

How It All Started

With the beginning of the 20th century Lebanon and Laclede County was basically isolated from the rest of the world with its lack of good roads. There was little more than a dirt path coming to Lebanon from St. Louis and going on in the direction of Springfield to the west. This path carried a few isolated travelers and commerce by way of wagon or stagecoach. The dirt road had change very little from its beginnings when it carried the Union troops during the Civil War to the battle at Wilson's Creek. The only major change to Lebanon and its dirt highway had been after the Civil War when the Railroad caused the village to move about one mile to the southwest from its original location.

Shortly after the turn of the century the old road eventually received an upgrading of gravel that made it more expectable during rainy weather and was even later given the number 14 by the State of Missouri. This served the adventurous travelers until 1922 when State Highway Commission purposed a new permanent highway running to and across the Ozarks. The original proposal for the route was to wind its way from St. Louis to Rolla and then take a southerly path through Houston and Cabool, and then on to Springfield by the direction that Highway 60 would later follow. The highway engineers of the time thought the route to Waynesville, Lebanon and Marshfield was too hilly, and too many rivers would need to be bridged. This decision would have been devastating for the towns along the more direct route and Lebanon was not going to let this happen without a fight. The community leaders of several towns, including Lebanon, led trips to Jefferson City to lobby the Highway Commission for a decision that favored the "Direct Route." Lebanon took their high school band to make a little more noise before the Commission and the story is told that a few of the Lebanon leaders even met the skeptical engineers at the Gasconade River to show them a path that would cross the hills and rivers of Laclede county with the involvement of only a little more work and money.

This foresight and effort paid off in the end and the route via Pulaski, Laclede and Webster Counties was chosen. Construction started in stages with the distance from the Laclede County line at Hazelgreen to Mill Creek Road in Lebanon being the first to be paved with concrete. Everyone along the new highway thought its number name would be 60 and some of the early maps even show this number. This prestigious number with a zero was selected for the route that would go from the east coast to the west coast south of Lebanon. A meeting was hosted at the Woodruff Building in Springfield and as a result 66 was chosen for the new road that was going from Chicago to Los Angeles.

Route 66 served Lebanon and Laclede County from 1925 until December 4, 1957, causing the creation of the places and stories we enjoy today

