

Title: **Businesses, highway tied together over history**
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The Texas Historical Commission is taking on a two-year project documenting the Sixth Principal Meridian Highway in Texas.

Don't know where it is? The highway has been a major highway north to south since 1911. The Commission is gathering information on travel related structures along the highway. New Braunfels is part of that survey.

In 1911 John C. Nicholson, a Kansas lawyer and supporter of the Good Roads Movement, organized the International Meridian Road Association wanting a highway from Canada to Mexico. This was the beginning of the Meridian Highway.

It is not a completely new highway as many segments of the highway follow Native American paths, Spanish explorer paths, military roads and cattle trails.

When the Texas Highway Department was created in 1917 the Meridian Highway in Texas was called State Highway 2 which meant it was the second most important highway in Texas.

The highway in Texas is approximately 900 miles. With the adoption of the interstate highway numbering system, this high-

way became US 81 for the most part and much of the segments now follow IH 35 — one of the nation's busiest interstate highways.

The highway links Canada to Mexico and also continues as the Pan-American Highway that stretches from Alaska to Argentina.

As far as Texas was concerned, a 1953 *Texas Parade* article noted that US 81 was in the process of being widened to a four-lane divided roadway from Fort Worth to San Antonio and the author called the road the "main street of the Lone Star State."

No doubt, the availability of automobiles and trucks in the 1900s changed the way of life for all Texans, but good roads were hard to find.

The Meridian Highway going from north to south opened up all avenues of trade and travel which affected auto repair garages, gas stations, diners, tourist camps, auto courts, motels, road markers, bridges, traffic signs and of course road construction and maintenance.

This important corridor was a big boost to tourism.

Think about our tourism in Comal County and how it would have been affected by the lack of automobiles and the roads on which

they travel.

New Braunfels, being the Beauty Spot of Texas, had a lot to gain from this highway.

In 1924 the Official Automobile Red Book showed the route of the highway to be from just north of NB to just south as follows:

One would travel along Post Road and cross over the Guadalupe River at the Faust Street Bridge, turn right on to Seguin Ave. and continue to the Main Plaza. After circling the Plaza, head out West San Antonio St. and then travel on FM 482. Later after the US 81 bridge was constructed the route changed slightly and became US 81 and then finally became IH 35.

The Texas Historical Commission has begun its survey collecting information on historic structures that were influenced and benefitted by the Meridian Highway.

When the survey is complete, results will be published and made available to the public.

In some of my past articles, I have written about several businesses along the New Braunfels downtown route that I think will qualify as examples of what was on the Meridian

Highway.

Now I will talk about one automobile business that I haven't written about that was actually located in three locations along the route.

Possibly no business benefitted more from a good highway than the automobile industry.

Becker Motor Company began in 1928 when August Becker and his son-in-law Louis Niemeyer held the Chevrolet franchise for Comal County.

August Becker had been connected with the Seguin Motor Co. for several years. He and his son, Walter, bought the Forshage Building at 472 W. San Antonio St. from Jess Sippel. The Becker Chevrolet Company was founded with August Becker as general manager and owner and located in that building.

The Great Depression had an impact on the automobile business. During this time period General Motors sent cars to the dealers, whether they wanted them or not.

This situation became a point of contention to August Becker because just as the new Chevrolet models were coming out, GM sent him 60 1932 cars to sell. This was during the height

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of the Great Depression.
 Can you see the problem?

August, his son Walter, and some of the sales staff literally went from door to door selling cars within a 30-mile radius.

All the cars were finally sold but, needless to say,

HISTORY

Continued from page 3C

when it moved to 547 S. Seguin Ave. The building was constructed from the demolition of two warehouses from the Landa Mill property. Concrete blocks were made on the spot.

Additional adjoining property, and properties across the street, were purchased by the company.

In 1972 the Chrysler franchise was obtained when Ruppel Auto Co. went out of business. In 1973 Becker Motor Company was reor-

ganized as a corporation and finally sold in 2002 to Bluebonnet Chrysler Dodge — but the building still stands. The Becker family members have in their possession a collection of photographs of the history of Becker Motor Company.

They have allowed the Sophienburg Archives to scan these photos and make them part of its vast collection. A particular one-of-a-kind collection is black and white photographs taken by George Becker with a little Kodak camera.

S. Seguin Ave. and then in 1935 moved to 300 South Seguin Ave. located where the First Protestant Church parking lot is.

This building subsequently held other automobile-related business like Carl Ohm Motor Co. and the last was Dietert

Auto Supply owned by Darwin Dietert. First Protestant bought the property to increase their parking capacity.

The final move for the Becker Motor Company occurred right after WWII

See **HISTORY**, page 6C

The collection is of 18 early Dodge trucks sold to local businesses and individuals. Names are on the back. Once again, if you have been hanging around in New Braunfels long enough, you will recognize some of these names:

“Tate” in front of a Fritos truck by the business that is now the First Protestant Church parking; Pittman’s Red and White truck; Sattler Feed Store truck; county road crew in front of truck; Oscar Brehmer in front of farm truck; Ed Soechting

Mobile Oil truck; Curt Linartz in front of delivery truck; Handy Andy grocery truck; Loeps Plaza Market downtown; First NB garbage truck; Erwin Staats Meat Market truck; Hanz Schwamkrug in front of New Braunfels Sausage Factory; plus many pictures of old buildings and unidentified trucks.

Thank you, Texas Historical Commission for taking on the Meridian Highway project and adding to the information that the Sophienburg has. I think there’s no doubt that we will all benefit.

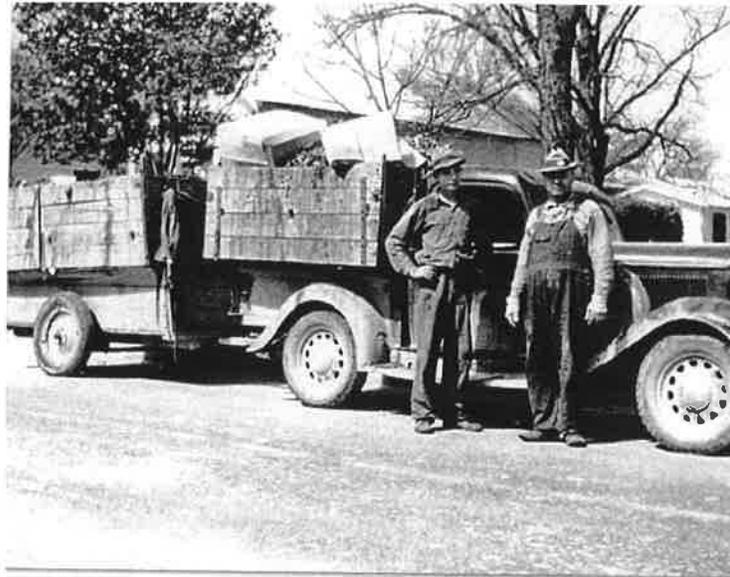


Myra Lee Adams Goff writes a biweekly column about New Braunfels history.



The Sophienburg

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NB garbage truck, Handy Andy grocery truck, Fritos truck and county road crew truck.

Submitted photo