

[Illinois Highways, August 1915,  
PP116-117]

## NAMING THE TRAILS

Another great automobile road has been officially christened and opened to travel, the name plates marking the course of the *Pontiac Trail*, the connecting highway between Chicago and St. Louis, having been placed in position on the guide posts which were erected at intervals of a mile along this highway by the Goodrich Tire Co., showing the mileage to Chicago and St. Louis, and the nearest local towns.

These name plates bear, in addition to the name, "Pontiac Trail," the full-length figure of an Indian upholding a map of the State of Illinois. The significance will be grasped at once, for this trail will inevitably become the great thoroughfare of the State, connecting as it does, its largest city with the metropolis of its western border, and passing through its capital as well as many other prosperous cities and villages, and the heart of the corn belt.

The appropriateness of the Indian figure to the name is likewise at once apparent, and for this great highway the name is doubly significant, for the famous chief whose name it bears, in the later years of his life, often crossed its course, since near its southern terminus he spent his last years and met his death, and three quarters of a century ago his name was commemorated by the christening of one of the prettiest, and most prosperous and energetic of the many towns, through which the trail will pass.

It is but justice to say that these name plates are paid for and put up at the expense of the live business men of the city of Pontiac, who are appreciative of the compliment paid their city by the naming of the trail, and who are also appreciative of the benefit their town will derive from being on the line of this splendid highway.

The naming of the trail after Pontiac, the great Indian, who was able by his genius and the power of his personality

to league all the tribes of the Northwest in one great confederacy against the English, was most appropriate, for while the scene of his great conspiracy and his warlike achievements was the region of the Great Lakes, his later life was spent in the country at the foot of the trail, and here he met his death by assassination at the hands of an Indian spy of the British in 1772.

The story of Pontiac, of his great confederacy of warring and hostile tribes, which he formed and held together at the close of the French and Indian war, of his great conspiracy against the English, and his plan to capture every frontier fort on May 6, 1763, a plan which only failed of complete success by the narrow margin of Fort Pitt, Niagara and Detroit, has been told at length by Francis Parkman in "The Conspiracy of Pontiac," and the career of the great chief has figured in history, legend, song and story.

Indeed, his whole career was a romantic one, and the story of the capture of Mackinac by the stratagem of an Indian ball game, of the saving of Detroit by the fondness of an Indian girl for Major Gladwyn, its commandant, and the many other incidents of its long siege, and of the whole war, have been immortalized by such authors as Mary Hartwell Catherwood and Gilbert Parker. The name should throw a glamour of romance about the trail which now further honors the memory of this mighty aboriginal statesman and warrior.

The course of the trail, after leaving Chicago, passes down the beautiful Desplaines Valley on the south side of that river, and of the Illinois and Michigan and Drainage Canals, in general paralleling the two latter.

Passing Summit, the traveler on the highway can, by a short detour, pass the monument of boulders marking the spot where Father Marquette camped, and where he first saw the Desplaines River on his voyage of exploration to the Mississippi. From Summit the road leads by Argo, with its mammoth corn products plant, by the stone quarries of Lemont and Lockport to the bustling industrial city of Joliet, the site

of the Northern Illinois Penitentiary, one of the largest and most noted prisons in the world, and the home of numerous iron and steel plants and other manufactures.

Here the Pontiac Trail intersects the famous Lincoln Highway from coast to coast. Hereafter the two highways will undoubtedly, to all practical intents, monopolize automobile traffic between St. Louis and eastern points on the Lincoln Highway, to the everlasting benefit of Joliet garages and hotels.

From Joliet the trail crosses the Desplaines and proceeds down the north side of that river and of the Illinois to Morris, county seat of Grundy County and a prosperous agricultural town of 4,000 souls. Morris is the nearest point on the trail to the State park at Starved Rock, with its scenic and historic interest, and the trail thus far is the shortest and best road between Chicago and the park, and here will flow a heavy and rapidly increasing motor traffic.

From Morris the way turns south, across the Illinois River and through a fine farming country, and a mile north of Dwight enters Livingston County, the second agricultural county of Illinois. Here it may be well to state parenthetically that the trail crosses the very mid region of McLean and Livingston Counties, and that McLean and Livingston Counties are respectively first and second in the banner farming State of Illinois in the value of farm products, and that for oats and corn they have no rivals in the United States or even the world.

Dwight is a handsome, well-built and exceptionally well-paved town, whose chief point of interest is the attractive buildings of the Leslie E. Keeley Co. From Dwight the road turns southwesterly, in the main paralleling the Alton Railroad, through Odell to Pontiac, the capital town of Livingston County, and the namesake of the trail.

Pontiac has also the distinction of being one of the most attractive cities of its size and class to be found within many a day's journey, with miles of pavement arched over by spreading trees, and the pleasant Vermilion River winding through

its midst and almost encircling the grounds of its famous Chautauqua, probably second in importance only to the parent institution in New York. Pontiac is primarily a city of homes and has infinite attractions as a residence town, although it also is celebrated for its shoes and is the site of the Illinois State Reformatory.

From Pontiac the trail pursues its way through the world's garden to Chenoa, just across the line in McLean County, where it intersects another newly named and established road, "The Corn Belt Route," from Logansport, Indiana, to Peoria.

Beyond Chenoa the trail passes between beautiful waving fields of oats and corn, through the prosperous agricultural towns of Lexington and Towanda, to Normal and Bloomington, contiguous cities, the former the seat of two State institutions, the Illinois Soldiers' Orphans' Home and the Illinois State Normal University, the latter especially, with its wide and beautifully shaded campus, being well worth visiting.

Bloomington is the queen of the corn belt. Devastated by a great fire on June 12, 1900, which burned over 10 acres of its business district, including the courthouse, with a loss of more than \$2,000,000, the city has come to regard the fire as its greatest blessing, and today, its business district is devoid of those ramshackle, prehistoric structures which disfigure most cities, and Bloomington has no competition in the matter of looks among cities even twice its size.

At Bloomington are located the great car shops of the Alton Railroad, and here also is the Illinois Wesleyan University, a Methodist school of importance. Bloomington, with the adjoining town of Normal, also boasts many beautiful residences, miles of perfect pavement and some beautiful parks, and is well worthy of a special visit, and a day or two's stopover by the motoring tourist.

Leaving Bloomington, the trail still continues through the heart of the corn belt, and a short distance south passes through the famous Funk farms near Funk's Grove, with their thousands of acres of perfectly tilled

land and model farm buildings and farm methods.

Pioneers in progressive farming, the Funk family were also early and firm believers in good roads, and at the present time do all the road work in their township at actual cost, making use of their farm tractors for the purpose.

Still southwestward, the trail takes its way through McLean, and Atlanta, and Lawndale to Lincoln, county seat of Logan County, a busy city of 10,000 people, and an important railroad center, having important mining interests. Lincoln also has the State School and Colony, an institution for the feeble-minded, and the Illinois State Odd Fellow' Orphans' Home, and a Presbyterian College, and it also has a Chautauqua, situated near the trail, and about two miles southwest of the city.

After Lincoln, the next large town on the trail is Springfield, the State capital, whose historic associations with the personality of Lincoln are too well known to need enlargement. His homestead and his grave are here, and the streets he walked in life, and here came at one time or another every conspicuous figure in the public life of Illinois. Here are the State House and many other public buildings, and here is located the State Fair, past whose grounds the trail enters Springfield, also passing the mammoth plant of the Illinois Watch Co.

At Springfield the trail is crossed by the Pike's Peak Ocean to Ocean Highway, and here another interchange of travel will eventually be developed.

From Springfield, still in the main following the Alton Railroad, the trail leads to the historic old town of Carlinville, capital of Macoupin County, named after a former governor. From Springfield, south, fields of corn and oats have largely given place to wheat, and the towers of coal mines frequently break the horizon, for here the trail passes through an important coal-producing region, and here it has reached the ancient hunting grounds of the chief whose name it bears.

From Carlinville the road bears nearly due south, and at the important

mining and manufacturing town of Collinsville, turns nearly west into East St. Louis and across the Mississippi to its destination.

The shortest route for motor travel between Chicago and St. Louis, with so many large and important towns on its course, and intersecting, as it does, so many important east and west thoroughfares, its rapid development as a highway is easily forecasted. Already it is a well-cared for highway, and following, as it does, State aid roads every inch of its length, its permanent improvement will be rapid and certain. At the present time, the trail follows stone roads the entire distance from Chicago to Morris, a distance of about 60 miles, and at Morris there are about 2 ½ miles of concrete road. South of Pontiac, there are 5 miles of asphalt, stone and concrete road, and about 4 miles of concrete and crushed stone through Funk's Grove. At Lincoln there are 2 ½ miles of concrete road, and at Springfield 3 or 4 miles of the same.

It is planned to form the Pontiac Trail Association, with a vice president in each township and an officer in each county through which the trail passes, for the purpose of improving the dirt roads along the route, and of hastening the coming of a permanent highway.

The Goodrich Tire Co., in addition to erecting the guideposts above referred to, are preparing a road log of the route, copies of which can be had, when completed, from the company at Akron, Ohio, from the garages at the towns along the road, and from the superintendents of highways of the counties through which it passes.

And so the christening of the trails goes merrily on, thanks to the gasoline engine, which has carried road building in Illinois further in five years than in the preceding century.