

## OLD HISTORY ALONG THE OLD SPANISH TRAIL

**A**HUNDRED YEARS before the Pilgrims set foot on Plymouth Rock the Spanish were penetrating the country along the Old Spanish Trail. The story of their explorations and settlements from Florida to California is a romance that has not yet been clearly written, but as the highway that traverses this country is reconstructed for modern-day travel this romance will be developed for the pleasure of the travelers that pass over it.

Four centuries of history, the longest period in American annals, are embraced in the Old Spanish Trail. From ocean to ocean it is rich with Spanish adventures and the wonders of the old Mission construction.

Ponce de Leon landed at Florida in 1513 and was the first European to disembark on the United States mainland. De Soto landed at Tampa Bay in 1539 and with a big expedition explored the Gulf country. He passed westward of the Mississippi River and died there. St. Augustine, settled in 1565, is the oldest city in the United States. The old Spanish fort and other relics still stand.

Texas was being penetrated this same period. De Narvaez reached Florida in 1527, ten years before De Soto, and explored the Gulf country with 300 men. He failed to reconnect with his ships and a historic disaster ensued. In crudely constructed vessels they reached Galveston Island, shipwrecked, naked and dying, and some lived as slaves to the Indians for six years. De Vaca, the royal treasurer, and others escaped in 1535—that story of eight years of suffering and nakedness is a revelation of the cost of conquering a new land. De Vaca is known to have been in the country of Sheffield, Ft. Stockton and the Big Bend in Texas on the Old Spanish Trail, passing that way into Mexico. In 1582-3 the Espejo expedition reached the same country. Later the Spanish reached inland to Santa Fe, the second oldest city in the United States. A census in existence of 1605 shows a population of 1708.

In 1683-4 Mendoza went north from Mexico through the Big Bend country, Texas, was at Comanche Springs (Ft. Stockton) and penetrated to and established a Mission on the San Saba River where later a silver mine and Spanish fort were located. The San Saba Trail developed from San Antonio through the Spanish Pass near Boerne to this fort. Others branched westward to El Paso and

southward into Mexico. Those were the days of mule and packtrains between San Antonio and Chihuahua, both then a part of New Spain and later of Mexico.

The first Isleta and seat of Missions is on the Rio Grande near Albuquerque. The younger Isleta on the Trail near El Paso is by some thought older than Santa Fe. Its old Mission is a point of interest. Just across the International bridge from El Paso is the Mission of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Juarez, Mexico, erected early in the 16th century. That section was explored by Coronado as early as 1540. He penetrated into Arizona and New Mexico hunting for the seven cities of Cibola an earlier Spanish explorer had reported as teeming with Indians and wealth. These were not mere bodies of adventurers, but expeditions worthy of the greatness of the Spain of that period.

San Antonio was settled in 1689. It became the center for Missions in 1716 or 1718 when the Missions and Government of Alarcon were transferred from Ysleta and the historic old Alamo was built. The old Missions around San Antonio are revelations in art and architecture and like all the old Missions they are more than remarkable for such a primitive and wilderness location.

While the Missions were building around San Antonio others were building near Tucson, Arizona—the Mission of San Xavier del Bac, founded in 1692, is claimed "more beautiful and interesting than any other in the country." Nearby and older than San Xavier is the picturesque ruin of San Jose de Tumacacori, now being reclaimed for preservation.

Much of the Old Spanish Trail in Arizona runs down the valley of the Salt and Gila Rivers to the Yuma gateway into California. Through all the centuries the westward march of the Spaniard and of the Anglo-Saxon has flowed over this trail peopling the California shores and crowning the land with a romance as eternal as that that lives all along the Old Trail to Florida.

In Southern California are old Missions again. On the Trail are San Diego, 1769, San Juan Capistrano, 1776, and Los Angeles, 1771.

At San Diego history and romance win the hearts of the visitors, for San Diego stands as the beginning of California. There was planted the first wooden cross, followed by the first church, followed in turn by the first town. The Mission Fathers soon commenced the cultivation of the soil, producing the first

palms, the first vine and the first olive tree. There they established, likewise, the first irrigation system; their original dam is still standing. A traveler may walk about the spot where was raised the first flag; may wander amid the ruins of old adobe buildings; may ring the old Mission bells which were brought from Spain; may sit in the old enclosure of Ramona's marriage place, and dream of other Alessandros, and other Ramonas, whose pictures, perhaps, they have seen in the Wishing Well.

The Pilgrims and the Puritans are imperishably remembered because their heritage of sturdy character and devotion lived on. The Spaniard came earlier; his adventurous spirit and the splendor of his expeditions made his work possible—the cavalier came to conquer and the friar came to save. The glory of the explorer has dimmed with time, but the labor of the priests and their old Missions still speak of the past, and the Old Spanish Trail now makes appeal that it may revive and keep alive the old Spanish days when this world was a wilderness and men braved the unknown to solve its secrets.

On the Trail around New Iberia in Louisiana is the land of Evangeline and of Longfellow's immortal poem. Among the moss-draped old liveoaks and the storied Bayous a thousand scenes speak of the Acadian maiden.

New Orleans needs no pen for its description. It lives in the hearts and consciousness of the people. There is hardly any really old history where New Orleans and the Mississippi River does not appear with romantic influence.

Through Mississippi the blue waters of the Gulf are skirted, then comes old Mobile. Iberville founded Mobile in 1702, but the Spanish influence antedated this. Mobile is the theme of song and legend and enjoys the distinction of having been under five flags—French, British, Spanish, Confederate and Old Glory. Texas too, has been under five flags—Spanish, Mexican, Texas Republic (the Lone Star), Confederate and Old Glory.

Through Florida are Pensacola and Tallahassee, the Suwanee River, Jacksonville, St. Augustine, Tampa. Florida was Spanish until 1819.

The playgrounds of the South are all touched. The Old Spanish Trail is the Highway for the traveler and one that will mellow his heart every day he travels it. Ancient scenes and rare history will continually sweep his imagination back into the dim past.

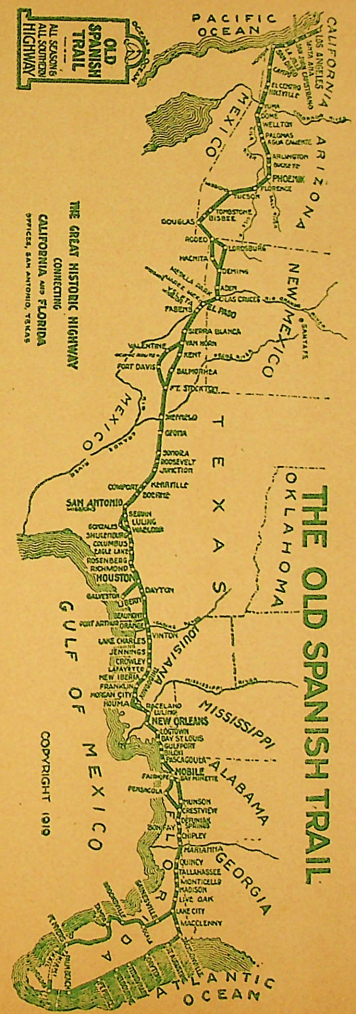
Pine Indians claim this mission 22 years older than San Xavier

1684  
also up along the coast

Ramona's grape vine



THE GREAT HISTORIC HIGHWAY  
CONNECTING  
CALIFORNIA AND FLORIDA  
AT SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS



THE OLD SPANISH TRAIL

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