

# If You Like Historic Milestones, Here's a Road Show Not to Miss

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For George Preston, the Lincoln Highway—that 3,119-mile stretch between Atlantic City, N.J., and Astoria, Ore.—is no lonesome trail.

That's why the Belle Plaine, Iowa, historian has established George's Story Line, a 900-line toll-call telephone service that takes callers down his favorite memory lane. Unlike some *other* stories popular with 900-line callers, Mr. Preston's tales are rousing rather than arousing.

And they're all about a highway most drivers know as U.S. Highway 30 rather than the Abraham Lincoln Highway. (Much of the highway hasn't officially been called the Lincoln Highway since the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials started numbering highways in 1926.)

The 79-year-old Mr. Preston has been gathering lore about the highway since 1923, when his family purchased a gas station on it and he began collecting maps from every state along the route. He then began storing up stories told to him by tourists and companies doing business on the road. "I've got stories on every town along the highway," he says.

Nearly every day, he tapes a three-to-

five-minute message for callers to 900-773-8111. No Garrison Keillor, Mr. Preston delivers his stories in a gravel-voiced, grammar-wrecking manner. One minute he rattles on about the first company to operate a carwash on the highway (Skelly Oil Co.), and the next he recalls the first president to appear on a Lincoln Highway map (Herbert Hoover).

Often, he tells listeners what travel—and life—was like back when motorists had to stop frequently in winter to refill car radiators with alcohol, the quick-to-evaporate antifreeze of those times. "I can remember..." a recent tape began, as he recalled how drivers often got "lost so bad" along the way that, in Chicago, police had to be enlisted to "put people back on the highway." He rarely gives his stories a time frame, preferring simply to say, "back in them days."

The line—which costs callers \$1.75 for the first minute and 75 cents for each succeeding minute—receives 50 to 100 calls a day. Mr. Preston gives his share of the proceeds to charities, including a local volunteer fire department and a new Belle Plaine library.

And callers get more than old stories. He sends them a free Lincoln Highway refrigerator magnet and bumper sticker.

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