



Celebrating the 100-year old history of the Bankhead Highway, antique and classic automobiles to tour through Naples and Omaha April 21



Bankhead Highway Tour Schedule

With approximately 50 vintage automobiles participating, the Bankhead Highway historical tour will leave Texarkana early Thursday morning and make a 15 minute stop at Maud ISD and the town at 8:53 a.m., then travel down Highway 67 and make short stop at the James Bowie School at Simms about 9:30.

From there the touring group will enter Naples at approximately 10:20. A visit is planned at Pewitt Schools at about 10:33. "We will loop into the HS/JH campus drive way and exit to the street that passes beside the administration building," said a tour guide. "We will then take the road up to the Elementary School and make a loop in front of the school before exiting back to 67."

After leaving the schools, the parade of antique vehicles will make a short stop at Omaha about 11:00 and then travel on to Cookville prior to making a stop in Mt. Pleasant about 11:48 for a 90-minute rest and lunch time.

"If there are no designated parking areas," the spokesperson said, "we will provide these towns with a slow-moving parade of 'yesteryear's transportation' through the heart of town."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DALE TRUITT

Editor's note: The following article was researched and written in 2014 by Lynda Stringer, a staff writer for the Mt. Pleasant Daily Tribune.

It offers some locations of the Bankhead Highway that included portions of Highway 67. Parts of the 100-year old highway still exist near Omaha and Naples. A section near Naples, leaves 67 onto a country road near the former David Leeves Garage west of town and makes a loop joining Smith Street in the city limits.

Another section takes a left on the east outskirts of town and goes past the Bo Granberry home and then back to 67 near Sulphur River. The map at the top left of the page is a reproduction of a rubber stamp that was used on all the correspondence sent from Naples by a former mayor, the late N. G. (Uncle Nat) Watts. He was proud of his city and wanted everyone to know where it was located on "The Broadway of America."

Naples and Omaha area residents will be afforded a look back at history on Thursday of this week when a group will drive antique vehicles on a tour of the century-old highway. A time schedule is included on this page.

===•••===

Texas historians are tracing a route to find your roots.

Embarking on a trip through time, the Texas Historical Commission (THC) has begun a two-year study to unearth and document the transcontinental roadway that took motorists through Texas before U.S. 67 and U.S. 80 were built.

The rich history of what was known as the Bankhead Highway dates back to 1916. That's when the Bankhead Highway Association was organized. The roadway, which was one of nation's earliest transcontinental highways, was designated in 1919. Named for John H. Bankhead, the U.S. senator who threw major support behind the effort, the roadway followed a route from Washington D.C., dipped down into Bankhead's home state of Alabama and then headed west through Texas and all the way to San Diego, CA.

According to the THC, its path snaked across approximately 850 miles of Texas from Texarkana to El Paso along the routes of U.S. 67 and U.S. 80, passing through towns big and small, including Mount Pleasant, Mount Vernon, Sulphur Springs, Greenville, Dallas, Fort Worth, Abilene and Midland.

John Shaffer, who serves on the Titus County Historical Commission (TCHC) and the Titus County Historical Preservation Society (TCHPS), said the remnants of the old highway that pass through Titus County are located "from Cookville on the north side of Cox Concrete on Highway 67 - the road behind that is the old highway - and intersects with 67 where it comes east and Y's at 14th Street, which is the old highway," Shaffer said. "Then it comes across and goes south on Jefferson Avenue to the [Titus County] courthouse. It turned west on what's now 1st Street and FM 899 to Farmer's Academy [a small community on County Road 1030 about three miles west of Mount Pleasant] and then angled over to Winfield."

Shaffer and his wife, Ginger, who serves as president of the TCHPS, have been digging into the highway's history partly because of the state's renewed interest in documenting its route and historical landmarks along its path, but also because the retired

couple has always been passionate about Texas history. When they moved from Dallas to their lake house in Titus County more than a decade ago, they naturally wanted to dig into the history of their new surroundings.

"We always want to know what's going on and what's here so we started researching Fort Sherman. That's how I got involved," John Shaffer said. "I've been the instigator of the Fort Sherman Dam reclamation project and they asked me to sit on the [Titus County] historical commission."

Ginger Shaffer said she hopes that once the state's Bankhead Highway project is completed Mount Pleasant and Titus County will be a key part of it.

"That will be something that we can celebrate because I don't think a lot of people really realize how important the Bankhead was," she said. "Hopefully we can get some of the buildings highlighted because we just got the [City of Mount Pleasant] preservation ordinance in place and some of these buildings will be even more important."

She is also excited about the tourism possibilities.

"Tourists and local residents could follow it and relive it. I don't think people realize that before there was I-30 and before there was 67 and 80, there was the Bankhead," she said. "We would love to see the route marked with signs and have individual markers for the buildings identifying what they previously were. We could have a walk-through or drive-through tour like they've done with the Lincoln Highway."

The Lincoln Highway was the nation's first transcontinental highway. Its path wound 3,400 miles from New York on a northern route through the Midwest to San Francisco, CA, according to the Lincoln Highway Association's Website.

"A number of vintage car clubs get together with their Model Ts from the 20s and 30s and drive from one town to another along the highway," John Shaffer said. "That's the kind of thing we'd like to see here."

Ginger Shaffer said Mount Vernon is ahead of the game in marking the Bankhead Highway through its borders.

"Mount Vernon has celebrated the Bankhead for quite some time and we can connect the dots to Mount Vernon and be a part of that," she said. "There are a lot more people than you think who follow those kinds of things and want to go to cities and spend time looking into their histories."

The interest in the Bankhead Highway is part of a national push.

"Folks are more aware nationally of the old Bankhead, but Texas has stepped right up," John Shaffer said.

Funding for the Texas Bankhead project comes from special money allocated by the Texas Legislature and a grant from the Texas Department of Transportation. The THC is contracting with an Austin-based historic preservation planning and management firm to complete the study.

The THC said the project will result in a history of the Texas section of the Bankhead Highway, and will also "survey the Texas Bankhead route and associated historic resources, including auto repair garages, gas stations, diners, tourist camps, auto courts, motels, road markers, paving, traffic signs, and bridges," according to its Website.

Leslie Wolfenden, the THC's historic resources survey coordina-

tor, said the Bankhead Highway project is the primary focus of the inaugural effort of the Texas Historic Roads and Highways Program, which was established in 2009 by the Texas Legislature and jointly administered by THC and TxDOT.

The program, which is funded by the U.S. Federal Highway Administration, has a goal of "identifying and commemorating historic highways in Texas and producing a series of interpretive publications to encourage heritage tourism," Wolfenden wrote in "Travel Through Time: Bankhead Highway Blazed a Path Across Texas," an article published in THC's The Medallion. Public meetings held across the state in the fall of 2013 encouraged residents to help them tell the story of the Bankhead Highway by sharing information, photos, maps, postcards and other items related to the Bankhead as they document its history.

Wolfenden said the program's staff will continue to receive input and materials through spring of 2014. Texans can post photos on the THC's Flickr photo sharing site. The project is scheduled to be completed by

July 2014. Information on the project and links to the Flickr page are at thc.state.tx.us.

John Shaffer said THC has been through the area and has taken photographs of a number of buildings in Titus County and Mount Pleasant that appear to be vintage that would have been along the Bankhead Highway route.

"We would like to have local maps and a walking tour, especially through downtown where we would see the most bang for the buck as far as tourists attractions," Ginger Shaffer said. "Property owners can also develop a renewed pride in the buildings by adding another dimension to their historical significance."

The local historical commission and preservation society are supporting the state commission's efforts. John Shaffer has been compiling exhaustive research on the Titus County portion of the roadway.

"The old Bankhead followed county roads and had lots of turns in it. Much of it paralleled Highway 67, which took the straightest route from Texarkana to Mount Pleasant," he said. "Back in the 30s when 67 was built; it was the modern two-lane highway."

Shaffer said one of the promoters of the Bankhead was the owner a concrete company.

"Every so often they would build a one-mile concrete portion to try to get counties to adopt concrete,

so they would promote that to the chambers and county commissioners," he said. "The Bankhead predates the creation of the Texas highway department. There wasn't a Texas highway department building highways until 67 came along."

Quoted in Wolfenden's article, THC Commissioner Tom Alexander said the in-depth study of the historic Bankhead Highway will "invoke memories of a time when automobile traffic was far more about adventure rather than

speed."

That nostalgia is part of what sparks the Shaffers' passion to explore the history around them.

"So many folks in our age group don't know the history of Titus County," John Shaffer said. "We've always chuckled that around here it seems like if it didn't happen after you graduated from high school, it didn't happen."

His wife added, "We've been surprised, though, that when we bring it to their attention they appreciate it more."

