



COTTON PICKING TIME ON PERTHSHIRE PLANTATION

Photograph by Maury Knowlton

ROADS IN BOLIVAR COUNTY
I

Immediately upon the organization of the county the Board of Police began to make provisions for public roads. In August, 1836, one was authorized "to begin at the house of John M. Henderson on Lake Bolivar and to terminate at the foot of Island Number 76 on the Mississippi River. One from thence to Indian Point, and one to continue from thence to the house of John V. Newman in the bend opposite Island Number 74."¹ The road from Lake Bolivar to the foot of Island Number 76 was to be located as near the banks of the Mississippi River as practicable.

In October, 1836, a jury was selected to lay out the road from one end of the county to the other, to be called the three per cent road, and an estimate was to be made of the cost of bridges and other items. It was to be located as near as possible to the Mississippi River.²

On July 10, 1838, Joseph McGuire and Francis Patterson, Jr., were employed "to cut a road or track, three feet wide, to be well blazed, and commence at the Mississippi River just below the plantation of Fearn and Burrus, and to be located on the best and highest ground and as near as practicable on a straight line, to the most eligible point on the River Yazoo between Roebuck's Prairie and Williams's Landing, and to be completed before the second Monday in October."³ The compensation was to be \$500.

In 1848, the road district for the county seat began at Goff's Bayou, ran thence down the river to the courthouse; thence down the river to the place of John L. Harris, which clearly locates the county seat above the present town of Beulah. The levee line shows the same location of the county seat.

° John Hibbard was in charge of the road from the courthouse to the lower line of the John L. Harris place in August, 1850. The levee line described it as "beginning at Stokes Bayou at the bend below the courthouse, and continuing down the river to the lower line of the district." The date of this description was 1850.

The slaves of J. L. Harris, J. McGuire, C. G. Coffee, J. V. Newman, and Charles Clark were used to work this road at that time.

In 1855, on petition of William S. Cook, all gates across the public road in his district were ordered, by the Board, to be removed. From the beginning of road building, gates were used across the roads wherever asked for.

II

After 1860 the Civil War and Reconstruction retarded progress. The Levee Board built a protective levee the length of the

¹The records of the Board of Police.

²The records of the Board of Police.

³The records of the Board of Police.

county. A road within this levee from landing to landing was a natural development. The completion of the Louisville, New Orleans and Texas Railway in 1884 along the eastern side of the county, and of the Bolivar Loop a few years later, gave growth to towns and villages, and subsequent roads connecting them. These roads followed the lines of least resistance and were literally "high ways" as they were on the ridges which paralleled the windings of the streams. The most important road crossing the county in the 1890's ran from Concordia to Shelby.

One of the first gravel roads was built in 1915 by Dr. J. C. Brooks, partly with private funds. Thirty-two carloads of gravel, furnished by the county, were laid upon the public road from Deeson to Brookslan, because of the vehement protest of Mrs. Brooks against living in a country with roads so bad as to require a wagon and six mules to convey her from the train to her home, during or after a heavy rain.

The year 1916 marks the beginning of gravelled roads as a public venture by bond issue, and the end of enforced hibernation of Bolivar County people. Road districts began this work, with local taxation as the basis for funds, but the problem soon became too great to be managed by small local units. After 1922 the State Highway Department began to assume maintenance of roads which met standard requirements of width, construction, and proper drainage.⁵

III

Having become an early advocate of good roads, I have been frequently asked to give a history of good road development in Bolivar County, and an opinion on road construction.

The Board of Supervisors that passed out of office January 1, 1908, had so conducted the affairs of the county that early the next year it was apparent there was a surplus in the treasury of about \$15,000. This fact being known to me, I went before the Board and urged that this surplus be used in grading a road from Cleveland to Rosedale. The Board, of which T. I. Sanders was president, acceded to this idea, and the grading of the public roads was begun.

The \$15,000 was soon expended, effecting an improvement in roads so great that a bond issue of \$50,000 was almost immediately sold for road purposes. This was followed by a second issue of \$50,000, and then by a third issue of \$100,000, making a total of \$200,000 of road bonds issued by the county. Although I had urged the Board to construct graded dirt roads, I soon saw that such work was futile and became an advocate of gravel as the solution of our road problem. The money spent for grading, however, was

⁵Part II was contributed by Cordelia McNees West.

not wasted, as it provided the foundation of many miles of gravelled roads.

The first efforts to construct a hard surfaced road in the county were made by Dr. H. L. Sutherland, a man of genuine public spirit and a pioneer in the demand for good roads, good schools, and public health measures. By his own contribution of time and money, assisted by his friends, he raised several hundred dollars and bought several hundred cords of wood, placed it on an embankment of the road two miles east of Rosedale, covered it with buckshot dirt, and burnt it to brick-like hardness, thus creating a hard surfaced road for about two hundred yards—the first, I am sure, in the county. It provided a good road for about two years.

About the year 1910, the mayor of Rosedale, John V. Lobdell, requested the authorities of the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad to furnish seven cars of gravel, to be placed around their depot at the expense of the town. This was done, and the gravel extended a short distance from the depot. This, I am sure, was the first gravel used in the county for road purposes.

The first gravelled road constructed in the county was built in February and March, 1914, and was extended two miles east from Rosedale. The forty cars of gravel used in this construction were paid for out of county funds, and hauled at the expense of a private subscription. This was followed, almost immediately, by the construction of a mile of road east and west of Benoit. In December, 1914, a considerable quantity of gravel was used on the road running east from Deeson, the gravel being furnished by the county and hauled at the expense of Dr. J. C. Brooks. The work on this road was probably not finished before 1915.

In the year 1915, the Board of Supervisors began the organization of road districts by the creation of the Riverside and the Phalia districts. The Riverside district—the first one to begin the real construction of hard surfaced roads—was organized in December, 1915, its first commissioners being W. L. Withers, W. B. Barry, and W. B. Roberts. This district was the first to complete a system of roads having completed, by 1919, forty miles of gravelled roads. The system consisted of a continuous road from a point four miles above Rosedale to the Washington County line, with three laterals running to the district line to the east—one each at Rosedale, Beulah, and Benoit.

Bolivar County was the only county in the state that carried on its road work during those years through the medium of each

neighborhood, and yet, out of it developed the three trunk line roads that were adopted by the legislature as highways.⁶

IV

To those who have watched Bolivar County emerge from the mud within the past thirty years, the present system of highways in the county seems a stupendous achievement. This has been accomplished, first, through a forward-looking county road program, which has brought gravelled and graded roads to all parts of the county; second, through the State Highway and Federal Aid programs for the principal routes.

* * * *

Prior to 1922 the county had full responsibility for construction and maintenance of roads within the county, except for small Federal Aid projects. In 1922 the legislature submitted to the people a constitutional amendment providing that the legislature designate a system of state highways. This amendment was approved in November, 1922, and under this provision the Highway Department was able to take over the maintenance of all previously constructed Federal Aid projects.

It was sometime during the year 1923 that the Highway Department began maintaining the road between O'Reilly and Shaw, this road bearing the official designation of Federal Aid Project Number 81. From time to time, as other roads have been brought up to state standard or reconstructed, they have been taken over for maintenance by the State Highway Department.⁷

The next decade found Bolivar County extending its gravelled road system until there was a network of good roads throughout the county. County roads were constructed and maintained under separate road or supervisor districts, with members of the Board of Supervisors acting as road inspectors in their respective districts. This system prevails today (1946), with 746 miles of gravelled county roads.

Under the 1922 Act the State Highway Department was divided by Congressional districts, each district having a representative on the commission. J. C. Roberts of Cleveland was representative for the Third District and served as chairman of the State Highway Commission.

In 1930 the legislature passed the Stansel Highway Act establishing the present state highway system, and the state was re-districted according to the judicial districts of the Supreme Court: namely, Northern, Central, and Southern. Sidney T. Roebuck of Newton is the present commissioner of the Central District, of

⁶Part III of this article on roads was contributed by W. B. Roberts.

⁷Contributed by Mr. Monette, Office Engineer, State Highway Department.

which Bolivar County is a part; and is chairman of the State Highway Commission.

In 1936 the Highway Construction Act was passed by the legislature. This provided \$60,000,000 (with Federal Aid) for paved roads and resulted in Mississippi obtaining one of the finest systems of paved roads in the United States. Number 61, which extends from Port Arthur, Canada, to New Orleans, traverses the full length of the county, passing through Alligator, Duncan, Shelby, Mound Bayou, Merigold, Cleveland, Boyle, and Shaw.

It is a matter of pride to Bolivar County that her representatives in the state legislature played an important part in enacting constructive highway legislation. Walter Sillers was one of the floor leaders in the House and, with Horace Stansel, handled both the 1930 and the 1936 bills, having written the major part of them. It was largely through Sillers' efforts that the compromise was effected which resulted in the passage of the 1936 Act. At the time the bill seemed sure to be defeated, but Sillers proposed a compromise which the House accepted. Representative Oscar Wolfe gave strong support to the measure, having always been a consistent advocate of good roads. Senator W. B. Roberts was one of the outstanding leaders in the Senate and helped to steer both bills through that branch of the legislature.

The following was contributed by Mr. Monette, Office Engineer of the State Highway Department, through the courtesy of Sidney T. Roebuck, chairman of the State Highway Commission.

At the present time the Mississippi State Highway Department is maintaining, approximately, 155 miles of highways in Bolivar County. The following tabulation shows the type of road as well as the mileage on each of the highways that the state is maintaining:

Type	Perthshire-Shelby	Scott Choctaw	Mississippi Number 1	Mississippi Number 8	United States Number 61
Concrete			5.5 miles	3.3 miles	44.3 miles
Asphalt				19.7 miles	
Bituminous		.3 mile	6.4 miles		
Surf Treatment	9.5 miles	20.6 miles	43.5 miles		
Gravel					
Totals	9.5 miles	20.9 miles	55.4 miles	23.0 miles	44.3 miles

The total number of miles maintained by the State Highway Department is 153.1.

The first project undertaken, a section of United States Highway Number 61 between O'Reilly and Shaw, was under the authority of the county with the cooperation of the State Highway Department and the Federal Government. The contract, covering 4.5 miles of grading and gravel surfacing, was awarded July 6, 1920, to J. S. McCloud and was completed in November, 1921, at a cost of, approximately, \$90,000. The contract was signed by A. E. Gra-

ham, chairman of the Shaw road district; George H. Stephens, secretary; V. W. Thomas, president of the Board of Supervisors. It was attested by P. B. Woollard

The first concrete pavement constructed in the county was 1.1 miles on United States Highway 61, in the town of Shelby, built by Horey and Gordon in 1926. The last pavement constructed on Highway 61 was in July, 1938.

The latter project consisted of the following sections:

Coahoma line, south	1.3 miles
Shelby, north	2.6 miles
Between Mound Bayou and Cleveland	6.6 miles

On Mississippi Number 8, the first grading work was done in the early part of 1939. The pavement, Rosedale to Cleveland, was completed in August of 1942.

The State Highway Department bears all of the expense in maintaining the 155 miles of roads, previously mentioned, in Bolivar County. Under the existing laws, the Highway Department is limited to participating in the construction cost of the following highways in Bolivar County: Mississippi Number 1, Mississippi Number 8, and Mississippi—United States Number 61, as principal routes.⁸

Number 1 was paved from Scott to the county line, south, in 1942. Highway Number 8 is designated as the W. B. Roberts Memorial Highway, in honor of Senator Roberts of Rosedale. A handsome marker has been placed at the beginning of Number 8, just south of Rosedale, commemorating the name and good works of one of the earliest pioneers for good roads and one of the most influential members of the state legislature.

Contract has been let by the State Highway Department for the bituminous surfacing of Mississippi Number 1, between Beulah and Scott, and the work of widening and straightening the old road is under way.

The 1946 legislature authorized a Farm-to-Market road program, which, when put into effect, will greatly improve the secondary roads of the county. The State Highway Department has recently made a survey of roads in Bolivar County for the purpose of setting up this program. The Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation, of which the Bolivar County organization is the largest unit, was instrumental in bringing this program before the legislature; and it worked in conjunction with legislative leaders for its passage.⁹

⁸Mr. Monette

⁹Florence S. Ogden is the author of Part IV.