

Along the Lincoln Highway



**The Newsletter of the Iowa Lincoln Highway Association
Summer/Fall 2000 Volume 5 Issue 3**

Fall Fun for Everyone in Pottawattamie County.

Everyone is invited to the Fall 2000 meeting of the Iowa LHA in Pottawattamie County, the westernmost LH county before crossing the wide Missouri to Nebraska. Participants are asked to congregate at the easy-to-find Airplane Inn on Iowa Highway 183 at Honey Creek by 9:00 am on Saturday, October 7th. From there we'll drive the short distance to the Hitchcock Nature Area to convene the business portion of the day. If you come late, the Hitchcock Center address is 27792 Ski Hill Loop. After the business meeting, we'll tour the highway, including a visit to the oldest running Dairy Queen in the U.S. The highlight of the day will be a visit to the old LH grade back at Honey Creek. The grade is a little steep, so walkers are asked to wear comfortable shoes and clothes. It'll take a little effort, but the autumnal view of the [Loess Hills](#) will be worth it!

GREAT GRADES.

The cover photo is an preview for our readers of what they'll see at the Fall 2000 ILHA meeting in Honey Creek.

The Honey Creek grade today is little more than an overgrown gully, but in the early days of the Lincoln Highway it was the only path through the impressive Loess Hills area north of Council Bluffs. The important words in that sentence are "Hills" and "Bluffs," both of which are in abundance in Pottawattamie County. Driving out of the Missouri Valley in the nineteen-teens and twenties was a chore, and there just wasn't a good way to get to the high flat land east of this area.

In Gregory Franzwa's book, *The Lincoln Highway: Iowa*, he writes, "This is the location of the toughest hill

on the Lincoln Highway in Iowa—the Honey Creek grade. Highway engineers entirely relocated the Lincoln Highway at an enormous cost to avoid the old Honey Creek hill.

“The old incline was 1.25 miles long and at one time had lots of kinks and turns. As the overheated cars approached the summit, drivers were confronted with a fifteen percent grade. So the road was moved to the present alignment—a relocation of 2.65 miles. [present-day Iowa 183] The summit was lowered by eighty feet. Some 75,000 cubic yards of dirt were removed in the taming of the hill.”

Before 1928 the Lincoln Highway followed the earlier and less organized Transcontinental Route, and today hikers can still find the long-abandoned poles and insulators from the [ancient transcontinental telegraph line](#).

We hope you'll be able to join us for a jaunt back in time as we make the grade in Pottawattamie County on October 7th. L

Greetings Friends!

Please welcome our newest members:

Carroll Chamber of Commerce	
Tim & Pat Downs	Tama
Dan Gesy	Denison
John Harvey	Waterloo
Ronald Klopping	Newton
Stuart Lehr	West Des
	Moines
Edna Rassler	Belle Plaine
Tallgrass Historians	Iowa City

Belle Plaine Lincoln Highway to be Altered.

by Jeff Benson

The Lincoln Highway in Benton County east of Belle Plaine is to be rebuilt. This segment, now a part of Highway 131, extends from 7th Avenue (Highway 21) in Belle Plaine east to where 131 turns north. The project will rebuild a very early 18-foot wide pavement and change the road's typical fit to the natural landform, but it may also create a new interpretive display.

Much of the road in town and past the cemetery east of town will have a new 31-foot wide pavement with curb and gutters. An original bridge will be replaced. A new 24-foot wide pavement and grading in the eastern third of the project will widen the right-of-way by 20 to 50 feet on the north side of the road and ten feet on the south side.

The project will improve safety by replacing badly deteriorating pavement and by increasing visibility. It will also accommodate truck traffic for the large Pierce Lumber Company.

Early in the design, the Belle Plaine mayor and project engineers invited the Iowa LHA to discuss the project. Although it was clear from this discussion that it would be very difficult to preserve the existing roadway, following that meeting the City and engineers tried, unsuccessfully, to get funds to preserve and relocate the bridge.

However, the design for a portion of the ditch was changed to reduce the width of disturbance, and discussion has begun on using native grass plantings to reduce the perceived width of the new road section. In addition, the possibility of an interpretive site was raised. Iowa LHA members will discuss this possibility at the October meeting.

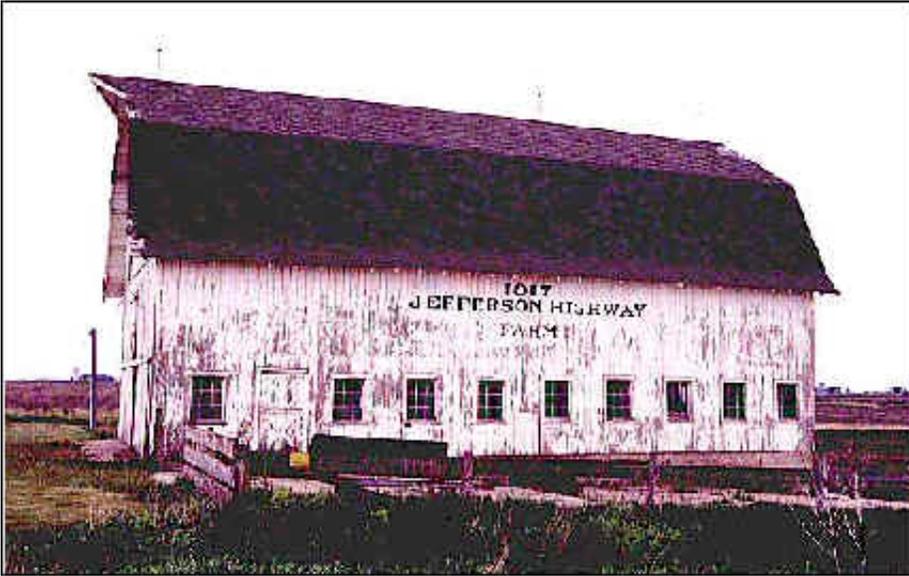
The project is bid this fall and should be under construction in the spring. L

Welcome to the Jefferson Highway.

by Lyell Henry

The Jefferson Highway was inaugurated in 1916 by “good roads” enthusiasts inspired by the example of the Lincoln Highway. Connecting Winnipeg and New Orleans, this highway traversed central Iowa on a north-south route running from Northwood, near the Minnesota border, through Des Moines, to Lamoni, at the Missouri border. Between Colo and Ames, the routes of the Lincoln and the Jefferson coincided, a fact accounting for the original name--L and J Station--of the Reed-Niland “one-stop” complex at Colo. Bob Stinson and I were eager to learn more about the Jefferson Highway and so on May 7 set out on a five-day trip of exploration of the highway between Northwood, Iowa, and St. Joseph, Missouri. Using early guidebooks, we followed the original route, except where road abandonments or other changes made that impossible. Much of our trip in northern Iowa was made on gravel roads. We also photographed whatever remnants we could find of the old highway and commercial roadside.

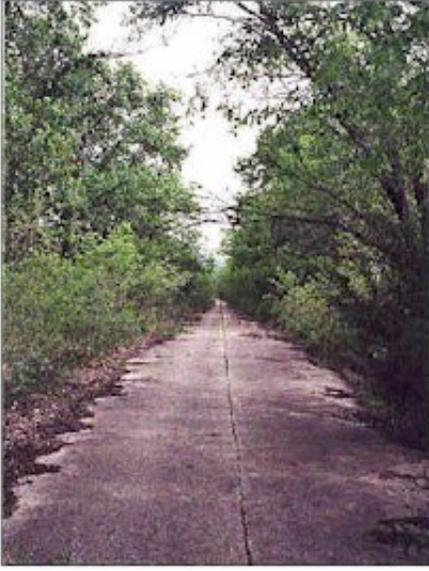
We saw very few early bridges and found no businesses, buildings, bridges, or parks bearing Jefferson’s name. Most surprising of all, only in Indianola is the street carrying the highway called Jefferson Street, which suggests that the Jefferson Highway did not make quite the impression on the minds of citizens along the route that the Lincoln Highway did. Every so often, however, came evidence pointing in the other direction, such as blue and white Jefferson Highway colors and logo painted on the sides of a small bridge in King City, Missouri, and a large inscription--“Jefferson Highway Farm, 1917”--painted on the wall of a barn along the old graveled route of the highway near Hubbard, Iowa (photo). Several other, less spectacular mementos of the Jefferson Highway can also be found along the road near Colo.



Our trip got off to a promising start when we discovered a four-foot high monolith that had been placed next to the highway on the Iowa-Minnesota state line in 1930. On it is a plaque commemorating “the completion of the Jefferson Highway” in those states (even though the road was by then officially called U.S. 65). Nowhere did we find any original signs along the road. However, in the Franklin County Museum in Hampton we saw a sign for the Inter-State Trail, predecessor of the Jefferson Highway in Iowa, and I tried unsuccessfully to persuade a resident of King City, Missouri, to part with a beautiful Jefferson Highway road sign. It was decorated with pine and palm trees, reflecting the Jefferson’s claim to be the “Pine to Palm” route. This person also would not let go of another treasure--a Jefferson Highway cigar box.

In hilly southern Iowa, the Jefferson followed a highly serpentine route, which was straightened by the Iowa Highway Commission sometime after the road was paved and had become U.S. 69. Fortunately, long stretches of the original road are still there and can sometimes be seen from the present highway. Just south of Indianola, Bob and I parked at a barricade and walked for about a mile on the old road, which was 18 feet wide and still had the old lip curbs which once brought notoriety and curses to Iowa’s highways.

Still strewn along the route are many gas station buildings which obviously survive from the 1920s but have long been abandoned or converted to other uses. We also saw the remains of several defunct old tourist courts and in Iowa Falls were delighted to come upon the Scenic Inn, a motel north of town that is still recognizable as the descendant of a one-stop begun in 1929 as the Scenic City Kabin Kamp. All but two of the cabins have been replaced with standard motel structures, and the building that once housed the gas station and restaurant is now rented out as a meeting place for Alcoholics Anonymous, but the motel remains in business. The Scenic Inn would have been a fine place to stay, but it had no vacancies on the day we visited, and we still had several hours of driving ahead of us anyway.



Although one night we were forced to pay an outrageous \$44 for motel rooms, twice we succeeded in our quest to find reasonably priced lodging (that is, under \$30) at vintage motels on the old route--first, at the very nice Royal Motel (“Fit for a King”) in Northwood, and second, at the Pony Express Motor Inn (“Great Western Hospitality”) in St. Joseph, Missouri. At this latter motel, Bob very accurately observed that our rooms didn’t sparkle and had many broken fixtures, and he also thought the absence of other cars in the motel’s huge courtyard struck an ominous note. True enough, the motel has obviously been in a phase of “deferred maintenance” for a decade or two, and patronage must have fallen off drastically since balmier days when the motel also had a large restaurant. But there were also some plusses—our rooms cost only \$28 each, and in front of the motel was an enormous two-sided moving neon sign, in perfect working order, showing a galloping horse and Pony Express rider. Keeping up this magnificent work of art no doubt absorbs all the money in the motel’s maintenance budget.

Our trip has inspired Bob to begin preparation of a guide to the variant routes of the Jefferson Highway in Iowa and given me a “feel” for the highway and much background information that will be useful in preparing the interpretive material to be presented at the Reed/Niland Corner project in Colo. Also, in the process of photographing one of the best treasures on the old Jefferson Highway—the abandoned Hotel Manly in Manly, Iowa—we encountered the mayor, who was surprised to learn that money may be available for restoring the hotel as an alternative to tearing it down. If the city of Manly is willing to follow through, I may therefore soon find a Jefferson Highway project among the Lincoln Highway projects in my portfolio. L

Ramblings Along the Lincoln Highway.

*Minutes of the Summer 2000 Iowa LHA
Board of Directors Meeting
Marshalltown, Iowa.
8 July 2000.*

At its July 8 meeting in Marshalltown the Board of Directors of the Iowa Lincoln Highway Association:

Agreed to provide tour guides for an August 23/24 tour of the Lincoln across the central part of Iowa by Creative Retirement, a program of Iowa Valley Continuing Education in Marshalltown.

Agreed to support a request from local business owners to the City of Marshalltown to change back to two-way the direction of traffic on Main Street and to push for banners to mark this part of the Lincoln Highway.

Agreed that County Consuls will contact city councils to arrange replacement of banners where needed and to seek funding for brackets.

Directed co-President Jeff Benson to write to the partners in the Greene County Interpretive Site project, including the Iowa DOT district engineer, the Greene County Engineer and Iowa State University Department of Landscape Architecture to urge more speedy progress on the project.

Noted that the 2001 national annual meeting of the Lincoln Highway Association will be in Grand Island, Nebraska, June 13 through 16. The Board also began discussion on planning for a national annual meeting in Iowa tentatively set for 2004.

Discussed selling pottery crocks and perhaps typical roadside souvenirs to raise funds for interpretive site projects across Iowa. Co-President Margaret Elbert and Benton County Consul Ann Schoonover will explore further details. L

Have Spare Tire, Will Travel

By Van & Bev Becker

Bev & I visited Willis and Catherine Bachman of Cedar Rapids the afternoon of May 8, 2000. We know this couple through our circle of amateur radio friends. Some months ago, Willis mentioned that he lived for awhile in the filling station on the Seedling Mile between Mt. Vernon and Cedar Rapids.

Part II

By this time, the Seedling Mile was paved on either side, to both Cedar Rapids on the west and Mt. Vernon on the east. Even then, the locals realized the significance of this special mile and appreciated the convenience of all-weather roads. Catherine promised to search vintage photos of cars stuck in the mud to illustrate and emphasize this point.

Both Willis and Catherine recalled that there were no robberies at the station during the years they lived along this stretch of the Lincoln. But they do recall one morning the highway was a mess with newspapers. It seems that one of the Chicago gangsters (John Dillinger) had a run-in with the local law and was leading a hot pursuit back toward Chicago. The gangsters were throwing newspapers from their car in the hope of blocking the vision of their pursuers with newspapers on the windshield. It didn't work very well, but it certainly left a mess. The desperadoes got away, but the morning light revealed a littered trail.

One crisp morning Willis and his father greeted a gas customer traveling back to Tennessee in a large late-model sedan with a dead deer strapped to the front fender.

"You had good luck, I see," one of them commented, thinking the remark innocent enough.

"Good luck and bad luck," was the response. "The deer hunting was good, but my brother was shot. He's in the back seat."

They were taking the deer home for burial. Good thing it was cold weather.

The locals drove mostly Ford Model T's and Model A's, as during the depression years the locals did not put too many fancy cars on rural highways. Most of the traffic consisted of rural farmers or Cedar Rapids and Mt. Vernon residents. A speed of 45 to 50 mph was considered to be very fast.

There was very little traffic from points east, not the amount of interstate traffic you would expect along the country's only transcontinental highway. The big truck traffic consisted mainly of DeKalb seed corn trucks. The trucks were regulars at the pumps and the drivers frequented the lunch counter. During a previous visit, Willis told of how the drivers would fill up, come in and have a sandwich. The highway traffic was so light that leaving the truck parked at the pumps during the lunch break did not interfere with business.



The Happy Valley station mid-demolition, 1999.

When asked if either Catherine or Willis recalled the Lincoln Highway radio show of the time, they responded, almost in unison, "No, we had a radio, but the batteries were usually dead." Those were different times. Games of pool without beer. Dirt track automobile racing on a now overgrown field and gas for 17¢ a gallon!

So many stories along the Lincoln—one could almost write a script for a radio drama! L



"Bachy's Happy Valley" gas station and "Recreation Parlor" is of 1938 vintage. There are (disappointingly) no longer any Lincoln Highway signs visible. The angle as photographed from the middle of the road shows the roadbed to be near level with the station, not built-up as today. The two vehicles parked under the canopy are a Ford Model A rumble seat coupe with dual stop lights and mudflaps. The far one is again a Ford, probably a 1936 2-door sedan. Despite the snow on the ground, the door to the oil room/pump room is standing open. In our photo reproduction, the sign atop may not reproduce well, but does say "Peter Pan--makes tastier meals." Block letters spelling out "Thank You" can be seen on the inside surface of the west pedestal. Willis advises that it was painted on the inside surface of the other pedestal as well.

New Banners Ready.

A fresh batch of red, white, and blue Lincoln Highway banners have been manufactured and are now for sale. Made of a more durable grade of tough vinyl, the new set of lamppost banners should last longer and be more colorfast than the last issue—which are five years old and still “hanging in there” on city squares and roadways across the state.

Cost of a banner and bracket pack is \$100, while the banner alone is \$60 (used with your existing bracket). Shipping and handling is \$10. Direct your order to Joyce Ausberger. L

Outside Iowa Along the Lincoln Highway.

The Fisher monument is moving forward with the selection of a committee to oversee construction. The committee will be made up of members from across the United States.

There is no monument for the creator of the Lincoln Highway. In Utah, Carl Fisher's contribution to the Goodyear Cutoff is often neglected. For his part in the Goodyear Contract with the State of Utah, Carl Fisher was granted two things - the state would rename Johnson Pass to Fisher Pass (still called Johnson), and he could build some type of a monument. While parts of the Goodyear Contract are disputed the Fisher Section is not. Read more about this at: www.xmission.com/~pgrimes/lincoln.htm, and click “Fisher Monument.” If you have any comments, questions, or want to get involved let me know at Rollin.Southwell@pgrimes.com.

- from *The Other Heritage*
Newsletter of the Utah LHA.

Joe Sanders informed me that the stretch of old Lincoln Highway, running east from Deep River to today's U.S. 30, won a contest held by the Indiana Ready-Mixed Concrete Association, for the oldest concrete pavement not resurfaced.

Then last November it was blacktopped over.

- Peter Youngman
Indiana LHA Newsletter.

Several significant finds have been made this year. One such find is an old remnant which is now part of an access road for properties fronting [Ohio] State Route 267, just a bit south of where the present roadway designated "Old Lincoln Highway" intersects State Route 278.

Other information has been used to identify the concrete arch bridge which appears in the 1921 and 1924 Official Guides. Bridge plans from the county office seem to confirm that the bridge replaced the so-called Brown's Bridge in Madison Township. Jim has cleverly titled reports of his explorations here as "The Bridges of Madison Township."

- *Buckeye Ramblings*
Newsletter of the Ohio LHA.
