

THE CULTURAL PLANNING ON ROADSIDE AMERICA: The Historic and Vernacular Context of Route 66 Based on the Regionalism

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After surveying the historic and vernacular basis for Route 66's popularity as a case study of Roadside America, this paper focuses on cultural planning with vernacular culture, which made the "National Highway" known as "Route 66" an American icon and an object of vernacular nostalgia. This paper also analyzes the perceptions of contemporary Route 66 enthusiasts, and discusses the interpretation of roadside vernacular culture and cultural landscapes along Route 66, especially in the State of Oklahoma. Route 66 is important to understanding the role of automobility and mobility, in general, on modern American automobile culture, and recognizing its crucial relationship to the "National Highway System" in America as well. This paper touches upon the history of roadbuilding and transportation in America, as well as Route 66 – as a symbolic "Mother Road" in America, while focusing primarily on American roadside vernacular culture or American popular culture based on the regionalism in the Oklahoma region.

Keywords: *automobility, national highway system, route 66, roadside vernacular culture, cultural planning*

1. INTRODUCTION: DEFINITION OF CULTURAL PLANNING

Today, the "Cultural Turn"¹ in the positioning of cities and towns is a response to the profound implications for how cities work and survive in the context of two major forces; globalization and the "new economy," in which technology, creativity, human capital, and capacity for innovation are the watchwords. It is also partly in response to a renewed concern with the quality of life in cities that, "Cultural Planning" has begun to enter the language of urban planning although that term is relatively new, emerging out of Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, as cities and towns faced changing economies and demographics. As part of European urban regeneration strategies, cultural planning integrated the arts into other aspects of local culture and into the texture and routines of daily life in the city. For instance, in the U.K., cultural planning has been used to assist local governments, urban planners, and community organizations in the delivery of cultural strategies and joined-up cultural and community

plans.¹⁾

Indeed, communities around the world today are actively engaged in cultural planning and nurturing cultural development. It is a way of looking at all aspects of a community's cultural life as community assets. Cultural planning considers the increased and diversified benefits these assets could bring to the community in the future, if planned for strategically.²⁾

However actually, cultural planning is not a very new idea. It was an idea that was at the birth of the Town Planning Movement in the early Twentieth Century. It is in the work of Patrick Geddes,² a Scottish biologist and philosopher, and a founder of the discipline and practice of Town and Regional Planning in the U.K. Jane Jacobs, an urbanist, a writer, and an activist in the U. S., saw the city as an ecosystem composed of physical-economic-ethical processes interacting with each other in a natural flow. While developing the idea of the city as a living ecosystem is very much at heart of cultural planning, Jacobs implicitly acknowledged her debt to Geddes who imported from French geography the idea of the "Natural Region."³ For Geddes, planning had to start

with a survey of the resources of such natural region; these ingredients were “folk, work, place,” of the human responses to it, and of the resulting complexities of the cultural landscape and of the human response to such natural region.³⁾

Since the 1980s, the concept of cultural planning has been considerably developed in the U.S., where it has been associated with the increased importance of culture for urban development and creative cities. Robert McNulty, a project director of The Partners for Livable Communities (TPLC)⁴ in Washington DC, published a report of “*Culture and Communities: the Arts in the Life of American Cities*.” McNulty’s report suggested that cultural planning is a process that takes stock of existing cultural resources and asks how they can be maintained, enhanced, or developed to continue to improve people’s lives and the vitality, livability, and success of their community.⁴⁾

Moreover, cultural planning needs to be integrated into other aspects of planning – such social, economics, transport, education, environment, and urban renewal – in order to play a truly effective role in citizens’ lives in creating development opportunities for the whole of the local community. In this context, the use of cultural assets is clearly seen as a cultural resource for both community improvements and urban revitalization in community planning, such as today’s “Livable City.”⁵⁾

2. AUTOMOBILE CULTURE AND AMERICAN DREAM

Today’s development of transport and its related urban development are also questionable in terms of aesthetics and morality. To put sustainable forms of mobility into urban planning, Americans, however, celebrate their automobility along with the other transportation innovations that have almost uniquely helped to define them as “a people.” Of course, all humans are inherently mobile and are not tied to a particular place but are able to move if they so desire from one place to another. The almost hyper mobility of Americans, supported by the mass-produced automobile and America’s extensive highway system, has contributed significantly to American history and culture. Mobility broadens American horizons and enables American people to establish new contacts, to gain new experiences, and to increase their knowledge. Automobility is the defining experience in the “American way of life.” For Americans, mobility means “Freedom” as the American dream and that freedom shapes who they

are as Americans; America’s love affair with the automobile has been eventually continuous and passionate.

However, there are also negative consequences of automobility and mobility as seen in modern America. For instance, the increase of automobile traffic inevitably leads to a loss of quality of life in both cities and rural areas. Although the use of the automobile has indeed increased very rapidly, a significant share of the urban population is isolated economically and prevented from fully participating in the culture of mobility. In the countryside, rural communities may provide a less stressful quality of life, but many are beginning to face dilemmas common to major metropolitan regions, including declining air quality and increasing roadway congestion.⁶⁾ Throughout the Twentieth Century, the development of cheap electricity generation and transmission, together with greater personal mobility offered by the automobile, and widespread easy communications, have combined to allow people to choose to live in what they identify as more attractive residential environments.⁵⁾

Americans have not yet resolved the problem of place, partly because they have seldom stayed in their places long enough to get them right and have rarely apprehended the connection between “place” and “community.” American continental heritage is a history of spasms of migration toward or away from someplace, beginning of course with the flight from the Old to the New World. The latest new American migration began in the 1980s and was continuing into the 1990s, that time in a migration whose motivation was not economic and whose direction was not focused on any particular geographic areas of opportunity. They came from a variety of environments; their criterion developed in reaction to their national romance with the automobile and the associated rise of the suburban lifestyle. The last new migration was plainly and simply the search for a good place to live in a land where such places were perceived as increasingly rare.

One major shortcoming of many American places is the lack of community gathering places where people can walk in at almost any time and be assured of either encountering old friends or making new ones. Thus, Ray Oldenburg in “*The Great Good Place*” calls them “third places” (after the first – home, and the second – the workplace). Unfortunately, American social history has not been kind to the third place. In America, the scarcity of the third place is more than an obstacle to good community. Compared to traditional cultural policies in community planning, cultural planning is

intrinsically more democratic, more conscious of the realities of “cultural diversity,” and more aware of the intangible features of “cultural heritage” and “cultural patrimony.” In response, Americans, participating in the latest new migration, have sought communities colored by a strong, unique, and even idiosyncratic sense of place in “Neighborhood Planning.”⁶⁾

Furthermore, cultural planning can help urban governments and local community organizations identify cultural resources of a city or locality and to apply them in a strategic way to achieve key objectives in areas such as community development, place marketing, or commercial development; it also includes integral planning.⁷ In fact, despite larger houses on more land, and all sorts of conveniences and aids to daily activities, most suburbanites feel like there’s something missing. Perhaps some of the answers can be given in the lives and communities of previous eras; is it likewise possible for people to live rich, fulfilling lives without automobiles? In the best neighborhoods, American people know that “the heart is more important than the head.” The residents recognize one another and count friends and family among their neighbors. They have a sense of concern and responsibility for the neighborhood and its people that is translated into action.

Neighborhood planning, associated with cultural planning, is an opportunity for citizens to shape the neighborhoods where they live, work, own property, or manage a business; its process addresses land use, zoning, transportation, and urban design issues. The goal of neighborhood planning is for diverse interests to come together and develop a shared vision for their community revitalization (Fig.1).



Fig.1 Community revitalization in Neighborhood Planning
(Source: Photo by T. Okuda).

There is the longstanding conviction among many Americans that their nation was forged by the pioneer encounter with wilderness. One of the founding myths of American nationalism is

articulated in Frederick Jackson Turner’s “*Frontier Thesis*,” which argues that American character and American democracy are both the products of a frontier encounter with the wilderness. As matter of a fact, the story of Route 66 starts over a century earlier when a young America’s country began to grow westward. The vast unexplored lands beyond the Mississippi River fired the imagination of the American people. The seemingly limitless resources beckoned to a nation on the move. The mountain men themselves, in an effort to leave the settled East behind, inadvertently opened up the unspoiled West to the westward expansion of a nation by their explorations. There were no established trails but the ones the mountain men blazed themselves, as they followed the beaver along the traces left by the Native Americans. These old trails, blazed by the mountain men, were generally all that existed for the immigrant wagon trains that followed shortly after. The trails were general courses, where wagons would spread out over a wide area, following a single track only where landforms forced them to. Thus, “Mobility” is very nearly the defining core of what is proudly described as the “American way of life” or the American dream.

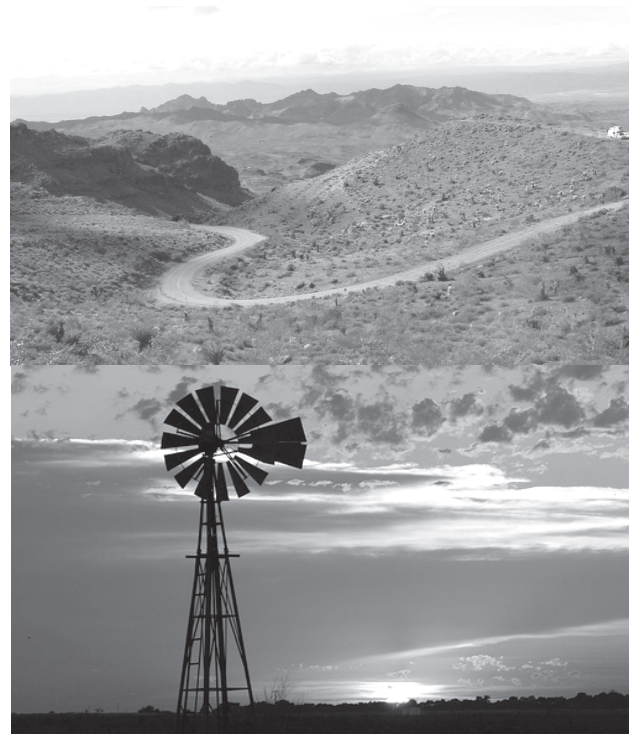


Fig.2 Historic Route 66 in Arizona(top) and Oklahoma(bottom)
(Source: Photos by John Sistrunk).

The federally founded “National Highway,” running from the Industrial Midwest to the Golden State of California known as “Route 66,” has become much more than mere pavement; it has become a long-lasting cultural icon which may be of

use in understanding who Americans are as a society. To understand how Route 66 came to be such a significant icon in the American experience, and why people in the Midwest and Southwest cared so much about Route 66, it is important to realize the genesis of the highway and what roads in general meant to the Region. It is also important to reexamine who Americans were in an age gone by, and to be reminded of who Americans are as a people now.

Roadside landscape patterns are often reflections of past and present elements in the American cultural experience on “Roadside America.” Route 66 was representative of an American highway which was historically significant, economically important, and a small but very meaningful part of the evolution of American roadside vernacular culture. Most of the pavement of Route 66 is gone today, however, a few portions of the old road remain as valuable links to American past, especially in the State of Oklahoma. The relationship which evolved, through time, between the highway, the people who depended on the highway within which each was found resulted in a unique roadside landscape, that of “Historic Route 66.”⁷⁾ (Fig.2)

3. REGIONAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND IN AMERICA

If distances for persons as well as for goods are to be shortened, revaluation of regions is the consequence, emphasizing the region as an expanded living space. The region mainly has to offer what the community needs in terms of contacts, incentives, and consumption. The production of as many vital goods as possible should occur where they are needed. Proximity must consistently be given priority over long distances; this implies that the population in a given region must be in a position to assign the priorities in their area. Emphasizing life in regions is in direct contradiction to the present-day tendency to organize life in society within ever-increasing spaces. The development is based on the assumption that mobility can be increased without limits across great distances. The call for sustainable mobility, however, inevitably opposes this development.⁸⁾

Rural highways, such as Route 66, rapidly become a critical link in the nation’s transportation system, increasingly providing access between urban areas and the American Heartland. Americans have thought that cars would simply provide another way of getting from one village, town, or city to another, and promoted the creation of parkways to link

existing centers. This evolved into the “Interstate Highway System;” the federal highway and the newer interstate highway roads are the backbone of American goods distribution system in the Twentieth Century and were the primary means of travel for the more than 60 million people per year. Traffic fatalities on rural roads are occurring at a rate approximately three times higher than on all other roads. Meeting the growing demand for safe and efficient mobility in rural America will require a significant increase in the commitment to improving the design and efficiency of the nation’s rural road system.⁹⁾

The 1920s, in much of rural America, were hard times. The technology that had brought automobiles and highways also revolutionized farming, forcing small farmers to mechanize, upgrade, and buy more land just to stay in business. The Baby Boom was well under way by the late 1940s, and as the 1950s rolled around, more and more families were in the mood to travel. After a period of the wartime prosperity, many farmers from the Midwest also moved farther the West in their transition to urban living. The South also went through a major set of changes during the mid-Twentieth Century period and became increasingly mobile. In the 1950s, automobiles were flashier, bigger, and faster than ever. As traffic increased, so did competition for tourist dollars, and the result was a highway roadside soon littered with billboards, motels, gas stations, curio shops, and diners, many of them drenched in throbbing neon.¹⁰⁾



Fig.3 Typical residential suburban sprawl (Source: Flickr).

In the 1970s, the trend towards an emphasis on residential location close to amenities rather than to the workplace became important in the move to rural communities. This has meant that the middle-class life-styles based on urban, white-collar employment have taken over many of the rural communities on

the periphery of metropolitan centers. By the 1970s, America provided a similar range of services and facilities throughout the nation, mobility was easy and relatively cheap everywhere, and the life-styles of the moderately and very wealthy were not too different. In the 1970s, one important feature of life in the “Post-Industrial Society”⁸ is the increasing complexity of relationships within a vast nation where relative distances have been reduced by modern transport and mass communications.¹¹⁾

However, along the Interstate Highway System, Americans discovered that improved roads and highways not only linked existing centers, but opened up millions of acres of “empty” land for development. Driven by the market place, and subsidized by trillions of dollars in public investment in highways, suburban development became a self-replicating machine; this has done enormous good, of course, in bringing the proverbial dream of home ownership to millions, but with many unintended consequences. Where the process has advanced to the point of extensive, uncoordinated, and dysfunctional development, it is termed “Suburban Sprawl.” (Fig.3)

American people have sought the American dream of a house in a quiet residential neighborhood, with the noise and congestion of the commercial and industrial centers at a comfortable distance. This distance, however, makes it hard to get to the stores, offices, and municipal services that people need. Along the way, the public also realized that shopping malls and office parks, aside from their parking lots, are pretty nice places to be, but “Mixed-use Development,” which generally means residential, retail, and office uses in close proximity, has been part of suburb since colonial times. In the 1980s and 1990s, this led to a convergence of interest and many experiments in mixed-use development around America. Today, mixed-use development is incorporated with cultural planning that has to be part of a larger strategy for urban and community development. Cultural planning has to make connections with physical and town planning, with economic and industry development objectives, with social justice initiatives, with recreational planning, and with housing and public works.

In terms of “regionalism,” Benton MacKaye⁹ in the 1920s, a regional planner, fully grasped the role that the automobile would play in effecting a wide distribution of population, but unlike the highway engineers at that time, MacKaye likewise understood that the new form of transportation – rather than locomotion – not merely demanded surface improvements in the old road system, but a radically

different form of highway system with the “Ingenious Environment;”¹⁰ it is a harmonious balance between human need and the natural environment¹²⁾ (Fig.4).

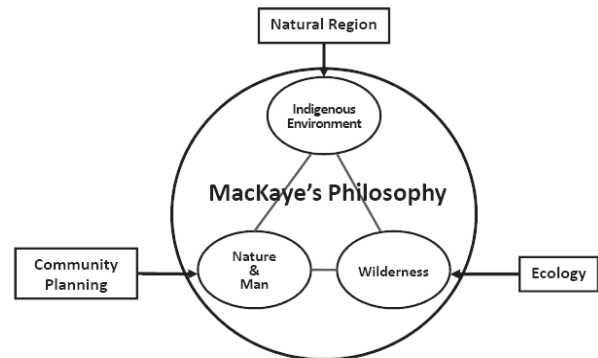


Fig.4 Benton MacKaye's regionalism drawn by T. Okuda.

4. HISTORIC CONTEXT OF U.S. HIGHWAY ROUTE 66

(1) Birth and Rise of Route 66

Route 66, also known as “U.S. Route 66” or “The Will Rogers Highway,” was a single, formally designated highway in the U.S. Highway System. “U.S. Highway 66” ran from Jackson Boulevard and Michigan Avenue in Chicago to Los Angeles and traversed 2,400 miles, winding its way through the most romantic and celebrated portions of the American eight states in the process. Route 66 was a lifeline through much of America, connecting the small Midwestern towns of Illinois, Missouri, and Kansas, with the big cities of Los Angeles and Chicago. Of these eight states, especially Oklahoma contained almost 400 miles of the Route; there are more miles of Route 66 in Oklahoma than in any other state (Fig.5).

Route 66 has two histories, one as a mode of transportation, and another as a symbol of the Midwest and Twentieth Century automobile culture or cultural landscape. Indeed, Route 66 came to be part of the uprooting and major change in the American way of life that took place during the first half of the Twentieth Century. The Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression, the war years of the 1940s, and the normalcy of the 1950s, all manifested themselves in various forms on Route 66 and each left its imprint.

With the introduction of the automobile in the 1900s, new businesses sprang up to provide services for the burgeoning tourist industry. The American dream was about to undergo a profound change, a change Americans still experience today. Travel by automobile was hard in the early days though; the

roads were not yet designed for the horseless carriage. Dirt roads were little better than local trails designed for travel by horseback. Roads would have to improve before the automobile could open up the vast corners of America. By 1917, only 2 percent of the nation's roads were paved. Most roads were unimproved earth, although some were graded, graveled, or both.

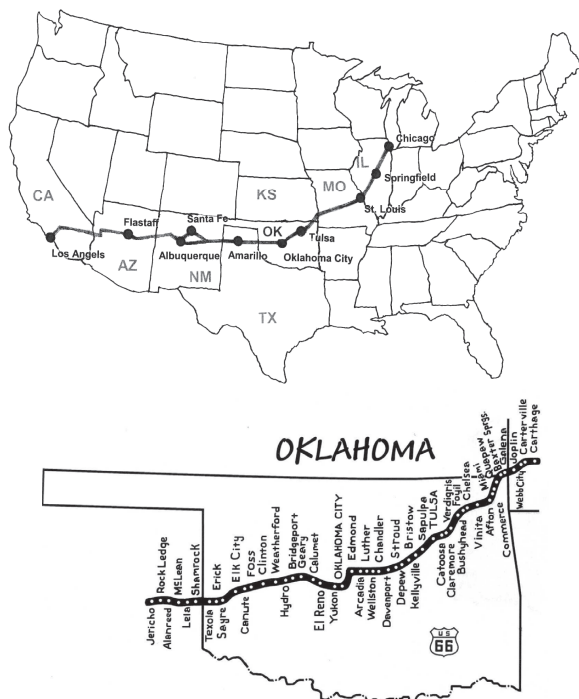


Fig.5 U.S. and Oklahoma Route 66 Map
(Source: Once upon a Highway: Route 66 in Oklahoma).

In Oklahoma especially, roads were a problem. A full-fledged state since only 1907, Oklahoma had not developed the network of pioneer trails, wagon roads, and railroads that crisscrossed the rest of the country. Then, when the territory was finally opened for homesteading, the roads that did develop were haphazard, inadequate, and poorly maintained; the people of the state knew it. Although each state along the way from Chicago to Los Angeles contributes to the Route 66 experience, most Road Warriors acknowledge that Oklahoma maintains an extra special relationship with the old highway. Without Oklahoma's almost 400 miles of vintage roadway, in truth, there would never have been a Route 66.

Route 66 is as well about people. Oklahomans made significant contributions to the lore of the Road; include Cyrus Avery (**Fig.6**), a successful businessman and promoter from Tulsa, Oklahoma, that wanted to improve road conditions in his home state of Oklahoma. Avery, now known to many as the "Father of Route 66," was charged with establishing what would become the U.S. Highway System, and

plotting and mapping the most-important interstate roads in the nation. Avery grew up in a country that was sparsely populated, ruled by a territorial government, and not well served by the usual amenities of American civilization, such as railroads, highways, schools, and mail service.¹³⁾

In Oklahoma, formally "Indian Territory," roads belonged to the various Indian tribes and did not connect from one tribe's land to another's. Avery knew the desperate need of rural America for good roads and envisioned the potential effect of a major highway through the Midwest. Becoming a president of the Associated Highways Association of America, Avery laid out a highway system, organized a maintenance plan for these highways, and established a systematic numbering system that replaced the previous tradition of naming roads – Lincoln Highway, National Old Trails Road, etc. – and a system of standardized, uniform directional, warning, and regulatory signs for the U.S. Highway System. Thus, Avery became one of the strongest supporters of the Chicago to Los Angeles route, a route that he wanted to pass through Oklahoma.



Fig.6 Cyrus Avery (top) early construction on Route 66(bottom)
(Source: The Road Wanderer).

Supporters of the major East to West route from Chicago to Los Angeles wanted to follow the Old Santa Fe Trail, which would bypass Oklahoma. This road would be linked with the Old Santa Fe Trail across the Southwest, which would then be connected to Beale's wagon route through California to form the National Old Trails Road. Avery knew that a major highway through Oklahoma would boost that state's economy, so he relentlessly pushed for an alternate route.

On November 11, 1926, a bill was signed in

Washington DC creating the “National Highway System.” As a leader in the effort to develop the Highway System, Avery was successful in his bid to have the new route pass through Oklahoma. This route was designated “U.S. Highway 66.” America’s country had entered a new era. The great roads were to be built – the roads to carry a nation on the move, through hard times, war, and rebirth. As a result, Route 66 would become the most celebrated and famous of these two-lanes. Route 66 was about to become the “Main Street of America.” Avery was influential in designating the route of the highway, getting the road paved, organizing a booster organization for it, and even gave it the numbers “66.” Thus, Route 66 was a product of the grassroots movement for better roads and was one of the main arteries of the “National Highway System” in America.



Fig.7 Severely blowing dust and black blizzard dust storm (Source: American Memory @ The Library of Congress).

Route 66 underwent many improvements and realignments. It was a major migratory path West, particularly during “The Dust Bowl”¹¹ of the 1930s

(**Fig.7**), and supported the economies of the communities through which the road passed. It was the “great diagonal highway” that sliced through the Midwest, straddled the deserts of the Southwest, and stopped at the very edge of the Pacific Ocean. In a sense, Route 66 was also something else; it was a real highway that grew to be a symbol for the American people’s heritage of travel and their national legacy of bettering themselves by moving “West.”¹⁴⁾

(2)Decline: 1950s after World War II

During World War II, Route 66 was a fascinating if not always financially satisfying, artery of military commerce. Besides bringing new and unusual traffic, the war caused population and economic booms in remote rural areas wherever the federal government decided to build military facilities. After the war, people along the highway were caught up in the excitement of a world on the move and the boom times of the postwar economy.

By the 1950s, promotion had become a requirement for business success on Route 66. Business owners, forced by time and circumstance to be promoters as well as vendors, spent an increasing amount of time making their signs, buildings, and services more desirable than those of the competitor across the highway. These promotions, in all their forms, played a significant role in fixing Route 66 in the American memory. Oklahoma was the home of the “National Highway 66 Association,” the group responsible for the promotion of Route 66 on a nationwide basis.

Route 66 was under constant change during its nearly eighty-year existence. As highway engineering became more sophisticated, engineers constantly sought more direct routes between cities and towns. Increased traffic led to a number of major and minor realignments of Route 66 through the years, particularly in the years immediately following the war. Most of the newer four-lane Route 66, paving in some of states, was upgraded into the Interstate Highway System in later years.

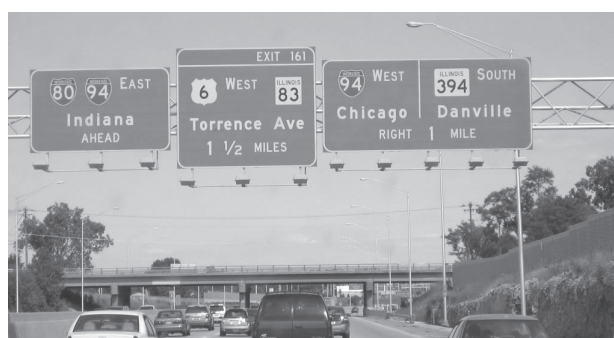


Fig.8 Interstate Highway System (Source: Photo by T. Okuda).

The beginning of the end for Route 66 came in 1956 with the signing of the “Interstate Highway Act”¹² by President Dwight Eisenhower – the largest public works project in American history. It approved the construction of 41,000 miles of multi-lane, limited access highway, serving nearly every major city in America. One early reason advocates used for the construction of the Interstate System was to make a significant increase in military mobility. Eisenhower also asserted that an Interstate Highway System would provide for safer, more efficient motoring, and encourage economic development¹⁵ (Fig.8).

(3)1960s after the decertification

The advent of the Interstate Highway System in the 1960s and 1970s brought about a devastating decline in the number of travelers on Route 66, dealing a once thriving economy a resounding deathblow. Countless numbers of businesses along Route 66 were forced to close their doors, leaving behind their crumbling shells as mute testimonials to the heydays of Route 66. Towns were bypassed and long stretches of road became isolated. By the mid-1970s, Route 66, “America’s Main Street,” had all but vanished. Though Route 66 is no longer a U.S. Highway, it is far from being the lost and vanished road people once imagined it was.

In 1985, the U.S. Department of Transportation decommissioned Route 66 and relegated its ownership to the states through which it ran. Oklahoma turned much of its highway section into “State Highway 66,” thus preserving many of its sights and features. Several county roads and town streets have also retained the “Historic Route 66” name. Route 66 has become a focal point for historians, photographers, revivalists, media, and good old-fashioned vacationers from across America and around the world. Route 66 gained a certain mythical character that is still fondly remembered. Although its days of glory are now faded and most of the old highway has disappeared, the vernacular nostalgic attraction of the Route 66 lives on, especially in Oklahoma. Route 66 is alive today and along her winding cracked pavement people discovered America. It was the America of their parents and grandparents, an America that people thought had been lost to them. It is the people of Route 66, those that live, work, and play along her corridor today that keeps the “Mother Road” alive.

In addition, Historic Route 66 is a road recognized as a “National Scenic Byway” for its archeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and/or scenic qualities. Ninety-five nationally

designated national scenic byways are linking the American people to the nation’s natural and cultural treasures and promoting tourism and education across America. Comprised of 95 roads in 39 states, these byways help create a sense of pride in America. They connect visitors to the American beauty, history, and culture – the heart and soul of America. Route 66 offers a piece of the American experience, both past and present; connecting the American people to their environment and cultural heritage, Route 66 provides opportunities for all American citizens to experience the beauty, the resources, and the history of the America, – and to gain a greater appreciation of the need to preserve and protect it often fragile and scarce resources.

5. ROADSIDE ROUTE 66 AND AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE

One of American popular culture’s universal truths is that Americans have carried on an unabashed romance with the automobile since its invention around the turn of the Twentieth Century. Cultural resources, along roadside Route 66, are here understood in a pragmatic way and include not only the arts and heritage of a place, but also local traditions, dialects, festivals, and rituals; the diversity and quality of leisure; cultural, drinking and eating, and entertainment facilities; the cultures of youth, ethnic minorities, and communities of interest.

Most importantly, Route 66 is the path of a people in flight; it is refugees from dust and shrinking land, from the thunder of tractors and shrinking ownership, and from the desert’s slow northward invasion – an adventure, an escape, a memory re-lived, and a destination in itself. Thus, Route 66 is history, it is people, it is a story of both struggle and triumph and, most of all, it is undying. Route 66 helped shape the evolution of American roadside vernacular culture in the Twentieth Century and left an indelible mark on the American popular culture. Route 66 also gave its name to a company and was immortalized in literature, pop music, and television.

Route 66, America’s most beloved highway, was born right particularly in Oklahoma – the home of Cyrus Avery and Will Rogers whose humor and keen wit led him to become one of the American first international superstars, and many other notables associated with the highway. It was Oklahoma that inspired Californian writer John Steinbeck. In 1939, Steinbeck published “*The Grapes of Wrath*,” his novel about the westward migration of Oklahoma’s

Dust Bowl farmers to California's San Joaquin Valley. In the book, Steinbeck spent a chapter describing the path West, which funnels to Oklahoma City and continues down Route 66. Steinbeck referred to Route 66 as "The Mother Road," a nickname the highway still retains. Steinbeck described the problems many of them faced, including prejudice and poverty, as they traveled to a hopefully better life. Nowhere is Route 66 more at home than in Oklahoma, where the pavement follows the contours of the land as though it had always been there. In Oklahoma, the West and East collide on Route 66, and the state becomes the crossroads for "America's Main Street."¹⁶ (Fig.9)

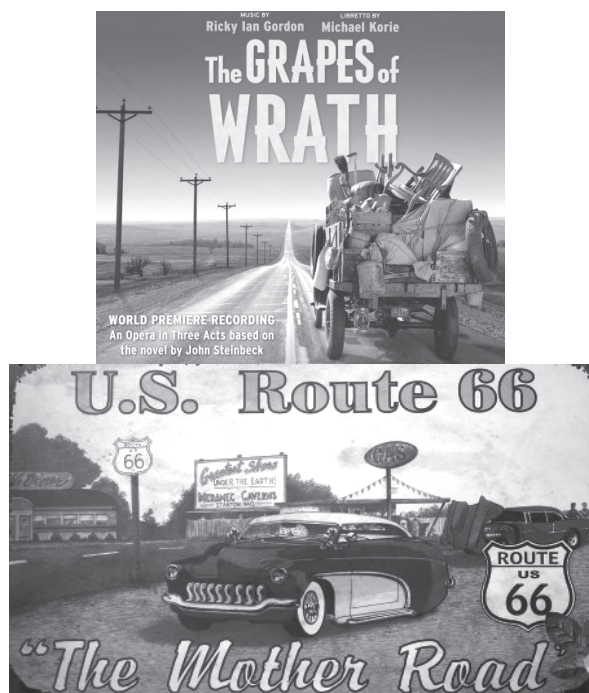


Fig.9 The Grapes of Wrath and The Mother Road of Route 66
(Source: Legends of America).

Route 66 is also the "National Old Trails Highway." It followed that the old trails laid out by the early explorers and railroad. Route 66 became the Twentieth Century version of the Oregon Trail, the golden road to the promised land and has inspired American spirit ever since. It provided hope to the farmers of the Dust Bowl era going West to find a new life. It served America's country well during time of war. In optimistic post World War II America, Route 66 defined a generation looking for adventure and freedom on the open road.

The highway neatly encapsulates for Steinbeck the forces that were busily transforming local folk communities into uprooted, eviscerated, and placeless areas. Tracing the journey of the Joad family and thousands of others like them, the novel

used the road to reconfigure the national landscape as a kind of living memorial writ large – a graveyard littered with the detached, fragmentary ruins of a formerly thriving and rooted culture. In effect, the Road came to function as a kind of mass excavation area – the repository for all of the remnants of local, folk, and roadside culture. Oil magnate Frank Phillips, a founder of Phillips Petroleum, credited the highway for the name of his "Phillips 66" gasoline. The "Phillips 66" company, with its distinctive shield logo, was founded and had its headquarters for many years in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.¹⁷

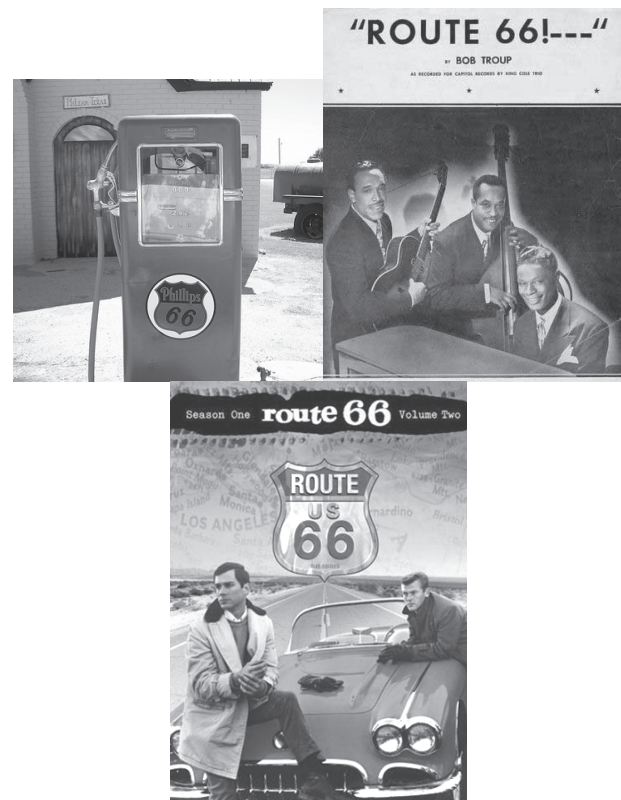


Fig.10 Popular culture along Route 66
(Source: Route 66: The Main Stream of America).

During World War II, millions of young people traveled across America via Route 66, as they were sent off to the European or the Pacific battlefields and when they returned home. One such traveler was Bobby Troup; in the 1940s, jazz composer and pianist Troup wrote his best-known song, "*Get your kicks on Route 66*,"¹³ after driving the highway himself to get to California. It was recorded as a rock piece, as western swing, as blues, and strictly as an orchestral piece and became a movie theme. Troup presented it to Nat King Cole who in turn made it one of the biggest hit singles of his career, as were several of the dozens of other recordings made by a variety of groups over the next forty years.

"Route 66" was an immensely-popular

American television series; its 1960 premiere launched two young drifters in a Corvette on an existential odyssey in which they encountered a myriad of loners, dreamers, and outcasts in the small towns and big cities along Route 66 in America (Fig.10). “The Mother Road” was portrayed in many motion pictures and television shows over the years and has earned its place in the history and culture of America. “Route 66” is still one of the few television series to offer such a range of socially-conscious stories, including mercy killing, the threat of nuclear annihilation, terrorism, runaways, and orphans – peaceful rebels rejecting material possessions and pursuing the American dream of owning a home along Route 66 and beyond. The show is continuing thread of wandering probes the restlessness at the root of all picaresque sagas of contemporary American roadside popular culture.¹⁸⁾

In a way, the story of Route 66 is American roadside story as well; it embodies what makes America a great nation. No other culture has had the same type of love affair with the automobile, and few have had the wide-open spaces offered by the American West. Geographer Arthur Krim suggests that, “Route 66 has become an icon of the auto age because it encompassed both the real geography of westward migration and the abstract need to symbolize the independence of the American roadside stories.”¹⁹⁾ Route 66 has held a special place in the American consciousness from its beginning. Road is uniquely American; there are a thousand stories of hope, heartbreak, love, hate, starting over, and new dreams found along the next bend of the highway that American calls “The Mother Road.” Krim’s assessment offers insight into the strength of the highway’s appeal and, perhaps more importantly, why its influence continues to be felt by millions. Thus, Route 66 is “The Mother Road” and also the “Road of Flight.”

6. ROADSIDE VERNACULAR CULTURE ALONG HISTORIC ROUTE 66

The roadside vernacular culture along Route 66 remains the most visual reflection of each region’s landscape, climate, tradition, history, etc. Contained within are scenes of gas stations, motel signs, churches, houses, barns, bridges, and many other structures that convey not only the aura and image of Route 66, but also the rich vernacular heritage present in many of the Oklahoma regions and roadside vernacular culture¹⁴ (Fig.11). While many of these structures still survive today, especially in

Oklahoma, in many instances; in most other states, they have disappeared forever.



Fig.11 Bridge, abandoned farmhouse, and decaying barn
(Source: Once upon a Highway: Route 66 in Oklahoma).

Building materials came from the resources of each state. Whether wood or clay or concrete, the buildings were built simply and usefully – a characteristic of the time – by local miners, farmers, and townspeople. These locals slowly emerged as small entrepreneurs, taking pride in their small stores, gas stations, cafes, and motels along Route 66. By maintaining the attitudes, customs, and history of their respective lands, they celebrated their roadside vernacular culture whether realizing it or not. Thus, Route 66, by winding through the deserts, the mountains, and small metropolises, brought people to roadside vernacular culture. The Road itself embodied American roadside vernacular culture

from Chicago to Los Angeles.²⁰⁾

Today, the main streets in many small Southwestern towns are proudly emblazoned with “Historic Route 66” signs (**Fig.12**). Every section of the highway has its landmarks; local individuals and groups have preserved or restored many of the nostalgic roadside attractions and landmarks along Route 66 in Oklahoma. Many roadside landmarks have become officially recognized historic sites. There are also many abandoned tourist accommodations and attractions along the old highway (**Fig.13**).

Although every Route 66 state has its own unique sights and special contributions to the history and lore of Route 66, only in Oklahoma has history and geography combined to preserve much of the romance and fervor of “The Road.” The effects of the Dust Bowl and the great migration to California along Route 66 that followed are still very present in the Twenty-first Century Oklahoma. Indeed, Oklahoma did not regain its pre-Dust Bowl population level until the late 1980s. Oklahoma alone was the hub or gathering spot for the destitute migrants from Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, and north Texas, as they set out on “The Road” to a supposedly better life in California; when these less-than-welcome migrants reached California, they were collectively and very derisively known as “Okies,”¹⁵ a perceived slur that still affects the self-image of many Oklahoman.



Fig.12 Route 66 signs
(Source: Photos by John Sistrunk).

Moreover, the geography of Interstate Highway construction served to preserve more of Route 66 and its margins in Oklahoma than in the states further West. In Oklahoma, the Interstate Highways were

laid out to miss the numerous cities and small town that lay, in profusion, along old Route 66 and the Interstates only paralleled Route 66 at some distance. Further West, in the almost deserted Southwestern desert, the Interstates followed the route of Route 66 much more precisely, obliterating most of the artifacts of “The Road.” Thus, along Route 66, the places and buildings in Oklahoma have become profound parts of the modern Route 66 experience and are authentic articles of “The Road.”²¹⁾

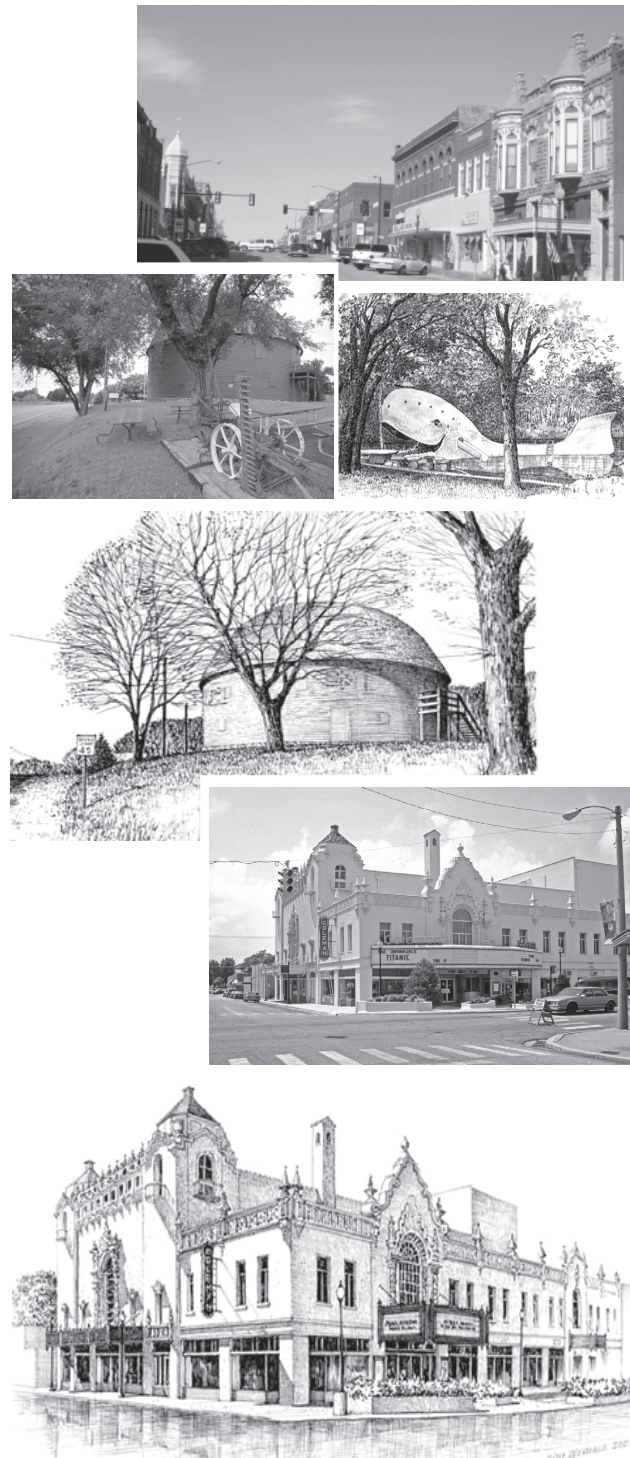


Fig.13 Preserved roadside historic landmarks
(Source: Once upon a Highway: Route 66 in Oklahoma).

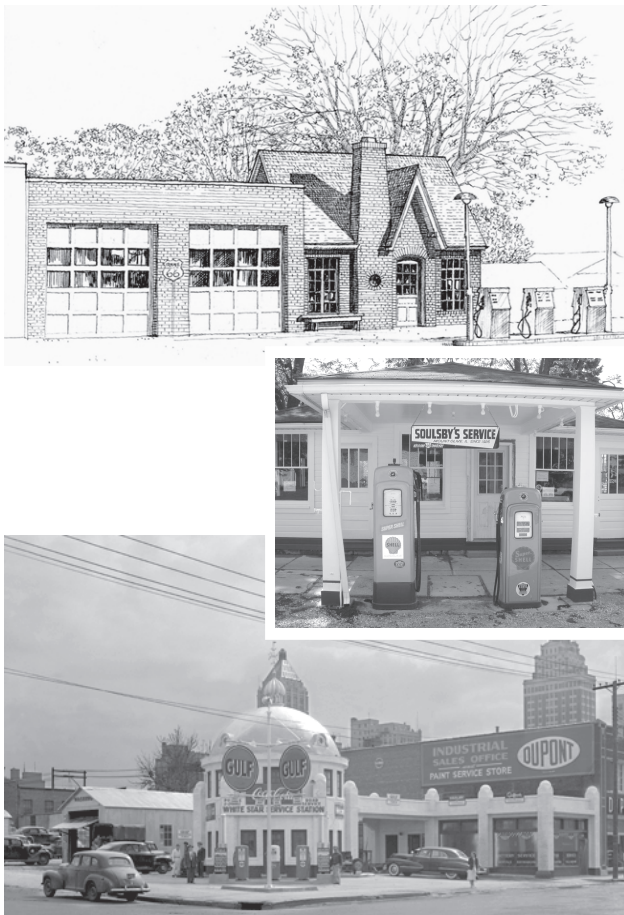


Fig.14 Restored gas stations as historic landmarks (Source: Photos by John Sistrunk and drawn by John Womack).



Fig.15 General-store-gas station in 1920s
(Source: American Memory @ The Library of Congress).

Gas Stations (**Fig.14**): During the 1920s when a national system of paved highways was still not much more than a dream, petroleum companies began building standardized stations and selling franchises, and the people who operated those stations learned the benefits of being on the receiving end of the oil companies' national advertising campaigns. The first gas stations, as well as the first motels in America, were born in the vicinity of Route 66. The number of service stations grew but not

rapidly; in 1919, as much gas was still being sold in America at general stores, as in dedicated "gas stations." (**Fig.15**) That percentage changed rapidly during the 1920s, however, as people saw the opportunity to separate the retail gasoline business from general merchandise stores. By adopting the 1930's functionalism, this new building type could be used all over the country with any materials available – porcelain-enameled steel, brick, concrete block, or frame and stucco. The gas station buildings told a lot about a region's climate and available materials. Thus, the gas station's universal simplistic design became a recognizable icon for gasoline. Attracting motorists all along Route 66 and other major roadways, these gas stations made it possible to travel faster and farther than ever before.

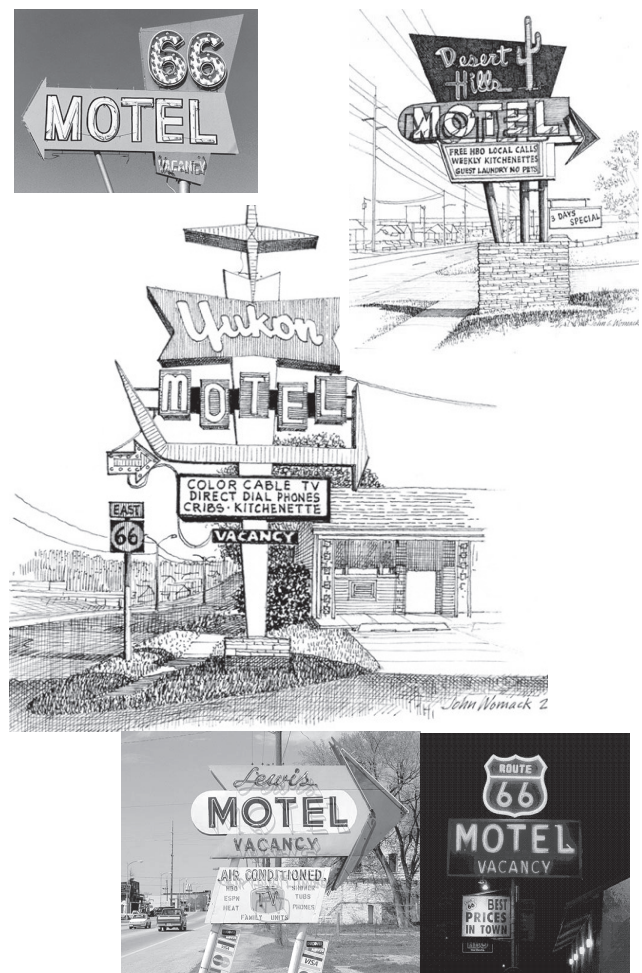


Fig.16 Motels with landmark signs
(Source: Once upon a Highway: Route 66 in Oklahoma).

Motels (**Fig.16**): Roadside architecture, particularly "motor courts," "motor hotels," or simply "motels" represent the America's last blast of roadside vernacular architecture based on regional and ethnic precedents. Following Teddy Roosevelt's encouragement of the outdoors, people began

traveling America's new highways to experience nature and get in touch with their rugged survival instincts. Thus, "motor hotels" quickly took the place of the earlier more expensive hotel. After the war – the beginning of modern-day motels, roadway travel soared especially along Route 66. Roadside residents, along Route 66, soon realized that the incessant stream of motorists required gasoline, food, accommodations, and diversions on their journey. Route 66 fostered the popularity of the "motorist hotel" or motel. Many of the old neon lighted signs are still around. There is a distinctive look to the old business signs on Route 66. The signs that announced the various motel locations and entrances are the most elaborate and eye-catching.²²⁾

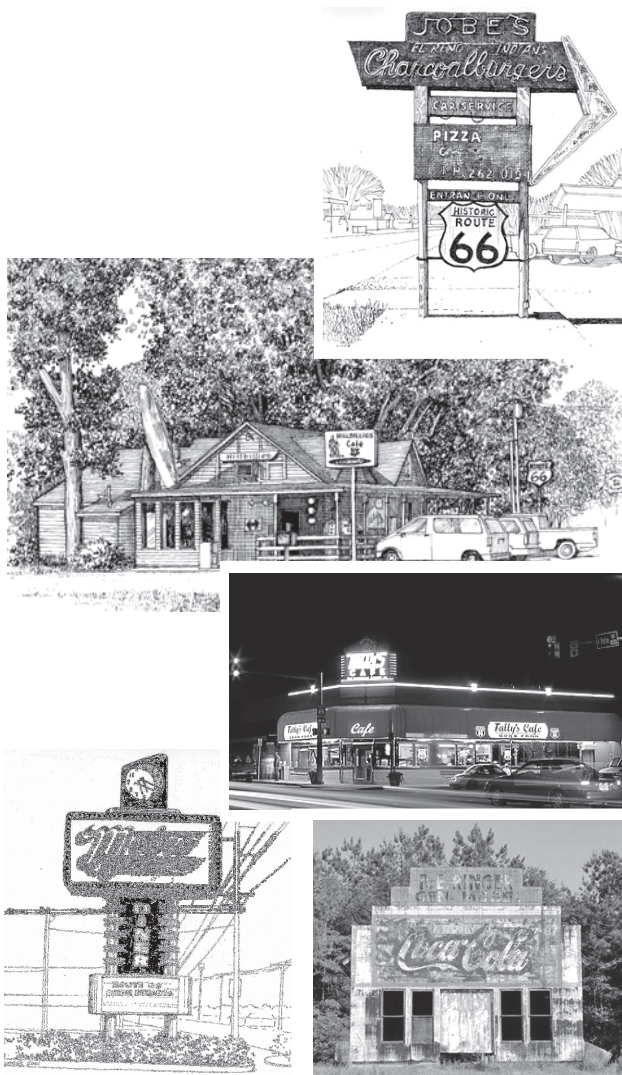


Fig. 17 Restaurant, cafe, and dinner
(Source: Once upon a Highway: Route 66 in Oklahoma).

Cafes (**Fig.17**): In the 1920s, while Americans were getting in touch with nature, they often brought their food-picnicking along the way. They found it easier, cheaper, faster, and healthier to make their

own food before their journeys. During the Depression, opening a cafe became a way to use the little skills out-of-work farmers had to make a living. By the 1940s, half the better motor courts contained cafes. Thus, cafes as well as gas stations and motels revealed a local color unable to surface without "The Road" and the American traveler.

Of all the Route 66 businesses that boomed after World War II, cafes seemed the most able to maintain their integrity after the inception of the Interstate Highway and survive as part of the surrounding community. Some of the other businesses – especially the ones that contributed to that special flavor that made Route 66 – were uniquely highway enterprises, not only dependent on travelers for their income, but entirely devoted to the idea of being new and different and something a passer-by might never have the opportunity to experience again. These were the businesses known specifically as "tourist businesses." Largely, they did not survive the arrival of the Interstate Highway.²³⁾

To understand the history of roadside vernacular culture or architecture along Route 66 is to understand a little bit about American people, where Americans came from and where Americans hope to go in the future. Understanding cultural assets and resources, such as cultural activities along Route 66, improves both community development and urban revitalization in cultural planning.

6. CONCLUSION

In terms of sustainability for social, economic, and ecological reasons, the need for better mobility and access in small urban and rural communities is placing new emphasis on the availability of public transportation services, which have become essential both to sustain and guide the growth in flourishing communities, and to revitalize regions that continue to struggle. In this response, as Benton MacKaye referred in the 1920s, this sustainable mobility within the "Ingenuous Environment" must be indeed reconsidered today.

The modern urban-industrial America lacked roots in the land, a sense of community, and connection to tradition, what is called an American "Roadside" vernacular culture. The history of the American roadside vernacular culture might be understood as something more than simply an automobile for extinguishing local places and local past.

Americans are rediscovering the warmth, hospitality, nostalgia, and wonderful diversity that

permeate the 2,400 miles of Route 66. The recent enthusiasm for Route 66 roadside vernacular environments is, in part, a popular reaction against the monotony of Interstate Highway as a powerful symbol.

Ironically, the modern, rationalized, efficient Interstate Highway System replaced Route 66, a varied vernacular already rich in cultural and historic references and vernacular whimsy. Even after the Interstates bypassed Route 66 and the highway disappeared physically, the Route gained a new nostalgic significance in the 1980s and 1990s to many Americans as well as to people in other countries; vernacular nostalgia is the primary motivation behind the current Route 66 preservation movement.

The Route 66 experience is reliant not only on the icons of the Road but on the in-between features, as well. In Oklahoma especially, along Route 66 there exists the vigor and spirit of “The Mother Road” with a sense of place. That is what makes the lure irresistible for many and what makes the Route 66 community a family in the “truest sense;” cultural planning is integrated into community planning as neighborhood revitalization.

Route 66 demonstrates environmentally-sensitive cultural planning for creative roadside town community, while providing access to areas of great scenic beauty and educates the public on the importance of environmental protection and enhancement.

Today, people in Oklahoma view the heritage of Route 66 with great affection and they are making great efforts to preserve and restore Route 66 as their cultural heritage or resource. Many Americans realize that the old highway, particularly in Oklahoma, is most representative of Route 66 as a symbolic “Mother Road” in America.

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APPENDIX

The paper based on the lecture notes of “Urban Planning Case Studies” at the graduate level in The Oklahoma State University School of Architecture. Last five years provided the author the great opportunity to teach a wide ranging course of this type to contribute to students’ understanding of cultural planning with urban and social issues as well as cultural resources. In urban settings, the relationships between natural environment, urban form, historic context, and cultural resources are best studied by a combination of theoretical understanding, on-site observation, and analytical evaluation of both kinds of information.

The primary objective of the case studies is to develop an understanding of urban analyses and the form of the urban environment and the forces that shape that environment. Through a combination of lectures, discussions, workshops, and case studies of existing urban fabrics, the students studied cultural planning in cities in the U.S. as well as overseas.

After all, Route 66 serves as an effective tool for education in urban planning for the students at the graduate level; the paper includes several brief case studies that demonstrate how cultural planning can be integrated into community development, utilizing Route 66 with roadside vernacular culture. The author engaged in a number of informal discussions with people in Oklahoma, as an element of the research needed to finalize the case study. The purpose of these interviews was to determine why Route 66 is significant to people who operate or have formerly operated businesses on Historic Route 66, and to people who belong to organizations dedicated to preserving Route 66.

NOTES

1. As stated by the “World Conference on Cultural Policies” in Mexico City in 1982, “Culture” is a leading source of intellectual renewal and human growth, and can be understood as embracing all creative activity, not only the traditional or “high” arts, but popular mass culture as well. Culture is also defined as a “particular way of life,” which expresses certain meanings — people create, which create people as members of societies — and values not only in art and learning, but also in institutions and ordinary behavior.
2. As Geddes insisted, “Planning” is not a physical science but a human science; all planning must take account of the three fundamental coordinates of “folk, work, place.” Planners also need to be anthropologists, economists, and geographers and not just draftsmen. They need to know how people live, work, play, and relate to their environment.
3. In terms of “Natural Region,” in the early 1920s, Benton

MacKaye appeared as a conservationist, a forester, a philosopher, and a regional planner, who along with Lewis Mumford founded the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA). MacKaye further lessoned on the integration of economic, social, and environmental concerns, which informed his work with the RPAA — which brought him into collaboration with Patrick Geddes. MacKaye thought of natural region the way; to be complete and functional, every town has to have what he called the “Five Senses” —home, church, school, government, and commerce. Indeed, real towns have these senses, and it makes them both more livable and more beautiful with amenities in town planning.

4. “The Partners for Livable Communities” (TPLC) is a Washington DC-based non-profit organization working locally to promote quality of life, economic development, and social equity. During the past 20 years, TPLC has provided new thinking about cultural policy which moves away from the compensatory logic of some arts program. TPLC demonstrates how cultural resources can contribute to youth development, economic development, social development, and community design.
5. Revitalizing urban communities, “The Livable City” (TLC) provides examples and strategies for improving the quality of life in urban, suburban, and exurban communities; it is open space, free-flowing traffic, historic preservation, attractive cultural and civic institutions, good housing, good jobs, good schools, and much more. TLC addresses every facet of improving livability from building private, business, and governmental coalitions to obtaining funding.
6. Beginning in the 1960s, when siting of urban freeways first become a political issue, publications like Jane Jacob’s “*The Death and Life of Great American Cities*” examined the ways that automobiles have changed urban environments. Automobility derives from the field of urban planning, with its interests in traffic patterns, congestion, mass transit, land use, suburbanization, and the social effects of the built environment.
7. Cultural planner suggests that what is being planned in cultural planning are the lifestyles, the texture and quality of life, the fundamental daily routines and structures of living, shopping, working, and playing — “folk, work, place.” They are not just streets and buildings, but conjunctions of habit, desire, accident, and necessity — “folk, work, place.”
8. After the 1970s, America was identified as the first nation in the world to enter the “Post-Industrial Society.” The onset of the Post-Industrial Society involved a massive shift in economic and social structure which will have an increasing impact on the nation’s geography — distributions of people, economic activity, and residential locations. The social changes are related to increased levels of education, leisure, and affluence; the work-orientated and achievement-orientated values and residential locations are replaced by a greater concern for amenities and access to recreational opportunities (Bradshaw, M.: *Regions and Regionalism in The United States*, University Press of Mississippi, pp.70-71, 1988).
9. MacKaye addressed the “Indigenous Environment” toward the regional city in America; his philosophy can be seen as one of the origins of today’s sustainability. The concepts of MacKaye are even more relevant today as the Twenty-first Century begins. MacKaye was as interested in protecting rural communities as he was in protecting the wilderness itself as the natural resource. MacKaye dealt with the design of the concrete means for controlling population flow; this took the form of the “Townless Highway,” originally published in “*The New Republic*” (30 March 1930). In this article, MacKaye first put together in complete form all the components necessary for a fast motorway, before the highway engineers had yet visualized it (OKUDA, T.: *The Roots of Environmentalism and Regionalism: Toward A New Direction for Urban Nature and Habitability in the 21st Century* throughout Benton MacKaye’s *Regional Philosophy*, Kajima Institute Publishing, pp.386-390, 2004).
10. Within MacKaye’s regional philosophy, “Indigenous” is defined as “innate, inherent, and intrinsic.” Joy and hope are emotions indigenous to the human mind. The three elemental environments which he cited (the primeval, the communal, and the urban) appear to be, like “joy and hope” themselves, “indigenous to the human mind.” So it is the “Indigenous Environment” that constitutes the natural resource (Anderson, L.: *Benton MacKaye:Conservationist, Planner, and Creator of the Appalachian Trail*, Johns Hopkins University Press, pp.205-206, 2002).
11. During the 1930s when the great economic depression gripped America, a drought descended on the Midwestern farming regions. In “The Dust Bowl,” centered in Oklahoma, but encompassing large areas of the surrounding states of Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, and north Texas, crops died and the parched earth turned to dust. Hundreds of thousands of farmers, in economic ruin, lost their homes, loaded their meager possessions on their cars or pickup trucks, and headed West for agricultural jobs in California. The vast majority of these Dust Bowl migrants used “The Mother Road,” Route 66 (Brady, A. W.: *Route 66 Redux:National Recognition for America’s Mother Road*, California State University, pp.42-44, 1998).
12. As a general fighting in Europe during World War II, Eisenhower was impressed by Germany’s high-speed roadways or “Autobahns.” Eisenhower envisioned a similar system of roads for America in which one could conceivably drive at high speed from one end of the country to the other without stopping. Naturally, this system also made it much easier to mobilize troops in the event of a national emergency (Ryburn-LaMonte, T.: *Route 66, 1926 to The Present:The Road a Local History*, Illinois State University, pp.138, 1999).
13. The Oklahoma region also is rich in cultural history, harkening back to the era when Americans took to the open road to see America. Although much of the original byway has been replaced by the new interstate, careful travelers can still journey on portions of the highway that inspired the words, “Get your kicks on Route 66.”
14. During the last two decades, interest in the ordinary architecture of the U. S. has grown rapidly and in diverse directions. Today, the term “Vernacular Architecture” is applied to traditional buildings, industrial and commercial structures, settlement patterns, and cultural landscapes; it is

not only a function of form and function but also a reflection of social, cultural, economic, and political influences. Embracing the value of multidisciplinary interaction and using building types for social and cultural interpretations, it also includes community planning; regional and cultural differences of traditional houses; religious architecture of various times, places, and denominations; farm buildings and other components of agricultural production; and complex and contradictory phenomenon of popular culture and architecture in the Twentieth Century.

15. “Okie” was one of the languages of Roadside America during the Depression of the 1930s. Although often used by writers and others, the term “Okie” did not have a negative connotation and was in use in Oklahoma and some of the surrounding states. The negative connotation came from a migrant camp in California and drifted East via the media, and especially the book and movie “The Grapes of Wrath.” Okie came to be “fighting words” for many migrants trying to adapt to living in California.

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ロードサイド・アメリカにおけるカルチャー・プランニング ーアメリカ地域主義に基づくルート66に関する史的・地域的コンテクスト解析を通じてー 米国オクラホマ大学 奥田 孝次

この5年間、米国オクラホマ大学大学院ゼミ講座「都市デザイン・ケーススタディー (Urban Planning Case Studies)」において、米国各都市における都市デザイン論、環境デザイン論、また地方都市の原点となるべき地域主義やバナキユラー文化等を研究してきた。本稿では、その研究課題の一環として、特にバナキユラー文化がまだ根強いオクラホマにおける「地域主義」を取り上げる。昨今、米国内外で人気が高まり、かつノスタルジックなシンボルとしても知られる「ルート66」、その史的及び地域的背景を考察すると共に、その変遷過程において培われてきたロードサイド・バナキユラーに基づいた「カルチャー・プランニング」に焦点を当てる。次に、オクラホマにおけるルート66沿線のバナキユラー・ランドマークも紹介したい。さらに、オクラホマにおけるロードサイド・ポピュラー文化にも焦点を当てると共に、全米ハイウェイシステムの経緯や歴史にも簡単に触れてみる。最後に、21世紀に入って従来の都市デザイン等を見直し、新たなビジョンを模索する必然性が問われてきた。米国では、環境創造型都市において環境、サステナビリティ、エコロジー等に加え、新たに「文化」と「都市デザイン」が共生しうる「カルチャー・プランニング」への関心が高まってきた。そのなか、地域主義に基づいたコミュニティー・プランニングを含むルート66保存運動を通じて、今日の自動車社会におけるアメリカの固有性としてのモービリティ思想の本質を明らかにし、また文化という視点に立ってロードサイド・ポピュラー文化との関連性を解析する上でも、新たなビジョンとしての「カルチャー・プランニング」は「21世紀の環境創造型都市デザイン」という課題に対して、何らかの示唆を提示するものであろう。