

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
1		objects
2		Total

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

**Number of contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register**

Route 66 & Associated Historic Resources in Oklahoma

0

Historic Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

Current Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE / TRADE: specialty store

COMMERCE / TRADE: specialty store

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement: Art Deco

foundation concrete

walls brick

roof unknown

other

Narrative Description

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

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 7

Bristow Firestone Service Station
Name of Property

Bristow, Creek County, Oklahoma
City, County and State

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

- 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 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.

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 8

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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)

Commerce

Transportation

Architecture

Period of Significance

1929-1957

Significant Dates

1929, 1930, 1947, 1953

Significant Persons

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

unkdown

Primary location of additional data:

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

Bristow Public Library

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 9

Bristow Firestone Service Station
Name of Property

Bristow Creek County, Oklahoma
City, County and State

Acreeage of Property less than 2 acres

UTM References

(Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

1 1/4 7/3/5/7/2/3 3/9/6/8/6/4/2
Zone Easting Northing

2 / / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing

3 / / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing

4 / / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Property Tax No.

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10

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date April 12, 2007

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)

name/title Dub Bolin Trust c/o Ms. Majel Shattuck

street & number 311 North Main St telephone 918 367-9497

city or town Bristow state OK zip code 74010

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Bristow Firestone Service Station, Bristow, Creek County, OK
"Route 66 and Associated Historic Resources in Oklahoma"

Narrative Description

The Bristow Firestone Service Station, constructed in 1929-1930, is an L-shaped, single-story building constructed in Art Deco style using randomly patterned bricks of multiple, but predominantly light, colors. An elaborate station with pilasters and parapets, the building is also large, about eighty-five feet on its east elevation and about seventy feet on the north elevation, with a spacious office section and four service bays, and the building even includes a basement. Constructed in 1930, the building faces directly onto Bristow's Main Street which passes west of the station and which had become U.S. Highway 66 in 1926. A concrete apron reaches from the front of the store and service bays to the street; the gasoline pump islands have been removed but a steel pole that once displayed a sign for the operation remains on the apron near the street.

The west elevation includes four service bay entrances and, to their north, the office section that projects westward as an ell from the façade. The entire façade presents an elegant appearance that especially derives from the use of gray, rust, and light yellow bricks randomly arranged, with the pale colors dominant but mottled and softened by the inclusion of darker bricks. Bricks are generally laid in a running bond except for the lintels and sills and other trim. The bricks above the service doors are headers and above the entrances are soldiers. The two south-most service bays remain, although the original wooden doors have been replaced with modern metal garage doors that rise on rails inside the building. The adjacent two bays to the north have been enclosed with six (three over three) large fixed-lite windows resting on red brick walls and sills; the enclosures simply replace the rising doors that once closed the bays. The brickwork in these two bays consists of a soldier course at the base with six courses of running bond bricks topped by a sill of rowlock bricks. The vertical wood paneling above the windows is painted yellow to blend (approximately) with the brickwork above. Although these two bays are sealed, there is no mistaking their original purpose and appearance and each of the brick piers separating the service bays retains its cone-shaped concrete bumper at the bottom. Adjacent to the service bays on the north is a pedestrian doorway that has been blocked simply by using a door blank without furnishings. A soldier course of bricks forms a lintel above the door and then continues to the entrance of the first bay.

The office section projects west from the façade, about fifteen feet beyond the service bays, and is the most complex part of the building. Although it ostensibly forms a rectangular wing, the two outside corners have been clipped sufficiently to allow fenestration, so that the office actually presents five separate elevations, each with a window or door. The outside corners, moreover, are reinforced with brick pilasters that reach almost, but not quite, to the parapet, thus hinting at crenellation but more importantly contributing to the overall Art Deco appearance of the building. (1) The south elevation of the office, the elevation nearest the service bay façade, is interrupted only by a single doorway that opens to the interior. Either original or similar to the original door, the door is wood with a large glass center. Bricks above the door are arranged in a soldier course that reaches from the façade corner to the pilaster on the west. (2) The clipped southwest corner of the office contains a tall window that reduces in width as it rises so that the windows enhance the geometric and angular qualities of the building. While the uppermost portion of the fenestration, that which contains a clerestory, has been covered with removable paneling and thereby gives the window a generally rectangular appearance, the stairstep brickwork framing the panel and the zigzag molding below clearly reveal the distinctive Art Deco style of the window. Above the windows, bricks are laid in a running bond separated every five courses by a course of rowlock bricks. At the bottom of the elevation, a curved concrete curb projects beyond the elevation and both protects the building from

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busy nearby vehicular traffic and contributes to the setback appearance of this corner elevation. (3) The west elevation, which is the front of the office section, is dominated by a large six-lite (three over three) window that reaches almost from corner pilaster to corner pilaster. Similar to the windows that flank it on the clipped corners, this also reduces in width but does so only at the top where a row of clerestory windows are stepped in at the sides with zigzag molding. The curb at the base is lower than the adjacent curved curbs at the corners. (4) The northwest clipped corner is an exact duplicate of the southwest clipped corner featuring the same Art Deco style fenestration, curved curb, and pilasters. (5) The north elevation of the office section duplicates the west elevation in its fundamentals with the large window and narrower clerestories that stretch almost from pilaster to pilaster. These windows, however, have been boarded, although the original surrounds remain. Moreover this elevation merges with the larger north elevation of the building which reaches all the way to the building rear, or east, elevation, and is separated from the larger elevation only by a forward projection of the bricks which match the other pilasters but which then becomes the main plane of the elevation with the office elevation recessed.

The remainder of the north elevation east of the office section, though not particularly complex, is nonetheless distinctive because of its five large vertical multi-lite windows that provided important illumination to the work area inside. These windows consisted of five rows of four lites each and are now completely boarded with the exception of the window on the west end which is only partially boarded so that the top two rows of lites remain visible. To the west of this row of large windows, and separating them from the office section, are two small narrow, vertical three-lite windows that open into the bathrooms. Soldier courses of bricks reach the entire width of this elevation above the windows and at the foundation.

The east elevation of the building is red brick and includes a variety of windows and entrances providing illumination and access from the alley to the interior of the business. A row of four large vertical multi-lite windows that match those on the north elevation is located on the north end of this elevation; these windows, like those around the corner, also are boarded. Although the brickwork on this elevation is not so intricate as that elsewhere in the building, the sills for these windows are again the slanting rowlocks that are found on the main elevations. A pedestrian door opens immediately to the south of these four windows and at that point the concrete foundation (not visible on the west and only partially evident on the north) slopes away from the building for wheeled carts and vehicles. South of that entrance two vehicle service entrances are now boarded but once provided a drive-through capability for the service bays adjacent to the office. The brick pier separating the vehicle entrances includes a concrete bumper at the base identical to those on the front piers. Another window, vertical but wider and shorter than the row of four nearby to the north, is also now enclosed south of the two vehicle entrances. This is the location opposite the counterpart third vehicle entrance on the west, but the construction is original and this was never a drive-through service area. Immediately south of that entrance, however, the vehicle entrance opposite the fourth (southmost) vehicle entrance not only remains but includes parts of its original wood rising door. Approximately half of the door, the top three rows of panels, remains; the bottom half is covered with sheets of wood siding. The top two rows are panels of eight lites each separated by wood muntins, and the row beneath is arranged similarly but the panels are thinner wood instead of glass. Presumably the remainder of the door originally consisted of more wood panels.

The south elevation of the building is largely obscured by the construction of a separate building that joins on that elevation, although a portion of the Firestone building projects to the east beyond the rear of the adjacent building. This is red brick laid in a common bond consistent with that on the east elevation and contains no fenestration.

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The cornice on both the south and east elevations is tile where the other elevations use a concrete cornice consistent with the Art Deco appearance attended on those street-side elevations.

The sign post in front of the station is a separate feature that was an important part of the Firestone Service Station operation. The fluted pole itself is about twenty-five feet tall and is anchored on a square concrete pad that rises above the concrete drive surrounding it and the pole tapers as it rises; it is capped with a simple but decorative finial. A horizontal member to support a hanging sign projects toward the highway (west) about twelve feet and is anchored to the pole at its east end and is capped with decorative arrowhead finials on both ends for decoration. The crossbar is supported by a chain and turnbuckle brace that extends from the extreme end of the bar to near the top of the pole.

The Bristow Firestone Service Station was used as a service station for around a half century and that period includes the time after the opening of the Turner Turnpike when much of the Route 66 route traffic no longer passed in front of its pumps and bays, but Route 66 itself remained. While the pumps themselves have since been removed, the building and the sign retain strong integrity of location, appearance, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

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Bristow Firestone Service Station, Bristow, Creek County, OK
"Route 66 and Associated Historic Resources in Oklahoma"

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Firestone Service Station at the corner of Ninth and Main in Bristow is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A because of its association with Route 66 and qualifies as a representative of the property type, "Gasoline / Service Stations / Garages" within the Multiple Property nomination, "Oklahoma Route 66 Historic Resources, 1926-1970" in the areas of significance Commerce and Transportation. This service station and garage was constructed by the Firestone Tire & Rubber Company in the winter of 1929-1930 and served traffic on Route 66 when that highway passed through the downtown Bristow business district throughout the life of the highway, reflecting in its life the social and economic transformation generated by U.S. Highway 66 until the end of the period of significance for the highway, 1970; this period includes about a decade and a half following the loss of substantial traffic to the new tumpike that passed north of town although Route 66 remained the official designation of the highway that the station fronted. The property is also eligible under Criterion C within the same Multiple Property nomination because the building represents a distinct type and period of construction.

Historic Background: Route 66 Comes to Bristow

The Firestone Service Station in Bristow is significant under Criterion A because of its association with Route 66 in the period 1929 – 1970. Bristow's relationship with Route 66 reached well into history to the very beginnings of the road. Bristow was part of the Muscogee, or Creek, Nation but at the beginning of the twentieth century, even before statehood in 1907, the community, spurred by the building of the Frisco Railroad through the town, began to grow faster than others in the area and become a modest trading center, unsuccessfully challenging nearby Sapulpa for the right to have the county seat. Even so, the community remained a quiet town that served especially local farming interests and one study of Bristow notes the prevalence of livestock on the main street well into the twentieth century. Dorothy Stone, in her master's thesis, captured the mood of the town in the years before major highways started to go through Bristow: "Besides the hogs bedded down in the mud on the west side of [Main] Street, it was not unusual to see chickens, as well as an occasional cow, making their way up and down the main thoroughfare. In the middle of the street at the intersection of Eighth and Main stood a huge hickory tree for many years, a number of trees were in the middle of West Eighth and numerous beautiful big trees were scattered along the edge of Main Street shading the business houses."¹ Indeed, the economy developed an agricultural focus but increasingly specialized on cotton production and by 1916 the town had seven cotton gins and two cottonseed processing mills.² Although there had been some effort to connect Bristow to other towns on automobile roads, it was only in 1916 when the Ozark Trails Association designated the road through the town as part of their network, thereby connecting it in theory with St. Louis on the east and Amarillo, Texas, and Las Vegas, New Mexico, on the west, but in practicality linking it to Tulsa and Sapulpa on the east and Stroud and Oklahoma City on the west.³ In 1918 the Ozark Trails Association published its guide to travel along the network of roads in its

¹ Dorothy Stone, "A History of Bristow," M. A. Thesis, University of Tulsa, 1952, 30.

² Purdy, Arthur H., JoAnn Purdy Erwin, Nona Purdy Cadman, and Donald E. Purdy, "Pictorial-History Album of Bristow," unpublished manuscript (1982) in Bristow Public Library, 4.

³ Stone, "A History of Bristow," 66-67.

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system and advised the travelers who were following the Ozark Trails of the correct course. Coming into Bristow on the road from Kellyville, which, the guide noted, "can probably be recognized from being a well traveled road," the Ozark Trails Association told drivers to turn left when they reached "Three corners, red brick residence on right."⁴ When the Ozark Trails system went through Bristow, it followed the course of Main Street, as it did in so many other communities along its path, and the business community welcomed the arrival of the new road and began to expand to accommodate the additional traffic and commerce the road would surely bring. In 1918 Bristow had a total of two hundred fifty automobiles on which it could report taxes.⁵

It would be an overstatement to suggest that the new road brought a booming economy to the community, although it certainly contributed; more accurately, it was the discovery and drilling and pumping of oil locally that generated the boom. That oil boom, of course, was directly related to the automobile generally; by 1920 gasoline consumption made up eighty-five percent of the petroleum market where it had constituted only twenty-five percent a decade earlier.⁶ A notable and powerful force in the rise of a modern business community in Bristow, the oil boom of the 1920s was still, just a boom, and not a permanent feature, and when it faded the commercial need for highway commerce only intensified and the systems of privately promoted roads, like the Ozark Trails network, no longer matched the dreams of the highway advocates. In what would become a familiar story along this road, the growth of expectations nurtured the growth of transportation and commerce, and vice-versa. In November, 1926, a new U.S. highway system was born that was coordinated and planned on a national basis and the highway that went through

BRISTOW

STOP

and visit with us on your trip west and see the best city on the Ozark Trail between St. Louis and Amarillo.

WE HAVE

Absolutely pure water for you to drink. Genuine Southern hospitality. Good accommodations for yourself and car. Reasonable rates for the traveling public.

BRISTOW

Is also the geographical center of Creek County, and the best primary cotton market in the world. Its resources are so many that you can well afford a day or two in this locality to find out all the good things concerning it.

IF YOU WISH

Further information concerning the town, address a letter to the Secretary of the Commercial Club and he will furnish all the data you need.

The town that never had a Boom, but has increased in population 100 Per Cent in the past five years.

Advertisement for Bristow from Ozark Trails Association, *The Ozark Trails: A 1200 Mile Link in a Transcontinental Road from Ocean to Ocean* (Amarillo: Russell & Cockrell, 1918), 43.

⁴ Ozark Trails Association, *The Ozark Trails: A 1200 Mile Link in a Transcontinental Road from Ocean to Ocean* (Amarillo: Russell & Cockrell, 1918), 42.

⁵ Stone, "A History of Bristow," 76.

⁶ John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *The Gas Station in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 50.

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Bristow followed the route of the Ozark Trails system connecting now not just St. Louis and Amarillo, by way of Bristow, but Chicago and Los Angeles too. Bristow, Oklahoma, was now connected to the world.

The new federal designation marked the beginning of a series of changes along the route of the highway in Bristow that unleashed ever more powerful forces. The first such change only dimly hinted at the transformation to come. In the autumn of 1929 the Bristow police chief puzzled over the question of whether it was still permissible, as it had been in previous years, to simply rope off a section of the road through town for the annual Halloween festival downtown. Life had changed, as one newspaper report noted: "The Main street of Bristow is a part of U. S. Highway No. 66. Bristow desires to be sure of its ground before stretching ropes across it."⁷ After consultation with the state highway engineer, local officials, with state approval, allowed the road to be roped off for the celebration, but also arranged to map out and mark a clear detour. This appears to have been the last year, however, that Bristow closed a section of Highway 66 for a local celebration. Business preferred the traffic volume to the celebration.

The larger change came with both the paving of the highway and then the addition of businesses along its side, especially in the downtown part of the "Main Street of America" as Highway 66 promoters called the new roadway. In 1927 Bristow's "good roads boosters" prevailed upon the state highway commission to pave the road between that community and Depew to the west—a project that would not be complete for several years.⁸ But there were other changes too. Especially significant were the new stores selling gasoline, tires, batteries, and other automotive supplies and services to the motorists who were increasingly piling onto Highway 66 to cross the country. Some of these replaced livery stables and hardware operations, but their actual number was increasing beyond anything the community had known previously. The automobile service business had achieved a prominent place in the city directories of Bristow by the end of the 1920s and each one was a locally-owned, "mom and pop," business characteristic of the low-capital, small operations that emerged alongside the highway throughout its 2200 mile span.

Historical Significance

When the Firestone Service Station was built at the southeast corner of Ninth and Main in Bristow in the winter of 1929-1930, it illuminated fundamental historic processes along U.S. Highway 66. The Historic Context Studies for historic resources along Route 66 in Oklahoma and the nation have noted the dramatic rise of business along the new road, drawn by the heavy traffic it carried and the promise of carrying even more. And the Bristow Firestone Service Station was one of the more conspicuous of these new businesses on Route 66. Those Historic Context Studies, however, have identified the major component of these businesses as small, "mom and pop" operations, independently owned and operated filling stations, cafés, and tourist camps. Clearly, the Firestone Service Station was exceptional when it began to operate in the spring of 1930; it was owned by one of the nation's largest corporations and it represented the trend toward vertical and horizontal integration and chain ownership of the retailers on Route 66 that was just then beginning but would later overtake the "mom and pop" operations. The historical significance of the Bristow Firestone Service Station

⁷ "Bristow to Rope off U.S. Highway," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 10, 1929.

⁸ Purdy, *et al.*, "Pictorial-History Album of Bristow," 83.

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was that it showed, at a very early point, what the future would be along the highway, and it contributed to the process by which that future would come about.

If Bristow, Oklahoma, had reached a new stage in its development with the advent of Highway 66 through town at the end of the 1920s, so too had the Firestone Tire & Rubber Company reached a turning point in its own evolution. The company founded by Harvey Firestone in 1901 to provide tires for the small but expanding number of automobiles and trucks in the nation, grew quickly and, after adopting pneumatic tires alongside the solid rubber tires that initially prevailed, by the end of the 1920s was one of the big four manufacturers of tires. What was especially significant about the Firestone Company was its vertical integration so that it controlled the process from the harvest of the rubber in the Amazon forests to its Ohio vulcanization and manufacturing plants where corded tires were produced in a system of assembly line production that kept labor costs low and maximized output. In addition, the company was integrating horizontally, taking over a multitude of smaller tire manufacturers and absorbing their production into their own lines of tires. Between 1921 and 1933 the number of tire producers dropped from one hundred seventy-eight to thirty-two and the four largest (Firestone, Goodyear, U.S. Rubber, and Goodrich) produced seventy-five percent of all tires in the United States.⁹ Firestone's output of tires increased dramatically during the 1920s and for all appearances, Firestone had succeeded remarkably by the end of the decade.

The other side of that increased production was the company's need to increase distribution. The first element of Firestone's program to increase sales had come at the beginning of the 1920s when Harvey Firestone initiated a national "Ship by Truck" movement encouraging, through education and the organization of a network of clearinghouses for promoting shipping by trucks, the use of trucks for transport, thus launching an early challenge to the role of railroads as primary carriers of freight in the nation.¹⁰ The second step was to increase distribution by persuading the automobile companies to use Firestone tires as original equipment, a strategy that promised to increase sales also for replacement tires. But the most powerful initiative was to establish an in-house retail system where the company would no longer depend on independent tire dealers to carry and sell Firestone tires. Pressed hard by mail order companies like Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward, the company became increasingly aware of its weak distribution system; distribution was, as noted by one Harvey Firestone biographer, "the weakest link."¹¹ The solution to this problem was for the company to enter the retail business directly by establishing "one stop" stores where the driving public would be able to purchase Firestone tires and also Firestone batteries and brake linings, and even gasoline to be sold under the Firestone name. With that goal in mind, Firestone "bought property, erected a new branch building of impressive stature, and along with it an attractive drive-in station on the corner" and the company did this on corner after corner.¹² In March 1928, Harvey Firestone explained the strategy, saying that the Firestone dealer "will use his gasoline to get a prominent location and get people into his place, and then he will sell them tires, batteries, and everything."¹³

⁹ Lloyd G. Reynolds, "Competition in the Rubber Tire Industry," *The American Economic Review*, (September 1938), 459.

¹⁰ Alfred Lief, *The Firestone Story: A History of the Firestone Tire & Rubber Company* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1951), 117-125.

¹¹ Alfred Lief, *Harvey Firestone: Free Man of Enterprise* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1951), 263.

¹² Lief, *The Firestone Story*, 180.

¹³ Lief, *The Firestone Story*, 182.

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In August, 1929, the plan was moving closer to realization and *Time* magazine reported that, "Today the ordinary country filling station may sell \$300 or \$400 of tires in a year, but at least one tire company—Firestone—foresees that in the future many if not most tires will be sold by chain tire stores, each part of a master service station in whose several departments specialized brake service, washing and greasing, battery service, will be combined with a filling station and a store for selling electrical equipment."¹⁴ In the fall of 1929 Firestone issued additional stock with the express purpose of expanding its sales outlets,¹⁵ but the plan was being implemented even before then. At the end of July, 1929, the Bristow *Daily Record* reported that Firestone had purchased lots at the corner of Ninth and Main for the purpose of constructing a \$25,000 building that "will be one of the most modern in the state when completed and give Bristow motorists accommodations as complete as any offered in the state."¹⁶

The location of the station was vital. This section of Main Street in Bristow was identified variously as "Motor Row" or "Gasoline Row" because of the location of automobile dealers and gasoline station. The same newspaper article that announced the Firestone station construction also observed that the new building "will add another modern plant to the growing 'gasoline row' on North Main street. The Kohler Chevrolet company building, opened about a month ago, was the latest addition."¹⁷

Within a month the lot was cleared of the used automobiles that had been displayed there by the Bristow Motor Company and the Norval Dial Agency and work began on the new building.¹⁸ Construction proceeded, the building was finished, and the store opened in May 1930, just in time for the tourist season of that year.¹⁹ This new station, it should be noted, was important to Bristow, but it was also part of a larger process and it reflected the importance of U.S. Highway 66 as a magnet for new business. At the same time that the Bristow Firestone station was being constructed, Firestone was also building new stations in five other Oklahoma communities, including Oklahoma City and Sapulpa, and also built one in Amarillo, Texas—dotting the route of Highway 66 in the region. Route 66 was not the only determinant of where Firestone located its stations, but the decision matrix for locating them converged with the factors that were also associated with Route 66, with special prominence given the flow of traffic past the specific location.²⁰

¹⁴ "For Man & Machine," *Time*, August 19, 1929.

¹⁵ "\$60,000,000 Issue by Firestone Seen," *New York Times*, October 17, 1929.

¹⁶ "Tire Firm to Build in City: Main Street Site Bought by Firestone," *Bristow Daily Record*, July 31, 1929.

¹⁷ "Tire Firm to Build in City," *Bristow Daily Record*, July 31, 1929.

¹⁸ "Work Starts Monday on New Tire Building," *Bristow Daily Record*, August 30, 1929.

¹⁹ "Firestone Names new Manager Here," *Bristow Daily Record*, April 24, 1930.

²⁰ "Firestone To Open Tire Station Here," *Daily Oklahoman*, February 21, 1930. The particular station described in this article was a two-story "fireproof tire, gasoline and battery station" in Oklahoma City.

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The Bristow Firestone station served the Route 66 traffic during the 1930s and evidently prospered despite minimal local newspaper advertising, relying on its premier location and national brand recognition, as well as on its distinctiveness as a service station rather than just a filling station, and that prosperity was part of the



Yellow pages telephone advertisement for Bristow Firestone Service Station, 1930, showing variety of services offered immediately after the store / station opened. From collection of Bristow Public Library, Bristow, Oklahoma.

local pattern of commerce, transportation, and social history. In the 1920s Bristow's self-image had been based on the formula of a town "where the oil flows and the cotton grows." But that formula had eroded as the thin soil, boll weevils, and depressed markets steadily dampened cotton production and the oil boom that had

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buoyed the town's commerce in the 1920s began to sputter. By contrast, Bristow's Main Street was paved with brick and traffic along that Main Street provided a continuing, and expanding, source of revenue for the local merchants and jobs for the workers along "gasoline row" and elsewhere in the community. The economy had shifted and Route 66 played an ever-growing role in the life of the town. Now it was traffic that flowed and automobile-related business that grew.²¹

The growing number of travelers on Highway 66 in the 1930s depended on the legion of businesses along the way to facilitate their journeys. By the same token, however, the businesses and even the communities came to depend on the traffic for their own well being. As long lines of people moving west for greater opportunities filed through the Main Streets of Bristow and other small towns, they were joined by many others who were traveling for recreational purposes and by still others who were driving trucks that were not only supplying the needs of the communities not served by railroads but were even replacing the railroads. Harvey Firestone's vision of "Ship by Truck" clearly contributed to the transportation revolution of the 1930s and commerce and transportation became intertwined, inseparable, and incredibly promising.

By the end of the decade, in fact, the dependence of the town's business on the highway was palpable as talk spread of the possibility of replacing Route 66 with another highway. The Bristow newspaper bristled at the suggestion and reported that the local Chamber of Commerce was sounding the alarm over such talk. "It is known," the *Daily Record* reported, "that the state administration has plans to make U.S. 66 a modern highway and to do this it will probably dodge as many Main streets as possible." The result would be, according to the Chamber of Commerce Highway Committee, "a program of highway building that will take U.S. 66 out of the towns and cities [and] thousands of dollars of valuations in the towns missed will be destroyed."²²

As it happened, the modernization of the highway anticipated did not take place just then, and the entry of the United States into World War II in 1941 actually created a scarcity of resources that sometimes even prevented basic maintenance of the nation's highways. Plus, with full employment, much of it military and defense-related, and the decline of the migration patterns evident during the 1930s, and with the imposition of rationing of gasoline and tires and the hiatus in automobile production for the war, highway traffic during the war was but a shadow of what it had been in the previous decade. In Oklahoma, the average number of vehicles traveling the paved roads, per mile, per day, dropped by around a third from 1940 to 1944, from 1460.6 to 974.5 vehicles.²³ During the war, retail sales of gasoline dropped to less than seventy percent of prewar sales levels.²⁴ Not surprisingly, many gasoline stations failed during the war. More than a quarter of all the service stations operating at the beginning of 1941 had closed by the end of 1943. Even though Highway 66 still carried

²¹ One important trend was the decline of the very small businesses that had hoped to make Route 66 the basis of their success. And this included the tire dealers. Nationally, the process was captured by the *New York Times*: "The gradual elimination of the independent tire dealer during the last few years has been due to a few of the important tire manufacturing companies extending their retail outlets through company-owned stores and super-service stations." Firestone led the way in this process, according to the *Times*, and "In these stations not only Firestone tires are being sold, but gasoline and oil, batteries and almost every accessory." "Wide Changes Loom in Auto Tire Sales," *New York Times*, August 10, 1930.

²² "Sees Disaster to Small Firms in US 66 Change," *Bristow Daily Record*, August 30, 1940.

²³ *Biennial Report of the Oklahoma State Highway Commission for the period ending June 30, 1946* (Oklahoma City, 1946), 24.

²⁴ Jakle and Sculle, *The Gas Station in America*, 67.

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a significant volume during the war, thanks in part to the development of military and defense-related installations along its route, the impact of the war was severe. The service stations that could withstand the whipsaw of these economic forces tended to be large stations, stations with diversified products to sell, stations with firm support from a corporate owner or sponsor, stations like the Bristow Firestone Service Station. The Bristow Firestone Service Station survived the war while many of its neighbors closed their doors.

It was the aftermath of the war, however, that powerfully changed the service station business generally and this station in particular. The formula for change was national. Pent-up desires to travel combined with a modicum of prosperity after the war enabled people to get on the road who had never ventured far from home before, and heading west to see California was now a vacation rather than a migration. Route 66 still went through the business districts of many communities in Oklahoma and new businesses sprouted up to serve the traveling public as never before. In fact, the flourishing commerce along the road proved to be a magnet to people leaving the armed service who sought not a job but a business. Encouraged by the Veterans Administration and the media, many people invested in opportunities running motels, cafés, and gasoline stations. This meant that the competition between the stations was actually increasing. The new commercial environment was effectively captured by one Cities Service Oil Company manager who advised prospective station operators of this fact after the war: "Competition is going to be tougher than pre-war, I think. Stations probably will be more numerous, oil companies more energetic in their promotion, and there will be a steady improvement in the quality of petroleum products and merchandise items. The station operator, too, will meet new competition from tourist lodges, hotels and general stores."²⁵ What was happening was subtle, but nonetheless profound. After World War II, the company owners responded to the increased competition at the service station level by transferring the burden of ownership and competition to the individual operators.

In 1947 the Firestone Tire & Rubber Company sold the Bristow Firestone Service Station. When Cal and Clara Jones purchased the station from Firestone at the end of that year, however, they agreed that they would use the property "faithfully and diligently to promote the sale on these premises of merchandise that you [Firestone] manufacture and such merchandise that you distribute which may be manufactured by others. We also agree to see that the property is not used to handle merchandise as may be manufactured by your competitors or distributed by them, except in respect to gasoline, oils and greases and also except such competitive products which are of similar type to those which Firestone fails to deliver."²⁶ It was still a Firestone store, but the managerial burdens and competitive risks fell squarely on the shoulders of the new owners / operators.

Traffic on Highway 66 at the end of the 1940s and early 1950s reached proportions that made earlier traffic patterns pale by comparison. That traffic surge contributed to the retailing boom along its right of way, but it also undermined the very existence of the road as a major corridor of transportation and commerce. The fundamental problem was that Highway 66 was carrying far more traffic than it was designed for. A spectacular success in drawing vacationers, migrants, business travelers, truckers (and trucking companies), and every other kind of traveler and vehicle from hitchhikers to semi-tractor-trailer rigs, the road was crowded, dangerous, and wearing out. The success of the promoters of the Main Street of America, of the main "best-

²⁵ John S. Cordell, "In Reply to Yours -," *Service: A Publication of Cities Service Company*, October 1945, 4.

²⁶ Letter of offer from S. C. Jones to Firestone Tire & Rubber Company, December 26, 1947, copy located in records of Creek County Clerk, volume 553, page 483.

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weather route between Chicago and California," of getting "your kicks on Route 66," began to loom, ironically, as the biggest threat to the road's existence. Pressure for the improvement of the roadway quickly turned into plans to replace it with something better.

The replacement was a four-lane, divided highway with limited access, and that bypassed not only the businesses that had attached themselves to the Highway 66 roadway but the communities that had tapped the commerce of the highway as well. One of the earliest instances where the pressure to replace Route 66 became manifest was exactly in the section between Tulsa and Oklahoma City. Community and business leaders along that part of Highway 66, including from Bristow, mobilized a powerful, coordinated, articulate, and even desperate opposition to the construction of a new roadway but the Oklahoma governor, Roy Turner, was equally determined, and ultimately, more powerful, and gathered to his side the clout of the state's largest cities. The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority was created by the legislature despite the opposition of Bristow, Chandler, and Stroud, the legislature then failed to repeal the law, and those communities then challenged the law all the way to the United States Supreme Court, and they failed there too. Construction on the Turner turnpike began in 1949 and the four-lane road was finally opened for traffic in 1953. The occasion was heralded nationally by advocates and promoters of the new order it betokened:

. . . Near-by U.S. 66, which has always carried most of the year-round traffic from the North and East to the Southwest, is narrow and over-crowded. Offering driving ease, safety and economy at a moderate cost, the Turner Turnpike is expected to siphon off a sizeable chunk of this cross-country highway load. . . . At the maximum 70-mile-an hour speed [the driver] saves close to two hours in actual driving time between the oil capital of the world and the Oklahoma state capital Should an Easterner find the Phillips 66 service shield unfamiliar, he will at least recognize the ubiquitous Howard Johnson Company, to whom the Oklahoma-born Phillips Petroleum Company has sublet the food concessions By-passing scores of curves on U.S. 66 of from 40 to 90 degrees and several miles of 4 to 7 per cent grades, and eliminating stop-and-go driving in four towns, the through traveler can easily save the other 70 cents [the toll].²⁷

In a few years the Turner Turnpike would become part of the new U.S. Interstate Highway System that further encouraged fast, long distance travel free of "stop and go" driving, or even pauses, in the nation's small towns.

The loss of the continuing flow of Route 66 traffic impacted the communities along its path, but at least it did not entirely devastate the towns like Bristow to the extent that some had forecasted. Obviously some local businesses had been entirely dependent upon the highway that served as Main Street and they suffered. But some, like the Firestone Store, or, as it had become, Jones Firestone Store, were large enough and prominent enough that they withstood the blow. In fact, Jones' service station underwent a change that replicated the larger economic transformation of the nation. In 1963, as the interstate system expanded across the western part of the state and as chain stores offering gasoline, food, and lodging proliferated, Cal and Clara Jones transferred ownership of their station to a new entity: Cal Jones Oil Company. But they also leased it out and it became Joe Mounce Firestone Service Station. What had appeared to be a mom and pop operation at the end of the 1940s (with the exception of the controls that Firestone still exercised) was now a corporation, as it

²⁷ Kent Ruth, "Oklahoma Opens a Turnpike," *New York Times*, May 24, 1953.

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probably had to be in the economy of the 1960s where individually owned operations were being squeezed out on every corner. The business had changed over the years. Tires were available, but the business was hardly selling gasoline in order to increase tire sales for the Firestone Company. Moreover, by 1970, which is the end of the period of significance for Highway 66 itself, Highway 66 was at this point just a shadow of what it had once been and was sometimes difficult to distinguish from other state and local roadways. The station remained and continued to serve the people of Bristow and travelers who found their way off the interstate and happened into view of the prominent station, but it was now a symbol of a different Route 66. What had once been a symbol of the world to come was now a symbol of the world left behind.

In the last several decades the building has been put to several other uses including an antique store and a sheet metal store (which it currently is), but the service station and store appearance of the building remains very much the same as in its original construction.

The requirements for eligibility within the Multiple Property Nomination, "Route 66 and Associated Historic Resources in Oklahoma" under Criterion A in the area of transportation and commerce stipulate that "a gas station, garage, or automobile dealership show a clear association with, and convey a feeling of, personal and commercial traffic along Route 66 in Oklahoma." The Bristow Firestone Service Station dates from almost the beginning of Route 66, and clearly was positioned at its location because U.S. Highway 66 carried traffic right in front of the building's store and service bays. In the course of its operation over the next four decades, the Firestone station reflected the transformative power of the highway on the organization of economies and social structure, especially its centralizing force, and that includes also the shift of the station from a major service point on the highway to a local-oriented store and station largely bypassed by the traffic that, after 1953, rushed past the entire town of Bristow on the new turnpike. The Bristow Firestone Service Station thereby meets the requirements for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A.

Architectural Significance

The Bristow Firestone Service Station is also eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C because of the architectural significance of the building and sign. Eligibility under Criterion C within the Multiple Property Nomination, "Route 66 and Associated Historic Resources in Oklahoma" requires that it "must be a good example of an architectural type or style in its design, materials, workmanship, association, feeling, setting, and location as it once appeared on Route 66 in Oklahoma."

Constructed in 1929-1930, just a few years after the 1925 Paris *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs Industriels et Modernes* from which the avant garde style of decoration and design known as Art Deco found its early popular expression, this building displays some of the most distinctive components of Art Deco in architecture. The subtle zigzags and the stair-stepping in the window molding and the strong geometric motifs in the strikingly angular façade of the Firestone Service Station place it squarely in that style of construction, and the pilasters and parapet of uneven height enhance the vertical appearance of what is really a single-story building. Although the building is made of brick instead of stucco, which was commonly used in Art Deco construction, the predominantly light color and mottled appearance of the brick softens the brick texture and enhances the building's smooth visage. This was a distinctive type and period of construction, a modernistic design that reverberated all along Route 66's pathway to the future.

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But the distinctiveness can also be found in the functional elements of the design of the building. The Bristow Firestone Service Station matched up a new type of building to go with a new type of business. In the 1920s the dominant form of automobile service business was a filling station, and the filling station was literally just that—a place where gas tanks could be filled. Broader services had to be obtained elsewhere and the early stations tended to be small huts or houses with pumps out front. A grease rack over a pit somewhere beside or behind the building and a battery charger represented the apex of auto service in the more advanced stations. Harvey Firestone's biographer noted this decentralized structure of the auto service industry when he described Firestone's approach to it:

In the 1920s a motorist went to one store for his tires, another for brake lining, another for gasoline and oil, and another for a greasing job. Some gas stations kept tires—in their back yards. The average dealer met his customers so seldom that it was decided to give him a line of Firestone-brand accessories in order to bring car owners in more often and expose them to the Firestone name.²⁸

This was precisely the change that the Firestone company initiated in its expansion and revolutionizing of its retail effort at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s and this store represents the elements of that change. The Bristow Firestone Service Station was now a real service station, not just a filling station like so many of its competitors along "Gasoline Row." And that new approach meant a different kind of building. Now the service function was paramount and was integral to the new building. The building had gasoline pumps outside and a sales area inside in a new attractive building with large glass windows for display and had probably a locally unprecedented four service bays inside and adjacent to the store.

This was not just going on in Bristow, Oklahoma. And it was not just the brainchild of Harvey Firestone. The transformation of the gasoline station was taking place nationally and the change had its roots both in the increase in motor traffic and in the desire of the station owners for increased sales along the road. Because of the Depression and its dampening effect on sales, gas station chroniclers John Jakle and Keith Sculle note that

many companies expanded auxiliary product lines requiring larger display rooms and larger storage spaces. The sale of tires, batteries, and accessories (the so-called TBA line) was universally adopted by the major firms. At the same time, companies began to emphasize automobile repair, which required more and larger bays.²⁹

U.S. Highway 66 drove countless people to their dreams of homes, jobs, vacations and adventures in the West and it drove them to a future that always beckoned just a little farther down the road. As the preeminent highway carrying them to that future, Highway 66 also helped carry the nation to a different future, a different economy,

²⁸ Lief, *Firestone: Free Man of Enterprise*, 263.

²⁹ John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *The Gas Station in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 144.

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and different realities. The gasoline service stations along the road typify that change in society and the Bristow Firestone Service Station captures the essence of much of that transformation.

The sign pole in front of the station no longer hangs the red Firestone logo from its cross member, but the very structure of the sign reveals the distinctive period and type of advertising the station and store used. With the cross member pointing west, perpendicular to the highway and Main Street in front, the store was able to capitalize on the drawing power of the nationally-known Firestone brand name. This was critical to pull the motorist off the highway and into the gasoline pumps and service bays of the station, especially since Firestone chose to build its stations / stores with individualized plans, though generally elegant. This was in striking contrast to the other gasoline distributors that sought to use their buildings themselves as advertising, drawing upon what the historians of the gasoline station call "place-product-packaging." Moreover, while the advertising sign in front of the station served an important function, it also predated subsequent advertising technologies common along Route 66, and in particular it never yielded to the ubiquitous neon signage that became popular after World War II. Because of its conceptual significance as an integral part of the station / store operation clearly dating from the 1920s and 1930s, the sign pole contributes to the architectural significance of the property.

The Bristow Firestone Service Station, as a representative of the property type "Gasoline / Service Stations," within the Multiple Property Nomination, "Route 66 and Associated Historic Resources in Oklahoma" is eligible under Criterion C in the area of significance Architecture.

Summary

The Bristow Firestone Service Station in Bristow, Oklahoma, has been historically associated with Route 66 and qualifies for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places because of its historical significance under Criterion A and because of its architectural significance under Criterion C, both within the Multiple Property Nomination, "Route 66 and Associated Historic Resources in Oklahoma."

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Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

This property includes lots 8, 9, and 10 of Block 42, Original Town of Bristow, Oklahoma.

Boundary Justification

This boundary includes the property historically associated with Bristow Firestone Service Station.



Bristow Firestone Service Station

