

Making tracks along the Lincoln Highway

BY EARL ALLEN

as told to Duane Carling

Editor's note: Several weeks ago, the Clipper and Clipper Today ran a series of articles on the historic Lincoln Highway that once ran through Davis County. The Highway was first conceived in 1913, and was really a collection of trails and cow paths that an imaginative traveler could follow to take him (or her) from Times Square in New York to Lincoln Park in San Francisco. The first version of the Highway came down Weber Canyon and down what is now the main streets of Roy, Clinton, Clearfield, Layton, Kaysville, Farmington, Centerville, and Bountiful, and on to Salt Lake. All of those streets were dirt or gravel except for a two-mile stretch of concrete from Davis High School to Moon Circle in Farmington.

Following the story in the Clipper, Earl Allen of Kaysville contacted us to tell of his journey in 1924, when he was age 10, from Salt Lake City to Philadelphia on the Lincoln Highway.

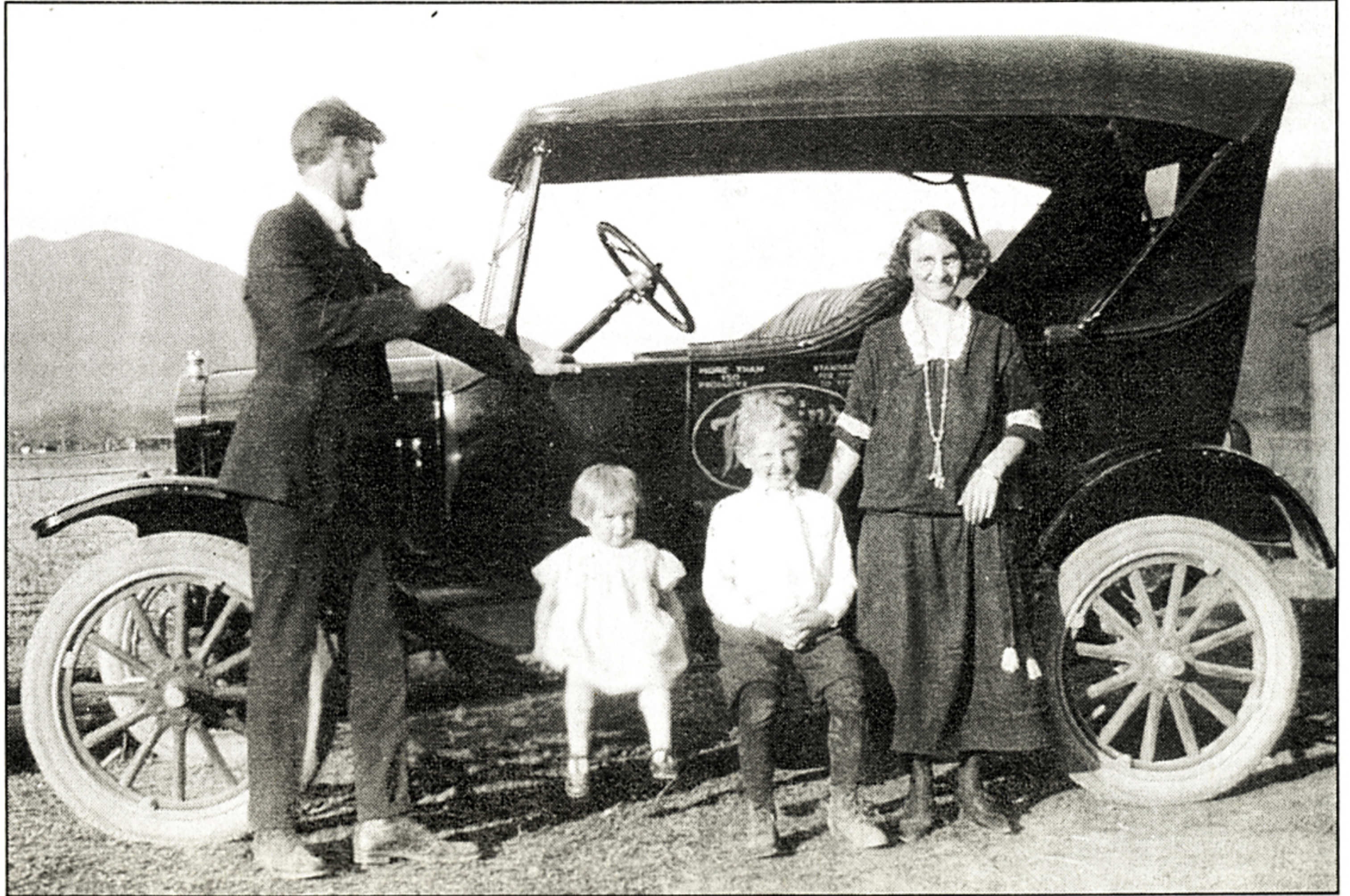
The first night we stayed in Lyman Wyoming, which is near Ft. Bridger. I figured we were about half way to Philly, and was pretty tired of traveling. Our Model T had a canvas top and isinglass side curtains, but we didn't put them on except for heavy rains (they only kept out the big stuff) and most of the time we didn't even put up the top since it didn't help much either.

The second night we stayed in Wamsutter, which is about 60 miles east of Rock Springs. It was hot and dusty (all the roads were dirt, except when it rained, then they were mud). The wind was blowing that red sand sideways and there was no campground at all. We just pulled over in a field of scrub grass and pitched out "car tent" which was kind of a canvas lean-to that attached to one side of the Model T. My father assigned us all jobs when we made camp, and we did them while mother cooked. She cooked a covered dish of some kind over a fire, that turned out to be about 1/2 sand by the time she served it.

Next day we climbed over the pass into Laramie. The Model T had a planetary transmission. To drive in low gear you had to hold your right foot down or it would shift into a higher gear. Dad had to hold his foot down while we climbed those mountains, and down the other side too because the brakes didn't work that well either. His leg about fell off!

The next day we were supposed to meet some friends in Ogallala Nebraska, but it rained and turned the road into miles of gumbo clay. The cars were backed up for as far as you could see. We met a World War I vet who was traveling to Laramie in a Nash sedan. He got permission to stay in a farmer's corn crib, so Dad turned in there too and announced we would spend the night. The vet had mustard gas wounds from the War, and told us all stories until bedtime. Sometime during the night another car pulled in there and let the farmer's bull loose. I was too tired to care, but I remember the adults were pretty upset.

Dad paid \$300 for our almost new T and was quite proud of it. I remember he said never wrap your thumb over the crank handle when starting it, because if (when) it backfired you wanted the crank to come out of your hand or it would break your arm. Coming over the divide he had burned out the brake band, which was a leather strap that rubbed on a drum mounted in the end of the transmission. It only slowed the back wheels, and had to be changed about every



EARL ALLEN, as he appeared at age 10, the year he and his family drove across the country along the historic Lincoln Highway, above. Below, Allen as a Chief Petty Officer in the U.S. Navy.

three days on steep roads. It was tricky to do in a field, and if you dropped the band nut inside, you had to disassemble the transmission.

Somewhere out in that mud, while Dad had the car apart, some guy gave him a tip that saved us a lot of work later. He told Dad when you are coming down a steep grade, keep it in low gear and turn the ignition off. He also said if you have to stop fast, step on the brake and put it in reverse at the same time. You can do that with a planetary transmission.

The fifth day we made it to Grand Island Neb. where I went swimming with a bunch of kids and one almost drowned in the lake. The deep part was roped off, but of course the game was to get under the rope. The next day was solid mud again, and we stayed in a feed lot somewhere close to the Missouri river. The mud wasn't bad enough, so I found some manure to fall in. I got in big trouble for that too. Remember there were no showers and few changes of clothes.

On the seventh day we made it to Ames Iowa, where we stayed for two days with some friends. We must have looked like mud bunnies with a fresh coat of dust. There were no car washes in those days.

I could tell we were getting near bigger cities. We still hadn't seen any paved roads but gravel was becoming more common. Flat tires were a way of life, and fixing flats and changing tires took a good part of the day. Those old balloon tires were just cotton fabric coated with rubber, with an inner tube inside that was usually covered with patches.

After Ames we stayed in South Chicago, where I saw my first flush toilet. The water tank was mounted way up high, so the water really flushed when it hit the bowl. I was real impressed with that new technology.

A couple of days later, after traveling on a few miles of actual paved roads, we made it to Philly and camped in Willow Row Park. They made Dad hang a piece of canvas over the "Watkins" sign on the side of our car,



because no commercial vehicles were allowed. Dad was a natural salesman and distributed Watkins home products. We ate at Grandma's house which was near the park, but played and slept in our car tent. It had a camp stove and folding cots that attached to the car, so we were quite comfortable.

People who saw our Utah license plates used to ask us if Utah was in the United States. My father completed the third grade in England, and my mother could barely write, but they were amazed at how little those city people knew of the world.

One day we drove to the Watkins headquarters which was in Trenton, New Jersey. Dad left early and it was dark when we got back. People couldn't believe we drove all that way and back in one day. It was only 50 miles from Philly, but that was a long way to those Easterners.

After about a week with Grandma, we started back but Dad wanted to see the capitol, Washington D.C. On the road he saw a

sign with a big "W" and an arrow pointing south. He followed that and we ended up in Wheeling, West Virginia. Dad didn't mind though, he said he'd never seen that part of the country either, so we just redirected and started west for Utah.

There weren't many numbered or named roads in those days, and even fewer road signs. Even the Lincoln only had signs every once in a while, and you found your way by following the red white and blue stripes painted on fence posts and barns. (Editors note: The use of standard signs such a STOP signs and the numbering of highways was recommended by the federal government in 1925.)

The trip back was about the same, except we were getting real low on money. When we crossed the Missouri the man who operated the ferry looked in Dad's wallet as he handed him our last dollar bill. The ferryman asked Dad how he was going to get all the way to Utah. Dad thought a minute and said he had some paste beads that smelled like roses, maybe he'd sell them.

As I said, Dad was a natural salesman, and before we were off the ferry he'd sold 30 dollars worth of beads, which was almost enough to get us home. Dad was real lucky too. We got low on money about Ft. Bridger, and a guy was admiring our car tent so Dad sold it to him for more than he had paid for it.

That trip was a great adventure. Maybe that's why I spent 22 years in the Navy. Travel isn't anything like it used to be, which is probably a good thing, but it was sure an eye opener for a 10-year-old kid.

Note: Earl must have inherited his father's good luck. He arrived on the ship Neosho in Pearl Harbor the day before the bombs fell. He was part of the Doolittle raid on Tokyo serving on the cruiser Northampton, which was torpedoed later in the war. Earl was in the engine room and had to climb five stories to the deck and go swimming with the sharks.