Route 66, Where Are You?
Four Cities and the Development of a Shared Cultural Resource

by

Anne Clayton Dodge

B.A., Visual and Environmental Studies and History, 1999
Harvard University

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in City Planning with a Certificate in Urban Design

at the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

June 2006

Copyright 2006 Massachusetts Institute of Technology. All rights reserved.

Signature of Author: ________________________________________
Department of Urban Studies and Planning
May 25, 2006

Certified by: ________________________________________________
J. Mark Schuster
Professor of Urban Cultural Policy
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by: ________________________________________________
Langley Keyes
Ford Professor of City and Regional Planning
Chair, MCP Committee, Department of Urban Studies and Planning
ROUTE 66, WHERE ARE YOU?
FOUR CITIES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SHARED CULTURAL RESOURCE

by

ANNE CLAYTON DODGE

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning on May 25, 2006
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master in City Planning

ABSTRACT

Although small towns, rural areas, state organizations, and federal programs are all pursuing the redevelopment of the Route 66 corridor, this paper focuses on how four urban communities currently are engaging with this cultural resource: Albuquerque, New Mexico; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Rancho Cucamonga, California; and Flagstaff, Arizona. More specifically, the paper answers two central questions; have urban places along the Route 66 corridor engaged in the preservation, development, and interpretation of the route, and if so, how and why have those forms of engagement differed from one another. Four case study chapters describe how engagement has taken different forms in different cities depending upon the city’s overall economic and political context, the city’s other redevelopment efforts, and the degree to which the city’s built fabric has survived the last twenty to thirty years of the corridor’s economic decline. Each chapter concludes with site-specific recommendations for each city.

After examining several local contexts for corridor redevelopment, the paper analyzes Route 66 as a national cultural resource and recommends strategies for local and interstate development and interpretation. Currently, Route 66 preservationists, advocates, and planners view states and cities as the route’s primary “units of preservation”, since these are the units in which preservation activity most often occurs. An alternative approach encourages Route 66 advocates to focus on regional and cultural themes as units for corridor redevelopment. This approach would emphasize the corridor’s connectivity by treating Route 66 as an interconnected network of places that interpret a common history. For the Route 66 corridor to reach its fullest potential both on the local and national level, it must be developed as a continuous place, in which each of its components contributes to the overall corridor’s success.

Thesis Supervisor: J. Mark Schuster
Title: Professor of Urban Cultural Policy
Route 66, Where Are You?
Four Cities and the Development of a Shared Cultural Resource

by Anne Dodge
Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the help of the Route 66 “roadies” and aficionados I met in my travels. In particular, I’m grateful for the conversations, insights, and cheeseburgers shared with Michael Taylor and Kaisa Barthuli at the National Park Service; Jim Conkle in California; David Kammer, Ed Boles and Johnnie Meier in New Mexico; and Dennis Whitaker and Emily Priddy in Tulsa. I owe a warm thanks to my departmental advisor, Terry Szold, for keeping me grounded here at MIT with her enthusiasm and candor. Lastly, if it weren’t for the conscientiousness and faith of Mark Schuster, I would never have found my way through the Route 66 maze. Thank you for seeing me through.
Table of Contents

1. Prologue ................................................................................................................. 9
2. Introduction ........................................................................................................ 13
3. Albuquerque, New Mexico: The Best of the Mother Road .................................... 29
4. Tulsa, Oklahoma: The Best-Laid Plans .............................................................. 51
5. Rancho Cucamonga, California: The Vanished Past ........................................ 73
6. Flagstaff, Arizona: The Future ............................................................................ 85
7. Conclusions ........................................................................................................ 99
8. Bibliography ....................................................................................................... 111
Prologue
I first learned about the “Route 66 Renaissance” in the spring of 2005, when I was browsing the Internet for a research paper subject. To complete the course Urban Design Policy and Action, I needed to find and analyze a government action that related to urban design and the built environment. Being a lover of history and the American West, I began my search with the National Park Service and discovered the Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program, a grant-making and advisory program run by the NPS for the preservation and development of the eight-state Route 66 corridor. After interviewing the administrators of the NPS program and reading about the program’s grant recipients, I began to wonder not just about the NPS’s involvement in Route 66, but about Route 66 in general – what was it, exactly? Where was it? Who was working on it? How were they trying to “develop” it? And why?

My first step in answering these questions was to get out on the road and see for myself what, exactly, Route 66 is. This was easier said than done – the former U.S. Highway 66 has not existed as a continuous road since the 1960s, when it began to be decommissioned. As the Federal Highway Administration began building the modern Interstate system, this new highway replaced the old U.S. Hwy 66 as a means of commercial and recreational transportation, and what was once “Route 66” was fractured into a series of state and local two-lane roads. At the same time, the federal government decommissioned older roads like Route 66 in a piecemeal fashion, taking down the Highway 66 signs and leaving the roads to be relabeled and renamed by the states. Some of these roads were far from the Interstate and continued to connect communities and cities to one another; others were paved over by the Interstate, and in these places Route 66 ceased to exist completely, except in some cases as an Interstate service road. So when I decided to drive Route 66 last summer, it was a tricky proposition – how does one do it? Is the road marked? Does it even exist as a continuous piece of roadway? And what, exactly, could I expect to see?

In August of 2005, I recruited former DUSP student Ariel Bierbaum on my Route 66 discovery tour, which happily coincided with her cross-country move from New Jersey to San Francisco. A month before we left, I began researching the Route 66 corridor and assembling a binder of all the sites that, according to a slew of internet testimonials, we simply could not miss: the Rock Café in Stroud, Oklahoma; the Gemini Giant statue in Wilmington, IL; The Petrified Forest and Painted Desert National Park in Arizona; Ted Drewes Frozen Custard in St. Louis; the Wigwam Motel in Holbrook, Arizona; the El Rancho Hotel (“Hotel of the Stars”) in Gallup, New Mexico; Meteor Crater near Leupp Corner, Arizona; the Big Texan hotel in Amarillo with its Texas-shaped swimming pool; a scale replica of Stonehenge in Rolla, Missouri; the famous Cadillac Ranch outside Amarillo. And this is only a partial list of the Route’s natural and manmade wonders, all of which are extensively photographed and written about all over the Internet, in a variety of languages. For a now nonexistent highway, Route 66 has an enormous cult following in both the US and abroad, and I was immediately impressed with the vast amount of information – both accurate and speculative – available online about Route 66 and its artifacts.
Above, the Rock Cafe in Stroud, Oklahoma. Below, the Cadillac Ranch just west of Amarillo, Texas. Source: Author.
So we began our trip – slowly at first, since we had only a vague sense of how much time we would want to spend at each landmark, whom we might meet, and what we were looking for. By then, I knew that Route 66 would be the subject of my master’s thesis – how could it not be? It was such an interesting, surprising, bizarre “place”; I was irresistibly drawn to it. And I wasn’t alone – everyone I met on my drive, those who worked on Route 66 and those who traveled it, was drawn to it too. Of course, I had formulated an initial and simple theory for why people (including myself) were interested in Route 66 – it was kitschy, eccentric, and literally quite far from the beaten path, and there will always be people in any culture who are drawn to its fringes. But to many people I met, Route 66 also epitomized a better time, a simpler era in American history before Walmart, before the social upheaval of the 1960’s, before computers and cell phones and global warming.

This was one of my initial fascinations with Route 66 and, later, with its aficionados – their conviction that the Route represents a better and more “American” America. Of course, I am not a student of sociology or American studies or even psychology, so this thesis does not attempt to unpack the notion of nostalgia and its role in Route 66 preservation. However, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my interest in this subject and my observation that these ideas – nostalgia, idealization, sentimentality – are active in the minds of many Route 66 advocates. This is particularly noticeable and important when questions of interpretation arise along the redeveloping corridor. These questions arise most frequently in the road’s many museums and interpretive centers. Although these buildings serve several purposes within their communities, their fundamental task is to communicate versions of the past to audiences in the present, and I fear for the future of Route 66 if its interpreters do not concern themselves with the questions of whose history they are telling and why they are telling it.

What this thesis does address is the planning and development of Route 66 in the urban areas through which it passes. The Route is a 2,400 mile-long corridor of cultural and architectural resources, winding from Chicago to Los Angeles through eight states and ten metropolitan areas. Of these ten cities, four have begun to engage with the development of the Route in the last five to ten years, with varying results. But to understand the role of Route 66 in each of these case study cities, it is important to understand the Route as a whole – where it came from, where it has been, and where it might be headed.

---

1 These ten cities include Route 66’s two points of origin. The Route’s ten major cities are: Chicago, IL; Saint Louis, MO; Springfield, MO; Tulsa, OK; Oklahoma City, OK; Amarillo, TX; Santa Fe, NM (a part of Route’s original alignment – it was rerouted in the 1930’s to bypass Santa Fe); Albuquerque, NM; Flagstaff, AZ; Los Angeles, CA.
Introduction
With this research, I will answer two central questions: have urban places along Route 66 engaged in the preservation, development, and interpretation of the route, and if so, how and why have those forms of engagement differed from one another? To approach these questions, I begin by describing the history of Route 66, the present-day Route 66, and the historic roads “movement” in the United States. I am also including a brief background on the ownership patterns and market forces that affect the future of motels along Route 66, because motels have been such an important and illustrative part of my research in three of the four case studies. I conclude the Introduction with a description of why I chose to focus on urban activity along Route 66 rather than rural and state-based initiatives, and how I identified my case study cities.

What Is Route 66, and Where Did It Come From?

In 1926, the Federal government’s Bureau of Public Roads launched the nation’s first numbered and organized highway system. This action followed years of lobbying from commercial organizations, agricultural business interests, bicyclists, and rural Americans who formed the backbone of the “Good Roads Movement” of the early 20th century. From the early 1900s until the 1930s, paved roads were still uncommon outside of urban areas, and agricultural businesses interests were beginning to advocate for good quality roads to connect agricultural areas and urban markets. This coincided with the expansion of Rural Free Delivery by the U.S. Postal service; it was not until 1913 that both US Mail and Parcel Post could be delivered directly to rural households. Therefore, both government and corporations had an interest in the paving of rural roads, since

![Route 66 road workers outside of Flagstaff, Arizona, 1926. Source: Northern Arizona University.](image-url)
existing dirt and gravel roads were unreliable at best, and impassable at worst. Even urban dwellers began to lobby for stronger roadways connecting the city to the country and cities to one another, since the growing popularity of the automobile highlighted the limitations imposed by poor roadways.

Many of the roads that became part of U.S. Highway 66 were first paved by volunteer community labor. This system worked well in the vicinity of towns and cities, but connecting these roads to one another posed a difficult challenge. In 1926, the federal government attempted to meet this challenge with the establishment of the U.S. Highway system. Due in part to the efforts of Tulsa native Cyrus Avery, the Commissioner of the Bureau of Public Roads, U.S. Highway 66 was declared a federal highway in the first round of designations; at the time, less than 25% of the newly designated highway was actually paved.\(^1\) What would become Route 66 wound 2,400 miles south from Chicago, through Saint Louis, Missouri, down through Tulsa and Oklahoma City, across the southwest via Santa Fe, New Mexico, and ended in downtown Los Angeles.\(^2\) Because Route 66 began as a series of interconnected, local roads that were built out from the center of countless towns, it was the “Main Street” of most of the towns and cities that it passed through. This feature, a direct result of the corridor’s historic origins, earned Route 66 one of its most popular nicknames, the “Main Street of America”.


\(^2\) For more on Cyrus Avery, see Chapter 4, “Tulsa, Oklahoma: The Best-Laid Plans”. This itinerary describes the 1926 Route 66 alignment; later alignments bypassed Santa Fe for Albuquerque, New Mexico.
It took ten years for a combination of federal, state-based, and local efforts to finally pave the entire length of Route 66. By then, the Route’s year-round accessibility and the boosterizing efforts of the newly-formed U.S. Highway 66 Association had made Route 66 one of America’s most well-known and well-traveled highways. Over the next four decades, the Route would see three distinct eras, characterized by different users and the businesses that sprung up along the corridor to serve them. In the 1920’s and 1930’s, Route 66 was the primary migration route for dustbowl farmers abandoning the arid fields of Oklahoma for agricultural work in California. While poor and usually short of cash, these migrants supported a string of Route 66 automobile service businesses and camp-sites, some of which later became full-fledged Route 66 motor courts and motels. In the same era, the Works Progress Administration was responsible for the construction of some of the Route’s most distinguished architectural features, like the state fairgrounds in Albuquerque, New Mexico. During the 1940’s, the Route served as an east-west thoroughfare for the transportation of military supplies for WWII, and many of the Route’s most well-known diners and truckstops date from this period, like the Rock Café in Stroud, Oklahoma. The last era of Route 66’s life as a cross-country thoroughfare was the 1950’s and early 1960’s, before the construction of the Interstate highway system, when families and tourists drove Route 66 westward to sightsee America’s built and natural wonders. This was the golden era of automobile tourism, when traffic backed up each day at sunset along Route 66 as tourists piled into the Route’s cities and towns, looking for a motor court to spend the night before another day of driving and sightseeing.

After the construction of the Interstate, the use of Route 66 as a means of travel from place to place disappeared. Some businesses, like diners and gas stations, survived by focusing on the needs of local clients instead of travelers. But other businesses, like motels, did not fare as well, since the market for their services practically disappeared. This left Route 66 in a state of decay, more vulnerable to abandonment than to redevelopment by the chain stores and big box retail that populate the Interstate. The last portion of Route 66 was decommissioned in 1985 in Arizona, although the road had long ceased to function as a continuous commercial and tourism thoroughfare. Then, in the late 1980s and early 1990’s, aficionados of Route 66 culture began to emerge. The first of the eight state-based Historic Route 66 Associations was founded in 1987 in Arizona, and within a few years all other seven states founded comparable organizations. Michael Wallis, the author of the best-selling Route 66 – The Mother Road (published in 1990), calls this period the beginning of the “Route 66 Renaissance” – a period of preservation, advocacy, events, organization, and self-expression celebrating the corridor and its history.

---

3 For more on the Rock Café (built in 1939) and its friendly owner, Dawn, see http://www.rockcaferoute66.com/, as well as Chapter 4, “Tulsa, Oklahoma: The Best-Laid Plans”.
4 While today’s traveler would find it hard to believe that there was ever traffic along Route 66, I was told by several interviewees of the traffic jams that used to happen on the edges of Flagstaff, Albuquerque, and Tulsa as tourists would pull into the city for the night, looking for affordable, clean lodging.
While I would not presume to call myself a serious Route 66 “roadie”, I have driven the length of the corridor from Chicago to Los Angeles, and I stopped to see as many of the road’s must-see sights as possible during my limited three-week trip. Then, several months after my first drive, I revisited each of the case study cities in order to gain a better understanding of their patterns of engagement with Route 66. From these first travels along Route 66, I was left with an overwhelming impression of the corridor as a half-formed, nascent resource – a destination just beginning to understand its own potential. The road was punctuated with small oases of recreated history, such as the Odell Gas Station in Odell, Illinois, where it was clear that a small band of zealots had poured years of money and effort into the pristine preservation of one small piece of their shared history (see picture). And there were other places, like Central Avenue in Albuquerque, where a concentration of decayed, restored, and completely re-imagined buildings and signage created a patchwork of the past and the present that epitomizes what Route 66 could become, if fully realized. In between, there were hundreds of miles of deserted road, abandoned service stations, breathtaking vistas, and small town Main Streets with empty storefronts. These silent places have a static beauty of their own, but Route 66’s identity relies on the corridor’s nodes of activity, more than its long stretches of silence.

In “The Ballad of Route 66”, journalist Christopher Hitchens describes his drive on Route 66 as an assault of on his cultural and aesthetic sensibilities. “You hear a lot about the standardization of America, the sameness and drabness of the brand names and the roadside clutter, but you have to be exposed to thousands of miles of it to see how obliterating the process really is. The food! The coffee! The newspapers! The radio!

The revamped Odell Gas Station in Odell, Illinois. The station no longer sells gas, but visitors can see the interior of the original station and service bays, upon request. Source: Author.
Two present-day incarnations of the Route 66 roadbed. Above, a section of original Route 66 paving in rural Illinois. Below, a section of unpaved, gravel Route 66 in Arizona dating from before the road became a continuous, paved highway. Source: Author.
These would all disgrace a mediocre one-party state, or a much less prosperous country,” he wrote of Route 66 in 2002. For an observer who expects culture to jump up and grab him by his white-collared shirt, perhaps Route 66 is a bit of a disappointment. First of all, its scale is so large that Route 66 can be difficult to comprehend as a discrete place. In total, the corridor covers 2,400 miles of roadway with only intermittent punctuations of human settlement and pedestrian activity. Also, Route 66 was built and developed around the car; therefore, in order to experience both the road and its communities, a roadie must know not only where to drive, but also where to stop and find some interesting conversation. I suspect that Hitchens spent too much time hopping on and off the Interstate (or as the roadies call it, the “SuperSlab”), since I found no shortage of fascinating locals and fellow travelers from all over the world on my roadtrip – Dutch, German, Japanese, Australian, even a Briton walking around the world via Route 66 to raise money for cancer research. The meaning of Route 66 is very much in the eye of the beholder, and in Route 66’s current incarnation, the eye must be sharp enough to perceive the corridor’s many small incidences of community, commemoration, and celebration.

In addition to its physical presence, present-day Route 66 has a cultural presence that reflects decades of music, television, literature, advertising, and other cultural products that have celebrated the road. All of these associations deepen the traveler’s Route 66 experience, since they comprise a reservoir of shared associations and meaning. Although this thesis does not focus on the sociology of Route 66, I do want to address the questions of what makes a physical place meaningful, and what are the economic, social, and cultural barriers to preserving and developing these meaningful places. To address the first of these questions – what makes a place meaningful – I look to history, memory, and emotional resonance, all of which Route 66 has in abundance. Associated with this are the actual structures that make up the Route’s built environment, particularly the commercial architecture and signage that situate the Route in a specific period of America’s built history. The route is also a place lined with spectacular natural beauty, like the Grand Canyon and the Painted Desert National Park. But Route 66’s meaning is not solely derived from its built and natural environment and the history that they represent. Meaning also resides in the cultural products associated with Route 66 – the song (“Get Your Kicks On Route 66”), the “Route 66” television series, The Grapes of Wrath (the novel and movie), and other media from the route’s period of significance that reference the Mother Road. It is perhaps due to these cultural products that Route 66 has emerged as an internationally recognizable icon. People from all over the world who may not know where the actual Route 66 roadway exists still recognize the Route 66 brand; currently, “Route 66” as a brand is used by at least two companies with no affiliation to the road itself (a line of clothing at Kmart and a GIS software company based in the Netherlands).

5 Christopher Hitchens, “The Ballad of Route 66”.
6 Another well-used term among roadies is the “Insipid Interstate”, or just “The Insipid”. Regarding the Worldwalker, Mark Cundy, I spotted him walking on the Interstate 40 service road (“Old Route 66”) outside of Amarillo, Texas, and stopped to have a chat with him and offer him a bottle of water, which he accepted. To read more about his walk, see http://www.worldwalker.co.uk/.
7 As a Federally designated highway, Route 66 existed from 1926 to 1984, when the last segment of the original highway was bypassed by the Interstate in Williams, Arizona.
A Context for Corridor Preservation

To contextualize my inquiry into Route 66’s redevelopment, I have looked at other heritage corridors in the United States to get a sense of how communities, states, and the federal government have engaged with similar resources. I restricted my background research to the United States because, unlike other parts of the world engaged with preservation such as Western Europe and Asia, the United States only has about two-hundred years of built history to preserve. Like our built heritage, our culture and national identity are also of recent vintage, and I believe that this distinguishes historic preservation in the United States from preservation in the rest of the world. Therefore, the preserved and redeveloped linear corridors that I can compare most meaningfully to Route 66 will most likely be found in the United States.

To begin with, I examined planning initiatives surrounding other historic roads, like the Lincoln Highway and the National Road, and then looked at canals and other industrial corridors. Efforts to preserve and plan for these corridors in the United States began in the 1980’s with a flurry of activity surrounding industrial canal and railway corridors, particularly in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and New York. Chief among these corridors was the Erie Canal, which runs from the Hudson River in New York to Lake Erie. In 1992, perhaps fifty years after the canal ceased to be economically relevant as a trade corridor, the New York State legislature transferred the Erie and other state canals from the state’s transportation department to the New York State Thruway Authority. This action followed a decade of grassroots efforts to preserve the locks, bridges, and ports along the canal, many of which were located in the historic commercial centers of small industrial towns. The New York State Canal Corporation, a subsidiary of the Thruway Authority, now manages and develops the canals for recreational and tourism use. Like Route 66, the Erie Canal runs through multiple towns that depended upon the canal for their economic survival during the canal’s period of significance in the mid 1800’s. Both Route 66 and the Erie Canal represented feats of engineering that forged new pathways for travel and commerce. Also like Route 66, shipping along the canal was almost completely replaced by trains; Erie Canal towns were “bypassed” by the railways much like the towns along Route 66 were bypassed by the Interstate. However, the canal’s period of significance predates the Route’s by a century; this gave Erie Canal preservationists in the 1980’s and 1990’s a greater time-distance from which to observe the canal’s historic importance.

In the 1990’s, northeastern communities engaged in the preservation of other industrial corridors as well. These included the East Broad Top Railroad Corridor, the Allegheny Ridge corridor, and a number of other smaller initiatives, many of which are

---

8 An important exception is the archaeological preservation work related to early (Native) American settlement. However, in terms of urban settlement and its associated structures, Americans did not begin to construct buildings, monuments, and infrastructure until the late 18th century.


10 http://www.canals.state.ny.us/welcome/index.html.
now combined and designated as U.S. National Heritage Areas and Corridors.\textsuperscript{11} To date, the National Park Service has designated 27 of these National Heritage Areas throughout the United States, many of which originated in shared transportation and commercial routes like Route 66. However, all of them date their period of significance to the 19\textsuperscript{th} or very early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, periods that pose a set of preservation and interpretation challenges very different from those arising from Route 66. For example, preservationists of 19\textsuperscript{th} century waterway corridors do not have to address the conflict between creating a tourist-oriented, pedestrian environment and preserving automobile-scaled historic architecture, as do preservationists along Route 66 (see Albuquerque Case Study). Also, industrial corridors define themselves by a single shared experience – the development of a particular industry in a particular place. This lends these areas a thematic cohesiveness that Route 66 lacks.

The Route 66 Renaissance might be better compared to the resurgence of interest in historic American automobile highways, like the National Road and the Lincoln Highway. Both of these long-distance roads, as well as other historic highways, have been at the center of national preservation efforts beginning in the 1990’s. In 1991, the federally-sponsored National Scenic Byways program was created to recognize the “archaeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and scenic qualities” of America’s roadways.\textsuperscript{12} A few years later in 1996, the first biennial “Preserving the Historic Road” national conference was held under the auspices of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.\textsuperscript{13} This conference addresses issues particular to historic roads, as opposed to scenic byways, which can be designated based solely on the beauty of the roadside’s natural landscape. Although both of these initiatives reflect a growing national interest in historic roadways, road preservation advocacy tends to begin at the grassroots level before engaging local, state, and federal government.\textsuperscript{14}

For example, the modern-day Lincoln Highway Association, which incorporates twelve individual state-based Lincoln Highway organizations, was formed by a group of advocates in 1992 to “identify, preserve, interpret and improve access to the Lincoln Highway and its associated sites.”\textsuperscript{15} This organization acts as an inter-state communications clearinghouse about current events, festivals, and preservation initiatives along the Lincoln Highway, and it organizes an annual conference specifically for advocates, residents, and preservationists along the corridor. It is important to note that the Lincoln Highway’s period of significance (1920 to 1940) predates that of Route 66 by almost twenty years. The highway was not an all-season road like Route 66 and was never designated by the federal government as a numbered highway, as Route 66 was in the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[11] The National Heritage Areas program is a National Park Service initiative that designates places, “where natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography.” See http://www.cr.nps.gov/heritageareas/FAQ/INDEX.HTM.
\item[13] This year’s “Preserving the Historic Road Conference” was held in Boston; it was here as a volunteer organizer that I first heard roadies use the term “movement” to describe the rising tide of interest in historic road preservation and tourism.
\item[15] http://www.lincolnhighwayassoc.org/about/.
\end{footnotes}
1920’s. As a result of these and other circumstances, the Lincoln Highway never gained
the cultural prominence of Route 66. However, the present-day Lincoln Highway
preservation movement benefits from a very active, multi-state association that keeps a
regularly updated website of all activities relating to the corridor.\textsuperscript{16}

In contrast, Route 66 does not have an effective, national-scale, non-profit or-\norganization. Organizationally, Route 66 does have a “Route 66 Federation”, an institution
that nominally represents the unified voice of each of the eight state-based Route 66
Associations. However, the Route 66 Federation currently does not have active leader-
ship or membership; functionally, the National Park Service Route 66 Corridor Program
performs most of the functions that the Route 66 Federation does not – specifically, facili-
tating communication between different states, cities, and towns; organizing conferences
and workshops; and a providing a national vision for the corridor’s development.\textsuperscript{17} The
Route 66 Federation’s inability to meet this need, as compared to the Lincoln Highway
Association, may simply be a matter of the scale of preservation activity. Route 66 has a
much richer stock of historic commercial architecture than comparable historic highways
and as a result generates much more preservation activity and advocacy in the public and
private sectors.

The quantity and quality of Route 66’s roadside architecture also represents one of
the corridor’s most complicated and unique preservation challenges, a challenge particu-
lar to Route 66’s period of significance. Other historic highways and canals date from
a period of building construction in which architects and builders relied more heavily
on native materials and local building practices. As Anthony Tung asserts in his book
\textit{Preserving the World’s Great Cities}, buildings made of local materials using pre-modern
construction techniques are becoming increasingly rare in the world’s building stock and
are emerging as a preservation priority because of their scarcity. This is true both in the
United States and abroad and will pose a conundrum for Route 66 preservationists, since
much of the Route’s most interesting and characteristic roadside architecture was not
built to last.

Unlike other linear corridors, which date their significance to the mid and late
1800s, Route 66 dates its period of significance to the 1920s, through the Depression
and WWII, to the early 1960s. Many of the corridor’s most interesting structures were
built during WWII, when building supplies were scarce and expensive and construction
standards were compromised by shortage of labor and materials. Others were built after
the war until the early 1960s, when modern construction methods and materials began
to homogenize the American landscape. Certainly, Route 66 has its share of pre-war
motels built with solid-block construction, like Pauline Bauer’s La Puerta Lodge, as well
as beautiful, handmade WPA projects like the Chandler Armory in Chandler, Oklahoma,
which is made of native Oklahoma stone. However, other landmarks may not fare as
well in the Route 66 preservation movement since they were built of modern materials
that were neither indigenous to the area nor particularly durable to begin with. Some are
still insulated with asbestos, like Tulsa’s “Rose Bowl” bowling alley, built in 1961 along

\textsuperscript{16} http://www.lincolnhighwayassoc.org/about/.
\textsuperscript{17} http://www.cr.nps.gov/rt66/.
11th Street in Tulsa. The architecture that sprung from the building patterns and materials in vogue during the Route’s period of significance will continue to complicate both the techniques and the priorities of preservation as the Route develops. But the passage of time will undoubtedly reframe the importance of different styles and methods of building construction, as Route 66’s heyday retreats further into history.

---

18 I first learned of the “Rose Bowl” from Dennis Whitaker, a planner in Tulsa, who told me that the building is filled with asbestos and that the current owner purchased the building from the city in the hopes of reselling at a profit. The building is currently listed on Ebay with a starting bid of $499,000.

---

Above, a 1960’s era postcard from Tulsa’s Rose Bowl Lanes. Source: www.tulsatvmemories.com. Below, the Rose Bowl today, boarded up and for sale to the highest bidder. Source: www.ebay.com
Motels – An Area of Focus

In my travels and research, I discovered that some of the most exciting, eccentric, and threatened properties on the Route 66 Corridor are its numerous motels and hotels. Hotels on Route 66 take on a wide range of fascinating forms, including wigwams, converted Harvey Houses, detached cabins with garages, and most commonly, drive-in courtyard motels. In this thesis, I have looked closely at the preservation and rehabilitation of motels, since they represent some of the Route’s most eccentric and most vulnerable architecture. They have also found themselves squarely in the crossfire in many cities, as local government (particularly in Albuquerque) has tried to crack down on motel-related crime. Lastly, motel owners represent one of the largest and newest Route 66 “demographics” – Indian and Pakistani immigrants who have become the primary owners of these historic resources.

To explain how this phenomenon began, it is important to understand how “bypassing” affected Route 66 businesses. Motels were the first businesses to feel the loss of commercial and tourist traffic when the Route was bypassed in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, as they were supplanted by newer, cleaner, and cheaper chain motels off the exit ramps of the Interstate highway system. This decommissioning and relocation of the hotel client base opened up a huge market of older motels for purchase; some of these motels were purchased by East Indian and Pakistani immigrants, many of whom moved to the United States in order to purchase and run these businesses. Newer motels (mostly chains) were opening up along the interstate, taking away business (and also reducing sale prices for a generation eager to leave the sputtering roadside motel business). So a trend began, and for many of these owners, this was only a stepping stone toward owning an established chain motel in a better, higher-traffic location. When these properties began to change hands in the 1970s and 1980s, they were only twenty or thirty years past their prime – old enough to have suffered from neglect or simple wear and tear, but too young to appear “historic” even to those concerned with preservation of Route 66. This new group of owners may not have even known that they were buying properties with any particular significance in the American landscape – not surprising, since Route 66 in the 1980s was a landscape of abandonment and deterioration, a string of bypassed communities with fading architecture, broken neon signs, and only the occasional lost or curious traveler to make up the dwindling tourist market.

According to the Asian American Hotel Owner’s Association (AAHOA), Asian Americans, mostly Indians, “own more than 20,000 hotels [in the United States], which have 1 million rooms representing over 50 percent of the economy lodging properties and nearly 37 percent of all hotel properties in the United States.” In other words, half

The Harvey House chain was the first hotel and restaurant chain in the southwestern United States, built by entrepreneur Fred Harvey in partnership with the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad Company. The Harvey Houses are credited with bringing the first “civilized” services to westward-bound train travelers, and have been immortalized by the movie-musical The Harvey Girls and Judy Garland’s rendition of the famous song Johnny Mercer song, “The Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe”. For more about Harvey Houses and Harvey Girls, see The Harvey Girls: Women Who Opened the West by Lesley Poling-Kempes.

www.AAHOA.com.
of the “economy lodging properties”, which include motels and other budget accommodations, are owned by Asians. In addition, the AAHOA estimates that 6,300 of the 20,000 Asian-owned hotels are non-franchise properties like the majority of independently owned motels along the Route 66 corridor. Clearly, this population represents a substantial economic and cultural presence on the American highway landscape.

A tangle of factors has contributed to the creation of this cultural/economic niche, including immigration patterns, the development of the American highway system and its roadside economy, and the live/work arrangement that comes with motel ownership. In an article in The New York Times, one Indian motel owner attributes the trend to a few simple factors: “Technically, it’s easy to run. You don’t need fluent English, just the will to work long hours…And it’s a business that comes with a house -- you don’t have to buy a separate house. Another important thing is the cash flow. We like that.”

The article also asserts that many new Indian immigrants have an informal financial system of friends and relatives from whom to borrow the initial down payment for the purchase of a motel property. “That…is one key to how this particular niche was captured. The down payment was seldom a problem for a prospective Indian purchaser, who was often able to turn to a network of relatives and friends to help him out.”

The down payment is only the first hurdle of motel ownership, however. The real problem is making a living off of such a sluggish business, a problem that in some cases has led to laissez-faire rental practices and even outright negligence in the management of older motels along Route 66, regardless of the owner’s background or experience. In an interview about the fate of motels, Johnnie Meier, the former president of the New Mexico Route 66 Association, recalled a conversation with an Albuquerque motel owner: “Some of these guys are being offered $200 a night by someone to be left alone, versus the asking price of $19.95. How can they resist when they can barely pay their mortgages?” In other cases, the motel owners stay in business by keeping prices affordable for local, regular tenants, who provide a somewhat reliable source of cash flow. The hazards of this market, however, are the same as those of any low-income renting market, but without the security (from the landlord’s perspective) provided by a long-term lease.

The strange forces at work in semi-rural America during this time have led to a confluence of events around the motels of Route 66 – a wave of East Indian/Pakistani ownership, and at the same time, a new trend in the illegal drug market that made low-profile motels the perfect spot for the production of methamphetamines. The number of Route 66 motels that have hosted meth labs may not be calculable, but in the city of Albuquerque alone, more than 40 of the city’s motels were identified by the local paper as meth lab sites. In Albuquerque, this trend was recognized in the late 1990s and addressed by the city in the form of advisory committees, panels, and a wave of code-violation shutdowns and demolitions of some of the city’s most historic motel properties.

Oklahoma, Arizona, California, and New Mexico have all had their share of methamphetamine-related motel incidents. The drug can be cheaply produced from over the counter cold medicine and household chemicals; its chemical production is relatively cheap and can be performed within an area as small as the trunk of a car or a motel bathroom. The drug has plagued semi-rural America for the last decade, as its in-home

---

22 Tunku Varadarajan, “A Patel Motel Cartel?”.
production has enabled local populations to create and distribute the drug cheaply and with little formalized networking. Although crime and motels have been bedfellows for years, the meth lab trend has had a particular impact on older Route 66 properties; they provide the perfect combination of cash-poor owners and managers and a don’t-ask-don’t-tell population of fellow renters who are not likely to jeopardize their own anonymity by complaining about the strange smell coming from the room next door.

Still, the motels that survive on Route 66 have done so by filling affordable housing gaps in their respective cities. This is the only “adaptive reuse” that has enabled the original motel structures to survive, unlike the situation with many diners and gas stations. The corridor is littered with cafes sporting a Route 66 theme while catering primarily to local clientele, who provide the bulk of the restaurants’ daily commerce. The counterpart to this market in the motel economy is local tenants who rent on a weekly or monthly basis. These tenants can rent a motel room for between $300 and $500 per month, on a month-to-month basis, with cable, telephone, and electricity included. For some populations this is an attractive deal, despite the occasionally decaying condition of the motels. Tenants may not have adequate credit to order their own utilities, or they may only be temporary residents of the city in search of work or other sources of income. However, motels in places like Albuquerque, Tulsa, or smaller towns along Route 66 must make a living catering to long-term tenants, despite the crime that often plagues these populations, since these are often the only customers available. Sometimes, these populations cannot afford cash rent, but the anonymity of the motels allows for unorthodox forms of payment; one study from Northern Arizona University showed that older motels in Holbrook, AZ, near Flagstaff, often exchanged rent for repair and remodeling labor when tenants were not able to pay cash.²³

While many owners run motels that serve relatively stable populations, such as veterans and the homeless who have housing vouchers or other forms of reliable public assistance, others find themselves catering to transient populations that are more likely to engage in on-site illegal activity. Unfortunately, the ubiquity of east-Indian motel owners has coincided with the economic and social factors that have marginalized older motels and left them vulnerable to vice. This coincidence has resulted in pure and simple racism on the part of some community members and Route 66 supporters, and this is one of most complex and under-acknowledged aspects of Route 66 preservation and advocacy. The most overt indication of this racism is the use of the slogan “American Owned” on motel signs, along Route 66 and across the country. This designation is meant to distinguish white-owned motels from Indian-owned. In 2002, The New York Times covered this phenomenon in a brief article about Winslow, Arizona, and two Route 66 motels that neighbor one another – one owned by a naturalized American, Navin “Nick” Bhatt, and one owned by Candy Moore, a white American. Ms. Moore’s motel sign bears the label “American Owned and Operated”, which she claimed to have placed on her sign following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. “Oh, we put that up two weeks after September 11. We thought of it weeks prior but we never got around to it.”²⁴

---

²³ I was told about this student-led research project by Sean Evans, a librarian at Northern Arizona University. See Sean Evans interview, Northern Arizona University, January 11, 2006.

Among Route 66 preservationists and advocates, the “American Owned” issue did not come up immediately in my interviews. But once I asked people how they felt about this, most expressed discomfort with the practice of labeling motels “American Owned,” and some had even taken public stands against it. Emily Priddy, the Eastern Vice President of the Oklahoma Route 66 Association, told me that she has set up a website to promote Oklahoma’s historic Route 66 motels and that she refuses to list motels that label themselves “American Owned”. “It’s a matter of principle”, states Priddy, who has established an outreach program for the Oklahoma Route 66 Association in which she presents all motel owners with a welcome packet and an introduction to Route 66 history, in case they are not aware of their motel’s historic significance. Priddy is also at least a generation younger than most Route 66 advocates I met, which may explain some of her open-mindedness toward new Americans. Michael Wallis, the unofficial spokesman for Route 66, has also spoken out about discrimination along Route 66 against Indian-motel owners. In our interview, he put present-day racism along Route 66 into the road’s historic context. “It’s a lot like Okies and the Black experience – I can still remember seeing signs out west, no drunks no Indians. And I take that [forward] to today with the obvious racism of ‘American Owned’. It’s total backlash against Pakistani’s and East Indians on the road, some of whom are great motel managers and some of whom aren’t.”

As I learned more about the Route 66 Renaissance, I kept Wallis’s perspective in the forefront of my mind. Racism is no more endemic to Route 66 today than it always has been to Route 66 and to America at large. But still, it seems incongruous with the “Route 66” brand, which suggests a free and prosperous America with automobiles and milkshakes for all. Again, this thesis is not an exploration of the symbology of Route 66 or its place in American sociology; but questions of race, place, and meaning arose in all of my interviews with preservationists, motel owners, city planners, and other roadies. Motels illustrate the role of race in Route 66’s renaissance particularly well, since motels have presented Albuquerque, Flagstaff, and (to a lesser extent) Tulsa with their most difficult preservation challenges. Most importantly, the motel situation has highlighted what I think is one of the Route 66 Renaissance’s most dangerous flaws – the lack of ethnic and cultural diversity in the preservation movement. However, motels are not the focus of this thesis; they are only one of many types of property that communities and individuals have preserved, neglected, or demolished.

The Thesis and the Cases

Although small towns, rural areas, state organizations, and federal programs are all pursuing the redevelopment of Route 66, this thesis focuses on how urban communities are engaging with their Route 66 corridors, and why, now, cities are beginning to cultivate this cultural resource. I have restricted my research to urban areas because I did not think I would ever be able to understand and describe the numerous small town and rural initiatives that have been springing up for decades along Route 66. Also, there are far fewer urban areas along the eight-state corridor – perhaps only one or two sizable cities in each state – and only a handful have actively engaged with Route 66 in the last five
to ten years. I identified my four case studies with help from Michael Taylor and Kaisa Barthuli at the National Park Service Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program. Part of their work is to help local governments formulate corridor management and preservation programs, and they directed me to the four cities that I write about here.

Certainly other cities have also engaged to some extent with Route 66. However, the four case study cities in this paper – Albuquerque, Tulsa, Rancho Cucamonga, and Flagstaff – have all distinguished themselves with conspicuous and focused planning efforts that address Route 66 as a corridor, not just as a series of individual properties. Other cities may have involved themselves with the preservation of individual properties along Route 66, but the four case study cities have claimed both the road and its built accessories as an important part of their urban fabric. Yet even though all four cities have embraced Route 66 as a linear resource, they have approached development in different ways. I have learned that these differences depend very much upon the context in which Route 66 redevelopment is occurring. Two additional factors, in particular, have been the most relevant to my contextual analysis: the quality of Route 66’s existing built fabric in each city, and the city’s current development agenda. The larger social and economic forces at work in the city affect both of these factors, and in the following four chapters, I describe how these forces vary from case to case. At the end of each chapter, I conclude with site-specific recommendations for each city. Finally, in the thesis Conclusion, I look at Route 66 as a national corridor and recommend strategies for local and national corridor development and interpretation.