



Standard Oil of Kentucky map of the Gulf Coast showing the Old Spanish Trail from Mobile to New Orleans, circa 1945. Courtesy of Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College Archives.

lengthened its vision from “sea to shining sea”—a transcontinental highway from St. Augustine, Florida, to San Diego, California. The association’s name conjured up images of helmeted conquistadors in breastplates astride huge war horses thundering along the Camino Real. In the far west the proposed route did follow a portion of the “King’s Highway,” but Spanish conquerors never rode from Mobile to New Orleans because there was no trail. They sailed.

Proof that no such colonial trail existed is found in early nineteenth century reports sent to Washington, D.C. Following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, American authorities sought an overland mail route from Fort Stoddard on the Tombigbee River above Mobile through Spanish-held territory to New Orleans. Spanish West Florida officials in Mobile granted right of passage for the U. S. mail, and Surveyor General Isaac Briggs, by letter of November 26, 1804, reported the results of his Mobile to New Orleans expedition to President Thomas Jefferson: