II.6. EAST TEXAS HIGHWAY (SH 8) – US 59

INTRODUCTION

The East Texas Highway was created in June 1917 when the Texas Highway Commission announced the establishment of the state's first highway system. It was designated as SH 8 and was the easternmost of three north–south highways that the Commission created at that time; the others were SH 2 (Meridian) and SH 5 (Del Rio–Canadian). Although the northern third of the East Texas Highway generally followed a straight north–south path from the Red River and Oklahoma border to the Harrison–Panola county line, the rest of the highway paralleled the Sabine River as it flowed to the Gulf of Mexico. (See *Figure 218*.)

Unlike SH 1 (Bankhead), SH 2 (Meridian), and SH 3 (Old Spanish Trail/Southern National), the East Texas Highway was not a transcontinental highway; rather, it primarily served a specific geographic region of Texas. The highway linked some of the oldest and most active communities in the region at that time including Port Arthur, Beaumont, Orange, Jasper, San Augustine, Carthage, Marshall, and Linden. This route extended through heavily forested land that was sparsely populated and relatively difficult to clear. The construction of the road no doubt was more challenging than some of the other highways, although each had its own set of unique obstacles and difficulties.

As originally conceived, the highway linked East Texas to the "Golden Triangle" that included Orange, Beaumont, and Port Arthur, where some of the nation's largest and most important oil companies, such as Gulf and Texaco, constructed refineries and docking facilities. The southern terminus at Port Arthur also allowed lumber, cotton, and other crops produced from the region to be shipped to other markets.

Since the importance of the highway diminished over time, it has one of the more complex histories among the named highways and changed designations multiple times since its establishment in 1917. Today, the northernmost segment from the Oklahoma border to Linden is still known as SH 8; however, the segment between Linden and Tenaha is US 59. From Tenaha, the route is now designated as US 96 and continues south to Lumberton where it joins US 287 and US 69. From that point, it continues south through Beaumont and ends at Port Arthur.

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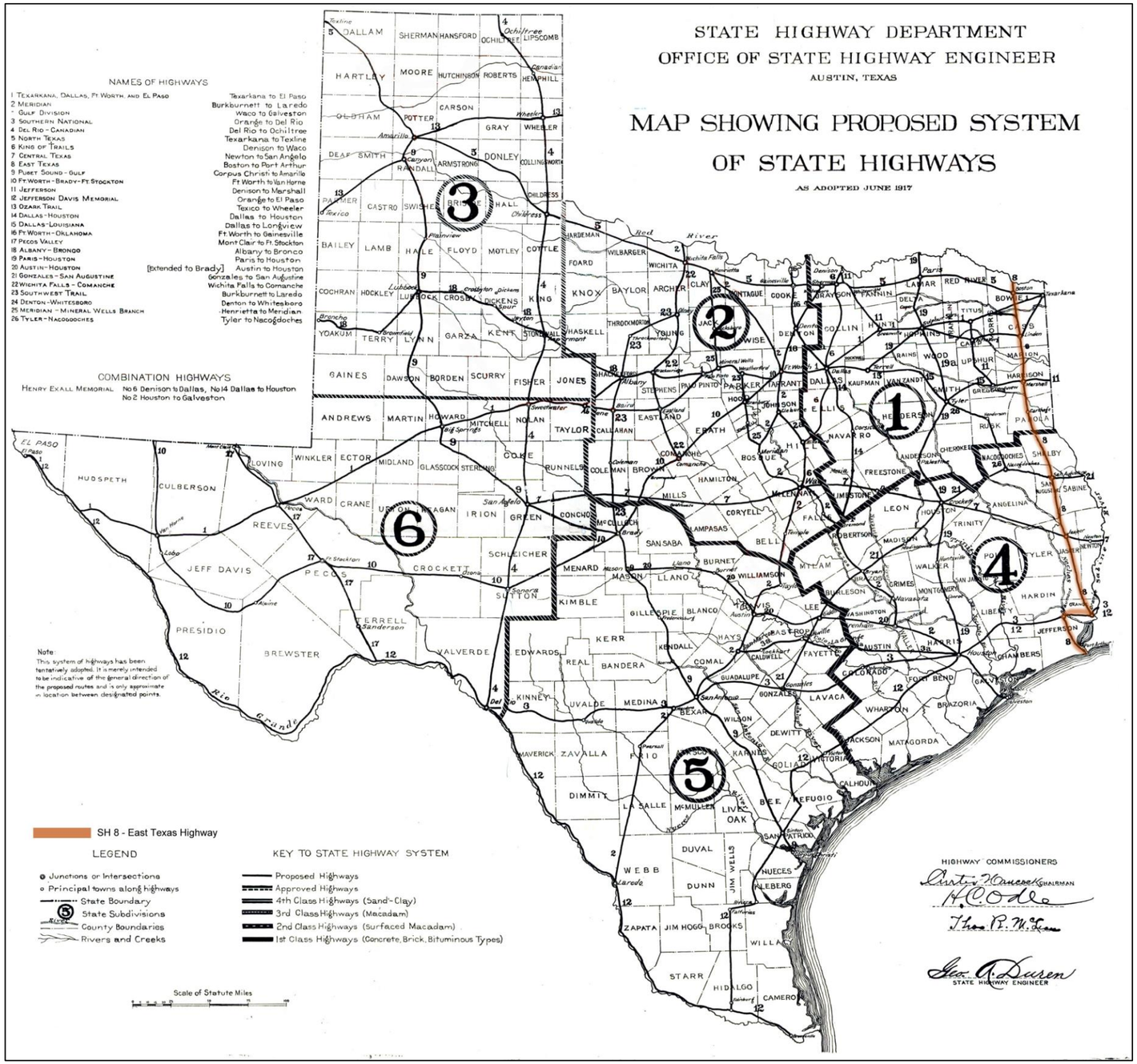
Figure 218. Edited version of the "Map Showing Proposed System of State Highways," 1917, highlighting the route of the East Texas Highway. Source: Texas State Library and Archives, Map Collection, https://www.tsl.texas.gov/cgibin/aris/maps/maplookup.php?mapnum=6254 (accessed February 21, 2014).



EARLY ROADS AND TRAILS: 1680–1880

Historic Context

Some of the oldest permanent settlements in Texas were established by Spanish missionaries on or near the East Texas Highway. Despite such activity, most of the early roads and trails from the Spanish Colonial era, most notably the Old San Antonio Road (also one of the many roads known as the "El Camino Real") followed a more southwesterly course that linked these settlements to the mission in the San Antonio area. Perhaps the earliest north–south road in East Texas was Trammel's Trace, a relatively short but important route blazed around 1820 between Jonesboro, Arkansas, and Nacogdoches.[1068] It supported the flow of immigrants from the United States into Texas. Although the southern portion of Trammel's Trace ran some distance west of the East Texas Highway, it follows the same general trajectory, and portions of the northern section as far south as Marshall may have been incorporated into, or were near, the East Texas Highway.

Development Patterns

Based on an 1858 map of Texas, the largest and most important settlements that existed along the future route of the East Texas Highway included Orange, Newton, Burkeville, Shelbyville, Carthage, Marshall, Jefferson, and Linden.[1069] However, no prominent north–south road or railroad had been constructed to link these settlements to one another, according to an 1874 railroad map of the state.[1070]

COUNTY ROADS AND THE GOOD ROADS MOVEMENT: 1880–1916

Historic Context

Between 1880 and 1916, development boomed in the vicinity of the future route of the East Texas Highway, much of it related to the lumber industry. After the city of Marshall offered financial incentives for the Texas and Pacific Railway to construct shops and offices in 1873, the city became an important regional rail and commercial center during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. With the development of Marshall as a railroad hub (see *Figure 219*), numerous businesses located in Nacogdoches, Jefferson, and other cities in the region, moved to the new rail center. Marshall prospered because of the Texas and Pacific Railroad and its proximity to river and rail shipping facilities in Shreveport, Louisiana. Lumber and naval stores industries thrived throughout the region as pine forests from Florida through Louisiana and East Texas provided ample sources of timber for harvesting. Development of a large shipbuilding facility in Orange further spurred growth at the southern end of the corridor, as did the

Figure 219. Photograph of the "Cannon Ball" train on the Texas and Pacific Railway, Marshall, Harrison County, 1903. The Texas and Pacific Railway played an important role in the development of Marshall into a commercial center in East Texas. Source: The University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, http://texas history.unt.edu/ark:/67531/ metapth28729/ (accessed April 8, 2014), crediting the Museum of the American Railroad, Frisco, Texas.

discovery of major oil fields in the Beaumont area, and the subsequent development of port facilities and oil refineries in Port Arthur in the early twentieth century. Installation of extensive drainage systems along the route opened large areas in the south end of the corridor to the cultivation of rice. The combination of agriculture, energy, lumbering, shipbuilding, and railroad construction created opportunities for the development of a transportation corridor that benefitted from Good Roads advocacy before 1917.

Physical Evolution

Roads near the Gulf Coast that extended along or near what eventually became the East Texas Highway were likely constructed of crushed shell, taking advantage of a cheap and readily available road-building material. As the road network extended northward, roads that would be eventually incorporated into the East Texas Highway probably were constructed of earth, sand-clay, gravel, or a combination of materials. Due to the numerous natural water features along the route and the heavy rainfall experienced in the eastern part of the state, it is likely that large segments would have been impassable if not properly drained. Additionally, dozens of timber, cast iron, and concrete culverts as well as timber, cast iron, wrought iron, and steel bridges were likely located along the route to offset the harsh conditions that affected the quality of the roadways.

Development Patterns

From 1880 through 1916, settlement patterns remained dispersed throughout much of East Texas, which did not exert the kinds of burdens on the road system experienced in other parts of the state. In

the 1890s, railroad development had spurred the lumber industry in nearby Marshall, but the path of the railroad ran east–west, as opposed to the north–south path of the future East Texas Highway.[1071] By 1913, the Santa Fe Railroad line ran north–south, parallel to the Sabine River along the future route of SH 8, and lumber mills were clustered along the railroad.[1072]

INITIATION OF THE HIGHWAY SYSTEM: 1917–1932

Historic Context

As with the Del Rio–Canadian Highway, organization of the East Texas Highway Association and recognition by the Texas Highway Commission appear to have been out of order, suggesting that a route had been identified by Good Roads advocates prior to June 1917 but not made the focus of an organization. Formal recognition by the Commission occurred on June 21, 1917, when it designated the East Texas Highway as SH 8. The route described ran from the Red River north of Boston in a due south direction through Boston to Linden, Jefferson, Marshall, Carthage, San Augustine, Jasper, Orange, and Port Arthur.[1073] Organization of the East Texas Highway Association occurred in July 1917 in Silsbee, where officers were elected. The meeting had been called in order to "secure" what one of the organization's vice presidents called the "Eastern Texas highway."[1074]

The SH 8 route apparently remained constant between 1917 and 1921, when the Texas Highway Commission designated it part of the Major State Highway System. The route was described as running from the Red River north of Boston south through Boston, Maud, Douglassville, Linden, Jefferson, Marshall, Carthage, Center, Shelbyville, San Augustine, Macune, Brooklyn, Jasper, Erin, Kirbyville, Mauriceville, over SH 3 to Beaumont, and then to Port Arthur.[1075] (Refer to *Figure 46* in previous Section I.4.)

Like SH 5, SH 8 was not designed as a primary road within the Federal Aid Highway System in 1924.[1076] However, the road continued to be improved by numerous Commission-approved projects. By July 1925, the highway had a total length of approximately 270 miles.

Physical Evolution

SH 8 extended through a rural area of East Texas and generally paralleled the Louisiana border. Segments of the highway near the Gulf Coast likely utilized crushed shell as a road-building material; however, as it extended northward beyond the Gulf Coast region, the road probably had a gravel or sand-clay surface. By 1925, in Bowie County for instance, the road was a gravel and surface-treated road. Construction work was in progress in Cass County, and then gravel in good condition

returned in Marion County. The traveler enjoyed good gravel roads through Marion and much of Harrison County. Earth roads predominated to Carthage, and iron ore roads were present in Shelby County and part of San Augustine County. Dirt roads appeared again in Sabine County.[1077]

Due to the abundant natural water features along the route, numerous bridges and culverts were likely constructed and upgraded along the route during the 1920s and early 1930s. Improved roadway surfaces were likely only found in or near the cities of Port Arthur, Beaumont, Marshall, and Texarkana.

Development Patterns

As late as 1928, the East Texas Highway was largely unpaved and/or under construction, although it had been planned as part of the State Highway System in 1917.[1078] In the 1920s, the economy of East Texas depended on lumber, truck and fruit crops, corn, and cotton, but the railroad remained the primary means of transportation for agricultural goods. Farm improvement still was concentrated along railroad lines. Oil production in East Texas rapidly increased in the early 1920s, especially in Harrison County.[1079] Access to oilfields appears to have been provided along other routes, such as US 80, where nearby oil discoveries in the late 1910s and 1920s created demands for improved roads. The opening the East Texas Oil Field in 1930 exerted the same kinds of development pressures in the region; however, the oil field was several miles west of the SH 8 route and affected communities such as Kilgore, Longview, and Tyler. Demands to improve the road network shifted to that area, relegating the SH 8 corridor to a lesser priority.

Overall, land-use patterns and the kinds of auto-oriented businesses along parcels fronting onto the East Texas Highway in urban areas mirrored those of the other named highways. The route extended through the downtowns of cities along its path, and gas stations, tourist courts, and similar auto-oriented buildings lined the corridor on the peripheries of the downtowns and the approaches into and out of the cities. This trend, common through Texas at the time, contributed to more dispersed land development that accommodated the growing need for parking and easy access to and from the highway.

DEPRESSION, MOBILIZATION, AND WAR: 1933–1944

Historic Context

At its June 20, 1933 meeting, the Texas Highway Commission ordered that SH 8 be re-routed across the state where necessary. The contract was let with the understanding that the counties for which the rerouting required right-of-way acquisition would provide at least 100 feet of

right-of-way for the work.[1080] The extent and degree of change resulting from that decision appears to be minimal, based on a comparison of multiple state highway maps published by the Texas Highway Department. With one exception, the route passes through the same cities and followed the same path along the entire route from 1917 to 1936. The only route change was the segment between Beaumont and Buna, which bypassed Orange and instead went through Silsbee. However, that re-routing had occurred earlier, between 1919 and 1922.[1081]

On April 22, 1935, the Texas Legislature adopted H.S.R. No. 138, proposing SH 8 through Texas as part of the "Central Military Super Highway" that the U.S. government had been considering from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico.[1082] U.S. Senator Morris Sheppard of Texas forwarded the resolution to Bureau of Public Works Chief Thomas MacDonald. MacDonald graciously received the resolution but countered that SH 8 was not on the War Department's recent list of roads of military value. Further, he argued that while the Texas Legislature was considerate in its suggestion of proposing a contiguous route, improvement of such a long stretch would involve "progressive improvement of a large number of individual sections" and would not be conducive to a wide distribution of funds for a variety of projects. While the proposal was rejected, MacDonald informed Senator Sheppard that he would forward the state's request to the Public Works District Engineer so that work on SH 8 might be considered for funding with newly available federal funds.[1083] The effort ultimately did not proceed, but it showcased efforts to upgrade the highway through East Texas.

In 1935, US 69 was created and extended from roughly parallel to SH 8, from Lumberton in North Texas to Port Arthur on the Gulf. By 1936, US 59 followed the same alignment, with SH 8 running from Maud to Port Arthur. Then, in 1939, The Texas Highway Commission reduced SH 8 so that it only travelled from the Texas–Arkansas state line to a point on US 67 at Corley.[1084] At the same time the Commission re-routed US 59; the alignment between Tenaha and Port Arthur was removed from the proposed route of US 59 and re-designated as US 96.[1085]

During mobilization and the lead up to direct U.S. involvement in World War II, the War Department did not establish any military training facilities on or near the East Texas Highway. However, the Army established the Red River Ordnance Depot, west of Boston in Bowie County, in August 1941. SH 8 extended along the west side of the plant and likely provided a means of transporting explosives and other equipment and supplies to other military installations. Other highways that bordered the plant included US 67 (Bankhead Highway) and US 82 (North Texas Highway), as well as the Texas and Pacific and St. Louis Southwestern railroads. Of all of the transportation lines that extended

to the ordnance plant, the East Texas Highway was the only one that did link directly to a military training facility.

Physical Evolution

As noted above, upgrades and realignments of roadways within the entire state highway system were common during this time period, and the East Texas Highway was no exception. In fact, at the beginning of this era in road construction, the Texas Highway Commission authorized the relocation of SH 8 "where necessary entirely across the state."[1086] To aid in this process, the Commission instructed the affected counties to provide no less than a 100-foot right-of-way for all sections of the road that were realigned. This initiative resulted in minor realignments that created a "modern" road with improved highway surfaces (most likely asphalt and concrete), no sharp curves, two lanes (each measuring at least 10 feet wide), shoulders, new drainage structures, and bridges.

Development Patterns

The East Texas Highway remained a popular route for the transportation of lumber, as well as servicing oil drilling and processing operations near Kilgore, Longview, Tyler, and the slowly expanding lignite mining industry in the vicinity Marshall. Tourism along the route was limited compared to some of the other named highways, such as the Bankhead Highway, Meridian Highway, and Old Spanish Trail, because it did not provide cross-country access or connect major metropolitan areas. Near Jefferson, however, Caddo Lake State Park was established between 1933 and 1937. (See *Figure 220.*) Much of the land for the park was donated by T. J. Taylor, who was the father of Claudia "Lady Bird" Johnson. Using CCC labor, the park included a recreation hall, cabins, a pavilion, and numerous structures, which were constructed in the park during the 1930s.[1087] Parks associated with the national forests in East Texas, including Angelina and Sabine National Forests, also afforded additional recreational opportunities for tourists traveling on the East Texas Highway. The national forests were created in 1936 after the Texas Legislature authorized their purchase into the National Forest system three years earlier.[1088]

POSTWAR ROAD EXPASION: 1945–1956

Historic Context

The physical alignment of the old SH 8 changed little during the postwar period; however, it was subject to various changes in designations. In 1947, US 59 was re-routed north of Linden, so the designation was removed from the section between Maud and Linden; this stretch was re-assigned the original state highway number of SH 8.[1089] At this time, US 59 followed the alignment of the old East Texas Highway from

Figure 220. Photo of a cabin built by the CCC at Caddo Lake State Park. Source: "Interpretive Guide to Caddo Lake State Park," Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_br_p4508_0029g.pdf (accessed May 7, 2013).

Linden to Tenaha.[1090] The 1956 General Highway Map of Bowie County notes an alteration of the northern alignment of the East Texas Highway to connect to a new bridge over the Red River at the Texas-Oklahoma state line. A business alternate route of the highway extended into New Boston from the north.

The regional economy continued to grow in the postwar era, and most of the land along the route of the highway was used for farming, lumbering, dairying, and poultry farming. The extraction of oil and lignite continued to be important, as well. Although the re-designation of the former East Texas Highway changed the name of the highway, the vehicles using the road generally followed the same route that had been established in the late 1910s. Two important trends of the postwar era did affect the highway: the development of the farm-to-market system and the growing importance of trucks to transport raw goods. These trends particularly influenced the lumber industry. The railroads shipped timber to milling operations; however, the expense of building spurs off main railroad lines was both time consuming and expensive. The development of a rural road network shifted the road building costs to the public sector and also allowed the flexibility to use trucks that could easily adapt to changes in the locations of tree harvesting activities.

Physical Evolution

With the expansion of the oil and lumber industries in the postwar era, improvements along the former East Texas Highway route probably included the upgrade of roads from two-lane facilities to four-lane undivided and divided roadways. With few cities along the route, it is likely that improvements may have been localized near oil extraction areas and the nearby national forests. As such, it is probable that

controlled-access thoroughfares would have been more common than controlled-access freeways along the route.

Development Patterns

At the one-time southern terminus of the East Texas Highway in Orange, the shipbuilding industry led to rapid expansion during World War II. After the war, however, shipbuilding declined and the population of Orange tapered off. Traveling north along the East Texas Highway, oil production continued to be an important industry in the postwar years. The lumber industry also experienced rapid expansion, fueled by technological advances as well as demand for lumber caused by the postwar housing boom.[1091]

EFFECTS OF THE INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM: 1957–1980

Physical Evolution

Through the 1980s, the East Texas Highway kept the designation SH 8 from its origin at the Arkansas border to Linden, Texas. The roadway was likely an asphalt-paved two-lane undivided roadway with small shoulders between 1956 and 1980. Proceeding south from Linden to Tenaha, the East Texas Highway was designated US 59 and was upgraded from a two-lane roadway to a four-lane divided roadway in the late 1960s and 1970s. From Tenaha, the road followed the two-lane US 96 roadway (designated in 1942) to Beaumont, where it joined US 287 to Port Arthur. The East Texas Highway was not subsumed by the Interstate Highway System, and thus did not need to meet the rigid AASHO requirements and standards for such designation. As such, it generally retains more of the physical qualities that reflect its historic use and function.

Development Patterns

Along the path of the East Texas Highway, lumber production, oil production, and the petrochemical industry remained the dominant economic activities during the period from 1956 through 1980. In all of these industries, large national corporations began to acquire smaller local operations in the 1970s. In the petrochemical industry especially, this led to automation of jobs that once were performed manually, leading to job losses and declining populations. In Orange, for instance, the population peaked in 1960 and steadily declined through the 1960s and 1970s.[1092] Tourism along the route received a boost, though, when the Big Thicket National Preserve was established by Congress in 1974.[1093] (See *Figure 221*.)

As with the other named highways that were not part of the Interstate Highway System, the East Texas Highway did not have the same kinds of

Figure 221. Photograph of conservationist Pete Gunter in the Big Thicket in 1971. Gunter's advocacy was essential in the designation of the Big Thicket as a National Preserve in 1974. Source: The Big Thicket Association, http://www.bigthicket.org/about/history/ (accessed April 8, 2014).

developmental pressures on properties that abutted the highway. The businesses along the highways generally served local citizens because the interstate tourism along this route was not as significant a factor as it was on the Bankhead and other highways incorporated into the interstate system.

CONCLUSION

The East Texas Highway was within the first group of state highways designated in Texas. It was the easternmost of three north–south routes that served different parts of the state. The highway extends through an area with rich piney woods that is part of a vast forest that stretches through the Deep South to Florida. Although the East Texas Highway was initially considered important to the state road network, its significance within the highway system diminished over time. Nonetheless, it connects some of the oldest and most important communities in the state including Jefferson, Marshall, and San Augustine.

[1068] Williams, "The National Road of the Republic of Texas," in *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, p. 218.

[1069] J.H. Colton & Co., *Colton's New Map of the State of Texas*, 1858, From the Texas State Library and Archives, Map Collection, map # 0445a, https://www.tsl.state.tx.us/cgi-bin/aris/maps/maplookup.php?mapnum=0445a (accessed January 22, 2013).

[1070] *Texas New Yorker's Railroad Map of Texas*, 1874, Map, From the Texas State Library and Archives, Map Collection, map # 0945, https://www.tsl.state.tx.us/cgi-bin/aris/maps/maplookup.php?mapnum=0945 (accessed January 22, 2013).

[1071] *Railroad and County Map of Texas*, December 1893, Map (Chicago: Rand McNally Co., Inc., 1892 [sic]), From the Texas State Library and Archives, Map Collection, map # 7878, https://www.tsl.state.tx.us/cgi-bin/aris/maps/maplookup.php?mapnum=1688 (accessed January 3, 2013).

[1072] East Texas Mills Owned by the Kirby Lumber Co., 1913; Map; on file in the East Texas Research Center at Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, TX; http://digital.sfasu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/EastTexRC/id/12315 (accessed January 21, 2013).

[1073] Minutes of the State Highway Department, Volume 1, p. 20.

[1074] *The Galveston Daily News*, July 28, 1917, p. 2.

[1075] Minutes of the State Highway Department, Volume 2, p. 76.

[1076] Ibid., Volume 2, p. 290.

[1077] *Lubbock Morning Avalanche*, July 26, 1925, p. 3.

[1078] Texas State Highway Commission; *Official Highway Map of Texas*; 1928; From Stephen F. Austin State University, East Texas Research Center; http://digital.sfasu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/EastTexRC/id/12322/ (accessed January 03, 2013); Miller, John D., *Map Showing Proposed System of State Highways*, Map, Texas State Archives Map Number 6254 (Texas: State Highway Department, July, 1917), From Texas State Library, Map Collections. https://www.tsl.state.tx.us/cgi-bin/aris/maps/maplookup.php?mapnum=6254 (accessed August 21, 2012).

[1079] East Texas Chamber of Commerce, *East Texas*, Book, 1923; digital images, http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth130179/ (accessed September 13, 2012), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, http://texashistory.unt.edu; crediting UNT Libraries, Denton, Texas; *Dallas Morning News*, "Map Shows Drilling Operations in Harrison County," February 18, 1931, p. 26, from http://www.proquest.com.

[1080] *Official Minutes of the State Highway Commission*, June 20, 1933, Book No. 9, 223.

[1081] Texas State Highway Department, *State of Texas Highway Map*, 1919, Texas State Library Map Collections. https://www.tsl.texas.gov/cgi-bin/aris/maps/maplookup.php?mapnum=6183 (accessed September 12, 2012); Texas State Highway Department, *Highway Map of the State of Texas, 1922*, https://www.tsl.texas.gov/cgi-bin/aris/maps/maplookup.php?mapnum=6184 (accessed September 12, 2012).

[1082] Copy of H.S.R. No. 138, April 22, 1935, Box 3011, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[1083] Thomas MacDonald to Senator Morris Sheppard, May 7, 1935, Box 3011, Record Group 30, Bureau of Public Roads, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[1084] Minute Order no. 16701, September 26, 1939.

[1085] The entire route of U.S. Highway No. 59 from Tenaha shifted westward and passed through Timpson and onward to Houston, then southwesterly to Laredo.

[1086] Texas Highway Commission Meeting Minutes, Minute Order 7666 (June 20, 1933), Texas Department of Transportation, Austin, TX.

[1087] "Interpretive Guide to Caddo Lake State Park," *Texas Parks and Wildlife Department,* http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_br_p4508_0029g.pdf (accessed May 7, 2013).

[1088] Christopher Long, "ANGELINA NATIONAL FOREST," *Handbook of Texas Online* (http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/gka02), accessed April 11, 2014. Uploaded on June 9, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

[1089] Administrative Order No. October 10, 1947.

[1090] US 59 Minute Orders 23641 and 24459, dated August 1, 1947; AASHTO Letter September 24, 1947.

[1091] Maxwell, Robert S. "LUMBER INDUSTRY," *The Handbook of Texas Online*, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/drl02 (accessed May 13, 2013), published by the Texas State Historical Association.

[1092] "Texas Almanac: City Population History from 1850 to 2000," http://www.texasalmanac.com/sites/default/files/images/CityPopHist%20web.pdf (accessed April 30, 2013).

[1093] "Funds Approved for Big Thicket," *Dallas Morning News*, June 10, 1977, p. 2, from http://www.newsbank.com/ (accessed June 4, 2013); Crewdson, John M., "The Big Thicket of Texas Is a Critical Year Away From Preservation," *The New York Times*, April 4, 1977, p. 62, from http://www.proquest.com/en-US/ (accessed June 4, 2013).