

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

WINKLEY BRIDGE

(Swinging Bridge)

HAER No. AR-48

LOCATION: Adjacent to State Highway 110, spanning the Little Red River, Heber Springs, Cleburne County, Arkansas.

UTM: 15/593160/3927660  
Quad: West Pangburn, Arkansas

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1912

BUILDER: Harry Churchill, Pangburn, Arkansas.

OWNER: Cleburne County, Arkansas.

PRESENT USE: Collapsed October 28, 1989.  
[After the completion of the HAER recording project in August 1988, the Winkley bridge collapsed when its cables broke, killing five people and injuring eighteen others.]

PREVIOUS USE: Vehicular Bridge (1912-1972)  
Pedestrian Bridge (1972-1989)

SIGNIFICANCE: The Winkley Bridge was an excellent example of a streamlined suspension bridge, and one of only two remaining suspension bridges in Arkansas, before its collapse in 1989. For a period of sixty years, the Winkley Bridge served as the only convenient link between the eastern section of Cleburne County and the county seat of Heber Springs.

HISTORIAN: Lola Bennett

DESCRIPTION: Corinne Smith

Arkansas Historic Bridge Recording Project, 1988

The Winkley Bridge, spanning the Little Red River at Heber Springs, is an excellent example of a streamlined suspension bridge, representing the shorter range of spans that may be achieved with this type of design. The bridge is one of two remaining pre-1941 suspension bridges in the state of Arkansas, the other being the Beaver Bridge in Carroll County (see HAER report AR-53). It is also the only remaining one of three suspension bridges which were contracted for by Cleburne County and built by Harry Churchill in 1912.

For a period of sixty years, between 1912 and 1972, the Winkley Bridge served as the only convenient link between the eastern section of Cleburne County and the county seat of Heber Springs.

The Winkley Bridge was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.

#### FERRY CROSSINGS ON THE LITTLE RED RIVER

There were private ferries on the Little Red River in what is now Cleburne County as early as 1818.(1) By the 1880s, a number of public ferries had been established by the county, including Hilger's Ferry, Greer's Ferry and Miller's Ferry.(2) These ferries serviced horse-and-carriage traffic for many years, but the Little Red River was a mountain stream with a swift current and was subject to frequent floods, and shortly after the turn of the century citizens of the county realized they needed a more efficient means of crossing the river.

COUNTY COURT PROCEEDINGS

At the October, 1911, term of the Cleburne County Court, J.W. Hardy presented a resolution to empower the County Judge, Marcus E. Vinson, to appoint a commission of three, "composed of good discreet business men," to act in conjunction with himself, "to proceed at once to arrange for the construction of a new Court House, and at least 3 Bridges across Red River, the Bridges to be constructed at points where it will do the most good to the greatest number of people."(3) The court passed the resolution and appropriated \$50,000. for the courthouse, and \$15,000 for the three bridges, to be paid in fifteen annual installments.(4) On May 6, 1912, W.L. Thompson and O.T. Ward, the appointed bridge commissioners, reported to the court that they, along with County Judge Marcus Vinson, had "recently made personal examination of places for the location of the three bridges," and had selected a location for each of the bridges, "one at what is commonly known as Turney's Ferry, on Little Red River, east of Heber Springs, another at Miller, across Little Red River, in said county, and one at the post of Tumbling Shoals."(5) The commissioners further stated that they were unable to furnish the court with "the plans and specifications best adapted to the grounds where said bridges are to be erected," and requested more time from the court in obtaining these. The commission went on to state:

It will be impracticable . . . to undertake the erection of steel Bridges, because of their immense cost at the places selected, and we are convinced that suspension wire Bridges will, when properly built, serve the purposes of our people in a satisfactory way.(6)

The court, thus advised, approved the report, and ordered the commissioners to secure plans and specifications by May 27, 1912.(7)

On May 27, the commissioners presented to the county court plans and specifications for both

suspension bridges and steel bridges proposed to be erected at Winkley Ford or Turney's Ferry, Tumbling Shoals, and Miller, and advised the court to advertise for bids on both types of bridges.(8) The court approved the report and ordered the commissioners to advertise for bids on the bridges, "the same to be built according to one or the other of the plans and specifications submitted by the commissioners."(9) The advertisement was to stipulate that 86 percent of the contract price would be paid when the bridges were completed, and 1 percent of the contract price would be paid "on the first Monday of July of each year thereafter until the full amount of the contract price shall have been paid."(10) Bids on the bridge contract were to be accepted until noon on June 8, and the commissioners were to report to the court on June 10 "the person, company or corporation to whom the contract was awarded, the price to be paid for the erection of the three bridges, and time given the contractor in which to complete the same."(11)

On June 8, the bridge commissioners "offered at public outcry for bids" for steel bridges "and received no bids of any kind on that class of work."(12) They then offered for bids on wire suspension bridges, and received a bid of \$26,000 from Harry Churchill of Pangburn.(13) The commissioners, "not feeling justified in accepting said bid," negotiated with Churchill and closed the deal at \$24,000. The price of each bridge was settled as follows:

at Miller . . . . .	375 feet . .	\$6595.00
at Tumbling Shoals . .	440 feet . .	\$7735.00
at Turney's Ferry . .	550 feet . .	\$9670.00 (14)

The commissioners stipulated in their agreement with Churchill that the bridges were to be completed by November 1, 1912, "subject to ordinary weather, and extension of time to be granted only in case of unavoidable accident, the act of God, or the public enemy."(15) The court gave

Churchill until June 17 "to perfect his contract and enter into good and sufficient bond for the faithful performance of his duty."(16)

Contracts for the three bridges were recorded in the Cleburne County Court Records on July 31, 1912. These contracts, identical in every respect, with the exception of the bridge location and amount to be paid to the contractor, reiterated all of the details of construction and payment previously agreed upon, with the further stipulation that:

Should the weather or condition of said river be such as to prevent the completion of said work within the time above specified, or should the construction of said bridge be delayed by failure of the railroads to transport any material required in the construction of the same, or any other cause or causes beyond the control of said contractor, then the time for fulfillment shall be extended for a period not less than the delay caused by such condition or failure.(17)

#### CONSTRUCTION OF THE WINKLEY BRIDGE

Apparently--although no local newspaper accounts are readily available to confirm this--construction on the bridges must have gone smoothly, because on August 31, 1912, Harry Churchill entered into another contract with Cleburne County for "a wire suspension bridge across Big Creek, near Walnut Grove . . . for the price and sum of six hundred dollars . . . said bridge to be completed on or before November 1st 1912."(18) On October 9, Cleburne County paid Churchill \$600 for building the bridge.(19)

The County made a number of payments to Churchill for the bridge at Miller in September of 1912, and a number of other payments, for unspecified "bridge building," in October, all of which were paid out of county bridge funds.(20) The only further mention of the bridges in County Court

Records was that the bonds were paid off in 1937 during the administration of County Judge Alton Bittle.(21)

### GREER'S FERRY LAKE

The spring of 1927 brought torrential rains to the Mississippi Valley, producing one of the greatest flood disasters in the history of the United States. Congress assigned the Army Corps of Engineers to develop a flood control program for the Little Red River, among other places. The Flood Control Act of 1938 authorized the construction of a series of flood control dams, including one at Greer's Ferry, but the project was delayed by the onset of World War II. In 1954, the building of the dam was authorized once again, and construction began in 1957. The lake was filled between 1962 and 1965, inundating the suspension bridges at Edgemont, Miller, and Greer's Ferry. The Greer's Ferry Dam was dedicated by John F. Kennedy on October 3, 1963.(22)

### CLOSING OF THE WINKLEY BRIDGE

The Winkley Bridge is the only remaining one of the series of suspension bridges built by Cleburne County in 1912. It remained in service until 1972, when it was retired to pedestrian traffic only. In 1968 a delegation of Cleburne County citizens asked the State Highway Department to replace the Winkley Bridge and to designate it as a tourist attraction.(23) The proposal was approved, and the bridge was programmed for replacement. A new bridge was constructed a few hundred feet downstream in 1972. The Heber Springs Business and Professional Women's Club raised approximately \$450 to buy commemorative plaques and build fieldstone pedestals to mount

them on at either end of the bridge.(24) The plaques are inscribed as follows:

WINKLEY BRIDGE  
IN SERVICE  
1912-1972  
COST \$6,500  
PRESERVATION SPONSORED BY  
B&PW OF HEBER SPRINGS, ARK.

Today, the Winkley Bridge is an important landmark and tourist attraction in Cleburne County. The area surrounding the bridge is a popular fishing spot, marina and camping area, known as "Swinging Bridge Resort."

#### DESCRIPTION

The Winkley Bridge is a 550-foot, one-lane suspension bridge. The cables are suspended from steel towers, supported on concrete piers, approximately 50 feet from either end of the bridge. Each tower is constructed of 30-foot I-sections, connected by bracing in the upper half. This bracing consists of steel angles bolted to form two double-intersection Warren trusses, one on top of the other. The ends of the cables are sunk in concrete at the end of the approaches. The suspension cables and hangers are wrought iron. The 5-inch-diameter cables are formed from binding eighth-inch-thick strands together. The cable is held together with one strand wrapped around the bundled strands and fastened with cast iron clips. A clip, comprised of two half-circles with flanges, is bolted where the two halves meet. The bottom bolt suspends a one-inch-diameter hanger, which is looped around the bolt and welded closed. The hangers suspend the timber floor beams, spaced every 5 feet on average, by passing through each beam, where they are threaded and bolted to steel plates on the underside of the beams. These beams support the eight timber floor stringers, which

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in turn support the 3-inch-thick floor deck. Six-inch-square timber forms a deck curb with scarf joints. At, and halfway between, these joints, hooks are bolted through the curb to suspend the edge stringers. A handrail of rough-cut 2" x 6" wood is formed by rough 6-inch-square wood posts bolted to the end of each floor beam and to the curb.

In 1949, the original wooden towers and floor were replaced with the present steel towers and floor.



ENDNOTES

1. Evalena Berry, "Fords and Ferries," Time and the River (Little Rock, Arkansas: Rose Publishing Co., 1982, p.330.
2. "Ferries in Early Cleburne County," Cleburne County Historical Journal, Summer 1981 (Heber Springs, Arkansas).
3. Cleburne County Court Records, October 25, 1911, Book 6, p.258.
4. *ibid.*
5. Court Records, May 6, 1912, Book 6, pp.372-373.
6. *ibid.*, p.373.
7. *ibid.*, p.374.
8. Court Records, May 27, 1912, Book 6, pp.377-378.
9. *ibid.*, p.379.
10. *ibid.*
11. *ibid.*
12. Court Records, June 10, 1912, Book 6, p.382.
13. *ibid.*, pp.382-383. County Court records indicate that Harry Churchill was a resident of Pangburn, Arkansas. Research in county census records, obituary indexes, and business directories did not reveal any further information about him. Telephone directories indicate that there are no longer any Churchills living in Pangburn.
14. *ibid.*, p.383.
15. *ibid.*, p.384.
16. *ibid.*
17. Court Records, July 31, 1912, Book 6, pp.489-498.

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18. Court Records, August 31, 1912, Book 6, pp.513-514.
19. Court Records, October 9, 1912, Book 6, p.533.
20. Court Records, September-October 1912, Book 6.
21. Court Records, July 1937.
22. Exhibit, Greer's Ferry Dam Visitors Center, Greer's Ferry, Arkansas.
23. Berry, p.337.
24. "Winkley Plaques Mounted," Cleburne County Times, July 6, 1972.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Berry, Evalena. Time and the River. Rose Publishing Co., Little Rock, Arkansas, 1982.

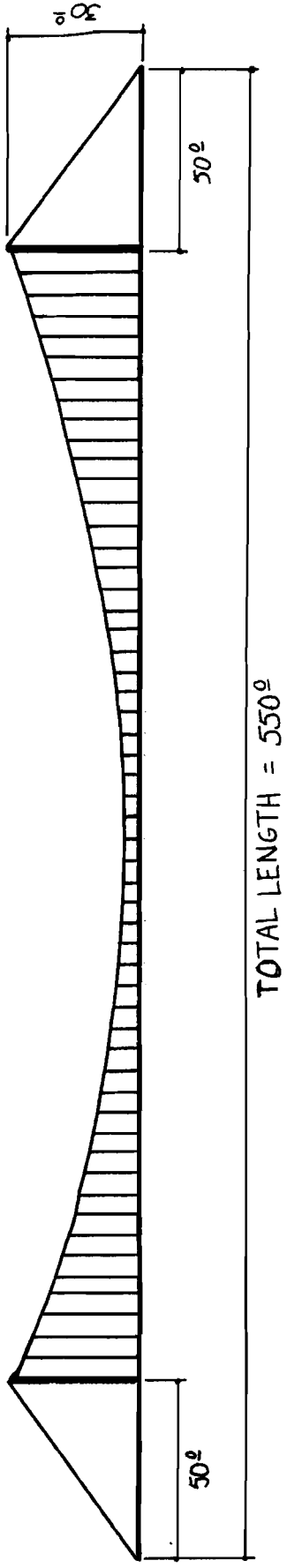
Cleburne County Court Records, 1911-1912 (Book 6). Cleburne County Courthouse, Heber Springs, Arkansas.

"Ferries in Early Cleburne County," Cleburne County Historical Journal, Summer 1981. Heber Springs, Arkansas.

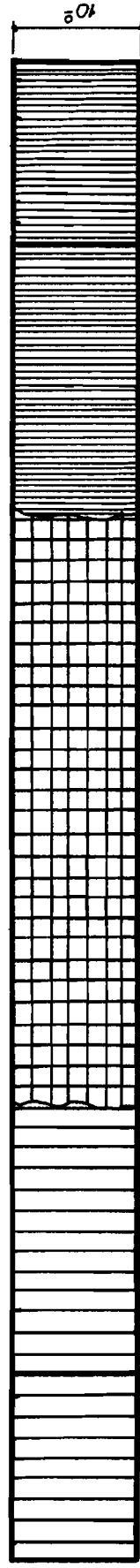
McClurkan, Burney B. "Arkansas' Historic Bridge Inventory, Evaluation Procedures, and Preservation Plan," report on file. Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department, Little Rock, 1987.

National Register Nomination: Winkley Bridge. Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, 1984.

ELEVATION



PLAN



FLOOR BEAMS                      STRINGER SYSTEM                      TOP VIEW

DIMENSIONS ARE APPROXIMATE  
DRAWINGS NOT TO SCALE

DRAWN BY CORINNE L. SMITH

for the completion of same, should be granted any in case of unavoidable accident, etc. act of God or the public's enemy.

It is further agreed and understood that upon the completion of said bridge, in the manner and within the time specified in this contract there shall be paid to said contractor by Cleburne Company in the ordinary advances of Cleburne Company the sum of \$8316.20 which equals 86% of the contract price as heretofore set out, and the further payment in said Company advances shall be made to the said contractor in the sum of \$96.70 which is 10% of the contract price for said bridge on the third day of the July term of the County Court of each year for 14 consecutive years after said first payment.

It is further agreed by and between the parties hereto that should the weather or condition of said river be such as to prevent the completion of said work within the time above specified, or should the construction of said bridge be delayed by failure of the railroads to transport any material required in the construction of the same or any other cause whatsoever beyond the control of said contractor then the time for fulfillment shall be extended for a period not less than the delay caused by such condition or failure.

And for the performance of all and every article and agreement herein the parties hereto bind themselves and their successors each to the other firmly by these presents.

3128  
 (Plumier County Court) June 1912

being Commissioners, Witnesseth:  
 That the said Contract as found in consideration of the sum of \$9670.00 to be paid in ordinary County warrants of Plumier County Arkansas as hereinafter set forth, hereby agreed and undertaken to build and construct a wire suspension bridge at Turner's Ferry on Little Rock River of the length of 550 feet according to the plans and specifications of said bridge now on file in the office of the County Clerk of said County, marked Exhibit No. 1 to the report of said Commissioners which was filed on the 27th day of May, 1912, which plans and specifications are specifically referred to as a part of this undertaking and contract.

It is further agreed and understood that said bridge shall be completed and turned over to said Commissioners by said contractor

Wetmore, County Court, July Term 1912

In Witness whereof this contract is executed in duplicate originals on this 12th day of June, 1912.

Harry Churchill  
Contractor  
M. E. Vinsan,  
County Judge.  
W. L. Thompson,  
Commissioners.

In the matter of W. L. Thompson et al }  
Bridge Commissioners for Cleburne County }  
on this day it is ordered by the }  
court that the Contract for a }  
County bridge across Little Red }  
River at Dumbling Shoals Arkansas, }  
entered into by W. L. Thompson, }  
M. E. Vinsan and O. J. Ward, }  
Commissioners and Harry Churchill }  
Contractor, be entered and spread }  
in full upon the records of this }  
Court and a copy of said contract }  
is in words and figures, as }  
follows to-wit:

Contract for Bridge at Dumbling Shoals on Little Red River.

This agreement made and entered into by and between Harry Churchill of one of the parties hereto, hereinafter referred to as the Contractor, and M. E. Vinsan County Judge of Cleburne County, Arkansas, O. J. Ward and W. L. Thompson, Bridge Commissioners for Cleburne County, Arkansas, hereinafter referred to as Commissioners, Witnesseth:

That the said Contractor for and in consideration of the sum of \$7735.00 to be paid in ord.

truly perform his contract according  
to the terms and stipulations in  
said agreement set out and referred  
to and within the time therein  
set forth, then this bond shall  
be null and void, otherwise to  
remain in full force and virtue  
in law.

Given under our hands on this  
15 day of June, 1912

Harry Churchill,  
Chas M. Kee,  
Carr Eganbright

Said bond is by the court main-  
tained and all need and covered  
thereof.

In the Matter of W.L. Thompson  
et al Bridge Commissioners  
for Cleburne County

On this day it is ordered by the  
court that the contract for a  
Canyon bridge across Little Red  
River at Durney's Ferry Arkansas,  
entered into by W.L. Thompson,  
W.E. Vinson and C.T. Ward Com-  
missioners and Harry Churchill,  
Contractor, be entered and spread  
in full upon the records of this  
court which said contract  
is in words and figures as  
follows, to-wit:

Contract for Bridge at Durney's  
Ferry on Little Red River.

This agreement made and  
entered into by and between  
Harry Churchill as one of the  
parties hereto, hereinafter referred  
to as the Contractor, and W.E. Vinson  
(County Judge of Cleburne County,  
and also C.T. Ward, with W.L. Thompson