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The Old Spanish Trail begins in St. Augustine

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Several towns and cities on "The Old Spanish Trail" are trying to revive interest in the route. The Zero Milestone Marker for the Old Spanish Trail stands next to the Visitor Information Center in St. Augustine. San Diego, Calif., was the western trailhead.

The idea of the Trail was pretty much spearheaded by folks in San Antonio, Texas, a city located at its midpoint. The Trail was one of several theme-based motoring routes contrived in the 1910s and 1920s to encourage road improvement and travel and tourism by automobile. Several of these "highways" passed through St. Augustine.

Our town was on the route of The Dixie Highway, running from Sault Sainte Marie, Mich., to Miami Beach, and the Atlantic Coast Highway, stretching from Maine to Key West. There had been no old Spanish path that ran from the Atlantic to the Pacific, although the southern tier of states had been part of the Spanish empire.

Some portions of Florida's old mission trail were incorporated as the 1920s Trail route passed near the site of the San Luis Mission in Tallahassee. For the most part, the Old Spanish Trail in Florida was U.S. 90. Florida was the first of the participating states to completely pave the Trail route.

After the Trail left Florida and crossed into Alabama, the road changed for the worse. Trail officials complained sharply about the condition of the Trail roads in Alabama. The Trail passed from a state (Florida) "with exceptionally fine paved roads into one that ought to be ashamed of itself."

Efforts to create The Old Spanish Trail began in 1916, but it did not become a reality until 1929. To initiate the Trail a motorcade started in San Diego on March 23, 1929, bound for our town. It gathered more vehicles along the way. As the caravan arrived in St. Augustine after 2,743 miles, a band and motorcycle patrol greeted the travelers at the city limits.

The round coquina Trail zero milestone marker was dedicated during three days of pageants beginning April 2, 1929. The marker originally sat adjacent to then-Fort Marion Circle, south of the Castillo de San Marcos. In May 1962 the shellstone sphere was moved to the north side of the VIC (Civic Center Building). Now it sits on the south side of that building.

Already San Antonio is making plans for a centennial celebration and is asking each of the 67 counties in the eight states along the route to put up signs and gather oral histories about the Trail. And another coast-to-coast convoy is part of that celebration.