

Palm to Pine

Let's be neighborly in our automobiles and go on a sociability run!

As cars became more ubiquitous, automobile associations formed to further promote automobile use and the needs of drivers. These associations planned sociability runs or tours. Sociability runs ostensibly were taken in order to bring distant communities closer together. They also afforded auto owners great opportunities to drive around and see novel places.

A sociability run was executed on the full length (approx. 2,300 miles) of the Jefferson Highway in July 1919. The tour was organized by J. D. Clarkson, the General Manager of the Jefferson Highway Association. It ran from New Orleans, Louisiana, to Winnipeg, Canada, and was called the Palm to Pine Sociability Run in honor of the designated start and finish of the run.

During the summer of 1919, many communities along the Jefferson Highway were busy paving parts of this road and others. Morrison County and its various cities were no exception to this paving boom. With the hoopla surrounding paving, the Palm to Pine tour, and other sociability runs, roadways received a lot of attention at the time.

Of course, a little self-promotion didn't hurt in raising public awareness, especially of the Palm to Pine tour. The Little Falls Daily Transcript first announced the Palm to Pine tour in May 1919 and, as the tour proceeded, gave regular updates. For the Palm to Pine run, communities along the driving route were urged to host celebrations in honor of the tourists. They were also encouraged to send motorists to meet the touring party before entering a community. Before the sociability run, R. B. Millard, a Little Falls native who was serving as the State Secretary for the Minnesota Jefferson Highway Association, published the following statement in the Daily Transcript: "We should make the afternoon a holiday in Little Falls. It has been suggested that all business houses [sic] along the line decorate with flags and bunting to welcome the tourists." (LFDT-June 25, 1919)

The city of Little Falls was scheduled to serve as a "night control" for the tour on July 16, 1919. This meant that tourists in the party who were traveling the entire route would be spending the night in the city.

The Palm to Pine Sociability Run got underway on July 1, 1919. The touring party was headed by J. D. Clarkson and his wife. Forty-two people started out in New Orleans, including Governor of Louisiana, R. G. Pleasant. Also included in the tour were Manitoba's Attorney General, Thomas H. Johnson; the mayor of New Orleans, Martin Behrman; the mayor of Shreveport, Louisiana, J. M. W. Ford; Louisiana State Highway Commissioner, Duncan Buie; the vice-president of the Louisiana Jefferson Highway Association, R. A. Nibert; the vice-president for the Minnesota Jefferson Highway Association, J. H. Beek; and president of the National Automobile Association, A. G. Batchelder.

The touring party had a strict schedule it was trying to keep, but by July 9, 1919, the newspaper was reporting that, due to heavy rains in the southern United States, the sociability run would be delayed a day. This caused a number of communities along the route to cancel their celebrations.

Two days prior to reaching Little Falls, the touring party was joined in Owatonna, Minnesota, by J. K. Martin and R. B. Millard of Little Falls. Other Morrison County communities, including Motley and Bowlus, sent cars to meet the party in Royalton on July 17, 1919. From Royalton, the entire auto tour drove to Little Falls and reached town at 5:12 p.m. the same day. "The local fire truck went to the south end of town and escorted the party in, with old glory waving from the main deck." (LFDT-July 18, 1919)

A public reception for the Palm to Pine party was planned to take place in Bank Square in Little Falls, with supper to be served at the Elks picnic. This was reported by the Daily Transcript on July 16. Plans changed quickly because, by the time the tourists reached town on July 17, they were taken to Pine Grove Park for the reception and had dinner at the Buckman Hotel. Speeches were given in the park by various people, including Nels N. Bergheim, the mayor of Little Falls and Thomas H. Johnson, Attorney General of Manitoba. "Mayor Hodgson, of St. Paul gave a very good talk in which he said that the Jefferson Highway would serve as a lasting connecting link between Minnesota and the south, encouraging more frequent visits between the peoples of the two sections and making for a closer connection in both a business and social way." (LFDT-July 18, 1919)

The Palm to Pine motorists left Little Falls at eight o'clock the following morning to finish the last few days of their trip. J. K. Martin, along with his wife and two sons, went with the group to Winnipeg. Now, doesn't a sociability run sound like fun? Let's make it a real party and throw in some dignitaries and bunting.