History

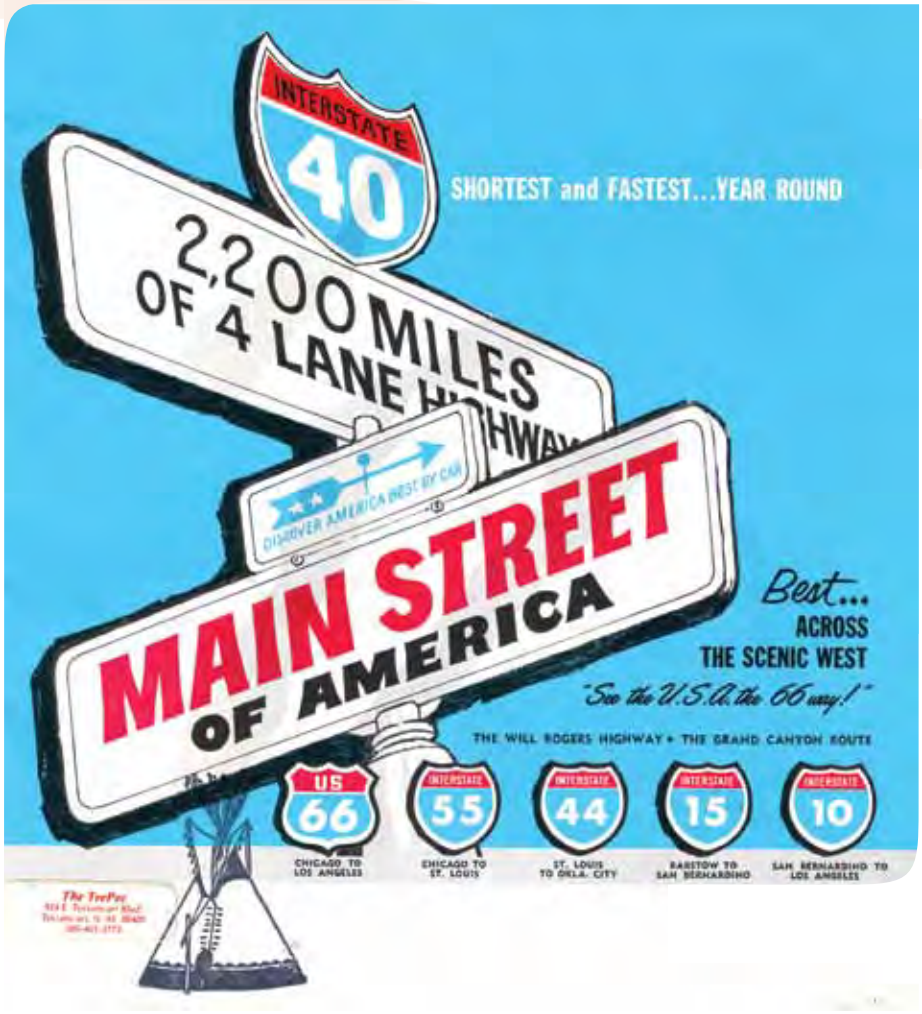
History by Joe Sonderman

Legislation for public highways first appeared in 1916, and the government executed its plan for national highway construction in 1925. U.S. Highway 66 (Route 66), also known as "Main Street of America" or the "Mother Road", was a highway in the U.S. Highway System. One of the original highways, the enumerated Route 66 was officially assigned to the Chicago-to-Los Angeles and established on November 11, 1926. That designation acknowledged Route 66 as one of the nation's principal east–west arteries.

From the outset, public road planners intended U.S. Highway 66 to connect the main streets of rural and urban communities along its course for the most practical of reasons: most small towns had no prior access to a major national thoroughfare. The journey along Route 66 in its entirety encompasses a total of 2,448 miles. The primary driving route for Missouri, Historic Route 66 comprises 347 miles of that total. The following article on Missouri Historic Route 66 is authored by Joe Sonderman:

"You could make a case that the most historically significant sections of Route 66 are in Oklahoma, or the most scenic is in Arizona. But since I'm from the "Show Me State," you would have a hard time convincing me that Missouri isn't the best of the eight states that can boast a stretch of Route 66. The man who became the driving force behind Route 66 attended college in Missouri. Springfield can lay claim to being the birthplace of Route 66. A Missouri attraction became the most famous of the tourist stops along the highway. A motel in St. Louis became one of the most notorious. A traveler headed west on Route 66 left the plains of Illinois behind, crossing the mightiest of America's rivers. Passing through the largest city on the route between Chicago and LA, the motorist soon found themselves in the rolling hills of the Ozark Plateau. West of Springfield, the land flattens out, and the traveler begins to realize they are headed into the great American West.

In the definitive work on the highway, "Route 66-The Mother Road," Michael



Promotion of Historic Route 66 - Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

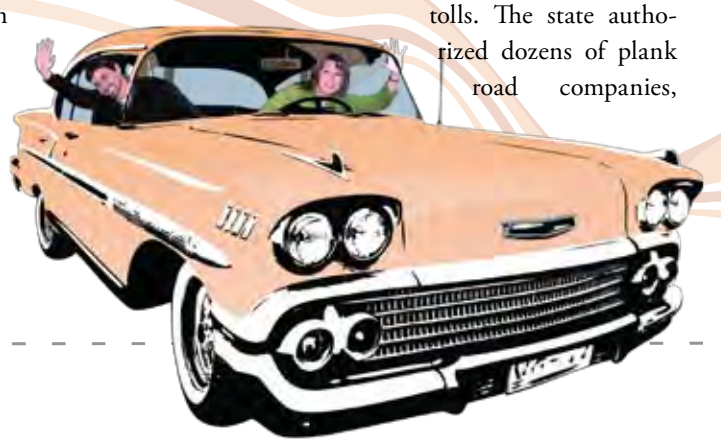
"Route 66 holds many memories for me. I always have wonderful thoughts of family trips to California and to see relatives in Arizona. It was the road of dreams."

Wallis wrote that 66 "was the road of dreamers and ramblers, drifters and writers." It was also "a road of commerce." Missouri had more than its share of mom and pop gas stations and cafes, "no-tell motels," tourist traps, curio stores and rock shops. Migrant workers headed west in search of a dream while Truckers "humpin to please" brought all manner of bounty to the great cities. GIs traveled the highway to Fort Leonard Wood. Then, the newly affluent generation came back, to follow the path of the beat writers or take their families to see the golden west. It was the people who made Route 66 a legend. The man who claimed to have invented the first drive up window, another who peddles frozen custard from a building ringed with wooden icicles, and a man who found a few rusty relics in a cave and turned it into a tourist attraction all played a role. So did the media, authors such as John Steinbeck and a songwriter by the name of Bobby Troup. So did the truck stop waitress, the gas pump jockey, the short order cook and the highway patrolman. Those people are still out there, waiting for you.

Indian Trails Through Missouri - Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

Route 66 officially celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2001. But it's really an old road. Route 66 was patched together from a myriad of Indian trails, farm-to-market routes and rutted paths through the Ozark woods. The first road west from St. Louis was merely an extension of Market Street. It was originally called Rue Bonhomme, after Joseph Hebert. His farm was along the route, and he was a good man, or "Bonhomme" en francais. The road led to Manchester, which later became the first path of Highway 66. The Osage Indians blazed a trail from the Ozark Highlands to the site where Pierre Laclede would decide to build his trading post in 1764. The route to St. Louis became known as the "Kickapoo Trace" the "Osage" or "Indian" roads. In 1822, the state made each county responsible for maintenance of its roads and all free males between the ages of 16 and 45 were required to help. The Missouri General Assembly established the first state road in 1835. That road followed the Road to Manchester, and then connected with the State Capitol in Jefferson City (later US 50).

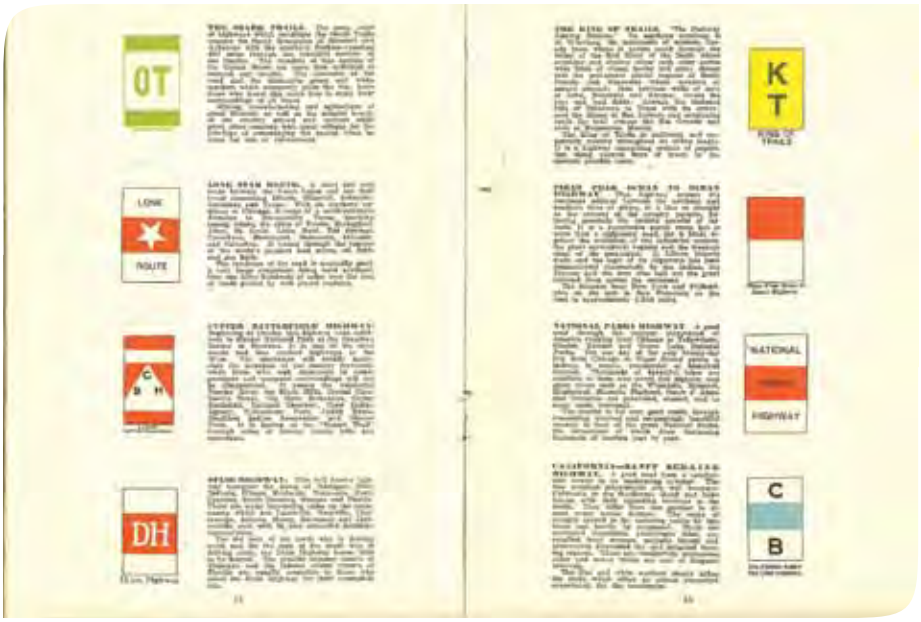
The road between St. Louis and St. James saw traffic increase about the time Missouri joined the union, when Iron ore was discovered in the Meramec Valley. On February 6, 1837, the State of Missouri authorized a state road between St. Louis and Springfield. The route would become known as the "Springfield Road" in most areas. The increasing traffic led to a movement for better roads in Missouri. A few enterprising folks thought it might be a good idea to "improve" the route by laying planks, or even logs, side by side. They would recoup the cost by charging tolls. The state authorized dozens of plank road companies,



but only a handful of these roads were ever built. The planks quickly rotted and warped, and travel over a road made of logs was a grueling experience in the days before shock absorbers. The companies quickly went bankrupt, and most of the plank roads reverted back to the state.

Another early road that ran west from St. Louis took its name from the French phrase "Gravois," meaning "gravelly." Some insist it also means "garbage." It was after all, the road to the dump. Gravois intersected with Chippewa, which took its name from an Indian tribe. Chippewa is an Ojibway name for the puckered seams on a type of moccasins worn by the tribe. On February 5, 1845, a group of St. Louis County residents, led by Wesley Watson, filed a petition for a road "From Cooper's Farm on the Old Manchester Roads, thence to the River Des Peres near the mouth of the Lick Branch, from thence the most practical route to a ferry landing opposite the town of Fenton." The road would be named for Watson. Watson's Road, Gravois and Chippewa would all someday become part of Route 66.

In the 1840's the US Government established a stage line along the route between St. Louis and Springfield. The road became a vital military thoroughfare during the Civil War. In 1858, the federal government strung telegraph lines along the road to Fort Smith, Arkansas. Stations were set up at St. Louis, Rolla, Lebanon, Marshfield and Springfield. The route soon became known as "The Telegraph Road" or "Wire Road." The Blue and the Grey marched along the dusty trail on their way to fight and die at Carthage and Wilson's Creek. Bushwackers and guerillas spread terror in the Ozark countryside. After the war, the government took down the wires, and left the lonely poles standing beside the road.



Historic Highway Markers - Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

The road system in Missouri languished after the war. The railways dominated travel, and the rutted country lanes were maintained mainly to provide access to the railway. The bicycle enthusiasts were the first to push for good roads in Missouri in the late 1800's. The first automobiles came to the state in 1891. By 1911, there were over 16,000 automobiles registered in the state. In 1907, the state saw the need to appoint a State Highway Engineer under the Board of Agriculture to help counties with construction of roads that would someday be part of a state system.

Meanwhile, promoters were developing a tangled web of roads across the US. They gave their road an important sounding name, and painted color-coded stripes on fence posts, telegraph poles or any handy surface. Drivers followed the confusing colors to travel the "Lincoln Highway," the "Dixie Highway," or the "Old Spanish Trail." In 1917, an association mapped out the "Ozark Trail" from St. Louis to Romeroville, New Mexico. From there, it joined the "National Old Trails Road" to Los Angeles.

By 1920, the situation was out of hand. The associations made money from "contributions" by merchants to have the highway routed past their business. It didn't take long for the hapless driver to realize he had been taken miles out of his way to be routed past a merchant or through a certain town. Sometimes, highways would take two or more different routes, so the promoters could collect from merchants in other towns. Telegraph poles and fence posts were often painted top to bottom with a confusing rainbow of colors. The promoters spent little of the money on actual road improvements or maintenance.

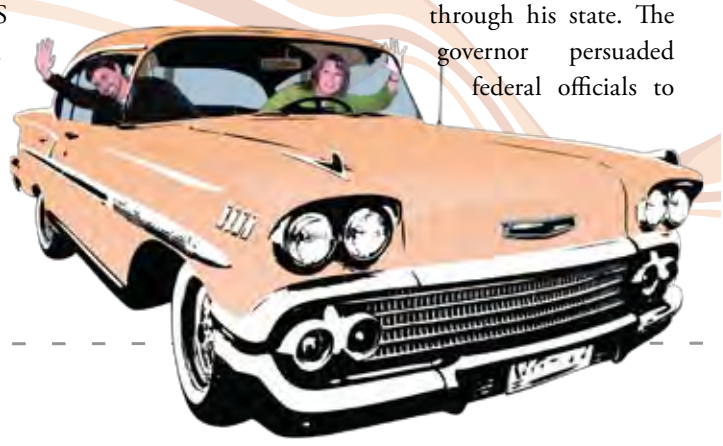
Maintenance Crew on Route 66 - Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

Missouri voters took action in 1920, approving a $60 million road bond issue. Governor Arthur Hyde led the push for the "Centennial Road Law." Proponents said the measure would "Lift Missouri Out of the Mud," by providing money for a state road system and means to obtain Federal funds. That same year, workers poured the first concrete pavement outside an urban center along the future Route 66. The $120,000 project extended 7.4 miles, from the Kansas border to Webb City.

In August 1922, the State Highway Commission designated seven roads totaling about 1,500 miles as primary roads connecting the major population centers. The routes would be numbered as: State Route 1 (later US 71); SR 2 (later US 40); SR 3 (US 65); SR 7 (US 63; SR 8 (US 36); SR 9 (US 61); and SR 14 - the future Route 66. The commission stated "a higher type of primary road is hereby designated between St. Louis and Joplin. The road will start at or near the end of the pavement on what is known as the Manchester Road in St. Louis County, thence south through or near Rolla, Lebanon and Springfield, to or near the Carthage-Webb City-Joplin population district."

The American Association of State Highway Officials, or AASHTO (AASHO prior to 1973) approved a new system for marking interstate highways. The report called for east-west highways to be assigned even numbers in November 1925. The north-south routes would be given odd numbers. The most important east-west routes would end in "0," and the principal north south routes would end in one or five. The one exception was the proposed Route "60." The important-sounding east-west number was not assigned to a completely transcontinental route. It was assigned to the highway between Chicago and Los Angeles, which crossed US 20, 30 40 and 50.

Maps were already being printed up in Missouri showing Route "60" linking St. Louis and Joplin. But the Governor of Kentucky had other plans. Governor Fields was upset that no routes ending in the important-sounding "0" passed through his state. The governor persuaded federal officials to



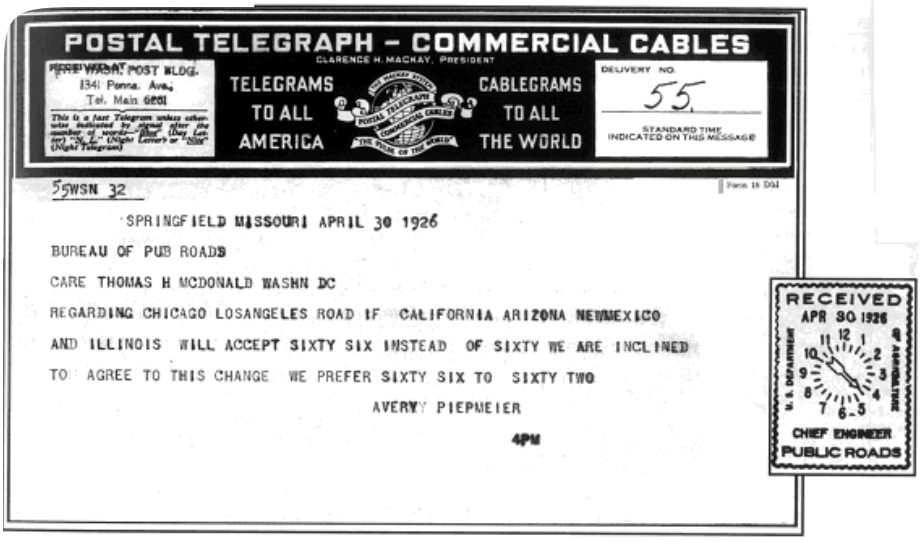
assign the number 60 to the highway running between Newport News to a point near Springfield. The highway between Chicago and Los Angeles was to be designated "US 62." Of course, this didn't set too well with officials in Missouri and Oklahoma. Missouri State Highway Commission Chief Engineer B. H. Piepmeier and Cyrus Avery, Chairman of the Oklahoma Department of Highways said they would accept only the number "60" for the Chicago to LA route. Angry telegrams flew.

Cyrus Avery is often referred to as "The Father of Route 66." Avery's family operated a service station and restaurant complex outside Tulsa, so he had more than a passing interest in good roads. Avery headed the board that chose which existing state highways would make up part of the new federal system. Avery battled the politicians and the promoters of the various "trails" to make sure the highway that connected St. Louis and Chicago with Kansas was moved south, through his hometown of Tulsa.

Avery and Piepmeier continued their battle with the Governor of Kentucky on into April of 1926. At a meeting with Piepmeier in Springfield, John M. Page, Chief Engineer from Oklahoma, noticed that the catchy sounding number "66" was still unclaimed. On April 30, 1926, Piepmeier and Avery fired off another telegram to federal officials, saying they would be willing to accept the number "66" for the Chicago to Los Angeles Route. It was the first reference to Route 66. Springfield can thus lay claim to being the "birthplace" of Route 66.

The Secretary of Agriculture approved the 96,000 mile Federal Highway System routes on November 11, 1926. That date is considered the official birth of Route 66, and Route 40, and Route 1, 30, 50 and all the rest! Within a few months, representatives from most of the states on the route founded the US Highway 66 Association. Its goal was to promote the highway and the businesses lining the route. John T. Woodruff of Springfield was named as the first president. Woodruff built the Kentwood Arms Hotel in Springfield along the future Route 66. He was also one of the original backers of the Ozark Trail. At the US 66 Association's first meeting in Tulsa, Cyrus Avery coined the name "The Main Street of America" for promotional materials. The State of Missouri granted the association a charter on April 6, 1927.

The Route 66 boosters went to work implanting the highway in the consciousness of the American public. Billboards went up, maps went out, and press releases flowed touting Route 66 construction. But it was good old-fashioned foot power that put Route 66 on the map for good. In 1928, promoter C.C. "Cash and Carry" Pyle, the man who brought Red Grange to the Chicago Bears, came up with the idea for a transcontinental foot race. The runners would travel from Los Angeles to Chicago along 66, then swing towards the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55WSN 32

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BUREAU OF PUB ROADS

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AVERY PIEPMEIER

4PM

RECEIVED APR 30 1926

CHIEF ENGINEER PUBLIC ROADS

Telegraph Designating Route 66 - Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

finish line-in New York City! On March 4, 1928, 275 runners started in the "Bunion Derby." An army of reporters was close behind. There were just 72 runners left when they crossed the Mississippi at St. Louis on April 27. Only 70 runners made it to Chicago. Just 55 were left when a part-Cherokee Indian from the Route 66 town of Foyil, Oklahoma crossed the finish line in the Big Apple on May 26th. Andy Payne made the 3,400 mile run in 87 days, or about 573 hours of actual time on the road. Payne won 25,000 dollars, C.C. Pyle lost a pile of money, and Route 66 reaped the publicity.

Postcard of "The Diamonds" - Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

Meanwhile, construction along Route 66 was proceeding across Missouri. Missouri voters in 1928 also approved another bond issue. This one called for the construction of traffic relief roads in Kansas City and St. Louis. The measure cleared the way for construction of the New Watson Road, a new alignment of Route 66 between St. Louis and Gray Summit. Route 66 was completely paved in Missouri as of January 5, 1931. The final section of pavement was just east of the Pulaski County line, near Arlington. Workers tossed coins in the wet cement to celebrate. A few weeks later, thousands of people turned out in Rolla for a huge parade and celebration to mark the occasion.

As travel increased, businesses quickly sprang up to serve the traveler. C.H. Laessig opened the first gas station in the US on Theresa Street in St. Louis in 1905. Early motorists avoided the finery of the big city hotels. At first, travelers simply camped beside the road where they pleased. But local farmers soon had their fill of what they derisively called the "tin can tourists." Some communities, eager for the business travelers would bring to merchants, began sponsoring local free campgrounds. One such early campground was located in Forest Park. But those camps soon began attracting undesirables, and the city closed the Forest Park camp in 1928.

It wasn't long before the farmers and those who lived along the road began putting up a ramshackle cabin or two. Travelers soon demanded more amenities, such as indoor plumbing and attached garages. A good example of an early Route 66 auto camp that has survived to the present day is Camp Joy, in Lebanon. John's Modern Cabins, slowly deteriorating today along the road west of Rolla, shows how Spartan some of these early accommodations were. Missouri roadside architecture ran the gamut, from the white clap board cabins of the Abby Lee Court in Conway, to the streamline moderne splendor of the late Coral Courts in St. Louis or the old Diamonds in Villa Ridge, (became the Tri-County Truck Stop, which closed in 2006). Many roadside entrepreneurs built from the materials they had close at hand. In the Missouri Ozarks, slabs of sandstone, also known as "Giraffe Rock" or any handy stones became the material of choice. Good examples of Ozark rocked buildings that survive today include the

Shamrock Motel in Sullivan, the Wagon Wheel Motel in Cuba and the Gascozark Café and station in Gascozark.

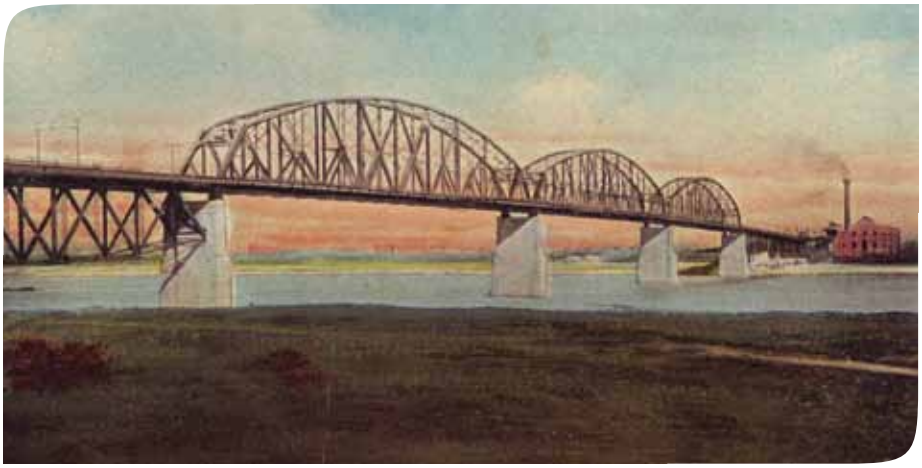
When it was commissioned, Route 66 crossed the Mississippi on the McKinley Bridge, then basically followed 9th, Salisbury, Natural Bridge, Grand, Delmar, Sarah, Lindell, Boyle, Clayton Avenue through Forest Park and McCausland before turning west on Manchester. The highway would follow a myriad of city streets over the years. You would be hard pressed to find a major city street that doesn't claim a 66 alignment. The story of Route 66 through St. Louis gets complicated, but here goes. 66 was shifted to the Municipal or "Free Bridge" in 1929, now MacArthur Bridge used entirely for trains, and the Route over the McKinley was marked as "Optional 66."

The first paving work ever by the State of Missouri within the city limits of St. Louis began on August 31, 1932 along Watson Road. Watson was paved between Chippewa and the city limits with state money. The first cloverleaf interchange west of the Mississippi River was completed on August 20, 1931 at Watson Road and Lindbergh as part of the new Watson project. The new highway through Valley Park to Gray Summit opened in August 1933. At that time, the US 66 signs came down along Manchester, and were shifted south on 12th Street (now Tucker Boulevard), Gravois, Chippewa and the new Watson Road. Merchants along Manchester fought in vain to keep the 66 shields up and have Watson Road designated as "Optional 66." Manchester was instead designated as US 50.

In 1936, AASHTO moved Route 66 to cross the Mississippi at the Chain of Rocks Bridge. The route went west on what is now Dunn Road and then swung south along Lindbergh, meeting up with Watson Road, before turning west towards Gray Summit. The old Municipal Bridge Route and 12th/Gravois/Chippewa/Watson carried the "City 66" signs. Another City route was marked out over Riverview, Broadway, Calvary, Florissant, Hebert, 13th and 12th Street. The main route continued to cross at the Chain of Rocks and swing down Lindbergh until 1955. At that time, new construction on the East Side allowed Route 66 to cross the Mississippi on the new Veteran's Bridge. (Now the Martin Luther King Bridge). The old Chain of Rocks/Lindbergh Route became "Bypass 66." That route was eliminated in 1965, following the completion of I-270 in North County.

Finally, on November 9, 1967, US 66 was shifted to the new Poplar Street Bridge, down I-55 to the Gravois exit, then onto Gravois-Chippewa and Watson. AASHTO eliminated Route 66 between Chicago and Joplin on June 25, 1974. Joplin would serve as the eastern terminus of Route 66 until decertification in 1984. Workers removed the Route 66 signs along Gravois, Chippewa and Watson in February, 1975. That route was re-designated as State Highway 366. The 66 shields stayed put on I-44, until January of 1977, when Illinois completed work on Interstate 55.

I assume that if you have not stopped reading, you already know the story of the glory years of Route 66. We've heard the tales of the Oakies, seen "The Grapes of Wrath" and sang along to "Get Your



St. Louis: McKinley Bridge - Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

Kicks on Route 66." The song that further ingrained Route 66 in the public's mind was born in Missouri. Songwriter Bobby Troup told the story in Michael Wallis' book, "Route 66, the Mother Road."

Crawford County: Meramec Caverns - Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

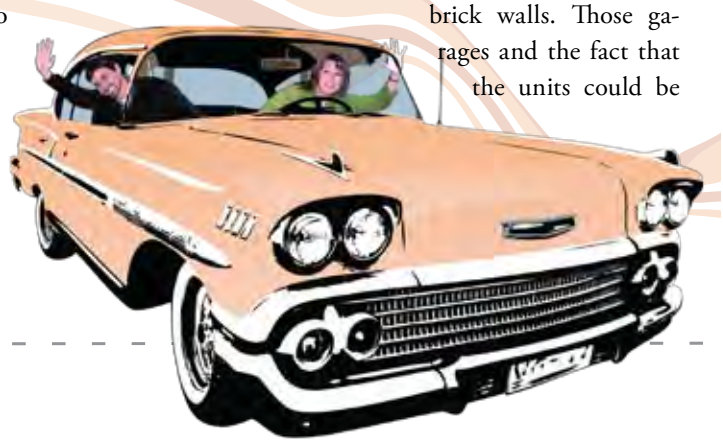
Troup says on a trip west, his wife Cynthia first suggested he write a song about Route 40. Troup said that would be silly, since they would soon be traveling on Route 66. He says just outside St. Louis, his wife leaned over and whispered "Get Your Kicks on Route 66." Troup began piecing the song together in the car as they headed to California. The song was released in 1946, and has since been recorded by dozens of artists as diverse as Nat King Cole, the Rolling Stones and Depeche Mode.

The post-war era is considered the golden age of Route 66. Roadside hucksterism was at its height. The mom-and-pop establishments were looking for ways to set themselves apart from the competition. They turned to roadside reptile ranches, basket weaving, selling Ozark rocks and the legend of Jesse James. The most famous roadside attraction in Missouri was first discovered in 1720. "Salt Petre Cave" provided an important ingredient for gun-powder. Legend says that Jesse James hid out in the cave while riding with Quantrill's Guerillas during the Civil War. Locals from the nearby town of Stanton would stage huge dances in a subterranean ballroom.

Lester Dill bought the cave on May 1, 1933 and re-named it Meramec Caverns. He didn't have time to build a parking lot before opening day, so he dubbed it "The World's Only Drive In Cave." Dill was a marketing genius, and is credited with inventing the bumper sticker to tout his attraction. In the 1930s Dill saw an ad for Lookout Mountain painted on the side of a barn - and got another idea. Soon barns painted with ads for Meramec Caverns were appearing all over the Midwest. Dill revived the underground ballroom and declared that Meramec Caverns was the "World's First Atomic Refuge" during the Cold War paranoia. Visitors were even given cards that guaranteed their admission if the bombs fell.

In 1942, Dill said he found some rusty old relics in the cave that could be traced to Jesse James. In 1949, he claimed to have produced Jesse in person. The media ate up the story when Dill and his son-in-law brought 102 year-old J. Frank Dalton to Stanton and said he was the famous outlaw. Today, Meramec Caverns still retains much of the feel of an old roadside attraction. Your tour ends at the huge onyx "Stage Curtain," where red, white and blue lights form an American flag while Kate Smith's "God Bless America" blares.

Another Route 66 attraction has not survived. The Coral Court Motel was a streamline Moderne masterpiece. It opened in 1941. Architect Adolph Struebig designed the yellow tiled cottages with their attached garages and glass brick walls. Those garages and the fact that the units could be



rented by the hour gave the motel a racy reputation. The hourly rate was actually put in place to give truck drivers a chance to grab a little shuteye. The motel made headlines around the nation in 1953. Carl Austin Hall holed up at the Coral Courts for a couple of days after kidnapping six-year-old Bobby Greenlease, the son of a wealthy Kansas City auto dealer. Hall claimed he had the entire $600,000 ransom with him the night he was arrested, but half of it disappeared. The mystery of the missing money was never officially solved. Some thought it might be stashed in the wall of the Coral Court. But the motel was torn down in the spring of 1995 to make room for a generic subdivision.

The original Route 66 Association continued to promote the highway. In 1952, they launched a cross-country promotional caravan to dedicate 66 as "The Will Rogers Highway." (People had been calling 66 the Will Rogers Highway for years anyway). The tour coincided with the release of the movie, The Story of Will Rogers. Ads were placed in travel publications and magazines such as The Saturday Evening Post.

Even as businesses along 66 reveled in the post war boom, change was already in the air. The war pointed out the need for faster and safer interstate travel. The first dual four-lane pavement on 66 in Missouri opened in 1942, from just east of the Phelps County line to State Highway 28 in Pulaski County. The new road eliminated a torturous route through Devil's Elbow, speeding traffic to and from Fort Leonard Wood. It was a great feat of engineering, boasting the deepest rock cut in the country at the time. At 93 feet deep, the cut became a prime postcard subject and an example of "the road of the future."

Pulaski County: Construction of Hooker's Cut - Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

During World War Two, General Dwight David Eisenhower witnessed the importance of good roads to the military built on speed. Germany's system of limited access high-speed autobahns were perfect for the lightning fast "blitzkrieg" of the German war machine. Eisenhower saw better roads as key to national defense, and a way to stimulate the economy. Congress passed his Federal Highway Aid Act in 1956, creating the Interstate Highway system. On August 2, 1956, Missouri became the first state to award a contract under the new Interstate Highway law. The first contract was for work on US 66 in Laclede County. Lebanon had the dubious honor of being the first town in Missouri by-passed by the Interstate. The nation's first actual Interstate construction took place west of the Missouri River in St. Charles on I-70 at Missouri Route 94.

While the Interstate began replacing the narrow and often dangerous two lane, a

Dual Designation Sign - Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

whole new generation was discovering the allure of Route 66. Beginning on October 7, 1960, the television series Route 66 beamed images of the "Mother Road" into the nation's living rooms. Route 66 told the story of a pair of young drifters, Buz Murdock (played by George Maharis) and Tod Stiles (portrayed by Martin Milner). Maharis left the show in 1963, and was replaced by Glen Corbett as Linc Case. The show was one of the most unique dramas of the 1960's, and one of the first series to leave Hollywood behind for locations on Route 66 and across the country. Much of episode #73, "Hey Moth, Come Eat the Flame" took place in St. Louis. Episode #75, "Where is Chick Lorrimer, Where has he gone" was filmed in St. Charles and around St. Louis.

Since Chevrolet was the sponsor of the show, Buz and Tod (that's right, only one "z" and one "d") traveled the road in a Corvette. The show firmly established the Corvette as an American icon. CBS cancelled the show in September 1964. By then, 116 episodes had aired. The shows had been lensed in 25 states, from Maine to California. Nelson Riddle's modern jazz theme song for the show became a hit single.

Through the 1960's, construction on the new four-lane Interstate route across Missouri continued at a breakneck pace. In 1962, the state took the lead in asking federal highway officials to designate I-55, I-44, I-40, I-15 and I-10 as Interstate 66 from Chicago to Los Angeles. The request was denied. I-66 was given to a short and nondescript stretch of highway in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C. The towns along 66 between Carthage and Springfield fought to keep the designation of US 66. They threatened to sue, and highway officials responded by building the new four-lane farther south. By 1965, those towns were completely by-passed. By 1972, Interstate 44 had replaced 66 across Missouri. Finally, in June 1974, AASHTO voted to eliminate US Route 66 from Chicago to Joplin. The Route 66 signs stayed up along I-44 for now, because state officials were waiting for Illinois to bring I-55 up to Interstate standards. In 1975, MoDOT workers took down the Route 66 shields along Gravois and Watson in St. Louis. That section became Missouri Route 366. Illinois

finished up work on I-55, and the last Route 66 sign in Missouri came down on January 24, 1977. The last section of old 66 still in use in Missouri was by-passed in January 1981. That was the old four-lane section between exits 169 and 173 around Devil's Elbow.

But then, a funny thing happened. The old road refused to die. Nostalgia buffs and roadside rebels continued to seek out the tourist traps, motels and gas stations that still held on for life on 66. People still saw and read The Grapes of Wrath and clung to memories of child hood vacations. They kept the "Mother Road" alive during those dark days. It was a media event when the very last section of Route 66 through Williams, Arizona was replaced by I-40 in 1984.

In 1990, Michael Wallis published "Route 66 - The Mother Road." His wonderful prose and pictures captured the romance of the road and inspired even more people, including myself, to take the next exit and discover America at a slower pace. By 1990, there was enough interest in Missouri to form the Missouri Route 66 Association. Its stated goal is "To preserve, promote and develop old Route 66 in Missouri."

The Association led the push for a designated Route 66 as a historic highway through the state. Governor Ashcroft signed the bill in July 1990. The measure cleared the way for MoDOT to begin erecting signs marking the historic right of way. The first sign went up at Kearney and Glenstone in Springfield on July 3, 1991. Since then, over 350 signs have marked the old alignment across the state. The association raises the funds for the signs and continues to work on additional marking.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Open Evenings

St. Louis County: Newspaper Article of Times Beach - Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

In 1999, the state of Missouri opened The Route 66 State Park on the former site of the city of Times Beach. Times Beach was a small community where Route 66 crossed the Meramec River, 17 miles west of St. Louis. The town was born in 1925, the result of a promotion by the old St. Louis Star-Times newspaper. A six months subscription for $67.50 entitled the reader to a 20' by 100' lot in "Times Beach." The town developed into a summer resort, known for its ramshackle cottages built on stilts to protect from the flooding. Over the years, many of the cottages developed into attractive permanent homes. The population reached 1,240 people by 1970.

The streets of the town were dusty, and the city decided to do something about in the early 1970's. Local officials contracted with waste oil hauler Russell Bliss to spray waste oil on the streets to keep the dust down. City officials figured they got a bargain, paying only six cents per gallon. But in November 1982, the EPA announced that the waste oil contained dioxin. A few weeks later, the rampaging Meramec River nearly wiped out the town. As residents

struggled to clean up, the EPA told displaced residents they should not go back and told those who remained that they should leave.

Route 66 State Byway Dedication: Springfield - Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

On February 22, 1983, the federal government announced a voluntary buyout. Some 2000 people were re-located. The entire community was demolished. The entire community was demolished. The "Times Beach" signs came down on I-44, and there was no trace of the once-thriving town. A gate installed across old Route 66 turned the site into a no-man's land. Today, there is some evidence that the threat was overestimated. But a massive and controversial cleanup effort was completed in the fall of 1997. The site is now Route 66 State Park.

On November 11, 2001, hundreds of people came to the park to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Route 66. The Missouri Route 66 Association continues to work on preserving the route for future generations. On May 4, 2009, the Missouri Department of Transportation opened a Route 66 themed rest area on eastbound I-44 at the 111 mile marker west of Conway."

Sonderman's account of Missouri's Route 66 history gives a thorough overview of the Road. This glimpse of American history makes it is easy to understand the interest and fascination for Route 66 worldwide. It also stresses the importance of preserving, protecting and promoting Missouri Historic Route 66. This Corridor Management Plan intends to set a plan for achieving those goals.

Cyrus Avery - Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

A. H. Piepmeier - Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

John's Modern Cabins - Courtesy of David J. Eslick

Hidden in a canopy of trees sits six tiny cabins. Once a location of activity from Route 66 providing travelers with a place for rest and relaxation on their trip, today is a quiet remnant of its golden years. Now no one stops, except for the stray photographer wanting to collect a picture of the past, but the motorist are not far away, and the sounds of the tires on the pavement still echo through the now empty shells.

Coral Court Motel - Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

The vision of John Carr, the Coral Court Motel was intended to be "something outstanding". The bungalows were designed and constructed in grand style. The original 10 units were dressed in honey-colored glazed ceramic bricks and large glass block windows. Later 23 additional units were added. Motel enthusiasts referred to the bungalow style as the "Mae West" units because of the curvy, rounded bays.

"Route 66 holds many ***memories*** *for me. I always have wonderful* ***thoughts*** *of family trips to California and to see relatives in Arizona. It was the road of* ***dreams.****"*