

## LITSEY ROAD BRIDGE

*Historical Narrative written and researched by Stacey Lotz and Micah Petrie  
for Denton County Historical Commission Historic Landmark Application, Denton County*

### I. CONTEXT

Settled around 1850, Elizabethtown was a once thriving community located at the point where the trail and the stage route from Fort Worth to Denton crossed Henrietta Creek. The Litsey Road Bridge spanned Henrietta Creek, a tributary of Denton Creek, where it intersected Litsey Road. Located in southern Denton County, Elizabethtown was a thriving center of commerce. Complete with a school, a hotel, a livery stable, churches, saloons, general stores, and a Masonic Lodge. The town also served as a supply station for cowboys driving their herds north to Kansas on the famous Chisholm Trail.<sup>1</sup> “Whatever the trail [Chisholm] may properly be called, between 1867 and 1887, thousands of Texas cattle were slowly driven northward through and just west of Denton. Drivers are known to have considered Fort Worth the last supply station on the way north but undoubtedly Elizabethtown, Denton, and Bolivar supplied them with such items as were available from their stock.”<sup>2</sup>

### II. OVERVIEW

Originally located west of Roanoke, the Litsey Road Bridge provided service to Elizabethtown, Roanoke and surrounding communities. In June 1912, the Denton County Commissioners Court allocated \$700 to build a bridge across Henrietta Creek near Roanoke.<sup>3</sup> The bridge was initially built to be used by horse and wagons and later, as they became more common, automobiles. According to those whose families remained in the Elizabethtown area after 1881, the bridge at the crossing of Henrietta Creek and Litsey Road was necessary for the farmers and ranchers to transport their crops to the gins, mills and railroads located in Roanoke and neighboring

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<sup>1</sup> Jeannine Sellmeyer, “Elizabethtown, TX” Handbook of Texas Online. <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/articles/hve52> [accessed July 1, 2013].

<sup>2</sup> C.A. Bridges, *History of Denton, Texas from Its Beginning to 1960* (Waco: Texian Press, 1978), 117.

<sup>3</sup> “Over \$11,000 Paid out by Court Monday,” *The Post-Signal*, June 14, 1912, Vol. 34, No. 42. <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph291221/>

communities.<sup>4</sup> Although it served its purpose for over a hundred years, the bridge was closed in 2007 when structural cracks were discovered upon examining the bridge.<sup>5</sup> In a 2008, report prepared for the City of Roanoke by Unified Building Sciences and Engineering, the bridge is described as being approximately one and one-half miles west of the Litsey Road/Business Hwy 114 intersection. The bridge is designed in the Warren Pony Truss style with both bolted and riveted connections. The bridge is described in the report as being 68'-8" in length over two spans. The roadway width is 11'-6" and the overall width to the outside of the structure is 14 feet. The height of the structure is 10 feet.<sup>6</sup> In 2011, the bridge was relocated by the City of Roanoke from its resting place over Henrietta Creek to the City of Roanoke Public Works building located at 265 Marshall Creek Road, Roanoke, Texas 76262 at a cost of \$14,720.<sup>7</sup> The City of Roanoke plans to use Litsey Road Bridge as a pedestrian bridge at a location to be determined.<sup>8</sup>

The road and bridge were named after Richard Randolph (R.R.) Litsey, who was born in Kentucky in 1841. He moved to Denton County around 1865 after serving in the Confederate Army during the Civil War.<sup>9</sup> He married Sarah Malvina Holford, of the Holfords of Holford's Prairie, on March 13, 1866. Holford's Prairie was located north of Highway 407 in Denton County, where present-day Highland Village is located. R.R. and Sarah were married in Holford's Prairie and lived there for a number of years near the original location of Bethel Church. They then relocated to land located south of Argyle, approximately a half-mile north of Smoot's Spur and west of Stonecrest Road. Mr. Litsey owned over 2,000 acres in Argyle and also purchased over 2,000 acres west of Roanoke around the prior location of

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<sup>4</sup> Calvin Peterson, interview by Micah Petrie, tape recorded, Roanoke, Texas, September 13, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Texas Department of Transportation, *Status of bridge condition*. March 2006

<sup>6</sup> Unified Building Sciences & Engineering, Inc. *Litsey Road at Henrietta Creek Bridge Feasibility Study*. 405 International Parkway, Ste 209, Richardson, Texas, 75081. July 10, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> The City of Roanoke and Half Associates, Inc., *City of Roanoke Professional Services Agreement*. September 10, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Debra Wallace, City of Roanoke, Texas. City Hall: 108 S. Oak St, Roanoke, Texas, 76262.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census. *1860 U.S. census, population schedule: District 2, Washington, Kentucky, Roll M653-399, Page 46, Image 42, Family History Library Film 803399*. NARA microfilm publication M 653, 1,438 rolls. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d. U.S. Bureau of the Census. *1870 U.S. census, population schedule: Precinct 4, Denton, Texas, Roll M593-1582, Page 193A, Image 389, Family History Library Film 553081*. NARA microfilm publication M593, 1,761 rolls. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.

Elizabethtown. He used the land outside of Roanoke to raise cattle and crops.<sup>10</sup> As a prominent rancher and landowner, R.R. Litsey and his family had not only a road named after them but also a school and church. The Litsey School, located in the Argyle area, was organized in 1887.<sup>11</sup> The Litsey Baptist Church was organized in 1921 at the Litsey Schoolhouse. The Litsey School District was divided between Justin and Argyle in 1946, at which time the building was sold and moved to the farm of Mr. W.H. Schooling in Wise County.<sup>12</sup> Mr. Litsey built a two-story barn on his property that featured a ramp which could be used to drive a vehicle to the upper story of the barn. According to R.R. Litsey's great-grandson, Sarah Litsey had a relative named Yancy Story, a man who was not always on the good side of the law. In fact, he was the leader of the rather infamous Story gang. Apparently, he had a habit of having cars in his possession, for which he didn't necessarily have the titles. Therefore, when he needed a good place to hide these cars, he would drive them up to the loft of the barn belonging to the Litsey family and cover them with hay to conceal them from anyone who might be looking for them, such as the Texas Rangers.<sup>13</sup>

### III. SIGNIFICANCE

Denton County experienced a dramatic population increase and development boom beginning in the 1880's. Along with a burgeoning population and increased business came the need for improved transportation accommodations. This led to the construction of approximately twenty iron bridges in Denton County between 1880 and 1912, a sure sign of the prosperity and growth to be found in Denton County communities. One such iron bridge was to be found at the crossing of Henrietta Creek, a tributary of Denton Creek, and Litsey Road in southern Denton County.<sup>14</sup> Located on the road named after the prominent Litsey Family of Denton County, a

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<sup>10</sup> Jim Heath, interview by Martha Len Nelson, tape recorded, Denton, Texas, February 25, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Myrtle Watson, "Argyle School System," City of Argyle, Texas, [http://www.argyletx.com/Section/Visitor\\_Information/History/Argyle\\_School\\_System/index.html](http://www.argyletx.com/Section/Visitor_Information/History/Argyle_School_System/index.html) [accessed July 26, 2011].

<sup>12</sup> City of Argyle, Texas, "Church History," [http://www.argyletx.com/Section/Visitor\\_Information/History/Church\\_History/index.html](http://www.argyletx.com/Section/Visitor_Information/History/Church_History/index.html) [accessed August 8, 2011].

<sup>13</sup> Heath, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Denton County Historical Commission, *The Historical Iron Bridges of Denton County Texas*.

family that owned thousands of acres in the southern part of the county, the bridge served the mostly farming and ranching families of the Elizabethtown and Roanoke areas. Elizabethtown was a community on the decline, due to being bypassed by the Texas and Pacific Railroad for its neighbor to the east, Roanoke. Nevertheless, several families, the majority of whom worked a vast amount of farmland, continued to reside on the west side of Henrietta Creek. Litsey Road Bridge provided a safe, reliable way for them to transport their goods and families to neighboring communities and markets.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Calvin Peterson, interview by Micah Petrie, tape recorded, Roanoke, Texas, September 13, 2011.

#### IV. DOCUMENTATION

1. Jeannine Sellmeyer, "Elizabethtown, TX." Handbook of Texas Online. <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hve52> [accessed July 1, 2013].
2. C.A. Bridges, *History of Denton, Texas from Its Beginning to 1960* (Waco: Texian Press, 1978), 117.
3. "Over \$11,000 Paid out by Court Monday," The Post-Signal, June 14, 1912, Vol. 34, No. 42. <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph291221/> [accessed March 19, 2015].
4. Calvin Peterson, interview by Micah Petrie, tape recorded, Roanoke, Texas, September 13, 2011. Roanoke Visitor Center and Museum: 114 N. Oak Street, Roanoke, Texas, 76262.
5. Texas Department of Transportation, *Status of bridge condition*. March 2006
6. Unified Building Sciences Engineering, Inc. Litsey Road at Henrietta Creek Bridge Feasibility Study. 405 International Parkway, Suite 209, Richardson, Texas, 75081.
7. The City of Roanoke and Halff Associates, Inc., *City of Roanoke Professional Services Agreement*. September 10, 2008.
8. Debra Wallace, City of Roanoke, Texas. City Hall: 108 Oak St, Roanoke, Texas, 76262.
9. U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1860 U.S. census, *population schedule: District 2, Washington, Kentucky, Roll M653-399, Page 46, Image 42, Family History Library Film 803399*. NARA microfilm publication M 653, 1, 438 rolls. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d. U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1870 U.S. census, *population schedule: Precinct 4, Denton, Texas, Roll M593-1582, Page 193A, Image 389, Family History Library Film 553081*. NARA microfilm publication M593, 1,761 rolls. Washington, D.C.: national Archives and Records Administration, n.d.

10. Jim Heath, interview by Martha Len Nelson, tape recorded, Denton, Texas, February 25, 2002. Denton County Courthouse-on-the-square: 110 West Hickory Street, Denton, Texas 76201.
11. Myrtle Watson, "Argyle School System," City of Argyle, Texas, [http://www.argyletx.com/Section/Visitor\\_Information/History/Argyle\\_School\\_System/index.html](http://www.argyletx.com/Section/Visitor_Information/History/Argyle_School_System/index.html) [accessed July 26, 2011].
12. City of Argyle, Texas, "Church History," [http://www.argyletx.com/Section/Visitor\\_Information/History/Church\\_history/index.html](http://www.argyletx.com/Section/Visitor_Information/History/Church_history/index.html) [accessed August 8, 2011].
13. Heath, 2002.
14. Denton County Historical Commission, *The Historical Iron Bridges of Denton County Texas*.
15. Calvin Peterson, interview by Micah Petrie, tape recorded, Roanoke, Texas, September 13, 2011. Roanoke Visitor Center and Museum: 114 N. Oak Street, Roanoke, Texas, 76262