National Historic Landmark Letter of Inquiry

Threatt Service Station (aka Threatt Filling Station)
21940 and 21960 Oklahoma State Highway 66, Luther, Oklahoma

Ulysses Grant Threatt and Marjorie Christine Threatt, c. 1950s. Courtesy of the Threatt Filling Station Foundation.

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Tell somebody else, if you go on 66 . . . please stop by Threatt's Service Station, because that's a place that you'll love, to get gas, to get your oil, and you can rest.

Reverend Allen Threatt III recalling the word-of-mouth advertisement of the Threatt Service Station, March 20, 2024

INTRODUCTION

Black entrepreneur Allen Threatt Sr. arrived in Oklahoma with his wife Alberta around 1918, following a small wave of Black migration to the Luther area. Threatt had been born in Alabama as the sixth of eleven children. His father, Newton, had likely been enslaved.

After securing the necessities of food, shelter, and livelihood for his family through farming, Allen Threatt Sr. did something extraordinary — he started a filling station. It is unclear when the first iteration of the station took form, but it likely coincided with the improvement of U.S. Highway 66 in front of his property and Threatt's need to develop new income sources. It may have begun humbly — as many gas stations did — with a few gas pumps and a sign. But by 1939, he and his son Ulysses had completed today's solid sandstone building, a beacon along Route 66 that tells the story of race and Black entrepreneurship automobile travel during the Jim Crow era.

For Black entrepreneurs, ownership of a service station represented a path into the middle class. In 1939, filling stations represented the 9th most common type of Black-owned retail, trade, or service business in the United States.[1] At the same time, Black ownership of a station was rare and ambitious. In those years, African American-owned gas stations were a minuscule percentage (roughly 0.006%) of the number of retail gas stations operating in the United States.[2] Starting a filling station, even on a modest scale, was a risk and required capital, planning, and a connection with an oil and gas distributor.[3] All of these were much harder when faced with the discrimination commonly experienced by Black people.

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[1] Juliet E. K. Walker, *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship* (New York: Prentice Hall International, 1998, 229, Table 8.4.

[2] This is an approximate figure based on the above 1939 data applied to the total number of service stations recorded in 1940. Petroleum Service Company, "A Brief History of Self-Serve Gas Stations," January 22, 2018, https://petroleumservicecompany.com/blog/brief-history-self-serve-gas-stations/?srsltid=AfmBOooVtf2yq6Mtfaq5no2ELDB6fpES3o-WPHQdFbjg7HuTdAphcn3I.

[3] Charles H. Sevin, *Establishing and Operating a Service Station* [United States Department of Commerce Industrial (Small Business) Series No. 22 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1945), 10-20.

Threatt's enterprise was advertised as Threatt Service Station, indicating it did more than just pump gas. It initially sold Texaco products but soon shifted to branded Conoco products. It included a café (Threatt Café) and later a grocery store used by the local Black community. Members of the Threatt family, who operated the gas station, lived in the building; other family members resided nearby and worked on the land.

Following the completion of the Turner Turnpike in 1953, Threatt Filling Station evolved into a community gathering place (Figs. 11 & 12). With Ulysses Threatt's sudden death in 1956, his wife, Elizabeth Hinton Threatt took over its operation. She ran the gas station, café, and grocery store until it closed in 1973.

The gas station was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on February 23, 1995 (NRIS 95000038), as the Threatt Filling Station with a construction date of 1915. Research conducted for the LOI found that the building was more likely erected in the 1930s, with a completion date of 1939, and that it originally went by a different name: Threatt Service Station. A future NHL nomination effort could correct this error.

It is the only known extant example of a Black-owned service station along the 2,448-mile-long course of former U.S. Highway 66.[4]

SIGNIFICANCE

National Pattern of History

The Threatt Service Station meets National Historic Landmark Criterion 1 for its significant association with Black travel and roadside commerce during the Jim Crow period. It represents the responses of Black entrepreneurs to the everyday racial discrimination experienced by locals and travelers alike.

Opened in the late 1930s, the gas station responded to the improved conditions of Highway 66 and reflected the business sense of its first owner, Allen Threatt Sr., a Black migrant from Alabama who came to Oklahoma in the late 1910s seeking land and a new opportunity (Fig. 5).

[4] Kaisa Barthuli, email to John W. Murphey, August 23, 2024. Barthuli is the program manager of the National Park Service Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program.

Historical Overview

Highway 66 was not even an idea when Allen Threatt Sr. acquired a quarter section of Luther Township in 1920. Edging the north side of his property was a section-line road, an informal path following the east-west township line. Based on early maps, this road led west to Luther and east into Lincoln County. After 1917, the wagon road took on more vitality, becoming part of the Ozark Trails — a multi-state network of linked roads. But the Threatts, like many Black and white farmers, still used horse-drawn modes of transportation.[5]

Allen Threatt Senior

Threatt was born in Vincent, Alabama in 1889, the year of the first Oklahoma land run. He grew up in a farming town in Shelby County in the North-Central part of the state. He was the sixth of eleven children raised by his parents, Newton and Alberta Threatt. His father came from South Carolina, where he was born in 1849. He had likely been enslaved. The 1867 Shelby County registry of voters records Newton Threatt, "Colored," as a "Qualified Voter" in District 24.[6]

In October 1907, Allen Threatt, then 17, married Alberta Wallace, 15, an Alabama native who had grown up in Harpersville, working on her family farm. Three years later, the federal census records the young couple living on a farm near Vincent, also in Shelby County.[7] It showed their ownership as "RO," likely meaning it was in a tenant or sharecropping arrangement. They lived adjacent to Allen's brother Frank, who also rented a farm.

They would leave for Oklahoma eight years later. Allen and Alberta arrived in Oklahoma County around 1918, following a small wave of Black migration from Alabama to the Luther area that started a year earlier.[8] The Town of Luther and surrounding Luther Township had a large African American population who left the Deep South for better opportunities and the right to own land. However, unlike historic All-Black Towns such as Boley, Langston, and Liberty, Luther's Black community was not organized as a "colony" but instead seems to have formed through chain migration.

The good word about Luther attracted Alabamans like Threatt, who came to the area after World War I to seek land. Threatt was still in Harpersville in 1917, but a draft card filled out a year later places him, along with Alberta, in Luther, working as a farmer.[9]

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[5] "Edmond Threatt," Transcript of interview conducted by David K. Dunaway, December 2000, 2.
[6] Ancestry.com. Alabama, U.S., Voter Registration, 1867 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015.
[7] U.S. Census Bureau, 1910; Census Place: Vincent, Shelby, Alabama; Roll: T624_33; Page: 8a; Enumeration District: 0119; FHL microfilm: 1374046. Accessed through Ancestry.com.
[8] West et al, "The Negro: Luther, Oklahoma and Vicinity," 17.
[9] Registration State: Oklahoma; Registration County: Lincoln County. Accessed through Ancestry.com.

Two years later, the 1920 federal census found Threatt renting a farm in Wellston in adjacent Lincoln County.[10] He lived with Alberta and four young children, all of whom had been born in Alabama. The farm included another household headed by John Broach, a Black farmer from Louisiana. The same year, Allen Threatt Sr. acquired a piece of Luther Township, a 160-acre quarter section bordering Lincoln County. Here, he would establish his own farm and later the gas station.

The gently rolling piece of ground became available with the Kickapoo Opening, the last land run. The 1907 map for Luther Township shows it divided into one-square-mile sections. Section 25, which would hold Threatt's farm, was separated into four 160-acre parcels. A January 1920 note in the local newspaper announced that Threatt had recently rented the "Diggs place" northeast of Luther.[11] Diggs appears to be Jewell Diggs, an African American man in his 20s, originally from Alabama. It is unclear if Diggs owned the land.

Land north and east of Luther was less desirable.[12] Instead of the deep loam found in the bottomland near the rivers, it was sloped with varying depths of soil, sometimes very shallow, and with steep wooded uplands that were not ideal for plowing. Given the previous short tenure of the property, it is assumed that Threatt had to break ground and clear away woods to build a home and start a farm. His obituary implies as much, stating that Threatt "began to carve out of its red clay, a living with his hands and brains, for his large family of eleven children."[13] On a high point overlooking his property, he erected a sandstone house that the family calls Home Place. He soon established a farm, raising corn and cotton. After two years of improving the land, Allen and Alberta received a warranty deed for their quarter section from the State of Oklahoma. Eight years later, it was recorded, and was theirs. [14]

Public records and newspaper accounts give a sense of the Threatt farm. Based on a chattel mortgage notice, it initially included six horses, two cows, and probably other animals not acquired with a loan.[15] In 1930, Threatt bought a registered 13-month-old Jersey bull calf that the Black columnist for the Luther newspaper wrote "would do much for developing our home dairy program."[16] Interviewed in 2000, Edmond Threatt, Allen and Alberta's youngest son who was born in 1922, recalled that the family grew cotton, corn, and peanuts, and with one bumper

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[10] U.S. Census Bureau, Year: 1920; Census Place: Wellston, Lincoln, Oklahoma; Roll: T625_1470; Page: 5B; Enumeration District: 138. Accessed through Ancestry.com.
[11] "Notes of Interest to Colored Folks," Luther Register, January 29, 1920, 8.
[12] This is based on a statement that African American farmers initially settled in northwest Luther Township, in areas with rich, bottomland soil, and after reviewing a contemporary (1969) soil survey of Oklahoma County, indicating that soils to the east are less productive.
[13] "All Luther Mourns the Loss of One of its Most Worthy Persons," digital copy of obituary provided to author from Edward D. Threatt, Sr. No publication or date are evident in copy.
[14] Certificate of Purchase, Commissioners of the Land Office of the State of Oklahoma to Allen Threatt, made January 26, 1920, filed October 21, 1928, Book 63, Page 196, Oklah9oma County, State of Oklahoma.
[15] "Chattel Mortgages," The Daily Law Journal, March 6, 1924, 2.
[16] John F. Moore, "Some News About the Colored Folks," Luther Register, May 30, 1930, 8.

cotton year, they purchased their first automobile, a Ford Model T.[17] Threatt was doing more than farming to just feed the family.

In 1930, census takers dropped by the farm, giving the first sense of the family's presence on the land. Allen Sr., then 42, was recorded working as his own boss.[18] While requiring hard work, land ownership was something that he couldn't achieve in Alabama and kept him from being his own man. He owned the farm and the land, valued at $4,000. This was comparable to his neighbors. Alberta, 38, managed the home, which now included ten children, ranging in age from a newborn to their oldest child, Ulysses, 18, who would later run the gas station. Six of the children had been born in Oklahoma. Black farming families surrounded the Threatts, many with fathers hailing from Alabama, followed by Mississippi and Texas. Allen Threatt Sr. moved in stature, entering local politics. Though he had no formal education, he became a member of the Luther Township board, later serving as its treasurer.[19]

As with many states during the Great Depression, Oklahoma was affected by a plummet in crop prices and devastated by the Dust Bowl. Luther and its Black community were not immune to these developments. Newspaper notices indicate that Threatt and many others in Luther Township had fallen behind in paying personal taxes. Several Black families lost all or part of their holdings, including homes and farms.[20]

With the decline in cotton and corn prices, some turned to raising chickens, while others diversified their crops, adding small grains, melons, fruits, and raising hogs, in essence looking to develop a "Live at Home Program," where debt and money crops were avoided. With the arrival of New Deal programs, others, as described in a contemporary account, "left farming on a large scale or altogether."[21]

Continuing to be behind on taxes and still paying a mortgage on the farm, Threatt may have been forced to think of another source of income. His choice was entrepreneurial and likely responded to racial conditions of the time.

Highway Development

Before the U.S. highway system was created in 1926, nearly one hundred private highway associations competed to build intrastate or transcontinental highways. The first successful private highway, the Lincoln Highway, began in 1913, establishing a drivable passage between Washington, D.C. and San Francisco by 1919. Following close on its heels was the Ozark Trails Highway, promoted by the private Ozarks Trails Association, based in Arkansas.[22]

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[17] "Edmond Threatt," Transcript of interview conducted by by David K. Dunaway, December 2000, 2.
[18] U.S. Census Bureau, 1930; Census Place: Luther, Oklahoma, Oklahoma; Page: 7B; Enumeration District: 0027; FHL microfilm: 2341652. Accessed through Ancestry.com.
[19] "Township Offices," Luther Register, July 25, 1930, 1; West et al, "The Negro: Luther, Oklahoma and Vicinity," 16.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., 18.
[22] John W. Murphey, "Ozark Trails Marker at Lake Arthur," (National Register of Historic Places nomination, March 2004, NRIS 04000702), 8-6.

The road passing in front of Threatt's farm became part of the Ozark Trail's "Main Route," a conjectured automobile highway connecting St. Louis, Missouri, to Las Vegas, New Mexico. A Luther organization chapter formed in 1914, with the town's newspaper announcing, "Public Highway to Come to Luther."[23] Much of this route would become the template for U.S. Highway 66 across the Southwest, a highway plan that had been hatched, in large part, by Tulsa booster Cyrus Avery.[24]

The Ozark Trails began to see automobile use in Oklahoma starting in 1917. There is evidence of its influence on local commerce in states where it traveled, with gas stations, hotels, and cafes along the route bearing its name. In 1920, the local hostelry in Luther was renamed the Ozark Hotel, no doubt to draw travelers using the highway.[25]

During the 1924 Oklahoma legislative session, lawmakers passed a bill creating the state's first highway system.[26] The road defining Threatt's north property line was designated State Highway 7 — an ambling east-west road, starting in Miami in the east and ending in Hollis in the west. A year later, the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads selected State Highway 7, from Miami to Oklahoma City, as part of a yet-to-be-designated national route.

Like other towns on the prospected route, Luther welcomed the news, announcing publicly that it would be part of a national highway.[27] Federally designated in 1926 as U.S. Highway 66, the route across Oklahoma County was soon marked and would be paved with concrete in 1930. The section in front of Threatt's land was completed in July of that year.[28]

Further improvement came three years later when the Oklahoma State Highway Commission restarted a stalled federal-aid project to close one of Highway's 66 "gaps" near Wellston, in adjacent Lincoln County.[29] Completing the so-called Wellston Cut-Off, which straightened and shortened the route, improved automobile flow and made the route passing in front of Threatt's farm more attractive to cross-country motorists.

Seeing these improvements and the increased flow of vehicles passing in front of his property, Threatt likely realized the advantage of establishing a filling station for locals and cross-country motorists on Highway 66.

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[23] "Public Highway to Come to Luther," *Luther Register*, June 2, 1914, 1.
[24] Earl Swift, *The Big Roads: The Untold Story of the Engineers, Visionaries, and Trailblazers Who Created the American Superhighways* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), 97-98; Susan Croce Kelly, *Father of Route 66: The Story of Cy Avery* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014).
[25] "Local News of a Week!," *Luther Register*, July 22, 1920, 1.
[26] Dianna Everett, "Highways," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry?entry=HI004, accessed June 28, 2024.
[27] "Luther is on a National Highway," *Luther Register*, August 14, 1925, 1.
[28] "Paving Completed on Highway '66,'" *The Oklahoma County News*, July 4, 1930, 1.
[29] Jim Ross, *Oklahoma Route 66* (Arcadia, Okla.: Ghost Town Press, 2001), 101-103.

It is unclear when Threatt built the first filling station, but a newspaper account from 1936 announced that he had recently purchased a lighting system for his filling station.[30]

Archival evidence, including 1920s and '30s highway as-built plans, indicates the land was undeveloped and still used as pasture (Figs. 6-8). A 1937 Soil Conservation Service aerial photograph shows a smaller building, likely a shed, with a long canopy (Fig. 9). This may be the nucleus of the building that stands today.

An article in 1937 announced that Threatt had opened a rock quarry on his farm that could "supply building rock of many nice colors."[31] The present building was completed two years later, in the spring of 1939.[32] Sources indicate that Threatt's oldest son, Ulysses, was involved in its construction. At some point came the small grocery and café.

Following World War II, Oklahoma embarked on a program to develop a system of toll roads that were referred to as turnpikes. Business leaders in Oklahoma City and Tulsa petitioned Governor Roy J. Turner to support legislation to build the first turnpike between their cities.[33] Covering some 80 miles, work on the Turner Turnpike began in 1951 with the paving of a four-lane highway that generally ran south of former Highway 66.

As evidenced by editorials and articles published *The Black Dispatch*, African Americans were generally against the turnpike, aligning with tax-payer organizations that questioned whether the new road was a scam. Others raised a red flag about loss to property and businesses due to condemnations which would disproportionately affect Black communities during interstate construction.

A 1951 article in *The Black Dispatch* quoted a Black businessman in Sapulpa who warned that the Turner Turnpike would "wipe out 123 Negro homes and business places" in a town that had an established Black business district and chamber of commerce.[34] (The Sapulpa alignment was later abandoned). Memory is too distant to know how the Threatts viewed the potential impact of the turnpike, and the local newspaper only ran favorable accounts about the new highway.

With no real opposition, the turnpike barreled through the Oklahoma countryside, opening to traffic on May 16, 1953.

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[30] John F. Moore, "Latest News Notes of Luther Colored Folks," *Luther Register*, April 23, 1936, 8.
[31] Ibid., *The Oklahoma County Register*, December 30, 1937, 8.
[32] Ibid., *Luther Register*, February 23, 1939, 8; West et al, "The Negro: Luther, Oklahoma and Vicinity," 3.
[33] Bill Corbett, "Transportation," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry?entry=TR006, accessed August 8, 2024.
[34] "Sapulpans Alarmed Over Ruthless Move to Dispossess Them of Homes for Roadway," *The Black Dispatch*, June 2, 1951, 1.

The completion of the turnpike did not kill Highway 66, though it relegated it to a secondary road that saw less interstate traffic than it had before. It remained federally posted through the area until the 1980s and worked as a free alternate route to the turnpike.

By the mid-1950s, the Threatt service station complex was in full operation. It included the service station, a roadside bar and barbeque, and a combination apartment and automobile service area southwest of the station (Fig. 12). This last building is no longer extant, and the family does not have a clear memory of it, but it is believed to have included a grease rack along the east side of the building. Just west of the gas station on the highway's edge stood a wood frame "rattlesnake pit," a standard Route 66 attraction, where tourists would squirm at the viewing of hissing snakes.[35]

The future of the business came into question after Ulysses Grant Threatt died on January 10, 1956, at 44 of a heart attack. His wife, Elizabeth Hinton Threatt, a teacher who had been pursuing a master's degree at Central State College in Edmond, had to take over running that gas station, the café, and the store. Asked years later if her husband's death and the resulting responsibilities were difficult, she answered: "No, it was, and it wasn't. See I accept challenges and do what I have to do. I don't care how hard they are."[36] She continued to manage the businesses and earned her master's degree in 1959, being one of the first African Americans to graduate from the college.[37]

Responding to her work as a teacher, the station adopted new hours. Elizabeth rose at 4:30 a.m. each morning to start the café, which served short-order breakfasts and coffee to local men who commuted to Oklahoma City for construction jobs.[38] Helping her in the kitchen were various local women, including Minnie Johnson, remembered by the family as a Black woman of Cherokee ancestry. She left for teaching after 7:00 a.m., making the short commute to Luther's Booker T. Washington High School.

Elizabeth returned to the station at 4:30 p.m. By then, the same commuters who had left early in the morning had returned from the city. They would often drop by the store to pick up a loaf of bread or other groceries before heading home. Others would stay at the café, ordering a hamburger or a few beers as they chatted or watched the TV mounted behind the counter.[39] It was a place to relax and unwind from the day's toils.

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[35] Edward D. Threatt Sr., interview with John W. Murphey, March 18, 2024, Threatt Filling Station, Luther, Oklahoma.
[36] "Mrs. Elizabeth Hilton-Threatt," Transcription of December 3, 2004, interview with Equlla M. Brothers, 7-8.
[37] Ashley Romano, "First Black Educator, Student Honored," *The Vista*, February 15, 2005, 1.
[38] Edward D. Threatt Sr., interview with John W. Murphey.
[39] Ibid.

The business wound down in the mid-1970s, with the Oklahoma Corporation Commission designating the gas station closed in 1973. At some point after 1986, probably in relation to highway widening, the concrete island and two gas pumps, were removed.

Elizabeth Threatt continued to live in the building until her death in 2009.[40]

CRITERION 1: THE BLACK EXPERIENCE OF U.S HIGHWAY 66

Automobile travel for Blacks during Jim Crow was a mixed experience. One on hand, given the country's deeply entrenched racism, Black people venturing beyond their home environments could encounter discrimination, hostility, or even violence. In her book, *The Overground Railroad*, photographer and cultural documentarian Candace Taylor sums up the dilemma: "There was virtually no way for them [Black motorists] to know what was coming up around the bend."[41] It could be humiliation; it could be harm.

Another view is that once the hurdle of car ownership was overcome[42], automobile travel led to new freedom denied to Blacks who relied on other forms of transportation. Operators of trains, busses, and streetcars typically forced African Americans to sit in segregated areas on trains, often dubbed "Jim Crow Cars," usually near baggage and sometimes animals. Even Luther, a town with a decent size which, on the surface, accepted the Black population, had a separate cab service for Blacks traveling to the railroad depot.[43]

In this way, even with its dangers, car travel gave freedom of movement and was a respite from the humiliation experienced on a train or bus. The problem was, of course, that one had to stop for services.

Blacks could generally buy gas at a white service station. Reflecting the 1940s, Gunnar Myrdal and Arnold Rose noted that "Gas stations will be least segregated; both in the South and in the North the rule is that the customer is to be served without regard to his color."[44] Using the

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[40] Mike Kertok, "Threatt Filling Station, Route 66, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma [Historic Structures Report]," Unpublished report prepared for the National Park Service Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program (December 2020), 4.

[41] Candace Taylor, *The Overground Railroad: The Green Book and Roots of Black Travel in America* (New York: Abrams Press, 2020), 297.

[42] Taylor discusses these challenges extensively. The author of this report found that in some regions of Oklahoma, Black citizens had to register their automobiles in a separate location from white car owners.

[43] James J. West et al, "The Negro: Luther, Oklahoma and Vicinity" (Unpublished manuscript prepared for the Oklahoma Federal Writers' Project. May 9, 1939), 15. West and his fellow authors gloss over the discrimination, stating it was based on a "misunderstanding."

[44] Gunnar Myrdal and Arnold Rose, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1944), 637. Contrasting with this period view is a statement by Route 66 researcher

restroom was another matter. Many service station operators denied Black people this basic right, posting a "Whites Only" sign above the bathroom doors. Some gas stations offered a separate "Colored Bathroom" adjacent to the restrooms reserved for white patrons, or as an outhouse set away from the building.

Where discrimination drew a hard line was with food and lodging. Black people were generally forbidden to eat with white people in restaurants and rustic cafes along the highway. Most did not need to post a "Whites Only" sign; the message was clear.[45] The Royce Café, a fixture along Highway 66 in Edmond, Oklahoma, had a tourist postcard that touted the qualities of the town, including that it had "No Negroes."[46] Some places allowed Black people to order food but required them to walk around the back of the restaurant and wait at the kitchen door.

Similarly, but to an even harsher degree, Black people could not stay at white-run tourist camps, hotels, and motels. The only exception might be if the African American person was traveling with a white family as a servant. In that case, they would have to wear a uniform and sleep on a cot — never in the motel bed.[47] Representing this mindset was B.M. Bennett, who operated the Freemont Auto Court in Las Vegas, New Mexico. Writing in 1939 to the *Tourist Court Journal*, he stated: "We make it a strict rule never to take negro, Jap, Chinese, or any other sort of colored peoples, servants or otherwise …. Our court is for decent white people only."[48]

Filling the void were several Black travel guides, of which the *Green Book* is the best known. Started in 1936 by New York postal workers Victor Hugo Green and George I. Smith, the *Negro Motorist Green Book*, as it was originally called, consisted of an annual listing of businesses that catered to Black travelers. The guides systematized what once was a word-of-mouth network of hotels, restaurants, bars, and nightclubs that were open to Black travelers. The guide initially focused on New York City but later expanded to a national reach. It would go international in 1949, with listings in Canada, Mexico, and Bermuda, and later would also cover resorts and other vacation destinations.

Located in a rural community, the Threatt Service Station would not have been listed in a Black travel guide that focused on cities and towns. But its services were in the spirit of the *Green*

Joe Sonderman: "A lot of the gasoline chains didn't serve African Americans; Esso was one of the only ones who went out of their way to help them." Quoted in Taylor, *The Overground Railroad*, 297.

[45] From reviewing Oklahoma newspapers, the preferred terms in the Sooner State were variations of "White Patronage Only."

[46] The postcard is highlighted in Taylor, *The Overground Railroad.* This language appears on a c.1940s printing of the restaurant's promotional postcard. Other postcards did not include the offensive language.

[47] Lyell Henry, "Accommodations 'for Colored,'" *Society for Commercial Archaeology Journal* (No. 23, Fall 2005), 12.

[48] Quoted in Ibid.

Book, which worked to provide "assured protection for the Negro traveler."[49] Its advertisement instead came by word of mouth.

A Few Experiences

Firsthand accounts of Black people traveling Highway 66 are rare. However, newspaper articles and notices published in African American newspapers such as the Oklahoma City-based *The Black Dispatch* paint a picture of their experience of the Mother Road. These articles suggest that Blacks who owned cars and had time and money to travel took to Highway 66 to visit friends and family or attend conventions. Some articles even point to the fun of pleasure driving. The general tone is that the highway was welcoming. As for their white counterparts, having a car meant freedom.

An insightful piece appearing *in The Black Dispatch* was written in 1942 by Freddye Harper Williams, an Oklahoma City resident and columnist who later became a state legislator. In her piece — titled "California Here I Come" — Williams, then 25, describes her trip to Los Angeles and back to attend the 33rd annual NAACP convention.[50] While she and her caravan of Oklahoma attendees chose another route to get to Los Angeles, they took Highway 66 back to the Sooner State. Before the advent of the interstates, trying different highways was common.

In Los Angeles, Williams and the other conference attendees drove to popular tourist sites — Hollywood, Exposition Park, Olvera Street — which, in her account, had no discriminatory policies. This experience was quite different than Oklahoma City at the time, where Black people were barred from nearly all private amusements and public recreation areas.

Poignantly, the group drove past a Japanese detention camp at Santa Anita Racetrack along Highway 66. Williams "experienced a most peculiar sensation" on seeing the detainees housed "like cattle."[51]

Driving back to Oklahoma on U.S. 66, they visited the Petrified Forest and Painted Desert National Park Service units, the latter of which Williams called "another wonder of nature."[52] She may have experienced racist behavior along the highway but chose not to write about it.

Roscoe Dunjee, the editor of *The Black Dispatch*, had been on the same trip and later wrote about it in the paper. Like Williams, he had a sense of wonderment (especially with dead

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[49] Capitalization removed from quote. Victor N. Green, *The Negro Traveler's Green Book* (New York: Victor N. Green & Co., 1956), 3.
[50] Freddye Harper Williams, "California Here I Come," *The Black Dispatch*, April 1, 1942, 1-2
[51] Ibid., 2.
[52] Ibid.

jackrabbits) driving the highway's desert stretches. He wrote "I'm surely pleased we came back on the '66' Highway."[53]

Perhaps more revealing of the discrimination on the route is a piece by columnist Jimmy Stewart, which ran in the paper's July 16, 1949, edition.[54] Similar to the group seven years before, Stewart drove U.S. 66 to a convention in Los Angeles. In the column Stewart mused at sites along the road, including Meteor City, Arizona with its tiny population of two. He visited popular Highway 66 tourist sites like Flying "C" Ranch, a kitschy souvenir trading post near Santa Rosa, New Mexico. These visits appear to have been without incident.

However, when he reached Gallup, New Mexico on the west side of the state, he received the "old brush-off" when trying to get a room at the Harvey House.[55] Stewart explained that the clerk "very courteously says they are filled for the next two days." The clerk then directed Stewart and his companions to the hotel's bar, where a Black bartender helped them find a place for the night, likely a rooming house. Further down the road, Stewart and his passengers hummed "(Get Your Kicks on) Route 66" — the song made famous by Nat King Cole a few years earlier — as they approached Barstow, California.

In this limited sampling of accounts of Black professionals who wrote for The *Black Dispatch*, a trip across Highway 66 (at least between Oklahoma City and Los Angeles) was generally positive, with stops at the same tourist spots that whites visited. It could be assumed that entrenched, everyday racism was present but given their relaxed accounts of travel to California and back, it didn't need to be highlighted.

More recently, Earl Hutchinson, in his 2000 memoir, *A Colored Man's Journey Through 20th Century Segregated America*, briefly reflected on traveling Highway 66 in Illinois. Hutchison, a postal worker, wrote that he would look at the horizon leaving Chicago, realizing that he "knew you couldn't," as a Black man, "eat in a roadside café or stay overnight the roadside motel."[56] Hutchinson's worry about what lay ahead is probably more representative of what the average Black motorist experienced on Route 66 and other highways during Jim Crow.

CRITERION 1: AFRICAN AMERICAN OUTDOOR RECREATION

[53] Roscoe Dunjee, "Do the Rabbits Get Drunk on the Desert," *The Black Dispatch*, August 8, 1942, 12.
[54] Jimmy Stewart, "Jimmy Says [column]," *The Black Dispatch*, July 16, 1949, 3.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Earl Hutchinson and Earl Ofari Hutchinson, *A Colored Man's Journey Through 20th Century Segregated America* (Los Angeles: Middle Passage Press, 2000), 87.

Threatt Service Station embodies the history of African American travelers seeking places on the road to rest and recreate. Responding to the latter, in the 1930s the family developed Threatt Park adjacent to the service station. The park served as a private recreation area that sponsored picnics, baseball games, and dances.

The gas station and the landscape behind it are associated with the theme of Black Recreation, but given that no extant structures exist, there is nothing left in the way of historic integrity to communicate this history.

Starting in the 1930s, the Threatts maintained what was locally called Threatt Park. From newspaper accounts and family memory, it started as picnic grounds used by local social organizations and, at times, the larger Black community from nearby Oklahoma City. The park likely worked as a safe place for recreation for Black people, who were excluded from using Oklahoma City public parks until the 1950s. Threatt Park evolved with a baseball field built for local Black baseball teams and a dancing platform for weekend celebrations. The family recalls that the area behind the gas station once had large picnic tables and benches. These have been removed, and there is little sense that grounds once had this function.

As stated in the National Park Service context on Black outdoor recreation, the "segregation of parks, beaches, campgrounds, and other outdoor recreational spaces sought to affirm America's racial hierarchy and enforce Black subordination."[57] From the end of Reconstruction through the late 1950s, most African Americans were excluded from almost all forms of public outdoor recreation. This included parks and recreation facilities maintained by the National Park Service, which often bent to local Jim Crow practices.

Denial of the basic right of recreation resulted in two choices. One was to fight, often with bad consequences, to win access to these resources. The other was to create a separate place that offered what should have been available to every citizen. In this way, the struggle to gain the right to recreation parallels much of the long history of securing equal education.

Like many southern states, Oklahoma denied Black people from using public facilities such as libraries and city parks. Paradoxically, Oklahoma was one of the first states in the South, following Florida, to allow Black people to use state parks.[58] But these were separate-but-equal Negro areas separated from the white population.

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[57] Andrew W. Kahrl and Malcolm Cammeron, *African American Outdoor Recreation Theme Study Historic Context and National Historic Landmark Survey Historic Context Study* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 2022, 5.
[58] William E. O'Brien, *Landscapes of Exclusion: State Parks and Jim Crow in the American South* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2016), 49.

In Oklahoma City, the closest metropolitan area to Luther, segregation and exclusion from public facilities in began soon after statehood. While making up nearly 10% of the city's population in 1930, Black people were excluded from using city-owned recreation facilities, including parks, pools, baseball fields, tennis courts, and even the municipal zoo.

Roscoe Dunjee, the founder of the *Black Dispatch*, initiated a campaign to fight for access to these public amenities. In 1917, two years after the newspaper was founded, Dunjee and other Oklahoma City Black leaders successfully passed a city bond issue to allow Blacks to use Fair Park — the site of the former state fairgrounds.[59] The city had just gained the park that year and was using public money to improve it. No sooner had the park opened to African Americans when an incident occurred, reportedly involving seven Black men and a brick thrown at a streetcar. Despite an investigation substantiating that the men did not instigate the event, the park was closed to all African Americans. Jim Crow laws were rigidly enforced, as claimed by one newspaper, "to prevent an outbreak of race trouble."[60]

Dunjee continued to agitate for Black access to parks, using his position at the newspaper to write numerous editorials. He no longer pushed for equal access but instead the creation of a separate municipal "Negro Park." In a 1921 editorial, Dunjee expressed his frustration that the "Negro had no inside or outside parks in this city,"[61] reflecting that the then commissioner of parks had banned Black people from using all public outdoor facilities and the city's Carnegie Library.

Riverside Park, a tract along the Oklahoma River, was the only place the city allowed Black people to recreate. Dunjee would later call it "an undeveloped, unlighted, unsupervised tramp rendezvous in a red light district where no decent black man would want to send his children or go himself."[62] *Harlow's Weekly*, a white newspaper, echoed Dunjee's sentiment, stating that "Riverside Park, the park designated exclusive use of the negroes, is used by whites as a common dumping ground for trash."[63]

In the late 1920s, the city created a separate facility, Booker T. Washington Park, complete with a concrete tennis court, pool, and baseball diamond. But they closed it down in 1931 after a lease was granted to drill for oil. Black business leaders had allowed for the lease, feeling that

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[59] Bob Burke and Angela Monson, *Roscoe Dunjee: Champion of Civil Rights* (Edmond, Okla. UCO Press, 1998), 54.
[60] "Riots Threaten in Capital, But Police Nip 'Em," *Muskogee Times-Democratic*, July 17, 1917, 8.
[61] "Vote No on the Bonds," *The Black Dispatch*, November 24, 1921, 4.
[62] Burke and Monsoon, *Roscoe Dunjee*, 54.
[63] "Segregation Causes Racial Controversy," *Harlow's Weekly*, November 10, 1921, 2.

they had reached agreement that the proceeds would be used to acquire land beyond the city limits for a "large diversion park" for Black people.[64]

Worsening matters, in 1933, Governor William H. Murray — by executive order — segregated Oklahoma City into white and Black residential areas, delineated by a militarized "non-trespass zone."[65] The city council followed Governor Murray's order by passing a segregation ordinance which further cut off access for Blacks to municipal resources.[66]

It was only in 1944 that African Americans were allowed their own park. After 15 years of controversy, a proposal was approved to allow Black people to use Hassman Park located in the north part of town. While this victory was praised by both Black and white newspapers, it kept African Americans from enjoying many of the city's other public amenities, including Lincoln Park which held the town's zoo.

The situation was not much better at the state level. White planners in Oklahoma City often questioned the need for a Negro Park distant from the Black area of town, stating Black people would not use it because of lack of transportation. Yet the state built a segregated picnic center at Roman Nose State Park — a recreation area in a white-majority county 75 miles west of Oklahoma City — utilizing New Deal funds.

This was followed by the construction of a Negro "section" at Lake Murray State Park near Ardmore, approximately 50 miles south of the capital. The segregated section would eventually develop into an organized youth camp on par with white facilities. Still, with the lack of in-town recreational facilities, Threatt Park and other private picnic grounds supplied much-needed spaces to relax, refresh, and share camaraderie.

Threatt Park

The first advertisement for Threatt Park (sometimes Threatt's Park) appeared in the local Luther newspaper in July 1935. It announced a two-day picnic conducted by the Order of the Eastern Star, a Masonic group for women.[67] Earlier advertisements simply implied a picnic would be held on the farm, not using the term park.[68] The 1935 advertisement is typical of how the park came to be used over the next decade. Notices published in the Luther newspaper and *The*

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[64] Burke and Monson, *Roscoe Dunje*e, 54
[65] Ibid.
[66] "Council Adopts Jim Crow Zone Defining Where Negroes May 'Occupy' Property," *The Black Dispatch*, September 28, 1933, 1-2.
[67] John F. Moore, "Latest News Notes of Luther Colored Folks," *The Luther Register*, July 18, 1935, 8.
[68] Ibid., July 19, 1934, 8.

Black Dispatch announced picnics and social events sponsored by local social organizations, often women's clubs.

Others show the park used by local rural organizations, such as the Women's Farm Club, Excelsior Club, and Home Demonstration Club. By their appearance in the "Negro" column of the local paper and *The Black Dispatch*, the assumption is that these events were held for Black people.

Several ads running in *The Black Dispatch* simply announced, "BIG PICNIC,"[69] implying the event was more of a public gathering than one for a specific social group. A few notices referred to political events, including a 1936 rally held by the Negro Democratic Club of Oklahoma Inc., to introduce candidates.[70]

The last appearance of the name Threatt Park in a newspaper occurred in 1947 with brief reference to "club ladies" holding a picnic. It is unclear what happened to the park after this time. Descendants of Allen Threatt who grew up after this period recall a different type of park, a more active — sometimes raucous — place that had less to do with picnics and instead promoted baseball, dancing, and barbeques. Newspaper notices indicate that these activities started in the late 1930s and picked up again in the immediate postwar period.

Reverend Allen R. Threatt III and his first cousin Edward Dwayne Threatt Sr. grew up around the gas station. Born eleven years apart, their memories come together in the 1950s, when Reverend Threatt was in his teens and Edward was a young boy. They both recall summer weekends when people drove from as far away as Tulsa to take in baseball games and dances. And later, Allen Threatt's son, Ulysses Threatt, served up barbeque and libations when he opened the Brown Bomber Bar and Bar-B-Q[71] adjacent to the service station.

Baseball, like all sports of the period, was segregated. While there were official Negro League baseball teams in Oklahoma — including the Tulsa Black Oilers and Oklahoma City Monarchs — baseball games held in the countryside were often informal.

Most communities with a Black population formed a team to play summer weekend games. These included the nearby Wellston Bearcats in adjacent Lincoln County. Ulysses Threatt organized one of these teams, giving them the name County Line Tigers for their location next to Lincoln County.[72] The team initially played on a field across the highway, north of the gas station. They later moved it to the Threatt property, creating a baseball diamond and possibly

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[69] "Big Picnic [advertisement]," *The Black Dispatch*, July 1, 1937, 5.
[70] "Negro Democrats Schedule Rallies," *The Black Dispatch*, June 15, 1936, 7.
[71] This is how the name appears in a 1950s published legal notice.
[72] Edward D. Threatt Sr., interview with John W. Murphey.

bleachers over a flat area southwest of the gas station. The two Threatts remember the baseball field and grounds being “just packed” during summer weekends.[73] People would convoy from Oklahoma City and other communities to take in the games, which could go on all Saturday. Many would stay overnight, sleeping in their cars or on the ground.

Aerial photographs from different periods, starting in 1937, show what could be interpreted as a baseball diamond (Fig. 13). A rectangular structure, which could have had another function, remains steadfast in the aerial imagery. The closest resemblance to a traditional baseball diamond appears on a 1943 flyover on a different property to the east (Fig. 13). Judging by an aerial from 1951, the field on the Threatt land was marked with foul lines and had what appeared to be bleachers.[74]

Around the same time, a platform was installed across a level area about 175’ southwest of the service station. Placed in the center of a small grove of native trees, the wood dance platform was low to the ground. Wood poles were strung with lights, and music played through a speaker. The Threatts recalled that, as boys, they would search around the platform in the morning, looking for loose change that had jumped out of the dancers’ pockets.[75]

In the late 1940s, Ulysses Threatt (Fig. 10), who at the time co-ran the gas station, opened the Brown Bomber and Bar-B-Q next to it. The core of the concrete block building likely dates to this period. The bar paid homage to Joe Louis, the world heavyweight champion who became known as “The Brown Bomber." Louis was the first African American athlete to reach international acclaim, and he was esteemed by the Black community nationwide.

Affixing Louis’ nickname to a bar was natural and fit within the active theme of the park. Ulysses operated an outdoor barbeque behind the building, where he smoked beef, chicken, and ribs in a cinder block and red brick pit. The business remained in Ulysses’ ownership until he died in 1956 at age 44. After his death, his son, Edmond C. Threatt Sr., took over the bar and taught his own sons how to operate the barbeque. Edmond ran the bar until 1971, after which he leased the building, moving it out of family management.[76]

There were a few other private Black parks in the area. These included the Sky Beauty Recreation Center off Highway 66 in nearby Arcadia. This park spread over ten acres and was

[73] Edward D. Threatt Sr. and Reverend Allen R. Threatt III, interview with John W. Murphey.
[74] A pedestrian survey, particularly enhanced by a metal detector, could define the outline of these and location of these stands.
[75] Edward D. Threatt Sr., interview with John W. Murphey.
[76] Edward D. Threatt Sr, email communication to John W. Murphey, August 21, 2024.

financed by Oklahoma City businessman W. R. Goodson. It featured baseball and barbeque.[77] But Goodson's park is featured only in a few ads in 1949, and seems to have been short-lived.

With no visible material features, the larger area forming Threatt Park behind the gas station does not retain sufficient integrity to support its significance as an outdoor recreation site. In addition, it would be doubtful if the site, even retaining its original features, would be of a national level of significance. Further research on the park's material remains could be conducted through an archaeological survey or aerial Lidar mapping to evaluate whether it may be eligible under Criterion 6.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Threatt Service Station comprises a small house-type gas station constructed in the mid-1930s. It continued to sell gasoline until 1973.

The building stands on the south side of Oklahoma Highway 66, approximately three miles east of Luther, an agricultural town approximately 30 miles northwest of Oklahoma City (Photo 1). It occupies the extreme northeast corner of the Threatt family property acquired by Allen Threatt Sr. in 1920 at currently approximately 150.56 acres (Photo 2). To the east is a local road delineating the line between Oklahoma and Lincoln counties. Oklahoma Highway 66, representing a portion of the federal highway, was widened recently, with its shoulder extending into what was originally a gas pump service lane.

The larger Threatt property includes several structures and sites associated with family history and/or the commercial and recreational activities proximate to the service station. These include a block building that held a bar and barbeque (Photo 3), a small grove of native hardwoods where weekend dances occurred (Photo 4), and a clearing that historically had a baseball field (Photo 5). More distant are the ruins of the original family home (Photo 6) and the agricultural field associated with the Threatts' use of the land (Photo 7).

Gas Station Building

Constructed of wood and sandstone, the gas station building has a one-and-a-half-story cross-gabled plan. It generally fits within the "House" gas station typology, representing a small

[77] Mack Jackson, "Picnic and Ball Games to Attract Thousands to Southwest's Best Recreation Spot," *The Black Dispatch*, July 2, 1949, 2.

building that gives the impression of a dwelling.[78] The house-type included a canopy over the gas pumps in its earliest phase. The building shows a Craftsman influence with its roof form, stonework, and patterned gabled ends. This effect was lessened in the c.1990s by removing the exposed rafter tails.

The building presents to the road a symmetrical façade of a centered door flanked by rectangular store windows (Photo 8). The façade, like the side elevations, is made of multi-colored sandstone quarried on the property. The irregularly shaped orange-to-brown colored pieces are laid in a random pattern and bonded together with wide mortar joints painted black. The technique locally is called "giraffe stone." Above the stone rises a medium-pitch gable penetrated by a sash window. The gables and roof structure were reconstructed during a recent (2023) SHPO-approved rehabilitation project. The work involved replacing in-kind the drop siding on the gables. Synthetic "shake" shingles cover the roof.

In front of the building is a steel sign pole and circular metal frame (Photo 8). Historically, the gas had a Conoco sign and two gas pumps. Since being listed on the National Register in 1995 (Fig. 18), the island and its two pumps have been removed. This likely came as the result of a highway widening project.

The side elevations show the building's cross-gable form (Photos 9 & 10). Each gable has a square, fixed window turned on its side to form a "diamond." These deliver light into the attic, which was once used as a bedroom. The ground level has the same sandstone penetrated with a few windows.

A patch of sandstone at the northeast corner is important to the building's history, as it is the place where locals scratched in their initials, did doodles, and made crude portraits (Photos 11 & 12). Older family members can identify some of the initials and have memories of these individuals. Should an NHL nomination be pursued, an inventory of the initials and markings could be conducted to provide additional information on these individuals and their connection to the station.

A c.1950s addition, reconstructed in 2023, attaches to the back side of the building (Photo 13).

Interior

The interior contains six rooms, including the attic. Four of the rooms were original to the building during its period of significance.

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[78] John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *The Gas Station in America* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 137-141. An Oklahoma Department of Highways cartographer noted in 1950 that the structure was a "Rock Store & Filling Stat[ion]," which may be a more apt description.

Front Room

The most important is the front room, which historically held the café and store. It comprises one large room, enclosing the café' counter and booths and the grocery store's shelves (Photo 14). Its walls are sheathed with 5⅜" faced pine paneling. The floor is tongue-and-groove; the ceiling, which is textured sheetrock, was originally made of a Celotex-type material. Simple wood display shelves span the west wall (Photo 15). Historically, these were stocked with canned vegetables and other goods sold in Elizabeth Threatt's store (Fig. 14). On the opposing wall are vinyl booths from the café period (Photo 16). The room feels original and evokes the time when travelers and community members would stop for a hamburger or a beer.[79]

Kitchen

A square pass-through window on the southeast corner of the front room signals the kitchen behind it. This roughly 120-square-foot room is where Elizabeth Threatt prepared meals early in the morning and late in the afternoon for her customers. "I've fried many strips of bacon, sunny side eggs, poured many, many cups of coffee on Route 66 where you got your 'kicks,'" as Threatt described her use of the space in a 2004 oral history.[80] Some of this feeling comes across with the retention of a period basin sink, green laminate counter, and wood-grained cabinets and drawers (Photo 17). The stove, icebox, and food stock shelves are missing. Like the front room, the kitchen has a textured ceiling and a modern light fixture.

Other Spaces

To the west, through a narrow doorway, is Elizabeth Threatt's bedroom. It is mostly original but also has a textured ceiling and a recent light fixture (Photo 18).

The back bedroom and attic (Photo 19) have been reconstructed. The latter shows structural members connected to the recent rehabilitation project. The bathroom and its hallway are new spaces. Many of the interior doors appear to be original or period appropriate.

Brown Bomber Bar and Bar-B-Q

The Brown Bomber Bar and Bar-B-Q, a later addition to the site, stands approximately 70' west of the gas station (Fig. 2). The core building consists of a gable-front structure made of concrete masonry units, with a later cross-gable addition created across its west elevation. This structure exhibits a thoroughly vernacular style that reflects its history as a roadside bar.

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[79] An original cash register has been removed temporarily from the room and displayed at Smithsonian affiliate museums as part of a Green Books exhibit.
[80] Mrs. Elizabeth Hilton-Threatt," Transcription of December 3, 2004, interview, 2.

The building features a simple façade with a centrally positioned entry door, flanked by fixed windows that are smaller than the original openings, due to the addition of PBR metal panels. The windows retain their original rough openings as seen from the interior. The metal door is not original, nor is the other siding applied across the gable. A period photograph shows the façade with the same fenestration pattern but with a sign above the door (Fig. 12).

The visible east elevation features a solid wall made of concrete masonry units that have been painted blue (Photo 3). In the photograph referenced earlier, this elevation is shown with two windows that have been filled in with concrete blocks, some of which have a rusticated finish. The west elevation is obscured by an addition that is covered in V-rib metal siding (Photo 21). Recently, the building has been used as a private club, which is accessed from the west side via a wood deck (Photo 22).

A small hipped-roof extension is attached to the original building, creating its southern elevation (Photo 22). Covered with rusted corrugated metal panels, it better reflects its historical significance than the façade. The small space is entered through a metal panel door.

A pit barbeque was historically located at the back of the building. It was made of concrete block and red clay bricks. This structure is no longer present.

The interior of the older building has retained the vestiges of a bar from a later era. It has a lowered, three-angle ceiling and a collection of bar fixtures and furniture (Photo 23).

The building's construction is unclear. The Oklahoma County Assessor gives a construction date of 1940 but assigned assessor dates are typically inaccurate. A published legal notice in 1948 suggests the Brown Bomber Bar-B-Q was in operation then.[81]

PHYSICAL INTEGRITY

Gas Station Building

Threatt Service Station retains a medium level of integrity for its period of significance, a suggested range from 1939 to 1973. Its overall form and design have been retained, with interior spaces — especially the front room — conveying the historical period and association. However, removing the gas pumps and signage has affected its ability to communicate its use as a gas station. The removal of small details of its Craftsman characteristics has also affected the

[81] "County Clerk," *The Dailly Law Journal-Record*, Mary 4, 1948, 7. The legal notice identified the business as the Brown Bomber Bar and Bar-B-Q.

aspect of design. These changes were made recently and cannot be attributed to the "ongoing impacts of segregation and discrimination."[82]

There are many instances of Highway 66 gas stations listed on the National Register without their pumps present. However, these buildings were recognizable gas stations nominated under Criterion C as a good example of an architectural style or a branded form, particularly the Phillips Petroleum house model.[83]

Location

The building, erected at the northeast corner of the Threatt property adjacent to Highway 66, has retained its original location.

Setting

The setting of the property has changed little since the period of significance. While widened, the asphalt-surfaced highway that is now designated Oklahoma State Highway 66 remains an essential element of the setting, conveying the building's relationship to the road. The widening of the highway resulted in the partial removal of the outside gas pump lane.

The south and west areas around the station remain open, including small historic structures (a small pump shed and above-ground foundations) and the former Bar-B-Q (Photos 2 & 3). These features were present during part of the period of significance.

Several structures and small-scale features have been removed within or proximate to the recommended boundary. These include a two-story apartment-over-garage building, a snake pit, and a block structure that may have served as an outhouse (Figs. 7 & 10). Some of these features were likely removed before 1973. Beyond this cluster of buildings, little has changed to the landscape. Proximate development includes a recent modular home and a dairy transport company parking lot located approximately 225' to the southeast (Photo 4).

Design

The design of the building, including its exterior and interior components, retains relatively good integrity. This includes its original cross-gabled plan, Craftsman-bungalow appearance, fenestration pattern, interior spatial organization, and design and appointment of primary rooms.

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[82] Sarah Jane Shoenfeld, Prologue DC and Nakita Reed, Quinn Evans, "20th Century African American Civil Rights Sites in Washington, D.C., 1912-1974" Multiple Property Submission, 2020, F-56.
[83] The author reviewed 30 National Register listings for gas stations located on Highway 66. The majority, 22, did not have extant pumps when listed.

Components of the design that have been affected include removing and/or obscuring extended rafter tails which, based on an undated photograph (Fig. 16) were visible on the front and side elevations. The rafters helped communicate the building's Craftsman inspiration. At some point after the 1980s (Fig. 17), the rafters were cut off at the eave line and an angled fascia board was tacked to their ends. During a recent (2023) SHPO-approved rehabilitation project, the eaves were reconstructed with new fascia board, replicating the alteration.[84] A second element which may not have been original was the knee braces at the front and side gables.[85] These, too, were removed during the rehabilitation.

Materials

The character-defining sandstone wall construction remains intact and communicates the building's 1930 construction period. Other exterior materials were replaced with the rehabilitation project. These involve mostly wood elements that were replaced due to their poor condition. They include the drop siding at the gables, the fascia and eave trim, and the rear addition's cladding. They were primarily replaced with like or in-kind materials. The windows and doors, including the front entry, have been replaced. The building was re-roofed, changing from asphalt shingle to a polymer shake.

As part of the rehabilitation, some of the interior walls and all the ceilings were replaced. However, the overall materials and features of the front room (the most important space) have been retained. These include the wood paneling of the walls and counter and the vinyl seats of the booths. They are original to the period and help convey the building's use and significance.

Workmanship

The element of workmanship is confined to the sandstone exterior walls. These were rendered in what is locally called giraffe stone and convey this regional construction technique.

Feeling

Given its location parallel to the highway, the building communicates its historical use as a roadside business. Compromising this is the removal of the Conoco sign, the concrete island, and its two gas pumps. The signage had been removed before the National Register designation, but the pumps and island were part of the nomination (Fig. 18).

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[84] A thorough discussion of current conditions and a preservation treatment plan is found in Kertok, "Threatt Filling Station, Route 66, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma."
[85] Ibid., 5.

Removing these elements affects the building's ability to convey its use and the feeling of a service station. A sign pole and an air hose stand survived and have been reinstalled on a new concrete apron without an island.

Association

Like feeling, removing the signage and pumps has affected the aspect of association. Without its pumps and signage, the building has difficulty presenting its historic association and significance.

Conclusion

Once working as the grocery store, café, and residence of the Threatt Service Station, the building retains the *essential* physical features associated with its significance. As stated by cultural geographers John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle gas stations like Threatts reflect a "frontier for trial and error where small operators, financed largely by 'sweat equity,'" hope[d] to succeed."[86]

The exterior materials, of which the sandstone is the most visible, are original and in good condition. Other materials have been replaced with like or in-kind components. The removal of gas station-related signage and equipment somewhat compromises the aspects of feeling and association and the ability to convey historical use. However, the essential form and exterior characteristics of the building remain intact.

Brown Bomber Bar and Bar-B-Q

The adjacent bar is a vernacular block building that, despite a large metal addition and narrowed front windows, retains its essential core structure. The building supports the site's context and helps communicate the gas station's later use and historical significance.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Gathering comparative data on historic Black-owned gas stations is difficult. While there are older economic studies of African American automobile-related businesses, the accompanying statistics are presented at the macro level and typically do not include filling stations. Other studies looked at specific communities, such as Chicago, but are not helpful because of limited data and no information on the gas station locations referenced in the text.

It is clear that African Americans owned automotive-related businesses, including gas stations, repair shops, and car dealerships. One study placed the number of Black-owned filling stations

[86] Jakle and Sculle, *The Gas Station in America*, 20.

nationally in 1939, at 1,268.[87] Based on contemporary newspaper accounts and advertisements, most were in cities with large African American populations — Baltimore, Atlanta, Detroit, and Memphis. The 1948 *Negro Who's Who in California* highlights several Black entrepreneurs who owned multiple service stations in Los Angeles County. As in the case of Oklahoma, Black-owned filling stations were found in predominantly Black communities, such as Langston and Boley, in Oklahoma.[88]

African American-owned newspapers such as Oklahoma City's *The Black Dispatch* or *The Chicago Defender* contained advertisements for African American-run gas stations and automobile services in these Highway 66 communities. The difficulty is discerning the historic location of the business. Street names and/or addresses often no longer correspond with current conditions. Like other communities, road names in Oklahoma City have changed since the 1930s. Several of the historically Black-owned gas stations in the city were researched, and no conclusion could be reached as to whether they exist.

A second source for comparative data is the *Green Books*. As discussed earlier, the guidebooks were tilted toward city amenities — hotels, restaurants, beauty parlors, and places of entertainment — and rarely listed filling stations. The guide's selection, as admitted by its publisher, was not comprehensive and, therefore, left out some businesses.

The statewide Route 66 surveys provide another source for comparative resources. Conducted mainly in the 1990s, they recorded what had survived along the highway's edge. The work leaned toward bridges, motels, and gas stations — structures that had a strong presence with an equally strong highway association. Other resources, such as storefront businesses in urban areas, were not recorded. In relation to Black businesses, it is unclear what may have been missed. Still, within the surveys — several of which have been updated — no significant African American auto-related resource exists besides Threatt Service Station and Café.[89]

There is also the factor that most buildings of this type were ephemeral. They had to weather economic cycles or evolve within industry trends. In many cases, they were replaced with new businesses or destroyed by redevelopment or highway construction. A Black-owned "super service" gas station described in the 1948 *Negro Who's Who in California* as "one of the best

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[87] Walker, *The History of Black Business in* America, 229, Table 8.4. The number in the table is based on a publication that the author could not locate in a library or repository. Several recent blogs refer to a statistic on Black-owned gas stations reportedly published by the American Petroleum Institute (API). The source of this information could not be located online, and multiple inquiries to the API went unanswered.
[88] Gas stations in these communities appeared in articles or advertisements in *The Black Dispatch*.
[89] Kaisa Barthuli, email to John Murphey, August 18, 2024.

equipped service stations owned by Negroes in America" is now an empty lot in South Los Angeles.[90]

In 2013-14, National Park Service historian Frank Norris attempted to locate businesses listed in the *Green Books*. While his work didn't cover Chicago, it did look at Oklahoma City. Of the 27 Black businesses identified, 21 of them had been demolished.[91]

Based on this, Threatt Service Station has no known comparable properties. It is singular, as it is assumed to be the only surviving Black-owned gas station on U.S. Highway 66. This is the conclusion of the National Park Service's Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program, making its value exceptional.[92]

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP AND SUPPORT

The Threatt Filling Station Foundation, representing Threatt family members who own the property and buildings, fully supports National Historic Landmark designation.

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[90] Negro Who's Who in California, *Negro Who's Who in California, 1948 Editio*n (Publishing location unknown: "Negro Who's Who in California" Publishing Company, 1948), 60. The location of the service station was identified using Google Street View.

[91] National Park Service, "Physical Legacy of Buildings Listed in Black Traveler Guidebooks," https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/physical-legacy-of-buildings-listed-in-black-traveler-guidebooks.htm, accessed August 11, 2024. See also, National Park Service, "Green Book Properties Listed in the National Register of Historic Places," May 5, 2022, https://www.nps.gov/articles/green-book-properties-listed-in-the-national-register-of-historic-places.htm.

[92] Kaisa Barthuli, email to John Murphey, August 23, 2024. The author contacted SHPOs in Highway 66 states, inquiring about historically Black-owned automobile services (gas and service stations and garages) beyond the route. None of the states have these resources listed on the National Register. Only Texas had identified Black-owned automobile businesses through an initial Google map search of Green Book listings. Adjacent states were contacted about their registered Black-owned gas stations. Colorado was the only state that had listed these types of resources.

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Research Assistance

Invaluable information and feedback were provided by Mike Kertok, architect, and Edward D. Threatt Sr., Allen Threatt Sr. descendant and member of the Threatt Filling Station Foundation.

FIGURES

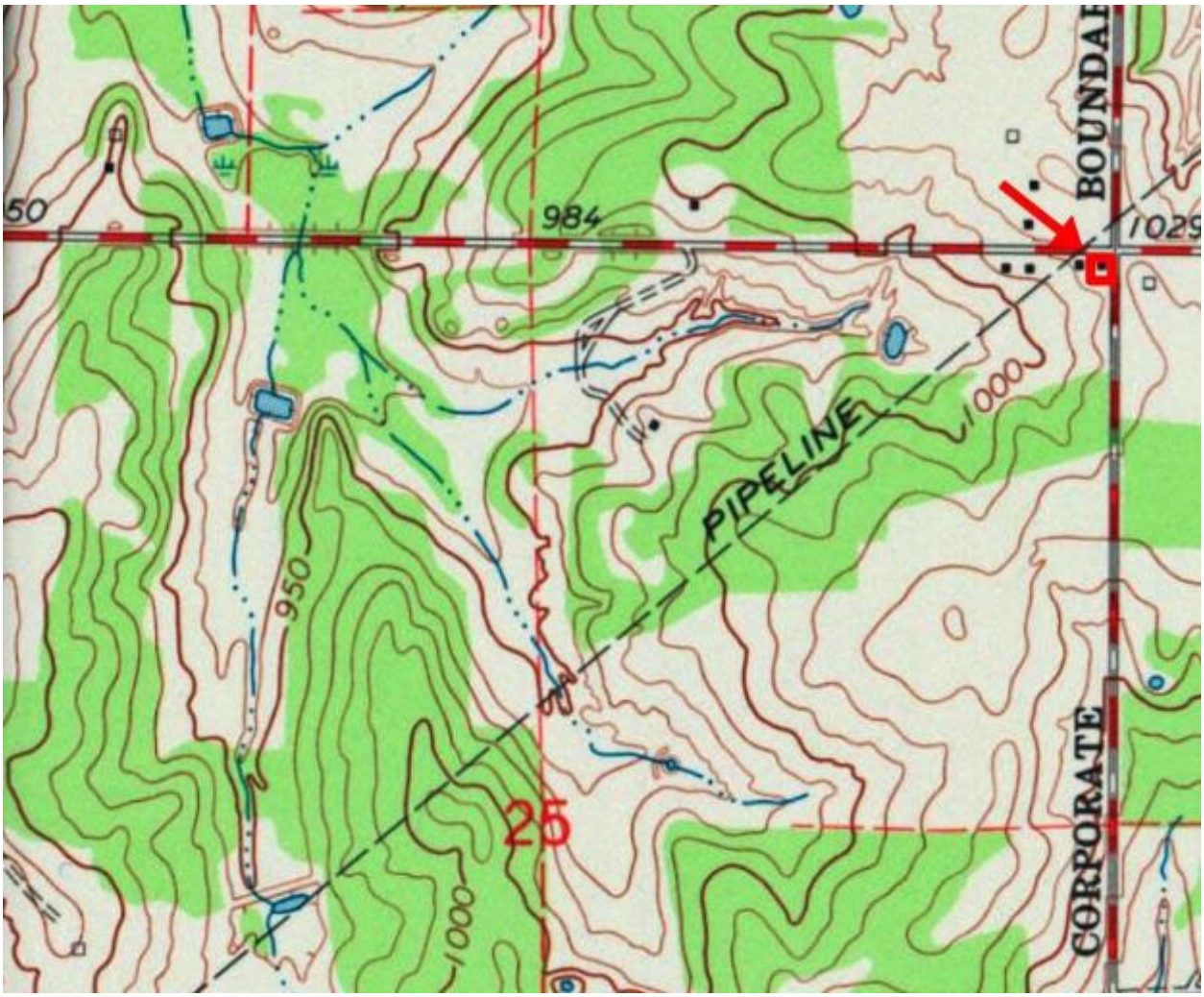

Figure 1: Vicinity Map.
Luther, Okla. (1:24000 map) 1966, revised 1983, USGS quad map.

Figure 2: Threatt Service Station complex. 1” = 200’.

Figure 3: Threatt family historic property. 1” = 600’.

Figure 4: Potential NHL boundary, including the Threatt Service Station building, Brown Bomber Bar and Bar-B-Q, and a small grove where the dance platform is thought to have stood.

Figure 5: Undated portraits of Allen Threatt Sr., and his wife, Alberta W. Threatt. Courtesy of Threatt Filling Station Foundation.

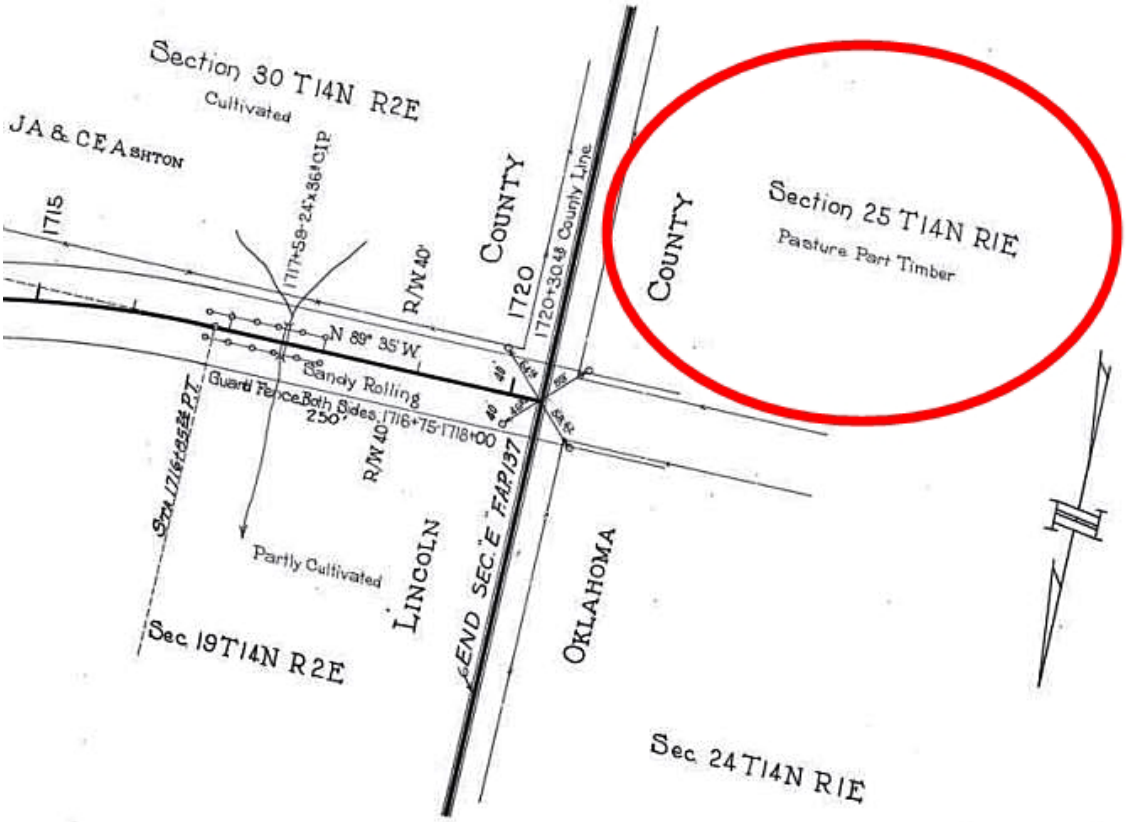

Figure 6: 1926 highway project plan sheet indicating the Threatt land was undeveloped. FAP 137E L, Sheet 14, 1926. Courtesy of the Oklahoma Department of Transportation.

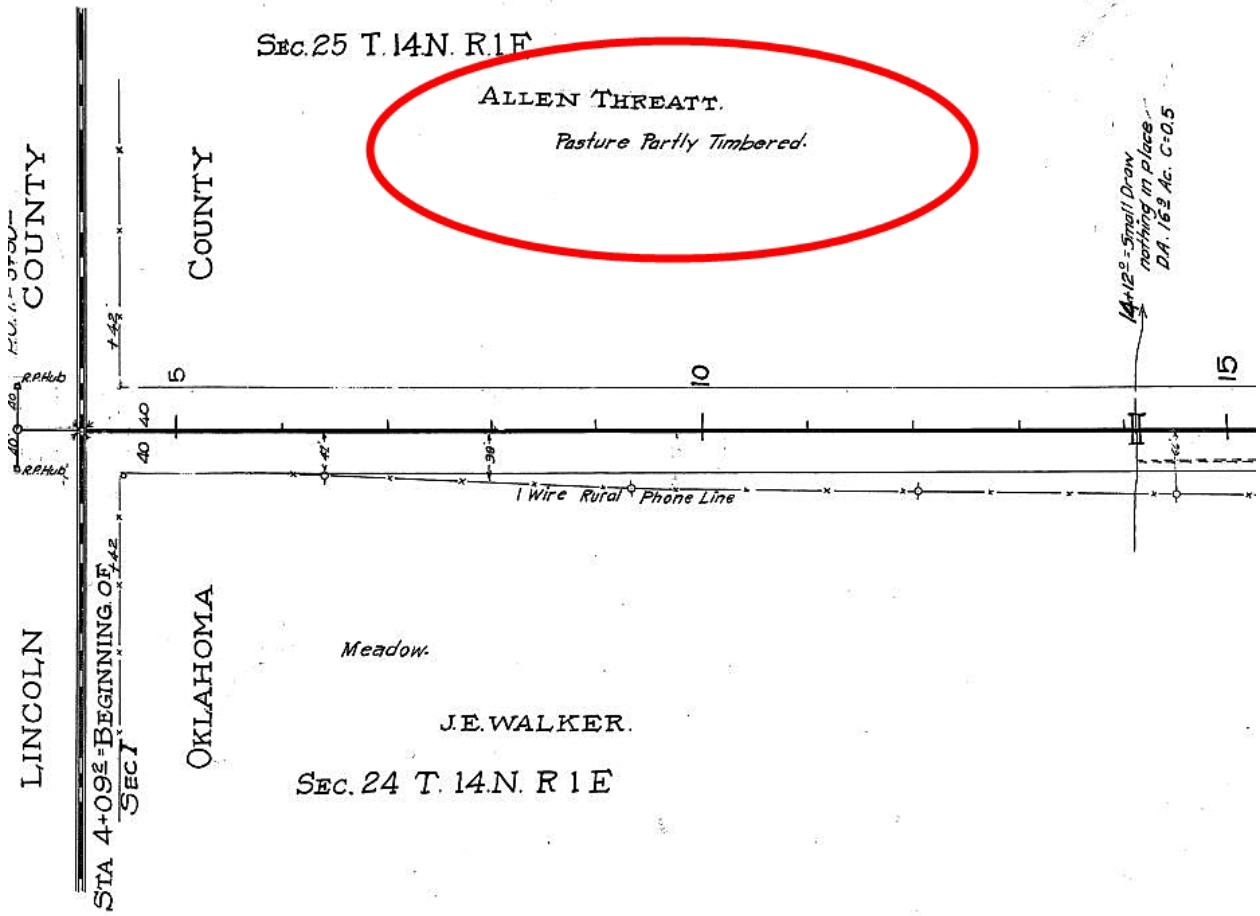

Figure 7: 1930 highway project plan sheet indicating the Threatt land was undeveloped. FAP 137 I et al., Sheet 5. Courtesy of the Oklahoma Department of Transportation.

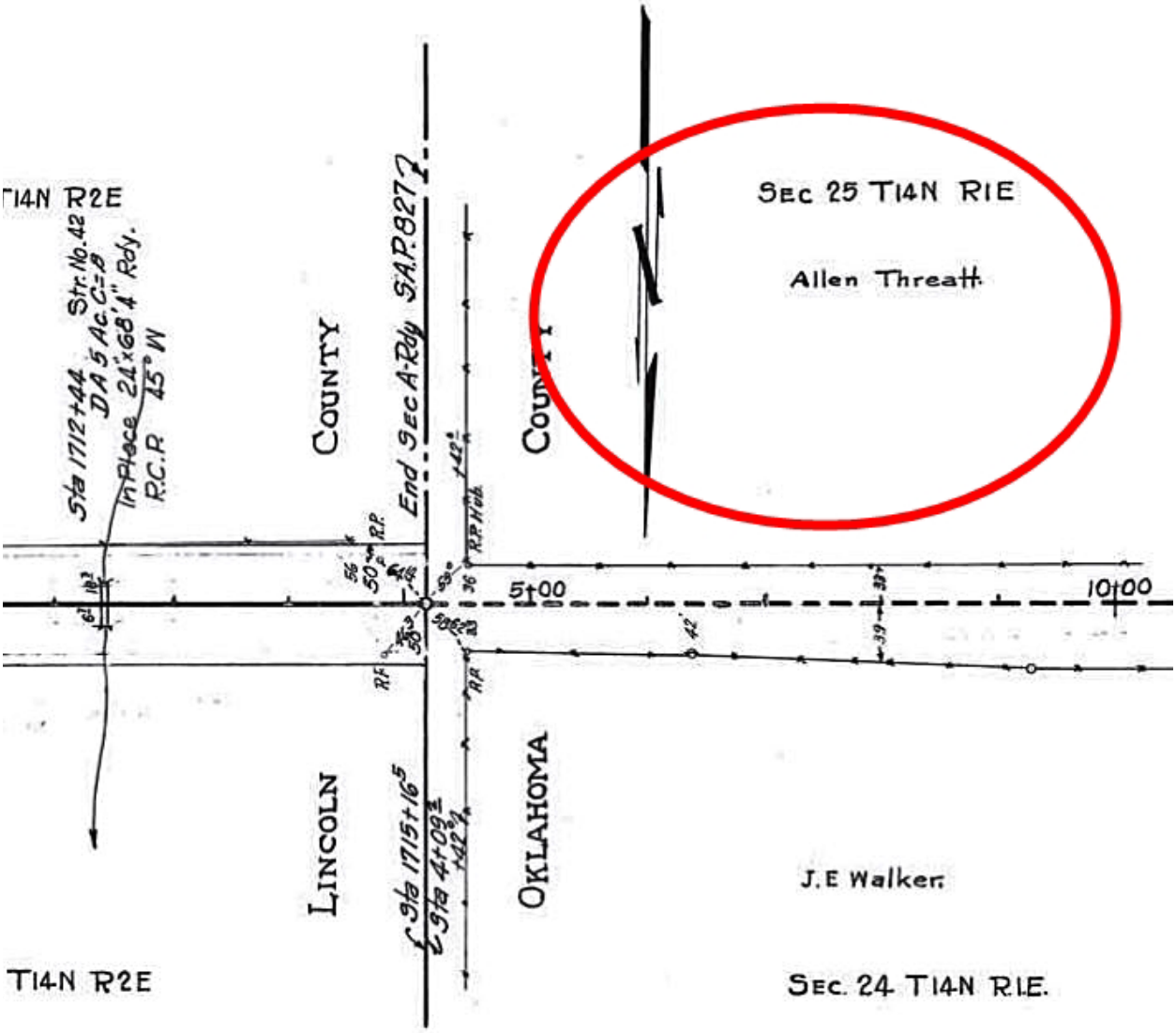

Figure 8: 1931 highway project plan sheet indicating the Threatt land was undeveloped. SAP 827 A, Sheet 17. Courtesy of the Oklahoma Department Transportation.

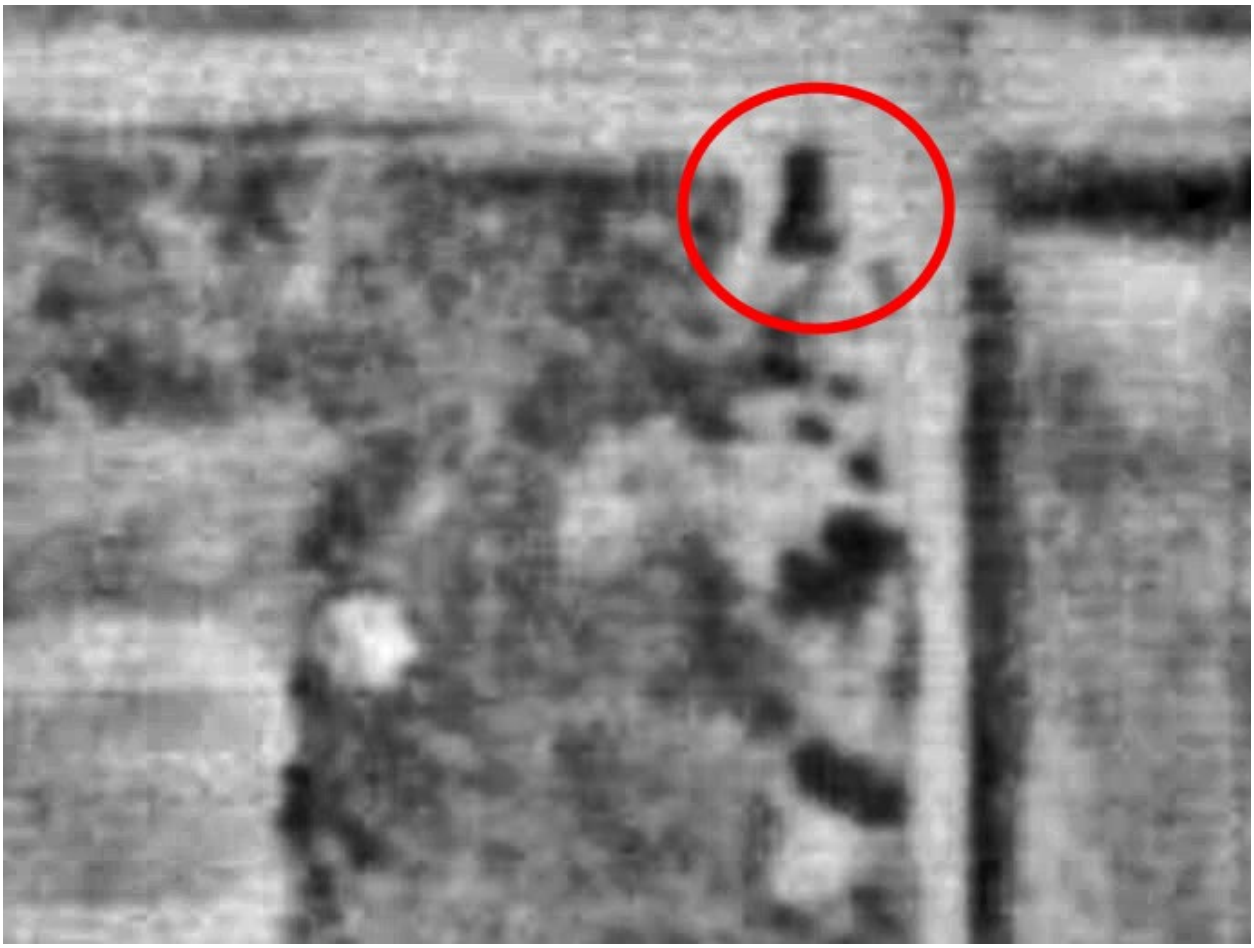

Figure 9: 1937 aerial photograph showing what appears to be a small shed and canopy building, likely a filling station, located where the current gas station stands. Soil Conservation Service, Oklahoma_1937_folder15_ON-6-23.

Figure 10: Ulysses G. Threatt attends to a car, c.1940s. Courtesy of Threatt Filling Station Foundation.

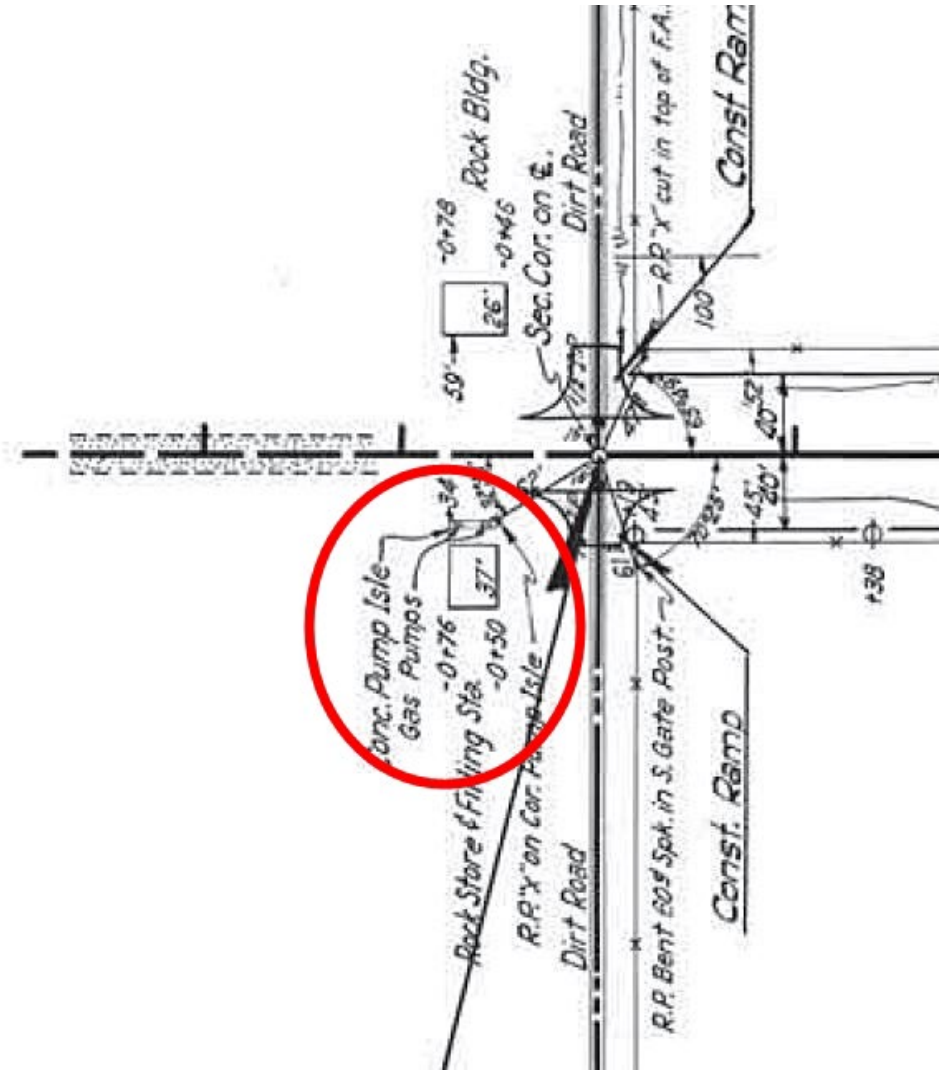

Figure 11: 1950 highway project plan sheet indicating existence of current building. SAP 764 1, Sheet 5. Courtesy of the Oklahoma Department Transportation.

Figure 12: c.1950s aerial image of the Threatt Service Station complex. Courtesy of KOCO and Threatt Filling Station Foundation.

Figure 13: 1943 aerial photograph showing what appear to be two baseball fields (circled). Courtesy of the University of Oklahoma.

Figure 14: c.1951 photograph of Marjorie Mayberry Threatt with children in front of grocery store shelves. Courtesy of Threatt Filling Station Foundation.

Figure 15: c.1960s photograph of Edmond Threatt, Maymie Jones-Threatt, and David Threatt in front of service station. Courtesy of Threatt Filling Station Foundation.

Figure 16: Undated photograph of Threatt Service Station. Note presence of extended rafter tails at the eaves and smaller structure left and right. Courtesy of Threatt Filling Station Foundation.

Figure 17: 1986 image of Threatt Service Station. Note extended rafter tails at façade. Courtesy of photographer, Jerry McClanahan.

Figure 18: 1991 survey photograph taken for National Register nomination. Note presence of gas pumps and island and knee braces at the right gable. Extended rafter tails had been removed by this time. Courtesy of the National Park Service.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 1: Highway setting. Camera facing southwest. March 18, 2024.

Photo 2: Threatt Service Station setting. Camera facing northeast. March 18, 2024.

Photo 3: Former Brown Bomber Bar and Bar-B-Q. Camera facing southwest. March 18, 2024.

Photo 4: Grove of trees south of service station. Red highlights approximately where the dance platform stood. Dairy transport parking lot in background. Camera facing east. March 18, 2024.

Photo 5: Approximate location of baseball field. Camera facing southwest. March 18, 2024.

Photo 6: Ruins of Threatt family Home Place. Camera facing northwest. March 19, 2024.

Photo 7: Historic Threatt family farm field. Camera facing west. March 19, 2024.

Photo 8: Gas station and store. Front (north) façade. Camera facing Southeast. March 20, 2024.

Photo 9: Gas station and store. East elevation. Camera facing west. March 18, 2024.

Photo 10: Gas station and store. West elevation. Camera facing southeast. March 19, 2024.

Photo 11: Gas station and store. Northeast corner of building. Camera facing northwest. March 18, 2024.

Photo 12: Gas station and store. Northeast corner of building. Detail of character scratching in sandstone. Camera facing northwest. March 18, 2024.

Photo 13: Gas station and store. South elevation with reconstructed back addition. Camera facing north. March 18, 2024.

Photo 14: Gas station and store. Front room. Camera facing northwest. March 18, 2024.

Photo 15: Gas station and store. Front room, west wall. Camera facing west. March 18, 2024.

Photo 16: Gas station and store. Front room, east wall and café booth. Camera facing east. March 18, 2024.

Photo 17: Gas station and store. Kitchen. Camera facing northeast. March 18, 2024.

Photo 18: Gas station and store. Elizabeth Threatt's bedroom. Camera facing southeast. March 18, 2024.

Photo 19: Gas station and store. Attic. Camera facing north. March 18, 2024.

Photo 20: Gas station and store. An inscription at the southeast corner of the building reads “1933.” The inscription should be examined below the surface of the paint to determine if the last digit is a “3” or an “8.”

Photo 21: Brown Bomber and Bar-B-Q. Front (north) façade. Camera facing south. March 18, 2024.

Photo 22: Brown Bomber and Bar-B-Q. West and south elevations, including additions. Camera facing northeast. March 18, 2024.

Photo 23: Brown Bomber and Bar-B-Q. Interior of older building. Camera facing north. March 18, 2024.