



Downtown Nacogdoches Circa 1910
Photo courtesy of SFASU ETRC Collection

Workers prep East Main Street for brick installation in 1923. Notice the bricks on the left-hand side of the picture?

Photo courtesy of Jessica Sowell

Paving The Past

BRICK STREETS HOLD ICONIC VALUE FOR TOWN

By Kasi Dickerson

THE RED BRICK STREETS of downtown Nacogdoches are an iconic symbol of the oldest town in Texas. For many, these bricks have paved a way of life and a path to travel down memory lane.

“People always talk about seeing the red brick streets of Nacogdoches and I think it is really neat the red brick doesn’t extend farther than downtown,” Assistant Historic Sites Manger Jessica Sowell said. “As soon as people drive on that and hear that thump, they know they are driving on the red brick streets and know this is the oldest, most historic part of Nacogdoches.”

Before the concrete and asphalt roads, the red bricks extended outside of downtown Nacogdoches to North Street and other areas.

Engineer David Barfield compiled a report documenting the history of the brick streets. His research led to reviewing various articles from The Daily Sentinel. At 7:30 a.m. on Nov. 10, 1923 Eleanor Estelle Orton, a seven-year-old girl, placed the first brick on North Street. Months later on Jan. 31, 1924, the final brick was laid on North Street, according to Barfield’s research of The Daily Sentinel articles of the 1920s. A group of prominent citizens and government leaders initiated the

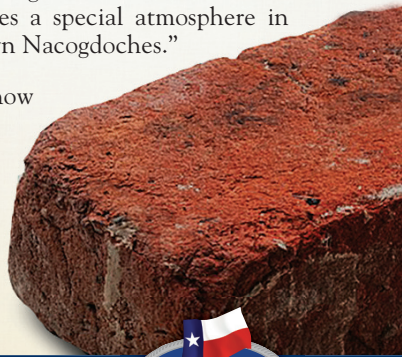
“paving program” in November 1922 and petitioned for “street improvement bonds in sufficient amount to repave the entire square, and also to pave six or eight miles of residence streets.” The bond totaled \$225,000 and was approved 45 days after the initial petition.

“It is definitely something unique,” Sowell said. “There are several other towns that have brick streets, but probably not any that are talked about as much as ours.”

Communications and Main Street Director Sarah O’Brien agrees the brick streets are a steadfast symbol of the city.

“People remember and associate Nacogdoches with the red brick streets,” O’Brien said. “Strolling the brick streets is a huge draw for both residents and locals, and creates a special atmosphere in historic downtown Nacogdoches.”

Sowell explains how the brick streets first replaced dirt roads and Nacogdoches streets lined with wooden Bois d’arc blocks.



"I know it was quite an undertaking downtown since they already had those Bois d'arc wooden blocks and they had to take all those up, level everything and lay all the bricks out," Sowell said.

The bricks were a "modern" upgrade, which made for easier horse and cart travel in the bustling downtown area.

Downtown was, and still is, a center for the town with people shopping, eating and relaxing in businesses on the square.

"[The brick streets are] a great way to identify our downtown square," Sowell said. "Downtown is still very vibrant and alive and there is still stuff going on, so it is a great identifier."

In fact, O'Brien said "the red bricks make a perfect backdrop for a variety of special events and activities."

Annual events such as the Nine Flags Christmas Festival Parade, Texas Blueberry Festival, Nacogdoches Main Street Wine Swirl, the Art Walk, Dia de los Muertos, Wassail Fest, Boots and Brew and more bring the community together and to the brick streets.

"There is something magical about walking around downtown on the bricks during Christmas time," O'Brien said. "My second favorite time of the year is when the Azaleas, Camellias and other flowering plants are in full bloom, typically during the Azalea Trail. There is something really unique about the gorgeous blooming flowers against the red bricks that I love so much."

O'Brien confirmed the streets were designated a local landmark by the Historic Landmark Preservation Commission when it was first created in the 70s.

Located on a major highway, cars drive over the brick streets daily meaning maintenance is a regular occurrence. Sowell said most of the bricks now are replacements and are not the original bricks from the 20s.

Each perfectly hand-placed brick serves as a constant reminder of Nacogdoches' rich history.

"Whether it's watching the little ones compete in a pie eating contest, perusing our local merchants while sampling wassail, listening to live enter-



Photo by Kasi Dickerson



Downtown Nacogdoches 1926
Photo courtesy of SFASU ETRC Collection

tainment on the plaza principal stage or walking to an art opening, the bricks help us remember the history associated with our great town, and it is fun to imagine the thousands of people who have walked the bricks before you," O'Brien said. "The red brick streets are a place where memories are created, and we are looking forward to many more people making memories of their own on them."

