



THE LEADERSHIP of a group of San Antonio people and their steady subscriptions for ten years and the fine cooperation of other groups across the continent gave the Old Spanish Trail to the southern borderland country. Many contributed on special occasions and they too have a part in the work but the men and women who gave steadily year after year kept the work alive and gave the leadership power to battle on. When the time came highway engineers and officials conquered

problems without parallel in road building. In San Antonio a group of some two hundred persons backed the work with their faith and generous contributions. And their travels totaled nearly 60,000 miles fostering interest and sustaining the leadership until it finally spread its influence even to foreign countries. For much of the period they were supporting a dream the masses thought impractical. The Managing Director's travels cannot be computed.

As late as 1922 Federal and State officials had not yet granted recognition to the Old Spanish Trail route. This expensive route seemed impractical. The route now U. S. 80 thru Montgomery, Shreveport, Dallas and El Paso to California was logical and inexpensive. Federal aid was denied in 1922 on sections of the Old Spanish Trail. At the same time War Department road plans favored connecting the Gulf ports with the Montgomery-Shreveport-Dallas route. Bays and rivers tributary to the Gulf of Mexico broke this Old Spanish Trail project into disconnected units and kept the people strangers and uninterested. Numerous long and tedious ferries and mud and mire kept travel from this country. The Managing Director for many years did not travel the route by automobile. Trains, boats, saddle horses and at times local automobiles were the ways for getting around. Yet this Old Spanish Trail country was rich in natural resources and exceptionally attractive. Travelers today find this attraction and interest everywhere. The people of this country have opened it to national enjoyment.

The Old Spanish Trail movement was organized at Mobile, December 10-11, 1915, to promote a highway that would connect New Orleans with the Florida East Coast. Western people became interested and the plans were changed to a Florida-California project with the route westward from New Orleans thru Dallas. Palmer Pillans and S. A. Le Blanc of Mobile were the first President and Secretary. An interesting observation is that S. H. Peck, also of Mobile, and a staunch friend of work, became the

last President and served thru the period when the big bridges and paved roads were being completed and the highway opened to transcontinental travel.

San Antonio Called to the Work

The eastern barriers and the costs were so serious neither headway nor recognition was achieved for seven years. And there was no recognized route across South Texas (one-third the distance across the continent) until 1921. On July 25, 1919, a conference was held at Houston. Altho the routing thru Dallas still prevailed, San Antonio was invited to that conference. It resulted in San Antonio being asked to assume leadership and establish, if possible, a southern highway to include the ancient Spanish centers across the continent. There were five great centers of mission and colonization works with relics and ruins of those ancient days a heritage of interest and wonder — Saint Augustine, San Antonio, El Paso, Tucson and San Diego. In addition was New Orleans, the old French center with its Spanish period.

At San Antonio, Harral Ayres was selected as Managing Director. The first step was a convention in San Antonio, November 14-15, 1919. 130 West Texans attended. They selected Judge Chas. E. Davidson of Ozona as their leader and pledged a road across West Texas. Thereupon the convention voted to change the routing from Dallas and North Texas to a route thru San Antonio, Kerrville and Fort Stockton. The convention could not decide upon a route between San Antonio and Houston; travel then and for several years to come found difficult passage by Victoria or by Austin. In the summer of 1921 Harral Ayres arranged with J. C. Baumgarten of Schulenburg to proceed with a plan to fix the route thru Gonzales and Schulenburg and to hasten its improvement. Gonzales aided liberally. The plan succeeded. Then a conference was arranged at Orange, September 15, 1921, with Mayor W. E. Lea leading, and there the people from Houston, Texas, to Lake Charles, La., were rallied and their expensive bridge and paving construction, now completed, was promptly started. In two years San Antonians, with this cooperation, had established a way across South Texas and henceforth millions of dollars annually became available for its roads, bridges and pavement.

January 28-29, 1921, a convention had been held at Gulfport, Miss., without much result. Beginning 1922 it was clear the Old Spanish Trail as a transcontinental highway was still not officially recognized. States were refusing to adopt certain expensive sections. Federal aid was denied. The Texas State highway engineer stated a trunk line highway did not exist if there were