

Parliament of Women  
Beautification of the Old Spanish Trail  
BY CHARLOTTE KAHL  
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As we invite travelers across the southern U. S. to drive the quiet, scenic, historic Old Spanish Trail as an alternative to Interstate 10, we can continue the work begun in 1923 to beautify the roadway. The following article is from the 1929 OST Travelog.

## Beautification Department

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### Developing the Plans

The beautification work along the Old Spanish Trail was organized by southern women at New Orleans in 1923, at the Old Spanish Trail convention. This was the first organized movement in a national way for roadside protection and beautification. At this gathering the women emphasized the principle that while the men would build the roads the women should lead in developing their beauties and attractions. Since then long trips over the Old Spanish Trail have been made by groups of these women. Individual members of the Board have made trips thru many states and thru Europe studying conditions in the interest of this work.

### The Headquarters Section

Mrs. A. C. Seiser, Chairman.

One of the first practical steps was to adopt the 30-mi. road from San Antonio to Boerne, Texas, as a special Headquarters Section. The women recognized this would give them practical experience and qualify them better for leadership to the other localities. The Headquarters Section is scenically capable of beautiful development but it had the usual collection of advertising signs and crude roadside buildings; in places the road was too narrow, some curves were sharp and other conditions were unfavorable to nice development. The first necessary step was a wider right-of-way. All agreed one hundred feet was the minimum to be secured and experience sustains this conclusion.

Widening the right-of-way to 100 ft. has now been in progress for three years and has cost the combined effort of the women and the San Antonio civic organizations. Fences are being put back and the State is following along with improvements. Property owners are slow giving the needed right-of-way and this emphasizes the importance of getting a proper right-of-way before property improvements become too settled.

The Bexar-Kendall county gateway, costing \$1000, has been constructed of native stone columns and buttresses according to an architect's design. The road clearance between the columns is 40 ft. Where possible the State Highway Department prefers 50 ft. to 60 ft. The other counties thru West Texas are planning similar stone gateways at their county lines.

A rugged, shaded tract on the Balcones Creek was donated for a wayside park; this is being improved with

stone fences and entrances, stone tables and seats, fire places, resting places and a stone caretaker's house. The Kiwanis Club, the Bexar County Medical Auxiliary and numerous San Antonio and Boerne citizens have cooperated to provide funds and materials for this work. Other beautiful spots along the Old Spanish Trail are offered for wayside parks. The experience with this park work will aid the planning of other parks.

#### The Beautification Program

Bulletins, architects' drawings, photos of completed works, and other helps are now available.

1—The most attractive and efficient route marking in the United States is being installed by the route marking department; the beautification department coordinates with this. Blue prints and bulletins are ready and the work is in progress. Localities may now go ahead with some of this work.

2—Signing of the historical, interesting and scenic places. A design of old Spanish types with the rich Spanish colors has been adopted.

3—County Line gateways. Architect's plans for stone or concrete columns and gateways will be mailed on request. A stone gateway has been erected at the Bexar-Kendall County line on the Headquarters Section. West Texas counties will place columns or gateways of native stone.

4—State Line gateways.

5—Wayside parks. On the headquarters section such a park has been donated, a stone caretaker's house is being erected, also stone tables, benches and fences. This is not an auto camp but a wayside park with a caretaker. Other donations have been offered along the Old Spanish Trail. It is somewhat expensive preparing such a park but cooperation on this park has been cordial. The caretaker will have a home and should sell enough for his living, therefore be no expense.

6—Improved city and town entrances. This will be much finer than the billboards and crude advertising signs along the highway to advertise the town or city.

7—Improved property entrances and fences. Individual property owners are responding to this suggestion nicely. Photos of improved entrances will be mailed.

8—Removal of advertising signs. The highway departments are proceeding with this splendidly. New laws are needed. This department has laws for submission to legislatures.

9—Planting of trees and shrubs where desirable, and preserving scenery where no planting is needed. Providing consulting landscape artists and horticulturists to help outline this phase of the work. Where cattle are allowed on the road stock laws must be passed; localities should take this matter up at once.

10—Establishing cooperation with the State highway departments for attentions by the engineers and the maintenance forces to improve conditions. This cooperation is being delightfully extended by the highway officials.

11—Ultimately it is hoped some sort of an award sign can be given the localities showing the best sector during the year. This perhaps to be erected on the highway in the localities receiving the award.

80 years later, OST100 began looking for the photos, blue prints, bulletins and architects drawings mentioned above to help with preservation of 1920s and 30s enhancements. The search continues in university and news archives, descendant's attics and garages for the papers of the women associated with the 1920s OST. The Handbook of Texas credits Mrs. George Sealy (East Texas Director) with establishing Galveston as the "Oleander City." Others of the Parliament of Women were:

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Miss Mary Bonner

The Women's Clubs of Boerne and San Antonio worked on the 30-mile Bexar/Kendall County Headquarters Section.<sup>(1)</sup> Baldwin Co., AL first began placing historical signage and planted miles of trees.<sup>(2)</sup> The Mississippi coast department created a five year landscape plan. El Paso planted 1000 trees in 1928 and another 1000 in 1930.<sup>(3)</sup> There are 1924 news photos of cacti among stones around the 0-mile stone boulder on the San Antonio City Hall lawn.<sup>(4)</sup> Plans for lining the OST with trees from the Alamo to the cradle of Texas history, San Jacinto were proposed.<sup>(2)</sup> After 1925, as the federal government designated U. S. Highways, much of the landscaping came under federal funding.<sup>(5)</sup> The OST Beautification Department asked the public to "encourage by their patronage the tradesmen whose places of business are attractive."<sup>(6)</sup>

Landscaping complimented the various highway surfaces. Some of the OST in Florida was built of brick,<sup>(7)</sup> some of red clay, in Alabama of crushed seashells,<sup>(8)</sup> through Texas of Uvalde asphalt<sup>(9)</sup> and on the Arizona/California border of wooden planks.<sup>(10)</sup> Spanish themes were incorporated into OST signage. San Antonio artist Mary Bonner advised the department<sup>(4)</sup> and the King's envoy approved the final colorful designs.<sup>(11)</sup>

Revitalization and beautification continues along the OST today as many counties take part in courthouse restoration,<sup>(12)</sup> cities in Main Street programs<sup>(13)</sup> and states designate scenic routes for preservation<sup>(14)</sup>. Some have gone further: Leon Co., FL has Tree Canopy Roads,<sup>(15)</sup> Pima Co., AZ Sonoran Desert Conservation,<sup>(16)</sup> Bexar Co., TX aquifer protection<sup>(17)</sup> and Crestview, FL an annual OST festival.<sup>(18)</sup>

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