BRICK ROADS IN FLORIDA

I recently read this statement: "The first west to east road across the state of Florida was brick and ran through Osceola County."

This sent me researching to learn when, why, and where.

In the 1800's roads where actually trails: animal, Indian, and explorer paths, with all the problems of trees, water and terrain impediments. As settlers came, they created whatever road-ways they needed in their area, usually between their settlement and other's areas, waterways, and railroads. As these travel means brought more settlers and tourists that learned of some place in Florida that offered a relaxing or fun place to visit, transportation forms expanded.

By the 1880s, a mixture of roads ran from towns and cities throughout the United States. Buggies, horses, bicycle, and the newly invented automobile needed improved roadways. The Florida bicycle clubs consolidated to form the "League of American Wheelmen". This led to the "Good Roads Movement", a national call for improved surfacing and labeling of rural highways. This led to the creation of multiple statewide "road aid" or funding and laws beginning with New Jersey's in 1891. Funding for construction was shared by state, adjoining property owners and county.

In 1893, the Office of Road Inquiry was created within the U.S. Department of Agriculture to deal with increasing road problems. This office was organized by act of Congress and approved by President Benjamin Harrison as one of his last actions as President. It was renamed in 1899 as Office of Public Inquiries and over the next decade it was shown that working directly with individual counties had seen little success and that instead they should work with state highway departments.

In 1900 a non-governmental Florida Good Roads Association was created at a meeting in Orlando to meet Florida road needs and problems.

By 1902, the American Automobile Association (AAA) was formed from nine automobile clubs.

With the development of the Tampa/St. Petersburg area on the Florida West Coast, there was need to have a reliable road connection with Jacksonville and other cities developing on the East Coast. In 1910 St. Petersburg accepted bids for supplying brick pavers for a road from St. Petersburg to the East Coast and join with a major road to Jacksonville. The first pavers were to pave 75 miles of streets in St. Petersburg and a Georgia company, Georgia Engineering Company got the job and put the pavers on a

train to be delivered to St. Petersburg. The brick pavers were deeply impressed with the words "Augusta Block". "Augusta" after Augusta, Georgia and "Block" from the last name of the company's owner Phineas T. Block.

Local cities had trouble getting enough money to keep up on road improvements and in 1916 the Federal Aid Road Act set aside $75million to be divided among 48 states, funding 50 percent of road costs.

By the mid-1920s, Florida had 337 miles of rural brick highways, the third largest amount of brick-paved highways, following Ohio and Pennsylvania. By 1926, Florida had 389.5 miles of county and local brick streets, the second largest amount in the U.S. Soon these were not practical as they were only 9 feet wide and passing another car was difficult. Two-way road building was more economical using cement and lime rock, which was easier to obtain. Today many of these streets are listed as Historical and are being preserved.

Some cities even use their brick streets in tourist advertisements. St. Petersburg papers will occasionally reprint a story about the Augusta Block brick pavers as part of the "lure" of St. Pete!

"Many years ago there lived in St. Petersburg a prosperous brickyard owner named Phineas T. Block. He had a ravishing red-haired daughter named Augusta, a spoiled beauty, if ever was one. Phineas was so crazy about her that he had

her name printed on all his bricks. Well, disaster struck in the form of a San Francisco corset salesman who swept Augusta off her feet and across the state line, never to be seen again.

Phineas was heartbroken. Wherever he walked, her name stared up at him – Augusta Block, Augusta Block. At last the poor man, unable to forget, bricked himself in his closet and died of grief."

Osceola County's portion of the cross Florida road is State Route 92.

Our "Highway 15" through Narcoossee has had many names and numbers in the early settlement to about 1945. A more recent history of our State Route 15 takes it from State Route 80 in Belle Glade in Palm Beach County to Jacksonville and the Georgia state line. It combines with State Route 17 and parallels Interstate 95 on north as one of the main U.S. East Coast roadways.