

ANCIENT CASTILIAN ORDER BESTOWS

HONORS ON ASBURY PARK MAN

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destined to become one of the most famous and popular in America. The project really had its inception when 419 enthusiasts met in Mobile, Alabama, in 1915, and organized the undertaking. At that time, few of them comprehended the big achievements that were destined in the name of that enterprise or visioned that \$110,000,000 or more would be required before the two ancient Spanish cities should be connected by a paved highway. Probably their hearts would have failed them at the mention of such a staggering sum.

However, the leadership of a group of San Antonio people and their steady subscriptions for 10 years and the cooperation of other groups across the continent finally gave the Old Spanish Trail to the southern borderland country. When the time came highway engineers and officials conquered problems without parallel in road building. In San Antonio a group of some 200 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. Managing Director Ayers' travels cannot be computed.

Seemed Impracticable

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 the Old Spanish Trail project into disconnected units and kept the people strangers and uninterested. Numerous long and tedious ferries and mud and mire kept travelers from that 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 trail movement was organized at Mobile, Dec. 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.

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. Only July 25, 1919, a conference was held at Houston. Although 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.

Ayers Made Managing Director

At San Antonio, Herral Ayres was selected as managing director.

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 unrecognized sections. Ferriage totaled in spring flood periods \$30 to \$50. The more northern route, now U. S. 80, enjoyed official favor for economy, convenience and easy construction. War department engineers considered the Old Spanish Trail route between New Orleans and Pensacola as impractical. Numerous highway promotions claimed the route in Florida.

The large cities were working for highways from the north and feared the Old Spanish Trail project would complicate their efforts. Federal engineers very properly ruled a highway along the Mississippi gulf coast should not be built without a protecting seawall.

A four-state conference of leaders, public officials and state highway commissioners from Florida,

Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana was called at Mobile, March 20-21, 1922. The managing director spent three months in these states developing that conference. Mobile and Baldwin county, Alabama, paid the expenses. The conference was strongly attended but the Louisiana highway department did not participate because the construction east of New Orleans was considered impossible. New Orleans sent delegates. A stronger attendance or a more unified determination was hardly possible yet it was apparent still greater effort was needed before recognition and appropriations would come.

Gets U. S. Recognition

In June and July, 1922, Manager Ayres established himself at Washington. The Senator Underwood of Alabama and Congressman McDuffie of Alabama and Wurzbach of Texas placed their offices and secretaries at his command and other southern senators and congressmen aided with the result that the war department changed its road plans and declared for this far-southern highway as a military necessity. Senators and congressmen signed a declaration it was a basic national need. The American Automobile association urged it for winter recreation and travel. The U. S. bureau of education fell in step and in an official bulletin distributed to the public schools adopted the Old Spanish Trail as a medium of studying southern development and old history.

The Washington declaration officially established the Old Spanish Trail as the southern national highway and the period of liberal appropriations and great construction immediately followed. Today over \$80,000,000, including funds available for present work, have gone into this project. It is now half paved and paving San Antonio eastward will soon be wholly completed. At