

Midland Trail Signs Installed by Automobile Club of Southern California

The Automobile Club of Southern California has given much to our valley and other Southern California areas, adding their share to our history since 1900. They intend to continue providing the best in all forms of travel information and promoting highway improvements. Automobile clubs were first organized in Europe setting the pattern for the clubs which would later develop here in the United States. The automobile age began about the turn of the century, but was not very much accepted by most people. The automobile was looked upon as a toy for the adventurous person and the idle rich. Thus for many years the horse drawn wagons continued well into the auto age.

On June 7, 1899, the first auto club in the United States was established in New York, uniting the owners of the new horseless carriages. Interest spread across the country giving rise for protection the new horseless carriage owners.

On December 13, 1900, the Automobile Club of Southern California was organized to protect owners from unreasonable regulations and to plan motor tours to places as far away as 60 miles from Los Angeles. Until 1903 there was little activity until the Club was reorganized with new by-laws and offering additional services to its members.

On January 19, 1904, the club set up an office in the O. T. Johnson Building. As membership grew so did the need for office space. From its first location the office was moved to the Laughlin Building in 1906. Then in July 1909 they moved to South Hill Street. It became necessary to move again and this to another location on South Hill Street in November of 1910. In 1911 the office was located on the corner of 8TH and Olive Streets and remained there until 1914. That year the Club leased and built its own building on South Figueroa Street. Through the years with the growth of membership and more services provided, the expansion of buildings grew to compensate for their growth. Today, in 1971, the Headquarters office for the Automobile Club of Southern California is still on Figueroa Street in Los Angeles.

In 1905, through the efforts of the Club, road conditions were improved and a few State Laws were enacted. The State Laws in 1905 required vehicles to be registered, and operators of such must have a license to operate their autos. Road rules and speed limits were also part of the new laws, as was regulating overtaking and passing another vehicle. Speed limits of ten miles an hour were posted in heavily built up areas, and 20 miles an hour outside of the city or town limits.

The Club's first periodical, *Touring Topics*, was printed in February 1909, becoming the forerunner of the *Westways* magazine we know today. The name was changed to *Westways* in 1933. *Touring Topics* was printed for members, to provide information on Club activities, and other events of interest. Pictures, maps, and road conditions were also part of this monthly publication. It also kept the members abreast of the Club's position on different issues of State affairs.

Another aid to members was the tour book printed in March 1909. This book provided complete detailed road maps of coastal and inland roads to travel, and the location of all road signs placed by the Club along the main routes. Members were kept informed on new State Laws, and a list of the Club's objectives for the future, which in essence were: to promote construction and aid for better roads; to erect warning and direction signs on main roadways in Southern California, to obtain proper traffic laws, and cooperate with the police to preserve law and order.

Signing of roads in Southern California began in 1905 between Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino, and from Ventura to San Diego. These signs showed the name of the communities and mileage to reach them, thus proving to be of great assistance to planned tours of the Club. Posting of road signs was so greatly accepted, the Club Board of Directors, in 1906,

contracted enamel signs to be made, and placed on 4 X 4 inch redwood posts. The signs contained warnings and directions, and were hauled to their respective locations by horse drawn wagons. Light cars were used to take the signs to closer areas. Even in 1906, as it is today, vandalism of road signs existed, to the extent that rewards of \$100 00 were offered for any information leading to the conviction of persons removing or destroying road signs.

After several unsuccessful contracts with commercial sign firms, the Club established their own signing crew, and acquired their first sign truck, a 1908 Maxwell, and then a second truck, a 1910 Franklin. By 1910 more than 2400 warning and guide signs had been placed in Southern California at a cost of over fifty thousand dollars. In 1911 the sign crew erected the first Railroad Crossing signs, and the first detour and warning signs at construction sites. Approximately 500 signs were placed throughout the desert area, and the following year, 1913, warning signs were placed near schools. In August 1914 the Club took on the job of sign posting old trail routes. The signs were 18 inches by 24 inches with red and blue lettering on a white background, and gave warnings, mileage and names of the nearest towns.

The trail concerning our area is the Midland Trail, running basically from south to north, from Los Angeles, through Mojave, then Little Lake, continuing on to Big Pine. At Big Pine the trail turns east over Westgard Pass to Ely, Nevada, and on to the Lincoln Highway

The main roads during these years were dirt and very narrow, with side roads leading off to farm house or a mine. Many times these side roads were mistaken for the main route of travel, sometimes taking the traveler many miles out of his way. To solve this problem the Club placed signs at each and every intersection.

California signs were changed in 1929 and 1930, to conform with national requirements. These new signs were much more expensive, with reflector buttons for nighttime visibility. Up to this time Club members had shared in the cost of the signs, so the directors and managers decided that it would only be fair that others who benefited by the posting should share the cost. The Club adopted a new policy, donating the expense of labor, equipment, overhead, and continued to make surveys, all at the expense of the members, but did charge city, county and state agencies the cost of materials.

For fifty years (1905 to 1956), the Club carried on the signing of roads. Since that time they have maintained a sign service department to help with surveys, and to receive any complaints or requests of the members or motoring public making sure they are processed to the proper public official. During the Club's fifty years of signing they placed over four hundred and sixty thousand signs along highways. I believe the Automobile Club of Southern California, all its officers and members deserve a large thank you from all for starting and continuing through the years for their work and effort in helping to make California Highways safe for the motorist and pedestrians. THANK YOU!