



Buffalo Tales



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THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY

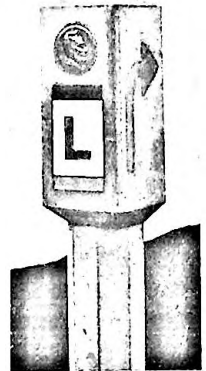
by Alice Shaneyfelt Howell

Today our hard-surfaced, multi-million dollar highways are so commonplace that we cannot imagine our nation, or even part of our nation, without roads. And this very road system has wrought greater changes in the American social and economic life than perhaps any other single factor. Imagine, if you will, that in 1912 there was no system of connecting roads in the United States. There were many miles of unrelated, unconnected roads leading to a railroad center or a market town. The railroads by 1912 had covered much of the country, connecting cities and towns, but this did not get people from store to store or from farm to warehouse.

The Lincoln Highway was the first planned transcontinental road system. It was the idea of Carl G. Fisher, who had been associated with the motor industry from its beginning—the great Indianapolis speedway was another of his ideas. With production of motor cars on the increase Fisher said, "A road across the United States; let's build it before we're too old to enjoy it."

By 1912 auto manufacturers were producing more cars than the market would absorb. Recognizing that roads for horse-drawn wagons were not roads for motor cars, the leaders of the auto industry were ready to listen, and gave serious consideration to Fisher's road improvement system. Fisher was an enthusiastic motorist himself. His idea of a highway across America was a hard-surfaced, all-weather, and accurately-signed road over its entire length. His first thought was that it would have to be constructed of rock and he referred to it as "The Coast-to-Coast Rock Highway."

How could such a highway be financed? The logical people, Fisher thought, were the auto manufacturers, and these leaders were indeed the organizing group. It was estimated that ten million dollars would be needed, that all contributions should be handled by a trust company, and that no money would be spent until the set goal of ten million was reached. Some of the earliest subscribers from the auto industry were the Packard Motor Car Co., the Midland Co., Willys-Overland, Hudson Motors and Goodyear Tire & Rubber. Conspicuous for a lack of support was Henry Ford and the Ford Motor Company, although years later Edsel Ford became a heavy contributor. One source of help not sought was the offer by the Lehigh Portland Cement Company that they believed at least a million and a half barrels of cement could be donated to the road construction. Fisher knew that private citizens might also be willing to contribute and he suggested the forming of an association with memberships offered to the public.



Concrete marker used across nation to mark Lincoln Highway.

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Gene E. Hamaker Editor
Alice Howell Circulation
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Membership in the Buffalo County Historical Society is open to anyone who has an interest in Buffalo County and its people, or in the history of the area.

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Trails and Rails Museum, Mardi Anderson, Director. Phone 234-3041

WITH THE SOCIETY

Report from Mardi Anderson, Museum Director.

Trails and Rails Museum opened its summer season Memorial weekend with a special display of clothing dating from the late 1880's to about 1920. Items in the display include clothing loaned by some members of the Buffalo County Historical Society as well as clothing in collections which have been donated to Trails and Rails. The museum will be open daily from 1:00 to 5:00 P.M. throughout the summer.

Several BCHS members visited the museum for the "Volunteers Coffee" on May 19 to sign up for the afternoons when they will be helping out at the museum. There are still a few days left, especially Sundays, for anyone who still wants to volunteer some time.

On June 2, over 100 second, third, and fourth grade girls attending the Campfire Day Camp visited the museum. Other groups of visitors include the Midway Kensington Club and the Gibbon Sunshine Extension Club.

Both the school house and the Freighters' Hotel are attracting a lot of attention from visitors. We are looking forward to the time when these buildings will be open. We have two girls working at Trails and Rails under the summer youth CETA program. Besides their regular duties in grounds and depot maintenance, they will be providing assistance in getting the school and hotel ready for display.

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The BCHS will be in charge of pioneer crafts and displays at the Fort Kearny Stampede on Saturday, July 2, from 1:00 to 5:00 at the Fort Kearny Historical Park. Weaving, dyeing and spinning, quilting, braided rugs, lace making, stained glass, blacksmithing, gun checkering, and chair caning are some of the crafts to be shown.

Interest and support sprung up all over the nation, each city, of course, clamoring to be on the route. Various names were suggested: The American Road, Ocean to Ocean. Carl Fisher Memorial Highway, Lincoln Memorial Road and Jefferson Memorial Highway. The organizing group adopted the name of the Lincoln Highway Association, which was the preference of Carl Fisher. The articles of incorporation declared its purpose: "To procure the establishment of a continuous improved highway from the Atlantic to the Pacific, open to lawful traffic of all description without toll charges. such highway to be known, in memory of Abraham Lincoln, as **The Lincoln Highway.**" Also set out in the articles of incorporation were membership classes: "Sustaining," an annual fee of \$5.00, and "Founders", contributions of \$1000.00 or more annually for three years.

All agreed that only the shortest, best and most direct route was worthy to be the great memorial they planned. There was never any doubt as to the highway starting at the nation's metropolis, New York City. Gateways through the Rockies considered and studied were (1) a route through Arizona to southern California, (2) through the center of Colorado with its scenic beauty, and (3) the northern route on the original Emigrant Trail to San Francisco.

Before any route had been determined for the highway, two auto clubs in Indianapolis sought to stimulate interest in a transcontinental road by organizing a caravan tour from Indianapolis to San Francisco. The caravan, which left Indianapolis on July 1, 1913, included one Marmon, two Marions, a Pilot "60", two Haynes, two Americans, a McFarland, two Appersons, two Hendersons, an Empire, a Pathfinder "40", two Premiers and one Brown truck; also one Premier truck which carried a supply of tires provided by the G & J Tire Co. The Brown truck carried camp equipment, repair parts and supplies. Each car was required to carry the following equipment:

One pick or one mattock;

One pair of tackle blocks; 600 ft. of $\frac{3}{4}$ inch rope;

One barn lantern, hung on the rear tire carrier, to be lighted if the car's regular lights failed.

One steel stake 3 ft. long, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide at top, tapered to point, for use as anchor to pull car out of sand or mud.

12 mudhooks; 1 full set of chains; 1 sledge.

Chocolate bars in cans, beans, canned goods, stowed under rear seat.

West of Salt Lake City each car also carried 4 African water bags, kept filled at all times, one 4x6 tent to be tied to the top and wheels of car. Camp equipment sufficient to shelter and feed the entire tour was carried in one of the trucks; provisions in cars were for emergency use only. Practically every car was said to have used each item at some stage of the journey. The trip was completed on August 3, a total of 34 days travel. As the caravan neared the towns, a delegation would escort them into the city, wine and dine them until the drivers were more exhausted from the evening celebrations than from the rigors of travel. (This caravan did not come through Nebraska, but took a route through Kansas and Colorado to Salt Lake City and on to San Francisco.)

In the meantime, the Lincoln Highway Association was busily at work mapping out its proposed route. It was completed and made public at the National Governors' Conference held in Colorado Springs in August of 1913. With New York City as the starting place, cities included on the route were Newark, New Jersey; Philadelphia



Membership certificate of Fred Haug in Lincoln Highway Association.

and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Canton, Ohio; Fort Wayne, Indiana; Chicago Heights and Dixon, Illinois; Clinton, Marshalltown and Council Bluffs, Iowa; Omaha, North Platte and Kimball, Nebraska; Julesburg, Denver, Fort Collins, Colorado; Cheyenne, Rock Springs, and Evanston, Wyoming; Salt Lake City and Kearney's Ranch, Utah; Ely and Reno, Nevada; Truckee, Sacramento and San Francisco, California. The loop into Denver was agreed to after an eloquent appeal from Colorado's governor and as a courtesy to the host state of the Conference. It was later acknowledged that no single act of the Association caused so much regret, difficulty and trouble.

Following the auto caravan and the Governor's Conference came tremendous and immediate public response. The Association officers concluded that since the project was a longtime affair, rather than take on the task of raising the full ten million dollars before starting the highway, a better plan would be to build a sample mile of roadway any place on the route, and the public would thus see tangible evidence of the proposed road. The program adopted encouraged the marking of the route throughout its length; encouraged local boards to designate the route as "Lincolnway" wherever it passed through their towns; sought contributions in sums up to or exceeding \$1,000, such funds to be used for constructing demonstration sections, or "Seedling Miles." Through nationwide advertising the message was carried to the people, good roads meetings were held across the land, and government at all levels became interested. State, county and local consul were appointed, serving without pay as the contact men between the Lincoln Highway Association and the public officials who were to do the actual road construction.

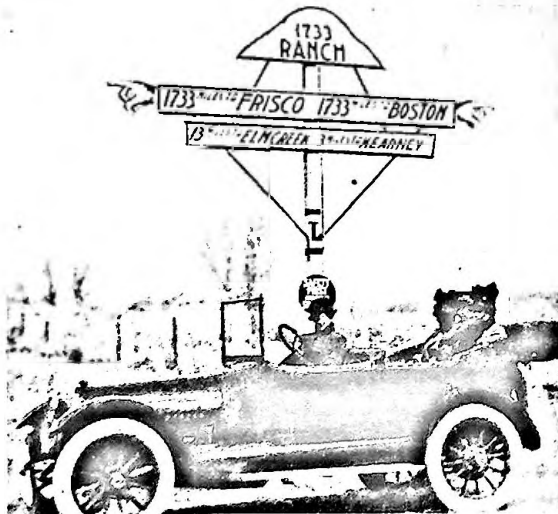
Construction of Seedling Miles successfully launched the idea of concrete highway construction, and is credited with bringing about a revolution in transportation. With donations of cement, local and state funding, and use of state road machinery and state engineers to supervise, the first Seedling Mile of concrete paving was laid west of DeKalb, Illinois in October of 1914. Nebraska was the next state to show interest. In December of 1914 Grand Island became the next applicant and its first Seedling Mile was completed November 3, 1915. Later Grand Island applied for more cement to build two more seedlings.

News of Grand Island activity stimulated Kearney. Willard F. Bailey, county consul, started negotiations with the Association for donated cement, and the Kearney Commercial Club voted to raise funds to finance the construction of a Seed-

ling Mile on West 24th Street from the tailrace to the present Youth Development Center road. However, they did not want the narrow 10 ft. width used in Illinois, asking for more cement to make the road 15 ft. wide. W. L. Stickel, local lumber dealer, personally guaranteed \$3,000.00 to get the road started and Dan Quinton received the paving contract. Kearney had high hopes of completing their Seedling Mile ahead of Grand Island. All preliminary work had been done by late September, but frustrating delays were caused by the state, which was responsible for hauling gravel to the site. Finally the actual paving started on October 19 and was completed November 6. Items in the **Kearney Daily Hub** of November 5 and November 6, 1915 describe the completed project: Seedling Mile one mile long, 15 ft. wide, concrete 8 inches thick laid on a strong foundation. The road is amply wide enough to make possible the passage on two loaded hayracks without interference.

Donors listed were: 16 carloads of cement from St. Louis Portland Cement Works; Grading by City of Kearney; Hauling of sand and gravel by State of Nebraska; one-half freight charges on cement paid by Union Pacific Railroad; Steel culverts furnished by Nebraska Steel Culvert Company. 69 cars of gravel, 24 cars of sand, and 16 cars of cement were used.

No seedling miles were constructed after 1919. The value of the concrete road was by then so generally accepted that the Lincoln Highway Association turned its attention toward improvement of the highway, marking it, and adhering to the most direct route by realignment. The loop into Denver was eliminated, as was the Council Bluffs/Omaha section, taking instead a direct line from Missouri Valley to Fremont. The longest realignment ever brought about was in Nebraska in 1922. All roads originally followed section lines, and the Lincoln Highway motorist zigzagged his way for hundreds of miles across the state, crossing and recrossing the Union Pacific tracks. The obvious answer was to follow the diagonal line of the Union Pacific, but public officials refused to consent to this relocation until the road was worn out. Appealing to the Union Pacific officials at Omaha, and pointing out the numerous accidents at grade crossings, Carl R. Gray, then president of the Union Pacific, authorized the



1733 Ranch marker. Note the Lincoln Highway marker on the post.

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railroad to pick out section by section the location the leases should cover, and laid out an ideal alignment across the state. This relocation not only shortened the route through Nebraska, but reduced the number of grade crossings from 29 to 5. (At this date all U.P. grade crossings on the Lincoln Highway through Nebraska have been eliminated.)

Kearney civic leaders were quick to take advantage of their unique location midway between Boston and San Francisco. Advertising signs and brochures pointed out Kearney as the "Midway City, 1733 miles to Boston, 1733 miles to San Francisco, on the famous Lincoln Highway." The extensive Watson Ranch, three miles west of town, changed its name to 1733 Ranch. Its "largest barn in the world" was a featured landmark on the Lincoln Highway until torn down in 1935. Early Kearney city directories designated addresses of homes and business on the highway as "Lincolnway," and the term is still used to a limited extent, but most addresses today are Highway 30 or 25th Street (24th Street west of college corner.) The Lincoln Highway became federal highway No. 30 in 1924.

Oldtimers remember sharp turns in Shelton and at the west edge of Elm Creek before the highway was realigned. Mrs. Genevieve Winchester Owens recalls that when her family lived on the Boyd Ranch on the west side of Gibbon from 1920 to 1938, her father was often called upon to pull people out who were stuck on the Lincoln Highway when it rained. Also, when the highway was paved the house at the ranch had to be moved north and west to its present site because it was setting in the middle of the proposed roadway. Kearneyites remember the sharp turns from 24th Street to 25th Street on 9th Avenue before the construction of the maze of present traffic lanes, given such humorous appellations as The Concrete Jungle, The Maze, or The Toughest Entrance Requirement to KSTC.

Carl Fisher's dream of a coast-to-coast highway did not become a reality until 1927. Although Interstate 80 now carries most of the transcontinental traffic, the Lincoln Highway, or No. 30, continues to be busy. Bisecting each town on its route through Buffalo County, it remains the life blood of each town from the surrounding community.

SOURCES

The Lincoln Highway, 1935 by Lincoln Highway Association; Omaha World-Herald, Magazine of the Midlands, Oct. 28, 1973, Nebraska Living, February 1978; Kearney Daily Hub, Nov. 5 & 6, Feb. 17, 1956; Mar. 5, 1962; Sept. 24, 1963; 1915; Pictorial Kearney, 1919-1920; Kearney Pamphlet, 1928-29. Interview with Genevieve Winchester Owens.

NEW MEMBERS

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