

## A Notable Achievement

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Although the route of the Jefferson Highway had been settled by mid-1916, the big job of making the route known to motorists still lay ahead. In the spring of 1917 the Jefferson Highway Association put up 2,500 enameled steel “Pine to Palm” signs on poles placed at one-mile intervals along the highway. However, more important and useful guidance for motorists would come from placement of stenciled trail signs displaying the blue, white, and black JH insignia. By mid-1919, over 15,000 of the latter painted marks had gone up along the Jefferson Highway.

Getting those stenciled markings in place was a formidable task, made more difficult by the restrictions some states placed on putting up trail signs along the public right of way. Trail signs were especially needed within large cities, where motorists could easily get lost, but their control over placement of trail signs was likely to be at its fullest in order to prevent signage clutter and defacing of public property. Yet, as the number of auto trails grew, and as more motorists were taking those trails, large cities also had an obvious interest in providing clear route guidance for the major highways running through their streets.

Fortunately, the Jefferson Highway ranked high among auto trails likely to be warmly received and accommodated by cities on the highway’s route, and in late 1917, Minneapolis became the first big city to invite the Jefferson Highway Association to mark the highway through their city. The event was recorded in an article entitled “A Notable Achievement” in the *Jefferson Highway Declaration* of February, 1918. The article noted that “several highways had requested of Minneapolis the privilege of putting their marks on the lamp posts, but these requests had not been granted.” In sharp contrast, the Minneapolis City Council approved the Jefferson Highway signage project at their regular meeting held December 14, 1917, and on December 27, the City Clerk’s office sent the following letter to JHA:

*Gentlemen: Attached you will find a copy of the report from the Standing Committee on Public Lighting, adopted by the City Council at a meeting held December 14, 1917, requesting your association to place markers on the ornamental lamp posts on Crystal Lake Avenue to Twentieth and Washington Avenue, thence down Washington Avenue to Hennepin and on East Hennepin and Hennepin from University Avenue to Washington Avenue.*

*Yours Truly,  
H. Benton,  
Assistant City Clerk*

According to the article, “Such an enormous traffic went into the city of Minneapolis over the Jefferson Highway in 1917 and congested [the city streets] that something had to be done to relieve the situation.”

Adding to the evidence for this conclusion, J.D. Clarkson, JHA general manager, described how he believed the decision to invite the JHA to post signage had come about: “Last July the official car of the Jefferson Highway was threading its way through the congested district of Minneapolis when a traffic officer called for us to stop. Visions of a police court and a fine floated through the mind of the general manager. The officer said ‘Have you a map of that Jefferson Highway? I would like to have one, and you should furnish one to every traffic officer in the city. We have all been flooded with questions and don’t know how to answer them.’

“The police officer had seen the lettering on the door, ‘Official Car Jefferson Highway,’ and he was determined to have a map,” Clarkson continued. “He held up traffic while we got down into the grip and procured a map for him. He was also provided with a hanger [a map in large format for the wall] for the traffic room at headquarters, and all the traffic men will be provided with pocket maps.”

Getting control over the mounting automobile traffic may have been perceived as an unavoidable necessity for Minneapolis, but Clarkson put his finger on more positive reasons why the city would want to accommodate motorists: “The Jefferson Highway tourists spend a mint of money in Minneapolis every year, and

it did not put them in the best of humor to have to follow a blind trail through the city. Minneapolis knows that a satisfied customer is the best advertisement. It is extremely satisfying and gratifying to the tourist to be able to follow the marks in the city as well as in the country. Other cities would do well to take note.” Presumably, all other cities on the Jefferson Highway route did take note in very short order, readily coming to Clarkson’s conclusions about where their self-interest lay.

