



# Message from the Secretary

Margaret Fisher



## **Taking the Road (if you can call it that) Waiting to be Travelled**

This past May, it was my great privilege to spend time with and introduce event Keynote Speaker, Mr. Lee (and Mrs. Jane Whiteley) researchers and authors of the book *“The Playground Trail” The National Park-to-Park Highway: To and Through the National Parks of the West in 1920.*

World War I was over and Americans were embracing automobile ownership and the desire to get out and see beauty. They responded to the national advertising campaign to “See America First” rather than go back to Europe to be reminded of 4+ years of unspeakable tragedy on a level no one could have comprehended in 1914.

While the sons and husbands were away, America had been preparing. Magazine advertising, guidebooks and maps, touring bureaus,

availability of fuel and lodging had all been established. Everything was ready but the roads. The book describes and illustrates in abundant detail the desperate condition of the trails, roads or smoothed over grassy tracks and poor signage the cars and tourists were expected to travel by.

It was a far cry from today's superior highway paving that when new feels like melted butter on velvet. We have little to complain about.



Automobile and Road Maintenance clubs were established and without any kind of Federal Funding, members took it upon themselves to firm up stretches of roads and maintain them.

Assistant Secretary of the Interior Stephen T. Mather came up with the idea of linking all 12 National Parks of the West with The National Parks Highway in 1917. The Park-to-Park Highway gained backing and the

National Park-to-Park Highway Association took off! A Dedication Tour was then undertaken by 17 vehicles covering 5,000 miles in 76 days, averaging about 65 miles per day. Sounds like a grand adventure, but the photos tell a story of real courage, fortitude and danger. They had only each other to rely on should they become inconvenienced along the way by mechanical issues or the ever-present problems with the roads or lack thereof.



Lee and Jane retraced this route on today's well maintained roads in a little over 4 weeks, stopping at the towns along the way to find newspaper clippings and photos of the tour's route as they passed through. It is all nicely conveyed and illustrated in their book, and has served as the foundation document for the Ken Burns PBS Documentary: *Paving the way: The National Park-to-Park Highway*.

Our club's membership spans approximately 1/5<sup>th</sup> of Wisconsin, primarily SE Wisconsin from Beloit to Rhinelander. Starting in February

2022, most members were contacted by phone as a reminder of dues renewal, but also to get their input on their club. Common responses were: Bring Back Technical Sessions, Love the car shows, Need more social/fun events, Want technical articles, etc. Very often, a member would suggest that all or most of the events happen within ½ hour of their own house. If that was possible, the club would only cover one town and would consist of 15 or fewer people.

So, the events are going to move around a little more this year to try to make it possible for more people to find something just a little closer to their own home to participate in. Regardless, most events will not take more than an hour to get to, and that's not expecting too much from your vintage car. During the phone campaign, often an early member would reminisce about trips taken across country, to large GOF events 5 states away, etc. Everyone survived and they did it together. We're looking forward to your participation and have you in mind when we are hard at work planning this year's club events.