



#21: The Old Atascocito Road

The Atascocito Road. You read that correctly: Atascocito ... ending with an "o," not an "a." The modern Atascocita Road follows the path of an original road that was built by the Spanish in 1756. We say road, but it was mostly just an established dirt trail. The old road started in present-day El Paso, then went through San Antonio, Houston, Liberty and Beaumont, terminating in Opelousas, La. The road was named for the Spanish settlement and military outpost of Atascocito near present-day Liberty. We know the Spanish used the Atascocito Road to travel across Texas, using outposts along the way to keep the French, who were in Louisiana, from trading with the local Indians. After the Texas Revolution, the old road was used mostly to drive cattle across Texas. During this history, the Atascocito Road was one of the most traveled roads in Texas and is probably the oldest road in Harris County. The road was often listed as a landmark on land grants between 1820 and 1835, more than any other road.

I've been pronouncing the word "Atascocita" wrong for years. As a life-long Humble resident, my mother says it correctly. I spent years correcting the way she said the word "Atascocita," explaining to her that there is no "u" in that word. And then ... I found the official pronunciation of this old Spanish trail while researching old Texas maps. The name was pronounced as "A-tusk-a-cee-to" ... just the way my mother says it.

The place where the road crossed the San Jacinto River, on the east side of Humble, was called the Atascocito Crossing, and was one of the oldest-named places in Harris County. For years there was a ferry operated at the Atascocito Crossing (basically a wooden platform that you could use to cross the river). Harris County had established rates for using the ferry: passengers cost 10 cents each, two-wheeled vehicles cost 15 cents, and horses cost 15 cents each. In the 1930s, the ferry was replaced by a bridge. It laid very low in the water and would often flood.

Some people mistakenly think the McKay Bridge that crosses Lake Houston is the location of the Atascocito Crossing ... but they are wrong. The Atascocito Crossing was south of the present-day bridge. Want to know where it was? On the east side of the lake, there is still a road called "Old Atascocita Road." The present-day Atascocita Road no longer crosses the river. It ends and joins FM 1960 about a mile before you get to the lake.

The Atascocito Road was an important road in the early days of Humble, especially for people wanting to drive their cattle or journey eastward (to Liberty or to Louisiana). The first school in Humble, Joe Dunman's Schoolhouse, opened on the Atascocita Road in 1873. By the way, we aren't quite sure when the name changed to Atascocita instead of Atascocito.

So, the next time you find yourself traveling on the Atascocita Road ... think about the "centuries" of history around you. Look around at all the businesses on the road ... and realize that up until about the 1960s, there was mostly just the concrete road and a lot of prairie around it. And, before the 1920s, there was just a dirt trail that saw a lot of Texas history travel across it.