

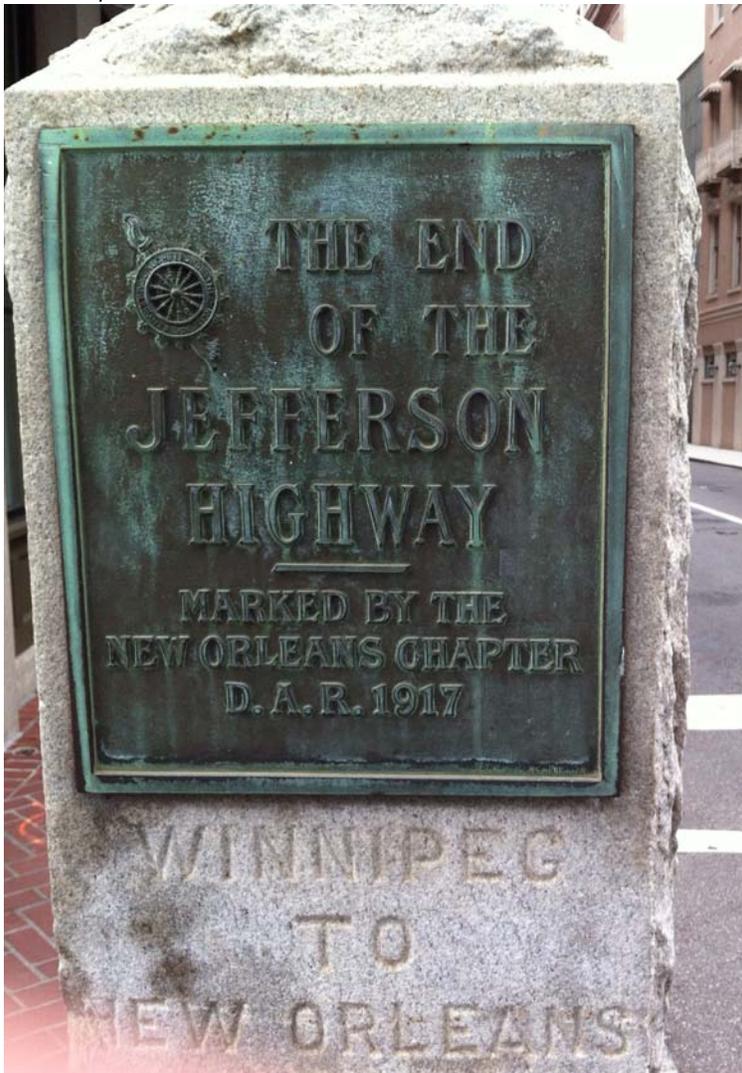
NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Winnipeg to New Orleans

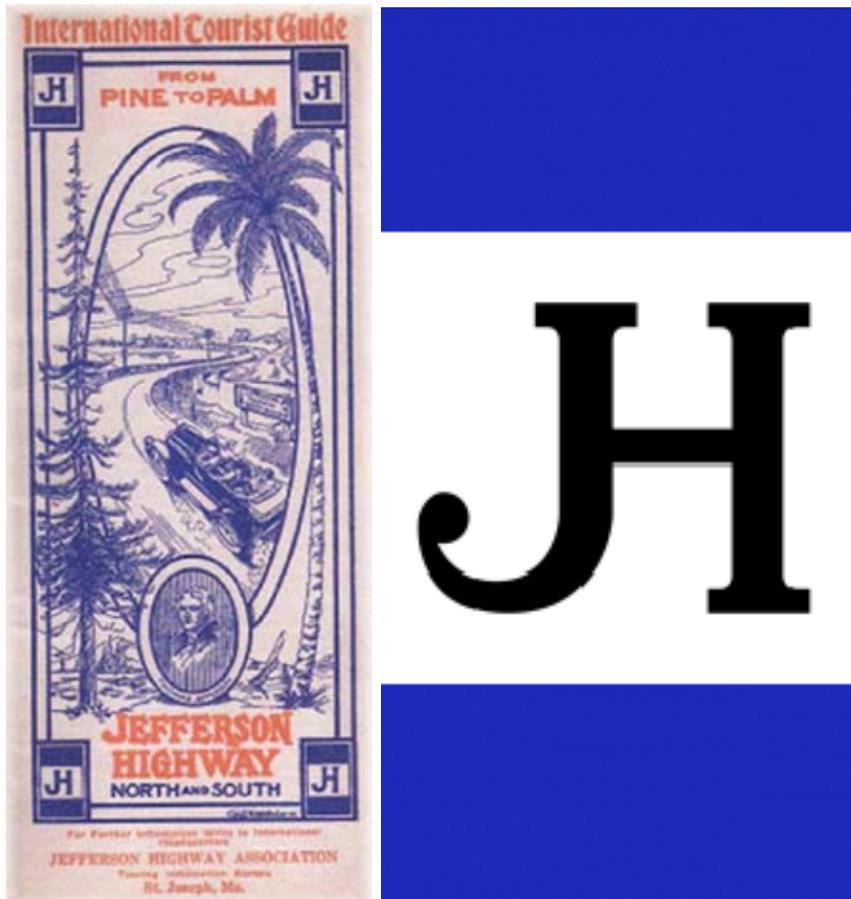
Right in the heart of downtown New Orleans, at the corner of St. Charles and Common, is a monument with a bronze tablet engraved with the words "The End of the Jefferson Highway – Marked by the New Orleans Chapter D.A.R. 1917". Below that, chiseled into the granite, is the route, "Winnipeg to New Orleans". The story behind the dedication of this solid mini-obelisk is fascinating, one of exploration, travel, tourism and commerce.



Jefferson Highway Monument at St. Charles and Common

In the early years of the 20th century, an informal highway network known as the National Auto Trail system was formed to connect routes that existed in the United States and Canada. Colored marking bands with initialed logos were placed on telephone poles to help motorists navigate their way in those early days of automobile travel. The Old Spanish Trail was one of those initial auto trails that once linked St. Augustine, Florida, with San Diego, California (crossing the entire U.S. from east to west through areas that shared a history of Spanish colonization). The trail, for the most part, eventually became U.S. Highway 90 (which travels through New Orleans), and (in the west) U.S. Highway 80. Work was initiated in 1915 in Mobile, Alabama, at a meeting at the Battle House Hotel (which is still there today).

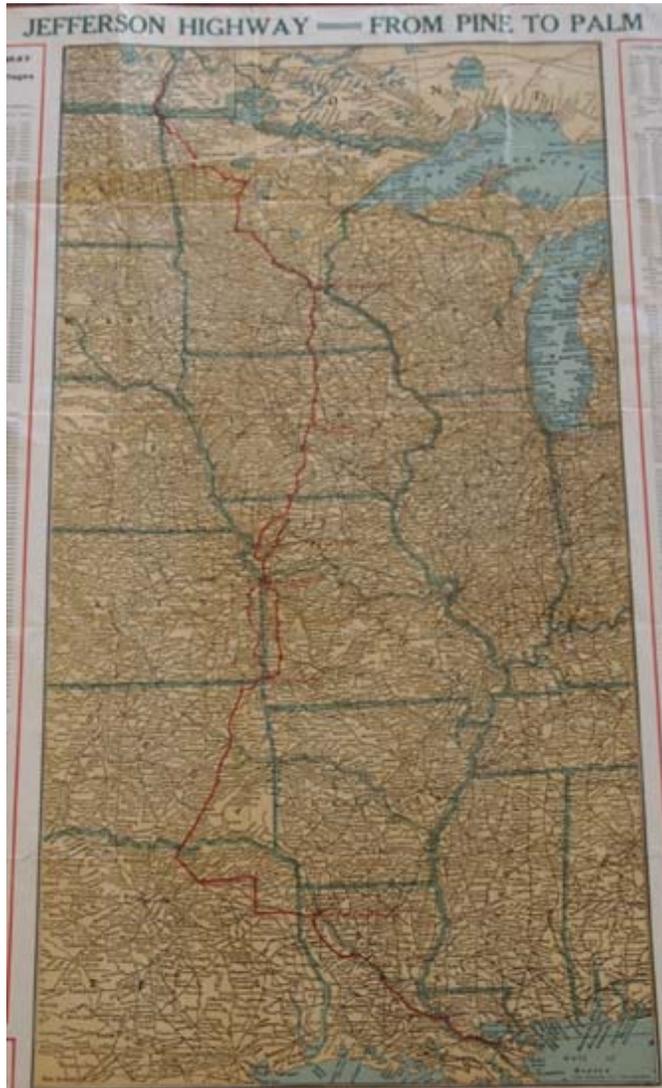
Also that year, another great auto trail (almost 2,500 miles long) was begun, and it linked New Orleans with other towns and cities across the United States. But this time, the Crescent City was the southern terminus, or lower end of this great north-south trail.



Jefferson Highway brochure (left) and colored marking band (right)

The Jefferson Highway Association, named after Thomas Jefferson (the president responsible for the Louisiana Purchase), was formed in 1915 to build a highway roughly traveling through the states forming the eastern boundary of the Louisiana Purchase. The auto trail was the

brainchild of Edwin T. Meredith (born Avoca, Iowa, December 1876), publisher of *Successful Farming* and *Better Homes and Gardens*. He would later serve as Secretary of Agriculture under President Woodrow Wilson. Meredith (son of a farm implement dealer) believed the north-south Jefferson Highway (inspired by the east-west Lincoln Highway) would be of great economic benefit to the farmers in those regions. The Jefferson Highway was nicknamed the "Pine to Palm Highway", for the types of trees likely found at either end. New Orleans was at the "palm" end and Winnipeg, Canada, was at the other.



"Jefferson Highway" route – "From Pine to Palm"

Winnipeg is the capital and largest city of Manitoba, Canada, situated near the longitudinal center of the North American continent. Boosters of the highway system linking New Orleans to Winnipeg, Manitoba, were active all along the way. Although the highway ran from the top to the bottom of the nation, it was not a highway system constructed by the federal government. Instead, it connected existing local roads, with linking towns paying a segment of the costs. This created healthy

competition, since each community was keenly aware of the increased commerce and tourist dollars that would be generated.

Many of the towns and cities chosen to be along the route hosted celebrations and "sociability runs", which were festive auto convoys connecting the various segments of the highway. New Orleans, too, would host one of these events in 1919.

Some of the many cities along the route down from Winnipeg included Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota; Des Moines, Iowa; St. Joseph, Missouri; Joplin, Missouri; Muskogee, Oklahoma; Dennison, Texas; Shreveport, Louisiana; and (of course) New Orleans.

The installation of the Jefferson Highway monument, composed of blue Georgia granite, took place at St. Charles and Common on April 15, 1918, and it was formally dedicated (with international directors present) the following January. The directors represented the states of Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas and Louisiana, while proxies represented the directors of Texas, Oklahoma and the Canadian Province of Manitoba. The monument was draped with both the American and British flags. Mrs. C. Hamilton Tebault, vice president general of the National Society of the D.A.R., did the unveiling, while Henry T. Robinson (of the Sons of the American Revolution) served as master of ceremonies. Additional comments were delivered by New Orleans Mayor Martin Behrman, Louisiana Governor Ruffin Pleasant, President Walter Parker of the Association of Commerce and J. D. Clarkson (general manager of the Jefferson Highway Association).

J. D. Clarkson also organized one of the great "sociability runs" along the Jefferson Highway, which took place in July 1919. Participants volunteered to travel from New Orleans north to Winnipeg, and the event was named the "Palm to Pine Sociability Run" (since – instead of Pine to Palm - this time things started in New Orleans). The grand tour got underway July 1, 1919, headed by Mr. Clarkson and his wife. An entourage of forty-two motorists and passengers started out in New Orleans, including Governor Pleasant.

Ruffin G. Pleasant, one may remember, was Louisiana's 36th state governor (serving 1916-1920), known for mobilizing his state for World War I. In his college days he was captain of the LSU football team, and played quarterback in LSU's first match against Tulane in 1893. In that game, the LSU squad wore purple and gold for the very first time. Nevertheless, Tulane won the game, 34-0.

Also participating in the "sociability run" were Manitoba's Attorney General Thomas H. Johnson, Shreveport Mayor John McWilliams Ford and Mayor Martin Behrman (the longest-serving mayor in New Orleans history), to name just a few. Communities along the touring route

were encouraged to host celebrations in honor of the motorists making the trip.

When not motoring or attending monument dedications, Mayor Martin Behrman of New Orleans was making some observant remarks. When Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels shut down Storyville (the city's red-light district) in 1917, citing its "bad influence", Behrman commented, "You can make it illegal, but you can't make it unpopular."

In the mid-to-late 1920s, these early auto trails were replaced in the United States with a system of numbered U.S. highways. Road surfacing was improved as time went on, and a plan of numbering the highways in Canada was implemented as well.

The question most New Orleanians are wondering is: "How did a driver back in those days begin his journey at the corner of St. Charles and Common streets and link up with Jefferson Highway in Jefferson Parish?"

Here's how it worked: The original route (finalized December 1916) took the motorist from the monument one block on St. Charles to Canal Street. From there he took a left turn on Canal Street and traveled to City Park Avenue. Another left turn on City Park Avenue, he took it until it became Metairie Road and then on into Jefferson Parish. Leaving Orleans Parish, the original Jefferson Highway continued along Metairie Road until reaching Shrewsbury Road. After turning there, the driver then connected with Jefferson Highway and followed it to Kenner and beyond.

The stretch of highway today called "Jefferson Highway" between Shrewsbury Road and the city limits of New Orleans at South Claiborne Avenue was *not* part of the original route, as it wasn't constructed until 1928.

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