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Tattered Tidbits: Alpine Historical Society

THE HISTORY OF OLD HIGHWAY 80 – LEE HIGHWAY

Before Interstate 8 was built there was U.S. Highway 80. In 1915 California built this highway from San Diego to Yuma, Arizona. In Alpine US Highway 80 went through Arnold Way, which was the main road in Alpine at the time. This highway eventually became a transcontinental highway that went all the way to Savannah, Georgia and eventually to Tybee Island, Georgia on the Atlantic coast.

On February 12, 1919 a group of fourteen men met for lunch in the Hotel Roanoke in Roanoke, Virginia. They established the Lee Highway Association. They named the highway after Robert E. Lee who was a General in the Civil War.

Nine months later on December 3, 1919 more than five hundred men, from five states, met in Roanoke to figure out exactly where this highway would be built. Their purpose was *"To promote the proper location, construction and maintenance, according to modern plans and specifications, of a great National Highway..."*

They established milestones in cities and towns across America. These milestones measured highway miles for maps and guide books.

The State of California officially designated U.S. Highway 80 (Lee Highway) as an official state historic route on October 21, 2006. There were several ribbon cuttings along the route starting at Seaport Village. Going east they stopped in La Mesa, El Cajon, the Town Hall in Alpine and ended up at the Viejas Outlet Center.

A car caravan with classic cars followed the route. Another car caravan started in Yuma and headed west. The two caravans met at Viejas for the final ribbon cutting ceremony .

The Historic Highway 80 Corporation worked with community groups to organize this major event. Signage has been installed along the route within the cities of San Diego, La Mesa, El Cajon, Flinn Springs, Alpine, Descanso, Guatay, Pine Valley, Boulevard, El Centro and Yuma. The rest of U.S. Hwy 80 is a historic highway but has no official recognition yet. However, even the eastern section is old and historic. Maybe someday it will be designated as an official historic route all the way to Tybee Island, Georgia.

The way you can tell whether a route is designated historic or not is by the color of the sign. Brown signs are historic routes, white signs are not. While you are driving around Alpine see if you can find the Historic Route 80 signs.

By Carlette Anderson