Well-digger Weir worked frantically to slow the flow and one night sneaked out of town — presumably to purchase more supplies. He was never seen in Belle Plaine again.

Fourteen months later the well — now known as “Jumbo” — was brought under control, helped by advice from experts as far away as Chicago, but mostly by the hard work of local resident George Palmer. Palmer, with 300 feet of pipe, 40 carloads of stone, 130 barrels of cement and large quantities of sand and clay stemmed the flow. The town’s $175 initial investment swelled by many thousands of dollars before the well was finally controlled.

The location of the old well is marked today with a brass plate on a modest boulder on the corner of 8th Street and 8th Avenue in Belle Plaine. The “8th Wonder of the World” is now quiet at 8th and 8th.

Where did Weir go? Years later, he was contracted to dig a well in Cherokee, Iowa. It was customary at the time for a well-digger to drink the ceremonial first cup of water to prove the well’s quality. Weir honored the tradition, contracted typhoid fever and died. Back then, the doctor called it “well digger’s disease.”

Website Spotlight

Our first website in the spotlight belongs to long-time Lincoln Highway advocate and author of the book that helped start it all (over again), Drake Hokanson.

Visitors to www.drakehokanson.com can view his stunning black-and-white photographs as well as publications going back to 1988 when Drake published The Lincoln Highway. Drake’s photos are available for purchase, as are his books. The professional and easy-to-navigate site also discusses the art of photography and you can learn about upcoming photo exhibits.

Our second website offers a break from seeing page after page of “franchise” hotels on Orbitz and Travelocity. As the www.MotelGuide.com website states, “It is our sincere desire to provide this guide as a service to motels and the traveling public for your travel experience.”

From the Timber Motel in Clinton to the Starlite in Council Bluffs, MotelGuide.com is "the only motel guide on the web for..."
I read with interest Van and Bev Becker's column in the Winter issue, and am glad to hear that someone is fielding questions about automobiles manufactured in towns along the Lincoln Highway. That reaffirms my belief that there is an interest in the subject. I am writing a book about the history of the industry in Iowa and have so far chronicled over 90 automotive efforts. I marched across the state and I continue to uncover nuggets of auto industry gold. I'll comment on the automobiles cited by the Beckers and add my own.

Clinton’s Lamb, Marshalltown's Marshalltown and Boone’s Sunderlin all fall into the "dreamer's" category. Despite the best intentions, well intentions anyway, there is no evidence that any of these enterprises ever produced a single car.

Council Bluff’s Keys is listed in the Standard Catalog of American Cars 1805-1942 but the Public Library could find no reference to the production of the two “prototypes.” The good people at the Library did come up with information about Mr. L.P. Madsen and his "homemade" vehicles, although a man named M. Wollman should share in the credit. Very early automobiles often absorbed the name of their maker instead of a conventional "brand." Actually the machines were never intended for a mass market. They were merely a sideline, with the machines often sold to acquaintances of the manufacturer, "reckless people" as Wollman called them, and right there in Council Bluffs.

Madsen was a blacksmith and Wollman a jeweler. It is recounted that there existed four cars in Council Bluffs in 1901, "Kiki" Madsen and Mr. Wollman built all of them. Later, Madsen became a successful automobile dealer selling cars from other manufacturers.

Although the Desert Flyer is sometimes attributed to Council Bluffs, it’s likely that this "one-off" was built in Nevada and then "mom and pop'-owned motels."

We'll See You on the Lincoln Highway!

Ramblings Along the Lincoln Highway.

Minutes of the Winter 2004 Iowa LHA Meeting
- There is evidence that none of these enterprises ever produced a single car.

Submitted by Su Aros, Secretary.

Approximately 30 members and guests attended the January 10 meeting of the Iowa LHA. Coffee, tea, fruit and cookies were provided by our host, Catherine Noble.

Mike Kelly called the meeting to order at 9:30am. Minutes of the October 11, 2003 meeting held in Boone were approved as published in the Winter 2003 ILHA Newsletter.

Joyce Ausberger reported checking account balance of $3,434.70 with $1,200 slated for the LH Walking Tour booklet of Ogden. Savings account balance is $4,261.23. Joyce asked for status of pledges (association and personal) made to the State Center Main Street Brick Project. Paul Walker provided praise for the involvement in Iowa:

Cecil Stewart reported a gain of 10 members in the past 6 months. Thanks to State Center for its membership drive. Approximately 350 newsletters are distributed each quarter.

Paul Walker reported Ausberger’s are organizing a bus tour from Iowa to the 2004 Annual Conference in Chester, WV, June 16-19.

* Copies of the 2004 Nostalgic Event Calendar (available for the LH Walking Tour booklet of Ogden. Savings account balance is $4,261.23). Paul Walker agreed to stay on until the summer 2004 conference.

* Rollin Southwell of the Utah LHA was introduced and reported on plans underway for the 2005 Annual LH Conference in Ely, Nevada.

Minutes of the Winter 2004 Iowa LHA Meeting
- There is evidence that none of these enterprises ever produced a single car.
* April 10 ILHA Meeting: Walker to follow up on ILHA presentation by Charlie Kuester, postponed to Spring IDOT Meeting in Ames.

* October 9 meeting in Des Moines will be hosted by Bob Stinson, and will include a tour of Des Moines-area Jefferson Highway road and sites.

Mike Kelly to follow up on the joint Illinois/Iowa meeting in the Summer of 2004 as noted in the IL newsletter.

Rural Heritage Center – State Center.

Noble asked the ILHA members to keep an eye out for a new project underway in the center when restoration is complete. Center’s goal is as regional resource for visitor information on area tourist sites. Donna Sampson, Main Street Project director, was introduced to the group.

There is one auto you can actually see. In 1904 three examples of Cedar Rapids’ Maxen Electric were built by Roy McCartney. One was restored by Jerry and Jeanne Newport in the 1970s and donated by its owner, Dave Newport, to the Cedar Rapids History Center, where it resides today at 615 First Avenue SE.

* Jeff Benson to draft letter for ILHA review regarding preservation of the enhancement funds (which have benefited many LH projects) in the Federal Transportation bill.

* A draft report of the NPS Study has not yet been released. Benson working with a national committee. Historic significance of the LH needs to be re-emphasized with Iowa legislation (Governor Vilsack was raised on the LH in PA). State Senator Daryl Beall from Ft. Dodge is on the Iowa Transportation board and is a member of the LH.

* Benson, Noble and Kuester will re-visit the Scenic Byway application process. Ten years have passed since Ausbergers tried for this designation. ILHA learned that information in their application efforts and received the designation.

LHA Websites

* Walker has responsibility for keeping ILHA Websites updated. All newsletters need to be uploaded as well as updating the list of ILHA officers and County Consuls.

* The national website needs updating as well. Under ‘News’, the 2003 Indiana Conference is the highlight! Executive Committee and Board of Director info needs updating.

Fisher Monument Project.

Southwell reported that LH-initiator Carl Fisher gave $25,000 to the State of Utah to complete state’s LH. In return, State would rename Johnson Pass to Fisher Pass and build a monument, which never happened. Bureau of Land Management will donate land on which to build the monument.

Southwell estimates $20,000 to build the monument and has organized committee, has written to individuals and companies with personal or historic interest in Fisher and the LH requesting funding.

Motion made and carried that ILHA would contribute $500 toward monument and challenge all state associations to pledge equal amount.

I am honored to serve as the new Clinton County Consul. Walker to contact national treasurer Jess Peterser to formalize grant escrow account, and promote the challenge
nationwide.

**Reed/Niland’s Corner Project**

* Niland’s Café ribbon cutting was held on December 22, 2003. Café open Tuesdays through Sundays with capacity for 60. Copy of menu was provided by Joe Harper to all.

* Reed’s Station restoration complete. I was chairman of the project in the Spring.

* Harper reported that the committee is considering Grand Opening coinciding with Colo Crossroads Festival in July.

**County Consul Reports**

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**Clinton:** LaFollette unable to attend meeting.

**Linm:** Van Becker reported that LH is getting good press in Old Car Weekly. Fate still unknown regarding the LH (now Holland) Orchard. Mortgage on LH in Clinton Co. Hunt for a new owner retired; LH marker is in basement of that building. Tall Corn Historians brochure still not available but will include Bev’s input on the importance of the seedling mile that was replaced in Linn Co.

**Benton:** Ron Preston reported that the building of the Belle Plaine museum is underway with completion scheduled for the end of July. Hwy. 131 into Belle Plaine has been renamed B40. I have newly reported Youngville is closed for the winter. Need more volunteers to increase hours when it reopens in the spring.

**Tama:** Ron Cory reported that the 25th Annual Tama LH Bridge Festival will take place May 14/15. Maintenance of the bridge and park area is in its 17th year. He solicited for vintage car to be designated as “LH car” for parade. Work continues on the King Tower cabin interior. Eight banners line roads into Tama.

**Marshall:** Noble reports Rose Festival is scheduled for June 18-20 in State Center. Would like a vintage car in Tama festival for Rose Festival. ILHA will have membership sign-up table at the festival. ILHA new member sign-up effort held in conjunction with the Nevada LH Days was very successful as evident by new members reported in newsletter. Marshalltown C&VB is working on a Marshalltown to Boone tour.

**Story:** Benson reported Tom Richards striving to make 2004 Nevada LH Days more LH-oriented. LH exhibit at Ames Public Library will be up through January 18. Ames has funded brochure on the LH and how it changed Ames. Jeff to give LH lecture on January 17 in the Ames Library. Full-page article on LH was published in Ames paper in December. LH Artists Studio Tour scheduled for October 16/17 artists pay $150 sign-up fee, partly used to print promotional brochures for LH tour with side trips to artists’ studios. LH display sites will be planned along the tour, complete with map packs, membership info and LH items for sale. Sites also available for artists who don’t want visitors to their studios. Sponsorships will be available to local businesses. Jeff asked for contact from each tour city: State Center: Noble and Catherine and Sampson; Colo: Scott; Ames: Benson; Boone: John Fitzsimmons or Barb & Joe Moore; Ordien: Joyce to find contact.

**Boone:** John Fitzsimmons saw genuine interest in the LH after weekend at Scenic Valley RR where LH brochures have been gobbled up. John suggested that an insert to the brochures list paved and gravel “hot spots” on the LH.

**Greene:** Bob Owens is working on the preservation of the old Deep Rock station on the east edge of Jefferson. County supervisors are involved and supporting this effort. Ralph Miller, owner and leading the restoration of the “old” Camp Cozy south of Grand Junction on old LH, introduced.

**Carroll:** Norma Berns reports Wittrock’s showroom and canopied station still for sale. New curator at the Carroll Co. Historical museum has asked for a LH display. Norma and Kollin spent 3 days doing research along Hwy. 6 (River to River Road) which was one of two routes considered for LH through IA.
Zoning Board. I applied for a Riverboat Development Grant for $7500 to fund Dixon’s sesquicentennial and am happy to report that we received it! The city kicked in $2500 for a total of $10,000. Many folks in town didn’t think this was possible, but now Dixon will be able to hold a big celebration on June 19, 2004.

With my experience in preservation and special events and leading the Route 66 Association for the past 4 ½ years, I hope to bring valuable experience to the Lincoln Highway Association. I will work hard in Clinton County and throughout Iowa for the common good of the Lincoln, for its glorious past and its prosperous future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to serve as Clinton County Consul. I look forward to meeting all of you soon.

—Su Ellen Aros, Secretary

**From the President’s Corner.**

by Mike Kelly, ILHA President

The work done to preserve Lincoln Highway continues. Crawford: no report. Harrison: Dedication of the Lincoln Way in Woodbine was held on October 27, 2003 with approx. 100 people attending. Elaine Ehler reported that the last gas station in the county is located in Carlinville. It will save the canopied (“eyebrow”) gas station there. Elaine hopes to restore the old service station building. Pottawattamie: Brett Ford’s written report stated that the Honey Creek project is moving forward. $26K bid received for deck construction and two interpretive site panels. Thanks to those who provided input for funding ideas.

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Lunch was served at Bailey’s Pizza, followed by a tour of Watson’s Grocery Store. Original shelving, bins, cash register, display cases, coolers, lights, and other valuable items make this a “must see” for visitors. Watson’s is open from May to September on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Restoration has begun on 104 Main Street which will become the Rural Heritage Center, with displays planned for the LH as well as Barn Restorer’s organization. Last, the group stopped at Shepler’s Barber Shop, left as is by its previous owner – as if he closed one day at 5 p.m. and never returned.

Respectfully submitted,

Su Aros, Secretary

**Springtime Means Tama Bridge Festival Time**

by Ron Cory, Tama County Consul

The 25th Annual Lincoln Highway Bridge Festival is scheduled for Friday evening activities include the Bill I is kicked off with a 5K run at 8:00 a.m. do Friday evening activities include the Bill I is kicked off with a 5K run at 8:00 a.m. do. The bigger-than-ever parade starts at 10 Montezuma High School Band, the Ississ participated. A beef barbeque follows the parade and presented directly in front of the Tama C children’s show from Estes Park, Colorado; his brothers who have performed in Nashville. Especially for kids will be the popular $2 food court will be in operation both Frida's.

Join us for the celebration under the Lincoln High Bridge. Information contact Ron Cory at 641-484-2761.

Respectfully submitted,

Ron Cory, Tama County Consul

**RESCHEDULED**

Due to a conflict with Dixon’s Sesquicentennial, the 20th Annual Tama Bridge Festival (formerly known as the Tama County Sesquicentennial Bridge Festival) has been rescheduled from September 27/28 to October 25/26. This is the biggest event in town, featuring a huge parade, children’s activities, and a beef barbeque. Don’t miss it!
The primary focus of this organization is The Lincoln Highway. It is in our best interest to promote all of the historic routes in the state. While The Lincoln is our most recognized and best documented historic highway, the color-coded IDOT map of Iowa's "registered" highway routes shows there are 63 others that literally crisscross the state. This map, which is part of the historic display at Niland's Café, helps visitors from across the state connect their communities with the Lincoln Highway corridor.

Speaking of other highways, I'd like to welcome Jeff LaFollette, our new Clinton County Consul. Jeff is also President of the Route 66 Association of Illinois. There has always been a bit of friendly competition between the routes. For example, they had a television series named for them but we had a very memorable evening when George Preston stole the show from Johnny Carson. Not only do people still talk about that evening, some actually mimic his mannerisms in recalling the legendary show. Enough of the differences—this looks like an opportunity to celebrate our similarities.

Finally we wish the best to Ron Corey who will continue as an active member but will be stepping down as Consul. Time and space do not permit me to adequately thank Ron for all that he has done for Iowa LHA. We look forward to the new opportunities that will be done for Iowa LHA.

Marshall County Consul Catherine Noble reports that on May 14th, State Center Main Street will host a celebration for the restoration of the structure at 104 W. Main. This is the dilapidated building next door to famous Watsons Grocery on the Lincoln Highway in State Center.

Van & Bev Becker
IowaLHA@McLeodUSA.net

Benton County
Amie Schoonover (319) 477-6191

Tama County
Ron Cory (515) 484-2361

Marshall County
Catherine Noble (641) 483-3002

Story County
Margaret Elbert (515) 233-1445

Boone County
John Fitzsimmons (515) 432-3907

Greene County
Bob Owens (515) 386-3419

Carroll County
Joy Fitzsimmons (712) 792-5880

Crawford County
Norma J. Berns (712) 679-2779

Pottawattamie County
Brett Ford (712) 545-3283

OFFICE VOLUNTEERS

Membership Coordinator
Cecil Stewart

Newsletter Editor
Paul Walker

President
Noble Sojourner

Secretary
LeRoy Hansen

Rural Heritage Center Celebrates Grand Opening.
From 5 to 10 p.m. there will be tours of the building, musical entertainment, and the State Center Farmers’ Market. Everyone is welcome. For more information, contact Jeff Merrill at 641-485-3959.

Have Spare Tire, Will Travel

By Van & Bev Becker

Let's look back six months to our Autumn 2003 column in which we referred to a boathouse north of Detroit, Michigan on Lake St. Charles, a small lake connecting Great Lakes Huron and Erie.

The boathouse had belonged to first LHA President Henry Joy who was also President
of the Packard Motor Company. This boathouse was later donated by the widow of Henry Joy to what is now the Gross Pointe Sailing Club; a generous gift indeed. As time passed, the building aged and the trendy City of Gross Pointe raised taxes. Recently I spoke with a member of the sailing club’s Grounds Committee and unfortunately, Henry Joy’s beloved boathouse will probably be torn down before year’s end. They blame the tax situation.

In the same article, I wrote of young Abe Lincoln’s involvement in a prominent Davenport/Rock Island lawsuit. In his legal capacity as a railroad president, James F. Joy, Henry Joy’s father, was the first to enlist and hire Abe Lincoln in legal work for the railroads.

On May 6, 1856, the new side-wheel steamer, *Effie Afton*, veered to the left (Iowa side) and struck the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad bridge, the first railroad bridge that crossed the Mississippi River at Davenport/Rock Island. Research reveals that after the collision, the steamer stalled and the river wedged the boat in below the bridge decking, breaking the smokestacks and showering both bridge and boat with sparks. Newspaper accounts use the word “spectacular” to describe the resulting conflagration. The passengers escaped, but the livestock aboard were destroyed. In the end, the draw span was inoperable, the bridge was impassable and the *Effie Afton* was a charred sunken hull.

The boat owners sued the railroad/bridge company, claiming the bridge was a hazard to navigation. Intervening was a young Mr. Lincoln who reviewed the logbook of a local ferryboat that had been struck earlier in the day by the *Effie Afton* as it departed Rock Island for St. Paul. Lincoln walked to the damaged center draw span of the bridge, asked a few questions about the river’s current, looked over the edge at the water, then nodded and left the bridge. Many years later, the U.S. Supreme Court finally settled the trial in favor of the railroad and bridge company.
The original railroad bridge was repaired and replacement bridges were constructed in 1865, 1872 and 1896. The 1896 bridge steel bridge is still in use today.

The *Effie Afton* never sailed again. Years later, a dredging crew discovered the ship’s bell, which can be seen today on display in the Rock Island Arsenal Museum.

But I digress.

Bumping along the Lincoln Highway into the town of Belle Plaine, an early traveler could visit the site of the Jumbo Well, “Eighth Wonder of the World!” The well is celebrated each September by townsfolk with a carnival and 3-day celebration named - what else? - Jumbo Well Days.

Back in the summer of 1886, the town of Belle Plaine contracted for an artesian well for water and fire protection. The well-digger, William Weir, was paid $175 to dig it. Why the site south of the railroad station was selected is unknown other than it was in the middle of the street.

The Weir family’s cup ranneth over. The Belle Plaine artesian well erupted into a monster, spewing more than 3,000 gallons of water per minute into the street.

This made the news, not just in Belle Plaine, but coast-to-coast and beyond. A Paris, France, newspaper carried a photo with the story. The (doctored) Paris photo showed the main downtown street flooded with 2-3 feet of water. The water threatened homes.
and businesses.