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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Ca.	Circa (or ca.)
CCC	Civilian Conservation Corps
FAP	Federal Aid Project
GC&SF	Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railway
GOCO	Government-owned contractor-operated
HHM	Hardy·Heck·Moore, Inc.
H&TC	Houston and Texas Central Railway
I&GN	International–Great Northern Railroad
IH	Interstate Highway
MKT	Missouri–Kansas–Texas Railroad
NPS	National Park Service
NYA	National Youth Administration
SH	State Highway
THC	Texas Historical Commission
TxDOT	Texas Department of Transportation
US	U.S. Highway
WPA	Works Progress Administration

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I. Statewide Historic Context

I.1. INTRODUCTION

The Meridian Highway is the foundation of one of the busiest and most significant transportation corridors in the nation, yet few people know and recognize this highway by its historic name. The beginning of the Meridian Highway dates to 1911 during the early years of the automobile era. Largely the brainchild of John C. Nicholson, a Kansas-based attorney and Good Roads advocate, the Meridian Highway was one of the very few north–south routes promoted by highway associations created at the dawn of the nation's highway system in the 1910s. Most other contemporaneous highways linked the east and west coasts and included such well-known routes as the Lincoln Highway, Pikes Peak Ocean-to-Ocean Highway, Bankhead Highway, and Old Spanish Trail. The Meridian Highway, in contrast, had an international character that extended from Canada, through the United States, and into Mexico by way of Texas (see *Figure 1* on the next page).

Nicholson, the driving force behind the establishment and promotion of the Meridian Highway, hailed from Newton, Kansas, which was at the crossroads of two of the most famous routes in that part of the country – the Chisholm Trail and the Santa Fe Trail. Both were early trade routes that extended across vast stretches of land within the nation's mid-section. Perhaps because of the city's strategic location at the intersection of these two storied trails, Nicholson and others in the area envisioned an automobile route that would extend north to Winnipeg, Manitoba—at the time, Canada's third largest city and a major rail and agricultural center—and south to the port city of Galveston, Texas, and to Mexico. He founded the Meridian Road Association in 1911 (later renamed the International Meridian Road Association) in Salinas, Kansas. Early supporters and maps referred to the route as the Meridian Road, but it eventually became known as the Meridian Highway. Such a change in title likely reflected an improved and higher-quality "highway" rather than "road," which may be perceived as little more than a wide trail. The highway association later promoted the route as the "Main Street of North America," which further reinforced the grand vision of its founders and its service area (see *Figure 2*, to follow).

While the Meridian Road originally extended through the city of Meridian, Texas, the highway is not named for that community in Bosque County. Rather, the namesake is derived from the Sixth Principal Meridian, which extends north–south through the Great Plains region. It was created in 1855 by the U.S. General Land Office (now the Bureau of Land Management) following the enactment of the Kansas-Nebraska

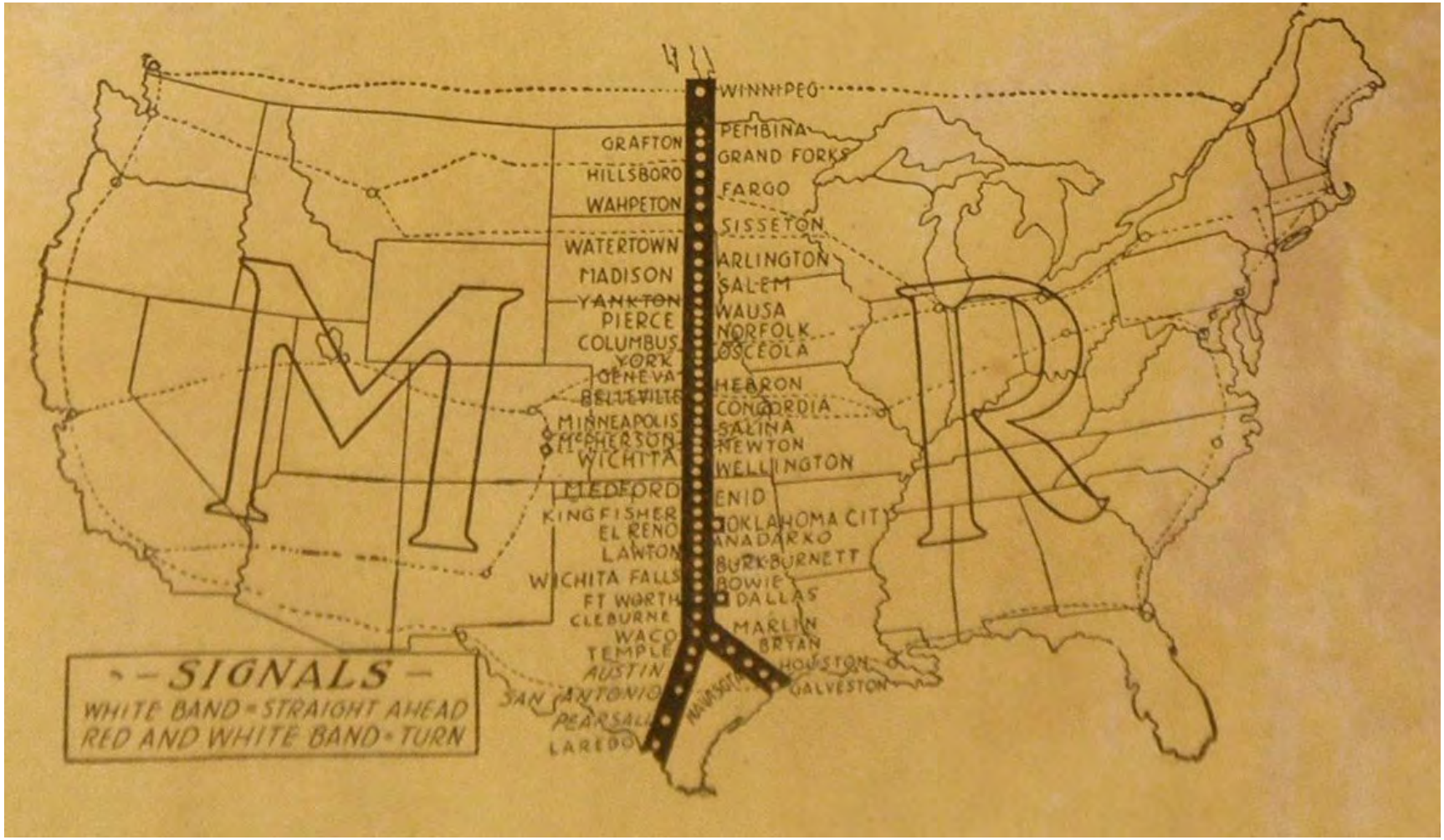


Figure 1. "The Meridian Road." This map shows the entire route of the highway as originally conceived. While it lacks specificity, the map clearly illustrates the basic premise of the road, which was designed to extend from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico and to Mexico. Source: Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

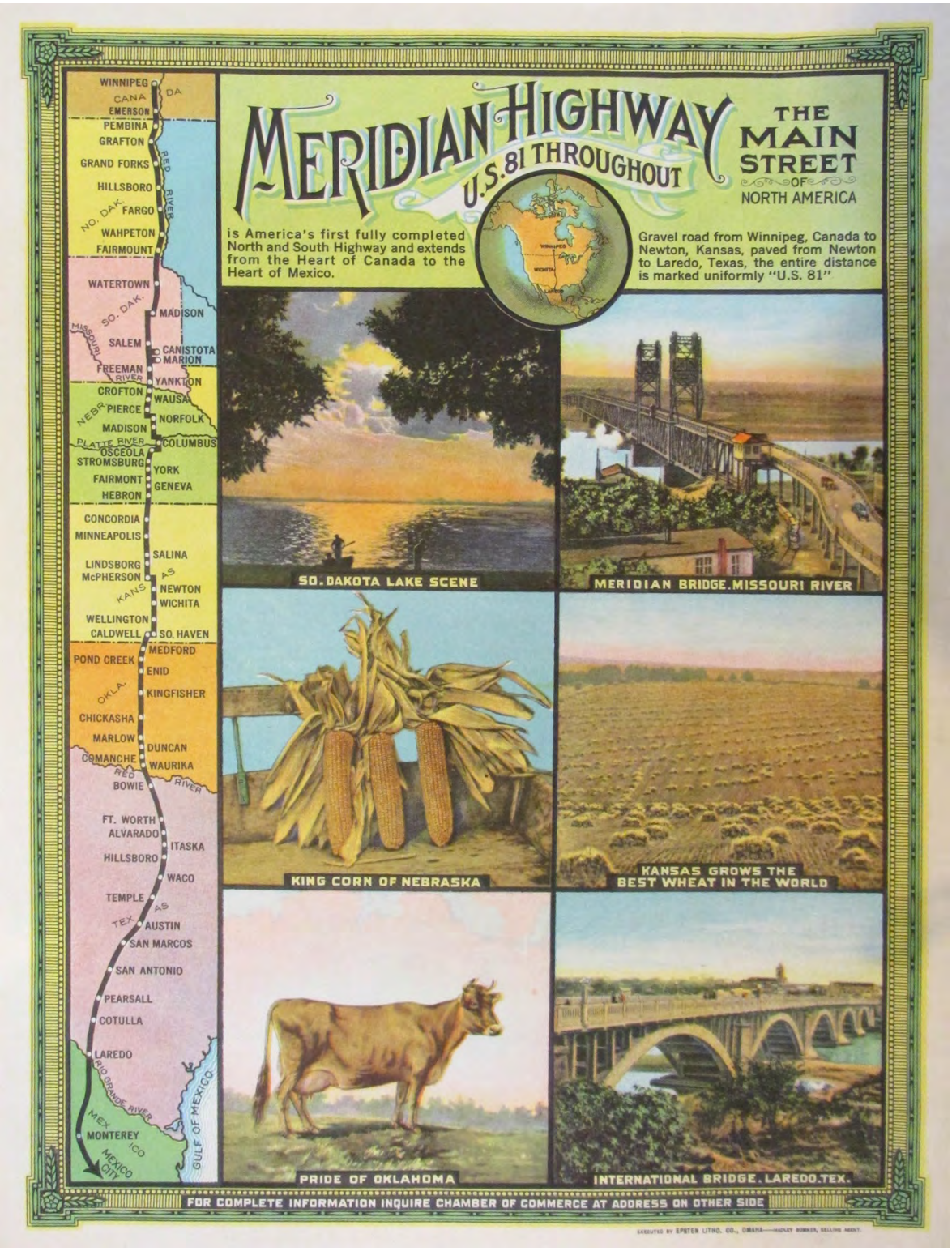


Figure 2. "Meridian Highway: The Main Street of North America." This flyer presents the route of US 81 (Meridian Highway) from Winnipeg, Canada, to Monterrey, Mexico, and includes a series of images along its international path. The map shows the route entering Texas near Bowie (Ringgold) and continuing southward through such cities as Fort Worth, Waco, Austin, San Antonio, and Laredo. The flyer also includes a number of scenic views, most of which illustrate the rich agricultural lands through which the highway extends. Source: Harvey County History Museum and Archives, Nicholson Collection, Box 1, File 3.

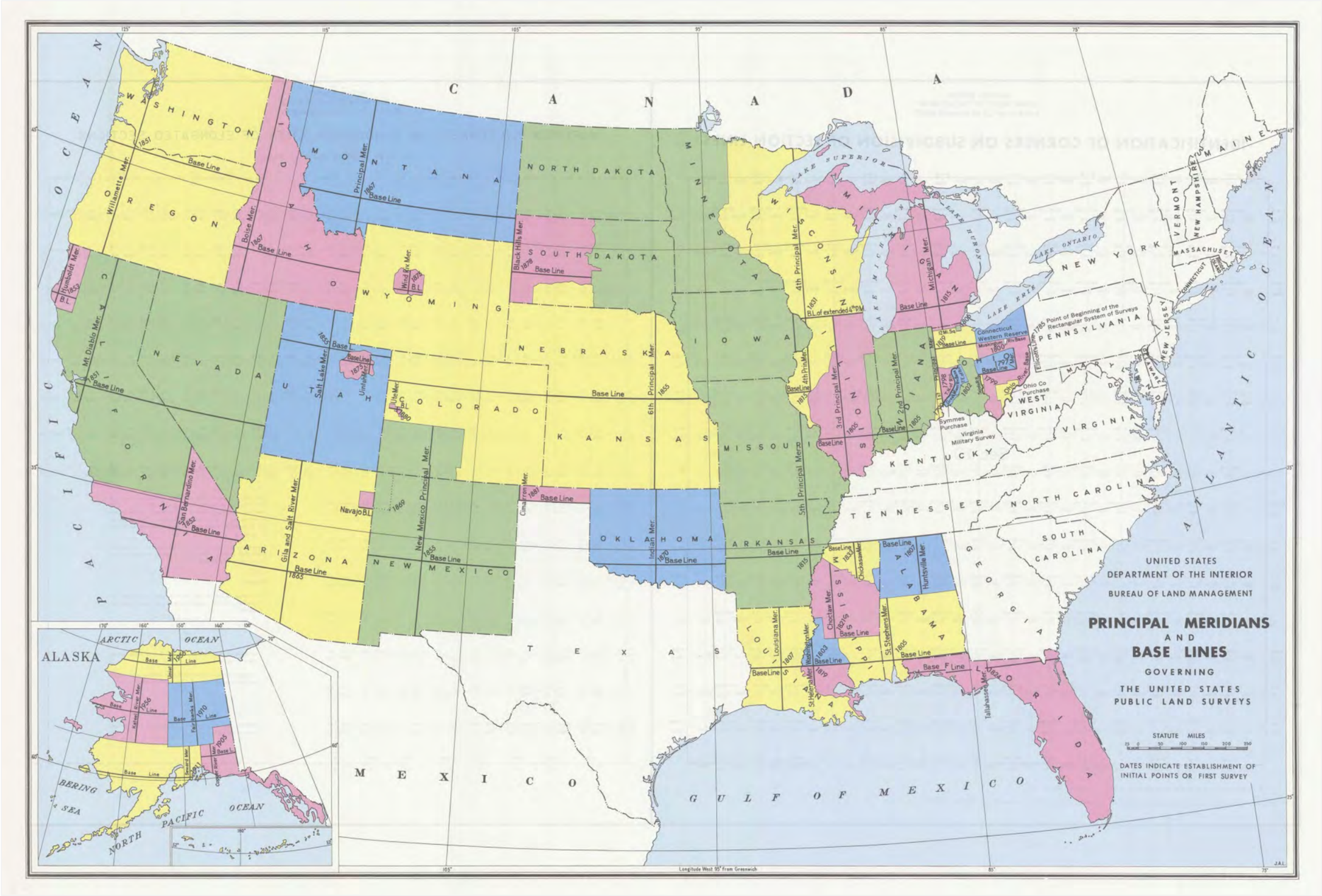
Act of 1854. This longitudinal line became a foundational reference for the federal land survey system and served as the basis for cadastral records for a significant amount of land associated with the Louisiana Purchase. It also was used to establish the boundaries of Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, and South Dakota (see *Figure 3* on the next page). While Texas developed its own land surveying system, much of the rest of the nation, especially west of the Mississippi is based on a grid (Section/Township/Range) system that relies on the Sixth Principal Meridian.

Although Nicholson headed the entire highway association, David E. Colp of San Antonio guided the efforts of the Meridian Highway in Texas. In 1916, he supervised the publication of *The Meridian Road in Texas* (see *Figure 4*, to follow), which he used to promote the route for Texans and other travelers and motorists. Unlike all of the other states serviced by the Meridian, Texas was the only one with two branches. The main, or trunk, line extended north–south through the middle of the state and generally followed the path of the Chisholm Trail, famously used to run Texas cattle to the railheads in Kansas in the heyday of the Cattle Drive era after the Civil War. The other branch, or lateral, extended from Waco on the Brazos River to Galveston – at the time, the state's largest port and exporter, as well as a popular tourist destination. This branch became known as the Gulf Division of the Meridian Highway.

The two branches of the Meridian Highway brought tourists to Texas, as did other named highways of the early automobile era, but few extended to Galveston. Nicholson sought to capitalize on this fact when he posed for an early promotional photo showing him and the pathfinder car in front of the Hotel Galvez overlooking the Gulf of Mexico (see *Figure 5*, to follow). Such an image showed how residents in the Plains states could travel by automobile to such a tourist mecca as Galveston.

On its path through Texas, the Meridian Highway followed several railroads, and historic maps reveal that the highway closely hugged these rail lines and rarely ventured far beyond the tracks. The Bankhead Highway and Old Spanish Trail, on the other hand, generally followed a single railroad. The Bankhead Highway extended along the Texas and Pacific Railway, while the Old Spanish Trail followed the Southern Pacific line. The Meridian Highway paralleled segments of the Fort Worth and Denver City Railway, Gulf–Colorado and Santa Fe Railway, International and Great Northern Railroad, and the Houston and Texas Central Railway. These railroads extended through rich agricultural lands, and as the yields of farmers and ranchers in these regions continued to increase during the early twentieth century, the evolving road network enabled them to get their goods to market more easily, taking advantage of the Meridian Highway and the many secondary roads extended to and from it. The Meridian Highway began largely as a dependency of the railroads; however, over time, that relationship changed dramatically and assumed a completely different character.

Figure 3. Principal Meridians and Base Lines Governing the United States Public Land Surveys, 1968. This map shows the meridians used to establish public land surveys in the country. Prominently noted in the middle of the map is the Sixth Principal Meridian, from which the Meridian Highway derived its name. The contiguous areas in yellow depict the boundaries of states established relative to the Sixth Principal Meridian. Source: Bureau of Land Management.



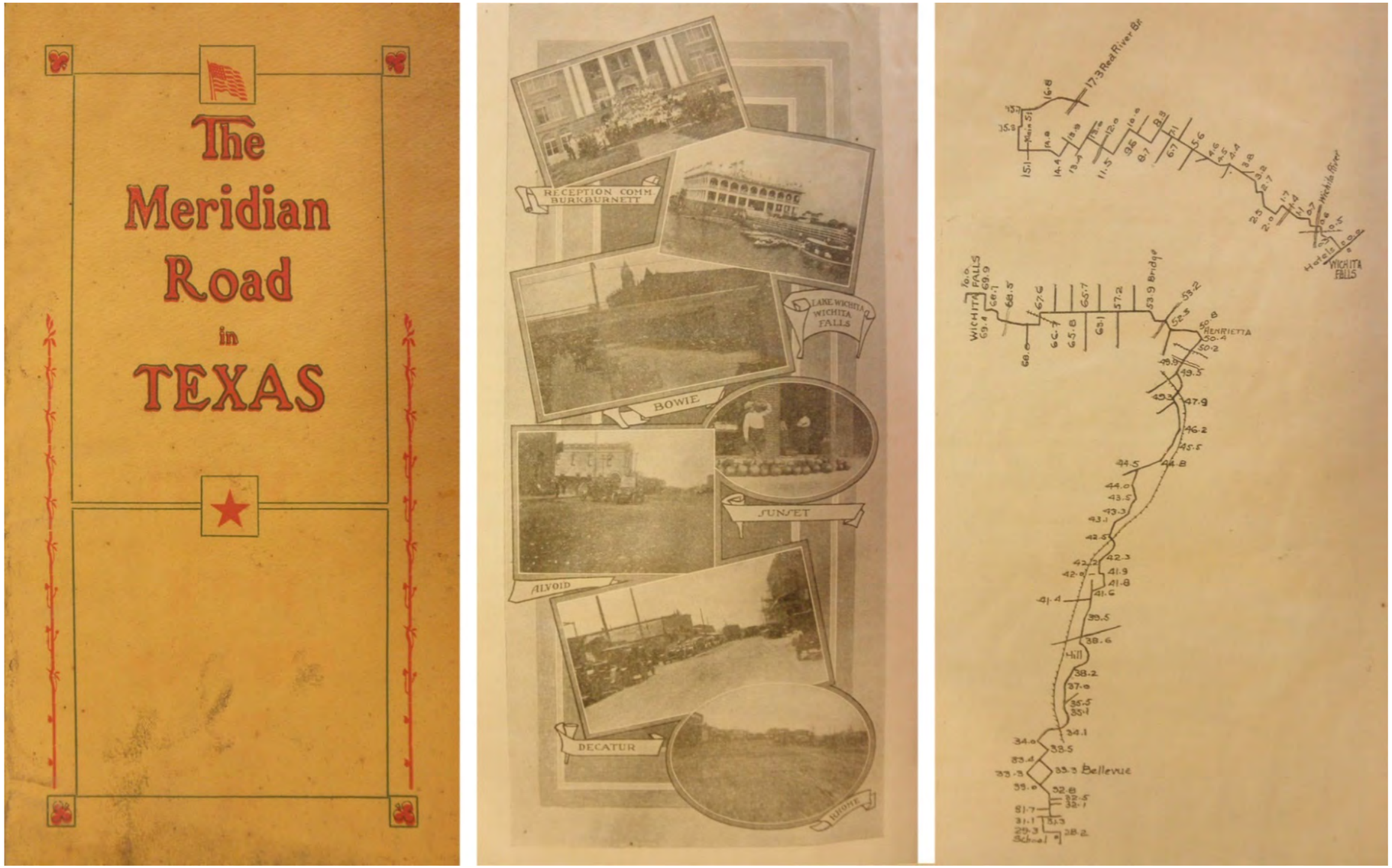


Figure 4. The Meridian Road in Texas, published in 1916. Colp oversaw the production of this travel guide, which was prepared with contributions by G. A. MacNaughton of San Marcos and Lake Robertson of San Antonio. The guide provided a crude map that depicted the route and the cities along its path and represents the oldest known detailed illustration of the highway in Texas. The guide included illustrations of important local landmarks, such as hotels, garages, and tourist destinations, as well as short promotional descriptions of the cities along the route. Typically under a subheading that made use of alliteration based on the city's name, these brief narratives showcased the qualities that distinguished each community and were intended to encourage motorists to stop, see, and explore. Source: The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

Figure 5. Meridian Road Tour. In 1912, John C. Nicholson led a pathfinding trip into Texas to promote the Meridian Road. He draped his car with pennants as a way to generate local interest in the highway. On December 14, 1912, he arrived in Galveston, crossing the newly completed concrete causeway and continuing on to the Hotel Galvez, an imposing landmark that overlooked the Gulf of Mexico atop the famous seawall. Source: Harvey County History Museum and Archives, Newton, Kansas.

This and other highways began to compete directly with railroads as a means of shipping and transporting goods, material, and people.

The significance of the Meridian Highway continued to grow following the creation of Texas Highway Department in 1917, and the subsequent designation of the route as State Highway (SH) 2. With the availability of federal funds to upgrade the most important roadways through the

Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1916, the Texas Highway Department embarked on a highway improvement program that relied on a more coordinated and professional-based approach. Prior to the Highway Department, local (county and municipal) governments bore sole responsibility for highway construction and maintenance. By 1916, the state played a significant role. In 1926, the creation of the federal highway numbering system created a new designation overlay for the nation's priority highways; this designation would remain consistent from state to state. Most of the Meridian Highway became U.S. Highway (US) 81; however, the designation of the Gulf Division (Waco–Galveston segment) as SH 6 severed the connection with the Meridian Highway, and this association has largely been lost and forgotten over time.

During the Great Depression, work-relief programs and federal efforts to stimulate the economy through public works projects brought many changes to the Meridian Highway. These efforts led to the widening of many roadways, alignment shifts, elimination of many dangerous at-grade railroad crossings, and replacement of obsolete and inadequate bridges along the route. However, continued popularity of the automobile led to further congestion, especially in more dense population centers such as Houston, San Antonio and Fort Worth. Highway studies of the late 1930s and early 1940s began to promote new "super-highways" to relieve traffic congestion. Moreover, these improved roadways also supported a growing need to link the many military reservations in Texas, which became more critical as the United States faced inevitable participation in World War II.

Although the war postponed many of the proposed improvements, the Texas Highway Department focused a significant portion of its attention in the postwar era to segments of the Meridian Highway for the implementation of the Interregional Highway program. The first freeway in Texas replaced a very busy and overly congested segment of the Meridian Highway between Houston and Galveston. The interregional highway system served as the foundation for the Interstate Highway System of the 1950s and 1960s. This massive highway-building campaign had a profound effect on the highway network as well as to historic segments of the Meridian and other named highways that began to serve a new constituency that continues today. This study will explore how the Meridian Highway has changed over time and how these changes are revealed in the historic built environment and the many kinds of roadside buildings and architecture that reflect this rich history. Today, much of the Meridian Highway has been absorbed into the Interstate Highway System and includes one of the nation's busiest and heavily used roadways: Interstate Highway (IH) 35. Its legacy endures and many extant resources, some of which date to the early years of the Meridian Highway, remain a direct and tangible link to the past and this important chapter in the history of highways in Texas.

I.2. THE MERIDIAN HIGHWAY 1680–1880

Trails, roads, and highways—where they were located and how they functioned—grew out of complex relationships between travelers and the natural setting, partners in commercial transactions, and governors and the governed. Transportation routes began as arteries for exploration, military conquest, settlement, and commerce during the Spanish Colonial period. They also carried "information vital to the survival of the province."[1] The routes continued to fill those functions during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when they supported nascent and growing urban centers, created and supported an exploding agricultural economy, and linked a growing network of military installations. They filled in the short haul spaces left by rail systems, and supported travelers in their explorations of new landscapes.

The historic route of what became the Meridian Highway exemplified all of these functions and extended their reach across national borders to help support a Pan-American ideal in the twentieth century. The two main branches of the highway as seen generally in present-day IH 35 and SH 6 were rooted in Spanish and Mexican transportation systems that linked Mexico and Texas and reflected the strategic importance of the Texas coast. During the colonial period, the centers of trade and the civilized world were Mexico City and Saltillo. Cattle ranching pushed northward with commerce, and by the 1690s, livestock accompanied expeditions that had started with Alonso de León in 1689 and continued with the expeditions of Domingo Terán de los Ríos, Fray Isidro Félix de Espinosa, and Martín de Alarcón. In 1721, the Marquéz de Aguayo explored as far north as the Brazos River on a well-used trail from San Antonio de Bexár.[2]

These Spanish Colonial routes had their roots in Mexico and extended from a crossing on the Rio Grande upstream from modern-day Laredo. Only one segment, called the *Camino Pita*, paralleled the future Meridian Highway. Located in present-day Bexar, Medina, and Frio counties, the *Camino Pita* lay several miles northwest of the Meridian Highway (see *Figure 6*). The trail was still visible in the late 1820s, when it was recorded by Stephen F. Austin.[3]

The vicinity of Laredo at the modern North American terminus of the Meridian Highway was settled as a *rancho* under the authority of colonizer José de Escandón. Its presence began to shift commerce between San Antonio and Saltillo from San Juan Bautista downstream towards Laredo and the Gulf of Mexico. Troops and teamsters moved regularly between San Antonio and Saltillo across the Rio Grande. Freight moved both ways, as did cattle that Spanish ranchers drove south to Saltillo and mail that passed between San Antonio and

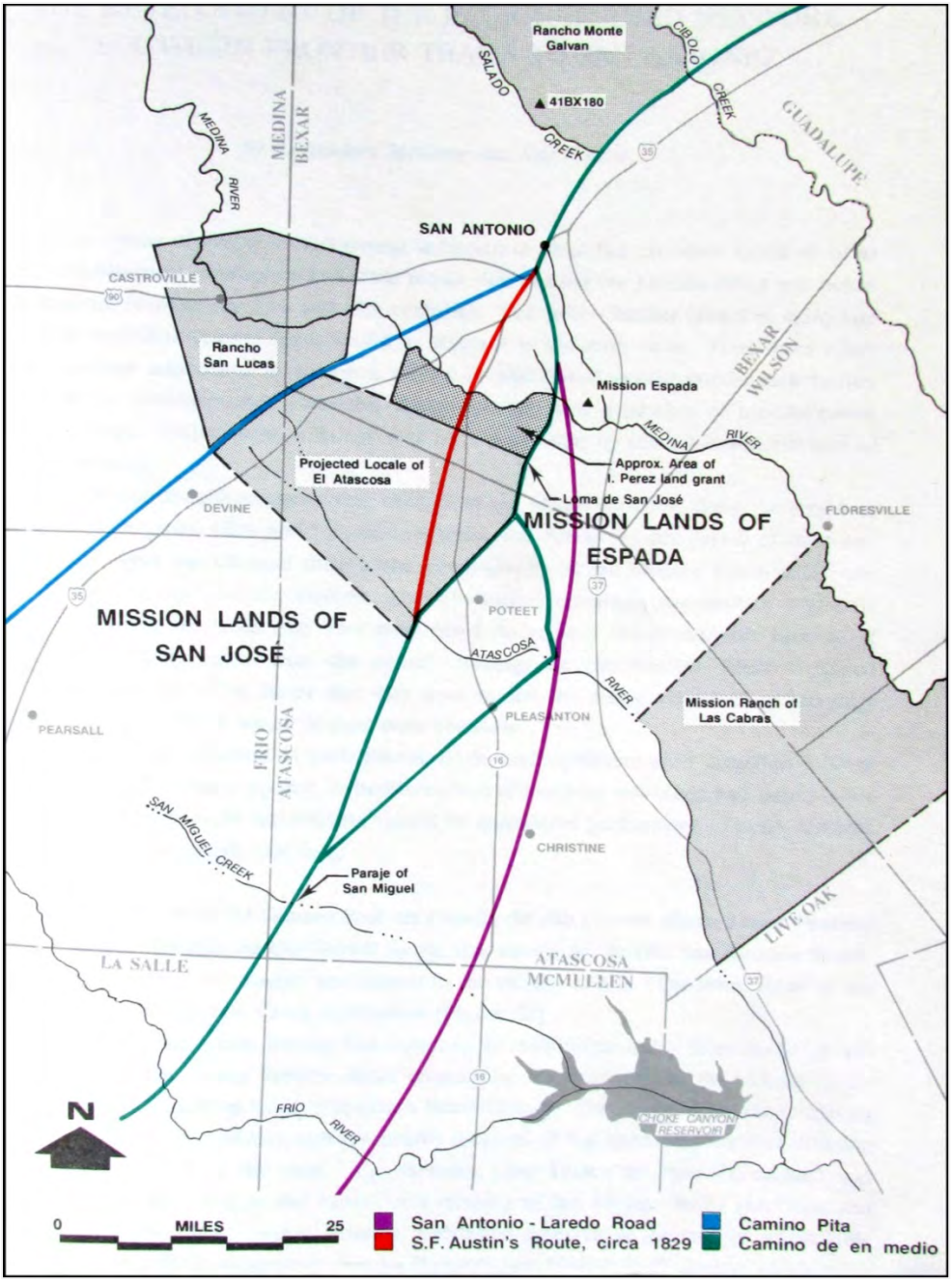


Figure 6. Map depicting roads leading into and out of San Antonio de Bexár. A segment of the Camino Pita, shown in blue, paralleled present-day IH 35 during the Spanish Colonial period. Source: A. Joachim McGraw, "Spanish Mission Ranchos Along the Camino Pita and Camino de en Medio (or Lower Presidio Road)," A Texas Legacy: The Old San Antonio Road and the Caminos Reales, A Tricentennial History, 1691–1991, edited by A. Joachim McGraw, John W. Clark, Jr., and Elizabeth A. Robbins (Austin: Texas State Department of Highways and Public Transportation, 1991), p. 151

northern Mexico, and San Antonio and points north.[4] By the early 1800s, the general route of the Meridian Highway connected the important commercial centers of San Antonio and Laredo with trade centers to the south. It connected a presidio in San Antonio with a late eighteenth-century military garrison in Laredo, and it established a strong cultural identification between Central Texas and Mexico that became the root of the Pan-Americanism associated with the Meridian Highway in the twentieth century. The route also extended northeast from San Antonio along the *Camino de los Tejas*. Leaving San Antonio by

various routes (modern-day Commerce Street, Main Avenue, Broadway Street, and Nacogdoches Road), the trail traversed the future locations of New Braunfels, Gruene, San Marcos, Kyle, Buda, and Austin before reaching Taylor.[5]

Trade and commerce between San Antonio to Laredo strengthened in the 1800s. At the same time, Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo filibusterers increasingly appreciated the strategic importance of Galveston Bay and Island. In 1815, former members of the Gutiérrez-Magee Expedition landed north of Galveston Island and named the site Bolivar Point for Simón Bolívar, "The Liberator," who first advanced the idea of Pan-Americanism. French privateer Luis Michel Aury erected crude fortifications on the island in 1816. He was followed by Spanish exile General Francisco Xavier Mina, whose fortification was taken over by General Charles Francois de Lallemand after his retreat from Champs d'Asile on the Trinity River. Severe storms subsequently damaged the island, but visitors remained impressed by the strategic military location and commercial potential of Galveston (see *Figure 7* below). In 1834, Juan Almonte remarked that it was the best situated port on the Texas coast. Texan forces during the Texas Revolution agreed, and Colonel James Morgan oversaw construction of fortifications on Galveston Island in 1836.[6]

Figure 7. Port of Galveston, 1845. Galveston was Texas's foremost port during the nineteenth century as well as a strategic military location. This image from the Illustrated London News of January 4, 1845, depicts the port and town shortly before annexation of Texas by the United States. Source: Thomas T. Smith, The U.S. Army and the Texas Frontier Economy, 1845-1900 (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), p. 103.

Repeated storms battered the island, but investors remained confident of its value as a port and commercial center, as did the government of the Republic of Texas. At the same time, the Republic sought to fortify its border to the west of the Balcones Escarpment by establishing ranger stations and forts along a trail that ran from Austin to the Red River; one temporary outpost, Fort Fisher, was established near the

vicinity of present-day Waco in 1837. Colonel William Cooke was charged with laying out a military road from Austin to the Red River in 1840–1841, much of it along a corridor that paralleled the future Meridian Highway.[7]

The Military Road effectively extended the existing and well-traveled road from Laredo to San Antonio and from San Antonio to the new capital city, Austin. Several years later, the activities of the Houston-based firm Torrey Brothers, whose primary business was trading with Native Americans, established a trading post several miles downriver from the future site of Waco (see *Figure 8* below). The post, operated by George Barnard and using the services of freighters such as William N. P. Marlin, was located on a trail from the Waco area to the main trading house in Houston.[8] Such a freighting road from the vicinity of Waco to Houston may have been the progenitor of the twentieth-century Gulf Division (SH 6) of the Meridian Highway. It also may have accounted for the 1848 initiative by Ebenezer Allen of Houston to obtain a charter for the Galveston and Red River Railway, a line that would run "from Houston to the Brazos River and the interior of Texas."[9] The trail facilitated a trade in goods and furs that evolved into an agricultural-based trade by the 1850s. Connections between Waco and Galveston that revolved around real estate were similarly strengthened when John Sydnor of Galveston bought a two-league land grant that was developed by Jacob de Cordova of Houston and Galveston and became the location of the City of Waco.[10]

Figure 8. The Indian and Trading Frontier, 1837–1845. During the period of the Republic, Central Texas was the location of numerous forts, trading houses, and ranger stations, including Torrey's Trading House near the future site of Waco. Source: William C. Pool, A Historical Atlas of Texas (Austin, Texas: The Encino Press, 1975), p. 77.

Annexation of Texas by the United States in 1845 and conclusion of the Mexican War in 1848 had far-reaching consequences for frontier and coastal defense, construction of infrastructure, and urban and agricultural development. Nowhere was that seen more clearly than in the two main corridors that would comprise the Meridian Highway. Texas retained its public lands, but the United States became responsible for frontier defense and protection of the seacoast. San Antonio, already a tourist destination because of the Battle of the Alamo, became the central military supply depot for the new state (see *Figure 9* below). Texas prospered as federal money poured in to establish and support forts and camps on the Meridian corridor from Fort McIntosh in Laredo to Fort Worth.

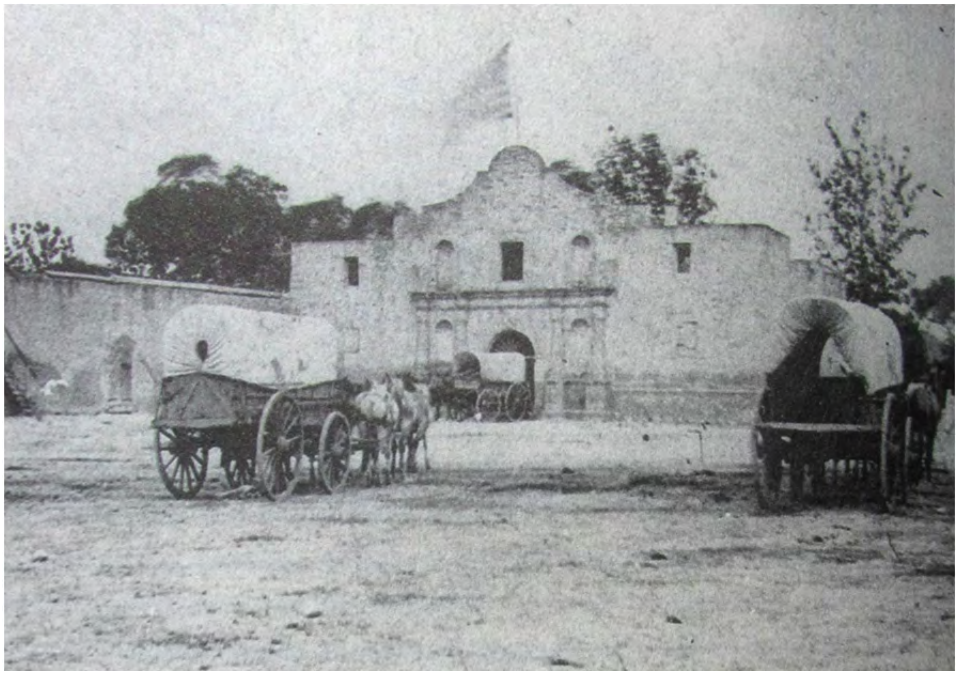


Figure 9. The Alamo as Quartermaster Depot for the Department of Texas, ca. 1868. Army wagons in Alamo Plaza moved in and out of San Antonio, supplying frontier forts in the Department, much as carretas moved back and forth between San Antonio de Bexár and Laredo on the Rio Grande during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Source: Thomas T. Smith, 1999, p. 106.

The federal military presence also emboldened permanent settlement and town building: notable communities that began and grew during this period included Waco, Hillsboro, Salado, Georgetown, Round Rock, and San Marcos. Austin, New Braunfels, San Antonio, and Laredo all prospered, thanks to immigration and military contracts that underwrote wagon and freight trade. Galveston remained dominant in population, and its trade territory expanded as the Brazos River cotton culture intensified. Marlin, Bryan, Navasota, and Hempstead became population centers, while the fertile Brazos River Valley attracted settlers who would form the basis of towns such as Calvert and Hearne concurrently with construction of rail lines. A military presence also provided a ready market for beef and helped protect livestock that went up the Shawnee Trail from Central Texas through Austin, Waco, and Dallas to markets in Missouri (see *Figure 10*).[11]

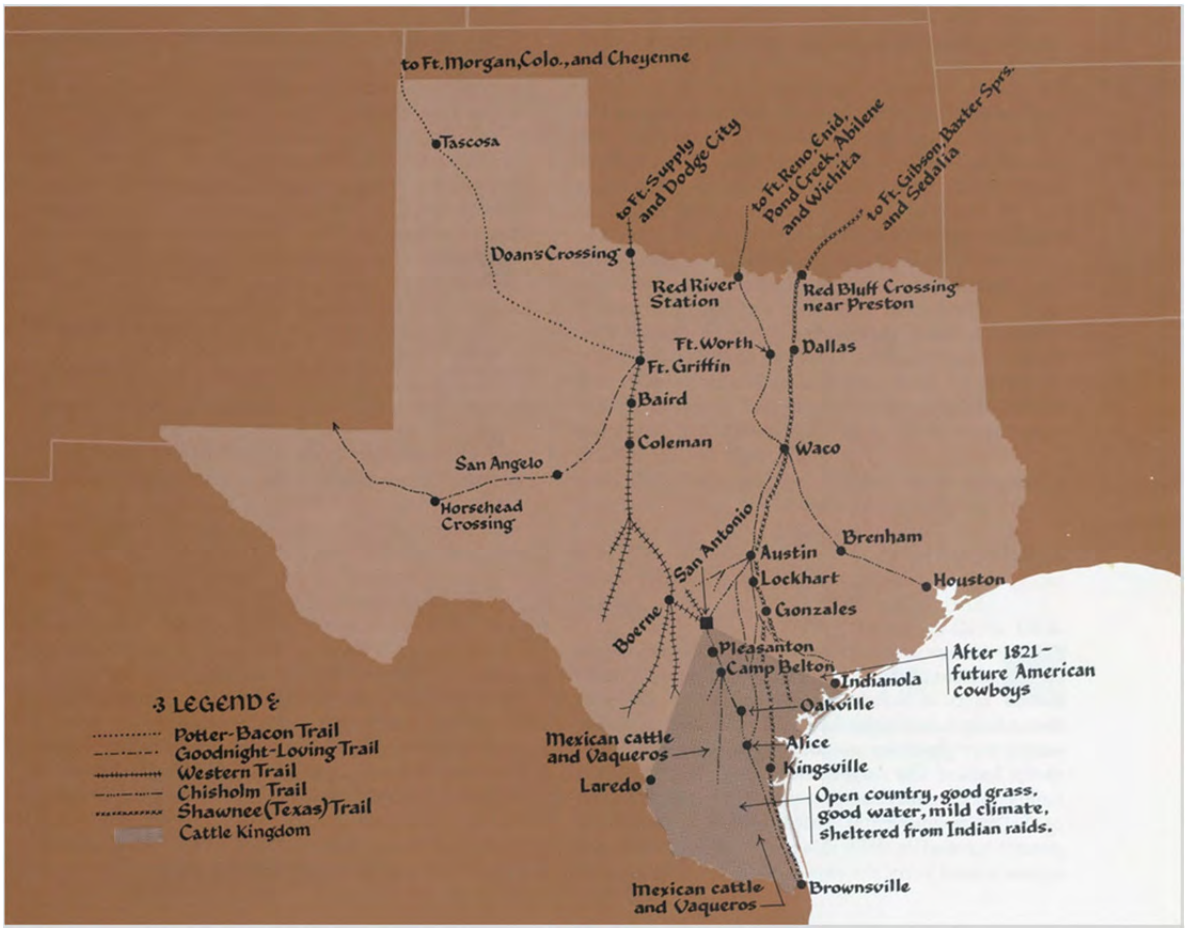


Figure 10. Cattle trails in the nineteenth century. The Shawnee Trail, progenitor of the Chisholm Trail that eventually passed near Newton, Kansas, on the Meridian Highway, ran from southeast Texas to Austin and then to Waco and Dallas before exiting the state near Preston. Source: William Pool, 1975, p. 121.

Railroad construction began by 1852, when the Buffalo Bayou, Brazos and Colorado Railway laid track between Galveston and Harrisburg; by 1860, five lines originated in the Houston area. But full-scale development of a rail system was delayed by the Civil War. The end of the war in 1865 saw the resurgence of railroad construction, cattle drives, and cotton cultivation, all of which strongly impacted the locations and development of the primary and secondary routes of the Meridian Highway. The postwar years also saw the birth of an idea for a transportation link that would connect Texas with Kansas, boosting the fortunes of the port and providing an outlet for Kansas's agricultural products.[12] The cattle industry was the first to revive with the reopening of the Shawnee Trail and its metamorphosis into the Chisholm Trail. Then, immigration boomed in Central, North-central, and Southeast Texas as even more agriculturalists were drawn to the fertile valley of the Brazos River from Waco to the coast and to the Blackland Prairie.

Growing populations and expansion of the cotton industry brought with them demands for rail transport, and by the early 1880s, four rail systems were firmly in place that traversed the future trade areas of the

Meridian Highway, knitted the region together, and provided access to market centers and a major Gulf Coast port. The Houston and Texas Central Railway (H&TC), growing out of the 1840s plan to capture the trade and assets of the Brazos River Valley for Houston and Galveston, traveled up the future route of SH 6 to Hempstead, Navasota, College Station, Bryan, Hearne, Calvert, and Marlin before turning north to Corsicana and Dallas. By acquisition of other lines, the H&TC also provided service to Austin and Waco. In 1873, it coordinated with the Missouri–Kansas–Texas Railroad (MKT) to carry excursionists from the state of Kansas to Galveston, where they viewed the port and enjoyed the city's hospitality.[13] The International–Great Northern Railway (I&GN) served Austin by 1876 and built rails to San Antonio and Laredo in 1881. The Gulf–Colorado and Santa Fe Railway (GC&SF) bypassed Houston and headed to Fort Worth by way of Hempstead, Belton, and Temple. Finally, the Fort Worth and Denver City Railway (FW&DC), whose promoters advocated a line from Colorado to the port of Galveston by way of Fort Worth, received a charter in 1873 and started construction towards Wichita Falls from Fort Worth in 1881.

Rail lines, each serving varied parts of the rural areas, converged in the state's largest urban centers and transported agricultural and other products both within the state and to external markets; a significant percentage of those products also left Texas by way of its primary port, Galveston. Each of those cities and the smaller towns that functioned as market centers and county seats became centers of commercial and legal activity. Thanks to railroads, those centers benefited despite poorly built and poorly maintained roads, which remained as unreliable in the 1870s as they had been during colonial times: muddy quagmires or deeply rutted trails.

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[1] Jesús F. de la Teja. "The *Camino Real*: Colonial Texas' Lifeline to the World," *A Texas Legacy: The Old San Antonio Road and the Caminos Reales, a Tricentennial History, 1691–1991*, edited by A. Joachim McGraw, John W. Clark, Jr., and Elizabeth A. Robbins (Austin: Texas State Department of Highways and Public Transportation, 1991), pp. 43, 48.

[2] Elizabeth A. Robbins. "The First Routes Into Texas; a Review of Early Diaries," *A Texas Legacy*, pp. 89, 104.

[3] A Joachim McGraw. "Early Roads Across the South Texas Landscape," *A Texas Legacy*, pp. 150-151.

[4] De la Teja, pp. 43-48.

[5] John W. Clark. "Route of the *Camino de los Tejas*," *A Texas Legacy*, p. 187.

[6] Martha Doty Freeman and Sandra L. Hannum. *A History of Fortifications at Fort San Jacinto, Galveston Island, Texas* (Austin, Texas: Prewitt and Associates, Inc., 1991), pp. 7-16.

[7] Gerald S. Pierce. "The Military Road Expedition of 1840–41," *Texas Military History*, Volume 6 (Summer 1967). According to Erlichman, at the same time Cooke was laying out a road from Austin to the Red River, Captain Joseph Wiehl developed a military road from Austin to a new post at San Marcos Springs. Howard J. Erlichman. *Camino del Norte: How a Series of Watering Holes, Fords, and Dirt Trails Evolved into Interstate 35 in* Texas (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2006), p. 75.

[8] Henry C. Armbruster. *The Torreys of Texas* (Buda, Texas: Citizen Press, 1968).

[9] George C. Werner, "Houston and Texas Central Railway," *The New Handbook of Texas*, Volume 3 (Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, 1996), p. 742. The Galveston and Red River Railway was renamed the Houston and Texas Central Railway Company in 1856.

[10] Dayton Kelley, editor, *The Handbook of Waco and McLennan County, Texas* (Waco: Texian Press, 1972), p. 84.

[11] Erlichman 2006, p. 108; Anonymous, "James Monroe Day," *The New Handbook of Texas*, Volume 2 (Austin: Texas.

[12] Caleb Forshey, former Confederate engineer in Galveston, promoted a Great Northern Railroad along the meridian at a commercial convention in Louisville, Kentucky in 1869. Earle B. Young, *Galveston and the Great West* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), pp. 20-21.

[13] Young, p. 53.

I.3. THE MERIDIAN HIGHWAY 1880–1910

In the early 1880s, the broad pattern of what would become the route of the Meridian Highway was visible in cattle trails, wagon roads, and early rail lines. The next three decades would see a collapse of the cattle market in the 1880s, a national banking panic in 1893, a devastating flood that inundated the Brazos River Valley in 1899, and a hurricane in 1900 that all but destroyed one of the state's largest cities and its most important port, Galveston.

Despite these natural and fiscal disasters, Texas experienced enormous growth during the same three decades. Work on an extensive railroad network meant that the state had the most railroad miles in the United States by 1900. That network linked Texas towns and cities and provided unprecedented access to and for agricultural communities. The same network linked the state to markets throughout the United States. Completion of the Mexican National Railway from Mexico to Nuevo Laredo on the Rio Grande in 1887 inspired late nineteenth-century advocates of Pan Americanism in the United States and Latin America to forge hemispheric connections with an emphasis on commerce. Conferences and expositions as early as 1885 also promoted the concept.[14]

Local economies boomed, and towns and cities undertook infrastructure construction, including bridges, paved streets, street cars, electrical lighting, and improved water systems. Because road building technology was in its infancy, little extra-urban road improvement occurred, but geologists and engineers had identified principles underlying good roads. Due to then-current Texas laws governing road construction, funding was insufficient. But legislators passed acts in the late 1880s and early 1890s that encouraged bridge and road building and maintenance. Their initiatives were supported after 1900 by the formation of auto clubs such as those in San Antonio (1903) and Dallas (1904). In addition, construction and enlargement of military camps and posts in Austin (Camp Mabry), Galveston (forts Crockett, San Jacinto, and Travis), and San Antonio (Fort Sam Houston) encouraged local, state, and federal planners and funders to think seriously about the road infrastructure necessary to service the installations.

Extension of existing rail lines and construction of new ones between 1880 and 1910 underlay the urban and rural growth that characterized Texas in the late nineteenth century (see *Figure 11*). The early 1880s saw the greatest amount of construction: the I&GN Railroad, which had operated largely in East Texas, extended its line to Austin at the end of 1876 and then moved aggressively in 1881 to lay rails to San Marcos, New Braunfels, San Antonio, and Devine; it completed construction to Laredo by way of Dilley, Cotulla, and Encinal by 1882, effectively

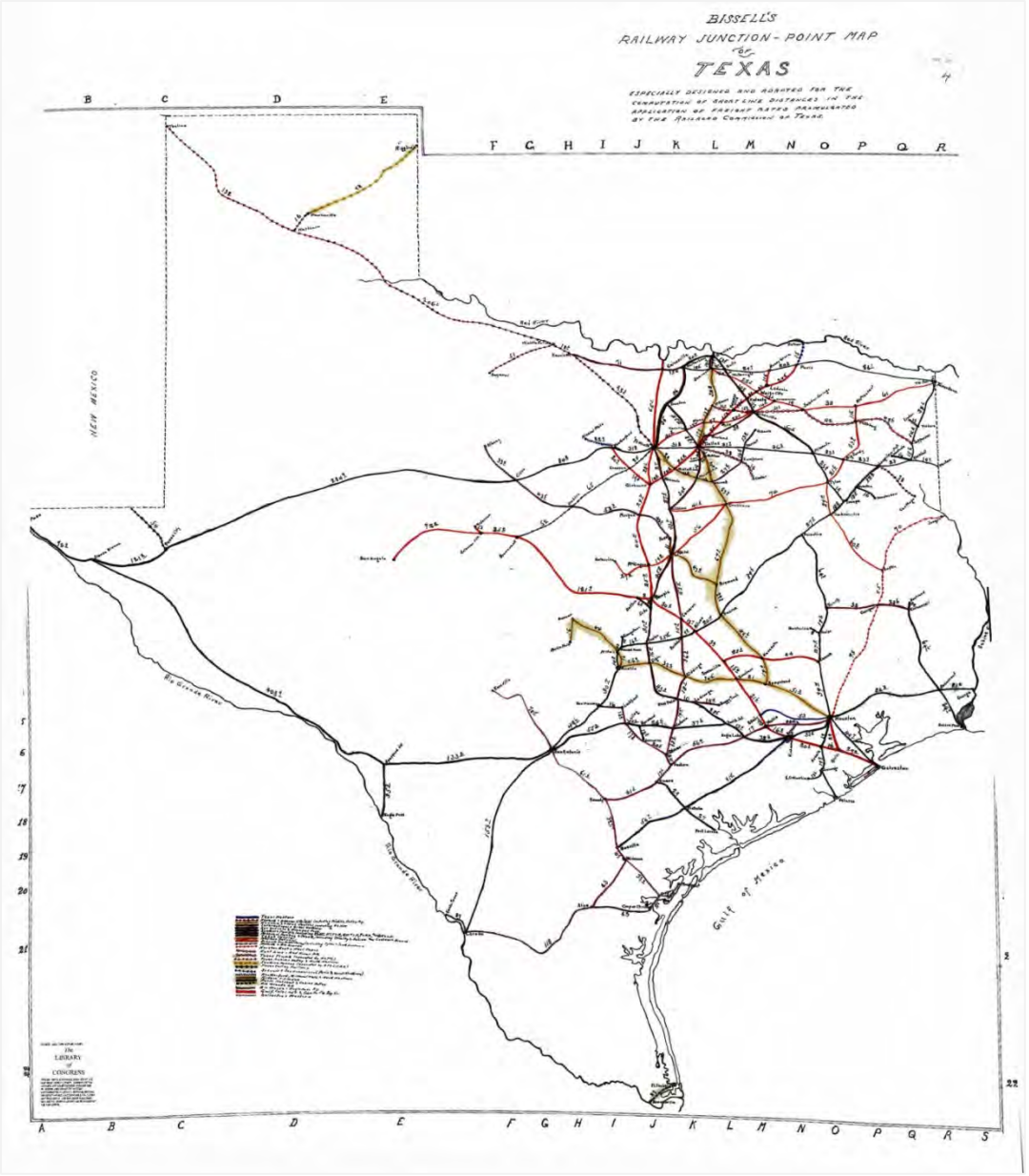

Figure 11. Bissell's Railway Junction-Point Map of Texas. Bissell's map depicts rail lines in Texas in 1891. After about 1910, roads such as the Fort Worth–El Paso (Bankhead Highway), Meridian Highway, North Texas Highway, and the southern route of the Old Spanish Trail generally followed a number of the lines. Source: copied from Texas Department of Transportation historic maps.

replacing much traffic along the older wagon roads from San Antonio to Laredo.[15] North of Austin, the I&GN serviced Round Rock and Georgetown; the I&GN/MKT Railroad also serviced a route that would become a branch of the Meridian from Hutto to Taylor and then north to Temple. The MKT then led north through Waco, Hillsboro, Waxahachie, and Dallas on the east and Burleson and Fort Worth on the west. Earliest rail access to Houston through towns along the Meridian Highway and SH 6 was by way of the H&TC Railway. That rail line came under the control of the Southern Pacific in 1883, although it continued operation by its own organization between Houston and Waco for almost 45 more years.

The GC&SF Railway, chartered to give Galveston the same access to interior markets that the H&TC enjoyed, reached Fort Worth by 1881 and then was acquired by the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe (AT&SF). Arrival of the AT&SF in Fort Worth rejuvenated plans by developers in Colorado to build a rail line from Denver that would "form a virtual air line [from Denver] to the Gulf of Mexico at Galveston" by way of the H&TC and MKT. Such a rail line also would provide access to Laredo by way of the MKT and, eventually, to Mexico City. That dream, which would provide Denver access to a major U.S. port and international trade, came to fruition with completion of the FW&DC Railway to Wichita Falls in 1882 and to the state line in 1888. The resulting rail route was mirrored after 1910 by the Gulf and Laredo branches of the Meridian Highway.

Rail service between Fort Worth and Denver began in April 1888[16] and kicked off a real estate boom in southeast Texas that was further encouraged when the U.S. Board of Engineers recommended projects that resulted in Galveston's development as a deep harbor. Within a decade, Congress had passed a bill that paid for deepening the city's harbor to 22 feet and constructing jetties. Completion of the project assured Galveston's role as a leading port and outlet for an area from the Mississippi River to the Rockies. Connections with the Midwest were particularly strong, and Galveston became an outlet for much of that region's grain output.[17] Import and export trade with Central and South America burgeoned as well, and the federal government, recognizing the increasingly strategic facilities of this important port, approved construction of forts Crockett, San Jacinto, and Travis at Galveston in the 1890s.[18] (See *Figures 12* and *13*.)

These rail lines, completed along the main routes and branches of the future Meridian Highway in the 1880s, promoted and influenced the growth of their trade areas and the urban centers through which they passed. Towns and cities all along the routes soon became market and distribution centers for agricultural products. Individual businessmen and companies built industrial plants such as corn, wheat, flour, cotton seed oil, and wool mills; compresses; gins; and meat packing houses. Hempstead was the location of a cottonseed oil mill with the second

Figure 12. Wharves at Galveston. A photograph taken in the early twentieth century shows the Galveston wharves. Agricultural products flowed to the port from throughout the Midwest and Texas and were shipped throughout the world. Source: John C. Nicholson Collection, Harvey County Historical Museum and Archives, Newton, Kansas.

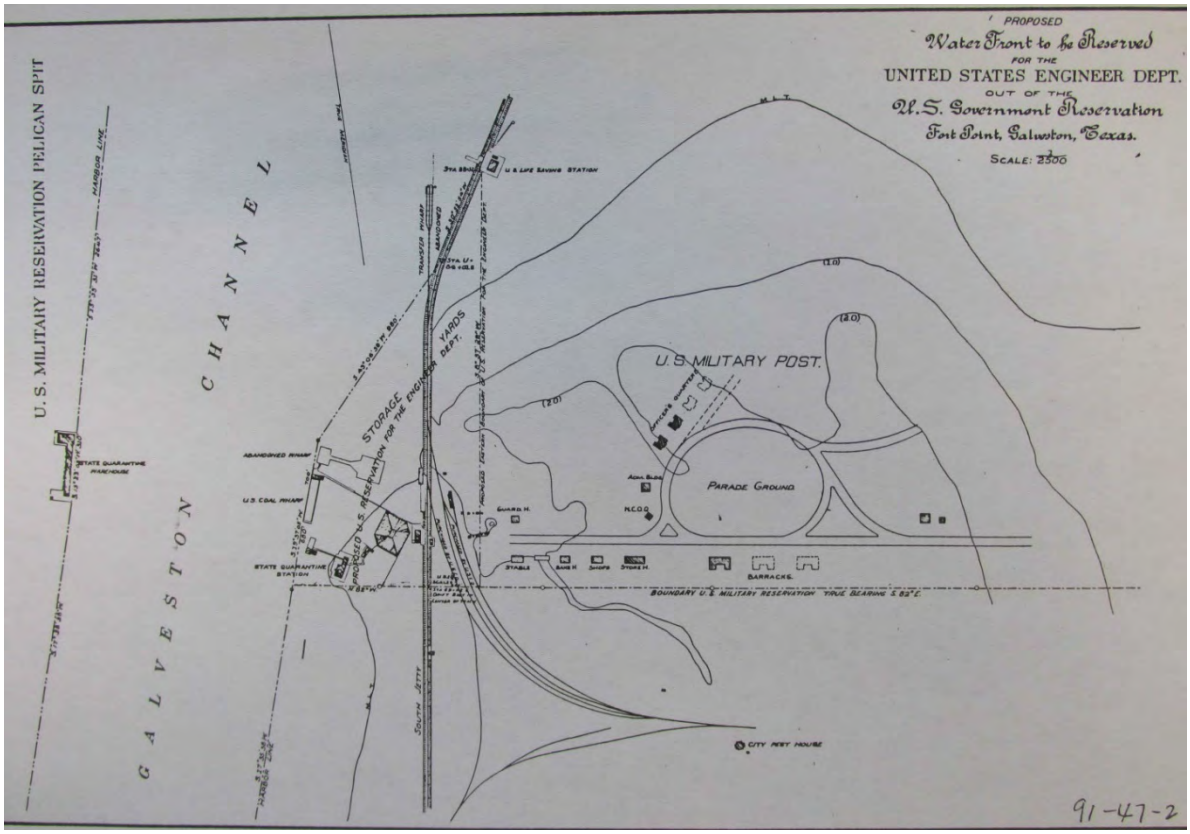

Figure 13. Plan of the U.S. government reservation on the east end of Galveston Island, 1898. The importance of Galveston's shipping facilities resulted in major federal expenditures on batteries, quarters, and barracks; one battery was estimated to be the most expensive in the United States. Immediately after they were completed, the fortifications were swept away in the 1900 Galveston storm. They were rebuilt soon after. Source: Martha Doty Freeman and Sandra L. Hannum, A History of Fortifications at Fort San Jacinto, Galveston Island, Texas (Austin, Texas: Prewitt & Associates, Inc., 1991).

highest production in the state. Waco, one of the most important cotton markets in the South, also included a wool mill that was among the largest (see *Figure 14* below). Granger bragged that its gin was among the largest in the United States, while Taylor to the south stated that it was the "largest inland cotton market in the world." New Braunfels could boast of being a milling center for both cotton and wool products. San Antonio remained firmly rooted in the livestock industry. The city's large number of stores, warehouses, and banks; a stockyard; and rail lines serving distant towns in Southwest Texas made the city a hub and distribution center for the border region and greater South. As the location of the headquarters and supply depot of the Department of Texas, Fort Sam Houston reinforced San Antonio's role as an essential economic hub.

Figure 14. Austin Avenue in Waco, 1908. This street extended through Waco's central business district. Waco-Austin-Ave-1908-.jpg Source: Texas Collection, Baylor University https://www.flickr.com/photos/texascollectionbaylor/12486355344/.

In contrast, the area between Houston and Galveston began a shift away from cotton and livestock by the mid-1890s, when investors in the two cities promoted the potential of the area for fruit and rice cultivation. Assisted by a transportation infrastructure that consisted of several railroads and, by 1911, the Galveston–Houston Interurban rail line, and complemented by advances in irrigation technology introduced from Louisiana, Midwestern farmers flooded the area in the early twentieth century. They were attracted by promises of riches that would accrue from their fig, orange, and other crops, allowing them to purchase "new model automobile[s]." Families settled on small farms near the railroad and interurban lines that provided transportation for themselves and their crops.[6]

A similar pattern, although without the amenity of an interurban line, developed in La Salle County in the 1890s, when promises of wealth from onion culture drew investors and farmers from across the United States. Twenty-three new towns were surveyed in the first decade of the twentieth century, although not all were permanently settled. Some new immigrants tilled their own soil. Others, operating on a commercial

basis, used Mexican laborers who moved between Mexico and Texas during the 1890s and early twentieth century before becoming a more permanent work force when the Mexican Revolution drove many families north.

The agricultural goods that flooded markets thanks to the rail network brought revenue to towns, cities, and counties that allowed them to provide infrastructure and other amenities to residents and visitors. Between 1880 and 1910, communities along the future route of the Meridian Highway built sewer systems and reservoirs, dams, or waterworks dependent on wells. These included Burleson, Navasota, Houston, Galveston, San Antonio, Pearsall, and Laredo. Some of these and other communities, such as Bryan, Taylor, New Braunfels, and Dilley, also provided electric lighting and telephone or telegraph services. Others offered streetcar service, built dams in order to provide electricity and water, or constructed new county courthouses. Several communities in proximity to one another built interurban lines (Fort Worth and Dallas, Temple and Hillsboro, Houston and Galveston, and Bryan and College Station), while others located on major rivers or bays (Waco, Austin, Laredo, and Galveston) constructed permanent bridges or causeways (see *Figure 15* below). On the Red River, early twentieth-century bridges often were built by private companies that charged tolls.

Figure 15. Galveston Causeway under Construction, 1910. A series of hurricanes beginning in 1900 destroyed or severely damaged the causeway, which was Galveston's link to the mainland. Source: http://digitalcollections.smu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/tex/id/138/rec/57.

Some cities undertook grading, graveling, or paving projects (Waco, Austin, San Antonio, Laredo, Houston, and Galveston). But there was little, if any, actual permanent road improvement outside of towns and cities with the exception of Object Lesson Roads built under the direction of the federal Office of Public Roads; one of those located on the future Meridian Highway route between Taylor and Circleville was built in 1908.[7] Instead, the new immigrants who came to the state between 1880 and 1910 were largely dependent on rail lines and a nascent interurban system. Coming largely from the Midwest, they followed routes that would eventually evolve into the Meridian Highway. Once in Texas, they viewed and often purchased small

properties in the new agricultural developments of southeast Texas between Houston and Galveston and in Southwest Texas between San Antonio and Laredo.

Much of the immigrant and other traffic was agriculturally based, and rural road configurations from the period document the relationships between rural property lines and road placements. But some amount of traffic responded to promotional materials published by railroads, land companies, auto clubs, and chambers of commerce; it could be described as recreational or tourist-based. Wichita Falls' Lake Wichita was built to supply drinking and irrigation water, but it was not long before a streetcar extension added a recreational element to the lake, which soon featured a hotel, pavilion, racetrack, boardwalk, and vacation cottages (see *Figure 16* below).[8] Water features also drew visitors to Waco with its natatoriums; Marlin with its hot mineral wells, bathhouses, and flowing fountain; and New Braunfels, where the I&GN promoted Landa Park, a private resort area.

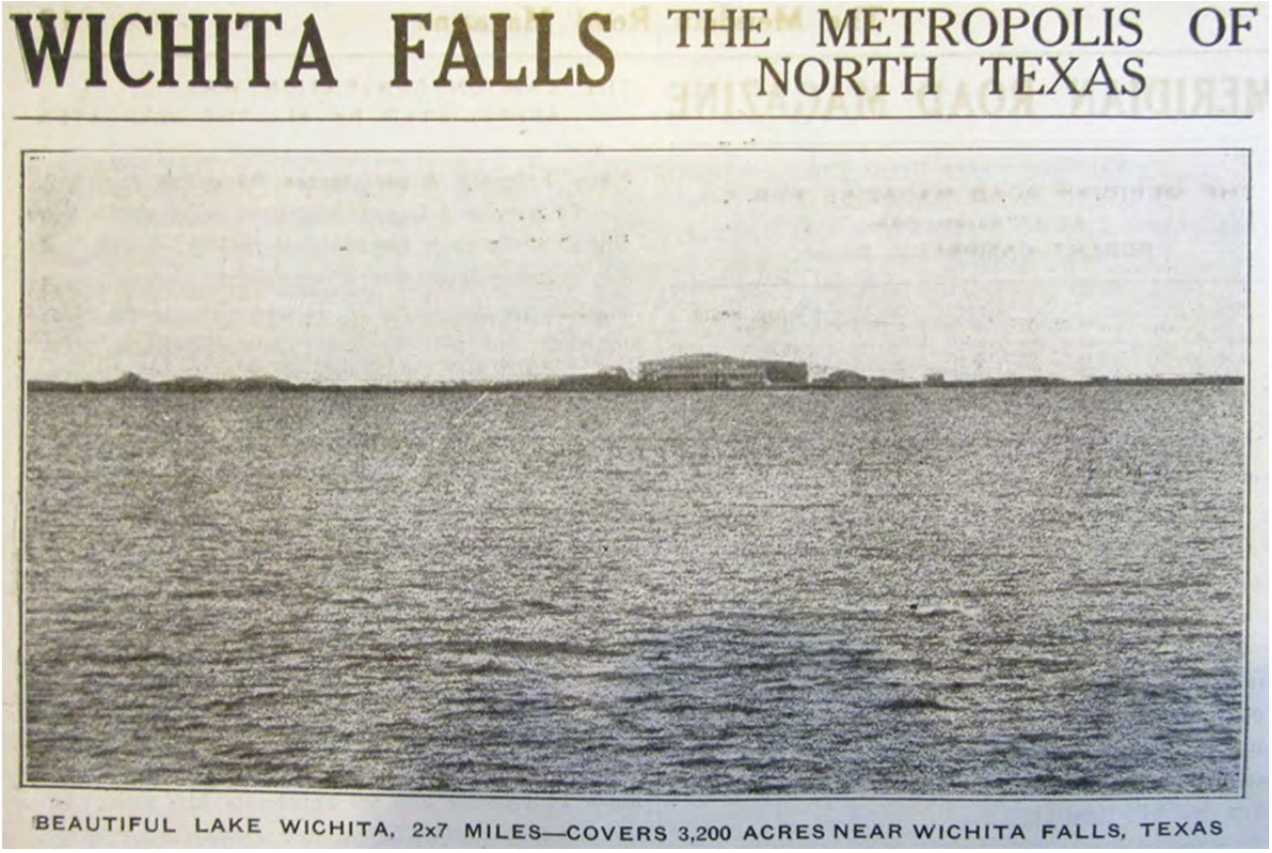

Figure 16. Beautiful Lake Wichita. An issue of the Meridian Road Magazine advertised "Beautiful Lake Wichita," a 2,200-acre regional amenity built in 1901 that rapidly became a tourist attraction. The advertisement's statement that the lake covered 3,200 acres may have been an example of local boosterism. Source: Meridian Road Monthly Magazine, Volume 1, No. 4 (December 1913), p. 14. John C. Nicholson Collection, Harvey County Historical Museum and Archives, Newton, Kansas.

Cities such as Austin and San Antonio lured visitors with their grand public buildings (the new state capitol and University of Texas campus),

scenic landmarks (Mount Bonnell), and historic sites (the San Antonio missions). Fairs and expositions were favorite tourist destinations as well, and some of them had an international flavor.[9] Fort Worth was the location of the Texas Spring Palace, the Fat Stock Show, and the Southwestern Exposition and Fat Stock Show that resulted in construction of the Northside Coliseum in 1908.[10] Waco was the location of the Cotton Palace, where the annual fall exposition drew visitors from throughout the South. Galveston was the proposed location of the Inter-American Exposition in 1897,[11] and in 1909, Colonel William L. Moody started the Cotton Carnival that included parades, exhibits, balls, sporting events, and auto racing on the beach.[12] Visitors could arrive by railroad, or they might choose to enter the city on the interurban, the pre-automobile system that most symbolized leisure at the turn of the century. "More than just a means of transportation, [the interurban] symbolized such leisure pleasures as weekend 'outings' to countryside picnic grounds and amusement parks. . . ."[13] Before automobiles were widely available, the interurban, together with railroads, opened a world that reached beyond urban centers to the natural and cultural landscapes that would prove to be so attractive to the twentieth-century tourist.

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[14] Robert Alexander González, *Designing Pan-America: U.S. Architectural Visions for the Western Hemisphere* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), pp. iv, 4.

[15] Construction in the early 1880s occurred under the control of Jay Gould and by lease to the MKT Railroad Company. George C. Werner, "International-Great Northern Railroad," *The New Handbook of Texas*, Volume 3 (Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, 1996), pp. 861-862.

[16] Erlichman, pp. 113, 116, 119-123, 126-128, 136; Richard C. Overton, *Gulf to Rockies: The Heritage of the Fort Worth and Denver-Colorado and Southern Railways, 1861-1898* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1953), pp. 38-40, 49, 51, 151, 215- 216, 228-229.

[17] Earle B. Young, *Galveston and the Great West* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), pp. 3, 174-175, 184-185.

[18] Freeman and Hannum, pp. 27-39.

[6] Margaret A. Howard, Martha Doty Freeman, and C. Britt Bousman, *Archeological Reconnaissance in the Third Reach of the Clear Creek Flood Control Project, Galveston & Harris Counties, Texas* (Austin, Texas: Prewitt and Associates, Inc., 1992), pp. 19, 21-26.

[7] J. H. Dodge, Final Report on Object Lesson Road, Taylor, Williamson County, TX, 1908, Box No. 86, General Correspondence, 1893-1916, Records of the Bureau of Public Roads, RG 30, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (from here forward referred to as NARA College Park).

[8] Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr., "Wichita Falls, Texas," *The New Handbook of Texas*, Volume 6 (Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, 1996), pp. 955-956.

[9] With the exception of Galveston, most international exhibits and conventions that focused on Pan-American relations occurred outside of Texas, although they had long-term implications for the state. As González expressed it, "[r]are was the international exposition held in the United States between 1876 and 1968 that did not include significant exhibits from Latin American nations." Buffalo, New York, for example, was the location of a Pan-American Exposition in 1901. González also pointed out that San Antonio "was a part of a broad network of Texas cities that maintained strong ties to Mexico" through the I&GN that ran from Chicago to St. Louis, San Antonio, and Laredo; a link with Monterrey and Mexico City existed in Nuevo Laredo by 1888. González, pp. vii, 181.

The next year, the First International Conference of American States was held in Washington, D.C. Conference participants sought to join together in a league that would "serve to guide commercial, social and cultural currents. . . down the whole length of the Continent, from the uttermost confines of Canada to the banks of the River Plate" by means of a railroad line. In the twentieth century, "development of automobiles and improvements in highway construction. . . caused the plan of building a highway to appear more feasible. . . ." Secretaria de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas, *The Pan American Highway*, Enero de 1937, Box 26-Folder 24, International, Thomas H. MacDonald Papers, Cushing Memorial Library, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas.

[10] Janet Schmelzer, "Fort Worth, Texas," *The New Handbook of Texas*, Volume 2 (Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, 1996), pp. 1122-1124

[11] González, p. xvii.

[12] David G. McComb, *Galveston, A History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp. 179-180.

[13] David Neal Keller, *Stone & Webster 1889-1989: A Century of Integrity and Service* (New York: Stone & Webster, Incorporated, 1989), p. 33.

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I.4. THE MERIDIAN HIGHWAY 1911–1916

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, rail lines had been completed along the two future routes of the Meridian Highway; cities, towns, and agricultural communities were booming; the first auto clubs had been organized to promote construction and improvement of public roads; and there were more than 14,000 automobiles in Texas. Good Roads proponents throughout the state urged counties to pass bonds that would improve the mostly earthen, sand-clay, shell, and gravel roads, and almost $9 million in bonds were approved by Texas voters. Completion of 15 Object Lesson Roads with the oversight of the federal Office of Public Roads showed what could be accomplished on a local level to improve roads.[27] But it was clear by 1910 that county-level vision and funding would never result in integrated, large-scale road or highway construction projects that could match the benefits that had accrued from the existing rail network.

What was needed was the leadership of visionary organizers who were committed to the cause of good roads. In the early history of the Meridian Highway, that individual was Good Roads booster John C. Nicholson of Newton, Harvey County, Kansas (see forthcoming *Figure 17*). Born on January 2, 1862, in Parke County, Indiana, Nicholson moved to Harvey County in 1883 and farmed land that belonged to his parents. He briefly returned to Indiana, where he taught at a school, and then moved permanently to Newton, a town located at the crossroads of two historic trails: the east–west-running Santa Fe Trail and the north–south-running Chisholm Trail. He studied law in Newton, was admitted to the bar, and eventually became a partner in a local law firm.[28]

Nicholson was a booster of Newton, a capitalist and investor in real estate, director of a local bank, partner in the light and power plant, and founding member of the Newton Commercial Club. He also was a fan of automobile trips: he purchased a four-cylinder Maxwell in 1909 and became increasingly convinced of the need for improved roads. Shortly after, he became a supporter of the idea of a cross-country, east–west-running road that would evolve into the New Santa Fe Trail. He cut his teeth on the project, learning the specifics of county-level organization and road promotion, funding, and construction. By April 1910, communities north of Newton had begun to promote the idea of a north–south-running road that would extend to Nebraska and, perhaps, further north. As described in the *Weekly Kansan-Republican* of April 7, 1910, such a road would connect Wichita, Kansas, with Nebraska, the Dakotas, and Winnipeg, Canada. Nicholson embraced the idea, stating in June 1910 that “it is confidently believed that there will be constructed a...highway extending from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada

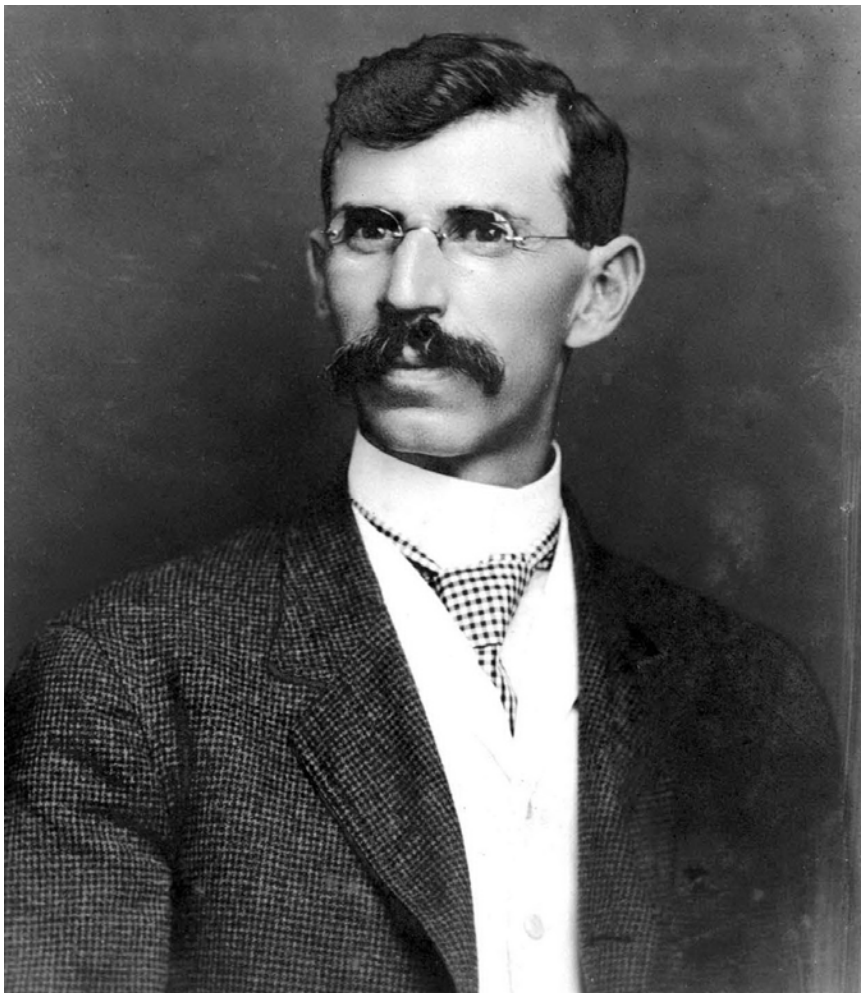


Figure 17. John C. Nicholson, a Good Roads booster for three decades and resident of Newton, Kansas, originated the idea of the Meridian Highway, the nation's first north–south, international highway. Source: L. Robert Puschendorf, "Two Trails of the Twentieth Century: John C. Nicholson and Newton, Kansas," Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains, Volume 32, No. 3 (Autumn 2009), p. 154.

passing through Fort Worth, Oklahoma City...Wichita, Newton...and across Nebraska to the North."[29]

Nicholson was not alone in his vision of an international highway. Representative Richmond P. Hobson of Alabama, perhaps inspired by the opening of the Pan-American Building in Washington, D.C., in 1910, proposed construction of a national highway "from Canada to Mexico along the twenty-third meridian west from Washington." He reiterated the call in 1911 for a Canada–Mexico highway that would pass west of San Antonio and cross the border at Eagle Pass.[30] Nicholson's vision, on the other hand, was more focused on the economic benefits that would accrue from access to the Gulf of Mexico. From the beginning, he identified the Gulf as a target of the route, Galveston being the logical terminus (see *Figure 18*, to follow). That city, having recovered from the effects of the 1900 hurricane, had completed a new causeway that accommodated three railroads, the Galveston–Houston Electric Railway, and a county road (see *Figure 19*, to follow).[31] In 1911, Galveston was a city of about 40,000, the principal Texas port on the Gulf of Mexico, and second only to New York City in the value of its annual exports.[32]

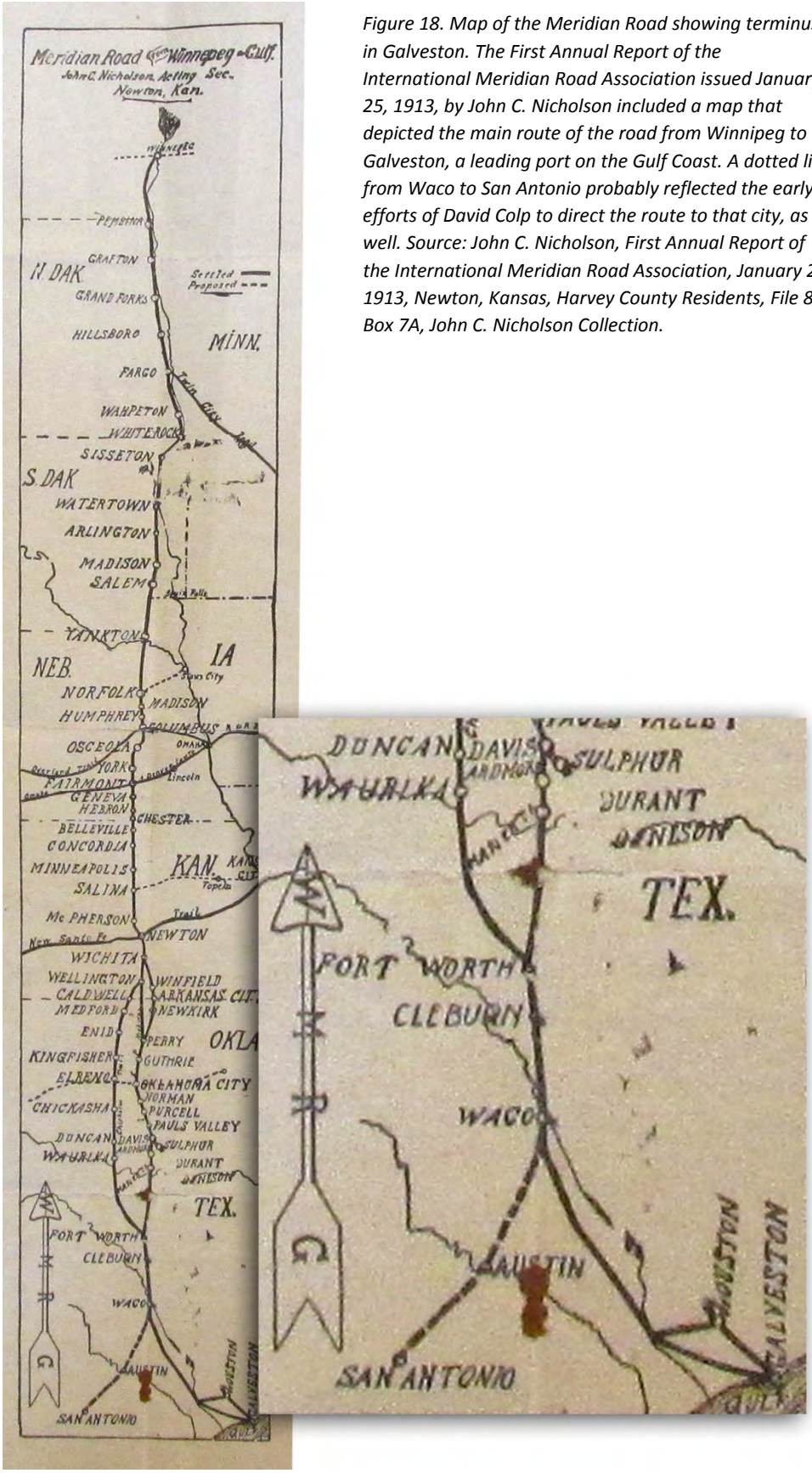


Figure 18. Map of the Meridian Road showing terminus in Galveston. The First Annual Report of the International Meridian Road Association issued January 25, 1913, by John C. Nicholson included a map that depicted the main route of the road from Winnipeg to Galveston, a leading port on the Gulf Coast. A dotted line from Waco to San Antonio probably reflected the early efforts of David Colp to direct the route to that city, as well. Source: John C. Nicholson, First Annual Report of the International Meridian Road Association, January 25, 1913, Newton, Kansas, Harvey County Residents, File 8, Box 7A, John C. Nicholson Collection.

Figure 19. Galveston Causeway, 1912. A concrete causeway that connected Galveston and the mainland by rail and automobile was completed in 1912. Source: Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Winnipeg, then the third largest city in Canada, was a railroad center that had prospered thanks to wheat cultivation in Canada and the northern plains, and to the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Nicholson called for a meeting to be held in Salina, Kansas, on June 1, 1911. Participation from local and county representatives was strong, and an organization was formed. Members agreed to call their project the Meridian Road, agreed that the route should follow the Sixth Principal Meridian, and projected a route that would stretch from Winnipeg to Galveston on the Gulf of Mexico. Each Kansas county through which the road passed would be organized as a division, "responsible for its routing, signposting, and improvements." Nicholson agreed to organize the state divisions. Six months later, in January 1912, the Kansas State Good Roads Association formed the International Meridian Road Association.[33]

John Nicholson would have found an enthusiastic reception in Texas cities such as San Antonio, where the San Antonio Automobile Club (*Figure 20*, to follow) had published a book in 1911 that logged routes from Fort Worth to Waco by way of Cuba, Itasca, Lovelace, Hillsboro, Abbott, and West; from Austin to San Antonio by way of Kyle, San Marcos, Gruene, New Braunfels, Solms, Selma, Fratt, and Fort Sam Houston; and San Antonio to Cotulla by way of Castroville, Hondo, Pearsall, and Dilley (*Figure 21*, to follow).[34] However, he chose, instead, to write the Texas Commercial Secretaries' and Business Men's Association, intending to get in touch with the officers and directors of the Red River to the Gulf Highway. Not having first-hand knowledge

Figure 20. (Right) San Antonio Auto Club Clubhouse, 1913. Source: Library of Congress.

No need for a log-book.

Our chauffeurs know the streets and roads. That's their business.

Carter-Mullaly Transfer Co.

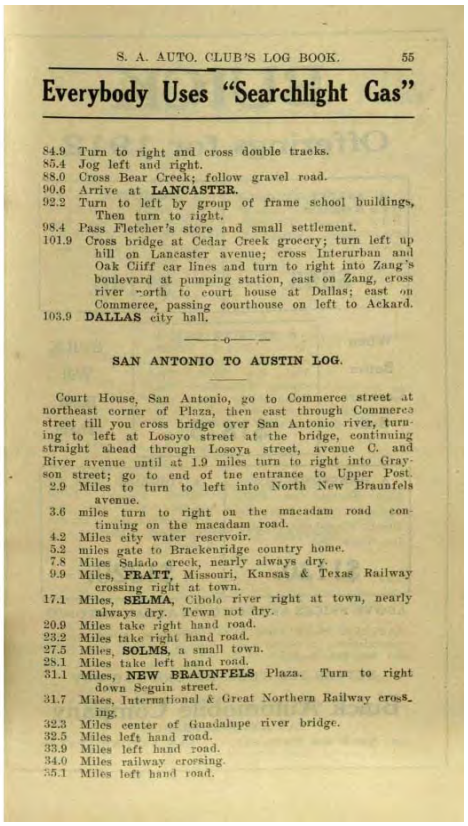
Main Office 801 E. Houston St. **Either Phone 1-2-3.**

Packard motor cars for hire.

Taxicabs in service.

Our big Packard 35 passenger cars "Seeing the Missions" and "Seeing San Antonio" leave Alamo Plaza daily at 10:30 A. M. and 2:30 P. M. We also operate a full line of baggage wagons, furniture moving vans and storage warehouses for household furniture. - - -

OFFICE OPEN DAY AND NIGHT



S. A. AUTO. CLUB'S LOG BOOK. 55

Everybody Uses "Searchlight Gas"

84.9 Turn to right and cross double tracks.
85.4 Jog left and right.
88.0 Cross Bear Creek; follow gravel road.
90.6 Arrive at **LANCASTER.**
92.2 Turn to left by group of frame school buildings. Then turn to right.
98.4 Pass Fletcher's store and small settlement.
101.9 Cross bridge at Cedar Creek grocery; turn left up hill on Lancaster avenue; cross Interurban and Oak Cliff car lines and turn to right into Zang's boulevard at pumping station, east on Zang, cross river north to court house at Dallas; east on Commerce, passing courthouse on left to Ackard.
103.9 **DALLAS** city hall.

SAN ANTONIO TO AUSTIN LOG.

Court House, San Antonio, go to Commerce street at northeast corner of Plaza, then east through Commerce street till you cross bridge over San Antonio river, turning to left at Losoyo street at the bridge, continuing straight ahead through Losoya street, avenue C. and River avenue until at 1.9 miles turn to right into Grayson street; go to end of the entrance to Upper Post.
2.9 Miles to turn to left into North New Braunfels avenue.
3.6 miles turn to right on the macadam road continuing on the macadam road.
4.2 Miles city water reservoir.
5.2 miles gate to Brackenridge country home.
7.8 Miles Salado creek, nearly always dry.
9.9 Miles, **FRATT**, Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railway crossing right at town.
17.1 Miles, **SELMA,** Cibolo river right at town, nearly always dry. Town not dry.
20.9 Miles take right hand road.
23.2 Miles take right hand road.
27.5 Miles, **SOLMS**, a small town.
28.1 Miles take left hand road.
31.1 Miles, **NEW BRAUNFELS** Plaza. Turn to right down Seguin street.
31.7 Miles, International & Great Northern Railway crossing.
32.3 Miles center of Guadalupe river bridge.
32.5 Miles left hand road.
33.9 Miles left hand road.
34.0 Miles railway crossing.
35.1 Miles left hand road.

Figure 21. (Left) San Antonio Auto Club Log Book, 1911. The club's guide provided directions for travelers between major cities in Texas and between San Antonio and outlying towns. It also carried advertisements, such as the one for Carter-Mullaly Transfer Company at 801 East Houston that had 35-passenger Packards. The cars left Alamo Plaza daily at 10:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. for tours of the city and the missions. Source: Michaels & Maline, compiler, San Antonio Automobile Club's Log Book ([San Antonio, Texas]: Michaels and Malone, 1911), cover.

about road conditions in Texas, Nicholson wanted to explore the possibility of completing the Meridian from Nebraska through Oklahoma and then connecting with the Red River to Gulf Highway at the Red River.[35]

Supposedly, Nicholson and others made an attempt to log the Meridian Road in 1911, traveling south from Winnipeg. However, their automobile got as far as Oklahoma City and then "reached a dead end," unable to find a road further south that was "suitable for motor car travel."[36] Success did not occur until 1912, when the International Meridian Road Trip left Winnipeg on September 10 and traveled to Milburne, Oklahoma, before crossing the Red River and continuing to Denison, Dallas, Fort Worth, Weatherford, Jacksboro, and Wichita Falls. While in Dallas, Nicholson met with the president of Dallas's automobile club and visited the State Fair. He also promoted a route from Dallas to Waco, to Houston, south to Corpus Christi, and back through San Antonio and Austin. Another proposed route went through Wichita Falls, Jacksboro, Weatherford, Fort Worth, Cleburne, and Waco before terminating in Galveston.[37]

Nicholson reported that the Meridian Road in Texas was organized into the North Texas Division (Red River to Waco) and Gulf Division (Waco to Galveston) in November and December 1912. The same official publication noted a Waco–Austin–San Antonio Division and a San Antonio–Laredo Division, but stated that the delay in forming the Texas divisions had precluded road building there.[38] The State Good Roads Association (Texas) also moved ahead quickly to establish the official route for the Meridian Highway through Burkburnett, Wichita Falls, Jacksboro, and Fort Worth in November 1912.[39] In the meantime, Nicholson organized another tour. This time, he traveled to the Gulf, helping to log the road between Houston and Galveston in December. He then traveled with David Colp of the San Antonio Highway League (Colp also served as president of the San Antonio–Laredo Division of the Meridian) and other boosters in five automobiles to Laredo. The group went sightseeing in Laredo and Nuevo Laredo, experiencing the "novelty" of border life.[40] (See *A Car Dealership in South Texas, Part 1* on the next page.)

News about the Meridian Road and its possible location encouraged road boosters throughout the eastern half of the state to make a play for the route. The citizens of Freeport promoted a loop to go from San Antonio to Freeport and then to Galveston, or alternatively from Freeport to Houston, Rosenberg, Richmond, and Wharton.[41] David Colp continued to press for an extension of the road from San Antonio to Laredo and wrote about plans for a San Antonio to Corpus Christi link that passed through Floresville, Karnes City, Beeville, and Sinton. He also proposed another extension of the Meridian from San Antonio to Galveston.[42] In 1913, he implied that the road might shift westward to Gatesville, Lampasas, Burnet, and Marble Falls because of the "inactivity of the Waco citizens and the residents living between there and Bryan."[43] In a serious overreach, he formed the San Antonio–El Paso Division of the Meridian Highway Association and made himself president.[44] Shortly after, his cohort and secretary of the Meridian

A Car Dealership in South Texas, Part 1

Figure 22. This undated photograph shows Charlie Neal with an early model Ford. In 1912, he established a garage in Cotulla, which was strategically located between San Antonio and Laredo, just as the Meridian Highway was being developed. Neal's operation proved to be successful and expanded his business operations as a Ford dealership. He later built a garage and showroom at the corner of Front Street and Broadway (now Tilden) Street in downtown Cotulla. Source: Images of America: La Salle County, Arcadia Publishing Company, Charleston, South Carolina, 2010.

Accompanied by David Colp, John Nicholson drove from San Antonio to Laredo in December 1912, even though that route did not appear on a January 1913 map of the Meridian Highway. Nicholson was two years behind Charles E. "Charlie" Neal, a South Texas cowpuncher who bought a second-hand Rambler in 1910 and made what he claimed was the first auto trip from Cotulla to Laredo so he could enter the Washington's Birthday celebration parade. David Colp accompanied Neal on his return trip to Cotulla in 1912 and noticed an unusual number of dead snakes. Colp asked the reason why, and Charlie joked that "the snakes had tried to follow the tracks of the Rambler the day before and the trail was so crooked, that they broke their backs in the effort."

By 1912, Cotulla had two automobiles. Charlie Neal and the owner of the second car decided that the town needed a garage. Neal rented an iron-roofed building with barbed wire walls and employed a Mexican mechanic who knew how to fix windmills.

"Business was pretty good because both cars were in the shop most of the time." In 1914, Neal bought the property he was in, despite bankers who wouldn't help him with financing. He became a subagent, required by his location (La Salle County) and the Ford Company to contract for 24 cars a year. The number seemed impossible: "[People] were afraid of the infernal things. He couldn't get the natives to take a little ride in them, much less buy." Furthermore, the first cars had 56-inch treads, whereas the previous cars had 60-inch treads, the width of the wagon roads. His few prospective customers were afraid of the "'narrow gauge' cars." Charlie Neal finally sold one Ford and had to go to the Sames-Moore Company in Laredo to pick it up. He made a side deal with a salesman for the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company and managed to sell all 24 vehicles. After that success, the district manager called Neal in and gave him a 54-car contract. "That required more building improvement and the first glass windows of any building in Cotulla were put in, and the dirt floor gave way to a cement floor." A gulf hurricane almost "wiped [him] out" (probably the devastating storm of 1915). But Charlie Neal rebuilt.[45]

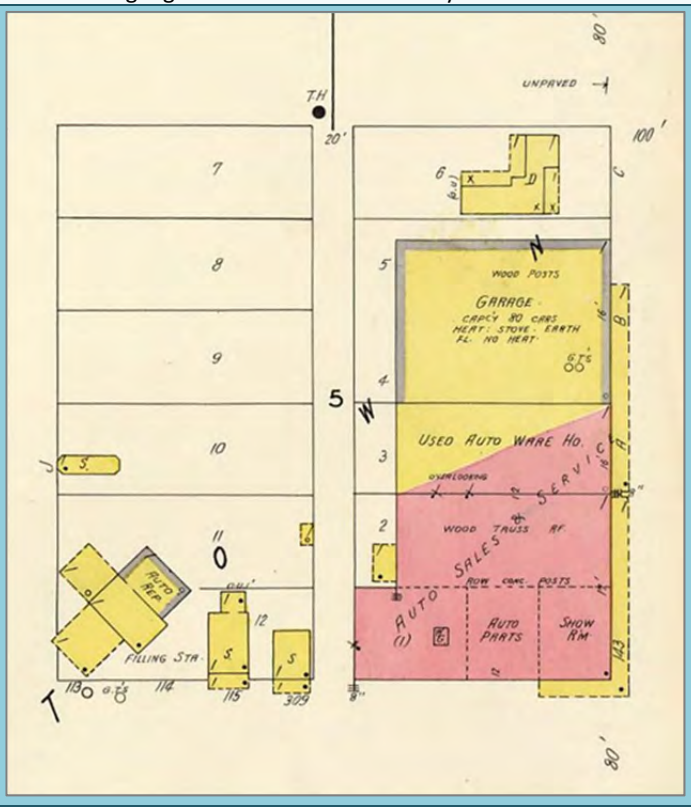


Figure 23. The detail of a 1931 fire insurance map depicts the building footprint of the Neal Ford dealership in Cotulla. No historic images have yet been found. The building's location was a block east of the Meridian Highway as it extended through Cotulla. However, it was also adjacent to the I&GN railroad and a secondary highway (Broadway/Tilden) that extended to the east. Source: Sanborn Map Company, 1933. Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, The University of Texas at Austin http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/txu-sanborn-cotulla-1933-2.jpg (accessed February 22, 2016).

Highway Association, G. A. McNaughton of San Marcos, worked with Colp to map a loop that went from Henrietta to Fort Worth via Mineral Wells and Weatherford.[46]

The Gulf route from Waco to Galveston seems to have been one on which everyone could agree. In addition, it was a route that also had been selected by promoters of the Colorado-to-Gulf Association. The two associations appear to have coordinated, and both the Meridian and Colorado-to-Gulf Association members conducted sociability tours over the route. May 1914 found a group from Denver driving to Wichita Falls and from there to Fort Worth, probably by way of the Meridian Road. They then traveled south from Dallas, picking up the Meridian again in Waco and proceeding to Galveston, where the mayor "emphasized that close business relations between Colorado and Texas should be created and good roads were the most vital means of doing this." He also stressed that Galveston was Colorado's closest port (see *Figures 24* below and *Figures 25–27*, to follow).[47]

Figure 24. Atop the Amicable Life Insurance Company (ALICO) Building in Waco. Completed in 1911, the Amicable remains the tallest building in Waco at 22 stories. It was designed by the Fort Worth firm Sanguinet and Staats and built by Westlake Construction Company of St. Louis. It was a natural draw to Waco residents and tourists, such as the members of the Sociability Tour, who enjoyed the view from the top of the building. Its sturdy construction helped it survive the devastating tornado of 1953 that destroyed a large part of Waco's downtown. Source: Virginia J. Church 1914 Sociability Tour Collection, Special Collections, Pikes Peak Library District online; image no. 262-6940.

Figure 25. (Right) The Sociability Tour reaches Decatur, Texas. Schoolchildren lined the streets of downtown Decatur to see the Sociability Tour parade through on May 11, 1914. The Wise County Courthouse is in the background. Source: Virginia J. Church 1914 Sociability Tour Collection, Special Collections, Pikes Peak Library District online; image no. 262-6943.

Figure 26. (Left) Sociability Tour at the Agricultural College. The tour paused at the entrance of Texas's Agricultural College. The college in College Station was located on the Meridian Highway (Gulf Division) and the Colorado-to-Gulf Highway, the route passing directly in front of the campus's main building. Source: Virginia J. Church 1914 Sociability Tour Collection, Special Collections, Pikes Peak Library District online; image no. 262-6956.

Figure 27. Galveston City Limits. The Sociability Tour reached Galveston on May 16, 1914, and was presented with the key to the city. In this image, the tour group appears to be standing near the seawall; the gulf is in the background. An additional caption for the picture, "No Speed Limit Here," probably refers to the participants' enjoyment of the shell road between Houston and Galveston, despite having been picked up for speeding. Source: Virginia J. Church 1914 Sociability Tour Collection, Special Collections, Pikes Peak Library District online; image no. 102-10208.

Another segment of the Meridian Highway that was a widely accepted route was located between Austin and San Antonio. The approximately 80-mile stretch had been used since Spanish colonial times, and its use intensified after Austin was designated the capital and San Antonio became the state's largest city. The road served as a stage route and paralleled much of the route of the I&GN Railroad between the two cities during the nineteenth century. But it quickly became apparent that it was unsuitable for automobile and truck traffic in the twentieth century. By 1913, the Bexar County Highway League under David Colp was pushing for improvements to the road, and Colp encouraged organizations and citizens in the five-county area to work on the road and lobby for its improvement. Opportunity came in the form of the federal Post Office Appropriations Act of 1912 that made $500,000 available to the Office of Public Roads for the "improvement of roads used in rural free delivery." By 1914, negotiations among federal, state, and county representatives resulted in a federal-aid grant of $160,000, appropriation of county funds, and the raising of private money that would be used to construct a post road from Austin to San Antonio.[48]

Ground breaking occurred on October 20, 1914, at the midpoint of the community of Hunter. A barbecue and celebration were attended by approximately 1,500 to 1,600 people living along the road.[49] A meeting at Landa Park in New Braunfels in early April 1915 resulted in the formation of four committees of five men each who were charged with planting trees along the length of the road.[50] The plan was one part of an earlier and broader movement spearheaded by Colp to plant trees

and install water features along the entire length of the Meridian Highway in Texas. Residents of Fratt were so enthused that they had begun planting trees by the end of March 1915.[51] By February 27, 1916, *The San Antonio Light* could report that: "Thousand[s] of trees already have been set out and are growing, and more are to be planted after the next rain."

Construction of the road occurred simultaneously in the five counties, each one using its own engineer and each county's commissioner's court setting standards for workmanship and control. Segments of the road were opened as they were completed, and the road as a whole appears to have been opened in the spring of 1916. Use was continual, with demand being particularly high after the United States entered World War I, when National Guard troops, trucks, gun carriages, and animals moved between military installations in San Antonio and Austin. That traffic resulted in immediate deterioration of the gravel road. Nonetheless, at the time of its completion, the Austin to San Antonio Post Road was "the finest section of roadway in Texas. . . [and] a model for the development of roadways in other counties. . . ." It was "the first and only of its type built in Texas, the longest post road completed in the country under the experimental post road program, and the first road in the state to be constructed under a cooperative plan with participation from the counties, state and federal governments."[52]
The routes of the Meridian Road from Austin to San Antonio and from Waco to Galveston were settled by 1916, and Colp's persistent promoting of the San Antonio to Laredo route meant that it was a generally accepted extension despite the persistence of the name "Canada to Gulf" as a supplement to "Meridian Road." On the other hand, Meridian Road routes between Austin and Temple and from Waco north were still sources of frequent debate. For example, two routes were possible between Austin and Temple. The traditional and more scenic route would have followed the Chisholm Trail through Round Rock, Georgetown, and Salado. The presence of notable cultural institutions in Georgetown, Salado, and Belton (Southwestern University, Salado College, and The University of Mary Hardin-Baylor), the road's historical associations, and recreational opportunities associated with the streams and rivers that crossed the route also made this an attractive road location. But the presence of the MKT Railroad from Taylor to Temple through Granger and Bartlett and the strength of the cotton-based agricultural culture in eastern Williamson County made that line a strong contender from an economic point of view. G. A McNaughton, editor of *Texas Good Roads Magazine* in San Marcos, pointed out the assets of traveling by way of Round Rock, Georgetown, Salado, and Belton in the 1916 guide to the Meridian Road.[53] However, the more-easterly route was the one he and Colp mapped in the same guide.

Not ones to give up on their aspirations to be included on the Meridian route, a delegation from Georgetown and Jarrell traveled to Belton to present their case at a Good Roads meeting. Colp apparently interrupted his trip to log the Meridian through Pflugerville, Hutto, Taylor, Granger, and Bartlett to attend the same meeting. The delegation members made their case for the more-westerly route, which was "one of the most picturesque and interesting in Central Texas." They summarized the assets of the area, noting that "it would be the educational route; it is the scenic route and the historical route as this was the old government military highway and the shortest route from the Gulf to Canada." Examples of the sights that would appeal to travelers were Southwestern University, the "old Robertson homestead," "the historic old town of Salado," and the San Gabriel and Lampasas rivers.[54]

The delegates from western Williamson and Bell counties argued for the assets of their towns. They also expressed an underlying concern that probably was common for every relatively small community that lacked the population, commerce, and railroad lines of urban centers such as Temple, Waco, and Fort Worth. As the reporter for *The Belton Journal* wrote, "If we do not make traffic and travel in our small towns easier the cities will destroy our business through the mail order."[55] That concern may have motivated Hillsboro to lobby for inclusion on the route. It was on the interurban line from Waxahachie to Waco and on several rail lines, but not officially part of the Meridian route. Citizens held a mass meeting in February 1916 as part of an effort to secure the Meridian Road to their town.[56]

To the south of Hillsboro, the small community of West was not an official part of the route either. But citizens there may have taken heart when A. L. Westgard, a pathfinder representing the National Highways Association, selected a route for the Meridian Road that went by way of Waco, West, Hillsboro, Milford, Forreston, Waxahachie, Red Oak, Lancaster, Dallas, Grand Prairie, Arlington, and Handley before reaching Fort Worth and exiting Texas through Wichita Falls and Burkburnett.[57] Unofficial confirmation of this route through West and Hillsboro occurred two years later in November 1916, when a group of auto enthusiasts, undertaking a distance run from Winnipeg to Laredo and passing a message between the mayors of the two cities, whizzed through West. Driving a Hudson Super Six between Wichita Falls and Waco at an average speed of 31 miles per hour, Charles M. Davis dashed through West on Main Street at full speed and startled a peace officer, who fired into the air.[58]

Perhaps because of its location in a scenic part of Texas, the proposed route from Waco to Cleburne by way of Valley Mills, Clifton, Meridian, Walnut Springs, and Glen Rose never appears to have been at risk prior to 1917. The route was included in Nicholson's early tour of the Meridian route (see *Figure 28*, to follow), when he collected pennants

Figure 28. Meridian Road party in the vicinity of Seven Knobs between Glenrose [sic] and Clifton, Texas. Source: John C. Nicholson Collection, Harvey County Historical Society and Museum, Newton, Kansas.

that were attached to the lead car in the caravan (visible in *Figure 28* above). The route persisted, despite problems posed by identifying bridge locations over the Brazos River. Citizens in the counties along this scenic route turned out to maintain parts of the road, as in May 1915, when businesses and public offices closed so that townspeople could join farmers to gravel a segment of the Meridian Highway and Walnut Springs public road, a part of the "main National Meridian Highway."[59] The area was represented in the North Texas Division of the International Meridian Road Association, and garages in Glen Rose, Meridian, and Clifton advertised in the *Meridian Monthly Magazine*, published by Nicholson in Newton, Kansas (see *Figures 29* and *30*, to follow).[60]

Perhaps the strongest competition for the route occurred in North Texas between the Red River and the Dallas-Fort Worth area and revolved around the issue of bridges. The official itinerary for the September 1912 Meridian Road Trip called for the group to cross from Milburne, Oklahoma, and drive to Denison, Texas,[61] but at that time, Nicholson commented, there were no highway bridges across the Red River. So, instead, he formed a plan for the 1913 reliability run that would lay out two routes south from Oklahoma City: one that went from Lawton to Wichita Falls, the other from Durant to Denison.[62] In the meantime, Montague and Clay counties began to promote the idea of new bridges on the Red River, the locations of which would route traffic south to Bowie or Henrietta and cut off Wichita Falls.[63] In April 1913, the *Dallas Morning News* reported that the issue of the location of a steel suspension bridge over the Red River was finally settled by a decision to build the bridge between Temple, Oklahoma, and Byers, Texas. At the

Figure 29. (Above) Official Meridian Road Tour leaving Fort Worth. The lead car of the tour had a banner announcing its route—Winnipeg To The Gulf of Mexico—and pennants collected from towns and cities along the route. Source: John C. Nicholson Collection, Harvey County Historical Society and Museum, Newton, Kansas.

Figure 30. (Left) The John C. Nicholson Collection includes pennants from towns and cities in Texas that hoped to be a part of the official Meridian Road route. Source: John C. Nicholson Collection, Harvey County Historical Society and Museum, Newton, Kansas.

annual meeting of the Meridian Highway Association in November 1913, a proposal was made to officially change the route, leaving Wichita Falls and Burkburnett out and including the Byers–Henrietta route as the new Red River crossing.[64]

Construction on the Byers Bridge continued in 1914, giving tourists a choice of good roads through either Burkburnett and Wichita Falls or straight south from Temple, Oklahoma, to Henrietta, a savings of about 15 miles.[65] But Wichita Falls fought back, and by October 1916, a meeting of the Association in Wichita, Kansas, confirmed the Burkburnett–Wichita Falls–Fort Worth route as the official route of the Meridian Highway in North Texas. At the same meeting, delegates frustrated an effort by representatives from East Texas to run the highway through Denison, Sherman, Dallas, and Hillsboro. Their votes also left the more-westerly Wichita Falls–Fort Worth–Cleburne–Waco route intact.[66]

Attractions along the road—scenic, educational, historical—and users of the road—tourists, agriculturists, commercial truckers, the military, and immigrants from Mexico[67]—all influenced the location and design of the Meridian Highway. Other constraints included then-current road-building techniques, available road-building materials, and natural environmental conditions. During the period of 1910 to 1916, economics appears to have played the largest role in the locations of the central and southeast Texas routes. As an article in the October 1913 issue of *The Meridian Road Magazine* pointed out, there was an agricultural and financial inevitability to the route that, in 1910, crossed six states and was proximate to three others. That trade region furnished 43 percent of the corn, 57 percent of the wheat, 46 percent of the oats, 40 percent of the hay and forage, 34 percent of the cotton, 43 percent of the horses and mules, 42 percent of the cattle, and 43 percent of all hogs raised in the United States. “In other words, more than three-sevenths of the staple agricultural wealth of the United States is found in these states.” That production, raised largely in land-locked areas, required a port, and Galveston was the logical outlet. Railroads had shown the way in their routes, making much of the early footprint of the Meridian Road a logical one.

The locations of major military posts had an impact on the earliest route as well. The location of Fort Sill, Oklahoma, appears to have exerted a powerful pull on the selection of a route to Lawton and then south to Wichita Falls, despite the desirability of a more-direct route from Oklahoma City south to Dallas. Similarly, San Antonio was a logical terminus because of the existence of Fort Sam Houston, headquarters for the Department of Texas. Once proposed, the route appears to have attracted twentieth-century military facilities in San Antonio and elsewhere, including Hicks and Meacham fields in northwest Fort Worth in about 1914–1916. The location of the road may have influenced the selection of the site of Kelly Field in south San Antonio in late 1916. It also facilitated the activities of the Texas National Guard that was headquartered at Camp Mabry in Austin and of the National Guard that mobilized at Camp Wilson, Fort Sam Houston, in 1916 prior to service

along the Mexican border after Pancho Villa raided Columbus, New Mexico.

The existence of major tourist attractions such as the missions, the San Antonio River, hot springs, hotels, large public parks, and Medina Lake—a fishing lake with nation-wide prominence by 1914—further cemented San Antonio's claim to the route.[68] In addition, the leadership of Good Roads advocates, such as David Colp, influenced extension of the Meridian Highway route south from San Antonio to Laredo (see *Figure 31* below). Less important prior to World War I were landmarks such as the oil fields near Burkburnett (see *Figure 32* on the following page) and notable gushers at Electra near Wichita Falls. These drew the attention of tourists after 1911, together with Lake Wichita, the Amicable Building in Waco, hot springs of Marlin, Galveston beaches, monumental public buildings in Austin, and the more exotic sights on the border.

Figure 31. A group of men stand for a portrait in front of the ruins of a Spanish-style building. Sociability Tour members visited Mission San Jose in San Antonio on May 21, 1914. Source: Virginia J. Church 1914 Sociability Tour Collection, Special Collections, Pikes Peak Library District online; photo no. 262-6937.

Figure 32. View of downtown Burkburnett in the 1920s with oil derricks in the background. Source: http://www.tracesoftexas.com.

By 1916, the general footprint of the Meridian Highway through Texas had appeared, and the segment between Austin and San Antonio had set a new standard for construction. Details of the route in the area north of Waco remained to be sorted out, but the significance of the road to intrastate and interstate commerce was unquestioned. Availability of federal funding and lobbying by the Texas Good Roads Congress throughout 1916 would lead to the passage of state legislation. That legislation, in turn, facilitated the Meridian Highway's contributions to economic development, the role of Texas in World War I, and the development of its identity as the state's primary north–south highway route.

[27] Two Object Lesson Roads were in communities—San Antonio and Taylor—later associated with the Meridian Highway.

[28] *Evening Kansan-Republican*, Newton, Kansas, August 28, 1942; Harvey County Residents, Box 7A, Hwys 81 & 50, John C. Nicholson Collection, Harvey County Historical Society and Museum, Newton, Kansas (cited hereafter as John C. Nicholson Collection); L. Robert Puschendorf, "Two Trails of the Twentieth Century: John C. Nicholson and Newton, Kansas," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains*, Volume 32, No. 3 (Autumn 2009), p. 155.

[29] Puschendorf, pp. 156-162.

[30] *Quanah Tribune Chief*, May 5, 1910; Rodríguez, p. xii; *San Antonio Light*, May 17, 1911. Architects of the Pan-American Union Building were Paul Philippe Cret and Albert Kelsey. Kelsey had designed the Spanish Colonial Revival University Baptist Church across Guadalupe Street (the future Pan American Highway route) from the University of Texas campus. Rodriguez, p. xii. While there appears to be no record of Nicholson's promoting a "Pan Am" highway in 1911, an article in *The Jefferson-Gazette* mentioned "the old Santa Fe trail and the proposed Pan-American Highway." *The Jefferson-Gazette*, Lawrence, Kansas, December 13, 1911.

[31] "Application of Galveston County for Assumption by the State Highway Commission of Expenditures for Maintenance and Operation of the Galveston County Causeway," Folder (39) Galveston County Re: Galveston Causeway 8-1-36, Box 2002/101-34, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

[32] Herb Woods, *Galveston-Houston Electric Railway* (Glendale, California: Interurban Publications, 1976), p. 6.

[33] Puschendorf, pp. 163-165.

[34] Michaels & Maline, compiler, *San Antonio Automobile Club's Log Book* ([San Antonio, Texas]: Michaels and Malone, 1911), pp. 47-49, 55-59, 63-65.

[35] *The Bryan Eagle*, July 21, 1911. The association whose work captured Nicholson's attention had been formed by 1911 to promote the Red River to the Gulf Highway. That highway may have been a project of the Gulf Coast Good Roads Association; it was planned to be 20 feet wide with a 100-foot right-of-way.

[36] Harvey County Residents, Hwys 81 and 50, Box 7A, John C. Nicholson Collection. Robert J. Potts, who taught highway engineering at Texas A&M, had better luck in 1911, when he made a road trip from Denison to Houston. The section of the road he mapped from Waco through Marlin, Calvert, Hearne, Bryan, Navasota, and Hempstead became the Gulf Division of the Meridian Highway. Hardy·Heck·Moore, Inc., *Historic Highways of Texas and the Bankhead Highway through Texas*, 2013.

[37] *Dallas Morning News*, October 20, 1912; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 20, 1912; Harvey County Residents, File 8, Box 7A, John C. Nicholson Collection.

[38] John C. Nicholson, *First Annual Report of the International Meridian Road Association*, January 25, 1913, Newton, Kansas, Harvey County Residents, File 8, Box 7A, John C. Nicholson Collection.

[39] The reason given for routing the Meridian Highway via the Burkburnett bridge between Lawton and Wichita Falls was that the route from Oklahoma City through Ardmore to Fort Worth included "a very poor road across or around the Arbuckle Mountains." In addition, there were no highway bridges over the Red River. Nicholson, *First Annual Report*.

[40] *The Galveston Daily News*, December 14, 1912; January 1, 1913; *Waco Morning News*, January 1, 1913.

[41] *The Daily Advocate*, Victoria, Texas, February 17, 1913; February 22, 1913; February 25, 1913).

[42] *Meridian Road Monthly Magazine*, August 1913, p. 21; "Road Building in South Texas," *Good Roads*, [April 5, 1913], p. 232.

[43] *The Meridian Magazine*, October 1913, p. 23.

[44] *The San Antonio Light*, February 27, 1916.

[45] Sidebar: the summary and all quotes are from the *San Antonio Express*, December 7, 1924.

[46] *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, March 30, 1916.

[47] *Galveston Daily News*, July 1, 1913; Katie Rudolph, "Bumps in the Road: The Spirit of Enterprise & the Sociability Tour of 1914," *Enterprise and Innovation in the Pikes Peak Region*, edited by Tim Blevins, Dennis Daily, Sydne Dean, Chris Nicholl, and Michael L. Olsen (Colorado Springs: Pikes Peak Library District, 2011), pp. 115-117, 121-136.

[48] Renee Benn, *Report for Historical Studies: Austin to San Antonio Post Road, 1915* (Austin: Texas Department of Transportation, 2015), pp. 1-4.

[49] *The Galveston Daily News*, October 21, 1914.

[50] *The San Antonio Light*, April 8, 1915.

[51] *The Galveston Daily News*, March 28, 1915.

[52] Benn, 2015, pp. 1, 5-7, 10.

[53] G. A. McNaughton, *The Meridian Road in Texas 1916* ([San Marcos, Texas: International Road Association. Texas Division], 1916).

[54] *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, February 23, 1916; *The Belton Journal*, February 24, 1916; *The San Antonio Light*, February 20, 1916.

[55] *The Belton Journal*, February 24, 1916.

[56] *Fort Worth Star*-Telegram, February 20, 1916; A. H. Belo & Company, *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide for 1912* (Dallas, Texas: A. H. Belo & Company, 1912), p. 145.

[57] *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, July 12, 1914.

[58] *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, November 4, 1916. George Willeford, a veteran of the trip from Burkburnett to Laredo, remembered that "precious minutes were saved in that dash across Texas by guides who were stationed at various points to direct the drivers," and by refueling that was done "as the party cruised along at what was then 'a terrific rate of speed.'" The entire drive across Texas was completed in 20 hours and 8 minutes. *Corpus Christi Caller*, January 11, 1950.

[59] *Dallas Morning News*, May 23, 1915; *The Clifton Record*, May 28, 1915.
[60] *Meridian Road Monthly Magazine* (August 1913).
[61] *The Galveston Daily News*, December 14, 1912.
[62] *Dallas Morning News*, April 2, 1913.
[63] *Carthage Panola Watchman*, February 12, 1913; *Llano News*, January 9, 1913.
[64] *Wichita Weekly Times*, November 28, 1913.
[65] *Meridian Road Monthly Magazine*, May 1914, p. 4.
[66] *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 7, 1916.
[67] While it has not been possible to document the role of the Meridian Highway in the mass emigrations from Mexico during the Mexican Revolution of the early twentieth century, the road was the main transportation link between San Antonio and northern Mexico. The numbers of frequently destitute immigrants who made San Antonio home eventually led, in 1916, to the founding of the Pan American Round Table. According to González, "When San Antonians engaged Pan-America in 1916, they did so with the formation of the Pan American Round Table, a woman's group originally offering shelter and aid to refugees from the Mexican Revolution of 1910–1920. Refugees also benefited from the Pan-American Union's guidance, but the Pan American Round Table resisted any focus on commercial and political conflict." Also according to González, "Perspectives changed beginning in the 1930s when San Antonians began to imagine their city bisected by the Pan-American Highway. . . ." González, pp. 150-151.
[68] Facts About the Medina Lake Toll Road, File Designation—Bexar 1925, 2002/101-29, Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

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I.5. THE MERIDIAN HIGHWAY 1917–1932

By 1916, thanks to the efforts of Meridian Road President John Nicholson in Kansas and the directors of the organization in Texas, the routes of the road were laid out; tourists, truckers, and the commuting public were using the route in increasing numbers; and broad public support had resulted in the passage of county bonds for its construction and improvement. During the next 15 years, the Meridian Highway would be affected by passage of state and federal laws that funded construction, by events associated with World War I and the Mexican Revolution, and by growth in towns and cities after the war. The highway also would be impacted by the end of the revolution that brought with it a renewal of the Pan-American idea and new opportunities for economic intercourse among Canada, the United States, and Mexico. An explosion in trade, particularly through the port city of Laredo and throughout the Winter Garden District of South Texas, increased demands for improved roads as the trucking industry grew to fill in the gaps left by rail lines. That traffic also impacted routes through cities as the need grew for wider roads capable of accommodating commercial traffic. The same communities also were experiencing suburban and general business growth as a result of economic prosperity and an increase in the numbers of the touring public.

With passage of the Federal-Aid Highway Act in 1916 that appropriated $75 million for road construction in the United States, highway associations achieved a noteworthy funding goal. However, the money would be apportioned only to states with active highway departments, and Texas had none. As a result, Good Roads associations through the Texas Good Roads Congress lobbied furiously in 1916 and helped formulate a bill that created a state highway department. Members were successful in getting quick passage of House Bill 2 during the 35th Texas legislative session in 1917. The law created a state highway department and the Office of State Engineer, as well as a three-member, governor-appointed commission. At this point, Texas was able to avail itself of federal funding that would supplement new state funding and on-going county funding.

One of the first acts of the commission was to tentatively select 25 roads that were described by their terminal or intermediate points. The Meridian Highway was designated as SH 2; the commission described its main route as entering Texas via Oklahoma by Burkburnett, then going to Wichita Falls, Fort Worth, Meridian, Waco, Temple, Taylor, Austin, San Antonio, and Laredo. The Gulf Division of the Meridian Highway branched off from the main route at Waco and extended southeast to Marlin, Calvert, Bryan, College Station, Navasota, Hempstead, Houston,

and Galveston (see *Figure 33* on the next page). The Texas Highway Commission also included a segment called the Mineral Wells Branch that left the main road at Henrietta and continued through Jacksboro, Perrin, and Mineral Wells, where it intersected with SH 1 (the Bankhead Highway). It continued east on SH 1 to Weatherford. There, it turned and continued to Granbury and Glen Rose where it reconnected with the main line. Subsequent route changes appear in *Table 1* (to follow), which documents the lack of an established route. It also reflects the aspirations of numerous communities to be included as their representatives negotiated with the Texas Highway Department and representatives of the Meridian Highway Association.

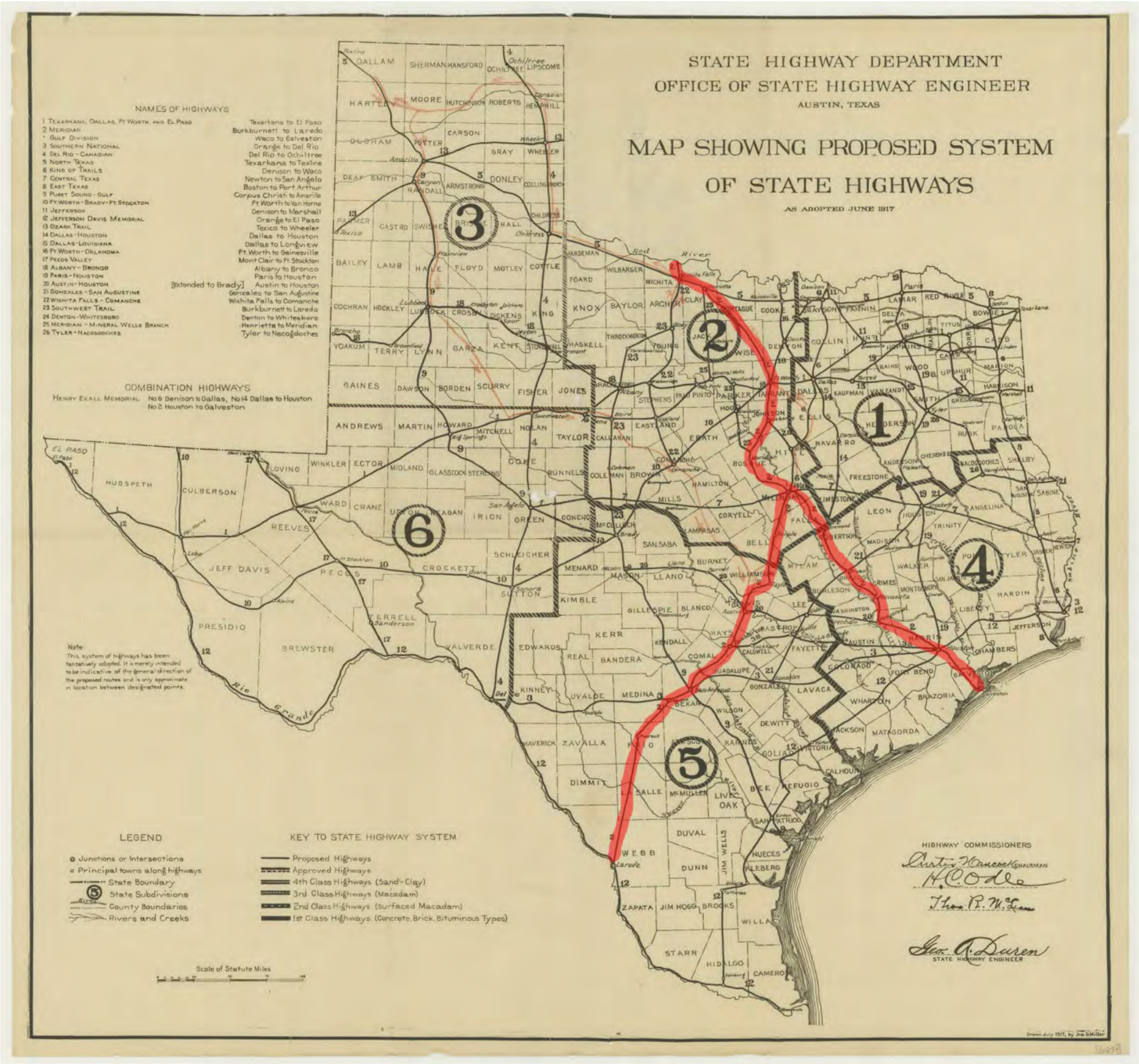

Figure 33. "Map Showing Proposed System of State Highways," 1917. This is the earliest known map prepared by the Texas Highway Department. It was published soon after the agency's creation and depicts the proposed plan for the state highway system. The map also shows the boundaries of the six regional divisions/offices that supported the agency's operation. The map provides insights into the intent of the agency and the hierarchy of the highway network. The routes of the Meridian Highway are highlighted in red. Source: Texas State Library and Archives, Map Collection, https://www.tsl.texas.gov/cgi-bin/aris/maps/maplookup.php?mapnum=6254.

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Table 1. Routes of the Meridian Highway, 1917–1932.

Date	Source	Description
8/17/17	*The Taylor Daily Press*	Taylor was assured by the Texas Highway Commission that it was permanently on the Meridian Highway route from Austin to North Texas.
9/27/18	*The Clifton Record*	Hill County voted against road bonds by a margin of three to one.
12/17/18	*San Antonio Evening News*	SH 2B = Ringgold bridge to Ringgold and a point 1.5 miles north of Bowie.
10/5/19	*Dallas Morning News*	Meridian Highway = Burkburnett, Wichita Falls, Henrietta on SH 5, Bowie, Decatur, Fort Worth, Cleburne, Meridian, Clifton, Valley Mills, Waco, Baylor University, Lorena, Bruceville, Eddy, Troy, Temple, Bartlett, Granger, Taylor, Hutto, Austin, Buda, Kyle, San Marcos, Hunter, New Braunfels, San Antonio, Pearsall, Cotulla, Laredo.
		SH 6 = Waco by Brazos River, Marlin, Calvert, Bryan, College Station, Navasota, Hempstead, Houston, Galveston.
		Mineral Wells Branch (SH 25) = Henrietta, Jacksboro, Perrin, Whitt, Mineral Wells, Weatherford, Granbury, Glen Rose, Meridian.
		SH 2A = Cleburne, Burleson, Alvarado, Grandview, Itasca, Hillsboro.
		SH 2B, Gulf Division = spur 11 miles ± below Waco to Mart.
		SH 2C = Temple, Belton, Salado, Prairie Dell, Jarrell, Georgetown, Round Rock, Fiskville, Austin.
		SH 2D = point 1.5 miles north of Bowie to Ringgold and Ringgold bridge crossing.
11/25/19	*Fort Worth Star-Telegram*	"Direct from" Fort Worth to Terral, Oklahoma.
9/7/20	*The Brownsville Daily Herald*	Burkburnett to Waco, Galveston, and Laredo.
11/20/20	*The Bryan Daily Eagle*	Waurika, Oklahoma; Bowie, Fort Worth, Cleburne, Meridian, Waco, Temple, Taylor, Austin, San Antonio, Pearsall, Cotulla, Laredo.
1921	State Highway Department[69]	SH 2 = Troy, Temple. Belton, Salado, Prairie Dell. SH 2B = Temple, Little River, Holland, Bartlett.
1921	State Highway Department[70]	Parts of SH 2, SH 2A, and SH 2C were designated as elements in Major State Highway System: SH 2 (Burkburnett to Burleson, Waco to Temple, north of Austin to Laredo), SH 2A (Burleson to Waco), SH 2C (Temple to intersection with SH 2 north of Austin), Gulf branch (Waco to Bremond and Bryan to Galveston).
3/31/21	*Shiner Gazette*	SH 2D = Cleburne, Covington, Itasca.
3/22/22	Fauntleroy[71]	SH 2 (primary) = Burleson to Cleburne, Round Rock to Taylor. SH 2E = Cleburne to Itasca.
4/24/22	Federal-aid project (FAP) 262[72]	SH 2 = north to the Red River in Wichita County.
6/25/22	*The Galveston Daily News*	SH 2 = two primary routes through both Georgetown and Taylor.
6/24/23	*San Antonio Express*	Meridian Highway = Austin, Round Rock, Georgetown, Jarrell, Salado, Belton, Temple; or Austin, Round Rock, Taylor, Granger, Bartlett, Holland, Temple.
7/25/23	Fauntleroy[73]	SH 2 (7% system) = Texas–Oklahoma state line near Devol to Wichita Falls, Henrietta, Bowie, Temple, Granger, Taylor, Burleson, Cleburne, Meridian, Waco, Marlin, Bremond, Hearne, Bryan, Navasota, Hempstead, Houston, Galveston.
		SH 2D, SH 2A, SH 2C = Texas-Oklahoma line near Ringgold, Bowie, Fort Worth, Alvarado, Itasca, Hillsboro, Waco, Temple, Belton, Georgetown, Round Rock, Austin, San Marcos, New Braunfels, San Antonio, Pearsall, Cotulla, Laredo.
		SH 2E = Cleburne, Itasca.
7/30/23	Nicholson[74]	Colp showed the Meridian Highway passing Wichita Falls, "which route we abandoned for the direct route through Terrall [*sic*] Okla

Table 1. Routes of the Meridian Highway, 1917–1932.

Date	Source	Description
		many years ago."
9/1/23	Fauntleroy[75]	SH 2 (7% system) = Ringgold, Bowie, Decatur, Fort Worth, Burleson, Itasca, Hillsboro, Temple, Belton, Georgetown, Round Rock, Austin, San Marcos, New Braunfels, San Antonio, Pearsall, Laredo.
		SH 2A = Burleson, Cleburne, connecting with SH 2 north of Itasca.
		SH 2B = Temple, Taylor, Round Rock.
1924	State Highway Department[76]	Texas Highway Commission designated primary roads in the Federal Aid Highway System: SH 2 (from Texas–Oklahoma state line to Fort Worth, Hillsboro, Waco, Austin, San Antonio, Laredo; no branches included).
1/27/24	*Wichita Daily Times*	Wichita Falls was on the Meridian Highway.
6/17/24	Williamson County[77]	SH 2F = Taylor to Travis County line.
11/18/24	*The Corsicana Semi-Weekly Light*	SH 67 = Waco, Meridian, Cleburne.
3/29/25	*The Galveston Daily News*	SH 2 = Waco to Ringgold. SH 6 = Waco to Galveston.
4/28/25	*San Antonio Express*	Meridian Highway commissioner stated that the route should be Waco, Meridian, Cleburne, Fort Worth as marked by the association.
9/25/25	*Laredo Times*	Meridian Highway = Terral, Ringgold, Bowie, Fort Worth, Hillsboro, Waco, Temple, Georgetown, Austin, San Antonio, Dilley, Encinal, Laredo.
9/29/25	*Laredo Times*	Meridian Highway = US 81 = Ringgold, Bowie, Decatur, Fort Worth, Hillsboro, Waco, Belton, Georgetown, Austin, San Marcos, New Braunfels, San Antonio, Pearsall, Cotulla, Laredo; branch from Itasca to Cleburne, Burleson.
1926	AASHO	AASHO highway numbering system was adopted. SH 2 = US 81.
1/1/26	*The Abilene Reporter*	SH 6 = Waco, Meridian. SH 89 = Meridian, Cleburne. SH 2A = Cleburne, Tarrant County.
5/12/26	*The Taylor Daily Press*	Meridian Highway = Temple, Granger.
6/25/26	*The Clifton Record*	Meridian Highway = Clifton.
6/22/28	Alignment map[78]	SH 2B = Taylor
1/18/29	*The Clifton Record*	Meridian Highway = Clifton, Meridian.
12/14/30	*Wichita Daily Times*	Meridian Highway = Ringgold, Bowie.
7/16/31	Webb[79]	SH 2 = Ringgold.

Declaration of war by the United States on April 6, 1917, stalled highway work because of financial demands that shifted federal spending from roads to a buildup of other military assets. But the government never lost sight of the strategic value of good roads and the necessity of oil, the development and distribution of which depended on highways that could hold up to heavy use. As Thomas H. MacDonald, Chief of the Bureau of Public Roads, expressed the equation, "all highways are essentially military highways." As such, they had a "direct relation to the service, supply and guidance of military activities."[80] On February 5, 1918, that assessment was verified at a meeting in Dallas for the purpose of preparing a program for the improvement and maintenance of highways in their order of military and economic importance. George Duran, State Highway Engineer, identified the Meridian Highway from Wichita Falls to Fort Worth, Waco, Temple, Taylor, Austin, and San

Antonio and the Gulf Division of the highway as having the highest priority because the two routes "[touched] the army cantonments and aviation fields as well as the large cities and centers of population and production."[81]

MacDonald's ideas may have had their roots in a general war policy issued by the Council of National Defense meant to guide state-level road construction. The Council advised state councils to cooperate with state highway departments in viewing all plans for road construction and maintenance from the perspective of war conditions so that "expenditure of labor and materials should be directed only to those roads which are of prime importance for economic and military purposes." In addition, the council asserted that the only highways that should be built or maintained were those used or to be used by the military establishment, those that carried "considerable volume of material and supplies essential to war industries," and those that had a bearing on the "production and distribution of food supplies, connecting population and shipping centers with surrounding agricultural areas." Finally, the Council urged the use of local road materials.[82]

Texas policy makers would have been particularly sensitive to wartime concerns, given the flood of Mexican immigrants that filled South and Central Texas and the presence of revolutionary leaders such as Francisco Madero, who lived in San Antonio after 1910. In addition, the issuance of the revolutionary Plan of San Diego (Texas), and a thwarted attempt by Mexican terrorists to destroy the I&GN Railroad bridge at Webb Station (Webb County) would have put legislators and others on alert.[83] By the end of 1917, the importance of the Meridian Road to border defense and troop training was clear, and the route soon functioned as the "365-day road between the different army posts in Texas. . . ."[84] By February 1918, federal aid was being considered or had been granted for road projects in almost all of the counties along its length, including Wichita, Clay, Montague, Wise, Tarrant, Johnson, Bosque, McLennan, Bell, Williamson, Travis, and Comal; an application from Bexar had not yet been received. According to E. J. Hernan, district chairman of the National Highway Transport Committee of the National Council of Defense, the Meridian Highway from Wichita Falls to San Antonio and from Waco to Galveston, and the Henry Exall Highway from Denison to Galveston by way of Dallas, Ennis, Corsicana, Mexia, Groesbeck, Navasota, Hempstead, and Galveston had been recommended for priority construction by the State Department.[85]

Anchoring the north–south system was historic Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio that served as headquarters of the War Department's four-state Southern Department (Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona) until August 20, 1920, when it became headquarters of the five-state 8th Corps Area (see *Figures 34* and *35* to follow). By early summer 1917, Stone & Webster, which had built or operated numerous

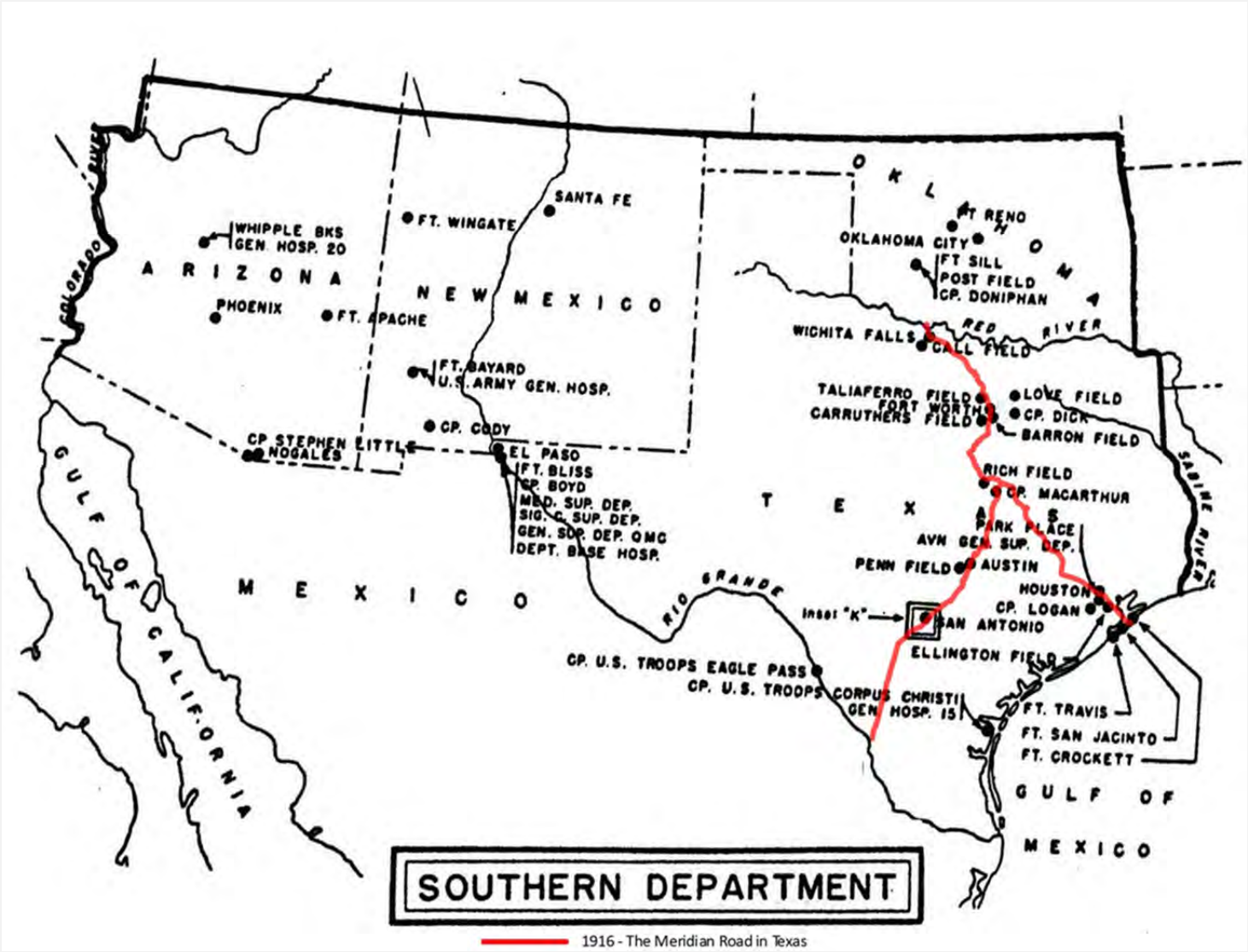
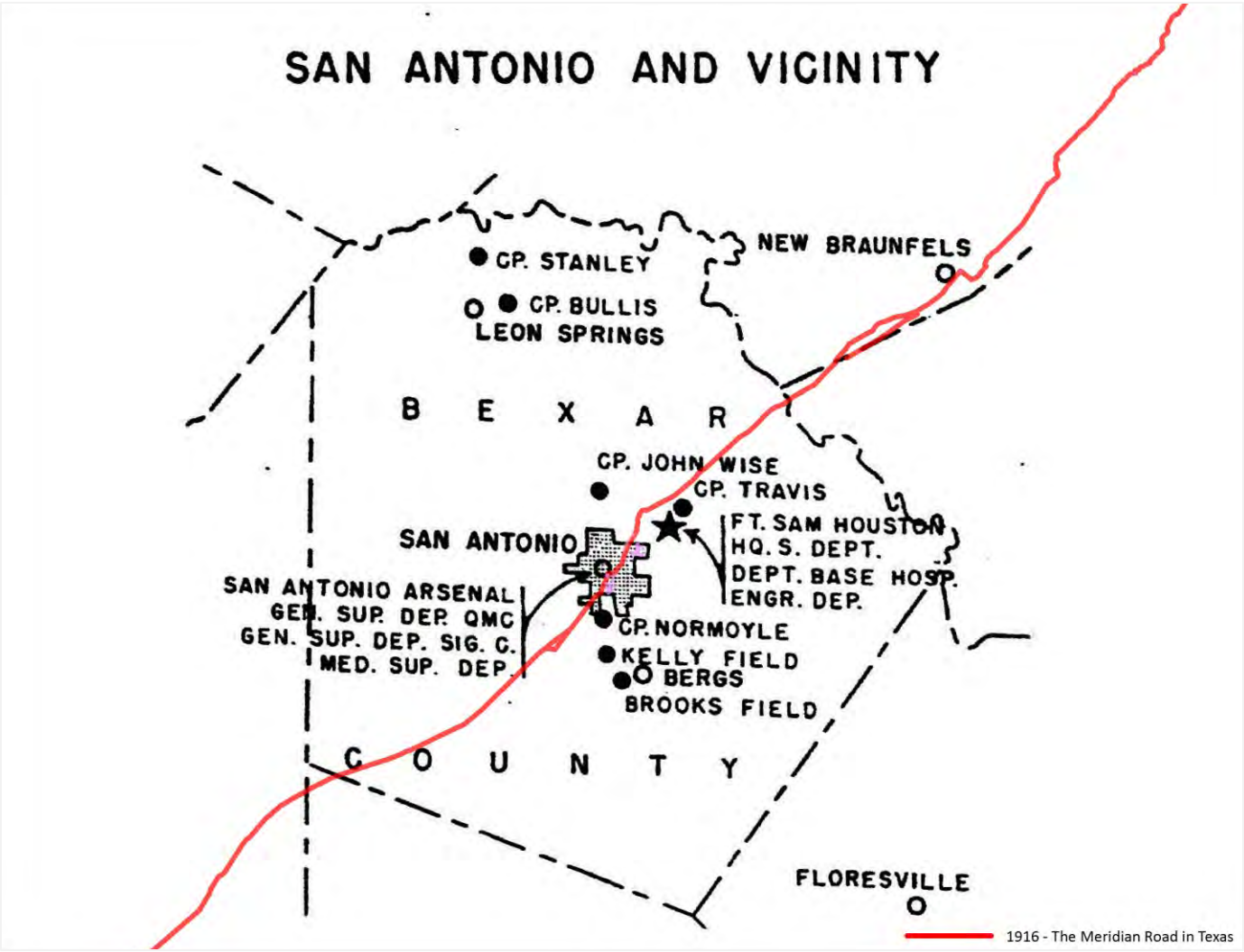


Figure 34. Installations within the Southern Department of the U.S. War Department. A map of the four states within the Southern Department, headquartered at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, shows the numerous air fields and army bases in the vicinity of the Meridian Highway. Source: Center of Military History, Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War, Volume 3, Part 2 (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1988), p. 899.

Figure 35. Military installations in the San Antonio area, 1920. A map of Bexar County depicts the locations of numerous military sites in the vicinity of the Meridian Highway, including Fort Sam Houston, Camp Travis, the San Antonio Arsenal, Camp Normoyle, Kelly Field, and Brooks Field. Source: Center of Military History, Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War, Volume 3, Part 2 (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1988), p. 926.



Texas interurban lines, electric companies, and highway infrastructure, had been selected by the federal government to build army cantonments, National Guard camps, and flying fields for the Army Air Service.[86] Due to their work and that of other contractors, the route of the Meridian soon was associated with numerous military installations. On the north end of the Meridian outside of Wichita Falls, Call Field was established in 1917 and operated until 1919. Fort Worth was the location of Camp Bowie and several flying fields, some of them used initially to train members of the Canadian Royal Flying Corp; these included Taliaferro (later called Hicks) and Carruthers (Taliaferro No. 2, later called Benbrook). At Waco, the War Department built Rich Field and Camp MacArthur, while Austin was the location of Penn Field at a site selected in 1917 on the Meridian Highway and developed in 1918 as a flying field with facilities for a radio school. On the Gulf Division of the Meridian Highway, Houston was the location of Camp Logan, a National Guard camp and emerging training center. Ellington Field was located in present-day Pasadena, while forts Travis, San Jacinto, and Crockett continued to provide coastal defense. Fort Sam Houston expanded significantly with the activation of Camp Travis, successor to Camp Wilson. By mid-October 1917, the camp included more than 31,000 officers and men; the troops were Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, and Native American. In downtown San Antonio, the mid-nineteenth-century San Antonio Arsenal was enlarged during World War I and continued to see service as a major supply depot. To the southeast, a new aviation camp became Kelly Field, while Brooks Field was located a short distance to the east. Camp Normoyle near Kelly Field was a quartermaster ordnance and engine-replacement depot. Finally, Fort McIntosh in Laredo found its military life extended through World War I and beyond thanks to cross-border threats posed by the Mexican Revolution.

As MacDonald pointed out, railroads became “clogged” during the war and “thousands upon thousands of motor trucks [were] thrown into the breach” with the result that trucks “save[d] the day.”[87] Troops and trucks were a common sight on the Meridian Highway and were seized upon by promoters as reasons to improve the highway to withstand use by trucks of all sizes, as well as automobiles. The end of war in 1918 and of the Mexican Revolution in the early 1920s saw a drawdown of troop strength. But the presence of trucks and, eventually, buses, persisted and grew as conditions in and relations with Mexico normalized. By 1921, when the Texas Highway Commission voted to designate a number of state highways, including Highway No. 2 (the Meridian), as “The Major State Highway System,” newspapers were promoting the new “era of prosperity. . . in the Southern Republic.” Business was being rehabilitated, and “all trains running to principal points in Mexico have been crowded for months.”[88]

Relative peace in Mexico had impacts on commerce, agriculture, tourism, and towns and cities along the Meridian Highway, particularly between San Antonio and Laredo. The industrialized Midwestern United States was affected as companies that provided services and supplies related to highway construction became aware of the new commercial opportunities opening up south of the border. Overarching these changes was a belief in the roles of Mexico, Texas, and the United States in the Pan-American movement. Mexico, for its part, realized by the early 1920s that economic development would require more than a railroad system. Texas, in particular—and the United States in general—soon realized the enormous economic benefits that might accrue if Mexico and countries to the south had a functioning highway system. By mid-1924, Latin America had sent a highway delegation to the United States, and highway engineers and governments on both sides of the border were firmly committed to cooperation by 1925.

Renewed interest in the benefits to Texas of international trade appears to have restarted by about 1920, when the Laredo Chamber of Commerce, through its highway committee, became committed to securing recognition of the Meridian Highway for its connection with Mexico through Laredo. Their efforts attracted the attention of out-of-state businessmen, such as an individual from Nebraska who wrote in 1922 that his company had "given a great deal of study to the best and most satisfactory border point through which to ship our products and decided upon Laredo as being the most feasible point."[89] About that time, the Laredo Chamber of Commerce held the first international conference of chambers of commerce at the Latin American Club in order to promote trade relations with Mexico. A year later, *The Laredo Times* wrote that the marking and mapping crew of the Meridian Highway would reach Laredo and then continue by extending its work southward to Mexico City.[90] Soon, representatives from a number of U.S. chambers of commerce met with their counterparts in Monterrey. Other attendees were the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads district engineer A. R. Losh, Texas' chief bridge engineer G. G. Wickline, and Laredo engineer H. B. Zachry. While Losh hyped the benefits of tourist traffic to the Mexican attendees, he also showed them the role that American roads played in moving commodities and the importance a similar system would have for Mexico.[91]

By December 1923, the annual trade conference of the American Chamber of Commerce of Mexico was scheduled for Mexico City, and the San Antonio Chamber had been encouraged to send a delegation.[92] That outreach was followed within six months by a visit to Washington, D.C., and elsewhere in the United States by members of the Pan-American Highway Commission, who inspected improved roads (see *Figure 36*, to follow).[93] U.S. business concerns soon realized the opportunities for American engineers.[94] John Nicholson also picked up news of a possible extension of the Meridian Highway into Mexico and

Figure 36. Pan-American Highway Commission, June 1924. Members of the Pan-American Highway Commission were photographed with President Calvin Coolidge by the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads. Source: Thomas H. MacDonald Photo album, Folder 7, Box 28, International, Thomas H. MacDonald Papers.

offered to help the San Antonio and Laredo chambers in advancing the idea.[95] Cities such as Dallas and Houston were quick to see the potential benefits of an extension of the Meridian Highway. Dallas published a magazine, *Mexico*, that promoted completion of the Meridian Highway from Winnipeg to Mexico City and claimed that Dallas would be "a great beneficiary as it is the embarking place for Mexico City via the automobile."[96] In addition, the Bankhead Highway leadership seized on the potential benefits of a north–south route to Mexico City by promoting a branch (the Texas–Mexico Division) that intersected that highway's main east route in Mount Pleasant, Texas.

A meeting at the Pan-American Union in November 1924 resulted in a proposed program that would occur the next year in Buenos Aires and touch on aspects of highway planning and construction. In the meantime, there was a growing awareness of potential benefits for U.S. companies selling automobiles, road construction companies, and increases in the numbers of Mexican and U.S. tourists.[97] San Antonio, particularly, anticipated benefits from extending the Meridian Highway into Mexico, enhancing the city's "strategic importance as a gateway to Mexico" and location as a "pivotal position in [future] interchange between an economically expanding Mexico and American products."[98]

The First Pan-American Highway Congress in Buenos Aires in October 1925 kicked off years of cooperative engineering and road building that had dramatic effects on the territory served by the Meridian Highway in Texas. The United States saw the area south of the border as a

"storehouse of incalculable resources in raw materials, the exploitation of which would bring wealth to the individuals and nations owning them, labor for the unemployed and new impetus to foreign trade." Improved highways were the key to this process, as well as to the core tenants of Pan-Americanism, and the Meridian Highway was to be a primary instrument in the promotion of "friendship and unity of interest" among members of the Pan-American Union.[99]

On a more local level, officials of the highway departments of Canada, the United States, Mexico, Texas, Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, and Coahuila, and the states' respective governors, proposed an international highway meeting to be held in Laredo "for the purpose of combining efforts to create tourist trade between Canada, the United States and Mexico along the Meridian highway."[100] (See page 92 in the *1933–1945* section for additional information on Pan-Americanism in Texas). The attention Texas cities and newspapers paid to the expanded role of the Meridian Highway increased between 1928 and 1931 as the Pan-American ideal broadened to include the principle of not only "free interchange of trade" but also of ideas and "harmonious relationship between North and South America. . . ." Crediting John Nicholson for this philosophy, a southern editor stated, "[i]f the roads of the United States had been north and south instead of east and west the Civil War would never have been fought."[101]

By 1928, the name "Pan-American Highway" had come into common usage, the idea being that it would "evolve from the Meridian Highway," and Nicholson had begun to use stationery with the title "The Pan-American Highway—The Main Street of North and South America. Under Construction in Ten Nations. International Meridian Highway—U.S. 81, Canada 14, Mexico 1, Main Street of North America."[102] (See *Figure 37*, to follow.) San Antonio and smaller communities, such as Belton, on the Meridian/Pan-American route were excited by plans for the highway, and representatives from San Antonio participated in an auto caravan from Laredo to Monterrey in May 1928.[103] One newspaper reported that a new organization, the Trans-American Highway Association, might come out of the Monterrey conference and that it would absorb the Meridian Highway Association.[104]

Eventually, Congress authorized the engineering participation of the U.S. Public Roads Administration in assisting the highway departments of Central America with completion of the Pan-American Highway; financing had been arranged by the countries through the Export-Import Bank of the United States.[105] But the international activities associated with the Meridian Highway and Pan-American movement had already begun to bear fruit for the corridor between Laredo and San Antonio. Agricultural and land development interests, many of them based in San Antonio, were quick to recognize the benefits that would accrue from increased traffic from the south and the north, while local Texas stockmen took advantage of post-revolutionary needs in

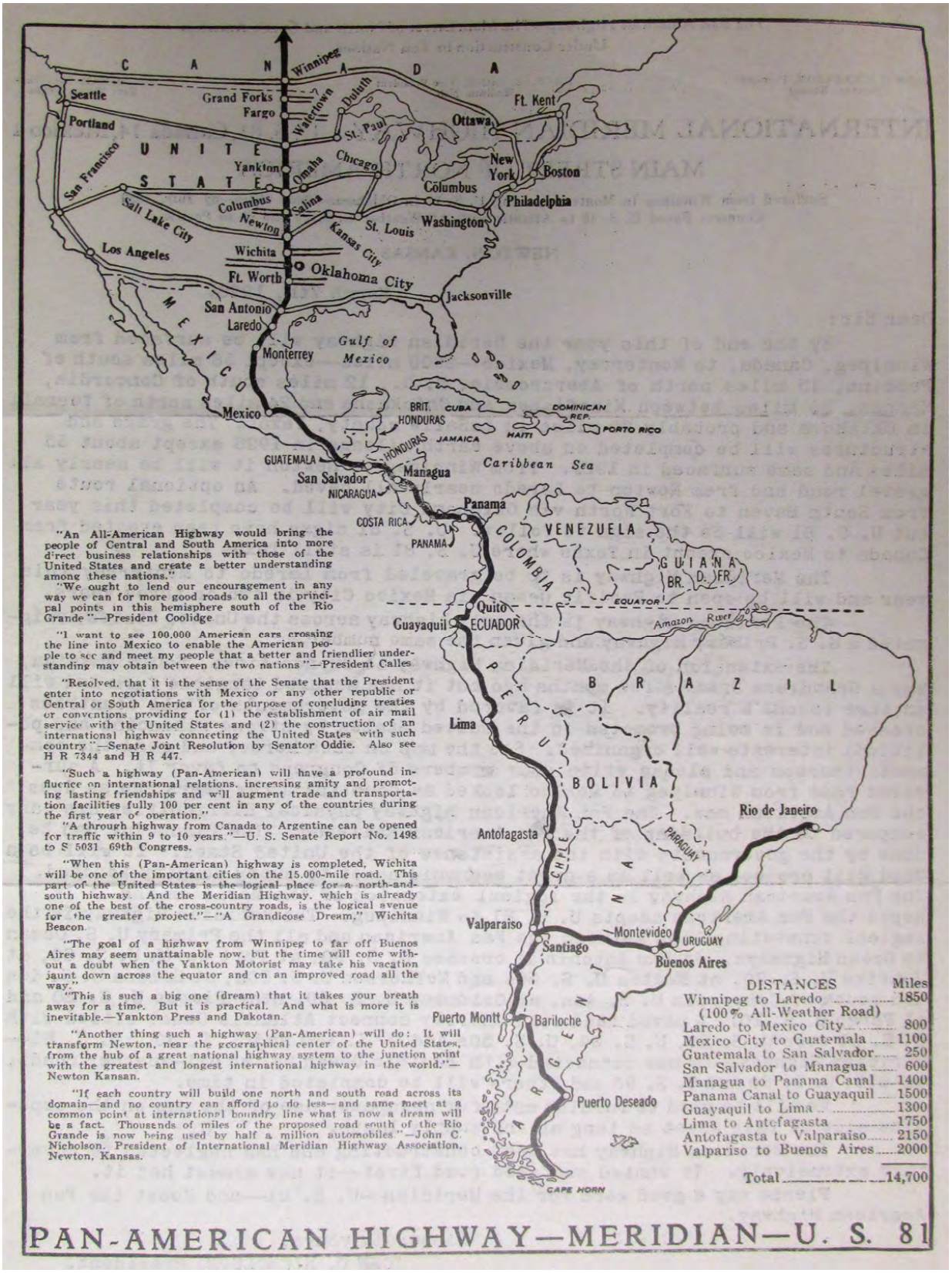


Figure 37. John C. Nicholson promoted the Pan-American Highway as the natural successor to the Meridian Highway. Source: John C. Nicholson, Newton, Kansas, to Dear Sir, March 7, 1928, O.S.T. A-H, Highways: Related/Joining, Ayres Collection.

Mexico: the president of the Dilley Chamber of Commerce raised "big-bone type Poland-China hogs" and shipped breeding stock into Mexico. The towns of Dilley and Pearsall in particular and the Winter Garden District in general experienced development booms that were directly attributable to traffic on the Meridian (see *Figure 38*, to follow). D. D. Harrigan of San Antonio, for example, bought an approximately 5,000-acre ranch near Dilley that was immediately west of the Meridian Highway. An article in a San Antonio newspaper speculated that the combination of the highway, potential for irrigation, and other factors were "attracting far-sighted investors to the Dilley section."[106] Gus Mauermann, a San Antonio attorney and, later, mayor, bought another large tract on the Meridian Highway near Dilley, built several houses, and announced plans to subdivide his property into 5- and 10-acre tracts that he would then sell to "the small investor" for irrigated and poultry farms. Perhaps counting on those new farmers, a wholesale nursery company organized in Dilley to supply citrus trees and ornamental shrubbery, while Temple Lumber Company of Houston bought lots on the Meridian Highway where they planned to establish a branch company.[107] Another 700 acres on the highway three miles south of Dilley were sold for development in May 1926.[108]

Encinal came in for its share of attention as well, advertising itself as the hub of an agricultural district of "immense potential worth" on the Meridian Highway. Focus also was directed on Cotulla, where Francis C. McCarty, a developer with offices in San Antonio's Plaza Hotel and owner of the 14,000-acre Sutton Ranch five miles south of Cotulla and on the Meridian Highway, announced his intention to develop and colonize the property for citrus farms. He planned to plat "a model townsite, which will be known as LaSalle."[109] Similarly, realtor Thurman Barrett used motion pictures, displays of citrus in the Gunter Hotel, and the promise of truck transportation to lure potential buyers to his property around Pearsall, located approximately one-eighth mile from the Meridian Highway. Development was so rapid in the general Pearsall, Frio County, and Winter Garden District sections, thanks to the asphalt-topped Meridian Highway, that the *San Antonio Express* predicted the region soon would be "a great agricultural paradise."[110]

The improved Meridian Highway and agricultural boom in the 1920s brought with them commercial development and population growth in towns and cities along the length of the Meridian. Various cities and towns, such as Temple and Clifton, announced construction of new modern filling stations in downtown locations by companies such as the Magnolia Petroleum Company and by individual investors, such as a Mr. Simmons. Simmons built a gas station "on the corner of his yard, where the Meridian Highway passes it on two sides" in a residential neighborhood.[111] In Dilley, Dillard Brothers contracted with a Waco firm to build a 10- by 120-foot hollow clay tile and stucco filling station at the intersection of the Dilley–Eagle Pass and Meridian highways.[112] Hotel

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1927. THE SAN ANTONIO LIGHT. PART ONE 19

OKLA
TEXAS
The Winter Garden Region
SAN ANTONIO
PEARSALL
Country

San Antonio Is Reaching Out Into the Great Pearsall Citrus Country!

SUCH is the colossal spirit of progress in Southwest Texas, working to achieve results that will make men rich. Free motion pictures and lectures, depicting the wonderful money-making possibilities and remarkable resources of the Pearsall Citrus Farm Tracts, presented daily in the auditorium of our building.

What we have accomplished for thousands of investors in the Comfortable Harlandale District of Greater San Antonio, we expect to repeat in the Pearsall Citrus Country.

See the display of CITRUS Gunter Hotel Bldg.

THIS display is a partial exhibit of the Parcel Post Citrus Show, held at Pearsall on the 9th and 10th of December, placed there by the San Antonio Real Estate Board and the Pearsall Chamber of Commerce, in order that you might visualize the possibilities of the successful production of citrus fruits on a commercial basis in this section.

This display is in the Gunter Hotel Building, second door west of East Houston Street lobby entrance.

After seeing this display, come around to see us, and attend the free motion pictures, showing the wonderful Pearsall country. These moving pictures are interesting and educational and will prove a revelation to you, concerning the great opportunities in citrus in the Pearsall section.

FREE TRANSPORTATION
San Antonio to Pearsall Daily

Own Your Own Orchard

$50 Starts you on the road to Orchard Ownership. Write for FREE Illustrated Booklet.

Free Motion Pictures Here

In the Auditorium of

Our New Office Building

429 North St. Mary's Street
Next South of the Builders' Exchange Building
Moving Picture and Lecture Daily, 10:00 a. m., 2:00, 4:00, 6:00, 8:00 p. m.—300 seats—plenty of room.

Come to See Us!

CHAS. A. BROWN
Sales Representative, San Antonio, Texas
J. M. SORRELL, Sales Manager on Grounds
Pearsall, Texas

Seventy Thousand Citrus Trees in This Section

IN the section of country immediately surrounding our properties at Pearsall more than 70,000 citrus fruit trees have been planted, especially in the territory tributary to the Meridian Highway, passing along about one-eighth mile from our properties.

The Pearsall section is a good citrus fruit country, and many of the fine varieties are being successfully grown, including grapefruit, oranges, kumquats, tangerines and others.

The Strategic Location of These Citrus Orchard Tracts

Our properties, located from one-fourth mile to three miles of Pearsall, are in close contact with a big prosperous market like San Antonio.

Trucks afford a splendid means of transporting the products of the Pearsall section, as well as that furnished by the Missouri Pacific system.

Pearsall is on the Missouri Pacific System—the International-Great Northern railway, one of the trunk lines of the Southwest. Pearsall is 100 miles north of Laredo, one of the gateways and ports of entry to the Republic of Mexico.

Pearsall, in the famous Winter Garden Section, is just 54 miles from San Antonio—reached over a hard-surfaced highway.

Citrus Orchards return an income from $600 to $1500 per acre per annum

10, 20 and 40 Acre Citrus Farm Tracts, $50 Cash, $20 per month on 10 acre tracts

Thurman Barrett
REALTOR

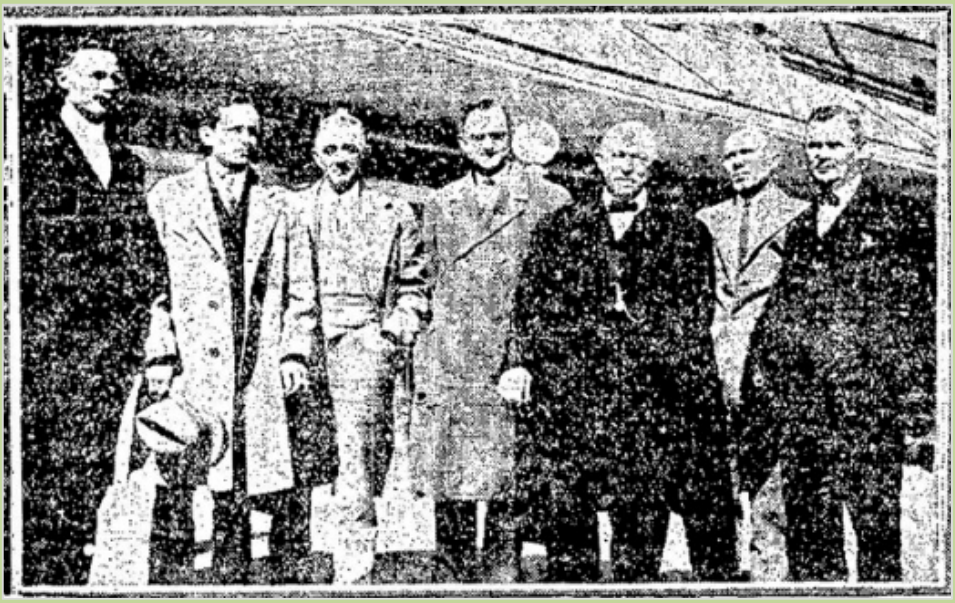
Figure 38. Advertisement for the Pearsall area. With ready access available on the Meridian Highway, land developers bought up numerous ranches and subdivided them into small farms that were marketed to city dwellers and people from out of state. San Antonio was a center for both developers and for the amenities that attracted tourists, including hotels such as the Gunter. Source: The San Antonio Light, December 18, 1927.

construction and expansion on the Meridian Highway occurred in the 1920s as well. In 1924 alone, Dilley saw construction of The Couser Hotel, 40 new houses, two store buildings, a filling and service station, and a wholesale oil distributing station.[113] (See *A Car Dealership in South Texas, Part 2* and *Figure 39* below.)

A Car Dealership in South Texas, Part 2

Charlie Neal, pioneer auto dealer in Cotulla (see sidebar on page 33), met with enough success before World War I to warrant glass windows and a cement floor in his store. In 1917, he went "over the top" with orders for 72 cars and again with 96 cars in 1918, despite the war and a terrible drought. He was able to buy up all the property facing Front Street, where he began building a new, modern plant – a brick, cement-floored, glass-fronted building measuring 45 feet by 125 feet. At the time, Neal recalled, the Ford Company required "dealers' buildings of a certain character, and this building was not being constructed according to their plans...." Neal outtalked the Ford Company representative, and his plans were approved.

In 1920, when he sold 144 cars, he built a modern office and sales, parts, and service spaces on the corner lot. He also added a large storage building adjacent to his first building. Neal went on to sign a contract for 250 Lincoln and Ford cars, and Fordson tractors in 1923. By 1924, when he attracted the attention of the *San Antonio Express*, Neal had a thoroughly modern operation that included six Bowser electrically operated gas pumps and "[a]ttractive rest rooms for both men and women patrons...." Neal indicated that his business for the year would reach a volume of at least $200,000, "[a]nd that's going some for a town of 1,100 inhabitants."[114]



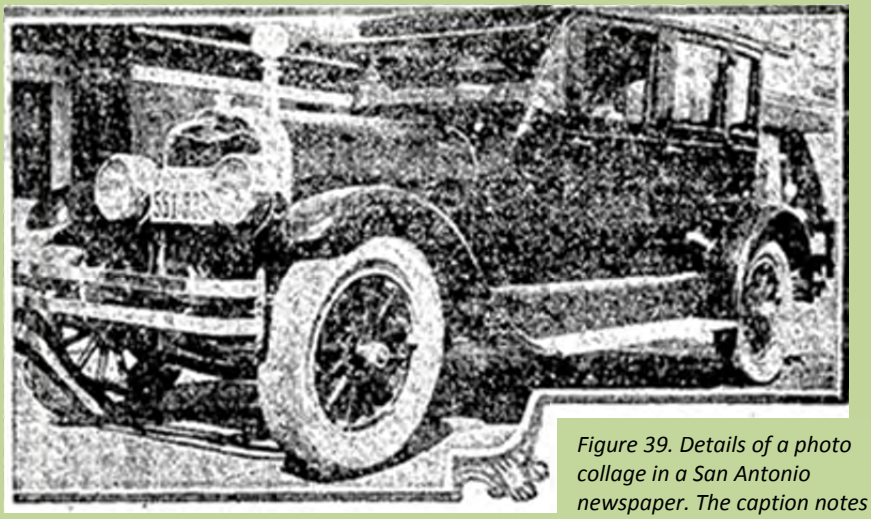


Figure 39. Details of a photo collage in a San Antonio newspaper. The caption notes a group of San Antonio residents in front of the Charles E. Neal Automobile Company at Cotulla. Neal (second person from the right in the top picture) is identified as the Ford and Lincoln dealer. Source: San Antonio Express, February 28, 1926.

Laredo benefited particularly from the international trade that grew exponentially during the 1920s, catching the attention of Houston and Dallas; Houston began to promote itself as the natural gateway to Mexico City through Brownsville. A Laredo editorialist responded sharply to the potential competition by harkening back to the city's stellar history: "Before Houston was a town, before Brownsville was anything more than a frontier fort, before Tampico was anything more than an insignificant port at the mouth of the Panuco River. . . Laredo was the gateway to and from Mexico."[115] The boasting was not idle – thanks to the Meridian and completion of a new concrete bridge over the Rio Grande at the foot of Convent Street in March 1922, and despite the failure of LaSalle County to pass bonds that would close up the last unimproved stretch of road between the Rio Grande and Red rivers, Laredo was on an economic roll (see *Figure 40* below).[116] The value of American goods entering Mexico generally was increasing, and it was estimated that the merchandise and goods going through the port of Laredo during 1926 would exceed $40 million (approximately $533,602,240.00 in 2015 dollars). By January 1927, O. W. Killam, president of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce, could boast that his city handled "more export and import transit business than all other border cities combined." Those numbers persisted until the end of the 1920s, securing Laredo's place as an international trading center. Trade also accounted for a building boom that included improvements to the Meridian Highway and city streets connecting with it, and construction and enlargement of hotels such as the Aztec, the Robert E. Lee, and the Hamilton.[117]

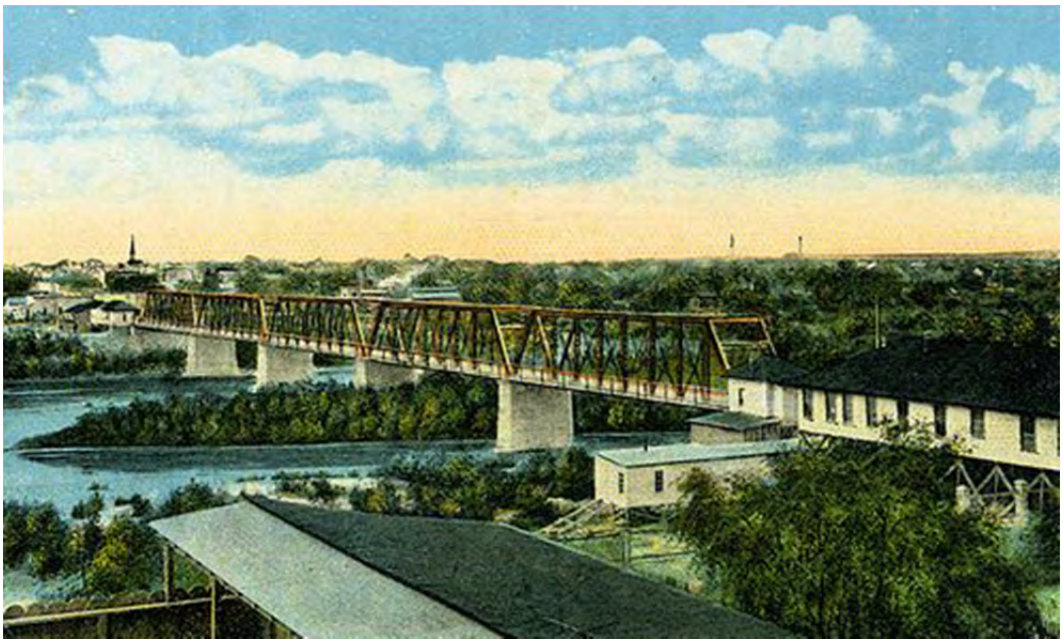


Figure 40. New international bridge over the Rio Grande at Laredo. The Port Arthur News, October 18, 1925, announced the opening of the new $500,000 international bridge at Laredo, marking the beginning of the new highway that linked Texas with Mexico City. Source: https:// www.flickr .com/.

Much commercial traffic up and down the Meridian Highway after World War I was facilitated by trucks, and their use boomed in the

1920s, when they were used to supplement train freight (*Figure 41,* below).

Sunday, April 30, 1922

THE SAN ANTONIO LIGHT

Automobile Section

San Antonio Hub of Truck lines to many surrounding Places

SAN ANTONIO and AUSTIN INTERURBAN MOTOR EXPRESS DIVISION RIPS TRANSFER CO. DEPOTS IN ALL TOWNS FREIGHT REFRIGERATOR SERVICE EXPRESS

MACK "BULL DOG" EMPLOYED TO HAUL FREIGHT TO AUSTIN

More Than Thirty Routes Link City With Neighboring Towns—Motor Transportation Great Boon to Rural Districts—Farmer Enabled to Market Products Quickly and Economically. Development of Motor Bus of Great Importance—Cheap Transportation Crying Need of Country.

FARMER USES TRUCK TO MARKET PRODUCE QUICKLY

ONE OF PASSENGER BUSSES USED BY RIPS FAST MOTOR LINES.

SPECIAL BUS ON WICHITA CHASSIS.

TRUCK IS VALUABLE ASSET TO WHOLESALE MERCHANT.

INTERIOR OF NEW BUS.

Figure 41. San Antonio Hub of Truck Lines. A full-page article in The San Antonio Light touted the more than 30 routes that linked the city with surrounding towns and allowed farmers in rural areas to market their products quickly. Trucks came into common usage during World War I, and their use exploded after the war. The article featured both a variety of short-haul vehicles and passenger buses used for commutes and local tours. Source: The San Antonio Light, April 30, 1922.

A heavy-duty truck manufacturing company—the Wichita Falls Motor Company—began in Wichita Falls in 1911, and its product was used widely in the oil business and by the military during World War I.[118] Trucks were used throughout the Meridian Highway corridor. For example, merchants in Valley Mills and Clifton trucked supplies from Waco,[119] and by the late 1920s, trucks were particularly common near wholesale cities. Indeed, between 1925 and 1930, the number of trucks used on Texas highways increased 300 percent to 206,000 registered trucks. Many of those vehicles were private contract carriers, who took considerable tonnage away from Texas railroads. In addition, the private carriers, who were unregulated, "all but destroyed the business of the common carrier truck lines." As a result, the Motor Transport Division was created within the Texas Railroad Commission in 1927 to regulate the trucking industry. Then, in 1932, the 42nd Texas Legislature passed House Bills 335, 336, and 628 for the purpose of imposing weight limits in an attempt to mitigate the impacts that trucks had on roads and bridges.[120]

Also numerous but less controversial were the hundreds of commuter and touring buses that used the Meridian Highway after World War I and eventually replaced the interurbans as commuter lines.[121] By the early 1920s, touring buses such as Fageol, manufactured in California and seating approximately 25 people, were being sold by an agent in Dallas. They were used on the Meridian Highway between Houston and Galveston and were introduced to San Antonio in 1923.[122] Numerous commuter buses ran every day from Union Bus Station at 210 East Travis Street (an address also given as 219 East Travis Street) in San Antonio. Service occurred every hour from 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Many buses ran from San Antonio to Austin, and customers interested in fishing, swimming, or other leisure activities could take a bus to Medina Lake as well. Others could travel from San Antonio to Pearsall by way of Lytle, Devine, and Moore. Tourists wishing to go on to Laredo and Mexico could pay $5.00 to ride a "single deck royal bus" that left from the San Antonio headquarters of the Meridian Highway at the Texas Hotel (at the intersection of Navarro and Martin) on Monday and returned on Tuesday.[123] Presumably they stayed overnight in one of Laredo's numerous hotels and enjoyed Laredo's and Nuevo Laredo's night life.

A popular company was the Red Ball Bus Line that had a station on Avenue D in San Antonio. It also had direct connections through a station in Austin to Georgetown, Taylor, Temple, Waco, and Lampasas.[124] Even little Walnut Springs had service: by early 1925, the Meridian Highway Bus Line left Walnut Springs daily at 7:30 a.m. and stopped in Meridian, Clifton, Valley Mills, and China Springs on its way to the St. Charles Hotel in Waco, then returned north at 4:00 p.m. The moniker "bus" was used loosely, since the proprietor, W. A. Matthews, actually drove a "high powered sedan of standard make." But the

service was useful to residents of small towns on the Meridian who wanted to make a trip to much larger cities.[125] By 1929, there were nearly 300 bus lines working Texas highways, covering about 32,000 miles of routes and carrying nearly five million passengers. The same year saw "the opening of a $350,000 state-of-the-art bus terminal in San Antonio and the emergence of Greyhound lines."[126]

There was no lack of things to see and activities to enjoy along the Meridian Highway after World War I, whether traveling by bus or personal car. (See *The Traveler Family Goes up the King of Trails & Meridian Highways* and *Figure 42* on the following page.) Tourists entering Texas by way of Burkburnett would have passed over a toll bridge (see *Figure 43*, to follow) until construction of the new $360,000 free bridge before traveling on through oil fields—that made the region renowned in the 1920s—and visiting Lake Wichita. Those entering through Ringgold on a new steel and concrete bridge completed and put into service in July 1931 (see *Figure 44*, to follow) would have driven south to Bowie where they could stay in a tourist park located near the business section of town; it was well-shaded and equipped with lights, water, shower baths, and a pavilion. Local attractions included the world's largest poultry farm owned by M. Johnson, who had a flock of 26,000 white leghorns. Down the Meridian Highway, Fort Worth also had a tourist park one mile from the center of the business district that was described as "one of the best equipped tourist parks in the country."[127]

Somervell and Bosque counties, with their interesting geology and picturesque natural landscapes, were particular favorites with tourists. Glen Rose was famous for its petrified wood that appeared in local buildings as well as in cities along the route of the Meridian from Bowie to Austin. Clifton boasted of having two parks suitable for tourists – a city park on the Bosque River and Tom Pool Old Settlers' Park five miles south of town. Area residents hoped for a state park site that would help the Bosque River Valley become "the playground for tourists," who would stay in the tourist camps and leave "a little of their money, because they will be glad to give it to us."[128]

Waco advertised its many parks, impressive downtown buildings, Baylor University campus, country clubs, and Texas Cotton Palace Exposition and Dairy Show complex that attracted more than 500,000 visitors each fall. The Cotton Palace tourist camp was conveniently located nearby, and there were numerous hotels downtown, as well.[129] Marlin had no grand promotional publication like Waco's, but its mineral baths were renowned, attracted thousands of visitors, and supported numerous businesses. In 1919, under the direction of the local Kiwanis Club, a committee developed the modest Kiwanis Rest. It adjoined property owned by the Marlin Oil Co. and had eight large benches and two electric lights. By 1928, the town could offer three hot mineral wells, a

Figure 42. Delayed by mud on the Blackland Prairie. A photograph of a "highway" through the Blackland Prairie of Central Texas depicts driving conditions in the 1920s in rainy weather similar to conditions the Traveler Family experienced in April 1922. Mrs. Traveler wrote of the area near Georgetown, "The next evidence we found of the recent rains was a half mile of mud stretching away before us. Through it ran two deep ruts that looked unfathomable." Here, a mule waits patiently to haul a car, while the farmer anticipates making a fee. Source: Photo library, TxDOT.

The Traveler Family Goes up the King of Trails & Meridian Highways

Between April 2, and June 4, 1922, The San Antonio Light ran a weekly installment that described auto travel on the King of Trails and Meridian highways from San Antonio to the Red River. Entitled "The Traveler Family, The adventures of a San Antonio family who decided to tour in their car," the series was written by "Mrs. Traveler" and began with a description of the family's preparations for the trip. Equipment, besides their trusty car, "Ginger," included limited clothing, suitcases, cots, blankets, an army truck covering, and a traveling bag. The day before they left, a friend took Mrs. Traveler to see the Chapel of the Miracles, where she felt she had "stepped back from another century and another country—Spain." She would be leaving with "a new impression of old San Antonio to take away" with her.

The family of five left San Antonio in mid-April, passing through Fort Sam Houston and entering open country. They arrived at the New Braunfels "wide, white plaza" an hour later at the same time as another touring party composed of a covered wagon pulled by four mules. They camped at Landa Park, cooking over a fire, sleeping on cots, enjoying the park landscape, and learning about the park's history from Mr. Landa. After several days, they left for Austin, guided by signs on telephone poles that marked the road as the King of Trails. They remarked on the cotton fields and cedars before arriving at Rogers Park in San Marcos, where they ate a picnic lunch. Badly broken pavement slowed their trip to Austin, but they picked up a passenger who was able to identify two camping parks, one two miles south of the Colorado River and another within Austin's city limits. They decided to camp at Pease Park until a late night thunderstorm sent Shoal Creek out of its banks; the Traveler Family checked into a hotel at 1:00 a.m. The next day, they visited the French Embassy, old land office building, and capitol, and then headed for Georgetown.

The trip was rough, with bridges and culverts washed out by the rain and miles of mud that taxed the car. They arrived in Georgetown after two hours and were directed to a city campground on the river across the road from a cemetery. The next day, they detoured past Southwestern University on their way to Jonah after learning that the main bridge over the San Gabriel had washed out. They found "good pike roads" on their way to Granger, Holland, Temple, and Waco, where they arrived at 6:00 p.m. Impressed by the "wide, straight streets and high buildings," they stopped at a public market and bought food and other supplies. The city camping ground was a disappointment, being a muddy lot with a street on one side and the Brazos River on the other. When they drove through a neighborhood, looking for a more-appealing location, a resident allowed them to camp; a car repair was done with the assistance of an African-American employee of a local serviceman named Bob Gay.

The Travelers left Waco and headed north, "dreading Hill County" which "had the reputation of having had the worst roads in the state...." To their relief, the family found good pikes. They stopped for gas and oil in Hillsboro, then continued on to Waxahachie, where they left the King of Trails. They entered Dallas by way of a bridge over the Trinity and visited the city, seeing the post office, library, municipal building, and new Magnolia Building. Leaving town, they decided to camp at a farm along the road. From that point on, they chose to camp at farms from North Texas to Kansas, always finding "good water, and milk and eggs in abundance." Dallas and Fort Worth were impressive to Mrs. Traveler, but she felt that, in their straight streets and tall buildings, the cities had lost "a spirit that San Antonio [had] retained." She wrote, "Over the more southern city, with its winding river, its crooked side streets, and its buildings dating back into the centuries, there lies a shadow of mystery and romance that is charming. In the large cities of the more northern part of the state that old-world air is forfeited to modern hustle."

A substitute for less urban charm was the value of travel education. Mr. Traveler remarked on the oil cars lined up outside Fort Worth and explained the importance of the city to the oil industry. The family stopped at the chamber of commerce to inquire about further travel on the Meridian Highway and then decided to continue on it to Bowie despite advice to the contrary. So they picked up their "M-H's on the telephone poles" and proceeded. They passed up a trip to Lake Worth, noted the changes in landscape and agriculture, which had evolved from cotton to cattle, and remarked on the pipelines that ran through the region to converge on Fort Worth. After more than 10 days on the road, the Travelers turned north from Bowie and left Texas by way of a Red River toll bridge.[130]

Figure 43. (Right) "Texas Highway No. 2 Red River – 1923." The photograph depicts the toll bridge at Red River crossing in Montague County. Until the late 1920s and early 1930s, many bridges across the Red River had been constructed by private bridge companies and were tolled. Plans for a new free bridge at this location had been discussed as early as 1925. Source: TxDOT Photo Library.

Figure 44. (Left) Terral-Ringgold Bridge, 1931. Building a new bridge across the Red River required the cooperation of Texas and Oklahoma, each of which spent $121,691.50 for construction. Source: Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

city lake, tourist park, and numerous hotels.[131] (See the *Mineral Springs* sidebar at the end of this section, on pages 71–72.)

To the south, Taylor had voted for a bond issue in 1923 that enabled the city to acquire and develop a municipal park and swimming pool. Locals boasted that the facility would be "a pride to the home folk and a haven of rest for the tourist" who might arrive in town on any of the four named highways (the Meridian, Gulf to Glacier, King of Trails, and Farrier highways). The elaborate park would have streets, walks, four

lakes, a fish pond, sunken garden, and concrete pool measuring 75 by 150 feet. The pool would be designed according to requirements of the National Swimming Association so that "swimming records made here can be made of national record." Austin landscape specialist F. M. Ramsey, whose own home in Austin's Hyde Park was near the Meridian Highway, had made plans for the beautification of the park. Water would be supplied by the Zilker artesian well, 3,432 feet deep with a daily flow of 1.5 million gallons of water daily, and owned by Andrew J. Zilker of Austin.[132]

Water-enhanced amenities up and down the Meridian Highway from the Bosque River Valley to the Brazos River, hot mineral springs of Marlin, beaches of Galveston, and Balcones Fault-generated fresh water springs, were strong inducements for tourists. Their appeal was enhanced by the presence of notable public institutions and dramatic scenery in Austin and by the historic sites of San Antonio and Laredo. Those sites, including the missions and parks, and enhanced by mixed-ethnic populations, introduced tourists to cultural experiences that hinted of foreign experiences. They suggested the possibilities of traveling beyond the boundaries of the United States. In this aspect, travel on the Meridian Highway was unique, even though the physical evolution, highway technology, and development patterns associated with it were typical of highways in Texas after World War I.

Mineral Wells Along the Meridian Highway

Mineral wells are naturally-occurring springs that contain mineral salts, elements, or gases in their water which have healing properties. These wells were a popular aspect of American culture prior to the introduction of penicillin and other modern medicines in the 1940s. People traveled to the springs, either by train or automobile, and bathed in or drank the water (referred to as "taking the waters") in efforts to cure common ailments, such as arthritis, rheumatic diseases, skin diseases, circulatory diseases, and many more. For instance, Sam Houston visited both the sulfur springs in Piedmont, Grimes County, and Sour Lake in Hardin County to heal his wounds, and Davy Crockett reportedly visited Texas Sour Wells in Caldwell County. In conjunction with the rest of the United States, Texas offered visitors numerous locations, including multiple spots along the Meridian Highway, to partake in the healing properties of the water.

History of Mineral Springs in Texas: The first mineral springs resorts appeared in Texas in the 1830s. According to Dr. Valenza's *Taking the Waters in Texas*, the "Golden Age" of the resorts lasted from approximately 1880 to 1919, when over 100 new resorts were established (*Figure 45, right*). During these years, the railroad aided in the success of many resorts as railroad companies produced illustrated brochures that advertised the "aesthetic and healthful features" of towns along their routes. Many of these routes were later followed by the Meridian Highway and other named auto trails, thus prolonging the success of some of the larger resorts and towns, including Mineral Wells, Marlin, and Hot Wells in San Antonio.[133]

Marlin: Discovered in the early 1890s, heavily mineralized hot artesian water quickly drew tourists and health seekers to the town of Marlin. Almost overnight, people began to flock to the town in order to "take the waters." In response to the increasing numbers of tourists, Marlin constructed a pavilion that included a continuously flowing hot water fountain, benches, and in the early days, a mineral water and soda stand. During summer hours, an orchestra played at the pavilion every other night. In addition to the pavilion, Marlin offered other activities for tourists either arriving by rail or via the Meridian Highway. There were two large lakes (including one located within the Marlin City Park), an opera house, and dancing arenas. In the 1930s, 80,000 people reportedly visited Marlin each year. This increase in tourism led Conrad Hilton to open his eighth hotel—the Falls Hotel—in 1930 (*Figure 46*).

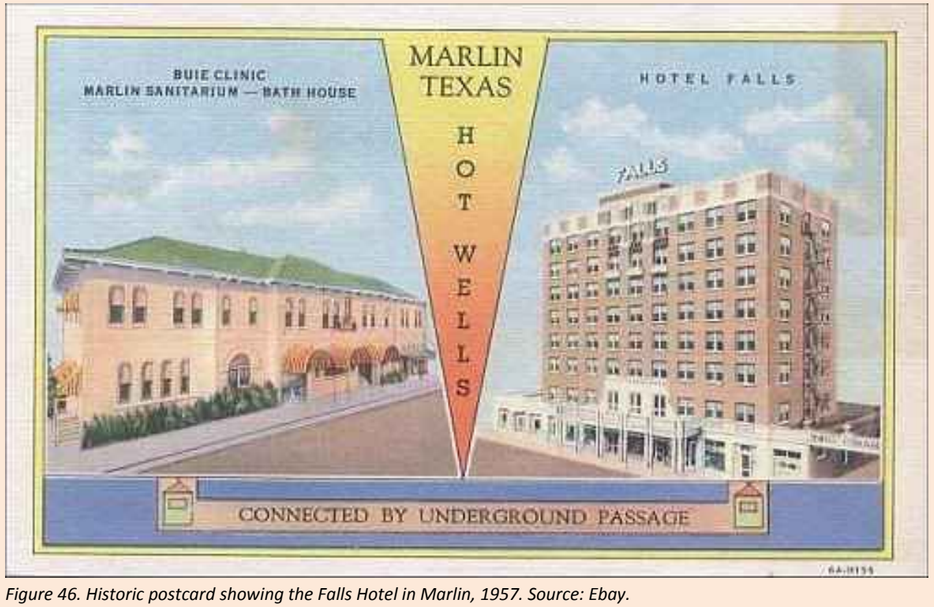


Figure 46. Historic postcard showing the Falls Hotel in Marlin, 1957. Source: Ebay.

The Falls Hotel, which featured a miniature golf course in the hotel garden, operated under various names and owners until finally shutting its doors in 1984. Today, it sits vacant and serves as a reminder of the opulence that once graced Marlin. One lasting element of this time does remain, though – visitors to the area can still drink from the hot water fountain located in the 1916 Hot Well Pavilion on Coleman Street.

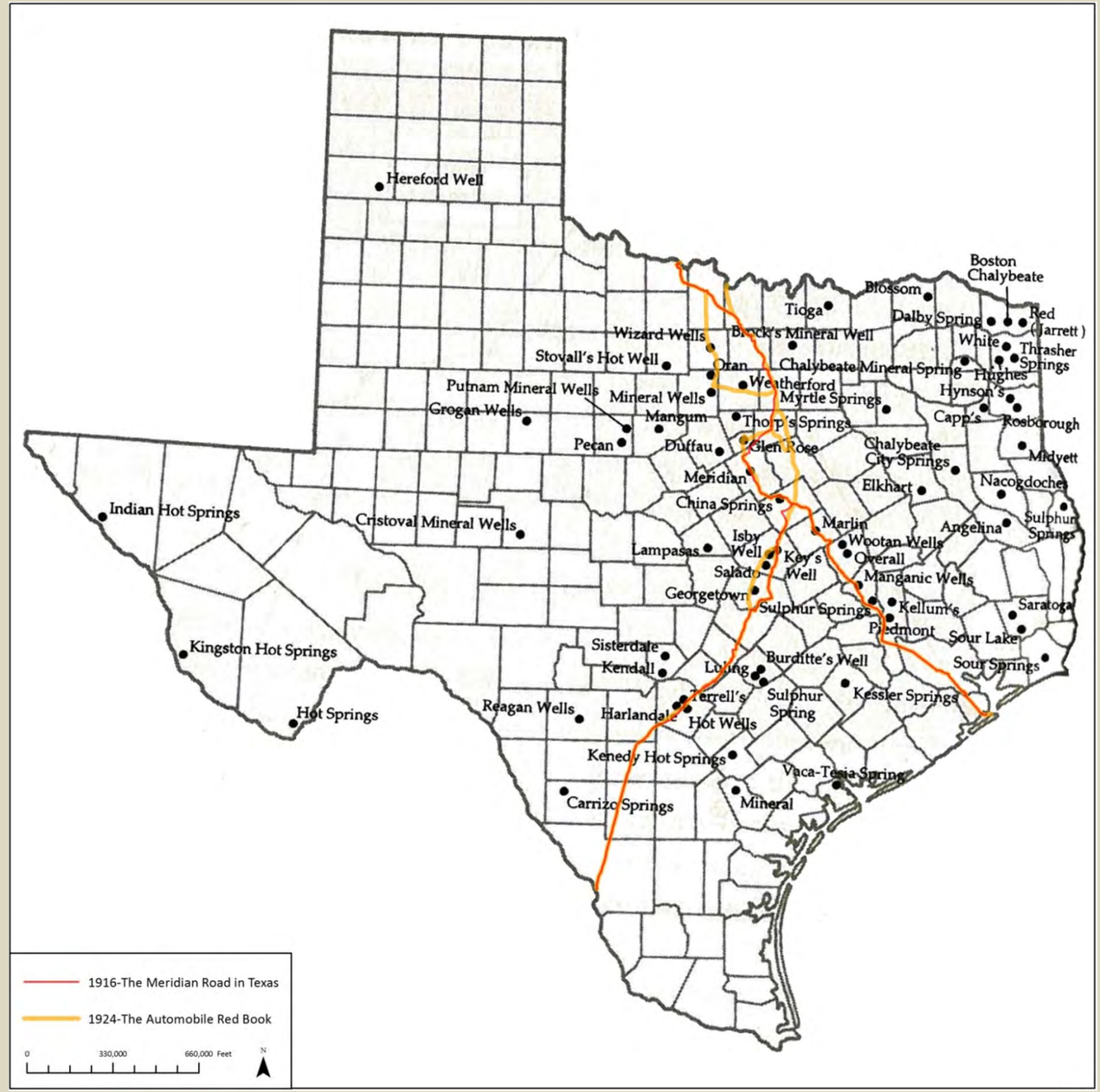


Figure 45. Map showing mineral well resorts in Texas with Meridian Highway routes overlaid. Original map source: Janet Mace Valenza, Taking the Waters in Texas, 2000.

Mineral Wells Along the Meridian Highway (Continued)

Glen Rose

Located along the scenic route of the Meridian Highway, Glen Rose is an example of a mineral spring town that benefitted from the rise of the automobile. In 1903, the first of many sanitariums offering sulphur water baths opened within the town. Due to its lack of access to a railroad, however, the popularity of Glen Rose did not immediately reach the status of other mineral spring destinations that fell along existing railroad routes. This changed with the construction of the Meridian Highway. As stated in a 1918 article from the *Christian Courier*, "…the great value and drawing card of Glen Rose is its mineral waters.... Hundreds of automobiles will come in from Cleburne, Fort Worth, Dallas and other towns and cities, tents are stretched everywhere in the parks, boarding places are crowded—hundreds to whom this water proves a boon and a cure to the 'ills that flesh is heir to.'" Today, little remains of what was once a significant industry for the town. Stump Well, for instance, offered four different kinds of mineral waters in the 1920s, but was demolished in the 1950s. By the 1960s, the springs that once fed the well had stopped flowing. Despite this, several buildings dating to the period of significance for "taking the waters," including the Snyder Sanitarium (*Figure 47*) and the Glen Rose Hotel, remain in existence. In 1915, Dr. George Snyder opened the Snyder Sanitarium (currently Inn on the River), which functioned until 1962. In the 1990s, Snyder Sanitarium was turned into a bed and breakfast, and today guests can view pictures and other mementos of the building's history and swim in the mineral water-filled pool. The Glen Rose Hotel is another building that remains in operation and was directly related to the tourism brought by the mineral springs. Opening in 1928, the hotel was only in operation for a year before succumbing to the Great Depression. It reopened its doors in 1939 and frequently accommodated overflow patients from the Snyder Sanitarium that was located next door. The hotel continued to operate until the mid-1970s, after which point it became so deteriorated that many rooms were uninhabitable. In 2004, the property was purchased by new owners who rehabilitated it to reflect its former glory. Today, guests traveling to Glen Rose can stay in the old Glen Rose Hotel (now Glen Hotel) and drink mineral water from drinking fountains in the town square.

Figure 47. (Above) Historic photograph of the Snyder Sanitarium in Glen Rose, 1934. The "Hotel Glen Rose" sign is also partially visible on the far left side of the image. Source: Ebay.

Mineral Wells

Established in 1881 after therapeutic properties were discovered in a recently dug well, the town of Mineral Wells quickly developed into a health resort. It was reported that bathhouses, pavilions, and hotels soon dominated the built landscape, and Mineral Wells contained the "largest number of structures of any Texas resort".[134] In the early 1900s, more than 150,000 tourists reportedly visited the town each year, and in 1910, the City of Mineral Wells shipped more than three million bottles of its mineral water to the South and Midwest. By the 1930s, when other resort towns were experiencing a decline in the numbers of visitors, the strategic location of Mineral Wells along both the Bankhead and Meridian highways helped to sustain and expand the town. The Baker Hotel, which opened in November 1929, was modeled after the Arlington Hotel in Hot Springs, Arkansas. It provided all the amenities of a modern-day resort, as well as a drinking pavilion, mineral baths, and a medical floor with physicians, a dentist, and an optometrist. The 200-room Crazy Water Hotel, although not as grand as the Baker, was constructed in 1927. It also offered many luxuries to the weary traveler, as well as a pavilion and bathhouse. Many celebrities visited Mineral Wells during this era, including Clark Gable, Tom Mix, Douglas Fairbanks, and American financier, John Pierpont "J. P." Morgan. Until World War II and the introduction of modern medicine, Mineral Wells relied solely on the health resort business. Today, there are only a few remnants of what was the town's driving force for so many years. Both the Baker Hotel and Crazy Water Hotel still stand, though vacant and reminiscent of a time long past.

San Antonio's Hot Wells

The Hot Wells Sulphur Bathhouse opened in 1900 on the east bank of the San Antonio River, within view of the old Mission San Jose, approximately 4.5 miles east of the Meridian Highway. The hotel, which featured an octagonal natatorium with 3 pools and 45 private bathing tubs, offered modern conveniences such as steam heat, electric and gas lights, and individual telephones in the office. In addition to the hot mineral baths, the resort offered other amenities to draw tourists from the Meridian Highway. Bowling, racing, and an alligator and ostrich farm were among some of the features offered to guests of Hot Wells. Gambling was also reported to take place in the bathhouse, where a Jockey Club bookie placed bets. The resort was quite popular during its heyday, attracting many celebrities, and even President Theodore Roosevelt. Unfortunately, multiple fires in 1925, 1988, and 1997, helped to finish off the resort. In the mid-1990s, however, sulphur water still flowed into two of the three bathing pools. Today, ruins of the one-time famous resort are still visible, although they are on private land, inaccessible to the public.

Memories Left Behind

Mineral wells resorts remained popular until around the time of World War II, when advances in modern medicine, such as the introduction of penicillin, turned people away from holistic healing. In addition to the destinations listed above, many other mineral spring destinations were located along the routes of the Meridian Highway. Today, little remains of a once bustling economy focused on natural healing; however, a few remnants can still be seen if one knows what to look for. These few remaining buildings are some of the physical evidence left to teach us about a former way of life that focused on the restorative properties of mineral springs. Like so much other roadside architecture, once these buildings are gone, the memories associated with them will also disappear.

[69] R. T. Smith, *Road Map of Bell County, Texas*, State Highway Department, 1921. File: Designation Bell County 1924, Box 2002/101-29, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

[70] Minutes of the State Highway Department, Volume 2, pp. 75, 290.

[71] J. D. Fauntleroy to Mr. A. R. Losh, Washington, D.C., File G-C-3: Federal AIS Highway System 1922-1923, Box 2002/101-2, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

[72] FAP 257 through 266, Austin, Project Files, Box 32, E. 30TX-1, Bureau of Roads, RG30, National Archives and Records Administration, Fort Worth, Texas.

[73] J. D. Fauntleroy to Mr. R. J. Hank, Austin, Texas, July 25, 1923, File G-C-3, Federal AIS Highway System 1922–1923, Box 2002/101-2, Texas Highway Department Records, Archives and Information Services Division, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas; cited hereinafter as Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

[74] John C. Nicholson, Newton, Kansas, to H[.] B[.] Ayres, San Antonio, Texas, July 30, 1923, O.S.T., A-H, Highways: Related/Joining file, Ayres Collection. The Brother Joseph W. Schmitz Special Collection, St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas; cited hereinafter as Ayres Collection.

[75] J. D. Fauntleroy, July 25, 1923.

[76] Minutes of the State Highway Department, Volume 2, p. 290.

[77] Application for an Allotment of State or Federal Aid, File B-Series, Williamson County, Box 2002/101-45, Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

[78] Alignment Map Showing Two Possible Locations for State Highway No. 2-B Through Taylor, Texas, File Williamson County 12-1-30, Box 2002/101-45, Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

[79] T. H. Webb, Austin, Texas, to Gibb Gilchrist, Lufkin, Texas, July 16, 1931, File G-C-3, Red River Bridges, Terrall [*sic*] Bridge Negotiations – Acct. Toll Bridges, Red River and Sabine River bridge records, Box 2005/112, Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

[80] Thomas H. MacDonald, "Highways and Airways," Folder 110, Box 6, MacDonald Personal, Thomas H. MacDonald Papers, Cushing Memorial Library, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas. Cited hereinafter as MacDonald Papers.

[81] *Corsicana Daily Sun*, February 1, 1918.

[82] Anonymous, "War Policy Formulated for Highways," *Colorado Highways Bulletin* (August 1918), p. 3.

[83] Erlichman, 2006, p. 153; Robert C. Overfelt, "Mexican Revolution," *The New Handbook of Texas*, Volume 4 (Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, 1996), pp. 686-688. Another version of this list was offered by J. D. Fauntleroy's office in the sixth federal aid district. Highway engineer B. H. Burrell noted that approved roads would "tend to increase the development of acreage for the production of necessary feed and foodstuffs and assist in the moving of agricultural products," would "serve a military camp," and would "result in the relief of railroad congestion between cities." *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, February 4, 1918.

[84] *San Antonio Light*, September 9, 1917.

[85] *Corsicana Daily Sun*, February 1, 1918; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, February 4, 1918; *The Corsicana Semi-Weekly Light*, November 26, 1918.

[86] Keller 1989, pp. 99, 101.

[87] Thomas H. MacDonald, "Highways and Railroads," Folder 131, Box 6, MacDonald Personal, Thomas H. MacDonald Papers. An article in the *San Antonio Light* on September 9, 1917, remarked on a flexibility associated with "army truck trains" in moving troops and equipment that "railroad trains" lacked. These "mammoth military movements" made completion of "a high class highway between San Antonio and Fort Worth or the Red River and San Antonio and the Rio Grande" an urgent matter.

[88] *The Grand Prairie Texan*, October 21, 1921.

[89] *Laredo Weekly Times*, June 25, 1922.

[90] *The Laredo Times*, March 25, 1923.

[91] *Laredo Weekly Times*, April 22, 1923; *San Antonio Express*, April 7, 1923.

[92] *San Antonio Express*, December 16, 1923.

[93] "The Pan American Highway Commission, June, 1924" [photographic album], Folder 7, Box 28, International, Thomas H. MacDonald Papers.

[94] *San Antonio Express*, April 25, 1924.

[95] John C. Nicholson, [Newton, Kansas], to H. B. Ayres, San Antonio, Texas, May 3, 1924, A-H Highways: Related/Joining file, Ayres Collection.

[96] *The Daily Courier-Gazette* (McKinney, Texas), June 3, 1924.

[97] Percy Owen, Washington, D.C., to Mr. Pyke Johnson, Washington, D.C., February 24, 1925, Folder 16, Box 25, International, Thomas H. MacDonald Papers; *San Antonio Express*, March 8, 1925.

[98] *San Antonio Express*, April 24, 1925.

[99] *Pan American Congress of Highways, Buenos Aires, October 5–16, 1925, Report of the Delegates of the United States, Designated by the President in Pursuance of a Joint Resolution of Congress Approved March 4, 1925*, Folder 13, Box 25, International, Thomas H. MacDonald Papers. A publication resulting from the 1925 meeting identified the Pan American ideal as the preservation of freedom, independence, and the love of country. "Our International Relations as Shown by the Pan American Road Congress at Buenos Aires," Folder 6, Box 65, Thomas H. MacDonald Papers.

[100] *Amarillo Daily News*, July 1, 1927; *San Antonio Express*, July 1, 1927; *The Port Arthur News*, July 1, 1927.

[101] Hwys 81 & 50, Harvey County Residents Box 7A, John C. Nicholson Collection. The author reiterated the ties of the Meridian Highway to motor transportation, which had largely superseded railroad transportation and pointed to the future of air transport with the idea that the proposed, presumably wider, Meridian Highway would be able to accommodate airplanes.

[102] John C. Nicholson, Newton, Kansas, to Dear Sir, March 7, 1928, O.S.T. A-H, Highways: Related/Joining, Ayres Collection.

[103] *The Belton Journal*, May 3, 1928; *The Laredo Daily Times*, May 3, 1928; May 8, 1928.

[104] *The Laredo Daily Times*, May 8, 1928.

[105] "Pan American Highways Symbolic of Pan American Unity," Folder 10, Box 7, MacDonald Personal, Thomas H. MacDonald Papers.

[106] *San Antonio Light*, August 30, 1925.

[107] *San Antonio Express*, January 24, 1926.

[108] *San Antonio Express*, May 23, 1926; August 21, 1928.

[109] *San Antonio Express*, November 20, 1927; *The Laredo Daily Times*, February 19, 1927.

[110] *San Antonio Express*, August 21, 1928; *The San Antonio Light*, December 18, 1927.

[111] *San Antonio Express*, June 23, 1923; *The Clifton Record*, April 11, 1924.

[112] *San Antonio Express*, July 17, 1924.

[113] L. F. Merl, Dilley, Texas, to Mr. D. E. Colp, San Antonio, August 2, 1924, Box 2H443, Colp Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas; hereinafter cited as Colp Papers; *San Antonio Express*, January 4, 1925. After four years, the success of The Couser was such that the owners added 20 rooms and a large dining room. *San Antonio Express*, June 17, 1928.

[114] *San Antonio Express*, December 7, 1924.

[115] *Laredo Times*, July 13, 1925.

[116] *The Laredo Daily Times*, January 22, 1926; *San Antonio Express*, April 16, 1922.

[117] *The Laredo Daily Times*, June 2, 1926; January 10, 1927; February 19, 1927.

[118] Hugh Hemphill, "The Trucking Industry in San Antonio and South Central Texas," http://www.tx.transportationmuseum.org/history-trucks.php. Accessed February 25, 2015.

[119] *The Clifton Record*, October 22, 1920.

[120] Hugh Hemphill, 2015; "Answer of Texas Railroads to Letter of Mr. W. H. Beck, Vice-President and Manager of Texas Motor Transportation Association to Honorable Franklin D. Roosevelt, President, Dated July 25, 1933," Folder 55, Box 21A, Miscellaneous, Thomas H. MacDonald Papers. MacDonald argued for the need to build highways that could withstand truck traffic: "We are not investing the large sums we are pouring into this newest of the great works of internal improvement simply to provide pleasure roads for motorists." Thomas H. MacDonald, "Highways and Railroads," Folder 131, Box 6, Thomas H. MacDonald Papers.

[121] The Galveston–Houston interurban company bought buses in 1928 "to forestall other bus operators from obtaining franchises over the highways paralleling its line." Herb Woods, *Galveston-Houston Electric Railway* (Glendale, California: Interurban Publications, 1976), p. 24.

[122] *San Antonio Express*, September 2, 1923.

[123] *San Antonio Express*, May 6, 1924; *The San Antonio Light*, August 17, 1924.

[124] *San Antonio Express*, July 15, 1924; October 7, 1924.

[125] *The Clifton Record*, January 30, 1925.

[126] Howard J. Erlichman. *Camino del Norte: How a Series of Watering Holes, Fords, and Dirt Trails Evolved into Interstate 35 in* Texas (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2006), p. 170.

[127] Map of the Meridian Highway/U.S. Highway No. 81, O.S.T. A-H Highways; Rated/Joining, Ayres Collection; *The Clifton Record*, November 19, 1926.

[128] *The Clifton Record*, March 14, 1924; January 28, 1927; June 19, 1931.

[129] Humble Oil & Refining Co., *Highways of Texas* (Houston: Humble Oil and Refining Company, 1928), p. 56; *Waco: Magnet of Commerce and the Air Mail, The Center of Texas Population* (N.p.: n.p., 1931).

[130] *The San Antonio Light.*

[131] Geo[rge] S. Buchanan, Marlin, Texas, to Mr. Claud Tier, Austin, Texas, February 9, 1928, File Designation File Maps—Falls County, Box 2002/101-33, Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

[132] *San Antonio Express*, July 15, 1924.

[133] Although no longer operating as mineral water resorts or towns, each of these locations has visible remnants of its past that would have catered to motorists traveling along the Meridian Highway.

[134] Janet Mace Valenza, Taking the Waters in Texas (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000) 75.

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I.6. THE MERIDIAN HIGHWAY 1933–1945

INTRODUCTION

During a 12-year time span that began in 1933 and concluded in 1945, the Meridian Highway evolved from a narrow, two-lane roadway into a bustling and vibrant transportation corridor (US 81) that extended from Canada to Mexico and beyond. In addition, the Gulf Division of the Meridian Highway, by then more commonly known as SH 6, served the ports of Houston and Galveston and continued to be a major conduit of raw and processed goods to markets elsewhere in the United States and the world. Combined, these segments represented a significant component with the state's, indeed, the nation's highway system. (See the *Main Street of Texas* sidebar and *Figure 48*, to follow.)

This 12-year span includes three distinct periods, each of which is largely defined by trends and events associated with the New Deal, Mobilization, and World War II. Policies and actions at all governmental levels, as well as trends in the private sector, affected the character of much of Texas' highway system and adjoining properties, including the Meridian Highway. These changes extended to the roadway itself, as well as to highway frontages and land-use patterns in urban, suburban, and rural settings. The Meridian Highway benefitted from worker-relief programs designed to stimulate the economy during the New Deal era and gave workers greater opportunities for employment and financial stability. The many kinds of public works and infrastructure projects of the era included reductions in the number of at-grade railroad crossings, resurfacing or widening existing roadways, construction of new alignments and turns, and landscape beautification. As the 1930s drew to a close and a reluctant nation prepared for war, government and military leaders developed a greater appreciation of the strategic significance of a well-maintained highway network and its role in the nation's defense. These highways provided a vital means of transporting people, goods, and materiel to military installations and industrial centers in Texas. The Meridian Highway assumed a particularly prominent role within the highway system because it served such bases as Fort Sam Houston, Kelly Field, and Randolph Field, among others. In addition, the expansion of industrial operations along the Houston Ship Channel in support of the war contributed to increasingly congested highways that contained growing numbers of trucks transporting raw and finished goods to and from these facilities. With war still raging, highway planners considered innovative ideas about highway design and construction and developed ambitious new plans for a postwar economy, which assumed a more significant burden on selected segments of the highway system.

"Main Street of Texas"

Before the federal and state governments became involved with highway construction, private automobile and highway associations largely spearheaded efforts to build highways for early auto enthusiasts. These groups typically adopted creative ways to promote their respective routes and give each its own identity in the public's mind. The Old Spanish Trail, for example, evoked a sense of the past from the Spanish Colonial era on its route from Jacksonville, Florida, to San Diego, California, by way of Texas. Likewise, the Meridian Highway Association adopted a similar strategy but chose a variety of names over time to promote the Meridian Highway. Among the names that the group used include the Winnipeg-to-Gulf Highway, Meridian International Highway, and the Pan-American Highway. However, one of the names that arguably captures the essence of the route—and the expansiveness of the highway's idea that distinguished it from others—was "Main Street of North America." Adopted in the late 1920s as the highway expanded (largely due to increased government support and funding), the highway became a physical link that connected cities and towns in the midsection of Canada, the United States, Mexico, and beyond.

Figure 48. The Meridian Highway in downtown Austin. This image, taken about 1940, shows how the Meridian Highway (SH 2/US 81) extended through the state capital. This view looks north along Congress Avenue from the intersection with 1st Street (now César Chávez Boulevard). The majestic Capitol Building is visible at the far right side of the photograph. Early promoters touted the highway's path to one of the state's best known landmarks. Source: Texas Department of Transportation.

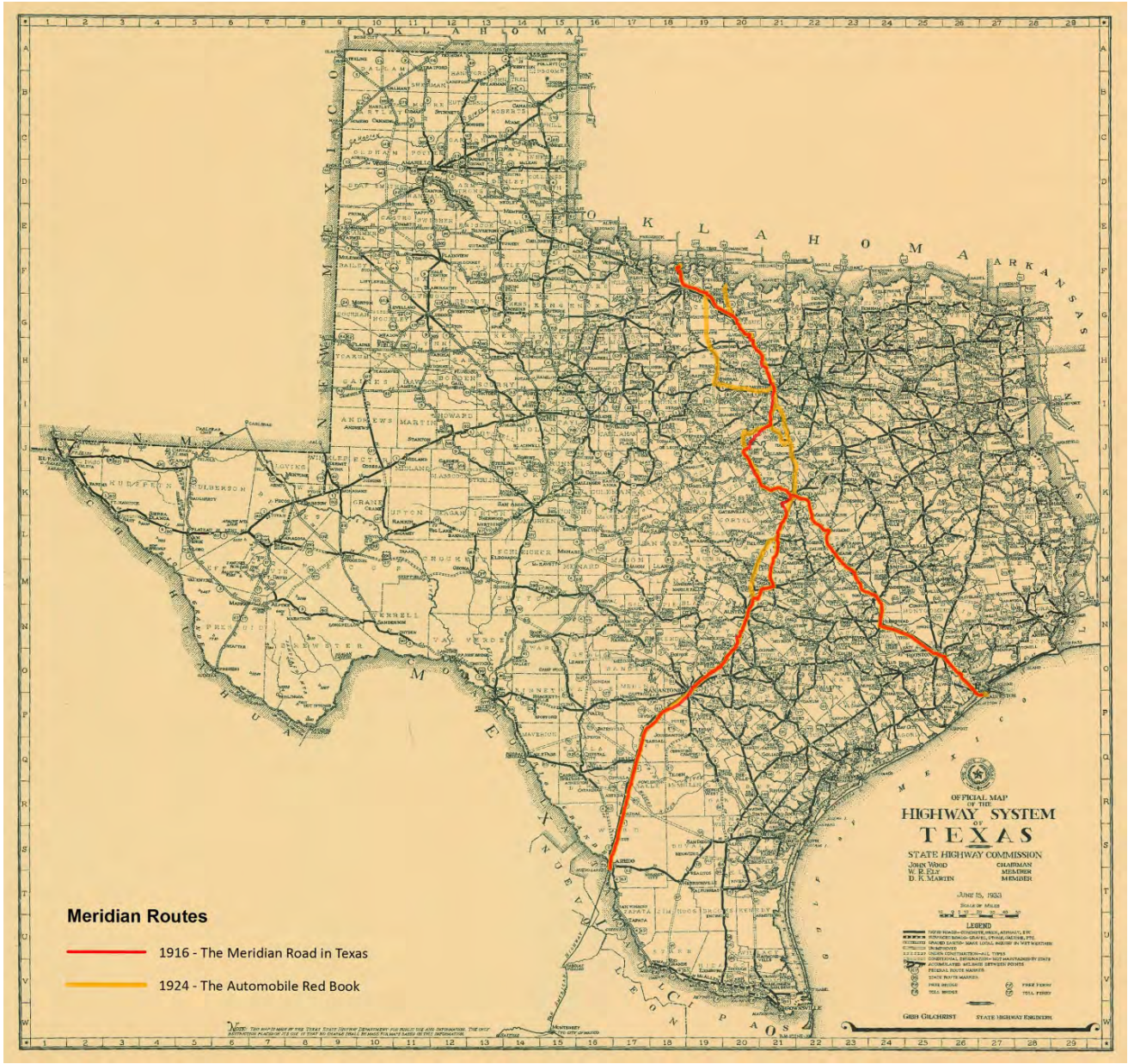
On a smaller, more modest scale, the route through Texas could similarly be described as the "Main Street of Texas," even though it was never promoted as such. The route extended through San Antonio and Laredo, both of which trace their heritage to the Spanish Colonial era and are home to many historic places, such as the Alamo, Spanish Governor's Palace, and Mission San José. Besides passing through the state capital with the majestic Capitol Building and the classically inspired Governor's Mansion, the highway extended through the fertile Blackland Prairie, which was the nation's greatest producer of cotton during the early twentieth century. The Meridian also passed by the Fort Worth Stockyards, a lasting reminder for motorists of the famous cattle drives of the late nineteenth century that proved to be so synonymous with Texas. In the Wichita Falls and Burkburnett areas, motorists witnessed the beginnings of a new chapter of Texas history as they drove past the rapidly growing forest of oil derricks. Few historic highways in Texas provided motorists the opportunity to bear witness to such a broad spectrum of terrain, development, history, and culture like the Meridian Highway, and for that, it could indeed be called the "Main Street of Texas."

CONDITIONS

In 1933, the main trunk of the Meridian Highway was known primarily as State Highway 2 or US 81 and extended from Ringgold (Montague County) to Laredo (Webb County). The Texas Highway Commission still depicted the SH 2 name on maps and in its files, but also used the overlay designation of US 81 after 1926, when Texas and the other state highway programs across the country adopted a federal highway number system. The original route of the Meridian Highway entered Texas at Burkburnett; however, its successor, US 81, crossed the Red River near Ringgold in Montague County and continued south to Bowie. The Burkburnett–Wichita Falls–Bowie leg remained largely unchanged after 1926 and retained its designations as two separate U.S. highways. The segment between Burkburnett and Wichita Falls was known as US 277, while the Wichita Falls to Bowie stretch was part of US 370. From Bowie, US 81 continued in a south–southeasterly direction through Fort Worth and on to Burleson. At Burleson, US 81 again deviated from the Meridian Highway and continued through Alvarado, Itasca, Hillsboro, and West into Waco. The Cleburne–Meridian leg extended along the same highways (SH 144 and SH 67), both of lesser significance within the highway system. A segment designated as State Highway 2A extended from Burleson to Itasca by way of Cleburne and Covington but did not appear to be part of US 81, based on the official Texas State Highway Map of 1933 (see *Figure 49*, to follow). At Waco, US 81 extended through the downtown and continued southward toward and through downtown Temple. The original Meridian Highway extended to Taylor by way of Bartlett and Granger. This segment was designated as SH 95 in 1926 and was not part of the federal highway system. The present route of US 81 followed a mostly parallel alignment to the west and extended through Belton, Jarrell, Georgetown and Round Rock, where it reunited with the SH 95/SH 43 branch by way of Taylor. In Round Rock, US 81 continued in a south–southwesterly direction extending through the downtowns of Austin, San Antonio, and other communities along the historic route of the Meridian Highway until it reached Laredo, the southern terminus of US 81.[134]

The Gulf Division of the Meridian Highway remained a prominent component within the state system; however, it retained its state highway designation (SH 6) and was not part of the US highway network. The highway generally followed the historic route of the Gulf Division, but the 1933 map shows the segment between Bryan and Navasota under construction. This new alignment bypassed communities such as College Station and Millican and followed a more direct path than the historic route with its many twists and turns and multiple railroad crossings. In Navasota, the highway again returned back to the historic route as it continued eastward to Hempstead, Houston, and Galveston, the highway's southern terminus.

Figure 49. Official Map of the Highway System of Texas, 1933. Prepared by the State Highway Commission. Source: Wikimedia.com [original on file at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission].



The routes just described remained largely intact through the end of World War II, and the Texas Highway Department completed multiple projects to improve discrete segments of the roadway. The easiest and least costly upgrades and class of improvements included resurfacing and widening existing alignments and replacing drainage structures, such as culverts. However, the Highway Department also constructed several new segments on new right-of-way that often were not far from existing alignments. Such improvements facilitated traffic flow and enabled motorists to travel more safely and at higher speeds. Many of these projects were completed in mostly rural settings and bypassed small communities and other areas of congestion. Besides the aforementioned Bryan–Navasota route, new location projects were completed in Montague and Wise counties, McLennan and Hill counties, and Travis, Hays and Comal counties. In other cases, the new alignments avoided downtowns and other areas with significant cross-traffic and intersections. By the mid- to late 1930s, the Highway Department began constructing what the agency sometimes called “loops” to avoid areas of dense development, such as those completed in Waco, New Braunfels, and San Antonio, where traffic congestion increasingly became an issue of greater concern. Other improvements of the period included projects of smaller scale and scope, the most common of which included grade-separation facilities designed to eliminate dangerous intersections with railroads or other highways.

THE NEW DEAL AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY EFFORTS: 1933 TO THE LATE 1930S

The Great Depression marked an unprecedented period of sustained economic stagnation. Its beginning dates to the stock market collapse of October 1929 and continued, for the most part, until the United States officially entered World War II. The inauguration of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933 marked a watershed year in American history as the federal government, under the direction of President Roosevelt, assumed a far larger and more prominent role in the lives of American citizens. The Roosevelt administration implemented a variety of new programs and policies generally known as the New Deal. These efforts attempted to jumpstart the economy and directed the federal government to develop and implement innovative programs and funding measures, many of which directly affected the state highway network and segments of the Meridian Highway.

Prior to the New Deal era, federal funding for highway construction placed the highest priority on safety and traffic needs. However, the dire economic conditions of the 1930s and enduring high levels of unemployment triggered a change in highway project funding policies, and the federal government began to offer employment opportunities through newly created work-relief programs. Many of these programs are still well known and include the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Works Progress Administration (WPA), and the National Youth

Administration (NYA), all of which assisted with highway-related projects for much of the Great Depression.

Established in March 1933, the CCC was among one of the first New Deal programs and provided jobs for young unemployed men. The program primarily targeted natural resource conservation through reforestation and better soil management. To fulfill its mission, the CCC established camps across the country, including various locations in or near cities associated with the Meridian Highway in Texas (see *Figure 50* below). Most of the camps were devoted to soil conservation projects, such as those in the cotton-rich counties along the Blackland Prairie belt, including Bell, McLennan, Travis, and Williamson counties. Others were devoted to the development of state parks and even roadside parks under the auspices of the Texas Highway Department. CCC camps close to state parks along the Meridian Highway include those established at Cleburne, Meridian, and Clifton. *Table 2* on the next page presents an inventory of CCC camps on or near the Meridian Highway in Texas, as identified by CCC Legacy, a non-profit group dedicated to promoting the history and lasting contributions of the program.[135]

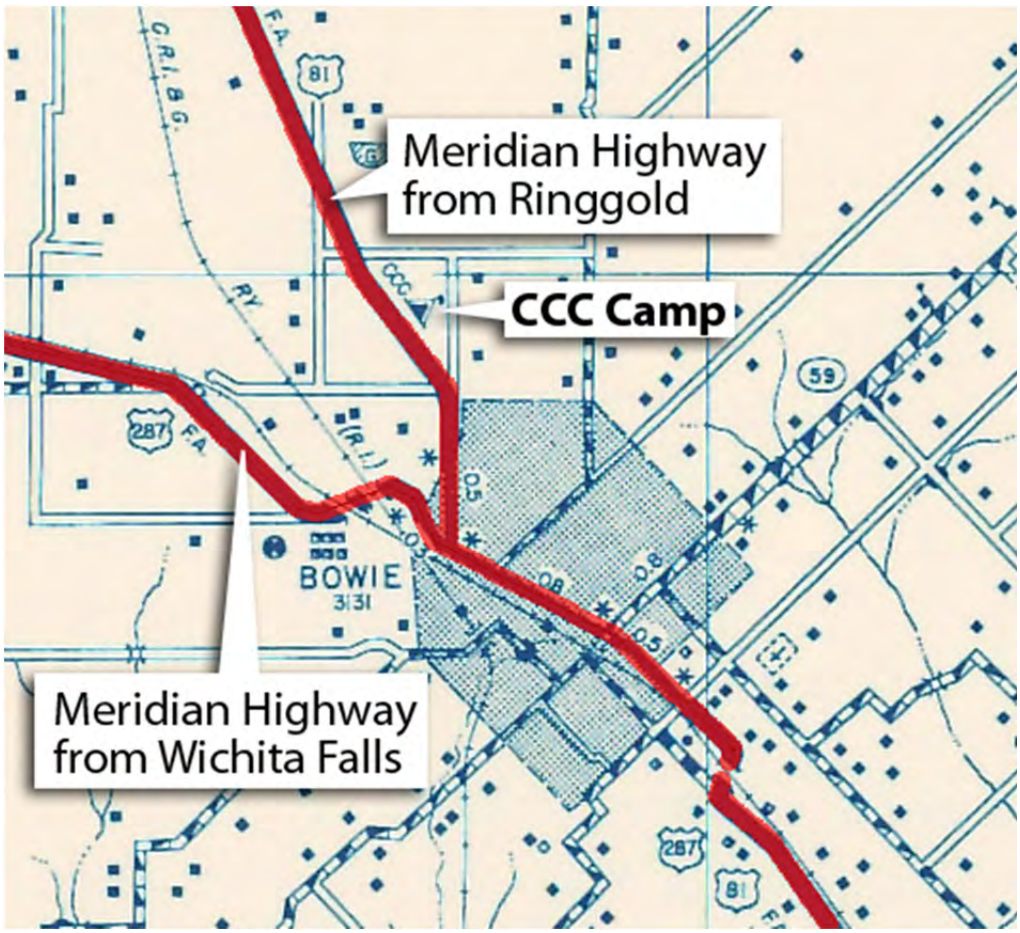


Figure 50. Detail of General Highway Map Montague County, Texas, prepared by the Texas State Highway Department, 1936 (partially revised 1940). The establishment of this CCC camp along US 81 outside of Bowie was one of several along the highway. The camp's location near an improved and well-maintained roadway enabled program participants to be transported easily to work sites. Other CCC camps were established along other segments of the US 81 and SH 6, which generally followed the Meridian Highway. Source: Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

Table 2. List of CCC camps along the Meridian Highway in chronological order.

Camp Site	Established	Service/Agency
Valley Mills	6/15/1933	(Undetermined)
Clifton	6/19/1933	State Park
Meridian	7/12/1933	State Park
Taylor	10/21/1933	Soil Conservation Service
Belton	1/3/1934	Erosion on Private Land
Austin	4/29/1934	State Park
Temple	4/29/1934	Soil Conservation Service
Troy	4/29/1934	Soil Conservation Service
Fort Worth	5/3/1934	State Park
Hillsboro	10/15/1934	Soil Conservation Service
Fort Sam Houston	6/16/1935	War Department (Army)
Cleburne	7/22/1935	State Park
Waco	8/19/1935	Soil Conservation Service
Bartlett	8/20/1935	Soil Conservation Service
Pflugerville	8/20/1935	Soil Conservation Service
Fort Worth	1/3/1940	National Park
San Antonio	5/2/1941	Municipal Area
San Antonio	4/1/1942	National Park

Source: http://www.ccclegacy.org/home.php.

Besides providing direct employment opportunities through the CCC and other work-relief programs, the New Deal also channeled federal monies to state and local governments to fund public works and infrastructure projects, including those involving the highway system. To encourage such efforts, the federal government relaxed many of its funding regulations to encourage the job-creating construction projects, by reducing the amount of matching state and local monies previously required to fund road-related projects. New Deal programs also provided new sources of revenue through the National Recovery Act and other legislative initiatives.

The Texas Highway Department seized the opportunity and instigated a series of projects along the highway system including many segments along the historic Meridian Highway. Minutes of the Texas Highway Commission recorded such actions. In its meeting of October 21, 1933, the Texas Highway Commission approved the Department's intent to use National Recovery funds "to make improvements without county participation" for a number of improvements in the state's highway system. These included Project NRH-M 614C, which was a 3.57-mile concrete segment of SH 2 in Waco. Subsequent meetings of the Commission note other projects with the same funding source that included relatively short roadway segments in Hillsboro, Alamo Heights, and Waco, as well as a "beautification project" along a 10.21-mile segment of SH 2 between the south city limits of Austin and the Hays County line.[136]

One class of highway-related projects that remained a priority at the federal and state levels and received large funding support was the construction of grade-separation facilities. This program, which sought to reduce the number of dangerous railroad crossings and highway intersections, not only improved safety but also provided much-needed employment opportunities (see *Figure 51* below). In 1935, President Roosevelt sent a letter to Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace, who also supervised the Bureau of Public Roads; the Bureau identified grade-separation projects in Texas. The letter listed 64 projects totaling almost $5.2 million. Of that amount, 9 projects were on the route historically known as Meridian Highway, as noted in *Table 3* on the next page.[137]

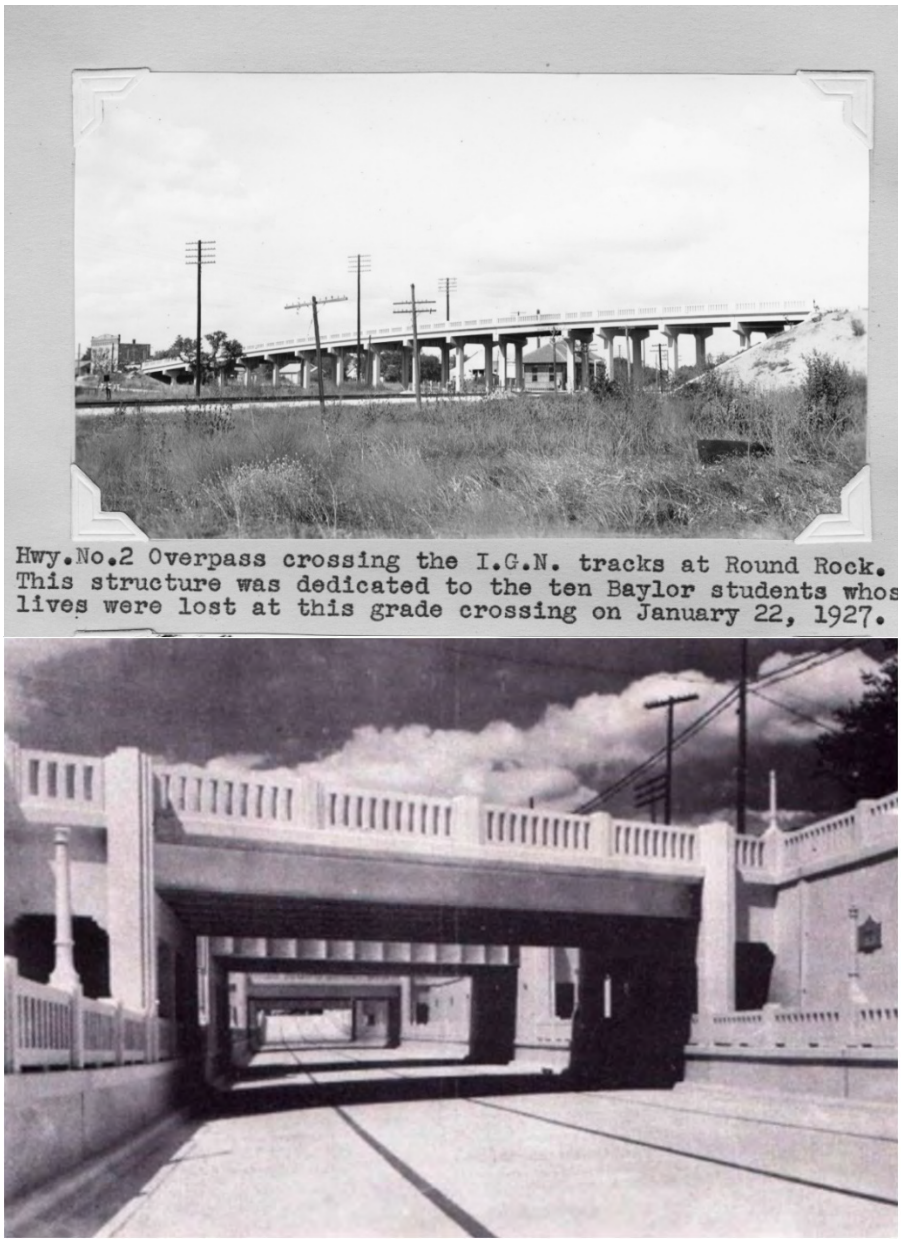


Figure 51. US 81 Overpass in Round Rock (top), ca. 1936, and US 81 underpass on Nogalitos Street in San Antonio (bottom), ca. 1936. These grade-separation structures represent an important type of highway improvement completed during the New Deal era on the Meridian Highway. Both structures improved the flow of traffic and safety by eliminating at-grade railroad crossings. These and comparable projects of the era provided much-needed job opportunities for the employed and also was a public benefit. Source: Texas Department of Transportation, Photo Library.

Table 3. List of grade-separation projects along the Meridian Highway, 1935 (in alphabetical order by county).

County	Railroad/Railway	Location
Bell	Missouri–Kansas–Texas	Temple, south of (on SH 95)
Frio	International–Great Northern	Derby, 1 mile north
	International–Great Northern	Pearsall, 3 miles north
Johnson	Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe	Alvarado
	Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe	Cleburne, 1 mile south
Medina	International-Great Northern	Devine, 1 mile north
	Fort Worth and Denver City	Bowie, 1 mile south
Montague	Missouri–Kansas–Texas	Ringgold, vicinity
Webb	International–Great Northern	Webb, vicinity

Source: *Franklin Roosevelt to The Secretary of Agriculture, November 15, 1935, Box No. 3010, Bureau of Public Roads Classified Central File, 1912–50, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, NARA College Park.*

Another important state-run program of the early New Deal era involved a building campaign to construct offices for regional districts within the Texas Highway Department system, several of which were in cities serviced by US 81 or SH 6. In fact, 7 of the 25 regional headquarters were established in cities along the Meridian Highway, which reflected the ongoing significance of the route in the highway system and the strategic locations of these cities within the state's entire highway network. Some of these headquarters, such as Bryan, Houston, and Wichita Falls (see *Figure 52*, to follow), fronted directly onto the highway and afforded agency staff and the general public easy access to the regional highway system and the territory within the District's jurisdiction. On the other hand, regional offices for the Austin, Fort Worth, San Antonio, and Waco Districts were on other transportation routes and were not directly associated with the Meridian Highway.[138]

Another large class of highway projects of the New Deal era included new bridge projects. Noteworthy examples from the period include the Guadalupe River Bridge in New Braunfels (1934) (see *Figure 53*, to follow), the new causeway over Galveston Bay linking Galveston to the mainland (1939), the Frio River Bridge near Derby (1938), and the North San Gabriel Bridge in Georgetown (1939). Most of the new bridges were of concrete and steel construction and typically replaced wooden or metal truss bridges that were obsolete and no longer met current highway standards.[139]

Besides the economic calamity that affected the nation during the Great Depression era, natural disasters remained a recurring problem and created their own set of hardships, oftentimes affecting the highway system. Extensive flooding in June 1935, for example, caused widespread damage throughout Central, South, and Southeast Texas. Newspaper headlines lamented the loss of life and home, as well as extensive damage to crops and agricultural properties. Additionally, the floods washed away roadways and compromised the structural integrity of numerous highway bridges. One such example was the Nueces River

Figure 52. Images of Wichita Falls (top) and Bryan (bottom). The Texas Highway Department built offices and headquarters for engineers and support staff at each of the regional districts. Many of these facilities were located on important transportation routes within the state highway network. These examples are on the Meridian Highway and were constructed during the 1930s building campaign. Source: Texas Department of Transportation, Photo Library.

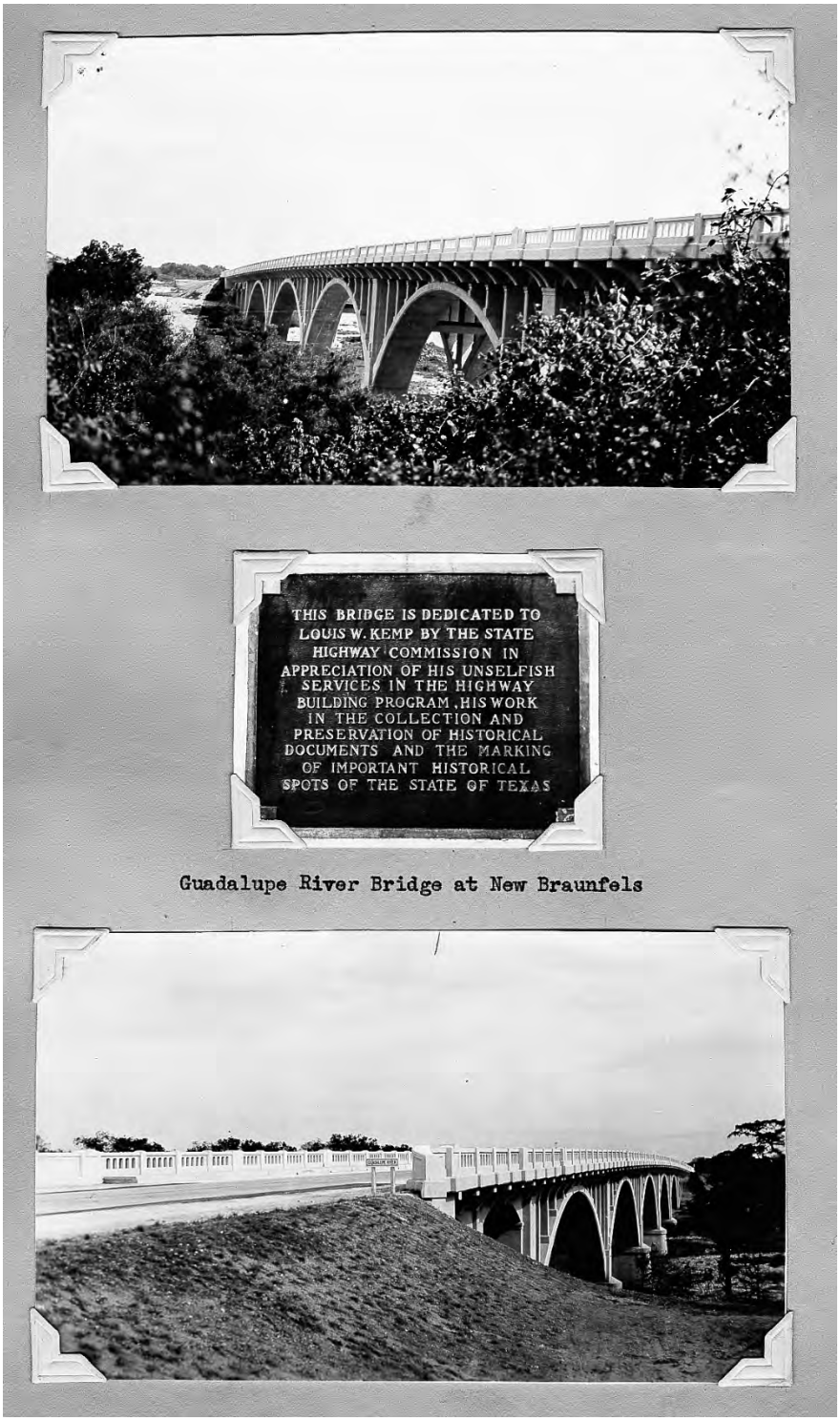


Figure 53. US 81 Bridge over the Guadalupe River in New Braunfels, 1934. This concrete bridge supplanted a still-extant 1887 metal truss bridge that was too narrow to meet growing traffic demands on US 81. The concrete-arched bridge was constructed on new alignment that extended east of downtown New Braunfels. This structure, with its aesthetically pleasing portions and design, became well known because the highway department showcased it in numerous publications at the time. The dedication plaque notes the contributions of Louis W. Kemp, who played an important role in developing the historical marker program implemented with the Texas Centennial celebration. Source: Texas Department of Transportation, Photo Library.

Bridge in Cotulla on SH 2/US 81 (see *Figure 54*, to follow). The wooden bridge that once spanned the water was reported to have been covered with at least two feet of water on June 18, 1935, according to newspaper accounts. Although the bridge survived and traffic across the structure resumed three days later, the bridge was vulnerable to high

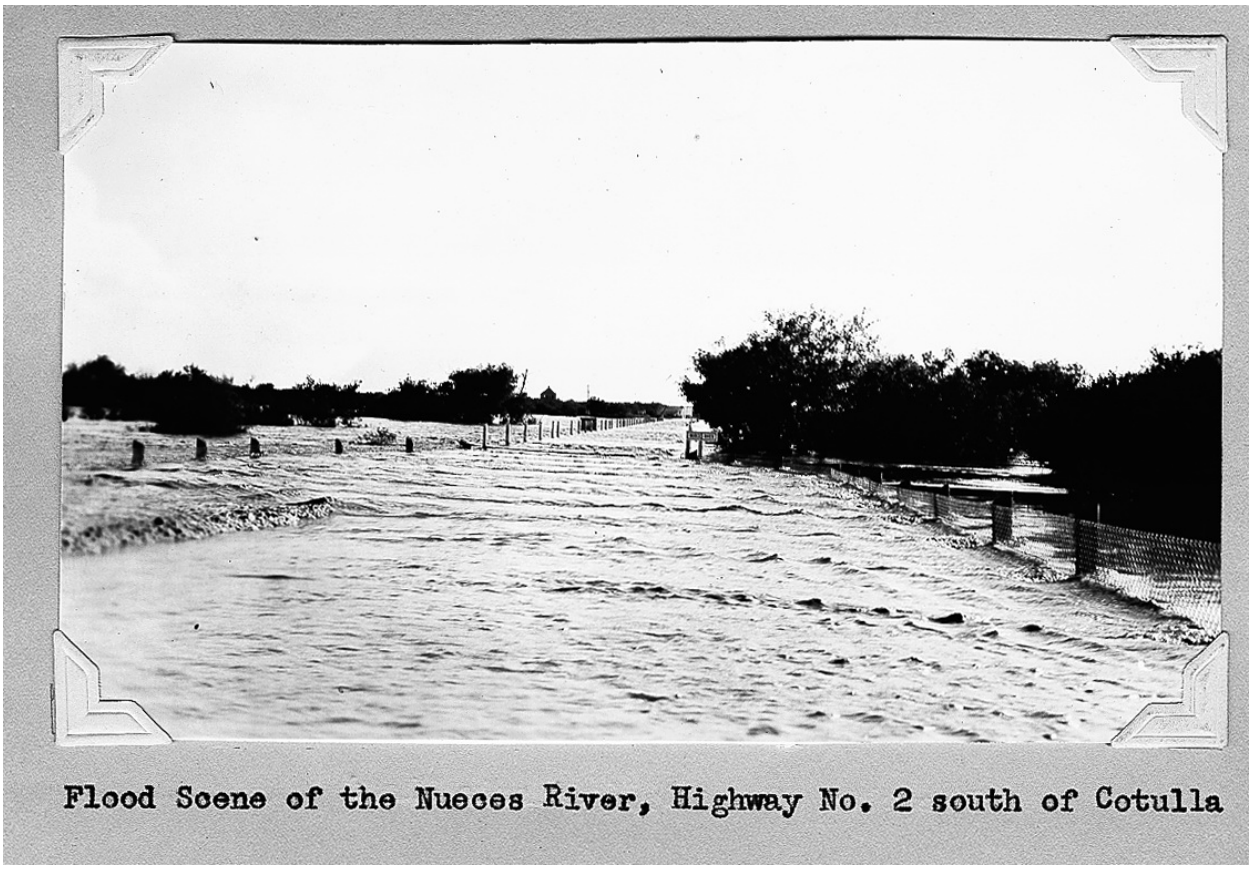


Figure 54. Flood at the US 81 bridge over the Nueces River in Cotulla, 1935. Heavy rainfall triggered widespread disaster across a broad geographic area in Central, South, and Southeast Texas. Flooding caused significant damage to roadways and bridges along US 81. This weather event resulted in the replacement of a number of bridges over the next few years, including the bridge at Cotulla. Source: Texas Department of Transportation, Photo Library.

waters, and the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce began lobbying to replace the bridge with a modern structure. On August 30, 1938, the new 1,226-foot-long replacement bridge, replete with pedestrian walkways on either side, opened.[140]

Local communities and their citizens did not always support or embrace proposed alignment changes by the Texas Highway Department, as illustrated by the recommended rerouting of SH 2 (US 81/US 287) in Rhome, Wise County in 1938. The need for the shift stemmed from the Highway Department's assessment that an existing curve on the south side of Rhome posed a danger and needed to be changed. This stretch of highway, which extended to the nearby intersection with SH 114 (Dallas Northwest Highway), had been the scene of five traffic-related deaths and multiple accidents and injuries. Highway engineers proposed two different routes along mostly new alignments on either side (one block east and one block west) of the existing right-of-way (see *Figure 55*, to follow). Writing to the Texas Highway Commission, a local resident presented a petition suggesting a "compromise route" along the existing right-of-way. The petition noted the amount of investments already made to existing commercial developments and the need for many traffic-dependent businesses to retain their frontage directly on the highway. Despite the resident's pleas and other local input, the Highway Commission ultimately chose the "western" route, which extended along C Street as the highway cut through downtown Rhome.

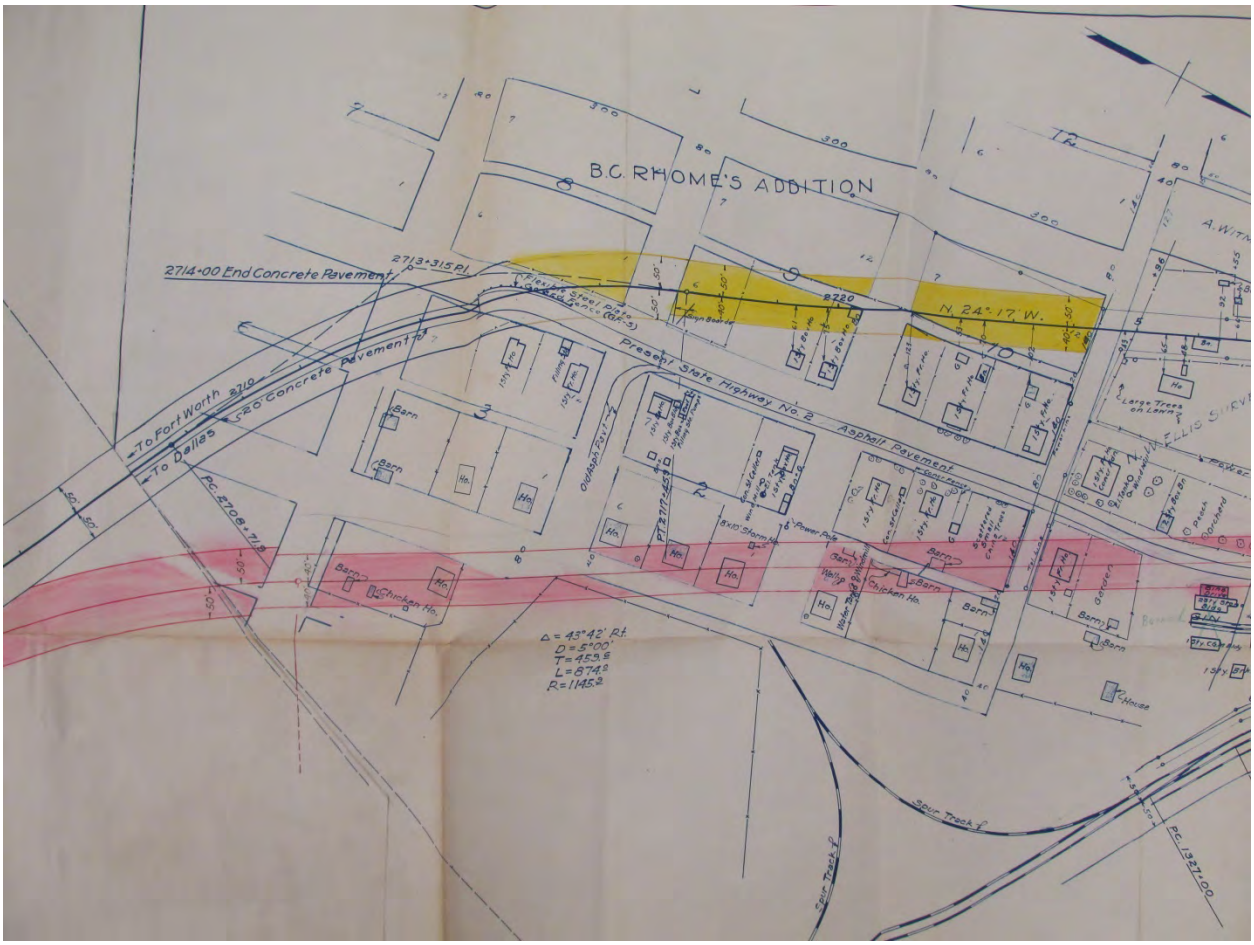


Figure 55. Detail of Plat Showing State Highway No. 2 through Rhome, Wise County, 1936. This graphic shows the alternatives being considered for proposed improvements of the highway. This section is at the south end of the community and shows the existing route at that time, as well as the "western" route in yellow and the "eastern" route in pink. The map shows commercial and residential development along the existing alignment and what buildings would be affected by any changes by a shift in the alignment. Source: Box 2002/101-97 Folder (21) Wise County, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

The agency's decision to move forward likely typified similar situations along other segments of the highway, regardless of community size or geographic area.[141]

As a consequence of the various roadway improvements of the period, the construction of new highway sections triggered the need to remove replaced and supplanted segments from the state-maintained system and return them to county governments. While some counties simply abandoned the roadway segments and sold and conveyed rights-of-way to adjoining landowners, other counties retained control and integrated the segments back into the local road network. A number of factors affected decisions at the county level to assume responsibility or facilitate transfer back to the private sector: population density in the area serviced, existing traffic patterns and usage, the level of redundancy within the immediate road network, and the county's ability to maintain the road. An example of such a trend occurred along a stretch of SH 2/US 81 in Hill and McLennan counties. In 1934, the Texas Highway Department completed a new segment that bypassed the community of West and nearby lands where a large number of family-run cotton farms remained the foundation of the local economy. The new segment facilitated through traffic along the busy highway, but

it also removed the community from the highway network. Since the old road still provided an important means for local traffic to link back into the highway system, the State conveyed the road to the county, which assumed responsibility for its upkeep and maintenance. On February 16, 1938, however, the regional Texas Highway Department engineer wrote the Texas Highway Commission to explore the possibility of providing state monies to "rehabilitate" the roadway. Although the State did not provide the funds because of the segment's non-state highway status, the effort highlighted the fiscal challenges many counties faced during the Great Depression, and the ongoing need of its citizens to use the highway network (see *Figure 56*, to follow).[142]

Although commerce and trade were the primary reasons for the establishment of the Meridian Highway, tourism was another aspect that early proponents used to promote its development because it extended to Galveston, a famous resort city of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition, it was proximate to famous historical sites such as the Alamo and other Spanish Missions in San Antonio. The Meridian Highway also provided a direct link to Mexico and other countries to the south, and the route continued to be promoted as part of the Pan-American (within and outside the United States) or Inter-American Highway, as the route south of Laredo was sometimes called. The Texas Centennial Celebration in 1936 brought tourists to Texas, and many used the Meridian Highway to get to Dallas where the celebration took place in Fair Park. Other highways, such as the Bankhead Highway or the King of Trails Highway, extended directly to Dallas and are more closely associated with the Centennial Celebration.

Efforts to promote tourism assumed great significance during the late 1930s, as illustrated by the establishment of the United States Travel Bureau by 1939 within the National Park Service (NPS). On May 20 of that year, Nelson A. Loomis, Chief of the Washington Office of the newly created Travel Bureau, wrote to the Texas State Highway Engineer, Julian Montgomery, and asked for information to support the Bureau's mission. Loomis also noted that the agency was distributing literature within the United States as well as to Latin American countries "for the purpose of encouraging interest in, and travel to, the United States." Although unstated, US 81 and its connection to the Pan-American Highway clearly would have been a key factor in such efforts since it would have provided a primary means of travel between the United States and Latin America. Montgomery's response underscored the lack of direct government involvement in tourism, as well as the tourist industry's complete reliance on the private sector. He cited the state's many historical sites, as well as numerous roadside parks maintained by the highway department. He also touted the department's "information booths" where important highways, such as US 81, entered the state as being stops that would be "of interest to the traveler." However, he

Figure 56. Roadway formerly part of State Highway No. 2, vicinity of West, 1938. With the construction of a new alignment that avoided small rural communities such as West in McLennan County, the Texas Highway Department conveyed the old segment of the road to local control and maintenance. Although no longer part of the state-maintained highway system, this segment remained a vital part of the local road network; however, it still required routine maintenance. Source: Box 2002/101-84, Folder (20) McLennan County, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

added that the state did not provide any tax funds to promote travel in Texas. He stated that "practically all tourist promotion work in Texas was done by the Chambers of Commerce and financed with local funds in the form of donations by the merchants."[143] (See the *Pan American Round Table* sidebar and *Figures 57–59* on the next page.)

Pan American Round Table in Laredo and the Meridian Highway

Figure 57. Portrait of the First Lady from The Laredo Times, Thursday, December 5, 1940.

On December 5, 1940, a crowd of thousands gathered on the Meridian Highway in Laredo, Texas, at the New Plaza Hotel to greet First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who had come to give a lecture on Pan-Americanism, hosted by the Pan American Round Table of Laredo, Texas (*Figure 57*). The founder of the Pan American Round Table (PART), Florence Terry Griswold, was a Spanish-speaking native of South Texas[144] whose exposure to the discrimination and inequities faced by Mexican Americans motivated her "to provide mutual knowledge, understanding, and friendship among the peoples of the Western Hemisphere, and to foster all movements affecting the women and children of the Americas."

The 1940 meeting illustrated the success of efforts that began almost a quarter of a century earlier. The organization's first gathering took place at the historic Menger Hotel along the Meridian Highway in San Antonio's Alamo Plaza on October 16, 1916.[145] Griswold's Round Table Movement subsequently gained widespread popularity in the state and nation, and eventually extended to other countries. From December 1–3, 1919, the first Pan American Conference between women of the United States and Mexico took place in San Antonio, this time arranged by officials of the Mexican government.[146] Other chapters were organized throughout Texas, first with Laredo in 1921. That same year, PART El Paso formed, and Austin followed in 1922.[147] In 1928, the first PART took place outside of the United States in Mexico City, and in 1936, the first PART outside of both of those countries took place in Costa Rica.[148] The organization's success in bringing publicity to issues of Pan American concord attracted the attention of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, and, on Thursday, December 5, 1940, Mrs. Roosevelt gave a lecture on Pan-Americanism, hosted by the women of PART Laredo.

The First Lady's arrival was abuzz in *The Laredo Times* newspaper for the days leading up to and after her visit. Chairman of PART Laredo, Mrs. J. T. Halsell, Jr., remarked on the "unbounded enthusiasm" by the Table on that Monday prior.[149] *The Laredo Times'* December 1, 1940 publication had strongly encouraged all Laredoans to greet the First Lady at a reception prior to her lecture, to be hosted at the New Plaza Hotel[150] (extant[151]), located on the Meridian Highway at 600 San Bernardo Avenue (*Figure 58*). Upon Mrs. Roosevelt's arrival, Mrs. Halsell and her PART members "drove out the highway" to meet Mrs. Roosevelt's car— heading in from Victoria by way of Goliad[152]—and escorted her to the new Plaza Hotel with a "motorcycle force of city and state highway department officers blazing the trail."[153] Mrs. Roosevelt was greeted and cheered on by thousands, and was presented to officials from the cities of Laredo and Nuevo Laredo, and county, federal, and district officials, members of the American and Mexican consulates, officers from Fort McIntosh, and the military garrison of Nuevo Laredo.[154] Large groups were expected from Asherton, Winter Garden, Hebbronville, Zapata, Freer, and Mirando City, and 30 tickets were reserved from Cotulla[155] – many of whom likely traveled along the Meridian Highway. The lecture followed that evening at 8:00 PM at the Martin High School auditorium, also on the Meridian Highway (*Figure 59*). All public schools in Laredo were closed for a half day, and children's tickets to the First Lady's lecture were on a special price of 50 cents.[156]

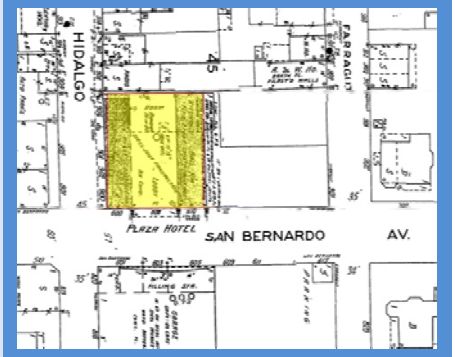


Figure 58. The Plaza Hotel highlighted on a 1931 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map.

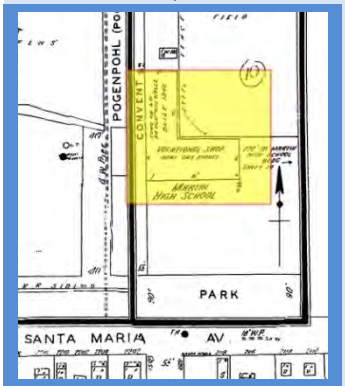


Figure 59. The Martin High School auditorium highlighted on a 1931 (updated 1950) Sanborn Fire Insurance Map.

In her daily diary entry for December 7, Mrs. Roosevelt wrote of her time spent in Laredo.[157] She remarked on Laredo's beauty and charm in its architectural design and its people,[158] particularly the balconies, the flowers, and food.[159] The experience made a lasting impression on Mrs. Roosevelt, and, years later, in her daily diary of April 22, 1943, she wrote of their visit to Mexico, when the presidents of those two nations met face-to-face for the first time in 34 years.[160] She spoke fondly and wisely, remembering the importance of Pan-Americanism. "Let us hope that in [their grandchildren's] generation this friendly gesture will grow to very active cooperation for the mutual benefit of Mexico and the United States and all the other American republics."[161]

While efforts to maintain and upgrade the highway network at the state level continued throughout the 1930s, new ideas emerged at the national level. On March 24, 1936, Representative Jennings Randolph of West Virginia introduced a joint resolution in Congress that advocated the creation of a "Superhighways Commission." Among the routes he suggested was "one extending to Laredo, Texas, to connect with the Pan-American Highway. . . ." During the same session, Representative J. Buell Snyder (D-PA) introduced a bill that directed the Bureau of Public Roads to locate and survey "a system of three transcontinental and six north–south highways. . . for transportation of commodities and to economize in the building of national highways and provide modern and adequate national-defense equipment." One of the cited north–south routes extended from Fargo, North Dakota, to San Antonio (i.e., the Meridian Highway). Although Congress took no immediate action, both initiatives reflected the continued importance of the Meridian Highway route and, by extension, its association with the Pan-American Highway.[162]

Support for an expanded national highway system continued to build among members of Congress to the extent that the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1938 authorized the Bureau of Public Roads to prepare a report to examine a new "superhighway" system and an appropriate means of financing its construction. The results of this study were presented in a report entitled *Toll Roads and Free Roads*, House Document No. 272. In transmitting the report of Congress, President Roosevelt wrote that "the report is the first complete assembly of data on the use being made of our national highway network. . . . It emphasizes the need of a special system of direct interregional highways, with all necessary connections through and around cities, designed to meet the requirements of the national defense and the needs of a growing peacetime traffic of longer range." The report concluded that direct tolls would not provide sufficient funding and warned of right-of-way acquisition costs, "excessive taking," and the need to prioritize construction. The report advocated that the nation's major metropolitan areas be the first priority because they included the most heavily traveled sections of roadways. The sixth installment included a north–south segment in Texas between Dallas and San Antonio and included a large segment of the Meridian Highway. Ultimately, this section would be part of Route 3, which extended from Chicago, Illinois, to Laredo, Texas (see *Figure 60*, to follow).[163] Although the president and Congress did not take immediate action on the recommendations of the report, the concept of "superhighways" ultimately laid the groundwork for the creation of an interregional highway system in the mid- to late 1940s and its successor—the Interstate Highway System—that came to fruition in 1956.

While the New Deal era marked a time when government assumed a more prominent and visible role in American culture, the continued

PLATE 57.—Location of existing routes tentatively selected as approximating the lines of a proposed interregional highway system.

Figure 60. Map of proposed interregional highways along existing routes, 1939. This map shows a network of a new generation of highways proposed to meet growing demands on the national highway system. The primary north–south segment in Texas follows most of the Meridian Highway. Source: Toll Roads and Free Roads, 1939.

maintenance and upgrade to the highway system extended to the private sector and affected patterns and trends in land use, business establishments (especially those catering to an ever-increasing automobile-based citizenry), and the construction of new architectural forms along roadsides. Foremost among these trends was the continued proliferation of standardized gas stations. Oil companies such as Sinclair, Humble, Magnolia, Texaco, and Gulf erected distinctive gas stations that became a regular feature on the cultural landscape and a familiar sight along the Meridian and other highways (see *Figure 61* below). Each company began to recognize the importance of branding and standardization as a way to promote the company and encourage greater loyalty and patronage.

Figure 61. Detail Sinclair 1933 Road Map of Texas. The Sinclair Company was one of several oil companies that developed a distinctive gas station form that enabled motorists to instantly recognize the company and its products. Sinclair used this architectural form in a variety of media, such as the road map of Texas. This gas station was replicated throughout Texas and many extant examples remain on older segments of the Meridian Highway in Texas. Source: Rosenberg Library, Galveston.

In addition, motor courts continued to gain popularity. Ed Torrance, who in 1929 established the first Alamo Plaza Courts in the 900 block of Elm Street in Waco, expanded his operations and built similar-looking motor courts in Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and elsewhere in the South. He also began to sell franchises, each of which included the distinctive Mission Revival parapet so closely associated with the historic Alamo in San Antonio and reflecting Torrance's proud Texas heritage. These and other tourist and motor courts typically were built on the outskirts of urban areas on roads with the greatest amount of traffic, such as the larger cross-roads cities of San Antonio, Waco, Houston, and Fort Worth, where multiple highways intersected.[164]

MOBILIZATION AND PREPARATIONS FOR WAR: LATE 1930S TO 1941

The Mobilization era includes the years that immediately precede direct U.S. involvement in World War II. It also marks a period of transition as the Roosevelt administration redirected its focus from economic

recovery and turned instead to improving the nation's military and industrial might in preparations for war. The number of existing military installations along US 81 (the main trunk of the Meridian Highway) along with the growing importance of the trucking and trade industries through the ports of Houston and Galveston using SH 6 and US 75 (Gulf Division) led to additional improvements to the Meridian Highway (see *Figure 62* below). In addition, several forward-thinking government and business leaders began contemplating ways to upgrade the nation's highway system and, in particular, the route historically associated with the Meridian Highway.

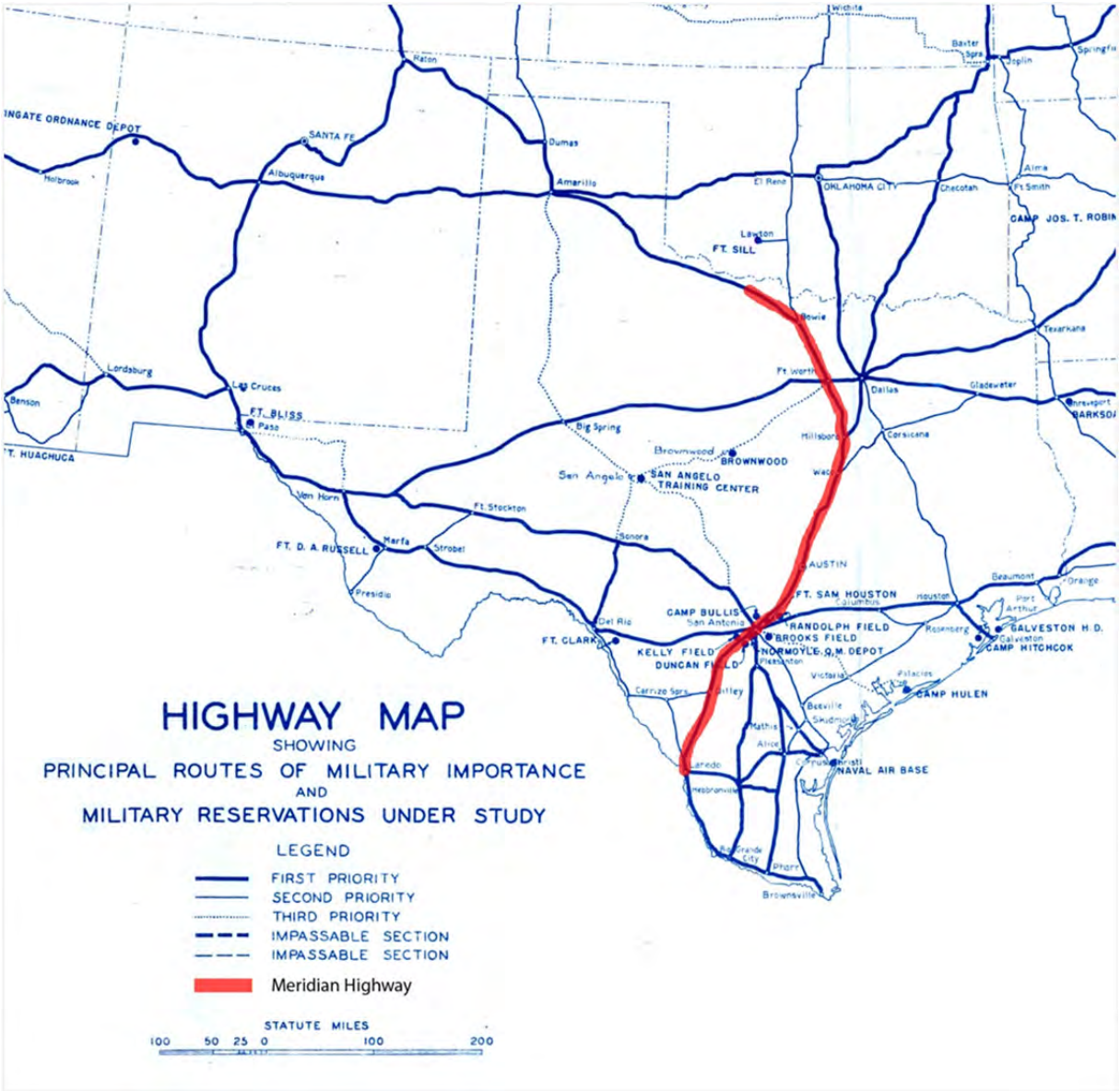


Figure 62. Detail of Map Showing Principal Routes of Military Importance and Military Reservations under Study. This map was part of a federal study that identified existing military installations throughout the nation. This map shows the large number of bases along or near the Meridian Highway and how important the roadway was in national defense and military preparedness just before the United States officially entered World War II. Source: Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads. NARA College Park.

With war raging in Europe, Africa, and Asia, and as the nation prepared for war, the Texas Highway Department published a report entitled *The Texas Highway System as Related to National Defense Transportation* in December 1940 that examined the state road system in relation to the country's "Strategic Military Network." The report briefly and succinctly assessed how the state's highway system was an integral part of the nation's defense and how these roads were important to overcoming Texas' "exposed position." The highways helped to protect, secure, and link the many large military installations within its borders and supported the state's growing value and importance as an industrial center and a producer of war-related goods and materials. The 1940 report presented a harsh evaluation of the system and noted the need for system-wide improvements and upgrades to facilitate the use of the highways in times of war. Specifically, the report noted such deficiencies as road widths, bridge height clearances, and inflexible bases, as well as bridges with insufficient weight-carrying capacities (see *Figure 63* below). Of the "first-priority roads," which would have included US 81 (Meridian) and other federal-aid highways, the report stated that an estimated 81 percent of the mileage needed to be improved or reconstructed. The combined estimated cost of improvement to first-, second-, and third-priority roads was a staggering $80 million.[165]

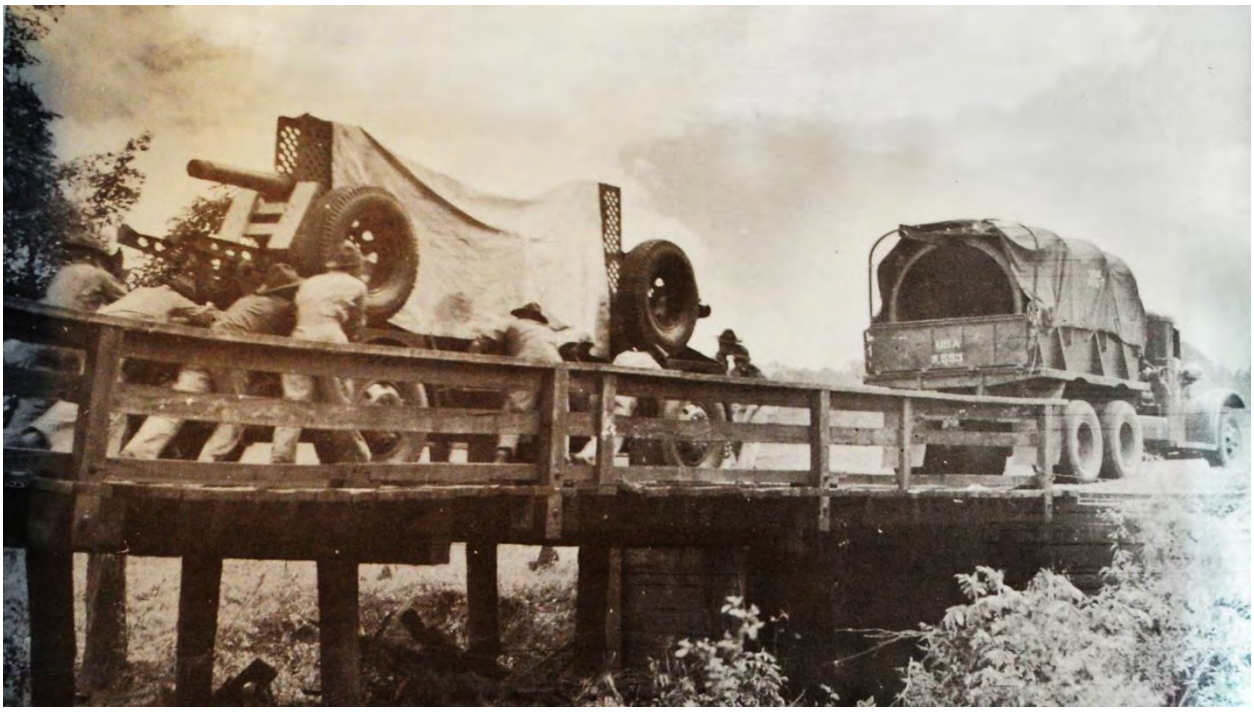


Figure 63. Image from The Texas Highway System as related to National Defense Transportation, published by the Texas Highway Department, 1940. This photograph shows problems military personnel encountered by conducting a series of war games and military maneuvers as the nation prepared for war. Narrow bridge widths and weight limits impeded the exercise and exposed the need to upgrade the nation's highways, especially those deemed to be important for national security. Source: Record Group 30, Box 3038 481 Corresp. PS & E Texas, 1941, NARA College Park.

Upon reflection from today's perspective, it is easy to look back and see how such thoughts and concerns might seem to have been an overreaction. However, government and military leaders did not take perceived threats to national security and vulnerabilities to enemy attack lightly or without careful thought and deliberation. Their concerns reflected a true and potential threat. Indeed, the overarching strategic military significance of the highway system had remained a central argument for having a national highway network since the passage of the first Federal-Aid Highway Act in 1916. For the first true assessment of this need, the highway system proved inadequate and insufficient to the nation's needs, and the deficiency remained an enduring concern into the next decade.

Besides assessing the state's overall highway system, the 1940 report also devoted an entire chapter to the physical damage that the Army caused during training maneuvers earlier that year. These exercises were among the first of a series of drills and war games in East Texas and later in Louisiana to test the readiness of Army forces. These maneuvers exposed the Army's lack of preparedness and posed a disturbing set of problems and issues for the military and elected leaders. The exercises also highlighted the inadequate condition of the state's highway network and its capacity to handle oversized loads and vehicular traffic at the time. The maneuvers required the movement of mechanized military equipment, the heaviest of which included 155-mm howitzers, a moderately sized artillery piece designed to be towed. The report included photographic documentation that showed deep pot holes, severe cracks, and other surface damage to the roads, most of which were in East Texas along SH 21 and SH 87 near Nacogdoches, Newton, and nearby cities in the region. Although the maneuvers did not take place on any highway segments associated with the historic route of the Meridian Highway, the damage affected the kinds of roadway designs, roadbeds, and surface materials used on the Meridian Highway and other routes within the Texas road network. The amount and severity of the damage generated a great deal of consternation among military leaders, government officials, and highway planners.[166]

Concurrently and independent of this Texas-based study, some of the ideas promulgated in the 1939 Toll Roads report by the Bureau of Public Roads began to take hold, specifically in urban areas along the historic Meridian Highway. On March 27, 1940, representatives of the Houston and Galveston Chambers of Commerce met in Galveston to discuss a proposed "modern super-highway" between the two cities. The group prepared a report outlining the need and justification of the highway and made specific reference to the 1939 report. In a joint letter to the members of the Texas Highway Commission, former Governor William P. Hobby of Houston and A. J. Dow of Galveston proposed the construction of a highway "with a minimum of four traffic lanes and that provision be made for at least two additional lanes."[167] The group's

report and accompanying exhibits highlight the widespread local support, safety needs, and strategic military- and defense-related advantages of such a system (see *Figure 64* below).

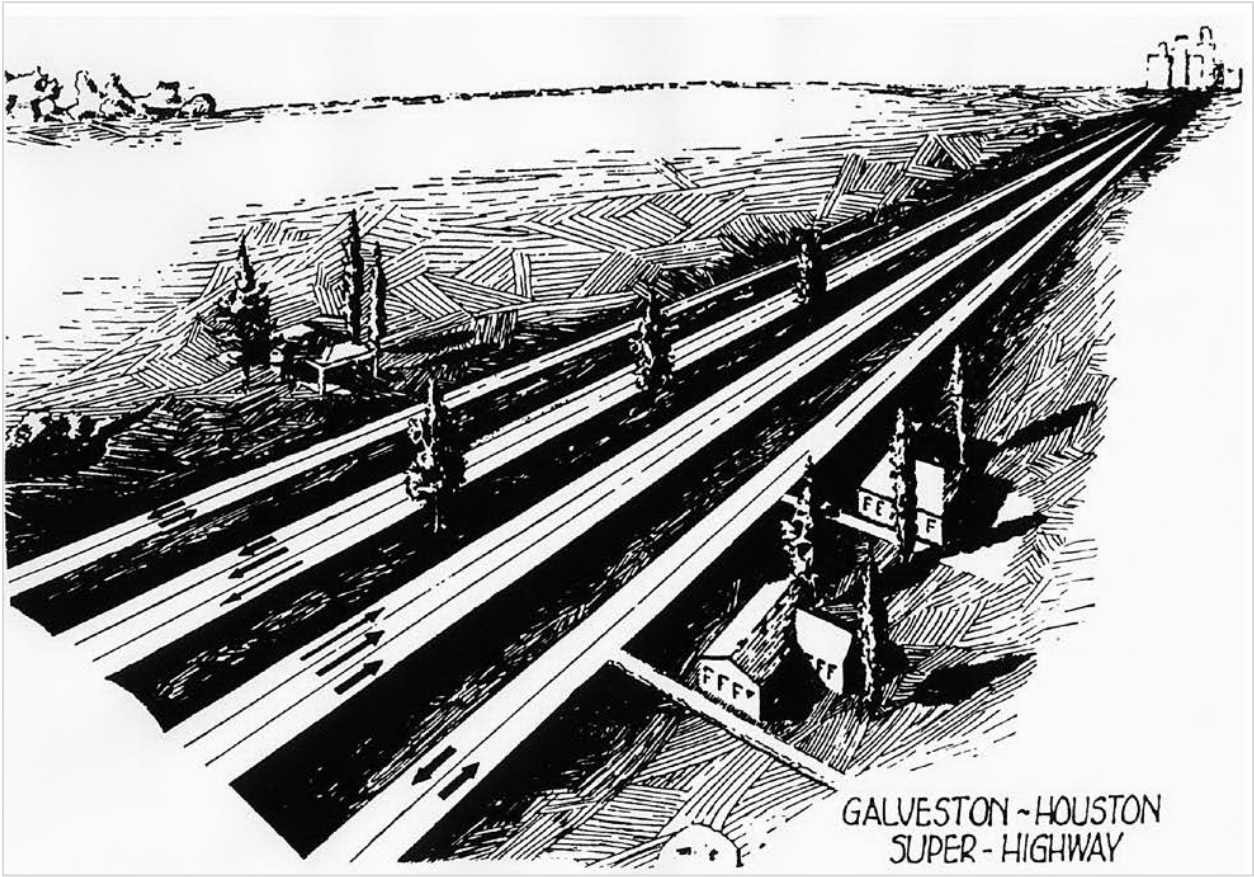


Figure 64. Rendering of Proposed Galveston–Houston Super-Highway. This illustration reflects local efforts to build a new highway between Houston and Galveston. It was prepared by W. J. Van London, who was in charge of the new urban highway office created by the Texas Highway Department. The drawing shows a design concept for an expressway in advance of the Interstate Highway System of the mid-1950s. Source: Erik Slotboom, Houston Freeways: A Historical and Visual Journey, 2003, p. 94.

In a separate letter to the Texas Highway Commission dated June 5, 1940, A. J. Peterson, president of the Galveston Chamber of Commerce, noted the added benefit of such a highway "…as a military road. Fort Crockett, located on Galveston Island, now houses the Anti-aircraft Regiment of Coast Artillery. The probability of a large increase in this unit is imminent and, as you know, they have a great deal of equipment. In the case of war, it will be very necessary for them to have quick and adequate means of transporting this mechanized equipment." The report also noted the significance of the Houston-Galveston highway segment to the nation's defense and pointed out that "one-third of the gasoline refined in the United States is produced within a ninety-mile radius in Houston. This fact, alone, warrants serious consideration of meritorious highway construction, directly affecting and serving the Houston-Galveston area."[168]

Still another aspect of mobilization was the establishment of government-owned contractor-operated plants (GOCOs), most of which were built along major highways within the nation's highway system. Examples in Texas include the North American Aviation plant along US

80 (Bankhead Highway) in Dallas/Grand Prairie and the Consolidated Western Steel Corporation, Levingston, and Weaver Shipyards near US 90 (Old Spanish Trail) in Orange, and the Bluebonnet Ordnance Plant in McGregor near US 81 (Meridian Highway).[169]

WORLD WAR II AND PLANS FOR A SYSTEM OF INTERREGIONAL HIGHWAYS: 1941 TO 1945

From 1941 to 1945, both the public and private sectors, along with the American public, supported all-out war and redirected all collective efforts to achieve victory. In part because of the existing strategic importance of the Meridian Highway, the federal government established a number of new military installations on or near the roadway. Examples include Air Corps fields at Austin (Bergstrom), Bryan, Houston (Ellington; reactivated from a previously closed World War I installation), Laredo, Waco, and Wichita Falls (Sheppard), and auxiliary and outlying fields in College Station, Georgetown, Hearne, Navasota, Riesel, and Temple. Moreover, increased industrialization, expanding trade and the growing reliance on trucking as a means of transporting goods demonstrated the need for better and improved highways that were capable of handling more traffic. Such trends were particularly obvious in dense urban areas with concentrations of military installations and industrial operations, such as San Antonio, Fort Worth, and Houston. While addressing short-term needs triggered by the war, highway planners and policy makers also remained keenly aware of the future postwar era and a nation with a reawakened and revitalized economy. They began making plans for an influx of discharged military personnel eager for jobs and a resulting strain on the nation's highways and infrastructure. They proposed an "interregional" highway system that served as the basis for the subsequent Interstate Highway System established in 1956. Many of these new "superhighways" in Houston, Fort Worth, and San Antonio were conceived during the World War II era and were intended to replace outmoded, congested, and inadequate segments of historic routes associated with the Meridian Highway.

With battles being waged in Europe and other parts of the world and the federal government increasingly preparing for the inevitability of war, President Roosevelt created the National Interregional Highway Committee on April 14, 1941. Headed by Thomas H. MacDonald, Commissioner of the Bureau of Public Roads, and six other state and local officials appointed by the President, the committee was to advise the President and the Federal Works Administrator and explore efforts to consider a national highway system. Members of the committee first met in June 1941 and began their deliberations with support staff provided by the Federal Works Administration. Despite early progress, the committee's efforts were delayed for almost three years due to the war.[170]

When completed on January 12, 1944, the report, entitled *Interregional Highways: A Report of the National Interregional Highway Committee, Outlining and Recommending a National System of Interregional Highways*, House Document No. 379, 78th Congress, 2nd Session, included a message from the President who implicitly endorsed the findings. Roosevelt wrote that "the report recommends the designation and improvement to high standards of a national system of rural and urban highways totaling approximately 34,000 miles and interconnecting the principal geographic regions of the country." He added that "the recommended system follows in general the routes of existing Federal-aid highways." Among those routes was a large segment of the Meridian Highway in Texas that extended from Hillsboro to Laredo, as well as the segment between Houston and Galveston (see *Figure 65*, to follow). Reflecting on his tenure as governor of New York, Roosevelt also wrote that "experience shows that it is in most cases much cheaper to build a new highway, where none now exists, rather than to widen out an existing highway at a cost to the Government of acquiring or altering present developed frontages." Such ideas were later central to planning efforts for the interregional highways built in Texas along the historic Meridian Highway.[171]

Although the report was the culmination of a multi-year effort, local and grass-root efforts were already underway in Texas. Only a few days after the report was presented to Congress, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* published an article on January 16, 1944, that described Fort Worth as a hub because of its location at the intersection of north–south and east–west routes. The article continued by describing the north–south highway that "would traverse Oklahoma via Oklahoma City, would run the depth of Texas via Austin and San Antonio, and connect at Laredo with the Pan-American Highway to Mexico and beyond." The article also included observations from J. K. Elliot, District Engineer, District Six of the Federal Works Agency who "declared that the chief problem remaining in the preliminary planning was the method routing the super highway through cities so as to give uninterrupted flow of traffic and at the same time provide intracity arteries as interregional arteries. He stated that the plan was to provide highways without cross-traffic, but with entrances at intervals through which vehicles could flow into the arteries. Cross-roads would be overpassed or underpassed."[172]

A similar and even further advanced interregional highway effort was underway in Houston. On January 22, 1944, Elliott wrote to the head of the Interregional Highway Committee (and Commissioner of Public Roads), Thomas MacDonald, noting that "the City of Houston is going to vote on a bond issue which will include funds for cooperation with the State Highway Commission in the reconstruction of the Galveston highway into that city. I understand the estimated cost of the right of way is approximately $3,000,000 and the estimated cost of the proposed construction is approximately $9,000,000." The effort

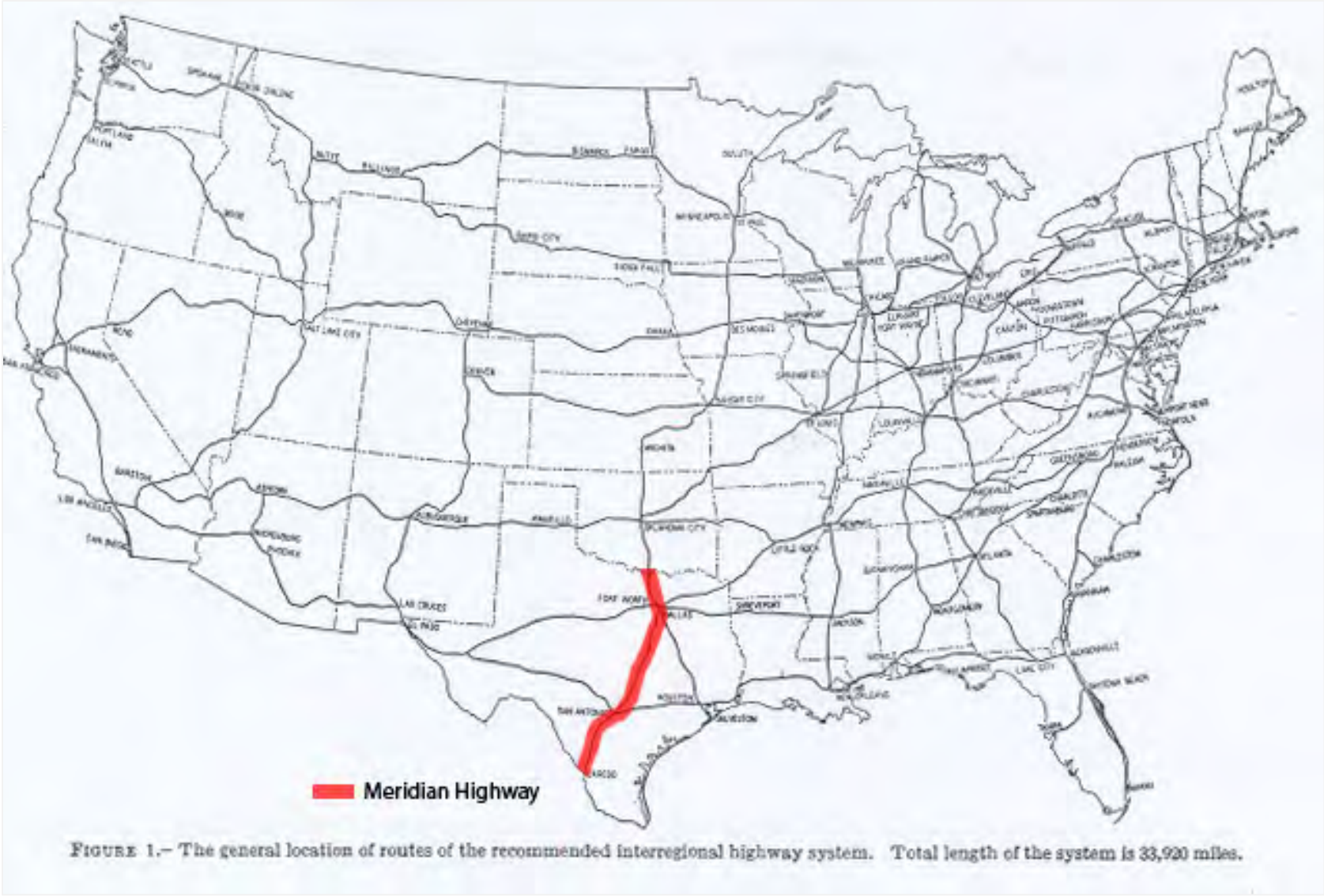


Figure 65. Proposed Interregional Highway System, 1944. This map shows the recommendations of a 1944 report that advocated the construction of a new highway system. It was designed to facilitate the flow of traffic to important commercial, trade, and military centers throughout the nation. Among the routes included in the study included large segments of the Meridian Highway. Source: Interregional Highways, 1944, p. 7.

ultimately was successful, and a few years later, a new "superhighway" opened along a new location corridor that paralleled the historic route of the Meridian Highway and became the first freeway in Texas.

The influx of people to urban areas such as Houston, Fort Worth, and San Antonio, many of whom were employees of defense-related industries, strained the ability of the road network to handle rising volumes of traffic; however, increased industrial and manufacturing output in support of the war was another factor. Besides the GOCO facilities from the Mobilization era, other plants expanded due to large government contracts. Many of these plants were located on or near the Meridian Highway including the Consolidated-Vultee plant in Fort Worth, which manufactured B-24 Liberator bombers, and the Bluebonnet Ordnance plant in McGregor southwest of Waco. Most were in the industrial sector of Houston and included such plants as Cameron Iron Works, Brown Shipbuilding and the Lufkin Foundry and Machine Company on the Houston Ship channel.[173]

Smaller-scale factories and plants were scattered elsewhere in the state. In Taylor, for example, the Taylor Bedding Company re-focused its operations to support the war. The company made use of locally grown cotton to produce beds for military personnel. The company operated in an industrial complex on the south side of the 400 block of West Second Street, just two blocks from the intersection of SH 95 (formerly the Meridian Highway). Its location in a major cotton-producing area with ready access to locally grown crops via the highway network contributed to its successful operation (see *Figure 66*, to follow). In July 1943, the company received the prestigious Army-Navy "E" award, acknowledging its meaningful and efficient operations in support of the war. A newspaper article announcing the award made note of the "women employees who have taken the place of their husbands and brothers who have entered the armed forces."[174]

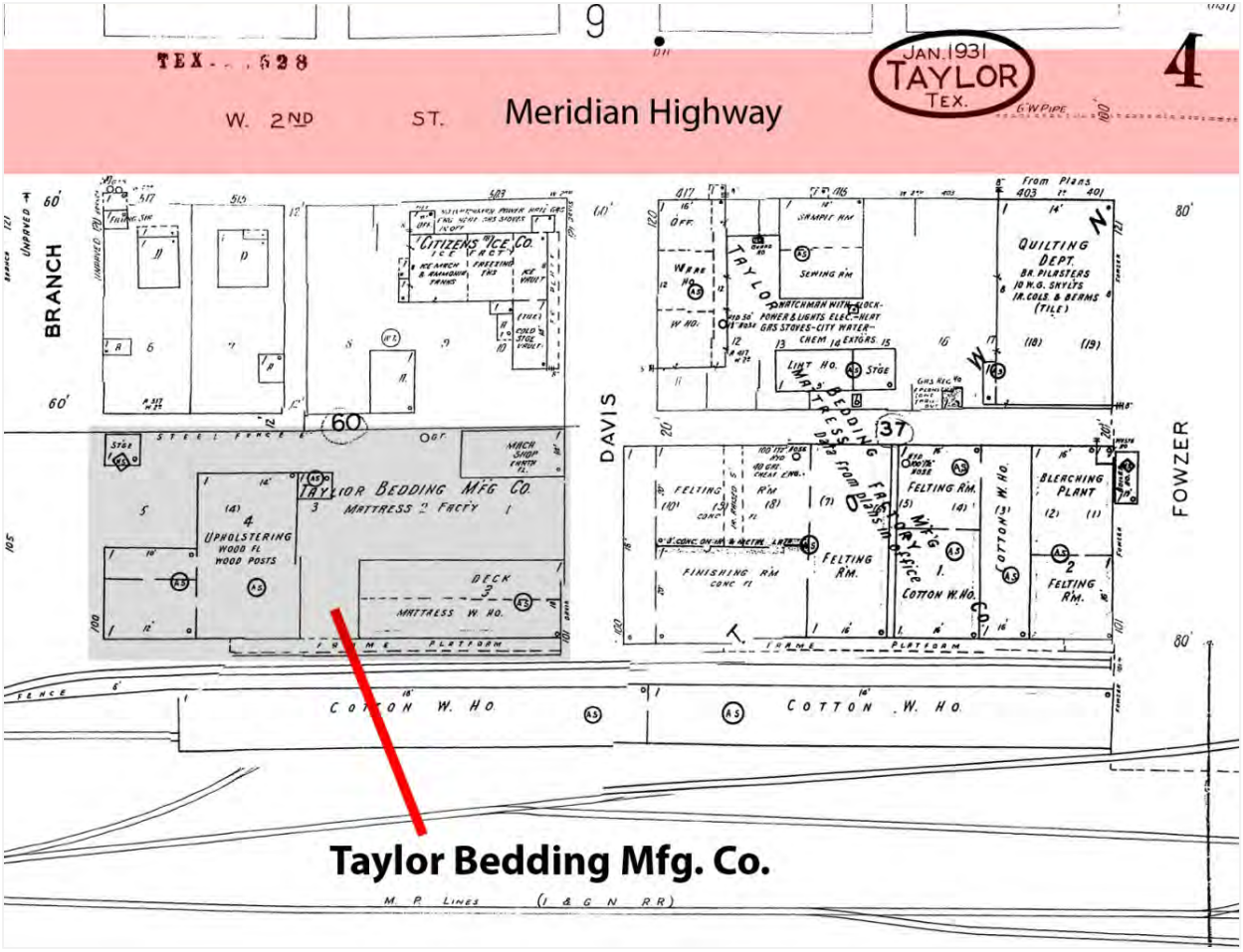


Figure 66. Detail of Sanborn map of Taylor, 1931, revised to 1947. The Taylor Manufacturing plant is one of a number of industrial operations along the Meridian Highway that was used to support the war effort. The factory was strategically located near the intersection of the Meridian Highway (SH 95) and the I&GN railroad. Source: Sanborn Map Company.

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[134] Minutes of the State Highway Department, June 21, 1917, Volume 1, pp. 19, 22, Texas Department of Transportation, Austin, Texas . State Highway Department, Map Showing Proposed System of State Highways, 1917. https://www.tsl.texas.gov/cgibin/aris/maps/maplookup.php?mapnum=6254 *(accessed February 21, 2014)*.

[135] "The Civilian Conservation Corps," The American Experience, Public Broadcasting System, *http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/introduction/ccc-introduction/* (accessed April 16, 2015). State Highway Commission, Official Map of the Highway System of Texas, 1933, https://www.tsl.texas.gov/cgibin/aris/maps/maplookup.php?mapnum=6188 (accessed February 21, 2014), "CCC Camps Texas," Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy, http://www.ccclegacy.org/CCC_Camps_Texas.html (accessed April 19, 2015).

[136] Minutes of the State Highway Department, October 19, 1933, Volume 10, pg. 91-93.Texas Department of Transportation, Austin, Texas.

[137] *Franklin Roosevelt to The Secretary of Agriculture, November 15, 1935*, Box No. 3010, Bureau of Public Roads Classified Central File, 1912–50, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, NARA College Park.

[138] David Moore, *Facilities of the Texas Department of Transportation in Texas: 1917-1969: Historic Context and Final Infrastructure MPS Components*, March 20, 2015, Work Authorization No. 574 02 SH002, Texas Department of Transportation, Environmental Affairs Division, Historical Studies Branch, Austin, Texas.

[139] Texas Highway Department *Tenth Biennial Report, September 1, 1936 to August 31, 1938*, Texas Highway Department, *Eleventh Biennial Report, September 1, 1938 to August 31, 1940*.

[140] "Cotulla Bridge Ready for Travel" *San Antonio Express*, August 31, 1938, http://newspaperarchive.com/ (accessed February 16, 2013).

[141] Plat Showing State Highway No. 2 through Rhome, Wise County by M. C. Wellborn, Division Engineer, Fort Worth, Texas, May 1, 1936, Box 2002/101-97, Folder (21) Wise County, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

[142] Transcribed notes of testimony before the Texas Highway Commission, January 24, 1938, Box 2002/101-84, Folder (20) McLennan County, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

[143] Correspondence between Nelson A. Loomis, Chief, Washington Office, United States Travel Bureau and Julian Montgomery, Texas State Highway Engineer, 1939, Box 2002/101-3, Folder G-C-2 United States Travel Bureau, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

[144] Lois Terry Marchbank, *The Pan American Round Table*, (San Anotnio, Texas: Avon Behren Press, 1983), 5–11, from Pan American Round Tables of Texas (PARTT), "Biography of Mrs. Florence Terry Griswold," http://www.partt.org/marchbanks_ftg_bio.html (accessed March 2, 2016). Griswold was born Florence Terry to her parents Thomas and Louisa Terry of Eagle Pass, Texas. It is interesting to note that Thomas Terry was one of the first federal judges in Southwest Texas, who rode his buggy to and from town from their ranch, called the *Pendencia*, every day. Today, the *Pendencia* would be about 86 miles east of Cotulla on US 277; a leg of the Meridian Highway. (See page 79 under *Conditions* for more information on the US 277 Meridian route.)

[145] See *Figure 9* for a photo of army wagons in the Alamo Plaza.

[146] Helen B. Frantz, "Pan American Round Table," *Handbook of Texas Online*, https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/vwp01 (accessed March 3, 2016).

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid.

[149] "Entire Area to Hear Mrs. Roosevelt," *The Laredo Times*, December 2, 1940, http://newspaperarchive.com/ (accessed March 3, 2016).

[150] "Public to Greet Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt," *The Laredo Times*, December 1, 1940, http://newspaperarchive.com/ (accessed March 3, 2016).

[151] Surveyed as *Resource ID WB-1828* (recommended Eligible and recommended Contributing under NRHP Criteria A and C).

[152] *My Day*, "December 6, 1940," Eleanor Roosevelt, from The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, https://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1940&_f=md055754, (accessed March 2, 2016); *The Laredo Times*, December 1, 1940.

[153] "Mrs. Roosevelt Arrives Here, Speaks Here Tonight," *The Laredo Times*, December 5, 1940, http://newspaperarchive.com/ (accessed March 3, 2016).

[154] *The Laredo Times*, December 1, 1940; "Greatest Welcome for Mrs. Roosevelt," *The Laredo Times*, December 4, 1940, http://newspaperarchive.com/ (accessed March 3, 2016); *The Laredo Times*, December 5, 1940.

[155] "Schools To Close for Mrs. F. D. Roosevelt, All Area to Greet Her Thursday," *The Laredo Times*, December 3, 1940; December 4, 1940; December 5, 1940.

[156] *The Laredo Times*, December 4, 1940.

[157] *My Day*, "December 7, 1940," Eleanor Roosevelt, from The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, https://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1940&_f=md055754, (accessed March 3, 2016).

[158] Ibid.

[159] Ibid.

[160] *My Day*, "April 22, 1943," Eleanor Roosevelt, from The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, https://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1940&_f=md055754, (accessed March 4, 2016).

[161] Ibid.

[162] Richard F. Weingroff, "A Vast System of Interconnected Highways: Before the Interstates," pp. 211, 213, Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/highwayhistory/vast.pdf, accessed March 30, 2015.

[163] *Toll Roads and Free Roads*, 76th Congress, 1st Session, House Document No. 272, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1939), p, vii, http://transportationfortomorrow.com/final_report/pdf/volume_3/historical_documents/06_toll_roads_and_free_roads_1939.pdf, (accessed January 23, 2015).

[164] Harold T. Purvis, "TORRANCE, EDGAR LEE," *Handbook of Texas Online,* http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fto38 (accessed April 07, 2014); John A. Jakle, Keith A. Sculle, Jefferson S. Rogers. *The Motel in America.* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), pp 90-105.

[165] Publication entitled *The Texas Highway System as related to National Defense Transportation*, published by the Reproduction Division, Texas Highway Department, December 1940, Box No. 3038, Corresp. PS & E Texas, 1941, Bureau of Public Roads Classified Central File, 1912–50, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, NARA College Park.

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[168] A. J. Peterson letter to Texas Highway Commission, June 5, 1940, Box 2002/101-72, Folder Application to State Highway Commission - Super Highway - Houston to Galveston, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

[169] Hardy·Heck·Moore, Inc., Cultural Resources Survey of Naval Weapons Industrial Reserve Plant, Dallas, Southern Division, Naval Facilities Engineering, Command, 2001; Hardy·Heck·Moore, Inc., Cultural Resources Survey of Naval Weapons Industrial Reserve Plant, McGregor, Texas, Southern Division, Naval Facilities Engineering, Command, 2003; Howard C. Williams, "United States Naval Inactive Ship Maintenance Facility," *Handbook of Texas Online* (http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/qbu03), accessed April 18, 2015.

[170] *Toll Interregional Highways*, 78th Congress, 2nd Session, House Document No. 379, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1939), pp, ix, x, http://transportationfortomorrow.com/final_report/pdf/volume_3/historical_documents/05_interregional_highways_1944.pdf, (accessed January 23, 2015).

[171] Ibid, pp. iii, iv.

[172] Newspaper clipping, *Fort Worth Star Telegram* June 16, 1944, sent by J. A. Elliott, Box No. 2992-93, Corresp. FAS Texas - 1944, Bureau of Public Roads Classified Central File, 1912–50, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, NARA College Park.

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I.7. THE MERIDIAN HIGHWAY 1946–1955

INTRODUCTION

At the dawn of the postwar era, the Meridian Highway remained an integral component within the state highway network, although its physical character had changed considerably since John C. Nicholson, David E. Colp, and others established the idea of such a route in 1911. Improvements and upgrades to the highway supported an ever-increasing flow of traffic that was part of an international trade network that extended to Canada, Mexico, and beyond. The highway also catered to a large number of tourists who traveled to Galveston with its beaches, Austin with the Texas State Capitol Building, and San Antonio with the Alamo and other historical sites and destinations. The highway also linked a series of permanent military installations and defense-related industries that had played such a crucial role in the war effort. To handle increased capacities, the Texas Highway Department upgraded almost the entire route with wider lanes and improved shoulders.

The Meridian Highway name and its identity as one of the nation's earliest auto trails continued to fade over time. By 1946, travelers and motorists typically knew the two segments in Texas by their numbered highway designations within the federal and state systems. The main north–south arterial remained closely associated with a single highway: US 81. The Gulf Division route, by contrast, lacked the same level of continuity and became more fragmented. Segments included parts of SH 6, US 190, US 290, and US 75. However, a new name—the Interregional Highway—entered the lexicon, and throughout the postwar era, began to redefine the historic Meridian Highway route, especially between Fort Worth and San Antonio where the Texas Highway Department completed significant changes to large stretches of the highway.

The historic Meridian Highway extended through rich agricultural lands, as well as heavy industrial areas that were poised to rebound after World War II. The energy built up after years of economic stagnation from the Great Depression and rekindled activity in support of the war ushered in a period of sustained growth, prosperity, and change that altered much of the character of Texas and the rest of the nation. Urbanization continued at an accelerated pace, which affected the highway system, particularly large sections of the Meridian Highway. This trend influenced land-use and development patterns on parcels fronting onto or near the roadways. The construction of new interregional highways circumvented downtowns and contributed to decentralized commercial development and a decline in retail activity in

central business districts. The redirection of through traffic onto the interregional highways and other new-location improvements relegated older highway segments to a new role within the road network, especially in urban settings. Increasingly, these older segments catered to local rather than interstate traffic, and this shift affected property owners who began to adapt to changing conditions and often repurposed their buildings for other uses and functions. These patterns clearly emerged in the postwar era and the dawn of the interregional highway system, and they became more common and pronounced in the interstate highway era of the late 1950s and 1960s.

CONDITIONS

Public works and roadway improvements of the New Deal era changed many aspects of the Meridian Highway through Texas. Most of these projects fulfilled a dual purpose of upgrading the highway and providing employment opportunities to stimulate an underperforming economy. The establishment of roadside parks and turnouts, the placement of historical markers to celebrate the state's centennial, and the planting of trees and other vegetation as part of designed landscaping efforts were among the kinds of enhancements that became commonplace and were character-defining features of the historic Meridian route and other top-tiered highways in the state. Another class of upgrades firmly in place by 1946 was the completion of new grade-separation structures at many of the most dangerous at-grade railroad crossings. Most of the facilities were above-grade structures, such as the railroad overpass constructed in 1936 over the I&GN railroad in Round Rock. Others, such as the 1937 MKT Railroad underpass on Nogalitas Street in south San Antonio, were below grade, as was common at many railroad crossings in urban settings. Regardless of type, grade-separation structures typically were built within the existing right-of-way and involved little, if any, alignment changes.[176]

In 1946, various highways associated with the Meridian Highway generally followed the same overall path and configuration that dated from its original idea and conception, and retained the designations that the Texas Highway Commission implemented in 1939 with the general re-description of the state highway (see *Figure 67*, to follow). The primary segments of the historic Meridian Highway included:

- Ringgold–Bowie–Fort Worth–Hillsboro: US 81
- Hillsboro–Waco: US 81 and US 77
- Waco–Temple–Belton–Georgetown–Austin–New Braunfels–San Antonio–Webb: US 81
- Webb–Laredo: US 81 and US 83
- Waco–Marlin–Hearne: SH 6
- Hearne–Calvert–Bryan: SH 6 and US 290
- Bryan–Navasota–Hempstead: SH 6

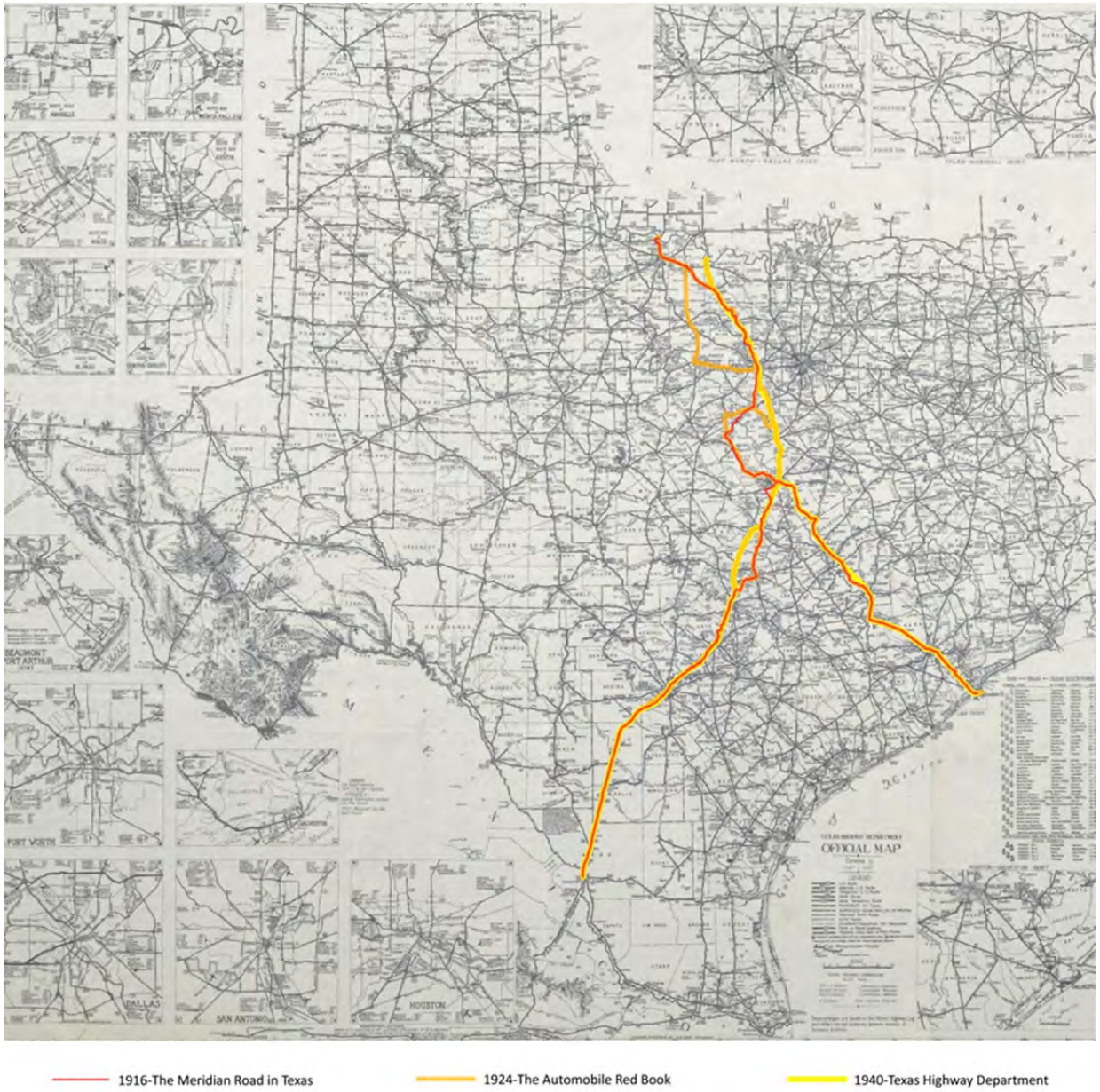


Figure 67. Texas Official Highway Map of 1946. Issued by the Texas Highway Commission, 1946. Source: Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas (Map 6207).

- Hempstead–Cypress–Houston: US 290
- Houston–Galveston: US 75

Other segments of the original Meridian Highway increasingly became disassociated with the historic highway and included the following:

- Burkburnett–Wichita Falls: US 277
- Wichita Falls–Bowie: US 287 (formerly US 370)
- Burleson–Cleburne: US 67
- Cleburne–Walnut Springs: SH 174
- Walnut Springs–Meridian: SH 144
- Meridian–Clifton–Waco: SH 67
- Temple–Round Rock: SH 95
- Round Rock–Georgetown: US 79 (formerly SH 43)

Almost all segments of the Meridian Highway, regardless of their respective designations within the federal or state highway systems, still passed through downtowns in medium- and large-sized cities in 1946; such a feature had been a fundamental element of the highway's original role, function and configuration. However, with rising automobile popularity and resulting increases in vehicular (automobiles and trucks) usage and traffic congestion, the Texas Highway Department completed roadway improvements during the 1930s that typically utilized new alignments that bypassed central business districts, especially in larger metropolitan areas.

INTERREGIONAL SYSTEM: 1946 TO 1955

The federal government laid the groundwork for a new highway program in the late 1930s that was developed primarily, but not exclusively, within the context of war mobilization. Advocates proposed to build "super highways" to link the nation's critical military installations and the most developed cities and trade centers. The interregional highways also supported a growing trucking industry that continued to provide an alternate means of transporting raw and finished goods that was less dependent on railroads. The new network relied on the construction of what came to be called interregional highways that featured controlled-access expressways and highway interchanges. The routes typically followed some of the oldest and most popular auto trails from the 1910s, including the Meridian Highway. In urban areas, the plan expanded upon a trend that began in the 1930s and called for the construction of highways that bypassed central business districts on new-location alignments. Such an approach proved far more cost effective because land values in less-developed areas were cheaper.[177]

Although World War II postponed any immediate action on the new interregional highway program, DeWitt C. Greer, the Texas State

Highway Engineer, began developing plans for such a system in anticipation of the program's likely revival after the war. Greer's decision proved crucial. When Congress passed the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944, the Texas Highway Department was prepared. The Act is best known for spurring the development of a secondary farm-to-market road network; however, it also was a catalyst for a new generation of highway design and construction because it provided 50/50 matching funds to states for the construction of interregional highways.[178]

Segments of the Meridian Highway became a major focus of the interregional highway program in Texas, and no other route in the state, including US 80 (Bankhead Highway) or US 90 (Old Spanish Trail), benefited from the many improvements and innovations completed during the immediate postwar era. The areas slated for initial enhancement included an approximately 270-mile segment between Fort Worth and San Antonio and a 50-mile section of US 75 between Houston and Galveston, both of which had been targeted for upgrade as early as 1939.[179]

The US 81 segment was to become the primary north–south interregional highway in Texas, and it extended from Fort Worth to San Antonio. In the section between Hillsboro and Waco, the path also included a shared segment with US 77 (King of Trails Highway). The two highways (US 81 and US 77) carried significant amounts of traffic because they linked some of the state's largest and most significant transportation, commercial, trade, and military centers: Fort Worth, Dallas, and San Antonio. The segment between Houston and Galveston served the state's greatest concentration of agricultural shipping facilities, refineries, and other industrial operations, as well as major deep-water harbors and port facilities that enabled Texan goods and products to be shipped anywhere in the world. In addition, Galveston remained a major tourist destination, and US 75 was the major highway to serve the island community.

While the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944 provided federal monies needed to construct the interregional highways, Texas law required local governments to acquire right-of-way, placing acquisition costs on local governments. Thus, the key to any progress on new interregional highway construction rested squarely on the affected municipalities and county governments. Highway advocates in Texas from both the public and private sectors, keenly aware of this requirement, worked to garner support for the new system, especially in large metropolitan areas where traffic congestion grew increasingly worse. Foremost among those proponents in Texas were politicians and business/civic leaders in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, and Fort Worth. All of these cities passed bond programs in 1944 and 1945 to acquire land that allowed the interregional system to move forward. Supporters appealed to the need to remain competitive and attract new businesses and spur economic

development. Such approaches were not as attractive to voters in rural locations who were more wary of taxes and government debt. As will be explored later in this section, some county governments resorted to more creative means to obtain the necessary voter approval to acquire the needed land for new highway construction.[180]

The new interregional highways featured physical attributes and design elements that differed from highways of the past, many of which stemmed from ideas first introduced and implemented in Germany. U.S. highway engineers visited Berlin in the mid-1930s and saw first-hand the innovations of the Autobahn outside the city. One of the design enhancements was the median that separated opposing flows of one-way traffic. The median acted as a buffer from oncoming traffic that provided greater safety and allowed for higher speeds of travel. Other innovations included access ramps to enter and exit the expressway, as well as grade separations at railroad crossings and highway intersections that allowed continuous traffic flow.[181]

Following a trend that had already started in the United States in the 1930s, the interregional highway construction program in urban settings redirected traffic away from historic and often congested downtowns along new-location alignments that skirted city centers. The main difference between efforts from the 1930s with those of the postwar era was the scale and scope of the projects. The new interregional highways deviated from large segments of existing alignments in favor of new routes. A primary factor stemmed from the disparity in right-of-way acquisition costs. Purchase of additional land needed to expand or widen roadways along existing alignments proved to be expensive due to high property values and dense development. In contrast, land values for new location alignments that circumvented city centers typically were much lower. Moreover, the new alignments provided better opportunities for subsequent expansion, as became evident in the 1950s and 1960s with the interstate highway era (see the next chapter). In rural areas, the interregional highway typically incorporated the existing roadway in its design, often improving it as part of the main roadway or as a frontage or access road on one side of the divided highway.

The policy of constructing new highways that bypassed downtowns marked a dramatic departure from past patterns and policies. An op-ed piece in the *Austin Sunday American-Statesman* captured this changing sentiment by noting "[i]t wasn't many years ago that some of the business firms in a city would make a vigorous fight against provision of any through traffic artery that might take some of the heavy trucks off the main street. But that attitude has been reversed. Retail stores and service establishments, it has been found, got little business from the hurrying truck-driver on his way from the Valley to St. Louis or Chicago, but suffered actual and substantial losses because the local customer couldn't fight his way to the front door."[182]

Interregional highway construction efforts in Texas typically began in the major cities including Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth, and San Antonio. Initiatives to build controlled-access highways began in 1944 while the war was still being fought, and most of them included segments of the Meridian Highway, which continued to play such an important role in commerce and trade and the ever-increasing trucking industry.

HOUSTON–GALVESTON SEGMENT OF THE INTERREGIONAL HIGHWAY

The first segment of interregional highway constructed along the historic Meridian Highway was also the first expressway to be completed in Texas. Efforts to construct an improved and wide roadway between Houston and Galveston can be traced back to the Great Depression. Ross Sterling, chairman of the Texas Highway Commission and later governor, first proposed a super-highway between the two cities as early as 1930. Three years later, the Galveston Chamber of Commerce created a committee to lobby for federal funds to build "a superhighway between Galveston and Houston" through recently enacted New Deal programs. While their efforts failed in the short term, the group garnered sufficient support to secure Public Works Administration (PWA) funding for the construction of a new four-lane causeway to Galveston Island in 1936. Work began later that year, and the new causeway officially opened on August 15, 1939 (see *Figure 68* below). This structure, along with a new highway interchange at the so-called "Texas City Junction," where the newly designated SH 6 (formerly SH 38) and SH 146 converged with US 75, proved to be a key factor in the subsequent development of the interregional highway.[183]

Figure 68. "The New Causeway At Galveston, Texas." This is an undated photograph of the Galveston Causeway, completed in 1939. Source: Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, Texas.

With the causeway and the US 75/SH 6/SH 146 highway interchange in place, political and business leaders in Houston and Galveston continued to promote the superhighway. They relied heavily on the recommendations of the U.S. House of Representatives Document No. 272 of 1939 entitled *Toll Roads and Free Roads* to support their position. In 1940, a joint committee of the Houston and Galveston Chambers of Commerce prepared a report advocating the construction of the "super-highway." The study noted the existing strains on the highway, as well as its strategic military significance as the nation prepared for war. The Texas Highway Department supported the project and initially proposed to widen the existing alignment (present-day SH 3). However, agency engineers revised the plans soon after the City of Houston acquired the right-of-way of the discontinued Galveston–Houston Interurban Railway. Houston Mayor Oscar Holcombe, a strong proponent of the highway, helped the City to secure the right-of-way, which roughly paralleled, but about one mile west of, the existing US 75 alignment. This linear corridor went through a much less developed part of Houston. By 1941, the City Planning Commission began requiring developers to recognize the proposed right-of-way of the "super-highway" while platting new residential subdivisions in southeast Houston. In 1944, Houston voters approved a bond program to fund right-of-way acquisition for the new highway. Construction began in 1946 and the first leg between Dowling and Wayside was completed in the fall of 1948. Local and state officials celebrated its dedication with a ceremony on September 30 with great media coverage (see *Figure 69* below). The initial speed limit was set at 45 miles per hour.[184]

Figure 69. Photograph of ceremony commemorating the opening of the first segment of the Gulf Freeway at the Calhoun Road overpass on September 30, 1948. Source: Oscar F. Slotboom, Houston Freeways: A Historical and Visual Journey, 2003, p. 148 [original on file at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission].

Local newspapers referred to the highway as the "Interurban Expressway," but Houston officials held a contest, ostensibly to come up with a new name. But the contest also generated a great deal of public interest and support for the project. On December 17, 1948, the *Houston Chronicle* announced the winner of the $100 prize: Sara Yancy, an employee of the City National Bank of Houston (see *Figure 70* below). Of the approximately 13,000 submissions, the winning entry proposed to call the new interregional highway the "Gulf Freeway." An editorial in the *Galveston Daily News* later acknowledged the name "for better or worse," expressing some skepticism about the use of the term "freeway," and hoping that the new highway would be "free of traffic congestion."[185]

Figure 70. "What's in a Name?" Photograph of Sara Yancy whose entry of "Gulf Freeway," was selected as the name of the new interregional highway to be constructed between Houston and Galveston as noted in an article in the Houston Chronicle of December 17, 1948. Source: Box 2002/101-114 Folder Application to State Highway Commission: Super Highway – Houston to Galveston, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

Subsequent highway construction continued in discrete installments to the southeast of downtown Houston toward Galveston, and the Texas Highway Department completed a four-lane divided expressway to Galveston by August 2, 1952. A ceremony to herald the completion was

held at the approximate mid-point between Houston and Galveston, near Dickinson (see *Figure 71* below). E. H. Thornton, Jr., of Galveston and chairman of the Texas Highway Commission officially opened the freeway and is reported as saying that "the highway was dedicated to the people of Texas and was part of a master plan to build a bigger and better Texas." Although the new roadway was regarded as Texas' first expressway, only an 8.5-mile segment featured a controlled-access design that today is a signature element of such a facility. Most of the roadway was a four-lane divided highway with a small median and no barriers. Although it lacked any traffic signals, the highway had 32 at-grade crossings. Such design features soon proved to be problematic and were subject to upgrade and improvement during the subsequent interstate highway era. However, at the time of its dedication, the Gulf Freeway marked the beginning of highway transportation in Texas and added to the rich and colorful history of the Meridian Highway.[186]

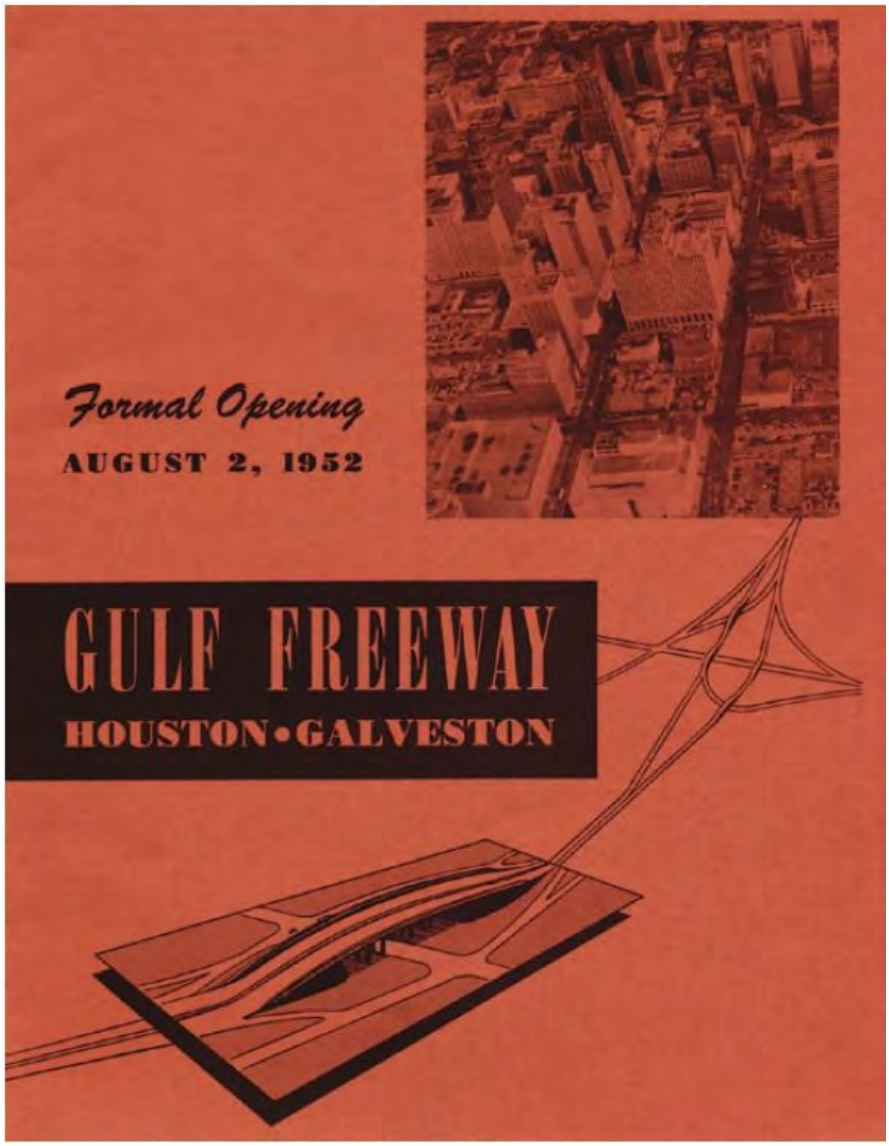


Figure 71. Dedication brochure marking the formal opening of the Gulf Freeway in Houston, Texas, on August 2, 1952. Source: Oscar F. Slotboom, Houston Freeways: A Historical and Visual Journey, 2003, p. 148 [original on file at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission].

FORT WORTH–SAN ANTONIO SEGMENT OF THE INTERREGIONAL HIGHWAY

The second part of the interregional highway system associated with the Meridian Highway was far greater in length and scale. Like the Houston–Galveston segment, the Fort Worth–San Antonio interregional highway grew out of a need that had been recognized years before at the federal level, most notably in House Document 272 (*Tolls Roads and Free Roads*) and Document No. 379 (*Interregional Highways*). Efforts to construct such facilities initially were confined to large cities such as Houston and Dallas, but the 270-mile segment between Fort Worth and San Antonio was deemed to be one of the nation's top priorities for highway improvements. The truly remarkable aspect of this segment was the construction of an expressway through largely rural areas of Central Texas. In this regard, the new highway fulfilled an intended function of the interregional highway system which connected important regional centers of commerce and trade and presaged the interstate highway era of the mid- to late 1950s.

The interregional highways along this segment began in urban areas and emanated outward to rural locations. In Fort Worth, the Texas Highway Department made plans to shift the route of US 81 through the southern part of the city as early as 1939. At a meeting on April 19, Texas Highway Commissioners approved the designation of US 81A to relieve congestion along a large segment of Hemphill Avenue where suburban development and intracity travel hindered traffic flow at the south end of Fort Worth. While designed to provide short-term relief, the new alignment clearly was part of larger scheme that was implemented in subsequent years. During World War II, the Fort Worth Public Works Department prepared a map in 1944 that depicted the "north–south interregional highway" extending through the city (see *Figure 72*, to follow). The new highway incorporated the recently designated US 81A, as well as extensions at each end as part of the inaugural expressway system in the city. Soon after World War II ended, local voters approved bonds to purchase right-of-way for the new expressway, and construction began soon afterwards. A dedication ceremony held at the Ripy Street overpass on September 14, 1949, officially opened the expressway and marked the beginning of the freeway era in Fort Worth (see *Figures 73–75*, to follow).[187]

San Antonio was another urban center that was involved with the initial interregional highway efforts in Texas. With its many military installations and strategic location as a hub within the state's road network, San Antonio was an obvious participant. Local leaders began promoting the need for a superhighway prior to World War II as part of the Military Highway Program of the mobilization period. World War II interrupted these early efforts, but the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944 spurred renewal in the interregional highway program. Soon after the war's conclusion, the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce advocated a

Figure 72. (Right) Detail of Proposed Location Interstate System of National Highway Routes Showing Present & Proposed Connecting Thorofares [sic] City of Fort Worth, Tarrant County, Texas, June 28, 1944, Department of Public Works, City of Fort Worth, Texas. This image depicts the path of the Proposed North–South National Highway Route, which is now known as IH 35W. Source: Box 2002/101-105, Folder Tarrant County G-A-Y Urban Project, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

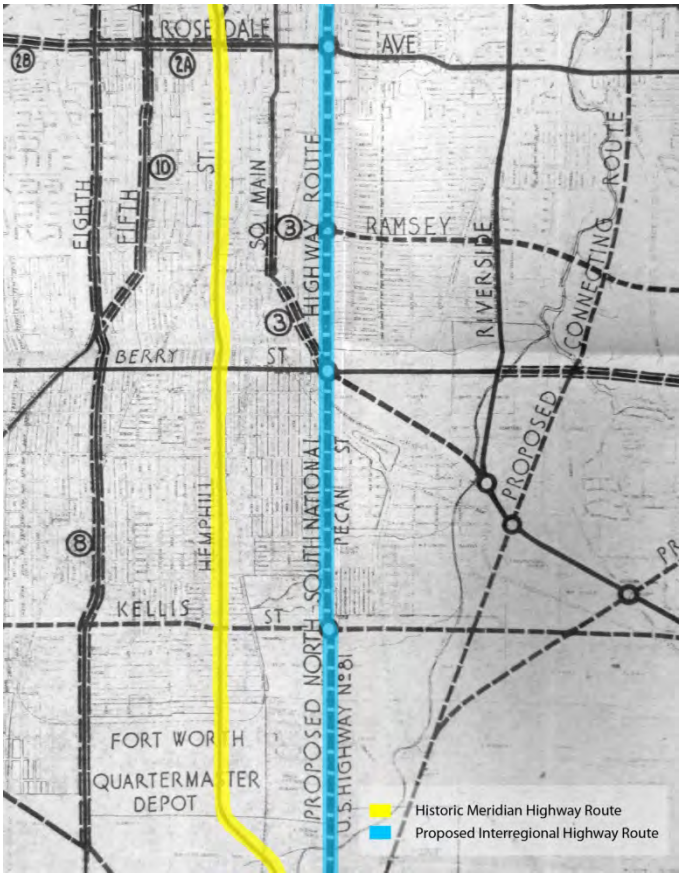
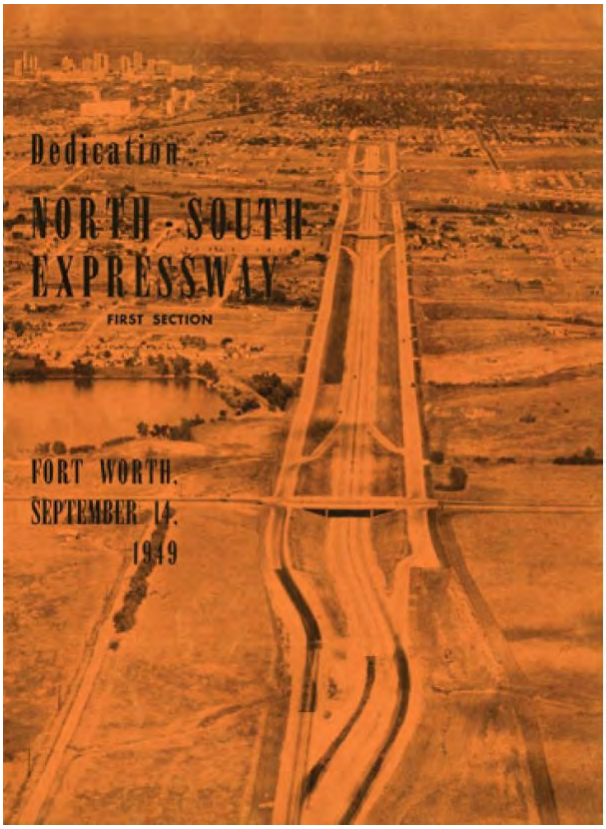
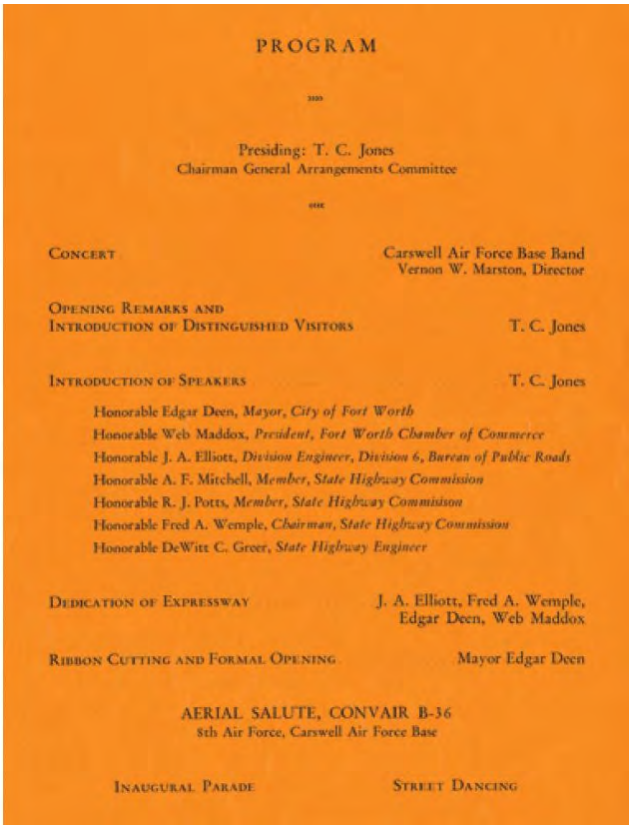


Figure 73. (Below) Dedication brochure marking the dedication of North–South Expressway, Fort Worth, Texas, September 14, 1949. Texas Highway Department and local officials used the official dedication of the highway as a way to generate further interest and support for highway construction. Source: Oscar F. Slotboom, Dallas–Fort Worth Freeways: Texas-Sized Ambition, p. 474 [original on file at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission].





PROGRAM

Presiding: T. C. Jones
Chairman General Arrangements Committee

CONCERT	Carswell Air Force Base Band Vernon W. Marston, Director
OPENING REMARKS AND INTRODUCTION OF DISTINGUISHED VISITORS	T. C. Jones
INTRODUCTION OF SPEAKERS	T. C. Jones

Honorable Edgar Deen, *Mayor, City of Fort Worth*
Honorable Web Maddox, *President, Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce*
Honorable J. A. Elliott, *Division Engineer, Division 6, Bureau of Public Roads*
Honorable A. F. Mitchell, *Member, State Highway Commission*
Honorable R. J. Potts, *Member, State Highway Commission*
Honorable Fred A. Wemple, *Chairman, State Highway Commission*
Honorable DeWitt C. Greer, *State Highway Engineer*

DEDICATION OF EXPRESSWAY	J. A. Elliott, Fred A. Wemple, Edgar Deen, Web Maddox
RIBBON CUTTING AND FORMAL OPENING	Mayor Edgar Deen

AERIAL SALUTE, CONVAIR B-36
8th Air Force, Carswell Air Force Base

INAUGURAL PARADE — STREET DANCING

Figure 74. (Left) Aerial view of North–South Expressway under construction at Morningside Drive, Fort Worth, December 1947. The proposed right-of-way extends up to an existing subdivision, portions of which were later acquired by the City and cleared to make way for the continued development of the expressway. Oscar F. Slotboom, Dallas–Fort Worth Freeways: Texas-Sized Ambition, p. 472.

Figure 75. (Right) Ground-level of North–South Expressway completed up to Morningside Drive area in Fort Worth, ca. 1946. A residential subdivision is directly north of the interregional construction zone and lies directly in the path of future expansion of the expressway. Source: Record Group 30, Box 59 FAP 471 (pt) through SG 475, NARA College Park.

bond election to fund land acquisition costs for the proposed expressway. The City of San Antonio agreed and included it within an ambitious—and what turned out to be a controversial—bond program that proposed a variety of public works and infrastructure projects. On September 25, 1945, voters rejected 17 of the 22 bond propositions;

however, they approved the interregional highway project by a narrow margin. Despite the vote, implementation of the interregional highway project program did not proceed as planned. A small group of local taxpayers filed a lawsuit challenging the results. As the case proceeded through the courts, business leaders and newspaper reports warned that the city could lose the $6.5 million of federal funds earmarked for the project. The case ultimately was settled in 1947 when the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case and let stand a Court of Appeals ruling in favor of the city; the ruling allowed the project to move forward.

The first segment of interregional highway construction to be completed in San Antonio included a new location alignment northwest of downtown between Woodlawn Avenue and Culebra Road that relieved congestion along US 90 (Fredericksburg Road). The highway opened by July 19, 1949. In subsequent years, construction extended southward to Martin Street (1950), where the interregional highway included a shared segment with US 81. The shared segments for both US 90 and US 81 continued southward on the west side of the city's primary business district. Other interregional highway segments for US 81 were built north and southwest of downtown (see *Figure 76 below*).[188]

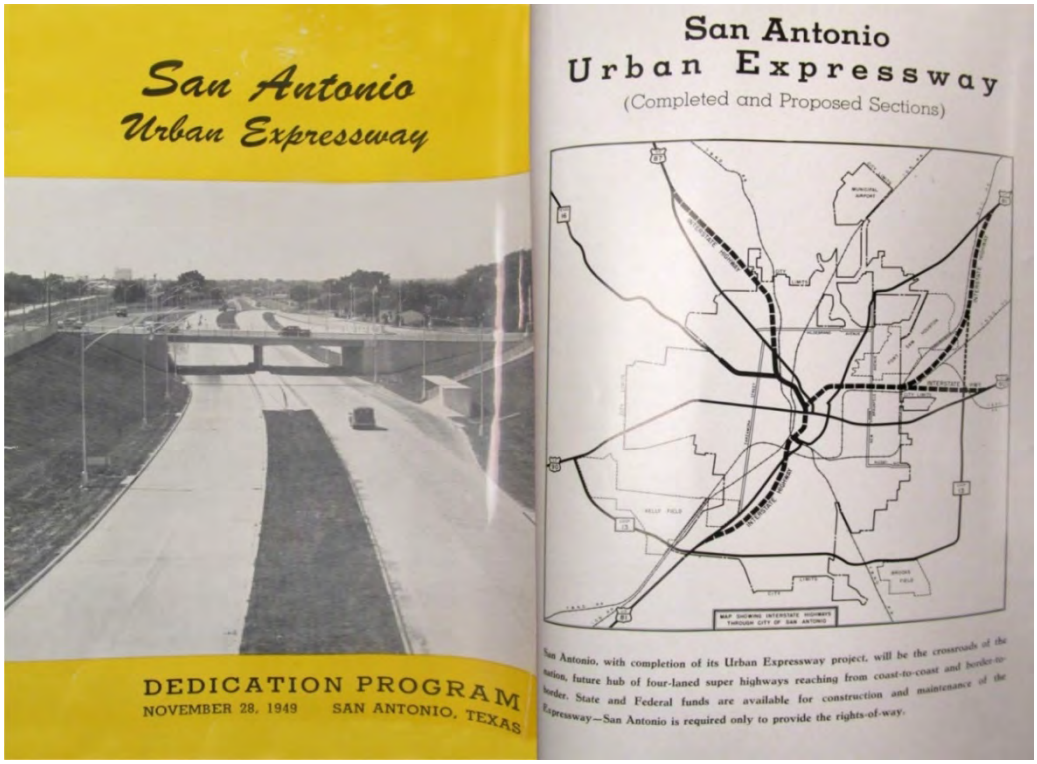


Figure 76. Dedication Program for the San Antonio Urban Expressway, November 28, 1948. The program included a map that showed sections completed and those proposed and/or under construction. The map also shows the major highways in San Antonio and their relationship and connections with the new expressway system. Source: Box 2002/101-132, Folder Bexar County G-A-Y Urban Project, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

As with the other cities, the initial push to build an expressway in Austin dated to the early to mid-1940s. One of the earliest plans proposed to redirect traffic to a new route that would have extended to the east side

of the city and crossed the Colorado River at the new metal truss bridge at Montopolis. The plan, which resembled a highway bypass implemented in Waco, was eventually discarded in favor of a new route that utilized East Avenue. This north–south boulevard marked the east limits of the original 1839 town site of Austin. With its esplanade and proximity to the downtown, East Avenue provided an ideal alternative to the existing US 81 highway that extended through the central business district and became the desired route for the proposed new interregional highway in Austin (see *Figure 77* below). With support from the Texas Highway Department, the City of Austin held a bond election to provide local funding for the project. The proposition faced significant opposition, but the measure passed with a 60 percent majority. However, the City delayed issuing bonds until the Supreme Court ruled on a similar case involving the City of San Antonio. Following the Supreme Court's decision to allow a lower court ruling stand in favor of the City of San Antonio, the City of Austin proceeded with the bond program in February 1947 and allowed the sale of the bonds to be advertised. [189]

Figure 77. Aerial view of East Avenue before the construction of the interregional highway in Austin, undated. Source: Texasfreeway.com [original on file at Texas Department of Transportation, Photo Library].

As with other cities, the Highway Department built the highway in segments, and the first contracts were let in 1950 for a section between 17th and 46th streets in Austin (see *Figure 78*, to follow). As work progressed on the part of the highway on the north side of the Colorado

Figure 78. Ground-level view of interregional highway near completion in Austin, ca. 1950. The exact location has not been confirmed but is estimated to show the concrete overpass at 38½ Street and East Avenue before the construction of the interregional highway, undated. Source: Texasfreeway.com [original on file at Texas Department of Transportation, Photo Library].

River, the route on the south side continued to be debated as questions remained regarding the location of a new bridge. In 1952, the City Council finally approved the entire route for the highway and the river crossing. Overall, the construction and path of the interregional highway in Austin adhered to policies advocated in the *Toll Roads and Free Roads* report of 1939 that initially proposed the highway system. At the north end of the city, the new interregional highway shifted to the east along a new-location alignment that largely avoided existing development along Lamar Boulevard (Business US 81), the city's primary north–south thoroughfare in that part of the city. The new interregional highway continued southward and extended several blocks east of the downtown along East Avenue. After crossing the Colorado River, the highway extended through largely undeveloped areas and reconnected with Business US 81 (South Congress Avenue) about five miles south of the Colorado River. The highway included "depressed grade-separation structures" as the 1939 report had proposed in urban areas.[190]

Although efforts to build interregional highways in most of the larger cities along the Meridian Highway generally had support and consensus among civic and business leaders in each of the affected local communities, Waco had a different experience. The Texas Highway Department prepared and presented plans in 1944 to local officials and groups for review and input. The roadway plan proposed the construction of the interregional highway along Clay Avenue, about six blocks south (east) of Business US 81, which ran along Washington and Franklin avenues. On October 10, 1946, J. H. Kultgen, chairman of the Highway Committee of the Waco Chamber of Commerce, wrote a letter to the Texas Highway Commission recommending an alternate route to the north along Jefferson and Barnard avenues that better served the community since the city's biggest growth was projected to be in that

part of town. Moreover, he added that the existing bridge over the Brazos River and part of the "highway loop" already served south Waco, and he suggested a new bridge north (west) of the existing Business US 81 crossing at Elm/Washington streets. The lack of consensus between the community and the Texas Highway Department delayed construction of the interregional highway through Waco. As comparable projects proceeded in the other urban areas along US 81, the Texas Highway Department did not undertake any major interregional highway improvements within Waco during the postwar period. The lack of progress was particularly problematic since the city was a major hub within the state's highway network. Waco was at the juncture of US 77, US 81, US 84, SH 6, and SH 67, and the traffic circle at the south end of town was insufficient to meet increased traffic demands (see *Figure 79* below).[191]

Figure 79. Traffic along US 81 in Waco, 1954. Source: Texasfree way.com [original on file at Texas Department of Transportation, Photo Library].

RURAL SEGMENTS OF THE INTERREGIONAL HIGHWAY PROGRAM THROUGH CENTRAL TEXAS: 1946–1955

As the initial segments of the interregional highways were completed in the state's largest cities, the Texas Highway Department began upgrading routes in rural areas and worked with county governments to secure right-of-way for the interregional highway. In contrast to segments in urban areas described in the previous section, the Texas Highway Department typically made use of existing alignments for the expressways built in rural settings. The interregional highways simply incorporated the roadways already in place and expanded them on either side.

The interregional highway program in Bell County was among the first extended rural segments to be constructed along the Fort Worth–San Antonio corridor. In the late 1940s, the Texas Highway Department proposed to construct a four-lane divided expressway through the county and developed plans that relied heavily on the use of the existing US 81 right-of-way and the purchase of adjoining land for expansion. To support the project, Bell County Commissioners followed state-mandated requirements to acquire the necessary land for expansion. They created Road District 1-B in 1949 that was confined to a two-mile area on either side of the existing US 81 right-of-way. The county commissioners then proposed a $1 million bond program to fund land acquisition and confined the election to only those voters within this newly created road district. The rationale for creating such a district is not known, but the decision allowed those most directly affected by the proposed project to vote and excluded other voters in the county from participating. On May 10, 1949, voters in Bell County Road District 1-B overwhelmingly approved the bond package, which helped to advance the expansion of the interregional highway system in the county (see *Figure 80*, to follow). The vote also demonstrated growing support for such a system in rural parts of Texas and augmented comparable efforts in more densely populated centers such as Houston, San Antonio, Fort Worth, and Austin.[192]

The Bell County project did not lack controversy. Not long after voters approved the bonds, the county began right-of-way acquisition efforts. At the urging of the company selected to issue the bonds, the county did not publish or make available plans that depicted the actual route. The subsequent implementation of the land-acquisition program generated concern, especially in the small community of Troy. On November 29, 1949, a delegation from the town appeared before the Texas Highway Commission and requested that the proposed route through Troy be moved one block west (see *Figure 81*, to follow). They noted that such a shift would avoid the removal of two churches, a gas station, and 13 residences. Right-of-way acquisition for the proposed alternative, one of the delegation members also claimed, would be about $100,000 less than the cost of improving and widening along the existing route. Members of the Highway Commission noted the overwhelming support by voters and referred the group back to the Bell County Commissioners Court. Texas Highway Commission members stated that the county was the party responsible for right-of-way acquisition, not the state. In the end, the proposed shift was rejected, and the route was built along the existing roadway. In keeping with an important design scheme of the interregional highway, the highway followed a depressed or below-grade route through Troy and included a concrete overpass; similar structures were used in Austin at busy intracity intersections (Manor Road, E. Cesar Chavez [1st] and 38½ Street). The structure allowed through traffic to pass through Troy unimpeded without having any stops or street/highway intersections.

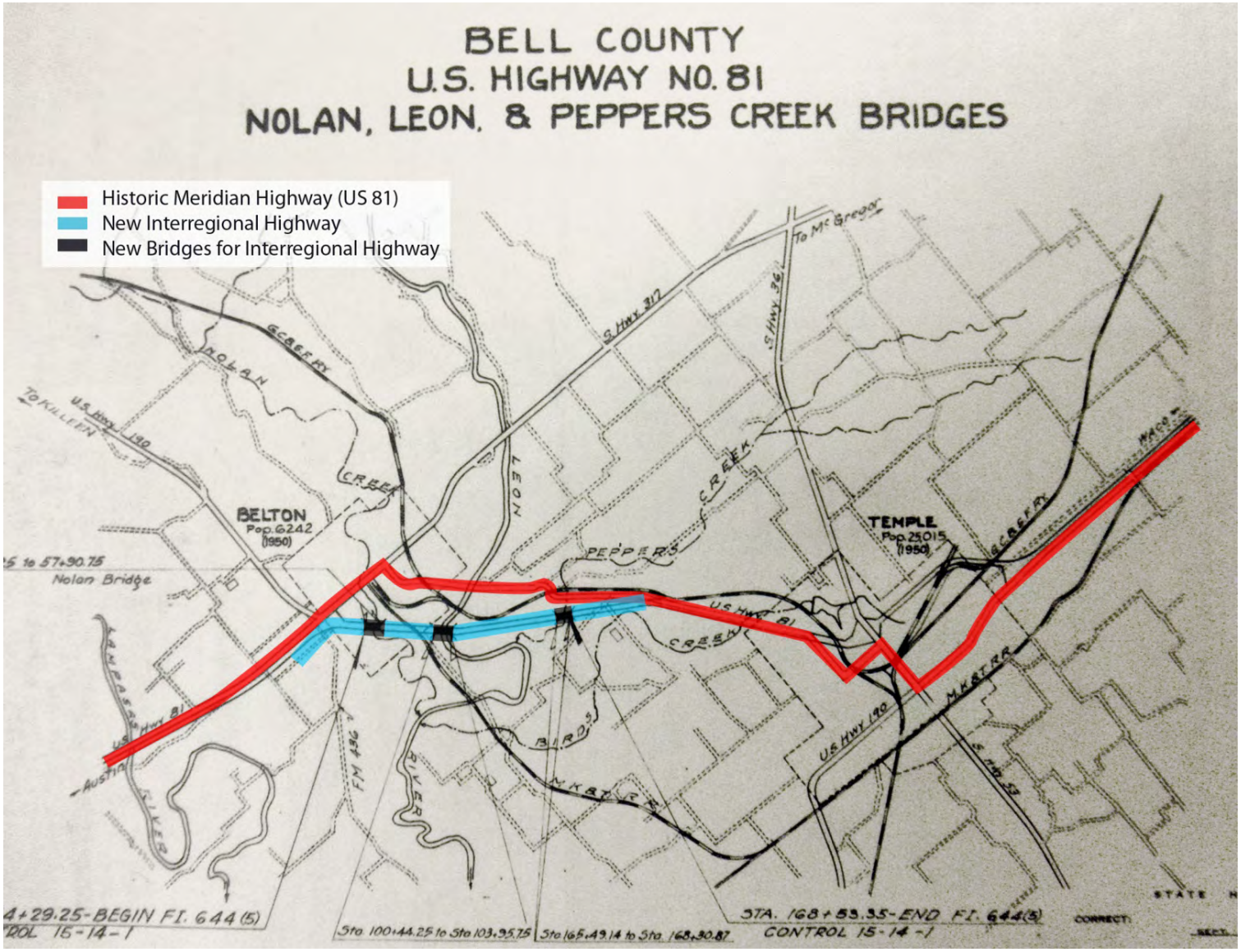


Figure 80. Schematic depicting new bridges to be constructed in support of the new interregional highway constructed in Bell County, near Belton, 1952. Source: Record Group 30, Box 90 WPH 642 through S 645, Folder FI 644 (5) Bell County, NARA College Park.

Figure 81. Detail of schematics show proposed route of interregional highway in Troy, Bell County, Texas, 1949. Red lines show the preferred route along the existing right-of-way, and the yellow lines indicate an alternative alignment proposed by a delegation from Troy. They argued that the alternative route would be less costly and affect fewer residences, businesses, and churches. Source: Box 2002/101 Folder (4) Bell County, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

The structure also allowed locals a safe and effective means of crossing the new interregional highway.[193]

Another example of the expansion of the interregional highway into rural settings was reported in the *Waco News-Tribune* for a segment being constructed in southern McLennan County in 1955. An article published on June 18 described the status of the soon-to-be-built 12-mile segment of the interregional highway between the Waco "Circle" and a location just north of Bruceville. The Texas Highway Department announced that plans had been finalized for the construction of a "four-lane expressway and controlled access roads on U.S. 81," and anticipated an August contract letting date. The article noted that the new highway would be built along the existing right-of-way and that the old roadway would become the "west side access road." The highway would also include below-grade throughways at Yellow Dog (just south of the Waco city limits) and at Lorena.[194]

Some sections of the Meridian Highway remained off the interregional highway system by the mid-1950s, most notably segments north of Fort Worth and south of San Antonio. In 1953, for example, a delegation of civic leaders from South Texas appeared before the Texas Highway Commission advocating that US 81 between San Antonio and Laredo be upgraded to a "freeway." However, Commission members noted that current traffic volumes were too low to justify the expenditure of such funds. They also expressed concern "about the thousand miles of highways that already have sufficient count [to warrant upgrade]." Although State Engineer DeWitt C. Greer noted that the Highway Department had already programmed some widening and resurfacing projects for the area, the delegation returned with little to show other than receiving praise from the Commission for "being wise in their forward thinking." The minutes of the meeting also reflected other trends associated with the Meridian Highway and its successors, US 81/SH 6. When asked about trucking along the route, a member of the delegation replied that "onion season is just under way, and a large percentage of onions and tomatoes move out by trucks; they have imports of oranges and produce from Mexico." The question and response showed trucking and international trade continued to play an important role in the ongoing significance of the highway; however, the argument failed to sway the Texas Highway Commission members.[195]

The Texas Highway Department also completed other improvements along various segments of the historic Meridian Highway that were not part of the interregional highway system. The need for such work demonstrated the dynamic quality of highways and the need to maintain and improve roadways due to changing traffic patterns and simple routine upkeep. In Hearne, growing traffic along Market Street led the Department to add two lanes to the existing roadway. This stretch included a shared segment of US 190 and SH 6 that intersected with US 79, an increasingly important northeast–southwest

thoroughfare in that part of the state. In Hill County, the rerouting of US 81 near Itasca occurred over an extended period of time and generated a great deal of frustration among local residents. The highway served a small community in the cotton-rich Blackland Prairie belt of the Central Texas. The amount of cotton produced in the area led to the construction of a textile mill in Itasca and the growing use of trucks led members of the community to advocate for highway improvements. Although World War II delayed any improvements, the highway was rerouted and improved during the immediate postwar period, but eventually was itself rendered obsolete when an interregional highway was later constructed on a new location alignment in the 1950s.[196]

DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS ASSOCIATED WITH THE INTERREGIONAL HIGHWAY PROGRAM: 1946–1955

The ambitious interregional highway construction program afforded new opportunities for commercial development and directed growth along affected corridors. The trend certainly contributed to greater decentralization of the downtown district. At least in Texas, the inclusion of frontage roads running parallel on most of the expressways constructed in the state provided entrepreneurs opportunities to relocate their businesses and establish new ones on roads with high traffic volume and a greater number of potential customers. Meanwhile, the construction of new highways also relegated the old routes to a new role within the transportation network. Instead of serving both local residents and out-of-town travelers passing through, the old segments increasingly served as an intracity route that catered more to local residents. Although the trend was only just beginning during the interregional highway period, the Texas Highway Department also created new designations for old routes that reflected their new status. Various segments of Business US 81 marked the historic route in many communities, and many of the roadside-related businesses began to be used for other purposes. The trend accelerated during the interstate highway era, but the pattern began during the postwar years.

The relocation of the highways opened up large tracts of land for all kinds of new or expanded commercial development. Among the first to seize such opportunities were entrepreneurs in the travel lodging business. The franchising ideas of Edgar Torrance and his Alamo Plaza Courts proved to be profitable and provided the basis for a new generation of accommodations for travelers. Some of the more successful businesses included Holiday Inn, Howard Johnson, and Ramada Inn, all of which were present along US 81 and the new interregional highways. Each motel chain developed its own distinctive building form and company branding that proffered predictability and a standard level of comfort and expectations. Meanwhile, many of the independently-owned tourist courts on the older, historic highway routes began to struggle and had a difficult time competing with the

new motels being built, especially among those constructed on the new interregional highways that catered primarily to out-of-town travelers.

Likewise, oil companies embarked on new and aggressive building campaigns during the postwar era and responded to the growing number of travelers and motorists along the interregional and other highways (see *Figure 82* below). Travelers and regular commuters needed fuel for their vehicles, and the gas station operators resorted to new strategies to attract customers. Many companies introduced new gas station designs that were modern-looking and came in distinctive shapes and forms. They often constructed tall signs that were visible from afar and enabled motorists to see opportunities to purchase gas and exit off the growing number of ramps on the new controlled-access highways.

Figure 82. A Sinclair gas station near the intersection of the interregional highway and E. 1st (now Cesar Chavez) Street in Austin, 1955. Gas stations of the postwar era presented a more modern character compared to those from the interwar years. This gas station, like many others of the period, evoked a sense of the future with its clean and simple lines. It does not include architectural details or elements associated with stylistic movements and traditions of the past. Source: Portal to Texas History [original on file at the Austin History Center].

The construction of the new expressways as part of the interregional highway system also spurred a great deal of construction for commercial and retail stores along property directly fronting onto the roadways. Such a trend was common along multiple segments of the highway, particularly in the outskirts of the major urban areas along the route. In Austin, for example, the *Austin Sunday American-Statesman* reported in March 1950 on the planned construction of the Delwood

Center, a "community center," at the corner of the interregional highway and 38½ Street and its planned completion to coincide with the opening of the "new Interregional Highway" (see *Figure 83* below). In announcing the commercial venture, land owner and developer Bascom Giles stated that it would serve nearby neighborhoods being developed in what was then the outskirts of Austin proper. He added that the shopping center also would be the first shopping opportunity for those who lived in rural areas to the north and east of the city. The article also noted that the commercial center would be on the "principal artery of motor travel between Houston and Austin, Dallas and Austin and San Antonio and Austin."[197]

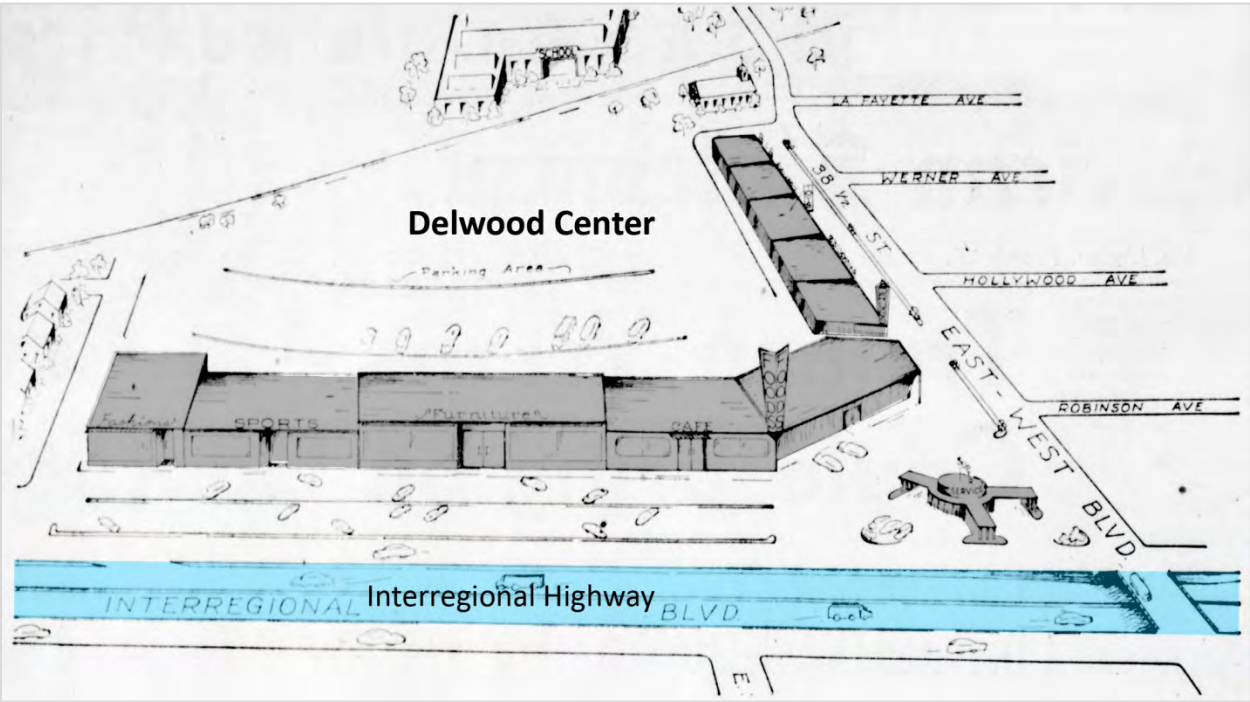


Figure 83. Sketch of Delwood Center, 1950. The image notes the "community center's" proximity to the depressed or below-grade segment of the interregional highway at the intersection with 38½ Street, which was a proposed major east–west boulevard at the time. The center heralded a new type of shopping that relied heavily on automobile transportation and included a large paved parking lot for customers. Delwood Center was among the first shopping centers in Austin, and this new commercial building type rapidly gained popularity in subsequent years. Source: Austin Sunday American-Statesman, March 26, 1950 (accessed via Newspaperarchives.com).

Real estate developers quickly realized the many opportunities the new highway offered and often touted the advantages of new subdivisions located on or near the new interregional highways. As early as 1950, the developer of the Georgian Acres subdivision in north Austin published an advertisement in the local newspaper that extolled the neighborhood's proximity to the new interregional highway. Further promoting its appeal, the ad noted that property owners paid no city taxes but could enjoy nearby amenities such as a school and "community" (shopping) centers. Interestingly enough, the subdivision included land between old US 81 (Lamar Boulevard) and the new

interregional highway, and thus had access to both roadways. This trend in suburbanization enjoyed tremendous popularity in the postwar era and was repeated in seemingly countless variations in cities along the entire route of the Meridian Highway.[198]

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[176] "Set Opening of Underpass," *San Antonio Light*, June 29, 1937, http://newspaperarchive.com/ (accessed April 26, 2015).

[177] *Toll Roads and Free Roads*, 1939. *Interregional Highways*, 1944.

[178] Penny, Beaumont, Rhonda Brinkman, David Ellis, Chris Pourteau, and Brandon V. Webb. *The Development of the Interstate Highway System in Texas*. Texas Transportation Institute. http://d2dtl5nnlpfr0r.cloudfront.net/tti.tamu.edu/documents/TTI-2006-8.pdf (accessed April 23, 2015).

[179] *Toll Roads and Free Roads*, 1939. *Interregional Highways*, 1944.

[180] Weingroff; Penny Beaumont, Rhonda Brinkmann, Davis Ellis, Chris Pourteau, and Brandon V. Webb. "The Development of the Interstate Highway System in Texas." Texas A&M University, 2006.

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[186] *The Galveston Daily News*, August 3, 1952. Oscar F. Slotboom, *Houston Freeways: A Historical and Visual Journey*. (Cincinnati: C. J. Krehbiel, 2003), http://www.houstonfreeways.com (accessed April 30, 2015), p. 149.

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[194] "Austin Gets Final Plans on 4-Laner," *The Waco News-Tribune*, June 18, 1955, http://newspaperarchive.com/ (accessed November 25, 2014).

[195] Summary of Minutes of the Texas Highway Commission meeting of March 25, 1953, Box 2002/101-49 Folder (10) Bexar, Atascosa, Medina, Frio, LaSalle, & Webb Cos., Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

[196] F. M. Garrett letter to Mayor of Hearne and County Judge of Robertson County, May 31, 1950, Box 2002/101-129 Folder Robertson G-A-X, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas; Summary of Minutes of the Texas Highway Commission meeting of December 16, 1947, Box 2002/101-75 Folder (5) Hill County, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

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[198] Ibid.

I.8. THE MERIDIAN HIGHWAY 1956–1972

INTRODUCTION

The period from 1956 to 1972 saw further expansion and improvements to the Meridian Highway that began during the postwar era and continued under the new interstate highway program created by the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. By the 1970s, most segments of the Meridian Highway and the interregional highways were absorbed into the interstate system, namely IH 35 along much of the main branch of the Meridian Highway and IH 45 along a portion of the Gulf Division from Houston to Galveston. This phenomenon led to many of the segments of the historic highway that still extended through the downtowns of cities to be bypassed in favor of the new interstate highway route. Likewise, sections of US 81 on the main branch of the Meridian Highway and segments of other portions of the highway system on the Gulf Division were realigned to bypass the central business districts of the communities they served. The changing roles and character of historic sections of the Meridian Highway within both state and local road networks led to a focus on new property types, such as large commercial hotel chains.

On the other hand, the original vision of the highway as an international link saw fruition in many ways. The Meridian Highway also retained an important function in the state highway system's role in service of Texas's military installations. In addition, the highway's symbolic, if not physical, link between North American countries, with Texas as a crucial location on that sequence, was emphasized through tourism and marketing.

CONDITIONS

By 1956, several segments of the Meridian Highway route had been improved and featured controlled-access expressways that were part of the postwar interregional highway system. These expressways illustrated the evolving character of highway design and construction, as well as the ongoing importance of the Meridian Highway route and the amount of traffic it bore. The *Official Texas Highway Map of 1956* captures the status of the state's highway system as it was about to be supplanted by the new and far more grandiose interstate highways. The 1956 map notes completed segments of interregional highways through the cities of Fort Worth, Temple, Austin, San Antonio, and Houston. These routes typically followed new alignments that avoided central business districts. In rural areas, the Texas Highway Department completed segments of interregional highways in Tarrant, Johnson, Hill, McLennan, Bell, Travis, Comal, and Bexar counties. In most cases, these

expressways incorporated existing alignments of US 81 and expanded on either side of the already-in-place highways. (See *Figure 84* on the next page for the Official Texas Highway Map of 1956.)

Some of the deficiencies and shortcomings of the interregional highway system were addressed during the interstate highway era. For example, most of the first generation interregional highways, including the Gulf Freeway, had a narrow median that separated the opposite lanes of traffic. Not only did these medians provide limited protection from a vehicle jumping the curb and median and crashing into oncoming traffic, the median provided limited means of shielding drivers from being blinded by headlights of traffic in opposing lanes. The entrance and exit ramps also proved to be too short and provided insufficient room for drivers to accelerate into fast-moving traffic or to slow down to turn onto side- and cross-streets. Another serious design flaw on the interregional system was the series of below-grade intersections in urban areas, such as those constructed in Austin. They typically did not allow any room for expansion and as the numbers of cars driven by an increasingly prosperous and affluent citizenry rose significantly, the existing two lanes proved to be inadequate.

One trend that continued to increase from the postwar period was that of creating bypasses through urban areas, oftentimes in the form of an entirely new kind of highway – the loop. Examples include interstate loops in Fort Worth (IH 820), San Antonio (IH 410), and Houston (IH 610). This pattern followed a nationwide trend. However, the use of loops to avoid downtowns extended to smaller communities, as well. In a 1957 speech to the American Institute of Architects, U.S. Chamber of Commerce President Philip M. Talbot suggested that one way for cities to solve the "problems of downtowns" was to bypass highways around cities to relieve congestion and to construct expressways.[199] The Texas Highway Department continued to follow this practice and built bypasses and loops to avoid highway traffic in central business districts in cities along the Meridian Highway. Notable examples on the main branch of the Meridian Highway included bypasses at Decatur, Hillsboro, Temple, and Belton. One Waco business owner took advantage of the highway's relocation. In October 1958, the owner of Bigden's Surplus Co. Inc. and Equipment Sales and Supply Company moved from his downtown Waco site on Franklin Avenue out on the Temple Highway (US 81). The move offered Bigden easier access to his area-wide clientele via the thoroughfare.[200]

In a few cases, the alignment of the Meridian Highway was altered. At Ringgold and Fort Worth, the route of US 81 returned to the 1920s alignment. The old route of US 81 through Temple, transferred to farm-to-market (FM) 817 in 1954, was transferred to FM 93 in 1974.[201] On the Gulf Division, the highway was rerouted to follow US 75 between Houston and LaMarque.

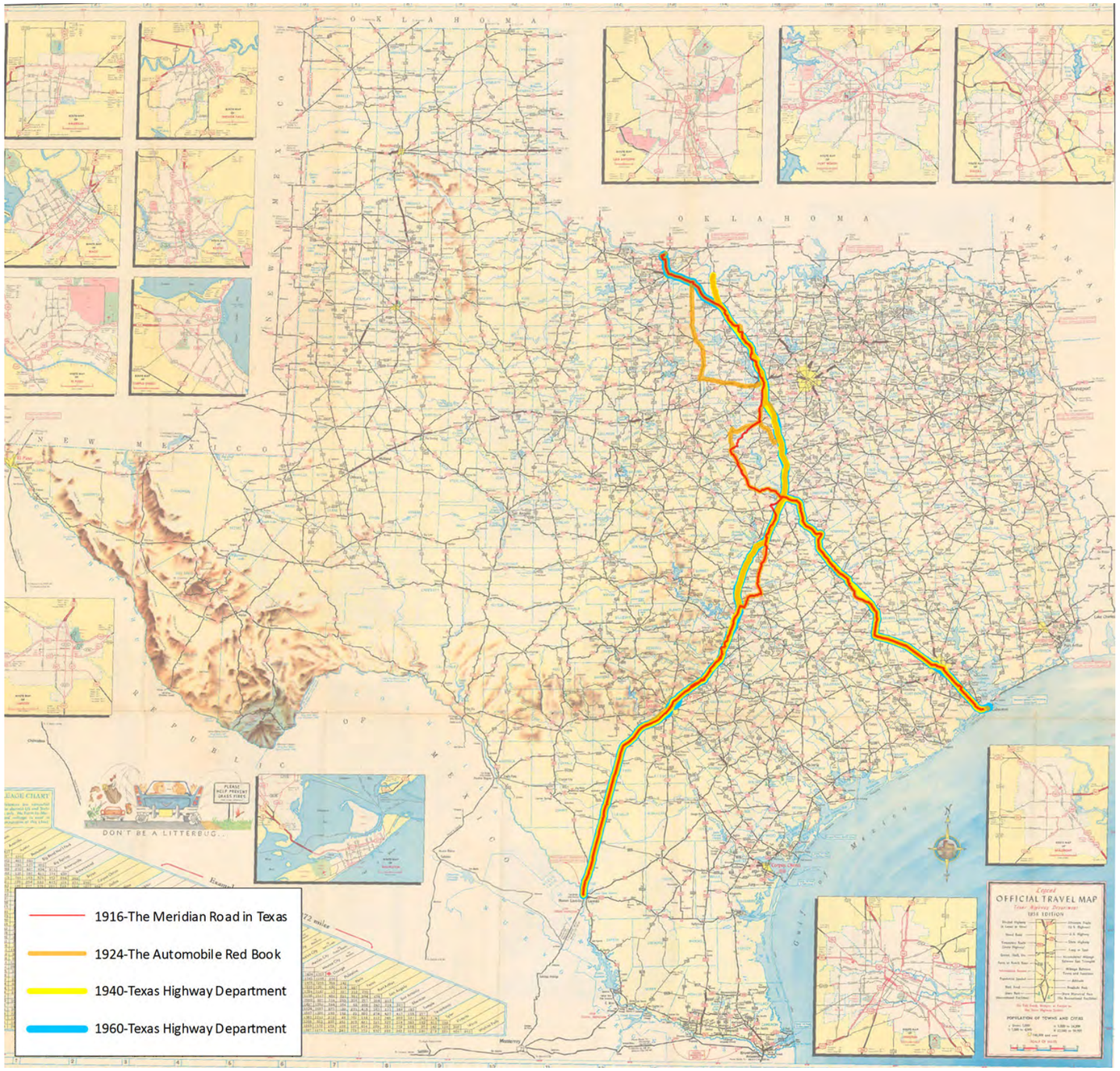

Figure 84. Official Texas Highway Travel Map, 1956. This map provides evidence of the state of the highway system in Texas at the dawn of the interstate highway era. During the intervening 16 years, most of US 81 was upgraded to freeway status to serve a continuously increasing volume of traffic. Source: Wikimedia. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1956_Official_Texas_Highway_Map_JPEG.jpg.

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ROADWAY IN TRANSITION: 1956–1959

Across the state, the Meridian Highway underwent major structural and physical improvements in the late 1950s. The section between Hillsboro and Temple, in particular, saw major work. Along a 1.743-mile stretch of US 81 south of Hillsboro, a project approved in March 1955 consisted of grading, structures, and grade separation improvements.[202] That same month, a project to widen culverts and resurface the old concrete between Elm Mott and West was completed.[203] In Waco, the Texas Highway Department constructed a three-level interchange with US 81, US 84, and Loop Highway 81.[204] The Highway Department also completed a 12-mile four-lane expressway with controlled-access roads from the Waco city limits to near Bruceville in 1956. By the publication of the 1956 Official Texas Highway Map, various segments of the Meridian Highway were divided highways of four or more lanes. From north to south they were:

- From the junction with FM 718 to north Fort Worth
- South of Fort Worth to Cleburne
- Between Abbott and Waco
- Between Temple and Belton
- From SH 195 to north of Georgetown in Williamson County
- From Pflugerville to north Austin
- Between New Braunfels and Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio

Another section of the Meridian Highway in transition during the 1950s was that in Austin. From September 1955 to February 1957, "US 81 Interstate" from St. Elmo to Slaughter Creek was improved with grading, structures, and new base and pavement.[205] This section completed the new alignment east of the existing highway in South Austin. On the Gulf Division, only US 75 from Spring to Galveston was a divided highway at this time.

The San Antonio metropolitan area also saw highway developments along the Meridian Highway corridor. At the northeast edge of the city, the underpass of US 81 and the MKT Railroad in Fratt was widened.[206] This path provided direct access to Fort Sam Houston and residential areas at the city center. It would also be a useful facility with the coming of the interstate. San Antonio also created preliminary infrastructure for the coming interstate with the installation of new expressway lighting on US 81 from Broadway to Travis streets in a project that was completed May 1956.[207] Just south of San Antonio, another grade separation was improved with the additional of grading, structures, and paving and the widening of the I&GN Railroad overpass between Artesia Wells and the Nueces River Bridge at Cotulla from January 28 to September 5, 1955.[208]

The Meridian Highway's Gulf Division was also improved in the late 1950s. From May 1955 to February 1956, one Federal Aid Project to widen several bridges along SH 6 between College Station and the Navasota River was completed.[209] In August 1956, another project to widen bridges and widen and resurface the pavement on SH 6 in Waller County from the Grimes County line to US 290 at Hempstead was completed.[210]

The aforementioned projects in or near Waco, Austin, San Antonio, College Station, and Hempstead only highlight the many construction projects that occurred on the main and Gulf Division branches of the Meridian Highway during this period. After Congress passed the National Interstate and Defense Federal Highway Act on June 26, 1956, local, state, and federal agencies recognized that segments of the Meridian Highway slated to become part of the interstate system did not meet the appropriate geometrical and structural standards of the new highway system.[211] This deficiency provided an impetus for continued improvements to large segments of the Meridian Highway. As early as August 1956, a "Public Voucher for Work Performed Under Provisions of the Federal Aid and Federal Highway Acts" provided almost $1.7 million for grading and structures on US 81 in Waco from Lincoln Avenue to the Brazos River bridge.[212] Also in San Antonio, improvements were made from Fratt to Loop 13 for the proposed US 81 Interstate (IH 35).[213]

Whereas the routing of the future interstate highways along portions of the Meridian Highway was certain, citizens in some parts of the state raised concerns about expressway alignment. Members of the Williamson County Historical Association, for example, were opposed to the proposed rerouting of US 81/IH 35 in Round Rock from the business district as it would divide the residential section of the city, separate the historic part from the modern part of the city and be a "detriment" to public welfare.[214] In Decatur, another group argued that while the proposed rerouting of US 81 would ease local traffic congestion in the downtown core, the city would not be able to afford infrastructure in the form of water and sewer lines to access the new route and that the proposed bypass and overpass would take business from the city.[215]

On the other hand, San Antonio was "Ready for [the] Highway Boom." A large share of funds from the federal highway program was slated for the construction and improvement of expressways and "belt routes" in metropolitan areas like San Antonio.[216] Like other proponents, San Antonio newspapers supported the expressway program because they thought it would meet local traffic needs, increase property values, and aid in city beautification. Sections of the US 81 expressway (later parts of IH 35) were completed early on in 1951 (southbound from South Alamo to Nogalitos streets) and in 1957 (northbound IH 10 West to Broadway Street).[217] While immediate benefits of the expressway through the city were not realized per a study of the economic benefits

of the system in 1958, San Antonians looked forward to future expressway (and interstate highway) development.[218]

The majority of US 81 between Hillsboro and Laredo coincided with or paralleled IH 35. The Texas Highway Department facilitated the development of the Interstate Highway System with the continued construction of expressways, as well as use of the existing right-of-way. While some changes were made in the late 1950s following passage of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, the next two decades saw old sections of the Meridian Highway transformed to accommodate the new Interstate Highway System in earnest (see *Figure 85* on the next page).

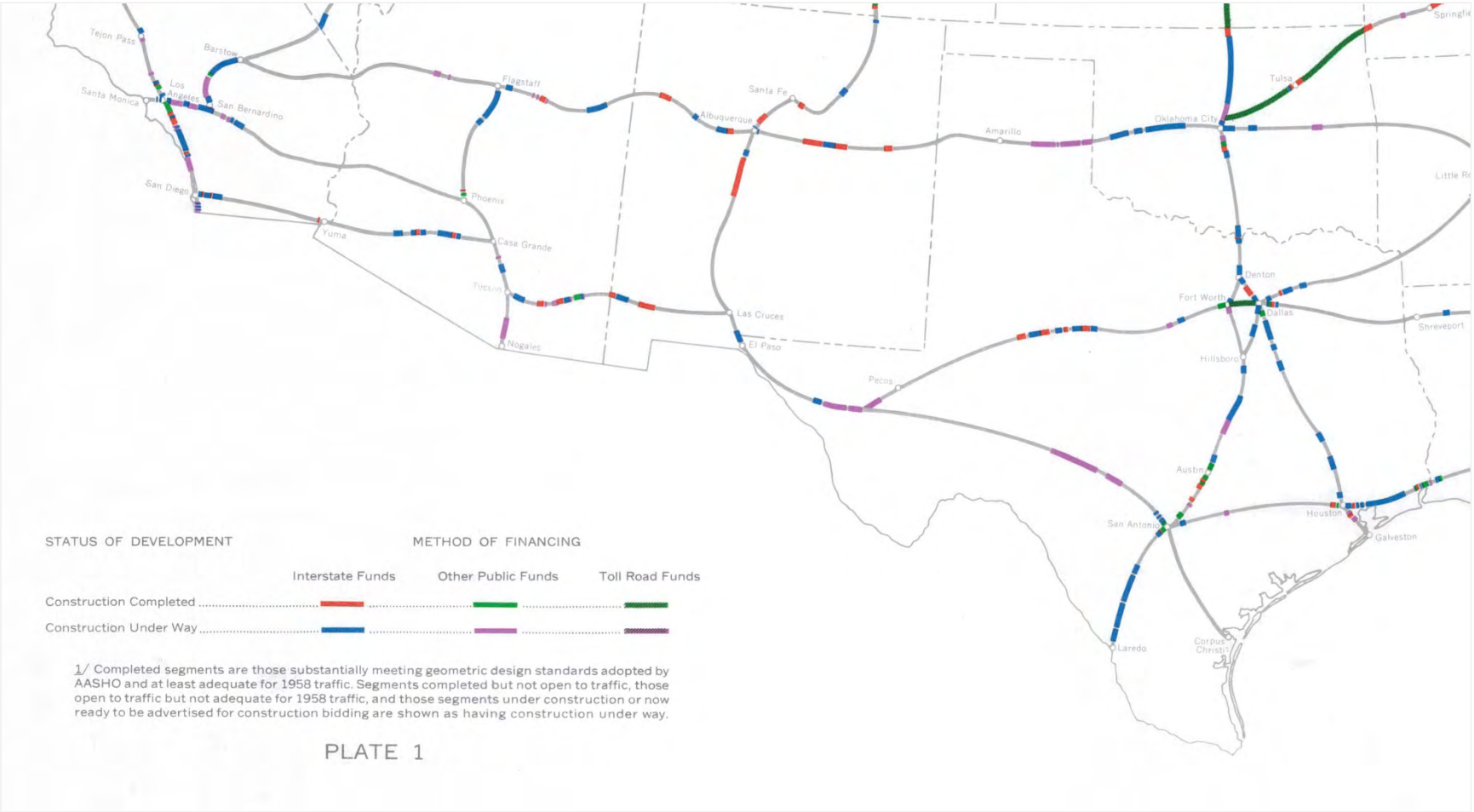

Figure 85. This map detail illustrates the state of the proposed Interstate Highway System in Texas in 1958. Much of IH 35 through Texas, along the portions of the historic Meridian Highway, was under construction in major metropolitan areas – Denton, Fort Worth, Waco, Temple, San Antonio, and Laredo. In Austin, most of the freeway was already complete. On the Meridian's Gulf Division, a small portion of future IH 45 was complete with most of the freeway under construction. Source: National System of Interstate and Defense Highways. Map. 1958. Series 5, Maps of Highway Systems (Interstate & Defense Highways), Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, NARA College Park.

INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM: 1959–1972

The Bureau of Public Roads approved the route and designation of IH 35 through Texas on October 1, 1959.[219] Generally, IH 35 was routed along the edge of downtown business districts in urban areas such as Fort Worth, Waco, Austin, and San Antonio. The interstate also bypassed smaller towns such as New Braunfels, Lytle, Devine, Pearsall, Dilly, Cotulla, and Encinal. In most cases, the abandoned route through the downtown of these smaller cities became a business route of the interstate. Devine was one exception were the road was re-designated as SH 132. From the Oklahoma–Texas state line to the Mexican border, the new interstate widely impacted highway transportation and the appearance of Texas cities.

In 1968, the segment of US 81 that now functioned as interstate, bypassing Hillsboro and traveling north to downtown Fort Worth, was designated as IH 35 West (IH 35W).[220] The interstate through Waco was near completion when it was depicted in the February 1970 issue of *Texas Highways Magazine*.[221] Further south, IH 35 continued to serve Temple's status in Bell County as a geographic transportation hub and economic distribution and industrial center.[222] In July 1961, the Texas Highway Department published the *Plan of Highway Development in and Around Temple*. The plan proposed to eliminate crossovers in the vicinity of the interchange of IH 35 and Spur 290 north of Temple, as well as crossovers on the interstate highway between 57th Street and Avenue H. These recommendations were implemented and included erection of an elevated ramp in the area southwest of downtown (see *Figure 86*, to follow).[223]

Documents like the plan for Temple and other planning efforts proved to be important for successful development of segments of the Meridian Highway into the Interstate Highway System. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962 presented a provision that stated that no projects be undertaken in urban areas over 50,000 people unless state and local authorities developed a comprehensive transportation plan.[224] This directive resulted in local governmental entities to conduct transportation plans and studies, such as the urban transportation study of Waco approved by the McLennan County Commissioners Court in 1963.[225]

In Austin, the route retained the moniker as the "Interregional," and numerous businesses and advertisements continued to refer to the highway by that name. Interstate highway construction and improvements in the Austin area started in the late 1950s. The downtown section was completed in May 1962, opening the freeway through all of Austin.[226] In order to ease the limitations of the interregional highway's below-grade-lanes through much of the city, and the lack of available right-of-way, the Texas Highway Department

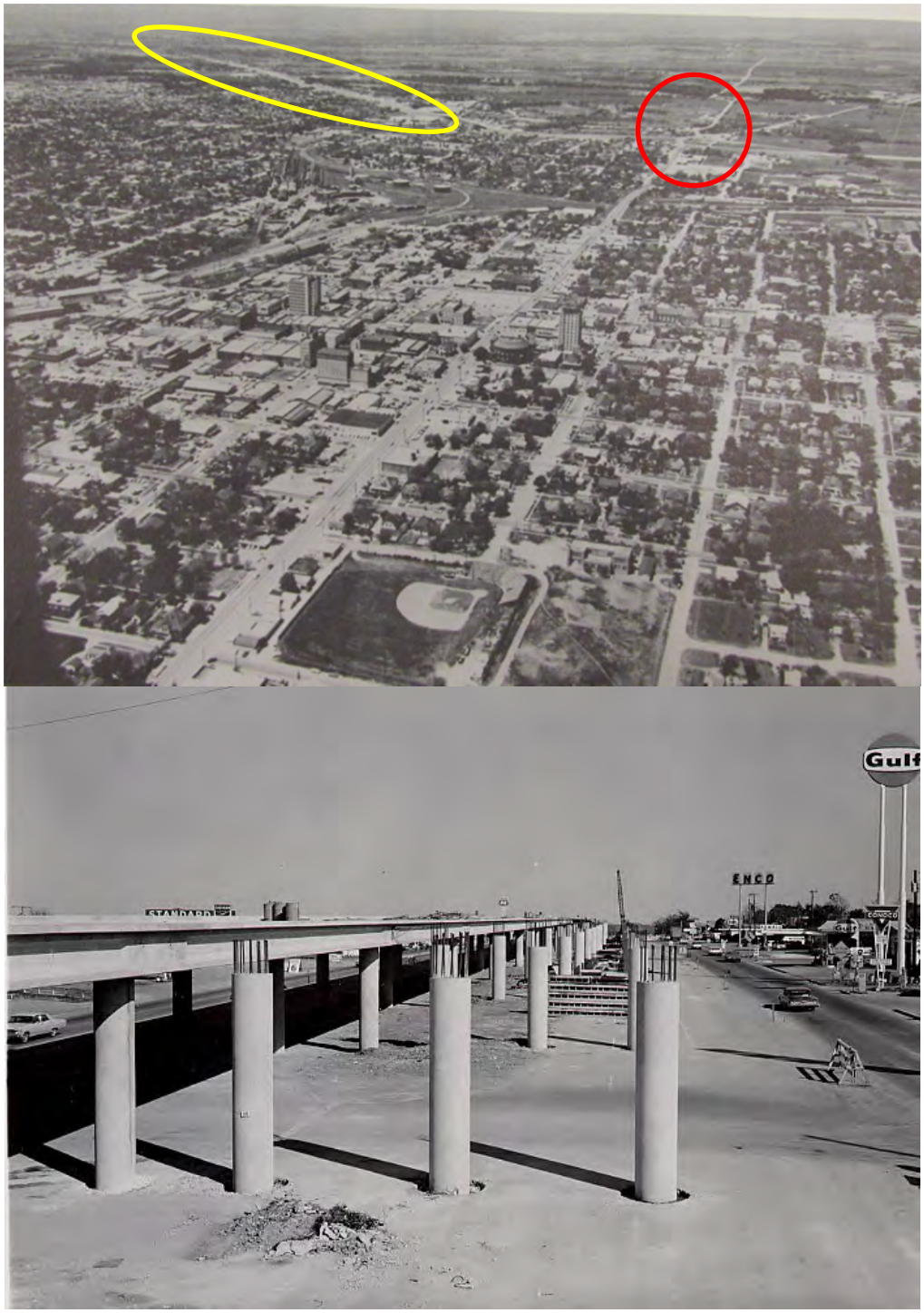

Figure 86. These images depict the transition that US 81 underwent in the Temple area. The aerial on the top looks west, with the intersection of IH 35 and US 195 in red and the area of proposed work in south Temple (discussed in the 1961 Plan of Highway Development) highlighted in yellow. On the bottom is a historic photograph showing the construction of the elevated ramp in south Temple in 1968. Note the Gulf and Enco gas stations (right side of bottom image) on the highway that are being bypassed by the ramp and relegated to the frontage road. Sources: Plan of Highway Development in and Around Temple, 1961. Box 2002/101-48, Texas Highway Department Historical Records, Texas State Library and Archives Commission (top); TexasFreeway.com (bottom).

designed and built an upper deck from north of downtown to Airport Boulevard. Work started in 1971 and was completed in 1975.

The north- and south-bound lanes of the interstate highway were originally called the "Northeast Expressway" and the "Southwest Expressway," respectively, through San Antonio.[227] In many areas throughout the city, the interstate highway deviated from the route of

US 81 and the historic Meridian Highway. At the northeast edge of the city, IH 35 left US 81 at the MKT Railroad line to travel south and east of Fort Sam Houston and avoided the Alamo Heights and Terrell Hills communities. The interstate route then aligned with FM 78 south of Fort Sam Houston; the 1961 General Highway map indicates that this section was under construction at the time. IH 35 briefly rejoined US 81 in south-central San Antonio before again separating; the new alignment finally met the older route at Indian Creek near the 410 Loop. Segments of IH 35 through San Antonio were completed in various phases. The northbound sections of the interstate were completed in 1961 (north to Artesia Road and north of Fratt Road) and 1964 (remainder of IH 35 North).[228] Southbound sections were completed in 1957 (north to IH 10) and 1964 (Nogalitos Street to Loop 410).[229] Although the interstate was not finished, San Antonians celebrated its opening through Bexar County in May 1962.[230]

While the development of the interstate highway through Texas affected portions of US 81 associated with the main branch of the Meridian Highway, segments of the Gulf Division also were subject to major changes during the period. Most notably, a 1968 extension of FM 60 resulted in SH 6 bypassing Bryan and College Station to the northeast.[231] In Houston, IH 45 was routed along US 75 from central Houston to Galveston, and the former route (the historic segment of the Meridian Highway) was designated as SH 3 from downtown Houston to the southern city limits of LaMarque. (See the following page for *Figures 87–89* and a sidebar about African Americans traveling the Meridian Highway in Galveston in the Jim Crow Era.)

The expansion of the Interstate Highway System, particularly the trend of creating bypasses from the business centers of small towns and large cities alike, affected commercial resources. In some cases, automobile travel-related enterprises persisted, even on abandoned segments of the Meridian Highway. One example was the Imperial '400' Motel in Austin. Located on South Congress Avenue, or State Loop (SL) 275, the motel provided access to downtown Austin and The University of Texas at Austin campus (see *Figure 90*, to follow). Conversely, some businesses were abandoned as a result of a shift in automobile clientele; some establishments were repurposed to provide other goods and services. New commercial property types were also created. In major cities where the interstate ran parallel to the commercial core, new high-rise office towers and parking structures were constructed to serve growing industries like oil and banking and other business interests.[232] Large corporate hotel chains were another nascent property type. One notable example is the cylindrical Holiday Inn built at IH 35 and Lady Bird Lake in Austin in 1964. Still extant, though with later boxy additions, the hotel is symbolic of the modernism sought by automobile tourists and travelers utilizing the interstate system (see *Figure 91*, to follow).

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Gus Allen and African-American Travel in the Jim Crow Era

Andrew August "Gus" Allen, Sr. (1905–1988), an African-American native of Leesville, Louisiana, moved to Galveston in the late 1920s.[233] As a resident for 60 years, he became owner and operator of Gus Allen Enterprises.[234] Allen's travel-related business endeavors helped to foster travel for African-Americans along the Meridian Highway in Galveston.

Several of Allen's businesses were located on Church Street, two blocks north of the Meridian Highway (present-day Broadway Avenue). Gus Allen's Café opened on the corner of Church and 27th streets in the early 1940s (*Figure 87 below*).[235] At the café, the Allens and their staff not only catered to black travelers, but also served famous guests such as boxer Joe Louis and musicians Lionel Hampton and Ivory Joe Hunter.[236] Across the street, Allen operated the Gus Allen Hotel at 2711 Church Street (*Figures 88* and *89 on the right*). The hotel featured prominently in race-related travel guidebooks such as the *Negro Green Book* from 1949–1961. On the lower level, the hotel included a barber shop and store to the left and right of the lobby entry respectively. Gus Allen advertisements for wait staff, cooks, and barbers appear in 1940s and 1950s issues of the *Galveston Daily News*. In addition to fostering his own success and serving African Americans at a time when their dining, lodging, and travel options were limited, Allen's café and hotel on Church Street were a catalyst for other black-owned businesses. Allen supported establishments such as Honeybrown Restaurant, opened at 2728 Church Street in 1946, which was among a number of other boarding houses and restaurants in the vicinity as shown on historic maps.[237]

Figure 87. (ABOVE) Gus Allen Café at 2702–2704 Church Street (corner of 27th Street). Source: Tommie D. Boudreaux and Alice M. Gatson, African Americans of Galveston (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2013), p. 34.

In 1965, the Gus Allen Villa and Café opened adjacent to Seawall Boulevard at 2820 Avenue R 1/2. Allen sought to capitalize on additional travel- and tourist-related opportunities with this later endeavor. The villa and café were among a small number of African-American-owned beachfront businesses grouped in the 2800 block of Seawall Boulevard. Although a hallmark of segregation, these businesses prospered and were very popular, and "…in this one block many great memories were formed. People came from all over the world to stay at Gus Allen's Villa, eat at the Jambalaya Restaurant or dance at the Manhattan Club. Gus Allen, an astute businessman, owned [both] the Jambalaya and Villa locations."[238] The popularity of the two businesses and the fare they served were highlighted in a June 1969 issue of *Ebony* magazine.[239]

Gus Allen died in 1988, having served on various civic, social, and charitable organizations on the national, state, and local levels.[240] Although none of his businesses are extant, his legacy remains. Gus Allen, Sr. Park occupies a portion of the 2700 block of Church Street that was once occupied by Allen's former properties.[241]

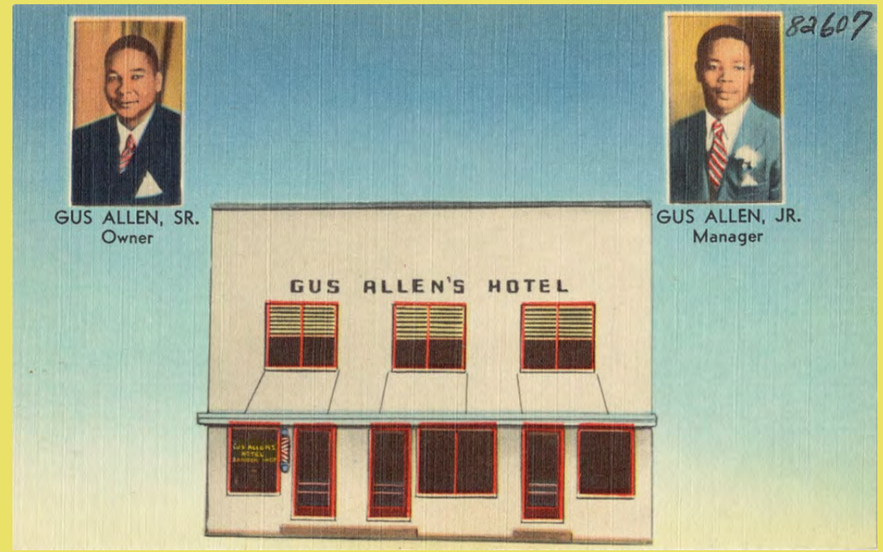

Figure 88. Historic postcard depicting Allen, his son, and their hotel on Church Street. Source: Print Department, Boston Public Library, http://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/zk51vw44j (accessed February 26, 2016).

Figure 89. Gus Allen (seated third from left) with staff of the Gus Allen Hotel located at 2711 Church Street. Source: Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.

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Figure 90. (Above) The Imperial '400' Motel was a Los Angeles-based chain that took advantage of the post-World War II hotel-room shortage. In 1959, architects Palmer & Krisel of Southern California designed a prototype for the chain that was utilized across the country. The Austin franchise, pictured here in 1961, was located on the abandoned segment of the Meridian Highway south of downtown. The establishment was routinely advertised in the University's alumni magazine The Alcalde in the early 1960s. The decline of SL 275 as a highway route eventually affected the motel and other businesses on South Congress. The Imperial '400' was turned into a small shopping center with boutique shops in 2007.[242] Source: Imperial 400 Motel, Photograph by Douglass Neal. July 7, 1961. http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth19585/ (accessed May 19, 2015), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, http://texashistory.unt.edu; crediting Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, Austin, Texas.

Figure 91. (Left) Austin architect Leonard Lundgren established a professional relationship with Memphis-based hotelier Kemmons Wilson, founder of the Holiday Inn chain. Lundgren took advantage of the new interstate system to design Holiday Inn hotels that fit the modern expressways as opposed to older hotels like those of the Howard Johnson hotel chain. One modern feature of the chain was the green, gold, and orange neon signs. In Austin, the result of Lundgren's brand of modernism was the Holiday Inn's first cylindrical hotel. Lundgren went on to design many other cylindrical hotels for the chain across the country, as well as in Mexico and Panama. Source: http://www.leonard lundgrenarchitect.com/Holiday_Inn_ Austin_Texas_ Round.html.

Throughout Texas, the interstate system spurred suburban development. Outside of the major urban areas, suburban communities emerged along the main branch and Gulf Division of the Meridian Highway. The areas just north and south of Austin were relatively undeveloped prior to the completion of the interstate. Shortly after, however, the IH 35 corridor in Williamson, Travis, and Hays counties—with Austin at its core—encouraged the growth of suburbs in areas from Georgetown to the north to Buda and Kyle to the south. Similarly, as the University of Texas at Austin grew rapidly in the 1960s, high-tech industries built facilities in the city's suburb including IBM (1967), Texas Instruments (1969), and Motorola (1974).[243] Even as planning for the construction of the limited-access interstate was underway, development of roadside attractions continued. From the 1950s through the 1970s, the Aquarena Springs in San Marcos attracted tourists traveling along the highway with an amusement park, glass bottom boats, and underwater theater with mermaid performances.[244] Across the state, billboards advertised approaching travel-related business tourist attractions for miles in advance, so that tourists would know when to exit off the limited-access interstate. The construction of IH 35 through Georgetown inadvertently led to the establishment of Inner Space Caverns, a pre-historic underground cave, in 1963 (see *Figure 92*, to follow). The cave has since become a major tourist attraction in the Austin area with the requisite billboards and signage to attract local and interstate travelers.[245]

Geared towards travel and tourism, the Meridian Highway also developed as an interstate highway for defense, one of the main motivations for passage of the 1956 Highway Act. Military installations throughout the state retained a direct link and their strategic importance to the Meridian Highway. Throughout the route, accommodations were made to access them. The bases in San Antonio especially benefitted from changes to the Meridian Highway. In the rerouting of US 81 and construction of new alignments for the interstate, the boundaries of these installations were left intact, including Bergstrom Air Field in Austin. San Antonio area air fields greatly benefited from the highway. In 1958, FM 1518 was expanded from US 81 to Randolph Air Field.[246] The realignment of US 81 from Kelly Air Force to the Atascosa County line also directly benefitted access to that installation.[247] With the completion of the interstate in southeast and southwest San Antonio, other highways and local roads provided access to various installations – Stinson Field (SH 16); Kelly Air Force Base, Lackland Air Force Base, Withers Southwest and Northeast Bases (US 90 and Loop 13); and Brooks Air Force Base (Loop 13 and US 181). Even on the Gulf Division, a spur—FM 528—was built from Clear Lake City to IH 45 in order to access NASA.[248]

Figure 92. This image shows Texas Highway Department workers' discovery of the underground caves during excavation for IH 35 underpass foundations at Georgetown. Source: TexasFreeways.com.

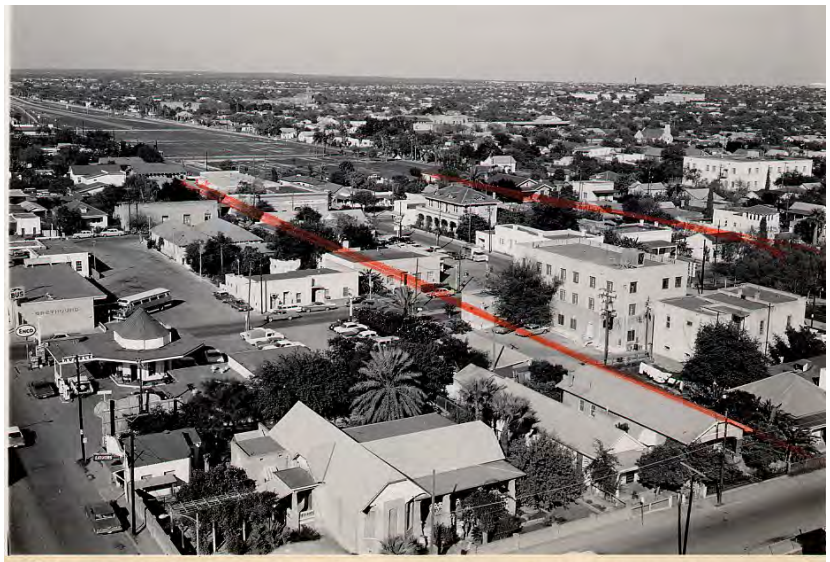
INTERNATIONAL TOURISM AND THE MERIDIAN HIGHWAY

With its spiderweb of expressways, San Antonio boasted of its potential for economic development and tourism due to its first-class road system.[249] San Antonio's pivotal location in this link across the Americas was highlighted when IH 35 superseded US 81 as the city's major north–south highway; the interstate through the city become known as the Pan-American Expressway.[250] In 1968, the HemisFair—the first "officially designated international exposition or world's fair in the Southwestern United States"—celebrated the heritage that linked San Antonio, and the State of Texas in general, to Central and South America.[251] The grounds for the fair were strategically located between IH 35 and IH 37. With its Tower of the Americas, Convention Center and Arena, and pavilions highlighting more than 30 countries, the fair attracted over 6.3 million visitors. Construction of both the interstate highways and the

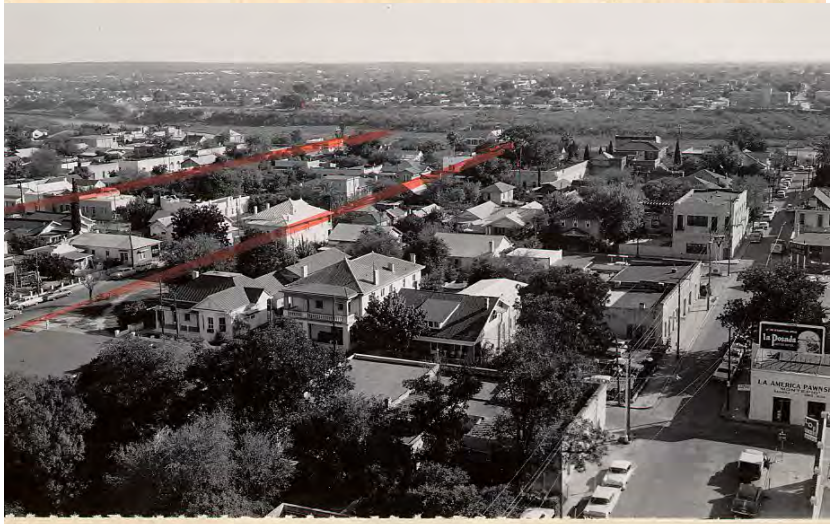
fairgrounds aimed to revitalize what was considered a blighted area and to regenerate local tax revenues.[252] In preparation for the fair, the City of San Antonio cleaned up and redeveloped the River Walk, or *Paseo del Rio*, which had been constructed initially in the 1920s. Like the Meridian Highway, however, the HemisFair and the buildings and attractions constructed as part of it, did not ultimately become the "permanent unifying element that is planners had envisioned."[253] Further, the fair did not have any physical effects on the character of the highway and adjoining properties. However, during the 1970s, the City of San Antonio continued to capitalize on this tourist infrastructure by drawing conventions to the city and continuing to give incentives for the construction of new hotels and tourist amenities in the vicinity of the historic Meridian Highway.

The International Bridge at Laredo on the other hand, in conjunction with IH 35, became a more tangible link between the Americas. In the 1960s, the interstate was rerouted east of US 81 from San Bernardo Avenue to between Santa Ursula and San Dario avenues. At that time, the highway continued from the interstate's terminus at Victoria Avenue west to Convent Avenue then south to the old International Bridge. The new bridge was intended to alleviate traffic on other bridges between the United States and Mexico in Laredo and Nuevo Laredo. It was constructed at the southern terminus of IH 35 in 1976 following the already established and less circuitous path of the interstate through the city and eliminating the cumbersome path between the interstate to the Convent Avenue Bridge. The Juarez-Lincoln International Bridge (named after Mexican President Benito Juárez and U.S. President Abraham Lincoln) caused the historic *El Azteca* neighborhood to be cut off from the historic center of the city, as well as the destruction of many buildings in the community, but symbolically served as a fulfilment of the Meridian Highway as an important part of an international network and promise for Texas' highway system (see *Figure 93*, to follow).[254] Its completion marked the conclusion of an extended and protracted effort to provide improved transportation facilities between the two cities, dating back at least to the 1930s.

Figure 93. These views of Laredo indicate, in red, the future path of IH 35 and the Juárez-Lincoln International Bridge. The image on the top is oriented north with portions of the interstate that were already complete or under construction in the right background. The bottom image shows the highway's proposed path toward the Rio Grande and Mexico. Source: TexasFreeway.com.



3282 Location of the future site of IH 35 in Laredo, Te



281 Location of the future site of IH 35 in Laredo, Te

[199] "U.S. Chamber Urges Cities to 'Vitalize,'" *Jamestown Post-Journal*, June 3, 1957: 9.

[200] "Surplus Equipment Sales Company Quits Downtown Site after 23 Years," *Waco News Tribune*, October 2, 1958:

[201] "Farm to Market Road No. 817," Highway Designation File, https://www.dot.state.tx.us/tpp/hwy/fm0500/fm0817.htm (accessed May 8, 2015).

[202] *J. M. Page to D. C. Greer, March 28, 1955* and *State of Texas, State Highway Department, Plans of Proposed State Highway Improvement, Federal Aid Project IN 113 (16) & F 113(17)*, Box No. 14, Austin Project Files, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, NARA College Park.

[203] *State of Texas, State Highway Department, Plan of Proposed State Highway Improvement, Federal Aid Project FI 139 (9)& (10) & C 14-12-8,* Box No. 17, Austin Project Files, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, NARA College Park.

[204] *Public Voucher for Work Performed Under Provisions of the Federal Aid and Federal Highway Acts, as Amended, May 26, 1954* and *Plans of Proposed State Highway Improvement, Federal Aid Projects U 605 (16), UI 139 (8), UI 614 (9),* Box No. 85, Austin Project Files, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, NARA College Park.

[205] *Initial and Final Construction Inspection Report, February 15, 1957* and *Plans of Proposed Highway Improvement, Federal Aid Project UI 200 (20)*, Box No. 26, Austin Project Files, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, NARA College Park.

[206] Plan for *Bexar County, U.S. Highway No. 81, Fratt Underpass N.E. of San Antonio, Widen Existing, M-K-T Railroad Underpass*, Box No. 4, Austin Project Files, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, NARA College Park.

[207] *State of Texas, State Highway Department, Plans of Proposed State Highway Improvement, Federal Aid Project UI 1083 (19)*, Box No. 124, Austin Project Files, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, NARA College Park.

[208] *Contract Time Estimate* and *State of Texas, State Highway Department, Plans of Proposed State Highway Improvement, Federal Aid Project F 548 (8) & IN 548 (9)*, Box No. 73, Austin Project Files, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, NARA College Park.

[209] *State Highway Department, Plans of Proposed State Highway Improvement, Federal Aid Project F 471 (18)*, Box No. 59, Austin Project Files, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, NARA College Park.

[210] *State of Texas State Highway Department, Plans of Proposed State Highway Improvement, Federal Aid Project F 471 (19)*, Box No. 59, Austin Project Files, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, NARA College Park.

[211] Texas Highway Department, *Plan of Highway Development in and Around Temple* (July 1961), 11, Texas Highway Department Historical Records, Box 2002/101-48, Folder (01) Bell County, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

[212] *Public Voucher for Work Performed Under Provisions of the Federal Aid and Federal Highway Acts, as Amended, n.d.* and *State of Texas, State Highway Department, Plans of Proposed State Highway Improvement, Federal Aid Project UI 614 (10) and UI-UGI 614 (11)*, Box No. 85, Austin Project Files, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, NARA College Park.

[213] *State of Texas, State Highway Department, Plans of Proposed State Highway Improvement, Federal Aid Project, FI 1088 (1)*, Box No. 125, Austin Project Files, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, NARA College Park.

[214] Hearing re: proposed Routing – Interstate Highway U.S. 81 – through the Round Rock Area, November 21, 1956, Texas Highway Department Historical Records, Box 2002/101-97, Folder (02) Williamson County, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

[215] Hearing re: Location – U.S. Highway 81 – in the vicinity of Decatur, March 27, 1958, Texas Highway Department Historical Records, Box 2002/101-97, Folder (04) Wise County, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

[216] "San Antonio is Ready for Highway Boom," *San Antonio Express*, January 7, 1956: 2B.

[217] Brian Purcell, "San Antonio Area Freeway System, Interstate 35 North (North PanAm Freeway): History," available from http://www.texashighwayman.com/i35n.shtml#History (accessed May 11, 2015).

[218] William G. Adkins and Alton W. Tieken, *Economic Impacts of Expressways in San Antonio: A Study of the Effects of a 3.7-Mile Expressway Near Downtown San Antonio, Texas, on Land Values and Land Use*, Texas Transportation Institute Bulletin No. 11 (August 1958).

[219] Texas Department of Transportation, "Interstate Highway No. 35," Highway Designation File, available from https://www.dot.state.tx.us/tpp/hwy/ih/ih0035.htm (accessed May 6, 2015).

[220] This branch met up again with IH 35E in Denton, where it continued northward as IH 35.

[221] Historic Photos Statewide, Interstate 35 (non-urban sections), available from http://www.texasfreeway.com/Statewide/Statewide/historic/photos/images/i35/i35_waco_txhm_feb_1970.jpg (accessed May 18, 2015).

[222] Texas Highway Department, *Plan of Highway Development in and Around Temple*.

[223] Ibid, 17, 19.

[224] McLennan County Commissioners' Court, Resolution (copy), September 18, 1963, Texas Highway Department Historical Records, Box 2002/101-84, Folder (01) McLennan County, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

[225] Ibid.

[226] "Interstate 35 through Austin," available from http://www.texasfreeway.com/austin/photos/i35/i35.shtml (accessed May 11, 2015).

[227] Purcell, "San Antonio Area Freeway System, Interstate 35 North (North PanAm Freeway): History."

[228] "Northeast Expressway: Broadway to N. Olive," *San Antonio News*, August 5, 1959: 12-C, San Antonio Vertical File, Expressways, IH-35, San Antonio Public Library; "Route of Northeast Expressway," *San Antonio News*, August 6, 1969: 14-C, San Antonio Vertical File, Expressways, IH-35, San Antonio Public Library; *San Antonio News*, January 16, 1962: 4-D, San Antonio Vertical File, Expressways, IH-35, San Antonio Public Library; Purcell, "San Antonio Area Freeway System, Interstate 35 North (North PanAm Freeway): History."

[229] Purcell, "San Antonio Area Freeway System, Interstate 35 North (North PanAm Freeway): History."

[230] "Cross-Country Route to be Opened Today," *San Antonio Express*, May 3, 1962: n.p., San Antonio Vertical File, Expressways, IH-35, San Antonio Public Library; "Cross-Bexar Roadway First of Kind in Texas," *San Antonio Express*, May 3, 1962: n.p., San Antonio Vertical File, Expressways, IH-35, San Antonio Public Library.

[231] Re: Requested Extension F.M. 60 – From State Highway 6 in College Station East to the Proposed East Loop, Texas Highway Department Historical Records, Box 2002/101-52, Folder (03) Brazos County, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

[232] Hardy·Heck·Moore, Inc., et. al. *The Development of Highways in Texas: a Historic Context of the Bankhead Highway and Other Named Highways*. Volume I. Prepared for the Texas Historical Commission. June 2014, 326.

[233] "Local businessman 'Gus' Allen, Sr. dies," *The Galveston Daily News*, June 18, 1988, p. 4, http://newspaperarchive.com/ (accessed February 26, 2016).

[234] Ibid.

[235] Dreamland Café was probably the Allen's precursor to Gus Allen's Café. *African Americans of Galveston* notes that Gus and his wife Bertha (1906–1981) initially opened the Dreamland Café at 2704 Church Street in the early 1930s, and that this restaurant closed in the late 1940s. However, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps and historic newspaper articles indicate that Gus Allen's Café was located at 2702–2704 Church Street by 1943. Tommie D. Boudreaux and Alice M. Gatson, *African Americans of Galveston* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2013), 34; Brian M. Davis, *Lost Galveston* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2010), 68.

[236] "Mrs. Gus (Bertha) Allen," obituary, *Galveston Daily News*, January 5, 1981, p. 5, http://newspaperarchive.com/ (accessed February 26, 2016).

[237] Boudreaux, 32; Maury Darst, "Nelson 'Honey' Brown Jr. kept recipe for his sauce a secret," *Galveston Daily News*, February 25, 1990, p. 16, http://newspaperarchive.com/ (accessed February 26, 2016).

[238] "African American Beachfront," http://www.galveston.com/africanamericanbeachfront/ (accessed February 26, 2016).

[239] "Sun 'N' Fun Spots on the Gulf Coast," *Ebony,* June 1969, p. 150, https://books.google.com/books?id=RNoDAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA150&dq=gus%20allen's%20hotel%2C%20galveston%2C%20tx&pg=PA1#v=onepage&q=gus%20allen's%20hotel,%20galveston,%20tx&f=false (accessed February 26, 2016).

[240] "Andrew Augustus Allen, Sr.," http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=71768890 (accessed February 26, 2016).

[241] "Gus Allen Sr. Park," http://www.galveston.com/gusallensrpark/ (accessed February 26, 2016).

[242] Southern California Architectural History, "Palmer & Krisel and the Imperial '400' Motels: Spreading Good Design to Mid-Century Travelers," available from http://socalarchhistory.blogspot.com/2010/03/palmer-krisel-and-imperial-400-motels.html (accessed May 11, 2015); Don Martin, *Austin* (Mount Pleasant: Arcadia Publishing Co., 2009), 125.

[243] Ibid.

[244] Ibid.

[245] A. Richard Smith, "INNER SPACE CAVERN," *Handbook of Texas Online,* http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/rqi01 (accessed May 19, 2015).

[246] "Farm to Market Road No. 1518," Highway Designation File https://www.dot.state.tx.us/tpp/hwy/fm1500/fm1518.htm (accessed May 11, 2015).

[247] *State Highway Department, Plans of Proposed State Highway Improvement, Federal Aid Project* FI 264 (10), Box No. 32, Austin Project Files, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, NARA College Park.

[248] Re: Freeway System Houston Metropolitan Area – F.M. 528 (NASA Project), Texas Highway Department Historical Records, Box 2002/101-72, Folder (02) Harris County, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

[249] "S.A. Freeway System to Sprout $40 Million in New Segments," *San Antonio Light*, October 4, 1964; "Bexar County has Recorded Two Decades of Dramatic Progress in Highways, *San Antonio Express and News*, January 16, 1966: 74; "S.A. Highway System Envy," *San Antonio Light*, March 8, 1970: n.p.

[250] *San Antonio Express-News*, January 19, 1974: 2-A.

[251] Frank Duane, "HEMISFAIR '68," *Handbook of Texas Online* (http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/lkh01) (accessed May 12, 2015).

[252] Hardy·Heck·Moore, Inc. 328.

[253] Duane, "HemisFair '68."

[254] Maria Eugenia Guerra, *Historic Laredo: an Illustrated History of Laredo and Webb County* (San Antonio: Historical Publishing Network, 2001), 7.

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I.9. HISTORIC CONTEXT CONCLUSION

When originally envisioned in 1911, the Meridian Highway extended through much of the vast Great Plains and was the earliest international highway in North America. It created a direct link from Winnipeg, one of Canada's largest and most dynamic cities during the early twentieth century, to the Gulf of Mexico. Soon after, it extended to the U.S. border with Mexico. Most of the early auto trails and named highways of the era extended east–west, connecting major cities on the Atlantic coast with those on the Pacific coast. The Lincoln Highway, National Old Trails Highway, and Pikes Peak Ocean-to-Ocean Highway are among the best known of these routes, and some, such as the Bankhead Highway and Old Spanish Trail, extended through Texas. These roadways thrived on the often-promoted romantic character of early automobile tourism. They gave many of those living along the eastern seaboard and in the Midwest and South opportunities to explore the West on their own terms, independent of the static routes of rail travel.

The Meridian Highway, in contrast, largely evolved from commerce-based travel. Much of the route between Texas and Kansas followed the historic Chisholm Trail and other paths used to drive cattle to northern markets. Other parts of the route followed trails dating back to the Spanish Colonial era. The Meridian Highway also possessed its own romantic appeal for auto tourists, touching on such Texas destinations as the beaches and hotels in Galveston and the historic Alamo and Spanish missions in San Antonio. Early promoters of the Meridian Highway touted the route as the gateway to Mexico, with its many unique cultural, architectural, and historical offerings. This north–south corridor has since evolved into one of the country's busiest and most important highways, and a vital part of the nation's economic infrastructure.

The name "Meridian Highway" has largely been forgotten within Texas, and the route is now known by new names, or more accurately numbers, within the federal and state highway systems. The main trunk between Fort Worth and Laredo is designated as IH 35/IH 35W; it is frequently upgraded, expanded, and improved to accommodate the rapidly increasing numbers of vehicles and traffic. With the enactment of the federal highway designation system in 1926, the Gulf Division segment between Waco and Galveston lost its historical association with the Meridian Highway and is now known mostly as SH 6. Secondary and alternative routes, such as the Mineral Wells Loop (SH 148/US 281/US 280), the Meridian Loop (US 67/SH 144/SH6), and the Taylor Loop (SH 95), likewise are no longer associated with the Meridian Highway. But early highway maps reveal that these segments were once part of this great international highway.

Since the Texas Historical Commission—sponsors of this study—also funded a similar project to document the Bankhead Highway through Texas, a comparison of these historic routes provides an opportunity to note shared qualities and contrasting differences between the two highways. Both highways originally paralleled existing rail lines that underscored the early support of railroads to the emerging automobile culture. The railroads saw automobiles and trucks as a way to increase profits through greater commerce and trade, especially as the road improvements enabled agriculturalists to bring their goods to cities and to ship them by rail to other markets in a more efficient manner. As improvements in the road network and vehicular transportation occurred, highways soon began to compete with railroads. This trend was more pronounced on the Meridian Highway because of its connection to Galveston and the new port facilities along the Houston Ship Channel during the early twentieth century.

The physical characteristics of the Meridian and Bankhead highways share many qualities in part because the hiring of professionally trained and educated highway engineers, as well as the development of federal and state guidelines, led to increased standardization of road design, construction, and maintenance. However, regional differences did emerge and, in some cases, still exist. In areas between Fort Worth and Abilene, for example, the Bankhead Highway boasted large stretches of brick highway construction. This labor-intensive material largely relied on street-paving brick manufactured in Thurber along the route. An intact brick-highway segment survives east of Cisco and attests to this once-popular road material. Early promotion of the Meridian Highway touted the concrete shell roads in the Houston and Galveston areas, tapping a readily available road-building material from the Gulf coast. No extant examples along the route have been documented, but the practice was continued in the region through the mid-twentieth century. The Meridian Highway through Central Texas was characterized by the use of limestone, a readily available material.

Both highways also supported national defense needs, especially during the two world wars. During World War I, the Meridian Highway played a more significant role because it linked a series of existing and new military installations from Wichita Falls to Laredo, and from Waco to Galveston. Political instability in Mexico during the 1910s also was a factor in the improvement of the Meridian Highway since San Antonio was one of the nation's most important and strategic military centers. The Bankhead Highway also fulfilled a key role in national defense, but its contributions were felt more strongly during World War II when a number of air bases, training facilities, and industrial operations were established along its route.

Both highways extended to downtowns along each respective route and relied on existing hotels to provide accommodations for early auto enthusiasts. Notable examples along the Meridian Highway included the

Rice Hotel in Houston, the Galvez Hotel in Galveston, and the Gunter Hotel in San Antonio. Comparable landmarks along the Bankhead Highway included the Paso del Norte Hotel (now Camino Real Hotel) in El Paso, and the Adolphus Hotel in Dallas. With its humble beginnings at the Mobley Hotel in Cisco, Conrad Hilton's hotel operation had close ties to both highways, as numerous communities of all sizes along the routes boasted large, multi-story hotels. Among the earliest were hotels in Marlin, Waco, Abilene, Fort Worth and Dallas. Tourist courts and motels also provided lodging for motorists, and they typically were built in outlying areas away from more congested downtowns. Survey results show that a much larger number of historic tourist courts and motels survive along the Bankhead Highway, which suggests that more tourists traveled along the Bankhead than the Meridian. Further research and analysis is needed to understand this trend. Perhaps the Meridian Highway carried heavier traffic and was widened and improved more extensively than the Bankhead Highway. Perhaps tourists on the Bankhead Highway who passed through Texas typically were on their way to destinations on either the east or west coasts. In contrast, the Meridian Highway in Texas had more tourist-related destinations, and indeed, both Laredo and Galveston functioned as terminals during the early operation of the Meridian Highway.

During the early 1940s, the Texas Highway Department targeted large segments of the Meridian Highway for improvement as part of the interregional highway system that predated the Interstate Highway System. The construction of large stretches of controlled-access highways with medians and underpasses at busy intersections facilitated traffic flow between Fort Worth and San Antonio, and between Houston and Galveston. Segments of the Bankhead Highway were improved but extended for much shorter distances, and were confined to urban areas such as Dallas and Fort Worth. Design deficiencies in the interregional highway along the Meridian Highway informed subsequent layouts and configurations for roadways of the Interstate Highway System. For example, the construction of subgrade underpasses with concrete archway bridges greatly inhibited the ability to widen the thoroughfares. This condition is especially evident in Austin.

Since the Meridian Highway in Texas extends through one of the nation's most dynamic and rapidly developing transportation corridors, much of the historic fabric and character of the highway is threatened or has been compromised. This quality contrasts with most of the Bankhead Highway, where a larger percentage of the route extends to remote and less-populated parts of the state. Nonetheless, both routes contain many significant historic resources that reflect the significance of the highway system to the history and development of Texas since the early 1910s and the dawn of the automobile era.

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II. Meridian Highway Case Studies

II.1. INTRODUCTION

The first part of the historic context report examines the broad trends associated with the history and development of the Meridian Highway. The narrative explores how early settlements and trails provided the basis for the development of the Meridian Highway and how the route evolved from well-established patterns that predated the automobile. It also examines the evolution of the highway as an important transportation corridor in the state that ultimately was integrated into an international highway network stretching from Canada to Argentina. In contrast to most of the other auto trails that extended through Texas, the Meridian Highway relied more on commerce and trade than tourism, as was more characteristic of east–west routes such as the Bankhead Highway and Old Spanish Trail. Moreover, the Meridian Highway provided a vital link to some of the state's most important military reservations operating in San Antonio, Galveston, Laredo, Austin, and Waco. And with the advent of the Interstate Highway System in the mid-1950s, the historic route of the Meridian Highway became part of IH 35 and a vital part of the nation's economic underpinning.

Since the context provides a macro-level view of the Meridian Highway, the following section considers how the Meridian Highway affected five Texas communities along the route. Each of these case study communities represents different kinds of urban locations. The targeted cities are:

- Bowie – a small-sized city at an important juncture on the route;
- Waco – a medium-sized city at the only division point on the entirety of the Meridian Highway;
- San Antonio – an important trade, transportation, and military hub whose significance predated the automobile;
- Laredo – the southern U.S. terminus of the route; and
- Houston – one of the nation's largest metropolitan areas that boasts a heavy industrial sector.

Figure 94 (to follow) depicts their locations along the Meridian Highway and alignments of the highway at selected years: 1916, 1924, 1940, and 1960.

Each of these communities possesses a unique history that is influenced by a variety of factors and themes; however, they also share some traits and trends that may be applicable to comparably sized communities.

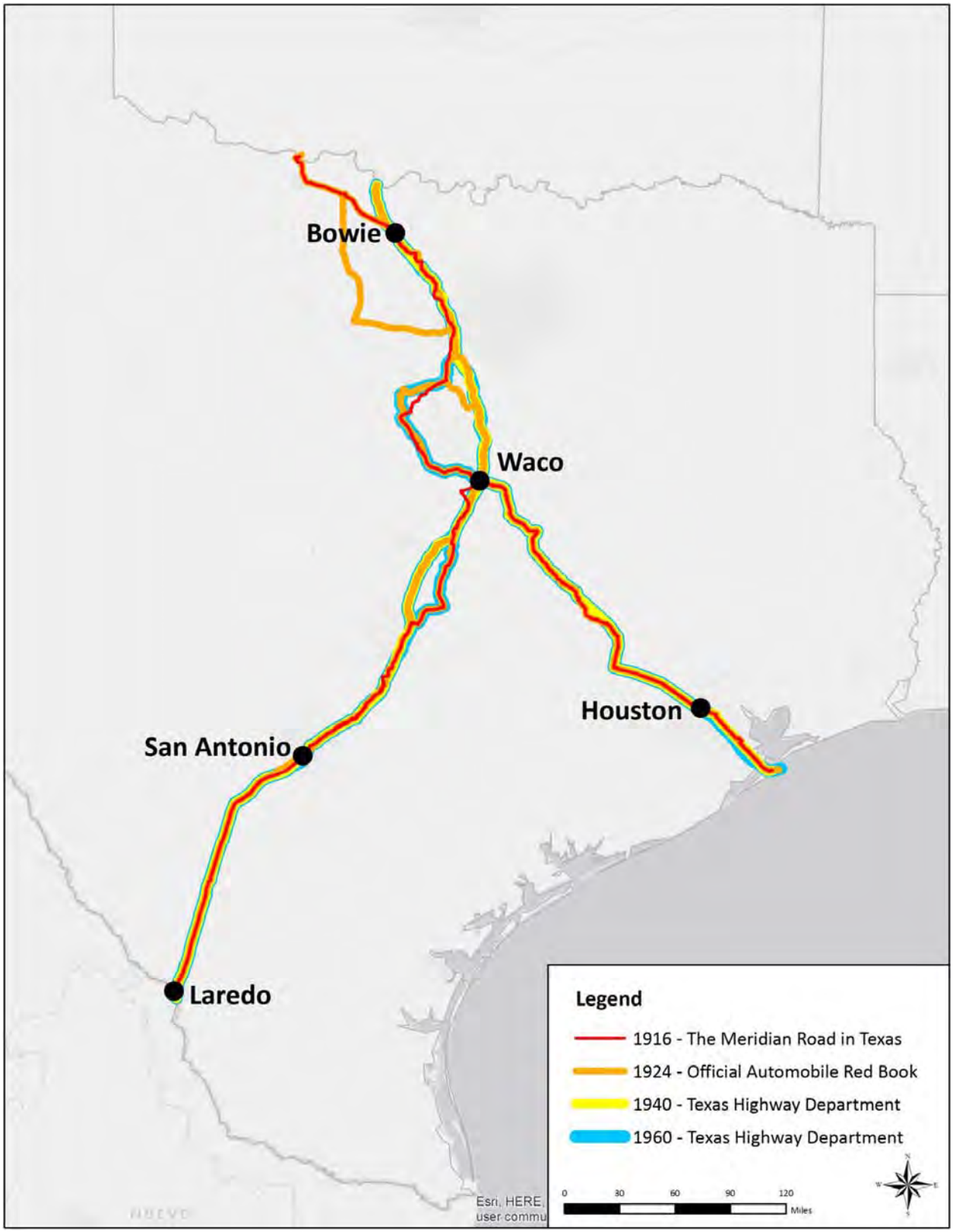

Figure 94. This image shows the case study locations along the Meridian Highway and alignments of the highway in 1916, 1924, 1940, and 1960. Map by HHM.

The case studies should enable readers, historians, and residents to understand some of the major patterns associated with the Meridian Highway and urban land-use and development and apply them to other cities along the route, each of which is a chapter in the rich and textured history of the Meridian Highway in Texas.

Every case study begins with text extracted directly from *The Meridian Road in Texas*, a travel guide published in 1916 for tourists driving on the Meridian Road, as it was called at the time (refer to *Figure 4*, page 6 in the *Historic Context*). As possible, the case study includes graphic material that shows the original or early route and related development, and identifies some of the factors that influenced the highway's path and alignment shifts over time. Each narrative explores how the Texas Highway Department improved the roadway and sometimes even constructed new routes that relegated the historic highway to a completely new role within the community and the intra-city street network. The evolving role of the Meridian Highway is reflected in the kinds of buildings constructed along its route and the way property was used and developed over time.

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II.2. BOWIE

Bowie Brings Back By-Gone Bliss

"Down the Road we bowl towards Bowie. Historic name, and what floods of musings and memories are aroused thereby. And we cannot help but pause and recite the fact that it is well-named, and we again recall the glorious history of Bowie, and Travis, and Crockett, and the kindred spirits who so patriotically sacrificed themselves at the Alamo at San Antonio, that Texas might forever be the home of the brave and free. Bowie has a population of 4,000 and is the center of a rich country."

G. A. MacNaughton, *The Meridian Road in Texas*, 1916

The community of Bowie in Montague County is important to the Meridian Highway because it marks the northernmost location in Texas where the general path of the highway has remained the same over time. As originally conceived and promoted, the Meridian Road entered Texas near Burkburnett and continued on to Wichita Falls, Henrietta, Bowie, and beyond. In fact, an early promotional map that depicted the concept of the Meridian Highway noted Bowie as one of the cities in Texas along its path (*Figure 95*, to follow). This route later became part of the original State Highway No. 2, as designated by the Texas Highway Commission with the establishment of the original state highway network in 1917. The Texas Highway Commission also dubbed the route as the Meridian Highway in Texas. The construction of a new toll bridge over the Red River near Ringgold led to the development of an alternate route to Bowie, which gained popularity over time. By 1922, the Texas Highway Commission absorbed this segment into the state highway system and designated it as part of SH 2. The establishment of the federal highway numbering system in 1926 led to several profound changes that affected the Meridian Highway but Bowie remained a key location on the route. Most of the Meridian Highway was designated as US 81, which included the Ringgold–Bowie leg. The Wichita Falls–Henrietta–Bowie segment became part of US 370 (later US 287); however, both routes followed the same southeastward path from Bowie as the highway continued on to Decatur and Fort Worth and beyond. This route generally paralleled the Fort Worth and Denver City Railway. Thus, Bowie evolved into an important crossroads within the state highway network between Wichita Falls and Fort Worth.

At the time of the establishment of the Meridian Road in 1911, Bowie was an important commercial and trade center in southwestern Montague County. The community was founded in 1882 when the FW&DC Railway extended its line through the area and was named for James Bowie, who died at the Alamo fighting for Texas's independence. In 1893, the Chicago, Rock Island and Texas Railway established service

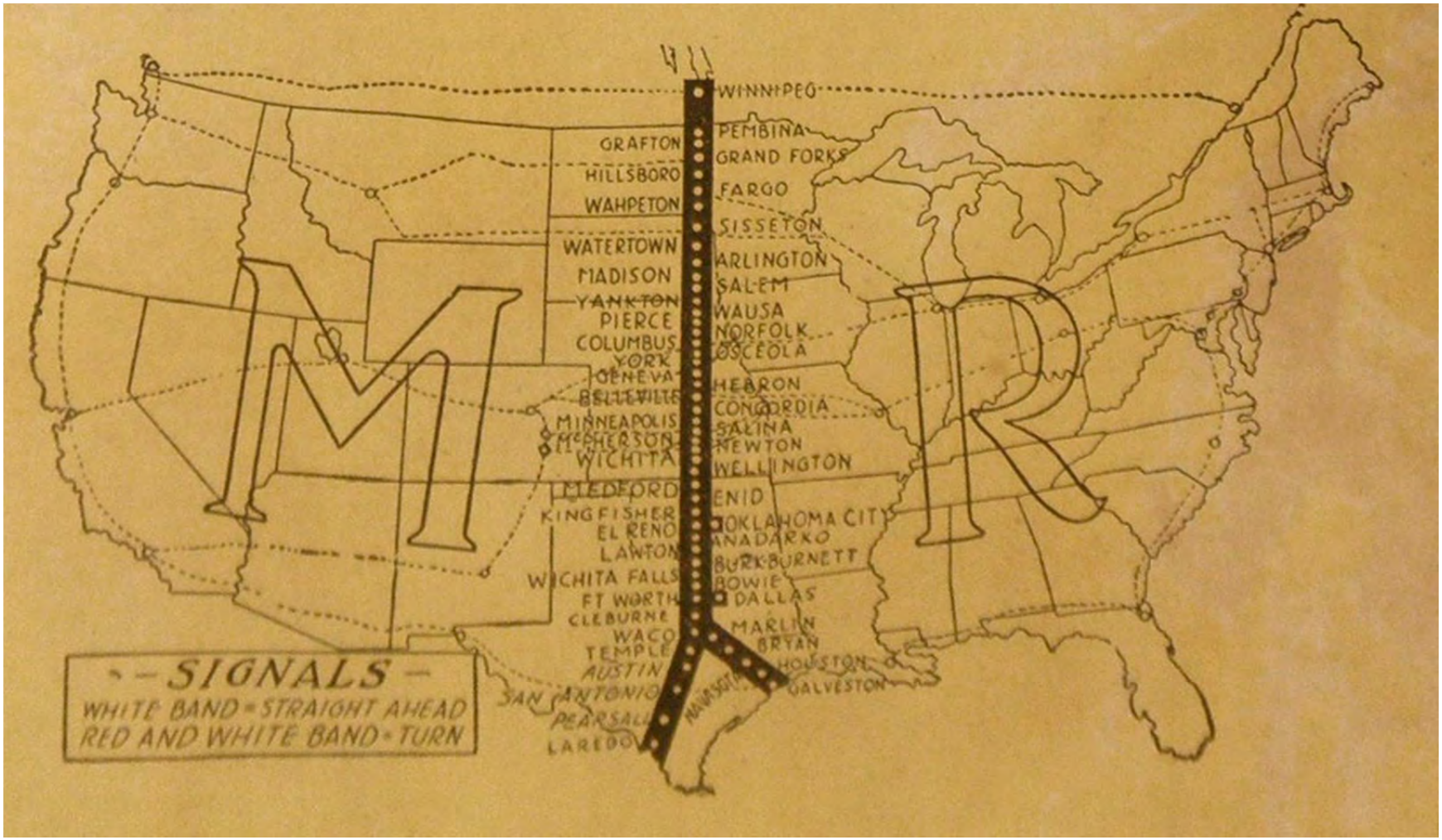

Figure 95. The Meridian Road, no date. This map was used to promote the Meridian Road following the establishment of the Meridian Road Association in 1911. Although it lacks specificity and scale, the map identifies cities along the route. Among those cities listed in Texas included Bowie, which implies a sense of importance for motorists traveling the highway. Source: Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

through western Montague County and crossed the FW&DC Railway just west of Bowie. The city's location at the juncture of two major railroads boosted the local economy and enabled local agriculturists to ship their goods to more distant markets. Cotton was the most profitable agricultural commodity, as evidenced by the number of cotton gins, compresses, and cotton yards in the city. The two railroads also played an important role in the establishment of early automobile routes during the 1910s when so many of the routes paralleled existing rail lines.

One of the most striking aspects of Bowie is its layout and the many odd-sized blocks and intersections, especially in the downtown area (see *Figure 96*, to follow). These features affected how the Meridian Highway extended through the city and how and where local entrepreneurs established roadside-related businesses along the route. The retail district developed on the north side of the FW&DC tracks, primarily along Smythe, Tarrant, Wise, and Mason streets. Most of the city's industrial operations operated on the south side of the tracks, as noted by Sanborn maps. The development and location of the downtown affected the route of the Meridian Highway as it extended through Bowie.

An advertisement in May 1914 issue of *The Meridian Road Magazine* touts Bowie as being on both the Meridian Road and the Colorado-to-Gulf Highway. A driving tour of a group associated with the Colorado-to-Gulf Highway stopped in Bowie and a photograph shows the townspeople celebrated their arrival (see *Figure 97*, to follow). Although both highways originated in different parts of the country, they shared an extended segment in North-central Texas, and they paralleled the FW&DC Railway. This railroad extended directly through Bowie on its path between Wichita Falls and Fort Worth. The *Meridian Road Magazine* also included a list of hotels and garages presumably affiliated with the highway association; this publication listed the Burns House in Bowie, as the "official Meridian Road hotel" in the community. It is interesting that the four-story National Hotel (not extant) at Smythe and Tarrant streets was not listed in the magazine even though it was a prominent and imposing physical landmark in the city during the early twentieth century (refer to *Figure 97*, to follow).

Several large-scale maps from the 1910s note that the Meridian Road extended through Bowie, but the earliest detailed depiction of the route in Bowie appears in *The Meridian Road in Texas* of 1916 (see *Figure 98*, to follow). The guide shows the highway following a somewhat complex and irregular path through the Bowie area as motorists had to navigate the railroad intersection on the outskirts of Bowie, immediately west of the city limits, just to get to the downtown. The only feature depicted in Bowie is an unidentified hotel, and the route appears to make a deliberate jog to extend to the building. The hotel likely was the National Hotel, mentioned earlier and shown in *Figure 97*. The map

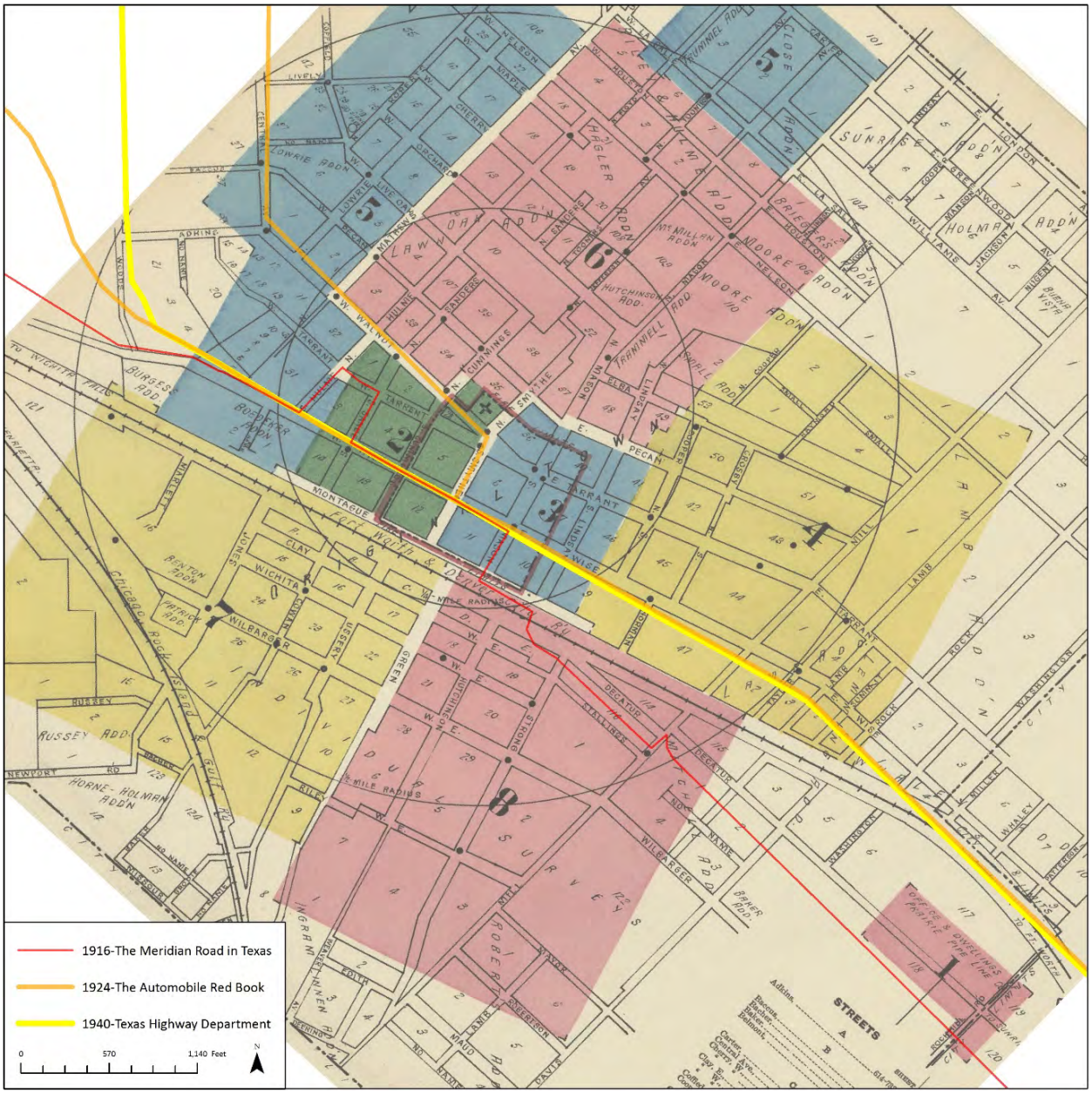

Figure 96. Sanborn Map of Bowie, Texas, 1922. This map shows the irregular layout of Bowie. Land on either side of the railroad was laid out in a standard grid relative to the railroad; however, areas beyond the railroad right-of-way adhered to the placement of much older, pre-railroad land grants. As such, multiple land-development schemes influenced the orientation and layout of the streets and blocks and lots. In contrast to most contemporaneous cities in Texas, Bowie does not present a grid layout, which forced the Meridian Road to make several turns and jogs within the community. Source: Perry-Castañeda Library, The University of Texas at Austin.

Figure 97. (Above) Downtown Bowie, 1914. The arrival of a caravan of Colorado-based motorists in Bowie to promote the Colorado-to-Gulf Highway generated a great deal of enthusiasm. Local residents came to the downtown to witness the event first hand. This is one of a series of images that documents the motorcade as it made its way from the Rocky Mountains to the Gulf of Mexico in the late spring of 1914 as part of the highway association's "Sociability Tour." Note the large four-story National Hotel on the left side of the photograph. Source: Virginia J. Church 1914 Sociability Tour Photograph collection, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

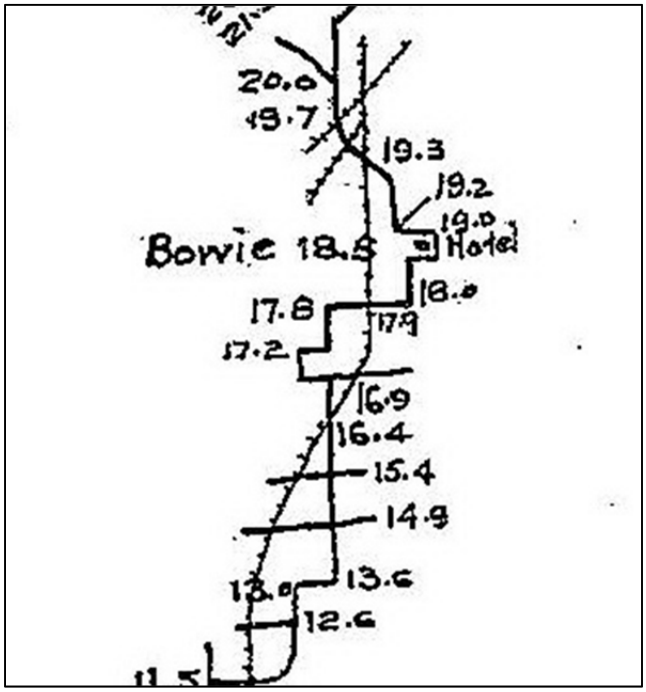

Figure 98. (Left) Detail from the travel guide, The Meridian Road in Texas, 1916. This illustration is not to scale and does not include a north arrow; however, it provides a graphic depiction of the general route, important landmarks, and odometer settings for turns along the route. One of the most distinctive qualities of the route through Bowie was the number of railroad crossings. The map shows that the route had five at-grade railroad crossings in and around Bowie. The high number was due to the two railroads that intersected near the city; however, it also created dangerous driving conditions, which led to improvements and alignment shifts in later years. Source: Colp Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

does not provide any street names, but other historic maps indicate that the route entered Bowie from the northwest on West Wise Street. The highway turned onto North Smythe Street to extend by Cummings Street and Mason Street. Based on Sanborn map analysis, this route took motorists to the previously mentioned National Hotel at the intersection of Tarrant, West Walnut, and North Smythe streets.

On June 21, 1917, the newly formed Texas Highway Commission designated the Meridian Highway as SH 2. Although the minutes did not specifically cite Bowie on the route, the city was depicted on the Texas Highway Commission map of the proposed state highways, published that same year.

By 1918, the Texas Highway Commission created another leg of SH 2 (referred to as 2-B, by the State Highway Commission) that extended north from Bowie to Ringgold, as reported by the *San Antonio Evening News*.[256] As with the original highway, this new segment closely paralleled an existing railroad, but this new route extended along the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad. Impetus for the designation of a new segment stemmed from the construction of a suspension bridge between Ringgold, Texas, and Terral, Oklahoma, in 1917.[257] The new segment branched off of the original route at the intersection of W. Tarrant and N. Mason streets. It extended about a half block on W. Tarrant Street and then branched off again at Walnut Street and continued to Central Avenue and the community of Ringgold and the toll bridge. This route still meant that most traffic extended through downtown Bowie, which continued to attract businesses that catered to motorists and tourists.

Sanborn fire insurance maps offer the most complete and thorough depiction of Bowie's central business district, and they provide graphic evidence how the Meridian Road affected the physical character of downtown and the kinds of businesses that operated within it. The 1922 edition of the Sanborn maps shows the greatest concentration of auto-related business fronting directly onto or located just off of Wise Street (see *Figure 99*, to follow). Such a trend typified development in similarly sized cities along this and other auto trails at the time. The proliferation of gas stations, garages, auto repair shops, auto parts stores, and even an auto dealership reflected the growing popularity of automobiles.

Despite the important role the railroad played in the city's founding and development, none of Bowie's hotels operated near the freight and passenger depots; instead, they all were about two blocks away and faced directly onto or were within a block of the Meridian Highway. Among those operating at the time of the 1922 edition of the Sanborn map included the Stephens, Dawdy, Commercial, Bob's, and Bill Ayers hotels (none of which appear to be extant). Two residential-like buildings were noted as "rooming" and may have been used as

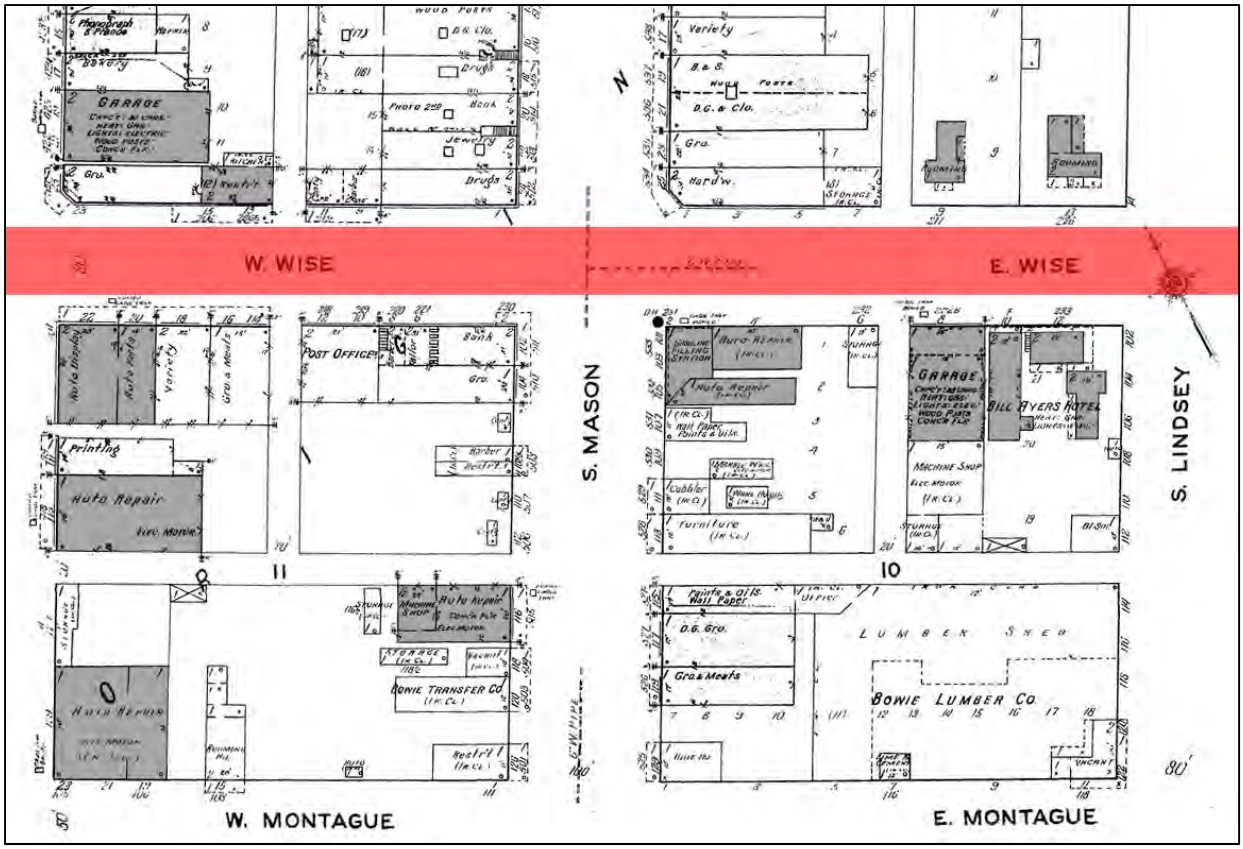

Figure 99. Composite of sections of Sanborn Maps of Bowie, Texas, 1922, showing the Meridian Highway in red. This figure captures the physical character and land-use development of downtown Bowie at that time. The Meridian Highway ran along Wise Street, where several auto-related businesses (highlighted in gray) operated to cater to motorists driving through the city. Source: Perry-Castañeda Library, The University of Texas at Austin.

temporary quarters for travelers and others stopping in Bowie on a short-term, interim basis. The largest hotel appears to have been the four-story National Hotel at North Smythe and West Tarrant streets. Other less-expensive alternatives may have been the two rooming houses on East Wise Street (between Mason and Lindsey streets) and the Bowie Tourist Park, which was noted in the 1924 Automobile Red Book travel guide.

Although the Meridian Highway extended through Bowie's commercial center, it also passed through the city's industrial zone, which was on the south side of the FW&DC Railway tracks. The proximity of these businesses to the railroad exemplified a common trend through cotton-producing areas of Texas. However, the establishment of the Meridian Road and the expenditure of federal and state monies to upgrade this and other highways in the state also afforded cotton farmers a better and more reliable means of getting their raw goods to the gins, compresses, and cotton yards in Bowie and other communities. In addition, an improved road network provided wholesale and retail businesses increased opportunities to expand and realize greater profits to meet growing consumer demands.

The inherent and dynamic nature of highway maintenance applied to the segment of the Meridian Highway in Bowie, and as the Texas Highway Department upgraded and even changed the route,

proprietors and operators of local businesses whose livelihood depended on traffic that the highway generated were affected by these actions. A good illustration of this trend occurred in the 1930s when the Texas Highway Department completed a number of roadway improvements along the Meridian and other highways in the state. In 1932, the Department developed plans to construct a new alignment that eliminated the at-grade railroad crossings in and immediately outside Bowie (see *Figure 100* below). The proposed plan shows a gentle curve and railroad overpass on the outbound segment of the highway east of downtown. The subsequent adoption of the plan and construction of the new alignment and grade-separation facility at the intersection with the FW&DC Railway cut off portions of the old segment and no longer had exposure to regular traffic. The construction of the new railroad pass and its gentle swooping S-shaped curve removed an early tourist court from its siting directly on the highway. The tourist court remains today as a vivid reminder of where the Meridian Highway once passed (see *Figure 101*, to follow).

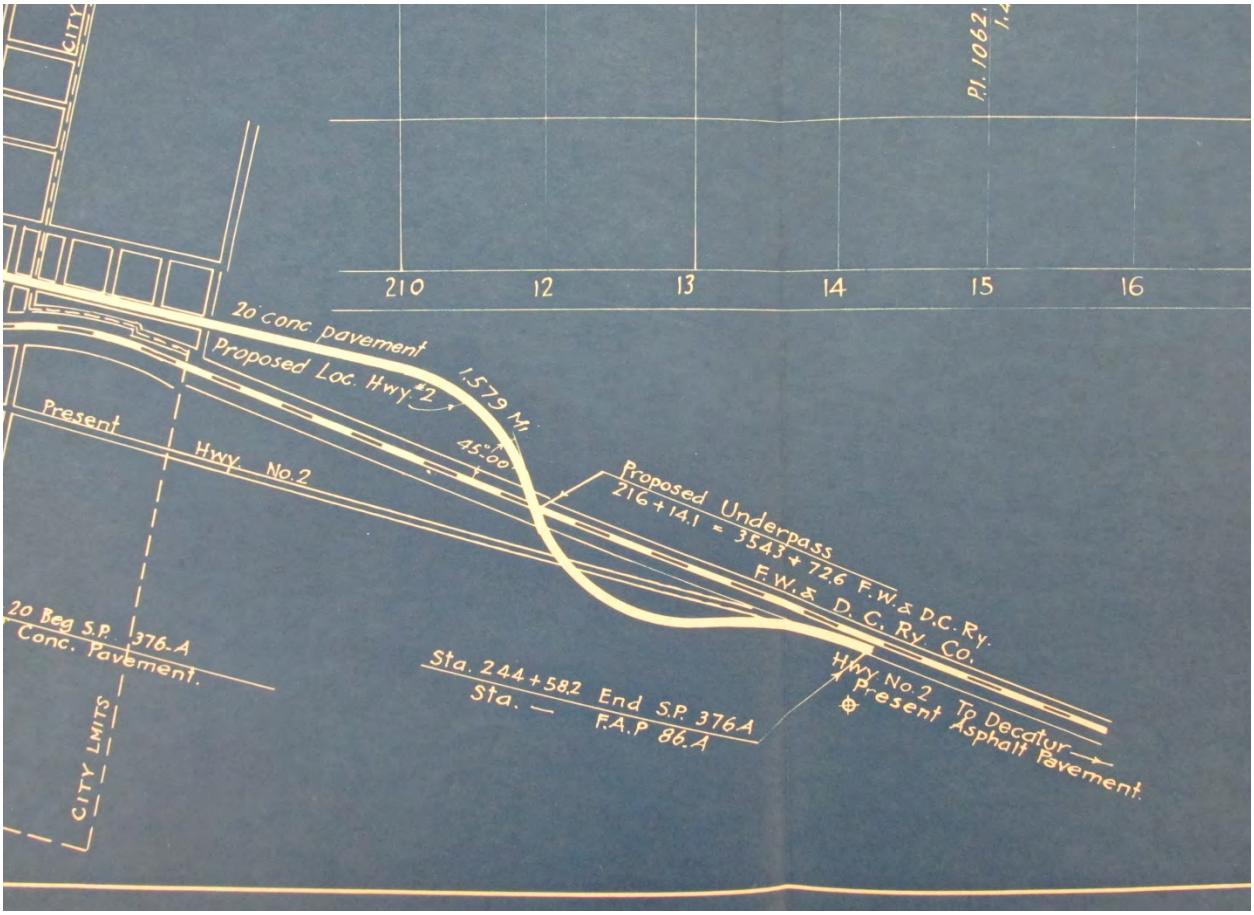

Figure 100. Detail of Sketch Map Showing State Highways 50 & 2, prepared by the Texas Highway Department, n.d. [ca. 1934]. This schematic shows the existing route of State Highway 2 east of Bowie and a proposed new alignment that eliminated an at-grade railroad crossing. The subsequent construction of this improvement removed parts of the existing roadway from the highway system. The bend on the south side of the tracks cut off a small segment where a small tourist court operated. Source: National Archives and Records Administration.

Figure 101. Former Tourist Court in Bowie. This small complex is on an abandoned segment of SH 2/US 81 that was bypassed with the construction of a new underpass shown in Figure 100. Source: Texas Historical Commission.

Although many segments of US 81 were targeted for improvement during the late 1930s and early 1940s for the proposed interregional highway system during the mobilization period, the part of the highway extending through Bowie was not included in those plans. World War II interrupted this program, but when the plan was resurrected as the war began to wind down, the Bowie segment was excluded and was not programed for improvements. This segment of US 81 and US 287—the part of the old Meridian Highway that linked Bowie with Wichita Falls—did not carry a sufficient traffic load nor did it possess enough strategic military significance to justify such highway improvements. Thus, the highway route remained largely static and unchanged until the US 287 route was upgraded to a limited-access divided highway in the 1970s (see *Figure 102*, to follow). The construction of this highway, which was awarded to highway contractor J. B. Abrams, Inc. of El Paso in December 1974, siphoned off a significant amount of traffic that otherwise would have passed through downtown Bowie. The new divided highway included an interchange that allowed exiting traffic to continue along the US 81 and old route through downtown. However, new commercial development gravitated to the new US 287 highway, which bore a significantly larger volume of traffic because it linked Fort Worth and Wichita Falls, the two largest cities in this part of the state at that time.

Many similarly sized cities along the Meridian Highway likewise had new freeways that bypassed the central business district, but Bowie, unlike most others, continued to have a federal highway that passed through its historic business district. Traffic volumes in the city center diminished in the intervening years, but enough travelers drove through the area to help sustain its locally owned stores and businesses.

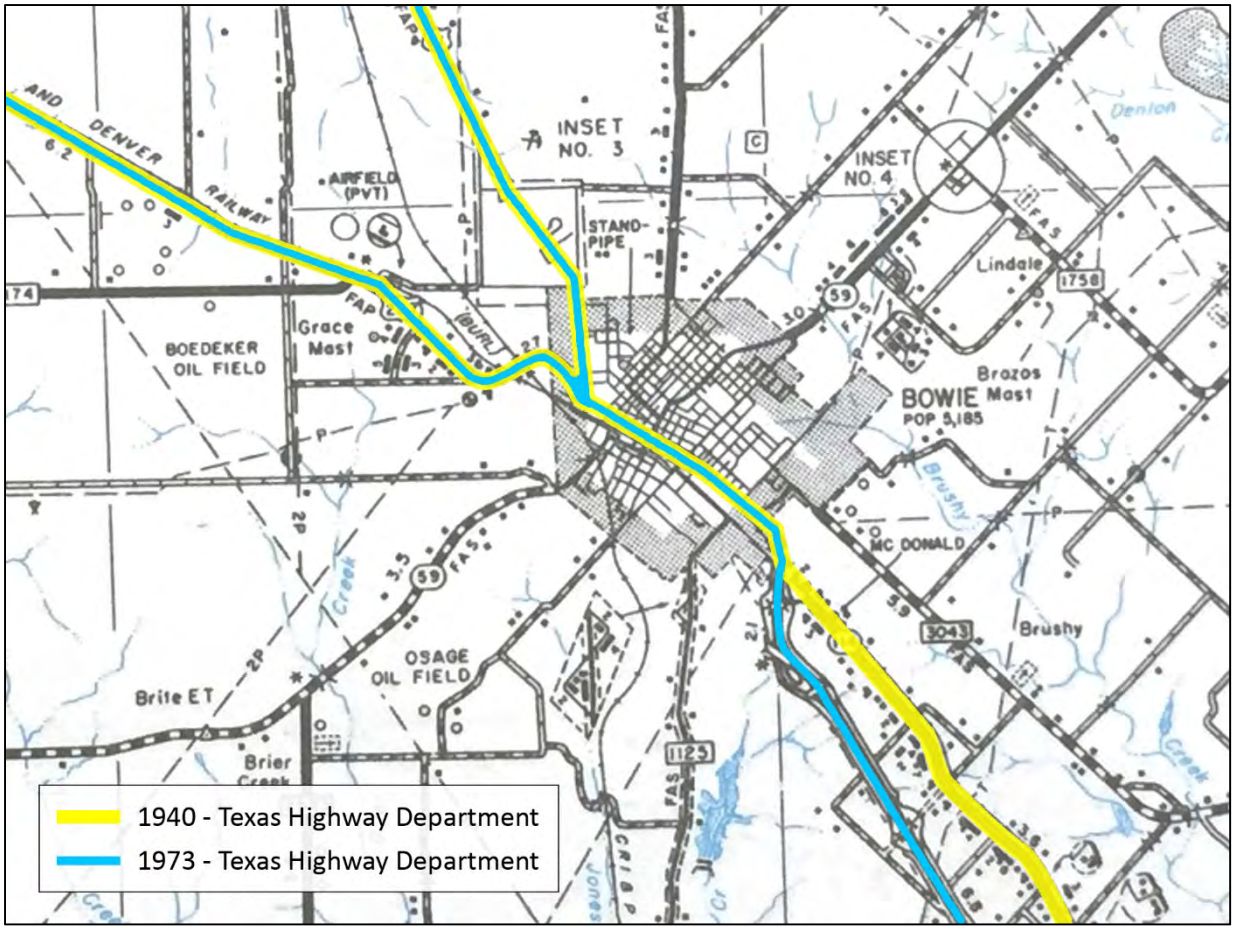

Figure 102. Detail of General Highway Map of Montague County, 1973. This map, published by the Texas Highway Department, shows the status of the highway system just as the agency was making plans to improve US 287 into a divided highway. The map shows how US 81 continued to pass through downtown Bowie. Source: Texas Highway Department.

The city of Bowie is typical of other smaller cities along the historic Meridian Highway route in Texas (*Figure 102* above). When the highway was originally established in the 1910s, the downtown was the primary commercial and retail center in the community and developed in proximity to the railroad. The Meridian Highway took advantage of such amenities, and existing hotels—such as the National Hotel that previously catered to people who traveled on the railroad—began to serve a new clientele – motorists. In other cases, home owners sometimes let rooms to travelers and established boarding houses or lodges for travelers, as evidenced by Sanborn maps. Increasing popularity of automobiles during the early years of the Meridian Highway led several local entrepreneurs to establish gas stations and auto service shops along the route to take advantage of the increased traffic flow. Typically, they constructed new buildings just outside the historic city center, often on corner lots. The relationship between the railroad and automobile traffic ultimately proved to be a mixed blessing, and by the 1920s and 1930s, the Texas Highway Department embarked on an ambitious program to eliminate at-grade crossings. This effort extended to Bowie. The construction of a railroad overpass on the east side of downtown allowed vehicular traffic to flow unimpeded, but it also changed the physical route and completely cut off existing

businesses, as evidenced by the former tourist court on the Sheldon Loop. The highway continued to run through downtown Bowie into the postwar era, but the ever-growing numbers of cars and trucks led the Texas Highway Department to improve US 287. This effort created an expanded divided highway on a new alignment that bypassed the historic city center, a trend repeated in countless locations across the state. While the new highway allowed drivers the ability to avoid traffic congestion in the city center, it also hurt downtown businesses, many of which historically relied on the Meridian Highway. Nonetheless, the city still boasts several auto- and tourist-related buildings that provide a tangible link to this important chapter in local history. See *Figure 103* (to follow) for a map showing the Meridian Highway through Bowie over time.

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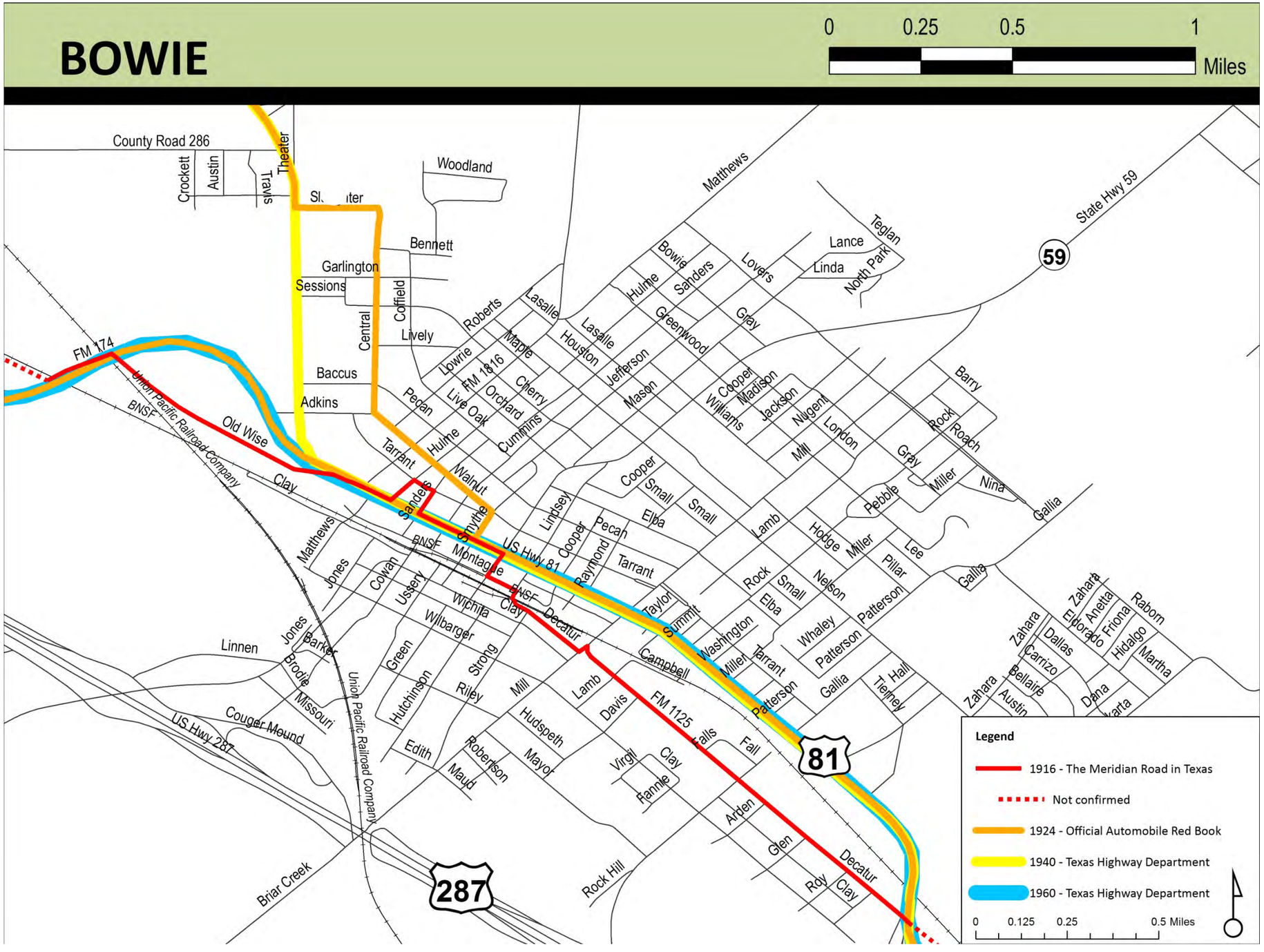

Figure 103. Map showing the route of the Meridian Highway and its successors over time through the city of Bowie.

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[256] San Antonio Evening News, September 17, 1918. "State Highway Commission Meets in Monthly Session."
[257] Bridgemeister: Suspension Bridges Crossing the Red River, 1917 Terral-Ringgold, http://www.bridgemeister.com/list.php?type=crossing&crossing=Red+River (accessed May 18, 2015).

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II.3. WACO

Waco Wealth and Wonders

"It may well be said that Waco is the heart of Texas, being in the center of the State and center of population. What Cameron Park is to Waco, the Cotton Palace at Waco is to Texas. No wonder Waco is rich in people and wealth, for they live right in the Valley of the Nile or the Brazos. Waco now has 43,000 inhabitants, with every indication of a marvelous increase; but we cannot write here all the advantages of the capital of McLellan [sic] County. It's the city of big springs, big hotels, big parks, the tallest building in the country; and the site of the great Baptist University, Baylor. There is so much of interest in and around Waco, that the tourist will conclude he has seen it all when he gets through Waco, and want to go no further. It is tarviated roads into Waco and its [sic] tarviated roads out of Waco; and so the going is good."

G. A. MacNaughton, *The Meridian Road in Texas*, 1916

Waco is among the most important cities located on the Meridian Highway because it marks the location where the route separates into two branches (see *Figure 104*, to follow). The main road continues south to San Antonio and Laredo, while the other path extends to the southeast toward Houston and Galveston. The latter route became known as the Gulf Division of the Meridian Highway.

When the idea of the Meridian Highway was first conceived, Waco was a major trade and commercial hub within the Blackland Prairie, a fertile and rich agricultural belt that extended through Central Texas. The city developed on the site of a village established by members of the indigenous Waco (Hueco/Huaco) tribe by the time Spanish explorers first reached the area. The Texas Rangers established an outpost at the site in the 1830s, and George Erath, a former Texas Ranger, laid out the town site in 1849.[258] As settlers moved to the area, Waco became an important trade center. Land in the surrounding area proved to be fertile and particularly well-suited to the cultivation of cotton, which attracted more farmers to the region. A growing population and trade along the historic roads that extended through Waco led to the construction of a suspension bridge across the Brazos River in 1870. The bridge was an engineering marvel at the time of its completion that contrasted with the more conventional design and construction techniques used for other bridges in the state. The city's stature continued to rise as the expanding railroad building campaign of the final quarter of the nineteenth century extended to Waco and tapped one of the state's primary cotton-producing areas. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Waco developed into a major inland cotton trading center in Texas and was among the state's largest and most affluent communities. Thus by the advent of the automobile

era, Waco was one of the state's most important centers for commerce and trade.

Figure 104. Detail of Highway Map published by the National Highways Association, 1915. The dark red line shows the route of the Meridian Highway by 1915. Waco marked the location where the route was divided into two branches. Source: Harvey County Museum and Archives, Newton, Kansas.

As originally conceived and promoted, the Meridian Highway entered Waco from the north via China Springs, then split in the downtown area and followed two separate routes. One branch extended south to Temple and continued on to Laredo, the southern terminus within the United States. The other route continued to Marlin, Bryan, and ultimately down to Galveston. In December 1912, John C. Nicholson of Newton, Kansas, arrived in Waco on a pathfinding tour and addressed the Waco Automobile Club to promote the route and emphasize Waco's role as the only "division point" on the entire route.[259] Although no pictures have been found documenting Nicholson's presence in Waco, a comparable party promoting another highway (Colorado-to-Gulf Highway Association) came to Waco with a photographer who captured the scene as the caravan extended through downtown (see *Figure 105* below).

Figure 105. Sociability Tour of the Colorado-to-Gulf Highway in Waco, 1914. This is one of a series of photographs documenting the driving tour from Colorado to Galveston. This image shows the caravan as it entered downtown Waco. This view is looking south onto Austin Avenue. The obvious landmark is the ALICO building, designed by the Fort Worth architectural firm of Lang & Witchell. Source: Virginia J. Church 1914 Sociability Tour Photograph collection, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

The Colorado-to-Gulf Highway was one of several in- and out-of-state highways that passed through Waco, as noted in *Figure 106* (below). Besides the Meridian Highway and Gulf-to-Colorado Highway, other roads that extended through the city included the King of Trails and Central Texas Highway. The presence of so many highways in Waco shows how important the city was in the early stages of highway development in Texas. With multiple railroads extending into the city and area farmers bringing their locally produced agricultural goods to market, Waco prospered and became a significant commercial, transportation, and trade hub in Central Texas.

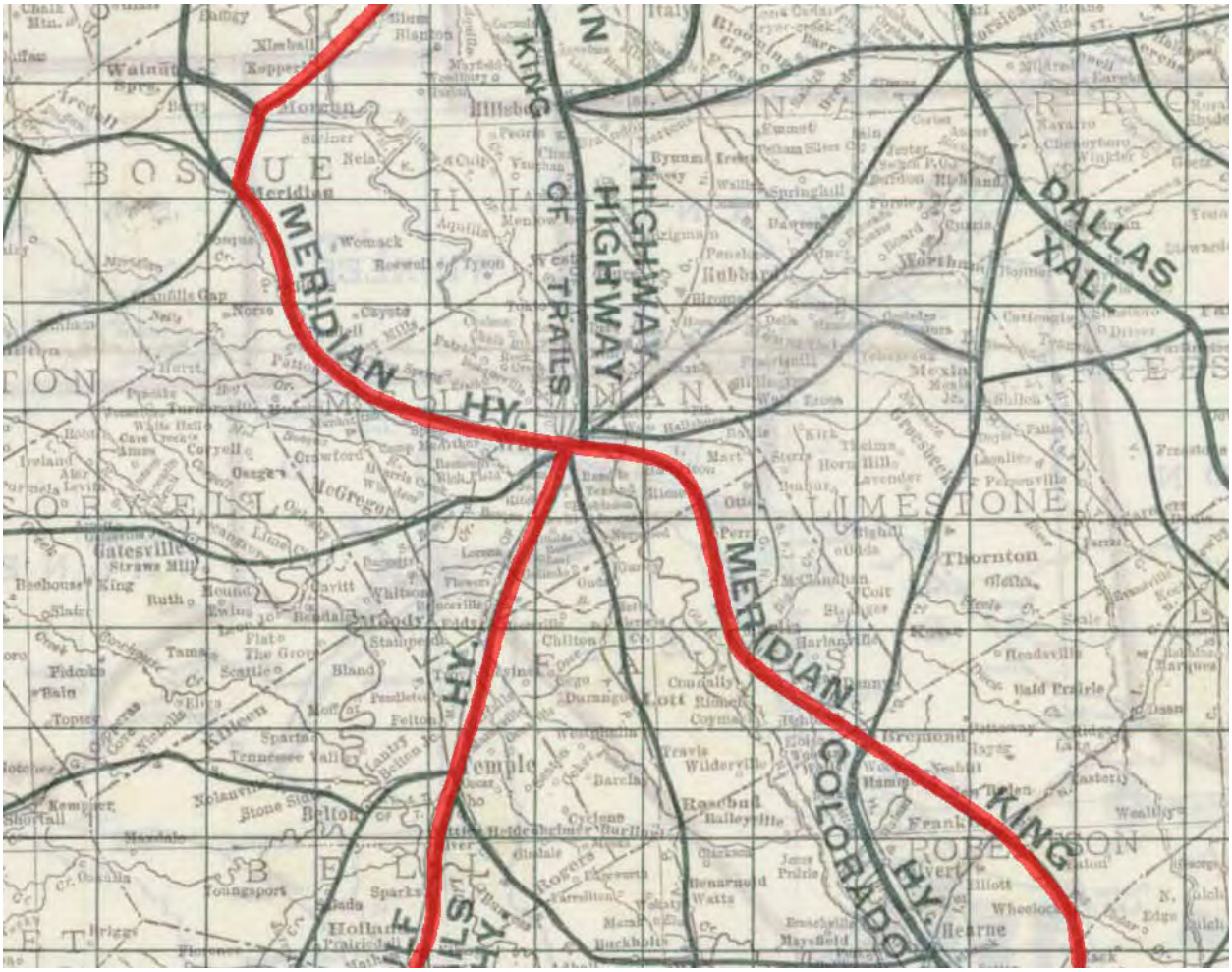

Figure 106. Detail of Highway Map of Texas. This map shows the many early roadways that extended through Waco during the auto trails era. Besides the Meridian Highway, Waco was served by the Colorado-to-Gulf Highway and King of Trails Highway. Source: Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

One of the factors that made Waco so important stemmed from the two bridges that crossed the Brazos River. To augment the 1870 suspension bridge, Waco built a metal truss bridge over the waterway in 1904 a few blocks upriver. Its completion provided a secondary means for vehicular traffic to cross the river. The metal truss bridge linked Elm Street in what is known as East Waco to Washington Street in downtown Waco (see *Figure 107*, to follow). Its completion relieved burdens placed on the older suspension bridge, which was built over 40 years earlier and proved inadequate to handle the growing traffic

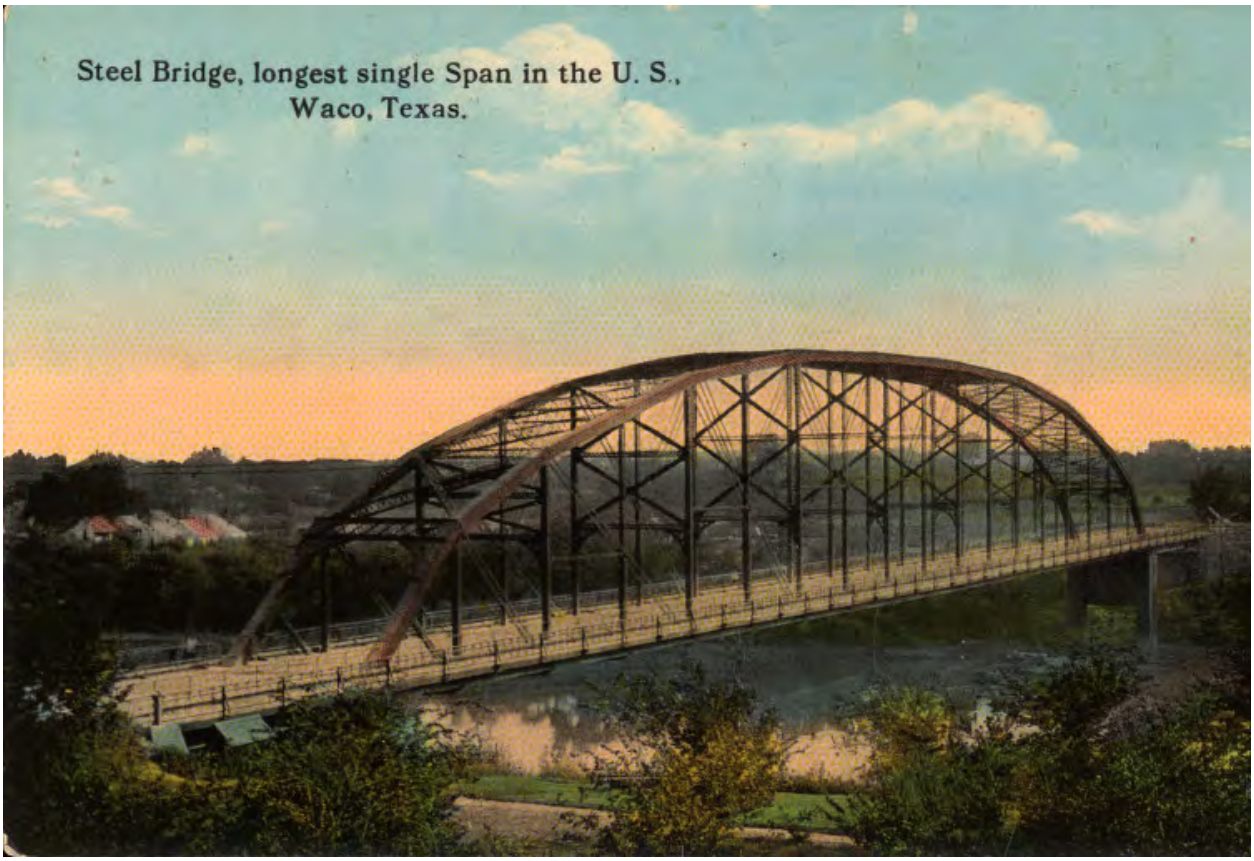

Figure 107. Washington–Elm Street Bridge in Waco, 1908. This postcard, created by Curt Teich & Company of Chicago, Illinois, claims the structure to be the longest single-span metal bridge in the United States. It not only provided a means for motorists on the Meridian Highway to continue on their way through Waco on to Houston and Galveston, it also enabled travelers on the King of Trails Highway and the Colorado-to-Gulf Highway to drive into downtown Waco. The metal truss bridge, which still spans the Brazos River and has recently been rehabilitated, is a particularly important structure within the entire state road network. Source: University of Houston Digital Library, Historic Texas Postcard Collection, Steel Bridge, Waco, Texas (http://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/p15195coll16/item/687).

extending to and from Waco. Like the nearby suspension bridge, the Washington–Elm Street Bridge was a significant engineering feat and was reported to be the longest single-span metal bridge in the United States at the time of its construction. It became particularly important to the Meridian Highway because it enabled the Gulf Division to cross back onto the east side of the Brazos River and extend southeast parallel to the waterway and the H&TC Railway.

Some of the earliest street maps of Waco that show the evolving highway network in Waco date to the mid-1910s. The B. F. Goodrich Tire Company published a travel guide that depicts the many highways that passed through the city (see *Figure 108*, to follow). It shows a complicated road system, especially in the downtown area with multiple at-grade crossings of railroad tracks and routes extending to various destinations. The travel guide published in affiliation with the Meridian Road Association in 1916 lacks the specificity of the B. F. Goodrich travel guide; however, as could be assumed by the title, it is confined exclusively to the Meridian Road (see *Figure 109*, to follow). It shows how the main line entered Waco from China Springs, extended past the courthouse, and continued southward to Temple.

In 1917, the Texas Highway Commission designated the entire Meridian Highway, including the two divisions that met/branched off in Waco, as SH 2. The decision meant that the Gulf Division still retained its

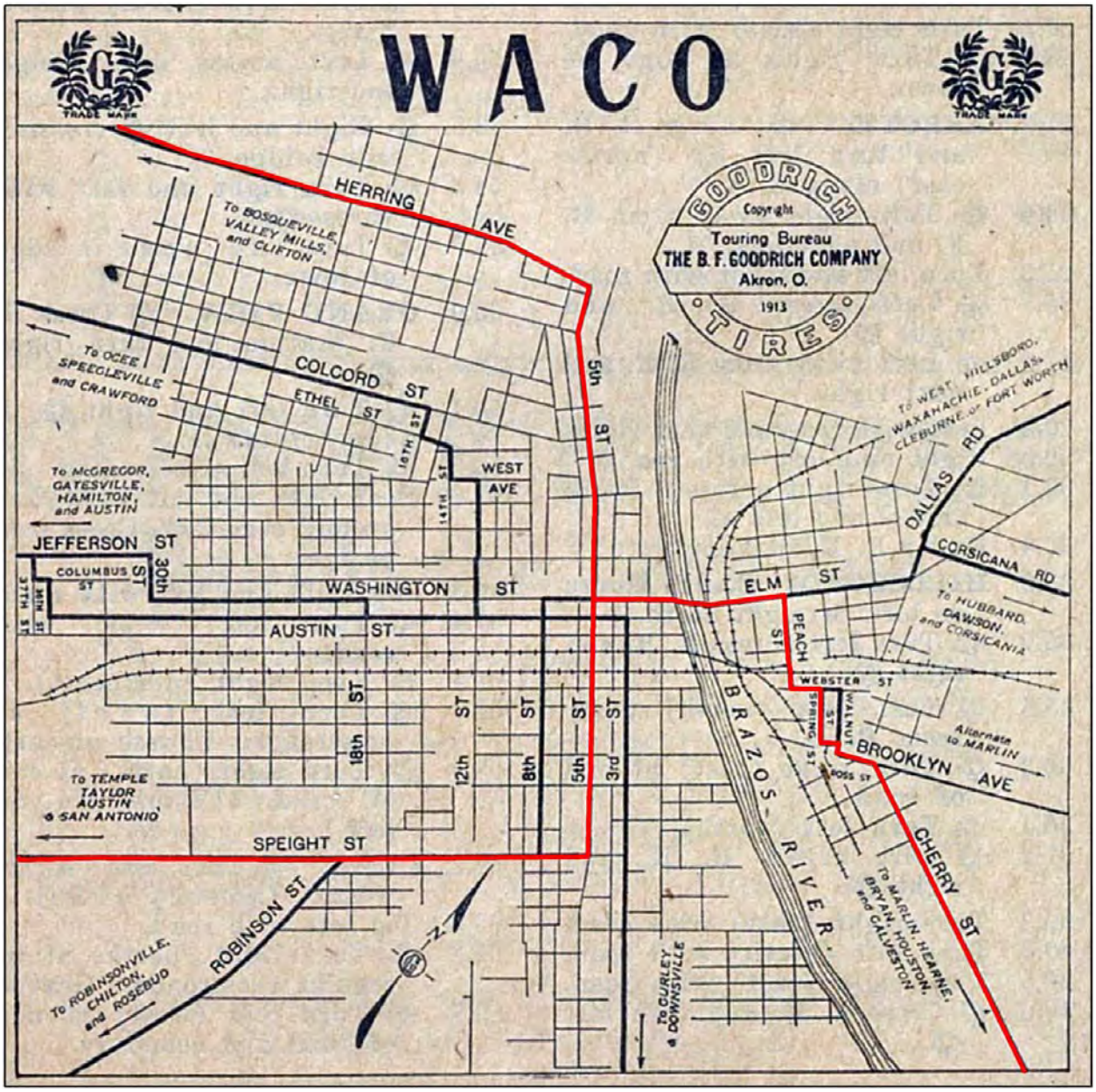

Figure 108. Waco City Map, B. F. Goodrich Tire Company, 1915. This map shows major roads within Waco but does not identify any of the routes by name. The Meridian Highway (highlighted in red) came into Waco via Herring Avenue and continued on to 5th Street where it extended to the McLennan County Courthouse. The Gulf Division route turned onto Elm Street and turned onto Peach Street where it stair-stepped its way to Cherry Street. The branch that extended to San Antonio and Laredo continued south along Fifth Street (with alternate routes along Third and Eighth streets) and turned south along Speight Street. Source: Martha Doty Freeman personal collection.

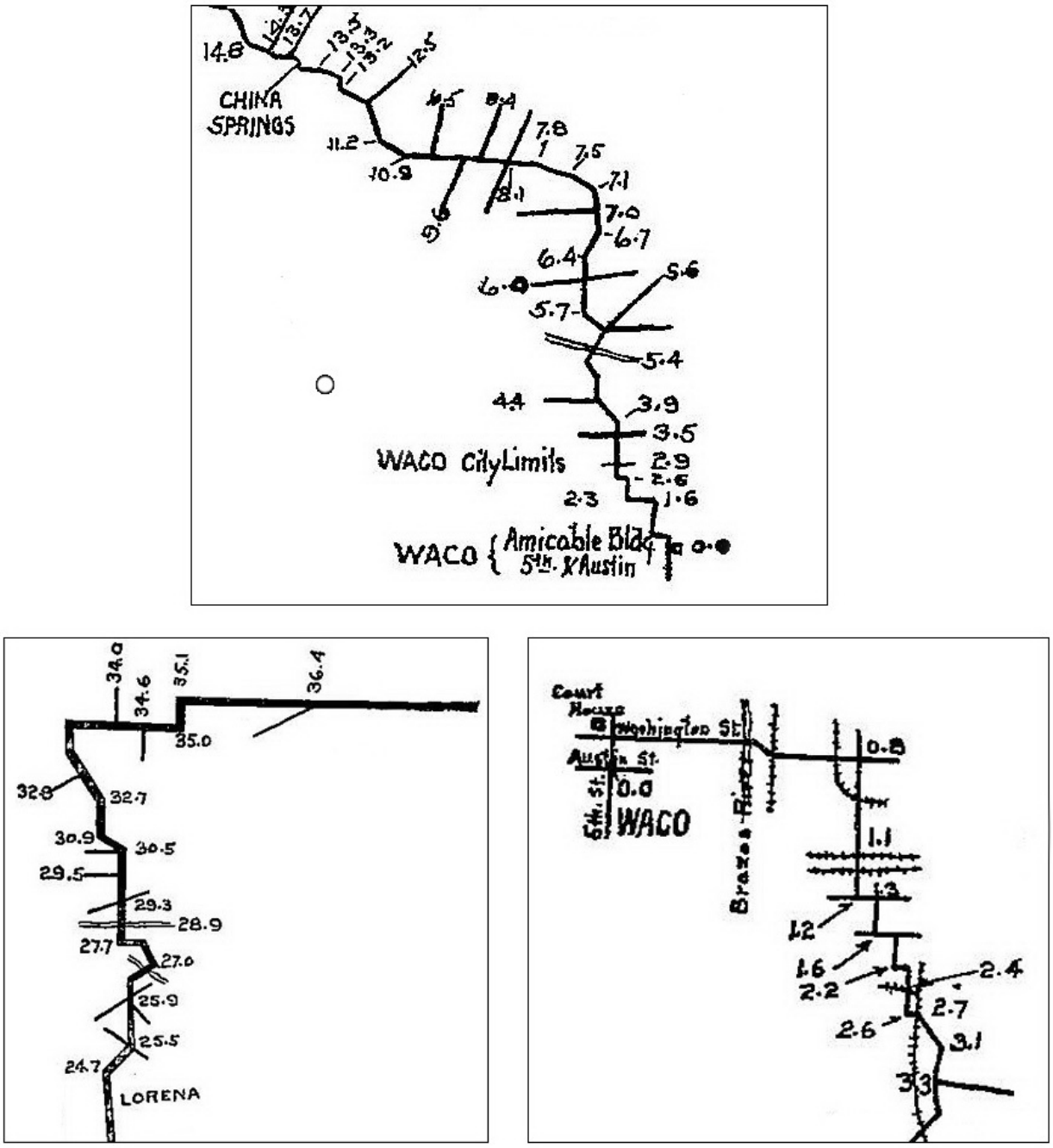

Figure 109. Composite of maps from The Meridian Road in Texas guidebook, 1916. These maps provide a visual representation of the route through Waco but do not identify any of the street names or include a verbal description of the route. Source: David Colp Collection, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

association with the main trunk. However, when Texas adopted the federal highway numbering system in 1926, the main line was designated as US 81, while the Gulf Division (Waco–Galveston) branch became SH 6. The new designation was not well-received by residents in most cities along the Gulf Division, and over time, the route's

association with the Meridian Highway has largely been lost and forgotten.

Although the Meridian Highway originally entered Waco from the west through Bosque County, the Texas Highway Department shifted the route by 1926 so that SH 2 excluded the Cleburne–Glen Rose–Clifton–Meridian leg (re-designated as SH 67 and SH 89) and instead followed the MKT Railroad from Burleson to Hillsboro, West, and Waco (see *Figure 110*, below). The Hillsboro–Waco segment was more closely associated with the King of Trails Highway, which the Texas Highway Department had previously designated as SH 6. This new route entered the city through East Waco and passed directly by Paul Quinn College, an African-American college established in 1872.[260] The new route of US 81/SH 2 extended along Elm Street toward the Washington–Elm Street Bridge. Along this path were a number of gas stations, tourist courts, and other travel-based businesses (see *Figures 111* and *112*, to follow).

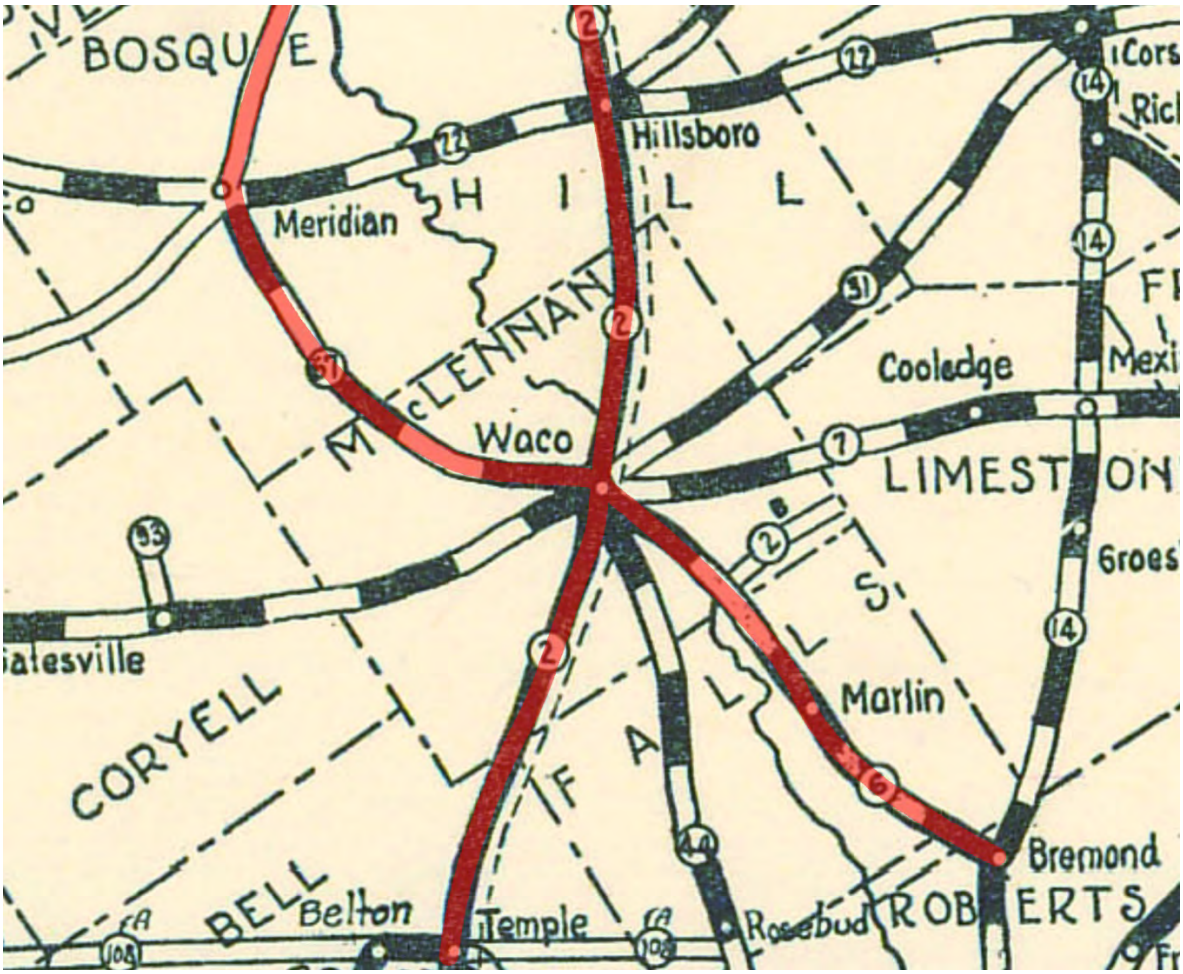

Figure 110. Detail of Official Highway Map of Texas, 1926. This map, published by the State Highway Commission, depicts the evolving route of the Meridian Highway (shown in red). As originally conceived, the highway entered Waco from the northwest along what is shown to be SH 67. The Texas Highway Department shifted the alignment that provided a more direct route to Waco via Itasca, Hillsboro, and West. The relocation directed traffic to Elm Street and crossed into downtown Waco at the Washington-Elm Street Bridge. Source: Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

Figure 111. Postcard advertising the Grande Hotel located along the Meridian Highway in Waco with the caption, "Grande Hotel, Waco, Texas, See the Only Petrified Wood Hotel. Texas Café – Petrified Wood American and Mexican Dishes. Grande Courts Tourist Apts., Waco, Texas," ca. 1930–1945. This postcard depicts the kinds of businesses that evolved on Elm Street in East Waco and greeted inbound travelers entering Waco from the north. Postcard Source: The Tichnor Brothers Collection, Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts.

Figure 112. A ca. 1930 Sinclair gas station on the 1926 route located at 800 Elm Avenue in Waco. This is one of several historic gas stations that catered to travelers on the Meridian that still lines Elm Avenue. This is a standardized form and style for Sinclair gas stations from the 1930s. Such standardization in design of gas stations by Sinclair and other gas companies was common practice and made brand recognition easy for automobile travelers. Photo by HHM.

By the time the 1924 *Automobile Red Book* was published, the route of the Meridian Highway leading into Waco was altered. Previously, the road entered from the northwest as part of a loop, passing through Glen Rose. By the time that the Red Book was published, however, the loop was deemphasized and the new route shared a segment with the King of Trails, coming into town via Hillsboro and West. The 1924 *Red Book* was also the first guide to publicize amenities for motorists traveling along the Meridian Highway in Waco. The guide has pictures and listings of several of these amenities, including the Raleigh Hotel, which was listed as being the "Automobile Tourists' Headquarters" (see *Figure 113*, below); the Elite Café, listed as "Waco's Best Café" (see *Figure 114*, to follow); and the Allen-Porten Auto Supply Company, listed as the "largest drive-in filling station in the southwest".

Figure 113. The former Raleigh Hotel (originally the Riggins Hotel) in Waco. Built in 1913, the Raleigh was designed by architect Roy E. Lane, who also designed the old Waco Public Library and the Hippodrome Theater, and collaborated on the ALICO building design. The hotel was part of a 1912 mayoral campaign to build "the most modern hotel in Texas," that would cater to Waco's growing business and touring travelers.[261]

Figure 114. (Above) Opened in 1919 at 608 Austin Avenue downtown, the Elite Café became a Waco institution over time. The success of the downtown restaurant and the growing city led to the opening of a second location (pictured) on Waco's traffic circle—on the new 1930s route—in 1941. In operation for over 50 years, the Elite Café was a popular stop for motorists along the Meridian Highway.

The 1926 edition of the Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Waco also shows the growing importance of auto-related traffic along the Meridian Highway (see *Figure 115* below). Sheet 73 shows a "filling station" on the same parcel as the Dixie Ice Company, thus leading one to believe that it post-dates the ice plant and was part of the trend for gas stations to be built on available corners.[262] What is noticeably absent on this sheet, however, is the presence of tourist courts, which would later be constructed along the route, suggesting that the weary motorist would have to travel into downtown before finding a night's lodging in any of the hotels operating in the downtown.

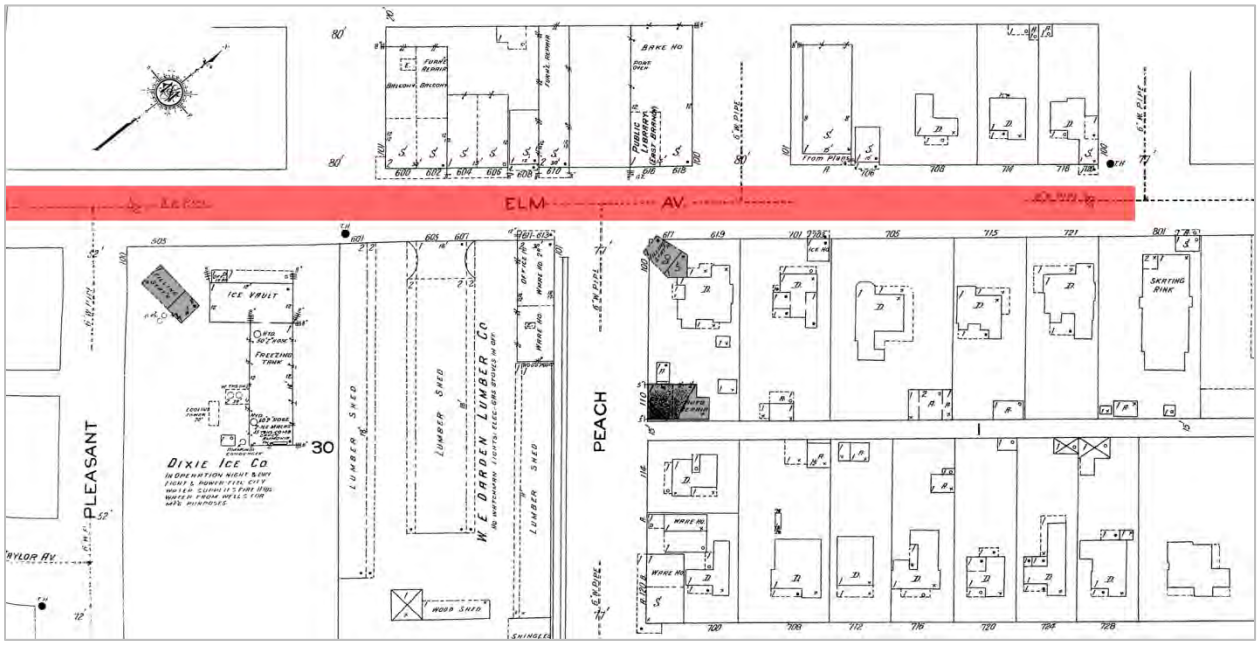

Figure 115. Detail of 1926 edition of the Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Waco, Texas. This map shows how Elm Street began to cater to the growing number of motorists who used the street to travel into and out of Waco using the Meridian Highway (shown in red). Located near Paul Quinn College, this stretch later included a number of gas stations and garages (shaded in gray) and motor courts. The Grande Tourist Courts (see again Figure 111) and Alamo Plaza Courts (see forthcoming Figure 117) were just a few blocks to the east. Source: Sanborn Map Company, 1926.

During the interwar period, Waco experienced significant growth and development, as evidenced by the buildings noted in a locally published booklet to promote the city and business and industrial expansion (see *Figure 116*, to follow). It stood at an important crossroads that was used to ship raw goods (mostly cotton) by rail to other markets in the nation and other countries. However, other companies established businesses that relied on trucks as means of distributing goods to local markets. A particularly noteworthy example was the plant constructed by the Borden Milk Company in 1929. In an article appearing in *The Texas Monthly*, the company's decision to build a facility in Waco stemmed from the success of the highway campaign there. The plant's location at the hub of a highway crossroads facilitated the distribution of milk and related products via trucks.[263]

One of the most significant aspects of development along the Meridian Highway happened in Waco with the establishment of the Alamo Plaza Hotel Courts. Founded in 1929 in the 900 block of Elm Street, the motor court was born out of the owner's vision to "offer high quality lodging available at moderate rates," and became one of the first franchising chains in the United States.[264] Use of the iconic Mission Revival-styled parapet (so closely associated with the Alamo) on the primary building's façade also became an important identifying feature of the courts, and motorists traveling to different towns knew that high-quality service and furnishings would be available at each location (see *Figure 117*, to follow).

By the early 1930s, vehicular congestion in downtown Waco had become acute, and the Texas Highway Department began making plans to remedy the situation. As reported in *The Texas Monthly*, the Highway Department, in cooperation with county and city authorities, proposed a new route "through the suburbs in such a way that a boulevard will be created 150 feet wide, partly within and partly outside the city limits and completely encircling the city. . . travelers merely passing through will not have to make through the already overcrowded business section."[265] The results led to the construction of the traffic circle or roundabout, which became a distinctive feature of the highway system in Waco. The confluence of multiple highways became a magnet for businesses catering to travelers. The Elite Café, for example, relocated to the traffic circle, and other restaurants and tourist courts, likewise, took advantage of the out-of-town traffic (see *Figure 118*, to follow). The new roundabout was completed in 1933.[266]

During the advent of the interregional highway-building campaign of the postwar era, Waco was among the cities in Texas that aggressively pursued this program. The Texas Highway Department developed plans for a possible route through Waco; however, local leaders did not support the proposed route. While the Highway Department designed the highway to cross the Brazos River between downtown and the loop,

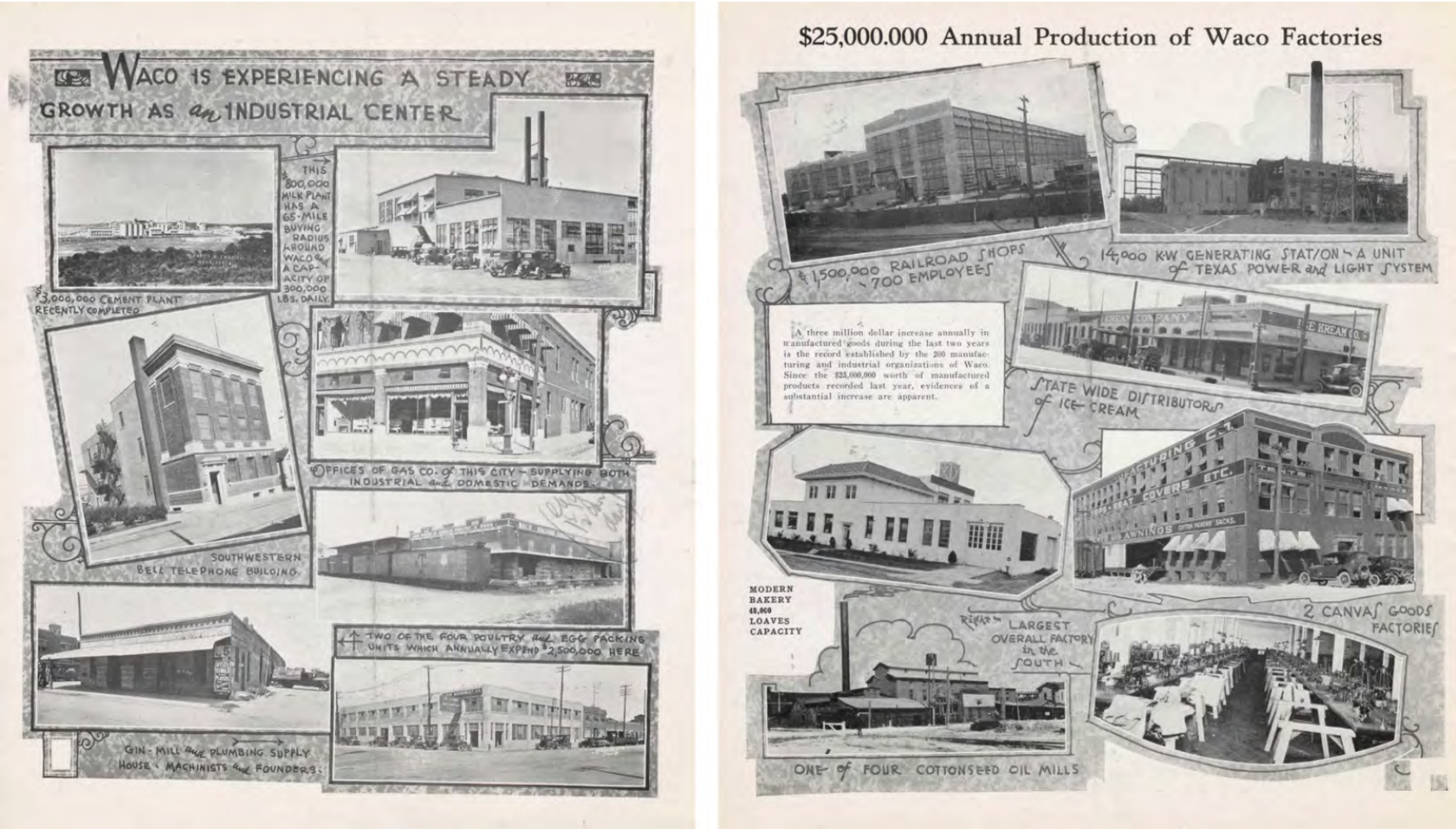

Figure 116. "Waco: Magnet of Commerce and the Air Mail – The Center of Texas Population, 1929." This pictorial booklet provides an overview of Waco just before the Great Depression struck the city and the rest of the nation. The images portray the city as a dynamic and growing urban center with a diverse and vibrant economy. It also highlighted the highways and good roads that served the community. Source: Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

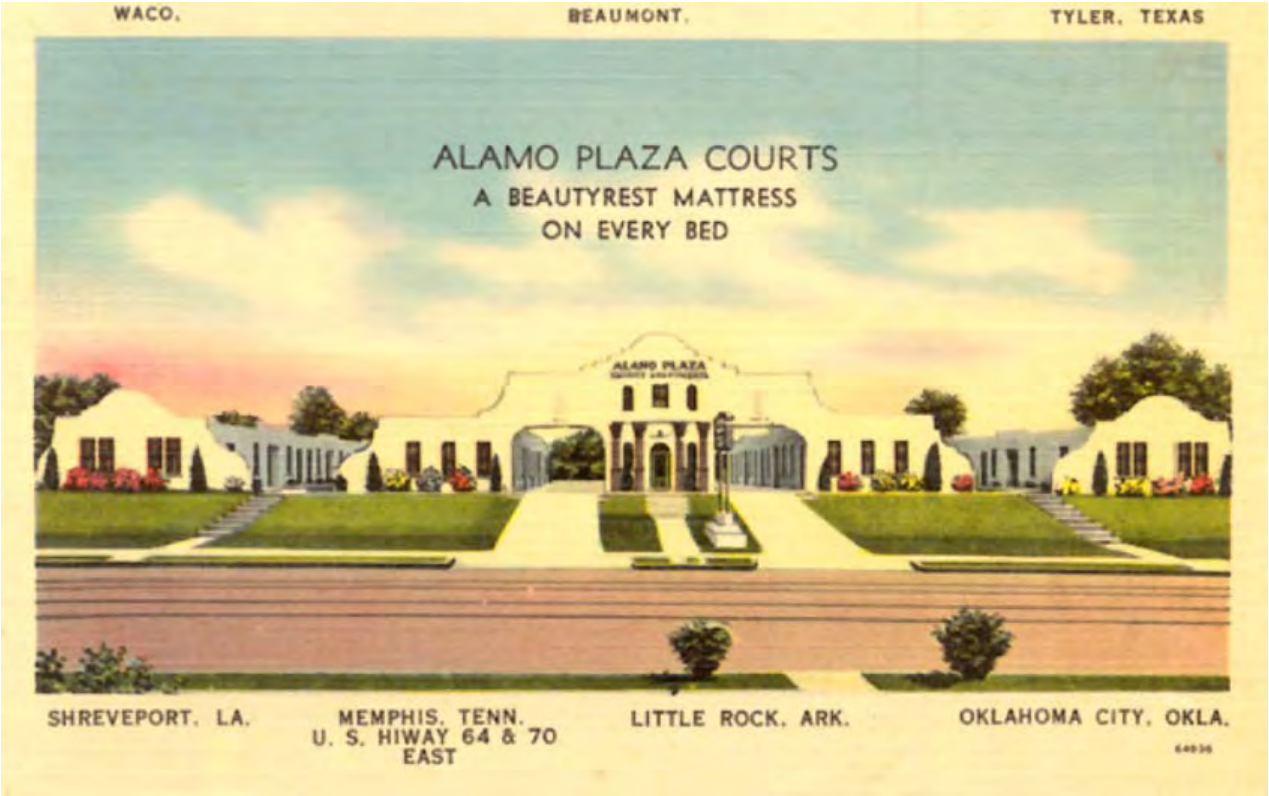

Figure 117. A ca. 1939 image of Alamo Plaza Courts in Waco. Despite the success of the chain, the construction of a loop along La Salle Street in the 1930s bypassing downtown Waco led to a steep decline in the number of travelers passing the motor court. As more and more travelers used similar loops in other communities, this iconic motor court and similar units elsewhere struggled to survive. Most have closed, were abandoned, or demolished, as was the case for the Alamo Plaza Courts in Waco. Source: Don O'Brien, Flickr photo, CC By 2.0 http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/wooda/motel/postcards/1001.jpg.

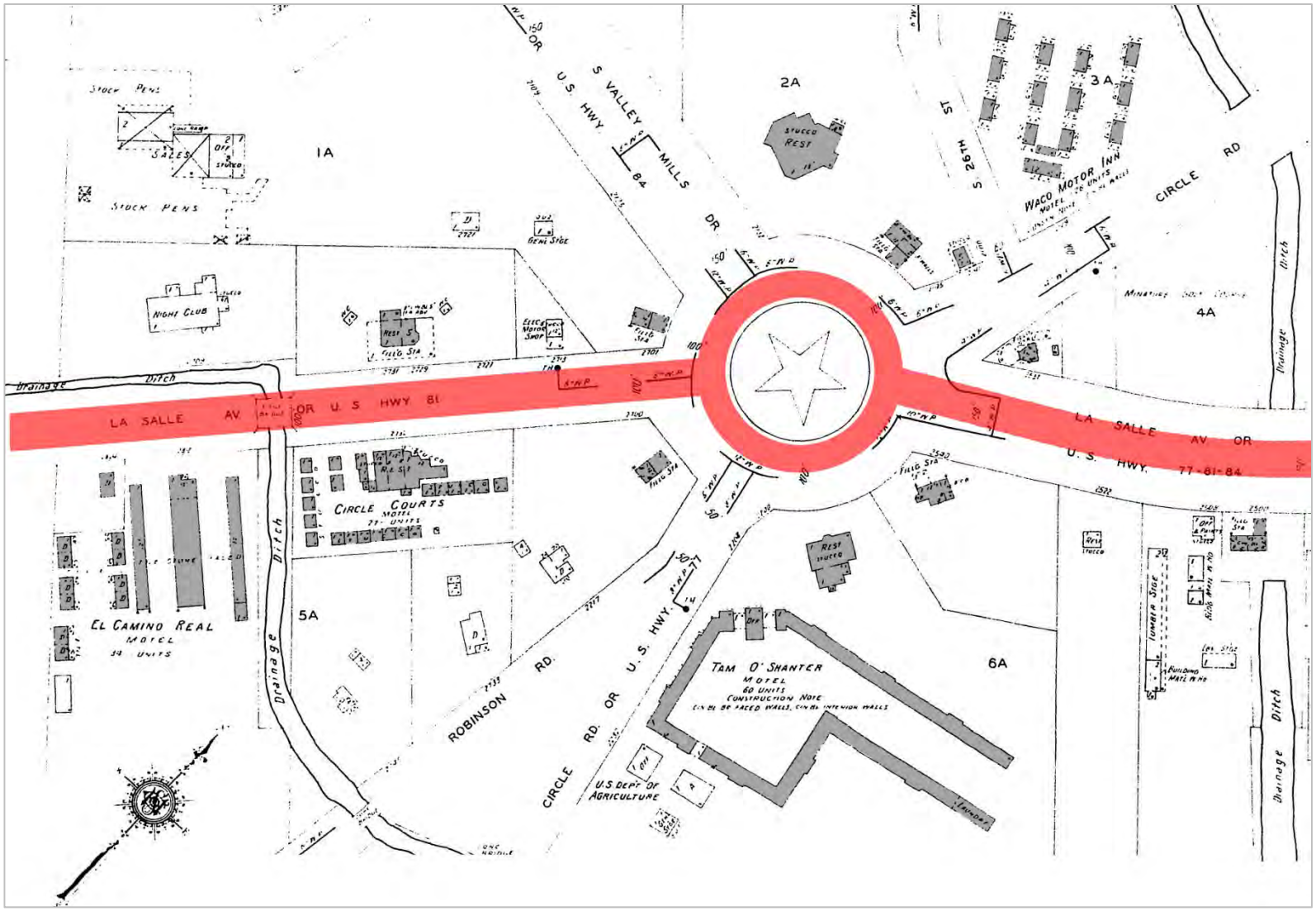

Figure 118. Detail of Sanborn map of Waco, 1926, updated 1951. This image shows how Meridian Highway traffic circled in Waco (shown in red) and the many auto- and tourist-related businesses (shaded in gray) that operated nearby. Note the Texas Star at the center of the circle, which was part of the landscaping scheme of this roadway feature. Source: Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

the City wanted it to go upriver from the downtown area. This difference in opinion led to delays in the implementation of major highway improvements through Waco. Even after a proposed route was settled upon, problems were encountered with the proposal of the purchase of new right-of-way. In 1956, the *Waco News-Tribune* ran an article stating that the "major interregional highway bottleneck of Texas is located here in Waco where the question of how to buy extra right-of-way along LaSalle Street has stumped the best local financial experts."[267] The article continues by stating that a four-lane expressway was currently under construction to the north and south of Waco and that if LaSalle Street were left in its unimproved two-lane condition, the expressway would essentially dump "more traffic into it than could be moved in a day's time."

Although plans to construct an interstate were in place in Waco as early as 1959, construction was not completed until 1972. IH 35 was constructed on a new location and removed many buildings along its path.[268]

The opening of the interstate highway through Waco led to the demise of many of the auto-related businesses that fronted onto the historic alignments of the Meridian Highway (see again *Figure 118*). The downtown had already been in decline for years, as a destructive tornado in 1953 and urban renewal efforts led to the demolition of many buildings in the central business district. Several hotels have survived, such as the Roosevelt Hotel at 4th and Austin streets, but they have been adapted to new uses. The Roosevelt Hotel has been rehabilitated into offices and remains a prominent landmark in the downtown. Many of the garages and auto dealerships along the main thoroughfares have likewise survived, but their glory days are long past. Nonetheless, they remain as visible reminders of the intense automobile traffic that once extended through downtown Waco. Gas stations were particularly affected by the Interstate Highway System. While many have been demolished or converted to new uses, several of the city's oldest gas stations remain along Elm Street, near the former site of Paul Quinn College. And even though Waco was the site of the one of the earliest chain of tourist courts in the nation (Alamo Plaza Courts), remarkably few motor courts remain. Moreover, few vestiges of the auto-related businesses along the Gulf Division outbound from Waco have survived. Perhaps the most visible physical landmark associated with the Meridian Highway is the roundabout at the south end of La Salle Street.

See *Figure 119* on the next page for a map showing the Meridian Highway and its successors through Waco over time.

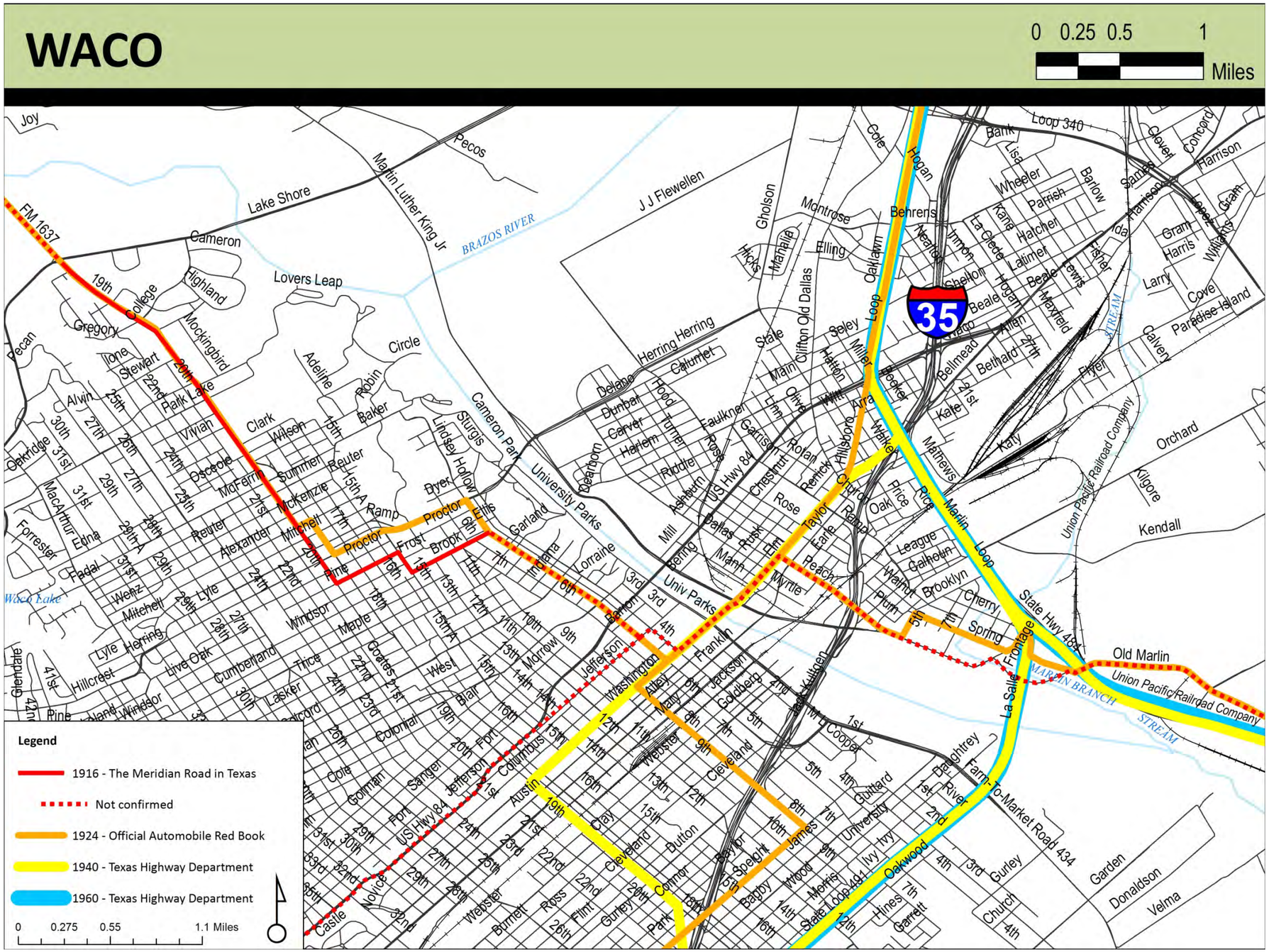

Figure 119. Map showing the route of the Meridian Highway and its successors through Waco over time.

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[258] Roger N. Conger, "WACO, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online,* http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hdw01, (accessed May 25, 2015). Uploaded June 15, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

[259] "Meridian Road Party in Waco," *Waco Morning News*, December 12, 1912.

[260] Douglas Hales, "PAUL QUINN COLLEGE," *Handbook of Texas Online,* http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/kbp08 (accessed May 26, 2015). Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Modified on June 13, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

[261] John A. Jakle, Keith A. Sculle, and Jefferson S. Rogers, *The Motel in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 92.

[262] Waco 1926-001-vol1-73.

[263] P. J. R. MacIntosh, "Concrete Roads to Progress" *The Texas Monthly*, Volume V, No. 5, June 1930.

[264] "Alamo Plaza Hotel Courts," http://www.highwayhost.org/AlamoPlaza/alamoplaza1.htm (accessed May 22, 2015).

[265] Ibid.

[266] Randy Mallory, "Waco's Historic Roundabout," *Texas Highways: The Travel Magazine of Texas*, http://www.texashighways.com/travel/item/5791-waco-s-historic-roundabout (accessed May 26, 2015).

[267] "New State Policy on Road Right-of-Way Cost Timely," *Waco News Tribune*, June 19, 1956: 7.

[268] "City, School Officials to Iron out UHS Sale," *Waco News Tribune*, October 20, 1960: 5.

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II.4. SAN ANTONIO

Seeing Scintillating San Antonio

"From [New Braunfels] to San Antonio many interesting villages and hamlets are seen, all typical of this intensely interesting portion of Texas—the mesquites, looking like immense fruit trees; with here and there a mass of the ever-increasing cactus, with stickers and spikes (also ever-increasing)—it's all worth while [sic]. Several creeks are crossed—the Alamo eventually looms up in the distance. We pass the Country Club; right on down River Avenue, to the very heart of San Antonio, the cosmopolitan and metropolitan center of the South. The Alamo, that had us in a warm embrace of entrancing welcome the minute we entered its environs—no wonder tourists all head towards San Antonio and are so loath to leave—no wonder Texans point with patriotic pride to the Alamo with all its hallowed traditions, and are always, as in the past, prone to see its possibilities and always quick to grasp the same—the simile being in the Bi-Centennial Exposition of 1918 that marks the birth of the City of the Alamo. The growth of this city is the marvel of the age; and it is a growth that is grasped as we say, more readily by the San Antonian than any other; and that with a community spirit that has evolved a vast city where there was once only "a wide place in the road." Its [sic] the Tourists' Paradise, for nowhere have the tourists' tastes been so sediously [sic] studied as right in San Antonio—the parks, the hotels, etc. The pikes are all tarviated, and, miracle of miracles, the serpentine San Antonio River, everywhere, is festooned with vari-colored electric lights, causing at night a grand and glorious vision, that you will have to visit San Antonio to rightly realize. Result is that never a train or bunch of autos come to the city, but what you may mark tourists; and each and everyone is welcome. Not like the new preacher: 'The congregation was so glad to receive him they felt like eating him up, and afterwards they were sorry they didn't.' No, not that way; but the visitor in San Antonio is made to feel like he is 'home folks,' and treated—absolutely treated that way."

G. A. MacNaughton, *The Meridian Road in Texas*, 1916

San Antonio is one of the most important cities along the entire Meridian Highway route, and it was prominently featured in numerous publications promoting the road since the idea of the highway originated in 1911. Indeed, San Antonio has been a transportation hub since its founding, and many of the state's oldest and most historic trails and roads—some of which date to the eighteenth century—either passed through or originated in the city. This aspect of local history underscores the significance of San Antonio to the development of Texas and of the Meridian Highway.

Founded in 1718 with the establishment of missions along the San Antonio River, the city played a key role in the Texas' fight for independence when several battles, including the siege of Bexar and the battle of the Alamo, were fought in the area. The city grew rapidly after Texas entered the Union and continued to develop as an important hub

of commerce and trade. The U.S. Army first established a military post in San Antonio in 1845, and the city subsequently became a key center of military fortifications within the entire Southwest region of the country. The development of Fort Sam Houston was particularly significant. The first railroad to provide service to San Antonio was the I&GN Railroad, which arrived in 1881. By 1900, three additional railroads provided service to the city.

San Antonio's response to the arrival of the automobile mirrored that of other large cities of the time; growth became horizontal in the form of expansive neighborhoods, which, along with the establishment of Fort Sam Houston, helped the city steadily grow to the north. The city also expanded in other directions. Many of the city's wealthiest and most affluent residents embraced the automobile and became very active in the early automobile movement efforts in Texas. They created their own automobile club and even published a series of travel guides that provided detailed driving instructions and trips for enthusiastic motorists (see *Figures 120* and *121, to follow*). As the Good Roads movement gained popularity, San Antonio became a major hub of activity, and residents such as David Colp readily embraced the effort and helped to form and support multiple highway associations that promoted highways that passed through the city. The auto trails that extended into San Antonio included the Meridian Highway, Old Spanish Trail, King of Trails Highway, Colorado-to-Gulf Highway, and the Puget-Sound-to-Gulf Highway (see *Figure 122, to follow*).

As originally conceived and promoted, the Meridian Highway was among the earliest, if not the very first, interstate auto trail to pass through San Antonio. It entered the city from the north via the communities of Solms, Comal, Selma, and Fratt, and continued south towards Laredo via Natalia, Devine, and Moore, more or less following the I&GN Railroad. The route extended through Fort Sam Houston and passed near the famous quadrangle and parade grounds. The highway continued onto Broadway and into downtown via Houston Street (see *Figure 123, to follow*). This route largely followed the old Post Road, which was established in 1915 to facilitate the U.S. Post Office and its service between San Antonio and Austin.[269] The Meridian Highway extended past the federal post office as well as other local landmarks including City Hall and the Bexar County Courthouse. The road continued south along S. Flores Street toward Nogalitos Street and on to Frio County and the Winter Garden District region.

Among all of the major cities in Texas, San Antonio has the most distinctive and unique layout, which reflects its Spanish Colonial heritage. Many of the major streets extend along former *acequias* that were part of irrigation systems that supported the missions along the San Antonio River; other streets were part of a colonial-era road system that linked San Antonio with other early towns, such as Nacogdoches. These main arterials within the system greatly influenced the overall

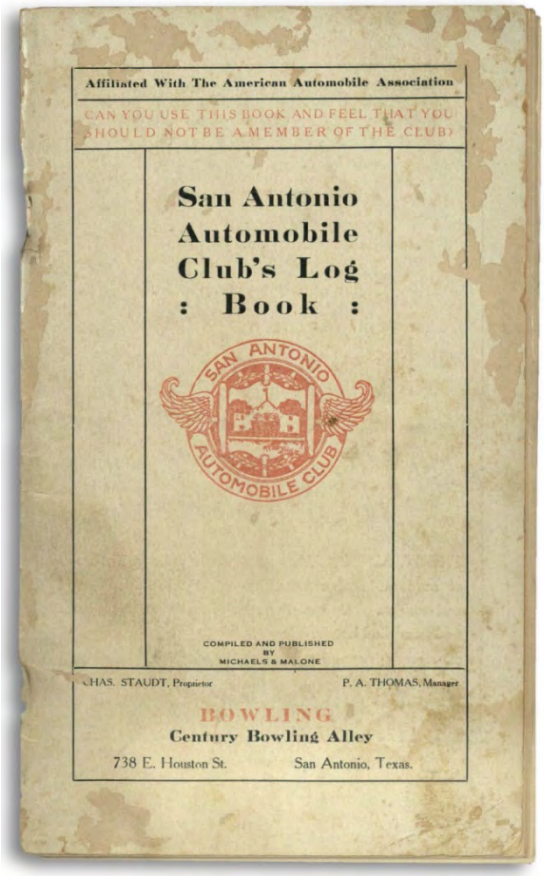
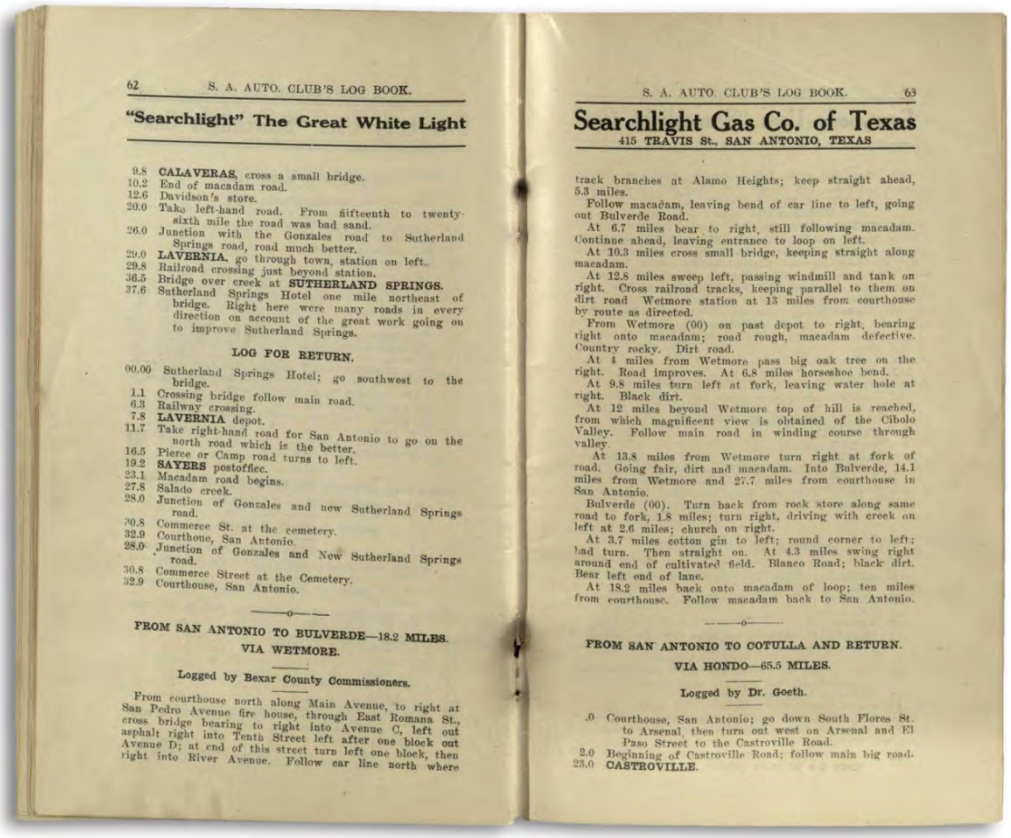


Figure 120. Excerpts from the San Antonio Automobile Club's Log Book, 1911. In the early years of automobile travel, groups such as the San Antonio Automobile Club published guides that recommended trips and drivable roads for auto enthusiasts. This guide also suggested multiple trips emanating from San Antonio, including those associated with the Meridian Highway. Source: Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas (available online at http://brushauto.net).



62 S. A. AUTO. CLUB'S LOG BOOK.

"Searchlight" The Great White Light

9.8 **CALAVERAS**, cross a small bridge.
10.2 End of macadam road.
12.6 Davidson's store.
20.0 Take left-hand road. From fifteenth to twenty-sixth mile the road was bad sand.
26.0 Junction with the Gonzales road to Sutherland Springs road, road much better.
29.0 **LAVERNIA**, go through town, station on left.
29.8 Railroad crossing just beyond station.
36.5 Bridge over creek at **SUTHERLAND SPRINGS.**
37.6 Sutherland Springs Hotel one mile northeast of bridge. Right here were many roads in every direction on account of the great work going on to improve Sutherland Springs.

LOG FOR RETURN.

00.00 Sutherland Springs Hotel; go southwest to the bridge.
1.1 Crossing bridge follow main road.
6.3 Railway crossing.
7.8 **LAVERNIA** depot.
11.7 Take right-hand road for San Antonio to go on the north road which is the better.
16.5 Pierce or Camp road turns to left.
19.2 **SAYERS** postoffice.
23.1 Macadam road begins.
27.8 Salado creek.
28.0 Junction of Gonzales and new Sutherland Springs road.
30.8 Commerce St. at the cemetery.
32.9 Courthouse, San Antonio.
28.0 Junction of Gonzales and New Sutherland Springs road.
30.8 Commerce Street at the Cemetery.
32.9 Courthouse, San Antonio.

FROM SAN ANTONIO TO BULVERDE—18.2 MILES. VIA WETMORE.

Logged by Bexar County Commissioners.

From courthouse north along Main Avenue, to right at San Pedro Avenue fire house, through East Romana St., cross bridge bearing to right into Avenue C, left out asphalt right into Tenth Street left after one block out Avenue D; at end of this street turn left one block, then right into River Avenue. Follow car line north where

S. A. AUTO. CLUB'S LOG BOOK. 63

Searchlight Gas Co. of Texas
415 TRAVIS St., SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

track branches at Alamo Heights; keep straight ahead, 5.3 miles.

Follow macadam, leaving bend of car line to left, going out Bulverde Road.

At 6.7 miles bear to right, still following macadam. Continue ahead, leaving entrance to loop on left.

At 10.3 miles cross small bridge, keeping straight along macadam.

At 12.8 miles sweep left, passing windmill and tank on right. Cross railroad tracks, keeping parallel to them on dirt road Wetmore station at 13 miles from courthouse by route as directed.

From Wetmore (00) on past depot to right, bearing right onto macadam; road rough, macadam defective. Country rocky. Dirt road.

At 4 miles from Wetmore pass big oak tree on the right. Road improves. At 6.8 miles horseshoe bend.

At 9.8 miles turn left at fork, leaving water hole at right. Black dirt.

At 12 miles beyond Wetmore top of hill is reached, from which magnificent view is obtained of the Cibolo Valley. Follow main road in winding course through valley.

At 13.8 miles from Wetmore turn right at fork of road. Going fair, dirt and macadam. Into Bulverde, 14.1 miles from Wetmore and 27.7 miles from courthouse in San Antonio.

Bulverde (00). Turn back from rock store along same road to fork, 1.8 miles; turn right, driving with creek on left at 2.6 miles; church on right.

At 3.7 miles cotton gin to left; round corner to left; bad turn. Then straight on. At 4.3 miles swing right around end of cultivated field. Blanco Road; black dirt. Bear left end of lane.

At 18.2 miles back onto macadam of loop; ten miles from courthouse. Follow macadam back to San Antonio.

FROM SAN ANTONIO TO COTULLA AND RETURN. VIA HONDO—65.5 MILES.

Logged by Dr. Goeth.

.0 Courthouse, San Antonio; go down South Flores St. to Arsenal, then turn out west on Arsenal and El Paso Street to the Castroville Road.
2.0 Beginning of Castroville Road; follow main big road.
23.0 **CASTROVILLE.**

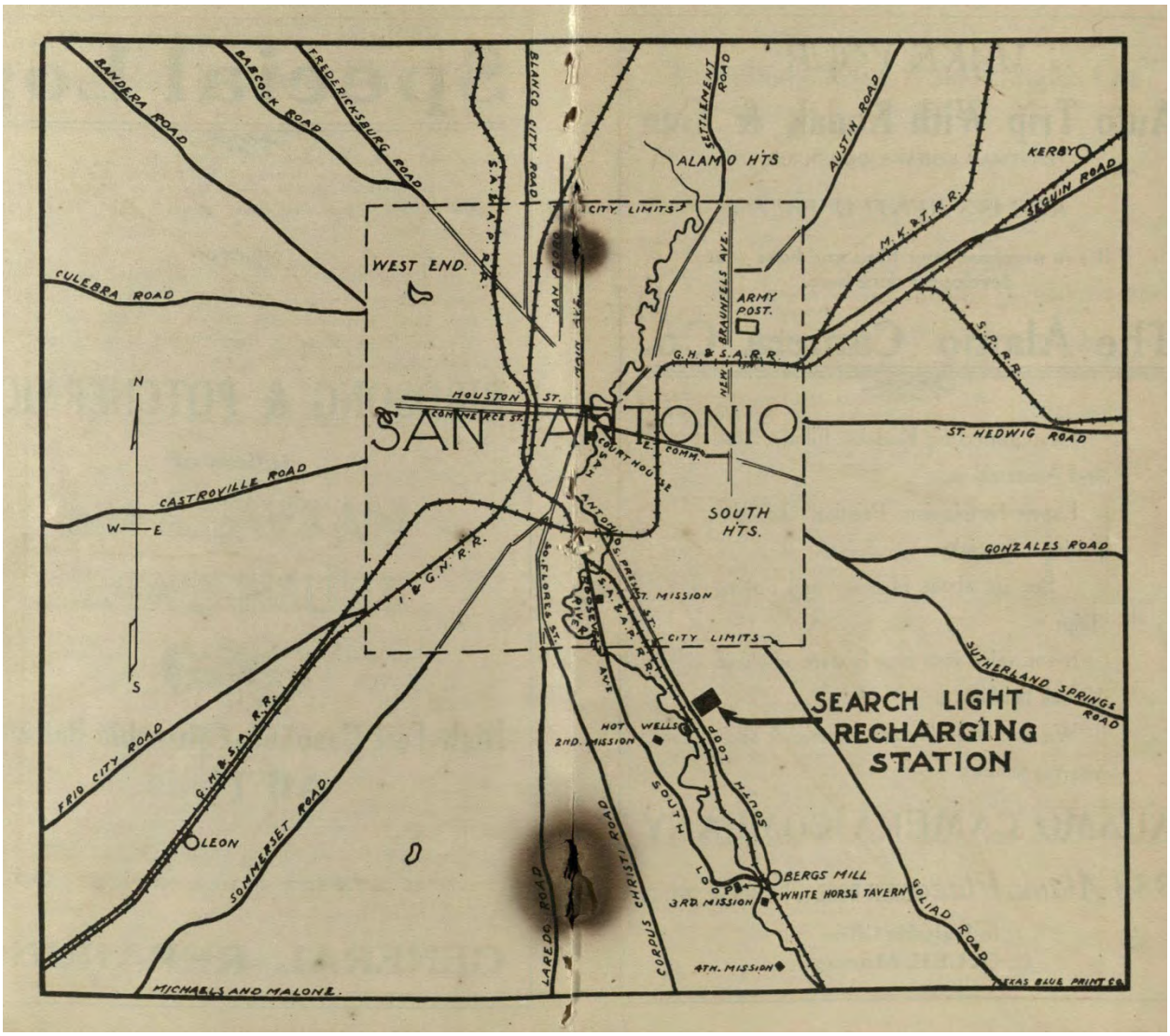


Figure 121. San Antonio map in the San Antonio Automobile Club's Log Book, 1911. This map was included as the center page of the travel guide. The routes outlined in heavy line weight show the recommended roads through the city. Although the Meridian Highway is not identified, segments of the route are depicted, notably the Austin Road at the top-right corner. Source: Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas (available online at http://brushauto.net).

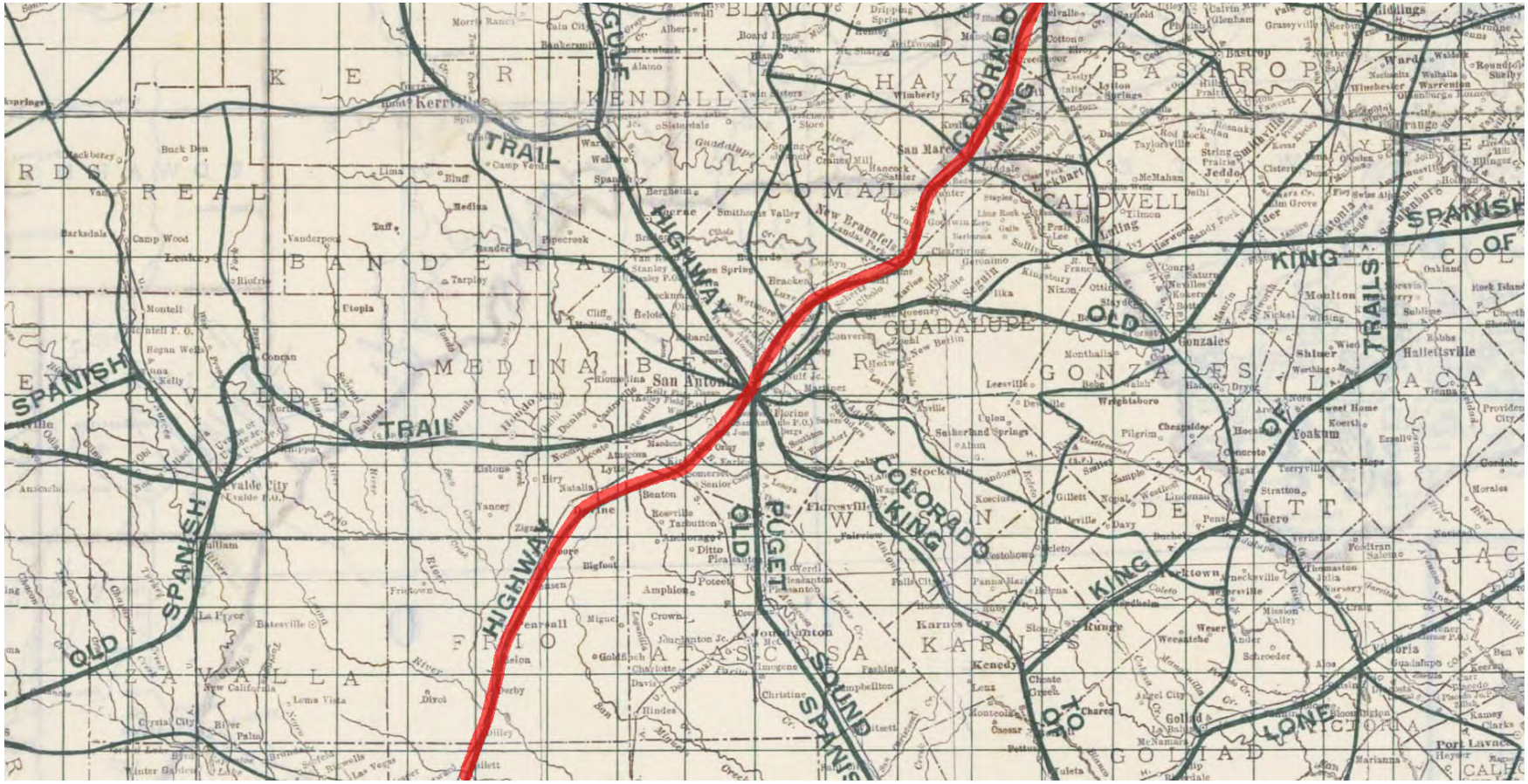


Figure 122. Detail of Texas Highway Map. This map shows the many historic named highways/auto trails that passed through San Antonio, with the Meridian Highway in red. With its many parks, rich history and architecture, temperate climate, and abundant supply of lodging, the city attracted many visitors from Texas and other parts of the country. Source: Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

Figure 123. San Antonio City Map, B. F. Goodrich Tire Company, 1915. This map shows major roads servicing San Antonio in 1915. Neither the Meridian Highway nor any other historic auto trails are identified by name, but the route (noted in red) generally conformed to later travel guides promoting the Meridian Highway. Source: Martha Doty Freeman personal collection.

street network/layout in the city, and many of the oldest roads followed the *acequias*. Later infill, especially outside the city's historic core, adopted the standard grid that typified most late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century urban development in Texas. The resulting melding of two very different street patterns created a unique urban setting, especially within Texas. Thus, it is not surprising that the Meridian Highway route through San Antonio followed an irregular path with multiple turns, especially in the downtown and city center.

The establishment of the Meridian Highway through San Antonio, combined with the presence of other historic highways, such as the Old Spanish Trail, made San Antonio a key destination for travelers. The city

offered numerous tourist attractions, such as the Alamo and the various missions (see *Figure 124* below), and the Meridian Highway route passed by or near several large and prominent San Antonio hotels, such as the Gunter Hotel and the Menger Hotel.

Figure 124. This photograph shows members of a caravan associated with the Sociability Tour of the Colorado-to-Gulf Highway Association in front of the Alamo on its tour through Texas. The group posed for photographs at other landmarks, such as the San José Mission, also in San Antonio, and the ALICO Building in Waco. This tour was one of many that other highway associations undertook during the mid- to late 1910s to promote the highway and generate support for the route and its improvement. Source: Virginia J. Church 1914 Sociability Tour Photograph collection, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

The Meridian Highway's route from Austin to San Antonio extended along the existing route of the Post Road. Its primary function fulfilled a very practical role that facilitated the postal service and the delivery of mail. However, the aesthetic quality of the route and its effect on the driving experience became a matter of growing concern. Local residents hoped to improve landscaping along the route, and such a trend occurred elsewhere on this and other early automobile trails. According to an article in the *San Antonio Light*, "The San Antonio–Austin Post Road, which is a section of the Meridian road, will be distinctive for the rows of trees on either side of it for the entire distance."[270] The article continued, saying that in addition to clearing grass, weeds, and trash from the road, posts were being cut to a uniform height, and the land surrounding the road was in the process of being made more attractive by "removal of unsightly shacks and all but the pleasing landmarks."[271]

In 1916, David Colp, who served as president of the San Antonio–Laredo Division of the Meridian Highway Association, oversaw the production of a travel guide entitled *The Meridian Road in Texas*. It was prepared in cooperation with G. A. MacNaughton of San Marcos (also secretary of

the Meridian Road Association) and Lake Robertson, a San Antonio-based engineer. The guide included a map and description of the cities along the route; it also provides the earliest known detailed illustration of the route specifically identified as the Meridian Road through San Antonio (see *Figure 125, to follow*). The guide shows a meandering path north of San Antonio and a complicated route once the city limits were reached, as directions listed on the map tell the traveler to go "west on Houston" then "south on Flores Street." Noteworthy features depicted on the map include Alamo Plaza, City Hall, and the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railroad Depot. South of San Antonio, the route straightened and generally ran adjacent to the I&GN Railroad.

A year after the first official route was published, Kelly Field (later Kelly Air Force Base and now Joint Base San Antonio) was established in what was then an area considered to be on the outskirts of San Antonio, close to the Meridian Highway and approximately five miles southwest of the city. The Army deliberately selected this relatively remote (at the time) location far from downtown, "so as to minimize the chances of aircraft accidents."[272] Prior to the establishment of Kelly Field, the Army conducted flight training at Fort Sam Houston, but Army leaders soon realized that the post had insufficient space for additional flying operations, and decided to build new facilities at another location. The establishment of the new air field further solidified San Antonio's position as a military center, and that status only grew over time as other posts and reservations were established in and near San Antonio during subsequent years. Examples include Brooks Field, Randolph Field, Camp Travis, and Camp Bullis. In addition, the army continued to expand Fort Sam Houston.

Another important aspect of the Meridian Highway around the San Antonio area was that it serviced the Winter Garden Region, which extended to Dimmit, Zavala, Frio, and LaSalle counties, south and southwest of San Antonio. In the 1890s, the Winter Garden Region rose in importance as irrigation was brought to the area, allowing for year-round production of vegetables. The name of the area, no doubt would have appealed to mid-westerners who would prefer to relocate to a more temperate climate and engage in year-round farming. The arrival of the railroad in the early 1900s, followed by the establishment of the Meridian Highway, helped support a major real estate and land development boom, and by 1920, the number of farms in the region had tripled. Due to its strategic route on the highway, travelers to and from this area utilized the Meridian Highway (see *Figure 126, to follow*).

Another early tourist guide that publicized amenities for motorists traveling along the Meridian Highway in San Antonio was the 1924 *Automobile Red Book*. This guide had pictures and listings of many amenities in San Antonio, including the Prudential Hotel, the Jefferson Hotel, the Alamo, Mission San Juan, and Mission Concepción. In

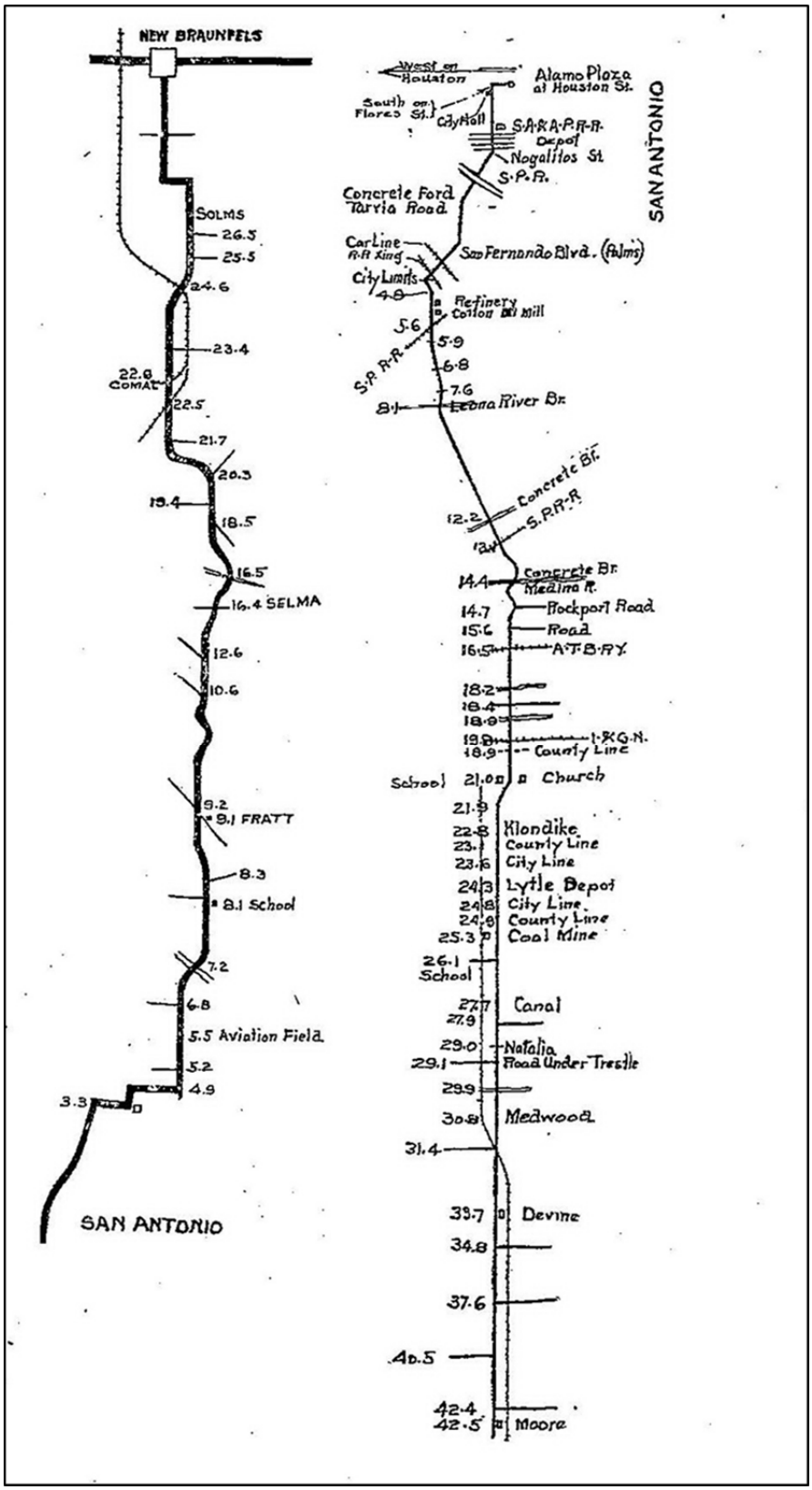


Figure 125. Detail of a map from the 1916 guidebook, The Meridian Road in Texas. This illustration shows the road as it extended through San Antonio. Source: Colp Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS: SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 18, 1927. A 3

Announcing the Introductory Sale of the New City of

WINTER GARDEN

In the Famous Winter Gardens District of Southwest Texas

The Most STARTLING INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY You've Ever Had - Positively Guaranteed 100% But You Must ACT NOW

A LOT IN THIS NEW TOWNSITE WORTH $100.00 Your Investment AND THIS GILT EDGED CERTIFICATE FOR $100.00 Your Guarantee

Both for $100.00

The new city of Winter Garden, located as shown above, is 102 miles southwest of San Antonio on the S. A. U. & G. branch of the M. P. System, between Dilley and Carrizo Springs. It is reached via the Meridian Highway and is almost in the geographical center of Dimmit County, the real heart of the famous Winter Gardens District of Texas.

Winter Garden is the logical trading and shipping point for five major land developments in the Artesian belt, is near good schools and churches, and is served by excellent transportation facilities that carry vegetable and citrus products to a waiting world market every month of the year—"Green Gold" that returns a handsome profit to the grower.

The plat of the new townsite includes approximately 400 acres of land, surrounded by several thousand acres of fine agricultural development tracts. Business lots are 25'x140' with 15' alleys. Boulevards in the business district are 80 feet wide and are supplemented by 50-foot streets.

TERMS:

$100 CASH or Easy Monthly Payments

No Interest, No Taxes Until Deed Is Issued

Officers of WINTER GARDEN SECURITIES CO., INC.
W. B. Bass, Pres.
M. C. Abrahams, Vice-Pres.-Secy.
W. W. Johnson, Vice-Pres.

REFERENCES
Guaranty State Bank
Bradstreet Mercantile Agency
Mutual Deposit and Loan Assn.
All of San Antonio, Texas.

MUTUAL DEPOSIT & LOAN ASSOCIATION

September 15, 1927.

Winter Garden Securities Co., Inc.,
San Antonio, Texas.

Gentlemen:

The Building & Loan Certificates (shown above) which you are purchasing in trust for investors in the new city of Winter Garden are our regular Prepaid Investment Certificates secured by improved Real Estate, principally homes, in San Antonio and vicinity. This company is operated under the Supervision of the State of Texas, whose statutes require that real estate loaned upon must be of an appraised value of at least 50 per cent in excess of the amount loaned. Our loans average somewhat less than 50 per cent of the real estate value.

This certificate will be redeemed by the Mutual Deposit and Loan Association at maturity at its face value in cash.

Yours very truly,
(Signed) A. L. MOON, President.
MUTUAL DEPOSIT AND LOAN ASSN.
The Oldest Building and Loan Association in Southwest Texas.

ONLY 1000 LOTS ARE INCLUDED IN THIS OFFER

When they are sold the Winter Garden Securities Company will begin other development of its large acreage holdings in the vicinity of the new city. THIS GUARANTEED INVESTMENT WILL NOT LAST LONG BECAUSE THERE ARE TOO MANY PEOPLE INTERESTED IN THE WINTER GARDENS.

You Must Clip and Mail This Coupon Today If You Want Complete Information About the New City of Winter Garden.

COUPON
WINTER GARDEN SECURITIES CO., Inc.,
326 Aztec Building, San Antonio, Texas.
Gentlemen: Please mail me, without obligation to myself, complete information concerning the new City of Winter Garden and your 100% Investment Guarantee.
Name .....
Street .....
City .....
Phone .....

Every section of the United States is interested in the famous Winter Gardens Section. The stories of its "green gold" developments are drawing thousands to this newest and most important agricultural area. The developers of the new city of Winter Garden are only a step ahead of the general development that is coming and you will be a step ahead if you join them in this project which is destined to become the Queen City of the Winter Gardens District of Southwest Texas.

Men and money are concentrating their energies in the Winter Gardens as never before. Power line extensions; railroad service; paved highways; diversified agriculture; climate; new shipping routes; publicity—all are combining to develop this great district with astonishing rapidity.

Mail Coupon TODAY for More Information About—

1. Development Plans.
2. Permanent Membership in Lake Encina Country Club.
3. Profit Guarantee to Every Purchaser.
4. No Taxes Until Property Is Conveyed.
5. No Interest on Deferred Payments.
6. Special Death and Permanent Disability Clause.
7. Moratorium in Case of Partial Disability or Sickness.
8. Our Re-Sale Guarantee.

Winter Garden Securities Co., Inc.

CHARTERED UNDER LAWS OF TEXAS

326-327 Aztec Building—Crockett 1136

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

Figure 126. Advertisement for the Winter Garden District in the San Antonio Express, 1927. This full-page ad specifically references the Meridian Highway as a way to reach a new development within the Winter Garden District, south of San Antonio. Source: San Antonio Express, September 18, 1927.

addition, the publication devoted an entire page to "San Antonio's Leading Hotels," which listed Travelers Hotel, Crockett Hotel, Menger Hotel, Robert E. Lee Hotel, Gunter Hotel, and St. Anthony Hotel (see *Figure 127* below and *Figure 128*, to follow). The travel guide also highlighted other auto-related businesses such as local service stations, auto-repair shops, and even a restaurant.

Figure 127. San Antonio's leading hotels, as noted in the Automobile Red Book of 1924. This page assured motorists that San Antonio offered outstanding hotel accommodations for travelers visiting the city. These hotels provided the most modern and up-to-date amenities. Source: Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

Figure 128. Photograph of Gunter Hotel, no date. Designed by architect Ernest J. Russell of the St. Louis firm, Mauran, Russell and Garden, and built by Garden/Westlake Construction Company, the hotel opened in 1909. Named for Jot Gunter, a rancher and real estate investor who helped finance the hotel, it was one of many multi-story hotels constructed in the early twentieth century that helped reshape downtown San Antonio into a major tourist destination. Situated at the prominent location of Houston Street and St. Mary Street, the Gunter was one of the first high-rise hotels in San Antonio constructed of steel and reinforced concrete, allowing for its numerous stories. The Gunter became a popular destination and meeting place for cattlemen, military officers, and even celebrities. Source: Texas Transportation Museum, http://www.txtransportationmuseum.org/ost.php.

By the early 1930s, growing congestion in downtown and the city's continued importance as an important military, commercial, and trade hub led the Texas Highway Department to make changes to the highway system in San Antonio. By that time, the Meridian Highway was known both as SH 2 (designed in 1917 with the creation of the Texas Highway Department) and as US 81 for the adoption of the federal highway numbering system. The Meridian Highway's alignment was shifted and upgraded; instead of passing directly through Fort Sam Houston, the highway moved to the Austin Highway and intersected with Broadway in the suburban community of Alamo Heights.[273] Previously, the route had followed what is now known as Harry Wurzbach Road. Rather than turn west onto Houston or Commerce streets, the highway continued south and passed in front of the Alamo Plaza. It followed S. Alamo Street through the King William neighborhood until it intersected with S. Flores Street, south of downtown. Still, the amount of traffic remained high, and intersections within the local road network became increasingly congested (see *Figures 129 –131*, to follow).

By the late 1930s, leaders within San Antonio began to advocate for improvements to the entire local highway network, a trend that occurred concurrently in other major Texas cities, such as Houston, Dallas, and Fort Worth. In 1939, the interregional committee of the San

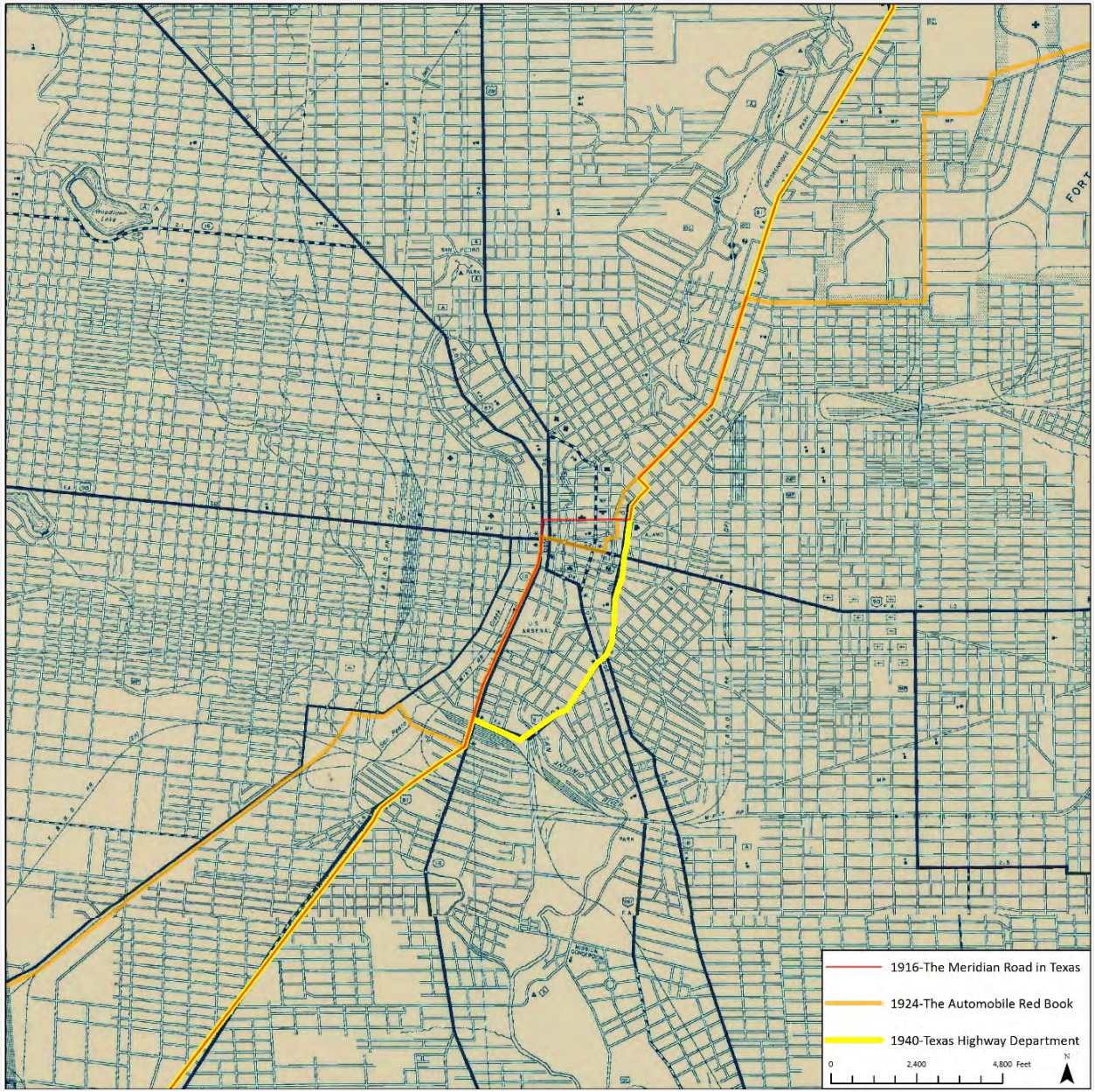


Figure 129. Detail of General Highway Map of Bexar County, 1936 (updated 1940). This map depicts the alignment shifts of the Meridian Highway through San Antonio. Source: Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

Figure 130. Intersection of S. Alamo and S. St. Mary streets in San Antonio, ca. 1940. The re-routing of a segment of US 81 onto S. Alamo Street was intended to relieve congestion in the downtown, but the decision also introduced a new set of problems in other parts of the city. This intersection, near the well-known King William neighborhood, became more difficult for local and out-of-town motorists. This trend spurred the development of a new highway system in San Antonio that was built in the postwar era. Source: Texas Department of Transportation, Photo Library.

Figure 131. Current view of an abandoned Humble gas station, located on South Laredo Street, just a few blocks west of the King William neighborhood, south of downtown San Antonio. The ca. 1935 Art Deco building remains one of the few surviving examples of a Humble Oil and Refinery Company gas station in San Antonio. The contrasting bright orange and blue tiles and distinct mosaic sign were clearly recognizable and attention-grabbing features to the many motorists traveling along the Meridian Highway. The Humble gas station is one of many auto-related businesses that lined the local roads surrounding the Meridian thoroughfare. Photo by HHM.

Antonio Chamber of Commerce met to discuss the possibility of turning the Meridian into an interregional highway; however, the start of World War II delayed this initiative, and the idea remained largely dormant until 1944 when Allied forces anticipated victory and an end to the war. Despite the delayed start, the importance of the proposed highway enjoyed continued support among civic leaders, and local newspapers promoted the idea to a war-weary and self-sacrificing public. An article published in the *San Antonio Light* on January 28, 1945, stated that "[t]he Interregional highway system, if properly located and built in San Antonio, will form the backbone of our entire thoroughfare structure."[274] An unmentioned requirement was the need for the city to purchase the necessary right-of-way for such a system, which would call for the issuance of bonds and a resulting tax increase. In September 1945, voters narrowly approved a bond issue that would enable the city to spend $1.75 million for the purchase of right-of-way for a new expressway that would include sections of the Meridian Highway.[275] Although city taxes would be raised, local media touted that construction of the highway would increase the value of land in the city, thus covering the difference in the tax rate.[276] A small group of local taxpayers contested the election results and filed a lawsuit challenging the outcome arguing that "the law governing such requires a two-third favorable vote instead of a majority."[277] As the case made its way through the courts, local newspapers warned that the city could possibly lose the $6.5 million of federal funds, as other cities (most notably Dallas) attempted to secure the monies.[278] The lawsuit was finally settled in 1947 when the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case, which allowed the city to move forward with the project. With the ability to issue bonds for new right-of-way acquisition, the city cleared the way for highway construction, sometimes moving the displaced houses to other locations. One such instance where houses were relocated occurred on land adjacent to Martinez Creek where dirt fill from highway excavation work was used to straighten a bend in the creek.[279] These houses were then sold to the public for approximately $5,000 each and sales were used to purchase other land for the new expressway (see *Figure 132*, to follow).

In July 1949, the first segment of the interregional highway opened in San Antonio along a portion of US 90/Old Spanish Trail. Subsequent construction extended south to include a shared segment with US 81/Meridian Highway. Bypassing the established route of both the Meridian Highway and Old Spanish Trail, the interregional highway system in San Antonio was built on new alignments. This shift of the main highway forced the Texas Highway Department to develop new interchanges at locations where the new highway intersected with key thoroughfares within the local street network, as noted in *Figure 133* (to follow).

The passage of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 marked a turning point in the history and development of the highway system, and its

Figure 132. (Above) Houses being moved for the new expressway, 1947. This photo captures a trend that characterized the construction of a new generation of highways in urban areas. The Texas Highway Department typically selected a new alignment for the expressways and often chose paths that extended through residential neighborhoods where land was less expensive than in densely developed commercial or industrial areas. This segment, which was part of the first expressway built in San Antonio during the late 1940s, was not actually on US 81/Meridian Highway (it was part of US 90/Old Spanish Trail route), but it illustrates an issue that the highway department faced for such highway construction efforts. Source: The San Antonio Light, June 12, 1947.

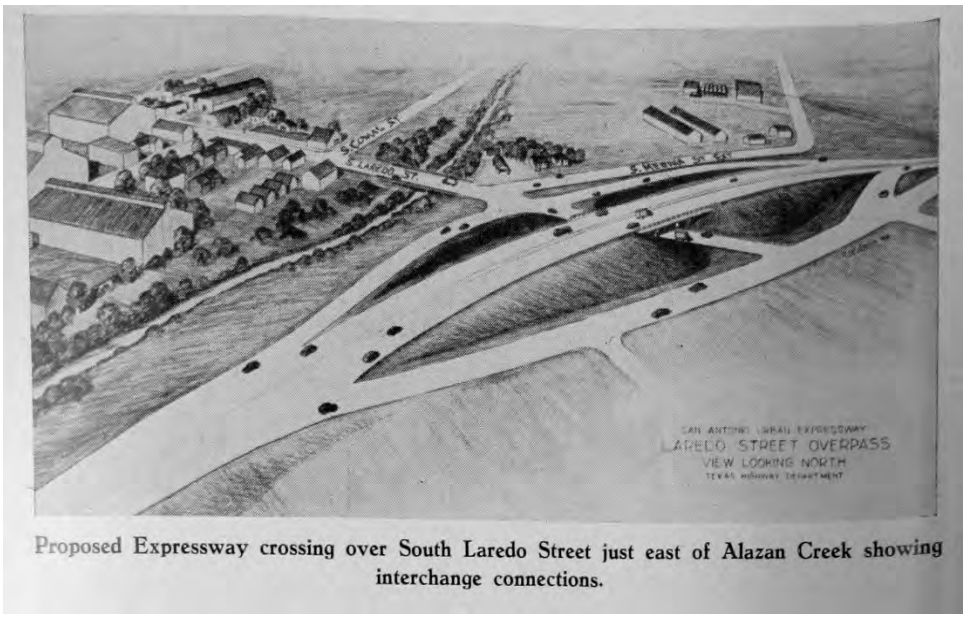


Figure 133. (Left) This rendering shows the proposed expressway or interregional highway at S. Laredo Street. The design embodies many of the new ideas about highway design that were intended to improve safety and facilitate traffic flow. The kinds of innovations introduced by this and other highway interchanges of the interregional highway era were refined and developed further when the Interstate Highway System was built in the late 1950s and 1960s. Source: Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

effects extended to San Antonio. The existing sections of the local interregional highway system were upgraded, and the Texas Highway Department embarked on an aggressive building campaign to construct freeways on new alignments for the newly designated IH 35 (US 81/Meridian Highway) and IH 10 (US 90/Old Spanish Trail). By 1960, the highway network in San Antonio was one of the most developed among major urban centers in the state, as noted in *Figure 134* (to follow).

The new expressways changed the role of older segments of the highway within the local transportation network, and historic highway routes increasingly catered to local traffic. This change also affected many of the travel-related businesses along the route. Some proprietors relocated their businesses to the new interstate highway, while others sold the property or repurposed their buildings. Such trends were particularly common on Austin Highway and Broadway Street on the city's north side. The Pig Stand (*Figure 135*, to follow) on Broadway is an example of one of the many establishments that endured having to move due to the construction of IH 35. Fortunately, in this case, it only had to relocate several feet north. Another drive-in restaurant, Bun 'N' Barrel (*Figure 136*, to follow) on Austin Highway, stands out as a relic of the 1950s era, in which it was constructed, amid the otherwise modern surroundings. The car stalls and car hop service distinguish the restaurant and remind passers-by of the period when numerous automobile-related businesses lined the street, catering to Meridian Highway travelers.

The first officially designated international exposition in the southwestern United States was held in San Antonio in 1968, commemorating the 250th anniversary of the city's founding. Known as HemisFair '68, the location chosen for the event encompassed 92.6 acres on the southeastern edge of the city's central business district, on the post-1934 path of the Meridian Highway. Of the 120 historic buildings located on the site, only 22 were saved and utilized for the event. Ultimately, the fair reinforced early marketing efforts of the Meridian Highway as part of the Pan-American Highway and led to improvements of the highway system linking the United States with Mexico.

Perhaps more than other major urban centers in Texas, San Antonio retains a high percentage of its historic built environment, which gives local residents and tourists alike a unique opportunity to obtain a strong sense of the past. Providing access to such landmarks as the Alamo and the other missions from the Spanish Colonial era was a primary reason that the Meridian Highway extended through the city. By the time automobiles began to traverse the local streets in the early twentieth century, the tourism industry was already well established and the number of opulent hotels in the downtown catered to the growing number of "automobilists" who visited San Antonio. The establishment of the Meridian Highway and other highways from the Auto Trails era

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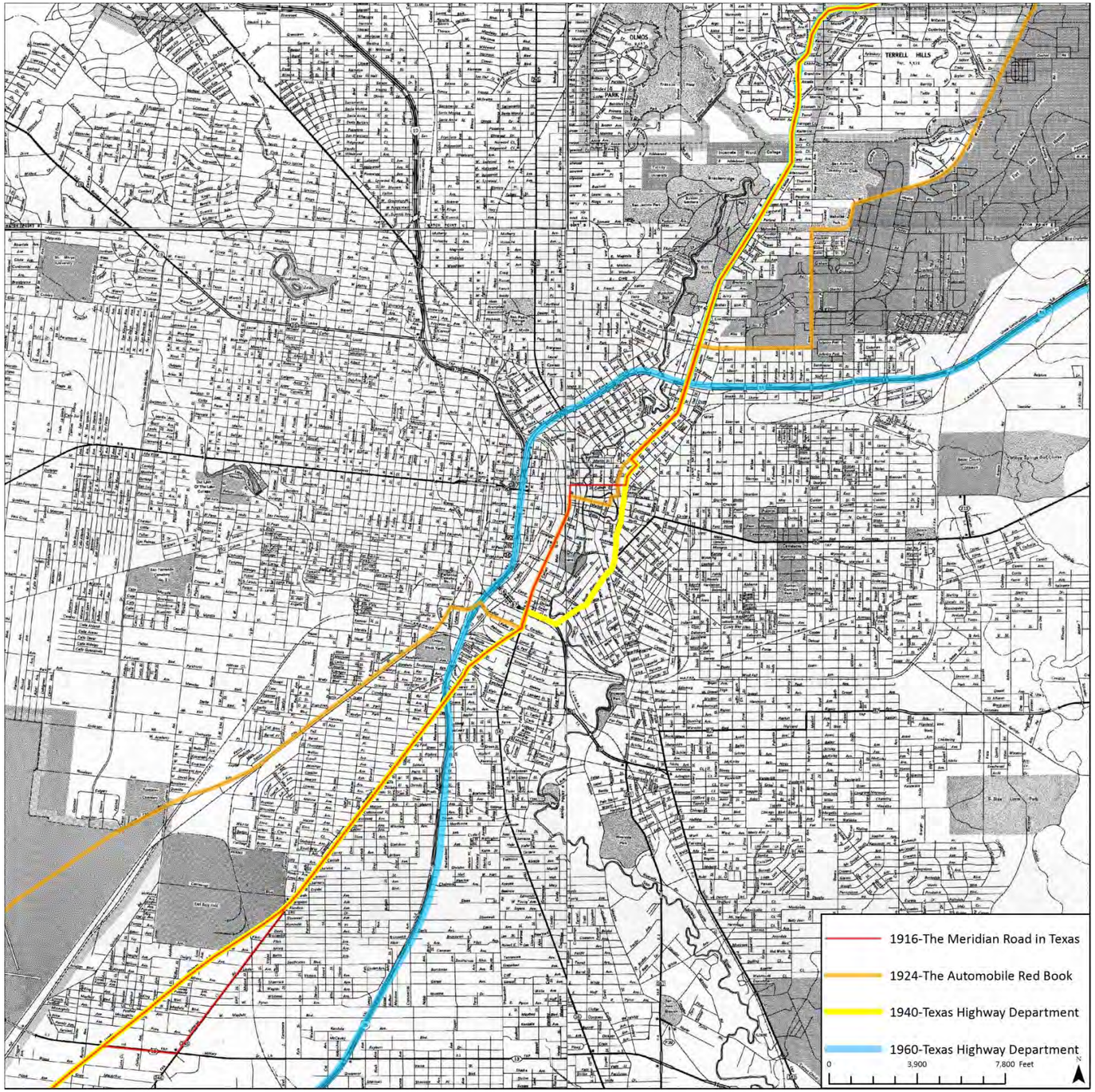

Figure 134. Detail of General Highway Map of Bexar County, 1960. Throughout most of its history, San Antonio has been an important hub within the state's transportation network. The city's age, size and population, along with multiple military bases, made it a logical focus of early highway-building improvement efforts. As this figure shows, the highway system in San Antonio embraced the Interstate Highway System and included several improved expressways that bypassed the historic city center. The shift in alignment enabled the downtown area to retain a high degree of historic character and integrity, fueled in part by the many tourist attractions in the downtown, most notably the Alamo. Source: Texas State Archives and Library Commission, Austin, Texas

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Figure 135. Current view of the Pig Stand #29, located at 1508 Broadway Avenue. San Antonio's original Pig Stand restaurant opened during the 1920s at the well-traversed location of Broadway Avenue near downtown San Antonio, surely attracting the throngs of motorists traveling along the Meridian Highway, looking for a bite to eat. The Pig Stand #29 represents the many automobile-related businesses that thrived along the Meridian Highway, in this case, for many decades. Part of a Dallas-based chain, the drive-in restaurant was forced to move and rebuild just north of its original location in the 1960s, when IH 35 was constructed. It stands today relatively unchanged from its 1960s era iteration. Photo by HHM.

Figure 136. Bun 'N' Barrel, a drive-in restaurant along Austin Highway in San Antonio. This is one of the few intact automobile-related businesses that remains along the thoroughfare since the period before IH 35 was constructed, causing many owners of travel-related businesses along the older segments of the Meridian to close or relocate their establishments. Bun 'N' Barrel opened in the 1950s and still has the mid-century Modern style features such as contrasting colors, a low-pitch angled roof and sharp-angled metal supports.

spawned a new generation of businesses (see *Figure 137*, to follow), especially along Broadway Street. A significant concentration of buildings that housed these businesses still survive and provide a tangible link to the past. The city also boasts many historic motels, gas stations, and restaurants, many of which were adapted to new uses as the tourist traffic shifted to the new freeways. The changing land-use patterns are particularly visible along Austin Highway, which was once lined with a variety of auto-related businesses. However, as the city has continued to grow in recent years, new strip shopping centers and large franchise retailing operations have led to the demolition of many of the historic auto-related businesses on this segment of the highway. A few notable survivors, such as Bun 'N' Barrel and the Phillips 66 service station have nonetheless survived.

See *Figure 137* for a map showing the Meridian Highway and its successors through San Antonio over time.

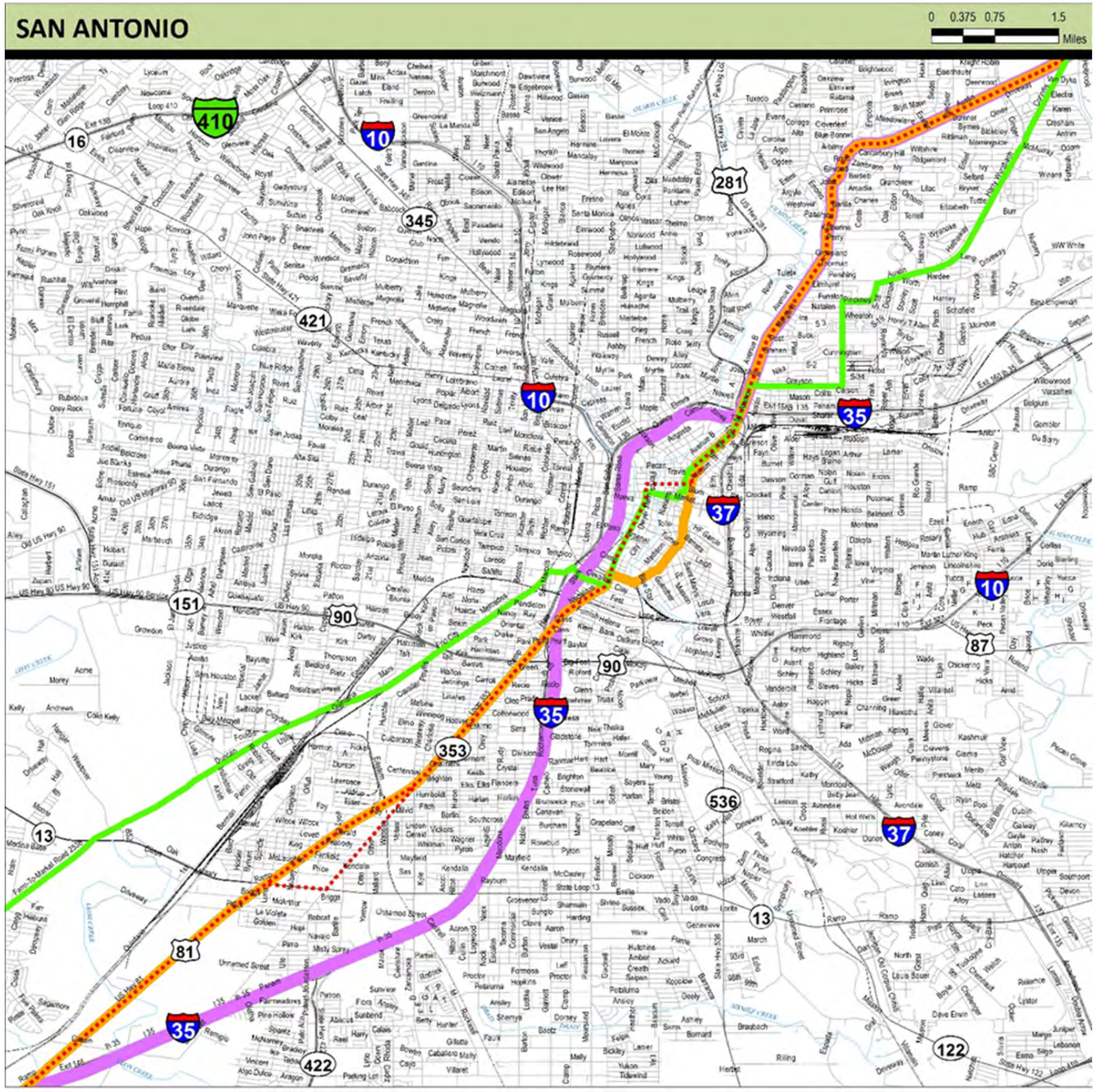

Figure 137. Map showing the Meridian Highway and its successors through San Antonio over time.

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[269] Renee Benn, *Report for Historical Studies: Austin to San Antonio Post Road, 1915*, Texas Department of Transportation, Austin, Texas, 2015, pp. 3-4.

[270] "May Light Portion of Meridian Road," *San Antonio Light* [San Antonio], 23 February 1916: 6.

[271] Ibid.

[272] "1916-1941 Era," Kelly Heritage, http://www.kellyheritage.org/1916-1941era.asp (accessed May 22, 2015).

[273] TxDOT control section job (CSJ) logs show the construction of the Meridian Highway through Alamo Heights in 1934.

[274] "Rail Men to Hear S.A. Traffic Plans," *San Antonio Light* [San Antonio], 28 January 1945: 13.

[275] "Returned Service Men Can Vote on Bond Issues Without Poll Tax Receipt," *San Antonio Express* [San Antonio], 13 September 1945: 9.

[276] "Low Cost to Individual Owner Emphasized in Tax Analysis," *San Antonio Express* [San Antonio], 19 September 1945: 11.

[277] "City Bond Election Contest Notice is Served on Mayor Mauermann," *San Antonio Express* [San Antonio], November 2, 1945: 17.

[278] "Bond Compromise Offered to Mayor," *San Antonio Express* [San Antonio], 29 November 1945: 13; "Tiner Becomes President of Planning Board," *San Antonio Express* [San Antonio], 4 December 1945: 19.

[279] "'Displaced' Set Up New Colony," *San Antonio Light*, 12 June 1947: 21.

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II.5. LAREDO

Laredo Largely Latin

"Laredo, symbolic of the Aztec, and overflowing with richest promise of all that is desirable—we are fain to linger long in thy midst. Laredo, on the banks of the murky and fearsome Rio Grande—so we go down to the middle of the bridge and view the "marker" that means that it is the boundary line between the States and Mexico—the line that divides the Stars and Stripes from the soil over which floats the red-green-white on which is emblazoned the snake, the eagle and the cactus. Probably we will cross over to Nueva Laredo; but, so far as Mexican ways go, it is utterly useless to take a step further; for when you have seen Laredo you have seen Mexico, combined with all the pep and vim and go of the American. Semi-tropical as it is, you find oranges, grape fruit, and all that you could ask for, even to natural gas and oil; and this coupled with the fact that street cars and electric lights have been added, makes the fact very apparent that one of the long stops will be at Laredo."

G. A. MacNaughton, *The Meridian Road in Texas*, 1916

Laredo is particularly important to the Meridian Highway because it marks the southern terminus of the highway in Texas as well as the point of entry on the route from Mexico. As such, it was critical to the promotion of the highway as an international thoroughfare and was featured prominently in early marketing literature. As originally conceived and promoted, the Meridian Highway entered Laredo from the north where it extended through several small communities such as Cactus, Webb, and Cotulla. The highway encouraged travelers to continue into Mexico by way of the International Foot Bridge, which crossed the Rio Grande from Convent Avenue. Following the establishment of the Texas Highway Department in 1917, the Meridian Highway was designated as SH 2 within the newly organized state highway system. In 1926, the route was integrated into the federal highway system and included another highway overlay designation as US 81. Within the private sector, proponents of the Meridian Highway also associated it with the Pan-American Highway, which initially extended to Mexico City but later stretched as far south as Argentina, making it one of the longest highways in the world. Within this highway, Laredo was a key location and was known as a "gateway between Texas and Mexico."[280]

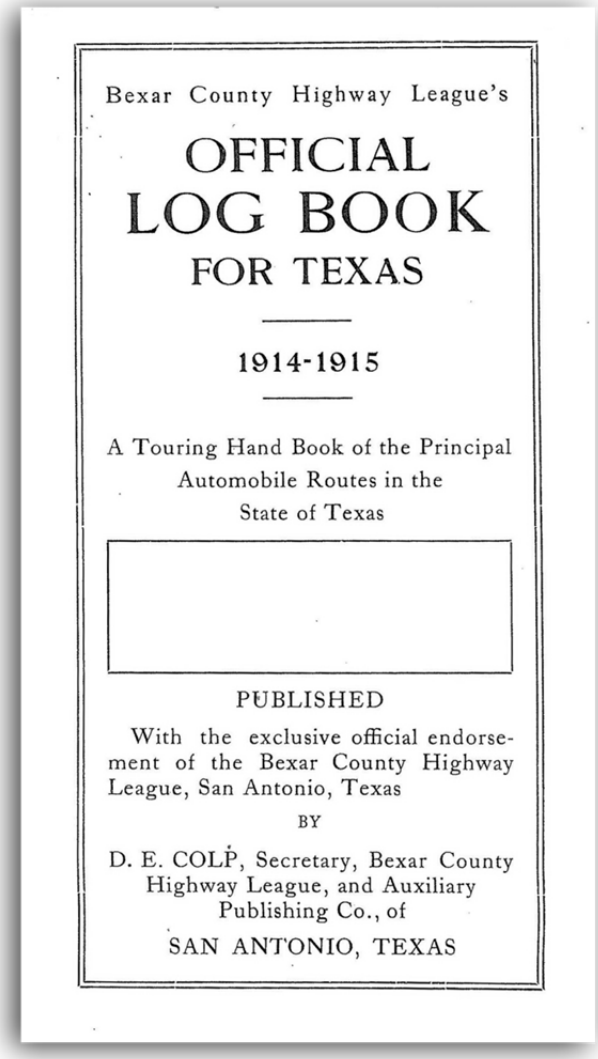
Well before named highways, such as the Meridian Highway, made their mark on the city, Laredo was an important transportation corridor between the United States and Mexico. Tomás Sánchez de la Barrera y Garza founded Laredo in 1775 to discourage French settlement into Spanish territories.[281] After a period of political unrest, Laredo officially became part of Texas and the United States in 1846; two years later the city became the seat of Webb County. The Rio Grande was established as the international boundary between the United States and Mexico,

and effectively separated a portion of the city from the U.S. side; the separated portion became Nuevo Laredo.

Although established in the mid-eighteenth century with the Rio Grande making the city a major trade and commercial center, Laredo's modern era did not begin until 1881, when the Texas Mexican Railroad laid tracks from Corpus Christi, and the I&GN Railroad extended service from San Antonio. The following year, the Rio Grande and Pecos Railway was constructed north of Laredo along the river. These rail lines made Laredo the only Texas border town to have a permanent rail connection along the lower Rio Grande until the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railway reached Brownsville in 1904. Of the railroads that extended to Laredo, the I&GN Railroad played an important role in the establishment of the earliest automobile route, especially for the Meridian Highway. It provided the most direct route between San Antonio and Laredo, and as roads evolved in the early 1900s, the path of the Meridian Highway closely followed an existing railroad (in this case, the I&GN), which typified trends elsewhere on the Meridian and other auto trails of the era.

The Bexar County Highway League published one of the earliest travel guides that described the Meridian Road through Laredo (see *Figure 138*, to follow). The guide listed Jarvis Plaza (incorrectly spelled as "Parvis" Plaza) and the Customs House on Matamoros Street as the starting point and directed motorists to turn right (north) onto Santa Maria Avenue. The guidebook identified this route as the Meridian Road, and it continued northward to San Antonio. The log book mentioned the "brick church on left" at the intersection of Matamoros Street and Santa Maria Avenue.[282] However, it did not note the Bender Hotel, which was built in 1913 and was regarded by some as "Laredo's finest hotel" (see *Figure 139*, to follow).

Another early travel guide of the era was *The Meridian Road in Texas*. Published in 1916 by the Texas Division of the International Road Association, this booklet differed from the other auto logs described earlier because it was a map-based guide that depicted the entire route of the Meridian Road including the path as it entered and extended through Laredo (see *Figure 140*, to follow). The guide shows a meandering route just north of Laredo as motorists had to cross over the I&GN Railroad at multiple locations. Within the city limits of Laredo, the route followed a stairstep-like fashion before terminating at the "Hotel Laredo." The 1916 Sanborn map (see *Figure 141*, to follow) includes a listing of major businesses and while it notes several hotels, including the Bender Hotel, it does not include anything under the name "Hotel Laredo." However, the overall configuration of the Meridian Road as shown in the guide matches the route described in other travel guides, and the feature identified as "Hotel Laredo" may actually be the Bender Hotel. One other item of note about these travel guides is that



Bexar County Highway League's

OFFICIAL
LOG BOOK
FOR TEXAS

1914-1915

A Touring Hand Book of the Principal Automobile Routes in the State of Texas

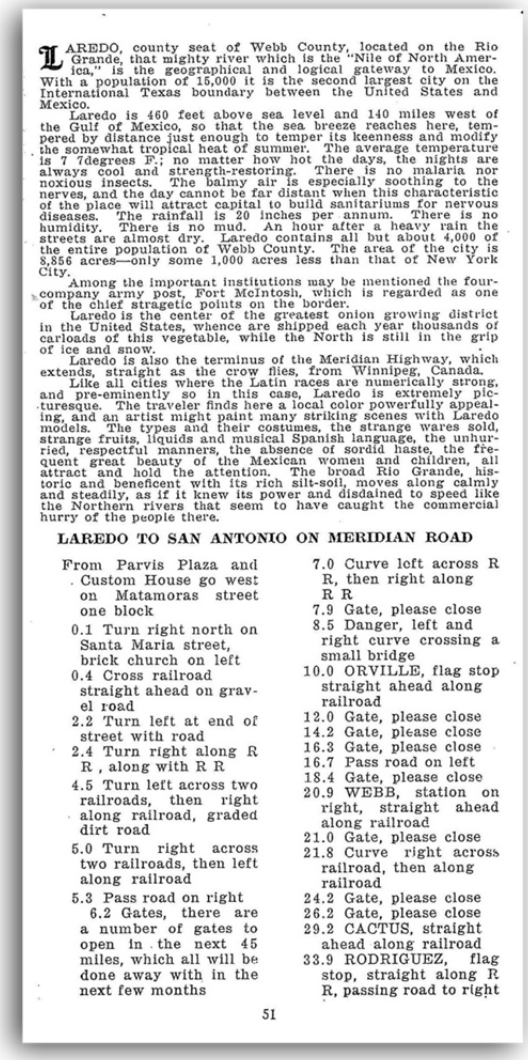
PUBLISHED

With the exclusive official endorsement of the Bexar County Highway League, San Antonio, Texas

BY

D. E. COLP, Secretary, Bexar County Highway League, and Auxiliary Publishing Co., of

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS



LAREDO, county seat of Webb County, located on the Rio Grande, that mighty river which is the "Nile of North America," is the geographical and logical gateway to Mexico. With a population of 15,000 it is the second largest city on the International Texas boundary between the United States and Mexico.

Laredo is 460 feet above sea level and 140 miles west of the Gulf of Mexico, so that the sea breeze reaches here, tempered by distance just enough to temper its keenness and modify the somewhat tropical heat of summer. The average temperature is 7 7degrees F.; no matter how hot the days, the nights are always cool and strength-restoring. There is no malaria nor noxious insects. The balmy air is especially soothing to the nerves, and the day cannot be far distant when this characteristic of the place will attract capital to build sanitariums for nervous diseases. The rainfall is 20 inches per annum. There is no humidity. There is no mud. An hour after a heavy rain the streets are almost dry. Laredo contains all but about 4,000 of the entire population of Webb County. The area of the city is 8,856 acres—only some 1,000 acres less than that of New York City.

Among the important institutions may be mentioned the four-company army post, Fort McIntosh, which is regarded as one of the chief stragetic points on the border.

Laredo is the center of the greatest onion growing district in the United States, whence are shipped each year thousands of carloads of this vegetable, while the North is still in the grip of ice and snow.

Laredo is also the terminus of the Meridian Highway, which extends, straight as the crow flies, from Winnipeg, Canada.

Like all cities where the Latin races are numerically strong, and pre-eminently so in this case, Laredo is extremely picturesque. The traveler finds here a local color powerfully appealing, and an artist might paint many striking scenes with Laredo models. The types and their costumes, the strange wares sold, strange fruits, liquids and musical Spanish language, the unhurried, respectful manners, the absence of sordid haste, the frequent great beauty of the Mexican women and children, all attract and hold the attention. The broad Rio Grande, historic and beneficent with its rich silt-soil, moves along calmly and steadily, as if it knew its power and disdained to speed like the Northern rivers that seem to have caught the commercial hurry of the people there.

LAREDO TO SAN ANTONIO ON MERIDIAN ROAD

From Parvis Plaza and Custom House go west on Matamoras street one block
0.1 Turn right north on Santa Maria street, brick church on left
0.4 Cross railroad straight ahead on gravel road
2.2 Turn left at end of street with road
2.4 Turn right along R R , along with R R
4.5 Turn left across two railroads, then right along railroad, graded dirt road
5.0 Turn right across two railroads, then left along railroad
5.3 Pass road on right
6.2 Gates, there are a number of gates to open in the next 45 miles, which all will be done away with in the next few months
7.0 Curve left across R R, then right along R R
7.9 Gate, please close
8.5 Danger, left and right curve crossing a small bridge
10.0 ORVILLE, flag stop straight ahead along railroad
12.0 Gate, please close
14.2 Gate, please close
16.3 Gate, please close
16.7 Pass road on left
18.4 Gate, please close
20.9 WEBB, station on right, straight ahead along railroad
21.0 Gate, please close
21.8 Curve right across railroad, then along railroad
24.2 Gate, please close
26.2 Gate, please close
29.2 CACTUS, straight ahead along railroad
33.9 RODRIGUEZ, flag stop, straight along R R, passing road to right

51

Figure 138. Excerpts from the Official Log Book for Texas, published by the Bexar County Highway League of San Antonio, 1914–1915. This travel guide is one of a series published in Texas during the early years of the automobile era. Narratives in the booklet describe various routes for auto enthusiasts, including a trip from Laredo to San Antonio on the Meridian Road. The route, which notes odometer readings and important landmarks, underscores how closely the route followed the railroad. It also informs motorists of gates that impeded travel but politely asked travelers to "please close" the gates after passing through. Source: Daughters of the Texas Republic Library, San Antonio, Texas.

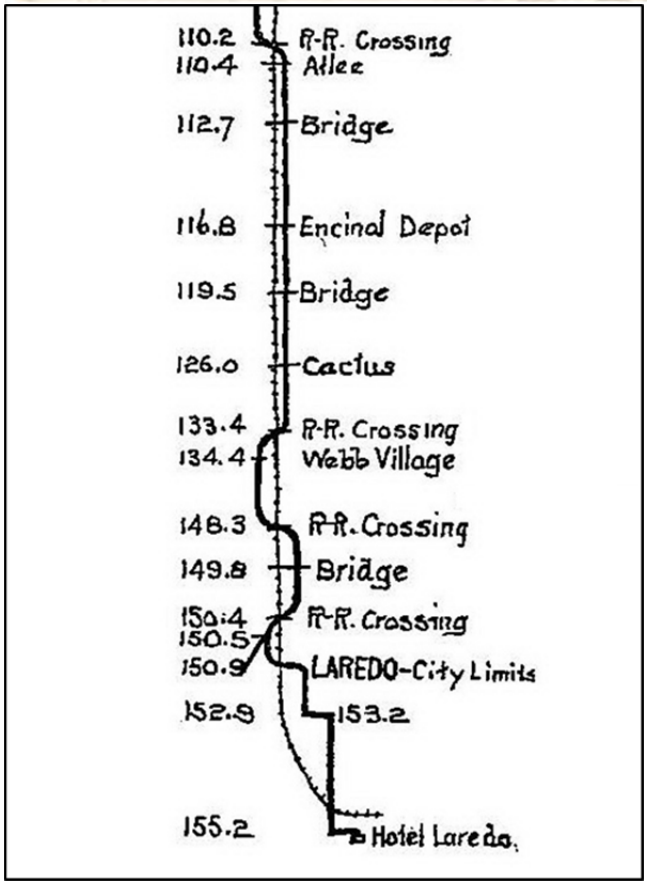


Figure 139. (Above) Bender Hotel, Laredo, 1925–1926. This postcard shows the three-story Bender Hotel at the corner of Matamoros Street and Santa Maria Avenue. Overlooking nearby Jarvis Park, it occupied a prominent location in downtown Laredo and was an early destination of motorists traveling through Laredo. It was something of an anomaly at the time because most of the city's other hotels were concentrated near the passenger depot of the I&GN depot, six blocks to the west on Santa Isabell between Hidalgo and Matamoros streets. Thus, the Bender Hotel and nearby Hamilton Hotel indicated an emerging trend that reflected the growing influence of automobile travel. Source: The Portal to Texas History [original on file at Laredo Public Library, Laredo, Texas].

Figure 140. (Left) Detail of The Meridian Road in Texas, 1916. This is a detail of the route as the highway reached its southern terminus in Laredo. The map shows how the highway closely followed the I&GN Railroad. As it entered Laredo, the Meridian Road extended along Santa Maria Avenue and ended at a hotel on Jarvis Plaza. Source: Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

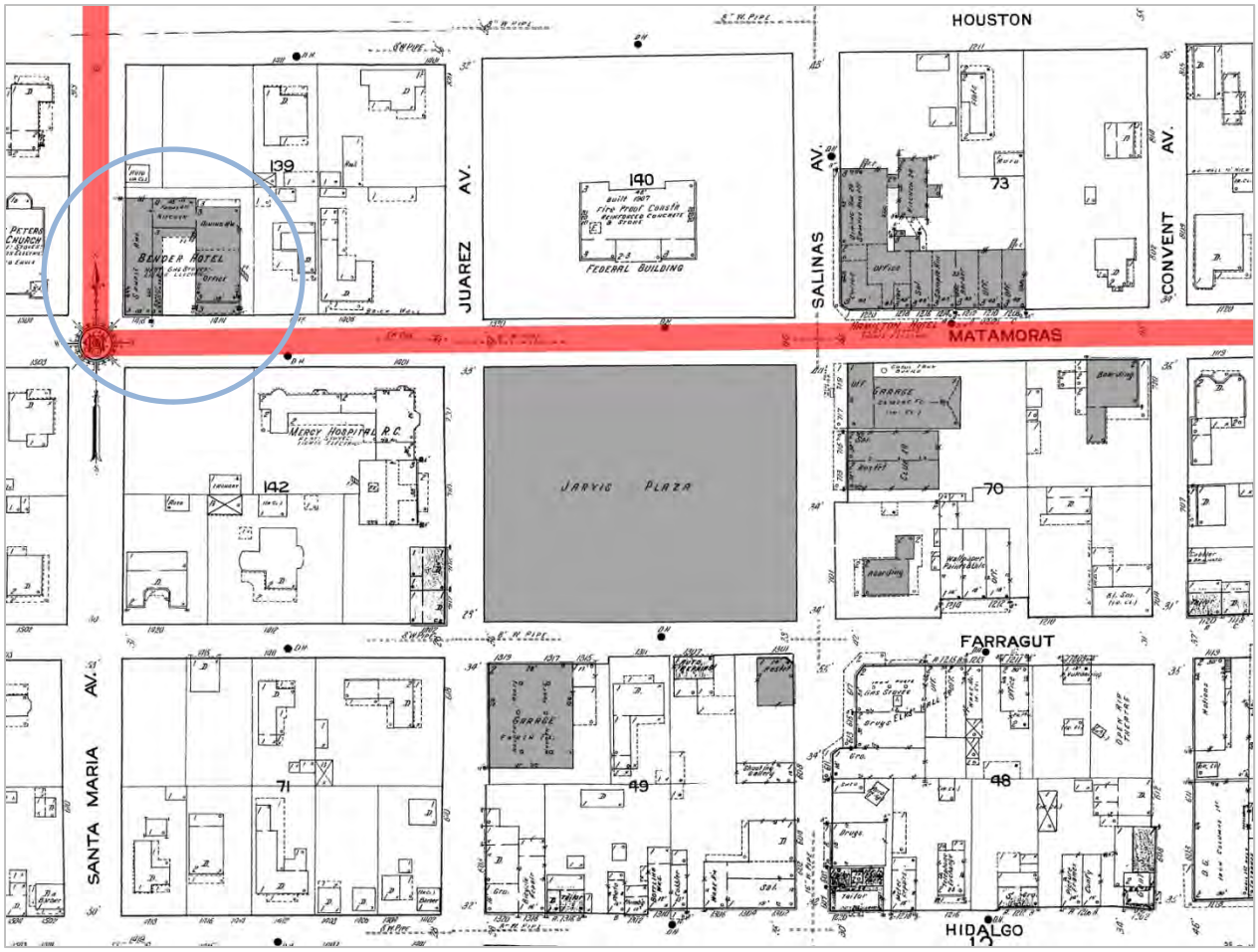


Figure 141. Detail, Sheets 8 and 9, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Laredo, 1916, showing the path of the Meridian Highway in red. This composite map shows Jarvis Plaza and a number of auto- and tourist-related businesses fronting onto this open space in downtown Laredo (shaded in gray). The Bender Hotel is noted at the northwest corner of Juarez and Matamoras avenues (circled in blue). Source: Perry-Castañeda Library, The University of Texas at Austin.

the route always ends in Laredo; none show the highway continuing on to Mexico. As the road developed over time, however, the highway continued along Matamoros and turned south onto Convent Avenue, which extended to the International Bridge, a toll facility that linked Laredo and Nuevo Laredo (see *Figure 142* on the following page).

Besides including a list of businesses, industrial, and institutional facilities, Sanborn maps of 1916 provide a glimpse of how the Meridian Highway was beginning to affect land-use and development patterns. However, its impact was not as dramatic as other communities. The most noticeable pattern was the development of a node of businesses that emerged near Jarvis Plaza that catered to the growing number of motorists visiting the city (see *Figure 143*, to follow). Most of Laredo's older, more established hotels and travel-related businesses were concentrated near the I&GN passenger depot, six blocks west of Jarvis Plaza. However, the Bender and Hamilton hotels, as well as multiple garages, auto repair shops, and restaurants marked a new yet relatively modest-sized trend in Laredo's business climate. Over time, this development trend became more pronounced and assumed greater significance as railroad passenger travel diminished and as the automobile became an increasingly popular choice of transportation.

Figure 142. (Right) International Toll Bridge. This bridge served as the primary link between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo for much of the historic period of the Meridian Highway. Source: The Portal to Texas History [original on file with the Laredo Public Library, Laredo, Texas].

Figure 143. (Above) Jarvis Plaza and Hotel Hamilton, Laredo (date unknown). Jarvis Plaza was featured prominently in various publications geared to traveling motorists. Located near the downtown area, the plaza had well-maintained landscaping that would have been welcomed by weary tourists confined to the automobiles during extended periods of travel. Several hotels, including the Hotel Hamilton featured in this postcard, operated adjacent to or nearby Jarvis Park. Source: Laredo Public Library, Laredo, Texas.

Jarvis Plaza remains a popular downtown landmark in Laredo, and while commerce, traffic, and government buildings surround the plaza, the

landscaped park continues to provide a respite to pedestrians, tourists, and local workers amid the bustling, urban environment (see *Figure 144* below).

Figure 144. Current view of Jarvis Plaza. Mature trees, a green lawn, and park benches provide a peaceful place for those working in or traveling through downtown Laredo. The plaza remains a prominent landmark along the Meridian Highway. Photo by HHM.

Yet another tourist guide that highlighted the Meridian Highway and its path through Laredo was the 1924 *Automobile Red Book*.[283] According to this guide, Laredo contained a number of auto-related amenities and local tourist attractions, such as commercial shops on Flores Street, selected residences, Jarvis Plaza, Mercy Hospital, Laredo High School, and the International Bridge crossing the Rio Grande from Convent Avenue (see *Figure 145*, to follow). It also noted that "Laredo's modern tourist camp is located on the corner of Santa Maria Avenue and Park Street as travelers enter from the north over the Meridian Highway."[284]

By that time, the Texas Highway Department had designated the Meridian as SH 2 and identified Laredo as its southern terminus. However, civic and business leaders in Laredo continued their efforts to extol the benefits of the Meridian Highway as a vital and increasingly significant link to Mexico and other countries to the south. In 1925, the first Pan-American Highway Congress met in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and promoted a more cooperative, deliberate, and coordinated approach to highway construction. This trend gained support, and the Meridian Highway and Laredo were key elements of the growing Pan-American Highway movement.

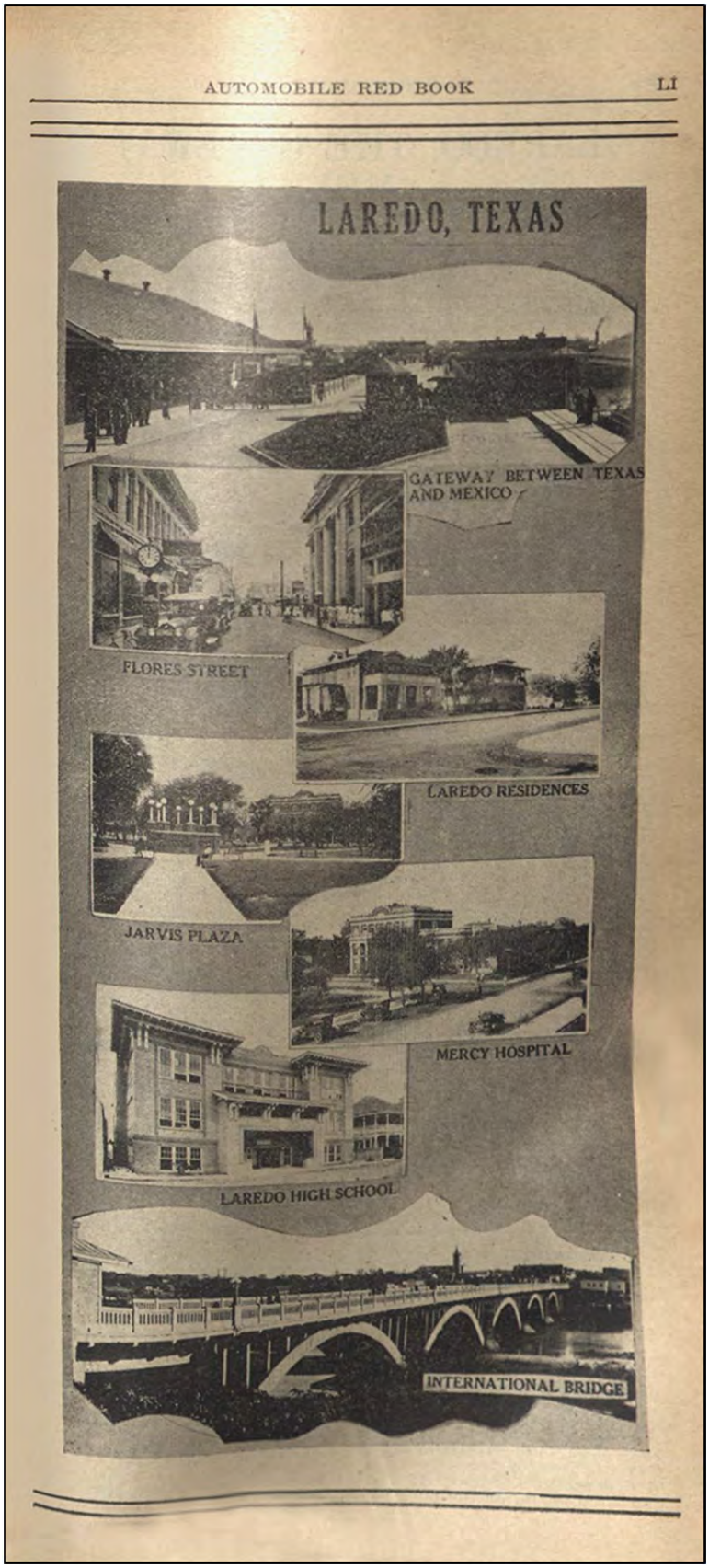


Figure 145. Selection from the 1924 edition of the Automobile Red Book. This travel guide included maps, photos, and other information for motorists. Source: Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

Subsequent editions of Sanborn fire insurance maps documented the growing popularity of the automobile and its influence on the city's physical character, particularly along the Meridian Highway. By 1925, Sanborn maps showed a shift in land-use patterns along Santa Maria Avenue, the primary segment of the Meridian Highway in Laredo, and an increase in the number of auto-related businesses. While domestic buildings continued to line most property fronting onto the thoroughfare, a degree of commercialism had begun. Besides having several grocery stores, Santa Maria Avenue contained a number of auto repair stores, filling stations, automobile garages, and two rooming houses. This trend typified property fronting onto highways in similarly sized cities along the Meridian Highway and other auto trails at the time. The 1925 Sanborn maps of Laredo also show one- and two-story garages near the Bender, Hamilton and new Penna hotels in the densely developed area near Jarvis Park (see *Figure 146*, to follow).

As had happened within other communities along the route, the Meridian Highway and its path through Laredo evolved over time. In the late 1920s, the Webb County Commissioners and Laredo city officials worked to acquire sufficient right-of-way to widen and pave San Bernardo Avenue and extend it to what locals referred to as the "San Antonio Highway."[285] These routes simultaneously bore the burden of north–south traffic, but travelers began to gravitate toward San Bernardo Avenue. As the proprietor of a Gulf gas station at the corner of San Bernardo noted, "many tourists are coming to Laredo these days over the San Bernardo highway. Most of these tourists replenish their gasoline, oil and water before proceeding into Mexico."[286] Businesses on both thoroughfares competed for the growing out-of-town tourist trade. In 1935, for example, a local newspaper reported the arrest of a man who was directing traffic onto San Bernardo Avenue; he was later released since he had not violated any law. The article also noted that someone else had placed a large sign on the north end of town that urged motorists to use Santa Maria Avenue.[287] By 1936, the Texas Highway Commission had officially designated San Bernardo as the route of US 81/SH 2, and subsequently constructed a tourist information bureau just north of the Laredo Highway.[288] This route consequently developed into a tourist transportation corridor and was lined with numerous gas stations, motor courts, and motels that transformed the physical character of the route as it extended through the city (see *Figures 147–149*, to follow).

Increased traffic and the many turns necessary to connect with the only vehicular bridge over the Rio Grande at Convent Avenue led to multiple proposals to construct a new structure. On July 18, 1938, a joint committee of representatives from the Texas Highway Department and the Department of Communications and Public Works of Mexico met in Laredo to discuss the project. The proposed free bridge would cross the Rio Grande between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo and would replace the

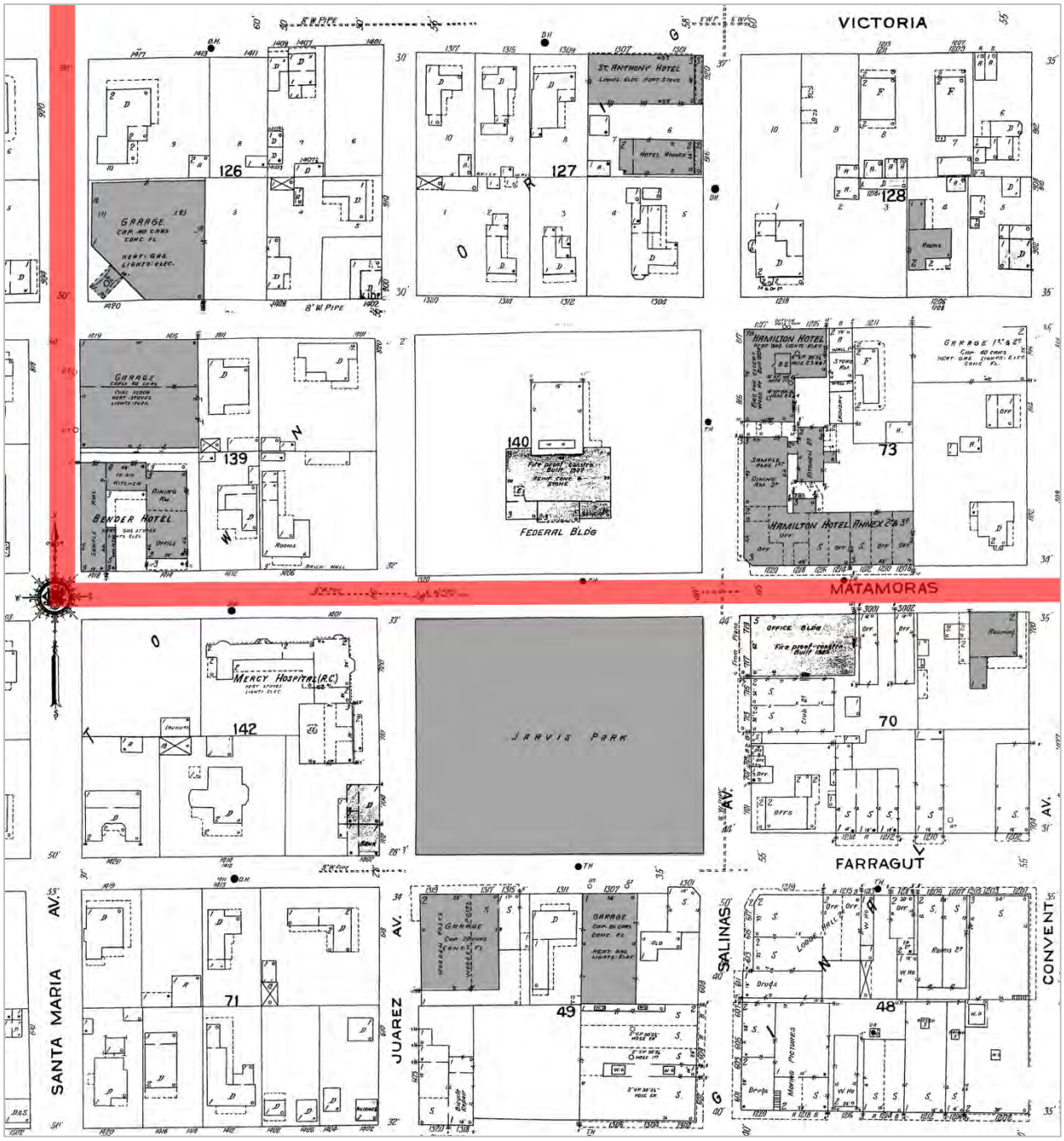


Figure 146. Composite of Sanborn Maps, 1925, showing the path of the Meridian Highway in red. This map depicts conditions surrounding Jarvis Plaza in 1925. Notable tourist-related features include the hotels and the automobile garages (shaded in gray). Source: Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

Figure 147. Postcard of Las Palmas Court, Laredo. This postcard is one of many that proprietors of tourist courts along San Bernardo Avenue generated to publicize their businesses from the late 1920s through the 1950s. During this period, San Bernardo Avenue became a major commercial corridor that offered a variety of services to meet the needs of motorists traveling to and through Laredo. Source: Laredo Public Library, Laredo, Texas.

Figure 148. Current view of a former Sinclair gas station located at 919 San Bernardo Avenue. Constructed ca. 1930, the Mission Revival gas station represents the many automobile-related businesses that emerged along San Bernardo Avenue in the 1930s, catering to US 81/SH 2 travelers. In this particular example, the building has been repurposed, the original doors and windows have been replaced and the garage bays have been enclosed; however, the tile roof, shape of the canopy and its Mission Revival style remain distinguishing features of the original form and function of the edifice.

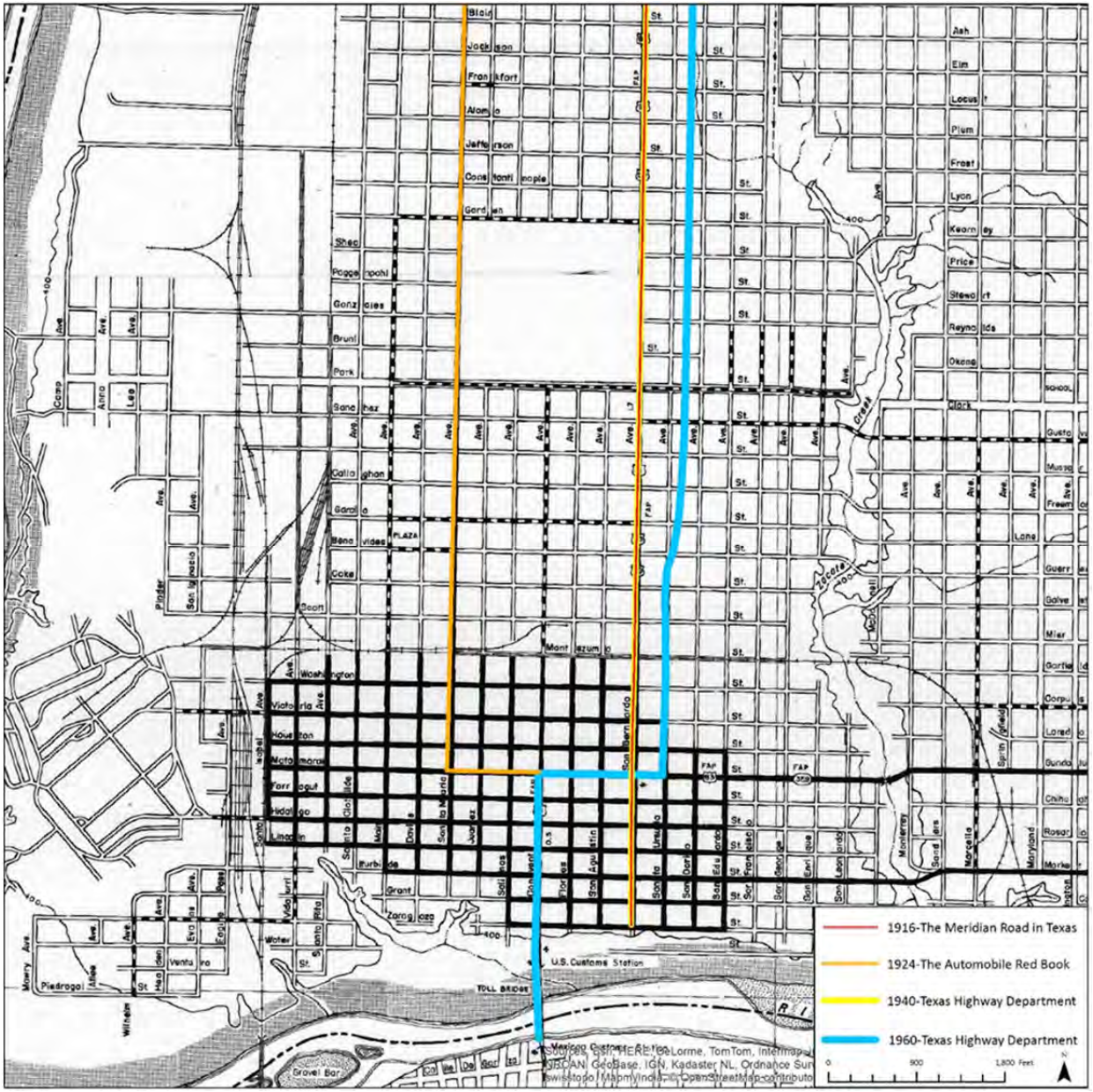
Figure 149. Postcard of the Siesta Motor Hotel, a ca. 1955 hotel located at 4109 San Bernardo Avenue. The Ranch style motel featured a swimming pool and restaurant and typified the numerous lodging establishments that once thrived along this segment of the Meridian Highway. Source: http://www.playle.com/browse.php?t=s&s=1198.

existing toll bridge that extended south over the Rio Grande from Convent Avenue. This bridge would be located several blocks to the east – midway between Santa Ursula Avenue and San Bernardo Avenue, according to a report submitted by L. R. Cardio of Mexico's Department of Communications and Public Works, and John E. Blair, Division Engineer of the Texas Highway Department, in September 1936. The idea was to have the proposed bridge align with the revised route of SH 2 along San Bernardo Avenue, creating a more direct route for travelers.[289] This effort failed, and the International Toll Bridge at Convent Avenue remained the sole means of crossing into Mexico from Laredo.

Although Laredo remained a densely populated area, with heavy traffic and an active military reservation (Fort McIntosh) during the mobilization period preceding World War II, the city was not among those locations deemed to be a priority for the new interregional highway system introduced in the late 1930s. The route remained unchanged through and immediately after World War II, and property along San Bernardo continued to develop for the persevering tourist traffic extending to and through Laredo.

The new interstate highway systems of the mid- and late 1950s brought a substantial change to the highway network, as most of US 81 through Texas was upgraded as IH 35 (see *Figure 150,* to follow). The approval of the construction of IH 35 through Laredo in 1959 led to the third and

Figure 150. Detail of General Highway Map of Webb County, 1961. This maps shows that the Texas Highway Department had formally designated San Bernardo Avenue as the main northbound route to San Antonio. Santa Maria Avenue, which had originally served that role when the Meridian Highway was initially established in the 1910s, remains an important arterial within the local road network. US 83 also extended along San Bernardo Avenue, which contained a high concentration of gas stations, motor courts, and motels that catered to the growing number of tourists heading to Laredo and into Mexico. Source: Texas State Archives and Library Commission, Austin, Texas.



final alignment shift of the Meridian Highway approximately one block east of San Bernardo Avenue. Constructed as a divided four-lane highway beginning in 1961, the interstate was proposed to "come south from Del Mar Boulevard to a point just east of the Holiday Inn Motel, where it will swing east about 300 feet, putting it in line with the block between Santa Ursula and San Dario Avenues, which will be the route into Laredo."[290] The entire block between Santa Ursula and San Dario avenues was acquired for the construction of the interstate. This plan also included widening the north end of San Bernardo Avenue, which would become the southbound frontage road, from 20 feet to 68 feet. An interesting side note to the construction of the interstate is that approximately 97 percent of property owners kept their residences and moved them elsewhere, thus selling only the land to the state.[291] A 1965 USGS topographic map shows the completed construction of IH 35 terminating at Victoria Street (the current terminus of IH 35) and a detour along Victoria to Convent Avenue, at which point the traveler must head south to reach the international bridge (see *Figure 151*, to follow). A new, second bridge—the Juarez-Lincoln International Bridge—was constructed in 1976 on San Dario Avenue, immediately south of the interstate. To date, both bridges remain intact and in operation.

The Meridian Highway has had a lasting effect on land-use and development patterns in Laredo (see *Figure 152*, to follow). When originally established, the route entered Laredo from the north paralleling the I&GN railroad, along Santa Maria Avenue. It extended to Jarvis Plaza, before continuing to the International Bridge and into Nuevo Laredo. The downtown boasted several hotels catering to the growing number of automobile tourists who came to the city with the intent of traveling further south into Mexico. This influx of people fostered the development of new businesses, such as gas stations, motor courts, and garages that catered to the growing number of tourists who visited Laredo. These new businesses initially developed along Santa Maria Avenue, but a shift in the alignment led to San Bernardo Avenue's becoming the main corridor. By the 1930s and 1940s, the street contained a dense concentration of such businesses, many of which remain today. The subsequent construction of IH 35 just a few blocks to the east helped to maintain the commercial viability of many of the motor courts, motels and other tourist-related businesses on San Bernardo Avenue. Although newer businesses presently line IH 35, many of the historic tourist-related businesses still survive on nearby San Bernardo Avenue.

See *Figure 153* for a map showing the Meridian Highway and its successors through Laredo over time.

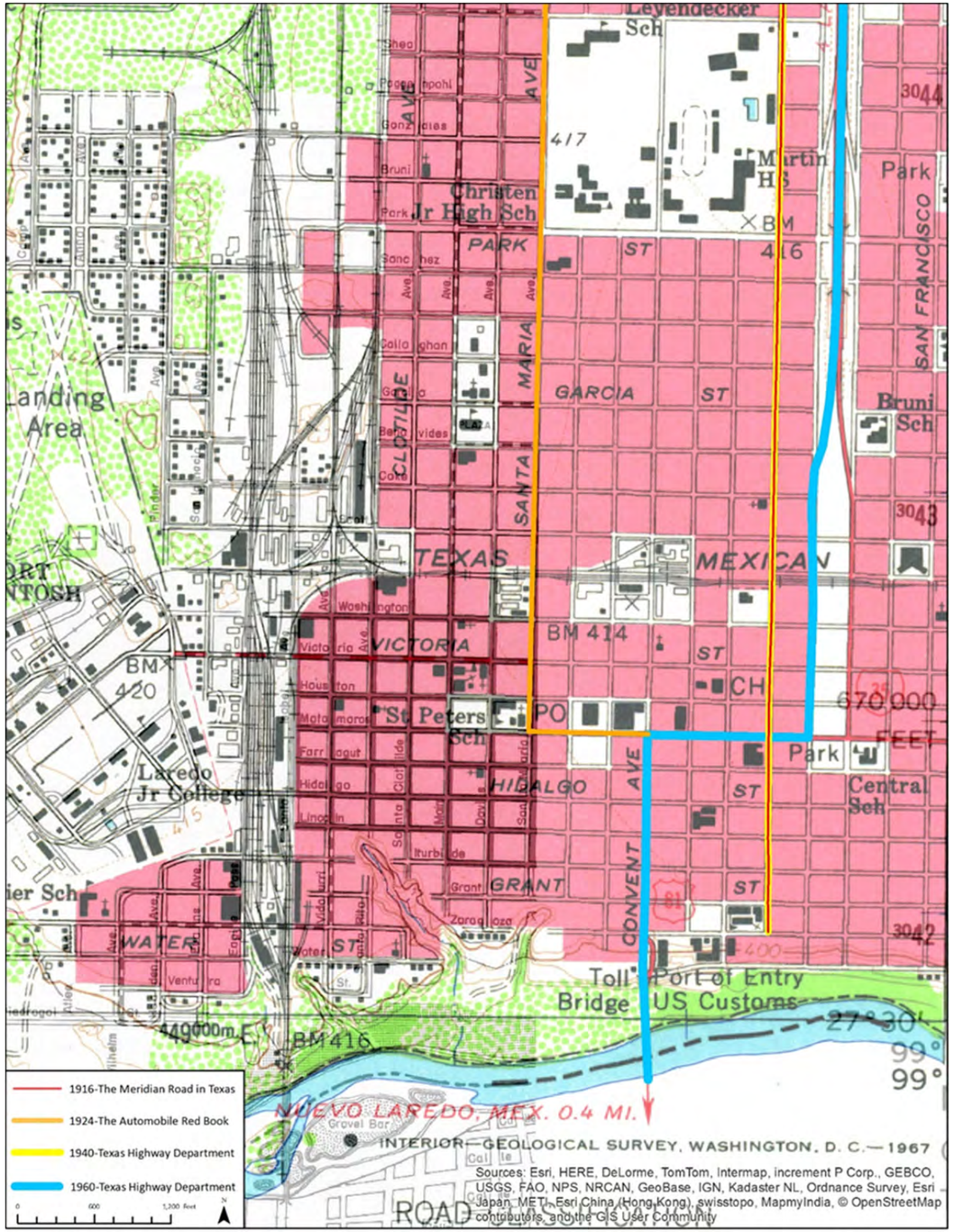


Figure 152. Detail of USGS topographic General Highway Map of Laredo West, Texas, 1965 and Laredo East, Texas, 1965.This composite shows the progress of IH 35 by 1965. The highway ended a few blocks north of the Rio Grande, which marked the border between the United States and Mexico. The highway was extended following the opening of the Juarez-Lincoln International Bridge in 1976. Source: USGS TopoView, http://ngmdb.usgs.gov/maps/TopoView/ viewer/#4/40.01/-100.06.

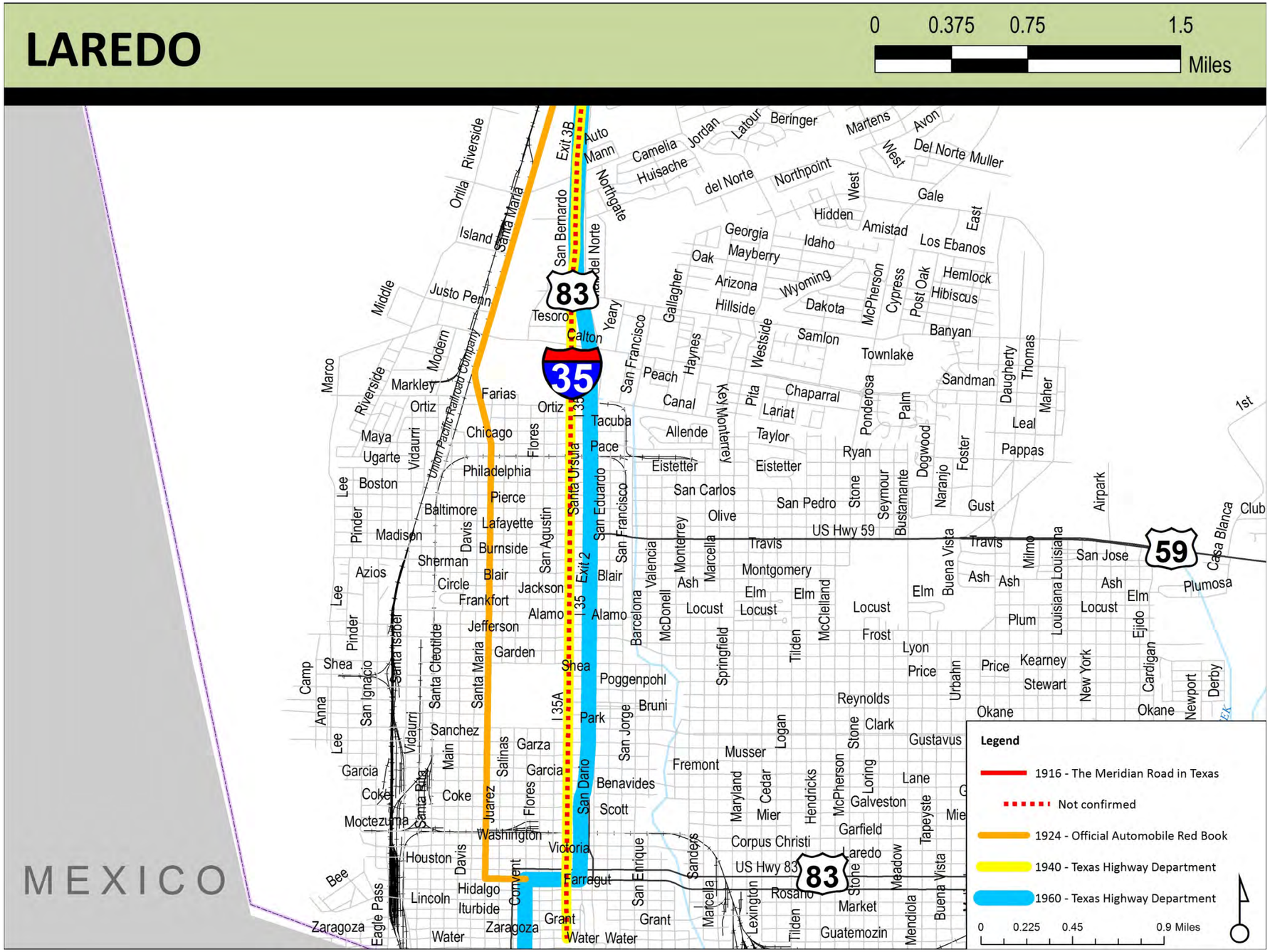


Figure 153. Map showing the Meridian Highway and its successors through Laredo over time.

[280] *Official Automobile Red Book*, Volume D (Temple: Automobile Red Book, Co., 1924), LI.

[281] Carlos E. Cuéllar, "LAREDO, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online*, available from http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hdl02 (accessed May 20, 2015).

[282] The 1916 Sanborn map indicates the building as St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church.

[283] This book also states that the southern branch of the Bankhead Highway terminates in Laredo.

[284] According to the *Red Book*, the Meridian Highway follows the same path along Santa Maria Avenue as the 1915 *Texas Goodrich Route Book of 1915*. *Official Automobile Red Book*, LII. Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

[285] "County and City Committee Secures Boulevard to Highway," *The Laredo Times*, June 13, 1929.

[286] "Mainly About People," *The Laredo Times*, June 30, 1932.

[287] "Merchants Vie For Tourist Route Into Business Sector." *The Laredo Times*, June 28, 1935.

[288] "Information Bureau Here to Be Continued," *The Laredo Times*, October 6, 1940.

[289] "Report of the Joint Committee from the Department of Communications and Public Works of the Republic of Mexico and the Texas State Highway Department, Regarding the Proposed International Free Bridge Across the Rio Grande between the Cities of Nuevo Laredo, Tamps., and Laredo, Texas," Box 2002/101-3, Folder Webb County International Bridge Across Rio Grande at Laredo, Hwy. No. 2, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

[290] "Local Firms Bid Lowest on New Highway 35 Job," *Laredo Times*, 19 July 1961: 1.

[291] "Highway 35 ROW Work Continuing," *Laredo Times,* November, 12 1961: 6.

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II.6. HOUSTON

They Call It Heavenly Houston

"Historic Houston not only sounds good, but is the truth; being the first civic effort of the Republic of Texas, by General Sam Houston and the Allen family after the battle of San Jacinto, when Texas licked the Mexicans in 1836. Owning to a disagreement the Harris family located Harrisburg and the Allens located Houston, and today it is said that Harrisburg is about the same size, and now a suburb of Houston. Read of the advantages of Houston and one would almost think the sun rose and set in Houston. Largest inland cotton shipping port; largest banking center in the Southwest; largest oil development; largest lumber business; largest industrial and manufacturing enterprises; and so on and so forth. Its hotel facilities are unsurpassed, and it claims the record in sky scrapers."

G. A. MacNaughton, *The Meridian Road in Texas*, 1916

The story of Houston and the Meridian Highway is a complicated one of ever-evolving highway routes and designations. As originally conceived and promoted in 1911, the Meridian Highway entered Houston by way of Waller, Cypress, and Fairbanks, then continued on to Galveston through Genoa, Webster, League City, Dickinson, and La Marque. The segment that extended through Houston was part of the Gulf Division of the Meridian Highway in Texas,[292] and it followed the Houston and Texas Central Railway (H&TC) northwest to Bryan. The Meridian Highway, including the Gulf Division, was part of the original SH 2, which the Texas Highway Commission designated in 1917 for the original state highway network. After the establishment of the federal highway numbering system in 1926, the Gulf Division lost its affiliation, and segments extending through Houston became part of other highways. The segment between Hempstead and Houston was designated as SH 6 while the stretch between Houston and Galveston became part of US 75. These designations effectively severed the association of the Gulf Division route from the Meridian Highway. In 1939, the Hempstead–Houston Road was re-designated as US 290, and SH 6 was re-routed from Hempstead to Alvin and Sugarland but reconnected with US 75 at Virginia Point, just north of the Galveston causeway.

At the time of the establishment of the Meridian Highway in 1911, Houston was a growing and vibrant city with a robust economy that had surpassed Galveston as a harbor and shipping port. The discovery of oil in nearby salt domes similar to the famous one at Spindletop oil field in Beaumont led to the construction of oil refineries along the Houston Ship Channel and the rise of giant oil companies that established operations in and around Houston.

Houston's origins date to 1836, when the Allen brothers settled the area and ran an advertisement in the *Telegraph and Texas Register* offering

lots for sale. Construction on the H&TC Railway began in 1853 and reached Millican by 1861, when the Civil War halted its construction. Work resumed after the war, and the railroad extended its line further north. The railroad was particularly important for the Meridian Highway because it became the corridor used to develop what came to be called the Gulf Division of the Meridian Highway. The railroad tapped rich agricultural lands in Central Texas and was used to ship agricultural goods to port facilities on the Gulf of Mexico. Galveston was the primary designation but several ambitious Houstonians sought to compete with Galveston. In 1876, a 12-foot-deep waterway was constructed on Buffalo Bayou to Clinton, a port town below Houston, and provided new shipping facilities. The waterway was expanded over time and in 1914, the Houston Ship Channel opened. With port facilities in Houston, the H&TC Railway and other railroads extended into Houston, and land along the ship channel developed into one of the nation's largest and most significant industrial zones. With the Meridian Highway and other roadways emanating out of or extending through Houston (see *Figure 154*, to follow), trucking and wholesale distribution expanded in the intervening years after the opening of the ship channel.

Besides the Meridian Highway, other highways converged in downtown Houston, and included the Old Spanish Trail and Exall (also X-all or Xall) Highway, Gulf-to-Colorado Highway, and the Lone Star Trail (see *Figure 155*, to follow). The Old Spanish Trail was among the most important because it was an early transcontinental highway that extended from St. Augustine, Florida, to San Diego, California. It was designated as SH 3, and later became US 90. It entered Texas at Orange and continued through Beaumont, Houston, San Antonio, Del Rio, Van Horn, and El Paso. The Exall Highway, later US 75 and eventually IH 45, was the primary highway connecting Dallas to Galveston (south of Dallas it merged with the Meridian Highway). Together, the highways worked in conjunction with the railroads to transport goods from the Houston Ship Channel to various parts of the state. While the railroads were able to transport larger items and greater quantities at a time, trucks utilizing the highway system were able to respond more easily to changing economic and market conditions. Therefore, the use of the highway system complemented the use of the railroad. As a rapidly growing city with a diversified economy and a broad industrial base, Houston became an important transportation hub and was a logical place for the Meridian Highway to extend. For the same reasons, the routing of the Meridian Highway through the city also had less of an impact on its physical character than it did on smaller, less-established cities with fewer transportation arteries.

One of the earliest sets of travel guides published to help motorists navigate through Houston was the Goodrich Texas Route Book of 1915. This guide included a trip to provide directions for travel between Houston and Waco. This route, which would more or less become the

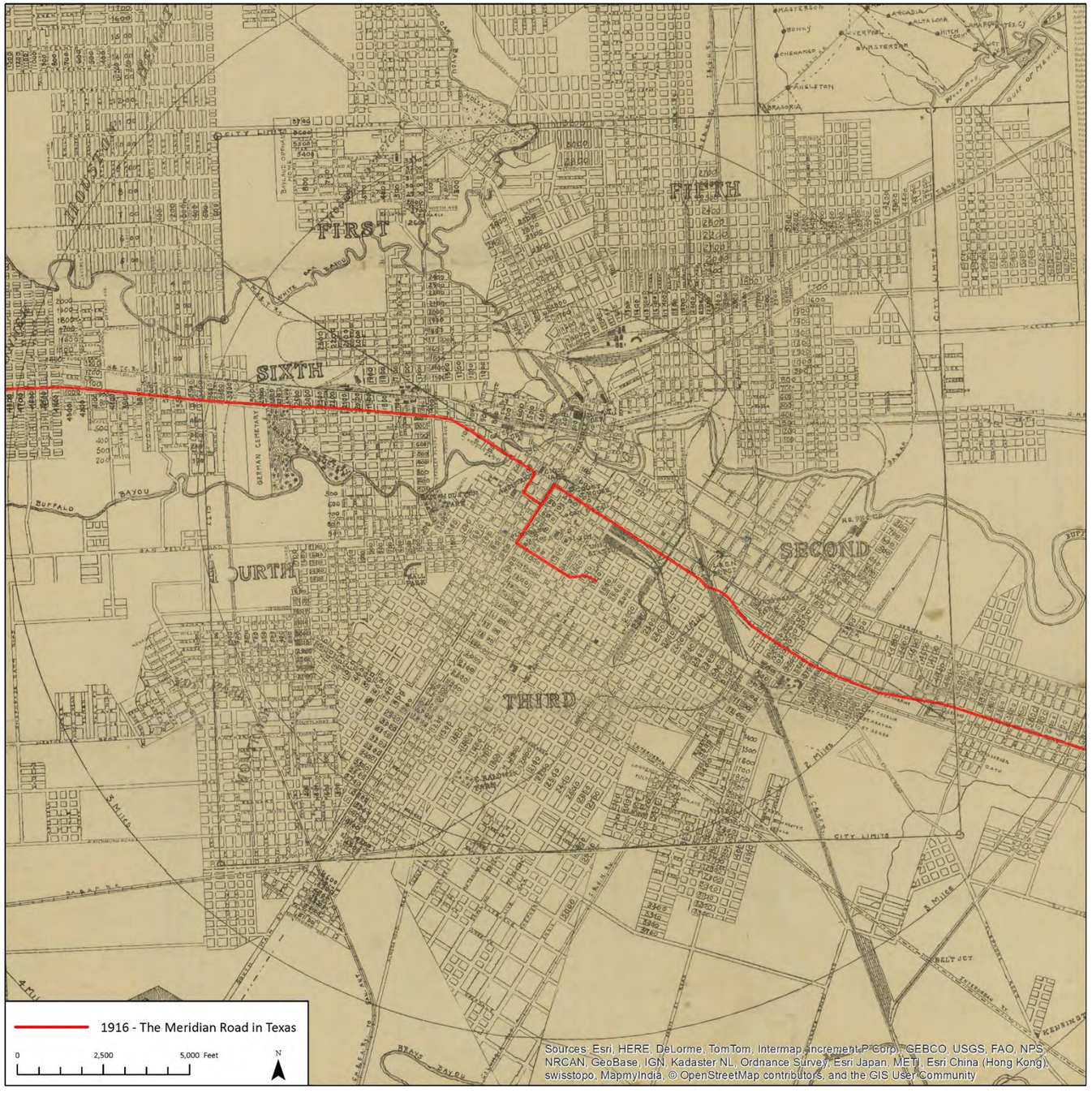
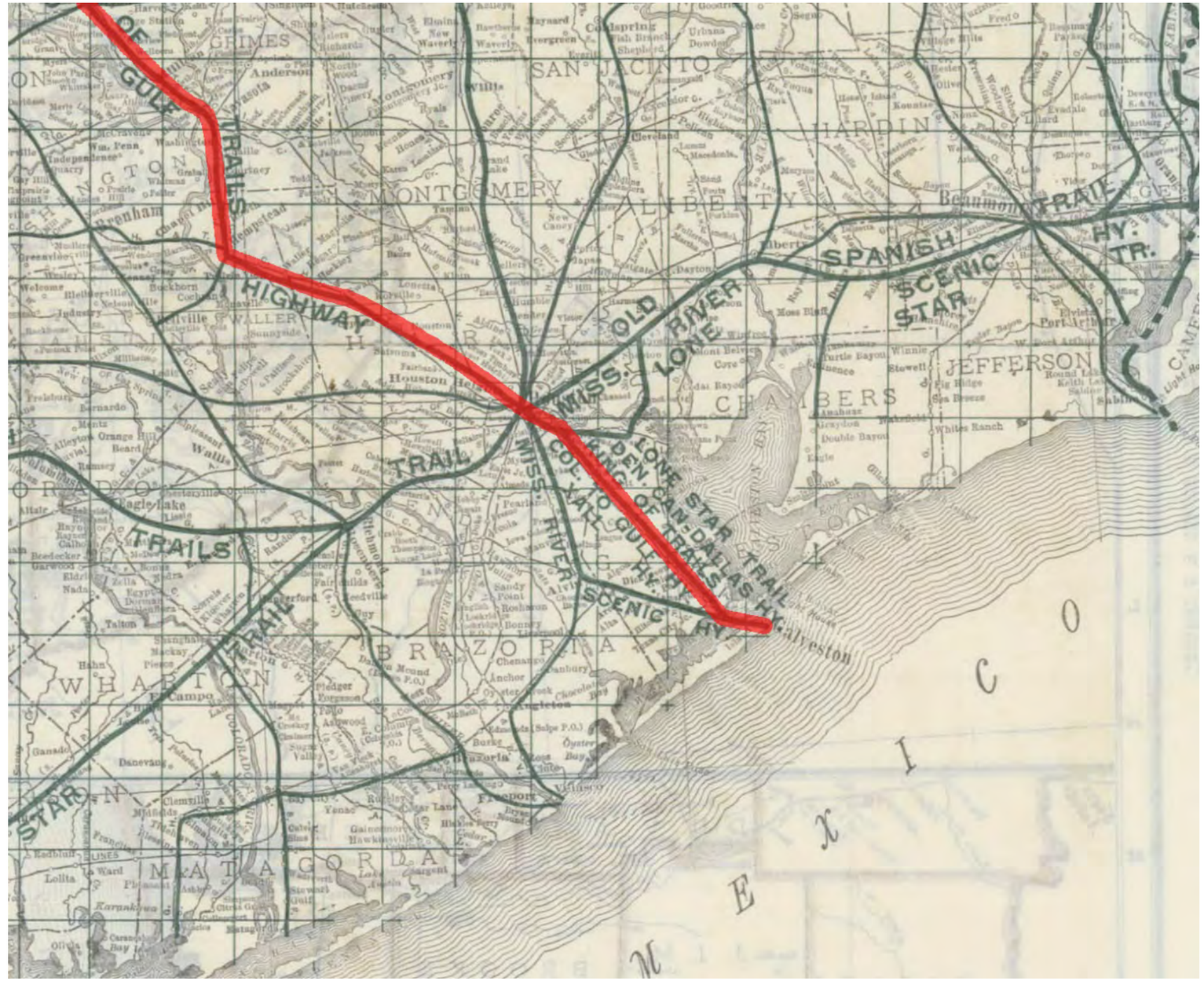


Figure 154. Houston Street Guide, J. M. Kelsen, 1913. This map depicts Houston's street network during the early years of the Meridian Road. This map shows streets that were part of the Meridian Road (noted in red) as it extended through Houston; however, the route is not identified by the name. The Meridian entered Houston from the west along Washington Avenue and turned south on Main Street. It continued east along Preston and Prairie avenues and Harrisburg Road. The map also shows how residential areas developed along railroad corridors, which also influenced the evolving highway network. Such a trend is particularly obvious on the city's east side in areas identified as Central Park and Magnolia Park. Source: Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

Figure 155. Detail of Highway Map of Texas, with the Meridian Highway in red. This map shows how Houston was an important crossroads within the early history and development of the state highway network. It also identifies the major auto trails that passed through Houston. Among those noted included the Meridian Highway, Old Spanish Trail, Colorado-to-Gulf Highway, King of Trails Highway, Exall Highway, Mississippi River Scenic Highway, and the Lone Star Trail. Many of these auto trails extended along the same path as they passed through Houston; however, they deviated from one another at other locations. Source: Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.



path of the Meridian Highway, started at the Goodrich Building (1114 Prairie Avenue) and extended west for two blocks, then traveled north on Main Street for 0.3 miles before turning west on Franklin Street (listed as a brick road), north on Louisiana Street, then west on Washington Street (now Washington Avenue). The guide directed motorists to continue along Washington Street out of Houston, paralleling the H&TC Railway (see *Figure 156* below). The travel guide also provided instructions for travel to Galveston. Beginning at the same start point, the Goodrich Building, a motorist traveled northeast on San Jacinto Street to the courthouse, then turned right on Preston Avenue (listed as a brick road) and followed the road out of the city.

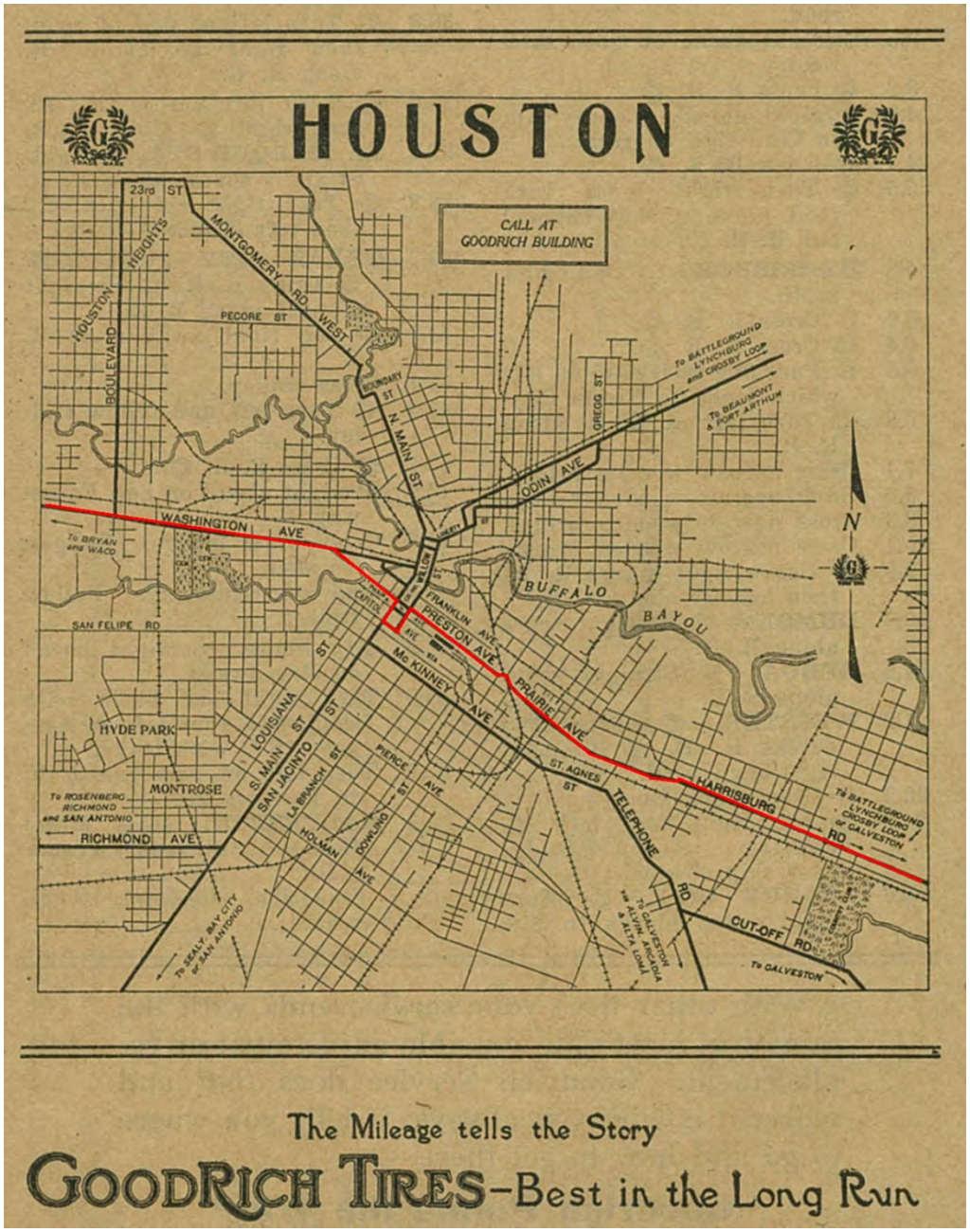


Figure 156. Houston Map, 1915. This illustration comes from a 1915 travel guide published by the B. F. Goodrich Tire Company. It shows early highway routes through the city including segments of the Meridian Highway (noted in red). Source: Martha Doty Freeman, personal collection, Austin, Texas.

The earliest map depiction of the Meridian Highway through Houston is found in *The Meridian Road in Texas* (see *Figure 157*, to follow). The route followed the H&TC into Houston and extended along Washington Avenue. The route extended through downtown to the Rice Hotel, arguably Houston's largest, most modern and best known hotel. In fact, the highway seemed to make a deliberate one-block side-step to extend to the front of the hotel (see *Figure 158*, to follow). Constructed in 1913, the Rice Hotel was a downtown Houston magnet. The hotel boasted the first air-conditioned public room in Houston and hosted many public events and notable guests through the years. From downtown, the Meridian Highway left the city on Harrisburg Boulevard, turned south on Broadway Street, and then followed the path of the Galveston, Henderson, and Houston Railroad along the Old Galveston Road to Galveston. Today, several downtown hotels, including the Rice Hotel, and a ca. 1920 gas station are among the few remaining auto-related properties from this early period of the Meridian Highway heading south out of Houston (see *Figure 159*, to follow).

As the state's third largest city by 1924 and a hub for transportation, Houston had 18 railroads, and multiple interstate highways traversed the city. Houston also was home to the Motor League of South Texas. Advertising itself in the 1924 *Automobile Red Book*, the Motor League had offices in the Hotel Bender, which was on the Meridian Highway at Main and Walker streets. Also known as "The Homey Hotel," the Hotel Bender contained 285 rooms and a café and catered to tourists and other travelers visiting Houston. Other nearby auto-related businesses noted in the Red Book included Hotel Cotton, one block off the Meridian Highway at Fannin and Rusk streets, as well as the Serv-U Shop and Garage.

Sanborn fire insurance maps from this period also show the impact of the Meridian Highway along the portions of the route through the city. The 1924 edition of the map includes a series of sheets (Volume 2) covering the area between downtown and Houston Heights. These maps depict conditions along Washington Avenue, the inbound route from Hempstead, as a thoroughfare with an eclectic mixed-use character with stores, residences, and a few light industrial complexes. The number of businesses catering to automobile owners and travelers was minimal when compared to similar urban areas, such as Broadway Street in San Antonio. Blocks near the former H&TC depot at Washington Avenue just east of the intersection with Preston Avenue contained several hotels, but the Sanborn maps show only a small number of gas stations, such as the one at Washington and Houston avenues (see *Figure 160*, to follow). Noticeably absent along the inbound route of Washington Avenue were any tourist camps, which were commonplace in the outlying areas of other communities on the Meridian Highway. For inbound travelers from the northwest, the downtown contained concentrations of auto-related resources and

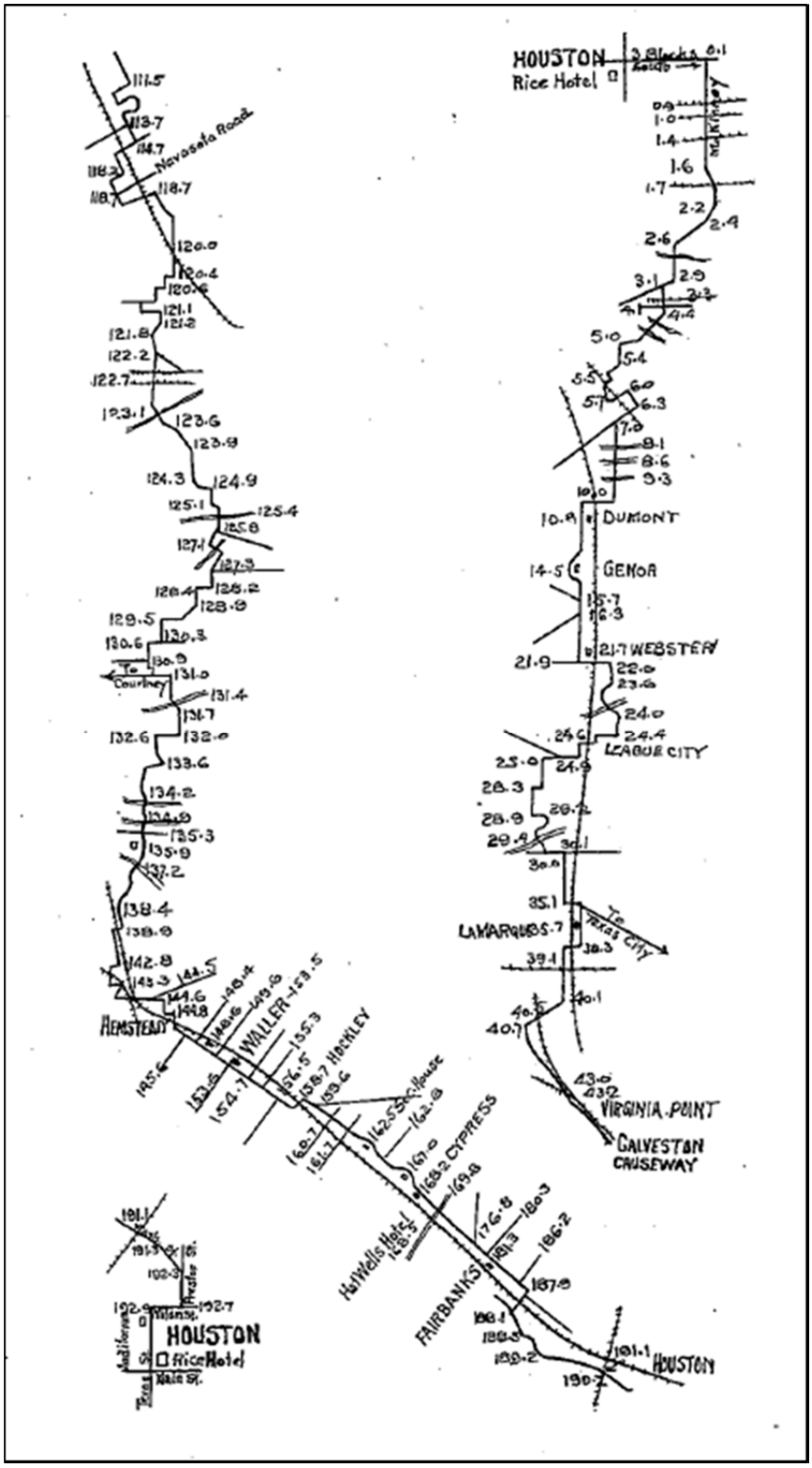


Figure 157. Detail from the 1916 guidebook, The Meridian Road in Texas. This map shows a portion of the Gulf Division of the Meridian Highway as it extended through Houston on its way to Galveston. Note how the route extends to the Rice Hotel, which was a great source of pride among Houstonians at the time. Source: David Colp Collection, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

Figure 158. (Top left) Rice Hotel. The Rice Hotel has been an important physical, cultural, and architectural landmark since its opening. Early travel guides directed traffic to this well-known hotel, and these publications almost always included photographs and illustrations. Source: Boston Public Library.

Figure 159. (Below) The former Porter and Heinse Auto Filling Station on Harrisburg Avenue. This building is one of the oldest remaining gas stations along the Meridian Highway in Houston. Photo by HHM.

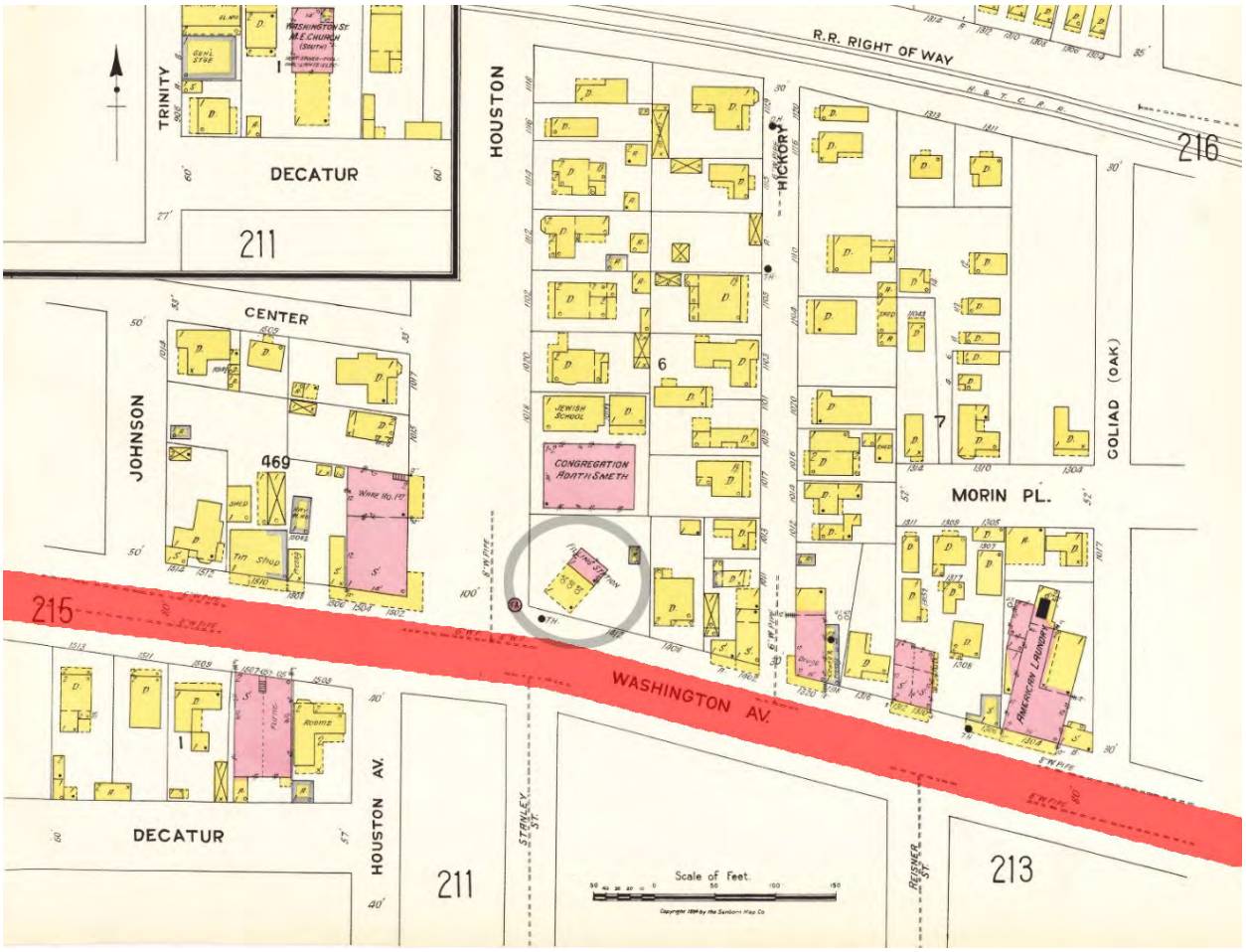


Figure 160. Detail, Sheet 215 Sanborn fire Insurance Maps of Houston, 1924. The "filling station" noted at the northwest corner of Washington and Houston avenues (circled in gray), was one of the few gas stations documented in the 1924 edition of the Sanborn Maps, which documented the near northeast side of Houston. Despite its location on the Gulf Division of the Meridian Highway (shown in red), Washington Avenue contained a relatively small number of auto- and tourist-related business at that time. Source: Perry-Castañeda Library, The University of Texas at Austin.

overnight options, such as the Preston Hotel. A notable surviving example is the Knapp Chevrolet dealership on Houston Avenue, just off Washington Avenue (see *Figure 161*, to follow). A similar pattern existed on the outbound route immediately east and southeast of the downtown area. However, the greater the distance from downtown, the density of auto-related businesses diminished and property fronting onto the road assumed a greater residential character.

During World War I, two important military facilities were located on the Meridian Highway within the vicinity of Houston: Camp Logan and Ellington Field. Both installations reflect the strategic military significance of the Meridian Highway, a quality that influenced the roadway's history and development. Camp Logan, an army training facility, largely included an area that lies within present-day Memorial Park. Camp Logan is best known as the site of the famous Houston Riot of 1917.[293] After the war, the land on which Camp Logan operated was

Figure 161. The Knapp Chevrolet dealership on Houston Avenue. By 1951, according to Sanborn maps, most of the residences that had lined Washington Avenue in the 1920s had been removed and replaced with a mixture of industrial and commercial buildings. Among the commercial buildings, a number of 1930s and 1940s gas stations, restaurants, and automobile dealerships helped transform the roadway into a major commercial thoroughfare within Houston. Among the new businesses that opened during this period was Knapp Chevrolet. Just south of Washington Avenue on Houston Avenue, the dealership opened in 1939 on the site of a former church and residence. Within less than 30 years, the routing of the Meridian Highway along Washington Avenue, as well as the military presence (Camp Logan and Ellington Field), transformed this particular segment from residential to commercial, in part to meet the needs of automobile travelers. The 1939 Moderne Style Knapp dealership remains in operation today, a legacy of this piece of Meridian Highway history. Photo by HHM.

purchased by William C. Hogg and his brother Mike, who conveyed the property to the City of Houston, which in turn established Memorial Park.[294] Ellington Field, an army training facility where pilots trained for combat, was located between Houston and Galveston near Genoa, Texas. After the "Great War," the National Guard established an aviation squadron at the base and used the facilities until 1927, when the field was rendered obsolete. The following year, a massive fire engulfed the vacant base and consumed all remaining structures, leaving only concrete foundations and a metal water tower. For the next 12 years, the vacant land was leased to local ranchers for pasture. The outbreak of World War II saw a resurrection of Ellington Field and new infrastructure was constructed. After the war, the base sat vacant for two years prior to being reactivated and renamed Ellington Air Force Base in 1948. In 1959, the Civil Air Patrol moved its national headquarters from Washington, D.C., to Ellington, and the base was transferred from active duty to an Air Force Reserve facility. In 1962, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) established an astronaut flight-training program at the base. Ellington Air Force Base was finally deactivated in 1976, although the Texas Air National Guard continued to use it. In 1984, Houston purchased Ellington Air Force Base for use as a third civil airport and renamed it Ellington Airport; it also operates as Ellington Field Joint Reserve Base.[295]

Soon after the establishment of the two military facilities, the Meridian Highway became an important transportation corridor that connected Camp Logan with Ellington Field. This led to a great increase in truck traffic between the two bases, which quickly degraded the existing road surface of oyster shells and bituminous concrete. In response to this, Washington Avenue was reconstructed with reinforced concrete pavement in 1918.

Until the early 1930s, the route of the Meridian Highway from Houston to Galveston was the primary local road with a hard (oyster shell), concrete surface. Prior to the paving of the remainder of the city with concrete, Houston was known as "an island in an ocean of mud" during periods of bad weather.[296] Roads of better materials constructed during the 1930s brought more travelers to Houston, which spurred the establishment of tourist courts and motels along the Meridian Highway on what was then the far northwest side of the city, such as the ones at Washington Avenue and Dell Street just south of the intersection with present-day IH 10 (see *Figure 162* below). In contrast, the outbound route toward Galveston contained still fewer numbers of tourist courts and other short-term lodging accommodations, perhaps because Galveston, a major tourist destination, was only a short drive away. Based on historic photographs and postcards, the route of the Old Spanish Trail (SH 3/US 90) along South Main Street contained the city's most significant concentration of tourist courts and motels from the 1920s to the 1950s. This trend likely stemmed from that route's tourist-based function and Houston's role as a way station for travelers heading to destinations farther east and west. The Meridian Highway, in contrast, appears to have had a more commercial- and trade-based role (see *Figure 163*, to follow).

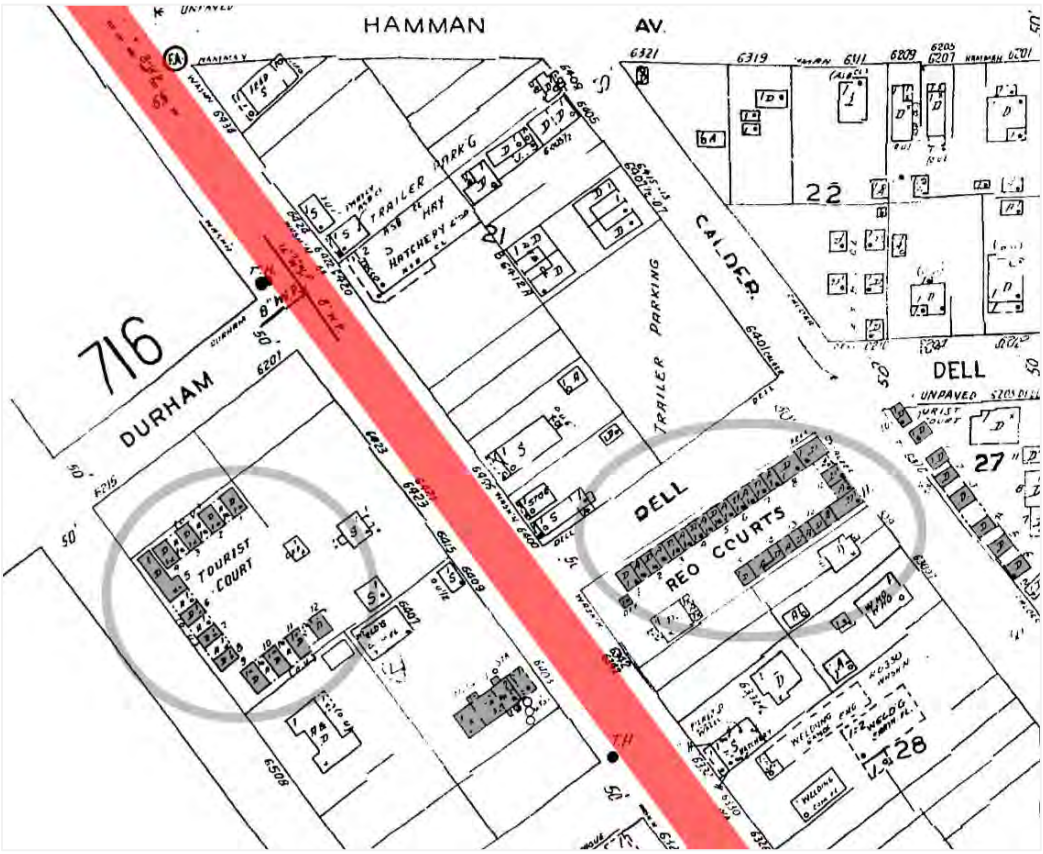


Figure 162. Detail, Sheet 716 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Houston, 1924 (updated 1950). The tourist courts in the 6300–6400 blocks of Washington Avenue (shaded and circled in gray) provided lodging for inbound travelers entering Houston from the northwest along the Meridian Highway. This was one of the few nodes of such lodging accommodations along this section of the Meridian Road. Source: Perry-Castañeda Library, The University of Texas at Austin.

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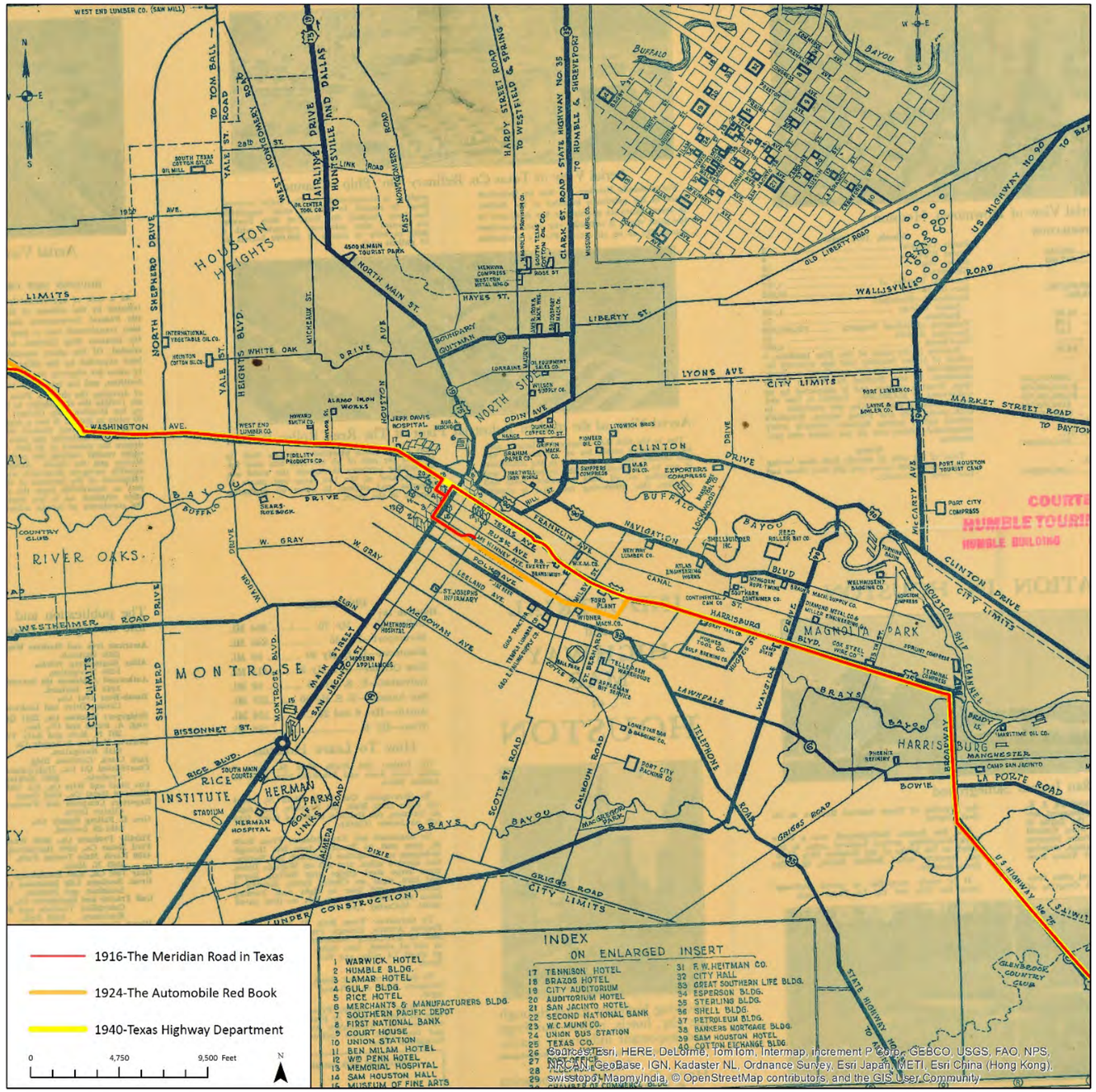

Figure 163. Industrial and Highway Map of Houston, 1935. This map presents the highway system that served Houston at that time. The Meridian Highway route (shown in red) entered Houston from the northwest along SH 6 and extended into downtown on Washington Avenue where it intersected with US 75. The route took a one-block jump to the south on Main Street and proceeded to the east as US 75 along Preston and Harrisburg Boulevard. The map shows a heavy industrial component along US 75/Harrisburg Boulevard that included the "Ford Plant," the Hughes Tool Co. (owned by Howard Hughes), multiple compresses (presumably cotton compresses), and other industrial concerns. The map also shows the proximity of the route to the Houston Channel; when it turned south onto Broadway, the highway was adjacent to the waterway. Source: Texas State Library and Archives, TSLAC map 0436.

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In 1942, the workers of the Writers' Program of the Works Progress Administration in the State of Texas published a book entitled, "Houston: A History and Guide."[297] One section of this book highlighted various points of interest in the city, many of which were located on the route of the Meridian Highway. The Scanlan Building (located at 403 Main Street), the site of Congress and Market squares (located between Preston and Congress avenues), and Memorial Park are three such examples. In addition, the guide also mentions the Rice Hotel. Even though the hotel was no longer on the route of the Meridian Highway (by 1940 the route had straightened and followed Preston Avenue through the downtown area), its listing still shows the importance of the hotel within the context of the city.

For much of Houston's history, local civic leaders welcomed growth and recognized that an improved highway system would facilitate that growth and show how the city embraced change and increased economic opportunities. In 1930, for example, local oilman Ross Sterling, who also served as chairman of the Texas Highway Commission, advocated the construction of a super highway between Houston and Galveston, citing traffic congestion on the existing system.[298] When elected as Texas Governor in 1932, Sterling tried and failed to implement his plan due to the effects of the Great Depression. However, the idea of a super highway took hold, and support for the proposed highway reemerged in the late 1930s. Houston Mayor Oscar Holcombe announced that the City of Houston would acquire the right-of-way of the former Galveston–Houston Electric Railway (GHE) and advocated the use of this 60- to 100-foot corridor for a six-lane super highway with frontage roads. The start of World War II prevented this plan from being fulfilled as funds to purchase additional right-of-way along the corridor could not be obtained. Despite this, planning for the freeway continued and in 1943, the Texas Highway Commission signed an agreement with the City of Houston and Harris County to develop the highway, ultimately bypassing the Meridian Highway (US 75) to the west.[299] The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944 provided funds for the project, and in early 1946, the Texas Highway Department released drawings of the highway's proposed design. Noted as the first freeway in Texas, the section from downtown Houston to Telephone Road opened to the public on September 30, 1948, and was named the Gulf Freeway.[300] The remainder of the highway was finished in 1952 and took on a "mild dog-leg form," as it was believed that straight highways over long stretches were monotonous and created "laxness" (the previous US 75 route was straight).[301] The shift of the freeway from its original route to the west meant that all auto-related services established along the Meridian Highway were bypassed. Consequently, as businesses along the highway closed their doors and disappeared, new development (often in the form of nationwide chains) began to appear on the Gulf Freeway (see *Figure 164*, to follow). The Gulfgate Shopping Center, opened in 1956 on the new freeway, was the first

Figure 164. This former Howard Johnson opened in 1970 on the Gulf Freeway and is representative of the development trends happening along the roadway during this period. The Howard Johnson chain was one of the country's largest restaurant and motel chains, thanks in part to the use of a highly recognizable building design and color scheme travelers associated with quality. In the 1990s, as trends shifted away from the restaurant-motel combination, and fast-food restaurants and newer motels became more popular, Howard Johnsons across the country closed their doors. This example is one of the few that avoided demolition, and remains an excellent landmark from a specific era of automobile travel.

shopping mall in the Houston area and reflected the shift from centralized commercial activity to nodes of commerce outside of the downtown on the city's many highways (see *Figure 165,* to follow).

Among all of the cities along the Meridian Highway, Houston contains among the lowest number of historic auto-related resources on a per capita basis. Such landmarks as the Rice Hotel figured prominently in early marketing efforts, and it remains an important building in the downtown with significance that extends to, yet transcends, the Meridian Highway. The city's continued growth and extensive redevelopment efforts have resulted in the demolition of a significant number of historic properties in all parts of the city, including the historic path of the Meridian Highway. Some gas stations, garages, auto-dealerships, and repair shops survive, and many have been subject to extensive change or have been converted to new uses. The construction of the Gulf Freeway as the first completed expressway in the state redirected auto-related businesses to the thoroughfare. However, increased traffic and further expansion of the highway has led to the demolition of many historic businesses along even this relatively new route. Although the Meridian Highway is largely forgotten in Houston today, it played a pivotal role in the history and development of the local transportation network. (See *Figure 166* for a map showing the Meridian Highway over time through Houston.) A few gems, such as the Rice Hotel and Knapp Chevrolet dealership, remain as tangible links to this important chapter in local history.

Figure 165. The Gulfgate shopping mall marked a new chapter in the retail sales history of Houston. Its opening in 1956 was part of a nationwide trend that provided an alternative to downtown shopping where traffic congestion often made it difficult for consumers to patronize department stores and other retail shops. With ample space for parking and a convenient location adjacent to a freeway, this automobile-friendly center proved to be an immediate success and led to the construction of other shopping malls and centers along the Gulf and other freeways in Houston.[302]

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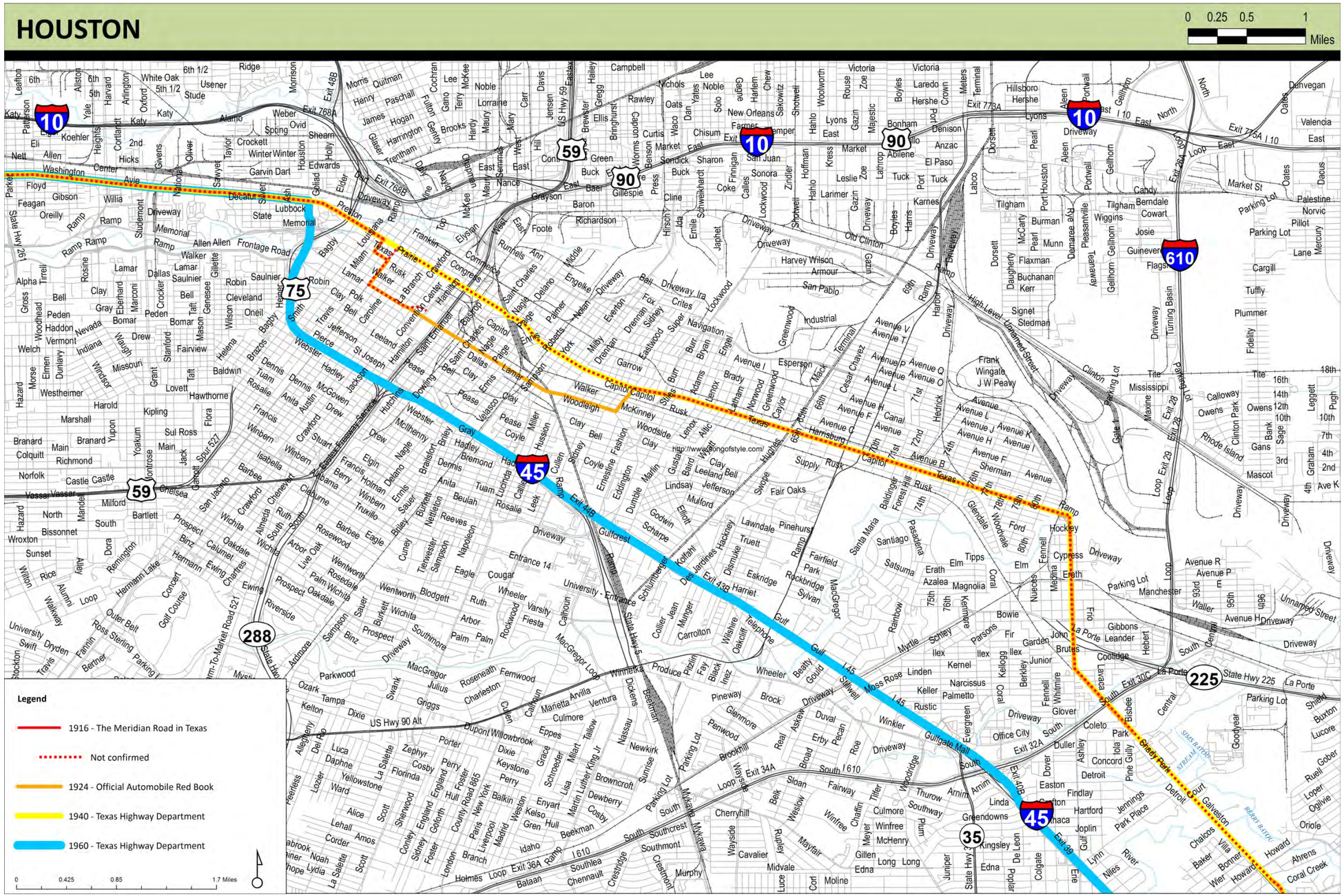

Figure 166. Map showing the Meridian Highway and its successors through Houston over time.

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[292] The Gulf Division of the Meridian Highway covers the section of the highway from Waco to Galveston.

[293] In July 1917, a battalion of African-American soldiers was sent to Houston to guard the construction of Camp Logan. The following month, police arrested one of the soldiers for intervening in the arrest of an African-American woman. That afternoon, a corporal from the base attempted to inquire about the arrest of his soldier and was also arrested. This led to a race riot involving 156 armed African-American soldiers who marched on the city, and left 20 people dead after it was over.

[294] Claudia Hazlewood, "CAMP LOGAN," *Handbook of Texas Online,* http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/qcc26 (accessed May 20, 2015). Uploaded June 12, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

[295] Erik Carlson, "Ellington Field: A Short History, 1917-1963."

[296] P. J. R. MacIntosh, "Concrete Roads to Houston," *Texas Monthly* (Texas Monthly Inc., Dallas): 394.

[297] Found on Portal to Texas History, http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth5865/m1/7/?q=houston%20guide.

[298] Sterling was also one of the founders of the Humble Oil Company, now Exxon; however, he sold his interest in the company in 1925.

[299] The original US 75 route subsequently became SH 3.

[300] "Gulf Freeway, Interstate 45 South," *Houston Freeways*, pp. 144-149, http://freeways.azurewebsites.net/houston-freeways-book/Gulf_Freeway_72ppi.pdf.

[301] Ibid.

[302] "Bayou City History," http://blog.chron.com/bayoucityhistory/2009/06/gulfgate-mall-in-pictures/ (accessed May 20, 2015).

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II.7. CASE STUDIES CONCLUSION

The five case study cities provide a cross-section of the urban experience of the Meridian Highway in Texas. This group includes small-, medium-, and large-sized communities, and extends over a broad geographic area. Each city, of course, possesses its own unique history, economic underpinnings, and land-development patterns that have evolved from a variety of factors. Waco, for example, was located on the flood-prone Brazos River in the heart of the state's early-twentieth-century cotton belt. San Antonio stood at the crossroads of multiple historic trails and roads, several of which date back to the Spanish Colonial Era. An emerging industrial center for the entire South, Houston was in the midst of surpassing Galveston as the state's largest shipping point for Texas-grown agricultural products as the Meridian Highway was established. Laredo was a major commercial center on the Texas–Mexico border strategically located, as civic leaders and others promoted, as the "Gateway to Mexico." Bowie was largely a railroad town that served as a regional hub of commerce and trade. Yet, despite their many differences, all of these cities share commonalities that extend to other comparably-sized communities along the Meridian Highway. In each case, the route extended through the city center, typically running parallel to an existing railroad track. This trend not only underscores the early ties between railroads and the development of auto trails such as the Meridian Highway, but also enabled early automobilists to take advantage of existing infrastructure and development. The multitude of brick hotels in most downtowns near passenger depots provided temporary lodging for those who traveled by train. The establishment of the route near the railroads allowed motorists to take advantage of these businesses as they traveled along the Meridian Road before the advent of lodging that catered to the automobile tourist. This type of lodging, in the form of less expensive tourist camps and tourist courts, developed outside of downtowns. Other auto-related businesses, such as auto-repair shops and service and gas stations, developed along this linear corridor in a more dispersed pattern of development.

The path of the Meridian Highway through these communities generally remained unchanged from the 1910s through the 1930s, although some subtle alignment shifts did occur. For example, the route originally extended through Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, but eventually moved to avoid this active military installation, probably due to expansion and build-up associated with World War I. The relative stability of the route in the downtowns during this era provided a degree of predictability that afforded proprietors of auto-related businesses the confidence to make major investments along the route. No place better exemplifies this trend than the 300–1100 blocks of

Broadway Street in San Antonio, where a number of automobile dealerships, garages, and auto-service buildings were constructed on this busy thoroughfare. Such nodes developed just beyond the city center where property values were more affordable, were less dense, and enabled the implementation of new ideas and concepts in architecture to adapt to automobile-based rather than pedestrian-based development. Free-standing buildings, curb cuts, ramps, and even parking lots created less dense land-use patterns better suited for automobiles. Likewise, Sanborn maps of these cities document how "filling stations" became common on many corner lots along the route, just beyond the city center.

Despite the hardships triggered by the Great Depression, automobiles remained exceedingly popular, and federal, state, and local officials continued to upgrade the highway system, including segments in urban locations. One of the popular trends of the era was the elimination of at-grade railroad crossings. Indeed, highway officials and engineers recognized the problem well before the Great Depression and had already worked to construct over/underpasses for safety reasons in the early 1920s. However, work-relief efforts and the flow of federal funds to state and local coffers led to the elimination of numerous at-grade crossings in these and other cities along the Meridian Highway. Notable examples are the railroad overpass just east of Bowie and the Art Deco-styled railroad overpass on Nogalitos Street in San Antonio.

Increased traffic during the 1930s also resulted in early attempts to construct new loops to bypass increasingly congested downtowns in these and other communities along the Meridian Highway. The city of Waco was among the first along the Meridian Highway to be subject to such efforts, and the Texas Highway Department constructed a bypass about two miles east of downtown on an entirely new alignment in the early 1930s. The new highway triggered new development as restaurants, gas stations, and tourist courts served motorists who avoided the downtown. This trend further accelerated the dispersed pattern of development as the automobile culture began to transform a relatively new and still-evolving landscape along the roadway – the suburb.

A continued sluggish economy and the U.S. involvement in World War II largely curtailed such massive public works and infrastructural improvements in the late 1930s and early 1940s, but in major urban centers like San Antonio and Houston, highway engineers, government officials, and local leaders continued to push for these kinds of projects. Innovative highway designs and concepts—such as controlled access expressways—gained traction, and even before the end of World War II, the Texas Highway Department and government officials worked to begin implementation of such ideas. Houston and San Antonio were among the first cities in the state to envision the construction of new "superhighways" that would facilitate traffic flow on new alignments

that completely avoided downtowns. The construction of the earliest expressways predated the Interstate Highway System and had a profound effect on land-development patterns in their respective communities. In Houston, the new "Gulf Freeway" was built along the right-of-way of the former interurban railway that extended between Houston and Galveston. On the other hand, San Antonio acquired properties in existing neighborhoods and demolished or relocated buildings to make way for the construction of its new expressway.

The new highways began to siphon off traffic in the downtown as segments opened for traffic, and many businesses suffered. The trend only accelerated when the Interstate Highway System was introduced in 1956, and the flow of federal monies coming into Texas and other states led to massive improvements to the Meridian and other highways. Typically, these improvements followed new alignments, which relegated the historic highways to a new role that was far more significant with the local transportation network than the statewide highway system. This trend extended to all cities. Many old tourist courts closed or were demolished, as the need to serve tourists diminished. Instead, travelers often stayed at the new motels (and later highway hotels) that developed in outlying areas along the new expressways/freeways. Many of the new motels were franchises that offered travelers predictability and a sense of familiarity. Some tourist courts survived and increasingly provided an apartment-like function for short-term accommodations. Gas stations continued to operate since they served local customers. However, with rising oil prices in the 1970s and de-regulation that allowed drivers to pump their own gas, many gas station owners closed their businesses or replaced/converted them to convenience stores as a supplementary source of income. Again, these trends were felt in cities of all sizes along the Meridian and other historic highways.

By the 1970s, memories of the Meridian Highway as one of the nation's most important north–south highways were largely forgotten. Most of the auto-related businesses that once served the many motorists who traversed the road during the early to mid-twentieth century were either gone, adapted to new uses, or left abandoned as sad reminders of a once glorious past. A few landmarks still exist, notably many of the high-rise hotels in the downtowns. However, a scattering of automobile dealerships, garages, gas stations, and other tourist-related resources also survive as tangible links to the past.

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IV. Survey Results

IV.1. FIELD INVESTIGATIONS

The HHM project team conducted the field survey over the course of six months. Each survey team included two-person crews consisting of qualified historians and architectural historians. Survey crews began field investigations in July 2015 near Burkburnett at the Texas-Oklahoma border in Wichita County. The surveyors continued southward along the main line of the Meridian Highway which extended through Wichita Falls, Fort Worth, Cleburne, Waco, Austin, San Antonio, and Laredo. Along the way, survey teams documented secondary and short-term loops or segments also associated with the Meridian Highway including the Mineral Wells Loop through Jack and Palo Pinto counties, the Meridian Loop through Somervell and Bosque counties, and the Taylor Loop through Bell and Williamson counties. After completing the main route of the Meridian Highway through Texas, the survey crew completed field investigations along the Gulf Division of the Meridian Highway, which extended from Waco to Galveston through Marlin, Bryan/College Station, Navasota, Hempstead, and Houston. The survey team completed field investigations in early December 2015.

During the field investigation phase, the survey teams documented auto-related historic resources associated with travelers along the oldest known alignment of the Meridian Highway and its successor names. The survey crews followed alignments based on the following source materials that were digitized for the project and are noted in the map files in the .kmz document that accompanies this report:

- **1916 Meridian Road in Texas**, prepared by David E. Colp, G. A. MacNaughton, and Lake Roberton (copy available at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin)
- **1924 Official Automobile Red Book**, published by Automobile Red Book Co. (copy available at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas)
- **1936 (updated 1940) County Highway Maps**, published by the Texas Highway Department (available at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission and online at the Map Collection Search)
- **1961 County Highway Maps**, published by the Texas Highway Department (available at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission and online at the Map Collection Search).

The use of these maps enabled the survey team to document the physical evolution of the “Meridian Highway” over time and underscored the dynamic quality of the roadway and its complex

history. Moreover, the maps documented the route at critical times within the history and development of the highway, as discussed in the historic context.

Teams recorded locational and physical information into a tablet utilizing HHM's web-based database (exportable to Microsoft Access compatible format). Survey crew members copied all field images to the tablet and subsequently associated each image with appropriate records in the database while still in the field. The team took at least two images of every resource that documented salient physical features and general setting. The survey teams used the database mapping interface to plot resource locations through Google Maps. This system enabled the database to generate latitude/longitude points for each documented resource. For linear resources, such as roadway segments, the database enabled the survey crew to enter two latitude/longitude points, marking the beginning and end of each roadway segment, and allowing the survey crew to draw a line in Google Maps following the documented roadway segment

IV.2. PROPERTY TYPES

The following table (*Table 5*) provides a breakdown of the identified resources by property type classification and tallies the total by time period that corresponds to those defined in the historic context. The property type classifications rely heavily on historic insurance maps published by the Sanborn Map Company and uses and functions during the period of significance for the Meridian Highway. Some of the recorded buildings pre-date the Meridian Highway for non-auto-related purposes; however, they were later converted for a variety of uses that catered to motorists traveling the Meridian Highway. Common trends included commercial buildings that were repurposed into hotels, restaurants, or auto supply stores.

Table 5 also includes roadway segments that extend into two or more counties. Although the exact date of construction for such resources has not been confirmed, the dates assigned in the database correspond to the earliest map that shows the alignment. Some of the roads may be much older than reported and/or subject to extensive alteration and change over time. However, the date shown indicates the oldest map that confirms the roadway segments association with the Meridian Highway.

Table 5. Property Types by Time Period.

Category	Type	Subtype	Total	Periods As Defined in Historic Context					
				Pre–1911	1911–1916	1917–1932	1933–1945	1946–1955	1956–1970
Building	Commercial	Auto dealership	103	1	4	35	27	18	18
		Auto dealership, Used car lot	46	0	0	0	8	17	21

Table 5. Property Types by Time Period.

Category	Type	Subtype	Total	Periods As Defined in Historic Context					
				Pre–1911	1911–1916	1917–1932	1933–1945	1946–1955	1956–1970
		Auto parts store	38	0	0	7	6	8	17
		Auto repair shop	214	3	3	39	35	67	67
		Bus station	2	0	0	0	0	1	1
		Car wash	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
		Farm stand	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
		Gas station	521	3	0	116	108	141	153
		Hotel	72	31	9	22	2	3	5
		Motel	139	0	0	6	16	52	65
		Restaurant	244	13	0	24	39	56	112
		Restaurant, Drive-in restaurant	13	0	0	0	0	6	7
		Restaurant, Roadhouse	7	0	0	0	2	3	2
		Roadside attraction	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
		Tourist court	10	0	0	7	2	1	0
	Cultural	Museum	4	0	0	2	1	0	1
	Institutional	Courthouse	18	10	2	2	2	2	0
		State Capitol	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Object	Commercial	Sign	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
	Cultural	Historical Marker	3	0	0	1	2	0	0
		Historical Marker, Centennial marker	12	0	0	0	12	0	0
	Roadway	FAP marker	6	0	0	0	5	1	0
Site	Commercial	Amusement park	3	1	0	2	0	0	0
		Campground	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
		Drive-in theatre	2	0	0	0	0	1	1
		Roadside attraction	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
		Stockyards	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Institutional	Zoo	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
	Recreational	Park, Historical park	6	5	0	0	1	0	0
		Park, Memorial Park	2	0	0	1	0	0	1
		Park, Municipal park	38	11	0	14	3	3	7
		Park, State park	10	1	1	0	4	1	3
		Park, University park	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
		Park, World's Fair Park	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
		Plaza	6	6	0	0	0	0	0
		Square	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
	Roadway	Roadside park	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Structure	Recreational	Gazebo	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
		Pavilion	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
	Roadway	Bridge, Causeway	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
		Bridge, Concrete Bridge	4	0	0	4	0	0	0
		Bridge, Metal Truss Bridge	5	5	0	0	0	0	0
		Roadway Segment	279	0	141	92	37	0	9
		Roundabout	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
		TOTAL	**1,681**	**91**	**158**	**342**	**280**	**347**	**463**

PHOTOGRAPHS

Table 6 summarizes all digital photographs taken for the Meridian Highway project.

Table 6. Meridian Highway Survey Photos.

8,761	Photos tagged to documented resources/records in the database
97	Photos of streetscapes, contextual views, and duplicate views
8,929	**Total photos taken for project**

COUNTY TOTALS

Tables 7–9 count the number of resources tallied in each county along the various segments of the Meridian Highway. Please note that these totals do not include roadway segments or bridges that extend into more than one county, thus the combined total does not equal the 1,830 total report in the property types table above.

Table 7. Resources along the Main Meridian Line by County.

County	Total
Wichita	121
Clay	20
Montague	58
Wise	51
Tarrant	150
Johnson	54
Hill	36
McLennan	180
Coryell	1
Bell	108
Williamson	65
Travis	118
Hays	36
Caldwell	1
Comal	53
Bexar	234
Atascosa	5
Medina	23
Frio	21
La Salle	30
Webb	55

Table 8. Resources along the Mineral Wells Loop by County.

County	Total
Jack	16
Palo Pinto	9

Table 9. Resources along the Meridian Loop by County.

County	Total
Somervell	18
Bosque	52

Table 9. Resources along the Gulf Division by County.

County	Total
Falls	36
Robertson	55
Brazos	56
Grimes	15
Austin	1
Waller	10
Harris	74
Galveston	24

NRHP ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Besides identifying auto-related resources along the route, the survey also provides NRHP evaluations for the resources identified during field investigations (see *Table 10*).

Table 10. NRHP Evaluations of Resources Surveyed.

NRHP Recommendation	Total
Not Eligible for NRHP	1,398
Eligible for NRHP	180
Contributing in NRHP-Eligible District	128
Non-contributing in NRHP-Eligible District	50
Individually Eligible and Contributing in NRHP-Eligible District	74

Appendix C contains a complete list of all resources that are listed in or eligible for the NRHP on an individual basis and/or in a district (including non-contributing resources. The list is organized by county, city, and Resource ID order.

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V. Appendices

The results of the Meridian Highway survey project are presented in the accompanying appendices, which include the following:

Appendix A – Inventory

The section identifies every identified auto-related resource along the various alignments of the Meridian Highway over time. The inventory includes a thumbnail, the geographic location, and salient physical attributes of each historic resource. The list is presented in county and Resource ID order.

Appendix B – Survey Forms

This section presents more detailed architectural and historical information on resources that are already listed in the NRHP or are recommended eligible for inclusion in the NRHP, either on an individual basis and/or as a contributing element in an NRHP-eligible district. Each form contains up to four thumbnail images of each resource, including (if applicable) no more than one historic photograph obtained during research efforts. The forms are presented in county and Resource ID order.

Appendix C – List of Resources Recommended NRHP Eligible and/or in NRHP-Eligible Districts

This inventory provides a comprehensive list of every identified auto-related resource in NRHP-listed or -eligible districts. The table groups resources by county, city, and district, and lists every recorded resource and identifies its recommended classification as a contributing or non-contributing element. The inventory is presented in county, city, district, and address order.

Appendix D – Maps of the Meridian Highway

This set of maps shows the various alignments of the Meridian Highway over time. For urban areas, the maps include inset detail maps that depict the route in larger cities and towns along the route.

Appendix E – KMZ File *(separate file)*

These digital files are not included in the final submittal, but present survey results as a series of GIS-based layers that can be exported into a variety of GIS-based applications, such as ArcMap, ArcExplorer, and Google Earth. The various routes/alignments are color-coded by source and appear as separate layers. Resource locations are presented in yet another layer, and include the most basic information (e.g., property type classification and physical location/address).