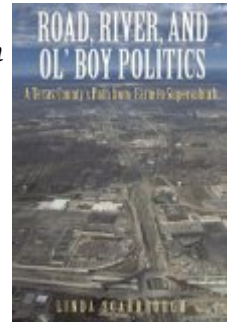


**Linda Scarbrough.** *Road, River, and Ol' Boy Politics: A Texas County's Path from Farm to Supersuburb.* Austin: Texas Historical Commission, 2005. 404 pp. \$33.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-87611-202-1.



**Reviewed by** Tom McKinney

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Williamson County is located just north of Austin, Texas, and became one of the nation's fastest-growing counties in the 1980s as suburban developments mushroomed in the county. It was this fact that inspired Linda Scarbrough to examine the causes of this process. The author discovered that the county's explosive growth was the result of the construction of dams on the flood-prone San Gabriel River and routing Interstate 35 through the county. According to Scarbrough, these projects were the result of the efforts of local politicians who manipulated the federal government into building them. In her examination of urban growth through the lens of the politics that surround infrastructure planning, Scarbrough finds that role of local people and politicians were the driving force behind federally funded projects.

The book's first section is focused on the construction of dams on the San Gabriel River. Scarbrough argues that the deadly floods of 1920s were the singularly most important events in the county's past, as they shaped the generations of local politicians who continually pushed the fed-

eral government into constructing dams in the county. The location of these dams became embroiled in a politics, and competing federal agencies argued against local politicians over the location and number of the dams. Scarbrough's writing in these chapters is rich with detail and makes compelling reading. The second part of the book explores the politics of interstate highway planning in Williamson County. Again, Scarbrough conveys this through the eyes of the local politicians and their interactions with state and federal agencies. These two projects, the dams and the interstate, gave the county the needed transportation facilities and an adequate supply of water to support the massive influx of suburbanites into the area. The author finds that this process has eroded the county's regional identity, as the suburban population lacked interest in local culture and traditions.

This work will be of great use to anyone interested in the social and political history behind infrastructure-planning. The emphasis is given to local politicians and how local needs spurred them into action. The examination of local politi-

cal officials as the prime architects of these projects is interesting, as often their role is overlooked in more "top down" studies. The tenacity of these colorful individuals is one of the facets of the book that helps keep the reader's attention to what could easily be very dry reading.

The author has deep roots in Williamson County, and this occasionally obscures her objectivity. In short, she is keenly aware of what was lost during the rapid development of the county and has a deep attachment to these places. While she does not try to hide this, it is worth mentioning as it does present a bias. Her attachments also help the study, as she is able to draw upon source materials and oral interviews that another author might not have know about or have access to. These sources add a rich detail to the work and help to make it enjoyable reading.

*Road, River, and Ol' Boy Politics* is a well-written "bottom up" examination of infrastructure-planning. By presenting the material in this manner, Linda Scarbrough has crafted an extremely well-written examination of how local politicians influenced urban growth in Williamson County. While the author has occasional bouts of nostalgia, they are not overly distracting. Taken on the whole, the book would be useful to anyone interested in the political dimensions of infrastructure-planning.

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