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Maud Durlin Sullivan

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## OLD ROADS AND NEW HIGHWAYS IN THE SOUTHWEST<sup>1</sup>

By MAUD DURLIN SULLIVAN

THIS title should continue in a rather Thackerayish manner, "in which a public library endeavors to revive a tradition for the community." It is not our purpose to present a series of historical facts in connection with each trail mentioned, nor to give the history of the trails themselves, but rather to show how the romance and adventure surrounding them were used to stimulate an interest in the whole subject of Southwest history.

The Southwest is young. Its cities have been built by those hardy and determined Americans who have only recently written the final chapter to the story of their long and active lives. Our "Mayflower" was that first covered wagon which appeared over the mountain road, making its slow progress down toward "the Pass to the North," to the broad valley of the Rio Grande. Others came in great numbers in search of fortune, or health, or just an adventure. These knew little of anything of the history so closely interwoven with Spain's great period of exploration, nor of that far older Indian civilization which archaeologists have revealed to us during the past twenty years. Nor does the present generation know much about them.

A simple way of approaching the subject was to bring home to our people the history underlying the highways of the Southwest. To do this it was necessary to go back over the period of Spanish exploration and to bring to life those who had crossed the country before trails were in existence. Roads and trails are fascinating things in themselves. Arising from man's need for communication and transportation, they generally followed some old well known path possibly first made by animals, and as time drove this need onward,

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1. A paper read before the American Library Association at Los Angeles, June 1930, by Mrs. Sullivan, librarian of the El Paso Public Library.

and in different directions, the trails became traveled roads. The rough-going trails of these explorers and pioneers in time developed into the smooth broad highways of today.

Our first venture was a course in Southwest history which was given to a group of business women. This work was followed by another venture of real importance, when El Paso celebrated its 50th birthday in 1922. The preparation for this festival in which so many citizens took part taxed the resources of the library to the utmost, but it also served to introduce the subject in all its fascination to a much wider audience.

Later several lectures were given under the auspices of scientific and literary societies. The problem of showing routes and locations of the early explorations so that persons in the audience could see them, led us to enlarge the map in Dr. Bolton's charming book, *Spanish Borderlands*. This map as finally completed measured four and one-half by seven feet. The journeys were outlined in bright colors, plainly visible in a medium size lecture hall. The amazing wanderings of Cabeza de Vaca and his companions across Texas always captivated an audience. There is no more thrilling tale of adventure in the annals of our history.

In tracing the footsteps of these gallant adventurers, it had not occurred to us that anyone in the audience would dispute the various geographical points mentioned as having been visited by each explorer. At the first lecture when this map was used, there were several men in the audience who could scarcely wait for an opportunity to speak. One loyal Texas felt moved to protest that Cabeza de Vaca did not travel on the South side of the Rio Grande, but crossed Texas to the Pecos river; while a New Mexican asserted that this journey through Texas extended into New Mexico, and a long stop was made where the Governor's palace now stands!

Another theory was advanced in regard to the plants growing in that part of Texas indicated on the map where Cabeza de Vaca stopped because of the food value of the veg-

etation. There was quite a heated argument in regard to the botany of Texas, showing that this sojourn was impossible.

Realizing that these differences might arise every time the map went visiting, a brief bibliography of authorities cited was compiled for the use of those who wished for more information.

For motorists, the highway following the Rio Grande for many miles became the scene of many of these early journeys, as nearly all of them followed the river from some point near Fort Quitman. What we call the "Valley Road," winding through Ysleta (del Sur) and through all the small towns clustered along the river in El Paso county, is part of this main travelled road.

Coronado seemed a more familiar name to many people. It was not difficult to interest them in reading about his journey across New Mexico. The tale of the Seven Cities and of that wonderful scouting trip to the Grand Cañon, made by López de Cárdenas and his companions, added much to the pleasure of visiting these places.

Oñate's journey in 1598 gave an opportunity to add more color and romance to the story. Breaking a new trail from Santa Bárbara, Chihuahua, instead of the usual route along the Conchos river, Oñate led his company of Spanish soldiers and Indians over the dust and glare of Mexico's northern desert country, arriving at last on the shore of the Rio Grande near El Paso where they took possession of the land. The story goes that when they finally reached shade and coolness after their hard journey, they celebrated the event with a comedy arranged by Captain Farfán. The mention of this brought more difficulties. We were besought for the play which had been given, and many other questions were asked which it was impossible to answer.

We found Oñate an excellent guide for further motor trips of discovery as we followed his adventurous footsteps across New Mexico and Arizona. El Morro, that famed rock upon which the conquistadores wrote their names, be-

came a definite objective for travelers after reading the story. Resting in its great shadow in 1605, Oñate was the first to carve with his dagger his name and the discovery of the Sea of the South (The Gulf of California).

In the usual descriptive material issued from various sources for the benefit of the motorist, there are few, if any, references to Count Juchereau de St. Denis, whose story is one of the most delightful romances. The long road called on some old maps *El camino del rey*, on others *The Old San Antonio Road*, crossing Texas from Natchitoches to Coahuila, Mexico, was established partly through the energetic efforts of St. Denis to open a trade route for the French. Railroads and highways in Texas cross and recross this old road. St. Denis is described as good to look at, very brave and always ready for the most entrancing dangers. The story of his exploits would make excellent material for the novelists, and for the so-called fictional biographer. We found the account in Grace King's *New Orleans, the place and the people*, one of the best to interest the average reader.

Travelers from El Paso to Santa Fé drive along the modern Old Spanish Trail part of the way, and also cross the path of the famous *Jornada del Muerto*, its name implying all the terrors experienced by those who traversed this barren desert. Humboldt, writing in 1801, describes it as "30 leagues in length, destitute of water." We hear of it often in descriptions of various journeys, and nowhere more vividly than when Doniphan led his famous company of Missourians over its fateful path.

There are no terrors now, at least not of the same kind, as one speeds across these desert highways. It is not, however, difficult to visualize all that took place on this historic ground. The age-old hills and rugged bare mountains stand grey and silent in the brilliant sunlight, as they watch the procession of the years and man's endless struggle to conquer nature.

One of the most interesting accounts of early road building is given in the reports of the Secretary of War,

published in 1850, giving the reconnaissances of routes from San Antonio to El Paso, the project being to establish a permanent military road from the Gulf of Mexico to El Paso. To those who know the country it is fascinating to read of the day's findings as recorded in these reports. The distance travelled, the climate, every detail of the country is mentioned. We ride today, swiftly and in comfort over this road with no thought of the slow, arduous labor of that first trail blazing journey.

When gold was discovered in California, the question of the day became "What is the best route to California?" It is frequently heard today. The well known trails were the Oregon Trail, and the Santa Fé. Little was said about the routes through the Southwest. There were four new roads into the Rio Grande Valley, three of which passed through El Paso, the Mexican town on the west side of the Rio Grande, known then as Paso del Norte. In 1888 it was given its present name of Juárez, after Mexico's great man, Benito Juárez.

It was noted with some amusement how active the states of Arkansas and Texas were during this period in advertising the advantages of certain routes. No tourist travelogue or folder of today contains more alluring tales of "How sunshine spends the winter" than the articles which appeared in the newspapers of that day. From a note in Bieber's "Southwestern trails to California," we find this item taken from the *Houston Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register* of February 15, 1849: "These emigrants, therefore, may actually be digging in the gold mines of San Francisco or Los Angeles, before the emigrants left at St. Louis can commence their journey. The peach trees here are in blossom, the grass is springing up fresh upon the prairies, and the spring birds are singing merrily, while according to telegraph accounts, St. Louis' cold chilly winter still chains the rivers with icy bands and covers the Prairies with his snowy mantle." Not "Bigger and better" roads but "Warmer and safer" seems to have been the slogan.

El Paso was the important halfway place on these different southern routes, and was a veritable oasis in the desert. Here these emigrants rested before continuing their journey, and purchased supplies from Mexican and Missouri merchants. It was during this period that the American city of El Paso had its real beginning.<sup>2</sup>

One route for cattle drivers from Austin to Fort Yuma followed the emigrant trail. The map of this route shows every water hole and the locations of forts; the two great needs for such journeys, water and protection from the Indians. The opening chapter of Emerson Hough's *Story of the Cowboy* contains a fine description of the Long Trail of the cattle range.

With the great increase in motoring during the past ten years there were more requests for books on early New Mexico history. Stopping at some Indian village or passing the ruins of an old fort, many of these travelers wished to learn something of an apparently unknown country.

Using an automobile road map, places of interest on different routes to California were selected, and a few books were listed which would make the journey more profitable. As this way of reading became more popular, the scope of the motor travelogues was enlarged to include a wider field in the Southwest, as well as the roads close to the city. A small folder is distributed through the Automobile Club, hotels, and camps, mentioning briefly a few places of historic interest to visit, and that the library has material about them.

In this agreeable method of presenting Southwest history, incidents were selected here and there from different periods, or wherever a character or event suggested some central point for starting a new search for adventure. In recent years, the Southwest has frequently been the subject for study groups and various club programs. Our enlarged map is often loaned to these groups.

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2. Bartlett, *Personal Narrative of Exploration, 1850-53* gave the population as about 21,000 in the Mexican town and 400 on the American side.

The Spanish conquerors have become familiar to all. Their helmeted faces appear on the facades of our new hotels and adorn the home of the much sought after Spanish type.

Promoters of travel trips find it safer to consult the histories and maps in libraries before venturing on new and alluring tales. One is so likely to find here and there an argumentative tourist who knows.

From some high point on one of these highways, you may look down on a wide stretch of desert and the green fields of irrigated land following the silver line of the river. While you watch the changing lights and the color on mountain and mesa, you may see in fancy, a group of conquistadores with shining helmets and the flying pennants of Spain, riding slowly along one of those old unbroken trails. In sharp contrast you may vision the dark-robed friars, bravest of all, carrying the faith to an unknown country. A long procession of shadowy figures follows: Indians, traders, adventurers, pack trains, covered wagons, and perhaps the galloping horse of some famed bad man, escaping the rough justice of the time. While you dream over old stories which seem so real against the unchanging background of mountain and river, a great scarlet plane from Mexico drifts into sight, one of today's adventurers blazing new trails across the blue of a Southwest sky.