

# FULTON TOURIST CAMP



**Photo circa 1925: Lincoln Highway Bridge is shown in the background. Park was located north of the Illinois approach to the bridge. Later this area becomes the Riverside Park.**

By Barbara Mask

The Lincoln Highway Association, founded in 1913 to provide for the first transcontinental highway in the United States, created a wonderful stretch of concrete across the State of Illinois from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River; Chicago to Fulton. Many tourists planned their trip to make a stop at the Fulton Tourist's Park; a shady grove on the banks where tents were pitched and showers were provided. A beach offered the weary traveler a unique adventure to swim in the 'Father of Waters,' the only one place on the entire Lincoln Highway providing such an experience. That opportunity served as an incentive for the transcontinental travelers to spend a night or two in Fulton.

Another major attraction was the steamboats with their lights aglow and compelling music from the calliopes that not only entertained the happy, carefree passengers aboard, but, also provided scenic pleasure to the visitors in the Tourist Park. The Lyons-Fulton High Bridge walkway provided an awesome position where out-of-town guests could watch the floating palaces.

The Fulton Tourist Park offered plenty of shade trees, artesian water, good stoves, modern toilets and showers and lots of room for children to play. Fishing was good and many guests pulled out their fishing tackle and learned that minnows were the favorite food for the crappies which were plentiful. On August 11, 1922, the popularity of the site influenced the City of Fulton to buy eight more lots for \$150 from the Aurora Brewing Company expanding the Park west and allowing more recreational access to the Mississippi River; the major attraction.



**Photo circa 1920's. Patent Novelty Complan is seen on the far right.**

The Fulton Tourist Park, however, was not exclusively used by travelers. On the Labor Day weekend in 1922, it was reported in the Fulton Journal that, “over 400 hundred people camped on Saturday night.” Some of them were residents from the local and surrounding areas who enjoyed the site and meeting travelers from other locations.

Fulton welcomed the tourists. According to an article written in 1924 by Dr. Hendricks, a local dentist, the Fulton Community Band gave open-air concerts every Wednesday evening and it was reported that an open invitation was extended to the guests at the Park that on “Tuesday noon at the Hotel Martin the Kiwanis Club has its meetings and the door is always open to visiting Kiwanians.”

The Lincoln Highway is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year—1913-2013. And this is another wonderful era in Fulton’s history. So much to learn about; so much to tell about the first transcontinental highway coming into our city.

#### **A KANSAS COLLEGE MAKES THE FULTON TOURIST PARK ITS TEMPORARY CAMPUS**

“On Saturday, the “College on Wheels” had for its campus, Fulton’s beautiful Tourist Park overlooking the Mississippi River. The students roamed at will around the park, up on the bridge and even ventured as far as Main Street where extras for the satisfaction of the inner man were purchased,” according to a report in the Fulton Journal on July 16, 1929.

This was not the first visit this unique institution had made to Fulton. For seven years Southwestern’s “College on Wheels” of Winfield, Kansas had included Fulton in its itinerary. The nine mammoth omnibuses carried summer term student through twenty-five states and into Canada. They visited places of historical and industrial interest and, in 1929, the focus was a three credit-hour biology course. There were 170 students, six instructors, a dean of women, an official nurse, a musical director, a secretary, a mechanic, transportation coordinators, a manager of the cafeteria and his chief chef.

While in Fulton, they slept in tents and the meals were served from a huge cafeteria bus equipped with a 16-burner stove. Students interviewed by the Fulton Journal were enthusiastic in their praise of the opportunities afforded in the “Omnibus College.” One of the most memorable for many was the viewing and swimming in the Mississippi River and staying in the Fulton Tourist Park.