

Future of the Lincoln Highway

In the first decade after the Lincoln Highway was created, the United States transportation system went from only one major named highway to a confusing, unorganized system of named highways, distinguished only by bands painted on telephone poles. To help ease the confusion, the government created a federal highway system based on numbered routes and the Lincoln Highway became several numbered roads. In 1928, thousands of boy scouts across the country placed small commemorative concrete markers about every mile along the entire length of the route. The Lincoln Highway Association dissolved in 1935 and when the federal interstate highway system was introduced in the 1950s, the Lincoln Highway was all but forgotten. By the early 1990s, however, interest in the highway was reawakened by many Americans who understood its significance in the American past. The Lincoln Highway Association reorganized in 1992 and is now dedicated to keeping the highway in the public consciousness and preserving the few remaining stretches of the original highway, important landmarks along the route, and the 1928 markers. In 2000, the Illinois portion of the Lincoln Highway was designated a National Scenic Byway by the U.S. Department of Transportation, leading many modern-day auto tourists to rediscover the joy and adventure of traveling off the beaten path.



Commemorative marker

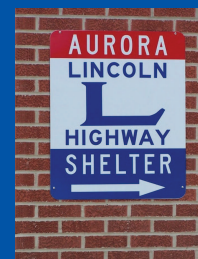
City of Aurora Preservation Commission
44 E. Downer Pl.
Aurora, IL 60505

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Auto Camping on the Lincoln Highway



Lincoln Highway Shelter at Phillips Park Aurora, Illinois



City of Aurora Preservation Commission
www.aurora-il.org
630-844-3648

Early Auto Travel

At the turn of the 20th century, few people could afford cars. Even if one was lucky enough to own a car, traveling even short distances was demanding. The roads were unpaved, dirty, bumpy and often impassable. Drivers experienced frequent breakdowns and served as their own mechanics. In the early days of travel, most people chose railroads over automobiles. In 1908, a trip from New York to San Francisco in a car took 60-90 days. A train ride was quicker and more civilized.



Development of the Lincoln Highway

Carl Fisher, the founder of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, came up with the idea for a "Coast to Coast" highway in 1912. He enlisted the help of auto manufacturers to cover the \$10 million dollar price tag. Even though the father of the automobile, Henry Ford, did not support the Lincoln Highway, other companies including Goodyear and Packard served as backers. Auto giant Henry Joy of Packard suggested naming the highway in honor of Abraham Lincoln and was pivotal in getting Congressional funding for the project. Starting with a one-mile seed stretch in Malta, Illinois in 1914, the Abraham Lincoln Memorial Highway was born.

The 3,389-mile route from Times Square in New York City to Lincoln Park in San Francisco, California tended to avoid large cities. This relaxing scenic route spurred development of new attractions and places for people to stay. The Lincoln Highway helped spark the development of the Aurora Hotel in 1916-17. It was an "example of the excellent accommodations being provided for the comfort of transcontinental and other motorists."

Camping

Municipal camps were popular along the Lincoln Highway. Local boosters created municipal camps hoping to entice travelers to visit local businesses. By the mid 1920s, there were over 500 municipal camps in the United States.

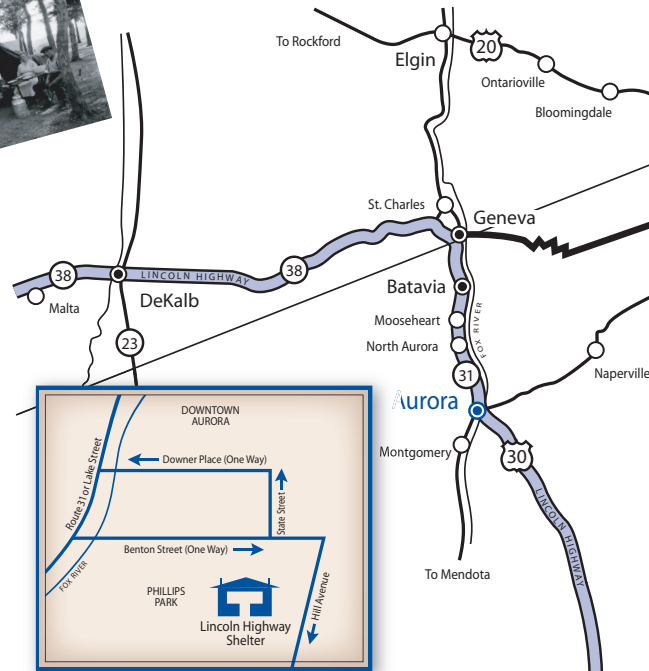
"Motor Hoboing" was an alternative to a hotel stay. Municipal camps provided free conveniences, including fireplaces, stoves, picnic tables and recreation equipment, allowing motorists to travel lightly. Grocery stores, gas stations, and mechanics were also located along the highway allowing travelers to leave necessities at home.

Lincoln Highway Shelter

Auto clubs and maps helped travelers navigate the new Lincoln Highway. The Aurora Auto Club established the Aurora Lincoln Highway Shelter in 1923. Located in Phillips Park, the camp provided travelers with amenities they would find at home. The 1924 edition of the Complete Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway noted the Aurora camp had "free camping ground at the City Park," "two fireplaces, two ovens and a sink" and it offered a "good well of pure drinking water just outside the building."

During World War II, the shelter was enclosed and used as a Civil Defense Shelter. The last known tourists to use the shelter were traveling gypsies in the 1940s, who established a camp and told fortunes to local residents.

Auto Camping in Aurora, Illinois



Renovation

The Shelter fell into disrepair after being boarded up in the late 1940s. When the historic shelter was threatened with demolition in 2001, the Aurora Preservation Commission sought to save this cultural treasure.

The Shelter has been restored to its original 1924 appearance using grants including one from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs. The restoration includes a new wood roof, operable fireplaces, repointed bricks, restored stucco, and a pump for water. In addition to restoring the building, its original use as a tourist haven has been restored with interpretive plaques featuring the history of the Lincoln Highway, directional signage, and brochures for regional attractions along the highway.



Pre restoration



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