

# Along the Lincoln Highway



**The Newsletter of the Iowa Lincoln Highway Association  
Fall/Winter 1998 . . . . . Volume 3 Issue 4**

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## Mt. Vernon the Site of Our First Grant Completion.

*by Bob Ausberger, State Director*

Three cheers for the first Lincoln Highway/ISTEA project to be finished in Iowa!! ISTEA stand for Inter-Modal Transportation Equity Act and is the federal highway enhancement funding for historic transportation projects, highway beautification, and hiking and biking trails.

The viaduct at Mt. Vernon was the original Lincoln Highway method of crossing the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. It was a very early example of a "grade separation" type of crossing, and probably the only one on the route in 1913. In this case the grade separation was made easier because the railroad passes through a "cut" eliminating the need for an extensive and expensive approach system.

The viaduct was replaced by the one presently used on the highway going from Mt. Vernon to Cedar Rapids. I believe it was constructed in the 1930s on what was then U.S. 30. This new route eliminated the direct right-hand turn, the brick street approach, and the hazard of the narrow original viaduct.

This original viaduct continued in use as a city bridge until the 1980s, when it was closed. Technically it belonged to the railroad, who wanted to demolish it. It is valuable as a Lincoln Highway artifact because it is the only structure of this type left on the Lincoln Highway in Iowa, and possibly in the nation. It is valuable in transportation history as an example of early attempts to make railroad and highway crossings safer by separating them vertically.



Credit Dick Thomas of Cornell College with recognizing this and leading a movement to save the structure. In 1991 the ISTEA program was announced so funds were made available through a grant process. Mt. Vernon applied for the funds and agreed to provide the 20% matching funds. They also negotiated with the C&NW railroad to acquire ownership. The grant was approved about the time that Union Pacific bought out the C&NW. The city then renegotiated with the U.P. to keep the viaduct.

The viaduct is actually a pony truss bridge with two highway approach sections. The bridge was actually set aside while repairs were made to supporting wood pilings and concrete abutments. The bridge was then swung back into position, the floor replanked, and the iron structural members painted with a technique that gives it a very authentic "pitted" antique look.

The ribbon-cutting took place on September 15<sup>th</sup> (photo). It was attended by Iowa DOT officials, the mayor, representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, representatives of the engineering firm that planned and supervised the project, campaigning politicians, Iowa LHA representatives, and the general public. L

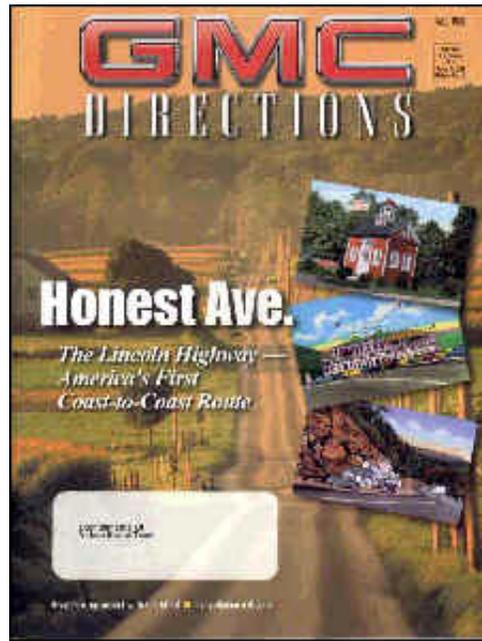
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## Emancipation Transportation.

*by Amy Bishop*

*GMC Directions Staff Writer*

*(excerpted from a Fall 1998 article in the GMC trade publication)*



There's a quiet little road carefully winding its way through the aging downtown of Van Wert, Ohio. As the last rays of daylight stream through the big, shady trees, it looks like any other street one might encounter on a driving trip through the Midwest. The only hint at the deep-seated history behind this road is the red, white and blue signs dotting the landscape.

Earlier this century, this thoroughfare was built as a part of the great Lincoln Highway - the talk of the nation. As the first transcontinental highway in the United States, the Lincoln Highway forever changed the face of transportation and led future generations to enjoy the freedoms of traveling they've come to know so well.

The country was on the verge of the driving revolution, where, in a matter of years, automobiles would become a household staple. People were excited to be on the move.

"You have to remember, the automobile was a fairly new machine at the time of the highway," says [LHA National Director] Drake Hokanson. "People were eager to use these machines, but the roads were not up to the task."

"The Lincoln Highway really captured the American public's imagination," says Hokanson, an assistant professor at Winona State University in Winona, Minnesota. "It was just the right thing at the right time."

People embraced the idea of the highway, not only for the pleasure of driving but for the feeling of patriotism it brought with it.

Businesspeople along the route quickly saw the opportunities provided through the highway. Roadside cafes and diners, gas and service stations, souvenir shops, and cabin camps - an early alternative to hotels - sprouted up along the route. Other attractions, ranging from the cultural aura of opera houses and theaters, to the quirkiness of a ship stuck in the side of a cliff [S.S. Grandview Point Hotel near Bedford, Pennsylvania] or a three-story shoe-shaped building [Haines Shoe House near York, Pennsylvania], could be found along the route and provided highway travelers with an interesting journey.

In Van Wert, Ohio, there have been a lot of changes along the route since the early days. Other things have stayed the same.

"There used to be service stations from one end of town to the other," says Lucia Burtz, a waitress who's worked at Balyeat's Coffee Shop in Van Wert since 1950. "It used to be this was the main highway before the bypass came through in the '60s. But this place was famous from coast to coast."

Balyeat's, which opened along the highway in the early 1920s, still serves diner food. It's a throwback to the old days, where the waitresses and the owners mingle with the customers.

Farther west on the highway, Orr's Ranch in Skull Valley, Utah, was a popular place to stay along the Lincoln Highway. For travelers headed west, it was the last stop before a long trek across the desert.

"It was quite a gathering place," says Shirley Orr Andrus, who lives at the working ranch with her husband, Dennis, after being raised there by her parents. "A lot of the surveyors stayed here at the ranch. My folks cooked meals and they sold gas. Once, the Army Corps of Engineers came and the army band played. There was a young officer who was with them, (later to become) President Eisenhower.

Orr Andrus says although there's only one log cabin left at the ranch, people still stop by to catch a glimpse of the Lincoln Highway accommodations.

Although many of those early roadside stops - ice cream parlors, cheese shops, diners and others - have been replaced by strip malls and new highways, there are still many left to explore.

The new association continues to lobby for sensitive highway improvement projects, maintain the road's historic character and to educate the public. The association, which has chapters in every state along the route, is trying to raise money to install interpretive sites along the highway.

"We want to develop a living history highway so people can see the development of our modern transportation system," says Bob Ausberger, vice president of the association's Board of Directors and director of the Iowa chapter.

"People complain about what we have now, but they don't realize how far we've come in the last 100 years," he says. "The automobile and our highway system may have had more impact on our culture than anything else has."

It's also enough to send you searching for your own adventures out on the highway - in the modern day comfort of your GMC, of course. L

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## Preserving Our Lincoln Highway Heritage: The Interpretative Site Process.

***Keith Whitlatch, Cedar County LHA Director, has submitted an application for an ISTEA grant to aid in the renovation of Kreinbring's Phillip 66 Station in Lowden. Below are excerpts of the application.***

The city of Lowden and the Lincoln Highway Association propose to purchase the Kreinbring Phillips 66 station from New Horizon Farm Service of Oxford, Iowa. The station will be used as a regional site in the National Interpretive Site Program being developed by the Lincoln Highway Association. The city of Lowden will also use the station as an annex for their city historical society. The dual purpose will be mutually compatible as both users will use it for historic transportation related purposes. The building has been kept in good repair as the station was in continual use from 1934 until April of 1998.

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The sponsoring agency is applying for funding for three reasons. First, there is a good chance that if not purchased as a historic preservation project, the building will be destroyed. It is in a residential area, and U.S. 30 has been relocated to the south of town where new stations serve the traveling public.

Second, being tied in with a state-wide and national project, there is a good economic development potential through tourism, especially heritage tourism. Cedar County has a major tourism attraction in the Hoover Library in West Branch. The Historic Register-eligible transportation resources can lure them to the Lincoln Highway towns. Adequate funding is needed, especially for planning to turn the station into a quality tourist attraction while maintaining its historic integrity.

A third reason is improved inter-regional cooperation. Most of the Lincoln Highway and its roadside features, as stand-alone

projects, don't have the attraction for preservation and tourism as when they are tied together as the interpretive site project. It is important that each town sees itself as part of a larger picture. The four Lincoln Highway towns in Cedar County - Mechanicsville, Stanwood, Clarence and Lowden - all have good Lincoln Highway resources and are working together to preserve and promote them. Cedar County is also working with Clinton County to the east to tie in a very nice section of the original Lincoln between Lowden and Calamus. This section is also eligible for the National Register.

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The Lincoln Highway Association proposes to tell [its] story through a series of interpretative sites. These sites, because of the local nature of early road building and politics, will be located in every town and selected rural areas. As each state developed roads in their own method and time, this story varies from state to state as well as town to town. The interpretive site process will result in the development of a 3000-mile Living History Highway [including] roadside features such as gas stations, cabin courts, restaurants, auto dealerships, service garages, and drive-in businesses.

The National Park Service has declared that the Lincoln Highway is significant in local, state and national history. In Iowa about 100 miles of the Lincoln Highway and subsequent relocations along with 350-400 bridges, statues, monuments, abandoned segments and roadside features are eligible.

Kreinbring's Phillips 66 Station has been determined eligible for the National Register in two categories. First, because it has contributed to development of broad patterns (transportation) of local state and national history. Second, it is a distinctive style of construction. The building is eligible both in its present state (with service bay addition) and if the service bay were removed. (The original station exists under the addition.) Part of the planning will be concerned with which situation to preserve. The original building represents the best example of a cottage style station on the Lincoln Highway in Iowa. However, the addition represents the typical way in which gas stations evolved into service stations to expand their business.



Kreinbring Phillips 66 Station in Lowden, 1938. Photo courtesy Collection of Lowden Historical Society.

The cottage style station, used as a corporate style by Phillips 66 as well as by White Eagle and Pure Oil, served two functions. It was an attempt to lure customers by presenting a clean, wholesome and homelike atmosphere. It was a place that could be trusted. Phillips enhanced this image with clean uniformed attendants and with the shield of the Federal Highway system as part of their logo. Earlier places that dispensed gas, such as hardware stores and drugstores, had gotten pretty grimy (where cars leaked oil and spilled gas) and their system of measuring was unreliable.

A second advantage of the cottage style architecture was that it might (and did) sneak through zoning restrictions. Therefore they could be located in about any part of town including the residential district.

In addition to showing and telling the story of the development of gas stations and their inter-relationship with the development of highway transportation, this station bets to tell the story of the Phillips 66 Company. Though the company was not started in Iowa, it was started by an Iowan. It is one of the few companies that started early and still exists today without the benefits or complications of mergers. They used the cottage style station as a corporate logo longer than any other company.

The town of Lowden has a rich transportation history, especially on Main Street where one notices the Lincoln Hotel and the historic Chevrolet garage. Also, the whistle of passing Union Pacific trains reminds one of the earlier means of transporting passengers. The town museum is located in a renovated depot. In addition, the Herbert Hoover Highway begins in Lowden, and the historic stage and wagon road serving Cedar and Linn Counties passed through the town. At one time there were seven gas stations on Main Street.

The Lowden Historical Society's theme will be local and Cedar County transportation history. Memorabilia from the Lincoln Hotel, Chevrolet dealership, and the seven stations will be displayed along with photos and maps. Personal experiences will be obtained through interviews. A video tape of the interviews will be available. L

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## Mid-Winter Meeting Set for Tama County.

The first Lincoln Highway Association Board Meeting of the new year is scheduled for Saturday, January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1999.

Tama County Director **Ron Cory** has reserved the Tama Civic Center for the semi-annual Directors meeting, although *all* members of the Iowa LHA are welcome to attend. Donuts and coffee will be offered at 9:00 a.m., and the business portion of the meeting will commence at 9:30.

The Tama Civic Center is located two blocks west of U.S. Highway 63 on Third Street in downtown Tama. For more information, contact Ron at 515-484-2761, or ILHA President Jeff Benson in Ames at 515-233-1445.

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## Ramblings Along the Lincoln Highway.

*Minutes of the Fall 1998 Iowa LHA General Membership Meeting.*

*11 October 1998.*

*Community Center Building,*

*Van Horne, Iowa.*

*Submitted by Joyce Ausberger, Secretary*

The meeting was opened by Co-Presidents Jeff Benson and Margaret Elbert. Jeff read and discussed the Iowa by-law changes. The recommended by-law revisions were unanimously approved.

Bob Ausberger reported on the following grants recently submitted:

1. The Historic Site Preservation Grant for the Welcome Center of the Lincoln Highway addition in Harrison County.
2. The Story County Transportation Museum planning grant (ISTEA enhancement).
3. Two ISTEA applications for books. One on the bridges located on or near the Lincoln Highway (including railroad bridges), and another on Iowa bridges in general.
4. Carroll County submitted another ISTEA grant that would include a Lincoln Highway Interpretative Site. The Site would be the transition of business along the railroad to the Highway.
5. A REAP-grant application was made for matching money for the Interpretive Site at the Lions' Club Tree Park east of Grand Junction. This is the only grant reviewed to date and was not accepted. The Committee said it was a good project to interpret the Lincoln Highway and its bridges and the REAP was more of a conservation grant. The LHA was including the wetland difficulty to build roads in Iowa at this site.
6. Scott Beska from Colo Economic Development reviewed the planning being done at Niland's Corner at Colo. Niland's Corner will be another regional LH Interpretative Site, representing the early "one-stop." John and Joan Niland have donated this property to the city of Colo. The Iowa LHA will assist Colo Economic Development with their planning and grant proposals.

Tom Conway shared an article from *The Cedar Rapids Gazette*. The *Gazette* and KCRG, a Cedar Rapids television station, have had some great coverage on the Lincoln Highway. The only disappointment from the coverage was an incorrect statement credited to the Iowa LHA that we wanted absolutely nothing done to the seedling mile section of the Mount Vernon-to-Cedar Rapids road.

Our first enhancement project, the Mt. Vernon bridge restoration, is complete. [Related article elsewhere in the newsletter.]

It was announced that Lincoln Highway Christmas ornaments could be purchased from the RSVP office, Boone County Courthouse; attention Michelle Holly.

Benson reviewed the plans being made with Iowa Lincoln Highway corridor management. He reviewed important participants: local support through the county supervisors and county engineers, the Department of Economic Development, the Department of Tourism, and SHPO including local county historical societies. The Iowa LHA will be meeting with these groups in the near future.

Benson also reported that work was being done on updating our membership renewals. Contacts need to be made with those who have not renewed.

Roland Southwell from Salt Lake City and the Utah LHA was present at our meeting. Roland reviewed work that was being done by the Utah Historical Society planning state school service projects for 4<sup>th</sup> graders studying the Lincoln Highway. He also gave Utah's LHA state website address and indicated he would be happy to share our state activities on-line through the Utah site (<http://www.xmission.com/~pgrimes/lincoln.htm>).

Ron Cory has invited the LHA to have its Iowa Board of Directors meeting in Tama on January 9<sup>th</sup>. Anyone interested is welcome to attend. The Spring 1999 Iowa LHA meeting is scheduled for April 10<sup>th</sup> in Denison.

The program portion of the Van Horne meeting included a slide presentation by Lyell Henry on "One Stops" in the Cedar Rapids-to-Belle Plaine road. Jim Hippen presented a "Lincoln Highway Bridges" presentation that also included other significant bridges in Iowa. Mike Kelly presented a comprehensive historical video on the Lincoln Highway in Iowa that is still in progress. Anne Schoonover reviewed progress made at Youngville and invited attendees to tour the Youngville Station one-stop after lunch, which was provided by the Community Center. L

# Feature Photo.

This issue's mystery photo is on the front page. If you think you know where the photo was taken, you can email your guess (pwalker@inav.net) or call the editor at 319-358-7056, or just keep it to yourself and revel in your own Lincoln Highway wisdom. L

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