

# Following in the Lincoln's Wake: The Jefferson Highway

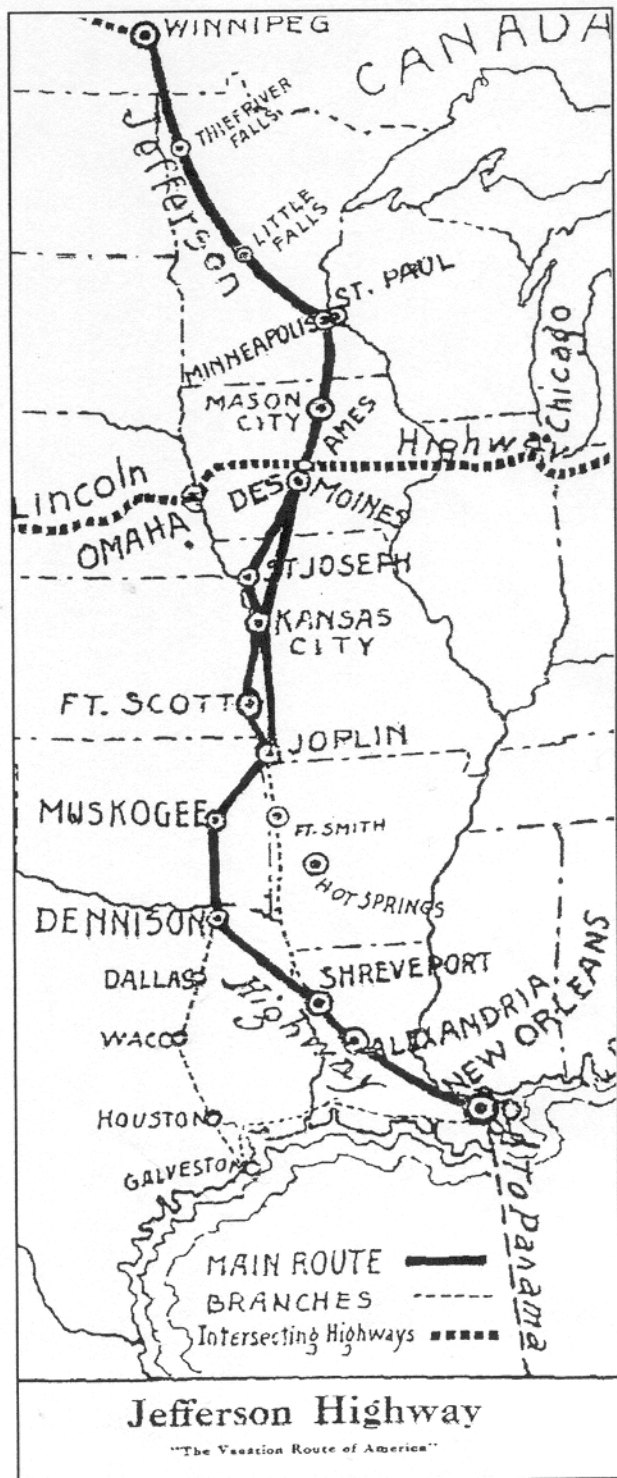
Lyell Henry

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The campaign to build the Lincoln Highway had a stimulating effect on the quest for better roads in the United States, intensifying efforts throughout the country to obtain highways suitable for automobile use. Inspired by the example of the Lincoln Highway Association (LHA), highway boosters soon created many more promotional organizations dedicated to blazing long-distance "auto trails." Among the earliest was the Jefferson Highway Association (JHA), whose goal was a highway coursing through the Midwest heartland linking Winnipeg and New Orleans. In a 1920 publication, the JHA claimed that it was one of nine highway groups whose creation had been "stimulated and assisted" by the LHA. What specific help the LHA provided is not known today, but in gratitude, the JHA was moved to proclaim "all honor to the Lincoln."<sup>1</sup>

Of the Jefferson Highway's 2,300 miles, at least seven actually ran due east and west. This happened in Iowa, where the Jefferson Highway overlapped the route of the Lincoln Highway between the towns of Colo and Nevada—and after 1921, the highways continued together for another nine miles farther west in Story County to Ames. This brief merging of the two highways in central Iowa was fitting: the Jefferson's founder, Edwin T. Meredith, who lived only forty miles away in Des Moines, had been inspired by the Lincoln to pursue an equivalent highway running north and south. Meredith was further emboldened by the example of the just-completed Panama Canal (a prodigious feat that also greatly impressed LHA President Henry Joy, although Joy still believed a transcontinental highway "overbalance[d]" the canal in "far-reaching effects" of public benefit). Writing in 1916, as the Great War raged in Europe, Meredith urged Americans to direct all their energies to such heroic national undertakings and away from warfare.<sup>2</sup>

When Meredith began his campaign for the Jefferson Highway in 1915, he was a Des Moines publisher of magazines, the best known



Map published by the JHA shows trunk and branch routes of the Jefferson Highway in 1916.

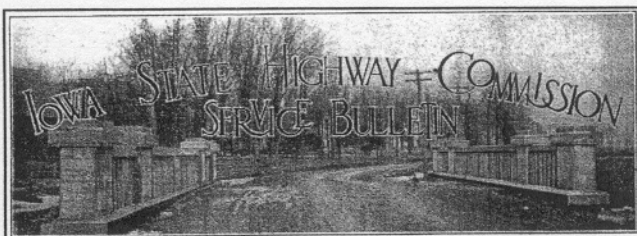
of which were *Successful Farming* and a gardening journal that eventually became *Better Homes & Gardens*. From Meredith's agricultural interest came a further reason to champion the new highway. A "Good Roads" progressive, he had long used the pages of his farming magazine to advocate improved rural roads as a necessary step toward upgrading the economic, social, and cultural well-being of farmers. Meredith eventually concluded that long-distance highways also promoted that same worthy end, as well as fostered a more general regional prosperity. "Iowa needs nothing so much as better roads today," he wrote in 1916. "The

tapped by a national highway cannot be overestimated."<sup>3</sup>

Meredith clearly conceived of the Jefferson Highway as the north-south counterpart of the Lincoln Highway. The latter highway reflected and accommodated the American people's historic proclivity for westward movement, he argued, but now "the time has come to turn a part of our highway building efforts northward and southward." True, the Jefferson would necessarily fall short of the Lincoln's distance by about a thousand miles, but in another respect, it would go the Lincoln one notch better: by reaching a Canadian city, it would qualify as an international highway. Linking the vast industrial and agricultural heartland west of the Mississippi River to the port city of New Orleans, the Jefferson Highway would be "the backbone of a great system of improved roads in the great Garden of Allah—the fertile Midwestern states," Meredith rhapsodized. It would also nicely commemorate the Louisiana Purchase and honor the great president (not far below the sainted Lincoln in iconic status) who was responsible for this far-sighted expansion of the American empire.<sup>4</sup>

Meredith's proposal quickly stirred up attention, excitement, and support. The chairman of the highway committee of the New Orleans Association of Commerce reported, for instance, that "almost daily the association receives from ten to twenty letters from all parts of the [Mississippi] Valley concerning the plan urging New Orleans to take an active interest." The steady beat persuaded him that "the people of the Mississippi Valley regard this highway as of as much importance to the North and South as the Lincoln is to the East and West."<sup>5</sup>

The Jefferson Highway Association came into being in New Orleans on November 15 and 16, 1915, at a conference called, at Meredith's request, by the New Orleans Association of Commerce. The host association sent invitations to 750 state and local governments, "good roads" groups, automobile clubs, and commercial and civic organi-

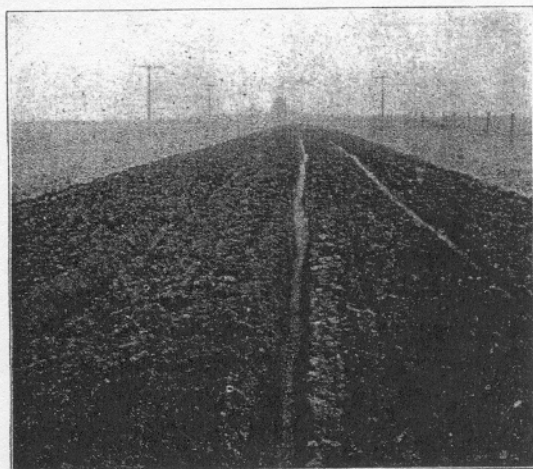


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No. 1

Where the Nation's Greatest East and West and North and South Highways Join on Iowa Soil in Story County



The road pictured above is part of the Lincoln Highway, also the Jefferson Highway. It is a permanently graded earth road, well drained. It has been maintained for years. Under good weather and season conditions this is a beautiful stretch of earth road. If any dirt road ever had an opportunity to stand up and give good service all the year round and under all conditions, this one had. That it failed in no cause for criticism on the road or road officials. When the picture was taken, there were perhaps 12,000 or 16,000 miles of dirt road in Iowa in just such condition or worse. Can you picture to yourself, this road tree-lined and with a concrete or bitum roadway down the center? Would such a transformation on all the main traveled highways make life in Iowa more attractive and desirable? Would it help keep the Hawkeye people at home and encourage them to spend their playtime and their money within the borders of their own state? Can it be that impossible road conditions may be largely responsible for their longing to escape to the city with its sidewalks and surfaced streets? Would not the lifeline of this annual mud quarantine and enough pleasure and joy to life in Iowa as well as satisfaction and contentment to the people on the farm, who, like the rest of us, have only one life to live, to pay many times over the cost, of building better roads?

*Enraptured by the overlapping section in Iowa of two major highways, the state's highway commission featured it in this 1919 pitch for hard-surfaced roads.*

importance of good roads is impressed upon the people of Iowa more forcibly by the Jefferson and Lincoln Highways than through any other means. The importance of having any state



*E. T. Meredith was a publisher as well as politician and founder of the Jefferson Highway.*

zations, and nearly 300 persons from eleven states showed up. After selecting Lafayette Young, a former U.S. senator from Iowa, as presiding officer, the conference proceeded to other business, including approving a charter and bylaws for the Jefferson Highway Association and electing officers. In recognition of his leadership on behalf of the new highway, Meredith was named JHA president.

On Meredith's recommendation, the conference's invitation had specified only that the new highway would be called the Jefferson Highway and have Winnipeg and New Orleans as end-points; all further decisions, including determination of a specific route, were to be left to the new highway association. This doubtless maximized interest in the project but also assured that the conference would be contentious. According to one newspaper account, "As soon as temporary organization was effected, advocates of...rival routes split into two factions and fought over all the convention's business." One faction favored a route to Winnipeg running through Shreveport, Fort Smith, Joplin, Kansas City, Des Moines, and St. Paul, but the other faction sought a more westerly route (the so-called "Kansas plan") going through Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas to Kansas City and then on to Winnipeg by way of Omaha, Fargo, and Grand Forks.<sup>6</sup>

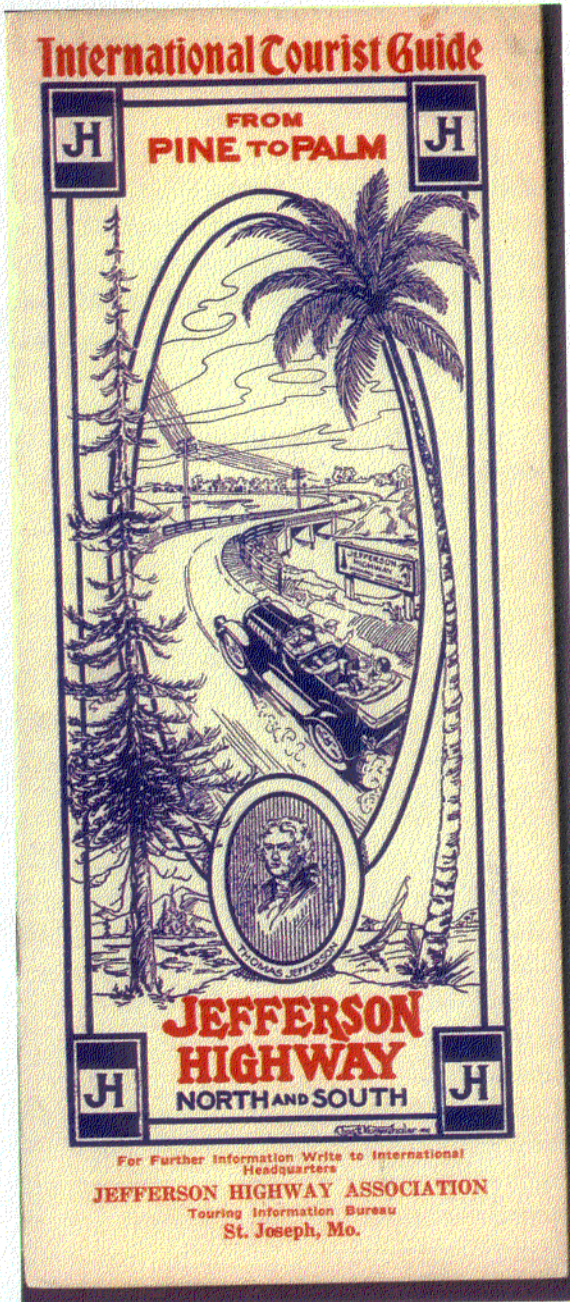
If Meredith had counted on having the new highway come through Des Moines, he must have been alarmed by the Kansas plan's strength

at the conference; among its supporters were the largest delegations, those from Texas and Oklahoma. Following a debate sprawling over two days, however, the conference narrowly rejected the Kansas plan and instead adopted a proposal put forward by the board of directors. This proposal identified cities between Winnipeg and New Orleans that would be "cardinal points" on the Jefferson Highway and left for determination by the board the specific route that would connect them. The cities named were Minneapolis, St. Paul, Des Moines, St. Joseph, Kansas City, Joplin, Muskogee, Denison, Shreveport, Alexandria, and Baton Rouge.<sup>7</sup>

Designation of this group of cities opened the way to a considerable blending of the plans pursued by the meeting's two factions. The selection of Des Moines as a cardinal point meant the scuttling of that part of the Kansas plan that would take the highway through Nebraska and the Dakotas, but at least the big delegations from Texas and Oklahoma were assured that the final route would come through their states (and the delegates from eastern Kansas could continue to hope—and to lobby—for inclusion). Omission of Fort Smith from the list disappointed the delegates from Arkansas, but their factional allies from Missouri, Iowa, and Minnesota could be jubilant that the new highway would reach key cities in those states. The directors' proposal succeeded in accommodating the claims and hopes of a majority of delegates, but much contentious fine-tuning of the route still lay ahead.

When the directors arrived on February 3, 1916, at the Hotel Muehlebach in Kansas City, Missouri, for the first JHA board meeting, they found that nearly 400 other persons were also there, all intent on lobbying for favored routes. In the words of a reporter for *The Road-Maker*, the directors' meeting was "turned into an old style town meeting, and they did not omit the band. The most surprised man in the whole bunch was President Meredith, who had gone to the meeting expecting to preside with a gavel and found he needed a gatling gun." At one point during a session described as "tumultuous," in order to maintain control of the meeting, Meredith allegedly threatened to resign as the JHA president.<sup>8</sup>

According to the official minutes of the



This route guide was issued by the JHA in 1923.

meeting, the board heard sales pitches made on behalf of no fewer than thirteen route variants. The article in *The Road-Maker* noted that “the route north from Kansas City to the Iowa border was quite a bone of contention.” Indeed, four proposals were made for this segment, including two that would bypass St. Joseph, even though that city was supposed to be a cardinal point.<sup>9</sup> The matter was finally settled (or so it appeared) by a unanimous vote for a motion “that all contests filed on sections of the High-

way north of Kansas City be disapproved and that the route known as the Inter-State Trail from Kansas City to St. Paul be adopted” in its entirety.<sup>10</sup> The Interstate Trail had been under development since 1911, covered over 500 miles of the Jefferson’s intended route, and reached all stipulated cities from Kansas City to the Twin Cities, so it made good sense to incorporate that entire trail in the new highway. By the time the meeting was over, however, the directors had somehow managed to approve two official routes in northwest Missouri, one going through St. Joseph via the Interstate Trail, the other one providing a cut-off to Kansas City running by way of Cameron.<sup>11</sup>

The highway south of Kansas City was also the subject of clashing proposals: each of the delegations from Kansas and Missouri championed a route running from Joplin to Kansas City on its side of the border between the two states. So heated was the contest that the author of *The Road-Maker* article concluded that “the Missouri and Kansas contingents were there to start another Border Warfare.” That calamity was averted, however, when, once again, the directors voted to endorse two routes. They also resolved that whichever route—in Kansas or in Missouri—had the most miles of surfaced road by Labor Day would be declared the main route, and the other identified as a branch route.<sup>12</sup>

The directors designated as branches several other roads veering off from the highway’s main trunk. One branch ran from Denison, Texas, to Dallas, and, in fact, a map issued by the JHA soon after the meeting showed this route extending through Dallas to Waco and Houston and then going all the way to Galveston. (Apparently the extension was another decision made informally, because not until its 1926 meeting did the JHA get around officially to recognizing the extended branch route lying beyond Dallas.)<sup>13</sup> Another branch route adopted by the directors allowed the Arkansas delegates to salvage something from the meeting. The Arkansans had made a strong case for their route, arguing that it was not only more scenic but also much shorter (by nearly 270 miles!) than a route through Oklahoma and Texas, but the directors judged that better road conditions on the longer route justified its selec-

tion. Acknowledging, however, that they also “look[ed] with favor on a scenic division of the Jefferson Highway from Joplin to Shreveport through Arkansas,” the directors added an Arkansas branch to the main trunk of the Jefferson Highway.<sup>14</sup> This branch route stayed just inside the state’s western border, following a direct line from Joplin to Shreveport by way of Fort Smith, Mena, and Texarkana.

Three routes lying beyond the Twin Cities in northwest Minnesota were in competition for inclusion in the Jefferson Highway, but because the condition of none of these roads was known, the directors deferred a decision until the three options could be inspected. The inspections were made in the summer of 1916, after which the eastern-most and western-most routes were passed over in favor of a middle route going by way of Anoka and Bemidji.<sup>15</sup> This action completed the initial routing of the Jefferson Highway, whose configuration (including branches) was indicated in a sketch map published by the JHA in 1916 and reprinted on page 34.

Encrusted from the start with tributaries and multiple routes, the Jefferson Highway took on even more complexity in coming years. A JHA route guide published in 1923 showed, for instance, three official routes then traversing the approximately 200 miles between Kansas City and Joplin! To the routes running on each side of the Kansas-Missouri border had been added a second one in Kansas—an indication of continuing route disputes in that state and probably a measure intended as temporary, pending a final determination of the route.<sup>16</sup> And in northwestern Minnesota, where the two unchosen routes were joined together to form a rival highway—the wide-looping Minnesota Scenic Highway—local interests along the western portion of that highway (through Crookston and Detroit Lakes) appear to have touted that route as part of the Jefferson Highway. Indeed, a 1927 publication of the American Automobile Association even identified this western portion of the Minnesota Scenic Highway as the main trunk route of the Jefferson Highway. Was that an official route change, authorized by the JHA? If so, it didn’t show up on a route map issued by the JHA in the late 1920s, but possibly it was another of those routes recognized by the JHA

as branches.<sup>17</sup>

The biggest alteration of the original route of the Jefferson Highway came in 1926, when, in recognition of the great progress made by Arkansas in road improvements, the JHA admitted that state to full membership in the association. That meant that, although the route through Oklahoma and Texas would continue as a main trunk line, an additional official trunk route would now go through Arkansas as well. However, the association left the choice of that route to the Arkansas directors, who spurned the existing branch route in western Arkansas (even though it was now fully hard-surfaced) and instead picked a route that first headed east to Eureka Springs and then dropped south through the Ozark Mountains to Little Rock and on to Monroe, Louisiana!<sup>18</sup> This route was definitely scenic and supported the vacationland promotion of the Ozarks then underway, but it would take Jefferson Highway travelers through some rugged terrain, and it also undercut Shreveport’s long-standing claim to be a cardinal point on the highway.

So peculiar, in fact, was this decision that it appears not to have held up for long, because a JHA route guide and map issued in the late 1920s showed the former branch route along the western border—now identified as U.S. 71—as the main route of the highway across Arkansas.<sup>19</sup> Also according to this late map, the Jefferson Highway now reached Winnipeg Beach, 50 miles north of Winnipeg, and the main trunk line in Texas now ran to Dallas. Although the second route in Kansas was no longer indicated, several longer-standing anomalies remained: both of the originally designated roads running along the respective sides of the Kansas-Missouri border were still identified as official routes, neither having ever been demoted to branch status, and the original alternate routes through northwest Missouri were also still in place.

In sum, from its beginning to its final days, the Jefferson Highway remained a fluid product of accommodation and inclusion, an amalgam of proliferated and sometimes uncertain or even mysterious routings. It was a highway shaped at least as much by contending pressures arising from local boosters as by a unifying central vision or direction. The resulting high-

way, replete with official and unofficial variant routes, loops, and branches, smacked somewhat of another famous north-south highway—the Dixie Highway—but diverged from Meredith’s original ideal and inspiration, the Lincoln Highway. That celebrated road, no less than any other early highway, faced constant pressure to include branches and variant routes, and at times the LHA found it expedient to bow to the pres-

way—decidedly unlike both the Dixie and the Jefferson Highways—as direct and free from encumbrances and variants as practicable.<sup>20</sup>

If the Jefferson Highway tended to sprout branches and tributaries, however, this was further evidence of the enormous enthusiasm for the new highway throughout the Mississippi Valley. To tap this zeal and direct it to definite results, Meredith hired James D. Clarkson to be the JHA’s general manager. An automobile and implement dealer in Carthage, Missouri (a city on the Jefferson Highway), Clarkson was also founder and president of the local 365 Day Road Club and a well-known preacher of the evangel of constructing automobile roads adequate for use in all weather conditions. In the judgment of *The Road-Maker*, he was “undoubtedly the leading figure of the country when it comes to . . . inspiring community action” on behalf of such roads.<sup>21</sup>

Totally dedicated to the Jefferson Highway cause and seemingly indefatigable, Clarkson immediately set out for Minnesota to settle the route question there and, by the end of his first year, he had traveled the entire route, everywhere whooping up the highway and promoting local organizations to carry on the work needed to make it a reality. As of November, 1916, Clarkson also took over from Meredith the editorship of a monthly promotional magazine, *Jefferson Highway Declaration*. In order to edit the journal, manage the organization, and stay constantly on the road, Clarkson traveled in a specially designed touring car, which contained his office and files and may even have served as his living quarters while traveling. The new circumstances of his work life apparently caused problems for his home life, however, because at the June 1917 meeting of the board of directors, he announced that “my connection with the Jefferson Highway Association has been such that it has been necessary to discontinue my home [in Carthage].” Unless the board objected, he declared, thereafter Mrs. Clarkson would travel with him, assisting him in his duties, and her travel expenses would also be charged to the JHA. Doubtless recognizing in Clarkson a devotion to the cause far beyond the ordinary, the board raised no objections.<sup>22</sup> Clarkson’s leadership and promotional activities quickly brought good results.



*This Jefferson Highway campground guide was produced in 1923.*

sure. Under the early leadership of Henry Joy, however, the LHA acquired a steady organizational commitment to keeping the Lincoln High-

After one year's effort, the JHA had local committees in all seven states and eighty-seven counties crossed by the Jefferson Highway and enough money in the bank to keep the organization going for a second year. Shortly after becoming editor of *Jefferson Highway Declaration*, Clarkson reported to the board of directors that his success in securing more advertisers meant that that journal no longer drained the JHA finances. Moving the JHA home office from Des Moines to St. Joseph in 1918, Clarkson cut expenses by having the JHA join forces with the organization promoting the Pikes Peak Ocean to Ocean Highway, which also ran

assessments by localities.<sup>23</sup>

Once the highway route was determined, Clarkson turned to the task of getting the route marked. By 1919, over 15,000 stenciled pole marks and 2,000 enameled steel signs were in place to guide motorists. The pole mark consisted of two six-inch blue bands separated by a twelve-inch white band on which were placed the conjoined letters J and H in black. The steel signs, posted at mile intervals, indicated the highway's name and its terminal cities of Winnipeg and New Orleans and carried stylized depictions of fir and palm trees—a visual representation of the JHA's claim that the

**The Cross Roads of the Nation Serve all Latitudes and Longitudes**  
 They intersect all North and South, East and West Transcontinental Routes  
**THE JEFFERSON HIGHWAY** and **PIKES PEAK OCEAN TO OCEAN HIGHWAY**

The Avenue from the Bread Basket of the World to the Land of Cotton, Palms and Romance.  
 Winnipeg—2300 Miles—New Orleans  
 The Jefferson Highway traverses the heart of the richest country on the globe, and one filled with romance and sentiment. It connects Acadia, the Land of Evangeline, with the

The Street from Hell's Gate to the Golden Gate.  
 New York—3564 Miles—San Francisco  
 The Pikes Peak Ocean to Ocean Highway is the superlative scenic route. Leading to places of beauty and grandeur,

lake region and pine forests of the great North-land; the land which stretches away across lake and plain, through forests and over mountain tops, to the Hudson Bay country. It extends through the cotton plantations of the South and the oil districts of Louisiana and Oklahoma, across the great corn belt of the trans-Mississippi country, through the zinc mining districts of Missouri to the vast wheat fields of Minnesota and Canada.

It gives expression to the "See America" idea. But it is more than a sight-seer's road—it binds together the work shops of the industrial centers with the treasure chests of the mountains. It is an artery of travel that gives life to the commercial, industrial, agricultural and mining districts of the first magnitude.

For Touring Information Address Either Association at **St. Joseph, Mo.**

After the JHA moved its headquarters from Des Moines to St. Joseph in 1918, the Pikes Peak Ocean to Ocean Highway became the JHA's favored east-west highway.

through St. Joseph. Soon the two road groups shared not only an office in St. Joseph but also a promotional magazine, *The Modern Highway*, of which Clarkson became editor and which replaced *Jefferson Highway Declaration*. When the JHA's bank account neared depletion in 1918, Clarkson revived the association's financial condition by devising a new method of assessing cities and counties on the route. Essentially a franchise-granting scheme, his new method included bestowing on the general manager the power to relocate the Jefferson Highway route as a means of last resort for securing maintenance of the highway and payment of

highway ran "From Pine to Palm." To help give substance to this slogan, road boosters in Winnipeg and New Orleans pledged to plant pine or palm trees, respectively, along the highway approaches to their cities.<sup>24</sup>

Another slogan concocted by Clarkson—"The Vacation Route of America"—exploited the fact that, because the Jefferson Highway ranged over twenty degrees of latitude, agreeable weather could be found somewhere on the route during any season. As more Americans had automobiles and disposable income and took vacations, many might be enticed to flee the summer's heat by heading to the coolness

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of the North Woods, or to escape winter's snowy blast by motoring to the sunny Southland. To promote the notion that the Jefferson Highway was an ideal route for year-round vacation travel and ready for such use, Clarkson organized a so-called "sociability run" from St. Joseph to Winnipeg and back in the summer of 1916. Although most of the road was not yet hard-surfaced, an enormous number of automobiles managed to negotiate all or substantial portions of this long trek.<sup>25</sup> Traveling in those automobiles, as well as appearing on welcoming platforms in cities and towns along the route, were scores of enthusiastic and loquacious boosters—JHA officials, chamber of commerce secretaries, bloviating politicians and city fathers, small-town Babbitts and their wives. All were eager to hymn the merits of their fair cities and to join in celebration of the Jefferson Highway. Frequently heard themes were the highway's salutary role in promoting amity between town and country, between North and South, and between two nations.

Walter Parker, general manager of the New Orleans Association of Commerce, was a traveler on that first sociability run. Devoting three weeks to the trip and traveling in one of six touring cars carrying New Orleans dignitaries, he sent a message back to the association president that he was "getting lots of air, but mighty little rest." So far, he claimed, he had given over sixty short speeches on "New Orleans, the Southern Terminus of the Jefferson Highway." (By the end of his "working vacation," the total number of speeches would stand at 127.) Parker explained to the president how he and the many other speakers on this run were able to accomplish their tasks efficiently:

At each town each car stopped just ten minutes. Each of the official cars carried one speaker, who was introduced by the speaker in the preceding car. In turn he introduced the speaker in the next car behind. In this way a programme of from half to a full hour was staged at each town, but no car would lose more than ten minutes. Extra high power cars were provided so no speaker would fall behind his programme time in the event of tire trouble.<sup>26</sup>

Parker was delighted by the reception he got everywhere. "Many citizens along the road expressed open eyed amazement over the



*Lincoln Highway Association member David R. Smith, Hopkins, Minn., stands next to a monument erected in 1917 by the D. A. R. at the intersection of St. Charles and Common Streets in New Orleans, the southern terminus of the Jefferson Highway.*

development work going on at New Orleans," he reported. Interest in the new highway ran high, too: "At every town we stopped [at] in Missouri, Iowa, and Minnesota, great signs reading 'Jefferson Highway—New Orleans, Winnipeg' were hung across the road, and great road maps showing the Jefferson Highway were displayed."<sup>27</sup> So festive and productive was the sociability run that the JHA sponsored at least five more in the next ten years, including a southern tour from St. Joseph to New Orleans in late fall of 1916 that complemented the summer's successful northern run and a 1926 trek that left Winnipeg for New Orleans during a January blizzard. (This latter run was intended to demonstrate that the Jefferson Highway could already be traveled in any season. No matter that in a December 29, 1925, letter to JHA headquarters, Fred White, the chief engineer of the Iowa Highway Commission, had strongly advised against the run, citing the risks facing motorists on any road in Iowa in winter and noting that the Jefferson Highway lacked a hard surface from Des Moines to the Missouri border. In spite of White's worries, the sociability run reached New Orleans more or less on schedule).<sup>28</sup>





*The Pembina Trail in northwest Minnesota near the Canadian border was part of the original Jefferson Highway route.*

From the start, a 365-day road—hard-surfaced and driveable in any weather—was the JHA’s main objective, and by “hard-surfacing,” Meredith had explained, was meant any material—gravel, rock, asphalt, concrete—that would make the highway usable 365 days of the year.<sup>29</sup> Like other national organizations promoting highways, the JHA didn’t propose to finance highway construction; instead, the money that the JHA raised was spent on promotional activities, all ultimately aimed at securing the financing and building of the highway by other entities—local commercial and road groups, state and local governments, and, eventually, the federal government. Progress was likely to come fairly slowly and unevenly over the entire route, yet in a burst of exuberance upon taking the job of general manager early in 1916, Clarkson proclaimed a goal of a completely hard-surfaced road by the end of 1917.<sup>30</sup> Although this was wildly unrealistic, the highway’s promoters probably had a good foundation on which to build during that first year. While on the first sociability run, Walter Parker learned from JHA sources that twenty-five percent of the route already was considered hard-surfaced and that sufficient money had allegedly been made available in the states and localities for the early hard-surfacing of another twenty-five percent.<sup>31</sup>

In November 1916 President Meredith announced a new objective for the JHA: “Hard Surfaced by 1919.” The revised goal also proved to lie beyond the organization’s grasp, however, and as late as January 1926 at the an-

nual JHA meeting JHA President Hugh Shepard announced that he expected that another three years would be needed to finish the highway’s hard-surfacing.<sup>32</sup> This time the projection was on the mark. One of the JHA’s last route guides, issued even after numbers had replaced names on highways in the late 1920s, proclaimed that the Jefferson Highway was now an “All Year Route, Practically All Hard Surfaced from Pine to Palm.” The guide documented this claim by indicating the road surface to be found at every point on the route.

Since the JHA’s first days in 1915, however, expectations for hard-surfacing had risen, and the new desideratum was a road paved with concrete or asphalt. The route guide identified substantial sections of the Jefferson Highway already paved in all of the states—for instance, the long stretch in Minnesota between Little Falls and Geneva and most of the highway in Missouri and Kansas. Writing in late 1928, Hugh Shepard recounted many large-scale paving projects underway on the Jefferson Highway in Minnesota, Iowa, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana, so it is likely that by the early years of the next decade, a hard surface at nearly all places on the Jefferson Highway meant a paved surface, usually of concrete.<sup>33</sup> As of the early 1930s, in fact, because so much new paving had been completed in Minnesota, and because the entire highway through Iowa now had a concrete surface, a motorist could already have been assured of a pleasant drive on a mostly paved road from somewhere in central Minnesota at least as far as Joplin, Missouri, and would have encountered much pavement beyond, no matter which of the two routes was followed to New Orleans.

The association’s achievements, as well as the growing road-building involvement of state and federal governments, had increasingly made the JHA superfluous, however. Especially undercutting the JHA’s work and the Jefferson Highway’s identity was the replacement in late 1926 of names by numbers on U.S. highways. Writing in 1928, past JHA President Hugh Shepard tried to put a positive spin on this development: “The work of the Jefferson Highway planners was so well done and the highway so carefully selected that the Jefferson Highway for practically its entire distance was placed on numbered United States highways forming a part of

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the main trunk line system of highways in the United States.”<sup>34</sup> True enough, but, like the Lincoln Highway (and all other named trails except the Meridian Highway), the Jefferson Highway was not assigned a single number; now it was a very complex medley of many federal highways—U.S. 2, 10, 65, 66, 69, 71, 73, and 80—and some state and county roads in Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Minnesota. A new ban on posting of distinctive trail signage along the roads added to the difficulty the JHA now faced in trying to preserve the identity of the Jefferson Highway.<sup>35</sup>

At a meeting in April 1929 a JHA advisory committee, pondering again the future of the organization, decided to recommend keeping it going. A month later, the JHA headquarters, still located in St. Joseph, announced that 20,000 Jefferson Highway maps were ready for free distribution. Accompanying the announcement was a somewhat wistful statement from JHA President George McNinch: “Despite the present day system of numbering roads, sentimental and historical significance attaches to the name of the Jefferson Highway. It is the aim of our association, through publication of maps and by many other organized efforts, to retain the identity and prestige of the Jefferson Highway.”<sup>36</sup> Probably this was the final map issued by the JHA, however, and very likely the organization itself was soon gone, undone not just by the difficulty of its final objective in the new age of numbered highways but also by the onset of the Great Depression.

Clearly, the JHA had accomplished much during its brief life. Spurred on by a conviction that the Jefferson Highway was the peer of the celebrated Lincoln Highway, hundreds of JHA members located in many small towns and cities along the Jefferson’s route poured their money, time, and energies into producing a 365-day road in relatively short order. Their grass-roots efforts were impressive, fully justifying the expansive feelings of pride they manifested in their achievement. At least three other early north-south auto trails also ran through the Mississippi Valley, but because the promotional organizations for each of these came into being from three to five years after the JHA, probably none would have exceeded the latter’s production of a mostly paved road by the early

1930s.<sup>37</sup> The JHA’s work helped lay the foundation for an important segment of the American highway system, one linking some major cities in the midsection of the United States; today, Interstate Highway 35 approximates a large portion of the Jefferson’s route. Unquestionably, too, the JHA’s efforts in pursuit of the Jefferson Highway gave a boost to campaigns in several laggard states to upgrade their roads—in Arkansas, for example—or to augment state government authority to issue bonds and build roads—in Iowa and Missouri, for examples. Finally, the blazing of the Jefferson Highway in northern Minnesota made possible the promotion of tourism there and was followed in 1918 by the creation of the Ten Thousand Lakes of Minnesota Association for that purpose.<sup>38</sup>

Well aware by 1928 that an era was nearing an end, delegates to the national JHA meeting that year passed a resolution conveying their hopes “that the importance of pioneer transcontinental highways like the Lincoln Highway and the Jefferson Highway shall be nationally appreciated and that the location and memory of these highways shall be perpetuated to posterity.”<sup>39</sup> The next five decades brought little evidence that those hopes could ever be realized. However, a renewed interest in historic highways and their roadsides at last became detectable in the late 1970s and has become more pronounced ever since. A key event in the renewal of interest in the Lincoln Highway, and in historic highways generally, was the reorganization of the Lincoln Highway Association in 1992.

Although the Jefferson Highway Association has not yet been reactivated, and the



*Located south of Hubbard, Iowa, on a gravel road that was part of the original Jefferson Highway, this barn has borne this inscription since 1917.*

Jefferson Highway still lags far behind the Lincoln Highway in revived solicitude, some stirrings of interest in the old “Pine to Palm” highway are evident today in Iowa, Minnesota, and Missouri. In the latter two states, several local museums, libraries, and historical societies are undertaking to identify and study historical resources related to the Jefferson Highway and its route. The Powers Museum in Carthage, Missouri, has been especially active in this respect, soliciting information and cooperation from all the museums and historical societies along the entire Jefferson route and launching in 2008 a website dedicated to promoting interest in the old highway. Iowa’s Department of Transportation also maintains a website providing historical information about the Jefferson Highway and many of the other early auto trails in Iowa.

The Jefferson Highway is also now the subject of interpretive historical displays at Itasca State Park in Minnesota; at the historical museum in Harrisonville, Missouri; and at Colo, Iowa, in the restored and reopened Niland’s Café (originally called the Lincoln & Jefferson Café) standing at the point where the Lincoln and Jefferson Highways met. In Missouri, at several places along the Jefferson’s route, enthusiasts have hired artists to paint elaborate murals celebrating the highway. Finally, in October 2003 many of the highway’s fans in Missouri participated in a sociability run from Harrisonville to Carthage, and more runs are planned.

This last item would especially have delighted James D. Clarkson, but probably all of these developments would have buoyed his hopes, as well as those of Edwin T. Meredith



*David Smith stands next to a concrete sign, once painted blue and white, that pointed north at the intersection of the Lincoln and Jefferson Highways at Colo, Iowa. The sign is on display at the Reed/Niland corner restoration in Colo.*

and their many JHA colleagues, that the product of their labors will not be forgotten. Helped along today by the renewal of interest in historic highways and the rise of “heritage tourism,” perhaps this early spin-off of the Lincoln Highway may follow once again in the wake of its illustrious predecessor and reach its founders’ final dream—just like the Lincoln, a “nationally appreciated” road whose “location and memory” are “perpetuated to posterity.”

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Lincoln Highway Boosts Others,” *Southern Good Roads*, Feb. 1916, p. 17. The JHA claim was made in “The Lincoln,” *The Modern Highway*, Jan. 1920, p. 14. The alleged source for the claim of the LHA’s help for the JHA and eight other (unidentified) road organizations was a circular published by the LHA, but this circular has not yet been located in the LHA archive at the Special Collections Library at the University of Michigan.

<sup>2</sup> E. T. Meredith, “The Two Visions,” *Jefferson Highway Declaration*, May 1916, p. 15; Henry B. Joy, “The Lincoln Highway,” *Jefferson Highway Declaration*, April 1916, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> E. T. Meredith, “Definite Value of Sociability Run,” *Jefferson Highway Declaration*, Oct. 1916, p. 9.

According to Meredith, Iowa farmers would be quick to realize that their local roads were “doubly valuable” when joined in a longer continuous highway, and he predicted that soon “thousands of farmers will drive their cars to Winnipeg or New Orleans every season.” Meredith was the Democratic candidate for governor of Iowa in 1916. Making “good roads” a centerpiece of his campaign, he discovered that it was not yet a winning issue in Iowa politics. Meredith’s Republican opponent, William Harding, challenged him directly on the roads issue and rallied much of the rural vote with scary stories about the high tax burden that road improvements would bring and the increased state control over local road districts that would accompany them. Another decade would pass before a critical mass of farmers, now owners and drivers of Model T Fords, would join other Iowans in voting for improved roads on which to get to town or to take those vacation trips.

Ending his active involvement in the JHA in 1917 and returning to publishing, Meredith had a short fling in government in 1919, when President Wilson appointed him as secretary of agriculture, a post Meredith held during the final year of the Wilson administration. He received some votes for the presidential nomination at the stalemated Democratic national convention in 1924, was prominently mentioned as a prospect for the 1928 presidential nomination, but died in June 1928.

For Meredith’s travails as a “good roads” gubernatorial candidate, see Peter L. Peterson, “A Publisher in Politics: Edwin T. Meredith, Progressive Reform, and the Democratic Party, 1912-1928,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1971.

<sup>4</sup> Meredith, "Definite Value of Sociability Run," p. 9; [E.T. Meredith], "The Jefferson Highway," *Successful Farming*, Jan. 1916, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Reports, Highway Committee, New Orleans Association of Commerce, July 9 and Nov. 12, 1915. My thanks go to John Kelly of the University of New Orleans Library for providing copies of these reports.

<sup>6</sup> "Highway Association Formed," *Des Moines Register and Leader*, Nov. 16, 1915, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*; also, minutes, JHA board meeting, Nov. 16, 1915, as published in *Jefferson Highway Declaration*, Feb., 1916, p. 20. Here, and throughout, I've had to rely on JHA publications and newspaper and magazine accounts, because I failed to locate JHA organizational records, which probably no longer exist. The JHA was located at the headquarters of the St. Joseph Automobile Club (SJAA), which presumably held the JHA records until it closed its office and merged with the Automobile Association of America (AAA) in 1995. A retired long-time employee of SJAA told me that at that time many old records were thrown out but that two boxes of materials were sent to the AAA office in St. Louis. Looking into those boxes on my behalf, a friend reported that the materials therein had to do almost entirely with the Pikes Peak Ocean to Ocean Highway, whose association shared offices with the JHA.

<sup>8</sup> "The Jefferson Highway Meeting," *The Road-Maker*, March 1916, p. 9. I am greatly indebted to Richard Weingroff, information liaison officer at the Federal Highway Administration, for providing photocopies of this and many other useful articles on the Jefferson Highway published in early trade magazines.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Minutes, JHA board meeting, Feb. 3, 1916, as published in *Jefferson Highway Declaration*, March 1916, p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> The minutes, as reported in *Jefferson Highway Declaration*, don't record approval of this additional route, but it showed up on the map issued following the 1916 meeting and on all subsequent maps.

<sup>12</sup> "The Jefferson Highway Meeting," *The Road-Maker*, March 1916, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> As reported in *St. Joseph Gazette*, Jan. 29, 1926, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Minutes, JHA board meeting, Feb. 3, 1916, as published in *Jefferson Highway Declaration*, March 1916, p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> The three routes and selection process are described in two articles in *Jefferson Highway Declaration*: "To Settle Minnesota Route," June 1916, p. 23; and "Three Routes Contending for Jefferson Highway in Minnesota," July 1916, p. 11. For excellent contextual material on the Jefferson Highway and other early highways in Minne-

sota, see Arthur J. Larsen, *The Development of the Minnesota Road System* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1966; mimeographed).

<sup>16</sup> From the first JHA meeting in 1915 into the mid-1920s, rival groups jostled over route selection in Kansas. A "heated argument between two factions [over the route] in Kansas" that took place at the 1923 JHA national meeting was described in the *Joplin [Mo.] Globe*, Jan. 17, 1923, p. 10. During his term as the JHA president, 1925-26, Hugh Shepard devoted an inordinate amount of time to an effort to learn what route was officially registered with the State of Kansas. His extensive correspondence with an uncooperative Kansas secretary of state is in the Hugh H. Shepard Papers, Department of Special Collections, Iowa State University Library, Ames, Iowa.

<sup>17</sup> Because there was very strong local support for the western route through Crookston and Detroit Lakes, the JHA considered adopting both it and the middle route as Jefferson Highway options. See "Minnesota May Have Two Routes," *Jefferson Highway Declaration*, May 1916, p. 5. The American Automobile Association's appropriation of the western route as the Jefferson's main route is found in Chester L. Saxby, "Winnipeg and New Orleans: Road of Democratic Opulence," *American Motorist*, Nov. 1927, p. 18. That the western route was once promoted by local interests as the main Jefferson Highway route is indicated by the use in recent years of "Pine to Palm" as the name of two motels on that route, one in Crookston and another in Detroit Lakes.

<sup>18</sup> As reported in *St. Joseph News-Press*, Jan. 29, 1926, p. 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> The Arkansas route decision was made subject to the approval of the Missouri, Arkansas, and Louisiana directors about the points at which the route would enter and leave the respective states and, in the event of disagreements among them, the board of directors would decide the matter, as reported in "Jefferson Highway Meeting Ends Today," *St. Joseph News-Press*, Jan. 29, 1926, p. 2. Very likely the Louisiana directors objected to the excising of Shreveport as an entry city. Postcards from that period show that the Eureka Springs-Little Rock route continued to be promoted by some as the official Jefferson Highway route in Arkansas.

<sup>20</sup> For the contrast between the Dixie and Lincoln Highways in this respect, see Drake Hokanson, *The Lincoln Highway: Main Street across America* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1988), p. 21. A letter dated April 23, 1925, sent to A. H. Shafer by Hugh H. Shepard, then-president of the JHA, reveals that Shepard was uncertain about the wisdom of adopting a route in Arkansas as a second trunk route and apparently had solicited advice on the matter from the Dixie Highway Association (DHA), which had lots of experience with multiple routes. According to Shepard, DHA replied that "the double line highway is most confusing, and that they think that a single line highway is a better one, and advise that we keep our highway a single line as far as possible." That this advice was forthcoming from promoters of the Dixie High-

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way is ironical, but by then, of course, the Jefferson Highway, too, was already far-gone in branches and double lines, and probably Shepard's qualms were easily pushed aside. Shepard's letter is located in the Hugh H. Shepard Papers, Department of Special Collections, Iowa State University Library, Ames, Iowa.

<sup>21</sup> "J. D. Clarkson and Jefferson Highway," *The Road-Maker*, May 1916, p. 11-12.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, for information on Clarkson's special car and his claim that he would "live" in it. For Clarkson's statement to the board, see minutes, JHA board meeting, June 22-23, 1917, as published in *Jefferson Highway Declaration*, August 1917, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> This account of Clarkson's activities draws upon information published in various issues of *Jefferson Highway Declaration* or supplied by him in reports made at various JHA board meetings.

<sup>24</sup> Plans for tree plantings are mentioned in "Jefferson Highway Meeting," *Southern Good Roads*, March 1918, p. 25. In "Dream Coming True," *The Road-Maker*, Dec. 1917, p. 56, a more grandiose monument planned for Winnipeg is described: "This will be a lofty white shaft, illuminated by floodlights at night, surmounted by a great lamp, and bearing the names of Canada and the United States. From nearby flagpoles the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes will float. A great park is to be maintained around it in keeping with the vastness of the project." Neither the monument nor the park was ever constructed. However, a much smaller monument was put up by the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1917 in New Orleans, at the terminus of the highway at the corner of St. Charles and Common Streets. The monument is still there today. For a picture and fuller discussion of this monument, see *Jefferson Highway Declaration*, March 1919, p. 5. Also, in 1974, a small monument marking the original northern terminus of the Jefferson Highway was erected in Winnipeg. See Jefferson Highway entry at Iowa DOT website.

<sup>25</sup> According to Clarkson, the total number of cars participating in the St. Joseph to St. Paul segment of the first sociability run was 2,361, "nearly seven hundred each day." "On the Jefferson Highway," *The Road-Maker*, August 1916, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> Walter Park, letter to Ernest Lee Jahncke, St. Paul, July 24, 1916, included in New Orleans Association of Commerce, "Reports of Bureaus, Departments, and Committees," July 1916.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> A detailed account of all sociability runs is in Hugh Shepard, "Jefferson Highway Association," *Annals of Iowa*, 16:6, Oct. 1928, p. 432-447. Because runs were a major JHA promotional activity, all were also covered amply in issues of *Jefferson Highway Declaration* or *The Modern Highway*. White's letter is in the Jefferson High-

way registration folder on file in the library of the Iowa Department of Transportation at Ames, Iowa.

<sup>29</sup> E. T. Meredith, "Linking Up Jefferson's Empire," *Jefferson Highway Declaration*, Feb. 1916, p. 7-8.

<sup>30</sup> "J. D. Clarkson and Jefferson Highway," *The Road-Maker*, May 1916, p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> "Hustle along Jefferson Highway," *Southern Good Roads*, Oct. 1916, p. 22.

<sup>32</sup> Meredith announced his goal in E. T. Meredith, "Jefferson Highway Meeting," *Jefferson Highway Declaration*, Nov. 1916, p. 7. Shepard's projection was reported in "Fine Progress Made on J.H. Route," *St. Joseph News-Press*, Jan. 28, 1926, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Shepard, *op. cit.*, *Annals of Iowa*, p. 437-438.

<sup>34</sup> Shepard, *op. cit.*, *Annals of Iowa*, p. 440.

<sup>35</sup> Segments of the Jefferson Highway route were approximated by U.S. 2 and U.S. 10 in Minnesota; by U.S. 65 in Minnesota and Iowa; by U.S. 66 in Oklahoma; by U.S. 69 in Iowa and Missouri; by U.S. 71 in Minnesota, Missouri, Arkansas, and Louisiana; by U.S. 73 in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas; and by U.S. 80 in Texas. Regarding the ban on trail signs, see Hokanson, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

<sup>36</sup> *Northwood [Iowa] Anchor*, April 11, 1929, p. 2, and May 2, 1929, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> These early highways were Mississippi Scenic Highway, King of Trails, and Mississippi Valley Highway. Like the Jefferson Highway, the first two claimed to be international roads; both originated in Winnipeg. King of Trails terminated in Mexico, after running most of the way on the route laid out in the so-called "Kansas plan" spurned by the JHA in 1916. Another highway originating in Winnipeg was the Meridian Highway, which was launched in 1911, well before the Jefferson Highway's start-up. However, it followed an even more westerly route than the King of Trails, terminating in Laredo, Texas. This information is taken from *Auto Trails Map of the United States*, published by Rand-McNally in 1924.

<sup>38</sup> Shepard, *op. cit.*, *Annals of Iowa*, p. 437; *The Land of Ten Thousand Lakes Over [the] Jefferson Highway*, promotional brochure, 1919. The Jefferson Highway in Minnesota also stimulated creation of a regional bus line, still in business today. See Margaret Walsh, "Minnesota's 'Mr. Bus': Edgar F. Zelle and the Jefferson Highway Transportation Company," *Minnesota History*, Winter 1991, p. 307-322. Some JHA activities in Missouri are reviewed in Carol Bohl, "Jefferson Highway: The Palm to Pine Vacation Route of America," *The Jackson County [Missouri] Historical Society Journal*, 44:1, Spring 2003, p. 11-15.

<sup>39</sup> Shepard, *op. cit.*, *Annals of Iowa*, p. 440.