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U.S. 1 STARTS HERE 'AT THE END OF THE RAINBOW'

By HAMPTON DUNN

KEY WEST --- U.S. 1 is a long ribbon of concrete that follows the Atlantic seaboard from Kent, Me., to Key West, Fla. Whether it "begins" or "ends" in this tropical isle is debatable, but local folk boast that it does, indeed, start right at the Monroe County Court House (photo).

Certainly there is no more spectacular section of U.S. 1 than that stretch from Miami through the Florida Keys to Key West. This is known as the Overseas Highway and often called "the road that goes to sea." A veteran travel writer, who's seen 'em all, thinks this road provides one of "the most rewarding and exhilarating motoring experiences in the world."

It leap frogs the 157 miles between the two cities with 42 bridges linking the long string of coral islets. The spans range from 37 feet to seven miles.

Although Key West is one of the state’s oldest communities, (Monroe County was established in 1823, named for President Monroe) it was not until modern times that it was linked to the mainland by highway. First came the great Florida developer, Henry M. Flagler, who performed one of the great engineering feats of all time and built the Overseas Railroad here in 1912. In the mid-30s, two ferocious hurricanes wiped out much of the roadbed and the rails of the old Florida East Coast Railroad Extension. Shortly after the State of Florida utilized the right-of-way and road bed and built the highway. It is the longest ocean-going motor road in the world.