United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Multiple Property Documentation Form

This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

[X] New Submission  [ ] Amended Submission

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Historic and Architectural Resources of the Meridian Highway in Nebraska

B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

Highway Development in Nebraska, c. 1890 – 1974

The Meridian Highway in Nebraska, 1911 – c. 1960

C. Form Prepared by

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D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register Criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. ( [ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature and title of certifying official  Date
State Historic Preservation Officer

State or Federal agency and bureau
Nebraska State Historical Society

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Signature of the Keeper  Date of Action
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Provide the following information on continuation sheets. Cite the letter and the title before each section of the narrative. Assign page numbers according to the instructions for continuation sheets in *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (National Register Bulletin 16B). Fill in page numbers for each section in the space below.

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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for application to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.
E. Statement of Historic Contexts

Introduction
This Multiple Property Documentation form of Historic and Architectural Resources of the Meridian Highway in Nebraska is based on surveys and research completed for the Nebraska State Historical Society.

Historic Highway Development in Nebraska

Introduction
Prior to the twentieth century, much of the country, including Nebraska, had largely undeveloped road networks. The railroad dominated in the nineteenth century as the preferred method of transportation and the system of roads developed haphazardly based on local travel and continuous use. The regular trip of farmers moving crops to market formed pathways from rural areas into communities. Like the rutted trails formed by travelers on the Oregon, California, and Mormon Trails and the route of the Pony Express, these local unimproved roads were the only vehicular transportation routes.

The popularity of the bicycle and the introduction of the automobile in the 1890s raised public awareness of the need for adequate road networks. In response to the poor condition of the nation’s road system, the “Good Roads” movement emerged. By the 1880s, interest groups began pressuring the federal government to reevaluate its role in the development of roads. A group of bicyclists organized the League of American Wheelmen, founding the first of many organizations to promote road improvements as part of the Good Roads movement. With the motto, “lifting our people out of the mud,” they lobbied the federal and state governments for better roads.1 Advocates of the Good Roads movement lobbied for federal, state, and local involvement and financial resources in road building and maintenance activities.

Rural Free Delivery Service (“RFD” postal delivery), begun in 1896, increased the awareness for an adequate road system and broadened the support for good roads, especially among those in rural areas who did not previously see the need. Mail delivery was required in all conditions and poor road conditions could prohibit this. Additionally, local applications for Rural Free Delivery were sometimes denied because of poor road conditions.2

The nation’s first state highway department was formed in Massachusetts in 1893 and Massachusetts was the only state to spend any significant amount of money on roads between 1894 and 1903.3 The federal government formally involved in roads in 1893 with the formation of the Office of Road Inquiry within the United States Department of Agriculture. The engineers within the Office of Road Inquiry became involved with the Good Roads movement and the department evolved into a central source of technical information regarding roads. The Office of Road Inquiry was involved in data collection and released bulletins and circulars addressing road construction and administration issues.4

The Office of Road Inquiry was renamed the Office of Public Road Inquiry in 1899 and continued with technical and promotional efforts to improve roads.5 One effort of the Office of Public Road Inquiry was to develop a material testing laboratory to test samples and identify suitable road materials. In 1905 the Office of Public Roads was created by the passage of the Agriculture Appropriations Act which terminated the Office of Public Road Inquiry and established a permanent federal road agency with an annual budget of $50,000.6 Based on continued testing, the Office of Public Roads issued typical material specifications and testing procedures, as well as construction guidelines in 1911 and bridge specifications shortly after. Highway standards were also developed by professional trade organizations, a few states, and even the Lincoln Highway Association, which developed an ideal pavement section.7

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1George E. Koster, A Story of Highway Development in Nebraska (Lincoln, Nebraska: Department of Roads, 1997), 7, 11.
3Seely 12-13, 22.
4Seely, 9.
5Seely, 16-17.
7Seely, 29.
By 1902 numerous national, state and local groups were involved in road promotion including the National Good Roads Association, 32 affiliates of the Automobile Club of America, and 18 state and 14 local road associations. Despite the early efforts of these groups, only 154,000 miles of the country’s over two million miles of road were improved in 1904.8

County and township government, local commercial clubs, business associations, automobile clubs, farmers and merchants often contributed labor and funds to improve local roads. Merchants recognized that good roads brought trade to their businesses. Farmers recognized good roads for the benefit of farm-to-market travel. These interest groups were significant in the ultimate development of a national highway system.

The early twentieth century was the height of popularity for “good roads” and “automobile trails”. Citizen organizations were formed to designate, promote, and improve regional and cross-country highways. These groups also lobbied state, federal, and local governments to cooperatively plan and construct roads. In Nebraska the potential of the automobile for long distance travel is reflected in the promotion of three of the earliest automobile trail associations, all organized in 1911: the Omaha-Denver Transcontinental Route, the Meridian Road from Winnipeg, Canada to the Gulf of Mexico and the Platte Valley Trans-Continental Route from Omaha to Cheyenne and Denver. The latter became the route of the coast-to-coast Lincoln Highway through Nebraska just two years later. These “named highways,” took on colorful, commemorative or descriptive names such as Blue Pole Highway, Cornhusker Highway, Golden Rod Trail, George Washington Highway and Alfalfa Trail are just a few of the many other named early twentieth-century roads in Nebraska. As the automobile gained popularity and travelers made their way across the state and the country, these routes became well-traveled thoroughfares. By 1918, some 38 highways were being promoted into and through Nebraska.

Road organizations promoted their routes through published guidebooks. These guidebooks advertised the group’s highway by offering route directions and identifying locations of tourist services and sites of interest. Two national guidebook series identifying routes throughout the country, including those in Nebraska, were the *Tourist Information Bureau* and the *Automobile Blue Book*. In addition to the published road and route guides, gasoline, oil and tire companies often published state maps identifying early named highways. These state maps provided information on a variety of highways, but also served as a marketing piece and included the location of the sponsoring company’s service stations. Companies such as Standard Oil and Goodrich Tire are known to have published early maps of the state of Nebraska.

In Nebraska the Good Roads Association was not officially formed until 1918, offering a forum in which private citizens and organizations could express opinions on highway development matters. The organization’s purpose was to encourage the most efficient and economical expenditure of highway monies. It also offered state and local officials accurate information to help guide them in enacting legislation concerning Nebraska’s roads.9

Although prior to the turn of the century the automobile was a luxury only for the wealthy, by 1904, there were over 55,000 vehicles in use across the United States and by 1910 this had skyrocketed to approximately a half-million.10 By 1900 the first automobiles were being sighted on the streets of Nebraska. The statewide need for roads and state involvement in road construction was spurred by the state’s increase in motor vehicle registration. In Nebraska, motor vehicle registration was 571 in 1905, but by 1910 it had risen to 11,339.11 Motor vehicle registration continued to soar in Nebraska with 211,750 autos reported in 1919, and the count nearly doubling to 419,198 in 1929.12

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8Seely, 24 and 9.
10Koster, 7.
11Koster, 14-15.
12Koster, 20-22.
Early State Road Legislation

Nebraska’s first county road law pre-dates statehood, passed by the Territorial Legislature on January 26, 1856. The Legislature recognized the need to develop roads to connect settlements within the territory and passed the authority for constructing territorial roads to county commissioners. With this permission, commissioners were able to impose taxes and appropriate labor to aid in constructing and maintaining roads.\(^\text{13}\) The law stated that construction of roads was the responsibility of the individual counties affected. Therefore, the county was responsible for surveying public roads, maintaining them to standards spelled out in the law, and overseeing construction labor. Despite the legislation, roads throughout Nebraska remained poorly repaired and maintained. The majority of traffic on early roads was local in character; therefore, the condition of the roads was initially only the concern of individual townships.\(^\text{14}\) These local roads often remained in poor condition because maintenance meant higher taxes.

An 1862 map prepared by civil engineer Augustus Harvey indicates the first ten territorial routes in Nebraska. They were: Omaha City to Cedar Island, Plattsmouth to Archer and Kansas line, Brownville to Nebraska Center, Tekomah to Pawnee, Florence to Fontanelle, Nebraska City to Grand Island, Bellevue to Catherine, De Soto to Pawnee, a suitable point on the Platte River to Dakotah, and Pawnee to Nebraska Center.\(^\text{15}\)

In the following years, the state began to recognize the need for good roads; however, they did not take responsibility for the construction of the roads. In 1879 the Nebraska Legislature passed legislation reserving section lines as public roads. Individual counties and townships were required to build and maintain them. The required width of these roads was 66-feet. The law also authorized a tax levy to finance maintenance projects. Because road construction was financed through local taxation, interest in road construction and improvement rarely extended beyond township lines. Men within a community would opt to do road construction work to pay off their tax levy, but expressed little interest in additional taxation or labor to extend or complete the road. As a result, as early highways were delineated in Nebraska, they often followed poorly maintained existing roads that were largely section line roads. The section line roads followed the rectangular township-range system of land survey and, as a result, the highways often had many 90-degree turns where section lines intersected. By 1904 Nebraska had 79,462 miles of roads, most of which were along section lines.\(^\text{16}\)

The first state agency with road-related responsibilities was the State Board of Irrigation. Created on April 24, 1895, the State Board of Irrigation was charged with supervising irrigation practices to manage Nebraska’s water resources, while preserving the integrity of affected waterways. Included in the board’s responsibilities was overseeing bridge construction. It grew into the state agency that dealt with road issues. With the introduction and popularity of the automobile, the board sought legislation regarding the registration of motor vehicles in 1905. The legislature passed a motor vehicle registration fee of $1.00 and responded to safety issues regarding speed limits, such as the operation of a vehicle near horses and the use of brakes, signals, and lights.\(^\text{17}\)

As the number of automobiles increased in Nebraska, the legislature recognized the need for improved roads. In 1911 the Nebraska Legislature changed the name of the board to the State Board of Irrigation, Highways and Drainage and increased its responsibilities to include road construction and maintenance.\(^\text{18}\) The Board was directed to elect a civil engineer to serve as the “State Engineer.” Registration fees for vehicles were raised by the Legislation to $2.00 and the revenue was given to county road funds.\(^\text{19}\) The State Aid Bridge Act, which passed the same year, was the first legislative action resulting from this increased interest in roads. The act not only increased the state’s authority over local road administrators, but it also resulted in increased local expenditures.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^\text{13}\)Koster, 11-12.
\(^\text{15}\)Wardner G. Scott, “Nebraska Public Highways,” *Nebraska History* XXVI, no. 3 (July-Sept. 1945), 164.
\(^\text{16}\)Nebraska Highway Advisory Committee, *Nebraska Highway Needs* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Nebraska Highway Advisory Committee, 1948); Koster, 13.
\(^\text{17}\)Koster; iv, 14-15.
\(^\text{18}\)Koster, iv.
\(^\text{19}\)Koster 16.
\(^\text{20}\)Warne, 44.
Federal Funding for Nebraska’s Highway Construction

Federal-Aid Road Act of 1916

No federal and state funds were available for road construction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In 1916 Congress passed the first formal highway policy with a regular appropriation of matching funds to the states. By this time the number of automobile registrations in the country had reached 2.3 million and the auto industry and motorists were heavily lobbying for programs and funds to improve roads. The Federal-Aid Road Act was signed by Woodrow Wilson on June 11, 1916. Now the federal government was directly involved in road building efforts. Approximately, $5 million was appropriated the first year with the funding escalating in annual steps to total $75 million. Funding, managed by the Secretary of Agriculture, was allocated by a formula based on a state’s population, land area and road mileage. Under this act the federal government would finance up to 50% of the cost of construction, not to exceed $10,000 per mile.

In order to obtain federal funds, each state’s highway commission had to meet the Office of Public Road Inquiry’s standards and approval. To participate in the Federal-Aid Program, a state had to:
- maintain a state highway department to administer the Federal-Aid act
- assume responsibility of all roads on which federal funds were spent (this could be delegated to local governments)
- classify eligible mileage in eligible systems based on traffic needs and services rendered
- agree to uniform standards of construction and design
- meet inspection requirements before bills were paid
- match federal funds under mutually acceptable standards.

The passage of the Federal-Aid Road Act of 1916 discouraged the haphazard construction of roads by counties without state supervision. Through the requirement that states establish a highway department that met the Office of Public Roads approval states now had to have financial resources and encouraged engineering skills to be used for road design. The state highway commission had the responsibility for the preparation of plans and specifications and all construction and maintenance, while the federal government held the right to inspect all projects.

The Federal-Aid Road Act of 1916 required Nebraska’s State Board of Irrigation, Highways, and Drainage to take on a greater role in road development. Once Nebraska accepted federal funding, the state became responsible for the construction of the highway system. The state was now propelled into the full-scale development of highways.

World War I hindered actual road construction following the passage of the Federal-Aid Road Act. Road construction continued at a slow pace but by 1918 sixteen projects comprising 512 miles had been approved, contracts for 200 miles had been let, 1,600 miles had been surveyed, and plans had been prepared for 952 miles. The first Federal-Aid road project in Nebraska, the Lincoln and Emerald Road (West O Street), began in July of 1918 and was completed the following year. The project was 5.44 miles in length and was estimated to cost over $217,000. Several other Federal-Aid projects in the state were completed by 1920, including a paved portion of the Lincoln Highway from Dodge Street in Omaha to the Saunders County line, an earthen 12.53-mile stretch of the Geneva-Belvidere Road in Fillmore County, and the 25.87-mile long Seward-York-Aurora Road.

After the war, Congress transferred surplus equipment and materials from the War Department to state highway departments. Nebraska received 407 trucks, 74 touring cars, and miscellaneous equipment and tons of materials and

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21Seely, 24-25.
22Seely, 43.
23Nebraska Highway Advisory Committee.
24Seely, 42-43.
supplies. The state sold surplus trucks, equipment and materials to county road departments to use for road construction and maintenance.27

In 1919 approximately 5,000 miles of highway under a total of 88 route numbers were designated as the state highway system.28 Maintenance of the state highway system was assigned to the counties. In addition, the legislature created the State-Aid Road Fund, financed by property tax. With the establishment of the state highway system, counties were required to form a system of county roads, under the jurisdiction of the County Board, not exceeding 20% of the total mileage in the county.29

That year the Nebraska Legislature restructured state government, replacing the State Board of Irrigation, Highways and Drainage with the Department of Public Works. The Department consisted of the Bureau of Irrigation, Water Power, and Drainage; the Bureau of Roads and Bridges; and the Division of Motor Vehicle Registration, all under the authority of the State Engineer. The Bureau of Roads and Bridges was responsible for the construction of all state and Federal-Aid roads and the building of all State bridges. It was divided into three sub-divisions: Maps and Plans, Road Construction, and Road Equipment, Repairs, and Maintenance. The Maps and Plans division was responsible for preliminary field investigations and surveys required in planning State and Federal-Aid roads. They also completed special designs for equipment, such as derricks, camp buildings, and wagons. The Division of Road Construction was responsible for all facets of construction, maintenance, and testing for State and Federal-Aid road projects. The Division of Road Equipment, Repairs, and Maintenance was responsible for outfitting counties with equipment, and keeping up with the general maintenance and repair of Department vehicles and equipment. The three divisions worked together to create and maintain Nebraska’s earliest roads and highways.30

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1921
Federal funding for highway construction was continued by Congress with the passage of the Federal Highway Act of 1921. This act provided states financial aid for the construction of highways under the seven percent system in which each state was eligible for assistance for the construction of seven percent of its highways. Within two years, each state was required to designate three percent of their primary roads and four percent of their secondary roads as part of the federal-aid highway system and as a result, these roads were eligible for assistance under what was called the “Seven Percent System.”31

Federal funding was to be matched by state funds on a 50-50 basis. Nebraska’s certified mileage at the time was 80,272, allowing for 5,619 miles of roads to be designated, Nebraska’s seven percent system. Roads were designated as important interstate throughways, and were to be developed into an integrated national road system that would allow easy interstate travel throughout the country. Road designs were required to adhere to the federal government’s standards for minimum width, grade, and adequacy of roadbed type for the traffic load. States were required to submit their plans to the Department of Agriculture for approval.32 The 4,500 miles of Nebraska’s state highway system, established in 1919, were included in the 5,619 miles of road designated as post roads in 1921 and included in the seven percent total of roads eligible to receive federal aid.33

Between 1917 and 1926 Nebraska spent over $27 million on road construction of which just less than half, $12.5 million, was furnished by the federal government.34 The 1920s were a boom for highway construction and improvements nationwide with over $10 billion invested in roads. Most states financed this significant road construction through

27Koster; 20, 28.
31Seely, 74.
33Warne, 46-47.
34“Roads and Road Building in Nebraska,” Nebraska Highways 1, no. 3 (1927): 6.
increased taxation and bonds; however, Nebraska was not willing to go into debt or dramatically increase taxation to pay for improved roads. Until about 1925, road construction and maintenance in Nebraska was financed largely by federal aid and funds from property taxes levied by state, county, and cities. After 1925 road construction and maintenance was funded by gasoline tax and vehicle registration fees.

Nebraska’s fiscally responsible pay-as-you-go policy challenged the Bureau of Roads and Bridges of the State Board of Irrigation, Highways and Drainage to meet the state’s growing highway needs and to keep up with the pace of road development in the rest of the country. This policy also forced the Bureau of Roads and Bridges to continually struggle to meet the financial match for federal funding. In an effort to control costs, Nebraska researched road materials and advocated dirt roads as a sound and economical option.\(^\text{35}\)

The trend toward a centralized system of highway construction and maintenance, begun with the establishment of the State Board of Irrigation, Highways and Drainage, continued into the 1920s. In 1926 the Nebraska Legislature passed a statute requiring the Department of Public Works to maintain the state highway system, except for state highways within the corporate limits of municipalities with a population over 1,400. Other city and village streets in Nebraska were under the authority of municipal agencies, with no clear pattern of municipal management. Financing for state roads was provided for by setting aside 30 percent of all motor vehicle registration fees, and portions of the gasoline tax, first passed in 1925, as deemed necessary. Prior to this time, counties were responsible for state highway maintenance. The legislation also required highway construction and maintenance contracts, previously let by the counties, to be awarded by the Department of Public Works. The Legislature also gave the Department of Public Works the power to acquire right-of-way directly.\(^\text{36}\)

In 1933 the Legislature changed the name of the Department of Public Works to the Department of Roads and Irrigation. The State Engineer was given the additional duties of Director of Motor Vehicles, Chairman of the State Planning Board, and Director of Highway Safety and Patrol.\(^\text{37}\)

### From Names to Numbers

Local, regional and national organizations marked named highway routes in the early twentieth century, but there was a need for a uniform system for marking interstate roads and presenting warning signs. In 1918 Wisconsin became the first state to adopt a state highway numerical numbering system to alleviate the haphazard system of named trails.

In an effort to diminish the confusion surrounding named routes and unify the national highway system was taken up. The movement for a nationwide system of highway routes and road signs was proposed at an annual meeting of the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) in 1922. AASHO, formed in 1914 of senior state and federal highway officials, had a role in shaping many aspects of road policy including building, financing, and maintenance. By 1925 AASHO adopted a national numbering system plan including the standard design for signs and a uniform sign to mark roads carrying the same name or number between states. The Federal Department of Agriculture announced a numbered system of highways that year.

Danger and warning signs, in compliance with the AASHO and the Federal Bureau of Roads, were also placed throughout the state in 1926 to increase safety. These signs came in four shapes and all were yellow. The diamond shape was used to mark a hazard within the road, such as loose gravel, new fill, a narrow bridge, or a curve. The square shaped marked hazards outside the road, such as crossroad traffic or school children. The circular shape was used only to mark railroad crossings. The octagon shape was used only for stop signs.

\(^{35}\)Koster, 26.

\(^{36}\)Nebraska Department of Public Works, *Sixteenth Biennial Report of the Department of Public Works 1925-26* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Nebraska Department of Public Works, 1926), 74; Koster 32.

The uniform white shield sign had bold black text and the only variation was the name of the state. The state’s name was included in the top portion of the sign, and the highway number appeared in large bold text on the lower portion. Odd numbers were used for north-south routes using the number 1 for principal interstate routes and even numbers were assigned to east-west roads with principal routes designated using multiples of ten. Several interstate routes were selected for marking in Nebraska including: Lincoln Highway, U.S. Route 30; Grant Highway, U.S. Route 20; D-L-D Highway, U.S. Route 38; Washington Highway, U.S. Route 75; Cornhusker Highway, U.S. Route 77; Meridian Highway, U.S. Route 81; and Platte Valley Highway, U.S. Route 26.

When this took effect in 1926, the new numbering system affected 145 roads or 76,000 miles of road across the United States. Although the need for a marking system had been apparent for several years, Nebraska held off until a national standard system was adopted. In the spring of 1926, the Nebraska Department of Public Works began placing numbered state highway markers along highways in the state. The State Highway Marker adopted by the state was a diamond shaped sign, 15-inches square, with a covered wagon graphic on the upper half and the route numbers on the lower half. The sign was black and white, which made it easy to distinguish from the yellow and black danger and warning signs. In addition to placing route signs along highways, the state placed signs along the highways that were designed to inform motorists. Signs were located at various points along the highway that gave the distance to the next town and other important places ahead. The names of streams were marked at crossings with signs on the right side of the road, on either side of the stream. In Nebraska the named routes, such as the Potash Highway, Lincoln Highway and Meridian Highway lost their unique identity to a number. With some rerouting of sections, the the Lincoln Highway largely became known as U.S. 30 through Nebraska and the Grant Highway as U.S. 20. The north-south Meridian Highway was designated as U.S Highway 81 as a continuous highway from Canada to Mexico.

Nebraska was in line with the rest of the nation in highway marking. Over 50 percent of the states, including Nebraska, had erected the standard signs by the close of 1926; the remaining states were scheduled to comply by the end of 1927. In order for the standardized highway signs to be effective, they had to be seen by the motoring public. All advertising signs had to be removed from the right-of-way and the vicinity of the right-of-way to ensure that they would not conflict with the highway markers.

In 1928 the legislature mandated stop signs to be placed on 6,200 miles of Nebraska roads. Signs were placed at the entry of side roads into main “arterial” highways. These signs gave highway traffic the right-of-way and required all approaching vehicles to stop and wait for traffic to clear before proceeding across intersections. These early stop signs had black text on a yellow background. Nebraska continued to conform to the national signage standards set by AASHO and all signs purchased in Nebraska after January 1, 1936, met the most recent set of standards recognized by AASHO and the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads.

Paving the Way

Early existing traveled routes in Nebraska often became the delineations for the state’s first highways, such as the Lincoln Highway and the Omaha-Lincoln-Denver Highway. These early routes were largely created by linking sections of existing earth roads, although these roads were often primitive and not improved. In 1914, State Engineer Donald D. Price reported that Nebraska had three major highways: the Meridian, the Lincoln, and the Omaha-Lincoln-Denver highways. He also reported that these highways were in fairly decent condition, with the exception of portions in the western part of the state where they were merely deeply rutted trails. At this point in time only one-and-a-half percent of the total number of Nebraska roads had been “improved” (graded).
The 1912-1914 Biennial Report stressed the economical benefits of earth roads, with excellent building materials located throughout the state and paved or macadam roads viewed as too costly. Basic road maintenance was outlined in the biennial report as follows:

An earth road should be properly graded wide enough so that two vehicles can pass easily; that the grade should not be crowded too much but should be left rather flat so that the travel can be over any portion of the road; and that after the grading has been done and the grade has been fixed, that it should be surfaced with clay and gravel, either one of which is nearly always readily obtainable in the vicinity. Then if the road is kept properly dragged, it will remain in a more or less permanent state and this work can be done at a very low cost.44

Road grading or dragging was imperative to maintain the state’s early dirt roads. D. Ward King, a Missouri farmer, invented the “King road drag” method around 1904, to be used in areas that could not afford macadamized roads.45 The United States Department of Agriculture printed King’s road dragging method in 1908, complete with a description of the materials needed to construct a drag and the proper technique in its use. The King “Split-Log” drags were constructed of split timbers or squared timbers. The Pierce County Auto Club promoted the use of King’s road dragging method. They pointed out that unless the dragging was conducted immediately after a soaking rain, the benefits would be lost. The drag had to be completed while the road was muddy, so “the soft mud is troweled onto the road bed,” and allowed to harden in the sun. Road dragging continued to be an issue for the auto club throughout the 1910s and into the 1920s.46

Stone, sand and gravel surfacing materials were found naturally in Nebraska and used in the creation of roads. Deposits of limestone and shale located throughout Nebraska were combined to create cement, the most important material used in some forms of early road construction. Niobrara chalk rock combined with Granerose shale, both occurring naturally in Nebraska, created high-grade cement, much of which was made near the town of Niobrara. Large volumes of sand were available. Sand was used to create mortar and concrete for construction projects involving curbs, gutters, sidewalks, water pipes, sewers, culverts, bridges, and pavements. It was mixed with sand and clay used in the construction of roads. Nebraska’s varied soil types were often ideal for construction purposes.47

At the federal level the Office of Public Roads and its predecessor the Bureau of Public Roads operated research programs focusing on practical issues of road construction including the construction and performance of various road materials. Concrete and bituminous materials were studied. The Bureau of Public Roads partnered with trade groups and professional organizations such as the Asphalt Institute and the American Society of Civil Engineers, state highway departments and universities on research. The Bureau of Public Roads also established a research journal, Public Roads, in 1918 to disseminate information to the states.48

Research addressing road construction and materials was also the focus of many state road agencies. In 1915, the Nebraska Legislature provided that the State Highway Engineer work cooperatively with the Nebraska State University on the testing of materials for road construction. A cooperative agreement was reached with the Department of Public Works and the University of Nebraska in 1920 to test materials. Nebraska highway engineers were continuously looking for inexpensive, yet quality paving materials and this directed much of the material testing research. In 1919-20, 1,208 tests were completed to develop a new hard surface that would be cheaper than concrete pavement.49

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44State Board of Irrigation, Highways and Drainage, Tenth Biennial Report of the State Board of Irrigation, Highways and Drainage 1912-1914 (Lincoln, Nebraska: State Board of Irrigation, Highways and Drainage, 1914), 221.
48Seely, 107 and 109-110.
49Koster 24-25.
In 1918 legislation was enacted to provide funding for the maintenance of the state highway system. Prior to formal funding, maintenance had been recommended but often did not occur. The legislation allowed for the maintenance to be conducted state-wide and for skilled crews to grade highways and bring them up to standards. Counties were responsible for surface maintenance, repairing ditches, opening culverts, maintaining official road signs, snow removal, and the emergency repair of roads, bridges, and guardrails.  

As traffic increased, Nebraska highway engineers advocated the use of gravel for surfacing highways. Even 25 years after other state highways had embraced hard surfacing such as concrete and bituminous asphalt, Nebraska was still promoting gravel. In Nebraska, gravel was promoted because an abundance was found in Nebraska and it provided a suitable roadbed. A 1928 article in *Nebraska Highways* described the fine quality of the state’s gravel for use as a road material:

> (G)ravel in Nebraska is distinctly different from the class of roads usually referred to as ‘gravel roads’ or ‘sand gravel roads’ or ‘sand clay roads’ in other states. From the standpoint of materials, Nebraska gravel lies between the above classes and has generally been satisfactory. It partakes of the smoothness of the sand clay road and has the wearing and carrying capacity of the best gravel roads of other states. The material is fine enough so that the surface does not ravel and with proper and continuous maintenance, which it must have, can be kept in good condition.”

Despite the limited use of hard surfacing in the state, Nebraska still ranked fourteenth in the nation in 1929 in state highway mileage that was graveled or better. During this period when Nebraska highway engineers were advocating gravel roads, the Bureau of Public Roads was continuing to research and test improved paving materials including asphalt, concrete, and the quality of aggregate.  

To lessen overall expenses, the Department of Public Works planned to relocate or shorten the highways when paving was needed. Rather than completing a relocation project, the department would wait until paving or surfacing was needed, then relocate the segment and pave or surface the new section. These route relocations allowed state engineers to create more direct routes and increase safety by eliminating hazardous railroad crossings or sharp curves and were designed to save drivers time and money. By the close of 1928, Nebraska had 8,012 miles of state and federal highways, including 165 miles of paved roads and 3,761 miles of gravel roads. During the late 1920s hard surfaced roads began to be advocated. Both concrete and asphalt were used for hard surfacing, while gravel was falling out of favor for major roads. By the end of 1930 it was estimated that 368 miles of state highways had been paved, with more paving projects scheduled for the coming years. In 1929, the Nebraska Legislature had provided funds for the approximately 100 miles of paving annually. The Department of Public Works adopted several standards including distances, widths, and smoothness.  

During the 1931-1932 biennium, both paved and oiled roads were being completed across the state. By the close of 1932, it was estimated that 663 miles of pavement had been completed in the state. At the same time, progress was being made on the construction of oil-surfaced roads. Prior oil surfacing work had been relatively experimental and was restricted to small projects. By 1932 it was believed that enough experimentation had been completed at that oil-surface work had a proper place in the highway construction program. Oil-sand surfacing was constructed by the application of an asphaltic road oil and a small amount of very fine material to a sand base and thoroughly mixing them with discs or blades to a depth of five inches. When no free oil remained in the mixture it was spread and ready for traffic. In some cases protection work was required on the shoulders and back slopes to prevent sand from blowing or washing away.
During the 1931-1932 biennium 292 miles of oil-surface roads were completed and an additional 248.7 miles of oiled roads were completed during the 1933-1934 biennium. The Department of Roads and Irrigation’s road material testing in cooperation with the University of Nebraska continued into the 1930s on hard surface materials. Testing proved that a bituminous surfacing would be durable for traffic and weather conditions in the state. The initial cost of construction was lower than that of concrete paving and local materials could be used, also costing less than concrete. Although Nebraska continued to use gravel for highway surfacing projects, they were beginning to move towards more permanent hard surfacing materials that would require less maintenance. Hard surfacing projects became more popular across the state, especially in populated and high traffic areas.

Several large paving projects were awarded in 1935-36 in an attempt to close the remaining five open patches on Nebraska’s principal highways. In 1935, U.S. 30 was the first highway to be hard surfaced across the state, including both concrete and bituminous materials. At this time, projects were also completed on U.S. 6 and U.S. 8 resulting in completely paved highways. These projects totaled over $1.5 million, with the state funding approximately one-half and federal matching funds covering the remainder. Asphalt evolved as the material of choice for highways, although most of Nebraska’s lesser used county section line roads remain to this day as well maintained gravel surfaces.

Road Development Through the Depression and World War II

New Deal programs and federal relief of the 1930s provided jobs and funding that contributed to the construction and improvement of roads throughout the country and the state of Nebraska. An ample workforce, lower wages, and lower costs for building materials allowed Nebraska to save money during the period. Road construction saw a period of “unprecedented progress.” Federal funding increased for highway construction in the 1930s. With the Depression on in 1931 eighty million dollars in emergency Federal-Aid was made available to the states to supplement their required matching funds. In 1931-32, Nebraska received $4.25 million in emergency federal -aid. During the hard times of the Depression, this allowed states to continue with highway construction and put unemployed people to work. The following year, a second emergency relief act was passed by Congress with stipulations. States were required to pay a minimum wage rate, 30 cents per hour for unskilled labor and 50 cents per hour for skilled labor and give hiring preferences to locals and ex-servicemen with dependents. To employ as many people as possible, laborers were hired for only a 30-hour workweek.

As the Depression continued, “New Deal” programs such as the Public Works Administration (PWA), Civil Works Administration (CWA), and Works Projects Administration (WPA) were enacted. A total of 198 Civil Works Administration (CWA) projects were completed under the supervision of the Department of Roads and Irrigation. The Nebraska Legislature offered measures to assist taxpayers and the counties. In 1933 motor vehicle registration fees were lowered to lessen the tax burden on individuals and the counties’ received an increased share of the gasoline tax. Both of these measures decreased the state funds available for highway construction. Also in 1933 the Department of Public Works became the Department of Roads and Irrigation. They included construction of new earth roads, widening cuts and fills, producing and placing gravel surfacing, construction of bridges and drainage structures, widening bridges and culverts, improving railroad crossings, painting bridges and guardrails, removing and relaying brick pavement, slope and ditch

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55Nebraska Department of Public Works, Bureau of Roads and Bridges, Nineteenth Biennial Report of the Department of Public Works 1931-1932 (Lincoln, Nebraska: Nebraska Department of Public Works, Bureau of Roads and Bridges, 1932), 41-45; Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation, Bureau of Roads and Bridges, Twentieth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Roads and Bridges 1933-1934 (Lincoln, Nebraska: Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation, Bureau of Roads and Bridges, 1934), 49.
56The Biennial Report did not specify the five remaining open patches.
58Ask Paving Bids on No. 6 Highway; Opened July 23,” The Morning Spotlight, 2 July 1936, 1.
59Twentieth Biennial Report for 1933-1934, 189; Koster 41.
60Koster, 44; Scott, 166.
After the suspension of the CWA on March 31, 1934, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) began organizing work divisions. CWA projects that had not been completed prior to March 31, 1934, were transferred to FERA and continued as work relief projects. Over 150 work relief highway projects had been approved under this system by November 1, 1934.62

Highway beautification projects began under the National Recovery Act. Under the act, the Federal Bureau of Public Roads required that at least 1% of total funding to each state be used for “the appropriate landscaping of parkways or roadsides.” The act advocated roads that conformed to their natural setting, including sensitive siting, conserving soil, selective tree cutting, and appropriate plantings. The Department of Roads and Irrigation cooperated with local civic organizations and assisted with several improvement projects by contributing plans, layouts and consultation. In 1934 the department built its first rest area or roadside park on the southside of U.S. 20 near the Bryan Bridge, southeast of Valentine. This rest area remained in use for only five years, closing in 1939 when the state did not renew the lease.63

Weather conditions in the state in the 1930s had a significant effect on road construction activities. Severe flooding in the Republican River Valley in 1935 and heavy snows statewide in the 1930s forced the Department of Roads and Irrigation to allocate financial resources toward cleaning and repairing damaged highways and bridges. Flooding destroyed approximately 341 miles of highway and 307 bridges.64 During the 1930s, a severe drought also hit Nebraska and the rest of the Great Plains. In the Sand Hills region, the dry, sandy soil could not withstand the winds, which triggered dust storms that hindered road construction. The dry conditions also affected materials, forcing workers to use water to compact the grade work. “Concrete would also dry out. If you were doing any paving, you had to keep the surface wet for so many hours in that dry, dusty, windy weather, it took more work.”65

Nebraska continued to struggle to match the federal funding for road construction on a 50-50 basis. By the end of the decade, utilizing its “pay as you go” policy, Nebraska was unable to match approximately $2 million of the total federal funds available, which would have totaled approximately $4 million dollars available for construction.66

By 1940, Nebraska had a highway system of 11,220 miles of which only 9,000 miles were maintained. Of the 9,000, 4,784 miles were graveled, 3,804 miles were hard-surfaced, and 412 miles had dirt surfacing.67 After the U.S. became involved in World War II, road construction activities in general stopped with the exception of roads needed for military purposes. For national security, the War Department and the Public Roads Administration identified a system of roads known as the Strategic Network of Highways to access military bases, defense manufacturing plants, Army air fields and other strategic sites. In Nebraska three main routes were designated as a top priority for materials and were eligible for federal funds made available in the Defense Highway Act of 1941:
- US-75 from Kansas to Omaha
- US-30 and US-30A (Fremont to Omaha spur) from the Missouri River to Omaha and then the Wyoming state line
- US-81 from the Kansas line north to Norfolk continuing on US-275 from Norfolk to O’Neill, and then on US-281 from O’Neill to the South Dakota line.68

61Twentieth Biennial Report for 1933-1934, 190-191.
62Twentieth Biennial Report for 1933-1934, 185.
63Twenty-First Biennial Report of the Bureau of Roads and Bridges 1933-1934, 56; Koster 46-47.
64Twenty-First Biennial Report of the Bureau of Roads and Bridges of the Department of Roads and Irrigation 1935-36, 15, 57; Koster, 48.
65Koster, 45-46.
66Koster, 49-50.
67Koster, 43.
68Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation, Twenty-Fourth Biennial Report of the Department of Roads and Irrigation 1941-1942 (Lincoln, Nebraska: Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation, 1942), 5.
But the Defense Highway Act of 1941 further restricted other activities of state highway departments. Federal funds were limited to the Strategic Network of Highways, construction of roads to military bases and defense manufacturing plants, construction of air fields, and advanced engineering surveys for projects to be initiated after the war. A major war effort project undertaken in Nebraska was the completion of the state’s first four-lane divided highway on December 8, 1941. Highway 73/75 from the south city limits of Omaha to Fort Crook (currently Offutt Air Force Base) consisted of 6-miles of two, 22-foot concrete lanes separated by a 10-foot grass median. The road led to the Glenn L. Martin Bomber Plant at Fort Crook.  

During the war, the Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation shifted its efforts to defense-related activities and assisted the Army and Navy engineers with the design and construction of ordnance plants and airfields. The department provided information regarding soil conditions within the defense areas, rented out survey equipment for engineering work, and collected scrap materials. Work was postponed on active highway contracts so that contractors could assist in Army and Navy projects.

Restrictions on critical building materials during the war forced the department to change design and construction standards and reduce or eliminate the use of critical materials in new construction. At first metal, now diverted to wartime production of vehicles, resulted in shortages that the department had to do without. Later restrictions included lumber, asphalt products, cement, and other materials. The AASHO Committee on Standards suggested changes in design and construction standards to reduce or eliminate the use of critical building materials. These suggestions were used to the fullest extent possible in the design of highway construction in Nebraska and non-critical materials were used whenever possible. In the case of concrete structures it became necessary to remove almost all steel reinforcement because metal was restricted to military use. Several projects had to be postponed until materials were made available, while some designs were deemed adequate without the steel reinforcements, but became more expensive due to the additional amounts of concrete needed.

Near the end of World War II, in 1944, the condition of Nebraska’s highway system was similar to its pre-war state. Of a total of 9,119 state highway miles only 4,050 miles were paved. With the war effort, highway maintenance and construction had been deferred. Overall the condition of the roads was poor due to their general neglect and deterioration during the War. In a post-war report to the roads committee of the U.S. House of Representatives the Department of Roads and Irrigation stated that over half of the state’s 1,200 miles of concrete pavement was over 10 years old and in need of repair and 40% of the state’s bituminous surfacing was inadequate.

Post-World War II Road Development in Nebraska

In order to address road deficiencies nationwide, a post-war highway program was implemented by the 1944 Federal-Aid Highway Act. Three categories of funding were established:

1) federal-aid primary roads based on the previously used Seven Percent System; 2) feeder or secondary roads, including farm to market roads, rural free delivery routes and public school bus routes; 3) highways in urban areas with a population over 5,000.

Nebraska’s highway system, roads eligible for funding included 5,630 miles of primary roads, 9,800 miles of feeder or secondary roads, and roads within 18 cities with populations over 5,000. Nebraska was initially scheduled to receive approximately $8.5 million in funding annually; however, funding was reduced and the program was cut back in 1946.

As federal funding was limited and roads remained deteriorated following the war, the state of Nebraska reviewed its road system situation. In July of 1947, a 35-member Nebraska Highway Advisory Committee, composed of private citizens,

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70 Twenty-Fourth Biennial Report of the Department of Roads and Irrigation 1941-1942, 6-7.
72 Koster, 49, 57.
73 Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation, Twenty-Sixth Biennial Report of the Department of Roads and Irrigation 1945-1946 (Lincoln, Nebraska: Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation, 1946), 1, 4.
was established to assess the state’s present and future highway needs. This committee was the predecessor of the State Highway Commission established in 1953. The committee’s assessment identified over 6,500 miles of the state highway system that was defective and estimated the cost of repair to exceed $259 million. They recommended the adoption of a 20-year program of highway improvement, which upon completion would result in a completely modern and adequate highway transportation system. To finance the improvements, the gasoline tax and motor vehicle registration fees were raised in 1949 to increase funds available for road construction. Together these taxes would produce $5 million in revenue, with $4.5 million earmarked for matching federal-aid highway funds to provide $9 million for state highway construction. This legislation was repealed in a November 1950 referendum, by voters who were not willing to pay for or did not understand the need for highway financing.

In addition to limited funding, the Department of Roads and Irrigation still faced continued material shortages after the war. It was anticipated that steel, used as a reinforcement material, would be readily available in the years immediately following the war for highway construction. However, steel continued to be in short supply into the early 1950s, creating an obstacle in the development of an accelerated highway program. The shortage of skilled engineers also affected the department. Trained engineers who had left the department for the war effort were failing to return to positions in Nebraska’s Department of Roads and Irrigation, often taking more lucrative positions elsewhere. By the 1953-1954 Biennium, the required materials were no longer in short supply and delayed highway projects were back on schedule.

Highways began receiving improvements when they were graded and widened to accommodate automobile traffic. Over the years the routes were relocated and new highways were constructed, many times bypassing the smaller communities once served by highways. Gradual improvements included the widening and paving of roads, the creation of shoulders, the addition of signs and safety measures to the road, the beautification of the highway and its surroundings, and the movement towards creating a pleasurable driving experience. Nebraska was quick to comply with federal standards and although they did not abandon gravel surfacing when much of the nation had moved to hard surfacing, Nebraska was constantly experimenting with new and innovative road surfaces.

By 1950, Nebraska’s state highway system included 9,578 miles of road, of which 5,062 were graveled, 4,386 were hard-surfaced and 130 miles were dirt. In addition to maintaining the state highway system, the state by this time was also responsible for maintaining streets and highways in communities with populations under 2,500. In the 1950s converting Nebraska’s gravel highways, which still included over half of the system, to hard-surfacing was a priority of the Department of Roads. With funding remaining tight, the need for highway improvements in Nebraska began to be determined through the establishment of a Sufficiency Rating. The rating took into consideration surface conditions, economic factors, safety and service. The rating system process was described by John W. Hossack, former State Engineer, as follows:

Basically, you drove every mile of highway in the state and analyzed it as to its condition, width, and all the various things that would have to do with the condition, life, and service rating of that particular section. Then, every highway got a grade. Kind of like a report card, it got a grade from 0 to 100.

Roadside improvements, begun in the 1930s, continued in the 1950s to reduce soil erosion and improve the aesthetics of the right-of-way. Trees and shrubs were planted in the right-of-way to improve the appearance and screen properties adjoining the roads. Noxious weeds were removed from the right-of-way through the use of chemicals. Brome grass

74Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation, Twenty-Seventh Biennial Report of the Department of Roads and Irrigation 1947-1948 (Lincoln, Nebraska: Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation, 1948), 3; Koster, 63.
75Koster, 66.
78Nebraska Highway Advisory Committee, 19.
79Koster, 57-59.
80Koster, 68. The quote was from George Koster’s 1985 interview with John W. Hossack, former State Engineer.
seed was planted on highway shoulders, slopes, and roadsides to prevent wind and water erosion and the growth of weeds.81

In 1953 the State Highway Commission was established by the Nebraska Legislature and replaced the Highway Advisory Commission. The State Highway Commission was formed to promote better relations between the public and the Department of Roads and Irrigation and to act as a liaison between citizens, the agency, and the governor. The State Highway Commission also served as an advisor to the State Engineer, establishing broad policies and forming a trunk highway system to be financed with revenue generated from highway user taxes.82 In 1957 the Nebraska Legislature divided the Department of Roads and Irrigation into three separate agencies: Department of Roads, Department of Motor Vehicles, and Department of Water Resources. The Nebraska Department of Roads (NDOR) included the Bureau of Highways and the Safety Patrol (in 1967 renamed the Nebraska State Patrol)83.

The earliest plans for the national Interstate system were included in a 1939 Federal Bureau of Public Roads report that advocated the construction of a special system of direct interregional highways, with necessary connections through and around cities that would meet the requirements of the national defense in time of war, as well as the increasing demands of traffic. However, the project was delayed by World War II and the diversion of tax money into military rearmament.84 Further steps were taken in 1944, when the Federal-Aid Highway Act called upon the states and the Bureau of Public Roads to designate a national system of interstate highways, not to exceed 40,000 miles in total connecting state capitals, principal metropolitan areas, cities, and industrial centers by direct routes. Finally, the 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act authorized construction of the 40,000 miles proposed in 1944. In passing the act, Congress declared it essential to the national interest to provide a national system of interstate highways for early completion, as authorized under the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944.

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 had a significant impact on the development of Nebraska’s highways and the volume of traffic they were able to serve. The Bill increased appropriations to states for Primary, Secondary, and Urban Highway construction and made a provision for a 41,000-mile Interstate Highway System. The Legislation authorized a 13-year construction period for the Interstate, which would be extended as states faced routing and funding difficulties. The entire system was anticipated to cost over $27 billion, with the states responsible for only ten percent of the construction costs and the federal government covering the other 90 percent of costs. The intentions of the Interstate Highway System were described as follows:

- Consisting of routes of highest importance to the Nation, which connect the principal metropolitan areas, cities, and industrial centers, including important routes into, through, and around urban areas, serve the national defense, and connect at suitable border points with routes of continental importance in the Dominion of Canada and the Republic of Mexico.85

General road construction and improvements increased in the late 1950s and continued in the 1960s. Over 500 miles of construction was completed on state highways in 1962. Construction projects were generally geared towards modernizing highways that had become inadequate due to increased traffic loads and deterioration. It was a goal of the NDOR to replace gravel surfaces with dustless surfaces in all towns and highway routes across the state. These projects were often overshadowed by the development of Interstate 80 across the state.

During these decades, the planning, design and construction of the interstate became the central focus of the NDOR and the State Highway Commission. The NDOR, the State Highway Commission, and the governor were responsible for developing and selecting the actual route within the general corridor outlined by the federal government. Work in

81Koster, 69.
82Koster, 69-70.
83In 1981 the Nebraska State Patrol became a separate state agency.
84James C. Creigh, “Constructing the Interstate Highway in Nebraska: Route and Funding Controversies," Nebraska History History 72, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 44.
85Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation, Thirty-First Biennial Report of the Department of Roads and Irrigation 1955-1956 (Lincoln, Nebraska: Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation, 1956), 1.
Nebraska began almost immediately after the 1956 federal legislation was passed, and the construction was planned for four phases over an anticipated 15-year time line.

In Nebraska, it took 17 years to complete the construction of the Interstate across the state’s landscape. Despite a slow start in 1956 and 1957 and the struggles over the location of the highway, interstate construction picked up momentum and the majority of the interstate was completed in the 1960s. On October 19, 1974, the interstate was fully opened with the completion of a five-mile section west of Sidney. The final cost of completing I-80 in Nebraska was $390 million, or about $857,000 per mile.\(^{86}\) Although behind the schedule outlined in the 1956 Highway Act, Nebraska was the first state to complete its main line Interstate system. Nationally, only 28,000 of the 41,000-mile Interstate system outlined in the 1956 Highway Act were completed by the end of the 1960s. Routing controversies and right-of-way acquisition in urban areas delayed the completion of several sections for extended periods in some states.\(^{87}\)

**Conclusion**

From a random system of unimproved dirt roads to modern hard surfaced regional and transcontinental highways, to the completion of Interstate 80, automobile routes have been greatly transformed in Nebraska in less than a century. Rutted pathways evolved into the early named highways, promoted by local citizen groups, which in turn developed into a system of state highways that have been continuously improved for safety and efficiency. In Nebraska, as in the rest of the country, road development was influenced by both federal funding and road building standards.

I-80 across Nebraska serves as a national transportation thoroughfare and the state’s major roadway. The NDOR has worked to improve not only the Interstate and Expressway system, but all highways within the state. Increased safety and the addition of modern surface materials have been a major focus of these improvements. By the year 2000, the NDOR had reduced the miles of gravel surfaced highways to only 44 statewide.\(^{88}\)

The NDOR’s eight district offices manage approximately 9,950 miles of state roads. These roads represent the evolution of the Nebraska highway system; gravel roads following township lines, original unimproved segments of the named highways, paved secondary roads connecting communities, the modern Interstate connecting Nebraska with the nation, and the urban freeway express system. All of these roads are vital to the state’s transportation system.

\(^{86}\)Curt McConnell, “I-80 Changed Car Travel in Nebraska.” *Lincoln Journal Star,* 29 March 1999, 14x. The “Golden Link” was meant to symbolize the “Golden Spike” that symbolically completed the first transcontinental railroad.

\(^{87}\)Kaszynski, 192.

\(^{88}\)Information provided by Len Sand and Cindy Veys, Nebraska Department of Roads, 29 April 2002.
The Meridian Highway in Nebraska

Introduction
The Meridian Road, renamed the Meridian Highway in 1919, was developed in the early twentieth century to become the only north-south route through the central United States. Eventually extending from Winnipeg, Canada, to Mexico City, Mexico, the Meridian Highway passed through six states including the eastern portion of Nebraska. The road’s initial outline followed the survey of the Sixth Principal Meridian line through the central Great Plains, hence the name Meridian Road.

Prior to the twentieth century much of the country and Nebraska had largely undeveloped road networks. Citizen organizations were formed to lobby local, state, and federal governments to cooperatively plan and construct roads. Local commercial clubs, business associations, automobile clubs, and merchants often contributed labor and funds to bring major roads through their towns and to improve roads in their locale. One of these grassroots efforts was spurred by a national organization, the Meridian Road Association.

Beginnings of the Meridian Highway

“It touches the great lumber and wheat belts of the north, swings straight into the land of corn and of cotton and carries its route into the tropics of the Mexican republic direct from the snow laden hills of northern and central Canada.”

-Description of the Meridian Highway from the Columbus Daily Telegram, 7 May 1924

The Meridian Road, promoted by one of the earliest road associations, was organized in Kansas at a meeting of supporters on June 1911 to establish a direct, north-south automobile route. The objective of its promoters, led by John C. Nicholson of Newton, Kansas, included the adoption of a sign, mapping of a route through Kansas and instructions for the association to promote the road south to the Gulf of Mexico and north to Canada. The name “Meridian Road” was selected for the proposed road because it would closely follow the Sixth Principal Meridian.89

After the Meridian Road Association was formed in Kansas, the group solicited support from other states. South of Kansas into Oklahoma and Texas various other highway organizational efforts were already underway, however most of these organizations had failed to establish a road passable for automobiles. In Texas the association was divided into three divisions: North Texas from Burk Burnet to Waco; San Antonio division from Waco to Laredo; and the Gulf division from Waco to Galveston.90 North of Kansas, the Nebraska division of the Meridian Road Association was organized on September 4, 1911 in Columbus, Nebraska. Planning of the road continued quickly north from Nebraska as the South Dakota and the North Dakota divisions of the Meridian Road Association planned a route in October 1911 and the Canadian division was organized in November 1911.91

In January of 1912 the International Meridian Road Association was formed, representing Canada, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. The newly formed group adopted a charter and elected officers-Samuel H. Lea, President and state engineer of South Dakota; Sidney Suggs, Vice-President and Oklahoma highway commissioner and John C. Nicholson, Secretary-Treasurer.92 The objective of the association was to promote the construction, maintenance and improvement of a north-south international highway. The constitution and by-laws of the Meridian Road Association specified that:

(T)he Meridian Highway shall be well graded, well drained Highway with permanent bridges, substantial culverts and kept in a condition to facilitate travel, and it shall be the aim and object of the Association to

90“Meridian Highway History.”
91“Meridian Highway History.”
92Samuel H. Lea, “Inspection Trip Over the Meridian Road,” The Road Maker 2, no. 3 (n.d.): 1-4.
secure the construction and maintenance of a hard surfaced road as soon as conditions will warrant the same and is justified.93

The International Meridian Road Association adopted official signs for the road consisting of 12-inch wide bands on poles indicating to travel straight ahead. Turns were indicated by a six-inch white band with six-inch red band above painted with the letters "M.R." on three poles before and three poles after each turn.94 The international Meridian Road organization was involved in advertising, promotional tours and general improvements to the road and was the body responsible for solving any disputes over route location at the state borders.

Each state division of the organization was responsible for activities within the state including the location of the road, maintenance, and signage. The Nebraska division of the Meridian Road Association adopted a uniform sign in January of 1912. The enameled steel sign measured 17” x 22” with a white background and blue lettering. The sign featured the word “Meridian” across the top, the word "Road" across the bottom and in the middle an outline of the state showing the distance between the county seats along the route.95 In the spring and summer of 1912, the state divisions were assigned to lay out the road, post signage, and get the road in the best condition for travel and advertising.96 For example, in Norfolk, the Norfolk Commercial Club put up signs and markers on the Meridian Road in and around the city in August 1912.97

In 1919, the Meridian Road was renamed the Meridian Highway by the association. Improvements along the national route of the Meridian Highway continued in various stages over the years. In 1924, the completion of the Meridian Highway Bridge at Yankton, South Dakota, marked a major milestone, being the final link over a major waterway along its route. Previously a seasonal ferry and pontoon bridge carried Meridian Highway traffic across the Missouri River to South Dakota. The International Meridian Highway Association’s brochure in 1927 boasted, “By the end of 1928 the Meridian Highway will be practically surfaced from Winnipeg to Laredo and will be an all-weather road-perhaps the second all-weather road across the United States-the Pacific Highway being the first.”98 In 1926, the Federal Bureau of Roads designated the prospective primary highway system and the Meridian Highway was designated as U.S. 81. This was the only named highway given the same number entirely across the entire United States.99

In the 1920s the International Meridian Highway Association worked towards becoming a link in the Pan-American Highway through Mexico to South America. United States Highway 81 (U.S. 81) was promoted as a part of the Pan-American Highway system that extends from Winnipeg, Canada, 17,000 miles to the southern tip of Chile, South America, at Tierra Del Fuego. The Pan-American Highway Association remains active promoting the road as “the longest and fastest Trans-American Highway.” In the late 1990s the association promoted the route and lobbied for the closure of the 462-mile “missing link” in the highway that was not four lanes in the United States. The two-lane section extends from Minneapolis, Kansas, to Watertown, South Dakota, including part of the state of Nebraska.100 Presently only a few portions of U.S. 81 have been developed as a four-lane Expressway in Nebraska, such as the section of road from Columbus to Norfolk, the section from York south to Fairmont, and the section from Bruning south to Chester at the Nebraska-Kansas state line.

93Meridian Road constitution and by-laws in the collection of the F.A. Long Papers. Manuscript Collection of the Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.
94“Meridian Highway History.”
95Hebron Journal, 5 January 1912.
96“Meridian Highway History.”
97Norfolk Daily News, Local Happenings section, 24 August 1912.
100Pan American Highway... Gateway to Southeast Nebraska,” (n.d.). Available at the Nebraska State Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, Lincoln, Nebraska.
**Meridian Highway Through Nebraska**

“The Meridian Highway in Nebraska is wonderful this fall. I drove from Madison to Osceola 60 miles in two hours five minutes Sunday before last. When you recall that this trip involves the Platte River and Loup River bottoms, you may know that at least a part of the road is good. We have a daily stage line now from York to Norfolk, via the Meridian Highway. People coming from the Dakotas say the Meridian Highway from Yankton down here is the finest road they have traveled.”

In September 1911 John Nicholson of Kansas, organizer of the road, spoke in Columbus to gain support for the development of the Meridian Road through Nebraska. As reported in the *Columbus Telegraph*, Nicholson told local businessmen that the Meridian Road was located and marked in Kansas and was approximately routed in Oklahoma and Texas. Nicholson further explained that the main goal in outlining a route was not only to follow the meridian line, but to follow “the main traveled roads leading to the county seat, and the principal towns located close to the line.”

At the Columbus meeting, local and visiting businessmen from communities along the proposed route attended and organized the Nebraska Meridian Road Association. O.E. Mickey of Osceola was elected president and H.A. Clarke of Columbus was elected secretary-treasurer. The Nebraska organization’s objective was to cooperate with other state divisions in locating and marking an improved north-south road between Canada and the Gulf of Mexico.

To coordinate the effort in Nebraska, the Nebraska Association selected representatives from each of the counties on the proposed route to promote interest in the road and identify the most practical route through their county. At the organizational meeting, the group identified a tentative route through the county seat towns from the town of Chester on the Nebraska-Kansas border north to the Missouri River opposite of Yankton, South Dakota. To build local support for the highway, local towns were connected in the network of roads chosen as the route of the Meridian Road. The original route in Nebraska traveled over 200 miles through a number of towns from south to north connecting Chester, Hebron, Belvidere, Bruning, Strang, Geneva, Fairmont, York, Stromsburg, Osceola, Shelby, Columbus, Platte Center, Humphrey, Madison, Norfolk, Pierce, Wausa, and Crofton.

There was some controversy in the designation of the road in the northern section of Nebraska. The route was originally defined at the 1911 organizational meeting of the Nebraska Meridian Road Association to travel through Knox County, but community boosters in neighboring Cedar County challenged this alignment because they wished the route to travel through their county. The controversy was short lived as the official inspection party of the International Meridian Road Association logged the route in September of 1912 through Knox County, recognizing this alignment which appeared in the *Automobile Blue Book*.

Local promoters in each county often played key roles in the location and development of the highway. One promoter was Dr. Francis A. Long of Madison. Long had an extensive country practice, so the condition of roads were recognized early. He served as a local representative for the Meridian Highway in Madison County and helped to designate the route. Long’s devotion to the Meridian Road continued after the establishment of the route and, in 1923, he was elected as Vice-President of the Meridian Highway Association. He served until 1931.

Another local promoter was Woods Cones, pioneer Pierce banker and automobile enthusiast. Cones was an automobile enthusiast, served as vice president of the Pierce County Automobile Association, was a supporter of the Pierce County Automobile Association.
Commercial Club and a member of its good roads committee. Due to his enthusiasm for good roads and automobile transportation, Woods Cones was requested to represent Pierce County in the Nebraska Meridian Highway Association and was chosen to delineate the route through Pierce County in 1911.107

In 1919 the Nebraska Meridian Highway Association separated into two associations. The South Platte Division of the Nebraska Meridian Highway Association organized in Fairmont for the communities between York and the Kansas border. The North Platte Division served the communities north of York. Woods Cones drafted bylaws for the northern division.

**Promotion of the Meridian Road/Highway**

Promotion of the route was important to the development and success of a highway. The Meridian Road was advocated and promoted by the International Meridian Road Association, state associations, local commercial and civic clubs, and private businessmen. The *Meridian Road*, published monthly for a period of time, served as a marketing tool of the highway and as a guide to travelers. In 1913, the magazine listed official hotels and garages along the Meridian Road. In Nebraska, a number of hotels and garages, one per community, were recognized as official hotels and garages.108

On September 10, 1912, an “official party” comprised of the members of the International Meridian Road committee and others, including the editor of Road Maker and a representative of the Automobile Blue Book, started on a promotional tour along the Meridian Road traveling south to the Gulf of Mexico. The purpose of the trip was to observe progress on the road and to meet with local officials to encourage continued maintenance and improvement of the road. The party traveled over 100 miles a day and were met by large crowds in many cities. The group logged the route as far as Perry, Oklahoma. The party refused to log and post Meridian Road signs beyond this point until road improvements were made.109

Each state provided the group with transportation, and the towns furnished hotel and garage facilities free of charge.110 For example, in Norfolk the Commercial Club hosted a banquet for the party and lodging for the night. Activities in Norfolk surrounding the visit included a postcard campaign. Norfolk residents were encouraged to use postcards showing the Meridian Road and other automobile roads throughout the state for a full month to advertise the international highway association’s trip through Nebraska and Norfolk.111

Due to the success of the first trip, the Meridian Road Association planned a second booster trip in 1914. A.L. Westgard of the National Highways Association and a group of Texas businessmen traveled from Texas and Oklahoma north to Canada accompanied by a film crew.112 The travelers were met with enthusiasm in towns along the route. Promotional activities of the International Meridian Highway Association continued, including a 1921 tour of Mexican cities to advocate the connection of the Meridian Highway into Mexico.

The International Meridian Highway Association was also involved in the development of promotional literature that was funded by businesses along the route. For example, in 1923, the association published a campsite manual through the funding of cities and businesses along the route.113 In 1931 at the annual meeting in Salina, Kansas, the *Meridian Highway (U.S. 81) Guide* was adopted as the official advertising medium for the highway. The tourist guide was used “for the purpose of attracting and directing the traffic across ‘The Main Street of North America,’ the only highway entirely completed across the United States north and south, and the only highway reaching from Canada to the Mexican border.”114 The guide served as a directory for lodging, restaurants and gas stations and provided information for the

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107 Pierce County Leader, 3 November 1910; Pierce County Call, 19 October 1911; “Pierce is On Meridian Road,” Pierce County Call, 22 February 1912.
108 *Meridian Road Monthly Magazine*, August 1913. Available at the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office, Lincoln, Nebraska.
109 “Meridian Highway History.”
110 Lea, “Inspection Trip Over the Meridian Road,” 2.
112 “Gulf to Winnipeg,” Hebron Journal, 10 July 1914.
113 Notes in F.A. Long Papers. Manuscript collection of the Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.
114 *Canada to Mexico, Official Guide of the Meridian Highway, Pan American Route*, 1931. Available at the Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.
Traveler on points of interest along the highway. Publication of the tourist guide was financed through advertisements, and the guide was distributed along the route by chambers of commerce and touring bureaus.  

**Travel Along the Meridian Highway**

Travelers often relied on published route and guide books to navigate across the state or across country. In the early twentieth century two such general road guides were popular— *Touring Information Bureau (TIB) Automobile Route Book* and the *Automobile Blue Book*. The *Automobile Blue Book* was established in 1901 and described itself as “Standard Road Guide of America” and as “a veritable motorist’s encyclopedia.” By 1920 there were 13 volumes covering the entire United States and Southern Canada and providing travelers with travel directions and recommendations on sites to see and places for automobile repairs and lodging. The 1920 *Automobile Blue Book* includes descriptions of the route of the Meridian Highway in Nebraska from Columbus, Nebraska, to Belleville, Kansas, and from Columbus, Nebraska, to Yankton, South Dakota, as well as the reverse route for these stretches. In addition to published guides, organized geographically to cover all roads in a region, guidebooks were also compiled for individual roads. In 1931 a tourist guide was published for the Meridian Highway that identified the route and served as an advertisement for tourist services along the highway.

Towns along the Meridian Highway route promoted tourist services available to the traveler including lodging, camping facilities, restaurants, and automobile repair services. Businesses often used the name “Meridian” to promote their services to travelers. The Argo Hotel (KX05-015), constructed in 1912, in Crofton was renamed the “New Meridian Hotel” by new owners in 1924. The name change indicates that the road was a significant transportation route to and from Crofton. Another business promoting its services using the name Meridian was the “Meridian Tourists Cabin Camp,” located on North 13th Street in Norfolk and offered “a home away from home.”

A new type of commercial district, known as the “automobile row,” appeared in the late 1910s and 1920s when automobile dealerships and gas stations located in or near commercial business districts. Gas stations were integral to the automobile row and often their construction signaled the beginning of the row. Automotive businesses clustered in the automobile row, including automobile dealerships, auto supply stores, battery stores, repair garages and tire dealerships. These locations were most often on or near the route of the Meridian Highway. The automobile row not only served a large local and regional trade, but also provided the products and services for the traveler on the Meridian Highway.

Towns advertised their tourist-related services in published guidebooks. For example, the town of Chester in southern Nebraska advertised the services it could provide to the traveler in the 1931 Meridian Highway guide. The advertisement included a map identifying the location of tourist services along the Meridian Highway (U.S. 81), presently Thayer Street. Tourist services in Chester included: Barney Google Filling Station and Tourist Camp, Standard Oil Co. Filling Station, Meridian Garage, Mona Motor Filling Station, City Park - “A nice place to stop and where you can get as good drink of water as you will find on Highway 81”- Chester Filling Station and Rest Rooms, J.C. Sell Drugs and Cold Drinks, Café, Frame’s Café, and Filling Station. Hebron, Nebraska, with a population of 2,000 in 1931, offered travelers four cafes, three service stations, two motor companies, and one tire shop.

Community leaders saw the potential for campgrounds to encourage the motorist to stop in town and do business. In an effort to entice tourists, many communities began to establish simple campgrounds, offering a shaded grove with fire pits, picnic tables, outhouses and water. It was common practice for the communities along the route to offer overnight camping in the city park. By the 1920s some communities built municipal tourist parks, often in city parks and with the support of local commercial clubs. Highway associations, such as the Meridian Highway Association, advertised the

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115 Canada to Mexico, Official Guide of the Meridian Highway, Pan American Route, 1931.
116 *Automobile Blue Book* 1920, 10 (New York: The Automobile Blue Book Publishing Co., 1920), Available at the Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.
118 Canada to Mexico, Official Guide of the Meridian Highway, Pan American Route, 1931.
119 Canada to Mexico, Official Guide of the Meridian Highway, Pan American Route, 1931.
availability of these parks along the route. Neighboring towns soon began competing for tourists and strove to build the most popular tourist camp. Conveniences such as a community building or shelter house, fireplaces, toilets, showers, picnic areas, recreation areas, public telephones and/or electrical hookups were provided. Fees were often required to keep out undesirables and police patrols were assigned to the facility. Business opportunities also appeared for the building of private tourist parks requiring a rental fee. These often consisted of shaded grounds, cooking facilities, showers and restrooms, electrical hookups, a shelter house or community room and/or concession stand. Depression era “New Deal” programs of the WPA built parks that offered amenities to the local public and the traveler. These parks were built as designed landscapes consisting of tree planting, roads, stone entrances and sometimes a lagoon. Amenities to the traveler included community buildings, shelter houses, fireplaces, picnic tables, restrooms and camp grounds.

In 1921, the following towns along the Meridian Highway offered tourist camping grounds - Wausa, Pierce, Norfolk, Madison, Columbus, Osceola, Stromsburg, York, Fairmont, Geneva, Hebron, and Bruning. Both Crofton and Chester had plans for their community’s camping grounds to be completed in the spring of 1922. In the tourist camp at York provided a number of amenities to the automobile traveler and its offerings were described as follows:

It is located at the Chautauqua Park, five blocks from the business section on paving. Has many free accommodations, with shelter in case of storm, is electric lighted, has wash rack for cars, tubs for family wash, shower bath with water heater, gas for cooking, open fire for those who prefer it, and a caretaker on the job all day and night to look after the tourist.

By the late 1920s and 1930s entrepreneurs discovered travelers were willing to pay for more convenience, comfort and completely private accommodations in the form of one- and two-room cabins arranged in rows or right angles. These were often called “cabin camps” and were built on the outskirts of town.

During the post-World-War II period, roadside lodging quickly revived and the “motel” took over as the favorable form, moving to the new alignments. The commercial “strip” first developed in the post-World War II period when the automobile became engrained in American culture. These strips consisted of motels, restaurants, gas stations, and private or franchised, drive-in “fast food” eating places. Commercial strips developed along the major highways in the larger urban locations and most notable among the commercial strips were those developed in the largest cities on U.S. 81, Columbus and Norfolk. With rapid changes in marketing trends these strips evolved rapidly.

Early Road Conditions and Description
The early road was largely developed along township and range, where section line roads were delineated. The distinguishing feature of the early Meridian Highway was this section line system, linked together to form the route of the Meridian Highway. These early roads were earthen surfaced and improved by efforts of local “good roads” advocates and boosters of the highway. Experimental segments were once built to demonstrate a new construction technique to individuals and county governments, called “object lessons.”

Automobile route books such as the Automobile Blue Book included route maps and entries to guide motorists on early highways. The 1911 Automobile Blue Book first included an entry for the Meridian Road with rudimentary instructions on how to maneuver the road. The following year on the first official Meridian Road trip a representation of the Automobile Blue Book accompanied the party and formally identified the route for the publication. Another guidebook, the 1918 Official TIB Automobile Route Book describes the section of Meridian Road from Hebron to Columbus as a “good dirt road.” The guide’s map for this section was endorsed and “officially O.K.’d” by the officers of the Meridian Road Association. Three years later, the section from Hebron to Columbus was again described as a “good dirt road.” A more detailed description was included in the 1921 guide for the route from Columbus to Yankton:

120 Dr. F.A. Long, Madison, to G.A. MacNaughton, San Marco, Texas, 20 December 1921, F.A. Long Papers. Manuscript collection of the Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.
121 A.W. Ballenger, York to Dr. F.A. Long, Madison, 16 December 1921, F. A. Long Papers. Manuscript collection of the Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.
122 TIB (Touring Information Bureau) Automobile Route Book (Kansas, City, Mo.: TIB Automobile Book Co., 1919).
123 TIB (Touring Information Bureau) Automobile Route Book (Kansas, City, Mo.: TIB Automobile Book Co., 1921).
Dirt road with some sand near the Missouri River. Passes through rich agricultural country with numerous progressive towns en route, and is one of the coming sections of the West. This route is part of the great transcontinental highway north and south from Winnipeg, Canada, to the Gulf of Mexico, and is an excellent connecting link for east and west roads.124

The year 1916 marks the first federal-aid to states. Federal-aid saw advancement of road construction. Standard road construction would be advocated by state and federal government. As improved roads became the focus of highway development, roads were subject to improvements including the installation of culverts, grading, gravel and later hard surfacing with concrete or asphalt. Segments of the Meridian Highway became evolutionary as improvements in the road were made. In 1922 the Meridian Highway became a state highway. By the mid-1920s the Meridian Highway was now promoted as a direct highway from Canada to Mexico.

From the Meridian Highway to U.S. 81
In 1926 the Meridian Highway was designated a federal highway, U.S. 81, the only continuous route from Canada to Mexico. This designation ensured funding and continued maintenance. It also led to the route being improved and changed to meet state and federal design standards. Turns and railroad grade crossings were eliminated, the route was shortened, and the road was designed to be more efficient. By the end of the summer of 1928, it was predicted that the highway would be one of the first roads in Nebraska to be entirely hard surfaced in gravel. Only 19 miles remained earth and these were under contract to be completed with gravel in the summer of 1928.125 Regraveling was made on a regular basis to maintain the road.

As improvements were made to the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 it became an important north-south highway for truck transport beginning in the 1920s. Truck transport would overtake the railroad as the transporter of most wholesale products. With improvements to the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81, transporters delivered a variety of products both retail and wholesale beginning in about the 1920s. Significant traffic on the highway occurred during the Depression and drought of the 1930s, some transporters turned to the transport of gasoline. In the early 1930s truck transport for bulk quantities of gasoline began to spread in the Midwest, serviced by the refineries of the Mid-Continent fields of the south central United States, such as those in Kansas. Truck transport of gasoline into Nebraska followed the Meridian Highway/U.S 81 as a major north-south route. The highway continued to be an important route for the trucking of gasoline, livestock and other products from the 1950s to the present.

Continued improvements along the highway route in the 1930s included several relocation and surfacing projects including:
- the relocation and hard surfacing of Highway 81 between the city limits of Columbus and the point where Highway 30 turns west and Highway 81 continues south in 1937-38.
- a relocation of U.S. 81 bypassing Belvidere to Bruning in 1937-38, which shortened the route by two miles and eliminated railroad grade crossings at Belvidere and Bruning.
- realignment of the route through Osceola to eliminate several bad turns and two bad hills in 1937-38.
- rerouting U.S. 81 to bypass Fairmont in 1935-36 to create a direct connection with Highway 6 (earlier known as the Detroit-Lincoln-Denver Highway).126

During the late 1930s and early 1940s the desire for speed, the shortening of distances between major communities and safety resulted in significant route changes. Concrete surfacing on the route of the Meridian Highway began in the late 1930s. Prior to this time, the road had received hard surfacing of brick and concrete only within communities.

124TIB (Touring Information Bureau) Automobile Route Book, 1921.
125Norfolk Daily News, 11 June 1928.
126Relocations of U.S. 81 were compiled from the Biennial Reports 1910-1974 of the Nebraska Department of Roads and its predecessors. Available at the Nebraska Department of Roads, Lincoln, Nebraska.
Safety included the elimination of railroad grade crossings and radius curves that improved sharp angles typically found along the older routes. Many improvements occurred through several counties as the road was realigned to bypass communities. For example, in 1939 the Meridian Highway was rerouted bypassing all of the communities in Pierce County including Hadar and Pierce. The rerouting was often controversial as communities and newspapers lobbied and fought for the highway to continue to pass through their town. Similarly, citizens from the towns of Madison, Humphrey and Platte Center raised concerns about the proposed rerouting of the Meridian Highway 1.5 miles east of Madison and 3 miles east of Humphrey and Platte Center. A compromise was reached where the road would continue through the town of Madison, but bypass the other towns-Humphrey and Platte Center-by 1 mile. Other communities, such as Norfolk, experienced the bypassing of the traditional downtown business district as the route was reestablished directly through town, resulting in the creation of a separate commercial “strip” in the years following World War II.

As the U.S. became involved in World War II, the War Department and the Public Roads Administration identified a system of roads known as the “Strategic Network of Highways” to access military bases, defense manufacturing plants, Army air fields and other strategic sites. In Nebraska one of the three main routes were designated as a top priority for materials and were eligible for federal funds made available in the Defense Highway Act of 1941. US-81 from the Kansas line north to Norfolk was one of the three. The highway served the Fairmont Army Airfield and the Norfolk Airport, an auxiliary air field.

Rerouting of U.S. 81 continued into the 1950s. In 1953-54 another significant relocation occurred between Norfolk and Yankton, South Dakota, shortening the distance between these communities by approximately 10 miles. The relocation project included grading, constructing culverts, gravel surfacing, and constructing three bridges.

The most recent evolution in the route of the U.S. 81 occurred when the Department of Roads established an expressway system to link the state’s major cities and cross-state travel. A network of four-lane highways was proposed across the state. The plan included sections of U.S. 81. Presently U.S. 81 largely serves as a regional corridor linking the major communities along its route and providing a link to the interstate system. Today, U.S. 81 in Nebraska is a combination of a two-lane road and a four-lane road. Sections with higher traffic levels are under construction as a four-lane expressway between Norfolk and the Kansas-Nebraska border. Very few sections travel the original route of the 1911 Meridian Road, but the expressway system generally follows the later alignment of the route of U.S. 81. Construction of the expressway continues to the present.

**Conclusion**

The Meridian Road, later renamed the Meridian Highway and U.S. Route 81 was first initiated by local “good roads” promoters in an effort to develop a north-south highway through the United States linking to Canada and Mexico. From 1916 through the 1930s road construction was advanced by state and federal government. The 1930s saw advancement of that construction and the bypassing of communities that were once linked by the highway. Improvements continued on the highway through the 1950s, following a hiatus during World War II. In the 1950s the entire route was paved in concrete. All sections developed after the 1960s have been improved by modern construction, most notably the expressway. Construction continues through the present along sections that are designated as part of the expressway. The 1916 *Automobile Blue Book* calculated that the length of the Meridian Road through Nebraska at 237 miles. Today’s length of U.S. 81 in Nebraska is about 215 miles.

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127*Humphrey Democrat*, 30 November 1939.
128*Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation, Twenty-Fourth Biennial Report of the Department of Roads and Irrigation 1941-1942* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation, 1942), 5.
F. Associated Property Types

Evaluation Methods and Application of National Register Criteria

In order to qualify for listing, resources must have a documented association with the Meridian Highway by applying the four National Register of Historic Places “Criteria for Evaluation:” an event, a person, design/construction and information potential. The evaluation of potentially eligible properties will be intact examples of one of the identified related property types and meet one or more of the National Register criteria. Meridian Highway resources must retain integrity of location, design, setting, material, workmanship, feeling and/or association of historic period(s).

Application of the National Register Criteria
Related property types are evaluated for eligibility applying the four National Register criteria. These are:

Criterion A – Event
A property is eligible for the National Register for significance associations with a single event, a pattern of events or activities, or historic trends in the development of the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81. Related property types will qualify for the National Register under Criterion A for history and association with transportation, commerce, travel patterns and development along the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 during a historic period(s). These may include the promotion or development of the highway, pioneering or advancement of road construction, or representative of highway-related travel or commerce.

Criterion B – Person
A property is eligible for the National Register if the property conveys a strong association with a person significant to the history and development of the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 during a historic period(s). Under Criterion B the specific contributions of an individual must be identified and documented and the associated property must best illustrate the person’s significant achievements. These may include a property that best represents an individual’s importance in the promotion or development of the highway, contributions to the pioneering or advancement of engineering or road construction, a person that advanced or innovated a type of roadside business or highway-related commerce, or a government official whose contributions to the development of the highway can be specifically articulated. In some cases, a person’s residence or business building could qualify if no associated highway-related properties are found.

Criterion C – Design/Construction
A property is eligible for the National Register if it exemplifies a property as a type. The property must be significantly associated with the history and development of the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 during a historic period(s). Under Criterion C resources must embody a distinctive characteristic of a type, period or method of construction, represent the work of a master, possess high artistic value, and/or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction. They may exemplify a design, construction method, architecture, engineering or construction type, a type of roadside business building, innovations or an evolution in road building or an associated roadside business type. Under Criterion C, “type, form and function” or distinctive architecture or engineering most often represents significance and a relationship to the highway.

Criterion D – Information Potential
Criterion D is usually applied to archeology, in the case of historic highways, “historical archeology.” They must have yielded or have the potential to yield information data and address research questions. In very rare cases, an early alignment of the road will qualify for listing under Criterion D if it could yield information about early road engineering and construction methods. In these cases, historical documentation would otherwise found to be inadequate. Through investigation, information may be learned about a period of road design and construction prior to the development of standard specifications, such as if archival records are inadequate and research fails to yield information. Properties must remain sufficiently intact to potentially yield information. Appropriate study techniques would have to be employed. Non-extant historic buildings or structures would not qualify under this criterion since documentation is commonly available or other examples of a type remain extant.
Criterion Considerations
In some cases National Register “Criterion Considerations” should be applied to the eligibility of related property types associated with the Meridian Highway/U.S. Highway 81. Two Criterion Considerations are most likely to apply:

Criteria Consideration B: Moved Properties
Properties that have been moved may be eligible for the National Register for their association with the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 if they retain an orientation, setting and general environs similar to the original and should maintain a location, connection and physical association with the Meridian Highway.

Criteria Consideration G: Properties Less Than 50 Years Old
Properties associated with U.S. 81 may include resources that are less than 50 years old under requirements of Criterion Consideration G. Properties less than 50 years old should be rare, exceptionally distinctive or important, or a single example of a property type.

Periods of Significance
Historic resources represent the context of history and development of the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 as a component of the automobile transportation network from its origins of the Meridian Highway in 1911 through 1960, when the 50-year cutoff for the National Register period of significance is approached. Properties must have an association with the highway during the period of significance. Some resources may predate the establishment of the Meridian Highway in 1911 but could be evaluated within the period of significance if they became associated with the Meridian Highway and achieved significance due to this association. In some cases Criterion Consideration G may be applicable when beyond the 50-year cutoff for the National Register of Historic Places.

Integrity
Properties must retain acceptable levels of historic integrity to qualify for the National Register. The aspects of integrity are: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. A property or group of properties that meet one or more of the National Register criteria and retain sufficient integrity should be considered potentially eligible for the National Register if dating to a period(s) of significance.

Several resource types were once prevalent on Nebraska’s highways but are disappearing from the highway landscape. The relative scarcity and availability of comparable properties should be used to inform the degree that alterations affect a property’s historic integrity. Many highway resources are vacant or no longer in their use; however, this does not usually affect the historical association and may not affect the historic integrity of these resources.

Alterations completed within the period of significance generally will not diminish the historic integrity of the property. Property types associated with highway construction and roadside travel on the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 changed or evolved due to many factors, including roadway improvements and marketing techniques. In these cases, alterations may not diminish integrity and may have themselves achieved significance.

Fewer alterations are acceptable on resources that are ubiquitous highway resources, as numerous examples in better physical condition can better represent the property type. To be eligible for the National Register these should retain a higher degree of physical integrity.

Significant alterations occurring beyond the period of significance will diminish the overall integrity of a resource, disqualifying it from National Register listing. Significant alterations include major changes made to buildings and structures such as structural alterations, additions or façade changes.

Levels of Significance
Resources associated with the Meridian Highway can be evaluated at local, statewide or national levels of significance. The Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 traversed across six states. No comprehensive surveys have been accomplished through these states. Therefore, significance at a national level has not been applied since a definitive context of study cannot be
made of related resources. A national level of significance, therefore, is beyond the scope of this Multiple Property Documentation form.

Statewide significance can be applied under Criteria A, B, C and/or D. Statewide significance should be applied to related property types that represent an aspect of the history of the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81, such as those considered as major components representative of the highway system as a whole. Properties may include those that are now rare, uncommon or relate to a particular body of resources that can demonstrate statewide impact or association. A property significant at the state level will possess historical associations that extend beyond a local area.

Local significance can be applied to Criteria A, B, C and/or D. Local significance may be applied to related property types found on or near the routes of the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 frequently. It will apply to resources that served local and regional trade but bear a documented association to the highway. Resources of local significance include those that are ubiquitous and found in many, if not all, locales.

**Related Property Types**

Property types are buildings, structures, objects, sites, or districts. For the purpose of this document, historic highway resources are identified as properties associated with transportation, commerce, architecture or engineering. Historic highway resources encompass a wide range of property types. A discussion of the prominent property types and examples related to the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 includes:

- Gas Stations: Curbside Pumps, Filling Stations and Service Stations
- Automobile Agencies, Garages and Dealerships
- The Automobile Row and Commercial Strip
- Commercial Districts
- Truck Transport and Associated Sites
- Tourist Sites
- Markers, Signing and Monuments
- Campgrounds, Tourist Parks and Comfort Stations
- Wayside Areas and Parks
- Boarding Houses, Hotels, Cabin Camps, and Motels
- Roadhouses and Rural Crossroads Stores
- Restaurants, Food Stands, Diners and Drive-ins
- Man-made Landscape Features
- Natural Landscape Features and Viewsheds
- Bridges and Culverts
- Roadways

**Gas Stations: Curbside Pumps, Filling Stations and Service Stations**

**Description**

The gas station was developed in the early twentieth century to provide petroleum and other products exclusive to the automobile. They grew rapidly in number with the phenomenal acceptance of the automobile and as numbers of motorists that took to the road. The gas station became a marketing operation of both the hundreds of small independent operators as well as large companies. The gas station, as a marketing outlet, is represented by the following: "curbside pumps," the "filling station" and the "service station." Their type, form and function can be described as the "curbside pump," "shed," "house," "house with canopy," "house with bays" and "oblong box."\(^{129}\)

The early “drive up” source of gasoline was the “curbside pump” placed in front of businesses, such as automobile agencies, garages, dealerships, liversies, implement shops, hardware and general merchandise stores. With a pump and

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\(^{129}\) Jakle and Scully, *The Gas Station in America*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1994 is referenced throughout this section to describe type, form and function.
underground storage tank this was a convenient and effective source for a fill of gasoline. However, the proliferation of these curbside filling stations soon came to the attention of city officials especially when located in the larger, more concentrated commercial districts. Their underground storage tank and pump often required the operation to be placed in the public right-of-way. Concerns about fire hazards, odor, noise, and pedestrian and traffic conflicts were voiced. Fire and zoning ordinances enacted in larger cities during the 1910s and 1920s eliminated curbside operations. Curbside pumps, however, remained a fixture in small villages and rural crossroads stores.

The first off-street, drive-in “filling station” is so-named because it offered only a limited line of products, mostly a fill of gasoline. Among the first were utilitarian “sheds,” which began to appear in the decade of the 1910s. Some types were prefabricated; others built as common sheds and self-built for local operations and taking their cues from utilitarian buildings used by dealers in grain, lumber and coal or those familiar to petroleum operations used at oil yards or bulk stations. As oil companies began constructing these sheds in neighborhoods and downtowns where aesthetics were important the appearance of the shed station was objectionable. These utilitarian structures were sometimes eliminated in the highly concentrated commercial districts by local zoning ordinances. Among the first to apply an attractive style and standardized type were the architect-designed stations of the Standard Oil Company of Nebraska, built from 1914 to 1919.

Operators sought a better appearance for their stations. These often took the form of a “house” and “house with canopy.” As the name suggests, the house type filling station took on the appearance or details of a domestic house. The typical house type consisted of an office, perhaps a storage or workroom and single restroom. Products and services were limited and included free air, water for batteries and radiators, lubricating oils, tire repair and a small line of automotive parts. Outdoor grease pits and hoists provided lubrication services. The house with canopy was similar to the house type, but had a canopy that extended over the pumps to shelter customers and employees in inclement weather. These were sometimes referred to as “bungalows,” due either to their small size or architectural style and/or details.

Most filling stations were built by small independent retailers in a manner preferred by the operator, using designs worked out with local contractors or observations of industry trends. The house and the house with canopy were erected largely in the 1920s. The large oil companies chose a standardized design. One of the finest of examples was architect-designed for the Standard Oil Company of Nebraska and used statewide throughout the 1920s. Another example was the standardized stations built by the Continental Oil Company in Nebraska. Standardized designs allowed the public to easily identify the oil company and its products. The filling station sometimes took on other architectural themes as a marketing tool because the public was attracted by the “homelike” appearance, such as quaint cottages or styles such as Spanish Revival. These include the cottage types built by the Phillips Petroleum Co. in Nebraska. Sometimes exotic themes were used, meant to attract the highest attention for pulling the motorist from the road.

During the 1930s, the filling station began to evolve into the “service station.” During the Depression, gas sales sagged. Oil companies offered a much-expanded line of more profitable products and services, such as tires, batteries and accessories (in the trade, TBA) and automotive repairs. Existing stations sometimes adapted this new marketing technique. Canopies were removed to accommodate larger cars and trucks and either attached or detached service bays were added. Bays were equipped for services such as lubrication, car washing and automotive repairs. Probably the first to transition to the service station type were those remodeled by the Standard Oil Company of Nebraska.

Some new stations kept the traditional appearance of cottages or other styles and were built with attached service bays, or the “house with bays.” One example of those built in Nebraska is the Sinclair Oil Company stations. They took on Spanish details of stucco exteriors and tile mansard roofs, but maintained the canopy. A design was introduced by Standard Oil Company of Nebraska by 1932, retaining its brick façade and canopy but with three connected service bays.

But service stations most often adapted a new and very different type of gas station building, pioneered in the 1930s: the “oblong box.” In contrast to the house types, the oblong box was designed to be both functional and to attract the motorist. Most often these stations were built in a prominent location along the highway, built in a streamlined, functional, rectangular form with a flat roof, and were constructed of brick or concrete block sometimes finished in glazed brick or
porcelain enamel panels. The oblong box often was painted with the oil company’s trademark colors and included prominent signage. The interior space included an office, storage, a display area, workshop and service bays. The Texas Company (Texaco) innovated perhaps the earliest and most prototypical of this modern, stylistic type in 1934. Oblong boxes were most popular in the 1950s through the 1960s. The Standard Oil Company of Indiana built a number of these service station types in Nebraska in the 1950s and 1960s, requiring a strict uniform design, signage and product line. Beginning in the 1970s the exterior details of the oblong box fell out of favor. Elements such as cedar shakes, brick facing, and gable roofs with cupolas were added to existing stations, such as those of the Standard Oil Company/Amoco. By the 1990s a new station type was introduced, the “convenience store,” fronted by a large canopy sheltering the pumps. Sometimes alterations were made to the oblong box to serve as convenience store operation. Today, the oblong box has been largely replaced with the convenience store and its monumental, freestanding canopy.

**Significance**

Gas stations located on or within close proximity to the historic alignments of the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 may qualify for listing on the National Register under Criterion A for their association with the highway and the marketing of products and services for the traveling public. Under Criterion B a gas station may best represent an individual’s importance in the promotion or development of the highway or a business person that built of a number of gas stations that advanced roadside business, related highway commerce or innovation of a marketing technique. A gas station may also qualify for the National Register under Criterion C as a distinctive example of a type, form and function or as a representative example of a distinctive architectural style related to trends in marketing of petroleum products. Properties will embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. Early examples are increasingly rare resources on the Meridian Highway. Moved properties must retain an orientation, setting and general environs similar to the original and should maintain a location, connection and physical association with the highway.

Most curbside operations are no longer extant. The curbside station is only identified by the pump itself, an object not considered eligible in itself to the National Register of Historic Places. National Register criteria would not be applied since associated buildings primarily served other purposes, such as a livery, hardware or general merchandise store. Other examples are automobile agencies, garages or automobile dealerships; gasoline being only a supplement to their business (see “Automobile Agencies, Garages and Dealerships,” below).

No common “sheds” have survived along the Meridian Highway. They were short-lived examples of petroleum marketing and probably soon supplanted by the more common type that came into use, the “house” or “house with canopy” filling station.

Criteria A and C are most likely to be applied to filling stations. These buildings should be evaluated under Criterion A as early examples of the marketing of petroleum products and other offerings to the long-distance traveler. Under Criterion C the filling station may represent a type, form and function, such as the “house” and “house with canopy.” The period of significance largely dates to the decade of the 1920s. Although they may display alterations and removal of the pumps, the filling station type should retain characteristic features of a period of significance in association with the highway. Excellent examples are found in Warner’s Filling Station in Geneva (1922, FM05-060, National Register of Historic Places) and another in McCool Junction (YK07-039).

In some cases, early filling stations evolved into service stations. The canopy could have been removed to accommodate larger cars and trucks and either attached or detached bays were added to expand the business offerings. These changes to a property should not diminish the property’s ability to convey integrity but rather the alteration(s) will convey the transition of the filling station to the service station in type, form or function. An example is found in a station in Humphrey (PT05-079), which was originally built as a cottage-type filling station with the awkward addition of a two service bays built of concrete block. Due to the rarity of well-preserved examples of filling stations they warrant evaluation at the statewide level.
Criteria A and C are most likely to be applied to the service station. The service station, which appeared in the 1930s and through the 1960s, can accrue significance under Criterion A for petroleum marketing and its offerings to the long-distance traveler by providing expanded service and products. Criterion C can be met as a type, form and function of the “house with bays” and “oblong box.” Examples of the “oblong box” built through the 1950s and 1960s are commonly found on the highway and in order to be considered eligible for listing in the National Register need to retain a high degree of integrity. They remain eligible for the National Register if they retain sufficient physical integrity to identify their original use. Service stations may be vacant or have a new use, but may remain eligible for the National Register if they retain sufficient physical integrity that identifies their original use. Very few service stations retain gasoline pumps and this is not a requirement for the building’s ability to convey significance. Later alterations such as enclosed and downsized windows and service bay openings or additions/alterations to the building are not acceptable, as these changes diminish the historic integrity of the property. Many service stations were once found on the commercial strip of larger towns. One of the best examples of the oblong box is located in Columbus (PT01-539). This building is faced with porcelain-enamedeled metal panels and is the single survivor of an early commercial strip in Columbus. Due to their commonality, they will be eligible at the local level.

Service stations that are less than 50 years old will be evaluated under National Register Criterion Consideration G. To be eligible under this criterion consideration, the property’s appearance must retain excellent integrity of its period of original construction.

Beginning in the 1970s elements such as cedar shakes, brick facing, and gabled roofs with cupolas were commonly added and do not meet Criterion Consideration G because these integrity changes fall outside the period of significance of this Multiple Property Documentation form. By the 1990s the convenience store became the fashion. No examples of these stations have been recorded in historic building surveys of U.S. 81 due their recent construction date.

Intersections of the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 often attracted more than one gas station. Single or multiple gas stations may anchor automobile rows or were found in commercial strips in significant numbers (see “Automobile Rows and Commercial Strips,” below). For example, automobile rows in Geneva and Norfolk were anchored by filling stations.

**Automobile Agencies, Garages and Dealerships**

**Description**

The proliferation of automobile agencies, garages and dealerships corresponded to the phenomenal acceptance of the automobile in Nebraska. Travelers found these to be convenient for repair service, products and even for the purchase of automobiles themselves.

The earliest sales of automobiles were through “agencies.” Agencies became a marketing operation of the many automobile manufacturing companies, large and small. Few automobiles were offered for sale on-site, but rather the agent took orders for new automobiles. Automobiles arrived by railroad car and most were already spoken for by individuals that had submitted orders. Some were operated from liveries or implement dealerships. Those built as agencies are characterized by front doorways to drive vehicles in and out. They were commonly built of frame, brick or concrete block and were once found in larger communities. Often, dealerships offered gasoline from a curbside pump or indoor pump.

“Garages” responded to the growing need for automotive repair and other services. Sometimes called “automobile liveries” they represent the evolution from “horse and buggy” to the automobile. Some evolved from liveries or implement dealerships. Those built as garages featured front doorways to drive vehicles in and out. They were often built of frame, brick or concrete block and are found in towns large and small. Often, garages offered gasoline from curbside pumps.

As automobile sales soared in the 1920s the first automobile “dealerships” began to appear across Nebraska. Dealerships offered a large stock of new automobiles, an expanded line of parts and services, such as automobile repairs. Dealerships featured display areas to show new automobiles, offered a large stock of parts that were housed in a separate parts room, and multiple indoor bays for automobile repairs and storage. Often, dealerships offered gasoline
from curbside pumps. Dealerships varied in their construction methods and were typically of one-story construction. These early dealerships resembled commercial buildings of the period and were usually constructed of brick. Dealerships in larger cities were built to be large, fashionable and elegant. Upper-story construction is found in larger dealerships. Elevators large enough to carry automobiles served the upper floors. Here storage was provided for an inventory of vehicles. Dealers in smaller communities built scaled-down versions. The Ford Motor Company established a significant number of dealerships during this period, selecting larger towns and county seats for their location.

Beginning in the 1970s auto dealers began to locate to larger lots far from the commercial strips. The main building was removed from the curb-line and rows of autos were placed between the roadside and the building.

**Significance**

Automobile agencies, garages and dealerships were exclusive to the sale and/or servicing of automobiles. To be eligible for the National Register, the property’s appearance should retain overall massing, materials, siting, and architecture of the property’s period of significance. Criteria A and C are most likely to be applied. Those located on or within close proximity to the historic alignments of the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 may qualify for listing on the National Register under Criterion A for association with the highway and the marketing of products and services for the traveling public. Under Criterion B, however, they may best represent an individual’s importance in the promotion or development of the highway or a prominent business person that advanced roadside business, related highway commerce or innovation of a marketing technique. They may also qualify for the National Register under Criterion C as a distinctive example of a type, form and function or architecture. Properties will embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. Moved properties must retain an orientation, setting and general environs similar to the original and should maintain a location, connection and physical association with the highway. Automobile agencies, garages and dealerships were built in large numbers along the highway and possess significance at the local level. Those potentially eligible for the National Register may predate 1911 with the establishment of the Meridian Highway through the 50-year cut-off date for National Register listing.

Automobile agencies are potentially eligible for the National Register as serving travelers along the Meridian Highway by offering products and repair services. Criteria A and C are most likely to be applied. Facilities located on or within close proximity to the historic route alignments of the highway may qualify for listing on the National Register under Criterion A. Automobile agencies may also qualify for the National Register under Criterion C as examples displaying a type, form and function for the sale and servicing of automobiles. Eligible facilities may pre-date or date from the beginnings of the route of the Meridian Highway in 1911. Agencies that were constructed prior to the highway may be eligible for the National Register if a significant association with the Meridian Highway is established. Automobile agencies were largely established to serve local and regional patrons. They should be evaluated at the local level. The period of significance dates from before the 1910s into the 1920s. The physical integrity of these agencies is largely defined by the presence of front doorways to drive vehicles in and out. One fine example is a one-story agency located in Shelby (1911, PK03-25), which once marketed Maxwell automobiles. Another example is the two-story LaFleur building (MD03-012) in Madison, once housing an Overland agency. Single or multiple agencies may be found on automobile rows (see “Automobile Rows and Commercial Strips” below).
Automotive garages also provided services for the traveler on the Meridian Highway. They are common, found in almost every community along the highway in response to the phenomenal acceptance of the automobile and the sometimes unreliable nature of early automobiles themselves. Criteria A and C are most likely to be applied. Garages located on or within close proximity to the historic routes of the Meridian Highway may qualify for listing on the National Register under Criterion A if an association with travel on the highway can be determined. For example, the Columbus Auto Company in Columbus (also called the "Automobile Blue Book" garage; PT01-524) was advertised in this series of guidebooks for the long-distance traveler. Another example was a "Meridian Garage" in Humphrey, listed in a 1922 guidebook of Nebraska highways as being a stopping place on the Meridian Highway. Garages may also qualify for the National Register under Criterion C as examples displaying a type, form and function when built exclusively to servicing automobiles. The period of significance dates from as early as before the 1910s through the 1930s, when gas stations and automobile dealerships began to dominate the repair business. Garages that were constructed prior to 1911 may also be eligible for the National Register if a later association with the Meridian Highway is established. Integrity is largely applied to the presence of large front doorways. Many examples are found on or near the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81. Single or multiple garages may be found in automobile rows (see "Automobile Rows and Commercial Strips," below).

Automobile dealerships were established in larger communities in downtown commercial districts. The first period of significance for automobile dealerships begins in the 1920s through about 1930, when the Depression and World War II resulted in the decline in the sale of new cars. Criteria A and C are most likely to be applied. Dealerships located on or within close proximity to the historic alignments of the highway may qualify for listing on the National Register under Criterion A for their association with the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81. Automobile dealerships may also qualify for the National Register under Criterion C as examples displaying a type, form and function exclusive to the sale and servicing of automobiles. In most cases, the automobile dealership was built in a commercial style of architecture and located in or near the commercial business district. The former Rystrom Motors (YK11-547) in York is an excellent example. Dealerships in larger cities were sometimes built to be large, fashionable and elegant. The Gottberg Ford dealership (1921, PT01-003) in Columbus is probably the finest example in Nebraska, and certainly of any located on the Meridian Highway. Both the Rystrom building and Gottberg Ford dealership also may accrue significance under Criterion B for their association with prominent businessmen who entered into automobile sales and service for local and regional markets but also the traveling public. Single or multiple dealerships may anchor automobile rows (see "Automobile Rows and Commercial Strips" below). Although dealerships served the traveler on the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81, they also served local and regional trade and will most often possess significance at the local level.

The second period of significance for automobile dealerships dates from the post-World War II years through the 1960s. These properties are most common in larger towns along U.S. 81 and should retain a high degree of integrity. For example, an auto dealership building of this period was historically designed with large plate glass windows on the main façade to display automobiles. A dealership constructed during this era should retain this characteristic and functional feature to be eligible for the National Register. Criteria A and C are most likely to be applied. Newer dealerships located on or within proximity to the historic route alignments of U.S. 81 may qualify for listing on the National Register under Criterion A for their association with the highway. They may also qualify for the National Register under Criterion C as examples displaying a type, form and function to the service and sale of automobiles. Examples include the former Voecks Ford dealership in Madison (MD03-086, 1947), faced in glazed tiles, the Stromsburg Motors (PK04-175), Shaner Motors in Geneva, which includes a prominent pylon sign (FM05-129), and the Burnett Chevrolet dealership in Hebron (TY10-108). Examples of properties in this category that are less than 50 years old will need to meet National Register Criterion Consideration G. Automobile dealerships that began to locate to larger lots farther into the suburbs and away from the commercial strip in the 1970s to the present have not been recorded in surveys of U.S. 81 due to their recent construction date.
The Automobile Row and Commercial Strip

Description

The automobile row and commercial strip were established solely in response to the automobile. They are districts where automotive and transportation-related businesses were concentrated. They represent “new” forms of commercial districts.

The first type of automotive commercial district, known as the “automobile row,” appeared in the late 1910s and 1920s when groups of automobile-related businesses located in or near established commercial business districts. The automobile row included gas stations, automobile agencies and dealerships, auto supply stores and repair garages. The automobile row not only served a large local and regional trade, but also provided the products and services for the traveler on the Meridian Highway.

The “commercial strip” first developed in the post-World War II period when the automobile became engrained in American culture. Automobile-related businesses associated with what is most commonly referred to as “the strip” included motels, restaurants, private or franchised drive-ins, gas stations and automobile dealerships. They were developed remote from the business section of town in the time period when highways began to bypass the concentrated traffic of the business district. Commercial strips developed only in Columbus and Norfolk, the largest cities on U.S. 81. These commercial strips evolved rapidly due to changing marketing trends. Buildings and businesses continue to be replaced or remodeled at a rapid rate. Commercial strips are now dominated by businesses that date from the 1970s to the present.

Significance

The automobile row is characterized as a concentration of automobile related business buildings and would be evaluated as a district. These automotive districts provided products and services primarily for local and regional markets, as well as motorists on the Meridian Highway. Criterion A would apply to the automobile row’s association with travel on the Meridian Highway. Under Criterion B, this group of property types will rarely represent an individual businessperson, since the cumulative number of businesses associated with this property type represents a larger body of individuals. Criterion C would be met as examples of properties that exhibit distinctive characteristics of type, period and method of construction. The period of significance is the late 1910s and 1920s. In general, automobile rows will be eligible at the local level. However, the rarity of well-preserved examples might warrant evaluation at the statewide level.

Automobile rows that date to this period have been identified in Pierce, York, Columbus, Geneva and Norfolk. The finest example is one located in Norfolk. This automobile row consists of a one-block row directly on the route of the Meridian Highway that began with the construction of a Standard Oil gas station in 1915 (MD06-142, no longer extant). An automobile dealership and other businesses associated with automotive trade, including tire and battery stores, repair garages, and a parts store soon followed. Extant buildings include the McFayden Motor Company/Ford dealership (MD06-008) and Herb King Garage (MD06-513). The McFayden Motor Company was listed in a 1922 guidebook of Nebraska highways as a stopping place on the Meridian Highway. Another example of an automobile row is located in Pierce, where several roadside businesses cluster at the intersection where the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 once turned through town. Known locally as “Oliveville,” this intersection once hosted the Pierce Independent Oil Company (1919, extant but has a loss of integrity); the Teapot Dome (1924, PC05-059) consisting of a combined café/garage/gas station/automobile dealership; the Midway Filling Station (1925), and the Pierce Artificial Ice House/Tourist Filling Station (1925, PC05-047). Historically, this automobile row was complemented by a tourist campground, a municipal park, a cabin camp (all are no longer extant) and the WPA-built Gilman Park (PC05-051).

The commercial strip developed in the post-World War II years through the 1960s and served the automobile “culture” of the period. Commercial strips may be eligible under Criterion A for an association with U.S. 81. Under Criterion B, these property types may rarely represent an individual businessperson, since the cumulative number of businesses represents a larger body of individuals associated with this type of roadside business or highway-related commerce. Criterion C would be met as examples of properties that exhibit distinctive characteristics of type, period and method of construction. A commercial strip district will display distinctive architectural styles representing the marketing trends during this period.
There has been a rapid evolution of the commercial strip, which continues to the present day. No historic commercial strips of the period are found on U.S. Route 81, although the most prominent examples of commercial strips were developed in Norfolk and Columbus, the largest cities on U.S. 81. These commercial strips are now dominated by businesses of the 1970s through the present and Criterion G is not applicable.

**Commercial Districts**

**Description**

Early highways were routed through towns and “main street” commercial districts, both to promote local support for the new highway and for motorists to take advantage of the offerings that were found in these districts. Automobile-related businesses located in these commercial districts served local and regional patrons but also provided services for the traveler. Commercial districts provided for the frequent stops and services needed by the early motorist, such as food, supplies, lodging and repair services. Individual and multiple automobile-related resources are found in towns along the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81. Most numerous of buildings constructed in commercial districts were gas stations, automobile agencies, garages and automobile dealerships. Brick pavement was often built in towns to improve their commercial areas in the 1910s and 1920s, including the route of the Meridian Highway.

Four commercial districts on the Meridian Highway mark the crossing of major regional or national roads. These are located in Fairmont, the crossing of the north-south Meridian Highway and the east-west D-L-D Highway; Geneva, where the Potash Highway merged with the Meridian Highway en route to/from Kansas; Columbus, where the Meridian Highway converged with the Lincoln Highway, and the intersection of the Meridian Highway with the Seward-York-Aurora Highway (S-Y-A) at York.

In the 1930s, highway development included the bypassing of the smaller communities that were once linked by the highway. Crofton, Wausa, Pierce, Hadar, Humphrey, Platte Center, Strang, Bruning and Belvidere were eventually bypassed completely. The central business district was bypassed in other communities, including Shelby, Osceola, McCool Junction, Fairmont, and Hebron.

**Significance**

Commercial business districts most often merit recognition for periods of significance predating the automobile, such as railroad transportation, commerce and architecture of an earlier period. However, commercial districts may include period(s) of significance when the Meridian Highway/U.S 81 passed through these commercial business districts, recognizing the types of businesses and services offered for the traveler. Conversely, the highway brought trade into commercial districts and was responsible for further development of business and commerce. Highway-related businesses would contribute to a larger historic district and can be evaluated under Criterion A for relationship with period(s) of growth and commerce. They may also accrue significance for relationship with a community club/chamber of commerce or a local government in the development of the highway in an effort to promote the community’s commercial growth. Criterion B would rarely be applied, since the cumulative body of businesses in a commercial business district represents a larger body of individuals associated with the development of a community’s local and regional trade, but also highway-related commerce brought by the highway. Under Criterion C, contributing properties must display type, form or function or distinctive architectural styles representing property types related to the historic period(s) of the highway. Properties will embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. In general, commercial districts will be eligible at the local level. An automobile row may also be part of a larger commercial district or eligible in and of itself (see “Automobile Row and Commercial Strip,” above). The concentration of automotive-related business buildings might warrant evaluation at the statewide level.

The period of significance will include dates up until the time a number of the smaller communities were bypassed beginning in the 1930s. Crofton, Wausa, Pierce, Hadar, Humphrey, Platte Center, Strang, Bruning and Belvidere were eventually bypassed completely. In others the central business district was bypassed. These included Shelby, Osceola, McCool Junction, Fairmont, and Hebron. The further development of some types of automotive-related businesses declined with the removal of the highway. In the largest cities of Norfolk and Columbus, the removal of the highway from
commercial districts eventually led to the creation of the commercial strip (see Automobile Row and Commercial Strip, above).

Where regional or cross-country highways intersected with the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 commercial development was often more pronounced. As an example, the Meridian Highway and the Lincoln Highway converged through the Columbus business district. The Columbus Historic District (PT01-multiple sites, listed in the National Register of Historic Places) recognized, in part, commerce and architecture predating the arrival of the highways, but included periods of significance related to highway transportation, architecture and commerce. It includes a large number of automotive resources that are entered as contributing properties.

Brick or concrete paving were commonly built to improve local commercial districts, but often for purposes other than the highway and predating the highway. However, they may be eligible under Criterion A as contributing to a larger historic district if documented as having been built to accommodate the route of the Meridian Highway. Built by local governments, these would accrue significance under Criterion A as an early example of community development, long before comprehensive/transportation planning became a practice. An example is found in Fairmont (FM04-027) where brick streets were built c. 1920 to accommodate the traveler on the Meridian Highway and D-L-D Highway through town.

Criterion B could be achieved for a local promoter or government official who worked for street improvements. An example was Phil R. Hockenberger, Sr. of Columbus who became frustrated with the city’s progress in improving the streets approaching downtown Columbus (Columbus Historic District, National Register of Historic Places). Hockenberger became a city council member and worked with the city engineer and city attorney to develop paving districts.

Although applying common construction techniques found in communities across the state, Criterion C could be considered as a type, form or function of road construction used in commercial districts. These will embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction.

**Truck Transport and Associated Sites**

**Description**

The Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 developed as a highway of commerce. As improvements were made to the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 it became an important north-south highway for truck transport. Trucks would eventually overtake the railroad as the transporter of many types of goods.

With improvements to the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81, such as graveled surfaces, transporters delivered a variety of products, both retail and wholesale, beginning in about the 1920s. Significant traffic on the highway occurred during the 1920s for the transport of agricultural commodities to local markets and livestock to regional markets. Truck transport began to dominate shipping by railroad. As the agricultural market saw a major decline during the Depression and drought of the 1930s, shipping of agricultural commodities and livestock on the highway declined.

The transport of gasoline came into prominent use on the highway in the early 1930s. Truck transport for bulk quantities of gasoline began to spread in Nebraska, serviced by the oil fields and refineries of the Mid-Continent region of the south central United States, such as those in Kansas. A significant truck transport of gasoline into Nebraska followed U.S 81 as a major north-south route where the lack of north-south railroads and high freight rates made trucking economical. At “tank farms,” gasoline was unloaded directly from the transport truck. The tank farm was equipped with storage tanks that served as a bulk station for the jobbing of gasoline. Two very early transporters were Herman Ells of York and Hugh B. Hill of Superior. Herman Ells was a livestock transporter who experienced the decline in livestock transport during the Depression and found his business was no longer profitable. He entered the transport of gasoline by 1932, credited with being the first transporter of gasoline in Nebraska. Hill established the “Hill Oil Terminal” near Chester, jobbers and retailers but also retailing directly to the customer. It consisted of storage tanks and bulk station, which served as a jobbing operation. His retail and service venture included a combined gasoline station/repair garage/café. Hill’s establishment could also be described as an early type of “truck stop.”
For national security, the War Department and the Public Roads Administration identified a system of roads known as the Strategic Network of Highways to serve military bases, defense manufacturing plants, Army airfields and other strategic sites. In Nebraska, U.S. 81 from the Kansas state line north to Norfolk was designated under the Defense Highway Act of 1941. The highway served the Fairmont Army Air Field and the Norfolk Airport, an auxiliary airfield.

Truck stops on U.S. 81 saw a revival in the 1950s and 1960s to service long-distance truck drivers as well as local and regional patrons. They combined a restaurant and large bays to service trucks. Gasoline was sold to the retail customer and diesel fuel for trucks. Examples found along U.S. 81 are located on the edge of communities.

By the 1960s, pipelines and huge tank yards supplemented or dominated the transport of long-distance trucking of petroleum. However, U.S. 81 continues to be an important route for the trucking of gasoline, livestock and other wholesale products.

Significance

Significance under Criterion A would accrue to properties that represent the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 as a route for truck transport beginning in the 1920s. With improvements to the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81, transporters delivered a variety of products both retail and wholesale. One example of a building that represents wholesale trucking is a former motor freight house in Columbus (Columbus Historic District, listed National Register of Historic Places). An example of livestock transport is the Norfolk Horse and Mule Barn, first built as a tractor manufacturing company with access to the railroad. When the tractor operation dissolved in 1925, its later use – due to the nature of its direct location on the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 - is associated with the trucking of livestock to this regional market. In some cases, Criterion B could be applied for association with important transporters along the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81. Under Criterion C properties will embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction.

Petroleum transport is represented by resources such as wholesale gasoline outlets, bulk stations or tank farms that developed along the highway in the 1930s. Two very early transporters were Herman Ells of York and Hugh B. Hill. Ells recognized the retail and service business brought by the highway. He established a combined gas station/restaurant/service garage/cabin camp in York (not extant). Hill, whose business was located in Superior, built the Hill Oil Terminal near Chester (TY00-257). Hill’s Oil Terminal is eligible under Criterion A as a significant example of the early truck distribution of petroleum. Under Criterion B, Hill is significant for his association with early truck transport of gasoline. Criterion C may also be applied to the type, form and function of such a facility, consisting of storage tanks and bulk station associated with highway transport of gasoline and as an early truck stop. The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. The Hill Oil Terminal represents the only example recorded on U.S. 81. As the best representative example of truck transport and associated truck stop still extant it is eligible at the statewide level.

Defense facilities once served by U.S. 81 as part of the system of defense highways would likely not qualify for transportation, since highway transport only supplemented the primary functions of these facilities. However, if further research can confirm a section of roadway associated with the construction of a defense highway, significance could be evaluated under Criterion A. Criterion C could be applied if the section of highway displays a particular construction type built under defense programs. Their associations with defense facilities could warrant a statewide level of significance.

Truck stops of the 1950s through c. 1960 may be eligible under National Register Criterion A for association with commercial transport on the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 and related commerce. Under Criterion B, these property types may include an individual’s importance in advancing or innovating a type of roadside business. Several were associated with prominent businessmen who established these facilities and could accrue significance under Criterion B, for example, H. Ells and Robert Foote, who built a number of trucks stops along several highways. Criterion C is met by the type, form and function that these complexes of buildings took on to serve truck transport. Properties will embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. Examples less than 50 years old will need to be considered under National Register Criterion Consideration G. Examples of truck stops are the H. Ells Oil Company in Hebron and
the Foote Oil Co. Truck Stop (TY00-259) in Chester. Both consist of a restaurant and large bays that serve trucks. They served local and regional patrons but also the truck driver. In general, truck stops will be eligible at the local level.

**Tourist Sites**

*Description*

Tourist sites were built by private operators along highways featuring attractions to the tourist trade, often operated in conjunction with cabin camps. These included souvenir and roadside stands, fanciful architecture, exotic features and live animals meant to attract the tourist from the road. Historically, tourist sites were rarely built along the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81.

*Significance*

Significance may be evaluated under Criterion A for association with these types of business establishments exclusively meant to attract the tourist. Under Criterion B, these property types may include an individual's importance associated with this type of roadside business, highway-related commerce or promotion, innovated this type of business, or development of the highway. Criterion C may be applied if the buildings or features display a type, form and function or architecture to garner the attention of the traveler. Properties will embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. The period of significance will date to the 1920s and 1930s. No examples are extant on the highway, although one fine example was once operated along with a roadhouse near Enola. It was built in conjunction with the Nebraska Fur Farm and allowed the tourist to view live animals.

**Markers, Signing and Monuments**

*Description*

Signing helped guide the traveler on the route of the early highway and included markings on telephone poles and wooden and metal signs installed to mark the route and guide motorists to towns along the highway. This signing was once highly promoted by the Meridian Highway Association in an effort called “signposting.” Major landmarks were used by automobile guides of the period, such as the *Automobile Blue Book*. Signing was short lived and largely ceased after the designation of the highway as U.S. 81 in 1926. The highway also once included a profusion of billboards and other smaller advertising signs.

Markers or mileposts were built along Nebraska's highways to mark the contemporary road of a historical period of significance, such as those placed along the O-L-D/D-L-D highway in Lancaster County. The finest examples are found on the Lincoln Highway when the Lincoln Highway Association installed a number of concrete markers erected by the Boy Scouts.

Monuments were sometimes placed along highways representing a commemorative event. One series of monuments was erected across the state by a commission of the State of Nebraska and the Daughters of the American Revolution to mark historic trails of the nineteenth century, placed near the right-of-way of existing roads.

*Significance*

No examples of signing remain on the Meridian Highway. However, one that could be associated with the Meridian Highway was a building with a large painted sign, “Chemical Works.” This landmark was mentioned in the *Automobile Blue Book* to guide motorists on the correct route of the highway through Norfolk. The building remains today with its ghost sign still visible. This building may acquire significance under Criterion A, but Criterion B and Criterion C would not apply since a personage is probably associated with the business itself and its type, form or function is unrelated to the highway.

Federal and state signs erected beginning in 1926 soon replaced the early “signposting” once promoted by the Meridian Highway Association.
No markers or mileposts of a period of significance were erected on the Meridian Highway. Advertising signs have largely been removed, often in response to highway beautification efforts of the 1960s. Those that remain are on the modern routes of the highway and contemporary in nature.

One monument was erected, in part, to recognize the Meridian Road and was placed near Hebron in 1915 (TY00-076) to mark the crossing of the Oregon Trail on the Meridian Road, sponsored a commission of the State of Nebraska and the Daughters of the American Revolution. On the front of the marker is a covered wagon. The side of the monument features the image of a touring car and the words, "Meridian Road, Winnipeg to Galveston, Oregon Trail Crossing." This monument is the most distinctive of those erected by the state and DAR as well as the only monument of the type placed on highways that included a representation of the contemporary road. The monument accrues significance under Criterion A recognizing an event celebrating the new Meridian “automobile trail” that was barely four years in its promotion. Under Criterion B it is significant as an expression of the monument maker’s art, particularly its accurate depiction of a touring car, or a highway “booster” who lobbied for the inclusion of the marker’s use of representing the highway. Under Criterion C this property exemplifies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. As per National Register guidelines this marker should not considered under Criterion Consideration F. Although it was placed to mark a commemorative event it also represents a contemporary association with the Meridian Road during the earliest period of significance related to the development of the Meridian Highway. Originally located at an intersection of the old Meridian Road it has been moved with the construction of the modern U.S. 81 expressway; however it remains within a few hundred feet of its original location on the highway and placed on a turnout that gives the traveler a better opportunity to stop and see the monument. Criterion Consideration B for moved properties is met. It retains an orientation, setting and general environs similar to the original and maintains a location, connection and physical association with the highway. The monument is of statewide significance. It would be classified as an object.

**Campgrounds, Tourist Parks and Comfort Stations**

**Description**

The early motorist began to exercise the freedom of long-distance travel and the requirement to stop the car and get out and stay along the route. The early motorists brought their own gear and made makeshift camps along the roadside at convenient and attractive locations. This solution worked until the popularity of automobile tourism swelled after World War I, when the flood of travelers camping on the roadside, schoolhouse grounds or private property upset local residents. Leaving unsightly messes, these travelers were sometimes called “tin can” tourists.

Community leaders, however, saw the potential for campgrounds to encourage the motorist to stop in town and do business. In an effort to entice travelers, many communities began to establish simple campgrounds, offering a shaded grove, fire pits, picnic tables and outhouses. In the 1920s, larger communities built municipal tourist parks with the support of local governments and commercial clubs. Highway associations, such as the Meridian Highway Association, aggressively advertised the availability of these parks along the route. Conveniences such as a community building or shelter house, fireplaces, concrete slabs that were called “car washing floors,” toilets, running water and showers, picnic areas, recreation areas, public telephones and/or electrical hookups were provided. Fees were often required to keep out undesirables and police patrols were sometimes assigned to the facility.

Business opportunities for privately owned operations also appeared in the building of private tourist parks. These often consisted of cooking facilities, showers and restrooms, electrical hookups, a shelter house or community room and/or concession stand.

The largest communities sometimes offered “comfort stations;” individual buildings that incorporated a community room, showers and restrooms.

**Significance**

Campgrounds and tourist parks are potentially eligible for the National Register since they were exclusively developed to serve travelers along the Meridian Highway. It is important that eligible campgrounds and tourist parks retain features that convey their use by the traveler. For example kitchen facilities, shelter houses, washrooms or shower facilities must be
present for a tourist camp to be eligible. Moved properties must retain an orientation, setting and general environs similar to the original and should maintain a location, connection and physical association with the highway. Under Criterion A, they accrue significance as one of the earliest of accommodations for the motorist. Under Criterion B, these property types may include an individual’s importance in the promotion or development of a specific campground or tourist park to enhance community trade and commerce. As a type, Criterion C may be met by an individual or a group of buildings or structures displaying type, form or function representative of these early transportation facilities. Properties will embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. The period of significance dates from the 1920s through the 1930s. One such public campground was established in York’s Chautauqua Park, serving both travelers on the Meridian Highway and the Seward-York-Aurora (S-Y-A) Highway. No features are extant.

One private operation was once located in Columbus. Another was Ern J. Howland’s tourist park, built in Osceola in 1926 along a streambed.

A comfort station is eligible as an individual building if it retains integrity of its use and former functions. No comfort stations were built along the Meridian Highway. Campgrounds, tourist parks and comfort stations remained popular into the 1930s.

**Wayside Areas and Parks**

**Description**

Public wayside areas and parks offered amenities to the traveler. They provided stopping places and recreation for the motorist and included picnic areas and camping grounds. In some cases, provisions were made for public wayside areas along with construction of Nebraska highways. The first was developed in 1933-34 by the state’s Department of Roads and Irrigation near the Bryan Bridge on Highway 20, consisting of plantings of trees and shrubs, benches, trails, a footbridge and water well.

Depression era “New Deal” programs of the WPA built parks that offered amenities to the local public as well as the traveler on U.S. 81. These parks were built as designed landscapes consisting of shade trees, roads, stone entrances and sometimes a lagoon. Amenities to the traveler included shelter houses, fireplaces, picnic tables, restrooms, campgrounds and recreational offerings.

**Significance**

No public wayside areas were built on the Meridian Highway but parks provided attractive locations for the traveler. Three parks built by the WPA during the Depression offered amenities to the traveler on the Meridian Highway. These are Pawnee Park in Columbus (PT01-529), Ta-Ha-Zouka Park in Norfolk (MD00-123) and Gilman Park in Pierce (PC05-051). They were designed landscapes consisting of shaded groves, lagoons/lakes, and picnic areas. The park in Norfolk included a shelter house; the park in Columbus was built with stone fireplaces and a swimming pool. All would accrue significance under Criterion A for their association with U.S. 81 as providing amenities to the highway traveler. Criterion B could be applied to a landscape architect who innovated or designed these types of parks or other wayside areas. Under Criterion C these parks would be significant as designed landscapes that included provisions for the traveler. These properties embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. These parks would accrue statewide significance as the most substantial and distinctive of any built along U.S. 81.

**Boarding Houses, Hotels, Cabin Camps and Motels**

**Description**

Pioneering automobile tourists looked for boarding houses where they could rent a room after a day’s drive. These establishments were located in or near the downtown commercial district and were built to accommodate railroad travelers, such as the traveling salesman. Boarding houses provided rooms, bathing and meals. Boarding houses sometimes only offered the longer stay with weekly or monthly rates for renters and traveling salesmen.

Like boarding houses, “railroad” hotels were located in or near the downtown commercial district and were built near the railroad to accommodate railroad travelers, often predating the Meridian Highway. They were not an ideal situation for
motorists, who were unwilling to unpack their travel gear, did not want to leave their automobiles unattended and did not want to enter the hotel lobby after a day of dusty travel. Another type was the "commercial" hotel, built in larger cities in the 1910s and 1920s and served local and regional patrons with amenities such as ballrooms and meeting rooms. Some of the larger commercial hotels; however, recognized the opportunities brought by the traveling public and later began to advertise as "motor hotels" as stops for the motorist.

By the 1930s private "mom and pop" businesspeople built accommodations for travelers to provide convenience, comfort and completely private accommodations in the form of one- and two-room cabins arranged in rows, right angles or courts. These were often called "cabin camps" and were built on the edges of towns along U.S.81. The motorist could drive up to their private cabin and unload their gear. Sometimes a shelter was connected to the cabins to provide protection for the automobile. The cabins were most often vernacular in form with frame construction and gable roofs. A house for the owners, common showers, restrooms and shelter houses were often part of the complex. A store, lunch counter, concession stand and/or gas station may have also been a part of a complex. The grounds were often park-like in setting with picnic areas and well cared for grounds. They sometimes provided campgrounds for the camper. Exterior imagery and layout sometimes became aspects in attracting guests. Some owners utilized domestic architecture to give a "homelike" appearance. Others used exotic or fanciful themes or attractions designed purely to attract attention, such as teepees and live animals. Some cabin camps later adopted the newer form of the motel by connecting the cabins or enclosing the adjoining automobile shelters.

During the post-World-War II period, individual cabins slipped from fashion. The "motel" took over as the favorable form. The word "motel" is a contraction of motor and hotel. The word became the generic label for this type of highway-oriented accommodation. They consisted of single buildings with a string of rooms and parking provided so that motorists could drive up to their room. Motels date to the 1950s and 1960s. They were family operations with a combined office and living quarters for the owners, and sometimes a restaurant. They used prominent neon signs to attract the traveler. Motels were most often found along the commercial strips and the newer routes of U.S. 81 through which the highway passed (see "Automobile Rows and Commercial Strips," below). In the decades following the 1970s, national chain motels dominated the lodging industry in Nebraska, aggressively competing with the independently owned motels, with many ceasing business.

**Significance**

Boarding houses, hotels, cabin camps and motels represent the evolving marketing trend for lodging along the highway.

Boarding houses and railroad hotels need not be along the route of the highway, since most were located in or near commercial districts for the convenience of the railroad traveler. In order for a boarding house or railroad hotel to qualify for listing under Criterion A, an association in serving the traveler on the Meridian Highway must be established. One fine example of a hotel that served Meridian Highway motorists is the Argo Hotel in Crofton (KX05-015, listed in the National Register of Historic Places), built in 1912. It was listed in a 1922 guidebook of Nebraska’s highways as being a stopping place on the Meridian Highway. It was renamed the "New Meridian Hotel" in about 1924. Under Criterion B, these property types may include an individual's importance in the promotion or development of the highway, highway-related commerce or innovated the transition to this type of roadside business. Criterion C will not be applied since type, form and function was unrelated to the motorist. They will date before the 1900s to the early 20th century.

The commercial hotel or "motor hotel" offered lodging for the traveler and could accrue significance primarily under Criterion A. Under Criterion B, these property types may include an individual's importance in the promotion or development of the highway, highway-related commerce or was prominent in the development of this type of business. Criterion C is not applied since their type, form and function was unrelated to the motorist. Three examples of commercial hotels on or near the Meridian Highway are the Evans Hotel in Columbus built in 1913 (PT01-131, listed in the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Columbus Historic Commercial District), the Hotel Norfolk completed in 1926 (MD06-143, individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places) in Norfolk and the McCloud Hotel in York built in 1918 (YK11-510). The McCloud Hotel was listed in a 1922 guidebook of Nebraska highways as being a stopping place on the Meridian Highway. Although not an amenity offered by the McCloud Hotel in York, an adjacent garage operated as
a Ford automobile dealership, which probably offered convenient automobile storage and repair services for traveling hotel guests. The Evans Hotel (PT01-131) was listed as an “official” location in a 1913 promotional map published by the Meridian Road Association and advertised itself in issues of the *Automobile Blue Book*, the guide for motorists: “On the Lincoln and Meridian Highways.” It relates to a period of significance for highway commerce as a contributing building in the Columbus historic district.

Cabin camps will qualify for listing on the National Register under Criterion A for providing lodging along the highway. Their location and operation were almost exclusively to serve the motoring public along the highway. Under Criterion B, this property type may include an individual’s importance as one that advanced or innovated a type of roadside business or highway-related commerce. Cabin camps may also qualify for the National Register under Criterion C as examples of their type, form and function or as representative examples of a distinctive architectural style associated with an important type of lodging associated with the highway. Properties will embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. Cabin camps are an increasingly rare resource along Nebraska’s highways and these complexes should be evaluated as such. For the most part and due to their rarity, cabin camps should retain some examples of cabins and/or representative building(s) associated with the cabin camp. Statewide significance would accrue to cabin camps.

Moved properties must retain an orientation, setting and general environs similar to the original and should maintain a location, connection and physical association with the highway. A number of cabin camps were once located on U.S. 81, such as Riverside cabin camp and the Meridian Tourists Cabin Camp, both located on the outskirts of Norfolk, and the Barney Google cabin camp at the entrance to Chester. Extant cabins have been found that were once associated with the former cabin camps in Norfolk and Chester. These cabins have been moved far from the highway. Due to their current location, these moved cabins are not eligible for the National Register.

Only one representative building of a cabin camp is extant on U.S. 81. Ern J. Howland’s cabin camp was built in Osceola in 1926 and was located along a streambed. When first built, it included a building for showers and electric stoves. Howland’s cabin camp was probably originally built as a campground that later included cabins. Only the owner’s house is extant, including fanciful stone and concrete planters that illustrate the attractive grounds and artistry of this owner, who was also a builder of concrete bridges. Due to the rarity of extant examples, statewide significance could apply. Alterations to individual buildings or to a complex may be acceptable as some cabin camps adopted the newer form of the motel by connecting the cabins. These should be evaluated for their significance in representing the evolution of the cabin camp to the motel type.

Motels will qualify for listing on the National Register under Criterion A for providing lodging along the highway. Under Criterion B, this property type may include an individual’s importance in the promotion or development of the highway or one that advanced or innovated a type of roadside business or highway-related commerce. Motels may also qualify under Criterion C as examples of their type, form and function or as representative examples of a distinctive architectural style associated with this prominent type. Properties will embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. Motels of the 1950s-1960s should retain the main buildings of the complex and should display few alterations. Motel types are commonly found on U.S. 81; therefore these resources should retain a higher degree of integrity to be considered eligible for listing in the National Register. For example, a complex that originally displayed a flat roof that has been changed to a gable form would not retain the physical integrity necessary to be eligible for the National Register unless the change was made within the period of significance. Motel facilities may be vacant or may have a secondary use, but they remain eligible for the National Register if they retain sufficient physical features to identify their original use. Due to their commonality, local significance would be applied.

Excellent examples of extant motels are found in York, Hebron and Columbus. One of the finest examples was identified in a survey of Madison County along Norfolk’s commercial strip. The Bree’s Motel (MD06-408, now no longer extant) consisted of the owner’s residence/office, a row of motel rooms and prominent neon sign. The owner’s residence and office has been removed to a residential district. Facilities that are less than 50 years old need to meet National Register Criterion Consideration G and will display excellent integrity.
Moved properties must retain an orientation, setting and general environs similar to the original and should maintain a location, connection and physical association with the highway.

**Roadhouses and Rural Crossroads Stores**

**Description**
The name “roadhouse” often conveys a disreputable meaning. Located in rural areas, the roadhouse offered liquor and food and began to appear in the 1920s and 1930s. Rural crossroads stores provided goods and services primarily for local farmers. Rural crossroads stores, often pre-dating the Meridian Highway, offered groceries or other supplies for the traveling motorist. Some included curbside pumps for gasoline sales. Roadhouses and rural crossroads stores were built to accommodate local trade. Both types were constructed as modest vernacular buildings.

**Significance**
Significance may be evaluated under Criterion A for association with these types of business establishments, which provided goods and services to travelers on the highway. Under Criterion B these may include the type of property that best represents an individual’s importance in the promotion or development of the highway or a business person that advanced highway-related commerce. Criterion C would not be applied since their type, form and function was primarily to serve purposes other than the motorist. The period of significance for rural crossroads stores will sometimes predate the Meridian Highway. The roadhouse will date to the 1920s and 1930s.

No examples of rural crossroads stores or roadhouses are extant on the highway although several once were located on the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81. One fine example of a roadhouse was once located near Enola, called the “Rabbit Hutch,” known for its prepared rabbit and chicken dinners. Another example is a roadhouse or crossroads business known as the “Ten-Mile Inn,” once located south of Columbus.

**Restaurants, Food Stands, Diners and Drive-ins**

**Description**
Dining options were a necessity for the long distance traveler and represent changing or evolving marketing trends.

The earliest motorists often carried their own supplies of food, served and prepared at campgrounds and tourist parks. Before the 1920s, the automobile tourist had dining options at small, local restaurants. These operations opened in typical commercial buildings located within business districts through which the Meridian Highway passed.

During the 1920s and 1930s an assortment of entrepreneurs began serving travelers along highways. The food stand or lunch counter began as a modest spot for highway travelers to pause, most often operated in conjunction with a private tourist campground or cabin camp. Local roadside stands were small and modest buildings. Food, supplies and refreshments were served.

Open-air markets were also set up to sell locally grown produce. The communities of Madison and Norfolk, for example, were known for their superior watermelons, sold at roadside stands. A particularly interesting example of the period was once located near Enola that sold watermelons grown by horticulturalist Anton DeGroot in the 1930s. The DeGroots later moved to a new location on the modern route of U.S. 81 in about the 1950s where its offerings were supplemented by a large apple orchard.

Restaurants were located in commercial districts as small, local operations. They consisted of small and often prefabricated models sold by national manufacturers. Diners date to the 1930s and served local or regional patrons as well as truckers and travelers.

Restaurants were located on the newer routes of U.S. 81 during the post-World War II years through the 1960s. The drive-in was an important milestone in the evolution of the earlier restaurant and diner. Restaurants and drive-ins served local and regional patrons, as well as travelers on U.S. 81 and were primarily located on the commercial strip of the larger...
cities (See Automobile Rows and Commercial Strips, above). The drive-in often consisted of a building with ample parking for cars. Drive-ins featured curb service dining, where customers pulled up to the curb. Food was brought to the car by an attendant, commonly called a “car hop.” A large and creative sign was featured. Another distinctive feature of many was a canopy under which automobiles were parked so car hops were protected from the elements. Many included a curbside menu and call-in station where orders were placed. In larger towns, most were located on the new “commercial strip.” Drive-ins were both operated as family businesses or small regional chains. The chain operation followed distinctive and standardized designs and signage.

The most recent step in the evolution of the drive-in was the introduction of the modern fast-food restaurant in the 1950s, which reached Nebraska in the 1960s and 1970s. These nationally or regionally franchised fast-food companies emerged rapidly in the following decades. Modern fast-food restaurants typically followed a standard floor plan, exterior design and signage required of franchised chains, highly marketed by their name recognition. These standard designs allowed for easy recognition in any location across regions of the country. Most began to be located on the “commercial strip,” replacing the family business and smaller chains.

Significance
Restaurant facilities located within business district of the 1910s and 1920s may rarely qualify for listing on the National Register individually but could be contributing to a National Register district under Criterion A (see Commercial Districts above). Restaurants of this period could qualify if a strong association with highway travel can be determined. For example, a “Meridian Café” in Geneva took on the highway’s name and was listed in a 1922 guidebook of Nebraska highways as being a stopping place on the highway. Under Criterion B a business person that advanced and promoted the highway or highway-related commerce could be recognized. Criterion C would not apply since they were located in typical commercial buildings of the period and do not represent a particular type, form or function related to the highway or the traveler.

Diners date to the 1930s and served local or regional patrons, as well as truckers and travelers along U.S. 81. They were found in commercial districts or on the outskirts of the central business district. They may be eligible under Criterion A by association with highway travel on U.S. 81. Under Criterion B, this property type may include an individual’s importance in the promotion or development of the highway or one that advanced or innovated a type of roadside business or highway-related commerce. Criterion C would be met by their type, form and function or a distinctive architectural style of a roadside type. Properties will embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. Diners must possess their original form, although some had later additions. The diner is a rare type in Nebraska. Examples of this property type should be evaluated in the context of the relative rarity of these resources. Only one is known to have been located on U.S. 81 and was located on the outskirts of York (YK11-492, no longer extant). No lunch counters, roadside stands or diners of the period of the 1920s and 1930s are extant on the Meridian Highway.

Restaurants and drive-ins were established in the post-World War II era through the 1950s, 1960s through the present and served local and regional patrons as well as travelers along the Meridian Highway, mostly along the commercial strip. Restaurants and drive-ins may qualify for their association and location along U.S. 81 under Criterion A, serving local and regional patrons as well as the highway traveler. Under Criterion B, this property type may include an individual’s importance that advanced or innovated a type of roadside business or highway-related commerce. Both types may also qualify for the National Register under Criterion C as distinctive examples of type, form and function or as representative examples of a distinctive architectural style associated with a type of roadside business exclusive to serving the motorist. Properties will embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. Well-preserved restaurants and drive-in facilities may be individually eligible or contributing to a National Register district, the commercial strip. They must retain characteristic features from their period of significance in order to meet National Register criteria for listing. In the case of drive-ins, the removal of original canopies, a most distinctive feature of some drive-ins, would make the drive-in ineligible. The properties should also display few alterations outside the period of significance. Drive-ins may be vacant or have a secondary use, but they may remain eligible for the National Register if they retain sufficient physical integrity to identify their original use and convey their significance. Properties less than fifty years old would require application of Criterion exception G. One example of a drive-in is thought to have been built during a historic
period is found in Hebron (TY10-112). It served local patrons as well as the highway traveler and could accrue significance at the local level. Others ceased operation with the competition brought by the more modern fast food outlets. An example of a locally-owned drive-in was recently demolished; the “Y-Knot” in Columbus, which was located where U.S. 81 and U.S. 30 converged.

Franchised fast food outlets appeared nationally as early as the 1950s, but only entered Nebraska markets in the 1960s, 1970s through the present. No examples of fast food outlets have been recorded in surveys of U.S. 81 since all postdate an historic period of significance.

**Man-made Landscape Features**

*Description*

Man-made landscape features often characterize the roadside. These included scenic and other features that defined the road, giving feeling and association to sections of road.

One important man-made landscape feature found along some highways were trees and shrubs planted by the CCC to improve the scenic experience of roadways. They often were planted in popular varieties of the time, including locust trees, conifers and juniper shrubs.

Landscape features include hedgerows of Osage Orange found growing along sections of the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 with a hardiness zone south of the Platte River. Osage Orange trees were first planted by farmers to provide a natural fence for the containment of livestock; however they have now outgrown their original intent. Shelterbelts, built to control wind erosion, are often found along the section lines that characterized the Meridian Highway/U.S 81. Most shelterbelts were planted under New Deal programs, the “Prairie States Forestry Project” and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). They were planted in rows, featuring cottonwood, Siberian elm, Russian olive, cedar and other conifers.

*Significance*

No CCC beautification projects were located on the Meridian Highway, but shelterbelts and hedgerows are common. These shelterbelts and hedgerows contribute to the aspects of setting, feeling and association along certain sections of road that are being evaluated for the National Register of Historic Places. Both shelterbelts and hedgerows follow the section line roads that were most commonly used as the route of the highway and add to the landscape experience of the highway. They could be a contributing structure to an eligible section of roadway. Since hedgerows and shelterbelts were planted for purposes unrelated to the highway they would not be evaluated under National Register criteria as individually eligible as a highway related resource.

**Natural Landscape Features and Viewsheds**

*Description*

Natural landscape features of the highway characterize sections of the state through which the highway passed, such as hills, streambeds and rivers. The nature of these features often dictated where the early routes of the road were located and the types of construction applied to roads and structures built in response to local conditions.

“Viewsheds” give the road a characteristic of setting, feeling and association. They are broad visual landscapes, composed of terrain, patterns of fields and vistas descriptive of the landscapes and agricultural setting in which the highway passed.

*Significance*

Natural landscape features may be part of the narrative description of an historic road segment, giving context to eligible roads segments and their visual setting, feeling and association and may enhance the application of Criteria A and C. Under Criterion A, these features may give insight into how the routing of the early highway was determined. They may demonstrate construction methods applied to roads and structures built in response to local conditions under Criterion C. Properties will embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. They can be difficult to delineate in the boundaries of a National Register nomination. For example, the Benda Hill north of Shelby is a natural
feature that includes an abandoned, winding historic roadbed, part of an extensive natural divide from the uplands to the Platte River valley.

Viewsheets may be part the narrative description of the historic road by nature of setting, feeling and association although the boundaries are substantial and beyond the ability to delineate in a National Register nomination. For example, Benda Hill provides a viewsheet of more than five miles in all directions of the broad Platte River valley.

**Bridges and Culverts**

**Description**

Early routes Nebraska's highways included county-built or state-aid bridges at stream bed and river crossings predating the highway. These early and subsequent bridges were built in response to local conditions but the location of existing bridges accommodated the selection of the route. Simple stringer spans were built as late as the turn of the twentieth century. Existing bridges were of various types, either preferred by counties or that of county bridge contractors. State legislation in 1911 created the State-aid Bridge Fund to assist counties in the construction of bridges. By 1912 standard plans were developed by the state engineer for use by counties. State-aid bridges were truss bridges that were required to sustain a minimum twenty-ton load. The following year all counties using state-aid were required to adopt these standard plans. They included some 250 bridge configurations spanning twelve to thirty-two feet, with fourteen-, sixteen-, or eighteen-foot wide roadways. Steel girder bridges were thirty to forty feet in length with fourteen- or sixteen-foot roadways. Riveted and pin-connected pony trusses spanned thirty-five to one hundred feet. Riveted through truss trusses were from 90 to 160 feet; pin-connected through trusses included those from 90 to 300 feet. Most truss designs were available with either wood or concrete decks. Concrete structures gained popularity and in a 1912 report from Nebraska’s state engineer types included small arch culverts, box culverts, slab bridges, girder bridges and concrete arch structures.

The first Federal-Aid Road Act of 1916 saw funds for road improvement and by 1919 standard bridge plans for twenty ton capacity were widened to twenty feet. Transverse joist girder bridges were added to the state’s standard plans in the late 1910s and cantilevered stringer/girder bridges date from the late 1920s. However, the through truss and pony truss were still the choice for lesser waterways.

Pile design for substructures underwent a change in the 1930s with open steel pile bents replacing pilings of wood. Superstructures of the 1930s included cantilevered spans and stringer bridges. Rigid frame bridge forms were built beginning in the 1930s.

Most bridges on the Meridian Highway are small in scale, and are largely single-span truss structures. Some were replaced as a result of highway improvements. Yet the most noteworthy bridges are the Meridian Highway Bridge, crossing the Missouri River at the Nebraska-South Dakota border and the Columbus Loup River Bridge near Columbus where the Meridian Highway converged with the east-west U.S. 30. The York Subways were built as an underpass to a railroad in the 1930s and represent the advancement of highway construction meant to improve safety.

Deprivations of materiel caused by World War II saw little, if any, new bridge construction occurring on U.S. 81. However, when road construction accelerated beginning in the 1950s into the 1960s, new bridges followed such as modern concrete girder bridges. All bridges of this period have been replaced as modern improvements to the highway system advanced.

Modern and historic culverts are located on the historic alignment of the Meridian Highway. Older culverts, dating to the 1920s were built as standard types advocated by the state roads department. They are small structures built of concrete and included obelisk shaped markers rising on each side to mark the side of the road. Many culverts have been removed or replaced over the years; others have been damaged but others are fully intact. Another type, the concrete box culvert is a post-World War II development.
Significance
Since the early routes of the Meridian Highway were laid out to take into account existing bridges at stream beds and river crossings, bridges may predate the highway. Bridges are evaluated when along the documented route of the Meridian Highway during an historic period of the highway's development. Bridges of the historic period of the 1910s through the 1930s are rare and would be evaluated at statewide significance. Also, a bridge should be considered as a major component of the statewide highway system of the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 as a whole.

Three bridges mark major milestones in the statewide development of the Meridian Highway. In 1924, the completion of the Meridian Highway Bridge over the Missouri River at Yankton, South Dakota (CD00-256, National Register of Historic Places) marked the most significant event in the Meridian Highway in Nebraska. It accommodated the year-round crossing of this major waterway. Prior to the completion of this bridge, seasonal pontoon bridges and ferry service provided unreliable service for motorists. This bridge is also a significant as an engineering type, a Waddell vertical lift double-decked span built to serve both highway traffic and a proposed north-south railroad. The Columbus Loup River Bridge, built in 1932-1933, (PT00-068, National Register of Historic Places) carried both U.S. 81 and U.S. 30 at the intersection of the two major highways. It employed a rigid-connected Parker through truss. Finally, a third structure represents the significant advancement of highway construction meant to improve safety. The York Subways, built in 1938-1939 (YK11-051, National Register of Historic Places), are the only examples on U.S. 81 built as structures to improve highway safety, under-passing a railroad. Although Criterion C for statewide significance as engineering works was applied to these structures when listed in the National Register, other criterion should also be applied. These properties embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction.

Under Criterion A, bridges may be eligible for their association with transportation, travel patterns and development of the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81. Criterion B may also be applied to a bridge that best represents an individual's importance in the promotion of bridge improvements or construction of a particular bridge, the development or innovator of bridge construction, contributions to the pioneering or advancement of bridge engineering or construction, or a government official whose contributions to the development bridge construction can be specifically articulated as an example of his work on the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81. Bridges of the period from 1912 through the 1930s were mostly built by state and local governments using standard bridge plans. An association with a specific person may be lacking unless an association could be found, such as a bridge significant for its association with the work of an engineer who pioneered or advanced a type of bridge represented on the highway.

One example of a bridge along the Meridian Highway that is significant under Criterion B is a small but rare concrete bridge built by E.J. Howland (PK00-216). Howland was a local contractor who held the bridge contract for Polk County and who was a prolific builder of bridges. Howland's concrete bridge was built in 1914 on the earliest route of the Meridian Highway. He worked hand-in-hand with Ralph E. Dearborn, a county road overseer recognized statewide for the advancement of Polk County's system of roads, bridges and culverts. The Meridian Highway Bridge at Yankton, S.D. was entirely built by local subscription. An individual Nebraska "booster" of the Meridian Highway Bridge construction or an officer in the bridge's organization may be significantly associated with that construction. The Loup River Bridge may be significant for its association with the lobbying efforts of prominent local Columbus resident, Phil R. Hockenberger.

Individual bridges that possess a distinctive type, form or function or distinctive examples of engineering design or demonstrate a transition in bridge design may be eligible under Criterion C for engineering significance. Properties will embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction.

Moved bridges must retain an orientation, setting and general environs similar to the original and should maintain a location, connection and physical association with the Meridian Highway. No moved bridges are located on the highway.

Bridges may also be contributing structures to sections of road, such as in Pierce County (PC00-187, National Register of Historic Places) where two small-scale bridges are listed as contributing structures.
Culverts are small-scale resources that are common along many sections of the Meridian Highway. They are not individually eligible for the National Register. However, early culverts will contribute to an historic segment of the road. For example, fine examples of concrete culverts are found on the section of road in Pierce County (PC00-187, National Register of Historic Places). These culverts are a 1920s standard design and contribute to the significance of that section of Meridian Highway.

**Roadways**

**Description**
The early Meridian Highway was largely developed along existing section line roads and dictated where the earliest official route of the Meridian Road was designated, resulting in a zig-zag of section line roads. These section line roads predate the organization of the Meridian Road, having been first established by the system of land surveys established in Nebraska’s territorial period. Section line roads were designated to be of a uniform right-of-way of 66-feet. The earliest roads served farm-to-market transportation and Rural Free Delivery (RFD) mail service to rural areas. These early roads were earthen surfaced, maintained by local governments and improved by “good roads” advocates and boosters of the highway. In some cases, experimental segments were once built to demonstrate a new construction technique and particular contractors advertised as “scientific” road builders, adopting methods of advanced road construction. Unlike the Lincoln Highway, demonstration segments of concrete roads, “Seedling Miles,” were not built by the Meridian Highway Association.

The year 1916 marks the first federal-aid to states under the Federal-Aid Roads Act. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1921 provided states financial aid for the construction of seven percent of its highways and the mileage of the Meridian Highway was included in this designation. As improved roads became the focus of highway development, roads were subject to improvements including grading and gravel surfacing. Segments of the Meridian Highway/ U.S. 81 exhibit other types of improvements both rare or, more commonly, evolutionary as improvements in the road were made. These included the elimination of sharp corners with radius curves and the elimination of railroad grade crossings. Although brick was used in the construction of some highways in the 1920s, no sections of brick were ever built in rural sections of the Meridian Highway. Several brick sections, however, were built in towns by local governments to accommodate travel through towns (see also “Commercial Districts,” above). Very small scale sections of concrete were built in the 1920s as “low water crossings,” built to accommodate shallow areas where seasonal water flowed across the highway and where culverts for drainage could not be built.

Federal-aid and federal emergency funding to put people to work during the Great Depression of the 1930s saw advancement of road construction and significant improvements to the highway as a result. Programs such as the Civil Works Administration (CWA), Works Projects Administration (WPA), Public Works Administration (PWA), and Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) were sometimes directed to highway construction. Speed, efficiency and highway safety were among the goals of construction during this period. Roads were widened with the acquisition of additional right-of-way, railroad grade crossings were eliminated, guard rails installed and hard surfacing with gravel and concrete came into use.

In the 1930s, highway development included the bypassing of the smaller communities that were once linked by the highway. Crofton, Wausa, Pierce, Hadar, Humphrey, Platte Center, Strang, Bruning and Belvidere were eventually bypassed completely. The central business district was bypassed in other communities, including Shelby, Osceola, McCool Junction, Fairmont, and Hebron.

After a hiatus of construction of road construction and maintenance during the World War II years, improvements resumed on the highway through the 1950s and 1960s when the entire route was improved with paved surface. Construction continues through the present along sections that are developed as part of a four-lane expressway.

Three locations along the Meridian Highway/ U.S. 81 mark the intersection of regional or national roads. These are the intersection with the east-west D-L-D Highway located in Fairmont; the intersection of the southeast/northwest-bound
Potash Highway in Geneva; and the location where the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 converged with the Lincoln Highway/U.S. 30 in Columbus.

Significance
Road segments are linear resources and, obviously, the most exemplary property type of an historic highway. Road segments may also include bridges, culverts and other contributing property types. A segment of road that can still be driven gives a sense of time and place with travel on the highway. However, other sections of road may consist only of abandoned trails, long bypassed as new routes of the highway were identified. A completely abandoned section of road can meet National Register criteria. Road segments often represent more than one period of significance as the transition of highway development and improvements occurred. Road segments must retain enough characteristic features of the road from the historic period(s) of the highway and must convey their significance and integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and/or association. They would embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period(s) or methods of construction.

The first period of significance relative to road segments is defined as 1911 through 1916 with the formal establishment of the Meridian Highway and ends when federal and state governments began to replace the efforts of local governments, “good roads” advocates and highway boosters. The early road followed the existing roads and the uniform right-of-way of 66 feet can define the boundaries of an early road segment.

A second period of significance begins in 1916 with the precedent-setting Federal-Aid Road Act and ends in the 1930s, when road construction was now led by state and federal governments. This period represents the most significant advancement of road construction up until that time. As in cases where the road was realigned, the period of significance will end when existing roads were bypassed.

During World War II a hiatus of road construction and improvements occurred. A third period of significance dates from post-World War II continuing through the 1950s and 1960s. Roads were further realigned and the entire route was eventually paved in concrete or asphalt. As in cases where the road was realigned, the period of significance will end when existing roads were rerouted. All sections developed after the 1950s and the 1960s have since been improved by modern and standard construction, removal and replacement of pavement and the addition of paved shoulders. Construction continues through the present as part of a four-lane expressway. These road segments no longer retain sufficient physical integrity and do not meet Criterion Consideration G.

A road segment may be eligible under Criterion A for its association with transportation, travel patterns and road development on the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81. Locations where the Meridian Highway crossed regional or national roads may also be significant under Criterion A.

A road segment may be eligible under Criterion B for an association with a person if that road segment best represents an individual’s significance. This significance may be represented by a person’s pioneering or advancement of engineering or road construction. This person may be significant as a government official whose contributions to the development of the highway can be specifically articulated for an association with a segment of road. For example, Ralph E. Dearborn is one government official significantly associated with the development of the highway in Polk County. Dearborn was a county road overseer serving from 1911-1922 and was known statewide for the advancement of the county’s road system. An abandoned segment of road in Polk County represents his contributions to road construction. Another example is a segment of road that begins one mile south of Bruning and continues to Belvidere. This road segment was first improved with a demonstration of road-dragging by Thomas Lahners, a good roads booster and state legislator. Lahners was also the author of a road bill that established the “King split log drag” for use on Nebraska road improvement. The 4.5 mile segment of road (PC00-187, National Register of Historic Places), first laid out by banker Woods Cones of Pierce is yet another example. Cones was an automobile enthusiast, a prominent proponent of the road and was an officer of the Meridian Highway Association in Nebraska. A later example was Phil R. Hockenberger, Sr. of Columbus who worked extensively with State Engineer Roy Cochran in the 1930s to advocate a new alignment of the Meridian Highway through Columbus. Hockenberger also advocated for a new bridge on the Platte and the Loup River.
Bridge (PT00-068, National Register of Historic Places) and a viaduct over the Union Pacific tracks (now replaced by a modern viaduct). It is important to note, however, that road segments during the period of 1916 through 1930s were built by state and local governments. An association with a specific person, such as a road engineer, may be lacking unless this association can be found for a person who pioneered or advanced a type of road construction represented on the Meridian Highway/U.S.81.

Road segments may merit consideration under Criterion C as examples of a distinctive type, form or function of road construction or engineering. They would embody the distinctive characteristic of a type, period or method of construction. They may be eligible as property types representing early construction, a type of experimental road-building, or the advancement, evolution or transition as roads were improved. For example, an abandoned segment of road was built south of the earlier Loup River Bridge near Columbus with the aid of local boosters and farmers in 1914. This project used a pioneering sand-clay technique that was being advocated at the time. Alterations to road segments, such as paving, widening and removal of right angle corners with radius curves may contribute to the significance of the road if they were completed during an historic period(s).

An early alignment of the Meridian Highway may qualify for listing under Criterion D if it could yield information about early road engineering and construction methods. Significance can be applied to roadbeds that demonstrate significant advancement, construction techniques or experiment in which information is not found from other sources. If archival or historical references are lacking, archeological investigations may yield information of the very early period of road construction and the methods of construction used prior to the development of standard specifications. In this case, an appropriate research design would have to be developed. Examples of the original 1911 alignment are found on abandoned roads, having been vacated as newer and better routes were identified and where later improvements were not made. These locations offer the highest degree of integrity and the greatest potential for archeological study since they remain sufficiently intact to potentially yield important information regarding the construction of early roads. These early sections of the Meridian Road remain in rare cases. One example is the demonstration site of a sand-clay construction technique built south of the former Loup River Bridge at Columbus with the aid of local boosters and farmers.

A segment of road may also be urban in nature. An example is found in Fairmont (FM04-027) where brick streets were built c. 1920 to accommodate the traveler on the Meridian Highway and D-L-D Highway through town. Another is located in Madison (MD03-124), where the brick extends through town and follows the route to the city limits.

Segments of road may also include bridges and culverts. These structures will contribute to sections of road, such as in Pierce County (PC00-187, National Register of Historic Places) where two small-scale bridges, a number of culverts and two segments of low water crossings are listed as contributing structures.

Segments of roads should be considered as major components representative of the highway system of the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 as a whole and should be evaluated at the statewide level of significance.
Eligibility Recommendations
As a result of surveys of the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 numerous extant properties and several districts were identified for an association with the Meridian Highway/U.S.81. The following list is organized by county following the highway from north to south.

"Resource Name" are to be considered under the property types identified in this list. It should not be considered as a comprehensive list of all properties that may be associated with the Meridian Highway/U.S.81. Others may yet to be identified based on further intensive research and documentation. A property listed below may not necessarily fulfill National Register requirements in a final evaluation, but may be compared to others that are proposed for nomination.

"Location" is a verbal description of the property’s location. “NeHBS Site Number” is the survey number assigned to the Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey, maintained by the Nebraska State Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office. This survey delineates locations by mapping systems on local plat maps, USGS quadrangles, and county highway maps. Routes of the highway have also been mapped as linear resources and a site number for these routes have been given a single site number for each county.

“Potential National Register Criteria” identifies the most relevant thought to be applicable. Intensive research and documentation for this Multiple Property Documentation form has resulted in the application of those criteria thought to be or documented in considering the listing of a property in the National Register of Historic Places. Additional research conducted for a specific property should consider these criteria but further research may identify that not all criteria listed may be applicable. Conversely, additional research conducted for a specific property may identify one or more applicable criteria that have not been included in this list. Therefore, inclusion of a property may not necessarily apply all National Register criteria identified below.

Properties that have already been listed in the National Register of Historic are identified in this list. However, they may have been listed for associations other than the highway or did not identify criteria that may have been appropriately applied. Based on further research and documentation a subsequent association with the Meridian Highway/U.S.81 could be identified. Additional criteria may therefore be applied. All criteria thought to be applicable have been included in the list for these properties, not necessarily the criteria/criterion applied when these nominations were accepted in the National Register of Historic Places.

Integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and/or association has been applied to all resources listed.
**Partial list of Surveyed Properties Potentially Eligible for NRHP listing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Potential National Register Criteria</th>
<th>NeHBS Site Number</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cedar County</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Meridian Highway Bridge</td>
<td>Missouri River at Yankton, S.D.</td>
<td>Criterion A, B, C (listed, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
<td>CD00-256</td>
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<tr>
<td>Truck stop</td>
<td>South Yankton</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>CD00-</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Knox County</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Argo Hotel/New Meridian Hotel</td>
<td>211 Kansas Street, Crofton</td>
<td>Criterion A (listed, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
<td>KX05-015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pratt pony truss bridge</td>
<td>12 ½ miles north of Wausa, on Highway 121</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>KX00-341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automobile dealership</td>
<td>NS Broadway between Lincoln and Sherman, Wausa</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>KX16-40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Automobile dealership</td>
<td>NEC Hampton and Broadway, Wausa</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>KX16-29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standard Oil service station</td>
<td>West on Broadway, Wausa</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>KX16-</td>
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<td><strong>Pierce County</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Truss bridge</td>
<td>Immediately south of the intersection of Highways 121 and U.S. 20</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PC00-075</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gilman Park</td>
<td>Near Main and Mill Streets, Pierce</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PC05-051</td>
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<tr>
<td>Automobile row</td>
<td>Intersection of Main and Mill Street, Pierce</td>
<td>Criterion A, B, C</td>
<td>PC05-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist Filling Station and Artificial Ice House</td>
<td>122 Mill Street, (automobile row), Pierce</td>
<td>Criterion A, B, C</td>
<td>PC05-047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teapot Dome</td>
<td>Northeast corner of Main and Mill Streets, (automobile row), Pierce</td>
<td>Criterion A, B, C</td>
<td>PC05-059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midway Service Station</td>
<td>Main and Mill Streets, (automobile row), Pierce</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PC05-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woods Cones house</td>
<td>East Main Street, east of Mill Street, Pierce</td>
<td>Criterion B</td>
<td>PC05-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meridian Highway, 4.5 mile section</td>
<td>Rural Pierce County</td>
<td>Criterion A, B, C (listed with multiple contributing properties, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
<td>PC00-187</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Madison County</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Square Turn Tractor Factory, (former Norfolk Horse and Mule Barn)</td>
<td>Benjamin Avenue and Square Turn Boulevard, Norfolk</td>
<td>Criterion A</td>
<td>MD06-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoubek Oil Company</td>
<td>Elm Avenue and Queen City Boulevard, Norfolk</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>MD06-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical Works</td>
<td>Prospect Avenue and North 7th, Norfolk</td>
<td>Criterion A</td>
<td>MD06-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.F. Machine Works</td>
<td>Prospect Avenue and North 7th, Norfolk</td>
<td>Criterion A</td>
<td>MD06-220</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hotel Norfolk</td>
<td>Fourth Street and Norfolk Avenue, Norfolk</td>
<td>Criterion A (listed, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
<td>MD06-143</td>
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### National Register of Historic Places

#### Continuation Sheet

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<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
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<tbody>
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#### Historic and Architectural Resources of the Meridian Highway in Nebraska

##### Name of Multiple Property Listing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Listing</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Automobile Row</td>
<td>Norfolk Avenue between 7th Street and 8th Street, Norfolk</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD06-multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McFayden Ford dealership</td>
<td>707 Norfolk Avenue (automobile row), Norfolk</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD06-008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herb King Garage</td>
<td>713 Norfolk Avenue (automobile row), Norfolk</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD06-513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duda-Meyers (Sidles) building</td>
<td>702-04 Norfolk Avenue (automobile row), Norfolk</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD06-511</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial building</td>
<td>714 Norfolk Avenue (automobile row), Norfolk</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>MD06-418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporn building</td>
<td>NE corner Norfolk Avenue and 8th Street (automobile row), Norfolk</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD06-142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hudson Oil Company filling station</td>
<td>NW corner Norfolk Avenue and 8th Street (automobile row), Norfolk</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD06-512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ta-Ha-Zouka Park</td>
<td>One mile south of Norfolk</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD00-123</td>
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<tr>
<td>DeGroot apple stand</td>
<td>South of Norfolk</td>
<td>A, B</td>
<td>MD00-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radius curve and culverts</td>
<td>Seven miles north, one west of Norfolk</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD00-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radius curve and guard rails</td>
<td>North of Madison</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD00-149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radius curves</td>
<td>North of Madison, following south of MD00-149 along stream bed</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD00-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brick segment</td>
<td>North Nebraska Avenue, Madison</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD03-124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaFleur building/Schmitt automobile agency</td>
<td>SW corner 2nd and Nebraska, Madison</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD03-012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Filling station</td>
<td>SE corner 2nd and Nebraska, Madison</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD03-072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Star Dealership</td>
<td>Northwest corner of 3rd and Nebraska, Madison</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD03-123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automobile agency</td>
<td>3rd Street, north side, Madison</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD03-127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service station</td>
<td>SW corner 3rd and Lincoln, Madison</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD03-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Automobile garage</td>
<td>NE corner Madison and 3rd, Madison</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD03-037</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brick segment</td>
<td>Approach to former bridge, Madison</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD03-032</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. F.A. Long House</td>
<td>400 block, Main Street, Madison</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>MD03-125</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voecks/Mimick dealership</td>
<td>Northeast corner of 5th and Main, Madison</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD03-086</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abandoned concrete segment</td>
<td>North of Madison</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>MD00-</td>
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**Platte County**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Listing</th>
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<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Klub 81</td>
<td>Intersection of U.S. 81 and Highway 91, near Humphrey</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>PT00-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midway Motel</td>
<td>Intersection of U.S. 81 and Highway 91, near Humphrey</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>PT00-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humphrey Commercial District</td>
<td>Main Street, Humphrey</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>PT05-multiple</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standard Oil service station</td>
<td>NE corner Main Street and Elm, (Humphrey Commercial District)</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>PT05-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garage</td>
<td>East Main Street (Humphrey Commercial District)</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>PT05-049</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service station</td>
<td>Southeast corner of Elm and South 3rd Street, Humphrey</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PT05-079</td>
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<td>Garage</td>
<td>West side of D Street between 3rd and 4th Streets, Platte Center</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PT09-037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garage</td>
<td>West side D Street between 3rd and 4th Street, Platte Center</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PT09-032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virg’s Garage</td>
<td>155 A Street, Platte Center</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PT09-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ara Vista Motel</td>
<td>Howard Boulevard, Columbus</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PT01-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus Commercial Historic District</td>
<td>Columbus, on route of the Meridian Highway and Lincoln Highway</td>
<td>Criterion A, C (listed, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
<td>PT01-multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gottberg automobile dealership</td>
<td>(Columbus Commercial Historic District), Columbus</td>
<td>Criterion A, B, C (listed as a contributing property, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
<td>PT01-003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lincoln Highway garage</td>
<td>(Columbus Commercial Historic District), Columbus</td>
<td>Criterion A, C (listed as a contributing property, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
<td>PT01-122</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grey Taxi Cab Co. and garage</td>
<td>(Columbus Commercial Historic District), Columbus</td>
<td>Criterion A, C (listed as a contributing property, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
<td>PT01-444</td>
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<tr>
<td>O’Callaghan Auto Repair Station</td>
<td>(Columbus Commercial Historic District), Columbus</td>
<td>Criterion A, C (listed as a contributing property, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
<td>PT01-483</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goodrich Silverstone Store</td>
<td>(Columbus Commercial Historic District), Columbus</td>
<td>Criterion A, C (listed as a contributing property, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
<td>PT01-095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nickolite Garage</td>
<td>(Columbus Commercial Historic District), Columbus</td>
<td>Criterion A, C (listed as a contributing property, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
<td>PT01-446</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maier &amp; Son Blacksmith</td>
<td>(Columbus Commercial Historic District), Columbus</td>
<td>Criterion A, C (listed as a contributing property, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
<td>PT01-482</td>
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<td>Garage</td>
<td>(Columbus Commercial Historic District), Columbus</td>
<td>Criterion A, C (listed as a contributing property, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weil Packard &amp; Studebaker Co.</td>
<td>(Columbus Commercial Historic District), Columbus</td>
<td>Criterion A, C (listed as a contributing property, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
<td>PT01-448</td>
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<tr>
<td>Columbus Fuel &amp; Storage/motor freight house</td>
<td>(Columbus Commercial Historic District), Columbus</td>
<td>Criterion A, C (listed as a contributing property, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
<td>PT01-88</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evans Hotel</td>
<td>(Columbus Commercial Historic District), Columbus</td>
<td>Criterion A, C (listed as a contributing property, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
<td>PT01-131</td>
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<tr>
<td>Columbus Auto Co. / Automobile Blue Book garage</td>
<td>2819 Thirteenth Street, Columbus</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PT01-524</td>
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<tr>
<td>Automobile agency</td>
<td>2813 Thirteenth Street, Columbus</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PT01-523</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gembol’s Motel</td>
<td>U.S. 81 and U.S. 30 at viaduct, Columbus (also on route of U.S. 30)</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PT01-</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### National Register of Historic Places

**Continuation Sheet**

**Historic and Architectural Resources of the Meridian Highway in Nebraska**

**Name of Multiple Property Listing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Name of Property Listing</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Criterion(s)</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Service station</td>
<td>East side of Highway 81 between 7th and 8th Streets, Columbus (also on route of U.S. 30)</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PT01-539</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
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<td>Motel</td>
<td>East side of Highway 81 across from Pawnee Park, Columbus (also on route of U.S. 30)</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PT01-</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pawnee Park</td>
<td>South Columbus at Loup River Bridge</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PT01-</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Loup River Bridge</td>
<td>U.S. 81/U.S. 30, south of Columbus (also on route of U.S. 30)</td>
<td>Criterion A, B, C (listed, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
<td>PT00-068</td>
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<td>F</td>
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<td>Former Loup River Bridge piers</td>
<td>At former intersection of U.S. 81/U.S. 30, south of Columbus, upstream of PT00-068 (also on former route of the Lincoln Highway)</td>
<td>Criterion A</td>
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<td>F</td>
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<td>Abandoned roadbed</td>
<td>South-southeast of the former Loup River Bridge to Platte River bridge</td>
<td>Criterion A, B, C, D</td>
<td>PT00-270, 271</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Former Platte River Bridge pilings</td>
<td>Immediately downstream of current bridge, terminating a non-contiguous section of abandoned roadbed (PK00-270, 271 above)</td>
<td>Criterion A</td>
<td>PT00-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Polk County</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Howland Bridge</td>
<td>Rural Polk County on abandoned roadbed</td>
<td>Criterion A, B, C</td>
<td>PK00-216</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Abandoned roadbed</td>
<td>Traveling southwest of PK00-216 (above)</td>
<td>Criterion A, B, C, D</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Howland Bridge</td>
<td>12 miles north of Shelby</td>
<td>Criterion A, B, C</td>
<td>PK00-</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Radius curve</td>
<td>10 miles north, 1 east, 2 north of Shelby</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PK00-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Bridge</td>
<td>10 miles north, 1 east, 1 north, ½ east of Shelby on South Channel of Platte River</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PK00-</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Benda Hill</td>
<td>5 ½ miles north of Shelby; includes abandoned road to west of current county road</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PK00-</td>
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<td>Automobile agency</td>
<td>Shelby</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PK03-25</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Section of roadway and culvert</td>
<td>½ mile north of Osceola following alignment of railroad</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PK01-</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Abandoned section of road and culvert</td>
<td>Approaching Osceola north of cemetery</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PK01-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Howland cabin camp</td>
<td>Near Kimmel and Nebraska Streets, Osceola</td>
<td>Criterion A, B</td>
<td>PK00-</td>
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<td>Automobile dealership</td>
<td>East side State between Hawkeye and Hoosier, Osceola</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PK01-089</td>
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<td>Automobile dealership</td>
<td>NWC Main &amp; Nebraska, Osceola</td>
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<td>PK01-090</td>
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<td>NEC Main &amp; Nebraska, Osceola</td>
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<td>Co-op garage</td>
<td>SEC 5th &amp; Main, Stromsburg</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>PK04-176</td>
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<td>Stromburg Motors</td>
<td>SEC 3rd and Main Streets, Stromsburg</td>
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<td>PK04-175</td>
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<td>North side 3rd between Commercial &amp; Exchange Streets, Stromsburg</td>
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<td>PK04-063</td>
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<td>Garage (former livery)</td>
<td>North side 3rd between Commercial &amp; Exchange Streets, Stromsburg</td>
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<td>&quot;Y&quot; Motel</td>
<td>North Highway 81, York</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>YK11-550</td>
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<td>Buzz's Motel</td>
<td>North Highway 81, York</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>YK11-551</td>
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<td>Staers Motel</td>
<td>North Highway 81, York</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>YK11-</td>
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<td>W.H. Bovey machine shop</td>
<td>Directly north of York Subways, York</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>YK10-254</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Name of Multiple Property Listing</td>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Criterion</td>
<td>Property ID</td>
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<td>York</td>
<td>York Subways</td>
<td>York</td>
<td>Criterion A, C (listed, National Register of Historic Places)</td>
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<td>Automobile Row</td>
<td>North Lincoln Avenue, York</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>YK11-multiple</td>
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<td>Garage</td>
<td>North side 9th near Lincoln Avenue, (automobile row), York</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>YK11-549</td>
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<td>Rystrom automobile dealership</td>
<td>NWC Lincoln Avenue &amp; 9th, (automobile row), York</td>
<td>Criterion A, B, C</td>
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<td>Automobile dealership</td>
<td>East side Lincoln Ave. between 8th &amp; 9th, (automobile row), York</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>YK11-546</td>
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<td>McCloud Hotel</td>
<td>York</td>
<td>Criterion A</td>
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<td>Service station</td>
<td>NWC Lincoln Ave. &amp; Nobles, York</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>YK11-545</td>
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<td>Burnham Motors automobile dealership</td>
<td>SEC Lincoln Ave. &amp; Nobles, York</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>YK11-552</td>
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<td>Pratt pony truss bridge</td>
<td>T9N-R2W-7, rural York County</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>YK00-253</td>
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<td>Filling station</td>
<td>420 East O Street, McCool Junction</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>YK07-039</td>
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<td>Service station</td>
<td>SWC M &amp; former Highway 81, McCool Junction</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>YK07-040</td>
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<td>Automobile agency</td>
<td>NWC M &amp; 4th Street, McCool Junction</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>YK07-041</td>
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<td>Fillmore County</td>
<td>Intersection of O-L-D/D-L-D and Meridian Highways</td>
<td>North of Fairmont</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>FM00-84, 83</td>
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<td>Concrete bridge</td>
<td>T8N-R2W-19/20, one mile north of Fairmont</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>FM00-081</td>
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<td>Service station</td>
<td>South side D Street between 6th &amp; 7th, Fairmont</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>FM04-022</td>
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<td>Service station</td>
<td>SEC 6th &amp; D, Fairmont</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>FM04-023</td>
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<td>Sign</td>
<td>South side D, west of 1st Ave., Fairmont</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>FM04-026</td>
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<td>Belair Motel</td>
<td>South side between 1st &amp; 2nd, Fairmont</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>FM04-025</td>
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<td>Automobile agency</td>
<td>East side 6th between D &amp; E, Fairmont</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>FM04-024</td>
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<td>Brick street</td>
<td>Fairmont</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
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<td>Automobile Row</td>
<td>Geneva (also on route of Potash Highway)</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>FM05-multiple</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Warner’s Filling Station</td>
<td>Southwest corner of 8th and G (automobile row), Geneva (also on route of Potash Highway)</td>
<td>Criterion A, C (National Register of Historic Places)</td>
<td>FM05-060</td>
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<td>Shaner Motors</td>
<td>Southeast corner of 13th &amp; H Streets, Geneva</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>FM05-129</td>
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<td>Goldenrod Motel</td>
<td>West side 13th between E &amp; F, Geneva</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>FM05-127</td>
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<td>Former Amoco service station</td>
<td>West side 13th between E &amp; F, Geneva</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>FM05-128</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thayer County</td>
<td>Oregon Trail/Meridian Road marker</td>
<td>Hebron vicinity</td>
<td>Criterion A, B, C</td>
<td>TY00-258</td>
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<td>Automobile dealership</td>
<td>North side Lincoln between 3rd &amp; 4th, Hebron</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>TY10-110</td>
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<td>Garage</td>
<td>South Lincoln Avenue between 1st &amp; 2nd, Hebron</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
<td>TY10-109</td>
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<td>“81 Automotive” sign</td>
<td>Hebron</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
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<td>Burnett auto dealership</td>
<td>NWC of Lincoln Avenue and 2nd Street, Hebron</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
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<td>Drive-in</td>
<td>West side Lincoln Avenue &amp; 13th Street, Hebron</td>
<td>Criterion A, C</td>
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<td>Wayfarer Motel</td>
<td>NEC Lincoln Avenue &amp; 13th Street, Hebron</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>TY10-111</td>
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<tr>
<td>H. Ells Oil Co. truck stop</td>
<td>West side of old alignment of U.S. 81, Hebron</td>
<td>A, B, C</td>
<td>TY10-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bruning Motor Service</td>
<td>Main Street, Bruning</td>
<td>A, C</td>
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<td>Segment of road</td>
<td>Beginning 1 mile south of Bruning to Belvidere</td>
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<td>Filling station</td>
<td>400 C Street, Belvidere</td>
<td>A, C</td>
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<td>Hill Oil Terminal</td>
<td>Northwest corner of Thompson and Highway 8, north of Chester</td>
<td>A, B, C</td>
<td>TY00-257</td>
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<td>Concrete segment</td>
<td>Northwest corner of Thompson and Highway 8 at TY00-257, north of Chester</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>TY00-258</td>
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<td>Chester Electric Building</td>
<td>East side of Thayer Street between Huron and Howard Streets, Chester</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>TY06-054</td>
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<td>Foote Oil Company truck stop</td>
<td>East side of old alignment of U.S. 81, Chester</td>
<td>A, B, C</td>
<td>TY00-259</td>
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<td>Culvert and road segment</td>
<td>South of Chester at Kansas and Nebraska state line</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>TY00-</td>
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G. Geographical Data

Resources of this Multiple Property Documentation form will be located in the geographical area that encompasses the historic alignment(s) of the Meridian Highway and U.S. Highway 81 in Nebraska. Resources will generally be located on or within ¼ mile of the historic route alignment.

The Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 travels through the following nine Nebraska counties. From north to south: Cedar, Knox, Pierce, Madison, Platte, Polk, York, Fillmore and Thayer.

The Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 historically traveled through the following communities. From north to south: Yankton S.D., at the Nebraska-South Dakota state line, Crofton, Wausa, Pierce, Hadar, Norfolk, Madison, Humphrey, Platte Center, Columbus, Shelby, Osceola, Stromsburg, York, McCool Junction, Fairmont, Geneva, Strang, Bruning, Belvidere, Hebron and Chester. The smallest community is Strang (2000 population, 32). Norfolk is the largest (2000 population, 23,516).
H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

This Multiple Property Documentation form, *Historic and Architectural Resources of the Meridian Highway in Nebraska*, covers the beginnings of organized road development in the nineteenth century and the development of the Meridian Highway beginning in 1911 with the organizational beginnings of the highway through its period as U.81 and through 1960. This document is based upon several survey projects completed for the Nebraska State Historical Society.

In 1991 a statewide historic bridge inventory and statewide historic context for bridges was completed to identify and evaluate the eligibility of pre-1947 bridges in Nebraska for engineering significance. Information and eligibility decisions from the survey, historic context, *Nebraska Historic Bridge Inventory Management Plan*, and the resulting Multiple Property Documentation form (entered, National Register of Historic Places) provided the basis for the evaluation of bridges along the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81.

An intensive survey of the Meridian Highway was conducted as a thematic component of fieldwork for the 2000-2001 Nebraska Historic Buildings Surveys of Madison and Pierce counties (see reports dated August 2001, Nebraska State Historical Society). As a result of this project, a National Register of Historic Places nomination resulted in the listing of a 4.5-mile section of the Meridian Highway in Pierce County.

In 2001-2002 a statewide historic highway survey was conducted in Nebraska, commissioned by the Nebraska State Historical Society and Nebraska Department of Roads. (See, *Nebraska Historic Highway Survey* report, August 2002). The reconnaissance-level field survey identified and evaluated historic road features and road-related properties for five highways and a context study for Interstate 80. As a result, Multiple Property Documentation forms (subsequently returned by National Register of Historic Places) were prepared for the following highways: Lincoln Highway, Meridian Highway, Omaha-Lincoln-Denver/Detroit-Lincoln-Denver Highway, Potash Highway, and U.S. Highway 20. Survey methodology was based on *The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Identification and Evaluation* and the Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey manual.

In rural areas, one identified historic alignment of the Meridian Highway was the subject of this fieldwork. In communities, multiple historic alignments were surveyed in an effort to identify road-related resources. In both rural and urban areas, the reconnaissance survey focused on road-related resources still extant that had a potential association with the highway. Surveyed properties were generally constructed before 1960 and were located within a ¼ mile of the right-of-way. Properties were selected for survey and documentation based on their identified or understood association with the highway based on their physical location. To develop the historic context for historic highway development in Nebraska, archival research was primarily conducted at the Nebraska State Historical Society and the Nebraska Department of Roads. Research included biennial reports, early highway maps, and project database logs identifying road improvements and realignments. Other source material included period highway guide books, promotional state travel maps, newspaper research and county and local histories.

Surveyed properties on the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 were documented with black-and-white photographs and the recordation of locational and descriptive information in the Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey database. Surveyed properties were mapped on county highway maps, town plats and USGS quadrangle maps.

Surveyed properties retained a minimal degree of integrity and continued to convey their association with the highway as highway-related resources. Alterations to a property completed prior to c. 1960 were evaluated as having the potential to contribute to the highway’s history. If the association of the property was not clearly identifiable but appeared to be associated with the highway the property was documented. Partial complexes or features were surveyed although other factors may have diminished the historic integrity of the period.
Another source provided information for the preparation of this document. The Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey, maintained by the Nebraska State Historical Society, has previously identified a number of highway-related properties now included in this Multiple Property Documentation form. This program began in 1974 and is a county-by-county survey effort that includes documentation of over 60,000 properties of architectural and historic buildings. Surveys for all of the counties through which the highway passed have been conducted and verified for previously-recorded buildings that might bear relationship to the highway.

An intensive survey has been conducted by L. Robert Puschendorf of the Nebraska State Historical Society. Over a period of several years, all routes of the highway have since been identified. These date to the original alignment of 1911 through the present. Research included materials located in all county historical societies along the route, local newspapers published in towns along the highway, local histories, historical photographs and oral interviews with people familiar with the early highway and businesses. Maps and guides published by the Meridian Highway Association and other publishers identified garages, eating places and hotels offering services for the traveler on the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81. As an example, local committeemen and businesses were identified in the 1913 promotional map of the Meridian Road where a traveler could be provided information on the routes, local conditions of the highway and service for the traveler. Access by property owners allowed early alignments and features now vacated to be identified. In many cases, properties no longer extant have been researched and provide a basis for comparison with extant resources along the highway. This survey of the Meridian Highway includes buildings already recorded in the Nebraska Historic Highway Survey and others documented in the Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey. The resulting research has allowed the application of Criteria A and C and in some cases Criteria B and D. Section F of this document was prepared as a result. Research is continuing and several manuscripts are in process.

Limitations and Biases of Surveys
The Nebraska Historic Highway Survey, conducted in 2001-2002 was limited in scope and scale to focus on the agencies’ objectives within the project budget and schedule. Because early alignments were chosen to capture the early history and evolution of the early twentieth century roadways, eligibility assessments focused only on selected routes. The field survey of each highway was limited in the number of alignments driven and resources documented, as described above. In rural areas, one alignment was primarily chosen for field survey. In urban areas, multiple alignments, often including the original alignment and later alignments were surveyed.

Many of the survey efforts focused on visual identification. A limitation of reconnaissance level survey is site-specific research, a challenge of identifying a full historical association of a property, an understanding its relationship to the highway, and criteria that can be associated with resources. Further research on individual properties may yield historic associations beyond the scope of this survey and additional site-specific research would be necessary to further evaluate the potential significance of these and other resources, focusing on individual resources and a property’s history, level of association, and significance to the highway. In some cases, properties may have appeared to be highway related but further research may conclude the property had uses unrelated to the highway. Others will need to be evaluated for an association with the highway. Historical documentation could confirm a further association with the highway.

Research focused on the overall history of the road and property types, but other sources have yet to be tapped or to surface. Additional properties remain to be identified and documented based on additional research. In most cases, an example associated with a significant person can only be identified through research efforts and evaluated under Criterion B.

The Puschendorf survey (ongoing) was more extensive, identifying all routes of the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81. Post 1930s alignments identified properties dating as late as c.1960 to the present. The resulting research has allowed the potential application of Criteria A and C and in some cases Criteria B and D. However, dates of many individual buildings or structures have yet to be researched thoroughly.
Eligibility recommendations need to be evaluated prior to the preparation of a National Register nomination in order to identify if a property is eligible. Dates of construction, defined period(s) of significance and all applicable criteria would be identified through additional research.

Properties already listing in the National Register of Historic Places, both individually or as contributing properties to a historic district may possess further association with the Meridian Highway under additional criteria. Therefore, several of these were not listed under all applicable criteria related to the highway. These should be reevaluated under this Multiple Property Documentation form.

Since no comprehensive surveys have been accomplished across the six states through which the Meridian Highway/U.S. 81 traversed, significance at a national level has not been applied since a comparative study cannot be made of resources. A national level of significance is, therefore, beyond the scope of this document.

**Conclusion**

The results of these surveys will be used by both the Nebraska State Historical Society and the Nebraska Department of Roads in future planning activities. Both agencies have roles in highway project planning and in compliance responsibilities under the National Historic Preservation Act. The Nebraska Department of Roads has participated in the project to facilitate project planning and development by proactively identifying and evaluating historic resources. As the Nebraska State Historical Society continues to administer its designated role in historic preservation in Nebraska it will gain a better understanding of the state’s historic highways and related resources.

Both agencies also have the desire to raise public awareness of the history of highway development in the state and the significance of road-related resources. The projects’ products, including this Multiple Property Documentation form will serve federal, state and local governments, planners, teachers, researchers, tourism organizations, preservation advocates and the general public to advance the knowledge and advocate the preservation of these historic resources.
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