Written by Helen Kaverman Friday, November 22, 2013 9:12 PM -



The year is almost over but there is still one month to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the Lincoln Highway. We can celebrate that this coast to coast highway, sometimes called "Main Street Across America," especially since it goes right down Fifth Street in our town.

The Lincoln Highway began in Times Square, at Broadway and Forty-second, in New York City and ended at the Pacific Ocean in Lincoln Park, San Francisco, 3,389 miles west. From New York, it angled southwest through Trenton and Philadelphia, where it turned west, beginning its path across 12 states; New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada and California.

Carl Fisher is known as the father of the Lincoln Highway. Fisher was a man of ideas. In 1912, he hatched a new idea, a coast-to-coast highway. In September of that year, he threw a large dinner party for the leaders of the Indianapolis automobile manufacturing people. He knew the enthusiasm and capitol of these men could get the highway started. He told them that a gravel highway could be built from coast to coast for about 10 million dollars. This would be for basic road building materials. He thought counties and cities along the route could provide labor and machinery. (Note: Fisher was the man responsible for paving the Indiana Motor Speedway and inaugurating the "Indy 500" in 1911.)

Fisher was also the founder of the Prest-O-Lite Company, the maker of carbide headlights. Fisher's speech at the dinner was well received with the first major pledge, a \$300,000 offer from Frank A. Seiberling of Goodyear. The time had come — the first Model T rolled off the Ford Assembly line in 1908 and people were getting automobile fever. Fisher wanted his dream highway finished in time for 25,000 cars to cross the continent for the Panama – Pacific Exposition in San Francisco, only two and one half years away.

During the spring of 1913, Fisher hurriedly called several informal and closed meetings in Detroit, the heart of the automobile industry. As a result, substantial subscriptions for the highway came from the Hudson Motor Company and Willys – Overland. Henry Ford did not support the program because he thought roads should be paid for by everyone through taxes. However, Henry B. Joy, of the Packard Motor Company came onboard. He's the one who suggested the highway be in honor of Abraham Lincoln. This was before the Lincoln Memorial

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was built in Washington, D. C. and many people were anxious to do something in honor of Abraham Lincoln.

In July 1913, the group met again in Detroit, where they acted to put the organization into official existence. Those in attendance were: Henry Joy, Roy Chapman, Emory W. Clark, Arthur Pardington and Henry Bodman. Fisher was absent. He and Joy could not agree on the chosen route. Joy became president of the Lincoln Highway Association; Fisher and Pardington, vice presidents; and Clark was elected treasurer. Pardington was also placed on the payroll because he administered the day-to-day operations of the association. Now all they needed was the route.

Joy's route was chosen because of its directness and easy terrain and the fact that a motorist could reach the high point across the mountains at less than 9,000 feet. It was not chosen for its scenic beauty but for a direct route. Fisher wanted to take the road through Kansas and Colorado. Officials of those two states were very disappointed with the chosen route.

The public announcement of the highway route was made 14 September 1913. October 30 was set aside as a national day of celebration for this memorial to Lincoln. The farmers in Indiana marked the occasion by combining it with Halloween and set jack-o-lanterns on fence posts along the route. Parades, bonfires and fireworks were held in towns along the route.

By early 1914, it was apparent to the directors that the association was in financial difficulty. Joy, Fisher and other founders personally underwrote the preliminary expenses. The group realized roads of gravel would not last so they suggested concrete. A.Y. Gowen, of Lehigh Portland Cement Co. offered a donation, thinking the ocean-to-ocean highway might be a proving ground for his new road building material. They would create sample strips of concrete, called seedling miles. The first seedling mile was completed near DeKalb, Ill., in the fall of 1914. The year of 1914 saw the first effort in making the red, white and blue Lincoln Highway markers. In 1915 they poured seedling miles of concrete in Nebraska, Illinois and Indiana.

That same year, Carl Fisher stepped away from an active role in the organization and moved to Florida. Henry Joy was an outdoorsman with wanderlust and enjoyed taking his beloved Packard on reliability tests. In 1915, Joy and two of his friends set out for the west coast. It started to rain just before they got to LaPort, Ind., and rained for days and days. The roads were bad. Joy remarked that they were 12 to 20 inches deep in jumbo. They made 37 miles on Tuesday, driving in low gear practically all the way. They even forded the DeMoines River,

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driving the Packard through mud and water; water above the hubs and running boards but the carburetor and ignition remained dry. It had taken them 11 hard days to cover the 1,000 miles between Chicago and Cheyenne. In good weather, they could have done it in little more than three days. They eventually made it to the Panama – Pacific Exposition.

Henry Joy and his companions made a triumphant entrance to San Francisco and the exposition. Their unkempt car was the center of attention as it crossed the San Francisco Bay on a ferry, rumbled through the city and entered the exposition grounds, covered with mud and road grime. The Packard was placed on display in the Palace of Transportation. His beloved car had proved to be very reliable but Henry Joy was a little disappointed in the coast-to-coast road. It took them 21 days to make the trip from Detroit to San Francisco. The Lincoln Highway was no highway in the spring of 1915. It was a mud hole extending from Illinois to Wyoming. Later came U. S. Rout 30, which covered parts of the original route and since that time Interstate 80 runs along side the Lincoln Highway or just a few miles away in some instances.

Next week, this column will feature some of its points of interest and especially its route through Ohio and our City of Delphos.