

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Old Spanish Trail from U.S. 90 to Interstate Highway10
Other name/site number: Old State Highway 3; Old U.S. Highway 90; County Road 268
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & Number: County Road 268 between U.S. 90 and the north access road of I-10
City or town: Columbus State: Texas County: Colorado
Not for publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this
 nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:
 national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D

State Historic Preservation Officer
Signature of certifying official / Title **Date**
Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official **Date**

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
___ entered in the National Register
___ determined eligible for the National Register
___ determined not eligible for the National Register.
___ removed from the National Register
___ other, explain: _____

Signature of the Keeper **Date of Actio**

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

| | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Private |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Public - Local |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Public - State |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Public - Federal |

Category of Property

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | building(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | district |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | site |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | structure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | object |

Number of Resources within Property

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 0 | 0 | buildings |
| 0 | 0 | sites |
| 2 | 0 | structures |
| 0 | 0 | objects |
| 2 | 0 | total |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: Transportation: Road-related, Rail-related

Current Functions: Transportation: Road-related, Rail-related

7. Description

Architectural Classification: No Style

Principal Exterior Materials: Concrete, Asphalt, Steel

Narrative Description (see continuation sheet 6)

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| X | A | Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. |
| | B | Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past. |
| X | C | Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction. |
| | D | Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history. |

Criteria Considerations: NA

Areas of Significance: Transportation, Engineering

Period of Significance: 1920-1939

Significant Dates: 1920, 1921, 1939

Significant Person (only if criterion b is marked): NA

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion d is marked): NA

Architect/Builder: McClendon, W.A. (contractor)

Narrative Statement of Significance (see continuation sheets 7 through 13)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see continuation sheets 14 and 15)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): NA

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: Approximately 5.25 acres

Coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates WGS84 Datum

1. Latitude: 29.705817° Longitude: -96.532359°
2. Latitude: 29.707501° Longitude: -96.509728°

Verbal Boundary Description: The nominated property is a concrete and asphalt road beginning approximately 325 feet west of the intersection of U.S. 90 and Old U.S. 90, and continuing along Old U.S. 90 approximately 1.4 miles to the north access road of Interstate Highway 10. The nominated area is comprised of only the public property within the right-of-way, measured 15 feet from either side of the road's center line to include the original roadbed, and the entire Southern Pacific overpass and concrete abutments, owned by Union Pacific.

Boundary Justification: The boundary includes the historic roadbed, historic railroad overpass, and all publicly-owned property within the ROW.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Gregory Smith
Organization: Texas Historical Commission
Street & number: PO 12276
City or Town: Austin State: Texas Zip Code: 78711
Email: greg.smith@thc.state.tx.us
Telephone: 512-463-6013
Date: December 17, 2012

Additional Documentation

Maps (see continuation sheets-16 through 18, and historic plans, pp 30-31.)

Additional items (see continuation sheets 19 through 31)

Photographs (see continuation sheet 5)

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Photographs

Old Spanish Trail, from US 90 to IH-10
Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas
Photographed by Gregory Smith
Locations indicated on Map 3, page 18
January 2013

Photo 1
Abandoned western segment, looking towards US 90 bridge and Colorado County Courthouse
Camera facing west

Photo 2
Concrete road curving under railroad overpass
Camera facing northeast

Photo 3
Concrete section and culvert
Camera facing east

Photo 4
Culvert detail
Camera facing southwest

Photo 5
Concrete section with asphalt patching and culvert
Camera facing west

Photo 6
Concrete section
Camera facing east

Photo 7
Asphalt section
Camera facing west

Photo 8
Asphalt section with concrete culvert
Camera facing east

Photo 9
Eastern terminus from IH-10 access road
Camera facing west

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Description

The Old Spanish Trail (OST) segment immediately east of the Colorado River near Columbus, Texas, is a 1.4-mile-long section of a state highway built in 1920-21. The nominated road runs between business route U.S. 90 at the western terminus, and the north access road to Interstate Highway 10, which later served as the main line of U.S. 90 before the construction of the interstate highway. The western half-mile of pavement consists of 16-foot-wide concrete slabs, while the remainder of the road consists of asphalt on a gravel base, and ranges from 16 to 20 feet in width. The road follows a generally straight path, with two gentle curves near the halfway point, and a sharper S-curve near the west end which passes beneath a plate girder Southern Pacific overpass. This section served as the primary road east from Columbus to Houston before it was bypassed in 1939 by a new alignment of U.S. 90. This section was incorporated into the Colorado County highway system and is now known as *Old U.S. 90*. There are few modern intrusions along the roadbed, which retains a high degree of integrity and evokes the era of interstate auto travel in the early 20th century.

The city of Columbus is in south central Texas, approximately 65 miles west of Houston, on a small rise south and west of a bend of the Colorado River. The nominated road traverses a generally flat area east of Columbus which has historically been prone to flooding. The rural setting is moderately forested in the western half, which further isolates the road from the highway that bypassed it in 1939. The nominated segment is in the approximate location of the original road that ran east from Columbus towards Houston, crossing the Colorado River via the 1884 wagon bridge at Spring Street. The bridge required extensive repairs after a 1913 flood and 1928 truck accident, and was replaced by a 1932 bridge one block to the north at Walnut Street. The construction of the 1932 bridge and subsequent development of the area as a park erased the westernmost quarter-mile-long portion of the concrete highway.

The nominated road has three distinct sections, beginning at the west: an abandoned 325-foot long concrete segment that terminates abruptly at the c.1932 road berm; a half-mile section of actively-used concrete pavement running from U.S. 90 that curves under a c. 1910 railroad bridge; and the remaining asphalt section that completes the run towards Interstate 10. The western half-mile section of highway is characterized by its original 16-foot-wide 1920 concrete roadbed, while the remaining road is asphalt on gravel, a composition dating to its completion in 1921. The concrete sections, built to withstand flooding within the river bottoms, are in good condition, but numerous cracks have been patched with asphalt. These repairs have had a minimal effect on the road's overall integrity.

Approximately a tenth mile from U.S. 90, the road follows an S-curve under a railroad underpass, constructed prior to 1913 to serve the Texas & New Orleans Railroad (Southern Pacific). The overpass consists of a plate girder bridge resting on poured-in-place concrete abutments. Continuing eastward on a generally straight path, the road passes over three small concrete box culverts, which most likely date to the paving of the road c.1921. Due to their small size, these culverts are not counted as separate structures within this nomination.

The road is in good condition overall, and retains a high degree of integrity. While the vegetation has grown since the road's initial improvement in 1921, the rural setting is intact, distinguishing this road from the highway that replaced it in 1939. The historic 24-foot right-of-way is kept clear of all vegetation except grass. Integrity of *design*, *materials*, and *workmanship* is clearly evident, especially in the western half, which retains its original concrete pavement, its narrow (by today's standards) 16-foot width with no improved shoulders, and its original tightly-curved approaches to the railroad bridge, the design of which indicates the lower speed of highway traffic in the 1920s. Integrity of *feeling* and *association* is very high, allowing today's motorists to briefly experience the pace of interstate travel via automobile in the 1920s, in a setting that is relatively free from modern distractions.

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Statement of Significance

Built in 1921, the 1.4-mile-long segment of the Old Spanish Trail (OST) immediately east of the Colorado River near Columbus, Texas, is a rare drivable section of an early Texas highway in its original rural setting. Known during various periods as *Texas Highway 3*, the *Southern National Trunk Line*, and *U.S. 90*, the highway served as a primary automobile route between Houston and San Antonio, and as part of a national highway running between St. Augustine, Florida, and San Diego, California. The western half-mile of pavement consists of 16-foot-wide concrete slabs, while the remainder of the road is asphalt on a gravel base, ranging between 16 to 20 feet in width. Bypassed in 1939, the segment is maintained as a county road, and serves as a remarkably intact example of state highway design built by the county with state and federal aid through the Texas Highway Department, established in 1917. The property is nominated to the National Register under Criterion A in the area of Transportation and Criterion C in the area of Engineering at the state level of significance.

Colorado County is in southeast Texas, at the southern edge of the Post Oak Belt and the western edge of the Gulf Coastal Plains. Columbus, Texas, approximately sixty-five miles west of Houston, is county seat of Colorado County, as well as the county's largest city.¹ The city's proximity to a reliable Colorado River crossing established the city as an important stopping point for 19th century travelers on the route between San Antonio and Houston, as well as the southern route from Houston to Austin. Anglo settlement in the area began in 1821, with the arrival of Stephen Austin's colonists, and resulted in the establishment of a community called "Beeson's Ferry," in recognition of Benjamin Beeson's ferry across the Colorado River. The town changed its name to Columbus in 1835, at which time it served as home to about twenty-five families. The town was destroyed in 1836 during the Runaway Scrape, but was rebuilt shortly thereafter, and became the county seat later that same year. The city incorporated for a brief time after the Civil War. In 1867, the Buffalo Bayou Brazos & Colorado Railroad built the first railroad bridge across the Colorado River at Columbus, with financial backing from the city government.² This bridge was in the same location as the current railroad bridge and trestle, with tracks on a high berm reaching eastward over the alignment of the nominated road. The city of Columbus was incorporated once again in 1927. The local agricultural economy has historically been largely based on cotton and cattle production, while the sand and gravel industry flourished beginning in the early 20th century.³

Good Roads Movement in Texas

In the decades between the end of the Civil War and the turn of the 20th century, federal involvement in national overland transportation infrastructure was limited to legislation that favored the development of private railroads. Small towns and large cities were connected by a complex web of railroads, which in turn spurred the development of communities along their rights-of-way. While railroads supported the rise of new agricultural and industrial markets nationwide, access to the railroads was limited by the poor condition of local roads, which were often unpaved and unmaintained. Upon the dawn of the automobile age in the 1890s, efficient and comfortable intercity or interstate travel by cart or car was unheard of, as most roads were nothing more than the same dirt trails that earlier pioneers had blazed across the country. These roads were poorly engineered and rarely maintained, often leading to impassible stretches during inclement weather that limited their usefulness to most travelers.

¹ Columbus' population has never risen above 5,000, with 3,655 reported in the 2010 census.

² Stein, Bill. *Consider the Lily: The Ungilded History of Colorado County, Texas*.
<http://library.columbustexas.net/history/part7.htm>. Accessed December 14, 2012.

³ Don Allon Hinton, "COLUMBUS, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hgc12>), accessed December 11, 2012. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

The term “Good Roads Movement” describes an assemblage of numerous groups that promoted the development of improved roads nationwide beginning in the 1890s. Initiated largely by bicycle enthusiasts (including the League of American Wheelmen), such organizations primarily sought good bicycle paths, but worked in tandem with farmers, ranchers, and other rural residents to petition for federal support of improved local and state transportation infrastructure. The railroad companies, rather than seeing good roads as competition, also supported the movement in recognition that improved access to their services improved their profitability as interstate shipping and transportation providers. Regional associations such as the Southwestern Good Roads Association worked with national groups such as the National Good Roads Association (NGRA) and United States Good Roads Association (USGRA) to seek federal assistance, and congress responded in 1893 with the establishment of the Office of Roads Inquiry (ORI) under the Department of Agriculture.⁴

Interest in good roads in Texas resulted in statewide meetings beginning in 1895, but it wasn’t until 1910 that the Texas Good Roads Association (TGRA) formed. The availability of more affordable automobiles and the cheaper fuel products of Texas’ new and ever-growing petroleum industry no doubt spurred more interest in good roads during the second decade of the twentieth century, with 126 local “good roads” clubs organized by 1914.⁵ Automobile enthusiasts, especially in urban areas of Texas, joined regional auto clubs, which furthered the cause of good roads, and in the absence of government oversight of a state highway system, produced maps and guides for their members. These organizations and their efforts to identify drivable roads were a precursor to organizations that supported particular automobile routes and also produced maps and guides. Support for good roads and especially their usefulness to rural Texans became commonplace in local newspapers, as well as regional and national magazines, such as the Dallas-based *Farm and Ranch* and *Holland’s Magazine*, which in 1912 promoted an automobile tour between Dallas, San Antonio, Galveston, and back to Dallas.⁶

Establishment of Highway Associations

By 1910, private highway associations began to organize to promote good roads in general, and support improvement of particular regional and national routes. The Lincoln Highway Association, formed in 1913, is generally regarded to be one of the first and most influential of these groups, and was followed by similar organizations nationwide. The Lincoln Highway route connected New York City to San Francisco via Chicago and Omaha, joining together some of the largest U.S. cities with hundreds of rural towns and cities in between, and while the association did not actively fund the road building itself, they succeeded in forming coalitions between farmers, city-dwellers, large and small business owners, chambers of commerce, and local, state, and federal officials. This model was repeated nationwide, as highway associations assembled to promote improved highway design, highway safety, and increased funding at all levels of government for new road construction. By the mid-1920s, over 250 such highway associations represented named and numbered routes across the U.S., with dozens of named regional and interstate auto routes in Texas identified on road maps, including national roads such as the Bankhead Highway (Washington, DC, to San Diego, via Texarkana, Dallas, and El Paso), the Meridian Highway (Winnipeg to Mexico City, via Fort Worth and Laredo), and the Old Spanish Trail (St. Augustine, Florida to San Diego, via Houston, San Antonio, and El Paso). Many distinct organizations claimed the same segments of highways as their own, publishing maps and guides that excluded competing routes, and established highway markings from signs to painted telephone poles, often leading to confusion for motorists, especially in the absence of a comprehensive numbered road network at the state or federal levels.⁷ These associations, however, furthered the cause of good roads through increased public awareness and supported roadside business such as hotels and other lodging, restaurants, and automobile parts and repair facilities; these

⁴ Jones. “Bankhead Highway Historic District.” National Register nomination. 19.

⁵ Jones. 22.

⁶ Jones, 19.

⁷ *Rand-McNally Official 1923 Auto Trails Map* (Chicago, Ill.), 1923.

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

businesses in turn advertised their services in the associations' publications. The associations also proved to be instrumental in the rise of automobile-oriented tourism. While various associations promoted good roads in Texas, however, none could be counted on to actually improve the roads themselves. This task was left to various governmental entities, beginning with municipal and county governments, but eventually including a high degree of state and federal control.

The Old Spanish Trail (OST) in Texas

Despite its name, the Old Spanish Trail is not historically Spanish, nor is it a trail, nor is it even particularly old, except in the context of 20th century automobile highways. Instead, the OST was the southernmost of the transcontinental automobile highways supported by a variety of associations, including the National Highways Association, which identified the need for a road connecting San Augustine with San Diego as early as 1913.⁸ This southern route was plagued with geographic obstacles, including swamps, lakes, and the Gulf of Mexico, as well as the general disorganization of states' road financing and roadbuilding efforts. In 1915, the Old Spanish Trail Association organized in Mobile, Alabama, with membership representing mostly southeastern states and Texas. The association followed up with annual conferences in Pensacola and Tallahassee, but the group's initial momentum was stalled by World War I and other factors. The 1919 OST convention in Houston expanded Texas' influence, with the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce coming out in support of a transcontinental route that passed through the heart of the city, and the appointment of Herral Ayres of San Antonio to serve as managing director of the organization, a post he held for a decade. Ayres strongly endorsed the promotion of the OST as a linkage of places and sites historically connected to Spanish exploration and settlement in the New World. This approach can be seen as a precursor to modern "heritage tourism" efforts that promote routes that may or may not coincide with historic travel corridors.⁹

The OST Association publicized the route in ways similar to those of other national road associations, including publication of the short-lived *Old Spanish Trail Magazine*, tourist guides, maps, and an annual yearbook. The group adopted standardized signage guidelines, specifying red, white, and yellow banding on telephone poles and other signs. By 1921, the road through Texas connected Orange to El Paso, via Houston, Columbus, San Antonio, Kerrville, and Fort Stockton, although individual segments varied in regards to their all-weather drivability. West of Pecos County, the same road was claimed as the mainline of both the OST and the Bankhead Highway. Later OST divisions included a spur between San Antonio and Del Rio, a scenic route through Fort Davis, and a choice of routes through either Gonzales or Luling, Texas. The federal government did not initially recognize the OST as a high-priority route, prompting Ayres and the organization to increase efforts for national support in 1922, resulting in a declaration by southern congressmen in support of the road, and the U.S. Department of Defense affirming the necessity of a southern transcontinental route in the interest of national security. The OST's establishment as the "southern national highway" opened the door to federal funding.¹⁰

Government Support of Good Roads¹¹

The efforts of highway organizations such as the Old Spanish Trail Association coincided with greater government involvement in road and highway development. As the OST Association gained momentum in the late teens, plans for the first federally-aided improvements along the OST in Texas were underway. This level of state and federal

⁸ Jones, "Old Spanish Trail: National Trunkline of the Southern Borderlands." *Society for Commercial Archeology Journal* 15 (Fall 1997), 11. This article provides a good overview of the OST Association's history.

⁹ Jones, 12.

¹⁰ Jones, 13.

¹¹ Adapted from "1918 State Office Building and 1933 State Highway Building," National Register of Historic Places nomination (1997), pp. 34-35.

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

involvement, however, came only after nearly three decades of work by Good Roads advocates. While other state governments (beginning with the high population centers in the northeast, followed by those in the Midwest and the south), established centralized highway departments as early as the 1890s, Texas was one of the last states to do so. The rapid development of Texas in the late 19th century emphasized the need for better roads, and at an 1895 Good Roads convention in Houston, General Roy Stone, of the U.S. Office of Road Inquiry, criticized Texas for lagging behind every other state in road development. Between 1903 and 1915, the Texas legislature passed transportation bills which continued to leave control of road-building to the individual counties. Meanwhile, the number of automobile registrations in Texas skyrocketed.

The federal government established the Office of Public Roads (OPR) under the Agricultural Appropriation Act of 1906. The office served to promote “good road construction by testing materials and road-building methods, and providing scientific information to local and state road administrations.”¹² In 1913, recognizing the need for improved roads to facilitate an efficient postal system, the OPC established a program with the U.S. Post Office Department to improve existing post roads, and dispersed \$500,000 to states to improve their post roads, requiring a two-thirds match by county or state governments. The program yielded only 466 miles of improved roads in 17 states.¹³

The Federal Road Act of 1916 allocated federal road construction funds only to states with central highway agencies. The Texas Good Roads Association and state legislators mounted an intensified campaign to establish a highway department to administer potential federal funds. State Representative Leonard Tillotson of Sealy introduced House Bill 2 to create a state highway department, which Governor Jim Ferguson signed into law on April 4, 1917. The law authorized the establishment of a state highway commission, consisting of three individuals to be appointed by the governor for two-year terms, the creation of the office of state highway engineer to oversee highway projects, and the appointment of a secretary to direct the huge task of vehicle registrations. Motor vehicle registration fees provided funds for the department's operations. Counties retained control over road planning, and were reimbursed from the state highway fund. County engineers submitted plans and specifications to the state highway engineer for approval. The Texas Highway Commission proposed a network of 22 state highways at its first meeting on June 21, 1917.¹⁴ These routes largely followed existing county and local roads, and many followed routes that had been identified and promoted by various named highway associations. By 1919, the first 38 state highways were formally designated, including State Highway 3 (the Southern National Route, later the OST), running from Orange to El Paso.

A 1921 amendment to the 1916 Federal Aid Road Act required each state to designate a state road system by 1925, and further required the centralization of financing for road construction and maintenance in the state highway department. Most of the major named highways became part of this federal trunk-line system. In addition, state legislatures were required to meet the federal appropriations with a fifty percent match. Texas' 1925 highway law finally turned financial control of the state's roads to the highway department. The legislature had established the gasoline tax in 1923, three-fourths of which went to the highway department. The legislature passed increases in the gasoline tax in 1927 and 1929, which provided the financial resources necessary for large-scale highway construction. The department continued to expand in the late 1920s, adding the Road Design Division, responsible for locating, planning, and designing new roads, and the Right of Way Division, authorized to acquire right-of-way for road construction, in 1929.

¹² “Bunton Branch Bridge, Kyle vicinity, Hays County, Texas.” National Register of Historic Places nomination, (2000), p 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Texas Department of Transportation. “Historic Road Infrastructure of Texas.” Draft Multiple Property Documentation Form, 2012, 42.

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Improved Highway Engineering

Until the establishment of the Texas Highway Department (THD) in 1917, Texas state government had little oversight in the construction and maintenance of roads and highways, deferring to county governments, which often lacked experienced road engineers, and who depended heavily on unskilled convict labor to build roads. At the turn of the 20th century, most Texas roads were ill-suited for automobile traffic, and were generally categorized as being “improved” or “unimproved.” An unimproved road was typically a narrow dirt path with no identified lanes, shoulders, or drainage systems. Travel on such roads in an automobile was difficult under the best conditions and impossible after even a light rain. The quality of improved roads – while certainly better than that of unimproved roads – varied greatly, and was not necessarily conducive to heavy auto traffic. Improved roads featured hard surfaces and adequate drainage, but the foundation and surface materials ranged from compacted dirt or clay, to loose gravel (or broken shells in coastal regions), to macadam (laid gravel covered by a binding agent such as tar, a precursor to premixed asphalt). These roads required frequent maintenance just to remain passable, and by 1920 concrete was recognized as the standard material for high-quality durable roads and highways in Texas, although in many part of the state, paving bricks were also utilized for both city streets and intercity highways.¹⁵ In 1920, most new improved roads in the state featured gravel top surfaces, making the nominated road a rare early example of concrete highway construction in Texas.

The Colorado River Crossing and Highway on the East Side of Columbus

In 1867 the Buffalo Bayou Brazos & Colorado Railroad built the first bridge to span the Colorado River at the east side of Columbus, Texas.¹⁶ This bridge, which by 1884 served the Galveston, Houston, and San Antonio Railroad, featured three metal trusses on stone piers, with a wooden trestle extending eastward over the flood plain, and a raised berm intersecting what is now the alignment of the nominated road. By 1909, the original spans had been replaced by three Parker-truss spans. Non-railroad traffic continued to be served by a ferry until 1884, when a metal truss wagon bridge was constructed, with a western terminus near Spring Street and the city waterworks. Photographs taken of the wagon bridge around the time of the 1913 flood depict the eastern road heading towards Alleyton through the current railroad overpass included within this nomination. The bridge was partially destroyed during the flood, but was rebuilt in 1915.

The road served by the wagon bridge continued eastward to the community of Alleyton, linking to other local and county roads providing access to Houston, and eventually becoming a link in the highway that traversed Colorado County through Eagle Lake, Columbus and Weimar. By 1919, the Texas Highway Commission identified this road as State Highway 3 and the “Southern National Highway.” This choice of name over the “Old Spanish Trail,” was possibly due to the OST Association’s limited representation in Texas until the 1919 OST convention in Houston. The trunk line of the actual Southern National Highway (SNH, established in 1915), ran from Washington, DC to San Diego via Dallas, and the SNH Association did not the recognize the Texas route through Houston and San Antonio. By 1924, the Texas Highway Department identified Highway 3 as the Old Spanish Trail, probably in recognition of the OST Association’s success in branding the road as such.¹⁷

Colorado County first received federal highway funding (through the THD) for Highway 3 in early 1918. The initial amount was increased by \$25,000 after a group of citizens from Weimar, Eagle Lake and Columbus – including the county judge, county attorney, and county engineer – appeared before the State Highway Commission to request additional funding, emphasizing the route’s federally-recognized potential as a transcontinental military highway.¹⁸ In

¹⁵ Jones, 20.

¹⁶ Bill Stein, Bill. *Consider the Lily: The Ungilded History of Colorado County, Texas*. <http://library.columbustexas.net/history/part7.htm>. Accessed December 14, 2012.

¹⁷ “State Highway No. 3,” *Texas Highway Bulletin*. Austin, Texas: State Highway Department, August 1924.

¹⁸ “Colorado County to Receive Additional Aid for Building Highway,” *Colorado Citizen* (Columbus, Texas), 16 April 1918.

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

February 1919, Colorado County Road District bonds in the amount of \$175,000 provided additional funds for construction of the state highway.¹⁹ In May 1919, a contract was let to the firm Haden and Austin of Galveston, for the construction of the first 17.12 miles of the highway in the eastern and western sections of Colorado County.²⁰ An article in the *Colorado Citizen* described the overall project goal to “join up with similar roads to be built by the counties east and west of this county and eventually become a link in a surfaced highway reaching from San Antonio to Houston. This project has been under consideration for years...”²¹ The article further noted that roads under construction were covered by postal routes and received federal aid.

In 1919, the THD allotted nearly \$24,000 for work on a new phase of Highway 3 that included construction of the nominated road. In November 1919, the THD contracted for improvements made to the existing 16-foot road, extending three miles from the Colorado River Bridge at Columbus to Alleyton. Identified as the beginning section of Federal Aid Project 70 (FAP-70) for State Highway 3, the improvements consisted of grading the roadbed, building unspecified “structures” (most likely small culverts), and finishing with a gravel surface. Although not specified on the highway department job records, the concrete pavement at the west end of the project was also finished at the same time, evidenced by August 1920 articles in the *Weimar Mercury* and the *Colorado Citizen*. The concrete section was laid from the east end of the bridge to “county farm hill,” and was scheduled to take about 30 days, but the start date was pushed back due to heavy rains in late August. The contractor, W.A McClendon, anticipated that work would begin “before the end of the week” if no more rain fell.²² A photograph from THD files shows the concrete section at the railroad overpass as completed by June 1921. This concrete section was the only such road built in Colorado County as part of the Highway 3 project, and the material was likely chosen due to the road’s location in the flood plain. The concrete road was a point of pride for Colorado County officials, who touted its success to officials in neighboring counties in June 1922. The *Eagle Lake Headlight* took the opportunity to note the road’s quality and the excellence of roads throughout the county:

Some of the county officials on learning of the success of the concrete road through the river bottoms near Columbus in withstanding the recent flood, stated that they expected themselves to make an inspection of this concrete portion with a view of solving some road problems in bottom lands of their own counties. Come ahead – all of you – and we’ll show you some good roads, too, in Colorado county (sic).²³

In March 1922, the *Dallas Morning News* featured Colorado County road building efforts in a full-page article entitled “Colorado County Wins in Highway Race,” announcing that the final four-mile stretch of the county’s section of State Highway 3 had been completed, noting that 39 of the 40 miles were gravel-surfaced, with one mile of reinforced concrete. The county’s hard-surface road building effort resulted in its’ first-place finish among all other counties along the route. Completed at a total cost of \$386,126, the county bore more than half the cost, while the state supplied 21%, and the federal government 17%. The finished roadbed was 24 feet wide, with a road surface of 16 feet, allowing 4-foot shoulders, and the project eliminated three out of five existing grade crossings as the road followed the general alignment of the Southern Pacific Railroad. The county road project also included the construction of painted white wooden guardrails and signs identifying the road as “State Highway 3” placed at the edge of “every town, village, or station” with the name of each town identified. At each county line, similar signs included the name of Colorado

¹⁹ Money for Construction of Highway Now Available.” *Colorado Citizen* (Columbus, Texas), 7 February, 1919.

²⁰ “Contract Let for Immediate Construction of Seventeen Miles of Highway Number Three.” *Colorado Citizen* (Columbus, Texas), 16 May 1919.

²¹ “Grading of Highway Started at County Line Wed.” *Colorado Citizen* (Columbus, Texas), 18 July 1919.

²² “Contract Let for Immediate Construction of Seventeen Miles of Highway Number Three.” *Colorado Citizen* (Columbus, Texas), 16 May 1919; “Rain Delays Work on Concrete Road.” *Colorado Citizen* (Columbus, Texas), 27 August 1920.

²³ “County Officials From Five Counties Meet in a Business Session at Wharton Monday,” *Eagle Lake Headlight*, 10 June 1922.

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

County, which “no doubt met more than one glad eye coming out of the adjacent counties after plowing through the mud.”²⁴

In February 1928, the old wagon bridge that carried Highway 3 over the Colorado River suffered a partial collapse under the weight of a THD truck passing a gravel truck. The highway truck fell through the bridge deck after the floor beams failed, killing one man and injuring another. As a result, the county stepped up pressure for a new bridge but was unwilling to pass bonds to help pay for it, believing that it was the state's responsibility. Finally, after THD repairs to the old bridge failed, the state proceeded with a federal aid project to construct a new bridge to the north of the original structure.²⁵ The *Weimar Mercury* reported:

It will be remembered that this bridge gave way last week under the combined weight of a big tractor and grader, and in the wreck that followed one man was killed, another slightly injured, the tractor and grader practically ruined and traffic over the bridge delayed for over two days. A close study of the bridge reveals the fact that it is not entirely safe even now for the huge amount of traffic making use of same, and it is said the state highway department contemplates a new bridge at an early date to take its place.²⁶

By about 1930, the route was designated SH 3/U.S. 90, and by 1938 the original Highway 3 designation had been dropped. In November 1932 a new bridge was constructed across the Colorado River, just to the north of the wagon bridge. The new bridge, which was much wider than the previous bridge, connected to Walnut Street, and funneled traffic through the heart of town past the Colorado County Courthouse, a few blocks to the west. The new alignment eliminated a sharp turn on the western approach to the old bridge, which was set mid-block between structures at the city water works. The road leading east from the new bridge was built on a large berm, which buried the westernmost section of the 1921 concrete road, and connected to the extant 1921 road in order to take traffic under the railroad tracks. Due to the road's location in the flood plain, the federal Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) inserted a clause into the project agreement requiring THD to bypass the old railroad overpass when the volume of traffic demanded it. In 1939, the nominated road was bypassed when a railroad overpass and a series of bridges was built further to the east, carrying traffic well above the flood plain, and rendering the old road as obsolete except as a secondary local road.

The 1920-21 section of the Old Spanish Trail east of Columbus is isolated from the subsequent road alignments that replaced it and retains its original concrete pavement. It is nominated under Criterion C in the area of Engineering at the state level of significance as an intact and rare example of early automobile-era highway construction in Texas. Designed to withstand flooding of the Colorado River and carry traffic between the growing and militarily-strategic population centers of San Antonio and Houston, the state-of-the-art highway served as an example to other Texas counties at its completion, and is nominated to the National Register under Criterion A in the area of Transportation, as it exemplifies the cooperation of local, state and federal highway governments in addressing the need for improved roads in the early 20th century.

²⁴ Faber, B.H. “Colorado County Wins in Highway Race.” *Dallas Morning News*, 5 March, 1922, 5.

²⁵ Lauderdale, Regina, with Pat St. George. “State Highway 3 Bridge at the Colorado River, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas,” National Register of Historic Places nomination, 1995.

²⁶ *Weimar Mercury*, February 24th, 1928.

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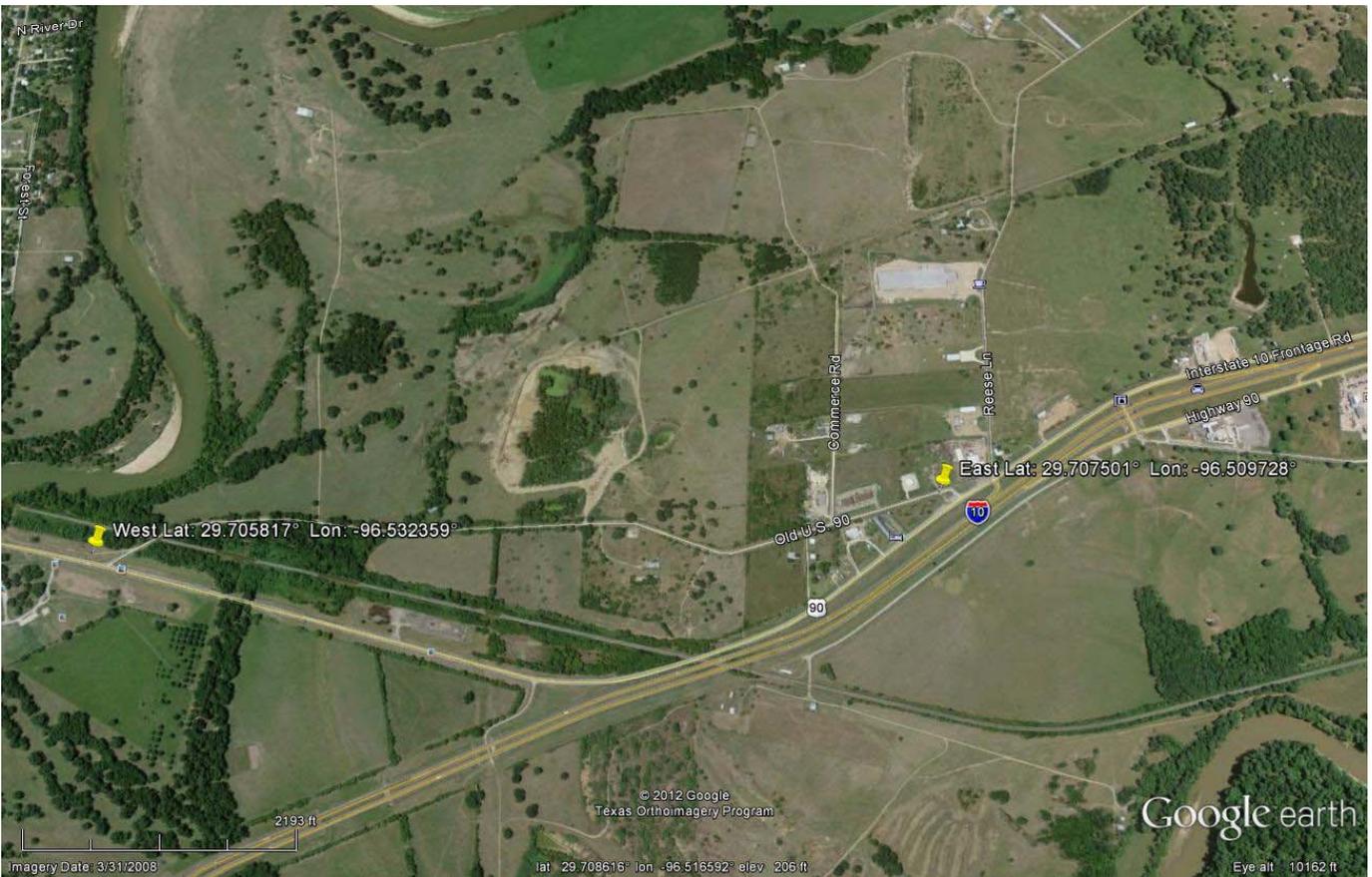
Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Geographic Information

Google Earth map, indicating west and east termini of nominated road

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates WGS84 Datum

- 1. Latitude: 29.705817° Longitude: -96.532359°
- 2. Latitude: 29.707501° Longitude: -96.509728°

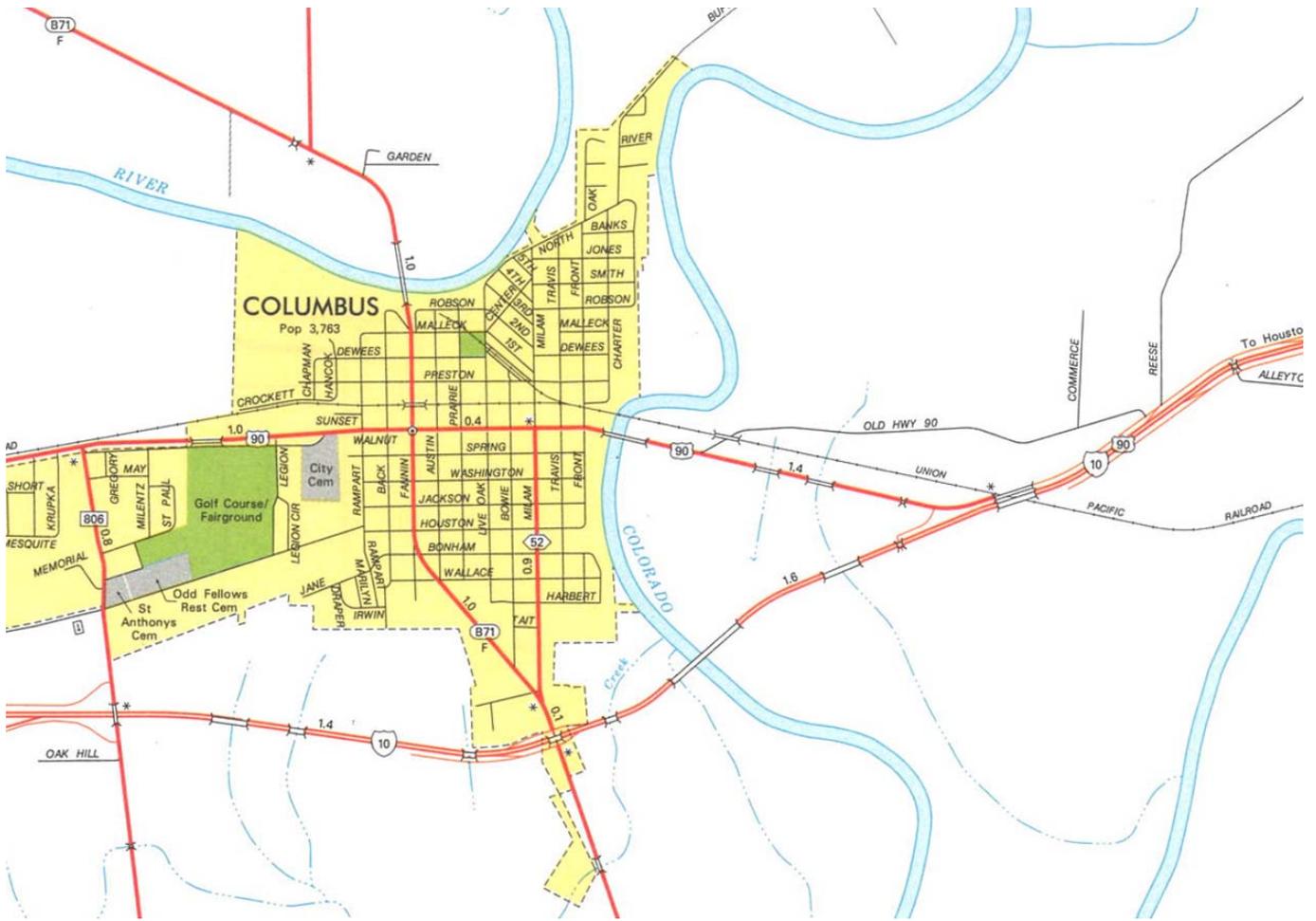


Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Map 2

2004 map indicating Old Highway 90 east of Columbus. No scale.

Source: TXDOT



Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Map 3, indicating photo locations
No scale



Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Figure 1

East River Wagon Bridge under construction at the foot of Spring Street in Columbus

Facing west towards Columbus

The photograph is one of a set of twenty made in Columbus in 1884 by Thomas B. Elrod and sent for exhibit to the New Orleans World Exposition. The *Colorado Citizen* of December 4, 1884 refers to the photograph as "Construction of Free Bridge."



Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Figure 2

East River Railroad Bridge and Ferry

Facing north from the approximate future location of the wagon bridge

The bridge was built in 1867 between Crockett and Walnut Streets in Columbus. The ferry operated at the foot of Walnut Street, and was replaced by a wagon bridge at Spring Street in 1886. The photograph is one of a set of twenty made in Columbus in 1884 by Thomas B. Elrod and sent for exhibit to the New Orleans World Exposition. The Colorado Citizen of December 4, 1884 refers to the photograph as "G. H. & S. A. Railway Bridge, East". The ferry is at the site of the current Highway U.S. 90 bridge over the Colorado River.



Source: Nesbitt Library, Columbus, Texas

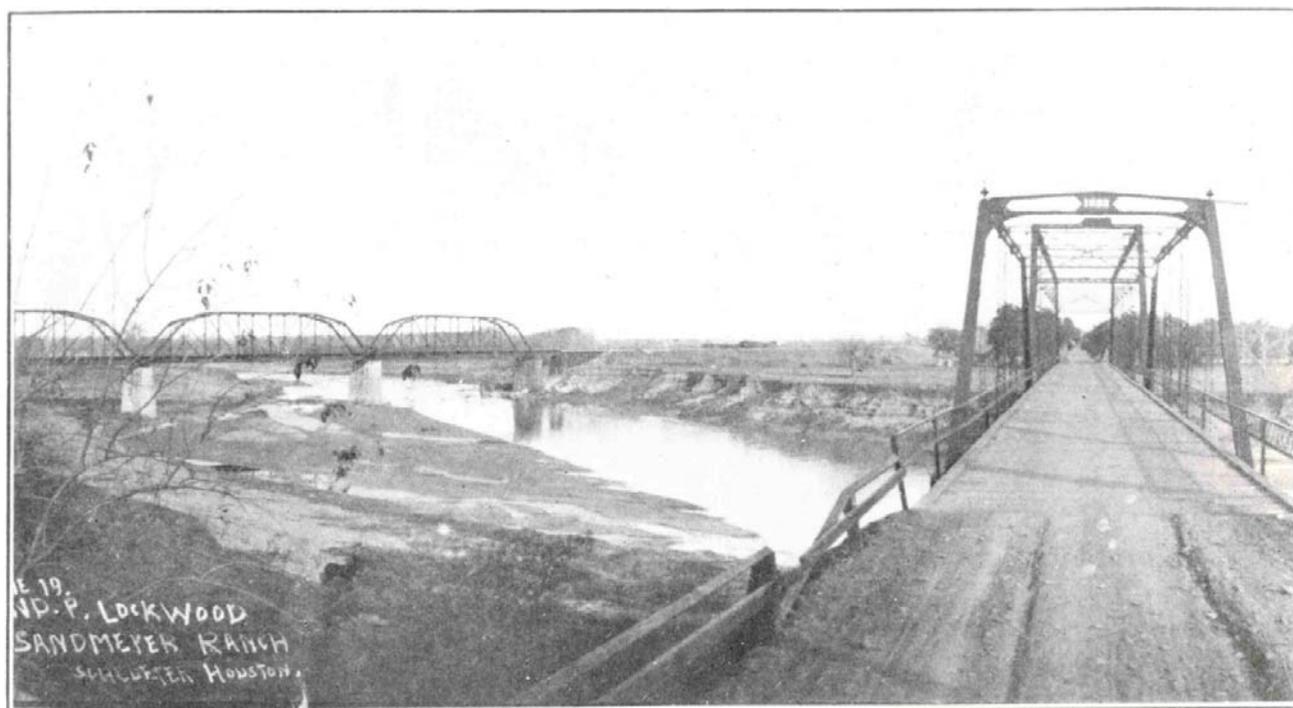
Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Figure 3

Railroad and wagon bridge, January 4, 1909.

Facing east

Originally published in a booklet, "Scenes from Columbus and on the Sandmeyer Ranch," published to help sell the Sandmeyer Ranch. The railroad bridge is at left, the wagon bridge at right.



Railroad and Wagon Bridge over the Colorado river, at Columbus, Texas.

Source: Nesbitt Library, Columbus, Texas

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Figure 4

East wagon bridge at Columbus and road to Alleyton, c.1913.

Photo taken by Oscar A. Zummwalt, most likely from old city water tower.

Railroad overpass visible in top center, indicated by arrow.



Source: Nesbitt Library, Columbus, Texas

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Figure 5

East river wagon and railroad bridges during 1913 flood, with the gauge showing a river depth of 42 feet.

In background the flooded road to Alleyton goes under the railroad bridge.



Source: Nesbitt Library, Columbus, Texas

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Figure 6

Three east river bridges at Columbus in 1932, after opening of U.S. Highway 90 Bridge

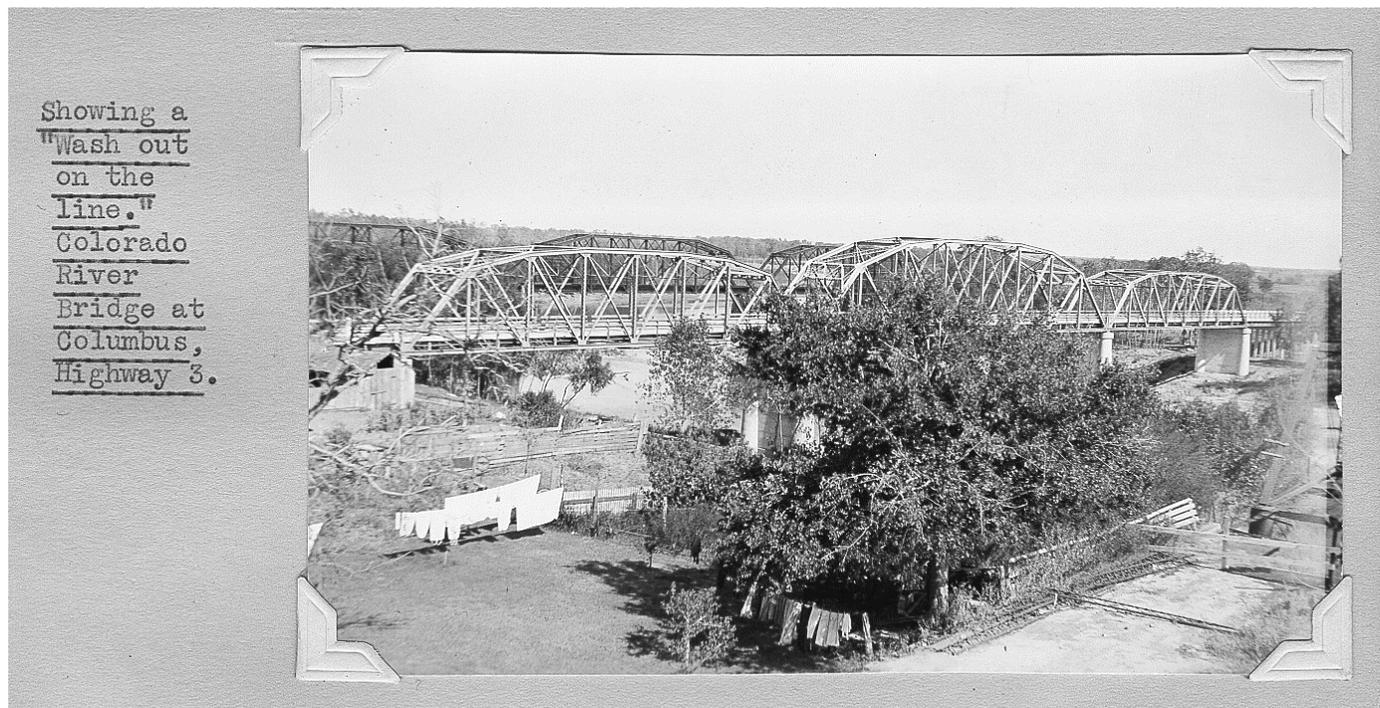


Source: Nesbitt Library, Columbus, Texas

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Figure 7

1938 THD photo of 1932 Highway Bridge, with approach to the old wagon bridge at right.

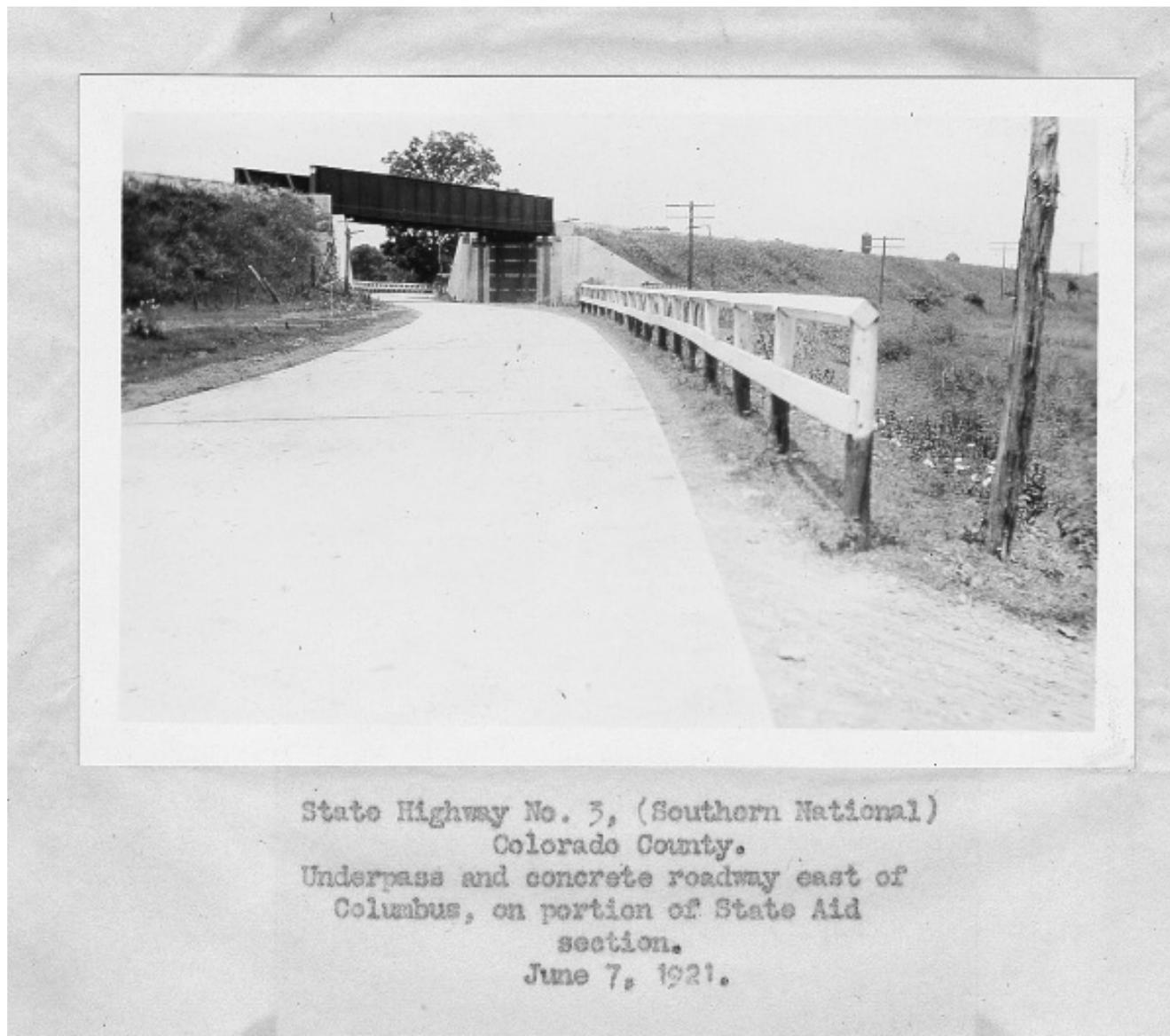


Source: TXDOT, Austin, Texas

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Figure 8

Photo of 1920 concrete section of Highway 3, identified as Southern National Trail, facing south



Source: TXDOT, Austin, Texas

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Figure 10

Dallas Morning News, March 5, 1922.

Detail of concrete road leading west to old wagon bridge.



Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

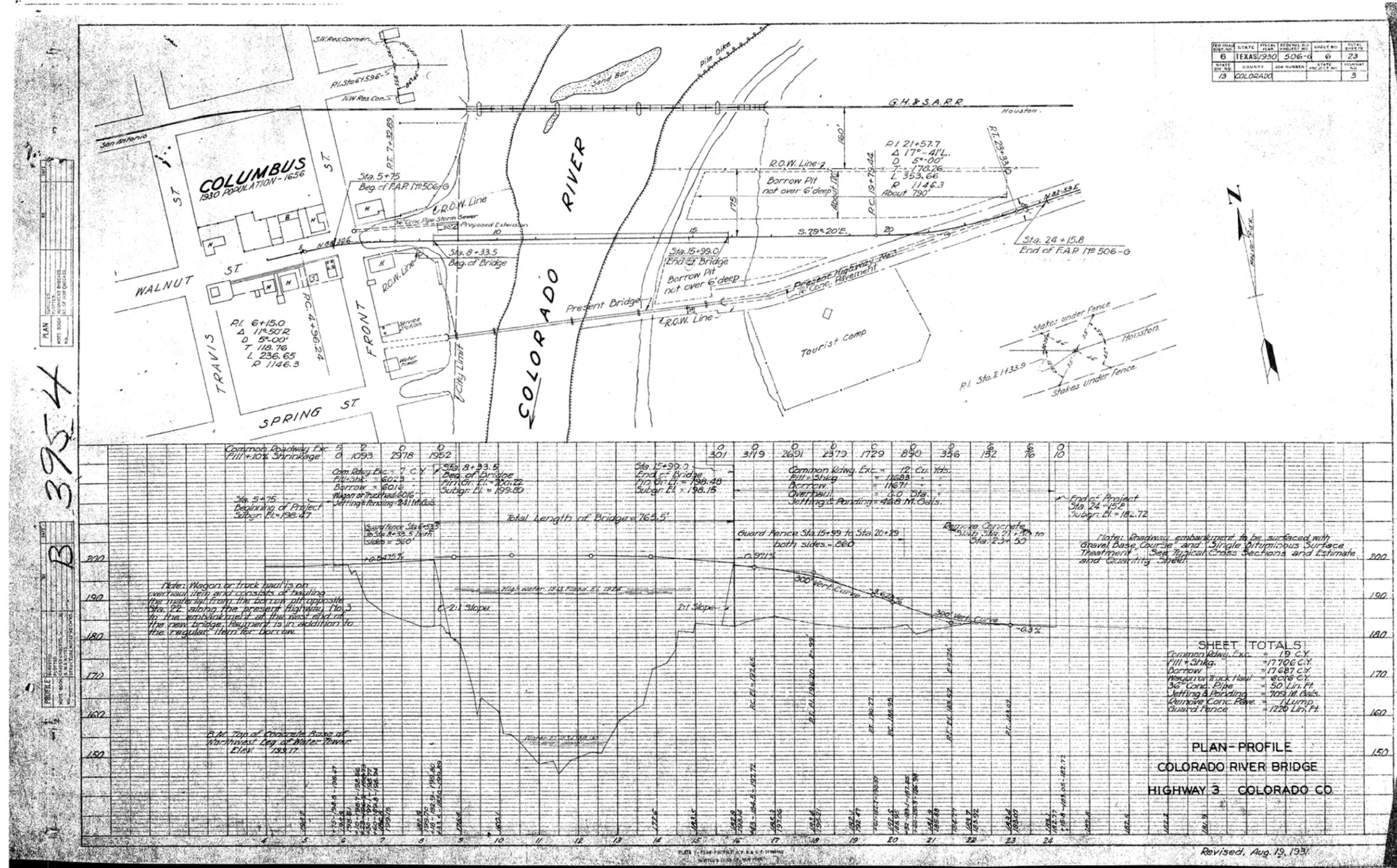
Figure 11

Dallas Morning News, March 5, 1922.
Detail of concrete road and railroad overpass



Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Plan 1: 1930 TDH plan indicating (from top to bottom) railroad bridge, proposed Highway 3 bridge, and old wagon bridge with existing concrete pavement. Note tourist camp on south side of highway, at site of present county park.
 Source: TXDOT



3954 B

Old Spanish Trail, Columbus vicinity, Colorado County, Texas

Plan 2: 1938 plan indicating proposed U.S. 90 bypass of U.S. 90 (Old Spanish Trail. Concrete pavement noted on old road. Source: TXDOT

