

Kearney Daily Hub – 1914

A local driver was awarded \$20.80 in damages in payment of a claim against the Kearney City Council. He had run into a ditch dug across Lincolnway, and the front wheel of his automobile was broken. The claim was protested by members of the council. It was found that the ditch was dug in such a manner as to make it impossible to cross the same in a machine without injury or a bad jar. Several other locations were discussed and were ordered put in proper condition.

Kearney Daily Hub, June, 1916

Due to heavy rains a truck became stuck in the mud on the Lincoln Highway at Buda. It was mired in so deep the owner/driver had to leave it there.

Lincoln Highway

by Dorothy Weyer Creigh

(one of a series written by this author and published in the Lincoln Journal for a Centennial Series in 1980)

Trouble was, with all those new automobiles in Nebraska in the early years of the 20th century, there were mighty few places to drive them. A few blocks in town, maybe, but not much else. It was inevitable, of course, that the proud owners of the new machines would organize clubs -- Americans do, you know -- and that the clubs would set up excursions. By 1910, the Hastings Automobile Club, for instance, went all the way to Harvard and back, fifty automobiles, in a single day, and later in the year to Holstein and Roseland and back. Other automobile clubs in the state were equally vigorous, members going from one town to another in caravan to boost each other out of deep ruts, push each other up steep grades.

The automobiles were ready. But the roads weren't. Although Nebraska legislatures of 1869, 1871, and 1873 had said that county section lines were to be public roads, those roads were really no more than trails, adequate for high-stepping horses and slow-moving wagons, but not good enough for automobiles which were capable of reaching speeds as high as 35 miles per hour. In 1909 total road mileage in Nebraska was 80,338, but seventy-seven counties reported no improved roads at all. Road repair was a township responsibility.

Out of the various automobile clubs came support for various highway associations. Most of them were akin to Chambers of Commerce, getting their support from towns which would be on their routes. The Good Roads Association, which met in May, 1911, was interested in stimulating a good road from Omaha to Denver, proposing that a book be put out telling about turns and grades, with pictures showing various identifying landmarks so that travelers could "easily follow the highway through the state without asking questions of anybody." Out of that organization came the O-L-D highway (for Omaha, Lincoln, Denver) which in 1920 became the D-L-D, for the 1,700-mile highway from Detroit to Denver; it is now known as US 6

Before long the Lincoln Highway Association was established, with the Nebraska branch one of the most active in the country. The route was laid out from New York City to San Francisco, in Nebraska following the Oregon Trail and passing through fifteen counties, fifty-three towns. "No other state in the Union has so many miles of level road as the Lincoln Highway -- across our state," said a brochure from the Nebraska branch which solicited funds in 1914 for planting trees along the roadside. And the Lincoln Highway, which later became US 30, was a marvel of

the age, for it had occasional concrete markers identifying the highway, far better than descriptions of turns at barns or cottonwood thickets which had been the only highway advice heretofore. Later on the Lincoln Highway Association secured from cement manufacturers an offer to supply free to any community three thousand barrels of cement if the town would see to improving a section of highway in its area; Grand Island, Kearney, and Fremont took advantage of the offer.

But although Nebraskans continued to buy automobiles at an astonishing rate, most of the taxpayers weren't interested in spending money on roads. It was the Federal Aid Road Act of 1916, providing federal funds to match state money, that was the impetus for early development of roads within the state, particularly for those highways which were part of an interstate road system. By 1921, 5,619 miles of Nebraska roads were included in the federal system, including one from Sioux City to Chadron (later called US 20), the Lincoln highway, the D-L-D, the one from Ogasllala to Scottsbluff (later numbered US 26, the road from Sioux City to the Kansas line (later numbered US 77), and the one from Yankton through York to the Kansas line (later numbered US 81). Before the roads were numbered, they had names, even though the drivers couldn't ever be sure where to turn at a fork. These included the S-Y-A , for the Seward-York-Aurora route; The Harding, Columbus, Grainland, Potash; presumably drivers knew where they were and where they went.

By the early 1920's, some enterprising towns along highways set up touring facilities in city parks to attract motorists. There on Bulletin Boards they posted up-to-date information about road conditions ahead, including detours. For the fine new graveled roads almost always had road-graders somewhere along their lengths which were hazardous to pass on the narrow roadway; after the driver had completed the maneuver he often found himself with a flat tire, the grader blade having kicked up glass or nails which caused punctures. The gravel pile in the center of the road was another peril, and loose gravel flipped many a car which had to brake to negotiate 90-degree turns on the highway.

In 1926 Nebraska highways were numbered and marked with metal signs, and gas stations which had sprouted up along the roadsides began to distribute free roadmaps. And other advertising evolved, itinerant painting crews wandering through the countryside offering to paint barns if the farmers would allow such slogans as "Carter's Little Liver Pills" or "Pink Pills for Pale People." A few years later, during the Depression years, drivers and passengers alike chuckled at the Burma-Shave signs which appeared in sequence along the highways, catchy limericks ending in an advertisement for shaving material.

Though Nebraska roads carried heavy traffic, they were far from adequate, far behind the standards of other states. By 1930's, 5,0000 miles were graveled 3,300 more were graded, baut only 309 miles were paved.. Increased federal highway funding during the 1930's for work relief projects and in the years since has helped; with the opening of Interstate 80 and improvement of other roads within the state, Nebraska has begun to catch up.

Kearney Daily Hub, April 2, 1923

Mr. Jordan, highway commissioner, states that work is progressing favorably on the Lincoln Highway, east. Many farmers have already set back their fences and grading will be started shortly. The farmers have been asked to establish their new fence line not less than eighteen inches inside of the road line, that it may be properly anchored against being dislodged when grading gets under way.

Hire Highway Patrolmen

Beginning today the county highway commissioner is starting five highway patrolmen on the job. These men will patrol the federal and state highways, giving them such emergency attention as may become necessary at all times. Last year the county operated with three highway patrols, not considered sufficient to handle the big mileage of roads which much be looked after.

Kearney Daily Hub, April 4, 1923 ad - An interesting mix of services as the times changed
Don't Undertake to send your money

Away
for HARNESS

When you can buy cheaper and better
in Kearney at the
J.M. CRAIG AUTO TOP WORKS,
BOLTE BLOCK

We are now repairing and oiling harness. Bring it in early.

Shelton Clipper, April 1925

The Nebraska Lincoln Highway meeting of good road boosters will be held in Kearney next Wednesday, Apr. 29. Highway authorities of the state will be present to address the gathering and a large attendance is anticipated. Men living in the towns along the route of the Lincoln Highway should be doubly interested and ready to boost for any improvement that can be made. Now that the gasoline tax will provide money with which to improve the roads of the state, the Kearney meeting ought to be an interesting one. Every city, town and village along this great transcontinental highway should be represented. It is expected that a number of Shelton people will go to Kearney for the meeting.

Kearney Daily Hub, Monday, April 27, 1925

To Hold State Meet Here
L. H. Association Delegates to
Be Guests of Chamber

Kearney Hub, Wednesday, April 29, 1925

Holding Highway Meet Today
Over Hundred Reservations Made
For Lunch
(This was the Annual Meeting of the Lincoln Highway Association. The Chamber of Commerce was giving a complimentary luncheon.)

Kearney Daily Hub, Thursday, April 30, 1925

Gravel or Paving on Lincoln Highway for Length if the State
Believe this can be Brought About in a Year

(more than 100 delegates attended this meeting. Discussion included advantages of paving)

"One point was brought out that will be of particular interest to Kearneyites. It was learned that within ten days or two weeks, when the Lincoln Highway through this county is surfaced

with gravel for its entire length and the road to Pleasanton is also surfaced, Buffalo County will be further advanced on gravel surfacing of state aid roads than another county in Nebraska."

Shelton Clipper, May 1925

The Yant Construction Company is expected to complete gravel surfacing the Lincoln Highway between here and Gibbon in a few more days. The highway has been graveled from Kearney east to a point between Optic and Gibbon. Nine trucks are being used to haul the material onto the road. Much of the gravel has been spread over the highway and travel is continuing over the route as usual. Road men say that when completed this will be one of the best stretches of graveled highway in the state.

The Seedling Mile

The Lincoln Highway was the first planned transcontinental road system

By 1912 many people were buying the new "horseless carriages" but there were few suitable roads where they could be driven.

Railroads covered much of the country connecting cities and towns. There were many miles of unrelated roads leading to railroad centers or market towns. No system of connecting these roads existed.

Carl G. Fisher is credited with the idea of building a road across the United States. He dreamed of a hard-surfaced, all-weather, accurately-signed road extending from coast to coast.

The first idea for financing this road - estimated at \$10,000,000 - by asking for donations from the auto manufacturers did not raise enough funds. The Lincoln Highway Association was formed with memberships offered to the public to raise additional money.

The Lehigh Portland Cement Company also offered to donate a million and a half barrels of cement toward construction of this highway. These were used to create the "Seedling Miles" along the route.

Kearney lost the race with Grand Island to construct the first Seedling Mile in Nebraska by 3 days.

A Seedling Mile was a mile of concrete paving along the Lincoln Highway route constructed to show the advantages of paved roads. They were constructed some distance outside a town so that a car would have left the smoother hard surface of city blocks and driven on rutted dirt roads before coming onto the smooth paving of the Seedling Mile. At the end of the mile the car was once again on the rough rutted dirt road.

The first Seedling Mile, a 10 foot wide strip of paving one mile long, was completed in October, 1914, west of DeKalb, Illinois. Nebraska was next to show interest. Grand Island made the first application and completed its Seedling Mile on November 3, 1915. Kearney's Seedling Mile was completed on November 6, 1915.

Kearney's Seedling Mile was located on West 24th Street from the tailrace to the present Youth Development Center Road. Instead of 10 feet wide, Kearney made theirs 15 feet wide. The Kearney Commercial Club voted to raise the funds needed. Dan Quinton was awarded the contract for construction. W. L. Stickel, local lumber dealer, personally guaranteed \$3,000 to get the road started.

Donations included:

16 carloads of cement from St. Louis Portland Cement Works

Grading by the City of Kearney

Hauling of sand and gravel by the State of Nebraska

Half freight charges on hauling the cement by Union Pacific

Steel culverts from Nebraska Steel Culvert Company