

"Brief History of the Lincoln Highway," 2019

HISTORIC AUTO TRAILS

HISTORY OF THE INTERSTATE TRAIL, JEFFERSON HIGHWAY AND JEFFERSON ASSOCIATION

Interstate Trail: Precursor to the Jefferson Highway

Before the Jefferson Highway Association's dream of connecting the nation from north to south was realized, an Iowa road association, known as the Interstate Trail Association, organized a route that connected Des Moines and Kansas City. Four years after the Interstate Trail Association had begun work on their route, the Jefferson Highway Association flooded the Missouri Valley with publicity and support for the Jefferson Highway. Many of the founding members of the Interstate Trail later became integral figures in the development of the Jefferson Highway, while the path of Interstate Trail itself became part of the Jefferson Highway.

On March 14, 1911, the Des Moines-Kansas City-St. Joseph Interstate Trail Association was organized in Lamoni, Iowa, and the route officially located, and ordered marked by the association who received assistance from automobile clubs, commercial organizations, farmers, and other citizens in the cities, towns and countryside traversed by the trail.

The organizational meeting was called by W.A. Hopkins, banker and citizen of Lamoni. The bylaws of the Interstate Trail Association, which were subsequently established on March 11, 1913, indicated the highway route was a direct route between Fort Des Moines and Fort Leavenworth, making it a practical military road for the transportation of troops and ". . . a valuable aid in developing the resources of the counties traversed, a better means of social and business communication, and a lasting benefit to the communities through which it passes. . ."

On Jan. 5, 1915, a meeting of the association was held at Mason City, at which time the original Interstate Trail was extended north from Des Moines through Nevada, Iowa Falls, Mason City, and Northwood, Iowa, and Albert Lea, Owatonna, Faribault, and Northfield to St. Paul, Minn., and the name of the route was changed to the St. Paul-Des Moines-St. Joseph-Kansas City Interstate Trail.

Hugh H. Shepard of Mason City called and organized the January 1915 meeting, and was selected as general manager of the northern division of the Interstate Trail from Des Moines to St. Paul. He was responsible for organizing the marking of the 271-mile trail section during the summer of 1915.

Jefferson Highway Association is Organized

The Jefferson Highway and formation of the Jefferson Highway Association was the brainchild of businessman and political activist Edwin Thomas (E.T.) Meredith of Des Moines. Largely inspired by the Lincoln Highway, Meredith and his colleagues sought to create a sister route to the Lincoln Highway with the Jefferson Highway. Meredith was an instrumental good roads promoter for both Iowa and the nation, and he was pivotal in the establishment of the Jefferson Highway as president of the Jefferson Highway Association and later as vice president of the Iowa Good Roads Association.

Edwin Thomas Meredith

Edwin Thomas Meredith was born at Avoca, Iowa, Dec. 23, 1876, the eldest of seven children of Thomas Oliver and Minerva J. (Marsh) Meredith. For several years, his father was a farm implement dealer at Avoca.

In 1892 "Ed" was sent to Des Moines to live with his grandfather while attending Highland Park College (later Drake University). His grandfather, a prosperous buyer and seller of land, was the chief financial sponsor of a weekly reform newspaper, the Farmers' Tribune, considered to be a major organ of the People's or Populist Party in Iowa. It was in the offices of this small paper that Edwin T. Meredith began his great publishing career.

In the spring of 1894, Meredith became the general manager of his grandfather's paper. In 1896, at age 18, he became the owner and editor of what had become an ailing Farmers' Tribune. That year he was also elected secretary of the State Central Committee of the People's Party.

Meredith gradually transformed the Farmers' Tribune into a statewide farm paper and increased the circulation to about 30,000.

In October 1902, Meredith began publication of a new monthly magazine designed expressly for the farmers of the agriculturally rich Midwest - Successful Farming. By 1908, over 100,000 farm families subscribed to the publication.

Meredith gave force to a publishing concept now called "service journalism." Meredith was aware of publishing trends, but he never strayed from the success formula that he discovered and was later was inducted into the Advertising Hall of Fame.

With the rapid growth of Successful Farming came nationwide recognition for its publisher, progressive Democrat concerned about political reforms affecting the lives of farmers and rural society.

Meredith was immersed in the political structures of Iowa from the mid-1880s through the late 1920s. He made two unsuccessful political bids as a Democratic candidate in Iowa, in 1914 for U.S. Senate and 1916 for governor.

Despite his defeats, Meredith's service on behalf of agriculture and the Democratic Party did not go unnoticed during President Wilson's second term. The president appointed Meredith to the American Labor Mission, which visited England and France in 1918, and the Treasury Department's Advisory Committee on Excess Profits. Meredith received his greatest honor when, in the closing months of his administration, President Wilson named him Secretary of Agriculture (1920-21).

Following his term as Secretary, Meredith once again devoted his energies to publishing. He purchased another farm journal, the Dairy Farmer, which he incorporated into Successful Farming.

In October 1922 the first copies of yet another publication, Fruit, Garden and Home was published in Des Moines. Renamed Better Homes and Gardens in 1924, this magazine soon became, and remains, one of the nation's major publications in terms of circulation and advertising revenue.

Even with the increased demands on his time created by the new publications, Meredith never lost touch with the Iowa and national political and business scenes. Meredith served as the director of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce from 1915-19 and once again 1923-28.

Meredith was hospitalized in 1928 at the Johns Hopkins hospital in Baltimore with complications resulting from high blood pressure. In April he entered a period of convalescence at his home in Des Moines, but after several weeks of improvement his condition suddenly worsened and he died June 17, 1928.

Since the Meredith Corporation was founded, it has grown to employ more than 3,300 people throughout the country, with its corporate headquarters still located in Des Moines, Iowa.

Jefferson Highway

The Jefferson Highway was envisioned by Meredith as the "great north and south highway," and named in honor of Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States, for his role in the 1803 Louisiana Purchase.

The first organizational meeting of the national Jefferson Highway Association was held in New Orleans, Louisiana, Nov. 15 and 16, 1915. This city was intentionally selected because of its link to the Louisiana Purchase and President Jefferson.

The meeting was called by Walter Parker, general manager of the New Orleans Association of Commerce, and presided over by former U.S. Senator Lafayette Young of Des Moines (editor and proprietor of The Des Moines Capital, a rival newspaper that later merged with the Des Moines Register). The convention was expected to attract 50 delegates, but six times that number attended.

Louisiana Purchase

The Louisiana Purchase was the acquisition by the United States of approximately 530 million acres of French territory in 1803. The land purchased contained all of present-day Arkansas, Missouri, Iowa, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota south of Mississippi River, much of North Dakota, nearly all of South Dakota, northeastern New Mexico, northern Texas, the portions of Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado east of the Continental Divide, and Louisiana on both sides of the Mississippi River, including the city of New Orleans. In addition, the Purchase contained small portions of land that would eventually become part of the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. The land included in the purchase comprises approximately 23 percent of the territory of the United States.

New Orleans was an important port for shipping agricultural goods to and from the parts of the United States. Through Pinckney's Treaty signed with Spain on Oct. 27, 1795, American merchants had "right of deposit" in New Orleans, meaning they could use the port to store goods for export. Americans also used this right to transport products such as flour, tobacco, pork, bacon, lard, feathers, cider, butter, and cheese.

In 1798 Spain revoked Pinckney's treaty, which greatly upset Americans. Louisiana remained under Spanish control until a transfer of power to France.

As long as New Orleans was under French control, Americans feared that they could lose their rights of use to New Orleans. So President Thomas Jefferson decided that the best way to assure the U.S. had long-term access to the Mississippi River would be to purchase the city of New Orleans and nearby portions of Louisiana, located east of the river.

Jefferson sent negotiators to France to make the purchase of New Orleans on behalf of the United States. The negotiations with Napoleon did not go well. Originally, he expressed no interest in giving up France's possession of city.

However, Napoleon soon realized that he lacked sufficient military forces in America to protect the land should the United States or Britain decide to take it by force. At the same time, Napoleon's regime and his empire-building efforts were suffering on several international fronts.

Taking these matters into consideration, Napoleon gave notice to his minister of the treasury, Francois de Barbe-Marbois, on April 10, 1803, that he was considering surrendering the Louisiana Territory to the United States.

To the surprise of the United States, on April 11, 1803, Barbe-Marbois offered U.S. negotiator Robert R. Livingston all of the Louisiana Territory, rather than just the city of New Orleans it was seeking. Certain the United States would not accept such a large land offer, Livingston was prepared to spend \$10 million for New Orleans, but was stunned when the entire region was offered for \$15 million. The treaty finalizing the purchase was dated April 30, 1803, and signed May 2, 1803.

France officially turned New Orleans over to the United States Dec. 20, 1803. On March 10, 1804, a formal ceremony was conducted in St. Louis to transfer ownership of the territory from France to the United States.

During this early road-building period, highways or trails were generally organized and marked on a local or statewide basis. Rarely were they interstate or international, making the Jefferson Highway, with its terminal points in two countries and across many states, an anomaly. At its first national meeting, the Jefferson Highway Association was formally organized and the Jefferson Highway's terminal points fixed at Winnipeg, Canada, to the north, and New Orleans, Louisiana, to the south.

Monuments Mark Northern and Southern Terminus

A granite obelisk at St. Charles and Common streets in New Orleans' Central Business District marks the southern terminus of the Jefferson Highway. The monument was erected in 1917 by the Daughters of the American Revolution.

A monument that marks the northern terminus of the Pine to Palm Highway was erected Nov. 12, 1974, by the Royal Trust Company commemorating its 75th anniversary and the city of Winnipeg centennial.

It was at the first meeting that E. T. Meredith was named president of the Jefferson Highway Association and the bylaws of the association were laid out. The next order of business was to decide on the highway's path, which would prove to be an ever-changing and ever-heated battle for the duration of the Jefferson Highway's existence.

Meredith's first thought was to have the Jefferson Highway routed directly through the land acquired during the Louisiana Purchase. He later dismissed that notion as simply "sentimental," not practical or efficient, since the route would have wandered as far west as Texas before returning north.

At the Jefferson Highway Association's first national meeting, there was overwhelming disagreement about the future path of the highway. Without a doubt, the first north to south trans-continental highway would have brought much prosperity to any towns and states through which it passed. Because of this, many states, cities and organizations attended the meeting to plead their case for the route to come to their area.

After two days of debate over the route, the Jefferson Highway Association settled on the "cardinal point" plan proposed by the board of directors. With this plan, the board was able to decide on the cardinal points or major cities, through which the Jefferson Highway must pass. All other decisions about the exact path of the route were to be made at a later date. The cardinal points were established - Winnipeg, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Des Moines, St. Joseph, Kansas City, Joplin, Muskogee, Denison, Shreveport, Alexandria, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans.

Ultimately, debates over the location of the Jefferson Highway would lead to "branch highways" and "scenic loops." These offshoots would spur from the main Jefferson Highway artery and extend to other nearby communities, businesses and states that pleaded for access to highway. On the downside, the branch highways made the Jefferson Highway more confusing for tourists and made matters more difficult for the Jefferson Highway Association. On the upside, however, the branch highways broadened the domain of the Jefferson Highway and appeased the road association supporters in the outlying branch areas.

Iowans were well represented at the Jefferson Highway Association's organizational meeting. Delegates from the Interstate Trail Association were in attendance. They were there specifically for the purpose of furnishing the backbone for the new Jefferson Highway route with the more than 500 miles that group had already organized and marked between St. Paul, Minnesota, and Kansas City, Missouri.

Early Iowa-based organizers of the Interstate Trail Association later became international presidents of the Jefferson Highway Association, including W. A. Hopkins of Lamoni and Hugh H. Shepard of Mason City.

Following its organizational meeting, the delegates were charged with going back to their respective states to undertake the tasks of helping insure that the highway was constructed, marked and advertised.

The first meeting of the Iowa branch of Jefferson Highway Association was held at the Des Moines courthouse Jan. 5, 1915. It was attended by former Senator Young, T.R. Agg and Thomas H. MacDonald. It was reportedly a cold, stormy night and there were 115 people in attendance, including the Good Roads boosters.

One of the attendees, Hugh H. Shepard of Mason City, who later became the international vice president of the association, reported he was "quite discouraged over the apparent failure of the meeting." Senator Young told him to cheer up, because "sometimes the very meritorious projects grow from small beginnings." Young stated that he had been fighting for good roads for 20 years and that he hoped to live long enough to see the State of Iowa covered with a network of roads that could be traveled year round.

On December 10, 1915, Harry Herndon Polk, director of Harry H. Polk & Company of Des Moines and vice president for the Jefferson Highway Association, filed a letter with the Iowa Highway Commission requesting application materials to register the new name of the Interstate Trail, to be known as the Jefferson Highway, extending from New Orleans, Louisiana, to Winnipeg, Canada.

In the letter of application, E.T. Meredith of Des Moines was named as the president of the Jefferson Highway Association and Walter Park of New Orleans secretary.

On Dec. 13, 1915, the Iowa Highway Commission responded to Mr. Polk. The letter referenced the previously established route as the Interstate Trail, and explained that the Jefferson Highway could be registered as the Interstate division of the Jefferson Highway.

On May 23, 1916, E.T. Meredith filed the official Registration of Highway Routes application with the required \$5 fee.

(Note: This was the first occurrence of recorded use of the Jefferson Highway Association's letterhead with the palms logo design amongst the official Iowa Highway Commission documents.)

In the application, the route was defined as about 2,000 miles in length, with its starting point of Winnipeg and terminal point New Orleans. The principal place of business listed for the Jefferson Highway Association was Des Moines, Iowa.

It was also noted on the application that the Jefferson Highway was also to be known as the "From Pine to Palm" and "The Vacation Route of America" route.

On September 26, 1916, the Iowa Highway Commission forwarded to E.T. Meredith the certificate of registration for the Iowa division of the Jefferson Highway.

Jefferson Highway Route Markers

Iowa's route registration application also defined the color combination and design for the route markers, which consisted of a six-inch band of blue above and below a 12-inch band of white, and the letters "J" and "H" in monogram (combined J and H) on the band of white.

The Jefferson Highway Association published the "System of Pole Marking for Guiding the Traveler," which was used by members of the organization to properly mark the route in accordance with the international rules. At one point during the route's history, the Jefferson Highway Association claimed there were 2,000 metal signs and over 20,000 pole markers and monograms blazing the route.

In addition to metal signs and poles, monogrammed concrete markers were also constructed, like the one in the photo taken by Iowa Department of Transportation employee Hank Zaletel of a fence row route marker located one mile north of Colo on U.S. 65.

Route Location in Iowa

The Jefferson Highway crossed these counties in Iowa: Decatur, Clark, Warren, Polk, Story, Hardin, Franklin, Cerro Gordo, and Worth.

The official index of cities along the route included: Northwood, Kensett and Manly in Worth County; Freeman, Mason City and Rockwell in Cerro Gordo County; Sheffield, Chapin and Hampton in Franklin County; Iowa Falls and Hubbard in Hardin County; Zearing, Colo, Nevada and Cambridge in Story County; Ankeny and Des Moines in Polk County; Somerset, Indianola, Cool, and Medora in Warren County; Liberty, Osceola, Weldon, and Van Wert in Clarke County; and Leon, Davis City and Lamoni in Decatur County.

A portion of a 1917 map published by the Kenyon Company map shows the route as it traversed Iowa.

Jefferson Highway Route Name and Mark is Contested

On December 6, 1916, W.A. Hopkins, vice president of the Jefferson Highway Association and president of the State Savings Bank of Lamoni, sent a letter to Thomas H.

MacDonald, chief highway engineer for the Iowa Highway Commission. In the letter Hopkins asked MacDonald to check on the status of the registration of the Jefferson Highway in Iowa in light of what had allegedly become a contest over road naming rights.

Hopkins said there was a road called the Blue J Route of the Jefferson Highway that went from Kansas City, by Chillicothe, Chariton, Iowa to Indianola to Des Moines. Col. Harry W. Graham of Chillicothe, Missouri, was identified as the president of that road association. Hopkins stated that the Blue J Route Association had attended the Jefferson Highway Association's organizational meeting in New Orleans and had made an unsuccessful attempt to get the Jefferson Highway located on their route. Following the New Orleans meeting, the Blue J Route Association had allegedly been advertising themselves as part of the Jefferson Highway, despite their failed attempt.

The Blue J Route Association had also stated in their promotional materials that they were organized in New Orleans on November 16, 1915, registered Jan. 12, 1916, and tied to the Jefferson Highway Association under the leadership of President E. T. Meredith.

Their promotional materials carried the slogan, "Follow the blue "J" marker, Direct as the Blue Jay flies, the Short Way, Jefferson Highway."

On December 20, 1916, in response to Hopkins letter, MacDonald reassured Hopkins that the Jefferson Highway was registered to the Jefferson Highway Association. In addition, the highway's mark and name were protected under the authority of the Iowa Act.

On December 29, 1916, H.W. Raymond, secretary of the Chariton Commercial Club, a group organized to promote the welfare of Chariton and Lucas County, filed a highway registration application for the "Jefferson Highway in Contest Association, Iowa Division." In a subsequent letter, the Jefferson Highway in Contest route was described as running from Kansas City to Des Moines, and the route's marker a blue "J" on a white background with a red band at the bottom.

The complete route description of the Jefferson Highway in Contest (Blue J Highway) and a route marker sample was included in the March 1, 1916, registration of trademark with the State of Missouri. An original copy of the application and sample mark is housed in the Iowa Department of Transportation's library.

In a letter dated January 18, 1917, the Jefferson Highway Association filed a protest with the Iowa State Highway Commission against the registration of the Jefferson Highway in Contest as a decided infringement upon their rights, and as tending to confuse the traveling public. Obviously angered by the move, the letter also stated, "if it becomes necessary we could have a storm of protest against the registration of the Jefferson Highway in Contest from the south to the north boundary of the state, or if necessary, from New Orleans to Winnipeg as there are thousands of people who are taking a vital interest in the Jefferson Highway..."

A number of prominent individuals were among officers of the Jefferson Highway Association in 1917, including: E. T. Meredith of Des Moines, past president and life member of the board of directors; W. A. Hopkins of Lamoni, vice-president; F.J. Wright of Des Moines, treasurer; J. D. Clarkson of Des Moines, general manager; and the following state officials H. H. Polk of Des Moines, vice president; and directors James F. Harvey of Leon, H. H. Shepard of Mason City, and E. C. Harlan of Indianola.

On February 14, 1917, the Iowa Highway Commission issued a letter to Raymond with the Chariton Commercial Club informing him that the registration of the Jefferson Highway in Contest application was denied based on a decision that it would infringe on the right of the Jefferson Highway Association. The group was offered the opportunity to submit another application using a name that would not conflict with that of another association, proposing that the Blue J Trail would be a "very good name under which to register."

Adding to the controversy over naming rights, in April 1917 the Blue J Highway Association erected a sign at its junction with the Jefferson Highway in Warren County that read "Jefferson Highway." Angered, the Jefferson Highway Association quickly fired off another letter to the Iowa Highway Commission.

Following an investigation by the Iowa Highway Commission into the sign's placement, Raymond wrote a letter to the commission dated April 7, 1917, stating that the sign was not erected by the Iowa-based club of the Blue J Highway Association.

It "was placed there by the Missouri men, while marking the route to Des Moines and boosting Excelsior Springs." Raymond said that as soon as the weather permitted, they would send out a marking crew to remark the sign so that it conformed to the authorized marking of their association.

Future of the Jefferson Highway Association Defined

On January 20, 1925, the Jefferson Highway Association held its 10th annual meeting in New Orleans. This event also marked the completion of the Jefferson Highway through the state of Louisiana, the first state to complete a road along the route. At the time, Minnesota was a distant second.

One of the major items on the agenda of this meeting was a discussion regarding whether the Jefferson Highway Association still filled an important community need that warranted retention

of a separate road organization. This discussion was taking place in recognition that the state highway commissions had been organized, states were marking their highways and improvements to the Jefferson Highway were being made in a manner far beyond the expectations of the organizers.

Prior to the meeting, in a letter dated January 12, 1925, to Fred R. White, chief highway engineer with the Iowa State Highway Commission, Hugh Shepard, international vice-president of the Jefferson Highway Association, sought White's opinion regarding the future of the association. Shepard relayed the fact that the work of the Jefferson Highway Association had "been of considerable importance during the last decade, and that we have really been of some assistance to the good roads improvement in the Mississippi Valley."

White responded to Shepard's letter stating, "Undoubtedly the Jefferson Highway Association and particularly those people connected with it have done an immense amount of good for the development of our highways. My feeling is that the association should be continued. I feel that there is room for such an association and for such a road, and then even though the states do adopt a standard number for such road and mark it in a uniform manner with the official state marker, it would be well to continue the Jefferson Highway marking and the Jefferson Highway organization."

Construction of the Highway Through Iowa

The Jefferson Highway was graded, graveled and paved over a number of years, and in different phases. Records housed in the Iowa Department of Transportation's library describe annual progress made in constructing and surfacing (gravel or paving) this route in each county during the early 1920s.

By January 13, 1922, Iowa State Highway Commission Maintenance Engineer W. H. Root was reporting that primary road #1, which corresponded very closely to the Jefferson Highway, was surfaced either with gravel or paving from the north Warren County line south to Des Moines to the Minnesota state line. It was also put to permanent grade from this same point south to the Missouri state line, with the exception of about eight miles north of Leon and a few miles south of Lamoni.

Iowa's first federal-aid highway project --- Project No. 1--- also involved paving of a section of the Jefferson Highway between Mason City and Clear Lake. This route section was promoted as the highway to the "delightful summer resort, Clear Lake, only 10 miles away."

By January 14, 1925, the Iowa State Highway Commission was reporting that the Jefferson Highway was entirely built to finished grade or under contract for building to finished grade, except for a very short section (less than one mile) at the north edge of Warren County. The route had been paved across Polk County and graveled from the north line of Polk County to the Minnesota state line. About 90 miles extending from the south line of Polk County to the Missouri state line had not been surfaced with either pavement or gravel.

Progress on completing the Jefferson Highway was also being made nationally at this time. An April 13, 1925, letter from the Jefferson Highway Association to Fred R. White of the Highway Commission indicated that the highway was completed through Louisiana; and by the end of the season, the graveling would be completed in northern Minnesota and Manitoba, Canada. So it would be possible to drive 835 miles from Des Moines, Iowa, to Winnipeg, Manitoba, over a completely graveled or paved roadway.

The Jefferson Highway Association's April 13, 1925, letter also referenced the fact that because the Jefferson Highway was significant militarily within the Mississippi Valley, it had been designated the "North and South Gold Star Highway" in Iowa.

Correspondence from the Highway Commission dated June 6, 1925, also referenced the cost to pave the Jefferson Highway south of Des Moines to the Missouri border would be \$22,000 per mile or less.

On December 29, 1925, Iowa State Highway Commission Chief Engineer Fred White wrote a letter to the Jefferson Highway Association. The letter was issued in response to that organization's inquiry regarding the possible condition of the Jefferson Highway in January 1926, when members of their group intended to cross the state on their way to the association's annual meeting in St. Joseph, Missouri. (In January 1926, the national headquarters of the Jefferson Highway Association was the Seventh Floor, Carby Building, St. Joseph, Missouri.)

In reply, White said,

"...anyone who attempts, in January, to make a long drive over any Iowa road is taking a big chance, for the reason that January is the season of snows and snows are likely to come at any time. The highway may be in perfect condition one day and the next day it may be hopelessly snowbound. We are using every effort to keep the highways in this state, such as the Jefferson, free from snow so that it can be traveled throughout the winter. However, if a bad snow should come, say a day or two before these people should expect to drive across the state, they might find it utterly impossible to get across. So far this winter we have had a great deal of snow in this state and our roads have frequently been blockaded by snow for a short time.

In addition to the snow menace, there remains the fact that the Jefferson Highway from a few miles south of Des Moines to the Missouri state line is not surfaced with either pavement or gravel. It is possible that at the time they wish to make this trip that the road would be frozen over and in good smooth condition so that they could get over it without inconvenience. On the other hand, if a thaw should come a few days before they take this trip, they might find the road exceedingly slippery, or they might find it frozen up so rough that they could not get over it.

Personally, regardless of whether the roads were surfaced or not, I would not undertake a drive at this season of the year from Winnipeg, Canada, to St. Joseph, Missouri."

Bonding For Completion

In a special session of the Iowa legislature in March 1928, the General Assembly voted to submit a constitutional amendment to the voters of the state at the general election to be held in November of that year that provided for a \$100-million bond issue that would complete the paving of the principal primary roads of the state and gravel the less important highways. If the bond issue carried, it was expected to complete the paving of the Jefferson Highway across Iowa by the end of 1929. The measure did not receive the support of the Iowa Highway Commission, and failed.

Jefferson Highway in Iowa Completed

A four-foot high concrete monolith with a metal plaque was unveiled for the dedication of completion of the highway sections in Iowa and Minnesota. Completion of the route was defined as graded and graveled. Located at the Minnesota/Iowa state line on U.S. 65, the monument reads, "This marker dedicated October 30, 1930, by Governor Theodore C. Christianson of Minnesota and Governor John Hamill of Iowa, commemorates the completion of the Jefferson Highway across their states."

Route is Numbered and Later Renumbered

The Jefferson Highway route name was abandoned in July 1, 1920, when Iowa's Primary Road numbering system was adopted and all highway/trail names were assigned a highway number. The Jefferson Highway route was numbered Iowa 1. The northern terminus of the route was the Minnesota state line north of Northwood and southern terminus the Missouri state line south of Lamoni.

On February 25, 1924, Iowa 1 was straightened between Sheffield and Hampton. The old alignment followed what is now Franklin County Road S-43.

The Iowa 1 route number was decommissioned October 16, 1926, and the original route incorporated into two new U.S. route segments --- U.S. 65 and U.S. 69 --- when the U.S. route numbering system was adopted. (Note: Iowa 1 was later recommissioned and used for a route from Brighton in Washington County to just south of Anamosa in Jones County.)

Today, U.S. 65 extends from the Minnesota state line north of Northwood, south to the Missouri state line at Lineville. At the time of designation in 1926, the segments from Mason City to the Cerro Gordo/Franklin County line and through Polk County were paved. The work paving U.S. 65 was not completed until 1968, when the segment from U.S. 69/Iowa 349 south of Indianola to Iowa 205 was paved.

U.S. 69 extends the Minnesota state line state line near Emmons, Minn., to the Missouri state line near Lamoni. All of U.S. 69 was unpaved at the time of designation in 1926, but it was entirely paved by the end of 1929.

Route Safety

In response to a June 1925 front page article published in the Des Moines Register about six motor vehicle fatalities occurring along the Jefferson Highway, the Jefferson Highway Association wrote a letter (dated June 23, 1925) to Iowa State Highway Commission Highway Engineer Fred White recommending that Iowa install safety signs on the roadway similar to those being installed in Minnesota, which read "loose gravel," "soft shoulders," "narrow road" or "sharp curve."

Jefferson Highway Association International President Hugh Shepard wrote, "It is my belief that a number of lives will be saved on the Iowa highways, if a similar system of warning signs is adopted in the State of Iowa, and I would recommend this to you for your careful consideration and prompt attention, particularly on the Jefferson Highway and other roads where the traffic is heavy."

In the early 1920s, representatives from Wisconsin, Minnesota and Indiana toured several states, including Iowa, with the intent of developing a basis for uniform signs and road markings. The group reported its findings to the Mississippi Valley Association of Highway Departments in 1932. Their efforts resulted in standards for sign shapes and messages, some of which are still in use today and part of the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices adopted for use by all states.

1928 U.S. Good Roads Association Address

An address was given by Hugh H. Shepard, Mason City, Iowa, Life Director and Past International President of the Jefferson Highway Association, before the 16th Annual Convention of the United States Good Roads Association at Des Moines on May 30, 1928. The remarks were published in the October 1928, *Annals of Iowa, A Historical Quarterly*, published by the Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa.

The address outlines much of the history of the Jefferson Highway Association and how it contributed to the building of the good roads in Iowa and across the nation, assisted travelers through the marking of the route and fostered international relations through its connection to Canada.

Social Runs

As automobile ownership became more common, automobile associations, such as the Jefferson Highway Association, formed to promote automobile use and the needs of drivers for good roads.

These associations organized and hosted sociability runs/tours, which were primarily taken to bring distant communities closer together. They also afforded auto owners an opportunity to drive to see what at that time were considered "novel" places.

Two notable social runs traversed the approximately 2,300-mile distance of the Jefferson Highway. The first occurred in July 1919. Participants traveled from New Orleans north to Winnipeg, Canada. The tour was organized by J. D. Clarkson, the general manager of the

Jefferson Highway Association, and was called the "Palm to Pine Sociability Run" in honor of the designated starting and finishing points of the run.

The Palm to Pine Sociability Run got underway July 1, 1919. The touring party was headed by J. D. Clarkson and his wife. Forty-two people started out in New Orleans, including Governor of Louisiana R. G. Pleasant. Also participating in the tour were: Manitoba's Attorney General Thomas H. Johnson; Mayor of New Orleans Martin Behrman; Mayor of Shreveport, Louisiana J. M. W. Ford; Louisiana State Highway Commissioner Duncan Buie; Vice-president of the Louisiana Jefferson Highway Association R. A. Nibert; Vice-president of the Minnesota Jefferson Highway Association J. H. Beek; and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the American Automobile Association A. G. Batchelder of New York.

Communities along the touring route were urged to host celebrations in honor of the motorists. They were also encouraged to send motorists to meet the touring party before entering a community. Newspapers along the route featured stories about the tour and community events organized in their honor.

The touring party had a strict schedule it was trying to keep, but by July 9, 1919, the local newspapers were reporting that, due to heavy rains in the southern United States, the sociability run would be delayed a day. This caused a number of communities along the route to cancel their celebrations.

R. B. Millard, a Little Falls, Minn. native who was serving as the state secretary for the Minnesota Jefferson Highway Association, published the following statement in the Daily Transcript on June 25, 1919: "We should make the afternoon a holiday in Little Falls. It has been suggested that all business houses along the line decorate with flags and bunting to welcome the tourists."

The next major sociability run for the Jefferson Highway Association began Feb. 4, 1926, in the dead of winter. The cavalcade of 132 people in 32 cars, most of them from Winnipeg, completed the 13-day trip from Winnipeg to New Orleans to celebrate completion of the highway. The visitors saluted the granite obelisk erected in 1917 that marked the southern terminus of the route.

Nov. 9, 2009 — Jefferson Highway enthusiast and historian Mike Conlin of Metairie, La., retraced the entire route in what he has called a "Reawakening of an International Treasure" and mapping expedition. [Read full article.](#)

Route History Recalled

An October 22, 1995, a series of articles were published by the Mason City Globe Gazette, titled "Take a Brief Road Trip with Us, Now, Back to North Iowa in the 1920s, 30s and 40s," and written by Kristin Buehner. These articles offer details about the building and navigating of the Jefferson Highway in northern Iowa, and how the highway gave birth to the Jefferson Highway Transportation Company, now Jefferson Lines.

Highway Gave Birth to the Jefferson Bus Line

The Jefferson Highway Transportation Company was formed September 1919 in Minneapolis by Emery L. Bryant and Ivan D. Ansell. It was named after the Jefferson Highway and followed its route. The first Jefferson bus line ran from Minneapolis to Osseo, Minn.

By the time of the Great Depression, a significant portion of the Jefferson Highway Transportation Company's business had become concentrated in Iowa. In June 1927, the Jefferson line included Mason City, Charles City, Decorah, Independence, Cedar Rapids, and Waterloo. Connections to Garner, Ames, Des Moines, and Kansas City were established in 1929.

Charlie Zelle, grandson of Edgar Zelle who purchased the Jefferson bus line in 1925, said in the 1995 Globe Gazette article, "Iowa's always been our core business. Iowa is very central for Minnesota and points south."

When this article was published in 1995, the Jefferson Line ran from Minnesota to Texas through 10 states.

Remnants of the Jefferson Highway in Iowa

Today, travelers can still see remnants of the historic Interstate Trail and Jefferson Highway in Iowa, including many gas station buildings strewn along the route that have been abandoned or converted to other uses.

One of the historic features along the route, which is being preserved through an Iowa Department of Transportation enhancement grant, is the Reed-Niland "one-stop" complex at Colo. It was originally named the L and J Station because it was located at the junction of the Lincoln Highway and Jefferson Highway. The filling station, tourist cabins and restaurant are partially restored and open to the public.

Other remnants along the route include the tourist courts. One such court is located in Iowa Falls. The Scenic Inn, now a motel north of town, 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.

Another tourist court, located in Northwood, is the Royal Motel, which was advertised as being "Fit for a King."

Another treasure along the former Jefferson Highway is the abandoned Hotel Manly in Manly, Iowa.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Jefferson Highway Association shall be remembered in Iowa's transportation history books for: the pioneering of the good roads movement in the Mississippi Valley; linking communities, county seats, state capitals, industrial and population centers; opening up the

avenues of travel, bringing a closer relationship between town and country, communities, and neighboring states; and establishing international goodwill between the U.S. and Canada.

In the words of Hugh Shepard, "The closer association of communities and individuals, both neighboring and distant, causes sectional lines to be obliterated and doubts and mistrust to be banished. In this work of promoting peace and good will, the building of good road and the establishment of trunk lines and international highways has played an important part."

Sources and Links

- Lyell Henry, "Along the Jefferson Highway", Lincoln Highway Association Newsletter, Along the Lincoln Highway.
- Mary Warner, "Jefferson Highway", Morrison County (Minnesota) Historical Society online. 2001.
- Timeline of Jefferson Highway in Cass County (Missouri) Democrat, compiled by Carol Bohl, 2003.
- The Jefferson Highway Association, Crawford County Division, Records, 1915-2005, contain items such as correspondence, minutes, maps, newspaper clippings and other related items to the Jefferson Highway, are housed at the Leonard H. Axe Library, and of the Kansas Technology Center Library - Pittsburg (KS) State University, <http://axelibrary.blogspot.com/2007/02/jefferson-highway-association-crawford.html>
- A mural to commemorate the Jefferson Highway was installed Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2007, on a building owned by Shelton and Sons Construction at 1201 N. Independence in Harrisonville, Missouri, which was on the route of the original Jefferson Highway. The mural was created on two aluminum panels by area artist Daniel Brewer. The 8' x 12' panel depicts the front of a Jefferson Highway tourist guide from the early 1920s, while the 4' x 8' panel is a map of the route of the highway from New Orleans to Winnipeg, Canada.