



PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE FOLSOM TELEGRAPH

The historic Lincoln Highway, the country's first continental highway, crossed Rainbow Bridge for one year.

# Rainbow Bridge once part of historic Lincoln Highway

By LINDA HOLDERNESS  
The Folsom Telegraph

It has long been a rumor, buried by time, that Rainbow Bridge was once part of the historic Lincoln Highway.

Now it's official. According to Caltrans engineer and Lincoln Highway bridge expert Norman Root, the country's first transcontinental highway crossed Rainbow Bridge for one year — in 1927.

When a highway that would stretch from ocean to ocean was first proposed in 1912, Rainbow Bridge didn't exist.

Roads were dirt and often didn't go anywhere, and no one would seriously have considered crossing the country in a car.

Three entrepreneurs with reasons to want to drive — the founder of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and the presidents of Goodyear and the Packard Motor Car Co. — came up with the idea of building a paved road from Times Square, New York, to Lincoln Park in San Francisco.

The route would travel some 3,400 miles through a dozen states and be fully opened by 1915 for the San Francisco Panama-Pacific Exposition.

A fourth potential partner, Henry Ford, declined to join the venture saying he believed government, not private industry, should build roads.

In California, the Lincoln Highway had a unique feature: It followed two routes for part of the trip.

The road split east of Lake Tahoe and circled the lake along both the northern and southern shores — roughly Interstate 80 and Highway 50 today.

Until 1927, the two roads

rejoined at Sacramento. The rest of the trip to Lincoln Park required going through Stockton to Oakland and taking a ferry to San Francisco.

Rainbow Bridge, built by Sacramento County, opened in 1919.

The Carquinez Straits Bridge opened a few years later, and drivers headed for San Francisco could then bypass Sacramento and Stockton.

In 1927, the southern leg of the Lincoln Highway, which followed Folsom Boulevard, was realigned to cross Rainbow Bridge and become one road again at Greenback Lane.

But by then, Henry Ford had gotten his wish. The federal government had become involved in road building and had created a numbering system for all the nation's highways.

When it was put into place on the last day of 1927, the Lincoln Highway designation officially ceased to exist.

The Lincoln Highway Association wasn't quite ready to give up, though.

Since the transcontinental route would no longer bear its name, the association determined to dedicate the historic road to Abraham Lincoln.

On Sept. 1, 1928, thousands of Boy Scouts across the country stationed themselves along the old highway and installed nearly 3,400 small concrete markers, each a mile apart and each bearing a likeness of its namesake.

In 1992, the Lincoln Highway Association reactivated to preserve the history of this groundbreaking road. Lincoln Highway communities are again marking the route for tourists and some are installing replicas of the concrete posts.

## Did Folsom miss chance to be part of highway?

Did Folsom miss a chance to become part of the Lincoln Highway when Rainbow Bridge was first built?

This curious news item from an early 1919 Folsom Telegraph, quoting the Placerville Democrat, raises that interesting question, but doesn't answer it.

Perhaps the answer is history.

"In the matter of signing the highway west and south of Folsom in order to direct traffic through that town and over the Lincoln Highway by way of Placerville and Lake Tahoe, the El Dorado County Chamber of Commerce has had up to the present time no assistance from the garages, hotels, restaurants or refreshment parlors in Folsom.

"Such indifference on the part of the Folsom people is the cause of considerable comment and it has been suggested by some of the more aggressive boosters of El Dorado County that steps be taken to ensure the shape of the public road ... and leave Folsom off the route."

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