

Red River Station – start of the Chisholm Trail in Texas

by Keith Bridwell

Of all cattle trails dating to the 1800's, the most historically significant in Texas was the Chisholm, because it was the major route for getting cattle from the ranges of Texas to the rail shipping lines in Kansas for more than 20 years.

"Feeder trails", at least one of which came through Wise County, terminated at one point - Red River Station.

Red River Station is no more than a state-erected granite monument, a cemetery and plowed fields today, but in 1867 it became the Texas terminal for the Chisholm Trail, where millions of cattle began their march across Indian Territory on their way to market.

The settlement, which at one time claimed about 300 residents, was started in 1860 as a Confederate outpost to help quell Indian uprisings in the area. Those troops were part of the Frontier Regiment, which patrolled the Texas-Indian Territory border during the Civil War.

Red River Station, however, gained its notoriety as the "collection point" for cattle drives. Because of its location on the small tributary, the settlement was first known as Salt Creek. A ferry boat operated on the nearby Red River, and in 1873, a post office began operation under the name Salt Creek.

The town's name was changed in 1884 to Red River Station, and that post office served the settlement until 1887.

A tornado destroyed much of the town in the mid-1880's, and although several of the buildings were reconstructed, the establishment of other trails and rail towns contributed to the town's decline, until it ceased to exist as a community in the late 1880's. Further contributing to its decline was the location of a railroad line through Nocona, and the few existing businesses moved south to be near the rail tracks.

The name "Chisholm Trail" is attributed to a Scottish-Cherokee trader, Jesse Chisholm, who is said to have driven his wagon loaded with buffalo hides through Indian Territory to his trading post near Wichita, Kansas.

Although Jesse Chisholm, himself, never drove cattle

over the trail named for him, other drovers herded hundreds of thousands of cattle each year to market over the same ruts his wagon had cut in 1866.

Eastern and Western cattle trails in Texas tied into the Chisholm at Red River Station, and a monument erected at the site reads: "Jumping off point on the famous Chisholm Cattle Trail (1867-87), Red River Station was a main crossing and last place on trail to buy supplies until Abilene, Kansas - 350 miles north.

"During the cattle drive era of western history, millions of animals swam the turbulent river here en route to Kansas railhead and markets.

"An abrupt bend in the river checked its flow at this point, creating a natural crossing which had been used for years by buffalo and Indians. Even so, the water was wide, swift and often clogged with sand bars. Frequently cattle were so jammed cowboys could walk across on their backs.

"Besides a cattle crossing, the station was an outpost of the frontier regiment, which patrolled Texas' northernmost border during Confederacy (1861-65). During cattle era, a town began here, its ferry serving drovers, soldiers, freighters and settlers returning from Indian captivity. Local cemetery (1 mile S.E.) contains many graves of these Texas pioneers."

Jesse Chisholm was born in 1805 or 1806 in the Hiwassee region of Tennessee. His father (Ignatius) was of Scottish ancestry - the source of the name "Chisholm" - who worked as a merchant and slave trader in the Knoxville, Tennessee area in the 1790's. He married a Cherokee woman and they had three sons. Jesse was the oldest.

The couple separated, and Ignatius reportedly moved to Arkansas Territory. His mother evidently took Jesse to the Indian Territory. In the late 1920's, Jesse moved to the Cherokee Nation and settled near Fort Gibson in what is now eastern Oklahoma.

From Red River Station, the Chisholm Trail entered Oklahoma near the settlement of Fleetwood, about five miles east of Terral.

The Fleetwood Townsite was established in the 1880's

by Houston F. Fleetwood who settled there in 1876, and built the first store and post office.

The Fleetwood Store was an old trading post opened in Indian Territory across the river from Red River Station.

The original log structure has long been gone, as is a second store that was destroyed by fire. An abandoned stone building stands at the site, with the remains of an old gasoline pump laying on a concrete step.

Two markers outside a fence relate that the Townsite "had a cotton gin, blacksmith shop and school house that served as a community church for the Methodists and Baptists."

The second marker notes, "The first store was built here in the 1880's, moved by Fleetwood from south of his homesite because the cattle of the trail drives caused too much commotion for business as usual.

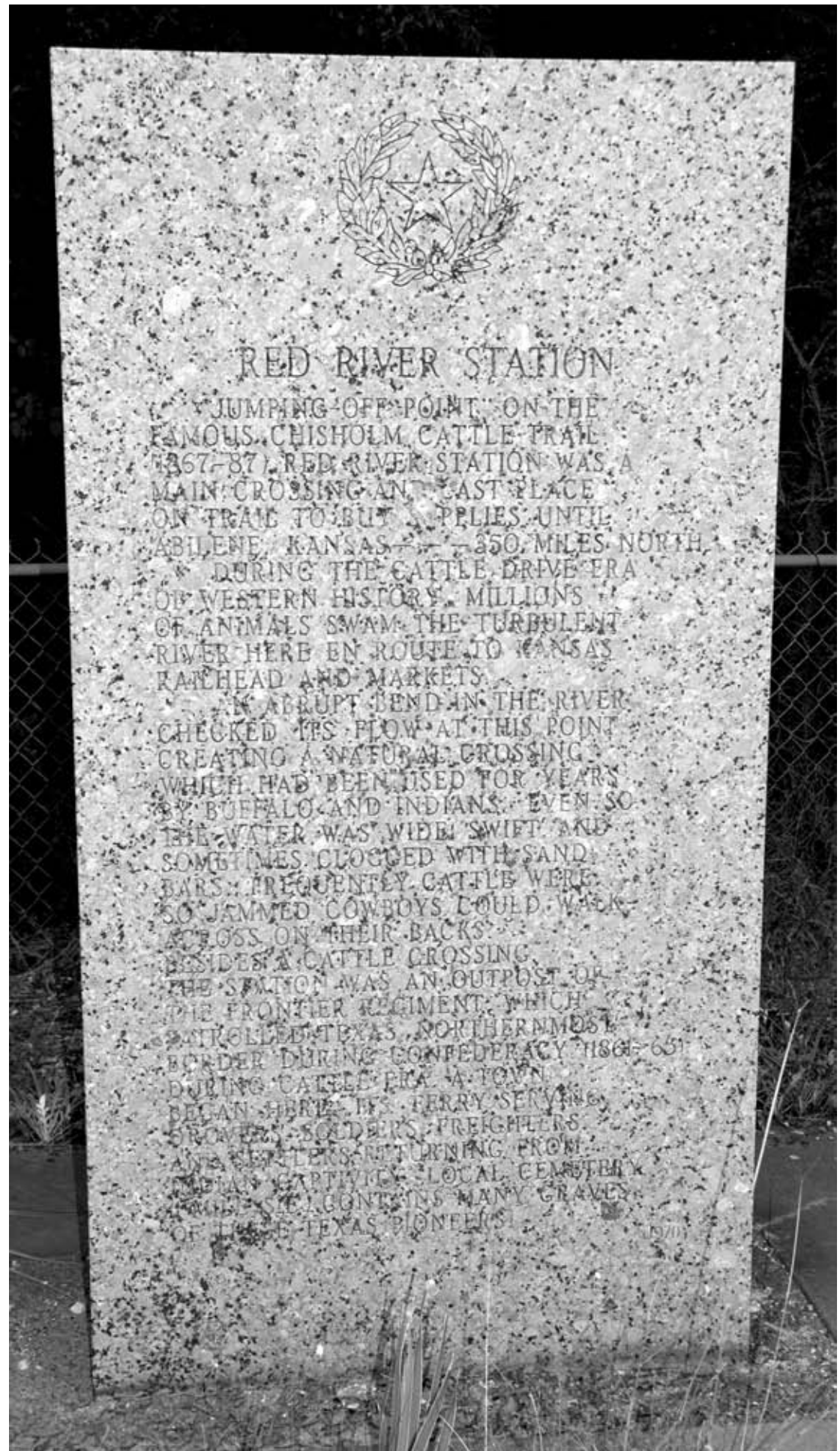
"This store became the first post office of the Indian Territory. It remained open until 1960. In later years the store was bought by O.C. Walker and W.L. Weatherly, then by Hugh Weatherly who kept it open until 1946. Olin Weatherly bought the store in 1946 and operated it until it closed in 1961.

"The original wood building was torn down in 1935 and the present building was built in 1935. This building was destroyed by fire in the early forties and rebuilt as it is today."

Both markers are signed by the "Historical Society of Fleetwood, Terral, Indian Territory, Okla."

The life of a drover was not an easy one, and although the particular crossing near Red River Station was as good a choice as was available at the time - because of shallow banks on both sides of the river - other perils faced riders and cattle.

Sand bars and quicksand have always been prevalent on the Red River, and they caused their share of problems (and deaths) during the days of the Chisholm cattle drives. And since the Red is a shallow river, it becomes quite turbulent during times of heavy rainfall. Many cattle and riders were swept away while attempting



A state-erected monument at the site of Red River Station in northwestern Montague County calls attention to the significance of the cattle collection point as the start of the Chisholm Trail in Texas.

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to cross the waterway during those times.

Today the property where Red River Station sat is owned by a gentleman from Wichita Falls, Texas, and is heavily treed. At the time that cattle walked the Chisholm Trail, it was raw prairie, with no protection from wind, rain or erosion. Before the cattle could reach the river, they had to cross Salt Creek, and during times of floods, erosion cut away any semblance of an easy crossing of that creek.

Depending on weather conditions, cattle on the trail moved from five to 15 miles a day, so stores located just 15 miles apart could easily be a day or more's journey for the drivers.

Although U.S. Highway 81 through Oklahoma has been designated as the Chisholm Trail Highway, much of the trail itself meandered through territory off any present-day roadway. The city of Duncan, Oklahoma was on the trail, however, and is home today of the Chisholm Trail Heritage Center, located at 100 North Chisholm Trail Parkway.

Monument Hill is located at the northern end of Jefferson County, about two and a half miles east of U.S. Highway 81 and the town of Addington.

A 40-foot-high concrete marker is visible from the highway north of Addington to commemorate the significance of the Chisholm Trail. Granite plaques on the monument call attention to "Chisholm

Trail Lookout Point," to Jesse Chisholm, to the cowboys on the trail, and to the hardships they faced.

Although many other cattle trails emerged from Texas - including the Goodnight-Loving Trail in the Texas Panhandle, the John Chisum Trail from central Texas into New Mexico, the Shawnee Trail which carried cattle from Texas to Missouri and Kansas, and the Western Trail which went into Dodge City, Kansas - it is the Chisholm which had tentacles reaching to Brownsville in south Texas, and which was in operation for almost 20 years.

The Chisholm Cattle Trail celebrates its 140th anniversary this year, and for Texas, a major player in the lore of that cattle trail was the abandoned and almost forgotten settlement of Red River Station.

To reach Red River Station and the marker calling attention to its significance, travel north from Nocona on FM Highway 103 to the south edge of Prairie Valley ISD school property, turn west on FM Highway 2849 and continue until the pavement ends.

A gravel road continues to the south, and about three-eighths of a mile further, a seemingly-insignificant dirt road heads west to cross a cattle guard leading between plowed fields.

The road wanders between fields and over numerous cattle guards and over Salt Creek, before emerging at a cross-

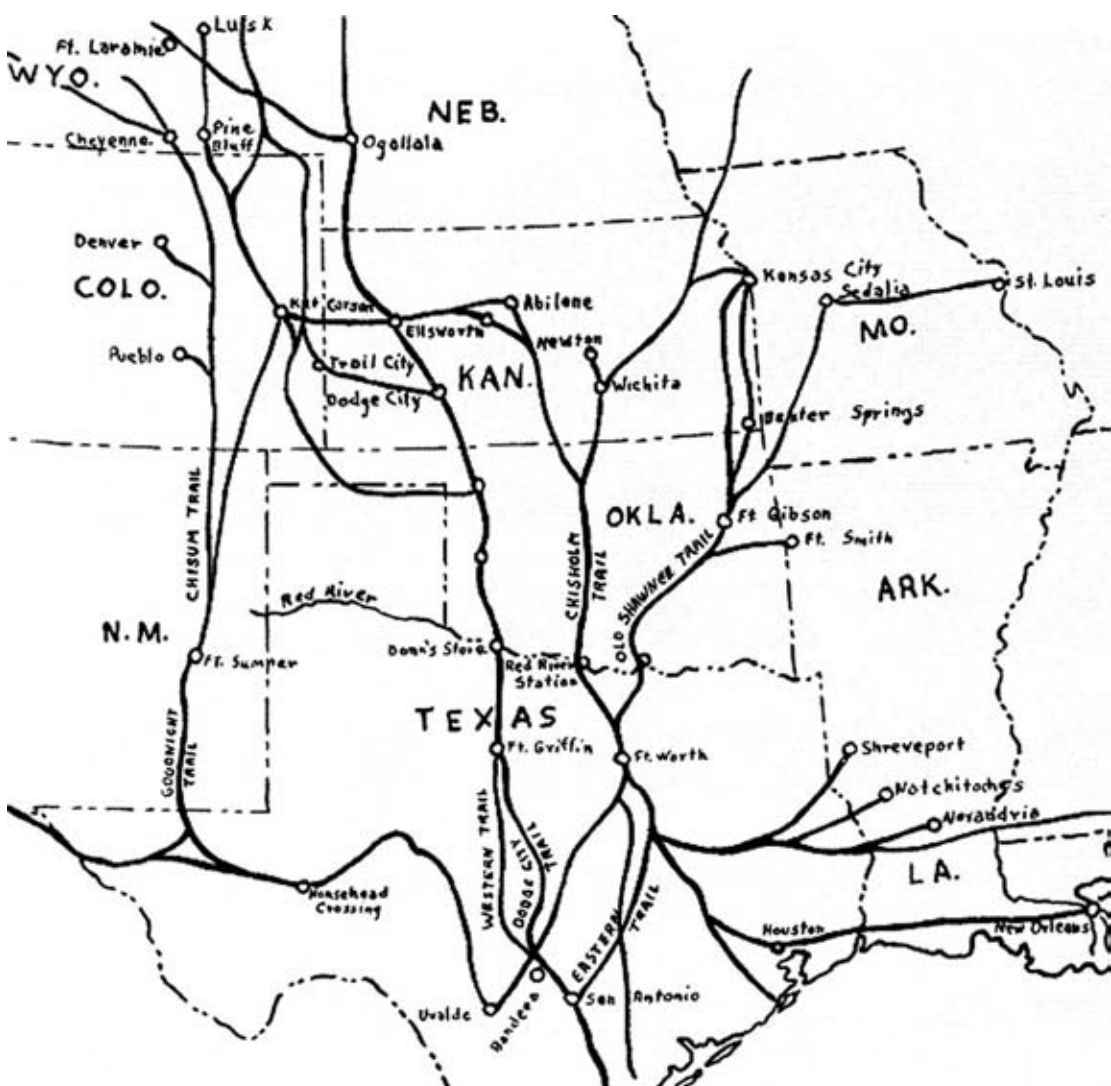
roads where the state-erected marker is visible to the north, just inside a tree line.

Since there is the residence of a longtime farmer on the site of the former settlement of Red River Station, the road evidently contains enough gravel to be passable in most weather conditions.

(NOTE: Glen Seeber of Oklahoma City is Trailboss of "thechisholmtrail.com" and was a major contributor of information for this article. Our thanks to Glen for his willingness to share his expertise on the subject.)

The Chisholm Trail

- one of the most significant cattle trails in western history, is 140 years old this year.



"THE CHISHOLM" was one of many cattle trails emerging from Texas during the mid-to-late 1800's, and had tentacles reaching from Brownsville in south Texas. Other major trails of the day included the Goodnight-Loving Trail in the Texas Panhandle, the John Chisum Trail from central Texas into New Mexico, the Shawnee Trail which carried cattle from Texas to Missouri and Kansas and the Western Trail which went into Dodge City, Kansas.

- map courtesy Glen Seeber, Trailboss of thechisholmtrail.com