

Frank Thomas Sheets

October 5, 1890 - November 3, 1951



Frank Thomas Sheets was born on October 5, 1890 in Lafayette, Ohio, to Edger W. and Gertrude (Williams) Sheets. The family moved to Springfield, IL after his father, Edgar, accepted the position of superintendent of the Illinois State Highway Department. In 1907, at the age of 17, Frank took a job as a clerk in the State Highway Department, leaving in 1911 to enroll in engineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Upon graduation from UI in 1914, Sheets returned to the highway department as a maintenance engineer, then, in 1916, as assistant maintenance engineer under the supervision of B.H. Piepmeier, who later became Chief Highway Engineer for Missouri.

A 1917 list of State Highway Officials shows Frank Sheets as Chief of the Bridge division of the Highway Department. Then, in 1920, he was appointed Chief Engineer of the Highway Department, serving in that position until 1932. He also performed the duties of Acting Superintendent of Highways, without additional pay, while serving as Chief Highway Engineer. He was active in the promotion and passage of both the \$60 million and \$100 million bond issues, which resulted in the construction of 9,800 miles of new highways in Illinois.

Sheets was president of AASHO in 1925, the year that the Joint Board on Interstate Highways was appointed in February by the Secretary of Agriculture to create the U.S. Route System. Not only was Sheets appointed to the Joint Board, but he was also on the Committee of Five appointed in August that year to create the numbering system for the initial routes, which had already been tentatively mapped. Appointed by E.W. James, Chief of the Federal Bureau of Public Roads' Division of Design, Sheets, Piepmeier of Missouri, and Cyrus Avery of Oklahoma were all on the committee, along with Roy Klein of Oregon and Charles H. Moorefield of South Carolina. Avery and Piepmeier had both designated the Chicago to Los Angeles route through Missouri and Oklahoma as Route 60. After a long and contentious battle with the State of Kentucky, they finally agreed to designate the route as U.S. 66.

Sheets retired from the Highway Department in 1932, and in 1933 he became a consulting engineer for the Portland Cement Association and was the trade group's president from 1937 until his death in 1951. Always interested in improving public highways, he wrote several books and monographs on road construction and remained involved in discussions about the planning of interstate highways.

Nearly 25 years to the day after Route 66 officially came into existence, Frank Sheets died November 3, 1951, at the age of 61.