

# WEST MICHIGAN PIKE

Since the advent of the automobile, there have been dozens of organizations created in this state to promote the establishment of various highways. The oldest of these entities is the West Michigan Pike Association.

This pioneer Association traces its roots back to 10 January 1912, when the West Michigan Lake Shore Highway Association was founded for the purpose of improving the road between Chicago and Mackinaw City. It was believed that a better motorway would encourage more tourists to visit the eastern coast of Lake Michigan, turning that region into the playground of the Middle West.

While the goals of the newly formed group were sound, its choice of a name proved to be too long and cumbersome. Consequently, on 30 May 1913 it reorganized as the West Michigan Pike Association and adopted the slogan, "Lake Shore All the Way."

Immediately the Association began issuing an annual guidebook to the resort and fruit-growing region of western Michigan. This publication, now a collector's item, provided a detailed map of the 400-mile route along with information about hotels, service stations, and general points of interest.

To make it easier for visitors to travel the Lake Shore route, the promoters decided in 1916 to erect concrete markers along every mile of its length. These posts, numbered consecutively from the southern border of Michigan, weighed 350 pounds, were eight feet tall (five of which was above ground), and had the words "West Michigan Pike" cast upon their face (a sample of this monument has been preserved at the corner of Fulton and Seventh streets in Grand Haven).

The guidebooks and the mile

posts greatly expedited travel along the West Michigan Pike, soon making it one of the most popular drives in the state. In part on account of this high vehicle use, in 1926 most of the road was incorporated into the federal highway system as route US-31.

When the coastal trunkline became a number rather than a name, the West Michigan Pike Association began to slowly disappear. The group had been formed to develop a road to the Lake shore region, and with that mission accomplished its purpose seemed fulfilled.

But by the late 1920s, traffic on US-31 had at times grown so heavy that motorists could travel no more than 20 miles per hour. The congestion had become so bad that tourists were vacationing elsewhere or avoiding the coastal highway enroute to their lakeside destinations.

To help solve this problem, the West Michigan Pike Association was reborn and reorganized in early 1929. This time the purpose of the group was not to push for the building of a shoreline road, but for its broadening, straightening, and relocation along a more scenic course.

The West Michigan Pike Association, always dependent upon donated funds and services, did not survive the Great Depression. But the cause for which it labored continues, as our Department of Transportation slowly develops US-31 as a freeway between Indiana and Mackinaw City.

Coordinates: E-N/7-10

