



THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY FORUM



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THE AUTOMOBILE AND THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY
THE 2012 LINCOLN HIGHWAY BUY-WAY AND SCAVENGER HUNT
LINCOLN HIGHWAY CENTENNIAL CURRICULUM GUIDE
THE FIRST JEFFERSON HIGHWAY ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
MAPPING THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY
FOLLOW THE GREAT PLATTE RIVER ROAD ACROSS NEBRASKA
A PREVIEW OF THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

The Official Journal of the Lincoln Highway Association

The First Jefferson Highway Association International Conference

Carol Ahlgren

How appropriate that the first annual conference of the re-formed Jefferson Highway Association (JHA) was held in Iowa, the state that led the way for the reestablishment of the Lincoln Highway Association (LHA) in 1992. The first Jefferson Highway Association International Conference took place in Ames, Iowa, on April 27-28, 2012, and was a resounding success. Forty attendees from ten states and Canada enjoyed informative presentations, well appointed meeting rooms, and great food during the conference and at the headquarters Gateway Hotel and Convention Center in Ames. The Gateway was an appropriate location, located within a few miles of where the Lincoln Highway and the Jefferson Highway shared the same route through Ames between 1921 and 1928.

The Lincoln and Jefferson Highways have a shared history, as indicated in the *Forum* article, "Following in the Lincoln's Wake: The Jefferson Highway" (Summer, 2008), by conference organizer and LHA lifetime member, Lyell Henry. The connection between the two routes would be further reinforced at the final gathering and awards ceremony which took place at the famed Reed-Niland Corner at the intersection of the Lincoln and Jefferson Highways (see the *Forum*, Fall, 2004, "The Reed-Niland Corner Reopens").

Conference planning committee members and LHA members Bob and Joyce Ausberger; Van and Bev Becker; Scott Berka; Lyell Henry; Mike Kelly, and Russell Rein developed a conference that was affordable, informative, and most of all, fun! Lyell and Mike, along with LHA member Paul Walker, created a well-designed conference program/guidebook, beautifully illustrated with tour highlights, including historic images.

The conference officially kicked off on Friday, April 27, with registration and greetings from Ames Mayor Ann Campbell, and introduction of the JHA officers. The remainder of the day was devoted to presentations followed

by a business meeting. Alexa McDowell, architectural historian and historic preservation consultant, provided a well illustrated history of the JH in Iowa and its various routes. Joe Harper, LHA member and chairman of the Reed/Niland Corner Restoration Committee, provided the background of the complex's successful restoration and reuse. Attendees gained a larger perspective of the JH through the wonderfully illustrated presentation on the National Scenic Byway program by consultant David Dalquist of Des Moines.

The resources at the Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT) library including historic images and records were described by IDOT librarian Hank Zaletel. The presentations concluded with JHA President Mike Conlin who described his 2009 Canada to New Orleans Jefferson Highway survey trip that aided in the re-formation of the organization.

Saturday, April 28, Tour

A cool, wet morning did not dampen the enthusiasm for the tour and the Jefferson Highway resources. As the bus headed north to the Minnesota-Iowa border, planning committee member, former LHA president Bob Ausberger described soils, drainage systems, and wind farms of the passing countryside. Several miles east of I-35W, the first stop was for a concrete marker, installed in 1930 that celebrated the hard-surfacing of the JH across the two states. The tour then continued south, following the original JH route, along gravel roads and through small towns such as Northwood, Kensett, and Manly that retain small town main streets, early twentieth century hotels, and gas stations.

A tour highlight was the Park Inn Hotel in downtown Mason City. Constructed in 1910, the hotel was designed by architect Frank Lloyd Wright. All conference attendees knew of Wright's work, but perhaps not that the Park Inn was one of only six hotels designed by the architect, and the only one still standing. Another fact new to most of those on the tour was that

the hotel was the Jefferson Highway Association information center in 1916 and that the highway's route passed east of the building, along Federal Avenue. Originally designed to house a hotel along with a bank and offices, the building suffered from alterations, partial abandonment, and for many years was considered threatened and endangered. Today, the Park Inn is one of the Midwest's most significant preservation success stories; it has been fully restored through the dedicated work of the non-profit organization, "Wright on the Park."

Following a tour of the building by a local docent, lunch was held in the former bank portion of the building, now used as meeting and banquet space. During lunch, Mike Conlin presented the first JHA President's Award to Ben Beito of Thief River Falls, Minnesota. His well-deserved award recognized his Eagle Scout project which consisted of the creation of metal signs with the JHA's historic logo, placed on telephone poles along the highway's route through Thief River Falls.



Mike Kelly

JHA conference attendees enjoyed lunch at the Park Inn in Mason City. The building was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

The tour next stopped at the Rancho Deluxe Z Garden in Mason City, one of three art gardens on the tour, but by far the largest and most elaborate. Created by local resident and former Mason City council member Max Weaver, the garden is an amazing collection of recycled material, signage, and bicycles perched

on walls—everywhere there was something to catch the eye and amuse. The tour continued south along gravel or asphalt roads following the original route of the Jefferson through small town main streets. In the small town of Rockwell, which included a long-closed brick canopy style gas station, a brief stop allowed participants to disembark to photograph the Rock of Ages Garden, located on the original highway route beside an early twentieth century bungalow. The garden featured a highway-facing sign with its name, cobblestone partial walls, and distinctive rock and concrete borders. At the outskirts of Iowa Falls, we stopped to explore the Scenic Inn, which had been constructed as a "Kabin Kamp" in 1929. The complex evolved to include a gas station and a connected motel complex in the 1950s. Tour participants were able to view several of the original, earlier buildings located behind the 1950s additions.

The Jefferson Highway Farm, south of Hubbard, features a dairy barn along the original highway, now a gravel road. The large barn, despite its apparent long term obsolescence as a working dairy, displays the painted signage: "Jefferson Highway Farm, 1917." The history of the farm, its owners, and their connection to the JH has not (yet) been determined.

Continuing south along the original Jefferson Highway, the tour reached Zearing, a town of less than 600 residents. Following the Jefferson Highway the bus traveled parallel to the railroad tracks then turned to continue along the one block main street, with its early twentieth century commercial buildings.

As the bus turned, everyone was intrigued by a freshly painted sign on the side of a two story commercial building for a long closed JH café that featured the interlocking J and H of the highway's logo. Zearing was also home to the tour's third art garden near the edge of town—the Blattel-Britton Garden—with its



Mike Kelly

The deluxe bus waits for bus tour members as they visit and photograph the Jefferson Highway Farm barn near Hubbard, Iowa.

wonderful salvaged material, including machinery with archways that framed views of the Jefferson Highway less than one-fourth of a mile in the distance.

The tour ended, appropriately, at the “one-stop” café, gas station, and motel—the Reed-Niland Corner, located at the intersection of the Jefferson and Lincoln Highways, very familiar to Lincoln Highway Association members who ensured its survival and interpretation (*Forum*, Fall, 2004). We toured the restored bungalow-style gas station and small U-shaped motel court prior to dinner at the Niland’s Café.



Mike Kelly

Before dinner, the group toured the restored Niland’s Corner near Colo, Iowa.

Managed by LHA member Sandi Huemann-Kelly with assistance from her husband, Mike Kelly (former LHA Iowa chapter president), the Niland’s Café, with its wonderful 1950s recreated interior was an ideal setting for the final meal and awards ceremony. The delicious fare consisted of Iowa pork chops, fresh green beans, and baked potatoes. Dessert consisted of homemade strawberry shortcake with real whipped cream. As attendees feasted on the shortcake, Van Becker delivered JHA awards: “Friend of the Highway and Outstanding Hostess” appropriately given to Sandi Huemann-Kelly; “First Leader and President of the Re-established JHA” to Mike Conlin; “First International Conference Chairman” award to Scott Berka. As noted previously, the President’s Award had been given to Ben Beito at the lunch stop in Mason City. Last but not least, the “High Mileage Member”—the person who traveled farthest to attend the conference—was given to Rollin Southwell of Salt Lake City, Utah.

The tour bus with its well-fed and satisfied conference participants returned to the Gateway Center in Ames. The conference began to break up with sincere goodbyes and anticipation for the second annual conference, scheduled for Olathe, Kansas, in 2013. The conference informally ended in a break-away room at the Gateway arranged by the conference



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JHA

planning committee, where attendees rehashed the previous two days and exchanged contact information. They were entertained by JHA and LHA member Wayne Shannon who performed jazz standards and show tunes on his portable electric piano. As indicated by Lyell Henry's article cited at the beginning of this report ("Following in the Lincoln's Wake") there is much to share and great potential for the Jefferson Highway and its historic connection to the Lincoln Highway.

Carol Ahlgren is a founding member of the reestablished Lincoln Highway Association and a former director of the Nebraska chapter.



Mike Kelly

Rollin Southwell points to a Jefferson Highway pole section that was presented to Max Weaver, the owner of the Z Garden.