

ALONG THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY

The Newsletter of the Iowa Lincoln Highway Association

Volume 2, Number 1 (February 1997)

THE SPRING MEETING and TOUR of LINN COUNTY.

Due to the huge interest in the Lincoln Highway around Cedar Rapids, your State Coordinator attempted to plan a November tour of the Lincoln Highway in Linn County. Lyell Henry, Jim Schmickley, and Art Swarzentruher and I set out one beautiful November day to organize the trip. However, a few days later we had freezing rain in central Iowa, with a forecast for heavy rain from the Cedar Rapids NewsChannel 2 weather guy. So we let the media know the night before that there would be no tour.

Of course, that forecast was wrong, and there was no adverse weather in eastern Iowa! Sorry if we went you on a wild goose chase! We already have a great tour planned - again - but this time we're attempting to get a bus. If we can get 40 warm bodies or so to go with us, we'll leave our cars in Lisbon after the Spring Meeting. We'll take the Lincoln Highway through Mt. Vernon and up the original route into Marion and down 1st Avenue. We'll go to the Hoover School at the intersection of Johnson and Wiley, and visit the original Twin Towers site. We'll also head back east down Mount Vernon Road (the early Marion bypass) and see an abandoned section of the Lincoln Highway and Lincoln Heights. One stop will include the Lighthouse Supper Club on Mt. Vernon Road.

It should be an interesting day, so let us know by *March 15th* if you can ride the bus with us.

Welcome to OUR NEW LINCOLN HIGHWAY ASSOCIATION MEMBERS!

- Don and Sandra McQuillen of Iowa City
- Dean Brotz of Jefferson
- Wittrock Motor Company in Carroll

LINCOLN HIGHWAY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SEMINAR

One of the goals of the Iowa Lincoln Highway Association is to encourage tourism on the road as a means of helping the economies of those merchants who choose to set up shop on the Lincoln Highway. With that in mind, the LHA is sponsoring a Lincoln Highway Economic Development Seminar on Thursday, April 24th. We'll start at 10:00 am at the brand new Leonard Good Community Center in Ogden.

This seminar will cover a little history of the Lincoln Highway and why it should be important to towns along the road. Representatives of the Iowa Department of Economic Development and Division of Tourism will be on hand. We'll discuss different economic development programs, tourism efforts, and ways to get federal dollars through ISTEA to help preserve structures and roadways in Iowa. We'll get reports from several communities about development efforts tied to the Lincoln Highway in their towns.

We'd ask LHA members and friends to please encourage your local city leaders, chamber execs and city council people to consider attending this event. There is no cost, except for lunch, and we plan to be done by 3:00 pm. Thanks to the Ogden Community Development Company and the City of Ogden for their help.

LINCOLN HIGHWAY EVENT CALENDAR.

March 15

Deadline for paying \$10 for tour bus of Linn County.

April 5

Spring meeting and tour, 10:00 am, Gwen's Lisbon, and Linn County Tour.

April 23

Lincoln Highway Economic Development Seminar, 10:00 am in Ogden

May 16 & 17

Lincoln Highway Bridgefest parade and tour in Tama.

June 14

Possible summer LHA Board meeting and tour with Belltower Festival in Jefferson.

July 9

Fun Days Parade in Ogden

August 22-24

Lincoln Highway Days in Nevada

REVISIT the LINCOLN HIGHWAY.

by Art Swarzenruber - (Reprinted by permission from *Time Lines*)

The heated debate on the proposed "Avenue of the Saints," now making very slow progress, awoke a few dormant memories on a similar but much larger historic roadway, "The Lincoln Highway." This route referred to as the "main street of America" has been expertly reported in two recent books. *The Lincoln Highway* by Drake Hokanson was published by the University of Iowa Press and is available at most book stores or on loan at the Cedar Rapids Library (call number 388.1 H68L). The second book is a well written and illustrated book by Gregory M. Franzwa. This publication is specifically about the route through Iowa.

Competition among states and cities wanting to be included on this New York-to-California cross-country route was understandably hot and spirited. Iowa, in particular, made a tenacious plea as our roads were notorious for being the worst in the nation. Thence, the decision to cross the heart of our state was a grand and celebrated victory.

The exact route was finalized about 1915; however, it was some ten years later before this new and exciting gateway into Iowa and Linn County was completed.

During the first half of the 20th century, Mt. Vernon Road became the most important thoroughfare in the Cedar Rapids area. With the passing of years and the advent of interstate highway systems, the Lincoln Highway (old US 30) has faded in usage. In fact, many new and young citizens to our community probably don't even know of its existence.

Attempting to estimate the tremendous impact this highway had on the growth and vitality of eastern Iowa is impossible. But if one wanted to go by auto from New York to the west coast, this route was it! There was no other direct or feasible route.

Having grown up on Mt. Vernon Road prior to and during the construction of this historical stretch of concrete, my recollections of this era are quite clear. Therefore, should someone choose to round up the family and drive over a small segment of his antique highway, say from Cedar Rapids to Mt. Vernon/Lisbon, perhaps the tour can be made more interesting.

Except for the elimination of a few curves and a new bridge or two, the old narrow roadway still carries considerable local traffic. Going eastward, Mt. Vernon Road (Avenue) starts off Tenth Street just past McKinley School. In the center of this road, buried beneath the brick and concrete, lays the track-bed of the electric street cars which served the southeast city area. This trolley proceeded east, terminating at Forest

Drive (24th Street). Here it turned north for 50 yards, then backed around, and after a 15-minute wait, returned toward the loop. All of this procedure was expertly maneuvered by the conductor. He and his counterparts enjoyed the respect and prestige comparable to today's airline pilots. Many a young man yearned to grow old enough to become one of these skilled motormen.

Passing Oak Hill Cemetery and continuing on across Memorial Drive you'll note on the left is the All Saints Church. In that exact location was a cluster of eight neat, white-frame cabins known as "Cook's Overnight Cabins." Long since dismantled, these cabins were a welcome sight to weary travelers. Here families could rest overnight in somewhat cramped comfort for less than a dollar without, however, such luxuries as running water or inside toilets. It's doubtful that Mr. Cook ever dreamed this innovative enterprise would become the forerunner to our modern motel system.

Located on the south side of the avenue, now occupied by Dairy Queen, an office building, and The Gallery, is a part of my parents small farm where I grew up. We sold eggs, milk, poultry and vegetables to neighbors and tourists. Although highway traffic was very light the first few years, numbers increased substantially each succeeding year. Surfaced roads plus the mass production of automobiles, especially Ford's inexpensive Model-T, put Americans "on the move" like never before.

Noteworthy among this migration were bands of gypsies. Although not particularly welcome, they would camp for days in an open field across from our farm. They were interesting and colorfully dressed families, but some were notorious for this thievery. My father was fortunate to collect for half the produce they toted away.

Continuing east to 34th Street you'll now be in the heart of a community formerly known as Dairy Dale. To the left, directly behind the Sinclair station and an office building stood Dairy Dale rural school - a solid fortress-like, three-room brick building built a few years after the Civil War. Students during my tenure (through the 8th grade) were taught and disciplined by Mrs. Crew, Miss Hahn, Miss Donahue and later Miss Wilder. There was no question or doubt as to who was in charge - who set the rules - and who meted out the punishment with the proverbial hickory stick. Parents and students alike fully understood the teacher's authority.

Across the way where the First Star Bank Branch is now located was Masek's Grocery Store. Truly an oasis that performed a vital service for these rural residents. The Masek family granted credit to almost everyone; but bills had to be paid monthly or else. My sister and I wrangled as to who would carry the case to the store. The reason was a very practical one: a free sack of candy with each monthly payment.

Heading your car up the hill past 42nd Street a water tower comes into view. Here you can hesitate and look back to the west down the long sloping hill. Wouldn't this be a great stretch of pavement to test the speed of a new car? Well, that's exactly what occurred late one balmy summer afternoon. A couple of young dudes gleefully headed their new Marmon touring car down the hill with determined acceleration and the speedometer ticking 55 miles per. Not aware that a speed test was in progress, an Reo speed wagon truck, owned by the Scalero family, entered the avenue at just the wrong time (Hy-Vee corner). The crash was earth-shaking and startled this quiet community. It was supper time and such an apparent earthquake was unexpected. Fortunately no deaths resulted - just some broken bones, egos and two totaled vehicles. A Reo wheel was reportedly found at the bottom of the hill at 36th Street. Such excitement was unusual and it took weeks for the neighborhood to return to normal.

Back to the trip: a short distance past the water tower (at Mefferds Garage) turn left, and this curvy section funs for less than one mile and was later bypassed for obvious reasons. It returns to the present highway

where you continue on east. Just before crossing Indian Creek you'll note on this corner the old Rosedale Country School, acquired by the Knights of Columbus a few years ago. The Indian Creek nature Center and the Fox and Sac Indian Trails are also located on this road.

After crossing the creek and a short distance east, the popular Lighthouse Supper Club comes into view. An eating establishment on this exact site has offered continuous service for over 75 years. Few eateries in Iowa can match this phenomenal record.

Carefully crossing Highway 13 and proceeding east a few hundred yards, you'll see on the left a stately red brick home that's over 135 years old. Construction started in 1961 before the Civil War. Prior to completion, the builder laid down his trowel, supposedly still embedded in the 15² walls, and headed off to join the Union Army. In 1865 at war's end he returned to complete the structure, until recently owned and carefully preserved by the Weakland family. There are three other residences of similar architecture and age in the neighborhood.

The remainder of this article will appear next month. Look for it and enjoy retracing the old route of the Lincoln Highway. Art Swarzenruber is a retired executive of Vigortone Feeds.

MAP PACK SALES SKYROCKET

A story in *The Cedar Rapids Gazette* discussed the Clinton County Road controversy, and the Last-Chance Drive of October 5th. In the story, writer Dave Rasdal mentioned the Iowa Map Pack for sale. Thanks to that article, we shipped out close to **60** Map Packs to Iowa and several other states.

Leon Mensing of Lowden ordered a map pack. He liked it so well he wrote this little story about the Lincoln Highway near Lowden:

"As for the use of machinery after WWI, I have to report that to run the new grade and highway overpass west of Lowden, almost all of the work was done with mules and scapers. When the mules died, they became part of the right-of-way."

Iowa Map Packs cost \$5.00 (add \$1.50 for shipping). Mail to:

Iowa Lincoln Highway Association
P.O. Box 14
Ogden, IA 50212

WEB SITE UPDATE

The Iowa Lincoln Highway Association World Wide Web site has been recently updated. All past copies of our newsletter *Along the Lincoln Highway* can be viewed, as well as state and national maps of the route. Paul Walker of Iowa City is maintaining the site. Our on-line members can contact Paul through e-mail at paul-walker@uiowa.edu. The web address is: <http://soli.inav.net/~pwalker>. Although the site was designed with the Microsoft Explorer browser in mind, it looks just fine in Netscape Navigator.

From the initial page, visitors can go to county sites to view photos of the Lincoln Highway in each of its thirteen counties. Some of the county pages also have individual maps that are being created as time allows. Visitors can jump to the web sites of other states, although at this time only Ohio is ³linked.² If other state chapters now have LHA sites up and running, please let Paul know so they can be linked to the Iowa site.

At this time, Paul wants input from Iowa members who wish to add data and photographs to their individual county pages. There's really no end to the amount of information that can be included so that everyone

on-line can take a ³virtual² trip along Iowa's Lincoln Highway.

CLINTON COUNTY UPDATE

The effort is still underway to try to save a Lincoln Highway bridge and roadway in Clinton County. Last summer the county engineer announced that due to three aging bridges near the Wapsipinicon River between Calamus and Wheatland, he would close the road. It would have to be removed in order to build access roads from new Highway 30 for the people living there. This is because this area is a wetland, and federal regulations could require the Lincoln Highway roadbed to be removed.

After much discussion, the Clinton County Conservation Board has decided to work with a variety of groups including the LHA to come up with a plan to make the area a trail-park of some kind, saving the bridge and roadway from the bulldozer. The groups have been given until the end of March by the County Board of Supervisors to come up with a solid plan. Thanks to LHA member Elmer Ketelsen for all of his hard work on this matter.



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