

America's Roadside Lodging: The Rise and Fall of the Motel

Lori Henderson

Lori Henderson, who earned her BA in history at Eastern Illinois University, is a graduate student in Historical Administration. She wrote this paper in spring 2009 for Dr. Nora Pat Small's HIS 5050 course on American Architecture.

The impact of the automobile on the American landscape cannot be overstated. The modern landscape, particularly our roads and the built-up environment along these roadways, has developed in direct response to the ubiquitous automobile. As Americans began their love affair with the 'horseless carriage' in the early-twentieth century, they discovered the freedom of the open road and the adventure of motor touring. Exploring the land by auto fit perfectly with the American character raised on the ideals of the pioneer spirit, rugged individualism, and freedom. Americans embraced the opportunity to seek adventure, witness the natural beauty of their country, strengthen family bonds, and commune with fellow travelers on the road. The automobile arrived and offered Americans an escape from the rapid industrialization and urbanization that many believed to be responsible for stripping America of her national character, a character defined by wide open spaces, natural beauty and frontiers to be explored.

The automobile allowed Americans to rebel against rail travel. Travelers were held hostage by the strict schedules of the train. Historian Warren Belasco wrote that "in a sense the car freed the motorist not only from the centrally set railroad schedule but from his own internal, work-disciplined schedule."¹ Traveling by train did not allow for scenic touring as the train roared through the landscape with no regard for natural beauty epitomizing the industrial side of American life. A contributor to *Outlook* magazine in 1914, Henry Griffin, complained that railroads were "fast treading all the romance out of travel." He believed the automobile to be a "veritable Aladdin's carpet, an open sesame to wide countryside, strange roadways, and the wonderland of all outdoors." His nostalgia for the pastoral prompted him to declare the car "a democratizing agent" that would permit Americans to go back to "the intimate acquaintance of the old stage coach days" while predicting that the car would "counteract the evil effects of the cities."² He marveled that the ability of the "same science that robbed us of the stage coach" by inventing rail travel could now "restore to

our wanderlust all of the glamour" of independent travel.³ Griffin believed that cars would offer new freedom, allow travelers to be their own master, and return life to a time when schedules followed more natural rhythms. He hoped the car would right the wrongs of technology and alleviate the problems wrought by industrialization and urbanization.

If the train robbed the traveler of adventure and intimacy with the open road, the downtown hotel deprived the traveler of privacy and anonymity. Downtown hotels required formal dress and the rituals of registration, dinner and check-out were all designed for exposure and public exhibition. The rituals associated with downtown hotels were incompatible with the spirit of motor touring. Touring by car also meant travelers arrived covered with road dust, making their appearance was unacceptable by hotel standards. Motor touring also appealed to families with children and the downtown hotels intimidated children and their parents. Hotels built for rail customers proved to be incompatible for motor tourists. Traditional overnight lodging may have created a dilemma for motor tourists, but in the true pioneer spirit, these tourists improvised and set up camp along the roadways.

This paper attempts to explore the evolution of roadside lodging as it developed in response to the automobile traveler beginning in the early-twentieth century. As Americans took to the open road in their automobiles they initially embodied the spirit of adventure and camped in open fields. Camping formalized into free, and later paid, auto-camps, to cabin camps, motor courts, and eventually the motel; beginning with local 'mom-and-pop' establishments and moving to the modern corporate chain. With the official, if not cultural, closing of the frontier, Americans extended the pioneer spirit by touring in the automobile. The modern roadside motel emerged to meet the needs of these auto-touring Americans seeking adventure and evolved to provide security in the perceived chaos of a strange place.

As early as 1910, an *Outlook* magazine article declared there to be "about 350,000 autos now in use in this country." This same article advocated traveling to the country in your auto to "not only show the country to the people, but show the people to the country" with a desirable result of increasing "neighborliness and diversion."⁴ By 1912, *Outlook* writers declared the "automobile has changed interior traveling from a physical racking bore to a distinct frontier outing and a pleasure trip" and proclaimed "the automobile has verily brought a new mental poise to some portions and parts of the unbroken and almost untrodden interior."⁵ By

³ Ibid.

⁴ Edward S. Martin, "The Motor Craze," *Outlook*, 19 November 1910, 628-629.

⁵ Randall Howard, "From Stage Coach to Motor Car," *Outlook* 27 January 1912, 240.

¹ Warren Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1979), 22.

² Henry Farrand Griffin, "The Motor Vagabond, His Wanderings at Home and Abroad," *Outlook*, 23 May 1914, 161.

1913, *Outlook* published an article declaring that by the end of that year over one million autos would be in use in America.⁶ Americans embraced the automobile, hit the open road and forever changed the face of the landscape.

The initial changes produced by these motor tourists were not always welcomed by rural landowners. Campers often carried food packaged in tin cans and left trails of empty cans behind them, prompting the nickname 'tin can tourists.' Farmers complained of the litter, of destroyed orchards and crops, and damage to their land all wrought by campers. But by the 1920s, autocamping had become an immensely popular recreational activity for thousands of families with no signs of abating. Belasco claims that the experience offered travelers what they perceived as a taste of what America's early pioneers endured. He also notes that in American society "growing specialization seemed to threaten individual autonomy and autocamping offered training in traditional values, self-help and all around dexterity."⁷ Magazines such as *Forest and Stream* instructed campers on how to pack their cars, purchase or make specialized tents that incorporated the car itself in the form, and build seats that folded to beds.⁸ Travel writer, F.E. Brimmer declared that the "motor tourist achieves both independence and comfort as he takes his hotel with him."⁹ Municipalities and national parks responded to the camping craze and the farmer's complaints and opened what were initially free auto camps.

The American Automobile Association announced in 1923 that there were 1,800 public auto camps in the U.S.¹⁰ and by 1924 they announced there were over 2,000 of these free camps.¹¹ In a 1924 report by the United States Public Health Service, the National Park Service reported over 100,000 auto campers to Canyon Automobile Camp in Yellowstone National Park in that same year. (Figure 1) Concerns about public health in these camps prompted a review by the U.S. Public Health Service. The Service laid out a design and plan for several auto camps to be placed throughout the park to alleviate crowding too many people in a small area. This particular camp required a registration fee of \$7.50, but campers gained the security of patrolling by park rangers, toilets, showers, drinking water, firewood, and picnic tables.¹² These amenities proved important to

⁶ Henry Griffin, "The Motor Conquest," *Outlook*, 22 March 1913, 619.

⁷ Belasco, *Americans on the Road*, 31.

⁸ F.E. Brimmer, "Double Service Kits," *Forest and Stream*, August 1922, 356.

⁹ F.E. Brimmer, "Auto Camping Deluxe," *Outlook*, April 1922, 170.

¹⁰ "Tourist Camps Draw Thousands to Open Road," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 June 1923, p. A10.

¹¹ "More Free Camps Open New Chapter in W.S. Motoring," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 July 1924, p. 10.

¹² Isador Mendelsohn, "Canyon Automobile Camp, Yellowstone Park," *Public Health Reports*, 24 June 1925, vol. 40, no., p.1248-1258.

traveling families, and municipalities as well as the federal government were implementing funding for them.

A 1925 *New York Times* article described a new "well appointed" motor camp in New York City equipped to accommodate 1,000 cars. The camp was within a half-hour drive of Times Square, it boasted a restaurant, telephone and telegraph, police protection, and plans for a "moving picture display." The charge for this camp was \$1.00 a day or \$5.00 per week. The camp planners defended their fee by noting that many other municipal camps throughout the country were implementing fees after research showed that the campers did not venture into the towns and spend money at local businesses. The article also reported on a new regulatory agency, "the International Association of Tourist's Camps was formed to direct in an advisory capacity the general management and equipment of motor camps in the United States and Canada. One of its prime objectives is to abolish the free municipal camping system, substituting better equipped camps at which a nominal fee will be charged."¹³ Regulatory and governmental oversight encroached to ensure safe and healthy conditions for campers and to ensure that municipalities could collect funding to finance those services. Despite the moves to regulate the motor touring experience, Americans continued to engage in this leisure activity and embrace it as a means to bond families and instill democratic values.

Before the automobile, vacationing among wealthy and middle-class families often meant mother and children escaped the city to a country or seaside resort while father remained in the city to work and visited the resort on the weekend. Resort life progressed at a truly leisurely pace, a remnant of Victorian ideals. The strenuous life endorsed by Teddy Roosevelt and the progressive era at the turn of the century did not uphold the resort lifestyle, but autocamping as a family met these progressive ideas perfectly. Belasco writes, "progressive thought favored farm or wilderness, where children could relive the strenuous life of a more robust era." He maintains that popular thought about separate spheres for men and women (and children) changed in this period and that this was the "beginning of the companionate, recreation-based family."¹⁴

Elon Jessup wrote of this trend in family vacationing in an article for *Outlook* when he wrote,

this living outdoors twenty-four hours a day and seeing with your own eyes all the wonderful things the geography books tell about certainly is the life. So much better than being cooped up in a boarding house all summer long on the edge of a silly old lake. Besides, it's great to have daddy along. He's

¹³ "New York has Motor Camp North of Pelham Bay Park," *New York Times*, 22 March 1925, p. 155.

¹⁴ Belasco, 64.

great fun when you get to know him. Yes, indeed this is the first time the family's been all together on a vacation.¹⁵

Jessup, an obviously enthusiastic supporter of auto camping, also endorsed the activity as “the only democratic sport” and that this “new sport of motor camping” is where you will find a “true spirit of real democracy.”¹⁶ He encouraged his readers to “hit the motor campers’ trail” and it assured them it would “lead to better citizenship, good cheer, health and happiness.”¹⁷ Promoters like Jessup believed that the camaraderie within the motor camps meant renewed national unity and confirmation of treasured American ideals. (Figure 2)

Belasco also notes the nationalistic tone of the autocamping supporters. He writes, “such fraternal feelings confirmed popular belief that outdoor sports promoted healthy nationalism. At a time of heightened Americanization efforts, outdoor recreation would consolidate a dangerously segmented society.”¹⁸ Patriotism did not wane as a component of motor touring, and in 1940 the manager of the American Automobile Association claimed that “utilization of this mobility has brought an interchange among people in all sections of the country, leading to a better understanding and to firmer loyalty. More than ever before we are truly a nation of united States.”¹⁹ Participants in motor touring and autocamping acted out the American dream and in the process reconfirmed perceived national unity and egalitarian values.

The 1920s witnessed the advent and height of the autocamping craze transforming the landscape as motor camps sprouted to lodge these adventure-seeking motor tourists. A *Chicago Tribune* article in 1929 predicted that over 5,000,000 Americans would camp that year with their automobiles. They reported that the “enjoyment of America’s outdoors has increased tenfold in recent years, through the sport of camping and we are becoming a nation of tent dwellers thanks to the increased use of the automobile and the ingenuity of the manufacturers of camping equipment.”²⁰ On the eve of the Great Depression this article had no aim of prophecy with its “tent dweller” comment, and while motor touring remained a popular American pursuit throughout the Depression, the free auto camps did experience a surge of homeless families frequenting their grounds.

¹⁵ Elon Jessup, “The Flight of the Tin Can Tourists,” *Outlook*, 25 May 1921, p. 166.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁸ Belasco, 92.

¹⁹ Russell Singer, “Touring this Year May Beat Record,” *New York Times*, 13 October 1940, p. 146.

²⁰ “Motor Campers Nowadays Live the Life O’Riley” *Chicago Tribune*, June 1929, p. G3.

Despite the publicity regarding the egalitarian, democratic and classless nature of the auto camps, there was a difference between the “desirable” tourist and the “undesirable” vagabond. (Figures 3 and 4) Private operators of auto camps discovered that desirable tourists were willing to pay for accommodations that freed them from packing all the camping equipment, yet still offered privacy and a pastoral setting. Farmers and rural entrepreneurs began building small cabins with sparse interiors and others built more elaborate bungalows with amenities such as a bed with mattress. Operators charged modest fees and succeeded in attracting those desirable tourists and banning the less desirable. (Figure 5) The cabins proved quite popular with travelers; Belasco’s research provides statistics that show tent sales “peaked in 1924 and by 1929 tent sales were at pre-1916 levels.”²¹ These new “cabin camps” still provided the camaraderie of the early auto camps as travelers shared bathrooms and campfires. Cabins “resolved the autocamper’s dilemma of how to go ‘light but right’, to move freely yet to live comfortably. By patronizing the commercial cabin camp, the motor tourist now sacrificed romantic autarchy for the sake of easy mobility.”²² (Figure 6)

A 1927 *New York Times* article declared “touring motorists can now sleep in bungalows if they do not want to pitch tents—large roadside industry developed.” Precursors to the motel, these cabin camps were only the beginning of a large roadside industry. The article reported that the growth of the bungalow camp “has been sensational” particularly in the west and that “these camps are nearly all privately owned and they are in direct competition to the municipal camp.” This article also foretold the future of competition among roadside cabin camps and their descendents, the motel, describing the different amenities provided by different proprietors. Some operators brought guests flowers and others provided hot water. The article also described the use of regional architectural styles to appeal to the tourist, another method employed by the privately owned motel. Perhaps most importantly, the bungalow camps are proclaimed as safe from crime and the elements. “One great advantage of the bungalow camp is that the tourist’s belongings can be placed under lock and key, it is true, but the tourist hardly feels at ease when he drives away for a little sightseeing leaving valuables under canvas.”²³ (Figure 7) An interview with Harry Burhans, secretary of the Denver Tourist Bureau, accurately predicted the development of the motel when he stated, “these camps will be standardized, as to price and accommodation. The tourist will know that at the end of the day’s run he can check in at a bungalow camp and get shelter, his car under roof...valet service...laundry and restaurants. (Figure

²¹ Belasco, 131.

²² *Ibid.*, 133.

²³ “Overnight Camps Dot the Country” *New York Times*, 28 August 1927, p.

8 and 9) There is no doubt in my mind that much of the future of automobile camping is to be found in the development of the bungalow colony."²⁴ Tourists simultaneously sought adventure and security when they traveled; the new cabin camps offered more security than tents, but with quaint nostalgic architecture and bucolic settings, the tourist need not sacrifice the pursuit of outdoor recreation.

Operators of these cabin camps advertised that they could offer the traveler the best of both worlds: security and outdoor adventure. The City View Camp, built in the 1930s in Harrison, Arkansas, advertised if tourists chose their establishment they could expect to

rest and relax where it is cool, with the comfort of knowing you and your personal effects are in absolute safety. City water from a gushing Ozark spring. Mountain top location and overlooking North Arkansas' leading city. Going South, it's through the City on top of the mountain, and going North, it's on top of the mountain just before entering the City. Cooking facilities for those desiring to cook. All modern rustic log cabins. Rates reasonable."²⁵ (Figure 10)

Private operators were not the only ones getting into the cabin camp business; national parks also converted their auto camps.

The Grand Canyon National Park built cabins in the 1930s, one camp was known as Moqui Camp. Research by the National Park Lodge Architecture Society indicates that Moqui Camp was built as a "motorist camp" with a Union 76 gas station.²⁶ Always building for the tourist and his automobile these cabin/motorist camps began offering security and protection for the tourist's vehicle as well. The new form of lodging required a new name, and the term motor court soon came into common use. This new form also brought the cabins closer to the motel form and many cabin camps were redesigned to fit the new trend in lodging. The Moqui Camp became the privately owned motor court, Moqui Lodge, in 1966 with a restaurant, swimming pool, tennis courts, beauty salon, and gift shop. (Figure 11)

Motor courts promised to fulfill the needs of a reinvigorated American public ready to hit the road again after the war. A 1946 Times article reported that an "eagerness to take to the open road has swept in a wave over the nation." Concerns about this travel included the state of the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Marilyn Breece, *Rustic Cabins Welcomed Visitors to City View Camp*, September 2006, http://www.bchrs.org/collections/historyqa/rustic_cabins_welcomed_visitors_to_city_view_camp.html (23 March 2009), Historical and Railroad Society, Inc.

²⁶ National Park Lodge Architecture Society, 2008, <<http://nplas.org/moqui.html>>, (23 March 2009).

nation's cars after sitting through years of gas rationing and material shortages, the condition of the neglected roads, and availability of lodging. The report stated, "tourist courts have made extensive plans for increasing and improving accommodations for visitors."²⁷ By 1948 the motor court was meeting the demands of the tourists and giving resorts and hotels a run for their money.

William Barker, reporting for the *Chicago Tribune* in 1948, declared that "this year, as never before, the resort hotels across the country are going to realize their little brothers, the motor courts, ...are about to steal the tourist's affections." (Figure 12) Acknowledging the recent struggles that motor courts had endured, he reported that during the "last years of prohibition... some cottage camps developed a distinctly shady reputation."²⁸ The period of bad publicity that this reporter alludes to could partially be attributed to J. Edgar Hoover's report in 1940 entitled "Camps of Crime." The motor court offering more anonymity and privacy than any previous form of lodging became fodder for moral crusaders. The FBI director "warned of an implicit immorality and tendency to criminality fostered by the motel."²⁹ Barker complained that the "unsavory camp was emphasized and dramatized in books, by the press and radio at the expense of the ethical majority of motor court management." However, Barker argued that the "unfavorable publicity served a good purpose in the end." He informed his readers that the motor court operators had joined forces to self regulate and police their peers, establishing the United Motor Courts, Inc., as well as the American Motor Hotel Association and Quality Motor Courts, all nonprofit agencies. Barker appealed to the tourist's desire for security and also threw in a bit of patriotism for good measure when he wrote, "the underlying appeal of the modern motor court today is that it is essentially American³⁰- an American idea." He added that this was unlike the hotel, which harbored European roots and customs.³¹ The battle between the hotel and the motel was on and the motel was winning. A conspiracy theorist may have hypothesized that hotel operators were in cahoots with the FBI and were feeding the press negative publicity.

Motels endured the negative publicity in the '30s and '40s and ventured into a period of great expansion in the '50s and '60s. Established

²⁷ Bert Pierce, "By Car- 'Fill er Up and Then Watch our Dust," *New York Times*, 9 June 1946, p. 148.

²⁸ William Barker, "Motor Courts to Steal U.S. Tourists," *Chicago Tribune*, 6 June 1948, p. c6.

²⁹ John Jakle, Keith Sculle, and Jefferson Rogers, *The Motel in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996) 16.

³⁰ Not only was the motel design and form an American creation, the term itself was coined and copyrighted in America. Architect Arthur Heineman designed the Milestone Mo-Tel in California in 1926, creating the new word *motel* out of *motor* and *hotel*.

³¹ Barker, "Motor Courts," June 1948.

highways continued to bring tourists into small towns and mom-and-pop motels sprouted up along the byways. Motels began to offer more and more services and amenities, prompting complaints that motels were beginning to look a lot like the hotel. Frances Brown wrote with an acute sense of nostalgia for the tourist cabins of the 1920s in her 1954 *New York Times* article. She complained of the \$7.00 charge for her motel accommodations and reminisced about the 75 cents she paid in the '20s. She noted that the "desire of motor travelers to have their cars close at hand was one of the primary reasons why tourist cabins came into being in the first place" and complained she had difficulty even finding a place to park her car in the motel where she stayed.³² Despite the growing pains experienced by tourists like Brown, motels continued to be built in great numbers.

A July 1960 *New York Times* headline read, "150 New Motels Planned in 6 Months" in the United States.³³ By October 1960, the *Times* declared that "209 Motels Started" in the United States; clearly bypassing the plans for 150 earlier that year. The motel form was so popular that in 1961 the city of Philadelphia developed plans to demolish the North Broad Street Station, a 1929 Greek Revival depot, in order to build a motel in its place.³⁴ Motels, a form born on the rural roadside, were no longer being restricted to obscure towns and bucolic settings; urban tourists could now find them in the cities. This was just the beginning of the major changes about to impact roadside lodging in the United States.

No other phenomenon had a greater impact on American lodging than Kemmons Wilson in 1952. A successful entrepreneur from Memphis, Wilson experienced an epiphany while vacationing with his wife and five children in 1951. Upset that establishments charged extra for children and dismayed at a lack of standardization among the various motels they visited; Wilson built and opened the first Holiday Inn in Memphis in 1952. Calling his establishment "hotel courts" and using the term "inn" he incorporated the ideas of the old amenities and services of the hotel with the motel form that included a tourist's car. Wilson proceeded to sell his Holiday Inn concept and name as a franchise and his success and influence on the lodging industry is unparalleled in the history of American business. The mottoes of "America's Innkeeper" and "The Best Surprise is No Surprise" firmly implanted the qualities of security and patriotism that pseudo-adventure seekers craved in their lodging. By 1966 there were already 568 Holiday Inn franchises in the United States and 202 in the

³² Frances Brown, "Motel Evolution," *New York Times*, 17 January 1954, p. xx3.

³³ "150 New Motels Planned in 6 Mos.," *New York Times*, 13 July 1960, p. 57.

³⁴ "Motel to Replace Philadelphia Depot," *New York Times*, 27 June 1961, p. 38.

planning stages.³⁵ Wilson had discovered the magic formula and permanently changed the face of the motel industry. (Figure 13)

During the success years of the 1960s, motels evolved closer and closer to the old hotel form, even the term motel began to fall out of favor and more and more chains began using 'hotel' again. Starting along the roadside, private motels were often built with features easily seen from the highway and this included swimming pools and signage. Soon the pool became a staple feature and eventually a luxury offering advertised to draw in families for more than just overnight lodging. In 1966, the *Times* reported that "Motels Aren't Just for Sleeping Anymore." Frank Litsky reported that "once, in the not-to-distant past, motels were places to stay en route to a destination. Today, with a shift of emphasis from bedroom to resort, motels are more and more becoming the destination." Interviewing Jack Ladd, Holiday Inn's senior vice president of marketing, Litsky reported that Holiday Inn was "emphasizing recreational facilities." Litsky described the York Valley Inn in Pennsylvania as a motel that started with 25 units in 1958 but after three expansions now boasted a health club, indoor swimming pool with fireplace, outdoor pool, ice skating rink, and cocktail lounge.³⁶ Now leisure pursuits could mean safe adventure in secure indoor settings and not being restricted to vacations in rural settings, city dwellers could take advantage of these recreational offerings too.

Americans accepted that corporate America could offer the security and standardization needed while traveling to unknown places. Historians Jakle, Sculle and Rogers note that in 1962 only 2% of motels were franchises and by 1987 franchises accounted for 64% of the industry.³⁷ With the building of the limited access interstate system in the 1950s many towns were bypassed. That combined with the powerful marketing schemes and appeal of the franchise spelled the demise of many of the mom-and-pop establishments along the highway. The abandonment of these buildings by credible owners and the introduction of the budget chain motel meant a new era of negative publicity for the motel in the 1980s and 1990s and the eventual downfall of the motel's original respectable form. (Figure 14)

At the same time that the industry was becoming more luxurious and offering more services, builders William Becker and Paul Greene were developing a budget motel to counteract the trend started by Holiday Inn. They introduced the Motel 6 chain in the late '60s with pared down services and amenities for the budget-conscious traveler. This business practice of scaled down service produced a formula for disaster and a new era of negative publicity for the industry. A guest of Motel 6 was brutally raped and robbed in 1988 by two ex-convicts in Fort Worth, Texas. The

³⁵ "Holiday Inns of America," *New York Times*, 16 April 1966.

³⁶ Frank Litsky, "Motels Aren't Just for Sleeping Anymore," *New York Times* 18 July 1966, p. 38.

³⁷ Jakle, Sculle, Rogers, *Motel in America*, 150.

victim sued Motel 6 for negligence in her safety as a guest at their establishment. Motel 6 settled with the victim for \$10 million; an amount that implied the motel had been lax in providing security for a woman traveling alone. The case highlighted the differences in higher-end chains with budget motels that were cutting corners to save money and resulted in terrible publicity for Motel 6.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported in 1991 that “cut-rate inns scrimping on security” were allowing “criminals to move in.” They reported some damaging statistics on the Motel 6 chain, including the fact that three more women were raped at the same Fort Worth motel since the 1988 attack. Interviewing police in Tampa, Florida, reporter Kevin Helliker wrote “police have recorded about 200 visits to one Motel 6 in the past 12 months.” A Buena Park, California, police department claimed 300 visits to a Motel 6 for “reasons ranging from drunkenness to homicide.” A former Motel 6 executive in charge of security “estimated that the 600-plus unit chain...averaged a rape a month in his three-year tenure.” The police chief of Collinsville, Illinois, stated that “crime at budget motels is so widespread that he was applying for a special state grant to combat it.” Helliker’s report also told of budget motels scrimping on “locks, lights, key-control systems, security guards and trustworthy help.” Since these budget motels required no identification, they appealed to drug dealers and police frequently made drug arrests at budget motels. Police also told of a ‘motel society’ being formed at budget motels, where the motels became living quarters for people unable to secure legitimate housing.³⁸ These security violations played on the fears of travelers and further damaged the reputation of the motel.

The hotel industry responded quickly to the negative press generated by the security problem highlighted at the budget motels. In 1992, the *Times* reported that motels were converting to plastic magnetic cards to replace metal keys that could be taken and copied. At the time of this report, in 1992, Motel 6 had no plans to convert to the keyless entry system, but they had removed room numbers from the keys. They also reassessed the lighting of parking lots and implemented a policy of requiring identification for guests and no guests under the age of 18. These security measures were not enough to stem the tide of negative publicity for the motel.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, accounts of housing the homeless in motels started making news and neighborhoods protested the practice. A report of a motel in an Astoria Heights neighborhood stated that the city started housing homeless families in the Westway Motel in October of 1990. Neighbors complained of harassment by drunken motel residents and

³⁸ Kevin Helliker, “With Cut-Rate Inns Scrimping on Security, Criminals Move In,” *Wall Street Journal*, 18 July 1991, p. a1.

an increase in home invasions.³⁹ In 1995 police discovered a brothel being operated out of a Bronx motel and seized control of the building in order to shut it down.⁴⁰ A 1989 *Times* report declared that a Connecticut town had passed a zoning law prohibiting homeless people from being sheltered at motels. The National Coalition for the Homeless in New York claimed that motels had become a “popular form of shelter in the mid-1980s.”⁴¹ A 1988 article reported that a judge found that 75 homeless persons in Putnam County New York had been housed in a motel for more than a year, a violation of a state sanitary code.⁴² In 2005 a motel in Irvington, New Jersey caught fire and three people died. The *Times* reported that the “Irvington Motor Lodge was a scary place.” “People smoked crack in the hallways. Prostitutes plied their trade. And gang members dressed in blue often hung out outside, according to a neighbor.”⁴³ As recent as March 2009, the *Times* told the story of a number of Orange County, California families left homeless by the failing economy and being housed in local motels.⁴⁴ The motel in its original form no longer embodied the American ideal of family adventure and leisure in a secure setting.

Popular culture capitalized on the fear and negative publicity surrounding the early-style motels. Bypassed by the interstate system, many motels ended up in remote areas of the country, away from urban centers and perceived security. Starting with Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, movies often portrayed the motel as the backdrop for horror and places of danger and nightmares. A cursory search on the Internet Movie Database, imdb.com, produced a result of 65 movies with the term motel in the title. The list includes titles such as, Motel Hell, Mountain Top Motel Massacre, and Desire and Hell at Sunset Motel. The motel’s place in current popular culture indicates a place to be feared, certainly not a secure ‘home away-from-home’ that early auto tourists sought.

The automobile introduced Americans to the possibility of adventure and the ability to experience the pioneer spirit still so prevalent in American culture in the early-twentieth century. Rapid urbanization and industrialization caused anxiety over and nostalgia for a bygone era of self-sufficiency, rugged individualism and pastoral settings. Those anxieties

³⁹ Norimitsu Onishi, “Homeless in Motel Ignite Local Fears,” *New York Times*, 9 October 1994, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Adam Nossiter, “Police Shut Motel in Bronx, Saying it is Used as a Brothel,” *New York Times*, 7 September 1995, p. 8.

⁴¹ Nick Ravo, “Town Bans the Homeless at Motels,” *New York Times*, 22 March 1989, p. 2.

⁴² James Feron, “Homeless Kept at Motel Too Long, Judge Rules,” *New York Times*, 9 December 1988, p. 3.

⁴³ Tina Kelley, “Motel where 3 Died was Cited for Chaining Doors,” *New York Times*, 9 October 2005, p. 37.

⁴⁴ Erik Eckholm, “As Jobs Vanish, Motel Rooms Become Home,” *New York Times*, 11 March 2009, p. 1.

provoked the desire for adventure but traveling families also sought security. Jakle, Rogers and Sculle claim that the “search for security simultaneous with adventure is a basic trait of modern consciousness. And the automobile-borne traveler seeking ‘home-on-the-road’ at a motel perhaps more commonly experiences this aspect of modern culture than anyone else.”⁴⁵ The earliest auto camps provided security by allowing tourists to experience self-sufficiency and building communities of comrades with fellow autocampers. They experienced true adventure by exploring the still untamed natural settings and national parks of the west, sleeping under the stars and communing with nature. Landowners discovered the potential for additional income by building cabins to shelter the motor tourists and the commercial cabin/cottage/bungalow camp was born. Building the cabins with shelter for cars as well meant a new term of cabin and/or motor court and the form for the modern motel developed. Motel building boomed in the ‘50s and ‘60s and establishments began to offer families the adventure they were seeking right at the site. Tourists could engage in recreation at the motel site, keep their cars outside the door, lock their belongings in the room, and employ a chain lock to keep out intruders; adventure and security offered in one package. The enormously popular Holiday Inn formula moved the trend in lodging more toward the old hotel form and started eroding the original motel form. Motels bypassed by the interstate system left once thriving businesses choked off from vital sources of travelers. Failed businesses fell to drugs, homelessness and vice further damaging the motel’s reputation as a secure family destination.

Preservation of this uniquely American form of architecture may be a difficult sell considering the motel’s unsavory reputation in popular culture. But there was a time when these businesses successfully catered to vacationing families by employing unique architectural designs, neon signs, swimming pools, and color TV. Many times the motel was responsible for introducing these innovative technologies to middle-class American. When Holiday Inn retired and demolished the “Great Sign” in the early ‘80s an iconic American symbol disappeared from the landscape. (Figure 15) Communications professor Andrew Wood writes that in his quest for an original “Great Sign” in its original habitat, he found only one and it was in Mount Airy, North Carolina, masquerading for a private mom-and-pop motel.⁴⁶ Many of these cabins and early motels remain along our American highways appearing like archeological sites ready for exploring by modern man. After my own travel through the evolution of this uniquely American phenomenon, my hope is that some of these buildings will be preserved for future historical journeys.

⁴⁵ Jakle, Sculle, and Rogers, 327.

⁴⁶ Andrew Wood, “Architecture, Imagery, and Omnipopia among American Mom-and-Pop Motels,” *Space and Culture* 8, no. 4 (November 2005): 399-415.

Illustrations



Figure 1
Autocamping off Monterey Hwy, California, 1920s.
Library of Congress on-line digital archive



Figure 2
Autocamping near the Washington Monument, 1920s.
Library of Congress Digital on-line digital archive



Figure 3
Migrant workers at an autocamp in the 1930s, an example of the 'undesirable' tourists. Photo by Dorothea Lange, Library of Congress on-line digital archive



Figure 4
The 'undesirables' in an autocamp in California, 1930s. Photo by Dorothea Lange, Library of Congress on-line digital archive



Figure 5
Private cabin camp in California, 1930s. Photo by Dorothea Lange, Library of Congress on-line digital archive



Figure 6
Cabin court in California, 1930s. Cars are pulled up right beside the cabin. Photo by Dorothea Lange, Library of Congress on-line digital archive



D-82-28

Figure 7
 Building a cabin camp where your car is never far and your valuables are secure.
 Oregon, 1930s
 Library of Congress on-line digital archive



HABS No. CA-2094-5

Figure 9
 Cabin court in California, 1940s. Predecessor to the modern hotel.
 Library of Congress on-line digital archive



HABS No. CA-2094-3

Figure 8
 Cabin court in California, 1940s. Predecessor to the modern hotel.
 Library of Congress on-line digital archive



Figure 10
 City View Camp in Harrison, Arkansas, 1930s.
<http://www.bchrs.org>



Figure 11
Moqui camp in Grand Canyon National Park with a gas station front and center, 1940s.
<http://nplac.org/moqui.html>



Figure 12
Motor court in Pennsylvania. Neat and tidy, striving for respectability.
Library of Congress on-line digital archive

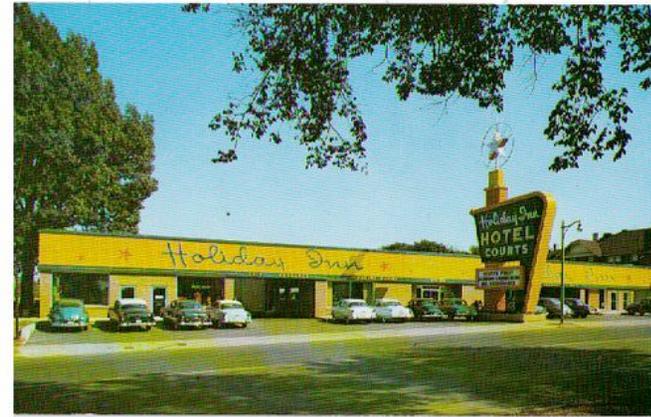


Figure 13
Postcard of an early Holiday Inn, 1950s.
www.flickr.com



Figure 14
An abandoned Holiday Inn in Springfield, Missouri, late 90s.
www.flickr.com

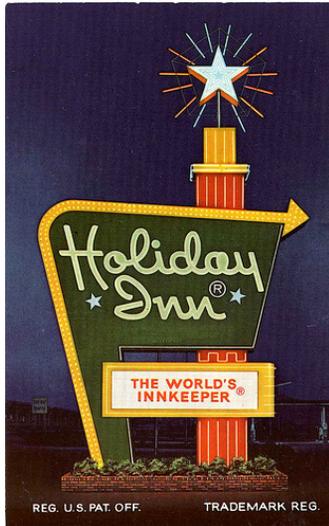


Figure 15
An American icon, Holiday Inn's Great Sign was retired in the early 80s.
www.flickr.com

What Doesn't Kill You Only Makes You Stronger: How the Temperance Movement Helped Make Coca-Cola

Staci Rogers

Staci Rogers is a M.A. candidate at Eastern Illinois University expecting to graduate in May 2011. She received her B.A. from Southern Utah University majoring in History, minoring in Psychology and certifying in Secondary Education. This paper was written for Dr. Lynne Curry's 5160 seminar; American Between the Wars. Staci is from Bountiful, Utah.

Coca-Cola was not a national wonder when it first hit the soda fountains. In fact, Coca-Cola comes from very humble beginnings and almost wasn't, due to the temperance movement. Coca-Cola's market dominance is the result of its battle with, and subsequent victory over, the temperance movement, whose attempts to eradicate Coca-Cola only made it stronger.

"Patent Medicines," "Nostrums," and Coca-Cola

To understand the Coca-Cola Company's problems with the temperance movement we must start with a general history of the Coca-Cola Company. And, to understand the Coca-Cola Company we must understand the history of "patent medicines," for it is under this classification that Coca-Cola was born.

The term "patent medicine" is a general term for medicines whose names were patented, but the ingredients were kept "secret."¹ Another, more animated, term for these drugs was "nostrums," and the doctors that produced, or at least prescribed them to their patients, were known as "quacks." Arguably the idea of quack medicine can first be seen in the medicine man of primitive times.² And, still today, there is no lack in quick fix solutions, especially in the arena of weight loss and beauty products.

But what made a nostrum different from a "real" medicine? The medication received from the quack doctor and the local apothecary shop could have been identical. The apothecary, however, owned a permanent shop and was subject to inspection of the tonics and pills he was selling. The quack doctor was more transient and his formulas could have been more inventive and unsafe. Nevertheless, there was no guarantee that the local apothecary's medicines would have been any more reliable than the quack's; it was merely a perception of stability that made the difference.³

¹ Mark Pendergrast, *God Country and Coca-Cola* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993), 11.

² Eric Jameson, *The Natural History of Quackery*, (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1961), 14-17.

³ *Ibid.*, 36-38.