

# Travel Through Time

## Bankhead Highway Blazed Path Across Texas

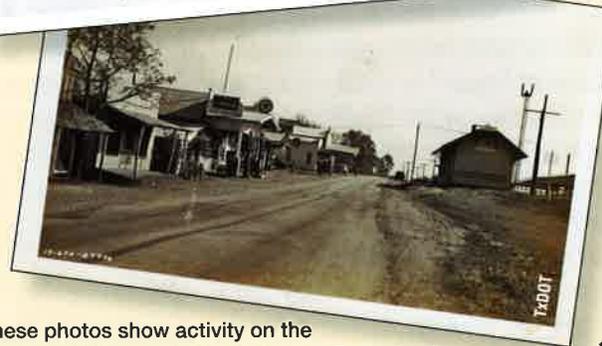
By Leslie Wolfenden  
 THC Historic Resources Survey Coordinator

For many Texans, driving along an interstate highway is a thoroughly modern experience, with gridlocked traffic, ongoing construction, and views of large-scale new development along the roadside.

However, historic maps show the routes traversed by some of today's modern interstate highways closely resemble the paths of the country's earliest paved highways from the 1920s. In some locations, the heritage of our modern highways dates back even further, following railroad lines, stagecoach routes, and even trails from the Spanish Colonial era and earlier.

The aim of the Texas Historic Roads and Highways Program is to clarify the links between our modern highways and their antecedents, and to explain the evolution of our roadways over time. The Texas Historical Commission (THC) and the Texas Department of Transportation jointly administer the program, established by the Texas Legislature in 2009 with the goals of identifying and commemorating historic highways in Texas, and producing a series of interpretive publications to encourage heritage tourism. Current work on the Texas Historic Roads and Highways Program is made possible by Federal Transportation Enhancement Program funds provided by the U.S. Federal Highway Administration.

The inaugural effort of the Texas Historic Roads and Highways Program, now underway, is the preparation of a historic context detailing the development of the Bankhead Highway and other named highways in Texas. The program's primary focus is the Bankhead, a transcontinental roadway that travels across the state from Texarkana



These photos show activity on the Bankhead Highway in North Central Texas (top) and Redwater (bottom).

to El Paso, roughly following the routes of historic highways U.S. 67 and U.S. 80.

"This in-depth study of the historic Bankhead Highway will invoke memories of a time when automobile traffic was far more about adventure rather than speed," said THC Commissioner Tom Alexander. "Opened nearly a century ago, it blazed a vital new pathway across the Lone Star State."

Since August, a team of professional historians and architectural historians has been conducting a series of public meetings and field survey trips to document historic buildings and structures along the Bankhead Highway. Several meetings remain to be held (see below),

and program staff will continue to receive input and materials until Spring 2014.

"The Bankhead Highway played a major role in helping to build and grow many of our local communities, and this project reminds us all that transportation infrastructure is truly the underpinning of our daily lives," said Rep. George Lavender (R-Texarkana). "It connects family and friends, helps ensure that goods and services get to market, and that first

responders can effectively serve their communities. As a member of the House Transportation Committee, I appreciate this effort to document and record the historic impact of our highways."

Anticipated program outcomes include a survey report that identifies, documents, and evaluates historic resources along the Bankhead Highway, an upgraded version of the THC's online Historic Sites Atlas, and the development of an online portal to distribute information to the public. For additional information about the program, contact Leslie Wolfenden at 512.463.3386 or [leslie.wolfenden@thc.state.tx.us](mailto:leslie.wolfenden@thc.state.tx.us). ★

### PUBLIC MEETING SCHEDULE

Midland	Nov. 6, 2013	5:30–7:30 p.m.	Haley Memorial Library & History Center 1805 West Indiana St.
Van Horn	Nov. 7, 2013	5:30–7:30 p.m.	Hotel El Capitan 100 East Broadway St.
El Paso	Dec. 3, 2013	5:30–7:30 p.m.	El Paso Community Foundation 333 North Oregon St.