

THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY AND THE AMERICAN IMAGINATION
Peggy Seigel
Quest Club Talk February 24, 2012

Go back with me some 93 years to Fort Wayne in a quieter, simpler time. Let's pretend that we're little kids and it's July 17, 1919, a warm, humid Thursday summer morning. In our pajamas, we slip out to the front porch to pick up the morning Journal Gazette that the neighborhood newsboy had tossed up before dawn. Leafing through the front section, we read a story that we've been following the past few days. A colossal army truck train that's traveling across the country reached Delphos, Ohio, last night and is expected to come rumbling into town this very afternoon around 4:00 p.m. We spend the next few hours plotting how we're going to get downtown to watch this unprecedented spectacle. We convince our moms we can go without them, round up a couple of friends, then hop on a streetcar. Rushing to find a good viewing spot along Harrison Street, east of Clinton, we learn that the parade has been over for at least four hours. The good roads through Ohio into northeast Indiana had helped the convoy make up for lost time. The mayor and a bunch of other big wigs had apparently rushed out to the east side of town, barely in time, to lead the grand procession along the Lincoln Highway, past Memorial Park, and into downtown. Instead of parking along Harrison Street, as originally planned, the 81 trucks in the convoy are in Lawton Park. What do we do now? Do we go home because our moms are expecting us or do we head over to get a good look at this once in a lifetime spectacle?

While I leave you with this dilemma, I want to ask another question. Why was this mammoth show of military force driving through our bustling industrial city? Had Fort Wayne been selected to host a grand World War I victory celebration? According to our morning newspaper, the army motor transport expedition was "one of the greatest publicity stunts attempted in the history of the country." Was this grand spectacle essentially a marketing ploy? If so, what was behind it?

Official military reports indicated that the convoy had clear objectives. The military wanted to service test on United States soil the special purpose vehicles used in World War I. How would the army and its supporting motorized vehicles meet the test of thousands of miles of plains, desert, and mountains should our country be invaded by an enemy force? The military also wanted to demonstrate the need for trained servicemen to operate these new vehicles. In addition, the convoy would demonstrate the need for improved roads. The military convoy would add its saga to the rugged adventures of conquering the west. Gasoline vehicles would now take on the country's vast frontiers, following in the traditions of ox-team prairie schooners, the first steam railroad and most recently, the first airplane flight. On this July day in 1919, such a prospect sparked the imagination with promises of gritty adventure and majestic landscapes.

Fort Wayne was their tenth day, their tenth stop, on a route that had begun in Washington, D.C. behind the White House and would push west all the way to San Francisco. After delays and mishaps crossing Pennsylvania, they had kept their steady pace of 15 miles per hour, 75 miles per day. Their drivers, mostly raw recruits, were improving with experience and badly needed discipline. They had had a general run of good luck, so far, with only a couple of exceptions. The worst had occurred their fourth day out in Pennsylvania when a cargo truck tumbled off a road in the Allegheny Mountains during a thunderstorm. The crew had quickly baled out; no one had been hurt. In Columbiana, Ohio they had enjoyed a Sunday of rest at the Firestone

Homestead. Not bad for roughing it. Their reception in Fort Wayne, as would often be the case, was smoothly pulled off with all the expected public fanfare. There was only a minor twist.

In Lawton Park, they set up camp, tended to routine inspections, repairs, and truck scrub downs. Then the hot, sleep deprived soldiers took advantage of the Lawton Park pool. No matter that only a few of them had swimming trunks. A local awning company surrounded the entire pool with a wall of canvas. These skinny dippers likely included a young lieutenant colonel, Westpoint graduate and career officer, Dwight D. Eisenhower. He was with the convoy as one of fifteen observation officers for the War Department. Did Eisenhower ever mention this swim when he returned to Fort Wayne as a middle aged war hero campaigning for the Presidency? Did any of the Fort Wayne kids so eager to get a look at the truck train climb the fence to get a peak at the swimmers?

As the afternoon and evening wore on, Fort Wayne citizens inspected such specialized military vehicles as a giant five ton tractor, a colossal wrecker/tow truck known as the Militor, trailers carrying blacksmith shops and kitchens, four wheel drive trucks and touring cars. In between speeches, the General Electric Band and the popular Kiltie Band from the Strand Theatre entertained the crowd. A large search light continuously swept through the sky. By 6:30 the following morning, however, all 81 vehicles snaked through downtown Fort Wayne, crossed the concrete arched Harrison Street bridge spanning the St. Mary's River, and then headed northwest on the Goshen Road some 70 miles to South Bend.

My purpose today is to invite you to experience the early 20th century's excitement of traveling west to California on the Lincoln Highway. Who knows, if we had been living in Fort Wayne in 1919, we might have gotten up in the wee hours of the morning, packed a tool kit, spare tires, tubes, a gas tank, and a tent, put on our scarves, gloves, and yellow goggles, thrown in our knee high boots, and cranked up the old Model T. In the tradition of Huck Finn, let's now "light out for the Territory ahead of the rest."

Only conceived four years earlier, the Lincoln Highway in 1919 was still largely a dream, an ambitious marketing plan, and a catalyst for extraordinary change. The dream had been conceived in 1912 by Indianapolis businessmen Carl Fisher and James Allison, visionaries who had already made a fortune in automobile related industries. They then sold industrialists connected to the burgeoning automobile business on their plan for a coast to coast highway. One of the first long term supporters of the plan, Frank Seiberling, president of the Akron based Goodyear Tire Company, put up an initial \$300,000. Together these industrialists formed the Lincoln Highway Association. In the summer of 1913 Seiberling and 70 other men in 17 cars plus two supply trucks left Indianapolis for a four week tour to promote the Lincoln Highway and Indiana built automobiles. They hammered out a route across twelve states, conceived it as a perpetual memorial to Abraham Lincoln, and lobbied for building roads.

From New York to the Mississippi River, the Lincoln Highway would follow old military, pioneer and stage coach roads, trails used by Native Americans, and routes carved by railroads. West of the Mississippi, routes used by earlier generations of travelers were all dirt roads, a combination of known routes and Wild West adventure. The founders of the

Lincoln Highway plotted their road across the middle of the country, crossing Nebraska following the Platte River, then the salt deserts of Utah, and through soaring mountain passes of the Sierra Nevadas.

For the men of the Lincoln Highway Association, the availability of better roads was the missing ingredient required for their automobiles manufactured in Indiana. This reflected Indiana's status as a leading car manufacturer. Before Henry Ford's mass produced Model Ts, most American cars were made in Indiana. To keep their competitive edge as Detroit began to take over the market, Lincoln Highway founders built the Indianapolis Speedway. A coast to coast road was an obvious next step. When funding lagged, they promoted "seedling miles." The Lincoln Highway Association agreed to pay for cement for a mile of road provided that a community would cover labor and materials. Promises of commercial growth became contagious as every town and burg wanted their own piece of the road.

Seiberling hoped to finish the Lincoln Highway in 1915 in time for the Panama – Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. The ambitious undertaking was glamorized by a motion picture caravan and caught the American imagination. Fundraising for building roads was uneven, however. Muddy routes in Iowa were infamously known as "gumbo." Farmers in the east and Midwest objected to automobiles on public highways because they upset horses. Ranchers found the eastern greenhorns downright annoying. They ran their cars into barbed wire fences at night; they got into a "heap of trouble" rolling off the road and getting stuck in sand and mud. They were lucky to see cattle belly deep in waving grass. And they were trespassing. Why didn't these "high-fallutin" Easterners in their "fan-dangled things" just stay home? (Butko 245) Ranchers and farmers learned, however, that they could make a little extra money rescuing these crazies from their road debacles. For motorists in 1915 in particular, the lure of the Pacific Ocean in a Model T Ford was irresistible. So they kept coming. At the end of the road would be the once in a lifetime chance to see the International Exposition, its 430 foot tall Tower of Jewels and the magnificent Palace of Fine Arts, an architectural wonder that resembled Roman ruins.

The Lincoln Highway spawned dreams at a time well suited for bold ideas and change. By 1914, the United States had directed the completion of the Panama Canal. Teddy Roosevelt had ignited the nation's interest in conservation, cattle ranches, and physical fitness. Reluctantly pulled into World War I, Woodrow Wilson led the United States' great effort to save the world for democracy and bring lasting peace. War time industries helped launch a period of unprecedented prosperity. As cities grew, people became more sensitive to the need for new experiences.

The shift to automobiles during the first decades of the 20th century was also brought about by major political and corporate changes. Teddy Roosevelt pushed to weaken big political machines, big railroads, and big corporations. A broad cross section of government and labor leaders and social reformers including Fort Wayne's Dr. Alice Hamilton sounded alarms over workplace conditions in the giant factories. They lobbied to end the grueling 55 hour work week and promoted public health. During this same period, mass production spurred a revolution in automobile manufacturing. By 1924 the price of a Model T Ford had come down to \$290 (Bark & Blake 377), a price that was affordable for households earning what was then considered a minimum standard of living, at least \$1,400 per year.

By the early 1920s, Fort Wayne workers found some new leisure and sustainable income, if not prosperity. For almost half of the city's industrial workers, the work week was cut to 48 hours. As automobiles moved off production lines, the Bowser Corporation and Wayne Oil Tank and Pump Company built gasoline pumps and gasoline supply tanks for service stations. Fort Wayne became the gas pump capital of the world.

The first decades of the 20th century were also years of profound changes for women. Fort Wayne's factories employed unusually large numbers of young women and children who helped their families maintain a basic standard of living. Although working women were stuck in low paying jobs, by the 1920s they were also envisioning new independence and possibilities. Women also expanded their intellectual horizons as members of women's clubs and networked with other women in state and national organizations. All of these activities brought women out of the home into a changing world known, appropriately, as the Progressive Era. Women now sported short hair styles and knee length skirts. In the years immediately following World War I when they finally won the vote, they anticipated a more equal place in their society. With hard work, fair play and a strong dose of what my grandmother called gumption, the average American might realize her dreams. Part of the dream included driving cars.

Not surprisingly, women were among the very first to drive west and write travel narratives that caught the national imagination. In June of 1909 twenty-two year old Alice Ramsey of New York City, with three friends, drove to San Francisco in 59 days in a dark green Maxwell 30 touring car. [*Veil, Duster, and Tire Iron* rpt. 1961] The next year Harriet White Fisher [*A Woman's World Tour in a Motor*, 1911] finished a ten-thousand-mile journey around the world by driving from San Francisco to New York in two months. Effie Gladding's account of her 1914 cross continental drive [*Across the Continent by the Lincoln Highway*] became the first published description of travel on the Lincoln Highway. Other women were conspicuous among the some 150 dreamers and foolhardy souls who answered the widely publicized call of the West via the Lincoln Highway in 1915. Undeterred by the continual quirky and back breaking work involved in cranking up the Model T and changing tires, they welcomed a chance to explore. They were also likely to be affluent and privileged with leisure time.

The most prominent of these motoring women circa 1915 was Emily Post, then a 43 year old recently divorced socialite, society columnist, and author of European travelogues. Her reputation as a sophisticated, gutsy adventurer won her an assignment from Collier's Magazine to entertain readers with an account of a coast to coast trip via the Lincoln Highway. In an era that worshiped heroes and new heroines, she earned her place.

You have to give Emily Post credit for breaking the mold of her privileged jet set. Many of her New York friends were thunderstruck with her decision to motor cross country with her college age son in their luxurious European roadster. Here was a woman known to despise "roughing it" about to set off on a perilous journey with no chauffeur, mechanic, or servants. Echoing the boredom of Scott Fitzgerald's Daisy Buchanan, Emily's friends considered the very idea "dreary." From the start, when she looked for help in planning her route, Emily Post would find new meanings for "dreary." The Lincoln Highway beyond the Mississippi River was "an imaginary line like the equator." Emily was nevertheless undaunted by tales of immigrants who ate hunks of fat pork and raw onions and slept on barroom floors or of drunken outlaws who might likely kill you. With son Edwin,

nicknamed E.M., and cousin Celia, Emily headed west out of New York City weighted down with far too many fashionable clothes and impractical farewell gifts stuffed in huge motor trunks. More importantly, Emily left with great optimism and humor, a good camera, and E.M.'s practical skills as a car mechanic. In typical Emily Post style, she was determined to create an impeccable image and an entertaining narrative. "As we come into the outskirts of a city, where we are to spend the night," Emily told her readers, "I take off, in the car, my goggles and the swathing of veils that I wear touring, and put on the lace one. The transformation from blown about hair and dusty face to a tidy disguise of all blemishes is quite miraculous." (p.39) Their route, averaging 20 to 25 miles per hour, included Albany, Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Erie, and Cleveland.

Unfortunately for Fort Wayne, Emily Post slid through northeast Indiana without notice. She spent the night in the fashionable Oliver Hotel in South Bend, then motored on to Chicago. Instead of pushing west across Illinois to Iowa on the tentative Lincoln Highway route, Emily sought more established roads that headed southwest to St. Louis. She and E.M., followed a habit of listening to local mechanics, hotel keepers and friends to avoid obvious disasters.

Emily's greatest trial in the early weeks came when they stalled midway through Illinois at Rochelle after torrential rainstorms. Mired in knee deep "gumbo" mud, their roadster was too much for the teams of four to six horses charged with rescuing motorists. Common sense seemed to have now caught up with her. She seriously considered putting the car on a freight train and shipping it past the muddy areas. But what kind of story would this have made? Headlines: Emily Post, a quitter! With even the possibility of such a turn of events, the local townspeople, at first so welcoming and helpful, were now sullen and distant. Emily Post, the bold adventuress, the magazine writer, realized she had no choice but the illogical one. She pushed on. "To finish what you have begun, to see it through at whatever cost, that seems to be the spirit here. ..The consideration as to whether it is the wisest and most expedient thing to do has no part in their process of reasoning." (p. 76) Emily Post and entourage learned the importance of car chains and a new definition of expedience. Under the cover of night, they drove across the Mississippi River on a railroad trestle bridge, an act which was clearly against the law. Down with common sense! On they drove through the legendary mud of Iowa and west through Nebraska to Colorado.

Instead of following a northern route identified as the Lincoln Highway through Utah and Nevada, Emily Post and entourage drove south from Denver through New Mexico, then west through pueblo Indian and Navajo country popularized by the Fred Harvey Company and the railroads. Experiencing the great open West, Emily Post felt that she underwent a "metamorphosis." She learned to value "a simpler, less unencumbered view of life," hoping that her "own puny heart and mind and soul might grow into something bigger." E.M. mastered the skills of driving on slippery roads, along narrow, rutted mountain passes, across treacherous streams with quicksand, and through arroyos. Although he managed lots of repairs en route, many hours were spent getting acquainted with more skilled mechanics and blacksmiths and waiting for new parts. In Winslow, Arizona, however, the "seriously crippled condition" of their car abruptly halted Emily's great journey. Now sending it ahead by a freight train, Emily, E.M. and Celia opted for the comforts of rail travel, visited the Grand Canyon, then picked up their car in Los Angeles.

After four weeks on the road during a 4,250 mile journey, Emily Post swept into San Francisco to keep her grand appointment at the Panama Exposition. Her descriptions offered her readers a candid and breathtaking vicarious experience. The Tower of Jewels “looked like a diamond and turquoise wedding cake,” rather sane compared to the general “bewildering chaos” of pavilions and exhibits. Among the industries represented, she found the Ford Motor Company’s assembly of cars on a conveyor the most interesting. What she found still more impressive were aerial stunts by a young aviator who had only recently become famous. In a late night performance he looped and twisted with a torch at the back of his machine that left a “trail of fire like a comet’s tail” spelling the word “ZONE.” In a show that started at 5:00 in the morning, he performed aerial somersaults, “dipping, diving,” “like a bird gone mad.” At the end, the young flyer “walked the whole length of the field between fifty thousand shouting, waving human beings. No hero of the Roman Stadium, no king coming to his own, has lived a greater moment than the young birdman lived every day,” Emily wrote. (235-236) In 1915, few of her readers would have identified the “young birdman,” Art Smith, as a Fort Wayne native.

In true Emily Post spirit, she left her readers with advice for the road including day by day routes, hotels, road conditions, and of course, clothes. She told her readers to carry new tires, African water bags, tire chains, a tire pump and spare tube and extra gasoline. She recommended “uncomplicated” clothing. A fur coat was preferable for cold weather; for a hat, she liked an untrimmed small and close fitting toque tied on with a veil. A soft black silk brocade wrapper was her favorite for “walking through public corridors.” Aware of the dangerous effects of too much sun, she also recommended a veil of a single thickness of orange colored chiffon and orange goggles. Finally, writing from her experiences of summer travel, she told her readers to “[w]ear the thinnest and least amount of underwear that you can feel decently clad in.”

Flash forward four years to the summer of 1919. The excitement invoked by early motorists on the Lincoln Highway has been subdued by World War I. Now, however, the country is reinventing itself. Americans no longer have to conserve gasoline for military use. They don’t need to avoid non essential trips. Driving is again fashionable. Once again the goal of a coast to coast Lincoln Highway as envisioned by leaders of the automobile industry captures the American imagination. Fresh out of World War I, Americans are also concerned with what we now know as homeland security. The massive transcontinental convoy pushing its way west along the Lincoln Highway stirs bitter memories of fighting in France along with pride, excitement, and love of country.

When you’re having a bad day, I suggest you go to the website of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library and read official reports of this first transcontinental motorized expedition. Eisenhower’s six page report is succinct, to the point. He challenges his readers to use their imagination. A daily log written by another officer paints a much more vivid picture. For example, August 3, Nebraska, after heavy rain: With the exception of the Engineers’ trucks and the F.W.D.’s, the Militor towed every truck in the Convoy at least once during the day. At one time, nine trucks chained together were unable to move under their own power, and the Militor pulled them through.” August 18 in Utah: ““Militor towed Class B Machine Shop all day on many steep grades and sharp curves. One section of road on a sharp turn and steep fill had to be supported by timbers to prevent a slide.” Following day, still Utah, August 19: “Departed Ogden, 6:30 a.m. Militor still towing Class B Machine shop, ran into a soft spot

in the road on a detour. The Class B broke through the surface crust and the Militor in trying to pull it out, also broke through and was buried in soft mud to a depth of about 4 ½ ‘.” About 3 hrs. were required to extricate the Militor.” Crossing the Salt Lake Desert was nothing short of life threatening. “August 20 ...Last six miles was natural desert trail of alkali dust and fine sand up to 2’ deep, with numerous chuck holes. No rain for 18 weeks and traction exceedingly difficult... Sage brush was cut from desert to fill in wheel ruts, as this was the only material available.” As the convoy moved further across the desert: “Practically every vehicle was mired and rescue work required almost superhuman efforts of entire personnel from 2 p.m. until after midnight.” Next day, water was rationed to one cup for supper and overnight. “Supper consisted of cold baked beans and hard bread, mere existence being chief concern. Impossible to distribute baggage and personnel obliged to sleep wherever they could.”

The ceremony welcoming the convoy in San Francisco on September 6 was subdued and stately compared to the Pan American Exposition that had greeted Emily Post four years earlier. A milestone was dedicated to mark the western terminus of the Lincoln Highway. Following well established conventions, the Red Cross Canteen Service served lunch. The final entry of the daily log simply recorded, “Convoy parked at the Presidio. Fair and warm. Paved city streets. Made 8 miles in 3 hours. Arrived San Francisco, Cal., 11:30 a.m.”

The Transcontinental Motor Convoy’s 62 day expedition gave over 3,250,000 people along the way personal awareness of the great need for improved cross-country roads. National security concerns combined with the continuing popularity of written travel accounts pushed politicians to create a federal highway system. States matched federal dollars to replace old gravel and macadam surfaces with concrete and brick. By 1928 the Lincoln Highway Association disbanded; the distinctive Lincoln Highway markers were replaced by new interstate highway signs.

Lacking vast western plains, mountain passes and deserts, the Lincoln Highway through Indiana seems quite, well, wimpy. Automobile routes followed old migration, trade, and Indian trails, then the tracks of the Pittsburg, Fort Wayne, and Chicago line of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Many Fort Wayne residents probably know the road coming into town from New Haven as the Lincoln Highway. Some of us have likely spotted the red, white, and blue L signs scattered through the city. Indiana’s road building resulted in 163 miles from the Ohio-Indiana state line southeast of Fort Wayne to the Illinois border outside of Chicago. The original route through Fort Wayne in 1913 headed northwest to Churubusco, Goshen, Elkhart, South Bend, on what we know today as Highway 33, then southwest to Valparaiso, continuing on to Chicago on Highway 30. A one and a half mile road near the Illinois border was created to illustrate the ideal modern road, a ten inch thick, 40 foot wide concrete surface bordered with electric lights. In 1928 the Lincoln Highway was rerouted to Valparaiso through Columbia City, Warsaw and Plymouth. These roads stimulated an endless cascade of capital improvements. Farmers found easier access to markets for their products. Motor camps, cabins, cafes, hotels, gasoline stations, along with automobile dealers and car garages quickly sprang up. Our landscapes would forever be changed.

Over the years, the legends and popularity of the Lincoln Highway have swelled and ebbed, then swelled again. Each generation has created its own memories of road trips. In 1992, a new Lincoln Highway Association was organized. These

enthusiasts began publication of a quarterly magazine and annual conferences. Old cafes, motels and filling stations along what more or less became Route 30 from Philadelphia to Salt Lake City, then Route 50 to San Francisco have become magnets for tourists and history buffs.

Enthusiasm close to home has brought about the Indiana Lincoln Highway Association. In 2007 thirty volunteers trained by Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana conducted a historic sites survey searching for evidence such as old road surfaces, commercial buildings, even camp grounds. In 2008, the Indiana Lincoln Highway Association opened an office in South Bend. With education materials, they aim at acquainting new generations with the legacy of our old road adventures. The same year, the Indiana Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission provided funds to hang colorful banners across Indiana marking the original 1913 route. This past October the historic Lincoln Highway across northern Indiana was named an official Indiana byway. Road signage and tourism materials will help promote its history and link the Indiana routes to national Lincoln Highway pathways.

As I have experienced something of the lore and grit of the Lincoln Highway, certain images and experiences stand out. Close to home, my husband and I have followed the old 1928 Lincoln Highway route through Columbia City to Warsaw. Besides appreciating the bucolic Indiana countryside, I have gained new respect for our magnificent Indiana courthouses. The stately limestone Whitley County Courthouse is a small older sibling of our colossal Allen County Courthouse. Both were designed by Fort Wayne architect Brentwood Tolan. Furthermore, the impressive Kosciusko County Courthouse in Warsaw was designed by Brentwood's father Thomas Tolan. The restored courtroom in Warsaw is a Victorian showcase for hand carved black walnut paneling and ornate iron seating. The building exterior is Indiana limestone at its best. Both courthouses honor their county's servicemen with impressive memorials. Whitley County soldiers who died in the Civil War are also remembered by their place of death. While partial to courthouses, I include another high point for Quest Club members following the 1928 route. As a young child, Cheri Becker remembers living next door to her mother's restaurant on the old Lincoln Highway between Fort Wayne and Columbia City. Cheri remembers taking naps in the back of the kitchen in a space reserved for the hired help. Her mother's great cooking kept regular customers coming again and again.

The original 1913 Lincoln Highway northwest from Fort Wayne on the old Goshen Road has a connection to Quest member Jan Paflas. Jan's late husband's grandfather, Nick Paflas, founded the Olympia Candy Kitchen on Main Street, Highway 33, in Goshen in 1912. Her father-in-law, now 88 years old, goes in three mornings a week to open the business, dip chocolates and make potato salad. Jan's sister in law, the current owner, manages the old soda fountain, candy shop and café with her son. Also in Goshen, NOT with Fort Wayne connections, is an example of Indiana architecture at its wackiest – an octagonal limestone police booth at the courthouse corner built for the purpose of keeping watch for gangsters noted for robbing banks. Constructed in 1939 by the WPA, this strange art deco structure with gun portals makes you think that the area was hard up for projects to keep young people out of trouble. In South Bend, the elegant old Oliver Hotel where Emily Post stayed has long since disappeared. The Oliver Mansion, however, home of the owners of the Oliver Chilled Plow Company, is preserved as a grand old Victorian house museum. An equally stunning Victorian mansion nearby is the 40 room Studebaker home,

Tippecanoe House, beautifully restored as a lovely restaurant.

In Fort Wayne, the Lincoln Highway comes into town on the east side past Memorial Park, an expansive rolling green space dedicated to World War I soldiers. Here also is a 40 foot obelisk honoring Fort Wayne's flying wonder Art Smith. His airborne career began on the small hillsides in this park and along the Lincoln Highway. Many of the landmarks in town, including the nine story Anthony Hotel, unfortunately no longer exist. Cindy's Diner, while on the route, has no historic ties to Fort Wayne's original Lincoln Highway. The Anthony Wayne statue so familiar to us from its place in Freiman Square was originally located on the east side of town. The old route across the St. Mary's River on the Harrison Street Bridge captures a bit of the experience of the narrow, winding streets leading out to the Goshen Road.

A general precaution while trying to follow the Lincoln Highway – so much has disappeared, so many of the routes have changed -- proceed with extra time, a sense of humor, and an awareness that, even with a keen nose for directions, you could very well find yourself just plain off any map. This is not to say that the hunt is not worth the effort.

Finally, despite all the romanticism associated with the open road, we need to be reminded that African Americans were most often forced to keep their journeys separate, barred by race from hotels, tourist cabins, and restaurants. All too familiar was a sign in cafes reading "The Management Reserves the Right to Seat Its Patrons." I found the unwelcome reminder that racism was all too well in Indiana in a 1949 article in Collier's Magazine. In addition, we also need to remember that many Americans working in the businesses along the route put in 50 hours or more a week just to scrape by. For them, traveling was a luxury.

Researching the early years of the Lincoln Highway has also impressed me with the importance of investment in improving our country. When the Lincoln Highway was dedicated in June 11, 1915, the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette ran a headline describing it as "The Costliest Memorial Ever Planned." Fortunately, visionaries pushed ahead to begin a coast to coast route that would encourage Americans to improve their country's infrastructure, an investment that made good economic sense. They named the first improved transcontinental road system after the president who believed in a vision of a better, united country. In a state that has done far too little to commemorate Abraham Lincoln [Will Clark's statue being only the seventh for all of Indiana] the flags along the old Lincoln Highway routes are appropriate reminders of our 16th President and the nation's great promises.

In closing, I will leave you with part of Emily Post's observations at the completion of her 1915 trip.

I suppose the metamorphosis has come little by little all across our wide spirit-awakening country, but I feel as though I had acquired from the great open West a more direct outlook, a simpler, less encumbered view of life. Coming in contact with new people, if only a tinge of their point of view... in a short while you find you have sloughed off the skin of Eastern hidebound dependence upon ease and luxury, and that hitherto indispensable details dwindle at least temporarily to unimportance.

Some one hundred years ago, exploration of the great American west included unknown frontiers and new commitments. In a vastly changed world today, such road trips still have the power to awaken our spirits. The Lincoln Highway, for me, however, serves as a metaphor for challenges and experiences far more complex than packing the car and heading west

on old roads. In the early 21st century we again need to “slough off the skin” of regular habits, learn more about this incredibly complex experience we share as human beings, and strike out for new territory.

Amott, Teresa and Julie Matthaei, Race, Gender, and Work: A Multi-Cultural Economic History of Women in the United States. Rev. ed. (Boston, 1996).

Beatty, John D., “Fort Wayne from the Progressive Era to the Roaring Twenties” in A History of Fort Wayne and Allen County Vol. I, Beatty, Ed. (M.T. Publishing Co., Evansville, IN, 2005).

Barck, Oscar Theodore, Jr. and Nelson Manfred Blake, Since History of the United States in Our Times 4th ed. (New York, 1965).

Butko, Brian, Greetings from the Lincoln Highway, America’s First Coast to Coast Road (Mechanicsburg, Pa., 2005).

Fort Wayne Journal Gazette July 16, 17, 18, 1919.

Lagemann, John Kord, “The Glory Road.” Colliers March 26, April 2, 1949.

Leiniger, Kevin, “Lincoln Highway may boost tourism,” The News-Sentinel October 20, 2011.

Paflas, Jan, Personal correspondence, October 13, 2011.

Post, Emily, By Motor to the Golden Gate (New York, 1916.)

Shupert-Arick, Jan, The Lincoln Highway Across Indiana (Arcadia Publishing, 2009).

“The 1919 Transcontinental Motor Convoy” in Digital Documents, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

Wallis, Michael and Michael E. Williamson, The Lincoln Highway: Coast to Coast from Times Square to the Golden Gate (New York, 2007).
“Panama-Pacific Exposition.” Wikipedia.