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LaGrades are also each charged lest a \$1,000 bounty allegedly she'd lent the car to her son. llarown@texarkanagazette.com

Historian gives talk on Bankhead National Highway

By Gano Bescor
Texarkana Gazette

Some Twin Cities residents Tuesday found out something they never knew before about a highway that has run through both cities for the last 92 years.

"At one time, it had become the most significant highway in America," said Daniel L. Smith, a former meteorologist and current Fort Worth-based historian, as he spoke to the Texarkana Oaklawn Rotary Club.

Smith spoke about this 3,000-mile coast-to-coast, all-weather roadway, completed in about 1920 as it linked Washington, D.C., with San Diego.

"Of its 3,000-mile stretch, nearly a thousand of those miles stretched through Texas," Smith said.

This stretch of roadway, which eventually became known as the Bankhead National Highway initiated by federal legislation in 1916 and completed about 1921, could actually lay claim to Broad Street as part of it.

"The highway existed and passed through here during the 1920s," Smith said. "It was nothing like what you think of a highway being today. Back then, it was mostly dirt and gravel, not much pavement."

Much of this road would later become U.S. Highway 67.

During his presentation, Smith showed slides depicting original remaining segments of the highway mostly in Eastland County, in and around the towns of Cisco, Ranger and Weaver, Texas.

This highway, like a lot of the roads at that time, followed alongside railroad tracks, Smith said.

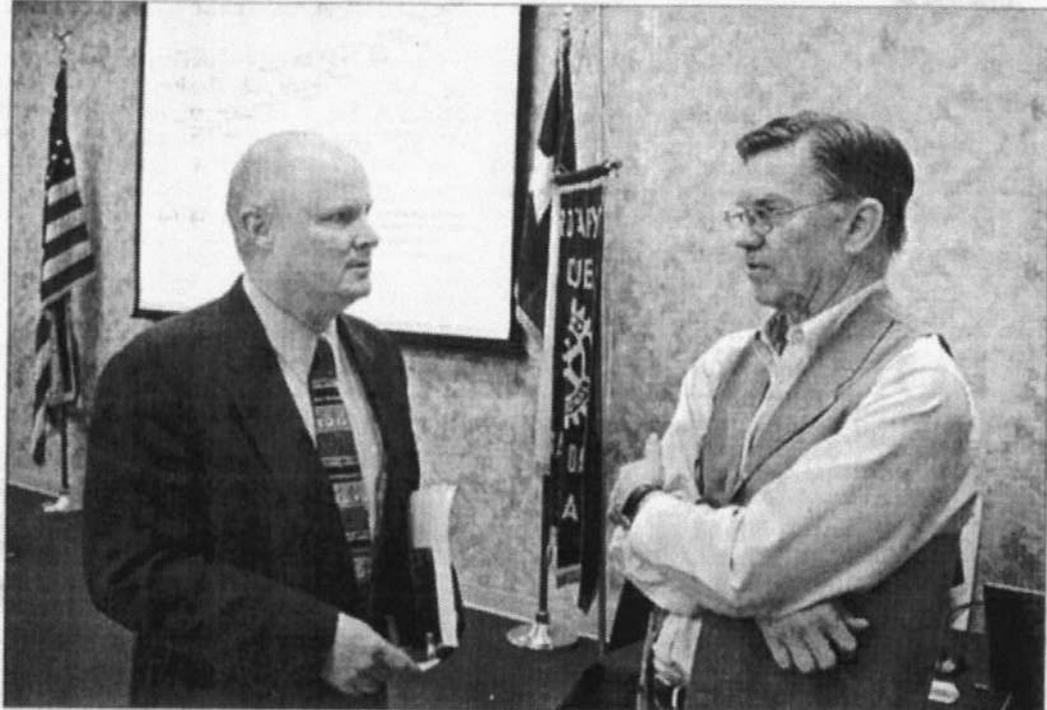
"Bonnie and Clyde used this highway as they were chased by police," he said. "Parker County farmers started setting up fruit stands near the highway."

The Bankhead National





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Staff photo by Greg Bischof

■ Daniel Smith, right, a Fort Worth-based historian, talks to Texarkana, Texas, resident Bart Vance about the Bankhead National Highway that used to run through Texarkana during the 1920s. The highway eventually became U.S. Highway 67. Smith spoke Tuesday at a Texarkana Oaklawn Rotary Club meeting.

Highway, which took its name from John H. Bankhead, a U.S. senator from Alabama, reaches its midpoint about 10 miles east of Sweetwater, Texas.

Even though a coast-to-coast highway known as the Lincoln Highway, which stretched from New York to Los Angeles, existed before the Bankhead National Highway, Smith said the Bankhead Highway was the first all-weather highway. It could be used by travelers year round without being blocked by winter ice or snow storms.

Smith said World War I actually prompted the United States to

first consider building national, coast-to-coast highways.

"During that time (1914-1918), it was assumed that America wouldn't be able to defend itself from foreign invasion—because the country didn't have any national highways (for military transportation)," Smith said.

The war prompted Bankhead to introduce a bill for this coast-to-coast highway that would improve on the existing Lincoln Highway farther north.

Eventually, as more federally built highways projects started, the U.S. Bureau of Roads (a forerunner of the federal highway

department) decided that named highways overlapped each other too much. This prompted the bureau to start issuing numbers to highways—such as U.S. 67.

Smith said he will try to finish and publish a book on the Bankhead Highway by the end of this year.

He added the Texas Historical Commission is also conducting some historical surveys of the surviving roadway sections.

"I'm hoping this survey will show how significant the highway is to Texas—especially for a highway never really heard of."