

The Bankhead Highway In South Carolina

Ernest Everett Blevins, MFA

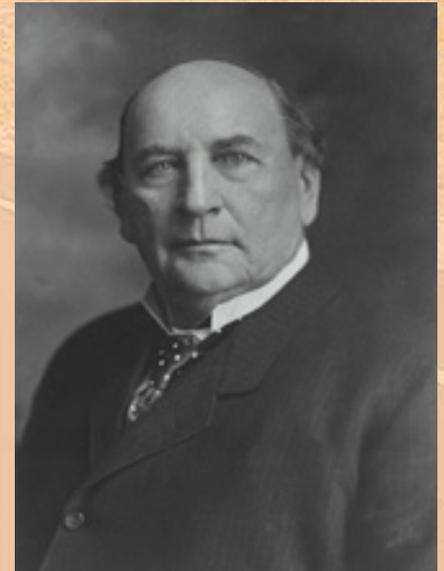
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John Hollis Bankhead

- Born on the family plantation near old Moscow now located in the town of Sulligent
 - September 13, 1842
- At 19 joined the Co. K 16th Alabama Infantry
 - Captain
 - Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and Perryville, Kentucky
- Alabama State legislator and State Senator
- Warden of the state penitentiary in Wetumpka, Alabama (1881-1885)
- Considered the state's prison system outdated and publicly criticized the appalling conditions in which convicts lived
- Served in US House of Representatives
- June 1907, upon the death of Senator John Tyler Morgan, he was appointed to the Senate
 - Predetermined by the Alabama legislature because at the time state legislators appointed Senators
 - Changed by 17th amendment (adopted 1913, ratified 1913)

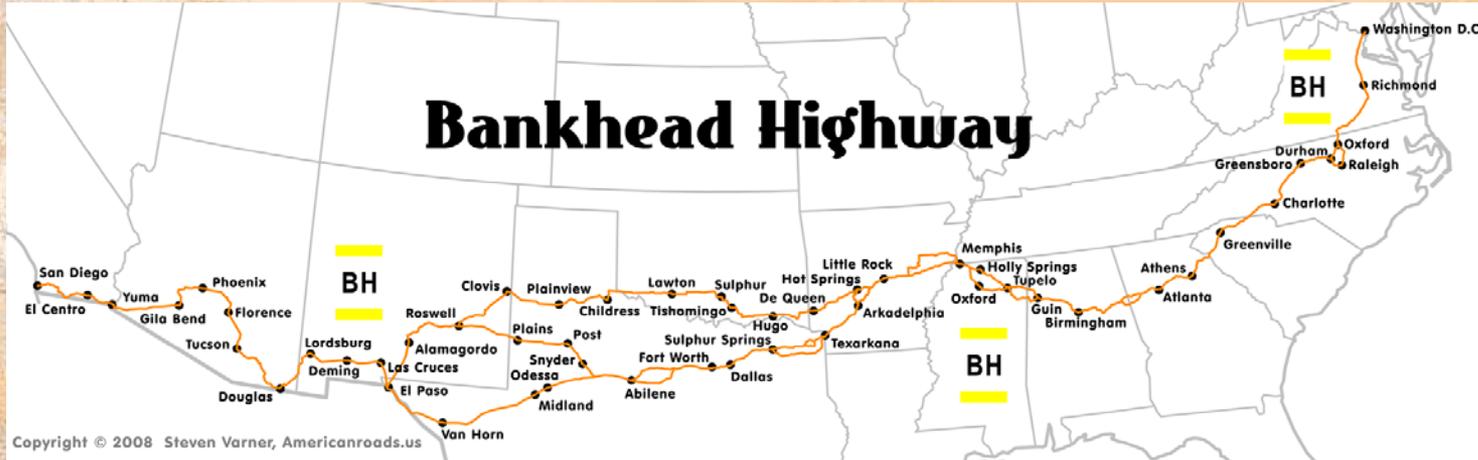


John Hollis Bankhead

- Bankhead started advocating for good roads at least by 1906
- Advocated the development of the nation's waterways.
- 1906 President Theodore Roosevelt appointed Bankhead to a position on the Inland Waterways Commission
- President of the United States Good Roads Association
- Frequent speaker at good roads conferences across the nation.
- Nickname "Father of Good Roads."
- 1916 Sponsored the "Bankhead Bill"
- March 1, 1920, John Hollis Bankhead died in Washington, D.C.
 - Transported to Jasper and interred at Oak Hill Cemetery
- Last Confederate Veteran in Congress
 - 1917 Bankhead and Knute Nelson (of Minnesota, a 4th Wisconsin veteran) marched in the United Confederate Veterans parade 1917 upon the Senate's adjournment for the events.



The Significance of the Bankhead Highway



- The longest highway in the world named for one individual – Senator John Hollis Bankhead
- The second transcontinental highway across the United States
- The first all weather transcontinental Highway
- “The Bankhead Highway is proving to be one of the most popular highways in the United States. It will be a great market and scenic road.”
 - Col. T.S. Plowman, president Bankhead Highway Association, 1916
- The Bankhead Highway as a fulfilling the Good Roads Movement

America's Early 20th-Century Roads

- Few city roads were paved
 - Brick, cobblestone, some concrete
 - 1877 - First asphalt paving in North America: Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, DC
- Fewer highways were paved
 - Macadam was a common paving with single-sized aggregate layers of small stones, with a coating of binder as a cementing agent
- Road maintenance minimal
- Local responsibility for road maintenance
- Minimal planning in road network development

US Public Roads Car In Mud,
probably North Carolina



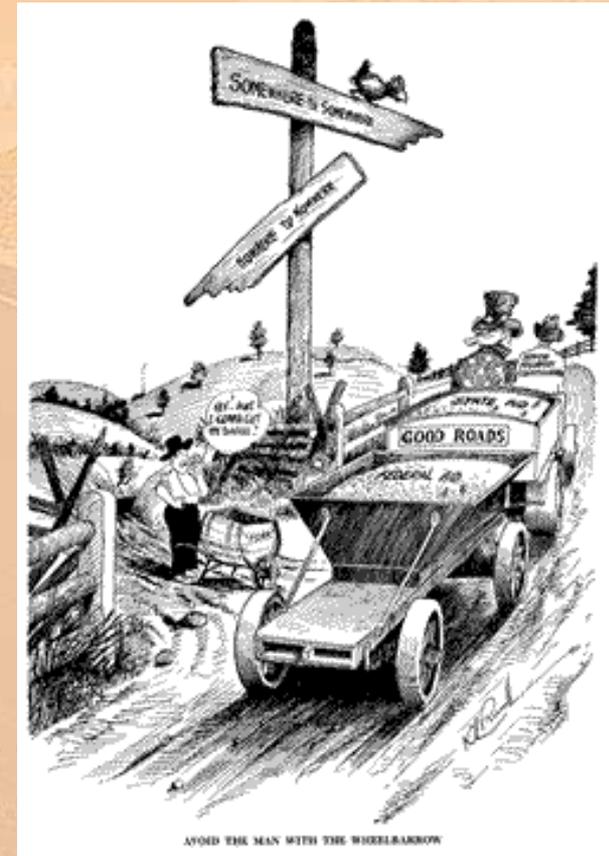
EARTH AND MACADAM ROADS

[Built by convict labor in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina]



Good Roads Movement

- League of American Wheelmen (LAW)
 - 1880, Newport, Rhode Island
 - Promoted bicycling and good roads
 - 1892, began publishing *Good Roads* magazine
- National Good Roads Association
 - 1893
 - Headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri
- U.S. Department of Agriculture created an Office of Road Inquiry
 - group funded by the federal government that conducted research on road
 - 1905 became the Office of Public Roads
 - Several name changes duties transferred to the new Federal Highway Administration in 1966



Need for Good Roads

- American Automobile Association
 - March 4, 1902, Chicago, Illinois
 - Response to a lack of roads and highways suitable for automobiles
 - Nine motor clubs with a total of 1,500 members banded together representing Chicago, New Jersey, Long Island, Rhode Island, Philadelphia, Princeton, Utica, and Grand Rapids.



WHAT FARMERS HAVE TO CONTENT WITH IN SOME SECTIONS OF ILLINOIS.

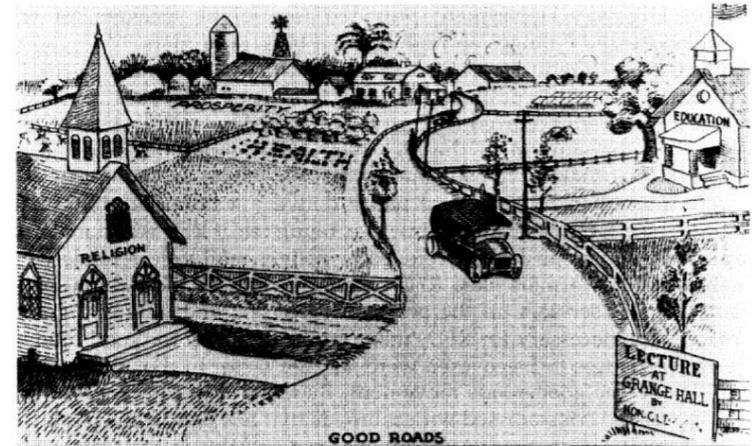


FIG. 1—Idealized effect of good roads on the American rural landscape. Source: *Better Roads and Streets*, Vol. 5, December, 1915, p. 9.

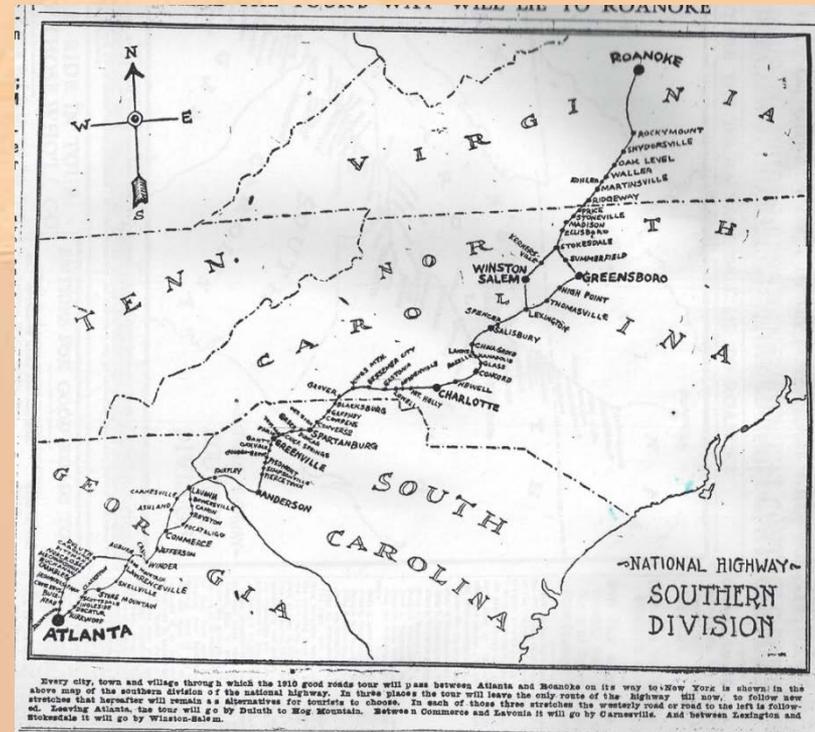
Reality of Good Roads

- Farmers resistant to early movement
 - Raise taxes
 - Easier for children to relocate to the city
 - Resisted being taxed to pay for good roads so wealthy city "peacocks" could ride their in the countryside.
- Farmers come around
 - Became advocates of good roads with the introduction of nationwide Rural Free Delivery (RFD) in 1896
 - Depended on the existence of passable roads for home delivery of mail.
 - Crops to market cheaper
 - Crops fresher and valued more
 - Taxes for roads from gas tax
 - Value of Farm land along roads increased.



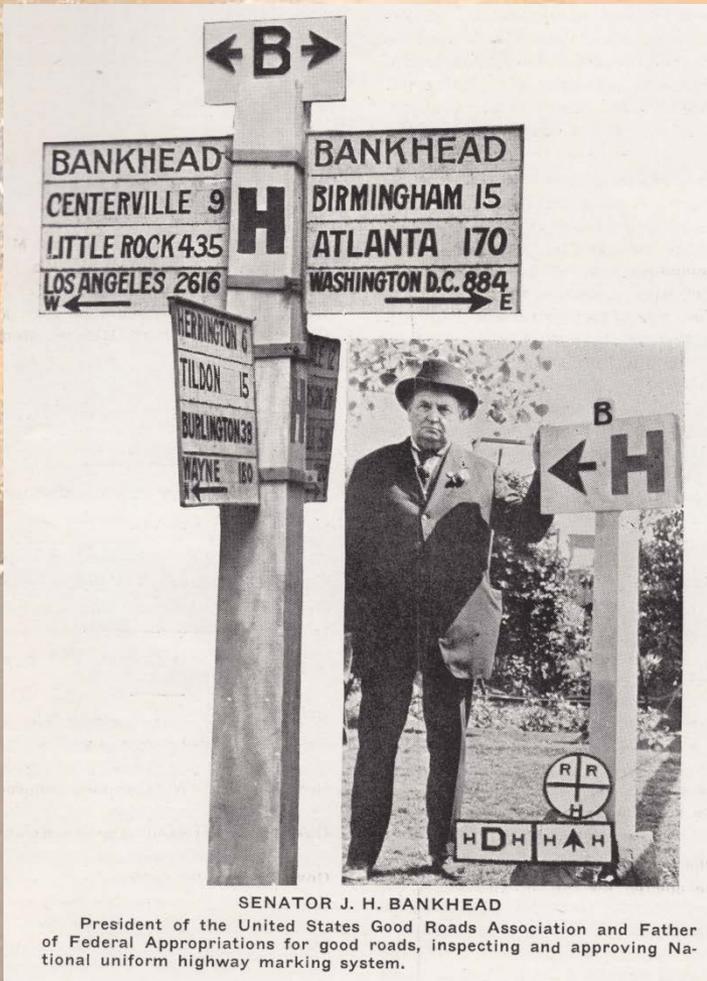
Good Roads Caravans

- In 1910 a Good Roads Tour along the Southern Division of the National Highway
- The route through South Carolina is the future Bankhead Highway was also the National Highway as mapped in 1915



Early Highway Systems

- Early highway systems used existing roads and designated them to connect towns.
- Highway Associations were created to align the route to attract designated routes to towns and to privately fund improvements.
- Highway Associations provided signage for the routes
- New Santa Fe (1910)
 - First association
- Lincoln Highway Association (1913)
- Dixie Highway Association (1914)
- Bankhead Highway Association (1916)



Federal Aid Road Act of 1916 (The Bankhead Bill)

- Rep. Dorsey W. Shackelford of Missouri introduced in 1916
 - authorized \$25 million to improve "rural post roads" with costs split by federal and local funds
 - Passed the House of Representatives and sent to the Senate
- Senate Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads, headed by Sen. John H. Bankhead of Alabama.
 - long-time advocate of federal aid for roads
 - May 8, 1916, the Senate approved the Bankhead bill
 - Authorized \$75 million for federal-aid improvements
 - Additional \$10 million (\$1 million per year for 10 years) for roads and trails within or only partly within the national forests.
 - Each state would have a highway agency with engineering professionals to carry out the federal-aid projects.
 - South Carolina created the State Highway Department in 1917
 - Renamed Department of Transportation with the State Government Restructuring Act of 1993
 - Prior to 1917, county governments were entirely responsible for building and maintaining roads..
- Served the social function of enhancing life in rural America by focusing on rural post roads
- As historian Bruce Seely said, "By incorporating this vision, the nation's first highway policy combined the Progressive goals of economic efficiency and social betterment."
- On July 11, 1916, President Wilson signed the bill in a White House ceremony that was attended by members of Congress and representatives of AAA, AASHO, and farm organizations.

Atlanta-Birmingham-Memphis Highway



- October 1916 the Atlanta-Birmingham-Memphis Highway 300 delegates from Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee met at the Tutwiler Hotel on 20th Street and 5th Avenue North in Birmingham
 - Tutwiler Hotel will host meetings of Bankhead and other highway associations and Good Roads movement organizations
- U.S. Senator John Hollis Bankhead
 - President of the U.S. Good Roads Association
 - “The Atlanta-Birmingham-Memphis Highway would be constructed in two years...”
 - “... be an important link in the great highway that stretches from the Atlantic to the Pacific.”
- By the end of the organizational meeting the Bankhead Highway Association was formed, named in honor of Senator Bankhead.

Bankhead Highway Association

- Organization is set up
 - President (T.S. Plowman of Talladega, Alabama)
 - Secretary (J.A. Roundtree of Birmingham, Alabama)
 - One vice-president from each state
- Each state mimics the national organization with vice presidents representing each county the proposed road will likely pass through
- This organization typical of early Highway Associations
- By February 1917, The Bankhead Highway Association “has already no less than 1,000 members”

Local South Carolina Bankhead Highway Associations

- Communities formed Bankhead Highway Associations
 - South Carolina invited to participate in the 1917 Greensboro, North Carolina Bankhead Highway Association meeting
- Two routes competed in South Carolina
 - The National Highway route Charlotte, North Carolina; Gaffney, Spartanburg, Greenville, Anderson, South Carolina, Athens, Georgia
 - A second proposed route from Raleigh, North Carolina to Columbia, South Carolina, to Augusta, Georgia

**CHANGE TO SECURE
BANKHEAD HIGHWAY**

ANOTHER ROUTE IS ASKING FOR
CONSIDERATION.

If it Follows Old National Highway
Route Will Give Cherokee 30 Miles
Government Built Road.

Since Cherokee county on Tuesday voted \$225,000 in bonds for permanent road improvement, interest here in the Bankhead highway, the military road to be built by the United States government from Washington to Los Angeles, Cal., has considerably increased. If the Bankhead road follows the old National Highway route, as has been suggested, it will mean that approximately 30 miles in Cherokee county, from Grover to Cowpens, will be constructed by the federal government. This would permit the Cherokee county highway commission to build approximately the same number of miles in other sections of the county.

But it is by no means certain that the Bankhead road will follow the old National Highway route from Washington to Atlanta. There is an effort being made to have the military highway go by Augusta, Ga., Columbia and Raleigh, N. C. This would leave Cherokee county off the route

**BANKHEAD HIGHWAY
ROUTED BY GAFFNEY**

PATHFINDERS COMING WITHIN
30 DAYS.

Piedmont Representatives Had Voting
Strength of 106, Sufficient to Control Convention.

Gaffney will be on the great military highway that will stretch across the continent from Washington, D. C., to Los Angeles, Cal. This was made definitely known Friday, when at the Bankhead Highway Association's meeting in Birmingham, Ala., the committee on location made the following report:

"Your committee on rules and regulations governing the location of the route of the Bankhead Highway, from Washington, D. C., to Los Angeles, Cal., begs to report that it has decided to locate the route as follows:

"From Washington, D. C., to Lynchburg, Va., to Danville, Va., to Greensboro, N. C., Charlotte, N. C., to Gaffney, Spartanburg and Anderson, S. C., thence to Hartwell, Ga., and via Winder to Atlanta.

"From Atlanta, the route selected is via Austell and Anniston, to Talladega, Pell City (via B. & A. Bridge), Leeds to Birmingham. Thence to Holly Springs, Miss., to Memphis, to Little Rock and so on to the west."

Cherokee county was represented in the convention by Hon. W. S. Hall, Supervisor John M. Jenkins, and County Commissioner J. El Sarrait. Other cities and towns of the Piedmont section sent delegates to the convention, with a total voting strength of 106. This gave South Carolina a controlling voice in the deliberations, and Mayor C. S. Webb, of Greenville, was placed on the important committee on location and C. O. Hearon, editor of the Spartanburg Herald and member of the State Highway Commission was selected chairman of the committee on resolutions.

The official route of the highway from Little Rock to Washington will be selected by a pathfinding committee, which will make the trip within the next thirty days.

At the Birmingham meeting T. Frank Watkins of Anderson was elected South Carolina vice president of the organization, and Mayor C. S. Webb of Greenville and Hon. W. S. Hall of this city were elected directors.

Selecting the Route of Bankhead Highway

- The Devil is in the Details
 - Naming the main towns did not designate the exact route
 - Route Selected by Pathfinders
 - When the pathfinders arrived they were greeted by the community in cars and along the sides of the roads
- Communities competed for the Pathfinders to come
 - Shelby, North Carolina altered plans for the Gaffney tour stop



Segment from Atlanta Constitution, 17 August 1917

Pathfinders Late in Arriving.

At the time of going to press yesterday the pathfinders of the Bankhead Highway had not arrived in Gaffney, although they were expected to get here by one o'clock. It was reported that the cause of the delay was a trip by way of Shelby, N. C., which would make the distance from Charlotte to Gaffney considerably further.

Where is the Bankhead Highway?

Some of the Roads in South Carolina

Unlike Georgia, Alabama, and Texas there are no roads named Bankhead Highway in South Carolina

- Grover, North Carolina
 - US 29
- Blacksburg, South Carolina
 - US 29/East Cherokee Street
- Gaffney, South Carolina
 - US 29/Old Georgia Road
- Cowpens, South Carolina
 - US 29/Main Street
- Spartanburg, South Carolina
 - US 29/East Main Street
 - US 29/West Main
 - Vanderbilt
 - US 29/W.O. Ezell Boulevard
 - Spartanburg Highway
- Duncan, South Carolina
 - Old Spartanburg Road
 - South Carolina Highway 290
- Greer, South Carolina
 - Rutherford Road/SC-23-21
 - South Carolina Highway 101 and 290
 - Depot Street
- Greenville, South Carolina
 - Rutherford Road
 - Dixie Highway/Poinsett Highway/Buncombe
 - Anderson Street/Anderson Road
- Anderson, South Carolina
 - South Carolina Highway 81
 - Greenville Street
 - Shockley Ferry Road
- Hartwell, Georgia

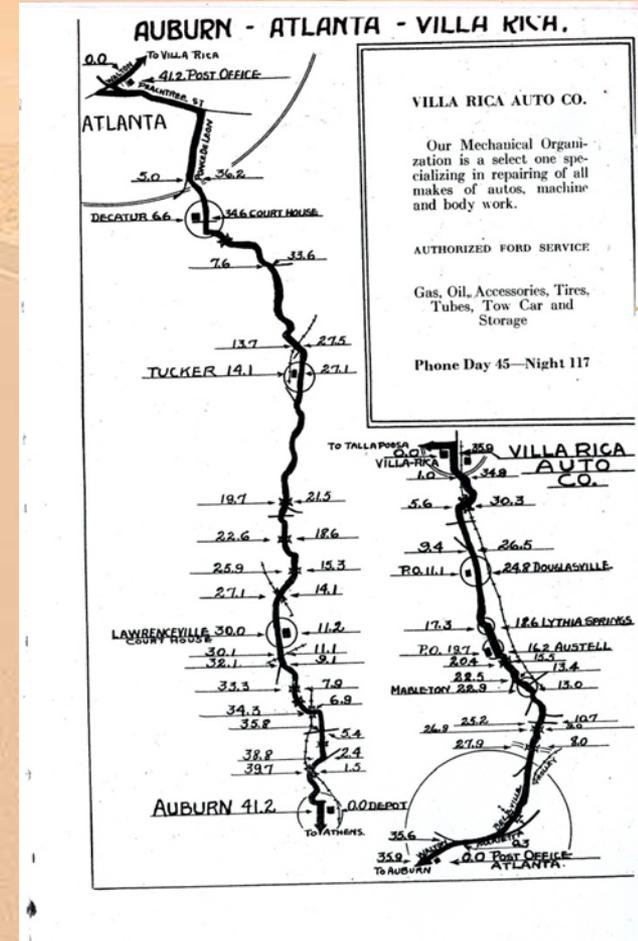
Bankhead Highway sign Over I-285
Westside, Atlanta, Georgia
Now renamed Donald Lee Hollowell Parkway



Improvements and Relocations

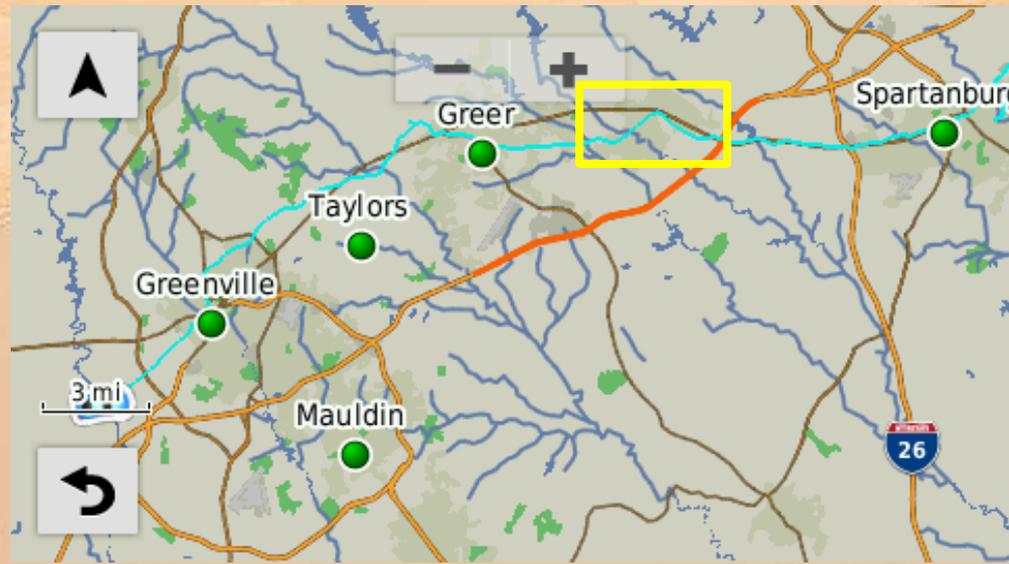
Finding the Old Road

- Historic Literature
 - 1921 *Bankhead Highway Bluebook*
 - Good Roads Movement literature
 - Local Newspapers
 - Archives
 - Newspapers.com
 - Newspaperarchive.com
- Modern Works
 - General Books
 - Bankhead Highway literature West of the Mississippi
 - This is the only East of the Mississippi work being done



Improvements and Relocations

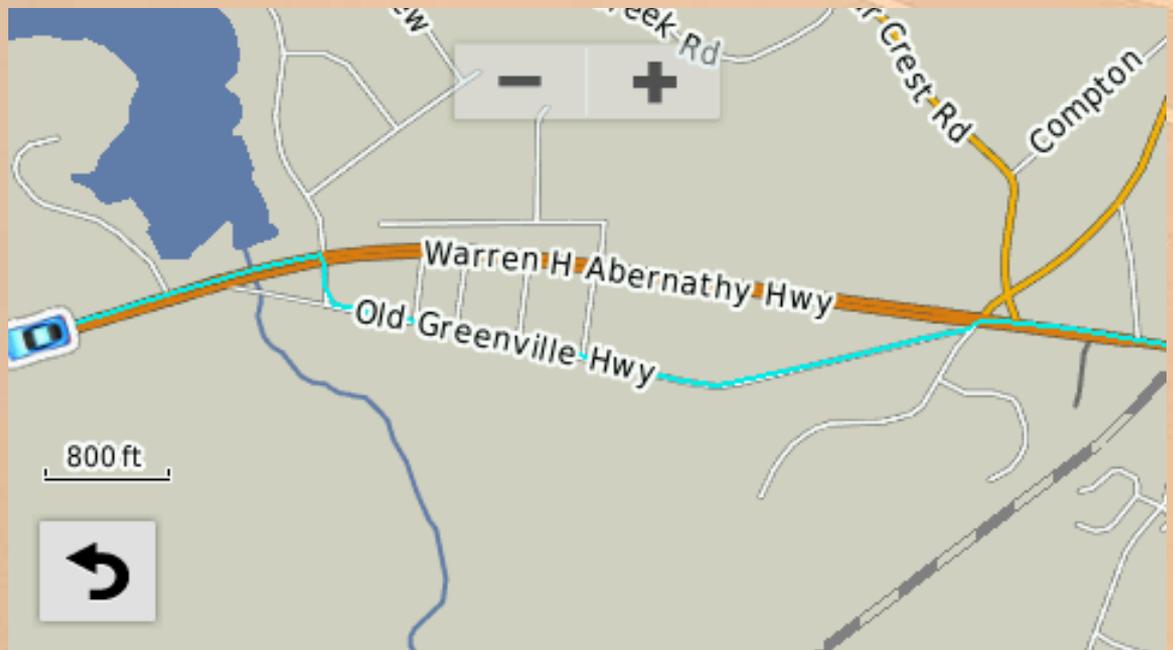
- Good Roads Improvements
- US Highway Conversion
 - 1925 Highways were numbered and the practice of naming ceased
- New Deal Era
 - New location in the early 1930s minimized railroad crossings placing the highway mostly on one side of the tracks.
- Interstate
 - By passes or parallels the historic roads



Improvements and Relocations

Finding the Old Road

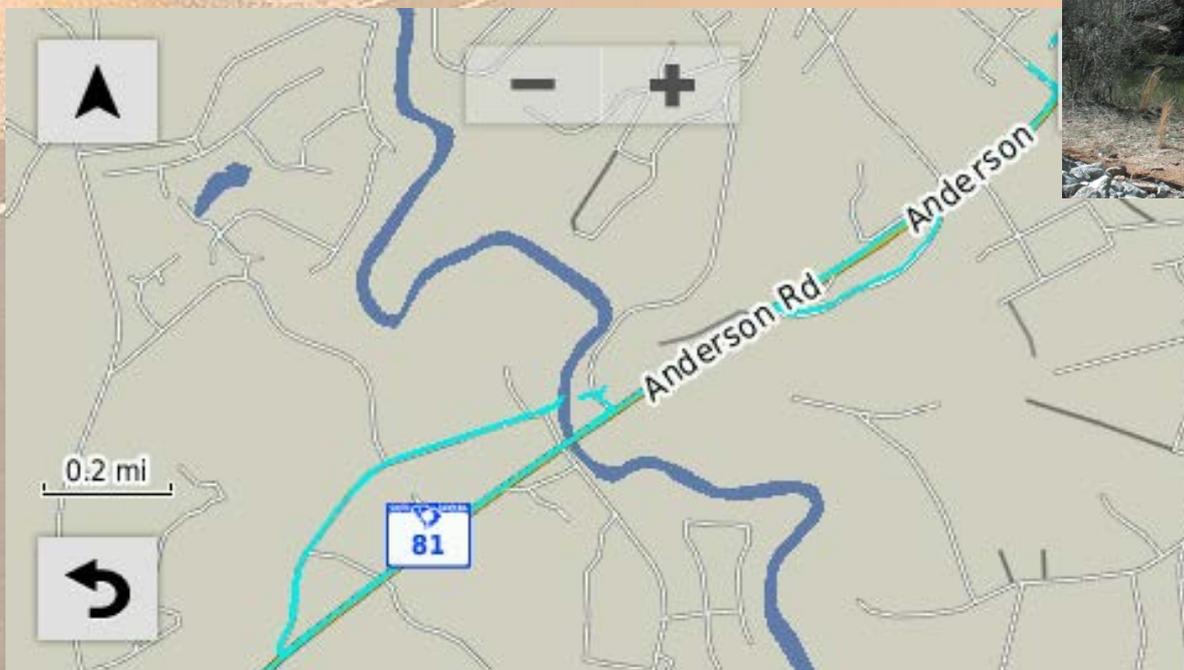
- “Old” Roads
 - Old Georgia (Gaffney)
 - Old Greenville (west of Spartanburg)
 - Old Spartanburg (Duncan)



Improvements and Relocations

Finding the Old Road

- Auto GPS
 - “Old” Road Names
 - Visual Indications
 - Good for field verifying

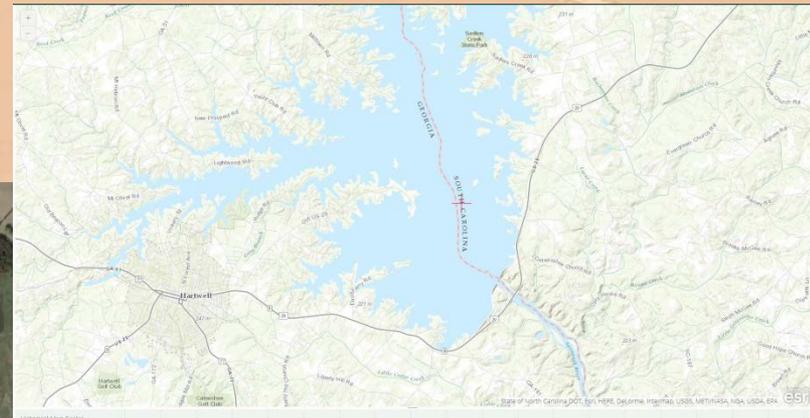
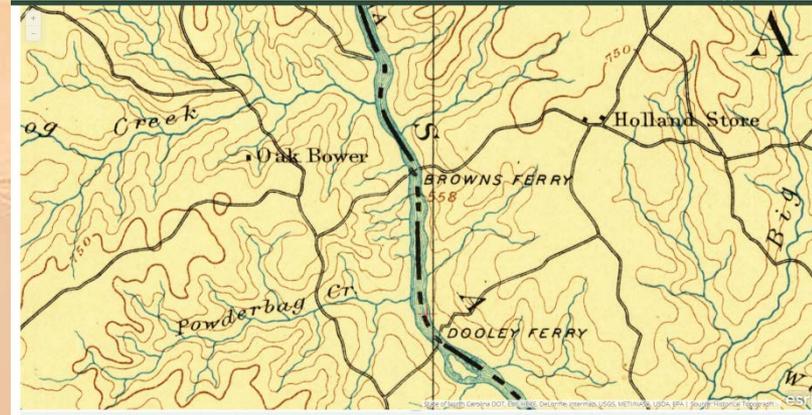


Old Dunham Bridge
Anderson County, South Carolina

Improvements and Relocations

Finding the Old Road

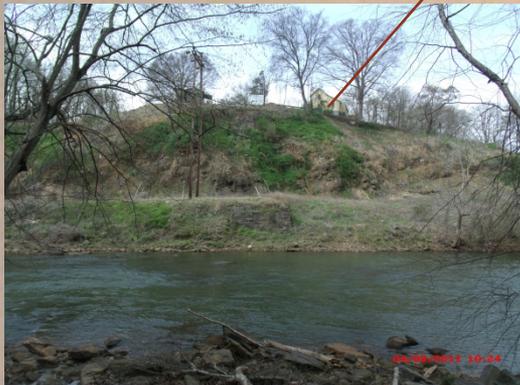
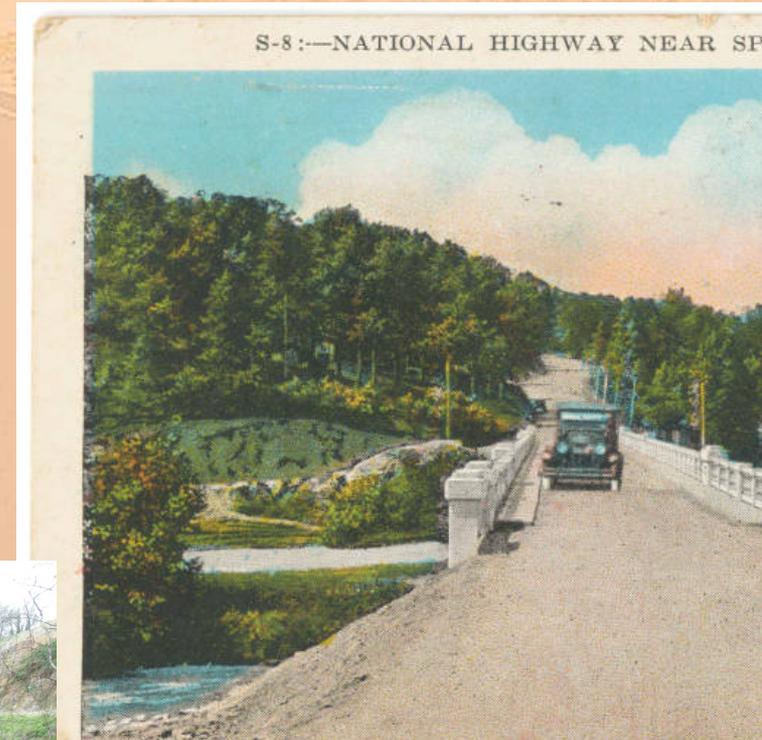
- Maps
 - City
 - County
 - Topographical
 - Highway
 - Google Earth



Improvements and Relocations

Finding the Old Road

- Old Bridges means old routes



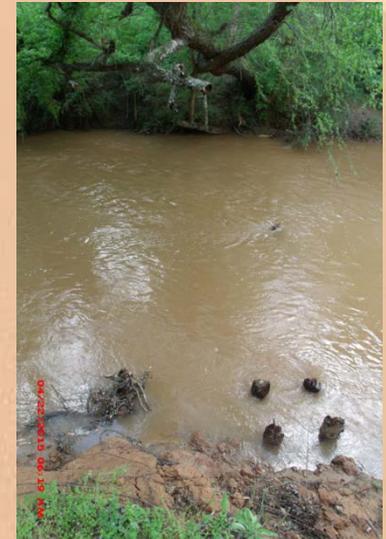
Improvements and Relocations

Finding the Old Road

- Old Bridges means old routes



Thickety Creek, Cherokee County



Improvements and Relocations

Finding the Old Road

- Abandoned Road Beds



Old Highway 29 into Lake Hartwell
Anderson County



Old Detour Road, Cherokee County

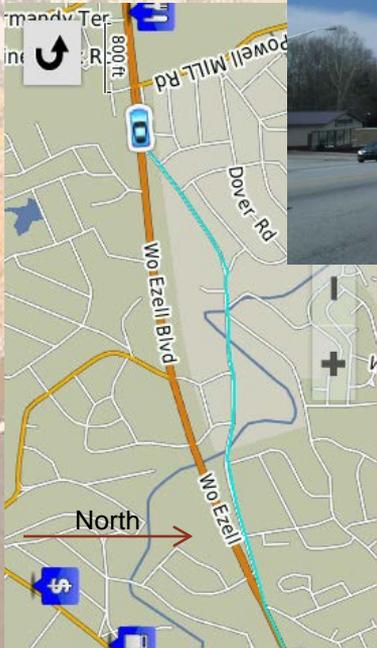


Historic Route with US 29
Converse, Spartanburg County

Improvements and Relocations

Finding the Old Road

- Active historic roads



US 29 and West Main Street (Bankhead Highway)
Spartanburg



Enoree River
Greenville County



1927 Bridge on Vanderbilt Road
Spartanburg County



Dixie Highway and Bankhead Highway
North side of Greenville

Improvements and Relocations

Finding the Old Road

- Architecture
 - Gas Stations
 - Motels
 - Bridges
 - Downtowns
 - Neighborhoods



Old Spartanburg Road
Duncan vicinity



Greer, South Carolina

What next for the Bankhead Highway?

- Continuing work on history of the road east of the Mississippi
 - Future book on the topic, none exist for East of the Mississippi
- Public History
 - Poster Panels for the 100th at the South Carolina Welcome Centers
 - Documentation of existing resources
 - Bankhead Highway Brochures
 - Texas already has these in circulation
 - Documentary video project
 - Several on other historic roads exist

For More Information or To Give Information

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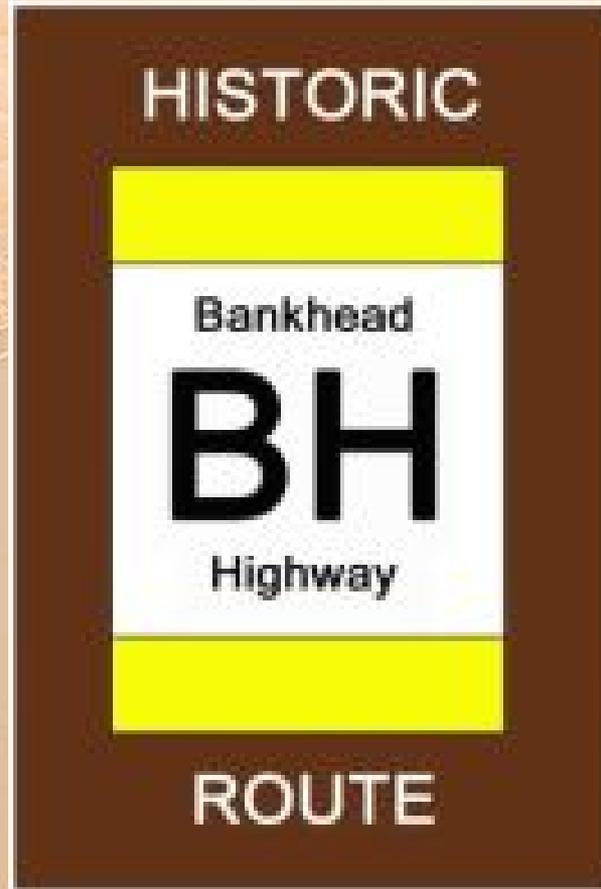
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Questions and Comments



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- Newspapers.com
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Presentation Dates

- Good Roads version Created 4 August 2012
- Different variation Presented Georgia Gwinnett College 7 August 2012
- South Carolina version 23 April 2015 South Carolina Historic Preservation Conference, Columbia