Across My Desk

By Brian Butko
Editor

When I met Ruth Moore at a speaking engagement, she told me about a geography book of her husband’s that featured the Lincoln Highway. The Moores graciously loaned the 1933 book, and indeed, 28 of the book’s 262 pages follow the Lincoln Highway across the U.S.

Richard Moore used this textbook at a private school in Queens, N.Y. The introduction explains that it was prepared for New York state schools, and “fully meets the requirements for the teaching of geography in the fourth grade as outlined in the state syllabus.... All non-essential details have been discarded, the aim being to give only vital facts and to draw a clear, simple picture with no confusing high lights or shadows.”

The Lincoln Highway had been decommissioned in 1925 in favor of the federal route numbering system we still use today. Still, road names lived on, and Richard says his family always seemed to locate along the route, hence his fondness for the Lincoln Highway chapter. It is one of a dozen journeys in the book, each told by following a family from that region.

Western Pennsylvania is explored in the Lincoln Highway chapter. The route passed through Ligonier, Greensburg, Irwin, and Pittsburgh before heading to East Liverpool, Ohio. The book mentions the Appalachian Highlands, Mountains, and Plateau before arriving in Pittsburgh, with its “tall chimneys from which clouds of black smoke are rising.” The coal industry is briefly examined; photos illustrate coal miners and a coke plant. Oil wells and the rivers are also mentioned before the tour moves on to the Great Central Plain and the Corn Belt.

The rest of the world is only mentioned in relation to these journeys: Japan gets just a paragraph; Mexico and Canada are only mentioned in that they share a continent; the Soviet Union doesn’t even make the index. But subsequent volumes for grades 5, 6, and 7 covered the rest of the world. As for Japan, Richard remembers already having studied it ... in third grade!