

THE PROGRESS OF THE WORK

The Old Spanish Trail is one of the Oldest Transcontinental Highway Projects in the United States and one of the Most Difficult to Build.
S. H. PECK, PRESIDENT, MOBILE, ALABAMA

The Old Spanish Trail was born of the vision and enthusiasm of the people of the East. The convention for organization was held at Mobile, December 16-11, 1915, with 416 delegates from Jacksonville to New Orleans. Mobile was the headquarters for four years and worked to establish and build the highway despite the fearful physical barriers. In 1916 a convention was held at Pensacola; in 1917 another at Tallahassee. The Florida people worked with enthusiasm and stand high among the founders of this great project.

During this period the people of Galveston, Houston, Beaumont and Orange, Texas, Lake Charles, and the other Louisiana towns became interested and a string of automobiles plowed the roads to New Orleans. Most of them shipped their cars back by train. This resulted in an extension being agreed upon from New Orleans to Houston, Texas, and northward to Dallas, thence to California.

The year 1918 was an inactive one due to war conditions. July 25, 1919 a conference was held at Houston to revive the work, and the members of the conference looked westward thru San Antonio rather than northward to Dallas for a way across the State of Texas. A connected highway across South Texas was a proper project, yet San Antonio when asked to handle the work assented because of the great merit of the project. Her Chamber of Commerce appropriated \$1000.00. Other subscriptions were pledged at the Houston conference but not paid, and San Antonio took up the burden. Haral B. Ayres was asked to organize the work. San Antonio has since paid in memberships liberally. Years of struggle have followed to create a unity of purpose and authority and a faith that the project could be nationally established and at the same time to study and develop the ancient and almost forgotten historical background for its value and appeal.

A convention was held at San Antonio November 14-15, 1919, and there the route was defined from San Antonio thru Kerrville and Fort Stockton to El Paso 597 miles across the uncharted range country of Texas. The San Antonio-Houston route was unsettled until 1921. The routing thru Dallas was abandoned.

The country from San Antonio to California is dotted with noted cities and with realms rich in the things men are doing, but between them for centuries have lain barriers that have prevented intercourse and kept the people strangers to one another.

It came to pass that if the project as a national highway was to live Texas must carry a burden until the people in the other states were prepared to enter into full partnership with so big an undertaking. Texans had 94% of the sparsely settled country to organize, and was given the responsibility for working together a national organization. In the six years of her stewardship she has given many thousands of dollars to the work.

March 1920, OST and Texas Highway officials and some thirty western ranchmen scouted the unbroken country around the Davis Mountains in West Texas.

From El Paso groups have been busy conquering the obstacles to the Pacific coast. Eastward the great waterways along the Gulf threatened the transcontinental integrity of the project.

January 28-29, 1921, the Fifth National Convention was held at Gulfport, Mississippi, without much result to the eastern work.

September 16, 1921, after activity in East Texas, Mayor W. E. Lea of Orange, Texas, OST Vice President, called a conference of the people between Lake Charles, Louisiana and Houston, Texas. It was splendidly attended and led to the \$4,500,000 construction program on that East Texas section to be completed in 1925.

The East still was inert. January 3, 1922, the managing director established a headquarters at Mobile. March 20-21, 1922, the Four-State Conference was held at Mobile with highway commissioners and engineers present from Mississippi, Alabama and Florida, and a large attendance from civic organizations, counties and cities from Pensacola to New Orleans. Bridging Mobile Bay was authorized by the Alabama Highway Commission; the Gulf Boulevard project, New Orleans to Pensacola, was inaugurated; the deadlock in that section was broken and the people heartened.

The Dixie Highway Convention was held at Jacksonville, May 26-27, 1922. On the invitation of the Chamber of Commerce and of the Automobile Club of Jacksonville the managing director visited Jacksonville on that occasion. There was conflict and confusion in Florida. The attempts of numerous "highway associations" in recent years to develop national highways had resulted in a multiplicity of claims. The managing director explained to the convention that the Old Spanish Trail in convention some years ago had by vote claimed north and south lines in Florida which properly belonged to the Dixie Highway, and that the Dixie Highway claimed the route from Tallahassee to Jacksonville which properly was a part of the OST main line, and that if each association would concede to the other the lines logically belonging to each confusion would be removed and the people encouraged to give full support to a clearly understood program. Historically it was stated the OST in Florida should have its beginning at St. Augustine and at Tampa.

A vote was carried agreeing to this proposal. After this action officials at Jacksonville submitted to the OST director plans for carrying the Old Spanish Trail to St. Augustine along the St. John's River and down the beach front, a scenic route with roads built or in progress that would pass the sites of the first settlements of the Huguenots and the Spaniards, and of Ponce de Leon's landing, and other spots graven in history by the fateful game of empires.

The way to Tampa should be worked out around the coast to complete the historical principles of the Old Spanish Trail.

During June and July, 1922, the managing director was in Mobile, Alabama, the managing director was in Washington where the work of establishing national recognition and unity was completed. Following that all agencies swung to the work despite barrier or cost. August 21-22, 1922, under the leadership of the Mobile Chamber of Commerce an expedition started across Alabama and Mississippi with cars in line representing the Automobile Club, Rotary, Kiwanis, Civitan and Optimist clubs, and with Alabama highway and other officials with them. Pensacola, Ocean Springs, Biloxi, Gulfport, Pass Christian and Bay St. Louis were visited. It was one of the finest examples of local activity in the whole OST movement. Today remarkable construction of paved roads, beach protection, hotels, golf and residence development help show the value of that effort.

The Sixth National Convention was held at New Orleans, March 26-28, 1923. The Second Gulf Boulevard Conference met with the convention and approved the remarkable progress since the Mobile Conference a year before had broken the shackles that had kept those cities and towns of the New Orleans-Pensacola section without highway connections. The women, too, gathered at New Orleans and conducted the first Parliament on Highway Beautification—the first attempt in an interstate way to foster and promote roadside beauty and to abolish the billboard abuse. Another gathering at that convention was the Southern Road Congress where a Southern Trunkline System embracing highways of immediate importance to travel into and thru the South was discussed and acted upon.

Today all the states are actively building. In each state the engineers, officials and people are solving engineering problems of unusual difficulty, bridging numerous great waterways along the Gulf of Mexico; spanning sparsely populated sections of the West; building across deserts and blazes the remarkable granite mountains.

Old Spanish Trail officials have published 40,000 service and general maps, 40,000 work orders, 10,000 lithograph four-color wall maps, 50,000 miscellaneous leaflets and booklets. Old Spanish history from Florida to California and covering three centuries has been searched and partly compiled. Magazine and feature articles have reached a circulation of over 4,000,000 people. Yet real travel service is just beginning.

Ten years have passed. The Old Spanish Trail in a nationally recognized highway rated as a basic trunkline, classed as of foremost importance, declared essential to military defense, conceded as destined to be the great continental travelway, and is improving at the cost of many millions of dollars annually.

THE OLD SPANISH TRAIL ASSOCIATION, Inc.

A Membership Organization

The membership is a voluntary band of men and women interested in building a great highway from Florida to Mexico and California and developing its travel comforts, and in the preservation of the old landmarks and the old history of those ancient and romantic periods in the Southern Borderlands where men and empires struggled for mastery long before the American Revolution.

All funds are controlled by an Executive Board of business men.

The Department of Beautification plans to beautify, to sign the historical places, to work against the roadside advertising nuisance, to plan distinctive marking, and to preserve the natural attractions and the wealth of historical values. Engineers, highway officials, women's clubs and boy scouts are cooperating.

The local Councils of San Antonio and Boerne are proceeding to make the section from San Antonio to Boerne a model of beautification. Their plans call for many notable undertakings and it is hoped not only members along the Old Spanish Trail but others through the United States will learn from these efforts the best methods for the beautification of the roadsides.

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The Old Spanish Trail still has different sections. It follows a route of great attraction, also a route of financial and engineering difficulties. But all the things are building. Thanks to the organized efforts of the Old Spanish Trail Association and of the engineers and highway officials it is hoped all information on this history part of its long mileage. Inquiry at chambers of commerce and in cities where the highway provides the best information. If the traveler is interested in great construction works he will find much to compensate him as he travels along.

