

OKLAHOMA'S HISTORIC BRIDGES

OFTEN A MARKETABLE ASSET

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The Oklahoma Department of Transportation's Cultural Resources Program (ODOT-CRP) conducts cultural resources surveys, performs National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) evaluations, and mitigates adverse effects to historic properties for Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) undertakings. These undertakings range from roadway striping and resurfacing, to widening and new construction, to bridge maintenance and replacement. Of the many resources that ODOT routinely encounters during cultural resources investigations, bridges are by far the most frequently encountered NRHP-eligible property.

The goals of ODOT and many State DOTs, to provide a safe and effective transportation network to the public, can conflict with preservation goals and statutes codified in federal regulations such as the National Historic Preservation Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and Section 4(f) of the USDOT Act.

Through federal regulation outlined in the Highway Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program (HBRRP), the Secretary of Transportation works with

States to encourage the retention, rehabilitation, adaptive reuse, and future study of historic bridges. In the context of the HBRRP, historic bridges are defined as those resources that are eligible for inclusion or are listed on the NRHP. To this effect, and in accordance with the HBRRP, states are required to complete an inventory of all bridges on and off Federal-aid highways to determine the historic significance of the bridges. ODOT completed one such study for truss and arch bridges in 1993. This study was subsequently updated in 2007 and contains a list of all identified truss and arch bridges in the state and the NRHP eligibility of each structure. Most of these resources date from the very early 20th century to the 1950s. ODOT is currently completing NRHP evaluations for Depression-era Works Program bridges from 1933-1945 in Oklahoma.

Bridges are products of their time and unfortunately are often unable to handle the traffic counts, speeds, or loads of today's vehicles. In accordance with Section 4 (f) of the USDOT Act, when historic bridges are proposed for replacement ODOT completes a thorough analysis of each historic bridge to determine whether



County Road 3011 Pony Truss
Bridge over Coon Creek, Osage
County

*Photo: Oklahoma Department of
Transportation, Cultural Resources
Program*

**Carpenter's Bluff Bridge over Red River,
Bryan County**

*Photo: Oklahoma Department
of Transportation, Cultural Resources Program*



the bridge is a candidate for retention or rehabilitation. In many cases the structure is unable to be rehabilitated to acceptable safety standards, or a rehabilitation attempt would alter the bridge to such a degree that it would lose the characteristics that made the bridge eligible for the NRHP. In these cases where the historic bridge must be removed, and in accordance with the HBRRP, ODOT makes a due diligent effort to preserve the bridge by making it available for donation to a State, locality, or responsible private entity – sometimes referred to as “marketing” the bridge. Should a bridge be successfully marketed, the accepting party enters into an agreement with ODOT to maintain the bridge and the features that make it historically significant and assume all future legal and financial responsibility for the bridge.

Marketable bridges are often limited to smaller trusses, such as the pony truss carrying County Road 3011 over Coon Creek in Osage County, which are historically known to have been moved or transported to other locations. For instance, the LeFlore County Pennsylvania petit truss bridge carrying County Road 4812 over the Poteau River was constructed over a waterway near Hodgen in 1910 and moved to its current location in 1935. The Cumberland Cut mixed truss bridge in Bryan County, which carried SH-199 over the Washita River near Fort Washita is constructed of three separate truss types, all likely derived from separate sources.

In order to effectively reach an audience for these bridges, ODOT first markets the bridge locally through newspapers in neighboring communities. If this effort is unsuccessful, ODOT will market the bridge statewide by placing notices in larger statewide newspapers. In addition, marketable historic bridges are included on a

website maintained by ODOT and linked on the ODOT-CRP website for historic bridges. Each of the bridges listed on the Adopt-a-Bridge site is available for donation.

In many instances, such as with the Carpenter's Bluff bridge over the Red River near Hendrix, which also includes an attached wagon bridge, the marketing effort is successful in simply leaving the bridge in place. In these cases, the County or State will construct a new bridge on an offset alignment, remove traffic from the historic bridge, and leave the historic bridge in place. The recipient will enter into the agreement with ODOT for preservation of the historic features of the bridge. On the State Highway system, ODOT has retained several historic bridges through offset alignments, including the Cumberland Cut bridge, the truss bridge carrying SH-101 over Lee Creek in Sequoyah County, and the historic Route 66 truss carrying US-60 over Little Cabin Creek in Craig County.

When bridges are replaced, removed from the transportation system, or moved to a new location, ODOT completes documentation of the structure. The documentation includes a narrative of the bridge type, history of the bridge, original plans of the bridge (if available), and photographic documentation. ODOT compiles this information into a report format and submits to the State Historic Preservation Office. As public outreach, ODOT posts a digital document on the ODOT-CRP website. Please visit the site at www.odotculturalresources.info/historic-bridges.html