



Area children scramble for Easter eggs and other goodies Saturday during an Easter egg hunt in downtown Frontenac, sponsored by the Cultural Enhancement Committee of the Uptown Frontenac Association. This year was the first year for the event, which planners hope will become an annual rite.

Ray Brecheisen/The Morning Sun

will be detoured throughout most of the project.

Heckert Construction, the project's general contractor, plans to start work on Monday, Acting City Manager John VanGorden said. Centennial will be widened to four lanes, from Knollview to the east city limit past Summerfield Apartments.

The first phase will be from Knollview to Rouse. Westbound traffic will be detoured, but one lane will remain open throughout the project, allowing eastbound traffic to stay on Centennial, VanGorden said.

In its contract, Heckert has 200 working days to complete the project. VanGorden said if weather is good this summer, he believes the project will be finished at the end of October or the first of November.

He said he expects the street work to be done by then, but the reseeding of the soil along the project area may take longer, depending on the weather.

The Kansas Department of Transportation is paying most of the \$3 million cost of the project, while the City of Pittsburg's share is about \$726,000. The project

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# Twenty-three miles of history

Crawford County once boasted stretch of Jefferson Highway

By HAROLD CAMPBELL  
Morning Sun Staff Writer

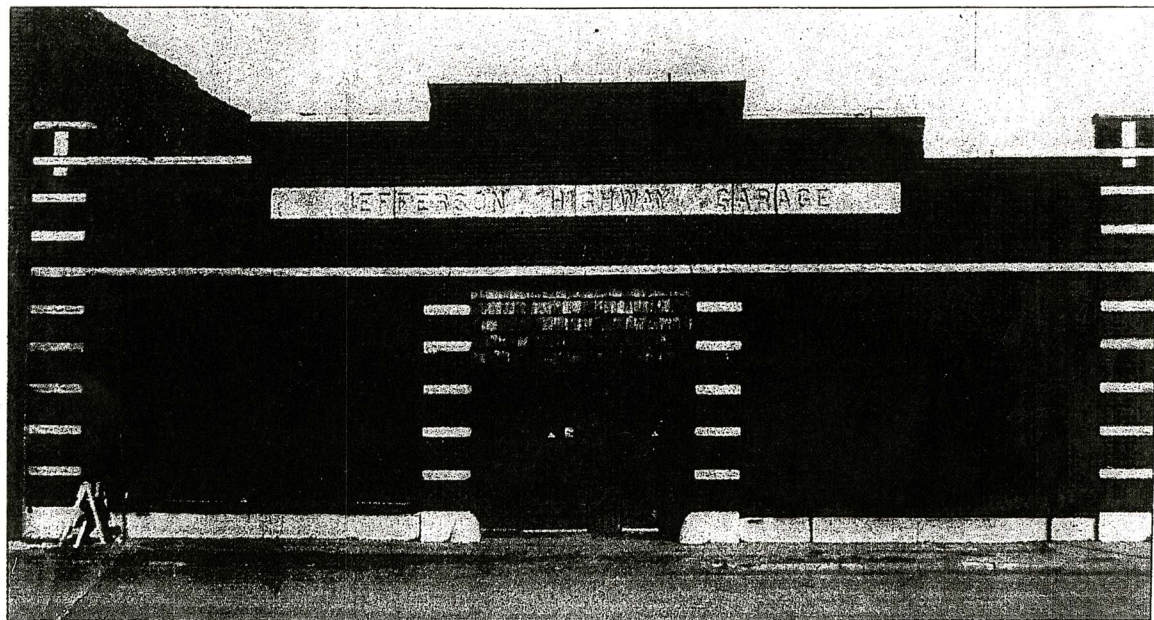
**D**rivers cruising down Locust Street likely haven't noticed a piece of Pittsburg transportation history sitting just north of the Fourth Street intersection.

Motorists intent on keeping their eyes on the road don't have time to read the words "Jefferson Highway Garage" carved atop the face of a small, plain red-brick building tucked away at 408 N. Locust.

The now-vacant structure nevertheless serves as the only visible local reminder of the Jefferson Highway, a route which from 1916 into the mid-1920s began in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, and passed through Pittsburg on its way to New Orleans.

Of course, discard the idea that highways in those days consisted of at least four lanes of smoothly paved asphalt, cloverleaf interchanges and fast-food restaurant billboards beckoning drivers to take the next exit.

"A lot of the time, they were just trails or lines on a map, muddy and impassable in the rain and dusty in the summer," Randy Roberts, Pittsburg State University special collections curator, said last week. "It's no wonder people took the train or just loaded up the wagon instead of driving."



This building at 408 N. Locust in Pittsburg, built in 1915 as the Jefferson Highway Garage, is one of the few remaining physical reminders of the Jefferson Highway, which in the 1910s and '20s stretched from Winnipeg, Canada, to New Orleans.

Ray Brecheisen/The Morning Sun

Still, the story of the 23 miles of the highway spanning Crawford County contains familiar elements — rivalry between Kansas and Missouri for the route, squabbles over which towns the road would pass through, gripes over costs and even a touch of racism.

By 1915, business promoters were beginning to recognize the economic potential from the increased use of cars and

trucks. As a result, individuals throughout the nation organized local and regional "good roads associations" to fight for construction of better highways.

One of the first such efforts led to construction of the Lincoln Highway from New York to San Francisco.

Construction of the highway began in 1913 and covered much of the route Interstate 80 takes today.

What became the Jefferson Highway began in the imagination of Edwin Thomas Meredith.

Meredith, of Des Moines, Iowa, founded *Successful Farming* and *Better Homes and Gardens* magazines. In 1920, he was appointed U.S. secretary of agriculture.

His deep interest in farming pushed him to preach to civic and business groups throughout

the heartland about the economic potential of a highway connecting the rich agricultural lands of the Mississippi Valley.

Especially interested with the idea were business leaders in New Orleans, who stood to profit economically from the highway.

The New Orleans Association of Commerce dis-

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