

# Book Review

*A 100 Year Road Trip*, 2008, published by the Chicago Map Society and the Newberry Library. University of Chicago Press. 160 pages plus appendices.

—Reviewed by Gerry Curtis

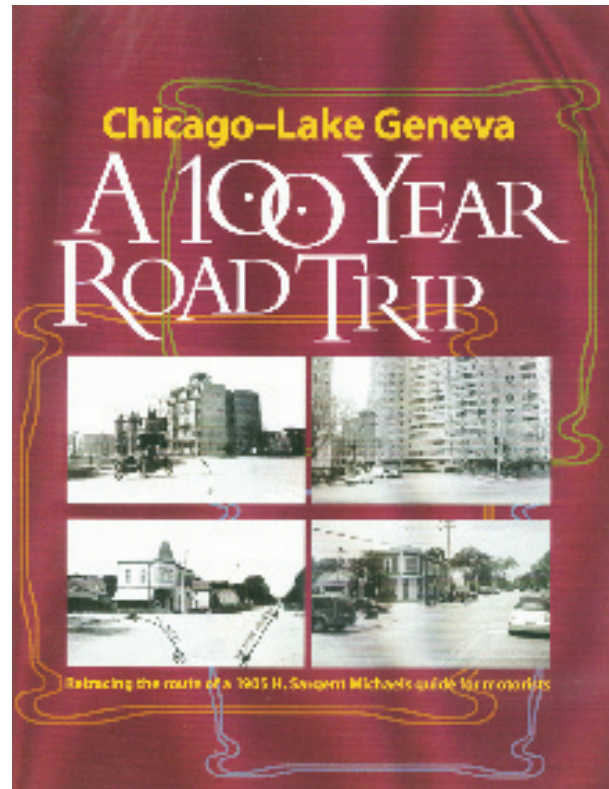
This book takes a 1905-published *Photographic Automobile* map—complete with advertisements for tires, “Motor Clothes,” “Carriage Work on Automobiles, lubricants, and “The Auto-Meter” (an early combination speedometer and odometer)—, reprints its contents, and retraces the route on contemporary roads with matching location photographs. If you’re nostalgic about the “good old days,” you need to read this!

The principal route narrated, pictured, and mapped in the original publication directs automobile adventurers (this was 1905!) along a route from downtown Chicago, specifically the 1905 location of the Stratford Hotel at the southwest corner of Michigan Avenue and Jackson Boulevard, to the already existing resort area of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. There are similar narrations, photographs, and maps for side trips from Lake Geneva to Williams Bay, Delavan Lake, Delavan, and Beloit. A somewhat different return-to-Chicago route is covered as well, for variety, I suppose.

Vintage photographs are of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century snapshot variety, somewhat fuzzy, but sharp enough to remind us of how far we have come in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from primarily dirt-and-gravel roads in mostly rural territory. Contemporary photos are also black-and-white, but as sharply reproduced as you would expect. To the extent possible, the current publishers have matched across-the-page location photographs to the original ones, or to a location or item indicative of the differences 100 years can make in a scenery and/or structures.

The original 1905 narrative directions are succinct: “...travel north upon Michigan Ave. to Rush St. bridge, cross to Ohio St. (Photo 2), run east one block to Lincoln Park Blvd...”, “....when you arrive in Richmond keep straight ahead through town....”, all this contained in one paragraph to describe the entire route. Designated turns are drawn on the vintage pictures in appropriate directions.

For the most part, each turn has a picture reference. A subsequent page is a chart listing picture numbers, their subjects, and the mileage between picture subjects follows on yet another subsequent page. Then there are two pages of “Towns Easily Reached By Following the Directions Given in this Book.”



After the narration, charts, and a list of towns come the pictures depicting scenes along the entire route: 1905 pictures on the left side of the page, contemporary pictures on the right.

The vintage pictures remind me of scenes in my grandmother’s photo collection of the Midwest I grew up in—lots of open country with dirt roads, very informal road intersections, and building styles typical of that period. The recent photos show paved roads, their surroundings in some cases looking somewhat like those in the period pictures, while in others there is little if any resemblance. Comparing in-town buildings between the pictures can feel like conducting building history forensics—some buildings have been altered beyond recognition, requiring a very keen appreciation of building technology and style.

The map pages contain stick-figure route lines, with picture locations numbered to match the picture numbers. The numbers progress usually from the bottom of the page to the top, and in some cases, continuous routes are broken into two or

three separate lines stacked one above the other.

Important landmarks are noted beside the picture locations and the directions of turns are written in text form (which is important if the road as mapped appears to turn right, but the traveler is supposed to turn left). North arrows are provided on every page, with North always being at the top of the sheet. The return route to downtown Chicago reads from top to bottom, so the maps always have the same orientation on the page.

Once the principal route has been traced from its start to Lake Geneva, the same format is followed for side trips and the return route.

The book contains ownership maps around Lake Geneva and Lake Delavan which are accompanied by lists of owners for each tract. Having driven for the estimated six-and-one-half hours to make the 84.1 mile trip, one would certainly want to find the cottage of the people who said "to just drop in any time"!

The 1905 reproduction ends with three advertisements, including one for Clement-Bayard Automobiles and one for the Stratford Hotel, the Chicago beginning point landmark. The 2008 edition of *A 100 Year Road Trip* picks up with route instructions and current map reproductions. The instructions given follow as closely as possible the 1905 route. Many right-angle turns and other poor travel situations have been largely eliminated on today's roads. Some old routes just aren't there any more, and many intersections have been completely relocated.

*A 100 Year Road Trip* is useful as a reference for both historians and geographers but, most of all, it is a fun book to be read by anyone who appreciates our transportation history and its progress, or just likes to vicariously relive the kind of adventures our grandparents and great-grandparents "enjoyed" on the roads of the past. ■