

## Lori Parker – White Way

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

“Road trip!” That’s a phrase which makes me want to hit the highway. But think back to a time when our ancestors did not have traversable highways between their communities. Visionary leaders led the effort to create better roads, including one known at the time as the Kansas White Way. Now another set of visionary leaders is honoring that heritage today, with – what else? – a road trip. It’s today’s Kansas Profile.

Lori Parker is the person who told me about the Kansas White Way Car Run. Lori was born in Nevada. She met her husband Tom in New Mexico before relocating to Denver, where they lived for 26 years. In 2000, Lori and Tom decided to move to the area where her mother had grown up near Blue Rapids, Kansas. “The people who have welcomed us here have been incredible,” Lori said. Tom continues with his writing and photography career.

Lori is a history buff. She enjoys reading the historical accounts of yesteryear as printed in the local newspapers. One such account told of an effort to develop an improved east-west roadway. To publicize this need, local citizens in 1914 organized a car run. Drivers from Atchison on the east and Concordia on the west agreed to drive toward each other and meet in the town of Frankfort.

Lori was intrigued by this concept. “This is back in the day when they didn’t have good roads between the towns,” Lori said. “They had mud.” Visionary citizens saw the need for improved roads for their communities. They used the car run to promote a connecting highway which was formed and called the White Way.

Lori contacted people in Concordia and Atchison to learn more and discuss how to honor and preserve this history. An idea was hatched to conduct a modern-day car run along the route of the old Kansas White Way, which is now Kansas Highway 9. The run was conducted successfully in 2006.

Now another Kansas White Way car run is scheduled for May 10, 2014, which will mark one hundred years since the original organizational meeting to create the Kansas White Way. A century ago, some highways were designated with colors, such as the White Way, Blue Line, Red Line, and Golden Belt. Highway numbers didn’t come into use until 1926.

The Kansas White Way was a major route from northeast Kansas all the way across the state. In fact, the White Way extended from Chicago to Colorado. Everyone wanted the road to come through their towns. An old map shows the route from Atchison to Goodland, with a connecting leg to Kansas City.

Lori and Tom Parker did extensive research on the Kansas White Way, locating old-time pictures of White Way markers. At one time there were many businesses along the route with names like the White Way Café, White Way Barbershop, White Way Bakery, White Way Chevrolet, and more.

On May 10, 2014, citizens are invited to follow the route of the Kansas White Way just as their ancestors had done one hundred years ago. One group will go east from Concordia and the other will go west from Atchison, with many others joining along the way. The cars will meet in Frankfort and have a ceremony at 2 p.m. Everyone is invited

to participate. A \$15 registration is requested. Both modern and antique vehicles are welcome and expected.

Of course, this route traverses rural Kansas. It passes through towns such as Goff, population 177; Barnes, population 148; and Palmer, population 105 people. Now, that's rural.

"People are having a lot of fun with this," Lori Parker said. Many communities are offering food and places to stop. Some old-time gas stations will wash car windows for free.

For more information, go to [kswhiteway.wordpress.com](http://kswhiteway.wordpress.com).

Road Trip! It's a call to hit the highway, or in this case, the White Way. We commend Lori and Tom Parker and all those involved with the Kansas White Way Car Run for making a difference with this effort to honor and perpetuate our history. They are celebrating our communities and our heritage with this trip down the open road.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.