

Project Category

NSBF Byway Community Award: Event

Numerous people were crucial to the evolution of the Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway. One of these was Henry Ostermann, who the Lincoln Highway Association hired in 1914 to be its first Field Secretary to promote this first improved transcontinental road. In the winter of 1917, Mr. Ostermann was also leading military convoys up and down the east coast. He merged his two occupations and suggested that the Army take a motor transport (convoy) across the nation to test both men and machines and test America's roads.

Project Name

Celebrating Henry Ostermann- Adventurer-Leader-Visionary 1876- 1920

Byway Name

Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway, state designation 3/31/2006, national designation 1/19/2021, 460 miles

Overview

We received a grant for an interpretive panel to be placed in the Maple Hill Cemetery, on the eastern edge of Montour, Iowa. The town has a population of 244 (2018 figures). We attended several Montour City Council meetings to get approval to install the interpretive panel and built a relationship with the council and city staff. It is a very small community and home to only an auto repair shop, a steakhouse, a post office, and a church. It lies directly on the Lincoln Highway, once known as Highway 30, but when a new 4-lane highway was built to the north, the grocery store, gas stations, and other businesses soon disappeared.

This small town had a Lincoln Highway monumental event occur in 1920 just on its eastern edge. Since 1914, Henry had traveled the entire route and visited with every city and county consul across the nation totaling over 500 visits and logging more than 15,000 miles. That year, on his 21st trip across the nation, Henry C. Ostermann was traveling from Tama, Iowa to Marshalltown, Iowa for an early morning meeting.

On that fateful morning in 1920, he was combining his delayed honeymoon with new wife, Sarah, and his Lincoln Highway Association work. Leaving Sarah behind in Tama, he hurried off to his early morning meeting and intended to return to her. But, taking a curve too fast as he tried to overtake a slower vehicle, he flipped his car, killing him instantly just mere feet from the Maple Hill Cemetery and never making it to Marshalltown.

The Lincoln Highway Association and auto enthusiasts across the nation mourned his death and in the August-September 1920 Iowa Highway Commission's Service Bulletin, they appealed to their members for a monument to be built in Iowa in his honor. The Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway did just that 99 years later with our interpretive panel.

This man and his legacy were important aspects of the Lincoln Highway story. The world needed to know that this tribute was here in this small, out-of-the-way town.

We organized an unveiling ceremony to be held August 15, 2019 at 5:30 PM. This event was just prior to two memorial convoys coming across the nation to celebrate 100 years since the original 1919 Convoy. We sent out press releases about our event and contacted governmental officials, historical societies, Lincoln Highway Association members, and the general public.

Historical Intrinsic Quality

Henry Ostermann was an integral leader in the Lincoln Highway's success across the nation. To promote this first improved trans-continental road, Mr. Ostermann was hired by the Lincoln Highway Association to be its first Field Secretary. He had traveled the entire route 20 times and knew it better than anyone. He lost his life on it in 1920, just outside of Montour, Iowa and very near the Maple Hill Cemetery.

He had an interesting upbringing as he was a newsboy at the age of 6, joined the Navy at age 14 for a three-year hitch, then traveled around doing odd jobs including working promotions in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. The Lincoln Highway Association hired him in 1914 to be the first Field Secretary to help promote the road.

In the winter of 1917, he was also leading military convoys up and down the east coast. He merged his two occupations and suggested that the Army take a motor transport (convoy) across the nation to test both men and machines as well as test America's roads. A young Lt. Col. Dwight Eisenhower was also on this convoy. Much has been written about the journey and several films are available on YouTube. Henry traveled ahead of the convoy and promoted the men and machines to communities who then lined the streets waving flags at the heroes of WWI and supplying meals and lodging all along the route. Henry was truly an adventurer, leader, and visionary and he promoted the importance of the Lincoln Highway at every opportunity. This man's history plays an important role in Iowa Lincoln Highway's "Historic" intrinsic quality.

Partners

The City of Montour approved the site for the event. We received funding from the Tama County Community Foundation, given through the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa, to create the interpretive panel and the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa provided a speaker for the event. Also speaking was Mary Preston, President of the Lincoln Highway Association and owner of Preston's Station Historic District; Rev. John Christianson, Living Faith Methodist Church, Montour; and City Council person, Susan Eberhart. State Representative Dean Fisher sent words of appreciation to be shared. Jan Gammon, Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway Coordinator, and Reed Riskedahl, Prairie Rivers of Iowa Board member (group that oversees the Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway program) rounded out the remarks at the event.

Byway Best Practice

By researching the important people involved with the evolution of our byway, we were able to not only create an interpretive panel, but hold a celebration of Mr. Ostermann's life. Even though the location of the event was set in a very small community, we had a very nice turnout of about 35-40 people. We sent out press releases to invite the public to the event, filmed it, and have posted the video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=co3_9Kf7BI4. This event brought attention to Montour, our byway, and to the legacy of Henry Ostermann.

With our diverse turnout, we were able to share Henry's life with the local community, within the county, and across the state. Those that attended are in-turn able to share his history with others. Locals even brought scrap books and news clippings to share with us, adding to our knowledge.

Keys to Success

Our event was successful through researching Henry Ostermann's life and being able to give him a tribute as well as share Lincoln Highway history with the public. We sent out press releases and the event was picked up by several print media. Our initial meetings and relationship with the City Council helped us gain the trust of the locals and encouraged them to attend. Two council women, Susan Eberhart and Vicky Garske, unveiled the panel and when Susan spoke about what this meant to the City of Montour - that "they matter to the Lincoln Highway," she got very emotional.

Additional Information

Contact Information

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Website

[Home : Lincoln Highway Heritage Corridor \(lhhc.org\)](http://lhhc.org)

Photographs:

