



RELIQS *of a* ROAD



In October 20, 1926, Colonel Ed Fletcher steered his automobile eastward from San Diego, California, resolute to reach Savannah, Georgia, in record time. The land developer's stunt was geared to drum up

support for a transcontinental driving route to San Diego, even though road trips were considered "something of a sporting proposition." Indeed, most roads were narrow dirt lanes, slippery when wet.

Fletcher's race with destiny ran along part of the Dixie Overland Highway, one of 250-plus "named trails" of the 1920s.

With more families buying cars (Model T Fords sold for \$300), business associations, such as the Dixie Overland Highway Association, laid out routes of intercon-

necting local roads through member towns. Signs painted on poles, barns, and even rocks offered meager driving directions.

After a breakneck (though relatively uneventful) coast-to-coast escapade—including an all-day drive across Texas—Fletcher made his 2,535-mile trip in record time, reaching Savannah on

October 23 in a little over 71 hours.

That same year, federal and state officials rolled out a national plan, long in the making, for a numbered U.S. highway system. Much of the Dixie Overland Highway became part of the new US Highway 80.

That inaugural class of U.S. highways also included US 66, which ran from Chicago to Los Angeles. By the early 1970s, legendary Route 66 was bypassed by modern four-lane highways. But Highway 80, America's first all-weather, coast-to-coast route, still exists... at least its eastern half. US 80 makes a 900-mile beeline from Dallas' eastern city limit at

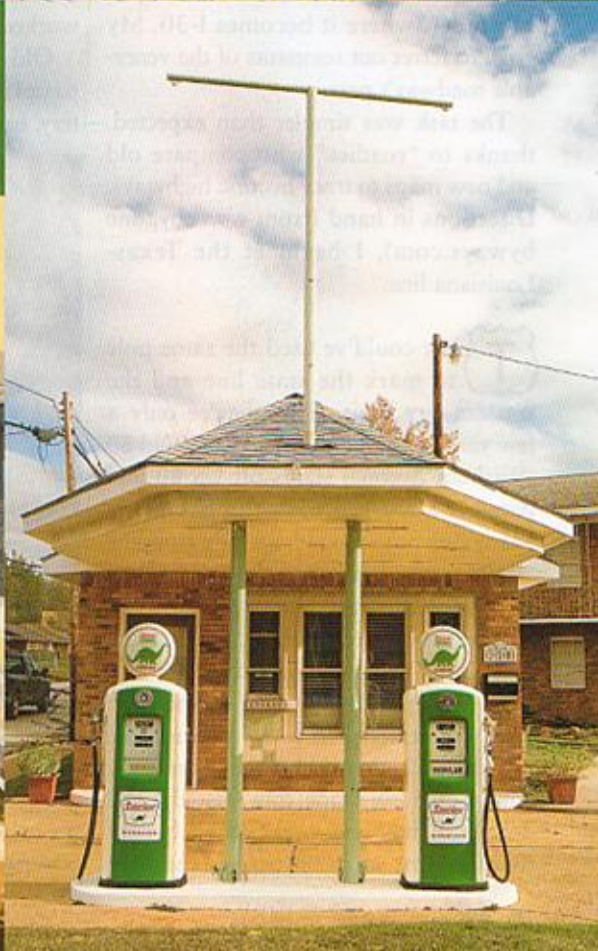
Story and photographs by Randy Mallory

Side-road surprises abound along historic (and new) stretches of US 80. Clockwise, from top left: road signs in downtown Mineola; Graham's Edgewood Market in Edgewood (seasonal produce, plus local honey and homemade ice cream); Marshall's restored 1912 Texas & Pacific Depot (now a museum and Amtrak passenger depot); an old Sinclair service station at the retro Dixie Motel in Gladewater; and Gladewater's Glory Bee Baking Company (owners Bill and Susan Morgan have their eyes on the pies).



ADWAY

Old Highway 80



Mesquite to the Atlantic Ocean at Tybee Island, Georgia. (By the early 1990s, the western half of US 80 had been replaced by Interstates 8, 10, 20, and 30.)

I've driven US 80 many times past rolling woodlands and quaint downtowns...not to mention strip centers, trailer parks, and pumpjacks. This is, after all, the blue collar of the East Texas Oil Field, once the world's largest puddle of black gold.

Decades of realignments and bypasses shifted US 80 away from the original

Cindy's New Waskom Cafe. Their new menu retains home-cooked favorites, such as chicken-and-dumplings and roast beef, enjoyed by generations of passersby.

West of Waskom, I take FM 134 (Old 80) north to Jonesville, where T.C. Lindsey & Co. remains the quintessential general store turned tourist destination. The business was established in 1847; the current building was built in the early 1920s by brothers Tom and Sam Vaughan. The late "Mister Sam" loved to

built a hilltop plantation (reportedly identical to Jefferson Davis' Mississippi mansion) and gave land for a cemetery, which still stands beside the historic home (open for tours; see Essentials). In the graveyard, fine statues by German-born Texas artist Frank Teich adorn 19th-Century monuments. The famed "Weeping Angel" monument rises over the grave of Will Scott Youree, whose 1904 death was memorialized by the construction nearby of a Victorian chapel that is still used for funerals.

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route. So what's left of Old 80? That's an engine-revving proposition for someone like me, who actually *likes* getting lost. (The unexpected sometimes brings wonderful surprises!)

So I set off on a 160-mile westward sojourn from Waskom, where US 80 enters Texas at the Louisiana line, to Mesquite, where it becomes I-30. My goal: to ferret out remnants of the venerable roadway's past.

The task was simpler than expected, thanks to "roadies" who compare old and new maps to trace historic highways. Directions in hand (from www.bygonebyways.com), I begin at the Texas-Louisiana line.

They could've used the same pole to mark the state line and the Waskom city limit, since they're only a few yards apart. A half-mile west, Old 80 (Waskom Avenue) slants off US 80 and parallels a railroad track through town. Many downtown buildings date from the 1920s and still face Old 80...but not the New Waskom Cafe.

When it opened in 1929, the café did face Old 80, but a realignment a few years later put the highway at the back door. To attract road-weary patrons, the owners jacked up the joint (some say with people still inside) and rotated it 180 degrees. Cindy and Guy Gibson bought the eatery last year and renamed the place

recount the day in May of 1934 when robbers Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow drove by en route to Louisiana and the police ambush that would kill them. "[Mister Sam] kept the news account in the front showcase, hoping to start conversations about Bonnie and Clyde," recalls "Miss Syble" Elliott, who has worked at the store since 1957.

Old 80 turns west at FM 1998 and passes the picturesque Scottsville Cemetery. In 1840, town namesake W.T. Scott

As FM 1998 rejoins US 80 in Marshall, I find a mother lode of historical sites. At North Washington Street, I go a couple of blocks north of US 80 to the Ginocchio National Historic District, which stretches along a working rail line. The neighborhood of historic homes surrounds the 1896 Ginocchio Hotel, home of the Harrison County Historical Museum.

A beautiful and rare stairway made of "curly" pine greets me in the old hotel



A vintage photo displayed at T.C. Lindsey & Co. in Jonesville shows former co-owner, the late T.W. Vaughan, taking an inventory of mule harnesses. At right, Greggton Antique Mall in Longview boasts "East Texas' Largest Collection of Militaria." Facing page, White Oak Road between Big Sandy and Gladewater is a scenic oil-top drive that once formed part of the original US 80 route.







Now a B&B, the 1918 Lott Home (above), a Texas Historic Landmark and also listed in the National Register, is just a stroll away from downtown Mineola's antique and specialty shops and art galleries. Below, this abandoned, one-lane iron bridge lies on old Highway 80 (now CR 3810) near Hallsville.

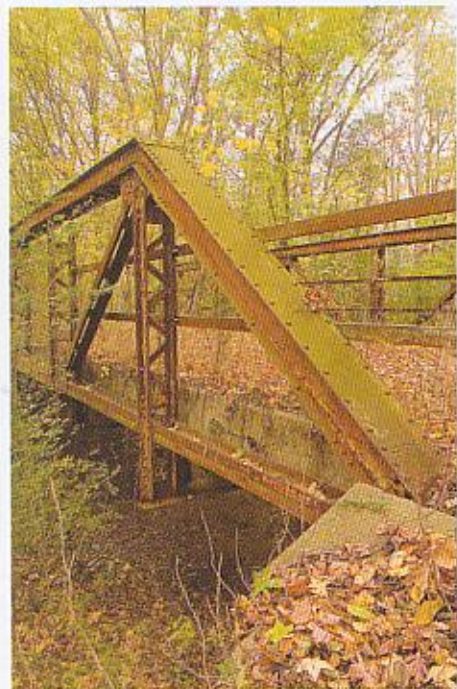
lobby. A few researchers are busy in a large genealogical and local-history library to my right. A small but professional exhibit hall to my left showcases the museum's permanent collection, which ranges from Caddo Indian relics to a Japanese flag captured at Iwo Jima during World War II.

The old hotel was erected atop a special foundation with supports drilled 10 feet into the ground. When a freight train rumbles by, I understand why. Across the tracks is the restored 1912 Texas & Pacific depot, now the Amtrak station for the *Texas Eagle's* daily runs between Chicago and Los Angeles. The depot sports a small gift shop and a railroad museum with photos from the golden age of steam locomotives.

Through downtown, Old 80 meets the courthouse square at Houston Street. Towering over the square is the 1901

Harrison County Courthouse, a Renaissance Revival masterpiece restored outside and being restored inside. Big-city-style eateries have sprung up on the square, including OS² Restaurant & Pub (entrées range from Veracruz-style tilapia to tenderloin medallions in Béarnaise sauce) and R & R Bakery & Coffee Shoppe (fresh pastries, coffees, and cappuccinos).

Near the square, I tour the Starr Family State Historic Site, the ancestral home of James Harper Starr, a local physician, Republic of Texas treasurer, land agent, banker, and namesake of Starr County in South Texas. In 1870, the Starr family built Maplecroft mansion, centerpiece of today's historic site, which is filled with 150 years of Starr family furnishings and photos. I overnight on-site in the quaint and cozy Rosemont Cottage, a bed and breakfast in the remaining wing of the



family's original 1830s home (the rest of the house was dismantled in 1914 after a lightning strike).

Old 80 (West Houston Street) exits downtown and passes other historic homes, in varying states of repair, and an abandoned but striking 1925 red-brick icehouse. The street becomes FM 3379, which feeds back into US 80 a few miles west.

A few miles east of Hallsville, a vintage iron bridge marks the Old 80 route. I park where CR 3810 once intersected US 80 (the county road's western terminus is now closed to traffic). Then I push through overhanging vines to view the one-lane bridge. It's a great spot to imagine the Model T days of car travel.

I stay on US 80 west to Longview and stop for spicy crawfish étouffée at Johnny Cace's Seafood & Steak House. Italian immigrant John Cace Sr. opened the

restaurant in 1949, and it's been a Cajun-food favorite since.

Nearby, I detour south on North Teague Street through the Nugget Hill Historic District, which boasts elegant Tudor Revival, Colonial Revival, and Spanish Revival homes and buildings (none open for tours).

On the west side of Longview, a sign at the Greggton Antique Mall catches my eye: "East Texas' Largest Collection of Militaria." Owners Gene and Danny Martin showcase the expected range of antiques, but also an unexpected museum's worth of World War II and other military memorabilia. A large room of the mall once comprised the museum of the local wing of the Commemorative Air Force. The mall now maintains the exhibits, which contain service relics ranging from vintage uniforms and weapons to wartime letters.

At Gladewater, I notice a four-story office and apartment building constructed in the early 1950s by wealthy oilman T.W. Lee. The top floor still has the Art Deco studio (no longer used) of the pioneering country-radio station KSIJ, where an unknown Elvis Presley hung out after live radio shows. A more public legacy of Lee and his wife, Helen, beckons just south of town (off US 271) at Mrs. Lee's Daffodil Garden, 35 splendid acres of flowers open for public tours each February and March.

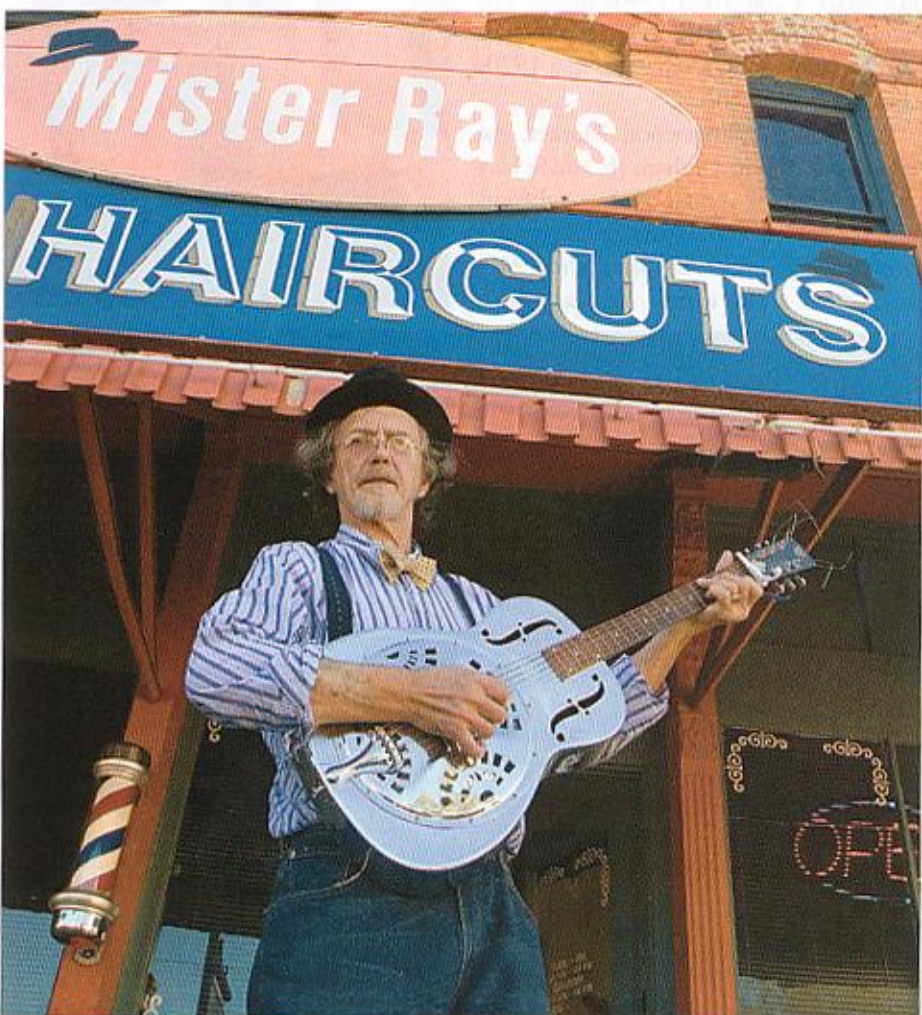
After the 1980s oil bust, Gladewater morphed into the Antique Capital of East Texas. I peruse a couple of downtown's 20 or so antique shops, then grab coffee and a pastry at Glory Bee Baking Co. Upstairs in the former 1930s furniture store, bakery owners Bill and Susan Morgan also operate the Honeycomb Suites bed and breakfast.

What a luxury to wake up with the aroma of fresh-baked "sticky buns," cinnamon rolls, and hot coffee rising from below! The luscious notion lingers as I search for the longest East Texas stretch of Old 80. I take US 271 north to Gay Avenue and head west until it becomes White Oak Road, a narrow country lane that rollercoasters for 15 miles up hills, down bottomlands, and beneath a canopy of trees.

White Oak Road becomes East Grove Street in Big Sandy and connects with Texas 155. One block south, I rejoin US 80 heading west and encounter "Family World." This aging recreation center was built in 1929 on a small lake built to supply water to steam trains. Amtrak and other trains still skirt the lake, and the old skating rink now hosts twice-weekly senior citizens' dances.

My Old 80 directions take me on side trips at Big Sandy (Texas 155 north to Quitman Road, west to FM 2659, then south to US 80) and at Hawkins (CR 3419 north to CR 3400, then west to US 80). At the community of Hoard (also known as Democrat), I leave US 80 and take FM 1801 (Old 80) into Mineola.

I recall that Mineola was supposedly named for a railroad official's daughter, Ola, and her friend, Minnie. To tout its past, the bustling burg is turning its 1937



Good music and a new do. Barber-musician Ray Moore plays a lick at his shop, Mister Ray's Million Dollar Haircuts, in Grand Saline.

post office into a historical museum, where the reproduction of a Depression-era transportation mural is complete. The town has also given its depot a vintage makeover, restoring it to its 1906 roots. Besides welcoming Amtrak, the station features first-class displays of railroad memorabilia. While waiting for the train, passengers can relax in a quaint gazebo or check out a new rose test garden nearby. Across the tracks, next to the old Beckham Hotel, LouViney's Cellars & Bistro, a winery based in Winnsboro, now serves its own varietals and other Texas wines along with a limited but diverse bistro menu.

After a delightful night's sleep at Mineola's Lott Home Cottages, I awaken to a dazzling sunrise and stand stupefied (but with camera at the ready) in the front yard of the Lott Home, a two-story, Prairie School-style mansion built in 1918. At Kitchens Hardware & Deli downtown, I fill up on a huge country breakfast (sausage and eggs, home-style biscuits and gravy, and steaming grits), then I'm off.

Just east of Grand Saline on US 80, I spy cedar furniture and cedar signs at Dove Creek Cedar. Owners James Wigington and his fiancée, Kathy, are wrapping up a project so they can head to the justice of the peace and get married! After glancing at James' finely-crafted dressers, beds, and tables, I wish the couple "a happy life" and head into Grand Saline via Old 80 (Frank Street).

In downtown, I happen upon a dapper fellow in bow tie and bowler hat beside a barber pole outside Mister Ray's Million Dollar Haircuts. Proprietor Ray Moore turns out to be as much musician as hair stylist. Barber chairs in his kitschy shop share space with musical instruments and a vintage jukebox blaring Jimi Hendrix guitar riffs.

Back on US 80, I stop by the Salt Palace Museum. The exterior of the local museum and visitor center is faced with salt blocks that gradually dissolve in the rain, requiring periodic replacement. The blocks come from one of the nation's largest salt domes, mined by the Morton Salt Company just south of town. After a lick of the wall for good

luck, I grab lunch at Don's Dairy Bar, a classic drive-in. Don Latham's Mexican dishes are tempting, but I choose an old-fashioned cheeseburger and a savory apple fried pie.

Whenever I'm in Edgewood, 10 miles west of Grand Saline on US 80, I visit the Edgewood Heritage Park Museum. Volunteers lovingly preserve the historical village's dozen-plus historic structures, including the Gilliam gas station and store, which served motorists during the 1920s on Old 80.

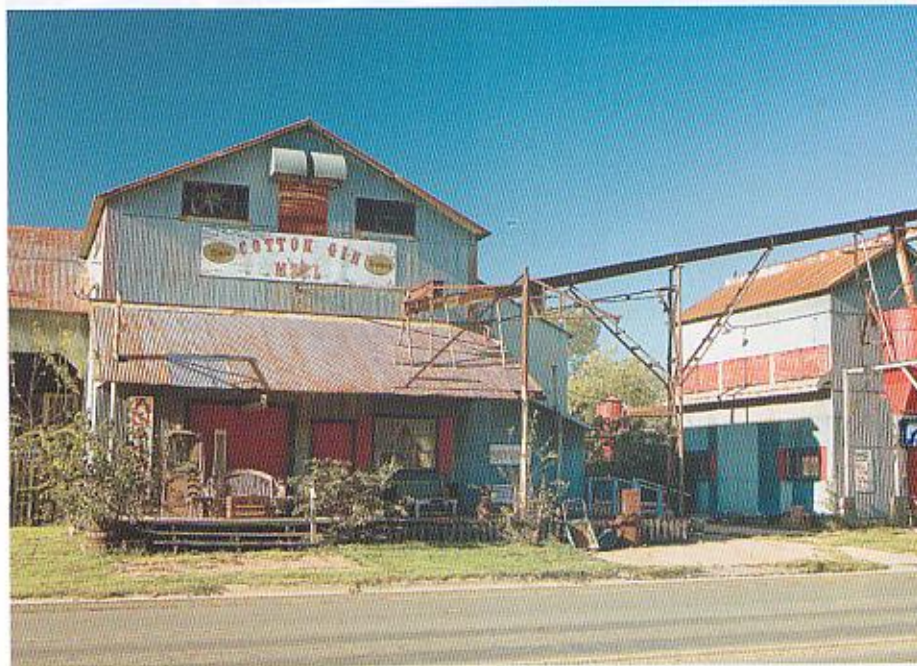
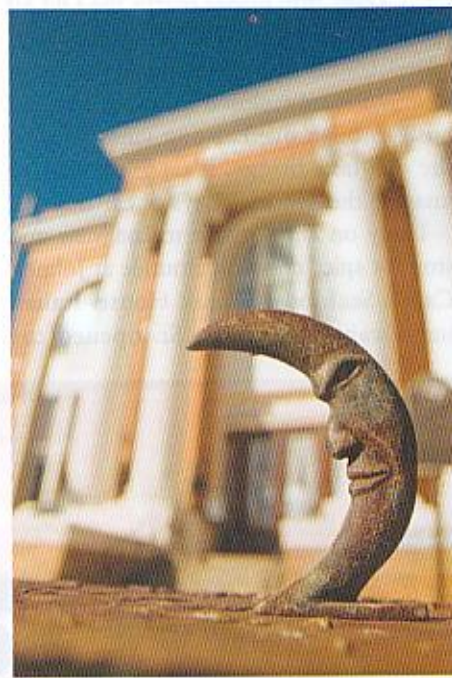
On new 80 in Edgewood, I find produce, plants, and pastries in ample proportions at two family operations.

The Stephen and Susan Pyle family cranks out an array of cheesecakes and muffins, plus gourmet coffee, at Pine St. Bakery & Tea Room. The bakery and the three-room Garden's Edge Bed & Breakfast share a converted 1940s house. The family also sells native Texas plants in a garden, and handcrafted items in a 1920s shack-cum-gift shop.

At Graham's Edgewood Market, the families of Ronnie Graham (Jr. and Sr.) lay out an aromatic spread of seasonal fruits and vegetables. Three years ago, they took over a stand open here since the 1940s and added a few extras, such as home-

made ice cream and home-style canned goods (don't miss fruit cobbler in a jar!).

On my way to Wills Point, the Bluebird Capital of Texas, I begin noticing bluebird boxes on fences along US 80. Locals promote the species via thousands of those roadside nesting boxes, and they host the annual Bluebird Festival (set for April 14, 2007). A stroll beside downtown's red-brick street leads



A sundial (top) sits in front of the Terrell Heritage Museum, housed in the town's historic Carnegie Library (at 207 N. Frances St.; 972/524-6082). Above, a former-cotton gin on Old 80 (now FM 688 or Broad Street) in Forney today features a gift shop and women's apparel boutique.



past the 1848 Wills Cabin (the wooden cabin of town namesake William Wills), the Rose Monument (an impressive structure in the middle of the street), the Bluebird Cafe (known for burgers and Mexican food), and the 1926 Majestic Theatre (one of the state's oldest cinemas). A bright red caboose on US 80 stands near the 1934 Texas & Pacific depot, which now houses a local-history museum.

By the time US 80 reaches Terrell, I've left the Piney Woods behind. An aging neon sign saying "Iris" grabs my attention in this blackland-prairie town, so I step into what's now Books and Crannies. Proprietress Gayle Harris tells me that the former Iris Theater, which dates to 1925, showed films for 75 years before she renovated it into a used-book store. To honor its cinematic past, Gayle added a 34-seat theater where she shows free classic films twice monthly.

A few blocks west, I rub elbows with locals at the Yellow Rose Cafe. When it opened in 1936, the hangout boasted a drive-up awning and waitresses on roller skates. Owner Beth White now dishes up as much Mexican food as she does country standards like chicken-fried steak. "We still get old-timers in their eighties coming in and reminiscing about coming here when they were young," she says.

At Forney, I peel off US 80 onto Old 80 (FM 688, or Broad Street). Just before I reach FM 548, I spot a new state historical marker by a row of crape myrtle trees. The marker chronicles the Dixie Overland Highway, including Colonel Ed Fletcher's 1926 adventure.

Near downtown, I pass the old Co-Op Cotton Gin. It's the last of a half-dozen gins on the highway that Fletcher surely passed on his cross-country race. The old gin now houses a gift shop and women's apparel boutique called Groovy's.

I return to modern US 80, its traffic flowing like a river, and remember something else I read on the historical marker. In the old days, the pavement west of Forney played out, and the Dixie Overland Highway became a dirt road sloping steeply into the flood plain of the East Fork of the Trinity River. That stretch was

ROADSIDE surprises are countless along historic US 80 (directions and details at www.bygonebyways.com). Here's a starter list, east to west, presented in the order they appear in the article. The area code is 903 unless otherwise noted.

WASKOM Cindy's New Waskom Cafe (230 E. US 80, 930-5445).

JONESVILLE T.C. Lindsey & Co. general store (2293 FM 134, 687-3382).

SCOTTSDALE Scottsville Cemetery (9455 FM 1998, 935-5001). Call for a tour of the cemetery, chapel, and Scott home.

MARSHALL Harrison County Historical Museum (707 N. Washington Ave., 938-2680) in the Ginocchio Natl. Historic District, also site of the Marshall Depot and Museum (800 N. Washington Ave., 938-9495); Harrison County Courthouse (Washington at Houston); OS² Restaurant & Pub (105 E. Houston St., 938-7700; www.os2marshall.com); R & R Bakery & Coffee Shoppe (115 E. Houston St., 935-9434); and Starr Family State Historic Site, which includes Maplecroft mansion and Rosemont Cottage Bed & Breakfast (407 W. Travis St., 935-3044; www.tpwd.state.tx.us).

LONGVIEW Johnny Cace's Seafood & Steak House (1501 E. Marshall Ave., 753-7691; www.johnnycaces.com); Nugget Hill Historic District (bounded by W. Marshall, N. 6th, Padon, and Teague); Greggton Antique Mall (3422 W. Marshall Ave., 759-9491).

GLADEWATER and **BIG SANDY** Mrs. Lee's Daffodil Garden (21600 CR 3103, 845-5780; www.daffodilgarden.com); Glory Bee Baking Co. and Honeycomb Suites (111 N. Main,

845-2448; www.honeycombsuites.com); Family World (601 W. Broadway St., 636-5557).

MINEOLA Historic Depot Plaza & Railroad Museum (115 W. Front St., 569-6944); Transportation & History Museum (114 N. Pacific St., 569-6944); LouViney's Cellars & Bistro (121 E. Commerce St., 569-1493; www.louviney.com); The Lott Home Cottages (311 E. Kilpatrick St., 569-0341; www.lotthomecottages.com); Kitchens Hardware & Deli (119 E. Broad St., 569-2664).

GRAND SALINE Dove Creek Cedar (2802 US 80, 962-4345); Mister Ray's Million Dollar Haircuts (118 E. Frank St., 962-6525); Salt Palace Museum (100 W. Garland St., 962-5631); Don's Dairy Bar (914 W. Garland St., 962-4239).

EDGEWOOD Pine St. Bakery & Tea Room and Garden's Edge Bed & Breakfast (708 E. Pine St., 896-2535); Graham's Edgewood Market (203 S. Main St., 896-1900); Edgewood Heritage Park Museum (N. Houston at Elm St., 896-1940).

WILLS POINT Wills Cabin (2nd at Commerce St.); Rose Monument (Commerce at N. 4th St.); Bluebird Cafe (124 W. North Commerce St., 873-4342); Majestic Theatre (136 W. North Commerce St., 873-8140); Wills Point Depot Museum (210 W. South Commerce St., 873-8626); Bluebird Festival, Apr. 14, 2007; www.willspointbluebird.com.

TERRELL Books and Crannies (209 W. Moore Ave., 972/563-5481); Yellow Rose Cafe (807 W. Moore Ave., 972/524-6204).

FORNEY Groovy's, in the old Co-Op Cotton Gin (201 E. Broad St., 972/552-1565).

called the Forney Gap because wet weather made it all but impassable.

Before I know it, US 80 merges into Interstate 30, and Old 80's western reaches vanish into the mists of memory. But I'm still thinking about Colonel Fletcher roaring out of Dallas headed east, hell-bent for the history books. I guess conditions were dry when Fletcher got to the Forney Gap, because he did, after all, complete his coast-to-coast gambit in record time.

I end my search for Old 80 grateful

that road trips these days aren't as daring as Colonel Fletcher's. But I'm also glad that Highway 80 (old and new) still recalls a time when traffic flowed less like a river and more like an intermittent stream, full of stops and starts...and plenty of unexpected (and sometimes wonderful) surprises. ★

Longtime contributor RANDY MALLORY wrote and provided photographs for our January story on the Blanton Museum of Art.