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P. 10

MODERN CRUSADERS

The Old Spanish Trail was not easily transformed into a modern road. Mobile people began in 1915 to promote interest for an automobile road through the Gulf of Mexico country between New Orleans and the Florida East Coast. West from New Orleans was a land of darkness to those people at that time. It seems apparent a route that could be constructed easily was the first thought rather than to follow the ancient trail of the Spanish fathers through North Florida. This ancient trail was near the Gulf of Mexico and offered difficult construction problems. But through all those organizing years crusaders rose who battled for all the historical integrity a modern highway could attain and those crusaders continued until the modern Old Spanish Trail was officially laid from Florida to California through the lands of the Spanish explorers, conquerors, colonizers, viceroys, governors, padres and others, and until paved roads and great bridges, costing more than \$100,000,000, assured the pleasures of these Spanish Borderlands to American travel.

Organization Meeting at Mobile

The convention to organize ^{trail} was at Mobile, Alabama, December 10-11, 1915. It is recorded that 138 delegates were from Florida; 274 from Alabama; one from Mississippi; five from Louisiana (New Orleans); one from Arizona. A promotion map published prior to the convention shows that South Georgia was proposed for the route eastward; that route offered easy waterway crossings compared with the old King's Highway (Camino Real in Spanish) through North Florida, between Saint Augustine and Pensacola. Floridians attended the convention in force to assure the adoption of the historic route regardless of physical difficulties and costs presented by those rivers and bays of the coastal country. They stopped at Marianna, Florida, and held a convention of their own and resolved to crusade for the ancient camino real. At the Mobile convention they strenuously plead their cause and the Old Spanish Trail project as officially launched was laid through Florida to Mobile along the trail of the Spanish pioneers. From Mobile to New Orleans it followed the trail of the French and the Spanish. Thus, at the beginning historical integrity became the policy rather than mere expediency.

They were crusaders then, dreaming dreams as did the crusaders of old. No connected road existed ~~along~~ that Gulf of Mexico country. The rivers and bays and their basins from New Orleans eastward would require, as present construction shows, over thirty miles of bridges and ~~with~~ with costs running into tens of millions of dollars. The present era of highly organized highway departments and of State road laws had not yet arrived. Because of these big waterways the cities and country were units on semi-islands with but little acquaintance with one another; their communications were along those waterways, not across them. It was a dream of unlicensed enthusiasms to then hope for a modern highway through that country. The Spanish conquistadores and padres could travel about in their primitive way but seven years were to pass before the governments admitted the practicability of an automobile highway. Then southern capacity for achievement rose to majestic heights and millions of dollars were made available and super-highways and -bridges were built. During those years crusading forces grew in strength. It is the crusader that supplies the impulses that force progress.

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