



Solomon Valley History

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A Brief History of....

The Red Line Route, Red Line Basketball Team and the Midland Trail, *the Shortest Motor Road from Coast to Coast*

(Not to be confused with the widely recognized Oregon Trail and Santa Fe Trail, the famous overland routes used during the 19th century.)

The Red Line "Division" Route and Midland Trail

Prior to and just after the turn of the 20th century, there were many known "minor" road routes leading across Kansas. One of these routes, located in the northern third of the state was established in 1913; it was named the *Red Line*.

The Red Line route, established by road enthusiasts in Plainville and Glasco, was a precursor to the forthcoming "major" transcontinental route to be named the *Midland Trail*. Prior to the Midland Trail being officially established, many small town boosters took it upon themselves to promote and sway the National *Midland Trail Road Association* in selecting a path across Kansas that would lead through their communities. They understood that the Trail would facilitate the attraction of the new wave of auto travelers to their businesses. Consequently, an uncommon asserted willingness and effort to improve the travel experience and accommodate travelers transpired.

The process of route designation occurred in 1914. Fortunately, the Red Line was selected to be part of the Midland Trail. Following the 1914 work to locate the roads to be designated as The Midland Trail, the National Midland Trail Road Association published the official ***Midland Trail Tour Guide 1916***, with explicit directions, mile by mile, both east and west, from Washington D. C. to San Francisco

Glasco's Red Line Basketball Team

At the turn of the 20th century it was not uncommon for rural communities to have their own established sports teams (baseball, basketball, etc.) made up of local players. In turn, these teams played other town teams within the region and sometimes state to state.

Glasco played a strategic role in drawing attention to the route chosen for the Midland Trail. It was in this spirit, and with the intentions of promoting the Trail's Red Line "division" across Kansas, that Glasco's Red Line basketball team was established.

As the Midland Trail's route was officially known in 1915, the Red Line basketball team endeavored to publicize it through Kansas, and hit the road, playing games from Kansas City to Denver.

Along the way, the team went to the effort of painting roadside telephone poles with 6-inch colored bands by day and playing basketball in the evening. These painted bands of designated colors signifying the routes were:

- **Midland Trail:** orange – black – orange
- **Red Line Division:** black – red – black

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Historically, painting poles was done by local road associations across the country, a process that took considerable time. The markings occurred at strategic points – sensible distances along straighter sections, turns, corners, bends – a means of keeping travelers on the correct path.

The scheduled *Red Line* team's game dates along the Midland Trail:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Miltonvale--January 6, 1915 | 13. Kansas City--January 21, 1915 |
| 2. Clay Center--January 7, 1915 | 14. Beloit--February 1, 1915 |
| 3. Leonardville--January 8, 1915 | 15. Glen Elder--February 2, 1915 |
| 4. Riley--January 9, 1915 | 16. Cawker City--February 3, 1915 |
| 5. Manhattan--January 11, 1915 | 17. Downs--February 4, 1915 |
| 6. Wamego--January 12, 1915 | 18. Osborne--February 5, 1915 |
| 7. St. Marys--January 13, 1915 | 19. Plainville--February 6, 1915 |
| 8. Rossville--January 14, 1915 | 20. Hoxie--February 8, 1915 |
| 9. Topeka--January 15 & 16, 1915 | 21. Colby--February 9, 1915 |
| 10. Lawrence--January 18, 1915 | 22. Goodland--February 10, 1915 |
| 11. Eudora--January 19, 1915 | 23. Burlington, CO--February 11, 1915 |
| 12. Desoto--January 20, 1915 | 24. Limon, CO--February 12, 1915 |
| | 25. Denver, CO--February 13, 1915 |

The Midland Trail, Today

By 1926 there were over 250 named highways; this was a traveler's nightmare of deciphering specific locations, distances, travel times and other touring logistics. Finally, in 1926, the *National Highway Association* replaced highway names with numbers... a merciful gesture and improvement for travelers. Soon thereafter, the memory and name of the Midland Trail eroded into history.

Today, the transcontinental Midland Trail auto route, which passes through the Solomon Valley, is largely forgotten. Likewise, most to all of those adventurers who were willing to tackle hundreds of miles of unpaved dirt roads, are gone.

Preparing for Midland Trail Recognition

In 2013, the *SV24 Alliance* proposed leading an effort to recognize the 100th year of the founding and designation of the Midland Trail and its transcontinental, Kansas path... connecting first with Kansas towns. Taking the recognition and event *national* is proposed as a second step.

Since then, the *SV24 Alliance* has attracted many Kansas friends who are supporting this discovery and celebration process.

An exhibit at the *2014 Sampler Festival* in Wamego was the first public event and recognition sponsored by the *SV24 Alliance* about this historic route. A second rendezvous is planned to take place at the *2015 Sampler Festival*, again in Wamego. This event will bring car and road enthusiasts together to complete the first phase of the Midland Trail 100 Year recognition. Wamego, also situated on the Midland Trail, is strategically located and promises to attract and inform hundreds if not thousands of people.

Celebrating the Centennial of the Midland Trail, *Red Line Division*

On October 4, 2014, Glasco sponsored the *Midland Trail Kickoff* event at the annual *Glasco Fun Day*. The theme was "**Celebrating the Centennial of the Red Line-Midland Trail.**" Events included a car show, Red Line Hoop Shoot, and an exploration of the Red Line Basketball Team's road supporting activities. The role of the Red Line Basketball Team will be highlighted in Glasco's hometown *team* exhibit, March 21 through May 3, 2015, "*A Triple Threat on the Diamond, Field, and Court.*"

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Researchers in Manhattan located news articles from 1916 to 1921 documenting the work of the original Midland Trail Boosters. The Riley County Historical Society is coordinating this work. This adds to the extensive work Sherry Brown, an Alliance board member, has done on the Plainville papers, tracing the history of the Midland Trail.

Other Discoveries from Along the Midland Trail

From Manhattan – articles from the *Manhattan Nationalist*, 1916-1921, reporting on Road Association meetings, the actual route of the M. T. through Manhattan, and a unique contest for drivers to identify the best maintained roads.

From St. Marys – the first issue of *Highway 24* magazine with a feature article, "Following the History of Highway 24," introducing the Midland Trail.

From Glasco – an old photograph which clearly shows a telephone pole with painted with M. T. color bands.

From Colby – a 16mm film, produced in 1957, Main Street of America.

To be continued... 😊