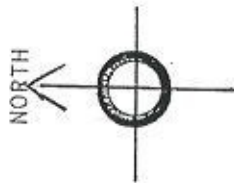
NARRATIVE HISTORY
TO SUPPORT APPLICATION FOR HISTORICAL MARKER FOR

SMITH'S STATION
ON THE
BUTTERFIELD OVERLAND MAIL ROUTE

by

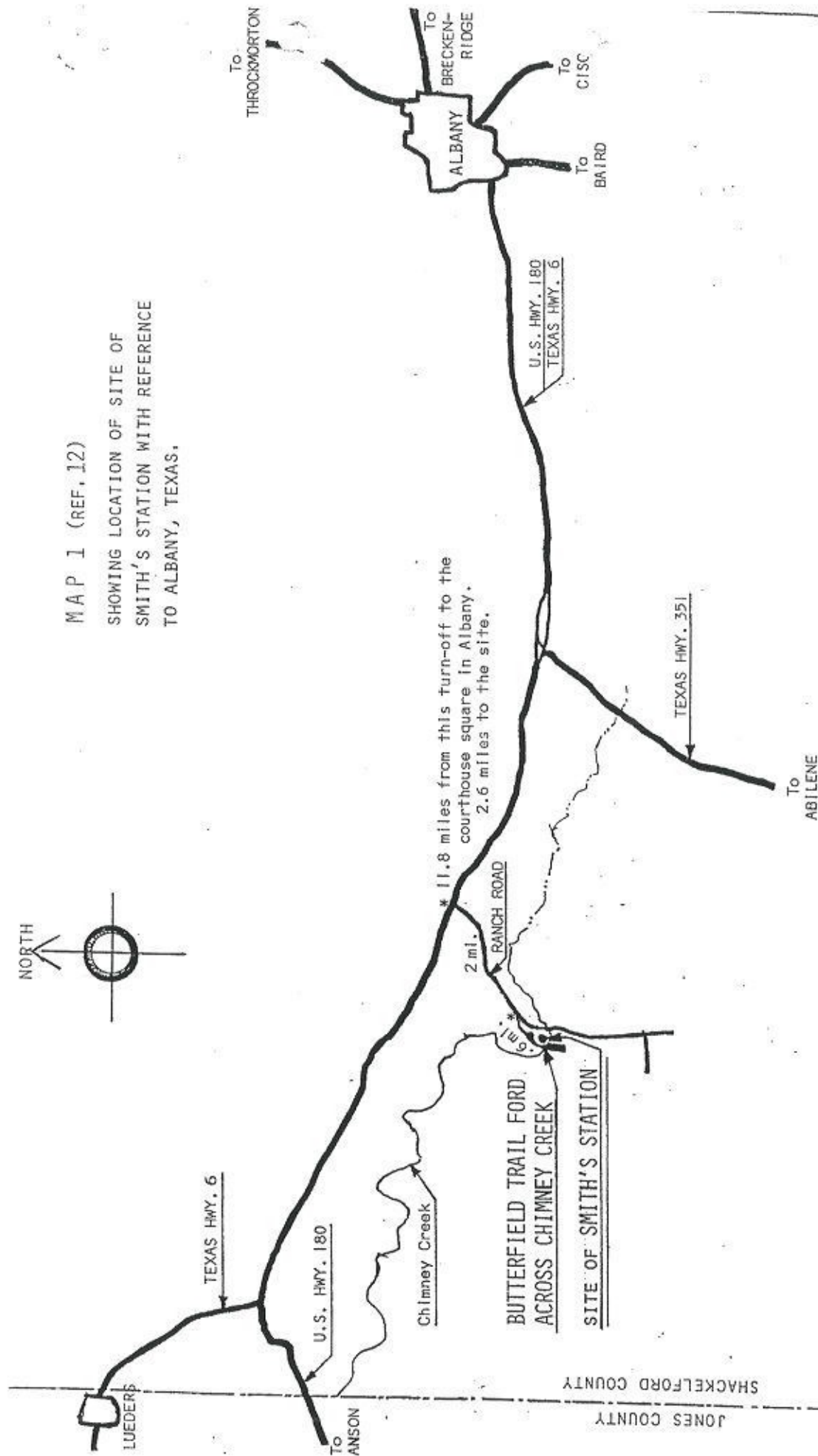
JOSEPH E. BLANTON

[MEMBER, SHACKELFORD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION]



MAP 1 (REF. 12)

SHOWING LOCATION OF SITE OF
SMITH'S STATION WITH REFERENCE
TO ALBANY, TEXAS.



SMITH'S STATION

Smith's Station,¹ the only stand on the Butterfield Overland Mail Route in what is now Shackelford County, Texas, was situated on the north bank of Chimney Creek, a short tributary of the Clear Fork of the Brazos River, at approximately 32°-42'-25" north latitude and 99°-32'-36" west longitude.² The Conklings gave the distance from Smith's to Clear Fork, the next station to the northeast, as twenty-six miles³ and that to Fort Phantom Hill, the next station to the southwest, as twelve miles.⁴ The site is about fifteen miles west of Albany by U.S. Highway 180 and a ranch road.⁵ Describing the road from Clear Fork Station through Smith's Station and on to Fort Phantom Hill, J. W. Williams wrote, "From here the mapped road bore to the southwest, avoiding much of the broken hill country west of the site of Albany, and crossing the course of the modern Stamford-Albany highway two miles southeast of the railroad flag station known as Budmatthews.⁶ Two miles south of Budmatthews, the road crossed Chimney Creek and continued in a somewhat westerly direction to the county line, where it crossed Deadman's Creek in Section nine of Block fourteen, Texas and Pacific Railroad surveys. Without any great change of course, the old road passed on and crossed Elm Creek about a mile and a half above its junction with the Clear Fork, and from this crossing extended due west for about one-half a mile directly into the ruins of old Fort Phantom Hill."⁷

The site is in Section 10, Block 13, of the Texas and Pacific Railway Company lands on what has been known for a century or more as the Chimney Creek Ranch.⁸ The first owners of record were George B. Horsfull and John F. Horsfull who on June 19, 1883, conveyed the property to A. W. Rhodes⁹ who sold it to Joseph Kile on August 15, 1883.¹⁰ On February 28, 1889, the property was patented to R. B. Thompson, trustee of the estate of Joseph Kile, deceased, by Governor L. S. Ross.¹¹ On January 12, 1903, J. M. Kile and wife conveyed the section to Virginia A. King¹² who sold it to Ella M. Conrad on July 20, 1909.¹³ Various undivided fractional interests passed to Mrs. Conrad's sons, John N., Louis B. and George R. Conrad, and to her brother-in-law, George T. Reynolds.¹⁴ On June 1, 1920, Mrs. Conrad, George R. Conrad and George T. Reynolds sold the property to G. R. Davis,¹⁵ and from him it passed by way of his daughter, Robbie Davis Johnson, to the Robbie Davis Johnson Trust, Mary Frances Driscoll and the Midland National Bank, Trustees,¹⁶ where title currently lies.¹⁷

The Butterfield Overland Mail was organized by John Butterfield, its first president.¹⁸ The mail contract with the United States Government was signed on September 16, 1857.¹⁹ The first west-bound mail left St. Louis a year to the day after the contract was signed while the first east-bound stage left San Francisco at 12:10 A.M. on September 15, 1858. The contract required that the trip each way be made in twenty-five days or less. The first westward run was completed in thirty minutes less than twenty-four days,



MAP 2 (REF. 13)

SITE OF SMITH'S STATION AND LOCATION OF CHIMNEY CREEK
RANCH HEADQUARTERS AND BUD MATTHEWS SWITCH

"the fastest time for the overland journey up to that date." The coaches travelled day and night at speeds ranging from three to twelve miles per hour, depending upon the terrain.²⁰ The Butterfield route was over already well-established roads. Of a portion of the trail between Smith's Station and Clear Fork Station, Sallie Reynolds Matthews wrote, "The old Butterfield stage route passes through our ranch, the route so many wagon trains took during the famous gold rush to California."²¹

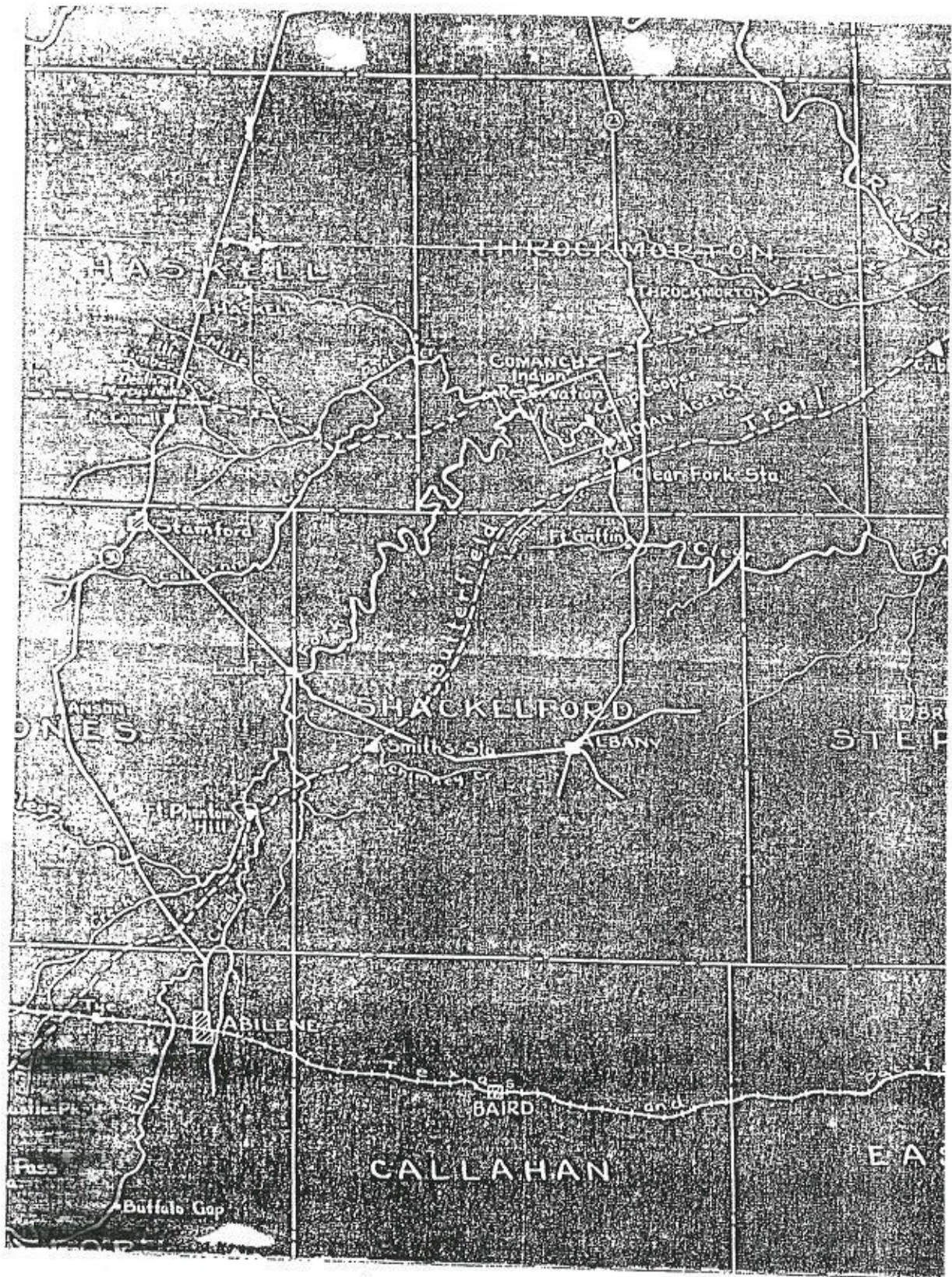
The first west-bound through passenger fare was two hundred dollars, while the east-bound fare was half that amount. Later the through fare was changed to one hundred fifty dollars each way with the "way" fare ten cents a mile.²² The price of the meals served to the passengers at the stations ranged from forty cents to a dollar.²³

John Butterfield, who rode the first stage from Missouri to Fort Smith, Arkansas, was given high praise by Waterman L. Ormsby, a special correspondent of the New York *Herald* and the only through passenger on the first west-bound run.²⁴ The stage arrived at Smith's Station for supper on Wednesday, September 22, 1858. Ormsby described it in this way, "Our next stopping place was at Smith's Station, twenty-three miles²⁵ 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 in 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."²⁶ (Mules replaced horses in Indian areas as they were not the temptation for Indian raids that horses proved to be.)²⁷ He mentioned the "mesquite timber"²⁸ — a sorry landscape" around Smith's Station and Fort Phantom Hill.²⁹

Earlier in the day, after a hurried bath in the muddy water of the Clear Fork of the Brazos River, Ormsby had been obliged to finish dressing in the coach as the teams had been changed so quickly.³⁰ So important was speed that the station-keepers listened for the faraway sound of the conductor's bugle so that they could have all in readiness upon the arrival of the stage.³¹

Another newspaper correspondent, J. M. Farwell, who made the east-bound trip later in the year, wrote: "Leaving Phantom Hill, we came to Smith's Station, a distance of ten miles,³² passing numerous herds of antelope on our way. To Clear Creek³³ is twenty-five miles,³² and as a whole the road may be called good, though it is intersected, along the last drive, by a number of deep 'gullies.' Deer and turkeys are abundant; the latter we see in flocks of twenty to forty."³⁴

An east-bound trip in the summer of 1860 was written up by William Tallack. Of the day which included Smith's Station, he wrote that they "passed over a blackened tract of ground, still smouldering in places after a recent prairie fire, which was still burning in the distance." He further related that his driver told him of once having "to wait for half an hour whilst a



MAP 3

DETAIL FROM JESSE WALLACE WILLIAMS'S MAP (REF. 14).

Smith's Station at Co-ordinates A-A.

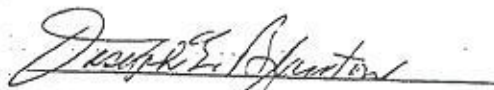
long herd of buffaloes passed by; but we have as yet seen none, as they are gone northward during the summer heats." He recounted that each passenger except himself had lost while dozing at least one hat "overboard" since leaving San Francisco.³⁵

Instead of the regular stage coaches which were used over the east and west extremes of the route, a lighter carriage was driven through this area. The Conklings described them as follows, "The 'celerity' wagon was an innovation on the part of Butterfield to provide a lighter and faster type of vehicle for use on the rougher sections of the route, and also to furnish something like an overland mail coach sleeper. The carriage of this vehicle was built on the same lines as that of the regular coach, but had smaller wheels. The lower part of the body was fashioned much the same as the regular coach body also, but the top was a frame structure covered with heavy duck, the doors and sides provided with curtains of the same material. This vehicle had a capacity for nine inside passengers only. The three inside seats were so constructed that they could be adjusted and made into a bed. With its low center of gravity this wagon was less liable to an upset than the regular coach."³⁶

Nothing is known of the Smith who was the station-keeper, not even his first name. The Conklings wrote that the name *Chimney Creek* could have been suggested by the limestone chimney of the station;³⁷ it is generally believed by those who have lived on the ranch that a pile of stones immediately upstream from where the old stage road fords the creek is what remains of the station chimney.³⁸ Many corral stones have been hauled from the ranch for road construction. While there is substantial evidence that the old part of the Chimney Creek Ranch house, a mile or so to the north, was once a stage station,³⁹ it was not in existence at the time the southern route of the Butterfield Overland Mail was abandoned.⁴⁰

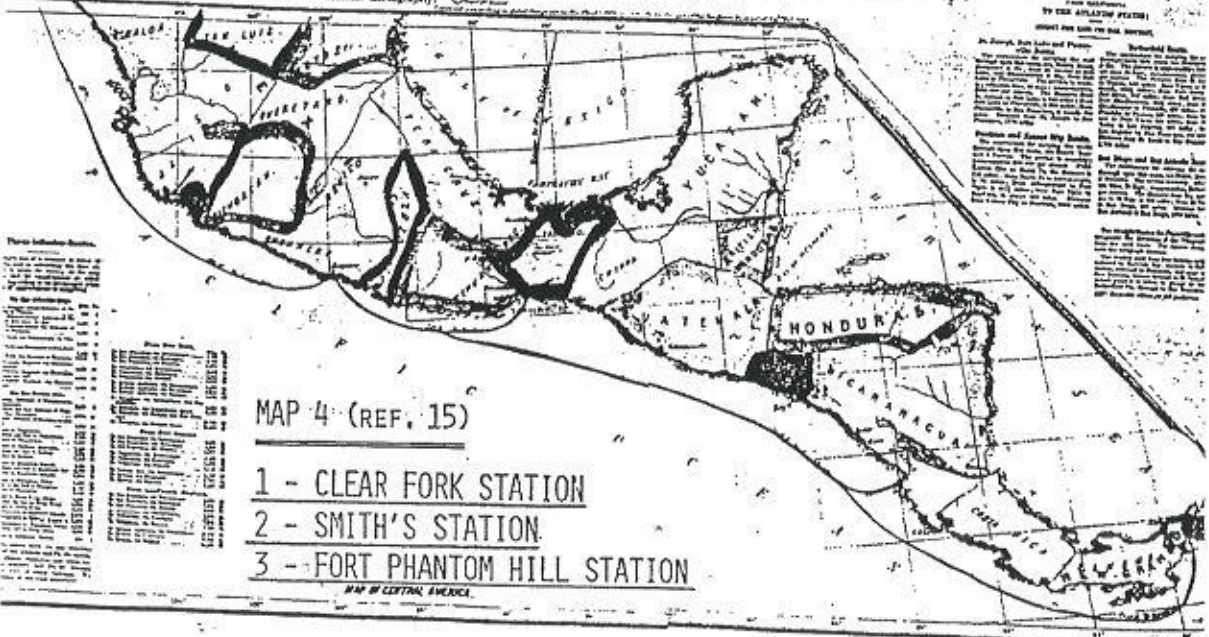
By early 1861, the gathering clouds of war had so darkened that there was interference with the Butterfield mails. The last east-bound coach went through El Paso on March 6, 1861, and arrived at California, Missouri, on March 21.⁴¹ According to the schedules, that last celerity wagon should have made its stop at Smith's Station late in the day on March 13 or sometime in the morning of March 14, scarcely a month before the firing on Fort Sumter.⁴²

Although the southern route of the Butterfield Overland Mail was in operation for only two and a half years, Smith's Station played its part in a once vital link between the Mississippi Valley and the Pacific Coast.



February 25, 1982

SEE NOTE ON PAGE 11



MAP 4 (REF. 15)

- 1 - CLEAR FORK STATION
- 2 - SMITH'S STATION
- 3 - FORT PHANTOM HILL STATION

MAP OF CENTRAL AMERICA

NOTES

- ¹ There were two other Smith's Stations on the Butterfield; one was in Polk County Missouri [Ref. 2, v.I, p.177], and the other in Barry County, Missouri [Ref. 2, v.I, p.186]. See Map 4 for entire Butterfield Trail.
- ² As plotted on the U.S. Geological Survey map [Map 2].
- ³ Ref.2, v.I, p.327. Page 328.
- ⁴ See detail of Shackelford County road map [Map 1].
- ⁵ Named for Judge J. A. Matthews through whose ranch the Butterfield Trail ran and whose wife wrote *Interwoven* [Ref.4]. The railroad has been abandoned and the rails taken up but the cattle-loading pens are still at the site of the "Bud Matthews Switch." [personal observation] See Map 2.
- ⁶ Ref.7, pp.79 & 80; see Williams's map [Map 3].
- ⁷ For location of ranch headquarters, see Map 2.
- ⁸ Ref.1, Bk.6-3, p.432.
- ⁹ Ibid. Bk.6, p.55.
- ¹⁰ Ibid. Bk.15, p.252.
- ¹¹ Ibid. Bk.23, p.98.
- ¹² Ibid. Bk.32, p.84.
- ¹³ Ibid. Bk.38, pp.123, 124 & 619.
- ¹⁴ Ibid. Bk.66, p.7.
- ¹⁵ Ibid. Bk.229, pp.317 & 328; Bk.240, p.504; Bk.248, pp.333, 342-344.
- ¹⁶ This was affirmed by Mary Frances (Mrs. E. T.) Driscoll; Mrs. Gaither Lieb graciously permitted the use of abstracts of the area.
- ¹⁷ Ref.2, v.I, p.123.
- ¹⁸ Ibid. v.I, p.114.
- ¹⁹ Ibid. v.I, p.137.
- ²⁰ Ref.4, p.61. Lamshead Creek [map 3] is in the Matthews ranch.
- ²¹ Ref.2, v.I, p.138.
- ²² Ibid. v.I, p.135.
- ²³ Ibid. v.I, p.137.
- ²⁴ cf. Conklings' miles given above.
- ²⁵ Ref.5, p.48.
- ²⁶ Ref.2, v.I, p.142.
- ²⁷ One can be sure that in 1858 the mesquite trees were only sparse for Sallie Matthews, writing in 1935 of her personal memory of the range between Smith's Station and Clear Fork Station as it was in 1866, stated, "The country at that time was open, not covered with mesquite timber as it is now." [Ref.4, p.28.]
- ²⁸ Ref.5, p.49.
- ²⁹ Ref.2, v.I, p.323.
- ³⁰ Ibid. v.I, p.140.
- ³¹ cf. Conklings' miles given above.
- ³² Clear Fork.
- ³³ Ref.3, p.125; from an article in the *Daily Alta California Mail*, San Francisco, Saturday, November 6, 1858.
- ³⁴ Ibid. pp.154 & 155; from *The California Overland Express*, "communicated" by William Tallack.
- ³⁵ Ref.2, v.I, p.133.

³⁷ Ref.2, v.I, p.327.

³⁸ Ref.11.

³⁹ Ref.10.

⁴⁰ Refs.8 & 9.

⁴¹ Ref.2, v.II, p.325.

⁴² April 12, 1861.

I have inspected various points on the Butterfield Trail, including Smith's Station, Clear Fork Station and Phantom Hill Station.—J.E.B.

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- Ref.2 Roscoe P. Conkling and Margaret B. Conkling: *The Butterfield Overland Mail*, (The Arthur H. Clark Co., Glendale, California-1947).
- Ref.3 Walter B. Lang: *The First Overland Mail—Butterfield Trail—St. Louis to San Francisco, 1858-1861*.
- Ref.4 Sallie Reynolds Matthews: *Interwoven*, (Anson Jones Press, Houston, Texas, 1936; page numbers herein are to the edition by Carl Hertzog, El Paso, 1958).
- Ref.5 Waterman L. Ormsby: *The Butterfield Overland Mail*, (The Huntington Library, San Marino, California-1954).
- Ref.6 Carl I. Wheat: *Mapping the Transmississippi West 1840-1861. Volume 4: Pacific Railroad Surveys to the Onset of the Civil War; 1855-1860*.

ARTICLE

Rupert N. Richardson: "Some Details of the Southern Overland Mail," (*Southwest Historical Quarterly*, July, 1925).

THESIS

- Ref.7 Jesse Wallace Williams: *The Marcy and Butterfield Trails across North Texas*, (Hardin-Simmons University, 1938).

INTERVIEWS*

- Ref.8 James Robert Green (local ranchman and historian).
- Ref.9 Watt R. Matthews (local ranchman who as a boy in the first years of the 20th century would travel the Butterfield trail with his parents from their ranch in Throckmorton County to the Chimney Creek Ranch, then owned by his aunt, Ella Matthews Conrad. Some years ago, he erected a stone monument at the Butterfield Trail's cut in a low escarpment on his family's ranch).
- Ref.10 Grady Smith of Hamby, Texas (foreman of the Chimney Creek Ranch 1925-1943).
- Ref.11 Robert Waller (local ranchman and lessee of Chimney Creek Ranch where he has lived since August 1957).

* These four men were interviewed by me. As a boy, I visited my great-aunt, Ella M. (Mrs. Frank B.) Conrad, and my great-grandmother, Mrs. Joseph Beck Matthews, at the Chimney Creek Ranch.—J.E.B.

MAPS

- Ref.12 Map 1: Detail based upon Shackelford County road map.
- Ref.13 Map 2: Detail of Nugent (Texas) Quadrangle, U. S. Geological Survey map.

Ref.14 Map 3: Detail of J. W. Williams's map in Ref. 7.
Ref.15 Map 4: The Dixon & Kasson map of 1859 in Ref. 6.

NOTE

After writing this narrative history, I made another trip to the Smith's Station site. The remaining rocks around the tree which was pointed out to me by Mr. Waller on my first visit to the site as the location of the chimney pile cannot now be identified as having once been a chimney. Two lines of rocks at the ground surface which corner at the tree are obviously the bases of what were once stone corral fences or the walls of a stone building. If excavating should show no foundations, they would be fence bases. This corner is approximately fifty yards upstream from the old Butterfield road.

Also, I found that since my last visit, a concrete "low-water bridge" had been built only a few yards below the Butterfield ford and a new oil-field road had been bulldozed up the slope on the south side of Chimney Creek. Fortunately, this did not obliterate the last vestiges of the historic trail, the tracks of which are still plainly discernible several yards to the east.

J.E.B.

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