

El Camino Real, From Old Trails to Modern Highways

1890-1945

by

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*National Park Service, El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail,  
<http://home.nps.gov/elte/photosmultimedia/mission-tejas-state-park.htm> (accessed May 1, 2020)*

## INTRODUCTION

El Camino Real de los Tejas was a series of roads founded by Spanish colonizers in Texas that followed previously established Native American trails. The colonizers' intentions were to develop transportation in order to exploit the commodities and people of an area annexed by the Spanish Crown. The "King's Highway of Texas" wound its way through the northern Spanish provinces, similar to the El Camino Real in California. Running all the way from Mexico City, the Camino crossed the Rio Grande near the mission San Juan Bautista, and continued northeast on to the Caddo Villages in east Texas and the mission at Los Adaes. Although there were multiple trails that made up the El Camino Real in Texas, one of the most popular was the Old San Antonio Road, which stretched from San Antonio de Bexar to Nacogdoches. After periods of Spanish, then Mexican control had passed, this road, and the other trails of the Camino, continued to be utilized in the nineteenth century, despite a sharp decline in usage after the 1860s in favor of more commercial routes. However, it was during the time-frame of the 1880s to the 1930s that the state of roads in Texas underwent substantial changes. As older and newer roads became incorporated into a modern infrastructure, these changes were the roads' usage rates, their quality, and even certain roads' cultural meaning to Texas residents. These transformations occurred from the immediate years prior to the proliferation of automobiles, through the conversion of roads to accommodate this new traffic. The result was new highways that were built upon old trails, such as in this case, El Camino Real. This set of old trails transition to a series of new, modern roads serves as a link to the state's history, as well as early key vehicle passageways across the state. It is for these reasons that El Camino Real and its modern iterations are truly unique and important among Texas roads.

The precursor to the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) was the State Highway Department. This organization was created early in 1917, and later the same year proceeded to outline the first state highways, with the intention that these would be accessible to the majority of the population.<sup>1</sup> Among the original twenty-six highways created by the department were State Highway 21, or TX 21, and referred to in this study as SH 21, State Highway 2 (SH 2), and State Highway 3 (SH 3). Each of these highways followed a portion of the old Camino Real. Interestingly, SH 21 still exists today, while SH 2 & 3 have been absorbed into other highways, similar to other examples of these original highways that have been renamed or replaced by newer roads. The history of El Camino Real and its status in the 1880s just prior to the introduction of the automobile will be discussed, but the focal point of this paper is on a later period in Texas history. The majority of information will be presented on the creation and development of new roads across the state in the twentieth century, which resulted in the formation of state highways 2, 3, 21, and later, certain U.S. highways that followed the Camino. It was not one event or individual that was responsible for the conversion of an antiquated chain of connected trails and roads that was El Camino Real into a contemporary system of highways. Rather, it was a synthesis of ideas and technologies that led to the construction of new roads across the state. This synthesis and its components will also be identified and examined. Whether it was popular opinion or political motives that influenced highway building in Texas, differing ideas about how, where, and when to construct roads all had their impact. The aspects of these ideas that most directly affected the highways following

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<sup>1</sup> Phil Wilson, "Cities, Counties and State Have Shared History of Providing and Maintaining Safe Roads," *Texas Department of Transportation* (Austin, TX: 2013), <https://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/media-center/statewide-news/2013-archive/040-2013.html> (accessed March 17, 2020).

the Camino Real are the main concern of this paper. All of this information will be presented in a chronological order, with care taken to record the important milestones of Texas state highways.

Government documents provide primary sources to trace road and highway development within Texas and the United States. Taken from TxDOT, Texas General Land Office archives, the Texas State Library, as well as federal and state legislative acts, these are important documents that reflect the progression of government authority and organization, but also the motives of officials who may have been under the influence of lobbyist groups. Newspapers are also useful references for historical context, information, and publicly aired opinions from the early twentieth century. There is no shortage of articles in published newspapers from this time period that chronicled the building of roads and highways in Texas. Automobiles and new road building methods were maturing technologies with understood benefits for residents across the state. Thus, towns and cities were eager to provide information on the building of new roads in or near their communities. Another primary source for road development in Texas over the decades is maps, which trace the expansion of roads from trails to highways. Survey maps of Texas from the nineteenth century often featured the Old San Antonio Road, or El Camino Real, because it was a long-established road, even at that point. Road maps from the twentieth century, especially after 1917, show the increasing number and importance of highways that connected the state. Whether they were maps produced for the traveling public or official government maps, they exhibit the advancement of road building initiatives and the automobile's popularity in Texas. These maps can be found at the Land Office, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections, and the historical map collections at the University of Texas at Austin.

Secondary sources also provide information on road building within the U.S. and the state of Texas. Select monographs are used that describe Texas history and the evolution of

modern highway building across the country. Two co-authored studies about historic road development proved invaluable to the research conducted in this paper. *A Texas Legacy: The Old San Antonio Road and the Caminos Reales, A Tricentennial History, 1691-1991*, by A. Joachim McGraw, John W Clark, Jr., and Elizabeth A. Robbins, and *The Development of Texas Highways: A Historic Context of the Bankhead Highway and Other Historic Named Highways*, by The Texas Historical Commission, offer a wealth of detail on the process of building and preserving historic Texas roads. Finally, articles from the Handbook of Texas Online and TxDOT provide important information on historic road construction and the legacy of old roads that became paved highways. The collection of these sources serves as evidence to make clear the distinctive and noteworthy characteristics of El Camino Real, and the state highways built on its path.

All the information presented will be organized into four chapters, each covering important periods within the history of El Camino Real and the Texas State Highways. As stated previously, the chapters will follow the history of the Camino and the highways that superseded it. Although Spanish colonial roads from San Antonio to Laredo and La Bahia (Goliad) are also considered part of El Camino Real and will be mentioned, this thesis focuses on the roads of the Camino that became the first official highways in Texas, which mainly consists of the Old San Antonio Road. Chapter one deals with early history in Texas when European explorers arrived and began recording the routes that they traveled, which led to the creation of El Camino Real de los Tejas. The Spanish and French roles in creating the roads are examined, along with the initial purpose and uses of the trails that made up the Camino. As Texas went through government and population changes in the nineteenth century, the roads also went through changes, mostly regarding the intentions of the people who traveled on them. These changes to the Camino will

also be discussed, as the road served multiple functions. The chapter will close by addressing the usage, or lack thereof, of the old trails before the next century brought new opportunities for the road's continued existence.

In Chapter two, the focus is the popular movements and organizations that formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whose concern was preserving places of historical significance and improving infrastructure within their communities and states. One important feature of this chapter is the influence that these organizations and individuals were able to exert, both socially and politically, to achieve their goals, which included road building. These groups' efforts aligned with the Progressive movement in the U.S. and coincided with the rise in popularity of a new technology— automobiles. This relationship will be discussed, along with the confluence of ideas that helped El Camino Real become part of the new highway administration within Texas in the 1910s.

Chapter three explores the multiple highways that were built upon the old Camino Real and their development after the creation of the state highway department. There were various unanticipated delays that occurred in the initial construction of modern highways in Texas, as well as several factors that benefited or negatively affected the completion of a certain number of these roads. The preservationist organizations had an impact during this time period and their efforts led to special designations for certain highways, including El Camino Real. These details will all be discussed as they occurred within the late 1910s to the early 1930s. While the status, and construction techniques of Texas highways in general is a theme of the chapter, the focus will be the highways that were built following the Camino, which included SH 21, 2, and 3, among others, as well as the parts of the Camino that had not yet been converted to highways.



The last chapter describes further delays that affected road building in Texas and the country in the early 1930s before federal New Deal programs gave a boost to road work, and then a construction boom came about in the 1940s. The Great Depression's reverberations on the U.S. economy impacted road building. How substantially this affected construction, and on which roads, including the highways of the Camino, will be analyzed. Construction techniques and materials will be identified in their progression as well. Also, in this chapter is information on the positive effect that the outbreak of World War II had on the construction of roads and highways in Texas, which contrasted with what took place in the 1930s. The advancement of roads that resulted from the war meant that new sections of highways, both the state and U.S. versions, were extended further, and in some cases completed to where they stand at present. This included certain highways that followed El Camino Real. The lasting historical meaning and continued functionality of these highways are also something emphasized. The conclusion provides a summary of the major points of the thesis, and shares some personal history that I have with the road.

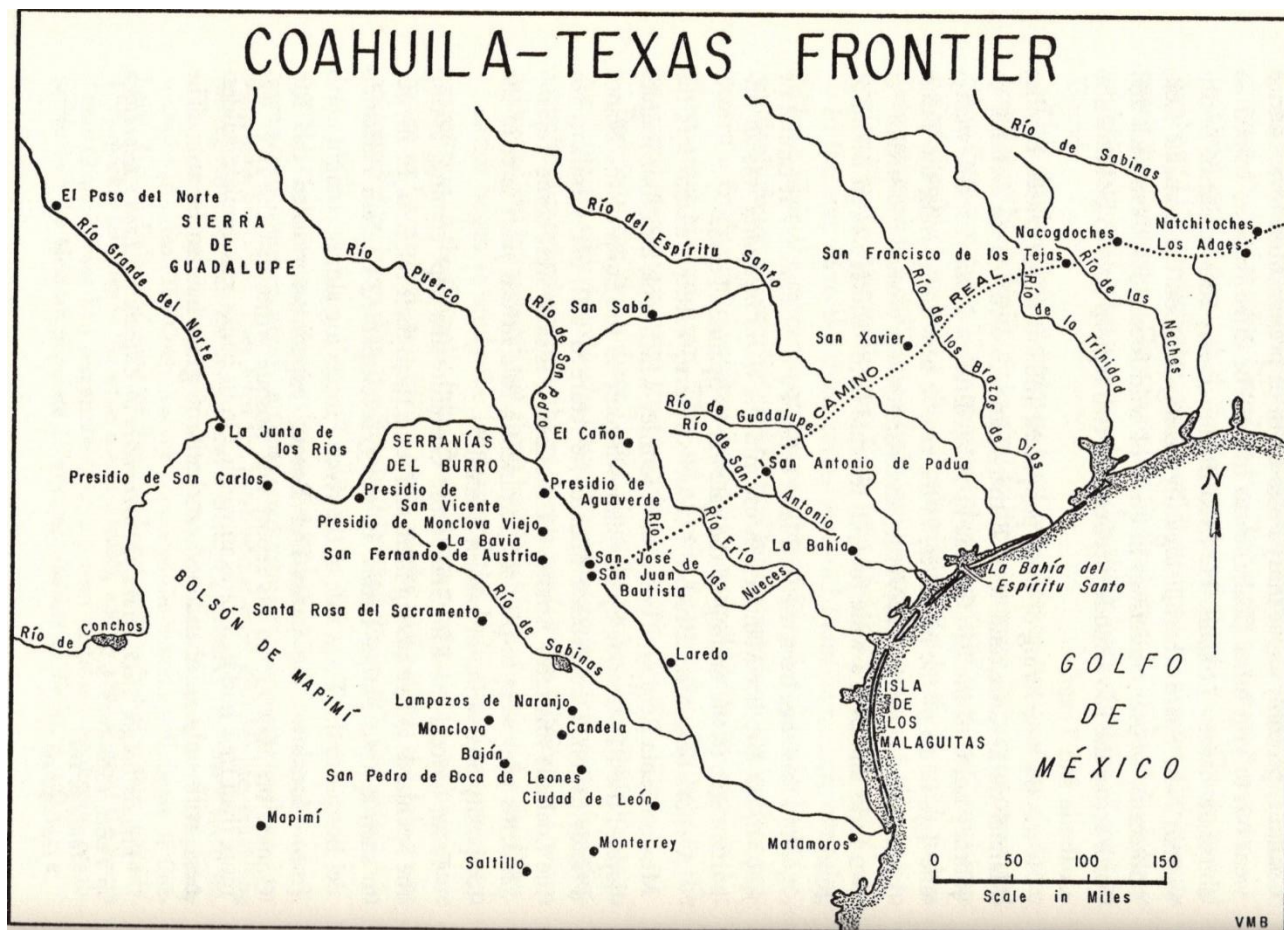


Figure 1. Map of the northern Spanish frontier (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991). The Camino Real connects the territory.

*San Juan Bautista: Gateway to Spanish Texas*, 8.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE CREATION OF EL CAMINO REAL AND ITS CHANGING ROLE

The Native American trails that preceded El Camino Real de los Tejas cut across the natural Texas environment, and had been utilized for hundreds of years prior to European arrival. The migratory pattern of Native Americans through the Brazos river valley of Texas, is just as important as any element when considering the road's history. Before Europeans arrived, many parts of the trail's surroundings did not lend themselves to a sedentary existence, and indeed the Native Americans who lived nearby were often of a nomadic culture, alternating their settlements between watering locations.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the trail crossed multiple rivers that ran southeast towards the Gulf of Mexico, and the encampments along the rivers used by the Indians were later utilized by the Spanish and the Mexicans. Its existence as a walking trail for Native Americans surely suggests that the course, in one way or another, cut a natural path through the southeast Texas countryside between the rivers. The Spanish and French, who later followed, then "founded" El Camino Real, would also have observed this characteristic of the then frequented Native American walking paths. This attribute would be especially true for the portion of the Camino from Louisiana to the mission at San Antonio de Valero and the Villa de Bexar. This road, for a time, connected multiple Spanish missions that were founded along a natural pathway.

The Camino Real, known by several names, including the San Antonio Road, the San Antonio-Nacogdoches Road, and later, the "Old" San Antonio Road, was largely founded based on Spanish-led expeditions in the 1690s. While the Spanish had previously claimed the area of

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<sup>2</sup> Joe B. Frantz, "The Old San Antonio Road," *Along the Early Trails of the Southwest* (Austin: Jenkins Book Publishing Co., 1969), 50.

present-day Texas, it was not colonized by Europeans through the majority of the seventeenth century. It was not until the Spanish acted on information of French expeditions, such as René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle's failed colonization and reconnaissance attempt in 1685, that the government in New Spain decided to create a presence. La Salle had built a temporary French fort near present day Matagorda Bay on the Gulf coast, and then was killed by his own men near the Caddo Indian villages in northeast Texas, as he searched for the Mississippi River.<sup>3</sup> Responding to reports of the Frenchmen's incursions, Spanish military officers and priests were then sent to build missions in the area, while also documenting, and naming the road they traveled on. In 1690, Alonso De León was sent to establish a mission in east Texas just north of present-day Crockett, traveling north from Mexico on what would become Caminos Reales. An additional expedition to establish missions by Domingo Terán de los Rios in 1691, and a supply mission by Gregorio de Salinas Varona in 1693, both traveled similar courses as De León. By the time Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, another Frenchman coming from Louisiana traveling to Mexico used at least a portion of the same route in 1714, the trans-Texas route of El Camino Real had already been established. Even though the Spanish called it the king's highway, in truth it was a network of roads that branched off from a main path, following the existing Native American tracks.<sup>4</sup>

The approximate point at which De León, Terán, and Varona crossed the Rio Grande became an important community where three Spanish missions and a military fort was founded, as well as the starting point of El Camino Real in Texas. Located in present day Guerrero, Coahuila, the missions and presidio were built to convert local Coahuiltecan Indians to

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<sup>3</sup> Frantz, 51, 52.

<sup>4</sup> "OLD SAN ANTONIO ROAD," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/exo04> (accessed March 17, 2020).

Catholicism, and also serve as a way station and military supply point. The first mission, San Juan Bautista, was founded in 1700, and the fort, Presidio del Rio Grande, in 1703, and the community that grew there would serve as a gateway into Texas for many other expeditions.<sup>5</sup> While El Camino Real headed north from the important Spanish settlements of Mexico City, Saltillo, and Monclova before reaching the Rio Grande, the Camino that crossed the river at this point (Paso de Francia) split into two main roads that headed northeast. These were the Upper Presidio Road, also known as the Camino Arriba del Rio Grande, and the later established Lower Presidio Road or Camino de en medio. St. Denis traveled part of what is believed to be the Upper Presidio Road on his trip to San Juan Bautista in 1714 to meet with the captain of Presidio del Rio Grande, Diego Ramon. Later in 1716, Ramon and St. Denis made an expedition back towards east Texas, also traveling on the Upper Road from Presidio del Rio Grande to reestablish Spanish missions that had been abandoned because of previous French threats, and to found a new mission at San Miguel de los Adaes.<sup>6</sup> The mission at Los Adaes, and the presidio that followed it, were built to convert the local Caddo-speaking Adai Indians. It could be said that San Juan Bautista is the mother of Spanish missions in Texas because of the journeys launched from there to build subsequent missions, traveling on El Camino Real.

Despite its frequent use by explorers in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the Upper Presidio Road declined in usage within Texas when the Lower Presidio Road was founded beginning in the 1730s.<sup>7</sup> In addition, other parts of El Camino Real would come under different names because of the paths they took, especially after the key settlement of Villa de

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<sup>5</sup> Robert S. Weddle, *San Juan Bautista: Gateway to Spanish Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 18.

<sup>6</sup> A. Joachim McGraw, John W. Clark, Jr., and Elizabeth A. Robbins, eds., *A Texas Legacy: The Old San Antonio Road and the Caminos Reales, A Tricentennial History, 1691-1991* (Austin: Texas State Department of Highways and Public Transportation, 1991), 89, 129.

<sup>7</sup> McGraw, Clark Jr., Robbins, 131.

Bexar was established in 1718. The Camino de los Tejas, which mostly follows the seventeenth century routes, traveled from San Antonio northeast to the mission San Francisco de los Tejas, before continuing on through the Hasinai Indian territory near Nacogdoches, then to Los Adaes, which sits about 13 miles west of the Red River. The Camino Arriba, organized later in the eighteenth century, but with sections that also follow the Spanish expeditions of the 1690s, took a more southerly path from San Antonio, before also ending up in Nacogdoches. Rather than one line of roads, all these varying courses of El Camino Real that were traveled and documented by the Spanish and French are shown on a map of southeast Texas (Figure 2). Also shown is the approximate route of La Salle's party in 1687 that intersects with the later expeditions.<sup>8</sup>

The mission San Antonio de Valero and the Villa de Bexar that accompanied the mission were founded in 1718, and would become the most important Spanish settlement in Texas. The community was established on the previously discovered San Pedro Springs by the governor of Texas, Martin de Alarcon, on his inspection tour of the province. In this spot the road was level, and it was easy to secure water from the spring located about three-fourths of a league from the San Antonio river.<sup>9</sup> San Antonio de Bexar, despite its isolation from the heart of New Spain and conflicts with two powerful tribes, the Apache and Comanche, slowly grew with the help of an introduction of settlers sponsored by the Spanish crown. The population gained an additional boost from government actions in the 1760s. In that decade, the reformed colonial policies of the Bourbon monarchy of Spain made their impact in Texas. The Marques de Rubi toured all of New Spain's provinces (which also included Louisiana, obtained from the French after the Seven

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<sup>8</sup> McGraw, Clark Jr., Robbins, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Francisco Celiz, *Diary of the Alarcon Expedition into Texas, 1718-1719*, Translated by Fritz Leo Hoffman (Los Angeles: Quivira Society Publications, 1935), 34, 48-49.

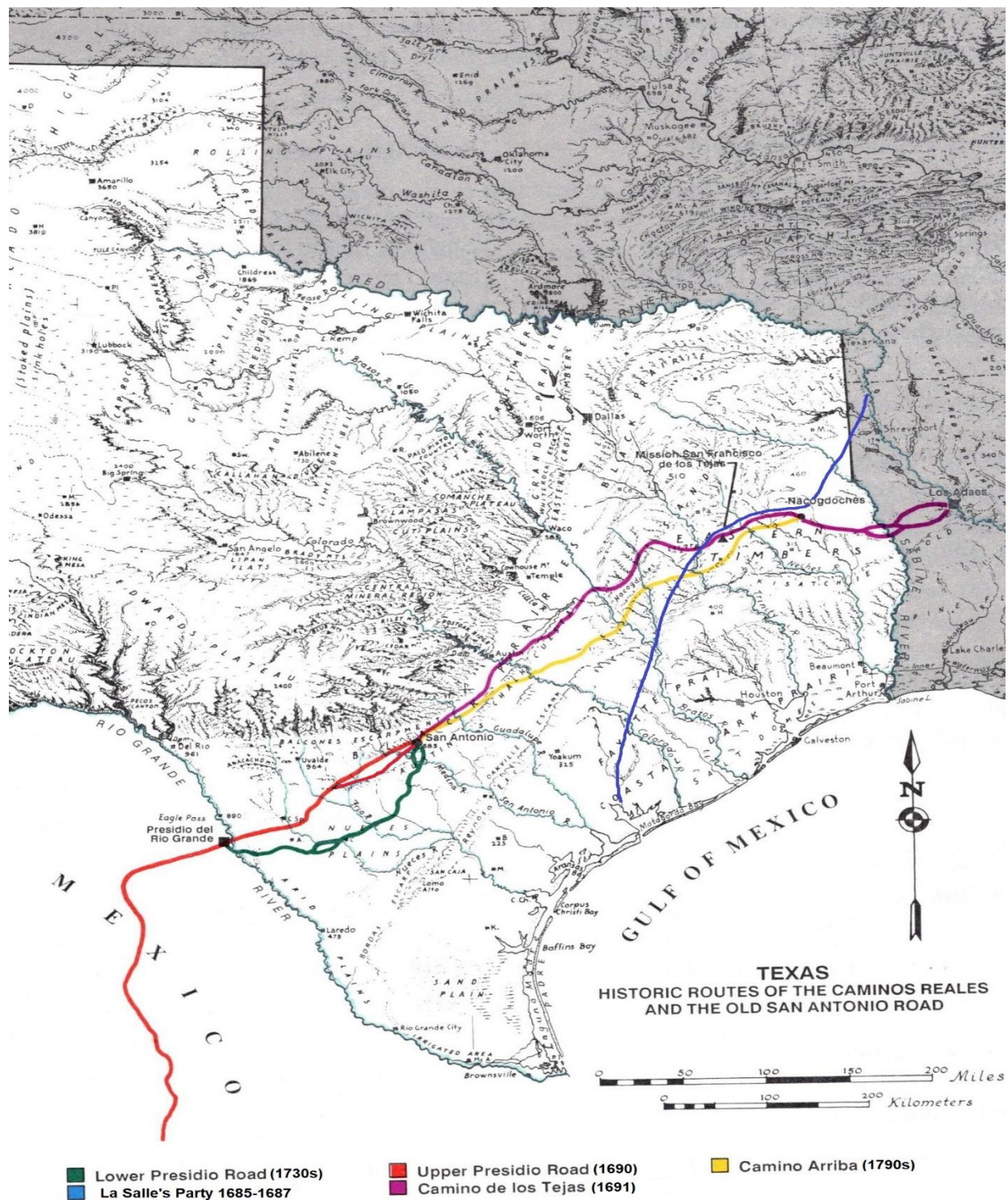


Figure 2. Map of the historic roads of the Caminos Reales (Austin: Texas State Department of Highways and Public Transportation, 1991). The approximate routes of the Spanish expeditions that created El Camino Real de los Tejas are indicated.

*A Texas Legacy, The Old San Antonio Road and the Caminos Reales: A Tricentennial History, 1691-1991, 9.*

Years War) in 1766-1768 on an official inspection ordered by King Charles III. After first going through New Mexico, then California, eventually the Marques traveled El Camino Real de los Tejas from San Antonio to Louisiana and was less than impressed with most of the settlements. Based on his recommendations, Spain decided to consolidate its northern settlements, and abandon its less successful missions in east Texas (Figure 1, pg.8). This left only the communities at San Antonio de Bexar and La Bahia remaining in the province. San Antonio became the capital of the territory in 1773, taking over from Los Adaes, when that mission was abandoned. Although the mission Valero would become secularized in 1794, shifting roles to a military barracks, the significance of the community meant that the Camino Arriba, running in and out of town, was now also referred to as The San Antonio Road.<sup>10</sup>

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Camino would have many roles. It served as a route for cattle drives, supplies and freight traveling to and from San Antonio de Bexar, military expeditions for revolutionaries and filibusters, and, of course, as an immigration trail from the United States. There were some considerable changes regarding the political control of North America in the first few years of the 1800s that proved crucial to the history of the road, and Texas itself. The emperor of France, Napoleon Bonaparte, regained control of Louisiana from the Spanish in 1800, and had designs on sending an army to New Orleans to assert French control, and to gain further territory from the United States. However, the destruction of two separate French armies in Saint Dominique dashed those plans, and, in 1803, the Louisiana Territory was sold to the United States for \$15,000,000.<sup>11</sup> This meant that the U.S. was now directly adjacent to Spanish controlled Texas, and U.S. citizens would soon be

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<sup>10</sup> Frantz, 55.

<sup>11</sup> Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 46-47.



migrating there for different reasons, some legal, and some not. One of the more infamous events in the Mexican revolutionary period, directly related to this new proximity between Mexico and the United States, involved both Mexicans, and Anglos recently arrived from the U.S., and it occurred along El Camino Real. In 1812 Jose Bernardo Gutierrez led an army of mostly American volunteers to “liberate” Texas from Spanish authority, but in reality, its participants were interested in gaining land and the spoils of war. The revolutionaries traveled the Camino from the Sabine River, first occupying Nacogdoches, then eventually San Antonio de Bexar. The results were heavy loss of life for both the Spanish royalists, who were initially defeated, and then the revolutionaries when New Spain’s government sent an army to retaliate and reoccupy San Antonio. Revolutionaries, and those suspected of being so along the Camino from Bexar to the Sabine, were also subsequently punished, and imprisoned.<sup>12</sup>

In 1820, the entrepreneur Moses Austin journeyed down the Camino Real to San Antonio to meet with the governor of Coahuila y Tejas to legally petition for land. Departing from the Sabine River, which was the established Louisiana border after the Adams-Onis Treaty a year prior, he traveled the San Antonio Road and met with governor Antonio Maria Martinez. With the help of the Baron de Bastrop (Phillip Hendrik Bogel), Moses was successful and gained an empresario title to bring in immigrants. After Moses died when he was recruiting settlers, his son Stephen Austin would also travel down the Camino like his father had, seeking the transfer of the empresario contract his father obtained, to himself. Following Mexico’s independence from Spain, a series of temporary governments, and after spending time in Mexico City, Austin was finally recognized as a legal empresario in 1824 with the creation of Mexico’s constitution.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Randy Roberts and James S. Olson, *A Line in the Sand: The Alamo in Blood and Memory* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 62-64.

<sup>13</sup> McGraw, Clark Jr., Robbins, 31.

Prior to the Texas Revolution, Anglo settlers arrived in Austin's first colony and subsequently established colonies via multiple routes, one of which was the Camino Real. However, in 1830 Mexico altered its policy in Texas in order to restrict further emigration from the United States. The Mexican government was aware of previous filibustering expeditions led by Americans, the high foreign population compared to those born in Mexico, and the designs on Texas by the U.S. government.<sup>14</sup> When the fighting broke out over disputes about slavery, which Mexico had abolished, and a switch to a centralist Mexican government that the Texans opposed, El Camino Real played a major role in the conflict. With the Alamo fort at Bexar being a key military outpost, the San Antonio Road was used to move soldiers on both sides of the fight during the revolution. The road allowed for Texian troops and reinforcements to come from the east, and Mexican forces to come up from the Rio Grande. While the Mexican General Martin Perfecto de Cos, had landed on the Gulf Coast to begin his march towards Bexar before his eventual defeat, his superior, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, chose to march overland.<sup>15</sup> Santa Anna made the long journey on El Camino northward through Mexico before reaching Presidio del Rio Grande early in 1836. He and his generals traveled the Upper Presidio Road, and found it in excellent condition. The road followed a line of gentle hills, made of solid earth, that proved to be less dusty in dry weather and not too muddy in wet conditions. The state of the road at that time meant that the cold winter, and lack of supplies for the troops, were detriments to the Mexican army, not the road itself.<sup>16</sup> It has been theorized that if all of Santa Anna's army would

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<sup>14</sup> McGraw, Clark Jr., Robbins, 31.

<sup>15</sup> Roberts, Olson, 42.

<sup>16</sup> Vicente Filisola, *Memoirs for the History of the War in Texas, 2 vols*, Translated by Wallace Woolsey (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1987) 159.

have continued on the San Antonio Road after the fall of the Alamo, towards Nacogdoches, it would have had the flanking advantage over Sam Houston's forces.

After Texas gained its independence in 1836, the settlers continued to arrive traveling along the road, which was adjacent to the land grant settlement colonies that had been created under Mexican authority, that now became counties within the Republic of Texas. The General Land Office's creation coincided with Texas independence, and it oversaw the existing surveys and land grants, as well as new surveys of counties that were formed in the following years. One such example is a survey map from 1840 of land plats in the recently created Bastrop County, which had originally been a part of Austin's colony (Figure 3). The map features at the top of the page the intersection of the "San Antonio Road," with what is the Colorado River, located next to the small town of Bastrop. These three features are used as reference points for the survey. The plat's south of the road and the river are numbered and named, with some individuals owning several tracts of land. These landowners, the majority of which were Anglos, accessed their property via the road or the river.

From the 1840s through the 1860s, the Camino's importance would fluctuate, and its function would also change. The Texas economy before and after its annexation into the United States in 1845 would shift from mainly ranching, which it had been under Spanish and Mexican rule, to agricultural, cash crop farming. These crops, such as cotton, would be brought to market overland to New Orleans by traveling along the San Antonio Road.<sup>17</sup> This maintained the importance of this stretch of Camino Real, while other sections became less traveled. The road's distinction is indicated on a map of The Republic of Texas in 1839, compiled from surveys in the

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<sup>17</sup> McGraw, Clark Jr., Robbins, 32.

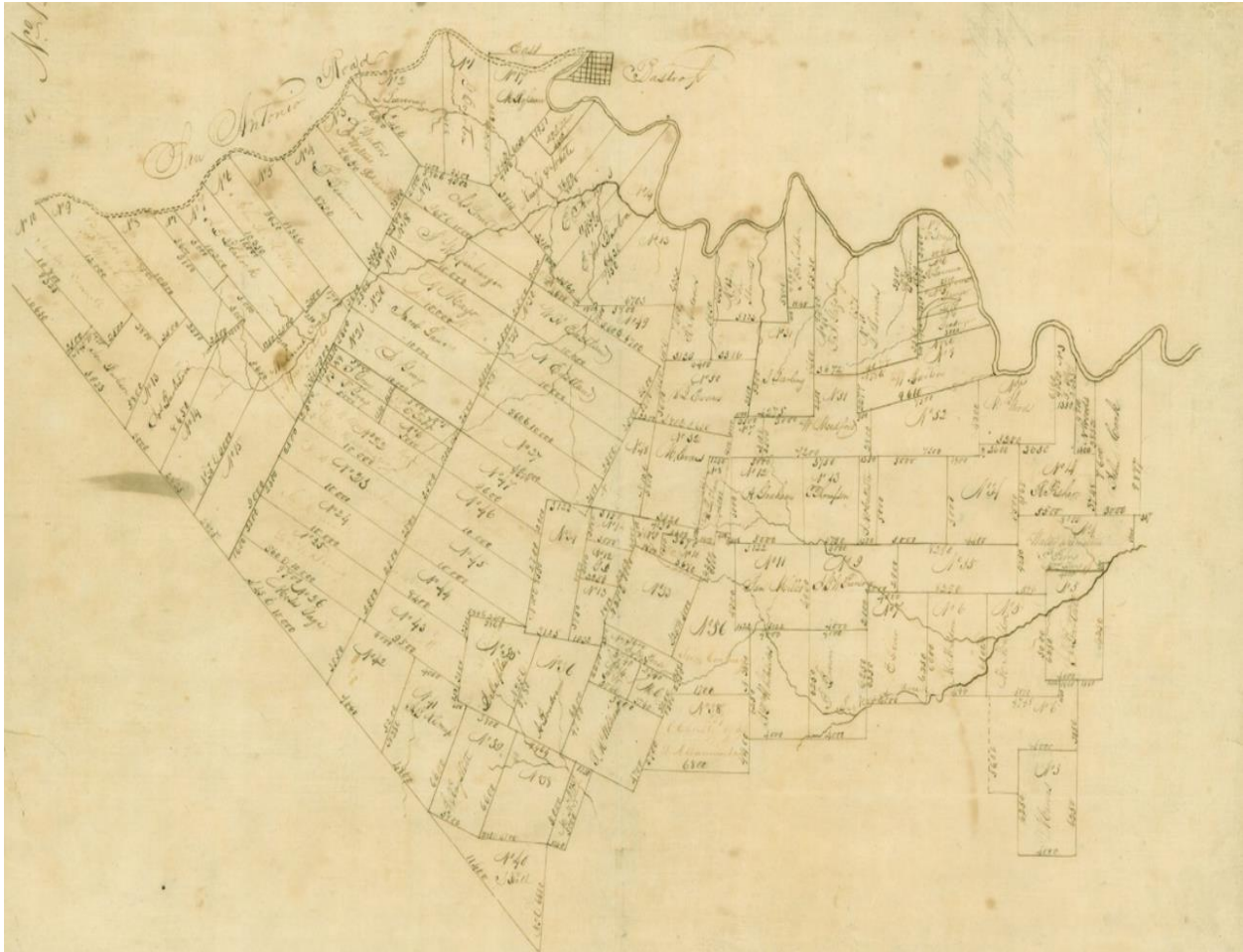


Figure 3. Survey map in Austin's Colony south of the San Antonio Road, and west of the Colorado River, 1840. The San Antonio Road, and the town of Bastrop appear at the top of the map.

*Texas General Land Office, Archive map store, #50*

Land Office (Figure 4). The map, which is a copy made in 1891, shows the republic and its counties in their entirety (with the southern border the Nueces River, as always maintained by Spain and Mexico, not the Rio Grande). Reflecting the times, the “Road from San Antonio de Bexar to Nacogdoches” is featured prominently cutting across the country diagonally. Meanwhile, only one of the Presidio Roads is shown going south to the Rio Grande, and the Camino de los Tejas north of the San Antonio Road is not shown. The rise of the cotton crop would continue during the U.S.-Mexican War 1846-1848, even when an American army invaded Mexico traveling from San Antonio to Presidio Del Rio Grande, then continuing down El Camino Real to Saltillo. Mexico never formally acknowledged the independent republic of Texas, and the war began after the latter was annexed into the United States.

In following years, El Camino served other purposes as well. Fortune seekers traveled along the road responding to the 1849 gold rush, guiding travelers from the east to San Antonio, and then further west towards their destinations. During the Civil War, 1861-1865, overland routes were vital to the Confederacy because of the Union naval blockade on the Gulf Coast. Cotton from east Texas was transported to San Antonio and Laredo via the Camino. Moving in the other direction, troops and supplies from San Antonio, Bastrop, Crockett, and Nacogdoches would be transported east to Louisiana on the San Antonio Road. By that time the route had become better known as The Old San Antonio Road.<sup>18</sup> The Civil War had revived the importance of the road, but all of El Camino Real’s use would decline sharply in the remaining years of the nineteenth century. Newer roads and commercial markets drew traffic away from this old artery,

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<sup>18</sup> McGraw, Clark Jr., Robbins, 32-33.



Figure 4. Map of the Republic of Texas 1839, by Richard S Hunt and Jesse F. Randel, copy made by Sid J. Rowe in 1891. The San Antonio Road is depicted prominently in the middle of the map.

*Texas General Land Office, Archive Map Store, #1891*

and portions running east and west of San Antonio, as well as many sections south to Laredo and Goliad, were abandoned or limited to local use.

Two factors that triggered a gradual decline of El Camino Real in the second half of the nineteenth century were newer roads traveling west that accommodated overland stage coach lines and the expansion of railroads in Texas (Figure 5). Even before the Civil War, the U.S. Army's efforts to defend towns and settlements from Indians, such as the Comanche, Kiowa, and Apache, meant that a line of federal forts were constructed in the 1850s on the western frontier. Roads that connected these posts served commercial and military purposes, in addition to the mail service.<sup>19</sup> Military exploration and road building only increased after the war, where the focus was on the Panhandle and the Trans-Pecos regions of Texas. The military invested heavily in new road building out west, and both infantry and cavalry combat commands mapped the roads and the territory during their campaigns against Native Americans.<sup>20</sup> Stage lines, such as the Butterfield Overland, traveled on roads connecting San Antonio to El Paso and further west to New Mexico and California. The stage lines were subsidized by federal government acts to expand the postal service. As this frontier continued to shift west in the state, so too did the forts and roads that connected them, pulling people and commerce from the old routes of the Camino.<sup>21</sup>

Railroad construction in Texas began near Houston in 1852, a town that had only been incorporated fifteen years prior. Railroad service also first developed in that region and along the

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas T. Smith, *The U.S. Army and the Texas Frontier Economy, 1845–1900* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 138–139.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, 145-148.

<sup>21</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, *The Development of Texas Highways: A Historic Context of the Bankhead Highway and Other Historic Named Highways*, <https://www.thc.texas.gov/public/upload/preserve/survey/highway/Section%20I.%20Statewide%20Historic%20Context.pdf> (accessed June 6, 2020), 14, 15.



Figure 5. Map of Texas taken from *Albert Hanford's Texas State Register* (Galveston, A. Hanford, 1876). Most of the railroad lines and proposed railroad lines are shown on this map, as well as the military telegraph lines and dashed lines indicating mail or stage coach routes. Many of these roads and railroads extend out west, or bypass the Old San Antonio road, which is not indicated.

University of Texas at Arlington, Special Collections, #JK4830 .T53 1876 Garrett



Gulf coast. This helped make towns, such as Houston, and Galveston, important centers for agricultural and commercial freight that was brought by wagon to the railroad stations, then transported to the ports. The state grew rapidly after annexation, and recognizing the importance of railroads, cities and counties issued bonds for track construction, and the state offered land grants and loans to spur on its expansion.<sup>22</sup> Eventually by the 1870s, railroads such as the Houston & Texas Central Railroad and the Texas & Pacific Railway, had connected to other national railways that traveled north. As seen on the “New Map of the State of Texas” from 1876 in Figure 5, drawn by Anton Roessler, the railroads were built away from the old routes of Camino Real, and traveled to cities that had been established in the 1830s and 40s. San Antonio finally gained rail service in 1877, several years after other much newer cities of Austin and Dallas had acquired a rail line. In addition, newer cities that were surveyed and built by the railroad companies boomed, while the older settlements in Texas that were connected to the railways no longer relied upon Camino Real for transportation. During the 1880s, thousands more miles of rail lines were built, connecting all the way to El Paso.<sup>23</sup> Through stagecoach and railroads, Texas was growing along the coast and expanding to the west and the north, areas where El Camino Real did not travel.

During the time when the old road’s usage dwindled, or altogether ceased, its role in Texas’s past was almost forgotten. Forged by Native Americans and European colonials, the King’s Highway of Texas became the main thoroughfare in the territory, and the state’s early history was greatly impacted by the traffic that travelled its trails. This impact might have existed in the recollection of old timers or stories passed down to further generations, but El Camino was

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<sup>22</sup> Texas Historical Commission, 15, 16.

<sup>23</sup> George C. Werner, "RAILROADS." *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed June 7, 2020, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/eqr01>

becoming less familiar to Texas residents every year. In the late nineteenth century, it seemed the trails of the Camino were destined to exist mainly in the history books, rather in any physical form. However, that would change in the early twentieth century when renewed historical interest once again shined a light on these famous trails. As part of a national movement, preservationists in Texas society would eventually succeed in lobbying the state government to sponsor a bill in order to survey the old route of the Camino Real.<sup>24</sup> This survey would signify new life for the road. Simultaneously, Texas and the U.S. had realized the need for a new kind of road to accommodate a new kind of traffic, automobiles.

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<sup>24</sup> Frantz, 60.

## CHAPTER 2

## GOOD ROADS, PROGRESSIVES, AND PRESERVATIONISTS

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Texas economy was predominantly agriculturally based, and the majority of its residents lived in rural areas. The nature of agriculture in the state was also transitioning from self-contained production, to commercialized agriculture that employed new industrial technologies. This agricultural economy relied almost entirely on the railroads for a widespread and reliable transportation system in the state that also connected with national transportation networks. Because of this reliance, the railroads continued to expand as rapidly as the Texas economy. By the early years of the twentieth century, Texas ranked first in the country in total railroad track mileage.<sup>25</sup> But, problems in this system had already been recognized. The network of railroads did not touch many parts of the state where farms existed, and the county roads available to farmers were often of poor quality.<sup>26</sup> Also, even though counties were responsible for road building, they were limited to the materials available to them within the county and on their abilities to raise proper funding. Railroads had proved so dominant that, before 1890, road and highway building techniques were largely derived from the practice of laying railroad tracks.<sup>27</sup> These problems and the initial lack of political intervention fostered the explosion of interest groups, and lobbying organizations focused on, among other things, good roads. As the twentieth century began, these groups gained significant political influence not only in Texas, but in the United States as well.

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<sup>25</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 24-25.

<sup>26</sup> Frank M. Stewart, *Highway Administration in Texas: A Study of Administrative Methods and Financial Policies*, Bureau of Research in the Social Sciences Study no. 8, The University of Texas Bulletin no. 3423 (Austin: The University of Texas, 1934), 12.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas H. MacDonald, "The Engineer's Relation to Highway Transportation," 1954, *Thomas H. MacDonald Papers*, Box 4A, Compiled by Truman R. Strobridge (College Station, TX: Cushing Memorial Library and Archives, Texas A&M University), 33.

The Good Roads Movement in the U.S. began in the 1880s, having originally been focused on improving roads for bicycling. As organizations began to form in the 1890s, they also started to publish magazines, which advocated their group's efforts for better quality paved roads. Many of these organizations were grassroots groups made up of cycling enthusiasts, but they quickly shifted their efforts towards automobiles. Multiple outfits were established as a part of the movement, and they pushed for road improvements from the government at the state and federal levels, even before many of these groups were nationally organized. The first automobiles had appeared in Texas in the 1890s, just as the Good Roads Movement was also beginning to make strides within the state.<sup>28</sup> Because of the largely agriculturally centered economy of Texas, the public understood that better quality roads, and more of them, were needed to serve rural areas to increase the possibilities of agriculture production. Residents in Texas successfully voted to pass an amendment to the state constitution in 1890. The amendment allowed counties to collect certain taxes for road construction, and authorized the legislature to pass local laws for road maintenance.<sup>29</sup> Voters clearly understood the costs that could be avoided by using better roads to more easily transport crops to market, or the railroad stations, and the Good Roads Movement had also started to have an influence.

The impact of quality roads and ideas on how best to build them began to be studied in depth by academics, just prior to the creation of the professional field of highway engineering. At the close of the 1880s, two professors at the University of Texas in Austin offered their interpretations of the state of roads in Texas and the United States, and how they could be improved.<sup>30</sup> Robert Hill was a geologist who published reports about the large agricultural area

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<sup>28</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 24, 31.

<sup>29</sup> Stewart, 13, 14.

<sup>30</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 27.

in central Texas and the types of roads that should be built to overcome the clay soil found in this part of the state. His suggestions about new road building included laying down a proper foundation to allow for drainage, and regular maintenance. According to Hill, the Texas laws governing road construction were still set in a “pioneering stage” that also existed across most of the country, and were inadequate.<sup>31</sup> His colleague at UT, T.U. Taylor, was a civil engineer who had similar conclusions as Hill. In a speech given at the university that was later published, Taylor asserted the need for better roads to improve economic conditions and described the ideal building materials for construction at that time, compared to what many roads actually consisted of. He stated that all the emphasis since 1830 in America had been placed on railroad building, while roads had been neglected, especially when compared with the rest of the world.<sup>32</sup> The commentary on the shortcomings of highway and road building at that point in the U.S. by prominent professionals was something that did not go unnoticed.

By the dawn of the twentieth century, the progressively focused Good Roads Movement had become linked to automobiles and the advantages gained from them. Newer groups such as the American Automobile Association (AAA est. 1902) formed as automobile ownership increased.<sup>33</sup> But, in the immediate years prior, good roads organizations on the national stage had already successfully lobbied congress for new legislation. Two groups, the National League for Good Roads, which formed in 1892, and the League of American Wheelman, which published the *Good Roads* magazine, also began in 1892, were able to influence congressmen and other public servants. In 1893, a congressional act was passed that appropriated \$10,000 to the

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<sup>31</sup> Robert T. Hill, *Roads and Material for Their Construction in the Black Prairie Region of Texas* (Austin, TX: The University of Texas, 1889), 18, 24–27, 29.

<sup>32</sup> T. U. Taylor, “County Roads,” *University of Texas Bulletin no. 54*, 1890.

<sup>33</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 24.

Secretary of Agriculture in order to make inquiries on the subject of road management across the United States, and to investigate the best methods of road construction. There were other duties involved, and it was a modest beginning, but the Office of Road Inquiry, as it was named by the Secretary of Agriculture, began a nationwide process of improving public roads.<sup>34</sup> Another aspect of this act was the initiation of Rural Free Delivery (RFD) for mail, which meant federal postal service to rural areas was free if the area was accessible via road. Minimal congressional appropriations for the Office of Road Inquiry continued for the next few years, but the Good Roads Movement had gained significant momentum.<sup>35</sup>

After its creation, the Office of Road Inquiry, or Office of Public Roads as it was later known, began a program called Object-Lesson Roads, in order to experiment with road building techniques. It also hoped to educate the public on these developments and distribute its findings to engineering schools. Part of this program was establishing a laboratory in 1900 that worked with the Bureau of Chemistry on testing road making materials.<sup>36</sup> Texas counties, often influenced by local or regional good roads organizations, began requesting inspections from Office of Roads agents, who would travel to those counties and oversee the construction of short stretches of Object-Lesson Roads. Several of these roads were built in Texas communities in 1908-1910, including in Nacogdoches on a section of El Camino.<sup>37</sup> Oftentimes these roads were used as quality, properly funded examples that would convince the counties to vote on bonds for public road construction. But there were also unintended results from the Office of Public Road's perspective. These Object-Lesson Roads showed just how labor intensive the construction was

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<sup>34</sup> MacDonald, "The Public Roads Administration and Its Work," 1946, Box 9: Intra Agency, 1.

<sup>35</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 28-29.

<sup>36</sup> MacDonald, "The Engineer's Relation to Highway Transportation," 1954, Box 4A, 35.

<sup>37</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 34.

and the difficulties that could arise if the proper building materials were not available in certain counties. Also, the possible difficulties in approving bonds if the county was experiencing drought conditions became apparent during these examples, as certain counties refused to even hold bond elections until the drought ended. Office of Public Road's agents and good roads proponents became convinced that new road and highway construction would not truly be successful unless a statewide program provided additional funding to the counties.<sup>38</sup>

The National Good Roads Association, officially organized in 1907, with the Texas chapter organizing in approximately 1911, became the most politically influential of the groups that formed around the Good Roads Movement.<sup>39</sup> This association lobbied the governor and the Texas legislature continually for the creation of a statewide highway system. Although less politically active, automobile clubs in Texas also pushed for good roads by way of their meetings and published periodicals. These groups' combined efforts would lead to the introduction of bills to the state government on several occasions in order to create a Bureau of Highways or a Texas Highway Department, even though they failed.<sup>40</sup> Despite these setbacks, state and local good road organizations helped pass numerous county-wide bonds for road construction and maintenance, even before there was a statewide highway program. Drawing on inspiration and support from the national groups, smaller clubs and member-oriented highway associations also formed in the 1910s to promote road and highway construction in their specific states or localities. One of these clubs, the El Camino Real Association (also formed in 1911), was a group directly tied to The Daughters of the American Revolution, a national organization whose goal was historical preservation. El Camino Real Association is the club that successfully had the

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>39</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 24.

<sup>40</sup> Stewart, 91.

Old San Antonio Road surveyed, and was one of the first of these highway associations in Texas.<sup>41</sup> It is at this point that the Good Roads Movement and the Preservationist Movement converged to promote much needed highway construction in the state. This alliance was not unique to the state of Texas. Indeed, these converging ideas had taken shape across the country, and a flurry of highway legislation and then construction ensued.

As early as 1910, the general public began to realize that professional engineers would be essential to planning and executing road work. This realization was most likely the result of published reports on the nature of Texas roads by academics and good roads proponents, such as Robert Hill and T.U. Taylor, and the object-lesson road program begun by the Office of Public Road Inquiry. In 1913, a group of civil and highway engineers formed the Texas branch of the American Society of Civil Engineers and exhibited a “Good Roads Park” at the Texas State Fair in Dallas.<sup>42</sup> This group of engineers also spoke at a large meeting of the Texas Good Roads Association that same year. These professionals and other engineers from the Agriculture and Mechanical College of Texas and the University of Texas helped to maintain relationships between agents at the Office of Public Roads, the good roads organizations, and lay persons responsible for road construction at the county level. As a result, counties began to reach out to the Office of Public Road’s agents more often, seeking recommendations and studies on where and how to build roads. In one such example, the city of Crockett, where the Old San Antonio Road passed through on its way east towards Nacogdoches, was assisted by Office agents with road improvements in the city, and upon suggestion, hired a county civil engineer.<sup>43</sup> Progress had already reached a significant breakthrough in 1912, when congress passed the Post-Office

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<sup>41</sup> McGraw, Clark Jr., Robbins, 231.

<sup>42</sup> “State Fair Program for Today,” *Dallas Morning News*, October 26, 1913.

<sup>43</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 38-40.



Appropriation Act. This act more than doubled the Office of Public Roads' budget, and got the federal government directly involved in public road building on a local level. The officials in charge of the Office, the Secretary of Agriculture and the Post-Master General, were tasked with selecting mail service roads for improvement, and in turn, the state or locality would partially match the funds provided by the federal government.<sup>44</sup>

The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) was just one of the organizations that led the historical interest movement in the early 1900s. In Texas, its endorsements and efforts, via El Camino Real Association, to recognize and preserve the road resulted in a \$5,000 appropriation from the Texas Legislature in 1915 towards a professional survey. V.N. Zivley was the surveyor who received the commission to retrace the route of the Old San Antonio Road and any other parts of El Camino he could find. Using eighteenth century Spanish surveys, land records, as well as remaining physical remnants of the road, his efforts were quite productive.<sup>45</sup> Zivley was able to follow parts of the old trail that were still in use, pathways that had been abandoned but still showed evidence of beaten tracks, and natural markers that corresponded with land surveys and field notes from the two previous centuries.<sup>46</sup> The path he marked was largely the same route as the old road from San Antonio to Nacogdoches, as seen on maps from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, his completed survey map produced for the DAR (Figure 6) does differ from maps of the previous two centuries in its projected route of the Presidio Road southwest from San Antonio. This is because during his survey of 1915-1916, Zivley found limited physical evidence of the old road's existence between San Antonio and the Rio Grande.

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<sup>44</sup> MacDonald, "The Public Roads Administration and Its Work," 1946, Box 9: Intra Agency, 2.

<sup>45</sup> "OLD SAN ANTONIO ROAD," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/exo04> (accessed March 22, 2020).

<sup>46</sup> V.N. Zively, *Field Notes and Detail Map of the King's Highway* (Austin: Texas State Library and Archives, 1916) Transcribed by A. Joachim McGraw, 1991.

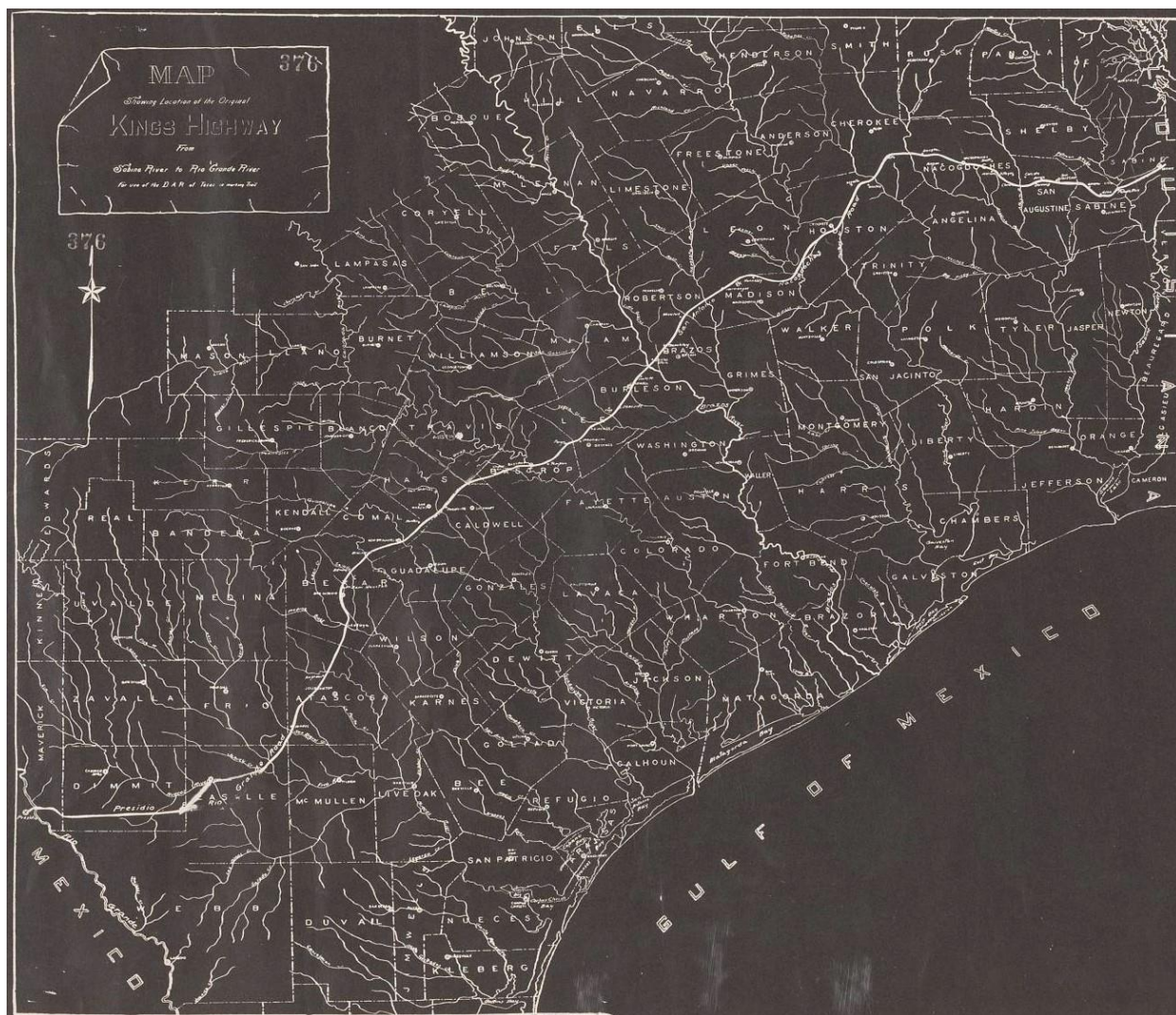


Figure 6. Zivley's plotted map of El Camino Real, 1915-1916.

*Hardin Simmons University Library, #HSU-0307002084241*

The inconsistency owes to how much less this part of El Camino was used in the second half of the nineteenth century, compared to the trails northeast of San Antonio. In those northeast sections of where the road had been, it was a different story. He found evidence of the road in the land, “and produced the road on the map, just as he found it on the ground.”<sup>47</sup> This marked an enormous milestone in the road’s history, for this survey would be used to turn a centuries old trail into a modern highway.

While the Progressive Era in the United States has been described as a period of widespread social activism and political reform, it also was a time of maturing technologies. The good roads organizations and clubs, preservationists’ groups such as the DAR, and in Texas, the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, were all part of a time when new and developing technologies were rapidly changing American life, presumably for the better. The survey of El Camino Real represented a step forward for modern interests because of the role it would play in locating future highways, but it also illustrated the interest and awareness of Texans in the history of the trans-Texas road.<sup>48</sup> As technologies, such as the automobile and road building techniques and materials matured, the people behind these innovations were spurred on by the many progressive activists across the country, as well as noteworthy individuals who understood the benefits that new roads and highways could garner. The sentiment expressed by Colonel Albert Pope, founder of the League of American Wheelmen and organizer of one of the first lobbying groups for good roads, represented a sentiment shared by many Americans in the early twentieth century, “I hope to live to see the time when all over our land, our cities, towns and

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<sup>47</sup> Zively, *Field Notes*...

<sup>48</sup> McGraw, Clark Jr., Robbins, 231.

villages shall be connected by as good roads as can be found.”<sup>49</sup> The potential for these new technologies energized people across the country, and the enthusiasm behind the Good Roads Movement did not weaken after the Post-Office Appropriation Act of 1912, rather it only increased.

A wave of immigrants arrived in Texas between 1880 and 1916, many of them from Europe or the southeastern U.S. This caused the population in the state to grow to nearly four and a half million people by 1916. Most of these immigrants had settled adjacent to existing roads and railroad lines, and many of them became involved in agricultural or ranching industries. Because many rural roads remained underdeveloped, the means of hauling goods from these industries overland to market, processing facilities, or railroad stations, remained a challenge, despite the increasing number of automobiles. Also, the shortage of trucks on the road and the lack of a significant trucking industry up to 1916, partly owing to the state of Texas roads, meant that trucking goods and freight was also not yet a viable option. As a result, despite the existence of railroad lines covering most of the state, commercial transport from farms and ranches remained characteristically inefficient.<sup>50</sup> Naturally, farmers in the counties across Texas remained big proponents of good roads. As the state’s population swelled, so too did the number of vehicle owners calling for better roads, which only put more demand on officials and road builders to accommodate.

Nationally by 1916, vehicle registration was growing substantially. Americans were relying more on their vehicles every day. The pressure put on federal and state governments by good roads organizations and the general public to increase funding for road building even

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<sup>49</sup> Tom Lewis, *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 7.

<sup>50</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 55-56.

further was also mounting more every day. In July of that year, President Woodrow Wilson signed the first Federal-Aid Road Act into law in response to these pressures. This act promised millions of dollars for road construction over the next few years and stipulated that half of the state's cost for road improvement would be covered by the federal government.<sup>51</sup> This act extended powers set forth by the 1912 act and required states to form their own highway departments in order to distribute funds provided by the federal government. It also established principles of administration and engineering and served as a template for future acts regarding highway planning. One drawback though, proved to be the funding. Despite the seemingly large sum of money at the time (especially for Texas as it received the most out of any state), it turned out to be far less than required.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the United States' involvement in World War I the following year severely hampered this act. Funding was then directed to the military, road engineers were drafted into military service, and supplies for construction were appropriated by the armed forces or shipped overseas.

Prior to the war, however, good roads and highway associations pushed hard to have the Texas legislature create a highway department in order to participate in the federal system outlined by the 1916 act. Representatives from these organizations toured the state, encouraging support for this initiative, and also met with large congregations of good roads supporters.<sup>53</sup> In October of 1916, with the engineer and superintendent of road construction in Texas, George D. Marshall assisting, a committee of the Texas Good Roads Association even drafted their own bill for introduction to the legislature.<sup>54</sup> These methods were effective, as The Texas State Highway

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<sup>51</sup> "Texas' Share of Good Roads Fund \$4,515,760," *Dallas Morning News*, July 15, 1916.

<sup>52</sup> MacDonald, "The Engineer's Relation to Highway Transportation," 1954, Box 4A, 36.

<sup>53</sup> "Good Roads Meeting at Austin," *Dallas Morning News*, September 7, 1916. 2.

<sup>54</sup> "Adopt State Highway Bill: Legislative Committee of Association Holds Meeting," *Dallas Morning News*, October 17, 1916. 13.

Department was established by the Thirty-fifth Texas Legislature in April of 1917. The bill introduced to the legislature to create a state highway department was not only sponsored by the Texas Good Roads Association, but also supported by Governor James “Pa” Ferguson. Ferguson was noted for his support of the agricultural community, for whom these highways would directly benefit. The passage of the bill also created The Texas Highway Commission, whose initial members were appointed by Governor Ferguson and the Office of State Engineer. The State Highway Engineer (with approval from the highway commission) was responsible for preparing plans that determined the location and construction of the new state highways.<sup>55</sup>

In July of 1917, the engineer’s office produced a primary map that divided state highways into six different regions. This map titled *Map Showing Proposed System of State Highways* (Figure 7) identified the first twenty-six highways, and was drawn by J.D. Miller, the Chief Draftsman for the state highway commission. The names and numbers of the highways are noted in the top left-hand corner, as well as their points of departure and terminus. The El Camino Real Association had achieved another victory, when a large portion of the recently surveyed Camino was chosen to be incorporated into the highways. State highways 2, 3, 3A, and 21 followed the Old San Antonio Road from west of San Antonio in Bexar County to the Louisiana border east of San Augustine. Most of this stretch was covered by State Highway 21 (SH 21), or the Gonzales to San Augustine highway as named on the map. This highway is shown traveling through the fourth and fifth designated regions, and was most likely heavily influenced by the Zivley survey of El Camino, completed the year prior. Although in this map

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<sup>55</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 68.

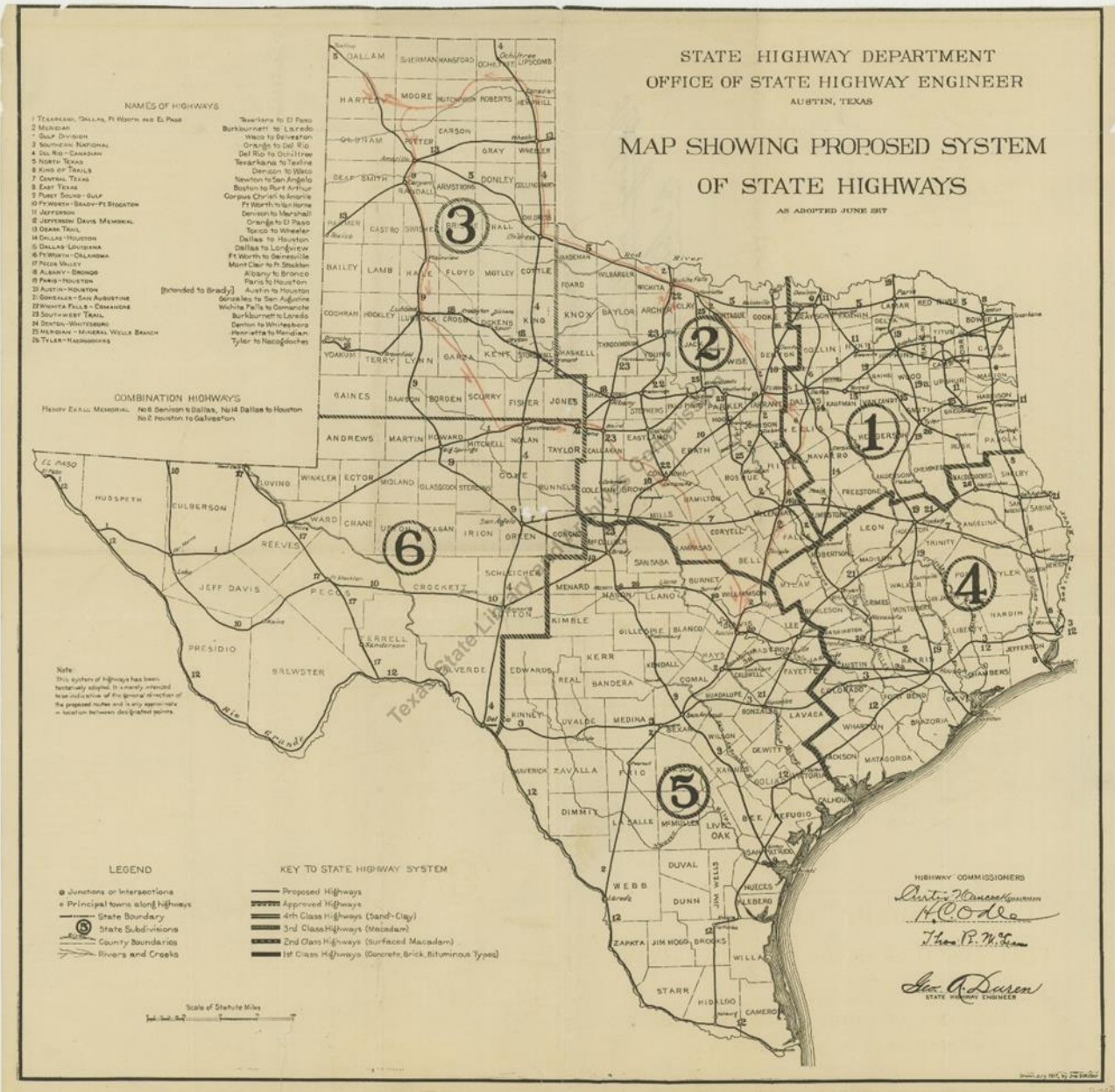


Figure 7. First map issued by the highway department showing the proposed location of the newly created state highways, numbered 1-26. The approximate route of The Old San Antonio Road is identified as highway 21.

Texas State Library and Archives, Map Collection, #06254

the proposed SH 21 is shown traveling further south than where it would end up, this would later be revised. A note clarifying this map's information begins with, "This system of highways has been tentatively adopted." Also of note, there is a key specifying the planned construction material to be used on the proposed highways.

Things began to shift back towards road and highway construction in the country after the war was over. In 1919, Thomas MacDonald was appointed as chief of the newly created Federal Bureau of Public Roads, which was the successor to the Office of Road Inquiry.<sup>56</sup> MacDonald, a trained civil engineer and longtime proponent of good roads, would lead the Bureau of Public Roads for nearly forty years, and be hugely influential to highway building in the U.S. This was a crucial step in the country's prospects for improving its public roads, as well as the creation of many state highway departments that had preceded MacDonald's appointment. Even before the highway department and state designated highways had been created, a system was in place to complete road projects in Texas. Important elements of a state highway system, such as engineers, experienced contractors, good roads organizations and clubs, and counties committed to road building, had been in place prior to July of 1917.<sup>57</sup> But, now that there was a state system in place, things did not go as smoothly as hoped for a variety of reasons. Officials, such as MacDonald on the national level and others in Texas, continued to find ways to work through, or around these problems.

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<sup>56</sup> Lewis, 10,11.

<sup>57</sup> Texas Historical Commission, 55.



### CHAPTER 3

#### THE ROADS AND HIGHWAYS OF EL CAMINO

There were multiple factors that delayed or slowed the construction of these new highways in Texas after they were outlined in 1917. One of which, mentioned previously, was World War I, which diverted money and resources away from the highway department. In 1917, after its creation, the Texas Highway Department and its commissioners took over approximately 12,000 miles of road in the state. The first state highway engineer appointed was George A. Duren, a civil engineer who had previously worked for the railroad companies. Secretary of the highway commission was David E. Colp, who had been a noted member of the Texas Good Roads Association and the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce.<sup>58</sup> All these men were immediately engaged in inspections on the proposed highway routes, but they were soon forced to deal with supply issues due to the war. The Texas Highway Commission appealed to Washington D.C. on this matter, in order to convince the leaders there of the importance of building highways to support the military bases in Texas. In a report to congress in December of

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<sup>58</sup> Texas Historical Commission, 72.

1917, the commission detailed its work up to that point on “military highways,” between army bases in Fort Worth, San Antonio, Waco, and Houston.<sup>59</sup> Later in January 1918, Duren outlined the information that appeared in the report in a call for prompt work on these military highways (of which SH 2 & 3 were a part of). He stated that more trucks on these roads could support these military installations and reduce their reliance on railroad freight.<sup>60</sup>

Another delay was caused by an abrupt change in leadership within the highway commission. Not long after the commission submitted its report to congress regarding its progress on highways, all three members suddenly resigned early in January of 1918. Governor William Hobby, who had taken over from James Ferguson who was forced from his office after being impeached, was forced to accept their resignations and immediately began looking for their successors. The members of the highway commission had been appointed to a two-year term, but had quit after only about six months on the job. The exact reasons were unclear, but chairman of the commission, Curtis Hancock, indicated that there had been much friction between the members, and, for the good of the highway department, each member stepped down. The highway engineer Duren, temporarily took over their responsibilities.<sup>61</sup> Further impediments occurred when the war ended the following year. The federal restrictions on building materials for all highways were lifted, but a drought had made it very difficult for counties to raise bonds for road construction. Even with now federal, and state funding, the state’s agricultural economy was suffering.<sup>62</sup> Ironically, construction slowed later in 1919 because the heavy rains that brought an end to the drought caused floods and damaged many roads that had been built with

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<sup>59</sup> “Hancock Files Map of Work Done on Highways,” *Dallas Morning News*, January 6, 1918. 6.

<sup>60</sup> George A. Duren, “Urges Immediate Construction of Military Highway System,” *Dallas Morning News*, January 20, 1918, 2.

<sup>61</sup> “Highway Commission Members All Resign,” *Dallas Morning News*, January 11, 1918, 1.

<sup>62</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 67.

gravel or lesser materials. During these delays, the country, and the state had utilized the time to modify and improve its standards for highway construction and organization.

While these delays were going on, preservationists had made some gains with regards to El Camino Real. Mrs. Claudia W. Norvell was the booster and leader of the Texas chapter of the DAR, who was instrumental in having the Old San Antonio Road turned into modern highways. She was also key to having portions of SH 21 and other highways designated as historic roads. A native Texan from a well to do family, she had grown up in Bastrop and understood the historical importance of these old roads. Through the connections she made with state officials as chairwoman of the Texas National Old Trails, and Roads Committee of the DAR, it was her lobbying efforts that gained the appropriation from the Texas legislature to have the San Antonio road surveyed in 1915.<sup>63</sup> After the State Highway Department came into existence, the DAR's next step was to install permanent historical markers along the highways of El Camino Real, from the Louisiana border, down to the Rio Grande. Again, using the Zivley survey as a reference and working with the highway department, the DAR placed pink granite monuments along the route of the trails in 1918 and 1919. The granite markers were positioned in locations next to the newly designated highways, but also trails and small roads that would later become part of the highway system. Norvell also requested the assistance of county judges to ensure the proper locations of the markers.<sup>64</sup>

When congress passed the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1921, it was an amendment to the 1916 act. It forced states to take more control of highway and bridge building away from local counties. Thus, the Texas Highway Department would have to be granted more jurisdiction

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<sup>63</sup> McGraw, Clark Jr., Robbins, 231.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

and agency to build roads with state and federal money, rather than relying as much on counties to control the projects.<sup>65</sup> The federal government also had in mind with the 1921 act to create a system of national highways, which the states would be responsible for building. Because the specifics of this national legislation required the state to take more authority, a modification of the Texas Constitution was required. At the time the state constitution gave the counties control over road building, which was now in conflict with the newly signed federal act. States were given a few years grace period to conform, but in order to still be in line for federal money given towards highway building, Texas would eventually modify its constitution in 1925.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the slow progress brought upon the building of these roads, by the early 1920s long sections of highway had been cleared utilizing the recently upgraded standards. Captain J.D. Fauntleroy, who would later become the State Highway Engineer in 1922, had been a pivotal figure in Texas roads since the Federal-Aid Road Act of 1916. He was an army officer who previously had served as the district engineer for the Federal Aid Department. Acting in that capacity, he toured the state in 1917, explaining the details of the 1916 congressional act. He also had worked closely with the first commissioners of the Texas Highway Department.<sup>67</sup> Fauntleroy described the disposition of the Camino Real as it stood in 1920. He discussed the lengths of the old road, beginning at the Sabine River that borders Louisiana, to San Antonio, that had been incorporated into state highways, with SH 21 covering the initial stretch from the east. At the time, highway 21 extended from the Sabine, through Houston County, approximately 130 miles. He described the gap between this point and the town of Bastrop, where the Camino Real had not been converted to state highways. From Bastrop to about fifteen miles west of that town, it was

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<sup>65</sup> "Texans Loose Fight Against Road Bill," *Dallas Morning News*, November 2, 1921.

<sup>66</sup> Stewart, 38-40.

<sup>67</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 72.

part of highway 3A. From that point to San Marcos, again it is not part of a highway, and from San Marcos to San Antonio, it was part of SH 2. At San Antonio, continuing southwest “to the Rio Grande it does not follow a designated highway.”<sup>68</sup> Although he does not mention it in his report, in 1920 a section of SH 3, just west of San Antonio, but still within Bexar County, did follow the Upper Presidio Road.

Besides the large stretches of the Old San Antonio Road that comprised SH 21 in east Texas and the smaller portions of SH 2 and SH 3 that converged on to it closer to San Antonio (and a very short extent of SH 20 near Bastrop), other highways also followed parts of the old trail in the 1920s. Like highways 2 and 3, State Highway 9 was one of the original twenty-six highways created in 1917, and was overlaid on top of the proposed route of the Puget Sound-Gulf Highway, although that national route never fully materialized. Beginning in the panhandle at Amarillo, it traveled southeastward through the state to Corpus Christi. In 1919 a second route of SH 9 was outlined leaving San Antonio in a more southerly direction, traveling to the town of Pleasanton. From San Antonio to the Bexar County line, this section of SH 9 was very close to the course of the Lower Presidio Road. The original route of the highway south of the city, drafted in 1917, became designated part of SH 16 in 1923, while the second route of SH 9 remained. United States Highway 90 (U.S. 90) in Texas was drafted in 1926 to follow the path of SH 3. SH 3s original western terminus was at Del Rio on the Rio Grande, but it was extended to west Texas through towns such as Alpine, and Marfa, before ending in Van Horn. This also became the path of US 90, as was described by the highway commission’s meeting in 1927.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Mrs. Lipscomb Norvell, *King’s Highway: The Great Strategic Military Highway of America, El Camino Real, The Old San Antonio Road* (Austin: Firm Foundation Publishers, 1945), 279-280.

<sup>69</sup> Texas Department of Transportation, Transportation Planning and Programming Division, *U.S. Highway NO. 90, Original Description per Administrative Circular No. 16-44, 1927*  
<https://www.dot.state.tx.us/tpp/hwy/us/us0090.htm>, (accessed June 18, 2020).

Technically, U.S. 90 and SH 3 were the same road, but U.S. 90 became the first national highway that tracked a portion of El Camino Real de los Tejas.

As progress continued on the highways, including SH 21, 2, & 3, the State Highway Commission held regular meetings to determine which highways, and which counties, would receive a combination of federal and state funds. The regularity of their meetings had increased substantially after the Federal Highway Act of 1921 had given the Texas Highway Department increased control over road building. One such example of the highway commission's meeting comes from October 1922. In the meeting's official minutes, state and federal funds are delineated for different highways, often with a combination of the two going to a certain county in which a highway passes through. Within these minutes, Houston County was granted \$16,708.21 additional federal aid and \$8,354.10 additional state aid on highway 21, from the east side of the county to Crockett.<sup>70</sup>

As the development of highways advanced, so too did the quality of the roads and the materials used. In rural areas of Texas, which was the majority of the state in the early 1900s, dirt or sandy roads were the norm. Heavy rains would wash out these roads or make them too muddy to travel on, especially as trucks and machinery became heavier. Transportation was often impaired for farmers traveling to market or for many oil companies in certain parts of Texas, when that particular industry began to boom after World War I. Even after the passage of the federal highway acts required better construction materials to be used in order to obtain federal money, dirt roads were still commonplace outside of the big cities. After 1917, engineers at the state and federal level realized that, due to poor conditions, many roads would have to be

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<sup>70</sup> Texas Department of Transportation, Public Documents, *Minutes of the Sixty-Third and First Adjourned Regular Meeting of the State Highway Commission* (Austin, TX: October 16, 1922) 2.

moved after better locations were found. Despite these circumstances, in many areas of Texas, there was also the existence of better roads, such as those paved with concrete or macadam,<sup>71</sup> and better-quality materials available to be used across the state. Speaking as an engineer, Fauntleroy reported to the Texas Highway Commission about proper road building procedures. From his perspective, communities needed to understand that the best location of roads must first be selected, then during construction the road must be properly graded for drainage, and depending on the traffic traveling over the road, paved with top quality materials such as concrete. He stated this process must be followed, even if this meant relocating a road currently on unstable dirt or sandy surfaces.<sup>72</sup>

An additional result from improved road conditions was the growing industry of automobile tourism. In turn, the auxiliary support highway building received from this tourism was significant. While World War I was still going on, many soldiers stationed in Texas were joining sightseers in creating a demand for gas stations, lodging, and other roadside amenities and services.<sup>73</sup> Despite the reduction of the military after the war, this tourism only escalated. The new highways allowed more people to travel in their cars on overnight journeys, whereas before, the road conditions had discouraged such trips. What began first with tourist camps in towns and cities where the new highways were built, evolved into tourist courts, motels, and nationally franchised gas stations being built along these roads through the 1920s.<sup>74</sup> The automobile's popularity in the late 1910s and the 1920s, extended to African Americans as well.

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<sup>71</sup> *Macadam*, broken stone of even size used in successively compacted layers for surfacing roads and paths, and typically bound with tar or bitumen.

<sup>72</sup> "United States District Engineer Explains How to Secure Federal Aid for Building Roads in Texas," *Dallas Morning News*, October 14, 1917. 22.

<sup>73</sup> "Numerous National Army Camps and Aviation Fields Expected to Bring Thousands of Motorists to Texas," *Dallas Morning News*, October 14, 1917. 17.

<sup>74</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 119.

Unfortunately, many middle-class African Americans, themselves war veterans and professionals, who were purchasing vehicles, could not participate in automobile tourism in the same manner. Clubs such as AAA forbade black membership, and these new highway facilities were often segregated or not open to black patronage.<sup>75</sup> But these restrictions could not prevent the African American community from embracing the new automobile culture, and taking to the highways as tourists and vacationers, along with the rest of the state.

Referencing road maps of Texas produced by companies such as Clason, and Rand McNally in the 1920s, revealed that SH 21 was not paved, but divided between graded earth roads and gravel or macadam. This was not a characteristic unique to SH 21. Considered “second class” roads behind first class paved concrete, surfaced macadam would be the principal material used on the state highways in their earliest iterations, especially in rural areas where concrete was not easily obtainable. To match the funds for road construction that were coming from the federal government, the Texas Highway Department levied the first auto-registration fees, soon after the department’s creation. The registration fees amounted to a minimum of \$7.50 per car, not an insignificant amount of money in 1918. Registration increased substantially in the 1920s as automobiles in Texas became more and more abundant. However, progress on the roads came to a near complete stop in the mid-1920s due to political disputes that arose between the governor, the counties, and the highway department on how the highway dollars were being spent.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>76</sup> "From Pioneer Paths to Superhighways - The Texas Highway Department Blazes Texas Trails 1917-1968," *Texas State Library and Archives Commission*, <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/exhibits/highways/farmer/page1.html> (accessed April 6, 2020), Ch.5, pg. 2.



In 1924, Governor Pat Neff, hoping to increase road production after several years of slow progress, appointed Gibb Gilchrist as the State Highway Engineer. Gilchrist was an engineer who had worked for the railroads and also constructed roads for the army in Europe in WWI. Before being appointed as state engineer, he had worked for the highway department in different districts across the state.<sup>77</sup> After his appointment by Governor Neff, he immediately began to develop a plan of action to galvanize the department and escalate highway building. Part of his plan was to purchase surplus army trucks to use for construction and to hire many more state employees to perform the work. Although his plans were scuttled soon afterwards when Miriam “Ma” Ferguson was elected governor, and she began awarding road construction contracts to disreputable companies who paid for ads in her husband’s newspaper. In essence, these companies were being paid state dollars and not performing any work. This caused Gilchrist to resign from his position and other leaders in the state to openly investigate Ferguson and the members of the highway commission. What resulted had a huge negative effect on the federal aid that was being given to the state for road construction, because Texas was not maintaining its roads as stipulated by the federal government. Federal aid was temporarily cut-off, and counties again had to shoulder the lion’s share of the cost burden. These delays contributed to the percentage of concrete paved highways in Texas being significantly less (just 1,000 miles of more than 16,000 miles of public highways in 1925), compared with the rest of the country.<sup>78</sup> By 1926, SH 21 had been extended along the path of the Old San Antonio Road to Giddings, a town east of Bastrop, as seen on a road map from the Texas Almanac (Figure 8). But

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<sup>77</sup> Gibb Gilchrist, “Bulletin of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas,” October 1938, *Archives and Information Services Division* (Austin, TX: Texas State Library and Archives).

<sup>78</sup> “From Pioneer Paths to Superhighways...”, Ch.5, pg. 3.



Figure 8. Road Map of Texas from the 1926 edition of *The Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide* (Dallas: The Dallas News, 1926). The state highways that followed part of El Camino at the time are shown. SH 9 in green, SH 3 in blue, SH 2 in yellow, and SH 21 in red. The longest stretch, highway 21, ends just north of Giddings, TX.

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the highway would remain to that extent for years, and still mostly be composed of macadam or dirt roads.

The road map issued with the 1926 edition of the Texas Almanac was actually produced by Rand McNally and included in the almanac as a 14" x 21" fold out. Unlike the travel road maps made by Clason, the mile markers between towns are not indicated on the roads, and the materials of the highway surfaces are not keyed in on the map either. However, the almanac itself contained much more information that was not present on the fold out map. This edition of the almanac stated that the entire public road system in Texas was now approximately 180,000 miles, of which 160,000 miles were outside either the federal, or state highway system. These public roads that were not designated highways were mostly unpaved, and given the number of highways themselves that were still not paved with concrete, it meant a large percentage of Texas roads were still gravel, dirt, or clay.<sup>79</sup> When federal aid for highways was removed from Texas in 1927, it was due to a lack of proper maintenance on highways in order to sustain mandated standards. At this time, the state highway commission was forced to announce that it would not propose any new highways until existing roads had been improved.<sup>80</sup> The state highway engineer in 1928, Gibb Gilchrist, reappointed to that position by Governor Dan Moody after the previous political disputes over funding had halted highway construction, spent the year working on solutions to solve these problems. These solutions included a temporary tax on gas to augment funding and rehabilitating hundreds of miles of highways that had been neglected.<sup>81</sup> But, the lack of money was still a serious issue, and some counties carried an increasing cost due to highway taxes. The paving of state highways, including SH 21, remained a slow process.

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<sup>79</sup> *The Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide* (Dallas: The Dallas News, 1926), 322.

<sup>80</sup> Stewart, 122-123, 139.

<sup>81</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 108.

On the federal level, in 1925 the Secretary of Agriculture, Howard M. Gore, appointed a Joint Board on Interstate Highways. With the assistance of each state, the goal of the board was to select a certain number of U.S. highways across the country to be determined arterial routes. There was much confusion in the U.S. at the time with regards to the naming of highways. Highway associations and organizations gave these roads specific names that often conflicted with other associations that may have named a different road the same thing. The board planned to rename the highways that they selected as numbered roads, and a uniform shield design was also approved to be used as signage. There was some initial push back from road organizations that thought that the names meant something, but number designations meant nothing. Eventually, however, through meetings between the board and these organizations, some small compromises were made, and the members of the road associations understood the intentions of the board.<sup>82</sup> The board then decided to assign odd numbers to north-south running highways and even numbers to those that ran east-west, and the state highway departments pushed to have much more highway mileage included in the U.S. system than the board originally anticipated. One result of the new numbered highways was the dissolution of some highway associations in the country, since the names of these roads had been replaced by numbers, but in Texas, groups such as El Camino Real Association continued their operations.<sup>83</sup> The U.S. highways began making their way onto road maps a couple years after the board first began to conduct their meetings, as seen on the example from the Clason company in 1927 (Figure 9).

With automobile traffic surging across the U.S. map makers and publishers, such as Rand McNally and Clason, were continually producing and selling road maps that contained the most

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<sup>82</sup> Richard F. Weingroff, "From Names to Numbers: Origins of the U.S. Numbered Highway System," *Federal Highway Administration*, <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/numbers.cfm> (accessed June 18, 2020).

<sup>83</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 113.

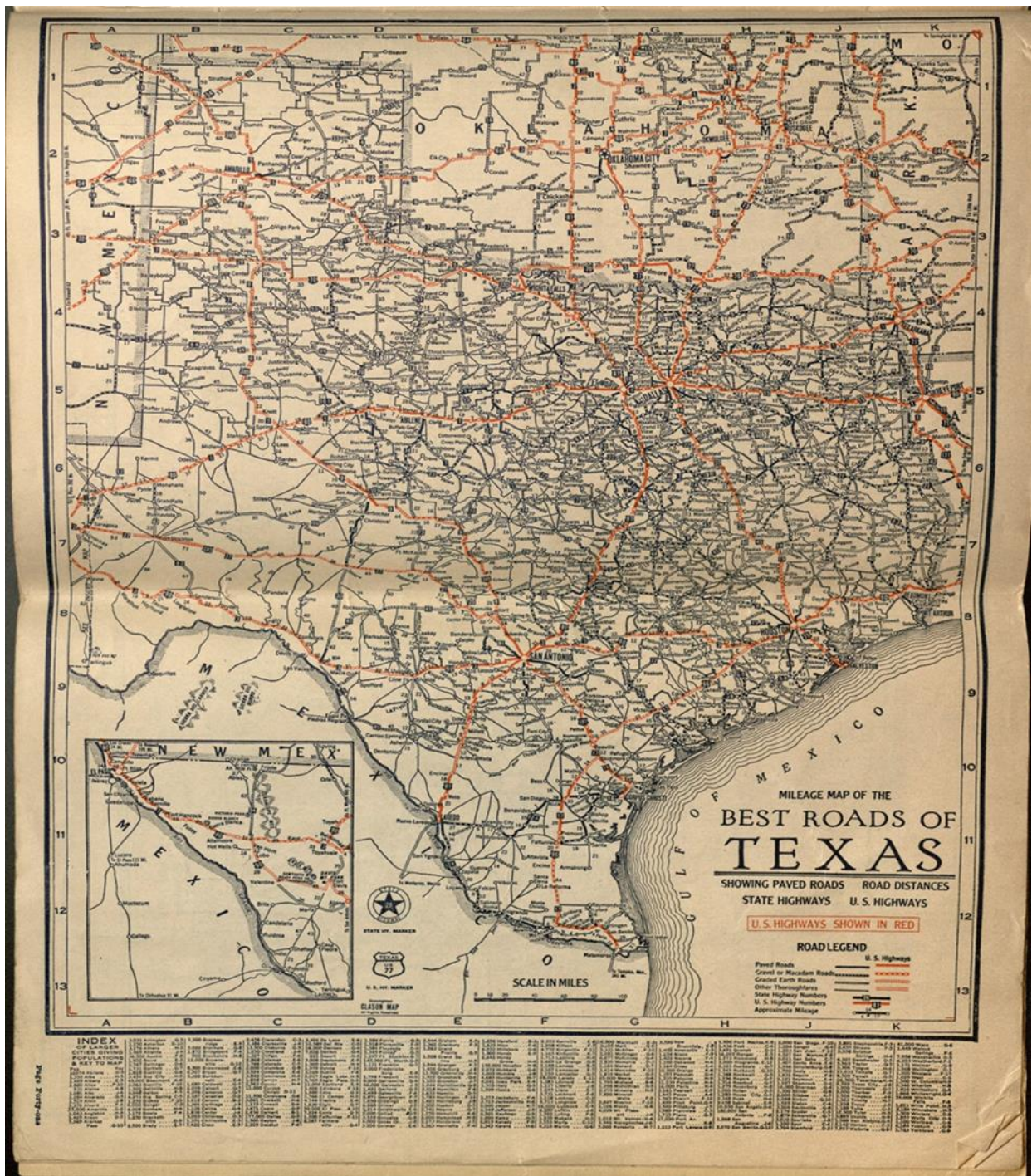


Figure 9. Road Map of Texas taken from *Clason's Touring Atlas of the United States, Ontario & Quebec* (Chicago & Denver, Clason Map Co., 1927). Highway 21 is shown as it was previously, but Highway 45 overlays 21 beginning at Crockett. This was a temporary designation.

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up to date highway information for motorists. In 1927, Clason's collection of road maps of the United States has a page devoted to the "Mileage Map of the Best Roads of Texas." Both the new state highways and U.S. highways are presented crisscrossing the state. Fauntleroy's report concerning SH 21 in the early 1920s still accurately corresponds with this road map. Differences include the next addition of state highways outlined by the Texas Highway Department in 1919, 1923, 1924 and subsequent years are on the map, as well as the newly designated U.S. highways. The details that this road map features are listed below the title in the cartouche, but there is also a legend showing the paving materials of the roads, a feature that distinguishes it from Rand McNally maps of the time. The majority of SH 21 is either gravel, macadam, or graded earthroads, while the sections of SH 2, 3, and 9, immediately around San Antonio that align with the Camino, are paved with concrete. Interestingly, SH 45 is shown in place of 21 between Giddings, and Madisonville, but this was only a temporary designation, as the path of SH 45 was in repeated flux and was soon rerouted further south.<sup>84</sup> There is also an index of cities and their populations at the bottom of the map. Most of these informational features, with limited decorative elements, are found in present day road maps as well. This map was a useful tool to take along on a road trip, as many American motorists were beginning to do ever more frequently at the dawn of the 1920s. The Clason company understood this, and many maps were made using cheap paper, similar to newspapers, with the intent they would be heavily used, but not saved.

The 1920s saw a pronounced change in the Texas economy that also became directly related to good roads and highways. While the rise in popularity of the Good Roads Movement,

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<sup>84</sup> Texas Department of Transportation, Public Documents, *Minutes of the Eightieth regular meeting of the State Highway Commission* (Austin, TX: August 11, 1925) 83.

and the call for better highways across Texas was influenced by the state's reliance on agriculture, oil and petroleum took on a greater significance as the decade continued. Beginning in 1906, oil production in the country continued to rise for seventeen straight years, with Texas being a huge part of that production.<sup>85</sup> Production in selected regions of Texas grew exceptionally large in the early 20s, enough to overtake agriculture as the most important aspect of the state's economy. Texas had become a leading oil producer for the United States. Areas such as north central Texas, west Texas, north Texas near the Oklahoma border, and along the Gulf Coast were the hot spots in the mid-20s, and more strikes were occurring every week. Road and highways were crucial to exporting this oil with trucks and vehicles from the oil fields to the refineries, as a result, it was no coincidence that the most productive oil fields in Texas were near state and U.S. highways. For example, there were fields adjacent to SH 1, or US 80 in west Texas, SH 5, or US 370 in north Texas, and SH 32, or US 75 in north central Texas.<sup>86</sup> It was a mutual relationship. As highways aided this oil production, oil companies and counties were more incentivized to better develop these roads. Another component of this growth in oil production were the cities that served as financial centers for oil companies, such as Dallas and Houston, whose populations grew appreciably in the 1920s.

In the early years of highway construction, because of the inconsistent monetary support from the state and federal governments, counties in Texas were continuously relied upon, and also burdened with, providing the necessary funding. In 1924, the Texas Highway Commission selected eleven state highways as comprising the primary roads inline for money from the federal

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<sup>85</sup> "Decrease in Oil Production 1924," *Dallas Morning News*, January 1, 1925.

<sup>86</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 117.

government, and SH 21 was not one of these highways.<sup>87</sup> Counties that did not have one of these roads passing through them were forced to deal with comparatively less funding than those counties that contained the eleven designated highways. In addition, even after legislation had granted authority of road construction and maintenance to the State Highway Department, the counties were still taxed at the state level, or forced to raise bonds to cover many of the costs. One of which was the cost of right-of-way clearance. Parts of these new highways passed directly through private property or old roads had to be expanded into private property to better suit automobile traffic. Either way, the land had to be acquired from the existing owners. In 1926, the highway commission defined five rules for state highways, one of which stated that the counties through which the road passed had to provide adequate fenced right-of-way, which could be a minimum of one hundred feet, depending on the amount of work required to make the road level.<sup>88</sup> This extra cost contributed to the inhibited progress of building these roads or bringing them up to newly enacted highway standards. Fortunately, many of these counties received support from preservationist clubs, such as in the case of SH 21, the El Camino Real Association, or the Old San Antonio Road Association (formed in 1929), to help with these costs.

The highway clubs and associations that formed to build and promote highways had been founded by preservationists, who took on good roads ideals. Often these associations had been looked upon with some suspicion by official government organizations, since they had begun to appear in the 1910s, after state highway departments had started to be created. In 1924 the

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<sup>87</sup> Texas Department of Transportation, Public Documents, *Minutes of the Sixty-sixth and First adjourned regular meeting of the State Highway Commission* (Austin, TX: November 24, 1924) 290.

<sup>88</sup> Texas Department of Transportation, Public Documents, *Minutes of the Ninety-fifth regular meeting of the State Highway Commission* (Austin, TX: July 13, 1926) 169.



Bureau of Public Roads acknowledged the service some highway associations had performed by way of stimulating highway improvement, maintenance, and marking, but decried the self-serving work of other certain rogue associations. Regardless of how the highway departments at the federal and state level felt about them, there was little government officials could do about possible suspect highway clubs.<sup>89</sup> In fact, through the remainder of the 1920s, these highway associations were often successful in their endeavors, including in Texas. While not directly responsible for construction and road paving, reputable preservationists assisted counties by raising money for road building and influencing the state legislature to pass new bills towards this objective. The state highway commission meanwhile continued to work to achieve their goals.

Governor Moody, the chief highway engineer Gilchrist, and the head of the highway commission Ross Sterling, sought to restore not only funding for the highway department, but also respectability to the office. Sterling, who was one of the founders of the Humble Oil Company, joined the highway commission under Moody, and then would succeed him as governor in 1931. Federal funding returned in 1928, but even before this, steps were taken that proved impactful in the long term. In 1927, the department established twenty weigh stations on Texas roads to inspect trucks for weight and safety and to collect the appropriate fees for commercial use of the roads. These weigh stations eventually evolved into their own agency in 1935, the Texas Department of Public Safety. When the federal money came back in 1928, one of the priorities was paving the roads and highways with hard surfaces, such as concrete. To sustain continued construction, that year the department built seventy warehouses across the state to store and stage equipment for road building and created a system for providing tents,

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<sup>89</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 97.

bunkhouses, and hot food for the road crews. These men worked long hours for relatively low wages, and most often in rural areas. The fees collected from the weigh stations and the gas tax helped fund this renewed construction, but by 1930, the state was feeling the effects of the stock market crash the previous year.<sup>90</sup>

Mrs. Norvell was not only one of the founders of the El Camino Real Association, but also later the Old San Antonio Road Association. Her endeavors at modernizing and then memorializing this road continued through the 1920s and 30s. Prior to the founding of the Old San Antonio Road Association, but within the same year, El Camino advocates persuaded the state legislature to pass a bill that was to preserve significant portions of the road. El Camino Real Association members, along with supporters such as V.N. Zivley, who had already been so important to the viability of El Camino, were able to perpetuate their influence on the Texas government when the Senate passed Bill No. 570. The bill pledged the preservation of the extents of El Camino that had already been incorporated into the highway system, which at the time, still included the smaller sections of SH 2, 3, and 9, but mostly meant SH 21. However, the bill committed to no additional construction, and the counties would need to provide right-of-way for preservation. Norvell then helped charter the Old San Antonio Road Association, when their attention was turned to said counties. Along with state and local officials, this association was then able to convince the counties that contained SH 21 to provide the proper access for preservation and subsequent upgrades to the road.<sup>91</sup> In the 1930s, the association through direct purchase or private donations was able to obtain the needed right-of-way of the entirety of 21 for preservation. However, the portions of El Camino Real in the southern part of the state that did

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<sup>90</sup> "From Pioneer Paths to Superhighways...", Ch.5, pg. 3.

<sup>91</sup> McGraw, Clark Jr., Robbins, 232, 233.

not include SH 21 were never acquired because of the large extents of property that remained in private hands.<sup>92</sup>

At the conclusion of the 1920s, efforts to increase funding for road construction resulted in calls for the state to issue highway bonds, rather than just relying on increased taxes to pay for the costs. In order to finance the highways being built within the counties, the counties themselves were responsible for paying off these bonds with interest. This idea was strongly supported by certain good roads associations and Ross Sterling, who was still chairman of the highway commission at the time. Sterling even made this one of the pillars of his campaign for governor, but this later backfired on him during his administration.<sup>93</sup> Once the depression had taken hold in Texas and the economy began to suffer, the counties faced a crisis in the form of a massive default on their road bonds issued just a few years prior. First and foremost, this caused highway construction to temporarily slow down considerably, as counties, who had always been counted on to provide a large share of the money required to build state roads, suddenly found their funds dried up or dwindling. Secondly, it forced the state legislature to take action and permanently change the way highway construction was paid for in the state. In 1932 the legislature passed the State Assumption Highway Bond Law, which provided funds to repay the county and road district debt. A large portion of this money came from the state diverting one cent of the gas tax towards repaying the debt. With this law, the financing of highway construction and improvements, which included securing any federal aid, became strictly the state's responsibility, while providing the necessary right-of-way remained with the county.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Norvell, 302.

<sup>93</sup> William M. Thornton, "Sterling Gives Up His Pet Plan for Road Bond Issue," *Dallas Morning News*, May 21, 1932. 6.

<sup>94</sup> "Bond Payment Bill," *Dallas Morning News*, September 20, 1932. 11.

But, the dilemma caused by the default on the road bonds and the suffering economy proved costly for Sterling, who lost a closely contested race for re-election to “Ma” Ferguson.

Some demographic patterns in the 1920s were directly related to the development of highways and roads within the U.S. and Texas. Previously mentioned was the oil boom which had begun in Texas early in the twentieth century at Spindletop, and was aided greatly by road development through the 20s, but there were other “booms.” There was also a boom in the populations of larger cities in Texas, while many smaller towns in the rural areas of the state plateaued. This pattern was similar in other states across the country. Cities, often adjacent to highways and located in strategic economic locations, prospered. Highways allowed for the bigger cities to grow out of the city centers, into suburbs, which were then annexed into the city limits. One example of the highways influence on cities is the Interurban Rail Line between Dallas and Ft. Worth. Growth became concentrated on roads, such as the Bankhead Highway (U.S. 80), between the two cities, and the rail line ceased operations in 1934 due to lack of use.<sup>95</sup> These trends are also a reflection on the highways of El Camino. SH 21 was by far the largest stretch of highway that made up the Camino, but because it passed through rural areas of east Texas, it remained mostly unpaved and incomplete through the 1920s. In contrast, state highways 2, 3, and 9, all converged on the city of San Antonio, and, in the immediate proximity of the city, became concrete paved highways before the decade was over. Furthermore, showing just how much the state highway department itself had grown during the same time period, the department began with twenty-six highways in 1917, and by 1933 that number had grown to nearly two hundred. But, a large stretch of the southern track of El Camino Real, near San

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<sup>95</sup> Texas Historical Commission, 117.

Antonio to the Rio Grande, although it was recognized by historians and residents, never officially became one of these highways.

## CHAPTER 4

### DEPRESSION, WAR, & COMPLETION

In the early 1930s, when the depression was gripping the country and the state, the highway department often set up make-shift operations to proceed with construction. Projects in Texas were mostly in rural, isolated areas, and functioned in a crude, but practical manner. The engineers and the road crews were expected to chip in for food and living supplies because most of the money from the highway department went to daily wages, room and board, and tools. Also, considering the times, the department was focused on job creation, rather than total efficiency in construction. The goal was to hire more men and crews, and keep them working, even if that meant not always using machinery and trucks that would make the work faster. Despite meager accommodations and low wages for the crews, it meant more people were at work, and more businesses associated with road construction remained busy as well. This proved to be an effective strategy under the leadership of the chief engineer Gilchrist, as many long overdue projects were tackled, namely the hard surface paving of highways in the state.<sup>96</sup> The department's procedure was the result of the trying times of the depression and of the state's responsibility for securing all funding after the counties were bailed out of their bond debts. However, large amounts of money for road construction would soon begin to arrive from the federal government, when the "New Deal" programs were signed into law by the new president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

In 1932, Roosevelt won the presidential election, and when he took office the following year, he promptly went about enacting the New Deal plans that he had used to propel his

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<sup>96</sup> "From Pioneer Paths to Superhighways...", Ch.6, pg. 1.

campaign. The federal agencies that were created as part of the New Deal were catered towards road construction in the country or directly benefited roads, because they were considered the best and most economical public work to create jobs.<sup>97</sup> One of the first laws passed under the New Deal was the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) on June 16, 1933. This law authorized the president to regulate industry in order to stimulate economic recovery, which meant Roosevelt was able to make grants to the state highway departments for the construction of public highways in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Highway Act of 1921. The grants also included the cost of any other construction that would provide safer traffic facilities and eliminate hazards to pedestrian and vehicular traffic.<sup>98</sup> Later in the year, the Texas Highway Commission prepared their plans for assignment of the approximately twenty-four million dollars that was allocated to the state under the national recovery act. The preliminary plans by the highway commission stated that half of the funds would be used on the existing state highways, a quarter of the money going towards further extending these highways to more towns, and the last quarter going to undertaking work on the secondary roads in each county of the state. The commission then submitted this to the federal Chief of the Public Roads, McDonald, who in turn presented it to the Secretary of Agriculture for approval.<sup>99</sup> After the proposed assignments of funds were approved on the national level in July of 1933, the state commission began allocating this money in their meetings in Austin.

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) began in 1935, and it became the largest agency of Roosevelt's New Deal programs during his administration. It was created by the

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<sup>97</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 139.

<sup>98</sup> "An Act to encourage national industrial recovery, to foster fair competition, and to provide for the construction of certain useful public works, and for other purposes," June 16, 1933; *Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789-1996*; General Records of the United States Government; Record Group 11, National Archives. <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=66&page=transcript> (accessed June 23, 2020).

<sup>99</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 139-140.

president, via Executive Order No. 7034, under authority of the Emergency Relief Act of 1935.<sup>100</sup> The act was part of the “Second New Deal,” which emphasized the government’s continued plans for relief, reform, and recovery. Another goal of the legislation that came through in the second wave of the New Deal was to create agencies with more capabilities to initiate recovery and to replace previous programs that had failed (parts of the NIRA were ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1935). While its sister organization, the Public Works Administration, which was created by the NIRA in 1933, took on larger projects by employing professional construction firms and contractors, the WPA put to work the average unemployed American, creating jobs for those who desperately needed them most. During the tenure of its existence, and before it was dissolved in 1943, the WPA had put roughly 8.5 million unemployed persons back to work.<sup>101</sup> All these people employed by the agency worked on quite diverse projects, “from the building of stadiums, to the stuffing of birds: from the construction of highways, to the extermination of rats.”<sup>102</sup> However, the largest area of the WPA employment was towards the improvement of the country’s infrastructure, which of course included building roads, highways, and bridges.

Typical WPA road projects began at the county or city level, where both the localities needed improvements and the unemployment numbers were assessed. Project proposals were then sent to the state WPA office for approval, before then being sent to Washington D.C. for final authorization. On normal occasions, the city or county government had to provide at least twelve percent of the project cost before federal funding kicked in to pay for the remainder.<sup>103</sup> In

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<sup>100</sup> Federal Works Agency, *Final Report on the WPA Program, 1935-43* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), 7-10.

<sup>101</sup> Federal Works Agency, iii.

<sup>102</sup> Donald S. Howard, *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1943), 126.

<sup>103</sup> Howard, 147.



order to maximize the amount of federal aid coming in, the Texas Highway Department utilized multiple relief agencies of the New Deal, in addition to the WPA, but the costs of the WPA projects through 1936 were second only to the initial funds received by the state from the NIRA. WPA workers not only paved highways and roads in Texas, they also worked projects on many existing roads, which included eliminating improper road grades and/or relocating roads to more level surfaces. Another tactic used by the highway department to ensure a steady amount of federal dollars flowing into the state was halting construction on smaller state road projects, or rural roads, so that the focus was on the major highways.<sup>104</sup> This strategy led to the completion of many state highways, some of which were the original twenty-six outlined by the highway commission in 1917 that still had not been finished, but it also meant that the condition of rural roads, or secondary highways, could still be an issue.

The focus in 1935 and 1936 was also on the upcoming centennial celebration in the state. Dallas was chosen to host the Texas Centennial because of strong public support, availability of hotels within the city, and the highways near the State Fairgrounds. But perhaps what was most important was that the city offered the largest cash pledge.<sup>105</sup> The prominent Dallas businessman R.L. Thornton was a key figure in the city being selected as the site for the celebration, and he also served as the chairman of the Centennial Corporation Executive Committee. He described Dallas's location on the "Broadway of American route" (U.S. 80) that proceeded west to California.<sup>106</sup> The noted importance of the highways to the centennial by individuals such as Thornton was also echoed by the Texas Highway Department. The department considered road improvement an important investment to encourage tourists to travel to the celebration.

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<sup>104</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 142.

<sup>105</sup> "Dallas Shows Reasons Why This City Should Get Texas Centennial," *Dallas Morning News*, September 7, 1934.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

Motivated by the benefits of many travelers arriving for the official Centennial Celebrations in Dallas and many other unofficial celebrations in communities across the state, the highway department (with benefit from Federal Aid agencies) constructed roadside parks, travel information centers along the highways, and also marked historic highways with official department signage.<sup>107</sup> These included the Old San Antonio Road, marked with road signs and on maps as “OSR” (Figure 10).

Spurred on by the upcoming centennial, in 1934 the Texas Highway Commission had authorized the State Highway Engineer to receive right-of-way donations of land along highways in order to erect fences and generally make the roadsides more attractive.<sup>108</sup> But, thanks to the Old San Antonio Road Association, these processes had already been taking place along El Camino Real since 1929. When right-of-way was acquired by the association or through the highway department, it was because the historical significance of the road was impressed upon the counties or towns it passed through. In 1932, after the highway department had assumed responsibility from the counties for construction, maintenance, and preservation of the historic highway, it was still working in conjuncture with the San Antonio Road Association to acquire the necessary right-of-way. The majority of this work was occurring on SH 21. However, during the two years preparation for the centennial, the highway department also paved and extended sections of the San Antonio Road that were located on State Highway 938. First outlined at the conclusion of the 1920s, SH 938 diverted north from SH 21 near Bryan, straddling the county line between Robertson and Brazos counties, and tracking a path that more closely followed the historic Camino than SH 21. There was also a small stretch of 938 east of San Marcos and west

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<sup>107</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 143, 144.

<sup>108</sup> Texas Department of Transportation, Public Documents, *Minutes of the One hundred-eighty ninth meeting of the State Highway Commission* (Austin, TX: August 9, 1934) 293.



Figure 10. View of State Highway OSR (Old San Antonio Road) near Bastrop, July 1941.

*Bastrop County project files, Texas Highway Department Records, Texas State Library and Archives Commission.*

of Bastrop, while 21 had not been extended past Giddings. In 1934, the State Highway Department began working on paving, and preserving these parts of SH 938, assigning the alternate name to the highway as SH OSR. State Highway “OSR,” or Old San Antonio Road, rather than 938, is the name that appeared on road signs erected on this highway by 1936, as well as on the road maps produced for the centennial (Figure 11). The 938 would officially be dropped by the Texas Highway Commission in the 1940s, making SH OSR the only state highway without a number designation.<sup>109</sup> In the 1950s, an unrelated Farm to Market Road, FM 983, would be designated.

The highway commission approved the preparation and publication of special maps intended to aid tourists arriving from out of state for the centennial celebrations, such as the example in Figure 9 from March of 1936. The road maps were made to assist travelers on the highways, but also arouse interest in the state’s qualities. Many photographs were included on the map of picturesque scenes in Texas, along with a brief history of the state, and there was even an original song written by the State Highway Engineer Gib Gilchrist included in the lower right-hand corner. Like previous road maps made by Rand McNally or Clason, this map includes all the state and U.S. highways, as well as a key identifying the condition of the roads. The status of SH 21 had not changed much since the 1920s, and there were still significant stretches of the highway that were either gravel, macadam, or dirt roads, especially from Bryan to its terminus near Giddings. Other aspects of the Camino that had not changed were the routes in and out of San Antonio, such as U.S. 90 (SH 3), U.S. 81 (SH 2), and SH 9 south of the city. These stretches of highway that followed El Camino Real had not changed since the late 1920s. A difference is

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<sup>109</sup> Texas Department of Transportation, Transportation Planning and Programming Division, *State Highway – Old San Antonio Road (OSR)*, Minute Order 019224, March 26, 1942, <http://www.dot.state.tx.us/tpp/hwy/sh/shosr.htm> (accessed June 28, 2020).

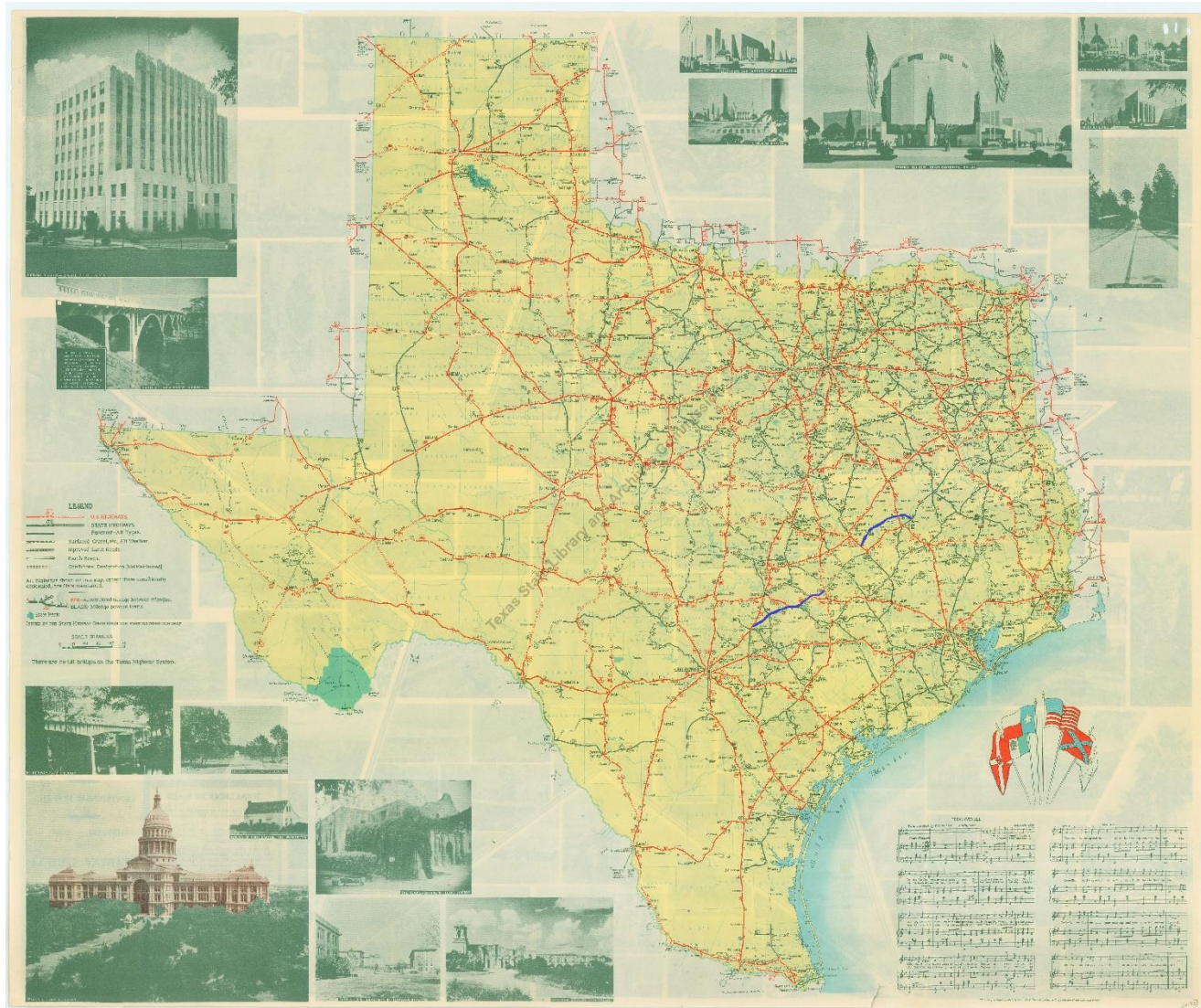


Figure 11. Official Map of the Highway System in Texas. This is the special Texas Centennial Edition, 1936. State Highway Old San Antonio Road, (OSR), is marked in blue.

*Texas State Library and Archives, Map Collections, #06193*

the presence of SH OSR, shown on the map north of Bryan, heading east until it reconnects with SH 21 at the town of Midway. Another change is the newer highway, U.S. 290, which aligns with the Sand Antonio Road between Austin and Giddings. Owing to the Texas Highway Commission's commitment to the centennial preparations, OSR is fully paved from where it diverts north from SH 21. But it is still a dirt road between Giddings and Bastrop in the sections where it does not align with U.S. 290. First drafted in the late 1920s, U.S. 290 went through several reroutes before replacing the majority of the original State Highway 20 in 1935.<sup>110</sup>

The Texas Centennial Celebration ran from June through November 1936, and that year proved to be quite productive in other ways for the State Highway Department. A new branch of the department, the Texas Highway Planning Survey, was formed to conduct an exhaustive survey of traffic patterns, the rural roads, road life, and the financial status of roads. Ultimately, its main goal was to catalogue the highways, including many rural roads that became incorporated into the state highway system, and investigate ways the system could better maintain and finance the roads.<sup>111</sup> Also in 1936 and the following year, many laborers, including those working for the WPA, completed or improved thousands of miles of highways, marking a very productive time for the highway department, compared to the multiple delays experienced in the 1920s and the lean first few years of the depression in the early 1930s. When Gib Gilchrist resigned as the state engineer in 1937, with the network of state highways at the time, the highway department had completed all of its original goals set forth in 1917, and the department would gradually shift its attention away from local roads and highways, to national highway

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<sup>110</sup> Texas Department of Transportation, Transportation Planning and Programming Division, *U.S. Highway NO. 290*, Original Description per Administrative Circular No. 16-1944, March 1, 1935, <https://www.dot.state.tx.us/tpp/hwy/US/US0290.htm> (accessed June 29, 2020).

<sup>111</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 150.

planning for those roads that traveled through Texas.<sup>112</sup> This trend followed the federal governments increased focus on building national highways and improving national highway standards.

An interstate highway system was first proposed by the Bureau of Public Roads in 1939, after the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1938 authorized the bureau to prepare a report on the subject. It reflected the federal government's, and especially the Roosevelt administration's, realization of the importance of a standardized system of interstate highways. The report suggested a system of interregional, four lane toll roads across the country. Chief of the Bureau, MacDonald, and a group of engineers who worked for him, upon presenting the report, deemed the construction of the highways feasible, but the large-scale toll roads economically impractical. The concept of the interstate highways for the general public was then put on hold, as the president's attention was shifting to world affairs.<sup>113</sup> In Texas, once a comprehensive highway system within the state had been achieved, good roads organizations, echoing the shift in focus of the federal government, and the Texas Highway Department, turned their attention to expanding the system and promoting the benefits of national highways. The Texas Good Roads Association published a brochure in 1938 that encouraged highway expansion to benefit the increasing number of cars on the roads, and told of the economic benefits of Texas highways. The brochure relied on the number of registered motorists in the state to make their point, as well as numbers from the Bureau of Public Roads breaking down the rate of return on dollars spent towards road construction.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 150-151.

<sup>113</sup> Lewis, 52-55.

<sup>114</sup> Texas Good Roads Association, *Looking at the Highway System from All Angles* (San Antonio: Texas Good Roads Association, 1938).

As an increasing amount of attention was being paid to the national highways, dollars through the federal aid and New Deal programs kept coming in to the state highway department. Projects included continued maintenance of existing highways and the construction of bridges across the state. There were also appropriations from the Texas Highway Commission for work on secondary highways and roads, but these amounts were less than the primary, or national highways. At this point, often these projects were funded half by federal money and half by the state.<sup>115</sup> Due to the number of highways in Texas by the late 1930s, other concerns for the highway department were roadside landscaping and beautification, as well as zoning. The state's response to these issues was influential on a national level. The Texas Highway Department Landscape Engineer, Jac L. Gubbels, published two reports in 1937 and 1938, first through the state department, then nationally, about roadside landscaping, erosion control, park development, and highway alignment, among other things. In 1939, the state highway department published a document, suggesting that proper zoning in rural areas of highways would be necessary to prevent the over-commercialization of roadsides, in order to preserve the natural beauty. It also suggested that road placement should be coordinated with engineers to place scenic vistas within the head-on view of motorists.<sup>116</sup> These publications by Gubbels and the Texas Highway Department were not only shared with the Bureau of Public Roads, but were incorporated by the bureau in Washington D.C. into their national highway standards.

With the 1930s coming to a close, events abroad were having a substantial impact on domestic policy regarding government spending. Military preparedness began ramping up, and the Roosevelt administration switched from relying on large scale public projects to employ

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<sup>115</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 153.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 153-154.



Americans to issuing massive military contracts that put many thousands of people to work. Ironically, as this concern for the state of the military increased, the idea of an interstate highway system that had been put on hold would be reinterpreted to serve a military purpose.<sup>117</sup> By 1940, with conflict already breaking out in Europe and the Pacific and war looming on the horizon for the United States, the federal government officially recognized the need for cross country highways to serve as military defense routes. That year congress passed the Federal Highway Act of 1940, which redirected federal funds to planning and construction of highways for defense. The huge sum of money specified in the act was to be divided up equally in each of the following two years.<sup>118</sup> In Texas, over six thousand miles of roads were determined to be of prime military importance and placed within a strategic military network for the country. These roads were deemed crucial because of the many military installations in Texas, but also because of the state's vast oil reserves and refining facilities.<sup>119</sup>

Although SH 21 in the 1930s was being maintained by preservationists and the state as a recognized historic road, the length of the highway had remained largely as it had been at the close of the 1920s. This is seen on road maps from the 1930s, such as one from Rand McNally in 1939 (Figure 12). Other than some increased stretches of concrete pavement, this map shows SH 21 approximately as it had existed on maps a decade prior, but the map also has some key features that point towards its future development. SH 21, along with other portions of highways in Texas that the Camino covered, was considered one of the highways to be strategically important to the military because of the potential link it could be between several military bases

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<sup>117</sup> Lewis, 55.

<sup>118</sup> "\$327,000,000 Voted to Aid Defense Roads, Congress Acts to Improve Highways of the Country," *New York Times*, August 29, 1940. 12.

<sup>119</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 155.

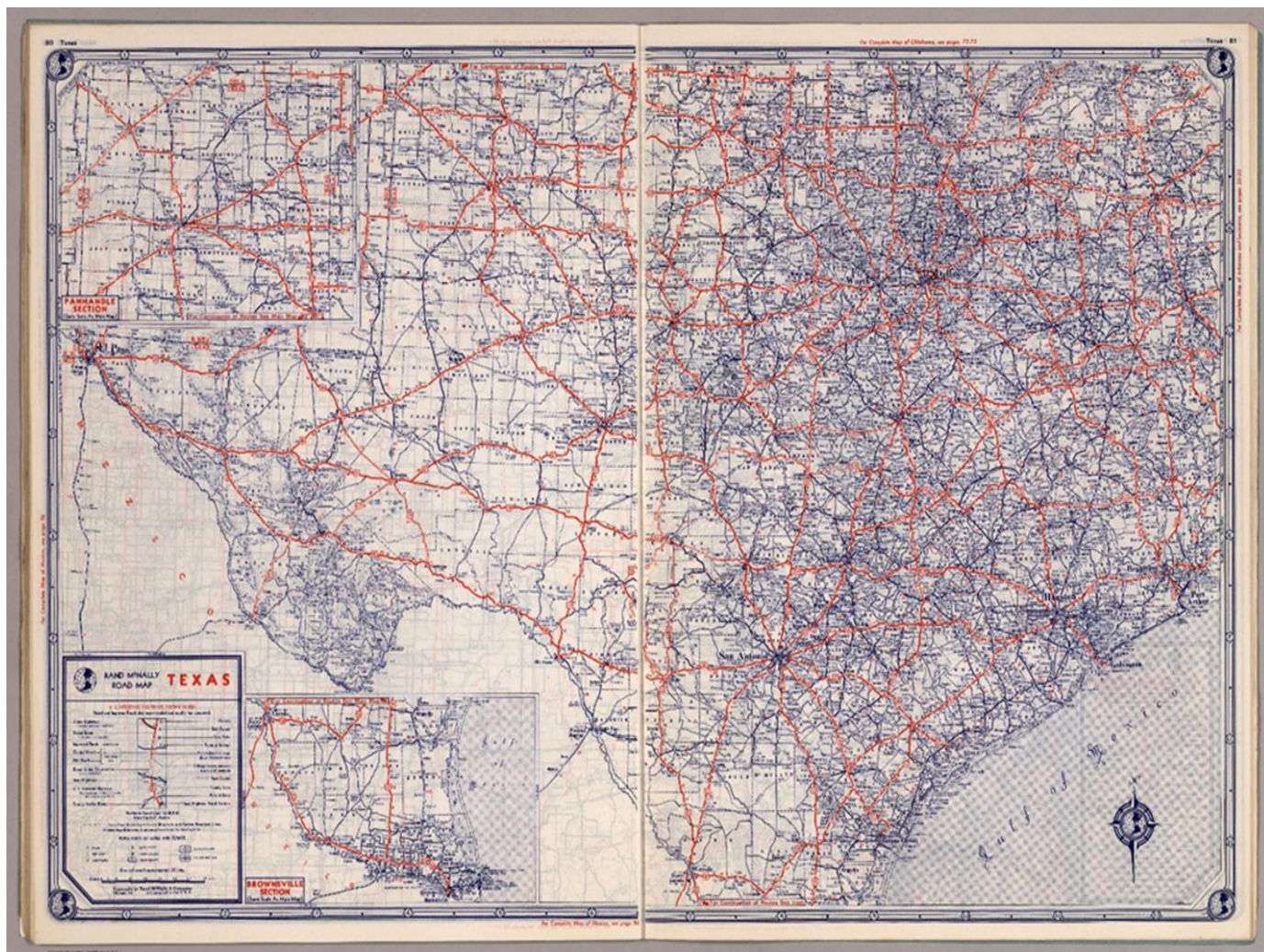


Figure 12. Rand McNally's Road Map of Texas in 1939. Many parts of Highway 21 have been paved according to this map, but it still only extends to Giddings, TX, similar to maps from the late 1920s.

*University of Texas at Austin, Dave Rumsey Historical Map Collection, #6825047*

and depots. Expanding the highway further west to connect with U.S. 81 (SH 2) would secure this link. The map from 1939 corresponds with this information, as it has small red stars indicating a military facility of some sort, with stars adjacent to towns just west of SH 21 (Figure 13). In 1941, the War Department met with representatives from the State Highway Department and determined that in order to connect the installations in San Antonio, San Marcos, and Bastrop, highway 21 should be extended west, from its then terminus north of Giddings, west along SH OSR, and U.S. 290, to the town of San Marcos. With the state financing the project, within a few years this proposed extension of SH 21 was completed and paved where it then merged with U.S. Highway 81, continuing southwest to San Antonio.<sup>120</sup> Once accomplished, this extension marked a significant milestone for SH 21 and El Camino Real in Texas.

The substantial and lasting advancement that was made on SH 21 was in the name of national defense, or The Texas Strategic Military Network. One of the other highways that was a part of the network was U.S. 81(SH 2), which as stated previously, linked up with SH 21 and the El Camino Real as it approached San Antonio heading southwest. Similar to U.S. 90 with SH 3, 81 was outlined in 1926 to overlap SH 2, although it was built a little later than 90. Because it was the principal north/south highway in Texas, traveling from the Red River in the north to the Rio Grande in the south, it was fully paved long before SH 21. For their importance and route across the state, the entire stretches of U.S. 81 and U.S. 90 in Texas were part of the military network.<sup>121</sup> On the 1939 Rand McNally map, Highway 21 is shown as a paved concrete or “first class” road all the way to Caldwell, Texas. But, from there it is a graded dirt or macadam road

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<sup>120</sup> J.M. Owens, *A Report of the King's Highway (Old San Antonio Road) in Bastrop, Caldwell, and Hays Counties* (Austin: Texas Department of Transportation, 1962) 2, 89.

<sup>121</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 155.

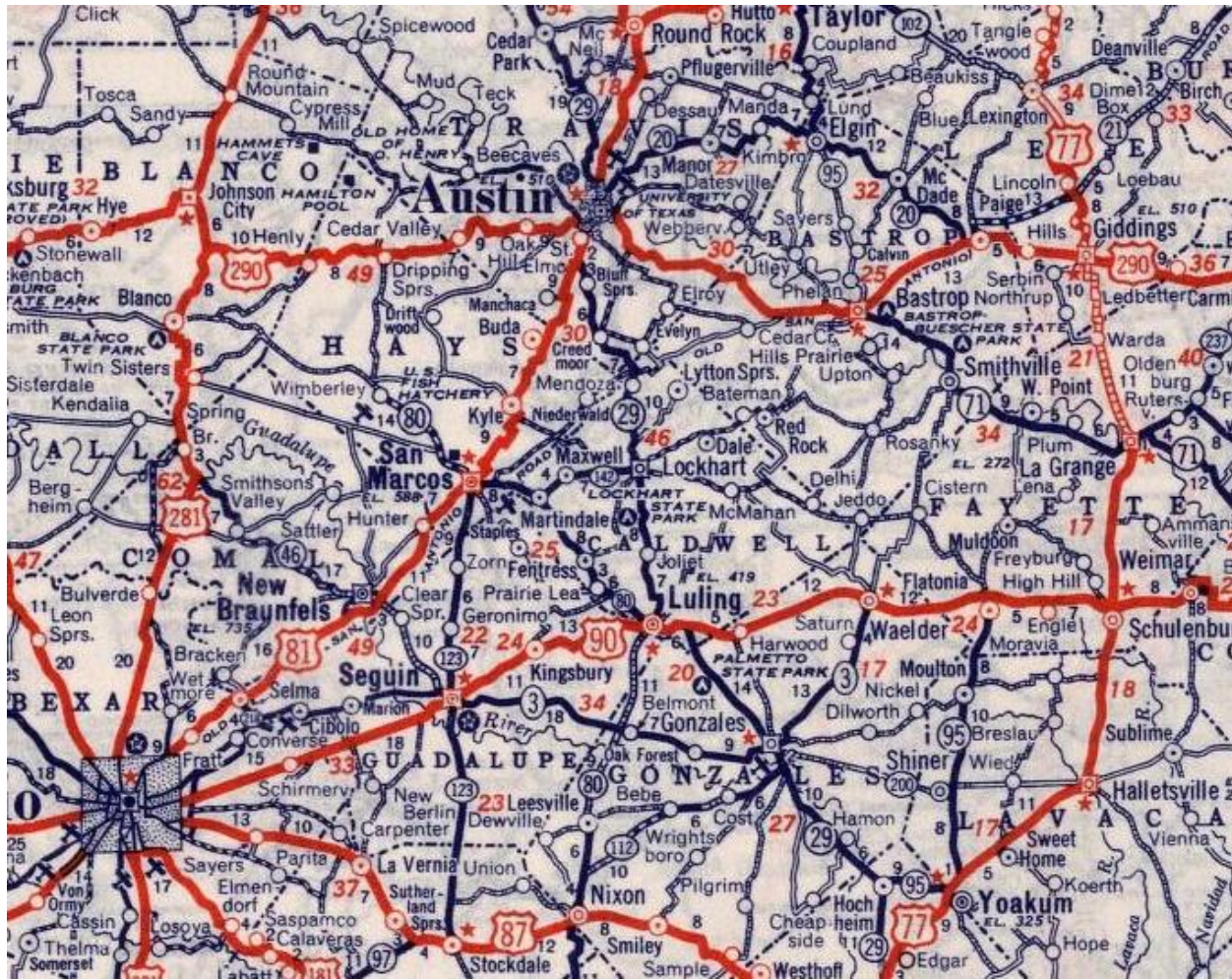


Figure 13. Enlarged detail of Rand McNally's Road Map of Texas in 1939. The red stars adjacent to San Antonio, San Marcos, and Bastrop are military installations that would eventually be connected by the extension of highway 21.

*University of Texas at Austin, Dave Rumsey Historical Map Collection, #6825047*

until it ends near Giddings. In contrast, U.S. highways 81 and 90 are first class, all weather roads in their entirety on the same map. Also noted on the map is the path of the Old San Antonio Road, as it follows SH 21, veers north of the highway as Old San Antonio Road, or SH OSR, then reconnects with it at the town of Bryan. This was the path that was built for the Texas Centennial, and it remained in this state, while conversely, SH OSR between Bastrop and San Marcos would be overlaid by SH 21 as part of the Texas Strategic Military Network. Continued efforts to pave the entirety of SH 21 with concrete, would carry on in the years following the end of the war, but this highway's extension in the 1940s marked the complete stretch of the road that stands at present. Finished before the war ended in 1945, SH 21 and the historically significant road it followed, had gained approximately 30 miles of paved surface. From its stretch on the border with Louisiana, east of Nacogdoches, to San Marcos, the highway would not be extended any further. SH 21, together with SH 2 and 3, had once again made El Camino Real a military route through Texas.

The Rand McNally road map from 1939 is taken from a collection of maps published by the State Farm Insurance Company Travel Bureau. With State Farm Insurance headquartered in Bloomington, Illinois, and Rand McNally in Chicago, it is a logical conclusion for the two companies to work together given their proximity to each other. The publication by State Farm is a series of maps of the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, along with a hotel and cabin camp guide. This map incorporates many features that had not been found on Rand McNally maps of previous years, including time zones, the quality of road material, approximate populations of towns and cities, and the relief of the area. There is even a more decorative look to the map with the border grid and the compass rose in the lower right-hand corner. Interestingly, the state highway numbers no longer appear on the roads that are also U.S. highways, just the federal number

designations. The War Department and the Texas Highway Department in 1941 would have used the information referenced on this road map to decide the best locations of routes that served the military installations in the state.

About the time that the length of SH 21 was completed to San Marcos, Gibb Gilchrist, who was now back in the employ of the State Highway Department as Chief Administrator, gave an address to the public regarding the Old San Antonio Road's history between the years 1915 to 1940. This address and a later report he made for the *Handbook of Texas*, borrowed from the previous report made by former highway engineer Fauntleroy in 1920 and Mrs. Norvell's book about the San Antonio road that had been recently published. In addition, it used maps and information from Zivley's survey of the old road made in 1915.<sup>122</sup> These endeavors on the part of Gilchrist were either endorsed or sponsored by the Texas State Historical Association. This is representative of the continued working relationships between the preservationists, the civic minded groups in Texas, and the state government organizations responsible for highway development. With regards to the Old San Antonio Road or SH 21, cooperation between state officials and civic groups date back to 1915, when the Texas legislature issued the funds for Zivley's survey. Although at times in discord, the state government, counties, and highway organizations often found a way to collaborate in a constructive manner, despite monetary or feasibility problems that may have kept highway expansion in some parts of the state behind the rest of the country. These collaborations would endure through the years, as SH 21, and other highways of El Camino developed, and proved to be crucial to the status of Texas highways in general by the mid-twentieth century.

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<sup>122</sup> McGraw, Clark Jr., Robbins, 233.

In the 1940s there was also some reorganization of highways along the Camino, in addition to the work that was being done on the designated military routes. The federal aid funding for work on the military highways afforded the state the necessary funds to conduct work on other highways. SH 9 south of San Antonio that aligned with a section of the historic Lower Presidio Road was replaced with State Highway 346 in 1945. SH 346 was originally outlined in 1942 as a short route between the towns of Jourdanton and Poteet, approximately thirty miles south from the center of San Antonio.<sup>123</sup> The decision was made three years later to extend this highway north until it eventually merged with U.S. 81 within the San Antonio city limits.<sup>124</sup> Twenty years later this highway was also replaced by a new designation of SH 16 that had previously been removed from its course running southeast along U.S. 181. After this occurrence, SH 346 ceased to exist within Texas. As with SH 346, many state highways were renamed or completely replaced by newer roads as the highway system developed in the state. Ironically, the oldest highway in Texas remained, in part because its name, El Camino Real, preceded all other highway names or designations.

Within the same decade, questions by officials at the federal and state levels were being asked as to how larger highways, with new building standards and right-of-way requirements, could be extended into cities. Individuals leading the Bureau of Public Roads, such as Chief MacDonald, had begun their careers by figuring out ways to get the highways built in the first place and also focusing on providing quality roads for Americans living in rural areas. Now, many cities and towns were looking for solutions to traffic congestion on older roads and

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<sup>123</sup> Texas Department of Transportation, Transportation Planning and Programming Division, *State Highway NO. 346*, Minute Order 019374, April 29, 1942, <https://www.dot.state.tx.us/tpp/hwy/SH/SH0346.htm> (accessed July 9, 2020).

<sup>124</sup> Texas Department of Transportation, Transportation Planning and Programming Division, *State Highway NO. 346*, Minute Order 021383, August 22, 1945, <https://www.dot.state.tx.us/tpp/hwy/SH/SH0346.htm> (accessed July 9, 2020).

original highways that were built through the center of towns, but on a smaller scale. The idea of neighborhood and slum clearance to allow for larger highways to be built through the cities was suggested by MacDonald and his engineers at the bureau. This idea was considered the best possible solution to alleviate traffic in these cities, rather than choosing to build bypasses around the “slums.”<sup>125</sup> Slums were often older parts of town that unfortunately were considered expendable because they contained lower income neighborhoods inhabited by minorities. Later in the 1940s and in the 1950s, saving the inner cities took another form with the concept of urban renewal. There were similar ideas about slum clearance, but rather than dealing with too much traffic, part of urban renewal’s goal was to revitalize the inner city that was having traffic drawn away from it by the new highways. Supporters of urban renewal in the U.S. envisioned that the modernization of a highway infrastructure in the country would mean multiple things for the cities, including the elimination or isolation of slums, the segregation of traffic into dedicated expressways, and the linking of the urban core to the suburbs. But these supporters could not foresee the effect the highway link would have on the urban core.<sup>126</sup> A post-war boom in suburb development that was located increasingly further away from city centers was directly aided by highways that could guide commuters to and from their places of work, gradually drawing people and commerce away from older downtowns. In another case of irony, it was a new generation of progressives who championed urban renewal to bolster cities, but by doing so they aimed to erase many historic sections of town, going against the preservation rhetoric of progressives of decades prior. Ultimately, urban renewal failed in most cities in America, and the highways would continue to transform everyday life for U.S. citizens.

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<sup>125</sup> Lewis, 54.

<sup>126</sup> Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011) 64.



The transformation included even more extensive highway and road building that was instituted across the country and the state. This expanded highway building began first in the late 1940s, with the extension of many miles of rural roads, and later, the farm to market roads, then in the 1950s with the Federal Interstate Highway Program.<sup>127</sup> The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1944 approved the Federal Secondary roads, or the farm-to-market roads, that served as “feeder roads linking smaller communities to outlets and the primary highway system.” This legislation was important for creating roads to serve the parts of the country that had been bypassed by state and national highways, but it also sought to create a national system of interstate highways. The act drew inspiration from the 1940 Federal Highway Act that had created the Strategic Military Network of Highways. The 1944 act first defined the Interstate Highways as direct and practical routes with continental importance to serve the national defense and connect metropolitan areas, cities, and industrial areas to border points across the country.<sup>128</sup> Texas was one of the first states to move forward following this legislation by planning for new interstate highways. The metropolitan area of Dallas and Fort Worth hired a civil engineering firm to prepare plans for new interstate highways to run east/west and north/south within the same year of the 1944 act.<sup>129</sup> Although this original plan was modified by both Dallas and Ft. Worth separately, this plan would be the basis for the current interstate freeways running through the metroplex. The highway act of 1944 proved to be the last step towards the landmark legislation of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956, which formally created the interstate highway designations and provided for complete federal funding and modern highway building standards.

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<sup>127</sup> Kirk Kite, "HIGHWAY DEVELOPMENT," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed April 15, 2020, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/exo04>

<sup>128</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 181.

<sup>129</sup> “\$61,000,000 road planned for Dallas and Fort Worth,” *Dallas Morning News*, November 14, 1944.

The farm to market roads and new federal highways would add thousands of miles to roads in Texas, but they would also bypass, or eliminate older state highways. About half of the original twenty-six designated state highways in 1917 would be replaced by new U.S., state, or Interstate Highways in the ensuing decades. But, SH 21 would persist in its place. From the 1960s onward, historical societies, government representatives, and former state officials, continued to memorialize The Old San Antonio Road, El Camino Real, and the parts of SH 21 that follow it. Some of their accomplishments included more roadside markers, successful requests for national historical recognition, and monuments in the city of San Antonio. Again, leading the charge for these initiatives was a familiar name in Gib Gilchrist (later serving as the Chancellor of Texas A&M) and also the Texas State Historical Association, which had published articles about El Camino Real in the 1950s.<sup>130</sup> But on maps and in person, SH 21 had arrived at a conclusion by 1945. The highway was paved and had reached its fullest extent at its western terminus in San Marcos. SH OSR would gain approximately nine miles to link it between SH 21 and SH 6 north of Bryan, but it would also reach its fullest extent by the end of the 1940s. These two state highways would remain, while the other highways of El Camino would experience continued renaming. However, all of these roads would maintain the history of their earliest beginnings because of their incorporation into a contemporary network of highways. The modern iterations of the Camino would be marked on all present and future road maps of Texas, as evident on a road map distributed by Shell Oil in 1956 (Figure 14). This map made by the H.M. Gousha Company was intended for distribution in Shell service stations. It is also interesting as being one of the last road maps made of Texas before many state highways were renamed with new federal interstate number designations or replaced with the new interstate highways. One of

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<sup>130</sup> McGraw, Clark Jr., Robbins, 234.

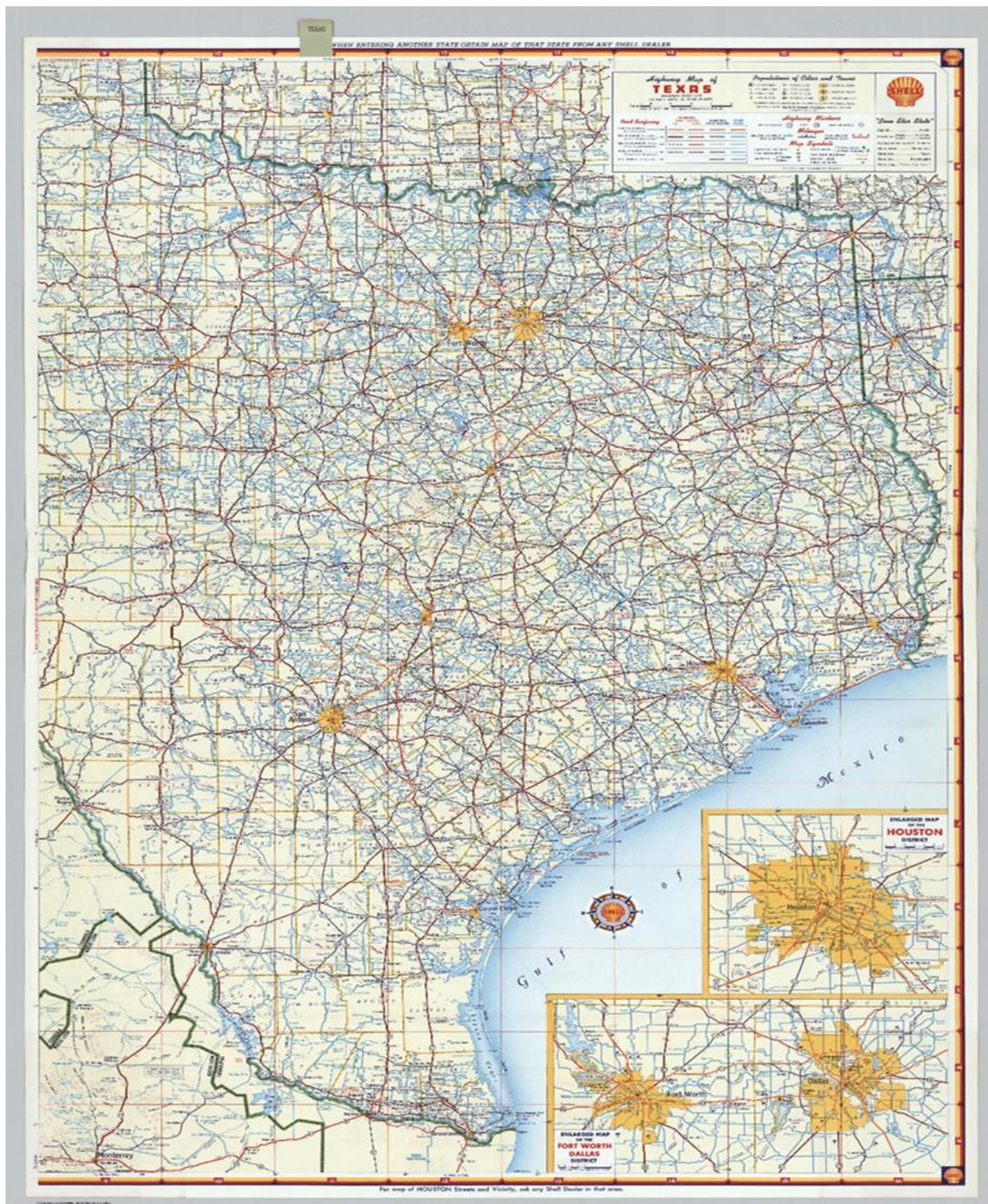


Figure 14. Shell Oil's Road Map of Texas in 1956, made by H.M. Gousha of Chicago. Highway 21 is shown at its current state terminating in San Marcos. Parts of the Old San Antonio Road that branch off from 21 are indicated as "OSR."

*University of Texas at Austin, Dave Rumsey Historical Map Collection, #5840075*

these, Interstate 35 between San Marcos and San Antonio, replaced the previous SH 2, and U.S. 81, but the state historical association had already recognized this highway's importance as part of Caminos Reales with an article published in the *Handbook of Texas* in 1952.<sup>131</sup>

When El Camino Real reemerged as paved highways in the twentieth century, it gave new life to a series of roads that had been critically important to the state's past, but were almost lost to time. Afterward, due to multiple factors, this new life would continually sustain the highways built upon it into the present era of automobile traffic and travel. Whether it was the road's historical significance that was promoted by civic groups and governments on multiple levels that proved to be most important or its strategic connection to military camps and stations that was key, the highways survived. And in the case of SH 21, essentially how that road was laid out on maps by the State Highway Department in 1917 is what exists today, making it truly unique. Because of its history, and continued use, El Camino Real de los Tejas should be regarded as a foundation of Texas's modern system of highways and transportation. In the past and in the present, the Camino was never one particular road or highway, but a network of roads. Once finished, these roads served the state both commercially and recreationally. This statement also applies to the past, as well as modern times. By the second half of the 1940s, the highways of El Camino were complete, and both commercial and recreational travelers were occupying the roads.

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<sup>131</sup> McGraw, Clark Jr., Robbins, 233.

## CONCLUSION

The history of El Camino Real in the first half of the twentieth century is similar to other highways in Texas that were developed and paved for automobile traffic. Yet, looking back much further, the road's past is far more extraordinary than these other highways. Its existence had gone through several iterations, from a series of natural walking trails, official King's Highway for the subjects of Spain, an immigration route from the United States, and a nearly abandoned and forgotten road, before it was rediscovered in the early 1900s. The Spanish and French colonizers in the state were fundamentally the road builders of their time. Long before engineers and workers labored on highway department road crews, soldiers, priests, and settlers forged trails through the Texas landscape. Once El Camino de los Tejas was established by the Spanish beginning at San Juan Bautista just across the Rio Grande, the road became both a beachhead for invasion into the territory and an artery for the lifeblood of Texas.<sup>132</sup> But, with regards to these roads, the colonizers were essentially just building upon the previous paths used by Native Americans. Spanish officials acknowledged the trail as being the long Indian paths that led to the land of the Tejas (Caddo), which is how El Camino Real became El Camino Real de los Tejas.<sup>133</sup> In turn, the road crews of the twentieth century were building upon the work of these colonizers and the subsequent generations of Texans who followed whatever their nationality. The continued work being done on the road is directly associated with the series of stages in the road's life and its changing uses. It was a stage of neglect that El Camino was experiencing in the late nineteenth century before it transitioned to a new stage of rebirth.

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<sup>132</sup> Weddle, 18.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

The rediscovery of the road owes just as much to the new opinions that developed in the twentieth century about preserving America's past as much as it does to the love of a new technology, the automobile. When the automobile fully arrived in the U.S., it was viewed by many as a vehicle that offered hope of economic opportunity on the frontier by tying country and town together. It became a means to open the frontier where the railroad had left off, with fewer restrictions, and with more personal freedom.<sup>134</sup> These ideas reflected the country's growing population and its fascination with cars, that in turn necessitated the building and improving of roads on which to travel. Essentially, these were the concepts of the Good Roads Movement, its organizations in the U.S., and the groups that followed suit in Texas. It was the preservationist societies and clubs that closely aligned with the good roads advocates and came to identify El Camino Real as a model for new a highway that would also demonstrate the legacy of the state's long history. Each of these groups had their own agendas, but through their combined efforts and political influence, new roads and highways in Texas received consistent support. Although the transportation of agricultural products was the principal motivation for good roads organizations initially, especially in the farming economy of Texas, by the 1930s and 1940s, urban traffic would surpass agricultural traffic.<sup>135</sup> This led to new concerns for highway engineers and planners, but the earliest goals of the Good Roads Movement had been accomplished.

The automobile was the instrumental factor that initiated road development in the twentieth century, but another developing technology correlated with the evolution of the automobile—road building. A developing technology is defined as an innovation in materials or a process that has not yet reached its full potential. This definition is certainly applicable to the

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<sup>134</sup> Phil Patton, *Open Road: A Celebration of the American Highway* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986) 42.

<sup>135</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 164.

methods of road and highway construction in the early 1900s. The two professors at UT Austin, Robert Hill and T.U. Taylor, who in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, researched and wrote about the way new roads should be built, were very important to the highway building processes that advanced in the decades afterwards. These two were at the forefront of a trend towards the professional study of road building that saw civil engineers, geologists, and later landscape architects focus their talents on developing the technology of road construction. Engineers who had been in the employ of the railroad companies, or younger engineers who had been indoctrinated into the Good Roads Movement, made their way into highway departments at the state and national levels. These engineers included notable people, such as Thomas McDonald, J.D. Fauntleroy, and Gibb Gilchrist, who were very influential to road building in Texas. Although they are mentioned several times within the previous chapters, their impact, with regards to how and where state and U.S. highways were built, cannot be overstated. Because El Camino Real became part of the state and later federal highway system, these engineers had a great effect on the old King's Highway.

It is worth pointing out that while good roads organizations had a motto of "Good Roads for All," and the Texas Highway Department's goal was to build highways to serve the state's citizens, this did not necessarily mean equal opportunities for all. Women, and especially minorities, did not receive all the same benefits from the highways during and after their construction. In the 1920s and 1930s, as the Texas highways were being built, African Americans were generally excluded from being hired for road projects. This was at the height of the Jim Crow era in the southern United States, and African Americans were at a significant disadvantage by the restrictions placed on them. This hiring process also applied to WPA projects during the depression, when jobs were especially scarce. Also, during the depression,

the highway department had a policy of not hiring married women for road projects because of the assumption that one wage earner per family was enough.<sup>136</sup> But the discrimination did not just apply to southern highway departments, federal road agencies, such as the Bureau of Public Roads, almost exclusively only employed white men well into the 1960s. This lies in part because colleges and universities where individuals might pursue a degree employable by the bureau discouraged African American and female enrollment, but owes mostly to the agency's personal prejudices during that time period.<sup>137</sup>

Black motorists traveling the highways also experienced the inequities when compared to a normal white motorist. Automobiles and the new roads were open to African Americans, but by the 1920s, blacks faced the reality that by driving to certain areas, their presence could provoke hostility among white Americans. Seeking car repairs or buying gas and oil could be a challenge or potentially dangerous in the southern United States.<sup>138</sup> In the 1930s, as road side amenities adjacent to highways expanded into areas outside of the bigger towns and cities, many of these hotels, motels, tourist parks, and restaurants continued to be segregated or exclusive to whites only. This inhibited highway travel for blacks across the country and Texas, but did not prevent it. In response, the U.S. Travel Bureau began working with certain publishers on producing guides that listed facilities that would accommodate African Americans. The most popular of these was the *Green Book*, which listed roadside hotels, motels, and dining options that catered to blacks. Often these facilities were only located in larger metropolitan areas and located blocks away from the highway within African American neighborhoods.<sup>139</sup> Because SH

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<sup>136</sup> "From Pioneer Paths to Superhighways...", Ch.6, pg. 1.

<sup>137</sup> Lewis, 132.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>139</sup> The Texas Historical Commission, 168-171.



21 traveled a more rural stretch of east Texas, especially in the 30s, this meant it would have been difficult for African Americans to find places to serve them while traveling on this highway. Not until reaching San Antonio would these motorists have been able to locate a hospitable restaurant or hotel along El Camino.

The position of El Camino's highways in the second half of the 1940s was one of completion in terms of the number of highway miles that had been incorporated into the state and federal highway system. The Camino would gain no more miles of paved highway. This partly goes back to the Zivley survey of 1915, which was immensely important to the road's future. Because he could find scarce amounts of evidence of the road between San Antonio and the Rio Grande, Zivley had to rely on much older Spanish surveys to project the route of El Camino Real. Without much evidence of a path for highway builders to follow and because the community at San Juan Bautista was not a pertinent destination anymore, the Texas Highway Department bypassed this part of the Camino in 1917. With a concentration on the San Antonio to Nacogdoches Road, the Daughters of the American Revolution and the El Camino Real Highway Association found their cause to support in the name of good roads and historical relevance. They continued to support this cause through the state and War Department's collaboration to add the final extension of SH 21, effectively completing the Old San Antonio Road as it stands today. On the other hand, highway building in Texas was far from complete. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed the most comprehensive highway building for automobile traffic in the world as the Federal Aid Highway Acts of the 1950s and 1960s dwarfed the acts of previous decades in terms of dollars allocated. Yet this highway building would be built on previous highways, just as some of the first state highways were built on previous roads and trails, like El Camino Real.

Upon its creation, the Texas State Highway Department was an organization with limited initial resources, but ambitious plans for the state. The department, with its three commissioners, one state engineer, and a few field engineers, faced the large task of creating a state highway system from the ground up. Rather than beginning in a modest manner, these men boldly proposed the first twenty-six highways, totaling more than nine thousand miles of roads.<sup>140</sup> The incentive of promised federal money to help pay for road construction was enough for the state legislature to officially form the highway department, but what also contributed to its creation, was the years of pressure put on the state by good roads advocates. Just the highway department's formation represented an achievement for these groups and individuals. The department's ambitions were challenged in the first several years of its existence due to multiple unforeseen delays at the state and federal levels. Also, the department itself was not free of mistakes, which inhibited highway construction. Problems, such as in-house bickering, bowing to political pressure, and giving preferential treatment to certain roads over others, contributed to the department's early underperformance. With just one hundred miles of paved roads by the end of 1917, initial progress was slow, to say the least.<sup>141</sup> However, in the 1920s, 30s and 40s, the development of automobiles, highways, and industries that supported or augmented the highways could not be decelerated. It was a synthesis of people and ideas that helped propel the expansion of roadways within Texas, as well as the U.S. The highway department turned to registration fees, gasoline taxes, and road bonds to help raise funds before federal dollars began to contribute substantially to the costs. The department also benefited from certain leaders and engineers, who were not only determined to get the highways constructed, but also provided appropriate ideas on how new roads should be built. Finally, the remaining support of the

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<sup>140</sup> "From Pioneer Paths to Superhighways...", Ch.4, pg. 1.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., Ch.5, pg. 1.

counties and good roads organizations cannot be overstated. These groups consistently drove the concept of new and better highways in the state, and were frequently counted on by the highway department to help raise funds in times when there was no alternative. Because the creation of the department and the marking and maintaining of the Old San Antonio Road (which became State Highway 21) occurred at roughly the same time, the twentieth century histories of El Camino and the Texas Highway Department are intertwined.

Traveling northeast from San Antonio towards Bryan on SH 21 years ago was my first personal experience with El Camino Real. At first it did not seem that significant because the highway is clearly not as sophisticated, or elaborate, as Interstate 35, which travels north to Austin, or Interstate 10, that travels east to Houston. But the historical markers were present, and they suggested a substance to the road that is not discernable within its modern-day surroundings. It was only after researching this topic did I realize the important path I had been on and its link to Texas history. In that particular stretch of highway, SH 21 passes through communities that can trace their beginnings to the Spanish colonial period, such as San Marcos and Bastrop, and it also straddles the border of the original colonies established by Stephen F. Austin that later became official counties in the state. That highway also exemplifies the road building techniques and materials that developed in the early 1900s. The same attributes apply to SH OSR, built and paved with modern techniques, upon an outlying stretch of the Old San Antonio Road, not as streamlined, but more historically correct. With their long histories across more than three centuries, State Highway 21 and State Highway OSR evoke a narrative unlike any other road or highway in the state and even across the country. That narrative can be relived to this day by anybody who travels down the road and observes the historical markers with the words, “El Camino Real.”

Experiencing El Camino first-hand is one way to connect with Texas history, but it is not the only way to observe and discover this distinctive aspect of a bygone era. Today, traces of these historic routes and the shadow of their evolution can still be recognized by a careful inspection of modern road maps. The modern road maps are of course based upon previous maps, and, much like any technology, have evolved to be ever more accurate and include more details. Also, it is maps that perform as both tools to understanding the location and geography of an area as well as informative books which tell a short story about the time period. Because modern maps of Texas and some of the earliest maps of the territory both include the long roads of El Camino Real, a story is told of just how significant these roads have been to the state. Although this study is centered on the twentieth century, the story of the Camino goes back centuries. A set of old trails, hundreds of years old, transition to a series of new, modern roads, serves as a link to the state's history as well as early key vehicle passageways across the state. It is for these reasons that El Camino Real de los Tejas and its modern iterations are truly special and important among Texas roads.



State Highway 21 along El Camino Real, in east Texas between Nacogdoches and Crockett.

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