



Route 66 in Oklahoma: A Historic Context Review

A Perspective on Topics and Sources for Archives Collections and Oral History Studies

This document suggests topics and ideas for additional research along Oklahoma's portion of Route 66. Primarily, the review is intended to assist researchers collecting information about Route 66 by collecting oral histories and organizing research projects. This outline may also be used to encourage the preservation of archival materials and artifacts. The topical headings are random in order.

I. Waterways crossing or near Route 66

A. The waterways that crossed or came very near the roadway including bridges, ferries, low water crossing, and other roadway features that are related to waterways. Waterways were the most important landmark for early native travelers and for early explorers. The same waterways continue to be important for the obstacles for the original and later roadways.

1. Neosho/Grand River
2. Grand River
3. Verdigris River
4. Arkansas River
5. Deep Fork River (Canadian River)
6. North Canadian River (Now the Oklahoma River as of 2006)
7. South Canadian River (Sometimes just called the Canadian River)
8. Red River
9. Deep Fork Creek in Oklahoma City
10. Cat and Dog Creeks in Claremore

Waterways may be researched at the Oklahoma Department of Transportation or the Corps of Engineers office. The Works Progress Administration Federal Writers Project papers are available at the Oklahoma Historical Society and may offer additional insight into the changes in Oklahoma waterways.

II. American Indian Lands or Reserves crossed by Route 66 or near Route 66

- A. Quapaw
- B. Miami
- C. Modoc
- D. Eastern Shawnee
- E. Peoria
- F. Wyandotte
- G. Ottawa

- H. Seneca-Cagyua
- I. Cherokee
- J. Osage
- K. Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma
- L. Muscogee (Creek Nation)
- M. Sac and Fox
- N. Iowa
- O. Kickapoo
- P. Cheyenne and Arapaho

American Indian topics can be researched at the Oklahoma History Center, tribal centers, and the Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

III. Pre-Modern Transportation Routes in the areas near to or crossing Route 66

A. The Santa Fe Trail (Cimarron Route)

- The Santa Fe Trail passed through the panhandle of Oklahoma but was not directly related to the path of Route 66 in Oklahoma. Since the Santa Fe Trail was the first East to West route to Santa Fe it is included in the heritage of Route 66. The Santa Fe Trail is mentioned since it was the first major roadway across present-day Oklahoma. It began a national consciousness of westward travel for Eastern America for this region of the country.

B. The Texas Road

- Immigrants traveled from Missouri and other areas North and East through Oklahoma en route to Texas. The route was an unmarked path wide enough for two or three wagons to pass at one time. Much of the path was used for US 69. US 69 and US 66 merged near Vinita area on this old road.

C. Immigrant Routes

- Included the California road that used the North and South Canadian Rivers which ran across Route 66. Some landmarks such as “Rock Mary” can be seen from Route 66.

D. Cattle Trails

- Chisholm Trail
- East Shawnee Trail
- The Western Trail

E. The Travelers Bureau

- Traveled by early cars on an overland route from Oklahoma City to California using landmarks and guides. At least some of the routes used were similar to Route 66’s alignment and to the old California Road.

F. Early Highway Associations and Good Roads Movement

1. Ozark Trails Association (Oklahoma and Arkansas origins, early 1900s)
 - a. This organization placed stone or masonry markers to be used with a printed guidebook. Few roads of any kind existed when the trails system was in use
2. Citizen Road Building
 - a. Counties required each citizen to serve one day a year in building or repairing the roads. A few Oklahomans of advanced age may still recall a part of this experience.
3. League of American Wheelmen
 - a. Bicycle advocates for roads
 - b. Local bicycle businesses
4. National Auto Trail
 - a. Similar to the Ozark Trail system relying on markings on telephone poles ect.
5. Automobiles become more common in Oklahoma
 - a. Car dealers
 - b. The auto as an oddity
 - i. Auto Rodeos
 - ii. Car Races
 - iii. New laws relating to cars and horse-drawn vehicles and other considerations
6. The car vs. the horse
 - a. Changes in the transportation business
 - b. The decline in horse-drawn vehicles
 - c. Road building with draft animals and tractors or other motorized equipment
 - d. Early car repair
 - i. Blacksmiths
 - ii. Model T repair
 - iii. Repairs at service stations, under a shade tree ect.
 - e. The motorcycle as used by police, highway patrol, US mail and for general transportation
 - f. Cartage by draft animal
 - i. Cartage was generally short distance freight services from a train station, truck freight dock, or van and storage companies warehouses
 - g. Teams for hire
 - i. Teams of horses, or mules, etc. used to pull our stuck cars and trucks
 - ii. Farmers near steep hills or bogs or teamsters also often helped pull steam powered oil field equipment in and out of the early oil fields along Route 66
 - iii. Draft animals were used as late as the late 1950s in some areas

- h. Wagon Yards during the horse and buggy era
 - i. Wagon yards provided a stable for the horses/mules and a place to stay for the driver and passengers for the night
 - ii. Wagon yard operators often were involved in efforts to improve roads and/or resisted road development
- 7. Urbanization
 - a. City planning for cars
 - i. Route 66 traffic required additional considerations for city planners and law enforcement because of the volume of traffic
 - b. Competing with the streetcar lines, trains and buses
 - c. City streets development
 - i. Types of materials used, locations, end of street(s), special signage, ect.
 - ii. Natural or common routes for Route 66 thru cities and towns including commercial district development, auto dealers and repair shops and filling stations before 1927
- 8. Ferrys, low water crossings, early bridges, and cable bridges
 - i. A few photos exist documenting ferries and it is possible that some locals may have family photos or recollections of crossing a river by ferry on Route 66

Potential for more development of pre-modern roadway history includes: maps, newspapers, personal accounts, early city records, early highway records, various business records, and old family records. Family and business photos including local professional photographers, telephone books, fire insurance maps, ect. Potential for this topic's development through oral history collections is limited.

IV. The Beginning of Route 66

- A. Early roadways that became a part of Route 66 or are near to Route 66
 - 1. State Highway 39 (Began at Commerce and runs through Quapaw and on to Baxter Springs)
 - 2. State Highway Route 6 (Vinita to Big Cabin)
 - 3. State Highway Route 7 (Baxter Springs, Commerce, Miami, Vinita, Claremore, Tulsa, Sapulpa, Bristow, Chandler, Luther, Arcadia, Edmond, Oklahoma City)
 - 4. State Highway 3 (The postal highway) (The route ran from Oklahoma City West to Albuquerque, New Mexico)
- B. Cyrus Avery
 - 1. Identified as the "Father of Route 66"
 - 2. Avery was a Tulsan who organized an effort to route an East-to-West cross country federal highway through Tulsa and Oklahoma City
 - a. The location of the highway
 - b. The name of the roadway
 - c. The creation of the Federal Highway System
- C. The State Highway Department
 - 1. Cyrus Avery also helped create the State Highway Department

The Cyrus Avery Collection at Oklahoma State University Tulsa has the most potential for researching the beginnings of the roadway as related to Avery.

V. Names of the roadway and names on the land related to Route 66

- A. The roadway
 - 1. Route 66
 - 2. RT 66
 - 3. US 66
 - 4. Will Rogers Highway
 - 5. Raymond Gary Expressway
 - 6. The Mother Road
 - 7. The Skelly Bypass
 - 8. Turner Turnpike
 - 9. Will Rogers Turnpike
 - 10. Interstate- 40
 - 11. Main Street USA
 - 12. 1-44
 - 13. 39th Expressway

The architecture of the roadway included many cottage-styled rock or brick service stations. Documentation of roadway architecture may be found at the State Historic Preservation Office located in the Oklahoma History Center

VI. The influence of land forms on the roadway

- A. Oldest paths
 - 1. This would include all researchable influences on local commerce where the roadway passes by the path of least resistance
- B. Adaptation of the roadway to the geographical areas including the need for special road building techniques, bridges, ect.
- C. The appearance of the roadway as the traveler passes through
- D. The landforms are from Northeast in Kansas to West in Texas:
 - 1. The Ozark Plateau from Kansas state line to Commerce
 - 2. The Prairie Plains from Commerce to Claremore
 - 3. The Sandstone Hills from Tulsa to Chandler
 - 4. The Red Bed Plains from Chandler to El Reno
 - 5. The Gypsum Hills from El Reno to Erik
 - 6. The High Plains from Erik to the Texas state line
- E. The Woodlands
 - 1. Crosstimbers are a large forest of short oak trees range from South Central Kansas to North Central Texas
 - 2. The Groves of trees located along Route 66 in Western Oklahoma are usually related to local water sources and were often used for roadside picnic tables or “unofficial” turnouts.
 - 3. Small groves were often called “stands” of trees

F. The Plains

1. Usually expressed by the land forms or by the height of the grass “short grass country” is at the Western most area of Oklahoma
2. Rolling hills

G. Landmarks along the roadway

1. Natural Landmarks used by early travelers prior to 1900
2. Man-made landmarks such as boundary markers
3. Road signs and similar devices (barn paintings, rock paintings ect.)
4. Abandoned man- made structures along the roadway
5. Old-alignments of the roadway
6. Old bridges

VII. The roadway and national defense

A. World War II

1. Hitchhikers in uniform
2. Military convoys
3. National Guard armories on or near the roadway

B. Interstate Highway System

VIII. The image of Oklahoma and Route 66

A. Image makers

1. Route 66 stories were most often communicated about experiences on vacationers, travelling business people, and by commercial drivers
2. For many of Oklahoma’s tribes, the roadway was a way West to places mentioned in oral traditions of their tribes
3. “The Mother Road”
 - a. The Grapes of Wrath (novel)
 - b. The Grapes of Wrath (movie)
 - i. The working title of the movie was “Route 66” locations include Bridgeport, Sayre and Sallisaw
 - c. “Route 66” the television show
 - i. A few segments were filmed in Oklahoma
 - ii. The segment filmed at Frontier City is the only one identified
 - d. Route 66 in print
 - e. Route 66 in commercial recordings such as “Get Your Kicks on Route 66” and “The Theme to Route 66” (the TV show)

B. Users of Route 66 images

1. Authors of non-fiction books on the roadway
2. Authors of fiction involving the roadway
3. Songwriters
4. Manufacturers of roadway memorabilia
5. Food sellers along the roadway
6. Oil companies
7. Special attractions created especially to take advantage of the high tourist traffic

- a. Examples include: The Buffalo Ranch, The Blue Whale, the Rock Café, various Indian trading posts, the so-called “snake pits” animal attractions, and others.

IX. Signage on Route 66

- A. Commercial signage
 1. Retail and other business advertising
 2. Sequential signs for advertising. Burma Shave is the most common
 3. Some signage was simply a painted message on a barn, a boulder, ect.
 4. The reform of commercial road signs beginning in the 1960s
 5. Junk cars/trucks with painted signage were very common
- B. Political signage
- C. Roadway Hazards and warnings by non-governmental sources
- D. Commercial realignment signage to divert the motorist from newer realignments to older paths to reclaim retail trade lost.

X. Route 66 and Commerce

- A. Earliest Business
 1. Filling stations
 2. Small grocery stores
 3. Car repair shops
 4. Tourist courts
 5. Motels
 6. An appropriate identity for businesses established before 1945 is a “first generation” business
- B. Businesses established after 1945 should be considered second generation businesses
- C. Businesses established after the advent of turnpikes and interstate highways might be considered third generation businesses
- D. Businesses established after the official end of the U.S. designation ended in 1985 are fourth generation businesses
- E. Post 2000 retro Route 66 enterprises are a fifth generation business
 1. The most notable example of this business is “Pops” in Arcadia, Oklahoma
- F. Food Sales
 1. Drive- ins
 2. Cafes, restaurants, convenience stores
 3. Drive thrus
- G. Automotive related sales
 1. Service Stations
 2. Truck Stops
 3. Car dealers (used and new)
 4. specialty mechanical shops (this might include a generator shop, starter shop ect.)
- H. Tourism
 1. Curio stores
 2. Indian art galleries
 3. Hotels

4. Old general stores
- I. Many so called snake- pits were roadside attractions featuring snakes, monkeys, alligators, exotic birds, big cats, and more. These were low budget enterprises designed to shock the visitor.
- J. The trucking industry
 1. Cartage
 2. Postal
 3. Freight
 4. Farm related
 5. National defense
 6. Mistletoe Express
- K. The bus industry
 1. National companies
 2. Local or regional operations
 3. Bus stops and the locations for bus stops through the years
- L. The auto salvage business was often as simple as a “junk yard” next to the roadway. The movement to shield the view of the salvage yard began in the 1960s
- M. Farm to market roads and Route 66
- N. Route 66 associations and commercial promotional groups

XI. The end of Route 66 as a federal highway

- A. Turnpikes, the beginning of the end
 1. Turner Turnpike
 2. Will Rogers Turnpike
- B. Commerce on the Turnpike
 1. Phillips 66
 2. Howard Johnson
- C. Interstate alignments
- D. Bypasses
 1. Bypasses were created to soften the economic impact of the transition of change relating to Route 66
 2. Raymond Gary Expressways (bypasses) were created or started during Governor Gary’s administration
 3. First generation retail businesses were along the original alignments
 4. Second generation retailers would include franchise, chain, and other national or regional associated businesses
 5. Third generation retailers were either first or second generation businesses that moved to new alignments of the roadway on bypasses or within sight of the roadway. Sometimes the adjustment was with roadside sign advertising encouraging the traveler to leave the new alignment and go through the business district of the community.
- E. Route 66 was official closed nationally on June 27, 1985.
 1. In most areas of Oklahoma the realignment to Interstate 40 in the West or the Turner and Will Rogers Turpikes in the Northeast had been complete many years before.

2. Fourth generation businesses are those opened or moved to take advantage of the roadway's popularity. The businesses appealed to Route 66 enthusiasts
3. A fifth generation business might be all those created to celebrate the new-found enthusiasm. These businesses are usually aimed at Route 66 tourism

XII. The Roadway and Tourism

- A. Why the traveler traveled and why they used Route 66
 1. The adventure of the roadway
 2. A celebration of car culture
 3. To see the American West (This might include the Rock Mountains, the Grand Canyon, and other sights of the West)
 4. Going West was a celebration of American optimism
 5. Family vacation
 6. Route 66 was the most direct route to New Mexico, Arizona, and California
 7. Memories
 8. Route 66 commercial associations including local Chamber of Commerce, state level groups and national organization
 9. Several state agencies have actively promoted the roadway
 - a. Department of Tourism
 - b. Oklahoma Department of Transportation
 - c. Oklahoma Historical Society
 - d. State University System
 10. Hobby groups and Route 66 associations

XIII. Icons of the roadway and roadside attractions

- A. Icons of the roadway include all the sights that are often identified with the road. Some of the icons listed are, or were, near to the road but not always directly on the road.
 1. Blue Whale
 2. Will Rogers Memorial
 3. The Totem Pole at Fovil, Oklahoma
 4. Phillips 66 service stations
 5. Pop Hicks Café in Clinton
 6. Lucile's Tavern near Hydro
 7. The Milk Bottle in Oklahoma City
 8. The State Capitol of Oklahoma
 9. Sussy's Italian Restaurant in Oklahoma City
 10. Rock Mary
 11. The Park O'Tell in Oklahoma City

XIV. Events related to the roadway

- A. National events
 1. The Bunion Derby (1928)
- B. Local events
 1. Openings of parts of the roadway
 2. Car and motorcycle rallies
 3. Route 66 celebrations

4. Route 66 rendezvous at the Oklahoma History Center

XV. The people of the roadway

- A. Jack and Gladys Cutberth ran the National Route 66 Association from their home in Clinton, Oklahoma
- B. Cyrus Avery, the father of Route 66
- C. Michael Wallace
- D. Jim Ross

XVI. The roadway in folk life and popular culture

- A. Expression once heard or used daily on the roadway that are now rare:

1. Service Station terms
 - a. Clean restrooms
 - b. Pump gas
 - c. Filler-up
2. Terms related to cars, trucks, and buses
 - a. Jake breaks
 - b. Bobtail
 - c. Flatbed
 - d. Milk run
3. Expressions specific to hotels, motels, and tourist courts
 - a. Free TV
 - b. A/C in every room
 - c. Magic fingers
 - d. Rooms for families
 - e. Heated swimming pool
 - f. Carport parking, shed parking
4. Language of food services on the roadway
 - a. Footlong
 - b. Chili-pie
 - c. Coney
 - d. Blue plate
 - e. Trucker special
 - f. Dip-cone
 - g. Burger-basket
 - h. Chicken fry
 - i. Soft ice cream
5. Bumper stickers
 - a. No riders
 - b. Company car

XVII. Out of date auto tourism experiences found on Route 66

- A. Carrying a water bag for the radiator
- B. Getting a minor overhaul of the car's motor while on a vacation
- C. Literally pumping gas

- D. Service at a service station: checking the oil, tires, radiator, cleaning the windshield ect.
- E. Introduction of oil company credit cards
- F. Renting or owning a window mounted evaporative air conditioner or “cooler”
- G. An ash tray in the motel or free matches

XVI. The roadway and the Great Depression

- A. Employment in road construction including paving the roadway.
- B. Improved farm to market routes
- C. Improved trucking routes
- D. The exodus from the American South through Oklahoma. The first contact for the roadway and folds migrating West was Oklahoma City
 - 1. Migrant camps along the roadway
 - a. Community Camp in Oklahoma City
 - b. Sandtown in Oklahoma City
 - c. Ropers Shady Corner in Erick, Oklahoma
 - 2. The language of the roadway during the Depression
 - a. Okie- did not have a negative connotation in the beginning. The negative association migrated East from a migrant camp in California with the help of The Grapes of Wrath
 - b. Jalopy- dilapidated car often overloaded with family belongings
 - c. Used tires for trade- the practice of exchanging a bad tire from their car for a used tire usually found in a pile beside a service station
 - d. Used oil for sale- the oil cost less if it was poured out from common container as compared to a filtered and sealed can of oil
 - e. Drip gas- was fuel obtained illegally from oil field pumping sites

XVII. Risks of the roadway

- A. Narrow bridges
- B. Dangerous curves
- C. The Route 66 concrete lip or shoulder. This was part of the original roadway
- D. Soft Shoulders
- E. Dangerous intersections
- F. No guard rails
- G. Commercial traffic entering the roadway

Recommended Web Resources for Route 66 in Oklahoma

The Library at Oklahoma State University in Tulsa:

<http://www.osu-tulsa.okstate.edu/library/>

Special Collections of OSU Tulsa Library

http://www.osu-tulsa.okstate.edu/library/Sp_Coll.htm

Cyrus Avery Collection includes maps, photographs, and personal papers. **Michael Wallace Collection** includes interviews, photographs, papers, and more done for *The Mother Road* and for *Cars* the animated movie about Route 66. **Kathy Anderson Collection** includes research materials and video from several documentaries completed on Route 66. Beth Freeman is the Director of the Library. 918 594-8132 or beth.freeman@okstate.edu

The **Oklahoma Historical Society Research Library** located in the Oklahoma History Center in Oklahoma City has also been named as a repository for roadway collections. Published resources can be accessed in the institutions database.

<http://okhistory.cuadra.com/star/public.html>

The Research Library can provide further assistance with published books and articles.

<http://www.okhistory.org/research/library/index.html>

The Archives can provide newspapers on microfilm, personal collections related to Route 66, photographs including collections from Oklahoma Department of Transportation, film and video, and oral histories about Route 66 and Oklahoma's transportation history.

<http://www.okhistory.org/research/collections/index.html>

The **Oklahoma's State Historic Preservation Office** is also located at the Oklahoma History Center. SHPO has developed a historic context for Route 66 in Oklahoma as part of its ongoing efforts to nominate properties associated with the historic highway to the National Register of Historic Places. A few examples of property types that are eligible for or listed in the register include roadbed segments, bridges, motels, diners, service stations, roadway business districts, and roadside attractions.

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/rt66/histsig/OklahomaContext.htm>

Oklahoma Route 66 Museum the Oklahoma Historical Society also operates a Route 66 Museum in Clinton Oklahoma. The museum holds the Jack Cutberth Collection. Cutberth was the president of the original Route 66 Association.

<http://www.route66.org/contact.html>

Oklahoma Route 66 Association

<http://www.oklahomaroute66.com/theroad.html>

Oklahoma Department of Transportation's Route 66 web page

<http://www.okladot.state.ok.us/memorial/route66/index.htm>

National Park Service Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/rt66/>