

# A Story of Route 66 Told in 100 Buildings

HOW THE  
MAIN STREET OF AMERICA  
HAPPENED



CRUDEN BAY BOOKS

**A STORY OF ROUTE 66 TOLD IN 100 BUILDINGS  
...HOW THE MAIN STREET OF AMERICA HAPPENED**

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# INTRODUCTION

Despite its out-sized place in the American imagination, America's Main Street enjoyed only a relatively brief time in the sun. The entire road was not paved until 1938. President Dwight Eisenhower authorized the interstate highway system in 1956 and the modern limited-access roads began replacing the outdated two-laned Route 66. In 1985 the entire road was removed from maps.

Almost immediately Americans recognized that something had been lost. Preservation groups sprouted and President Bill Clinton signed into law a bill providing \$10 million in restoration funds. The National Park Service made grants available. Even so, it wasn't long before Route 66 found its way onto "Most Endangered Sites" lists.

What is it that people were so afraid to lose? Route 66 was not the first long distance highway, not by a long shot. The first interstate highways were built and promoted by private road associations led by businessmen with auto interests. The first was the Lincoln Highway spearheaded by Carl Fisher whose Indiana firm supplied every acetylene headlamp on American cars. The Lincoln Highway was dedicated in 1913 with 3,389 miles running through 13 states from New York to California. On its heels came the Dixie Highway, the Spanish Mission Trail, the Liberty Highway, the National Old Trails Road, and others.

One automobile tycoon who did not participate in the road-building mania was Henry Ford. Ford was selling the most cars of anybody with his \$490 Model T but he argued that if people got used to private money building roads they would never demand that the government - much more qualified for the job - get involved. As it turned out Ford need not have worried. In 1910 the automobile was a plaything for the rich and there were only 500,000 in the entire country; by 1920 there

were eight million cars registered in the United States, one for every 10 adults. The federal government had no choice but to get involved in constructing new roads. Legislation was passed in 1916 and again in 1921 resulting in the creation of the American Association of State Highway Officials.

Job one was taming the spiderweb of private roads with a numbering system that is still in use today: north-south roads received odd numbers and east-west routes even numbers. The main routes hopped across the country in multiples of ten. The names disappeared (although the Lincoln Highway Association lobbied to keep its name listed with its new number 30) but in some cases the magic of motoring transferred to the new numbers.

The U.S. 66 Highway Association formed to promote "the shortest, best and most scenic route from Chicago through St. Louis to Los Angeles." Their route promised no new necessary construction as existing roads were stitched together to connect communities along more than 2,400 miles. The plan was accepted in Washington and Route 66 was open to travelers in 1926.

The first time Route 66 penetrated the national consciousness was not with wheels, but feet. In 1928 pioneering sports promoter C.C. "Cash and Carry" Pyle staged the First Annual Transcontinental Footrace - over 3,400 miles from Los Angeles to New York City. From California to Chicago the race used Route 66 every step of the way. The winner would be the pedestrian with the lowest total elapsed time after the daily "laps." While the competitors slept away their aching feet in tents each night Pyle staged a carnival at each stop and issued daily reports on the "Bunion Derby" to a press that included the nation's first mobile radio station.

Pyle's brainchild attracted 275 entrants, including long-distance running stars from around the world. Of the 55 marathoners who finished

the race the surprise winner turned out to be a 20-year old part-Cherokee farmhand named Andy Payne. Payne hailed from Claremore, Oklahoma which happened to be a town right smack on Route 66. Payne and the highway basked in national acclaim. Andy also pocketed the \$25,000 first prize which he used to pay off the mortgage on the family farm. C.C. Pyle did not make enough money to pay the winner of the Second Annual Transcontinental Footrace and there was never a third.

Route 66 was not a static road, especially as paving was introduced. The general alignment always stayed the same, however, as the route shifted to eliminate sharp turns, eliminate railroad crossings, and to find better ways through congested urban areas. A fully paved version of America's Main Street did not appear Texas contractors laid concrete in Oldham County in 1938.

John Steinbeck gave Route 66 its next notoriety the following year with the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the story of the Joad family blown off their Oklahoma farm by "Dust Bowl" drought conditions and forced to head to California. A year later *The Grapes of Wrath* became a beloved motion picture, winning two Academy Awards. In describing the Joad's travels across the Southwest Steinbeck dubbed Route 66 "The Mother Road" - a moniker it would never lose.

Following World War II Route 66 entered its golden years. The Great Depression and World War II were in America's rear view mirror, times were prosperous, and the road trip was invented. The battered Joad farm truck was replaced by the convertible and the station wagon and Route 66 now meant fun and adventure. When nostalgia buffs go looking for Route 66 today this is the America they are looking to find.

The highway even got its own fun theme song, courtesy of Bobby Troup. In 1946 Troup was 27 years old and driving across country to try his luck in Hollywood. He spent a lot of the trip on US 40 and was intending to work that road into a tune but his wife Cynthia offered

the tagline “Get Your Kicks on Route 66” as they ventured further west and altered the course of American culture forever. Nat King Cole recorded the original version in 1946 and it went to #11 on the Billboard charts. Bing Crosby backed by the Andrews Sisters charted with the song that year as well. Chuck Berry took “Route 66” to rock and roll and the Rolling Stones covered it on their debut album. In 1982, with the actual road in its depth throes, the Manhattan Transfer took home a Grammy Award for their jazzy rendition of Troup’s 36-year old tune.

Route 66 was entrenched in the ethos of American youth in 1960 when Tod Stiles (Martin Milner) and Buz Murdock (George Maharis) rode their Corvette into the country’s living rooms each week on the CBS television series *Route 66*. For five seasons, as the interstate highway system was methodically eliminating the obsolete two-lane highway, Tod and Buz made the case why it should not ever go away. Route 66 was independence, freedom, and possibility.

But away it inevitably did go, although some 85 percent of the road can still be found. In 2002 the United States Congress initiated the Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program making grants available through the National Park Service to those looking to restore existing buildings along America’s Main Street. The program is set to expire in 2022 and it is far from certain that additional Route 66 monies will be forthcoming from the federal tap.

So as the window on Route 66 nostalgia begins to close what is still out there? What stories do the buildings tell? Let’s have a look.

# ILLINOIS

291 miles



No state had an easier creation of U.S. Route 66 than Illinois. Route 4 was the first numbered route from Chicago to St. Louis and it was paved all the way by 1926. All it really required was switching some highway signs. But the Illini's early good fortune just pushed back its headaches for a few years. While other states hustled to upgrade existing infrastructure to meet government standards for the

new Route 66, the Illinois pavement sailed through the 1930s as it became the most heavily-used highway in the state. With the burden of transporting troops and supplies during World War II, however, the roadbed began to sag and become dangerous. Thanks to a \$400,000 cash infusion from the Defense Highway Act of 1941 Illinois was able to upgrade the Mother Road in time for the explosion of post-war travelers. Much of what those motorists experienced driving through the Land of Lincoln was far different than the congestion found in its urbanized anchors of Chicago and St. Louis. Today no state outdoes Illinois for small-town Route 66 pride.

# Lou Mitchell's

Chicago

565 W Jackson Boulevard



The world's first skyscraper - all of ten stories and 138 feet - appeared on Chicago's streets in 1885. Just month's later, on January 29, 1886, Carl Benz applied for a patent for the first automobile. Never do those two symbols of modern American life mesh so perfectly as they do in Grant Park on the Lake Michigan lakeshore. Stand at the eastern terminus of Route 66 with your back to the water and look westward with 2,451 miles ahead of you. Your first task is to navigate the phalanx of Chicago's humbling army of skyscrapers - 133 stand more than 500 feet in height. In a few blocks Route 66 crosses the Chicago River and the buildings become more human in scale. At 565 West Jackson is Lou Mitchell's - a popular stop to fill up for the Mother Road ahead since forever. The breakfast institution pre-dates Route 66, started by William Mitchell in 1923. When Bill handed the keys to his son Lou, he had one request: when the cash register rings enough to permit it, make a trip back to the Greek village where dad was born. The post World War II travel boom made that possible in 1952 and the trip became an annual pilgrimage. The old country traditional greeting of offering sweets to guests carries on inside the largely unchanged eatery with Chicago-born Milk Duds passed out to all women and children.



# Dell Rhea's Chicken Basket

Willowbrook

645 Joliet Road



Irv Kolarik got his start on Route 66 in 1927 like many others - he set up a hot dog stand and a couple of picnic tables at the Triangle Goat Farm. He put in a single gas pump and in short order enough people were stopping

at Kolarik's Triangle Rest that Irv was able to build a proper service station with a lunch counter and two repair bays. One day a pair of business-minded sisters let Irv know the quality of his food was wanting. They offered to teach him a fried chicken recipe if he would buy all his fresh poultry from their family farm. Best deal Irv ever made. He was soon selling so many chicken dinners that the two service bays were converted into dining rooms. When his lease expired in 1946 he brought architect Eugene Stoyke out from Chicago to build a new single-story brick restaurant with plenty of windows, so his customers could watch the action at the little airport across the street. He called his new place the Chicken Basket. The southern part of Chicagoland was one of the first sections of Route 66 to be bypassed and traffic on I-55 was roaring right past Kolanik's back door by the early 1960s. With process servers at the front door Irv sold out to Dell Rhea whose father-in-law had been the family with the magic chicken recipe. Rhea was a one-time executive with the Chicago Convention Bureau and he re-directed the Chicken Basket's marketing to locals instead of travelers. Business boomed again and hungry travelers were making a point to find a way off the interstate to try the award-winning chicken, still marinated in brine overnight and then refrigerated for six hours after a bath of milk, flour and bread crumbs.

# Ambler Beckler Texaco Station

Dwight

417 W. Waupansie Street



With Chicagoland fading in the rear view mirror, Route 66 headed into the American heartland in earnest, connecting small towns and villages. Big Oil was sensitive to the impact that this intrusion may have on residential communities so when Jack Shore built this Texaco station he designed it to look like just another house in the neighborhood. The commercial cottage was gabled with a shingled roof and wooden clapboards dressed the siding. Windows were framed with lintels and shutters and decorated with flower boxes. Basil "Tubby" Ambler came to manage the station in 1938 and stayed until 1966. The pumps kept operating until 1999 which gave the town bragging rights to the "oldest continuously operated gas station on Route 66." A few years later owner Phillip Becker gave the property to the Village of Dwight which matched a \$10,400 grant from the National Park Service's Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program to bring the Texaco dispensary back to its pre-World War II appearance. The Ambler-Becker station now does duty as a welcome center.

# Standard Oil Station

Odell  
400 S West Street



To say that the United States was gripped by anti-monopoly fervor in the late 1800s would be soft-selling the point. The Sherman Antitrust Act in 1890 passed the United States Senate 51-1 and the House of Representatives 242-0. That year John Rockefeller's Standard Oil controlled 88 percent of refined oil in the country's pipelines. And there weren't any automobiles on the roads yet. It was not until 1911 that the Supreme Court ordered the dissolution of Standard Oil when gasoline was becoming its primary product. One of the resulting 34 companies was Standard Oil of Illinois. Patrick O'Donnell signed on to sell Standard Oil products when he opened his service station in 1932; he based the homey design on a company model from 1916. Odell was born of the railroads and was a grain collection point dating back to Civil War days. As the railroads transitioned to highways the town was so busy with traffic that a pedestrian underpass had to be built beneath Route 66. The village of 1,000 people supported ten gas stations along the Mother Road. One by one they shuttered when I-55 went into service and O'Donnell's old canopy-style station was slated for demolition in the 1970s. The townspeople called off the wrecking ball and engineered an award-winning restoration, right down to the historic Standard Oil Company sign.

# Route 66 Hall of Fame

Pontiac

110 West Howard Street



John Walters founded the Shirley Oil Company in 1923 with a business plan to deliver fuel from the railhead in town out to the surrounding countryside. After Route 66 opened he established a foothold on the highway with leased space in a McLean, Illinois repair shop, setting up gas pumps and a six-stool lunch counter. Walters sold Dixie brand gasoline, a name that conjured up Southern hospitality at the time. By the 1940s Walters was providing round-the-clock service and the Dixie Truckers Home boasted a full restaurant and guest cabins. The original building burned to the ground in 1965 but truckers were being served from one of the cabins the next day. The Route 66 Association of Illinois organized in 1989 and the following year began displaying artifacts and souvenirs from the Mother Road in the Dixie Trucker's Home for its Hall of Fame. After the Walters family sold the operation in 2003 the new corporate overlords de-emphasized the Route 66 connections and the museum exhibits moved up the road to Pontiac into the city's restored 1900 brick municipal complex. The second floor is dedicated to the life and times of Bob Waldmire, the fabled Route 66 wanderer and traveling artist. The Hall of Fame hosts Waldmire's iconic 1972 Volkswagen van - his studio-home on wheels - and out back lives the converted school bus he called his "road yacht."

# Sprague Super Service

Normal

305 East Pine Street



Despite hard economic times the 1930s were the sweet spot for eclectic rural gas station architecture. The first gas pumps were installed in front of general stores or even just clearings in the road. Filling stations following this period were standardized beacons of oil company brand identity. In between local Route 66 entrepreneurs created cottage-style buildings that blended into existing neighborhoods and announced their hospitality to passing motorists. William Sprague called his operation "Super Service" when it opened in 1931, without exaggeration. Gas was dispensed under the canopy of a two-story brick Tudor Revival manor house the likes of which were seen nowhere else along the Mother Road. There was enough room inside to house both the Sprague family and the station attendant. Sprague sold Cities Service Company products, which pulled its crude from giant east Oklahoma reservoirs; since the 1960s the brand has been CITGO. In 1940 the highway was expanded to four lanes, but on the other side of town. Sprague's Super Service, in all its opulence, was relegated to Business Route 66 and within a few years it was gone. Jack Rittenhouse, in his seminal *A Guide Book to Highway 66* in 1946 did not even give mention to the alternate route or Sprague's. Accordingly other businesses moved in - a welding company, a bakery, even a bridal shop. The pumps were hauled away in 1979 but the slice of Merrye Olde England on old Route 66 survived to be restored and acquired by the town as a gift shop.

# Funks Grove Pure Maple Sirup

Shirley

5257 Old Route 66



When American settlers first came to Illinois, lured by land selling for \$1.25 an acre, they found mostly prairie grass thriving in thick glaciated soil. But every now and then the newcomers would find small groves of hardwood trees that had managed to establish a bulwark against the grasses. These prairie groves were the first areas to be settled since

the woodlands provided timber for fences and cabins and shade to escape the summer heat. Isaac Funk arrived from Kentucky in the 1820s to stake his claim. Isaac concentrated on running cattle and shaping early Illinois politics with his friend, Abraham Lincoln. His descendants, however, turned their attention to the land. In 1891 grandson Arthur tapped the abundant sugar maples for commercial purposes for the first time. Funks Grove Pure Maple Sirup - the proper spelling for the thick, sweet liquid - sold for \$1 a gallon. By the time Route 66 was routed past the maple grove the Funks were producing 240 gallons of sirup per season, along with pure maple candy. After I-55 arrived signs pulled enough sweet-toothed motorists from the highway to keep the business strong. Today's modern taps pull ten times as much golden sap from the trees. The grove itself, designated a National Natural Landmark, stands as the largest prairie grove in Illinois with more than 1,000 acres. The sirup tapped and processed here helps Illinois sneak into the ranks of the 12 American states that produce maple syrup - and the southernmost.

# Mill Museum

Lincoln

738 South Washington Street



Across the United States there are 205 towns named for Abraham Lincoln, our 16th President. The first was right here in Illinois in 1853 when Abe was still a backcountry lawyer preparing papers for the Chicago & Mississippi Railroad that was founding the town. Paul Coddington had no interest in trafficking in Abe Lincoln nostalgia when he opened his Blue Mill restaurant on July 25, 1929. Coddington's hook for travelers along Route 66 was going to be a Dutch motif and he designed his building to resemble a windmill. For the Grand Opening the Coddington kids dressed in Dutch clothing and greeted guests in wooden shoes. All that was missing were the dikes. In 1945 Albert and Blossom Hoffman took over the business which became familiar for its breaded veal schnitzel; in time the tenderloins became pork. The Blue Mill survived the decommissioning of Route 66 but four generations of Hoffmans would fade away in 1996. By that time the old windmill had been taken out in a storm and the Dutch motif was a distant memory - the property seemed to be a prime candidate for the bulldozers. Improbably, twenty years later some \$90,000 was raised to replace the roof, restore the windmill, fix up all 44 windows in the original building and reopen as a museum.

# Lauterbach Giant

Springfield  
569 Wabash Avenue



Fiberglass was developed as a viable commercial product around the same time as Route 66, in the 1930s. The first practical applications were for things like boat hulls and auto bodies. In the 1960s, however, another type of fiberglass began appearing on the Mother Road. Bob Prewitt entered the fiberglass game to manufacture lightweight horse trailers. He added a fiberglass model of a horse to his trade show display and soon began fielding orders for the horses instead at his California company. One day an order came in for

a giant Paul Bunyan to promote a Sacramento restaurant. Prewitt created a mold of a 14-foot tall "Giant Man" with one hand facing down and the other palm aimed towards the sky so as to simulate the holding of an axe. The advertising gimmick caught on immediately and soon there were thousands of giant roadside pitchmen for mufflers, tires, carpets and the like. The Uniroyal Tire Company commissioned a platoon of giant "Uniroyal Gals." The Arab Oil embargo of the early 1970s swatted away orders and International Fiberglass stopped production of the Giant Men in 1974. All molds were destroyed but the pitchmen were still out there. The giants can still be found along Route 66 - Wilmington, Illinois boasts a 30-foot tall "Gemini Giant" erected during the 1960s Space Race and Flagstaff, Arizona has a lumberjack crafted for the one-time Paul Bunyan Cafe, among others. The Lauterbach Giant has led a bit of a peripatetic existence - he arrived in Springfield in 1962 as a tire man but was sold to the Roundup Cafe and Motel in Farmersville south of town. After the motel closed in 1978 the big guy returned to automotive duty for Lauterbach Tire.



# Brick Road

## Auburn

Curran Road (north of town, off Route 4)

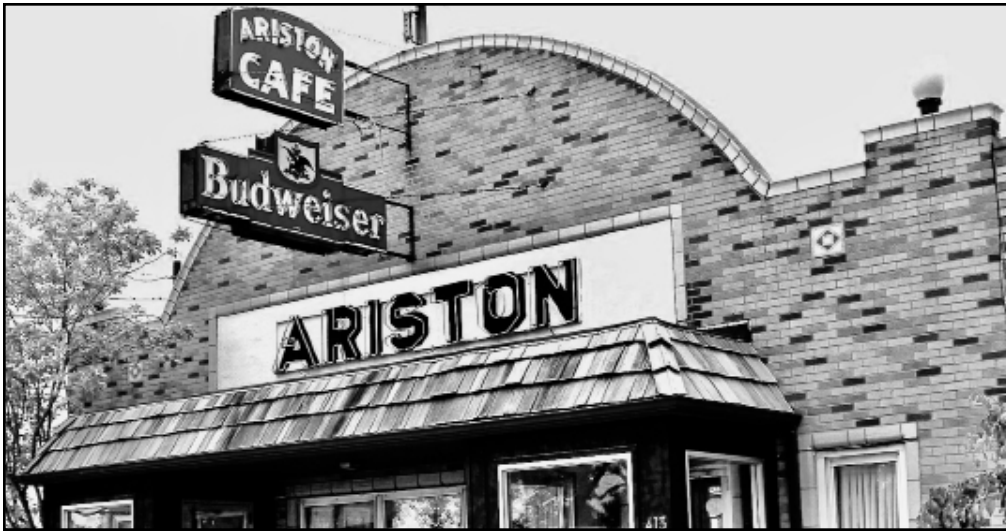


When Carl Fisher was paving his Indianapolis Motor Speedway in 1909 he chose bricks instead of concrete for its superior traction. The bricks were formed of shale, not clay, and fired at twice the typical temperature in the kiln. More than three million were laid by hand on a bed of sand and fused with mortar. The “Brickyard” would not be fully covered in asphalt until 1961. Illinois put down its first roadway bricks in 1915 but with increased traffic in the 1920s engineers in the highway department conducted extensive tests with concrete, asphalt, and bricks. Bricks were the clear loser. In 1932, however, when the alignment of Curran Road was altered to eliminate a 90-degree turn local masons got the call since during the depths of the Great Depression the labor-intensive bricky laying created more jobs. There are a few detours onto original brick roadways remaining along Route 66 but none are more pleasing than the arcing 1.4-mile journey through the Auburn countryside. Bricks are still replaced as needed, as well as the flanking ribbons of concrete curbs.

# Ariston Cafe

Litchfield

413 Old Rte 66 North



Transportation has always been a high stakes game in America, whether it be wagon roads, railroads, or auto roads. In 1850s Illinois everyone knew the Terre Haute & Alton Railroad was coming. But where? The people of Hardinsburg hedged their bets by constructing buildings on top of wooden sledges. Hardinsburg indeed lost the gamble in 1854 when the railroad went two miles north. So everyone pulled their houses to the railroad and Litchfield was born. Pete Adam felt like he won the transportation lottery decades later when his Ariston Café on Route 4 in Carlinville, started in 1924, became a part of Route 66. But fortune again smiled on Litchfield when the road was realigned in 1930. Adam's café was not constructed on prairie runners so he picked up and followed the Mother Road to Litchfield. The new Ariston Café opened in 1935 when Route 66 was the heaviest traveled road in Illinois. But dang if the road didn't move again, this time replacing the increasingly congested two-lane asphalt in front of the Aniston with a four-lane highway around back. Instead of moving, Adam installed a large neon sign behind the restaurant to draw hungry motorists into the parking lot. They could find the front door from there. Not only did the ploy work but the Ariston Café remained open and in family hands until 2018. Still locally owned and a bit larger, the American, Italian and Greek fare is served up in an atmosphere and setting that has varied little since Nat King Cole's "Route 66" was coming out of car radios.

# Soulsby Service Station

Mount Olive  
710 West First Street



The first coal discovered in North America was uncovered by French explorers in what is now modern-day Illinois; the Land of Lincoln is still the country's fifth-largest coal producer. Led by Mount Olive native Alexander Bradley the town became a hotbed of union activity in the 1890s. Tensions snapped in 1897 in the nearby town of Virden in a confrontation that left seven miners and five company guards dead. When local pastors proved less than welcoming to memorials to the workers the union purchased a plot of ground in Mount Olive for the Union Miners Cemetery. Before she died in her nineties fiery fighter for worker rights Mary Harris "Mother" Jones requested to be buried here and her memorial dominates the graveyard. In the 1920s William Henry Soulsby was forced out of the southern Illinois mines by an injury. As he looked around for a new living he saw the new Route 66 and plowed his savings into a residential-style service station that he built himself. His family continued to pump gas until 1991, laying claim to being the longest continuously operating filling station on the original Mother Road. A restoration has taken Soulsby Service Station back to the golden age of motoring.

# Chain of Rocks Bridge

Mitchell

Mississippi River



Some 130 bridges, more or less, cross the Mississippi River - none were built specifically to carry the Mother Road across the famous water. The first was constructed in 1874 by St. Louis resident and bridge-building pioneer James Buchanan Eads. The Eads Bridge was the first built primarily of steel and was the longest arch bridge in the world. To test

its holding power before sending steam locomotives across an elephant was walked from Missouri to Illinois. The first bridge selected to carry Route 66 traffic over the Mississippi was the McKinley Bridge that funneled travelers directly into downtown St. Louis. After a few years the road was re-routed onto the Municipal Free Bridge that linked with East St. Louis. Before that bridge could be named for General Douglas MacArthur in 1942 the main road was re-aligned once again to skirt downtown St. Louis to the north on the Chain of Rocks Bridge. The multiple truss bridge was an ambitious private project that eventually cost \$2.5 million when completed in 1929 and resulted in a unique 22-degree bend in the middle around the namesake rocks that created dangerous shoals before being submerged by a dam. Although tolls were collected this was an exceedingly user-friendly passage with 400 elm trees planted on the Illinois side and the Chain of Rocks Amusement Park on the Missouri side. At 40 feet in width the Chain of Rocks Bridge was much roomier than its predecessor but was still not up to the needs of modern traffic. The inevitable I-270 bridge arrived next door in 1967. None of the three Route 66 Mississippi River bridges continue to carry vehicular traffic but all still stand, not worth the cost to demolish. The Chain of Rocks Bridge has been converted into a cornerstone of bike greenways and pedestrian corridors.

# MISSOURI

301 miles



When Route 66 was christened in 1926 St. Louis was the sixth largest city in America with some 800,000 citizens. After pulling out of St. Louis the early travelers would not see a town of 100,000 people on the Mother Road until reaching Los Angeles. In Missouri the route followed the path of the Great Osage Trail, blazed through the Ozark Mountains by migrating bison centuries

before. This has been the preferred crossing across the Show-Me State ever since. When I-44 superseded Route 66 it heeded so closely to the historic corridor that America's Main Street can be driven on frontage roads between towns in many places.

# Ted Drewes Frozen Custard

St. Louis

6726 Chippewa Street



Ted Drewes has been dishing out frozen custard to Route 66 travelers for more than 90 years. Locals know the ice cream stand as a favorite place to score Nova Scotia balsam fir trees for Christmas in the winter. The store is known to Mother Road aficionados around the world. But when the original Ted Drewes passed away in 1968 at the age of 70 his sweet treat

business didn't merit mention until the sixth paragraph. The earlier words were devoted to his career as a standout amateur tennis player in St. Louis. There was even mention of his high school basketball exploits. At Ted Drewes vanilla was the only flavor and a four-scoop cone could be had for a handful of coins even after Route 66 was decommissioned in the 1980s. By that time the number of serving windows had expanded from five to twelve. When sugar was rationed during World War II Drewes substituted honey into his recipe developed at a traveling carnival. In 1959 malts so thick they were served upside down in signature Ted Drewes yellow cups were introduced and the "concretes" quickly became a menu favorite. Through the years there have been many offers to franchise the Ted Drewes formula but the family insists it will never happen - you have to cruise Route 66 to experience this concrete.

# Steiny's Inn

Route 66 State Park-Eureka  
96 N Outer Road



Flooding has always been the defining feature of this slice of land beside the Meramec River. Farmers took advantage of the rich soil for crops and when the *St. Louis Star Times* newspaper purchased 480 acres to start a family resort many of the buildings were raised on stilts. Over the years the summer resort morphed into a Route 66 town called Times Beach with a population over 1,000. In the 1970s the city moved to improve its dirt roads but couldn't afford full paving. So Russell Bliss was hired to oil the streets periodically to keep the dust down. Bliss had other contracts as well, including hauling chemical waste for a local manufacturer of the defoliant Agent Orange. In 1982 investigative reporters revealed that for years Bliss had been spraying toxic dioxins on the roads of Times Beach. When the worst flood the Meramec had ever seen happened that winter the town was evacuated and the Environmental Protection Agency recommended that residents not return. Within a couple of years the evacuation was mandatory; it was the first buyout of an entire town by the federal government. Times Beach became a poster child for environmental degradation and in the 1990s the entire town was incinerated. When all was safe the land became the Route 66 State Park. The only structure left standing was a 1935 roadhouse on the east side of the Meramec River from the main town which became the park headquarters and museum. The deck has been removed from the Meramec River Bridge so Edward Steinberg's old inn is disconnected from the park where nature is busy reclaiming the townsite and you can still drive on a short segment of the original Route 66.

# Meramec Caverns Visitor Center

Sullivan

1135 Highway W



When Missouri isn't going by the nickname "Show-Me State" it uses the nickname "Cave State." There are more than 6,000 caves in Missouri but travelers along Route 66 likely knew only one - Meramec Caverns. To promote his tourist cave Lester Dill had yellow and red advertising signs painted on some 200 barns in 14 states, peppering the Mother Road for hundreds of miles. The 35-year old Dill bought what had been known as the Salt Peter Cave in 1933 and changed the name. For 140 years the underground rooms had been mined for saltpeter, a necessary ingredient in making gunpowder. Dill didn't stop his promoting after luring motorists from the highway. While the tourists were on cave tours he hired "bumper sign boys" to assault the parking lot to wire cardboard advertisements to car bumpers. Eventually he just used adhesive and the souvenir bumper sticker was born. Dill developed Meramec Caverns until there were seven levels for underground visitors to visit. When he found century-old artifacts deep in the cave he put out the word that this was once a hideout for legendary Missouri bad boy Jesse James. More cars began pulling off the highway. Dill passed his promotional wizardry down to subsequent generations - in the internet age the Meramec Caverns operators grabbed "Americascave.com" as its web address.



# Wagon Wheel Motel

Cuba

901 East Washington Street



Leo Friesenhan earned his spurs as a master stonemason in St. Louis so when he got the call to construct tourist cabins down the road in Cuba with native Ozark sandstone he knew how to put up buildings that last. Not only is the Wagon Wheel Motel the oldest continuously operating guest quarters on Route 66 but the restored Tudor-style accommodations look just like they did at the 1936 opening. The first tourist courts constructed along the Mother Road were mostly single unit cottages with a carport or garage conveniently attached. Robert and Margaret Martin, however, fashioned their overnight quarters with buildings containing three units. There would eventually be 14 cabins, each with steeply pitched roofs and ornate stone trim around the windows. Stacked against the hundreds of idiosyncratic motor courts along the Mother Road, the Wagon Wheel stood out. If that wasn't enough to pull travelers in for the night subsequent owner John Mathis designed the two-piece neon sign in 1947 that became a Route 66 icon. In its first incarnation as the Wagon Wheel Cabins the operation included a cafe and a gas station for Standard Oil products. These were soon eliminated to provide additional room for lodging that was then \$2.50-\$3.00 per day. Today it is \$72 to \$138.

# “Four Way” Phillips Station

Cuba

102 W Washington Street



There are eight towns in the United States named Cuba, none remotely near the Caribbean island. Cuba, Missouri is the biggest, with a population around 3,000. Like many communities the original name sprang from the post office - Amanda, who was the postmasters wife. When the town was

platted in 1857 in anticipation of the coming of the Union Pacific Railroad the surveyors chose a new name based on their fondness for the island after a visit returning from the California gold chase. Apples were the first big industry in Cuba but by 1946 Jack Rittenhouse was writing in his guidebook that “though still important as an agricultural center, Cuba is now an important highway town.” One of the most popular stops on that highway was the Midway, a restaurant/garage/new car dealership, that thrived at the busy intersection of Highway 19 and Route 66. In 1932 Paul T. Carr jumped into the game by building a sharp-gabled service station in front of his house across the street. The Carr Service Station began as a Phillips 66 retailer but would eventually dispense Standard Oil and then Mobil Oil gasoline. Whatever the brand, Carr’s was always known locally as “the four way” because stop signs were needed at each corner to control traffic. In the 1980s the pumps were removed and the building became a bakery. After the oven shut down owner Lynn Wallis rejected offers to buy the lot and instead worked with the Phillips 66 organization to restore the cottage-style station, right down to the unique roof pattern and identifying cursive “P” on the front brick chimney. The three garage bays received a mural treatment, one of a dozen historic wall paintings in the “Route 66 Mural City.”

# Devil's Elbow Bridge

## Devil's Elbow

Big Piney River on Teardrop Road



It is a toss-up who is more excited to get to Devil's Elbow Bridge - artists, kayakers, or Route 66 buffs. Two centuries ago timber was cut down, milled in the Ozarks and floated down the Big Piney River to St. Louis. The bend in the river was so severe here that logjams were a commonplace; "Devil's Elbow" was probably the most family-friendly euphemism to survive from those days. The double span steel truss with the gently curving approach on the east side arrived with a dedication on July 4, 1924. Route 66 officials chose this way to cross the Big Piney. It was still a sleepy corner of the Ozarks in 1940 when Fort Leonard Wood was created nearby to train U.S. Army infantry troops. There was such an influx of traffic on Route 66 that the road abandoned the quaint river crossing by building one of Missouri's first four-lane stretches of highway. It required blasting 90 feet out of the Ozark sandstone in what became known as the Hooker Cut, an engineering feat that brought motorists just to drive through the exposed rock. The Devil's Elbow Bridge trundled on but eventually was closed to traffic. After a makeover in 2014 the bridge happily re-opened to vehicle crossings.

# Old Stagecoach Stop

Waynesville

106 N Lynn Street



George Washington once summed “Mad” Anthony Wayne, this way: “Open to flattery, vain, easily imposed upon and liable to be drawn into scrapes.” And he was one of Washington’s most trusted generals. But aside from the President himself and the Marquis de Lafayette no figure from the Continental Army captured Americans’

hearts like Wayne. Across the United States there are seven cities, 10 towns, eight villages, 16 counties and on and on named for the Revolutionary War leader from outside Philadelphia. When Route 66 rolled through downtown Waynesville in 1930 the population was 392. But as guide book writer Jack Rittenhouse noted in 1946: “During the war, Waynesville was the chief recreational center for the soldiers from Ft. Leonard Wood. It experienced a sudden boom...” That boom drove the highway south of town. Nostalgia travelers will skip that bypass and on the main square see the 1000-pound representation of the *Route 66 Shield*, imagined by Tim Berrier. The art installation stands in front of the brick Romanesque Pulaski County Courthouse from 1903, the county’s fourth seat of government and now a museum. Route 66 became an official historic Missouri highway in 1990 when then-governor John Ashcroft signed the designation into law here. Around the corner, the Old Stagecoach Stop saw it all. William Walton McDonald, back from caring for horses and mules in the Mexican War, came to Waynesville in 1850 to handle business for Pulaski County raised the beginnings of the two-story building on the St. Louis-to-Springfield stagecoach road in 1854. After the telegraph came it was the Wire Road and when automobiles followed it was Route 66.

# Roubidoux Bridge

Waynesville  
Roubidoux Creek



The Missouri State Highway Commission designed this handsome bridge in 1923 when the roadway wasn't even paved. Construction was contracted out to George W. Koss of Des Moines, Iowa. Koss was a civil engineer for the Chicago Northwestern Railway until striking out on his own in 1907 to specialize in pouring concrete bridges. Koss Construction completed bridges across the Midwest from Alabama to Minnesota and did this work for \$44,035. The 415-foot long bridge across Roubidoux Creek was a five-span concrete spandrel design that became a favorite of Missouri highway builders in the years prior to World War II but you won't see another one like it in the Show-Me State today. The original Route 66 crossed over the Roubidoux Bridge from the beginning in 1926. It was widened with a sidewalk in 1939 and given a full facelift in the early 2000s.

# Munger Moss Motel

Lebanon

1336 U.S. Route 66



Nelle Munger Megan began chasing tourist dollars on America's Main Street in 1929 when she built a sandwich shop with her husband Howard at the ramp for the Devil's Elbow Bridge. Howard died in 1936 and her new husband Emmett Boss took over the open pit Kentucky-style barbecue. The roadside stop was so popular that when new owners Jessie and Pete Hudson bought the business in 1940 they kept the Munger Moss name. They even kept it when they followed the new road alignment to Lebanon in 1945. The following year 14 tour-

ist rooms sprouted from seven stucco cabins raised on the property. As big chain motels began creeping onto Route 66 in order to compete the Hudsons added air conditioning, free televisions, an outside pool - the works. The most obvious change was the installation of an eyeball-grabbing neon sign hanging off the highway. The new amenities seemed like wasted money with the announcement of the interstates but fortune smiled on the Munger Moss - the new I-44 so closely hugged the forsaken Route 66 at this point that the nearest off-ramp turned out to be only a half-mile from the motel. While mom-and-pop motels up and down the Mother Road were shuttering, the Hudsons added 25 rooms in 1961. The trademark sign scored a restoration grant in 2010 to return to its original splendor.

# Route 66 Museum

Lebanon

915 S Jefferson Avenue



Arthur Truman Nelson arrived in Lebanon with his family in 1882 at the age of 18 from New York, looking to start an apple orchard. By the time he took over the business after his father's death in 1901 the Nelson Orchard was growing ten varieties of apples, shipping the fruit from "the land of the big red

apple" all across the country. Nelson was one of the first to use trucks to drive his crop to market, or at least attempt to do so. Roads were horrible and Nelson became a leading voice for improving rural Missouri roads. He served on the Ozarks Trail Committee and was instrumental in bringing the multi-state road through Lebanon. As Route 66 began to stir Nelson donated chunks of his farm for the new highway. When travelers began using the road he opened the Nelson Service Station selling Barnsdall Be Square Gasoline. A hamburger stand, tent camp, Spanish-styled hotel and opulent Nelson Tavern followed. With ornate plantings from around the world "Nelsonville" became a featured Route 66 attraction. In 1934 a fully formed "village" came to Nelson in a dream and he set out to create it across the highway. The cabins were constructed of stone, hand-picked by Arthur, and situated around a fountain highlighted by colored lights. Word quickly spread along the Mother Road of Nelson's creation as one of the most attractive stops on the highway. The Nelson family assumed management of the Dream Village but without his passion the enterprise did not make it out of the 1950s before being razed. The Route 66 Museum in the Lebanon-Laclede Library building features a full re-creation of a 1950s gas station and a roadside diner. And a detailed diorama of the Nelson Dream Village.

# Woodruff Building

Springfield

331 Park Central East



Without Springfield businessman John Thomas Woodruff there would be no Route 66. Not the road, but the name. Along with Cyrus Avery, "the Father of Route 66," the two were instrumental in developing the route from Chicago to Los Angeles. When the federal highway system coalesced in the 1920s it was decided that all transcontinental routes running north to south would be numbered with odd numbers and those east to west in even numbers. Furthermore, the major routes would be spaced in multiples of 10; it is a system in use a century later. Initially the Chicago to Los Angeles route had been assigned Route 60. Avery and

Woodruff were delighted. But that number had already been given to a different road, one going through Kentucky. An indignant William J. Fields, governor of the Bluegrass State was not about to let that injustice stand. When he complained Avery and Woodruff's road was changed to Route 62. Deflated but not defeated the men thought it over before sending a telegram from Woodruff's office here: "Regarding Chicago Los Angeles road if California Arizona New Mexico and Illinois accept sixty six we are inclined to agree to this change. We prefer sixty six to sixty two." And that is how Springfield became the "Birthplace of Route 66." Woodruff built the city's first skyscraper in 1910; the ten-story building follows the convention of the day to make high rises resemble classical columns with a prominent first floor (the base), the unadorned center stories (the shaft) and the ornate roofline (the capital).



# Gary's Gay Parita Sinclair

Ash Grove  
21118 Old Route 66



Gay and Fred Mason built a filling station on this stretch of Route 66 in 1930. The Mason's sold Harry Sinclair's products, the largest oil company in the Midwest. A fire destroyed the Sinclair station in 1965 and that appeared to be the end of a familiar story - another business along America's Main Street gone and forgotten forever. But Gary Turner was restless in his retirement so why not build a spot-on replica of the old Sinclair station. The building itself turned out to be a draw to the new wave of Mother Road adventurers but not as much as Gary, who tapped into his experience as a gun-slinging train robber in the Old West stage shows at Knotts Berry Farm in California. From his outpost in southwestern Missouri the gregarious Turner acted as a story-telling tour guide for the people and experiences awaiting travelers along the entirety of Route 66 until his death in 2015. The Turner family has picked up the torch as caretakers for the popular attraction, stuffed with signage, antique vehicles, memorabilia, and hospitality.

# Spencer Garage

Spencer  
County Road 2062

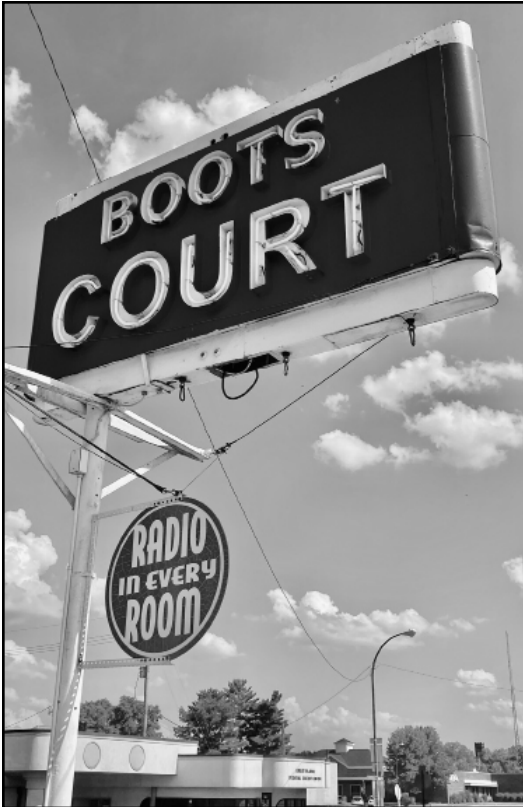


The tiny village of Spencer was bypassed by Route 66 not once but twice - and that was after it already had become a ghost town. The first stirrings of civilization here were in the 1860s when Oliver Johnson built a flour mill on the creek that took his name. A general store opened in 1868 with a post office and the nascent town took the name of the owner, Spencer, who otherwise seems to be lost to history. By 1907 there were a couple of churches and a schoolhouse in the little farm community but the town became dented after the access road became impassable. In 1925 entrepreneur Sydney Casey caught wind that the routing for the proposed Route 66 would include the old stagecoach road through Spencer. He paid \$400 for the entire town which included two acres of land and the store building. When the roadway indeed appeared Casey re-opened the store and attached a row of buildings from which he dispensed Tydol gasoline. The Caseys added a platform across the road to hold community dances and soon an enclave of nine tourist cabins known as Camp Lookout appeared. In 1961 Route 66 was realigned, taking the service station with it. What was left of Spencer disappeared when I-44 bypassed everything. A ghost town for a second time, Spencer remains in private hands and various states of restoration. Out front is a rare stretch of original Route 66 pavement as it crosses Johnson Creek on a 1923 steel truss bridge.

# Boots Court Motel

Carthage

107 S Garrison Avenue



Arthur Boots' professional background was as a machinery salesman but he certainly possessed the innate instincts of a hustling Route 66 entrepreneur. Before establishing his service business Boots researched traffic patterns and locations extensively, eventually settling at the corner of Routes 66 and 71, what the locals fancied as "The Crossroads of America." Boots started with an office building in 1938 he designed himself, giving the vernacular structure a streamlined Art Moderne style with rounded corners and a smooth stucco dress. Then came a pair of gas pumps for his Red Horse filling station. Next followed a motor court, stuffed with all the

latest amenities, including "A Radio in Every Room" as his prominent signing advertised. Boots charged a hefty \$2.50 a night for one of his rooms to encourage an upscale clientele. Legend has it that Clark Gable, the "King of Hollywood," once signed the guest register. With the demise of Route 66 hard times inevitably descended on the Crossroads of America. Demolition was stopped by public protest in 2003 and in 2011 the Boots was rescued from duty as low-income housing by sisters Debye Harvey and Pixie Bledsaw. They returned the motel to its stylish beginnings and set about restoring the rooms one by one. The Boots Court Motel under the glowing green neon lights is thus one of the oldest operating tourist courts on the entire Main Street of America. In keeping with the 1940s vibe the Boots still has a radio in every room - but no television.

# 66 Drive-In

## Carthage

17231 Old Route 66 Boulevard



Richard Hollingshead began showing outdoor movies in his New Jersey driveway in 1933 with a projector mounted on the hood of his car and a screen pinned to some trees. A radio placed behind the screen provided the sound. He patented the concept for what he called Park-In Theaters. Hollingshead battled in court to retain exclusive rights to movie drive-ins but he ultimately lost and outdoor screens sprouted everywhere by the 1950s. At one time there were more than 5,000 drive-in theaters operating in America; today 95% are gone. The

numbers are similar in Missouri where 11 outdoor screens remain, including this one on the Mother Road. Bill Bradfield, who owned the Roxy Theater on the square in Carthage, expanded his cinematic footprint in town with the opening of the 66 Drive-In on September 22, 1949 with room for 500 cars. The steel tower holding the screen was an apropos 66 feet high. Bradfield put his son-in-law, V.F. Naramore, in charge of operations which began with an opening night presentation of *Two Guys from Texas*, a musical farce with Dennis Morgan and Jack Carson as song-and-dance men who get stranded on a dude ranch when their car breaks down. The Carthage drive-in died along with Route 66 in 1985 but was rescued and spruced up for an April 18, 1998 reopening. Most of the theater infrastructure is original, including the glass-block clad Art Deco ticket booth.

# KANSAS

13 miles



The signing into law of the Dwight D. Eisenhower National System of Interstate and Defense Highways in 1956 meant that states would suffer the loss of many communities that had grown up along Route 66. In Kansas it was different; the entire state would be bypassed by the interstate system. Historically, the southeast corner of the Sunflower State has been one of the nation's busiest lead

mining districts. That infrastructure included paved roads which attracted the planners of the original alignment for Route 66. When the highway was commissioned in 1926 only Illinois and Kansas offered motorists completely hard surfaces from the get-go. That route required a ninety-degree jog through 13 miles of Kansas. Pavement wasn't a novelty for interstate planners so they selected a more direct route for I-44. So long, Kansas. Old Route 66 is still there, waiting for road warriors to exit off the interstate.

# Cars on the Route

Galena

119 N Main Street



Rich veins of lead made Galena the first mining town in Kansas in 1877. Times were good and the population exceeded 10,000 by 1900. There were half as many people when America's Main Street linked in during the 1920s to staunch the decline. When Route 66 went away there was nothing to take its place as the Galena population dwindled under 3,000. The old Little's Service Station built in 1934 on Main Street became the restoration project of Betty Courtney, Melba Rigg, Renee Charles and Judy Courtney. When the work was done "4 Women on the Route" dished out sandwiches and gifts to Route 66 explorers. Parked outside was a rusty 1951 International Harvester L170 SERIES boom truck that would go on to make a star turn as Tow Mater in the animated movie series, *Cars*, voiced by Larry the Cable Guy. The tow truck is kept in running condition and rents to special events. With the success of the movie franchise the station name was changed to Cars on the Route.

# Old Riverton Store

Riverton  
7109 SE Highway 66



Back in the day, if you were looking for a competitive game of croquet along Route 66, this is where you came. Leo Williams, who built the store in 1925 after a tornado wiped out his previous operation next door, added a regulation court complete with a walled enclosure and lights for night play. In addition to croquet competition folks could also get everything from Texaco gasoline to freshly barbecued venison to shoes at the Williams' store. Leo died in 1948 but his wife Lora could still be found managing things into the 1970s. The second - and current family, the Eislers - took over in 1973. The vernacular commercial architecture of the single-story brick building has remained unaltered as it enters its tenth decade. Except the croquet court is gone. It was sacrificed for parking long ago when the welcoming business was tabbed as a official stop in Route 66 literature.

# Rainbow Bridge

Baxter Springs

SE Beasley Road off N Willow Avenue



Concrete is the most widely used building material in the world but its adoption was slow in coming. The first use of reinforced concrete in an arch bridge was in Hungary in 1889. When James Barney Marsh, an Iowa engineer and bridge builder, started constructing concrete and steel bridges in the early 1900s he published papers to advocate their use. In 1912 Marsh received a patent for a reinforced highway bridge that became known as the Marsh Rainbow Arch. He would oversee the construction of some 70 such bridges, many in the Sunflower State. There were three Marsh Rainbow Arch bridges on the short 13-mile jaunt for Route 66 through Kansas. When two of them were hauled away for scrap the Kansas Historic Route 66 Association became alarmed and stepped in to save the Rainbow Bridge. A spot for the 1923 bridge on the National Register of Historic Places alone did not insure its survival. Every Route 66 motorist drove across this graceful 130-bridge until the Mother Road was bypassed by I-44; it is still open for vehicle and pedestrian traffic beside the crossing that replaced it.