



## Historic Stands along the Old Natchez Trace



Daily life at Buzzard Roost Stand

Inns, or stands, provided occasional shelter for travelers along the Natchez Trace from the 1790s to the 1840s. These stands offered food to eat and food for thought: local news, information, and ideas. The ever-changing mix of diverse people – whites, American Indians, African Americans – interacted at the stands on a regular basis.

### Why were the stands along the Natchez Trace?

The need for stands appeared when the US government wanted to improve the Natchez Trace into a post road to deliver mail from Nashville, TN to Natchez, MS. In 1800 most of the Natchez Trace ran through Choctaw and Chickasaw lands. A limited number of homesteads offered provisions on Chickasaw land.

Indian wives. While the United States did not recognize women's rights to own land many American Indian nations-including the Chickasaw and Choctaw-did. Tribes preferred to manage their own businesses on tribal land. During this time stands generally bore the last name of the owners: Brashears Stand, for example.

As trade and travel increased down the Mississippi River so did stands along the Natchez Trace. Many of these stands were owned by frontiersmen and their American

### What were the stands like?

The stands along the Natchez Trace varied widely in size and services offered. Many stands offered very basic food along with meager accommodations. Advertisements by stand owners in Natchez newspapers focused on the travelers' diet along the Natchez Trace. The highlights included ground coffee, sugar, biscuits, bacon, and whiskey. Corn was a staple served to Natchez Trace travelers. It usually took the form of hominy, a dish prepared by soaking the corn in lye.

Lucky travelers would have the option to sleep on a crude bed, but a cleared spot on the floor was what they expected. Due to cramped and dirty conditions inside the stands, many travelers chose to sleep outside on the porch or yard under the stars.

### Slavery along the Natchez Trace

Each decade from the 1820s through the Civil War, roughly 200,000 enslaved people were forcibly moved from the upper south to Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Many of these roughly 1 million enslaved people traveled the Natchez Trace on foot. Many stands along the Natchez Trace were home to enslaved people; they worked for the profit

of stand owners and served travelers. Mount Locust, Colbert Ferry, the Gordon House, and numerous other stands relied on the labor of enslaved people to prosper. Some plantation owners, including Turner Brashears of Brashears Stand, became wealthy as traders of enslaved people.

---

## Mount Locust

Mount Locust is one of the oldest structures still standing in an area known for historic homes. John Blommart began what would become Mount Locust by 1780, but his stay was short. Blommart's former business associate, William Ferguson, and his wife Paulina purchased Mount Locust in 1784 and operated the farm until William's death in 1801. A short time later Paulina married James Chamberlain, an overseer at Mount Locust, and they continued to build the growing

plantation. Mount Locust was home to five generations of Chamberlains, with the last leaving in 1944.

A small number of families were forced to endure the bondage of slavery at Mount Locust. The 1820 census listed 26 enslaved people at Mount Locust, and by the middle of the 19th century, the number of enslaved people reached 51.

---

## Brashears Stand

Brashears Stand is named after Turner Brashears, who moved to the area in the late 1700s. He became a trader with the Choctaw and learned their language.

In 1806 Turner Brashears placed an advertisement in the Natchez newspaper about his stand labeling it "A house of Entertainment on the road leading from Natchez to Nashville." Travelers on the Natchez Trace generally seemed to be pleased

with their treatment and accommodations at Brashears Stand. In 1807 Reverend Jacob Young, a Methodist preacher, wrote "Near the line that divided the Choctaw Nation from the Mississippi Territory stood a fine public house kept by a man by the name of Brashears...He treated us very well but knew how to make a high bill." In addition to earning money from his stand operation, Brashears prospered by selling land and enslaved people.

---

## Colbert Ferry

George Colbert, a member of the Chickasaw Nation and owner of Colbert Ferry, is often mentioned in any account of the Natchez Trace due to the strategic location of his ferry along the Tennessee River.

George Colbert played a vital role in establishing the Natchez Trace. He worked with General James Wilkinson to have the post road surveyed near his property. He started his ferry and stand services immediately after the US Army improved the Natchez Trace in 1801.

One traveler, Jose Bernardo Gutierrez de Lara, described the stand that Colbert built near his ferry as "a country palace." Unlike other frontier buildings, it had an "abundance of glass in windows and doors."

In 1837, George Colbert accompanied the major portion of his fellow Chickasaws to Oklahoma territory during the Chickasaw Removal. His prosperity followed him to Oklahoma, but it was short lived as he died in 1839.

---

## Gordon House

The brick home of Captain John Gordon and his family, built in 1818, was one of the more impressive homes in the area. It was a landmark for travelers of the Natchez Trace, letting them know that soon they would be in Nashville, Tennessee, where simple human comforts could be found after weeks of traveling a rustic trail. A ferry provided a safe way for travelers and locals to cross the Duck River, and the grounds provided a place to sleep for the night.

When John Gordon died of pneumonia in 1819, his wife Dolly continued to run the farm with the help of her children and enslaved people. Cotton, cattle, and hogs all helped to support her family. At the time of her death at the age of 80, her son-in-law wrote, "She bore the burdens of their home, and was as brave and heroic as he." She lived here until her death in 1859.

---

## What happened to the stands?

Travel on the Natchez Trace declined as travelers used steamboats more and more for transportation to and from market towns such as Natchez, MS and New Orleans.

Many stand owners relocated to more active trade routes or closed their doors. For decades after, however, settlers relied on sections of the Natchez Trace for local travel. With the establishment of the Natchez Trace Parkway many of the stands live on only in our history.

---

## Bibliography

Guice, John D. W. *Bedfellows and Bedbugs: Stands on the Natchez Trace*. Southern Quarterly 48, no. 1: 7-26.

Obernuefemann, Kelly, and Lynnell L. Thomas. *Travel, Trade, and Travail: Slavery on the Old Natchez Trace*. Eastern National, 2001.

Phelps, Dawson A. *Stands and Travel Accommodations on the Natchez Trace*. National Park Service, 1948.

---