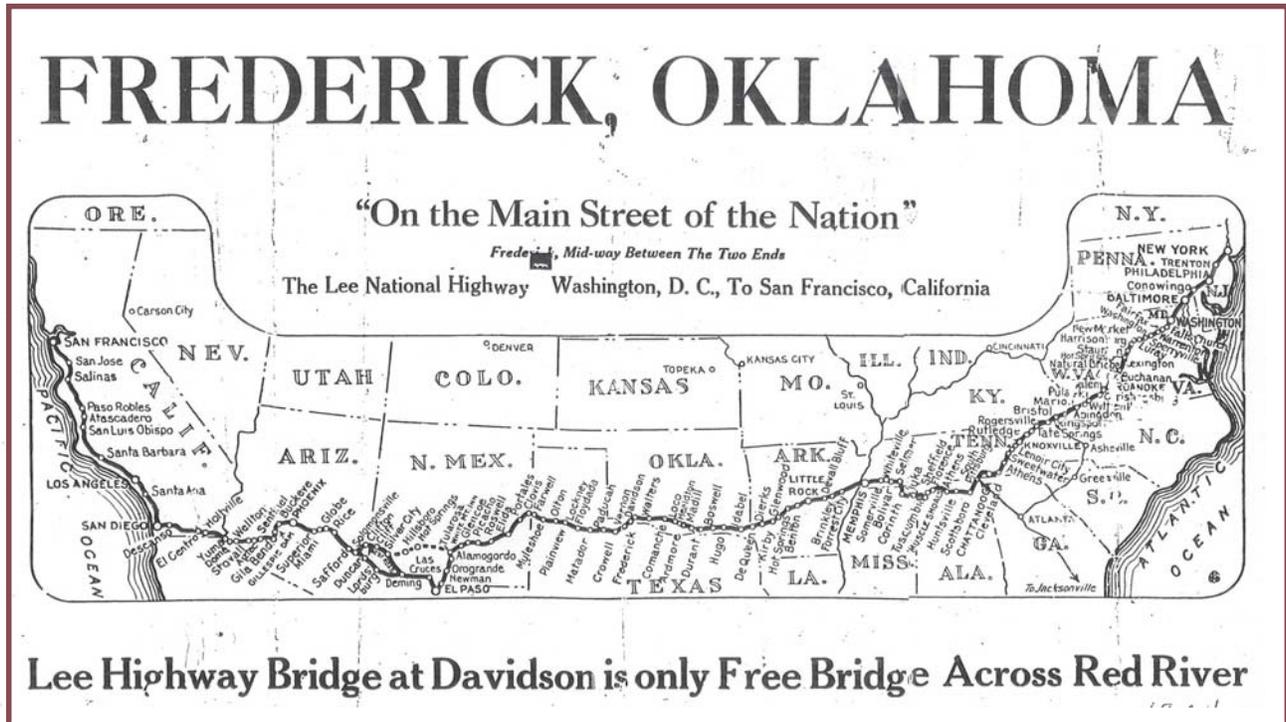


# Tillman County Chronicles

Tillman County Historical Society Column

by Joe Wynn

May 19, 2009



Publication from 1924 shows Frederick's place on Lee National Highway (See map in more detail on Page 3)

## Lee Highway passed through Frederick in 1920s

Before there was a Route 66 or I-40, there was the Lee National Highway. It was established in the early 1920s as one of only a few cross-continental highways, and it passed directly through Frederick and Tillman County.

Prior to the 1920s, almost all long-range transportation and hauling of freight was by train. As motor vehicles became common, though, there was a growing desire to travel by car and to haul merchandise by truck. At that time there was no organized, systematic highway system to travel from state to state. All roads were dirt or gravel and there were no standards for building or maintaining them.

The Lee National Highway was organized in the early 1920s as a primary cross-country route that

extended from Washington, D.C., through the South, South Central states (including Oklahoma), and the American Southwest, finally arriving at the Pacific Ocean in San Diego, California, before moving up the California coast to end in San Francisco.

The Highway was named as a memorial for General Robert E. Lee.

The other most important cross-country route from New York City to San Francisco was the Lincoln National Highway which crossed through northern states. It had been established just a few years previous to the Lee Highway.

Official maps of the Lee Highway show two versions as it crossed through Tillman County.

**Continued Next Page**

**Continued From Previous Page**

The direct highway route passed through Walters then into Frederick from the east along the route of the current Highway 5. The Lee Highway turned southward at Frederick, passing through Davidson before moving into Texas over a brand new Red River Bridge, then on to Vernon. A map of the national highway was printed in a Frederick publication in November 1924 with the headlines "Frederick, Oklahoma, 'On the Main Street of the Nation', 'Lee Highway Bridge at Davidson is only Free Bridge Across Red River.'"

An auxiliary version of the national highway contained a loop that curved northward from the Walters area, through Lawton, then southwest to Frederick from the north, joining the direct highway route through Frederick.

Why was there a sudden need for national cross-country highways in the 1920s?

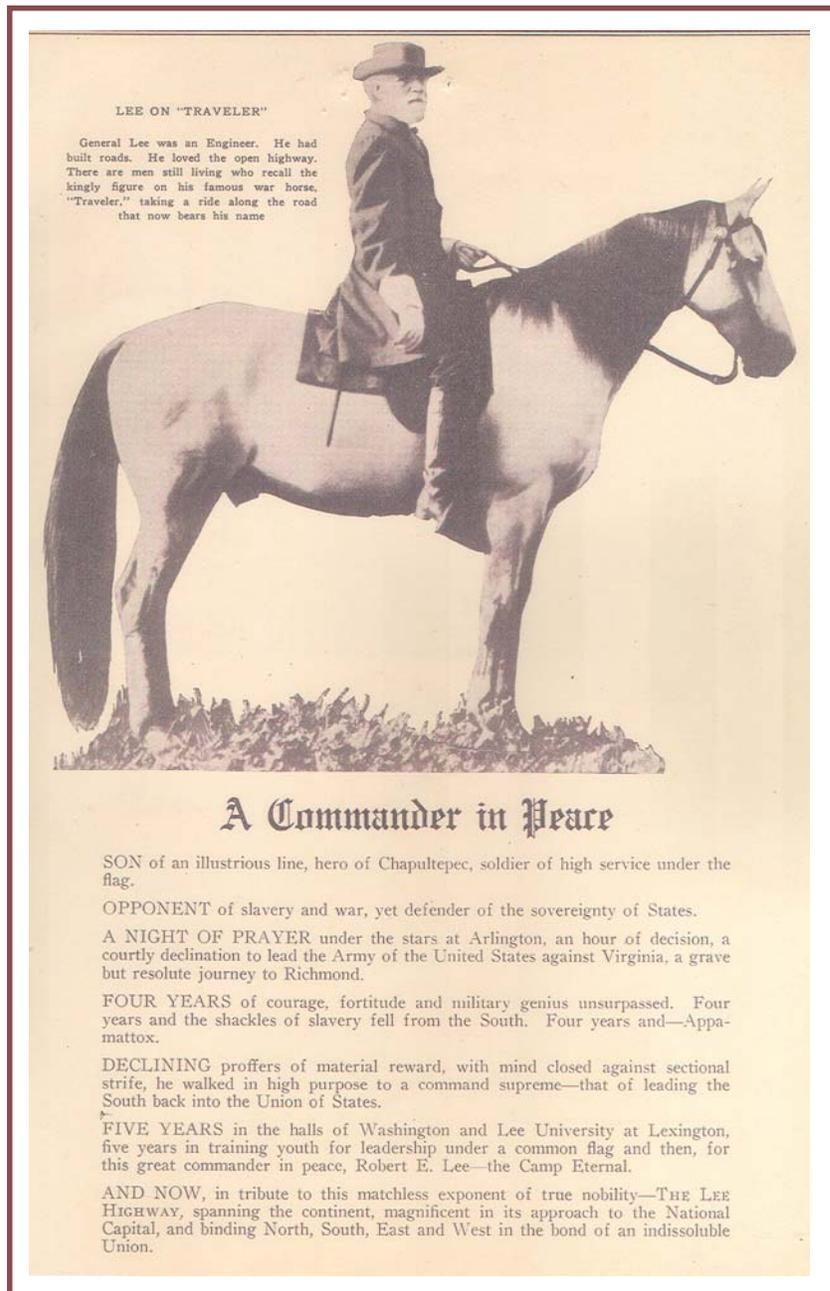
A few visionary men of the time realized that automobiles would grow in importance and would replace trains as the principle means of long-distance transportation and freight hauling. At that time, the federal government was not involved in road building at all, and some states did not even have highway departments.

During World War I, good roads in Europe helped with transport of military vehicles, and after the war, many American leaders began to realize the importance of being able to quickly move military vehicles, food and equipment across the country on roadways in times of emergency.

The Lee National Highway was established in the early 1920s as one of the main cross-country thoroughfares.

Its start was in Washington, D.C. at the Potomac River, directly in front of the Robert E. Lee family mansion that is located on the grounds of Arlington National Cemetery. In 1926, work began on the Arlington Memorial Bridge over the Potomac to officially mark the beginning of America's Highway.

Robert E. Lee National Highway



### A Commander in Peace

SON of an illustrious line, hero of Chapultepec, soldier of high service under the flag.

OPPONENT of slavery and war, yet defender of the sovereignty of States.

A NIGHT OF PRAYER under the stars at Arlington, an hour of decision, a courtly declination to lead the Army of the United States against Virginia, a grave but resolute journey to Richmond.

FOUR YEARS of courage, fortitude and military genius unsurpassed. Four years and the shackles of slavery fell from the South. Four years and—Appamattox.

DECLINING proffers of material reward, with mind closed against sectional strife, he walked in high purpose to a command supreme—that of leading the South back into the Union of States.

FIVE YEARS in the halls of Washington and Lee University at Lexington, five years in training youth for leadership under a common flag and then, for this great commander in peace, Robert E. Lee—the Camp Eternal.

AND NOW, in tribute to this matchless exponent of true nobility—THE LEE HIGHWAY, spanning the continent, magnificent in its approach to the National Capital, and binding North, South, East and West in the bond of an indissoluble Union.

During coming decades, other national cross-country highways would be established, such as Route 66 from Chicago to California, and development of the interstate highway system in the 1950s.

During the 1920s, though, one of the primary routes across America passed directly through Frederick and Tillman County.

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*Joe Wynn is a member of the Tillman County Historical Society Board of Directors.*

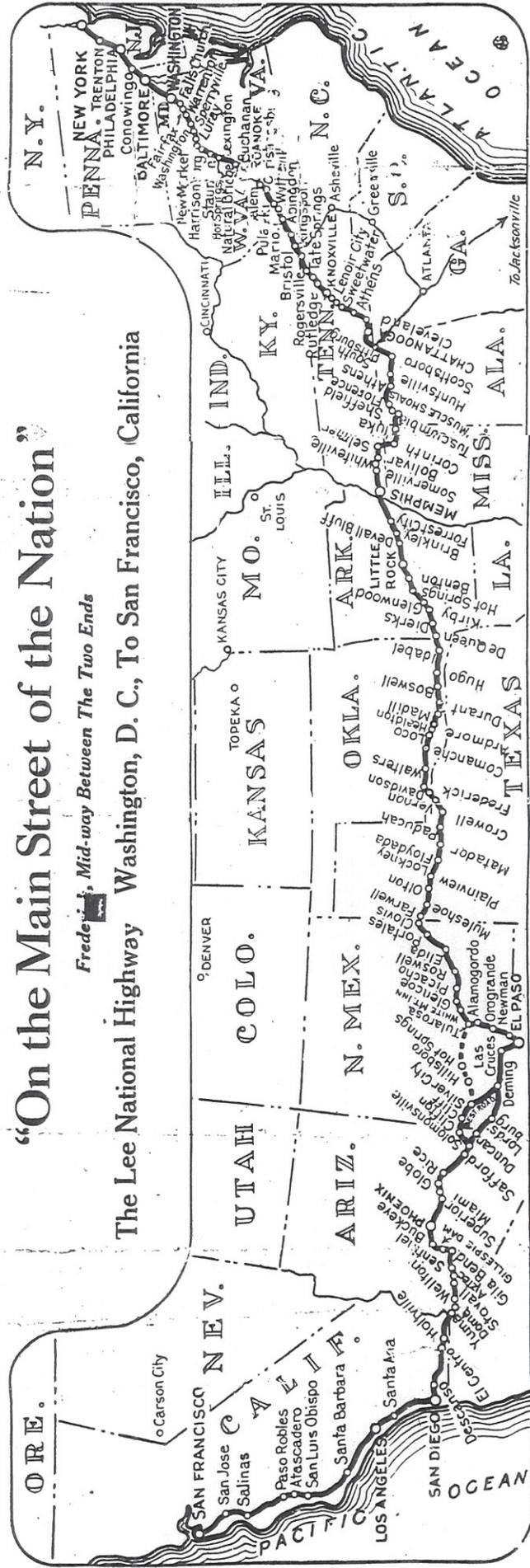
**Map Detail on following page**

# FREDERICK, OKLAHOMA

“On the Main Street of the Nation”

Frederick, Mid-way Between The Two Ends

The Lee National Highway Washington, D. C., To San Francisco, California



Lee Highway Bridge at Davidson is only Free Bridge Across Red River