

Palo Duro Weight Station O'Laughlin Ranch
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There are lots of cotton wood, hackberry trees, and willows on the Palo Duro Creek, a good wide shallow gravel crossing about six miles up the creek from the Oklahoma line. There are nice wide level valleys and the Indians camped there for hundreds of years. There were many Indian artifacts pick there in latter years.

When the railroad came into Dodge City Kansas, the army contracted freighters with wagons and teams, mostly Ox teams to haul supplies to the Army Forts, from the railroad. The freighters made what was called trails. They chose the best way to get across the country- everyone followed that trail. They wore the ground down so it was easier to get across the country. Two such trails crossed the Palo Duro Creek at the Old Indian Crossing. The first from Dodge City Kansas to Tascosa, Texas, and a latter one from Denver, Colorado. One of the first freighters from Dodge City to Tascosa was Amos Hibbs, with four wagons in tandem; (two wagons hooked together and pulled by six oxen) There was plenty of grass. He had twelve head of oxen hitched and twelve feeding on grass. The ones that were not pulling were tied together and herded along with the wagons, grazing on the grass. It took him almost three months round trip from Dodge City to Tascosa and back. The next three months he freighted from Dodge City to Fort Elliot, Texas, by way of Fort Supply and Canadian, Texas. This route was not quite as far but almost took as long. So He made four trips a year. He had the contract until the railroad came into Amarillo Texas, and Fort Elliot was shut down. Tascosa was a trading post and small town. All the freighters on the Dodge-Tascosa trail stopped over at the Indian Crossing to rest their live stock and repair wagons and harnesses. The O Laughlin brothers' file on the land, they came there in the later part of the 18??

They built a weight station about three hundred yards north of the Indian Crossing. It was a 24 by 48 foot two story building, and was set in the side on a hill. There were two rooms downstairs, and three upstairs- two bedrooms and a freight storage. A loading dock and doors even with Wagon beds; the bottom north room was just about three-foot above ground. The entire bottom floor that was above ground was rock on the outside but lumber inside. Freighters hauled lumber from Dodge City. The freighters hauled buffalo hides and bones on their trip back to Dodge City. There was a large kitchen in the north end of the bottom floor and a lobby in the south end, which was used as a sitting room but the men would roll out their beds on the floor if the weather was bad. The O'Laughlin brothers lived there a few years. Robert Hibbs said he thought the weight-station was built 1881 or 1882. He was there on a trip with his father Amos Hibbs in the summer of 1883, when he was a small boy, and one of their wagons needed some repairs. They stayed there three or

four days and it was very new then. He was there many times through the years. Rob Hibbs said they called it Palo Duro Station back then. Rob Hibbs bought the Palo Duro Mullock Station thirty years later. The O'Laughlin brothers built a ranch headquarters up on the flats about three miles south east of the weigh station before 1890. They sold the weigh station and some land to Ira P Mullock. Mullock had sheep and built a sheep shed about 300 ft long. The shed was very low only five or six ft high, about ten or twelve foot deep, and open on the southside. There were some horse barns. At some time someone drilled a well on the top of the hill just above the house and put a windmill, then piped the water into the kitchen, into a barrel, then into a trough for cooling, and then out the side of the house into a ditch and on down the hill. What modern convience! There was a lot of woven wire sheep fence. Mullock planted alfalfa on both side of the creek. The creek at that time had a large curve beginning just below the crossing and ran about 150 yards west of the house, full width of a half section one half mile to Bertrand's Property line. The north side of the section line (the Bertrand's were not there yet at that time) The weight station was on a half section connected with a full section on the west and a full section on the east. The Bertrand Place was a half-section, surrounded on side by Mullock.

The land was free range if not claimed and fenced. No one could claim more than one half mile of the creek unless they bought someone else's land. O'Laughlins got the next half-mile up the creek after they sold the weigh station. Ira P Mullock established a Post Office April 8th 1899. Located section 47 block 45 H& TC RR survey. Mullock Post office postmaster Ira P Mullock. Mullock sold out and moved to California 1902, but the Post Office retained the same name until it was discontinued Nov. 30 1918. The Post Office was moved from Ranch to Ranch the next 9 years (1902-1911). Other Postmasters were Simmons, Caldwell, and Robinson.

Austin A Robinson and wife Rosa Robinson bought the weigh station and two and one half sections of land. The Post Office was moved back to the Weigh Station June 6 1904. The Robinson's also had sheep and alfalfa. Mr. Robinson decided he wanted to straighten out the bend in the creek, he had the channel changed and moved the crossing down the creek about a quarter of a mile. It was a very bad crossing, but was never changed again. The change brought the creek brought the creek to about fifty-foot or less from the house down the hill but not far enough. When the creek rose it came very near the house. Charlie Crowley had bought the Huff and Mel Wright Ranch. Beginning w miles north of the Mullock north line.

E.A. Luke a stone mason and a civil Engineer was a long time friend of Mcrawley. Mr. Luke had just finished a ten-year contract building a railroad across Eastern Oklahoma from Coffeerville KS to Denison Texas I 1904. They operated as Lukes and Sons, Alamo construction Company-contractors. Mr. Crowley persuaded Mr. Luke to come to Hansford County to build some irrigation dams on the Palo Dura Creek. The Luke family bought a

section of railroad land just north of Newcomb's ranch near New Hope sod schoolhouse. They had three children of school age, two girls, and a boy, and also a baby boy, four grown boys (two married) and a grown daughter. The married sons soon moved to Oklahoma and file on land of their own. The Luke family fenced their land, build a sod house and a dugout. They drilled a well, and put up a windmill and built a shed for two milk cows, which they bought from one of the neighbors. They also fenced and plowed a garden near the well. They built two small Dams for McCrawly, and on the property line between Mr. MrCrowley and Oren Bertand and they built ten Chimney's on houses in Hansford. They also built steel bridge and a concrete and rock slab crossing for JD Steele on Palo Duro Creek. It is still holding eighty years later. Mr. Robinson decided he wanted a bigger damn than the others dams. There was no safe place to put a dam on his half mile of the creek. Mr. Luke tried to dissuade him, told him a dam would not hold there, but Mr. Robinson believed it would work, he was very adamant. Mr. Luke finally gave in with the stipulation that it had to be in the contract that if the damn failed he would not be responsible, and that he had told this strongly to Mr. Robinson.

I think they finished in 1909. I have a picture of the men working on building the dam. It was taken in May 1908. It was not a big damn. It was not much bigger than the other three. The first big rise washes around it, if it had not it would have probably would have came into the house. They estimated they put in one hundred tons of rock hauled by wagons and mules from the Caprock east of Mullock and cement hauled from Guymon, OK. It was three hundred foot long with two wooden gates. The other two dams were smaller dams built with overflow and concrete and rock shirts to keep it from washing the ground away on the other side.

The Robinson's moved away early spring of 1910. John Luke was working for the O'Laughlins. John Luke and his wife Betty moved into the Weight Station. Betty Luke took care of the mail without a commission from the spring of 1910 to July 1911, when Mrs. Newcombe was commissioned. At that time Betty Luke went to work cooking for the O'Laughlin Ranch.

Robert Hibbs and his wife Lura (the oldest daughter of Ethan A. Luke) bought the weight station and eight sections of land, four in Hansford County, and four in Ochiltree County in 1912. They moved in with a small daughter about Feb 1913. Another daughter was born at the Weight Station March 25 1913. A son was born there Sept 1 1914. The freight station was discontinued then but many travelers and freighters camped there until about 1920. Some would stay several months when the weather was bad or some of the family was unable to travel. Mr. Hibbs would sometimes hire the men for a while to build fence and sheds or put up some alfalfa hay. He tore down the sheep's sheds, and built horse barns and wind brake sheds for one hundred heads of cattle. He also built a chicken house, A

black smith shop, and a small bunkhouse for a hired man. He brought about 150 head of cattle, six horses, a crippled mule and a jersey milk cow with him from Oklahoma. Some of the horses were both work and saddle horses. It seemed he was building fence the next twenty years. There was always fence to be repaired or new fence to build. Everything went very well until the winter of 1918. The creek kept getting nearer the back door of the house. Each rise it came nearer. In 1917 Mr. Hibbs hired Joe Edden. He rented the Tom McMurry Place. It had a two-room house and a three room half-dugout. The Eddens moved into the house and the Hibbs family moved into the dugout. Mr. Hibbs and Mr. Edden tore down the weight station and built a four-room house on higher ground. Hibbs had about 100 head of cow. Mr. Wilmeth didn't have much pasture. Hibbs and Mr. Wilmeth made a deal. Mr. Wilmeth bought a twelve hundred-dollar Bull and one head of registered Hereford Cows. Mr. Hibbs bought one hundred head of Registered Hereford cows. They put them all on Hibbs pasture. Mr. Hibbs gave Mr. Wilmeth's sons board. They stayed in the bunkhouse and helped care for the cattle. Then things began going bad. First World War I, then the Flu Epidemic, then the worst winter in history, and in the middle, the cattle market dropped to the bottom. Hibbs lost all 90 head of cows and all the calves in the blizzard. I think Mr. Wilmeth lost about all of his as did all the neighbors. Hibbs had plenty of alfalfa hay for all he could get into the sheds. They were so crowded he lost ten of them. He got all his Hereford in the sheds. He parked his Oldsmobile car between the haystacks and put cows in the car shed. Mrs. Hibbs and two little children were down with the flu. Mr. Hibbs and the oldest girl (8) did not get the flu, but most of the neighbors were down sick also. Mr. Hibbs tried to care of his family and all the neighbors. A neighbor, Mrs. McElreath (a nurse), tried to help but she had an invalid husband in a wheel chair, and two small boys with the flu. When it was all over in 1921 Mr. Hibbs gave up the cattle business. He had twenty head of mustang mares left. He sold several sections of land, moved to mares on what pasture he had left, and started raising wheat, and built a house two miles east. Bob Archer bought the Palo Duro Place and sold it to Bill McClarity of Perryton TX in 1922. Mr. McClarity leased it to JC Scroggs the first of April 1922. Mr. Scroggs had a heart attack about three weeks later and died. He left a wife and eight children who lived on the land for eighteen months. George Faus leased the place for five years in 1925 and moved to Colorado in 1930. Grover Brillhart and his family bought the Palo Duro weight station place, the O'Laughlin Ranch, and The McMurry and Newcombe ranch in the early 1930;s. They still own all of that land. James Brillhart owns the old Palo Duro Station--all of the old buildings are gone, the creek crossings all washing out.....Nothing like it was when I was a child there. I am Rob Hibbs 88-year-old daughter. Everyone else that lived in that part of Hansford County, except James Brillhart, has passed on.

Julia Hibbs McManus

Amos Hibbs and E.A. (Ethan Allen) Luke were both my grandfathers.

Editor Note: Editor LD Pierce noted that Hibbs and Luke were my great great grandfathers!