

*"It is the youngest Highway and yet in a little over a year ... it has forced itself into a position second only to the premier highway of the country. A tour over this Highway will be an experience never to be forgotten."*

Promotion for the Jefferson Highway in Huebinger's Pocket Atlas and Automobile Guide of Iowa, 1918.



Illustrative material courtesy the Iowa Department of Transportation Library.

**TAKE A BRIEF ROAD TRIP WITH US, NOW,  
BACK TO NORTH IOWA IN THE 1920S, 30S AND 40S**

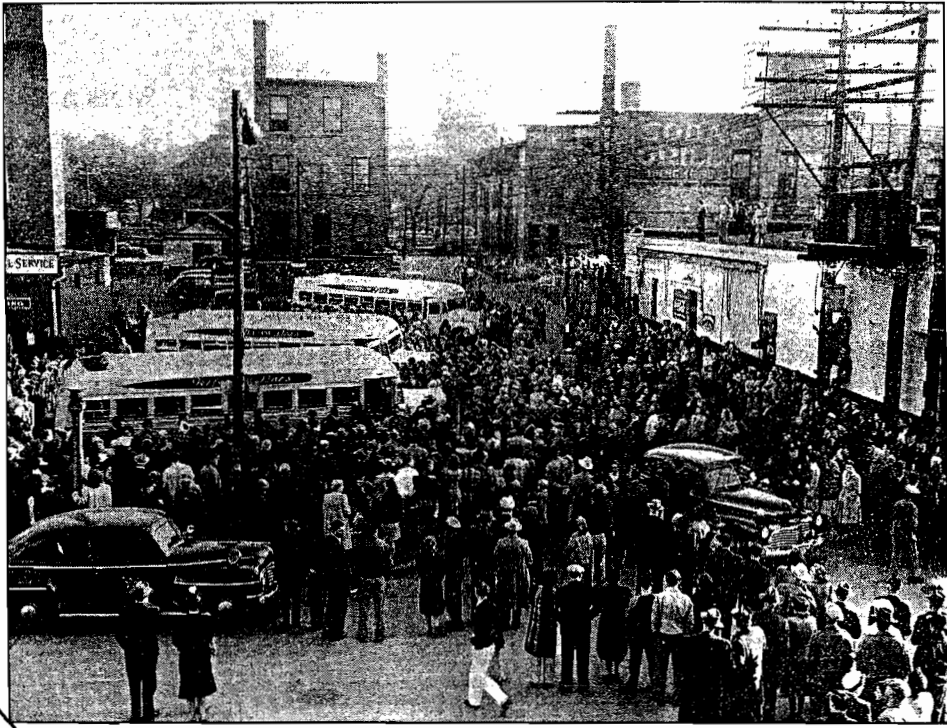
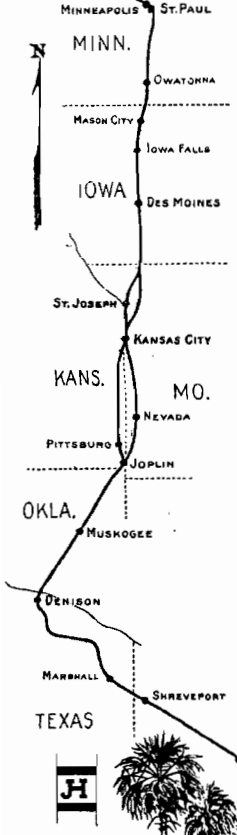


Photo courtesy of the Jefferson Lines

Through the years, the Jefferson Highway proved to be a trail of joys, occasional tears and, sometimes, mixed emotions. The latter sentiment prevailed on March 23, 1942, when more than 2,000 people gathered at the Jefferson Bus Depot in Mason City to see off 122 World War II draftees. They left for service aboard buses of the Jefferson Lines, named for the highway it traveled, now U.S. 65.

10/22/95

By Kristin Buehner  
Of The Globe-Gazette  
MASON CITY

**B**efore there was an Interstate Highway 35, before there was a U.S. Highway 65 — before there were paved roads — there was the Jefferson Highway.

The early north-south route through North Iowa from Winnipeg, Canada, to New Orleans, was the forerunner of U.S. Highway 65, and one of the major arterial roads in the country.

"The Jefferson Highway is on the National Highway System that was proposed to Congress to establish major U.S. highways in Iowa for federal funding," said George Sisson, deputy director of the engineering division of the Iowa Department of Transportation.

"What that means is that the Jefferson Highway has significance not only in Iowa, but in other states. Because it was an established route — it carried a certain amount of traffic — it was one of the first Iowa high-

ways that was paved. It was a major arterial highway. Those things have been carried forward today."

The highway followed quite closely in North Iowa the Glacier Trail, a national highway registered in 1921 that extended from St. Louis, Mo., to Glacier National Park, Mont. The Glacier Trail, however, veered northwest out of Northwood and southeast to Marshalltown out of Hampton.

Known as the "Pine to Palm" highway, the Jefferson Highway extended 2,000 miles from New Orleans, La., to Winnipeg, Canada. It was an outgrowth of the Des Moines-Kansas City-St. Joseph Interstate Trail, organized at Lamoni in 1911, according to Globe-Gazette files.

It extended through 89 counties and 264 cities. The late Hugh Shepard, a Mason City attorney, was instrumental in bringing the original Interstate Trail-Jefferson Highway to North Iowa. He headed a meeting

- Building, and navigating, the Jefferson Highway **Style**
- Buildings reflect the Jefferson glory days **Style**
- The highway gave birth to the Jefferson Lines **Style**

# The Jefferson Highway

THE SUNDAY GLOBE

## PINE TO PALM

From Page A2

in January 1915 during which the road was extended to Mason City and St. Paul, Minn.

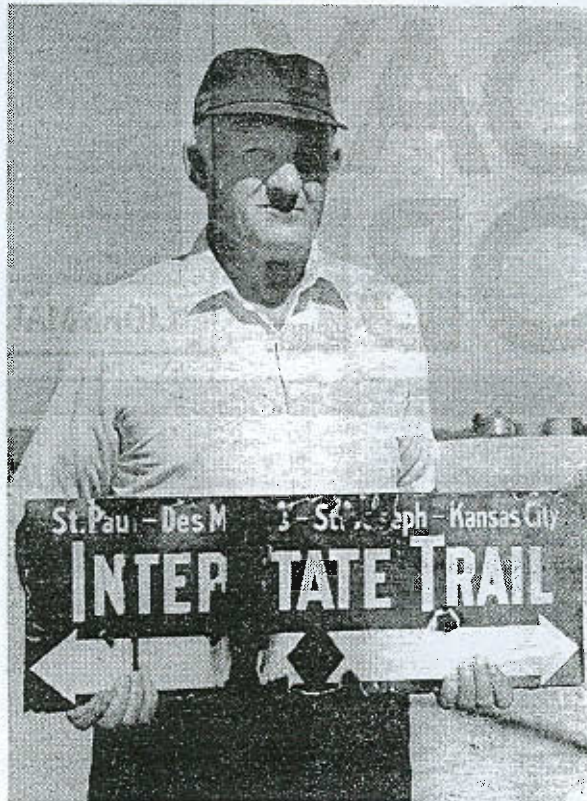
The purpose of the trail, he said, was "to get the most practical and direct route between terminals and never let personal influence enter into the selection of such a route."

Shepard represented the state of Iowa at a meeting held in November 1915 in New Orleans, at which the Jefferson Highway Association was formed. (He was named international president of the association in 1925). The association was a group of people interested in promoting the highway and in raising funds for its construction and maintenance.

The Jefferson Highway was registered Sept. 25, 1916. In December, it was officially designated as the Jefferson Highway by the Iowa Highway Commission.

Longtime area residents remember that telephone poles were used as Jefferson Highway signs. The Jefferson Highway marker consisted of an 18-inch field of white, with a six-inch border of blue top and bottom and a blue letter J painted in the center of the white field.

It was not unusual for some poles to have seven or eight high-



Globe-Gazette photo by KRISTIN BUEHNER

## Marking the Jefferson

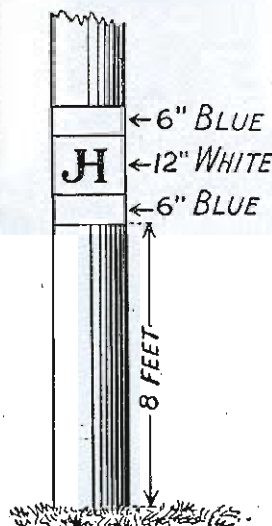
Howard Muhlenbruch, of Hampton, found this pre-1920s sign marking the Interstate Trail, later the Jefferson Highway, in 1956 in a grove on his farm, two miles northwest of Hampton.

The enameled steel sign once stood along the Jefferson Highway at the point shown in the photo. Chapin is to the north. The farm is at Muhlenbruch's left.

The Jefferson Highway was marked by a series of markings placed on utility poles that paralleled it.

At right is a portion of the original design drawing for the marker showing the combined letters "J" and "H" painted on a 12-inch white field against a 24-inch field of blue.

The design was selected in a competition open to residents of states served by the highway.



way designation signs on them, said Hank Zaletel, librarian for the Iowa DOT in Ames. "The only way you could see where you were going was to stop and get out and look."

Other developments in the life of the Jefferson Highway, as recorded by the Mason City Globe-Gazette:

■ In August 1917, Cerro Gordo County officials were advised that the county had to name a seven-man board and pay dues of \$243 (\$9 a mile) to become a permanent member of the Jefferson Highway Association. Five members were chosen from Mason City, with one member from Rockwell and one a farmer who lived along the highway.

■ In June 1919, Cerro Gordo County voted nearly 4 to 1 to pave its highways, including the Jefferson Highway, and to issue \$750,000 in bonds.

■ In 1920, official national routes were assigned numbers and marked accordingly, as part of the federal highway system. The Jefferson Highway was designated Iowa Primary Highway No. 1.

■ In July 1921, the Jefferson Highway was selected as the cross-continent military road "from the gulf to the lakes." The decision was part of a plan by the War Department to develop arteries of highways across the country to facilitate the movement of supplies and men in the event of war. Selection meant the road was the main north-south highway in the country.

■ In February 1926, the Jefferson Highway (Iowa Primary Number 1) was renamed U.S. 65, the "Lakes to Gulf" highway. Old yellow and black signs in the shape of an Iowa map were replaced with a white U.S. shield with numbers outlined in black.

■ Paving of the highway from the Iowa-Missouri line to Duluth was completed in 1930. A celebration-reception was held at the Minnesota-Iowa state line on Oct. 28.

Unlike modern highways, the Jefferson Highway wove through every town along its route, including almost every county seat town in the Iowa counties through which it traveled.

In North Iowa, the Jefferson Highway passed through Northwood, Kensett, Manly, Mason

City, Rockwell, Sheffield, Chapin and Hampton.

By 1925, all of the highway in the state of Iowa had been built to finished grade or was under contract for building, except for a short section, less than a mile, at the north edge of Warren county, according to DOT library files.

## Jefferson route can be traced

Portions of the Jefferson Highway are located approximately where U.S. Highway 65 is today. Much of the old highway is paved, but some of it is still gravel.

Following is the approximate route of the Jefferson Highway in North Iowa, based on recollections of area residents and information from the Iowa Department of Transportation:

■ Northwood. The Jefferson Highway entered Iowa from Minnesota on what is now Mockingbird Lane, located about three-fourths of a mile west of U.S. Highway 65. It intersected with 490th Street heading east to U.S. Highway 65 and following the

current U.S. Highway 65 south and east through Northwood.

■ Kensett. The highway entered Kensett on U.S. Highway 65 (Maple Street), went east a block on Sixth Street, south a block on Elm Street, east two blocks on Fifth Street to Main Street, on which it headed south out of town, eventually becoming what is now Orange Avenue, east to 400th Street and south on Partridge Avenue.

■ Manly. The Jefferson Highway entered Manly from the north on Partridge Avenue. The highway became Broadway Avenue in Manly and traveled

straight south through town, exiting the city on Partridge Avenue, then west on 340th Street, south on Pheasant Avenue and west on 310th Street to U.S. Highway 65.

■ Mason City. The Jefferson Highway followed what is now U.S. Highway 65. The highway

took a different route at the north end of town, in those days, following partially what is now Nature Center Road.

■ Rockwell. The highway came south on U.S. Highway 65, then turned east to Rockwell on 170th Street to Pheasant Avenue. It exited town going south on Pheas-

ant Avenue, then turned west onto 120th Street to U.S. Highway 65.

■ Sheffield. The highway came south on U.S. Highway 65, west on 250th Street, which becomes Sheffield's main street, Gilman Street. The road merges with Franklin County Road S43

(Chapin Road) at the south edge of town.

■ Chapin. The highway entered town on Franklin County Road S43 and followed it through town and south to Hampton.

■ Hampton. The Jefferson Highway entered Hampton on 12th Avenue on the north, turned

east and connected with Main Street. The exact streets used are uncertain.

The highway's route had been amended by 1925 to follow the current U.S. Highway 65 route north from Hampton, bypassing Chapin and Sheffield and eliminating numerous twists and turns

through the city of Hampton, according to information from the IDOT.

The improvements were undertaken to eliminate two dangerous grade crossings and numerous right angle turns, thereby reducing the length of the road by two miles.