

THE NATIONAL ROAD 5

When I heard of the statue of Madonna in the corner of Glen Miller Park on U.S Route 40 in Richmond, Indiana for the first time, I didn't associate her with a famous pop singer, but with the Virgin Mary. I found there, however, the statue of a woman clasping her baby on her bosom with her young son clinging to her skirts.

Penny Karanovich, public relations coordinator of Richmond Convention & Tourism Bureau explained to me, "It is the Madonna of the Trail that represents pioneer women."

It was The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) that constructed this statue in 1928, the year before Great Depression. The DAR was founded in 1890 to promote patriotism and preserve American history by a group of women who were the lineage descents of patriots of the American Revolution.

The idea of the construction of the Madonna statues as a highway memorial was first planned in 1909. Twelve statues were built up along the historical road for the West in 20 years since then. Five of them are along U.S Route 40, the National Road, through which settler's cover wagons used to pass before the modern motorization.

Then, what did the National Road look like when the Madonna statues were built up? According to "The National Road" edited by Karl Raitz, the road declined over the late nineteenth century. Due to the locomotive boom, it became a mere way "to get farmers from their farms to the nearest railroad station."

However motorization changed the situation of the National Road. The construction of highway system became one of the most important national challenges. The National Road was integrated into U.S Route 40 in 1926. The idea of the trans-continental highway from coast to coast also began to materialize.

The movement to preserve historical monuments went together with the construction boom. The book pointed out, "The patriotism motivated the nation's historic preservation movement in the early years of the twentieth century." The construction of the Madonna statue along the roadside "would help insure that the meaning of National Road history will be preserved."

However the patriotism escalated to trigger the second movement of Ku Klux Klan (KKK)

that advocated white supremacy, and the Immigration Act of 1924 to lead a movement to totally exclude Japanese immigrants. In Richmond also, KKK was influential by getting supports from the Quakers.

Travel Industry Association of America and Department of transportation designated the National Road in Indiana as National Scenic Byway in 1998, and the whole way as All-American Road in 2002.

Joseph M. Jarzen, executive director of the Indiana National Road Association (INRA), 28, took office five years ago after getting M.A. for historical preservation at Columbia University. He says, “We expect more tourists for the historic National Road. Although American history is only one-tenth as long as Japanese history, we have to learn our history for better understanding of ourselves in present.”

Mr. Jarzen repeated the word “history” so many times in our two-hour interview. I felt his enthusiasm to try to get back the “regional characters” of Indiana state deeply buried in the history of the National Road.