Highway

Continued from front page

tributed invitations to all the farmers from the Louisiana Purchase to send de-
gelates to the city on Nov. 15 and 16, 1915, to organize an an-
other Jefferson Highway. In
memory of Thomas Jefferson, who was president at the time,
the Louisiana Purchase from France in 1803. The slogan for
the highway became “From
Pine to Palm.”

United forces

News of the proposed high-
way intrigued business
leaders in eastern Kansas,
including several Crawford
County businessmen. The
invitation from New Orleans indicated Kansas City and Joplin were
logical terminal points for a portion
of the highway, but where
the road would pass between those points was still undetermined.

As a result, Kansas leaders realized they would have to
come to Missouri to get the road.

Highway enthusiasts from area commercial and
good roads associations met in
Fort Scott on Oct. 27, 1915, to
discuss the proposed route. The
Crawford County Good Roads
Association sent as delegates
its chairman, Arthur H. Shafer,
or Pittsburgh, and president,
James H. Seeley of Girard.

Those attending the Fort
Scott meeting decided to
publish a route including
Paola, Pleasanton, Fort Scott, Girard,
Pittsburg and Columbus.

However, another Kansas
group meeting in Ottawa a week
later wanted the highway to go
through Ottawa, Garnett,
Humboldt and Parsons.

Because Kansas delega-
tion would now be challenged
at the New Orleans convention
not only by Missouri, but by
this mid-state rival as well, a
1916, the decision to include
the Crawford County
Good Roads Association. At
this meeting, the group decided
the Crawford County portion of the highway give up and pass
through Beulah.

How to pay for the highway,
of course, was a major topic for
under the state law at the
time regulating road construc-
tion, only “bona fide” projects
building the highway would be
shared by townships and
landowners along the route.

Townships were allowed to
pay one-fourth of the expense,
with landowners paying the rest.

Highway promoters esti-
ated the road would cost $1,500
per mile to construct. (In
comparison, a common estimate for
highway construction today is
$1 million a mile.)

That figure would mean a
tax of 75 cents a year for
those with land closest to
the highway. Those at the Pittsburgh
meeting assured residents
the expense would be justified
by the advantages of having a good
highway nearby and subsequent increases in property values.

The highway further was
touted as a way to bring educa-
tion and culture to isolated rural areas.

As soon as the cost esti-
mates were revealed, opposi-
tion to the highway surfaced.
A group of 35 Beulah-area
farmers met a few days after
Christmas to oppose organizing an anti-Jefferson Highway
organization. The farmers
believed the $1,500 per mile
cost estimate was too low. They
also remained skeptical of
the advantages the road was
predicted to bring.

Pittsburg leaders said they
would help Beulah build its
portion of the highway, but
war protests made funds unavail-
able if Beulah-area residents
did not want the road.

The many concerns surround-
ing the highway emerged early
the next year.

At a February 1916 meeting of
Jefferson Highway support-
ers in Fort Scott, W.D. Konantz
of Arcadia proposed the
Commercial Highway, a road
leading from Pittsburg north
to the southeast Crawford
county coal fields, should be upgraded to become part of the
highway from Pittsburg to Arcadia and then to Fort Scott.

The Arcadia route, however, would leave Gott cut out of
from the Jefferson Highway, con-
firming earlier suspicions of
Girard leaders that their town
city would be bypassed.

Pledges of financial support
for the highway through the
county also were slow to come in.

Spokesmen seeking to have
Commercial Highway included in
the Jefferson Highway attributed
the delay to “foreigners” living
in the area. These “foreigners” —
mostly residents working in
the coal mines — were accused of failing to file property
deeds with the proper county
officials.

Short of expectations

By September 1916, the
decision to include Crawford County as part of the Jefferson
Highway was completed. Plans called for
construction of the new route, 83 miles long, including
Beulah and Pittsburg.

Before Christmas, the national Jefferson Highway
Association announced that there would be two routes
between Kansas City and Joplin — the eastern Kansas
route through Pittsburg and the western Missouri route.

Ironically, a common estimate for the Kansas route
roughly approximates present-
day U.S. Highway 69, while the Missouri route goes
along part of the now U.S.
Highway 71.

“It’s interesting that there
was the 69-71 route even back
then,” Roberts said.

The Crawford County portion
of the highway was completed
several years later. However,
the road never lived up to expectations.

According to interviews with
the family of a number of residents involved with the road, the highway through
Crawford County was so nar-
row that when two cars met going opposite directions, one
vehicle would have to pull off the road.

The road was also described as
rough and full of sharp curves.

In downtown Pittsburg, the
Jefferson Highway Garage
was built around 1915 by Tim
Keltner, who had no connection
with the group supporting the
highway. The business later
became the Samson-Keltner
Auto Supply Co and Osage
Auto Supply. Crawford County register of deeds office records show
Osage Auto Supply as owner of
the building.

With the automobile revolu-
tion of the 1920s and changes
in federal highway laws, the
Jefferson Highway faded away.

Congress passed the first federal highway funding act in
1916, mainly to benefit rural
and farm-to-market routes,
and then approved a second highway act in 1921. In 1926,
Congress stood the highway
numbering system in use today,
ending the era of highways
named after individuals or
places.

Nevertheless, the last vestiges of the highway still exist.

Jefferson Highway addresses are found in cities along
the route from Osage, Mo., to
Baton Rouge, La., a barn with
“Jefferson Highway Farm 1917” stands along the former
route in a small town and
the world champion
Jefferson Lines bus company
which serves southeast Kansas is named after the highway.

Although not a success, the
story of the Jefferson Highway illustrates the importance
of unity, cooperation and determi-
nation. As the headline noted:
Nov. 1915, after the
New Orleans convention:
“Told to the men proves
what goes after a thing usually
gets it. They went there with
a determination to win and they
did win, and I thought it would
be no use for them to go. The
result proves there is nothing
like trying, however.”

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Two Palestinians attack army post
a day before resumption of truce talks

-STEWARD (Ewan),
Nathan A. Bucko, 61, of 818 S.
200th St., Pittsburg, was pro-
nounced dead early Monday
morning, March 16, 2002. Services
will be at 11 a.m. Monday at Brenner
Mortuary Chapel with Pastor James
Sumrall of the First Church of the
Nazarene officiating. Burial follow-
cer at Hillard Park Cemetery.
The family will receive friends from 7
to 8 p.m. Sunday at Brenner Mortu-
ary, 114 E. Fourth St., Pittsburg.

BURRE, Sandra Lou (Gough), 61,
of Pittsburg, died Friday, March 22,
2002, Grasswood, Kan. Services
will be at 10 a.m. Tuesday at St. Olive
Cemetery with Pastor Darly, a member
of Lighthouse Tabernacle officiating.
Burial will follow the services. The
family will receive friends from 7 to
8 p.m. Monday at Brenner Mortuary
Chapel where friends may call until
noon Monday. Arrangements are
under the direction of Brenner
Mortuary, 114 E. Fourth St., Pittsburg.

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