United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
INTERIOR REGIONS 6, 7 & 8
1 Denver Federal Center, Building 50
Denver, CO 80225

IN REPLY REFER TO:
H34 (IMDE-HPP)

March 20, 2025

John Murphey
Architectural Historian
[via email: john@archhistoryservices.com]

RE: National Historic Landmark Letter of Inquiry for the Threatt Filling Station (NRIS95000038) 21940 and 21960 Oklahoma State Highway 66, Luther, Oklahoma.

Dear Mr. Murphey,

Thank you for your letter inquiring about the potential of the Threatt Filling Station at 21940 and 21960 Oklahoma State Highway 66, Route 66, Luther, Oklahoma, to be designated as a National Historic Landmark (NHL). Our office has reviewed the evaluation and conferred with our colleagues in the Washington, DC, program office and find that this property warrants further consideration for NHL designation.

The Threatt Filling Station appears to have significance under Criterion 1 as a rare extant example of a historically Black-owned business on Route 66. To be eligible for NHL designation under Criterion 1, a property must be "associated with events that have made a significant contribution to, and are identified with, or that outstandingly represent, the broad national patterns of United States history and from which an understanding and appreciation of those patterns may be gained."[1] As noted in your letter, Route 66 has been the subject of statewide survey or context efforts in every state it crosses. A review of these documents identifies very few Black-owned business along the route, and the number of extant resources within that subset is even smaller.[2] The Threatt Filling Station thus appears to be an exceptionally rare surviving resource in this context.

The letter of inquiry also assessed the possible significance of the Threatt Filling Station under Criterion 1 for its association with the African American Outdoor Recreation Theme Study (2022). We agree with the findings of the letter that while the Filling Station fulfilled a critical local social role, the site does not possess national significance in this area. Further, the site has seen considerable loss of integrity of these recreational spaces including the former dance floor and baseball diamond. The nomination may consider addressing the recreational activities that took place on the Threatt property to demonstrate the variety of economic strategies employed by the family on the Route 66-adjacent property.

---

[1] *NHL Bulletin: Guidelines for Preparing National Historic Landmark Nominations,* (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2023).

[2] As noted in your letter, given the age of most of these statewide surveys and the scope of many being limited to resources directly fronting Route 66, there may be more recently surveyed or listed resources. We recommend pulling updated information from the NARA records for NRHP listings to identify comparable properties identified since the late 1990s. Available online at: https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/database-research.htm

The National Register of Historic Places listing for the Filling Station, designated in 1995, contains several erroneous dates including a much earlier date of construction (1915) than is supported by period documentation in the form of historic photos, family recollection, and newspaper articles. A 1984 historic preservation survey completed by Oklahoma State University reports build dates of 1937-38.[3] Future nomination efforts should build on the extensive research completed in support of this letter to correct the errors present in the original NRHP designation. The initial NRHP nomination used the 1915 date of construction as the period of significance for Criterion C, and a period of 1926-1944 for Criterion A. These dates correlate to the context "Commerce on Route 66 in Oklahoma (1926-1944)" in the *Route 66 and Associated Historic Resources in Oklahoma Multiple Property Listing.*[4] The end date of 1944 was chosen for the multiple property listing in accordance with National Register guidance regarding historic events that occurred less than fifty years ago (the document was developed in 1994). For the proposed NHL nomination, the period of significance for the Threatt Filling Station spans 1939 to 1973. This more contextually appropriate period begins with the corrected date of construction and ends with the last year the station sold gas.

A successful nomination will need to carefully evaluate the elements of integrity necessary to communicate significance under Criterion 1. As noted in the letter of inquiry, several important alterations have been made to the station since the proposed period of significance. The removal of the gas pumps, which were intact at the time of the property's listing in the National Register of Historic Places, somewhat diminishes integrity of materials and design as it relates to the site's significance as an example of type (1930s gas/filling station). This alteration is not uncommon among Route 66 filling stations, as addressed in the *Route 66 and Associated Historic Resources in Oklahoma Multiple Property Listing*, which notes for multiple sub-types of gas station that "the pumps may be gone and alterations to the form and materials may exist as long as the significant characteristics of the architecture design are prominent and intact."[5] Threatt Filling Station retains the significant characteristics of a house-type station, including massing, scale, gabled roof, fenestration, and exterior materials. The relationship of the station to Route 66 remains the same and the character defining features of the station interior, former barbeque, and associated outbuildings retain sufficient integrity to communicate their significance. The Threatt family operated several types of business at the Filling Station to take advantage of economic opportunity presented by Route 66. A successful NHL nomination could emphasize this continued relationship, which retains a high degree of integrity of setting, location, feeling, and association.

The letter of inquiry extensively demonstrates the relative scarcity of Black-owned businesses along Route 66 and of extant historically Black-owned filling stations nationally. Comparative analysis of this resource is thus difficult with few extant examples of type, as after the passage of the Civil Rights Act many such businesses faced greater competition as services were available to Black patrons elsewhere. Identifying comparable properties is a central part of establishing the relative significance of any NHL. Some possible extant properties related specifically to Black-owned filling stations include Horatio's Esso Service Station #2 in Scotlandville, Louisiana,

---

[3] Oklahoma State University History Department, *Route 66 in Oklahoma: An Historic Preservation Survey* (Oklahoma State University, 1984) https://www.okhistory.org/shpo/docs/route66inok.pdf.

[4] Maryjo Meacham, Brenda Peck, Lisa Bradley and Susan Roth, *Route 66 and Associated Historic Resources in Oklahoma Multiple Property Submission* (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1995) https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/64500493_text.

[5] Meacham, et.al., *Route 66 and Associated Historic Resources in Oklahoma,* Section F, 12.

Smitty's Gas station in Newark, New Jersey, the A.C. Lewis Service Station in North Little Rock, Arkansas and the Dearfield Filling Station in Dearfield, Colorado.[6]

A valuable avenue of inquiry may be the larger experience of African Americans with the oil and gas industry as business owners and travelers alike.[7] Taking into consideration that the Threatt Filling Station also operated as a café, additional research during nomination preparation may also explore the broader context of African American entrepreneurship, focusing on small road related and specialty store businesses catering to Black travelers. Useful sources within this context include *Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance* by Mia Bay, which examines Black travel more generally, as well as Psyche Williams-Forson's exploration of the relationship between cooking and Black female entrepreneurship in *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power*.[8]

Although operating within a different cultural context, a recent NPS-funded study by the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office surveyed extant commercial resources in all-Black towns around the state, which does identify a few now-closed Black owned businesses and at least one gas station.[9] This study, and others like it in neighboring states, such as the pending *African American Travel Resources* survey in Colorado, the upcoming Michigan statewide Green Book sites survey, or similar completed projects in Texas and Virginia may prove useful.[10] In addition to these surveys (see footnote) the nationwide MPDF *Historic Properties Associated with U.S. Highway 66, from Chicago to Santa Monica, 1926 to 1985* and associated nominations submitted under its aegis may aid in identifying useful contextual data for the NHL nomination.[11]

Thank you for providing us the opportunity to consider the Threatt Filling Station for NHL nomination. Prior to nomination, it will be important to confirm or reaffirm the participation of all property owners. We look forward to reviewing a future draft. Should you have any questions

---

[6] Louisiana Public Broadcasting, "Horatio's Esso Service Station #2," *Safe Haven: Louisiana's Green Book*, posted October 22, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPtLAvRE7Xo; Robert Brunswig, "Dearfield Filling Station," *National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet* (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2024); Barry Carter, "Carter: Service station has been Newark Staple for Three Generations," *NJ.com*, September 16, 2012, https://www.nj.com/njv_barry_carter/2012/09/carter_service_station_has_bee.html; Lewis Towing, "Serving the Community Since 1949," 2023, https://lewistowing.com/about-us.

[7] Mackensie Smith, "Did the Oil and Gas Industry Benefit African Americans?"ArcGIS StoryMap, February 23, 2022, https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/6bd003f03bec406092483f21cda314d6; "Wright, Alonzo G." *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, https://case.edu/ech/articles/w/wright-alonzo-g.

[8] Mia Bay, *Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021); Psyche A. Williams-Forson, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Women, Food, and Power* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

[9] Cox McClain Consulting, *Architectural and Historical Survey of Oklahoma's All-Black Towns* (Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, 2023) https://www.okhistory.org/shpo/docs/ABT-Pt1-2023.pdf. Of note is Scott's Grocery and Deli (now abandoned) which has associated gas pumps.

[10] Front Range Research Association, *Colorado African American Travel and Recreation Resources Historic Buildings Survey* (draft), (Colorado State Historic Preservation Office, 2024); Kayla Halberg, Ashlen Stump, Lena McDonald, *Negro Traveler's Green Book in Virginia: Race, Space and Mobility National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form* (draft) (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2023) https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/01-Green-Book-MPD-Draft-4.15.2024.pdf; "African American Travel Guide Survey Project," website, Texas Historical Commission, accessed January 16, 2024, https://thc.texas.gov/learn/historic-resources-survey/african-american-travel-guide-survey-project.

[11] Michael Cassity, Thomason and Associates, and NPS Staff, *Historic Properties Associated with U.S. Highway 66, from Chicago to Santa Monica, 1926 to 1985,* (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program, 2011) https://s3.amazonaws.com/NARAprodstorage/opastorage/live/60/8910/28891060/content/electronic-records/rg-079/NPS_IL/64501140.pdf; Maura Johnson, *Architectural/Historic Survey of Route 66 in Missouri Summary Report* (Route 66 Association of Missouri, 1993) https://mostateparks.com/sites/mostateparks/files/Route%2066%20PI%20Report.pdf.

or concerns, and for assistance through the remainder of the nomination process, please feel free to contact Poppie Gullett, Historian, at poppie_gullett@nps.gov.

Sincerely,

Justin Henderson
Heritage Partnerships Program, Program Manager

cc: C. David Threatt, Threatt Family Partnership, property owner
Lisa Davidson, Ph.D., Program Manager, National Historic Landmarks, NPS
Déanda M. Johnson, Ph.D., Historian, National Historic Landmarks, NPS
Lynda Ozan, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Oklahoma Historical Society