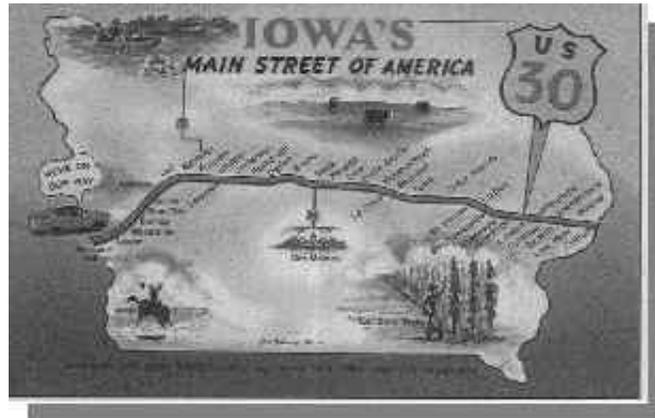


# Along the Lincoln Highway



**The Newsletter of the Iowa Lincoln Highway Association  
July/August 1998 . . . . . Volume 3 Issue 3**

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## Blanche Preston, Wife of the Late George Preston, has Passed Away.

*by Bob Ausberger*

One of the most important and well-known landmarks of the Lincoln Highway is the Preston station in Belle Plaine, Iowa. George Preston, its founder and lifetime owner, died several years ago. Now, his wife, and business partner has gone to join him.

While George was more talkative, flamboyant and well known, Blanche was always part of the action at the station and small motel that they operated. She could and did perform all duties from pumping gas to cleaning rooms – and she did a wonderful job or raising their two boys, Ron and Monte.

Joyce and I always tried to visit Blanche when we were in Belle Plaine. She would generally be in her favorite chair in front of a rather loud television, and when we knocked she usually yelled, "come on in." She was a gracious lady and furnished us with family photos and station photos from its early years. And yes, the early station did have a canopy and did not have any signs fastened to its exterior.

Of course, the question always arises, what will happen to the station now. Ron Preston has been to all of our National Conferences and many of the Iowa meetings. I believe he has a good sense of the importance of the Lincoln Highway in our history and I know he knows how much the station means to the history of the Highway. It appears that this perspective will be guiding future decisions regarding the station. Well preserved and with continued presentation to the public, it would make a great memorial to Blanche and George. L

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# Taking a Sunday Drive Through American History

*by Douglas Burns*  
The Daily Times Herald *Staff Writer*  
(*excerpted from an 18 July 1998 article*)

Like the Mormon Trial or the Trial of Tears, the old Lincoln Highway is more than just a former byway. It's an integral part of American history, holding the stories of a different time in this country, a time when people still drove through towns rather than whisking by on the interstates in their sport utility vehicles.

In our rush to get where we are going, some people are afraid that we are losing sight of where we've been.

That's why Carroll resident Norma Berns and other historically minded people on the Lincoln Highway's transcontinental route are working diligently to make sure the highway is not forgotten.

"We want to keep it alive," said Berns, the Carroll County director of the Lincoln Highway Association. "If we don't keep it before the kids, they are not going to remember what their ancestors went through."

For the city of Carroll, preservation of the Lincoln Highway takes on a particular importance in terms of tourism potential.

The highway still runs through the central business district on what is now U.S. 30. A Lincoln Highway marker stands in front of the Carroll County Museum, and there are other acknowledgments along the route, such as the sign outside Wittrock Motors, itself a member of the highway association.

Berns, fresh from a national Lincoln Highway Association meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah, is asking merchants to place the red, white, and blue Lincoln Highway stickers in their windows and do whatever they can to promote the historic route.

"That's money in their pockets when they get people to come to Carroll," Berns said.

In its early days, the route wasn't paved and made for some difficult driving. Berns recalled how her uncle John Platt, who lived three miles east of Carroll near the Lincoln Highway, would have to take horses out on the road to assist motorists who were mired in the mud road.

For those who don't understand Berns' passion for the Lincoln Highway, she has a suggestion: slow down and take a road less traveled. It is a learning experience and a chance to see the nation in much the same way as other generations of Americans. L

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## A Tour of the Lincoln Highway in Ames, Iowa

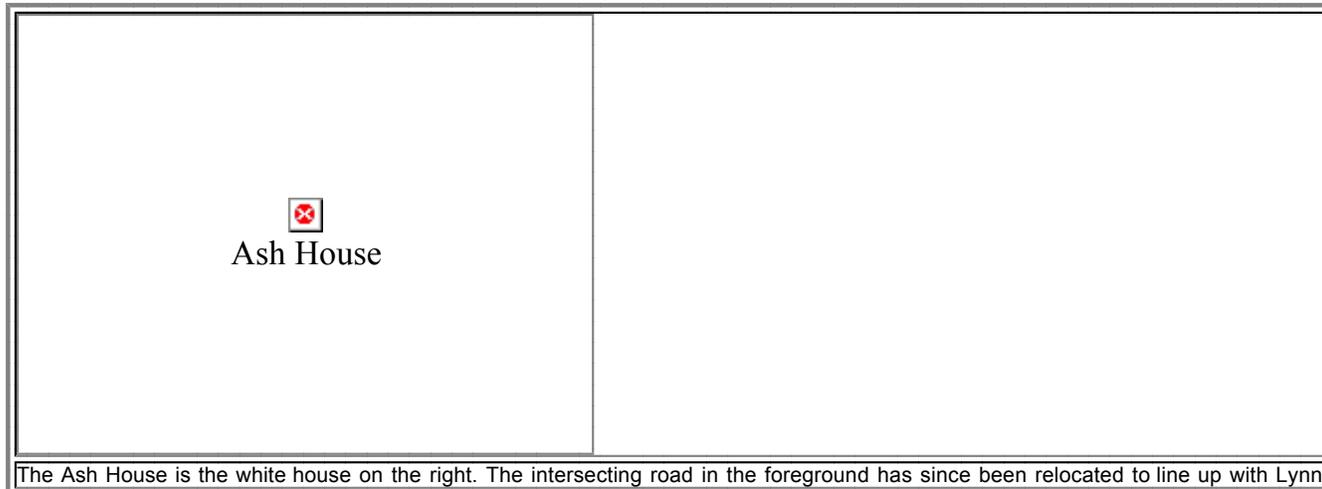
*In our last issue, Margaret Elbert and Jeffrey Benson took us on a tour of Ames, from East Lincoln Way, through the Downtown, along Grand Avenue and ending at Squaw Creek. This the second and concluding part of their tour.*

The view from the Squaw Creek bridge to the west and north was of the crop fields of the Squaw Creek floodplain, with the trees of the Iowa State College campus on the hill beyond. Above the trees rose the college water tower, the dome of Beardshear Hall and of course the Campanile, the beautiful bell tower that rings on the quarter-hour.

*Campustown*

As you drove up the hill into the college there were many beautiful homes on both the north and south sides. On the north was Miss Ruth Stafford's cottage, where the Richardson Court dormitory complex is today. Another was the Lincoln Way Cottage, listed at 2131 Lincoln Way in 1919/1920. We don't know what this place was but it had a lovely name, didn't it? Sometime in the 1960s, the last of these stately homes was relocated from the south side, just east of Buchanan Hall.

At the southwest corner of Lincoln Way and Ash is a building with a long history, most commonly known as the Ash House (103 Ash). It dates back to the 1880s probably. Between 1900 and 1910 it has been listed at different times as owned by A. L. Champlin and R. H. McCarthy, both very early Ames families.



There have been many people, clubs, fraternities, and other things housed in this place. Club La Verne was one of these. It has housed and fed thousands of I.S.U. students since the early part of this century. Unfortunately, it is doomed to be destroyed this year, for expansion of the student services portion of the church next door. Churches are also a frequent roadside feature of this portion of the Lincoln, with five of them now within a one-mile portion

A railroad crossed the Lincoln diagonally from on the north side where today is the entrance to the Memorial Union parking ramp to the southwest corner of Lincoln Way and Lynn.

There were many businesses that have come and gone since the early 20s, but there are a few that stand out for their longevity. One such long-standing business was located at the corner, Edwards Coal at 2312 Lincoln Way where the Campus Book Store now stands. The earliest record of it we found was 1914 and the latest was in the 1950s.

On top of the hill across from Lake Laverne was a house built before 1910 by the congregation of the First Congregational Church to serve students at Iowa State College. It was known as the Frisbie House and was here until about 1970.

Next door at the southeast corner of Lincoln Way and Stanton is St. John's Episcopal Church. At the time of the early Lincoln, two or three wood frame houses stood in this area. One served the many student members of the congregation, as their church was in Ames. The present building was begun in 1929 and finished in 1930. The stone came from Wisconsin, possibly by train along those diagonal tracks just south of the church property.

Among other long-standing businesses here in what became known as Campustown was LW Pharmacy, operating by 1936 at the southwest corner of Lincoln Way and Stanton, (later Landsberg's Pharmacy until the 1980s). The American Theater opened in 1919, changed to the Ames Theater in 1920, was recently remodeled and now boasts two screens - still the Ames Theater - and the Varsity Theater, opened in 1937 but recently closed.

The Champlins built many of the buildings in this block. The name is partially visible at the top of one and discernible on another. In 1917 and probably much earlier, the Champlin's Livery Barn was at 2418 Lincoln Way (now Burger King), followed in 1921 by Champlin Garage and Storage. Then it was the L-Way Cafe from 1935 until 1977, owned and operated by the Theils.

In the two blocks of the Lincoln between Stanton and Hayward, many restaurants served students at Iowa State College in the 1930s and 40s as they still do today, although much changed. These include several listed in 1936 city directory: College Inn (now Home Team Pizza), Andy's (now Cafe Beaudelaire), and the Campus Cafe (now Cafe Lovish).

In 1916, College Savings Bank built a new building at 2546 Lincoln Way. Now the first Star Bank, this is the oldest operating business on Lincoln Way in Ames. Across Hayward to the west in 1936 was Whatoff Motors and Kirby's Sandwich Shop. Beyond that was the Collegiate Methodist Church, dedicated June 6, 1926.

### *North Lincoln Way*

The street known now as Sheldon Avenue was first named Pike Street. Here the Lincoln Highway turned north and it was soon renamed North Lincoln Way. The section of the Lincoln Highway we have just traversed from the Squaw Creek bridge to this corner was paved in 1921. In 1929, the highway was rerouted to go straight west from here to the city limits and although the highway was then Highway 30, the street name was changed from Boone Street to Lincoln Way.

The trolley ran along the east side of North Lincoln Way for two blocks north from the Lincoln Way corner and then into the college campus. There was a shelter somewhere here.

The west side of the street was lined with rooming houses and residences when the Lincoln Highway was established. Exceptions are the Collegiate Presbyterian Church at West Street, dedicated December 9, 1917 and West Gate Lunch near the same corner at 209 North Lincoln Way, which was a cafe primarily for students and also housed a barber shop. It was owned by the Steel family. Bill Steel relates that the cafe closed in 1943 or 1944, but we are unsure when it opened.

Right at the corner at 203 N. Lincoln Way lived George and Mrs. Meyers in 1917. In 1919 this address was listed as the Hauki Club, but we have no idea what this was. As it is the main west entrance to the college, this corner is called West Gate.

In addition to the church, at least five of the current buildings in the southern (100) block were there when the Lincoln was designated. Rooming houses in the north (200) block include one at 221 N. Lincoln Way where Nelli Swearingen and her son Lester lived and rented rooms at least until 1917. In 1919, an Iowa State College map indicated it was vacant. A modern apartment building now stands in its place.

The existing building at 225/227 N. Lincoln Way was built as a duplex in 1918. At some time it became a rooming house. In 1917, 233 N. Lincoln Way was the address of H.L. Lackie. Rumor has it that this was a fraternity, Tau Kappa Epsilon, in 1919. Rumor also has it that it burned about that same time. A 1926 map shows it as a rooming house. The city says that the current building here was built in 1929; by 1940 this was a rooming house called Sheldon Lodge. It is still apartments today.

Although the house at 247 N. Lincoln Way has been gone a long time, it is of particular interest because in 1919 the Brileys lived here. Next door at 249 N. Lincoln Way was Briley's Store. Mr. Briley had a delivery truck that was seen all around town. Several pictures show his old truck stuck in the mud on Lincoln Way. We heard that he had a funny hood ornament, a hand that waved as he drove along. A 1926 map shows the grocery building standing and five buildings in the back, but gives no clue as to what those were. By 1940 it was the residence of Newton Briley and Mrs. Ella E. Briley lived at 247.

In this area, known as Olsonville corner, N. Lincoln Way turned northwest for a short distance. In 1917 J. P. Olson, the florist, was listed at 308 N. Lincoln Way, which would have been on the east side of what is now Hyland, a little north of this area. The greenhouses were at the top of hill, west of where the College of Design building is now. In this diagonal segment, College Garage was at 270 N. Lincoln Way in 1917. The address next door, 268 N. Lincoln Way, was listed as Gilbert Garage by 1940. It was demolished on March 27, 1998.

Then the Lincoln turned north again. This is the current intersection of Hyland and Sheldon. Just west of this intersection, at the intersection of Oakland and Campus Avenue, in the 1860s a pit was dug from which clay was taken to make bricks at a brick yard owned by George Cameron, which in turn are thought to have been used to build the Farm House (first building on Iowa State campus) and others. This pit became known as Briley's pond. It was the site of annual tug of war between student groups. The pond was filled between 1910 and 1913.

When the Lincoln first passed this way, it did not follow the Hyland alignment as it is now. According to the 1914 plat map it curved off to the west and back again.

At Ontario Road the Lincoln turns west to go to the town of Ontario. This part of the Lincoln was never paved. The current road was paved in the 1960s. It is thought there was a service station on the southwest corner of this intersection.

On the north side, extending to the east and west some distance was the first Iowa State College horticultural farm, including extensive orchards. Some apple trees may still be visible among the homes to the west. At some point, the west part of these orchards was owned by the Jensens. On the north side of the intersection of the Lincoln with Scott Street, the Jensens had a house and a barn. There was also a canopy gas station on the northeast corner. A 1928 phone book ad says "Free Tourist Camp" and a 1929 phone book ad says "Tourist Camp and Garden Oil Station." They ran an orchard there until sometime in the 1960s. Only a few scattered houses were on the Lincoln Highway from here to Ontario.

### *Ontario*

In the late 1800s, Ontario was a booming farm town, serving people west of the Squaw and east of Boone. It had a railroad depot, which some believe was moved to Boone where it still stands. Many businesses grew up here, especially in the area two blocks north of the Lincoln, such as a drugstore, two general stores, blacksmith, grocery and shoe store, two churches and a school.

One of these general stores, at 1507 Florida Ave. (now Winkler Painting) was built around 1900 and later became the post office. A drawing of the building shows a gas pump in front - it may have been a stop on the Lincoln.

By 1924, especially noteworthy were three grain companies, including Ames Reliable. The current elevator was built in 1955 and was the most modern and automated livestock and poultry feed mill in the world at the time.

From Ontario, the Lincoln Highway proceeded straight west about a mile to the Boone County Line, now fully out in the country, leaving the growing community of Ames, Iowa State College and the village of Ontario behind. L

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## Our Iowa Fall Meeting Set for Benton County

The Iowa Lincoln Highway Association's fall meeting will begin at 9:30 a.m. on Saturday, October 10, at the Van Horne Community Room in Van Horne, Iowa, preceded by coffee and rolls at 9:00.

Following a brief business meeting, the program will include presentations by Jim Hippen, on bridges on the highway in eastern Iowa, and by Lyell Henry, on one-stop businesses on the highway between Cedar Rapids and Belle Plaine. Lunch will be served in the meeting room. A highlight of the lunch will be presentation of a video, produced by Mike Kelly, on the Lincoln Highway in Iowa.

Some time after lunch, the meeting will reconvene at Youngville Station, where Anne Schoonover and some of her associates will show the results of their work so far on the restoration project and discuss the work remaining and their plans for the fully restored site. L

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## Ramblings Along the Lincoln Highway

*Reports given by the ILHA County Consuls (Directors) at the July 11 Board of Directors meeting in Marshalltown.*

### **Benton County**

Anne Schoonover reports that bidding is now going on for contract work to restore Youngville Cafe. Meanwhile, a farmer's market is held there every Friday from 4 to 6 PM.

### **Boone County**

The ice cream parlor and diner on the Lincoln in Ogden near the famous foot prints has been demolished. Helen Miller reported drawings are now being completed of local historic homes for the historic walking tour guide. It will also include a list of other sites, such as the Battin Chapel and the high bridge. John Fitzsimmons and Ty Casotti report that Pufferbilly Days in Boone will be on first weekend after Labor Day.

### **Carroll County**

Norma Berns set up a Lincoln Highway display at the Little Red School House in Graham Park in Carroll for Kids' Fest, in late July. Norma also reports that the Lincoln Highway west of Carroll has been widened to four lanes.

### **Cedar County**

Clarence, working on a community vision through the Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning Program, has identified the Lincoln Highway as a major asset and element of its vision.

### **Clinton County**

Elmer Ketelsen reports that welding is underway on the three historic bridges preserved this past year on the old Highway 30 section east of Wheatland. Third through sixth graders have been recruited to paint it.

### **Crawford County**

A hearty Lincoln Highway welcome to Ardith Sporleder of Charter Oak as the new County Consul (Director) for Crawford County.

### **Greene County**

Bob Owens reported on setting up a Lincoln Highway display (photo) at Drug Town in Jefferson for a competition among all of Iowa's Drug Towns about local tourism helping.

Not surprisingly, Jefferson's Drug Town won first place and sales of Lincoln Highway products have been brisk. The products are still on sale there. McAtee Tire Service obtained use of the 1917 Packard truck, the Wing Foot Express, for Bell Tower Days parade on the Lincoln in Jefferson.

### **Harrison County**

The Lincoln Highway Malt Shop has opened in Woodbine. Woodbine will host a meeting on the Lincoln Highway in summer of 1999. Elaine Ehlert won \$1000 for volunteerism, which she will donate toward a display. The planning work on the interpretive center in Harrison County will begin October 1, which is being done under an ISTE grant (now TEA-21, but basically transportation money).

### **Linn County**

The State Historic Preservation Office has stated that improvements planned on a segment of the Lincoln between Mt. Vernon and Marion, *including the Seedling Mile*, will have an adverse effect on a historic property. Since this segment is eligible to the National Register of Historic Places, public review and comment is required. We are tracking this process, so contact Bob Ausberger or Jeff Benson if interested in making comment to the appropriate agency.

### **Marshall County**

Mick Jurgenson, reporting for Mary Gift, says that the state Department of Natural Resources has identified as historically significant the trees at Shady Oaks cabins and tree house, on the east side of Marshalltown.

### **Story County**

Margaret Elbert reported about on-going research on changes along the Lincoln in Ames from 1913 until after World War II.

Lincoln Highway Days will be held in Nevada on August 28, 29, 30. The Iowa Lincoln Highway Association will have a booth in the Varied Industry Building. Any volunteers should please call Margaret at 515-233-1445.

**All of the Directors** warmly thank **Paul Walker** for setting up the meeting in a great room in the beautiful Marshall County Courthouse, and more especially for arranging a memorable reminiscence and lunch at historic Stone's Restaurant, since 1881 "under the viaduct, down by the Vinegar Works." L

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# Trucking's Pioneer

## The Wingfoot Express Story

One April morning in 1917, a group of Goodyear workers gathered in the chilly dawn at the company garage in Akron, Ohio. Before them stood an ungainly new truck, motor ticking quietly.

The truck was a five-ton Packard, but Goodyear had designed the 10-foot-high, specially built body.

The plan was to establish the first interstate trucking route by making regular nonstop runs from the Akron tire factory to the company's tire fabric mill in Connecticut and return, a distance of 740 miles.

Across the width of the truck, behind the driver's seat, was an enclosed sleeping compartment. Using a two-man crew, they would alternate driving chores while one rested in what was to become the first sleeper cab in the trucking industry.

Behind the novel traveling bunk, the cargo bed was loaded with a dozen spare tires, a compressor to inflate them, 500 feet of manila line, shovels and a heavy block and tackle.

Handshakes done, two men stepped from the crowd and climbed into the enclosed cab. Drivers Harry Apple and Harry Smeltzer waved to their co-workers and started their trip into transportation history -- an interstate truck run that pioneered long-haul trucking in the United States.

What was most novel about Goodyear's truck, named the Wingfoot Express, was the big pneumatic tires it rolled on. Hard, solid rubber tires were standard equipment for short hauls in those days.

But this trip was not to be a routine five- to 10-mile errand. Accompanied by a tire engineer, movie man and a publicist in two support autos, this truck was to attempt a 1,540-mile round trip, an unheard-of feat in 1917.

The trucks of the day labored along at eight or 10 miles per hour, the solid rubber tires giving their drivers a bone-jarring ride. The cargoes most often were limited to less-than-fragile items like gravel, grain, coal and lumber. Manufactured goods such as furniture, china, pianos as well as farmers' produce and eggs, all suffered a high rate of damage and loss when carried by truck.

Paul Litchfield was plant manager of Goodyear in 1917 and the tire company was thriving. Litchfield was convinced that pneumatic tires would give the heavy trucks the necessary flotation, traction and smooth ride to range as far as trains, carrying huge loads great distances.

Litchfield found his message falling on deaf ears. Both truck operators and manufacturers scoffed at the idea that air-filled tires could support five or ten tons. "Show them" was Goodyear's response. Only a successful, fulltime trucking service, operating in fair weather and foul, would prove Litchfield's theory.

The three-vehicle caravan that set out to do just that was barely to the Akron outskirts when it became mired in the mud. So began an agonizing odyssey of muddy ditches, broken bridges, blown out tires and engine failures.

It came as no surprise that a heavy truck would have much more difficulty on the poorly graded dirt roads than the farmers' lightweight buggy. Bridges that safely carried farm wagons collapsed under the Packard truck. Twice the engine failed and had to be rebuilt.

The Goodyear crew doggedly pressed on. They added a winch to their equipment, more rope, and rapidly mastered the art of hauling themselves out of the mud. The support cars were worn out by the time the caravan reached Pittsburgh and were traded for new ones. Blowouts occurred about every 75 miles as the truck plodded ahead at 15 mph.

As the Express traveled, Ferris Miller, the advance man and publicist, took pictures with his folding Kodak and wrote stories for local and national newspaper coverage.

"Every place we stopped we attracted a crowd," Harry Smeltzer later recalled. "People would come around, kick the tires and want to know if they were solid or pumped up."

The Goodyear team pushed on, across the Gettysburg battlefield and the farmlands of New Jersey, through historic Trenton to New York and along the roads that bordered Long Island Sound.

Finally, 21 days overdue, the bone-weary men in their mud-splattered truck entered the bucolic streets of Killingly, Conn. To their astonishment, they were greeted by a crowd of hundreds of Goodyear fabric mill girls and a rousing brass band.

As Smeltzer described the trip, "it took 28 days and 28 tires." The trio back with fabric from the mill was less eventful and took just five days.

Walter Shivery, the tire engineer, promptly applied the lessons learned in the grueling truck tire test and improved tires were almost immediately available. A stronger bead and heavier sidewalls produced a tire more resistant to blowout. The Goodyear cotton cord concept in tire construction already had proven itself in passenger car tires and was indispensable in building the sturdy tires that trucks required.

Future trips employed seven Wingfoot Express trucks, ranging from three- to five-ton models of White, Mack and Packard. The 740-mile run one way was pared down to 80 hours running time within a year. They carried tires to Goodyear dealers in the Boston area, or shoe soles for New England footwear makers, bringing back tire fabrics from the Connecticut mill.

So reliable did the truck tires become that in 1918 seven Express trucks carrying Boy Scouts completed a 3,000-mile excursion along the East Coast without a single blowout. The immense pressure that World War I production was placing on the railroads in 1918 caused shipping delays across the country. Responding to an appeal from the American Red Cross, Litchfield sent his Wingfoot Express fleet to Chicago. They hauled a commercial load of tires to the Windy City, then reloaded immediately with 18 tons of Red Cross medical supplies destined for France.

Using the Lincoln Way east-west route from Chicago, the trucks delivered urgently needed supplies to transport ships at Baltimore's harbor in just 100 hours. Average highway speed was 15 mph, considered remarkable at the time. A letter sent by Red Cross officials in Chicago to their office in Baltimore advising of the shipment arrived only two hours before the trucks.

The success of the Wingfoot Express was reflected by a spurt in highway construction, as state governments strove to improve roads within their jurisdiction.

The Lincoln Highway movement, conceived in 1913 to create a modern coast-to-coast highway, was strongly supported by Goodyear's President Frank Seiberling.

In 1918, the same trucks that had conquered the ten-foot snow drifts of Pennsylvania's worst winter in decades, left Boston for San Francisco. This time, the caravan faced a round trip of 7,763 miles, some of it across trackless desert.

In Wyoming alone, 36 of 56 wooden bridges gave way beneath the highway giants. This time the commercial cargo were aviation tires needed by the Army on the West Coast.

Again, the persistent Goodyear teams overcame all obstacles of road conditions and weather. After completing four round trips totaling 30,000 miles, the Express trucks had established a new world transcontinental record, coast-to-coast in just 14 days.

So began the long battle to unchain the truck from its parochial chores of shuttling cargo between the local railroad platform and nearby loading docks.

The Wingfoot Express had literally re-invented the truck, freeing it from its confinement to town or city streets.

Prophetically, a month after the start of the Express, Seiberling told the U.S. Chamber of Commerce that "the introduction of the motor truck into our commercial life sounds the death knell of the short line railroad."

So, as the railroads had originally opened up the country and Ford's Model 'T' put America on wheels, the Goodyear Wingfoot Express put business on wheels, creating a swift and reliable highway transportation industry that is still growing. L

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## ILHA Calendar of Upcoming Events

### **October 10 Fall Meeting and Tour**

The Iowa Lincoln Highway Association's fall meeting will begin at 9:30 a.m. on Saturday, October 10, at the Van Horne Community Room in Van Horne, Iowa, preceded by coffee and rolls at 9:00. Story inside on page 10!

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