

HISTORIC TEXAS HIGHWAYS

BANKHEAD HIGHWAY

The Broadway of America

Preserve the Future

Help the THC preserve the past while touring. Please be respectful of historic artifacts and structures. We hope you enjoy your travel and encourage you to celebrate Texas heritage with future generations.

Gateway to Heritage Travel

Explore travel themes such as Historic Trails and Highways, Texas Frontier, Military History, or Cultural Heritage to plan your next adventure.

See the Sites

From western forts to Victorian mansions, the THC's state historic sites illustrate the breadth of Texas history. Come explore the real stories at the real places.

Plan your next trip at www.texasimetravel.com and www.texashistoricsites.com



TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
real places telling real stories

www.thc.state.tx.us



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Federal Highway Administration

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COVER: Background: Old Bankhead Highway near Redwater, Bowie County.
Top: Fort Worth Landmark Lodge in Fort Worth (Tarrant County)
Bottom: Old U.S. 67 alignment east of Rockwall circa 1940, Rockwall County (TxDOT Photo Library).
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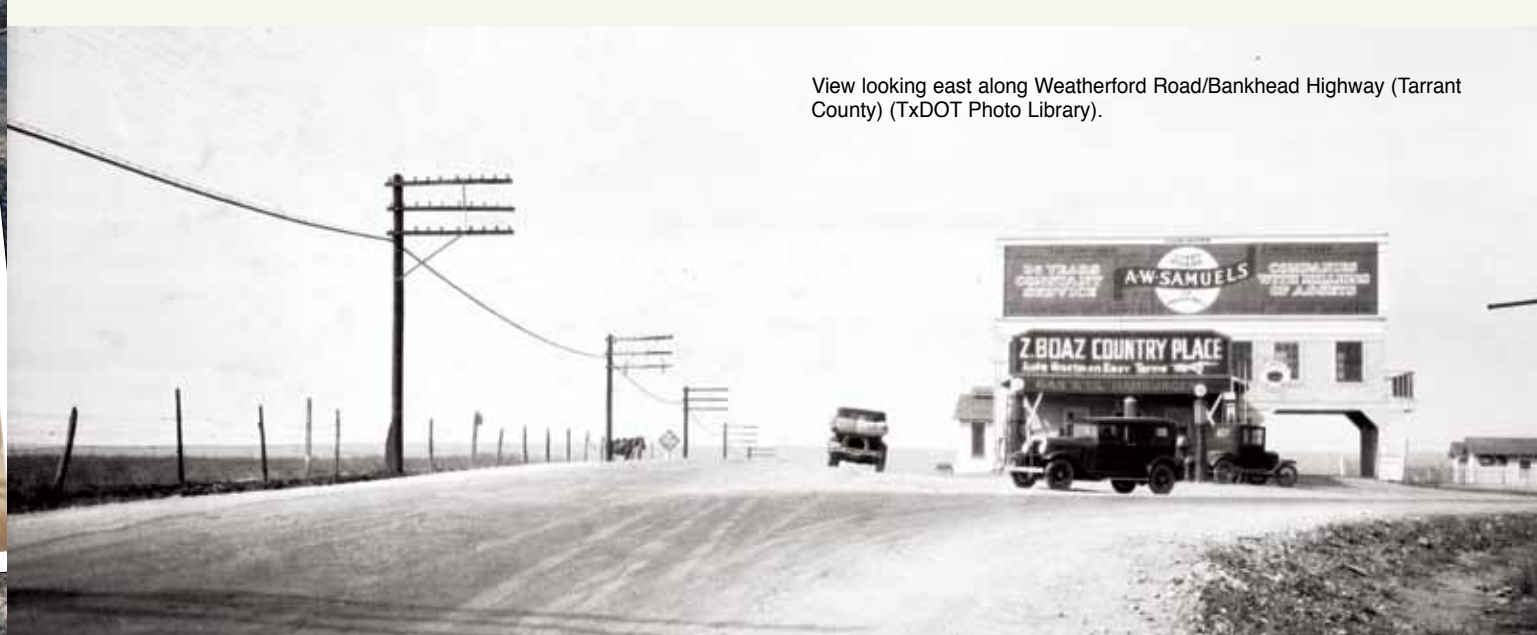
Left: Placing and pouring concrete on the Bankhead Highway; Texas Federal Aid Project No. 45 (Tarrant County).
Middle left: J. P. Punk McNatt Motor Co. Olds-Cadillac in Greenville (Hunt County).

Middle right: Bankhead Highway through Mount Pleasant (Titus County) circa 1940 (TxDOT Photo Library).
Right: Sinclair gas station in Albany (Shackelford County).

For many Texans, driving along a Texas interstate highway can be a thoroughly modern experience—with gridlocked traffic, ongoing construction, and views of large-scale development along the roadside. However, historic maps show the routes traversed by today's modern interstate highways closely resemble the routes of

some of the earliest paved highways in the United States, constructed in 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.

View looking east along Weatherford Road/Bankhead Highway (Tarrant County) (TxDOT Photo Library).





HISTORIC TEXAS HIGHWAYS

The highway system affected development in Texas—how agriculture and industry responded, the types of buildings constructed along the roadside, and the patterns of highway use for shipping, commerce, and tourism. These historic routes and future highways linked Texas regions with each other and with neighboring states and Mexico. Many 19th century roads, stage and mail routes, and railroads followed portions of these early roads and trails, and sections of some evolved into segments of future highways. Until Anglo-American settlement began in Texas in the late 18th century, most roads and trails were pedestrian, equestrian, and pack-animal routes. Wagons traveling on narrow dirt paths created ruts, but also led to the widening of many routes. Railroads were frequently built parallel to wagon roads, and future highways continued this trend, often incorporating sections of earlier routes.

BANKHEAD HIGHWAY

The Bankhead Highway was one of the nation’s earliest transcontinental highways. Its beginnings can be traced to 1916 when the Bankhead Highway Association was organized to promote the highway’s development. The roadway extended from Washington, D.C. to San Diego, California, by way of Alabama, home of U.S. Senator John H. Bankhead and a major supporter of the highway. Its path crossed approximately 850 miles of Texas, passing through Texarkana, Mount Vernon, Dallas, Fort Worth, Weatherford, Abilene, Midland, Van Horn, and El Paso, among other communities, and roughly followed what became U.S. 67 and U.S. 80. The Bankhead was the first all-weather transcontinental highway in the United States, and was designated State Highway 1 in 1917 by the Texas Highway Department. The highway provided an engineered roadway for local and regional traffic, as well as for military use. The highway also brought a new industry—highway tourism—to Texas and entered popular culture through stories and music. The Bankhead Highway includes segments of, or sections near, roads and trails forged during Spanish Colonial, Republic of Texas, and statehood eras.

In addition to the physical historic highway itself, associated road-related historic resources along the

roadway are auto repair garages, gas stations, diners and cafes, tourist camps and courts, motels and hotels, road markers, traffic and commercial signs, bridges, and culverts.

Highways, such as the Bankhead from the auto trails period of the 1910s and 1920s, laid the foundation for the state and federal highway systems that survive. Highways were important routes transporting people and goods, supporting the national system, and aiding the tourism industry. The trend for naming highways in Texas has been a cyclical one. Before 1917, road names were often associated with colonial names or with the geographic or locational routes that they followed. Auto organizations and named highway organizations used nostalgia and memory to promote these roads and to secure funding for their construction, expansion, and eventual absorption into the Texas highway

system as major routes. The Bankhead Highway was also known as the “Broadway of America.”

To explore Texas’ Bankhead Highway and to plot heritage tourism routes, go to www.thc.state.tx.us to download the Texas Historical Commission’s (THC) Google Earth-based Bankhead Highway map that shows the various alignments of the Bankhead Highway as well

as road-related National Register of Historic Places properties, Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks, State Antiquities Landmarks, historic-age resources, and more.

Left: Hi-Ho Ballroom on West Jefferson Street in Grand Prairie (Dallas County). Far left, background: South Commerce Street in Ranger (Eastland County).



Top: Unsubmerged Bankhead Highway in Lake Ray Hubbard (Rockwall County). Bottom: U.S. 67 in Texarkana (Bowie County) circa 1940 (TxDOT Photo Library).

