

Half a Century of Tourism on the Texas Heritage Trails

This document is a work in progress, an evolving history based on presentations and conference papers from 2012 to 2017. In 2018, as the Texas Travel Trails mark the fiftieth anniversary of the program's founding and the Texas Heritage Trails Program, which evolved from the 1968 program in 1997-98, celebrates twenty years of success, we're sharing what we know, to date, of this remarkable story.

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Overview



Fifty years ago (1966) Texas's first-ever tourism marketing study revealed that few visitors thought of the Lone Star State as a top travel destination. Acting on that research, Gov. John Connally's administration moved quickly to change perceptions, commissioning what would come to be known as the Texas Parkway Study.

The result, instituted just in time for San Antonio's 1968 HemisFair, was not one but ten Texas Travel Trails, designed to attract tourists from urban centers and Interstates onto back roads and into remote and rural locales where the state's varied history took place. The program continues today as a nationally award-winning heritage tourism program under the Texas Historical Commission (THC). Today the Texas Heritage Trails popularize the state's rich history, helping preserve structures, sites, and stories that might otherwise have fallen into obscurity, and generating significant dollars for local and state coffers.

Precisely how the Texas Heritage Trails evolved into an effective and sophisticated program, from Connally's original series of driving trails, is also a story worth telling—one illustrated by the continuing, visible motif of blue-and-white highway signs. Connally managed to institute an appealing, forward-thinking program, with cooperation among several state agencies and local authorities, and very little financial burden, in a way that sets an inspiring example for today.

Over the past five years, a half-century's worth of documents in the Texas Historical Commission's records, the Texas State Library, the Connally papers in the LBJ Library, the Texas Tech University Archives, the Briscoe Center for American History, and other repositories have been analyzed to record the program's origins and evolution. A rich trove of correspondence, reports, photographs, and artifacts makes for a lively look into this

underappreciated history. They form an interesting chapter in the larger story of Texas identity, and insight into how the Lone Star State has chosen to present itself to the world.

Further, as the 2015 deadline loomed for expiration of the federal highway enhancement funding that had sustained the Texas Heritage Trails throughout the THC era, the necessity of understanding and communicating the program's mission and results to various publics became critical. Research into the program's roots, paired with thorough study of economic impact, is an essential way of demonstrating why the Texas Heritage Trails merit renewed funding so that the program can continue its unparalleled service to the state.

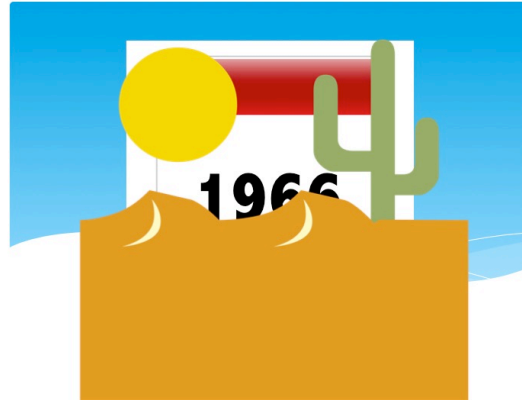
Although I've undertaken this modest account with enthusiasm and have been rewarded with interesting discoveries, the work is far from comprehensive. More could and should be done, to deepen connections with other aspects of Texas's economic, political, and social circumstances of the past half century, and to preserve in greater detail the contributions of the many individuals who created and instituted this program.

It's my hope that even more background can be added to this initial survey, and that the Trails program will be successfully preserved, to serve the citizens of Texas and travelers everywhere.

—Barbara Brannon

* * *

This is what tourists outside the Lone Star State thought of Texas more than half a century ago.



This is the impact of heritage tourism on Texas circa 2017:



To those who care about preservation, travel, and local history, this phenomenal transformation has an interesting history of its own. If we can appreciate and show what set our state's heritage tourism program apart, we stand a much stronger chance of persuading our leaders why it's worth keeping.

Most followers of today's Texas Heritage Trails Program know that the Trails were created as an engine of economic development, using Texas's storied past as fuel. Texas governor John Connally, a savvy businessman, saw the trend of increasing leisure travel in the 1960s and a chance to bring more of those tourist dollars into the state's far-flung counties. Insiders also know that this program has been vitally important to our state as a mechanism for historic preservation, education, and economic development.



Beyond those basics, however, few were aware of the details of the program's origin. What motivated Governor Connally to pursue the idea to begin with in the 1960s? Where did the money come from? How were the regions and routes and names determined? How did the

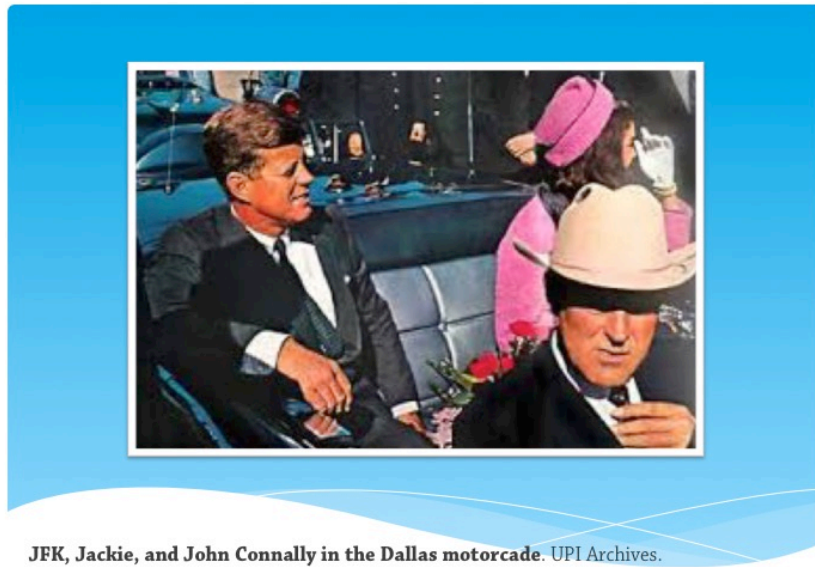
THC decide, thirty years later, to take over the trails and transform them into regions including all 254 counties? THC staffers and program volunteers could provide some of the answers, but it is vital to discover and record more.

Perhaps the most obvious place to hunt for information was Austin, at the THC itself. Although the agency's archives and records yielded a great deal of recent data and lots of clues, explorations there didn't reveal much about the Trails' beginnings.

After a couple of days in the THC library I trudged back home to Lubbock with my notes and photocopies. And there, in a visit to Texas Tech University's Southwest Collection, I bemoaned to a librarian friend the gulf I'd encountered in my searches for background on the Texas Heritage Trails, a.k.a. Texas Travel Trails. *That* phrase rang a bell to him, and he phoned the university archivist. In short order she brought me three fat boxes of seldom-consulted papers. The faculty member whose vision had guided the original 1960s study was deceased, as it happened; the records of his project had been filed under an earlier version of its name; and the academic department that housed it had ceased to exist. Thus, hidden

away in an apparently unrelated archive in an apparently unrelated institution was the key that would unlock the entire story.

But let's go back, first, to the middle of the twentieth century. Texas had finally begun to see the economic and political potential of travel in the boom years following the second World War. With a forward-thinking young chief executive in the White House and a Texan as his vice president, Texas leaders were poised to drive tourist dollars to the state's coffers. John B. Connally, elected to the governor's office in 1962, was in the midst of his first, trying legislative session. Texas was still viewed as a parochial backwater of the Solid South. President Kennedy, anxious to cultivate support here, by 1963 was urging vice president Lyndon Johnson to arrange a visit¹ — an occasion we all remember for its ultimate result in tragedy.



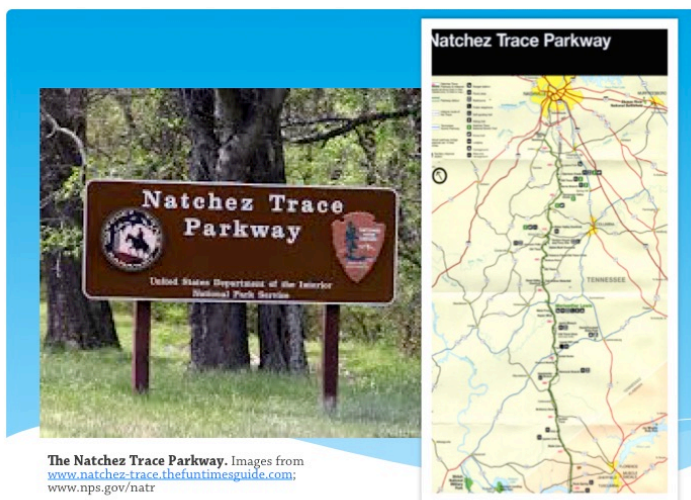
With the establishment of the Texas State Historical Survey Committee (predecessor of the THC) and the county historical commissions in the 1950s, Texas had begun to examine its own history with greater scrutiny than it had brought to bear back in its Centennial year in 1936, when the Texas Highway Department had been given charge of all tourism promotion. The state was keenly aware of the boom

¹ Talk given by Julian Read, Texas Downtown Association, Bastrop, TX, Nov. 7, 2013. See also Read's book *JFK's Final Hours in Texas: An Eyewitness Remembers the Tragedy and Its Aftermath* (Austin: Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, 2013).

in postwar leisure travel by car, and the importance of roadside attractions and historic sites in tourism. Americans had the means to travel again: they had great new cars, they had growing families, they had brand-new Interstates. And they had a pent-up desire to get out on the road and see the USA.

But although tourism had emerged in the 1950s as the state's fifth largest industry, Texas could not by law use tax dollars to attract outsiders—until a constitutional amendment in 1958 at last reversed the situation. In the spring of 1963, Connally's first session in Austin, the state passed its first allocation of funds for this purpose, and also established the Texas Tourism Development Agency (TTDA).² The TTDA hired an enterprising reporter for the *Baytown Sun* named

Frank Hildebrand, who would head the agency for many years.



In July of that year, a rising sophomore at Texas Tech by the name of Jim Phillips wrote to Governor Connally with an idea. Phillips's family had taken a vacation in the southeastern U.S. from Wichita Falls a

couple of years earlier and had driven on the Natchez Trace Parkway. Phillips described his idea thus: "I laid out my thoughts on a trail to the Governor, thinking that would at least get the idea out of my head. I was surprised when within a week, I got a letter back saying the Governor thought it was a great idea and he had forwarded it to the head of the Texas Highway Department."³

Whether Phillips's letter is what really got the ball rolling, we may never know. But the governor in any case took the possibilities for highway tourism seriously. The TTDA began the search for a Texas advertising agency, and by January 1964, even with Connally still recovering from the gunshot wound received

² "An Inventory of Texas Tourist Development Agency Scrapbooks at the Texas State Archives, 1970–1977." Accessed at www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/tslac/80010/tsl-80010.html, March 15, 2013.

³ Email, Jim Phillips to Barbara Brannon, 14 April 2013.

when the President was assassinated in November, it had narrowed its review and on February 3 selected McCann-Erickson's Houston office to handle its account. In account executive Kern Tips's report, two weeks later, of the agency's initial meeting with representatives of the Highway Department (which had been responsible for all tourism promotion to date) and the new TTDA, the exploratory concept of "Texas Travel Trails" was already in the air.⁴

The ad agency also got down to business on marketing research to "provide information about the Texas 'image' and public attitudes toward Texas as a place to visit." Their research firm was to explore these objectives in detail.⁵



Texas Visitor Industry Report, 1966. John B. Connally Papers, LBJ Library.

What the survey revealed was dismaying. Overwhelmingly, Americans thought of all Texas as a desert wasteland—lots of oil and gas and cactus (saguaro, at that) but no

⁴ LBJLib_081913 4651, letter, Frank Hildebrand to Gov. John Connally, 18 Nov. 1963; LBJLib_081913 4654/4655, memo, Hildebrand to Connally, 19 Feb. 1964, attached to McCann-Erickson contact report, 17 Feb. 1964, John B. Connally Papers, [Box _], "Tourist Development Agency 1964-64" folder, LBJ Library (collection hereafter cited as Connally Papers, using the document number I assigned to identify the digital copies I made). TTDA had compiled a list of 27 ad agencies statewide and planned to invite six to make presentations in Austin Jan. 16-17, 1964. The process apparently went forward on schedule despite the disruption caused by Connally's long recovery after the Kennedy assassination Nov. 23, 1963.

⁵ LBJLib_081913 4655-62, contact report, Kern Tips to TTDA, 17 Feb. 1964, Connally Papers.

water. There was little awareness of any water recreation of the sort that brought tourists to Florida or California.⁶ So Texas set about to change that perception, both through its advertising messaging and by more direct means—building more recreational lakes. It's no coincidence that the state approved major dam projects in the 1960s, including the De Cordova Bend Dam that would create Lake Granbury and prompt John Graves's river trip that he famously recalled in *Goodbye to a River*.⁷ (I speculate that the desire to counter the tourist image of Texas as a state without water is one theory behind the naming of the Texas Lakes Trail.)

The 1963 legislative session had also merged two separate agencies to establish Texas Parks & Wildlife—the result of a study Connally commissioned from the then new Department of Parks Administration at Texas Technological College according to the recommendation of the Texas Research League. The state parks study was so well received that in 1965 Connally commissioned another. By then Connally, ambitious and eager to showcase Texas as both a modern, cosmopolitan state and a stronghold of Old West mystique, set Professor Elo J. Urbanovsky and his Texas Tech team on a new task.⁸ They were to examine the feasibility of creating a Texas State Parkway.⁹

⁶ LBJLib_081913 4519, Texas Visitor Industry Report 1966, Connally Papers.

⁷ Laurie E. Jasinski, "Lake Granbury," *Handbook of Texas Online*, www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/rolgr, accessed November 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

⁸ The genesis and development of these two studies is documented in the Department of Parks Administration Papers, Texas Tech University Archives, Southwest Collection (4 boxes; hereafter cited as DPA Papers) and corroborated by Prof. Urbanovsky's scrapbooks, also in the TTU Archives.

Further documentation is provided within the Texas Historical Commission's working files on the Texas Heritage Trails, located in their Austin offices (hereafter cited as THT records). Because this latter group of records has not been archived or cataloged, the citation system is unofficial but identifies the folders as currently organized and labeled, and the type, author, and date of each document as far as can be determined. Documents available at the time of this writing were digitized to facilitate further scholarship; however, it is quite possible that the contents of the original folders may change during the course of ongoing staff work.

An in-house "History and Status of the Texas Travel Trails Program," drafted by unidentified THC staff in 1991, provides a useful but general overview of the program (THT records, Folder 1, "Texas Travel Trails History").

⁹ LBJLib_081913 4503, Texas Parkway Project brochure, Connally Papers.



It was the carefully organized papers of Professor Urbanovsky that the university archivist recalled, that cracked open the door and shed light on a not-too-distant history most had forgotten. Via his, and his students', contributions to the Texas state parks system, the Texas Heritage Trails, and even the landscaping of the Tech campus, Urbanovsky left an important mark on the Lone Star State for decades to come.



One of the original grad-student team, Jerry Rogers, now retired from a distinguished career with the National Park Service, paints a colorful picture of the man. “Genial, friendly, outgoing beyond the normal meaning of the word, he was well liked among faculty and

staff,” said Rogers, “and his reputation for innovation and unconventionality was

known to all. . . . Always dressed in a rumpled suit and tie and when outdoors wearing an almost goofy little hat, he happily cultivated a reputation for being both brilliantly innovative and eccentric to the point of occasional nuttiness.”¹⁰ He was “a man of many ideas and much energy,” and he had secured a state contract in the amount of \$30,000 a year to “identify and designate roads in Texas that would counteract the “Interstate effect”; to get cities, towns, and counties to recognize that money could be made by getting tourists to slow down and explore special places; and to understand that each community had some special identity that deserved to be recognized, preserved, and cultivated.” The spade work of these tasks he left largely to the four graduate assistants: Donald Stence, H. Alden Sievers, and Harold Dollins, in addition to Rogers.

Urbanovsky also assembled a team of colleagues in four disciplines, among whom Dr. James W. (Bill) Kitchen, professor of landscape architecture; and Dr. Seymour Vaughan (Ike) Connor, professor of history, contributed most regularly. Under their loose supervision the students would survey the landscape, literally, to determine how an automobile route might bring travelers out into the remote historic locales of Texas to stay longer and spend more. The group was to consider all aspects, draft a solution, and present recommendations to the governor by spring of 1967. But this was no mere theoretical exercise. “This Parkway,” wrote team member Sievers, “should be a State Parkway, a Texas State Parkway, and it should portray the real Texas, the real Texan.”¹¹

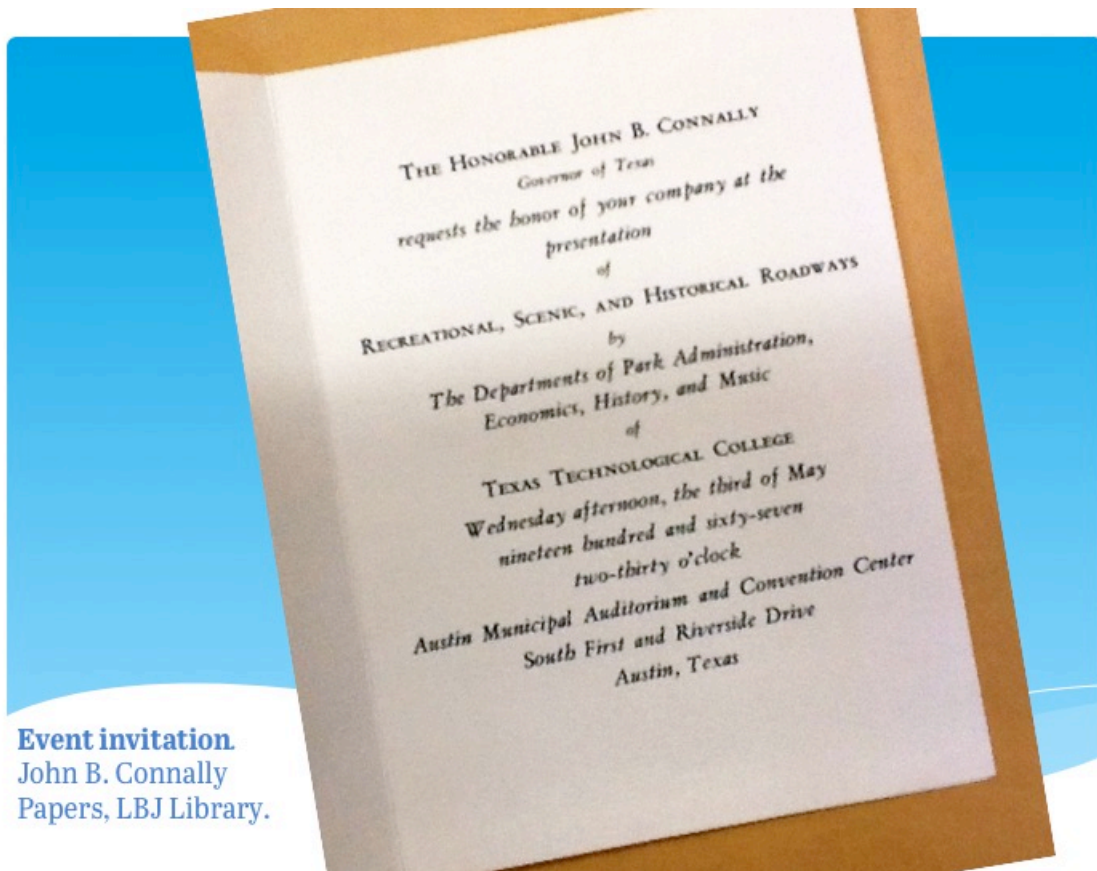
They turned out a thoroughgoing project, based on their own exploratory trip and enhanced with photography and description. Laying out the challenges in a session, “Foundations of a State Parkway,” at the 12th annual Southwest Park and Recreation Training Institute at Lake Texoma, they researched and refined and reassessed throughout the year. At the Texas State Historical Association in March 1967 they gave a “Preview of the Texas Parkway” complete with scenic slides and stirring narrative, revealing three broad recommendations they planned to present to the governor: “. . . [F]irst, that local governments and private citizens be

¹⁰ Jerry Rogers to Barbara Brannon, Feb. 2, 2015, with attached unpublished notes, “Vignettes of a TTU Trails Project.”

¹¹ “Parkway Research,” E133.6C, Box 3, Folder 31, “Texas State Historical Parkway Project, 1965–1966,” p. 5, DPA Papers.

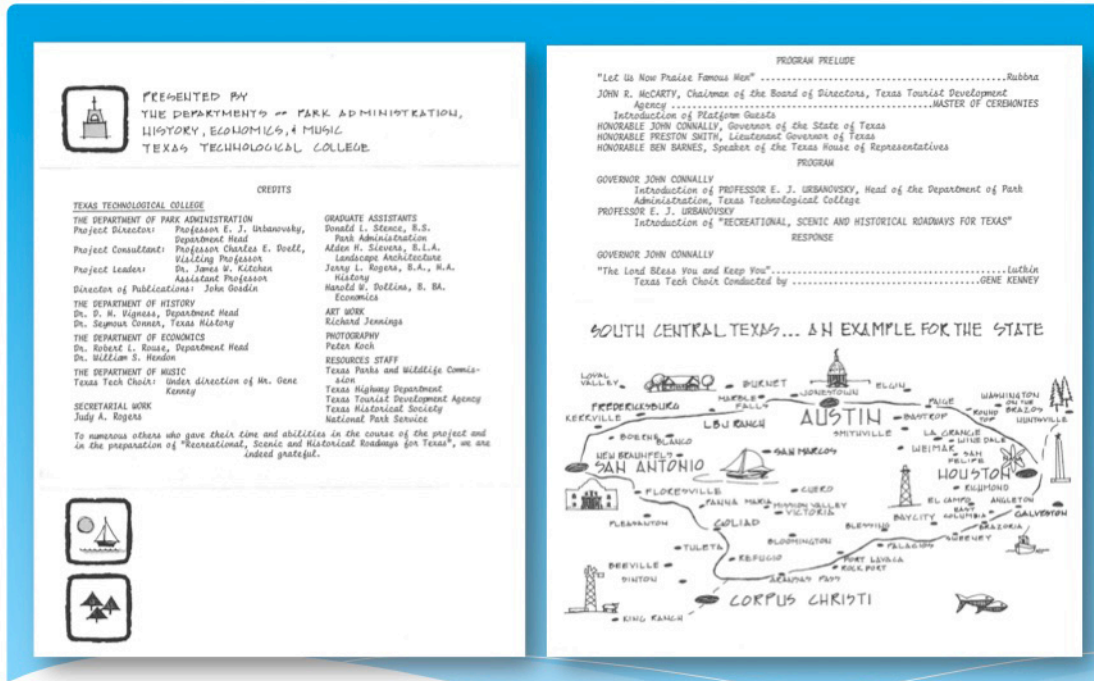
stimulated to play a more important part in recreation and tourism planning; second, that a Texas State Parkway be developed as the uniting element of a larger recreation package; and third, that a vigorous statewide planning and development organization be established so that recreation may be included in comprehensive planning.”¹²

The main event, however, took place on May 3, 1967, at Austin’s Municipal Auditorium.¹³



¹² “Preview of the Texas Parkway, 1967,” E133.6A, Box 1 Folder 43, DPA Papers.

¹³ Invitation from Gov. Connally for 3 May 1967 presentation, Box 25, Accepted Itinerary April 24 through June 13, 1967, “Meeting on Historic Roads, Dept. of Park Adm. - Texas Tech, Austin, Texas, May 3” folder, Connally Papers.



“A Recreational, Scenic, and Historical Series of Texas Roadways,” Program, May 3, 1967. Courtesy Texas Historical Commission.

On the platform were Governor Connally, Lieutenant Governor Preston Smith, and Speaker of the House Ben Barnes. Texas Tech brought a busload from Lubbock: not only the heads of three academic departments involved in the study, several colleagues, and their four graduate assistants, but college president Grover E. Murray, and the entire college choir along with their director, Gene Kenney.¹⁴

Following a choral prelude, the governor introduced the presentation by calling the project “a completely new idea and innovation in the treatment of recreational travel . . . designed to provide visitors to our State, as well as Texans, with a means of getting off the beaten paths and onto the byways for a leisurely look at the abundant scenic, historical, and recreational attractions that Texas has to offer.”¹⁵ He trumpeted the state’s first-ever billion-dollar tourism year, playing up the personal value of recreation and the financial value of travelers coming to the state. And he asked the audience to consider this: that if those tourists had been

¹⁴ Invitation to 3 May 1967 event, and “Recreational, Scenic, And Historical Roadways For Texas” program, THT records, Folder 2, subfolder “Announcement, Governor’s Speech Info, Editorials.”

¹⁵ “Film Introduction,” E133.6C, Box 3, Folder 36, “Texoma Presentation, undated,” DPA Papers.

persuaded to stay only one more day, it would've brought an additional \$188 million to the state's economy.¹⁶ The Trails were how Texas was going to do it.

The multimedia extravaganza, which Jerry Rogers described as “over the top even by Eloesque standards,” featured slides narrated by Rogers, segueing into a filmstrip that gave the effect of a windshield tour of the South Texas sample region, as the choir provided a background medley including “Shrimp Boats is a comin’,” “Come to the Bower,” “Hello, Dolly,” and “The Chisholm Trail,” among other numbers.¹⁷

Connally emphasized the financial benefits of travel promotion to Texas. The trails, he said in his remarks, would “bring new economic hope to the door-step of small towns and out-of-the-way points all over the state.” He cautioned, however, that Texas could “only get them there once and then it will be up to each Texan through his hospitality, warmth and friendliness to make sure they return.”¹⁸

A series of documents show that the team wrestled with what to call their project. Variant drafts of the presentation, and other documents, show the shifts in nomenclature and concept from the time the study was commissioned in 1965 as the “Texas State Park Study in Texas History.” It was the Urbanovsky team themselves who envisioned the study “in terms of Texas State Historical Parkway Research” with “the use of a parkway as the vector of interpreting history,” as they put it.¹⁹ The team’s Lake Texoma document demonstrates that they conceived of a single, and unique, *recreational* Texas parkway, contrasted with non-commercial, interpretive routes like the Blue Ridge Parkway or turnpikes like the Garden State Parkway and the Sunshine State Parkway. The name of this Texas parkway “must portray a mood or feeling that will picture Texas as a pleasant state, a fun state,” they wrote. “It must beckon; it must welcome the visitor.”²⁰ Emendations in drafts of

¹⁶ “Remarks, Governor Connally, Travel Trails of Texas Presentation, Austin, May 3, 1967,” Connally papers, Series 5, Speeches, April 13, 1867 through June 13, 1967, Box 20, Texts, LBJ Library.

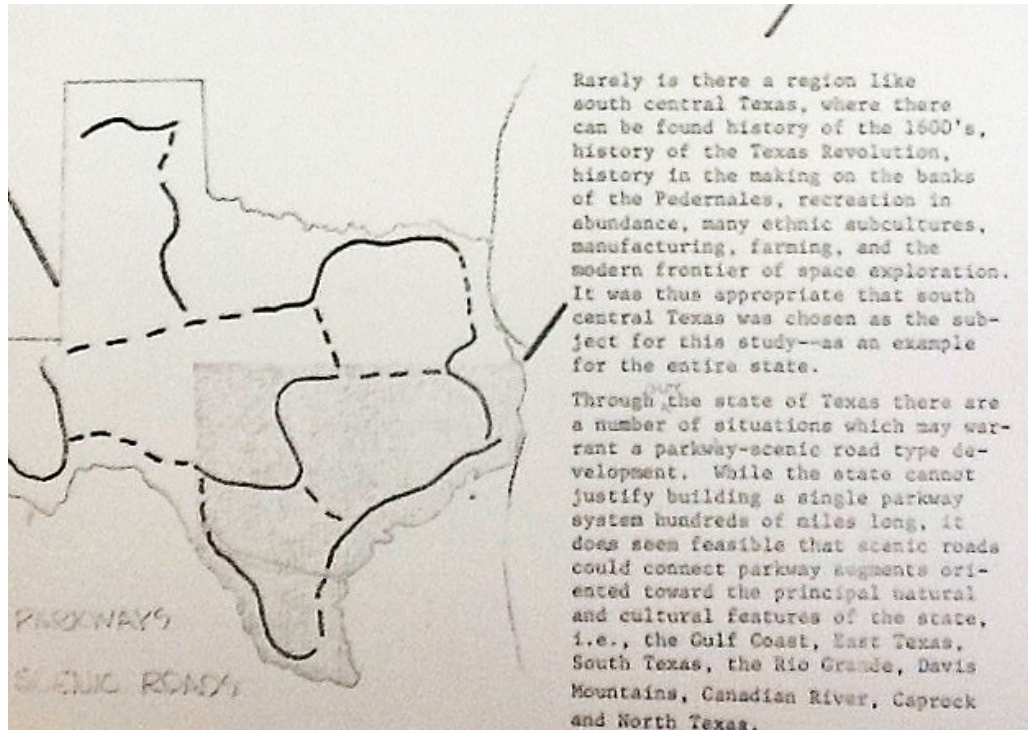
¹⁷ “Texas State Parkway Study—Austin Presentation,” E133.6C, Box 3, Folder 36, “Texoma Presentation, undated,” DPA Papers; THT records, Folder 2, subfolder “Announcement, Governor’s Speech Info, Editorials,” Recreational, Scenic, And Historical Roadways For Texas Program [May 3, 1968]. These folders contain actual photographs and filmstrips used in the original presentation, which are not shown here.

¹⁸ LBJLib_081913 4596, Jerry Hall, “Ten Texas Trails Outlined at State Conference,” news clipping from *Waco Tribune-Herald* [4 May 1967], Connally Papers.

¹⁹ “Parkway Research,” E133.6C, Box 3, Folder 31, “Texas State Historical Parkway Project, 1965–1966,” DPA Papers.

²⁰ “Foundations of a State Parkway,” [box number], DPA Papers.

the Austin presentation show all references to “Parkway” struck in favor of “Byway,” “Tourway,” and “Trail”; and the final program was titled “Recreation, Scenic, and Historical Roadways for Texas.”²¹



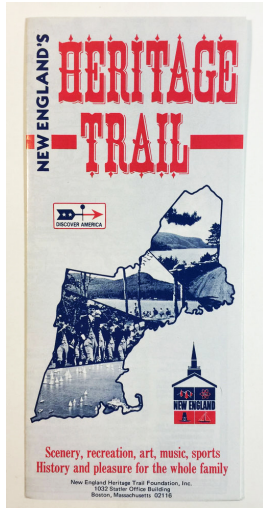
Draft of Texas parkway routes, 1967 (LBJLib_081913 4507, Connally Papers)

The team came to see the roadway as a designated system of existing highways complemented by new construction, where recreational needs warranted. They saw it as passing through long stretches of rural land and small towns. They saw it as an opportunity for historical interpretation whose aesthetic and economic benefit to the state would in the long run exceed initial costs. And their implementation plan made it clear that they envisioned it as a public-private partnership. As the governor emphasized in his remarks to the press that afternoon, the committee would “shortly be in contact with county judges to solicit suggestions for the route each trail will take. The success of the entire program will rest with local initiative. It will be up to you to convince the committee that your community

²¹ See marked drafts in TDA Papers; also marked draft in Folder 1990/20-6, “Texas Travel Trails” folder, Publication Division records, Marketing Communications Division records, Texas Historical Commission. Archives and Information Services Division, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Texas State Library (hereafter cited as MC/THC Records).

has sufficient scenic, historical and recreational interest to warrant inclusion on a trail.”²²

Other organizations had already been pursuing the Trails idea by then. In 1966 the American Petroleum Institute (organizer of seven “Heritage Trails”



nationwide, involving more than half of the fifty states) had approached Connally at the invitation of Frank Hildebrand to gauge interest in a new trail, or trails, that might involve Texas.²³ These trails were promoted via ads by oil companies such as Ethyl, touting travel on back roads as a family adventure.²⁴ Connally drew on the comparable example of the New England Heritage Trail in the introduction to his 1967 rollout.

Their challenge, furthermore, had expanded. President Johnson himself urged the task force, “I want to make sure that the America we see from . . . (our) . . . highways is a beautiful America . . . Broaden the study now underway on the needs for scenic roads and Parkways to include the goal of maintaining and enhancing the Beauty of America.”²⁵

The governor adopted the Texas Tech study enthusiastically, appointing a five-member permanent committee composed of Austin agency heads: Tom H. Taylor of the Texas Highway Department’s Travel and Information Division; Truett Latimer of the Texas State Historical Survey Committee; William M. (Mark) Gosdin of the Parks and Wildlife Department (a Texas Tech protégé of Urbanovsky); and Dorman H. Winfrey of the Texas State Library, with Frank Hildebrand of the Texas Tourism Development Agency as chair. Connally laid out their charge, with nine specific points, a spring 1968 deadline, and an expectation that they would develop not one but “a series of scenic, recreational, and historic *trails*.” The governor’s office issued a press memo the afternoon following the Tech presentation. “What I see for

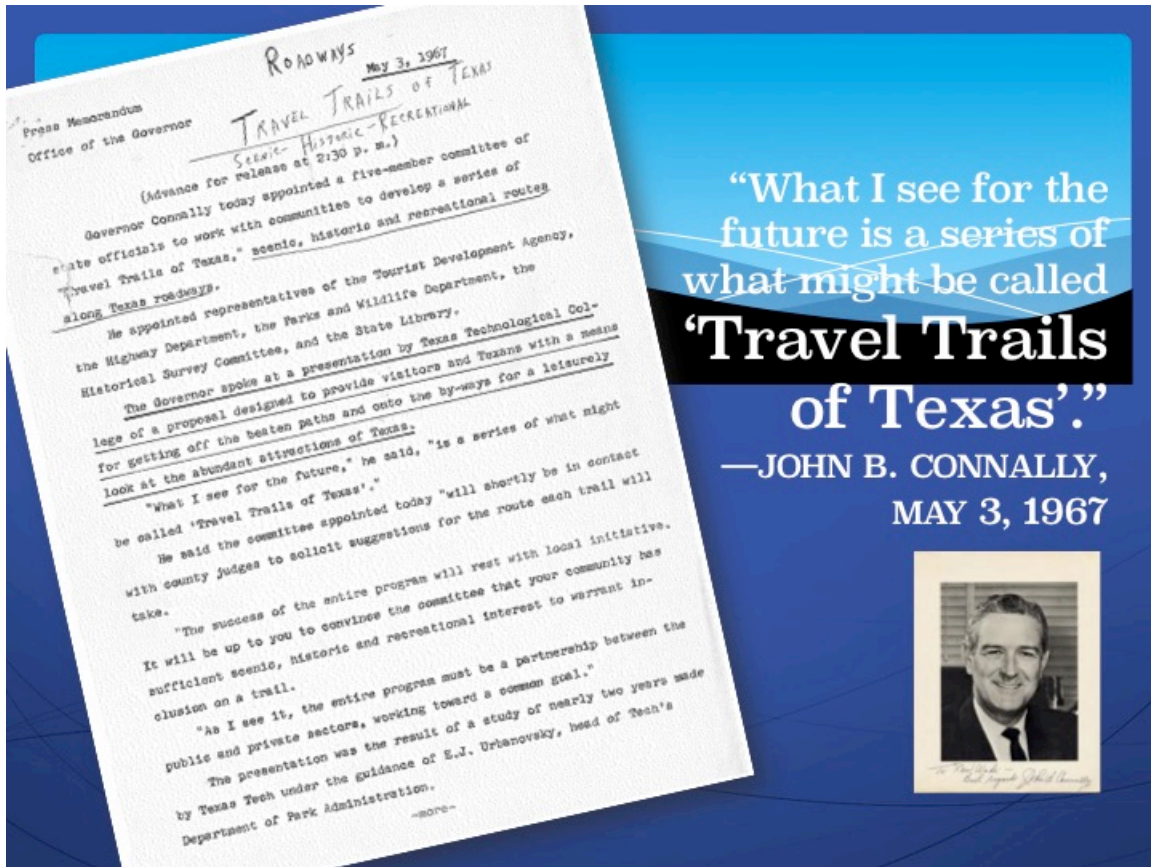
²² LBJLib_081913, press memorandum, Office of the Governor, 7 May 1967, Connally Papers.

²³ LBJLib_081913 4632, letter, Henry Bellmon [governor of Oklahoma], 1 Mar. 1965, Connally Papers.

²⁴ LBJLib_081913 4560ff, various memos and supporting documents, Folder 60-15-67, Heritage Trail, Texas, Louisiana and New Mexico; LBJLib_081913 4443ff, “Remarks, Governor Connally, Travel Trails of Texas presentation,” Box 20, Texts, Connally Papers.

²⁵ “Foundations of a State Parkway,” [box number], DPA Papers.

the future,” Connally said, “is a series of what might be called ‘Travel Trails of Texas’.”²⁶



Further, Connally, never one to ignore the prospect of dollars flowing into the state, had a huge stake in the success of the upcoming HemisFair '68, the first international exposition, or world's fair, to be held in the American Southwest.²⁷ He envisioned that the series of trails would draw millions of travelers from San Antonio during the six-month exposition into the small towns and rural byways of every corner of Texas.²⁸

²⁶ Brochure on "Texas Travel Trails Committee [1967], THT records, Folder 1, "Texas Travel Trails History"; "Press Memorandum," Office of the Governor, 3 May 1967, THT records, Folder 1, "Texas Travel Trails History"; Frank Maddigan, "Travel Trails of Texas: Connally Appoints Five to Develop Tour Series," *Austin American-Statesman*, 4 May 1967.

²⁷ (L to R) Gov. John Connally of Texas; H. B. Zachry, HemisFair '68 Board Chairman; Frank Manupelli, Executive Vice-President of the fair and Walter W. McAllister Sr., Mayor of San Antonio. The group were gathered to announce plans for the fair at a press conference at the New York Hilton Hotel. University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries, Archives and Special Collections, San Antonio Fair, Inc., Records, 1962–1995 (bulk 1964–1968) MS 31, Box 431, Folder 2. From "Rescuing Texas History, 2009" collection, accessed via <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph66143>, March 2013.

²⁸ "HemisFair '68," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HemisFair_'68, accessed March 15, 2013.

That very month the committee sent letters to every county judge, and began to solicit input from community stakeholders. Each of Texas's 254 counties was invited to submit a proposal by June 30, as the governor expected the trails to be in place by fall of that year so that maps could be drawn, signage erected, and advance publicity arranged.²⁹ The April 1968 launch of HemisFair was less than a year away.³⁰



²⁹ Brochure on "Texas Travel Trails Committee [1967], THT records, Folder 1, "Texas Travel Trails History"; form letter, Hildebrand to "Dear Judge," 17 Jan. 1968, Folder, "Texas Travel Trails," MC/THC Records.

³⁰ Series of "Texas!" tourism ads [1968], artifacts from Texas Plains Trail Region collection. Photo by Barbara Brannon.

Committee members drove the regions themselves, noting features of the land, its history, its people. They plotted attractions on a large map, and supplemented the counties' lists with their own knowledge. They envisioned perhaps six to fifteen loop trails. The Travel Trails were to function as a public-private partnership, and also a cooperative venture between local and state agencies, and it was precisely these local entities that stood to reap the benefit even while the state's tax revenues were expected to increase.³¹



As responses came back to Austin from the provinces, the committee began formulating driving routes based on the study's recommended criteria and counties' willingness to participate. I believe that Highway Department representative Tom Taylor and Historical Survey Committee representative Truett Latimer were likely most closely responsible for the determinations, which cannot have been easy, given the criteria that trails were to avoid both freeways and unimproved roads, no side or alternate routes were allowed, and no trail was to backtrack, not to mention taking into consideration the possible ire of any county or community not selected.

³¹ The committee's activities are documented in follow-up reports in the TDA Papers.

Initial layouts were altered when a handful of counties declined to fund the modest cost of signage. In an irritating irony—or perhaps a deliberate political maneuver—Judge Voges of Wilson County, of which Governor Connally’s own hometown of Floresville was the seat, was one of the holdouts, initially refusing to contribute the princely sum of \$315, two cents per resident.³²

As Fort Worth businessman and Texas Historical Survey member A. M. Pate, Jr., explained to his fellow citizens that June, the Travel Trails would “be the basis for a ‘recreational environment’ where the stresses and strains of existence in the nuclear age may be replaced by a more pleasant and rewarding way of life.”³³ He went on to describe Texas’s parks in language straight out of the “Mad Men” era: “Texas must act now to develop recreation environments to their fullest if we are to compete with other states in providing outlets for our tense businessmen, bored housewives [*sic*] and active children as well as vacationing out-of-staters.”

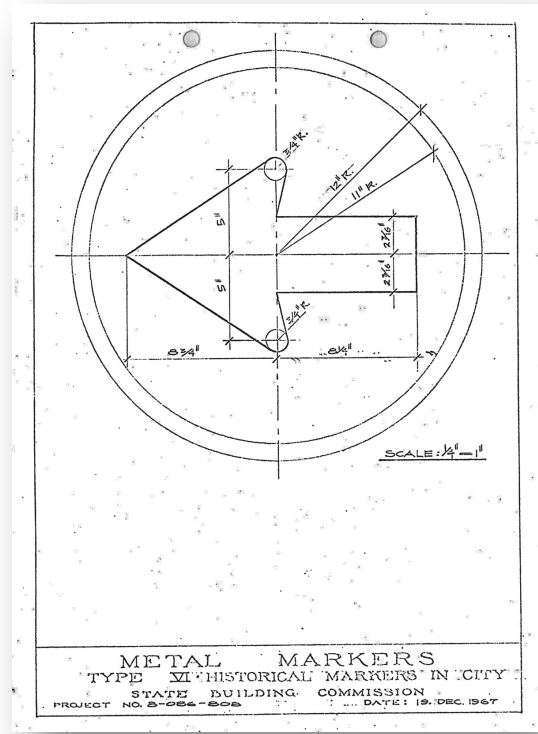
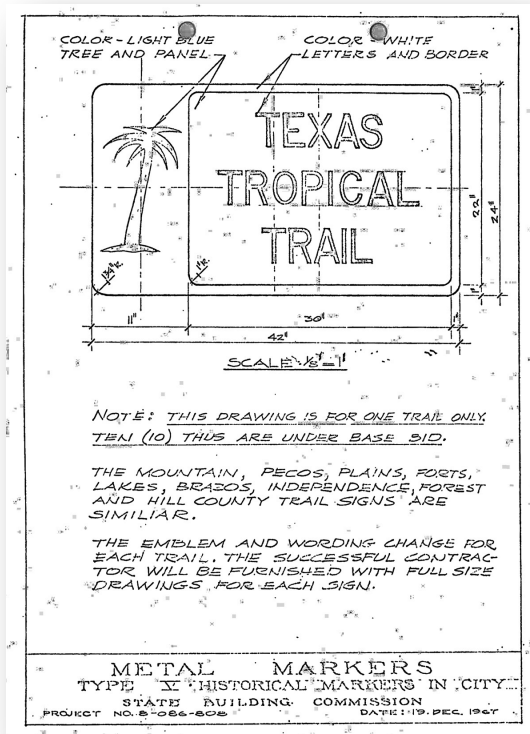


Texas Travel Trails. Texas Highway Department, 1968.

³² News clipping “Nothing To See,” 7 March 1968, THT records, Folder 1, “Texas Travel Trails History.”

³³ Remarks of A. M. Pate, Jr., at the Region 2 Meeting, 17 June 1967, Jacksboro, THT records, Folder 1, “Texas Travel Trails History.”

By November the committee had settled on ten trails,³⁴ abandoning a plan that would have created eleven.³⁵ The driving routes had been mapped out with the assistance of highway engineers and would be marked with distinctive signage.^{36 37}



They decided the Trail signs would be brown, to distinguish them from the Interstate system of green. They estimated some 1,500 signs would be needed, and an equal number of directional arrows.³⁸ In January 1968 a memo and invoice went to each included county noting the breakdown of signs required, with a two-week deadline for payment.³⁹

³⁴ Map of all ten trails, THT records, Folder 2, "Texas Travel Trails General Information." A digital copy of the original black-and-white image has been colorized for this presentation.

³⁵ LBJLib_081913 4576, memo, Frank Hildebrand to Bill Carter, 8 Nov. 1967, Connally Papers; letter, D. C. Greer to Frank Hildebrand, 28 Nov 1967, THT records, Folder 1, "Texas Travel Trails History."

³⁶ Map of all ten trails, THT records, Folder 2, "Texas Travel Trails General Information." A digital copy of the original black-and-white image has been colorized for this presentation.

³⁷ Partial memorandum re: 8-086-808 [December 1967], pp. 7-8, THT records, Folder 2, "Texas Travel Trails Specs for Trail Markers and Arrows."

³⁸ Attachment to form letter, Hildebrand to "Dear Judge," 17 Jan. 1968, Folder, "Texas Travel Trails," MC/THC Records.

³⁹ Form letter, Hildebrand to "Dear Judge," 17 Jan. 1968, Folder, "Texas Travel Trails," MC/THC Records. Hildebrand followed up with a request to the governor several weeks later for his personal help in dunning the six slow-pay counties (LBJLib_081913 4627, memo, Hildebrand to Gov. Connally, 1 Mar. 1968, Connally Papers).

By the time the committee actually ordered the signs a few weeks later, the choice had been modified to a medium blue and white, a distinctive scheme still recognizable fifty years later.⁴⁰

But it was no ordinary, run-of-the-mill shade. According to a newspaper travel feature in April 1968, when Frank Hildebrand apparently related the story to an enterprising reporter:

Governor Connally has had a strong hand in developing the new tourist program, even to designating the color of the signs marking the trails. The color choice had been narrowed to blue or green, cool colors that psychologists said would take tourists' minds off the hot summer weather. When asked what color he would suggest, the governor, seated at his desk, pointed to a picture of his wife and said, 'I would like to see it the color of Nellie's dress.' And so the signs are 'Nellie's Blue.'⁴¹

The Southwell Company of San Antonio, makers of the signs, corroborates the unusual choice; in May W. P. Southwell, Jr., supplied Texas Highway Department district engineers with complimentary touch-up bottles of the "Nellie Blue" transparent paint, "slightly lighter in shade than your standard Interstate Blue," that had been mixed especially for the project by 3M.⁴²



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⁴⁰ A detailed record of correspondence among Department of Transportation engineers, the Texas Historical Commission, and members of the Texas Travel Trails committee may be found in THT records, Folder 2, "Texas Travel Trails Sign Purchases." Later reports of the Texas Historical Commission indicate that more than 10,000 signs were eventually erected.

⁴¹ "Mrs. John Connally Makes 780-Mile Trek Through East Texas," *Longview News-Journal*, Apr. 7, 1968, p. 12-D.

⁴² W. P. Southwell, Jr., to Texas Highway Department Engineers, 20 March 1968, accessed via Portal to Texas History.

⁴³ Texas Heritage Trails signs. Image from www.TexasTimeTravel.com.

On Jan. 17, 1968, Governor Connally launched the Texas Travel Trails to great fanfare at the Third Annual Governor's Tourist Development Conference in Austin, leading with several encouraging travel statistics. In 1966, tourism revenues in Texas had for the first time reached the \$1 billion mark—and of that bonanza, Connally noted, 86 million dollars went directly to state coffers in the form of sales taxes, a hundredfold return for every dollar invested in tourism.⁴⁴ He presented a lengthy slide show unveiling the routes, signage, maps, and major sites. 157 counties had been designated as participants, and judges in these counties were billed that very day for their trail signs—directional signs cost counties \$22 each, arrows \$13.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ "Remarks of Governor John Connally, Governor's Tourism Conference, January 17, 1968, Austin, Texas," THT records, Folder 1, "Texas Travel Trails History"; incomplete draft of remarks on Texas Forts Trail and other trails.

⁴⁵ Incomplete draft of remarks on Texas Forts Trail and other trails, THT records, Folder 1, "Texas Travel Trails History." A draft of this speech, marked with revisions, may be found in Folder 1990/20-6, "Texas Travel Trails," Connally Papers.

TEXAS
HILL COUNTRY TRAIL

<u>COUNTY</u>	<u>MARKERS</u>	<u>ARROWS</u>	<u>TOTAL COST</u>
BANDERA	8	8	\$ 280.00
BEXAR	8	7	267.00
BLANCO	13	13	455.00
BURNET	9	7	289.00
COMAL	24	39	1,035.00
GILLESPIE	13	11	429.00
HAYS	2	22	330.00
KERR	5	5	175.00
LLANO	11	9	359.00
MEDINA	7	7	245.00
REAL	9	11	341.00
TRAVIS	14	14	490.00
UVALDE	20	29	817.00
WILLIAMSON	5	5	175.00

Cost per Trail Marker - \$22.00

Cost per Trail Arrow - \$13.00

Communities blessed by inclusion wrote to thank the governor, but there were also predictable and numerous complaints regarding omission and pleas for reconsideration. Frank Hildebrand outlined for the governor's office several strategies for responding to the disappointed and disgruntled—and included a list of the 52 counties, predominantly in West Texas, that had never communicated a desire to participate. One counterargument was that the system of ten new Texas Travel Trails was designed from the outset to accommodate complementary, private trails (such as the recently designated President's Ranch Trail).⁴⁶ There is no record of any brainstorming or dissention about the ten trail names—they always appear exactly as we know them today. The ten trail logos, which also remain unchanged today, were produced and implemented by the Highway Department.⁴⁷



⁴⁸As HemisFair '68 was set to open in San Antonio, so, too, were preparations being made to open the Travel Trails. The trails, which ranged in individual length from 523 to 859 miles, totaled nearly 7,000 miles of state highways and farm-to-market roads. The brochures created by the

Highway Department for distribution at the state's Travel Information Centers proved popular; the agency would print half a million annually.⁴⁹ ⁵⁰

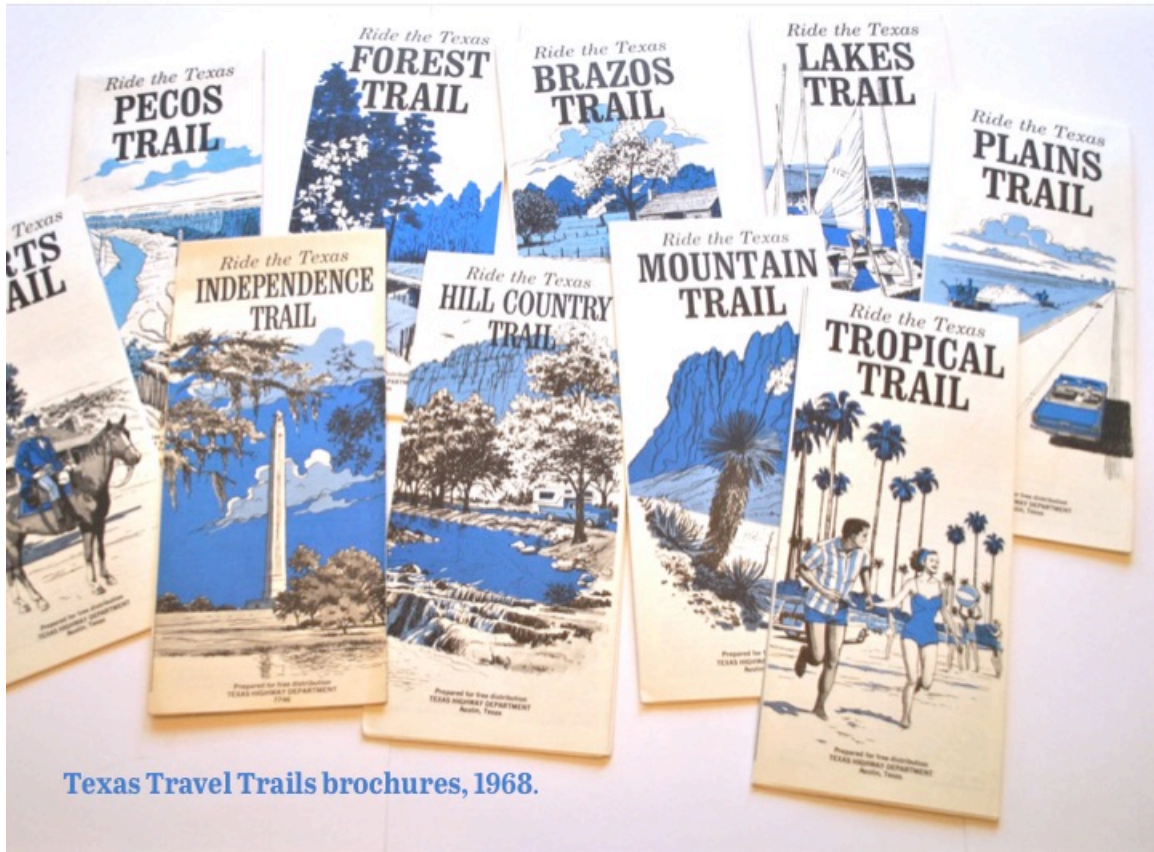
⁴⁶ LBJLib_081913 4613–14, memo, Frank Hildebrand to John Mobley, 2 February 1968, Connally Papers. Folder 60-15-67, Travel Trails, includes numerous complaints received in the weeks following Connally's announcement of the trails routes, but one "particularly heart-warming" editorial prompted Hildebrand to forward a clipping to the governor, noting "I rather expect that the committee will take such 'up-by-our-bootstraps' attitude into account when it comes time to add new communities to the Trails" (LBJLib_081913 4575, "Attracting Tourists to an Off-the-Trail Spot," Hamilton Herald-News, 25 Jan. 1968, and LBJLib_081913 4574, memo from Hildebrand to Gov. Connally, 6 Feb. 1968, Connally Papers).

⁴⁷ "Remarks of Governor John Connally, Governor's Tourism Conference, January 17, 1968, Austin, Texas," THT records, Folder 1, "Texas Travel Trails History," p. 7.

⁴⁸ HemisFair '68 promotional items, artifacts from Texas Plains Trail Region collection. Photo by Barbara Brannon.

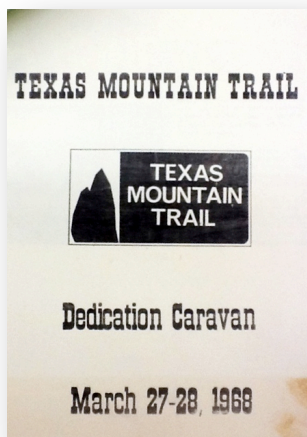
⁴⁹ [Add citation for print run]

⁵⁰ Set of ten original two-color Texas Travel Trails brochures, artifacts from Texas Plains Trail Region collection. Photo by Barbara Brannon.



The Travel Trails garnered significant media coverage statewide and in newspapers large and small. Gov. and Mrs. Connally dedicated several of the trails during 1968, traveling to major cities with an entourage of supporters.⁵¹ ⁵² A caravan traveled

portions of the Texas Mountain Trail — the first to be dedicated and launched — on Mar. 27 and 28, beginning in Alpine, traveling down to Lajitas, back up to Van Horn, and over to El Paso—with an evening reception across the border in Juarez—and winding up the next afternoon at Fort Davis for the dedication of Texas’s first million-dollar state park.⁵³



⁵¹ Letter, Truett Latimer to Charles R. Woodburn, 20 Nov. 1968, THT records, Folder 1, “Texas Travel Trails History.”

⁵² LBJLib_081913 4419, program, Box 29, Accepted Itinerary Mar 6 through Apr. 1, 1968, “Mountain Trails—El Paso, March 28, 1968” folder, Connally Papers.

⁵³ Itinerary, LBJLib_081913 4412, itinerary, Box 29, Accepted Itinerary Mar 6 through Apr. 1, 1968, “Mountain Trails—El Paso, March 28, 1968” folder, Connally Papers.



Texas Plains Trail metal map sign, 1968⁵⁴

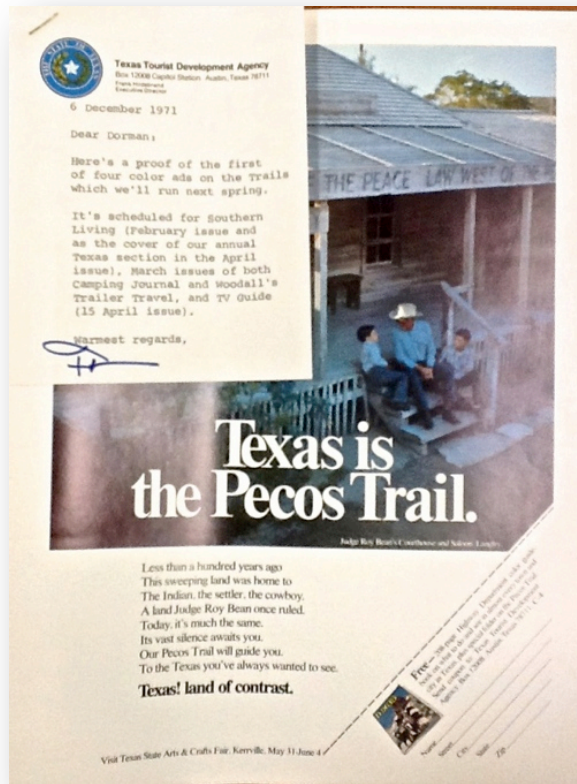
HemisFair itself was beset by a series of troubles, some of its own making and some coincidental. While HemisFair never met its projected draw of 10 million tourists and ended up \$7.5 million in the hole,⁵⁵ the Travel Trails flourished. The Trails, which required little in the way of maintenance other than the occasional reprinting of brochures and replacing of damaged signs, fulfilled their mission as anticipated. Visitor traffic to Trails communities increased threefold.⁵⁶ The TTDA made ample use of the Trails as a tourist promotion.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Sign donated to Texas Plains Trail Region by Hutchinson County Museum, Borger, Dec. 2012. Photo by Barbara Brannon.

⁵⁵ "HemisFair '68," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HemisFair_'68, accessed March 15, 2013.

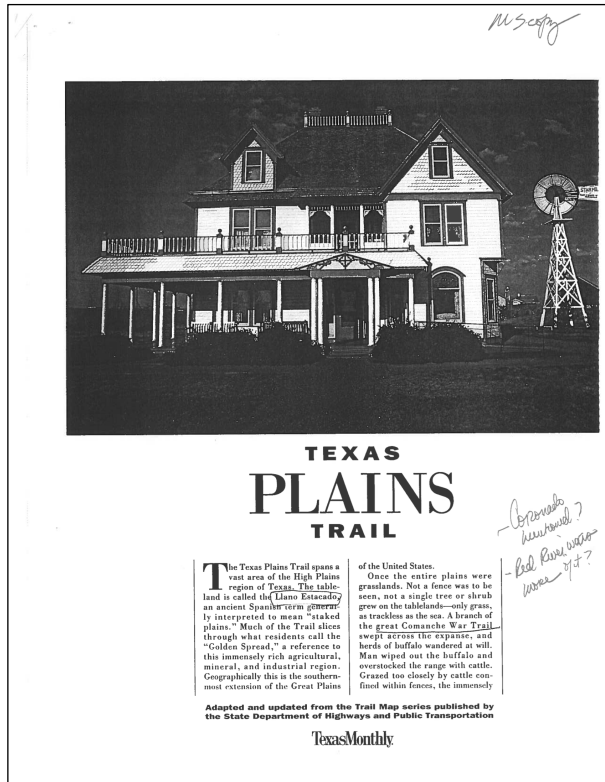
⁵⁶ [Add citation for figures]

⁵⁷ TxStLib_081913 4486, ad promoting Texas Pecos Trail with covering note from Frank Hildebrand to Dorman H. Winfrey, 6 Dec. 1971, Winfrey Papers.



Over time, as the wheels of the program ran smoothly and required little grease, however, new administrations paid the Trails scant attention. Only a few minor overhauls of the routes were made, during the program's first few years, when the committee remained active. Soon counties' original commitments to fund signage were forgotten, and in 1974 the Texas Department of Transportation (successor to the Highway Department) absorbed responsibility for the signs as well as the brochures. During the oil embargos of the 1970s leisure travel declined nationwide, and funding for the brochures dried up. Brochure printing lapsed from 1979 to 1983 and again in 1987.⁵⁸ The blue-and-white signs remained, a curiosity and holdover for any travelers who might attempt driving the routes without benefit of printed map or guide.

⁵⁸ "History and Status of the Texas Travel Trails Program," THT records, Folder 1, "Texas Travel Trails History."



On several occasions private sponsors helped make the Trails materials available. At the outset, in 1968 and 1969, Pearl Brewing branded and distributed a full-color booklet touting all ten trails. In 1991 *Texas Monthly* ran a series of supplements presenting updated descriptions of the trails, underwritten by GMC Trucks⁵⁹ (Frost Bank would later support a similar program, in 2002–03).

But the 1990s brought another game-changer, with the first major

national highway legislation since the Eisenhower era, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). Among the law's provisions was significant funding for *enhancement* of the travel experience, now that the Interstate system was largely complete.⁶⁰ Efforts could be focused on preserving and promoting highways. Planting wildflowers, Creating new rest areas, maps, historical interpretation.

In 1997 the Texas legislature tapped the Texas Historical Commission, one of the original players on Connally's five-agency Texas Travel Trails committee thirty years earlier, to devise a heritage tourism program for the state, and to tap into these federal funds.

The agency's 1996–97 annual report noted "New Directions in Heritage Tourism" as a strategic priority.⁶¹ "This biennium, for the first time, the agency was

⁵⁹ Copies of these publications may be found in each collection cited here. Copies of some of the 1991 *Texas Monthly* sections, with THC staff annotations, are located in THT records, Folder 1, "Texas Travel Trails History," "Texas Plains Trail," excerpt from *Texas Monthly* [Sept. 1991].

⁶⁰ Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991, HR 5920, U.S. Dept. of Transportation National Transportation Library, <http://ntl.bts.gov/DOCS/istea.html>, accessed March 2013; "Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intermodal_Surface_Transportation_Efficiency_Act, accessed March 2013.

⁶¹ Biennial Report. (Austin: Texas Historical Commission, 1997). The advent of ISTEA, and its influence on the enhancement of historic highways and tourism trails, could be explored further. The

appropriated funds to develop a heritage tourism program. It has been shown time and time again that visitors enjoy historic sites and are willing to spend their dollars touring and visiting these symbols of Texas history.”⁶² (A significant portion of that year’s brief report is devoted to plans for the new heritage tourism initiative, and it’s worth reading the entire document.)

TxDOT made tentative plans to merge the Travel Trails with a similar federal program of scenic byways, but the Texas legislature in 1997 instead tapped THC for the responsibility. THC, as custodians of the state’s past, found itself in the position of figuring out how best to use those assets for its future.⁶³

Someone—no one seems to recall who—in a September 1997 task force meeting, recalled the old Texas Travel Trails. It might have been the brainchild of Chairman John L. Nau himself. As the THC group defined it,

A Texas heritage trail combines natural, cultural and historic resources to form a cohesive, distinctive marketable unit that provides outstanding opportunities for conservation, heritage tourism, education, interpretation and recreation.

A Texas heritage trail may be defined by a common history or geography that links the resources to be preserved and marketed . . . Building on the trail’s unique identity, the program will stimulate the region’s economy, while fostering preservation efforts.⁶⁴

Revived and expanded to Heritage Trails Regions, the program would encompass all 254 counties this time around, and focus less on the driving tour than on the regional experience. Jim Kimmel and Andy Skadberg of Southwest Texas

Texas legislature set aside \$2 million for heritage tourism in 1997 when it tapped the THC to administer its heritage tourism program, but the correlation between ISTE and the Texas legislature’s decision to pursue heritage tourism is not yet clear here, nor is the initial role of the intermediary, TxDOT.

⁶² “Breaking Out of the Box: New Approaches to Historic Preservation,” Texas Historical Commission Biennial Report 1995-96,” p. 5. Dolph Briscoe Center for American History.

⁶³ [Add citation for TxDOT plans]; “History and Status of the Texas Travel Trails Program,” THT records, Folder 1, “Texas Travel Trails History.”

⁶⁴ THT records, Folder 3, “Heritage Trails General Information,” TC, Mario L. Sanchez to John L. Nau III, Curtis Tunnell, and John Preston, 2 Oct. 1997; TC, John Preston and Mario Sanchez to Heritage Tourism Committee, 8 Oct. 1997.

State University's Center for Nature and Heritage Tourism were contracted to devise the plan.⁶⁵

Once again, counties, communities, and chambers were invited to submit proposals. Regions would operate under the THC's umbrella as independent nonprofit organizations, each headed by a paid coordinator and run by a volunteer board.⁶⁶ They would be financed initially by a three-year grant stemming from transportation enhancement funding, with the expectation that they would become self-sufficient through the development of partner or county contributions or other fund-raising efforts.⁶⁷

Janie Headrick of the Texas Historical Commission staff was the first statewide coordinator of the Trails program, which operated under the agency's Community Heritage Division.

The application process was rigorous and lengthy, requiring the cooperation of numerous local organizations and demonstration of resources. Following the announcement of the Texas Forts Trail as the pilot program (a natural choice, as a local Texas Forts Trail was already in place to link several frontier forts and the Spanish presidio at San Saba), many groups vigorously lobbied the THC for inclusion.⁶⁸ In at least one part of the state — the Panhandle and Plains, local coalitions advocated for separate regions. But the original structure of ten trails prevailed.



The Texas Forts Trail Region debuted in 1998 with headquarters in Abilene.⁶⁹ A pilot study based on extensive site visits to the region was conducted and

⁶⁵THT records, Folder 3, "Correspondence," TCS, James R. Kimmel to Mario Sanchez, proposal 26 Jan. 1998.

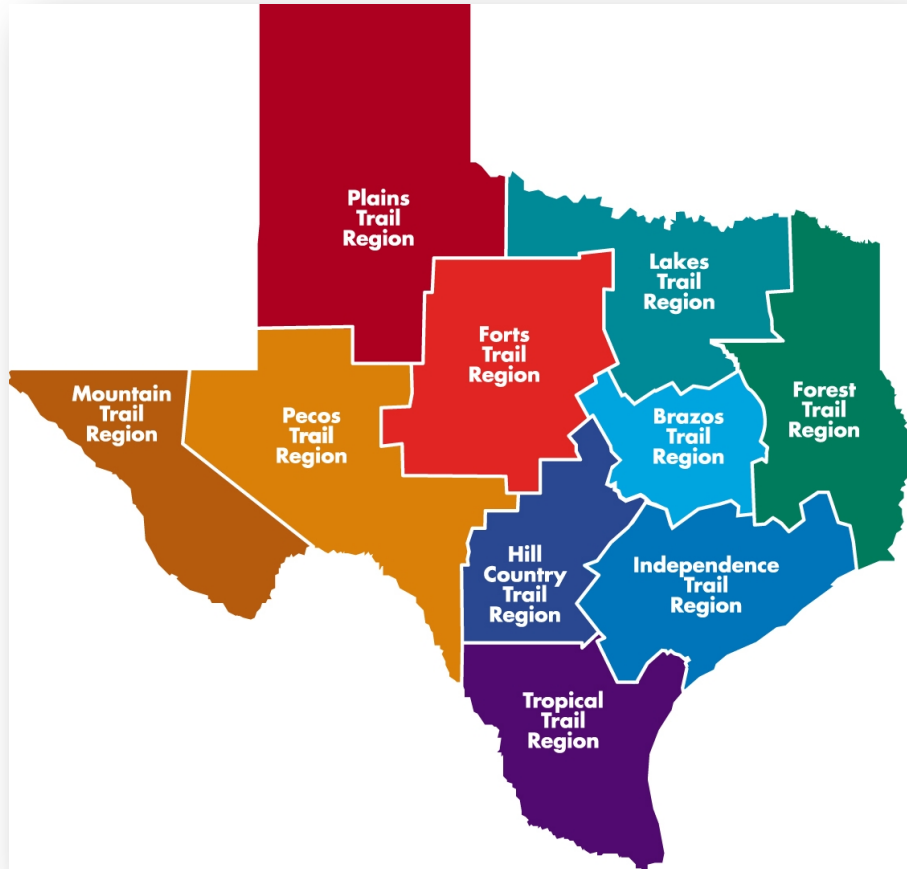
⁶⁶ [Add citations from TPTR clipping files]

⁶⁷ As events played out, as of the time of this writing, none of the regions ever achieved such an ambitious goal; when the SAFTEA bill was passed as a successor to ISTEA, continued federal highway enhancement grants ensured an equitable level of funding for ten separate organizations that doubtless would have struggled to deliver consistent programming otherwise. When the expiration of SAFTEA grants was imminent after 2011, several Trail Region organizations joined together to form a for-profit LLC, which has begun to yield a separate revenue stream for the participating partners as a result of Authentic Texas Magazine (launched in 2015) and related enterprises.

⁶⁸ [Add citation for correspondence and press clippings documenting community interest]

⁶⁹ Texas Forts Trails sign. Image from www.TexasTimeTravel.com

published in 1999, outlining mission and strategies.⁷⁰ Once again, caravans hit the road, and favorable publicity ensued. Forts was soon followed by the Independence, Forest, Lakes, and Brazos Trail Regions.



In West and South Texas, the process took a little longer, with the Texas Plains Trail Region coming on board in 2003, and Tropical, Pecos, Mountain, and Hill Country joining by 2006 to complete statewide coverage.^{71 72}

⁷⁰ Texas Historical Commission, *The Texas Forts Trail Region: An Interdisciplinary Evaluation for the Texas Travel Trails Program*, 1999, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History. The report was produced with the assistance of the Texas Forts Trail Board of Directors, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Department of Transportation, Texas Department of Economic Development, Texas Commission on the Arts, and Robert W. Parvin, Texas Heritage Tourism Consultant.

⁷¹ [Add citation for years that Trails Regions joined]

⁷² Texas Heritage Trails Regions, as of 2006. Map from Texas Historical Commission.



The Texas Heritage Trails today focus on the regional experience, not the legacy driving loop (show in blue) alone. Texas Plains Trail Region map from regional brochure, 2003.

Thorough evaluations of each region’s heritage sites were conducted, with the assistance of THC staff, and these provided the raw material for the brochure series as well.

Over the years our ten Heritage Trail Regions have operated with slightly different approaches, projects, promotions, funding methods, and goals — and their individual stories remain to be written. But we have all contributed rich content, promotions, and knowledge to our state’s tourism efforts, thanks to energetic regional coordinators (executive directors, since 2011) and dedicated volunteer

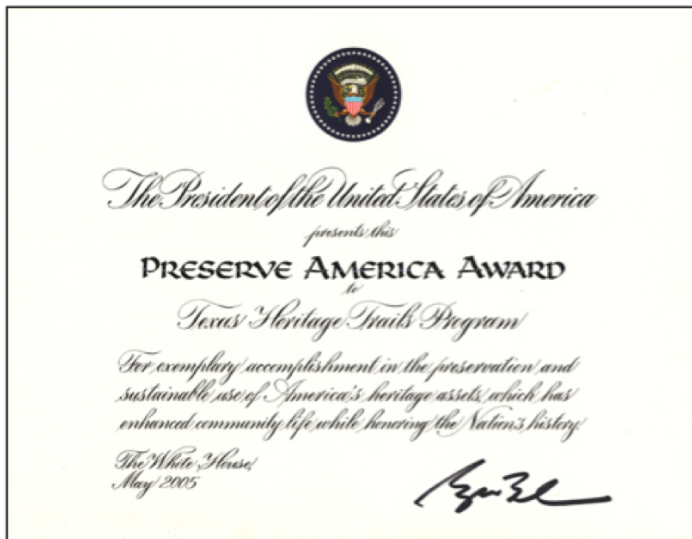
boards. Upon the retirement of Janie Headrick in [REDACTED], Teresa Caldwell became statewide coordinator of the program.

Federal grants administered by the THC via TxDOT were succeeded in fiscal year 2017 by contract funds via the Office of the Governor for Economic Development and Tourism and, beginning in fiscal year 2018, have allowed all ten regions to implement tourism and heritage promotions that have made Texas the envy of the nation. Initiatives like regional cooperative advertising campaigns, group travel itineraries, passport programs, behind-the-scenes heritage tours, social media engagement, maps and books, visitor assistance during and after natural disasters, travel-show exhibits, event promotions, community education, hospitality training, a network of giant arrows recognizing Native history, tourism passport programs, and full-color magazines and travel guides provide travelers with reliable information about authentic destinations, and provide partners with affordable marketing options. The regions continue to deliver effective results on a lean budget.



Members of 2003 original board of directors, at Tulia, Texas, 2013.

In 2005 the Texas Heritage Trails program was jointly recognized with the Preserve America Presidential Award, presented by President and Mrs. Bush.⁷³ The award was presented “for exemplary accomplishment in the preservation and sustainable use of America's heritage assets, which has enhanced community life while honoring the nation's history,” and the following year the program also received a Preserve America grant for developing the *Heritage Tourism Guidebook* and for providing heritage tourism training across the state.⁷⁴



Today the Heritage Trails continue to bring visitors to Texas sites and communities, increasing tourist dollars and hotel stays, and getting folks excited about historic preservation, and contributing to an industry that has grown from a \$1 billion annual impact to more than \$70 billion. The extensive UT/Rutgers “Economic Impact of Historic Preservation in Texas” study (2015) shows that more than 12 percent of that is attributable to heritage tourism. As THC commissioner John L. Nau III noted as far back as 2002 at the first Federal Heritage Tourism Summit in Washington, D.C., travelers’ increasing interest in “visiting the past” can yield an economic bonanza for localities, states, and the nation, if we are diligent to preserve, research, interpret, and promote our authentic places and their stories.

⁷³ “2005 Preserve America Presidential Awards Presented,” <http://www.preserveamerica.gov/news-05PApresawards.html>, accessed January 2014.

⁷⁴ “Texas Heritage Trails: A Regional Tourism Initiative,” <http://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/texas-heritage-trails>, accessed 8 Jan. 2018.

A personal perspective

In the end, a visionary program that has yielded economic benefit to our state is about much more than money alone. It's about recreation, inspiration, imagination, and gratitude for our natural, scenic, and cultural heritage. When I met original Parkway study team member Jerry Rogers quite by chance a few years ago, he said that what he found most gratifying, and amazing, is that the Heritage Trails program had turned out so much like the vision those idealists originally imagined.

I want to leave you with a few words from our creation story, from the closing paragraph of Urbanovsky's 1967 Texas Parkway Study.

"Perhaps the term Recreation Environment can be expressed in the Plains Indian word *Waucaunda*. It meant 'Great Spirit.' . . . For the Indian saw *Waucaunda* everywhere: in the sun, the moon, and the stars; in the earth, the waters, and the wind; in the eagle, the trees, and the buffalo. *Waucaunda* was a profound and reverent identification between man and his environment. [Today we have] almost lost that identification. But we can regain it through Recreational Environment. This is our challenge: to influence future development so that recreation [*—and I will add, enjoyment of our heritage and culture—*] will become an integral part of our daily lives."

We hope that what we learn about our own past will help inform and secure the program's future, for the benefit of travelers everywhere.

* * *

Barbara Brannon's research into twentieth-century American social history ranges from bookstores to back roads and encompasses forms as diverse as folk songs, travel blogs, magazine features, and a highway history. The author of *The Ferries of North Carolina: A Guide to the State's Nautical Highways*, she currently serves as executive director of the Texas Plains Trail Region. She holds the MA and PhD in American literature from the University of South Carolina and undergraduate degrees in art and English from Georgia College.