

Along the Lincoln Highway

The Newsletter of the Iowa Lincoln Highway Association
Fall/Winter 1999 Volume 4 Issue 4

Lincoln Highway Exhibit at Ames

by Jeff Benson

An exhibit on the Lincoln Highway in Story County and Ames is now on display at the Story Center in Ames. The Story Center is located at 417 Douglas in downtown Ames and is open on Saturdays from 10 am until 5 pm, on Sundays from 2 pm until 5 pm and on Wednesdays and Fridays from 1 until 4 pm.

The exhibit is titled "From Mud Road to Miracle Mile" and tells how and why the Lincoln Highway was established, how it changed the way Americans traveled and how it changed the communities through which it passes. It has historical photographs of places along the Lincoln in Ames and Story County as well as maps of the routes of the Lincoln Highway across Story County, Iowa and the U. S.

Also on display are various Lincoln Highway guides and products as well as tools and supplies the typical early Lincoln Highway traveler would have taken along. Of course, various types of Lincoln Highway markers are included. It even includes a set of Burma Shave sign reproductions made by Clare and Marge Robson of Jefferson. A portion of the exhibit describes the proposed restoration of Nilands Corner one-stop in Colo.

The exhibit was planned by a group of Story County LHA members, assembled by Jeff Benson and Margaret Elbert-Benson and installed by Jeff and Margaret with generous assistance by Phyllis and Cecil Stewart, Larry Forney and Bob Ausberger. The exhibit will run through the middle of January. L

Reed/Niland Corner Preservation Moves Forward

Since the Niland family donated a portion of Reed/Niland Corner to the City of Colo one year ago, the Niland's Corner Committee of the Colo Development Group has made substantial progress toward preserving one of the best examples of a roadside "one stop" in the country. Using a Rural Innovation Grant from the Iowa Department of Economic Development, it hired a design team, established objectives and prepared a restoration plan. It recently applied for a Statewide Transportation Enhancement Fund grant for \$252,000 to restore the gas station and build interpretive signs for the site.



From 1923 until the 1960s, the Reed/Niland Corner served travelers with a canopy gas station, later a cafe, and eventually tourist cabins and a motel. At the intersection of the Lincoln Highway and Jefferson Highway (now U.S. 65), it was one of the first such convenience stops on the Lincoln Highway.

The grant will help restore the service station to its appearance in the early 1930s. Future work will restore the cafe to its appearance in 1955, open it again for business, and sponsor an interpretive display. Eventually, one room of the motel will be furnished to about 1946 and open for display. The shower and restroom building for the cabins will be restored. The site will become one of seven state and regional Lincoln Highway interpretive sites across Iowa.



The Niland's Corner Committee is chaired by Joe Harper and includes various Colo and Story county residents and members of the ILHA.

The design team is headed by landscape architect Doug Adamson of Adamson + Associates in West Des Moines and includes David Arbogast, architectural conservator, Lyell Henry, historian and Troy Siefert.

The Iowa Department of Transportation staff is now reviewing the grant application. The Commission usually makes the final decision on these grants at their January or February meeting for funding to be available after October 1, 2000. The grant requires \$108,000 in matching funds. For further information, to make donations or to help, contact Colo Development Group, PO Box 294, Colo, IA 50056, or call (515) 377-2238. E-mail at colocity@netins.net. L

Chasing Lincoln.

Motorcycle Cruiser is a magazine for motorcycling enthusiasts. Two staff writers recently rode the Lincoln

highway across the country to promote the new Polaris Victory, (manufactured in Spirit Lake, Iowa) and a Harley-Davidson Dyna Convertible. Their best promotion, however, was for the Lincoln Highway itself.

Jamie Elvidge wrote of their adventures in the article below. Watch for her continuing story in subsequent issues.



THE PARTING OF THE CORN

The stretch from Illinois into Iowa was once known as the Lincoln's mudhole. Now it's an enormous sea of corn. When Fisher and Joy plotted their highway they mostly strung together existing roads, almost all of which were not graveled, crowned or raised to shed water. The skinny tires of the day simply chopped up the mud and worsened the problem. With its limited funds, the Lincoln Highway Association set about creating "seedling miles" in 1914. These concrete sections were used to demonstrate how pleasant it was to travel on a solid surface. With donated concrete they planted the first seedling section in Illinois. It was 10 feet wide and only a mile long, but it was just a beginning.

Just east of Iowa, between Schererville and Dyer, Illinois, is another example of the Lincoln Highway Association's educational attack. In 1921, the year the Federal Highway Act was passed and government assistance was assured, the Association spent nearly \$200,000 and built "The Ideal Section." It was more than one mile long, four lanes wide with concrete laid 10 inches deep. It had landscaping, lighting and a pedestrian footpath. Today, it looks just like every other suburban street in America.

In Iowa, everything about the Lincoln Highway changed. The terrain gave way to gentle swells and the densely populated East suddenly became the essentially empty Midwest. The best part is – the Lincoln Highway is alive and well in Iowa. The new Lincoln Highway Association began its redemption campaign here. "Iowa" is the first volume in a collection of historical travel guides being published with Association funds.

The donations also supply towns with lamppost banners, declaring each street part of the original highway with the traditional L. Volunteers in Iowa repainted phone poles with the red, white and blue insignias. Instead of educating the public about the benefits of good roads, the new Association seems bent on teaching the advantages of good marketing. A town that finds economic value in their historic positioning is inclined to preserve it.



In Mt. Vernon, I found my first original concrete marker. I was so elated I almost kissed Lincoln's little copper face. When it got dark I was still two hours east of Des Moines and my meeting with Evans. I decided to jump off the Lincoln and onto I-80 to make up time. The feelings I had were unexpected. As I sped along undistracted by route numbers, cross traffic or roadside ambiance, I realized I missed it – I was lonely for the Lincoln. I knew it was running along just north of me in the darkness just as it had for almost a century. The interstate felt so impersonal – so cold and without character.

ESCAPE FROM IOWA

Evans couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. Following the Lincoln Highway here was like a big game of Connect-the-Ls played in a giant cornfield. The road was open and empty. What were we whining about? I tried to explain that if Art and I had been measuring distance in seat time instead of stoplights we would have ridden all the way to Hawaii by now.

Much to our astonishment, Evans and I got almost nowhere our first day on the road. We became trapped on the Lincoln Highway. We were riding down an old gravel section of the road when we discovered we were mysteriously surrounded on all sides by roads closed for construction. It had a Twilight Zone feel. Perhaps we had witnessed some secret corn testing and we were being detained while our identities were filtered through some government department. After hours of fumbling around like kids in a House of Mirrors, we popped out on Route 30 pretty much where we had departed from it. The endless gravel roads – though thoroughly groomed – gave me renewed respect for all those who'd passed this way before the cement was poured.



The land in Nebraska rises toward the west with deceptive speed. Evans and I didn't realize how far into the high country we'd traveled until his bottle of sunscreen imploded. What a different world this must have seemed to early travelers new to the West. The emptiness must have been astonishing.

The Lincoln Highway through Nebraska runs within a stone's throw of the mighty I-80 for much of the way. At one gas stop the girl behind the counter had no idea what the Lincoln was even though she had grown up with it right under her feet. When an older gentleman walked in, she asked him if he knew about it. He said he personally laid tricycle tracks in the west cement during the Highway's first paving.

When stuck on I-80, I would occasionally get a feeling about how the old Lincoln had been laid, and catch a

glimpse of its scraggly remains cautiously flowing over and around what it couldn't blast through. Where U.S. 30 had taken sips and swallows from the old road, I-80 simply devoured it. L

Next issue: *Wyoming and the End of the Road.*

Ramblings Along the Lincoln Highway.

*Minutes of the Fall 1999 Iowa LHA
General Membership Meeting.
9 October 1999.
Jefferson/Greene County Community Center,
Jefferson, Iowa.*

Submitted by Joyce Ausberger, Secretary.

President **Jeff Benson** welcomed the LHA members and guests. Three new members were introduced: **Bill Paeth** from Cedar Rapids, **Bob Stinson** from Des Moines, and **Larry Forney** from Colo.

COUNTY REPORTS

Benton

Anne Schoonover sent a progress report for Youngville. Newspaper articles from the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* reminded us what Youngville was like before restoration. Schoonover is accepting ideas and help for photo displays in the on-site museum.

Boone

Ty Casotti and John Fitzsimmons set up a LH display near the Cultural Center in Boone during "Pufferbelly Days." Ty is working with the Tall Corn Car Club to loan their 1903 Hans Apperson for the Story County Museum's LH display.

Carroll

Norma Berns introduced her daughter from California. Carroll submitted a grant to establish an interpretive site near the LH between the railroad depot and Wittrock Motors that will tell the story of businesses adapting to highway transportation.

In August, Norma had a LH table at Carroll's annual "Kids Fest" at Graham park on the LH.

Cedar

The nomination for the National Register of Historic Places has been completed for the Keplinger Phillips 66 station in Lowden.

Clinton

Elmer Kettelsen reported that two new access roads were built to connect the abandoned LH with new U.S. 30.

Crawford

Ardith Sporleder will be visiting with prospective members in Westside.

Greene

Bob Ausberger reported for **Bob Owens**. The county LHA association set up a display at the restored train depot near the LH and a new bike trail (on railroad grade). The display was for a regional Questers group to tour. The county relocated and removed trees and shrubs necessary for the LH Interpretative Site to be built at the Lions Club Tree Park in Grand Junction. The county engineer plans to have the trail completed yet this fall.

Harrison

Zell Millard reported on the LH brick streets renovation process in Woodbine. An engineering and consultant firm have made plans and cost estimates that were submitted for an ISTE (T-21) grant. The city of Woodbine is responsible for raising \$400,000 for its part of the initial grant.

Linn

Bev and Van Becker are photographing and documenting all the LH markers in Iowa. They continue to find new markers and ask members to notify them of unrecognized ones.

Marshall

No report.

Story

Margaret Elbert-Benson has been working with the Story County Historical Society's display during November and December. It will feature the LH in Ames as well as Story County. Larry Forney, representing the Reed/Niland Corner Restoration Committee, reported that their grant was submitted to the IDOT. Lyell Henry and Elbert-Benson reported that the Ames Motor Court is undergoing extensive remodeling, changing its focus from apartments to motel units only.

Tama

Marie Vileta reported for **Ron Cory**. They had another successful LH Bridge Festival. New management is doing very well at the King Tower Restaurant. The four-lane development of U.S. 30 will go north of the city.

Following County Consul reports, **Marj Robson** summarized some of the Greene County LH Preservation Groups activities. The group organized in February 1992 in an effort to save the National Register eligible sections of the LH in Greene County. Marj and her husband **Clare** have recently put up two sets of Burma Shave signs near their home. Another one they recently completed is for sale for \$100 and will be on display in Ames in November and December.

ELECTIONS of OFFICERS and DIRECTORS

Ausberger moved and Casotti seconded that **Paul Walker** be Iowa Director to the national LHA. Motion carried unanimously.

Henry moved and Berns seconded that **Bev and Van Becker** be the Linn County Directors to the Iowa LHA. Motion carried unanimously.

Henry moved and **Elaine Ehlert** seconded that Norma Berns be the new Secretary to the Iowa LHA. Motion carried unanimously.

Joyce Ausberger moved and Marie Vileta seconded that Ron Cory be the new Treasurer. Motion carried unanimously. Elbert-Benson and Benson will continue as co-Presidents for another year.

Following lunch in downtown Jefferson, the group toured four abandoned sections in Greene County and several bridges, all listed on the National Register of Historic Places. L

Lincoln Highway On the Air

by Van Becker

We find the strangest things when looking for Lincoln Highway markers!

The Lincoln Highway radio show was an NBC feature broadcast from March 16, 1940 to June 6, 1942 grouped under the category of “Dramatic Anthology” or Soap Opera. The 30-minute show was broadcast on Saturdays at 10 a.m. 1940-’41 and at 11 am. Shinola Shoepolish and Hecker Products were sponsors. It is said to have been a show worthy of broadcast in “prime time” and it was amazing that the super line-up of stars including Ethel Barrymore, Mary Astor, George Murphy, Betsy Barnes, Benny Baker, John Carradine and John McIntire, as announcer, were willing to participate at that hour of the day and on a weekend.

We understand that the show was scheduled for broadcast opposite CBS’s hit show “Let’s Pretend,” sponsored by Buster Brown Shoes, which proved to be too stiff competition in that particular time slot.

We have been told repeatedly that only two episodes of the Lincoln Highway Radio Show have been preserved, yet we have found three episodes. Tapes of the old shows that Bev and I have been able to locate are as follows:

August 2, 1941. Starring Betsy Barnes—a struggling female understudy got her break when the old star is mysteriously drugged. The bumbling doctor cannot understand how prescription drugs keep disappearing from his desk. The understudy is an instant star and she and her boyfriend live happily ever after.

February 14, 1942. Fruit market owner is found guilty of killing his banker. Visits to prison near Marshalltown, Iowa, are along the Lincoln Highway. The hardships bring the family closer together. This episode was performed at the 1999 National Conference by the Vince Carney Community Theatre Players during the final banquet.

Date unknown, although it must be close to World War II as it refers to military shortages. Two professional writers, one a married man, collaborate on a book in a remote farmhouse retreat just off the Lincoln Highway. The man’s wife is just “too nice” to the interloper. The scheming home-wrecker gets sent packing. Shinola Shoepolish advertisements throughout the program.

How would these shows be ranked today for literary and theatrical merit? Don’t ask!

Do any of you readers have additional episodes that you would be willing to share with the membership of the LHA? If anyone has information that would help identify the date of the third show, please notify Paul Walker or us: Van & Bev Becker, becker2@mwci.net

Thanks to Rollin Stockwell of the Utah Chapter of the LHA and Lyell Henry for providing the tapes of the above-described shows. Thanks also to numerous Internet old-time radio sources. L

~ WANTED TO BUY ~

Original bronze Lincoln medallion from 1928 concrete marker, in excellent condition, to complete renovation of marker. 319-358-7056

Youngville Station.

By Dave Rasdal

Reprinted from the Cedar Rapids Gazette.

Youngville is 19 miles west of Cedar Rapids on the northeast corner of the intersection of Highway 218 and Highway 30.

The Youngville cafe was an old dilapidated service station/eatery out in the middle of nowhere along Highway 30 in Benton County when I first wrote about it in 1994. It was a graffiti-stained eyesore overgrown with thick brush, a condition that had worsened each year since it closed in 1967. By all rights, it could have been torn down and only a handful of people would have missed it.

The Iowa Department of Transportation had planned to do just that as it turned Highway 30 into a four-lane divided highway.

Then Anne Schoonover of Garrison and Ruth Mayhew of Vinton stepped up. They saw the cafe as a way to help Benton County celebrate Iowa's sesquicentennial in 1996.

"Are you out of your cotton-pickin' mind?" Ruth heard friends say.

But Ruth and Anne held a couple of meetings, generated some interest and convinced the DOT to build its highway south of the cafe. They worked to secure about \$120,000 in state and federal grants, appealed for volunteer labor and continued to direct the project under the non-profit auspices of Youngville Highway History Association, Inc.

In a bit of irony, the four-lane highway appears as if it will soon open. The cafe has a ways to go.

"You always set this mental target date to look forward to," Anne says. "You always have your hopes."

Donations and volunteer labor have provided for a new roof, a restored exterior, a reinforced balcony, refurbished floors, repaired window frames. The women and the volunteers have plodded along, never giving up. After all, these people have lives too. It's not as if they're building the two-story stucco structure from scratch like Joe Young did in 1931.

In those early days, the Youngville Station was the only all-night stop between Cedar Rapids and Tama. Highway 30 was the old Lincoln Highway. Travel was more leisurely then, more of an adventure.

When Youngville opens this spring, it will be a wide spot in the road to recall those times. Old authentic gas pumps will stand guard outside, a 24-seat restaurant will serve pie and short orders, a manager will live upstairs. One corner will feature a gift shop and a small museum. The oil room at the west end will be furnished just like it was in the '30s. L

From a July 8th letter to the *Nevada Journal*.

We started our journey in Nevada, Iowa.

As you travel the old Lincoln Highway, it can be a bit perplexing, as many sections of the highway are either all but consumed by progress, or they are hardly noticeable because of neglect in the fact that it IS the original highway.

We took our time, though, and would meander along winding road, with rolling hills of scenery, and come upon communities that hardly had a trace of evidence that the Lincoln Highway had actually went through there, while other areas were festooned with colorful red, white and blue banners, flowers, planted in beautiful array and sections of the road preserved, adorning the heritage it deserves with plaques, signs, posts and memorabilia of an earlier era.

Nevada should be very proud to be a part of that heritage, and Nevadans can boast of living in one of the towns that has a strong historical attachment to the development of such a grand highway. Nevada is great small town living!

Cec Landis
Nevada

Feature Photo.

When it comes to identifying culverts on the Lincoln Highway, don't ever bet against Bob Ausberger. Bob was the only person to correctly identify this culvert on the abandoned segment of original LH at Honey Creek in Pottawattamie County. The culvert is just north of the historic Honey Creek grade area—a real treasure for any LH fan. The grade and culvert are on private property, so be sure to knock at the farmhouse before hiking the hill. The Loess Hills view, however, is free to the public.

Outside Iowa in the LHA.

*From the North-East Chapter of the New Jersey LHA,
Keith Hixon, President*

The program is beginning to fill in with speakers and activities. We have cut the nights of attendance from five to four, but we also seem to have cut only a few spots for seminars. As we have so much to see in New Jersey, the bus tours won't be as much mileage as previously. The latest great idea is to have an evening New York Harbor Dinner Cruise, an extra cost item, but for our guests, it may be popular. More later.

We will call our [June 2000] conference "Highway of History." As we have been working on this planning, it appears that this old road is justified in assuming that more historic, industrial, educational, scientific activity has occurred than any other sixty miles in the U.S. Every mile has exciting things to consider.

*From Buckeye Ramblings,
Ohio Lincoln Highway Association,
Mike Buettner, President and Editor*

Seven members of the Mid-Ohio Chapter of the LHA made their way to Beaverdam, Ohio, on Saturday, October 16, where they erected a brick Lincoln Highway pillar dedicated to Carl Fisher.

The pillar was built on the same concrete base of a previous Lincoln Highway pillar which was long ago destroyed. The first pillar was dedicated October 20, 1928, when the last stretch of concrete pavement was opened across Allen County, Ohio.

Because Carl Fisher was the founder of both the Lincoln Highway and the Dixie Highway, it was appropriate for the Beaverdam pillar to be dedicated to him. The pillar is at the intersection of the two routes. As testimony to the wisdom of his ideas, the never-ceasing hustle and bustle from the four-lane traffic on both Interstate 75 and U.S. 30—the modern descendants of the two transcontinental named roads - is within earshot of the new pillar. L

Ames to Host Winter Board Meeting.

Members and non-members alike are invited to join the Iowa LHA Board of Directors at their semi-annual business meeting. We'll convene at the Ames Library at 515 Douglas, upstairs at the Founders Suite, on Saturday, January 8th, with coffee and conversation at 9:00 and the meeting at 9:30. Lunch in downtown Ames follows the meeting.

After lunch the fun continues at the Founders Suite with a Lincoln Highway presentation; speakers will be Lyell Henry and Joe Harper. Joe is the head of the Colo Nilands Corner project addressed on page 1. He will describe the community's progress on the project, and Lyell will present a slide show of roadside accommodations.

Remember...

By checking the renewal date on your mailing label and resubscribing well in advance of the date, you will save your ILHA from having to send renewal notice letters.

Thanks!
