

LISTED 12-9-02  
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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable". For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name Texas Trail Stone Corral  
Other names/site number NeHBS# CH00-041

## 2. Location

Street & number \_\_\_\_\_ Not for publication   
City or town Imperial Vicinity   
State Nebraska Code NE County Chase Code 029 Zip code 69033

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*Andrew Samuel* \_\_\_\_\_ Date 10/21/02  
Signature of certifying official  
Director, Nebraska State Historical Society  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_
- see continuation sheet. \_\_\_\_\_
- determined eligible for the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_
- see continuation sheet. \_\_\_\_\_
- determined not eligible for the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_
- removed from the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_
- other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- Private
- Public-local
- Public-state
- Public-federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Number of Resources within Property		
Contributing	Noncontributing	
	2	Buildings
		Sites
1	1	Structures
		Objects
1	3	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER: Corral

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Foundation N/A

Walls STONE

Roof N/A

Other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- X A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B Removed from its original location.
C A birthplace or a grave.
D A cemetery.
E A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F A commemorative property.
G Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

c. 1876 - c. 1886

Significant Dates

c. 1876

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Webster, Thomas B.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
Previously listed in the National Register
Previously determined eligible by the National Register
Designated a National Historic Landmark
Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location for additional data:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local Government
University
Other
Name of repository:

**10. Geographical Data**Acreage of property Approximately 1.95 acres

UTM References (place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet).

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1.		RESTRICTED	RESTRICTED	3.		RESTRICTED	RESTRICTED
2.		RESTRICTED	RESTRICTED	4.		RESTRICTED	RESTRICTED

[ ] See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Erin Pogany and Sarah Davis McBride, Historic Preservation Specialists  
 organization Mead & Hunt, Inc. date May 2002  
 street & number 6501 Watts Road telephone 608.273.6380  
 city or town Madison state WI zip code 53719

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets****Maps**A **USGS map** (7.5- or 15-minute series) indicating the property's location.A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.**Photographs**Representative **black-and-white photographs** of the property.**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name/title Bentz Valley, Inc. c/o John Maddux  
 street & number P.O. Box 217 telephone 308.882.3016  
 city or town Wauneta state Nebraska zip code 69045

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determined eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, (15 USC 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503

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Texas Trail Stone Corral

Name of Property

Chase County, Nebraska

County and State

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**Introduction**

The Texas Trail Stone Corral, built by Thomas B. Webster on his ranch in c. 1876, is located along a historic route of the Texas Trail.<sup>1</sup> The ranch is currently owned by Bentz Valley, Inc. and is located in Chase County, Nebraska.

Historically, the ranch property consisted of 640 acres of land.<sup>2</sup> Currently, the ranch consists of 8,000 acres of land, a house, a stone fence along the east and south elevations of the house, and the surviving two walls of the stone corral. There are also several outbuildings on the ranch property, including a spring house, three barns, a calving shed, and several smaller outbuildings. The stone corral is located northeast of the house in an area with two sheds and two modern corrals. The ranch complex is set back from USH 61 and accessed by a gravel driveway.

The surrounding landscape consists of rolling hills and open grassland used for cattle ranching. Spring Creek, a branch of the Stinking Water Creek, flows northwest through the ranch property towards the Republican River. Limestone outcroppings lie to the north of the creek. Spring Creek meanders approximately 250 to 300 feet from the north wall of the corral.

**Description<sup>3</sup>**

The corral consists of two intersecting limestone walls forming a right angle. One of the walls is oriented east-west, while the other is oriented north-south. The walls range in height from approximately 4 feet 6 inches high to 5 feet 6 inches high, and range in depth from 3 to 4 feet wide. The east-west wall is 99 feet long and the north-south wall is 57 feet 6 inches long. Originally, the corral consisted of four walls and an opening, and was rectangular in plan. Owners removed two walls of the corral, c. 1940, to construct a stone fence along two elevations of the ranch house. At the base of the east-west wall, close to the corner, a small opening accommodates a 1-foot-round metal drainage pipe. According to the present owner, the drain pipe was constructed sometime after the corral was built.

The Websters constructed the Texas Trail Stone Corral of single-stone, dry masonry. This method of construction involves laying stones without mortar, which was commonly used by European settlers who brought the tradition to the colonies as early as the seventeenth century. As settlers moved west, so did their building traditions. The technology of single-stone, dry masonry is simple. The method generally used readily available local stone such as fieldstone found in farm fields or rock outcroppings.<sup>4</sup> The Websters likely gathered the limestone to construct the stone corral from the rocky outcroppings near their property. The stones were selected for their shape and size and were piled one on top of another, approximately 7 to 10 stones high, forming a single wall. The large stones are generally long and flat, ranging in size from approximately 6 to 10 inches high and 1 to 2 feet long. Extant examples of this type of construction are rare in Nebraska. It is unknown if portions of the wall are buried below grade at the property as no archeological excavations have been conducted.

<sup>1</sup> Nellie Snyder Yost, *The Call of the Range; The Story of the Nebraska Stock Growers Association* (Denver, Colo.: Sage Books, 1966), 109; Anoma Hoffmeister, "A Ranch on the Texas Trail" (n.p., n.d.), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Speech of Archie Smith, "The Webster Ranch," (n.p., n.d.). Available at the Nebraska State Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, Lincoln, Nebr.

<sup>3</sup> Unless noted, general history of Stone Corral is taken from John Maddux, interview by Mead & Hunt, Inc., 4 October 2001, Imperial, Nebraska.

<sup>4</sup> William D. Walters, Jr., ed., "Stone Walls" (n.p.: *Pioneer America Society Transactions*, 1987), 67-70; Harley J. McKee, *Introduction to Early American Masonry: Stone Brick, Mortar and Plaster* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1987), 31-32.

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By c.1940, the east and south walls of the corral were dismantled and a portion of the stone was used to construct the stone wall presently in front of the south and east elevations of the ranch house. After the corral's east and south walls were dismantled, a frame, gabled-roof calving shed and horse shed were constructed adjacent to the remaining two walls of the corral. The calving shed touches the north wall of the corral at the eastern end. The second building, a frame shed, is located at the southeastern corner of the corral. Both outbuildings are located within the site of the former east and south walls of the corral. The calving shed and horse shed were constructed c. 1945 and are both noncontributing resources of the property. A modern corral constructed of wood and metal wire is also within the historic boundary and is a noncontributing resource.

Although 125 years have passed since construction, the Texas Trail Stone Corral continues to display the original materials, the dry-laid stone construction technique, and the workmanship of the nineteenth-century builders. The remaining walls of the stone corral convey the design, setting, and feel of a nineteenth-century stone corral used for cattle trading located along the Texas Trail. The inclusion of outbuildings on working agricultural properties such as ranches, is common over time. Therefore, the noncontributing shed and corral do not diminish this property's association with the Texas Trail or hinder its ability to convey its significance for the National Register of Historic Places. The Texas Trail Stone Corral is a unique extant resource of the Texas Trail in Nebraska. The corral is a physical resource that conveys the early history of the cattle industry in the state.

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Statement of Significance

The Texas Trail Stone Corral is eligible for the National Register under *Criterion A: Commerce* for its association with the cattle trade of the late nineteenth century. The corral gains significance from its location along the Texas Trail where it served in the development of the cattle industry through trade and transportation. The cattle trade that developed after the late nineteenth century had an immense commercial impact on the geographic areas it traversed, especially Nebraska, which served as the termini of several cattle-driving routes during the late 1800s. As such, the corral represents an important theme in the history of the American West and in Nebraska's commercial development of the cattle industry and is of statewide significance.

Thomas B. Webster constructed the corral in c. 1876, as well as an early homestead, along the Spring Creek Branch of the Stinking Water Creek in Chase County, Nebraska. Webster's stone corral served as a stopping point for cattle drovers for nearly a decade before the demise of the Texas Trail. Few visible features from the Texas Trail remain along its routes due to the mobile and ephemeral nature of the resources. According to the Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey inventory of over 60,000 properties statewide, the corral is a unique extant resource associated with the Texas Trail and early cattle trade in the state of Nebraska.<sup>5</sup> The Texas Trail Stone Corral derives statewide significance from its association with the growth of the cattle-trading industry, which had an immense commercial and economic impact on the state of Nebraska. The period of significance is c. 1876 to c. 1886, the years that Texas Trail drivers actively traversed western Nebraska and Webster's corral served as one of the stopping and resting points along the trail in Nebraska.

Chase County

Like other areas in Nebraska, settlement began in Chase County when the federal government encouraged land purchase and settlement through legislation such as the Homestead Act. Land speculators and railroad companies also owned tracts of land and promoted settlement. The federal and state governments gave land to these companies to encourage railroad expansion west.<sup>6</sup> The Union Pacific Railroad was the first company to complete a line across the nation.<sup>7</sup> When the Union Pacific Railroad finished a line across Nebraska in 1867, areas surrounding the railroad line developed with ranches and small settlements. The line also provided shipping points for the cattle drivers coming north from Texas. One of the stops along the Union Pacific Railroad was in Ogallala, in neighboring Keith County, approximately 40 miles to the north of Imperial and the stone corral. The railroad arrived in Ogallala in 1866, and soon stockyards were constructed to hold the large numbers of cattle before shipping them east.

Even with a railroad corridor completed to the north, Chase County remained sparsely populated throughout the nineteenth century, having a population of less than 80 in the early 1880s.<sup>8</sup> Ranch development in Chase County began c. 1876 when Texan cattle drovers shifted their route to western Nebraska from areas farther east and drove their herds north through Chase County to Ogallala. Because of Chase County's dry climate, cattle ranching developed as the primary agricultural industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> According to the Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey, which consists of approximately 60,000 entries, the Texas Trail Stone Corral is a unique resource from the Texas Trail in the state of Nebraska.

<sup>6</sup> Anoma Hoffmeister and Chase County Genealogical Society, *A Research Guide to Genealogical Data in Chase County, Nebraska* ([Nebr.]: Nebraska State Genealogical Society, 1986), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Nebraska State Historical Society, *Nebraska Planning and Development Region Nineteen: A History and Historical Sites Survey of Grant, Arthur, Keith, Perkins, and Chase Counties* (Lincoln, Nebr.: [Nebraska State Historical Society], n.d.).

<sup>8</sup> *History of the State of Nebraska*. 1 (Chicago: The Western Historical Company, 1882), 541.

<sup>9</sup> Nebraska State Historical Society.

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*Cattle Drives and the Texas Trail*

In the years following the Civil War, demand for beef in northern states reached new highs. The military's need for beef during the war, coupled with the northern states' new emphasis on grain crops, led to a regional shortage of beef cattle. During this period, Texas had an abundance of beef cattle; however, due to the large number of cattle available in and around Texas, prices were low and ranchers received up to \$5 per head. To the north, however, beef cattle prices were rumored to reach over \$30 a head. To capitalize on the demand in northern states, Texas cattle ranchers began driving their herds north along several routes.<sup>10</sup>

Prior to the Civil War, cattle were largely driven from Texas to shipping points in Missouri and Kansas. Although the practice of cattle driving commenced prior to the war, it was not until the post-war era that cattle drives made their first notable appearance in Nebraska. For nearly 20 years after the Civil War, thousands of men drove millions of multicolored longhorns from Texas ranches to shipping points as far north as Iowa, Illinois, Nebraska, and Wyoming. In 1866 alone, approximately 260,000 head of cattle made their way to northern markets via the trails.<sup>11</sup> The cattle came in numerous independent herds that included anywhere from a few hundred to 6,000 cattle in a drive.<sup>12</sup>

Several factors contributed to the increasing popularity of cattle driving following the Civil War. In 1867 the Union Pacific Railroad completed a line through Nebraska. The westward expansion of the railroad resulted in shipping points further west and a shorter distance to railheads from Texas. The expansion of the railroad also greatly increased the ability to haul large numbers of beef cattle to market.<sup>13</sup> Two other factors supported the new cattle-driving ventures. A declining bison population following the war increased the amount of grazing land available, and fewer conflicts with Native Americans over land and hunting rights increased the safety of the open prairies in western Nebraska.<sup>14</sup>

As the drives continued between c. 1866 and c. 1886, the routes used by cattle drovers shifted further west. The early routes led north from Texas to southwest Kansas and Missouri. These earliest cattle routes were known as the Chisholm Trail, then the Fort Griffin, and Dodge City Trail. As later trails moved west, the new routes became known as the Northern Trail, the Texas Trail, and the Western Trail.<sup>15</sup> Each successive trail was not a definable path or road, but rather a general area where cattle drovers chose their routes based on the condition and availability of grass and water.

During the long journey north, outbreaks of the cattle disease tick fever led to legislation blocking the passage of cattle herds in areas of Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska. In order to continue the drives, the drovers were forced to move their routes further west.<sup>16</sup> As westward settlement continued, drovers were increasingly confronted with legislation and angry farmers and landowners who could not afford to have their herds destroyed by the spread of disease or their crops trampled by the thousands of longhorns.<sup>17</sup> In many cases, settlers enclosed their property with barbed wire, which closed off the open prairies to cattle drovers. As a result, the cattle drives shifted further west where there was ample open grazing land and water.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Norbert R. Mahnken, "Early Nebraska Markets for Texas Cattle," *Nebraska History* XXVI (January-March 1945): 4; Philip Ashton Rollins, *The Cowboy: An Unconventional History of Civilization on the Old-Time Cattle Range* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), 10.

<sup>11</sup> Mahnken, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Philip Ashton Rollins, *The Cowboy: An Unconventional History of Civilization on the Old-Time Cattle Range* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), 11.

<sup>13</sup> Yost, 37.

<sup>14</sup> Yost, 38-39.

<sup>15</sup> Rollins, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Mahnken, 4, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Mahnken, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Rollins, 12.



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Early legislation prohibited the passage of diseased cattle through the eastern and central plains sections of Nebraska. Although the legislation was not always enforced, by c. 1876 the drovers pushed west and traveled through Chase County in western Nebraska on their way to Ogallala. As the trail traversed open grasslands in the latter half of the nineteenth century, settlers established ranches along waterways and services near railroads to supply the needs of the drovers and their herds. The cattle drives advanced approximately 20 miles a day due to the need for rest and water. Ranches along springs and rivers offered valuable resources and rest stops to the drovers making the journey.

In Nebraska, there were approximately seven main routes of the Texas Trail between 1866 and the late 1880s.<sup>19</sup> The route through southwestern Nebraska was firmly established by c. 1876 when the Union Pacific Railroad moved their cattle-loading pens west to Ogallala in Keith County from stockyards further east.<sup>20</sup> As a result, for approximately the next 10 years, the route traversed several counties in southwestern Nebraska and eastern Colorado before reaching the shipping point at Ogallala. Railroad companies also benefited from the cattle drives by transporting large herds on the last section of their journey to markets further east. Frontier cities along the routes and at the railheads also prospered by providing goods and services to the increasing number of drovers passing through their communities. Cities such as Omaha, North Platte, Sidney, and Ogallala served as trading and shipping centers for the industry. They also served the drovers by providing lodging and entertainment.

The importance of the cattle drives to the regions it traversed was multifarious. It provided a job for drovers who found themselves broke following the Civil War. Furthermore, the trail furnished an economic base for cattle towns along the route and at the railheads. Cattle drives from Texas also provided a service for the ranchers by cutting transportation costs and by delivering droves of cattle to shipping points, producing capital. The cattle drovers and ranchers also benefited. "Cattle Kings" made their fortune by trading anything that yielded a profit. Through trading, ranchers increased their capital and concentrated the additional funds on enhancing their herds.<sup>21</sup> Thomas Webster and his ranch along the trail is an example of how trading was profitable for ranchers. Overall, cattle driving from Texas left behind a legacy in all areas the trail traversed. The drives had an agricultural impact on southwest Nebraska by bringing millions of longhorns through the area and giving rise to the beef-and-cattle ranching industry. The drives also had an immense commercial impact on the region in the years following the Civil War. During this period, the cattle trade helped establish ranches and stockyards to trade and hold cattle before shipment east, which helped give rise to communities along the route.

In 1886 a drought hit Nebraska. The dry summer was the first obstacle that eventually led to the demise of the Texas Trail and the cattle-driving industry. The drought lasted well into the fall and was followed by a series of blizzards throughout the winter season. The U.S. Department of Agriculture stated that the 1886-87 winter losses amounted to over 2,000,000 head of livestock. By the end of 1887, many cattle drivers quit, others found themselves deep in debt.<sup>22</sup> By the 1890s, the long cattle drives had virtually disappeared from the landscape. Even so, the cattle drives north from Texas left a lasting impression on the commercial, agriculture, and economic state of the region.

Although many cattle ranchers and drovers were financially destroyed following the decline of trail driving, it is estimated that half of the original entrepreneurs were successful.<sup>23</sup> The cattle drives disappeared, but cattle corporations, established during the trailing era, had prevailed. For years, ranchers in the West provided the raw material that was

<sup>19</sup> Yost, 45.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Barron McIntosh, *The Nebraska Sand Hills; The Human Landscapes* (Lincoln, Nebr. and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 87.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis Atherton, *The Cattle Kings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961), 219-20.

<sup>22</sup> Yost, 141-143.

<sup>23</sup> James M. Skaggs, *The Cattle Trailing Industry; Between Supply and Demand, 1866-1890* (Lawrence, Manhattan, and Wichita: The University Press of Kansas, 1973), 24.

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processed in areas further east. Today, the beef industry that was born during the age of cattle driving still dominates Nebraska, as well as many other areas in the western United States. The legacy of the nineteenth-century cattle drives is visible through resources such as corrals and cattle corporations.

*Site-Specific History*

In 1876 Thomas B. Webster and his father, Erastus Webster, established a ranch north of Imperial, Nebraska, on the Spring Creek Branch of the Stinking Water River.<sup>24</sup> Erastus was a notable figure in mid-nineteenth-century Nebraska. He was a pioneer editor of the Omaha newspaper, the *Republican*; served as confidential clerk to Secretary of State William H. Seward under President Lincoln; and organized the Republican party in Nebraska.<sup>25</sup>

Webster established his ranch in 1876, during the time the cattle routes were moving further west and became known as the Texas Trail. Webster constructed a sod house and barn, and a stone corral. A scarcity of trees in the area made wood an expensive building material. Therefore, he made use of materials at hand and constructed the corral of limestone gathered locally. Thomas Webster, a native of New York, incorporated a dry-masonry construction method common on the East Coast.<sup>26</sup> Although widely used in the eastern United States, this construction method is rare in Nebraska. It is likely that Webster was familiar with this construction method because of his roots in New York.

The location of Webster's ranch, along Spring Creek, gave the drovers and their herd the last dependable opportunity to take in water before their 2-day, 40-mile trip to the shipping yards in Ogallala. The location of the ranch, near the end of the trail, provided Webster a great opportunity to use his ranch for business purposes. As one of the final stops before reaching the shipping point, Webster's ranch was one of the last opportunities for the cattle drivers to enhance the quality of their herd through trade. Reportedly, Webster traded healthy animals for a larger number of sore-footed cattle, which he then nursed back to health, thereby greatly increasing the value of his ranch. The stone corral likely served to facilitate this trade.<sup>27</sup> The 1880 Census reported that Webster's livestock value was \$18,775, including 23 horses and 1,300 cattle. In that year alone, Webster purchased 500 head of cattle and sold only 300 head, indicating his trading activity.<sup>28</sup> He used his corral for dehorning and branding the new cattle with his Quarter Circle W brand, the oldest registered brand in Chase County.<sup>29</sup>

Cattle drovers arriving at Webster's ranch may have drove about 10 miles from the Kempton Ranch stone corral southeast of Champion on the Frenchman River,<sup>30</sup> or from the lower branch of the Stinking Water River in the southeast near Hamlet.<sup>31</sup> This pattern supports the fact that many herders did not follow one route to Ogallala, but established several routes within the corridor of the Texas Trail. Another known stopping point along the Texas Trail in Nebraska is Wild Horse Spring, located between the head of the Stinking Water Creek and Ogallala in Perkins County. This natural spring occasionally provided water to thirsty drovers and herds using this route. However, Wild Horse Spring was an unreliable source of water.

<sup>24</sup> Sources imply that Thomas ran the day-to-day operations of the ranch while Erastus' involvement was limited to financial support.

<sup>25</sup> Yost, 109.

<sup>26</sup> Smith.

<sup>27</sup> Anoma Hoffmeister, "A Ranch on the Texas Trail" (n.p., n.d.), 2. Available at the Nebraska State Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, Lincoln, Nebr.

<sup>28</sup> Smith.

<sup>29</sup> "Ranch History; The Webster Ranch" (n.p., n.d.), 1. Available at the Nebraska State Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, Lincoln Nebr.

<sup>30</sup> Anoma Hoffmeister, "Herefords Replace Longhorns on the Old Kilpatrick Spread" (n.p., n.d.). Available at the Nebraska State Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, Lincoln, Nebr.; "Ranch History; The Webster Ranch," 2.

<sup>31</sup> Yost, 46-47.

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Webster's stone corral was used as a resting stop and trading post on the Texas Trail from c. 1876 until the end of the large cattle drives. After the drought in the summer of 1886, and the blizzards that followed through the winter of 1887, Webster sold his ranch. In June of 1889, the Kilpatrick brothers, who were in the railroad construction business, advertised in a newspaper that they had purchased Webster's property.<sup>32</sup>

The Kilpatricks continued to use the corral, but made several changes on the property over the years. The existing c. 1940, early ranch-style house replaced Webster's earlier sod house. Around the same time, the Kilpatricks dismantled two walls of the stone corral and used the stone to construct a fence near the front of the house.<sup>33</sup> The Kilpatrick Brothers Corporation owned and operated the property as their "North Ranch" until 1955 when they sold it to Basil Bentz. The present owner is Bentz Valley, Inc., which acquired the property in the 1990s.

No archeological investigations have been conducted at the stone corral. Archeological remains may exist, however. The nature of the potential archeological deposits was not evaluated. If such investigations are conducted in the future, they may reveal additional information about the corral's construction and use.

**Summary**

The Texas Trail Stone Corral is significant under *Criterion A: Commerce* for its use in the trade of goods and services along the trail and for its association with an era that had an immense commercial and economic impact on the state of Nebraska. Cattle driving, which brought millions of longhorns to Nebraska in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, gave rise to the beef industry, which still dominates much of Nebraska's agricultural production today. The period of significance is c. 1876 to c. 1886, beginning with the date of construction of the corral and continuing through the end of the cattle drives along the Texas Trail. The period of significance encompasses the time frame when the corral was used as a stopping and trading point along the trail.

The trail represents an important theme in the history of agriculture in the American West and in the development of the cattle industry in the state of Nebraska. Few visible features from the Texas Trail remain along the route due to the mobile and ephemeral nature of the resources. The Texas Trail Stone Corral is not only a unique resource in Nebraska associated with the early cattle-drive trails, but is believed to be the only identified extant resource of the cattle trails that traversed Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas.<sup>34</sup> The Texas Trail Stone Corral, constructed by Webster in c.1876, represents a rare physical resource directly linked to the cattle-driving era and this important stage in Nebraska's commercial and agricultural history. As such, the corral is significant at the state level.

<sup>32</sup> Anoma Hoffmeister, "Herefords Replace Longhorns."

<sup>33</sup> John Maddux, interview by Mead & Hunt, Inc., 4 October 2001, Imperial, Nebr.

<sup>34</sup> The State Historic Preservation Offices of Kansas, Texas, and Oklahoma were contacted to learn if they knew of extant Texas Trail or cattle trail resources within their states. These offices did not know of identified extant resources within their states relating to the Texas Trail and confirmed that the Texas Trail Stone Corral is a significant resource.

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**Geographical Data**

*Verbal Boundary Description*

Restricted

*Boundary Justification*

Restricted

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The following information pertains to all photographs:

*Texas Trail Stone Corral*  
*Imperial Vicinity*  
*Chase County, Nebraska*  
*Photographer: Mead & Hunt, Inc., October 2001*  
*Negatives: Nebraska State Historical Society*

*Photograph 1 of 9*  
Stone Corral – general view  
View looking northeast

*Photograph 2 of 9*  
Stone Corral – detail of north wall  
View looking south

*Photograph 3 of 9*  
Stone Corral – general view of west wall  
View looking east

*Photograph 4 of 9*  
Stone Corral – detail of west wall  
View looking north

*Photograph 5 of 9*  
Stone Corral – general view  
View looking southeast

*Photograph 6 of 9*  
Stone Corral – general view  
View looking south

*Photograph 7 of 9*  
Stone Corral – detail of culvert in north wall  
View looking north

*Photograph 8 of 9*  
Stone Corral – general view of north wall  
View looking southwest

*Photograph 9 of 9*  
Stone Corral – general view  
View looking southeast

Photo 1 of 9



Photo 2 of 9



Photo 3 of 9





Photo 4 of 9



Photo 5 of 9



Photo 6 of 9





Photo 7 of 9



Photo 8 of 9



Photo 9 of 9



