

“To give some idea of the difficulties we have encountered, besides the insurmountable delays of transporting our horses over rivers . . . where there are no ferries, I will mention the progress we made in one fatiguing . . . day’s travelling, when entangled among impassable and boggy drains . . . we encamped at night about three miles from our encampment on the preceding night.”

The Briggs expedition passed above Biloxi Bay and the Bay of St. Louis descending along the road following the Pearl River to Farve’s Farm (later Pearlington). There, faced with the impenetrable Pearl River swamps, the trailblazers gave up, loaded their horses on a schooner, and sailed through via the Rigolets into Lake Pontchartrain thence to New Orleans. The 220-mile trip from Fort Stoddard to New Orleans consumed 25 days, the final 53 miles being traveled by water.

The following year a U. S. Army officer riding out of Fort Stoddard reported more specifically on the situation at Pascagoula. He wrote, “This river is 250 yards wide. A family lives here and keeps a canoe in which the rider with the mail is crossed, the horse swimming along with the canoe. There is a swamp here, five [author’s note: three] miles wide, which must be causewayed.” This is an excellent description of the estuarine delta of the Pascagoula River which divides into two distributaries with the deeper and stronger channel being the East Pascagoula and the shallower one being the West Pascagoula. That American officer crossed at East Pascagoula very near the location of the high-rise bridge of 2003.

By 1806, because no “Spanish Trail” existed along the Coast and because of trouble brewing with the Spanish, the Americans had laid out the Federal Road along the 31st Parallel from Fort Stoddard due west to the Mississippi River. At Ford’s Fort on the Pearl River, a branch of this road led to the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain where the mail then traveled by boat southward to New Orleans.

By dint of war and revolution, culminating in the Battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1815, the Mobile to New Orleans region fell under American control. During the antebellum period which lasted from then until the Civil War, six towns began to grow along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Known as the Six Sisters, because they were daughters of New Orleans, these were from west to east—Shieldsboro (Bay St. Louis), Pass Christian, Mississippi City-Handsboro, Biloxi, Ocean Springs, and the Pascagoulas (East and West). In the antebellum period the Pascagoulas were considered one settlement, but in time East Pascagoula evolved into the town of Pascagoula while West Pascagoula became Gautier.

In the antebellum period the faster steamboat gradually replaced schooners in transporting freight and passengers between New Orleans and Mobile. In 1827 the first regularly scheduled steamboat entered service on the New Orleans to Mobile run. In the same year Captain John Grant, formerly of Baltimore, Maryland, arrived on the Gulf Coast to begin a 55-year career that would earn him the title, “Father of Gulf Coast Transportation.” Grant, who eventually held what amounted to triple citizenship in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, owned