

I-30's predecessor draws attention

Bankhead National Highway object of interest for project

By GREG BISCHOF
Texarkana Gazette

About 45 years before Interstate 30 came through Texarkana, the Twin Cities had another "interstate of sorts" come through as far back as 1920.

Several local residents attended a public outreach meeting Tuesday evening that focused on the Texas Historical Commission's current Bankhead Highway Historical Project.

The meeting was the commission's first of 10 public outreach meetings which will stretch across the state from now until Dec. 3—all focusing on this historic roadway.

The meetings will be part of a two-year study to document the history of Bankhead National Highway, one of the nation's earliest transcontinental roadways.

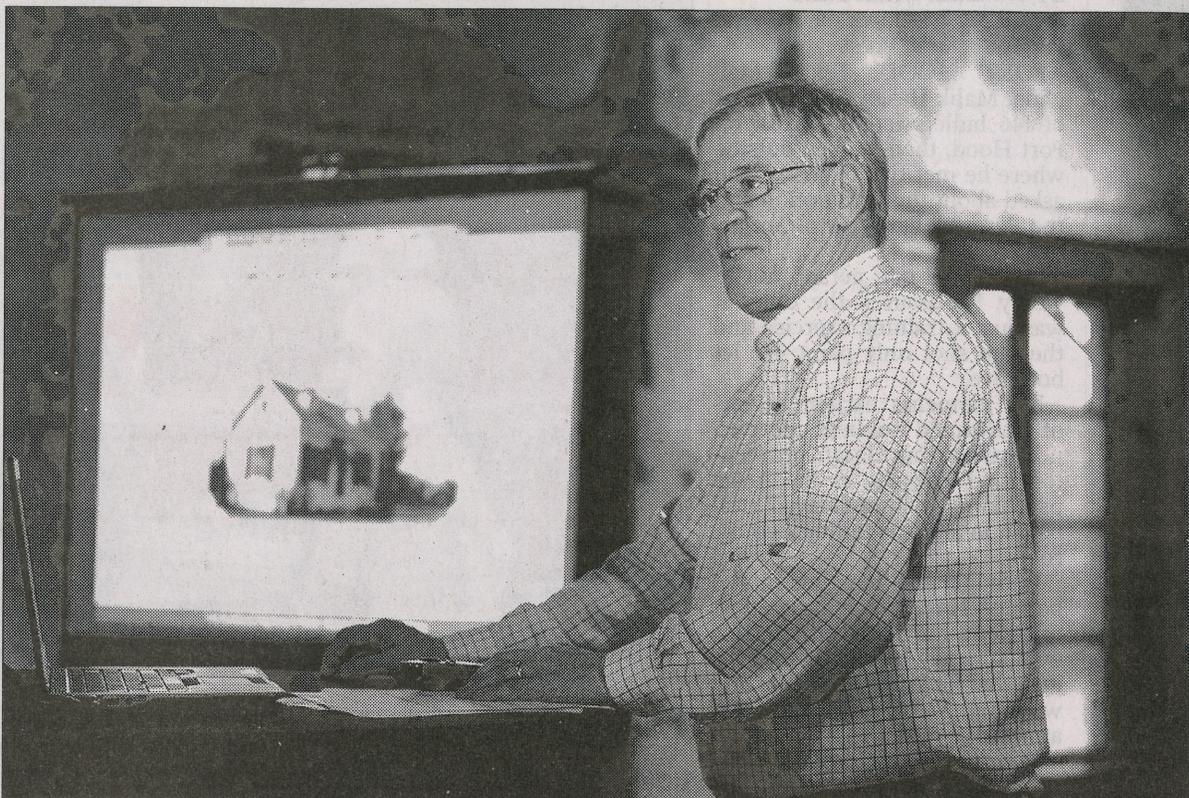
The historic highway's route follows the current path of U.S. Highway 67 and U.S. Highway 80. It spans about 850 miles from Texarkana to El Paso.

The commission plans to produce a written history of the Texas section of the national highway—which actually stretched about 3,000 miles from Washington D.C. to San Diego after being completed in 1921. Work started on the highway in 1916.

The study will be completed by the Austin-based historical preservation, planning and management consulting firm of Hardy-Heck-Moore.

During the meeting, David W. Moore, the firm's president, delivered a slide presentation to a group of about 15 Texarkana residents.

This stretch of roadway, which eventually became known as Bankhead National Highway, took



Staff photo by Evan Lewis

■ David Moore Jr., president of Hardy Heck Moore Inc. a Historical Preservation Planning and Management firm based in Austin, speaks Tuesday evening at Silvermoon Theater about the old Bankhead National Highway that ran through Texarkana. The Texas Historical Commission is organizing a program to identify and document the historic highway that stretched approximately 850 miles in Texas.

its name from John H. Bankhead, a U.S. senator from Alabama.

Federal legislation initiated the highway in 1916 and it took five years to complete. It reached its continental midpoint about 10 miles east of Sweetwater, Texas.

Part of this roadway, which at the time was largely dirt and gravel, lays claim to Texarkana's Broad Street.

"This highway came into Texas from Arkansas, right where we are standing today," Moore said. "We are conducting this study to help people understand the rich history that is Texas."

This road, like most of its day, ran along railroad tracks. Many of its original segments can be found in Texas's Eastland County in and

around the towns of Cisco, Ranger and Weaver, Texas.

The Bankhead National Highway, also known at various points in history as Highway 1 and the Broadway of America, was the first all-weather highway. It could be used by travelers year round without being blocked by ice or snow.

Before the Bankhead Highway, the Lincoln Highway, which stretched from New York to Los Angeles, existed as the first coast-to-coast highway.

World War I actually prompted the United States to first consider building national coast-to-coast highways as a matter of national defense. This led to both of these highways being built, one in the north the other in

the south, Moore said.

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

"This highway was also known as the southern route," Moore said.

Eventually, as more federally built highway projects started, the U.S. Bureau of Roads (a forerunner of the federal Highway Department) decided the named highways overlapped each other too much. This eventually prompted the bureau to start issuing numbers to highways, such as U.S. 67.

The commission's next Bankhead meeting will be held Thursday in Mount Vernon.