



To Our Members

Summer and fall is a great time to explore Illinois' scenic roads and highways, as our cover story on Ill. Rte. 1 suggests. Many of these roadways have great web sites. A few of our favorites are: www.DriveLincolnHighway.com, www.NationalRoad.org, and www.IllinoisRoute66.org. Each site features excellent maps, summaries of historic sites, photographs, and even some short videos.

But what struck me the most as I reviewed these web sites—as part of my preparation for a recent radio interview on the Farm Bureau RFD Network—is the incredible work that has been done by a wide range of volunteer groups to save and preserve our state's heritage.

Below are just a few examples (for more information, "google" each project and/or community):

LINCOLN HIGHWAY This was the nation's first improved cross-country roadway, stretching from New York to San Francisco. A one-mile concrete demonstration section was laid in 1914 near Malta, west of DeKalb. Today, the national headquarters of the Lincoln Highway Association is located in a dry goods building (1860) in Franklin Grove, which was restored in the 1990s by local residents. A few of the route's other preservation successes: the City of Aurora's restoration of an early auto camp shelter (1923) near Phillips Park; the rescue of the Egyptian Theater in DeKalb (1928); the stewardship of the steel gateway arches in Dixon; the rehabilitation of the Lincoln-Manahan House in Sterling (1856); and the retention of surviving stone mile-markers (1928), which were designed by landscape architect Jens Jensen.



Lincoln Highway Association, Franklin Grove; The Mill, Lincoln



NATIONAL ROAD Constructed between 1828 and 1841, this was the "road that built the nation," running from Cumberland, Md., to Vandalia, Ill.—and later becoming the route of U.S. 40 and Interstate 70. Heritage tourism is slowly growing along the National Road, including Marshall (see cover story). Other examples include: stewardship of the row of distinctive porches along Greenup's Main Street, as well as its restored railroad depot (1870); rehabilitation of commercial buildings facing the Old Statehouse (1836) in Vandalia, although one historic structure recently was destroyed by fire; and several house museums in Greenville, including a fascinating collection of band uniforms and lodge paraphernalia. [Unfortunately, one of the city's most historic houses (1892) is threatened; see our 2010 "Ten Most" list at www.landmarks.org.]

ROUTE 66 This road, famously storied in song, roughly parallels Interstate 55 in its journey from Chicago to St. Louis—before heading to Los Angeles. Numerous groups and individuals have helped to promote heritage tourism in the Illinois towns along the way. Some of the notable efforts include: historic gas station museums in Dwight (1933), Mt. Olive (1926), and Odell (1932); the reopening of the Palms Grill Café (1934) and Grain Elevator Museum (1904) in Atlanta; the rescue and ongoing restoration of The Mill (1929) in Lincoln; the repair of a neon directional sign in Lexington (c.1948); and the preservation/celebration of the Catsup Bottle Water Tower (1949) in Collinsville. Many of these efforts have been aided by the Route 66 Association of Illinois, which maintains a Hall of Fame and Museum in the old city hall in Pontiac.

These and many more preservation success stories can be found in communities across the state—both on and off of historic roadways. Thanks to all of you who are working to save and restore the buildings and structures that are at the heart of Illinois' efforts to promote heritage tourism and economic development.

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